

Ansible



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From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. <http://ansible.co.uk>. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (e). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Sue Mason**. Available for SAE or petals from St Klaed's computer.

High-Level Talks. Towards the end of June, John Clute and I visited certain London publishers to discuss plans for the third edition of *The Encyclopedia of SF*. I'm not holding my breath: all this had sounded plausibly imminent at the previous such meeting in mid-June 2003....

Creatures of Apogee

Brian Aldiss became an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the Queen's Birthday Honours on 11 June. His inside story is an *Ansible* exclusive: 'I was greatly chuffed by the award "for services to Literature"—a euphemism in this case for SF.... But when chatting to Her Majesty, I was disappointed to find she had only got as far as John Wyndham and the triffids. "What do you like about it?" I asked. She replied, "Oh, it's such a cosy catastrophe." I blushed.'

Neal Asher has a gloat: 'The *Skinner* has won the Czech SF&F&H Academy Award for the best SF book published there in 2004: the Salamander Award. This was out of a shortlist of *Blood Music* Greg Bear, *Chasm City* Alastair Reynolds, *The Scar* China Miéville and *A Deepness In the Sky* Vernor Vinge—one of the best shortlists I've read in ages.'

Margaret Atwood once again came clean in the *Guardian* (17 June), not only explaining why we need sf but boldly acknowledging her own complicity: 'I have written two works of science fiction ...'

Terry Pratchett's vital statistics are provided by the indefatigable Colin Smythe, who's been obsessively studying the 2005 *Bookseller's Pocket Yearbook* with UK data for 2003. 'Of the Top Fiction Authors in hardback, Terry came second with 3.4% of the sales and 3.8% of the value, after J.K. Rowling (6% and 5.6% respectively). In paperbacks, Terry came fifth (after James Patterson, Alexander McCall Smith, John Grisham and J.R.R. Tolkien—in that order) with 1.2% and 1.3%—Patterson got 1.9% and 1.7%. Terry was therefore ahead of Stephen King in both hardcover (by quite a lot) and paperback sales (just)....'

Steven Spielberg knows how to have fun: 'Science fiction for me is a vacation, a vacation away from all the rules of narrative logic, a vacation away from physics and physical science. / It just lets you leave all the rules behind and just kind of fly.' (Reuters interview) [LR]

Robert Sheckley survived six hours of heart surgery—a triple bypass and mitral valve replacement—on 29 June. After all these health upheavals (see *A215*), I hope he'll have a tranquil recovery. Alas, he won't be able to attend the Glasgow Worldcon as a guest of honour, but will be represented by his wife Gail Dana and feted *in absentia*.

Jules Verne was honoured by the French post office this year, marking the centenary of his death with a set of six stamps showing scenes from his novels. The chosen books: *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *From the Earth to the Moon* and ... *Michael Strogoff*, *The Courier of the Czar*. Michael who? [MV]

Concubitant

9 Jul • **British Fantasy Society** 'Awards Showcase' evening, upstairs, Devereux pub, Devereux Ct, London WC2. 6:30pm on. All welcome.

9-10 Jul • **Faringdon Arts Festival** sf events, Faringdon, Oxon. Most items free. Contact paulcornell[at]owlservice.freereserve.co.uk.

11 Jul • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Top floor, 6:30pm. With Pat Cadigan, Iain Banks, Kate Elliot and Tricia Sullivan.

16 Jul • 12:01am at 5,000-odd bookshops ... juvenile street riots! Tattoos! 10.8 million copies printed! If only I could remember the title.

27 Jul • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Gary K Wolfe.

29-31 Jul • **Accio 2005** (H. Potter), U of Reading. £160 reg (room & meals). Contact 26 Discovery House, Newby Place, London, E14 0HA.

29-31 Jul • **Clarecraft Discworld Event**, Warren Farm, Woolpit, Suffolk. Camping weekend. £5 reg to Clarecraft, Unit 1, Woolpit Business Park, Woolpit, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9UP.

29-31 Jul • **Precursor 2** (relaxacon)—CANCELLED.

30-31 Jul • **Caption** (comics/small press), Wolfson College, Oxford. £10 reg; £5 unwaged. Contact 149 Campbell Rd, Oxford, OX4 3NX.

1 Aug • **Extra London Fan Meeting**, Walkers of Holborn, 9 Norwich St. 5pm on. All welcome. If visiting the UK for Worldcon, please note! The usual first-Thursdays meeting will happen on 4 Aug, but ...

4-8 Aug • **Interaction** (63rd Worldcon), Glasgow. Now £120/\$225 reg; kids (7-15) £32/\$50; same at door. Day rates £25 Thu or Mon, £30 Fri, £40 Sat or Sun. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Note that the voting for those pointy rocket awards closes on 8 July.

