



Another outbreak of the UK fannish news zine from Dave Langford, 22 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, Berks. RG2 7PW, UK. Subscriptions 4/60p UK, 6/£1 Europe, 5/£1 elsewhere. Sterling preferred; if you insist on paying in dollar bills, it's 2/\$1. The amazing Keith Freeman and his Mad Mailing Labels should indicate your sub status, SUB DUE or \*\*\*\* being like unto the first buboes in the armpits... Heading by Taral. Lapses in frequency are because I have deadlines to meet. Several readers have suggested I should expand and make ANSIBLE the UK LOCUS: thanks, but I gave up work to be a full-time writer rather than a full-time publisher. Even though new and cheaper supplies of quarto paper have been secured, ANSIBLE does not make a profit (surprise, surprise); and to send more than 2 sheets adds 5p to the cost of US and African copies in postage alone. Times are hard everywhere... Should there not be another ANSIBLE before January: Merry Christmas! 27/10/80

\* MILFORD 1980: CHRIS EVANS

The Milford (UK) Writers' Conference resumed this year (28 Sept - 4 Oct) after a break in 1979. This is a week-long workshop held at the Compton Hotel in Milford-on-Sea, Hampshire. Membership is by invitation, the current qualification being that a person has had a work of fiction professionally published; theoretically you could get in on the strength of a 500-word vignette bought by *Scintillating Stories of Startling Science*, though in practice some kind of track record is usually necessary.

Milford-on-Sea is a small, quiet coastal town set in scenic surroundings. Verdant fields interspersed with bracken and blackberry briars eventually give way to a long, shingled beach where the incoming waves fall with a delicate whisper, and there is a splendid view of the Isle of Wight across a short stretch of limpid sea which glitters under the golden light of the autumnal sun. (That last sentence courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of Purple Prose.) The Compton owners are by now used to the peculiar habits of conference attendees, whom they let have the run of the place. Manuscripts are read in the morning and discussed in the afternoon. This is not a great distraction, however, since the bar is open all day and there are numerous facilities for recreational activities (of which, more in a moment). Two hours each evening are set aside for formal discussions on aspects of sf writing or informal games such as 'Call My Bluff'.

Fourteen people attended this year's gathering, four of these (including yours truly) being newcomers. In alphabetical order, they were: Pamela Bulmer (who was at one point thrown into confusion by a spurious conference schedule posted by the devious Langford), Richard Cowper (who demonstrated a flair for blocking up the pockets of the hotel's pool table with wads of newspaper as a belated economy measure), Patrice Duvic (a French writer/bookseller whose ploy in offering free brandy to all present just before his story came up was much respected), Chris Evans (who brought a tatty story which was duly savaged), Alan Farmer (rumoured to have had a somewhat illegal substance secreted in his room), Randal Flynn (who on Saturday evening, possibly under the influence of the same illegal substance, perfected the interesting routine of dancing with a chair while still sitting on it), Rob Holdstock (a supporter of the theory that writers write with their prickles—Joanna Russ, take note), Garry Kilworth (whose quietly efficient chairmanship gets a vote of thanks here),

Bobbie Lamming (whose piece left everyone deeply envious of its superbness; she is also known as Robin Douglas and R.M. Lamming), Marianne LeConte (who is as French and as womanly as a Frenchwoman can be), Dave Langford (who will doubtless have further gossip to impart elsewhere in these pages), Pip Maddern (an Australian writer presently studying at Langford's former college of Brasenose), Chris Priest (who by dint of tireless application throughout the week progressed from a novice into a practised Space Intruders (*sic*) player) and Tony Richards (who continues to resist Langford's attempts to get him to subscribe to *Ansible* and will therefore probably not read this). Hazel Langford was also there as a non-participant; she went for lots of walks and didn't seem at all bored.

Milford has something of the atmosphere of a small-scale convention; there is a tendency to get little sleep and drink too much. Among the fragmentary images which survive the week, I particularly recall an extremely drunken Langford and Evans vainly striving to practice Zen and the Art of Pool Playing (whereby the pockets of the pool table are supposed to assume the dimensions of dustbins—unfortunately we found the balls also grew larger in the mind's eye, to approximately the size of dustbin lids) against an equally drunken Holdstock and Cowper. Various arcane subjects arose out of the formal and informal discussions held throughout the week: there was talk of genetically engineered clones of Adolf Hitler; of the Zen master who scaled a sheer rock-face unaided by such encumbrances as ropes and pitons; we discovered that a 'tappen' really was a mucous plug formed in the rectum of a polar bear during hibernation; Rob Holdstock told of his ideal encounter with a (presumably) female fan, which discretion prevents me from elaborating on, except to say that it would be an oral encounter of a peculiar kind.

