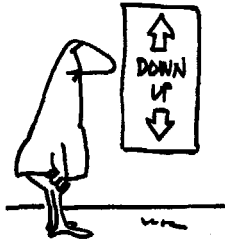


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From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. <http://ansible.co.uk>. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (online). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Bill Rotsler**. Available for SAE or upgrade of sebalism to chorasm.

Another New Year. Belated good wishes to you all! As a fragment of cheer amid the encircling gloom, Tom Purdom's guest speech at Philcon 2004 contained a soothing reply to the plethora of 'As Others See Us' stories: 'It used to bother me that people thought liking science fiction was weird. But then I discovered that to Americans any interest, be it astronomy or playing chess or whatever, is weird. The only thing you can do that Americans won't find weird is watching four hours of television a night.' ('Which [for Americans, at least] explains everything,' added *Ansible's* man on the spot, Michael Swanwick.)

The Meadows of Fantasy

Margaret Atwood, still wrestling with the fatal temptation to produce sf, has devised a new strategy of lovingly outlining the books she *doesn't* intend to write. Her 18 Dec *Times* article gives rip-roaring scenarios for *Worm Zero* (in which, evidently homaging Edgar Wallace's classic 'The Man Who Hated Earthworms', global disaster is brought on by worm extinction), *Beetleplunge* (in which, 'like lemmings', the world's beetles suicidally plunge) and *Spongedeath*—in which a rampant sea-sponge becomes The Blob That Ravaged Florida. But, she muses, 'until I'm convinced, in my heart, that the human spirit has the wherewithal to go head to headless against this malevolent wad of cellulose—because as a writer loyal to the truth of the inner self you can't fake these things—it might be as well not to begin.' [TW] Oh, go on....

Quentin Blake, noted illustrator of (especially) children's books, was made a CBE or Companion of the British Empire in the New Year honours list—upgrading his 1988 OBE award. He's best known for his collaboration with Roald Dahl, but several of us have a particular nostalgic fondness for his work on the *Uncle* fantasies by J.P. Martin.

Chaz Brechley answered *The Bookseller's* appeal for reports of people in the book trade who'd been arrested while going about their lawful business. His own encounter was a near miss: 'I was walking home, when a large stranger loomed up beside me and said hello. "You write books," he told me. I admitted that this was true. "I know you do," he said, "I used to follow you around." At last, I thought, my very own celebrity stalker. "I'm a bouncer now," he said, "but I used to be a store detective at Blackwell's. You were just the type we were trained to keep an eye on. Cap, shades, long overcoat, you couldn't look more suspicious. You used to come in every day and you never bought a book. I couldn't catch you at it, but I just knew you were pinching. In the end I got my manager to look at you on the CCTV. "Oh, no," he told me. "That's not a shoplifter. That's an author."'" (26 November) [RD]

Arthur C. Clarke issued a statement following the horrific tsunami disasters in South/Southeast Asia: 'I am enormously relieved that my family and household have escaped the ravages of the sea that suddenly invaded most parts of coastal Sri Lanka, leaving a trail of destruction.' Read it all at <http://www.clarkefoundation.org/>.

Peter Crowther of PS Publishing receives a surprise namecheck in Alan Hollinghurst's (Booker Prize-winning) novel *The Line of Beauty*—reports Lisa Tuttle, who was disconcerted by the first line: 'Peter Crowther's book on the election was already in the shops.' Further down the page: 'He had met Peter Crowther once, and heard him described as a hack and also as a "mordant analyst": his faint smile, as he flicked through the pages, concealed his uncertainty as to which account was nearer the truth.' Perhaps Mr Crowther will let us know.

William Gibson, that wrinkled old patriarch, was described by the *Sunday Times* as 'the sci-fi pioneer William Gibson.' (2 January) [DW]

Diana Wynne Jones is ecstatic after a secret première of *Howl's Moving Castle*, practically on her doorstep in Bristol: 'Miyazaki came in person, carrying with him a tape of the film, an interpreter and sundry other shadowy figures (all this was supposed to be secret for fear of the Japanese media, who then descended on me afterwards, so I couldn't mention it beforehand) and we had a private showing at the Watershead cinema. The film is goluptuously splendid with breathtaking animation. I had grown used to young ladies regularly writing to me to say that they wanted to marry Howl. Now, Howl in the film is so plain stunning

and sexy that I think I have joined them. And after the showing and the scamper through Bristol I had a long talk with Mr Miyazaki and it began to seem that we were soulmates.' Some writers have all the luck.