7 Aug • **PM 2005** (*Prisoner*), Portmeirion. 11am-8:30pm. £15 reg, advance booking only, plus Village admission. info[at]theunmutual.co.uk

11-15 Aug • **The Ring Goes Ever On** (Tolkien Soc): Aston U, Birmingham. £60/\$115/€103 reg; society members £55/\$105/€95. Contact 28 Loverock Crescent, Rugby, CV21 4AR.

12-14 Aug • **Consternation** (RPG), New Hall, Cambridge. Now £27 reg. Contact 130 South Rd, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 6EL.

13-19 Aug • **Milford (UK) SF Writers' Conference**, Snowdonia. Contact Top Flat, 8 Bedford St, Kemp Town, Brighton, BN2 1AN.

14 Aug • **Banopticon** (*Who*), Marine Ct Hotel, Bangor, Co Down, Ireland. GoH C. Baker. £20 reg. Info: banopticon2005[at]yahoo.co.uk.

16-17 Sep • **The Fforde Ffestival** (Jasper Fforde), Goddard Arms Hotel, Swindon. £25 reg. Tickets L Swindon Tourist Info Centre, 37 Regent St, Swindon, SN1 1JL. 01793 530328 or 466454.

17-18 Sep • **SF/Fantasy Weekend**, Techniquet science discovery centre, Stuart St, Cardiff, CF10 5BW. Further details TBA.

30 Sept - 2 Oct • **FantasyCon 2005**, Quality Hotel, Walsall. Now £50 reg; BFS members £45. Day rate £20, Saturday only. Contact (with SAE) Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8DQ.

23-25 Feb 07 • **Redemption** (*B7/B5*), Hinckley. £45 reg, rising to £50 on 9 Aug 05. Contact 26 Kings Meadow View, Wetherby, LS22 7FX.

Infinitely Improbable

As Doctor Who Sees Itself. Journalist Nick Griffiths interviews Russell T Davies (*Radio Times*, 4-10 June). NG: 'Why do you think the show has been a success?' RTD: '... Our greatest decision was not to "science fiction" it too much.' [HS] Thus, with austere understatement, Earth is attacked by mere millions of Daleks rather than billions of talking squid from outer space.

Obligatory War of the Worlds Mention: *Ansible* recommends the August *Fortean Times* coverage.... • *Ian Covell* has a dream of seeing the version actually made in 1898: '... that alternate history in which the Lumière Bros or Edison reproduced on film the bestseller of its day—men on stilts, disguised under tarpaulins carefully tailored to look almost like German helmets, lurching above model towns and cities, the crackle of electric guns hand-scratched on to each frame ... H.G. Wells making his usual brief guest appearance as the placard-wearing prophet: "The Millennium is at Hand, Prepare to Meet Nobody." And at the end, troops of dancing girls, representing the triumphant bacteria of Earth, gleefully pushing over Martian after Martian....'

R.I.P. *Carl Amery* (pen name of Christian Anton Mayer, 1922-2005), German author and political activist, died on 24 May. His sf novels were *Das Königsprojekt* (1974), *Der Untergang der Stadt Passau* (1975) and *And den Feuern der Leyermark* (1979). [JK] • *Anne Bancroft* (1931-2005), Oscar-winning US actress, died of cancer on June 6. Rare genre roles included voicing the Queen in *Antz* and appearing in her husband Mel Brooks's poorly reviewed horror parody *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*. • *Michael Billington* (1941-2005), actor who co-starred in Gerry Anderson's *UFO*, died from cancer on 3 June; he was 63. [S] • *Norman Bird* (1924-2005), popular UK character actor who appeared in several sf/fantasy films and voiced Bilbo Baggins in the 1978 animated *Lord of the Rings*, died on 22 April. He was also in *Man in the Moon*, *Night of the Eagle*, *The Mind Benders*, *First Men in the Moon*, *Doomwatch*, and *Omen III*. [JL] • *Ed Bishop* (1932-2005), US actor who also co-starred in *UFO* and appeared in various sf films including *Saturn 3* and (briefly) *2001*, died on 8 June aged 72. He was the voice of Captain Blue in *Captain Scarlet*. [S] • *Robert Clarke* (1920-2005), writer, director and star of *The Hideous Sun Demon*, with sf B-movie roles in *The Man from*

