



Ansbible 172 November 2001

From Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansbible@cix.co.uk. Fax 0705 080 1534. Logo: Dan Steffan. Cartoon: Joe Mayhew. Available for SAE, treeliths, crymorphs, zanzers or Vapours of Loth.

**THANKS** to everyone who was swayed by Big Engine's subtle blandishments and *Ansbible's* unsubtle plugs for *The Leaky Establishment*, which according to Amazon insider Jon Weir reached #121 on Amazon.co.uk's sales list in October, not to mention #7 in their sf/fantasy bestsellers. Life detected in 17-year-old reissued novel! I gloat, shamelessly.

## T Zero

**Brian Aldiss** mourns: 'Re the collapse of Stratus. Stratus was a brave new idea, print-on-demand, cutting out old-fashioned warehouse costs. My belief is that they printed too much too fast. At least before they went down the tubes they brought out about twenty-five of my back-list titles, elegantly published. Who else, I ask you, would have been crazy enough to do that? Thanks, Stratus, brave try!' But Stratus has avoided actual bankruptcy, 'rescued' by former CEO David Lane, says *The Book-seller*. It's uncertain whether creditors will get any actual money. [PL]

**Terry Brooks** achieved supreme topicality in these days of biowar panic, with a new fantasy novel which (after some stuff about this being *The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara Book 2*) is titled ... *Antrax*.

**Arthur C Clarke's 2001 SF Calendar** continues to stun us with gobbits of wisdom: 'Isaac Asimov never had any work converted to either the large or small screen.' As Simo observes, 'Even assuming Clarke wrote this before *Bicentennial Man* came out, there remains the small matter of the *Nightfall* movie, the BBC's *Caves Of Steel* play, six episodes of *Out Of The Unknown* and one of *Out Of This World*. I'm sure ACC would have known about these if only he had access to some sort of global, instant-access information resource ... wait a minute!'

**Ken Follett**, at a London charity auction, bid £2,200 to feature as a character in Terry Pratchett's next novel. 'I want to appear as a giant but Terry is making no promises. All he asked me is how I want to die, which is a little disconcerting.' But ever so characteristic. [PL]

**China Miéville** has the inside story: 'My supervisor, an expert in the Middle East, told me about a rumour circulating about the name of Bin Laden's network. The term "Al-Qaeda" seems to have no political precedent in Arabic, and has therefore been something of a conundrum to the experts, until someone pointed out that a very popular book in the Arab world, Arabs apparently being big readers of translated sf, is Asimov's *Foundation*, the title of which is translated as "Al-Qaeda". Unlikely as it sounds, this is the only theory anyone can come up with.'

**Mike Moorcock** reports from darkest Texas: 'Turned on the TV this am. An ad—if your child has been introduced to Satanism by Harry Potter books call this number.... As far as I can tell it's a commercial exorcism outfit. See what happens when you deregulate. • Come to think of it I could simply pass the number on to the various loonies who have been possessed by Elric. Elric seems to behave very uncharacteristically while possessing people, I've noticed—rape, ritual murder, torture ... I've always prided myself that I'm an influence on the young, but it's getting the bastards to fall on their swords that's the hard bit.'

**Sandy Sladek** sends a topical John Sladek anecdote: 'I remember one time after we had returned from our second trip to England, John was coughing in the airport. (Any change in temperature or location could trigger a coughing episode.) At any rate, John noticed someone staring at him and immediately said to me in a loud voice, "Ever since we left Ebola, I can't seem to get rid of this annoying cough."

## Contraction

9-11 Nov • **Armadacon**, Copthorne Hotel, Plymouth. GoH Tom Holt. Still £27 reg; £18 Sat only, £12 Sun. Contact 4 Gleneagle Ave, Mannahead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL 01752 252827.

9-11 Nov • **Novacon**, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. GoH Gwyneth Jones. £35 reg to 27 Oct, £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

12 Nov • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Pat Cadigan, M. John Harrison, Ken MacLeod. Nalo Hopkinson won't be there as planned; she has to get back to Canada. NB: there's no Dec reading.

28 Nov • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Rising Sun pub, Cloth Fair,

London, EC1. 7pm on, fans present from 5pm. With Liz Williams.

7-9 Dec • **Smofcon 19** (secret mastery), Monkbar Hotel, York. £25/\$40 reg. Contact KIM Campbell, 69 Lincoln St, Leeman Rd, York, YO26 4YP, or Ben Yalow, 3242 Tibbett Ave, Bronx, NY 10463, USA.

