

# Ansible



## Ansible 196 November 2003

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. Net: [ansible@cix.co.uk](mailto:ansible@cix.co.uk), [www.ansible.co.uk](http://www.ansible.co.uk). ISSN 0265-9816. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Joe Mayhew**. Available for SAE, winning smiles, or Nipponanium iggy tubes.

**Thirty Years Ago ...** I attended my first sf convention, Novacon 3 in November 1973, and came back to the Oxford University SF Group meeting to find a new member called Hazel. Reader, I married her.

### Whirligig World

**J.G. Ballard** revealed a secret dream: 'I've always found great rivers mysterious and I'd like to track the source of the Amazon. [...] I'm not sure the source of the Amazon has ever been traced—there's certainly some doubt about it. I'm building a balsawood raft in my garden at the moment, but it's going very slowly.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 26 Oct)

**John Brosnan** muses on the sincerest form of flattery: 'A press release from the UK Film Council announces their backing of a new movie from the director of *Dog Soldiers*, Neil Marshall. Called *Outpost*, the film is "set on a derelict oil rig where a secret genetic experiment goes horribly awry. Forty eight hours later a special military forces team arrives to investigate only to find themselves faced with a fearsome and mutating opponent." Gosh! As the co-author, with Leroy Kettle, of a novel called *Slimer* which was set on a derelict oil rig which contained a secret genetic engineering facility and a mutating monster, and the part author of the screenplay for *Proteus*, the movie based on the novel, I can only approve of Neil Marshall's good taste in his choice of subjects. I suppose the cheque for the rights is in the post?'

**J.M.Coetzee**, as Gordon Van Gelder points out, is the first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (announced on 2 Oct) to have been shortlisted for the Philip K.Dick Award. The 1982 US paperback of his *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) lost to Rudy Rucker's *Software*.

**Tove Jansson** may have died in 2001, but on 4 Oct the *Guardian* books editor Nicholas Clee included her *The Summer Book* in a list of new bestsellers by first-time novelists. A very late debut.... Paul Barnett: 'Wonder if it's the same translation as the 1988 Shocken Books edition?'

**John Jarrold** shyly confesses that the unsigned feature '10 Authors To Watch' in *SFX 110* (Nov) is all his own work: 'And only including two who I published at Earthlight!' John's list predicts great things for Neal Asher, R.Scott Bakker (first novel due 2004), James Barclay, Andy Duncan, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Jeffrey Ford, Ian R.Macleod, Justina Robson, Charles Stross ('has not so much been knocking on the door for some years as beating heavily on it with fists, boots, forehead and anything else he could lay his hands on'), and Liz Williams. ● David Garnett instantaneously responds: 'John Jarrold is of course correct about Charlie Stross's long-term status as an up-and-coming author to watch. ● In my editorial to the first of the Gollancz *New Worlds* quartet (1991), I wrote: "... at least seven British authors will be having first novels published in 1991 or 1992—an unprecedented number ... before too long ... Charles Stross will join the ranks of those who have sold their first novel ..." ● So, another zany sci-fi prediction comes true!'

**Terry Pratchett** dropped a hint that he may have originated in an unfamiliar leg of the Trousers of Time, when reminiscing in the *Telegraph* (4 Oct) about his early library reading: 'vast amounts of Gollancz science fiction in those virulent magenta and purple covers that you could spot across the entire length of the fiction section.' [PWa]

**J.K.Rowling** placed fifth—and was the only woman—in a Top Ten list of highest-paid Brits, with earnings last year of around £125 million. (*Sunday Times*, 2 Nov) Thus she also tops the women-only list, where the Queen languishes in seventh place and Madonna in eighth.

### Constative

7-9 Nov ● **Novacon 33**, Quality Hotel, Walsall. Now £40 at the door.

14-16 Nov ● **Alternate Universe** (media), Thistle London Heathrow Hotel. Many guests; general air of 'pay lots for actors' autographs'. £125 'VIP' reg, £85 weekend, £40 Fri. Contact Level 3 Conventions, 71 Virginia Way, Reading, Berks, RG30 3QR. 0118 967 5739.

15-16 Nov ● **Wardrobe** (costuming), Boundary Hotel, Walsall. Now £40 reg; day £25 Sat, £15 Sun. Cheques to British Costume Convention, 7 Church Close, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 1SG.

20 Nov ● **Skeptics in the Pub**, Old Kings Head, London Bridge,

7pm for 7:30. With Montague Keen. £2 admission.

21-23 Nov ● **FantasyCon 2003**, Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford. £60 reg (British Fantasy Society members £55). Contact (SAE) Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ.

26 Nov ● **BSFA Open Meeting**, Rising Sun pub, Cloth Fair, London, EC1. 7pm on, fans present from 5pm. Guest speaker TBA.

