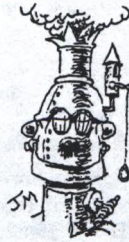


Ansible



Ansible 173 December 2001

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.co.uk. Fax 0705 080 1534. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Joe Mayhew**. Available for SAE or a mappemonde crafted from finest azulejaria.

THE JOY OF AUTHORSHIP. For fear of men with big sticks, *Ansible* is tactfully not naming the major UK publisher which—a week after the very last royalty payment date allowed by my contract, 31 Oct 01—sent a circular implying that the delay was caused by a change to direct bank payment. The punchline: this message was dated December 1999.

Negative Minus

Mike Moorcock feels cheery after unspecified surgery, or would if it weren't for an imminent movie release: 'I have, by the way, emerged from under the knife lighter and feistier. I have dropped the Gandalf hit plan and have decided to go and do the job myself. Or did he die in the end? I started skipping too soon, I suppose. Yep, I'll never know who bought Frodo's beautiful hole or whether they found his ring. The Lord of the Rings ballet at Covent Garden, done à la the all-male Swan Lake, should be good. I see Sauron in pastels.'

Terry Pratchett is our man with the popcorn this issue, emerging with faint praise for *Tomb Raider*: 'After watching this, in mounting aghastment, I've now realised why it's so bad. It's because it's good. Unfortunately, what it's good at is being a movie of a computer game. If you've played your way through the *TR* games you'll realize that. The atmosphere of the locations, the way Lara runs and fires, the traps ... someone sat through all the games, taking notes. It's truer to the feel of the games than most novel-based movies are to the original novel. Time and care was spent on that. • Then, since the games have no characterization, or any plot much above the level of "get all the bits", they pasted together an inconsistent load of old garbage in twenty minutes and hoped the SFX would carry it. They don't.'

Chris Priest was presented with the Prix Utopia 2001—the French sf lifetime achievement or grandmaster award—at the Utopiales 2001, the international festival in Nantes at the start of November. Previously honoured authors are Jack Vance, Brian Aldiss, and Frederik Pohl.

Andy Sawyer was in Nantes too. 'My job was to talk learnedly about the fiction of Christopher Priest on a panel preceding the Award Ceremony during which Chris—and an increasing number of fiction writers, film makers, *bandes dessinées* illustrators, computer game designers, and people who looked neat on stage but I can't quite remember why they were there—received their prizes. By the time Chris was called on stage to pick up the Prix Utopia, it had been under the spotlight for so long that it was hot enough to raise blisters as it was handed to him, thus giving him the honour of becoming the first major sf writer to inadvertently dismantle his award before he got off stage. We North European plebs in the audience were wondering long before that stage whether we would have to sit through the winning film before sloping off to the free drinks, but managed to cheer lustily as Chris outdid us all by delivering his victory speech in French.'

Contorno

7-9 Dec • **Smofcon 19** (secret mastery), Monkbar Hotel, York. £25/\$40 reg. Contact the committee in the bar, I should imagine.

15 Dec • **British Fantasy Society Xmas Open Night**, upstairs, Princess Louise pub, High Holborn, London. 6pm onward. All welcome.

20 Dec • **London Xmas Meeting**, Florence Nightingale, Westminster Bridge Rd roundabout. 5pm on. By this date, friendly landlord Kevin will have moved to a pub near Kennington, apparently with no private room for sf meetings. Despite initial worries about this change, the FN has been booked for 20 Dec and first Thursdays through 2002.

26 Dec • **BSFA London Open Meeting** cancelled as usual in Dec.

1-3 Feb 02 • **Contabile-Fortean** (filk), Hilton International, Basingstoke. £25 reg to 31 Dec, £12 supporting or concessions. Contact 34 Star Rd, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 4HB.

9 Feb 02 • **Picocon 19**, Imperial College Union, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB. £8 reg, students £5, ICSF £2. GoH Anne Gay, China Miéville, Stan Nicholls. Contact 51a Goldhawk Rd, London, W12 8QP.

9 Feb 02 • **Reminiscen Fifty**, Hanover Hotel, Schooner Way, Cardiff. Celebrating Lionel Fanthorpe's 50 years in print. Contact 48 Claude

Rd, Roath, Cardiff, CF24 3QA. 'Supported by Welsh Academi.'

8-10 Mar 02 • **MeCoN V**, Senior Common Room, Queen's University of Belfast. Guests announced: Ken MacLeod, Mike Cobby, Ian McDonald, David Wingrove. £15 reg to 7 Mar 02, then £17. Contact 30 Bendigo St, Belfast BT6 8GD.

