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Ansible 222 January 2006

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 Economics 2.0 scams.

The Omega Point. On 30 Dec, Eileen Gunn announced the end of her webzine *The Infinite Matrix*, and I posted my final 'Runcible Ansible' news column to the site. *TIM* finished in a blaze of new material which will remain on view at www.infinitematrix.net throughout 2006. Sad to see this one go, so soon after the cancellation of *Sci Fiction*....

The Raree-Show

Brian Aldiss went to the movies: 'The SF Film Festival took place in Trieste in November (23rd to 27th). Screenings in the new and sassy Cinecity. Among the organisers, Daniele Terzoli. / Since I attended the original festivals there in the 60s and 70s together with such luminaries as Kingsley Amis, Harry Harrison and Walter Ernsting, they invited me back as a sort of totem—a role I find increasingly easy to perform. / Most enjoyable flick was a Russian documentary, *First on the Moon*, shot in grainy b-&-w. The pretty humorous concept was that a Soviet ship reached the Moon successfully in the 1930's, unfortunately crashing in Chile on its return, so that the whole thing was hushed up. Among fake shots of the early USSR was one of the young Stalin proclaiming, "The hallmark of the new Soviet Union will be gaiety".... The satirical rogue who made this movie is one Aleksey Fedorchenko. Use your immense influence to get this neat little trick shown in the UK. / Another documentary was Kevin Willmott's *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America*. The South wins the civil war. Slavery still exists in 2004. So, another satirical rogue. / The film that won the award was James Bai's *Puzzlehead*. Another take on *Frankenstein*, the theme originated rather more engagingly by Miss Mary What's-her-Name.'

Iain Banks was typecast yet again for *Celebrity Mastermind* (BBC1, 2 January), where he answered questions on that profoundly Cultured subject 'Malt Whisky and the Distilleries of Scotland'. And won.

Robert E. Howard is rarely news these days, but it was a relief that his house in Cross Plains, Texas—now the REH Museum—survived grass fires which on 28 December destroyed many local homes. [AIP]

Clive James, writing about 'sludge fiction', digresses on '... the classically awful British television SF series *Blakes Seven*: no apostrophe in the title, no sense in the plot. The deprived space queen *Servalan*, played by the slinky Jacqueline Pearce, could never quite bring herself to volatilize the dimly heroic Blake even when she had him square in the sights of her plasmatic spasm guns. The secret of Blake's appeal, or *Blakes* appeal, for the otherwise infallibly fatale *Servalan* remained a mystery, like the actual wattage of light bulb on which the design of Blake's spaceship, or *Blakes* spaceship, was plainly based.' (TIS) [PDF]

David Lammy, our Minister for Culture, may not know much about Art but he knows what he doesn't like. His opening words when presenting the 2005 Turner Prize (awarded to the DIY conversion of an old shed by laborious stages into an old shed): 'I don't care who wins, as long as it's not *Lord of the Rings*.' [CB]

Steven Spielberg's rep Marvin Levy on rumours of an SS plan to remake *Mary Poppins*: 'I never heard of this and couldn't imagine Steven ever doing a remake of a classic—and a [Walt Disney] classic at that.' (IMDB) What of *War of the Worlds* (2005)? Was *Hook* (1992) totally unconnected with that Disney classic *Peter Pan* (1953)? [GD]

Condyle

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

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

14-17 Apr • **Concussion** (Eastercon), Glasgow Moat House Hotel. Now £55 reg; supp/concessions £27.50; ages 12-18 £15; 5-11 £5; 0-4 free. Contact 23 Ranelagh Rd, Bruce Grove, London, N17 6XY.

1-3 Sep • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Day's Hotel, Manchester. £70 reg. Contact 95 Meadowgate Rd, Salford, Manchester, M6 8EN.

10-12 Nov • **Armadacon 18**, Plymouth. Guests and details TBA.

10-12 Nov • **Novacon 36**, Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall. GoH Ken MacLeod. £36 reg. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

21-23 Sep 07 • **Eurocon 2007**, Copenhagen, Denmark. Postal contact details TBA; email 'contact at eurocon2007 dot dk'.

