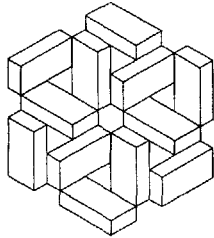


# Ansible



## Ansible 234 January 2007

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**. Artwork: **Harry Turner**. Available for SAE or *Nexialism for Dummies*.

**My Science Fiction Life.** This BBC4 programme about those funny sf fans was broadcast on 29 December. For readers who missed it or just couldn't face watching, *Max* provides a lightning summary—

'It was along these lines: *Narrator*: Science fiction is largely about escapism. See these people escape too far. *Daft woman*: I like being a Klingon called KickArse at the pub. *Narrator*: But sometimes real things come from SF. *Random contributor*: Gosh, aren't mobile phones great. *Narrator*: Here's a man who had computer bits implanted in him. *Kevin Warwick*: I had computer bits implanted. Isn't that great. *Kevin Warwick's wife*: It's so great I did it too. [etc ...]

'They did actually go along to the Tun and filmed a bunch of decent people. I think Roger Robinson, definitely Pete Young, Doug Spencer, new girl on the scene Abi Brown. But clearly they were looking for weirdos and disappointed at the clear, well read people they found.'

### The Woodland Tweezers

**D.G. Compton** (David Guy Compton) will be made the SFWA 'Author Emeritus' for 2007 at the Nebula Awards event in May.

**Michael Crichton** has discovered the age-old technique of taking revenge on perceived enemies by writing them into fiction. So claims *New Republic* editor Michael Crowley, who last March grumbled about this author's partisan handling of global warming issues in *State of Fear* ('Crichton has relentlessly propagandized on behalf of one big idea: that experts—scientists, intellectuals, reporters, and bureaucrats—are spectacularly corrupt and spectacularly wrong.'). It could be sheer coincidence that Crichton's latest, *Next*, introduces a character called Mick Crowley who has no detectable plot function but just happens to be a political writer/reporter who like his *NR* namesake went to Yale. 'Mick' is described as a dickhead and a weasel, possesses a singularly tiny penis, but has nevertheless raped his own two-year-old nephew. Responding on the same lofty intellectual plane, the original Michael Crowley published a response whose *New Republic* website link read: 'Michael Crichton, Jurassic Prick'. Such is the Real Literary World.

**Jo Fletcher** of Gollancz has been somewhat out of things: 'Just back online after (non-elective) laser eye surgery. Steve thinks I just wanted to be a rock-chick; I did enjoy the whole Ray-Bans in the dark thing, but let me tell you having lasers shot into your eyeball WHILE YOU ARE AWAKE is not the fun it's cracked up to be ... however, lump's gone, sight's restored and a month banned from reading anything particularly computer screens has left me with an enormous backlog of emails. If you use this in *Ansible*, please carry my apology to all those people who think I'm deliberately ignoring them ...' (2 January)

**Margaret Mahy**, award-winning New Zealand author of children's and YA fantasies, has cancelled all her public appearances until further notice owing to ill-health. She was to be a guest of honour at the 2007 Australian national sf convention (Convergence) in June. [AIP]

**Terry Pratchett** remarked in a *Metro*.co.uk interview that fantasy has transcended the shackles of genre: 'It's been happening for years and years, it's now so mainstream, people don't think of it as fantasy any more. You could say it's disappearing as a genre. Once, fantasy and sci-fi were always at the back of the shop, like a VD clinic—those who needed to know where to find it. I went out of genre in the mid-1990s because every Discworld book was getting to No. 1 and I was getting readers who wouldn't shop at Forbidden Planet. I found out I had a bunch of fans in a convent. The nuns sent a young lady to get their books signed at a signing because they couldn't come themselves.' (15 December) [LW] I suspect that 'sci-fi' was supplied by the interviewer. A local Reading paper recently interviewed me by email, and although I avoided using such terms as 'sci-fi', 'obsession', 'overwhelming passion', 'sci-fi', etc., the reporter kindly corrected all these omissions.

**J.K. Rowling** confounded all the fans who'd placed their bets on the unconvincingly rumoured *Harry Potter and the Mystic Kettle of Nackledirk*, and announced that (as widely predicted by no one at all) book seven would in fact be *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The bookies are accepting bets on which character(s) will die...

### Contento

24 Jan • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Paul Cornell.

31 Jan • **Farthing Readings**, Nell of Old Drury pub, 29 Catherine St, London, WC2B 5JS (opposite Theatre Royal, Drury Lane). 7.30pm for 8pm. With Wendy Bradley and a selection of the magazine authors.