2-3 Mar 02 • **Microcon 2002**, Exeter University. Guests TBA. Contact 79 Alphington Rd, Exeter EX2 8JE. Phone 07740423320.

12 May 02 • **Fantasy Fair** (10th anniversary event), Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough. Contact 01477 534626.

9-11 Aug 02 • **ConteXXt** (Unicon 20) has a new venue, sort of: on 23 Oct, after ten years' struggle, the former Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education became the University of Gloucestershire. GoH Keith Brooke. £25 reg to 2 Apr 02, £15 concessions, small children £1. Contact 17 Cow Lane, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7SZ.

19-20 Oct 02 • **Octocon 2002** (Irish national con), Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. GoH China Miéville, many other guests. £10(!) or £8 reg to 31 Dec 01. Irish cheques c/o Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland; sterling to Dave Lally #2 A/C, 64 Richborne Tce, London, SW8 1AX.

18-21 Apr 03 • **Seacon '03** (Eastercon), venue confirmed as the Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics—as for the 2001 Easter event. Guests of honour: Chris Baker, Chris Evans, Mary Gentle. Now £35 reg. Contact 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Herts, SG12 0HR.

**Worldcon Bids** • Australia vs Japan in 2007? Or Australia in 2009?

## Infinitely Improbable

**Redistribution.** Ten years is a long stint, and I'm tired of having life revolve around a particular monthly deadline. No, *Ansbible* isn't going away yet, but will no longer be distributed at every single first-Thursday sf meeting in London (currently upstairs in the Florence Nightingale pub, Westminster Bridge Rd roundabout, from 5pm or so until late; nice people, awful acoustics). See [www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Ansbible/](http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Ansbible/) for web archive and details of free e-mail subscriptions. SAEs still work!

**Thug's Critical Masterclass.** A school website suggests a disarmingly radical new approach to reading fantasy: 'The well-known story of *Alice in Wonderland* takes on a whole new view when read in its original form.' (Metropolitan School District of Mt. Vernon, USA) [AMBJ]

**R.I.P. Josh Kirby** (1928-2001), sf/fantasy artist famously responsible for many Discworld covers and a great deal of other memorable genre artwork going back to 1954, died unexpectedly on 23 October. He was 72. I very much enjoyed working with Josh—a charming and modest man—on the Paper Tiger collection of his paintings for which I wrote the text, and it was a huge treat to be allowed a Real Kirby Cover on that first Discworld quizbook. When the second was under way, I told Josh that another cover commission might be coming, and he replied at once: 'Ah! such timing! Not only have I heard of your new quizbook, but later today I'll be sending off the finished cover! *The Wyrdest Link* is one of the occasions when I'm told exactly what to do, so I feel a bit like a jobbing gardener being directed from the flower-hung balcony—just a head of the Librarian, looking like Anne Robinson plus mortar-board ... will she mind?!—no creative input possible. Well, I added her glasses, omitted from the doodle I was sent ... stroke of genius? Hm....' And that was the last letter I had from him, about what they tell me was his last commissioned Discworld painting. He'd since begun work on a new painting in his 'Voyage of the Ayeguy' sf myth-sequence, often returned to since its portfolio appearance in 1981. Goodbye, Josh. • **John Cunningham Lilly** (1915-2001), the experimental psychologist whose work on dolphin intelligence and communication inspired several sf stories, died on 30 September. [DB] • **Milton Rothman** (1919-2001) died on 6 October aged 81. Bill Higgins writes: 'Milt Rothman was a physicist, author, and fan. He was active at the dawn of fandom and was one of the hosts for the first sf convention in the US. He chaired two Worldcons (including the one in 1953 that introduced the Hugo Award), wrote *Golden Age sf* under the name Lee Gregor, and was a columnist for the *Skeptical Inquirer*.' • **Douglas J. Stone** (1947-2001), vice-president of Odyssey Press, which prints and mails *The New York*

Review of *SF*, died on Flight 11 on 11 September.

