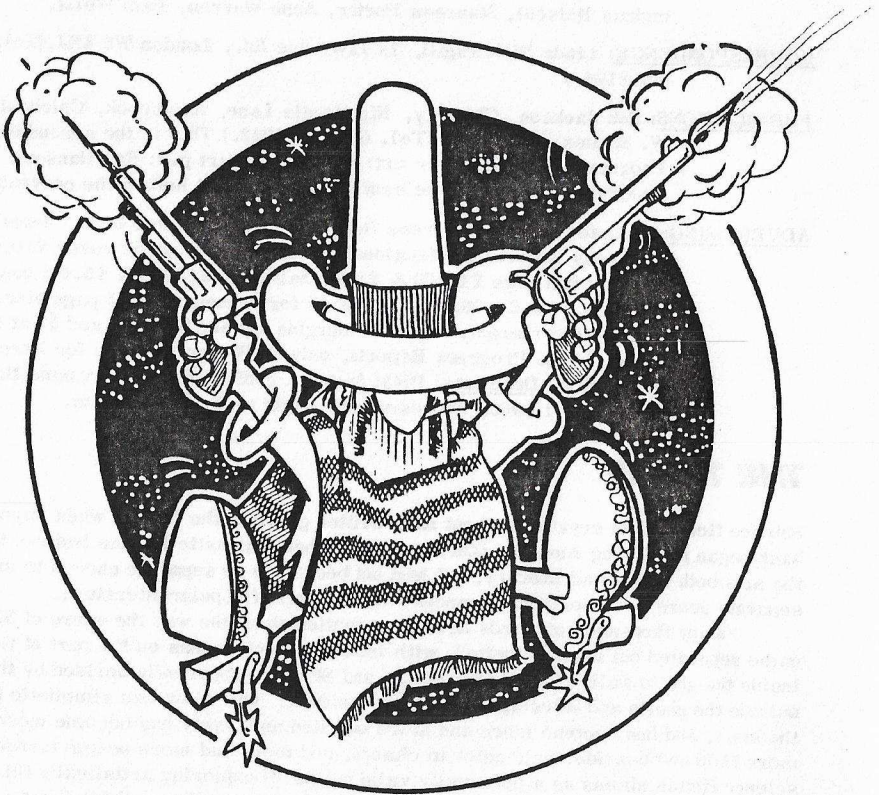


MEXICON 2

Strathallan Hotel, Birmingham

7-9 February 1986



Progress Report 2

2

MEXICON 2 - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

- VENUE:** Strathallan Hotel, Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B16 9RY.
- DATE,** Friday 7th to Sunday 9th February 1986.
TIMES: Noon Friday to late night Sunday.
- TO JOIN:** Send £9.00 (cheques/P. Os payable to Mexicon 2) to:
Pam Wells, 24a Beech Road, London N11 2DA. (Tel. (01) 889 0401.)
- ROOM RATES:** £17.50/person/night inclusive of private bathroom, tea & coffee facilities in room, voucher for either full English breakfast or snack lunch, and VAT. Booking forms with PR3, to be mailed late summer. 220+ beds available.
- COMMITTEE:** Linda K. Pickersgill (Chair), Greg Pickersgill, Lilian Edwards, Abigail Frost, Colin Greenland, Rob Jackson, Paul Kincaid, Anne Page (Birmingham liaison), Maureen Porter, Anne Warren, Pam Wells.
- CORRESPONDENCE:** Linda Pickersgill, 7a Lawrence Rd., London W5 4XJ. (Tel. (01) 568 8174.)
- PUBLICATIONS:** Rob Jackson, Chintay, Nightingale Lane, Hambrook, Chichester, W. Sussex PO18 8UH. (Tel. (0243) 574242.) This is the second of four Progress Reports (cover art: Jim Barker; art p.4: Rob Hansen). The Programme Book will be sent to members just before the convention.
- ADVERTISING:** Accepted in both Progress Reports and Programme Book. Rates for Progress Reports (professional & fan/amateur): Back cover £20.00 & £16.00; full page £16.00 & £8.00; half page £10.00 & £5.00; quarter page £6.00 & £3.00. Copy to be A4 for reduction to A5 page size, or proportions thereof. Allow 1" margins top and bottom, and $\frac{3}{4}$ " at the sides. In the Progress Reports, only B&W copy suitable for Xeroxing acceptable. Deadlines: PR3: August 1 1985. PR4, Programme Book: December 1 1985. We reserve the right to decline adverts.