2-4 Feb • **D'Zenove Convention** (filk), Basingstoke Hilton, Basingstoke. £27 reg; £26 electronic publications only; £13 unwaged. No detectable postal address. See [www.contabile.org.uk](http://www.contabile.org.uk).

POSTPONED 3 Feb • **David Stewart Memorial Event**, in or near Dublin: owing to delays in cataloguing David's books for the intended charity auction, this will probably happen at Octocon in October.

17 Feb [date correction] • **Picocon 24**, Imperial College, London. 10am-7pm/8pm. Approx £8 reg, £6 concessions, £4 ICFS members. Contact ICFS, Beit Quad, Prince Consort Rd, London, SW7 2BB.

23-25 Feb • **Redemption 07** (B7/B5), Hinckley Island Hotel, Leics. £55 to 9 Feb, when advance booking closes; £60 at door. Day: £35, £40 at door. Under 18s £15; day £10. Under 3s free. Contact 26 Kings Meadow View, Wetherby, LS22 7FX.

3-4 March • **Microcon**, Exeter University. Further details TBA.

6-9 Apr • **Contemplation** (Eastercon), Crowne Plaza Hotel, Trinity St, Chester, CH1 2BD. £45 reg, £30 unwaged, £20 supp/junior (13-17), £5 child (5-12), £1 infant (under 5). Hotel rooms £85/night double or twin, £75 single. Also slightly posher 'executive' rooms at £20/night extra. Contact 18 Letchworth Ave, Feltham, Middlesex, TW14 9RY.

3-5 Aug • **MeCon 10**, Queen's Elms Centre, 78 Malone Rd, Belfast. Now £16 reg (£14 unwaged). 115 Malone Rd, Belfast, BT9 6SP.

16 Jun - 30 Sep • **The Art of Josh Kirby**, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. The first retrospective exhibition of paintings by the much loved genre artist Josh Kirby (1928-2001).

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us.** Australia eagerly welcomes its own sf pay-tv channel: 'Sci-fi fans are strange animals. Their natural habitat is their parents' basement and their traditional pastime is watching their favourite shows on DVD. But on December 1 all this changed. Now we can watch our favourite shows on Foxtel too. That's right, my pasty-faced friends [... etc, etc, "sci-fi geek", etc ...] So grab your Klingon costume, put up an "I believe" poster in your parents' basement and veg out. The truth is out there.' (Alice Clarke, *The Age*, 7 December) [FMCH]

**R.I.P.** *Joseph Barbera* (1911-2006), US cartoonist who as half of Hanna-Barbera created *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *Scooby-Doo* and other notable animated tv series, died on 18 December. He was 95. • *Peter Boyle* (1935-2006), US actor whose best known genre role was the Monster in *Young Frankenstein* (1974), and who won a 1996 Emmy for his guest appearance in *The X-Files*, died on 12 December aged 71. [GW] • *Hardin 'Jack' Burnley* (1911-2006), US comics artist who was the first person other than their creators to draw Superman, Batman and Robin, died on 19 December; he was 95. [PDF] • *Jaye Carr* (pen-name of Margery Krueger, 1940-2006), US author of *Leviathan's Deep* (1979) and other sf novels, died on 20 December aged 66. [SFWA] • *David H. Charney* (1923-2006), US fan who was active in New York in the late 1930s (Science Fiction League, Fantasy Circle) and published two sf stories in 1973, died on 12 December aged 83. [SJ] • *Richard (Dick) Eney* (1932-2006), US fan active ever since since the 1950s, who edited/published the landmark *Fancylopedia II* (1959) and was fan GoH at the 1984 Worldcon, died on 22 December following a stroke. [MAW] He was 74; US state records and his own brother confirm a birth year of 1932 despite his later preference for 1937. • *Chris Hayward* (1925-2006), US tv writer who worked on *Rocky and Bullwinkle* and co-created *The Munsters*, died on 20 November aged 81. [SJD] • *Patricia Matthews* (1927-2006), author who also published novels as by Pat A. Brisco and Laura Wylie, died on 7 December; she was 79. [SFWA] • *Martin Nodell* (1915-2006), US comics artist who invented and drew

the original 1940 *Green Lantern*, died on 9 December at age 91. [PDF] ● *Philippa Pearce* (1920-2006), UK children's novelist best known for her classic timeslip fantasy *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), died on 21 December. She was 86 and had been a popular figure at conferences. Though it's non-fantastic, your editor is also very fond of her first novel *Minnow on the Say* (1955)... ● *Virgil Utter* (1925-2006), US fan and critic who contributed sf biographies to the Galactic Central bibliography series, died on 3 October aged 81. [SFWA] ● *Ursula Moray Williams* (1911-2006), UK children's author whose fantasies included *Gobolino the Witch's Cat* (1942), died on 17 October; she was 95. [JE]

