



DISPATCHES 3



THE Reconnaissance FORUM

Dateline: Cardiff. Issue 3: November 1990

Centre Pages: Film and TV SF in the Post-Mundane World by Frances Bonner.

Hotel Information

1. If you did not return the booking form enclosed with *Dispatches 2*, please return the form enclosed with this *Dispatches*, even if you do not intend to book a room. The rear of the form gives us important information about you and your wishes.

2. If you do intend to book a room, note the following:

Each person booking a room is responsible for settlement of their own bill.

48 hours notice is required by the hotel to cancel a room booking. If you do not cancel 48 hours before your booking starts you are responsible for the bill.

If you are sharing and have indicated a specific sharer, make sure that he/she is a member of the convention. We cannot process your room booking unless both persons for a shared room are full attending members and have both filled in a form.

3. Note that the convention programme (at least, on current plans) winds into action between 17:00 and 19:00 on Friday (Opening Ceremony at 19:00), and lapses into disarray at around 17:00 on Sunday (though we've still got too many programme items and may have to extend this somewhat). Programme will run from 10:00 Saturday and Sunday and finish far too late at night on Saturday when the parties stop.

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The No Shame Theatre is looking for a few uninhibited people willing to perform in front of a modest audience. If you have something to perform and want to see it done, we have the perfect venue for your expression. No Shame is at least as serious as you are.

Body Language

Reconnaissance needs bodies. Not the stiff, rotten variety, the upright (OK, semi-upright) talkative variety. We need volunteers for ~~three things~~ four things (*nobody expects ...*):

1. **Auction** – *Reconnaissance* will have an auction, run by Roger Robinson, so we need you to bring along books and any other material you wish to sell. The convention's 10% commission from the sales will go to our charity – the Science Fiction Foundation.

2. **Build a Flyer** – (see page 2) does your Pippa doll aspire to the 6 ft high club? We would like anywhere up to four teams of two to seven people to participate in this silly activity.

3. **The Quiz** – as mentioned in the programme article on page 2, we will be having a quiz and need two teams of four to participate.

4. **Discussion Groups** – as mentioned in the article of the same name (page 2), we will be having discussion groups based on our theme. The intention is to allow intense discussion in small groups with a Special Participant involved in each group – meet the pros. The number of groups and participants is flexible, but we would prefer five groups of five people.

If you are interested in any of the above (as some of you have already indicated), either say so on the back of your Booking Form (enclosed), write to us separately, or buy one of us a drink and tell us all about it.

No Shame

Guerilla theatre – SF style.

by Mike Ibeji

The advertisement above paraphrases a similar notice which was posted on the call-board of a Midwestern university theatre in 1986. Not many nights later, student actors stood on the back of a truck in a nearby parking lot, illuminated by the light of a motor-cycle headlamp, and performed a set of impromptu pieces they had written themselves. It was a great success.

No Shame is guerilla theatre. Its motto is 'Dare to fail!', and this underlying philosophy is the force that drives it. The onus is on you, the individual performers, to put as much effort as you feel necessary into each piece.

I have several pieces, both sketches and monologues, which I have never had the time or opportunity to perform, and I'm sure I cannot be the only one. No Shame is a great chance to show these the light of day in a non-judgemental framework. All we need is three of four like-minded people who are willing to take a little time from the convention to iron out the glitches, before making fools of themselves on stage. This is fandom. I *know* I can't be the only exhibitionist out there. Any others who are interested should contact the convention c/o Alice Kohler 75 Hecham Close, Walthamstow, London, E17 5QT and threaten to burn the place down if they don't give us at least half an hour of programme time.

Don't be shy, Dare to Fail.

P.S. This is not on our programme yet – write to have it put on!

Smoked Fish

by Alice Kohler and
James Steel

Reconnaissance has always maintained a fairly serious tone; our aim has been to present a thought provoking programme and to stimulate discussion on the current direction of SF.

However, we discovered we were becoming pompous and stuffy. Several correspondents made pointed remarks about the lack of "fun items" in the programme. We decided that something had to change. With this resolution firmly in mind, we searched far and wide to bring you glitz, zip, pazzang and some items we thought you might find amusing.

When the idea of an item on parodies was suggested to us we felt we had to investigate. After serious consultation and long and careful deliberation, our thoughts came hazily together and *Filthy Prose* was born, a blatant rip-off of a popular Milford past-time.

We don't want to tell you too much, but if *The Lord of the Rings* in the style of A. A. Milne is anything to go by, it is not to be missed.

Since *Reconnaissance* is about new ideas in SF, we couldn't very well run the usual old quiz, so we had a new one specially developed. Sadly, the developers, truly artistes, will tell us very little about it; all they have revealed is that it will be loosely based on Hangman. Apart from that, your guess is as good as ours. They will be needing two teams of contestants, so be warned.

There will also be assorted games, see *The Time Police* and *High Flyers Required* for details of two of these. A third is *Earthdoom*, the game of ecological disaster. The world is slowly roasting under the Greenhouse Effect. The team must try to save it. ... or perhaps it is being flooded out ... or perhaps a new ice age is starting – an exercise in black humour.