5 Dec ● **British Fantasy Society** open night, Princess Louise pub, High Holborn, London. 6:30pm on. All welcome.

28-29 Feb 04 ● **Construction** (Interaction staff weekend) is 'looking at hotels from Swindon to Sheffield'. Details TBA.

9 May 04 ● **Fantasy Fair**, The Cresset Exhibition Centre, Bretton, Peterborough. 10:30am-4pm. Contact: 01477 534626.

13-14 Nov 04 ● **P-Con 2**, Ashling Hotel, Parkgate St, Dublin 8. GoH Juliet E.McKenna. £15/€20 reg until after Eastercon, then £20/€30 (TBC). Contact Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland.

29-31 July 05 ● **Precursor 2: Smithcon** (relaxacon, in memory of Martin Smith), Quality Hotel, Walsall. Details to follow.

4-8 Aug 05 ● **Interaction** (63rd Worldcon), SECC, Glasgow. £85/\$135/€135 reg, rising to £95/\$155/€145 on 1 Dec—when the £13/\$20/€20 presupporters' discount expires at last. Still £32/\$50/€50 child, £30/\$45/€45 supporting. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ; or PO Box 58009, Louisville, Kentucky, KY 40268-0009, USA.

**Rumblings.** ● **Eurocon 2007**: an Irish bid is mooted, with plans for a 'pre-bid' launch at the 2004 Bulgarian Eurocon. [DL] ● At Norcon in Oslo (Oct), there was talk of another Scandinavian Worldcon bid. [MH]

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us.** *Radio Times* invited alleged celebrities to comment on the BBC 'Big Read' longlist of the public's 100 favourite books. Which clunkers should have been excluded? 'All Terry Pratchett's novels,' according to Jo Brand: 'It's a bit unfair of me because I've probably only read the first page of one of his books, but sci-fi is a genre that really makes me want to bang my head against a wall.' Her personal favourite novel on the list: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. [DH] The Pratchett-free shortlist of 21 included this and seven other sf/fantasy titles: *Harry Wossname and the Goblet of Fire*, *His Dark Materials*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

**Small Press.** *Interzone*, whose scheduling problems have already led to two double issues in 2003 (indeed three, in that 'September' is now redefined as 'September/October'), is officially moving from monthly to bimonthly publication. David Pringle assures subscribers that they will get all their paid-up issues; it'll just take longer.

**R.I.P.** **Hal Clement** (Harry Clement Stubbs, 1922-2003), well-loved US author of hard sf whose career spanned more than 60 years, died peacefully on 29 October; he was 81. His first story 'Proof' appeared in *Astounding* in 1942 and his final novel *Noise* in 2003. Fandom honoured him often, notably with the 1997 Skylark award, a 1996 Retro Hugo for 'Uncommon Sense' (1945), and as professional guest of honour at the 1991 Worldcon; SFWA chose him as their Grand Master for 1999. Clement's best known title was *Mission of Gravity* (1954), and I was madly proud when NESFA Press let me write the introduction for their Clement omnibus that included this classic. ● **Jack Elam** (1916-2003), US actor typecast as a villain in many film/TV westerns, died on 20 October aged 86; his rare genre appearances included *Uninvited* (1993) and the role of Frankenstein's creation in the late-70s TV sitcom *Struck By Lightning*. ● **Lloyd Arthur Eshbach** (1910-2003), old-time US writer, publisher, fan and chronicler of sf, died on 29 October aged 93. He edited the first book about then-contemporary sf: *Of Worlds Beyond: The Science of Science Fiction Writing* (1947), with essays by leading authors. His 1983 memoir *Over My Shoulder* told the story of sf small presses from the 30s to the 50s. ● **Beryl Mercer** (née Henley) died on 12 October, aged 79. With her husband Archie Mercer, who died in 1998, she was active and influential in the BSFA and British fandom of the 1960s and early 1970s. [PWa] ● **William Steig** (1907-2003), prolific US



cartoonist and illustrator whose popular children's books included *Shrek* (1990), died on 3 October aged 95. His first cartoon sold in 1930 to *The New Yorker*, which published him for over 70 years. [PS]

**Science Corner.** *Dept of Now Why Didn't We Think Of That Before?* 'How can we best protect ourselves against the bioterror attack certain to come one day? The ultimate answer is personal self-defense—arming the human immune system with the power to recognize, attack and defeat any germ or virus that a bioterrorist can create. Such an alliance between brain and immune cells would also defeat all other diseases now afflicting humanity.' (William Safire, *New York Times*, 20 Oct) [KC]

