

Ansible



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From Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. Web news.ansible.co.uk. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (e). Logo: Dan Steffan. Cartoon: Brad Foster. Available for SAE or tungtanium section delvers.

As Is Traditional: Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.

The Ides of October

Raymond Briggs received the lifetime achievement award in the 14th Cartoon Art Trust Awards, presented in London on 19 November. [JG] From his recent rant about the status of graphic novels: 'Next [after painting and illustration] comes cartoons. Here we are virtually in the gutter press [...] Then, below the gutter, are the sewers—strip cartoonist Comics! Ugh! The very cess-pits of non-culture, read by utterly common people such as children, foreigners and Americans.' (Oldie, December)

Ian McDonald's Brays! is on the 20-title longlist for the £50,000 Warwick Prize for Writing (in any genre or form), run by the University of Warwick. This first award's theme is 'Complexity'; its judging panel includes China Miéville (chair), Maureen Freely and Ian Stewart. [PD]

Ed Naha, US sf author, reviewer (notably of films for *SF Chronicle*) and former *Starlog* editor, feared he'd lost his home to Santa Barbara, California wildfires last month. 'We are used to seeing smoke because we do have fires up here, but I've never seen that reddish, hellish glow that close,' he said: 'I was waiting for Dante and Virgil to show up.' (AP, 14 November) [DKMK] Later: 'In the end, my family and my home emerged unscathed. 210 other families were not as lucky.' (23 November)

John Parker, UK literary agent formerly with MBA, has launched the new Zeno Agency in partnership with John Berlyne. Interests include 'in particular Science Fiction and Fantasy': authors who are following Parker to Zeno include Ian McDonald, Roger Penrose, Justina Robson and Ian Sinclair. (www.zenoagency.com release, 25 November)

Alexei Sayle plugged his new novel—set partly in outer space—in a Radio 2 interview, and revealed the closely guarded secret: 'Science fiction is a kind of way to use magic.' (4 November) [SS]

Consopite

Until 3 Jan • **The Illustrators**: British Art of Illustration 1800-2008, Chris Beetles Gallery, St James's, London. Includes art from the first Dan Dare story. 10am-5:30pm, Mon-Sun. Info www.chrisbeetles.com

Until 4 Jan • **Space Age**: Exploration, Design and Popular Culture, City Art Centre, 2 Market St, Edinburgh, EH1 1DE. Admission free.

3 Dec • **Christmas Spirits** (ghost story reading), The Voicebox, Forman St, Derby. 7pm for 7:30. With Mark Chadbound and others. £5 inc glass of mulled wine. Contact alexdavisvents at hotmail co uk

5 Dec • **British Fantasy Society Open Night**, Ye Olde Cock Tavern, 22 Fleet St, London, EC4 1AA. From 6pm. All welcome.

5 Dec • **Space Frontiers**, Victoria & Albert Museum, London. 7pm. With Jean-Pierre Haigneré (ESA astronaut), Alastair Reynolds. £8; concessions available. Book online or call 020 7942 2211.

5-7 Dec • **Battlestar Starfury** (BSG), Thistle Hotel, Heathrow. £78.50 reg; £33.50 under-15s; under-8s free. Booking 07930 319 119. 18 Dec • **London Christmas Meeting**, The Melton Mowbray, Holborn. From 4/5pm until late—pub booking confirmed. [PT]

8 Jan 09 • **London First Thursday Meeting** (displaced from 1 Jan), Melton Mowbray, Holborn. 4/5pm on; booking confirmed. [RH]

28 Feb 09 • **Picocoan 26**, Imperial College Union, London. 10am-7/8pm. GoH Michael Marshall Smith, Robert Rankin, one other TBC. £10 adult reg, £8 students—payment at the door only. Contact ICSF, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BB.

19-21 Jun 09 • **Aetherica** (fantasy), Chester: CANCELLED because, rumour says, the hotel unexpectedly demanded a huge advance deposit. Full refunds are promised: contact membership at aetherica dot org.

25-28 Jun 09 • **The Perelandra Project**, Oxford. Swann/Marsh opera (long embargoed) of C.S. Lewis novel on 25, 26, 28 June. Also colloquium at St Stephen's House, 26-27 June, with Walter Hooper; £100 residential, £65 non-residential, both inc opera ticket; bookings open 10 December. Contact admin at perelandraproject dot org.

26-27 Sep 09 • **NewCon 5**, The Fishmarket, Northampton. Hotel: Park Inn. GoH Pat Cadigan, Paul Cornell, Paul McAuley. £40 reg; £25 day (£45/£30 after Easter 2009); under-17s £25/£15; under-5s free.

