

Ansible



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INTERVENTION (Eastercon 1997, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool) ... was not the sort of convention which I can view with *Ansible's* habitual cosmic impartiality: I was a guest and had a great time in between nervous spasms surrounding my speech, the *Fantasy Encyclopedia* panel, and a very lengthy *Libe Whog's Mastertlass* presentation at which the usual suspects (Barnett, Langford) were joined by ace thespian Mike Cule. Mike's impassioned rendition of how a Lionel Fanthorpe heroine cleans her teeth scored 102% on the audience Lascivimeter. ● **Octavia Butler** was visibly the most popular guest, with an autograph line of almost Pratchettian dimensions; Brian Aldiss was very Brian Aldiss; famous Jon Bing arrived so late and left so early as to escape my attention (not to mention the opening and closing ceremonies). ● **Silly Moment:** Diana Wynne Jones allowing armteister Ron Tiner to decorate her neck-support collar with a frieze of naked dancing nymphs, necessitating a furtive visit to Boots for something to cover up this display in public. ● **Reconvene** won the 1999 Eastercon bidding—see below—returning us once again to the Adelphi. ● **BSFA Awards** went to Iain M. Banks for *Excession* (novel), Barrington J. Bayley for 'A Crab Must Try' (*Interzone* 103; short) and Jim Burns for the *Ancient Shores* cover (art). Then an evilly grinning Paul Kincaid whipped out the trophies which had somehow never materialized for the 1986 BSFA awards, and embarrassed your editor.... ● **Nitpicking?** Three problems seemed generally acknowledged. Intervention's 'Communications' theme was fraught with irony thanks to the combination of many programme changes and no newsletter (the alternative 'Chinese Wall' noticeboard was concealed in the hinterland and—as those *Ploka* satirists pointed out—publicized chiefly via the Chinese Wall). In accordance with UK con tradition, the hotel had failed to order anything like the requested amount of real beer. And in accordance with Adelphi tradition there were determined assaults on security by all manner of outside low-lives, peaking with a dealers' room burglary and the attentions of the police. One filthy but enterprising derelict in the cellar bar was repeatedly flogging a soiled copy of *The Big Issue* and then snatching it back: 'it's my last one, see.' Still, Gary Stratmann's gibbering security efforts entertained; John Harold's stealth and total obscurity were rewarded by a standing ovation at the closing ceremony. ● **TV Crews** shadowing hotel staff and Iain Banks were less obtrusive than we'd all feared. ● **Oh Dear.** Final confession: I'm definitely still too shattered to write the long report which Intervention deserves. Too much desperate fun....

A Handful of Darkness

Steve Baxter zoomed to Norwescon in Seattle to collect his Philip K. Dick award for *The Time Ships*, and claimed that he'd be flying the flag with 'my Spice Girls union jack mini-skirt.' This award was for the best paperback original sf published in the US during 1996; a special citation also went to Michael Bishop's *At the City Limits of Fate*. [GVG]

Harlan Ellison was sighted in Seattle by *John Lorentz*: 'While here, he was tracked down by *Newsweek* to write a sidebar on the San Diego mass suicide—something on the order of "what's the difference between sf and the lunacy these people were preaching?" At \$5,000 for 800 words, he said it was probably the best word rate he's ever been paid.' But the piece was heavily censored for suggesting that Horrid Cults and Real Organized Religions are not always easily distinguished.

David Garnett has deftly changed his address (see C.o.A.) to evade junk submissions arriving thanks to market reports ... 'loads of competency-challenged MSS from been-to-college-got-a-degree-in-creative-writing "authors". None of them has ever heard of *New Worlds*, of course. [...] What can you say to someone dumb enough to send a MS marked "copyright 1991"—or with US stamps as return postage?'

John Jarrold is now the part-time sf/fantasy editor for Simon & Schuster UK (3 days weekly, 2 of them in the London

office), while freelancing for the remainder of each week.

Jack Vance was 'pre-announced' as winner of the SFWA Grand Master Award presented with the Nebulas on 20 April.

