PNNewt1



Langford Skips Nurse Shock!

Dave Langford delayed the November issue of Ansible, inspiring the Plokta cabal to produce this downloaded edition of the Plokta News Network. But at November's Dead Nurse, we all sat around morosely wondering how we could cope without our monthly dose. Boldly thrusting into the breach were Alan Sullivan's Mongolian Jird and Tony Keen's The Convertible Bus. Alan writes "The Art of War advises against starting conflicts that cannot be won quickly, and which lack the support of the people. I suspect George Bush thinks that Sun Tzu is a breed of dog." Tony, meanwhile, asks "Who'd have thought that thirty years on a Gerry Anderson series would still have things to say that reflected contemporary debate?"

Way Too Good to Check

Ken MacLeod received the following fine Internet Rumour from China Miéville, who wrote:

"My supervisor, an expert in the Middle East, told me about a rumour circulating about the name of Bin Laden's network. The term 'Al-Qaeda' seems to have no political precedent in Arabic, and has therefore been something of a conundrum to the experts, until someone pointed out that a very popular book in the Arab world, Arabs apparently being big readers of translated SF, is Asimov's Foundation, the title of which is translated as 'Al-Qaeda'. Unlikely as it sounds, this is the only theory anyone can come up with." Ken further comments: "This hypothesis raises some interesting possibilities. One is that bin Laden has a number of video appearances prepared in advance, which without being too specific give the impression that he knows what has just happened at the time they're shown. They could continue to appear at intervals long after his reported death. Another is that there's a Second Al-Qaeda, somewhere else."

Superfluous Philately

The Royal Mail has issued a new set of stamps commemorating the centenary of the Nobel Prize, using a weird and wonderful assortment of high-tech printing processes. The stamps include a holographic stamp, a scratch-and-sniff stamp and a thermochromic stamp, which graced the British envelopes of *Plokta 24*.

Osama Bin Laden is a Muppet

The web has been full of this story, but we can't resist it. Osama bin Laden supporters in Bangladesh scoured the Internet for photos on their hero to put on posters, and apparently downloaded one that showed him hobnobbing with Bert from Sesame Street.

Turns out there are a number of websites devoted to the proposition that Bert is evil, containing doctored photographs showing him in compromising positions, and one of these was the downloaded one.



Why the Bangladeshi poster printers kept him on the image is anybody's guess. Maybe fundamentalist Muslim demonstrators calling for the downfall of the Great Satan enjoy Sesame Street. Or maybe Bert is evil. A spokesman for the print shop that designed the posters said "we got the images off the Internet", and Sesame Workshop made an official statement—"this is not at all humorous". So that's all right then.

OMCL Trained on Bromley

Dr Plokta has taken up residence in a new, high-rise Fortress of Solitude, From his secret hideout, located on the seventh floor of a converted office block, he is said to be making plans to take over the world. The Plokta cabal were privileged to be the first viewers of the new command centre. Extreme lengths were gone to to ensure that we couldn't let people know of the new location, as a result of which we got lost several times as we drove there. We transferred unfeasibly large quantities of electronic equipment, including a dozen computers, multiple black boxes and several large bags of random cabling. "Where should we put this stuff?" we asked. "Oh, anywhere," replied Dr P, fiddling with the fixings on the Orbital Mind Control Lasers.

Dr Plokta then spent some time revealing his global domination plans exclusively to

PNN. We were particularly horrified by his experiments in biological warfare, notably the fridge that he left unplugged in storage for eighteen months with a pint of milk inside. The Giant Plokta Statistical Engines have also been working overtime. Dr P has calculated that [The Joke That Is Too Tasteless For PNN would have been inserted here, but, well, it's too tasteless for PNNewt, too].

Experts have also suggested that Dr Plokta may be sending coded messages to followers through the pages of his fanzine, *Plokta*, or even making use of the Internet. But on the whole, we $\bigstar \mathbb{H} = \& \mathcal{H}$ X•□□M◆◆△ X○□□□Q⊙Q●M. Most importantly, the new headquarters is perfectly placed for world-conquering, as it's bang in the middle of Croydon. We gazed out through the massive bank of windows at a vista of much of South East London. "Soon much of Bromley will have succumbed to my amazing mental powers," explained the madman. Dr Plokta's official spokesman, Bert, was unavailable for comment.



The stunning view from the flat

Millennium Philcon Programme Controversy

The Locus letter column is a raging hotbed of controversy at present. An open letter from John Norman accused the convention of "discrimination, prejudice, censorship, partisan programming, intellectual policing". Then Hugo nominee James Gifford (who had previously complained bitterly about the Hugo voting system, and later withdrawn that complaint) suggested the programming committee were "inept, mismanaged, extremely partisan and clueless". The letters (completely barking as far as PNN is concerned), and responses from Todd Dashoff (Millennium Philcon chairman) and Teresa Nielsen Hayden, among others, are on the Locus letters webpage.

2001 World Fantasy Awards

Life Achievement: Philip José Farmer, Frank Frazetta; Novel (tie): Declare by Tim Powers and Galveston by Sean Stewart; Novella: "The Man on the Ceiling" by Steve Rasnic Tem & Melanie Tem; Short Fiction: "The Pottawatomie Giant" by Andy Duncan; Anthology: Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora by Sheree R. Thomas, ed.; Collection: Beluthahatchie and Other Stories by Andy Duncan; Artist: Shaun Tan; Special Award, Professional: Tom Shippey (for J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century); Special Award, Non-Professional: (for At The Foot Of The Story Tree: An Inquiry into the Fiction of Peter Straub) .

