

ansible



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From Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU, UK. Fax 01734 669914. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk. Logo and 1987-vintage cartoon: Dan Steffan (for TAFF!). Available for SAE or drunken whim.

SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE. Past *Ansibles* have recounted how famous-in-some-circles sf writers Brian Stableford, Colin Greenland and I have all been deluged with skiffy plot ideas from an allegedly young, ailing and (usually) female correspondent going under a vast multiplicity of pseudonyms. Colin was a little grumpy when in 1994 this person wrote to the BBC posing as Colin Greenland, and in recent weeks I too became miffed when the same thing happened with Channel 4 and me. After—in Brian's words—pooling information and applying the calculus of probability, the lucky three have theorized that young Rachel Oliver (*alias* a million other names) may possibly be contacted c/o F.R. Oliver, 12a Langton Rd, Norton-in-Derwent, N.Yorks, YO17 9AD. Plot-starved authors please take heed! Perhaps 'she' would also like to receive fanzines!

Why pick on Brian, Colin and me? Probable answer: all our addresses have appeared in *Interzone*. Stop-press sequel: the BBC has just sent a polite brush-off to a familiar-sounding correspondent who gave *Interzone's* address and claimed to be the precocious 'Master Stephen Baxter'. [DP] Cue link...

The Pelagic Argosy Sights Land

Stephen Baxter modestly polishes his fingernails: 'My expert squad of back-up proof-readers (i.e. my old mum) spotted the following glowing endorsement in the HarperPrism US edition of *Anti-Ice*: "He writes like I used to.... I should have him assassinated before it's too late!"—David Niven.' Sadly for Niven, author of *The Moon's an Inconstant Balloon* and *Bring On the Flying Horses*, it really is too late.'

Poppy Z.Brite wittily reacts to her Pseuds Corner stardom: 'If I ever come into contact with these charming *Private Eye* fellows, I'll be sure to politely request that they kiss my butt.'

Vincent Clarke has been reading *The Work of William F. Temple* by Mike Ashley (Borgo Press, CA, no price visible), a 112pp paperback in their "Biographies of Modern Authors" series. It's a completely comprehensive checklist and short biography, with a preface by Arthur C. Clarke, a short tribute by Forry Ackerman, and a "final word" by Joan Temple. It's thoroughly well researched, and a deserved tribute.'

Charles Platt had a slight tussle with David Pringle over the cover of his guest-edited *Interzone*, whose title logo initially failed to be in 'the usual lowercase seventies-style typeface which the magazine has suffered from for years.' The old logo was reinstated.... 'All that remains now is the predictable reaction of shock-horror from the readership when they see the Piers Anthony story in *IZ94*, which describes in guilty lascivious style the rape of a very young girl by a character named "Bluebeard". It's all excusable because it happens in virtual reality, see. • Remember, it's only ink on paper, folks!'

Andy Sawyer is stirring things again. 'I see from the HarperCollins press release about William ("Dunton Wood") Horwood's new book *Journey To The Heartland* that it is "the first positive portrayal of wolves from a major fiction writer since Jack London's *Wolf Fang*". Er, obviously Jack London is so major a writer that one doesn't need to go to a reference book to check on the title of his best-known work. And wouldn't Garry Kilworth have something to say about this? Who publishes Garry? Let me check ... oh dear.' (The next edition of Garry's *Midnight's Sun: a Story of Wolves* will, I am unreliably informed, carry the endorsement 'Not a major fiction writer!—The Publisher'.)

Bob Shaw is 'feeling healthy and optimistic these days. In

Ansible [Dec 93] you said there had been an exploratory operation. There wasn't one. What I had was a full-scale invasion. At one stage of the surgery they must have been able, literally, to look right through me and out the other side. I have now got over the physical aftermath....' [21 Jan]

'**IAN WATSON** NO LONGER MILLIONAIRE!' writes the man himself. 'Due to the devilish redenomination of the Polish currency, IW's massive holdings in the Bank Handlowy of Warsaw have fallen ten-thousandfold from 1,525,550 zlotys, sufficient to buy several beers, to 152 zlotys and 55 grosz—still sufficient to buy several beers, but it just doesn't sound the same.' Next: 'IW SIGHTS WOLF NEAR DOOR! Just three miles from Moreton Pinkney, loping greyly and unmistakably in the headlights along the rural road. Contacted by concerned author, Chris Priest advised that gypsies keep wolves. Sceptical author surmises that this was probably a wolf-hybrid house pet, such as recently savaged baby, abandoned in panic by its owners on nearby M1. A Wolf is just for Christmas, not for Life.' [7 Jan]

Contubernal

3-5 Feb • **Transept** (7th UK filk con), Royal Cambridge Hotel, Cambridge. £22 reg, £17 unwaged. Just turn up....

4-5 Feb • **Generations** (*Trek*), Albert Hall, London. 10-step price scale from £8 (students, standing) to £30—*per day*. 10% discount if you book both days, but "booking fee of £2.50." GoH: most of the *ST:TNG* cast, but with many supposedly appearing only once on one day. Tickets 01905 613005, 0171 838 3100.

