

Shards of Babel



After a long, long gap of six months, the Editorial Pair of SOB is united again! And to prove that they have their minds, bodies and act indeed together, here is **SOB 19**. Shards of Babel is published by Lynne Ann Morse and Roelof Goudriaan, Noordwal 7, 2513 EA Den Haag, the Netherlands, and will appear with a regularity of one issue per six weeks -- a higher frequency because of a high influx of news.

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We can also be reached by phone: 11 (70) 647340. Hot news always welcome! However, phonecalls only between 10 am and 10 pm, please. Phonecalls at other times are interpreted as emergency calls from Lynne Ann's family -- and you do NOT want to be an emergency!

the Belgian scene

No 1986 Beneluxcon

by Eddy C. Bertin.

The committee of the Belgian SF Association SFAN has decided that there will be no BENELUXCON/SFANCON organised in Flandrers in 1986. This decision was already clear to the organisers and informed members since last year, and has been threatening the convention since we lost the use of the Fabiola Home in Ghent, which has been the site of three well-organised and good cons. However, it always posed problems to get the site at the right time. Also the last time, fans left such messes behind that we no longer could rent the Fabiola Home for the 1984 convention. Though the convention of 1985 in de Jalen van Eyck stayed out of the red and everybody had a good time, it didn't get the public coverage in press and media needed to make it a really successful con. Also there are no rooms available at the site, and since it is located in the very centre of town, this poses a lot of parking problems. These are all problems that can be fought and conquered with some good will, but the real reasons lie elsewhere: age and time.

SFAN still has over a hundred steady members (membership shifts between 120 to 160, with 80% Belgians and 20% Dutch fans). I publish the magazine SF-Gids (SF Guide) regularly every month since 1982, and membership dues (600 Francs for a year and 12 issues) make me no profit at all, but are sufficient to keep the magazine alive and in orbit without losing money. In that way, the magazine is at the moment the only outward expression that SFAN still exists. SFAN as an association has sufficient funds to organise some things now and then, and even risk a small-scale convention, but not enough to organise a big convention with guests from overseas, whose expenses have to be met. We had the good fortune that our British and American guests (and the Irish and French and German also) for our earlier conventions have been so kind to come to Beneluxcon at very reasonable rates (and they all enjoyed our conventions!), but one may remember that Beneluxcon 1985/Leicon was very small-scale, with no foreign guests at all. So the money-risk is already a problem.

The other problem is that fandom is getting lazy. Flemish fans keep SF, they buy the magazine and remain members, but one no longer knows what one should do to get them out of their houses for something more active. We organised get-togethers in nice pubs, with good speakers, slide shows, and even free SF movies on big screens. For the movies we got lots of unknowns, who just came to watch the free show, and then left. As to the rest: it turns out it's always the same group of local die-hard fans who show up, and a few guys from Antwerp, all in all not more than 20, 30 people at most. Our 1984 convention drew not more than some 150 people during the whole weekend, including some 30% foreigners. This makes the organisation a heavy risk to take, a financial risk which none of the committee members are quite willing to take.

As I have also said: age and time. The members of the

committee all live around Ghent, within a 20-mile radius. We meet once a month as friends in our own homes (We tried open meetings in pubs but again, only the same people showed up), but we're no longer young people: we're in our forties and fifties now, we all have demanding jobs, some of which run far beyond 9 to 5. We no longer have the free time necessary for the organisation of a con, where you have to make most of the contacts during working hours. The committee is tired, it's true, and well it may be after the work it has been doing for the last ten years. We have tried to find new blood among the younger members for several years, without luck. There are no candidates with the needed skills (Know-how is no problem, the committee is willing to give all advice and help possible) and the will to take such an organisational task on their shoulders. It's a sorry situation, but that's the way it is. There are still some loose ideas about organising a one-day happening somewhere in Ghent, to keep the tradition at least alive, but so far it remains a schema on the drawing board. (Eddy C. Bertin)

Editorial comments:

