



CONVOCATION

UNICON 16 18th - 20th July 1997 New Hall, Cambridge



Progress Report Two

« The Plot Chickens »

CONVOCATION

In which it is discovered that the convention is imminent and quite possibly also immanent, that Guests are moving across the face of the waters, and that Our Heroes might just get away with this one.

Welcome to Progress Report 2 from Convocation, the 1997 British Roleplaying Convention and Unicon 16. Due to unexpected pressures of work amongst all the committee, this welcome and PR are rather late, so we would ask you please to fill in the room booking form included with this PR as soon as possible, and return it to the convention address (19 Uphall Road, Cambridge). Our apologies for this tardiness.

"We" in this context are the committee, being:

Kari:	chair and secretary
Phil Nanson:	treasurer and site liaison
Mike Scott:	memberships and guest liaison
Sue Mason:	artist and dealer liaison
Rhodri James:	publications and lateness

Convocation will run from 18th - 20th July 1997 in New Hall, Cambridge, starting at 6pm on the Friday, and will be concentrating on games, literature and having fun, mostly in the form of stories. To help us in our various endeavours we have as Guest of Honour **Steven Brust**, and as our UK Guests **James Wallis** and **Andrew Rilstone**.

If you have any friends who are intending to come along but haven't joined yet, please let them know that membership of Convocation will cost them £20, or £25 if they join on the day. Donations to the *Adron's Disaster Relief Fund* will also be gratefully received; this is the fund set up to defray the cost of bringing our principal guest across the Atlantic. The committee would like to thank Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Tor books for their kind donations of books to be auctioned for the Fund.

Steven Brust – An Appreciation

Jo Walton

I've never met Steven Brust. I really want to. I really want to ask him what's so magical about the number seventeen. Why do all his novels have seventeen chapters?

As a storyteller, Steven Brust is never less than tremendous fun. Considered as a serious writer he keeps taking my breath away. For Brust, and for the others who claim in a "seriously joking" way to be members of the Pre-Joycean Fellowship, there is no distinction between the two. Whether it's the deft charm of *Cowboy Feng's Space Bar and Grill*, the mock-Dumas hilarities of the Khaavren books (*The Phoenix Guards* and *Five Hundred Years After*) or the dazzling brilliance of his new epistolary novel *Freedom and Necessity* (with Emma Bull) Brust consistently manages to pull off something pre-eminently readable, technically amazing and never predictable.

Brust began his career with *Jherag*, a novel introducing a character and a world. The character was Vlad Taltos, human assassin, the world was Dragaera. Vlad is a wise-cracking fast talking, engaging, cynical protagonist, the world grew out of a role-playing game and had everything one might wish - floating castles, two different magic systems, guilds, plots, more plots, elves, reversible death, irreversible death, fencing, thieves, true love. Which really was just the beginning. If that had been all there was to it I'd have been quite satisfied with the novel and would have recommended it. But beyond all that it had an economic system that had been thought about, the elves weren't elves at all and the book gave a fast paced glance at thousands of years of Dragaeran history that leave one wondering if it is fantasy or SF after all. (Are the Dragaerans genetically engineered elves? How, *precisely*, do sorcery and witchcraft differ? What are those menacing morganti daggers *really*? And what in Dragaera are the tantalising Jenoine?) This background is illuminated by the other books set in this world: the

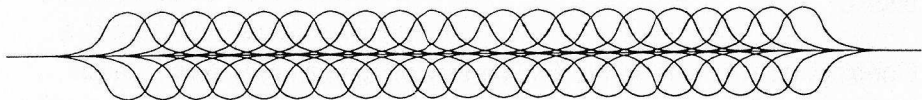
other Vlad books (*Yendi*, *Teckla*, *Taltos*., *Phoenix*, *Athyra* and *Orca*); the Khaavren romances mentioned above and the very strange *Brokedown Palace*. (Brust himself describes this as "your basic mixture of Hungarian folktale and Grateful Dead song lyrics.") It was the first Brust I read, and I like it a lot.

