

"Not nearly as controversial as its reputation belies," says the hard-hitting **British Fantasy Newsletter** of the blandness you hold in your hand... from DAVE LANGFORD, 94 LONDON ROAD, READING, BERKSHIRE, RG1 5AU, UK. (Electronic mail to Telecom Gold 81:TWH152, telex 265451 MONREF G quoting 81:TWH152 in the first line; none of this is of the slightest use, I'm just showing off.) What of the future? As Alfred Bester once wrote, "The Future is Tekon", and little more can be added. Chuck Harris suggests that besides the promised irregular and whimsical distribution, rich idiots should be allowed to subscribe at £1.50 or \$3 a copy. OK if that's what you want: the point of the change is that with my current workload I can't pretend to run a regular, frequent or comprehensive SF newsletter, and not even rich idiots are likely to get one. US agents: Mary & Bill Burns, 23 Kensington Court, Hempstead, NY 11550. Aussie agent: Irwin Hirsh, 2/416 Dandenong Rd, North Caulfield, Vic 3161. Language Lesson from Sue Thomason. Print run 600 and falling. Thanks to **Matrix**, Q and **SF Chronicle** for news oddments, and to the latter's readers for two awards....

RUNNING DOWN: the Me column

I remember less than I should about the burning issues of British fandom circa 1987. The low-key Rubicon has shrunk to a single stark memory of David Brin and Avedon Carol in the hotel lounge, furiously debating the fitness to live of the Governor of California, while behind them an opportunistic committee moved up chairs and indicated by furtive gestures that this was the day's programme item.

At Easter, Becon produced violently polarized opinions: it was unutterably boring, dull and bad (and certainly I seem to have spent a much higher than average percentage of my time wandering around looking for something happening), it was wondrous and brilliant beyond compare (and certainly there were several nifty items). There hadn't been enough allowance for the depletion of Eastercon in a British Worldcon year, and the convention rattled around in a fairly vast venue, while much lightweight padding was needed to fill the innumerable programme tracks. Imagine the spleen of Alan Dorey on finding that his Alan Dorey Quiz was merely the latest of six full hours of quiz programming.

Good bits that I noticed: the bizarre Oriental kung-fu fantasy horror flicks, the fireworks, about three speeches, the fan room parties (at the Holland/LA bidding party I found myself explaining at mendacious length to Mike Glycer that **Anible's** vastly greater coverage of the Dutch bid was a mere statistical anomaly; such was the bonhomie of the occasion that he almost tried to believe me), the real beer, the cheap and acceptable hotel snack food, and a few offbeat programme items (like the Ian Sorensen/Malcolm Hodkin comedy duo which momentarily brought a thin smile to even my withered lips).

Not-so-good bits: the truncation of the fireworks (first toned down at the request of resident Saudi Arabian royalty, then halted altogether merely because blazing embers were cascading on the breakfast marquee--"The committee just got cold feet," said angry fuse-wielder Martin Hoare, "and the marquee was going to be taken down in a few weeks anyway." Chris Atkinson, newly recruited to the ranks of pyromania, complained of **detonatus interruptus**), the early drought of real beer, the near-inaccessibility of restaurants from the remote National Exhibition Centre fastnesses, and a ghastly moment at the awards ceremony.

There was Bob Shaw, who'd incautiously been telling everyone all weekend how he'd appreciate votes for the BSFA award (which he won). There was Paul Kincaid presenting the new Arthur C. Clarke award, all £1000 of it, and saying approximately: "The judging committee really did find it incredibly hard to decide, but in the end we realized we were unanimous. Bob Shaw's **The Ragged Astronauts** impressed us hugely as a tremendous book--" [Bob begins to rise from his seat] "and we're commending it ever so highly, while giving the loot to Margaret Attwood's **The Handmaid's Tale!**" [Applause. Collapse of Irish party. Ouch.]

The NEC's principal bar had its moments (when the main approach wasn't closed off to become the fan room), but the decor caused pain to sensitive drinkers and gave insight into the horrid hearts of hotel folk. This was the "Library" bar,

you see, containing shelves of actual printed books, all with half-inch holes bored through their middles so they could be threaded on dowel rods and protected from being read.

(Overheard there... John Brunner, reading in A49 that **Stand on Zanzibar** proofs were offered at \$2500, said: "Oh goody, I sold it to him and was promised half his profit, so that's another \$750 if it sells." Gamma asserted: "I'm now SF consultant for Sphere." Dave Hodson insinuated: "Gamma says Richard Lewis' underpants are too tight." Greg Pickersgill, qualifying a remark on his good wife's youthfulness, barked: "Well, she's young compared to Arthur C. Youthfulden." Helen McCarthy explained: "There are no interesting media conventions this year, since we cancelled ours." Hazel gasped: "It was an incredible film, they showed the reels in the wrong order because they were labelled in Chinese, but it didn't matter, there were all these hysterical kung-fu hopping zombies...." Ian Sorensen confided: "Jim Barker doesn't draw any cartoons these days. He's just an ideas man now, he pays a YTS trainee to do the drawing.")

The bidding for the 1988 and 1989 conventions (see below) established that one phrase is now the kiss of death for an Eastercon bid. Prospective committees can drone on about soft toys or tourism opportunities, but should steer well clear of committing themselves to "science fiction." **Verb. sap.**

The things that fill my working days and blot out convention memories are for the most part deeply boring: three monthly magazine columns, for example. One, the "Critical Mass" SF review spot in **White Dwarf**, brings much feedback from mingy fans who read this bit and then put the magazine back on the newsagent's rack, not wishing to buy anything so uncool as a games rag. Now you can all read the first 50 columns in a A4 softcover volume, with an index: well over 60,000 words of thrillingly ephemeral reports on the soiled masses of prose which passed through my protesting forebrain between 1983 and 1987. **Critical Assembly** was a mite expensive to produce and will cost you £10 or \$20 (post free). No--to forestall you--it isn't worth it, but buy it anyway.

Which brings me to other Langford volumes about which some of you have asked, you fools. In hardback, the non-fiction **War in 2080** (futurological weaponry, etc), **An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World, 1871** (Victorian UFOs) and **Facts & Fallacies: A Book of Definitive Mistakes and Misguided Predictions** can be yours for £4 each, post free. In paperback, choose between **The Space Eater** (hardish SF) and **The Leaky Establishment** (undisguised autobiography) at £2.75 each. Don't forget **The Transatlantic Hearing Aid**, the TAFF report of which major **Anible** editors have said "Pardon?"--a snip at £2.25, proceeds to TAFF. Review copies also on sale!

I seem to have some more small-press notes here. Chris Priest emerges from long silence with **The Last Deadloss Visions**, an essay about the 16-year history of a famous though still unpublished Harlan Ellison anthology. "Trade" edition £2, bound "collector's" edition £5, from 78 High St, Pewsey, Wilts, SN9 5AQ: as a feeble defence against possible litigation, this is "Not for sale in the USA." There are a million scurrilous stories about **The Last Dangerous Visions**--you know, so-and-so "was actually in Ellison's office, listening to him phoning the publishers to say the complete package was in the mail, while the cardboard box of manuscripts still sat on his floor...." Chris avoids these hearsay distractions, traces the damning record of actual documented facts, and offers a solid piece of journalism (26 A4 pages, small print) which--without invective--is also a devastating hatchet-job. Is it necessary? Fans may regard "TLDV" as a joke, but many of the 100+ contributors feel sour about having thrown their best efforts into this black hole. Others (20%) are dead. **Deadloss** asks "how it will end", and gives constructive answers....

