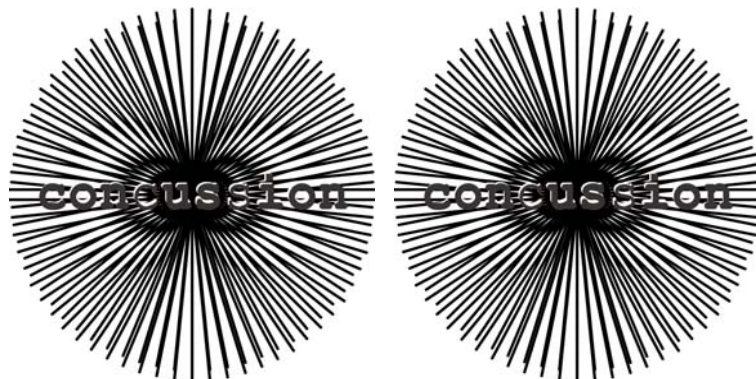
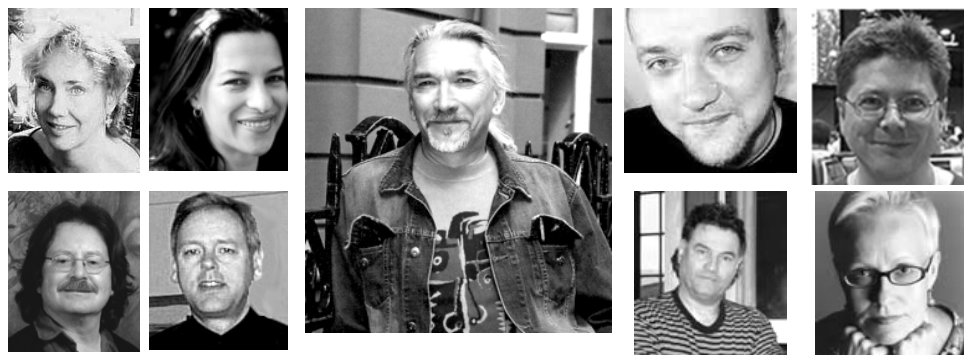


Concussion

14-17 April 2006
Moat House Hotel, Glasgow



PR2 - Easter 2005



**Guests of Honour M. John Harrison, Elizabeth Hand,
Justina Robson, Brian Froud and Ian Sorensen**

plus Special Guests

Dan Abnett, Marc Gascoigne, Mat Irvine and Johanna Sinisalo

Concussion

Concussion is the 57th Annual British National Science Fiction Convention.
It will be held on April 14-17 2006 at the Moat House Hotel, Glasgow.

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Attending	£40	£45
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Concessions	£30	£22.50
Junior (12-18)	£15	£15
Child (5-11)	£5	£5
Infant (0-4)	free	free

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"Four Go Mad in Samarkand" © Liz Williams 2005.

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The Eastercon Committee On Which The Sun Never Sets

- a chair's welcome by Farah Mendlesohn

It's February, and the snow is thick on the ground. I am living in a part of the world where they measure snow in feet, and meteorology is an obsession. My committee is (mostly) on the other side of the world and a four hour time differential away.

I remind myself: in the nineteenth century people used to run governments from these distances using horse and cart communications and the occasional messenger pigeon. We have email. We have electronic communications. We have a LiveJournal.

But it's not all electronic. At the end of last year we experimented with parallel and serial meetings, in Reading, in London and in Glasgow. This is the solution to the kind of long distance team we have constructed. New to the team (and very welcome) are Andrew J. Wilson, Jamie Scott and Iain Emsley, a group of three who bring a range of skills in journalism, science and the publishing industry into the team. Andrew is a freelance writer and editor, and reviews SF and fantasy for *The Scotsman*. He has been attending cons since Albacon in 1978. Jamie is based in Glasgow, and divides his time between the university SF Society and the solid state physics department. Iain is a SF critic and bookseller; see his reviews later in this issue. Within the team, Simon Bradshaw is now head of programme, and in the future I will be processing memberships.

Since last year we have checked out the venue which is superb. The staff are delightful, the hotel has a great place for a bookroom, open to the light but with inner and outer door also secure, and a stage for the Masquerade. Disabled access is the best we've seen as there is an alternative ramp route if for some reason the elevators are over crowded. Unison's Disabled caucus were meeting while we were there and we now have good inside information on mobility issues. There will be a con bar which has access to the outside and the hotel bar in the main concourse is open 23 hours and 55 minutes. Apparently they have to close for five minutes each night while the computer switches over.

PR2 Contents

Information	2	Hotel News	11
Chair's Welcome	3	Cicisbeo by M. John Harrison	12
Brian Froud	4	Four Go Mad in Samarkand	20
Elizabeth Hand	5	Interview with Tech	22
Communications	6	List of Members	23
Book Reviews	9	Merchandise	24
Glasgow	10	Mat Irvine	24



The Faeries' Best Friend

- Judi Hodgkin on the work of Brian Froud

When I was a lot younger than I am now, my brother-in-law-to-be introduced me to puppetry. In order to get my sister into dark places, he had to take along a chaperone and theatres and cinemas were distracting enough that I didn't notice (or care) what happened in the back row.

We started out on the small stuff: the local puppetry guild, working through *Sesame Street* and *The Muppets* until he finally revealed the good stuff – *The Dark Crystal* – and I was in love.

I rediscovered *Labyrinth*. Later on, I found *Jim Henson's Storyteller* series. I still hadn't made the connection between Brian and Wendy Froud and these wonderful creatures that were being created on the screen in front of me. In fact, I didn't make the connection until the re-release of *The World of The Dark Crystal*.

Someone had given me *Lady Cottington's Book of Pressed Fairies* a few years before and again, I had fallen in love. But it was so well put together that I didn't notice it was the same people involved in its construction.

One day a lightbulb finally went off in my head; I had a massive spending spree and bought everything I could afford that had the name Brian Froud on it.

Of all the wonderful GOH's we've asked to Concussion, Brian was the one I held out for. If we could a) contact him and b) get him to agree to be a GOH, I would be in seventh heaven. When the email came through that he had accepted, I danced around the office until Zandy came through to find out what was going on.

Brian's faeries are beautiful. His goblins are suitably nasty. I have *The Faeries Oracle* and will often sit flicking through the cards as each one is a miniature piece of artwork (and I can never hope to afford an original Brian Froud). My favourites at the moment are the six Singers cards, they are calming and inspirational. However, I expect that next time I look through the pack I will change my mind. Himself is starting to hold a certain attraction...

