

Ansible



Ansible 72 July 1993

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, £12/year, etc. Kim Newman Appreciation Society artwork by **Dave Mooring**.

WATCH THIS SPACE: as we go to press the death struggle between Little, Brown and Millennium to commission the *Fantasy Encyclopaedia* (companion volume to ...) is in its final phase.

The March of Mind

Piers Anthony's personal statements are always intellectual treats. In the *British Fantasy Society Newsletter's* 'Desert Island Books' spot he chooses, for his 'single item of no practical use whatsoever', a critic. Also he would take *Finnegans Wake* plus a guide to understanding it (written presumably by a cr*t*c), and the complete works of George Bernard Shaw (that fine dramatic and musical cr*t*c). Why Shaw? 'As an outspoken vegetarian writer of greater competence than the critics claim, I relate well to him....' I love it, I love it. [BFSM]

David Clark, ConFrancisco chair, warns of new convention peril: Vampire Cats in Arizona! 'At Westercon, there was a woman going around with a black cat. The cat wore a black cape with a red lining. This was Vladimir, a "vampire". His fangs were rather long, though I'm told this isn't uncommon in cats. He was being wheeled around in a little coffin, being made available for photographs. His mistress—his "human slave", as she puts it—is working to build Vladimir a career as a photogenic cat for commercials, TV and such. (He was so relaxed about dealing with people that we were debating which tranquillizer had been used.) At the Vladimir Party it was revealed unto us that we could purchase Vladimir mounted photographs, and Vladimir key-chains, and Vladimir photo buttons. And the Vladimir fanzine. We were able to tear ourselves away from this bounty....'

Les Dawson, who died in June, will be remembered as a very funny comedian and not—we hope—for his staggeringly awful horror-fantasy *A Time Before Genesis* (1988). See 'How Not To Write A Novel' by David Garnett in *Vector* 144.

Lilian Edwards knows how to acquire *Ansibles*: 'Stamped addressed envelopes? I'll get my secretary to send you some.'

William Golding of *Lord of the Flies* fame died on 19 June aged 81. Anthony Burgess's obituary complained that WG didn't write enough; a great scratching of pens was heard as the obvious rejoinder was added to many draft Burgess obits....

John Grant exults: 'Red Fox have seen sense and decided that 12 *Lone Wolf* novels is probably enough. The temptation is considerable to make #12 end with the most stupendous cliffhanger—as Our Hero dangles by a single blade of grass over the cauldron of bubbling lava, a crossbow-bolt is already hissing towards his groin, but if the caterpillar chews through the grass in time he'll drop just far enough that the bolt merely parts his hair rather than getting him in the chest, so that as he falls he can unsheathe the Sommerswerd, strap it across his shoulders and thereby gain just enough airlift that he can glide past the rim of the cauldron and into the relative safety of a pitched battle between mutant necromancers and giant carnivorous slugs left over from millennia ago when the legions of Agarash the Damned stalked the world; on the other hand, if the caterpillar chews just a mite too slowly ... could this be *The End*? It's going to be hard for me to get out of the habit, you know.'

David A.Hardy announces the 20th birthday of his green plasticene alien 'Bhen' (created 1973; seen on various *F&SF* covers since Nov 75; endemic in Birmingham). Dave protests that Bhen is not a 'little green man' but, as evident from the scale of accompanying NASA hardware in the paintings, over 2½ metres tall. *How did a mere artist afford all that plasticene?*

Dave Langford whinges that *PCW Plus* magazine is axing his

legendary column (along with other outside contributions) as part of a cost-cutting exercise. He confidently expects his millions of fans not to write in and complain.

Chris Priest visited the doctor to have a horrid mole removed and became a guinea pig: 'While I was in the waiting room, a man was sitting there with a big case and a large bottle of liquid nitrogen. Ha ha, thought I, smart-aleck as ever, bet he's in for a kidney transplant. Turns out he's a rep from a medical supplies company, here to demonstrate a nifty new liquid-nitrogen scalpel on, well, er, me. I now have a black crater where my chest was, slowly warming up....' Besides the ignominy of being operated on by a *salesman*, Chris had to go back a week later for a real doctor to finish the (botched) job. After which he was 'stitched together by the head of the Dartmoor Mailbag Division'....

David Pringle has 'combined' his ailing *Million: the Magazine About Popular Fiction* (now, alas, down to 500-odd subscribers) with *Interzone*. Anyone remember the *Million/IZ* crossover issue furore? No, actually the merger announcement scheduled for *IZ74* radiates soothing signals in all directions: erstwhile *Million* subscribers will get *IZ* and are assured that several *Million* features like Brian Stableford's 'Yesterday's Bestsellers' series will continue to appear there, while for *IZ* readers the message is that *Interzone* 'will not change its nature'. [DP]

Carl Sagan habitually asks UFO nuts who claim contact with alien intelligence to prove it by passing on the superior ET's proof of Fermat's Last Theorem. Following Prof.A.Wiles's mind-boggling announcement of a proof at a Cambridge lecture on 23 June, Sagan could soon be getting a lot of mail.... Since the hard bit reputedly runs to 200 pages, Fermat was right: a bloody enormous margin will be needed to contain it.

