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The Inexorability of the Specious

Ramsey Campbell quotes 'a literary agent's statement of his needs: "He would specifically love to see a super smutty horror novel that addresses big societal questions in a unique and compelling way." I should like to think this is parodic, but my fear is great.' (Facebook, 31 August)

Nnedi Okorafor reports: 'The airport in Austin, TX has a gate for "Interimaginary Departures" and, Oomza Uni from the Binti Trilogy is on there! How cool!' (Facebook, 28 September) Other destinations include Lilliput, Moomin Valley, Narnia, Nessus, New Crobuzon and Pegana.

Paul Riddell was once again in the news with his famous anecdote about being investigated in depth by the FBI for joking – while at Texas Instruments – about selling missile secrets to the Daleks. 'I told them I would never sell us out to the Daleks, anyway ...The Cybermen or the Sontarans, sure! They pay more.' (*Dallas Observer*, 3 September) [AIP]

Somtow Sucharitkul is happy to be one of the three recipients of Thailand's 2024 Public Diplomacy Award, given for promoting the country worldwide through his works. (Facebook, 19 September)

Kurt Vonnegut is again vindicated as a prophet! *The Sirens of Titan* (chapter 6) features Schliemann Breathing, allowing humans to survive in vacuum or 'inhospitable atmosphere' by absorbing oxygen through the intestines. One of the 2024 Ig Nobel Prizes for offbeat science went to Takanori Takebe for finding that some mammals can actually do this.

Contratabular

Until 6 Oct • **Birmingham Anime Film Festival**, Mockingbird Cinema, Custard Factory, Birmingham. See www.baff.uk/schedule/.

3-6 Oct • **Grimmfest** (film), Odeon Great Northern, Manchester. Full pass for all screenings £79.99 plus fees at grimmfest.com.

5-6 Oct • **Octocon**, Gibson Hotel, Dublin. €65 reg; concessions €40; YA/virtual/supp €20; under-13s free. See octocon.com.

11-13 Oct • **Fantasycon**, Queen at Chester Hotel, Chester. £85 reg. See britishfantasycon.org/events-calendar/fantasycon-2024.

19-20 Oct • **Film & Comic Con Cardiff**, International Arena, Cardiff. £16; £32 early entry. See filmandcomicconcardiff.com.

24-27 Oct • **Celluloid Screams** horror film festival, Sheffield. Weekend pass £115; this and other tickets at celluloidscreams.com.

25-27 Oct • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Pendulum Hotel, Manchester. £110 reg. See fantastic-films.uk for day rates.

26-27 Oct • **BristolCon**, Hilton DoubleTree Hotel, Bristol. £65 reg; £50 under-18s, concessions, disabled; under-14s free; £20 supp. Day rates at www.bristolcon.org.

26 Oct • **Comic Con Halloween**, Haydock Racecourse. 10am-4pm. £11; ticket link for junior rates at www.ljeventsentertainment.com.

31 Oct - 3 Nov • **Edinburgh Horror Festival**, Banshee Labyrinth and Lauriston Castle. More at edinburghhorrorfestival.co.uk.

1-3 Nov • **Armadacon**, Future Inns, Plymouth. £45 reg; £35 concessions; single day £25. More at www.armadacon.org.

1-2 Nov • **Frightfest** (film), London, Odeon Luxe, Leicester Square. Tickets on sale early October: www.frightfest.co.uk/filmsandevents/.

1-3 Nov • **Glasgow 2024, Back to Our Futures**, free online for Glasgow Worldcon attending or virtual members: tinyurl.com/2earcc4d.

8-10 Nov • **Novacon 53**, Palace Hotel, Buxton. £53 reg; couples £106 (gosh); under-17s £12; under-13s free. Day rates at novacon.uk.

9 Nov • **Cymera Writers' Conference**, Edinburgh/online. £75; concessions/virtual at www.cymerafestival.co.uk/writers-conference.

9-10 Nov • **Surrey Steampunk Convivial**, Stoneleigh, Epsom. See bumpandthumper.wixsite.com/steampunkconvivial.

