

Ansible

ACTUALLY, I'M A
TELEPATHIC
HAGGIS



IT HAD TO COME: I finally got to be a virtual convention guest ... one of several at Cascon in Slovakia, via Internet Relay Chat [1 July]. Great hospitality, though vodka does not e-mail well.

The Graveyard Heart

Steve Baxter enquires: 'Separated at birth? I wonder if your readers have noticed the remarkable resemblance between the comic Lancastrian idiot "Peter" in BBC2's *The Smell of Reeves and Mortimer* and Manchester-based neo-cyber-guru Jeff Noon. Are they by any chance related? I think we should be told.'

Octavia Butler was one of the 24 winners of the 1995 US MacArthur grants, sometimes called the 'genius awards'. This means \$295,000 (in instalments over 5 years) plus free health insurance; the money can be spent as she likes, being 'intended to encourage and facilitate the recipient's work'. A cheerfully unexpected 'outside' recognition of a good sf writer. [MF] Of course the reaction in certain generous circles of fandom was, 'Ah, she only got it because she's female and black....'

Neil Gaiman was alarmed on 22 June: 'Phone calls received this morning asking if it were true that I was dead. Reports of it "all over the Internet". "I can wake him up and ask him," Mary told the callers, "But I think I would have known."'

Mike McQuay, US sf novelist, died recently of a heart attack in his mid-forties. He had just completed a collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke, entitled *Richter 10*. [PB]

Peter Nicholls enjoyed mixed blessings: 'It's very embarrassing. At last year's Australian national convention I stood up at the business meeting and tongue-lashed the organizers—"Who is this mad old fart?" BNF Marc Ordieb was heard to mutter—about (a) their failure to invite local writers and critics on to panels, and (b) the oddities of Ditmar nominations and voting. As an example of these I foolishly laid myself open to accusations of megalomania by instancing my own failure to get on to the Wm Atheling Jr Award shortlist with *The Encyclopaedia of SF*. "I can get on to Hugo shortlists," I thundered, "but can't even get nominated in Australia." This year the Natcon was the small but hugely successful Thylacon; there were insufficient nominations for the Atheling award to be given at all. So the committee gave a special Atheling to me. I accepted (as I had to) with genuine pleasure—the award memorializes one of the best friends I ever had in sf—but what does it make me look like? I'll go down in history as the person who begged for an award, and was given it the next year just to shut me up. Australia's Andy Porter. Greg Egan collected all the fiction Ditmars going, by the way. Deservedly. I got drunk that night with Stan Robinson and Karen Fowler.... • Tomorrow I'm Best Man at the joyful nuptials of Jack Dann and Janeen Webb. The movie will be called *Four SF Conventions and a Wedding*. [18 June] Spies insist that this Best Man wore a kilt.

Charles Platt, man of many facets, 'is best known to Washingtonians as the architect of the elegantly neoclassical Freer Gallery of Art.... Architecture is just a part of Platt's legacy, however. This exhibit includes many examples of his etchings and paintings,' writes the *Washington City Paper* ... but at this point our US newspaper clippings agency (Martin Morse Wooster) was severely reprimanded.

David Pringle feels unthreatened by *SFX*: 'Quite impressive in its vulgar way. They're obviously trying to do a sci-fi media version of *Q* or *Empire*. Not a bad idea, commercially! It's the people at *Starburst* who will be feeling green about the gills....'

Brian Stableford, cheery as ever, had an attack of the third person: 'Thinking that the impending Millennium might cause an upsurge of interest in the future, and sick of the hypocrisy involved in

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From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU, UK. Fax 01734 649914. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk. Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **D. West**. Available for SAE or all-purpose plot coupons.

carefully disguising his sf novels as horror or fantasy trilogies in order to make them saleable, Brian Stableford prepared an outline for a six-part future history spanning the next 1,500 years, accommodating therein such recent successes as Hugo-nominated "Les Fleurs du Mal" and the awesomely brilliant "Mortimer Gray's *History of Death*". His current editor (John Jarrold) said that he quite liked the idea but that the Random Century Sales Dept had decreed that the UK sf market is now too small to be worth bothering with. The only other editor who nibbled (Nick Austin) was similarly overruled in committee. Only time will tell whether this is the death-knell of British sf or Nature's way of informing BS that destiny has him marked down as a fantasy writer and he'd better stop prevaricating and bloody well get on with it.'

