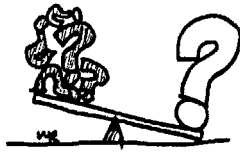


Ansible



Ansible 220 November 2005

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, 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 the Ace of Nitwits.

Nothing New Under the Sun. What goes around in sf criticism, comes around. In *Slate's* analysis of the complete *Star Wars* cycle as 'The greatest postmodern art film ever', critic Aidan Wasley probes 'its secret, spiky intellectual heart' (oh, please let him be joking), goes on about its knowing postmodernism, and realizes in a blinding flash that 'The Force is, in other words, a metaphor for, or figuration of, the demands of narrative. The Force is the power of plot.' Like David Bratman (who told me about the *Slate* piece), I was irresistibly reminded of Nick Lowe's 1986 *Ansible* essay 'The Well-Tempered Plot Device', and its insight that realizing the Force is in fact the Plot '... makes sudden and perfect sense of everything that happens in the film. "The time has come, young man, for you to learn about the Plot."' And so on.

And Then There'll Be Fireworks

Richard Calder's taste in accessories received special mention in an *Guardian* article celebrating the appearance of *Interzone* 200: 'Some things, however, appear impervious to change: gratifyingly SF writers today, it seems, are content to look as geeky as ever they did in the 1980s. A photograph of the lead interviewee, Richard Calder, in which the author is captured bathed in red light and sporting glasses whose lenses could windscreen an Austin Maxi, screams "here is a man who had his lunch money pinched as a child".' (Travis Elborough, 22 Oct)

Neil Gaiman quotes a (positive) review of *Anansi Boys*: 'Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* garnered admirers (George Lucas being the most famous) who started tapping into age-old plots rather than plowing new narrative ground. [...] Science fiction and fantasy writers especially took to Campbell because he allowed them to see themselves not as dime-store hacks but as working in the tradition of the Viking sagas and *Beowulf*.' (*Houston Chronicle*, 31 October)

Simon R. Green wishes to make our flesh creep: 'In my current novel there's a character who is a water elemental, and an assassin. Just guess what they call her. The Liquidator.'

Paul Park responds to Ursula Le Guin's *Ansible* 219 comment on the retro-tech ansible appearing in his *A Princess of Roumania*: 'Ms. Le Guin is of course correct. The Roumanian ansible is a primitive prototype, as can be demonstrated by its limited range: it is barely powerful enough to contact ghosts in the land of the dead, and other imminent locations. The immensities of space-time are another matter entirely. As for its mass—again, most of that is merely decorative. The Roumanian engineer who worked on the project, "Hank" Curlicu, later consulted for the Ford motor company's department of chassis design.' Now we know.

Terry Pratchett revealed (in a 12 October *Guardian* feature) thirteen objects of special personal importance to him—including his wheeled Luggage, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, a computer with four separate monitors, his 2004 Carnegie Medal, and 'Bob, my robot, which does all the cleaning in my office.'

Anne Rice returns, still writing about immortal supernatural beings but with a certain change of emphasis: her new one is 'a novel about the 7-year-old Jesus, narrated by Christ himself. "I promised," she says, "that from now on I would write only for the Lord."' *Newsweek* (MSBNC.com) headlines this as 'her most daring book yet'—though the Rice approach looks safely devout, and there seems little chance that the infant Christ will radiantly sink his teeth into deserving throats.

Geoff Ryman's sf novel *Air* won the 2005 Sunburst Award for best Canadian fantastic literature.

Confray

11-13 Nov • **ArmadaCon 17**, Novatel Plymouth. £30 reg. Contact 4 Gleneagle Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, PL3 5HL.

11-13 Nov • **Novacon 35**, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. Now £40 at the door. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

14 Nov • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Top floor, 7pm (not 6:30). With Pat Cadigan, Justina Robson, Farah Mendlesohn. *The final Borders event of 2005; the next should be in February 2006.*

23 Nov • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews,

London, SW1. 6pm onward; admission free. With Adam Roberts.

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

3-4 Dec • **Discworld Beer Festival**, Maddocks Sports Pavilion, Wincanton Sports Ground, Moor Lane, Wincanton, Somerset. 11am-11pm Sat, 11am-10:30pm Sun. £5 reg. Contact 0709 226 4571.

21 Dec • no BSFA meeting in December; resumes in January.

22 Dec • **London Circle** Christmas extra meeting, Walkers of Holborn, 9 Norwich St ... TBC in our December issue, I hope.

