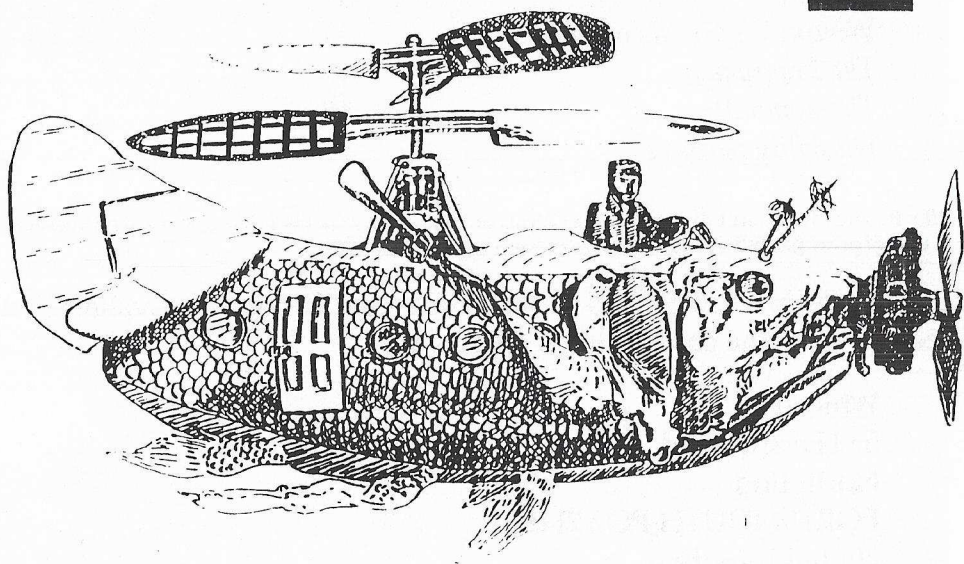


# WINCON V

*Unicon 1999*

# Report 1.1



13–15 August 1999  
King Alfred's College, Winchester

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## Report 1.1

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Why Report 1.1? Report 1 didn't have the Guests of Honour because the information wasn't available at time of press, just before Intuition. This version is dated July 1998.

LARGE PRINT VERSIONS of Wincon V publications are available on request from the convention's address:

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Website: <http://www.pompey.demon.co.uk/wincon.htm>

*Special thanks go to Jasper Smithers for the cover artwork. It shows Chairman Plumbly attempting to learn the art of navigation in his new vehicle ably assisted by Tech Officer Croft who is temporarily out of view while he PAT tests the radar.*

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# We're Back!

In 1999, Unicon returns to Winchester, brought to you by the team behind Intervention—the 1997 UK National SF Convention, and previous Wincons.

Wincon V (Unicon 1999) will combine the relaxed atmosphere of a small science fiction convention with the cream of large convention programming—without big convention prices!

We're hard at work designing a lively programme to provoke and amuse, with international guests, writers' workshop, films, games, quizzes, fan items, dealers' room and our traditional 'cake burning' contest. Please come along and be a part of it!

## The Site

Why King Alfred's College again—especially when we said at the end of Wincon III that we weren't coming back?

There are several reasons for going back there for Wincon V. Firstly—it's an educational establishment; this is required by the Unicon Charter. Secondly—it's a site we know. Thirdly—the John Stripe Theatre is an exceptionally good place to hold program items. Wincons I–III were held at King Alfred's, but due to various reasons we had decided to see if we could hold a convention of similar size a bit nearer to Portsmouth (where the majority of the committee live), but after approaching the site and having a look at the improvements they've made—and are going to be making—we have decided to return there for Wincon V.

The college is undergoing extensive refurbishment and looks a lot nicer than it did. The accommodation rooms will be refurbished later this year. We will be going to have a look at them and keep an eye on their progress, and will keep you up to date with any major developments. King Alfred's College are trying to address the thorny issue of disability access problems on the site, and have already made a few alterations; for example, there is now wheelchair access to the John Stripe Theatre via the front doors. They have bought an old school nearby, which will be the new conference facility as soon as it is fitted out. King Alfred's also have a new conference officer—Sarah Hudson. Sarah was previously with the Novotel in Southampton which has hosted SF conventions before, so she should have a rough idea of what to expect. We look forward to working with her to bring you what we hope will be the best Wincon yet.

# Wincon V's Guests of Honour

We're delighted to announce that our Guests of Honour so far will be Diana Wynne Jones, Warren Ellis and John Barnes.