THE THEME

Science fiction first crystallised out as a written genre in the 1920s, when Hugo Gernsback began publishing Amazing Stories. Before then, fantastic themes had run through the arts both visual and literary, but had not been seen as separate enough to merit a separate genre — "scientific romances" were a part of popular literature.

Many thousands of words have been written about the way the genre of SF became separated out into a "ghetto", with intense consciousness on the part of those inside the ghetto walls of this separation, and SF being apparently derided by those outside the ghetto and worshipped by those inside it. This view was simplistic from the start, and has become more and more outdated as society has become more and more fluid and bewilderingly quick to change, and more and more people turned to science fiction idioms as a potentially valid means of exploring artistically this rate of change, an exploration which may help people be better prepared for those changes.

That's why you can watch lots of Star Trek repeats on TV.

That's also why fandom, which started off cosy, small, isolated and focussed mainly on the written word both in the professional field (books and SF magazines) and in fanzines, has spread wider and become more and more diffuse, with dozens and

dozens of special interest groups within it. The ghetto walls have been thoroughly broken down and fandom can now consider itself socially acceptable — but the diffuse focus is the price paid.

Anybody who absorbs most of their SF by actually reading books, or devotes much of their fannish activity to reading and writing fanzines, is likely to feel quite at a loss amongst all the wargamers, Star Warriors, Creative Anachronists, Dorsai, comix fans, Tom Baker groupies, computer freaks, dungeonmasters, masqueraders, Trekkies, ghostbusters...

Most of these areas have their own conventions.

So why shouldn't written SF and fanzine fandom have a convention set aside too? ... Here it is — Mexicon.

The areas of SF that Mexicon feels are most neglected are those on the borderland of other literature (halfway back across the ghetto walls, what's left of them) which tests the intellectual limits of its readers and challenges easy assumptions. The serious side of Mexicon's programme will be looking at the latest developments in written SF and speculative literature, and also fanzine fandom. In particular we are going to examine the creative process in SF. A subtheme will be the alienness of Earth. We're also featuring a writers' workshop.

But that's only the serious side. Most of the con — oops, I mean the lighter side — will be the kind of fun that you have every right to expect. Silly games, competitions with good prizes, a disco, the "Baltimore Bean Company" bar with a huge range of foreign beer, Mexican (and other) food, the fanzine room, a fanzine production workshop, room parties, raffles, fanzine auctions, the bar open very late...

In short, a con that stimulates both sides of your brain.

— Rob Jackson

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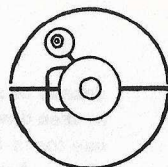
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c/o Vincent J. Docherty
20 Hillington Gardens
Cardonald
Glasgow G52 2TP

How we came North-West to Birmingham



We tried to find a London hotel for Mexicon, we really and truly tried. We realise now, though, that London's so popular as a business venue (even more so now the pound is so incredibly cheap to foreigners) that the hotels can ask almost what they like, and the prices of London hotels would have meant charging a membership fee equivalent to a flight to Mexico City itself.

One fine old place on Blackheath looked at the start to be an ideal con hotel; old and rambling with many nooks and crannies for conversation spaces, a quaint old bar done up in nautical motif and a room large enough for a programme hall. Rob Jackson, Greg and I followed the lively old manager around the winding hallways as he showed us around until we reached the bar where we sat to discuss business. We explained all the activities we'd be up to, giving him the serious stuff first: panel discussions, lectures, films. Then we approached a vital point, the bar hours. "Oh, no problem," the old fella said, "we keep regular pub hours but for residents..." — he laid a finger aside his nose — "...we stay open an hour longer. Maybe even two." Trying not to choke, we posed the question: "What if people wanted to keep drinking past an hour or two after closing time?" "Oh, well... we have this little dispensing machine..." He was absolutely rigid about this as the owner was terrified of upsetting local residents. We thanked him for his time.