Even in the books that Brian has written himself, I tend to flick over the words and admire the artwork before going back to read. Often I find the words are difficult to register, and I forget them immediately after reading. Maybe this is the faeries way of stopping me from holding vital information about them. The characterisation that is captured in the artwork holds a major fascination for me.

And now he has given us a new world of *Goblins*. One of them, Vennh, has recently developed a new habit – he now empties the ink out of printer cartridges at the very moment you need it when you don't have a replacement to hand.



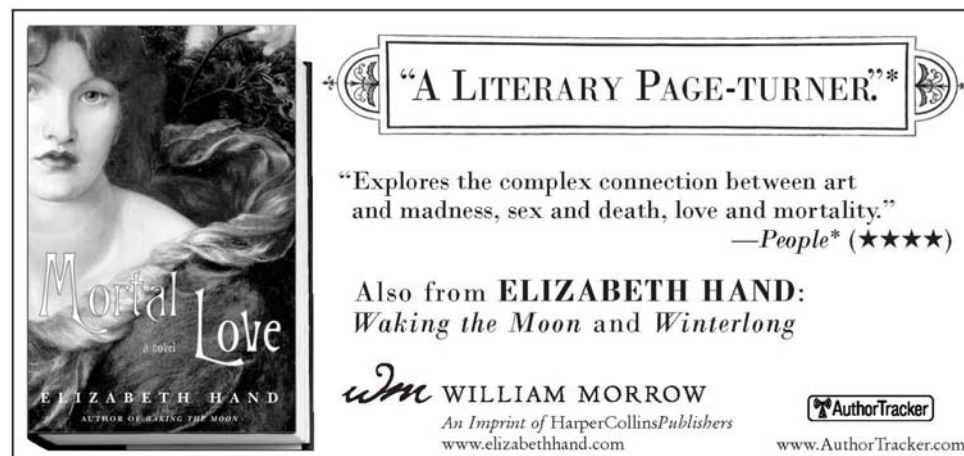
Elizabeth Hand

- Iain Emsley on Elizabeth Hand

Elizabeth Hand grew up in Yonkers and later in Pound Ridge, New York. In 1975 she moved to Washington, D.C., to study playwriting and cultural anthropology at Catholic University. From 1979 to 1986 she worked at the National Air & Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution. However she had first to go through the Hammer Horror and Lin Carter stages of reading and watching and her first typed-up story ended really badly for the kangaroo. Fortunately that did not stop her.

She had her first story published in 1988 and first novel, *Winterlong*, in 1990. The latter began an SF sequence, never-completed, that included *Aestival Tide* (1992) and *Icarus Descending*. Contemporary fantasy *Waking the Moon* (1994), which won the James Tiptree Jr. Award and Mythopoeic Society Award, was followed by science fantasy *Glimmering* in 1997, and contemporary fantasy *Black Light* in 1999, which also featured the Benandanti and Malandanti from *Waking the Moon*. Her story collection *Last Summer at Mars Hill* (1998) includes the Nebula and World Fantasy award-winning title novella. *Bibliomancy: Four Novellas* (2003) contains the International Horror Guild award-winning "Cleopatra Brimstone" (2001). Hand has also written numerous movie and TV novelizations. She is a regular book reviewer for F&SF, Washington Post Book World, and the Village Voice Literary Supplement, among others. With her longtime friend Paul Witcover, she created DC Comics' post-punk, post-feminist cult series *Anima*. Her one-act play, "The Have-Nots," was produced in 1997, and was a finalist at the Battersea Arts Centre as part of London's Fringe Theatre Festival. Her seventh novel, *Mortal Love* (2004), is a magic realist re-visioning of England.

Take a chance and read her – you'll enjoy the experience. A word of warning – don't ask her what makes her hopeful.



Keeping in Touch

- by (and with) Cheryl Morgan

One thing that every Eastercon committee wants to do is avoid making the same mistakes as their recent predecessors. The things that you Must Not Do are made very clear to you at the bid session at which your bid is chosen. You are faced with a room full of people all keen to vent their frustration with the current Eastercon and demanding that you do better. But it isn't always that easy. At Concourse, where we were entrusted with our very own Eastercon, one of the main sources of complaint at the bid session was lack of communication.

Raising the bar

Of course things have got harder for Eastercons, and indeed for all conventions, down the years, because communication has got so much easier. The bar has been raised. It used to be that you could get away with just producing Progress Reports at the approved times. Nowadays you have to have a web site and a mailing list and quite possibly other forms of communication as well. Our North American agent, Kevin Standlee, is also working on a convention to be held in Calgary, Canada later this year. There is one very annoying local fan who, every couple of weeks, posts on a fannish bulletin board saying, "I haven't heard anything from that Westercon convention in ages, I guess it must have been cancelled." So they reassure him, but a few weeks later he is at it again. He's an extreme case, but fans have become so used to regularly updated convention web sites that if they don't see fairly regular action they do start to worry that there is Something Wrong.

Part of the solution to this is to have a convention blog that is updated every time something new appears on the web site. One of the best things about blog software is that you can use webfeeds (RSS and Atom for the geek-minded) to keep people informed about new postings. There isn't space in this article to explain what that means, but if you are interested by all means email us at <webmistress@eastercon2006.org> and ask. Our blog has an Atom feed, and is also syndicated on LiveJournal as "eastercon2006". If you are a LiveJournal user that means you can just add eastercon2006 to your Friends list and see our new postings automatically.

Public Outreach

Active web sites are important in another way as well. Long time fans know exactly what an Eastercon is like. As long as there is a hotel booked they are happy to turn up in the sure knowledge that most of their friends will do likewise and they can spend a happy weekend in the bar chatting. If there happens to be some programming, all well and good, and it will probably have something of interest to go to. Few Eastercons make the mistake of not having enough programming, so you can rely on it happening.

But what happens if you are not a long time fan? What happens if the convention is trying to sell memberships to people who don't go to cons regularly, or indeed have

never been to one before? There is no denying that Eastercon could do with a bit of new blood, and Concussion is hoping to benefit from what is known as "Worldcon bounce". After almost every Worldcon, the next local convention in the area where it was held gets a surge of new members. We want to make sure that we capture those new and enthusiastic people for fandom. But many of them will have only ever attended one convention before, and that will have been Interaction. It is therefore important that our web site does not assume that everyone reading it knows what an Eastercon is.

Consequently you will see us signaling as much content as possible in advance. When an author signs up and agrees to be on a panel, we'll let you know. The web site will talk about things like the Hay Lecture and the BSFA Awards. As much as possible we want the web site to let people know that Concussion will be an event where lots of interesting things will happen, and which will therefore be worth attending.