In all these novels Brust tells stories that are never less than compelling and exciting in their own right. Behind that there is a background that is as complex and fascinating as any in fantasy. Behind that there is a level on which the books are about the nature of fantasy and of art itself. Tolkien wrote in "On Fairy Stories" that it isn't possible to write about Faerie from an insider's point of view, that one can only write about the stranger who goes there to visit. I think in one way all the Dragaeran books can be read as a commentary on that statement.

As well as the aforementioned novels, Brust has written *Agyar*, one of the only two vampire novels I've ever enjoyed. (The other is John M. Ford's *The Dragon Waiting*.) It's very different. He's also written the very hard to get hold of novel *To Reign in Hell*, which treats the Christian mythos much as Zelazny treats the Egyptian one in *Creatures of Light and Darkness* and the Hindu one in *Lord of Light*. It has an introduction by Roger Zelazny that effectively says "Wow" a lot. Brust really is that good. As if all this wasn't enough, and as if all this enthusiasm wasn't enough to send you all rushing out to buy all these books at your nearest import shop (I don't think any of them are in print in Britain at present) I haven't even mentioned the best thing he has written. This is the totally indescribable book *The Sun, The Moon and The Stars*. It's a book about the nature of art, it uses another Hungarian folk tale and anyone who is interested in storytelling in any sense of the word should read it. It was originally published as part of the excellent Ace Fairy Tale series, and is now back in print in a US edition. Just read it, and if you can be coherent about it please, please come and be coherent about it to me.

Through all of Brust's books wanders a little girl, about eight years old, with big brown eyes. Her name is Devera, though it isn't often mentioned. She generally just appears - often in just a line or two,

generally anonymously, and then wanders away again. People who read Brust enough to notice make a game out of spotting her in his novels. People often wonder who she is. My muse recently suggested to me that Devera may be Brust's muse, popping into all his novels to keep things on track and scattering a little magic on the way. That would certainly be one explanation. But with Brust there is rarely only the one explanation.

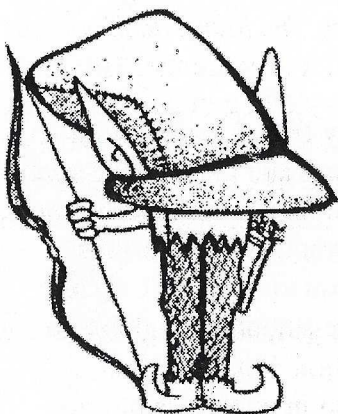


British RPG Cons: the What & Where

Phil Nanson

It all started with a group of us sitting around at an Eastercon, complaining that games cons weren't like science fiction cons, that you were either gaming or waiting to game, that there was nothing going on if you weren't gaming and that they just didn't have the right atmosphere dammit.

At some point it occurred to us that the only way to get the convention we wanted was to run it. So Conjunction was born. An attempt to cross the classic 'two hundred people sitting round tables' gaming cons with the 'there's something good on the programme but I'm quite happy here in the bar' atmosphere of science fiction conventions. The convention was held in New Hall Cambridge, the guest of honour was Greg Stafford, and a fun time was had by all.



This inspired several groups of people -

Stabcons were revived, the Convulsion series of Runequest conventions (with Greg Stafford as GoH) and the 'direct successor' Contraption.

Contraption was the second British National Role-playing convention. The British National Roleplaying Convention was conceived as a series of conventions similar to (and based on) Unicons, and Conjunction had been the first (though if there hadn't been a second It wouldn't have been).

Contraption was held in the University of East Anglia, had Steve Jackson (of Steve Jackson Games) as a guest of honour, and was followed in turn by Sto Con Trent, which was in Keele and didn't have a guest of honour as such .

Last year a hideously mutated version of the Contraption committee ran Contraptions in Northampton and invited Steve Jackson back again.

And so to Convocation, which is being run by a cabal claiming descent from the original Conjunction committee through rite of trial, knowledge of the hidden secret and having three members in common.

Getting There

Being a guide to finding Cambridge, and once therein locating the bastion of women's education that is New Hall.