We came very close to using the Great Western Royal Hotel next to Paddington Station. Again, it possessed the age and rambling atmosphere that makes a good con hotel, only with far more elegance than the Blackheath hotel. While being shown round by the weekend manager I couldn't help but notice all the Paddington bears everywhere, ranging in size from humungous to teeny weeny. I immediately thought of the soft toy fans who'd go crazy in a place like this. In every way but one the Great Western was a perfect place: perfect size, perfect room layout, perfect location and bar hours. It was the cost of function space that stopped us. We finagled and wrangled and wheeled and dealt and eventually got what was their best offer, one that we could have taken up if we had made a huge wad of money from the last Mexicon, but as we were starting from scratch we knew we just couldn't cut it no matter how we tried to juggle our figures.

Further north-west... we also had a trip to Oxford to see the Randolph, site of the '69 Eastercon. The trip there was very pleasant, as are the hotel's siting and facilities — but we couldn't say that about their prices, nor the elderly tourists the hotel seemed to be accustomed to.

I was becoming, how shall we say... frantic; that's a good description. Verging on the hysterical but too cool to blow my fan credibility. Here we were coming up to Novacon, our first major con since announcing Mexicon 2 and with our first PR due, and we still had no hotel. That was when our fairy godmother in the form of Mary Woodward appeared. Mary is a sales manager with the Thistle Hotel group, and is based in the well known Royal Angus in Birmingham. Someone had passed my name on to her, not surprising as I had been writing to every known hotel in London including several of the Thistle group. She called one evening when I was out and spoke to Greg, leaving the message that she'd like to help us find a con hotel, mentioning that she'd had con experience with a number of Trek cons. At first I put the message to the back of my brain, still trying to turn water into wine by finding an affordable London place. At last I thought what-the-hell, she's the first person to actually offer help, and she knows cons... I'll call her. She knew about the upcoming Novacon when I spoke to her and suggested we meet that weekend so she could show me an interest-

ing place she had in mind.

Come noon on Novacon Saturday she picked up a team of us from the Grand and took us to the Strathallan. Never having seen Birmingham other than the town centre (and more of the ring roads than anyone should ever have to experience) I was surprised to find myself on a pleasant suburban road not far from the Grand. Mary chattered enthusiastically about Birmingham, which made a change from the usual moans and groans one hears, and looking at the place through her eyes I saw a Birmingham I'd not before experienced. Soon we were in Hagley Road, and slowing down in front of a building that looked like a gasometer. It turned out to be the Strathallan Hotel.

There are two parts to the hotel. At ground level there are restaurants, bars, function rooms and the lobby, but rising above that there's the fantastic gasometer part — three levels of indoor parking and four tiers of rooms — that makes up the bulk of this round hotel. Mary took us up the spiral drive and parked, then shepherded us into an elevator and down to reception to meet the manager, who gave us the full tour. Everything seemed so new, modern, clean and spacious. I immediately began planning out the Fan Room, Book Room, the main bar. It all fell easily into place. Seemed like a good place to have a convention. Next we went back upstairs to see the bedrooms, stepping out of the elevator into a hall that curved around either side into the distance, not unlike the inside of a giant spacecraft (it's horrible how my mind slips into SF clichés at times like this). All the rooms turned out to have baths and showers, radio and TV, phones, tea and coffee facilities, and even trouser presses and hairdryers for the most fastidious fans.

There is also an in-house video system.

There's certainly no trouble finding the elevators from any of the rooms because all you do is keep walking in a circle and you're bound to end up there sooner or later. I did, though, begin to wonder whether a circular hotel might not have a few unusual problems of its own. Perhaps the rooms not being rectangular would throw susceptible fans off into weird Lovecraftian unnatural geometries and we'd get stuck with their hotel bills. (Don't give them ideas, Linda — Ed.) Or some junior physicist would try playing CERN and leave the corridors littered with smashed atoms. Or worst, and most likely, I imagined poor inebriated fans stumbling out of the lifts searching for their rooms, and going endlessly round in circles until they collapsed from exhaustion. In the end I figured we could live with these slight disadvantages.