Too Many Methods

In *Amadeus* the Emperor of Austria chastises Mozart for using too many notes in one of his operas. That was perhaps a bit picky, but there is such a thing as being spoiled for choice, and one of the things that causes it is rapid development of new technology. Right now there are many different ways in which conventions can communicate electronically with their members (and potential members). Web sites are an obvious option, but they are pretty much a one-way medium without adding extra software. If you want two-way communication you have to go an extra step. And there the path forks. The traditional means of two-way communication is the e-mail mailing list, but there are also new web-based methods such as bulletin boards and LiveJournal.

Immediately after Concourse there was some discussion in Eastercon SMOF circles about which method was preferable, and it became very obvious that there was no right answer. There are technical and practical arguments on both sides. From a practical point of view, many people still access the Internet by dial-up and do not want to have to browse through complex web sites such as bulletin boards. Or they may get their web access at work and find that they are blocked from accessing "hobby" sites. Equally some people get their email access at work, but are discouraged from receiving large quantities of personal email and so don't want to be on active mailing lists.

From a technical standpoint the main problem with a mailing list is that you lose track of discussions. You can archive the mail, but that means using a web site, and in any case few people ever bother to browse through the fairly unfriendly format of an email archive. In addition, some fans object to having email archives kept on web sites because they worry about their email addresses being harvested by spammers. But the big advantage of email is that it is "push" technology. You don't have to do anything to receive new messages beyond opening your in-box. With web-based communications you have to remember to actively visit the web site in question to look for new messages.

Given that there was no obvious way to choose between email-based and web-based communication, we have decided to go for a "both and" solution and provide both options. But that wasn't the end of the decision-making.

Do You Yahoo?

Traditionally conventions have relied upon friendly fans with their own web servers to provide email services. More recently there has been a tendency to use the free service of Yahoo Groups. Once again both methods have their pros and cons. Yahoo is a commercial service, and even though Yahoo Groups is free it still comes with sense of reliability and availability that you expect from a commercial service. On the other hand, Yahoo appends advertisements to messages sent through Groups, and it collects a lot of intrusive personal data if you want to sign up for full access to a Group. Consequently some fans object to joining Yahoo-based mailing lists.

At Concussion we have opted for the traditional fan-based route. Alex McIntock has been running web-based services of interest to fandom for many years now, and he has mailing list software available. (For the geek-minded it is Mailman, which I much prefer to Majordomo.) You can sign up for our mailing list at: <http://www.eastercon2006.org/contacts.php>. We would like to thank Alex and his colleague, John Bray, for making this service available to Concussion.

Final Answer

Which left just one decision to be made: which bulletin board software should we use? Or should we? Could we just use LiveJournal instead?

From a technical point of view I much prefer a proper bulletin board to LiveJournal for active discussion of a range of topics. While you **can** add to LiveJournal discussions days or even weeks after they are started, it can be hard to find the topic that you want and it is much easier to start a new thread. Thus conversations get lost and repeated.

But LiveJournal is also very popular. Large numbers of British fans are very active on LiveJournal, and the journal created for Interaction has been very successful. In addition using LiveJournal would save me from having to learn and install bulletin board software. It would also probably save us some money in hosting fees for running a database from our web site. All in all, LJ seemed a good option. So we have taken a decision to go with LiveJournal. Our journal is called "concussion_chat" ("concussion" was taken) and we hope to see you posting on it, and adding it to your Friends list if you are an LJ user, very soon.

Web site	http://www.eastercon2006.org
LiveJournal	http://www.livejournal.com/community/concussion_chat/
LJ News Feed	http://www.livejournal.com/users/eastercon2006/
Email	webmistress@eastercon2006.org
Mailing List	http://www.eastercon2006.org/contacts.php
Post!	103 Rustat Road, Cambridge CB1 3QG



Mortal Love and Natural History

- Book reviews by Iain Emsley

Love and Art in the City : *Mortal Love* by Elizabeth Hand

In the midst of crumbling surroundings, *Mortal Love* is a hallucinatory tale of reconciliation through love and art. In the nineteenth century, Radborne Comstock is introduced to his muse and gradually declines into madness in the wilds of the north Cornish coast. In the twentieth century, Daniel Rowland, a journalist on sabbatical trying to write a novel, meets Larkin Meade and is taken to the inner workings of London, those side streets and areas so easily ignored. As these two narratives merge, they reveal the secret history which thins the real and fantastic which reveals a world which is stranger than imagined.

Mortal Love is a strange fabulist tale - at once ancient and modern, lyrical and chilling - which repays careful reading and indulging your imagination. It is Hand's most accomplished novel.

The Evolution of the Species : *Natural History* by Justina Robson

Natural History is a strange novel, at once looking toward the future positively and negatively. Humanity has engineered itself to be capable of a variety of new tasks, including space flight. Deep in space, Isol comes across a piece of alien technology which promises to be a technological and social panacea. As civilisation tries to find ways of dealing with this new information, it becomes apparent that we are not the first to come into contact with the aliens. Zephyr Duquesne, an archaeologist, is sent to the planet Taleborn with Isol to determine how the alien culture disappeared by the Strategos, the head of civil order, and to monitor the use of the technology.

Emphasising individual choices, this is an antithesis to the Clarke vision of mass uplift through technological advance and a strong voice in the new Space Opera, resisting the standard expectations of the subgenre whilst unafraid to explore the ramifications of its own positions.



Tiptree Congratulations

The Concussion Committee would like to extend our congratulations to our guest, **Johanna Sinisalo**, on being joint winner of this year's Tiptree Award. Her novel, *Not Before Sundown* (*Troll* in the US) has been honoured alongside Joe Haldeman's *Camouflage* in this prestigious award for the exploration of gender roles through science fiction. The award ceremony will be held at Gaylaxicon, in Boston, Massachusetts, July 1-4, 2005.



The One About the Deep Fried Mars Bar

- Jamie Scott devours Glasgow's seedy underbelly

The deep fried Mars Bar. Does it actually exist then? Two researchers working for the Glasgow Health Board were sceptical, having never seen such a beast for sale, and after hearing Jay Leno (he of the Tonight Show) mention the existence of same, wondered if the whole thing might be an urban myth. They resolved to do a survey [1] to find out the facts, so they started phoning up chip shops to find out what they offered. To make it a proper scientific study, they phoned a lot of chip shops (488 to be exact). From the 303 responses they got, it transpired that 22% did indeed offer such a delicacy, and a further 17% used to. 76% were sold to children. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Glasgow is one of the leading centres for cardiovascular research in the world.

Naturally, a nation that thinks that chocolate and caramel confectionary can be improved with some batter and lard is not going to stop there. Oh no sirree. Haggis, Creme eggs, pineapple rings, all are fair game. However, there is one comment in the paper that should be thoroughly debunked;

Encouragingly, we did also find some evidence of the penetrance [sic] of the Mediterranean diet into Scotland, albeit in the form of deep-fried pizza.

