

ConSept : Un7con

PROGRESS REPORT 3



G.O.H. Tanith Lee

8-10th August 1986

University of Surrey

Welcome to Progress Report Three for ConSept:Un7con. I know it was promised for Albacon, but... Just to remind those of you who've lost their other Progress Reports, the University of Surrey is in Guildford, and the convention address is

9, Graham Road,
Wealdstone,
Harrow.
HA3 5RP

All other details are cunningly hidden elsewhere within this progress report, together with the room booking form and rail travel details.

The following piece was written in 1983 and hasn't been updated, but we thought it so good that we put it in regardless.

The Comedy of Bone

- an appreciation of Tanith Lee by Nick Lowe -

"Let's try a few simple spells. Repeat after me:

Ernal pernal dippily dock,
I should like to be a clock.
Humple, dumple, filigree forry,
Make it snappy or you'll be sorry."

And Hey Presto! Girdle vanished, and there was a fat clock with a round face, cheerfully ticking.

Hynchatti was delighted.

"I'll try," she said, but somehow she couldn't quite remember the spell. What she said was this:

"Ernie pernie dimilly dick,
I should like to be a click - oh dear, that's not quite right -
Himble pimble, funnily filly,
Make it snappy or you'll look silly."

There was a terrible bang. The broomstick fell on the floor and the cauldron shot up the chimney.

When the smoke cleared, there stood Girdle, quite astonished, and on the floor was a very small Hynchatti, ticking away loudly.

- Princess Hynchatti.

A white light sailed high; he looked up at it, thinking to see the moon, but saw instead a pearly skull set in the sky, grinning, ribboning worms of clouds threading its eye-sockets.

- Companions on the Road.

I wonder if anyone really survives unchanged the shock of entering fandom and discovering most SF writers are just like their Dad. As a boy, I used to know all about science fiction authors. Whether by habit or design, Langside District Library always used to lop off the bit of the dust jacket with the author's picture, but I didn't need that to tell me what they looked like. They were always in their early thirties, tall and debonair, smoothly good-looking with only a telltale wicked twinkle in the eye to distinguish them from, say, Paul McCartney or the Man from Uncle. Even the awareness that some of these people had been writing for a matter of decades never clouded the image. Authors had to be larger than their books, and the books were larger than life: the conclusion was incontestable. I think my pleasure in SF diminished irreversibly with the appalling discovery that the gods wore specs, that their hair was vanishing, above all that they tended to be a trifle more, well, mature than I'd imagined them. Those books had been written by people. Just people.

Even so, I find the habit of thought hard to shake. In 1976 I encountered an astonishing short story called *The Demoness* by a writer with the richly-evocative name of Tanith Lee. It was the sort of story you inhale like drugged mist, turning your spine to fire and ice and back to bone in a dozen magical pages, and all the other fantasy you've read that year to dust-flavoured dross. Within weeks I'd hunted down everything Tanith Lee had published, and though I'd never seen her picture I knew just what she was like. She'd be pale, blonde, and devastatingly beautiful, with deep, haunting gipsy eyes and a hint of cool vampiric enchantment. At the same time, I knew this was just romantic fancy, and that in all probability her real name was Doreen Potts and her true identity a retired shipping clerk from Bristol or an owlish geography teacher in Saffron Walden. It didn't matter by this stage. She still wrote like a magician, no two books remotely alike, yet each able to snare the sceptical reader in an irresistible web of story by turns violent, lyrical, hilarious, intense, tragic, erotic, ridiculous. That should be enough.

All the same, I was right the first time.

The quotations heading this piece are both from early works. *Princess Hynchatti and Some Other Surprises* was Tanith's second book, a collection of witty, inventive, exquisite fairy stories, now lamentably out of print. (Like a berk, I had to go and read it, the first time, in a university library. By page three I had to run out of the room with my tongue wedged between my teeth and my face purple with suppressed giggles.) *Companions on the Road* was published around the same time as *The Birthgrave*, but was written much earlier - not that you could tell that from the assured writing, chilling dance of images, and brilliantly sustained atmosphere of dread. At the time, it seemed incredible to me that the same author could have penned both, let alone the bloody, passionate *Birthgrave* and the scintillating SF romp *Don't Bite the Sun*.

