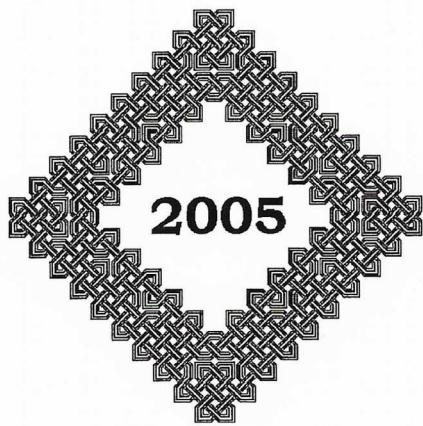


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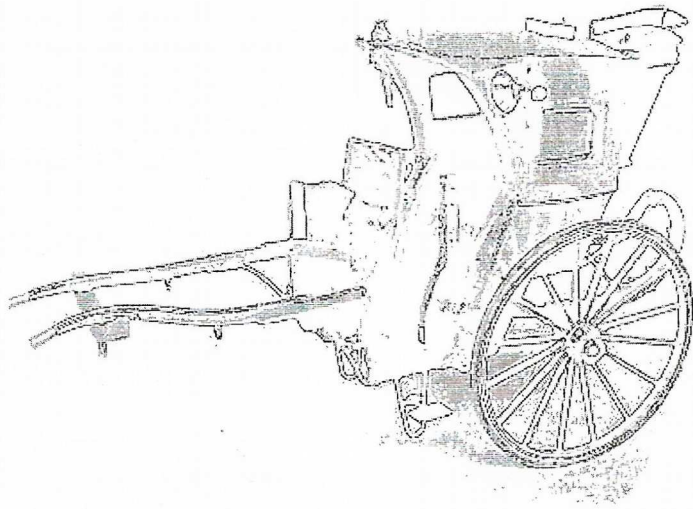
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25th-28th March 2005

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Hinckley

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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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Concourse

COVER: 'Expedition to Earth' by Danny Flynn

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Concourse

Welcome to the souvenir book for Concourse, the 55th British National Science Fiction Convention.

This publication is designed to give you some background on our guests, on the history of the Eastercon, and a few perspectives on the year just passed and the state of the genre. However, as is traditional, we'd point out that there is nothing in these pages that you need to know during the Eastercon; information on the programme and other events, and on the Winter Gardens, is contained in the separate booklet which you should find in the pack that contained this book. Having said that, should you find yourself with a few spare minutes during the convention, we'd recommend that you take the time to read the contributions by and about the convention's guests.

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank all our contributors, especially the convention's guests: Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Sue Mason, Christopher Priest and Philip Pullman. We've said it before but it's worth once again thanking all those who have contributed to the four progress reports, with a special mention to Sue Mason who produced the splendid cover artwork. Dave Langford's *Ansible* was, as always, a useful and reliable source of information, as was the PNN website and *Locus* magazine. Geoff Wilkinson and the staff of the Print Shop at Sheffield Hallam University have done a splendid job on all our publications, as we've come to expect; Fran and John Dowd assisted with some fetching and carrying of progress reports. We also encourage you to support our advertisers.

MITCHELL BURNSIDE CLAPP

Where There's a Will by Mitchell Burnside Clapp

I was thinking recently about NASA and its desire to invest heavily in new technologies to develop better launch vehicles. I know this is worthy work and that NASA's charter requires them to do a fair bit of this sort of thing, but I can't help be reminded of the kids who spend a hundred bucks on top of the line basketball shoes in the hope that it will give them game.

You get game by doing the work. You get it by doing a hundred thousand free throws. You get it by running your legs into jelly until you can drive the lane. You get it by doing something other than layups at practice because anyone can make those shots and you don't always get them in real games. You get it by trying and failing and trying and failing and repeating the process until the ball goes swish, every single time.

It doesn't come from the shoes.

Okay, I'll get down off my metaphorical high-horse. Truth to tell, I suck at basketball. My strategy is always 'pass the ball to the tall kid'.

But I've faced this a bunch of times in my own life. Haven't we all? Ever say:

I'm not going to do a classical methods analysis because the fancy software I can't afford will solve it with a mouse click?

I'm not going to go jogging today because that promotional deal at the gym starts next month?

I'm having the crême brûlée tonight because I'm starting a diet tomorrow?

I'm not going to code this software tight because next year's hardware will run it fast enough?

Back in the 1960s, a time of incredible, inspirational achievement in space, we had technology far less advanced than we have currently. Everyone knows about the electronics, of course, but even fairly straightforward things like welding, rocket engines, navigation, and so forth have advanced amazingly since the moon programme. Our financial resources have grown immeasurably as well. But we are currently offered a plan to go back to the moon, and it'll take twice as long as it did the first time. For me, the question is often, 'If they can put a man on the moon, then why can't they put a man on the moon?'

What has changed? First, I think, is a lack of relevance to the ordinary person. People interested in space have never managed to make the case to the broader public that the scientific benefits, the prestige benefits, or the spinoff benefits are worth the expenditure. Rationally, they aren't. We believe, almost as an article of received wisdom, that space is worth doing for inherent reasons, because it

feeds something inside us. But that case has never been made clear to the people who are obliged to pay for it.

Second, of course, is the self-perpetuating notion that space is so colossally expensive that it can only be done by governments, when in fact it may be the other way around—it's expensive because it's done by governments. And a desire for ever more elegant technology before committing to actually building anything makes the status quo a way of life, permanently. At 41 years of age, I am below the average age for aerospace professionals still, when in nearly any other industry I would be above it, and in some regarded as quite over the hill.

In my opinion, the only way space will become a significant region of human activity is to make it pay for itself—to get people to invest in it, and to reward them handsomely for doing so. My own company is attempting one approach to this, and I'm sure many others are as well. Someone, eventually, will succeed, and space will become a routine place for people to travel to and work in and make livings from.

In the 1960s, there was a historically unique convergence of technical capability and political will. We are unlikely to see it again in our lifetimes. The will necessary to do the things in space that we all dream of, I conclude, must come from us alone.

I suppose what I'm trying to say here is that success, progress, and so on comes from doing the work. Nothing else.*

—Mitchell Burnside Clapp

Mitch: A Man of Many Arts by Simon Bradshaw

It is said of some people that if they did not exist, they would have to be invented. The flaw in this argument as applied to Mitchell Burnside Clapp is that whilst the sentiment is in no doubt valid, few authors would risk their Dramatic Licence being endorsed for stretching credibility so far. You can imagine the conversation between Author and Editor:

A: You said you had a few issues with some of my characters?

E: Well, you could put it that way.

A: And which of them seem to be the problem?

E: There's the dashing USAF test pilot and the brilliant rocket scientist for starters. Then there's the polyglot with more languages than most people have fingers, the renowned singer-songwriter, the wit and raconteur, the American and, come to think of it, the Australian.

A: Um... I don't think I have that many characters.

E: And that's the point—you don't! They're all the same guy, this, er [ruffles through manuscript] Mitchell Burn...

A: Burnside Clapp. He used to be just Clapp, Burnside was his wife's name. Oh yes, she's a singer too.

E: I noticed.

A: So what's the problem? After all, I've been awfully economical. To give you that sort of spread of expertise, most authors would end up with a *dramatis personae* out of a Niven and Pournelle blockbuster.

E: Because even Niven and Pournelle wouldn't invent someone like this! I mean, don't you think it stretches credulity just a smidgen to have a guy who flies F-15s in the morning, designs rocketplanes in the afternoon, and gives a concert at a science fiction convention in the evening?

A: Well, I agree it's unlikely anyone would do all that in a day.

E: I'm glad to hear—

A: Mitch would probably spread them over at least a week...

Fortunately, Real Life operates under no such tedious constraints, and we are indeed happy to welcome a man who has done all of the above and more. Mitch has actually managed to become a legend in multiple fandoms, to the extent that whilst to one fan he's legendary as the designer of the Black Horse air-refueled rocketplane, to another he's best known as the writer and singer of 'Falling Down On New Jersey' (or its anglicised version, 'Falling Down On Milton Keynes').

The first time I came across Mitch was in his Rocket Scientist identity. About ten years ago his name started to crop up on the space-interest Internet newsgroups in connection with a couple of novel and exciting proposals for achieving low-cost access to space. One was the DC-X, a prototype vertical-takeoff-and-landing rocket built by McDonnell-Douglas; the other was 'Black Horse', a design concept for a rocketplane that would use aerial refuelling* to greatly enhance its performance. It turned out that not only was Mitch working as a flight controller on the former, but that he had written the technical paper that first described the latter. This was at the time when I was helping to plan the science programme for Intersection (the 1995 Worldcon), and I was delighted when out of the blue Mitch emailed to say that he would be at the convention and would we like him to be on any programme items? Well, here we had a guy who designed and flew rockets, and was coming to our convention: how could we say anything but 'yes please'?

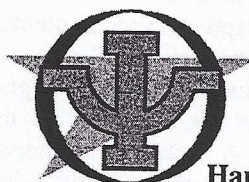
Another of Mitch's many facets became clear when I met him at the convention itself. Intersection prided itself on being a particularly international Worldcon, and extended the common idea of badge-ribbons to include ones for fluency in different languages. In a spirit of helpfulness, Mitch had been honest about his language

skills... resulting in a ribbon selection of impressive scope and breadth (I don't recall if they found one for Latin for him in the end). This was when I also got my first inkling of his other area of fame, when having mentioned to some fellow fans that I'd arranged for Mitch to be on some programme items, they commented that they didn't know I was organising filk. It was only then that I found out that one of our star programme participants was a Big Name Fan in another area of fandom entirely (and in which capacity he was to come back to the UK a few years later, as Guest of Honour at Decadence, the 1998 Filk con).

Well, Mitch proved to be an excellent programme participant and fellow fan: knowledgeable, witty and—that highest of British accolades—a Thoroughly Good Chap. I won't steal his thunder by repeating any of his anecdotes here, but if you get a chance ask him about the DC-X test launch that went a bit wrong, or the Marine General and the packet of Oreos. And by all means feel free to test the theory that the strength of Mitch's residual Australian accent is directly proportional to the quantity of beer imbibed! Mitch just seems to be one of those people for whom there is a bye-law (or perhaps Divine Injunction) against anyone having anything but a good time when he is around, and I've no doubt that he'll be a superb Guest of Honour for Concourse.*

—Simon Bradshaw

* To be pedantic, it would take on oxidizer, not fuel, from a tanker. Why this is so is one of the clever bits of Mitch's design, which I'm sure he'll cheerfully explain to you given a beer and a sufficiently large napkin. Just be prepared for phrases like 'mass fraction', 'relative density' and 'specific impulse'...

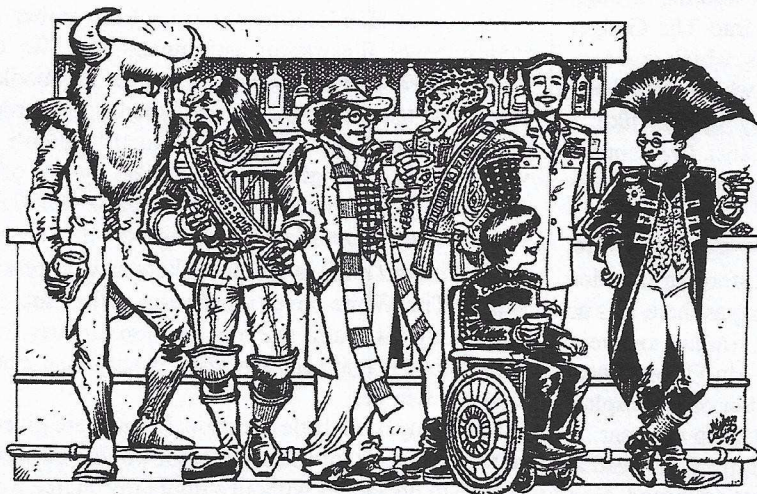


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DANNY FLYNN

An Essay for Eastercon... by Danny Flynn

It was just coming up to Christmas 2001 and all was not well. Things were not going as planned in my attempt to further proceedings with my children's TV project. Postponed meetings, even more revisions to my space characters, complicated emails to answer etc. It was around this time when I first heard that I'd been invited to be the guest of honour artist for Concourse, the Eastercon. It wasn't until I looked closer at the email that I saw that it was for 2004! '2004, but that's miles away,' I thought, without appearing to sound ungrateful... the opposite in fact, I was delighted!

And now as I sit down to write a few paragraphs for this brochure, the event is *only* a month away. It's hard to imagine where all those weeks and months have gone and how the time has sped by so quickly.

I even went up to Blackpool last weekend to take a look at the Winter Gardens, mainly to check out the Exhibition area just to see how many paintings I should bring along. Quite an impressive building, very art deco, with some truly unique rooms as you will soon discover too. It's the first time I have been to Blackpool outside a summer time, and what a different place it is... like a town that's resting, catching its breath after a long battering before yet another big invasion of tourists during the coming months. I thought the town could do with a lick of paint and a bit of a tidy-up, if I'm allowed to say that without offending anyone at Blackpool Council. Then again, I think all English seaside towns have that weathered feel about them, which is probably what gives them their character, so a spring clean is probably not a good idea after all. What the hell do I know anyway, and why am I talking like a town planner?

Oxfordshire to Blackpool took me three hours with little hassle, and I'm sure I drove past Martina Navratilova driving a mini near Junction 17 of the M6. After parking the car and walking through the shopping precinct, I couldn't resist calling into The Gadget Shop. I wanted to check out the Bad Taste Bears, which you may have seen before. A friend of mine knows the guy who created them, so I was curious to see for myself what they looked like; I understand they're very popular with collectors. Also, I'm about to have my own characters *Lunartics* made into figurines, so I guess you could say it was a bit of research too.

When I found them, I was initially surprised how small they were, yet I have to say they looked quite impressive all stood to attention on an elaborate if precarious display stand. Seeing as there was no 'Do not touch' sign, the temptation to pick one up was just too great. After laughing at all their names, I settled for the 'Muff Diving' bear (I kid you not), perched cheekily on the highest tier of the display. With thumb and forefinger, I ever-so-gently lifted up the bear... I guess I hadn't really expected his body to detach from his head as 'Crash, bang, shatter': the whole bloody stand just collapsed. How embarrassing eh... still, I did at least discover that the bears were not that well-made. I thought it best to carefully place the grinning Muff Diver's bodiless head back on the trashed display stand, casually stroll out of the shop and head off to the Winter Gardens... fast!

So, this Eastercon's coming up, and just what do I take there as in paintings etc? Hard to believe, but I left Art College now almost 20 years ago now, so I probably have enough work and scribbles to fill up every room. I would love for my old tutors to come along, well one in particular—who really hated science fiction and was convinced I'd get nowhere with my art. As rude and unhelpful as gits like this may appear at the time, this one certainly inspired me to prove him wrong. It won't really surprise you, but this same idiot had never read a science fiction novel: 'You won't catch me reading that drivel'. How often do you hear people say that when you tell them you enjoy science fiction? 'That's for people who can't deal with reality, just nonsense escapism,' he would insultingly jibe, believing he was all superior and only his opinion counted for anything. I thought that all literature was a form of escapism to some degree, but there you go..

'So you do read then?' I asked him. 'Of course, but only proper stuff: John Le Carre, Anthony Burgess—now they know how to write a decent story' he enthused. I had to admit to not reading any of their novels, but was not ignorant or stupid enough to dismiss them as crap. 'So how come you're so sure that SF writers can't tell good stories, especially if you've never read them?' I asked him, but realised there was little point in trying—not even to change his thinking, but at least get him to agree that he may be missing out on something not at all bad. I went on to tell him that he'd probably really enjoy Clarke, Asimov, Philip K Dick and Larry Niven, but there was no way he was ever going to accept that maybe, just maybe, he might actually like a science fiction book.

It's a shame isn't it, when you come up against this cold and hard blinkeredness (is there such a word?), but it got me thinking... Let's suppose you could choose just *one* SF novel to try and convert an SF non-reader, which book would it be? Have a little think about it. Not easy, is it? I don't mean your favourite SF novel, but a book that you feel would really make an impression on the stubborn 'Don't like sci-fi, know what I do like and that's that!' mentality of too many people out there. Does this mean I now have to give *my* opinion? Damn, I've set myself up for this, haven't I? OK then, after some thought, what about Robert A Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*? I could think of so many more: Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*, Phillip Mann's brilliant *Master of Paxwax*, Christopher Hinz's intriguing Paratwa trilogy, but now I'm getting carried away...

Talking of Heinlein, by the way, I remember my first science fiction cover illustration assignment was *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*. So pleased was I to get this book, I submitted no fewer than ten pencil roughs, numbered 1-10 in order of my personal preference, and yes... they chose No.10! I didn't really mind, as I was thankful to be given a cover to do by one of the big name SF authors. This led to many more Heinleins—*I Will Fear No Evil*, *Red Planet*, *The Puppet Masters* amongst others—but sadly no *Stranger in a Strange Land*, as the publishers saw no reason to change the superb Tim White cover illustration at the time. Perhaps one day, and I may just paint my own version anyway for my portfolio... Time I read it again anyway and I'm surprised it has not been made into a movie yet.

This is my other little question: if you were given the opportunity to turn any book into a movie, what would you choose? Not difficult for me to decide, as without a doubt my choice would be George R R Martin's classic Mississippi vampire novel *Fevre Dream*. Abner Marsh (the larger than life rough 'n' ready steamboat captain) and Joshua Yorke (the elegant if reluctant aristocrat vampire) have to be up there as two of the most likeable and fully realised characters

ever to grace the pages of any novel, in any genre. If you have read this book too, you'll know where I am coming from. If you have not read it, believe me you've missed a real gem. I was fortunate enough to illustrate the cover, which is how I discovered it, and I remember reading it right through cover-to-cover one cold and windy night. I could not even think about sleep until I'd reached the final page, and was even moved to tears at the end—as in a similar way recently after seeing Tim Burton's genius *Big Fish* movie. Isn't it just something else when a book manages to do that to you?

I was fortunate enough to meet Mr Martin back in 1995 at the Worldcon in Glasgow. I was telling him how he also happens to be the author of my favourite short story, 'The Sand Kings'. Again, I'm sure that anyone who has read this story would agree that it's an incredible tale, with a clever twist at the end. If you or anyone you know has a copy of it you happen to have brought to Eastercon then do let me know as I would love to read 'Sand Kings' again, having found it difficult to get hold of (even on Amazon!) There's another Glasgow Worldcon next year, which I'm looking forward to already.

You will probably have noticed that as I write each sentence for this brochure, my mind keeps suddenly jumping to something else. Just as well I'm not a proper writer eh... I was supposed to be talking about what I should bring along to Eastercon, wasn't I? Obviously I will bring a selection of paintings I have done for book-jacket covers, and I have found that people are often just as interested in the preliminary conceptual sketches and roughs, so I'll see what I can find. Many of you will know that it is the job of us book cover artists to initially read the novel, then come up with many enticing ideas we think will help the book sell thousands of copies.

Once the 'rough' visual gets approval from the publisher's Art Director, then it's the fun part—getting on with the illustration, though I have to say occasionally some paintings can be a struggle (I don't really know why this is). I would imagine this happens with other illustrators too, but usually it all comes together at the end. Also, it is still a thrill to see one's art on a book cover, even way back with my first published title *Pippi Longstocking in the South Seas*. I was only given this job, I believe, on account of the odd socks I was wearing on the day I nervously took my portfolio along to Penguin Books. Pippi wears odd socks too. She also carries a horse to school but, even if I was strong enough to do the same, horses make me sneeze...

From horses to unicorns... I was recently at the International Spring Fair in Birmingham, and was amazed to see a poster of mine at one of the stands. It was of a fantasy landscape with what I now consider to be two absolutely awful unicorns sat amongst some poppies against a backdrop of waterfalls etc... My mind was taken back seven years ago when I was asked, after submitting the artwork, to make the unicorns much bigger in the painting. I thought the Art Director was just winding me up. 'But they'll look ridiculous, and that will surely mean making everything else around them bigger too?' I protested. Anyway, I did as I was told then thought no more of it; I never was sent a proof poster nor ever saw what it turned out like when published.

The people on the stand had no idea who I was, so I enquired of the unicorn poster. 'Lovely isn't it?' the man said 'And still one of our best sellers,' I was excitedly informed, to my utter amazement. I almost didn't tell him I was the artist, but I wanted to try and blag a poster as, coincidentally, I had recently been considering doing a similar painting to go on my new website. I was given a poster, yet had forgotten that I would have to trawl the huge thing around with me for the rest of the show. I then had a tough time with the security staff, who thought I'd nicked it from a stand. Funny now, but it was

quite strange arguing with them that the artwork was in fact one of my own embarrassing paintings.

In most cases artists thankfully get artwork returned, usually on publication if it's a book cover, for example. I have been building up quite a collection of paintings, yet in recent years I have become more involved in TV and computer games art. In all honesty though, I have really missed illustrating the covers of books. There was no deliberate choice to move away from books; rather that was just the way my career has gone these past few years. This does not mean that I have suddenly gone all digital like many artists have chosen to do (not that it's a crime or anything). I have been more involved in computer generated art, on the concept side of things rather than sat at a computer using the amazing 3D packages. In a computer game, for example, my role is to think up objects—known as the assets list—then provide a detailed enough sketch from which the 3D artist can 'model', whether it be a spaceship, a tree or a totem pole.

This diversion to CG art I guess came about after a car crash I was in five years ago, just outside Oxford. A drunken cyclist had decided it would be a cool idea to cycle in the outside lane of the M40, towards oncoming traffic and without lights! You can probably imagine the rest. We all tried in vain to avoid running the poor man over (and yes, I know he should not have been there) but, needless to say, there was an almighty pile-up of cars, the aftermath of which resembled a scene from an episode of *Casualty*. Thankfully, I was not hurt too badly, but hell, did it give me a fright or what? Some wake-up call: how we simply presume we have all these many years ahead of us, eh? Whilst recovering, it certainly made me realise that I still had many directions in which to take my art... and no time like the present.

It had always been an ambition of mine to one day take a sidestep from book illustration, and have a real go at seeing how far I could get with my own characters. For years I had been doodling these oddball space creatures, often on beer mats or the scribble-pad by the telephone. I took time to develop them into stronger characters, gave them personalities and took ten of them to 'finished artwork' stage, as well as writing a couple of basic storylines around them. 'Manic Moonsters' they became known as. Bored rigid with life on Mars, they head to our moon having discovered that the interior is in fact hollow! Without going into all the details, from a variety of good contacts in the industry I managed to secure funding to make a pilot episode for an animated children's TV series.

This was a great learning curve for me, and a true eye-opener as to just how far computer graphics had evolved. The 15-minute pilot was eventually shown to the BBC, who in principle liked it very much, though suggested we use a different writer, one of theirs—who was not available for two years! Patient as I can be, I couldn't wait that long so tried to find a way of meeting this guy in the hope that he would write me a strong script. I already had some superb extra scripts from respected writer friends of mine, but discovered the BBC preferred to use their own established and experienced scriptwriters. I did eventually get my script from their recommended man, yet the wait goes on...

