

Thanks to the Magician (Chris O'Shea II) for his very comprehensive convention listing. If anyone wants details of cons not mentioned, especially media cons, come and ask me, as they are almost certainly on Chris' list.

October 21 - 23 DECAID, Hatfield Poly 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary con with women GoHs Gwyneth Jones, Lorna Mitchell and others. Many of their old GoHs expected to turn up as well. £6 attending, £1 supporting, details from Jes Hildred, Decaid, PSIFA c/o Students Union, Hatfield Poly, Hatfield Herts. Cheques payable to "H.P.S.U", all profits to charity. PSIFA cons are always very cheap, with student bar prices and crash space available, but enthusiasm varies from year to year, large OUSFG party going.

November 4 - 6 NOVACON 18, Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. GoH Garry Kilworth. £10 attending to Bernie Evans, 7 Grove Ave, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 7UY. This is the second largest con after the Eastercon, OUSFG party going to sleep on Jason's floor.

February 3 - 5 1989 CONTABILE, Chequers Hotel, Newbury. £12 attending, £5 supporting to CONTABILE, 7A Mill Rd. Cambridge CB1 2AB. Hotel £20 per night with breakfast. This is Britain's first filk singing convention, Matt is the OUSFG expert on filking, but not even he is sure he can face a weekend of warbling.

March 24 - 27 CONTRIVANCE, Hotel de France, St Helier, Jersey. GoHs Anne McCaffrey, M John Harrison (see him at OUSFG first!). £18 attending, £9 supporting to Contrivance, 63 Drake Rd, Chessington Surrey KT9 1LQ. The traditionally strong OUSFG and ex-OUSFG presence at the Eastercon may be reduced by the expense of travel there, but the lemmings will still go, if for no other reason than to push the OUSFG book.

May 26 - 29 MEXICON III, Albany Hotel, Nottingham. Fannish relaxacon with strong author attendance. Hotel £20 per night with breakfast/lunch voucher. £15 attending to Mexican III c/o Greg Pickersgill, 7A Laurence Road, South Ealing, London W5 4XJ. The con I would really want to go to, but finals loom....

June 16 - 18 ICONOCLASM Griffen Hotel, Leeds (a LUCON II). GoH Diane Duane and Peter Morwood. £9 attending to Iconoclasm c/o Penny Glover, 16 Aviary Place, Armley, Leeds LS12 2NP. This really is slap bang in the middle of finals!

August 11 - 13 ish NICON, UNICON 10, Queen's University Belfast. £6 attending, rooms £6 normal, £3 student, GoH Terry Pratchett, Iain Banks, James White. No address as yet. Some confusion about the details of this, but there will be a strong OUSFG presence, we've got to push the Spawn of Conine bid!

31 August - 4 September NOREASCON, the Worldcon in Boston

April 13 - 16 1990 EASTCON, the Eastercon in Birmingham

August 23 - 27 CONFICTION, the Worldcon in the Hague, Netherlands

July, Spawn of Conine/Uniconze, whoever wins the Unicon bid.

TO SAIL BEYOND THE SUNSET - Robert A. Heinlein

(Simon McLeish)

Back to the dross. His last (mercifully) effort to draw together all he has ever written. Concerns Maureen, mother of Lazarus Long, and her sexual encounters over several thousand years. These are, for reasons perhaps best known to RAH, mainly of an incestuous nature. If Heinlein was going to continue writing like this, perhaps it is a good thing he died...

(Melanie Dymond)

I found it mildly diverting in places, but Simon is right - there is more incest than anyone is ever likely to want to hear about, and it is even portrayed as "normal" in places. Not one of Heinlein's better efforts, and from me that says quite a lot.

John Bray - "Most fish you see are flat on their backs with their legs in the

# DEAD DOG WITH MAGGOTS+FLIES

## NEWSLETTER OF MICHAELMAS 1988 Pt1

# OUSFG

## OXFORD UNIVERSITY SPECULATIVE FICTION GROUP.

TITLES BY *Robot*  
*JOHN BRAY*

Library Meetings - Sundays at 8.15, St Johns

GAZE in wonder at 2000 books, DELVE into the stacks for Space Sex, BOO El Ron Hubbard, CHEER as a precariously stacked bookcase squashes an unfortunate roleplayer who forgot his class 3 helmet. The OUSFG library will be fermenting this year under the capable eye of Adrian Cox (St Johns) in 22 Museum Road, room 6 (Ring bell and GURK! for admission). LIBRARY RULES?

