

Ansible



Ansible 153 April 2000

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU, UK. Fax **0705 080 1534**. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.co.uk. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Sue Mason** (for TAFF!). Available for SAE or the secret of the old custard.

NONSEQUITUR. John Wyndham's apotheosis in Penguin Classics reminded me of an unlikely title from e-mail.... 'The Finnegan Wakes: The disturbing, incest-haunted, cyclical dream of a huge drunken sea-monster is related, using a variety of multi-lingual puns.' [GA via BF]

Elephant with Wooden Leg

Brian Aldiss will become the latest SFWA Grand Master in May.

Neil Gaiman feels grumpy: 'I was surprised to discover from yesterday's *Mirror* [18 March] that I'm meant to have accused J.K. Rowling of ripping off Tim Hunter from *Books of Magic* for *Harry Potter*. Simply isn't true—and now it's on the public record it'll follow me around forever. • Back in November I was tracked down by a *Scotsman* journalist who had noticed the similarities between my Tim Hunter character and Harry Potter, and wanted a story. I disappointed him by explaining that, no, I certainly *didn't* believe that Rowling had ripped off *Books of Magic*, that I doubted she'd read it and that it wouldn't matter if she had: I wasn't the first writer to create a young magician with potential, nor was Rowling the first to send one to school. (The only mild bother was that in the *Books of Magic* movie Warners is planning, Tim Hunter can no longer be a bespectacled, 12 year old English kid. But given the movie world I'll just be pleased if he's not played by a middle-aged large-muscled Austrian.) Not sure how this transmuted into "Gaiman has accused Rowling of ripping him off." I suppose it's a better story than "Gaiman doesn't accuse Rowling of ripping him off."

Richard Matheson is this year's International Horror Guild Living Legend Award winner—roughly equivalent to SFWA Grand Master. [D]

Philip Pullman found that the Amazon.com page for his upcoming fantasy included a message supposedly from himself: 'Trully my best piece of work. / Good day to all my readers, I never new I had so many who admired my novels so dearly. I am so sorry to all my readers v ho are waiting for Amber Spyglass to come out ...' Pullman: 'Close textual analysis seemed to cast a doubt over the authorship of this.'

J.K. Rowling is responsible for an exciting breakthrough in virtual publishing: 'Stocks of the fourth [Harry Potter] novel which Rowling has yet to finish writing have already sold out on the website of internet bookseller Amazon.' (*Manchester Metro News*, 8 March) [MH]

Michael Swanwick longs to become the Simon R.Green of *Ansible* self-promotion: 'Since I'd broken my toe a week before, I was hobbling around Boskone on a cane happily clutching a brand-new copy of the NESFA festschrift, *Moon Dogs*, and another of *Puck Aleshire's Abecedary*, the chapbook of the short-shorts I ran in *NYRSF*. Pointing out to anyone who would listen that these were only *half* the collections I'd have out this year. Marianne said to me, "You know, you've got the makings of a good murder mystery here." And when I asked How so, she said, "Tomorrow morning when you're found beaten to death with your own cane and the detective asks who had a motive to kill you, every writer in the hotel is going to raise his hand and shout, 'Me! Me!'"

Concatervate

14 Apr - 1 Jul • **Dan Dare** 50th anniversary exhibition, Atkinson Art Gallery, Lord St, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 1DB. £2.50 admission.

21-24 Apr • **2Kon** (51st Eastercon), Central Hotel, Glasgow. *Advance booking now closed*. £35 at door. Day rates, extending to 10am next morning: Sat or Sun £18, Fri or Mon £12, evenings (from 6pm; not Mon) £8. Contact 30 Woodburn Terrace, St Andrews, KY16 8BA. Last-minute rooms: try the Glasgow Tourist Board, 0990 992244.

22-23 Apr • **Comics 2000**, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. Tickets £3 'browser' (dealers/exhibits), £6 'fanboy' (same plus programme, with exceptions), £25 'superpass' (all events except Eagle Awards meal). Contact (SAE) PO Box 48, Clevedon, Bristol BS21 7LQ; 0117 924 4655.