Around this time (two years ago), I felt I needed to keep myself on the ball and up to date with the latest CG art software, so looked for a computer games project to work on whilst I waited for the green light on *Moonsters*. As luck would have it, a team was being recruited to commence work on Universal's latest *Crash Bandicoot* game for the Play-Station 2, being developed by Travellers Tales Games—who had just set up a southern studio, conveniently for me in Summertown, Oxford, a 20-minute drive away. Working on *Crash* proved to be a very valuable experience, and it was exciting

to see how a computer game all comes together. My role on the game recently came to a close, yet I had a great time there working with a great bunch of guys. I still see them as we meet regularly to play badminton, then it's down to 'The Dew Drop' for a pint or two to replace the calories we just burnt off on the court

I am probably not allowed to say too much about the game, but initially it was going to be very SF and fantasy orientated. I may well bring some of the drawings along to Eastercon, should anyone wish to see them. As the *Crash* project progressed, there were too many games of a similar nature coming onto the market, including the thoroughly enjoyable *Ratchet and Clank*, with the sequel to the superb *Jak and Daxter* well on the way too. I don't know how many of you play computer games, but I love them. Yes, many will argue they're a waste of time, and I tend to agree to a point—yet they're so much fun! *Exile: Myst 3* kept me enthralled yet baffled for weeks, and I would love to have worked with the art department on it—breathtaking graphics! The same can be said for the three *Oddworld* Games—the adventures of Abe—who is so far my favourite games character.

Back to *Moonsters*... since the pilot I have expanded the range of characters to 70, with more to come. This was all done during the little spare time I got whilst working on *Crash*. I have also renamed them *Lunartics*, which was my initial choice anyway, but I had been told by the PC do-gooders in horror, 'You can't call them *Lunartics*, you may upset someone.' Here we go again. It seems there's always some legislation, rule, law or code of conduct for just about everything now, and it's all got silly and gone too far really. *Lunartics* they are, so I'll see what happens from here. My experience so far of trying to bring a project to television has taught me that too many people believe they know everything, where it seems most people actually know little. There don't seem to be any hard and fast rules about how to win the day, except to never give up if you believe in what you're doing. One thing for sure, I know I will keep trying no matter what, and if it never happens at least I will know I gave it a good shot.

As for the moment, I am trying to finish off some new paintings in time for Eastercon, including if possible a painting inspired by Phillip Pullman's *Northern Lights* which I have only just got around to reading (naughty me). I have never met him, but he must be on top of the world at the moment with all his recent successes and rave reviews of his literature. After the show I plan to reintroduce myself to all the UK publishing houses in the hope of illustrating some book covers again. Also, I have recently teamed up with a printer friend of mine in Oxford, Simon Harris, to form 'Lunartics Ltd'. We are about to release the *Lunartics* creatures as collector cards and posters, having had an encouraging and positive response to them at last year's Licencing Trade Show in London. Through Lunartics Ltd, I will also at last be able to have my book jacket art available as posters and particularly limited edition prints, having had many requests from visitors to my website in recent years. And so that's currently in the process of a massive update, even with an online shop.

I'm trying to think of a brilliant last sentence to close with but I can't, sorry... All I will say is that I am really looking forward to this year's Eastercon. I hope you enjoy viewing whatever paintings I decide to bring, and especially having an 'Out of this World' time at the event...*

—Danny Flynn

No Time to Paint the Cat by Fred Clarke

I first met Danny back in 1992, when he helped me at the Minehead Space Festival in Somerset. I recall that I may, quite unintentionally, have terrified him by saying the first time I spoke to him on the telephone, 'Hello, is that Danny Flynn? I have been trying to track you down for some time.'

Danny began apologising at length for the late payment of his poll tax, presuming I was Mr Clarke from Oxford District Council. I had forgotten to explain that I was in fact Arthur's C Clarke's brother, and even then it took Danny a while to let the name Arthur Clarke sink in.

At this time Danny had recently illustrated the book cover of one of Arthur's anthologies—*Expedition to Earth*—a collection of enjoyable short stories that included 'The Sentinel' (the lengthened version of which became *2001: A Space Odyssey*). Arthur was both surprised yet pleased that the publishers had for once *not* adorned one of his works with a typical space hardware scene, and even sent a memo to them remarking on how much he liked the new artwork.

Instead of a spaceship against an inky sky, the *Expedition* cover had an eerie icy landscape of soft blues and purples, with distant hazy mountains. The foreground had unusual foliage with shell-like shapes dotted around, dominated by a menacing-looking bird that resembled a kingfisher with a vulture's eye... inspired by the title story of the book.

We thought it would be a good idea to invite an artist to our Space Festival—held in Arthur's birth town of Minehead, to celebrate his 75th birthday. Danny brought so much work with him he could probably have filled a gallery. At the time I was not really familiar with Danny's work, so was pleasantly surprised to see the variety of paintings he had produced for many other authors. The exhibition he put up was greatly admired by all who were fortunate enough to see it, both adults and children alike.

I had not realised that Danny was also the progenitor of some quite scary paintings, but he assured me he was a safe and harmless enough person. Like most of his work at the time, Danny's paintings were produced specifically to end up being used on the cover of a novel. It almost seemed a shame that the painting would then be reduced down to fit on the cover of a book, with half the image further being obliterated by the book's title and author's name. Having seen the work of so many SF and fantasy artists over the years, I am always amazed at the fine detail in the original paintings that is all too often lost once the image becomes book-cover size.

Danny told me that book publishers did usually return artwork once the book was in the shops—as they don't own the artwork, just the rights to reproduce the image. I would imagine Danny now has quite a collection of originals. I'm sure he will bring along as many as he can to the convention. Danny was telling me recently that he had regrettably not been doing much book-jacket painting of late, having been involved in the making of a computer game—*Crash Bandicoot*—which is thankfully almost finished now. Hopefully, we will soon start to see Danny's paintings on the covers of books once again...

This prompted me to wonder why it was that science fiction and fantasy art in general (not just Danny's work) is not more widely seen by the public. You would think with the success of science fiction and fantasy movies in recent years, nearly everyone would want to see this sort of art both in galleries and on their walls. I own many science fiction paintings, including one which Danny painted especially for me of which I am very proud. It was specially

commissioned, and presented to me (to my utter surprise) at the Arthur C Clarke Awards at the Science Museum in 2002.

Few people would have realised that Danny had worked around the clock, flat out for a week to finish the painting in time. He was supposed to be in hospital having a double hernia operation. (I presume he did eventually have his op.) He told me the paint had only just dried as it was handed over to me...

When I first looked at the painting, it felt like I had suddenly been taken into a colourful and gentle make-believe landscape, there was so much detail. It was as if Danny had just returned from some mythical magical world and taken a snapshot of what he'd seen there. I know full well that he is known for the extra things he hides in his paintings, yet it took me a while to notice a family of badgers near the base of a tree, so obvious once you know they are there. I was telling Danny about my cat and asked if she could be sneaked into the painting somewhere one of these days, when he gets the opportunity.

One of the great joys of owning a Danny Flynn painting is watching the instant pleasure it gives to everyone who sees it for the first time. Danny's paintings are not just for the science fiction buffs; viewers of all tastes in literature or art admire them. The more they are looked at the more pleasure they give, for there are many facets hidden into them with so many visual tales leading out of the main story. I have just about completed my own children's SF story, for which I have asked Danny to produce the cover illustration.

I remember how delighted Danny was a few years ago, when he thought he had found a publisher to take on a book project he had for many years wished to undertake: bringing to life some of Arthur's literature. Everything was in place—or so Danny thought—and he was even three months into the paintings when the publishers unexpectedly changed their mind. To this day we are still unsure why, but I know Danny is still keen to try and find a way to get this book published. The book was due to be out in time for the year 2001, containing 70 paintings inspired by Arthur's best-known novels. It would have been a treat for Arthur C Clarke fans as well

as giving a visual insight into Arthur's work to those who had not yet read any of his books

I often hear stories of the struggles of writers and artists, but somehow they always seem to bounce back and keep persevering with their craft. I have known Danny to have had several professional setbacks, yet do admire the way he is always prepared still to fight on no matter what. Talking of which, Danny has been telling me about his latest project *Lunartics*—and his attempts to bring 26 episodes to television. He said he never intends to give up until the day comes when he can sit at home one afternoon, feet up, and watch the first episode.

When he starts to tell you about what the *Lunartics* are like and where they're from, it's as if he really knows them personally—as though they are his friends all going down to the pub together. I often wonder how he manages to think up such quirky creatures and hope he brings some of his Moon characters along to the Winter Gardens for others to see. I feel I have met them too now, having just received one of the first packs of *Lunartic* collector cards Danny was kind enough to send me: 70 creatures no less (with many more on the way, he informs me).

In May, we are looking forward to Danny being a guest at this year's Odyssey 2004 Space Festival in Taunton, where I'm sure his art will once again be warmly received and appreciated. As for this year's Eastercon at the delightful Winter Gardens building in Blackpool, I know Danny is very pleased to have been asked to be this year's artist Guest of Honour. Many will know his work already, but as with all paintings it's always better to view the originals, as well as seeing how they look on the covers of books. I'm sure you will find Danny a friendly and easy-going fellow.

From the most recent conversation I had with Danny, I understand he intends to spend the rest of the year working on paintings exclusively for his new and updated websites—more *Lunartics* and more science fiction and fantasy landscapes, I presume. I for one look forward in anticipation to the results, yet I do now wonder when he'll ever find the time to paint my cat... *

—Fred Clarke

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BSFA

Sue Mason

[Right] Fighting Centaur; he's quite magnificent, though a bit battle-scarred...



[Left] A nice bit of design, the echo between her hair and the skirt.

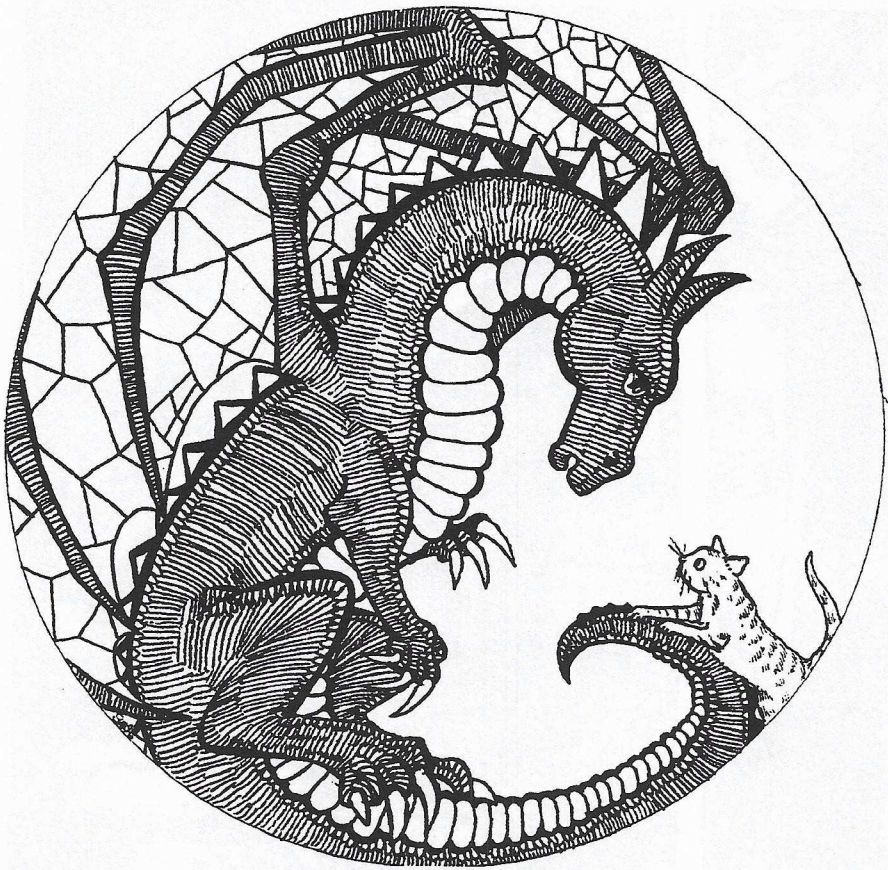
[Facing page] Wyrd Sisters (character © Terry Pratchett). Four postcards for the first Discworld convention.

I first met Terry in 1987, before he was 'big', at one of our Samurai Wookiee conventions (don't ask...) in Manchester. It was held in The Merchants, a seedy little hotel where one had to throw the prostitutes out of the bar in the evening and the owner and the manager would join in our water pistol fights in the halls. It only had about ten rooms so we would pile in, with a couple of extra people on the floor of each room. If you wanted a cup of tea in the evening, you knew where the kettle was. The bar we ran ourselves, buying in a couple of barrels of beer and selling it at cost. If you wanted spirits, you brought your own.

There were about 50 of us at the con; we had not gone there to see Terry who was just one of the guests. The convention was called A.S.S.H.O.L.E 87—don't ask me what the acronym stood for; it was a long time ago. We were all card-carrying CAMRA members but Terry was, at that point, a gin drinker. So we did him a T-shirt saying Campaign for Real Gin with the name of the convention on the back. He loved his T-shirt and wore it religiously for a year, until at the next Eastercon someone asked him who the other 86 assholes were.

The postcards are very busy. The Nanny Ogg one is the best. Terry called my friend Gytha one day and asked if she would be offended if he used her name for one of his characters. Go right ahead, she said. She never expected the books to be so famous. He actually made a bit of a boob; Gytha is much, much more like Granny Weatherwax than Nanny Ogg. He tells me I am becoming more Ogg-like in my old age. I disagree; I don't do the children business. But I do have the evil old cat.





[Left] A meeting of minds. Two fannish favourites, cats and dragons. I like working in a frame—square, oblong or circle. The dragon's wings could fit into the circle better, but the composition is cute and they look very curious about each other.



[Right] Phoenix. The most successful of a set of four elements I did. I've used variants on this design several times but I still think this is my favourite one.

—Sue Mason (words and art)

The People's Sue Mason by Giulia De Cesare

You know, it's funny now I think about it, but I don't actually remember meeting Sue Mason. I should, because my first proper British con was Novacon in '89 and I remember meeting lots of the people there, but not Sue. I just feel as if I've always known her. There is a sort of essential Sue-ishness that pervades British fandom. Everyone knows Sue. An Eastercon without Sue feels strange indeed and is a rare beast. In fact, the only one I remember was Seacon '03, and that was only because she was Fan GOH at Minicon that year. So it's about time that a British Eastercon honoured her.

So, what has Sue done to deserve this? Apart from winning a few Novas, TAFF and a Hugo, that is? Well, she sings and was GOH at a filkcon a few years back. She regularly presents Masquerades, with Olympic standards in flim flam that has the audience ceasing itself and absolutely failing to notice whatever frantic backstage shenanigans are causing the delay. She produces illos to order and at the drop of an eraser, to the endless joy of fanzine editors and readers everywhere. (Just don't mention moose. Or edelweiss.) She is a regular panellist on late night programme items, and would be on daytime ones too, except that that's when you'll find her in the dealers' room behind a table of exquisite pyrography and artwork. Oh, and she's a regular in the art show, and has done a great service to all in promoting the concept of dressing up on a Saturday night, with Advanced Tactical Corsetry.

You start to see what I mean about the pervasive Sue-ishness of fandom? So no, I don't know why Concourse are bothering either.

If you can't hide it, decorate it.

But enough about the fannish Sue. What about the, er, shy, retiring person behind the public mask?

Sue's love affair with books, like that of most fans, began at an early age and was demonstrated when she became her school's first-ever library monitor. The canny observation that this let her spend her lunch hours indoors when the weather was rotten did not influence her in any way. In an educational environment where most of her contemporaries had no higher aspiration than to become the playthings of the Jackson 5, the Osmond brothers or David Cassidy, our Sue became an Alan Garner stalker.

A circuitous network of friends of friends, involving grandparents, neighbours and the milkman, enabled Sue to find lots of excuses to go and visit the great man's house, but she never actually got to meet him until years later, at lectures and book signings. He even gave a talk at her school—after she'd left.

At secondary school Sue was a bit luckier. A science teacher called Mrs Matherson lent her books by the dozen, expecting them to be read in a week, and introduced her to the concept although not the actuality of conventions, due to the imminence of a baby (Mrs M's, not Sue's).

Sue was by now growing up—she was, honest—and was faced with the necessity of making her way in the real world. In very grown-up manner, she decided that she wanted to be a poor starving artist, not immediately realising the drawbacks inherent in the words 'poor' and 'starving'.

I'm bad. I'm wicked. I'm never getting to heaven.

Like many of us, Sue did much better in fandom. At her very first con, Mythcon 82 in Birmingham, she set the tone for years to come

by winning a prize for Best in Art Show. She started going to Albacons in Glasgow, meeting many fannish reprobates who were to become life-long friends. She also endeared herself to a few pros, in ways you couldn't make up. Sue sacrificed herself to a custard pie to save the virginal purity of Diane Duane's cream silk suit. Being the only fan at comic cons old enough to get into the bar let her chat up the likes of Chris Claremont, Bryan Talbot and other stalwarts of *Warrior*, an early British comic which was the proving ground of many famous illustrators.

She discovered RPGs, and in her usual half-hearted manner joined a *Shadowrun* game that occupied every Sunday night for a decade. She produced detailed drawings every week for a fanzine about the group's adventures. This fanzine had a circulation of six. Can you say 'rare limited edition'? Sue's character in this game was Fox, a skinny elf with great hair and very irritating personal habits. As *Shadowrun* did not let Fox have the kind of adventures Sue really wanted him to have, aside from the Belgian Incident, she also discovered slash; and the less said about that, the better.

Enjoyment of dressing up and the kind of people she was associating with led Sue to re-enactment, where she went wildly against type by adopting the persona of a bawdy wench.

Love of personal adornment also involved Sue in Masquerades, winning regular awards (such as 'Most Experienced Female'). She also assisted at the birth of filking, which at Eastercons in the late '80s meant a bunch of fans singing rugby songs around a hotel piano. Sue and the aforementioned reprobates joined in with Viking drinking songs, and the next thing she knew, she was a conrunner. Fourplay, the fourth British filkcon, was run by Sue and a bunch of cronies who evolved into the Confabulation committee a few years later to run an Eastercon and then metamorphosed into the Plokta Cabal; and the less said about that, the better.

Over the years, Sue has been GOH at a filkcon, presented a Worldcon masquerade—in costume as 'The Cheshire Tits'—won more awards than the rest of the Cabal put together, including a mantelpiece full of Novas and a resplendent golden Hugo to nestle among them, been a TAFF winner and, as mentioned, Fan GOH at Minicon.

English is my third language, after crap and bollocks.

Meanwhile, back in the Real World, Sue finally decided that being a poor, starving artist has more knobs on it than Darth Maul, and, besides, she wanted a mantelpiece to put all those nice statues on. So she sold her soul to Mammon, in the form of a nice little building company that Shall Remain Nameless. (But if you need a bit of work done around the place, say an Olympic stadium or a bijou little bus depot, give her a call.)

This let her buy a mantelpiece of her very own, with nice house attached, which she shares with Spooky, her lifelong and increasingly senile feline companion.

Lest anyone fear that becoming a wage slave has had a detrimental effect on her artwork, Sue has not only continued to illustrate *Plokta* and many other fanzines and produced the wonderful covers for the Concourse PRs since getting a Real Job, but she has also achieved mainstream success by winning a competition that saw a piece of her work in the National Portrait Gallery.

So, whither Sue Mason? If only she could lower her sights far enough to submit unmade beds or piles of bricks, the Turner Prize could be next. *

—Giulia De Cesare

The Imprimatur of Fun by Dave Hicks

'It's so easy to be seduced by *technique*,' says John le Carré's master spy George Smiley in *The Looking Glass War*. He's talking to fools, of course, although they don't know they're fools. One young fool in particular, out of a desperation for belonging, a need to be part of something, cleaves to methods, tricks and appearances as a doomed substitute for actually knowing what he's doing, or having any real sense of accomplishment or joy.

Thus the young tyro fanzine editor, if not thinking clearly, might suppose that if a good fanzine is something with fan art in it, then if it's got fan art in, it's a good fanzine (although we've been blessed with smarter ones in recent years). So whom to ask? Although not quite as brief a work as *John Jarrold: The Sober Years*, The Directory of British Fan Artists doesn't run to more than a few lines. D West might oblige, and as Ian Sorensen observed, his work carries the 'imprimatur of fandom'; Alison Scott's photo-manipulations take time; Steve Jeffery's usually game; and we've been tragically deprived of Dave Mooring. If you can find her, if she's not out having fun, you can ask Sue Mason.

The benighted wretches who might first approach David Hicks for artwork we'll leave to their own foetid pit of despair.

The more experienced editors have clear ideas of what they want, and know how to communicate it to the artist. Not being able to draw themselves—or having *been told* all their lives that they can't, which amounts to the same thing—the very sharpest understand, just as in George Smiley's world, that bribery and blackmail, threats and flattery are essential to getting work out of fan artists. They never get it, of course, but it's fun for the artists to watch them try. I'm sure we all start out trying to draw what's been asked of us, but something usually goes astray, a line, a thought, whatever; and personality starts creeping in. The ability to wander off like this and still supply a drawing the editor prizes is called talent.

It's the *personality*, not the technique, that makes a good fan artist.

What I mean is, the work is the person; and in fandom, so very often, the person is the work. If it's difficult enough to read the work of the liveliest fan writers—Greg Pickersgill or Alison Freebairn say—without hearing their voices and picturing the people behind the words, then after you've met Sue Mason, try and think of *anything* drawn by her that isn't full of Sue. Every drawing by Sue gives a fanzine the imprimatur of *fun*. And although I like to de-emphasise it, there is technique in that, and control, focus, practice and discipline, it's just that these are all subservient to the good time Sue is having in fandom, and the good time fandom has for Sue being around. Part of this, perhaps, is that Sue's the best at doing fan art on the fly; while the convention or the party's still happening she can produce work to the same standard as stuff done quietly at home.

Last year Sue was hung in the National Portrait Gallery. After a moment's silence where we all supply our punchline to that sentence, I'd like you to recall the belly-dancer drawing of herself she submitted successfully, and of how quintessentially Sue that image is. After all, a good portrait was never a mechanical description of what somebody looked like—even before the camera was invented—but of who they were, how they see the whole of themselves and were seen by others. Sue's drawings of Sue, along with her images of the rest of the Plokta Cabal, gently nourish and enrich the fannish *personas* of her targets. She's rarely very cutting in her images of fans (compared to some of us for whom sarcasm is synonymous with breathing), although that matters little, since for

most fans the only thing worse than being sent up by a Hugo-winning, Nova-winning fan artist is *not* being etc. etc.

Speaking of which, the editors of this publication did suggest to me that I might like to draw something myself by way of this contribution, but I've declined because a) it's Sue's show not mine and b) when I think of Sue I think of someone in *colour*, reds and golds and glimmerings of occult jewellery, which is a bit of a bugger to do in black and white line art. Movement too: Sue's not a stationery, sedate person; I think you'd need something by way of kinetic sculpture that you could wheel round the convention. There'd be a mechanism inside whereby if you poured beer in one orifice and then inserted a sheet of paper into a special slot, back out would then come a piece of fan art.

