



Ansible 233 December 2006

From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. Web news.ansible.co.uk. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (online). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Joe Mayhew**. Available for SAE or Orel's Epulotic Vulnerary.

The Keys to December

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, made the usual distinction when talking about global warming in November: 'This is not science fiction. These are plausible scenarios, based on clear and rigorous scientific modelling.' [SS] Is this a slur on Kim Stanley Robinson's research?

Arthur C. Clarke is no longer writing, and has asked dynamic young author Frederik Pohl (born two years after ACC) to finish his new novel. 'Talked to Pohl recently, and he was doing it,' confirms Charles N. Brown. It is rumoured that this came as a surprise to Greg Benford, who had rather expected to be called on for the task.

James Ellroy deftly avoids false modesty: 'I am a master of fiction. I am also the greatest crime novelist who ever lived. I am to the crime novel in specific what Tolstoy is to the Russian novel and what Beethoven is to music.' (*New York Times Magazine* interview, 5 Nov) [MMW]

James Gunn will be honoured as SFWA Grand Master for 2007 at the Nebula Awards weekend next May. [SFWA] The usual mutterings of 'shouldn't X be honoured first?' were heard from the usual suspects.

Stephen Hawking announces that humanity must colonize planets in other solar systems, using *Trek*-style antimatter propulsion. (Reuters, 1 Dec) [DKMK] So presumably this particular notion isn't sf any more....

Stephen King is to receive a Grand Master award from the Mystery Writers Association at their NYC banquet in April 2007. [MR]

David Langford wonders whether anyone will notice him inserting a plug for his highly unauthorized nonfiction book from Gollancz, *The End of Harry Potter?* Yes, I'm afraid it's all about a certain boy wizard.

Terry Pratchett's best-kept secret was revealed in the BBC website blurb for his 21 November BBC4 interview: 'Terry Pratchett talks to Mark Lawson about his life and work, from the early days as a teenage journalist to his rise to fame as one of the world's most popular sci-fi writers under the name Iain M Banks.' Our newshound David Kennedy can hardly wait for the appearance of 'a future Culture novel featuring a drone which follows the hero on hundreds of little legs ...'

Somtow Sucharitkul (now writing fiction as S.P. Somtow) caused an unexpected stir in Thailand with his opera *Ayodhya*. Showing the death of the mythical demon king Thotsakan sent the Thai military government into a frenzy of superstitious alarm: this event had to be moved offstage. 'The composer said officials told him that any misfortunes which befell those in power would be blamed on the opera.' (BBC) [S] Do UK terror laws allow us to quote *Macbeth* at Tony Blair?

Contrarious

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

9-10 Dec • **Birmingham International Comics Show**, Custard Factory, Gibb St, Birmingham, B9 4AA. £10 reg; £6 Sat only.

13 Dec • **Science and Its Fictions**, Birkbeck (U of London) free lunchtime lecture: Rm B04, 43 Gordon Sq, London. 1pm. Steve Connor on 'Big Bangs and Whimpers: The Ends and Beginnings of Science'.

21 Dec • **London Circle Xmas Meeting**, Melton Mowbray, 18 Holborn. Evening; all welcome; NB upstairs bar (the cellar was booked).

27 Dec • **BSEA Open Meeting**—cancelled as usual in December.

13 Feb 07 • **Picocon 24**, Imperial College Union, London. 10am-7pm/8pm. GoH Charles Stross, Ken MacLeod, and Farah Mendlesohn. Approx £8 reg, £6 concessions, £4 ICFS members. Contact ICFS, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BB.

6-9 Apr 07 • **Contemplation** (Eastercon rescue bid)—no venue as yet. This event was overwhelmingly approved at Novacon and has the blessing of Convoy, the cancelled 2007 Eastercon. £45 reg, £30 unwaged, £20 supp/junior (13-17), £5 child (5-12), £1 infant (under 5). Contact 18 Letchworth Ave, Feltham, Middlesex, TW14 9RY. Hopes of using the Britannia International Hotel in London Docklands were thwarted by too-high function space charges. Developments awaited....

3-5 Aug 07 • **MeCon 10**, Queen's Elms Centre, 78 Malone Rd, Belfast. £14 or £12 concessions, rising to £16 or £14 concessions on 1 Jan

2007. Contact 115 Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 6SP.

21-23 Sep 07 • **FantasyCon 2007**, Britannia Hotel, Nottingham. GoH Michael Marshall Smith, Stephen Jones, more TBA. £45 reg rising to £55 after 30 Jun 2007; BFS members and students £25 to the end of 2006, £40 to 30 Jun 2007, £45 thereafter. Contact 3 Tamworth Close, Lower Earley, Reading, Berks, RG6 4EQ.