Contact 41 Wheatshaf Rd, Alconbury Weston, Cambs, PE28 4LF.

? Nov 09 • **Novacon 39**, venue TBC; the usual Walsall hotel's new management is apparently not enthusiastic. GoH Justina Robson.

16-17 Jan 10 • **ConRunner 2**, Mecure St Paul's Hotel, Sheffield. £30 reg, rising to £35 in Jan 2009; £40 mid-2009; £45 in 2010 and at the door. Contact 56 Jackmans Place, Letchworth GC, Herts, SG6 1RH.

25-28 Mar 10 • **World Horror Convention**, Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton. First-ever European instance of this event. £50 reg, rising to £60 on 1 February 2009. Contact PO Box 64317, London, NW6 9LL.

Infinitely Improbable

Publishers and Sinners. Signs of the end times: the major New York publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt instructed its editors to stop acquiring new manuscripts. (*Publishers Weekly*) VP Josef Blumenfeld added that this is 'not a permanent change' [TM] Later, HMH downplayed the situation as merely a 'freeze-lite' ... 'blown out of proportion.'

Science Fantasy. Lisa Shaw of Century Radio Northeast: 'In which book is Room 101 a place to be feared?' Caller: '101 Dalmatians' [PE]

Awards. *Novas* for UK fanzine activity: *FANZINE Prolapse* ed. Peter Weston (its third win in this category); *FAN WRITER* Claire Brialey (her sixth win); *FAN ARTIST* Alison Scott (her third win).

As Others See Us. At last, even *Star Trek* transcends! 'The eagerly anticipated *Star Trek* film is set to cast off the geeky associations of the sci-fi genre ...' (*Daily Mail*, 18 November) [SD] What, no talking squid?

• An alleged villain's key defect: 'It was claimed that mother-of-seven Mathews faked Shannon's kidnap with sci-fi fantasist Michael Donovan to try to pocket a £50,000 reward from the media.' (*Daily Express*) [SG]

R.I.P. *George C. Chesbro* (1940-2008), US author whose 'Mongol' dwarf-detective thrillers—beginning with *Shadow of a Broken Man* (1977)—often used sf themes, died on 18 November aged 68. [CH] • *Michael Crichton* (1942-2008), US physician, writer and film director best known for sf thrillers including *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *The Terminal Man* (1974) and *Jurassic Park* (1990)—all filmed—died from cancer on 4 November. He was 66. Notable director credits are *Westworld* (1973), which Crichton also scripted, and *Coma* (1978). His novel *State of Fear* (2004) caused controversy with its environmentalist villains and, according to several climate scientists, distortion of global warming research.

• *Irving Gertz* (1915-2008), US composer—often uncredited—of music for *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964 tv) and assorted sf/horror films, died on 14 November. He was 83. [MMW] • *Richard K. Lyon* (1933-2008), US author and research chemist whose 1973 debut story appeared in *Analog*, died in 21 November aged 74.

His 1978-1981 'War of the Wizards' fantasy trilogy was written with Andrew J. Offutt. [SFWA] • *Joseph McGee*, US horror author whose small-press publications had attracted much attention since 2006, died on 27 November. He was in his early twenties; reportedly just 23. [DDA via AIP] • *Jack Narz* (1922-2008), US tv actor and broadcaster (best known for quiz shows) who narrated *Space Patrol* (1950-1955) and episodes of *Adventures of Superman* (1951-1958), died on 15 October aged 85. [MMel] • *Ivan Southall*, award-winning Australian children's author whose *Simon Black* aviation/sf adventures appeared from 1950 to 1961, died on 15 November; he was 87. [RH] • *Levi Stubbs* (1936-2008), former lead singer of Motown group The Four Tops, who voiced Audrey II in the 1986 musical remake of *Little Shop of Horrors*, died on 17 October; he was 72. He was also the voice of Mother Brain in the animated tv series *Captain N: The Game Master*. [CH] • *William Wharton* (Albert William du Aime, 1925-2008), US author best known for the magic-realist *Birdy* (1979), died on 29 October aged 82. His novel *Franky Furbo* (1989) is an outright though offbeat fantasy. [JC]

Thog's Führer Special. Hitler's secret superpower is to give speeches that cause, at least in this protagonist, uncontrollable farting: 'The buttocks let out the quickfire whumps and cracks that accompanied the volleys firing from the mouth, and the room gradually filled with a gaseous sulphur odour.' (A.N. Wilson, *Winnie and Wolf*, 2008) [MMW]

Lexicongate. Despite general hopes that the *Harry Potter Lexicon* litigation was at last over (see A247, A248, A250, A255), RDR Books filed a last-minute notice of appeal against the 9 September US judgment blocking publication of the printed-book version. [PM]

