

# CONCOU EASTERCON

55th British National Science Fiction Convention (Eastercon)

9-12 April 2004

Winter Gardens, Blackpool

**Guests of Honour:** Mitchell Burnside Clapp **Danny Flynn** Sue Mason **Christopher Priest Philip Pullman** 

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### **E-MAIL ENQUIRIES:**

concourse@eastercon.com

### WORLD WIDE WEB SITE

http://www.eastercon.com/concourse

### **MEMBERSHIP RATES**

£45 attending membership until 21 March 2004 (see web site for other rates).

### THE CONCOURSE COMMITTEE ARE:

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Programme, Publicity & Promotions

Chris O'Shea - Co-Chair

Publications, Operations, Tech, Newsletter, Security

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Beyond Cyberdrome Without Portfolio



**CONCOURSE PROGRESS REPORT 3** Produced by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer (SRBAS) in October 2003.

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# From the Bench...

The committee and staff are now hard at work preparing for Concourse. We have sorted out most of the contract details for the site, and work is going on to develop the programme—some of the highlights are described on page 8. The teams who'll be working behind the scenes at the convention are being put together. So now we need your help.

It's the members who will make the convention a success. Coming to a convention is a fun way to spend a weekend—but taking part can be even more fun. Details about volunteering to help out are included later in the PR, but there are a few areas we'd particularly encourage you to think about.

The masquerade has long been a key part of an Eastercon, but over the last few years the number of entries has been falling. If we don't do something to change this there soon won't be a masquerade at all. So the call goes out to anyone who has a costume they would like to enter: please do take part. It doesn't matter if you haven't made the costume yourself. In fact, it doesn't matter if you don't even have the costume yet; you can always make one in the chaos costume workshop at the convention. If you want to take part, or think you might want to, or just want some more information, please let Alice Lawson or

Barbara Stewart know (direct, or via the convention address), preferably before Christmas.

If costumes don't appeal to you, perhaps robots do. 'Beyond Cyberdrome' can always use more robots; contact SMS or the convention if you are interested.

While you're thinking about what you might do at the convention, have you booked your accommodation yet? As explained later, although the official deadline for booking accommodation in advance is 27 February, we'd recommend doing it before Christmas in order to ensure you get exactly what you want—and there are plenty of choices in Blackpool.

We've provided some more information to help you to work out when to travel to the convention and how long to book your accommodation for: official start and finish times for the programme and some ideas about what else you could do in the area around the convention. Basic travel information can be found on the Concourse web site, and there'll be more details in the next PR.

We know that those of you who'll be coming to the convention with children will have particular requirements as regards accommodation. There's some specific information (on page 9) about how to find out more about hotel baby sitting and baby listening services, as well as the state of play on childcare at the convention itself.

-Marcus Streets (on behalf of the UHT)



# From the editors...

As the convention's UnHoly Trinity of chairmen explain above, with only five months to go before Easter this PR includes some more information you might need to make arrangements for attending the convention. If any Concourse members haven't attended an Eastercon before, the articles by Randy Byers and John Jarrold provide, respectively, a fan's and a pro's view of this year's Eastercon (Seacon '03) and should give you an idea about what you might expect. Old hands may find that these con reviews help them to remember if they were there. But all Eastercons are different—just as Randy's and John's Eastercons were different—so check out the information on the expected highlights of the Concourse programme as well.

Meanwhile, Julian Headlong is free at last from his duties as part of Seacon '03's programme committee but has found another way of timebinding Eastercons together as he looks back over the century of science fiction that precedes Concourse. And if that doesn't give you enough inspiration about what to read, we're continuing our series of articles about the work of the convention's writer guests, to give you a chance to prepare for that part of the programme. In this PR, Maureen Speller looks at Philip Pullman's Sally Lockhart novels and Steve Jeffery considers the intricate wonder of *The Affirmation* by Christopher Priest. You'll be able to read a lot more about all the guests in the convention souvenir book, of course—but traditionally you'll be doing that on the way home from the con.

Chris Priest has sent us an update of what's been happening to him since the last progress report, and we also have news of two more of Concourse's guests. We'd like to congratulate Chris for his double success in winning the BSFA Best Novel award (awarded at Eastercon this year) and the Arthur C Clarke Award with The Separation, and we'd also like to congratulate Sue Mason for winning the Fan Artist Hugo Award at the Worldcon (Torcon 3) earlier this year. Sue has again provided us with the cover artwork for this PR, for which many thanks, and the incidental illustrations are also Sue's work. Making it a rather successful year, Sue has also had a self-portrait exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery, as part of a project you may have seen on TV. If you're more the theatrical type, however, you may already be queuing for tickets to see the two-part adaptation of His Dark Materials which is scheduled to run at the National Theatre in London until March 2004. The cast includes Niamh Cusack (as Serafina Pekkala), Timothy Dalton (Lord Asriel), and Patricia Hodge (Mrs Coulter). Those who can't wait should surely be reading Lyra's Oxford, a new book by Philip Pullman which includes a short story following on from His Dark Materials and a wealth of related information.

Next time we write one of these it will only be weeks before the convention. The final PR will include more information to help you prepare, but there's a lot to think about now especially if you want to read some more of the writer guests' work before the con. What's on your Christmas list?

Thanks to all contributors, and as usual to Fran & John Dowd—now partly responsible for another Eastercon of their own, Paragon 2—for help with PR collection and transport.\*

-Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer

# The Priest Effect

If there is a sound effect to a Christopher Priest novel, it is that of a rug being pulled adroitly from under the reader's feet. The celebrated 'Priest effect' combines a mastery of calculated indirection, literary legerdemain, and a continuing fascination with doppelgangers, doubles and twins that reaches perhaps its most accomplished in *The Prestige* and its most subtle in *The Separation*. But *The Affirmation* (even down to its title) remains a tour-de-force of literary and psychological dislocation. It is a trap for the unwary; and when I walked into it, twenty years ago, its audacity and accomplishment had the power to shock and delight me. Re-reading it—even with the benefit of hindsight and a body of critical commentary and interviews (in Vector issues 206, 209 and 221 and Foundation issues 50 and 52) that almost allows me to see how the trick is performed—I find it still does.