Ursula Le Guin, though, was deeply unhappy with the Sci Fi Channel's adaptation of her *Earthsea* fantasies, and says so in an article for Slate.com: 'I don't know what the film is about. It's full of scenes from the story, arranged differently, in an entirely different plot, so that they make no sense. My protagonist is Ged, a boy with red-brown skin. In the film, he's a petulant white kid.' The overall result: 'a generic McMagic movie with a meaningless plot based on sex and violence.'

Roger Levy, dentist and author of the sf novels *Reckless Sleep* and *Dark Heavens*, was the second of six victims of a lunatic's North London stabbing spree on 23 December. He was reported as stable in hospital after the attack. This grim news first emerged via Erik Arthur of Fantasy Centre, who actually had an appointment at the Levy dental surgery in Wood Green that day, and was told the alarming reason for its cancellation. [RR] Best wishes for our man's speedy recovery.

Philip Pullman is much annoyed by another *Times* story (8 December), headlined 'God is cut from film of Dark Materials' and alleging that New Line Cinema plans 'to remove anti-religious overtones [...] because of fears of a backlash from the Christian Right in the United States.' Moreover, Pullman complains, 'the article maintained that I had gone along with this, by cheerfully colluding in a betrayal of the vision that underlies the books'. This claim was buttressed by creative use of quotation: 'To take an answer from one context, invent a question that hadn't been asked, and put the answer next to it is not what used to be called honest journalism.' Finally our author insists, 'There will be no betrayal of any kind.' We shall see.

Contraplex

26 Jan • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With (it says here) *The Thackery T. Lambshead Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*.

4-6 Feb • **Construction 4** (Interaction staff weekend). Moat House Hotel, Congress Rd, SECC, Glasgow. Free, but send e-mail if you plan to come: Colin.Harris [at] interaction.worldcon.org.uk.

14 Feb • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Top floor, 6:30pm. With Pat Cadigan and guests TBA. (NB: no January event.)

19 Feb • **Picocon 22**, Imperial College Union, London. Contact ICSF, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB.

4 Mar • **British Fantasy Society** open night, Devereux pub, East St, off the Strand, London. 6.30pm onwards. All welcome.

4-6 Mar • **Mecon 8**, Park Avenue Hotel, Holywood Rd, Belfast. GoH Ian McDonald. £20/€30 reg; £22 at the door. Contact 17 Meadowbank Place, Belfast, BT9 7FE, N. Ireland.

5-6 Mar • **Microcon**, Exeter University campus. Guests TBA.

11-13 Mar • **DeciKon: AKFT 10 (Trek)**, Fircroft Hotel, Bournemouth. £25 reg, rising to £30 on 6 Jan. Rooms approx £33 pppn. Contact 12 Greenfield Rd, London, N15 5EP. 0208 801 8867.

8-30 Apr • **The Day of the Triffids**—stage adaptation by Shaun Prendergast, New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich. Box office 01473 295 900.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. No one expected the *Daily Mail* to like Philip Pullman's views on organized religion, and Quentin Letts's review of *His Dark Materials* (National Theatre) is duly filled with spleen: 'Intellectual teenage girls swear by Philip Pullman. His novels sell by the ton and his science fictions are exotic and pseudo-portentous. Harry Potter for Oxbridge eggheads.' (*Mail*, 10 Dec) [BA] There is more, much more.

Glittering Prizes. *Dick Award* shortlist for best original US paperback of 2004: Minister Faust, *The Coyote Kings of the Space-age Bachelor Pad*; Eileen Gunn, *Stable Strategies for Middle Management*; Gwyneth Jones, *Life*; Lyda Morehouse, *Apocalypse Array*; Geoff Ryman, *Air*; Karen Traviss, *City of Pearl*; Liz Williams, *Banner of Souls* [GVG] • *Nebulas*: novel and script nominees from the preliminary ballot. NOVEL:

Lois McMaster Bujold, *Paladin of Souls*; Cory Doctorow, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*; Jack McDevitt, *Omega*; Sean Stewart, *Perfect Circle*; S.M. Stirling, *Conquistador*; Gene Wolfe, *The Knight*. SCRIPT: *The Incredibles*; *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*; *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. [JS] See SFWA website for other categories.