24-26 Feb 06 • **Distraction 2006** (small sf/fun), Chequers Hotel, Newbury. £30 reg. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

14-17 Apr 06 • **Concussion** (Eastercon), Glasgow Moat House Hotel. £50 reg; supp/concessions £25; ages 12-18 £15; 5-11 £5; 0-4 free. Contact 23 Ranelagh Rd, Bruce Grove, London, N17 6XY.

1 Sep 06 • **Iain Banks Academic Conference**, University of Westminster, London. More TBA; this is at the call-for-papers stage.

Rumblings • **Novacon** (www.novacon.org) was not best pleased to find a cybersquatter trading on this long-running convention's reputation with assorted sf ads and links at www.novacon.org.uk.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. Ian Rankin grumbles that crime fiction is underrated and excluded from major literary awards—but of course things could be worse. 'We don't get as raw a deal as science fiction writers. Science fiction is dealing with some of the biggest ideas—where we are going to go as a race—but for some reason it's not taken seriously.' (*Times*, 14 October) Hey, someone actually noticed!

R.I.P. Teisho (aka Sadamasa) Arikawa (1925-2005), Japanese special effects director and cinematographer who worked on the original 1954 *Gojira/Godzilla* film and several sequels, died on 22 September 22 aged 80. Other credits include *Destroy All Monsters* and *Frankenstein Conquers the World*. [RS] • **Lloyd Bochner** (1924-2005), US actor best known for his part in the 1962 *Twilight Zone* adaptation of Damon Knight's 'To Serve Man', died on 29 October aged 81. Other TV work included *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Bewitched*, *The Bionic Woman*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Battlestar: Galactica*, the feature-length *Manimal* pilot, *Superboy*, and the 1992-4 animated *Batman*. Films included: *The Dunwich Horror* (1970), *Millennium* (1989), *Legend of the Mummy* (1997) and the animated *Batman: Vengeance* (2001). [SG] • **Alastair Graham Walter Cameron** (1925-2005), distinguished Canadian-born astrophysicist known in the field as Big Al, died on 3 October. Guy Consolmagno writes: 'His many accomplishments in astrophysics include pioneering work in the theoretical understanding of nucleosynthesis; the formation of the solar system in a turbulent solar nebula; and the formation of the Moon by a giant impact of a large planetesimal into the accreting Earth—a theory regarded as science-fictional when he first proposed it in the 1970's but which is now widely accepted. / He was also a great fan of fantasy and science fiction. Active in Canadian fandom in the late 1940's and early 50's, most notably he developed a Fantasy Classification System published by the Canadian Science Fiction Association in 1952. When I worked as a postdoc for him in the late 1970s, I learned from his wife that he was still an avid fan of the Doc Smith Lensmen novels, which he would re-read regularly!' • **Elmer Dresslar**, US entertainer who was the voice of the Jolly Green Giant in the famous TV ads (homaged in *Bored of the Rings*), died at the age of 80 on 23 October. [BB] • **Sig Frohlich** (1908-2005), US bit-part actor remembered for his role as the leading—and last surviving—winged monkey in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), died on 30 September; he was 97. (*Daily Telegraph*) [BT] • **Dénis Lindbohm** (1927-2005), Swedish fan and sf author whose first story (of more than a hundred) was published in 1945, died on 24 October; he had suffered from cancer for several years. He was 78. John-Henri Holmberg writes: 'Dénis was a founder of Swedish fandom and one of its most important members, writers, humorists, and publishers. He was a talented author, a stimulating and intelligent writer, a staunch friend and a wonderful,

warm, demanding and giving person. There is no one to take his place in Swedish science fiction or in Swedish fandom.' • *Louis Nye* (1913-2005), US actor/comedian who played horror host Zombo in the 1960s *The Munsters*, died on 9 October aged 92. He was the Carpenter in the 1985 TV *Alice* and voiced cartoon roles in *Inspector Gadget*. [JHB] • *Keith Parkinson* (1958-2005), Chesley Award-winning US fantasy artist and game designer, died from leukaemia on 26 October, four days after his 47th birthday. (SFWA) • *Michael Piller* (1948-2005), American TV writer/producer praised for his work on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, died from cancer on 1 November; he was 57. • *Charles Rocket* (1949-2005, real surname Claverie), US actor/comedian seen in *Max Headroom*, *Earth Girls Are Easy* and other genre TV and film productions, was found dead on 7 October—apparently suicide by throat-cutting. He was 56. [SFS] • *Mary Wimbush*, UK actress, died on 31 October aged 81; she collapsed at the Birmingham BBC studios after recording an instalment of *The Archers*. Genre work included the psychodrama *Fragment of Fear* (1970) and *Hammer's Vampire Circus* (1972); in TV, the *Who* spinoff *K-9 and Company* (1981) and *Century Falls* (1993). [SG]