## Diana Wynne Jones

Diana Wynne Jones has frequently been commended for the Carnegie, Britain's most prestigious children's book award. She's won the *Guardian* Prize for Fiction and the Hornbook/*Boston Globe* Honor Book Award, and has received numerous honors, including nominations for the Hugo, the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award and the World Fantasy Award. She's had one of her books, *Archer's Goon*, televised by the BBC.

Diana primarily writes fantasy novels for children and young adults. Her adult characters, though occasionally well-meaning, are ineffectual. Her far-from-perfect child heroes recognise their own failings as the adults never will, and so are much better at Saving the World. Of course, her one adult novel also doesn't present grown-ups as particularly clever.

When asked why she made her fictional adults so dreadful, Diana responded "As a child I had parents. They were worse than anything in my books. If I put in anything out of my childhood, I always have to reduce it to a tenth of what was actually true, because people wouldn't otherwise find it credible". In *The Time of the Ghost*, Fenella has her hair tied into knots for several days in an attempt to be noticed by her parents. In reality, Diana's sister did the same trick—and was not noticed for six months.

When Diana wrote her adult novel, *A Sudden Wild Magic*, she found herself thinking, "These poor adults are never going to understand this; I must explain it to them twice more and then remind them again later in different terms". *A Sudden Wild Magic* contains the same controlled chaos that pervades all her books (and, one suspects, her life). Though she'd been looking forward to the "greater freedom in writing for adults", she quickly realised that her children's books had all the sophistication of adult books, without needing to conform to as strict a pattern. Diana's children's books have covered topics from time paradox (*Tale of Time City*, *Archer's Goon*) to multiple universes (the 'Chrestomanci' books); from mythic structures (the 'Dalemark' quartet, *Fire and Hemlock*, *Eight Days of Luke*) to meta-textuality and the power of language (*Homeward Bounders*, *Spellcoats*). All this while being great fun, loved by children, and extremely funny.

Diana was nominated for the 1997 Hugo Award for *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, her traveller's guide to the worlds of High Fantasy. In *Fantasyland*, everyone eats Stew on the journey through the Vestigial Empire, and horses never need to rest unless the minions of the Dark Lord are only half an hour behind. Perhaps the best

way to describe Diana's books is by what they're not—they are never set in Fantasyland. Not for her the stock characters and settings, the plots plagiarised from Tolkien. All of the books of Diana Wynne Jones are different, even from one another, clever, and enjoyable.

DEBORAH KAPLAN

## Warren Ellis

Writing an introduction for Warren Ellis isn't going to be as easy as I thought. There are the obvious details, of course. Warren writes comics for American companies. After all, if you are going to write comics, the Americans are the obvious people to write for. I think that he writes good comics. This, too, is hardly surprising. After all, if we didn't like his work we would hardly ask him to be a Guest of Honour at our convention. The fact that I managed to convince the rest of the committee, few of whom are addicts of the comic book form that he should be our guest may give a better idea of how good the comics he writes are.

Although his first work was done for UK Tundra in 1992 he became a "fan favourite" with his work for Marvel starting in 1994 (*Excalibur*, *Doom 2099*). While the four issues of *Thor* he wrote were quite the best on the title since the departure of Walt Simonson.

His work with Image has turned a tired "flagship" title—*StormWatch*—into an exciting and thought provoking series. In an industry where the major commercial imperative is not to change too much, and thus imperil spin off merchandising. A writer who can generate so much surprise by not killing off characters is truly remarkable.

*Transmetropolitan*, published by DC/Helix, has been one of the few SF comics that someone of my—occasionally puritanical—inclinations would be prepared to accept as being science fiction and not science fantasy; imagine Hunter S. Thompson spiking William Gibson's orange juice.

It won The British National Comics Week 1998 award in the Best New Comic: International category. *i-D Magazine* made it their Comic Of The Month for September 1997 and The Squiddies Internet Comics Awards gave the Best New Comic/Best Character prize to its hero Spider Jerusalem. Despite all this praise it is still worth reading.

Damn it, the guy is good and I, for one, am dying to meet him.

JOHN RICHARDS

P.S. He also wrote some *Vampirella* stories.

## John Barnes — Man of Mystery

I'm sure that this title will seem stupid in retrospect after I meet John Barnes at Wincon V, but it's a sign of how difficult I've found it to find information about him to write this article. The normal best reference on authors and science fiction, Clute and Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 2nd Edn., is very sketchy on the subject of John Barnes. Several hours of solid web-searching found no home page, no tribute page, very little information beyond the bare bones bibliography. I seem to have little in the line of reference or criticism apart from the occasional review in my own collection.

