

# Ansible



## Ansible 209 December 2004

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. <http://ansible.co.uk>. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (online). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Bill Rotsler**. Available for SAE, crabwicks, frawlpins or gulits.

**Bahl Humbug!** Seasonal greetings and good wishes to all. Not to mention a small grovel to those who send Christmas cards, and get no more than another miserable issue of *Ansible* in return. Enjoy 2005!

### The Scone of Stone

**Iain Banks** was at the Inverness Book Festival. David Kennedy reports: 'Amongst plugs for *The Algebraist* and his whisky book, Banks revealed he would not be attending the opening of the Scottish Parliament for a number of reasons, including that the Queen would be there (an opinion he shared with our national poet and, to judge from the applause, at least half the audience. Christopher Brookmyre agreed, but had to go, because his Mum said so). (I later learnt that Banks was one of a number of literary figures attending the alternative event, the Scottish Socialist Party's Declaration of Carlton Hill, an update of the Declaration of Arbroath, the original independence manifesto.) Shock and horror, however, when the interviewer stumbled on a typical Culture name and asked Banks how it should be pronounced. Banks instantly admitted he had no idea either. *Brookmyre*: "I always suspected that!"

**Ray Bradbury** received the 2004 US National Medal of Arts, and Madeleine L'Engle the corresponding National Humanities Medal, in a White House Oval Office ceremony on 17 November. Eight people were honoured in each category. Bradbury accepted in person; L'Engle was represented by her granddaughter. [L]

**Martin Greenberg**, sf anthologist extraordinaire, will surely be surprised to learn that he perished in a 1999 Egyptian plane crash and left a thirty-million-dollar bank account unclaimed in (apparently) the Czech Republic. So at any rate says this e-mail from BEN FARA, LAWYER BY PROFESSION AND PERSONAL ASSISTANCE TO LATE MR MARTIN GREENBERG, written all in capitals with a strong Nigerian accent.... [MC]

**Diana Wynne Jones** suffered merciless fun: 'Oh God!—my publishers decided to hold a belated celebration of my seventieth birthday (where did all that time go?) at the recent IBBY conference at Roehampton. By some curious oversight they forgot to invite me, but they sent a hired Merc for me anyway, whose driver reminded me that last time he was sent to pick me up he hit a deer on the M4. I wasn't feeling well and threw up in said car as we reached London—after which I was feeling even less well. As I contemplated basely asking the driver to turn round and go back to Bristol, he remarked sadly that there seemed to be some kind of jinx.... So we went on and in Roehampton I was suddenly confronted with a vast blue cake with my name on it, plus champagne, plus two silver wine goblets, plus most flattering addresses by Stella Paskins and Charlie Butler, and a video specially made by Nick Tucker (who couldn't be there). Now have you ever looked at champagne when you think you are going to throw up? It is like hearing Alka Seltzer fizz when you have a hangover. Have you ever been confronted by a blue cake? Suffice it to say that, although it was wonderfully kind of everybody, I simply couldn't have felt less like any of these things.... Oh dear.' *Later*: 'Did I mention that the Sainsbury's bag the driver resourcefully presented me with had a hole in the bottom?'

**Chris Priest** was at the Utopiales event in Nantes, Jules Verne's birthplace. With the 2005 Verne centennial looming, some guests visited the town library's Verne archive, 'where we were shown his original MSS, and a few other bits and pieces of Verneana. Pretty interesting, as he wrote all his books by hand (commendably neat handwriting), and generously left large areas of white space for his editor. All present were vastly amused by the inevitable: "M. Verne, the people in Le Department Mercatorial wonder if this might be reduced by 100,000 words?" "We think this reads too slowly, and wonder if we could move Chapter 7 to the beginning, remove Chapters 2 and 3, and ..."

### Connotive

**December Non-Events** • *British Fantasy Society* open night, announced last issue as 10 December, was moved to 3 December without *Ansible* being told. Next is 4 March. • *Reading at Borders*, Oxford St, London: no December meeting. Reconvene in February. • *BSFA Open*

*Meeting*, 4th Wednesday: event CANCELLED as usual in December.

23 Dec • **London Open Xmas Meet**, Florence Nightingale pub. Possible rival booking? Check [www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/Ansible/london.html](http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/Ansible/london.html).

4-6 Feb 05 • **Construction 4** (Interaction staff weekend). Moat House Hotel, Congress Rd, SECC, Glasgow. Free, but send e-mail if you plan to come: Colin.Harris [at] interaction.worldcon.org.uk.

19 Feb 05 • **Picocon 22**, Imperial College Union, London. Contact ICSF, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB.

