

# ansible



## Ansible 238 May 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 (e). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Bill Rotsler**. Available for SAE, mnoui oil, agania root or hkpersia.

**Clarke Award.** Once again sf people gathered in the acoustic hell of the bar at the Apollo Cinema, Lower Regent St, prior to the Clarke presentation on 2 May—opening event of the Sci-Fi London film festival. Spooning up our free ice-cream in the auditorium, we learned that M. John Harrison had won the fancy bookend and £2007 cheque for *Nova Swing*. Fred Clarke was present, and his daughter Angie Edwards marvelled that she'd seen Paul Kincaid (still basking in the warm glow of being an ex-ACCA administrator) smile. The judges—one of whom said 'Langford, you dog!'—and the current ACCA organizers Paul Billinger and Tom Hunter didn't look particularly harrowed. General good cheer.

**Contemplation.** A sunny mood also prevailed at the 2007 Eastercon in Chester. No one seemed bothered by the omission of compulsory set-pieces, like Cyberdrome or the Masquerade, from this hastily-put-together replacement convention; having lots of restaurants and touristy bits close at hand also made a refreshing change from, well, Hinckley.

• **BSFA Awards.** Novel: Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *End of the World Blues*. Short: Ian McDonald, 'The Djinn's Wife' (*Asimov's* 6/06). Artwork: Fangorn, *Angelbot* (cover of *Time Pieces* ed. Ian Whates). • **Eastercon 2009:** the Bradford LXcon bid was unopposed. Exciting details below!

### The War in the Air

**John Clute** thought fast when returning from America the other day: 'I usually tote some books in my carry-on bag, and had planned to keep with me a copy I'd just bought of Wilson TUCKER's *Time Bomb* as back up reading. But had a sudden teeny BigThink about the savants of Homeland Security at the security gate, and stashed this obvious Terrorist Manual in my checked luggage. We all got here safely.' Phew!

**Cormac McCarthy** won the Pulitzer fiction prize for his post-apocalyptic science fiction novel (though of course we mustn't call it that) *The Road*; additionally, Ray Bradbury received a special Pulitzer citation as '... an unmatched author of science fiction and fantasy.'

**Germaine Greer** refutes John Lauritsen's theory of *Frankenstein*—that a great novel couldn't possibly have been written by self-educated Mary Shelley, so Percy Bysshe must be the real author—by ingeniously arguing that it's such a lousy book that Mary obviously *did* write it. (*Guardian*, 9 April) [MMW] Such are the intricacies of feminist literit.

**Joyce Carol Oates** makes the traditional discovery that sf is OK if only it's written by *the right kind of people*: 'Long the province of genre entertainments—science fiction, dystopian fantasy, post-apocalyptic movies—the future has been boldly explored in recent years by such writers as P.D. James ("The Children of Men"), John Updike ("Toward the End of Time"), Margaret Atwood ("The Handmaid's Tale," "Oryx and Crake"), Doris Lessing ("Mara and Dann"), and Cormac McCarthy ("The Road"). Now comes a grim prophetic fable by the much admired British writer Jim Crace ... (*New Yorker* review, 30 April) [NH]

**Philip Reeve** was asked his reaction to the horror of *Mortal Engines* being 'put in the sci fi section. How do you feel about the label, do you think it's a derogatory term?' His reply: 'Well, for a long time I avoided it, but I've started to embrace it because I'm quite proud to be considered a sci fi author as it's so unfashionable. It's strange that people worry about boys not reading, even though the one genre that boys are likely to be interested in is dismissed as garbage, often by the same people. I think it's time to stand out and be counted. I also think sci fi should be aware of its own absurdity.' (*Literary Review*, April) [JoH]

**Mitt Romney**, currently seeking the US Republican presidential nomination, caused much amusement in and out of sf circles by announcing that his favourite novel is L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*. (on Fox News, 29 April) Some deft spin-doctoring followed: 'Romney spokesman Eric Fehrstrom said: "Battlefield Earth is pretty good science fiction. It's about Earth being ruled by an alien race, sort of the way the Democrats are running Congress.'" (*Boston Herald*, 2 May) *Slate* coverage included a subtly apposite quote from *BE* itself: 'What in the name of diseased crap are you reading?' (John Dickerson, 2 May). [CH] Meanwhile, Mr Romney decided he'd meant that *BE* was his favourite sf novel, and that his real favourite fiction was *Huckleberry Finn*.

