

Ansible



Ansible 65 December 1992

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. Fax 0734 669914. ISSN 0265-9816. Logo by Dan Steffan. *Ansible* is available for SAEs, whim, personal threats or (rich idiots only) £12 per year. Abigail Frost for TAFF!

XMAS QUIZ. A small prize to the first devoted *Ansible* reader to explain why these writers form a series, and who comes next: Clifford Simak, Charles Fort, John Sladek, Jody Scott, A.E. van Vogt, Jack Vance, Edward Gorey, James Branch Cabell...?

The Aliens Among Us

Nick Austin, erstwhile sf editor/consultant for practically every UK publisher you've heard of, has now left Orion/Millennium.

J.G. Ballard, 62 on 15 Nov, got a *Sunday Times* birthday notice as 'science fiction writer and novelist'. What, both? [DW]

Damien Broderick, almost famous Aussie sf author, 'has published *The Lotto Effect: Towards a Technology of the Paranormal*. ("Lotto" is the favourite ordinary-person's method of gambling here, with a success probability of 1 in 8.5 million or so.) Damien has been working on this book for very many years, and the blurb explains: "Dr Damien Broderick has studied a vast computerized trove of data—three-quarters of a billion guesses—from many draws of Tattsлото. The database is provided—tables and graphs of the way players voted in 23 consecutive draws. This invaluable information for Lotto punters has never before been published anywhere. / Does ESP affect Lotto players? It seems to. The results are startling, statistically significant, and inexplicable." ... Bruce Gillespie complains that Damien has left out all the Scientific Explanation of how his conclusions follow from the data. John Foyster wrote a letter (enclosing graph) to point out another and simpler explanation for an effect which Damien claimed could only be paranormal. Damien's response appeared to miss the point. Then, on 17 Nov, we discovered that three Crop Circles had formed in the crop of 33" grass that we are growing in our back yard. I regret to say that John sent Damien a circulation-of-one newsheet about Pre-Cognitive Crop Circles—*Weekly Wild News, November 1992*—headlined CROP CIRCLES PREDICT LOTTO RESULTS....' [NR] (*To be discontinued—Ed.*)

John Clute, in an access of euphoria, tried to drive the other SF Encyclopaedists mad with a post-last-minute fax: 'I'm worried about the use within ascription brackets of the term *chap* [*chapbook*], and would like to substitute the term PYG ... so as to refer to the rewritten SUPERMAN entry I will send later today, which will now be called PYGMALION, and will address the true nature of the DEFINITION OF SF, which will need rewriting. Where PYG is not appropriate within ascription brackets, i.e. for short sf novels with detective or policier elements, I would prefer you to substitute the term *pig*, for all MAGICAL REALIST tales I would prefer the term *puig*, for all FEMINIST works (I think I can modify that entry pretty quickly) the term *peg*, and in the MUSIC entry it will have to be *pag*....' H'mm.

Geraldine Cooke, Penguin sf (and ghastly TSR game tie-ins) supremo, was recently made redundant. Her union struggled to save her job but is now thought to have given up.

Malcolm Edwards (says this HarperCollinsEditorial leak) has moved to a 'new role' giving him lots less time to spend with his sf writers. 'Extrapolating from his availability in recent months,' said one excited author, 'this implies the concept of *negative time!*' A *Bookseller* photo identifies Malcolm's new role as lurking in the Virgin Isles wearing boxer shorts, swilling cocktails, and signing contracts with a lady hotel-owner whose coming bestseller about hotel-owning may well not be sf.

Alasdair Gray, Mexicon's most famously horizontal former guest of honour, won both the *Guardian* Fiction Prize and the

Whitbread Prize for best novel with his *Poor Things*. [AJF]

Diana Wynne Jones, after suffering severe spinal pain for far too long, underwent major neurosurgery on 1 Dec and next day was reported as doing encouragingly well. 'She can feel her legs again for the first time in some while, and the hospital staff are now talking of her full recovery in terms of "when" rather than "if".... All very, very pleasing.' [CB via PB]

Bob Shaw, now in a new slimline version, reports that he's been teetotal for some months and feels strong and vital (his local pub the Dog & Duck does not, having entirely stopped selling Greenall's Original Bitter for lack of Shavian custom).

