

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: Grant Canfield. Available for SAE or fifty pounds of frumpstiggles.

In the Lonesome October

Dan Brown's latest shows his mastery of classic 'As You Know, Bob' exposition: "'Peter," she said, "you already told me that the Egyptians knew about levers and pulleys long before Newton, and the early alchemists did work on a par with modern chemistry ..."' (*Financial Times* review, 19 September) [MMW] Elsewhere, a minion opens his infodump to the hero with: 'As you probably know, Professor ...' [MW]

John M. Ford (1957-2006) is still fondly remembered, but his non-fan family would rather we didn't. Rumours of awkwardness have been circulating for some time, and NESFA's *Instant Message 825* reports that a hoped paperback reissue of their Ford collection is unlikely: "... it does not appear that the Estate will license any further printings. This appears to be the policy for all of Ford's works, not just the Nesfa Press book, so that only those works under contract can be reprinted.'

Eddie Izzard the comedian spent 52 days running 1,100 miles in 43 charity marathons, and found the only possible simile for this shattering experience: 'My legs hurt, my body hurts, I'm very tired. I lost my toenails, had blisters and stuff, but to finish—it's kind of like science fiction in a way.' (*Guardian*, 16 September) [DG]

Ursula K. Le Guin laments the passing of the squid: '[L]ast night on the *Lehrer* news hour Margaret Atwood did not say she did not write science fiction because she did not write about talking squids, but said that she did not write science fiction because she did not write about talking cabbages. I am pondering the significance of this change from sea beast to land vegetable, but so far it escapes me. She was otherwise charming, and I do think *The Year of the Flood* is good science fiction even though its cabbages are speechless.' (23 September) Those eloquent cabbages presumably live on Planet X: the indefatigable Ms Atwood told the *New York Times* that her work is not sf since 'I don't write about Planet X, I write about where we are now.' (21 September)

Ken Livingstone opened his *New Statesman* interview of Iain Banks with the key question that must be in every reader's mind: 'I remember meeting you at the Brighton Science Fiction Festival in 1987. There were a lot of people walking round in Vulcan costumes. Were you dressed as a Wookiee?' Banks: 'Absolutely not!' (17 September) [JY]

Maura McHugh enlivened Fantasycon by observing that a book of horror-author interviews being launched there by the British Fantasy Society—in *Conversation* by James Cooper—had an interesting gender balance: 16 male interviewees and no women at all. [AIP] BFS chair Guy Adams apologized on behalf of the society. (*Guardian*, 22 September)

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* was number two in the ALA list of books most 'challenged' by would-be US censors in 2008. 'Reasons: political viewpoint, religious viewpoint, and violence.' [GF]

Kim Stanley Robinson took a poke at the Booker Prize in the *New Scientist* sf special of 17 September, calling sf 'the best British literature of our time' and complaining that Booker juries 'judge in ignorance and give their awards to what usually turn out to be historical novels. [...] these novels are not about now in the way science fiction is. Thus it seems to me that three or four of the last 10 Booker prizes should have gone to science fiction novels the juries hadn't read.' • In response, Booker judge John Mullan (as befits a professor of English at University College London) ringingly affirmed his sf ignorance and 'said that he "was not aware of science fiction," arguing that science fiction has become a "self-enclosed world".' / "When I was 18 it was a genre as accepted as other genres," he said, but now "it is in a special room in book shops, bought by a special kind of person who has special weird things they go to and meet each other." (*Guardian*, 18 September) [KM/CP] Could he mean literary festivals? • According to *Private Eye*, 'Whispers from the judging room suggest [the Booker] panel were stunned by the awfulness' of some submissions including Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*: 'is she turning into Doris Lessing, from feminist to sci-fi daffiness?' (18 September) This was the only sf novel ('No it isn't!—M.A.') submitted by any Booker-seeking UK publisher, and this is the reaction Atwood wriggles so hard to avoid: the *Eye*, like

at least one Booker judge, automatically equates sf with 'no good'.

J.K. Rowling was reportedly considered for the US Presidential Medal of Freedom during the last Bush administration; but according to a former Bush speechwriter, 'people in the White House' objected to this 'because the Harry Potter books encouraged witchcraft.' (Matt Latimer, *Speechless: Tales of a White House Survivor*, p201) [DKMK]

Conquace

3-4 Oct • **BICS 2009** (comics), Thinktank, Curzon St, Birmingham. Tickets £20, child £10; day £12/£6. Payment to International Comic Shows, 30a Keeling St, Dudley Port, Tipton, W Midlands, DY4 8UQ.

