

Ansible



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CORRIDORS OF POWER. Hordes of children's writers attended a 10 Downing Street reception on 2 December. Various Blair offspring were glimpsed, and Tony B. himself assured the massed literati that they did valuable work and that this was a great responsibility, at which a voice behind Diana Wynne Jones growled 'Yes, we know.' Diana's sightings included Peter Dickinson, Philippa Pearce and the inescapable Terry Pratchett. Her usual attendant disasters were the failure of No.10's electronic door-opener ('The polite policeman said, "I think you'll have to knock at the door, madam."'), a canapé accident ('I took a rice thing from one of the small ladies and it came open and rice went all up my sleeve, like gummy little beetles.') and momentary panic when the knob fell off the bolt in the ladies' loo. Only *Ansible* brings you the facts.

The Caltraps of Time

Paul Barnett/John Grant, man of many pseudonyms, extends his range: 'A little kids' book (both senses of "little kids", in fact) on robots that I did a quick rewrite job on in the Spring is now to be published, according to the publisher, under my name rather than that of the guy who "wrote" the original. Aaargh, no, was my response; you can do it as an Eve Devereux if you want, though. Not so keen on that, they said: for a subject like robots we'd sexistly prefer a man's name (this from a female editor, no less). After much wrangling, the terrifying outcome is that 'the principal narrator of my novel *The Truth About the Flaming Ghoulies* is to publish his very first book: yup, they went for Dirk Somers Knight, completely failing to notice any pun at all...'

John Cleese is reportedly writing a new 96-page Superman comic, to be called *True Brit*. One hotly unrumoured possibility is that thanks to the impish spells of Mr Mxyzptik, Superman will find himself resistlessly compelled—even while fighting crime—to do the silly walk.

Diana Wynne Jones discovers her roots: 'I recently got sent a set of academic essays on my books, published as a slim volume and full of the most extraordinary statements. My favourite is the assertion that I am "rooted in fluidity". Obviously hydroponic, probably a lettuce, possibly a cabbage. A new light is cast.'

Mike Moorcock plugs Poul Anderson at the expense of some other guy: 'Just reviewed *The Broken Sword* for the *Guardian*, partly to answer H[umphrey] Carpenter's assertion that before Tolky there was nothing like it. My argument is that after *Broken Sword*, Tolky seemed tame.'

Terry Pratchett has had many unexpected literary accolades in his time, but I think Michael Dirda's rave review of *Night Watch* in the *Washington Post* is the first that compares him with Chaucer. 'When that Discworldle with his shoures sote ...' [CS]

Margaret Weis, interviewed by *SF Weekly*, brags about her innovative fantasy worldbuilding. Apart from lots of dragons, 'It is a kind of atypical fantasy world in that there are just humans. No elves, no dwarves—at least not yet.' [CA] Always keep something in reserve, eh?

Connixation

9 Dec • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, CANCELLED Dec and Jan. May then move from second Monday to second Tuesday of the month.

13 Dec • **British Fantasy Society Xmas Open Night**, upstairs, Princess Louise pub, Holborn, London. 6:30pm onward. All welcome. Ben Jeapes of Big Edge and *3SF* editor Liz Holliday are guests.

14 Dec • **J.G. Ballard & Iain Sinclair** in conversation on film, ICA Cinema 1, London. 7:15pm. £8 admission, concessions £7, members £6. The ICA describes Iain Sinclair as 'author of *Crash*, a BFI Modern Classic ... presumably his book about Cronenberg's film of Ballard's novel.' [PT]

19 Dec • **London Xmas Meet**, Silver Cross, Whitehall. 5pm on.

25 Dec • **BSFA Open Meeting** is CANCELLED, as usual in December.

25 Dec • **Mae Naak** (opera), Bangkok. If you're at a loose end on this date—as who isn't?—S.P.Somtow has a proposition: 'Somtow's horror opera, *Mae Naak*, opens in Bangkok on December 25 with an stellar cast headed by Nancy Yuen who drops in to create the title role just before going off to England for a repeat of her celebrated Albert Hall *Butterfly*. About 250 performers, a wild *avant-garde* production

design by Sumet Jumsai (who built the infamous "Robot Building" in Bangkok, mentioned in the *Guinness Book of Records*) and mucho grand guignol coupled with a lyrical score that pulls out all the late-Romantic stops. It runs for five performances. • So, last time a Somtow opera opened in Bangkok, *Opera Now* in London called it "one of the operatic events of the year". Royalty came to every performance, including the Crown Prince of Belgium. About 50 friends flew all the way from the US for the premiere because of a special deal he was able to get, so this was almost a mini-convention with an operatic twist. This year, the Bangkok Opera offers a similar package: 4 nights in a deluxe hotel, tickets to the Royal Command Gala including private reception in the presence of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana, and many other perks, for US \$350. [...] Just send email to bangkokopera@aol.com and someone will email you back with all the arrangements...'