(Rob is fed up with people using his quotes out of context, so I should point out that all comments attributed to him in *Ansible* (or indeed anywhere at all—DRL) were made drunkenly and lightheartedly and are Not To Be Taken Seriously.)

By the end of the week everyone was exhausted, hungover or slightly deflated after having a prized fictional specimen delicately but uncompromisingly dissected by their colleagues. Yet everyone expressed a desire to return next year, for the feedback obtained at such gatherings is very useful. The criticism is fair and incisive, and it does every writer some good to get together occasionally with other writers and talk shop. Next year I intend to take a

story so brilliant that no one will be able to find anything wrong with it. At least, not until they actually start reading the thing... (Chris Evans)

(The editorial last word is a solemn privilege, and I enjoy abusing it. I remember Patrice borrowing my portable typewriter and finding the keyboard lettering slightly different from a French one: you will probably not believe me when I mention that he halted with a shriek every few words and gave out the all too appropriate cry 'Aaaagh! Another French letter!' Since Rob is becoming sensitive about being reported, I have no intention of detailing his tales of compulsive buttock-groping both somnambulist and in 'real time': you will find no such filth in *Ansible*. The photographs, however, may be inspected by appointment. DRL)

#### \* RUMBLINGS FROM THE SF WORLD

Ian Watson is reportedly on the dole, his *Gardens of Delight* not having sold outside UK hardcover... Michael Bishop is also said to be in desperate straits, eking out a living by writing articles on (if my ears did not deceive me) gardening... Peter Nicholls found himself in an embarrassing position concerning the SF Foundation's writer-in-residence, having agreed to be referee for both John Sladek and Ian Watson. In the event the little-known Sladek, Watson and Priest could not stand against the colossally famous writer Colin 'Who?' Greenland, who got the post and was to talk about it at the BSFA meeting of October 24, but failed to turn up... The meetings are for members only and the next is November 21: there will be no BSFA mailing to pass on this titbit, so tell your nearest BSFA member. Venue is The Rutland, a pub on Lower Mall near Hammersmith bridge (just upstream). Also on Oct 24, the committee was pitted against the membership in a quiz largely based on Gerry Anderson productions: to its eternal dishonour, the membership won... R.L.Fanthorpe has Dick Downes of the Swansea group as a director of his company 'Greystoke Mobray': he planned to pay £5000 advance on Downes' first novel until it was pointed out that between one director and another, this might look slightly shady. Mike Ashley is no longer editing the GM original anthology, but a drunken Ian Watson planned to take over with a collection of shorts based on great paintings (no connection whatever with *Gardens of Delight*, of course)... Chris Priest leaks secret data on the *Omni* short-short competition, telling your editor in strict confidence "You didn't win"... I failed to mention last time that the John W Campbell Memorial Award (as opposed to the new-writer thing of similar name) went to Tom Disch for *On Wings of Song*: Crowley's *Engine Summer* and Ballard's *The Unlimited Dream Company* took second and third place. Disch is American GoH at York next Easter; the unusual invitation of two pro guests (Ian Watson is English GoH) is said to be not so much go-ahead Leeds dynamism as the result of a communications error... Another traffic award which caused even *Locus* to boggle slightly is the '1980 Galaxy Award and Trophy for Best Novel of the Year consistent with the tenets of the Society for the Advancement of SF and Spirituality', which went to Donald F Glut for his very spiritual *The Empire Strikes Back*. The first Prometheus Award for best libertarian sf (trophy is \$2500 in gold, and US sources drool over this without making it clear whether you have to give it back after a year) went to F Paul Wilson's dull, routine *Analog* novel *Wheels Within Wheels* (see review by one of the great critics of our time, in *Vector* 97)... Computers are already supposed to have determined next year's Hugo novel finalists: *Ringworld Engineers*, *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*, *The Snow Queen*, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, *The Number of the Beast*. Aagh. Only other things for which anyone offers any hope are Benford's *Timescape* (UK hardback subtly amended for fear of offending the Royal Family) and what's-his-name's *The Magic Labyrinth*... Ted White got the boot from *Heavy Metal* for his temerity in trying to introduce complicated concepts such as words of more than one syllable; Jim Baen has left Ace to be top man at Pinnacle,