**Adams Award.** The BBC's first Douglas Adams award for radio comedy was presented on 30 Oct to Julian Barratt and Noel Fielding, whose show *The Boosh* (surreal rather than sf) airs on Radio 4. [JW]

**Random Fandom.** John Foyster & Yvonne Rousseau 'are pleased to say (by means of John dictating to Yvonne) that things are looking up. It appears that John has had one of the new and technologically advanced illnesses that generates kidney failure and lung failure, and simulates some aspects of stroke, without actually being any of these things. (This, of course, is no consolation to the person with kidney failure, lung failure, and manifestations of stroke.) Fortunately, large intravenous doses of antibiotics seem to deal with the problem adequately, if slowly. At the moment, it is hoped that the major problems will all have been resolved by the end of November.' Release from hospital is promised then. • *John L. Ingham* seeks fans with memories or photos of Eric Frank Russell, or letters from him, for a biography in progress. 41 Rosemary Ave, Lower Earley, Reading, RG6 5YQ. • *The Paper Snarl*, Paul Barnett's very fannish e-newsletter for Paper Tiger, is (like him) going on sabbatical for six months or so. • *Colette Reap* remembers Octocon 2001: 'I think the best bit was being in the audience for the recording of two episodes of Crazy Dog Audio Theatre's new 6 part space opera. The audience had a part to play—we were the normally unseen (or should that be unheard) expendable crew, and we got to shout at the bridge crew from time to time. Tremendous fun.'

**C.o.A.** *Bridget & Simon Bradshaw*, 5 Sandwich Rd, Brampton, Huntingdon, PE28 4QH. *Linda & Ron Bushyager*, 4025 Mitra Ct, Las Vegas, NV 89103-0162, USA. *Grant Canfield*, 7 Flemings Court, Sausalito, CA 94965, USA. *Chris Nelson*, PO Box 1571, Apia, Samoa. *Pam Wells*, Psychology Department, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD.

**First Ever?** The *Radio Times* Webclub newsletter revealed the little-suspected nonexistence of the *SF Encyclopedia*: 'Following the success of the film guide, *RT* has a new one for you: the *Radio Times Guide to Science Fiction*—the first book covering not just science-fiction films, not just science-fiction television but all of it, including the greatest radio tales of them all.' [GSD] All of sf, that is, except for obsolete media like books. *Simo* dutifully bought this major reference work, 'pre-ordered on the assumption that it would be a gargantuan piece of original research à la *The RT Guide to TV Comedy*. Alas, it seems to be a quickly cobbled together bunch of thumbnail reviews, so accurate that it refers to "computer graphics" in the TV series of *Hitch-Hiker's*.'

**Outraged Letters.** *Anthony Brown* rushes 'to correct "sad little trekkie's" correction! The *Enterprise* character was Jeffrey Archer for a brief few days in late April (until, presumably, the name's significance was pointed out to the producers), in between being Jackson Archer and the final Jonathan Archer. The source for this is a casting sheet reported on a trade website for Hollywood casting agents, which was then reported on at least one of the Trek news and rumour sites.' • *Denny Lien* can now reveal that 'the killer in an early Ellery Queen short story ("The Adventure of the Seven Black Cats", first published in *Mystery* in October 1934 and later collected in *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*), is a building superintendent named Harry Potter. This presumably will give fresh ammunition Ms. Nancy Stouffer, who can now claim that this proves Rowling stole from Ellery Queen too....' • *Mike Moorcock*: 'The *AI* billboard was directly outside my window when I was staying in Beverly Hills. I was jealous. Even in the small print Brian's name was about five hundred feet high. I'll swear Ian Watson's name was actually bigger than Ian Watson. We're just back from our vacation on the abyss (i.e. San Andreas Bay). Felt good. Felt appropriate.' • *Gordon Van Gelder* gnomically remarks, 'As *Dracula* the librarian says: I never read ... books.' (Taken cruelly out of context, I admit.)

**Last Straw.** Four American sf film fans are suing Warner Bros and 20th Century Fox for their publicity use of reviews the fans reckon must have been obtained by bribery. In their lawyer's words, 'They were sick and tired of looking at movie ads which say that *Battlefield Earth* is the greatest movie since *Star Wars*'. Who will do the same for excess use of 'In the great tradition of *Dune*' or 'Comparable to Tolkien at his best?'

