

# ansible

YES EARTHLING, THE TIME HAS COME TO SETTLE THE FATE OF YOUR MISERABLE LITTLE PLANET



TAKE ME TO YOUR EDITOR

**RETURN OF THE PRODIGY.** Long-time readers may recall various British sf authors being plagued with handwritten (or ill-typed) letters from 'Rachel Oliver' of the million pseudonyms, an allegedly young, allegedly ailing, alleged female who went on to forge terrible TV sf submissions from such unamused writers as S. Baxter, C. Greenland and D. Langford. Now the horror begins anew, in *American Robert L. Forward* writes: 'A number of weeks ago I received a very erudite but poorly typed letter from "Julie" Johnson (8½ years) of 47 Market Place, Malton, North Yorks, telephone (01653) 693212. • I have a 9 year old granddaughter, and the difference in vocabulary was so amazing I was suspicious, but I responded with reprints since "she" sent a SASE (unstamped). The letter has yet to return to me. • Today I received a similar letter typed on a similar typewriter from "Rachel" Oliver (8 years old) of East Lane, Embassy, Skipton, BD23 6QD. My non-Sherlock eye could not "prove" the two typewriters were the same, and the paper was different, and "she" was not asking for anything except whether I had written the novel *Voyager* (which I have not). So I responded to that one with encouragement. After the letter was sealed, I remembered the power of *Alta Vista*. So I hooked up to the Internet, called *Alta Vista*, stuck in "Julie Johnson" and struck a blank. • Then I tried "Rachel Oliver", and *bingo!* I got your column. My little "geniuses" are fakes. I have reopened the envelope (might as well use the stamps, they are worthless otherwise), stuck in a complaint and will mail it off tomorrow—with instructions on the envelope that if the letter is undeliverable, to forward it to F.R. Oliver at the address you gave. • Thanks for posting the info. Perhaps we should make a collection of our "precocious" youngster's names and post them on the Internet under "fraudulent names" where others can find them and be forewarned....' [12 Oct]

Colin Greenland adds, in our correspondent's almost inimitable style: 'Actually, I notice little Rachel is even younger now than when she used to write to me. Does this mean that she is aging backwards and will soon reach "Zero Years Old" and disappear?—Just a thought—You might use this plot for one of your "science fiction books"—'

## The Future Is Tekon

**Lionel Fanthorpe** took up last issue's challenge to comment on *The Tomb of God*: 'After twenty years plus of Rennes investigation, I'd say absolutely, finally and categorically that there is more likelihood of finding the embalmed body of Donald Duck inside Mount Cardou than of finding the body of Jesus in there!' Meanwhile, despite this potboiler's good UK sales, *John Gribbin* reports: 'I'm told the book has failed in the US with less than 1,000 copies sold. Who said Americans are gullible?'

**Elisabeth Gille.** *Peter Nicholls* writes: 'French editor (and my dear friend) Elisabeth Gille died—too young but not too painfully—on Sept 28. I have few specifics: her daughter Marianne told me she had "a lung problem". (Elisabeth had been quite a smoker.) She was around my age, I think: in the late fifties. She was well known to and well liked by many sf people of my generation, who remember her intelligence and grace, her sharp wit, and the excellent work she did when she was in charge of the Editions Denoël of line in the late 1970s, which she built up into perhaps France's premier sf list (Aldiss, Bester, Clarke, and so on through the alphabet). Later she changed companies and worked in more senior positions, but while she was no longer directly responsible for sf lists, she kept up with her many friends in the sf community.'

**Simon R. Green** had fun at *Fantasycon* ... 'Michael Marshall Smith came up with a new game: questions that can only be answered by the phrase, "You can just fuck right off." In his case: "How's the Weaveworld adaptation doing?" In my case: "How many more Death-stalker books are there going to be?" MM suffered from painful ribs after an unfortunate encounter with unexpected banisters. I offered the industrial-strength paracetamols I am never without. Those surrounding then struck up a quick chorus of God Damn The Pusher Man; after

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which, the hotel staff seemed to follow my movements with more than usual interest.'

**Gordon Van Gelder** of St Martin's Press is to be the new editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, following the resignation of Kristine Kathryn Rusch; he will also continue editing sf (but no longer non-sf) at SMP. [PNH] Congratulations!