A young man called Peter Sinclair suffers three blows in quick succession: his father (his sole remaining parent) dies, he is made redundant, and he loses his flat in London. The three crises precipitate a further one, as he suffers a break-up with his girlfriend, Gracia. Help comes from a chance meeting with Edwin Miller, an old friend of his father. Edwin offers him a free loan of a holiday cottage he has just bought on the Welsh border, on the understanding that Sinclair helps renovate the place while he is living there and will move out when Edwin and his wife want to use it.

A couple of weeks later, Sinclair takes possession of the cottage, imagining how he will transform it into a place for parties and weekend visits from friends, while enjoying the quiet life of the countryside. His good intentions evaporate almost immediately following a visit from Edwin and his wife, Marge. She makes it plain she resents Sinclair's presence in the cottage and has her own firm views on how the place is to be redecorated. Discouraged, Sinclair makes a few peremptory efforts and falls into lassitude, rousing himself as spring approaches to make a determined effort on decorating the large main room, marvelling as his efforts transform it into the clean white room of his imagining. Pleased at the result of his efforts, but alarmed at being unable to recognise himself in a mirror, he decides to make his 'white room' a metaphor for his own life. He will write down everything about his life and how he came to this point, 'to write myself into existence', and from there he will be able to start again.

It's at this point everything begins to break down. Although, in fact, a careful reading of *The Affirmation* suggests things are not what they seem from the first sentence.

This much I know for sure:

My name is Peter Sinclair, I am English and I am, or I was, twentynine years old.

Uncertainty already creeps in. Why does Sinclair doubt his age? By the end of the next sentence, even that certainly is abandoned and he writes: 'Age is a variable; I am no longer twenty-nine.'

By the end of *The Affirmation*, however, everything about that opening sentence is open to question, and the reader, like Sinclair, is left grasping at the flotsam of a disintegrating psyche, trying to disentangle 'fact' from 'fiction', looking for solid ground from which to assess the novel they have just read.

There is none. The novel, and multiple levels of Sinclair's 'autobiography' with which it has become inextricably entwined, refuse closure in an unfinished sentence, '...but when I looked back—'.

As a callow youth, I first encountered this literary Moebius trick in Peter Gabriel's enigmatic story in the liner notes to the Genesis album The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway, and in Delany's Dhalgren which begins/ends with the lines 'I come ... to wound the autumnal city', and thought it pretty damn cool, not realising they'd both nicked it from Joyce's Finnegans Wake. Priest does something slightly different, the unfinished last line re-entering the text part way through, turning an endless loop Moebius strip into a three-dimensional Klein bottle. It also marks the point at which Sinclair abandons his first manuscript. He finds himself unable to trust his recall of events, such as which arm he broke in a childhood accident, even when faced with seemingly objective evidence of family photographs borrowed from his sister, Felicity. Instead, Sinclair embarks on a new version of the manuscript in which he will reveal the truth of himself through fiction. This takes the place of an invented world (although readers will recognise it as the Dream Archipelago, the setting for a number of Priest's stories such as 'The Watched'). London becomes 'Jethra', his sister Felicity 'Kalia' and Gracia 'Seri'.

Sinclair throws himself with renewed energy into this new manuscript and then, with only a handful of pages to go, he is interrupted by a visit from his sister.

Felicity's visit is the first indication that all is not well with Sinclair. The pristine white room in which he works, with its smell of honeysuckle blowing through the open windows, is revealed as a sham; the garden an overgrown tangle of weeds, the house a mess. Under Felicity's furious onslaught, Sinclair's vision wavers, the two realities overlapping like a double exposure, and then he is forced to confront what *she* sees. This is the first indication that something is seriously wrong with Peter, but we have a long way to go before the full depth of Sinclair's immersion in the fantasy of his own imagination is revealed to us.

In the alternate world he has imagined into existence, Peter Sinclair is the winner of the Lotterie, whose prize is the opportunity to travel to the island of Collago and undergo athanasia treatment which will make him, barring accidents or injury, immortal. He takes the trip, still undecided about whether to accept the treatment, and on the island of Murisaey, at the Lotterie office, he meets Seri, who decides to accompany him for the rest of the trip and help him make his decision.

A side-effect of the treatment is that the cell renewal process will also effectively wipe his memory, and so as part of the preparation for the treatment recipients must complete a questionnaire—'the longest form in the world'—writing down everything they know about their life. However, the discovery of a medical complication means the process must be rushed; there is no time to complete the full questionnaire. But Sinclair has brought with him a manuscript in which he has, he claims, already written his autobiography, and insists that that be used as the basis for his rehabilitation.

But as Seri and the doctors try to rebuild Peter's memory from what he has provided, they run into continual problems. Where is 'London'? What are 'The Beatles'? Who is 'Felicity' or 'Gracia'?

If, up to this point, the structure of *The Affirmation* had resembled the optical illusion of a Necker Cube, in which perspective turns itself inside out, this is the moment when the book turns into the literary equivalent of the Escher print of two hands drawing each other. Has the 'real' Peter Sinclair so completely embedded himself in the imaginary world of the Dream Archipelago that he has brought his past, in the form of his autobiographical manuscript, across with him? Or is it the other way round? But the trick is not yet finished; the rug is still (just) under our feet, before Priest, in a stunning moment, whips it away.

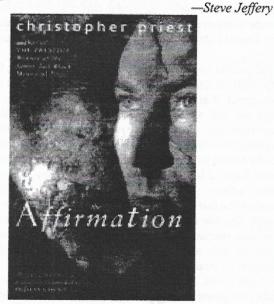
I spread the battered pages across the bed, like a conjuror fans a pack of cards. The words, the story of my life, the definition of my identity, lay before me. It was all there: the lines of typewritten text, the frequent corrections, the pencilling, notes and deletions. Black type, blue ballpoint, grey pencil, and brown whale-shaped droplets of dried blood. It was all of me.

'There's nothing there, Peter! For God's sake, it's blank paper!'

