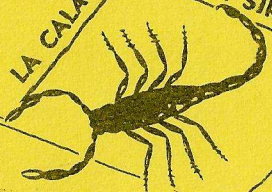
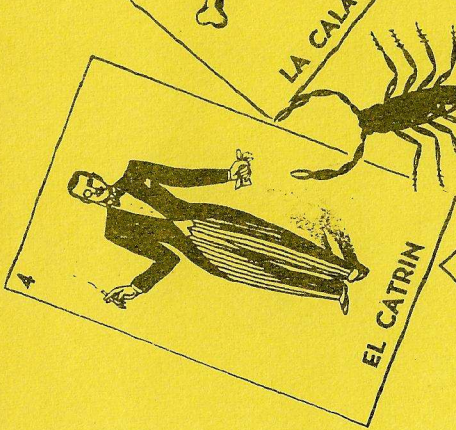
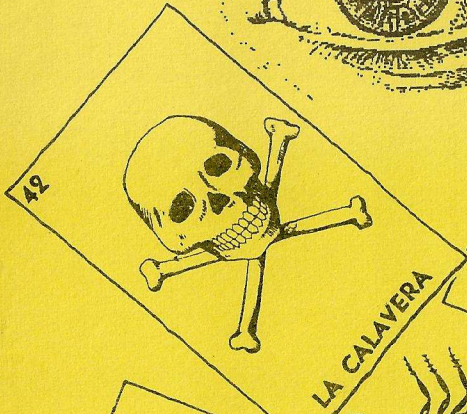


# MEXICON 5



PROGRAMME BOOK

# The Fifth Column

Nine years down and who knows how many to go? Mexican is always a convention full of surprises, and not the least, to your ever-loving committee, is the fact that we're still here after all this time. Next year is our tenth anniversary, and we *may* just have a small surprise for you coming up then. Be at the Closing Ceremony to give your views.

But what about this year's surprises? The biggest must be finding ourselves in Scarborough, home of Charles Laughton, a theatre called the Futurist, and the White Heat of Technology. But there are more. You will be utterly amazed by Saturday night: Spinrad chilli, for a start. Who needs a £20.00 gourmet banquet when we have a Mexican feast at just one round pound for 100 people? (Tickets available at Registration on a first-come-first served basis.) Add a participatory radio play, and a live band, and the odd Fortean event...

The bulk of the programme is either all surprises, or no surprise at all - it's just as good as ever. See the centre section for full details. Our guests, Pat Cadigan, Ian McDonald and Norman Spinrad will be much in evidence, and to start off your acquaintance they've each contributed a personal view on the present state of SF to this programme book. Read, enjoy, and get thinking ready for Mexican. Since Mexican likes to keep the ideas flowing about fandom too, Bridget Wilkinson offers a guide to the different fandoms of Europe. You may find a few surprises here, too.

The committee would like to thank guest commissioning editor, Charles Stross, for his work. Thanks are also due to John Jarrold, Paul Kincaid, Mary Gentle and Maureen Speller for aspects of programming; to Pete Lyon for our logo; Graham Higgins and Dave Carson for PR artwork; and all the usual suspects, including you.

## Committee

Mike Ford (co-ordinator  
and moneykeeper)

Colin Harris (programming)

Bernie Evans (memberships)

Abigail Frost (publications)

Eve Harvey (fannish matters)

John Harvey (ops etc)

Linda Strickler (hotel liaison)

Nic Farey (tech)

Linda Kraweke (i/c having fun)

### Consultants:

John Jarrold

Paul Kincaid

**MEXICON 5: 28-31 May 1993**

**Hotel St Nicholas, Scarborough**

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## MEXICON 5 PROGRAMME BOOK

Commissioning editor: Charles Stross

Editor: Abigail Frost

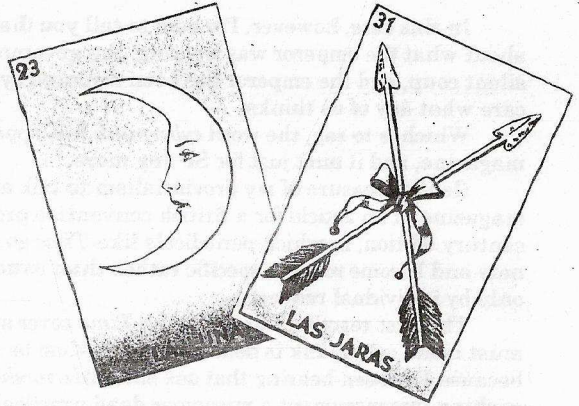
Production: John Harvey

Printed by:



# Ten Years After

Pat Cadigan



Has it *really* been ten years since cyberpunk SF (to use the instantly recognizable term) began sending its first ripples through the SF field? Well, more or less. It's ten-ish, at least, so what the hell, let's call it a decade. And during that entire time, I've refrained from writing manifestos, articles, position papers, or even letters to the editor - any editor for whatever reason. One more voice in the controversy was only going to turn up the noise level, I reasoned, and besides, I was writing and I had a baby to take care of. When you're trying to meet a deadline and you have to get up for a two am feeding, your response to somebody's diatribe is less along the lines of *My esteemed colleague is stuffed full of wild blueberry muffins* and more like *For chrissakes, doesn't this bozo have a life?*

Anyway, it's hard to run commentary on something while it's going on - it's hindsight that is the clearer vision because the scope is always larger. You see, finally, the elements of the big picture that is, the *bigger* picture that you are inevitably part of and only then is a real understanding possible. (Not necessarily probable, but possible.)

Now, I thought about this a lot before I wrote it. Did I have anything to say about cyberpunk SF that would be at all enlightening? Who would care, and did that matter? And anyway, I don't write nonfiction. Hell, these days I can barely write *letters*. The book's late (the book's *always* late), I owe three people short fiction, and the world has managed to keep turning without my pronouncements on the subject of cyberpunk, so why fix it if it ain't broke?

(At this point, I don't know what comes next - I may have talked myself out of writing this article. Stay tuned.)

Well, let's face it there are three inexorable human drives: the drive to reproduce, the drive to rewrite someone else's copy, and the drive to shoot your mouth off. (In fact, in the early days of the field, it was the first two drives getting intertwined that would result in the third - which is to say, writers who felt they'd been screwed by editors changing their text would complain loudly. See? Every kind of life has its own ecology.) So, I'm going to shoot my mouth off, an activity that has a long and honorable tradition in this field, and in the field of literature in general. But I would venture to say that SF in particular has benefitted from the willingness of certain, uh, mouth-shooter-off-ers to get up and say, "Hey, that emperor's *naked!*" and others to say, "No, not naked, just tacky!", and still others to say, "That's no emperor, that's your mother!"

In this case, however, I'm here to tell you that while everyone was arguing about what the emperor was wearing, the government was toppled in a swift and silent coup, and the emperor has been replaced by a global anarchy that doesn't care what any of us thinks.

Which is to say, the word *cyberpunk* has appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, and it ain't just for SF any more.

(Is it a measure of my provincialism to talk about an American weekly magazine in an article for a British convention program book? Well, see the 21st century edition, in which periodicals like *Time* go electronic on the international nets and become market-specific rather than nation-specific, to appear as hard copy only by individual request.)

The first reaction I heard to the *Time* cover story within the field was: "That must mean cyberpunk is dead for sure". Must be an echo in this continuum because I've been hearing that one since *Mirrorshades* came out. People have been wishing this movement a misnomer dead practically from the beginning, for a wide variety of reasons, some stupider than others. Others have tried to abort it retroactively by insisting there was never any movement in the first place and it's all just a marketing gimmick. And still others try to pre-empt it by insisting that Alfred Bester did it all first, so it's all old news to begin with.

Well, you can get up every morning, face the east, and repeat the mantra, *The moon is made of green cheese* fifty times before breakfast, every day of your life, and I promise you that this will have absolutely no effect on the moon whatsoever. I also promise you that the moon's seeming refusal to alter is not a personal affront to you and all the other green cheese lovers.

*Popular culture* - for many people, this term verges on the obscene, conjuring images of *People* magazine, Teen-Aged Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Geraldo with a broken nose - enough to send anyone screaming into the streets. But this is only because *popular culture* is one of those terms like clothes - it's only specific enough to let you know you won't be discussing the principal exports of Paraguay or the life-cycle of anaerobic bacteria.

When I use the term *popular culture*, I am referring to contemporary artistic attempts, succesSful and otherwise, that mirror current events and/or cultural shifts. Collectively, this is what all art does. Even bad art.