## Contango

8-10 Nov • **Novacon 26**, Hotel Ibis, Birmingham. GoH David Gemmell. Too late unless you've booked: no walk-ins.

15-17 Nov • **Armadacon**, Astor Hotel, The Hoe, Plymouth. Contact £22 reg. GoH Colin Baker, Jack Cohen, Dave Langford. Contact 4 Gleneagle Ave, Mannamead, Plymouth, Devon, PL3 5HL.

23-4 Nov • **TV SF/Fantasy Weekend**, part of Folkestone & Boulogne International Film Festival. £40 reg (proceeds to charity). Contact 38 Rochford Ave, Loughton, Essex, IG10 2BS.

27 Nov • **BSFA London meeting**, Jubilee pub, York Rd, near Waterloo. With **Pat Cadigan** ('You dog.'). 6pm for 8pm-ish.

28 Nov - 1 Dec • **DefCon 96** (*media*). Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. £35 reg. Contact 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5RN.

24-6 Dec • **Yulecon**, Plough & Harrow Hotel, Edgbaston, Birmingham. £20 reg and 3xSAE (now just one?). Contact 56 York Rd, Torpoint, Cornwall, PL11 2LG. 01752 812698.

14-17 Feb 97 • **Attitude: the Convention** (born of the fanzine), Abbey Hotel, Gt Malvern. £27 reg to 31 Jan; hotel booking deadline is early Nov, so watch it. Contact First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW.

9 Mar 97 • **Sector 14** (B5), Central Hotel, Glasgow. One day only. Contact 79 North Drive, Troon, KY10 7DN.

28-31 Mar 97 • **Intervention** (Eastercon), Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £30 reg, £20 supp/unwaged, rising to £35/£25 on 1 Dec. Contact 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 7TS.

28 Aug - 2 Sep 97 • **LoneStarCon** (55th Worldcon), San Antonio, Texas. \$95 reg. Contact PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755-2277, USA. LSC has decided not to award Retro-Hugos, cruelly spurning an immemorial tradition going back to 1996.

*Rumblings* • **Contagion** (Trek) has ceased to be, 'due to the attentions of the Tax Man, following the crafty machinations of the man behind Stargazer Productions' [C] ... too much paperwork required, to the detriment of the con's donations to charity. • **Aussiecon III**. Secret agent 'Bunyip' cannot be gagged: 'A member asked for information about his status with the convention—"oh no", was the reply, "the database is kept in the US."'

## Infinitely Improbable

**Mad Penguin Disease.** Because I am a kindly soul, I don't really want to go on and on at Penguin for their lame-brained publicity stunt of a computer virus hoax. However ... the lie still continues to propagate around the net, and Penguin's Guy Gadney has developed a damage-control response which irritatingly glosses over little matters like culpability: 'There is an Interactive Novel which you can access from the Penguin Books homepage at [www.penguin.co.uk](http://www.penguin.co.uk) called "Irina" after the main character Irina Zotova. This has conflicted with reports of a virus called Irina which does not exist and the Professor Edward Prideaux mentioned is a character in the story. The virus rumour has been checked by experts in the UK and it has been confirmed that there is currently no "Irina" virus to guard against and that an email erroneously circulated to a mailing list was at the root of this rumour.' Admiring this whole-

hearted apology, this eager readiness to shoulder the blame, one is compelled to the realization that Guy Gadeny is wasted in publishing and should move to a career in politics. As soon as possible.