Library meetings every Sunday, 8.15 to 8.45, when its down to St John's Frestwich room via the bar, for witty banter over a tasteful Guinness Float (I'm holding you to that Paul - typist), on the subject of how many people can be crammed into the library when OUSFG returns om masse at 11 O'clock for biscuits and coffee in those plastic mugs you love to hate.

Discussion Meetings - Wednesdays at 8.15, Somerville

Come LISTEN to a short talk, BARRACK from the floor, SNEER at the speakers opinions and QUIVER in the backlash. This year in Penny Heal's room (Penrose 14 in Somerville), with yet cheaper coffee and biscuits.

1st week "Ha! They called me mad" - the image of the scientist in SF - Mo  
2nd week And they were right! - Matt Bishop  
3rd week A young penguins journey to Viriconium - Ivan  
4th week Keep the penguins burning - All about Sladek, and then some - Adrian

Video meetings - Mondays of even weeks, almost anywhere

Current, classic and crap - videos to please everyone, organised by Matt Bishop, the man with the colour clash ties

M John Harrison - later this term

This writer famous for rock-climbing in Peckham, will be along about 5th week to talk about his fantasy works, in particular his Viriconium series.

Michael Moorcock - later this term-ish

Hopefully he will be along to a joint meeting with the William Morris society later this term, but details still have to be finalised.

Sfinx

'The magazine of speculative fiction in Oxford', come try out your talents on our editors, Paul's Cray and Marrow in St Annes, and Mark Davies in Trinity. We hope to have a writers workshop later this term.

Conventions

Come to a SF convention with our hardened bank of floor-sleepers, more details elsewhere, but groups going to Decaid and Novacon this term.

Plug - Wychwood Warriors, Dark Age Battles, steel weapons, Feasting and drinking. Public Shows. Battle practice 2.30 Sundays, New College Gardens

Forbidden Planet 1 & 2 now moved to 71 New Oxford Street. London WC1A 1DG



And for the very latest hip-hop news on the publishing scene, we hand you over to our resident reviewer and crap-fancier, recently returned from the Canada with dross like you've never seen.

OUT OF PHAZE and VALE OF THE VOLE - Piers Anthony

(Simon McLeish)

These are both continuations of some of Anthony's most popular series; they are, respectively, the fourth in the Split Infinity trilogy and the tenth in the Xanth series. In both cases, they are the worst books in the series so far. Out of Phaze is especially bad - mainly because at the end of the Split Infinity trilogy every possible loose end was cleared up and even the communication between the two worlds that made the trilogy possible was made unusable. So there is nothing for Anthony to start on (when has this ever stopped him before? I hear you cry - but it is particularly bad in this case as the first three books were a lot better). It probably wouldn't surprise anybody to discover that Vale of the Vole has exactly the same plot as the other nine books (young man sets out to prove manhood, meets various non-humans, saves Xanth, marries nice girl) and is, in fact, exactly the same as the others but with the names changed (bit like Tubb, really...). You may have thought that Piers Anthony could not get any worse, but these books make it seem like we have hardly yet plumbed the depths.

THE PLAYER OF GAMES - Iain Banks

(Simon McLeish)

This was actually quite good, considering Phlebas. Gurgeh is the greatest player of games in the Culture, and becomes a little bored with the lack of competition. Seeking a new challenge, he travels to the Empire of Azad, where they play a game so complex that the winner of the annual tournament is made Emperor as the best man in the region. He wins his way up to the highest levels before the Azadian establishment start trying to make it impossible for him to win. Well written, with marvellous names for the spaceships (Ivan's favourite bit) and an unexpected twist. Well worth reading.

IN ALIEN FLESH - Gregory Benford

(Simon McLeish)

This was my favourite of all these books; a very imaginative collection of short stories (plus one poem). The best stories, apart from the title story, were "Time Shards", "Me Days", "Doing Lennon" and "Of Spacetime and the River". This last is about aliens who restore Egypt to a facsimile of its former self with themselves as living versions of the gods. Altogether a most fascinating collection.