In America, the first amendment guarantees our right to see lots of art, bad, not so bad, and pretty good. The all-pervasive-ness of mass media pretty much ensures that even the most ethereal artists can't help being influenced to some degree by the tenor of their times. These days, you really have to go out of your way to avoid the mass media, television in particular - and if you did, the life you would live would be, in most cases, highly abnormal in comparison to the society around you. Now, it has been chic for a number of years to talk about how much better off we would be without television, and what a great cultural wasteland it is. But - and I feel a little silly saying this, as if I'm explaining why you ought to know the alphabet in order - television isn't any more responsible for its condition than your bathroom mirror is for the way you look when you get up in the morning. If you don't like what you see, throwing out the mirror is one way to handle it but frankly, it also means you're an idiot.

Over the past four or so decades that television has been generally available, its role has enlarged from amuser/babysitter to eyewitness/testifier - who would have thought that the thing that put *I Love Lucy* in our living rooms would also put the Viet Nam War there as well? Television, that propagator and distributor of

popular culture, was the first modern medium that could not only document our cultural shifts but instigate them as well.

Among other things, this does tend to mean that people who grew up with television are quite different than people who grew up without it, and if you would like to know exactly how someone in the latter group can be at an extreme disadvantage by failing to adapt, get in touch with George Herbert Walker Bush, who has a lot more spare time to answer his mail these days than he used to.

Which is the long way round to another obvious point: cyberpunk SF (still using the instantly recognizable term here, and I refuse to apologize for it) was able to come into its present existence *only after* the desk-top computer entered mainstream, general use the way television did back in the 1950s. The PC and the TV have since been engaged in a *menage a trois* with the telephone, and the fact that the three of them have not yet merged into one creature is only because the technical details haven't been worked out yet.

Does that sound like some kind of wild cyberpunk SF scenario, with computers becoming not just sentient but horny? Well, don't blame me, I just work here.

Cyberpunk SF was the response to the start of the desk-top computer era - speculative fiction concerning new developments in technology. Does that description sound familiar? ("Oh, no, she's made cyberpunk sound *respectable!*" Chill out, homey - it's only a description of the thing, not the thing itself. Like the man said, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*) Of course, it had its own generational and temporal characteristics, just like anything else - Buddy Holly and Eddie Van Halen, for example, probably picked up their guitars for similar reasons, but the sounds they chose to make are completely different. But then, if you enjoy the sounds of one or the other - or both - is it really because you've made a tedious study of the motivations involved?

In any case, SF is and has always been a popular culture artform in that it has mirrored the tenor of its time even while trying to extrapolate - sometimes quite successfully - from that time. Cyberpunk SF came into existence because several writers were responding to a cultural shift - without fully realizing it at first. This is the nature of the initial artistic response, in that it is spontaneous, not calculated. In any case, because of developments in general-use technology, what has become known as cyberpunk SF was inevitable, and you cannot wish it away or invalidate it any more than you can insist cable TV doesn't exist by ripping out the connecting cord - or never having it put in.

The appearance of cyberpunk as *Time* magazine cover story material means that the cultural shift is still going on, and is affecting the lives of more people, and more different kinds of people - like the advent of television. Science fiction got a mention in the *Time* article, but it was not the primary focus of the article. Cyberpunk SF turns out to be "SF about cyberpunk things" but then, it always was.

Critics, adherents, writers, observers, readers, editors, and the marketing guys, all of us together made this important initial mistake - we kept saying cyberpunk was about science fiction. It isn't, and *it never was*. To think otherwise is like believing America's space program was about science fiction.

The culture didn't "catch up" - not exactly, anyway. To put it that way would seem to imply that the culture was following the SF deliberately, and that simply is not, has never been true. Had there been no SF about cyberpunk, we would still have this same cover story in *Time* magazine, probably with that same word, "cyberpunk", because we would still have desk-top computers, computer nets, hackers, viruses, and all the rest of it. As there are millions of people who go into

bookstores every day without ever stopping to browse the science fiction section, there are millions of people who use networks every day and never read science fiction.

In other words, Galileo is still right - the earth goes around the sun, not vice versa.

Eventually, as many people have pointed out, cyberpunk concerns will be absorbed into the mainstream; many SF readers and writers insist that the conventions and themes of cyberpunk SF have already been absorbed into "mainstream science fiction" (if you can believe *that* term). And I have to say that I would be shocked if they were not.

As for cyberpunk SF - rather than SF about cyberpunk things - that's going to be one hell of a magical mystery tour. Eventually we *must* change from observers to participants. I think of hypertext and interactivity and I say let's push it and see how far we can go into a landscape morphing into near-unrecognizability for the children of Gutenberg.

Cultural shift is never about SF, but vice versa - and cyberpunk, being a cultural shift rather than a form of science fiction, cannot be declared either alive or dead because nobody owns it.

Nobody owns it and everybody participates. So you can say you're tired of it, or you don't like it any more, or you're bored because all the new wore off, or you want to do something else... but you can't say it's over. The cultural shift is still in progress; you can ignore it at your peril, or you can stay alert and see what's coming up next.

Overland Park, KS, 1993

# Literary television

Norman Spinrad



I have been doing quarterly columns for *Asimov's SF Magazine* for over a decade now, and during that time I have watched with growing horror as the franchise universe business has come more and more to dominate American science fiction publishing. During this long devolution I have commented on this phenomenon *en passant* often enough, and often enough, as it has become more and more central, I have told myself that I really *should* do a whole column on franchise universe books. But I never have. And probably never will. For in order to do so in terms of a review column with even a modicum of responsibility, I would have to actually *read* through a stack of such current industry product. And they don't pay me enough to do that.

Mexican, however, is not paying me at all for a piece in this programme book, so, perversely enough I somehow feel free to say a few things here in a non-specific mode not appropriate to my *Asimov's* column. That is, I feel free to discuss the franchise universe phenomenon without having read a quarter of a million words of this literary television.

What do I mean by literary television?

The "Wild Cards" series of anthologies and novels is by no means the worst of this stuff, but the metamorphosis of George R. R. Martin into an overt executive producer of books is starkly illustrative.

George is a fine writer with solid work of substance behind him, though he hasn't written that much fiction lately. But he was never a fast writer, nor was he a writer of best-sellers, which meant that he was not a rich writer when he fell into the cushy job of story editor at the revived *Twilight Zone* TV series.

Believe me, because I visit there occasionally too, when you come from writing mid-list science fiction into TV work, the big bucks for little effort seem totally unreal. You giggle uncontrollably as you get paid up to \$25,000 for writing what amounts to a quick pulp novelette. Of course, if you don't watch out, if you start doing it regularly, before you know it, it starts seeming *normal*, and once it seems normal, it gets hard to give up, and . . .

When *Twilight Zone* expired, George R. R. Martin picked up an even better gig at the production end of *Beauty and the Beast*, and when that got cancelled as all series sooner or later do, he seems to have applied all that he learned in Hollywood to the creation of the Wild Cards franchise, a TV series in print, and maybe the first to proclaim its nature so forthrightly.

He wrote a format. He sold a pilot volume to a publisher. He hired some writers, good ones too, how I am not sure, except that by then he had been story editing and executive producing for quite a while and had demonstrated a talent for recruiting and motivating writers. The pilot did well enough for the series of anthologies to get picked up. And later, for novels to be spun off.



And now, I have recently seen a Wild Card book whose cover credits include one for a hiring editor, the line producer, as it were, and another for George R. R. Martin himself as series creator and effective "Executive Producer".

There are much worse things out there than *Wild Cards*. *Twilight Zone* and *Beauty and the Beast* were good television, this format is clever, and George R. R. Martin had a certain passion for his TV work too, so this stuff is not entirely empty.

But better than anything else, *Wild Cards*, as a marketing and production phenomenon, demonstrates how the bulk of the SF on the racks in the United States at least has quite literally devolved into literary episodic television.

Back in the old New Wave days, there was much soul-searching, public and private, among SF writers who tried to take themselves seriously as to whether one should "leave science fiction". Vaedictorian parting shots from self-exiles were published in fanzines. I even wrote a thing called *Why I Am Announcing That I Am Not Announcing That I Am Leaving Science Fiction*.

Now, twenty years on, all this seems moot, quaint, even. Cruising the SF racks, perusing the catalogue and order form copy of my own publisher, observing what surrounds reviews of my work in various journals, I can only conclude that "science fiction" has long since left *me*.

Putting questions of literary self-judgment aside, and concerning myself with sheer audience demographics like a good marketeer, I can hardly credit the bizarre notion that the audience for the latest *Star Trek* or *Wild Cards* or *Robot City* or *Fleet* episode has anything significantly in common with the sort of people who might get a pleasurable read out of *The Void Captain's Tale* or *Deus X*.