2-4 Nov 07 • **Novacon 37**, Quality Hotel, Walsall (again). GoH Charles Stross. £35 reg. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

10-12 Nov 07 • **Armadacon 19**, Novotel, Plymouth. £30 reg. Contact 20 Pinewood Close, Plympton, Devon, PL7 2DW.

Rumblings • Eastercon 2009: two bids so far have emerged for the 60th UK Eastercon. **Concordia** (concordicon at googlemail com) is aiming for the Birmingham NEC Metropole Hotel; **LXcon** (no contact details received) is currently 'looking at Yorkshire in general, and Leeds in particular, for a city centre bid'. See www.eastercon.org.

Infinitely Improbable

As Others See Us. Or rather, as others see space entrepreneurs on a field trip to Bigelow Aerospace: 'The van full of visiting space geeks didn't seem to mind the harsh conditions. Last July they happily left the air-conditioned glamour of Vegas's Flamingo Hotel and Casino, where the cream of the private space industry had gathered for the NewSpace 2006 conference, to spend a few hours at Bigelow's warehouse and mission control center. They couldn't have been more excited if the van had been on the way to a Star Trek-themed strip club.' (Katherine Mangu-Ward, *Reason*, January 2007) [MMW]

R.I.P. **Robert Altman** (1925-2006), noted US film director who ventured into sf/fantasy with *Countdown* (1968), *Quintet* (1979) and the live-action *Popeye* (1980), died on 20 November aged 81. • **Pierce Askegren** (1955-2006), US sf novelist, died in late November; he was 51. [SFWA] • **Jerry G. Bails** (1933-2006) US 'father of comic book fandom', died on 23 November aged 73. [GW] • **Sydney J. Bounds** (1920-2006), UK author active since 1946 (and in fandom from 1937), who published four sf novels in the 1950s but became better known for horror, was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer and died in a hospice on 24 November. He was 86. [PH] Syd's agent Phil Harbottle had just sold his last novel, a western. It's always a sad occasion when another name is removed from the printed *Ansible's* dwindling mailing list: goodbye, Syd. • **Dave Cockrum** (1943-2006), US comics artist who created several major *X-Men* characters, died on 26 November; he was 63. [GW] • **Don Dohler**, founding editor of *Cinemagic* magazine and maker of various low-budget sf/horror films, died on 2 December. [SFS] • **John Hallam** (1941-2006), Irish character actor whose genre credits included *Dragonslayer* (1981), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1989 tv) and *Dr Who* ('Ghost Light', 1989), died on 14 November aged 65. [JY] • **Craig Hinton** (1964-2006), UK author of *Doctor Who* spinoff novels, was found dead at home on 3 December. [GW] • **Ken Ishikawa** (?1948-2006), co-creator of the 1970s giant robot anime *Getter Robo*, died suddenly on 15 November; he was 58. [PM] • **Akio Jissoji** (1937-2006), Japanese film-maker best known for *Ultraman* and *Ultraseven* (1960s tv), died on 29 November aged 69. [PM] • **Stanley Meltzoff** (1917-2006), US artist who became best known for marine subjects but painted several influential covers for 1950s Signet/NAL sf paperbacks, died on 9 November; he was 89. [L] • **Maggie Noach** (1949-2006), UK literary agent for many sf authors, died unexpectedly while being treated in hospital for a back injury on 17 November. She was 57. Her current list included Brian Aldiss, Colin Greenland, Garry Kilworth, Michael Scott Rohan and Geoff Ryman. • **Basil Poledouris** (1945-2006), US composer whose film scores included *Robocop*, *Starship Troopers* and (notably) *Conan the Barbarian*, died on 8 November aged 61. He scored several other genre films and tv episodes. [GD] • **Leon E. Stover** (1929-2006), US academic who wrote nonfiction about sf and collaborated with Harry Harrison on the 1968 anthology *Apeman, Spaceman* and on a novel, died on 25 November; he was 77. [L] • **John Symonds** (1914-2006), UK author and playwright who wrote such children's fantasies

as *The Magic Currant Bun* (1953) and was the literary executor of Aleister Crowley, died on 21 October aged 92. [JE] • **Shirley Walker** (1945-2006), US composer who scored *Batman* (1992-1995) and other animated superhero tv series, died on 29 November; she was 61. [GW] • **Jack Williamson** (1908-2006), much-loved US author and academic whose astonishingly long sf career stretched from his first magazine story in 1928 ('The Metal Man' in *Amazing*) to a final novel published in 2005, died on 10 November aged 98. His many awards included the 1973 Pilgrim for sf criticism, SFWA Grand Master status in 1976, and a 1985 Hugo for his autobiography *Wonder's Child*. [SFWA]

