



Ansible 102 January 1996

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1995 SWAN SONG. In December a small horde of writers converged on Swansea for the tail end of the city's 'UK Year of Literature' events: this was the sf bit, organized by that mighty maestro of multiplicitous metaphor, Lionel Fanthorpe. It was a convention, Jim, but not as we know it. The various UKYoL events mostly took place in Tŷ Llên, a rather jolly old municipal building only recently restored from being a dilapidated abode of dossers and alcoholics (we'll leave that straight line right where it is, thanks) ... although certain items happened in other scattered venues, including an alley inappropriately named Salubrious Passage and a bleak university arts centre several miles around the bay. Meanwhile the honoured guests were (in Steve Sneyd's phrase) 'exiled to an Industrial Estate Motel' far, far away in another direction altogether—this being the sort of luxury accommodation where, having undressed and begun to shiver violently, you find a small sign reading: THIS HEATER IS CONTROLLED FROM THE RECEPTION DESK. PLEASE ASK AT RECEPTION IF YOU WISH IT TURNED ON.

To add a keen spirit of competitiveness, all UKYoL events were separately priced, enabling the organizers to charge extra for the mighty Aldiss/Pratchett double bill while accepting mere coppers for access to the small, hard-to-find room containing Langford and Stableford. (Our advertised title was 'The Decay of Science Fiction', illustrated by me talking about padding and Brian reading several of his own stories.) Fun was nevertheless had, encouraged by that man Fanthorpe as a manically bouncing MC who, naturally shaven-headed and clad in sinister evening dress, did indeed closely resemble a bouncer. Having him on hand as presenter while giving a talk is rather like being allotted a high-volume laugh track. Other familiar weirdnesses of organization soon emerged: what do you do when a million thirsty Terry Pratchett fans crowd into the festival building for a signing session? Close the adjacent bar, of course.

Brian Aldiss's striped jacket and straw hat aroused general awe, but he was all of a tizzy: 'You're lucky. You only have Stableford. I have to follow Pratchett. I can see the rush for the exits already....' Colin Wilson, who revealed his new serious scientific theory that Atlantis lies beneath the Antarctic ice, was billed as 'a real life *X-Files* Agent Mulder'—but soon demonstrated by comparison that Mulder is absurdly closed-minded and sceptical. Alas, I missed most of the excitement by leaving early, since I was coming down with a foul cold that turned off my brain. Please ask at Reception if you wish it turned on.

The Dragon's Grandmother

Robertson Davies, who died in December aged 82, was of course a major author both in his native Canada and worldwide ... and one of those quirky writers who without actually working in the fantasy genre (though deploying various angels, saints and spirits) had a strong appeal to countless sf and fantasy fans. I fervently recommend his 'Depford' and 'Cornish' trilogies. (Damn, another good one gone.)

Lionel Fanthorpe's bubbly enthusiasm somehow kept the slightly shambolic Swansea 'UK Year of Literature' sf events going (see above). Perhaps his finest hour came when a large hole appeared in the programme as a result of Bob Shaw eloping to get married in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Dauntless Lionel replaced the advertised Shaw 'Serious Scientific Talk' with a medley of his own songs, including a heart-rendingly lyrical summary of the entire occasion which wrenches the words from

my mouth: 'Brian Aldiss, Terry Pratchett, / Colin Wilson and the rest, / All our Science Fiction writers / Rank among the very best. (Chorus: *Every kind of Science Fiction / Or an Unsolved Mystery, / Supernatural, Horror Stories / And Heroic Fantasy!*) Guy N.Smith and Andy Sawyer; / Ian McDonald—pleased to tell— / Freddie Clarke and David Langford / And Paul Brazier's here as well. (Chorus.)' Later verses dropped the names of Pringle, Sneyd and Stableford; I won't say in what.

Simon R.Green sniffs at the Copyeditor's Riposte to his complaints (see *A101*): 'Jokes about the severely disabled? Could this be my comment that one character's actions were as sensible as a leper playing volleyball? Gosh; I'm so ashamed.... The politically conscious Yanks didn't raise an eyebrow, and passed my book pretty much untouched.'

Chuch Harris sends a horrifying account of being whisked to hospital in December with an aneurism: 'My blood pressure reading was damn near off the top of the sphygmomanometer. I had a sort of bulge in the aorta that had torn and was leaking blood into the body cavities.... There is a new procedure where they can replace the aorta with one grown specially in a pig but I dunno—would Shin Bet rule that this is even worse than a bacon sandwich?' The operation was thought too dangerous; instead, aortal leakage was reduced by blood-pressure-lowering drugs that 'put everything below the waist into hibernation (yes, that too),' and Chuch is now taking things easy at home. He'd like to thank everyone who cheered him with encouraging messages and corrected his startlingly original spelling of 'sphygmomanometer'.

Diana Wynne Jones was bemused to find her *Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (an alphabet of fantasy clichés arranged as a cod travel guide) reviewed in December's *SFX* before she'd even corrected the proofs. Gollancz's highly co-ordinated publicists had mailed out the copyedited MS and a *New Book Information* flyer announcing publication on 7 Dec ... which, once the review was irrevocably scheduled, became March 1996. Oh well.