My Heart Leaps Up is the autobiography of R.A. Lafferty, which reads as dottily as his novels. Chris Drumm is issuing the book as lots of his nifty Drumm Booklets, two chapters at a time. Two chunks out so far, ch 1-2 and ch 3-4: each \$2.75 from PO Box 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226. Good stuff.

Swede Ishes collects 10 chunks of Swedish fanwriting, determinedly lightweight articles which I suspect have lost in the translation: there are funny lines, but often the humour doesn't quite get off the ground. John-Henri Holmberg steals the show with a "Carl Brandon" memoir, originally

written in English. £1 (or \$1 plus IRC) to Ahrvid Engholm, Renstiernas Gata 29, S-116 31 Stockholm, Sweden; proceeds to "a new SEFF", of which--I regret--more below.

Concatenation, ed. Jon Cowie (see COA) and Tony Chester, was distributed free around Easter and represents another attempt at a "yearbook" for British SF/fandom. Much effort has gone into financing this via ads and sponsorship, with a print run of 2000. Its contents are rather eccentric, with random SF coverage embedded in an unstylish imitation of **New Scientist** (a low point being the tongue-in-cheek formality of NS's "Ariadne" column: the **Concatenation** version is dismally pompous). Having launched their pilot issue in what looks like a bit too much haste, the dynamic duo can--I hope--take more time over the next, and remember that (a) even exciting news items fall flat when flatly written; (b) when doing a review of the SF year which covers only six books, it is not convincing when one of this highly select few is a "Retief" squib from Keith Laumer; (c) fans interested in tiny snippets of science news probably read them weekly in **New Scientist**: a yearbook should be made of weightier stuff....

Where does one go for regular, frequent British SF news? The boring old BSFA is worth a look, now that Maureen Porter has vastly expanded the news pages of **Matrix**: for a year's worth, rush your £10 to the BSFA, 33 Thornville Rd, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS26 8EW. Meanwhile, Novacon should see the launch of **Critical Wave** from Steve Green and Martin Tudor. "Imagine an SF supplement to the **Guardian** and you might be part of the way there," says Steve, indicating that **CW** will contain typos if nothing else. "No way would we get away with some of the stuff you print," he flatteringly adds, leaving me wondering. A 500-copy print run; 10pp per bimonthly issue; no price yet, but as October looms you might ask Steve at 33 Scott Rd, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

Izzard is merely the best "conventional" (i.e. duplicated) fanzine I've had this year--fat and unsummarizable. P&T Nielsen Hayden, 75 Fairview (2D), New York, NY 10040, USA.

THE USUAL LETTERS OF COMPLAINT

BRUCE STERLING: "I send you this missive in the probably vain but earnest hope that it will spare me from the **Ansible** address-list purge. How else am I to receive such vital on-line input as the Chris Evans **A48** Speech, since xeroxed and distributed as a kind of Object Lesson within Yankee 'post-modernist' circles. Morbid as it must have been for his audience, this speech is an intensely cheering document! 'Say--I always thought 'cyberpunk' sucked, but consider the alternative--we could have ended up like Chris Evans!'"

"While critics might quail at the thought of pronouncing G.Jones's **Escape Plans** "unreadable", the following conversation took place in New York during Nebula weekend:

"(Scene: Tiny office in gigantic Manhattan megalith.)

"STERLING: Hmm, see you have **Divine Endurance** here... ever read **Escape Plans**?"

"PROMINENT "PROGRESSIVE" EDITOR (eyes lighting up): What a great fucking book!"

"STERLING (pleased): That's the True Quill, isn't it? Talk about "crammed prose"--wow!"

"PPE: Yeah! Sure wish I could publish it...."

"STERLING:"

"PPE: Of course, the five hundred people here hip enough to appreciate it can buy it from Mark Ziesing."

[The tasteful "suck" idiom reminds me that US visitors to Conspiracy will enjoy our current vacuum cleaner posters: "NOTHING SUCKS LIKE AN ELECTROLUX!" DRL]

DENNIS VIRZI: "Bruce Sterling continues to compliment your efforts each time he tears up your latest issue on the SMOF BBS bulletin board under his guise as 'Jules Verne'--he says you have 'a BAD attitude'. I don't know what that means."

HARRY HARRISON: "What's this Langford! Putting **status dodgy** on my **Ansible** label. I give you cheques, pound notes, tips, dirty items. Doggy my arse! Just to prove it--here is a goody. Perhaps the end of the biggest bumsucking act of all time. Hark!"

"In the Observer book page [April], there are some SF books sneered at by one John Clute. He appears to like a collection of short stories by--guess who? Someone named Watson. Whom he refers to as '...fecund Ian Watson.'"

"Well! Eric Partridge in **Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English** lists 'fecund' under 'female'. Already Clute is in trouble. The word is defined as 'essential physical femineity' giving us the Latin 'fecundus... of land, crops, females, fertile.' And the **fe** root of the word also appears in felicitate and fetus and rests upon the old Indo-European root ***dhe-** which means--wait for it--'to give suck to'. Is Clute trying to tell us that Watson is a pregnant cow? Or perhaps he means he is a fetal sucker or... the mind boggles at all the possibilities.

"Legal proceedings in the offing."

[US visitors to Conspiracy will enjoy... hang on, we seem to have covered this territory. DRL]

BRIAN ALDISS: "I think you made up that bit about the Journal of the Daventry Institute of Caprine Studies, since JDICS doesn't sound at all memorable. However, I assume you didn't make up the bit about the death of Theodore Cogswell."

"It's a shame to let a good man go without a good word. Ted would have liked you, or maybe vice versa. He was famous in fanac as in more legitimate pursuits. As you delicately hint in **Ansible**, he did write 'Wall Around the World'. He also edited a notorious fanzine, **PITPCS**, pronounced 'Pit-fucks', reputedly the Proceedings of the Institute for Twenty-First Century Studies. In the early 60s, anyone who was anyone wrote to **PITPCS**, as did some who weren't."

"When he died, Ted was working on a collected edition of **PITPCS** for hardcover publication. I hope someone can see this project through; it will form a valuable social document for our times."

"I hope I'm not giving you ideas. How's your health?"

ARTHUR HLAVATY: "I'm not sure if Avedon's been misinformed about the big book chains banning Delany, Hambly et al for alleged gay content, or if news of such things reaches England before it reaches North Carolina, but the local [North Carolina] B.Dalton's and Waldenbooks not only haven't kicked those miscreants out, but they've got big display bins of the latest Rita Mae Brown right up front."

[Rita Mae who? Oh god, another cultural gap. DRL]

PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN: "It's the new Neveryon book, not **The Splendour and Misery of Bodies, of Cities**, which is 'in the publication process': entitled **The Bridge of Lost Desire**, it should be out as a hardcover from Arbor House late this fall. Contents: a new novella, other new Neveryon fiction, a revised version of 'The Tale of Gorgik' from **Tales of Neveryon** (1979), and a lengthy critical essay by Chip's critical alter ego 'K.Leslie Steiner'. **The Splendour and Misery**, on the other hand, has been 'stalled on page 161 for several months', according to Chip in a phone call ten minutes ago.

[That particular item came from a bundle of computer-net gossip forwarded by Peter Mabey: the writer was a fan who claimed to have "personally spoken" to Chip Delany and heard this. Never trust a hacker. DRL]

MALCOLM EDWARDS: "I can't believe Avedon's theory about Del Rey. Corporate publishers don't give editors that much autonomy with best-selling authors; cf del Rey's well publicized falling-out with Stephen Donaldson, where Ballantine went to great lengths to find him a more sympathetic editor (their Subsidiary Rights Director, as it turned out)."