26 Apr • **BSFA Open Meeting**, Florence Nightingale, on York Rd/Westminster Bridge Rd roundabout. 7pm on. With Tricia Sullivan.

28 Apr - 1 May • **AD 2000** (*Trek*), Palace Hotel, Manchester. £55 reg. Contact (SAE) Sector 14, PO Box 3870, Troon, Scotland, KA10 7PZ.

29-30 Apr • **Unconvention** (Fortean), Commonwealth Inst, Ke ns-

ington High St, London. £25 reg or £15/day, now at the door only.

26-9 May • **plokta.con**, Holiday Inn, Leicester. £20 reg (kids £10) to 15 May, £30 at door. Contact 3 York St, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9QH. Room bookings to hotel by 30 April: 0116 2531161, fax 2513169.

28-31 Jul • **Millenicon Hand & Shrimp** (Discworld 3), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow: **CANCELLED**. The committee blames members for not 'joining in the spirit of the event' by booking hotel rooms. Only 15% had booked by mid-March; the hotel deal needed lots more. Refunds promised. Contact PO Box 189, Patchway, Bristol, BS32 8YE.

28-30 Jul • **Clarecraft Event**, Warren Farm, Wetherden, Suffolk, replacing the cancelled MH&S as above. GoH T.Pratchett, S.Briggs, more TBA. £5 reg, in advance only. Contact The Collectors' Guild, Unit 1a, Woolpit Business Park, Woolpit, Suffolk, IP30 9UP. 01359 244462.

21-22 Oct • **Octocon 2000**, Royal Dublin Hotel, O'Connell St, Dublin. GoH announced: Michael Marshall Smith. Corrected sterling rates: £13 full, £11 junior, or £5 supp to Dave Lally No.2 A/C, 64 Richborne Tce, London, SW8 1AX. *These rates rise after Eastercon*.

30 Aug - 3 Sep 01 • **The Millennium Philcon** (59th worldcon), Philadelphia. \$135 reg, rising to \$145 on 30 April. For 2001 site selection voters: \$70 rising to \$90. (Paid presupporters deduct \$10 from all figures.) Contact PO Box 310, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006-0310, USA.

Rumblings • **Worldcon in Japan?** A bid for 2005 or 2006 is in the air, with an official announcement expected before long. [F770]

Infinitely Improbable

Publishers and Sinners. Paper Tiger editor *John Grant* preferred not to comment on the catalogue of their US distributor Sterling, which lists the imprint's top megastar artists as Boris Vallejo and John Grant. • *Winchell Dredge*, master of sensitive character descriptions for *Wild Rampage Wrestling* ('And then, as though to show his true nature, his eyes turn up to show just white, and a demonic tongue snakes out of his mouth.') was outed in the 29 Feb *Washington Post* as a pseudonym of sf author David Bischoff. Many *Rampage* writers are 'moonlighting horror and sci-fi scribes'; the (then) editor was Scott Edelman. [MMW]

Awards. *James Tiptree Award*: Suzy M.Charnas, *The Conqueror's Child*. • *Nebulas*, 2000 novel shortlist: Octavia E.Butler, *Parable of the Talents*; Ken MacLeod, *The Cassini Division*; George R.R.Martin, *A Clash of Kings*; Maureen F.McHugh, *Mission Child*; Sean Stewart, *Mockingbird*; Vernor Vinge, *A Deepness in the Sky*. Winner to be announced late May.

Adelaide Festivalballs. *Yvonne Rousseau* liked one fantasy reading, thus: *Elizabeth Knox* reads from *The Vintner's Luck*, frequently mentioning the angel Xas. Introducer *James Griffin*: 'I'm sure that many of us reading *The Vintner's Luck* would like to know: how do you pronounce the name spelt X-A-S? *Elizabeth Knox* (exactly as before): 'Xas.'