We may also have some surprise items, but then again we may not. We're not telling 'cos it's a surprise.

Have fun and see you there.

The Time Police

Audience participation role-playing
by Mike Ibeji and David
B. Wake

From a world blasted by science come the Time Police. To arrest the scientists to blame. As the scientists protest their innocence, the ethics of time travel itself come under trial. You the jury, you the audience, you the victims must decide.

This game will be run in three parts. The first part will take place in the bar, and will concern the science projects that the trial is based upon. In the second part, the scientists are arrested and interrogated by the Time Police (under audience supervision). Finally, the scientists defend themselves before the jury in the form of public debate on the ethics of time-travel, and the jury make their decision.

Anyone who attended *Conjunction* and played Mike and Dave's game there will know that this event is not to be missed.

Discussion Groups

by Oliver Grüter

The idea of discussion groups at a convention, while not totally new, is uncommon. As our aim is to hold an event that gives constructive results for as many participants as possible, we plan to organise dedicated members into five or six groups of up to five people, each of whom would like to have a session to exchange detailed ideas with like-minded people.

We will ask some of our Special Participants to lead each of these groups and get a discussion started that should follow only the broadest of directions: "The possible developments of SF in the next thirty years" just about covers the theme of the whole convention. The discussion groups will take place in a quiet corner of the convention without audience or panel.

Afterwards, each group will send a speaker to a panel discussion where they will com-

pare their results and sum up their ideas about SF in the next three decades.

Please write to the convention address if you are interested in taking part.

High Flyers Required

Inventors, engineers and renaissance men – listen up.

On the theme of our logo, the Leonardo da Vinci flying machine, *Reconnaissance*, will be holding a flyer-building competition. Teams are required make a flying machine, in the spirit of the Great Egg Race, to carry a specified load over a certain distance.

Each team will be provided with a number of helium filled balloons, and a mess of other raw materials, and will be given 1 hour to build a flyer that must carry a teenage mutant ninja Pippa doll (or other object we provide) from A to B, without touching the ground. Such details as how far A and B are apart and the time given for completing the task may yet change (i.e. we haven't tried this yet ourselves), but our first stab at a set of rules are as follows.

1. The flyer must carry a specified object (possibly a Pippa doll).
2. Time limit for flyer design and build is 1 hour.
3. Distance to fly is not less than 30 ft.
4. Bonuses are given for flights in excess of 30 ft, and for style, grace and artistry.
5. The flyer MUST be airborne.
6. At least one helium-filled balloon must be used.
7. The flyer may be released at any height.
8. Once the flyer is released no-one may touch it or enter the space between the sending position and the 30 ft distance limit.
9. The flyer should finish its flight on the ground (and not on the ceiling).
10. All flyers must be named.

Information for Conrunners

The article by Andy Morris on running films at SF conventions was to be continued in this *Dispatches*. Unfortunately, the guide has reached such mammoth proportions that there was no way we could fit it in. The complete article, including the first part published in *Dispatches 2*, is available as an 8 page booklet. It will be available at the convention, or can be provided by post to anyone who writes to us enclosing a large stamped/addressed envelope.

Special Participants

We now have a growing list of Special Participants attending *Reconnaissance*. These are the people you should come to meet, the new (and in some cases not-so-new) faces, in SF, the people who will generate new works and new ideas. Below, in random order, is a very brief bio on each of them – apologies to anyone who accepted our offer after print deadline, and is therefore not represented below.

Alex Stewart

Alex manages to combine the qualities of a long-standing fan and new author. He was the first new writer to be published in *Interzone* and has most recently edited the excellent anthology of short stories *Arrows of Eros*. He is now a director of *Midnight Rose* and is editing *Temps*, a shared world anthology, which will appear shortly.

Terry Pratchett

Terry spent many years as a PR officer for the CEGB. Having shrugged off the weight of explaining Britain's nuclear programme, he now writes very funny and highly acclaimed fantasy books (such as the *Disc-World Series*). Talk to him about cats.

Colin Greenland

Colin spent two years at the Science Fiction Foundation, the adopted charity for *Reconnaissance*, as writer in residence. He has since run the SF class at the London City Literary Institute, and now runs the reviews column in *Foundation* magazine. He is a prolific reviewer, writer, journalist (see his four-page supplement in the Sunday Times, 9 September) and his books include *The Hour of the Thin Ox*, *Other Voices*, and *Take Back Plenty*.

Lionel Fanthorpe

Lionel was born in the same small Norfolk town as Brian Aldiss. He was described in the programme for the Cardiff Literary Festival SF day (which he organised on behalf of the Welsh Academy) as the most prolific SF writer. He and Ken Bulmer can argue the toss, but Lionel has written over 100 SF books in his time. He has recently returned to science fiction conventions after a well-earned rest and his new book on *Rennes-le-Château: its Mysteries and Secrets* will be published on 17 January next year.

