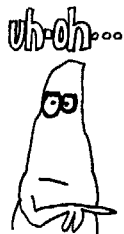


Ansible



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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 the formula for 3-blindmycin.

The Cosmic Puppets

Steve Cockayne, UK fantasy author, spoke at February's BSFA London meeting and revealed his deep sf background. *Mark Plummer* reports: 'He told us about his parents who ran something called the Pegasus Marionette Theatre. This gave performances in various indoor and outdoor venues in North London in the 1950s, and one of their shows was (at least loosely) inspired by the radio programme *Journey into Space*. • The show would start with a rocket landing, a sound created using an extended cymbal roll from one of those "Special Effects" records, with the tone varied by careful application of the thumb to the side of the disk. The spaceman marionette then emerged, wearing a classic fish-bowl helmet manufactured from a child's plastic rattle. He confronted and killed the moon monster, a (Wells-inspired) tripod with a body made out of an old pickled gherkin tin. Three flying saucers appeared—red, green and blue—and then the rocket took off again. It is, Cockayne admits, not much of a plot, but apparently the show was incredibly popular with North London children in the 1950s. • And then Cockayne climbed up on the table to show us his father's spaceman marionette. It was probably about 18" high, with a carved wooden body and, yep, that fish-bowl helmet—though now sporting a couple of ear pieces, a best attempt to cover up damage that'd occurred at some point in the last fifty years. Cockayne's father had drilled a couple of holes through the hard plastic helmet so that strings could manipulate the marionette's head inside it, and another string enabled the puppet to effect a fast draw of its ray gun. Sadly, the moon monster has not survived into the 21st century, and whilst there was much support for its recreation so that they might duel again at some upcoming meeting or convention, it was pointed out that you can't get pickled gherkins in tins any more. However there was a rumour that they might still be available in Poland so all is not entirely lost...'

Lynette Cook, space artist, explains that her paintings of extrasolar worlds are untainted by genre: 'This is not science fiction ... These planets are so far away we cannot look at them with a camera close up, so we can't have the assurance at this point of time that it's 100 percent accurate. And that's fun for me because I can use some imagination as long as it is scientifically plausible. It can't be too far-out or I can't do it.' Nothing but hard-edged factuality: 'Cook imagined a Jupiter-style gas giant planet harboring life, but not on its gassy surface. Instead, there are hypothetical floating life forms, a cross between jellyfish and hot-air balloons, drifting along on air currents.' (Reuters) [DSZ] No doubt Sir Arthur C. Clarke will be delighted to learn that his 1971 gaseous story 'A Meeting with Medusa' was science fact all along.

Harlan Ellison has been talking to lawyers again. Lydia Marano, of the 25-year-old American sf bookshop formerly known as Dangerous Visions, explains: 'Harlan Ellison has asked us, through his lawyer, to stop using the name Dangerous Visions for our bookstore which went virtual-only in 2002. We have complied with his wishes and are now openly soliciting the public for a replacement name. Send us your recommendations and we will post the top ten on our site. The person who provides the best name will win a \$50 gift certificate—good on any purchase—and our undying thanks. The next five runners-up will receive a \$10 gift certificate. Name selection ends April 30th. Until then, we remain readsf.com.' Could this long-delayed request be intended to clear the way for web publication of some long-delayed anthology?

David G. Hartwell received NESFA's Skylark Award at Boskone.

Convertend

The Science Museum **Science of Aliens** exhibition closed on 26 Feb.

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

13 Mar • **Reading at Borders**, Oxford St, London. Top floor, 6:30pm. With Pat Cadigan, Neal Asher, and 'a special surprise guest'.

18 Mar • **enLarged** (informal Sproutlore/beer/Rankin event), The Flying Swan aka The Alexandra Hotel, 203 Siddals Rd, Derby. Free.

Also pub crawl on Fri 17 Mar. Contact deepblack23 at hotmail dot com.

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.

22 Mar • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present in the bar from 5pm. BSFA Award nominations discussion panel led by Dan Hartland.

7-9 Apr • **The Child and the Book** (academic conf on children's lit), Newcastle University. £40 reg to Sarah Barber, NIASSH, Newcastle University, Architecture Building, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. Cheques to Newcastle U; for credit cards call 0191 222 5064.

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), Sun ditto, Mon £15. Contact 23 Ranelagh Rd, Bruce Grove, London, N17 6XY. 'Concussion needs a driver. Must be over 25, with clean license. Willing to drive van from London via Birmingham to Glasgow (and back a week later). Free room night offered.' Reply to farah dot sf at gmail dot com.

