

# Ansible



## Ansible 221 December 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 CASS-9 computer systems.

**More London Upheaval.** Another glitch for the First Thursday pub meetings: Walkers of Holborn was sold in mid-November and promptly closed to be refurbished as a wine bar. Thus the 1 December meeting was in the nearby Melton Mowbray (18 Holborn), which is to become the regular venue in 2006—but check [news.ansible.co.uk/london.html](http://news.ansible.co.uk/london.html) for updates. Because the new pub is already booked for 22 December, the special Xmas meeting will be in the Goose (4 Leather Lane; formerly the Sir Christopher Hatton). [PT] Seasonal good wishes to you all!

### Nothing But Gingerbread Left

**Iain Banks** had a letter in *New Scientist*: 'Symbolically, reason has already triumphed in the debate over intelligent design. The faith-based side has shifted from using the term "creationism" to using "intelligent design". So their argument has ... evolved.' [GW]

**Stephen Baxter** was the first to receive the Oxford University SF Group award for 'best Speculative Fiction novel published in paperback in the preceding academic year'. In fact he was slightly bemused to learn in late November that *Coalescent* actually won last May, but the person who was supposed to e-mail you at the time and invite you to Oxford never got round to it. That sounds like the OUSFG I remember.

**Raymond Briggs** and Posy Simmonds became, this year, the first graphic novelists admitted to the fearfully stuffy Royal Society of Literature; they are jointly designing the next RSL magazine cover.

**Arthur C. Clarke** received the Sri Lankan government's highest civilian honour, the Sri Lankabhimanya award, presented on 14 November for 'his contributions to science and technology and his commitment to his adopted country.' (Reuters)

**Robert Conquest** was one of 14 recipients of the US Presidential Medal of Freedom on 9 November—not for his science fiction, nor for co-editing the *Spectrum* anthologies with Kingsley Amis, nor even for his unbelievably filthy verse sequel to 'Eskimo Nell', but for the detailed exposé of Soviet atrocities in *The Great Terror* and other historical works. In genre circles, his most quoted saying must be the *Spectrum* epigraph so often echoed in these pages: 'SF's no good,' they bellow till we're deaf. / 'But this looks good.'—'Well then, it's not SF.'

**Ellen Datlow's** on-line sf magazine SCI FICTION will be discontinued at the end of 2005—a poor reward for her double Hugo win as best editor of the best website. SciFi.Com explains this move as part of a master plan to 'expand with exciting new ventures.' All sympathy to Ellen....

**Harlan Ellison & William F. Nolan** will respectively become an SFWA Grand Master and an Author Emeritus at the Nebulas next May.

**Farah Mendlesohn** is to end her six-year editorship of *Foundation* with issue 100 in 2007. All her remaining issues are full; further letters and articles should go to the new editor Graham Sleight ([gmail.com](mailto:gmail.com) address 'Foundation.sf'). Who adds: 'I was hoping that being Mr Foundation simply entailed appearing as a hologram every thousand years to tell folk where they were going wrong. But apparently not ...'

**Terry Pratchett** savours another public accolade: 'On Sunday AM on BBC1 yesterday Andrew Marr was kind enough to describe me as "following in the tradition of Philip Pullman and JK Rowling." And a fine tradition it is.' (28 November)

**Christopher Priest** won the French Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire (best foreign novel category) for *The Separation*. The awards were presented at the Utopiales festival in Nantes on 11 November.

### Congruent

21 Dec • no BSFA meeting in December; meetings resume in January.

22 Dec • **London Circle** Xmas meeting at the Goose—see above.

5 Jan 06 • **London Circle** now in the Melton Mowbray.

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

11-12 Mar 06 • **P-Con III**, Ashling Hotel, Dublin. €25 reg; €15 supp. Contact Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland.

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.

26 Apr 06 • **The Arthur C. Clarke Award** has again found a new home: in the Apollo West End Cinema, as the opening item of ...

26-30 Apr 06 • **Sci-Fi London** film festival, Apollo West End cinema, Regent Street, London, SW1. Further details TBA.

20-23 Oct 06 • **Cult TV 2006**, Great Yarmouth. Details TBA. Contact PO Box 1701, Wolverhampton, WV4 4WT; 0700 4 2858 88.

**Rumblings** • **Convivial** is a planned 2007 'Glasgow fun convention', perhaps on the May bank holiday weekend; hotel enquiries continue.

