

# Ansible



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From **Dave Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU. <http://news.ansible.co.uk>. Fax 0705 080 1534. ISSN 0265-9816 (print) 1740-942X (e). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Bill Rotsler**. Available for SAE, Lessedrene, Temp or cauch.

## Men of the Ten Books

**Brian Aldiss** was on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* on 28 January, a mere quarter-century after his last appearance. From the BBC website: 'He is best known for pioneering, alongside JG Ballard, a new wave of British science fiction writing in the 1960s.' His luxury item: a banjo.

**Margaret Atwood** has warmed to her favourite example of sf: 'You can write well about giant squid that talk, and you can write poorly about giant squid that talk.' (Pacifica/KPFA radio, 11 January) [TM]

**J.G. Ballard** confirms a claim about his mid-1960s work which even the Ballard experts found hard to believe. Responding to an enthusiast who put the question, he explained: 'Yes, I did write a script for the BBC TV children's programme, *Jackanory*—I really wrote it for my children, who were keen viewers at the time.' [JMcN]

**David Eddings** burned down his garage and part of his office on 25 January, by throwing a lit piece of paper into spilt petrol to learn whether the latter was inflammable. It was. (*Nevada Appeal*) [PDF] The same report includes the sad news that, following a series of strokes, his wife and collaborator Leigh Eddings is currently unable to speak.

**Joe R. Lansdale** has won the 2007 World Horror Convention Grand Master Award, voted by a record turn-out of WHC members.

**Cormac McCarthy's** post-holocaust novel *The Road* may not have made the Clarke Award shortlist but is up for the US National Book Critics Circle fiction award. NBCC biography nominees include Julie Phillips's *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*.

**Chris Priest** enjoyed another small brush with fame: 'The *Prestige* got two nominations for Oscars: Cinematography and Set Design. While I might have preferred a nomination in the little-known category Best Adaptation of a Novel By Someone Living in Hastings, those two will do.' Several other genre films picked up 2007 Oscar nominations, including *Children of Men* with three and *Pan's Labyrinth* with six.

**Malcolm Wickes**, UK science minister, suggested that our schools should teach science via 'a chunk of *Doctor Who* and Billie Piper' rather than boring old textbooks. (*Sunday Telegraph*, 7 January) [JY]

**Oscar Wilde** has been honoured with an appearance on a British stamp issued on 9 January ... that is, he's one of many background figures on the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* sleeve, included in the Beatles commemorative set. Also present are Edgar Allan Poe and (least likely choice for philatelic immortality) Aleister Crowley. [JE]

## Constuprate

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

23-25 Feb • **Redemption 07** (multimedia sf), 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.

28 Feb • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Robert Holdstock.

2 Mar • **BFS Open Night**, Ye Olde Cock, 22 Fleet St, London.

3-4 Mar • **Microcon**, Devonshire House, Exeter University. GoH: Jasper Fforde, others. £7 at door; students £5; EU sf soc members free.

10-11 Mar • **P-Con 4**, Wynn's Hotel, Dublin. €25/£20 reg. Contact c/o Yellow Brick Rd, 8 Bachelor's Walk, Dublin 8, Ireland; UK c/o Dave Lally, 64 Richborne Terrace, London, SW8 1AX.

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. Advance booking closes 22 March. Hotel rooms £85/night double/twin, £75 single; 'executive' rooms £20/night extra. Contact 18 Letchworth Ave, Feltham, Middlesex, TW14 9RY.

2 May • **Clarke Award Ceremony**, London—by invitation. Held in conjunction with and on the opening night of ...

2-6 May • **Sci-Fi London Film Festival**. Contact FestivalBiz, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John St, London, EC1V 4PY. 020 7871 4555.

19-22 Jun • **SFF SF Criticism Masterclass**, U of Liverpool. £180 reg (rooms extra). Enquire by 28 Feb to farah dot sf at gmail dot com.

21-23 Sep • **Eurocon 2007**, Valby Medborgerhus, Copenhagen, Denmark. Rates to 1 Aug 07: DKK150, £15, €22.50, \$24, NOK165, SEK 195. Sterling to UK agent Dave Lally (64 Richborne Tee, London, SW8 1AX), but you should still fill in the form at [www.eurocon2007.dk](http://www.eurocon2007.dk).

6 Oct • **Satellite 1** (50th anniversary of first artificial satellite), Campanile Hotel, Tunnel St, Glasgow. £15 reg, £5 supp or child (5-15), £1 infant (0-4). Contact Flat 3/2, 132 W Princes St, Glasgow, G4 9DB.