6 May • **Alt-Fiction** (sf/fantasy/horror), Darwin Suite, Assembly Rooms, Derby. 'Workshops, discussions, talks and readings from major names.' 12:30pm-8:30pm. £18 admission, £15 concessions. Contact Alex Davis, 01332 715434 or alex dot davis at derby dot gov dot uk.

2 Jun • **British Fantasy Society** open night, Devereux pub, Essex St, off Strand, London. 6.30pm onwards. All welcome. Future meetings are on 1 Sep and provisionally 8 Dec. (I heard too late about 3 Mar.)

22-24 Sep • **Fantasycon 2006**, Britannia Hotel, 1 St James Street, Nottingham. GoH Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Raymond Feist, Neil Gaiman, Juliet E. McKenna. £45 reg to 30 Jun 06, then £55; BFS members £40 and £50. Day rate for Saturday only: £20. Contact (SAE) Beech House, Chapel Lane, Moulton, Cheshire, CW9 8PQ.

Rumblings • **Eastercon 2007**. Convoy, the Liverpool/Adelphi bid, is taking presupporting memberships at £2. Send to Convoy, 81 Western Rd, London, E13 9JE. No rival bid has yet revealed itself to *Ansible*.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. Yet another determined attempt to draw the line between good stuff and mere sf: "But beyond its sci-fi trappings and nerdy pedigree, *Battlestar Galactica* is, above all, a drama—and a deeply human one, at that. These aren't stock sci-fi characters wearing capes and speaking in a lame faux Shakespearean dialect; instead [...] they're real people with flaws and ambitions and hopes and fears who are instantly recognizable and believable.' (*Toronto Sun*, 19 Feb) [AM]

Nebula Shortlist. NOVEL Geoff Ryman, *Air*; Joe Haldeman, *Camouflage*; Terry Pratchett, *Going Postal*; Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*; Jack McDevitt, *Polaris*; John C. Wright, *Orphans of Chaos*.

• NOVELLA Bud Sparhawk, 'Clay's Pride' (*Analog* 7/04); Robert J. Sawyer, 'Identity Theft' (*Down These Dark Spaceways*); Paul Witcover, 'Left of the Dial' (*SCI FICTION* 9/04) Kelly Link, 'Magic for Beginners' (*Magic for Beginners*); Albert Cowdrey, 'The Tribes of Bela' (*F&SF* 8/04). • NOVELETTE Kelly Link, 'The Faery Handbag' (*The Faery Reel*); Daniel Abraham, 'Flat Diane' (*F&SF* 10/04); James Patrick Kelly, 'Men are Trouble' (*Asimov's* 6/04); Eileen Gunn & Leslie What, 'Nirvana High' (*Stable Strategies and Others*); Paolo Bacigalupi, 'The People of Sand and Slag' (*F&SF* 2/04). • SHORT K.D. Wentworth, 'Born-Again' (*F&SF* 5/05); Dale Bailey, 'The End of the World as We Know It' (*F&SF* 10/04); Carol Emshwiller, 'I Live With You' (*F&SF* 3/05); Nancy Kress, 'My Mother, Dancing' (*Asimov's* 6/04); Margo Lanagan, 'Singing My Sister Down' (*Black Juice*); Anne Harris, 'Still Life With Boobs' (*Talebones* Summer 05); Richard Bowes, 'There's a Hole in the City' (*SCI FICTION* 6/05) • SCRIPT *Battlestar Galactica* 'Act of Contrition/You Can't Go Home Again'; *Serenity*. • ANDRE NORTON AWARD (YA) Louise

Spiegler, *The Amethyst Road*; Ann Halam, *Siberia*; Susan Vaught, *Stormwitch*; Holly Black, *Valiant: A Modern Tale of Faerie*.

The Living Dead. *The Bookseller* gave its Diagram Prize for Oddest Book Title of the Year to a self-help book about being haunted, entitled *People Who Don't Know They're Dead: How They Attach Themselves to Unsuspecting Bystanders and What to Do About It*. (Reuters, 3 March) [BT] I think I've met a number of these people at sf conventions.