This is very mysterious. John's been publishing novels since the mid-1980s. He's been Hugo nominated, he's written widely and deeply and well, with originality and verve in various different streams of science fiction and fantasy, he co-wrote a bestseller with Buzz Aldrin. You can reasonably mention his name in the same sentence as Iain Banks, Stephen Baxter, Dan Simmons. Why so little apparent interest in him? If you search against any of these others through any of the various methods, you'll find pages of reference and criticism, whole websites devoted to their every movement. Why such relative obscurity for John Barnes?

I am, therefore, thrown back to the books, where I started. As well as the books themselves, there are a few words of biography on the flysheets of most of the books and the odd word of acknowledgement. This is not an article of review or criticism, so I'll only give a short precis of each novel, and any biographical details each provides. From them, hopefully we can move a little closer to clearing the obscurity.

*The Man who Pulled Down the Sky*, 1988

The first novel — and a deeply assured one. It portrays a very plausible future in which Earth's orbital (former) colonies dominate the rest of the Solar System, with their control over Earth's resources. This naturally leads to a conflict, where an agent from one of the Jovian lunar colonies goes to Earth to raise a simultaneous rebellion against the orbital colonies.

My UK edition is part of the "Isaac Asimov recommends" series, and says very little about John Barnes. However even with his first published novel he was recognised as an author of style and substance.

*Sin of Origin*, 1988

There's so much in this book, it's hard to know where to begin. There's the exploration of the culture of a (or some) very alien species, the future of Christianity and Communism, conflict in various forms, scientific research and an answer to the Fermi Paradox, all wapped up in one well-written novel. The only personal comment on the dustwrapper is that he lives in Missoula, Montana.

*Orbital Resonance*, 1991

A juvenile novel set on an orbital colony. This is the only one of John's books I haven't read yet, but I believe it's sort of a sequel to *The Man Who Pulled Down the Sky*. I intend to rectify the not-yet-readness of this book very soon. (Like about ten minutes after I finish this article —deadlines!)

*Timeraider: Wartide*, 1992; *Timeraider: Union Fires*, 1992; *Timeraider: Battlecry*, 1992

It took me a little while to be convinced that this was the same John Barnes as he who wrote the other novels. This little trilogy is a mens adventure story, the male version of a Mills & Boone or Harlequin Romance. It's the story of a time travelling Vietnam veteran who fights in World War II, the Mexican-American war and the U.S. Civil War. It's not the material itself, I quite like military SF. I suspect was either written to quite tight rules, or heavily edited.

There are afterwords to each of these three novels in which John makes it very clear that life was very difficult for him at the time he was writing this. In his own words his life was collapsing, and he moved to a new city (from Missoula Montana, one assumes), where he started a Ph.D. in theatre arts at the University of Pittsburgh.

*A Million Open Doors*, 1992

Humanity has spread through large chunks of the galaxy at sub-light speeds inventing all sorts of isolated and very different cultures as they go. Now, with the invention of the Springer, faster than light travel, these cultures are gradually being stitched together. A young man from one culture travels to another. Both cultures are very different, but display depth and interest. The culture shock of the encounter with other human cultures is very strong, and very well portrayed. All these cultures are doomed to change.

The dustjacket describes John as "computer simulation expert, theatre scholar and science-fiction writer." This man sounds more interesting as we find more out about him, doesn't he?

*Mother of Storms*, 1994

Big, complicated Global Disaster Novel. Usual thing — interesting characters, believable futures, lots of fun — read it yourself, you'll like it.

It also has a really informative duskjacket, which I'll reproduce in full:

*"John Barnes has five masters degrees, and is studying at the University of Pittsburgh for a PhD in theatre. A programming consultant and author of computer books, he has worked for corporations such as L A Gear and Xerox. He speaks a little Spanish and a little Japanese,*

*and has travelled extensively in the U.S. and Mexico."*

*Kaleidoscope Century, 1995*

A very unsettling book this. A man in the 22nd century looks back at the 21st century, and feels a great deal of responsibility for all that went wrong. As soon as he starts to remember incidents that have already taken place in our own time, you realise that the viewpoint's memory is very unreliable, and the whole story shifts under your feet, like an earthquake. It's a very bizarre feeling — all the 21st century history was fiction anyway, so why should it suddenly feel so unreal?