THE SKYLORDS - John Brosnan

(Simon McLeish)

This is a really bad novel, from someone described by N. Tringham as "at best a competent hack" and in a reply by I. Towlson as "an incompetent hack". Evidence for this latter opinion was a short reading from the end of the book. Right-wing and sexist (or possibly extremely feminist, as Neal pointed out), it is quite exciting in terms of action, but without plot or characters.

DEMON LORD OF KARANDA - David Eddings

(Simon McLeish)

This is the third of the Malloreon, of which the second has just been released in paperback (would you pay 6.95 for it? I wouldn't - ed.). It is also the best so far, in both the Belgariad and the Malloreon, in that it sees at last some character development. Even if I wasn't such a great fan of Eddings, I would have liked this (except that to understand anything about what's going on, you need to read at least the other books in the Malloreon). One of the more unusual aspects of the Malloreon is that a lot of the people on the bad side in the Belgariad turn out to be quite nice people, although still obliged not to help Garion and his friends.

METROPHAGE - Richard Kadrey

(Simon McLeish)

This was again not a bad read. N. Tringham claims that I missed the point of the book when I found it spoiled by the lack of original plot; apparently cyberpunk is basically about doing without plot at all. In this case, Kadrey succeeds really well; there is a lot of action, the scenes of the decadent LA are brilliantly described. It is basically the story of Jonny, the stock cyberpunk heroic character (mild-mannered junkie/dealer caught up in events too important for him to understand) and his dealings with the various powerful factions in the futuristic city.

BARE FACED MESSIAH: The True Story of L.Ron Hubbard - Russell Miller

(Paul Cray)

Recently published in paperback.

This biography of Hubbard, which the Scientologists attempted to suppress in the courts, gives the real and quite extraordinary details of the life of a self-made multi-millionaire, the inventor of Dianetics ("The Modern Science of Mental Health") and the founder of the Church of Scientology.

In short, Hubbard was the son of a Navy man; he travelled to Asia briefly in his youth, was thrown out of university for low grades and scratched a living as a pulp writer, aided by his talent for constructing fabulous lies about himself. After less than exemplary service in the Navy during World War II (no secret service missions) he was briefly involved in Black Magic before devising Dianetics, a sort of do-it-yourself psychoanalysis, which had a brief but intense vogue in 1950, and eventually evolved, via several law suits, into the Church of Scientology in the mid-Fifties. Hubbard spent something like 30 years raking in millions of dollars, much of the time in seclusion, often aboard one of a fleet of yachts. All this time until his death, Hubbard retained a charismatic hold over the vast majority of ardent believers in Scientology, who considered him a great genius.

Miller's book is successful in putting the meat on Hubbard's life story, in a lively, highly readable journalistic style. My main criticism is one I have with many biographies - the writer does not get under the skin of his subject, reducing the book to little more than a catalogue of events. Here, Miller fails to really explain the attraction that so many have felt to Hubbard, or give an adequate explanation for his genuine charisma, the secret of Scientology's success.

#### Wincon Report

John Bray

Whether its a reaction from the adrenaline high of Conine, or just a bit of "Our's is better", I didn't enjoy Wincon as much as I anticipated. After a most impressive series of PR's, the programme book though flash was small, and the programme at first seemed thin. But as the weekend wore on, and I gloated over my fellow floor-sleepers from the heights of my air-bed (wonderful wooshing noises and scrupes as I turned over), the con improved. The guests, Michael de Larabetti of Boribles fame, and Michael Tilley of the Amtrak Wars, hardly encouraged visits to the main programme, but the bar was full, and I needed it when Matt and co announced the follow-up to Conine, 'Spawn of Conine' or Sponine for short, I ask you.

In fact most of the weekend was taken up in plugging our bid for the 1990 Unicon against Uniconze (New Hall Cambridge again, yawn), although we adopted gentlemanly tactics, not revealing Graham Taylor's secret Gor obsession...

The programme improved, Geoff Ryman's surprise talk was on the making on the Wizard of Oz, and 'co-operative games' were nothing of the sort, the main aim being to embarrass people, and make the overweight ones jump up and down like jackrabbits. Rumours abounded about the disappearance of Patrick Tilley, only at the winding up was his leaving note found, attached to a shoelace above his room mirror - "Have found a small time warp below mirror, am lowering myself down now..." The censorship debate had a valiant defence from a vicar against overwhelming audience opinion, NICON winning the 1989 bid nem-con.