John Gribbin

John is a science writer and SF author. He is consultant to *New Scientist* and is well known for his readable and cogent arguments on the Greenhouse Effect; he has been called Dr Greenhouse. He has recent-

ly published *The Cartoon History of Time* with Kate Charlesworth

David Pringle

David is editor of *Interzone*, the British SF fiction magazine. He has nursed the magazine from its beginnings in the spring of 1982 to the monthly showcase of new SF it now represents. As one of the primary forces in New Works for SF, this is the man any budding author should talk to.

Dave Langford

Dave Langford is known by science fiction fans for his humorous writing and publication of *Ansible*, the most successful British fanzines in recent years. He has won the Hugo award for Best Fan Writer many times and his books include *War in 2080*, *The Space Eater*, and *The Dragon-Hiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey II*.

Gill Alderman

Gill is new to the SF field. Having published her first book *The Archivist* (see last *Dispatches*), she is running off to Ireland to join the other SF writers in retreat (actually, she is going to Cork, source of Murphy's stout). We hope this gives her even more time in peace to write.

Charles Stross

Charlie is a new SF writer. He is responsible for the spectre of *Technogoth* – see last issue, but claims to have been pissed at the time. He is qualified in pharmacy and computer science, and has 15 stories contracted to magazines. He is currently working on a novel.

Lorna Mitchell

Lorna is an expert in story telling, expert to such an extent that she was given an Arts Council grant to perform. Her performance at the last Hatfield convention was highly acclaimed, and she will be giving a talk at *Reconnaissance* entitled 'Morgan-Le-Fay Meets the Star Trek Rebels'. Go along and sit comfortably.

Mary Gentle

Mary is the author of *Rats and Gargoyles*, a director of *Midnight Rose* and has other causes for insecurity. The pen may be mightier than the sword, but given a choice in a brawl she would opt for the bastard sword over the word-processor every time.

Dean Wayland

... is, like his namesake, much concerned with swords. A quote from *Aliens* will win you his life-long friendship, and probably several hours of conversation. □

The Madness of the Hero

by Gary Stratmann

In my article in *Dispatches 2* I covered the development of human qualities in super-heroes, this tendency to have commitments other than slugging it out with the bad guys. The next logical step followed shortly.

Consider, as many writers did, what sort of person dons a silly costume and goes out pounding on criminals – obviously some kind of nut. Heroes began to develop psychotic tendencies.

The symptoms appeared earliest in heroes who developed their 'heroic' identities to avenge themselves. *The Punisher* is the archetype – he's so far over the edge that he forms a baseline for measuring how deranged heroes can get.

In *The Dark Knight Returns* Frank Miller takes the most famous masked avenger to the edges of madness and Alan Moore's *Rorschach* followed in a rapidly growing field. It should be said that *V for Vendetta* was an earlier study in insane revenge.

The aberrant behaviour of the obsessed avenger is the most obvious and logical type of insanity to strike the hero. The dedication and single-mindedness required to become a superhero borders on the psycho-pathological and it only takes a small shove to cross the line. Heroes who were born with special powers or who received them by accident usually take the 'greater power brings greater responsibility' route to heroics and are unlikely to be as single-minded about their work.

As a result, other routes to insanity had to be used. Simple steps like conversion to avenger by death of a loved one affected *The Flash* and insanity brought on by the use of their superpowers – Steve Dayton in the *Teen Titans* for example. Another useful route followed by some writers was to have real-time problems become sufficiently large to cause breakdowns, Tony (*Iron Man*) Stark's alcoholism being such an example.

It is interesting to note that many of the ways that heroes have been behaving recently parallel the behaviour of their supposed enemies. There is only a tiny difference between the lunatic out for revenge, hunted by heroes, and heroes obsessively punishing the guilty. □

FEATURE

Film and TV SF in the Post-Mundane World

by Frances Bonner

Frances Bonner is a Tasmanian now living in Milton Keynes. She has taught English as a foreign language in Japan and likes Japanese beer. After completing a PhD in TV and films, she is now lecturing in Liverpool Polytechnic, while as an SF fan she contributes to Foundation magazine. Her feature article looks at new work and new ideas in film and TV SF.

Warning: serious disillusionment ahead. To investigate the extent of new work and new ideas in SF film and TV, I'm going to concentrate on three exemplary texts – *Total Recall*, *Star Trek: the Next Generation* and *The Late Show* item on cyberpunk in the wake of British publication of *The Difference Engine*. Stop wincing at the back there – I know it doesn't augur well, but what I see is what you get and there ain't much else around. The new is certainly not in the works themselves, it's there in the outside world's response to them.

It is a bit disconcerting to discover that one's dear old genre – so long regarded as just this side of train-spotting as an intellectual pastime and as taboo as discussions of supermarket deodorants at dinner parties – has become smart. This is however what seems to have happened. Now we may have known that Philip K. Dick was (barring such matters as serious misogyny and delusions of visitation) a GOOD THING, but the rest of the world preferred Wilbur Smith – or maybe Günther Grass. Somewhere something seems to have happened. Have you seen for example the kind of intellectual property (I use the term in its legal sense only) Dick's name is being used to endorse these days? And the places it is being used in? Obviously this is where references to *Total Recall* should begin, but they can wait.

