

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 (online). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Bill Rotsler**. Available for SAE or Old Galactic plasmoids.

The Groves of Academe. It's not often that *Ansible* gets email like this from a Professor of Psychology & Linguistics: 'Dear Professor Langford, Please let me know if there is any mathematical work that pertains to the theoretical constructs for an ansible. My background includes the special and generalized theories of relativity as well some work in transfinite algebra.' I only wish I could help....

The Pyramids of Fformat

John Brunner belatedly got his due in William Safire's *New York Times Magazine* language column (18 December 2005): 'In writing recently about computer *malware*, I attributed the coinage of *worm* in its modern, destructive sense to John Dunner; wrong. The author's name is John Brunner; his mind-stretching 1975 sci-fi novel was *The Shockwave Rider*; and he has plenty of fans.' [MMW]

Ellen Galford, feminist fantasy novelist, and her partner Ellen Kelly took advantage of the new UK civil partnership legislation in January: 'As unapologetic 70s feminists we see Civil Partnership as preferable to marriage.' (*Equality Network News*, January) [FN]

Diana Wynne Jones is overcome. 'The University of Bristol have suddenly upped and said they'll give me an honorary D.Litt. this summer! Could have knocked me down with the proverbial. This sort of thing has to go through Solemn Committees full of serious men who do not know fantasy exists, so how this happened I am at a loss to know. / Oh, and did you hear that *Howl's Moving Castle* is nominated for an Oscar? On the strength of it, the Japanese have sent me Sophie's walking stick and a purple plush bag to keep it in—plus two stone of jigsaw puzzles and a tiny tiny ring.' (Other Oscar nominees for Best Animated Feature Film are *Corpse Bride* and *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*.)

Maureen McHugh has a problem that's shared by many fellow sf authors, explains Seattle librarian Nancy Pearl: 'The thing about Maureen McHugh is you're going to find her shelved in the science fiction and fantasy section. And that's unfortunate.' [NPR] [JL]

Sir Patrick Moore reports on exciting plans by the current owners of the London Planetarium: 'Madame Tussauds tell us that the new ten minute show will be a "celebrity based visual experience" without any astronomy content. "We're moving away from stars and planets and towards celebrities," it says.' (*Daily Mail*, 1 February) [DW]

Kurt von Trojan, Vienna-born Australian sf author best known for *The Transing Syndrome* (1985), was diagnosed with bone and kidney cancer on 25 January and given only months to live. Altair Australia Books will publish his last collection of short fiction as a memorial. The author is reportedly in good spirits, and said to doctors after the prognosis, 'Oh, I was hoping to squeeze a few more weeks in.' [RNS]

Kurt Vonnegut complains in *The Guardian*: 'I became a so-called science fiction writer when someone decreed that I was a science fiction writer. I did not want to be classified as one, so I wondered in what way I'd offended that I would not get credit for being a serious writer. I decided that it was because I wrote about technology, and most fine American writers know nothing about technology. I got classified as a science fiction writer simply because I wrote about Schenectady, New York. My first book, *Player Piano*, was about Schenectady. There are huge factories in Schenectady and nothing else. I and my associates were engineers, physicists, chemists, and mathematicians. And when I wrote about the General Electric Company and Schenectady, it seemed a fantasy of the future to critics who had never seen the place.' [PT]

Contristation

13 Feb • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Top floor, 6:30pm. With Pat Cadigan, Amanda Hemingway and Liz Williams

18 Feb • **Picocon 23**, Imperial College Union, London. 10am-7pm/8pm. GoH Ian Watson, Natasha Mostert, and Mark Roberts. £8 reg, £6 concessions, £4 ICFS members. Contact ICSF, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BB.

21 Feb • **Book Aid International** charity auction, Bloomsbury Auctions, Mayfair, London. Original handwritten material by Iain Banks,

Susanna Clarke, Eoin Colfer, J.K. Rowling.... Champagne reception 6:30pm, auction 7:30pm. Tickets £75 from Madeleine.Langford-Allen (no relation) at bookaid.org; phone 020 7733 3577. Cheapskates can view the lots 11am-4pm on 18 or 19 Feb for £10 (cost of catalogue).

22 Feb • **BSEA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Steve Cockayne.

24-26 Feb: POSTPONED • **Distraction** (small sf/fun), Chequers Hotel, Newbury. The committee apologizes for not being able to cope in 2006: 'So this year's convention is postponed until Spring 2008, when the next in the sequence was planned. We're offering members their money [£30] back, OR you can leave it with us as an advance membership for 2008.' Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

3 Mar • **British Fantasy Society** open night, Devereux pub, Essex St, off the Strand, London. 6.30pm onwards. All welcome. Future meetings: 2 June, 1 September, 8 December (last date provisional).