This is a vicious and unwarranted slur upon the good fast food emporia of Scotland. We do have some standards, and would never sully a proper Neapolitan or Sicilian with hot pig fat.

That's what the cheap supermarket versions are for.

On the other hand, if you don't fancy hearing your arteries clang shut, there are some places in Glasgow that sell (whisper it) proper food. Some even cook stuff in ovens! As many regular congoers will know, in the last decade or so there has been an explosion of decent restaurants in town. Admittedly the hotel this time is a bit further away from the city centre, but it's still only five minutes away by taxi. And it means we are closer to the West End as well.

The committee will at great personal risk (to our waistlines) be reviewing as many establishments as possible during the Worldcon in Glasgow. Volunteers are, as ever, gladly accepted. If you bribe us enough we might even tell you where the best ones are...

[1] "Deep and crisp and eaten: Scotland's deep-fried Mars bar", The Lancet, Vol. 364, Issue 9452, pp 2180, 18 Dec 2004



Hotel News

We will be using three hotels for Concourse, namely the Moat House, City Inn and Campanile. These three hotels are situated close together on the Clydeside, adjacent to the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC).

The main hotel will be the Moat House, where we have reserved 200 bedrooms plus all of the function space. The City Inn and Campanile will be used to provide additional bedroom space to ensure that we can accommodate everyone on site.

Inevitably, our room rates will be slightly higher than those offered by some recent Eastercons, due to the fact that we are going back to a city location and a 4 star hotel. However, Easter is always a very quiet time for the Glasgow hotel trade, and this has enabled us to obtain much better room rates than Interaction can achieve – up to 25% lower in some cases.

Our room rates are all for Bed and Breakfast. Please note, they are **per room**, not per occupant. We are asking people to contact the hotels directly to book rooms.

Glasgow Moat House £65 single; £80 twin/double.

Wi-fi in bedrooms and public areas, and coin operated internet access on the Mezzanine. There are restaurants and bars, and a gym with a swimming pool. There are two wheelchair adapted rooms and ten that are suitable for people with mobility difficulties who are not dependent on wheelchairs.

We anticipate that the Moat House will start taking reservations from May/June, and we will inform people then of the code to quote. If you particularly want to stay in the Moat House, let us know and we will make sure to notify you.

City Inn Glasgow £63 single; £76 twin/double

The City Inn is a more quiet hotel. It has wi-fi in public areas, an in house restaurant and bar, and six wheelchair adapted rooms.

Phone: 0141 2401002 Post: Finnieston Quay, Glasgow G3 8HN
Internet: www.cityinn.com/glasgow/ Email: glasgow.reservations@cityinn.com
Please quote code "SciFi06" to get the convention rate.

Campanile Hotel £55 single; £61 twin/double

This has dial up connections and a restaurant. It is similar in style to the Quality Inn Walsall (venue for Novacon). There are two wheelchair adapted rooms.

Phone: 0141 287 7700 Post: 10 Tunnel Street, Glasgow G3 8HL
Web: <http://www.envergure.co.uk> Email: glasgow@envergure.co.uk
Please quote code "SciFi06" to get the convention rate.

If you have any questions, or want to find room sharers, contact us at the convention address. Otherwise, contact the hotel directly to book and make arrangements for any special requirements (cot, disabled access, diet etc).



Cicisbeo - by M.John Harrison

The first 3 pages were also printed in PR1.

Summer was half over before it had even begun. With a sense that my life was in the same state, I phoned Allie Shaw. She hadn't changed.

They lived in East Sheen now, she told me, her and Tim, in a little house "practically given" them by a friend. She had worked for a while as a buyer for a high street fashion chain. "You'd have been proud of me," she said. "I was properly industrious." She had bought a BMW. Enjoyed the money. Missed her kids. "I wasn't getting home 'til eight. I had a twenty year old Polish girl looking after my family, I mean can you believe it?" Jobs pail, she said, as soon as you start thinking like that. She said she couldn't wait to see me. "People count more as you get older." She was thirty seven now. Then she said: "I'm pregnant again," and burst into tears.

That house was always full of sex.

*

"You will come and see us?" Allie said.

"I'm not sure," I said. "Would that be a good idea?"

"Please," she said.

I thought about it. I drove across London, intending to go there, but lost motivation somehow and fetched up in Brixton or Blackheath instead. Allie kept phoning. Would I go and see them again, or not?

"Why don't we meet where we used to?" I suggested. "Just the two of us?"

"It can't be like that again," she warned me.

"I know," I said.

I wanted to put the phone down and not speak to her for another three years.

"All right then," she said. "When?"

We had lunch at the Mercury on Upper Street in Islington. She was late, a little nervous. "I can't get over you," I said. The pregnancy threw her off-balance a little, but it suited her. "You look so well."

We talked about her boys for a bit. She had got them into Hill House school. They were so grown up, she said. So emotionally intelligent. "I don't know what I'd do without them, especially Gabriel." Of the buyer's job she would only say: "I felt it was right at the time. But now I feel it's right to be pregnant again."

"And how is Tim?"

"Just the same," she said "You know Tim."

I smiled. "I do," I said.

"He's converting the loft."

"Is he now?" I said.

"It's such a little house," she said off-handedly. "He thought it would be a good idea. He thought it could be a studio." She ate some olives and then some bread. She sat back. "This is nice," she said vaguely. "I always loved this place."

I knew that tone of voice.

"What's the matter ?" I said.

"Oh, you know." She looked away suddenly. "It's all he ever does now, really. The loft."

I reached across the table and tried to take her hand.

"No," she said, "I don't want that."

She told me about Tim. Something happened to him, she said, the day he was forty. He went up into the loft. He liked it there, the very first time he stuck his head and shoulders up through the trapdoor. He called down from the top of the ladder, something like, "Hey!" or, "Wow!" and that was it. Something clicked for him. Soon he was up there every available day, working, but not at his job. He had started out to store things up there. Then he was going to convert it. Then he was moving himself into it, bit by bit. He even had his own TV up there.

"He was forty," she said. Looking back, you could see that's when it began. "His life was so good," she said. "But something went wrong with his view of it."

After a pause she said, "He misses you."

I couldn't take that seriously.

"I bet he does," I said.

"We both miss you."

"I've missed *you*," I said.

"I know. I know," she said. "So you will come over ? To supper ?"

I began to say, "I'm not sure that's such a good idea," but she was already adding:

"Perhaps you can even talk some sense into him."

"I'm not the best person to do that."