'Yes, but-

Everything and nothing is true. 'I had written and I had not written. The story was there but the words were not'. And yet, even as he comes to this realisation, Sinclair scrabbles through the empty pages, reading words which are not there, to show Gracia a particular passage, of his first meeting with Seri.

Gracia is once again lost to him, and Sinclair is finally lost to himself.\*



\* In a strange and typically Priestian moment at NewCon 2, a couple of weeks after submitting the original text of this article, I discovered myself living a life imitating art. On the SF Foundation book table I came across a copy of Chris Priest's Anticipations anthology (Faber, 1978—although this was the 1980 Pan edition). Priest's own story in this volume is entitled 'The Negation', set in his Dream Archipelago in the middle of the war that forms the background to Sinclair's island journey in The Affirmation (but written three years before publication of that novel). In 'The Negation', a young man, Dik, a native of Jethra, while serving duty on the wall that separates the two warring states, meets the author of

...a novel entitled *The Affirmation*—[that] had so impressed him that he counted reading it as one of the single most important experiences of his life. In many ways a deep and difficult work, the book was little known or discussed. For Dik, the book's apparent obscurities were among its greatest joys.

# News from Chris Priest

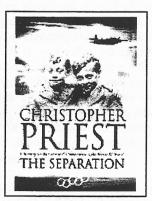
Since March...

I went to Eastercon and had a great time. Is this a record? Having a good time in that fleshpot of the Midlands, Hinckley? While there I fought off stiff and convincing competition from Mike Harrison and others, and nabbed the BSFA Award for *The Separation*. A remarkably cheering event. Perhaps more so was going on to nab the Clarke Award in May, once again in the teeth of terrific competition from much the same brace of fearsomely talented writers. At the moment (of writing) I'm waiting to hear the outcome of the Sidewise Award, for which *The Sep* has also been shortlisted. All this mention of awards gives perhaps the wrong impression: writers should be and are passive receptors of these things, beneficiaries of systems over which they have no control or influence. Well, cheers, I say.

In mid-June I flew to Madrid, to launch the Spanish edition of *The Extremes*. This might be seen as a small event in the progress of the world, but I enjoy travelling and it made a pleasant change (after the miserable debacle of Scribner in the UK) to be working with publishers (the Planeta Group) who seem to know how to publicise and sell a new book. A week later, back at home, Leigh and I went through the Quiet Rowling Weekend: the new Harry Potter book was launched, and our twins spent two silent days taking turns to read their copy, wrapped up in the long and engrossing novel. By evening on Sunday, they had both finished reading it, and the joyful noise of lively adolescents returned to our household.

In July I went to the meeting at the old White Horse pub near Chancery Lane, to help celebrate John Wyndham's centenary year. As well as me, several other old fossils turned out: notably Brian Aldiss and John Christopher, both looking remarkably fit, while Arthur Clarke dropped in by video. I have also, since March, been to Wilmslow twice to visit the ancient part of my family, watched several Grands Prix on TV, read about a score of books, seen about three dozen movies, and had root-canal surgery on the more ancient part of my jaw. I have also (nervously) started work on my next novel, which at present is to be called *The Decoy*, or perhaps *The Decoys*. Or perhaps nothing like that at all. To those extremely nice people at Gollancz it is so far known only by the much more candid title: *Untitled*. You found out about it here first.\*

-Chris Priest



The hardback edition of *The*Separation can be ordered from
Amazon via Chris's homepage
at:

http://members.aol.com/ chrpr997/sepcover.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup> Chris didn't complete the hat trick on this occasion (the long form Sidewise Award for Alternate History was tied between Martin J Gidron's *The Severed Wing* and *Ruled Britannia* by Harry Turtledove). At least the British-based awards got it right...

# Shaking the edge of the web: Sally Lockhart versus the world

Before there was Lyra, there was Sally Lockhart, the heroine of three novels by Philip Pullman (*The Ruby in the Smoke, The Shadow in the North* and *The Tiger in the Well*). I can't help feeling she's been overshadowed by her literary baby sister, so now is an excellent moment to draw her out of the shadows and into the light.

Here's our first sight of Sally, getting out of a cab in the City of London, 'alone, and uncommonly pretty. She was slender and pale, and dressed in mourning [...] she tucked back a straying twist of blonde hair [...] She had unusually dark brown eyes for one so fair.' And here's Sally, a few minutes later, in the offices of Lockhart and Selby, Shipping Agents, contemplating the man who has just dropped dead at her feet:

She did not move. Nor did she scream, or faint; her only actions were to draw back the hem of her dress from where it brushed the shiny dome of his skull and to breath deeply, several times, with her eyes shut. Her father had taught her this as a remedy for panic. He had taught her well; it worked.

It is perhaps as well for Mr Higgs that he dropped dead when he did, for otherwise Sally had planned to shoot him. Did I mention that Sally Lockhart carries a pistol? Her father taught her to shoot, alongside providing her with a 'thorough grounding in the principles of military tactics and book-keeping, a close acquaintance with the affairs of the Stock Market and a working knowledge of Hindustani.'

This is not, admittedly, the most immediately useful education ever received by a Victorian girl; these skills are unlikely to count as 'accomplishments' as understood by Sally's distant relation and reluctant guardian, Mrs Rees, and they're certainly not the skills needed by a governess, currently the only career prospect open to a well-bred but indigent orphan. Alas, Sally has no English Literature, French, History, Art or Music. How will she survive?

Fortunately, alongside the book-keeping and the shooting, Sally has other skills, not the least of which is her ability to draw people to her; she seems almost literally to 'lock hearts' with people, who will then help her. In *The Ruby in the Smoke* and *The Shadow in the North* her family is close-knit, comprising the Garlands—Fred, Webster and Rosa, photographers and Bohemians—and young Jim Taylor, the office-boy at her father's old firm who becomes like a brother to her, not to mention the assorted waifs and strays they rescue. In *The Tiger in the Well*, an older, wiser, more experienced Sally, having built a household of her own, will gather a new community around her, comprising the dispossessed and downtrodden and those people who want to make a difference to the world, to make life better.