Small Press. *Gnawing Medusa's Flesh* is Steve Sneyd's overview of Robert (Hawkwind) Calvert's sf poetry, with bio-biblio-discography. £3.49 or \$7 from 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD5 8PB.

• *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* ed. Andrew M.Butler, Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn is another SF Foundation benefit volume, collecting new critical essays about Mr Discworld. Out by May, with luck; £10 from the SFF c/o 22 Addington Rd, Reading, RG1 5PT. • *Big Engine*, Ben Jeapes's small press, launches with horror novels by Chris Amies and Gus Smith, a new *Interzone* anthology, and reissues of B. Stableford's *Hooded Swan* series (omnibus) and D.Langford's infamous *The Leaky Establishment*. • *TWK (The Wizard's Knob): The Terry Pratchett Magazine* has reportedly died.

FAAns. Fanzine Activity Achievement awards announced at Corflu: BEST NEW FAN OF 2000 Yvonne Rowse. FAN ARTIST D.West. FANWRITER Christina Lake. FANZINE *Trap Door*. No.1 FAN FACE Christina Lake.

R.I.P. *Gary Avedikian* (1914-2000), *Avedon Carol's* father and a provider of hospitality to countless fans visiting Maryland (including me and Hazel), died on 27 March aged 86. • *Mary Brown* (1929-1999), UK author whose fantasy debut was *The Unlikely Ones* (1986), died on 20 December; she was 70. [SFC] • *John Colicos*, actor unfortunately best known for playing *Battlestar Galactica's* villain, died in Toronto on 6

March. He was 71. [SH] *Alex Comfort* (1920-2000) died on 26 March at age 80; most famous for *The Joy of Sex*, he also wrote some satirical sf, such as *Come Out To Play* (1961). • *Martin Davis* (1942-2000), once involved in *Prisoner* production, and a member of esoteric Dave Fandom as 'Dave Syrup', died on 8 March—his 58th birthday. [G] • *David Duncan* (1913-1999), US author/screenwriter best known for *Occam's Razor* (1957), died on 27 December aged 86. [SFC] • *Gerald A. Facey* (1919-1999), British artist who painted until the early 1990s, died last Spring. Steve Holland credits him with 'those atrocious covers to the early Spencer magazines (*Futuristic Science Stories*, *Wonders of the Spaceways*, etc.) and covers for the boys' mag/comic *Tarzan Adventures*.' • *Charles Gray*, British actor known for Hammer movies, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* narration and playing Blofeld in *Diamonds Are Forever*, died in London on 7 March; he was 71. [BB] • *Roger Erskine Longrigg* (1929-2000), multi-pseudonymed UK author who wrote supernatural horror as Domini Taylor, died 26 February aged 70. [BB] • *Sture Lönnerstrand* (1919-1999), the first modern Swedish sf author and the father of Swedish fandom, died on 30 September 1999 aged 80. [JHH]

Chog's Genetics Masterclass. Conversation between three astronauts: "The difference between human and ape DNA is less than three percent!" "Yes, but that's the difference between us—and Einstein!" "Or ... *Jack the Ripper*." (*Mission to Mars* movie, 2000) [MMW]

C.o.A. *John D. Berry & Eileen Gunn*, 232 Winfield St, San Francisco, CA 94110, USA. *Mike & Diana Glycer* (PO Box likely to close), 705 Valley View, Monrovia, CA 91016, USA. *Lucy Huntzinger & John Bartelt*, 473 Linden Ave, San Bruno, CA 94066, USA. *Murray & Natalie MacLachlan*, 39 Park Rd, Middle Park, Melbourne, Vic 3206, Australia. *Ailsa Murphy* (soon to be Ailsa C.Ek), 290 Quarry St, Quincy, MA 02169, USA (from 14 Apr). *Robert Sneddon*, Flat 1F1, 34 Haymarket Tce, Edinburgh, EH12 5JZ. *Alan Woodford*, 2 Old Port Close, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 7XN.