Nor is the dear dead Dick all. Were most of us not too old, too hairy, too fat, too altogether tedious, we would be at the very wave-front of all that separates the hoi from the polloi. SF, though preferably not called quite that, is a very important part of the package that put the curlicues on the Sainsbury's portico.

If the mundane are this clued up, even if it's only the (very) mundane working in the culture industries, the world can no longer be regarded as all that separate. As far as I can see, we now live in the post-mundane world and that requires a familiarity with cyberpunk as much as with Jarmusch films. Ah yes the word is out; it isn't really SF – it's cyberpunk, ho-hum. At base, it's the promise embedded in the term – all the exclusivity, and of course the control, of being in-the-know. Professional language aims for that – think of the language of

nuclear warfare – and so too does trendiness. The very idea of SF on the *Late Show* is a give away. They hadn't grasped the idea that Bruce Sterling was a major figure and if they'd heard of steampunk they'd pretended not to have been listening, but wow cyberspace – Timothy Leary and all those lovely graphics ... Where was the joy for us? Personally, I kept my finger off the zap button by wondering if I'd ever seen a longer neck than Gibson's without David Attenborough doing the commentary.

It's fraud folks, as if you didn't know. Not even a mirrorshade of resemblance to the real state of our world. Maybe in the world

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of graphic novels and games design there are visual equivalents to the inventiveness of the print world, but as far as film and TV are concerned, there's an argument that *Reconnaissance's* theme is oxymoronic; there may be new work, but there are no new ideas (or possibly there are new ideas, but they aren't working in film or TV).

Look at TV and what is there? *Star Trek: The Next Generation* that's what. Not only is it not based on a new idea, it's not even new in itself, having been around on video for ages. But it's typical of the post-mundane, for it has had one new touch – a marketing one. Sell the video before the suckers can tape it off air. They know how desperate the people who like that kind of thing are. A close look at the premises of the new *Star Trek* can tell us a lot about changes in the last twenty years though – the sentimental moralising remains the same,

the tokenism has shifted to encompass the disabled, the sexism of the introductory voice-over has gone, but the split infinitive soldiers on. No longer do we "boldly go where no man has gone before" we "boldly go where no one has gone before." Significant, dude. Yes this *is* the moment to continue the pedantic peeve at grammatical excrescences. If Turtles must be deninja'd, why can't they be heroic? 'Hero' as adjective is creeping in everywhere – look at the tabloid headlines. Anyone for a 'con session on New Ideas in English Usage?

To bring down my blood pressure I'm going to recall the only really good relevant piece of television that I've seen lately, even if it was horror rather than SF. This was the literally round table discussion chaired by Clive Barker with Lisa Tuttle, John Carpenter, Roger Corman, Peter Atkins and the all-consuming Ramsey Campbell. I was rivetted for the full 90 minutes and I don't even like horror. I was held by the editing as much as by anything – and when was it last possible to say that of a TV discussion programme? This was truly new TV in that it was on the screen, not the transmuted modish touches of what we've just put down. These were the games we play, these were the people we value and loathe. And the revelations came through the games we play. As the six dining companions told a story round the table, their preoccupations and personae were revealed. John Carpenter *was* as clever as he'd sounded in discussion; Clive Barker *liked* making things difficult for the next-comer; Lisa Tuttle *knew* that horror lay in the not so complex; and Roger Corman turned out eventually to be every bit as clichéd as you'd feared.

So what about *Total Recall*? I'd waited as anxiously as anyone for this movie. Philip K. as the source, Paul Verhoeven directing, and Arnie – how could it lose? If you've seen it you can answer, but since I think it's symptomatic, I'm going to elaborate. The promotion led me to expect that this was 'real' SF and the critics were so busy counting the individual violent acts (how did they separate them?) that most didn't give a normal qualitative assessment. Kim Newman, though, liked it. He thought it state-of-the-

art SF and he traced the skewed sensibility of the *vrai* Dick. I suspect he was closer to the original story than would be the case for almost all the audience and the distancing devices and layered realities that delighted him would not be widely available. Nor did I see them and I don't want to go back to try again.