• **Year of the Teledu**, also 2007, is to be 'an amazing DIY convention' in the tradition of Year of the Wombat. James Bacon (for it is he) explains: 'it's a stinky badgering ting.' And I'd thought it must be some kind of Welsh television convention. • **Orbital** is a bid for the 2008 Eastercon. Details (rather few as yet) at [www.orbital2008.org](http://www.orbital2008.org).

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us.** An *Observer* bioscience article's opening sentence works hard to chill the blood: 'It is a prospect worthy of a science fiction B-movie: male couples, women past the menopause, infertile couples and even celibate clergy producing their own children.' (13 Nov) Presumably the reporters saw a range of Thog-rated sf films that the rest of us missed: *Attack of the Fertiloids*, perhaps, or the epically tacky struggle against alien oppressors in Ed Wood's *Planned Parenthood from Outer Space*. • Nowadays even Supreme Court nominees attract sf comparisons: 'On the other hand, [Judge] Alito has the disadvantage of following John Roberts, who was just as smart but carried himself like a big man on campus: athletic build, quick humor, and good looks. Compared with Roberts, Alito looks as if he were in town for a *Star Trek* convention.' (Dana Milbank, *Washington Post*, 3 Nov) [MMW]

**World Fantasy Awards** presented at the World Fantasy Con on 6 November: LIFE ACHIEVEMENT Tom Doherty; Carol Emshwiller. NOVEL Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. NOVELLA Michael Shea, 'The Growlimb' (F&SF 1/04). SHORT Margo Lanagan 'Singing My Sister Down', (*Black Juice*). ANTHOLOGY (tie) Barbara & Christopher Roden, eds., *Acquainted With The Night*, Sheree R. Thomas, ed., *Dark Matter: Reading The Bones*. COLLECTION Margo Lanagan, *Black Juice*. ARTIST John Picacio. SPECIAL AWARD, PROFESSIONAL S.T. Joshi for scholarship. SPECIAL, NON-PROFESSIONAL Robert Morgan for Sarob Press.

**R.I.P.** **Moustapha Akkad** (1935-2005), Syrian-born executive producer of *Halloween* (1978) and its seven sequels, died as a result of the 9 November suicide bombings in Jordan. • **David Austin** (1935-2005), UK cartoonist who often made wry, knowledgeable use of scientific and sf themes (I first met his work in *New Scientist*), died on 19 November at the age of 70. • **Michael G. Coney** (1932-2005), British-born sf author long resident in Canada, died from cancer on 4 November. After his diagnosis this year, he made various unpublished works (including the sequel to *Hello Summer, Goodbye*, perhaps his best novel) freely available on his website ([members.shaw.ca/mconey/](http://members.shaw.ca/mconey/)). A talented, quirky and underrated author, he never had quite the success he deserved—apart from his 1977 BSFA Award for *Brontomek!*—and does not seem to have been published in book form since 1989. • **Pamela Duncan** (1932-2005), US actress who played the female leads in Roger Corman's 1957 B-movies *Attack of the Crab Monsters* and *The Undead*, died on 11 November. She was 72. • **John Fowles** (1926-2005), celebrated UK novelist best known for *The Collector* (1963), *The Magus* (1965) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), died on 5 November after long illness. He was 79. His novels often touch on genre themes: paranoid-fantasy godgames in *The Magus*, erotic-comic grappling with a literal Muse in *Mantissa* (1982), and the unashamedly sf conceit at the core of the historical labyrinth in *A Maggot* (1985). A genuinely great writer. • **John Hollis** (1931-2005), UK actor best remembered as the bald villain Kaufman in the 1960s TV series *A For Andromeda* and *The Andromeda Breakthrough*, died after long illness on 18 October; he was 74. Other genre appearances include three *Superman* films, *The Empire Strikes Back* and the TV *Day of the Triffids*. [JL] • **Dan Hooker**

(1950-2005), US writer and literary agent who represented A.E. van Vogt and other sf authors, died on 24 November aged 54. [SFWA] ● *Pat Morita* (1932-2005), US actor who was in such TV series as *The Outer Limits* (1990s version), *Space Rangers*, and *The Incredible Hulk*, died on 24 November; he was 73. [SJD] Gary Wilkinson adds: 'Most famous for Mr Miyagi in *The Karate Kid* (and numerous sequels and spinoffs); he also did a load of sf/kung-fu/horror crossover nonsense.' ● *Gary S. Potter* (1959-2005), US horror fan and reviewer whose fanzine was *The Point Beyond* (from 1989) and who co-published the story chapbook *Voyages into Darkness* by Stephen Laws & Mark Morris, died unexpectedly on 13 February aged 46. [SG] ● *Wolf Rilla* (1920-2005), German-born film director who scripted and directed Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* as *Village of the Damned* (1960), died on 19 October aged 85. He once said: 'I've made 27 films and this is the only one people remember.' [JL] ● *Wendie Jo Sperber* (1958-2005), US actress who played the kid sister in *Back to the Future I* and *III*, had long been ill with breast cancer and died on 29 November. She was 47. [CH] ● *Harold Stone* (1913-2005), US actor whose films included *The Man With X-Ray Eyes* (1963) and who guest-starred in several genre TV series, died on 18 November; he was 92. [SJD]