Thog's Blurb Masterclass, or how to praise particularly massive books: a back cover quote from A.A. Attanasio warns that 'Ricardo Pinto's *The Chosen* strikes the reader with great force.' [JB]

Publishers & Sinners. Ben Ball, Simon & Schuster UK editor, is leaving to become publisher at Penguin Australia. Martin Sketchley grumbles that he'll soon be on his fourth S&S editor, with only two titles published.... Also leaving S&S is Tim Binding, who like Ball worked with the former 'Earthlight SF' authors (said to be unhappy).

SF Is Everywhere. A sighting by Dan Kimmel: 'On the US broadcast of *Boston Legal* on Oct 11 came an expected SF reference. William Shatner plays the egotistical partner of the law firm. James Spader, playing the lead attorney, was worried about wild salmon being wiped out by lice brought in by farmed salmon. "They call them cling-ons," he tells Shatner. "Klingons?" a startled Shatner replies.' As well he might.

BBC Stuff. Radio 4 plans a three-part documentary on British sf writing, to be broadcast next summer. UK authors are already fighting for places in the queue to be interviewed in, provisionally, Spring 2006.

• BBC2's double *Mastermind* (1 Nov) featured specialists in Iain Banks and Sir Arthur. *Ian Covell* writes: "The Banks questions were hard (and sounded ludicrous) but the contestant didn't pass on one ... and went on to win. / The Clarke questions began with "Which was Clarke's first novel, first published in *Startling Stories* in 1948?" He got it wrong.'

Fanfundery. *TAFF*: the ballot for the 2006 westbound race to LAcon was at last released on 12 Oct. Candidates, as predicted, are Bridget Bradshaw, ½r Cruttenden, and Mike 'Sparks' Rennie. Voting deadline is 27 May 2006; ballots are available from the usual sources.

As Others See Us II. David Honigmann on 'Guilty Pleasures of Second-Rate Art' (*Financial Times*, 19 October): 'The essence of a guilty pleasure is that it is something you know to be flawed but love anyway. My list would include the Corrs, Vaughan Williams, immense quantities of science fiction, *A Matter of Life and Death*, and Stanley Spencer.' [MMW] Perhaps modest quantities of science fiction are OK. • An article on campaigns to save cancelled tv shows implies that some of these are rather more equal than others: 'But if sci-fi shows are more likely to attract fans with too much time and not enough social skills, more surprising are those not wanting closure or validation, but fighting for (whisper it) quality TV.' (Stuart McGurk, *Guardian Guide*, 22 Oct) [TK]

Clarion, the long-running US workshop for beginning sf writers, returns to Michigan State U in 2006 'despite rumours to the contrary'. A new, non-profit Clarion Foundation now handles the administration.

Editorial. Oh gosh, I thought, what have I done to enrage Savoy Books into sending me email with the subject line FOAD? Nervously I opened the message of doom, to find Michael Butterworth asking: 'Did you get your review copy of *Fuck Off And Die* (the sequel to *Adventures of Meng & Ecker*) ...?' Now that should be fun to order in bookshops.

Outraged Letters. *Steve Green* on the *Dark Side* furore (see A215, A217): 'The latest *Dark Side* contains the following editorial note from Allan Bryce: "As many of you may be aware, we had a few problems recently regarding material published that turned out to have been 'cribbed' from internet sources. We've taken steps to ensure that this doesn't happen again, and of course would like to apologise to any writers whose material has been published in error—although our investigations did reveal the disturbing fact that many of the so-called 'ripped off' reviews can be found on a number of different sites under a number of different names ... showing that there's plenty of this sort of thing going on among the netheads!" • Translation: "We apologise for breaking into your home, but have since discovered you've been broken into before, so I guess