16 Nov • **Winter Haunts 3** (Gothic etc), online. See <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/winter-haunts-2024-tickets-998430531597>.

23-24 Nov • **Christopher Tolkien** centenary conference, online: www.tolkienociety.org/events/christopher-tolkien-centenary-conference/

25-26 Nov • **DarkFest 6** (film), Genesis Cinema, 93-95 Mile End Rd, London, E1 4UJ. £55. See infinitymagazine.co.uk/product/darkfest-6/.

15-16 Mar 2025 • **Dublin Comic Con**, Convention Centre, Dublin. Various ticket prices (extra for early entry, etc.) at dublincomiccon.com.

17-18 May 2025 • **HorrorCon UK**, Magna, Sheffield. Ticket prices and sales awaited at horrorconuk.com.

6-8 Jun 2025 • **Cymera**: Scotland's Festival of SF, Fantasy & Horror Writing, Edinburgh and online. See www.cymerafestival.co.uk.

18-20 Jul 2025 • **Fantasy Forest** (cosplay), Sudely Castle, Cheltenham. Tickets at fantasyforest.co.uk, where a long countdown to the start of sales at noon on 1 October ended with 'site is currently unavailable'.

16 Aug 2025 • **Stars of Time** (comics), Winter Gardens, Weston-super-Mare. Ticket sales awaited at www.starsoftime.co.uk.

Rumblings. *Reconnect (Eastercon 2025, Belfast)*: hotel booking is now open for fans with access needs, and will be generally open to all members from 14 October. • *Worldcon 2028*: the Brisbane bid changed its proposed dates from 24-28 August to 27-31 July, the weekend after a total solar eclipse that will pass through Australia. (Xitter, 10 September)

Infinitely Improbable

As Others Fear Us. On book blurb/review terms that 'instantly make your heart sink [...] Top of my list is "dystopian". The minute the word hoves into view, that author and publisher have lost me. [...] Not unrelated to my phobia for dystopias are: "futuristic" (even if the novel is set only as little as five years hence); "fantasy"; "supernatural"; "sci-fi"; "horror". Alas, it is almost impossible to find a contemporary novel that doesn't boast one or more of these adjectives.' Also, this writer has never read J.K. Rowling or Philip Pullman because 'I cannot stomach magical realism.' (Candida Crewe, *The Oldie Review of Books*, Autumn 2024)

Awards. *Booker Prize*: the shortlisted novel closest to sf is *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey, set on the International Space Station. • *The Arthur C. Clarke Award* is now open to 2024 submissions (UK publications only).

Satire Dept. A wicked claim that US politician J.D. Vance 'is turning the stories he has created on the campaign trail into a sci-fi trilogy. / Called "Wokemare", the books depict "a dystopia ruled by a liberal elite, where the human race faces extinction because women have selfishly chosen to have careers," Vance said. "It's up to a federation of brave tech founders to reestablish order."' (*The Borowitz Report*, 17 September) [GG]

Tongueslip. 'New cases of blue tongue have been identified in Norfolk ... the disease, which is spread by midgets ...' (BBC1, *Look East*) [PE]