Rumblings • **L.A.con IV**, the 2006 Worldcon, has announced its special extra Hugo category: interactive video games. That's a new one.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See First Fandom. 'Science fiction, or sci-fi as it became known (the new phrase purportedly coined by Forrest Ackerman himself), swept the world, no longer the diversion of a quixotic (or risible) few.' (George Pendle, *Strange Angel*, 2005) [MMW]

New Year Honours. Not a good year for modern literature, with only two people in the whole vast list honoured in this area. One of them has written enough fantastic fiction to appear in the *Clute/Grant Encyclopedia of Fantasy*: Jeanette Winterson, OBE. Another OBE, for drama, went to Robbie Coltrane—whose acting career since the 1970s now tends to be summarized as 'Hagrid in the Harry Potter films'. And fandom marvelled when the editor of that scurrilous 1970s fanzine *True Rat* also got an OBE: 'Leroy Richard Arthur Kettle, a senior policy adviser on Disability Rights at the Department for Work and Pensions.'

R.I.P. *George Bernau* (1945-2005), US lawyer and author of such alternate-history thrillers as *Promises to Keep* (1988)—in which there is life after Dallas for J.F. Kennedy—died on 12 December; he was 60. [PDF] • *Jack Colvin* (1934-2005), US actor seen in the TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman* and (as a regular character) *The Incredible Hulk*, died on 1 December. He was 71. [SFS] • *Pat Cranshaw* (1919-2005), US character actor seen in *Mork & Mindy*, *Alien Avengers*, *Quantum Leap*, *Mars Needs Women*, etc., died on 28 December aged 86. • 'Big-Hearted' *Howard DeVore* (1925-2005), long-time US fan, con organizer, book dealer, and editor of many editions of *History of the Hugo, Nebula and International [later World] Fantasy Awards*, died on 31 December aged 80. The 2006 Worldcon chose him as its fan guest of honour. A memoir by Curt Phillips appears in this *Ansible's* on-line supplement. • *Maurice Dodd* (1922-2005), who wrote—and from 1983 to 1992 also drew—the *Daily Mirror* 'Perishers' cartoon strip which gave us such catchphrases as 'Eyeballs in the Sky', died on 31 December; he was 83. [PB] • *Gregg Hoffman* (1963-2005), US horror film producer best known for *Saw* (2004) and *Saw 2* (2005), died on 4 December; he was only 42. [GW] • *Kenneth Macksey* (1923-2005), author and editor of books and collections of what-if speculation like his *The Alternate History of the German Invasion of England, July 1940* (1980) died on 30 November. [SFS] • *Robert F. Newmyer* (1956-2005), independent film producer whose credits include the Christmas fantasy *The Santa Clause* (1994) and its two sequels, died on 12 December; he was 49. [IC] • *Fred Pfeil* (1949-2005), US academic and author of the notable sf novel *Goodman 2020* (1986) died from brain cancer on 29 November. [JC] • *Richard Pryor* (1940-2005), US stand-up comedian who appeared in *The Wiz* (1978) and *Superman III* (1983), died on 10 December after many years of heart and MS trouble; he was 65. [GW] • *Vincent Schiavelli* (1948-2005), popular US character actor whose many genre film/TV credits included *Batman Returns*, *Buckaroo Banzai*, *Buffy*, *Ghost* and *Star Trek: TNG*, died on 26 December. He was 57. [SD] • *Herbert L. Strock* (1918-2005), US producer and director who did early TV work in the 1940s and directed such B-movies as *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), *How to Make a Monster* (1958), and *The Crawling Hand* (1963), died on 30 November after a car accident. He was 87. [PDF] • *J.N. (Jerry) Williamson* (1932-2005), prolific US horror author and editor of the 'Masques' original anthologies (1984-1991), died on 8 December aged 73. The first of his 30+ novels was *The Ritual* (1979). He received a 2003 Horror Writers of America Lifetime Achievement Award. [SG]

The Horror! The devout website www.balaams-ass.com exposes 'the darker and esoteric meanings of the *Chronicles of Narnia*', including the author's vile profanity: 'The word "ass" appears in 4 of the books. Being British, it probably did not mean the same to him as it does to Americans (as a swear word), but he could have left it out, especially since he only used it four times and did use "donkey" in other places.'

However, considering the filthy state of his mind, it is possible that he thought this cute.' Other parts of this analysis are, um, less balanced.

Outraged Letters. *Mike Moorcock:* 'Glad to hear that Robert Conquest was honoured by George W. Bush, since they are evidently soul mates. Nobody mentioned, however, that he is the original for Robert DeFete in the Jerry Cornelius stories. [...] I saw the Universal guys in Hollywood a short time ago and the Elric movie is moving forward nicely. I suspect King Kong will make them more cheerful about fantasy stuff after the predictable disappointments of Riddick and Van Helsing. We have also agreed to shoot in Arizona, which has far stranger and just as dramatic landscapes as NZ and isn't so far to go to work. [...] I'm definitely going to have to sneak in to Narnia. I have this wretched, sinking feeling that I'm going to enjoy it. A substitute, anyway, before they start making E. Nesbit movies.' • *Phil Stephensen-Payne* on post-1989 Michael Coney books: 'Both *No Place For a Sealion* and *A Tomcat Called Sabrina* (humorous, non-sf novels) appeared from Porthole Press in 1992, and among the many translations that have appeared in book form since 1999, special mention should perhaps be made of *I Remember Pallahaxi*, published in Russian in 1999 but unpublished in English.'