Publishers and Sinners. The late Byron Preiss's publishing companies Ibooks and Byron Preiss Visual Publications both filed for bankruptcy and vacated their New York offices on 22 February. [SFWA]

R.I.P. Peter Benchley (1940-2006), US author famous for *Jaws* (1974), died on 11 February aged 65. A genre venture was *White Shark* (1994), featuring a Nazi-engineered man/shark hybrid. [GW] ● Octavia Butler (1947-2006), distinguished and much-admired black US sf author, died with shocking unexpectedness on 25 February after a fall outside her house. She was 58. Butler won 1984 Hugo awards for 'Bloodchild' (short story) and 'Speech Sounds' (novelette); the latter also won the Nebula, as did her 1998 novel *Parable of the Talents*. Most unusually for an sf author, she received a MacArthur Foundation 'genius grant' in 2000. Newspaper and on-line obituary coverage has been extensive, and rightly so. I was proud and slightly overawed to be on the guest list with her at Intervention, the 1997 UK Eastercon. ● Phil Brown (1916-2006), US actor whose genre roles included Uncle Owen in *Star Wars*, died on 9 February. He was 89. [GW] ● Andreas Katsulas (1946-2006), US actor best known for playing G'Kar in *Babylon 5*, died from lung cancer on 13 February; he was 59. [GW] ● Don Knotts (1924-2006), US actor who starred in such minor genre films as *The Incredible Mr. Limpet* (1964) and *The Reluctant Astronaut* (1967), died on 24 February. He was 81. ● Darren McGavin (1922-2006), US actor best known to genre fans for his title role in the 1970s cult TV series *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, died on 25 February aged 83. [GW] ● Myron Waldman (1908-2006), US animator and art director who was the last surviving head animator of the Max Fleischer Studios, died on 4 February aged 97. His work included Popeye, Casper, and the original Superman cartoon series. [CH] ● Dennis Weaver (1924-2006), US actor who is best remembered for TV roles but also played the lead in Spielberg's *Duel* (1971), died on 24 February. He was 81. [SJD] ● Jack Wild (1952-2006), UK actor who starred in the late-1960s US fantasy TV series *H.R. Pufnstuf*, died on 1 March aged 53. His best-known part was the Artful Dodger in *Oliver!* (1968). [GW] ● Late notice: Charles Garvin (1945-2005), eccentric US book dealer and small-press publisher, died in January 2005 at age 59. His and Jeff Levin's Pendragon Press published chapbooks by R.A. Lafferty and Ursula Le Guin, including the 1973 first edition of 'From Elfland to Poughkeepsie'. [DAA]

As Others See Us II. According to *The Week*, the end of February was a "Good Week For Science-fiction fans, after a mysterious black goo bubbled up between cracks in the streets of downtown Los Angeles, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of residents." (5 Mar) [MMW]

Outraged Letters. Kim Huett shares a magical sf moment from 'The Coming Of the Ice' (1926) by G. Peyton Wertenbaker, which resonates with the current UK debate on animal testing: 'Now, I made a slight mistake one day in experimenting with a guinea-pig, and I rearranged certain organs which I need not describe so that I thought I had completely messed up the poor creature's abdomen. It lived, however, and I laid it aside. It was some years later that I happened to notice it again. It had not given birth to any young, but I was amazed to note that it had apparently grown no older: it seemed precisely in the same state of growth in which I had left it.' Kim observes: 'I don't think I'd ever want this bloke pet-sitting for me. If he can put a guinea pig to one side and forget about it for years then he doesn't fit my definition of responsible adult. On the other hand he has the makings of a fine politician.' ● Ben Jeapes knows how to cheer a former Big Engine author: 'I thought you might appreciate this testament to your most famous work. This morning I took delivery of a new bed, which required wheels to be inserted into the base. The instructions suggested a rubber mallet, which I don't have. I do have a very strong steel hammer that could have shattered the wheels nicely with one tap. I needed something to put between hammer and wheels to soften the blow and thought of a book. But which book? Obviously a book I would never read. / And the answer turned out to be *Deravy Urad*, the Czech-language equivalent of *The Leaky Establishment*. The wheels went in a treat. So, on behalf of myself and my wife to be, may I thank you for your fine work and express a hope that all your past and future writing continues to be so useful in the lives of your readers.' ● Tony Lee has been reading *Battlestar Galactica: The Official Companion*. 'Somewhat