Outraged Letters. *Michael & Jeri Bishop* confirm last issue's belated 18/8/99 end-of-the-world prediction: 'Criswell was correct. On August 18, 1999, our granddaughter Annabel English Loftin was born in Athens, Georgia, and the world as we previously knew it ceased to exist. An amazing prediction.' • *Dave Clark* on *Supernova*: 'It's the first film to sport the new directors' pseudonym, when a director disavows a film where control was taken away. Walter Hill was director, but "Thomas Lee" is credited. "Lee" replaces "Alan Smithee", which got too much attention with *An Alan Smithee Film: Burn Hollywood Burn* in 1997.' • *Bob Devney* on L.Ron Hubbard's birthday, 13 Mar: 'We usually bake a cake, synthesize a religion, and dash off, oh, say, 60,000 words in the evening to celebrate.' • *Alastair Reynolds* watched *University Challenge* (3 Apr) and was stunned by 'the once-in-a-lifetime experience of Jeremy Paxman attempting to pronounce "Gardner Dozois" ...'

Fanfundery. *DUFF*: the northbound race from Australasia to Chicon 2000 is on, with candidates Susan Batho and Cathy Cupitt. Voting closes 30 April. [JG] • *TAFF* near-final reminder: voting closes 6 May.

The Horror! The Horror! International Horror Guild award novel nominations: *NOVEL* Jonathan Aycliffe, *The Talisman*; Richard Bowes, *Minions of the Moon*; Kim Newman, *Seven Stars* (in *Dark Detectives*); Stewart O'Nan, *A Prayer for the Dying*; Peter Straub, *Mr.X*. **FIRST NOVEL** Michael Cisco, *The Divinity Student*; Fred Durbin, *Dragonfly*; Paul Griner, *Collectors*; China Miéville, *King Rat*; J.G. Passarella, *Wither*.

How To Campaign For Awards. Expert manipulator *Lawrence Person* commends Baen Books for mailing novels at lowest US book rate three weeks before the Hugo deadline, with mangled and incomplete copies of the Hugo ballot; Bantam for a 1 March package aimed to sway preliminary Nebula balloting, which closed on 23 February; and *Amazing* for an envelope with the promoted story not actually enclosed.

Group Gropes. NW Kent SF Society (Phoenicians) meets 13 Apr, 8.30pm, in The Duke, Bexley Rd (midway between Barnehurst and Erith Stations) with overseas pro guests Mandics Gyorgy (Hungary), Antuza Genescu (Romania) and Roberto Quaglia (Italy). [JC]

Chog's Masterclass. 'His wasn't actually a handsome face: without animation, the harsh planes looked uncompromising, the nose prominent, jutting out from a wide and high brow.' (Anne McCaffrey, *The Rowan*, 1990) [BA] • *Dept of Visual Acuity*: 'He saw the bullets coming from the other man's gun.' (Petru Popescu, *Almost Adam*, 1996) [AK] • *Dept of Psychic Entendre*. Psychic detective Elaine goes into trance state when helping the police: "You were describing the two in bed," he said. "Please continue." / Elaine looked at him a moment, as if deciding whether she wanted to or not. "It's hard going in and out like this," she said.' (Robert K. Wilcox, *Fatal Glimpse*, 1981) [PB] • *Dept of Relativity*: 'She ducked at the thunder like some stone-age primitive, counting off the seconds until lightning flared as she tried to work out how far away

the storm was.' (Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *reMix*, 1999) [TF] 'The creatures flew over the seas at an altitude of almost a kilometre, yet their bony heads were on the ocean and not each other ...' (Jack Chalker, *The Sea Is Full of Stars*, 1999) [RH] • *Dept of Alternate Mathematics*: '... if the entire world were to become a police state obsessed with recovering old secrets, then vast resources might be thrown at the problem of factoring large prime numbers.' (Neal Stephenson, *Cryptonomicon*, 1999) [JF]

John Sladek, 1937-2000

John Sladek died on 10 March. He was only 62. John Clute writes:

It is possible to hear the voice of John Sladek describing the career of John Sladek. The voice is slightly husky, hums and haws as it awaits a moment of inspiration from its owner, then lifts suddenly above its American prairie twang as something extremely hilarious comes down the line. It would be (I will not try to sound like John in full flow, he was too funny and too savage and too sad to be copied) a joke, sometimes a very great joke.