The Rich List. *Forbes* magazine produced an idiosyncratic list of the 15 wealthiest characters in fiction. Taking it from the top: Santa Claus supposedly has infinite wealth and Oliver 'Daddy' Warbucks from *Little Orphan Annie* is assessed at \$27.3 billion. Lesser lights: Richie Rich, Lex Luthor, C. Montgomery Burns, Scrooge McDuck, Jed Clampett, Bruce Wayne, Thurston Howell III, Willy Wonka, Arthur Bach, Ebenezer Scrooge, Lara Croft, Cruella De Vil, and finally Lucius Malfoy (\$900 million, allegedly). Where's Cordwainer Smith's Rod McBan, who bought Old Earth? Or the chap in Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes*, who owns the world after snoozing through 200 years of compound interest? Or even the Count of Monte Cristo? Of course, the Totally Rich of John Brunner's story paid *Forbes* well to keep their names unlisted....

Random Fandom. *Mark Andrew Bukumunhe*, Bradford-based sf fan, visited Uganda and was to return on 28 Dec but is still stuck there (with his father) owing to Home Office obduracy about a minor passport problem. Fingers are nervously crossed. • *Pádraig Ó Méalóid* feels decisive: 'I'm retiring from con-running after P-CON III next March.' • *Roger Robinson* had a hernia op in mid-Dec, perhaps owing to 'lifting the new Hamilton, Reynolds etc etc?'. • *Dave Wood* underwent surgery for a brain tumour on 20 Nov: 'A later biopsy shows the cancer is the same as that from my previous bowel cancer.' Get well soonest....

Again, Dangerous Awards. *Charles Platt* can't resist musing on Harlan Ellison's SFWA Grand Mastery: 'I love the way the Nebula folks have taken to preannouncing the grandmaster awards well in advance, just in case the recipient dies before the trophy can be placed in his trembling hands. In fact the naming of any grandmaster recipient suggests to me that the unfortunate person must be considered a high risk for keeling over at any moment. The award can be seen as much of a curse as a blessing. "Oh my god, a grandmaster award! Tell me doctor, does this mean ... it's all over?" / But the biggest question is whether Mr. Ellison will accept such an "honor," bearing in mind his frequent statements that he is not a science-fiction writer and indeed feels ambivalent at best toward the SF writing community ...'

C.o.A. *Jim Burns* has moved, but he ticked the 'No Publicity' box. *Arnie & Joyce Katz*, 909 Eugene Cernan St, Las Vegas, NV 89145, USA.

Ujog's Masterclass. *Time & Motion Dept.* 'The first step is to put the fleet on one-hour-alert status instead of twenty-four. ... It'll take about six hours to bring us up to one-hour readiness.' (Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Vor Game*, 1990) [TMCd] • *Dept of Nose Noises.* 'But the younger man had a nose for trouble which Acevedo had learned to trust, or at least listen very carefully to.' (David Weber in *Changer of Worlds*, 2001) [NR] • 'He whispered under his nose.' (Greg Vilk, *Golem*, 2005) [PB] • *True Romance Dept (or, Precursors of Gor).* 'I looked at Miellyn, took her slender unmanacled hand in mine, and smiled as we walked through the gates of the city. Now, after all my years on Wolf, I understood the desire to keep their women under lock and key that was its ancient custom. I vowed to myself as we went that I should waste no time finding a fetter shop and having forged therein the perfect steel chains that should bind my love's wrists to my key forever.' (Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Door Through Space*, 1961) [TMCd] • *Dept of Complex Mapping.* 'However erroneous the theory upon which the cartographers evolved their maps, mine were not entirely useless; though they required considerable mental mathematical gymnastics to translate them into usable information ... the actual and the apparent measurements of distance can be reconciled by multiplying each by the square root of minus one!' (Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Escape on Venus*, 1946) [BA]