R.I.P. *John Ashton* (1948-2024), US actor whose genre credits include *King Kong Lives* (1986) and *Reign of the Gargoyles* (2007), died on 26 September aged 76. • *Franca Bettoia* (1936-2024), Italian actress who co-starred in *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), died on 13 September aged 88. [SJ] • *John Cassaday* (1971-2024), award-winning US comics artist and writer who worked for DC (*Planetary*, *Superman/Batman*) and Marvel (*Astonishing X-Men*, *Captain America*, *Star Wars*), died on 9 September aged 52. [SH] • *Kenneth Cope* (1931-2024), UK actor in *X the Unknown* (1956), *The Damned* (1962), *Night of the Big Heat* (1967) and *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* (1969-1971, as the ghostly Hopkirk), died on 11 September aged 93. [SJ] • *Kathryn Grant Crosby* (1933-2024), widow of Bing and actress in *The Night the World Exploded* (1957), *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *1001 Arabian Nights* (1959) and *The Initiation of Sarah* (1978), died on 20 September aged 90. [LP] • *David 'Gryphon' Curry*, UK fan who was a stalwart of Eastercons and Redemptions, died on 26 September. [NW] • *James Darren* (1936-2024), US actor in *Hey There, It's Yogi Bear* (1964), *The Time Tunnel* (1966-1967), *City Beneath the Sea* (1971) and *Star Trek: DS9* (1998-1999), died on 26 August aged 88. [LP] • *David Stuart Davies* (1946-2024), UK Sherlock Holmes expert who published much nonfiction and fiction about Holmes – pitting him against Dracula in *The Tangled Skein* (1995) and the Giant Rat of Sumatra in *The Shadow of the Rat* (1999) – and edited *Return from the Dead* (2006) plus other supernatural anthologies, died on 16 August aged 78. [SH] • *Nelson DeMille* (1943-2024), often uncredited US author of techno thrillers with Thomas H. Block – the most science-fictional being *Orbit* (1982) and *Airship Nine* (1984) – died on 17 September aged 81. [PS-P] • *Pierre-William Glenn* (1943-2024), French cinematographer for *Death Watch* (1980) and *The Prize of Peril* (1983), died on 24 September aged 80. [SJ] • *David Graham* (1925-2024), UK actor best known for voice work in Gerry/Sylvia Anderson puppet series – *Four Feather Falls* (1960), *Supercar* (1961-