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER confirms: "**Secrets from the Del Rey Files**. It turns out that, in Judy-Lynn's last years, the house of Del Rey had **three** major editors. Judy-Lynn handled SF; Lester handled fantasy; and an anonymous junior editor was detailed to spend her time exclusively editing the mighty Stephen R.Donaldson. My mole reports that Donaldson's copy was so vile that Lester refused to touch it, delegating all responsibility to sub-editors. (Donaldson is on a special shortlist of writers whose work Lester can't stand, but whom he bought Because They Sold. Other writers on this select list are Terry Brooks and Piers Anthony.)"

"**Special Interests Department**. David Brin has reaped mighty rewards from **The Postman**. US postal unions are selling the book through union mail-order catalogues, and one union even presented Brian with a huge crystal goblet at their annual convention. I've got to find another special interest

o pander to, Brin says....

"Moorcock Censorship Horror! US fans waiting for Michael Moorcock's **Fantasy: the 100 Best Novels** will have to wait a while longer. The book has been delayed until the spring of 1988 because of US publisher Carroll and Graf's insistence that Moorcock remove three novels—including **The Story of O**--from his 'best' list on the ground that they're pornographic. 'Libraries will never buy a book advocating filth,' this publisher reportedly said. No word as to Moorcock's reaction; maybe the British edition of the book could be traded to US fans for copies of **Spycatcher**....

[**Ansible**'s roving drinker Martin Hoare visited Philadelphia recently and picked up some copies of the book Maggie Thatcher doesn't want us to read. "You must be English," they said at the bookshop. "Nobody buys this thing except tourists and political science students." I was able to confirm my suspicion that M5 activities consist wholly of elderly chaps forever asking each other whether in 1935 they'd been blackmailed into becoming homosexuals.... DRL]

CHRIS PRIEST: "You shouldn't feel obliged to include all this tedious stuff in **Ansible**. You're not the Congressional Record. Why print boring letters from Martin Morse Wooster?"

NEIL GAIMAN: "The August **Knave** book review column is the all-integrity issue in which a number of authors get to review their own books. These include Brosnan reviewing **Worm**, and JohnPaul GrantBarnett reviewing both his **Advanced Trivia Quiz Book** and something called **Earthdoom!** (which he wrote with some other bloke)....

"I had a phone call from my editor at **Today**. She said she expected I knew all about Dungeons & Dragons. I hastily claimed more knowledge than I actually possess, scenting the possibility of writing a huge article on D&D. Then she told me what the article would be: an exposé in which my task would be to find people whose lives had been destroyed, who had gone bankrupt or become obsessed by Black Magic, who had committed acts of appalling violence, or died, as a result of their connection with D&D, or reading **White Dwarf**, or whatever. This is apparently in response to US Moral Majority complaints about D&D being a Satanist tool or something. I declined to help."

[Footnote: when Ian Pemble was editor, **Knave** published much SF/humour by writers known in fandom. Neil's book column is now the last remnant of this era, the current editor having decided that too much literacy and wit might alienate the readership.... I asked **White Dwarf** coven leader Mike Brunton if he'd been exposed lately, and he tearfully confessed to "a phone call from a journalist (I use the word in its loosest possible sense) from the **Sunday Sport**, looking for an I THREW MYSELF OUT OF A WINDOW WHILE WEARING REMARKABLY FEW CLOTHES AT A GAY NUNS IN BONDAGE D&D PARTY story. Never having been invited to such a do, I couldn't help. Why do other people have interesting lives?"]

DAVID S. GARNETT: "Comrade Hugo Nominee.... When I saw you on the Thursday before the trivial General Election voting, you mentioned that you might be issuing another **Ansible** before the really important voting: the Hugos. If so, and if you're unwilling to reprint 'Still Life' as I requested, maybe you could run an unpaid advert (with your inimitable witty and astute editorial comments, of course) as follows: 'If, before giving "Still Life" their first place Hugo vote, anyone would like to read the story, a copy can be had in exchange for a 9"x6" envelope, stamped to the value of 26p, from David Garnett....' Not that I expect anyone to bother. I probably stand more chance if no one does.

"Nelson at Waterloo, Wellington at Trafalgar (or was it Trafalgar at the Wellington?), Montgomery at El Alamein, Sandie Shaw at the Eurovision Song Contest--next on this honourable roll of glittering British victories is Brighton '87!

"Asimov, Bear, Kelly, Springer--I wonder if any of them are Scientologists?"

[Most of the above seems to have something to do with the short story Hugo. I think. DRL]

MAL ASHWORTH sent a change of address for "history's very

latest neo-capitalist, idle nouveau riche D. (for Denarii) West, who nowadays talks more of Unit Trusts than of Hugo Nominations.... And then, of course, there's a COA for the Leeds Group As A Hole. Country cousins or not, we couldn't let the London lot get away with exojetsetting from the One Tun without doing something about it, so we moved too--no, not to the One Tun but to the Griffin. This is on Boar Lane, even nearer to the railway station than is the West Riding, but in the other direction (turn **right** when you come out of the station). The beer is 6p a pint dearer but you get a better class of hangover, as well as armchairs. So unprecedentedly popular has this move proved that even Michael Ashley has reappeared from under the van which removed a certain portion of his dental portfolio. (Consequently, when we have exhausted the subject of Unit Trusts we talk quite a lot about teeth. It is an experience not to be missed, watching someone who still has L plates on his new false set trying to snarl and still keep the unaccustomed autonomous Hampstead Heath in their allotted places. Oh, we are a zany crowd.)

"Who is this 'palaeolithic fan' 'Sid Barnes' you report as turning up at Conception? I was unofficially in charge of Old Fart Liaison at the affair and I didn't meet 'Sid Barnes'. The only 'Sid Barnes' I have subsequently encountered is in a Vince Clarke write-up of Conception in the Davenport-published Proceedings of the Innermost Temple of the Most Secret Order of the Amazingly Elite Corps of the Purest of the Distilled Trufans of All Ages. Now Vince, if you haven't sussed, is a darling man but lives in a parallel universe to the rest of us, inhabited by shadowy creatures with names like 'Rachel Dorey' and 'Sid Barnes' etc. For accredited primary sources, that is to say, Vincent is definitely not your man. But, for the historical record of **this** universe, there was at Conception a palaeolithic fan, long-time friend of George Airey, by the name of BERT WARNES. And I know he's real--at 77, he's probably considerably more real than I am--because he has just, at my request, produced a short article in appreciation of early 30s fan Douglas Mayer....

[I eagerly await the 2000-word sequel to Mal's letter, which will remind us of when the Leeds Group meets.]

GEORGE HAY: "Copy attached of Virago handout re Arthur C. Clarke Award. This handout was supposed to be available and promoted at the time of Fred Clarke's official presentation to Margaret Attwood at the Shaw Theatre. In fact there was no sign of it; outside Fred's actual presentation, there was no mention at the event of the roles of the SF Foundation, the BSFA or the International Science Policy Foundation. The Award judges were all given balcony seats so far from the platform that we would have needed a Moon Launcher to address to Attwood. And none of us were invited to the reception which I believe was held later. Boo-hoo! While we didn't break our hearts over this, we all found the situation rather sour. Being of a persistent nature I did later get Virago's new publicity lady--not responsible for the foul-up--to issue the handout as attached, mentioning the BSFA etc...."

[One drunken pundit hinted that Margaret Attwood was distinctly underwhelmed by the £1000 award: after all, **The Handmaid's Tale** had just sold for a US paperback advance of \$605,000. DRL]

DAVID R. SMITH: "Now that you are going to chop down the mailing list, am I going to enter into a long spiel, pleading with you to carry on, or at least not to drop me from the list? As it happens, no. I enjoy **Ansible**, but I'm just not fannish enough to be able to put up a convincing case...."

