

Ansible



Ansible 53 December 1991

From Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. Fax 0734 669914. ISSN 0265-9816. Logo: Dan Steffan. Available at random fan gatherings, by whim or for stamped addressed envelopes—sorry, no paid subscriptions.

Further sf news and gossip in the spirit of the great Mel Brooks, who said definitively: 'Tragedy is if I cut my finger.... Comedy is if you walk into an open sewer and die.'

The Novacon 21 Tradition

Abigail Frost hurtles through: Let's get this straight. Linda Krawecka and I were as shocked as everybody else. Only when our astral bodies returned for Sunday breakfast (after a hard night rushing about doing good) did we learn how our earthly forms had ruthlessly extracted money* for double-vodkas-and-orange to prepare J.Nicholas (who'd recklessly come without his minder) for the traditional fannish art-form of Joseph Decoration. They have been severely disciplined, while TAFF benefited from Joe's wimpish collapse after a mere three. [Next day his face looked ... well-scrubbed—Ed.]

Colin Greenland's several contributions to a bumper programme book included answers to the long-disused Novacon Questions: 'Do you have a nickname?' 'No.' (So what happened to *Cyberpixie*?) The same book revealed his beatific state to be another tradition, with Ted Tubb sighing 'anyone who's been a Novacon GoH has already been to heaven' and Langford babbling of 'droit du seigneur over the more nubile committee members' at Novacon 15 ... which Pearson sister? (Or Tony Berry?) Colin's GoH interview was the programme's highlight, as befits the only item I saw which didn't involve Pam Wells selling Nova awards or Michael Ashley filling swag-bags with luminous plastic slugs. Or possibly the other way round.

A further neglected fan tradition—your editor's epic nose-bleed—was revived at Pam's TAFF auction. I missed it, being too abstracted with joy at not having to sell exotic condoms to Martin Smith after Helena Bowles withdrew her bid on learning she was only getting one. (Me, I'd have strangled her and had done with it.) I did, however, view the ensanguined snot-rag. Under the Commonwealth huge sums were paid for handkerchiefs dipped in the blood of Charles, King and Martyr, but nobody wanted this one. Perhaps we should try next year with Steve Green's.

Gripes centered traditionally on the hotel—too far out for traditional treks to cheap curry-houses, and often rather staff-stretched. Breakfast saw hungover queues forming in spite of countless empty seats. The restaurant's 'Novocon [sic] menu' was OK and reasonably priced, though, even if wine did come in the wrong-sized bottle, after the food and before the glasses. The waiter's heart could be won forever with a used match-box, which is a new one on me.

Some traditions underwent subtle, post-modernist reinterpretation: thus, Avedon Carol was browbeating people to cast Nova votes for Michael Ashley. (Good try, but not quite funny enough.) I dressed up in black Lycra mini-dress and pink stilettos for Bradford Boy's benefit, but the miserable cunt stayed away that evening. Workaholic fun-lover John Jarrold checked into his overflow hotel to find a Macdonald sales conference; ecstatically he took Rob Holdstock over to share its delights, and was never seen again. Newlyweds John Brunner and LiYi Tan were out in force; she impressed one and all by her command of English after barely three months here.

The real stunner was the Novas. I'd got my orders by radio-wave from Keighley only just in time ('The contest looks wide open. The Storm Constantine Information Service could sneak

past and steal the lot.... And if you hear young Ashley plugging the name of Ken Cheslin, hit him.' [DW]). But as Harry Bond's three tellers soon learned, another block vote was operating. 'I don't believe this!' gasped Rhodri James. 'John Richards?' wept your reporter. 'I've known about it for ages,' said hoity-toity Caroline Mullan. Interesting times. All in all, a con like wot they don't make 'em any more.... (Except for Mexican.)

[* 'Come on Illingworth! You must be more generous and fun-loving than Martin Hoare and the fake Bob Shaw! ... That's all right, Sorensen—let's you and me go to your room and get your wallet!']

We Name The Guilty ...

Isaac Asimov is the sole almost-living writer on a *Harper's Magazine* list of 'cultural icons'—names so famous that US computer folk are told never to use them as passwords. (Too predictable ... yup, that's our Isaac.) Dead writers listed: Aristotle, Confucius, Goethe and Hitler. Other literary figures: Dracula, Frodo, Garfield and Superman. Ah, culture. [CF]

Neil Gaiman's 1991 World Fantasy Award for the 'Mid-summer Night's Dream' issue of his *Sandman* comic has, we hear, provoked vast rule-rewriting plans to save the Short Story category from any repetition of this terrible thing.

Rob Holdstock has been eagerly telling everyone about a certain discrepancy between the rampant, priapic wooden image described in his triffic new novel *The Fetch* (Orbit, Dec), and its tastefully eroded depiction on the cover.

L.Ron Hubbard typescripts (1940s shorts like 'Man Eats Monster' and 'He Found G-d' [sic]) are offered by US dealer Barry Levin at \$35-\$50,000 each. Who'd pay that? Oh, I see....