The last couple of years, we've seen a pattern where the Dutch Beneluxcons are much larger (150 to 750 attendees) than the Flemish ones, with more programming and more activities meant to attract the casually interested or reader. The Flemish conventions were smaller, aimed at the steady convention-goer, and cheaper to attend than the Dutch cons in their luxury "status" hotels. It's amusing to note that the latest Dutch Beneluxcon, Leicon, which you call very small-scale, was in fact the Dutch equivalent of the Belgian Beneluxcons as we know them from Gent: aiming at a cosy atmosphere and catering for a relatively small audience (146 people attending), in a decent but low-priced hotel.

The difference between the Dutch situation, where fan activity is lively enough to think about hosting a Worldcon, and Belgium is striking. There are a lot of factors (size of the region, publishers' SF activity) playing a role here, but one reason surely is that the energy put into a Beneluxcon formula that also attracts newcomers is paying off. We do have new blood (I'm counting myself as one of that lot), and enthusiasm with the younger fans for fanish activities as they've encountered them.

Personally, I find conventions that cater mainly for the in-crowd more enjoyable, but it seems that in the long run, you cannot do with these kinds of cons only. To make the new faces enthusiastic, you need the status and the showpieces... -RG-

and, adds Lynne Ann, the promise of accessibility, which can be absent for a "neo" at an in-crowd convention.



AN OLD CON AND TIRED

a report by Judith Hanna
on Novacon 15
2-3 november 1985
de Vere hotel, Coventry, UK

The De Vere had been the site for a couple of Eastercons during the '70s: it had a reputation as a venue well laid for socialising and for the shocking nylon carpets on which stampeding herds of fans built their own portable static electric charge. This year both the layout and the carpets had been changed. But it is even more like Dante's Inferno. Lost souls still climb up and down interminable stairs searching if not for desperate fun then at least for the convention they've come to attend. All the rooms were over-nated.

From our stifling bedroom Joseph and I descend to the 4th floor where we find in the fan programme room only rows of empty chairs and the ghost of Tony Berry who exhorts us to stay and watch a silly game. Not a ghost of a chance. In the art show the spectre of J West is hanging 4 austere pictures among the lush fantastic sorceresses and superphallic rocketships. In the Fan Bar a delicately green-faced Phil Palmer exchanges dismal groans with a "Simon Unsley" so ill with glandular fever he looks like the ghost of Nigel Richardson. The Fan Bar is closed. It is Saturday Morning.

We descend to the 3rd floor. The bookroom is thronged -- the liveliest spot in the Con. Ignore it for the moment: leave Joseph there spending all his eating money.

I continue, down another flight to the main programme where zombies lister to Greg Pickersgill tell Rog Peyton that Venture SF is "mindless junk, published just to make money". The ghost of 50g agrees. A Phil Probert robot makes interminable announcements. Several programmed speakers have failed to appear. The ghost of Tony Berry implores people to go watch silly games in the fan room.

On the ground floor a bar is open. Through a tobacco fog I glimpse James White and Dave Langford looming over Bob Shaw, Rob Holdstock gesticulating all over Malcolm Edwards and Chris Priest. The tobacco fog rolls out to engulf me. I cough, and flee.

I go for a walk around Coventry city centre, visiting the old Cathedral, destroyed during WWII, and the new cathedral built beside the ruins of the old. I return to the hotel and find Sue Thomson, Rod and Garroll Pardoe and Ingrid Walton in the ground floor coffee lounge. They all seem quite alive. We retreat to Sue and Rory's room to absorb tea and talk about Cambridge and Wales. Maureen Porter, Moira Shearman and Paul Kincaid join us. The talk turns to teddy bears and the problem Maureen has had running off the new Mexican fanzine. Christina all in pink with crinkly hair and Peter Fred arrive to carry away the Mexican fanzines. I tell Paul he's wrong about Chris Priest. It is a cosy interlude. But there is rumoured to be a

convention out there. I resume the quest.

