

Ansible



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THIS PROVES IT. I've been doing some numerological research for a *Fortean Times* piece, and stumbled across an ineluctable Secret of the Universe: that *Ansible's* deadly rival *Apparatchik* is fated to win the Fanzine Hugo this year. Using a mystic 1997-based cipher table whereby A=97, B=107, C=117 and so on in steps of ten, the letters of *Apparatchik* add to 1997! It is the Year of Andy Hooper (and his team). Meanwhile, according to similar ancient and mystical ciphers, *Ansible* and *Interzone* are accursed—for their titles merely yield 666, Number of the Beast. I will spare you my cabalistic proofs that Tom Disch, George Orwell and Arthur C. Clarke were fated by their very names to write novels called 334, 1984 and 2001.... Would anyone like to buy a copy of this home-made software for generating mystic and ancient numerological tables at the rate of several thousand per second?

The Road of Use and Wont

Brian Aldiss modestly polishes his fingernails: 'Last year I became entangled with the Royal Mail and wrote the deathless prose for their presentation packet on the H.G. Wells stamps. The proofs they first sent me were excellent. Then someone in head office decided they should be more pop; the results were pretty atrocious. Of course. • My involvement gave me the chance to lobby for a Mary Shelley commemorative for her bicentenary in 1997. It hasn't quite worked out that way. But the RM will bring out a set of Monsters, including Frankenstein (and Frankenstein's faithful Hound of the Baskervilles). Who will be the artist? The man whose first professional job was to illustrate *Brothers Of The Head*, Ian Pollock....'

Lionel Fanthorpe is hosting Channel 4's *Fortean TV*, examining unlikely mysteries—but, in an obvious cover-up, the first episode attempted no investigation of his visible ability to teleport about the set. Just like Alfred Bester's character, Charles Fort Jaunte.... Lionel himself darkly adds, 'Terror and panic of Orson Welles proportions were reported in the Leeds area on 1 Feb, when ungainly, dancing aliens—one said to be wearing a biker jacket and encircling white collar—were seen in the heavily wooded grounds of a derelict hospital. All will be revealed on Channel 4 at 9pm on some future Wednesday....'

Tom Holt is philosophical about being invited to write for the US shared-world anthology *Helltours*, 'created by' Janet Berliner of 'Professional Media Services' and rather blatantly taking its inspiration from the tourist theme-park Hell of *Faust Among Equals* by, er, Tom Holt. 'I don't mind too much; after all, they've done nothing except swipe my idea, tacitly admit they've swiped my idea, announce that I'm contributing to their confounded anthology and then ask me if I'd fancy contributing. They are, after all, Americans. It's probably something to do with the time difference, or the side-effects of nuclear testing in the Nevada desert. Still, if anybody else bumps into these creeps, a wholesale issue of very long spoons might be in order.'

Charles Platt 'just returned from a planning session for a "virtual world's fair" for the year 2001. This session was sponsored in part by The Mind Science Foundation in San Antonio, which is where the "virtual fair" will take place. (How can a virtual event be based in physical space? Well, that's what we had to figure out. The short answer is that the event must be to some extent de-virtualized.) Anyway, I chatted informally with a woman from the Mind Science Foundation who says she has dealt personally with local personality Whitley Strieber, who has put her into contact with alien abductees who claim they have had strange artifacts implanted in their ears. One of these abductees had his artifact removed at an (unnamed) lab in California and presented it for inspection. A university lab in the San Antonio area conducted an analysis ... and found that it was *unable to identify the artifact as being*

composed of any known terrestrial substance! (Translation: "Dunno what this is, sorry.") The Mind Science people are now trying to decide whether to sully their reputation for sane and sober inquiry by locating another abductee and extracting his implanted artifact for themselves. In the meantime they emphasize that they have no formal link with Mr. Strieber, his abductees, or their implanted artifacts.'