4-6 Mar 05 • **Mecon 8**, Park Avenue Hotel, Holywood Rd, Belfast. GoH Ian McDonald. *Now £20/€30 reg; £22 at the door*. Contact 17 Meadowbank Place, Belfast, BT9 7FE, N. Ireland.

5-6 Mar 05 • **Microcon**, Exeter University campus. Guests TBA.

11-13 Mar 05 • **DeciKon: AKFT 10** (*Trek*), Fircroft Hotel, Bourne-mouth. £25 reg, rising to £30 on 6 Jan. Rooms approx £33 pppn. Contact 12 Greenfield Rd, London, N15 5EP. 0208 801 8867.

25-28 Mar 05 • **Paragon2** (Eastercon), Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics. *Now £45 reg, £20 supp, £22.50 junior, £5 child (5-11), infants free*. Contact 4 Burnside Ave, Sheffield, S8 9FR.

16 Apr 05 • **BSFA/SF Foundation** free event, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1. 10:30am-5pm. Including both AGMs.

9 Jul 05 • **Faringdon Arts Festival** of day, Faringdon, Oxon. Speakers: Brian Aldiss and Gwyneth Jones, admission free. Non-clashing half-day novel workshop run by Juliet McKenna: £10 fee (20 places only). Contact paulcornell [at] owlservice.freeserve.co.uk.

4-8 Aug 05 • **Interaction** (63rd Worldcon), SECC, Glasgow. *Now £110/\$195/€165 reg. £30/\$45/€45 supp*. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. In North America: PO Box 58009, Louisville, Kentucky, KY 40268-0009, USA.

30 Sep - 2 Oct 05 • **Fantasycon 2005**, Quality Hotel, Walsall. Guests and other details to be announced.

1-2 Oct 05 • **NewCon3**, Guildhall, Northampton. GoH Jon Court-enay Grimwood, Liz Williams, Fangorn. £20 reg (£12 Sat, £10 Sun) to Northampton SF Writers Group, 16 Albany Rd, Northampton, NN1 5LZ.

11-13 Nov 2005 • **ArmadaCon 17**, Novatel Plymouth. GoH TBA. £25 reg to 1 Jan 05; £30 thereafter. Hotel rooms £50/night. Contact 4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL.

11-13 Nov 05 • **Novacon 35**, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. GoH Alastair Reynolds. £33 reg to end of Eastercon 06; £36 to 30 Oct; £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ; 0114 281 1572.

12-13 Mar 06 • **P-Con III**, Ashling Hotel, Dublin. GoH TBA. €25 reg. Contact Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland.

14-17 Apr 06 • **Concussion** (Eastercon), Glasgow Moat House Hotel. GoH M. John Harrison, Brian Froud, Justina Robson, Elizabeth Hand, Ian Sorensen. *Now £40 reg; supp/concessions £20; ages 12-18 £15; 5-11 £5; 0-4 free*. Contact 103 Rustat Rd, Cambridge, CB1 3QG.

18-20 Aug 06 • **Discworld Convention IV**, Hanover International Hotel, Hinckley, Leics. GoH Terry Pratchett *et al*. £45 reg to 31 Aug 05; then £50 to 31 Jul 06. Contact PO Box 102, Royston, Herts, SG8 7ZJ.

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us**. Howard Jacobson, who never tires of putting down fantasy, used John Stuart Mill's mental health as another convenient springboard: 'In his dejection, Mill turns to poetry; not Virgil or Ovid, but the English Romantics, Wordsworth in particular, who he believed helped to re-educate him into common feelings. Wordsworth, notice, not Tolkien.' (*Independent Arts&Books Review*, 19 Nov) [JB] Likewise, many 19th-century folk who wished to be entertained by a newspaper columnist turned to Dickens, notice, not Howard Jacobson.

**Nova Awards** for British fan publication: ARTIST Sue Mason.

WRITER Claire Brialey. FANZINE *Zoo Nation* ed. Pete Young.

BEST FAN (life achievement) Ray Bradbury—not the US one, but the legendary Birmingham fan who constructs the Nova Award trophies.

**R.I.P.** *Pierre Berton* (1920-2004), Canadian journalist, broadcaster and prolific novelist who wrote the children's fantasy *The Secret World of Og* (1961), died on 30 November aged 84. [SFWA] • *Irwin Donenfeld*,