But the young Sally knows nothing of what is to come. The first novel is a great adventure, in the finest style of Wilkie Collins, as she hunts for a ruby that brings tragedy and tries to solve the mystery of her father's death in the Far East and the loss of his fortune. All this is set against the backdrop of a London that is so murky that Jim is memorably described at his first

appearance as being 'like a sudden solidification of all the grime in the Cheapside air'. This London is almost pantomimically grimy, drawing as much on a literary conception of the Victorian city as on any reality—Dickensian, indeed. Light, instead, is associated with people: with Sally herself, blonde and pale, gun in hand; with Frederick's camera, with Rosa's blazing hair, and in Jim, the illumination of education, drawn from his beloved Penny Dreadfuls.

Education is a significant theme of this trilogy. The craving for knowledge is at times almost palpable, although not always for 'appropriate reasons'. How Jim learned to read and write is not clear but he does so fluently; later, we see him tiring of sensational novels, swearing he could do better, and setting out to become a writer of melodramas. Bill, in love with the formidable street urchin Bridie Sullivan, is convinced that being able to read will give him the edge over his rivals, although when we see him last he is reading bedtime stories to a child, and one wonders how a knife-wielding wild girl will respond to this.

But education is linked with empowerment too. We see this clearly in the second book, when Frederick Garland travels north in search of information about a particular engineering firm and meets a group of workers at The Workingmen's Literary and Philosophical Institute. They are men who have learned to question the world, who are well-informed, who know that their skills are being put to a bad end but who aren't yet sufficiently well-organised to act on that knowledge. Their route to greater empowerment is pointed out, in the third book, by Daniel Goldberg, the socialist activist and campaigner.

The second book, *The Shadow in the North*, shows Sally that the world is a more complicated place than she could ever have imagined. While the wonderful, vivid trappings of the Victorian age are still apparent—this time it's the magic, literal and metaphorical, of the stage and the strange world of the spiritualist—darker currents are becoming more apparent as Sally battles with the malign Bellmann, secret manufacturer of a new form of weapon which is more insidious than she can at first believe. Here Sally for the first time confronts the realisation that she cannot personally oblige everyone to behave well. She can wave her gun at unscrupulous lawyers and evil women, rescue small children and save businesses: but what do you do with a country that wants a terrible weapon to use against its own people?

Sally's own emotional education takes a step forward when she recognises that she can declare her love for Fred Garland and not lose her sense of herself and her work as a result. The theme of the freedom of women, a underlying thread in the earlier books, is brought to the fore in the final volume of the trilogy when Sally, the mother of an illegitimate child, finds herself sued for divorce by a man she didn't know she'd married; by virtue of this fake marriage he is permitted to legally steal her house and money, and her child. Sally's status, always a little dubious in the eyes of the respectable, is reduced to almost nothing as she finds herself attempting to play things by the book, dealing with blinkered pillars of the legal establishment, in order to retrieve what is rightfully hers. Only the people who live like her, effectively on the edges of society, properly understand her predicament. Those in authority see 'unmarried mother' or 'single woman' and behave accordingly, and unjustly. Sally's journey through the East End, working in a mission which takes in refugees and battered women, and her meeting with Daniel Goldberg open her eyes wide to the greater injustices of the world, not just those done to her.

And yet, at the end of it all, Sally's misfortunes are still traceable back to the Ruby of Agrapur and the mysterious Ah Ling, her father's agent, who has laid his traps so carefully, so thoughtfully, in order to take his revenge on her. 'Dead of revenge,' she says at the end, when she is pulled from a collapsed house having failed to save the man who tried to destroy her. But through Ah Ling she has learned the lesson that has sat in front of her throughout this trilogy, like a magical trick done in plain view: 'Things got done in the world when you worked with other people.' She's known this all along, working with the Garlands, with Jim, but that was personal. Working with Daniel Goldberg, who (like Fred) treats her as an equal, there will be 'movements to join, things to learn, groups to organise, speeches to make.'

And so Sally Lockhart grows up before our eyes, transforming herself: once a young woman who is almost inflexibly certain of the way the world should work, as simply and straightforwardly as a machine—and who is prepared to act, with the aid of her trusty pistol, to make sure it does—she becomes someone who sees the bigger picture but who is still prepared to act, using military tactics, knowledge and book-keeping, and her own passionate nature (if not now the pistol) to get things done.\*

-Maureen Kincaid Speller

#### The Sally Lockhart novels:

- The Ruby in the Smoke (1985; revised edition 1987)
- The Shadow in the North (1986 as The Shadow in the Plate; revised edition 1988)
- The Tiger in the Well (1991)



# Relevant web links:

#### Guests of Honour

Mitchell Burnside Clapp:

http://www.rocketplane.com/index.html

Danny Flynn:

http://www.dannyflynn.com

Sue Mason:

http://www.plokta.com/woodlore/index.html

Chris Priest:

http://www.christopher-priest.co.uk

Philip Pullman:

http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/

index.html

#### Eastercon-related

Concourse:

http://www.eastercon.com/concourse

Blackpool Tourism:

http://www.blackpooltourism.com/

North West Tourist Board:

http://visitnorthwest.com

North West Fine Foods:

http://www.nw-fine-foods.co.uk

### Online fiction

253 by Geoff Ryman:

http://www.ryman-novel.com/

Baen book samples:

http://jiltanith.thefifthimperium.com/

Baen Free Library:

http://www.baen.com/library/

Baen slushpile:

http://bar.baen.com/WB/default.asp?boardid=2&

ShowAllorNew=new

Work by Cory Doctorow:

http://craphound.com/place/

The Infinite Matrix (Bruce Sterling's ezine):

http://infinitematrix.net/stories/index.html

Infinity Plus:

http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/index.htm

Project Gutenberg:

http://www.pjbsware.demon.co.uk/gutenberg/

index.htm#authors

SciFiction Archive:

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/archive.html

Short fiction by Charles Stross:

http://www.antipope.org/charlie/fiction/

index.html

### Other resources

Arthur C Clarke Award

http://www.appomattox.demon.co.uk/acca/index.htm

British Science Fiction Association:

http://www.bsfa.co.uk

Interaction: 2005 Worldcon

http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk/

National Theatre:

http://www.nt-online.org/

Porcupine Books:

http://www.porcupine.demon.co.uk

Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund:

http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Taff/

Index.html

# Programme notes

The programme is taking shape.