Garry & Annette Kilworth return from their lengthy Hong Kong stint in January, but will be 'travelling until April'.

Chris Morgan has delivered a book on fortune telling to Quintet, with the oblique and witty title *Fortune Telling*.

Peter Nicholls was recently struck by lightning, twice ... well, his and Clare Coney's house in Melbourne was. [MR] The only reported casualty: his fax machine. A nation mourns.

David Pringle gloats: 'Heard that another magazine has gone? Blast has folded, and John Brown Publishing is rumoured to be in some difficulties despite *Viz*. Isn't *Million* doing well by comparison?' He goes on to exult that Frank Muir Himself is now a subscriber.

Ian Watson, speaking at Soupçon, revealed the closely guarded secret of his script work for a Stanley Kubrick skiffy epic. The shady figure 'Ansible Dave', who had to move text between the Watson and Kubrick disk formats, aroused paranoid dread in Mr K: 'How do we know we can trust this guy?' etc. [MAH] As for the content—my lips are sealed, but a Major SF Figure is said to be less than ecstatic about Kubrick's choice of author to replace him as adaptor of his story....

Infinitely Improbable

Ten Years Ago ... major sf figure Brian Aldiss was a Booker Prize judge. 'There was a distinct science-fictional (or "metaphorical-structural", as we euphemistically say in Booker circles) aura to half the novels in the shortlist. Like: Lessing's *The Sirian Experiments* is definitely galactic empire stuff, if not a patch on Doc Smith; Thomas's *The White Hotel* opens with a poem, integral to the novel, which was published in *New Worlds* in its palmier days; even the winner, Rushdie's

Midnight's Children, is about Wyndhamesque telepathic kids....' (*Ansible* 22, Dec 81).

Nova Awards. Best fanzine: *Saliromania* ed. Michael Ashley (2—*Helicon discussion Fanzine*; 3—*Lip*). Fan writer: Michael Ashley (2—*John Richards*, 3—*D.Langford*). Fan artist: D. West (2—*Dave Mooring*; 3—*Sue Mason*). [HB] Best block vote: see *Helicon's* Eastercon PR1 self-promotion ('Crass, but what do you expect from *Illingsworth?*'—*Martin Hoare*). Best blitz of material appearing too (ahem) late to have any effect on the Novas: D.West in every other fanzine at Novacon 21....

Mystic Rose. The new *Lone Wolf* fantasy from 'John Grant' may interest a certain editorial collective. Who is the proudly professional officer with 'an unstable glint in his eyes', who speaks of 'the Mysteries of the Midnight Rose, which are More Obtuse than Mortal Man May Know', and clinches a deal with: 'I swear it on my favourite unit of currency!'

RIP ... Irwin Allen (*Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Lost in Space*, *The Time Tunnel*, etc) died on 2 Nov, aged 75. [SG]

Hazel's Language Lessons: Gaelic ... taghairm, inspiration sought by lying in a bullock's hide behind a waterfall.

TAFF Rules OK? Pam Wells is conducting an informal poll about—perhaps—dropping the 'write-in' option from Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund ballots. Why? At present someone could theoretically win via write-in votes, without making any commitment to travel and run the fund ... even without being willing to do either. Unlikely, but the loophole might as well be closed in this rare period of no major TAFF controversy.

Book Dump: contemplating their paperback of Brian Stableford's *Empire of Fear*, Pan hesitated over the C-format version ... to remainder it, undercutting the new edition, or pay for further storage? Solution: Brian's home is now entirely full of freebie copies which he mustn't sell you for, er, a while.

Fire & Water is HarperCollins's new sf publicity sheet (far better than the dread *Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster*). #1 lists selected World Fantasy Awards: Robert McCammon's *Mine* (best horror), Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge* (best sf) and Unwin Hyman (best Jane Johnson, er, Euro sf publisher).

The Liquidator: Judgement Day. The report on Newsfield Ltd's collapse conveys that the company's only moneyspinners were computer titles based on now-dying machines. *Fear* is scorned as a 'fanzine' with 'limited circulation ... very low advertisement income ... marginal results up to the end'. *GMI*: 'the gaming market was in deep recession ... circulation and advertisement income targets were never achieved'. *Frighteners* is oddly described as 'selected short stories from famous and unknown authors, who were keen to find an outlet for their publishing efforts'; after #1 was removed from sale thanks to complaints about Graham Masterton's everyday tale of bestial perversion, Newsfield actually paid Learned Counsel to vet later issues. Post-crash deficit is £406,378, with familiar creditors' names: David V.Barrett £71, Kim Newman £132, Stan Nicholls £154, Ramsey Campbell £164, me £199, Ashley Watkins £440, Guy N.Smith £493, Liz Holliday £1029, Wayne Murphy (whose Mystery Surname only ever appears in these glum reports) £2000, and—the winnah!—John Gilbert £2451.