But then Tanith Lee is an extraordinarily versatile talent. In the eight years since her first Daw novels swept through the stale, cobwebby air of mid-seventies SF like a gust of spring breeze, she's produced accomplished, strikingly original work in fantasy and SF, for adults and kids, on radio and TV, besides moonlighting on the score for at least one of her radio plays and the frontispieces to her recent novels. And she's prolific, too: in one astounding 14-month burst in 1978-79 she published five novels totalling almost half a million words, or about the length of *The Lord of the Rings*. A skilled hack writer might equal or exceed this figure; but these were five good books, among them the fabulous tour de force of magical storytelling *Night's Master* and its strange, brooding sequel *Death's Master*: perhaps her finest novels to date (1983), and among the fantasy landmarks of the decade. I doubt there's an SF author past or present who's matched Tanith's combined record for range, output, and quality. And none of the three shows any signs of relenting.

All the same, even in this enviable diversity of production there are recurring points of style, theme, and imagination that drench every page of her writing with the addictive Lee flavour; and even in those early quotations you can see qualities which are going to distinguish all her subsequent work.

Most obviously, the first passage is funny, and the second is sombre. These two voices weave in and out, and around one another throughout her later writing, and her most original and affecting books are those in which the two strains carry on a constant, unpredictable flirtation. Don't Bite the Sun and its sequel, *Drinking Sapphire Wine* is, most of the time, a glorious comic joyride through a glittering blizzard of invention, with new delights popping off like fireworks faster than you can blink them away.

But what makes it one of the decade's outstanding SF novels is the descent into deadly seriousness as the story unfolds, and the moments of sudden, intolerable pain and despair interlarded with the highjinks. marvellous though the sequel is, the final happy ending rather blunts the stab at the end of the original novel, and I'd rather it were possible for people to read *Don't Bite the Sun* all the way through to that final (literal) questionmark without realising a sequel existed. The emotional power of this tragicomic rollercoaster effect is exploited even more deftly in *Night's Master*, where tales that end in laughter and tales that end in tears are woven together with cruel abandon, so that the reader always knows that the current strand will end in either a shock of blood or a burst of joy, but never knows which till it happens.

Until the recent *Prince on a White Horse*, *Princess Hynchatti* was Tanith Lee's last pure comedy; it was also her last pure fairy story. But as with her often bittersweet sense of humour, there are whiffs of traditional story throughout her writing, even when the setting is futuristic (*Sabella*) or historical (*Death is King*). Although it's by now tiresomely traditional in the genre to take traditional legends and give them (ho-hum) a new twist, Tanith Lee is, apart from Angela Carter, the only author I can think of with enough real imaginative insight into her material to stir new breath in its dry old papery lungs, without it lurching round the story wheezing its guts out. A minor radio play called *Red Wine* is her only descent into the Unknown-style yarn of the vampire in modern dress adapting to changed circumstances, and even that manages a great deal more than just the inevitable surprise ending. More typical is the approach of the remarkable *Lycanthia*, an extraordinarily subtle werewolf story that draws out the feral eroticism latent in the myth by weaving it into a fugue with the equally "mythical" themes of the consumptive hero, the decaying, solitary mansion, the still snows of winter and the wild forest beyond. Other legends similarly reanimated are ghosts (*Kill the Dead*), vampires (*Sabella*), witchcraft (*Volkhavaar*), the stories of *Sleeping Beauty* (*Thomas*) and the *Odyssey* (*Bitter Gate*). Often the new perspective involves unexpected inside viewpoints, as that of *The Demoness*, *Sabella*, *Penelope* in *Bitter Gate*.

In view of all this, it's little short of outrageous that Tanith Lee is still pigeonholed in most people's minds as a sword-&-sorcery writer. Unless you're prepared to stretch the term beyond recognition to encompass books like *Volkhavaar* and *Death's Master*, her work in that genre is confined to the *Birthgrave* trilogy and *The Storm Lord* (though this has a sequel due): four five-year-old (1983) novels in an output of two dozen books, six BBC scripts, and countless short stories still to be collected. And while these four are rather superior specimens of the type - you only have to compare the *Birthgrave* set with Jane Gaskell's *Atlan* series that inspired it to appreciate the incomparably better writing, storytelling,

and sheer vim of the Lee books - I wouldn't say they were anywhere near her best, far less more characteristic, work. They may be the best selling, but that's another matter. You might as well characterise her as a mainstream SF author because six of her books are straight science fiction; or a children's author, because nine books have been marketed as various shades of juvenile; or even a gothic writer, on the strength of *The Castle of Dark*, *Death is King*, and *Prince on a White Horse*. Wilful misrepresentation can cram the motleyest genius into categories if you just push hard enough.