Brian Stableford is now, alas, living alone. He said: 'To be deserted by one wife may be regarded as a misfortune ... to be deserted by two seems like carelessness.' All sympathies, boss.

Novacon 22

The Royal Angus, Novacon's traditional and now reinstated venue, met with huge acclaim in such terms as 'I suppose it's slightly better than that awful airport hotel.' Strange moments came when a barman went insane one midnight and was frog-marched off by enormous bouncers, and when a fan objected to being asked £2.25 for a pint of lemonade ... whereupon the manager himself appeared and flexibly explained It Wasn't His Fault, Thistle Hotels *made* him charge these prices, more than his job was worth, etc. The drink went down the drain. ● *Storm Constantine* was GoH, with her fabled Gothic entourage; the programme was typically lightweight with (according to a few) too many discos; the souvenir book lapsed into crammed unreadability once *really important stuff* like committee biographies had given way to mere GoH and sf appraisals. ● *Roz Kaveney* fulminated about Penguin's saturation publicity for *Eurotemps*: 'They told me that no dealers had asked for early copies, and now I find Rog Peyton had ordered 50, and they told *him* none had been printed....' Yet somehow they'd managed to send out review copies. 'One is contending with active *sabotage*,' continued Roz. ● *Greg Pickersgill* exuded bucolic euphoria and went on about how his life in London had all been a huge mistake, true tranquillity being reserved for idyllic Haverfordwest. 'Surrounded by baa-ing sheep,' I suggested. 'IT'S FUCKING CATTLE COUNTRY, YOU IGNORANT GWENT CRETIN!' How he has changed. ● *Pam Wells* wished to repudiate a vile slur: 'If I wrote the gossip column in *Critical Wave* it would be a bloody sight more interesting.' ● *Jim Burns* was unhappily in earshot when I peered at one of his Art Show contributions and opined that this was a Giant Space Turd. 'Oh God, Langford, you're too perceptive, now you've said it I see that *that is what it is*.' Er, sorry. ● *Paul Morley* the *Guardian* hack was sighted at Novacon and later published an odd article on sf's decease (11 Nov), all seemingly the fault of elves and Terry Pratchett. 'Does it make you feel as though you are writing obituaries in *Ansible*?' asked returned eofan Derek Pickles with false concern. ● *Rog Peyton* (The Expert's Expert) interrupted as we idly wondered how far down Novacon's All-Time Best Books Poll listing you had to go to find the first real stinker. Passing over #1 (*Tiger! Tiger!*), Rog snorted: 'Number two, that's all, total crap, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. And number three, "The Book of the New Sun", fucking rubbish. And....' ● Speaking of *Tiger! Tiger!*, Novacon research disclosed wide fanfannish unawareness that Bester's most famous line comes in

two flavours: 'Vorga, I kill you deady' (UK) and '... kill you filthy' (US). ● **TAFF**: in the interests of Equal Time the three attending candidates all gave impersonations of the absent Michael Ashley, replete with simulated Angst and vomit. ● **Roger Robinson** presented £2,500 (raised at various cons) to RNIB for talking books: 'There's a mistake in the cheque! I've got another £600.' ● **Nova Awards** went to Dave Mooring (artist), Michael Ashley (writer) and Ian Sorensen's *Bob?* (fanzine—'Incomprehensible!' said Britain's Mr Horror, Steve Jones, in a later unsolicited interview). Runners-up: D. West, Nigel E. Richardson and *Saliromania*. [HB] ● **Simon Ounsley** explained: 'The Leeds Group did not even bother to put in a fix for the Nova this year—much to the chagrin of the numerous fans who kept approaching the small Leeds contingent at the con and asking who they were supposed to be voting for. On being told to please themselves, they wandered off looking as baffled as all those East European journalists who suddenly had to go off and search out the news instead of having it delivered to their desks every day in a government envelope. Ian Sorensen's award had nothing whatsoever to do with any connections he might have with the Leeds Group, nor with the large number of duplicator stencils marked "Strathclyde Education Authority" which recently managed to fall off the back of a lorry in Keighley.' ●