[This continues with lashings of uncritical praise, enough to keep anyone on the list (though offbeat news or scandal would be even better). **Ansible** has never demanded signed certificates of fannishness--whatever that may be--and promises not to run the E-meter over prospective recipients. DRL]

W.E. COOPER: "I'm sorry you feel as you do regarding Ussher and his 4004 creation date. I do most sincerely believe that were you to read Genesis with an unbiased mind you would see that Ussher's 4004 was the creation of man and not of the earth. As further proof of his data see the enclosed re Daniel's visions... they are right up to date. Regarding the other enclosures I trust you will find them interesting..."

one must realize that the world is in an awful mess and Christ must come soon to restore law and order and so end all this sin and wickedness."

[Letters like this arrive every so often, via the publishers of **Facts & Fallacies** and/or my UFO spoof. Mr Cooper's proof is indeed earth-shattering: it seems Halley was born the year Archbishop Ussher died, and "We know it takes Halley's Comet 76 years to complete one orbit but are you aware that if you add 2000 AD to Ussher's 4004 BC and divide the total by 76 it goes exactly 79 times." Since "1986 is actually the year 2000" this shows via devious intermediate steps that Jesus Christ will return on or before 26 June 1987. I rarely answer these letters, but some are entertaining: another correspondent has discovered after 25 years "archaeo-biology" that the brain works exactly like a cheap computer--it even has a keyboard, I'm not sure where--and can be reprogrammed in BASIC to improve your personality no end. Heigh-ho. DRL]

C.O.A.

TONY BERRY, Flat 1, 17 Hilton Rd, Mapperley, Nottingham, NG3 6AN :: BERNADETTE BOSKY & ARTHUR D.HLAVATY, PO Box 52028, Durham, NC 27717, USA :: MIKE CHRISTIE & SHERRY COLDSMITH, Ty Llyn, Llangorse, Brecon, Powys, LD3 7TR :: JONATHAN COLE-CLOUGH, c/o Digital Type Systems, The Jam Factory, 27 Park End St, Oxford, OX1 1HU :: JONATHAN COWIE, 5 Charlieville Rd, Erith, Kent, DA8 1HJ :: IAIN DICKSON, 54 Valentines Way, Rush Green, nr Romford, Essex :: ALAN & ROCHELLE DOREY, 7 Conway Close, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Beds, LU5 5SB :: MIKE FORD, 27 Stanmore Crescent, Leeds, LS4 2RY :: RICHARD FRANK, PO Box 234, Avis, PA 17721 USA :: ABIGAIL FROST, 95 Wilmot St, London, E.2 :: NEIL GAIMAN, 4 Littlemead, Nutley, East Sussex, TN22 3LP :: PAUL & ANGIE HESKETT*, ICL (Reading) Club, 53 Blagrove St, Reading, Berks, RG1 1PZ :: MALCOLM HODKIN, 3 Main St, Strathkiness, Fife, KY16 :: K.J.KNIGHT, 178a Gipsy Rd, London, SE27 9RE :: LEE MONTGOMERIE, 53 Riviera Gdns, Leeds, LS7 3DW :: CHARLES PLATT*, 594 Broadway, Room 1208, New York, NY 10012, USA :: NIGEL RICHARDSON, c/o 28 Duckett Rd, London, N4 1BN :: DEB & MIKE ROHAN, 16 Helmsley Rd, West Park, Leeds, LS16 5JA :: GARY STRATMANN, 68 Eden Rd, Walthamstow, London, E17 9JY :: PASCAL THOMAS, c/o Librairie Ailleurs, 28 rue Pharaon, 31000 Toulouse, France :: PETER A.TYERS, 114 Shakespeare Way, Taverham, Norwich, Norfolk, NR8 6TZ :: D.WEST, 17 Carlisle St, Keighley, West Yorks, BD21 4PX :: OWEN WHITEOAK, Top Flat, 11 Horsell Rd, Highbury, London, N5 1XL :: MARC WILLNER, 84 Sandwich Rd (21), Bourne, MA 02532, USA :: *Late entry--sorry.

GHOST OF HONOUR SPEECH

[One interesting item at Beccon was this talk, written by famous **Patrick Parrinder** and delivered by a skiffy author whose aspect, manner and squeaks of indignation were held to be highly authentic.]

Ladies and gentlemen....

I want to make it quite plain that I am here under false pretences, and against my will. I have been given a few minutes to explain my presence here this morning, though I must tell you that it is as much of a surprise to me as it undoubtedly is to you. First of all, I am not the person that you may mistakenly think I am. I am not Mr Ian Watson, even though just at present I seem to be the inhabitant of his body. Mr Ian Watson is, I am told, a science-fiction writer, with a certain admiration for some rather trifling books I once wrote. Whether his admiration will survive this experiment in which he and I have become so curiously entangled, I cannot say. As I am the present inhabitant of Mr Watson's body, he, I can only suppose, is currently making free with mine. Mr Watson, I am told, bears a certain physical resemblance to me in my sprightlier and younger days. But I must assure you that the brain that is speaking to you from inside his body is not his. It is mine.

I am trying to outline these confusing matters to you as clearly as possibly. When I left home this morning, I distinctly remember the date. It was April 19th, 1932. I was being driven in a hired limousine, and with me in my briefcase was the speech I intended to give at a weekend conference run by the younger members of the Fabian Society. These conferences are rather jolly affairs, as they tend to attract

a number of intelligent young men and pretty and intelligent young women. On the whole I find that the young women make more attentive listeners than the young men. The subject of my paper was to be "The World of our Grandchildren"--though from my point of view, as I am 65, it would have been "The World of our Great-Grandchildren". I wonder what has happened to that paper. Perhaps at this very moment Mr Ian Watson is reading it to an audience somewhere--though if he should find himself at that Fabian conference, he would do better to tear it up and speak from his own experience. Mr Watson, I understand, is almost young enough to be one of my great-grandchildren.

Now when I am in my own body I am a notoriously incompetent speaker. I fiddle with my tie, lose my place, drop my notes, and my voice either dwindles into inaudibility or is mercilessly distorted by the public-address system. If I do not have a speech all written down beforehand I am left wordless, tongue-tied, squeaking and gibbering. Happily on this occasion I do not seem to be in so much of a funk as usual. Perhaps Mr Watson, like my friend Bernard Shaw, is a more gifted mountebank than I am. Certainly his body, unlike mine, feels relatively calm and collected on a public platform.

The fact is that I am a little nervous, but for a rather different reason. I understand that not only are you an audience of my great-grandchildren, so to speak, but you are an audience of "science-fiction fans". "Science fiction" did not exist in my day unless you count some horribly cheap magazines published by a swindling American called Hugo Gernsback. I know about Mr Gernsback and his little ways, since he is in the habit of reprinting my stories without my permission and without paying any fees. But even Mr Gernsback in his wildest dreams could not have imagined this extraordinary Convention in which I find myself. I have learned to my horror that this gathering includes people who count themselves, in this year of 1987, among my most loyal and enthusiastic readers. I can only hope that what I have to say will bring them to their senses. I have to tell you that the fantastic tales of scientific inventions which I wrote in my youth were the merest apprentice-work, on which I cut my teeth as a writer before turning to more serious tasks. I have asked to be allowed to speak to you so that I can urge you to give up reading scientific romance and turn to the serious business facing the world. I want to ask you to turn from reading Science Fiction to building an Utopian World State.