27-8 Sep 03 • **Phoenix Convention (P-Con)**, Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin 8. Another alternative to the cancelled Octocon 03. €20 reg to 7 Jan, €25 to 21 Apr, €30 thereafter, €35 at door; €10 supp. Contact: Yellow Brick Road, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland.

21-23 Feb 03 • **Redemption (B5/B7)**, Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent. Additional guests Tanith Lee, Mike Collins. £50 reg; £55 at door. Day: £30, £35 at door. Children £15 or £10/day. Contact 26 King's Meadow View, Wetherby, LS22 7FX.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. 'There are more nutters on the road than at a Star Trek Convention.' (Quentin Wilson, *Britain's Worst Driver*, C5) [SG]

Still More Awards. *Whitbread Prize*: yet again this literary award lists genre material in its children's category. Shortlist: Julie Bertagna, *Exodus*; Hilary McKay, *Saffy's Angel*; Celia Rees, *Sorceress*; Philip Reeve, *Mortal Engines*. Both *Exodus* and *Mortal Engines* are sf. [FM] • **National Book Award** (US): Nancy Farmer won the Young People's Literature category with her sf novel *The House of the Scorpion*.

Publishers and Sinners. Just to confuse us all, Tor Books UK is launching in March 2003 as an sf/fantasy imprint of Pan Macmillan.

R.I.P. *Mal Ashworth*, UK fan since the 1950s, died in an Otley pub on 27 November; he was 69 and for years had suffered heart problems which kept him from conventions. [IS/DW] Mal's chief fanzines were *Bern* (1954-59) and *Rot* (1955-63), the latter briefly revived in 1984. He continued to write exuberant articles and letters for other fanzines (and sent *Ansible* a cheery postcard in mid-October). All sympathy to Mal's wife Hazel, herself a major 1980s fanzine publisher with *Lip*. Dave Wood writes: 'Mal was a lifelong friend and will be sorely missed. For fifty years we have bounced in and out of each others lives, sometimes months or years passing without contact but when we did it was as if we were continuing a conversation from the previous day... There are many more things that could be said about Mal, including his wonderful fan writings, his quirky sense of humour, his encyclopaedic knowledge of beers. Then of course there was his secret life as a filthy pro—back in the 50s he had a story accepted by *Red Star Weekly* (or was it *Silver Star Weekly*?) a wimmin's pulp magazine...'. • *Hilary Bader*, Emmy-winning US comics and TV scriptwriter who wrote for *Star Trek: TNG*, *ST: Voyager*, *Xena* and other genre series, died from cancer on 7 November; she was 50. [PB] • *James Coburn* (1928-2002), Oscar-winning US actor whose sf films were *The President's Analyst* (1967) and *Looker* (1981), died at age 74 on 19 November, following a heart attack. [SG] • *Bert Granet*, the US TV producer responsible for *The Twilight Zone*, died on 15 November aged 92. [L] • *Jerry Sohl* (1913-2002), US sf author and TV scriptwriter, died on 4 November aged 88. His first sf story (in *Galaxy*) and his debut sf novel *The Haploids* both appeared in 1952; he later wrote for *The Twilight Zone* and *Star Trek*. • *Lionel Trippett* (1935-2002), CND campaigner who in the 1970s was a London sf editor, died on 31 July; he was 66. David Garnett remembers him as 'one of the first book editors to go to a convention. I first met him in Worcester at Eastercon in 1971, by which time he'd read and liked the script of my third novel (*Time in Eclipse*) but he couldn't

publish it because Arrow didn't do paperback originals. (Back in olden times, few publishers did.) But if I could find a hardback publisher, Lionel would take the paperback rights for £250. This was why I started selling to Robert Hale—and they beat Arrow down to £200. Half to me, half to them. (Chris Foss was paid £250 for the cover when, in 1976, Arrow did the paperback edition.) By then, Lionel had moved on to Mayflower. The only other things I persuaded him to publish were a couple of Avram Davidsons. (*The Island Under the Earth* and *The Phoenix and the Mirror*, both 1975, Mayflower.)