J. Michael Straczynski of *Babylon 5* fame, asked on the net about a certain Hugo nominee, dropped a subtle hint as to how his vote might go: 'What I have to say about Christopher Priest and his piece of crap *Deadloss Visions*, little more than attempted literary assassination, from a personal vendetta aided and abetted by Groth and Feeley, would fry your modem connection and violate just about every provision Congress just slapped onto electronic communications.' Gosh!

Roger Zelazny died on 14 June in Santa Fe, of kidney failure caused by colon/rectal cancer, following a period of illness not generally known to the sf community. Zelazny was at the heart of the 1960s 'US New Wave'—a deserving multiple Hugo and Nebula winner whose best fiction (like *Lord of Light*) still has a mythic dazzle. He was only 58 and left us far too soon.

Confragose

14-16 Jul • **Dimension Jump** (*Dwarf*), somewhere. SAE to Garden Cottage, Hall Farm, Scotton, Norwich, NR10 5DF.

15-17 Jul • **Conundrum** (*Trek*), Hospitality Inn, Glasgow. £35 reg; £40 at door. Contact (SAE) PO Box 1598, Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 4HS.

16 Jul • **Dr Who Tour**, Jarvis Parkway Hotel, Leeds. £14 reg. Contact (SAE) Tour 95, PO Box 85, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 9QH. Also Heathrow 30 Jul, Chester 6 Aug, Exeter 20 Aug.

26 Jul • **BSEA**, Jubilee pub, York Rd, London (nr Waterloo). Upstairs room, 7pm. Guest 'to be announced', probably at 6pm.

26-9 Jul • **The Time Machine**, H.G. Wells Soc centenary symposium, Imperial College, London. Contact: HGW Soc, English Dept, Nene College, Moulton Park, Northants, NN2 7AL.

30-31 Jul • **Broomcon**, 'The Pagan Convention', University of Essex, Colchester. £15 reg. 39 Henniker Rd, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 5HF. Possible reduced rates for familiars.

13-14 Aug • **UFO Research Centre Conference**. Contact (SAE) 30 Stonebridge Ct, Lings, Northampton, NN3 8LY.

24-8 Aug • **The Scottish Convention** (Worldcon), SECC, Glasgow. £90 reg, £100 at door. NO ADVANCE MEMBERSHIPS AFTER 22 JULY. Contact Intersection, Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR. Steve Green is 'resurrecting the "quotecard" concept' for this event, and invites witty one-line contributions (with sources) by 1 Aug: 33 Scott Rd, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ. Only one more *Ansible* left before D-Day and Haggis-Hour.... But: 'We have now passed 4000 attending members' belches Vince Docherty ecstatically.

22-4 Sep • **6th Festival of Fantastic Films**, Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. GoH Roger Corman. £45 reg; cheques to 'Society of Fantastic Films'. Contact 95 Meadowgate Rd, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

21-3 Jun 96 • **First International Discworld Con**. Venue: 'England'. Author and artist GoH: guess who? £17.50 reg

to 31 Dec. Contact (SAE) P.O. Box 3086, Chelmsford, CM1 6LD.
26-7 Oct 96 • **Who's 7** (Dr Blake con), Ashford International Hotel, Ashford, Kent. £40 reg to 31-5-96. Contact 10 Fillebrook Hall, Fillebrook Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 1AG.