6-10 Aug 08 • **Denvention 3** (66th Worldcon), Denver, CO, USA. Artist GoH now announced: Rick Sternbach. \$130 reg until 31 March 2007. Contact Denvention, PO Box 1349, Denver, CO 80201, USA.

## Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us**. Patrick Ness hopes that Tricia Sullivan will yet rise from the gutter: 'How frustrating to be a great writer who happens to work in sci-fi. For every Jeff Noon or Neal Stephenson who breaks out to wider arenas, there's a Tricia Sullivan or a Jeff Vandermeer stuck on the shelves in that bit of the bookstore where most of you never wander. Hearteningly, Sullivan may be nearing escape velocity, and about time, too.' (*Guardian*, 20 Jan) [SN] Ness's review concludes: 'Be brave. Step into the sci-fi section. You can wear a floppy hat.' Stephen Baxter muses: 'I'm intrigued by the floppy hat; what can he mean? And I couldn't help noticing the footnote that Ness's own new book is *Topics About Which I Know Nothing*; evidently a weighty tome.'

**Arthur C. Clarke Award**. Finalists were announced at a select and boozy Soho pub gathering on 20 January: Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *End of the World Blues*; M. John Harrison, *Nova Swing*; Lydia Millet, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*; Jan Morris, *Hav*; Adam Roberts, *Gradisil*; Brian Stableford, *Streaking*. ACCA prize money has been boosted to ... £2007! Administrator Tom Hunter writes: 'We've received a fantastic amount of positive response from people up to and following the announcement of this year's shortlist, and I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone for their messages and continuing support of the award.'

**Magazine Stuff**. Further woes for DNA Publications (*SF Chronicle*, *Absolute Magnitude*, etc): the editor of *Fantastic*, Edward J. McFadden, has resigned because 'DNA Publications, Inc. has not maintained a reasonable publishing schedule for *Fantastic Stories* in some time.' Meanwhile, Braveworlds.com reported a Virginia Police Dept 'Official Fraud Investigation' into alleged non-fulfilment of subscriptions to DNA's *KISS* magazine, the rock group's official quarterly. It later emerged that the Virginia Police have no jurisdiction, since the original complaint came from Canada: they are passing information to the US Postal Inspector's office, which is investigating. • *Weird Tales* is being redesigned and editorially reshuffled, with George Scithers moving upstairs as Editor Emeritus and Darrell Schweitzer sideways to write the nonfiction departments; a new fiction editor will be appointed. • *SFX* has instructed its staff and 'freelance monkeys' to write funnier, geekier and 'really anal' material. Should I draft my next column in Klingon?

**BSFA Awards**. 2007 shortlists: NOVEL Liz Williams, *Darkland*; Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *End of the World Blues*; Roger Levy, *Icarus*; James Morrow, *The Last Witchfinder*; M. John Harrison, *Nova Swing*. • SHORT Ian McDonald, 'The Djinn's Wife' (*Asimov's* 6/06); Ken MacLeod, *The Highway Men*; Benjamin Rosenbaum, 'The House Beyond Your Sky' (*Strange Horizons*); Margo Lanagan, 'The Point of Roses' (*Black Juice*); Alastair Reynolds, 'Signal to Noise', (*Zima Blue*); Elizabeth Bear, 'Sounding' (*Strange Horizons*). • ARTWORK Fangorn, *Angelbot*, (cover: *Time Pieces* ed. Ian Whates); 'Vertebrate Graphics', *Farthing 2* cover; Fahrija Velic, *Droid* (cover: IZ2006); Alexander Preuss, *The Return to Abalakin*; William Li, *Ring of the Gods* (cover: *Holland SF* 226). • NON-FICTION Paul Kincaid & Andrew M. Butler, ed.; *The Arthur C. Clarke Award: A Critical Anthology*; Justine Larbalestier, *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*; Paul Gravett, *Great British Comics*; Julie Phillips, *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*; Farah Mendlesohn, ed., *Polder: A Festschrift for John Clute*

and Judith Clute. Winners will be announced at Eastercon in Chester.

**As Others See Us II.** Film director Paul Verhoeven bewails his exile to the ghetto as a side-effect of the critically execrated *Showgirls* (1996): 'After that they would only let me direct science fiction, not normal films ...' (*Guardian* interview, 12 January) [PT]

**Philip K. Dick Award** shortlist: Andrea Hairston, *Mindscape*; Elizabeth Bear, *Carnival*; Chris Moriarty, *Spin Control*; Nina Kiriki Hoffman, *Catalyst*; Tony Ballantyne, *Recursion*; Mark Budz, *Idolon*; Justina Robson, *Living Next Door to the God of Love*. Winner to be announced 6 April. [GVG] Can anyone explain the ordering of that list (as in the official release)? *Gordon Van Gelder*: 'Ha ha, wouldn't you like to know!'