In the programme hall Phil Probert is making more announcements. In the bookroom Hazel Langford is embroidering a question cover. Joseph buys a copy of Dave's IAFF trip report. I congratulate Rob Jackson on breeding his own Hugo. I buy an Elly Queen mystery reject from Dave's collection. It turns out to be ideologically unsound (Dorothy Dunnett's "Dolly" stories are much more better. Or Josephine Tay). I promise Pam Wells that Joseph will buy the Mexican fanzine. Linda Pickersgill passes around the Mexican sombrero and takes many photos. Joseph promises Lillian Edwards that I will buy the Mexican fanzine. I hand over the money. Mike and Deb 'loir tell us about Beneluxcon.

On the 4th floor the bar is open now. I venture into the tobacco fog. I promise Ian Sorensen an Aussiecon report. Joseph tells Dave Wood what is wrong with Kyster. Dave remains genial. John Brosnan tells me he's given up smoking and asks if Australia is still the same. I assure him it is, except where it has changed. Avedon denounces whinging non-smokers. Eve Harvey agrees with her. I exit, coughing. Sprightly youngster Arthur Thomson introduces me to the equally youthful Chuck Harris. The convention's wittiest remarks are scribbled on his notebooks and passed around: instant Con reporting without the boring bits. A vortex of Desperate Fun™ materialises in the corridor.

It is time to eat. There was a restaurant guide in PR2. But who brings a PR2 to a convention? We find ourselves with



Sherry Francis and Mike Christian whose moustache impresses head waiters at the hotel's restaurant. We converse on revolution and semiology, on the history and philosophy of science, on TV and boiling penises. Hygiene, you know. The food is indifferent and expensive but we have a splendid meal together.

We find more Desperate Fun™ in the corridor outside Kate Solomon's, who used to be Kate Davies, room party. Kate wearing a black and red tabard poses for the cameras. Pam Wells, Hazel Asworth, Chris Atkinson, Helen Starkey all wear black. It is appropriate to mourn the passing of the Novacons of old. Novacon is dead. let us lay it ghost to rest. We party until very late. It is a wake. Dave Langford spills

OH LA LA

Pascal Thomas
P.O. Box 24495
Los Angeles, CA 90024
U.S.A.

Holland in 1990 is a good idea, which will enjoy my whole-hearted support. Enclosed is a check for FF 50.00. Or is it too much trouble for you to convert? I could be an agent for the

bid, except I'm afraid the locals here will not be too supportive on the whole. Jes' a feelin', ya know. But I could bring to bear some of the more 'shen' distinctive French skills. How about bombing the cars of some key LA committee people? No, no, don't thank me, just send in a sail boat with the amount of matériel.

All joking set aside, Los Angeles is a formidable opponent. Not only have they proved they can run a smooth (if fiscally conservative) con, they have taken \$20,000! (I think -- better check the published reports) to bid for 1990. Holland in 1990 will have to rely on a strong tide of anti-LA sentiment in the US to get through. Apparently, there's a feeling that the Californians are not playing entirely fair, since an amendment was just passed at Aussiecon, aimed at preventing the recurrence of precisely what they did ("forbidding the use of Worldcon earnings for future convention bids unless equal grants are made to other bidders", Locust, no. 297, p. 24).

Italy

The biweekly *Urania* celebrated its thousandth issue by publishing Asimov's novel *Foundation's Edge*, and by raising the cover price for the umpteenth time! *Urania* is not a magazine but a book series, published since October 1952 by the Italian book industry colossus Mondadori. It's the only cheap SF series in Italy in economic (and often qualitative) terms. Now *Urania's* editorial staff is changing: Marco Tropea has taken the place of Andrea Negretti as chief editor, and it's rumoured that Gianni Montanari will soon replace the very famous (and, because of their SF choices, infamous) pair Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini as the said editor of the series. The news is particularly surprising if one thinks that the professional contributions to *Urania* by Negretti, Fruttero and Lucentini began respectively with numbers 499, 281 and 336.

