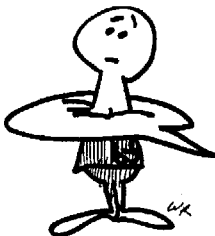


Ansible



ANSIBLE 231 OCTOBER 2006

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Tiny But Hostile

J.G. Ballard's latest is not for the likes of us cowering, timorous fans: *'Kingdom Come* goes far beyond the stockades of conventional science fiction,' explains Ian Thomson in *The Scotsman* (9 September). [HB]

Vikram Chandra, author of the mainstream *Sacred Games*, declares his literary roots: 'I had always been a big fan of Isaac Asimov, and was writing sci-fi stories by 11.' (*Financial Times*, 9 Sep) [MMW]

Jon Courtenay Grimwood has gone all stale: 'After five years the *Guardian* Review section has called time on the SF column (at least in its current guise and by its current writer). While remaining "absolutely committed to genre," the *Guardian* feels it needs time to bring freshness to its current coverage. Expect such "freshness" to be unleashed on the *Guardian* reading public sometime next year! / Everyone bet, when the column started, that it would be killed within a year. In fact it lasted 5 times as long, and will undoubtedly rise again from the grave, albeit with another spirit riding. / (And I know you were there before me ...!)

Harlan Ellison has launched further exciting litigation. One suit is against Gary Groth and Kim Thompson of Fantagraphics for (a) using his trademarked name with the unwise subtitle 'Famous comics dilettante' on the cover of *Comics Journal Library 8: The Writers*, reprinting an old HE interview; and (b) alleged defamation in their book *Comics as Art (We Told You So)*. The hand of the master can be detected in the statement of complaint, which describes Fantagraphics as 'a tiny but hostile publishing outfit', Groth as 'a scheming pathological liar ... an obsessively vindictive and petty man', and Ellison as famous, fearless, magnanimous, scrupulous, etc. Lawsuit number two is against Pocket Books, for allowing the use of Ellison's 'City on the Edge of Forever' character Edith Keeler in *Star Trek* novelizations by other hands.

Ursula Le Guin was dismayed by her listing in the 'Highbrow/Despicable' quadrant of a silly graphic feature in *New York* magazine. Being short of shelf space, she donates surplus books to the library, which in turn holds sales of stock ... and in due course the author John McNally, who'd sent her an inscribed novel, grumbled in his weblog that this 'pristine copy' had shockingly been offered on eBay. Moral: if you are a famous writer deluged with books, the only safe course is to burn them. (Which reminds me that a US small-town twit called Alton Verm is striking a blow for decency by demanding that his local school reading list be purged of licentious 'filth': that is, of *Fahrenheit 451*.)

Chris Priest found that the studio which filmed *The Prestige* has become infected by the novel's theme of obsessive, demented secrecy. His cautious commendation of the film (which they hadn't trusted him to see—he might give away the plot!) appeared in *Empire* alongside an interview with director Christopher Nolan, who endeared himself by urging fans *not* to read the book: 'It spoils everything.' Even the usual author perk of a film tie-in edition was vetoed in the USA. Though the movie has a different ending, the studio folk don't want anyone reading that 1995 novel for fear of ruining 'their' surprise. (Gollancz, however, acquired film artwork for a UK tie-in by dint of savage persistence.) *Ansible* dares not reveal that the character 'Rosebud' is actually ...

Robert Anton Wilson, co-author of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy and guru of offbeat thinking, has only months to live and is broke. He faced eviction from his apartment until a fund-raising call brought help with the rent. Donations to the cause of allowing RAW to die peacefully at home can be sent c/o Futique Trust, PO Box 3561, Santa Cruz, CA 95063, USA (dollar checks payable to him), or Paypal to olgaceline@gmail.com. He writes: 'I am dumbfounded, flabbergasted, and totally stunned by the charity and compassion that has poured in here the last three days. To steal from Jack Benny, "I do not deserve this, but I also have severe leg problems and I don't deserve them either.'" [BB]

Condy

14-15 Oct • **Octocon**, Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth, Ireland. €30 reg, student €25, under-18 €15, supp €10. Contact Octocon c/o Electric Dragon, 19a Main St, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Sterling payments to 'Dave

Lally #2 A/C', 64 Richborne Terrace, London, SW8 1AX.

25 Oct • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Rhiannon Lassiter.

30 Oct • **David Gemmell (1948-2006)**: thanksgiving service in celebration of his life. St James's Church, Piccadilly, London, W1. 3pm.

