



Ansible 114 January 1997

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ANOTHER MODEST PROPOSAL. I think I've now worked out how to continue financing *Ansible*. One simply incorporates in the USA and files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Immense rewards beckon: the ailing Marvel Comics group went through just this process at the end of 1996 in order 'to get \$525 million in new capital', which I could certainly use. The only snag is that someone called Ron Perelman, who already owns over 80% of Marvel, vastly increases his control. H'mm, wait a minute ... maybe Ron Perelman's first act would be to fire one-third of the present *Ansible* workforce (Marvel have recently done so, to the tune of 115 jobs), and it would be ever so hard to decide on my least favourite third of the decrepit Langford body. Modest proposal duly withdrawn. I never did understand Big Business.

Continued On Next Rock

Simon R.Green confides the secret of his literary success: 'I tend to do things like having someone leave a room twice in a row without having had them come back in again. Or completely forgetting about a sub-plot I'd set up two books earlier, and having to give it its own chapter in the next book. Or there was the time I got halfway through a locked-room murder mystery before discovering that my explanation didn't work. There followed much panic and screaming of oaths as I sought frantically to come up with a new solution that didn't involve jettisoning the already completed first half...' (Small prize to the first reader who correctly identifies the SRG novel in question.)

Robert A.Heinlein's *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* is to become a movie, and a contract has been signed; my impeccable but unattributable source adds, 'How sweet of the NASA people to discover ice on the moon when they did!'

Ursula Le Guin fancies writing a foreword to the collected *Thog's Masterclass*, if our nice publishers accept it: 'Her eyes dropped suddenly to the floor, rolling a little, as she gathered up her intestinal fortitude in both hands and murmured, "Oh, yes, indeed, Sir, I would write your Introduction!"'

Terry Pratchett has had an enjoyable tinker with his word processor (WordPerfect 6.1): 'There's something satisfying about having a SMALL CAPS key with a skull on it...' (But *Tom Holt* was more bashful about his antique system: 'For the record, I also use flint tools and light my home in winter with pottery lamps filled with bison dripping.')

Carl Sagan (1934-1996) died on 20 Dec aged 62. Genre readers will remember him not so much for his middle-of-the-road sf novel *Contact* as for his fascination with the idea of real alien life, and his dedicated efforts over the decades to promote SETI and public understanding of science (*Cosmos* being only the tip of the iceberg) while debunking exploitative pseudoscience ... as in his powerfully argued 1996 book *The Demon-Haunted World*. More from *Steve Baxter*, over.

Whitley Strieber has issued a follow-up statement about that stupefyingly 'authentic' picture of an alien (see *A113*), which makes everything much clearer: 'My conclusion is that this is most likely an exceptionally well executed fake. It remains the most authentic alien image that I have ever seen.'

Concent

22 Jan • **BSFA** London meet, Jubilee pub, York Rd. 7pm on.

31 Jan - 2 Feb • **HarmonIX** (filk), Rozel Hotel, Weston-Super-Mare. £23 reg. Contact 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ. Attempted use of e-mail will be Punished.

8 Feb • **Compulsion** (gaming), Edinburgh. £2.50 reg, to 7 Feb. Contact 67 Maitland Hog Lane, Kirkliston, ED29 9DU.

14-17 Feb • **Attitude: the Convention** (born of the fan-

zine), Abbey Hotel, Gt Malvern. £27 reg by post to 31 Jan only; £35 at door. Rooms £29/person/night; no singles now left; room deposit = 1 night's stay. Contact First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW. 01702 352846.

21-3 Feb • **TrinCon2**, Dublin, Ireland. £15(I) reg, £20(I) at door. Many GoHs. Contact 40 Daniel St, Dublin 8, Ireland.

1-2 Mar • **Microcon 17**, Exeter University. GoH: many. £5 reg? Contact 25 Victoria St, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6JQ.

2 Mar • **Picocon 14**, Imperial College, London. 10am-8pm. £8 reg (students £3). Contact ICSF c/o IC Union, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB.

28-31 Mar • **Intervention** (Eastercon), Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £35 reg (£25 unwaged), rising to £50 on 1 Mar and closing 14 Mar; no at-the-door memberships available. Contact 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 7TS.

18-20 Apr • **Nebula Awards Weekend**, Holiday Inn Crown Plaza, Kansas City. \$55 (\$25 without banquet) to SFWA c/o 806 W 39th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64111-4002, USA.

3 Jun • **Enoch Soames**, literary time-traveller from 1897, appears in the British Museum Reading Room at 2:10pm. [MB]

11-14 July • **The Alliance** (B5), Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. GoH J.Michael Straczynski; many others. Contact Wolf 359, 141 Waarden Road, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 9BE.

28 Aug - 2 Sep • **LoneStarCon** (55th Worldcon), San Antonio, Texas. Now \$135 reg (rises again 1 Aug). Contact PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA, or 27 Hampton Rd, Worcester Park, Surrey, KT4 8EU.