Now, note that my edition is from Millenium in the UK, same as *Mother of Storms*. Compare and contrast:

*"John Barnes has three masters degrees, and will soon receive his PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. As a computer consultant he has worked for firms as diverse as Xerox, L A Gear, and Toshiba, and has written numerous articles in the computer industry press. He has lived in several parts of the United States. He speaks enough Spanish to get a meal in a restaurant, if he doesn't care what he eats, and practically no Japanese, but he reads Latin pretty well, so if the Pope ever sends him a fax he's all set... He is assistant professor of theatre at Western State College, Gunnison, Colorado."*

*Encounter with Tiber (with Buzz Aldrin), 1996*

Man's first interstellar journey, alien races, interstellar politics. I very much enjoyed this, though it had a tendency to drift too far into the technical and start reading like an *Analog Science Fact* article. I still found it very enjoyable.

There's rather more about Buzz Aldrin than about John on the dustjacket, but that's just the way of the world.

*One For the Morning Glory, 1997*

John's first fantasy. This book has one of the most beautiful covers I've ever seen, an absolute stunning and accurate painting by Charles Vess. It's clever, it's funny, it has a dark edge, many dark edges in fact. It contains reflections of so much else I've liked about fantasy, quests and battles, mysterious advisers, true companions and romance. If you like fantasy and haven't read this you are missing a great book.

My copy's a paperback one, and says very little about John other than what a great writer he is. Hey! I knew that already.

*Caesar's Bicycle, 1997; Patton's Spaceship, 1997; Washington's Dirigible, 1997*

Parallel worlds, alternate histories, super science, evil invaders from another dimension — this series is great fun, but not entirely lightweight. It's a common pat-



tern of John's — the heroes are shades of grey, and the villains are (slightly darker) shades of grey. In one of these books, the "hero" meets the version of himself working for the bad guys. There isn't really much difference between them, but the good version happily kills the bad one, anyway.

Again there are afterwords here, but the only real personal mention is that he's very grateful to the Alternate History group on Genie's SF Round Table.

*Earth Made of Glass*, 1998

The sequel to *A Million Open Doors*. The protagonists of the earlier book are now diplomats charged with helping other cultures join the network of Springers. This is a very dark novel.

It says very little about John except that he lives in Gunnison, Colorado, with his wife, author Kara Dalkey. We're fortunate in that Kara is also coming to Wincon V. (Clute and Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* lists her as a founding member of the Scribbles, along with Steven Brust, Emma Bull, Patricia Wrede and Will Shetterly, and the author of half-a-dozen fantasy novels)

## Conclusion

So, theatre professor, wonderful (but under-acclaimed) sf author, ex-computer consultant, ready for anything the Pope chooses to fax to him—I'm not sure we're any closer to explaining the Mystery of the Obscure John Barnes, perhaps we can explore it further together, and meet the man himself, at Wincon V.

PAT McMURRAY

## The Programme

Wincon programmes tend to be born either on the train to work or in a bar somewhere. They consist of ideas sprung from drunken arguments or dazed musings on the rabbitings of the *Today* programme. These are the 'what ifs' which led me into science fiction in the first place. The speculations and nitpickings that make the genre such a joy.

Our programme this time owes its existence to film directors who can't tell the difference between UNIX and Windows. To those who feel that a map of the last patch of dry land need only comprise a picture of same. To publishers who seem to think that every book I buy will be the same as the last one with the names changed to protect the unimaginative. To authors who drop characters with a twentieth century conscience into a seventeenth century world. And especially to the last person

who said to me "Science Fiction? That's like *Star Trek* isn't it?"

We want to talk about why a genre that can do anything spends so much time hanging out at the same old scene. To look at how a traditional character is treated by a changing world. To discuss why comic book heroes make such terrible movie stars (they always seem so two dimensional, don't they). And to rip off Radio 4 panel games from the times when they used to be fun.

A good musical sends you out on to the street whistling. A good programme should send you in to the bar arguing. This is what we are aiming to do. Mind you we expect to make you work for your entertainment. Participation is the name of the game (well actually *The Mixer Quiz* is the name of the game but participation is a close approximation). If you've got something to say we can be persuaded to let you say it. The Programme Press Gangs will be afoot and many is the incautious drinker who has awoken to find his or herself on a panel.

Just remember it doesn't have to be solemn to be serious.

## The Committee

Between them, the members of the Wincon V committee have experience of working on virtually every style and size of science fiction convention, as well as events with fantasy and horror themes; previous postings range from Unicons to Novacons, Eastercons to Worldcons (European and U.S.), with more than half of the committee being veterans of previous Wincons. Alphabetically, we are:

*John Bark*—Promotions and Programming

Former treasurer, Edinburgh University SF Society; former chair, South Hants SF Group; committee member, Wincons I-III, Intervention; area head, Intersection.

