

Ansible



Another satisfied reader

Ansible 125 December 1997

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NOVAACON 27. More fannish fun in the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern, amid falling autumn leaves.... The most enduring memory of Novacon which fans carried away in their hearts was perhaps Dave Hicks's life-size cardboard replica of David Mellor perusing (for no adequately explained reason) a copy of *Ansible*. A 'Desert Island Books' panel saw me quailing under the serious and constructive eye of Maureen Kincaid Speller as I explained my choice of Borges's imaginary *Book of Sand* on the basis that its inexhaustible infinity of pages solves the castaway's twin problems of kindling and toilet paper. Merciless auctions, turkey readings and showings by Dave Lally of *Spock in Manacles* raised wads of cash for fan funds, RNIB and the SF Foundation. That traditional Leeds domination of the Nova Awards was overthrown despite the equally traditional rash of D.West artwork in last-minute fanzines: 'Has someone killed D.West or something?' enquired a bemused Sue Mason as she took the fan artist Nova. The popular winner for fan writer was an incoherent and embarrassed blur who escaped at near-relativistic speed; trained observers inferred the presence of Mark Plummer. Claire Brialey, accepting the fanzine Nova for *Banana Wings*, said sweetly: 'I'd just like to thank you all for making Mark so very embarrassed twice.'

Ansible went home before the closing Beer, Sausages and Bavarian Oompah Band outbreak, but ace reporter Diana Wynne Jones peeped in: 'Novacon ended in an event I was glad to miss. The sausages. They were OK. It was the band accompanying it. A set of wizened Gloucestershire types in lederhosen, making jokes about Spock in between playing such highly German numbers as *Che sarà sarà*. Well left....'

The Word is Woddy

Iain Banks received the ultimate accolade of a mention in *The Archers* (10 Nov). 'Can a cameo in Tarantino's next movie be far behind?' [SG]

David Gemmell was alarmed to hear he'd been rubbished in *The Times*, by a reviewer who claimed to like Gemmell-style action-adventure fantasy but thought his latest novel was dull. DG glumly bought the paper, to find a review of *'Polgara the Sorceress, by David Gemmell'*. [SJ] Such is the peril of having a surname so very similar to Eddings.

Peter Hamilton offers more on 'the totally amazing coincidence of reviewers' names cropping up in books.... In *The Neutronium Alchemist* manuscript there was a character called Spanton whose face was "half stubble half mirrorshades", who wore a black leather trenchcoat and toted a truly enormous pump action shotgun. You may not recall him appearing in the book itself. Neither he nor any of his scenes made it past the editorial stage. The name of my editor: Simon Spanton.'

Charles Platt on Judith Merril: 'Judy's great achievement was to be tough and radical without pissing people off. In the early 1960s her "year's best" collection was quite subversive, culling material from far beyond the usual genre boundaries and presenting it as "sf", an acronym that she purposely blurred in an attempt to broaden readers' tastes and win critical recognition outside the field. When the "new wave" adopted an even more radical posture Judy was characteristically open-minded, in contrast with contemporaries who denounced it on sight. She actually moved to London in a quest to understand the "new wave" and perhaps co-opt it in a sense. During the same period Thomas M. Disch, John Sladek, Pamela Zoline, and Norman Spinrad also spent time in London. All of these visiting Americans greatly enriched the literature and enhanced our naive ideas about fiction and publishing. • When I first met Judy I was a callow lad attending my first convention. She entered the room with a regal air, wearing a backless dress, which Brian Aldiss commented on lasciviously. "If you like my back, maybe you should kiss it, Brian," she told him. With wicked glee, Aldiss redirected Judy toward me. "Ask Charles Platt," he said. "He's an expert back-kisser." To my horror she marched over, stopped in front of me, looked me up and down, and said, "How about it?" She paused for a few seconds, registering my abject fear, then turned away with a shrug. Subsequently I grew to like her a lot, but she always maintained an intimidating presence—which people tolerated, I think, because it was founded on something that everyone had to respect: genuine integrity.'

Nicholas Royle achieved mainstream recognition: an extract from *The Matter of the Heart* was a finalist, up there with giants like Erica Jong and Edwina Currie, in the *Literary Review* Bad Sex Competition.

Conceptacle

13-14 Dec • **Babylon 5 Academic Conference**, York. £75 reg; £48 non-residential. Contact Farah Mendlesohn, Faculty of Humanities, Coll of Ripon & York St John, Lord Mayor's Walk, York, YO3 7EX.