New Fanthology Available

Spirits of Things Past 4: The Contact Fanthology is now available. This (literally) sparkling 100-page fanzine is produced by Dick and Leah Smith, publishers of the Hugo-nominated Stet. 72 fans, all substantially more famous than the Plokta cabal, tell the stories of how they found their way to fandom. Copies are \$10, including U.S. postage (add \$5 for copies to be sent outside the US, \$10 for overseas airmail); proceeds benefit ditto, FanHistoriCon and DUFF. Send a check or money order made out to Richard Smith to P.O. Box 266, Prospect Heights, IL 60070-0266, USA.

Penny For the Guy

Those who were at <plokta.con> last year may recall that **Guy Dawson** was the successful bidder for the right to have a political or religious faction named after him in GoH **Ken MacLeod**'s next novel (narrowly beating **Square Bear**, which must have been a relief for Ken). That novel, *Dark Light*, has now been published, and Guy has got his money's worth. Not only are the Dawsonites a significant religious faction, but one chapter is entitled "Dawson's Night", which is the night each year when their founder is burned in effigy.

Picture Books for Baby Font Queens

If you're overly fond of type, you might have found it difficult to find picture books suitable for indoctrinating your tiny children. Never fear, help is at hand in the form of *Bembo's Zoo*. This is a first picture book by Roberto de Vicq de Cumptich, in which all of the pictures are lovingly formed out of letters and punctuation in Bembo. The book's website includes a splendid shockwave file showing how the animals are made up out of the relevant letters.

Pam Wells Seeks Comedy

Pam Wells has embarked on a PhD in psychology. She's studying interactions between speakers and audiences, and trying to extend existing work on political speeches to stand-up comedians (We wonder how she tells the difference). She needs as many videos as possible to study, but has no research council support and can't afford to buy vast numbers. She'd like to borrow videos of British stand-up comedians with live British audiences, preferably in PAL format. If you can help, please email her (pam@ury.york.ac.uk).

David Levine Short Story Wins Tames White Award

We were delighted to hear that the winner of the 2001 James White Award is "Nucleon" by **David Levine**. The award, presented annually to the best story submitted by a non-professional writer, was accepted on David's behalf by **Lynne Ann Morse**. The winning story will be published in December's *Interzone*.

Cultural Imperialism

Whatever else you do, you should avoid reading the back cover of Iain M Banks' new Culture novel. Alison could have well done without the implied spoiler. So, what have we here? We're back in the Culture, Banksie's cosy utopia. The 50 billion inhabitants of the artificial Orbital world Masaq enjoy a fine quality of life, free from Beveridge's five giants and with full back-up capabilities just in case anything untoward happens. All benignly overseen by the Hub, an AI with a brain the size of a planet and a terrible pain in the diodes down its left side. Money is obsolete in the Culture, a concept that always makes me wonder how they decide who gets World Cup tickets, tables at the Ivy, or any other scarce and popular resource. And it's clear that some of the Culture's citizens find something lacking in their fear-free lives, so there's massive participation in the local Dangerous Sports Club.

As readers of previous novels will be

aware, the Culture is a pretty superior sort

of civilisation. So that gives it a perfect right to meddle in the affairs of lesser people, doesn't it?

Enter Chel, a warrior planet with a brutal caste system. A bit of Cultural influence, intended to encourage equality, has recently, inadvertently, led to a full-scale civil war. The Culture are of course terribly sorry about this.

Meanwhile, the Masaq Hub is currently planning a big bash to mark the Twin Novae period, when light reaches Masaq from two suns destroyed eight hundred years earlier. This was the result of a previous error of judgement by the Culture, who have been at this sort of thing for a while. The centrepiece of the memorial will be a new symphony by Ziller, a Chelgrian composer in exile. Chel, meanwhile, has despatched Major Quilan, a severely depressed warrior priest, to persuade Ziller to come home. The stage is set for a political novel with plenty of verve and style, and regular Cultural features like a sudden digression into ships' names. The plot ranges in all directions but isn't the main event here. Banks is taking the opportunity to raise questions about the meaning of life, the nature of risk, and the right of cultures, or Cultures, to muck about with peoples they consider inferior. The lightness of touch means that you're unlikely to feel you've been lectured to, and the topic is all too timely.

RIP

Josh Kirby, cover artist for the Discworld books, died peacefully at age 72. Milt Rothman, founder of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, died at 81.

More Better Tat

Just room to say that Seacon, the 2003 Eastercon, has announced its site as the famously coastal Hinckley Island Hotel.

MemeStream

Octocon 2002: http://www.octocon.com, Teddy Harvia art: http://www.webmail2.net/tharvia, Manhattan Subway Network (revised): http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/nyct/maps/mapsys926.pdf, Emerald City: http://www.emcir.com, Broadband UK comics: http://www.coolbeansworld.com, Potlatch 2002: http://www.potlatch-sf.org, Noreascon 4: http://www.noreascon.org, Dave's Quick Search Deskbar:

http://notesbydave.com/toolbar/doc.htm, Hot blog topics: www.daypop.com/top.htm/, Welsh SF Association WAP site: http://tagtag.com/wsfa.

The *Plokta News Newt* is the oversampled edition of the Plokta News Network. You can read PNN online (http://www.plokta.com/pnn) or sign up for emails. Newt by Sue Mason (surprise), photo collage (after Tourist Guy) by Alison Scott. No promises about the future of *PNNewt*, but send news and feedback to any cabal member or locs@plokta.com. Issue 1, Novacon 2001.