See—Sue Mason: if she didn't exist we'd have to invent her.*
—Dave Hicks

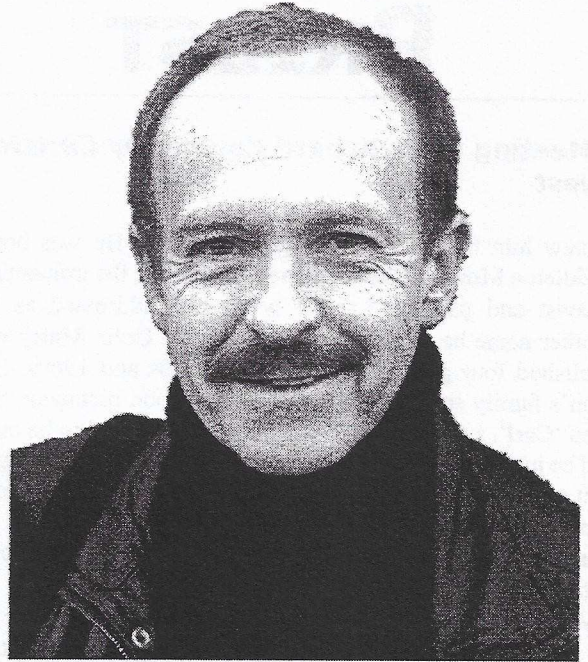


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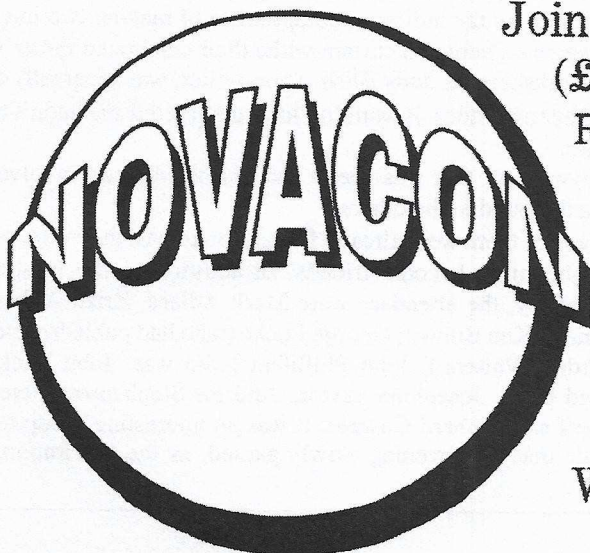
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CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

A Meeting with Richard Cowper by *Christopher Priest*

I knew him by his real name, John Murry. He was born John Middleton Murry, the same name as his father, the influential critic, essayist and pacifist. Later I heard him addressed as 'Colin', another name he wrote under: this was the Colin Murry who had published four general novels in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of John's family still called him by his boyhood nickname 'Col', or even 'Carl'. I once asked him what name he liked to be called by, and he just laughed and said he'd answer to almost anything so long as it wasn't obviously rude. To most people in the SF world, and in particular to those fellow writers who went to the Milford Conferences with him during the 1970s, he was Richard Cowper, or Richard.

My friendship with him did not start auspiciously. In the summer of 1971 I was asked for an opinion on a manuscript by the publishers Victor Gollancz: it was Cowper's novel *The Twilight of Briareus*. I had never read anything of Cowper's at this time, although I had heard of him. He had published two or three novels with Dennis Dobson and because of the general low status of that list, and also because those books had not made waves in the sf world, I unfairly assumed his stuff wasn't up to much. In addition, the fact that the new manuscript had been offered to Gollancz seemed to suggest it must have already been rejected by Dobson. I started reading it without many expectations.

By the time I'd finished it I was a Cowper convert. Yes, there were one or two minor things that needed fixing, but nothing for anyone to worry about. It was a smashing novel: a fresh take on the 'disaster' story, with many good satirical touches. I wrote an enthusiastic reader's report to recommend it and assumed Gollancz would publish it at some time in the next year or so.

About ten months later, I was looking forward to taking part in the first British Milford writers' workshop. One morning I received a phone call from James Blish's wife, Judy, who was organising everything. She told me that numbers were a little lower than expected and that there was room for a couple more people if I knew any of the newer writers who might be able to come. Richard Cowper was the first and only writer I thought of. I had kept a note of his address from the manuscript I'd read, so I passed it on to her.

A month or so later Judy Blish circulated the list of attendees, and there was Richard Cowper's name on the list. I was pleased my recommendation had been taken up and I looked forward to meeting him.

The first British Milford was held in September 1972. The scene needs to be set, because it had a bearing on what was to follow.

Fifteen writers took part, which meant that over the course of the next three days we had to read and discuss five manuscripts a day. Anyone who has taken part in such a workshop will realise what a heavy commitment that was, involving hours of intensive reading. The hotel was a small one, with the lounge chosen for the workshop only just big enough to hold everyone. With our arrival at this place, we started learning about The Rules.

The workshop was being introduced to Britain by the American writers who had been to the US Milford conferences, and they were running the show. In practice, this meant James and Judy Blish, and the nominal chair of the workshop, Anne McCaffrey. They were keen on rules, these people, and they policed them like beadles.

The first rule, for instance, was that the manuscripts had to be placed in the workshop room from the start of the conference. No copies of any of the manuscripts must ever be removed from that room—e.g. they weren't allowed to be taken to one's own hotel room for a quiet read—because that would make it difficult if someone else wanted to read it. Everything therefore had to be read in the main room in the company of everyone else. No manuscript must be discussed with anyone in advance of the workshop session, and this included a ban on making expressive noises, like groans of disappointment, gnashing of teeth, hysterical laughter, and all that. Notes must be kept private. Silence must be maintained at all times so as not to break the concentration of people still reading. Judy Blish issued these directives in a voice of chill authority, appealing to our innate professionalism and reminding us that this was a meeting of fellow professionals, one which depended for its success on the equal status of all taking part. In this she echoed the words of her husband, who had recently been GOH at the British Eastercon and devoted his speech to a description of the way a Milford workshop was organised. He too was strong on the rules, describing them as a formula that worked.

Even though I was one of the youngest and most inexperienced writers at the conference, right from the start I found myself bridling against the authoritarian tone of these people. I had never before been to any SF meeting when people didn't talk endlessly, have a laugh, hang around in the bar, fall over in a foolish way and so on. While we were all crammed into that small hotel function room, Judy Blish made me feel I had enlisted in the army for the weekend.

And what was all this 'fellow-professional' stuff she kept going on about? Everyone else was in fact a professionally published writer, a precondition for being there, but she wasn't. She'd never sold a thing. She was there because she was James Blish's wife. For a while I assumed she was being allowed in on sufferance because she had done the organising, and would keep out of the way once the workshops began. As things turned out, she was to take part in all the workshop sessions; this was one of several of their own rules that the Blish Mafia interpreted in different ways, depending on who you were. Later on, for instance, Brian Aldiss tried to get his children in so they could listen to his manuscript being discussed—this mild request led to a bad-tempered confrontation which was 'resolved' by the ludicrous compromise of making two intelligent teenagers sit behind a curtain while their celebrated father's work was workshopped. Judy Blish, a non-writer, was apparently exempt from her own rules. It wouldn't have mattered if *she* hadn't made it matter.

Anyway, all that was ahead and did not directly involve me. I looked around at the others.

Many of them were already friends, or at least they were people I thought might become friends. In addition to the Blishes, and McCaffrey, the attendees were Mark Adlard, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Ken Bulmer, George Locke (who had published stories as 'Gordon Walters'), John Phillifent (who was 'John Rackham'), David Redd, Josephine Saxton, Andrew Stephenson, Peter Tate, myself and Richard Cowper. It was an interesting group to be in. While that first evening slowly passed, as the full import of the

Blish Rules fell on me, what I really wanted to be doing was breaking the ice in the bar, complaining about publishers, listening to stories about copy-editors mucking things up and cheques not arriving when promised, and generally talking shop. Instead, La Blish instructed us that the sooner we began the mute reading of the manuscripts, the better.

In fact, on that first evening we weren't up to full strength, because Richard Cowper hadn't arrived. He had phoned ahead from somewhere: his car had broken down on the way and he was going to be delayed. The hotel staff put out a cold supper for him, and we settled down to our reading.

Late in the evening, car headlights flashed across the windows from outside and a few minutes later a slim figure slipped past on his way to the hotel reception. It was our first glimpse of Richard Cowper. Anne McCaffrey went out to reception to greet him on our behalf.

The workshop sessions began in the afternoon of the next day. Because he had been late arriving, and therefore hadn't had the same chance as everyone else to read the early manuscripts, Richard's own submission was one of the ones to be workshopped on the first day. It was an extract from *Briareus*, which also conveniently made my own reading load a little lighter. When the piece was workshopped, several people said how much they enjoyed it and that he should go ahead and complete the novel. When my own turn came to comment on the manuscript I couldn't resist revealing that I knew Cowper had already finished the book, and that it was every bit as enjoyable as everyone seemed to think it would be. While I was speaking, Richard was giving me a funny old look from across the room.

Afterwards, during the short break before the next session, he came beetling across to me. He asked how I had managed to read the whole manuscript, so I told him about Gollancz sending it to me.

'Ah-hah!' he cried. 'Then it was *you!*'

'Me?'

'The man with the golden rule of science fiction. We meet at last! Ah-hah! Found you!'

He was grinning through all this, so I didn't take it too seriously, but it was obvious I'd somehow touched a raw nerve without knowing what it was. We sat down in the bar and had a couple of quick beers together. I told him I'd loved the novel and, with the exception of a couple of small things I'd noted, I had given it a wholehearted recommendation. I added that I was surprised that Gollancz hadn't published it yet and had been expecting to see it announced at any moment.

'Not on your nelly,' he said. 'The buggers turned it down flat. They claimed it broke the golden rule of science fiction. They sent me a copy of the report they'd had from their SF reader.'

'*What?* I've never heard of that. If anyone said it, it wasn't me. I don't even know what the golden rule of science fiction is!'

'Their reader said that the golden rule of science fiction is that you mustn't have two unbelievable things in the same story.'

'Oh.'

It was news to me and I said so. I was amazed that there was even such a formulation, and I said that too. I immediately thought of half-a-dozen exceptions to the 'rule'. One of the most obvious is of course John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, a classic of SF by any definition, yet one which turns on two global catastrophes: sudden worldwide blindness, and the simultaneous emergence of deadly, walking plant hybrids.

We didn't get too far with this conversation because Constable Blish was patrolling her beat, rounding up stragglers so we could get on with the next story. Richard and I blended back in with the rest of the workshop and no more was said about *Briareus*.

However, I remained astonished by the news that Gollancz had rejected the novel. It was exactly the kind of SF Gollancz could do well with. It was by a British writer for one thing, and they had always actively supported the Brits. Also, the writer's skill showed on every page: the book was extremely well-written and psychologically convincing, it was satirical, moving, worrying, occasionally funny and well-told all the way through. Since when had this supposed 'golden rule' come into effect? It rather reminded me of the endless rules we were living by, down there in Milford-on-Sea.

Then came the next day and with it, for me, a full quota of manuscripts to plough through. One or two of them were huge, more than ten thousand words in length, and I found several of the stories pretty difficult to read or think about. One of the worst of these stories had been put into the workshop by Anne McCaffrey.

It seemed incredible to me that a so-called professional writer (and by this time McCaffrey had become a big name, at least in the USA) could produce such amateurish and shoddy work. It was in general incompetently written, but—even worse than that—it was incomprehensible and illogical. It looked like prentice work, something a new writer would draft and then throw away while getting ready to start submitting work to magazines. I sat on the uncomfortable chair in a corner of the cramped lounge, trying to keep my mind on McCaffrey's dreadful story. I was constantly distracted by the presence of so many other people around me. Everyone was maintaining silence, but it was the sort of oppressive non-silence where you can hear whispering all the time, and there was constant movement as people fidgeted, or got up and walked about the room. I kept restarting the manuscript from the beginning, trying to make sense of it and keep my mind on it. Each time I tried I could only get about halfway down page two before either losing interest or having my attention distracted.

Time was passing and the deadline of the afternoon workshop session was approaching. Before breakfast that morning, while exploring the hotel, I'd come across a small TV lounge tucked away at the far end of one of the corridors. After my fifth attempt to get past page two of McCaffrey's story I quietly stuffed the manuscript under my jacket and slipped out of the workshop room. I walked down to the TV lounge and went through the door. Already in the room, horizontal on a sofa, was Richard Cowper. He had an unfinished manuscript open across his chest and a cigarette smouldering in his fingers. He was staring at the ceiling.

The moment I saw him I backed away. 'Sorry,' I said. 'I didn't realise there was anyone in here.'

'Come in, come in!' he said, conspiratorially. 'Come in and close the door and I'll buy you a drink.' I realized then that it was McCaffrey's appalling manuscript he had been trying to read. As he sat up, he brandished it at me. 'I can't get past page two of this bloody story,' he said. 'What do you think of it?'

'I'm on page two as well. It's impossible to read, isn't it?'

With these words, and because we had already ignored the ban on removing manuscripts, we had broken at least three of the Blish Rules and no doubt went on to break many of the rest.

Richard and I sat in the privacy of that tiny lounge and found we had a lot to talk about. We were united by our enraged reaction to the McCaffrey manuscript, by the way its amateurish style and

unsophisticated ideas were actually offensive in the context of discussion by other writers. What did Anne McCaffrey expect us to do with such poor work? It couldn't be taken seriously as a piece of achieved writing, so did she want her fellow writers to correct her spelling and grammar? Sort out her illogical plot for her? Explain how to tell a story? *Teach her how to write?*

We knew it was hopeless. Already, Ms McCaffrey had been laying down the law to us: she was a Hugo and Nebula winner, after all, and although her manner was theatrically friendly there was a kind of barrier in there. She liked telling people what to do but she didn't seem to be much of a listener. I hadn't really thought about it until then, but Richard, giggling and exclaiming and groaning amusingly, put everything into context. We sat in that tiny room for another hour, occasionally sneaking out to the bar to replenish our glasses, the copies of the execrated manuscript lying unread on the floor between us.

'By the way,' he said, as lunchtime approached. 'Do you see anything wrong with my eyes?'

'Eh?'

'The other night, when I arrived late, I was just signing the guest book in reception, when this woman I'd never seen before in my life came rushing up to me. Scared me out of my wits! She grabbed me by the shoulders and stared straight into my face. "You have the eyes of a prune!" she yelled, then she kissed me.'

'A prune?' I said.

'Her very words! It was Anne McCaffrey. I tell you, mate, at that moment I nearly ran back to my car and fled.'

Later, feeling much jollier and amused by all the nonsense, we returned to the main room, sat in our respective corners, ground our way mutely through the unintelligible McCaffrey manuscript. We must each have finally found something to say about it that wasn't completely rude, and the next day the workshop finished and we all went home.

The eyes of a prune? It was inexplicable and ridiculous, but it helped launch what turned out to be a thirty-year friendship. Now Richard Cowper has died, suddenly and far too soon, and it is all over. *

—Christopher Priest

first published in *Unsurprising Stories* (2002)

PS (2004): After this article first appeared, I received an amused letter from Malcolm Edwards, who is now running the Gollancz list. He had gone back through the firm's files from thirty years ago and discovered that my version of Gollancz turning down *Briareus* couldn't have happened quite as I describe it here. There was a problem with dates, the order things happened in. On reflection, I realised that I was unconsciously concatenating two conversations with Richard. Victor Gollancz did of course publish *Briareus* the following year, as well as many more of Richard's books. The nonsense at the Milford Conference was in fact more or less as described, although I did leave out the bit where one of the most famous writers stormed out in a rage, where two others went for a midnight swim but afterwards couldn't remember where they'd left their clothes... and when Garry Kilworth suddenly appeared dressed only in a black plastic bin-liner. No, that was another year.

Anyway, Malcolm and I agreed that we shouldn't let a few minor factual errors get in the way of a good story, and so the above version is more or less as it first appeared. [CP]

Woman in Denim by Paul Kincaid

'I've been asked to write about you for the Souvenir Book,' I told Chris Priest recently. 'I think I'll call it "Woman in Denim".'

He looked at me without expression for a moment, then said: 'Lee. She won. Dammit.'

Twenty-nine years later it is still seared on his mind.

At the time I didn't know either Chris or Lee Montgomerie. It was my first convention, the 1975 Eastercon in Coventry, and I was going to everything on the programme. Including the masquerade. I wouldn't need the fingers of one hand to count the number of masquerades I've been to since so I've no idea if this is a regular feature, but at that first masquerade they had a category for dressing up like your favourite SF author. At one point a woman with shoulder-length hair dressed in blue denim jacket and jeans and dangling a leather shoulder bag sauntered down the hall.

It was, unmistakably, Chris Priest. And that, for a long time, was how I remembered him. That, and the long cigarette holder he used to affect. In those days he was a nervous speaker, and whenever he was on panels the cigarette holder gripped in shaking fingers would describe elaborate curlicues like a sparkler on Bonfire Night. I often used to wonder if it was spelling out some message counter to what he was actually saying.

Fast forward a year to my second Eastercon, this time in Manchester. By now I have actually read some stuff by this long-haired denim-clad shoulder-bag-toting author. And at the convention I picked up a copy of *Inverted World*, which everyone said was dead good. It seemed like an ideal opportunity to get it signed, but I was still new at this game and wasn't quite sure how to go about it. So, nervously, I approached the great man. 'Ah,' he said, looking at the book like I was offering him a red-hot poker, 'why don't you get Andrew Stephenson to sign it? He did the illustrations. They're excellent.' He edged away.

I was left with my book, unsigned, as it remains to this day.

(Many years later, after Chris had dedicated *The Separation* to me, I handed him my copy of the book. 'Well, you should sign it, shouldn't you.' He looked at it with exactly the same expression of panic as he had once regarded my copy of *Inverted World*. 'I never know what to write on these occasions.' 'How about just writing your name?' 'Is that enough?' he said, scribbling furiously and pushing the book away with evident relief. If you're after his autograph, it clearly pays to work out exactly what you want him to write. Try: 'I promise to pay the bearer...')

Fast forward another few years. It was the early '80s and *The Glamour* had just appeared. Chris (shorter hair, no cigarette holder, no denim) and I were propping up the bar at a BSFA London meeting. 'I really liked *The Glamour*,' I said, 'except for the ending...' He looked at me over his pint but didn't say anything. You'll notice he has a way of not saying anything very eloquently.

Two days later an envelope arrived in the post. It contained the manuscript for a revised ending for *The Glamour*. The first of many, as it would turn out, and he'd clearly been thinking along the same lines long before we spoke in the bar. Still, it was flattering to get that glimpse of the authorial process.

By now, I was getting together with Maureen. One day I arrived home from work. 'There was a phone call for you from Chris Priest,' she greeted me, then paused. 'He knew my name.' I persuaded her to read what was undoubtedly Chris's best book to that time (and arguably still is), *The Affirmation*. She was very quiet

after finishing it. 'I know he's your friend,' she said, eventually, 'but the man who wrote that has a black hole at the heart of him.'

Fast forward, then, to a small convention in Newbury in the mid-80s. Maureen is talking with Leigh Kennedy, Chris's wife, at one side of the bar. Chris and I are talking at the other side of the bar. After a couple of pints I mentioned Maureen's reaction to *The Affirmation* (I'm not sure that she has yet forgiven me—come to think of it, she probably won't forgive me for this, either). Chris immediately bellows out apologies to Maureen across the crowded bar.

Although I notice that he does not deny the black hole is there.

When you get to speak to him alone or in a small group, Chris is relaxed and easy to talk to. But despite an incredibly long career of being a guest at innumerable conventions, he remains a little uneasy when it comes to public speaking. Flash forward to the early '90s, when Maureen and I decided to get married. I invited Chris to be my best man. 'Delighted,' he says, 'so long as I don't have to make a speech.'

Which was fine by us. But a few years later we're in Liverpool for yet another Eastercon. I'd finally decided to step down from the BSFA and I was going to my first AGM in far too many years as an ordinary member. ('Er, about this presentation, boss.' 'What presentation?' 'Oops, forget I said anything.' Don't trust too many secrets to Chris.) And part way through the meeting, Chris stood up and delivered the best man speech he'd cried off five years before. Even when he lets the cat out of the bag, expect the unexpected.

Fast forward to the early years of this century. Hastings, a writers' workshop hosted by Chris and Leigh. We're drinking wine (although Chris tends to go for stubby little bottles of Belgian lager) and eating chocolate cake. A manuscript goes round, it gets to Chris's turn to deliver his verdict, there is a familiar expectant hush. 'This word you use here, it completely destroys the metaphor you've set up in the previous pages...' He doesn't do much criticism. He should; he's incisive and I've not met many people

who are as sharp on the machinery of prose. He takes a tightly constructed story and hands back a disordered heap of disconnected parts, but at least you know which tools you need to make it whole. In between, while we're mopping up the blood on the carpet, there's gossip and publishing stories (gloomy stories—publishing is always in a dire mess—but funny too if you have a taste for grim humour) and iconoclastic remarks about the favoured children of the literary establishment (Chris likes being an iconoclast; get him talking about Martin Amis some time, and then stand well back). And on one memorable occasion, when the workshop coincided with my birthday, he took me into his study and showed me the manuscript for *The Separation* with that dedication. I discovered others had known about it for weeks. 'Would he mind?' he'd asked Maureen. On the business of writing he is clear and hard and certain; on everything else there is a strange diffidence.

Fast forward to the summer of 2003. *The Separation* has won the Clarke Award and the BSFA Award and been taken on by Gollancz, who also published M John Harrison's *Light* which won the Tiptree Award. As the Tiptree laureate Mike was crowned with a fetching tiara. So, at the Gollancz party, Chris is presented with a tinsel tiara all his own. He wears it with unexpected panache. All he needs is the long hair, and the denim, and the cigarette holder.

Fast forward to today (or, more likely, a couple of days ago if you're only getting round to reading this after the convention). Chris is a well-deserved guest of honour (you've read the books, so you already know that). You'll surely see him on the programme, but you'll get a lot more from the experience if you seek him out in his natural habitat, the bar. Buy him a Belgian beer (have one for yourself, why be stingy?) and have a conversation. If you want to talk seriously, ask him about literature. For a grim laugh you could ask about publishing. Or if you prefer living dangerously, ask about Martin Amis... or the woman in denim. *

—Paul Kincaid

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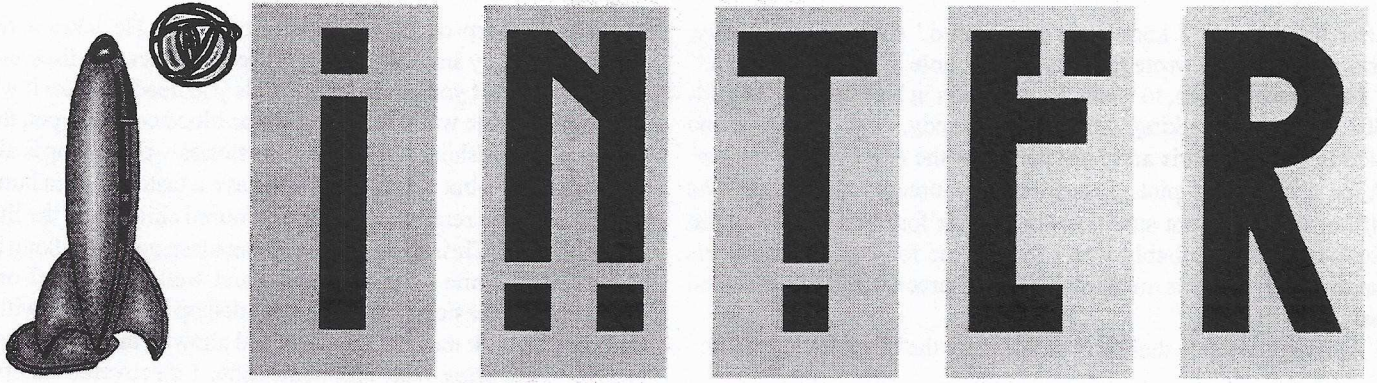


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See You at The Celidh

PHILIP PULLMAN

Some thoughts on speculative fiction, and play, and why the fundamentalists have got it all wrong by Philip Pullman

I want to begin by quoting a passage from Tove Jansson's marvellous novel *The Summer Book*. Little Sophia and her grandmother are spending the summer on their island in the Gulf of Finland. One day a postcard arrives for Sophia with a picture of Venice, and Sophia is captivated at once.