—Oh, yeah (he could be imagined saying), I remember John Sladek. He was the guy who called his first acknowledged novel *The Reproductive System*, and it wasn't non-fiction. He was the guy who brought out his second with a different firm, and called it *The Müller-Fokker Effect*, and it wasn't ever bought because nobody ever dared try to pronounce it at W.H. Smith's. He was the guy whose masterpiece, *Roderick*, was too big to go into one volume, so his publisher released it in two vols, the first hardback, the second, three years later, mass market paperback: demolished, disappeared, invisible. This is the novel David Hartwell of Timescape Books published the first two thirds of volume one of in the States, as a pb original to be completed in two further instalments—just before Timescape became an ex-desk at Simon and Schuster, which was all the American market got to see of *Roderick*.

—Oh, yeah (he might have continued), I remember John Sladek. He was the guy who published two detective novels, starring series detective Thackeray Phin, with different publishers. He was the guy who published some of the greatest and funniest and most melancholy short stories of the latter years of the 20th century in three mass market paperbacks with titles like *Keep the Giraffe Burning*. He was the guy who wrote about Scientology in *The New Apocrypha* and the insolent praetorians of The LRON whupped his ass for talking out of turn. He was the guy who collaborated with Tom Disch on a novel called *Black Alice*—and guess what they called themselves? Thom Demijohn. *Bestseller written all over that one!* He was the guy who wrote (as James Vogh) a 'nonfiction' spoof called *Arachne Rising: the Thirteenth Sign of the Zodiac*, and for the first time in his life his readers believed him.

John Sladek was an endomorph, short, sometimes overweight, congenial, lazy-seeming; but capable (like all endomorphs) of somehow managing to do far more work than ever seems possible. He wrote 24 books over the course of a career that began in the late 1960s and ended, as far as the publishing world was concerned, about 1990. He was born in Iowa, raised in Minneapolis, moved to Europe about 1965, did *New Worlds* stuff, lived for a while with Pamela Zoline and Tom Disch in the flat that (personal note) Judith Clute and I moved into in 1969, married Pamela Sladek in London, where he stayed (latterly in Swiss Cottage and Tottenham Hale) until 1986 when the marriage broke down and he returned to Minneapolis. They had a daughter, Dorothea. They all remained close. He met Sandra Gunter in 1994, they married, his last years were happy.

It must be said that although the world defeated him several times, he was a collaborator. It should also be said that, with all the complications of what I think must be described as genius, he had a pretty good life. He loved (in particular) women. He knew for a long time he was not going to make old bones—the progressive lung condition he died of was hereditary. He knew he would never be properly recognized in his lifetime for the terrifying default rightness of his vision of America, and he certainly knew as well that his two decades in England had given him no saving alternate vision, either in the life or in the work—but he must (surely, surely) have suspected that those who knew his work, and therefore loved him, would become more numerous. He must have known that some of us thought he made sense of things.

His dying puts a period to some of the meaning of the world.

Ansible 153 © Dave Langford, 2000. Thanks to Garrick Alder, Brian Ameringen, Paul Barnett, Barbara Barrett, DarkEcho, Jón Fairbairn, File 770, Tony Finch, Gamma, Janice Gelb, Steve Green, Rob Hansen, Paul Hood, Steve Holland, John-Henri Holmberg, Mike Hubbard, Amanda Kear, Bob Rickard, SF Chronicle, Martin Morse Wooster, and our Hero Distributors: Janice Murray (NA), SCIS, Alan Stewart (Oz), Brum Group News. 6 Apr 00