Chris Priest is extremely chuffed that his *The Prestige* has been shortlisted (along with novels by Anita Brookner, Kazuo Ishiguro and Ross Leckie) for the £3,000 James Tait Black Memorial prize, fiction division—'Scotland's oldest book award', whose winner will be announced this month. Meanwhile, true to his principles of Unreliable Narrative, he has once again rewritten *The Glamour* for a new US edition....

Condylarthra

24 Jan • **BSFA**, Jubilee pub, York Rd, London (nr Waterloo). Upstairs room, 7pm. Guest: mystery and uncertainty rule.

2-4 Feb • **Obliter-8** (8th UK filk con), Forte Crest Hotel, Milton Keynes. £25 reg, kids £12.50, under-5s free. Contact 212 Albert Road, Leyton, London, E10 6PD.

2-4 Feb • **Starbase 96** (*Trek*), Hilton Hotel, Leeds. £40 reg. Contact 152 Otley Rd, Headingley, Leeds, LS16 5JX.

4 Feb • **Picocon 13**, Imperial College, London. GoH Rob Holdstock, Chris Priest, Stephen Baxter. £8 reg; students £4. Contact ICSF, c/o Imperial College Union, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BB.

23-5 Feb • **Dissection** [sic], ~~Scottish~~ **Conbention** post-mortem event, Rutland Hotel, Sheffield. £24 reg (£25 by credit card). Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

8-10 Mar • **AKFT II** ('adult' *Trek*), Grand Hotel, Northampton. £20 reg; £5 'deposit' advised. Contact (SAE) 29 Courteenhall Road, Bilsworth, Northants, NN7 3DD.

5-8 Apr • **Evolution** (Eastercon), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, nr Heathrow. GoHs Vernor Vinge, Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Jack Cohen, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Kincaid Speller. £28 reg, 'very soft currencies £5'. Contact 13 Lindfield Gdns, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

28-30 Jun • **Discworld Convention**, Britannia 'Sasha's' Hotel, Manchester. GoHs: guess who? Now £20 reg. Contact (SAE) P.O. Box 3086, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 6LD.

23-4 Aug • **Contraptions** (gaming): venue now revealed as the Northampton Moat House Hotel. £25 reg until Easter. Contact 12 Cartersmead Close, Horley, Surrey, RH6 9LG.

Rumblings • **Eastercon 1998** ... Chris O'Shea muttered of resigning from the 'Istanbul' bid owing to the apathy of the other two-thirds of the committee, who according to subsequent rumour are being absorbed into the rival 'Intuition' bid.

Infinitely Improbable

Ringpull Press of Jeff Noon fame has been cast adrift again, thanks to editorial disagreements between their chap Steve Powell and Fourth Estate—which last year rescued Ringpull from bankruptcy and took it aboard as a Fourth Estate imprint, but has now dumped it. 'Editorially we were on different planets,' said Powell, confiding that he was a Martian and Fourth Estate were Venusians. (Only three Ringpull titles appeared during the Fourth Estate era, as opposed to seventeen in the previous independent year.) Business, or something, continues at the same Manchester address.

Random Fandom. *Dave Holmes* is flogging off much of his sf collection to meet a major cash need, and is agonizing over whether his 'first' edition of *The Colour of Magic* is the real UK first (conceivably worth £700) or, as looks awfully likely, a re-imported US remainder....

• *Caroline Mullan* reports a terrible aftermath of that recent party: 'one pair of men's slippers, grey, size 10. Will be donated to charity shop or rubbish bin if not claimed before 12 Jan. 0181 863 8849.' • *Ian Sorensen* blows the gaff on a secret event: 'Winterseason was a great success with over 30 attendees over the weekend. Jilly [Reed] was suitably awestruck at meeting the mighty D West but concluded that he was "really sweet". She also regaled us with a number of anecdotes concerning the mating practices of pigs and how she has had a hand in them. Not for the squeamish. Or people with sharp nails.' • *Fifteen Years Ago*: 'The Yorkshire Ripper gave his godmother a nice box of chocolates for Xmas; when he was arrested she lost her taste for them and gave them away, which is how they came to be eaten with enormous relish by the famous *D.West*....' (*Ansible* 15, 1981)

G.O.A. *Sandra Bond*, 10 Hawkesthrope Clo, Grove, Wantage, Oxon, OX12 0NU. *Brian Burgess*, c/o Creedy House, Nether Ave, Littlestone on Sea, Kent, TN28 8NH. *LynC & Clive Newall*, PO Box 104, Coburg, Vic 3058, Australia. *Nicholas Royle*, 73 Pennard Rd, London, W12 8DW.