Sophia went down to the marsh pool, which was a smooth brownish-black under the alder trees. She dug a canal through the moss and the bilberry bushes. 'Mama, my ring has fall in the canal.' Her ring was gold, with a red ruby. 'Dear child, don't trouble yourself. We have the whole drawing room full of gold and precious jewels.'

Sophia went to her grandmother and said, 'Call me "Dear child" and I'll call you "Mama".'

'But I'm your grandmother,' Grandmother said.

'Please, Mama, it's a game,' Sophia explained. 'Mama, shall we play you're my grandmother? I am your dear child from Venice, and I've made a canal.'

Grandmother stood up. 'I know a better game,' she said. 'We'll be old Venetians building a new Venice.'

They started building in the marsh pool. They made pilings for the Piazza San Marco out of a lot of little wooden plugs, and covered them with flat stones. They dug additional canals and built bridges over them. Black ants scurried back and forth across the bridges, while down below there were gondolas gliding along in the moonlight. Sophia collected pieces of white marble along the shore.

'Look, Mama,' she called. 'I've found a new palace.'

'But my dear child, I'm only "Mama" to your father,' Grandmother said. She was concerned.

'Is that so!' Sophia shouted. 'Why is he the only one who gets to say "Mama"?''

She threw the palace in the water and stalked away.

Grandmother sat down on the veranda to make a Doge's Palace out of balsam wood. When the palace was done, she painted it with watercolours and gold. Sophia came to look at it.

'In this palace,' Grandmother said, 'there lives a mother and a father and their daughter. Right through that window. The daughter has just thrown the dinner plates out of the window, and they broke on the piazza, because they were only china. I wonder what the mother said.'

'I know what the mother said,' Sophia declared. 'She said, "My dear child, do you think there's no end to your mother's china?"'

'And what did the daughter say?'

'She said, "Forgive me, Mama. I promise to throw only the golden dinner plates in the future!"'

They set the palace by the piazza, and the father, mother and daughter continued to live there. Grandmother made more palaces. A great many families moved into Venice and called to one another across the canals. 'How far did your palace sink today?' 'Oh, it's not so bad. Mother says it's only a foot or two.' 'What's your mother making for dinner? My mother's boiling some perch.' All night they slept soundly, and the only noise was the footsteps of the ants across the bridges.

I've quoted that passage firstly because I love it—I love the whole book, and I want everyone in the world to read it—but secondly because it says something, or shows something, about the nature of speculation and the nature of fiction. It's to do with play, but not with playing the sort of game where someone has to lose for another player to win. In this sort of playing, winning isn't the outcome anyway. The outcome is that the world is a bit richer and more interesting, and you're a bit older and wiser.

Every good story has something of that quality. In what I'm saying in the first part of this piece, by the way, I'm not distinguishing between the writer's experience and the reader's. I'll come to the difference later on. Here I'm assuming that we are all, when we read just as when we write, active participants in the game rather than passive spectators. We collude with the story, and a good story is one that encourages and rewards collusion by suggesting imaginative spaces that welcome filling-in or speculating about, whereas a poor one is one that resists collusion by telling you everything, or by holding back important information unnecessarily.

So in the passage I've just quoted—and indeed in the book as a whole—we collude with the story by wondering, perhaps, why Sophia wants so passionately to be able to say 'Mama'; and by thinking about our experience of being a grandchild, and perhaps a grandparent; and not least by wondering what it would be like to live in one of those miraculous palaces that sink so elegantly into the mud, and to go to sleep reassured by hearing the soft, sextuple footfalls of the giant ants on their mysterious errands over the endless bridges.

I think I'm saying that all good fiction is speculative—that in this important respect, there's no difference between what's realistic and what's fantastic. Fiction that leaves imaginative spaces to be filled can be set in a world that's very like our own just as much as in one that differs from it. After all, nothing can match, for sheer mind-blowing astonishment, the fact that *something* exists rather than *nothing*. The most fantastic of invented worlds pales beside that single amazing fact. The great realistic novels—the works of George Eliot, or Henry James, or Tolstoy—have this quality of suggesting imaginative space around themselves. The greatest work of fantasy that I know, David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, is great for the same reason: not because it describes another world in stupefying detail, but because it sets us speculating about the moral consequences of being human and conscious.

But I want to think for a minute about what Sophia and her grandmother were actually doing when they were playing. They were making up a story, which is not a game without rules. It's a democracy, which is very different from a state of anarchy: some things are allowed within the structure of the game and others are not. It's permitted to welcome things that you wouldn't expect would fit the game, such as the local wildlife that cheerfully incorporates Venice into its own landscape; it's OK to invent new characters who move into the story and talk to one another; it's fine to move between playing a part yourself and manipulating another character's role; it's allowed to import information from elsewhere—in this case, Grandmother's memories of a visit to Venice many years ago.

But you wouldn't be allowed to bring in new characters without telling your fellow-player, or to invent prohibitions that they didn't know about and then penalise them for transgressing, or basically to withhold any information. This sort of game would quickly fail if one player kept the others in the dark about important aspects of it. Nor would it work if one character insisted on just watching, but

refused to contribute. And if the game became a competition to see who could make a better palace or invent more amusing characters, then its nature would change entirely: it would become a zero-sum affair. One player would have to lose for the other to win.

The analogy with childhood play holds true up to a point, but there is a point at which it becomes less helpful. Sophia and her grandmother were both authors and both readers, in a way; each was creating, and each observing and reacting. That's an early stage, when everything is fluid and malleable and Protean. When we grow up a bit and start writing things down, a change takes place, and a split occurs between the functions of creating and observing. This has political consequences.

When I write, for example, would I welcome another person looking over my shoulder, making suggestions, adding sentences, crossing things out? I would bloody well not. Writing is despotic and tyrannical. I insist on absolute power of life and death over every phrase I write; I demand instant and unquestioning obedience from my pen, or my fingers on a keyboard; if I want to promote a favourite idea, or dismiss a faithful character, I do so without the slightest tug of conscience or remorse. I am a dictator, and I don't have to explain myself to anyone. I couldn't work in any other way.

But reading is exactly the opposite. Reading has to be open and democratic, or it isn't reading at all. Reading does not consist of receiving something unchanged from the page, as if it were being delivered by Federal Express. Instead, reading is all about negotiation (what does that mean? Let me try this guess first and see how it works), compromise (I'm not sure I agree with that, but let it pass), expectation (I hope this is as good as his last book), disappointment (it isn't), happy surprise (it's better), argument (that's not true at all—the evidence shows exactly the reverse), persuasion (I wasn't convinced at first, but I can see what she means now): every kind of political-with-a-small-p activity that our minds are capable of. If we don't turn up to vote, democracy gradually dies. If we don't take part in the full game of making meaning, if we don't bring something of our own to the exchange, if we don't (to return to Sophie's Venice) make a bridge for the ants to go over, the experience doesn't work.

Which is (and I said we were going to get here)—which is exactly why the fundamentalists have got it all wrong. They insist that there is only one way to read the scriptures, whichever scriptures they are. You're not allowed to read them metaphorically, or poetically, or ironically, or speculatively: you have to take every word as being the literal, unalterable, inerrant truth. The fundamentalists have got it wrong because they misunderstand the nature of reading; they are afraid of the democracy of play. ✱

—Philip Pullman

Stark Fantasies? The Novels of Philip Pullman by Andrew M Butler

There are moments in various interviews and talks where Philip Pullman claims that HIS DARK MATERIALS is not fantasy. Given that it features a world where everyone has a personal *dæmon* as alter ego, spirit guide, conscience and imaginary friend, wheeled aliens, witches, and travel between universes with the slice of a knife, this seems difficult to accept.

Sometimes Pullman modifies his claim and says that what he is writing is psychological realism—and immediately I'm reminded of a definition by the academic Catherine Belsey of realism that includes *The Hobbit* (1937) and *Watership Down* (1972): 'Speaking animals, elves, or Martians are no impediment to intelligibility and

credibility' as long as these behave like we expect humans to. Certainly Lyra, her *dæmon* Pantalaimon and most of the other characters do feel very real. I'm not convinced that is particularly useful—but on the other hand I am aware that little of what Pullman writes is like traditional fantasy. I take his (possibly ironic) characterisation of HIS DARK MATERIALS as stark realism to be a defence mechanism against a general disdain for fantasy, but the term suggests a fourth category.

To attempt a dubious history of fiction aimed at child readers, I would argue that it was dominated by the fantastic until late into the 1960s. The majority of this featured characters who were either children (railway children, water babies, lost boys, famous fives, secret sevens, Swallows and Amazons) or child analogues (Pooh, Bilbo, Paddington, perhaps Ratty and Mole), who slip their parental shackles to have fantastical adventures. Close cousin to this fiction is the boarding school story—the school almost being a pocket universe. From the late 1960s this was largely displaced by a fiction which tried to deal with issues of sex, drugs, race, class, and so forth in a more straightforward, realist way—and to avoid the consolation of a happy ending where foes were vanquished, or it was all a dream, or the characters are rescued. These writers include Robert Cormier, S E Hinton, Robert Westall, Aidan Chambers, Robert C O'Brien and Robert Swindells. The inclusion of O'Brien, author of *Z for Zachariah* (1972), and Swindells, author of *Brother in the Land* (1984), anticipates the appearance of works which fuse the possibilities for adventure inherent in fantasy with the starkness of Young Adult realist novels such as Cormier's *After the First Death* (1979). In two words: stark fantasy.

Stark fantasy is that class of children's fiction that uses fantasy not as a means of escape or consolation, but rather as a way to deal with contemporary problems that may face the child without lying to them. In this category I would include the books by Gillian Rubinstein, Ann Halam, Terry Pratchett, and David Almond, and those of Philip Pullman's works which tread a delicate path somewhere between fantasy and the real.

Lyra in HIS DARK MATERIALS is a *fin de millennial* Alice, a wild child running around the Edenic Gardens of Jordan College, an orphan who temporarily regains parents, who leaves her home for a series of fantastical adventures. (To a comprehensive-educated child such as myself, the Oxford college with its arcane rituals and job titles is in itself a pocket universe, and such environments in part gave rise to the fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien.) Lyra leaves her complex class position of being neither scholar nor servant and moves to a point where she is her own person—only to give up much of her agency in favour of Will, a boy from another universe which may be our own. By the end of the book she has been to a steampunk London, to the North Pole, and to a number of different universes. At the end, a changed girl, she returns to a much more serious garden and to the formal education provided by a women's college which she had disdained at the start of *Northern Lights* (1995).

Behind HIS DARK MATERIALS stand many literary influences, most obviously John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667)—although Pullman has no interest in justifying the ways of God to man. *Paradise Lost* has been claimed (by Adam Roberts) as the first work of science fiction, and it is certainly tempting to claim it as another precursor to stark fantasy. Another influence is William Blake, who had the ability to meld metaphysics with contemporary politics in his prophetic books. The characterisation of Lyra clearly owes a debt to several of Blake's little girls lost; and Pullman's

demand via his characters that we build heaven *here*, not elsewhere, echoes Blake's call for the building of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land.

But there is far more to Pullman than just his most famous trilogy. For the purposes of this article we can set aside his early novels *The Haunted Storm* (1972) and *Galatea* (1978), as well as *The Broken Bridge* (1990) and *The White Mercedes/The Butterfly Tattoo* (1992) which are predominately realist—although *The White Mercedes* features a protagonist who is haunted by a woman in white at an Oxford college. Pullman has written too many fine books to do them all justice in the short space available here.

Count Karlstein (1982, 1991) puts two orphans, Charlotte and Lucy, at the heart of a plot by their uncle, Heinrich Müller, to maintain his demonically acquired title of count. The original edition—recently re-released—featured a number of different narrators, in much the same way as Wilkie Collins structured *The Woman in White* (1860). In a shorter version released in 1991 the book was restructured to include illustrations by Patrice Aggs which both advanced and illustrated the action. The end of the book features a picture of Charlotte writing a novel, *Count Karlstein, or The Ride of the Demon Huntsman*, whilst Lucy reads one of her beloved penny dreadfuls and a third figure, the heroic Max, tells his own story to his children. There may (or may not) be demonic, supernatural powers (there is a space for hovering between the fantastic and the real), but the orphans face real dangers. But as the novel is aimed at a younger age group, things do work out.

Things also work out in *Spring-Heeled Jack* (1989), Pullman's Victorian variant on the superhero masked avenger, as a group of children escape from an orphanage, hoping to make a new life for themselves in the new world. The titular Spring-Heeled Jack helps them out, as does Jim, a sailor who has no need for superhero gadgets when he has his wits about him. The whole is enlivened by metafictional games, both in the form of the quotations which act as epigraphs to each chapter—which should not be taken at face value—and David Mostyn's superb cartoons which act as commentary and narrative.

Also set in Victorian times is the Sally Lockhart series: *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), *The Shadow in the Plate/The Shadow in the North* (1985, 1988), *The Tiger in the Well* (1990) and *The Tin Princess* (1994). Again these have a curious generic status. In the first three books, there is little you could point to which is overtly fantastical—although the deadly weapon in the second novel hints at the possibility of steampunk. But the realism for me is undercut by the sense that there is pastiche at work here, as Pullman channels Wilkie Collins novels, many of which feature strong female lead characters, sometimes defending a personal fortune, at the risk of ruin or worse thanks to arcane and cruel rules on women's property and marriage rights—and the absence overseas at a crucial time of a male character who could just save her. Sally evolves through the sequence, by having to earn her living and becoming slowly aware of the social conditions which have led her to be able to do so. The evil at the heart of the novels turns out not to be present in any of the villains of the sequence: it is not innate but in the system itself, in social and class inequalities.

The final novel moves away from the radical position of the third, as the now adult Sally is sidelined in favour of her friend Jim Taylor and of Adelaide, a minor character from *The Ruby in the Smoke*. When Jim discovers that Adelaide is due to marry Prince Rudolf of Eschtenburg, the heir to the throne of Razkavia, he is determined to help out and becomes bodyguard to the heir. Unfortunately for him

and Adelaide, there are conspiracies at work which will offer a nasty surprise, just as tragedy had struck Sally earlier in the sequence.

For me the most haunting of Pullman's novels is *Clockwork, or All Wound Up* (1996), which brings together his taste for quasi-middle European/Germanic settings, his interest in story-telling, and his play between text and illustration—here drawn by Peter Bailey. The novel fuses together three narratives: about Prince Otto, who has paid for the construction of an automaton to replace his dead son; about Fritz, a would-be author, narrating the story of Otto and his son; and about Karl, an apprentice clockmaker who has to make a piece for the town's clock, and who has been given a robotic knight by the same person who had built the robotic son. To make things more complex, this is interwoven with boxed and fullpage illustrations, and an authorial voice which need not be Pullman's. The mechanics of a story, says this voice, are like the parts of a clock, in the way they dovetail together:

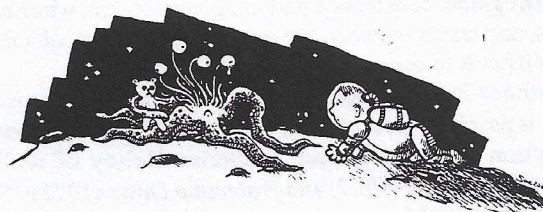
'Once you've wound them up, nothing will stop them; they move on forwards till they reach their destined end, and no matter how much the characters would like to change their fate, they can't. This is one of those stories. And now it's all wound up, we can begin.'

What is startling about this is the lack of free will that it grants its characters: they have to follow through their desires to their doom—or to their triumph. When one of the characters faces a sticky end, the authorial voice can disclaim responsibility: 'I'd save the wretch if I could, but the story is all wound up, and I'm afraid it must all come out. He was lazy and bad-tempered, but worse than that, he had a wicked heart.' Indeed, he had even failed to be kind to a cat.

To put it another way, in Calvinist terms the characters are either Elect or Damned. Free will need not enter into it; the fate has already been determined, the die cast, the consequences in wait. And this brings us back to HIS DARK MATERIALS, which must have been gestating alongside *Clockwork*. We are specifically told that John Calvin has been Pope. Through the course of the trilogy, and in various interviews, Pullman has critiqued organised religion and the belief that heaven (and presumably hell) is elsewhere. This world is the only one.

The tension between free will and predestination in Pullman's novels is one that fascinates me—and Pullman himself has noted that he saw the ending of the trilogy coming but could not stop it. Do the dæmons in Lyra's world represent your potential or your limit? Apparently a man with a dog as a dæmon does not have to become a servant, but it would perhaps be simpler if he does. Lyra is subject to a whole number of prophecies, suggesting that she might be a cog in a clockwork universe. She also hitches her actions to destiny, and yields her will to Will. At the end of the trilogy, she cannot have what she wants—or perhaps we cannot have what we want. Where has that determined wild young girl of the first novel gone? Do we prefer responsibility and annual appointments? And yet, and yet—well, I'm constantly drawn back to this stark ending, and to re-read one of our most fascinating story-tellers. *

—Andrew M Butler



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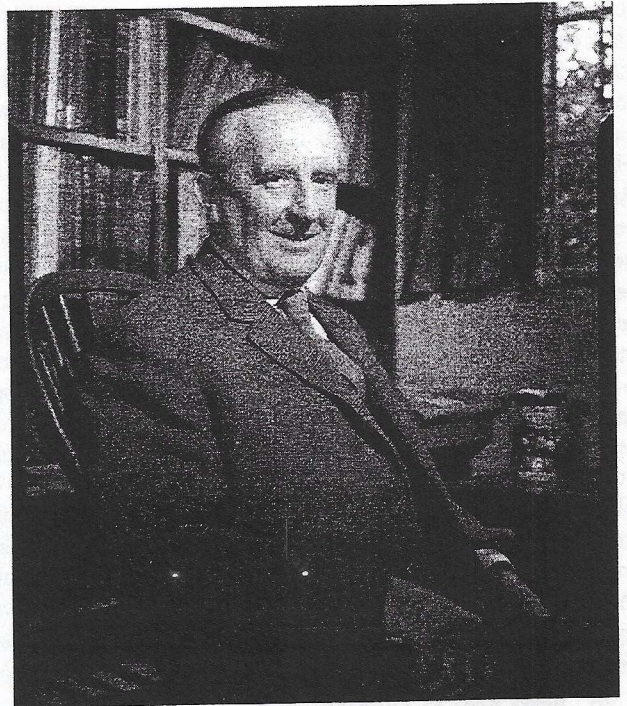
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Quiet Men in Pullovers: an interview with Francis Spufford by Andy Sawyer

Beginning with the British space programme inspired by a group of crank engineers and science fiction readers who actually seemed to believe that space travel would be possible, and taking us through Concorde, the computer game *Elite*, the mobile phone, the human genome project, and *Beagle 2*'s journey to Mars, Spufford celebrates what we all love about being British. In *Backroom Boys: The Secret Return of the British Boffin* (Faber, 2003) he celebrates the awkward, bolshy insistence that the gifted amateur in the garden shed or small team working on a shoestring is worth more than vast research budgets. True, this isn't always right; I can't be the only person to have paused awkwardly at the description of the British Interplanetary Society cheering as the first V2 lands in London, because this vindicates their belief in the rocket as the way to space. And, beautiful or not, Concorde was a mistaken attempt at seeking the coming trend in aviation, while the success of the mobile phone is the success of big business, however you look at it. But who can't help applauding at the story of how the attempt to patent the human genome was stymied by someone who believed that it was simply wrong, or at the (poignantly, as we now know) romantic story of Colin Pillinger and *Beagle 2*? For anyone who believes that vision beyond the realms of economics and the hobbyist appeal of loving what you're doing still means something, Spufford's hymn of praise to the 'quiet men in pullovers' is touching and hypnotic. This interview was conducted by email in November/December 2003.

AS: *I love the line in the inside cover blurb of Backroom Boys about 'quiet men in pullovers'. It's so much more poetic than 'nerds'. Where did that kind of 'affectionate incomprehension' become disdain?*

FS: It happened sometime between the 1960s and the 1980s, and my guess is that it had something to do with the way that the comprehensivisation of British schools accidentally delegitimised technical education. As a matter of human dignity, every British child was to get some version of the liberal-arts curriculum, no matter how diluted, no matter how badly delivered. Technology (as opposed to pure science) was for losers. It smacked of the secondary modern. The IT boom of the Nineties did a lot to make it OK again to be technical, and even produced a brief period of geek-chic, but the underlying disposition of the culture is still toward stuff whose elaborateness is verbal. But this may just be my inner grumpy old git speaking.

AS: *I'm sure you know this already, but quite a few people reading The Child That Books Built noted the phrase 'then, a godsend: I discovered science fiction'. This was followed by twenty pages in which you showed that you are well-read in SF and obviously enjoy it. Your recent appearance on BBC Radio 4's Open Book programme with Stephen Baxter and Pat Cadigan confirmed the case. You're not a literary critic but you write with passionate engagement about books, you have an interest in science, and you find stories in things. As my brief for this interview is SF and what*

makes it, how it fits into what for a better word we have to call our 'culture', could we start with that and move outwards: how you got into SF and why you seem to find it means something.

FS: I started reading SF as a teenager in the late 1970s. For me it performed the classic job of bridging the difficult gap between children's books and adult reading. When I picked up a copy of *The Left Hand of Darkness* in Newcastle-under-Lyme town library, it made immediate, instinctive sense to me, in a way that novels outside the genre didn't at that point. I think what I was responding to, as much as anything, was the glorious narrative confidence of Le Guin's particular voice, which could call worlds into existence so sensuously and so certainly; but I moved on hungrily, and as well as becoming a Le Guin completist I read my way through a whole swathe of what was then around, from the Clarke-Asimov-Bradbury-Blish-Heinlein inheritance through to Ballard and Keith Roberts and 1970s experimental. I pored over my copy of *Again Dangerous Visions*, thinking that Harlan Ellison's intros were the quintessence of cool, and Gene Wolfe's stories were the quintessence of elegance. (I now realise, of course, that while Gene Wolfe is the quintessence of elegance, Ellison is a twit.)

Frankly though, I did a lot of my reading with the quality-control switch flipped to off. I had a large appetite for pulp. It wasn't necessarily the specially good or memorable books that fed my imagination most, which was something I tried to bring out in *The Child That Books Built*.