Congou

18-20 Apr ● **Nebula Awards Weekend**, Holiday Inn Crown Plaza, Kansas City. The world waits, palpitating.

19 Apr ● **Unconvention** (Fortean), Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London. Contact PO Box 146, Glasgow, G1 5RN.

23 Apr ● **BSFA London meet**, Jubilee pub, York Rd. 7pm onward (some fans in bar by 5pm). With Colin Greenland.

2-5 May ● **The Mission** (*Trek*), Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. Contact Wolf 359 as for **Nightwatch** above.

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

23-6 May ● **Year of the Wombat** is now *completely full*.

27-8 Sep ● **Hypotheticon**, Central Hotel, Glasgow. GoH Anne Gay, Brian Waugh, others TBA. £15 reg (to 1 June). Contact 38 Scotstoun St, Glasgow, G14 0UN.

14-15 Mar 98 ● **Corflu** (UK edition of fabled US fanzine con), Griffin Hotel, Leeds. £25/\$40 reg. Rooms £25/person/night. Contact 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY. Some net controversy resulted from Ian (Master of Tact) Sorensen's perceived policy—only apparent, he declares—of restricting UK membership in favour of US visitors. Soothing the troubled waters, Ian told *Ansible*: 'Ho hum. I'm glad I don't want to please all the people all of the time.'

27-9 Mar 98 ● **Deliverance** (*Blake's 7*), Royal Moat House, Nottingham. £45 reg, rising 1 Sept. Contact (SAE) 18 Bury Ave, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 0ED.

10-13 Apr 98 ● **Intuition** (Eastercon), Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel, Manchester. GoH Connie Willis, Ian McDonald, Martin Tudor. £28 reg *rising on 1 May*. Contact 1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, SM5 3LQ. (The flyer's 3QL is wrong.)

2-5 Apr 99 ● **Reconvene** (Eastercon), Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. GoH Peter S. Beagle, John Clute, Jeff Noon. £25 reg; £12.50 supp, children, over-65s; £2 presupp discount. Contact 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

Rumblings ● **Bär-Con**, Worldcon bid for Berlin in 2003, emerged from its stupor at Intervention. ● **The Manchester Group** (FONF) has moved from the karaoke-infested Crown & Anchor pub to Wetherspoons (corner of Piccadilly Gdns, near railway station): 2nd & 4th Thur each month. ● **London** first-Thur meetings now seem settled at the Jubilee.

Infinitely Improbable

SF Classics: Hail & Farewell. The Fabbri Publishing/Brown Partworks sf partwork failed its market test in March: the first book-plus-mag fell short of the wished-for sales despite some TV promotion and Amazing Special Offers. Jo Bourne, project instigator, sobbingly reported vox-pop responses from the youngish target audience along the lines of 'Sounds good, but because of the kid[s] we don't have time to read books....' Jo is now moving to another partwork outfit, Eglemoss.

Dysacronymia. Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America decree—following a referendum—that the organization's initials are not the spluttery SFFWA but SFWA. (*Ansible Newsletter of Universal Skiffy* likes to be called just A.) They recently invited me to rejoin; unlike one J.M. Straczynski, I declined without actually throwing a public tantrum.

R.I.P. Martin Caidin (1927-1997) died of thyroid cancer on 24 March, aged 69. His 'bionic man' novel series beginning with *Cyborg* (1972) spawned the TV series whose title was an sf catchphrase, *The Six*

Million Dollar Man. • **Seth Goldberg**, US fan, Hugo administrator for three Worldcons and long-time Official Editor of FAPA, died in the night of 18/19 March from heart failure following a viral infection. He was only 44. • **Terry Nation**, creator of the Daleks for the second *Dr Who* storyline ('The Dead Planet', 1963), died on 9 March, aged 66.

Court Circular. A bemused *Rog Peyton* reports that legal action brought against him by *Dark Side* publishers Stray Cat Ltd (re payment for an ad published too late to be of use) was hastily dropped upon disclosure of the defence documents. Could this be because SC had cocked up by suing Rog personally, and not Andromeda Book Co Ltd?

