

# Ansible



## Ansible 144 July 1999

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**ROOTS.** Another conflicting origin story for our barbarian critic Thog the Mighty! In *Imaginary Worlds* (1973) the late Lin Carter deplored Robert E. Howard's inept coining of fantasy names ... 'Thak, Thaug, Thog, Yog, Yara, Yogah, Zang, Zogar, Sag.' I confidently expect Tom Holt to set this catchy chorus to music.

### The Secret Galactics

**Douglas Adams** was grilled by Jeremy Paxman on Radio 4's *Start the Week* (21 Jun). In tones of loathing: 'You're not a *science fiction* writer, are you?' No, no, definitely not, said DA hastily. Blowing up Earth in *Hitch-Hiker* wasn't horrible old sf but Pythonesque excess, and writing all those strangely sf-like sequels and nonsequels was forced upon him by, presumably, artistically integritous need for the money. [JR]

**Lindsey Davis** turned up in Reading to promote her new Falco novel, and was gratified to be told (all right, by me) that this series is so often recommended by sf people. Being herself a Pratchett fan, she remarked on coming from the same generation as Terry P. and Douglas Adams, the last to have its imagination shaped more by radio than TV.... Steely-eyed classicist Hazel asked the tough question: what was her source for people striking matches in 1st-century Rome? Answer, very approximately: 'Oh God, I think I found it in Carcopino's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* but I don't trust it any more and I'm never going to mention those matches again!' She'd go down well at a convention (hint).

**Neil Gaiman** encountered the cutting edge of cyberspace during his UK *Stardust* signing tour last week: 'Did an AOL conference today at AOL headquarters in the former Pan offices in Cavaye Place. I had imagined T1 lines and huge banks of enormous computers, but wound up typing my replies on someone's laptop, and after the first reply it kicked me off, and I discovered we were dialling in off the laptop modem. Ah, the shattering of illusions.' [24 Jun]

**John Grant** is excitingly busy 'writing my scholarly essay for Gary Westfahl, who's guest-editing the millennial edition of *Extrapolation* and has foolishly commissioned me to rant for a couple of thousand words, complete with Panglossish footnotes like wot academics dig, on the evils of Generic Fantasy—including not just the written word but works by Simon R.Green.' JG was at that Sotheby's NY auction of the legendary Sam Moskowitz collection: 'Highlight was the sale of a Frank R.Paul painting for what is believed to be a record for a Paul: \$67,500. The major sale of the day, however, although the price was a comparatively modest \$23,000, was of a vast collection of letters, manuscripts and other papers belonging or relating to William Hope Hodgson.' [30 Jun]

**Stephen King** was hit by an out-of-control car while out walking on 19 June, and spent several hours undergoing surgery for 'orthopedic kinds of injuries', chiefly a broken leg. Next day he was reported as out of danger and cracking jokes with hospital staff. Apparently the driver who swerved on to the shoulder and hit King lost control thanks to the antics of a loose dog inside the car. [BB] No *Cujo* jokes, please.

**Kim Newman** joined the Clarke jury: 'I took the precaution of confirming with Paul Kincaid that there was, indeed, a "no award" option.'

**David Pringle** continues to be sighted in literature: 'Anerley became conscious suddenly that there was a pringling about his skin and an overpowering smell of burned hair under his nostrils.' (From 'The Three Correspondents' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.) [KN/DP]

**Robert Rankin** creatively quotes: 'Heinlein said, famously, that ninety-five per cent of all science fiction was rubbish, adding that ninety-five per cent of *everything* was rubbish.' (*Snuff Fiction*, 1999)

### Conexa

16-18 Jul • **Baroquon** (RPG), New Hall, Cambridge. GoH Mary Gentle. £18 reg. Contact 8 Saddler's Close, Baldock, Herts, SG7 6EP.

16-18 Jul • **Nexus** (media), Hilton National Hotel, Bristol. Contact (SAE) 1 Lullington Rd, Knowle, Bristol, BS4 2LH.

24-25 Jul • **Telefantastique 2** ('multi-media'), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. £45 reg. Rooms £50 single, £40 sharing. Contact (SAE) 38 Rochford Ave, Loughton, Essex, IG10 2BS.

27 Jul • **Cult Fiction Evening**, St John's Wood Library, 5:30-7:30pm. All welcome. Enquiries/suggestions: 0171 641 5087, fax 5089.

28 Jul • **BSFA Open Meeting**, Florence Nightingale pub, on York Rd/Westminster Bridge Rd roundabout. 7pm on; fans present c5pm.

30 Jul - 1 Aug • **Clarecraft Event** (Discworld), open air, Woolpit, Suffolk. With T.Pratchett and the usual suspects. £2.50/ticket to Discworld Collectors' Guild, Clarecraft, Woolpit Business Park, Woolpit, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP 30 9UP. Credit cards: fax 01359 242253.