R.I.P. **Kenneth Vye Bailey** (1914-2005), UK sf poet and critic, has reportedly died. As K.V. Bailey he wrote many gently erudite reviews for *Foundation*, *The Third Alternative*, *Vector*, and other magazines; his most recent book was *The Vortices of Time: Poems of Speculation and Fantasy* (1998). ● **Larry Buchanan** (1923-2004), US maker of low-budget films, died on 2 December at age 81. His sf ventures included the TV movies *Zontar, the Thing from Venus* (1966), *The Eye Creature* (1967), *In the Year 2889* (1967), *Mars Needs Women* (1967), and *It's Alive* (1969—not to be confused with the better-known 1974 Larry Cohen film). [DK] ● **Humphrey Carpenter** (1946-2005), UK biographer whose works included *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (1977), *The Inklings* (1978) and *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (1984, with Mari Prichard), died on 4 January aged 58. ● **Will Eisner** (1917-2005), legendary cartoonist who created, scripted and drew *The Spirit*—and much else—died on 3 January following a quadruple heart bypass. He was 87. Since 1987 his name has been honoured in the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, which he loved to present in person. His comics debut was in 1936, and even now a new graphic novel awaits publication. ● **Frank Kelly Freas** (1922-2005), one of the best loved of all sf artists, died on 2 January aged 82. His long career began in 1950 and earned him ten Hugo awards as best artist, beginning in 1955 and with an unbroken run from 1972 to 1976; in 2001 he also received a Retro Hugo for 1950 work. Besides his hundreds of colourful, distinctively styled sf magazine and book covers, Freas spent seven years as chief cover artist for *Mad* and designed the Skylab 1 shoulder patch for NASA. He will be much missed. ● **Douglas Mason** (1941-2004), Scots antiquarian book dealer, avid sf collector, and Conservative politician who supposedly invented the unpopular UK poll tax, died on 13 December after long illness with a brain tumour; he was 63. (Not to be confused with the Douglas R. Mason born in 1918, who wrote sf as John Rankine.) London's Fantasy Centre recently acquired his vast magazine collection. [RR] ● **Jerry Orbach** (1935-2004), US actor whose best-known genre role was as the voice of a singing candelabrum in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), died on 28 December aged 69. [MJL] ● **W. Warren Wagar** (1932-2004), US academic and H.G. Wells scholar, died on 16 November. His publications ranged from *H.G. Wells and the World State* (1961) to the 2004 *H.G. Wells: Traversing Time*. [SFS] ● **Thomas Scott Winnett** (1962-2004), *Locus* staff member and reviewer, died on 12 December aged 42. [SFWA]

Sounds Like ... *The Bookseller* records yet another example of bookshop customers' creative title requests: C.S. Lewis's well-known children's fantasy *Lionel Ritchie and His Wardrobe*. [RD]

Publishers & Sinners. *Amazing Stories* magazine is taking a mysterious break from publishing: not closing down, insists new editor Jeff Berkwitz, but 'going on hiatus' after the January issue, as a result of its being (in his own words) 'unexpectedly successful'. [SFW]

As Others See Us II. 'I knew he was a science fiction nut because all the books he checked out were about the planet Romulac.' (Librarian in 1970s sitcom *The Love Boat*) [SG] How many telltale books about Romulac do you own? Be honest, now.

Dog Stars. Gordon Van Gelder reports sf nominations in the Dog Writers Association of America 2004 Writing Competition, whose 52 categories dwarf the puny Hugos: SHORT FICTION includes Bradley Denton's 'Sergeant Chip' (*F&SF*), and BOOK: FICTION has Martin Greenberg's and Alexander Potter's doggy anthology *Sirius* (DAW).

Sector General. Gloom all round at the hospital station; let's hope for better news to follow in every case. ● **Jack Chalker** went into hospital on 6 December and was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Surgery followed. His son Steven has posted reports on line, like this on 31 December: 'I know that Dad's book [in progress], *Chameleon*, will not be published, however that could be proved wrong. We are also moving to a one-story house with no stairs for Jack's comfort. So, just a summary: He is permanently disabled but not fully retired. However I think *Chameleon* might be cancelled and his latest book published will be his last published.' Jack's hoped transfer to a nursing home was delayed by bleeding problems reported on 3 January—since resolved, but he remains in hospital. ● **Dave Locke** had a heart attack on 23 December and entered hospital next day: early reports of his progress were discouraging, but the outlook now seems much brighter. An operation is awaited this week. [BB] ● **Ken Lake** sent a card whose seasonal greeting was footnoted: 'on my last, miserable Christmas (I have cancer

of the liver).' Ouch. ● **Dave Wood** wants all his fan friends to know: 'I had the biopsy results re the tumour removed from my colon. It shows a cancer which has spread possibly to a few lymph nodes etc, so come the New Year I start a 26 week chemotherapy course.'