*Keith Cosslett*—Secretary and Treasurer

First con, 1987 (Conspiracy '87 was the second); Wincon II-III, Intervention; edits South Hants fanzine Cyberspace.

*Andy Croft*—Tech, Safety and Eggs

As electrician turned stage technician, tech on Wincon I; since then has worked on three Worldcons, Wincon II-III and every Eastercon since. Was on Intervention's committee.

*Steve Green*—Fan Room and Publications

First con and debut fanzine, 1977; ran alternative programme, Novacon 13; chair, Novacon 14; fan room, Intervention; From 1987-96 was co-editor (with Martin Tudor) of Critical Wave.

*Pat McMurray*—Services

Enthusiastic, but lacks x-ray vision. Usually found Running Things at Eastercons with a radio in his ear. Not actually part of the Borg collective. Yet.

*Val Phillips*—Memberships and Guest Liaison

Underwent baptism of fire—Intervention was her first con committee, and now she's back for more.

*Phil Plumbly*—Chairman

Security and guest liaison, Wincon I; secretary, Wincon II; secretary and guest liaison, Wincon III; deputy ops, Confiction; historical exhibits, Magicon; all recent Eastercons except Contrivance; secretary and vice chair, Intervention. Edits newszine *Terminus Borealis Times*.

*John Richards*—Programming

In 1975, as head of school SF group, invited Intervention guest Brian W. Aldiss to speak; Wincons I-III; Helicon; Thirtycon; Starwinds; Intervention.

*Anne-Marie Wright*—Site Liaison

First con, Grovecon IV; has worked on Wincon II; Wincon III and Intervention committee member.

*Pete Wright*—Publications and Webmaster

Finally 'press-ganged into conrunning' for Wincon II; committee of Wincon III, Starwinds and Intervention.

Also we have on board

*Janet Barron*—Writers' Workshop

Co-editor (with Liz Holliday) of the new SF magazine *Odyssey*, and worked as guest liaison on Intervention's committee.

## Disability Services

It is our intention to make Wincon V as enjoyable and accessible to as many fans as possible. To this aim we have adopted the Electric Eggs basic service as the standard to aid our members who need some additional support. The Electric Eggs is a fan organisation originated in the USA a few years ago to supply medical and other support to people with disabilities who wish to attend conventions.

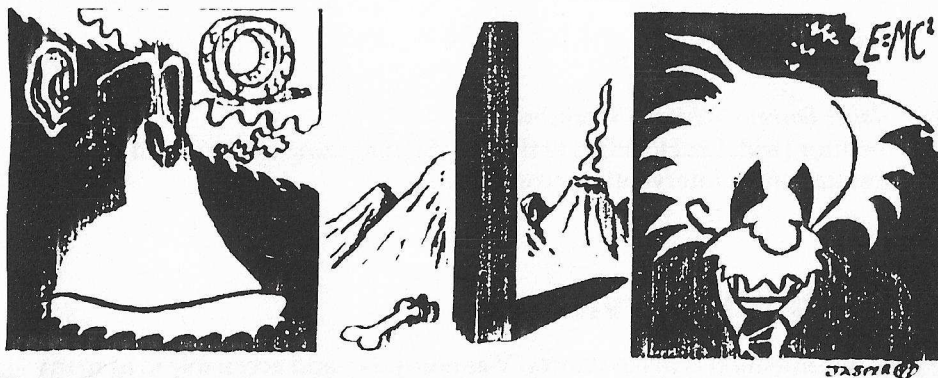
If you have any problem that you either know or think it may be wise for us to know about, please get in touch and we will send you a form to register with Electric Eggs.

Please be aware that most of the Wincon V site is on one floor; unfortunately, the floors in different buildings are spread over the side of a hill which equates to about a six-storey building. This is unfortunate, as it is steep in places and anyone with a movement problem will need to give some thought to the matter before attending. The Students Union building is five floors high, the bottom one is level with the main theatre and the top one is level with main site. It has a lift for people requiring one, as there is only a choice of steps or a steep road otherwise.

If you would like to find out more, please get in touch with us directly; our Eggs committee person—Andy Croft—will be happy to help.

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## THE SOUTH HANTS SCIENCE FICTION GROUP IS EVOLVING



Don't be backward—join us!

We meet every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month  
at the Magpie, Fratton Road, Portsmouth.