10-12 Nov • **Armadacon 18**, Novotel, Plymouth. GoH Richard Bonehill, Trevor Truran. £25 reg, £22 concessions. Contact 4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL.

10-12 Nov • **Novacon 36**, Walsall. GoH Ken MacLeod. £36 reg; £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

20-22 Jul 07 • **Year of the Teledu**, Stage Hotel, Leicester. £35 reg. *Hotel B&B rates*: single £55, double/twin £65 ordinary or £70 'premium'. Contact 14 Endsleigh Gdns, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 2HJ.

3-5 Aug 07 • **MeCon 10**, Queen's Elms Centre, Elms Village, Malone Rd, Belfast. GoH Iain M. Banks. Details TBA.

31 Aug - 2 Sep 07 • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Manchester. £70 reg. Contact 95 Meadowgate Rd, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

2-4 Nov 07 • **Novacon 37**, Walsall (again). Details TBA.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. On Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*: 'This marks a significant departure for McCarthy, but it's hardly a departure for apocalyptic fiction and film, which have trafficked in these dark visions for decades. Of course, McCarthy has borrowed from lowbrow forms before.' (*Washington Post* review, 1 Oct) Our reporter *Chris Lawson* adds: 'Ah, yes, the lowbrow apocalyptic subgenre, with typical schlock like *Lord of the Flies*, *Ridley Walker*, and *Alas Babylon*.'

R.I.P. *John M. Ford* (1957-2006), unnervingly talented and versatile US sf author, poet and wit, died unexpectedly c24 September; he was 49. Mike Ford, as everyone knew him, won World Fantasy Awards for *The Dragon Waiting* as novel and 'Winter Solstice, Camelot Station' as short story, though it's actually a poem. I can't add much to the flood of tributes on line. We shared a birthday—though he was four years younger—and swapped silly greetings every year. His were always funnier. I'll miss him. • *Charles L. Grant* (1942-2006), prolific US author and anthologist who was best known for horror and dark fantasy but also wrote sf, died on 15 September. He was 62. His many awards included the Nebula (twice) and World Fantasy Award, plus Stoker, World Horror and International Horror Guild life achievement honours. [SFWA] • *Peter Ling* (1926-2006), prolific UK tv scriptwriter who wrote for *The Avengers* and *Dr Who*, died on 14 September aged 80. [JE] • *Sara Purdom* (1930-2006) died on 14 September after long illness. Michael Swanwick writes: 'The wife of writer Tom Purdom, Sara was for many decades one of the social lights of the Philadelphia sf scene. She was known for her grace and intelligence, and as the creator of the sf lightbulb joke: *Q. How many science fiction characters does it take to change a lightbulb? A. Two. One to change the bulb and one to say, "As you know, Fred, the lightbulb was invented by Thomas Edison and operates by the principle of ..."* I've worked this joke into I forget how many public presentations, and the audience always thought me terribly witty. Well, no. But I knew somebody who was. Rest well, Sara.' • *Tetsuro Tamba* (1922-2006), Japanese actor who played Tiger Tanaka in *You Only Live Twice*, died on 25 September aged 84. Other genre work included the popular anime movie *The Cat Returns* and the original *Nihon Chimbotsu (Japan Sinks)*. [PM] • *Liese van Santen* (1952-2006), active in UK fanzines and con-running while married to Martin Hoare in the 1970s, died in September: she was 54. [MH]

Dept of SF Prophecy. Prime Minister Blair's grim determination to impose ID cards on us all was anticipated over 50 years ago: '... Blair dug down into the breast pocket of his tunic and came up with the pink identification card, carried compulsorily by all members of the Hundred Suns Federation ...' (A.J. Merak, *Dark Andromeda*, 1954) [BA]

Glittering Prizes. Recipients of the latest \$500,000 MacArthur Foundation grants include George Saunders, a current World Fantasy Award short-story finalist for 'CommComm', and David Macaulay, the

author and illustrator of *Motel of the Mysteries* (1979). [SFWA]

Market News. *Emil Fortune* writes: 'I'm looking for short SF stories of around 5K-7K words, to appear in an anthology for young adults. The book is to be published by Walker Books around the end of 2007. The only real restrictions on content are that the main character should be a teenager (or similar; if we're doing talking squid in outer space, they should be callow calamari) and that the story should be reasonably age appropriate (not too much in the way of sex and violence).' Email for more details: emil.fortune@walker.co.uk. Deadline: end February.