13-15 Aug • **Wincon V** (Unicon), King Alfred's College, Winchester. Now £35 reg, same at door; £15 Sat or Sun only, £5 Fri. Contact 53 Havant Road, North End, Portsmouth, Hants, PO2 7HH.

28-30 Aug • **Shinnenkai** (anime), Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. £30 reg, £35 at door. Contact PO Box 110, Didcot, OX11 7YH.

2-6 Sep • **Aussiecon 3** (57th Worldcon), Melbourne, Australia. \$A250/£110 reg; *advance booking closes 31 Jul*. Contact GPO Box 1212K, Melbourne, 3001, Australia; (UK) Martin Hoare, 45 Tilehurst Rd, Reading, RG1 7TT.

**Rumblings** • **Worldcon 2002**. The Bay Area group, bidding for both San Francisco and San Jose, dropped the former bid in June when its main hotel was pre-empted by a firm booking from a non-fan event, making San Francisco definitively unusable. Thus the San Jose 'ConJose' bid is no longer opposed even by its own committee. [KS] (Yes, there's a spoof Roswell bid too, but ...) • **Incandescent** is a rumoured 2002 Eastercon bid involving an alleged Pat McMurray negotiating with an unnameable South Coast hotel. Did anyone mention Brighton? Oh, no one did.... • **Seccon Helpings**. Simon Bradshaw confesses: 'We are tentatively poking—still with a long bargepole—at the idea of Seccon II (almost inevitably to be known as "Second", I fear).'

### Infinitely Improbable

**Servants of the Wankh**. Mattel Inc is nervously making changes to the packaging of its Tarzan action figure since—as has been pointed out with appropriate Shock Horror noises—the spring-loaded arm can be pumped rapidly up and down from Tarzan's chest to below his loin cloth, a motion that some people call suggestive. Some people seem to have easily stimulated imaginations. Mattel's cunning response is to secure this lustful limb so it can't grope below waist level, at least while a still-boxed Tarzan is being tried out in a shop. Rampant suggestiveness remains OK in the privacy of the home. [PS]

**Random Fandom**. **Ron Bennett** is home again following his bypass op and stroke, and according to Mal Ashworth 'seems wonderfully well, to judge by the lively funny letter I had from him.' • **Anthony Brown**, erstwhile *SFX* reviews editor, has been called to higher things—or as our *SFX* mole put it, 'As for Anthony, he was fired after trying to strangle our other writer.' • **Bob Shaw's** last convention talk, at Intersection in 1995, turns out to have been videotaped by a fan (Andrew Anderson). Copies should reach fanhistorical repositories before long. • **Patricia & Rob Welbourn** announce a new daughter, Avery Elizabeth, born in early June. • **Ted White** fell off a low wall while doing some gardening last month, and broke his hip socket; he's been repaired with various metal pins, but will be out of circulation for a little while. [rb]

**Thog's SI Masterclass**. As an unfrocked physicist, your editor gaped at an 18 June *Daily Express* story on food contaminants, which gave quantities in 'new grams'. Light came some while after reading the explanation that a new gram is one millionth of a gram. (Think 'µg'.)

**R.I.P.** **Chris Boyce** (1943-1999) died on 29 June after a heart attack at work in Glasgow. He was only 55. Best known in sf for the prize-winning *Catchworld* (1975)—a pioneering novel about brain-computer interfaces leading to transcendence—he also wrote thrillers, reviewed sf, organized sf events and was popular with fans. Cuddles adds: 'Chris was a colourful, boisterous and entertaining man, who has supported Scottish fandom for as long as I remember.' In 1990 he founded the publishing company Dog and Bone Press with his wife Angela Mullane (to whom all sympathy) and Alasdair Gray. • **John Glashan** (1927-1999), well-loved cartoonist, died on 15 June. He often flirted with sf

themes, as in the quirky 'Genius' sequence that ran in the *Observer* mag from 1978—starring genius inventor Anode Enzyme, IQ 12,794. ('At present I'm working on an international language based on numbers—I got the idea in a Chinese restaurant...') ● *DeForest Kelly* (1920-1999), the actor best known as Dr McCoy in *Star Trek*, died on 11 June after a long illness. He was 79. ● *John Roles*, old-time Liverpool fan and rare-books dealer, was apparently strangled when he surprised an intruder at home on 24 June. His house/shop was set on fire; a 38-year-old man with a record of arson has since been charged with murder. [K/F/MA/DP] JR was the first chairman of the Liverpool fan group in 1951, and co-edited their fanzine *Space Diversions*, launched July 1952. Mal Ashworth writes: 'A fine fellow and a wonderful eccentric who served with the army in India and once published a wholly edible OMPazine.' He was 70. ● *Ray Russell* (1924-1999), long-time sf/horror author and *Playboy* editor (1954-75), died on 14 March aged 74, following a stroke. [SFC] He received 1991 World Fantasy and 1993 Bram Stoker awards for life achievement. ● *Jim Turner* (1945-1999), editor and publisher at Arkham House (1976-96) and then his own imprint Golden Gryphon Books, died from liver and colon cancer on 28 March; he was 54. [SFC] Michael Swanwick reminisces: 'Once, when I published a story that Jim didn't think very much of, he called me up to determine whether I knew what a piece of crap it was or else had lost the ability to write altogether. The good opinion of a man like that was worth having.'