Rumblings • **Intervention** (Eastercon 97) suffered the traditional Curse of Winccon: 'Robert Silverberg has had to drop out—he believed Easter was at another date, which would have been just fine. At the right date for Easter, however, he had already agreed to do something else....' [ML] • **Armageddon Fireworks**: this traditional event (1 Jul) went noisily well despite 'a faulty multi-shot roman candle battery exploding in all directions.... Unfortunately, the crew was less than amused by a *Reading Weekend Post* report attributing the entire planning and organization of the display to Martin Hoare.' [GS]

Infinitely Improbable

Sincere Flattery of the Damned. The appearance of MGM's remake of *Village of the Damned*, based on John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*, persuaded fabled Thai author S.P. Somtow to spill some beans about *Kawoo Ti Bangphleng*—that is, *The Cuckoos of Bangphleng* by Thailand's erstwhile prime minister M.R.Kukrit, a Thai-language novelist of some note. Kukrit seemingly pinched almost the entire plot of Wyndham's book, transplanting it to a Thai village and changing the ending a bit (the novel twist is that the alien kids are nobbled by Earthly bacteria; subsequently, in a fit of Buddhist acceptance and tranquillity, they decide to go 'home' via UFO). Unfortunately, the Thai film industry's first real assault on the international market was to be an adaptation of the Kukrit novel....

C.O.A. Etc. **Brian Burgess**, Oak Hill House, Eady Close, Horsham, Sussex, RH13 5LZ—a permanent move to a nursing home; cards and fanzines still appreciated. • **John Dallman** (temporary), c/o EDS Unigrafics, Parker's House, 46 Regent Street, Cambridge, CB2 1DB. • **Phil Greenaway**, c/o 1 Twelfth Ave, Galon Uchaf, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid-Glam, S.Wales. • **Lesley & Naveed Khan** 'are happy to announce the birth of our daughter, Ila Elspeth Khan.' (On 3 July—congrats) • **Cherry Wilder**, Behring Str 5, 65191 Wiesbaden, Germany.

Old Money. After nearly four years of heroic accountancy, I.Clark, Liquidator of Newsfield Ltd (remember *Fear? GMI?*), has scraped together some £200,000 of assets, awarded himself a meagre £30,000 fee, and paid off creditors at 8.87p in the pound. I am having my generous £17.72 cheque framed....

Random Fandom. **Piotr Cholewa** gloats that he won the Polish Translators' Association award, popular fiction category, for his brain-bursting task of rendering *The Colour of Magic* into Polish. • **Jacks Edwards**, good lady of famous publisher *Malcolm*, was overheard at a party bewailing her struggle to find a reasonably priced hotel not too far from **The Stoltish Convention** site. Listeners were puzzled: surely HarperCollins could run to a room in the main hotel? 'Yes, of course,' said she. 'But this is for the nanny.' • **Dave Langford** whinges that editors at *SFX* magazine, trying to make him seem more knowledgeable and in touch with the genre, like to change the odd Langfordian mention of 'sf' to 'sci-fi'. • **Roger Robinson** reached the final round of the '15 To 1' TV quiz, but just missed eternal glory (he came second). A collection of his finest answers is expected soon from Becon Publications. • **Yvonne Rousseau** reports a visitor's alarm when, after consuming 'Anzac Biscuits flavoured with a hint of the Australian bush', he turned the packet over to learn what this flavoursome hint might be, and found the prominent words 'EMU BOTTOM'.... • **Alan Stewart** marvels: 'the latest Intersection PR lists Alan Stewart, Zev Sero and Cathy Kerrigan as Austrians! Here we are trying to lift the profile of Australian fandom by joining all these foreign conventions, and....' • **D.West** has submitted some strange designs for BSFA t-shirts, and modestly observes: 'I can't see anybody paying money unless they're at a convention and fairly well pissed too. But what do I know? People buy all kinds of rubbish.'

Clarke Award Judges for 1995's sf novels are ... **BSEA**: Steve Jeffery, David Langford. **SF Foundation**: Dr David Seed, Ian Watson. **International Science Policy Foundation**, *Whatever This Might Be*: Maggie McDonald of *New Scientist*, Maurice Goldsmith. (Administrator: Paul

Kincaid, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ.)