3-6 May 02 • **Damn Fine Convention** (*Twin Peaks*), Shepperton Moat House Hotel, Shepperton. Now £25 reg; Norwegians free, if resident in Norway. Contact 37 Keens Rd, Croydon, CR0 1AH.

1-7 Jul 02 • **Eurocon 2002**, Chotebor, Czech Republic. GoH G.R.R. Martin, K.Bulycov, R.Holdstock, A.Sapkowski, others TBA. \$20/\$25 reg (it says here; these are US dollars). Contact avalcon@avalcon.cz.

29 Aug - 2 Sep 02 • **Conjosé** (60th Worldcon), San José, California. \$160/£112 reg, rising to \$180/£125 on 1 Jan 02. \$35/£25 supp. Contact PO Box 61363, Sunnyvale, CA 94088-1363, USA; UK agents 52 Westbourne Tce, Reading, RG30 2RP.

1-3 Nov 02 • **Novacon 32**, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall (as in 2001). GoH Ian McDonald. £32 reg to Easter, then £35 to 20 Oct 02, and £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

Rumblings • Australian Worldcon bid update: 2007 seems unfeasible owing to US support for Japan. Sydney in 2008 is fancied by a few locals. Sources now say Melbourne in 2009 or, more likely, 2011. [RM]

Infinitely Improbable

Spooksafe. It's good to know that British insurance firm Ultraviolet sells this cover against alien abduction, poltergeist attack, and becoming a werewolf or vampire. Most Spooksafe sales, for some reason, are to California. But it isn't easy money: a UK newspaper reports that they 'paid out £100,000 to a woman whose claim that evil spirits threw her over the banisters was apparently verified by experts.' [IoS 4 Nov] No doubt ultra-expensive premiums would be quoted to Whitley Strieber.

R.I.P. Roy Boulting (1913-2001), one of the UK film-making Boulting Brothers, died early in November aged 87. The brothers ventured into sf territory with their nuclear thriller *Seven Days to Noon* (1950). [SG] • **Dorothy Dunn** (1923-2001), Scottish author whose historical novels (the Lymond series especially) were highly regarded in sf fan circles, died on 9 November; she was 78. • **Terry Hughes** (1950-2001), US fan, publisher of the very fine 1970s fanzine *Mota*, and 1979 TAFF winner, died on 14 November from complications of brain cancer diagnosed and surgically treated a year before. On a personal note, Terry encouraged me no end with lots of cheerfully silly letters to my own early fanzines. After his long absence from fandom, communications resumed via e-mail in 1999: 'I have been receiving e-mails from some people with familiar-sounding names (no doubt the grandchildren of the fans I used to correspond with) ...' It was always fun to hear from Terry. • **Warren Varnom**, UK fan who regularly worked for the Festival of Fantastic Films, died suddenly on 5 November; he was 29. [HN]

As Others See Us. The British media are still evolving strategies to deal with the vast popularity of Terry Pratchett without seeming too uncool. The *Independent on Sunday* recently ran an appreciative review of TP's *The Truth* which ended: 'a funny and curiously tender satire on the origins of journalism.' But the opening went: 'A good stiff drink should see you through this one. Failing that, give it to a Pratchett fan.' Perhaps a disapproving subeditor added that bit?

World Fantasy Awards 2001. Novel (tie) *Declare*, Tim Powers; *Galveston*, Sean Stewart. NOVELLA *The Man on the Ceiling*, Steve Rasnic Tem & Melanie Tem. SHORT 'The Portawatomie Giant', Andy Duncan. ANTHOLOGY *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, ed. Sheree R.Thomas. COLLECTION *Belutahatchie*, Andy Duncan. ARTIST Shaun Tan. SPECIAL AWARD (PRO) Tom Shippey, for *J.R.R.Tolkien: Author of the Century*. SPECIAL (NON-PRO) Bill Sheehan, for *At The Foot Of The Story Tree: An Inquiry into the Fiction of Peter Straub*. LIFE ACHIEVEMENT Philip José Farmer and Frank Frazetta.

Critical Masterclass. Sometimes Thog worries whether submissions may be *just too clever for him*.... 'What we have in the sentence of which this lexia is a part is a dispersal over the foreground topography

(i.e., in the subject), by metonymic reduction, of the New Sentimentality, which, three lexias hence (57) will reappear to disperse itself in the outward discourse with a direct statement.' ... 'This arrangement is at least as inadequate as the Saussurian concept of S/s before the Lacanian modification.' (Samuel R. Delany, *The American Shore*, 1978) [LP] Academic Andrew M. Butler tells Thog that all this makes perfect sense.

