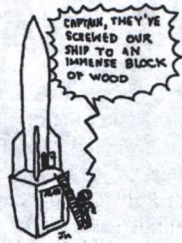


# Ansible



Ansible 198 January 2004

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. Net: [ansible@cix.co.uk](mailto:ansible@cix.co.uk), [www.ansible.co.uk](http://www.ansible.co.uk). ISSN 0265-9816. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Joe Mayhew**. Available for SAE or the Purple Dart Medal with Coal-sack Nebula Cluster.

**Happy 2004.** Welcome to the year of our 25th anniversary! Yes, it was in 1979 that (taking over from Peter Roberts's fine British fan newsletter *Checkpoint*), the first issue of that tatty scandal-sheet *Ansible* burst upon an unimpressed audience. Where does the time go?

## Galactic Medal of Honour

**J.G. Ballard** was revealed (in leaked 'secret' documents) to be one of nearly 300 British notables who have turned down state honours. Both Ballard and Michael Frayn are among the more select 40-odd who refused to be honoured by Tony Blair's government. (*Sunday Times*, 21 December) Ballard, who declined a CBE for 'so-called services to literature', explained: 'I am opposed to the honours system. The whole thing is a preposterous charade. Thousands of medals are given out in the name of a non-existent empire. It makes us look a laughing stock and encourages deference to the crown. [...] I must say I find it sad to see left-wing playwrights who have traded on their socialist credentials throughout their careers accepting knighthoods. People like David Hare who have worn their socialist credentials on both sleeves kneel in front of the Queen, it's too much.' [DP] Charles Platt laments: 'I greatly regret that we'll never see, for instance, *The Drowned World* by Sir J.G. Ballard.'

**Gwyneth Jones** was interviewed by one Barry Forshaw, who may have suffered subediting. 'Gwyneth Jones still lives in Manchester ...' he mysteriously writes of this long-time Brighton resident, and goes on to call her 'the most acclaimed British female science fiction writer since Ursula le Guin.' (*Independent*, 12 December) 'Watch out for that quote on her next book cover!' says our news-watcher David Garnett.

**John Le Carré** is not afraid to embrace the ickiness of genre and to aver that his novel *Absolute Friends* is 'political science fiction'. (*Guardian*) But much depends on where you insert the hyphen. [PT]

**Philip Pullman's** fame has reached the point where *His Dark Materials* fan minutiae appear in 'mainstream' gossip columns: 'Children's daemons change shape, he writes, but take a fixed form in adulthood. So why, a percipient fan asked Pullman the other day, does the kindly boatwoman Ma Costa's daemon appear first as a hawk, and later as a wolf? • A mistake,' Pullman confessed. (*Spectator*, 27 Dec) Oh, and unlike Ballard, he accepted a CBE—see the New Year honours list.

**Anne Rice** will suck no more! That is to say, her latest novel *Blood Canticle* concludes the 'Vampire Chronicles', and our author says she's finished with the subject: 'That chapter's closed.' (*LA Times*) [PL]

**J.R.R. Tolkien** is in the news again: the release of part three of a certain film provoked the usual sneers from the great and good. Allan Massie, Scots novelist and critic, was quick to publish a column in *The Scotsman* titled 'Sorry, but grown-ups don't read Tolkien'. Thus: 'His work seems to me closer to science fiction than to myth and legend, and has the characteristic weakness of that genre: indifference to the complicated individual human being, indeed ignorance of him and her.' [PC] • Howard Jacobson, another novelist turned newspaper pundit, is sure that reading this stuff can do only harm: 'Start low, end low. Tolkien does not lead ineluctably to Joyce or Conrad. Tolkien leads ineluctably to more Tolkien. Give me the child and I will show you the man. Give Tolkien the child and he will stay a child. [...] If I have my way, owners of these and other works which pose a similar threat to the continuance of the human intelligence will be able to deposit them in bins left outside police stations, no questions asked.' (*Independent*, 20 December) • One happily imagines these chaps' blood pressure rising further at the sight of UK postage stamps marking the 50th anniversary of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*. The ten stamps feature Tolkien's own artwork and are released on 26 February 2004.

## Convertite

29 Jan - 1 Feb • **Sci-Fi London 3** film festival, split between the Curzon Soho, 99 Shaftesbury Ave (box office 0871 871 0022) and The Other Cinema, 11 Rupert St (box office 0207 734 1506). Contact 22 Hanbury St, London, E1 6QR, or 077537 46621.

7 Feb • **Picocon 21**, Imperial College Union Building, London.

GoH Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Peter F. Hamilton, more? Contact ICSF, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BB.