Condylura

First Thur ● **London Pub Meeting Stabilizes**—in the Hamilton Hall bar on Liverpool St Station, as plugged last issue. Which isn't to say that rebel contingents are not encamped elsewhere: Turnmills (some media fans) and the old Wellington (unspecified diehards).

16 Dec ● **BSFA**: no meeting. A new venue is planned after the 20 Jan event at the usual V&A pub, Marylebone Station.

17 Dec ● **London Xmas Meeting** at Hamilton Hall.

27 Dec-3 Jan ● **Science Fiction, Science Fact**, theme items and events programme at the Science Museum, London. Talks 12:30 each day, repeated 14:30, with Brian Stableford. Mat Irvine, Jack Cohen, John Gribbin, me.... Contact 071 938 8000.

5-7 Feb ♪ **Pentatonic** (filkery), Rozel Hotel, Weston-super-Mare. ♪ Now £18 reg; £25 from 1 Jan. Contact: as Sou'Wester.

6 (?) Mar ● **Picocon 11**, Imperial College Union, Prince Consort Rd, SW7 2BB. This is all ye know on earth....

26-28 Mar ● **Trek Dwarf** (oh God), Holiday Inn, Leicester. Combines, er, something. £25 reg (£30 from 1 Jan). Contact 47 Marsham, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, Cambs, PE2 5AN.

8-12 Apr 93 ● **Helicon**, 44th Eastercon (+Eurocon), Hotel de France, Jersey. Now £28 reg. Contact 'Look On My Works, Ye Mighty', 63 Drake Rd, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

28-31 May ● **Mexicon 5** (vile elitist written-sf con), Hotel St Nicholas, Scarborough. Warning: rates rise from £18 to £20 on 10 Jan. Contact 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, B66 4SH.

30 Jul-1 Aug ● **Lunicon** (Unicon 14), Leeds. £10 reg, £5 for students. (Time to get out my antediluvian Oxford Union card again.) Contact LUU, PO Box 157, Leeds, LS1 1UH.

1-3 Oct ● **Fantasycon XVIII**, Midland Hotel, Brum. Last issue's Stanley Rd, Morden contact address is now invalid (Mike and Di Wathen have split up and moved). Try Peter Coleborn, 46 Oxford Rd, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6DT.

5-7 Nov ● **Novacon 23**, Royal Angus, Brum (probably). GoH Stephen Baxter. £20 reg; £25 after Easter. Usual address (as Mexicon). £8 supporting membership brings you all the bits of paper but not necessarily an attending place: hotel limit is 350.

1-4 Apr 94 ● **Sou'Wester**, 45th Eastercon, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Now £25 reg. Weary of comments about thievery at the Adelphi, Sou'Wester plans a policy of no at-the-door memberships unless (a) the committee knows you, (b) someone present vouches for you, (c) you have a good ID (passport, driving licence—thieves never carry these), or (d) you write in advance saying 'Dear Chris Bell, I am too mean to buy even a £12.50 supporting membership but might just turn up anyway.' Contact 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ.

? May 94 ● **Inconceivable**, Derby, a second 'sf humour' con. £15 reg. Contact 12 Crich Ave, Littleover, Derby, DE23 6ES.

29-31 Jul 94 ● **Wincon III**, King Alfred's College, Windsor. £17 reg (rises after 17 April 93). Contact 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 7TS. 'Ideas' theme. Cor, that rules out a lot of recent sf and fantasy, doesn't it?