Planet X, *The Astounding She-Monster*, etc., died on 11 June aged 85. [S] ● **Warren Norwood** (1945-2005), US sf author whose terminal condition was sadly noted in *A215*, died that same day: 3 June. He was 59. ● **John Fiedler** (1925-2005), who played the Jack the Ripper role in 'Wolf in the Fold' from *Star Trek* Season 2 and voiced Piglet in Disney's *Winnie-the-Pooh* films, died on 25 June; he was 80. [GVG] ● **Basil Kirchin** (1927-2005), drummer and composer best known for scoring the cult horror film *The Abominable Dr Phibes* (1971), died on 18 June; he was 77. ● **John Robert Owen**, 1950s-vintage British fan, died from cancer on 29 June. He was 74. Keith Freeman writes: 'He was a long time member of the Liverpool Group and attended Cons in the late 50s and very early sixties. He wrote, with Stan Nuttall, the "Sir William Makepeace Harrison" sagas that graced the fanzines of that period (*Triode* to start with).' NB: he should not be confused with UK fan John D. Owen, publisher of *Crystal Ship* etc. ● **Andy Roberts** (1963-2005), UK small-press comics artist and guitarist with the band *Linus*, died on 18 June, six days after suffering massive head injuries when hit by a motorcycle. [SG] ● **Lane Smith** (1936-2005), who played Perry White in *Lois & Clark*, died on 14 June. [S] ● **David C. Sutherland III** (1949-2005), US artist associated with *Dungeons & Dragons* and other role-playing games, died on 7 June aged 56. (SFWA) ● **Paul Winchell** (1922-2005), US ventriloquist whose genre voice roles began with *The Jetsons* in 1962 and who most famously voiced Tigger in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, died on 24 June aged 84. [CH]

As Others Saw Us. A late discovery in *New Republic* coverage of those Gingrich/Forstchen alternate Civil War novels (6 Sep 04). Reviewers Thomas J. Brown and Elisabeth Sifton explain that such alternate histories 'ooze out of the vast swamp of contemporary pseudo-literature, humid fantasy and geeky science fiction, adjacent to which is the spongy field where lurid video games are spawned, and all those graphic novels the Japanese love to read in which their country triumphs in World War II.' [MMW] Now I feel all humid, geeky and spongy, and am checking the back garden for lurid video games....

Fanfunderary. *TAFF* has received \$1000 from SCIFI (Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, Inc.) as a reward for the appearance of James Bacon's and Tobes Valois's trip reports. Well done, all round! ● 'The 2006 Taff Race is open for nominations,' says Euro administrator James Bacon: the nominations deadline is 4 September, and voting will close on 3 June 2006. Declared candidates for this westbound race are, so far, Bridget Bradshaw and 1/2r Cruttenden. ● *The League of Fan Funds* will be raising money at Interaction with a sales table, auction and Tat Tombola in the fan programme. Donations are welcomed.

Outraged Letters. *Craig Engler* on 'As Others See Us (A215): 'Interesting quote from Hal Hartley about *The Girl From Monday* [denying its sci-finess], because when his film screened at the Sundance Film Festival (where I saw it), it billed itself as "a science fiction by Hal Hartley" in the opening credits. Note: the strange wording is correct.' ● *Richard E. Geis* has his own complaint about the *Dark Side* allegations (see A215): 'Hmm. Nobody ever plagiarized and reprinted any of MY reviews. I feel slighted and humiliated. Hey, out there, steal my old, outdated reviews, please! Just change the book titles!' ● *Ben Jeapes* is in a naughty mood: 'I can't believe for one second that *Ansible* would ever stoop to the level of laughing at its competitors, so may I purely for information draw your attention to the headline in the latest *Locus*—"Sheckley ill in Russia". It would be unfairly picky to point out that he actually took ill in Kiev (as the article says) which is in Ukraine (as it does not). Russia used to run that part of the world, of course—maybe that was the thinking in the *Locus* offices at Oakland, Mexico.' ● *Adam 'A.R.R.R.' Roberts* has been reading John Blackburn: 'A Scent of New-Mown Hay (1958) ... about a spore that leaves men unaffected but turns women into huge and monstrous blobs of moving vegetable matter, like (and of course a rip-off from) that *Quatermass* episode where the astronaut gets infected by the space cactus. The thing I liked was that a major character was called Professor A R R Roberts, although he turns out to be the villain at the end. Oh for the extra R.'

By Any Other Name ... *Simo* notes that Universal Studios' plans for a DVD package of five classic 1940s horror films have outraged partisan monster fans by being titled *The Bela Lugosi Collection*, despite four of the selections actually giving top billing to Boris Karloff.