Mary took us back to the ground floor and into the newly redecorated Baltimore Bean Company, an "American" style bar that serves a variety of cocktails and imported beers as well as the usual. When I saw that the board listing the cheap bar meals for the day included tacos and chili I knew I'd received a sign from the Elder Gods that this was definitely a Mexican hotel.

Needless to say, we worked out a deal, and as you've realised by now Mexican 2 is being held at the Strathallan. The entire hotel is at our disposal for the whole weekend, and the bar will be open as long as we need it. Instead of merely having extended breakfast hours we've worked out a voucher scheme that entitles residents to a meal at either breakfast or lunchtime, so the miserly among us won't have to fling ourselves out of bed at painful hours in order to claim food we've paid for even if we can't really enjoy it.

The area around the hotel is dotted with a variety of restaurants and shops as well as several other hotels that can be used as overflows should the need arise.

All in all, the Strathallan turned out to be just what the Federales ordered. With the room rates fixed at £17.50 per person per night, inclusive of VAT and breakfast/lunch token, we think we have a fine deal for the first, and hopefully best, convention of 1986.

In the next PR we'll report on what a convention at the Strathallan is actually like, as Mexican representatives go where no-one has gone before — the Hitchhikers' con being held there in May.

— Linda K. Pickersgill

Members

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Rog Peyton | 45. Lawrence Dean | |
| 2. Colin Fine | 46. Martin Smith | |
| 3. Tim Illingworth | 47. John Jarrold | 89. Malcolm Edwards |
| 4. Dave Ellis | 48. John Dallman | 90. Darroll Pardoe |
| 5. Caroline Mullan | 49. Neil Thompson | 91. Ro Pardoe |
| 6. Brian Ameringen | 50. Dave Wilkinson | 92. Simon Beresford |
| 7. Brian Smith | 51. Jim Barker | 93. Stan Eling |
| 8. Roger Robinson | 52. Justin Rogers | 94. Helen Eling |
| 9. Julian Headlong | 53. Steve Higgins | 95. Lillian Edwards |
| 10. Alex Stewart | 54. Leah Higgins | 96. Maureen Porter |
| 11. Susan Francis | 55. Ann Looker | 97. Abi Frost |
| 12. Rob Jackson | 56. Martin Easterbrook | 98. George Ternent |
| 13. Coral Jackson | 57. Ann Green | 99. Linda Ternent |
| 14. Moira Shearman | 58. Paul Francis | 100. Dave Holmes |
| 15. Anthony Johnston | 59. Graham Stokes | 101. Mike Meara |
| 16. Kate Moore | 60. Dai Price | 102. Pat Meara |
| 17. Mike Hamilton | 61. Tibs | 103. Mike Moir |
| 18. Kate Davies | 62. Joan Paterson | 104. Debby Moir |
| 19. Malcolm Davies | 63. Helen Starkey | 105. Mal Ashworth |
| 20. Woofie Bear | 64. Paul Dormer | 106. Hazel Ashworth |
| 21. Ken Slater | 65. Steve Davies | 107. Roz Kaveney |
| 22. Mike Ford | 66. Cath Easthope | 108. Keith Oborn |
| 23. Owen Whiteoak | 67. Jeremy Johnson | 109. Krystyna Oborn |
| 24. Paul Vincent | 68. Vinç Clarke | 110. Helen McNabb |
| 25. Harry Bell | 69. Bridget Wilkinson | 111. Ken Lake |
| 26. Greg Pickersgill | 70. Simon Ounsley | 112. Jan Lake |
| 27. Linda Pickersgill | 71. Phil Dawson | 113. Roy Macinski |
| 28. Pam Wells | 72. Lawrence Lambourne | 114. David Garnett |
| 29. Steve Green | 73. Robert Meades | 115. Joy Hibbert |
| 30. Paul Kincaid | 74. James Steel | 116. Dave Rowley |
| 31. Philip Groves | 75. Alison Harding | 117. Joseph Nicholas |
| 32. Robert Stubbs | 76. John Steward | 118. Judith Hanna |
| 33. Peter Cohen | 77. Gwen Funnell | 119. Nick Mills |
| 34. Michael Damesick | 78. Peter Wareham | 120. John Harvey |
| 35. Rob Hansen | 79. Peter-Fred Thompson | 121. Eve Harvey |
| 36. Tom Taylor | 80. Kathy Westhead | 122. Bob Day |
| 37. Jim Darroch | 81. Mike Westhead | 123. Phil Palmer |
| 38. Alun Harries | 82. Roger Perkins | 124. Colin Greenland |
| 39. Kev Williams | 83. Sue Hepple | 125. Anne Warren |
| 40. Sue Williams | 84. Neil Hepple | 126. Jimmy Robertson |
| 41. Tony Berry | 85. Pete Weston | 127. Martin Hewitson |
| 42. Dave Langford | 86. Anne Page | 128. Iain Byers |
| 43. Arnold Akien | 87. Christina Lake | 151. Andy Robertson |
| 44. Peter Smith | 88. Robert Holdstock | 231. Arthur Cruttenden |