If there's a unity, in fact, to be found in the amazingly diverse Lee oeuvre, it's not in what she writes but in how she writes it. You couldn't mistake the authorship of that second quotation, unless perhaps the last phrase had been lopped off. Tanith Lee's visual imagination is miraculously fertile, building vivid and haunting images out of a repertory of very spare, stark elements that recur in freshly impressive conjunctions all through her writing: blood, bone, ice, dust, fire, stone, and raw dead colours like black, red, grey, yellow, white. (She seems to have got over an early thing about volcanoes.) Death, in fact, is a pervasive presence in her imagery and her themes - Not the hack-blood-twitch sword-& sorcery death, but the dust-dry grey Death who stalks silently through the world choking up the wells of life. At least four stories feature Death as a leading player, and his odour lingers in many others. And yet these tend, paradoxically, to be the most optimistic stories, with Death cuckolded at last if only for a time.

This, for me, is what makes Tanith Lee such an incomparably rewarding person to read. I can't think of any one else in the field who communicates so infectiously a feeling of being in love with life and in love with writing, though Brian Aldiss and E.R. Eddison come, in their very different ways, somewhere close. Add to this that she's every bit as captivating in real life as on paper, and ConSept:Un/con is proud to welcome SF's only real author as our Guest of Honour.

FOOD, DRINK AND ROOMS

Food and Drink are being provided in the student union building, at student prices. We shall not be requesting the provision of real ale in the bars, for the very good reason that we believe their normal range of six to be quite adequate, especially as only the Gales HSB was priced at over 75p per pint on our last visit.

The provision of food is being subsidised by the convention, so that it should be possible to eat an adequate meal for under £1.25. It won't be Cordon Bleu standard, but in our experience most fans would rather have cheap food during a convention as it leaves more money for the bar.

The room rate of £11.15 per night including VAT and English breakfast is also something to revive fond memories in the hearts of the older fans amongst us.

Parking During the Convention.

If you are planning to travel by car you will be able to park in Car Park 4 (see the map on the back page of this P.R.) but you will need a parking ticket from the University. If you tick the appropriate space on the enclosed ALL-PURPOSE form we will send you one before the convention, but you must be an attending member.

THE PROGRAMME

Here are a few words on some of the things that we have planned for inclusion in the programme. These are by no means exhaustive as negotiations on a number of items are still continuing. We hope that this will give you some idea of the sort of convention that we have planned.

THE FILM PROGRAMME

I was going to write about the great set of films that we had lined up for you at ConSept:Un7con. Unfortunately, had is right, because Harris wouldn't give us three of them. However, we have come up with another set that we think is nearly as good.

The China Syndrome

This film is a documentary on the probability-altering effects of an appearance by Jane Fonda, showing her ability to make sober respectable nuclear power stations melt into a small puddle. Recent experiments in the Soviet Union have failed to duplicate the result. Topical (?).

Condorman

... is the movie they made from Robert Sheckley's 'The Game of X'. Enough said ?

The Curse of the Crimson Altar

A hallucinatory horror fantasy, based on H P Lovecraft's 'Dreams in the Witch House'. It features Boris Karloff's final screen appearance, as an expert on black magic, and has been described as 'disorienting and enigmatic' (in the catalogue!).

Dune

The multi-million dollar blockbuster epic. Overall, well rated by the critics, though a number found it difficult to follow, as it is if anything too faithful to the novel, An unusual criticism in SF, where the opposite is more often true.

The Mouse and his Child

This is based on the story by Russell Hoban of the clockwork mouse and child who long to become self-winding. It has been described as 'A magnificent carton feature, with marvellous music and artwork', and if it's even half as good as the original story it will be well worth seeing. With Peter Ustinov doing some of the voices it promises well.

Time Bandits

Another movie from many of the Monty Python crowd. This is the one which features John Cleese as Robin Hood, seven dwarves and Sir Ralph Richardson as God. A movie you ought to have seen already, but come along anyway.