R.I.P. Continued

Kenneth Bulmer (1921-2005), old-time UK fan and prolific author, died fifteen minutes after midnight on 16 December. He was 84, and had spent several years in a Tunbridge Wells nursing home since a stroke in 1997. Ken loomed large in the Langford map of sf as the guest of honour at my first con, Novacon 3 in 1973; the first editor to buy one of my stories (for *New Writings in SF*, the anthology series he took over after founding editor John Carnell died in 1972); one of the most genially encouraging presences at the UK Milford workshops; and the first TAFF winner actually to make the trip, in 1955. The fan-published instalments of his TAFF report finally appeared in one volume as *TAFF Tales* (1998); his own fanzines included *Star Parade* (1941) and *Steam* (1954-59). Besides copious sf and fantasy under his own name, Ken wrote novels and novelizations in many genres—his personal favourite being the 'Fox' series of Hornbloweresque naval adventures, as by Adam Hardy. His longest-running success was the Kregen or Dray Prescott sequence of science fantasies in the vein of Edgar Rice Burroughs, bylined Alan Burt Akers and, later, Dray Prescott. Although Ken lost his US publisher (DAW) after 38 books, this series continued in German translation until #53 in 1998. His total output was enormous; Steve Holland calculates that the recent *The Steel Claw: The Invisible Man* (collecting his 3-issue stint on a *Valiant* comic strip, 1962-63) is his 189th book. A tireless worker and a thoroughly nice man.

Chris Priest was at the funeral in Tunbridge Wells, 30 Dec: 'It was a quiet funeral for Ken: those attending were mostly family or family friends. Ken had made himself popular in his final years at the nursing home, and three members of the staff turned out to pay their respects. They all spoke fondly of him, especially how struck everyone had been by his endless good nature and personal kindness, which persisted through many years of physical incapacity. His former wife Pamela Buckmaster was there, as were all three of their children (Deborah, Larry and Lucy), together with spouses. Erik Arthur and myself were the only two from the sf world who turned up. After a short committal service, we returned to a wake at Larry Bulmer's house, where we talked about our memories of Ken ... all of them happy or funny.'

Robert Sheckley (1928-2005), US author famous as a pioneer of intelligently humorous and satirical sf, died on 9 December. He was 77. After surviving critical respiratory illness in Spring 2005 and heart surgery in June, he suffered a brain aneurism on 10 November and failed to recover; his last days were spent in coma. Bob Sheckley entered the sf scene with a blizzard of 1950s/1960s short stories that ranged from engaging nonsense (he had a gift for silly names), through clever gadgetry and twist endings worthy of Saki or O. Henry, to dark satires whose comedy verged on nihilism. 'Voltaire-and-soda,' wrote Brian Aldiss. The short 'Seventh Victim' (1953) was notoriously filmed as *The Tenth Victim*, with Ursula Andress in a deadly, double-barrelled bra. His best novels, *Journey Beyond Tomorrow* (1962), *Mindswap* (1966; my favourite), and *Dimension of Miracles* (1968), are crammed with anarchic humour and increasingly unreliable realities. *Mindswap's* climactic duel in the 'Twisted World' where logic breaks down is a tour-de-force of sustained, surreal and outright silly invention. Many readers reckoned that he was, to say the least, a powerful influence on the humour of Douglas Adams's *Hitch-Hiker* novels. In person Bob Sheckley was genial, soft-spoken and unfailingly witty, a popular convention guest. Though his finest work appeared in decades when humour was sadly underrated, he received several honours from the sf community—including three Hugo nominations—and was much loved.

Michael Swanwick adds: 'I drove up to Kingston, New York, yesterday [13 December] for Robert Sheckley's funeral. Present for the memorial service were his family, including his four children and three of his five wives, and a clutch of friends, including Barry Malzberg, Edward Summer, and illustrator Steve Hackman. Bob's daughter, novelist Alisa Kwitney, read a moving and loving eulogy that began, "Robert Sheckley was a lousy father," and Barry extemporized a beautiful tribute ending with the words, "Not bad. Not bad at all." I took it upon myself to speak on behalf of Sheckley's Russian admirers. His ashes will be buried in the spring, when the ground thaws, in the Artists' Cemetery in Woodstock. So he will remain in death, as he was in life, a bohemian.'

Ansible 222 © Dave Langford, 2006. Thanks to Brian Ameringen, Paul Barnett, Chaz Branchley, John Clute, Ian Covell, Gary Dalkin, Paul Di Filippo, Steve Dunn, Simon Gasden, Steve Green, Yvonne Hewett, Tim McDaniel, Andrew I. Porter, Nonie Rider, SF Site, Gary Wilkinson, Martin Morse Wooster, and our Hero Distributors: Rog Peyton (Brum Group News), Janice Murray (North America), SCIS, and Alan Stewart (Thyme?). 6 Jan 06