11-12 Mar • **P-Con III**, Ashling Hotel, Dublin. €25 reg; €15 supp. Contact Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelors Walk, Dublin 1, Ireland. *New*: there will be a charity auction to benefit the Oesophageal Cancer Fund.

20 Mar - 29 Apr • **Les Edwards/Edward Miller** art exhibition, Redbridge Museum, Central Library, Clements Road, Ilford. 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 4pm Sat. Admission free. Contact 020 8708 2317. • **25 Mar tie-in events**: Stephen Gallagher on TV sf, 2pm-4pm, £8. Les Edwards, S. Gallagher, Steve Jones & Kim Newman on cover art, 7:30pm, £4.50.

13-16 Apr • **Eurocon 2006**, Kiev, Ukraine. 35/\$35 reg, 10/\$10 supp. GoH Sergey Poyarkov, Harry Harrison. info at eurocon.kiev.ua.

14-17 Apr • **Concussion** (Eastercon), Glasgow Moat House Hotel. £55 reg; supp/concessions £27.50; ages 12-18 £15; 5-11 £5; 0-4 free. Same at door. *Day rates*: Fri £5, Sat £20 (£10 evening only), Sun ditto, Mon £15. Contact 23 Ranelagh Rd, Bruce Grove, London, N17 6XY.

14-15 Oct • **Octocon**, Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth, Ireland. Guests TBA. 30 reg, student 25, under-18 15, supp 10. Contact Octocon c/o Electric Dragon, 19a Main St, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Sterling payments to 'Dave Lally #2 A/C', 64 Rickborne Tce, London, SW8 1AX.

10-12 Nov • **Novacon 36**, Walsall. *Corrected rates*: £33 reg; £36 after Eastercon; £40 at door. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

10-12 Aug 07 • **Recombination/HarmUni II** (Unicon 21/RPG/filk), New Hall, Cambridge. £20 reg; was to rise 1 Jan 2006, now held until after Eastercon. Contact 155 Gilbert Road, Cambridge, CB4 3PA.

Rumblings • **LA.Con IV (Worldcon 2006)**. Hotel rooms became bookable as of 1 January, according to the third progress report.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. More about how *Battlestar Galactica* is so very different: 'It's sci-fi, yes, but there are no aliens; there are androids, but they look just like us and are fervently religious; and both the best fighter pilot and the president are women. In other words, the conventions of sci-fi are borrowed only to be subverted ...' (*Radio Times*, 7-13 Jan) [DF] Katee Sackhoff, who plays Starbuck in the series, seems to agree: 'I'll meet people who haven't watched the show purely because it's on Sci Fi. I'm like, you've gotta be kidding me. It's not really science fiction. [...] they've turned it into a drama first and a science-fiction series second.' (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 19 Jan) [LW] What a novelty.

Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*; Ken MacLeod, *Learning The World*; Alastair Reynolds, *Pushing Ice*; Geoff Ryman, *Air*; Charles Stross, *Accelerando*; Liz Williams, *Banner of Souls*. Administrator Paul Kincaid remarks: 'Including Geoff Ryman, a Canadian long resident in the UK, this is the first all-British shortlist in the history of the Award.' Winner to be announced on 26 April.

In Conversation. *Ray Bradbury*: 'Every time a government official opens his mouth these days, something from a 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories* falls out.' (*Show* interview, October 1964, in *Conversations With Ray Bradbury*) [MMW] • *Ursula Le Guin*: Interviewer—'If you weren't a writer what would you be?' Le Guin—'Dead.' (*BellaOnline*, 2006) [PM]

Philip K. Dick Award shortlist: Neal Asher, *Cowl*; M.M. Buckner, *War Surf*; Karin Lowachee, *Cagebird*; Justina Robson, *Natural History*;

Justina Robson again, *Silver Screen*; Wil McCarthy, *To Crush The Moon*.

Publishers and Sinners. 'Solaris' is to be a new sf/fantasy imprint from BL Publishing, parent company of Games Workshop's The Black Library. It launches in Spring 2007. Plans are for original (rather than game-spinoff) novels and anthologies. No unsolicited submissions. Further information from: enquiries at blpublishing dot com.