but will continue as the listed editor of *Destinies* until purchased material runs out... *War in 2080*, which would be a bestseller if each *Ansible* subscriber bought 2,500 copies, is out from Sphere in February despite announcements for November: this is because some mound of tripe from Mandy Rice-Davies has snatched the November spot... The August Derleth award for best fantasy novel of (presumably) 1979 went to Tanith Lee's *Death Master* at Fantasycon VI in Birmingham recently... The Society of Authors recently ran a poll asking what the authors felt of their publishers, rating them from 1 to 5: herewith the scores for a few familiar names—Mills & Boon 5-; Allen & Unwin 4+; Cape, Gollancz and Hodder 4; Faber, Hutchinson and Sidgwick & Jackson 4-; Collins, Granada, Hale, Hamlyn and Macdonald, Pan and Penguin 3+; Transworld and Allen 3; David & Charles 2+; Dobson ('a statistical achievement!') 2. "Statistically meaningless," sniffs an ex-D&C editor I know. This does not assess the quality of the output (I mean, Mills & Boon, good grief) but how authors feel publishers treat them. Richard Cowper, who suffered with Dobson for many books before shifting to Gollancz, was showing the poll round at Milford and chortling a lot... Michael Ashley reports: 'The Woman's Own magazine dated Aug 16 carried a short story by Philip K Dick entitled 'Mrs Drew's Stolen Youth' (copyrighted 1953). Fascinating, eh?... Spider Robinson speaks: 'I have been informed by the Canada Council that they will not support my reading because I'm not a real Canadian Writer'... It seems that Harry Harrison ghosted the last (and alas, not very good) Leslie Charteris novel *Vendetta for the Saint*... Secret master of Pierrot Publishing, Phil Dunn, has departed from the almost bankrupt firm whilst the other directors try to save something from the ruin... Ursula Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* has rather nastily been retitled *Threshold* for UK consumption (Gollancz, £6)... Your editor, not content with delivering a book co-written with Chris Morgan (the one for which I was asking for strange and loony quotations—thanks to everyone who helped—it should be out from Webb & Bower next autumn), has, coff coff, just won *New Scientist's* #7 crossword puzzle prize... That latest arcane potboiler magazine *The Unexplained* is, I am told, largely a rerun of articles which first appeared in the *Pan World Atlas of Mysteries* (Francis Hitchin, 1978): articles on spontaneous combustion, Loch Ness monsters &c are lifted straight from said book, as are many of the photographs (which indeed get recycled through book after book of this kind). I looked into the black hole article in *Unexplained* #3 and found it laughably gullible and out-of-date: 1978 seems about right. The magazine is an outrageous ripoff and should be avoided at all costs. (Some info courtesy of Our Farmborough Correspondents.) ...The *Times* London Diary (14/10/80) has a bit on *Omni*, or rather on executive editor Ben Nova (sic—I like it, I like it). Gist of the piece is that Bova's loud support of the campaign to have America say 'finders keepers' as regards the Moon is but publicity-grubbing: 'The Moon Treaty ought to include a clause banning sales promotion stunts thinly disguised as serious scientific debate'... Newspaper snippet from early October: 'Broadway, which has seen many strange things, saw an ovation for a white mouse at the curtain of *Charlie and Algernon*. The little critter, which 'dances' with P.J.Benjamin in the show, even has a biography in the program ('has had extensive training in jazz, tap and maze-running').' I noticed billboards for this thing in New York: it's the improbable *Flowers for Algernon* which flopped so swiftly and decisively in London. ...Simon Ounsley reveals 'why D.West has decided to don (sic) the mantle of middle-class fandom (discarding the familiar dirty raincoat) by becoming a university shithead. After many days poring over the abacus at Bingley library, he's worked out that the amount of grant and the required total wordage for course essays yield a payment rate of 10p per word, even better than *IASFM* [—and] the essays don't have to be morally uplifting or have happy endings...' (Sources: *SFC*, *Locus*, *TMM*, *Matrix*, *DRL* or as credited)

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LETTER Simon Ounsley: "...the amazing BSFA *Matrix*-editor initiation ritual.