In the United States, there is now on cable something that calls itself the "Sci-Fi Channel". The Franklin Mint is hawking fancy pewter models of the so-aptnly-named Starship Enterprise. The racks are full of books "written in the Universe of Brand Name Writers".

This is the SF genre scene in the 1990s. This is genre SF. This is the nature of the SF Industry.

It is no longer a cosy little ghetto. It is big business. It is, as I have heard it called, a "major publishing profit centre". Too big to be left to the unscientific vagaries of literary chance.

Optimum target audiences have been identified—males between the ages of say 12 and 25 for "science fiction", females skewed to a somewhat older demography for "fantasy", though hopefully the generic "SF" logo is good for some crossover books that can be packaged to achieve it.

"SF" on the racks, on the screens, on the publishers' order sheets, in the minds of the targeted consumers, is defined by its familiar imagery and little else, imagery which in turn has been selected by the marketeers as familiar and reassuring to the consumers of "SF". Spaceships, space battles, starscapes, aliens, robots, and so forth, rendered in nostalgic semi-cartoon pulp style, and these days, elves, dragons, wizards, and barbarians in leather jockstraps or brass brassieres too.

Imagery which has long since percolated downward to an even younger demographic slice of consumers via video games, TV cartoon shows, and toys, preparing the prepubescent for consumption of SF Industry product, so that SF book packages come more and more to resemble the Nintendo section of the software store, and *vice versa*.

What does any of this have to do with literary content? With literary intent? With the inner imperatives that have caused writers as diverse as Ballard and Benford and Brunner, Simak and Spinrad and Sterling, Disch and Delaney and

Dick, Aldiss and Anderson, Le Guin and Leiber, to be randomly alliterative about it, to write SF in the first place?

As far as I can see, not a damn thing. Not any more.

I feel about as much spiritual connection to and solidarity with the Industry Product that surrounds my stuff on the racks, on the order forms, in the advertisements, as a militant African-American would have, stepping off a plane in Britain, turning on the tube, and confronting the *Black and White Minstrel Show*.

And I believe that in their heart of hearts, all science fiction writers who conceive to themselves as attempting to write for an audience of intelligent literate adults must feel the same.

In one sense, there is nothing new about this. There have always been pulp hackwork and monster movies, and "science fiction writers" have always been tarred with the "sci-fi" brush, in the eyes of the general public.

But now, at least in the US, and to a growing extent in Britain, it's no longer just a matter of ego or personal self-respect. The SF Industry, with its marketing machinery, with its packaging and merchandise tie-ins, with its reliance on Big Names to sell books that the Names haven't written, has come to circumscribe what actually can get published, and hence, in the long run, what gets *written*.

The mass audience that the SF Industry has developed for its product is basically adolescent, literarily unsophisticated, action-oriented, and looking for familiarity and reassurance wrapped in exotic packaging, for another slice of the very same cake they liked before.

It is therefore hardly surprising that this is what actually sells, and less surprising that this is therefore what the SF Industry mainly buys and promotes.

Yes, of course, adolescents have always been a significant segment of the audience for SF, and there have always been science fiction writers whose careers were based on writing for it. Nor is or was this the moral equivalent of kiddieporn or child-molesting.

But now the commercial pressure to write to Industry Format has become cruel and enormous. A writer of the stature of Paul Preuss finds himself doing Clarke. So does Gregory Benford. And while other writers find themselves sharecropping Robert Silverberg's Majipoor plantation, Silverberg himself does Asimov!

Worse still, far worse, for newer writers in earlier stages of their careers, trying to sell their own free-standing first, second, or third novels! I am peculiarly close to this situation for someone who has been writing SF for nearly 30 years, because my wife, N. Lee Wood, is one of them.

New writers whom responsible editors should be developing get it from both ends. Every cheap sharecropped novel that pollutes the racks eliminates a slot for someone's first, second or third novel, which the publisher could be acquiring for a similar price. And on the other hand, the paucity of publishing slots for free-standing SF novels by developing writers that are not episodes in some series format increases the pressures on those very writers to cave in, tote dat barge, and sign on to do it themselves!

That's the bad news.

In the letter soliciting this piece for the Mexican programme book, various topics were suggested, including Brian Aldiss's contention that we should "get SF back in the gutter where it belongs."

The good news, such as it is, is that Brian, at least, should have therefore have some faint cause for celebration.

It's gotten there already.

# GRAN COMETA Y QUEMAZON,



QUE MUY PRONTO SE VA A VER:

## EL MUNDO SE VA A VOLVER TODITITO CHICHARRON.

¡El mundo se va á acabar! Nos vamos á tostar irremisiblemente! ¡Qué á tostar! Ya quisieramos! ¡A volvernos ceniza!

Un gran astrónomo de Europa lo ha predicho últimamente; ya no para Noviembre del año de

1899, sino para el mes de Octubre próximo. Esta catástrofe horrosísima la va á anunciar el cometa gigantesco que aparecerá en estos días; este astro malévoló será el que chocará con la tierra, haciendo mil averías, por

# MEXICON5

MEXICONS

## The Programme

# The Ideas

With a month and a day to the opening ceremony, I find myself staring blankly at my shiny new word processor hoping for inspiration. A strange sensation, after almost a year of preparing a programme, not to know how to introduce it. So I shall start by saying what we don't have. We don't have a multi-stream programme. We don't have hotel areas designated Huey, Louey and Dewey. We don't have a film programme, a games programme, or a fan programme. What we do have is a science fiction programme.

So what's in this programme? For anyone who has attended a Mexicon before, the answer will not be a surprise. A single stream of high-quality discussion and entertainment focussing on written science fiction. Three guests whose work challenges and delights. A performance. And some new ideas.

The running order for the programme is given below, and all that I wish to do here is to draw attention to one recurrent theme and to one special item. The theme is the relationship between science fiction and the world beyond. From an opening keynote discussion led by John Jarrold, this theme recurs in no less than four of our items. In "Waves of Synchronicity" we explore the movements and trends that pervade science fiction, and ask whether they originate within the field or simply respond to external forces. "Dangerous Visions" touches on censorship and rebellion. "Telling It Like It Is" considers the language of SF itself as an influence on the way the wider world sees itself. And our special item asks what SF tells us about contemporary America.

The special item is the inaugural Mexicon lecture. For nearly ten years, Mexicon has tried to capture and discuss contemporary thinking in SF writing and criticism, with the support of a wide range of writers, editors, publishers, and fans. In Harrogate, we recorded a large part of the programme on cassette tape, and also linked up with Nexus to create a more permanent record of SF in Britain, vintage 1991. In Scarborough we are taking the next step by instituting a lecture which we hope will become a feature of future Mexicons. We are pleased to welcome Professor Tom Shippey as our first lecturer, and hope to see an accompanying article published in a suitable journal in the near future.

And so finally, nothing remains but to lay the programme before you, with the hope that you will find in it something to make you laugh, something to make you think, and something to make you want to come back. Enjoy!

Colin Harris

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## MEMBERS

	232	Chris Baker	109	John Bray
	233	Rachel Baker	169	Paul Brazier
017	043	Iain Banks	087	Ian Brooks
132	112	Paul Barnett	277	John Brosnan
016	012	David V Barrett	061	David Bruce
034	271	Tim Bartel	171	Jim Burns
064	279	Catherine Barton	073	Andrew M Butler
124	167	Allen Baum	092	Pat Cadigan
249	080	Stephen Baxter	110	Ros Calverley
123	222	Chris Bell	231	K.I.M. Campbell
128	183	Ian Bell	096	Ken Campbell
244	037	Tony Berry	191	Dave Carson
058	044	B A Blackburn	261	Catie Cary
172	059	Susan Booth	056	Carolyn Caughey
173	154	Grainne Mary Bradburn	174	Tony Chester
115	070	Michael Braithwaite	053	A Vinç Clarke

# The Plan

This is a provisional running order. We've included times of items for Friday, to enable people to plan their journeys. Times for other days and full details of panellists will be found in our programme sheet which will be available at the convention. Any changes will be announced through Cactus Times.

## Friday

### 7.30pm Sombrero Time

Meet the committee and guests, followed by:

### 7.45pm Kiljohn

With the coming of Science Fiction ideas into everyday life, have we seen the future? Are we bored by it? Are we living in a society which is "safer" now, more curtailed because of the recession? Does this have an effect on popular culture? And will the real future be blander or stranger than we can imagine? These questions and others will be asked (and maybe answered) by John Jarrold and his guests, in an hour of discussion too dangerous for daytime television.

### 9pm Guest Spot

Paul McAuley interviews Ian McDonald

### 10.30pm Banksie's Blowout

The first of several events in which we make you an offer too good to refuse - someone else is buying the drinks! Come along and help to launch Iain Banks' new book, *Against a Dark Background*.