"At least come to supper," she said. She put her hand over mine. "It's so good to see you again," she said.

*

I shouldn't have gone, but in the end I couldn't see any reason not to. I was bored. I thought she might light my life up again.

Their street was like all the others packed into East Sheen between the railway and the Upper Richmond Road. Tubs of geraniums outside narrow-fronted workingmen's cottages. German roadsters parked two wheels up on the pavement. The house was nice but far too small for them. By the time you had a family you were supposed to have moved down the road to Barnes, or out of London altogether. That part of Sheen was for younger people. They would have done better, as Tim said, in Roehampton: but you didn't get the resale value.

He hadn't changed much since I last saw him. You found people like Tim up and down the river from Putney to Richmond. They had rowed a little at school. At the weekend they wore chinos and a good quality sailing fleece. Boat shoes with no socks. They all had the same tall, polite good looks. They never seemed to age: instead, their self-deprecation matured into puzzlement. They began to look tired. Tim liked to cook. He had his treasured cast iron saucepans from the 80s, his five-hob Lacanche range. I watched him, and drank a beer, and asked him how things were.

"Oh, you know," he said vaguely. "Could you pass me that ? No, the little one."

Once we sat down to eat it became harder to sustain a conversation. "I wish I'd learned to cook," I said, as if I'd lived the kind of life which makes a thing like that impossible. He didn't know what to say to that. Who would ? This left things to Allie, who grew impatient. "It's lemon chicken," she explained to me. "A child could do it." He was quick to agree. "You could soon learn, you could soon learn." He slotted the plates into the dishwasher while she banged pudding down on the table.

"Well that was good," I said when we'd eaten it.

"I'm glad," Allie said. "The kitchen cost him fifteen thousand pounds." When he only smiled at this, she added: "No one puts a fifteen thousand pound kitchen in a cottage in East Sheen. Barnes, yes. East Sheen, no." Tim shrugged a little. He looked away. Fifteen thousand pounds was an exaggeration, the shrug said. It said that if you were going to cook you should have the right things.

While Allie made coffee in the kitchen, he gave me the tour. "We'd gone as far as we could without opening the loft," he said. You could see they had. "It was a bit of a push to find somewhere for the boys." Tim, you sensed, had turned his talents as easily to family life as to sport: but now he wasn't quite sure how he came to have a family in the first place. I poked my head into the little room he used as a study.

"No computer," I said. "That's a surprise these days."

He'd moved it up there already, he said. There had never been enough room down here. "Allie told me you were up to your neck in it," I said. The study was a mess. He laughed and looked rather tiredly at the heaps of stuff. "Eventually all this will go up there." I asked him if I could see the loft. "It's a bit dusty at the moment," he said. "Probably better to wait." I didn't press him, even though I knew Allie would have wanted me to; and I left not long later. Tim had his problems, I had mine. One of mine was that I didn't really care one way another about him. It's hard to hide that. He knew it as well as I did, she was the only one pretending not to know. I kept in touch. I went over there once or twice, for a meal, then let it lapse again. I was working anyway.

*

Three months later the phone rang.

I answered it. I said, "Hello ?"

"Hi. It's Allie."

I caught my breath.

"Hi," I said, "I--"

"There's someone on the other line, hang on," she said. Then, "Hi. How are you, I'm sorry about that."

"No, it's OK."

After a pause she said: "It's a girl."

"I can't believe it," I said.

"I know," she said. "A girl!"

I sent flowers. I sent a card. I telephoned my friends as if I was the father. In two days Allie was on the phone again.

"The baby's home," she said, "but he won't see it."

"That's ridiculous."

"We're both back from the hospital, but he won't see either of us."

"He won't see his own baby ?"

He wouldn't see his own baby. He sent notes down from the loft.

"I don't know where to turn," Allie said.

"Come on," I tried to encourage her, "he was a bit like this with the boys."

"Well now he's got a girl and he won't come down out of the loft to even look at her.

What am I going to do ?"

So I found myself in East Sheen again, hoping to get a word alone with her. The house was full of wellwishers. Her women friends had long backs and sexy voices. The men were packed with the aimless brutal confidence of people barely thirty years old earning large sums of money at merchant banking. Even their children were successful at something. I felt old and immature at the same time. Tim was nowhere to be seen, but no one mentioned that. He was in the loft of course, but no one mentioned that either. They had called the baby Emma. I held her while Allie had a bath. I couldn't believe her fingernails.

"Look," I told anyone who would listen, "they come with a manicure!"

The boys stared at me as if I was simple, and Emma started crying. I took her outside. I brought her back in. It was no good. She looked up at me angrily and flexed her spine. Her face went bright red.

"Give her to me," said Allie. "She wants something you haven't got."

This drew laughs all round.

I was there a lot the first few weeks. I helped with this and that. I learned to change a nappy. Allie sat up in bed, looking exhausted but pleased. "They've taken it well," she said of the boys. She was proud of them. After a few days, though, they grew thoughtful, painted their faces, spent money on slime. They ran in and out of the small garden whooping and shouting: but magical thinking would not save them. Change was inevitable. The tribe was doomed.

Tim watched it all from a distance. His idea, you could see, was to ride it out. Six months after his daughter arrived, the loft was his home. He cooked up there, he slept up there. "He's living on baked beans," Allie said. She looked down at the baby. "Essentially," she said in a tragic voice, "he's left us." No one had any idea what he was doing. He hauled stuff up in a plastic dustbin. Whatever it was began coming down again within a few hours. There was a lot of bumping and banging which sometimes went on all night. She asked me, "What's he doing up there, with all those power tools ?"

I said it could be anything.

"Is this something that happens to men ?" she said viciously, as if I was doing it too. Shortly afterwards he installed a good-quality pull-down ladder, but he rarely used it himself and the boys were forbidden to go near it. He was a man living away from his family.

"He might as well have gone to Blackpool," Allie said. "You've got to talk to him."

I tried. If nothing else, I thought, it would give me a glimpse of the loft. I went up the ladder. I stuck my head through the trap door. I got a confused idea of a much smaller space than I had expected, most of it curtained off by heavy tarpaulins which sagged

from the roofbeams. Piles of building materials lay about under an unshaded low-wattage bulb, everything thick with damp-looking dust. It all seemed thoroughly miserable. Tim sat at an old school desk, his legs sticking out awkwardly at the sides, writing something on a sheet of ruled A4. The computer components stacked on the floor beside him were still done up in bubble-wrap. He hadn't even bothered to unpack them.

"Hi Tim," I said. "When do you think you might be finished ?"

He got up quickly.

"Probably better if we talk downstairs," he said.