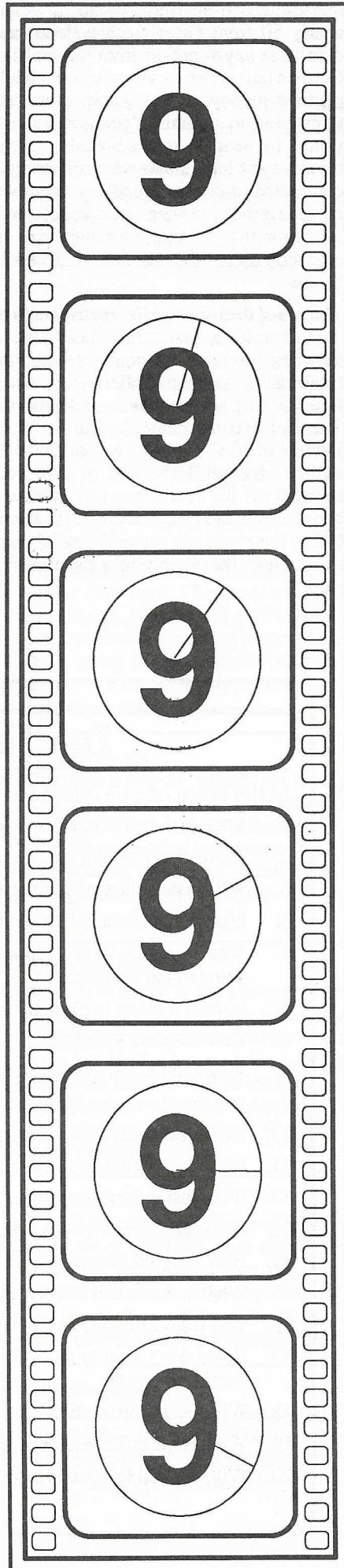
So far from finding myself positioned edge-wise to the real (the classic Dick manoeuvre), there I was sitting in my cinema seat flat on to the ordinary – and this on a posited Mars, yet! I'd been looking forward to classic SF location too. In the same way the editing made the horror discussion, it ruined *Total Recall* in my eyes. The

... the unadorned
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timing was out and I felt ill-served, not alienated. The best special effects in a long time – the drawer-like unfolding of Arnie's fat woman facial disguise – was gone before it could be savoured, gone even before it registered, yet the trite and tiresome oxygenating of the Martian atmosphere at the end dragged on as if to counteract charges of scientific impossibility.

While I was having my customary worry about whether I could handle the violence (even I am coming to find this tedious), a young woman friend warned me that the only scene she'd had difficulty watching was the second when the near-naked Arnie body was exposed. Frankly I flinched just before that when the usually disguised shot of the unadorned Arnie jaw, more simian than credible, hung on the screen. So unattractive was it that when later his eyeballs distended, I was merely glad to have attention focussed elsewhere. As for the violence, well I don't know. It did nothing for me. It's not the violence, it's the tension that makes me shake and there's no tension, no waiting in Verhoeven's post-mundane world.

Although there were a few recognisable Verhoeven touches – the vertical composition, the stress on male genitalia, the head wounds – I hated the look. Where did the \$60 million go? Why didn't they spend some on Syd Mead? The flatness of the surfaces, the sameness of the future world spoke more of bad accountancy than



planned distraction. It looked so pre-*Blade Runner* – late 60s, early 70s. Was it really that Ron Cobb who was the conceptual artist? Does that explain it? Why did the referential bits not have any conviction? "Fasten your seat belts" says the Johnnycab driver as the bumpy ride begins, but the moment disappears too soon. And the clichés! Oh my god! The receptionist may change her nail colour with the touch of a light pen, but she's still doing her nails. The Arnie set pieces were all deployed too: the women, but not the men, groin him; he's paired with a Chicana (it's that foreign accent, you know); he bleeds, but it never wears or gets sweated off. Did I like anything? Yes, I liked the bit where the guide dog slips, but I don't think it was intentional, though Philip K. would have done it. I loved the moment in the final credits when the entire screen was taken up top to bottom side to side with three columns of stunt people. Assuming Debbie Lee Carrington was the little blonde person, I also liked any scene when she appeared – especially with a sub-machine gun. but these are not SF and they certainly aren't Dickian, any more that Arnie is the Dick hero. His body is too much, too present. "There is no there, there" they quote (characteristically crammed in anyhow), but with Arnie it is the reverse. There is too much there, there. I never believed he was lost in the layers in his own mind. Arnie can't *do* 'lost' and he doesn't do figments.

Nonetheless this is SF and this is Dick for the post-mundane world. You can tell how much some sort of literacy is necessary by looking at TV ads. The SF touches are there, you have to be able to read them. It doesn't however have to be new, better if it isn't, easier to read. The same with *Total Recall*. At least *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is honest hokum. Not new, not exactly 'ideas', but it delivers on the pleasures it promises. □

Film Note

Reconnaissance was intending to show *Forbidden Planet* in 'scope. Unfortunately the 16 mm print was so badly damaged by previous hirers and age that it had to be scrapped. We then booked a standard ratio print. This has now been scrapped after being returned by a hirer with substantial sprocket damage. There is now no 16 mm print of *Forbidden Planet* available and we have had to drop the film from the program. This is what happens if you do not take care of the films you hire – subsequent customers loose out. □

– Andy Morris

What Went Wrong With X-Con '91?

by Oliver Grüter

Oliver Grüter was a member of the committee of X-Con '91, a bid for the first large German SF convention, which folded earlier this year. He reviews what went wrong.