**World Fantasy Awards** were presented on 2 November. LIFE ACHIEVEMENT (two awards) Lloyd Alexander; Donald M. Grant. NOVEL (tie) Graham Joyce, *The Facts of Life*; Patricia A. McKillip, *Ombria in Shadow*. NOVELLA Zoran Zivkovic, 'The Library' (*Leviathan 3*). SHORT Jeffrey Ford, 'Creation' (*F&SF 5/02*). ANTHOLOGY (tie) Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest*; Forrest Aguirre & Jeff VanderMeer, *Leviathan Three*. COLLECTION Jeffrey Ford, *The Fantasy Writer's Assistant and Other Stories*. ARTIST Tom Kidd. SPECIAL/PROFESSIONAL Gordon Van Gelder (*F&SF*). SPECIAL/NON-PROFESSIONAL Jason Williams, Jeremy Lassen & Benjamin Cossel (Night Shade Books)

**Yawn.** The Association of Christian Teachers is reportedly demanding that schools boycott the £850K National Theatre production of P. Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, on grounds of blasphemy. (TLS, Nov) [SG]

**Random Fandom.** Claire Brialey is taking over from Tanya Brown as BSFA Award administrator. ● KIM Campbell is in St Leonard's Hospice, York, owing to a return of cancer (now affecting the brain) and will be staying indefinitely, with further chemotherapy. Cards and messages c/o her home address are welcome. [JD] Much sympathy. ● Sue & Guy Dawson announced the 9 October birth of a new London fan, Alan John Richard Caetano Dawson: 'All family names!' [AM] ● Harry Payne reports the successful registration of 'Eastercon™' as a trademark, to protect our event's name from evil-doers like the late Fandom.com. ● Mike Scott Rohan has been lying low for various depressing reasons; most recently, 'I have had a major health scare these last few months—on top of the bloody diabetes, that is—and have been in and out of hospital for tests, culminating in a couple of lung biopsies.... What I have is something called sarcoidosis, which sounds vaguely like an invasion by Heinlein-esque reptilians, and indeed feels rather like that; they usually don't treat it unless it gets bad, and it leaves you with days when you're completely knocked out. But it's a lot better than what it might have been, and in most cases goes away on its own, eventually.'

C.o.A. Karen Babich, 3056 W. Berteau Ave #1, Chicago, IL 60618-2543, USA. Geoff & Hui Hill, 130 Hurdis Rd, Shirley, Solihull, B90 2DL. Jon Langford & Helen Tsatsos, 4665 W. Peterson, Chicago, IL 60646, USA. Paul Treadaway, 368 Mill Rd, Cambridge, CB1 3NN.

**As Others See Us II.** Playwright Neil LaBute congratulated himself (*Guardian*, 30 Oct) on anticipating some people's use of 9/11 to disappear and start new lives. As the prescient LaBute put it: 'That notion has always stuck with me, the anti-Rousseauvian logic that people have as much capacity for doing bad as they do good. In fact, I've been making a fair living over the past few years writing about just that, and while my work has been embraced and reveled, no one has ever accused me of writing science fiction.' [CP] Phew—that's all right, then.

**Editorial!** Another Langford gloat. This year's effort to push my old stuff back into print culminated with a retrospective collection of 36 stories (1975 to 2003), now delivered to Cosmos Books. Inevitably it's titled for the sole Hugo winner: *Different Kinds of Darkness*.

**Outraged Letters.** Celyn Armstrong on Harold Bloom's dismissal of Stephen King (see A195): 'Bloom does rate some sf. In *The Western Canon*, he has a list described as "Canonical Prophecy", books he thinks will become part of the canon. Whatever you think of that concept, he includes *A Voyage to Arcturus*, *The Gormenghast Trilogy*, *Solaris*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Cat's Cradle*, and three (count 'em!) books by John Crowley, as well as the usual suspects like Borges, Calvino and Huxley.' ● Tom Feller on the same subject: 'I find it interesting that Harold Bloom's attitude toward Stephen King hasn't stopped him from climbing on King's bandwagon. I was doing some research on King earlier this year and found that Bloom has edited two books about King, both entitled *Stephen King*. The first came out in 1998 and the second in 2002.' ● Darrell Schweitzer sent an update on a trans-Thoggian classic: 'My colleague Lee Weinstein cracked the "mystery" of "The Eye of Argon" recently. The story was originally published in the fanzine *OSFAN* (the journal of the Ozark SF Society) #7, 1970. There is a copy of this priceless publication in the Paskow Collection at the library of Temple University in Philadelphia. Mr Weinstein has actually held this amazing

artifact in his trembling hands. A subsequent issue interviews the author. This interview has been posted online. The story really is by Jim Theis, who was a well-known Kansas City fan, something of a local celebrity. In KC, his authorship was common knowledge. He was not a Clarion student.... Alas, Theis died a couple years ago at age 48.' Darrell also reveals that the accepted 'Eye of Argon' text contains typos which are not in the original. ● Simo rants: 'Went to see *The League of Excruciating Dialogue* this week and found it to be one of the worst films I've ever seen.... But here's something interesting: I checked out the film's website (picking as my language choice that little known dialect "Non-North American English") and found that there is not one mention on the entire site of Verne, Wells, Rider Haggard, et al. In fact, there is no hint that the film's characters are nominally derived from works of classic literature ("nominally" being the correct term since they have no connection other than their names). It makes me weep....'