Before I explain my ideas about the World State and the Open Conspiracy, let me try to say in a little more detail how I came to be here. I think I heard the person who introduced me suggesting that I might have travelled to this Convention in a time machine. I am afraid that he was guilty of a ridiculous error. The time machine of which I wrote in my youth was only a speculative device. Incidentally, I am told that Mr Ian Watson once published a story called "The Very Slow Time Machine". If this was meant as a flattering allusion to my work it has sadly misfired. The whole point about time machines is that, if they existed, they would move very fast. In any case, I did not travel here on a time machine. I came here by car.

When I arrived, another member of your Committee suggested that I might have come by the method described in a little story I once wrote, "The Stolen Body". It is true that I seem to have stolen Mr Watson's body. However, my story was written so long ago that I have not the slightest idea whether it is relevant or not. As I have said, I came here by limousine. I used to enjoy driving myself, in a jerky and approximate fashion, but nowadays when I have somewhere to get to I employ a chauffeur. The young man who turned up to drive me this morning seemed perfectly normal. As we drove along I was too busy making some last-minute amendments to my speech to notice the landscape. I may have nodded off for a minute or two. When I woke up I was puzzled to find that the chauffeur addressed me as "Mr Watson".

Whether I have stolen Mr Watson's body, or whether he has stolen mine, is I confess something of a mystery to me. His is a fairly agreeable sort of body, though when I caught sight of it in the driving mirror I did suffer a most unpleasant shock. Also, I begin to feel some anxiety as to what Mr Watson is up to in my body--assuming that is where he is, and that we are not caught up in some intricate game of physical musical chairs. I hope he takes good care of my body,

While he is inside it. He will need to give it regular exercise, fresh air, and a carefully controlled diet--since I am, or was, a diabetic. He will find my body's sexual urges a little troublesome, I dare say. He will need to seek out attractive and intelligent members of the opposite sex in order to give these urges some relief. I hope this necessity does not put Mr Watson too much strain. He is probably accustomed to a very different and much duller sort of life.

Now let me come to the real reasons why I wanted to be allowed to speak to you. When my chauffeur addressed me as "Mr Watson", I asked him what the date was and where we were. He said it was 1987 and that we were driving through the outskirts of Birmingham. I confess that I was not as elated by this as I might have hoped. In fact I was conscious of considerable dismay. Looking around me, I soon realized that the world of my grandchildren was a world in which people could not possibly have read any of my serious books. If they had read my serious books they would have planned and organized and cleared away the dirt and ugliness I glimpsed around me. You see, to me your world of 1987 is rather like my world of 1932. All my life I have dreamed of an ordered and spacious society, an educated and disciplined world of the future. The alternative, I believed, was stark catastrophe. But I arrive in 1987 and I find that you are content to muddle along in the same wasteful and outdated fashion as my contemporaries did.

It is true that before I came on this platform I asked your Committee what mankind had achieved in the past 55 years. Their answers at first were difficult to understand, but finally I made out that they were speaking of space-rockets, atom bombs, and electronic brains. Perhaps they were disappointed by my response. I had expected that you would have built the new world order, and brought about world peace. All you have done is to develop various inventions which are anticipated either in my books, or in those of one or two of my forward-looking contemporaries. Moreover, your scientists have been content to leave control of the world in the hands of the politicians and military men. Scientific research as a result is largely misdirected. It is plain to me that your age is in as much need of my ideas of the World State and the Open Conspiracy as were my contemporaries.

I feel that I am coming to the end of my allotted time on this platform, but I have not even begun to address you on these urgent matters. I would like to speak of the World State, of World education, World history, the World encyclopaedia and the Open Conspiracy. I would like to discuss how we are to stop *homo sapiens* from pursuing his present blind and suicidal path. I will not develop these matters further this morning. But this afternoon I intend to ask your chairman to suspend your regular proceedings so that we can debate them fully. If I am not here to do so, you will know that I have got my own body back and that I am busy expounding the same themes to the 1932 conference of the Young Fabians. You will, no doubt, wish to carry on this crucial debate in my absence.

Let me end, however, on a more personal note. Of all the many science-fiction writers who have claimed to be prophets, I am the first one to have actually visited the future. It is, I admit, a rather unnerving experience. But once I have got my own body back from Mr Watson it is plain what I shall do. I shall set to work on a novel describing this queer world of 1987, how it came into existence and where it is leading. Then I will travel round the world and unfold the results of my researches to Mr Roosevelt and Mr Stalin. No doubt they will see the necessity of amending their policies instantly. Now I realize that if I tell my readers *exactly* what I have seen in the year 1987 they will not believe me. I shall have to make some of it up. I shall certainly not mention anything so undignified as my appearance at this Convention.

I think I shall call this new novel of mine *The Shape of Things to Come*. Rather a good title, don't you think? I expect it to be published in 1933, and I shall then talk to Mr Alexander Korda about the film rights. Before I go I must confess that, after all, I am beginning to enjoy this world of 1987. There is something pleasantly informal about it. Some of your young ladies would, I suspect, make extremely congenial company. But I think I had better go back and write *The Shape of Things to Come* before Mr Ian Watson steals my

idea. I am sure he is an expert on 1987 but he would be bound to make a frightful mess of writing about it. Besides, I am beginning to find his body rather a tight and uncomfortable fit. In my mature years I have needed a good deal more room to bulge and sag and flop about in than Mr Watson's body seems to provide.

By the way, I see that I must be a little more modest than you may have thought, since I have still to tell you who I am. My name probably means as little to most of you as does Mr Watson's to whatever audience he is currently addressing himself. But, ladies and gentlemen, my name is--or was--H.G.Wells.

CONTINENTAL CALAMITIES

Gosh, there's been some stormy weather in Eurofandom. Two press releases follow....

"Why John Brunner Will Not Be At The French National SF Con" (by JB): "I have attended and enjoyed many SF cons in France. After a period of some years during which they were not very well organized, the one at Lille in September 1986 made a most favourable impression on me, and when I received a verbal invitation to the 1987 con I promptly accepted.

"Much water subsequently flowed under the bridge, including a change of venue, but I let six months or so elapse before trying to find out what in the world was going on. I still don't know.

"My friend and colleague Ian Watson informs me that he, and other people in Britain, have received progress reports--which state, apparently, that I am going to be present. I'd have been interested to see copies of these PRs. In fact, all I have ever received from the organizers is a one-page flyer and a sheet of letterhead blank save for the address.

"I had gone to some slight trouble. The possibility arose of my combining a trip to the Montpellier con with Beneluxcon the following weekend, which would greatly have reduced the financial burden on both committees. Unfortunately the Dutch organizers had to withdraw their invitation, owing to lack of funds. On 1 June, having received a letter to say so, I wrote as a matter of urgency to M.Gilles Murat asking for written confirmation that during the con I would be teaching at a writers' workshop; supported by it, I planned to ask for a British Council subvention.

"Although I wrote in French, he didn't bother to answer.

"I wrote again on 25 June. He still didn't answer.

"In the meantime I learned from Ian Watson that other people invited from Britain had been rung up to discuss details of travel arrangements. Two weeks ago he further told me that a M.Pierre-Paul Durastanti, who had spoken to him on the phone, had promised to contact me within a few days.

"That didn't happen, either.

"I consider the committee to have behaved with extreme discourtesy, and I wish it to be known that anyone who goes to Montpellier in the expectation of meeting me there will feel let down, as I do at this moment. **Verb. sap.**" [JKHB]

[Old-time *Ansible* readers will know that this is the

cue for Harry Harrison to write in and controvert....