The collapse of X-Con '91 was not the first time that a convention failed before it really got off the ground. Yet this particular case is the more tragic as it would have been the first convention for German fandom in the style of the events that the British SF scene is used to these days. It also hoped, quite rightfully, to attract an unusually large number of fans from abroad, mainly the British and thus create an international atmosphere of at least EuroCon standard. However, there were problems. I don't want to discuss the personal quarrels, which are apparently not unique to the British and that also contributed to the fall of the project, along with changes in the situations some of the individuals involved were in. I'd rather like to mention the difficulties the team ran into when they attempted to realise some of the initial ideas of X-Con '91.

One of the aims was to organise an event that would bring together aspects of SF, its groups, as well as individual fans, on the one hand and the scientific community concerned with topics edging into science fiction on the other. We know there is an overlap, so why don't we make it work for us? As the project was financially insecure (we had never before held a comparable convention in Germany) the committee was looking for sponsors from related industries, computer designers and those branches of publicly supported research groups (such as the Max Planck Institutes and the European Space Agency) that have a natural interest in promoting their projects. Thus hopes were high for talks given by various PR departments, researchers with private interests in SF and the odd Mark or two from Nixdorf Computers. Detailed, professional brochures were produced and sent to all even vaguely interesting institutions.

The response however was virtually nil. Only 10% of the addressed groups even wrote back and all those declined the offer of co-operation. Those who might have been expected to be interested in representing themselves, and might add a talk or seminar to the scientific programme tracks, deemed fandom unworthy of their contempt and hardly responded at all. At that point the committee felt extremely financially inconfident (no wonder with only 40

registrations from Germany so far – and nearly 50 from Great Britain alone) and didn't see any support from the ranks of German fans either – some of whom plainly planned to boycott the whole event and threatened to organise 'counter conventions' in nearby youth hostels. Even though some individuals were still strongly committed to the event and new members of some reputation were in fact about to join the committee, the existing members of the crew considered the chances of success to be low.

The actual decision to quit was triggered by the treasurer's announcement last June that he wanted to leave the committee and the Chairman's desire to gafiate (Get Away From It All), which he subsequently did. The fact that the contract with the hotel Intercontinental could only be cancelled without fee until the end of this year rounded off the decision not to wait for a better time but to bring the project to an end before there was any severe financial damage to either the organisers or the membership.

More

by Patrick Lawford

I am writing my contribution to the next issue of *Dispatches*. As you may know, I do not find this easy. Still, after all the electrotherapy and hypnosis that I have been through since the last such occasion, the prospect does not seem to be affecting me too badly. In fact, I seem to be taking it very calmly. Yes, when they told me that a third issue was planned and that I was expected to produce at least one hundred words, it only took four of them to subdue me.

A great improvement, I am sure you agree.

Less

by Patrick Lawford

Zen Tie-Breaker

In the event of a tie, please answer the following questions:

1. What is the point of murder with a blunt instrument?
2. Do British Telecom do it on purpose?
3. Why does industrial action have such a low productivity?
4. Is pre-sentient thought a good idea?
5. Was the industrial revolution a turning point in history, or are we just going round in circles?
6. Is there a future in planned obsolescence?
7. How deep is a puddle?
8. Should intolerant people be banned?
9. Am I really a solopist or am I just imagining it?
10. Do traffic lights change colour when no one is around?
11. Which vegetable do you use vegetable oil to lubricate?
12. If confusion is rife, why don't people say rife when they mean it?
13. Are zebras colour blind or do they just lack imagination?
14. How well did Morgana do in *Which?* magazine?
15. What is the capital of Ulan-Baatar?
16. Was the Marie Celeste chartered by the Mysterons?
17. If you don't want to mix your words should you avoid a Kenwood word-processor?
18. When is a contradiction not a contradiction?
19. What is the difference between a question and a riddle?
20. Will you still love me tomorrow?

Science Fiction for Science's Sake

by Rob Meades

Why do you read science fiction? No, no, don't stop reading, this is important. The question is often asked by people who don't, but I do and I'm asking.

Actually, I don't care why you read science fiction. I know why I read it – because I am a fan of science. Slartibartfast may have sounded silly when he said this, but the apparently frivolous tone hides a truth. I read *New Scientist* every week, I watch *Tomorrow's World*. I'm a fan. I don't claim to have a rigorous scientific mind (I actually have a more realistic engineering one) and I don't work as a scientist. Definitely a fan.

Is there anyone else out there with similar views? Why am I asking? Well ...

Different SF conventions have different aims; some look at literature, some at media, some at fantasy, some at written SF, none look at science. Why the hell not? It's called *science* fiction, that stuff you read, isn't it? *Eastcon* (the last British Easter Convention) aimed to bring the Science Back Into Science Fiction (a stated aim at one point in its chequered history), but failed to do so. *Reconnaissance* with its aim to look at 'New Works and New Ideas in SF' cannot be wholly science based. I think a science convention for science fiction readers is necessary.