editorial director and publisher of DC comics following the death of his father Harry (DC's founder) in 1965, died on 29 November; he was 78. [PDF] • **Edward ('Ted') Hughes**, old-time UK fan whose letters once appeared regularly in Terry Jeeves's *Erg*, died in October following a heart attack on the 8th. Terry writes: 'He will be missed. One by one the old fans drop off the tree.' • **Bob Haney**, US comics writer who wrote very many DC titles from the mid-1950s and was described as one of the Silver Age comics greats, died on 27 November. He was 78. [BB] • **Trina Scharf Hyman**, US artist and writer who illustrated over 150 books including many fantasies for children, died on 19 November aged 65. She was a winner of the Caldecott Medal for children's authors and artists. [JS] • **Howard Keel** (1919-2004), US actor whose best-known genre appearance was in the film *The Day of the Triffids* (1963), died on 7 November. He was 85. Steve Green adds: 'His scenes were judged so boring by the producers that additional scenes were inserted (directed by Freddie Francis), using a separate cast and set in a deserted lighthouse.' • **Ed Kemmer** (1921-2004), star of the 1950-55 TV and radio series *Space Patrol*, died on 5 November aged 83. His genre films included *Giant from the Unknown* and *Earth vs the Spider*, both 1958. • **Stieg Larsson** (1954-2004), important fanzine publisher and former chairman of SFSF, the largest Swedish fan organization, and a friend for 30 years, died suddenly Tuesday, November 9, from a heart attack,' writes John-Henri Holmberg, adding that Larsson had recently sold a series of crime novels: 'Stieg actually died on the threshold of international literary success.'

**Thog's Macho Movie Moments.** 'You're very pretty. For a girl.' (*Journey to the Center of Time*, 1967) [PB]

**Random Fandom.** **Harry Bell** is the seventh winner of the Rotsler Award for life achievement in fanzine art—bringing him \$300, a tasteful plaque/certificate, and eternal glory. [RL] • **Kim Huett** reports another national poll result to outrage the literati: 'Yes, I cheered and punched the air when it was announced that *The Lord of the Rings* had been voted Australia's favourite book. I know, but I don't care. It was the book I wanted to win and that's all that mattered. Oh, and that I'd been predicting a *LOTR* victory from the first moment I learnt of this competition. Nice to be so spectacularly right in my predictions for a change. Interesting to note that *The Hitchhiker's Guide To the Galaxy*, 1984, and the latest Harry Potter also made the top ten.' (So did *Catch-22* and, oh dear, *The Da Vinci Code*) 'All the other Harry Potter books made the top 100, as did C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (18), *The Hobbit* (26), and *Dune* (24). Some might have found the ABC presentation of this list somewhat irreverent. For example the plot of the Potter book was described using a rap song and the *Hitchhiker's* plot was sung by the Australian Rugby Choir. More shockingly, it was famed children's characters Bananas In Pyjamas who explained the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*.'

**Small Press.** *Orbital*, the new British magazine about sf which was scheduled to launch in June 2004, remains on hold for good reason. Its editor Steve Williams had a heart attack this summer and, although he intends to go ahead, has been under doctor's orders to avoid any work until his recovery is complete. Best of luck to him! • **Out of Focus.** BSA *Focus* editor Simon Morden corrects misinformation in a market report (not by him) in #46: '*Scheherezade* does not, and never has, accepted horror. Neither is it a fanzine. It does, however take sf. *Interzone* has a very minimal backlog of stories, and is actively looking for quality stories, especially hard sf. *TTA* is no longer accepting sf, as this causes problems with *Interzone*. *Spectrum* looks like a dead market ...'

**Science Corner.** Sighs of relief throughout the scientific world! A worrying 2003 prediction, that the universe could spontaneously self-destruct in as little as 10 billion years, was revised in September to allow us a cheering 24 billion or so years. (*Nature*) [MP] That's a relief for anyone who'd been carefully not starting any long books....

**Competitions.** **Robert Sawyer's** 'Identity Theft' won the €6,000 prize in the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya's annual contest for best unpublished sf novella in Catalan, Spanish, English, or French. [SFWA] *Ansible* guesses he didn't write it in Catalan. • **Stephen Baxter** is judging the [www.powerswitch.org.uk](http://www.powerswitch.org.uk) contest for sf about a future of too-expensive oil. Entries <= 3,000 words in e-mail or attached doc, txt or pdf, with name, postal address and age, to [weburnedsobright\[at\]powerswitch.org.uk](mailto:weburnedsobright[at]powerswitch.org.uk). Deadline 28 Feb. £50 first prize, £25 runners-up.