He looked embarrassed. You don't want your wife's best friend to see you living in your attic. You don't want him to think about what that means. I'd hoped I might shock him into talking about things. But in the end we just stood there awkwardly on the landing looking past one another, and all he would say was:

"You have to get away somehow. You have to get away from it all."

"I don't think Allie sees it that way," I said. "You know ?"

This sounded futile, even to me.

After a moment I added: "I think she'd like to see more of you. The kids would too."

He studied the floor and shook his head.

*

But Allie did want to see more of him. She wanted to see more of someone, anyway. She called me.

"Come and meet me in Islington," she said. "I'm in need of, oh, something." She laughed. "I don't know what I'm in need of." She left a pause and then said: "We could meet at the Mercury." I didn't ask who would look after the baby.

At the Mercury she seemed nervous. She kept taking her cellphone out of her bag, studying it with a faintly irritable expression, then putting it back again. She swirled her drink around her glass. She looked up at me once or twice, began to say something, decided not to. She was wearing skinny, low-cut velvet jeans. When she saw me looking at them she said, "Do you think they're too young for me ?" They were a champagne colour, and they fastened at the back with a lace, like a shoe. She touched my arm.

"It's odd, isn't it," she said, "how things happen ? I always loved this suit of yours Your only suit."

She said, "I've never seen your house, have I ?"

She drove us there in the Audi. They always called it that, her and Tim: the Audi. As if they had other cars, two or three of them. When I showed her into the house she said, "It's bigger than I thought it would be." She stared into the kitchen for a moment, then out into the garden. We went upstairs. She looked at the bicycle in the bedroom and said, "It's so like you, all this. Really it is." She got her phone out again. She put it next to her ear and shook it. When nothing happened her expression hardened. Then she laughed. "It's just what I expected, all of it."

I don't know what I expected. I'd been waiting for her for three years; longer. After about ten minutes I said, "I love your neck. The nape of it, here." Then I said: "I can't

believe this is happening." She twisted away immediately and we lay like that for a minute or two, awkward and embarrassed. My hand was still on her hip.

"This is stupid," she said.

"Why ?"

"Because it just isn't grown up."

I got off the bed angrily. When I looked back she had covered herself up with the sheet.

"What *do* you want then ?" I said.

She shivered.

"Can't you get it any warmer in here ?"

"No."

"I just want him the way he was. I'll have to leave him, if not. I don't even know what's going on in my own loft," she told me, with a false laugh. "Can't you at least try and find that out from him ?"

I shrugged. "Why should I do that ?"

"Don't sulk," she warned.

*

The second time I went up into the loft, I heard a regular metallic scraping noise, more distant than you'd expect in a space that size. The light was off and something was happening behind the tarpaulins. "Tim ?" I said. But I said it cautiously, to myself, as if I didn't want him to hear. I was curious. As much as anything else, I wanted to poke around. The tarpaulins were new, but they looked old. They sagged under their own weight, stiff to the touch, with fixed folds as if the dust had already worked its way into them. Perhaps it had. Around their edges I glimpsed the eerie white flicker of a butane lamp, or perhaps one of those portable fluorescent tubes.

I examined the desk, the abandoned computer, the piles of other stuff. Why would you keep a garden spade in a loft ?

"Tim ?"

This time the noises stopped immediately. For a moment, we were silent, each listening for the other. Then a draught seemed to go through the loft, along with a smell which reminded me of old-fashioned house gas. I saw the tarpaulins billow, hang, settle; and he called from just behind them, "Hang on. I'll be with you in a second." I backed away until I bumped into the desk, then descended the ladder. He followed me down and stood there rubbing his hands on an old towel as if he didn't know what to do next. He was covered in white dust. His hands were scraped and banged, the knuckles enlarged as if he'd been doing manual work, outside work. His fingernails were broken.

"I wasn't expecting you," he said. "Allie shouldn't really have encouraged you to come up."

I couldn't let him get away with that.

"Tim," I said, "for God's sake. What are you doing ?"

"I'm converting the loft," he explained patiently. "I'm converting the loft to give us more room." He didn't want to be understood. He was exhausted, and that made me feel exhausted too. In the end I said:

"You hire people to do the work. You don't do that yourself."

He shook his head.

"It's my loft," he said, with a certainty I admired.

While we were talking Allie came up the stairs carrying the baby. "Do either of you want coffee ?" she asked. Then she said to Tim: "I heard all that. What rubbish you talk." She began to cry. "You know it's rubbish." Tim pulled himself to his feet and looked as if he might try to comfort her. She backed away. "No," she said. "It's just an excuse. It's just another excuse."

"Allie's frantic, Tim," I told him. "You've hardly said hello to your own daughter."

"Don't talk about me as if I'm not here!" she said. She stood in front of me and wouldn't let me turn away. "Can you see me ?" she demanded.

"Allie--"

"Well I'm real," she said. "You always pretend I'm not." Her voice went from contempt to puzzlement. "You're as bad as he is." The baby wailed and waved its arms. "Now look what you've done, both of you."

"You asked me to come here," I reminded her.

I left them to it and went downstairs.

"That's right," she called after me. "Walk away. Walk away from everything, like you always do."

After I left, I drove about in the dark, through Balham and Brixton, jumping traffic lights to the accompaniment of a Sonny Rollins CD. By the time I got home it was three o' clock in the morning, and she had left messages with my answering service. They were a mixed bunch. One said: "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry." Another said: "Is it any wonder no one will have you ? It's just so easy for you to leave people behind, isn't it ? Just so *fucking* easy." A third said, "Please don't do this. Please answer, oh please, please." I could hear the baby crying in the background. "Please answer." But I didn't; and I didn't hear from her again for two or three months.

*

June.

The evening air was hammered like gold on to the rubbish in my front garden. I had been thinking about her all day.

Early summer had always been a dangerous time for us. Tim would be at work, we would go to the park. I would put my arm round her while we sat on a bench and watched the boys running about in the distance and she told me, at length but without ever saying it outright or irreversibly, why nothing could happen between us. "I'm making such a fool of myself!" she would decide at last; then appeal, "But you do see some of what I mean, don't you ?"

"Allie, I haven't got the slightest idea what you're talking about."

I knew she would call, because in early summer, desperate with the smell of her, I had always been ready to give her the reassurance she needed.

"Hello ?" I said.

"Hi," she said. "It's me."

"Hang on," I said. "There's someone on the other line."

"Don't do this," she begged.

"Can I ring you back ?"

She said: "You've got to come. It's Tim."

There was a confused scraping noise as if she had dropped the phone, and then all I could hear was her breathing, and a shout in the distance which might have been one of the boys.

"Something awful's happening," she said. "In the loft."