Random Fandom. John Foyster came home from hospital on 16 Nov, weakened but cheery after an alarming infection that simulated a stroke. Two days later Yvonne Rousseau wrote: 'Today (Sunday) he walked to the Torrens river for the picnic he'd been promising himself, and sat under a eucalypt, in the resin chair I had brought along, while Jennifer and Miranda and I sat on a large cloth, and the only duck in sight refused to be fed but seemed to become much healthier, even as we watched (it had an injured foot); an obvious effect of basking in John's antibiotic aura.' • Steve Green is writing a regular fandom column for the BSFA newsletter *Matrix*. 'Short items (con news, club events, etc) should be directed to sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk.' • Steve Sneyd continues to send his *Data Dump*, relentlessly cataloguing sf/fanzine poetry and song lyrics in tiny tiny handwriting, the latest issue seen here being #56. Contact 4 Nowell Place, Huddersfield, HD5 8PB.

Terrorwatch. Ben Jeapes had this message from Amazon.co.uk: 'We have recently become aware that some book shipments contain a white powdery substance used to protect titles from humidity. In light of recent events and in the interests of safety, we would like you to please refrain from including any such powder in your shipments to us. Additionally, since these materials are sometimes used by binderies, we ask that you notify your bindery to also refrain from using such materials.'

C.o.A. Richard Brandt, 835 Musket Dr #L-303, Colorado Springs, CO 80906, USA. Jane Carnall, 1f3, 57 Albert St, Edinburgh, EH7 5LW. Russ Chauvenet, 275 South Peace Haven Rd, Winston-Salem, NC 27104-4419, USA. James Frenkel, 1016 Vilas Ave, Madison, WI 53715, USA. Nick Shears, PO Box 582, Sumner Park, Queensland 4074, Australia. Roger & Pat Sims, 7030 Villa Estelle Dr, Orlando, FL 32819, USA. Nico Veenkamp, van Rensselaerstraat 4, 3862 AP, Nijkerk, The Netherlands.

James White Award. On 3 Nov this went to US fan and author David D. Levine of Portland, Oregon, for his short story 'Nucleon'. James Bacon writes: 'Peggy [White] was very happy with how it all went, which is good, and she read the winning story and told everyone present that she loved it and knew that James would have loved it also, and she asked me to pass on thanks to all the judges, for choosing such a nice story.' It's published in this month's issue of *Interzone*. The 2002 contest is already open: contact 211 Black Horse Ave, Dublin 7, Ireland.

We Are Everywhere. Late news: Kurt Vonnegut's story 'Harrison Bergeron' was cited by the US Supreme Court in May 2001. A decision that disabled players must be allowed to use golf carts in pro tournaments was dissented from by Justice Scalia, who compared this terrible thing to Vonnegut's dystopia where 'everybody was finally equal' thanks to massive handicaps imposed on the healthy and able-bodied. [RM]

Outraged Letters. A172 correction: Colette Reap had meant to write Crazy (not Mad) Dog Audio (not Radio) Theatre. • Ian Covell rebuked me at length for poking fun at the great and innovative John Norman: 'The real argument may even be that Norman is so GOOD a writer that he is immensely persuasive in his views—in which case (as with stupidly banning any "extreme" group you fear) YOUR goal is to create fiction or non-fiction to persuade people OTHERWISE, not to say, keep him quiet in case people listen.' Not, of course, that I said anything remotely like that. • Malcolm Edwards offers mystic confirmation of the *Foundation*/al-Qaeda link: 'I note, conclusively, that "Osama Bin Laden" is an anagram of "I a Seldon BA, man"—proof of his deep study of the Holy Text.' • Arthur Hlavaty: 'I thought the most remarkable thing about [John] Norman's *Locus* letter was the way he insisted he was being punished for bringing libertarianism and interesting sex to a field otherwise bereft of them. • On the other hand, I have to say that I was once on a panel with Norman, and it was a pleasant and informative experience. It was not about sex; it was about philosophy (his area of expertise). He speechified some (one of Teresa's main complaints), but was good at it.' • Terry Pratchett was at Josh Kirby's funeral on 6 November: 'It was a Humanist affair, consisting of a couple of pieces of favourite music and half a dozen eulogies—I think that that's the official word, but really they were a lot less formal and more moving than that—from relatives and friends, including me. • It may be the only such occasion so far to include Monty Python's "The Galaxy Song", which seemed well received all round...' • Robert Silverberg also fondly remembered Josh's work: 'My grasp of reality has grown so tenuous in this dreary century that I had quite forgotten the brilliant set of covers

Kirby did for the Majipoor books between the various Jim Burns versions, and I'm glad to be reminded that his work and mine did coincide on that occasion. (And also, of course, on the UK edition of *Legends*.) I hadn't forgotten the covers, you understand, just that it was Kirby who had done them.'