30 Oct - 2 Nov • **World Fantasy Convention**, Britannia International Hotel, Marsh Wall, London. Added GoH Iain Sinclair. £75/\$120 reg (rises 1 May); membership limited to 750. Rooms £75/night double/twin or, gorbliney, £65 single. Contact PO Box 31, Whitby, North Yorkshire, YO22 4YL.

2003 • **Toronto in '03** is the bid for a fourth Canadian Worldcon, with a committee two dozen strong. Pre-supporting memberships \$US15 or \$CAN20.03 (it says here). Contact Toronto in '03, PO Box 3, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5W 1A2. UK agent to be announced soon. There is a rival Berlin bid.

Rumblings • The 7-8 Dec **Stargazers Trek** con at Wembley Arena was cancelled at the last minute by arena administrators, who muttered about 'contractual difficulties' with Mr Stargazer. A nation mourns: 12,000 fans had been expected. 'This was advertised as a "Christmas Sci-fi Special ... a prequel to the 10th anniversary of the Next Generation and at the request of United International Pictures." A month after the ad appeared in *Empire* (Dec), the magazine printed a denial on behalf of UIP: "This was not set up 'at the request of UIP' as stated in the ad. The use of UIP's name was completely unauthorized." [AB]

Infinitely Improbable

Publishers & Sinners. *Tim Holman* (joint hero, with Colin Murray, of *Orbit's* work on the mighty *Fantasy Encyclopedia*) has been appointed Editorial Director of *Orbit* as from 1 Jan. So this is not the time to grumble that the *Orbit* catalogue page on the *FE* omits three Contributing Editors and both Associate Editors.... Temporarily erased from history: R.Kaveney, D.Langford, R.Tiner, D.Hartwell, G.Westfahl.

Random Fandom. *Chris Bell* 'is happy to say (again) that the doctors (again) have decided (again) that she doesn't after all have terminal cancer (again). They've decided as how I can reasonably book a summer holiday [this] year.' • *Guilia De Cesare & Steve Davies* are marrying in Tasmania on 18 Jan. 'Please note that using issues of *Plokt*

for confetti will probably not be appreciated.' [CM] ● *Rob Hansen* is to be the first beneficiary of the "Fanhistoricon Fan Fund", wafting him to America for Fanhistoricon/Boskone (Framingham, Mass., 14-16 Feb). ● *Jon Langford* reveals yet more about his visit to William Burroughs: 'The garage door was pocked with shotgun pellets, and there were all these bits of wood that had been blown apart ... I asked Burroughs what he thought about gun control, and he rasped, "I am a member of the NRA. But I don't pay any dues." Snapshots from the great meeting show a priceless cultural artefact in the Burroughs garden: his very own orgone box. ● *David McClintock*, Ohio fan and sf/fantasy book dealer, suffered 'a major stroke' on 1 Dec but is recovering well and hopes to resume mail-order shipments by late Jan. [RM]

1997 ... remember to celebrate *Mary Shelley's* 200th birthday and the 100th anniversary of *The Island of Dr Moreau*. Oh yes, and in Jan 1987 the London SF Circle left the One Tun....

C.o.A. *Janice Eisen*, 3535 Tarrytown Rd, Brookfield, WI 53005, USA. *Steven McDonald*, 9649 E Colette St, Tucson, AZ 85748, USA. *Pat McMurray*, Flat 4, 49 Wandle Rd, Croydon, CR0 1DF. *Harry Payne & Omega*, 22 Hilton Place, Harehills, Leeds, LS8 4HE. *Paul Rood*, PO Box 3086, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7SF.

Thog's Poetry Masterclass. D.G.Rossetti on a beloved pet: 'Oh how the family affections combat / Within my breast! Each hour throws a bomb at / My burning soul—neither from owl or from bat / Can peace be gained, until I clasp my wombat ...' (*Aussiecon 3 please copy.*)

Group Gropes. More updates on regular sf pub meetings ... *Cardiff*, 7:30pm 1st Tue of month, The Golden Cross, 283 Hayes Bridge Rd; *Cambridge*, 6:30pm 2nd Mon, The Wrestlers, New Market Rd; *Reading*, 9pm every Mon, The Sun, Castle St.

Small Press. The least likely guide to 1997 is Frank Key's *Hooting Yard Calendar*, this year's illustration theme being 'Planet of the Crumpled Jesuits'. Weekdays are given in Croatian, there are useful spaces for (e.g.) LIST OF TROUSERS, and selected days carry significant reminders like GO ALL RUBBERY. Limited edition of 80. £5 to P.Byrne, Hooting Yard Press, 103 Cavendish Rd, Highams Park, London, E4 9NG. Forthcoming: 'a little booklet on "The Making of the Hooting Yard Calendar"—a sort of sawn-off version of one of those "The Making of Jurassic Park" TV documentaries,' babbles Frank excitedly.

Spawn of the Damned. *Jenny & Justin Ackroyd* announce their daughter Lucy Hannah, born 18 Dec. [AS] *Helena Bowles & Richard Standage* also expect offspring this year; *Helen Tsatsos & Jon Langford* plan to make me an uncle in July; *Helena & Martin Tudor's* target date is around 10 May; *Kim & Tony Whysall-Hammond* have a 30 March ETA but do not intend to make this an unusual Eastercon programme item....