AS: *And then you refer to Robert Cham Gilman's Rebel of Rhada about which you say 'I never met anyone else who had even heard of it.' It was that which drew my attention—because you could certainly add me to that list! I was even a little uneasy about whether we had a copy in the SF Foundation library. (Fortunately we have.) It's interesting that it's not always the 'classics' of a form that spark us into exploring it.*

FS: At that stage I mainly liked SF's abundance of inventions, its never-stopping cornucopiod fertility. This has left me with a permanent admiration for the density of ideas that's normal in SF as opposed to other kinds of writing, but the way I used the genre to get idea-drunk when I was 16 and 17 also meant that I got embarrassed by it when I reached 19 and 20, because I thought that liking it was incompatible with being serious and literary and sensitive. So I stopped reading SF, and didn't start again till I was in my late 20s. By then, I'd got over my adolescent anxiety about whether or not I was really grown-up. I was grown-up, and I didn't see why I shouldn't enjoy all of the kinds of writing that gave me pleasure. There's an issue of temperament here: whereas some stern critical types, like my old friend James Wood, tend to believe that the world secretes only very small quantities of successful literature, I instinctively feel that the world is rich in all sorts of wildly dissimilar successes and partial successes, that it's actually streaked through with pleasures for the reader of all kinds, from the most efficiently escapist to the most demandingly-textured and subtle: and that these pleasures are not neatly segregated from each other by genre boundaries.

Having said that, the books that got me reading SF again did tend to be at the consciously literary end of its possibilities: John Crowley's *Beasts* and then the rest of his output, revelling in his toymaker's way with sentences; Kim Stanley Robinson's three Californian novels, for the sense of place and of people; Gibson, for the neon prose poetry. But gradually I explored further, and though

an awful lot of the genre output does seem to be marked in a restrictive way by offering its readers *known* pleasures—stories that do too exactly what it says on the tin—I always find things that keep me reading eclectically on. In the heap next to my bed at the moment, for example, alongside a Pynchon and a Penelope Fitzgerald and a book about the Soviet economy (don't ask), there are two Liz Williamses, a Robin Hobb, a Pratchett, a Ken MacLeod, the new Neal Stephenson and a Walter Jon Williams. The SF writers I admire most are probably Robinson and Gwyneth Jones, but there's a larger watch-list of people whose books I try never to miss, including Mary Gentle, Maureen McHugh, Iain Banks when there's an M in his name, Ian McDonald, and Michael Swanwick. I don't, in fact, often go back to Clarke and Asimov and co. on my own account, so the kind of SF that *Backroom Boys* engages with directly is actually more retro than my own taste is.

What does SF mean to me? Yikes. Well, it seems to me to be the pre-eminent modern form for thought experiments, with a wonderful freedom to exploit more of the counterfactual possibilities of fiction than mainstream literature allows itself to do. That freedom with time, place, scope, perspective and manner doesn't always combine easily with excellence of (for example) characterisation, which depends so much on showing that fictional people are subject to gravity, are sculpted by inevitability; but when it does, it brings unique rewards. I'm perpetually grateful for the visions SF gives me. I wanted *Backroom Boys*, alongside its other objectives, to say my thank you for that.

AS: *Backroom Boys*, like *The Child That Books Built*, is not about SF, but SF again seems important within it. You start with the British Interplanetary Society in a London pub in 1944, rather creepily aware that the German success with rocket weapons was the start of a new era. OK, the BIS weren't strictly an SF bunch, but with Arthur C Clarke a major figure in both and a number of other SF writers like Eric Frank Russell being part of it, there's very much a sense of a shared process: would it be fair to say that the SF world was virtually the only group to take all this mad stuff about space flight seriously?

FS: Yes, I think so. I picked that scene in the pub as my starting-point because it seemed to me to be a moment when you could see spaceflight making the leap out of imagination and into the world of fact. Before that it really had been, if not mad stuff, then dream stuff, and it was in organisations like the BIS that the dream had been nurtured. Now, thanks to the war, one of the BIS's fellow dreamers over in Germany had been able to get the backing to make the dream solid for the first time, in the shape of the V2, and lobbed it helpfully across the Channel. The bang was the signal that the future they'd dreamed about had begun to happen. Interestingly, they weren't the only group to take the flight of a V2 as a sign that a world was coming in which an SF sensibility would be an essential guide. Frank Hampton, the creator of *Dan Dare* in the 50s, would write that his first inspiration for it came from watching a V2 attack on Antwerp, as a soldier in 1945.

But there's something larger I wanted to bring out too, which is that all technology has its roots in imagination. The first step towards anything technological is to dream it. So the kind of organised, shared dreaming that goes into SF can be very important in the tentative, early stages of a technology when the task is to frame the possibility of doing whatever-it-is. Then engineering takes over. But that doesn't mean that imagination drops out, only that a different kind of imagination is then involved. I was struck,

over and over, talking to the engineers I interviewed for the book, by what a romantic continuum there seemed to be for them, between the futures they imagined, many of them, by reading SF, and the work under their hands. It wasn't the case that the romance was only located in the will-o'-the-wisp possibilities that danced on ahead of them; it was right there in the making, in the solid, compromised business of getting things to work. I try to get at the reasons for this when I talk, in the book, about 'a real constructed thing (however dented) beating a wish (however shiny) hands down'. So the British rocket scientists I met, for example, were keeping alive all the remote chances for a *Dan Dare* future when they laboured away at the dinky, economical Black Arrow launcher—but they were also doing something right then that had, for them, all the romance of that future already present in it.

It seems to me completely natural that the British Interplanetary Society in the 1940s had a membership that blended SF writing and reading with heavy-duty engineering competence; just as it's natural that writing software and reading SF often go together now. The kinds of imagination involved are different, but they flow into one another, and they're often both involved in the life-cycle of the same thing.

AS: You also scatter references to the *Eagle* and *Dan Dare*. How important was that link between SF and the more speculative wings of science in the 1950s? One of the things I liked about *Backroom Boys* was the way it treated seriously that sense of enjoyment you could find in the rocket programme and anything that was breaking new ground. All the enterprises you describe, even the mobile phone, have a sense of romance about them, don't they? Or even a 'sense of wonder'? Braben and Bell's *Elite* is a clearly science fictional exercise in world-building, and the mobile phone has probably done more to create a sense of a leap into a future than did the computer.

FS: It's incredibly difficult to quantify an influence, to say how important the link was and how different events would have been without it. Most influence by SF on the wider culture—including influence on science—seems to me to be anonymous and incremental, and to happen with the identifying marks of the science-fictional ideas erased in the process. It's like weather. It's rare to be able to trace anything as specific as literary cyberpunk's influence on real-world 1990s society. But you do keep finding these little hints and clues, these ambiguous fossils that tell you that there has certainly been some kind of significant overlap between SF's thinking about the future and science's. For example, if you look at reports of conferences on mobile-phone technology held in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they're full of people using the communicator in *Star Trek* as their model for what the future ought to provide. There were conference papers called things like 'Approaching the Functionality of the *Star Trek* Communicator'. So it's not a coincidence that a decade and a half later, we're all talking on little silver gadgets that flip open. I thought the sensible thing to do with an overlap which I couldn't easily resolve down to causes and effects was to concentrate on the *feeling* the engineers had for their work, where a sense of wonder (even if not the actual genre-defined *sensawunda* itself) certainly manifested itself all the time, and the preoccupations of SF ran together with the preoccupations of the passing decades. Also, apart from everything else, the changing SF background over the period I was writing about gave me a beautiful, indirect index of the changing historical mood. As everyone always points out, there's nothing that fixes a historical

moment like knowing what its idea of the future is. Concorde's design articulates the kind of 1960s technocratic future that you can also see in the look of the Post Office Tower; *Elite*'s game universe tells you about Thatcherism.

AS: *And the fight over the 'genome patent' implies that post-cyberpunk apotheosis of The Company, the idea that parts of us can in some way be owned.*

FS: I didn't think of it, but you're absolutely right. I could have—should have!—rooted that chapter in the biotech strand of '90s SF's dystopian corporate futures. Once you've seen the full equivalence between software and DNA, the question of who owns our biological operating systems follows straight on, and the exploratory/paranoid versions of a patented humanity in SF would have made a lovely resonant background for the true story I was telling of how humanity stayed open source in 1998. Bugger.

AS: *There's also nothing that dislocates a future more than the realisation that it's unfamiliar. Although there are mobile phones in Heinlein's Space Cadet the 'mobile revolution' seems to have come about without a science fictional model. Yes, there was Dick Barton's wrist-video and I've heard it said that flick-up mobile phones are that way because of those cool communicators in Star Trek, but the nature of the mobile-phone society gives us SF futures of post-human hive-minds, downloading information, surveillance, shifting identity—but without the way SF writers usually depicted it. Which was usually to do with the computer. The computer does things quicker; but the phone makes a different connection. We know where people are (or not: there's your anecdote about the man in Cambridge telling his wife he's in Coventry) and for a long time we're no longer able to write the mystery which revolves around the unidentified phone caller because we can tell who rang.*

FS: Yup, one of the big cultural surprises has been that space/place have been collapsed for us, not by super-speedy transportation but by a communications revolution which is really only a modest development of what already existed. A telephone is a telephone: a reliable Edwardian device which seemed to be fully bedded down and unlikely to do any more transforming work. Who'd've thought that putting telephones in motion would be enough to reconfigure the landscape so thoroughly? Maybe it's the modesty of the means behind the change that caused it to be anticipated wrong, where it was anticipated at all—as a grand and centralised system putting every jumpsuited citizen in constant touch with the authorities. Hardly anyone seems to have guessed that a mobile phone would be more than a walky-talky but less than totalitarian. To ornament the mobiles chapter of my book, we eventually found a picture of Dan Dare talking on something that looked like an early Motorola handset, but the writers of the *Eagle* comic were much more excited about monorails and personal rocketships than about telephones. Even cyberpunk, which absolutely staked its vision of the future on things happening in communications technology, didn't make much room for mobiles at first. The plots of early Gibson novels depend on people being periodically out of contact with each other, an ancient basis for storytelling and an utterly reliable one till the mid-1980s. Now, of course, the cheapness and ad-hocness and pervasiveness of mobiles has been fully integrated into SF, and is itself a place to be extrapolated from. I loved the rain of telephones at the beginning of Charlie Stross's new novel. It all goes to show that in SF as in other

human activities, people are (in the words of Flann O'Brien) much better at 'predicting past events'.

AS: *What is our idea of the future? The turn of the twentieth/twenty-first centuries seemed curiously bereft or at least half-hearted in speculation of what life might be a century hence compared to the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth. Now that we've 'had' science fiction, are we used to the future? Or given the state of how the twentieth century actually turned out to be, are we afraid of it? As you say, the earlier parts of the story in BB are very alien. The implied future of the times hasn't happened; it's alternate history from our viewpoint, isn't it? The other leg of the Trousers of Time?*

FS: Absolutely. The other tweedier leg in which it was actually possible to believe that squadron-leaders would drink tea beside the Sea of Tranquillity. (Presumably in a special self-heating aluminium canister designed by the boffins at Liptons, and for sale on earth at thirty guineas a time in Fortnum's.) I wanted the later bits of the book to be faintly haunted by that counterfactual universe, and for people to be gently surprised, over and over, that it was the real past which had projected it as a real (if incredibly unlikely) future. Alternate history is cognitively useful stuff. Your sense of the course of events changes if you've got something to compare it to. What does the future presently look like? Well, I've just been reading William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and like everybody else I was struck by the speech Gibson gives to Hubertus Bigend about the impossibility of us, now, looking forward coherently. 'Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which "now" was of greater duration... We have no future because our present is too volatile.' Hmmm. I think I don't agree.

I disagree that our moment in time is exceptionally volatile, for a start. It seems to me that we're just beginning to emerge from a period of very unusual placidity, when technology moved rapidly but there was a weird degree of global consensus, about (for example) the role of the market. It's not as if there isn't a huge bifurcation in the futures people are presently predicting: does the horn of plenty start to flow for everybody on the planet over the next century, giving us golden post-scarcity days, or does the biological infrastructure buckle under the strain, giving us a global dustbowl? It's just that these futures aren't yet urgently hitched to an ideological argument. In fact it isn't clear yet what the twenty-first century's ideological quarrel is going to be. (I'm betting that it won't be Islam vs. the West.) It may be that SF has, in a sense, done its job, and saturated our collective imaginations with so many futures that they've lost their potency. Genres do die, and I can see the argument that SF is in fact a transitory product of the first shock of seeing the world made over by industry—part of modernism, part of the mental furniture of the twentieth century and not necessarily of any other. SF could be a passing response to a particular stimulus. But I don't think that's what's happening. I think our present lull in expectation is caused by us waiting for things to go volatile again. We're in the trough between waves. The water will wrinkle, the surface will tilt, and suddenly a huge surge of green sea will lift beneath us, and we'll be in motion again, not necessarily to anywhere nice, but to somewhere interesting.

AS: *As befits someone with a sense of story you've even ended the book with a cliffhanger, with Beagle 2 approaching Mars and due to land on Christmas Day, and a kind of return to the old-fashioned British space programme with added extra marketing nous? (I'm*

reminded of Heinlein's 'The Man Who Sold the Moon' where schoolkids are urged to support the enterprise with their pocket money—something the ESA were apparently aiming to do.) You've shaped your narrative: what kind of story is this telling? One of national obsession? Individual genius? Zeitgeist?

FS: Not one of individual genius, since I thought the lone-inventor-in-a-shed story had been told too often, and often to the exclusion of the more revealing stories about what people have got up to in groups, and about what they've managed to get backing for.

AS: 'In groups' is interesting. Even the Elite story is fascinating because of the interplay between the two individuals and the marketing company. You do mention Clive Sinclair and the ZX Spectrum, but only briefly. Is he too much the 'lone inventor' or is it simply that the Spectrum was the only one of his things that actually changed the world?

FS: He's not in there because the Spectrum doesn't seem to me to be enough to counterbalance his adherence, otherwise, to a British tradition I really didn't want to celebrate. I refer to the great British tradition of Getting There First With Something Crappy. He did it with the digital watch, he did it with the calculator, he did it with most of his home computers. He seems to me to have been someone who could only operate in the very early stages of a technology, not because that was the time of maximum open-endedness and possibility, but because that was when you could flog things to punters while their expectations were low. Not part of the story I wanted to tell (he said, wiping a tell-tale fleck of foam from the corner of his mouth).

I suppose I wanted to tell a story of the times: one that used a discontinuous batch of scenes to fling some sort of loose net around a huge historical discontinuity. I keep being struck by how alien the earlier parts of the story seem to those of us who got their adult sense of the world in the 1980s or later. The rocket-building Britain of the 1950s and 1960s just does not compute very easily; de-industrialisation has made true stories seem radically unlikely. (Science-fictional, even.) I wanted to shovel away a few layers of oblivion; I wanted to show the threads that nevertheless run right through from then to now. Ending with Beagle was irresistible, both because it makes such a lovely antithetical match to the space story I began with, and because in many ways it's such a throwback of a project. *Virtual* engineering is much more typical of Britain in the early twenty-first century, from videogames to the current wave of space-operatic British SF—and then here's this tiny but literal spacecraft, due to flame its way down the Martian sky on the night before Christmas, 2003. Whether or not it reached the surface in one bit—I didn't know, writing the book, whether it would succeed—the effort to make that difficult descent seemed to be a story that locked the present and the past satisfyingly, if ironically, together.

AS: And of course we still don't know, discussing this as we are over email in early December 2003. A little nerdish insert: I think it's John Wyndham's *Stowaway to Mars* which has a Mars landing on Christmas Day? And meanwhile, while this 'tiny' spacecraft is on its way, China is talking about putting men on the moon by 2020. In fact one Chinese scientist, Ouyang Ziyuan, is talking about a permanent 'moon village' by that date. Which makes us wonder: are we living through the space race again? And is there going to be a boom in Chinese SF and what will it be like? (My contacts and

people who know more than I do say that there's a very Gernsbackian sense that SF is good for you, because it makes you interested in science and the potential of science.) But if this happens it looks like Beagle 2 is as you say a 'throwback', a great counterbalance to the 'British space programme' of the '50s but one which simply points out that that was a long time ago and things have changed. A friend of mine says that she was moved to tears by the description of the Beagle 2 project in BB, and it's such a beautiful story. But it's also an ironic story—('He would make it so cool that it would be hideously embarrassing for the Government not to support it'), and one which is made beautiful by the implied melancholy in it: this is a tactic which can only work once, a swan song.

FS: I do think it's very hard to see how anything more permanent and substantial can be built on Beagle, so, yes, for me the story is as much melancholic as triumphant. It's about a way of escaping, this once, the logic of recent history. Having said that, if Beagle does touch down with a gentle *boing*, and the very best *does* happen and Professor Pillinger's spring-powered mole finds a colony of bacteria 5 CM under the sand, he'll obviously receive a tremendous new one-time credit in the bank of public opinion, which I hope he invests wisely. Perhaps he could persuade the government that Britain ought to pay more than the bare minimum keep-those-rockets-away-from-me subscription to the European Space Agency. Perhaps he could get the European mission to search for earth-like extrasolar planets put back on the ESA timetable. That would be the way to go, as eager partners in a European programme strengthened by full-on British participation. Alas, I think that the ESA mission to see if the moon is made of green cheese will happen first. The Chinese programme, on the other hand, seems to me to have the scope to revive the whole kaboodle of human space-flight. I toy with the idea of going down to the bookies' and putting £5 on the first person to walk on Mars having a Chinese name. But I think it'll be a close thing: any serious, large-scale Chinese plan to get beyond Low Earth Orbit will arouse the jumpy nationalism of the Americans, and then it will indeed be space-race time again.

As for Chinese SF, my ignorance is complete. But I'm sure it won't just recapitulate the course of western SF. How could it, when it has such a different pool of present, near-past and far-past experience to draw on? I bet that the Gernsbackian moment when space equals science equals progress equals patriotism equals prosperity gives way to something fascinatingly perturbed. A photographer friend of mine went to do an assignment in the Pearl River Delta, and he described cities two, three thousand years old, which had been demolished as if they had never been, and replaced in their entirety by glass towers, and strange little synthetic theme parks, where couples in pedal boats visit scale models of the Pyramids and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It sounded to me like a place only SF could do justice to: SF by Chinese Philip K Dicks, and Chinese Gibsons, and by authors for whom there is no precedent at all...

AS: Francis Spufford, thank you. ✱



2003: Something Old and Something New: a symposium

It been suggested that book-selling is the most fannish of occupations, but it's a changing world out there as Eastercon regular Brian Ameringen explains:

Quite recently I was in a small British town, with a few moments before the train left, so I looked round one of the charity shops (not the Oxfam). It was quite spacious and well-lit, with a well-maintained book section. To my surprise I saw a scarce book by E R Eddison (author of *The Worm Ouroboros*, and other light classics): a nice copy, but with quite heavy foxing, a worn dust jacket, and the previous owner's name on the end paper; but nonetheless a nice oddity. I took the book down and looked at the price, then carefully put it back on the shelf. It was £80! Sitting on the train, I was reminded that a few years earlier I had been in Bloomsbury, and had visited one of the prestigious London Bookfairs. It had been spacious, hushed and costly, with neat rows of books in film-protected dust jackets sweltering under the bright lights, and the incessant jackdaw scrutiny... but eventually I found another scarce book by E R Eddison for what I thought was a very reasonable price. When I was at the 'Tun that evening I spoke with someone I thought might be interested. He told me with enthusiasm that he'd just about given up hope of ever owning a copy; so I mentioned a modest price, and we agreed the deal. The next day I returned to Bloomsbury... successfully. The seller was happy, the customer was very happy, and I made a small profit and transferred a book onto a shelf where it was appreciated, so I was happy too.

After considering these events, on the train, I returned home and took the opportunity to look the book up on the Internet. There were better copies, from reputable dealers, for around that price. The charity shop had obviously looked the book up already, and set their price according to that information, without taking the book condition, their location, or their customer base into account... but the Internet makes the information available to all, without the background knowledge of how to use it. This is changing the face of bookselling...✱

—Brian Ameringen

A future in which the expert specialist second-hand book-sellers are driven out by amateurs armed only with search engines is bleak indeed; so bleak that we don't believe any science fiction authors have ever tried to tackle it. Better go and buy a book from your favourite dealer right this minute to show that you still love them, that you still believe...

Still, while changes of this sort may not be welcome, we are, after all, supposed to be science fiction fans; we're used to change and we should be able to adapt to the brave new world, and that includes the changing world of SF itself. Yet the image of the jaded fan, who hasn't read a new SF work in decades and can barely summon the energy to revisit old favourites, is a firmly established cliché indeed.

But how true is it? Has the genre lost its lustre for the long-time enthusiast? Are we in danger of being left behind? We asked a number of fans to tell us about the new things they've discovered in the genre during 2003, both the new creations and the previously

overlooked classic works which they've encountered for the first time or perhaps revisited. We suggested that they use a flexible interpretation of 'SF'; thinking outside the box was encouraged. Here are the answers we received:

* * *

For the last few years I've been in a strange post-literate state, where the idea of reading a novel simply doesn't interest me. I used to read three a week. Experimentation has shown, though, that I can happily re-read old favourites; and so I came again to Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea*, and the first novel of what's now a six-book sequence, *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

I still own the copy I bought when I was ten years old: a Puffin edition, with a bright, creased cover showing the major characters—in defiance of the actual text—as pale-skinned. I didn't notice that discrepancy when I was ten. I didn't notice the echoes of classic literature (*The Iliad*, *Faust*, *Heart of Darkness*), and I was more interested in the map at the front of the book than in the implications of Le Guin's magical Equilibrium.

But as soon as I began to read I realised that the book had stayed with me ever since I first encountered it. Whole sentences resonated as I read them, so familiar that I'd been using Le Guin's phrases in speech and writing without ever realising that they weren't my own. And there were knots of memories around some chapters: reading aloud in class, reading when I was ill in bed, reading on a rainy summer afternoon next to an open window...

Full of hope, I bought one of the new *Earthsea* books; but I couldn't get past the first page, because it was not the familiar world that was encoded, but not contained, in *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

I read several new books last year, but the one that felt like coming home was *The Folk Keeper*, by Franny Billingsley. (It's another book for children, but that's only relevant because I needed something I could read cover to cover in one grim day.) It's an ordinary story, at first glance: a fairytale whose ending is as predictable as it's improbable. Corinna is an orphan whose fortune changes when she is taken from the Foundling Home by a noble widow. She must still tend the mysterious troglodyte Folk (who consume gargantuan quantities of food, and will ruin the crops and spoil the milk if not controlled) and she has to prevent the astute young heir from guessing the secrets she hardly knows about herself.

When I reached the end, though, I turned straight back to the first page and read the book through again. It's a long time since I've done that, and it's because of the sheer delight I felt in reading the story. The point at which I fell in love was on page 30: 'Suddenly the world paused, then turned itself inside out to run the other way.' What Corinna has sensed is the turning of the tide. That's a world, a magic, which makes perfect sense to me, in the same way that Le Guin's Equilibrium feels 'right'.