bemused by this bit from the Afterword by David Eick (exec. producer of the remake), re watching *Star Trek*' and other TV space operas ... "I knew how they felt to me: antiseptic, stately, austere, polite. I wanted something cruder, more real and more textured by the rawness of humanity; something like *Blade Runner*, 2001, and *Alien*; an epic, compelling, deeply emotional drama ..." I assume Eick's talking about a wholly re-imagined version of Kubrick's opus here, one that's all grungy and vulgar ...?' ● Mike Moorcock mourns deaths reported in the gloom-laden January *Ansible*: 'Fucking terrible year for losing good guys. Ken [Bulmer] was hugely encouraging to me when I was a callow 15 year old but at least I was able to get him into IPC a couple of years later which at least improved his income. I was in touch with him towards the end, I'm glad to say, and he remained in his letters just the same sweet person he'd always been. Similarly with Bob Sheckley who once literally pulled me out of the gutter.'

C.o.A. If anyone moved house last month, they failed to tell *Ansible*.

Eulogy Masterclass. At Octavia Butler's memorial service: 'Harlan Ellison also spoke via phone, calling the 6-foot Butler a King Kong to his 5-foot-5 Fay Wray ...' (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 4 March)

Random Fandom. Jonathan Cowie bewailed the disappearance of the www.concatenate.org website in February as a result of ISP naughtiness: 'Serverspace.co.uk aka ClickHosting have literally done a runner from all their customers (William Gibson's near futures were always pretty gritty and street orientated but I don't recall folk doing an old fashioned runner). We have no e-mail, no site and no easy way of proving to our internet registrar (based in Australia) we are who we are to get the site relocated...' Sanity was restored, with Ukrainian fan assistance, before the end of the month. ● Neil Gaiman & Steve Jones are seeking Ian Pemble, the 1980s editor of *Knave*, in order 'to give him *Now We Are Sick* money.' Neil has a touching belief that practically any such person must read *Ansible* 'if he hasn't been eaten by badgers...' ● Jan Stinson has been laid low by pneumonia but should by now have published the October 2005 issue of her fanzine *Peregrine Nations*.

Another Award. The Cambridge Theatre production of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* received a Laurence Olivier Award in the Best Entertainment category on 26 February. [SG]

The Dead Past. *Thirty Years Ago*: 'SF Monthly is folding with the April issue. The passing-away of Britain's only SF magazine will be mourned dearly by John Brosnan and Peter Weston who between them managed to keep some sort of standard.' (*Checkpoint* 65, March 1976.)

Group Gropes. In *Ansible* 218, Paul Treadaway suggested a special event to mark the 60th anniversary of the first post-war London pub meeting in March 1946. Nothing came of this, but Mark Plummer points out that there's another opportunity in April, when it will be 60 years since the first meeting in the legendary White Horse pub.

HIDEOUS GAFFES! A223 R.I.P.: Al Lewis was probably born in 1923 despite his claim of 1910 (source: his son). [GVG] Cynthia McQuillin is so spelt and died in 2006, not 2003. John Stewart, UK fantasy/horror illustrator, died on 18 January and not 8 January (writes Steve Jones, correcting his earlier note); his work appeared in *Whispers*, *Fantasy Tales*, an Arkham House collection and various European paperbacks.

Chog's Masterclass. *Dept of Cosmic Ennui*. 'A cyclone stood still compared to the *White Bird*. The flight of bullets, the flight of meteors, the flight of light, were snails in relation to him. He annihilated the far reaches of the universe at hundreds and thousands of light-years per second. A flash in infinity, a silvery bolt through the black, a ghost that was gone more quickly than the messengers of death, the *White Bird* bored the known universe, and went on.' (Donald Wandrei, 'Colossus', 1934) [TMcD] ● *Brighter Than You Think Dept*. '... it appeared the night sky would be cloudless and the land exposed to the revealing light of the new moon ...' (Terry Brooks, *The Sword of Shannara*, 1977) [CCF] ● *Visionary Dept*. 'Closing his eyes, he stopped in front of the row of sloping narrow windows in the ceiling and gazed at the cold sterile beauty of the stars.' (David Mack, *A Time to Kill*, 2004) [MF] ● *Dept of Moderate Ruthlessness*. "'If you make a sound, I will kill you where you stand.'" / "What do you mean?" he asked in amazement. / "Exactly what I say. We have returned from ...'" (Captain S.P. Meek, 'Awlo of Ulm', 1931) [TMcD] ● *Neat Tricks Dept*. 'She shrugged with her buttocks.' (Ron Goulart, *The Enormous Hourglass*, 1976) [BA]

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