It's the Arts! **Cherry Wilder** wraps things up: 'The most philistine comments on Christo and his wife wrapping the Reichstag came from merry old England. The big wrap was a neat Happening; the old Imperial pile looks 200% better wrapped; a class of school-leavers in Kronberg were inspired, and wrapped their school in blue plastic.... Isn't the Albert Memorial crying out to be wrapped? A Foreign Correspondent—who recalls those dear, distant days when Christo wrapped up Little Bay in New South Wales to roars of "A child of four could have done it!"—brings to the attention of independent wrappers (a) the tomb of Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery, and (b) the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens.' (In fact Britain's notoriously avant-garde authorities had the Albert Memorial wrapped years ago, evidently by a child of four.)

Publishers and Sinners. HarperCollins launched an exciting, shit-hot new imprint called *Voyager* (presided over by Jane Johnson), which to the unaided eye seems indistinguishable from the old HC/sf/fantasy list. • **Corgi** are zeroing in on Robert Rankin's audience, i.e. drunks, by pushing *The Most Amazing Man Who Ever Lived* as a cross-promotion with a beer company. • **The Bookseller's** Sarah Broadhurst does snap assessments of paperbacks: thus, of Robert Jordan, 'The fans hunger for him but he still needs lifting'—possibly not a reference to the author's alleged chair-crushing immensity or the 1,056-page slab which is his upcoming paperback.... Likewise Charles de Lint's 'covers have done a lot to lift him, but not enough'; while of Stephen Laws the keen insight is, 'I haven't read this either but he is very good.' [CP]

Updates. **Paul Williams's** horrific bike-crash injuries (see A95) are responding well to treatment: 'Much to my astonishment and delight, Paul showed up at [the] American Booksellers Association convention, looking somewhat fragile but quite well. He is up and around, under doctors' orders to wear a bicycle helmet, since there is an open place in his scalp from the brain surgery (eventually, the doctors will put a plastic plate there). He seemed very much himself, memory, mood, and personality intact.' [DN] • **Diana Wynne Jones** 'thanks all those (too numerous to list) who signed her "get well soon" card, which arrived on a low hospital day and was greatly appreciated. So low was the day that she spent ALL MORNING (which in hospital starts around 6am) gradually reading the card.... She's much better now, almost up to reading whole books.' [CB] • **Hugo Ballot**: under *NOVELLA*, Michael J.Flynn (as faithfully reproduced in A94) should be Michael F.Flynn.

20 Years Ago. 'How about a new definition of science fiction? It's about things going wrong.' (Brian Aldiss, *Vector 69*, Summer 1975.)

The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy Art Techniques by Ron Tiner and John Grant has been 'fucked over something rotten by asinine editorial decisions at Quarto,' confided JG impartially—though 'Quarto are now acting a bit more sanely as a result of notoriously stropky Grant becoming notoriously stropky.' One merry moment: 'For the section on sf hardware, David Hardy was asked to do work-up sketches towards a final piece; so he chose a really stunning picture of his and did "preliminary" sketches and blueprints to go with it. When he delivered this extremely interesting set, he mentioned what he'd done—and was promptly told that while he'd be paid for the sketches etc, there was nothing left in the budget for Artwork That Has Not Been Done Specially. Well, he said, pay me out of the Artwork That Has Been Done Specially budget—I won't tell if you don't. Nope: not allowed....' The finished artwork being essential for the rest to make sense, DH offered his solution: he'd 'repaint it, and charge his standard fee of n hundred pounds. Sudden budgetary rethink at Quarto! The official position is now 'he's changed it a bit', so they can permit themselves to pay up....

Thog's Masterclass. 'Vivia herself was a woman. Not only physically, as of course was Lilliot, but psychosomatically.' (Tanith Lee, *Vivia*, 1995) [PK] • 'Arias plunged his blue-grey regard into hers.' (Anne Gay, *To Bathe in Lightning*, 1995) 'I think this means he stared into her eyes'—A.Mole.

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