we're not guilty after all.'" • *John-Henri Holmberg* footnotes his D. Lindbohm obituary: '[A] major reason why Denis was never known more than by rumor to fandom outside of Scandinavia was that when he went to school, the first and obligatory foreign language taught to Swedes was German, not English (hedging their bets, the Swedish department of education waited until the Fall term, 1944, to switch to English); his English was shaky at best, and he never felt comfortable even reading in English, much less writing.' • *The Hotmail Abuse Team* had the last word on that harassing email (see A219) which caused the Glasgow University authorities to impersonate headless chickens. Micro-stuff is made of sterner stuff: 'I have closed the account you reported (timdonaldsonjd@hotmail.com) in accordance with the Hotmail Terms of Use (TOU). It is a strict violation of the TOU for our members to send objectionable material of any kind or nature using our service.'

Yet More Awards. *Doctor Who* won three of the British National TV Awards presented in the Albert Hall on 25 October: most popular drama, actor and actress. (BBC News) • *The 2005 Ig Nobel Prizes* include a splendid sf highlight, the Peace award presented 'for electrically monitoring the activity of a brain cell in a locust while that locust was watching selected highlights from the movie *Star Wars*.'

As Others See Ms Atwood. An entry for the *Guardian* review-a-novel competition tackles *Oryx & Crake*: 'This is a journey book which exemplifies the best of science fiction, not as a plot less [plotless?] technical specification or sex in zero gravity, but a sometimes brutal and excoriating tale of what the future may be.' (Chris la Hatte) So long as there are no talking squid having sex in zero gravity ... [KMcV]

Vox Pop. One can get into trouble (see, again, A219) through speculating on the provenance of fulsome reviews posted by legions of fans who with mysterious synchronicity open Amazon.com accounts solely to praise one common focus of adoration. But let's risk it: Joe McNally sends another instance, involving the DVD of the non-Spielberg *War of the Worlds* film from Pendragon Pictures. This, according to Joe, is pretty awful; Thog likes the notion of 'the narrator and his brother being played by the same actor, with and without highly mobile stick-on tache respectively,' not to mention a certain lack of plausible UK research: 'St John's Wood is shown as AN ACTUAL WOOD.' Apparently, though, the DVD has its fans. On its Amazon page, 'a cycle seems to have developed whereby a stinking review appears, but is then followed within a day by just enough incredibly positive reviews to knock it off the front page for the title—all of them, pretty much without exception, written by first-time, pseudonymous reviewers, all of whom think it's among the best films they've ever seen, for reasons which occasionally defy comprehension. You can check out the fun for yourself, if you're minded ...' See the Amazon.com site: 648 reviews, and counting!

The Dead Past: Prediction Corner. Words of wisdom from Brian Stableford in 1989: 'Very few new British writers have managed to establish themselves within the last ten years, but the next ten years will be different. The bandwagon is rolling, and anyone who is good enough, and prepared to put in the requisite work, ought to be able to jump aboard.' (*The Way to Write Science Fiction*, 1989) [FM]

C.o.A. *Peter Coleborn & Jan Edwards* (temporary, valid for up to six months), 25 Waterhouse Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 9LB. *Damien Warman & Juliette Woods*, 173 Portrush Road, Maylands, SA 5069, Australia.

Thog's Masterclass. *Words Fail Dept.* 'Flast broadcast the nonverbal equivalent of a shrug.' (*Geodesica: Ascent*, Sean Williams & Shane Dix, 2005) [MC] • *Sound of Silence Dept.* '... number three [thug] leaned against the wall near the window, the automatic in his hand filling the room with a silent buzz.' (Richard Stark [Donald E. Westlake], *The Black Ice Score*, 1965) [TMcD] • *Heavy/Light Water Dept.* or *Squid vs Archimedes.* 'The main body of the thing is sort of an inverted cup, like a half-inflated bladder, surrounded by a great ring of bone and muscle that anchors these tentacles. The bladder fills and empties with water to enable the creature to rise to the surface, or descend far below—the submarine principle. By itself it doesn't weigh much, although it is amazingly strong. What it does, it empties its bladder to rise to the surface, grabs hold, and then begins to fill again.' (George R.R. Martin, 'Guardians' in *Tuf Voyaging*, 1986) [TMcD] • *Dept of Born Politicians.* 'Untruth was a violin which he played like a Paganini of bunkum.' (Marlon Brando and Donald Cammell, *Fan-Tan*, 2005) [MMW]

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