18 Dec • **Xmas London Meeting**, Jubilee, York Rd, nr Waterloo.

24 Dec • **BSFA London Meeting** CANCELLED for obvious reasons.

8 Jan • **London Pub Meeting**, Jubilee, York Rd, nr Waterloo ... moved from 1 Jan, when transport is awkward and the pub closes early.

6-8 Feb 98 • **Decadence** (10th British filk con), Some Hotel Or Other, Eastbourne. Now £28/\$45 reg, £15/\$22 supp. Contact 43 Millbrook Gardens, Cheltenham, GL50 3RQ ... note new(ish) address.

28 Feb • **Picocon 15**, Imperial College Union, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB. Cost and GoH TBA. Contact ICSF, above address.

28 Feb • **SF Fair**, Drillhall, Lincoln. 10am-5pm. 50p reg. Contact 44 Staverton Cres, Birchwood, Lincoln, LN6 OYW; 01522 689271. With 'Schifi, Medeiaival Crafts, Roll Playing, Live Roll Playing'. Starting as humble Baps, roll-players gain crumbs of experience and rise via the levels of Croissant and Baguette to become mighty Burger Buns....

28 Feb - 1 Mar 98 • **Microcon 18**, Devonshire House, Stocker Rd, Exeter. £5 reg; students £2.50. Contact 25 Victoria St, Exeter, EX4 6JA.

14-15 Mar 98 • **Corflu** (the fanzine con), Griffin Hotel, Leeds. £25/\$40 reg. Contact 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

27-9 Mar 98 • **Deliverance** (Blake's 7), now Stoke-on-Trent Moat House. £50 reg; 2 days £45, 1 day £30; advance bookings close 12 Mar. Contact (SAE) 18 Bury Ave, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 0ED.

10-13 Apr 98 • **Intuition** (Eastercon), Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel, Manchester. Now £35 reg. PR3 and hotel booking form out. Contact 1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, SM5 3LQ.

10 May 98 • **Fantasy Fair**, Cresset Exhibition Centre, Peterborough. Contact 58 Pennington, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 0RB.

18-21 Sep 98 • **Discworld Convention II**, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £30 reg/£20 unwaged, rising to £35/£25 on 31 Dec. Contact (SAE/IRC) PO Box 4100, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2GZ ... new address.

25-8 Sep 98 • **Albacon 98**, Glasgow. *Highlander* theme. £25 reg, rising to £30 on 1 Jan. Contact F1/2, 10 Atlas Rd, Glasgow, G21 4TE.

13-15 Nov 98 • **Novacon 28**, Midlands venue to be announced (Abbey Hotel unavailable). GoH Paul J.McAuley. £28 reg, rising after Easter. Contact 14 Park St, Lye, Stourbridge, W.Midlands, DY9 8SS.

Rumblings • **Eastercon 2000**. Firm bids are the innovatively titled **A bid for the 2000 Eastercon**, using the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow; c/o Pam Wells, Flat 6, 7 Bootham Tce, York, YO3 7DH; and **2Kon**, using the Central Hotel, Glasgow; c/o 15 Kersland Street, Glasgow, G12 8BW. Both £2 presupp; both, coincidentally, 21-24 Apr 2000.

Infinitely Improbable

Publishers and Sinners. The hard men at Simon & Schuster signed up Stephen King for a three-book deal by cunningly negotiating him down from some \$17 million per book to a mere \$2 million or so—with 50% royalties. The publisher *I'm* currently talking to inclines more towards a 6% royalty and no advance. Tum-ti-tum. • Arguments about Bantam's plans to give *Star Wars* novelizers flat fees and no royalties were cut short when, Bantam's SW rights having expired, George Lucas awarded the new franchise to Ballantine. [JL] • Meanwhile, Bantam are giving Brian Herbert and Kevin J.Anderson a \$3 million advance to write 3 prequels to *Dune*. The first will appear in 1999. Oh dear.... [PB]

Random Fandom. *Ian Gunn* is cancer-free: 'Yes, folks after months of hairloss and out-of-stomach experiences, Dr Joe says "No more chemotherapy for you!"' • *Pat McMurray* has inaugurated 'Memory Hole Annex' to preserve old con publications (including badges and flyers) for a grateful posterity. 28 Plaistow Grove, Bromley, Kent, BR1 3PB. • *Mark Plummer*, man of modesty, should—we are advised, though not

by him—now be addressed as DOC WEIR AWARD LAUREATE AND MULTIPLE NOVA WINNER MARK PLUMMER. • *William Rotsler* experimented in his last months with abstract, multicoloured computer art: Robert Lichtman sent a sampler ('not to be reproduced in b/w', as promised to WR) for UK inspection.... • *The Brum Group* is suing former treasurer Sarah Freakley, who 'borrowed' some £400 from Novacon 26 profits etc.