Tad Williams & Deborah Beale 'gave birth, well, Debs did anyway, to Connor Beale Williams on 27 Jan. Arse about, and 10lb 8oz, he was delivered by c-section. Mom, Dad and Baby all doing well.' [LJF]

Conklin

14-17 Feb • **Attitude: the Convention** (born of the fanzine), Abbey Hotel, Gt Malvern. Advance registrations now closed; £35 at door. Contact First Floor Flat, 14 Prittlewell Square, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1DW. 01702 352846.

21-3 Feb • **TrinCon2**, Royal Dublin Hotel; O'Connell St, Dublin 1, Ireland. £15(£) reg; £20(I) after 15 Feb. Many GoHs. Contact Dublin U SF Soc, 40 Daniel St, Dublin 8, Ireland.

26 Feb • **BSFA London meet**, Jubilee, York Rd. 7pm on. With S. Baxter & B. Stableford, talking and being presented with their BSFA awards. (D. Langford still awaits his from 1986....)

27 Feb • **An Evening of Maximum Twang** in aid of the Richard Evans Fund: The Weavers Arms, 98 Newington Green Road London N1. With Hank Wangford; raffle; cash bar. 8pm. £9 reg (£10 at door) from Jo Fletcher c/o Gollancz, Wellington House, 125 Strand, London, WC2R 0BB. 0171 420 5518.

1-2 Mar • **Microcon 17**, Devonshire House, Exeter University. GoH: Chris & Leigh Priest. £5 reg. Contact 25 Victoria St, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6JQ. 01392 435478.

2 Mar • **Picocon 14**, Imperial College, London. 10am-8pm. £8 reg (students £3). Contact ICSF c/o IC Union, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB.

9 Mar • **Sector 14 (B5)**, Central Hotel, Glasgow. GoH Jeff Conaway. 10am-10pm. Now £18 reg (to 2 Mar; £20 at door). Contact Sector 14, PO Box 3870, Troon, Scotland, KA10 7PZ. Seemingly incorporates Wolf 359's *Nightwatch* (was 8 Mar, London).

28-31 Mar • **Intervention** (Eastercon), Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £35 reg (£25 unwaged), rising to £50 on 1 Mar and closing 14 Mar; *no at-the-door memberships available*. Contact 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 7TS. *Chris Bell* has issued the traditional rant about awkward fans who don't list alternatives to single rooms (now all taken) on their booking forms.

11 May • **Fantasy Fair**, Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough. 10:30am-4pm. Contact 01480 216372.

5-7 Sep • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. £45 reg (£55 from 1 Apr). Contact 5 S. Mesnesfield Rd, Salford, Manchester, M7 3QP.

25-7 Oct • **Octocon/Eurocon '97**, Dublin Castle. GoH Robert Jordan; others TBA. £20(I) reg; £25 from 24 Apr, £30 at door. Accommodation must be booked well in advance. Contact 6 Drom-na-nane Park, Beaumont, Dublin 9, Ireland.

6-8 Feb 98 • **Decadence** (10th British Filk Con), Forte Posthouse Hotel, Gatwick. £24/\$38 reg (until Worldcon). Contact Top Flat, 11 Evesham Road, Cheltenham, GL52 2AA.

14-15 Mar 98 • **Corflu** (the fanzine con), Griffin Hotel, Leeds ... UK edition of established US event. So far we've had a long period of apatetic silence, a formal announcement of cancellation in the face of alleged US hostility to a UK venue, and then tearful scenes of forgiveness and reinstatement: God knows what hidden agenda

lurked behind all this. £25/\$40 reg. Rooms £25/person/night. Contact 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

18-21 Sep 98 • **Discworld Convention II**, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Date/venue provisional as yet. GoH: Terry Pratchett and myriad associates (all the way down to me). Contact (SAE) PO Box 3086, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8TY.

Rumbings • Worldcon 2003 ... the German bid has apparently faded away [KC], but Toronto is now challenged by ConCancin: Cancun, Mexico. \$7 (50 pesos) pre-supp c/o PO Box 905, Eules, TX 26039-0905, USA. [TH] Meanwhile, what of British bidding plans? I have this terrible fear that someone is going to tell me.