400 BILLION STARS - Paul MacAulay

(Simon McLeish)

This is quite a competent first novel. A variation on the old first contact theme. An unmanned probe is inexplicably destroyed on entering a solar system; the manned follow-up is similarly dealt with. Human beings end up fighting a war with aliens they have never even seen; all ships in any danger of capture self-destruct. Possibly connected with this is a planet declared by astronomers to be cosmologically impossible. It is full of life-forms, some of which contain artificially produced DNA, others of which have been snatched from other planets, including Earth. Dorothy Yoshida is an empath who is sent to investigate this planet and its dominant creatures, who are about of the intelligence of chimps. On her descent to the surface, she receives a flash of a massive intelligence, but no-one takes her seriously until it's too late...



Banks' latest novel is set several hundred years on in the universe of *Consider Phlebas*, and falls somewhere between what that novel was aiming for and what it actually delivered. *The Player Of Games* is a space opera, and behaves like one--but it is an intelligent space opera, and on the whole its intelligence shows through. It's no *Wasp Factory*, but it is at least worth reading. This alone is enough to make me look forward to the third novel in the set ("it won't be a trilogy," Banks has said, "perish the thought.")--if he keeps getting better at this rate it should really be something. However, sticking to the novel at hand...

The plot is hardly a knockout: Jernau Gurgeh, the Culture's greatest games-player, can usually beat anyone at anything, and is getting pretty bored of doing so. He asks the Contact organisation if there are any interesting alien games he could try, and under threat of blackmail is persuaded to try Azad, a phenomenally complicated game which lies at the root of the empire of the same name. Azad is so complicated, you see, that a great player must be able to cope with so much that he can be trusted with positions of responsibility in the Empire--right up to the position of Emperor itself. You can work out the rest for yourself.

What, then, are the book's redeeming features? Well, it's not particularly well-written or tightly plotted or structured, so cross off three of Banks' greatest strengths. Characterisation is OK, though I found it vaguely worrying that the drones had more personality than the people (and then no more than was necessary). The description of the Empire of Azad is a fairly non-nice Banks rant against privilege and Margaret Thatcher and other such un-socialist naughtiness--quite well done, even if he's already approached the subject twice already... I was pleasantly surprised by the inventiveness of the book, though, given that Banks isn't really a genre writer and especially that *Consider Phlebas* was so stubbornly uninventive. The planet of fire where the climax of the novel takes place is an extremely neat idea (and one that a Hal Clement or Brian Stableford would have spent a whole novel on, just so that they could have the fun of working out all the ecological details, whereas Banks just uses it as background, leaving the reader intrigued by rather than tired of it). The spaceship names are also the best in the business: *Of Course I Still Love You*, *Just Read The Instructions*, *So Much For Subtlety*, *Unfortunate Conflict Of Evidence*... this is the sort of civilisation I could go for...

What really saves *The Player Of Games* from going the same way as its predecessor is its thematic depth. Such as it is. It's not particularly complex or particularly deep, but there is at least more to it than meets the eye. Games permeate the novel at every level: the author plays a teasing game with the reader (and loses, I'm afraid); the plot of the novel is itself an account of a game; the game of Azad is supposed to be based on real life (or vice versa). If Gurgeh can master Azad, why can't he master life? Maybe it's that life cheats, a recurring theme is the various games going on here...

Probably the best space opera you'll see this year, for what it's worth: certainly worth reading, especially for those who like intelligence without gross literary pretension. If the paperback's not too expensive, I may even buy a copy.

Then again, without the pretensions, how can it possibly be worth it?

PIONEERS - Philip Mann

(Simon McLeish)

To contrast with the MacAulay, a not very good novel. This is again a reworking of a familiar theme, here genetic engineering (also important in *Skylords*). The author of "Masters of Paxwax" has produced a book which might have seemed original about fifteen years ago, but today there are far better and more original books on the subject.

ANNALS OF THE HEECHEE - Frederik Pohl

(Simon McLeish)

The sequel to the trilogy of *Gateway*, *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon* and *Heechee Rendezvous*. The first was good, the others readable, and this is merely cute. It may clear up all the loose ends of *Heechee Rendezvous*, but it then proceeds to produce several of its own, which seem more attributable to bad plotting than an attempt (God forbid!) to produce material for a fifth book. The best things about the book are the three child characters, but the computer stored characters seem one-dimensional in comparison with their living versions in the other books, and the introduction of God as a machine stored personality (a la Gibson) is a definite mistake. It definitely seems to me time that Pohl went on to something new!