**Korean Fantasy?** John Jarrold, former editor at Earthlight, was a delegate at the UK-Korea Fantasy Publishing Forum in Seoul (19 Sep), where he detected great interest in translated commercial fantasy—as distinct from Korea's 'literary' fantasy tradition. Opportunity beckons, says John, and invites published authors to contact him in his role as 'liaison and conduit to various Korean publishers'.

**British Fantasy Award Nominees.** Winners to be announced at Fantasycon. NOVEL Ramsey Campbell, *The Darkest Part of the Woods*; Jonathan Carroll, *White Apples*; Mark Chadbourn, *The Devil in Green*; Graham Joyce, *The Facts of Life*; China Miéville, *The Scar*. ● SHORT Paul Finch, *Cape Wrath*; Mark Chadbourn, *The Fairy-Feller's Master Stroke*; Michael Moorcock, *Firing the Cathedral*; Andrew Humphrey, 'Open the Box' (TTA#29); China Miéville, *The Tain*. ● ANTHOLOGY Frank M. Robinson, Robert Weinberg & Randy Broecker, *Art of Imagination: 20th Century Visions of SF, Horror & Fantasy*; Stephen Jones & David Sutton, *Dark Terrors 6*; Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber, *Fantasy: The Best of 2001*; Stephen Jones, *Keep Out the Night*; Stephen Jones, *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume 13*; Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: 15th Annual Collection*. ● COLLECTION Clark Ashton Smith, *The Emperor of Dreams: The Lost Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith*; Stephen King, *Everything's Eventual*; Ramsey Campbell, Ramsey Campbell, *Probably: On Horror and Sundry Fantasies*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tales from Earthsea*; Andrew Hook, *The Virtual Menagerie*. ● SMALL PRESS PS Publishing (Peter Crowther), *Roadworks* (ed. Trevor Denyer), Telos Publishing (David J. Howe), *The Alien Online* (ed. Ariel), *The Third Alternative* (ed. Andy Cox). ● ARTIST J.K. Potter, Laura Bandilla, Randy Broecker, Bob Covington, Les Edward (aka Edward Miller), Dominic Harman, Chris Moore.

**We Are Everywhere.** Miles Kington wrongly tipped the obscure David Davis as Tory party leader: 'It occurs to me that nobody has ever become Prime Minister bearing the same name twice. It has worked for science fiction writers (Harry Harrison) ...' (*Independent*, 27 Oct)

**Group Gropes.** *London Beer/B7 Meetings*, Shakespeare's Head pub, Kingsway, near Holborn tube: CANCELLED in Dec, moved from 1st to 2nd Fri evening for Jan only—i.e. 9 Jan. ● *Princess Louise* (High Holborn) meetings—no more exclusive bookings of the upstairs room, Pat Cadigan reports, 'since they apparently don't do that any more.' Her advice: get in early (room opens 6pm) and colonize the space. ● *RIP: The Black Lodge (1991-2003)*, informal monthly Brum meeting, now dead. [SG]

**Updates.** A194: Official Torcon turnout vastly exceeded newsletter figures—of 5065 members, 4760 (rather than 3700-odd) attended. [EC]

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Metaphor Dept.* 'Long-since dusty hopes are about to float away on the invisible ink of time, he thought.' (Robert Newcomb, *The Fifth Sorceress*, 2002.) [MC] ● *Neat Tricks Dept.* 'A minute later, he was vomiting up the breakfast he had not eaten.' (Peter Straub, *Lost Boy Lost Girl*, 2003) [PB] ● *Dept of Unusual Platonic Solids.* 'The Arena itself was tiny, a fist-sized dodecahedron, its triangular sides so glossily black that they shimmered with faint pastels.' (Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix*, 1985) [ej] ● *Brain Race Dept.* 'A pair of bushy eyebrows jutted out above his [Francis Galton's] orbits like two hands cupped over the brow of a man peering into an unfathomable distance. At the same time, his dense windswept sideburns swerved back dramatically behind his earlobes, as though his mind was speeding faster than the rest of his head.' (Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak*, 2003) [MMW]

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