**As Others See Us II.** The *Wired* events calendar for December sums up the long-running Philcon: "This sci-fi fantasy extravaganza in Philly offers Filk music sing-alongs and adults-only role playing. It's enough to make Rod Serling roll in his grave." [MMW]

**Random Fandom.** *David V. Barrett* is recovering from a successful—but in its aftermath, very painful—lung operation performed on 22 November: Leander Ward, London Chest Hospital, Bonner Rd, London, E2 9JX. ● *Steve Green* grumbles that the novacon.org.uk cybersquatter site (see A220) includes a fraudulent page description: "The Sci-Fi science fiction fan meeting, held nationally—join us!" There is, of course, no mechanism for joining Novacon at this site.' ● *Tony 'Blindpew' Smith's* old sidekick has found a home: 'It is now official, Faldo retires to Tim and Marcia Illingworth on 1 December. Rebel, my new black Labrador Guide Dog in training, will arrive on 2 December to get used to me before starting training on the 5th (in other words mental and physical torture having to learn new commands new dog etc.)...' ● *Peter Sullivan* is now Official Editor of e-APA, 'the electronic APA that uses Adobe Acrobat PDF files rather than that old-fashioned "paper" stuff': [www.efanzines.com/eapa](http://www.efanzines.com/eapa).

**International Horror Guild** awards, 3 November: NOVEL Ramsey Campbell, *The Overnight*. FIRST NOVEL John Harwood, *The Ghost Writer*. LONG FICTION Lucius Shepard, *Viator*. MID-LENGTH Daniel Abraham, 'Flat Diane' (*F&SF* 10/04). SHORT Don Tumasonis, 'A Pace of Change' (*Acquainted With the Night*). COLLECTION Brian Evenson, *The Wavering Knife*. ANTHOLOGY Barbara & Christopher Roden, ed., *Acquainted With the Night*. NONFICTION DM Mitchell, *A Serious Life*. ART (tie) Darrel Anderson; Rick Berry. FILM *Shaun of the Dead*. TV *Lost*. ILLUSTRATED NARRATIVE Hideshi Hino, *The Bug Boy*. PERIODICAL *The Third Alternative*.

**The Truth At Last.** Tilda Swinton, who plays the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, dispels those persistent rumours at last: "This is not a religious film, but people will project onto it what they want to." (*Independent*, 18 November) The lion and the wardrobe were unavailable for comment.

**Fanfundery.** Don't forget to vote for Bridget Bradshaw in TAFF.

**Jerry Was A Gorman.** In early November, Dave Gorman's BBC Radio programme *Genius* awarded a prize for the brilliant concept of tiny GM elephants. Our correspondent 'Verity Cinnabar' finds it strange that 'an idea that could claim its pension soon can win a modern Genius award'. The laurels should go to a certain Heinlein story from *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in 1947, featuring Napoleon the tiny GM elephant with a bonus musical gift, beating time with his trunk.

**More Anonymous Reviews.** Mark Kelly of *Locus* passed on email from A.R. Yngve, complaining of further funny business with Amazon reviews (see A219). Yngve, it seems, was among the critics and mockers of a spammer—his word—who'd been plastering sf message boards with plugs for *Dragons: Lexicon Triumvirate* by one Kenneth Che-Tew Eng. Enter the new Amazon pundit 'Sharon Cross' with four reviews posted in a single day, three plugging the above book via unconvincing asides in comments on H.G. Wells, J.K. Rowling, etc, and the fourth denouncing Yngve's own novel as 'the worst experience of my life ... deserves a -6 rating.' Can this be coincidence? I will only say that I'm not responsible for the negative Amazon review of one of the great Robert Stanek's novels, which concludes: 'Compared with the work of masters such as Vernor Vinge, George R.R. Martin or David Langford, this limp effort doesn't even get its head above the parapet.'

**Nova Awards** for British fan activity. FANZINE: *Banana Wings*. FAN WRITER Claire Brialey. FAN ARTIST Alison '14 Hours of Photoshop' Scott.