Let me begin by making my position clear. I disliked *Blood Music*. I found *Eon* unreadable, even unskimmable. I never had all that much time for Arthur C Clarke, and Bear's feeble imitations always left me utterly cold. So I was not reading this book for fun.

Oh, it was interesting in its own way--I did want to see how he would destroy the Earth this time--but since the plot was telegraphed several novels ahead there wasn't really that much to keep me going. As with *Blood Music*, the end of life on Earth as we know it left me less with tears in my eyes than with a feeling of "Oh good, only the epilogue to go now."

The plot reads like Langford and Grant's *Earthdoom*: first one of the Jovian moons vanishes, then an alien beastie appears in (where else?) California and says "Oh woe to the gods, woe to Man, Earth is finished, foom, blap", then alien robots appear in Australia and start teaching us backward humans their super-duper physics ("Our scientists are baffled by the equations they have given us, sir." Oh, come on.), then there are rumours of yet more ETs in Outer Mongolia preaching the socialist millennium, then Mars and Venus get big hunks of ice shot at them, then the asteroid belt goes foom, then a couple of Very Heavy Objects (initially thought to be black holes, later discovered (by a sf writer) to be "bullets" of neutronium and anti-neutronium) get inside the Earth and prepare to collide at the core, then people start getting possessed by telepathic metal spiders, then it becomes apparent that the baddies have also seeded all the ocean trenches with enormous H-bombs (getting the hydrogen from (can you guess?) sea-water and in the process upping the atmosphere's oxygen content to the point where all the planet's major cities, forests etc go up in smoke as soon as someone lights a match) so as to "unzip" the Earth's crust, so that when the bullets finally collide and annihilate each other the planet will have no difficulty being blown into zillions of small pieces. You will be glad to know, however, that some humans are saved by the telepathic spiders, set up a colony on Mars and go out into the galaxy looking for the baddies to exact terrible revenge.

Now look, people, this really is a bit much. Why, one might ask, do the baddies spend ages "softening up" the people of Earth when they are going to blow it to bits anyway? Why do they do so in such a way that there is a "fuse" of several months during which the human race can escape to come after them? Why do they not take out Mars and Venus as well? What makes humanity think they can take on the baddies, given that they spend the first half of the book repeating the standard "we are to them what ants are to us" idea? In short, why do the baddies not quietly zap their neutronium/anti-neutronium bullets into the centre of the Earth on page one, watch the planet go bang on page two, and come in to collect the debris on page three in complete safety? I mean, how does a species that stupid develop that level of technology for a start?

Well, of course, we all know the answer to that one. Actually, it's not just the money: Bear discovered ages ago that pontification sells, and can moreover be passed off as intelligence and idea content to the average hard sf fan. So *The Forge Of God* jumbles political manoeuvring, apocalyptic cults, Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, and lots and lots of seriously feeble characterisation. There is some sort of idea under there about how people react to impending, inevitable doom (denial, aggression, withdrawal, acceptance) but it's not well handled and the bit about Harrydoom, which I assume is supposed to parallel *Earthdoom*, in fact contradicts it, thus screwing up Bear's message pretty thoroughly.

What is the purpose of this book? Why did he bother? Surely not for any artistic reason: *The Forge Of God* is contrived, ill-thought out, completely void of theme or character, clumsily written, derivative, with dubious and unoriginal science--and even forgiving all these faults it does no more than rehash *Blood Music* and *Eon*'s vague "I'm going to write about the end of the world with a bit of transcendence thrown in at the end" idea (it doesn't deserve to be dignified by saying it explores ideas about the end of the world and transcendence--because frankly it doesn't explore them). In fact it is even weaker than these two, lacking the former's (attempt at an) emotive vision of a next stage achieved through total unity (which was ripped off *Childhood's End* anyway) and the latter's hard sf idea and image content.

Paul Cray's felicitous phrase seems ideally suited to *The Forge Of God*: "turgidly flatulent quasi-self-plagiarism" it precisely what it is, and since Bear has never been worth plagiarising anyway, I can think of no more damning comment.