Your editor would also like to hear from M.Durastanti, who begged innumerable manuscripts for wondrous SF projects in 1983, and has yet to return any, pay for any, or answer my "What the hell's happening?" query dated September 1984. DRL]

"Cheating In SEFF" (by Ahrvld Engholm): "The 1987 race in the Scandinavian-European Fan Fund (SEFF) has caused one of the greatest scandals ever in Swedish fandom. SEFF works like TAFF and other fan funds, and sends fans between Scandinavian countries and the rest of Europe. The 1987 race aimed for Conspiracy, the worldcon in Brighton, and the 'winner' was decided by substantial cheating.

"Official Swedish administrator figures claim that out of a total of 229 votes cast, the Swede Anders Bellis defeated the Norwegian candidate Johan Schimanski with 112 votes to 107. (In the final round of counting the Australian system is used. There was actually a third candidate, Jan Risheden.)

"However, a few hours before the deadline Schimanski had a majority of about 20 votes!. It appears that the Bellis campaign phoned around for new votes the day of the deadline, scraping up a majority for themselves by 'proxies'. The SEFF ballot is very clear on this point: votes must be signed by

the voter--no proxies. Even more of a scandal was the fact that the Swedish SEFF administrator Maths Claesson personally helped the Bellis campaign. Just before the deadline he informed them that they were losing, and forwarded [AE's word. Promoted? Suggested? DRL] the idea of using last-minute proxies to change the result.

"Here are a few lines from an interview with Maths Claesson made by the Swedish SF newsletter **Fanytt**:

"CLAESSON: Yes, I informed them about the votes just before the deadline. A number of votes were delivered by proxies, and I accepted them. FANYTT [i.e. Engholm]: Can you say how many votes were delivered by proxies the day of and the day before the deadline? CLAESSON: No, I don't want to. FANYTT: Why? CLAESSON: I tell the final results of the voting, nothing more. FANYTT: We estimate that 15-20 votes were phoned for just before the deadline. Can you confirm or deny this? CLAESSON: (silence).

"The affair has aroused a cry of shame [sic] in Swedish fandom. There's pressure building up to 'overrule' the administrator's acts and decisions, and declare the Norwegian Johan Schimanski as winner. The British SEFF administrator Jim Barker, who had nothing to do with the alleged cheating, has expressed his deep concern, suggesting that the whole race should be declared void.

"Meanwhile, a great Scandinavian fuss is expected at Conspiracy, and even legal actions for fraud." [AE]

...Oh dear, here we go again. Always something new out of Sweden. "Further details reach me every day," Ahrvid adds bloodthirstily, "like the Bellis campaign stating themselves on the afternoon of the deadline day that they then had 94-95 votes." Nothing so far received here reflects badly on Anders Bellis himself, which is worth bearing in mind should he make the trip. I also note that **Ansible's** desultory coverage of Swedish upsets can seem one-sided because usually only AE sends reports: there's supposed to be a rival press release from AB, but I haven't seen it.

For the opposition, Kaj Harju tells me that "there is some facts quite wrong (and most people are sure that Engholm is mad)... very few fans in Sweden want anything to do with him and it is hard for him to know things as they actually are". Most of KH's assertions are not quite to the point: AE has been voted Swedish Fugghed of 1986 in a poll run by **Kolon** (AB's fanzine); there is a mysterious counter-allegation about Norwegian block voting; "AE states that he is working with LFP/Nova [John-Henri Holmberg's publishing outfit, where MC and AB work]--that's wrong, he has been refusing to give back the keys since they kicked him out early this year"; AE is guilty of vandalism and assault at Swedish cons; etc. KH successfully challenges a couple of AE's more strained interpretations of "evidence", but doesn't address himself to the central issue.

What evidence? Reading the "scandal" issue of **Fanytt** in this light, I boggled: "It so happens that [AE] is a free-lance employee of the same firm that the SEFF administrator Maths Claesson works for, LFP publishers in Stockholm, and we have our own keys to their office. One day when we paid it a visit, there were all the SEFF ballots in a corner!" Some are reproduced, clearly "proxies" or votes received by phone. I can't--despite AE's claim--find an explicit prohibition of telephone voting on the ballot form, and suspect it's harmless for administrators to accept (personally) phoned votes from fans known to them. But besides such worrying items as ballots apparently signed by John-Henri Holmberg on behalf of his relatives, MC does seem to have admitted that AB's clinching votes were drummed up at the last minute as the result of a self-confessed leak. Which is definitely Not On.

(Fandom's amateur lawyers will be glad to learn that even more than TAFF's, the minimalist SEFF rules rely heavily on good will and contain loopholes you could drive a Chris Foss spaceship through: no mention of confidentiality or administrative impartiality, and only an implication--the word "Signature" against a blank space on the form--that votes should be signed. Similarly, the rules don't prohibit administrators from setting fire to any ballots they don't agree with. You can't cover everything.)

The general level of abuse suggests that all this is linked with the long-term, pan-Swedish fan feud. KH sends pages of smears about AE but fails to dispute the accuracy of the Claesson/Engholm exchange above. Neither does AE confine

himself to facts: **Fanytt** offers disgraceful statements like "Bellis despite cheating didn't have a majority according to the Australian system (111 is less than half of 227)". The hint that AB personally cheated may be an accident of syntax, but the Australian ballot is slyly misrepresented (by quoting the total votes cast--now amended to 227--rather than the 219 remaining after the third candidate's elimination. 111 is not less than half of 219) in order to make it seem that MC also fiddled the counting.

At least we managed to get through the TAFF controversies without anyone sneaking into administrators' offices to conduct searches....

ALIEN CHRISTMAS: Terry Pratchett

[This postprandial speech from Becon's "Christmas Dinner" helped delay the present **Ansible**: for several weeks I gave up in a fit of pique at Terry's vile act of sending a spare copy to **Matrix**. But then I thought of all my non-BSFA readers, and couldn't resist using the only item ever to reach **Ansible** on disk....]

This is a great idea, isn't it? So much nicer to have Christmas at this time of the year instead of at the end of December, when the shops are always so crowded. Reminds me of those clips you used to get in The Queen's Christmas broadcast to the Commonwealth back in the 50s, with the traditional shot of Australians eating chilled prawns, roast turkey and Christmas pudding on Bondi beach. There was always a Christmas tree planted in the sand. It was decorated with what I now realize was probably vomit.

Last week I got this fortune cookie sort of printout which said **Your role is Eater**. I thought fantastic, I like role-playing games, I've never been an Eater before, I wonder how many hit points it has?

And then I saw another printout underneath it which said that at 2200 my role was After Dinner Speaker, which is something you'd expect to find only in the very worst dungeon, a monster lurching around in a white frilly shirt looking for an audience. Three hours later the explorers are found bored rigid, their coffee stone cold, the brick-thick after dinner mint melted in their hands.

That reminds me why I gave up Dungeons and Dragons. There were too many monsters. Back in the old days you could go around a dungeon without meeting much more than a few orcs and lizard men, but then everyone started inventing monsters and pretty soon it was a case of, buggler the magic sword, what you really needed to be the complete adventurer was the Marcus L. Rowland fifteen-volume guide to Monsters and the ability to read very, very fast, because if you couldn't recognize them from the outside you pretty soon got the chance to try looking at them from the wrong side of their tonsils.

Anyway, this bit of paper said I was to talk about Alien Christmases, which was handy, because I always like to know what subject it is I'm straying away from. I'll give it a try, I've been a lot of bad things in my time although, praise the Lord, I've never been a Blake's 7 fan.