BSFA Awards shortlist. NOVEL Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *9Tail Fox*; Charles Stross, *Accelerando*; Geoff Ryman, *Air*; Ken MacLeod, *Learning the World*; Justina Robson, *Living Next Door to the God of Love*. • SHORT Michael Bishop, 'Bears Discover Smut' (*SciFiction* Oct); Nina Allan, 'Bird Songs at Eventide' (*IZ* 199); Rudy Rucker, 'Guadalupe and Hieronymus Bosch' (*IZ* 200); Cory Doctorow, 'I, Robot' (*Infinite Matrix* Feb); Edward Morries, 'Imagine' (*IZ* 200); Kelly Link 'Magic for Beginners' (*F&SF* Sep); Will McIntosh, 'Soft Apocalypse' (*IZ* 200); Elizabeth Bear, 'Two Dreams on Trains' (*Strange Horizons* Jan). • ARTWORK (all cover art except last) Steve Rawlings, *Brass Man* by Neal Asher; Stephan Martinière, *Elantris* by Brandon Sanderson; Max Bertolini, *F&SF* Jan; Kenn Brown, *IZ* 198; Pawel Lewandowski, *IZ* 200; Frank Quitely, ch2 pp2-3 of *We3* (with Grant Morrison & Jamie Grant). • Short and Artwork categories have >5 nominations owing to ties. No Nonfiction shortlist as yet; winner to be decided by a BSFA panel based on nominations.

No Fun. Asked what he wished people would take more notice of, TV presenter Alex Zane said: 'Science fiction as a prophetic source of information and not a source of entertainment.' (*Independent*, 21 Jan)

R.I.P. *Cynthia McQuillan* (1953-2003), filker and author of several short fantasies, died on 14 January aged 52. She won a 1999 Pegasus Award as best writer/composer. [DARR] • *Ake E.B. Jonsson*, Swedish fan and collector of film/TV sf material, has reportedly died. [KS] • *Al Lewis*, US actor remembered as Grandpa in *The Munsters*, died on 3 February; he was 95. [GW] • *Jan Mark* (1943-2006), UK author of many acclaimed children's books, died on 15 January. She was 62. Her sf novels were *The Ennead* (1978), its sequel *Divide and Rule* (1979), and *Aquarius* (1982). Maureen Kincaid Speller writes: 'If Jan Mark had ever met Pollyanna, I feel sure she would have stuffed her into a trunk and firmly locked the lid, sparing generations of children and adults the trauma of wondering why things never turned out the way they did in fiction. Jan Mark always wrote about the bruising realities of life unflinchingly. She gave no quarter and she never took prisoners. The resolutions to her novels were, at best, bitter-sweet, and more often uncompromisingly bleak, but always satisfying and "right". 25 years on, the ending of *The Ennead* still thrills and disturbs me in equal parts. When I first read its bleak resolution, I knew that here was an author who understood exactly how the world worked, and who would never betray her readers. I don't believe she ever did. / Jan Mark came to Mexico II in 1986, at my instigation I feel sure; to be honest, I don't remember as much about the weekend as I'd like, though I recall she was a huge success, as any Guinness-drinking literary firebrand should be. I do remember that at one point we were talking, and I happened to mention that, although I had almost everything she had written, I had never been able to find a copy of *Aquarius*. Jan Mark immediately opened her briefcase, fished out her own copy of *Aquarius*, signed it and presented it to me, apologizing about its battered state, because it was the one she had been using for readings. / I'm way behind on reading her novels; she was scarily prolific. Catching up is going to be a melancholy business, but while real life is still bruising, the novels will, I know, be satisfying and "right".' • *Philip Ressler* (1922-2006), US editor and author of several children's books including the fantasy *August Explains* (1965), died on 27 December aged 83. [PDF] • *John Stewart*. Steve Jones writes: 'British illustrator John Stewart died of liver failure in a London hospital on January 8th. He was in his fifties.'

As Others See Us II. Nick Frost, star of the BBC2 sf comedy *Hyperdrive*, explains: 'The series is set in 2151 on a spaceship called HMS *Camden Lock*. With science fiction there's always a danger that 50 percent of the population is going to switch off immediately, so we've tried to make it more about the relationships between the characters than the fact they work on a spaceship.' (*Independent*, 14 Jan) [AR] • But A.A. Gill sees it differently: 'The good thing about sci-fi, for the terrestrial Tristrams who produce it, is that it attracts unarguably the least discriminating, most tunnel-visioned yet loyal audience of any oeuvre in any medium—and that includes Wagnerphiles, although Wagner could probably be seen as science fiction. People who read sci-fi read little else. Star Wars fans are a weird closed society, bearable only to each other. And there are still people writing me letters begging me to use my influence to bring back Blake's 7; or could I possibly beam them up episode 57 of Red Dwarf to complete their set? So I expect

Hyperdrive will attract a collection of smelly flotsam fantasists who will permanently orbit it. It's a shame it doesn't seem to be prepared to be about more than just science fiction.' (*Times*, 15 Jan) [AM]