**Small Press.** *I Think This Tram Turns Left* is Ken Slater's 1998 Polish trip report (A5, 20pp + covers), with photos: £3.50 to Ken at 23 Listers Rd, Upwell, Wisbech, PE14 9BW. 50p from each sale goes to Electrical Eggs. ● *Sierra Heaven* ed Alex Bardy has folded. [DB]

**Outraged Letters** ... *Joe McNally* grumbles about *eXistenZ*: 'The week it came out, I was less than thrilled to see that some of the print ads were carrying a quote from my *Bizarre* review ("It'll scare you out of your very eXistenZ!") which was (a) stupid, (b) not true, and (c) not actually in the original review, having been interpolated by a subeditor apparently annoyed at the lack of clunky and inaccurate soundbites in the piece as submitted.' ● *Kim Newman* adds to the meagre *A143* estimate of a certain sf/fantasy movie career: 'Dirk Bogarde also appeared in *Modesty Blaise*, *Providence* (with David Warner as a werewolf), and *Our Mother's House* (which, one suspects, Ian McEwan must have seen on television at an impressionable age); on television, he did *Blithe Spirit* and *The Vision* (near-future religious huckstering), and snippets of his performance in *The Blue Lamp* were used in the time travel satire *The Black and Blue Lamp*.' ● *Lawrence Schimel* blasphemously blurts, 'My story "Calvinism" was censored from the Spanish edition of my collection *The Drag Queen of Elfland* by the editor on the grounds of its being "too blasphemous".' However, it's to appear in Basque....

**C.o.A.** *Amanda Baker*, 23 Waterloo Gardens, Cardiff, CF23 5AA. *Gary Farber*, c/o Ailsa Murphy, 122A Englewood Ave #5, Brighton, MA 02135, USA. *Heidi Lyshol & Kjetill Gunnarson*, Smedsvingen 40, 1364 Hvalstad, Norway. *Ron Walotsky*, 3634 South Central Ave, Flagler Beach, Florida 32136, USA.

**Chog's Science Masterclass.** A chap breathes over-nitrogenated air, is then given oxygen (no pressure change), and ... 'Seven hundred and thirty-eight feet above sealevel in a forest in the Balkans, Ramada had just died of the bends.' A demonstration of how the Turin Shroud image was formed involves coating a small statue with 'a low grade isotope, newtonium' and holding it, by hand, above a test shroud ... whereupon a negative image of the thing rapidly begins to appear: 'The radiation heats and weakens the fabric on one side, creating an image. If I hold my statue here long enough, the cloth will turn dark. If I hold it higher, the image will be larger.' A radio message from underground suffers delays: '... the transmission bounced off the upper mantle and came back up through basalt that was folded. In short, the transmission was lost in stone for five weeks.' (all Jeff Long, *The Descent*, 1999)

**Still More Awards.** *Bram Stoker* (horror) winners ... NOVEL Stephen King, *Bag of Bones*. FIRST NOVEL Michael Marano, *Dawn Song*. LONG FICTION: Peter Straub, 'Mr Clubb and Mr Cuff'. SHORT Bruce Holland Rogers, 'The Dead Boy at Your Window' COLLECTION: John Shirley, *Black Butterflies: A Flock on the Dark Side*. ANTHOLOGY *Horrors! 365 Scary Stories*, ed Stefan Dziemianowicz, Martin H.Greenberg & Robert Weinberg. NON-FICTION *DarkEcho* (the first exclusively on-line Stoker winner), whose editor Paula Guran points out: 'best thing about the Stoker is that it's a nice looking thing. Unlike certain sci-fi awards it is neither phallic nor a chunk of plastic with glitter embedded in it, etc. You can leave it out for the neighbors to see and they'd never suspect...' FOR YOUNG READERS Nancy Etchemendy, 'Bigger Than Death'. SCREENPLAY (tie) Bill Condon, *Gods and Monsters*; Alex Proyas, *Dark*