As Others See Us II. Simon Hoggart, reporting on the UK Liberal Democrat party conference, has a theory that writing sf is a sublimation of what could have been so much worse: 'One thing that hasn't changed is the sense that, with the Lib Dems, we are dealing with a rather lonely boy in his bedroom. Some such have model railways, some invent new planets and go on to become bestselling science fiction writers. Others, like the Lib Dems, create masterplans for the management of an entire society and nation.' (*Guardian*, 23 September) [SB/GS]

Random Fandom. *Jim Benford* is staying in London until 1 December, and hopes to meet fans: 69B Elizabeth St, London, SW1W 9PJ; 0207 823 4211. • *Flick & Dr Plokta* were married on 15 September, an event described by ace reporter Claire Brialey as 'Flick's upgrading to Mrs Mike Scott version 2.0.' Kilted 'junior bridesmaid' James Bacon made a speech: 'When Flick was seven, she took a great interest in acrobatic gymnastics. And when Flick was seven, Mike was on his first honeymoon, where he took a great interest ...' • *Joe Gordon* told the world: 'The next [Forbidden Planet] catalogue will not now carry the Dave Langford Action Figure—it was planned to come with a range of accessories but we simply couldn't fit all the little plastic awards replicas into the package.' • *Peter Coleborn & Jan Edwards* were married on 15 September in Leek: 'As a wedding present, they are the new editors of the British Fantasy Society's magazine, *Dark Horizons*.' [PC] • *Debby & Mike Moir* were deeply frustrated to miss L.A.con IV—the one year they were Hugo nominees: 'Four days before we were due to fly, some doctors surprised us by deciding Debby needed urgent heart surgery. We had a rather scary few weeks, but nearly one month post operation; Debby has a repaired valve and is almost back to 100%.'

British Fantasy Awards. NOVEL (August Derleth Award): Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys*. NOVELLA Stuart Young, 'The Mask Behind the Face' (*The Mask Behind the Face & Other Stories*). ANTHOLOGY Allen Ashley, *The Elastic Book of Numbers*. COLLECTION Joe Hill, *20th Century Ghosts*. SHORT Joe Hill, 'Best New Horror' (*Postscripts* #3). ARTIST Les Edwards. SMALL PRESS Peter Crowther, PS Publishing. • SPECIAL (Karl Edward Wagner Award): Stephen Jones. BFS COMMITTEE FOUNDERS AWARD Keith Walker, Rosemary Pardoe, Phil Spencer, David Sutton.

Fantasycon. *Marion Pitman* was there: 'Fantasycon in Nottingham was good, with a turnout of well over 300. Usual problems with new hotel like they ran out of beer ("no, honestly, they really will drink that much"), but it seemed to me that the management was showing willing. Apparently when Graham Joyce complained about the red wine, the bar manager tasted it, said, "It is awful, isn't it," and instructed some decent stuff to be produced. The quality definitely improved. All the guests were very entertaining; most programme items started not too late; the panels were interesting, some even keeping to the subject. The auction was a mess; improvement was promised next year. None of the plaques fell off the awards. Clive Barker's trousers looked like someone had thrown up over them; as someone else said, "You have to be very rich to wear trousers like that." He spoke very well as always, passionate, visionary, and completely filthy.'

Fanfandery. *TAFF*: the latest ballot has at last been finalized with just two candidates for the 2007 eastbound trip, Chris Garcia and Mary Kay Kare. • *JETS*, the one-off fund to take a European fan to Nippon 2007, has aroused 'expressions of interest' but no formal nominations as yet. Deadline is 13 November 2006 (www.astralpole.org).

C.o.A. *Merv & Helena Binns*, #1 Plymouth St, East Bentleigh, Vic 3165, Australia (parcels still to PO Box 315, Carnegie 3163). • *John Jarrold*, Flat 31, Park Lane Mansions, Eversfield Place, St Leonard's-on-Sea, E Sussex, TN37 6DB (NB: unsolicited MSS thrown away unread).

Outraged Letters. *Brian Ameringen* admires the faint praise of Ziesing Books salesmanship, as applied to Diana Wynne Jones's *Year of the Griffin*: 'Jones sells reasonably well for us. I've deduced from this fact alone—that she's not a total hack. Here's a humorous fantasy ...' • *Paul Beardsley* spotted a deeply subtle John Norman allusion on ITV: 'Did you happen to see *Wire In The Blood* last Wednesday [20 Sep]? It featured a villain who lured young women to his dungeon where they were obliged to wear handcuffs, undergo humiliation and so on. The