More Worldcon Bids! 2000 Chicago; Boston Mountains (a hoax?). 2001 Boston; Hel (Norway); Philadelphia. 2002 San Francisco; Seattle. 2012 Chichén Itzá. 2017 Moscow. Blimey.

Editorial. 1996: bloody hell, what a year. Too many deaths. Too much TAFF gloom. Personal good cheer came from such things as a 20th wedding anniversary; *Ansible's* surprise LAcon Hugo, the first at a non-UK Worldcon; the publication of *The Unseen University Challenge* and *The Silence of the Langford*; the completion at last of the *Fantasy Encyclopedia*, of which my own puny bits run to some 80,000 words; convivial times with the usual good people, and others; and a GoH spot at Armadacon in Plymouth, with many new (to me) faces and no one at all who seemed jaded. O brave new world. ● 1997: we enter the seventh calendar year of *Ansible* distribution at every first-Thursdays London meeting. This fanatical dedication may not, alas, continue beyond Easter ... unless there's a move from the Wellington to some less strenuous pub. When almost everyone is saying 'too noisy, too crowded', and attendance has fallen to less than half that of the glory days, maybe it is once again Time. I will happily contribute to collections to hire a room in a quieter pub, and will eagerly hand out *Ansible* at any plausible breakaway meeting. But, since I live outside London and dislike phones, I'm not volunteering to organize anything. Sorry! ● Crumb of comfort: *Ansible* is also available via e-mail (details on request) and at <http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Ansible/> ...

Thog's Bumper New Year Masterclass. 'A bad feeling crawled up my trouser leg.' ... 'The heavy, rich scent of fresh-spilled blood filling

his lungs.' ... 'The alien becomes familiar as he picks scabs from the minds of his summoners.' (all Jay Russell, *Celestial Dogs*, 1996) ● 'And the great god laughed with a terrible thin laugh that brought to mind paper cuts and the slicing of eyeballs.' (Harlan Ellison, 'Chatting with Anubis', 1995) ● 'Webster moved at that, lifting one aristocratic nostril.' ... 'Keepe spoke through his teeth.' ... 'Faye turned a searching gaze on Carolyn, and she upon Ophy. Jessamine gathered Bettian with her eyes, then all of them turned their eyes on Aggie in a combined stare that had almost the force of hands laid upon her.' ... "I don't think I'd like Albert," Jessamine grated between clenched teeth.' ... 'Stay where you can be reached. Each of these six words came with that razor clarity, that fiery power, cutting him through, cauterizing the cuts, leaving him afraid to move. If he moved, he'd fall into pieces, into shreds. He had to heal first, had to let his cells regenerate; otherwise he would fall on the floor in strands, like noodles.' ... 'Still, his mouth moved, Keepe surprised that it was possible to move any discrete part of himself without detaching it.' ... 'The words hung in the air like the stench of vomit.' (all Sheri S.Tepper, *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, 1996)

Carl Sagan, 1934-1996

Steve Baxter writes ...

The untimely death of Carl Sagan has come as a sad footnote to a year full of scientific wonders.

Sagan was an astronomer, planetary scientist and author. He became widely known to the sf public and beyond for his accessible and uplifting pop-science books, from *The Cosmic Connection* (1973) to *Pale Blue Dot* (1994), and TV series like *Cosmos* (1980). He entered the sf field directly with his novel *Contact* (1985). The novel may be best remembered for Sagan's involvement of the physicist Kip Thorne in fleshing out the concept of a space-time wormhole—an involvement which led Thorne and co-workers to found a whole new sub-field of relativity theory, and led to today's theoretical interest in time travel. But Sagan's importance as a scientist should not be underestimated.

Sagan played an active role in spaceprobe projects such as Mariner 9 to Mars—Sagan ensured the probe was positioned to photograph Mars's moons—and Pioneer 10 to Jupiter and beyond, on which Sagan was responsible for placing a message to alien life. Sagan's speculations on terraforming Venus—the first serious scientific speculation on the subject—the possibility of permafrost on Mars, and conditions on Saturn's moon Titan, helped influence the thinking of subsequent workers.

In his books Sagan was not afraid of sharing himself and his experiences; *The Cosmic Connection*, for example, is enriched by accounts of battles with NASA bureaucracy and Cold War politicking. Like H.G.Wells, Sagan seems to have believed that the future of mankind would be a race between education and catastrophe; in 1984 he co-authored the concept of nuclear winter which may, perhaps, have helped avert that very catastrophe from befalling us all. As we near the end of a millennium still largely gripped by the madnnesses which dominated its opening, we cannot afford to lose Sagan's brand of clear-thinking, cheerful, communicative rationality.

I still have a copy of *The Cosmic Connection* on my study shelf. And in the current draft of my next novel I have my astronauts, bound for Titan, meeting a spry Carl Sagan early in the next century: 'Sagan came out of his retirement to give them a pep talk about his studies ... Sagan was in his seventies now, and he was a little bent, that famous voice even more gravel-filled, and his hair white as snow; but he was still as handsome as all hell ...' Already this is alternate history: but what the hell, I think it should stay in. ●

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