RIP ... Robert Maxwell's death at sea (5 Nov) led to much comment. Radio 4: 'The weather in the Tenerife area was calm ...' C.Priest, instantly: '... except for a large unexplained wave that destroyed seafront buildings.' What now of publishing institutions like Macdonald/Futura, Macmillan, Scribner and John Jarrold? Amid current horrific revelations and resignations, Maxwell Communications' book folk ('Unprofitable'—*The Guardian*) must be feeling nervously for their pensions. Lucky Allan Bryce, whose horror mag *The Dark Side* was dropped by Maxwell and rapidly revived by himself....

Success! Terry Pratchett was a double Nov bestseller with *Witches Abroad* (hc) and *Moving Pictures* (pb). Iain Sinclair got £500 as *Guardian* fiction prize runner-up, for *Downriver*. The

£4000 Gollancz/*Bookshelf* 'first fantasy novel' prize—that is, advance—goes to John Whitbourn for *A Dangerous Energy*.

Condom

19 Dec • **Xmas Wellington** (no BSFA meeting). New Year Wellington 2 Jan—chillingly soon after festive excess, but 'people will certainly be there,' say Secret Masters [RA].

25 Jan • **PentaCon**, Univ. Centre, Cambridge. £5 reg. SF/fan/academia mix. Contact Helen Steele, Newnham College.

31 Jan - 2 Feb • **Fourplay**, Victoria Pk Hotel, Wolverhampton. £18 reg, rooms £28/person/night. GoHs Cynthia McQuillan, Jane Robinson, Colin Fine. Contact 2 Craithie Rd, Vicars Cross, Chester, CH3 5JL. '4th British filkcon ... I know it's a bit beyond the pale,' quavers a trembling Alison Scott.

21-3 Feb • **Lucon IVy**, Leeds University Union, in some town or other. £7 reg. GoH Gwynneth [sic] Jones. Leeds U SF Soc, PO Box 157, Leeds, LS1 1UH.

7 Mar • **Picocon 10**, annual one-day thrash of Imperial College SF Soc at IC, Prince Consort Rd, S.Kensington.

17-20 Apr • **Illumination**, 43rd Eastercon; Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. £25 reg—note recent increase. Rooms £28/person/night. GoHs Paul McAuley, Geoff Ryman, Pam Wells (fan). Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

24-6 Apr • **Freucon**, Eurocon; Freudenstadt, Germany. £15 reg (£20 from 1 Jan) to UK agent Oliver Grüter, Dept of Physics, RHBN College, Egham, Surrey, TW20 OEX.

6-8 Nov • **Novacon 22**, Forte Post House Hotel near bloody Birmingham airport as in 1991, 'subject to confirmation'. £18 reg. GoH Storm Constantine. Contact, as ever, 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, W.Midlands, B66 4SH.

8-12 Apr 93 • **Helicon**, 44th Eastercon (+Eurocon); Hotel de France, Jersey. £22 reg. GoHs John Brunner, George R.R. Martin. Contact 63 Drake Rd, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

1-4 Apr 94 • 45th Eastercon bids: **Contact**, Isle of Man, £1 presup to PO Box 29, Hitchin, Herts, SG4 9TG (Nic Farey wishes to state that 'A Bill to decriminalize homosexual acts ... is on its way through Tynwald, the island's Parliament.');

Sou'Wester, Bristol, £2 presup to 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ. Either way, 'Authoritative rumour has Martin Easterbrook already preparing a rescue bid.' [AJF]

Rumblings • The mislaid *Wincon* I funds returned seconds after *A52* went to press, via a cheque from Harry Bond (eh?). All is well. • Apparently little but the scheduled gluttony and excess took place at **Soupçon** (Jersey). • **Novacon 21**: 'Crap hotel, crap programme, a few nice people,' opined Martin Hoare. 'But Ian Stewart's talk was wonderful,' protested Sue Jones. 'No one could get to that,' Mr Hoare scoffed, 'it was on at dawn. [10:30]' Brum Group chair Chris Chivers denounces Martin's *A52* remarks on Novacon profits, insisting that these all go to worthy sf causes and that the BSFG is Not Well Off.

Fear and Loathing

No, Steve Green will not be editing *Fear* as misrepresented in the first version of *A52*. 'Even if Pegasus had bought the title (they haven't), persuaded John Gilbert to relinquish his claim (they won't) and offered me the job, I'd have had to decline. There's plenty of bad will attached to *Fear*, as evidenced by the stream of people asking me (on reading *Ansible* 52) when I was going to pay them the money they were owed by Newsfield....' [SG] Many apologies, boss. Our ace newshound David Pringle adds, self-abasingly: 'The story came from what I thought was an unimpeachable source who told me he'd got it directly from John Gilbert.' • In fact Steve did turn down a *Fear* subeditorial post in early 1991, well before the crash. The later rumour is now ascribed to 'some prat at *Starburst*'.

Text © Dave Langford, 1991; may be xeroxed for others. Inputs: Harry Bond, Abigail Frost, Steve Green, Martin Hoare, Chris Priest, Roger Robinson, Yvonne Rousseau, D.West. 5/12/91