List complete
as at 5.3.85.

The PROGRAMME

As I write this, there is still nearly a full year to go before Mexican. So long in advance it would be ludicrous to start talking about specific programme items and specific panellists, especially as we are intending to build a large degree of flexibility into our planning to cope with the interests of the people attending. Nor would it be appropriate to start naming the writers we've invited, beyond saying that even if only a fraction of them are eventually able to attend this will be the most exciting collection of talent seen at a convention in a long time.

Nevertheless, planning for the programme is at a remarkably advanced stage, and we can at least let you in on some of our thinking. The more perceptive among you will have noticed the frequent use of words like "creativity" in our pronouncements about Mexican 2. Well, that is the theme of the convention. We are working on a series of talks, interviews and panels to explore creativity in its many guises. Why do writers write? And why do they write what they do, be it science fiction or mainstream, plays or comics? What about the commercial pressures on creativity? Or the compromises involved in translating from one medium to another? There will be authors who muse amusingly about their Muse, and others who'll make you think long and hard about an author's lot.

We will be creating a more informal atmosphere than usual on our panels to encourage the audience to join in the discussion much more. If you have questions to ask or points to make, you'll never have a better chance. And since science fiction fans are so creative anyway, we'll be doing our best to encourage that also. There's a short story workshop (about which more elsewhere in this PR) probably to be followed by a panel discussion on the experience; as well as various fan workshops.

"THE ARRIVAL"

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Unlike other conventions which divide the "main" and "fan" programmes up, we regard the two as being inseparable. So you can look forward to lively discussions about fanzines as well as lively discussions about books — after all, the creative impulse is the same.

We'll be doing a few things that Mexican 1 didn't do, but we'll be keeping those things that worked best. So there'll be the same linear programme well into the night, for instance. And since everyone goes to a convention primarily to have fun, there'll also be fiendish games and silly quizzes, or vice versa. And I haven't even mentioned the films and videos we'll be showing, or the disco, or... Well, there's just so much that will be going on it's impossible to give a brief summary here. But there's one thing I can promise: it won't be dull.

— Paul Kincaid

SHORT STORY WORKSHOP

So you fancy yourself a writer? Well, now's the time to do something about it. Mexican 2 is holding a special short story workshop, so you can have your story discussed, pick up pointers from other writers, and get the opinions of one of our leading novelists.

The workshop will be run on strictly professional lines. And to allow adequate time to consider each story, we must limit it to 8 people only. First come, first served, so make sure you get your application in the post straight away.

- * Participants may submit 1 story only. Maximum 5,000 words. Stories must be science fiction.
- * Anyone registered for the workshop must send one typewritten copy of their story to the address below, to arrive not later than 31 October 1985. The stories will then be copied, and one copy of each story will be sent to every participant to allow plenty of time for a thorough consideration of each story before the workshop.
- * A fee of £2.50 will be charged to cover the cost of copying and postage. Any sum remaining will be reimbursed to participants at Mexican 2.
- * Cheques should be made payable to Paul Kincaid and should accompany the coupon below. The address to send it to is:

Paul Kincaid, 114 Guildhall Street, Folkestone, Kent CT20 1ES.

I wish to register for the Short Story Workshop at Mexican 2. I enclose a cheque for £2.50 to cover administrative costs.

Name (block capitals) _____

Address _____

Mexican 2 Membership Number _____