## Saturday

### Waves of Synchronicity

What creates waves of related material? The incestuousness of an inward-looking field, or real events in the world outside? If the recent rash of vampire books is really a response to the AIDS crisis, what event explains the resurgence of Martian stories? Moderator: Richard Evans.

### The Long and Winding Road

Every writer follows their own path towards success, and faces triumphs and disasters along the way. But there are some who believe that the struggle can be reduced to a mechanical progression, from small press to magazine, anthology to novel. And there are a growing number of books that claim to

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240	Veronica Colin	215	Ellen Datlow	206	Lilian Edwards
155	Peter Colley	144	Brian Davies	031	Dave Ellis
203	Chuck Connor	067	Huw Davies	268	Lynne Emmerson
178	Storm Constantine	263	Malcolm Davies	045	John English
030	David T Cooper	089	Robert Day	004	Bernie Evans
273	Gary Couzens	029	Sarah Dibb	116	Chris Evans
239	Geoff Cowie	247	Aidan Dixon	038	Mick Evans
164	Paul M Cray	133	Chris Donaldson	170	Juliet Eyeions
126	Nichola Crowther	099	Alan Dorey	010	Nic Farey
127	Peter Crowther	100	Rochelle Dorey	181	Colin Fine
028	1/2 Cruttenden	018	Paul Dormer	027	Mike Ford
039	Roger Culpin	220	Frances Dowd	197	Estelle Fortnam
032	Rafe Culpin	221	John F Dowd	208	Vikki Lee France
009	Patrick Curzon	210	John Duffield	063	Susan Francis
150	Pamela Dale	054	Roger Eamshaw	040	Abi Frost
057	John Dallman	149	Martin Easterbrook	250	Eric Furey

## Mexicon 5: The Programme

guide the way. Can literary careers be reduced in this way, or is it just a dangerous fallacy? Moderator: Graham Joyce.

### Dangerous Visions

The liberals are up in arms over Rushdie and the stance taken against SF by US Christian fundamentalists, and we all think we are being daring. But are we really fighting censorship and saying what we believe, or is SF inherently conservative? Are we constrained in what we write, by publishers, readers, ourselves? Are there taboos we will not break? Is it easier and safer to conform to get in print? Moderator: Catie Cary.

### The Fanzine Panel

Mexicon 5's fanthology of work from last year's Nova winners and runners-up will form the panel's starting point. Two questions: does this represent current UK fanzine fandom, and do we want it to represent our fandom? Discussion Leader: Pam Wells.

### Out of Harm's Way

Our second special event will take place on Saturday afternoon, as Colin Greenland's new book *Harm's Way* is launched in the Cornelian Suite. Come along and hear the man himself say "gosh, amazing, thank you".

### Guest Spot

Paul Kincaid interviews Pat Cadigan.

### A Spirit of Place

Writers often work within inherited frameworks, of their own making or somebody else's. What constraints or freedoms does this provide? How does following a character differ from bringing new characters to a familiar surrounding? What happens in an occasional series, or a shared world? Moderator: Paul Barnett.

### The Light Programme

An evening of fun to bring back childhood memories of those halcyon days when we could get home in time to see children's TV, or listen to the radio under the bedclothes. Whilst tucking into Norman Spinrad's original chilli, come and re-live the delights of CRACKERJACK. Then stay to watch and participate in THE RADIO PLAY: D G Compton's *A Turning off the Minch Park Road*. Afterwards, stay around for another publisher's event, as Millenium host a party to celebrate the launch of Phil Janes's *The Galaxy Game*. For those still on their feet, there's only one thing left to do - boogey on down to a live band. Unless of course you fancy a quiet night, in which case

---

251	Maggie Furey	238	Jenny Harman	076	Edward James
090	David Garnett	192	Alun Harries	052	John Jarrold
114	Peter T Garratt	011	Colin Harris	117	Terry Jeeves
007	Mary Gentle	005	Eve Harvey	118	Valerie Jeeves
276	Keren Gilfoyle	006	John Harvey	209	Steve Jeffery
230	Roelof Goudriaan	051	Stanton C Hatch	091	Frances Jobling
201	Helen Gould	101	Julian Headlong	262	Alan Johnson
202	Mike Gould	188	G F J C Hedger	213	Stephen Johnson
085	Carol Ann Green	162	Richard Hewison	048	Gwyneth Jones
003	Colin Greenland	179	Mark Hewkin	078	Jenny Jones
253	Steve Grover	241	Michelle Hodgson	129	Graham Joyce
175	Margaret Hall	157	Steve Hubbard	083	Kevin Joyce
199	Peter F Hamilton	102	L J Hurst	119	Roz Kaveney
134	Kay Hancox	151	Tim Illingworth	142	Debbi Kerr
094	Bug Hardcastle	062	Rob Jackson	088	Barbara Kershaw
237	Andrew Harman	176	Sylvia Jahn	097	Annette Kilworth

author readings will be available in the Cornelian Suite. What better way to spend a Saturday evening?

## Sunday

### Auction

The traditional Mexicon auction, with Rog Peyton once again showing how easily pockets can be not only picked but completely emptied by an expert.

### Peakes and Troffs

Whatever happened to literary fantasy? Has the work of Hoffman, Poe, Carroll and James really been reduced to turgid trilogies (and is it all the fault of a single hobbit)? Or is modern fantasy a different beast, and if so are the true descendants of literary fantasy still around? Moderator: Brian Stableford.

### Lecture

Tom Shippey presents the First Mexicon Lecture, "The Critique of America in Contemporary Science Fiction". Two years ago Tom Shippey published an article called "The Fall of America in Science Fiction" in which he discussed - well, you guessed it: the Statue of Liberty with her head blown off (Spinrad), America sinking beneath its tears (Le Guin), America with no mail service (Brin), etc. But these are dramatic projections of the sort SF writers have always loved to do. What has SF got to say about America now, especially among authors who are trying to calculate the odds, not just go for drama? This first Mexicon lecture will discuss, mainly, three contemporary classics that show what SF can do, where it's going, and what the Booker Prize judges should be reading: Kim Stanley Robinson's "Orange County" trilogy (completed 1990), Tom Disch's *The M.D.* (1992), and Geoff Ryman's *Was* (1992).

### Rock Of Ages

SF has long been linked with music, and especially rock music. The link extends through critics such as Paul Williams and writers who use music as subject matter, such as Howard Waldrop and Pat Cadigan. And the connection flows both ways, with SF motifs frequently appearing in the work of artists such as Bowie and in shows such as *Rocky Horror*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and more recently *Return to the Forbidden Planet*. Where does the crossover come from, and what makes it last? Moderator: Paul McAuley.

### Guest Spot

Ellen Datlow interviews Norman Spinrad.

098	Garry Kilworth	229	Martin McCallion	121	Mark Morris
075	Paul Kincaid	125	Ian McDonald	136	Steve Mowbray
023	Linda Krawecki	236	Martin McKenna	001	Caroline Mullan
147	Christina Lake	180	Jackie McRobert	246	Philip Nanson
269	Andrew Lane	252	Key McVeigh	041	Kim Newman
072	Dave Langford	207	Sally-Ann Melia	274	Zy Nicholson
035	Alice Lawson	077	Farah Mendlesohn	024	Christopher F O'Shea
036	Steve Lawson	275	Andy Mills	086	Paul Oldroyd
256	Dee Ann Lipscomb	103	Neale Mittenshaw-Hodge	255	Simon Ounsley
195	Mike Llewellyn	068	Debby Moir	105	Darroll Pardoe
254	Pete Lyon	069	Mike Moir	106	Rosemary Pardoe
166	Craig Marnock	242	Mike Molloy	205	John Parker
161	Irene Maschke	160	Lee Montgomerie	200	Ellen M Pedersen
095	Jean Maudsley	033	Dave Mooring	049	Arline Peyton
245	Kari Maund	019	Chris Morgan	050	Rog Peyton
047	Paul McAuley	020	Pauline Morgan	163	Marion Pitman



## Mexicon 5: The Programme

### The Mexicon Quiz

Roger Robinson tests knowledge and wits in a contest no-one will want to lose.

### 8pm Ken Campbell in *Pigspurt*

Five years ago Ken Campbell stumbled on a new approach to the business of living. It seemed life enhancing at first but was gradually to tumble him into an alarming new form of decadence. A demonic nasal infestation led him on a snouting rampage. He was eventually to be rehabilitated by a Lady of God - or was she? There is no firm ground. **WARNING:** The practices demonstrated in this production should not be attempted in the home.