She dropped the phone again.

When I got to East Sheen it was dark. The front door of their house was open on the empty street. Allie stood in the hall at the bottom of the stairs with the baby held along the crook of one arm. She was wearing a white bathrobe and she had her cellphone up to her ear. The hall seemed too hot, even for a night like that. It seemed packed with heat. Why would they have the heating on in June?

"He's up there now," she said.

I wondered if I should take the baby off her.

"Allie ? What's wrong ? What's the matter ?"

"I thought I could get him to answer his phone. Get him to answer his bloody fucking phone for once," she said.

"I'll fetch him down."

She stared at me. "That's not it," she said.

"I'll just go up."

There was fine white dust all over the stairs. I could hear the boys in their room, quarrelling over the Playstation. The house seemed to get hotter from floor to floor, a dry heat which caught at your throat. "Tim ?" I called. Then louder: "Tim!" No answer. I had caught Allie's mood. I felt nervous, jumpy, angry with both of them. Why did I always have to be involved ? Why couldn't they put on their futile theatre without me ? "Tim ?" Dust had silted down all over the upper landing. I stood at the foot of the pull-down ladder and listened. I went up far enough to poke my head into the loft. The air was full of a grey light which, dim and distributed at the same time, seemed to come from everywhere at once. I could hear a distant, measured chunking noise. It sounded like someone using an old-fashioned pickaxe to break concrete.

"Tim!" I called.

Almost immediately there was a loud crash. The house lurched, a powerful draught parted the tarpaulins. That was enough. As I went down the ladder I heard him tottering about up there, coughing in the dust. He seemed to be trying to drag some item of equipment across the floor. "Tim! For God's sake!" I called up from the landing. His face appeared briefly, framed by the trap.

"The whole lot's coming down," he said. "Tell her to get the kids out. See if you can persuade her to care about someone else for once."

Allie, halfway up the stairs, heard this.

"You sod," she said. "I'd do anything for those children."

Everything seemed to lurch again. I got her by the arm and pulled her down the stairs and into the street. The boys, sensing the future like dogs before an earthquake, had already saved themselves. They couldn't believe their luck. Their house was falling down. The hall was full of plaster. Cracks had opened up in the exterior walls. From above came the shrieking sounds of joists giving way under huge loads. It was so cool. They stood in the quiet little street in the hot night air, staring up at the line of the roof where it had sagged into the void of the loft. Their father came running out, then stopped and turned as if he had forgotten something.

His house was done for. Window frames popped. The facade deformed and began to slip. Just before the roof fell in and it became obvious that the whole thing would come down on us if we didn't move, I saw the tunnel he had been digging out of the loft. It hung in the air, transparent but luminous, perhaps three feet in diameter. Travelling north towards the railway line, it rose steeply until, at perhaps a thousand feet, it linked up with a complex of similar tunnels all across South West London. Hundreds of them, thousands, more than you could ever count, they rose up from the houses. A British Airways Concord was making its way down between them, engines grinding, landing lights ablaze. When it had gone, the tunnels hung there for a moment like a great shining computer-generated blueprint in the night sky, then began to fade.

"See ?" Tim said. "What would you have done ?"

"We'll come back," I promised him. "We'll come back and find another way in--"

Allie didn't seem to hear this. "Fifteen thousand pounds on a kitchen," she said. She laughed.

Later, she sat on the kerb a little way down the street, with the boys on either side of her and the baby in her lap, thoughtfully watching the fire engines and drinking tea. Someone had given her a man's woollen shirt to wear, wrapped a foil blanket loosely round her shoulders. The street was full of hoses and cables, generators, powerful lights. Firemen were picking over the rubble, and a television crew had arrived.



Four Go Mad in Samarkand

- by Liz Williams

In May 2004 myself and 3 fellow writers - Cherith Baldry (*The Reliquary Ring*, *The Roses of Roazon* and many more besides), and Liz and Deirdre Counihan (editors of British fantasy and SF magazine *Scheherazade*) decided that as far as writing research was concerned, Ibiza was for wimps and the ideal place for a spot of light holidaying would therefore be a murderous, repressive dictatorship on the borders of a recent war zone.

And so we went in search of what's left of the Silk Road, in Uzbekistan.

The plane to Khiva was an ancient, rattling Tupolev. I admit to having been more frightened on Uzbekistan airlines than on any other flight, but we arrived safely. Khiva was very hot, very quiet. We stayed in a converted madrasa not far from the city gates - a lovely place, on two storeys, with an echoing entrance in carved white plaster and a big courtyard lined with mulberry trees. I liked the room which Cherith and I shared, in

spite of the rusty sputter from the tap, but Liz and Deirdre were immediately beset by Odour De Rat Mort, and had to change rooms.

In the afternoon, we walked around the city: a great many ancient mosques and minarets, striped and lined with azure tiles, rising out above the pale ochre roofs. In the courtyard of one we found a small family circus: grandfather, dad, and three sons, the youngest of whom was about nine. They did a very nonchalant high wire act, without a net. We could just imagine trying to get this past British health-and-safety - "OK, so the lad's going to stand on his brother's shoulders, and the kid stands on the top lad's head, on one leg. Oh, and they're twenty feet up."

On Tuesday, we drove to Bukhara - also a very old city, though most of it is modern. We spent a couple of days in Bukhara, looking around mosques and monuments. The centre of the city boasts the Ark, which is a massive mud-walled fortress containing a particularly grim prison called the Zindan, or - to the British - the 'bug pit.' The name should give you some idea of what it's like....

Later, we went to see the Summer Palace of the local Emir, which made the Brighton Pavilion look like a triumph of minimalism.

In the evening we went to a local dinner and dance. The dancing was done by a local group attached to the philharmonic - extremely beautiful women, all with four long plaits, wearing the ornate medieval dress of the regions: sweeping sleeves and veils, conical hats with egret feathers, velvet and silk. Our fantasy-writer's hearts beat faster. After this came a fashion show led by a model who was clearly working for SMERSH. If anyone recalls Servalan from Blake's 7 - that's where she's working these days.

On Wednesday we drove to Samarkand via Tamurlane's summer palace - a vast gateway framing the mountain wall. Nowadays, there is a statue of the old sod, looking far more imposing than he probably did in reality (he was supposed to be the ugliest man alive). The road from Tashkent to Samarkand is rather dull, but the Bukhara road follows high, sweeping country which glides up to the mountain wall - and really is golden, due to the long grass of the steppe. There were lots of old ladies on donkeys visiting one another.