SFX Story Competition. This is for unpublished authors only, and was launched in *SFX* 140 with the kind of small print everyone warns new writers not to touch with a ten-foot pole: 'Upon submission of their stories to the address set out at rule 2, entrants irrevocably assign to Future Publishing Limited all intellectual property rights that they have in any part of the world in their stories and waive all their moral rights.' After protests from Gollancz, who are co-publishing the book of winners, this was amended—or, as Future prefer to put it, clarified—to something less toxic. See www.sfx.co.uk/features/get_writing! [KB]

By Any Other Name. 'If you switch to the term "speculative fiction," which many sci-fi writers despise, the genre seems more interesting.' (Nancy Franklin, *The New Yorker*, Jan 23/30) [MMW]

Outraged Letters. *Henry Gee* of *Nature* promises more sf: 'I bear the happy news that our "Futures" series has been granted an extension, to the end of 2006.' (Still invitation-only.) • *N. Lee Wood* on UK news: 'Apparently, William Gibson is a convicted child molester working as a supply teacher in Bournemouth. Poor Bill. Why can't his namesakes find cures for cancer or save drowning puppies or something?' Lee adds that the 2005 Richard & Judy TV competition for new writers was won by Christine Aziz's 'dystopian future ... love story' *The Olive Readers*. 'If it doesn't have talking squid, her dystopia can't be all that bad.'

C.o.A. *Ed Meskys*, Niekas Publications, National Federation of the Blind of NH, 322 Whittier Hwy, Moultonboro, NH 03254-3627, USA.

Crawford Award (for new fantasy novelists) shortlist: Judith Berman, *Bear Daughter*; Hal Duncan, *Vellum*; Francis Hardinge, *Fly by Night*; Joe Hill, *Twentieth Century Ghosts*; Sarah Monette, *Melusine*; Holly Phillips, *In the Palace of Repose*; Anna Tambour, *Spotted Lily*. The winning author (rather than novel) will be announced in mid-March.

As Others See Us III. TV columnist Lisa de Moraes admires the ABC programming chief's courage: '[Steve] McPherson's even brave enough to take on one of the Scary Sci-Fi People in the room. They're the critics in the audience of every press tour who demand to know why that *Buffy* spinoff never happened, why *Farscape* got canceled, etc. etc. And they're always kind of angry.' (*Washington Post*, 22 Jan) [MMW]

Random Fandom. *David Stewart* was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in January and is 'facing a hard slog requiring several weeks, even months of radio- and chemotherapy followed by surgery and a convalescence period of several weeks with possibly more chemotherapy afterwards.' • *Peter Sullivan* had a quick and successful angioplasty in January: 'An absolutely text-book case, with no complications at all.' • *Martin Morse Wooster*, relentless supplier of news clippings, brags: 'My article about the craft beers of Scotland appeared in the January 2006 issue of *All About Beer Magazine*. So I managed to combine my trip to Glasgow with rigorous investigation of craft breweries.'

Group Gropes. *Resurgence of Trout*: new Glasgow fan meetings on 2nd Thur each month. Ingram Bar, Queen St, from 7pm. All welcome.

• *Herts Fandom*: Keith Bridges hopes 'to revive Hertsfandom using an online format.' Contact g.armstrong-bridges@tiscali dot co dot uk.

Hideous Gaffes! Yes, the *Infinite Matrix* URL in A222 (initial print run and email list only) was mistyped: it's www.infinitematrix.net.

Thog's Masterclass. *Trompe-L'Oeil Dept.* 'Nearby stood half a dozen patched-together vehicles which, contrary to their appearances, apparently did function.' (Gary Gibson, *Against Gravity*, 2005) [JT] • *Dept of No Matter Where You Go, There You Are.* 'Rafe was in Thendara. / That meant Kadarin and Thyra were—somewhere. / And so was the Sharra matrix. / And so—all the Gods of Darkover be merciful—so was I.' (Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Sharra's Exile*, 1981) [TMcD] • *Mutant Insect Dept.* 'The sisters had found some chrysalis [sic] in the toolshed in spring, and watched over them as they became caterpillars, then butterflies; so she regarded them as she she regarded her chickens, almost as offspring.' (Michael Moorcock, *Mother London*, 1988) [EO'B] • *Spare Parts Dept.* 'His feet slammed into Alayn's knees and knocked them both to the floor.' (Katharine Kerr, *Snare*, 2003) [EO'B] • *Helix of Semi-Precious Stones Dept.* 'On a busy European street, the killer serpentine through a crowd ...' (Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons*, 2000) [MN]

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