If I could, of course, you may be assured I would use it.

Robert Rankin: *The Brentford Trilogy*

IVAN

613 pages (why couldn't he have made it 666?) of desperate battle against ancient forces of evil which threaten the end of Brentford as we know it... Quiver in fear as the regulars at the Flying Swan reluctantly fight off the reincarnation of Alexander Borgia and his magic beans in *The Antipope*... Thrill as they overcome the horrors of invasion from Ceres and the Captain Laser Alien Attack Machine videogame with the assistance of Edgar Allan Poe and the teleported Great Pyramid (*The Brentford Triangle*)... And gasp with unending horror as even Sherlock Holmes, brought back from cryonic suspension inside the hollow Earth, is unable to defeat the hideous, faceless menace of the computerised society so prophetically envisioned in *East Of Ealing*...

Merciless piss-taking (of *The Omen* and its ilk, Erich von Daniken, the ley-liners and almost anyone or anything of an even vaguely occult persuasion--as well as computer programmers, who don't really count) combines with an almost Douglas Adams-ish style--and even a certain satirical edge in the third novel--to make this a steal at £4.99.

Tommy Wareing - "The edges go 'pheet' and the middle goes 'flot'"



The committee for Michaelmas '88 are:-

Mo Holkar - 3rd year Hertford physicist, President and Pontiff. Address: 63, Aston St., phone 242278. Responsibilities - none. Available at all times to answer any queries about personal matters.

John Bray - 3rd year Exeter physicist, Secretary. Address: Exeter, Staircase 12, Room 8. Responsibilities - everything, esp. letter writing (CUSFS visits, speaker meetings, Daily Info entries etc. etc.). The man who does the work. Also joint newsletter editor and Spawn of Conine committee member.

Penny Heal - 2nd year Somerville, Maths/Philosophy, Treasurer and Membership Secretary. Address: Somerville, Penrose 14. Responsibilities - the woman with the money, so all membership or financial concerns (eg. overdrafts) are Penny's concern. Has penguin fetish. Official Spawn of Conine committee concubine.

Adrian Cox - 2nd year St. John's, Engineering & Computer Science, Librarian. Address: OUSFG library c/o St. John's, 22 Museum Road rm. 6. The man with the books, all library problems. Spawn of Conine committee member (surprise, surprise). Blame him for the Red Mountain coffee used at library meetings.

Matt Bishop - 2nd year Jesus mathematician & member without portfolio. Address: 98, Hurst St. Responsibilities - video rep, bad dress sense. Also an android, and the Messiah (can down a pint of snakebite in one - proof positive). Also - guess what? - Spawn of Conine committee member.

Jane McCarthy - 2nd year St. Hilda's classicist - member without portfolio. Address: c/o St. Hilda's. Responsibilities - merchandise and charity rep. The woman with the mugs. Buy one, or she'll bite your kneecaps off! 2 pounds each.

Paul (Michael) Cray - 3rd year St. Anne's physicist, joint newsletter editor and Sfinx editor. Address - St. Anne's, 9 Bevington Road Rm. 2. Responsibilities - the weight of the world lies heavy on his shoulders. But please send him Sfinx contributions. Also a Spawn of Conine committee member. Likes to think he knows about SF, but unfortunately doesn't.

Melanie Dymond - 3rd year Pembroke, Maths and Computation. Joint newsletter editor (the one who does most of the typing) and part-time committee member. Has never recovered from gross public humiliation administered at Conine. Spends time whimpering in corners. A typical OUSFG member. (Are you sure about this? - confused typist)

after PMC (no responsibility)  
for character descriptions

WYRMS - Orson Scott Card

(Paul Marrow)

Without reading the book, one might think that OSC's latest novel is a venture into the field of fantasy. Ignoring hints in the back cover blurb, I was surprised to find that it is actually set in the same universe as "Ender's Game" and "Speaker For The Dead". (Are you sure, Paul? - ed.) Once again Greek civilisation exerts a great influence on the social system, and once again the hero(ine) is faced with a life-or-death situation; the life of humanity versus the death of an alien race. Naturally the problem is resolved (almost) without such messy solutions as genocide. The biological conundrums that Card sets us all become clear in the end, and almost obvious.