**Editorial.** At last I have copies of the new edition of *The Space Eater* (Cosmos, 2004), with cover art by the great David A. Hardy. That promised collection of Langford SFX columns, *The SEX Column and other misprints*, should now appear in 2005. The next excitement in my drab life, says Kevin Standlee, will be the arrival of the 2005 Hugo

nominations ballot—preprinted, for the first time ever, with my name! That is, with details of the 2003 books (*The Cambridge Companion to SF*, *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* and my critical collection *Up Through an Empty House of Stars*) mysteriously granted extended eligibility for Best Related Book. Of course the competition will be tough, with Mr Hardy's *Futures* (adv.) also in the ring ... not to mention reclusive, publicity-shy Peter Weston's [*That's enough free plugs—Ed.*]

**Publishers & Sinners.** The Earthlight domain, not renewed by Simon & Schuster UK, is now an ad/link farm exploiting past sf interest that could so easily have been redirected to S&S sf titles. (*SFCrowsnest*)

**The Dead Past. 25 Years Ago:** our title was tepidly debated. Mike Glicksohn: 'I looked up "ansible" in my *OED* and naturally it isn't there.... For the illiterates among us, kindly delineate the reference please.' Mike Glycer of *File 770*: '*Ansible* is a good name for a newszine. In fact I've been booting myself for not finding such a well-known relevant term in my own search for a title....' Brian Earl Brown: 'The party in the Ladies' Powder Room at Seacon sounds like a Legendary Event, sort of like Room 770. Maybe Glycer will change the name of his newszine to *Ladies' Powder Room*. It would be a relief.' Chris Priest: 'I've just realized it's an anagram of "lesbian".' (*Ansible* 5, December 1979) That issue foreshadowed Thog, with *Great Moments of SF Prose*: 'Dimly they/it perceived the final annihilation of a minuscule agglutination of refined masses ...' (Alan Dean Foster, *The Black Hole*, 1979)

**Fanfundery.** **TAFF.** The 2005 TransAtlantic Fan Fund race is on, with Chaz Boston Baden, Curt Phillips and Suzanne Tompkins (Suzle) contending to travel to the Glasgow Worldcon. Voting deadline: 3 April. Ballots from the usual suspects and *Ansible*. • Euro administrator James Bacon is seeking donations for the TAFF auction at Eastercon 2005—by arrangement via [piglet\[at\]indigo.ie](mailto:piglet[at]indigo.ie), or at the con in Hinckley. • *The Bring Bruce Bayside Fund* has succeeded, raising more than enough to waft the great Bruce Gillespie from Melbourne to San Francisco in early 2005, to bring him home again, and to publish his trip report. • **DUFF:** nominations are open for the 2005 Down Under Fan Fund race—North America to the Aussie Natcon (Hobart, Tasmania, 10-13 Jun). Usual 100-word platforms, 5 nominations (3 NA, 2 Oz) and \$25 bond to Guy & Rosy Lillian, PO Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092, USA.

**Outraged Letters.** **Mike Resnick** asks: 'Back at the 1987 Worldcon in Brighton, I bought a hand-crafted resin chess set, all fantasy figures, with its own board. I was on my way to Africa after the con, so I had it shipped to my house. The other day someone asked me who created it, and I seem to have lost any documentation I might have had. The major figures each bear the initials "HN". Does that ring a bell with anyone?' • **D.M. Sherwood** fingers the media pulse: 'Two speakers on BBC2's *Newsnight Review* went out of their way to say that though William Gibson is OK they really don't like SF. (Kurt Vonnegut writes something else of course.)' • **Kip Williams** sent cheer on 27 Nov: 'I got an e-mail this morning that said, "Celebrate Langford's Birthday Today." I looked, half expecting nothing. It was just more spam of the usual sort. / But hey, happy birthday "today" anyway!' • **Taras Wolansky** admonishes: 'Jack Vance is unfairly Thogified in #208. There is no reason why a "wordless cry of outrage" may not be immediately followed, in a separate sentence, by a word of outrage ("Unclean!")'

**C.o.A.** **Mike Scott and Flick**, 13 Collette Court, Eleanor Close, London, SE16 6PW.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Slannish Tendrils.* 'He turned to the strikingly beautiful girl sitting beside him. A girl whose long almost blue-black hair seemed so vibrantly alive that it pulsed with a sentience of its own.' (Bron Fane, 'Jungle of Death', *Supernatural Stories* #27, 1959) [G] • *Rocketry and Relativity Dept.* 'We're only going to go at a thousand miles an hour [...] We're in no hurry and a great increase in speed brings a large number of problems. [...] our bodies are being penetrated by cosmic radiation and probably cosmic particles as well all the time, but because they travel relatively slowly we suffer no ill effects. Speed them up and they would be fatal.' (Leonard Wibberley, *The Mouse on the Moon*, 1962) [BA] • *Dept of Stupefying Similes.* 'The boiling upsurge of questions and ideas whirled around in Harding's head like particles being accelerated in a cyclotron, until he felt like a man both blind and deaf searching for a needle in a lightless, soundless chamber, and forced to wear feather pillows for gloves.' (Steve Hall, 'Out of Character', *Science Fantasy* 57, Feb 1963) [JB]

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