Montanari is a writer, translator and editor of some book series (Galassia, SFBC, Fantapocket, etc.). He also wrote *Ieri, il futuro* ("Yesterday, the future", 1977), a critical history of British SF, and the handbook *La fantascienza: gli autori e le opere* ("Science Fiction: Authors and Works", 1978): (Bruno Vallo).

beer all over my suede boots. Anne Warren discourses on working in a collective business. Chuck Harris laughs a lot.

We wake to find ourselves in a nightmare: a breakfast queue that stretches for miles. At the end of the queue we find there are no mushrooms left: Dermot Dobson has scoffed the last of them for his second helping. The kitchen staff tell us breakfast is finished. The queue snarls and they relent. They do not take the breakfast buffet away. But they don't replenish it. We find ourselves sitting with a Daily Telegraph reporter who talks about financial scandals and collaborating with Langford.

We wait in the coffee lounge writing notes to Chuck Harris and admiring Helen Elings' intricate knitting. She tells us about Beneluxcon and Stan tells us about his industrial dispute. Vind Clarke looks lost.

It is Sunday afternoon. It is nearly time to depart. The fan programme is crowded. Tony Berry is happy. Not even the ghost of Pete Weston appears to explain his "cyclic Theory of Fandom". A lively discussion follows, featuring Greg Pickersgill. The panellists get a word in occasionally. I sketch out a Caterpillar Theory of Fandom: the dissertation will appear in our ideologically correct tri-continental Fanzine ASN. Or maybe it won't.

John and Eve Harvey and Jim Barker describe their GUFF and SEFF trips and auction off Swedish magazines, Australian finger-puppets and sips of some Scandinavian rocket-fuel. Eve and John are describing scenery I have seen. I descend to the main hall where Carolingian Julian is telling a panel of Ian Sorrensen, Chris Donaldson and Paul Oldroyd how to run conventions. They listen patiently. I have come here to say why I found this convention so bad. Before my eyes in letters of tobacco float the words "What's the point?". D West could not have put it better.

We stand on the station platform with Rob Hansen and Avedon

Carol. The train is late. The wind is fucking freezing. Bloody British weather. Still no train. When it does come it is crammed full. We stand in a corridor all the way to Rugby. We race along the platform to the usually empty first class carriages. We find seats but not all together. Bloody British Rail. Life is back to normal. Which is no improvement. We read our Novacon fannines. We plot our conreports. We post-mortem the corpse of Novacon. It has become a skeleton of disarticulated good moments connected by grey nothingness.

(Everything in this report is true. Times and locations have been confused in the confident belief that everybody else was too drunk to remember anyway.)

Mova Awards:
Fanzine - Prevent
Fan Writer - Abi Frost
Artist - Ros Calverley

[An annual event at Novacon is the presentation of the COFF Award -- the Concrete Overcoat Fan Fund. Votes are being bought for a worthy cause (TAFF and GUFF), and the Award goes to the person you would most like to see in a concrete overcoat...]

[Novacon chairman Phil Probert presented the awards at the closing ceremony. As legend wants it, he announced the COFF Award by the words, "And the winner is...". pulled the winner's name out of the envelope, paled and cried out, "But that's ME!". Then he and half the committee walked out, not to be seen again that convention.

[COFF, as a fund-raiser, is supposed to be innocent fun but still, would you like to win it? And WHY was Novacon so bad? Comments are welcome. --RG.]

USSR

Arkady Strugatski, one of the main USSR SF writers, was elected on the editorial staff of *Ural'sky Sleypot*. US (Uralian Pathfinder) is a youth magazine printing SF traditionally for many dozens of years now, and recently a centre of USSR fannish activity.

Ural'sky Sleypot did announce that it will stop with its SF quiz, which it has now annually done for eleven years. No clear reason is given.