Utopiales, France. *Andy Sawyer* braved the apocalypse: 'According to the December *Fortean Times* the "Neo-Phare" sect, based in Nantes and headed by someone called Arnaud Mussy, predicted that "Nantes will be consumed by the apocalypse on 24 October. All life will cease and the Earth will be invaded by flying saucers carrying 'beings of light.'" I can confirm that this didn't actually happen. The only invasion I noticed while there for the 2002 Utopiales sf festival included the customary disreputable crew of usual suspects, some of whom may have been beings of light in the guise of Samuel R. Delany, Brian Aldiss, James Morrow, K.W. Jeter, David Brin, Rob Holdstock, Chris Priest, Terry Bisson, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Liz Williams, Alasdair Gray [*who we hear was removed unconscious from the bar each night*], and Norman Spinrad. Robert Silverberg won the Prix Utopia. Jamil Nasir won Best Foreign Novel for *Tower of Dreams*. Graham Joyce won Best Foreign Short Story for "Leningrad Nights". Rob Holdstock won a special award for the new French edition of *Mythago Wood*, and another Brit success was Andrew Parkinson's "Mike Leigh zombie film" *Dead Creatures*, which won an award whose name I can't translate but which I think is sponsored by cinema chains. • Shame about the missed apocalypse. Perhaps we were having such a good time that we never noticed!

Random Fandom. *Justin Ackroyd's* Slow Glass sf bookshop in Melbourne closed for the last time on 26 October; sales continue by mail order and on line at <http://www.slowglass.com.au/>. • *Andrew A. Adams* 'has just stepped down from the Interaction committee due to the pressure of his personal and professional commitments.' [PT] • *Paul Cornell's* 42nd and final *SFX* column appeared in the Dec 2002 issue: 'Having an epiphany every four weeks was starting to break my concentration too much.' Hey, I'll have you know that I just had my 101st and ... er, what was I saying? • *Peter Darby* was momentarily excited by e-mail from the Sci-Fi Channel, 'offering me the opportunity to "get Taken on your desktop." Sadly, they're probably just referring to the new Spielberg mini-series.' • *Kurt Erichsen* won the 2002 Rotsler Award for fanzine artwork. The award was established in 1998 as a memorial to the late great Bill Rotsler. [MG] • *Michelle 'Cuddles' Drayton-Harold*, 'gave birth today [1 December]. Xavier Tarot & Xanthe Tegan were born 7 weeks early. Although in incubators they are doing fine and breathing without any assistance.' • *Linda Krawecka* is doing sponsored walks for Cancer Research 'in utter gratitude for just being alive and well' following her recent breast cancer diagnosis and mastectomy: 'All post-op checks have given me the all clear.' • *Damien Warman* also had bad news: 'Continuing in my effort to emulate John Foyster in all things, I have arranged to be diagnosed with cancer. However, my aim being less than accurate, I have ended up (ho ho) with cancer of the bum rather than cancer of the head.' Surgery on 15 November successfully removed a rectal adenocarcinoma, and after highly encouraging biopsy reports Damien was allowed home on the 21st. Get well soon.

Copyrights and Wrongs. Emily Somma, a Canadian author, has published a distant sequel to *Peter Pan* using some of the original Sir James Barrie characters. This is fine in Canada, where Barrie's work entered the public domain 50 years after his death in 1937. The same should apply in the USA, but Great Ormond Street Hospital—granted the *Peter Pan* copyright in perpetuity by Parliament—is unhappy. Its New York lawyers have demanded that Somma cease and desist, which cuts little ice in Canada, and are attempting to block distribution of her *After The Rain: A New Adventure for Peter Pan* in the United States, where certain Hollywood interests are on the hospital's side.... [LP]

Fanfundery. *TransAtlantic Fan Fund*. The 2003 eastbound TAFF race is on, with a healthy slate of four candidates: Randy Byers, Colin Hinz, 'Orange' Mike Lowrey, and Curt Phillips. The winner travels to Seacon '03, the UK Eastercon. Ballots available by request from *Ansible*, or on line at <http://home.attbi.com/~vmgonzalez/taff.html>. This race allows on-line voting too—a TAFF first. Voting closes 10 February.