**Culture Spot.** '... I was reminded of a scene in the science-fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451*, by Kurt Vonnegut, in which a literate culture has been destroyed.' (Suzanne Fields, *Insight on the News*, 3/7/2000) [RB]

**R.I.P.** *Desmond Briscoe* (1925-2006), UK composer and sound engineer who co-founded the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and scored *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958), died on 7 December aged 81. [JE] ● *Yvonne De Carlo* (1922-2007) Canadian-born actress who played Lily in *The Munsters* (tv 1964-66 and two spinoff films), died on 8 January. She was 84. [BB/GW] ● *Tudor Gates*, (1930-2007), UK screenwriter who scripted *Barbarella* and the Hammer lesbian vampire movies *Vampire Lovers*, *Lust for a Vampire* and *Twins of Evil*, died on 14 January. [GW] ● *Joe Gill* (1919-2006), US writer who scripted Charlton comics for 30 years (*Captain Atom*, *The Blue Beetle*, etc), died in December aged 87. [PDF] ● *John Heath-Stubbs* (1918-2006), UK poet awarded the Queen's Medal in 1973, died on December 26; he was 88. Steve Sneyd writes: 'One of his best-known works was the 101 page Arthurian epic poem "Artorius" (1973). His Romanized Arthur encounters multicultural myth/legend figures within a Zodiac pattern of 12 books ... e.g. Anubis in the Otherworld and classical Muses as well as the more traditional Celtic entities.' ● *Steve Krantz* (1923-2007), US producer of animated tv series—*The Marvel Superheroes* (195 episodes) and *Spider-Man*—plus the cult film *Fritz the Cat* (1972), died on 4 January aged 83. [PDF] ● *Carlo Ponti* (1912-2007), Italian-born producer of over 150 films, died on 10 January aged 94. His genre work included *Ulysses* (1955), *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973), *Gawain and the Green Knight* (1973), and *Whisky and Ghosts* (1976). [SG] ● *Liz Renay* (1926-2007), US cult actress who appeared in *Blackenstein* (1973) and whose final film was the memorably titled *Mark of the Astro-Zombies* (2002), died on 22 January; she was 80. [PDF] ● *Iwao Takamoto* (1925-2007), US animator (latterly VP at Warner Bros Animation) who created the *Scooby-Doo* characters and many others, died on 8 January aged 81. [BBC] ● *Robert Anton Wilson* (1932-2007), US novelist and anarchist philosopher who gloried in the tatty complexities of conspiracy theories—most famously in the *Illuminatus!* trilogy (1975), written with Robert Shea—died on 11 January. He was 74, and had been gravely ill for many months; friends and fans had raised money to save him from eviction (see A231). [GW] His last weblog post, on 6 January, ended: 'Please pardon my levity, I don't see how to take death seriously. It seems absurd.'

**As Others See 24.** 'I knew it!' gibbers Niall Harrison: 'I knew 24 would turn into sf eventually.' The nuclear strike on [Season Six spoiler hastily avoided] led Townhall.com pundit Hugh Hewitt to draw the line between fiction and, er, fiction: 'The key question is whether the drama is a bit of absurd science fiction, or the projection of a not-so-distant future, not in its particulars, but in its awful core depiction.' (22 Jan)

**Outraged Letters.** *John Clute*: 'Was a bit perturbed to see that this year's Clarke Award shortlist omitted two pretty important titles from 2006, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Thomas Pynchon's exuberant and exorbitant *Against the Day*. I gather both were left off because their publishers either refused or failed to deliver reading copies in time for the judges to make their decisions easily, and that each book was deemed ineligible because of this refusal or failure. One's sympathy for the plight of the Clarke and its judges notwithstanding, it does seem odd that books that (on the basis of very extensive review coverage) would seem to be plausible candidates for shortlisting were in fact not considered for reasons extrinsic to their merit. What the Clarke must be about—what importantly it is seen by most of us to be about—is the book itself. Nothing else. Really, nothing else.' ● *David Garnett* reminisces: 'I was talking with Bram/Derek Stokes in Dark They Were And Golden-Eyed, and this was his first shop in Bedfordbury, so it was around—er—1970. In walked this bloke who was obviously not one of the regular clientele. Suit and tie, briefcase, quite old, must have been in his 40s. "Have you got a book called *Pavane*?" he asked. So he buys the Keith Roberts novel and off he goes. It was Magnus Magnusson. Now that he's dead, he can be outed as a (presumably one-off) sf fan....'