Thog's PR Masterclass. The editor of the Bantam Spectra email newsletter may know something about the great Stan Robinson that the rest of us don't: 'Congratulations to Kim Stanley Robinson! Her technological eco-thriller *Fifty Degrees Below* is among *School Library Journal's* Best Adult Books of the Year for high school students!' [RR]

Smaugwurst. UK trading standards officials threatened to prosecute the makers of 'Welsh Dragon' sausages because the product *does not in fact contain dragon*. The general public, it is felt, will be less easily misled by the new label 'Welsh Dragon Pork Sausages.' (*Times*, 18 Nov)

Awards. Sarah Singleton's YA novel *Century* won the Dracula Society's Children of the Night Award for best gothic novel.

As Others See Us II. Michael Allen's 'Grumpy Old Bookman' weblog speculates plausibly about bad paperback design: 'The thinking goes something like this. "This book is just science-fiction crap. It's only going to be read by nerds who've worn the same t-shirt for the last three weeks, and who wouldn't appreciate good design if you gave them a course of instruction. Furthermore, if we print the book really cheaply, then with a bit of luck it will fall to pieces after they've read it, so all their friends will have to go out and buy another copy."'

Fanfunder. TAFF: with Convoy cancelled and the location of its replacement still uncertain, the TAFF administrators decided in early November to postpone the 2007 race until 2008. Condolences to the two candidates. • **JETS**, the one-off Europe to Nippon 2007 fund, has a final slate of seven: Abi Brown, Jim de Liscard, Jukka Halme, Tom Nanson and Teddy (running as a pair), Chris O'Shea, Liam Proven and Robert Sneddon. Further details and ballots at www.astralpole.org, or from LFF c/o 59 Shirley Rd, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7ES.

Outraged Letters. **Stephen Baxter** can't resist a little gloat: 'I noted NASA's announcement yesterday that they are planning a base at the lunar south pole—which is precisely where Clarke & I put our lunar base in *Sunstorm* last year. Clarke always goes on about this sort of thing, whereas I ... oh. (I just hope we were wrong about the Sun exploding however.)' • **Simon R. Green** is still at it: 'Having discovered that repeatedly killing you off doesn't win awards, I have instead introduced you to the Nightside universe as a kind of beer. So you will be appearing in the next Nightside book, *The One and Only Unnatural Inquirer*, as Langford's Exceedingly Old Speckled Hen. (Taste that albumen.) No need to thank me.' • **Mike Moorcock** mourns: 'I was very sad to hear of Ron Bennett's death. We'd been out of touch for a while and I'd begun to worry about him. Another lesson about enjoying your friends while you have the chance. Ron was one of a couple of people who first introduced me to fandom after I'd begun publishing *Burroughsiana*, not knowing that I wasn't an individual but part of the zeitgeist. His patience, humour and kindness, as well as his contributions to my fanzines and, eventually, prozines, made life better for me in many ways. My mother was also very fond of him, as was Linda. I remember visiting him at the NATO base in Belgium when he was still "Captain Bennett", teaching the children of the base. I was in full Hawkwind-style finery and travelling with my friend Jon Trux, whose hair was about eight feet longer than mine. Ron came to meet us, treated us with considerable courtesy and grace in spite of a few odd looks from the uniformed chaps at the gate. He later came to visit us in Yorkshire, with his wife and little girl. As his friends know, he bore a great deal of tragedy in recent years. The company of his son, who also helped run his comics business, was a great comfort. He was a witty, erudite man and I shall miss him. / I was also sorry to see that Philip Strick died. Another man whose erudition brightened my life.'

Academic Rigour. A University of Florida newsletter brags about 'New materials added to John Cabell Collection', explaining that 'A recent donation [...] has substantially improved the research value of the libraries' already extensive collection on Virginia author John Branch Cabell (1879-1958).' [MB] Somewhere is heard the sound, not convenient to describe, of James Branch Cabell rotating in his grave....

The Nova Awards for UK/Irish fanzine activity were presented at Novacon 36. FANZINE *Banana Wings* (runners-up *Zoo Nation*, *Plokta*).

FAN WRITER Claire Brialey (runners-up Mark Plummer, James Bacon). ARTIST Sue Mason (runners-up Alison Scott, Pete Young). [SG]

The Dead Past. Winston Churchill was a closet science fiction fan who borrowed the lines for one of his most famous speeches from HG Wells.' (*Independent*, 27 Nov) Not, alas, science-fictional lines: that 1906 speech drew on Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), but the only quoted borrowing is 'the gathering storm' from *The War of the Worlds*, later applied by Churchill to the rise of Nazi Germany. For slower readers, the researcher Dr Richard Toye offers this analogy: 'It's a bit like Tony Blair borrowing phrases from Star Trek or Doctor Who.' [J/PT] But not very. ('Iraq: We Must Reverse The Polarity Of The Neutron Flow.')