9 Feb • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. 6:30pm. With Pat Cadigan, Ellen Datlow and Paul McAuley. NB: no January event.

28-29 Feb • **Construction** (Interaction staff weekend) is still 'looking at hotels from Swindon to Sheffield'. Details TBA.

5-7 Mar • **Mecon 7**, Senior Staff Common Rooms, Queen's University, Belfast. Now £18/€28 reg; £20/€30 at door; £7/€11 supp. Contact 12 Hopefield Ave, Belfast, BT15 5AP, Northern Ireland.

5-7 Mar • **Oktokon/AKFT 8 (Trek)**, Fircroft Hotel, Owls Rd, Bournemouth, BH5 1AE. Latest rates not sent. Contact 0208 801 8867.

6-7 Mar • **Microcon**, Exeter University campus. Contact Daniel Bond, 100 Magdalen Rd, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4TU.

9-12 Apr • **Concourse** (Eastercon), Blackpool Winter Gardens. £45 reg until advance booking closes on 21 March; £25 unwaged. Contact 4 Cody Rd, Waterbeach, Cambridge, CB5 9LS.

**Rumblings**. • **Interaction**: there's to be an open meeting in London on 14 Feb, 12:30pm to late, at a 'central' pub yet to be decided.

## Infinitely Improbable

**The Arthur C. Clarke Award** is on the move, since its now traditional venue the Science Museum has announced a staggering increase in charges. Administrator Paul Kincaid writes: 'Having provided the facilities free of charge from 1996 until 2002, the Museum suddenly made a charge of £1,000 in 2003. They have now informed us that the cost of facilities for the 2004 ceremony would be in excess of £7,000. This is in addition to the cost of catering. • The Museum says this is because of funding problems. However, our own funding difficulties, exacerbated by the £1,000 charge in 2003, mean that this cost is totally beyond our means. • The Clarke Award ceremony will therefore not be held at the Science Museum this year. • We are already looking for other suitable venues, and fully expect to stage the award ceremony in May as usual.' Meanwhile, the Serendip Foundation has been formed to manage and raise funds for future Clarke Award presentations, and is described as 'non-profit making'. That part at least should be easy.

**As Others See Us**. Ronald D. Moore, a writer and executive producer of the new *Battlestar Galactica*, explains how it is importantly Different: "It's just fleshed-out reality," said Moore. "It's surprising to see because it's not in the science-fiction genre. Sci-fi doesn't usually treat adult men and women as adult men and women, and we wanted to treat them as adults." (*Washington Post*, December) This appears to mean that there's more sex than is common in television sf. As our newshound Marilee J. Layman remarks, 'I must say that all the sex is absolutely gratuitous, but what do you expect from the SciFi channel?'

**Philip K. Dick Award** shortlist for 2003 US paperback originals: M.M. Buckner, *Hyperthought*; Mark Budz, *Clade*; Jane Jensen, *Dante's Equation*; Richard K. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*; Chris Moriarty, *Spin State*; Ann Tonsor Zeddies, *Steel Helix*. [GVG] Winner to be announced 9 April.

**R.I.P.** *Joan Aiken* (1924-2004), one of Britain's most distinguished authors of children's fantasy, and of many memorable short ghost, suspense, horror and fairy stories for all ages, died on 4 January. She was 79 and had written 92 novels. Her best known work is the young-adult 'Dido Twite' sequence beginning with *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* (1962), set in an alternate 19th century with a Stuart dynasty on the English throne, and wandering worldwide. John Glute praised her work as having 'an almost relentless fertility' (*Encyclopedia of Fantasy*).

• **Charles Berlitz** (1913-2003), linguist and author of such science-fiction bestsellers as *The Bermuda Triangle* (1974) and *The Philadelphia Experiment* (1979 with William I. Moore; 1984 movie), died on 16 December aged 90. [PB] • **Marguerite McClure Bradbury** (1922-2003), Ray Bradbury's wife since 27 September 1947, died in Los Angeles on 24 November. She was 81. Forrest J. Ackerman was among those at the 28 November funeral and memorial service. • **David Hemmings** (1941-2003), actor and director, died on 4 December after a heart attack while filming in Romania; he was 62. A child soprano, Hemmings