● *Mike Moorcock* on A234: 'I've complained more than once to editors who translate my preferred "sf" into "sci-fi", but of course without satisfaction. My piece on Pynchon had some of the references to sf writers removed but at least was allowed to make pretty much the same point as Terry [Pratchett]'s—that sf techniques are these days as much part of the mainstream as any other. I also mentioned *Greybeard* as a far superior book to *Children of Men*. Apparently, it's not a bad movie, thanks mostly to the director. Often the case. Though I've never forgotten George Melly's review of *The Final Programme*—he thought the director had taken a "sci fi novel" and made it funny, rather than taking what was certainly intended as a funny book and making it stupid. The funny stuff in the movie was added by me and the actors (ad libbing) once I pointed out that it was not intended to be a sci-fi drama.... / So I was wrong about Harry going through his punk phase in *Hairy Pooter* and the *Gobbet of Phlegm*. Ah, well. That'll teach me to lay heavy bets on Captain Sensible's advice.'

**C.o.A.** *Peter Roberts*, Lower Pen-y-lan, Glasbury-on-Wye, Breconshire (Powys), HR3 5NT, Wales.

**As Others See Us Yet Again.** No mockery but just the sad truth, in a review of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*: 'This may help to explain why the post-apocalyptic mode has long attracted writers not generally considered part of the science fiction tradition. It's one of the few subgenres of science fiction, along with stories of the near future (also friendly to satirists), that may be safely attempted by a mainstream writer without incurring too much damage to his or her credentials for seriousness. The anti-science fiction prejudice among some readers and writers is so strong that in reviewing a work of science fiction by a mainstream author a charitable critic will often turn to words such as "parable" or "fable" to warm the author's bathwater a little, and it is an established fact that a preponderance of religious imagery or an avowed religious intent can go a long way toward mitigating the science-fictional taint ...' (Michael Chabon, *New York Review of Books*, 15 Feb)

**Random Fandom.** *Mike Cobby* reveals: 'In keeping with my detailed campaign for World Dominationism, I will be standing in the local elections in May as Liberal Democrat candidate for the ward of Govan in Glasgow. Some may be interested to learn that the Govan area has been somewhat Labour voting since roughly the Upper Cretaceous but am I daunted?' ● *Andrew I. Porter*'s 'Pancreaticoduodenectomy' operation on 19 January (see A234) was successful; he came home on the 28th and now, for safety's sake, expects 4-6 months of chemotherapy.

**SF in the News.** The *New Yorker* profile of al-Qaeda spokesman Adam Gadahn (the first American since 1952 to be indicted for treason) homes in on the signs of deviancy he displayed when a teenager. Not only was he a death-metal fan, but he read Piers Anthony's sf novel *Firefly* ... 'about an alien predator that puts people into a sexual trance, sucks out their protoplasm, and kills them with bile.' Gadahn's review of the book, according to the friend who recommended it: 'Man, that's twisted.' (Raffi Khatchadourian, *New Yorker*, 22 January) [MMW]

**Fanfudery.** *GUFF*: the 2007 race is from Europe to Convergence 2, the Australian Natcon. Candidates should send platforms, £10/€15 bond and names of 3 European and two Australasian nominators, to Pat McMurray (pccmurray at yahoo co uk) or Damien Warman (dmw at pobox com). Ballot to appear in mid-February, so don't delay. ● *TAFF*: Steve Stiles's long-awaited 1968 trip report, *Harrison Country*, should be published this month! [RB] Order from the administrators: £3.55 post free from Bridget Bradshaw, 103 Rustat Road, Cambridge, CB1 3QG; or \$6 from Suzanne Tompkins, PO Box 25075, Seattle, WA 98165, USA.

**Group Gropes.** *Herts Fans*: open house on Saturday following the first Thursday each month, 6pm to midnight(ish). Keith Armstrong-Bridges, 75 Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6SH.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Insights About Telephone Wires*. 'The overhead wires gave the illusion of shelter, but in fact offered no protection at all from the rain, a great big useless umbrella.' (Steven Sivell, *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, 2006) ● *High Invective Dept*. 'The High Sister struck her across the face. Her eyes were like burning black coals. "You weak, pathetic, little twit!" she hissed.' (Steve White, *Demon's Gate*, 2004) [MC] ● *Eyeballs in the Sky*. 'It was as though his eyes were two planets that had suddenly broken free from gravity and got whirled off—victims of centrifugal force.' (R.L. Fanthorpe, *Out of the Darkness*, 1960)

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