Cultural Pervasion. According to John Humphrys on the *Today* programme, the consequences of current UK fiscal policy are best pictured in terms of *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*. As the world awaits the outcome of a desperate gamble to avert oncoming disaster, the final scenes show newspaper presses rolling with two different headlines, 'Earth Saved!' and 'Earth Doomed!'.... (BBC Radio 4, 25 November) [SJ]

Outraged Letters. Adam Roberts has actually read the works of Nobel Prize winner J.M.G. Le Clézio (see A256) and reckons the *Encyclopedia of SF* is wrong about *Les Géants* (1973) being set in 'a nightmare shopping complex in a futuristic city': 'It's not SF, and is not set in a futuristic city. It is about a shopping complex, called in the novel Hyperpolis (hence, I suspect, the confusion); but this is modelled very closely on the actual shopping complex Cap3000, on the coast not far from Nice, which had opened the year before the novel was published. The world of the novel is unmistakably 1970s France: references to the "campagne électorale aux USA" and the Khmer Rouge and so on. There's a weirdness of tone to the book, but that's because it's *nouveau roman*-y not because it's SF-y.' (John Clute, busily amending the entry, traced the misinformation to the *SFE*'s first edition of 1979 and said: 'Wow. Fossil kipple in spades here.'). • Sean Williams is bemused: 'Gender Analyzer (www.genderanalyzer.com) claims to tell whether a man or a woman has written a particular blog. When I input my LiveJournal (curious because Astropolis features several gender-swaps and I was wondering if it was starting to rub off) the site returned with the following: "Sorry, we can only classify web pages written in english." I can't imagine what I've been writing in instead all these years. Klingon, perhaps? Clearly the mighty AI needs to be taught Australian. (It tends to classify women as male if they presume to write about, say, politics; girls are assumed to do only touchy-feely stuff, and so Avedon Carol was declared with 76% certainty to be a chap.)

Trivial Pursuits, or As Fantasy Sees Us. 'Her voice trembled with emotion. "And Wilfred of Ivanhoe's sword grows rusty and they say he just lies in bed all day and reads science fiction!"' (Edward Eager, *Knight's Castle*, 1956) Our ace researcher Brian Ameringer confirms this sad rumour: 'He is reading *The Angry Planet* [John Keir Cross, 1945] when we catch up with him a few pages later....'

Fanfundery. TAFF candidates for the westbound TransAtlantic Fan Fund race from Europe to the 2008 Worldcon in Montréal are Steve Green and Tom Womack. (John Coxon was also announced but decided not to go through with his nomination.) Voting continues to mid-April. Ballots available from administrators—Bridget Bradshaw, 103 Rustad Road, Cambridge, CB1 3QG; Chris Garcia, 962 West Weddell Dr. #15, Sunnyvale, CA 94089, USA—or from taff.org.uk • GUFF: Sue Ann Barber and Trevor Clark won by a clear first-round majority (88 votes from 118 ballots cast) and will be the fund's Australasian delegates to LXcon, the 2009 Eastercon in Bradford. Runners-up: Alisha Krasnostein with 21 votes, Norah Ding with 6, 'no preference' with 3.

Magazine Scene. *Aeon Speculative Fiction*, the on-line sf quarterly whose 15th issue appeared this August, has announced its closure; a 2009 anthology of outstanding inventory stories is planned.

As Others See Us II. A warm welcome to Australia: 'If you can't speak Klingon and don't like Wookies or the Borg, Melbourne may be the place to avoid in September 2010. More than 3000 rather nutty sci-fi fans from across the world are expected to converge for the 68th World Sci-Fi Convention at the Melbourne Conference Centre. [etc]' (D.D. McNicoll, *The Australian*, 15 September 2008) [BW]

Random Fandom. Forrest J Ackerman is suffering from congestive heart failure, not an actual heart attack. Choosing to undergo no further treatment, he's been preparing for the end but was much cheered by numerous messages of support, and celebrated his 92nd birthday on 24 November. Ray Bradbury presided over an early celebration in a Glendale, CA, bookshop on the 22nd. [AP] • James Bacon makes me envious that a minor injury kept me from the 'well attended and successful BSFA birthday bash [26 November]. I have never ever seen the Melton Mowbray so full ... including many luminaries, such as C-in-C Baxter, Chris Priest, Pat Cadigan, Louis Savy and Amanda Hemingway.' • Clare Coney is mostly recovered from a gall-bladder op which 'revealed that a gallstone the size of a golfball had already burst the gall bladder, destroyed the bile duct and was severely damaging the intestines. A second surgeon was called in, and it took the two of them six hours to clean up the mess, which involved chopping out two metres of intestine,

using six inches of this to manufacture a new bile duct, and rejoining the two ends of the now shorter gut, and then re-arranging everything so that it still fitted in the abdomen. It's a miracle she's still alive.... She has a vast scar she shows everyone, so people have been avoiding us.' [PN] • Elliot Shorter, reported as hospitalized in A253, is 'doing very well' and has transferred to a long-term care facility: see C.o.A. [AIP]