AUCTION

Don't forget to bring your Auction material well-packed and with a label indicating who you are and where you want the proceeds to go (10% of the proceeds will go to Un7con).

Pathfinder

A quiz game with elements of strategy, topology, and SF general knowledge. We require 18 players for this game, from which six teams of three will be formed for the competition. Individual entrants are welcome - we will assign you to teams. Use the space on the booking form to volunteer, even if you aren't booking a room.

THE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMME

The Alternate Programme will include a number of workshops. Some details are given here; use the space on the booking form to indicate interest, even if you aren't booking a room, as this will give us some idea of numbers.

Role-playing: Myth and Reality

John Dallman & Gary Stratmann

Once again, Unicon is holding a workshop on role-playing. Once again, we are in charge of it. These facts may be connected: given the success of the last workshop, the committee felt that another such well-attended program item could prove useful. Besides, we offered.

As has happened before, we intend to discuss (with you) various aspects of the mega-buck leisure industry, the way its games are conducted, and what is wrong with them. It is clear to us that an SF convention is a far more appropriate place to hold such a discussion than (purely for example) Games Day or Dragonmeet. This is largely due to the fact that those attending an SF convention (except in extreme cases of alcohol consumption) normally have two brain cells to rub together.

We intend to discuss, therefore, such subjects as:

- Can we save role-playing from itself?
- Why is so much commercial material so bad?
- What is role-playing?
- Why do so few people do it anyway?

These and other questions will be answered by our panel of experts (?), and the audience.

While this may give the impression that this is going to be a carefully organised event, we expect a free-form discussion to develop within 12.7532 seconds (approximately). Suggestions for additional topics to discuss will be welcomed (and swiftly pirated). We have already thought of '101 uses for a dead hobbit'.

THE COSTUME WORKSHOP - so you thought SPOCK IN MANACLES was over, did you.....?

I'm Helen McCarthy, and many of you are more used to seeing me without many clothes on and not exactly looking the picture of intellectual credibility. Despite this I've been involved in the study of costume history for many years, and my convention costume activities are a very enjoyable change from the serious stuff of wardrobe accounts and Latin fulminations against the horrors of high fashion. (Yes, there were costume fans back then, and yes, the sercon lot still thought them all deserving of nothing but condemnation, though what they had in mind was more permanent than a scathing comment or two in ANSIBLE.)

Wearing costume is fun, and if you don't think so you'd better not come to this workshop. What I plan to do is talk about the possibilities inherent in very simple materials. Almost no constructional ability is needed, though it would be useful if anyone who would like help in putting a costume together came supplied with safety pins, some cotton tape or braid or a couple of dressing-gown cords, and some fabric - the fewer seams and the bigger pieces the better - and/or old clothes.

Practically speaking, there is very little that cannot be converted into a costume of some sort. Obviously if you have a specific aim in mind - looking macho and barbaric or turning yourself into an alien princess - you should try and suit the materials to the mood. A big furry waistcoat and some weaponry is a help for the former, but you can become a fairly passable Ancient Briton with Rupert Bear's trousers and a soft blue eyepencil, and almost all you need to be a slave girl of Gor is lots of jewellery, a length of chain and very little inhibition.

Joke or pun costumes are also full of potential; I once saw a single black glove transformed into The Left hand of Darkness, a bag of fruit became The Currents of Space, and two friends and I were much appreciated as The Foundation Trilogy. Imagination is as important an ingredient as old curtains.

If anyone wants to talk to me beforehand about costume, or would like advice on what to bring along for the workshop, I can be contacted most evenings after 8 on 01 556 2970.

FANCY DRESS

Now is the time to try out all your wildest ideas for a Fantasy costume, organise a dramatic presentation or try out your sense of humour on our elite audience. You can even enter more than one costume, provided you give us clear indication and have the ability to do a fairly quick change. For the serious costume fan I must point out that entering a costume for this event does not disqualify you from entering the same costume for Worldcon. For the beginner and the less serious entrant, let me encourage you to let your hair down and join in the fun. The more entries the merrier. The costume workshop will help, advise and possibly give you a chance to do all those last minute additions. How about a Convention first... a Fancy Dress where the entire convention enters the contest? It's all up to you - just tick the box on the booking form, and let us have details when you arrive.