**As Others See Us II.** Caryn James of the *New York Times* discusses P.D. James's book as well as the film: "The Children of Men" is not another of Ms. James's famed detective novels, and it is not, as it has sometimes sloppily been described, science fiction. It is a trenchant analysis of politics and power that speaks urgently to this social moment, a 14-year-old work that remains surprisingly pertinent. [...] In both forms "Children of Men," which opened Monday, is a story of redemption, set in England just decades in the future (the film takes place in 2027), when women have inexplicably lost the ability to become pregnant.' (28 December) [NH] No nasty future speculation there!

**The Fast Show.** The *Guardian* list of the top 100 UK bestsellers ('fastsellers') for 2006 contains rather few genre titles. The most popular sf book of the year would seem to be the *Doctor Who Annual 2007* in 31st place, followed by Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* at 44. Further down we find Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife* (61) closely pursued by Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The End* (62), *The Beano Annual* (64) and *Hannah the Happy Ever Fairy: Rainbow Magic* (65) by Daisy Meadows (who?). Slower-moving genre work forms another little cluster in the 80s: J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (80) plus two Terry Pratchetts, *Wintersmith* (82) and *Thud!* (84). By way of perspective, the great Dan Brown has no fewer than five books positioned higher than all the above.

**Science Department.** BBC website coverage of the NASA moon-base plan led to a reader comment grounded in the legendary scientific tradition of *Space 1999*: 'I feel space exploration is great, as is our amazing progress in science and technology, but erecting a facility on the moon is quite simply mad. It is playing with fire. Consider the incredible dependence of life on earth on the moon. The moon is responsible for the stability of this amazing planet. Suppose there is some accident on this facility or perhaps a mistake during construction that results in damaging the fragile satellite. That could destroy the stability of our planet. As if the American government isn't doing enough to contribute to our potential doom with their militarism, nuclear weapons and horrible record on climate, now they want to mess around with the moon. What is wrong with these people?' [PB]

**Publishers and Sinners.** Can any reader guess whom Marc Gascoigne of BL Publishing could possibly be talking about? 'Setting up a new science fiction imprint isn't all about the high concept stuff. As we get ready for the launch of Solaris next February, we're also learning lots about human nature. We had a manuscript sent over from A Notable American Agent for the third novel by one of his authors. When we rejected it on the grounds that her sales history was nowhere near strong enough for her future prospects, we were bemused to get this reply: "Well in that case, I'm going to resubmit it to you under a pseudonym.'" (*The Bookseller*, 8 December) [RD]

**Thog's Natural History Masterclass.** 'Swallows certainly sleep all winter. A number of them conglobulate together, by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water and lie in the bed of the river.' (Dr Samuel Johnson, quoting received wisdom)

**Random Fandom.** *Kim Huett's* memorial collection of fanzine writings by the late John Brosnan was delayed by hardware trouble but should appear Real Soon Now. ● *Las Vegas Fandom* may have affected the mind of A.A. Gill, whose in his new book *Assignments from Here and There* insists that the Las Vegas skyline 'looks like the cover of a schlock science-fiction novel'. [FS] ● *Jim Meadows* on A233: 'Noting the obit for Dave Cockrum—I'm not quite certain, but I think Cockrum also did some cartooning for fanzines. I remember his work appearing in the early 1970s, in very fanish fanzines of New York fans such as Arnie and Joyce Katz, rich brown, Bill Kunkel and others. [...] Also, I believe Cockrum did some professional illustration in the 70s for *Amazing* and *Fantastic* under Ted White's editorship.' *Confirmed by on-line bibliographies—Ed.* ● *Lloyd Penney*, relentless contributor to a million fanzine letter columns, underwent eye surgery for a detached retina on 5 December; he reports that all is well. ● *Andrew I. Porter*, founding editor of *SF Chronicle*, has been diagnosed with a cancerous ampullary

(bile-duct) lesion and awaits a date for major surgery. Prospects are good, the doctors say; fingers crossed for success and speedy recovery.