The Dead Past, 46 Years Ago. The BBC report that inspired *Doctor Who* explains why Charles Eric Maine would never do for tv: '... too much a fantasist; he is obsessed with the Time theme, time-travel, fourth dimensions and so on—and we consider this indigestible stuff for the audience.' (Donald Bull, BBC 'Science Fiction' report, 1962) [FS] Other authors who get thumbnail descriptions include Brian Aldiss, 'not a crank'; Arthur C. Clarke, 'a modest writer'; and G.S. Lewis, whose 'special religious preoccupations are boring and platitudinous.'

C.o.A. Marcia & Tim Illingworth, 123 Edgewood Heights Lane, Powell, Tennessee, 37849, USA. Elliot Shorter, Harris Health Center, 833 Broadway, East Providence, RI 02914, USA.

As Others See Themselves. Adam Roberts was glued to the box when *Strictly Come Dancing* professionals Darren and Lilia showed viewers of the BBC2 spinoff show *It Takes Two* around their house: 'The moment that leapt out was when Darren announced: "I have a massive collection of science fiction books ... you never catch me reading anything else." As he was saying these words the camera panned along a shelf of twelve-or-so titles, most of them *Star Wars* novelizations, and a couple of them Horror. In the world of professional dance, this amounts to a massive collection. Exciting news. Well, for me.'

The Truman Show enters the annals of psychiatry: 'Researchers have begun documenting what they dub the "Truman syndrome," a delusion afflicting people who are convinced that their lives are secretly playing out on a reality TV show. Scientists say the disorder underscores the influence pop culture can have on mental conditions.' One cited patient 'believed he was in the virtual-reality universe portrayed in the 1999 blockbuster "The Matrix."' (AP, 24 November). [DKMK] Extreme cases may suffer the delusion that they are reading *Ansible*.

As Others Fail To See Us. Spot the difference between these summaries of Amy Spencer's *DIY: The Rise of Lo-fi Culture*. RSA Library: 'This exploration of lo-fi culture traces the origin of the DIY ethics back to the sci-fi zines of the '30s, the self-publishing of the beats, the skiffle movement of the '50s, and the '70s punk scene.' Amazon.co.uk: 'This exploration of lo-fi culture traces the origins of the DIY ethic to the skiffle movement of the 50's, the hippies of the 60's, the all-empowering punk scene of the 70's-80's and the 90's rave phenomenon.' [DL]

A256 Updates. Several readers note that 2008 Nobel laureate and sf fan Paul Krugman published a 1978 paper on "The Theory of Interstellar Trade": "This paper extends interplanetary trade theory to an interstellar setting. It is chiefly concerned with the following question: how should interest charges on goods in transit be computed when the goods travel at close to the speed of light? A solution is derived from economic theory, and two useless but true theorems are proved." [AM] • Greg Pickersgill was the longest-term, not the only, dues-paying BSFA member at Cytricon V: almost unprecedentedly, I misheard. [JL]

Library Thing. The 'Thieves' Top 10' listing of books most often stolen from Scots libraries has *Harry Potter* and *The Chamber of Secrets* in first place. Also *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (#7), the Discworld series (#8) and *The Stand* (#9). (*Daily Record*, 13 November) [DKMK]

Thog's Masterclass. *Metaphor-Mingling Dept.* 'I soon learned that the glamor was strictly surface. Unless you had a really well-heeled thumbprint: (Somtow Sucharitkul, 'Rabid in Mallworld', *Asimov's*, 1980; collected in *Mallworld*) [PM] • *Dept of Strange Endowment.* 'She runs one hand along the lines of her body, her breasts like damp petals.' (Bruce Boston, *All The Clocks Are Melting*, 1984) [BA] 'Beneath the contour jewellery her breasts lay like eager snakes' (J.G. Ballard, 'The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D', *F&SF*, 1967) [LP] • *Dept of Grammatical Warfare.* 'His voice was low, charged with unspeakable adjectives.' (Frank Herbert, *Dune*, 1965) [PN] • *Personal Service Dept.* 'The waitress had filled my coffee cup and taken my first swallow before the sheriff spoke.' (Charlene Harris, *Grave Sight*, 2005) [NR]

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