Food-Tasting

The Unicon Cooking Competition is now a grand old tradition of one year's standing. The first one, at Camcon, was such a success that we are holding a second sitting at ConSept.

Anyone can enter a dish in the food-tasting, you don't have to enter the competition as well.

Before you start making plans for whole roast oxen, three veg. and the usual trimmings, please remember our limitations.

We don't have access to cooking facilities for a hundred people, so dishes should be prepared beforehand and should not require re-heating.

We may be able to use the fridges in the University accommodation, but don't forget that you have to get your creation to Guildford first. Most of last year's entries were pates, dips, cakes and sweets.

If you are planning to enter the competition, then your dish should be capable of being divided into at least 20 portions.

If you are making something like a pate or a dip which you eat with another food, please bring some biscuits, crudites or whatever. We obviously can't subsidise people's entries.

The competition will follow a similar pattern to last year's. First, the judges will sample each of the dishes and then decide on the prizewinners. The dishes will then be divided up and will be sold at a set price per portion. Entrants will get first choice and will be allowed a number of free portions. Dishes with alcohol/vegetarian will be labelled as such. All money raised will go to a good cause.

THE SCAVENGER HUNT

There will be a Scavenger Hunt at ConSept, offering you the chance to roam around the convention site looking for all manner of weird and wonderful objects, which have been carefully selected by the committee in the hope that they cannot be found within 100 miles of Guildford. The lucky one of you who has access to a personal helicopter, and thus has a chance of finding one or two of these will win a truly magnificent prize, whose exact nature has not yet been decided, but will probably be alcoholic.

BUSINESS MEETING

The main function of the business meeting, in case you had forgotten, is to make sure that there is a Unicon 8. This means someone has to run it. Is there anybody out there planning it? If so, please drop us a line before the convention.

ALICE AT THE CONVENTION: CHAPTER VIII: The Queen's Discussion

"Can you discuss?" shouted the Queen suddenly.

Everyone was silent and looked at Alice, as the question was evidently aimed at her.

"Yes!" shouted Alice, thinking that any quieter answer would not get noticed at all.

"Come on then!" roared the Queen. "The Carroll Discussion is about to begin!" Alice joined the procession, wondering what was going to happen, and whether she shouldn't have stayed in the bar after all. (As it happened, she shouldn't have because the Queen's Executioner went round the bar afterwards executing everyone for not going.) Off they all went to the Alternate Programme.

"Get to your places!" shouted the Queen in a voice of thunder, and everyone began running around in all directions, looking for a chair and preferably even one each.

It was a most peculiar sort of discussion: there was a thing called a 'Speaking Object' (although it looked more like a flamingo than anything else), and only the person holding it was allowed to speak, and in fact was not allowed NOT to speak -- or so it seemed to Alice. Also, whenever the Queen shouted for the Speaking Object, she was given it, but Alice wasn't sure whether this was a rule of the discussion, a piece of court etiquette or a matter of self-preservation. She found out later that it was because one of the duties of the Queen was to change the subject if the conversation got dull. "After all," thought Alice, "what is the use of a Discussion without conversations?" Another of the duties of the Queen was to encourage people to speak: and after the first few executions, sure enough, everyone was much more talkative.

Alice settled back with her Beer to enjoy herself, and she did, at least until she forgot herself and started arguing with the Queen...

For those who haven't got the idea yet, there will be a discussion of the works of Lewis Carroll at about 2 pm on Sunday. The main books to be discussed will be Alice in Wonderland, Alice Through the Looking Glass, and The Hunting of the Snark, all available in Penguin with annotations by Martin Gardner. All welcome, but wear something to protect your neck.

DISCOUNTED RAIL TRAVEL

In common with most conventions these days, we have obtained discount rail travel to Guildford via the Theatre & Concert Rail Club. For anyone unfamiliar with the procedure, you fill in the details on the enclosed form and return the form, money and an sae directly to the Rail Club. Please allow at least seven days for them to process you application.

MEMBERSHIP RATES AND LIST OF CURRENT MEMBERS (31/05/1986)

Current Membership rates are £4.00 Supporting, £8.00 Attending.

However note that the on the door membership rate will be higher.

Key to membership list opposite; A = Attending S = Supporting.