We hope that many of you will come to the medieval banquet on Thursday night (details in PR2 and on the web site). However, the convention will formally start with the opening ceremony at lunchtime on Friday. Similarly, the convention formally closes at 4 PM on Monday afternoon and the final scheduled item—the last feedback session—will finish by 6 PM. For those staying on there will be the usual dead dog party in the bar and lounge at the Winter Gardens.

Other days will feature at least one item at 10 AM, but the main stream will not start until 11 to give you time to eat breakfast and make your way to the Winter Gardens. On all days except Monday programming will continue there until after midnight.

Besides the opening ceremony, Friday will feature a display of combat techniques, or men waving swords at one another. There will be an opportunity for people to take part in a workshop afterwards!

Highlights of Saturday's programme will, we hope, include a prestigious science event, Jonjo and Sharon's wedding, a filk concert, and a disco (kindly sponsored by Jonjo).

Sunday's schedule will include the art auction, the masquerade and Dave Wake's latest play, as well as the chance to vote for the 2006 Eastercon.

And on Monday, just in case you thought we'd be winding down too early, don't miss 'Beyond Cyberdrome' and the awards ceremony.

In between these headline items there will be the usual mix of panels, quizzes, readings and workshops, including of course items featuring the Guests of Honour and their work. We will aim to have at least two items and up to six on at any time; we know that this will mean you may be forced to make a choice between items on some occasions (in fact we think that's a good choice to have), but we will try to ensure we don't put on items likely to appeal to the same audience at the same time.

There will be a feedback session on each day of the con so you can tell us about anything that is going wrong for you before it spoils your convention. We will have staff from Blackpool Tourism present on Friday to help address any accommodation problems you can't sort out yourself with your hotel.\*

-Marcus Streets

# Information for dealers and artists

Dealers' information is available from Stuart Capewell via the convention address. Tables cost £35 each and all dealers must have a full attending membership of the convention.

Artists wishing to exhibit at the convention can find out more information from the convention address.

# A special announcement: Eastercon book auction

Bring out your signed Eric Frank Russells, E E 'Doc' Smiths and Robert A Heinleins!

In recent years the Eastercon book auction has shown less interest in large quantities of low-cost books and more interest in the more collectable items. We plan, next year, to enhance that trend and thus to have instead a special *de luxe* item auction focussing on first editions, quality hardbacks, limited and signed copies to be auctioned for something approaching market price.

We would like to include a list of such items in the next PR and on the web site to excite interest (and help you plan your bidding!) and perhaps even to attract postal or telephone bids from members who find they can't attend the convention.

If you have suitable items please email the details to Brian@porcupine.demon.co.uk so these can be included in the listing; items notified to us by mid-January will be included in the list in the PR, and later additions can be included on the web site. Please email the same address if you are not sure whether your item(s) are suitable, and we can determine this.

As usual a tithe will be charged by the convention for items sold on behalf of individuals, but not for items donated to charity.\*

-Brian Ameringen

Membership rates until 21 March 2004				
Membership type	Advance	On the door		
Attending adult (18+)	£45	£60		
Unwaged adult	£25			
Child (8-17 years old)	£25	£30		
Infant (under 8)	Free			
Family member (adult)	£25	£30		
Supporting member	£20			

- An attending membership entitles you to attend the convention, receive all relevant publications, and vote in the various popular-vote awards presented at the con.
- A family membership is intended for adults who wish to travel to Blackpool with attending members of the convention, take advantage of the convention's accommodation booking arrangements, and perhaps attend some social functions at the con, but who do not want to take part in the main convention programme.
- A supporting membership is an entitlement to convention publications only. It can be converted to an attending membership by paying the difference between the supporting rate and the attending rate in force at the time of conversion.
- The unwaged membership rate applies to full-time students and those signing on as unemployed, in the UK only. You will need to produce documentary evidence that you are unwaged on this basis on arrival at the convention, or else upgrade to the full rate.
- Ages for *child and infant membership* relate to the age of the child at the start of the convention (9 April 2004).
- Weekend and day membership rates will be included in the final PR.

# Booking Your Accommodation

It's the time of year that we're starting to remind everyone that they need to book their accommodation in Blackpool. The deadline for booking is 27 February 2004, but we strongly recommend that booking forms be sent in as early as possible, preferably by Christmas. All accommodation should be booked via the Blackpool Conference Accommodation Booking Service (CABS).

Although Blackpool has a lot of accommodation, we won't be the only people in the town during the Easter Bank Holiday weekend and it's best to take advantage of this advance booking opportunity.

Blackpool accommodation guides and booking forms were included with PR 2; if you haven't got another form enclosed with this PR, they can be downloaded from the Concourse web site or are available from the convention address.

Once you have selected the accommodation you require from the guide, just complete the form and send it to the CABS at the address below. Please indicate on the form what type of accommodation you require and the duration of your stay. You can either select a price range and other requirements, or specify a particular hotel you'd like to stay in. You don't need to send a deposit immediately, but you will need to pay a deposit to confirm your booking once this has been arranged. If you don't like filling in forms you can phone up the CABS or email or fax them the relevant information—but remember to mention Concourse.

If you have particular accommodation requirements due to special needs, please let the CABS know. They are mindful of visitors with varying physical abilities and will help to reserve suitable accommodation for you.

If you have any enquiries or problems about booking your accommodation in Blackpool, please do not hesitate to contact the CABS—or contact Concourse direct via email at : accommodation.concourse@ntlworld.com.

Any convention members arriving in Blackpool during the convention who still need accommodation should visit the Blackpool Tourism Office at the address below and they will make every effort to find accommodation for you. But we recommend not leaving it that late unless you have no choice!