8 Feb • **Explorations of the Marvellous** conference: 20th anniversary discussion at ICA. 'LeGuin has sent a keynote message, to be discussed by me, Mike Harrison, Ted Polhemus, and a selection of the great and good which may include e.g. Simon Ings, Mary Gentle, Gwyneth Jones. Contact Alan (can't remember surname), Talks Dept, 0171 9300493.' [PK]

10-12 Feb • Anything I could say about this weekend would be misconstrued; *Ansible* remains gracefully silent.

17-19 Feb • **Robocon**: half man, half machine, all **CANCELLED**.

22 Feb • **BSFA London Meet**, Jubilee Tavern, York Rd, nr Waterloo. Upstairs room, 7pm. With Brian Stabieford.

2-5 Mar • **World Horror Con**, Sheraton Colony Square Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. \$75 reg. Contact PO Box 148, Clarkston, GA 30021-0148, USA.

3-5 Mar • **AKFT Konvention** (*Trek*), Angel Hotel, Northampton. £20 reg plus 2xSAE. Kontakt Flat 16, Konnaught Mansions, Kold Harbour Lane, Brixton, London, SW9 8LE.

4-5 Mar • **Microcon 15**, Exeter University. GoH Ramsey Campbell. Contact 17 Polsloe Rd, Exeter, EX1 2HL.

18-20 Aug • **Portmeiricon**, 18th annual *Prisoner* con, Portmeirion, North Wales. Contact Six of One, PO Box 66, Ipswich.

24-8 Aug • **The Scottish Contention** (53rd Worldcon and Eurocon), SECC, Glasgow. Join now, they urge, while registration is still a bargain £80! On 18 April it rises to **£90**; advance memberships close on 22 July; the at-the-door cost will be **£100**. Contact Intersection, Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR.

Rumblings • **Fantasycon** has had a glitch: 'The Birmingham venue is not available this year, and the organizers of the last few Fantasycons have dropped out for this time.... It is possible that there might not be a con this year unless something changes soon.' [DH] • 'Did you know that to register for this year's World Fantasy Con one must send an inquiry to The Baltimore Gun Club? How lovely.' [JM] • **Reading SF Group** Monday evening meetings have moved to The

Forbury Vaults, Abbey Square. • **The Scottish Convention's** open London meetings are now at the Jubilee (see BSFA above), 3rd Fri each month, from 6pm. • **Toronto** is bidding for the 2003 Worldcon: 'Eclipticon', 3026-300 Coxwell Ave, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4L 2A0.

Infinitely Improbable

Clarke Award. The 30 Jan shortlist debate saw a deadly hand-to-hand struggle between judges C.Amies, J.Gribbin, D.Langford, M.McDonald, M.Plummer and D.Seed, while impartial administrator D.Barrett (and administrator-to-be P.Kincaid) made disinterested remarks like, 'I say that one's total rubbish—don't you dare shortlist it.' And the list is: John Barnes, *Mother of Storms* (Millennium); Pat Cadigan, *Fools* (HarperCollins); Gwyneth Jones, *North Wind* (Gollancz); Paul McAuley, *Pasquale's Angel* (Gollancz); James Morrow, *Towing Jehovah* (Arrow); Kristine Kathryn Rusch, *Alien Influences* (Millennium).

Worthy Causes. Bob Shaw urges fans to send spare sf books and magazines to his friend Yuri A.Mironets, Oktyabrskaya St 2 apt 15, Vladivostok, 690 000, Russia—a professor of English teaching sf in a place where English-language sf is impossible to find.... • *Memory Hole* is 'a fanzine recycling system which seeks to provide stocks of fanzines from yesterday for the fans of today and tomorrow.' Wads of priceless sf fanzines available for the cost of postage; unwanted collections and surplus copies are solicited for *MH* by Greg Pickersgill, 3 Bethany Row, Narberth Rd, Haverfordwest, SA61 2XG.

The Bottom Line. Impoverished authors took heart from HarperCollins's much-hyped advance of £500,000 for a new novel (plus story collection) by Martin Amis. The inspirational subtext is that Amis *filis* fired his agent for getting him an offer of only £450,000, and did the coveted half-million deal through a 'superagent' who grabs 20% rather than the usual 10%. Since the HarperCollins negotiations were conducted by our own satanically wily Malcolm Edwards (with some of the money reputedly tied to performance, such as best-seller listings), it's whispered that the *actual* advance is a mere £480,000 or even, dare we say it, £450,000. It is left as an exercise for the reader to compare the spurned £450k-minus-10% with £500k (or £480k, or £450k) minus 20%, and to marvel at such thrusting business acumen. *Footnote:* HarperCollins holds the current world record for unearned advances, a total of £27 million! [*The Bookseller*]

Media Mole. Lloyd Penney notes: 'I work in the building in which they are doing the post-production work for *Johnny Mnemonic*. They've been fairly quiet for as long as I've been there (8 months), but now small sticky notes with a rubber stamp of the film's logo are appearing all over the place, with the words "Fuck you" or "Piss off" or "I hate" over the imprint. A little disgruntledness in JM land, hmmm?' [2 Jan]

Fanfundery. GUFF: Acting Euro-administrator Joseph Nicholas grumpily reports a cock-up by Ian Gunn and Karen Pender-Gunn, two candidates for the coveted trip from Australia to **The Scottish Convention**. They've produced numberless GUFF ballots with the voting deadline inadvertently given as 31 May rather than the correct 31 March. *Late votes may well not be counted.* Please check and amend any ballot forms you come across.... • *Concatenation* fanzine and the Dartford 'Phoenicians' sf group are sponsoring two Romanians on a 10-day 'science fact & fiction' UK visit in Sept. Donations are begged: *Concatenation*, 44 Brook St, Erith, Kent, DA8 1JQ.