Infinitely Improbable

Clarke Award. Another year, another shortlist: *Voyage* by Stephen Baxter, *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, *Engines of God* by Jack McDevitt, *Blue Mars* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* by Sheri S. Tepper, and *Looking for the Mahdi* by N. Lee Wood. Winner announced at a ceremonial thrash in (again) the Science Museum, 28 May. [PK]

Dealings on the Dark Side. Steve Green grumbles: 'At least three regular writers for the UK horror magazine *The Dark Side* have withdrawn their services until the publishers honour invoices for work dating back to May 96. Contributors to the sister title *Infinity*—which has reportedly folded—are also in dispute.' Ominous, ominous....

Thog's Masterclass. The 'Osborne Spinechillers' series, we are warned, consists of 'Full length spinetwisting tales—too scary to read in the dark!' [PB] Well I never.

R.I.P. Alas, we are losing fans again. *Brian Burgess* died of heart failure on 28 Jan, aged 65. He had seemed very much older since his stroke some years ago, and intensely regretted missing his first Novacon in 1995 (having been at 1-24 inclusive); his fan involvement dated back to 1952. *Greg Pickersgill* adds: 'Brian was a real fan, a genuine enthusiast for science fiction, fantasy, fandom and conventions; he brought the same cheerful optimism to his other interests—he was widely travelled and made friends all over the world, and was something of an authority on G.A.Henty—and was a kindly and good-hearted fellow, with maybe rather more than the usual quota of eccentricities, but in every sense one of us.' • *Roy Hill* of Canterbury died from cancer last August. • *Brian Robinson* (1946-97) died from heart failure in mid-Jan, following long circulatory trouble and a 1996 leg amputation; he was deeply involved in the 1970s MaD (Manchester) sf group and in Manceon '76, and co-edited *Hell* with Paul Skelton. • *Phil Rogers* died of a heart attack on 23 Jan. He had been a congoer since 1958, a 1960s main-spring of the BSPA, a 1964 TAFF candidate, and a cheerful regular presence at Novacon with Doreen Rogers (Doreen Parker in the older days), who survives him. (All sympathy, Doreen.) Phil's 'humanist' funeral is at 12 noon on 11 Feb at Shrewsbury Crematorium. Family flowers only, please; memorial donations, if people insist, to Leopold Muller Arthritis Fund, Gobowan Hospital, Oswestry, Shropshire. [RH,KS]

Star-Gazy Pie. Stargazer International Productions, whose big Dec for-profit con in Wembley Arena was suddenly cancelled (see A114), went into liquidation later in December. *Sic transit.* A vituperative creditors' meeting followed in January: debts are apparently on the order of £250,000, while assets are negligible ... apart from a possibly saleable mailing list which somehow escaped the September burglary that destroyed all data files, making Stargazer quite unable to present any financial records at the meeting. The presiding solicitor grumbled aloud that he would have liked a bit more co-operation; 'You only had to ask,' cried wide-eyed Stargazer boss Simon Jenkins, but his voice was drowned in the gnashing of bilked creditors' teeth.

Random Fandom. *Tommy Ferguson's* attempt to become 'Tom' under cover of emigration to Canada met with stiff consumer resistance ('Fuck off, Tommy') and has been abandoned. • *Nigel E. Richardson*, in his cool-dude net identity as Nicholas E. Grinder, had his web diary singled out for glory by the *Toronto Globe & Mail* web column: 'He hates his job, despises his co-workers, and longs feebly for appropriate female partnership. Marooned in his flat in Leeds over a Bank Holiday weekend, he considers the possibility of getting a date, but concludes

he is too poor even to make himself presentable, short of diving into a stack of old magazines in search of an unused fragrance strip. He is the J. Alfred Prufrock of Net diarists.' [MM] That's our Nigel. • *Allison Scott* & *Steven Cain* announced the birth of their 'Pod', Marianne Susan Cain, on 14 Jan. We await word of when she's scheduled to devastate Tokyo.

C.O.A. *Simon Bisson* & *Mary Branscombe*, 5a Schubert Rd, Putney, SW15 2QT. *Tommy Ferguson* (now with postcode), 768 Manning Ave, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6G 2W6. *Paul J. McAuley*, 83a De Beauvoir Road, London, N1 4EL. *Stan Nicholls* & *Anne Gay*, 112 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DU. *Allison Weston* (to Easter at least), Flat 6, Wilton Court, Cavell Street, Whitechapel, London.