played Miles in Benjamin Britten's adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* before moving into film in 1954. Genre appearances included *Barbarella* (1968), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (tvm 1981), *Equilibrium* (2002) and most recently *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003). [SG] ● *Anita Mui Yim-Fong* (1963-2003), Hong Kong actress and singer who appeared in several fantasy, superhero and supernatural films—notably the 1987 *Rouge* and the 'Heroic Trio' sequence—died from cervical cancer on 30 December, aged 40. [KM] ● *Gordon Reid* (1939-2003), Scottish actor known to sf fans as the megalomaniac computer Angel Two in Radio 4's *Earthsearch*, died on 26 November aged 64. [AB] He also appeared in *Dr Who*. ● *Alexis Kanner* (1942-2003), French-born Canadian actor best remembered for his two parts in *The Prisoner* (1967-8), died on 13 December; he was 61. Kanner also appeared in a 1970 episode of the Andersons' TV series *UFO*. He was a guest at the 2003 *Prisoner* convention in Portmeirion. ● *Bob Monkhouse* (1928-2003), British comedian who died from cancer on 29 December aged 75, was a lifelong sf/fantasy fan who spent extravagantly at UK specialist shops like *Andromeda*, *Forbidden Planet* and the late *Dark They Were And Golden Eyed*. Authors signing for *Andromeda*, even me, would be asked to inscribe his copy specially. But Monkhouse's claimed genre career seems to be largely his own invention; experts are sceptical about the comics art, Sexton Blake novellas and Hank Jansen novels listed in his *Guardian* obituary and elsewhere. ● *Albert Nozaki* (1912-2003), US film art director who worked on *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *When Worlds Collide* (1951) and others, died on 16 November; he was 81. [SFS] ● *Bill Strutton* (1918-2003), Australian-born author and screenwriter responsible for the 1965 *Doctor Who* serial 'The Web Planet' and its novelization *Dr Who and the Zarbi*, died on 23 November aged 85. [JE] ● *Les Tremayne* (1913-2003), US actor who voiced cartoon characters in *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *Smurfs*, and others, died on 19 December. [SFS] ● *Simon van Dongen* (1959-2003), Dutch fan, congoer and filker, died from a heart attack on 16 December. He was 44, with a years-long history of diabetes and kidney problems. ● *Margaret Winch*, who with Peter McNamara coedited the Australian sf anthology *Alien Shores* (1994) and its 2003 successor *Forever Shores* (published on 12 November), died on 22 November. She had been diagnosed with advanced cancer just six weeks earlier. [P&MN]

**As Others See (Some Of) Us.** 'There is snobbery among anoraks, believe it or not. A philatelist may sneer at a train-spotter, and the consensus seems to be that *Dr Who* fans are beneath everybody.' (Louis Barfe, *The Oldie*, January) To be fair, the writer cautiously continues: 'I've never agreed. Surely one obsessive interest is as valid as another.' Put away those death threats, chaps.

**Random Fandom.** *David Garnett*, watching *University Challenge* on 29 December, was instantaneously able to answer Jeremy Paxman's question about the name of the instantaneous communication device in Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. But the student team was stumped.... ● *Ray Nelson*, inventor of that classic fan icon the propeller beanie, received the 2003 Rotsler Award for fan art. He was 'chosen in recognition of his current fanatic as well as his artwork in fanzines going back many years. His insightful and humorous cartoons have illustrated the fannish spirit for over three decades.' [MG] ● *Geri Sullivan* successfully sold her Minneapolis home 'Toad Hall' on 30 December, and is now leading a nomadic life while house-hunting on the US East Coast.

**The BBC 'Big Read'** book popularity poll (see A196 for shortlisted sf/fantasy) ended with the public once again horrifying many critics by choosing *The Lord of the Rings* as best-loved work. *Pride and Prejudice* placed second, followed by *His Dark Materials*, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Oh dearie me.

**Outraged Letters.** *Frank Key* at last understands my efforts to describe his work: 'Long long ago, in "Key Reading", you said something about the bastard offspring of Samuel Beckett & Hugo Gernsback. I had to ask you who HG was, and you told me, but I never actually read anything by him—until now! I am in the middle of *Ultimate World* and am completely smitten. What genius! What melodrama! What lengthy technical specifications!' ● *Fred Lerner* on the A197 Language Lesson: 'Greer Gilman left out my favourite Shetland Norse word, which I learned from *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language of Shetland*. "Bisnaak" is a verb meaning to talk a lot about something without ever doing anything about it, as in the phrase "to bisnaak about a 'ting". A useful addition to Fanspeak, I should think ...' ● *Mike Scott Rohan* remembers Beryl Mercer: 'I don't think anybody's mentioned so far that she and Archie were also among the creators of Tolkien fandom in this country, with their fanzine *The Middle Earthworm* which ran for three or four years in the late 60s and early 70s. It introduced a lot of

people to the idea of fandom, myself included.'