1962), *Fireball XL5* (1962-1963), *Stingray* (1964-1965) and *Thunderbirds* (1965-1966 plus spinoffs), died on September aged 99. Other credits include *Timeslip* (1970-1971), *Doctor Who* (1973-1979) and *Peppa Pig* (2004-2021). [CM] ● **Taylor Grant** (1970-2024), US horror author active since 2011, whose first collection was *The Dark at the End of the Tunnel* (2015), died on 12 September aged 54. [SJ] ● **Andrew C. Greenberg** (1957-2024), US game designer who co-created the early role-playing videogame *Wizardry* (1981 plus sequels) – featuring the evil wizard Werdna – died on 28 August aged 67. [MR] ● **Frank Griffin** (1929-2024), US actor in *The Giant Claw* (1957) and makeup artist for *Westworld* (1973), *Demon Seed* (1977), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) and many more, died on 4 September aged 95. [SJ] ● **Geoffrey Hinsliff** (1937-2024), UK *Coronation Street* actor also seen in *Doctor Who* (1977, 1979) and *Jackanory* (1980), died on 18 September. [CM] ● **Edward Jameson** (1934-2024), US academic critic who wrote extensively about sf, notably in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), died on 22 September aged 90. He received the SFRA Pilgrim Award in 2006. ● **Peter Jay** (1937-2024), UK author with Michael Stewart of the sf novel *Apocalypse 2000: Economic Breakdown and the Suicide of Democracy, 1989-2000* (1987), died on 24 September aged 87. [JC] ● **James Earl Jones** (1931-2024), EGOT-winning US actor who famously voiced Darth Vader in *Star Wars* (1977) and many franchise spin-offs, died on 9 September aged 93. Genre films in his long career include *Dr Strangelove* (1964), *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *The Lion King* (1994 plus sequels) and *Robots* (2005). ● **Dmitry Krinari** (1959-2024), award-winning Russian fan artist and event organizer, died on 31 August. [AM] ● **Kris Kristofferson** (1936-2024), US musician and actor in *Millennium* (1989), *Blade* (1998 plus sequels) and *Planet of the Apes* (2001), died on 28 September aged 88. [LP] ● **Nigel Lambert** (1944-2024), UK voice actor in *Doctor Who* (several episodes 1980-2001) and *The Adventures of Paddington Bear* (39 episodes 1997-2000), died in September aged 80. ● **Lee Hoi-sang** (1941-2024), Hong Kong martial-arts film actor in *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974, uncredited), *Demon of the Lute* (1983), *The Ghost Informer* (1984) and others, died on 9 September aged 83. [SJ] ● **Holly Lisle** (1960-2024), US author of some 30 genre novels, whose debut fantasy *Fire in the Mist* (1992) won a Compton Crook Award and opened a trilogy, died on 27 August aged 63. [F770] ● **Chad McQueen** (1960-2024), US actor – son of Steve – in *Death Ring* (1992), *Firepower* (1993) and *Possessed by the Night* (1994), died on 11 September aged 63. [SJ] ● **Roman Madyanov** (1962-2024), Russian actor in the Bulgakov film adaptation *Rokovyie yaytsa (The Fatal Eggs, 1996)* died on 25 September aged 62. [AM] ● **Bernie Mireault** (1961-2024), Canadian comics artist known for work on *Grendel*, *Madman* and his own creations *The Jam* and *Dr. Robot* – also a noted Gaiman-scripted Riddler story – committed suicide on 2 September aged 63. [SH] ● **Karl Moline** (1973-2024), US comics artist who worked on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for Dark Horse and co-created the spinoff *Fray* with Joss Whedon, died on 11 September aged 51. [SH] ● **Obi Ndefo** (1972-2024), US actor in *Stargate SG-1* (2000-2005), other genre tv series, and *Vampires in Venice* (2013), died on 31 August aged 51. [SJ] ● **John Nielsen-Hall**, UK fan active in the late 1960s (publishing *Zine* 1969-1970) and 1970s, when he was part of London Ratfandom, and again from the 1990s (in email lists and publishing *Motorway Dreamer* 2005-2012, plus others), died on 8 September. [UK] ‘Uncle Johnny’ was a good man and I’ll miss him. A memorial collection of his fanzine writing is in preparation. ● **Leonid Okunev** (1949-2024), Russian actor who starred in the urban fantasy film *Patrioticheskaya komediya (Patriotic Comedy, 1992)*, died on 8 September aged 75. [AM] ● **Heather Osborne** (1981-2024), Canadian author active from 2008, whose one novel was the fantasy *Songbroken* (2002), died all too young on 20 September aged 43. [RJS] ● **Graham Rawle** (1955-2024), UK collage artist whose surreal ‘Lost Consonants’ series appeared in the *Guardian* 1990-2005 and who won awards for his profusely illustrated 2008 version of *The Wizard of Oz*, died on 16 August aged 69. [AIP] His novel *Overland* (2018) is borderline sf. ● **Peter Renaday** (1935-2024), US actor in *The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes* (1969), *The Love Bug* (1969) and others, with voice roles in the *Star Wars* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchises plus many animated superhero series, died on 8 September aged 89. [SJ] ● **Dame Maggie Smith** (1934-2024), famed Oscar-winning UK actress whose genre credits include *Clash of the Titans* (1981), *Hook* (1991), the Harry Potter films (2001-2011) and *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011), died on 27 September aged 89. ● **Cleo Sylvestre** (1945-2024), UK actress in *Paddington* (2014), *Forever Young* (2023) and genre tv series, died on 20 September aged 79. ● **Brian Trueman** (1932-2024), UK screenwriter and voice actor who wrote and performed in much animated tv including the legendary *Danger Mouse* (1981-1993) and *Count Duckula* (1988-1993), died on 2 September aged 92. [O] ●

Valery Voskoboynikov (1939-2024), Russian author – mostly for children – whose adult fantasy *Voyna Vladigora (Vladigor’s War, 2000)* is set in the Vladigor shared world, died on 6 September aged 85. [AM] ● **Robert (Bob) Weatherwax** (1941-2024), US dog handler who followed his father Rudd in training collies to play Lassie, died on 15 August aged 83. Other trainer credits include *The Thing* (1982) and *Back to the Future* (1985). [AIP] ● **Lisa Westcott** (1948-2024), Oscar- and BAFTA-winning hair and makeup artist whose genre credits include *Captain Zep – Space Detective* (1983), *The Wolfman* (2010) and *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), died on 30 July aged 76. [AIP]

The Weakest Link. *Clive Myrie*: ‘The horror film villain Freddy Krueger, who attacks his victims in their dreams, first appeared in what 1984 film?’ *Contestant: ‘Kramer vs. Kramer.’* (BBC2, *Mastermind*) [PE]