TAFF. Ballots for the 1996 race (Simo vs Martin Tudor) should be out right now, after a slight delay occasioned by mighty UK administrator Abigail Frost's sense that London is being blanketed by Fog, Gloom and Depression rays emanating from Conservative Central Office. (No ballot? SAE to her at 95 Wilmot St, London, E2 0BP.) • Meanwhile TAFF controversy rages via e-mail, with LAcon bossman Mike Glyer first accusing nasty fanzine fans of keeping TAFF solely for their own kind; then, after a chorus of assurance that this was not so and that anyone was welcome to stand, complaining that said fans had been Inadequately Politically Correct in failing to publicly denounce e.g. Ted White and Greg Pickersgill for alleged wrong thoughts in this area; and then shifting to the more cogent point that the tradition of producing TAFF reports seems to have decayed. I wouldn't mind seeing a few more completed reports myself.... • What's bad for fan funds is not so much the inevitable debate as this repeated assumption of impassable gulfs between evil (or virtuous) fanzine fans and splendid (or despicable) convention fans. Yet Mike Glyer, recently the Savonarola-like scourge of fanzine fans, publishes a Hugo-winning fanzine: vile Langford has been known to work on conventions; tra la. Historically, writing in fanzines has been a notable route to TAFF victory since it can establish

a reputation on the far side of the Atlantic; but there are other paths to glory, including Usenet, word of mouth, and—come to think of it—being mentioned in others' fanzines. It's the voters, not arcane traditional dogmas, that choose the winner ... and I hope the 1996 race will see no acrimonious divide between supporters of that worthy fanzine editor Martin Tudor and that diligent convention worker Martin Tudor.

Publishers & Sinners. How to review for *Computer Weekly*: (a) Editor asks about doing reviews; I suggest sf coverage. (b) Enthusiastic invitation in Nov to do a whole Xmas feature on relevant sf. (c) Agree, asking for word length and deadline. (d) Silence from CW despite repeated enquiries, continuing into Dec. (e) Open CW on 14 Dec to find two-page sf feature as planned, only it's by good old David V. Barrett. (f) Scratch head at length. (g) After testy e-mail to CW, receive The Explanation: 'Quite simply, it never entered my head that two people—both called David—would be interested in doing the Christmas sci-fi book reviews and I didn't realise that you and David Barrett were not one and the same person....' (h) Scream gently to oneself. • Another computer mag reportedly reviewed the CD-ROM *SF Encyclopaedia* and reckoned that the main flaw in its update of those 1.3 million award-winning words was the presence of ... Too Much Text. *Voice of Emperor Joseph II*: 'Too many notes, Herr Clute.'

Ten Years Ago. *William Gibson* opened 1986 with subtle self-promotion in *Ansible* 45: 'I would like to point out, for the benefit of my massive and utterly devoted British following, that the version of my second novel, *Count Zero*, which will run in serial lumps (three) in *Asimov's SF*, is a special Lite version with reduced motherfucker-count and no graphic but intensely poetic and moving descriptions of oral sex. "At *IASFM*," I was told, "you can't come in anybody's mouth." I should also point out that these changes were made under my supervision and with my express approval. I agreed to go along with them, after due soul-searching, when it was pointed out to me how urgently young people in small towns in the US need fiction of this sort, and how much my new car is going to cost. • But with Gollancz, friends, you get it all!

Clarke Award. The rest of the submissions since the A99 list: Gregory Benford, *Sailing Bright Eternity*; Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*; Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*; Greg Egan, *Distress*; Peter Hamilton, *The Nano Flower*; Tanith Lee, *Reigning Cats and Dogs* (sent to only four of the six judges as Headline had only four copies left ...); Stanislaw Lem, *Peace on Earth* (1987, UK translated ed. 1995); Paul J. McAuley, *Fairyland*; Ian McDonald, *Chaga*; Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*; Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*; Tricia Sullivan, *Letha*; Melanie Tem, *Desmodus*. In all, 45 books were submitted; the shortlist will be decided this month. As for the presentation ... publishers dissatisfied with the traditional grotty venue claimed that the ICA would be available free (see Steve Jones and Jo Fletcher in *SF Chronicle*)—but 'free' proved on investigation to mean £600 plus catering costs and a requirement to organize a tie-in event. Bye-bye, ICA. But more ambitious plans are now afoot: something wonderful may yet happen....

Tiny Tales of Terror. Foolish sceptics in Reading (called, for the sake of argument, Langford) believed they could beat the CURSE OF THE UNDYING XMAS TURKEY by buying a small one and eating it all by 27 Dec! But THE TURKEY MAY NOT BE MOCKED! Soon their home was filled with what H.P. Lovecraft called A STENCH AS OF A THOUSAND OPENED GRAVES. Reconstruction of this JUST PUNISHMENT indicated that, rummaging in the cellar freezer before Xmas, hubristic D. Langford had dropped a small portion of an ENTIRELY DIFFERENT TURKEY which had inconspicuously rotted away until discovered and removed with large tongs and choking noises in the New Year.... THE CURSE WAS FULFILLED!

Thog's Masterclass. 'She filled the barstool and space around her with a masculine figure in too-tight jeans, or sometimes, in the summer, too-tight small shorts.' (Barbara Malensky, 'Finding Lottie', *Pirate Writings*, 1995) (MMW)

Once Again: Happy New Year and a spiffy 1996 to all.