**Bryan Talbot's** American tour for *Alice in Sunderland* had its moments: 'The signing at Jim Hanley's Universe in New York was nearly cancelled—a guy jumped from the 60th floor of the Empire State Building just a couple of hours before. He hit a ledge but one of his legs made it to the sidewalk right outside the store and the police closed off the street. Fortunately they'd cleaned it up and the store reopened in time for the signing. We were shown photos of the errant (and extremely grisly) leg by the store staff! It happened on Friday 13th.'

**Kurt Vonnegut's** obituaries included several 'As Others See Us' moments. The BBC noted that *Player Piano*, 'led to the author being dismissed as a science fiction writer.' Nevertheless he did what Wells, Huxley and Orwell couldn't: 'Some critics said he had invented a new literary type, infusing the science-fiction form with humor and moral relevance and elevating it to serious literature.' (*New York Times*, 12 April) [CRM/NR] And James Rosen of Fox News was not afraid to put the boot into a safely dead political foe: 'His life's work, 14 novels, short stories, plays, essays, left wing screeds, and random musings was much too quirky, too filled with scatological humor, cosmic coincidences, and self admitted sci-fi mumbo jumbo for him to have enjoyed stately induction into the great pantheon of American writers.' (16 April) [JaH]

### Concordial

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

23 May • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Star pub, West Halkin Mews, London, SW1. 6pm on; fans present from 5pm. With Stephen Hunt.

3-5 Aug • **Mecon 10**, Queen's Elms Village, Malone Rd, Belfast. GoH Iain M. Banks. £18 reg, £20 at the door. Contact 115 Malone Rd, Belfast, BT9 6SP.

10-12 Aug • **Recombination/HarmUni III** (Unicon 21/RPG/filk), New Hall, Cambridge. *Now £28 reg*; under-18s half price. Contact: 1 Mays Way, Cambridge, CB4 1UB.

15-22 Sep • **Milford Writers' Conference**, Trigonos Centre, Snowdonia. Published authors only. Contact Liz Williams, Homeway House, 40 Westhay Rd, Meare, Glastonbury, Somerset, BA6 9TL.

13-14 Oct • **Birmingham International Comics Show**, Millennium Point, Curzon St, Birmingham, B4 7XG. £10 reg; day £6 Sat, £5 Sun; child £6 or £3/day. Contact: as above.

21-24 Mar 08 • **Orbital** (Eastercon), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London. *Now £55 reg*; £20 sup or junior (12-17), £5 child (5-11), £1 infant. Contact 8 Windmill Close, Epsom, Surrey, KT17 3AL. Credit card bookings: www.orbital2008.org.

26-29 Jun 08 • **ConRunner 2008** (conrunning), Britannia Hotel, Wolverhampton. £25 reg to 30 Jun; £30 to 31 Dec; £35 to 31 Mar 08; £40 to 21 Jun; £50 at door. Day rate £25. Contact: 56 Jackmans Place, Letchworth G.C., Herts, SG6 1RH.

22-25 Aug 08 • **Discworld Convention 2008**, Hilton Metropole, Birmingham (NEC). £45 reg or £30 concessions until 1 June 2007 online (www.dwcon.org) or 15 June by post. Online registration closes 1 August 2008—or earlier if the membership limit is reached. Contact PO Box 4101, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, BA4 5XD.

10-13 Apr 09 • **LXcon** (Eastercon), Cedar Court Hotel, Bradford. GoH Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Tim Powers, Dirk Maggs. FGoH Mary & Bill Burns. £35 reg, £25 concessions/YA (18-25), £15 junior (13-17), £5 child (5-12), infants free. Rates to rise 'in the summer'. Contact 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us.** Christopher Hitchens knows our darkest secret: 'The great drawback of sci-fi is the dearth of sex from which it compels itself to suffer (I realized when reading Leader's book that this is why I have never bothered with the genre) ...' (review of Zachary Leader's *The Life Of Kingsley Amis* in *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 2007) [BNM]

**More Awards.** Philip K.Dick: Chris Moriarty, *Spin Control*. • **BAFTAs:** *Hogfather* beat *Doctor Who* for Best Visual Effects. • **Edgars**