It's too soon to tell if *The Folk Keeper* will stand the test of time for me, the way that *A Wizard of Earthsea* has. I don't think I read as avidly as I did at ten, for one thing: too much of the real world has intruded, over the years. But I want to go back.✱

—Tanya Brown

* * *

The start of 2003 brought one of those interesting chance discoveries of a new author working unacknowledged (and often unknowing) on the fringes of the genre that occasionally crop up out of the blue. In 2000 it was Michel Faber's first novel *Under the*

Skin (Canongate), a stark SFnal tale of brutal surgical reconstruction and predatory cannibalism. This year there were two such, both on the currently fashionable ('New Weird') interface of the mainstream and fantasy.

Edward Carey's *Alva & Irva: The Twins Who Saved a City* (Picador) became one of my favourite novels of the year. The two girls of the title are twin sisters, identical in appearance (both plain, awkward and, at six foot by their fifteenth birthday, gangly) but mirror images of each other in terms of character: Alva an adventurer who dreams of exploring and travel to places; Irva a recluse and almost total agoraphobe. The twins are bound to each other, but test the limits of their independence by an often brutal sibling rivalry.

Trapped in their obscure mid-European city of Entralla and the uninviting prospect of a life in the Post Office (their tyrannical grandfather is the Postmaster General), they escape into the freedom of their imagination, creating an alternative Entralla of their own as Alva roams the street with a notebook and tape measure and Irva lovingly crafts each building her sister describes in miniature, out of plasticine. The detailed model fills the house, spilling over into boxes as Alva explores the city's farther streets and suburbs. But when an earthquake devastates Entralla, turning it into an unrecognisable ruin, the twins' project comes to light and becomes the focus of the community's hope to rebuild the city as it once looked. Their private world becomes exposed to a public mixture of hope, argument, criticism and reverence and, for some, the girls achieve the status of saints.

There is much more to this book. *Alva & Irva* is by turns touching, funny, tragic and fantastical. The book (at least in hardback edition) is beautifully produced, told partly as the memoir of one August Hirkus—a one-time city exile who once knew the twins—and partly as a guidebook to the city. Chapter headings describing the main city buildings are accompanied by pictures of the little plasticine models.

Steven Sherrill's *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* (Scholastic) is another almost domestic excursion into the border of the fantastic and the mundane. The protagonist, M, is a short-order chef in a small American town, living in a trailer park. He is shy, solitary, largely inarticulate. He is also two thousand years old, immortal, and has the head and horns of a bull attached to a man's body. As a Kafkaesque metaphor for alienation it's perfect, but largely redundant. Read literally—with all its small domestic details of M's daily regime of care and grooming the often painful interface between skin and hide—it gains immeasurably, as the tragic history (and forcing the reader to ponder the future) of the monster of the Cretan labyrinth.

William Tenn, the pseudonym of writer Phillip Klass, was known to me from a handful of quirky, darkly humorous short stories, 'The Liberation of Earth', 'Brooklyn Project' and 'Bernie the Faust'. At the Northampton SF Group's Newcon 2 I came across a set of his collected stories from the 1940s and 1950s: *The Wooden Star, The Seven Sexes, Of All Possible Worlds, The Human Angle and The Square Root of Man* (all Ballantine, 1968). (There was one further volume in this set, his only full length novel *Of Men and Monsters*, which I am sadly missing.) Funny, satirical, sometimes farcical and often tinged with a dark pessimism, Tenn's stories neatly skewer human lunacy in the same way as the works of Sladek and Sheckley. *

—Steve Jeffery

Something old: In 2003 I rediscovered SF short stories. I've never been a magazine buyer. They don't shelve as neatly as books and I've never been organised enough to manage to buy anything that was ephemeral on a regular basis, so I've always been biased towards novels; but in 2003 I rediscovered short SF. It's not that I've never read any shorts. For many years I've haunted second-hand bookshops looking for any Theodore Sturgeon or Henry Kuttner, but in recent years kind people have started to reprint the complete short fiction of authors. I've been collecting the complete Sturgeon since North Atlantic Books brought out *The Ultimate Egoist* in 1994. In 2003, however, I found the NESFA reprints and I've bought the William Tenn (*Immodest Proposals*) and Fredric Brown (*From These Ashes*). I've also made inroads into Philip K Dick shorts, Ursula Le Guin shorts and been joyfully reintroduced to Robert Sheckley short stories. I'm savouring my way through *Pilgrimage to Earth* at the moment and I'd be overjoyed if the NESFA folk were to think about a complete Robert Sheckley short story collection in time for the UK Worldcon.

Something new: Always a problem, something new, when you've got a houseful of 'books waiting to be read'. Strictly not a 2003 book, but the one that carried me through the horrors of the seaside holiday 2003, was *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan. Of course that was the summer and it's 2004 now so all I remember was that it was addictive, exciting and had plenty of thrills and thought-provoking moments.

Another something-new-to-me are the Wen Spencer Ukiah Oregon books about an alien invasion of the Earth, with the added thrill of the werewolf-type interest, and the lovely twist that the aliens are basically pond scum with no abilities/intelligence inherent but the ability to subvert their intelligent hosts to their own ends.

And, for good measure, something borrowed: the Sheckley book. That's why NESFA really should do a complete Sheckley!

Something blue: Alison Sinclair's *Blueheart*. Isn't it time for another from her? *

—Yvonne Rowse

While 2003 was a year of much flitting back and forth between SF of the past and of the present, between written and media SF, old classics (and the not-so-classic) and newer experimentation, with plenty of time to myself when at home some of it has been spent rummaging around in my attic in dusty old boxes of SF novels that I curiously kept after losing interest in SF around 1985. But amongst these boxes of books I have also made other rediscoveries up there, and the most meaningful have been of a more personal nature. In battered old suitcases in a dark corner of the attic I have kept much artwork—paintings, drawings and illustrations, often of a science fictional nature—which I painted or drew in the years 1975-1985, occasionally commercially. These have literally not seen the light of day for almost fifteen years; nor have I cast much thought towards them in that length of time either. It took until 2003 for me to consider taking another look at them and wondering if they could do with another airing.

I'm recalling here a long-ago time when I wasn't in fandom, barely knew what a Worldcon was, and yet still had a strong desire to do science fiction book covers. I wrote about this period in the article 'Kitchen Appliances In Zero-G' in my fanzine *Zoo Nation* #2, but perhaps that article tells only half the story for I hadn't taken the time to recall the details, such as how it felt each time I reached the point where I knew a picture had been 'finished', or the lengthy thought processes while working on a picture's composition, the atmosphere I tried to capture with the use of colour, the music I was

listening to, the books I was reading, the recurring snatches of remembered conversation that go round and round in my head like a scratched record while, on automatic, I refined some important detail or other, or the nights of staying up until 5 AM while on a creative jag and not wanting to lose the muse.

Bringing this up to the present and seeing something of the whole story will mean a trip to Concourse's Art Room, where a small selection from that time has somehow been dragged back into the light of day, largely as a result of gentle nagging and coaxing from the likes of Dave Hardy and others. I'm still rather proud of these pictures, even if I am too often too critical about my abilities as an 'artist' as opposed to those of an 'illustrator'. If that distinction has any real meaning I want to ignore it for now and just rediscover how it felt then to put some pictures on show, instead of hiding them away in the dark for years where they have illuminated no one, least of all myself. ✱

—Pete Young

If you know me, you probably won't be surprised to hear that I'm going to bring *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* into this.

On the other hand, you might be wondering how I can possibly claim that it's something I'm revisiting for the first time in over five years. Well, I have a confession to make, and I'm making it here because I can't very well make it in *Mostly Harmless*: until 2003, it had been ten years since I last read *HHGG*.

Frankly, I'd forgotten how good it was. I used to know huge chunks of it off pat, but I was still laughing as I read. If you ever do one thing I tell you (unlikely, I know) then do this: go out there and read it again. Well, not those of you who never read it in the first place; you should just be ashamed of yourselves.

Even worse than my somehow forgetting that *HHGG* is rather bloody brilliant is the reason that I finally got around to re-reading it. It wasn't because of either of the two biographies of Douglas that have come out recently. It wasn't so that I could go out and recruit new members for ZZ9. It wasn't even because (damnit) it's a good book.

It was all because of the new thing that, in some small way, was a big thing for Douglas Adams fans in 2003: the BBC Big Read.

I suspect that everyone knows about the Big Read by now: the British public voting for their favourite book of all time and choosing a surprising number of finalists that could be classified as SF. It led to quite a lot of interest in *HHGG*, because of the consistent high placing of the book in the polls, and through that it also gave media coverage to ZZ9.

When the BBC first asked us whether ZZ9 would like to be on TV, we jumped at the chance. Well, I didn't, but they said it was my job so I didn't have much choice. As the summer wore on, though, the BBC missed ever more photogenic filming opportunities, including the Beeblebears' Picnic, for which they provided the superb excuse that they 'couldn't get a camera because Pride was that weekend.' Well, yes. It was about one hundred yards away from us, as it happens...

Eventually, they arrived at a slightly dingy pub in Peterborough for our AGM and, despite my best efforts, I ended up on TV for the first time ever*. At a guess, I would say that I talked far too fast, made no sense whatsoever and was edited down from about half an hour (subjective time) to thirty seconds (on-air time). It would have

* Actually, it was the second time. But as the first time was on French TV, walking past the Pont d'Alma on the first anniversary of Lady Di's death, I don't really think it counts.

to be a guess, though, because I've not seen it. I don't particularly want to, either.

And why did that make me re-read *HHGG*? Well, a load of my clients saw and recognised me on TV. And now they keep quoting bits at me, or asking me questions. And I can't be looking like I don't know my stuff, now can I? ✱

—Flick

I'm fascinated by witches. In particular, I'm fascinated by witches in the stories we tell: how the image of the witch persists from generation to generation and yet how it changes from decade to decade. There's the ugly old crone of fairytales, with a wart on her nose, a cat at her heels and wickedness in her heart; the dippy hippy chick herbalist; the glamour puss with the power to make herself desirable; and most recently there has been a veritable epidemic of teen witches.

Bell, Book and Candle—directed by Richard Quine in 1958 and starring James Stewart and Kim Novak—shows us just two flavours of witch, and in so doing tells us something of the anxieties of the period. Gillian Holroyd is a glamorous and powerful witch who knows that witches cannot fall in love but sees this as no obstacle to having fun. Her witchy family—an aging aunt and bongo-playing brother—are not in favour of Gillian's games. They restrict themselves to the role of harmless trickster, getting their kicks from magically unlocking doors and lighting streetlamps. Gillian's fun, by comparison, is far more dangerous: she enchants her handsome neighbour, sees off his fiancée, and brings chaos to his life. Inevitably, Gillian falls victim to her own games, falling in love herself and losing her witchy powers as a result. Her business is transformed from an edgy place of primitive arts and masks to a florist's shop, and her clothes echo the change. The dangerous predator—a woman with power—has been neutralised, and placed in a safely domestic setting. The aunt and brother, by failing to grow up, never become dangerous and are allowed to retain their power.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Joss Whedon has created one of the most interesting contemporary witches, in the form of Willow Rosenberg. Across the seven seasons of the TV show, she runs the gamut of witchy types, from misfit, in ugly clothes, to happy lesbian (witchcraft and lesbianism functioned as symbols of strength, rebelliousness and independence in 1970s feminism). She moves on to softer, prettier clothes, candles, and even a trace of the clichéd 'sparkle' that marks witches as feminine and confined to the domestic sphere. When Tara is killed Willow becomes a far more dangerous witch, focused only on revenge. She wrests magic from every possible source, destroys Tara's killer and attempts to destroy the world too.

In the final season, the Scooby gang is up against the ultimate Big Bad, and finding that they simply cannot fight it effectively. Willow is a much-needed weapon that refuses time and again to be deployed, holding back even as potential Slayers step up to be slaughtered, because she fears she cannot control herself.

Thankfully, when the crunch comes, when the fate of not just the world, but the universe hangs in the balance, Willow overcomes her fear. She proves not only her phenomenal power but also her control, and facilitates the triumph of good. At this stage, Willow has moved beyond all foregoing types of witch: she is not grotesque, nor confined to the domestic sphere, and she does not disrupt or destroy the world; instead she saves the universe.

This finally seems to be a grown-up version of the witch, acknowledging that women can have power and exercise control; that the powerful woman does not spell the end of the world. *
—Elizabeth Billinger

* * *

I am going to have to pick two novels that are at their heart a character study of the outsider.

I think the new novel I enjoyed most last year was Elizabeth Moon's *Speed of Dark*. The book is a study of an autistic man who, with the help of advanced medicine, is just about able to function within society. He is able to live his own life provided that he sticks to his routines. He has a job working with computers, but struggles when it comes to his relationships with other people.

At the start of the book he works in the research department of a chemical company, where his enhanced pattern matching abilities help in the design of new drugs. However, his life is thrown into chaos when the upper management decide that the unit he works in is not worth the cost of running it. He is offered the choice between being thrown out or taking part in a trial of a new drug that may completely 'cure' him.

In the meantime, his private life is beginning to flourish through his interest in fencing, although this too brings unexpected consequences—with the so-called 'normal' humans behaving much worse than the 'maladjusted' hero.

The book has a lot going for it, and you keep turning the pages. You are drawn into the hero's world and really begin to believe in him and eventually love him, although I am still not convinced by the ending.

This year also saw me re-read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a book I had read long ago; but I had almost forgotten how much more powerful the original is than its many tiresome retellings. In the original the Creature is a much more rounded character than the movie-makers ever allow. We also see Victor go from youthful enthusiasm through exhaustion to a fearful creature racked by guilt as what he has let loose on the world.

Mary Shelley's book resonates strongly in our current world, where the Creature—already abandoned by his creator—is outcast for his differing looks. The only person he manages to befriend is a blind old man, but he is driven away by the man's son who can only see the monster's looks, not his kind actions. Of course we only ever have the Creature's descriptions of his actions—do we really know if he is telling the truth?

Eventually the Creature turns on his creator and the spiral of violence ensues—death upon death. First Victor's brother, then the governess hanged for murder, then Victor's best friend and his bride Elizabeth. Eventually all that is left is Victor and the creature chasing one another literally to the ends of the Earth. *
—Marcus Streets

* * *

A new novel from Alan Garner is an event, so I was startled when *Thursbitch* slipped quietly into the shops. Startled, but delighted... and curious. Where would Garner go after ranging across the world in *Strandloper*? Maybe unsurprisingly, *Thursbitch* returns to Garner's home territory, Cheshire, but its protagonists—a packman, travelling the salt ways of northern England in the eighteenth century, and two modern scientists—acknowledge Garner's continuing fascination with the transmission of ideas across the miles, across continents, across time. *Thursbitch* reminds me strongly of *Red Shift* with its clipped, elliptical language and its two modern characters strangely out of joint with one another, but also of *Strandloper*, focusing as it does on a moment when the world is

changing irrevocably; in this instance, an ancient way of life is finally ruptured by the arrival of a landowner espousing new methods of management. One can only stand amazed at the miracle of compression Garner has performed to condense so many concepts into so small a space, with not a word wasted.

From the new to the old, and to the converse of compression, expansion. In 2003 I was obliged to re-read *Frankenstein* for a course I'm taking. I've lost count of the number of times I have studied *Frankenstein* over the years: *Frankenstein* as science fiction novel, as the study of a hubristic scientist, as an example of the fantastic novel. You may imagine my enthusiasm at having to tackle it all over again: *Frankenstein* and feminist theory, *Frankenstein* and Freud. Previously, I'd always read the revised edition of 1831 but given the particular slant of the course this time I decided to read the first edition, the 1818 edition, the edition that seemed to suggest that Victor Frankenstein's relationship with Elizabeth was much more incestuous than the rewritten 1831 edition would imply. And yes, the 1818 edition certainly does lead one to this conclusion.

But that's not why I've chosen to talk about *Frankenstein*. Having read the two editions, side by side, I was startled by how fresh, how immediate, the 1818 edition seemed by comparison with the later revision. While it's true that some portions of the earlier version have a distinctly purplish tinge, the 1818 edition nonetheless has an energy that the later revision seems to me to lack. The widowed Mary Shelley edited the novel with an eye on maintaining her perilous position as a respectable woman in a society that still viewed the Shelleys and the Godwins with suspicion, as well as being intent on celebrating her lost love, Percy. Victor Frankenstein becomes more like an idealised Shelley, and the text is larded with morally improving discursions on the nature of life and death, and God's place in it all. And, of course, the hints of incest are somewhat ineptly toned down. I understand why Mary Shelley did all of this, but in looking to her future, I can't help feeling she somehow stifled the vigour of her literary first-born. The 1818 edition breathes life into the incredible adventures of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature even as the 1831 revision suffocates it. The 1818 edition is now available as a Penguin Classic and is well worth seeking out: if you think you know *Frankenstein*, think again; you may be as surprised as I was. *
—Maureen Kincaid Speller

* * *

The arrival of *Felaheen* (Earthlight, 2003), the concluding part of Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *Arabesk* series, came with high expectations, with the preceding volumes, *Pashazade* and *Effendi*, gaining much critical praise: a standard that *Felaheen* more than reaches. In an alternative future where the Ottoman Empire still exists our very modern hero Ashraf (Raf) Bey has been a detective (*Pashazade*), even the Chief of Detectives and mayor of El-Iskandryia (*Effendi*) but *Felaheen* finds him having resigned all posts and being pressurised into investigating an assassination attempt on the Emir of Tunis—who may, or may not, be his father. This is a deeply personal story, focusing on Raf's need to find out who he is and where he came from, and thus on three generations of his 'family': very different from the more global, macro-political drivers of the others. This personalisation of both El Iskandryian and Ifriqiya (Tunisian) society results in the narrative being more powerful, more involving, and possibly the most important of the series. Although *Felaheen* is self-contained there is greater satisfaction to be gained from the interaction between the three volumes. The finale does bring suitable closure, to both the book and the series, but no definitive conclusion: some things are

revealed, others are not, and some are left tantalisingly (and very deliberately) vague. Anything else would not have done justice to this dazzling work.

After *Felaheen* I belatedly started Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (Heinemann, 1955) and the resonance between them was unexpected. Having become averse to Greene at school, when we 'studied' *Brighton Rock*, it was only the subject matter of *The Quiet American*—1950s Vietnam and the start of the American involvement in the region—that persuaded me to read it. The shock was immediate; not only is this a stunning story, the similarities with *Felaheen* were striking. Both are elegant and beautifully constructed, using individuals to illuminate the wider political landscape. In *The Quiet American* it is the relationship between Fowler, the cynical English foreign correspondent, Pyle, the enigmatic American, and Phuong, the Vietnamese girl in love with them both, which is used to show the developing political instability and warning of potentially tragic outcomes (showing Greene's journalistic insightfulness, given what later did occur). Throughout the novel the role of Phuong is critical; apparently passive she is constantly fighting against the subservient role demanded of women in Vietnamese society of the time. Greene has also superbly evoked time and place in the character of South Vietnam, from the bustle of Saigon to the peace, and danger, of the surrounding countryside. Both gender roles and the creation of place are equally strong in the *Arabesk* series. Greene and Grimwood are keenly aware of the importance of structure in the novel; both start with an ending, Greene with the reporting of Pyle's death, Grimwood with Raf buried alive under the great salt lake of Chott el Jerrid. Both are remarkable, insightful books and recommended to all. *

—Paul N Billinger

And we'll close with veteran two-times Worldcon chair and Fan Guest of Honour for this year's Worldcon, Peter Weston, a man who is far too eminent and venerable for us to object to him quoting Mark incorrectly in a conversation where Claire wasn't actually present...

'You're going to write about the Space Programme?' said Mark Plummer. 'That will do; after all, it's pretty old hat these days.'

Seeing the expression of outraged horror on my face, the ever-tactful Claire hastened to explain what Mark had *really* meant. 'Well,' she said, 'it did all happen a long time ago.'

Actually no, it is happening now (although no one seems particularly interested) in both fact and theory, still giving us true-blue science fictional types an occasional buzz of the pure, undiluted sense of wonder that you just don't get from reading fantasy trilogies.

For instance, here's a new thing. I put a book on my Christmas list last year with the unlovely title of *The Big Splat*, much ridiculed by my Rotary friends who probably thought it was something to do with the noise Jonny Wilkinson made when he fell into the deep mud at the Australian end of the rugby pitch. In fact it is about the origin of our Moon, and the new theory that has emerged from analysis of rocks brought back from the Apollo missions. The Moon, you see, just shouldn't be there.. Much too big, and no one has ever before been able to put forward a satisfactory explanation for the fact that Earth is essentially a 'double-planet'.

'Does it matter anyway?' my Rotary friends might wonder, except that without 'moon' there's nothing much to rhyme with 'June' and 'croon'. But as the great Larry Niven pointed out in stories like 'One Way Street' back around 1969, without a big Moon to pull off

the thick atmosphere of the early Earth, you're likely to get a runaway greenhouse effect and just another, slightly cooler Venus. No life, and no us. In fact the existence of the Moon (at *exactly* the right distance to provide spectacular solar eclipses; nice touch, that), is one of the only reasons to believe in God. Or benevolent aliens. But I digress.

The Big Splat tells us what happened, and when, and it is such a convincing theory that almost all planetary scientists have now accepted it. Just one of those nice little ideas like Velcro and non-stick frying pans to emerge from the space programme, all those years ago.

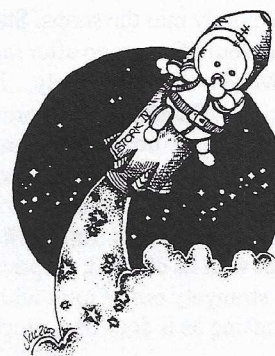
Meanwhile, those hopelessly old-fashioned Russians still haven't got the message, and with Gerry Webb's help they are still banging away with Soyuz; and just as well, too, since they are keeping the International Space Station going while the Space Shuttle is being fixed. My 'new' thing is the IMAX film I saw at the Science Museum on my last visit to London for the Barley Mow meeting, which has some great space-walk scenes but is an absolute eye-opener for its shots of the Russian space-centre at Baikonur.

We're all familiar with Cape Canaveral, the Vehicle Assembly building and the giant crawler, the white spacesuits and air-conditioned vehicles, the ranks of technicians at the control panels, the bunkers and the sheer 'bullshit' of NASA, to use a word. The Russian effort isn't like that at all. First there is a 'clanking' noise, and a railway wagon comes along a track through a cracked tarmac yard, with the rocket lying down flat on board. Then dozens of toothless little old men wearing construction hats, puffing fags and spitting, somehow manage to get it upright. (Well, they probably don't actually puff fags with all that hydrazine about, but they look as if they will as soon as the cameraman's back is turned.) Then a couple of spacemen come out of a corrugated iron shed, walk across the yard shaking hands with all the old men, and they climb up a ladder made of scaffolding tubing and get into the capsule.

It all struck me as so *routine*, so matter of fact, so much more the way we thought it would be than all these great PR-inspired programmes that don't lead anywhere and go wrong so badly. Then the IMAX film showed the Russian 'Proton' launcher, a totally alien design, a huge thing with lots of smaller engine nozzles, and it blasts off with tremendous power. We have to admire Korolev, the designer, who was an absolute genius, working with inferior technology and resources and still putting together a rocket that is the nearest thing we have to a true space-workhouse. They've been using it for a long time now, since well before we built *Saturn-5* in the West and then lost the blueprints.