C.o.A. *Discworld Con II*, see con list. *Nicki & Richard Lynch*, PO Box 3120, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20885, USA. *Catherine McAulay* is off to work in Brussels—COA to follow. *Krysia Oborn & Jonathan*, 46 Starlings Dr, Tilehurst, Reading, Berks, RG31 4SU. Alan Rodgers, 12312 Sherman Way, #119 North Hollywood, CA 91605, USA. *Johan Schimanski*, Siebensterngasse 58/5, A-1070 Vienna, Austria. *Alison Weston* (again) c/o 2 Halloughton Road, Sutton Coldfield, W.Midlands, B74 2QG.

R.I.P. *Kathy Acker* (1947-1997) died of cancer on 30 Nov; a 'mainstream' author of fantastic/apocalyptic fiction and journalism, she admired cyberpunk and *avant-garde* sf. (Her last public performance was with brother Jon and the Mekons, two months ago.) • *Norman Beswick*, UK fan and reviewer, died of prostate cancer on 5 Nov; he was 71. (See A124.) • *Lam Ching-Ying* the Hong Kong actor 'died from liver cancer on the weekend of 8/9 Nov, in Kowloon St Theresa's Hospital. He was 46. He will be best known to sf fandom as the stern Taoist priest in the films *Mr Vampire*, *Spooky Encounters*, and *Encounters of the Spooky Kind*. He made many appearances in similar roles, but was additionally a well-respected character actor, stunt co-ordinator, and martial arts trainer (former pupils include new "Bond girl" Michelle Yeoh). [KLM] • *Ross Pavlac*, 1982 Worldcon chair, SMOF and connoisseur of Christian sf/fantasy, died of colon cancer on 11 Nov. From his Chairman's Message to Windycon this year: 'I always used to hate the word "bittersweet" when applied to a book or a film; this year I have experienced it to the fullest as this will probably be the last convention that I chair.' [DD]

Hazel's Suspect Language Lessons. 'The proto-Sanskrit euphuism *Varniyapringoswatinattyavastrya* expresses the unique sound made by the silver filigree nostril-ring of an ambergris-vendor who has sneezed after taking snuff from the fingers of a person of superior caste.' (Donald Friend, *Save Me from the Shark*, 1973) [YR] *Hazel*: 'No!'

Small Press. *Steve Holland* mentioned his self-published *Badger Tracks* (1997)—a book-length bibliography of John Spencer/Badger Books—and in the same breath revealed that it's effectively out of print.

Strange! Weird! Eerie! It can only be *Paul DiFilippo*: 'Your experience with the revisionary powers of tragedy (Lady Di in your fiction) was brought to my mind recently. I'm re-reading Stapledon's *Last and First Men*, and came across this, in the recounting of England's war with France (!): "... a beautiful and extravagantly popular young princess was caught by the explosion. Her body, obscenely mutilated, but still recognizable to every student of the illustrated papers, was impaled upon some high park-railings ... The populace was in no state for ratiocination ... there was the princess, an overwhelmingly potent sexual symbol and emblem of tribalism, slaughtered and exposed before the eyes of her adorers." Another prediction fulfilled for this SF classic!'

Blurbismo. On *Myst: The Book of D'ni*: 'David Wingrove is the author of the Chung Kuo series of novels ... and *Sprex: The History of Science*, a volume which won the prestigious Hugo and Locus Awards ...' With truncation like that, he was lucky not to appear as Avid Wing.

TAFF: *last chance to vote in the eastbound race!* (V.Gonzalez, U. O'Brien, V.Rosenzweig, T.Sadler.) Voting closes midnight 13 Dec.

Outraged Letters. *Matt Freestone*: 'I couldn't let this quote from *Interzone 126* go by unremarked: "some of the weasels get trapped in the bodies of humans" (review of Garry Kilworth's *The Welkin Weasels*). Hamsters maybe—but weasels?' • *Simon R.Green* reports the existence of *Star Wars* Monopoly (see A124): 'Presumably there's a Get Out Of Jail With The Dark Side Of The Force card, for awkward moments.'