Condylo pods

2 Jul • **Weerde 2** anthology signing, 5:30, Dillon's, Oxford.

3 Jul • **Armageddon Fireworks**, Whitchurch, Reading—contact Martin Hoare or Hugh Mascetti. £4 at the gate.

14 Jul • **BSFA**. The Conservatory/Munchen upstairs bar. Chris Evans and Garry Kilworth hold forth. 7:30ish.

17-19 Jul • **Contagion** (Trek), Hospitality Inn, Glasgow. £35 reg. Contact PO Box 867, Rutherglen, G73 4HR.

24 Jul • **Dangercon V** (humorous sf/kids' TV), Croydon. £3 reg. 11am-11pm. Contact 37 Keens Rd, Croydon, CR0 1AH.

30 Jul-1 Aug • **Lumicon** (Unicon 14), Leeds. GoH Roger Zelazny. £12 reg, £6 for students. Contact LUU, PO Box 157, Leeds, LS1 1UH.

1 Aug • **Wottacon** (*Dr Who*), Imperial Hotel, Exeter. £12.50 reg. Contact 3 Victoria Clo, Kenton, Exeter, EX6 8JX.

2-6 Sep • **ConFrancisco** (51st Worldcon), San Francisco. Reg \$125 to 16 Jul, then \$145 at the door. Contact (UK) 12 Stannard Rd, London, E8 1DB.

12-19 Sep • **Milford** (UK) **SF Writers' Conference** cancelled. Too many people going to ConFrancisco instead, they say. [CS]

1-3 Oct • **Fantasycon XVIII**, Nameless (in the flyer, anyway) Hotel, Birmingham. £30 reg; BFS members £20. Contact 137 Priory Rd, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG.

12-14 Nov • **Armadacon V**, Astor Hotel, The Hoe, Plymouth. £20 reg. Various guests, all 'subject to work commitments'. Contact 4 Gleneagle Ave, Mannamead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL.

4-6 Mar 94 • **Masque III** (costume con), Stakis Victoria

Hotel, Nottingham. £20 reg to 30 Dec 93. Contact 4 Ednaston Ct, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 3BA.

20-22 May 94 • **Corflu Nova** (fanzine con), Arlington, VA, USA. \$37 reg. Contact PO Box 1350, Germantown, MD 20875. Corflu plans to exhume a long-dead horror: the partly rugose and partly squamous Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards.

Rumblings • **The Scottish Conbention's** first progress report was sighted at a fan gathering on 27 June. Many swooned or spoke in tongues. Miraculous cures were rumoured. Pigs flew.

• That **Speller/Kincaid Wedding** (26 June) was a riot of something or other, with standing room only in Folkestone's tiny registry office. Our fashion reporter forgets everything but Paul's puce paisley waistcoat and the bell-bedizened anklets that best woman Moira Shearman was persuaded to remove for the actual ceremony. The bride wore something purple with glittery bits. Others wore clothes. Best man Chris Priest almost made a speech but thought better of it, thus wasting the nanoseconds of research which had supplied him with the Doc Smith marriage line traditionally quoted at all Martin Hoare's weddings: 'Then, as Kinnison kissed his wife, half a million Lensed members were thrust upward in silent salute.' The rest is drunken silence.

Infinitely Improbable

A71 Corrections. It was BSFA *Matrix* 104, not infallible *Critical Wave*, which rumoured that the Gollancz graphic-novels line might be folding and led to hapless Dave 'Well, I Just Mentioned There Was A Rumour' Langford being severely chastised by Gollancz's Faith 'Strict Disciplinarian' Brooker. • Also *Paul Barnett's* lawyers demand the insertion of the statement (re Mexican), 'It was Stross's shorts that were unspeakable.'

Hodline or Header? Hodder & Stoughton sent circulars to their authors on 3 June, insisting that the coming merger with Headline as Hodder Headline PLC was a Jolly Good Thing. What luck—one fewer sf list to worry about selling to!

Exotic Imagery. Reported in a forthcoming Robert Jordan epic: 'The words left Elaida's mouth like a whip.' 'Now Danelle's big blue eyes looked thoughtfully inward.' [Anon] • Aussie radio, of a corpse: 'In an advanced state of decomposition, she was said to be an affectionate mother.' [SoEM]

Stamp Out Moriarty! UK stamps depicting scenes and people from Sherlock Holmes stories are to appear on 12 Oct, marking the centenary of Holmes's 'death' at the Reichenbach Falls (er, but ...). David Pringle suggests 'a write-in campaign on behalf of Wells's Martians', but that centenary isn't until 1998: how about Eloi and Morlock stamps for *The Time Machine* in '95?