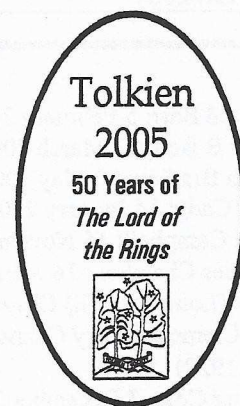
So there we are, one old thing that's actually quite new, because I hadn't seen it before. And one new discovery about something that's really very old—4.3 billion years, to be precise. Funny old world, isn't it! *

—Peter Weston



Tolkien 2005

The Ring Goes Ever On



Celebrating 50 Years of *The Lord of the Rings*
11-15 AUGUST 2005, ASTON UNIVERSITY, BIRMINGHAM,
ENGLAND

The Tolkien Society and partners are arranging a five-day conference to be held in the city of Tolkien's childhood. The conference will take place at Aston University, Birmingham from the 11th to 15th August 2005. This date has been chosen so that people who have travelled from far parts of the world to attend Worldcon: *Interaction* in 2005 (in Glasgow from 4th – 8th August) can stay on to attend Tolkien 2005.

Guests Speakers Confirmed at present:

◇ Verlyn Flieger ◇ Brian Sibley ◇ Tom Shippey ◇

Lectures and Panels, Evening Entertainments, Dealers Room, Art Show & Auction, Quizzes, Video Stream, plus Tours of Tolkien's Birmingham.

Conference Themes:

Art and Illustration
Popularity and the legacy of Tolkien
Authors responding to Tolkien
Characterisation and narrative
Dramatisation and film adaptation
The Inklings
Translation

Tolkien on the Internet
Philology and The Languages of Middle-earth
Tolkien and recent fantasy literature
Ecology and Environment
Tolkien in literary theory and cultural studies
Ethics, Power and Conflict
Tolkien and War

Participating Societies

The Participation Programme is intended to include international Tolkien Societies in the planning and running of the Convention, member societies involved so far include:

- ❖ *The Tolkien Society*
- ❖ *The Mythopoeic Society* (USA)
- ❖ *Elanor*, The Belgian Tolkien Society
- ❖ *Sociedad Tolkieni de México*
- ❖ *Arthedain*, The Norwegian Tolkien Society
- ❖ *Sociedade de Tolkien Brasileira*
- ❖ *Eredain*, The Swiss Tolkien Society
- ❖ *Deutsche Tolkien Gesellschaft*
- ❖ *Sociedad Tolkien Española*
- ❖ *The Polish Tolkien Society*
- ❖ *The Forodrim* (Sweden)
- ❖ *The Greek Tolkien Society*
- ❖ *Skies of Rohan* (Idaho and Montana, USA)
- ❖ *Haradrim*, The South African Tolkien Society

www.tolkiensociety.org/2005

**Visit our table in the Dealers' Room
to book at 2003 rates!**

In Memoriam

Donald Barr: 5 February 2004 (b.1921)	Virginia Heinlein: 18 January 2003
Peter B Bell: 23 March 2003 (b.1932)	Mike Hinge: 9 August 2003 (b.1931)
Keith Bradley: 20 May 2003	Kent Johnson: 14 May 2003
Jack Cady: 14 January 2004 (b.1932)	Virginia Kidd: 12 January 2003 (b.1921)
KIM Campbell: 15 November 2003 (b.1956)	Don Lawrence: 29 December 2003 (b.1928)
Jacques Chambon: 16 April 2003 (b.1942)	Tim Maroney: 3 July 2003 (b.1961)
Russ (Louis Russell) Chauvenet: 24 June 2003 (b.1920)	Willis E McNelly: 7 April 2003 (b.1920)
Hal Clement (Harry Clement Stubbs): 29 October 2003 (b.1922)	Beryl Mercer (née Henley): 12 October 2003
Walter Cole: 7 December 2003	Dave Mooring: 21 May 2003 (b.1961)
Peter Day: 23 February 2003	George O'Nale: 27 May 2003
James England: May 2003	Jan O'Nale: 27 May 2003
Lloyd Arthur Eshbach: 29 October 2003 (b.1910)	Julius Schwartz: 8 February 2004 (b.1915)
Howard Fast: 12 March 2003 (b.1915)	Martin Smith: August 2003 (b.1963)
John Foyster: 5 April 2003 (b.1941)	Bob Smith: 24 February 2003 (b.1930),
Peter T Garratt: 2 March 2004 (b.1949)	Roy Tackett: 23 May 2003 (b.1925)
Giles Gordon: 14 November 2003 (b.1940)	Simon van Dongen: 16 December 2003 (b.1959)
Ken Grimwood: 6 June 2003 (b.1944)	Harry B Warner Jr: 17 February 2003 (b.1922)
Paul Harland (John Paul Smit): 17 June 2003 (b.1960)	Margaret Winch: 22 November 2003
	Stafford Ernest Wright: 19 December 2003 (b.1920)

Awards presented in 2003

British Science Fiction Association Awards

Novel: *The Separation*, Christopher Priest
 Short fiction: 'Coraline', Neil Gaiman
 Artwork: cover *Interzone* #179, Dominic Harman
 Non-fiction: introduction to *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek*,
 Dave Langford

Arthur C Clarke Award

The Separation, Christopher Priest

Hugos

Novel: *Hominids*, Robert Sawyer
 Novella: 'Coraline', Neil Gaiman
 Novelette: 'Slow Life', Michael Swanwick
 Short story: 'Falling onto Mars', Geoffrey A Landis
 Related Book: *Better To Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill*,
 Judith Merrill and Emily Pohl-Weary
 Dramatic Presentation, Long: *The Lord of the Rings: The Two
 Towers*
 Dramatic Presentation, Short: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer:*
 'Conversations with Dead People'
 Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois
 Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton
 Semiprozine: *Locus*
 Fanzine: *Mimosa*
 Fan Writer: Dave Langford
 Fan Artist: Sue Mason

John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer

Wen Spencer

Nebulas

Novel: *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman
 Novella: 'Bronte's Egg', Richard Chwedyk
 Novelette: 'Hell is the Absence of God', Ted Chiang
 Short story: 'Creature', Carol Emshwiller
 Script: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

Locus Awards

SF Novel: *The Years of Rice and Salt*, Kim Stanley Robinson
 Fantasy Novel: *The Scar*, China Miéville
 First Novel: *A Scattering of Jades*, Alexander C Irvine
 Young Adult Novel: *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman
 Novella: 'The Tain', China Miéville
 Novelette: 'The Wild Girls', Ursula K Le Guin
 Short Story: 'October in the Chair', Neil Gaiman
 Collection: *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Ted Chiang
 Anthology: *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Nineteenth Annual
 Collection*, ed. Gardner Dozois
 Non-fiction: *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years*,
 Bruce Sterling
 Art Book: *Spectrum 9: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art*,
 ed. Cathy Fenner & Arnie Fenner
 Editor: Gardner Dozois
 Magazine: *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*
 Book Publisher: Tor
 Artist: Bob Eggleton

James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award

Light, M John Harrison; 'Stories for Men', John Kessel

Philip K Dick Award

The Mount, Carol Emshwiller

John W. Campbell Award

Probability Space, Nancy Kress

Theodore Sturgeon Award

'Over Yonder', Lucius Shepard

Sidewise Awards

Long Form: *The Severed Wing*, Martin J Gidron; *Ruled
 Britannia*, Harry Turtledove
 Short Form: 'Empire', William Sanders

Prometheus Award

Night Watch, Terry Pratchett

Nova Awards

Fanzine: *Zoo Nation*, ed. Pete Young
 Fan Writer: Claire Brialey
 Fan Artist: Sue Mason
 Best Fan: Ina Shorrock

First Fandom Hall of Fame Award

Philip Francis Nolan (posthumously) and Philip José Farmer

First Fandom Moskowitz Archive Award

Rusty Hevelin

E Everett Evans 'Big Heart' Award

John Hertz

Chesley Awards

Cover Illustration, Hardcover: Cover of *The Thousand Orcs*,
 Todd Lockwood

Cover Illustration, Paperback: Cover of *Briar Rose*, Tristan
 Elwell

Cover Illustration, Magazine: Cover of *Dragon* (December
 2002), Todd Lockwood

Interior Illustration: *Classic Fairy Tales*, Scott Gustafson

Colour Work, Unpublished: 'The Storm', Richard Hescoc

Monochrome Work, Unpublished: 'The Skimmer's Lagoon',
 Maurizio Manzieri

Three-Dimensional: 'Con José Dragon', Kim Graham

Artistic Achievement: Tom Kidd

Art Director: Irene Gallo (Tor Books)

Gaming Related Illustration: 'Spider Queen', Todd Lockwood

Product Illustration: 'The Light Ship', Dean Morrissey

Contribution To ASFA: Geoff Surette

British Fantasy Awards

Novel (August Derleth Award): *The Scar*, China Miéville

Anthology: *Keep Out the Night*, ed. Stephen Jones

Collection: *Ramsey Campbell, Probably: On Horror and Sundry
 Fantasies*, Ramsey Campbell

Short story: 'The Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke', Mark Chadbourne

Small Press: PS Publishing (Peter Crowther)

Artist: Les Edwards (AKA Edward Miller)

Special (Karl Edward Wagner Award): Alan Garner

World Fantasy Awards

Life Achievement: Lloyd Alexander; Donald M Grant

Novel: *The Facts of Life*, Graham Joyce; *Ombria in Shadow*,
 Patricia A McKillip

Novella: 'The Library', Zoran Zivkovic

Short story: 'Creation', Jeffrey Ford

Anthology: *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest*, ed.

Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling; *Leviathan Three*, ed. Forrest

Aguirre & Jeff Vandermeer

Collection: *The Fantasy Writer's Assistant and Other Stories*,
 Jeffrey Ford

Artist: Tom Kidd

Special/Professional: Gordon Van Gelder (*F&SF*)

Special/Non-Professional: Jason Williams, Jeremy Lassen &
 Benjamin Cossel (Night Shade Books)

**British Award Shortlist
(for work published in 2003)****BSFA Award Shortlists****Best Novel:**

Pattern Recognition by William Gibson (Viking)

Felaheen by Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight)

Midnight Lamp by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz SF)

Absolution Gap by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz SF)

Natural History by Justina Robson (Macmillan)

Maul by Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)

Best Short Fiction:

'Dear Abbey' by Terry Bisson (PS Publishing)

'The Wolves in the Walls' by Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean
 (Bloomsbury Children's Books)

'Entangled Eyes are Smiling' by John Meaney (*Interzone* #190)

'Birth Days' by Geoff Ryman (*Interzone* #188)

'Nightfall' by Charles Stross (*Asimov's*, April)

Best Artwork:

Cover of John Clute's collection *Scores: Reviews 1993-2003* by
 Judith Clute (Becon Publications)

Cover of Philip Reeve's novel *Predator's Gold* by David
 Frankland (Scholastic)

Cover of Tricia Sullivan's novel *Maul* by Lee Gibbons (Orbit)

Cover of *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* by Colin Odell
 (SF Foundation; edited by Andrew M Butler & Farah
 Mendlesohn)

Cover of Justina Robson's novel *Natural History* by Steve Stone
 (Macmillan)

Best Non-Fiction:

'Nothing is Written: Politics, Ideology and the Burden of History
 in the Fall Revolution Quartet' by John H Arnold & Andy
 Wood (from *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod*, edited by
 Andrew M Butler & Farah Mendlesohn; SF Foundation)

'The Profession of Science Fiction #58: Mapping the Territory'
 by Mike Ashley (*Foundation* #87)

'Reading Science Fiction' by Farah Mendlesohn (Introduction to
The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction, edited by
 Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn; Cambridge University
 Press)

'A Sick Mind' by Cheryl Morgan (Review of *The Thackery T
 Lamshead Pocket Guide to Eccentric and Discredited
 Diseases*, edited by Jeff Vandermeer & Mark Roberts; *Emerald
 City* #97)

Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams by M J Simpson
 (Hodder & Stoughton)

Attending members of the Eastercon (and all members of the
 BSFA) will have the opportunity to vote for the BSFA awards
 which will be presented at Concourse.*

Arthur C Clarke Award shortlist

Coalescent by Stephen Baxter (Gollancz)

Darwin's Children by Greg Bear (HarperCollins)

Pattern Recognition by William Gibson (Penguin Viking)

Midnight Lamp by Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz)

Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson (Heinemann)

Maul by Tricia Sullivan (Orbit)*

Eastercon: The British National Science Fiction Convention

The term 'Eastercon' is fannish shorthand for what is effectively the 'British National SF Convention' and Concourse is the fifty-fifth convention in an annual series unbroken since 1952 and actually dating back to 1948.

There is, of course, nobody who's been to all 55 Eastercons. Current thinking is that Bill Burns, last year's Doc Weir Award winner, may have the longest unbroken run; he's been to every one since 1965. Noted SF editor John Jarrold can't quite match that, but last year, while acting as Toastmaster for Seacon '03, he celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his first Eastercon and here he shares some memories from his first few years in fandom...

Eastercon Memories by John Jarrold

1973. Nixon's second term as US President began and Watergate started to creep up to destroy him. Skylab was launched. Later in the year, the three-day week took over in the UK, with TV shutting down early, regular power-cuts and Elton John's 'Crocodile Rock' topping the hit parade. And a spotty, skinny youth attended his first Eastercon, OMPAcon, at the Grand Hotel in Bristol. Reader, I was that youth. Samuel R Delany, who lived in London at the time, was the GOH; there were insufficient votes for the BSFA Award for Best Novel to be made (the sole award then); the committee—this is from memory—included Mike and Pat Meara, Gerbish, Fred Hemmings and Brian Robinson. I've doubtless forgotten someone. I remember playing cards, seeing Brian Aldiss on stage with a furry dog and a cardboard box, being fascinated by the various programme items and meeting Aldiss, James Blish and Peter Nicholls (all for the first time) for a night-long session in the bar, discussing everything from SF to sex to Aleister Crowley. Wonderful time. That was on the Sunday night. I returned to London by train on Monday morning, having not slept, ten feet in the air because I'd met some of my heroes. I also met and hung out with Malcolm Davies and Chris Bursey at OMPAcon. Still see Malcolm at cons, but I have no idea what happened to Chris.

1974. Tynecon—a legendary Eastercon. Newcastle was as far north as I'd been in 1974. That Easter, I was pushing twenty-one hard enough to break a wrist, and I'd already decided to visit Worldcon in Washington DC later in the year; anyone who asked about a birthday present was told: 'Give me money'. Peter Weston was the TAFF delegate (and also the Fan Guest at Tynecon; Bob Shaw was the GOH). But in Newcastle, where the committee included the Two Ians, Maule and Williams, Rob Jackson and Jovial Harry Bell, fun was to be had. That was where I bought my

hardback of *Billion Year Spree* by Brian Aldiss (which won a special BSFA Award. The Best Novel award went to *Rendezvous with Rama*). I was getting to know Rattfandom by then: Greg Pickersgill, Roy Kettle, Rob Holdstock, John Brosnan, Malcolm Edwards, the Charnocks and others. I remember Greg taking my registration for the next year's con, SEACON. I also remember staring deeply into a young lady's eyes, but that's enough of that. Overall, a great con, and one of the reasons we started Mexicon in the '80s and returned to the Station Hotel in Newcastle for the first one, in 1984.

1975. SEACON was supposed to be on the south coast, but became translated to Coventry, for all the usual fannish reasons. There are two particular memories—one happy, one sad. Rob Holdstock had the typescript of his first novel, *Eye Among the Blind*, at the convention, and his mixture of joy and angst was wonderful to see. But it was also the last time I saw and spoke to Jim Blish. Since meeting Jim back in Bristol in 1973, I'd spent time with him at Easter and Novacons, and we got on very well. Missed him then, miss him now. His writing and critical work go without saying. I miss him as a good bloke.

The hotel, the De Vere, had nylon carpets. This meant that any time you touched something metal, you received an electric shock—enough of one that you brought elbows into play when pressing lift buttons, and tried very hard not to reach for the shiny banisters on the stairs. Ouch. The winner of the BSFA Award was one of this year's Guests—Christopher Priest, for *Inverted World*. Harry Harrison was the GoH in Coventry, and regaled everyone with Tales of Hollywood, having recently been dealing with the filming of his novel *Make Room, Make Room* as *Soylent Green* with Charlton Heston (Hollywood's favourite SF film hero in those post-*Planet of the Apes* days). Wandered around Coventry Cathedral in the snow with cover artist Karel Thole and Andrew Stephenson, hung out with the Rats, danced with Josephine Saxton, who knocked my glasses off with a particularly expansive dance-step. Oh yes, John Jarrold the epitome of cool.

But my main memories of those early conventions are of *fun*, whether it be sitting and talking enjoyably, arguing in panel discussions, dancing madly or drinking too much with good company. I've continued to have fun in the (god save us) thirty-one years since my first con. I hope you do the same, at Concourse and in the future. *

—John Jarrold

Early Conventions

Name	Location	Year	Date	Guest
	Leeds	1937		Unknown
	London	1938		Unknown
	London	1939		Unknown
Midvention	Leicester	1943	Easter	None
Eastercon	London	1944	Easter	Professor A M Low

Eastercons

#	Name	Location	Year	Date	Guests
1	Whitcon	London	1948	Whitsun	A Bertram Chandler
2	Loncon	London	1949	Easter	None
*	Festvention	London	1951	Whitsun	Forrest & Wendayne Ackerman, Lyell Crane
3	London SF Con	London	1952	Whitsun	None

4	Coroncon	London	1953	Whitsun	None
5	Supermancon	Manchester	1954	Whitsun	John Russell Fearn
6	Cytricon	Kettering	1955	Easter	None
7	Cytricon II	Kettering	1956	Easter	None
8	Cytricon III	Kettering	1957	Easter	Unknown
9	Cytricon IV	Kettering	1958	Easter	Unknown
10	Brumcon	Birmingham	1959	Easter	Kenneth F Slater
11	London	London	1960	Easter	E J 'Ted' Carnell, Don Ford
12	LXICon	Gloucester	1961	Easter	Kingsley Amis
13	Ronvention	Harrogate	1962	Easter	Tom Boardman
14	Bullcon	Peterborough	1963	Easter	Edmund Crispin
15	Repetercon	Peterborough	1964	Easter	Ted Tubb
16	Brumcon II	Birmingham	1965	Easter	Harry Harrison
17	Yarcon	Yarmouth	1966	Easter	Ron Whiting
18	Briscon	Bristol	1967	Easter	John Brunner
19	Thirdmancon	Buxton	1968	Easter	Ken Bulmer
20	Galactic Fair	Oxford	1969	Easter	Judith Merril
21	Scicon '70	London	1970	Easter	James Blish
22	Eastercon 22	Worcester	1971	Easter	Ethel Lindsay, Anne McCaffrey
23	Chessmancon	Chester	1972	Easter	Larry Niven
24	OMPAcon	Bristol	1973	Easter	Samuel R Delany
25	Tynecon	Newcastle	1974	Easter	Bob Shaw, Peter Weston
26	Seacon	Coventry	1975	Easter	Harry Harrison
27	Mancon 5	Manchester	1976	Easter	Peter Roberts, Robert Silverberg
28	Eastercon '77	Coventry	1977	Easter	John Bush
29	Skycon	Heathrow	1978	Easter	Roy Kettle, Robert Sheckley
30	Yorcon	Leeds	1979	Easter	Graham Charnock, Pat Charnock, Richard Cowper
31	Albacon	Glasgow	1980	Easter	Jim Barker, Colin Kapp
32	Yorcon II	Leeds	1981	Easter	Tom Disch, Dave Langford, Ian Watson
33	Channelcon	Brighton	1982	Easter	Angela Carter, John Sladek
34	Albacon II	Glasgow	1983	Easter	Marion Zimmer Bradley, Avedon Carol, James White
35	Seacon '84	Brighton	1984	Easter	Pierre Barbet, Waldemar Kumming, Josef Nesvadba, Christopher Priest, Roger Zelazny
36	Yorcon III	Leeds	1985	Easter	Greg Benford, Linda Pickersgill
37	Albacon III	Glasgow	1986	Easter	Clive Barker, Joe Haldeman, John Jarrold, Pete Lyon
38	BECCON '87	Birmingham	1987	Easter	Chris Atkinson, Keith Roberts, Jane Gaskell
39	Follycon	Liverpool	1988	Easter	Gordon Dickson, Gwyneth Jones, Greg Pickersgill, Len Wein
40	Contrivance	Jersey	1989	Easter	Avedon Carol, Rob Hansen, M John Harrison, Don Lawrence, Anne McCaffrey
41	Eastcon	Liverpool	1990	Easter	Iain Banks, Anne Page, SMS
42	Speculation	Glasgow	1991	Easter	Rob Holdstock
43	Illumination	Blackpool	1992	Easter	Paul McAuley, Geoff Ryman, Pam Wells
44	Helicon	Jersey	1993	Easter	John Brunner, George R R Martin, Karel Thole, Larry van der Putte
45	Sou'Wester	Liverpool	1994	Easter	Diane Duane, Neil Gaiman, Barbara Hambly, Peter Morwood, Thog the Mighty
46	Confabulation	London	1995	Easter	Lois McMaster Bujold, Roger Robinson, Bob Shaw
47	Evolution	Heathrow	1996	Easter	Jack Cohen, Colin Greenland, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Speller, Bryan Talbot, Vernor Vinge
48	Intervention	Liverpool	1997	Easter	Brian Aldiss, Jon Bing, Octavia Butler, Dave Langford
49	Intuition	Manchester	1998	Easter	Ian McDonald, Martin Tudor, Connie Willis
50	ReConvene	Liverpool	1999	Easter	Peter S Beagle, John Clute, Tom Holt, Jeff Noon, Thog the Mighty, Ron Tiner
51	2Kon	Glasgow	2000	Easter	Bob Harris, Guy Gavriel Kay, Katherine Kurtz, Dr John Salthouse, Deborah Turner-Harris
52	Paragon	Hinckley	2001	Easter	Stephen Baxter, Claire Brialey, Lianne Norman, Mark Plummer, Mike Scott Rohan
53	Helicon 2	Jersey	2002	Easter	Brian Stableford, Harry Turtledove, Peter Weston
54	Seacon 03	Hinckley	2003	Easter	Chris Baker, Christopher Evans, Mary Gentle
55	Concourse	Blackpool	2004	Easter	Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Danny Flynn, Sue Mason, Christopher Priest, Philip Pullman
56	Paragon 2	Hinckley	2005	Easter	Eve & John Harvey, Ben Jeapes, Richard Morgan, Ken MacLeod, Robert Rankin

This list was created by Pat McMurray based on earlier work by Rob Hansen. Pat collects convention memorabilia of all kinds; if you have material to donate, please contact: pcmcurray@yahoo.co.uk

Helicon 2 Accounts Summary

Income		
Memberships		21,007.00
Advertising		950.00
Art & Books		1,627.28
Miscellaneous		577.53
Bank		146.74
Total		24,308.55

Expenditure		
General		1,085.51
Supplies	218.22	
Expenses	701.80	
Miscellaneous	165.49	
Publications		1,865.85
Publications	1,226.64	
Postage	364.10	
Newsletter	275.11	
Promotions		45.00
Advertising	45.00	
Hotel		6,908.85
Hotel	6,134.05	
Gratuities	774.80	
Programme		7,552.25
Programme	308.40	
Guests	6,837.30	
Green Room	406.55	
Ops & Tech Ops		5,385.20
Art Show	164.06	
Equipment	3,256.33	
Shipping	603.66	
Gophers	1,361.15	
Finance		352.40
Insurance	323.40	
Bank	29.00	
Total		23,195.06

Surplus 1,113.49

Disposal of Surplus	
TAFF	100.00
GUFF	100.00
Eastercon Equipment	250.00
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust	650.00
Balance	13.49

—Tim Illingworth, Treasurer, Helicon 2

[At the risk of stating the obvious, all figures are in pounds sterling.]