**As Others See Us III.** A temporally challenged publishing snippet: 'Fifteen years after his death, Philip K Dick is one of Hollywood's biggest ideas men [...] His publisher Gollancz is marking the 25th anniversary of his death with a new look for six key titles, which they hope will catapult him outside his core readership of science fiction fans.' (Alison Bone, *Guardian*, 16 December 2006) [AC] Strange that word of Dick's existence could spread beyond our hermetic, cultish circle. Who knows, one day he may be discovered by the academics... ● Among the 'most overrated' books of 2006: *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy (Picador). Critics loved it, but it is a slightly more earnest version of good genre fiction.' (Tyler Cowen, *Prospect* magazine, January 2007) [CL] And as we all know, even good genre fiction can't in a real sense be good.

**Eyeballs of Circumspection.** Some authors can take immense pains to avoid Thog's department of Eyeballs in the Sky: 'She just played with it [*a cigarette*] slowly, and then pointed a pair of grey eyes at me. I say a pair. I mean her pair. She didn't get a pair of someone else's out from a drawer and point them at me.' (Hugh Laurie, *The Gun Seller*, 1996) [MMcA] Thog stumbles offstage, cheated of his prey....

**Outraged Letters.** *Jo Fletcher* continues while Langford covers: 'If you're really short of text I can describe the ramming on of the plastic eye-poppie-out-thingie and the Ozzie nurse with the enormous specs who told me cheerily she wouldn't dream of having eye surgery just as the surgeon started swearing because my pupil wouldn't dilate properly for the iris recognition-thingie to do its bit, and the smell of burning eyeball ... on second thoughts, maybe not ...' ● *Stephen Gallagher* on A233 tv coverage: 'Oh, don't get me started. Working on *Eleventh Hour* was like having a window seat in a slow-motion zeppelin crash. Apparently if you insist on checking with your science consultant to determine what might feasibly happen in a given circumstance, that's "letting the tail wag the dog".' How I came to yearn for the scientific rigour of *Bugs*. ● *Steve Green* offers well-matured news: 'I wonder if J K Rowling's lawyers are aware of the movie *Troll*, wherein the youngster Harry Potter battles the eponymous magical beastie. The fact that it was released in 1986, four years before Ms Rowling began writing *HP* and *the Philosopher's Stone*, shouldn't prove too much of a problem.' ● *Simo* mourns the once well-loved UK comedian Charlie Drake (1925-2006), who died on 24 December aged 81, and 'actually had a little-known SF credit. He starred in an SF-themed revue at the London Palladium in 1963 entitled *The Man in the Moon*. I used to own an EP of this with a photo of CD in a space-suit. I should probably get out more.' ● *Jim Young* complains: 'You must stop publishing all these obituaries. It's giving people the horrible idea that they should ... stop living. Really, this business of time waiting for no one is just ridiculous; before you know it, we'll be declared First Fans, and then where will we be?'

**FAAn Awards.** The Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards ballot is on line at efanzines.com: vote via mail or email by 31 January 2007.

**The Dead Past.** *70 Years Ago:* the first true sf convention (in the sense of being pre-organized and using a public venue) was held in the Leeds Temperance Hall on Sunday 3 January 1937. Would-be writer Arthur C. Clarke was among the twenty or so fans and authors present, and so was Eric Frank Russell; inspirational messages sent by Olaf Stapledon, H.G. Wells and even John Russell Fearn were read out by the convention secretary. ● *30 Years Ago:* it was announced that the 1977 Eastercon had lost its venue owing to hotel problems and would be held in a different city.... (*Checkpoint* 78, January 1977).

**Group Gropes.** *Beer & Blake's* 7 meeting, 20 January: Old Joint Stock, 4 Temple Row West, Birmingham, B2 5NY, 12.30pm to 7pm.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Double Entendre.* 'Sternly, he kept his hands away from her. No sense making it harder than it was.' (Sheri S. Tepper, *After Long Silence* (aka *The Enigma Score*), 1987) [PB] ● *Storm in a Fishbowl Dept.* 'Judge Dee stretched out his hand to touch it, but the goldfish started an indignant uproar ...' (Robert van Gulik, *The Chinese Lake Murders*, 1960) ● *Dept of Astronomical Imagery.* 'The suns tumbled up into the mauve autumn sky like rollicking kittens.' (Jack Vance, *The Anome*, 1973) [LP] ● *Seasonal Fun Dept.* '... that binary with the involved planetary orbit that gave two winters for every summer ...' (Kenneth Bulmer, *The Earth Gods Are Coming*, 1960) [BA]

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