**Parallel Genres.** Jennifer Rohn on the ineluctable difference of laboratory literature: 'Lab Lit is not science fiction. Science fiction can never be Lab Lit, no matter how realistically it is portrayed, because it is removed from reality by definition. Science fiction will always have an element of fantasy—it will be set in the future, say, or in an impossible alternative universe. No matter how realistically crafted these fantasy scientists and their world are, or how closely they parallel actual science culture, it will never be a scene that you and I could encounter were we to walk into a research institute.' ([www.lablit.com](http://www.lablit.com)) ● Viewed through this impartial lens, *Blood Music* and *The Andromeda Strain* are by no means sf but appear on the approved Lab Lit novel list, classified as Thrillers. Conversely, *Brave New World* and *The Speed of Dark* are Drama; while Connie Willis, whom some of us unworthily thought to be tainted with sf, writes both Drama and Humor.

**Outraged Letters.** *Evelyn C. Leeper* disagrees with Joe McNally's film assessment last issue: 'Mark and I haven't posted reviews to amazon.com, but we both liked the Pendragon Pictures version of *War Of The Worlds*.' ● *Adam Roberts* repents his folly: 'I seem to have gotten into mildly warm water by telling the *Telegraph* that female SF fans (I told that journalist some female SF fans, dammit) like looking at Keanu Reeves in leather trousers. I'm quite tempted to follow Cheryl Morgan's advice and use this as a pretext for coming out of the closet (yes, I'm the one who likes ogling Keanu etc etc) but maybe not yet. / I think I shall silently retire from offering soundbites on SF to journalists. I'm so bad at it.' ● *Sean Williams* on a career landmark: 'I was delighted to see my co-written novel *Geodesica: Ascent* soundly Thogged in *Ansible* 220. The emails of congratulations have been flooding in all day. Of course, this does create something of a problem, though. Now Shane Dix and I are going to arm-wrestle for who gets to say wrote that sentence, and he's much, much bigger than I am ...'

**Touchy-Feely.** In a *Guardian* polemic headlined 'The trouble with television is that it can't stop shoving liberal values down our throats' (14 November), Mark Ravenhill particularly deplores the wimpish *Doctor Who* insight that 'Daleks have feelings too'. [DC]

**Lonelyhearts of Gor.** Dave Clark sends the 'alt.sex.column' page from a recent *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, in which 'Dark Wolf' asks: 'I am a dominant Gorean male (please look it up and divulge information to the public about us, for we are little-known) looking for a Gorean submissive woman. Do you know of any place in San Francisco?' Alas, although agony aunt Andrea Nemerson responds at great length, she's less than sympathetic. 'You guys are furries, basically, although unlike people who base their identities and lifestyles on funny animal cartoons and nylon plush, the somewhat Wagnerian, vaguely Nietzschean, faintly Randian world of Gor is essentially humorless. But then, it would be.'

**C.o.A.** *Janice Gelb* (from 15 Dec), Flat 14, 241 Williams Rd, South Yarra, Vic 3141, Australia. *Lucy Zinkiewicz* (from 13 Dec), 2 Tillbush Close, Hoppers Crossing, VIC 3029, Australia.

**As Others Envy Us.** Melanie La'Brooy defends 'chick lit' in *The Australian*: 'Produced by and for women, the gendered nature of chick lit should not be overlooked as one reason behind its dismissive treatment. [... An explanatory quote:] "Sociologists have long recognised a phenomenon called feminisation, which means that anything that becomes associated solely with women falls in general esteem." / This may explain why science fiction, crime novels and thrillers (of which women are also prolific creators and voracious consumers) have not been subjected to similar scathing commentary.' [DB] O brave new world, where no one is dismissively horrid about science fiction!

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Prestidigitation Dept* (or, *Yoga Exercise #42*). 'As Morgan sat in another chair beside him, Duncan rolled his head in Morgan's direction and looked at him searchingly, folding his hands and tapping joined forefingers against his cheek as he rested his elbows on the chair arms.' (Katherine Kurtz, *The Bishop's Heir*, 1984) [TMcD] ● *Method Acting Dept.* 'Leash drilled his eyes into Ramsey.' ● 'May furrowed her brow. Her pupils jittered side to side, as if her frontal lobes were doing heavy lifting. Her gaze was so intense, it looked like her skull could blow up in a puff of hot steam at any moment. Then her face lit up with a divine epiphany.' (both Greg Vilk, *Golem*, 2005) [PB]

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