USSR books can appear with quite sizable print-runs. The recent anthology *ORION* (with a story of Henry Kuttner new to Russian authors) reached a print-run of 100,000 copies, as did the new collection of stories by Z Bilenkina, *THE FACE IN THE CROWN* (published by Molodaya Gvardia) and *THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNKINEN* (published by Nauka) -- a book originally published in 1791, and now appearing in an annotated version.

"Small" in comparison with these is the magazine of the USSR Writers Union and Central Committee of Komosol -- only 12,500 to 25,000 copies are printed. This magazine has only printed SF once since its foundation by M.Gorky in 1930. However, at the end of 1985 *Literary Education* published an SF issue, with the works of four young SF writers, introduced by Arkady Strugatski. [Boris Zavgorny]

The USSR Writers' Union also sponsored an International Writers' conference in Leningrad, which took place from 6 to 17 October 1985. Delegates from nearly 40 countries attended, though the US delegate -- Erskine Caldwell -- was too ill to come. John and Marjorie Brunner were there, and report that "SF had little representation, but we had some pleasant and informative chats with a woman writer of children's science fiction, who gave us details of the way in which SF is used to spark the imagination of Soviet students training as inventors and innovators; this practice is apparently widespread, having been adopted in some 50 universities. [John and Marjorie Brunner]

Taff & self

The Summer is approaching, and that means the voting deadlines for the fan funds between Europe and other parts of the world are beginning to press. You have up to Apr '1 31st to vote for SEFF and enable a Swedish fan to attend a yet unknown British convention -- unless enough votes were received by February 29, in which case the SEFF winner will go to Glasgow's Alhambra (Easter).

Deadline for TAFF, bringing a European fan to the 1986 Worldcon in Atlanta, is May 15th (and I am hoping to see Judith Hanna there! --RG.) Ballots included where weight permits.

Terra SF 3 cancelled.

Don Mollheim of DAW books has decided not to publish *TERRA SF 3*. He gave two reasons why the third volume of *TERRA* would not come out: the first two volumes didn't sell enough copies (they sold 16,000 and 12,000 copies respectively) for a mass market publisher like DAW; secondly most of the stories, according to Mollheim, were too dark and depressing. [Richard Nolane]

TERRA SF was the only regular anthology with SF stories from West European authors being published in the English language. English readers interested in foreign SF stories will have to turn to the soon to appear *WORLD SF ANTHOLOGY* at Penguin books in Britain.

SF International

William Wheeler of "Andromeda Press" in California is announcing the launch of a new pro magazine, *SF International*. He is already actively accepting and buying stories in Continental Europe; however, publication of the first issue is postponed from June 1st, 1985, to an as yet unknown date.

I now know of four accepted stories from Dutch writers alone, and no rejections. SOB would be highly interested to hear about other writers who have stories accepted by *SF International*. [RG.]

Angelo De Ceclis, died 5 August 1985
in Cabo de Roca, Portugal. A fan
writer from Italy, editor of *Yox*
Futura between 1976 and 1984 -- he
knew him for too brief a time.

To the Challenger and her brave crew.

CONTOURS

28-30 Mar 86 ALBACON III, Glasgow, Scotland. (British Inland Eastercon). GoH: Joe Haldean. FanGoH: John Jarrold. Guest Artist: Pete Lyon. At the Central Hotel. Membership £9 up to 1 Mar, £12 thereafter. Write: Albacoon III, c/o Vince Docherty, 20 Hillington Oms, Glasgow, G52 2PR, UK.

23-25 May 86 FINNCON '86, Helsinki, Finland. GoH: Brian Aldiss (100% certain), Arkady and Boris Strugatski (not 100% certain -- both of these according to a phone call from the con organizer). FanGoH: Ahriid Engnolm (who mentions that other guests might be Sam J. Lundwall, Harry Harrison, "and, perhaps, Ursula K. LeGuin," he adds between parenthesis.) Programme languages: English, Finnish, and -- if the Strugatskis come -- Russian. 250 people are expected without the Strugatskis, 500 if they do show up. Write: for info Tom Olander, Box 3 SF-00251 Helsinki 25, Finland.