Meng & Ecker 6, latest issue of the first comic to be banned in the UK, turned up from Savoy Books. The highlight is a 7-page official transcript of the Greater Manchester Police interviewing scriptwriter David Britton about seized comics last year: it's non-communication to the point of surrealism. I wasn't that wild about the comic itself, which offers a scattering of OK jokes amid much murky artwork and determined Greater Manchester Police-baiting (good heavens, such *bravery*, here is someone *screwing a pig*, the frontiers of art are *hurled back*). But I would defend to the point of extremely minor inconvenience Savoy's right to publish it. The price is £1.75.

C.O.A. Etc. *Dick & Leah Smith*, 410 W. Willow Rd, Prospect Hts, IL 60070-1250, USA (a road is being built through their old place!). *Hazel Marchington & Robert Newman* will be married on 2 July. [MP]

SF Encyclopaedia Updates. The most mysterious item in the *SFE* update sheet (see A71) came from Harlan ELLISON: '*The Book of Ellison* (1978) is unauthorized.' Since most of its text is by HE himself, this implies wicked literary piracy on the part of publisher Algor Press—that is, Andrew Porter of *SF Chronicle* infamy, who remarks somewhat bitterly that HE never objected when receiving royalties: 'If the book was unauthorized, then Ellison's left hand didn't know what his right hand was agreeing to.' • Spies report that the most vituperative comments came from Piers Anthony, that one of the US computer nets

rang with cries of rage at the 'omission' of Vonda McIntyre (someone misunderstood the alphabetization convention), and that Larry Niven responded to *SFE* hints about loss of 'joy' in his later work by sadly agreeing it was so. • An even newer update sheet is expected soon, as addenda pour in. • The *Nimbus* CD-ROM edition planned for 'late June' seems to have been delayed, but they've sent another jolly sample CD of their wares, 128Mb including all of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*...

Raiders of the Lost Duck. Anecdote from 'Lucasfilm Archives, a state-of-the-art 28,000 sq ft barn': archivist Don Bies grows weary of visitors asking if they can open the Ark of the Covenant from *Raiders*, and of telling them their very souls might be endangered. So inside the thing he places two objects, and waits. In due course a brave fool lifts the lid and reels back at ultimate horror: a Howard the Duck mask and a sign reading I TOLD YOU YOU'D REGRET OPENING IT. [DLR] Gosh, how droll.

Ten Years Ago. The *TLS* discussed Japanese comics' conventional sounds for activities like slurping noodles (*suru-suru*), reddening with embarrassment (*pō*), adding cold cream to hot coffee (*suron*) and vanishing into thin air (*fu*). The news that 'When a penis suddenly stands erect the accepted sound is *biin*' led to wild surmise about a Japanese origin for the famous sound of Heinlein's nipples, *spung*.... (*Ansible* 34, Jul 83)

Proofs of Holy Writ

[Fascinating documents float around the world of publishing. Paul Barnett worked on the proofs of the coming *Before the Sun Falls* by William James, and felt it was so awfully written that it would damage Orbit's reputation if not heavily edited. Orbit decided not to bother: the author is said to be 'touchy' about his immortal prose. Here's an excerpt from a very long Barnett letter to the Orbit editor....]

For example, we have what I've come to call cliché-rivers. The author doesn't quite know what to do with his characters when they're mouthing dialogue, and has a limited gamut of incidental actions for them to perform. In any twenty-page stretch of the text you're almost certain to encounter not just a few but *all* of the following at least once, some of them (as asterisked) several times over:

*he showed his teeth • *he gave him a hard, flat, cold, level or expressionless stare (about every two pages someone gives someone else a stare of some kind—I particularly liked the single despairing instance of giving 'an oblique stare') • he produced a [*pick from the limited variety above*] stare • *he looked down his nose • *he wrinkled his nose • *he smiled grimly • he smiled sourly • *he grinned • the corners of his mouth twitched • *he pursed his lips (this one is so frequent it was driving me nuts) • *the head came round • *his head went back • his head came up • his st'lyan screamed • his st'lyan danced (first third of book only) • he sidestepped his st'lyan (latter two-thirds of book only) • he opened his mouth, then closed it again • he clenched his teeth • he seemed/appeared to do something (while in fact doing it—as in 'he appeared to hesitate') • *he made a face • something flashed in his eyes but then was gone • he reined around • his eyes went wide • he nodded (after having spoken an assent) • he shook his head (after having spoken a dissent or negation) • he rolled the cup between the palms of his hands • it was as if a message of some kind passed between them • he stirred the grass with his toe

Others are more localized. For example, early on a ship-board Kubulai spits expressively over the side; just a few pages later someone else comes up and, presumably inspired by his lord's example, *also* spits expressively over the side. This is in the midst of all the other, expressionless spits over the side that are going on, you understand....

[There is much more. A st'lyan, I gather, is a bit like a h'rse.]

Ansible 72 © Dave Langford, 1993. Thanks to John Bangsund's Society of Editors Newsletter, Paul Barnett, John Clute, Mark Plummer, Andy Porter, David Pringle, David L. Russell and Our Distributors: Vikki Lee France, Steve Jeffrey, Janice Murray, Charlie 'I will make you famous on the Net' Strass, Alan Stewart, Martin Tudor and Bridget Wilkinson. 1/7/93