**Awards.** *World Fantasy Awards* in presentation order: SPECIAL AWARD (NON-PROFESSIONAL) Marc Michaud, for *Necronomicon Press*; SPECIAL AWARD (PROFESSIONAL) Richard Evans, for contributions to the genre; ARTIST Gahan Wilson; COLLECTION Gwyneth Jones, *Seven Tales and a Fable*; ANTHOLOGY *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women* ed. A.Susan Williams & Richard Glyn Jones; SHORT Gwyneth Jones, 'The Grass Princess'; NOVELLA Michael Swanwick, *Radio Waves*; NOVEL Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*; LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT Gene Wolfe. [PNH, 3 Nov] Several of these provoked the traditional Langford 'Whoopie!' • *British Fantasy Awards.* NOVEL Graham Joyce, *Requiem.* COLLECTION/ANTHOLOGY *Last Rites & Resurrections* ed Andy Cox. SHORT Michael Marshall Smith, 'More Tomorrow'. SMALL PRESS *The Third Alternative* ed Andy Cox. ARTIST Josh Kirby. SPECIAL Mike O'Driscoll & Steve Lockley for 'Welcome to my Nightmare'. Most boggled author: John Grant, who learned only after the presentation that his *IZ95* story had been a short-fiction finalist. • 1995 BSFA Award nominations appeared at last! Shortlisted novels: Stephen Baxter, *The Time Ships*; Peter Hamilton, *The Nano Flower*; Paul McAuley, *Fairyland*; Ian McDonald, *Chaga*; Michael Moorcock, *Blood*; Chris Priest, *The Prestige*.

**Old News.** That shifty fellow *Charles L. Dodgson* was in fact Jack the Ripper—reports 'child psychotherapist' Richard Wallace in *Harper's* [Nov 96]. 'This is based upon previously undiscovered anagrams in the Carrollian opus, including such gems as "Twas brillig...," becoming: *Be I beat my glands til / With hand-sword I slay the evil gender. / A slummy theme; borrow gloves, / And masturbate the hog more!* [UF] Gosh.

**Random Fandom.** *Teddy Harvia* wants to make our flesh creep: 'I broke my nose last Thursday [3 Oct] helping to coach my daughter Matilda's softball team when a ball deflected by a bat hit me. A trip to the emergency room and three hours later the flow of blood finally stopped...'. • *Jon Langford* brags: 'Yesterday I went for tea at William Burroughs's house and Allen Ginsberg took my picture—WERT!!! but true.' [4 Nov] • *Martin Tudor*, after all his efforts at being a charismatic TAFF delegate, is captioned as 'unknown' in *SF Chronicle's* Hugo-recipients photo; but there is compensation, for the legend 'Martin Tudor for Dave Langford' is allotted to *Martin Hoare*.... • *Dave Wood* has a sobering reminder for us all: 'LEST WE FORGET: in this year 1996 Robbie was sold to the Weston family.' He's right, you know.

**C.o.A.** *Jane Barnett* (term), Room 270, International Hall, Brunswick Sq, London, WC1N 1AS. *Paul & Elizabeth Billinger*, 1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northants, NN11 3BE. *Tommy Ferguson*, 768 Manning Ave, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. *Heidi Lyshol*, Calle La Maso 20, Portal 2 1B, 28034 Madrid, Spain. (Address book stolen: tell Heidi where you live...) *Rob Meades & Alice Kohler*, 12 Victoria Ave, Salfiron Walden, Essex, CB11 3AE. *Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden*, 681 Union St, Apt D, Brooklyn, NY 11215, USA. *Charles Platt*, 9 Patchin Place, New York, NY 10011, USA (office address defunct). *Helen Kershaw* (née Starkey), South View Cottage, Yattton Keynell, Wilts, SN14 7JZ.

**Would You Believe It?** Asteroid 1982 VA1 (6630) has been named 'Skepticus' for the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal... 'Csicopus' being rejected as inadequately dignified. The International Astronomical Union has also named other asteroids for CSICOP's Paul Kurtz, Martin Gardner and James Randi.

**Honesty.** Not very sf... but the morning after his Booker Prize for *Last Orders*, Graham Swift was interviewed on *Today*. Q: 'Who do you think are our best writers?' A: 'I'm not going to name any names.' Q: 'Why not?' A: 'Because I have an enormous hangover.' Bravo. [PB]

**Outraged Letters.** *Michael Bishop*, wounded by *Thog's* *shasterrlass* (A111), protests that Thog 'badly misses the intentionality of the line's excessiveness... I now know what it feels like to die by friendly fire. (This sentence also contains irony.)' • *Mike Glicksohn* gently notes that his lovely fire is Susan Manchester, not Susan Glicksohn. Oops.