Seacon '03 Final Accounts

Income	
Memberships	30,279
Book room	1,270
Auctions	487
Sponsorships	800
Sundry (interest, advertising, etc)	723
Total	33,559

Expenditure	
Programme	7,121
Green Room and 'Yvonne's'	2,250
Crèche	300
Special events (Welcome event, disco, play etc)	1,800
Other (film, art show, masquerade)	971
Prizes etc	300
Guests of Honour & other guests	1,500
Equipment, Tech, Ops	8,071
Publications	7,323
Progress Reports	3,033
Souvenir book	2,500
Fanthology	1,200
Short story collection	350
Read Me	240
Memberships/Registration Desk	1,678
Hotel	2,010
Gratuity	300
Staging & tables	590
Subsidy for late night food	900
Other (wheelchairs, z-beds etc)	220
Other	1,375
Insurance	323
Bad debts/bank charges	162
Advertising	412
Admin	478
Total	27,578

Surplus 5,981

The surplus was a result of three factors:

- 1) One guest of honour cancelled 3 days before the convention
- 2) An unexpectedly large influx of members in the last few weeks; in particular, almost £2,000 was taken at the door
- 3) Sponsorships amounting to £800 were received for specific projects

It is the committee's intention to use these funds as follows:

- 1) To purchase equipment for use at future conventions, such as an LCD projector
- 2) To provide sponsorship for activities at Eastercons which would otherwise not take place
- 3) To produce a final progress report. This will be more like a fanzine, with post-con recollections and articles. It will go to all members of Seacon—hopefully by this year's Eastercon, but if not it will be posted to them.

—Eve Harvey, Treasurer, Seacon '03

Doc Weir Award

The Award was set up in memory of fan Arthur Rose 'Doc' Weir who died in 1961. Although a relative newcomer, he was already old when he discovered fandom but he'd become active in a number of areas in a short time. In particular he'd been a dedicated worker for the BSFA, so when Weir died John Phillifent wrote to Ella Parker and Peter Mabey suggesting that the BSFA could help out his widow by making an offer for his sf collection. This was believed to be of high quality and Phillifent thought it would be a useful addition to the BSFA library. A Doc Weir Memorial Fund was started to pay for the purchase.

However, it transpired that the collection was less extensive than was first thought and at the 1962 BSFA AGM it was decided to hold a vote on what to do with the money collected by the fund. The vote was overwhelmingly for the establishment of the 'Doc Weir Fan Recognition Award' which, it was decided, would be in the form of a trophy to be awarded annually and engraved with each recipient's name.

The first presentation was made at the 1963 Eastercon, Bullcon, which was held in April at the Bull Hotel in Peterborough. Peter Mabey was the first recipient (*in absentia*) of the Doc Weir Award, for his work with the BSFA lending library. The Award has been presented in most subsequent years, when it's usually been seen as the 'Good Guy' award: something for 'the Unsung Heroes'.

Fandom needs volunteers. Conventions, clubs, fanzines—they all require an extensive workforce, people who do 'stuff' for no financial reward. Some people have a high-profile role but there are many who don't, whose involvement goes almost unnoticed and may even be taken for granted. In some respects, the ideal Doc Weir Award candidate is the sort of person who *doesn't* immediately spring to mind but makes perfect sense if somebody else suggests them.

There is a Doc Weir Award web site at:
www.efanzines.com/DocWeir/index.htm

1963	Peter Mabey
1964	Archie Mercer
1965	Terry Jeeves
1966	Kenneth F Slater
1967	Doreen Parker
1968	Mary Reed
1969	Beryl Mercer
1970	J Michael Rosenblum
1971	Phil Rogers
1972	Jill Adams
1973	Ethel Lindsay
1974	Malcolm Edwards
1975	Peter Weston
1976	Ina Shorrock
1977	Keith H Freeman
1978	Gregory Pickersgill
1979	Rog Peyton
1980	Bob Shaw
1981	John Brunner
1984	Joyce Slater
1985	James White
1987	Brian Burgess
1989	Vinç Clarke
1990	Roger Perkins
1991	Pat Brown

1992	Roger Robinson
1993	Bridget Wilkinson
1994	Tim Broadribb
1995	Bernie Evans
1996	Mark Plummer
1997	John Harold
1998	Andy Croft
1999	½r Cruttenden
2000	Tim Illingworth
2001	Noel Collyer
2002	Dave Tompkins
2003	Bill Burns

(The list of past winners has been copied from the Award itself, so it should be definitive. Historical information derived from the third volume of *Then...*, Rob Hansen's history of British fandom.) *

Fan Funds

As luck would have it, there will be no fan fund delegates attending Concourse. In 2004, Europe is a net exporter of fans.

The Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) was created in 1953 for the purpose of providing funds to bring well-known and popular fans familiar to those on both sides of the ocean across the Atlantic. Since that time, TAFF has regularly brought North American fans to European conventions and European fans to North American conventions. TAFF exists only through the support of fandom. The candidates are voted on by interested fans all over the world, and each vote is accompanied by a donation. These votes, and the continued generosity of fandom, are what makes TAFF possible.

A new TAFF race will be declared imminently (as we go to press); the winner will attend the Worldcon, Noreascon 4 in Boston, in September of this year. Randy Byers attended Seacon '03, last year's Eastercon, as a TAFF delegate. You can read some of his thoughts on the trip in the third Concourse progress report and in *Chunga* #6 which is available on-line at:

www.efanzines.com/Chunga/index.html

TAFF ballot forms for the 2004 race should be available on-line and at the convention from the European administrator and 2002 TAFF winner Tobes Valois.

Modelled on TAFF and DUFF (the Down-Under Fan Fund, which operates between American and Australasia), GUFF was motivated partly by Chris Priest's visit to Australia and by the British 1979 Worldcon. It was originally intended as a one-off for Seacon, but the Get Up-and-over Fan Fund or Going Under Fan Fund (depending on which way you're going) has operated regular trips ever since. The 2004 southbound race was run by Pat McMurray who had arranged to make his trip over Easter. However, we've been assured that Pat's brother Colm will be attending Eastercon in his place so please be sure to say hello.

The most recent northbound race was won by Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber, and they attended Paragon, the 2001 Eastercon. Their trip report has been published on-line and can be viewed at:

www.efanzines.com/GUFF2001/index.htm

While there has not yet been a formal announcement, it's likely that next year both funds will send delegates to Interaction, the Worldcon in Glasgow.

You can find links to several fan fund pages at:

www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Ansible/ansilink.html#funds
 from which you can access details of current races and lists of past winners. *

Concourse Members*List as at February 2004*

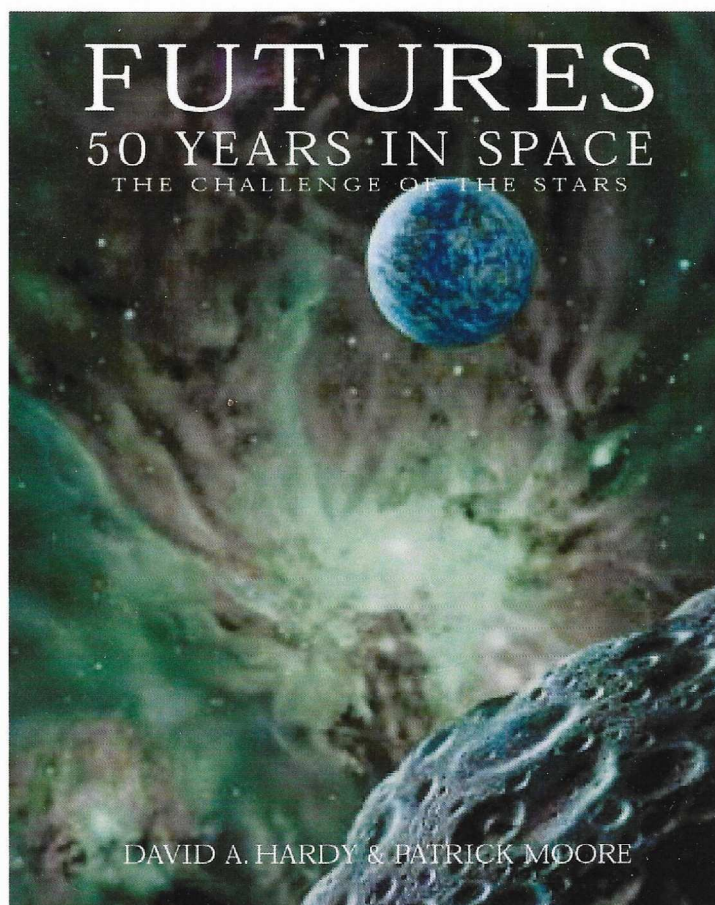
	484	Peter M Bingham	254	Stephen Davies	61	John Harvey	
	327	Jennifer Blackburn	81	Martyn Dawe	401	Susie Haynes	
	93	Paul Blair	39	Guy Dawson	271	Andrew Hayton	
	247	Kate Bodley	38	Sue Dawson	63	Julian Headlong	
	13	Jaap Boekestein	40	Peter Day	295	Anders Hedenlund	
GOH	297	Hans-Ulrich Boettcher	458	Robert Day	325	Zandy Hemsley	
GOH	474	Neil Bond	255	Giulia De Cesare	478	Karen Hetherington	
GOH	14	Duncan Booth	41	Chantal Delessert	235	Rick Hewett	
GOH	15	Judy Booth	376	Sharon Dennett	285	Anthony Hilbert	
GOH	16	Clare Boothby	260	Ben Dessau	326	Judi Hodgkin	
GOH	448	Simon Bostock	43	Vincent Docherty	482	Andrew Hogg	
GOH	290	Robbie Bourget	494	Chris Dollin	450	Liz Holiday	
GOH	18	Jill Bradley	103	Chris Donaldson	289	Graham Horsman	
GOH	17	Phil Bradley	44	Paul Dormer	307	Sidsel Horvei	
GOH	19	Bridget Bradshaw	210	Frances Dowd	65	Valerie Housden	
GOH	20	Simon Bradshaw	209	John F Dowd	287	Warren Hudson	
GOH	442	Tage Brannvall	275	Tara Dowling-Hussey	475	Oliver Humphreys	
	21	John Bray	296	Freddy Dowsing	423	Stuart Morgan Hurlbut	
	22	Claire Brialey	45	David Drysdale	280	Malcolm Hutchison	
	282	Matt Brooker	340	Jackie Duckworth	191	Tony Ibbs	
212	Barbara-Jane	211	Christopher Brooks	447	Al Duncan	67	Marcia Illingworth
510	Max	493	Douglas Brown	436	Chris Dunk	66	Tim Illingworth
329	SMS!	34	John Brown	511	Owen Dunn	354	Anna Jackson
361	Teddy	396	Tanya Brown	46	Steve Dunn	353	Charlotte Jackson
1	Michael Abbott	322	Robert Bryson	47	Roger Earnshaw	508	Derry Jackson
177	Dawn Abigail	172	Edmund Buckley	187	Martin Easterbrook	352	Glyn Jackson
167	Andrew A Adams	399	Mark Bukumunhe	48	Sue Edwards	68	Ian Jackson
257	Iain Alexander	24	Bill Burns	464	Greg Elkin	351	Judith Jackson
455	Poppy Alexander	26	Jim Burns	463	Sam Elkin	69	Rhodri James
244	Alex Allcock	25	Mary Burns	49	Herman Ellingsen	278	Richard James
242	Lissa Allcock	28	Roger Burton West	348	Stephen Elves	217	Wilf James
243	Philip Allcock	29	Simon Callan	50	Udo Emmerich	174	John Jarrold
514	Charlie Allery	258	Kim Campbell	51	John English	202	Ben Jeapes
3	Paul Allwood	194	Diane Capewell	341	Tim Evans	317	Jeremy Johnson
98	Brian Ameringen	195	Stuart Capewell	219	Lional Fanthorpe	488	Gwyneth Jones
99	Meriol Ameringen	30	Jane Carnall	220	Patricia Fanthorpe	42	Jonathan Jones
4	Diane Anderson	31	Arthur Chappell	52	David Farmer	318	Strachan June
5	John Anderson	466	Martin Clarke	53	Mike Figg	228	Amanda Kear
388	Tina Anghelatos	319	Norman Clinton	54	Colin Fine	70	Tony Keen
7	Johan Anglemark	428	John Clute	281	Birgit Fischer	234	Richard Kennaway
8	Linnea Anglemark	429	Judith Clute	55	Brian Flatt	71	Peter Kieivits
9	Andrew Armstrong	196	Elaine Coates	480	Flick Flicksdottir	251	Stephen Kilbane
10	Helen Armstrong	198	Ethan Coates	415	Jeffrey Ford	441	William King
369	Yvonne Ashcroft	197	Joel Coates	283	Lynn Fotheringham	72	Tim Kirk
314	Katharine Atkin-Wright	371	Michael Cobley	160	Susan Francis	88	Alice Kohler
313	Toby Atkin-Wright	204	Eddie Cochrane	56	Anders Friagon	253	David Laight
400	Sandy Auden	370	Paul F Cockburn	57	Gwen Funnell	6	Dave Lally
162	Mark Bailey	123	Malcolm Cohen	248	Peter Garratt	165	David Langford
421	Catherine Bains	262	Peter Cohen	343	Helen Glassborow	301	Andrew Langhammer
418	Eleanor Bains	32	Noel Collyer	342	Martin Glassborow	467	Hailey Lanward
420	Isabel Bains	501	Clare Coney	344	Meggie Glassborow	413	Peter Lavery
417	Jane Bains	293	Chris Cooper	58	Carolina Gomez Lagerlof	74	Alice Lawson
416	William Bains	294	Katheryn Cooper	256	Clare Goodall	73	Steve Lawson
405	Susan Bairs	33	Stephen Cooper	310	Roy Gray	363	Alain le Bussy
443	Barbara Ballantyne	516	Deirdre Counihan	451	Peter Grehan	309	Erhard Leder
444	Tony Ballantyne	515	Elizabeth Counihan	59	Urban Gunnarsson	312	Ruth Leibig
11	John Bark	159	Gail Courtney	272	Shobah Guzadhur	490	Elaine Lewis
513	Timothy Bartel	438	Gary Couzens	485	David Haddock	491	Owen Lewis
131	Andrew Barton	239	Chris Cowan	487	Henry Rex Haddock	101	Sharon Lewis
12	Covert Beach	35	Dave Cox	486	Sarah Haddock	221	Han-Chang Lin
427	Marion A Beet	434	Henning Croona	481	Peter Hamilton	473	Mike Llewellyn
27	Chris Bell	346	Chris Croughton	366	Isobel Hanson	437	Christian Lockert
241	Alan Bellingham	507	Enid Crowe	184	David A Hardy	213	Oscar Logger
498	Judith C Bemis	64	Arthur Cruttenden	291	John Harold	75	Marisa Lohr
237	Austin Benson	36	Rafe Culpin	60	Colin Harris	77	Gavin Long
218	Michael Bernardi	37	John Dallman	433	Niall Harrison	76	Caroline Loveridge
398	Tony Berry	471	Mike Damesick	431	James A Hartley	332	Sarah Lowenbein
412	Stefanie Bierwerth	231	R A Darragh	62	Eve Harvey	78	Peter Mabej
277	Pete Binfield						

435	Meredith MacArdle	499	Tony E Parker	321	Tom Sherlock	333	Martyn Taylor
264	Duncan Macgregor	105	Arwel Parry	279	James Shields	334	Melissa Jane Taylor
384	Bobby MacLaughlin	106	Brian Parsons	201	Gavin Shorrocks	505	Alexandra Thompson
80	Helen MacNeil	107	Andrew Patterson	200	Ina Shorrocks	504	Siobhan Thompson
79	Justin MacNeil	284	Andrew Patton	330	Cuilleann Short	145	Dave Tompkins
359	Chris Malme	225	Hal Payne	328	Eira Short	261	Julie Tottey
185	Keith Martin	223	Harry Payne	170	M J Simpson	347	Karen Traviss
82	Ian Maughan	226	Jodie Payne	422	Neil Simpson	146	Paul Treadaway
178	Janet Maughan	224	Omega Payne	188	Mark Sinclair	424	Neal Tringham
179	Robert Maughan	456	Malcolm Peacock	189	Sally Sinclair	147	Cristina Pulido Ulvang
267	Kari Maund	182	Mali Perera	229	Martin Sketchley	148	Tor Christian Ulvang
452	Alistair Maynard	108	Tommy Persson	230	Rosaleen Sketchley	205	Tobes Valois
495	Angus McAllister	259	Heather Petty	288	Kenneth Slater	149	Jan Van 'T Ent
270	Alastair McCullough	365	Rog Peyton	190	Mark Slater	292	Larry van der Putte
506	Ian McDonald	381	Catherine Pickersgill	126	Anthony Smith	419	Jane Vance
392	Conor McKeow	380	Greg Pickersgill	378	David Smith	414	Jeff Vandermeer
391	Liam McKeow	457	Marion Pitman	222	Faldo Smith	324	Marion Vandervort
390	Mike McKeow	109	Mark Plummer	183	Frank R Smith	323	Richard Vandervort
389	Morag McKeow	161	Silas Potts	426	Roger Smith	176	David Wake
356	Brian McLaughan	298	Ceri Pritchard	379	Sarah Smith	335	Keith Walker
83	Rory McLean	461	Henry Proctor	127	Dan Smithers	208	Nick Walker
84	Scotty McLeod	460	Judith Proctor	269	Jane Smithers	411	John Waller
169	Alex McLintock	404	Liam Proven	128	Lucy Smithers	227	Mark Waller
479	Colm McMurray	386	Anna Raftery	129	Nathaniel Smithers	302	Bob Wardzinski
86	Pat McMurray	387	Emily Raftery	377	Russell Smullen	305	Charlotte Wardzinski
89	Hazel Meades	385	Joe Raftery	383	Christine Sneddon	304	Francesca Wardzinski
90	Leo Meades	509	Philip Raines	382	Peter Sneddon	303	Julie Wardzinski
87	Rob Meades	462	Andrew Ramage	199	Robert Sneddon	150	Peter Wareham
432	Geneva Melzack	367	Aletia Ray	439	Ian Snell	472	Freda Warrington
203	Farah Mendlesohn	368	Bill Ray	130	Kate Soley Barton	181	Alan Webb
91	John Meredith	453	Danielle Ray	403	Ian Sorensen	180	Gerry Webb
300	Chloe Messenger	240	Colette Reap	85	Janice Sorrell	373	Dave Weddell
299	Sara Messenger	110	Thomas Recktenwald	246	Liz Sourbut	372	Jaine Weddell
465	Debbie Miller	111	Peter Redfarn	133	Christopher Southern	410	Karen Westhead
92	Judith Miller	163	John Campbell Rees	132	Jennifer Southern	408	Kathy Westhead
397	Nick Mills	445	Anders Reuterswård	186	Douglas Spencer	407	Mike Westhead
375	Brian Milton	446	Patrik Reuterswård	134	Michael Spiller	409	Peter Westhead
250	Sue Mitchell	113	Patricia Reynolds	135	Jesper Stage	152	Eileen Weston
94	Cheryl Morgan	112	Trevor Reynolds	136	James Steel	151	Peter Weston
193	Chris Morgan	469	J F W Richards	364	Richard Stephenson	265	Richard Alan Wheatley
192	Pauline Morgan	168	Julie Faith Rigby	137	Susan Stepney	153	Charles Whyte
95	Tim Morley	316	Dave Roberts	138	Alastair Stewart	154	Colin Wightman
268	Roger Morris	315	Estelle Roberts	274	Barbara Stewart	155	Sarah Wightman
206	Carol Morton	470	Mark Roberts	139	Christine Stewart	402	Malgorzata Wilk
207	Tony Morton	164	Roger Robinson	349	David Stewart	236	Bridget Wilkinson
358	Miriam Moss	331	Mic Rogers	273	John Stewart	245	Peter Wilkinson
489	Heidi Mounsey	114	Tony Rogers	311	Ian Stockdale	430	Liz Williams
96	Steve Mowbray	115	Steve Rogerson	394	Keith Stokes	449	Steve Williams
97	Caroline Mullan	476	Kevin Rooney	345	Michael W Stone	393	Neil Williamson
171	Ronan Murphy	116	Howard Rosenblum	140	Lars Strandberg	249	Phil Willis
266	Phil Nanson	117	June Rosenblum	142	Gary Stratmann	2	Anne Wilson
362	Tom Nanson	118	Michelle Rosenblum	141	Linda Stratmann	238	Caroline Wilson
454	Darren Nash	119	Stephen Rothman	173	Marcus Streets	157	Alan Woodford
216	Hazel Newman	120	Marcus Rowland	233	Mathilda Streets	156	Anne Woodford
215	Robert Newman	121	Yvonne Rowse	232	Rae Streets	252	Katherine Woods
502	Jack Nicholls	374	Simon Russell	477	Charles Stross	175	Ben Yalow
503	Luke Nicholls	350	Katrien Rutten	286	Anne Sudworth	158	Mark Young
500	Peter Nicholls	496	Jessica Rydill	308	Alf H Sund	339	Peter Young
406	Krystyna Oborn	122	Marjorie Sachs	306	Bjorn Tore Sund	459	Lucy Zinkiewicz
263	James Odell	214	James Samuel	355	Steph Swainston		
100	Andrew O'Donnell	320	Lena Sarah	143	Lesley Swan		
104	Roderick O'Hanlon	492	Keith Scaife	166	Lorna Sweetman		
102	Paul Oldroyd	425	Fiona Scarlett	512	Jennifer Swift		
440	Ruth O'Reilly	483	George E Schaller	395	Aaron Paul Taylor		
23	Chris O'Shea	497	Jamie Scott	144	Alison Taylor		
357	Martin Owton	124	Mike Scott	338	Charlotte Taylor		
360	Paul Paolini	468	Gaie Sebold	337	Ian Taylor		
276	Michael Pargman	125	Janet Shepherd Figg	336	Katherine Taylor		

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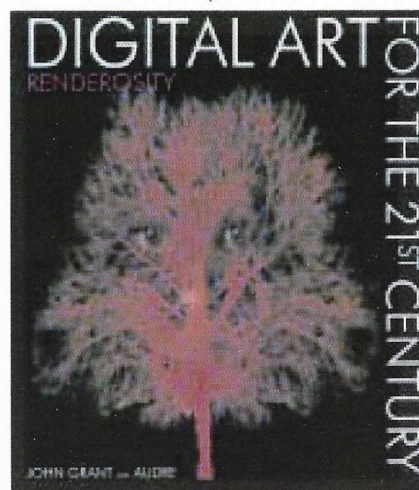
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Brian May, Queen guitarist and astronomer

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