Son of Trivia. *University Challenge* question in Jan: 'Who was the famous father of this person?', the photo being of Alan Clark MP. King's School of Medicine and Dentistry, hopefully: 'Arthur C. Clarke.' Actually it was Kenneth Clark aka Lord Clark of Civilization.... [DG]

C.o.A. Omni, 277 Park, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10172-0003, USA. [SFC]

Random Fandom. Andy Hooper sadly reports 'the death of Minneapolis fan Lee Pelton, one time co-editor of *Rune* and *A Private Heat*. Lee died on 29 Dec, from oedema arising from

pneumonia as a complication of AIDS. As far as I know, he is the first American fanzine fan to die of AIDS, although doubtless more will follow.' • *Eric Lindsay* has a cosmic mind: 'It is time to start campaigning for Hugos (no, not you!). Nominate Shoemaker-Levy 9 for Best Dramatic Presentation.' (I have this entrancing vision of Teresa Nielsen Hayden's *Making Book* and Chris Priest's *The Book on the Edge of Forever* battling it out for Best Non-Fiction—Ed.)

Beyond magazine 'is now scheduled to be published on 15 March. John Menzies have agreed to order the same number of copies as they currently take of *The Dark Side*.' [DF] 1,000? 10?

Thog's Masterclass. 'Louise remembered the ancient, beautiful names. *Pan, Atlas, Prometheus, Pandora, Epimetheus* ... Names almost as old, now, as the myths from which they had been taken' (Stephen Baxter, *Ring*) • 'I tossed her one of the cans of beer. She took it without saying anything, cracked it open, took a mouthful and wiped her hand across the back of her mouth.' (Geoffrey Maloney, 'Requiem for the General') [LVA] • The time police in *Timecop* swiftly confirm that time-thieved Confederate gold bullion is indeed from 200 years ago: 'It's genuine, we've had it carbon dated.' [MS/EC]

Enturbulated Thetans

Mighty noises of gibbering resounded across Internet following the Church of Scientology's discovery of the 'information super-highway'. Perhaps they call it the clearway. The Cof\$ (its frequent nickname in Usenet's alt.religion.scientology newsgroup) reacted as it usually does on learning that people are going around committing free speech. Legal threats were issued against Internet sites, demanding that alt.religion.scientology be closed down—a bit like suing the post office for carrying mail of which you disapprove—and that the net accounts of offenders like renegade churchman Dennis Erlich be cancelled. Dirtier tricks are rumoured, some deeply bizarre. • The problem for the ever-secretive and paranoid Org is that it can't directly intimidate those naughty people who use anonymous-mailing services to place embarrassing material in Usenet newsgroups. So Scientology's famous policy of always going on the offensive forces it into conflict with the net as a whole ... Clash of the Titans! • Morally, the issues are somewhat messy. Such dissemination of scientological 'sacred teachings' indeed violates copyright; yet many feel it's legitimate whistleblowing to expose the alternately risible and menacing doctrines of an outfit whose aim is to take over the world (for our own good, of course). And why, after all, should publicizing the loonier utterances of L.Ron Hubbard bring down litigious wrath when quoting from the likewise copyright New English Bible does not?

Charles Piatt explains more about 'the text which the Scientologists were upset about. One piece was crossposted to alt.conspiracy (a wonderful forum for all kinds of stuff). It was about 200 kilobytes (yes, 200, not 20) and consisted of a legal deposition by a one-time senior Scientology aide *telling everything*, including allegedly successful attempts to use "black audits" to trigger the suicide of several Scientologists who had "lost the faith". The word "devastating" barely begins to describe this document. If I was in the Church of Scientology, I'd be trying to shut down the Usenet group, too! Actually it's a nice demonstration, in miniature, of the threat to totalitarian systems posted by free information.'

Bruce Sterling adds, wistfully: 'Perhaps some day, in stark futurity, people of goodwill (euphemism for you and me) will be able to dance a rickety arthritic fandango over the final grave of Scientology.' It is a beautiful thought.

Ansible 91 © Dave Langford, 1995. Thanks to everyone credited; also Elaine Coates, Cuddles, David ('Miserably Rancorous'—Locus) Garnett, Abigail Frost, David Howe, Roz Kaveney, Mark Plummer, Chris Priest, David Pringle, David Riley of Beyond, SF Chronicle, Mark Slater, Lee Van Arden, and our Hero Distributors: Janice Murray (NA), SCIS, Alan Stewart (Oz), Martin Tudor and Bridget Wilkinson (FATW). 2 Feb 95