We got into Samarkand early in the evening and spent the rest of the evening in the bar, looking out across the minarets and domes - mainly the Registan square, which is an enormous complex of mosques and madrasas, mostly restored but extremely impressive, and dating from the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian period. They did not have the Islamic prohibition against figurative representation and their buildings are a riot of deer and suns and tigers and peacocks, all beautifully tiled. One of the minarets started to lean and was saved by rotating it by means of a hydraulic jet - ingenious people, these Russians. We also saw Tamurlane's mausoleum - he's buried under a slab of black jade, with typical restraint.

And then back to Tashkent and home. Lots of story ideas, and none of us were kidnapped by death squads - the definition of a successful trip.



60-Second Interview: Noel Collyer (Tech)

- Noel tries to answer without repetition, hesitation, or deviation...

How long have you been going to sf cons?

My first one was in 1985, Lazlarlycon I (a Hitchiker's Guide Convention). And twenty years later I'm still here! Cons are fun. I like to be involved with the behind the scenes stuff. Most of my friends are now in fandom; I just have a good time.

Enough of the mystery – just what is it that you do behind the scenes?

Normally I do stewarding - standing around looking butch! (Typist's note: he does this very well). It isn't exactly security, it's really making sure things aren't stolen from programme rooms, like computers, printers, etc. Making sure that convention attendees are the only ones in the convention area.

Being a responsible person on hand?

Yes, I suppose being a responsible person. And willing to fetch and carry!

At Concussion you are head of logistics. This covers a lot of areas...

Yes - stewarding, tech, dealer's room, gophers, the day to day operational running of the convention. The logistical nightmare of a convention.

So you'll have quite a lot of people working for you then?

I hope so. Volunteer! We really need people to do tech, and one volunteer is better than two pressed fairies.

Did you find things daunting at your first conventions?

Actually, at my first convention I volunteered for stewarding. Since then at most conventions I've done stewarding and gophering. I first started working on tech at a Novacon.

What does tech involve? I'm interested but have no idea where to start.

Tech normally involves running the sound systems at a convention - microphones, amplifiers and speakers - so that everyone can hear the programme participants. At other times you will be setting up projectors for the panels or guests talks, or maybe cueing music clips for a quiz.

As well as the tech for the ordinary panels and talking heads, you sometimes get the opportunity to work on theatrical projects - musicals, plays etc. There's the chance to get really creative.

Which bit of all of this do you like best?

Relaxing at the end of the convention.

Thank you, Noel. If you would like to know more about volunteering for tech, please contact Noel at the convention address.



The Membership List

- New members since October 2004

A: Attending – S: Supporting – C: Child – I: Infant – O: Other

201 A Michael Abbott	180 A David Haddock	187 A Sally Sinclair
189 A Arnold Akien	181 A Sarah Haddock	191 A Mark
230 A James Bacon	173 A Colin Harris	192 I Joel
182 A Barbara	213 A Karen	193 I Ethan
199 A Douglas Bell	228 A Paul Kincaid	212 O Guide Dog Smith
157 A Austin	200 A Christina Lake	163 A nojay
204 A Tony Berry	151 A Erhard Leder	194 A Adrian Snowdon
166 A Elizabeth Billinger	184 A Oscar	209 A Liz Sourbut
167 A Paul Billinger	145 A Craig Marnoch	169 A Sparks
141 A Kate Bodley	177 A Ian McDonald	227 A Maureen Kincaid
220 A John Bray	161 A AlexMC	Speller
165 A John Brown	196 A Nick Mills	142 A Jim Steel
154 A Steven Cain	17 A Cheryl Morgan	143 A Ann Steel
155 C Marianne Cain	233 A John Murnin	144 I Emma Steel
156 C Jonathan Cain	221 A FanTom	210 A James Steel
147 A Jim	223 A James	149 A Susan Stepney
232 A Paul Campbell	215 A Ken O'Neill	216 A Barbara E Stewart
190 A Elaine	205 A Rog Peyton	217 A John Stewart
164 A Steve Cooper	150 A Peter Redfarn	222 A Teddy
152 A Jon Courtenay	188 A Munquie	183 A Markus
Grimwood	AKA Julie Rigby	179 A David Thomas
207 A Dave Cox	176 A Tony Rogers	206 A Paul Treadaway
178 A Enid Crowe	214 A Mic Rogers	175 A Lennart Uhlin
229 A Tony Cullen	225 A Stephen Rothman	231 S Simone Van Zyl
185 A Andrew Darling	162 A Marcus Rowland	170 A Peter Weston
226 A Jack Deighton	174 A Yvonne Rowse	171 A Eileen Weston
172 A Tara Dowling-Hussey	198 A Andy Sawyer	148 A Charles Whyte
218 A Iain Emsley	146 A Jamie Scott	197 A Bridget Wilkinson
219 A Susan Emsley	153 A Alison Scott	18 A Andrew J. Wilson
211 A Brian Flatt	160 A Mike Scott	158 A Caro
159 A Flick	168 A Ina	202 A Anne Wilson
224 A Wendy Graham	208 A Maniac	195 A Pete Young
224 A Steve Grover	186 A Mark Sinclair	203 S Lucy Zinkiewicz



Concussion Souvenirs

- Um, buy our stuff!

Concussion has decided to produce merchandise through cafépress. We believe this offers good value products, while reducing the financial risk of holding stock. Plus, most of our houses are full of books so there's no room to store boxes of con t-shirts...

To buy items, simply go on the web to:
www.cafepress.com/concussion

We may also bring limited stocks to sell at conventions.



Now available: t-shirts, golf shirts, badges, tote bags, mugs, mouse mats, teddy bears, all featuring our logo.

The sizing is generous by UK standards; a golf shirt in XL was quite roomy on the 44"-chested Simon Bradshaw.

We particularly like the tote bag; strong and lightweight and ideal for carrying books. Expect to see a lot around!



Ogling Orac

- Bridget Bradshaw finally meets a childhood idol – and Mat Irvine

In February I went to Redemption, a regular Blake's 7/Babylon 5 convention. One of the reasons was to see Mat Irvine, one of Redemption's guests of honour and one of Concussion's special guests (work permitting). It was a *brilliant* con! Mat has a huge amount of experience working with miniatures for TVSF shows, Blake's 7 included, and shared some of the tricks they use and behind-the-scenes stories. The effects from back projection or foreground miniatures are amazing, when carefully lit and shot (and the bits where the wires wobbled are edited out). "Has modelmaking been superseded by CGI?" was a common topic of the weekend, but it has been since 1984 when the film *The Last Starfighter* came out – someone asked Mat back then "Aren't you out of a job now?" Happily, he is not.

In the Dealer Room he had a row of models, and I came over all fangirly at seeing the actual Liberator and the real Orac. Poor thing, Perspex doesn't age well.