investigating psychologist found a poster by Boris Vallejo (or someone similar) in one of the victims' bedrooms. He recognised the poster as an illustration from the series of *Vor [sic]* books, and concluded that the villain was drawing inspiration from them.' (I don't remember much of that kind of thing in Lois McMaster Bujold—Ed.) • *Paul Cornell*: 'I'm usually, mostly, onside for your war against the makers of *Space Station Spacey*, who insist that their show is "not SF" because it has people and jokes in it. But I think your quoting of Russell Davies the other month confuses two different things. Russell's never said the new *Who* isn't SF. He's said that he's consciously trying to make it less SFnal. And, as he says elsewhere in that interview, that that is actually against his own inclinations. The dividing line is hypocrisy. There's a difference between insisting, usually through ignorance, sometimes through panic at the niche that's opening up in front of you, that your very SF show is not SF, and deliberately reducing the SF elements in an SF show. The latter may not be to our taste, but it's an honourable strategy.' (Not all 'As Others See Us' quotes are presented as examples of hypocrisy. We've even been known to include people who openly admit to liking sf—Ed.) • *Cuddles* writes: 'Electrical Eggs UK is supporting one of our members to produce a fanzine reflecting on how the sf community provides a safe haven for persons suffering from mental illness. We believe this will help people understand how difficult ordinary activities become for fans with a mental illness or handicap such as depression or dyslexia. We are recruiting helpers prepared to spend ½ hour on the phone to assist with this fanzine.' Volunteers: email eggsuk.access4sf@ntlworld.com; phone 0141 587 1461. • *Greg Egan* was 'gobsmacked by the level of scientific illiteracy' in *New Scientist's* uncritical report (9 Sep) on the Roger Shawyer space drive proposal, which magically defies conservation of momentum. Full polemic and discussion at tinyurl.com/n3c7a.

Small Press. *Science Fiction Chronicle* 267 (September 2006, numbered 266 but following two issues both numbered 265) has Octavia Butler's death in February as its lead news story. The 'current issue' on the website—which still claims monthly publication—is February 2005.

Cultural Penetration. *Simo* has been reading, as one does, *Postman Pat's Summer Storybook* (John Cunliffe, 1987): "Would you like a book to read on the train?" said Katy. / "Mmmm ... that sounds like a good idea," said Pat. "What have you got?" / "This looks good," said Katy. "The Hobbit'. It's about dragons and magic." / "Yes," said Pat. "Thanks. It'll make a change from parcels and letters."

Hideous Gaffes. A230: Thog and his researcher were taunted with extreme prejudice for failing to imagine a cube balanced on its corner. A229: Patrick Nielsen Hayden corrects 'a subtle error ... *The Incomplete Terry Carr* wasn't a "memorial" fanzine, given that it was published a good fifteen or sixteen years before Terry actually died.'

Group Gropes. *London*: The cellar bar of the Melton Mowbray pub (First Thursday venue) is already booked for the Xmas meeting date of 21 Dec: using the smaller upstairs bar seems the easiest option. [PT]

The Dead Past. Inspired by the on-line *Checkpoint*, Greg Pickersgill and others have created a searchable archive of the previous UK newszine, Ron Bennett's *Skyrack* (1959-1971): www.gostak.co.uk/skyrack.

Thog's Masterclass. *Breathing Exercises Dept.* 'Faraday, eighteen-year-old daughter of Earl Isend of Skarabost, sat soaking up the atmosphere with her intelligent green eyes.' (Sarah Douglass, *The Wayfarer Redemption*, 1997) [NR] • *Dept of Factial Contortion.* 'Pym returned him a fixed smile over eyes blazing with fury.' (Lois McMaster Bujold, *A Civil Campaign*, 1999) [CB] • *Light of Other Days Dept.* 'She saw through its "eyes", which were packets of specialized nerves designed to collect information from a spectrum far exceeding human comprehension, from light waves now unseen but which were common when the planet was young and newly cooled.' (William R. Trotter, *Warrener's Beastie*, 2006) [DL] • *Dept of Teleporting Sweat, Crossed Eyes and X-Ray Vision.* 'Sweat rolled down the woman's face as she spoke, and beaded on the narrow face of the other man present.' 'His eyes popped open, and for a moment they stared at each other almost nose to nose.' 'Perhaps it was the handdog way they sat, shoulders slumped, eyes on the ground under their boots.' (all Robert Jordan, *The Fires of Heaven*, 1993) [CL] • *Serious Mainstream Dept, or My Vegetable Love Should Grow ...* 'He felt his cashew become a banana, and then a rippled yam, bursting with weight.' (John Updike, *Brazil*, 1994) [ADH]

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