C.O.A. **Sean Ellis** & **Tamasin Mallock**, 12 Queen's Lane, Upper Hale, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 0LU. **David Garnett**, Ferring Grange, Ferring Grange Gdns, Ferring, W.Sussex, BN12 5HS. ('West Grange' has become 'Ferring Grange', that's all.) **Marcus Bill**, 36 Magnolia Ct, Citrus Way, Salford, M6 5AN. **Ken Lake** is marrying Gillian Taylor this month and moving to her home: 46 Chestnut Ave, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, IG9 6EW. **Tom Perry**, 2268 NW 37th Place, Gainesville, FL 32605, USA. **David Stewart**, 43 Eglinton Rd, Donnybrook, Dublin 4, Ireland.

Random Fandom. **Henry Balen** grumbles about the Hugo form: 'An interesting advert was included with the ballot. A flyer for *Locus*. Maybe this is just a friendly reminder to fans not to forget placing this magazine's name on the enclosed ballot? [...] I did not see adverts for any other Hugo contenders enclosed with the ballot.' • **Jackie Causgrove** (Cincinnati fan, long-time partner of Dave Locke) 'has been diagnosed with lung cancer. She is currently home but will begin three weeks of radiation next week.' [RS] • **John Light** has issued *Light's List 1997*, tabulating (very briefly) over 1,100 small-press titles and addresses. £1.25 post free; 29 Longfield Rd, Tring, Herts, HP23 4DG. • **Bill Rotsler** has also been diagnosed with cancer—under his lip—and is beginning chemotherapy. • **Paul & Cas Skelton**, going through the late Brian Robinson's jumbled effects to sort out the books and fanzines he'd left to Worthy Fannish Causes, discovered what seemed to be a replica grenade. As ashen-faced, tight-lipped police later confirmed, it was real and live. • **Martin Tudor**, brooding on life's ironies, reports that the *Critical Wave* photocopy at last produces perfect, streak-free copies now that it's been released from the burden of doing *Critical Wave*....

Hazel's Language Lessons: Spanish. *cabrahigar*, to hang skewered figs on fig-trees for superstitious reasons. [ULG]

Births. **Paul Voermans** & **Fiona McHugh** report the impingement of Natalie Claire Louise Voermans, born 18 Feb.

Arg! Here is where *Fantasy Encyclopedia* editors shuffle embarrassedly. Gwyneth JONES's entry was cut at a late stage when pressure for space became extreme and writers whose fantasies were predominantly juveniles were tending to be dropped; the Curse of Gwyneth struck, however, because there's still a cross-reference to this non-article from GENDER. To universal horror, John Clute's emergency repair of the Alan GARNER piece (when *Strandloper* appeared in 1996) got lost in the works, leaving him saying that AG has been silent since 1980. Mike Ashley cringes at the discovery that his typo of a certain birthdate slipped past all the proofreaders (including me, dammit) to leave H.G. WELLS publishing *The Time Machine* at the ripe age of 9.... Oh dearie me.

FAAns. Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards were presented at Corflu: FAN ARTIST Ian Gunn (78 points ... Teddy Harvia 46, D.West 41); FAN WRITER Andy Hooper (87 pts ... D.Langford 42, David Levine 19); FANZINE *Apparatchik* (83 pts ... *Atritude* 53, *Mimosa* 42). [JM] Bear these broad hints in mind at Hugo voting time, which is real soon now.

Cult Connections. **Gregory Frost** writes: 'The recent mass suicide in Rancho Santa Fe, California, has induced me (at the urging of Michael Swanwick) to write you regarding my odd connection to an event that seems to have prompted that act—namely the discovery of the "companion" purportedly following the comet Hale-Bopp on its flyby. [See A116.] As is well-known by now, the cult was convinced (as are many UFO zipheads who weigh in on the internet) that the companion, discovered by amateur astronomer Charles Shramek, is an alien mothership, either preparing a mass invasion in the style of *Independence Day*, or a nice ship waiting to sweep up the souls of the 39 cult members. These conclusions were reached when some hapless fool in a position of authority claimed he could find nothing on the charts that corresponded to the object, which, if you see the photo in question, is

clearly and unquestionably a star. The UFO believers immediately shouted "government cover-up!" at this denial—even though the denial itself was supportive of their interpretation. It all turns out to be due to some very incomplete star chart being referenced, but never mind that. The UFOzOs had their mother ship and a denial of its reality by someone in power. It doesn't get better than that.