**Thog's Literary Research Special.** Not many people know that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is 'John Bunyan's religious poem of 1684'.... (Jenny Gilbert, *Independent Sunday Review*, 4 January)

**C.o.A. Jay Bonney**, 21 Peck Way, Rushden, NN10 6BD. *Bridget & Simon Bradshaw*, 103 Rustat Rd, Cambridge, CB1 3QG. *Tim Cadman*, c/o Post Office Meander, Tasmania 7304, Australia. *Michael Kennally*, 115 High St, Wheatley, OX33 1VE. *Ken Lake*, 8 Barrington Close, Loughton, Essex, IG10 2AZ. *Geri Sullivan* (temporary), c/o 3409 Columbus Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55407, USA. *Damien Warman & Juliette Woods*, 10 Scott St, Dulwich, SA 5065, Australia.

**Disney** pulled out of that new \$140 million production of *Peter Pan*, owing to unwillingness to let Great Ormond Street Hospital have any share in profits from spinoff toys, books and games. The London children's hospital controls rights to adaptations of James Barrie's play, with UK copyright extended in perpetuity by an unusual act of Parliament.

**Celebrity Interview.** Taras Wolansky conducted a merciless interrogation at Philcon, where 'I got a chance to ask Harry Harrison about his 1966 novel, *Make Room! Make Room!* (a.k.a. *Soylent Green*). How had he gotten New York City in the year 2000—population over 30 million, hundreds of thousands sleeping on the streets—so wrong? The book was not extrapolation, but "all lies ... pure propaganda", Harrison explained, and as propaganda he was very pleased with the influence it had over the years. But "crying wolf" like that, wouldn't it make people disbelieve him the next time he had a cause to push, I asked. "Fandom is reborn every year," Harrison replied complacently.'

**Small Press.** David Riley's sf/fantasy magazine *Beyond*, which folded after three issues in the mid-90s, is to relaunch in Spring with a new 96pp A5 format. 'We are actively seeking stories.' 130 Union Rd, Oswaldtwistle, Accrington, Lancs, BB5 3DR. See [www.rileybooks.co.uk](http://www.rileybooks.co.uk).

● The poetry zine *Krax 40* has a reviews supplement suggesting, in a kind of slightly tentative obit, that *Ansible* 'has ceased after many years'—news credited to our favourite reliable source, 'Someone'. I believe this report to be greatly exaggerated. (63 Dixon La, Leeds, LS12 4RR.)

● *Different Kinds of Darkness*, the long-awaited (if only by me) Cosmos Books collection of 36 Langford sf/fantasy/horror stories from 1975 to 2003, became available this month. There is no overlap with my 2003 parody/pastiche collection *He Do the Time Police in Different Voices*. For those who missed the Big Engine editions, Cosmos has also reissued *Maps: The Uncollected John Sladek* and my own *The Leaky Establishment*.

**Group Gropes.** *London First Thursdays*. Rafe Culpin wonders whether the 4 August 2005 meeting should be moved to the 11th in order to avoid a clash with the first day of the Glasgow worldcon.

**The Dead Past.** *30 Years Ago*: Peter Roberts warmly recommended 'Bob Rickard's new Fortean magazine *The News ...*' (*Checkpoint* 45, January 1974). I wonder what became of that nice Mr Rickard? *20 Years Ago*: Walt Willis reported a death. 'George Charters, Grand Old Man of Irish Fandom, died on Wednesday 18 January from a long standing heart complaint. [...] George used to say that the proudest achievement of his career was to have stencilled *The Enchanted Duplicator*, but in fact he published many fine issues of his own fanzine *The Scarr* and wrote several articles in other fanzines.' (*Ansible* 37, 1984)

**Superspsychic Corner.** Uri Geller, speaking on Radio Scotland, offered his authoritative diagnosis of Michael Jackson: 'He is a child trapped in the body of a five-year-old man.' [PE]

**A197 Updates.** Margaret Armen died Nov 2003, not 2001 (a typo). Todd Mason should have been credited for Thog's Alfred Bester quote.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Eyeballs in the Sky (Retro Division)*. '... she threw her eyes upon the walls, and saw their shattered condition.' (Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794) [DC] ● *Neat Tricks Dept.* 'Mel picked up both my hands and kissed them. His lips were warm. When he laid them back on the table he didn't let go.' (Robin McKinley, *Sunshine*, 2003) [MM] ● *Dept of Mass Destruction.* '... they were upon him, smothering him, squeezing and squashing him, with the sheer weight of their weightlessness.' (Terrance Dicks & Barry Letts, *Doctor Who: Deadly Reunion*, 2003) [LC] ● *Double-Take Dept.* 'As with most aerial bombardments in my era, the effects of the attack were more terrifying than the results.' (Dan Simmons, *Ilium*, 2003) [TW]

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