10-11 Oct • **Octocon 2009**, Camden Court Hotel, Camden St, Dublin 2. GoH Mike Carey, Dave Lally. €30 reg; €20 under-18s and students; €10 supp. Contact c/o Apt 56 Shalimar, Monastery Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22. Ireland; or octocon2009 at gmail.com.

11 Oct • **Hitchcon '09** (Hitchhiker), Southbank Centre, London. 11:30am-7pm. Day pass £32.50; signings etc are free. Box office 0871 663 2500 (£2.50 surcharge), or www.southbankcentre.co.uk (£1.45).

12 Oct • **Beyond our Ken: The Multiverse of Ken Campbell**: tribute show, National Theatre. £5. Box office 020 7452 3000.

16-18 Oct • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Day's Hotel, Sackville St, Manchester. £70/\$140 reg; under-17s £30; under-13s £20. £30/\$60 day+supp. Contact 95 Meadowgate Rd, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

17 Oct • **Fred Hoyle Day II**, St John's College Library, Cambridge. 11am-5pm. Free. Booking needed for 2:30pm talk: kib21 at cam.ac.uk

24 Oct • **Gamesfest** (gaming/sf/fantasy), Watford Colosseum, Watford, WD17 3EX. Tickets £5.50 from www.gamesfest.co.uk only.

28 Oct • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Antelope, 22 Eaton Tce, London, SW1W 8EZ. 5pm for 6pm. With Ian McDonald.

31 Oct - 1 Nov • **ArmadaCon 21**, Royal Fleet Hotel, Plymouth. GoH Lionel Fanthorpe. £35 reg; £30 concessions. Contact 20 Pinewood Close, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon, PL7 2DW.

6-9 Nov • **IDWcon 09** (Irish Discworld con), Falls Hotel, Ennistymon, Co. Clare, Ireland. €40 reg, €32 under-18s/students, €15 supp/junior (7-12), under-7s free. Rates rise 1 November; online booking closes 6 November. Contact Church Rd, Tulla, Co. Clare.

13-15 Nov • **Novacon 39**, Park Inn, Mansfield Road, Nottingham. £39 reg. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

16-17 Jan 10 • **ConRunner 2**, Mercure St Paul's Hotel, Sheffield. Now £40 reg, rising to £45 in 2010. B&B £70 double, £65 single. Contact 56 Jackmans Place, Letchworth GC, Herts, SG6 1RH.

5-7 Feb 10 • **Van der Filk** (filk), Ramada Hotel, Grantham, NG31 7XT. £32/\$46/€36 reg; £16/\$23/€18 child/unwaged; under-6s £1/\$1/€1. At the door: £35, £17 and £1. Day: £10 Fri, £20 Sat, £15 Sun. Contact 1379 Lincoln Rd, Werrington, Peterborough, PE4 6LT.

27-30 Aug 10 • **Discworld Convention**. £50 reg (£33 concessions), rising on 1 November to £55 (£36). £20 supp. Contact PO Box 4101, Shepton Mallett, Somerset, BA4 9AJ; info at dwcon dot org.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. Cory Doctorow has left our little genre behind, according to a review of his *Makers* subtitled '... a sci-fi writer growing up': 'It would be wrong to position this as a science fiction novel, even though it is set in the future and deals with technologies that do not yet exist ...' (Bill Thompson, *New Humanist*, September/October 2009)

Magazine Scene. *The Dark Side* (horror) is suspending paid-up subscriptions since 'the current financial climate' has forced publication to cease after more than 20 years. A 2010 relaunch in a 'brand new format' (on-line?) is supposedly planned, but once publishing momentum is lost it can be hard to regain. Wait and see. [SG] • *Electric Velocipede*, announces its editor John Klima, is now a semiprozine. [F770]

R.I.P. Ray Barrett (1927-2009), Australian actor who voiced characters in *Stingray* and *Thunderbirds* (and also appeared in *Doctor Who*), has died at age 82. [O] • **Barbara Bova**, US literary agent, wife of Ben Bova and founder in 1974 of the Barbara Bova Literary Agency, died