If writers come to SF conventions, at least in part, to pick up and swap ideas, SF writers will certainly come to a science convention to pick up ideas from scientists. The convention wouldn't be without the usual spread of authors.

But I don't pretend it would be easy to hold. The programme would have to step back and take a very different approach. While fandom has scientists in its ranks, it has nothing like enough. Liaison with other bodies would be necessary, with care to avoid the fate that *X-Con '91* suffered. And by science, take it as read that I include technology and therefore engineering (which is what space flight is all about).

Before it folded, *Icon*, the Unicon (university/college convention held every summer) intended to base itself on science and was in a prime position to do so, the committee being students at Imperial College. It was a great pity nothing came of it, but perhaps the resource can be used still.

I'm aware that I am digging my own grave here, but I believe in this one. I'm interested – how about you?

Convention Burn-Out

OR:

I wish I could win the "Free weekend for two in Paris" not because I want to go to Paris, but because I could do with a free weekend!

by Chris O'Shea II

The first question that you should ask yourself is why do people run conventions. The answer that I usually give is "power, fame, glory, women, leather, whips and chocolate"

In my case there were many reasons:

- 1) I'd always gotten involved in the actual on-the-day behind-the-scenes work and it seemed the logical progression.
- 2) I thought I could do as good a job as anyone else!
- 3) I wanted to give my own unique contribution to a convention (in publishing etc.).
- 4) for the ego-boo.
- 5) for the group spirit and bon hommie, or however you spell that, engendered in a group of fans/friends striving together towards a common goal. (Sounds like pretentious claptrap doesn't it!)[It is – ed].
- 6) to fill up my free time!
- 7) as an acknowledgement that I had finally "made it" in fandom.

Most of these reasons seem stupid now that I come to look at them, but when someone came up to me and asked if I wanted to be on the committee of *Reconnaissance*, I jumped at the opportunity. Unfortunately having been bitten by the bug of convention running I then proceeded to get drafted or volunteer for seven other conventions including at least one spoof!

And what effect did being on the committee of these conventions have on me? Well, firstly I had NO free time, secondly I had NO money, thirdly I had NO job, because my work was not cutting sufficiently into my convention running activities. I was having to cut down on my other activities (theatre, films, concerts, boogie-ing on down etc). I even had to drop a couple of conventions so that I had time for the convention running!

So then, why didn't I just stop working on conventions?

Because I was stupid!

Theoretically you can take on as much or as little work as you like, and pace it as you

wish. In the real world it turns out that there is too much work to be done and not enough time to do it in, and other people aren't doing their job anyway. Of course sometimes you have a committee that clicks and everything seems to get done incredibly easily and everything is done ahead of the deadlines and everything is happy, unfortunately not every committee works as smoothly as *Reconnaissance*'s. Sometimes you end up with a committee where everyone is only interested in their own little area and aren't doing anything about that either! You then have the option of desertion or revolution. This leads to a) loss of friendships in the committee, b) instant death! c) counter-revolution.

... and your publications team starts eating small children ...

There are also the external pressures: deadlines, hotel cancellations, guests vanishing up their own shoelaces, world recession (don't laugh, Holland probably lost 1,000 members from the US due to the world recession), jobs, family, accidents, death, and taxes.

My own personal hell is publications. This is one of the most important and yet least respected part of the con-running process (in fact every part of con-running seems to be the least respected!) If you set deadlines too far before the convention then no-one will do the stuff because they don't think it's urgent. If you set the deadlines too close to the convention then nothing makes it into the programme book, and your publications team starts eating small children.

So what happens once the pressures of con-running have gotten too high for too long? Convention burn-out. Convention burn-out is a bit like GAFIating but it doesn't always stop you going to conventions, just working on them. It can also lead to extreme sarcasm and disparaging comments about current committees that seem to be doing their job too easily (since you just know that it isn't that easy and that they must be doing something wrong...).

This article may seem bitty, but that's because it was originally three times the length and the deadline is long past and I've had to cut large chunks out in order to get it to fit on the page and (No! Don't cut the last paragraph Rob, it's got the best jokes in it, like "What is the difference between an Eastercon and a bucket of

Information

Reconnaissance will take place over the weekend of 22-24th February 1991 at the Park Hotel, Cardiff.

All correspondence/memberships should be addressed to:

Reconnaissance, 5 St. Andrews Road, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 2DY.

Electronic Mail Contact Points:

Greenet: gdn:johnstewart

DASnet: DE3MIR:johnstewart

Membership costs:

£18 Attending

£10 Supporting.

Conversion is always the current difference in rates. Cheques should be made payable to *Reconnaissance*.

Advertising in *Dispatches*:

Fan Rate: £20 full page,
£10 half page.

Pro Rate: £40 full page,
£20 half page.

Advertising in Souvenir Book:

Fan Rate: £30 full page,
£15 half page.

Pro Rate: £60 full page,
£30 half page.

Deadline for *Dispatches 4* and the Souvenir Book is 1 January 91.

Reconnaissance T-shirts and sweatshirts are available for £5 and £8 respectively from our convention desk at *Novacon*, or by post (add £1.00 for postage and packing).