1	Tanith	Lee	A	67	Juliet	Eyeions	A
3	Brian	Ameringen	A	68	Katherine M	Wright	A
4	Peter	Cohen	A	69	G	Millington	A
5	Steve	Davies	A	70	John	Murphy	A
6	Tim	Illingworth	A	71	David	Elworthy	A
7	Alison	McDonald	A	72	Michael	Bernardi	A
8	Caroline	Mullan	A	73	Ruth	LeSuer	A
9	Anne	Page	A	74	Barbara	Conway	A
10	John	Stewart	A	75	Larry	Van Der Putte	A
11	Colin	Fine	A	76	James R	Steel	A
12	Mike	Abbott	A	77	Steve	Bull	A
13	Phillip	Allcock	A	78	Martin	Harlow	A
14	Trevor	Barker	A	79	W.A.	McCabe	A
15	John	Botham	A	80	Rob	Meades	S
16	Mike	Christie	A	81	John	Dodds	S
17	Mike	Cule	A	82	Robin	Goswell	A
18	John	Dallman	A	83	Phil	Nansen	A
19	Mike	Damesick	A	84	Chuck	Connor	S
20	Zoe	Deterding	A	85	Ian	Sorenson	S
21	Paul	Dormer	A	86	Tim	Adye	A
22	Richard C.	Edwards	A	87	Jon D.	Axtell	A
23	Gwen	Funnell	A	88	Andy	Barkham	A
24	Julian	Headlong	A	89	Helen	Bernardi	A
25	R.	Meehan	A	90	Ben	Brown	A
26	Roger	Robinson	A	91	Robert	Burrage	A
27	Michael	Sandy	A	92	Rafe	Culpin	A
28	Joyce E.	Slater	A	93	Iain	Dickson	S
29	Kenneth F.	Slater	A	94	Martin	Dickson	A
30	Mike	Stone	A	95	Pete	Gilligan	A
31	Kathy	Westhead	A	96	Marla	Hamilton	A
32	Mike	Westhead	A	97	Teresa	Hehir	A
33	Kate	Solomon	S	98	Marina	Holroyd	A
34	Malcolm	Davies	S	99	Morag	Kerr	A
35	Dave	Ellis	S	100	Barbara	Kitson	A
36	Joy	Hibbert	A	101	Steve	Linton	A
37	Dave	Rowley	A	102	W.P.	Longley	A
38	Pompino	The Kregoyne	A	103	Patricia	MacLennan	S
39	Jan	Lake	A	104	Debby	Moir	A
40	Ken	Lake	A	105	Mike	Moir	A
41	J.W.	Lemming	A	106	Andrew	Norcross	A
42	Bernard	Peek	A	107	Dai	Price	S
43	Mike	Scott	A	108	John	Richards	A
44	Phil	Spencer	A	109	Steve	Rothman	A
45	Alex	Stewart	A	110	D.M.	Sherwood	S
46	Neil	Taylor	S	111		Tibs	S
47	Simon	Beresford	A	112	Dave	Turtle	S
48	Bernie	Evans	S	113	Pete	Tyers	S
49	Susan	Francis	A	114	Richard	Vine	S
50	Bruce J. H.	MacDonald	A	115	John	Wilkes	S
51	Rory O.	McLean	A	116	Tim	Broadribb	A
52	Mark	Meenan	S	117	Ruth	Bygrave	A
53	Nick	Mills	S	118	Pete	Cox	A
54	Gytha	North	S	119	Roger	Dearnaley	A
55	Roger	Perkins	A	120	Mike	Gould	A
56	Marcus	Rowland	A	121	Carol Ann	Green	A
57	Peter J. R.	Smith	A	122	Rhodri	James	A
58	Robert	Sneddon	A	123	Jane	Killick	A
59	Tom	Taylor	S	124	Hugh	Mascetti	A
60	Peter	Wareham	A	125	Kari	Maud	A
61	John	Bark	S	126	Helen	McCarthy	A
62	Mike	Cheater	A	127	Alan	Raphaeline	A
63	Phil	Plumbly	A	128	N.R.	Tringham	A
64	Dov	Rigal	A	129	Jenny	Watson	A
65	David	Strong	S	130	David	Willis	A
66	Paul	Winship	S	151	Andy	Robertson	A

Campus Map