from cancer on 23 September. [SFWA] • **Henry Gibson** (1935-2009), US actor whose many genre credits included *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (1981) and voice work in all episodes of the animated *Galaxy High School* (1986), died on 14 September; he was 73. [SFS] • **Ben Indick** (1923-2009), long-time US fan who published *Ben's Beat* (at least 95 issues from 1983) and contributed to countless other fanzines, died on 28 September. He was 86, and had received a 2009 First Fandom Hall of Fame award. [RLAIP] I remember his encouraging letter to a very early Langford fanzine in 1976. • **Troy Kennedy Martin** (1932-2009), UK screenwriter who adapted Angus Wilson's *The Old Men at the Zoo* and scripted the much-praised sf/thriller series *Edge of Darkness* (1985)—both for BBC TV—died on 15 September aged 77. [DP] • **Mary Hunter Schaub** (1943-2009), US fantasy author who chiefly wrote in Andre Norton's 'Witch World' setting, and collaborated with Norton on *The Magestone* (1996), died on 25 September. [PDF] • **Patrick Swayze** (1952-2009), US actor who starred in *Ghost* (1990), died from cancer on 14 September; he was 57. [BB] • **Jennifer Swift**, US-born author long resident in Oxford, whose stories appeared in *Amazing*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Interzone* and other magazines, died from cancer on 30 September. All sympathy to her husband Timothy Bartel. [CP]

Doublethink. Self-publishing pundit Henry Baum is miraculously unainted by genre: 'Personally, my own novel is science fiction, but I'm not a science fiction writer.' (*Sacramento News & Review*) [AIP]

Publishers & Sinners. Rebellion, owner of 2000 AD and Abaddon books, has bought the Solaris book imprint from Games Workshop.

In Typo Veritas. 'I knew a man who collected Star Wars and with-in the center shelving was a huge poster of the good ship Enterprise. The shelving was placed around that poster so there was no questioning what his collection was all about.' None at all. (Bon Summers, 'A Personal Library', *Sheppard's Confidential* website) [BA]

Outraged Letters. **Tony Berry** on the end of another era: 'As reported in the *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, the *Compass* (formerly Quality) Hotel near Walsall was suddenly closed last Friday [28 August] and is now in receivership. The reason given is "financial problems". The Novacon committee congratulates itself on seeing the writing on the wall last year and moving to a new venue!' • **David A(llen) Hardy** assures us his name is authentic. 'It is true that I've only had it for 42 years (one less than David A. Hardy has been doing freelance art), but I've gotten attached to it in the interval. [...] If it will help prevent confusion, I am prepared to swear that I, the David A. Hardy who writes for *Dark Worlds*, can't draw anything more complex than stick-figures.' • **Steve Jeffery** wants to make my flesh creep: 'Scary headline in *The Sun* (Friday 18 September): 1,000 FANS DIE EVERY WEEK. Elderly fans of *Coronation Street*, apparently, but it nearly gave me a turn.'

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Nominees for this major Swedish children's and YA literature prize include David Almond, Quentin Blake, Russell Hoban, Diana Wynne Jones and Shaun Tan. It's a big prize of SEK5 million (~£450,000), but our nominees shouldn't become overly excited since the shortlist of authors, illustrators, promoters and worthy organizations runs to something like 170 names.

History Masterclass. "Mesmerism!" muttered Conan ...' (Robert E. Howard, 'Shadows in Zamboulah', *Weird Tales*, 1935) [BA]

C.o.A. Chris Donaldson & Paul Oldroyd, 7 Magnolia Close, Worcester, WR5 3SJ.

Court Circular. The Tolkien Trust/New Line Cinema lawsuit for non-payment of royalties has been settled on deeply confidential terms. Everyone claims to be happy, and the planned films of *The Hobbit* can go ahead. The Warner Bros president/CEO thanked the unsung little people, saying that Warner 'deeply valued the contribution of the Tolkien novels to the success of our films ...' (*Guardian*) [JS]

Random Fandom. **Karen Anderson** evacuated from her Tujungua house to a hotel in late August owing to the Station Fire, one of several LA-area wildfires; she was soon able to return. [AIP] • **Joe Haldeman** has been in intensive care since surgery on 19 September for a twisted bowel and severe pancreatitis. He's stable but healing only very slowly.

British Fantasy Awards. NOVEL (Derleth Award) 'William Heaney' (Graham Joyce), *Memoirs of a Master Forger*. NOVELLA Tim Lebbon, *The Reach of Children*. SHORT Sarah Pinborough, 'Do You See' (*Myth-Understandings*). COLLECTION Allyson Bird, *Bull Running for Girls*. ANTHOLOGY Stephen Jones, ed., *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 19*. SMALL PRESS Andrew Hook, *Elastic Press*. NON-FICTION Basil Copper ed. Stephen Jones, *Basil Copper: A Life in Books*. MAGAZINE Postscripts. ARTIST Vincent Chong. COMIC/GRAPHIC NOVEL Joe Hill & Gabriel Rodriguez, *Locke and Key*. TV Doctor Who. Film *The Dark Knight*. NEWCOMER Joseph D'Lacey, for *Meat*. SPECIAL Hayao Miyazaki.