Not that Christmases aren't pretty alien in any case. It's a funny old thing, but when ever you see pictures of Santa Claus he's always got the same toys in his sack. A teddy, a dolly, a trumpet and a wooden engine. Always. Sometimes he also has a few red and white striped candy canes. Heaven knows why, you never see them in the shops, and if any kids asks for a wooden engine these days it means he lives at the bottom of a hole on a desert island and has never heard of television, because last Christmas my daughter got a lot of toys, a few cars, a plane, stuff like that, and the thing about them was this. Every single one of them was a robot.

Not just a simple robot. I know what robots are supposed to look like, I had a robot when I was a kid. You could tell it was a robot, it had two cogwheels going round in its chest and its eyes lit up when you turned its key, and why not, so would yours. And I had a Magic Robot... well, we all had one, didn't we? And when we got fed up with the smug way he spun around on his mirror getting all the right answers we cut them out and stuck them down differently for the sheer hell of it, gosh, weren't we devils.

But these new robots are subversive. They are robots in disguise.

There's this sort of robot war going on around us. I

haven't quite figured it out yet, although the kids seem incredibly well-informed on the subject. It appears that you can tell the good robots from the bad robots because the good robots have got human heads, a bit like that scene in Saturn Five, you remember, where the robot gets the idea that the best way to look human is hack someone's head off and stick it on your antenna. They all look like an American footballer who's been smashed through a Volkswagen.

They go around saving the universe from another bunch of robots, saving the universe in this case consisting of great laser battles. The universe doesn't look that good by the time they've saved it, but by golly, it's saved.

Anyway, none of her presents looked like it was supposed to. A collection of plastic rocks turned out to be Rock Lords, with exciting rocky names like Boulder and Nugget. Yes, another bunch of bloody robots.

In fact the only Christmassy thing in our house was the crib, and I'm not certain that at a touch of a button it wouldn't transform and the Mary and Josephoids would battle it out with the Three Kingons.

Weirdest of the lot, though, is Kraak, Prince of Darkness. At £14.95 he must be a bargain for a prince of darkness. He's a Zoid, probably from the planet Zoid in the galaxy of Zoid, because while the models are pretty good the storyline behind them is junk, the science fiction equivalent of a McDonalds hamburger. I like old Kraak, though, because it only took the whole of Christmas morning to put him together. He's made of red and grey plastic, an absolute miracle of polystyrene technology, and he looks like a chicken that's been dead for maybe three months. Stuff two batteries up his robot bum and he starts to terrorize the universe as advertised, and he does it like this, what he does is, he walks about nine inches ver--ry slowly and painfully, while dozens of little plastic pistons thrash about, and then he falls over.

Kraak has got the kind of instinct for survival that makes a kamikaze pilot look like the Green Cross Code man. I don't know what the terrain is like up there on Zoid, but he finds it pretty difficult to travel over the average living room carpet. No wonder he terrorizes the universe, it must be pretty frightening, having a thousand tons of war robot collapse on top of you and lie there with its little feet pathetically going round and round. You want to commit suicide in sympathy. Oh, and he's got this other fiendish weapon, his head comes off and rolls under the sofa. Pretty scary, that. We've tested him out with other Zoids, and I'm here to tell you that the technology of robot fighting machines, basically, is trying to fall over in front of your opponent and trip him up. It's a hard job, because the natural instinct of all Zoids is to fall over as soon as you take your hand away.

But even Kraak has problems compared with a robot that was proudly demonstrated to us by the lad next door. A Transformer, I think it was. It isn't just made of one car or plane, it's a whole fleet of vehicles which, when disaster threatens, assemble themselves into one great big fighting machine. That's the theory, anyway. My bet is that at the moment of truth the bloody thing will have to go into battle half finished because its torso is grounded at Gatwick and its left leg is stuck in a traffic jam outside Luton.

We recently saw **Santa Claus: the Movie**. Anyone else seen it? Pretty dreadful, the only laugh is where they apparently let the reindeer snort coke in order to get them to fly. No wonder Rudolf had a red nose, he spends half the time with a straw stuck up it.

Anyway, you get to see Santa's workshop. Just as I thought. Every damn toy is made of wood, painted in garish primary colours. It might have been possible, in fact I suppose it's probably inevitable, that if you pressed the right switch on the rocking horses and jolly wooden dolls they turned into robots, but I doubt it. I looked very carefully over the whole place and there wasn't a single plastic extrusion machine. Not a single elf looked as though he knew which end to hold a soldering iron. None of the really traditional kids' toys were there--no Rambos, no plastic models of the Karate kid, none of those weird little spelling and writing machines designed to help your child talk like a NASA launch controller with sinus trouble and a mental age of five.

Now, I've got a theory to account for this. Basically, it

is that Father Christmases are planet-specific and we've got the wrong one.

I suspect it was the atom bomb tests in the early 50s that warped the, you know, the fabric of time and space and that. Secret tests at the North Pole opened up this, you know, sort of hole between the dimensions, and all the stuff made by our Father Christmas is somehow diverted to Zoid or wherever and we get all the stuff he makes, and since he's a robot made out of plastic he only makes the things he's good at.

The people it's really tough on are the kids on Zoid. They wake up on Christmas morning, unplug themselves from their recharger units, clank to the end of the bed (pausing only to fall over once or twice) playfully zapping one another with their megadeath lasers, look into their portable pedal extremity enclosures and what do they find? Not the playful, cuddly death-dealing instruments of mayhem that they have been led to expect, but wooden trains, trumpets, rag dolls and those curly red and white sugar walking sticks that you never see in real life. Toys that don't need batteries. Toys that you don't have put together. Toys with varnish on instead of plastic. Alien toys.

And, because of this amazing two-way time warp thingy, our kids get the rest. Weird plastic masters of the universe which are to the imagination what sandpaper is to a tomato. Alien toys. Maybe it's being done on purpose, to turn them all into Zoids. Like the song says--you'd better watch out.

I don't think it will work, though. I took a look into my daughter's dolls-house. Old Kraak has been hanging out there since his batteries ran out and his mega cannons fell off. Mr T has been there for a couple of years, ever since she found out he could wear Barbie's clothes, and I see that some plastic cat woman is living in the bathroom.

I don't know why, but what I saw in there gave me hope. Kraak was having a tea party with a mechanical dog, two Playpeople and three dolls. He wasn't trying to zap anyone. No matter what Santa Claws throws at us, we can beat him....

And now your mummies and daddies are turning up to take you home; be sure to pick up your balloons and Party Loot bags, and remember that Father Christmas will soon be along to give presents to all the good boys and girls who've won awards.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Secrets of the Universe Nearly Revealed: Bill Gibson, briefly reduced to speechlessness, passes on a letter inviting him to contribute to a new SFWA book on how to write skiffy. "We hope that you might write something for us on the topic of **writing cyberpunk SF**." (Their boldface.) I have a fond vision of the simultaneous letter to Brian Aldiss, asking him to bash out a brief guide to **writing Helliconia trilogies**.

Condon: Eastercon 1988 is **Follycon** at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, with GoH Gordon Dickson and Gwyneth Jones, FGOH Greg Pickersgill. £6 supp/£12 att to 104 Pretoria Rd, Patchway, Bristol. Easter 1989 will be **Contrivance** at the Hotel de France, St Helier, Jersey: GoH Anne McCaffrey and M.John Harrison. £6 supp/£12 att to 63 Drake Rd, Chessington, Surrey. **Nolacon 88** (New Orleans worldcon) now has Linda Pickersgill as reluctant UK agent (7a Lawrence Rd, S.Ealing, W5 4XJ): "I was drunk at the time," she explains.