If this makes it sound like a recycled "Speaker For The Dead", think again. In many ways "Wyrms" improves on Card's previous masterpiece. Instead of a quaint, reactionary outpost of human civilisation in the midst of a vast unexplored alien landscape, human society spans the planet. Instead of one alien race, we are given four (or five). The central character is not haunted by deeds performed many centuries ago, but instead has to fight to control her own will (literally). In short, OSC has produced a drama which surpasses even SFTD. Well worth a read(I did so, last night, in one sitting; it is that good!)

Jason Stevens - "Fellatio was just something I tacked on at the end"

All those of you who were here last term must surely have heard of Conine. Those of you who weren't here missed a chance to see what happens if you let Ivan and Maria run an SF convention. Three days of programming with a lack of almost any apparent organisation at all is what happens. Amazingly, it worked, and even made a profit (in fact the only reason I bothered to write this at all was John's threat to publish the accounts if I didn't).

The first night (Friday August 5th, not that it matters much) has been largely blotted out of my memory. I remember an opening ceremony in which Dave Lally, one of the guests of honour, started out as a woman and ended up as a man in a silly hat. I remember the OUSFG and ICSF teams getting wiped out by the "professional" team at charades. Most of all I remember a lot of people coming round to my house and getting blotto on vodka. Adrian and Jason do not remember this very well. Adrian agreed to take his trousers off in the name of art. Jason woke up on a pavement after dawn the next morning.

Things calmed down a little on Saturday. There was serious programming, including lots of "Prisoner" items from Mr Lally, and Mel's interview with Terry Pratchett, our other GoH. There were silly games as well, of course. In the evening were Conine's two most original events, the one carefully timed to obliterate memory of the other. First - Fundament!. What else need I say? If you must make the Foundation trilogy into a musical, you must also be prepared to see Jason climbing into bed with Colin, watch Tom Yates of ICSF wearing a false nose and singing a Wagnerian death aria, and so on. "And so on" includes Ivan, in a fetching green dress, sellotaping Adrian (sans trousers) to a table, and getting out his whip; an image which I am unfortunately going to have to live with for the rest of my life.

The Cocktails Workshop was a good opportunity to lose all memory of Fundament. Pretty and deadly cocktails such as Grendels and White Lightnings circulated, followed swiftly by undrinkable Swamp Things and C5s. See Marina for recipes. And what happens when SF fans get drunk? Well, if you're Tommy you end up running away from the police. Normal people (!) end up filking (science-fictional folksinging, should you be interested) until the early hours in Hugh Mascetti's kitchen. Nothing strange about us, guv, honest.

Sunday brought about such horrors as KAOS in the park, the Massage Workshop (more fun than you can stand... bring a camera and get lots of photos of people grinning uncontrollably...) and Neal Tringham reading excerpts from "A Woman In Space". The less said about this, the better. The committee then collapsed in a small heap.

Conine was brought to you by Ivan Towlson, Maria Hamilton, Dave Bate, John Bray, and Paul Cray.

More worryingly, Conine II - also known as Spawn Of Conine - will be brought to you, if we win the bid for Unicon 11, by Ivan Towlson, Matt Bishop, Adrian Cox, Penny Heal, John Bray and Paul Cray. Plus probably a few others. Presupporting memberships available now! Only £1! No, I'm not advertising. No, John, please. Not the accounts. No. NO! Aargh....

James P Blaylock: *Homunculus*

IVAN

Tim Powers comes home to roost! Yes, here we are in the glorious 1870s: a place where mad hunchbacks raise up zombies in London alleyways, where self-proclaimed messiahs get the skulls of their dead mothers to vouch for them, where dashing renegade scientists build spaceships in silos near Harrogate, where nemesis comes in a chimney-pipe hat... well, I'm sure you get the idea.

*Homunculus* doesn't have the pure fun value of Powers' *The Anubis Gates*, but it does have the amiably deranged invention and warped period flavour. I know there was a plot in there, something to do with two (or were there three? I forget) identical locked boxes, one of which contained an absolutely enormously humongous whopper of a diamond and the other a homunculus with the secret of eternal life, but the details appear to have slipped my mind somehow... Anyway, it's all good traditional adventure sf fun, and besides a book which prominently features a character called "Captain Powers" can't be all bad, can it?

Adrian Cox - "It's been a bad week for armpits"