The Fleeting Stead of Death, Redux. Sandra Bond acquired Ian Maule's fanzine collection and found a rarity: *OSFAN 10*, containing Jim Theis's *The Eye of Argon*. The original appearance—badly typed and with execrable drawn-on-stencil illustrations—is every bit as bad as the many available sources' introduction confirms. (And a little mystery is solved; the art is by Jay T. Rikosh, which no doubt explains the cryptic reference after the author's name, "Winner of the Jay T. Rikosh award for excellence!") I may also add that the last page is extant in this copy and the ending as reported a few years ago is definitely canonical.' Some distrustful fans had insisted this long-lost ending was a hoax.

More Awards. *Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire* (France) foreign novel shortlist: Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts*; Ian McDonald, *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*; Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*; Dan Simmons, *The Terror*. • **Robert A. Heinlein** for sf promoting space exploration: Joe Haldeman and John Varley. • *Heinlein Centennial* story contest: 1 Karl Bunker, 'Under the Shouting Sky'; 2 Charlie Allery, 'In the Shadows'; 3 Sam S. Kempfield, 'Salvage Sputnik'.

Happy Media. *Primeval*, the dinosaur/time-travel series cancelled by ITV in June, was rescued by a co-production deal which makes its international distributor BBC Worldwide the major partner. (*Guardian*, 29 September) • *District 9* offended Nigeria's government, which told cinemas to stop showing a film that according to Information Minister Dora Akunyili 'denigrated Nigeria's image by portraying us as if we are cannibals, we are criminals.' Actor Eugene Khumbaniyawa pointed out: 'It's a story, you know ... It's not like Nigerians do eat aliens. Aliens don't even exist in the first place.' (BBC, 19 September) [MPJ]

Late News. **Frederik Pohl**, 73 years after dropping out of Brooklyn Technical High School, received a diploma from the school in August. 'I was flabbergasted. It was one of the kindest things that any total stranger had, without warning, ever stepped up and done for me.' [BH]

Conspiracy Corner. Why was *Big Brother* cancelled? Perhaps because the female participant Bea revealed secrets that they don't want you to know: 'If the astronauts had really gone to the moon they'd all be dead by now from cancer caused by the moon's radiation. And why was there a flag flapping on the moon? America faked it to get one over Russia.' Moreover, science fiction and the Internet are very very bad things, as shown by a telling anecdote from Facebook-addicted Bea: 'An old lady my mum knows died and people only found out after 16 pints of milk were sitting on her doorstep ... Her neighbours didn't care because they didn't know her. They were all probably watching science fiction on the internet.' This proves it! (Digitalspy.co.uk) [JW]

Fanfunder. *TransAtlantic Fan Fun*: nominations are open for the 2010 race from North America to the UK Eastercon (Odyssey), and close on 4 October. Prospective candidates should already have rushed the usual nominator details, platform and bond to administrators Chris Garcia (NA) or Steve Green (Europe). Candidates so far declared: Karen KG Murphy & Brian Gray, standing jointly, and Frank Wu. Final ballot to appear very soon after the closing date at taff.org.uk. • **GUFF**: nominations are similarly open for the 2010 race from Europe to the Australian Worldcon. Deadline 13 November. Details from Euro-administrator Ang Rosin, 26 Hermitage Grove, Bootle, Merseyside, L20 6DR. • **DUFF**: ditto, NA to Aussiecon. Nominating deadline 31 January 2010. Steve & Sue Francis, PO Box 58009, Louisville KY 40268-0009, USA.

Thug's Masterclass. *Dept of Dehydration.* 'Step after crushing step, his breath falling in and out of strange rhythms with the pounding of his feet. Mucus building at the back of his throat—the only moisture left in his body.' (Joseph D'Lacey, *Meat*, 2008) [PC] • *Eyeballs in the Sky.* 'Two disembodied large, evil eyes, swooped down on her, then receded, then swooped again and receded.' (Elizabeth Sinclair, *Gardens of the Moon*, 2009) [RF] • *Dept of How's That Again?* 'Her bare feet, though grimy, were caked with dirt.' (*Ibid*) 'Lissie's intense worry for her loved ones was almost palatable.' (*Ibid*) • *1509 Dept.* 'Ten years, and he'd never seen her look like this; half-annoyed, half-apprehensive, half-expectant.' (Laura Anne Gilman, *Staying Dead*, 2004) [SGR] • *Undercover Dept.* 'Atar stood scowling out from beneath his bushy moustache.' (Troy Denning, *Star Wars Fate of the Jedi: Abyss*, 2009) [AR] • *Neat Tricks Dept.* 'They scrambled forward at just shy of a sprint.' (*Ibid*) 'She heard a shocked silence from Baxter and the GAS lieutenant.' (*Ibid*)

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