COLUMN This requires the out-going editor to publish a complex competition in his last edition. This may well involve 70 book-titles split into groups of 3 words and require the intrepid readers to provide a correct list of titles and authors. The large number of entries received will be passed on to the new editor but not the solution, this not having been provided by the rather warped member who devised the competition in the first place. The incoming editor thus has to win his spurs by sorting the damn thing out; the only assistance allowed is that of Kate Jeary plus one 5-min phone call to the editor of *Foundation*. The skill lies in making proper use of the phone call. Questions such as 'Is *Dragonsinger Harper of Pern* one title or two?' may not yield the required results." John Piggott: "While buying my season ticket recently I noticed the ticket clerk looked like Kev Smith. Ugh! I handed over my £652 like a gentleman and proceeded on my way, assuming it was a coincidence; but then I realized that accountants regularly deal with large sums of money..." Ron Salomon: "When I checked in [at *Noreascon*] the firepeople were literally swarming, the elevators were shut down, and I was told there was a fire, but keep it quiet. On the 21st floor of the south tower." (There was a strange tendency to cover up unpleasantness at *Noreascon*. The committee could in no way be held responsible for, say, the fellow who broke a security guard's arm when restrained from breaking into the swimming pool one night; but I was asked not to tell anyone about this. The rumour's been printed in several places now, though... Likewise, Mike Glycer was not allowed to print cartoons (in the daily newsletter) which poked fun at Kate Wilhelm or even mentioned Harlan Ellison, Alexis Gilliland having done both. A mention of Dachau in a Chicago-bid comic strip provoked screams of rage simply at the mention, and artist Phil Foglio shamefacedly explained he hadn't known what Dachau was when he mentioned it... When the place was used in comparison with Mancon a few years back, I don't recall quite such a fuss. Maybe we UK fans are gross and insensitive after all? More Salomon:) "Bloody money-hungry Sheraton management want \$69/night for a double for Boskone '81... Boston '89 has to be a hoax—people listed there are all tykes and toddlers, I'm 99% sure."

INFINITELY Keith Walker announces his return to fan publishing: "well sorry, IMPROBABLE to disappoint you Mr D.Vest, Nickelarse and Co..." // J.G.Ballard and, good grief, Alan Dorey are provisionally marked as guests of honour at the 1981 Unicon. // The Reading pub meetings still continue on the third Thursday of each month at the Osborne Arms (turn right out of railway station, left after bus station and it's just up the road): the threatened move to

another pub has succumbed to apathy. (NB the 18th December meet will probably be depleted by the usual Xmas One Tun.) // *Ansible* apologises to Rosemary Walker for the COA overleaf: the mind plays funny tricks... // A.E.van Vogt actually got a \$50,000 settlement for possible plagiarism of his 'Discord in Scarlet' in *Alien*: he felt he could have got more but would be dead by the time the courts gave it him. // Simon Bostock wants to start an APA: stamp for details to 18 Gallows Inn Close, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, DE7 4BW. // Seems John Travolta is a Scientologist; *Ansible* wonders whether this will affect dance-alike fan Rob Hansen... // Latest Jackson status report: 'Still no baby yet. Coral is very large.' // Joyce Scrivener on Noreascon: 'More than one false fire alarm... assault/robbery in the Sheraton Thursday, rape/robbery of one Belgian and one American fan outside the hotel (they wanted to see the hotspots), pickpockets in the Hynes, closing of the Hynes [auditorium] for shampooing carpet after a dog with diarrhoea, an audience approved intercourse session...' // Another chain letter of the 'send only fl and get £8000' sort comes from US via Sweden and claims not to be illegal. I doubt it, and have just incurred the awful penalties of chainbreaking again. Wish fans would lay off this sort of thing. // Nic Howard tells of the August Derleth Society and of how it's time AD was recognized 'along with Steinbeck, Lewis, London & Co. as a major writer of the American scene'. Apparently the good stuff is his books on small-town US country life, all the HPL/Sherlockian stuff being regarded as pot-boilery. Memberships \$5/year to 20 E Delaware, Chicago, IL 60611, USA. // IBM have written to the BSFA offering a word-processor system which would actually correct the spelling in *Matrix*: only £4878! Said Chairman Dorey, 'We'll have to start another fund...' // Denvention II sends its newsletter *Rocky Mountain Oysters*, mostly Good Intentions with apologies for unanswered mail. On Hugo trophies: 'They are slightly pitted but it is understood that that is how all of them are.' Well, the Seacon ones were *very* pitted while those Noreascon ones I saw were hardly pitted at all... // Steve Sneyd: '3 most popular adult education courses in Bradford this year are one on SF, one on UFOs and one on what to do in case of nuclear war, "convert yr bubble memory into a deadfall trap", "how to microwave 2-headed cats", like that...' // Colin Fine: 'Polycon was an absolute shambles.' // Something completely different: a look into fannish etymology. I have written elsewhere about the high history of the fannish term 'blog', supposedly invented in the mid-50s in that taped production 'The March of Slime'. Blog was a universal panacea like Beachcomber's Snibbo: 'Blog's the stuff for work, Blog's the stuff for play, /Blog's the stuff, when you feel rough, to chase the blues away...' My footnote to fan history is the Beachcomber extract below:

'...His capillaries, set end to end, wouldn't circle the earth more than once.'

'Phugh! That's dreadful, Sir Harry. Poor blighter! Is there no hope?'

'Oh yes, Sir George; BLOGGO. A year ago my capillaries, set end to end, would barely have reached China. Today they would circle the earth three times...' (from CAPTAIN FOULENOUGH AND COMPANY, 1944)

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