Outraged Letters. *Paul Barnett* has been banging his head against the wall since the Associated Press report of a new movie (rated PG-13 despite an already-famous view of George Clooney's bare bottom): '*Solaris*, based on the novel by Stanislaw Lem, stars Clooney as a

widowed astronaut forced to deal with his grief in space. It's a remake of a 1972 Russian film.' Paul grumbles: 'Yes, and *West Side Story* is a rewrite of a 16th-century play.' • *Matthew Davis* warmed the cockles of my heart: 'I was working in a public library earlier this year.... One day I was trying to find a paperback that had a request on it in the children's section, which is organized supposedly by age ranges. Guess what I found in the paperback carousel "G-M" for ages 8-12? Yes, that classic of children's literature *The Leaky Establishment*. I changed the details on the catalogue, but it had been out at least twice, if I remember, so at that rate it shouldn't take long for the cheque in author's rights to pay for the stamp to send the cheque that pays for the stamp.' • *Simo* will not let us forget: 'I got the first proofs of *Hitchhiker* through last week and was rather disturbed to find that, according to the title page, it's the autobiography of Douglas Adams. Perhaps I'm channelling his spirit.' • Nobody seems to have noticed that the 1985 movie *Troll* (script by novelist and *Fangoria* editor Ed Naha) recounts how the forces of darkness are repelled by the magical powers wielded by an ordinary young boy named ... Harry Potter. I'm surprised no enterprising video label has thought to retile and reissue that one.'

Nova Awards. Administrator Steve Green announces that Britain's long-established fanzine awards have now been dragged kicking and screaming into the 1990s: 'New rules being instituted for the Nova Awards extend eligibility to electronic fanzines. In order to be eligible, an e-zine must be: (a) a complete publication in itself (unlike, say, an online journal); (b) available in printed form for those who specifically request it, for "the usual" (a reference hardcopy should be also lodged with the Nova Awards administrator at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ); (c) released between 1/10 of the preceding year and 30/9 of the current year. In addition, editors from Eire are now eligible.'

Small Press. *Jonathan Coleclough* sighted the elusive maestro of Hooting Yard: 'I met Frank Key on Sunday, and he asked after you (as a Londoner, he probably assumes that everyone in the hamlet of Reading knows each other.) He did a short and bewildering recitation on stage between acts by an amusing American singer and a dapper saxophone trio. I chatted to him a bit afterwards. He has returned to writing after a long hiatus, and remains reassuringly Key-esque. I came away with issue One of his new periodical *Crunlop!* which contains many ornithological references (including a paean to the buffhead), and also rashly promises that Hooting Yard is to publish *The Ignorant Ornithologist*, the journals of a fanatical bird spotter who knows absolutely nothing about birds.' £20 for 10 issues of *Crunlop!*—plus Arcane Extras—to P.J. Byrne, 5 Crusoe Ct, Woodhouse Rd, Leytonstone, London, E11 3NY. • *3SF* magazine, edited by Liz Holliday for Ben Jeapes of Big Engine, was launched at Novacon in November. Contact 31 Shottsford, Wessex Gdns, London, W2 5LG (editorial); PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 1GR (subs). • *Spectrum SF* reached its ninth quarterly issue, in which publisher/editor Paul Fraser notes that the future schedule will be 'occasional', say twice a year. No unsolicited submissions. Contact 53 Waverley Pk, Kirkintilloch, Glasgow, G66 2BL.

Group Gropes. *London First Thursdays*. After exploratory pub crawls, voting favours a 2003 return to the City area (of One Tun fame) with The Barley Mow, 50 Long Lane, not far from the Barbican and the BSFA meeting venue. [PNN] The usual fannish dithering continues.

The Dead Past. *Ten Years Ago*: J.G. Ballard, 62 on 15 November 1992, was rewarded with a *Sunday Times* birthday notice as 'science fiction writer and novelist'. What, both? (*Ansible* 65, December 1992)

Chog's Masterclass. *Sensitive Mainstream Dept.* '[They] walked off in separate directions through the chaparral to stand spraddlelegged clutching their knees and vomiting. The browsing horses jerked their heads up. It was no sound they'd ever heard before. In the gray twilight those retchings seemed to echo like the calls of some rude provisional species loosed upon that waste. Something imperfect and malformed lodged in the heart of being. A thing smirking deep in the eyes of grace itself like a gorgon in an autumn pool.' (Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 1992) [PB] • *Neat Tricks Dept.* 'He started pushing her buttocks up until they had almost disconnected.' (Nancy Taylor Rosenberg, *Interest of Justice*, 1993) [PB] • 'His nose wrinkled at the smell of blood and sought permission to cover the body with a sheet.' (Peter Tremayne, 'Methought You Saw A Serpent', in *Shakespearean Detectives* ed. Mike Ashley, 1998) [EO]

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