Reconnaissance badges are available for 50p (plain) or 75p (hand coloured).

The *Reconnaissance* committee:

Patrick Lawford, Rob Meades, Andy Morris, Chris O'Shea II, James Steel, John Stewart, Gary Stratmann and Marcus Streets.

□

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Membership List

At 31 October 90

A = Attending B = Baby/Juvenile

S = Supporting.

38 S Mike Abbott
4 A Gill Alderman
101 A Philip Allcock
79 A Brian Ameringen
59 A William Armitage
91 A Stephen Bagnes
102 A Henry Balen
121 A John Bark
130 A Michael Bernardi
32 A Neil Blaber
131 A Lissa Blackburn
34 A Jill Bradley
35 A Phil Bradley
42 A Alan Braggins
66 A Michael Braithwaite
132 S John Bray
45 A Jon Brewis
27 A Ben Brown
47 A Pat Brown
155 A Peter Brown
43 A Steve Bull
129 A Steve Burrige
111 A Julian Burrows
37 A Steven Cain
133 A Mike Cheater
26 A Paul Clough
156 A Malcolm Cohen
58 A Peter Cohen
157 A Geoff Cook
114 A Barbara Cooper
97 A Chris Cooper
68 A Keith Coslett
95 A Rafe Culpin
70 A John Dallman
40 A Mike Damesick
134 S Penny M Davidson
135 S Martyn Dawe
71 A Peter J B Day
108 A Iain Dickson
46 A Paul Dormer
136 S Tim Duckworth
82 A Martin Easterbrook
137 A Sue Edwards
112 A Frances Elsworth
36 A John English
31 A Fabian
10 A Lionel Fanthorpe
138 A Mike Figg
64 A Colin Fine
73 S Alan R Fleming
98 A Richard Fox
24 A Susan Francis
80 A Gwen Funnell
117 A Peter Garratt
8 A Mary Gentle
87 A Jenny Glover
90 B Robert Glover
88 A Steve Glover
89 B Tara Glover
74 A Tim Goodier
65 S Karen Goswell
28 S Michael Gould
3 A Colin Greenland
139 A Ben Gribbin
11 A John Gribbin
72 A P J Groves
22 A Eef Hartman
140 S Jackie Hawkins
25 S Trader Horn
141 A Paul Hunt
106 A Mike "The Fingers" Ibeji
30 S Rhodri James
54 A Richard James
39 A Neil Jezard
96 A Steve Jones
53 S Jane Killick
154 A James F Klein
116 A C V F Knight
21 A Alice Kohler
9 A Dave Langford
77 A Nick Larter
23 A Adrian Last

15 A Patrick Lawford
100 A Steve Linton
142 A Justin Lloyd
152 A Ann Looker
158 A Hugh Mascetti
85 S Helen McNabb
49 A Robert Meades
109 A Christine Milford
6 A Lorna Mitchell
115 A Anthony Neale Gerald Mittenshaw-Hodge
69 S David C Moor
16 A Andy Morris
20 A Wim Morrison
78 A Caroline Mullan
12 A Chris O Shea
104 A D Packwood
150 A Nigel "Günther" Parsons
2 A Phil Partridge
107 A J M Paxton
122 S Harry Payne
99 A Bernie Peak
61 A Roger Perkins
110 A Phil Plumby
55 S Maureen Porter
14 A Terry Pratchett
149 A David Pringle
57 S Liam Quin
52 A John F W Richards
44 A Roger Robinson
128 A Bruce Saville
124 A Alison Scott
123 A Mike Scott
56 S D M Sherwood
33 A Anna Smith
48 S Chris Smith
29 A Nick Smith
113 A Dan Smithers
143 A Jane Smithers
151 A Rob Southall
17 A James Steel
67 S John Stewart
51 A Alex Stewart
18 A John Stewart
144 A Mike Stone
148 A Gary Stratmann
19 A Marcus Streets
5 A Charles Stross
105 A G Taylor
153 A Dafydd ap Thomas
103 A D Thompson
76 A Toerag
86 A Ivan Towlson
126 A John Trasler
127 A Karen Trasler
83 S Martin Tudor
41 A Larry van der Putte
119 A Angeline Van Toorn
118 A Kees Van Toorn
145 S David Vines
92 A David B Wake
93 A Helen Wake
94 B Rachel Wake
81 A Peter Wareham
13 A Ian Watson
1 A Nina Watson
125 A Jeffrey G Watts
7 A Dean Wayland
84 A Johathan Weeks
63 A Kathy Westhead
62 A Mike Westhead
60 S Elda Wheeler
146 A Mike Whitaker
50 A Bridget Wilkinson
147 A David Wingrove
75 A Melinda Young

Credits

Thanks to Frances for her feature article and to Mike Ibeji for offering to make a fool of himself. Thanks also to our two one-person sub-committees, Oliver Grüter and Alice Kohler. Apologies to Marcus Streets for running out of room.