Contact Fanthology. 'In this sparkling [literally, with glittery cover stock] 100-page fanzine, produced by Dick and Leah Smith, 72 fans tell the stories of how they found their way to fandom.' With many fan/pro notables. \$10 in USA, \$15 surface or \$20 air mail outside. \$US checks or money orders to Richard Smith at PO Box 266, Prospect Hts, IL 60070-0266, USA; or use paypal.com to pay rhes@enteract.com.

Big Numbers. I got quite excited about a Fictionwise.com royalty statement saying they'd shifted 3,931 'units' of my story 'Different Kinds of Darkness', downloadable for a trifling sum. Closer inspection indicated approximately 31 actual sales and 3,900 downloads from when they offered the 2001 Hugo short-fiction nominees as freebies. Oh well.

Novacon 31 happened last month, and Martin Sketchley compares it with the dread Birmingham Britannia Hotel venue of recent years: 'The Quality Hotel near Walsall was a good location for Novacon, with all the required facilities. There was a largish room for the dealers, and while some attendees were slightly taken aback by the amazing arsenal on display, this tended to be those already somewhat disoriented by the distinct lack of inoperative lifts, and the fact that the wallpaper was actually in contact with the walls. A sizeable reception/bar area with lots of seats was a good place to meet people and ask where registration was, which, as it turned out, was down at the far end, past the dealers' room, underneath the sign saying "registration". There was also a room suitable for use as Dave Lally's Pit of Darkness (they tell me this is for showing SF-related films and so on, but it's always black, with just one or two strange voices emanating from somewhere deep within, and I've never had the nerve to actually enter), and not one but two rooms for the art show. One of these had a distinct odd smell thrown in at no extra cost, which no-one seemed to feel inclined to comment on just in case it belonged to the con and not the hotel.

'The hotel staff were friendly and accommodating, although most con-goers were at some stage confused by the question posed by the lady behind the bar when ordering a soft drink: "is that a glass or a point?" Initially many thought this was a trick question, or possibly something to do with the "modern points" referred to on a blackboard above the bar—presumably similar to air miles, but which allow the increasingly inebriated to look at blurred web sites—but gradually it was realized that she was asking in best Walsallese about the size of drink required. Next year, someone should tell her that things would be much clearer if she asked whether "a point or a narf" was required.

'Walsall itself apparently consists of Debenhams, and is populated by miserable grey people who, according to one con member "looked like they could do with a good party to cheer them up". Maybe it was just that they'd heard about the odd goings-on at the Quality Hotel, with its strange smells, assortment of weapons and disembodied voices...'

Fan Awards. *Nova Awards* for British fan work were presented at Novacon 31. FANZINE *Head* ed Doug Bell & Christina Lake. FAN WRITER Alison Freebairn. FAN ARTIST Dave Hicks. • *The Rotsler Award* for a life of outstanding fan art went to Brad Foster: \$300 cash and a plaque.

Ten Years Ago. Isaac Asimov featured as the only (then) living writer on a *Harper's Magazine* list of 'cultural icons'—names so famous, like Dracula, Frodo, Garfield and Superman, that computer users were warned never to use them as passwords. • Rob Holdstock was eagerly telling everyone about a certain discrepancy between the rampant, priapic wooden image described in his new novel *The Fetch* and its tastefully eroded depiction on the cover. (*Ansible* 53, Dec 1991)

Group Gropes. Pat Cadigan's 2nd-Mon readings in Borders, Oxford St, resume in February, and BSFA open meetings (4th Wed) in January.

Thog's Masterclass. 'The first smart rock overloaded the Phinon's shields and it collapsed to nothing but a smile of satisfaction on Rick's face.' (Jeffery D. Kooistra, *Dykstra's War*, 2000) • 'This wasn't like him. But he had just vanquished an alien race single-handedly. It was natural he'd be different after that.' "I'm going to remove the skull so I can watch what happens in the brain when I make you my mate," he said. "No one has ever determined if there is any actual physical response in the brain." (Rodman Philbrick & Lynn Harnett, *Abduction*, 1998) [FR]