As Others See Us III. In the tv series *Eleventh Hour*, Patrick Stewart 'portrays Ian Hood, a former physics professor hired by British police to solve cases in which scientific "progress" and technological excess have homicidal consequences. / In tonight's episode, Hood confronts the grim consequences of a multinational baby-cloning operation. Not for the squeamish, the episode begins with the discovery of a mass graveyard of discarded experimental fetuses.' Stewart is quick to explain that this is an everyday occurrence: 'It has nothing to do with science fiction whatsoever. No aliens in sight. These four stories deal with very pressing issues ...' (*Times Herald-Record*, 4 December) [KFL]

C.o.A. **John Jarrold** (again), Flat 1, 1 Eversfield Place, St Leonard's-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN37 6BY. **Julie Faith Rigby & Pat McMurray**, 9 Corcorans, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 9NR.

Cinegeekery. The genre film magazine *Cinefantastique*—launched in 1970, renamed *CFQ* in 2002—is 'on hiatus into 2007', whatever that means exactly. Subscribers instead received the new *Geek Monthly*, apparently its replacement, edited by *CFQ* editor Jeff Bond. [MMW]

The Dead Past II. **Brian Ameringen** wafts us back to 1950: 'I've just discovered that on April 9 1950 the *Sydney Sunday Telegraph* newspaper gave away a Science Fiction novel—presumably to educate the masses and inculcate a sensibility of science fiction and sensawunder. The classic novel chosen for such purposes was ... Frank Belknap Long's *John Carstairs: Space Detective*, the novel with lines like "No sane man would let a vicious killer plant hop around on his palm", and so many others that Thog would be in his seventeenth heaven....'

Hideous Gaffes. A232 obits: the question mark against Darrell Richardson's birth year (?1918) can be deleted. [MMW] • Lilian Edwards's CoA may be for about 'a year' but she hopes that her Chair of Internet Law will last much longer.

Group Gropes. **Sheffield:** Old Queens Head pub, nr Ponds Forge, Wed evenings and last Fri of month—check at www.sheffieldsf.org.uk.

Thog's Masterclass. **Fortean Physics Dept.** 'But what I mean is that if the ether is strong enough to convey from one central point to the ends of the Earth music and speech, and all the other things that are so broadcast, why shouldn't there be in space a kind of super-ether that will support mighty floating islands?' (Professor A.M. Low, *Adrift in the Stratosphere*, 1937) • **Dept of Spaceship Performance.** '... it seems that either the weight gets out or gravity gets in ...' (John Stafford Gowland, *Beyond Mars*, 1956) [KFS/IC] • **Superluminal Physics Dept.** "We are already more than a light-year away from Earth." "In seven hours? And that's how many trillion miles?" "Quite a few," said Swainson. "So even to go home—below light speed, it might take us nearly a year to get there." (*Deathstar Voyage*, Ian Wallace, 1969) [DB] • **Dept of Scientific Jargon.** 'As you know, the Masters possess a positive potential of several thousand bratilgrovits on which they depend for motivation. That potential is drawn from the positive static in the body of Conzan [*a moon of the planet Pirivar*] itself ...' '... you mean to create a fusing circuit within a Master ... Their bodies are positive in character, the mechanism actuated through the medium of a minute negative potential drawn from the girdle radiations of Pirivar itself ...' 'Exactly! And on such a basis of theory, if a strong negative discharge were introduced so as to impinge on the collectivators a fusing element would be introduced ... They would, therefore, be paralysed by the negative contact of a charged shaft of electronic particles.' And so probably would you. (Arn Romilus [Dennis Hughes], *Brain Palaeo*, 1953) [BA] • **Health & Safety Dept.** '—if you're going to traverse thin ice, you might as well dance your way across!' (Mercedes Lackey, *Winds of Fury*, 1993) [TMcd]

Ansible 233 © Dave Langford, 2006. Thanks to Brian Ameringen, Mike Blake, Damien Broderick, Ian Covell, Gary Dalkin, John Eggingel, Steve Green, Phil Harbottle, Jonjo, David K.M. Klaus Locus, Keith F. Lynch, Tim McDaniel, Petrea Mitchell, Mary Reed, Rich Rennicks, SF Site, Scott Simpson, Simo, Ken Slater, Paul Tomlinson, Gary Wilkinson, Martin Morse Wooster, Jessica Yates, and Hero Distributors: Rog Peyton (BSFG), Janice Murray (North America), SCIS, and Alan Stewart (Australia). Merry Xmas to all readers! 7 Dec 06