—Jonathan ('Jonjo') Jones

Accommodation booking contact details:

Conference Accommodation Booking Service: Tourism Division 1 Clifton Street Blackpool FY1 1LY

Telephone: 01253 478225 or 01253 478216

Fax: 01253 478226

Email:

carol.hunt@blackpool.gov.uk or kelly.walsh@blackpool.gov.uk

# Childcare

One of the aims of Concourse is to be a family friendly convention; we are currently in negotiations with Kindercare to supply childcare at the convention. This will be located in the Winter Gardens and will operate between the hours of 10 AM to 4 PM.

The care staff team will be led by an experienced and qualified care co-ordinator who, along with the Nursery Manager, will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the service. All staff are experienced and trained in working with children.

Activities will include games, construction toys, sand/water play, art and craft, drama and role play, computer games, reading, chatting and generally being together. In addition to all this, Kindercare can also arrange trips and visits. Popular venues include walks in the country, fun in the park, bowling or the cinema. (Children who go out on trips are transported in school shuttle vehicles, which are fully seat-belted and driven by qualified and experienced staff. Children are well supervised; at this and all other times, the health and safety of the children is given priority.)

Kindercare will also be able to supply a sitting service for parents in their hotel bedroom. To enable us to supply this service to our members we will need to know how many of you would take advantage of this service. If there is high demand for this we will organise it, so please let us know.

To aid parents in selecting their accommodation, Blackpool Borough Council has supplied us with a list of hotels, guest houses, apartments and holiday flats which separately offer baby sitting services or baby listening services. The full list is available on the Concourse web site or from the convention address. We recommend that parents contact the establishments direct to discuss their baby sitting or baby listening requirements before booking their accommodation via the Conference Accommodation Booking Service.

-Jonathan ('Jonjo') Jones

# Before and after Eastercon...

Blackpool is a popular holiday destination in itself, and you might want to spend a few extra days there. As well as the inevitable piers, pleasure beach, and funfairs—and of course the Tower—Blackpool boasts a model village, waxworks, sea life centre, zoo park and art gallery.

If you're planning a longer break around the Eastercon, you might want to base yourself in Blackpool in order to visit the rest of Lancashire or other areas of the North West of England. The North West contains some of Britain's most unspoilt countryside: the Pennine Way is regarded by many as the greatest long-distance walk in Britain, and the Lake District National Park has England's highest peaks. The region is also home to a number of other important towns and cities, including Manchester and Liverpool.

The North West Tourist Board web site provides some useful ideas and links (see page 7).

# Timebinding Cable Ties

I've been reading a lot of science fiction lately.

'My, what a surprise,' I hear you say. 'How unexpected.'

OK, I do read a lot of SF, so what's so special about that? Well, it's not the message, it's the medium. I've been reading all this SF on my laptop. So what have I been reading? First, there's the modern stuff—Cory Doctorow, shorts by Charlie Stross, Geoff Ryman's hypertext novel 253, which are all available online. Then there's ezines. For instance, the SciFiction Archive for good new stuff and good old stuff; The Infinite Matrix—a Bruce Sterling ezine with lots of good fiction; and more short stuff at the Infinity Plus site.

For slightly older and longer fiction there is the Baen Free Library, a really neat idea; you can find even more free novels on their free CDs—around thirty or so books, plus illustrations, maps, spoken versions and even (shudder) filk. For a taste of their more recent publications (some stories complete, some partial—caveat lector) you can try Baen's book samples page. And for the truly obsessed you can even read their slushpile.

For really really old stuff try the Project Gutenberg site, a wonderful resource.

Why is all this material available? Read Eric Flint's reasons for giving away his work on the Baen Free Library site. He believes in it, and it's his money, after all.

So I've been reading a lot of science fiction. What's that got to do with timebinding?

Well, this is a piece for Concourse, the 2004 Eastercon, so the relevant dates are... 1904, 1929, 1954 and 1979, chewing up the century into 25 year-sized chunks. Now let's bind some time.

What happened in 1904?

Clifford Simak was born, and so was Robert Oppenheimer; Hugo Gernsback arrived in the US of A; HG Wells published 'The Country of the Blind'; the Panama Canal was started, and so was Peter Pan. No sign of Jack Williamson yet—we'll have to hold our breath until 1908.

Meanwhile a chap named Fleming invented the vacuum tube diode, a picture was transmitted by wire for the first time ever, and dentistry got a little less fraught with the invention of Novocaine.

What about 1929?

Donald Kingsbury, Sheri Tepper and Ursula K LeGuin were born. Hugo Gernsback published *Ralph 124C+41*; Fritz Lang, Thea von Harbou and Willy Ley invented the countdown in the movie *Frau im Mond*; and Jack Williamson published 'The Girl from Mars'—unlike Jack, it hasn't aged very well.

FM radio transmission and broadband co-axial cable were invented. As was Lithiated Lemon Carbonated Drink—for some reason later renamed '7-Up'.

And in 1954?

Bruce Sterling was born, as were Guy Gavriel Kay, Graham Joyce, and Iain M Banks. The films *Godzilla* and *Them!* were released, and the BBC broadcast *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 1954 saw the publication of *Brain Wave* by Poul Anderson, *Mission of Gravity* by Hal Clement, and *The Fellowship of the Ring* by a certain John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. The Worldcon GoH that year, Jack Williamson, published *Undersea Quest* in collaboration with Fred Pohl.

And IBM launched its first business computer, Texas Instruments developed the silicon transistor, and the frozen TV dinner was invented.

In 1979?

Three Mile Island melted down; President Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr of Iraq named his successor, Saddam Hussein al-Tikrit; Margaret Thatcher took over as Prime Minister in the UK; and Peter Weston ran his Worldcon in Brighton—Seacon'79. An apocalyptic year. Oh, and John Wayne died.

Films released that year included Alien, based on an A E Van Vogt story; Time After Time, based on a Jack Finney story; and Star Trek: The Motion Picture, based on an obscure TV series. We also had Mad Max, based on an obscure continent. On TV we had Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, Doctor Who in many different centuries, and Blake's 7 in many different quarries. And BattleStar Galactica created Starbucks.

The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction was published, as were Arthur C Clarke's The Fountains of Paradise, Charles Sheffield's The Web Between the Worlds, John Varley's Titan, and John Crowley's Engine Summer. And Jack Williamson's Brother to Demons, Brother to Gods also came out in 1979.