By Train:

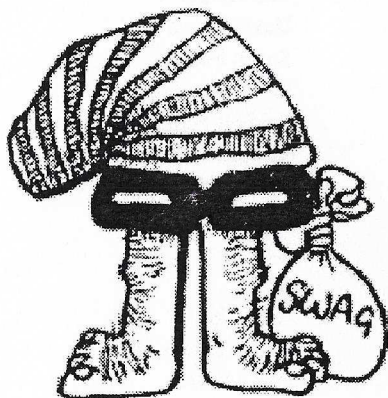
Cambridge is a little more than an hour away from London, with frequent trains running from both King's Cross and Liverpool Street. From the north, Cambridge is on the London lines from Peterborough, Ely and King's Lynn. In either case, when you leave Cambridge station, you will need to hire a taxi to take you to New Hall. While there are regular bus services to and from the station, they don't go anywhere near New Hall.

By Automobile:

From the North and West: find the A14 and trundle down it following signs for Cambridge. Just outside Cambridge the signposting gets a little confusing; the road ahead becomes the M11, the A14 splits off to the left, and you want to split off to the right from the A14 following the A1307 into Cambridge. After a short while, you will enter Cambridge. Carry straight on down Huntingdon Road for a long way. Look out for Fitzwilliam College on the right, easily identifiable by the sign reading "Fitzwilliam College". New Hall is immediately after Fitz on the right. People who have been to New Hall before should note that the car park is now at the other end of the building!

From the East: find the A14 (travelling west this time), looking out for signs to Cambridge. Take the second junction, signposted for Cambridge, Histon and Cottenham, and follow the signs for Cambridge. Carry straight on down Histon Road at both sets of traffic lights. Eventually the road will end at a T-junction with traffic lights. Turn right here. Ten yards later, the road will end at a T-junction with traffic lights. Turn right here. Really. Ten yards further on, just past the pedestrian crossing, turn **left** into New Hall.

From the South: find the M11 and trundle up it. Ignore the first exits for Cambridge, instead leaving at junction 13 signposted for Bedford A1303 (A45). Turn right when you run out of slip road, heading into Cambridge. Carry on down Maddingley Road until it ends in a mini roundabout. Turn left here, down Northampton Street. At the next traffic lights (**not** the pedestrian lights!) turn left up Castle Hill. At the top of the hill, go straight over two sets of traffic lights in quick succession, across one set of pedestrian lights in even quicker succession and turn left into New Hall.



Membership List

Michael Abbott
Andrew Adams
Brian Ameringen
Sion Arrowsmith
Volker Bach
Derek Barns
Square Bear
Austin Benson
Simon Bisson
Paul Blackwell
Simon Bradshaw
Mary Branscombe
Steven Brust
Roger Burton West
Steven Cain
Cardinal Cox
Diana Cox
John Cox
Michael Cule
John Dallman
Steve Davies
Giulia de Cesare
Paul Dormer
Bob Dowling
Sue Edwards
Tim Ellis
Tim Evans
David Finch
Susan Francis
Gwen Funnell
Bridget Hardcastle
Jasper Hedger
Valerie Housden
Rhodri James
Jenny
Kari
Karen Kelly
Richard Kettlewell
Phil Masters

Rory McLean
Pat McMurray
Tim Morley
Caroline Mullan
Phil Nanson
Tom Nanson
Lisanne Norman
Emmet O'Brien
John Oram
Chris O'Shea
Bernard Peek
Ceri Pritchard
Matthew Reid
Andrew Rilstone
Marcus Rowland
Mike Scott
Alison Scott
Ken Slater
Chris Southern
Jenny Southern
Helen Steele
Alex Stewart
Michael Stone
Rae Streets
Marcus Streets
Neil Taylor
Graham Taylor
Sheila Thomas
Larry van der Putte
James Wallis
Huw Walters
Jo Walton
Peter Wareham
Jaine Weddell
Dave Weddell
Janet Wilkins
Caroline Wilson
Anne Wilson