*City*. ILLUSTRATED NARRATIVE, OTHER MEDIA both No Award. ● *Spectrum Awards* (new, for sf/fantasy/horror that's positive about gay matters) shortlist ... NOVEL Anne Harris, *Accidental Creatures*; Stephen Leigh, *Dark Water's Embrace*; Carolyn Ives Gilman, *Halfway Human*; Nancy Kress, *Maximum Light*; Fiona Patton, *The Painter Knight*. OTHER WORK *Bending the Landscape* ed Nicola Griffith & Stephen Pagel; *Gods and Monsters*; *Things Invisible to See* ed Lawrence Schimel. HALL OF FAME Maureen McHugh, *China Mountain Zhang*; Lawrence Schimel, *The Drag Queen of Elfland*; Toby Johnson, *Secret Matter*; Melissa Scott, *Shadow Man*; Lyn Paleo & Eric Garber, *Uranian Worlds*. [LS]

**The Dead Past.** 20 Years Ago ... under the headline 'Langford KOs Checkpoint in Grim Fan Struggle', Peter Roberts announced the coming demise of his famed UK fan newsletter at issue 100, to be replaced by some ghastly parvenu rag called *Ansible*. (*Checkpoint* 97, Jun/Jul 79)

**Back from Bosnia.** *Alison Freebairn* is safe home ... 'I did nothing useful or worthwhile in my life until this. Everything that I felt was important is ashes and sand. Aside from my family, and my much-loved friends, everything that was taking up my time is a pile of cack and I'm now working to sort my so-called life out. ● Bosnia is the most wonderful country, its Muslims are a strong, generous people who can shatter your heart with their steadfast kindness and indomitable belief. ● I got a tan. Can you believe that? I also thrived on travelling rough on the convoy, sleeping in the cab of the lorry getting a knee-to-hip bruise from the air brake—although I did average two showers a day (what's a girl to do?). ● I lost 98 per cent of my hang-ups, and I fell in love. ● Now I have to learn to live in the "real world" again. Your support will be appreciated as I work my way back into the nasty, self-obsessed Western culture. ● I plan to continue working with Edinburgh Direct Aid, with luck I'll manage one night a week at their warehouses, and plan to get back to Bosnia in the autumn. ● It is not possible for me to walk away. And I wouldn't want to walk away, even if I hadn't heard the bombs fall and the economy crack and the Kosovar refugee camp mafia bosses bitch about the quality of the aid we brought... ● Shit, I've followed a bucket lorry all the way across Europe and wriggled my way out of all kinds of trouble there and back. After this, there's nothing I can't do. Except go back to the life I once led.'

**Group Gropes.** *Sequitur Masterclass*: I was charmed by the Peterborough sf group newsletter's mention of their Gothic fans 'marking the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of local-born vampire John Haigh. Convicted of six murders, though he confessed to nine, his parents were Plymouth Brethren, as were Aleister Crowley's.' ● *Reading*: complex site balloting led to The Hop Leaf, Southampton St, being chosen as the latest venue for those 9pm Mon meetings that I never seem to get to. [EC]

**Incense and Insensibility** (12 Jun) was an academic sf conference at Liverpool U. *Bridget Wilkinson* reports: 'Academia is shoestrung country, so GoH Colin Greenland was fed and entertained along with me and Andy Sawyer by organizer Elliot Atkins (a former chef) in his student flat. I backed out before 10pm to get my bed at the youth hostel before it vanished; Elliot and Colin were just going to have a quick drink on the way to Colin's hotel.... The following day Colin turned up appropriately garbed in lime green silk shirt, psychedelic waistcoat, cute little hat, and the mother of all hangovers. Papers covered the 60s drugs culture, popular music, *The Prisoner*, *Illuminatus!*, Ballard, Moorcock, and PKD. Highlights included Andy Butler's paper "LSD, Ink Lies, and Lies, Inc.", and Brian Baker's alphabet of psychedelia—"The Nelson Mandala: London, Psychedelia, Apocalypse".'

**Chog's Masterclass.** Vienna, in that perfunctory way of hers, has sighed and spread her legs to be shagged by the winter solstice.' (*Adrian Mathews*, *Vienna Blood*, 1999) ● *Dept of It Grows On You*: 'She was the kind who grew up with suitors, had powerful men with roses on their knees before her ...' (*Pay Weldon*, 'Inside the Whale', 1999) [SP] ● 'Crane had slid into the ranks of Washington's elite—well, the semi-elite, the under-elite—like a gilded suppository.' (*Robert Charles Wilson*, *Darwinta*, 1998) [PB] ● 'She raised her eyebrows and stepped away from them, but not so far that she couldn't eavesdrop.' (*Jonathan Lethem*, *Amnesia Moon*, 1995) [EW] ● 'Down, Fido' Dept: 'His eye jumped to the chair where he'd been sitting.' (*Mark Frost*, *The 6 Messiahs*, 1995) [PB] ... 'Excitement leaped like a trout in the public trousers.' (*Thomas Harris*, *Hannibal*, 1999) [LG]

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