Chog's Masterclass. *Dept of Real Lit*: '... She herself was unhurried, in a crisp dress that made her edible beauty cool without chill, like the flesh of a melon. Her husband was gracious and sculptural, gentle, even soft, and yet immovable, imperishable, as a granite monolith might be that was carved in the likeness of a tender and amiable god.' (Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1941-2) [KS] • 'She has a face for the corner, armored by hard-boiled eyes that float in a sienna tea—a cold glare to deny even the suggestion of complex feelings.' (David Simon & Edward Burns, *The Corner*, 1997) [MMW] • 'Madame Avignon motioned me to sit on a couch beside the dressing table with twinkling eyes.' (Jane Routley, *Mage Heart*, 1996) • 'To use a pre-Holocaust term, Brickman was clearly a hot potato—a vegetable that no one in the Federation had tasted for nigh on a thousand years.' (Patrick Tilly, *The First Family*, 1986)

Margaret Aldiss (1933-1997)

Margaret Aldiss died of liver cancer in early November. She had been married to Brian Aldiss since 1965, compiled a succession of standard Aldiss bibliographies, and brought good cheer to many conventions. A lady of great charm, she will be much missed. Harry Harrison writes:

Brian Aldiss and I met exactly 40 years ago—fittingly, at the World-Con in London. Since then our lives, and those of our children, have been inextricably entangled; but always in the nicest of ways. We celebrated with him at the Randolph in Oxford when he and Margaret were married. Our families crossed paths often in strange and wonderful places.

When Brian and Margaret were touring Yugoslavia, researching *Cities and Stones*, we were the first non-Jug faces they saw, when we met at a beach resort there. They, and their children, visited us in Denmark and California. We stayed with them in Oxford. The children grew up and left home. We all grew older. But the familial friendship stayed unchanged.

Don't think that it is an easy job being a writer's wife. In addition to family and home the new bride must see her husband around the house far too much. And put up with the trials and tribulations of the freelance career.

But there are also joys to this kind of life—and those are what Margaret always reflected. There was a pleasure in her home that was mirrored in the happiness of her husband and children.

All life has tribulations—but I never knew Margaret to mention any of them. Her life was a full one and a warm one that reflected on all around her.

It is hard to realize that she is gone so suddenly. I grieve for her, and for Brian and the children. All of us shall miss her greatly. I speak not only for myself and Joan—but for the many, many people in the science fiction community who have spoken to me of their grief and unhappiness, who have asked me if possible to pass their feelings on to Brian. I have done what I can.

This is most difficult to write. Brian, when you read this, please understand that you are not alone, but part of a multitude who share your loss.

Harry Harrison

World Fantasy Fun

Everyone wanted to add to my tiny bit on the World Fantasy Con, with fond reminiscences of Docklands and the Britannia International Hotel...

Jo Fletcher: 'I'll ignore the snippy report of WFC (when the hell have you ever seen Christopher Lee at an Eastercon, let alone more than 300 authors, editors, artists, agents etc?). But I agree wholeheartedly about the hotel. However, MOST IMPORTANT: You left off the 1997 World Fantasy Committee Award to Hugh B.Cave, who was given a standing ovation.'

Simon R.Green: 'Not only did I have no hot water till the third day, but there was no water at all from the sink taps. So I found myself trying to clean my teeth with water from the shower. Very surreal, first thing in the morning. • At breakfast on the second day: "Have you heard about the Silverbergs?" Oh Christ, I thought, we haven't had another one die on us, have we? Luckily he'd only lost his passport, six grand in cash, and the wife's jewellery. Got off lightly, indeed.'

Jon Courtenay Grimwood: '... Thought you were quite kind to the hotel: cold showers, freezing room, middle of nowhere, enforced diet of bad food (it was just like being back at school).'

Steve Jones notes that WFC's raffle raised £800 for Good Causes.

Ian Watson: 'Wot, nothing about the Silverburglary? Or the corkscrew concrete car park lacking the necessary *Facilis Descensus Averno* sign outside? Or the ploy to lure people into it: Hollow Voice of Hotel PA, "Docklands Development Police will commence removing cars from in front of the hotel in 30 minutes." "You are joking," Erik Arthur said when I mentioned this after kennelling my rover in Pluto's lair. Hardly had I replied, "No, and that was 15 minutes ago," than Erik greyshifted, going ashen and vanishing at high speed. Actually, it was only at Steve Jones's insistence that the hotel put out a PA announcement at all; they were going to do nothing to alert victims. Okay, the IRA blew the area up. (Now I know why.) So why no double yellow lines nor a parking restriction notice anywhere in sight? Enigmas of capitalism.'

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