(mystery): Matthew Graham's script for the first instalment of *Life on Mars* won Best TV Episode Teleplay. ● *Sidewise* (alt-history) long form: Robert Conroy, 1862; Paul Park, *The Tourmaline*; Charles Stross, *The Family Trade*, *The Hidden Family*, and *The Clan Corporate*; Harry Turtle-dove, *The Disunited States of America*; Jo Walton, *Farthing*. Short form: Stephen Baxter, 'The Pacific Mystery' (*The Mammoth Book of Extreme Science Fiction*); Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, 'O Pioneer' (*Paradox* 9); Gardner Dozois, 'Counterfactual' (*F&SF* 6/06); Chris Floyd, 'History Lesson' (*Moscow Times* 2/06); Martin Gidron, 'Palestina' (*Interzone* 6/06); Brian Stableford, 'The Plurality of Worlds' (*Asimov's* 8/06); Andrew Tisbert, 'The Meteor of the War' (*Paradox* 9).

**R.I.P. Massimo Belardinelli** (1938-2007), Italian cartoonist who was in the original 2000AD team (*Ace Trucking*, *Dan Dare* revival, *Slaine*), died in March aged 68. [GW] ● **Christopher 'Jamie' Bishop** (1971-2007), US academic who created digital cover art for two books by his father Michael Bishop, was killed in the 16 April shootings at Virginia Tech (where he taught German classes). He was 35. All sympathy to Mike & Jeri Bishop. ● **Bob Clark** (1941-2007), US director whose films included *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* (1972), *Dead of Night* (1974) and *Black Christmas* (1974), died in a car crash on 4 April; he was 65. [SG] ● **Paul E. Erdman** (1932-2007), Canadian writer whose bestselling thrillers included near-future borderline sf like *The Last Days of America* (1981), died on 23 April at age 74. [PDF] ● **Johnny Hart** (1931-2007), US cartoonist famed for *BC* and *The Wizard of ID*, died on 7 April aged 75; the *Wizard of ID* co-creator **Brant Parker** (1920-2007) died on 15 April aged 86. ● **Dave Martin** (?1934-2007), co-author with Bob Baker of eight 1970s *Dr Who* scripts—one introducing the dread K9—died earlier this year; he was 72. [CM] ● **Gerald Perkins** (1944-2007), US author of sf and anthropomorphic (furry fandom) stories, died on 30 March aged 62. [EV] ● **Bobby 'Boris' Pickett** (1938-2007), US pop singer who imitated Boris Karloff for his solitary hit 'Monster Mash', died on 25 March aged 69. [GW] ● **George Sewell** (1924-2007), UK actor whose long career included roles in *UFO* (1970-3) and *Dr Who* (1988), died on 1 April aged 82. [KF] ● **Ralph A. Sperry** (1944-2007), US sf author whose novel was *Status Quotient: The Carrier* (1981), died on 6 April. [SFWA] ● **Kurt Vonnegut** (1922-2007), who should need no introduction, died on 11 April at age 84. Though often deceptively lightweight and laconic, his best sf was hard to forget: *Player Piano* (1951), *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) ... Somehow, despite verbally distancing himself from 'the file drawer labeled "Science Fiction" [...] since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal', Vonnegut kept returning to the genre and his invented sf author Kilgore Trout, right up to his final satirical novel *Timequake* (1997). Media obituary coverage has been extensive. ● **Dick Vosburgh** (1929-2007), comedy writer and broadcaster who voiced Captain Larry Dart in the *Space Patrol* puppet series (ABC/Rediffusion 1963-4; US *Planet Patrol*), died on 18 April; he was 77. [PD] ● **Leslie Waller** (1923-2007), US author who novelized *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and is said to have co-invented the graphic novel with Arnold Drake in 1950, died on 29 March aged 83. [PDF]

**As Others See Us II.** From a list of droll words allegedly used in the book trade: "Gatsby" (n.) the twice-weekly enquiry about the possibility of a new book by Anne McCaffrey / Raymond Feist / Robert Rankin from a sad bastard.' (*The Bookseller*, 30 Mar) [JC] ● Interview with Geek Comedy Tour 3000, 'a seven-member stand-up troupe that works conventions dedicated to anime, sci-fi, video games, and other nerdy avocations. [...] The troupe's members cite a few downsides to working conventions: overenthusiastic fans, bad homoerotic anime, and hygiene-impaired attendees. "That's one of the hazards of doing geek comedy," says member Jake Young. "A lot of B.O." (Josh Eiserike, *Washington City Paper*, 27 April) [MMW]

**Magazine Scene.** Two UK rivals to *SFX* have emerged: *SciFiNow* (Imagine Publishing) launched in April, and *Death Ray* (Blackfish Publishing) follows in May. The latter comes from Matt Bielby, who set up *SFX* for Future Publishing; also involved is Guy Haley, an *SFX* editor before he left for a stint at *White Dwarf*. Interesting times... ● Bob Guccione Jr is reportedly negotiating with his father about acquiring and relaunching *Omni*. ● *The Hub*, a UK mag which launched in December 2006 and produced two printed issues, switched to free weekly on-line publication in April: 'Despite almost selling out each issue we still operated at a loss.' See [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk) for details.