### After *Pigspurt*: Party Time!

Come and celebrate the beginning of Dave Cooper's fourth decade, and the impending nuptials of Estelle Fortnam and Dave Roberts.

### Bedtime Stories

More readings from recent and forthcoming books.

## Monday

### Telling It Like It Is

The language of SF, the neologisms and future slang it produces. How much do modern SF writers rely on old SF terms to act as triggers so they don't have to describe things? How much does our language colour the picture we paint? And as SF terminology seeps into mainstream culture, does it affect the way that people as a whole imagine the future?

### More Than Human?

Recently, computer failure brought the London Ambulance Service to its knees. Computer failures, programming errors, overloads, etc happen all the time, sometimes with fatal consequences. So why do so many SF writers want to combine human and machine? Do they imagine machines to be perfectable? And would the results really be the best of both worlds, or the worst?

### Back to the Gutter

Brian Aldiss says SF should get back to the gutter where it belongs. Is he right? Has the ghetto mentality done more harm than good, or not? A discussion featuring writers with experience of both sides of the fence.

### 2.00pm Closing Ceremony & Dog Day Afternoon in the Last Chance Saloon

A brief farewell, a chance to discuss this or any other Mexicon, after which the guests will graciously spend a last hour in the bar so that the membership can show its gratitude by buying them one more drink.

---

135	Mark Plummer	122	Nicholas Royle	248	Mark Slater
130	Lorna Plover	219	John Edmund Rupik	177	Gus Smith
131	Mickey Poland	139	Ian Sales	211	Jason Smith
143	Simon Polley	278	Lena Sarah	266	Martin Smith
104	Josie Price	265	Bruce Saville	214	Michael Marshall Smith
226	Philip Raines	081	Alison Scott	264	Kate Solomon
257	Toerag	082	Mike Scott	146	Ian Sorensen
071	Peter Relton	074	Andrew Seaman	046	Liz Sourbut
152	Andy Richards	065	Moirá Shearman	026	Maureen Speller
182	Angela Richards	190	Sandra Shepherd	093	Norman Spinrad
189	Nigel Richardson	218	D M Sherwood	193	Brian Stableford
042	John D Rickett	060	Jean Sheward	194	Katharine Stableford
258	Chris Ridd	217	Tom Shippey	066	James Steel
198	Dave M Roberts	138	Michael David Siddall	002	Andrew Stephenson
022	Roger Robinson	015	Joyce Slater	187	Alex Stewart
153	Justina Robson	014	Ken F Slater	234	Barbara Stewart

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158	Billy Stirling	021	Martin Tudor	186	Peter Weston
212	Arthur Straker	084	Lisa Tuttle	243	Elda Wheeler
224	Marcus Streets	165	Sandra Unerman	168	Donya White
225	Rae Streets	267	Karen Usher	025	Bridget Wilkinson
008	Linda Strickler	141	Mark Valentine	260	Conrad Williams
159	Charles Stross	223	Jan Van 't Ent	204	Charon Wood
120	Robert Stubbs	184	Julie Venner	216	N Lee Wood
108	Neil Summerfield	107	Paul Vincent		
137	Lesley Swan	259	Helen Wake		
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055	Nadja Tegen	111	Chris Walton		
228	Dave Thomas	145	Lesley Ward		
156	Sue Thomason	196	Freda Warrington		
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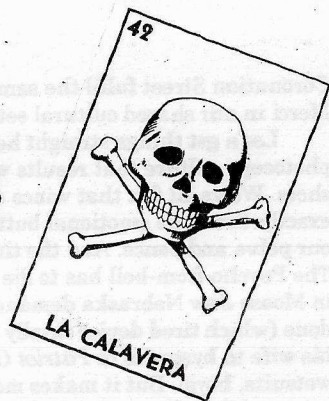
# THE BIGGEST AND THE BEST

Piers Anthony  
Isaac Asimov  
Robert Asprin  
Greg Bear  
James Blish  
Marion Zimmer  
Bradley  
Terry Brooks  
John Brunner  
Orson Scott Card  
Jonathan Carroll  
Arthur C Clarke  
Philip K Dick  
Greg Egan  
Alan Dean Foster

David Gemmell  
Harry Harrison  
Tanith Lee  
Peter Morwood  
James Morrow  
Andre Norton  
Robert Silverberg  
Allen Steele  
Bruce Sterling  
Michael Swanwick  
Howard Waldrop  
Tad Williams  
Gene Wolfe

# Searching for the young soul rebels

Ian McDonald



So, your nightmares came true. They finally managed to get flares to stick this time. Strange; I'm not as traumatised by this enforced return to my adolescence as I thought I would be; they've been threatening it most of the decade to date, so I was prepared. What goes round may have come round, but it's come round *different*. The petrol blue Oxford baggies can hang undisturbed in the wardrobe for another few decades.

If flares, platforms, tanktops, Tavarres and Emerson Lake and Palmer (a small pause while I cross myself) have come back to haunt us, they're part of a larger phenomenon. If they aren't quite as we remember, if their time in pop-cultural limbo has changed them, that too is another aspect of the same phenomenon. It's more than mere retro. It's Remix. Remix is the dominant cultural influence on these last two decades of the twentieth century; from *Generation X* to *Mondo 2000* and *Nixon in China*, from the new constructivism of Neville Brody and the *recherche* photomontage of Dave McKean to Betty Boo's memorable Fireball XL5 dress. Found sources. Cultural givens. Media icons. Scratches. Samples. These are the raw materials out of which new fashions, fads, fancies, styles, expressions, movements grow. But never quite the same as the original. Always tuned to the needs and perceptions of *fin-de-siecle* society. It may be Politically Correct today, but there's no guarantee it'll be PC tomorrow, and it's always just that little bit gritty and sticky. You can smell the glue. There are bits of bedroom carpet clinging to it. Those Improving House-of-the-Future films from the 1930s, where wives in plastic dresses wave husbands off to the office in this-year's-model autogyros are all the more charming, not because they never get the hairstyles right, or never give thought to the possibility that it might be Mrs O'Future flying off in her autogyro, but because the clean, vibrantly *modern* world of the postulated 1990s bears no resemblance to our eclectic, messy, culturally diverse, media-obsessed, information-dense, violent, chaotic present. Yes, we have our instant-dinner microwaves, but we cook Marks and Spencer's Chicken Tikka Masala in them, or dry our underwear - you never can be too careful with fungus. Our living rooms are furnished in remix Edwardian/Deco with hi-tech black-box TV, video and micro-system in the corners. On the walls we combine Victorian prints of ducks with Mexican rugs and framed Ansel Adams prints. (This concludes the brief tour of *Maison McDonald*.) Our present is not one thing, but many things. Bill Gibson said it (damn him): the street finds its own uses for things. My own *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day's* major premise was that each generation revises and remixes the cultural inheritance of its predecessors: our contemporary urban legends bear the same moral warnings as folk and faery tales, our Schwarzeneggers, *La Ciconis*, even Carmels from

Coronation Street fulfil the same iconic roles as Ulysses, Circe, La Belle Dame Sans Merci in our shared cultural setting.

Let's get things straight here. Remix culture is not cover-version culture, the photocopy culture that results when accountants are allowed to call the creative shots. We've all felt that wince of resentment at feeling Hollywood-in-suits push exactly the same emotional buttons they pushed the last time we graced them with our pelve and pence. And the time before, and the time before, and the time before. The Psycho-from-hell has to die a protracted and graphic death because the punters in Moose Jaw Nebraska demand that satisfaction and punishment be seen to be done (which tired device fatally torpedoed *Cape Fear* and reduced your writer and his wife to hysterics in *Patriot Games*, loved the neat matching Terroristz'R'Us wetsuits, boys). But it makes megabucks on its opening weekend (it has to, with everyone from Executive Producer to Best Boy adding zeroes to the end of their paycheques), so they'll do it again, exactly the same, but maybe this time we'll lose the cute spaniel-faced muppet-child in Noo York, whajja think? It can be any old generic keek so long as it Makes Money. Let us not get too superior on this side of the Atlantic; be honest, how many of you started watching *Eldorado* only when you heard it was under the guillotine? After brief flights of freedom in the sixties and seventies, the music business succumbed to terminal commoditisation: teeny poppers with the half-lives of some rare transuranic elements are manufactured to strict market research guidelines-they may not get fifteen minutes of fame, but at least you can be reassured by the knowledge that the next batch off the conveyor-belt will have exactly the same scream-appeal. Gentrification. Culture as commodity. The accountancy aesthetic: only what makes money can be deemed good. What the public buy is what the public like and the public shall have, yea, and more. Eat what's in front of you. Never mind that it's Brussels sprouts. Sprouts are Vegetable of the Month at Planet Hollywood. Really? Hmm, maybe it was just a childhood dislike after all. Here, have twenty quid, bless yer, gov.