In Typo Veritas. *Peter Wareham* remembers Zenna Henderson's *The People: No Different Flesh* (1968 Avon edition): 'It is disconcerting to find one of the People, during a desperate attempt to rescue a couple of humans from a flash flood, thinking "There were still two olives hanging on my ability to do the inanimate lift." ... Martini, anyone?'

Not Wired But Fused. *Chris Priest's* plans to write an article for *Wired UK* were deftly countered by the unanswerable editorial riposte that their March issue will be the last.

Group Gropes. Hideous convulsions of apathy have racked the Birmingham SF Group (suffering from declining attendance—e.g. a turn-out of 12 to meet megafamous Robert Jordan) and also FOKT in Glasgow (whose newsletter *Small Fry* has been folded by despairing editor Cuddles). Diminished meetings continue; the Brum group has moved from 3rd to 2nd Fri each month (Queen's Tavern, Essex St). Meanwhile, reconnaissance parties from the ghostly London Wellington meeting are investigating alternatives, starting with the Jubilee.

The Bookseller published one of its rare Top SF/Fantasy Sellers charts in late Jan. #1 Terry Pratchett, *Maskerade*; #2 Rob Grant, *Backwards* (Red Dwarf spinoff); #3 more Pratchett, *Hogfather*; #4 M.P. Kube-McDowell, *Star Wars: Tyrant's Test*; #5 Pratchett again, *The Colour of Magic*; #6 Alan Dean Foster, *Mid-Flux*; #7 bloody hell it's Pratchett, with *Mort*; #8 Raymond E. Feist, *Rise of a Merchant Prince*.

Fanfundery. DUFF: candidates for the Down Under Fan Fund trip from N.America to Basicon in Australia (Sept 97) are Andy Hooper, Joel Zakem ... and *Ansible's* utterly splendid US distributor *Janice Murray*. (He said impartially.) Ballot forms from me on request.

Small Press. The new *Fantasy Annual* (Spring 97, \$8/£6) sounds like a nostalgia trip: stories by Ted Tubby, Syd Bounds and John Russell Fearn (d.1960); articles by Philip Harbottle and others. Info from co-editors Sean Wallace, 415 Merriman Rd, Akron, OH 44303, USA, or Philip Harbottle, 32 Tynedale Ave, Wallsend, Tyne & Wear, NE28 9LS.

Intervention Plea. The fan lounge ('Bosh's') seeks (a) loans of photos, clippings and fannish relics, preferably embarrassing; (b) single A4 promotional sheets from cons and local groups, for insertion in ring-binders; (c) intending party organizers willing to 'pool resources and hold one memorable keynote event while retaining a platform for their individual agenda' (er, 'Why go to lots of parties when you could have just one?'). Contact Steve Green, 33 Scott Rd, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

Thog's Masterclass. Talbert's toes whipped like pennants in a gale. (Richard Matheson, 'The Splendid Source') [KJ] • 'It was a long time before words came to Elena's mouth. She seemed to have gone far in search of them. They were simple words, but they seemed to have spent long ages in a place I cannot even imagine....' (Jonathan Aycliffe, *The Last*, 1996) • 'His skin turned inside out like a glove.' ... The shocking stillness of the room wanted to blister and peel back like a layer of skin.' ... 'Sam felt the claw in the pit of his stomach, a dredging in his bowels.' ... 'And with every minute urging the evening on to midnight, the leather football of anxiety inflating in Sam's stomach was pumped still further.' ... 'A reptile claw dragged at his bowels.' ... 'He felt a dredger move across his heart.' ... 'He felt a claw of anxiety in his bowels.' (all Graham Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy*, 1996. Our researcher adds: 'Sam has quite a lot of things happen to his bowels, but I tastefully didn't note them all.' The author moans: 'Oh God. It was the senna pods what did it, cruelly administered to me when I was but a child....')