29 May-1 Jun SILCON-POLOCON '86, Katowice, Poland. Write: Sileski Klub Fantastyki, ul. Mariacka 17a, 40-956 Katowice skr.poczt.502, Polen. The announcement lists English, French and German as contact languages -- we got our announcement in German.

10-13 Jul 86 BALLCON, Zagreb, Yugoslavia. (1986 Eurocon). Membership: US\$ 12, supporting, \$25 attending. Write: Ballcon c/o Generalisturist Congress Dept, Praska 5, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Alternately: Ballcon, c/o Sfera, Ivanicgradska 41 A, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

11-13 Jul 86 Birmingham Science Fiction Group, 15th ANNIVERSARY. Write: for info, to give suggestions and money (£6) to Pauline Morgan, 321, Sarnole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham 28, UK. Tel. (0211) 777-2777.

18-20 Jul 86 MYTHCON, Goh Marion Zimmer Bradley. Membership: £10. Write: and send SASE for international reply coupon, too! For more info to Penny Hill, 53 Glencoe Street

MULL, North Huber-side HU3 6HR, UK.

8-10 Aug 86 CONCEPT:UNTCON, University of Surrey. Membership: £4 supporting, £8 attending. Write: Concept:UnTcon, 9 Graham Road, Haselstone, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 5AP, UK.

6-9 Sept 86 LILLE 86, Lille, France. Write: Alain Garguir, Librairie Andromede, 34 rue de la Clef, 59800 Lille, France.

And in 1987. . .

BECCON '87 is the only contender we know of for the 1987 Eastercon in Britain. 12 pre-supporting to 191 the Heights, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4BU, UK.

9-12 Jul 87 CENTERCON, Perpignan, France. The 12th Eurocon. Membership: 7077 supporting, 150 attending before 31 July 1986. Higher thereafter (we'll keep you posted, but we do note the savings are substantial if you move fast and send money to. . .). "Fictions" Centercon, 9 rue du 14 juillet, 66000 Perpignan, France.

27 Aug - 2 Sep 87 CONSPIRACY '87, 45th World Science Fiction Convention, Brighton, England. GoHs: Doris Lessing, Alfred Bester; Special Fan Guest David Langford; Artist Guest: Jim Burns; Fan Guests Joyce and Ken Slater; Toastmaster: Brian Aldiss. Membership: supporting £10 (US \$15, Aus \$20), attending £19.50 (US \$30, Aus \$40), and presupporters will get a 22 discount (US and Aus \$3) if they mention it. Full details from Conspiracy '87, PO Box 43, Cambridge, England, CB1 1JJ. This is the convention you want to be a member of if you want to take part in the 1990 Worldcon site selection. HINT: (unpaid)

And in the end



"MAKING THAT BIG DECISION."

Our Readers are also our eyes and ears -- you're the ones who attend the cons and see the books we can't get to. We're especially interested in hearing about the following: a celebration of Sam J. Lundwall's 45th birthday in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, where seldom-seen films from Lundwall's days with Swedish-tv (including one sf!) will be shown -- that's 20-24 Feb.; there's Fantastporto, a con/film festival in Oporto, Portugal, from 7-14 Feb.; Mexican 2 was in Birmingham 7-9 Feb.; in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, there was "The World of the Future" (The 4th festival of sf), 11-22 Nov. 1985; YuCon took place in Skopje, 4-6 Oct. 1985, (if we understood that letter correct-

ly!), and it was billed as the 7th meeting of Yugoslavian fans; finally we'd like to know a little about Fantasia, a film festival cum meeting done with World SF's help, in Cattolica, Italy, 21-25 August, 1985.

The sooner you move, and the more pertinent the detail you give, the more likely we can use the news in Sep 19. Between us we read English, Dutch, Italian, German, and French (in rough order of proficiency).

Until next time.

Vrede, tranquillità,

Roelof

Lynne Ann

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