Photocopy culture. As the successful (read *profitable*) formula is copied and re-copied and re-re-copied, information is lost. We end with a grey pulp with maybe a little Farley's rusk liquidized in. But the life has gone out of it. A finer activator of entropy it is hard to imagine as unpredictable, potentially profit-threatening energy is dissipated into predictable blandness.

Nothing could be further from the spirit of the true *remixado*. Connectivity is everything; the forging of creative links between entities and concepts previously unlinked. The scratch samurai moves through the planetary media net, lifting found sources *how might this go with that?* and *what if I connected that to this?* The street finds its own uses for things. Only connect.

A brief history of the training shoe. Once upon a time people ran in them. Played basketball in them. Did generally sporty things in them. Then a small sector of the population - a small, racially disadvantaged, economically disenfranchised, young sector of the population - adopted them as a cultural emblem. They didn't run in them. They didn't play basketball in them. They remixed them. They redefined them. The trainer moved into pop culture, the manufacturers looked up, realised there was something happening to their running jumping standing still shoes, and within a few months they're not just ubiquitous, they're compulsory. You can't run in them any more without endangering your feet. Mutant strains appeared. You could see through the soles. You could pump the bastards up with air. You could turn a little knob on the front to tighten the laces. Photocopy, cost-accountant culture. By this stage, all the life had gone out of them. Down on the

street someone was looking cute in a pair of Caterpillar work boots....

The remix is the dominant culture of the last two decades of this century because it is only in these last two decades that we have achieved the information density necessary for connections to be made. The scratch is a child of the mediasphere: film, television, radio, the Gutenberg media, electronic information; all the channels by which we participate in (or at least witness) a wider, more cosmopolitan, information-dense culture than thirty, forty years ago. This continual process of sampling and remixing into new, more relevant forms is more than mere post-modernism; it is a totally modern phenomenon because the technological, cultural, social base out of which it operates is a strictly modern phenomenon. Eclectic modernism, it might be deemed, a modernism of the information age.

Science fiction has always contained something of the spirit of the scratch; its purveyors rooting through their respective pop-cultural landfills, picking up coils of swarf from the latest scientific theories and technological appliances and asking those same questions: *what if?* What if I took *this*, did *this* with it? What if I connected *this* to *this*, what if I set *this* in *this* background; what would that tell us about ourselves, the present we live in, the future we will soon inhabit?

It can be argued that science fiction is the only literature of the present. Uniquely, it inhabits the angstrom-thin meniscus between future and present. Ideas, aspects of the present, connections between concepts, are its fuel stock. Let's not kid ourselves; our tales of thrilling wonder, our space operas our alien worlds, our cyberpunk dystopias, are reflections of the moments in which they were written. This is the reason SF ages gracefully - the nature of the present across which it is spread constantly changes; the ideas that shape the future it purports to portray shift and mutate; SF with them. The candy-coloured right-on universes of the sixties and seventies darkened and hardened into the cybernoir streets of the eighties, as these too are changing to face the concerns, crises and values of the nineties. As it moves up through time, forever in reach of the elusive future, SF continuously remixes itself to match the colour of the world.

You'll still find the expression "cutting edge" used in certain places by certain faces; personally, I prefer the image of an ever-expanding balloon, the surface of which is our culture; scientific, technical, social, artistic, popular, media, rushing outward at immense speed in every direction. As it expands, the distances between the differing disciplines grow, communication between them becomes difficult, in the space between new fields of creativity unfold. Early in the Gutenberg era there was a short-lived Renaissance phenomenon: the Man who Knew Everything. By the simple addition of a library to his bijou Suffolk manor he could have everything known about the physical, natural, philosophical and theological world at fingertip distance. New theorems and hypotheses could be accommodated in a yearly update volume. The phenomenon was short-lived because, even then, so much was known that no one could be a specialist in everything, and the rate of acquisition of new knowledge was growing exponentially. Today's A-level students are being examined on topics that were Doctorate thesis material thirty years ago, while the sheer mass of information in the natural sciences is so great that it cannot all be taught. I studied the basics of quantum theory in my physics A-level; my uncle, a GP who had studied physics to the same level thirty years before had cause to scratch his head. Quantum what? Though information technology has given us some of the advantages of the Man Who Knew Everything, the sheer mass of knowledge about the human and physical universes is too great for any one to know thoroughly in one lifetime, let alone become conversant with every new and brilliant idea. The

surface is expanding, but, like Yahweh on the face of the waters, science fiction, and science fiction alone, darts about picking here, selecting there, pocketing the odd shiny gewgaw, and making connections, held up by the surface tension while weightier, less nimble literatures fall through. Unlike them, science fiction is as comfortable with the new in the physical and scientific worlds as the human. Sampling and remixing. Creating from the blur of found sources.

On the grass-is-always greener principle that makes Anglos pine for beautiful Provence (if only they could ethnically cleanse the French), British SF lionises American SF for being fast-moving, well-plotted, concerned with story values (all the things British SF supposedly isn't) while the Americans praise British SF for all the things the Brits consider to be weaknesses. I'm not going to divert down this well-signposted and skidmarked sliproad (Okay, so why doesn't wonderful British SF win American awards, then?), I merely mention it because ever since cyberpunk came out of the SF closet to become a media icon (remix again; the second-generation cyberpunks should properly be christened cyberdweebs; you're walking around in Mad-Max Arizona dressed in wicked black leather and playing Sonic the Hedgehog?), the hunt has been on for the Next Movement. And eyes and hopes are turned toward this little green island next to France. Islands. Like John Major's economic revival, all the ingredients are there: a pool of new(ish), roughly contemporary talent working in a fairly small area, regular and high quality publishing space (*Interzone*, *New Worlds*, the many and sterling small presses in and out of the NSFA, a body of commissioning editors actively Buying and Promoting British), a flow of ideas and opinions between writers, access to and recognition in the SF heartland of the US. So: why is there no movement?

Maybe there is a movement. Maybe it's been here for quite some time, but because we are looking for another cyberpunk, another clearly defined literary manifesto with a core group of zealous apostles, we aren't seeing it. We're looking in the wrong place. Your gentle author now nails his colours to the mast. Shoot at them, if you will, but not at me. What exists is not so much a movement as an attitude. A spirit, you might say, to be of a mystical bent. A trend. An environment. What we are seeing, what we have been seeing for several years now, is, for want of a better expression, scratch SF. A science fiction that knows the place it inhabits, on the edge of the expanding bubble of *zeitgeist*, that understands its function as the gospel by which we understand where we are now, what we might become, that is as comfortable in the media-remixing of Kim Newman and his and Eugene Byrne's alternate worlds stories (sampling history and remixing it is surely the spirit of scratch) as in Steve Baxter's parables of high physics or Eric Brown's New Golden Age of Science Fiction. It lives in Mary Gentle's revisionist fantasies, in Brian Stableford's remixing of the familiar tropes of horror archetypes with scientific philosophical speculation, in Ian Watson's reality dubs and philosophical enquiries, in the sly boogie of Paul McAuley's Grand Scheme of Things to a samba backbeat. I could go on namedropping, but brown-nosing does become a tad nauseating after a while. In all these works there is no common thread, no overt manifesto being followed, yet the same spirit of sampling the happening world (even the happening world of science fiction itself) and remixing it into something new blows through them all. It's a buzz, a thing more caught than taught; the moment you try to quantify it, dissect it with ever more blunt I'll tools of formal criticism, it evaporates. The entire *In Dreams* anthology is a celebration of the scratch aesthetic, from the front cover to the back-of-the-book ads, and we see the same sensibilities regularly informing stories in *Interzone* and *New Worlds* salted

with media and pop-cultural resonances, allusions and quotations.

Though the remix attitude is most clearly enunciated in the alternate world story, where we examine our particular cast of Twentieth Century-ness in distorting mirrors of what-ifery, or in the dense media-mix of Howard Waldrop (he's been doing it since before there was an it to do), it's by no means confined to these sub-genres. Indeed, the entire dead hand of gentrification resting heavily on the ship of fools is anathema to it, it delights in breaking boundaries, running frontiers, smuggling rare and exotic things in workaday briefcases. It can energise both hard and literary SF, it can convey sharp humour, searing satire or deadly seriousness while at the same time delighting in a sense of play. Spot-the-allusion is a favourite scratch literary game. The seams can be roughly tagged together with glue and dogs-teeth, or invisibly stitched into a seamless whole, the sampled material and found sources blatant or subtle. It looks for new inspirations beyond the traditional bailiwick of the hard sciences: in my own forthcoming novella *Scissors Cut Paper Wrap Stone* (if I may be allowed to cling to the hem of Superman's cloak as he heads for the stratosphere) I mix together guerilla graphics with mountain biking with Buddhist pilgrimages in Japan. It's not a movement, it transcends long-standing arguments of plot versus character (why can't we have plot and character? They aren't incompatible) of hard versus soft, even the plethora of fairy-circle SF pseudo-movements and groupings that have mushroomed out of cyberpunk's gaudy corpse. It's an attitude. A way of looking at the world, a science fiction that recognises the culture we have remixed for ourselves, and celebrates it.