Infinitely Improbable

Evil Unmasked: a religious newspaper item tells how someone joined a charismatic church and was soon 'making a bonfire of his magic and mystery books—including expensively leather-bound Denis Wheatley and Arthur C Clark titles.' (Sic) [DW]

SF Encyclopaedia II: The End. The hard copy and disks were finally and utterly delivered on 16 Nov. Just a few last corrections in proof ... 'quite a deal of them, in fact, since Peter Nicholls has only now settled down to actually read the fucking thing. "Yes, Peter, this is all good and valuable stuff—that's why I was asking you for it six months ago."' [PB]

Games Workshop & Boxtree vs Transworld: the battle of 'Dark Future' (both a trademarked GW game and a kids' sf series written by Laurence James for Transworld) has led to a great swearing of affidavits. For GW, various authors declare with varying sincerity that they could make vast fortunes from official GW Dark Future novels were it not for this hideous Transworld imposture; in the opposite corner, Rog Peyton (The Expert's Expert) is understood to aver that these game-related books are all crap and can't be sold anyway, even by him....

R.I.P. Elke Lacey, a children's editor at Methuen and wife of NEL sf editor Humphrey Price, died of cancer on 10 Nov and is survived by their son (born 8 Oct this year).

World Fantasy Awards: NOVEL *Boy's Life*, Robert McCammon; NOVELLA 'The Ragthorn', Rob Holdstock & Garry Kilworth; SHORT 'The Somewhere Doors', Fred Chappell; ANTHOLOGY *Fourth Annual Year's Best Fantasy & Horror* ed. Terri Windling & Ellen Datlow; COLLECTION *The Ends of the Earth*, Lucius Shepard; ARTIST Tim Hildebrandt; etc, etc.

IRA Tries To Bomb TAFF Candidate! After that failed Nov attempt on Canary Wharf, the booby-trapped getaway car was found near Abigail Frost's flat; she and hundreds more were evacuated in the small hours, and given 'the most horrible coffee I'd ever had.' Can this be coincidence?

REM, Arthur Straker's almost legendary small-press sf magazine, celebrates its second issue in a riot of typefaces—lots of very tiny and/or heavy sanserif, one whole opening section in retina-wrenching 'shatter' type, Garry Kilworth's entire story in a 'handwritten' face with unindented paragraphs ... good stuff but harder going even than *Ansible*. Have the eye lotion ready and rush £1.95 to 19 Sandringham Rd, London, NW2 5EP.

Chocolate Flavoured Potato Crisps, a truly sf concept, are reputedly on trial in Scotland/NE England. Any sightings? [YR]

C.O.A. Jim and Linda Barker ('Married three years! Please remind people I'm still alive.'). 26 Campfield Street, Falkirk, FK2 7DN. **Mickey Poland**, 3 Frances Rd, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 7LD. **Jane Stableford**: God knows. **Thyme** (Aussie sf newsletter), PO Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vic 3005, Australia. **Di Wathen**, 54 Sumner House, Maddams St, Bow, London, E3 3RB ('I'm now living with Nick Reynolds—ex *Dark They Were* and *Forbidden Planet*—and all is wonderful!').

So It Goes. UK Publisher: We've done a reprint deal for your book, copies now being printed, you get 50%! **My Agent**: That contract terminated ages ago. You have no right to deal. We get 100%. **Publisher**: Deal? What deal? Never was any deal....

Ansible 65 © Dave Langford, 1992. Thanks to Paul Barnett, Chris Bell, Harry Bond, Abigail Frost, Steve Jones, Simon Ounsley, David Redd, Yvonne Rousseau, Brian Stableford, Di Wathen, Dave Wood and our hero distributors, now including THYME (Alan Stewart). ADVT: Chuck Death, i.e. my brother Jon, urges you to buy his rock cartoon epic GREAT POP THINGS (Penguin £5.99). 'This one you should actually read!'—INDEPENDENT. 3/12/92