That year Pioneer 11 reached Saturn; the first Graphical User Interface was developed at Xerox PARC laboratories; UseNet was created and the first newsgroups; and on 12 April a Mr Kevin Mackenzie emailed the Message Group and suggested adding some emotion back into dry text by using punctuation marks to suggest feelings. He proposed -) for 'tongue-in-cheek'. One wonders if he actually meant it.

And the flood of inventions continued: 1979 saw the first CDs, the first LCDs, the launch of the Sony Walkman, and 3M's 'Post-It' notes. And the first Commodore PET computers: a 1MHz model with 8KB of RAM for £569, 16KB for £776, or 32KB for £914—allowing for inflation, that last one would be around £3,000 in today's money. A bit steep for 32 kilobytes.

And so to 2004 (well, nearly).

Now we can put that century of invention to good use, putting together the wires and cables, silicon chips and message boards, CDs and LCD displays, to create a skiffically compact device for downloading and outputting loads of science fiction wherever we want, whenever we want it. I think my laptop's great.

But it'll never replace a good book.\*

—Julian Headlong

Editors' note: Web links for these and a number of other sites that may be of interest to Concourse members can be found on page 7.



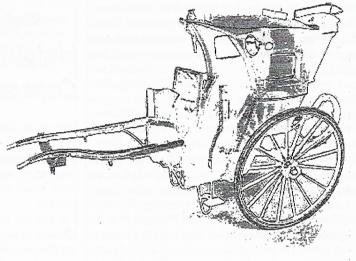


# Eastercon: The British National Science Fiction Convention

25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> March 2005 Hanover International Hinckley

### **Guests of Honour:**

John & Eve Harvey Ben Jeapes Ken MacLeod Richard Morgan Robert Rankin



### Membership Rates

		from 1 December 2003
Attending	£30	£35
Supporting	£15	£15
Junior	£15	£17:50
Child	£5	£5
Infant	free	free

### **Contact Address**

John Dowd

4 Burnside Avenue, SHEFFIELD S8 9FR, UK

telephone:

+44 (0) 114 281 0674

email:

memberships@paragon2.org.uk

# http://www.paragon2.org.uk

join online through the website using PayPal at no extra charge

Progress Report 3 Concourse

# Seacon '03: Blame TAFF

Thanks to the many kind supporters of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, I was able to attend Seacon '03—my first and, so far, only British convention.

What? Was that a groan of pity I just heard? But no, I had a terrific time, even in the windswept wasteland that is Hinckley. It's true that I never made it out of the hotel bar (I was afraid that all the Old Speckled Hen would be gone before I got back), but I met a shocking number of people that way.

Well, OK, now that I have the obligatory bar joke out of the way (they didn't really put up a plaque for me, did they?) I'll confess that I did see a bit of the convention. I was even on a panel or two-and I'm still cursing Sandra Bond for asking me whether TAFF has any purpose in this day and age. I suppose I wasn't badly behaved enough to give you lot anything to write about (and what other purpose could TAFF have?), but I certainly saw my share of depraved behaviour. There were the robot wars, for instance, although I had to stand on tiptoes to see even a sliver of it over the cursing, howling mob (didn't see any torches, but I suppose that came in the welding phase). Then there was Phil Raines and Ian Sorenson's latest multimedia extravaganza, graced by the ineffable onscreen presence of Julia Daly channelling Jackie McRobert. And there was that final dead dog panel with Jim de Liscard and Chris Tregenza, but best not go there at this point, I expect.

At a conservative estimate, I spoke with 120 people—at least half of them named Anders-at the convention. (That was the obligatory Anders joke, which I think orginated with Dave Hicks, but they say you should always steal from the best.) Inasmuch as I had met perhaps thirty or forty British fans at most before my TAFF trip, this was quite an expansion of my horizons. It's all very well to meet the jet-setting Yvonne Rowses, Peter Westons, Mark Plummers, and Christina Lakes of the world, but who in North America has ever had the pleasure of hearing Wag speak far too knowledgeably of DVDAs, or Helena wax wry about the horrific gleaming teeth of (I think) George Clooney? What right-thinking American has ever heard Dave O'Neill and Del Cotter rehearse an apparently traditional argument about the value of the space programme? Where else but on yonder side of the Atlantic can one learn from James Bacon the proper way to bellow incomprehensible Irish words, or marvel at Flick's shiny black antigravity device? And what was it that Ronan Murphy gave me to drink when I asked for a sip of water during John Harvey's band's hot, bluesy set? It was as clear as water, but it burned, it burned!

Thanks to TAFF I have a better feel for the shape (and factions) of British fandom (not to mention the Swedes) and I hope that the people I talked to enjoyed getting a small taste of US fandom as well. My sense is that most of us find our niche in fandom and don't stray too far outside it, and it's good sometimes to be shaken out of our ruts. Fandom is about making contact with like-minded souls, and it's certainly eye-opening and perspective-changing to meet like-minded souls from halfway around the world, speaking a language one can almost barely understand. It stretches even the Cosmic Mind (and more than that if one is foolish enough to try the Astral Pole, which I wasn't), and maybe it makes us better at understanding different experiences and cultural contexts. Worse yet, it gives one a

sense of responsibility toward the fans who support this exchange of ambassadors and other good causes in the SF community.

Thus I tip my hat to those who came to the End of the Pier festivities at Seacon '03 and bought a pastry and a silly balloon hat—made by Pat Murphy, no less—or tried their hand (and shoulders, and legs and hips) at the Astral Pole or the wheelchair slalom—and bravo to Doug Spencer for making it through *that* blind-folded: very zen. Likewise for the auction, which featured Ellen Klages doing her own inimitable crosscultural translations ('What? You call dollars "pounds" over here?'). Thanks to everyone who supports the fan funds. I look forward to meeting whoever you send over in reprisal for my visit.

And thanks, y'all, for throwing such a terrific party in my honour. And for letting me have more than my share of Old Speckled Hen.\*

-Randy Byers



# Helping out with Concourse

Like all fan-run conventions, Concourse is organised by fans for fans. The list of committee members and staff on page 2 shows some of the people who have already agreed to help out with the convention, and also indicates some of the different areas of work which need to be undertaken to make the convention a success

If you are interested in helping out with the convention, in advance or especially on the day, do get in touch (contact details are also set out on page 2). There are two main ways in which your help would be appreciated.