Yet Again As Others See Us. William Shatner was interviewed by another *Radio Times* journalist, Jeff Dawson, who with great originality mused: 'Lord knows, over nearly 40 years, how many times he's been forced to endure one of those dreadful conventions where men wear pointy ears and order halves of shandy in Klingon.' [HS] ● *Dr Who* director Joe Ahearne on his new sf film *Double Life*: 'It's got an SF

premise but it's not SF in terms of plot; it's more of an obsessional love story. It's got more in common with *Vertigo*. We don't want that SF element to swamp the way the movie's seen. [...] This is more about relationships.' (SFX #132, July) Our spotter Will Plant calls this 'a fine illustration of the eternal problem of attracting enough fanboys (and girls) to get a return on the investment ... but ensuring that the talking squid quotient is low enough not to scare the "normal" punter!'

Random Fandom. *Kim Huett* is preparing a memorial collection of the late John Brosnan's scabrous fanzine writings, which will appear on line. ● *Terry Jeeves*, long-time British fan whose fanzine *Erg* has appeared since 1959, wrote from hospital to say he'd been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He hopes to keep in touch with correspondents ('as you can see, I can't write very well so incoming mail will have to wait') but fears his publishing days are over. ● *Wrigley-Cross Books* (Portland, OR) is closing its shop but will continue business by mail order. *Debbie Cross* writes: 'I am sorry that we have to close the store, because we're losing so many to the internet. On the other hand, I am looking forward to not being tied to the store six days a week.'

Locus Awards novel winners: SF Neal Stephenson, *The Baroque Cycle: The Confusion; The System of the World*. FANTASY China Miéville, *Iron Council*. FIRST NOVEL Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. YOUNG ADULT Terry Pratchett, *A Hat Full of Sky*.

BBC Leak. Broadcasting House insider 'Deep Triffid' reports: 'There was an internal BBC advert for a producer and researcher needed to work on a "high profile documentary" for BBC4 about John Wyndham and his works, focussing on aspects of the novels that have proved prophetic. The ad said that production would start in mid to late May. No transmission date was mentioned.' [AK] ● The BBC Cult TV website is to close this month, despite being the Beeb's second most popular online feature. Who cares about a piffling 700,000 users per month?

As We See Ourselves. Michael Swanwick reports: 'Courtesy of *Locus Online*, a description of *The Road of Silk* by one of its authors. "Although the genre of the book is fantasy, this novel is a story of the battle between the dark and the light." (Barbara Dyson-Williams) I myself am thinking of writing a novel which, despite being science fiction, will be a story of space exploration.'

C.o.A. *Jeanne Bowman*, 1260 Hill Rd, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA. (PO box now closed.) *Wildside Press*, LLC, 9710 Traville Gateway Dr. #234, Rockville, MD 20850, USA. *Ben Zuhl*, The GateHouse in Thornwald Park, Carlisle, PA 17013, USA.

Cover Story. Strange are the ways of sf marketing. Here's the Orbit UK paperback of *Iain M. Banks's The Algebraist*, with no mention anywhere, on book or press release, that it's a Hugo finalist. Meanwhile someone has decided that the award-nominated cover design, with its striking NASA/JPL Jupiter photograph, was *not skiffy enough*. Therefore, stars have been added. Stars which shine straight through that gas-giant planet and its moon. Really science-fictional stars.

Horror Awards. *International Horror Guild* novel finalists: *The Overnight*, Ramsey Campbell; *Mortal Love*, Elizabeth Hand; *The Kings of Infinite Space*, James Hynes; *A Handbook of American Prayer*, Lucius Shepard; *In the Night Room*, Peter Straub. ● *Bram Stoker* novel and screenplay winners: NOVEL Peter Straub, *In the Night Room*; FIRST NOVEL (tie): John Everson, *Covenant*, and Lee Thomas, *Stained*; SCREENPLAY (tie): *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind & Shaun of the Dead*; YOUNG READERS (tie): Clive Barker, *Abarat: Days of Magic, Nights of War*, and Steve Burt, *Oddest Yet*. Yes, 'the rules are deliberately designed to make ties fairly probable ...' Everybody has won, and all must have prizes!

Thog's Masterclass. *Biothermics Dept, or Why Polar Bears Do Not Exist*. 'It was evidently cold-blooded or nearly so, for no warm-blooded animal could have withstood that more than glacial cold.' (George Griffith, 'Stories of Other Worlds', 1900) [AR] ● *Limits of Vision Dept*. "That," he said impressively, "is the blackest black you or any other mortal ever looked upon ... so black that no mortal man will be able to look upon it—and see it!" (Jack London, 'The Shadow and the Flash', 1903) [AR] ● 'Xavier closed his eyes, then forced himself to watch the terrible solution.' (Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson, *The Butlerian Jihad*, 2002) [DL] ● *Dept of Motherhood and Stale Apple Pie*. 'He took an instant to gulp water from a dipper, stale and welcome as a mother's love.' (S.M. Stirling & David Drake, *The Sword*, 1995) [TMCd]

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