Media Spot. From the *Guardian* round-up of newspaper predictions for 2005: "You would think that the latest Star Wars instalment [out in May] would be a dead cert but I feel that the public has tired of this moribund franchise," says Wendy Ide in the Times. "For space action, look instead to the Spielberg/Cruise collaboration *War of the Worlds* [July]." Space action? This implies some interestingly drastic changes to H.G. Wells's storyline.... [B'OH]

Small Press. *Light's List* (20th ed, 2005) should appear at the end of January, as usual giving details of over 1,400 English-language small press mags worldwide. 70+pp. £4 inc post (£5/\$10 overseas) to Photon Press, 37 The Meadows, Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 1NY.

Fanfundery. *DUFF 2005*: nominations close 15 Feb. For news and ballot forms, keep watching the skies at <http://DUFF2005.blogspot.com>.

Outraged Letters. **Steve Green** splutters: 'As for Adam Mars-Whatsiface trying to explain on BBC Radio 4's *A Good Read* why Kurt Vonnegut was really good, but not sf, even though it was kinda sf, but still worth reading ... What a pillock.' ● **Jane Yolen** on Trina Schart Hyman: 'Alas, one of dear Trina's last commissions was for the jacket of my historical novel (with a small fantasy element in it) *Prince Across the Water*. A dear friend, a brilliant illustrator, I shall miss her enormously.'

C.o.A. **Guy & Rosy Lillian** (and *Challenger*), 8700 Millicent Way #1501, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115, USA.

The Dead Past. *Ten Years Ago* we ran a topical Glasgow Worldcon item: '**The Scottish Convention** will be larger than we think, reveals Michael White in *GQ* magazine, with the meticulous accuracy for which his unauthorized biography of Isaac Amisov is famed: "... expected to attract upwards of 50,000 people.'" (*Ansible* 90, January 1995)

Bankswatch. **David Haddock** tracks the great man's movements (see *A209*): 'I believe Iain Banks expressed his support for the alternative event to the opening of the Scottish Parliament but did not attend. At the time it happened I believe he was being interviewed on the Janice Forsthye Show on BBC Radio Scotland. She said that he was on the line from Inverness. [...] The newspaper reports before the day did say he would be there, but newspapers have been known to be not entirely accurate.' ● **Stephen Baxter** has also been keeping watch: 'I believe Banks was also spotted at the "impeach Blair" launch bash at the Commons. Or perhaps these are all Banks impersonators, like Elvis, sent to liven up our public events.' ● **Several People** pointed out that David Kennedy's 'Declaration of Carlton Hill' should read 'Calton Hill'.

As Others See Us III. The *Radio Times* (5 December) explains a programme titled *What we still don't know*: 'Astronomer Royal Martin Rees explores ideas once firmly entrenched in the realms of sci-fi and philosophy ...' Mat Coward wonders, 'Is that what a PPE stands for, then? Politics, Philosophy and Enormousbigspaceshipswithtentacles?'

Random Fandom. **Tony 'Blindpew'** reports: 'Faldo the black thing that wandered the halls of the Winter Gardens will be retiring next year ... I will be reassessed for another guide dog March/April with a new dog becoming available within six months. I have asked that he not be retired until the end of August after World Con, but that depends on availability. So, Paragon could be Faldo's last convention.' ● **Mark McCann & Elaine Campbell** sent a 30 Dec message from Belfast: 'Baby boy, 8lb 12oz, 9.23pm, both mum and baby Rowan are healthy!' [TF]

Fountain Award. The Speculative Literature Foundation invites magazine and anthology editors to nominate stories published in 2004 for this \$1,000 juried award. Deadline 1 February 2005; details at <http://speculativeliterature.org/Awards/SLFFountainAward.php>.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of That's Easy For You To Say*: 'Kerlic opened his mouth to speak but then fell silent.' (Lyndon Hardy, *Master Of The Five Magics*, 1986) [WS] ● *Dept of Repair, or Impalement*. 'Binabik fixed Simon with his brows.' (Tad Williams, *Stone of Farewell*, 1990) [HC] Your editor remembers that Wizard Longbrows in *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* can actually do this. ● *Dept of the Noisy Dead*. 'It caught a man between neck and shoulder, and the dead man went down shrieking ...' (David Weber, *Oath of Swords*, 1995) [VJK]

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