**The Pain of Panels.** *Paul Barnett* broods on differences between conventions Here and There: 'Just been doing Albacon, and am yet again staggered by the low quality of US panels by comparison with UK ones—some of which, God knows, can be dire enough. The first panel I did was to the subject of, approx., "Is fantasy just the 14th century with pointed ears?" This was taken by one of the participants as an opportunity to give a five-minute plug for his own latest novel, by way of starting the discussion. One of the other panellists, new to the fantasy game (although seemingly a distinguished historical novelist

before that), assumed this was how panels were done, so followed up his self-promotional monologue with one of her own. There were gasps of astonishment from those in the audience still awake when Barnett, tactful as a pair of hobnailed boots in a ballet class, started talking about things like generic vs true fantasy, the copout of the xeroxed pseudo-medieval otherworld, etc. Later, on a movie panel, one of the contributors was visibly traumatized when, he having described the Ursula Andress *She* as one of the greatest fantasy movies of all time, I told him at emphatic length that this was cobblers of the first water: he clearly assumed that the audience had come along to listen in glazed reverence to the words of wisdom vomited by the panellists, and that I was committing an act of treason, as a fellow-panellist, by starting an argument. When I announced that *She* was one of those movies where you got to see your popcorn twice I thought he was going to burst into tears. • What was odd was that the two art-related panels I was on displayed a significantly higher standard of discussion—the artists genuinely wanted to communicate ideas to the audience as opposed to sitting on display as Famous People. Maybe I notice all this especially because the majority of the Famous Authors on these panels are authors I've, um, never actually heard of, let alone read. To judge by their own descriptions of their books, this tragic state of affairs is likely to continue, to my shame. Barely a one of them seems to be excited by the driving ideas of their books, and from their descriptions of those books there's a very simple explanation for this. • Ahem. Rant over. Barnett goes sticks head down lavatory ...'

**Viruswatch.** *Peter F. Hamilton's* infected computer was spreading the Magist'r e-mail virus circa 11 October: his apologies to all recipients.

**The Pain of Panels II.** Outraged by the Philadelphia Worldcon's decision that his services as a panellist were not required, *John Norman* published an open letter on the *Locus* website that ranted at the Philcon committee for 'suppression of dissent, an absence of authentic dialogue, its exclusionistic criteria for participation, and its parochial PC mentality.' Indeed—much rhetoric omitted here—they are 'puritans and censors, excluders, hypocrites, slanderers, and liars, [...] hoping to keep the members of the science-fiction community ignorant of a large variety of interesting alternatives to their own unquestioned dogmatism and complacent bigotries.' Heroic, martyred John Norman has 'put up for years with the abusive, predictable crap of the politically blinkered ideological Pavlovians, the psychologically insecure, the emotionally immature, the morally benighted, and the sexually retarded, of which science fiction has more than her share.' Such benighted souls, one gathers, perversely fail to see that the *Gor* novels are crammed with a large variety of interesting alternatives (such as institutionalized slavery) to dogmatism and bigotries. After all this splendid wrath, it was really rather cruel of Teresa Nielsen Hayden to suggest that the Worldcon's attitude might have something to do with John Norman being a boring panellist. [L]

**We Are Everywhere.** *Elizabeth Billinger* finds sf lurking in desert wastes: 'Idly flicking through *PricewaterhouseCoopers*' free (but deadly dull) publication *Private Client* I was somewhat startled to find "Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune*" cited in an article on Inheritance Tax. John Whiting, President of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, uses the Arrakis tradition of returning to the people a deceased's water as an illustration of the 19th century theory that, without the intervention of the state, death signals the return of a person's assets to the communal pot.' But was spitting on your host's floor a mark of high respect?

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Biometaphorical Research.* 'The remorse factor (Factor 26) flooded the sites in Gary's brain specially tailored by evolution to respond to it.' '... his glial cells purring with the sweet lubrication of his drink.' 'Cooks were the mitochondria of humanity; they had their own separate DNA, they floated in a cell and powered it but were not really of it.' 'He'd lived with the affliction of this debt until it had assumed the character of a neuroblastoma so intricately implicated in his cerebral architecture that he doubted he could survive its removal.' (all Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections*, 2001) [MMW] • 'It was Mark Beasley, a photographer for the *Globe* who wore a beard that reached the middle of his chest and was nicknamed the Beast.' (Brendan DuBois, *Resurrection Day*, 1999) [PM] • *Dept of Heartfelt Romance.* 'I wanted him in my mouth, aquiver, like the slippery muscle I'd once had a gloved hand on in an emergency room—a fibrillating heart.' (Elizabeth Knox, *Black Oxen*, 2001)