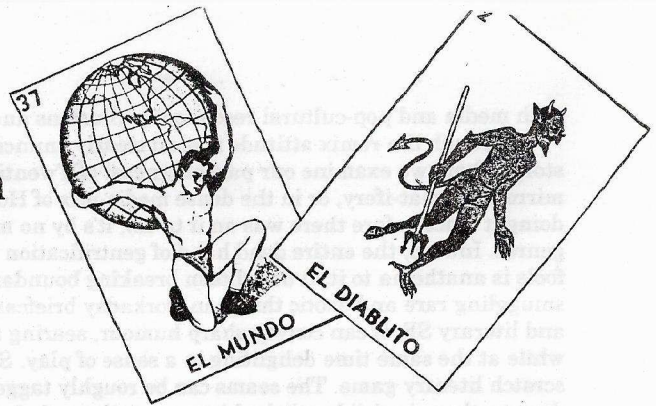
It aspires to the condition of dance music. Personal testimonial time. Last year my wife Trish and I went down to the Art College end-of-year ball. There was copious cheap booze, the music was so loud it was a physical presence, the dance-floor hot and crowded. Suddenly they pumped out the dry ice, turned on a white strobe and I was somewhere else. I don't know where, but it wasn't me. It only lasted a moment, but it was the same transcendence I seek and oftentimes find, in science fiction. A short trip in a fast machine. A benign mind-expanding drug. A change of consciousness. A combination of atmospherics that takes you, for a moment, somewhere else.

Like dance music, scratch SF is small scale, street level. Almost a new underground. You tell Roger Estate Agent at a party that you're an SF writer, he'll look at you as if he'd much rather you were out on the streets peddling pills. Underground, intimate, small scale. It's still a game for one. Bedroom music mixed together from stolen samples and found sources, but the rhythm and the backbeat lift you and take you. William Gibson once said of John Shirley's work that, sometimes, he could hear the guitars. In the remix, you hear the drums. The rhythm track. Keep the guitars, me, I'm the one in the corner hammering out the bass line. Stuff art, let's dance. Maybe you should welcome the new soul vision. Really must get those flares out again, have another look at them....



# Babel Fandom

Bridget Wilkinson



Fandoms vary - not as much as mundanes might believe, but much more than fans would. And one of the times when fandoms vary most is when they most try to be alike.

Rob Hansen (and countless others) has noted that during the fifties British fandom imitated what it heard of US fandom in fanzines. Thus, visiting Americans found a fandom more outrageous and off-the-wall than their own. These misunderstandings took place between two countries that theoretically speak the same language: language differences create even more spectacular opportunities for error.

"I wrote to Dan Mazilu" Mike Cheater said to me over the phone. "His English is good, but he didn't seem to have understood quite a lot of what I wrote. Come to that, I didn't understand some of the things he said either..."

"Mike, did you use fan slang?"

"Yes, of course."

"Romanian fan terminology comes from the French and Italian tradition, not from ours."

"Oh!"

Mike's mistake was easily made. The Germans have adopted quite a lot of our terminology, as have the fandoms of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Russia further East, either from us or indirectly via the Germans. Romanian fandom comes from a different branch of the family tree.

The first non-English-speaking fandoms we had contact with were those in Holland and Germany, during the late fifties and early sixties. Dutch and British fandoms are close, in the final analysis probably much closer than British and US fandoms, and while problems within German fandom during the early eighties caused a partial loss of contact, contact with Scandinavian fandom developed and flourished.

However, during the later sixties and the seventies after Heicon (the German Worldcon), the Latin fans, led by Italy, were as much or more, noticeable than the Germans. After the success of Heicon, discussions among this group gave rise to the first Eurocon in Trieste in 1972. And among the largest of the attending fan groups were the French and the Romanians. This strong Latin fandom was a feature of the early seventies, but all three groups subsequently declined in international importance. The French and Italians fandoms shrank, though readers continued to be interested in SF, while during the later seventies Romanians were simply forbidden practically all contact with the outside world.

Very roughly, within Europe there are two traditions: the Northern European (Anglo-Teutonic and Slav), and the Southern Latin one. Contrary to British fan myth, Northern does not equate with "fannish" or Southern with "sercon". Neither

is Western "fannish" and Eastern "sercon". An interaction of local conditions has prevented this, creating a mosaic of "fannish" and "sercon" behaviours and areas. Moreover, conscious imitation has often led to flamboyant misunderstandings and subsequent diversity rather than dull uniformity, since imitation in a situation where information is scarce and in a foreign language creates misunderstanding. Let's start from this end.

The Swedes, and to a lesser extent the Norwegians, have become to us what we were to the Americans in the fifties. In Holland and the Nordic countries understanding of English is very good indeed; there has been much contact via fanzines, but insufficient attendance at each other's conventions means that where they have decided to imitate us they have come out with a slightly alarming caricature of British fandom of earlier years - beanie hats, oceans of fanzines.... It is impossible to tell from here how much influence they have had on us. You'll have to ask the Americans that.

The Finns have also formed part of this Scandinavian community, which by and large looked West. Looking East was futile in past years, but now there seems to be a partial move towards creating a Baltic fandom, a coalition of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Germany and Poland do not seem to be part of this, although I am not fully aware of the situation in Gdansk. At present influence seems mainly to be running West to East in this area, but in future some interchange should be expected. Even so, there has been good enough contact for long enough that - in our chaotic pseudo-disorganisation, and in many other respects - we are very similar. In other fandoms gaps in contact have accentuated differences.

In the early eighties (west) German fandom was torn apart by a series of feuds which left a huge, young, Perry Rhodan fandom, a few older fans on the fringes and a large vacuum. Fandom rebuilt itself from the inside, but although the new generation is now forming contacts with the rest of Europe (and fast!), the phoenix act of the eighties has stolen bits from Perry Rhodan fandom, and countless other places in the meanwhile.

The most significant factor in present-day west German fandom is the Science Fiction Club Deutschland. In the ex-GDR the local clubs are still crucial, but a future in which they slowly affiliate to the SFCD seems probable. Unlike the BSFA, which was a latecomer to British fandom, practically everything done within German fandom is now done with reference to the SFCD. Regional cons bid for the SFCD annual meeting (at any time of the year, unlike the Eastercon), other conventions are held with reference to the SFCD, and it is also important in the fanzine scene and in organising and financing publications other than its own. Fandom not organised? Kill that one...

In France and Italy there was a tendency to concentrate on fanzines, but not in the form that we know them. In much of continental Europe professional SF magazines have been marginally viable at best, while Britain appears to be able to support one semi-professional magazine at any one time. This has not stopped a demand for SF magazines among enthusiasts, and the book supply has been smaller (we can buy US imports from specialist shops, this distorts our SF market in relation to our size). The result has been large numbers of semiprozine-type "fanzines" - or at least, that's what they call themselves - and thus "The Perfect Fanzine" is the one that presents the new translations, the new writers, and the reviews of new foreign books that the SF enthusiasts want to read. Production values mirror these concerns. In this context the Anglo-American gossipy personal

text is simply incomprehensible. (Zine reviewers might remember this when they hammer foreign chalk for not being cheese.)

In France and Italy this made for a rather intense fandom that concentrated on producing fanzines, stories, artwork, to the apparent exclusion of all else - a fandom that has been perceived over here as overserious. This has been taken as proof that "fandom as a place to create" (whatever) precludes "fandom as fun". It's difficult to tell whether the "ultra-sercon" aspect has contributed to the relative decline of both fandoms. It seems almost inevitable from here, but then again...

But what if you HAD to seem to be sercon in order to survive at all?

It seems bitterly ironic now, but during the seventies and eighties the Eastern European fandom with which we had the best contact was in Yugoslavia. It shared many survival characteristics with its more tyrannical neighbours.

One of the few things that all the "Communist" Eastern European governments shared was a preference for dealing with groups rather than dealing with individuals. (Whereas here, if you really want to put the wind up somebody get 200 subtly different letters of complaint sent to them, not an official delegation from an organisation with 1000 people.) Fandom was quite happy to oblige...