Firstly, we'd like volunteers to help with the programme, both as a participant on the day and by contributing ideas in advance. You don't have to be an experienced programme participant in order to get involved, but we want to make sure that we're asking people to play to their strengths in order to make the programme enjoyable for everyone. So if you're volunteering to be a programme participant, it would be helpful if you could give us an idea of your areas of interest (and of any particular expertise you have).

Secondly, we need your help to make the convention work behind the scenes: in specific areas like registration, the programme 'green room', Ops (operations), stewarding, tech, the newsletter—and also in a general capacity if you are willing to work for a few hours as a 'gopher', helping with any organisational or physical tasks which need to be done at the time. Again, no experience is necessary—and if you're particularly interested in learning about how one or more areas of an Eastercon works, please tell us—but experience that you do have could be very helpful to us and we'd be grateful if you could make clear what you've done before.

It would be very helpful to know at this stage when you'll be arriving at and leaving the con, and whether there are other days and times when you won't be available.

### Seacon '03 Revisited

Well, what a swell party that was. Seacon '03 was one of the best Eastercons I've attended since my first (Ompacon at the Grand Hotel, Bristol, in 1973). It takes a fine mixture of programme, hotel, bars and a committee who know how to have fun as well as making the trains run on time to conjure a classic convention. Many have tried, but few totally succeed.

What was interesting this year was the mix of the programme. Many of this committee are fannish fans, fanzine fans, and it showed. Apart from a fine list of professionals and worthwhile panels about SF, about writing and about ideas, there were also fascinating and hugely entertaining items by and with a plethora of fans. I found myself whizzing around, from panel to panel and back to the bar for chats with old friends. I haven't seen Graham Charnock at a con for years, for instance, and spent quite some time with him, Chris Evans and Chris Priest, amongst others. On a personal note, this was also the first Easter since 1987 where I haven't been representing a publisher, which meant I had more freedom-but also the sense of a hole at the centre of my convention. However, many chums made sure I had plenty to do, including being the convention's Toastmaster, and MC of the BSFA Awards on Sunday evening. As someone who hung around in bars and convention halls at cons for fifteen years before becoming a publisher, I'm very aware that a convention has to be all things to all people; to cater for those who want a social gathering as well as those who want an intelligent range of programming... or just want to be entertained. I believe that the ratio of attendees to programme participants was as low as 5 to 1 this year. That has to be a good thing, since it means people weren't out there looking at the same old faces, hour after hour.

The presentation of the Tiptree Award at Seacon '03 also added to the enjoyment of the Easter weekend for me. We should remember that this is the British national science fiction convention; it should be as important to us as the Worldcon is to the US (and to the UK in 2005. Join now, if you haven't done so already). The BSFA Awards are, together with the Arthur C Clarke Award, among the genre's most important awards in the UK; they're our Hugo, if you like, our popular-vote awards. I know—because I've done it myself—that publishers try to get a disinterested media involved in these awards, but it's equally important that we all support them as fans. We're the ones who don't just wander into WHSmith's once a month and look for a book with a spaceship on the cover. By definition—by joining conventions—we take the genre more seriously than that. So I do believe that every member of the convention should vote for their favourite SF novel of the year, and short fiction, non-fiction and artwork. Obviously, it also helps if you're a member of the BSFA, so you can send in nominations throughout the year, rather than simply voting for the shortlist with which you're presented on the day. So join the BSFA, too.

I suppose what I'm saying is cons are terrific fun, but even more so if you take part rather than simply sitting there and saying 'Entertain me'. You know it makes sense. And enjoy Concourse next Easter!\*

—John Jarrold

The current BSFA Award administrator, whipping off an editorial hat and donning another, writes:

Information about joining the BSFA and about making nominations for the 2003 awards can all be found on the BSFA web site (address on page 7), in any recent issue of *Matrix*, or by writing to me c/o 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CRO 7HA, UK. The deadline for nominations is 31 January 2004, and the shortlists will be available on the website as soon as possible after that. We'll also be printing it in the final PR to give you some more time to prepare to cast an informed vote at the Eastercon.

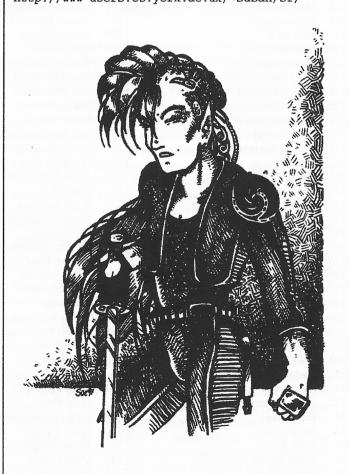
And at risk of making this read like one of those book reviews that make it into *Private Eye*, I'm also extremely pleased that John Jarrold will reprise his role as Master of Ceremonies for the presentation of the BSFA Awards at Concourse. Don't miss your chance to express your views on the best SF of the year, or to see the results announced live!\*

—Claire Brialey

If you'd like to read some other reports of Seacon '03, Cheryl Morgan has extensive coverage in her ezine *Emerald City* #92, which can be found at:

http://www.emcit.com/emcit092.shtml#Return *Emerald City* appears monthly and contains numerous book and convention reviews.

Also Susan Stepney has some notes on Seacon '03—and many other conventions—on her website at: http://www-users.cs.york.ac.uk/~susan/sf/



### Membership list as at 10 October 2003.

#### Guests of Honour

Mitchell Burnside Clapp

Danny Flynn

Sue Mason

Christopher Priest

Philip Pullman

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- 145 Dave Tompkins
- 261 Julie Tottey
- 347 Karen Traviss
- 146 Paul Treadaway
- 147 Cristina Pulido Ulvang
- 148 Tor Christian Ulvang
- 205 Tobes Valois
- 292 Larry van der Putte
- 149 Jan Van 'T Ent 324 Marion Vandervort
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