Without Comment. A.N. Wilson complains that rumoured candidates for Chancellor of Oxford University are all dull politicians unworthy of the Magical Dream That Is Oxford. His unexpected punchline: ‘If only J.K. Rowling had stood! A person of deep intellectual integrity, she is also, of all the great public figures of our times, the one who best understands the central part that magic still plays in our lives.’ (*The Oldie*, October)

Random Fandom. *NaNoWriMo* (National Novel Writing Month, every November) was widely criticized for suggesting that it was fine to achieve the goal of writing a novel in 30 days by having AI software churn out the words, and indeed that it’s ableist and classist to expect would-be writers to do their own writing. Is it coincidence that they have an AI-linked firm as sponsor? Three board members promptly resigned. [F770]

Scientific Comparison. On wildlife in Kent: ‘The bison will be able to roam 200 hectares of land after construction is finished, rather than the 50 acres they now have the run of.’ (*i* newspaper, 21 September)

Magazine Scene. *F&SF* for Summer 2024 appeared in September with a note from Gordon Van Gelder: ‘Ongoing production problems have led us to skip the Spring issue and to switch to a quarterly schedule.’ ● Titan Magazines is closing *Star Trek Explorer* (a market for fiction as well as news, interviews, etc) with issue #14 in December 2024. [KD]

Outraged Letters. *Caroline Mullan* on the shockingly inadequate coverage of Glasgow’s vibrant food culture in A446: ‘Sad that our haggis curry and black pudding dim sums did not make the cut.’

Court Circular. As a result of that legal challenge (see A446) to DC’s and Marvel’s joint trademark on the word “superhero” and its variations, and both companies’ mysterious failure to file a response, the US Patent and Trademark Office announced on 26 September that ‘the petition for cancellation is granted’. (*Bleeding Cool*, 27 September) [MS]

The Dead Past. *40 Years Ago*, ‘Bob Shaw’s *Fire Pattern* has roused speculation; the hero rings an aging John Sladek to ask about spontaneous combustion in people, and can only extract flip, joky, content-free answers. Is Shaw needling Sladek, I was asked? Bob confesses: “John wrote all his own dialogue for that scene.”’ (*Ansible* 40, October 1984) ● *30 Years Ago*, ‘Nancy Kress described the least flattering invitation she’d ever received, to join the team for Robert Silverberg’s *Murasaki* anthology (featuring Anderson, Bear, Benford, Brin, Pohl): “We have to have a woman, or we’re going to get killed!”’ (*Ansible* 87, October 1994)

Fanfundery. *TAFF Books*. For those who prefer print: the 2017 ebook *The Frank Arnold Papers*, compiled by Rob Hansen, now expanded by one-third with more of Frank’s nonfiction, is at last available as a trade paperback. See ae.ansible.uk/?t=FrankArnold. Meanwhile my own ebook *Work for Hire* scrapes the barrel of Langford contributions to long-ago genre reference works: free download at taff.org.uk/ebooks.php?x=Work4Hire. It’s hoped that the TAFF library may soon host GUFF reports as well.

Thog’s Masterclass. *Bullet Trajectories in the Reacherverse*. ‘It struck no obstacles, hit no buildings. It flew on straight and true until its energy was spent and gravity hauled it to earth in the far distance ...’ (*Lee Child, Without Fail, 2002*) [JG] ● *High-Tension Romance*. ‘This stranger was unfolding in my arms, roiling her thighs about the stiffened extension of my electrical being, sensations of her satin enclosure, the life pulsing in her coming out of its damp hiding to embrace mine, feeling like – this the picture in my mind’s eye replacing the bloody falling – electrical arcs furling and unfurling about an electrode.’ (*John Shirley, Dracula in Love, 1979*) ● *Neat Tricks*. ‘The blue eyes he’d inherited regarded him thoughtfully, hungrily, from within his mother’s face.’ ‘Alan glared and did not open his mouth in return. He was too busy breathing through it.’ (*Freya Marske, A Power Unbound, 2023*) [LA]

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