A group of ten people meeting week after week in a pub would have had officialdom getting twitchy. A signed and stamped application from a recognised organisation to rent a room once a week for cultural activities was the most natural thing in the world. At worst this brought permission to survive. At best it brought use of communal facilities for conventions, access to paper for publishing fanzines (vital when government publishing houses printed a handful of SF books each year), priority access to copies of the handful of SF books the government published, an SF library, SF film and video evenings... and this was just the legal stuff.

A good fanzine along French or German lines was the sign that a club had arrived, and a Eurocon fanzine award was a marvellous item to wave under the nose of the local council back home. National prizes, such as the Newt in Czechoslovakia, could form the pretext for an officially condoned convention short-story collection. Running the Eurocon, as in Hungary in 1988, would bring in western writers and fans who would otherwise be unlikely to come. The club would be padded out with members who simply joined for access to the publishing priority list, the library, and the video nights. (Any British fan who came through a university society will recognise this pattern.) But a sercon front to fool the authorities is quite different from a sercon fandom, as the story of the Polish room party next door to the British room party at an eighties con, each as quiet as mice so as not to disturb the sercon crowd next door, shows...

When fandom mushroomed in Slav Eastern Europe in the late seventies and early eighties fans borrowed many of the features they knew about from western fandom. Polish SF cons feature convention-wide live-action roleplaying games - the main daytime feature of Kontur is such a game. The Russian Hobbit Games carry this idea even further. And by the time the idea of fandom reached the USSR it came up against conditions very different from those in Britain. Russia is huge. The USSR was even more so. When Aelita in Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) became the national convention, fans were all too well aware that it was far too short, even if staying up all night, both nights. There was time to say hello to everyone, but hardly time for a full discussion. The time taken travelling to Aelita precluded a large number of short conventions; the solution was a handful of longer ones. The con as summer vacation.

One form was the "Komarinaya Plesh" (Mosquito Spot) camp. This rough camping spot was available to fans for the month of July each year - "bring your own tent, food, spoon, plate..." The role of the camp was more that of a relaxcon, a place to chat, swim, write, sunbathe, and unlike similar British experiments in the fifties abysmal weather didn't wipe it out.

The intensity of Aelita-style conventions combined with rumour of the Worldcon and the pace of the camps gave rise to the "Socialist Countries" convention, SocCon. Held in September 1989 it was supposed to be the precursor of a series rivaling the Worldcon. The next was to be run in Bulgaria. Events overtook it. SocCon featured the Strugatsky brothers as GOHs, apparently considerably more at ease than they had been in Britain in 1987. It had about 300 members, 60 of them from abroad, and lasted a week. Features included set meals, a book fair, panels, meetings, speeches and evening entertainments. This is the con where the water ran out and they had to wash in beer.

Apart from the USSR, members came from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

When some Romanians re-emerged on the fannish scene at Confiction in 1990, to all intents and purposes they had been cut off from both Western and Eastern mainstreams for 15 years. Ion Hobana had attended a few events, but his French is better than his English, he had to be cautious, and he knew the older writers best. Jean-Pierre Moumon had traded copies of his international SF fanzine *Antares* with various fans for Romanian books. Ion Hobana, Ioan Albescu and Alexandru Mironov got to SocCon. And that was just about it.

Their SF clubs had grown during the eighties, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe and for much the same reasons, but they had been founded a fan generation earlier, and owed their origin to the Latin tradition of creation and participation, rather than to the pseudo-conference convention, library, and film-show culture of the north. Many groups were called writers' circles, and the SF clubs proper also encouraged writing, artwork and organising skills.

The usual difficulties of getting things published were there in spades. Western SF was looked upon, if anything, even less kindly than in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union itself. This further encouraged an environment in which home-grown material became one of the driving forces behind fandom. Competitions were held for stories, artwork, etc., etc. Cons took place, but a development during the eighties was a different type of fan camp.

The Soviet ones were a place to relax and meet friends in a somewhat less hectic environment than Aelita. The Romanian ones were designed as young writers' camps, and based around competitions at that. Participants were expected to participate, but the competitions were targetted at differing levels of skill and earnestness. By the time I reached a much-evolved *Atlantykron* camp in summer 1992 the competitions included a major short story competition (the winner would be published professionally) and an artwork competition (illustrating a story to be published in the magazine *Anticipatia*) - but also a fishing competition (it was held on an island in the middle of the Danube), a chess competition, a one-sentence story competition (a la Frederic Brown), and an English pronunciation competition.

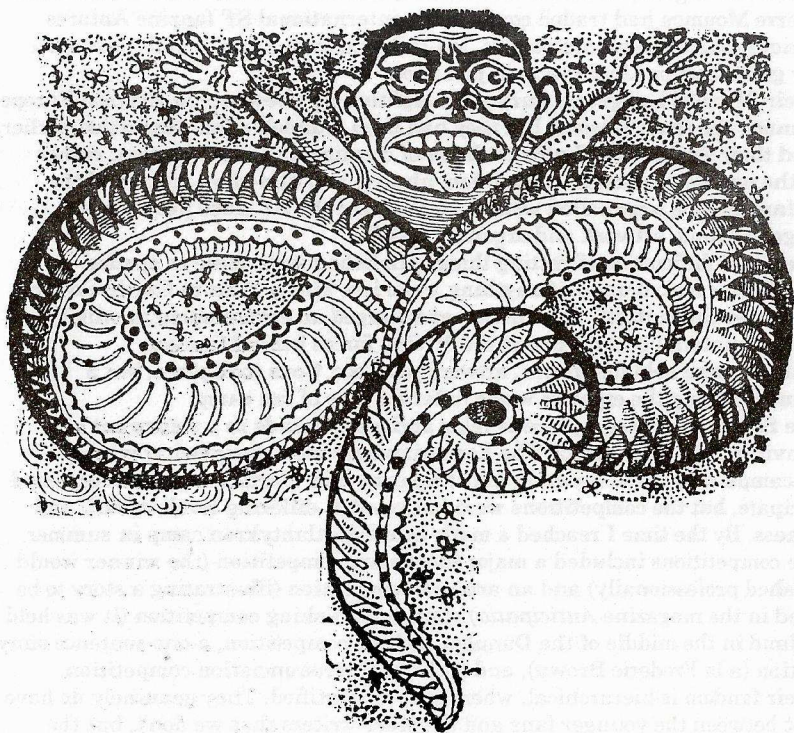
Their fandom is hierarchical, where ours is stratified. They genuinely do have a contact between the younger fans and the older writers that we don't, but the highly structured organisational system is the antithesis of our theoretical chaos. This hasn't stopped partying till 4 in the morning, silly games, spoofs, and most of the other relaxations we would count as "fannish". What price sercon?

Another part of Latin fandom is emerging into view now too, Spain has formed contacts with South America (and South Africa too, by some strange process). A South American "Eurocon", ConSur has taken place. This new branch will grow. How it will grow is difficult to say.

If we look back into ancient history, say 1988, European fandom stood thus: Britain, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and to a lesser extent Bulgaria were the major players. If you look around now the major players are Britain, Holland, Germany, Poland, the Czechs and Slovaks, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine.

In British fandom the ripples of the shock of 1989 are just beginning to reach us. We tend to assume that we do things the "right" way, that others will follow us. For sure, they will copy many of our ideas, but they are different enough that with increased contact they will change us too. In the future simple dichotomies such as "North"/"South", "East"/"West", "Sercon"/"Fannish" will no longer work, if they ever did, but the "Anglo-American"/"Furrin" divide may seem increasingly anachronistic too.

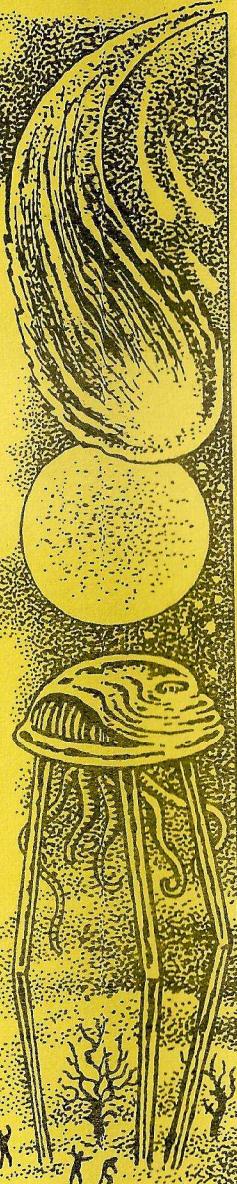
Plus ca change? We'll see...



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