**No Future In It.** R.I.P.: Future's magazine *PCW Plus* (formerly 8000 Plus), devoted to the Amstrad PCW word processor whose specially hard-to-read matrix print infested scores of UK fanzines. I myself bashed out 88 columns for this, from #1 in 1986 to the final #124,

Xmas 1996. Meanwhile *Simo* gloats about another Future mag: 'the October issue of *SEX* was the first to break the 40,000 sales barrier.'

*Thog's* *shasterrlass*. 'It was dark out on the surface, menacingly, cryogenically dark ...' (Ben Bova, *Moonrise*.) [MKS] No doubt it was fuliginously cold as well.

## TAFF UK: Bad News, and After

*A version of the following has already been distributed via the net.*

**TAFF: Rumours and Facts.** As has been the subject of extensive recent gossip in fandom (especially UK fandom), the TransAtlantic Fan Fund in Europe has suffered a major financial setback. The European fund has not been passed on to the 1996 TAFF winner and current UK administrator, Martin Tudor. • Thanks to general fannish goodwill, it was assumed that pass-on delays following Tudor's victory in early May were the result of simple disorganization on the part of former administrator Abigail Frost. Frost has additionally failed to publish the usual detailed voting figures and list of European voters, which are still not known. In late June, after repeated urgent enquiries, Frost responded indirectly by informing a non-involved person that no money was available; that person [John Clute] passed the news to Tudor. • The missing sum is assumed to be some £2,600, based on the amount known to be held by Frost at the end of 1994 (in her first and last TAFF newsletter she gave the then balance as £1,933.06), plus subsequent identifiable donations, estimated income from voting fees, etc. Expenses in the same period are thought to have been minimal. Frost has not directly responded to any TAFF-related letters or phone calls to her answering machine since the announcement of Tudor's win [slight misinformation here; she spoke to him a few times before the long silence], nor made her usual appearances at London pub meetings since early June. • TAFF traditionally has no secrets, except of course for individual voters' choices in the balloting. But it was felt that Martin Tudor's 1996 US trip—made possible by personal loans, anonymous contributions, the Mexican Hat, and other donations—would be ruined by endless argument and recrimination if all of the above, and its implications, were publicly discussed at that time. The matter was therefore kept confidential until Tudor had returned and recovered from his travels. • Unfortunately, despite Tudor's determination to release the full facts immediately on return to England, this announcement was delayed for several weeks by his own unavoidable personal crises—including illness. All those involved would like to apologize to fandom for the unintended and most regrettable delay. • The position remains unclear in several areas, including the possibility of TAFF's representatives taking legal action. What is certain is that the European TAFF fund is desperately short of cash, and that Martin Tudor's difficulties in performing (and performing well) as the 1996 TAFF delegate were an order of magnitude worse than those faced by virtually any previous winner.

*Issued on behalf of TAFF, 1 Nov 96, with the approval of administrators Dan Steffan and Martin Tudor, by past administrators Avedon Carol, Rob Hansen, Dave Langford (who drafted the text; infelicities are his), Patrick & Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Greg Pickersgill and Pam Wells.*

**State of Play.** Since the above went public, Abigail Frost has met and talked with Gary Farber (currently playing tourist in London). To summarize his report of her own account: she has been suffering from severe clinical depression or worse, leading to a period of sheer inability to deal with the world, and has partially recovered only after therapy. Nevertheless she says that she feels wholly culpable and deserves only condemnation. She estimates that the actual 'missing' amount is £2,700. Her cheque for an initial £200 has been handed over, with the voting records promised to follow, and a pledge of further repayment to TAFF in many £80 monthly instalments beginning in January. We shall see.

Meanwhile, TAFF in Europe needs support if it is to continue. All donations will be gratefully received by Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, off Clarke's Lane, Willenhall, W.Midlands, WV13 1HX. His just-published newsletter *TAFFon Tudor* #2 [3 Nov] contains a lengthier account of pre-trip travails, and calls for nominations for a 1997 TAFF race from North America to the UK Eastercon, Intervention. Candidates should rush their nominations (3 from NA, 2 from Europe), 100-word platform and bond to Dan Steffan, 3804 S 9th Street, Arlington, VA 22204, USA. The nominations close on 2 Dec 1996; voting closes 8 Feb 1997. Martin still means to complete his trip report for early 1997.

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