The thing is, Charles Shramek and I went to high school together. We occasionally cooked up batches of helium, filled dry cleaner bags with it, attached pie tins containing flares to the bottoms, then sent the bags off into the night. Immediately thereafter, we would call the local airport and report having sighted UFOs. Now and then, especially when other people saw our little flare balloons and called in, too, we made the local papers. Chuck is an inveterate prankster. He was also a ham radio operator, and deviously technological. I was on hand on one occasion when he ran his voice through a filter that made him sound like Zontar the Warp Master while he communicated with some glibbly ham radio operators elsewhere. Chuck had convinced a whole flock of them that he was a space alien from Venus. He told us one night that he had pulled a great prank on a neighbour who numbered among the believers by dressing all in black and wrapping his head in aluminum foil, then peering into the windows of the neighbor's house until the poor UFOzo spotted him, and tried to give chase. I believe Chuck had tied this into one of his ham radio communique, proving to the neighbour that the aliens had visited him. So when I discovered that the UFO dogging comet Hale-Bopp had been photographed by one Charles Shramek, and that this "discovery" was making a splash in national news, I had a lot of trouble sitting upright for awhile. After all, here was the only person I knew who'd ever tried smoking banana peels (it gave him a headache) pulling off a truly grandstand stunt.

That his jape convinced a bunch of—let's say, sadly demented—people in California that the awaited space aliens had finally come would be truly tragic if that were the sole motivation that had led them to this. In fact it was the appearance of the comet itself that was, as the cult put it on their web page, "the marker" they'd been awaiting, a signal that Earth is about to be "recycled"... and we all know what that means. Makes you want to scream out: "It's a cookbook!" I can't blame Shramek, unless we all agree to blame Whitley Strieber, Betty & Barney Hill, and every book-authoring half-wit psychotherapist who propounds that people *really* are being abducted and anally probed by alien visitors—all contributing to an atmosphere where unchecked lunacy reigns.

I'm not too worried about being recycled, either. At present I'm working on a book about 19th century American religious sects, and I have to tell you, the world has ended a lot of times before this. [29 Mar]

Intervention Grovels. **Gary Stratmann** conveys impassioned thanks to all stewards 'for tremendous work under very difficult circumstances.' **Chris Bell**, reeling from a special hotel liaison award at the closing ceremony, found on Tuesday that an Anonymous Benefactor had paid her hotel bill; she tearfully wishes to broadcast her eternal gratitude. *The BSFA Committee* felicitates chairbeing John Richards for his stentorian diplomacy in crying—once the BSFA Awards had been presented—'And now, back to reality!' **Dave Langford** thanks everyone in sight but has mislaid the lining of his throat (please return if found).

Chog's Hasterclass. 'When he sauntered into the squad room that bright mid-May morning, Detective Joe Slatterly raised the only other pair of eyebrows in the room, those of his partner Tom England.' (William T.Sampson, 'All in a Day's Work', *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, 4/97) [MMW] • 'Muffled through wood, and howl hooted in the distance, a swift surge and halt that thrilled her boneward. There was a message in that sound, a message that resonated and spread like the bloom of a bell. She couldn't hear it or she refused. But uprising from the earth, the palm-press she'd felt earlier closed on that sound in a precise mesh.' ... 'Love Bunny smiled and Katt noted that, pretty as she was, her teeth staled out of high pink gums.' (both Robert Devereaux, *Walking Wounded*, 1996) • **Flyers for The Gor Project** littered Eastercon: these drooled over plans for a John Norman-based colour magazine 'in the vein of Heavy Metal and the Savage Sword of Conan', resurrecting those literary wonders that were 'Blacklisted by the feminist movement in the late 1980's' and guaranteed to 'contain not only extremely graphic violence, but slavery, bondage and erotica, not to mention oppression, starvation, suffering and death.' Know your market.

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