"It's **UFOs by Royal Appointment!**" says a clipping sent by bibliophile David Garnett. "Head-in-the-Stars Prince Charles has joined a galaxy of celebrity space-watchers who believe in little green men. He's at the centre of a new cosmic controversy after graciously accepting weirdo sci-fi novels by the founder of the evil Scientology cult L.Ron Hubbard. The mystical Hubbard trilogy **Mission Earth**--stories of futuristic heroes zapping across the universe in flying saucers--is now sitting on the Prince's personal bookshelves," etc. "Sick and dangerous... corrupting works... the wacky Prince..." **Ansible** just can't match the professional journalistic standards of this **Sunday Sport** coverage. [14-6-87]

False Pseudonym Horror: This is complicated, so pay attention. "Sue Denim" is a deeply obvious pseudonym, used by US author Lew Shiner to be rude about people anonymously in **Cheap Truth**. Unfortunately the "Sue Denim" who contributed to Charles Platt's **REM:8** proved to be the pseudonym of somebody else altogether, provoking massive wrath from L.Shiner since, although nobody is supposed to know Sue Denim is **his** pseudonym, he feels his literary reputation has been shattered by

this impostor's publication of work under his name... I mean, not under his name. (Info: Charles Platt.)

Obit: this sad news is old, but I can't omit the 19 May death of Alice Sheldon, alias James Tiptree Jr. She was 71; her husband was 84, blind and bedridden; it was seemingly by mutual agreement that she shot him and then herself. Old-time fan and **Other Worlds** editor Bea Mahaffey died of emphysema on 28 March, aged 60: she was fondly remembered by many older fans here in Britain. Richard Wilson (perhaps best known for **The Girls from Planet 5** and the Nebula winner "Mother to the World") died of cancer at 66 on 29 March.

Cuts! is the Langford/"Grant" successor to **Earthdoom!** and sends up the naff aspects of horror novels. Good old Nick Austin at Grafton will publish it within decades. My collaborator sometimes strayed away from the genre: "Don't you remember how you were built only to help humanity, how you are bound by the famous Laws of Robotics?" "Yes: I mustn't enjoy myself too much while harming human beings, I mustn't fall around laughing when human beings harm themselves, and above all I mustn't let myself come to any harm." "I told you not to buy that cheap Ansible software," muttered Whitlow....

Togetheress Dept: Jerry Kaufman & Suzanne Tompkins at last got married on 16 May, in Seattle; ditto Paul Heskett and Angie on 12 March, in Reading; Maureen Porter was miffed by my failure to report her engagement to Paul Kincaid; Jan Huxley will shortly marry Paul Didntquitecatchhisname.

Trivia Corner: "By April 1984," says a quiz-card issued to promote Wm Younger's curiously unpleasing beer, "how many different beer mats had Tim Stannard of Birmingham collected?" Could this be fandom's Tim Stannard, who, being a solicitor, likes to dress up in Nazi uniform at conventions? Indeed it is he. (Answer: a puny 28,400.)

Nebulas, for those who want to know these things, went to Orson Scott Card's **Squeaker for the Dead**, Lucius Shepard's "R&R", Kate Wilhelm's "The Girl Who Fell Into The Sky", Greg Bear's "Tangents"... and Isaac Asimov is at last able to stop dropping hints about the SFWA "Grand Master" award.

Closet Strippers: Our local bookshop is doing a comics promotion and promises the attendance of two authors who I hadn't realized were comics megastars, Ben "American Flag" Bova and Harry "Swamp Thing" Harrison....

Club Staff: "I suppose you know all about the York SF Group?" asks Sue Thomason, correctly expecting the answer No. "We meet on Wednesdays in The Golden Ball, Bishophill, York. But not every Wednesday—phone Liz Sourbut (York 646827) or me (425873) for details. Recent activities included a video evening, a group visit to Star Trek IV, and a beertalk with Michael Scott Rohan (nice man; he told me I'd got charisma; he can come back again anytime...)." LEEDS: see the Ashworth Testament (letters, above). READING: erstwhile pub meetings have quietly died, but there's a massive flexible response capability whereby visiting fans can usually precipitate an instant gathering at the ICL Club close to the station, by phoning the Hoares (0734 588570) or me (665804).

Serious & Constructive: William Wheeler's **SF International** (see A48) has been discontinued as a magazine, but WW plans "to use stories already bought for **SFI** 3, 4, 5 & 6 in a trade pb anthology", and if it succeeds will do more. Last issue I noted that asking for the offered freebie copy of **Fantasy Review** resulted only in demands for money: later I was also inundated with **FRs**, plus further and increasingly reproachful invoices (I think this is called inertia selling). Despite such shrewd marketing, **FR** is now collapsing into an annual hardback volume at \$57.50, more than twice the old price of a year's subscription (10 copies). I wish them luck. **Sex in Space** was the triffic working title of the anthology **Demon Lovers**, now contracted to NEL and looking out for tasteful stories which can credibly be assimilated under either title: Alex Stewart, 47 St Johns Green, Colchester, Essex, CO2 7EZ. The amateur **Cassandra Anthology** folds with issue 13/14 in late September (overwork, lack of publishable submissions).

Bob Shaw Menaced By Nightmarish, Glistening Insect! This scene was the subject of a large drawing in **The Independent** [26 May], the insect being a metaphor for depressive side-effects of a slimming pill called Ponderax, which left Bob badly blocked on a novel—until he worked out what was wrong, swore off the pills, and as a happier side-effect sold the whole tale of woe to a national newspaper....

At Last, The 1954 Show! The Spring **Skeptical Inquirer** has a newish theory of the deeply implausible UFO book **Flying Saucers From Mars** by "Cedric Allingham" (1954). Several independent items of evidence point to an amateur astronomer who's been suspected of several naughty hoaxes, and who is also the only person ever to claim he's met the elusive "Allingham". Step forward, Patrick Moore....

Fans Across The World raised £300 at Easter, to assist poverty-stricken travellers from far climes to Conspiracy.

Church Harris Reports: "[Bryan Barrett] tells me that Lucy Huntzinger now has a small tattoo of Orca, the Killer Whale in a very intimate place indeed. It is inadvisable to holler 'Thar she blows' unless one is wearing a tarpaulin jacket. This was jolly interesting... Bryan, you must understand, has not actually seen the tattoo so far, but like the tenth planet between Uranus and Pluto, he knows it is there."

Ansiblecon 85: accounts (30 June) show \$A8886.59 profit.

Was This The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived? A photo of Maxim Jakubowski (provenance unknown) adorned this spoof **Private Eye** story about Le Corbusier, showing that (at least to the **Eye**) Maxim looks like the epitome of a French architect....

Adelphi Horror: looks as though Follycon will have to take care, since there was lots of theft at the Sol III Trekcon on 1-4 May. Rog Peyton reportedly lost £360 and Cytha North £130 when the dealers' room was busted on the Saturday night; £450 of Chris Chivers's sound gear also vanished, and another £140 in tools and costumes. **Ansible's** mole says, "we suspect h*rt*1 st*ff...." Surprisingly, Becon lost some fairly expensive sound mixing gear despite determined security organization.

Mother of God, Is This The End For ANSIBLE? Wait and see.

WY J. BURNS
23 KENSINGTON COURT
HEMPSTEAD, NY 11550 USA

Ansible



OK to issue 99

HAZEL'S LANGUAGE LESSONS: Breton

anal	breath
koan	evening meal
stank	numerous
halo	spittle
gall	(1) French; (2) stammering

Lee Hoffman
401 Sunrise Trail NW
Port Charlotte
FL 33952
USA

ANSIBLE 50, 94 London Road, Reading, UK, RG1 5AU