**Random Fandom.** ½r Cruttenden lost his whiskers at Eastercon: 'We raised £55 for the League of Fan Funds with the sponsored cheek-scalping.' ● **Nathan Marcus Field** was born to Alice and Dave Field on 23 April. [SG] ● **Steve Jeffery**, whose cartoon byline is 'esjay', wants it

known that he's *not* the notorious 'Essjay' who used fake academic credentials to bolster his authority as a Wikipedia editor. ● **Maureen Kincaid Speller** survived the Great Folkestone Earthquake of 28 April: 'Totally weird experience ... You haven't lived until you've driven up a street with bricks whistling past the window! My poor ward looks terrible. 73 uninhabitable houses at present. Place swarming with scaffolders.'

**As Others See Us III.** On the one hand, there are times when even the respectable phrase isn't right: 'It feels almost too confining to place [Zoran] Zivkovic's work in the category of speculative fiction, but until our limited language can generate a more befitting name for his genre, the classification will have to do.' (Dave Itzkoff, *NY Times*, 15 April) [CP] On the other hand ... 'Metamorphosis: sci-fi novella by Franz Kafka' (*Radio Times* listing for BBC7 *The Seventh Dimension*, 15 April) [SJJS]

**Small Press.** *Meisha Merlin Publishing* (USA) closes down this month owing to 'major distribution problems'. The definitive 'Virginia Edition' of Heinlein will continue elsewhere; it is rumoured (via SFWA) that all other book rights will be or have been reverted to authors.

**Outraged Letters.** *Petrea Mitchell* was reminded of David Drake's response to a nasty Charles Platt review by including, in various novels, 'cameos by idiotic, disgusting, or just plain dead characters named Platt. [...] I also just read *Variable Star*, in which a C. Platt dies unmourned, and our hero has to work out the best way to recycle him into the minimal ecosystem of the starship. I have no idea if Spider Robinson has something personal against Mr Platt too, or if he just wanted to join in the beating.' ● **Richard Nash** on the claimed non-sfness of a novel (see Stephen Baxter last issue): 'Just FYI, Soft Skull (the original, North American publisher of *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*) would never do that, we proudly embrace SF. That was effing Heinemann....'

**Fanfundery.** *GUFF*: Ang Rosin won the 2007 southbound race with a first-round majority, and will attend the Australian NatCon in June. 95 votes cast: Johan Anglemark 15, Steve Davies 18, Anna Davour 10, Ang Rosin 49, no pref 3. ● **JETS**: Chris O'Shea won an assisted passage to Nippon 2007, with 67 votes at round 4 of the counting: others who made it that far were Jim de Liscard (31) and Abi Brown (26). ● **TAFF**: there is an eastbound race to Orbital (Eastercon 2008). Candidates should provide 5 nominations (3 NA, 2 Euro), a 100-word platform and \$20 bond by 16 July. Send all this to the NA TAFF administrator: Suzanne Tompkins, PO Box 25075, Seattle, WA 98165, USA.

**As Others See Us IV.** More downplaying of the icky sf elements in a certain tv show, which in fact seems to be barely distinguishable from *The West Wing*: 'Battlestar Galactica. Less a science fiction series and more an innovative political thriller enlivened by the occasional intrusion of armour-plated war droids, *Battlestar's* intoxicating mix of gritty realism, high-calibre performances and intelligent scripting continues to impress.' (*Scotland on Sunday*, 22 April) [HB]

**C.o.A.** **Chuck Connor**, 64 Chelwood Ave, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 0RE. **Marlin Frenzel**, 654 E San Ysidro Blvd 331, San Ysidro, CA 92173, USA.

**The Douglas Adams Memorial Debate** was held on 3 May as part of the Sci-Fi London film festival. To ensure a properly balanced debate of such issues as 'does sci fi skew our understanding of science?', no detectable sf author, critic or scholar was included in the panel.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Equine Anatomy*. 'Terrence knew he would have to stop several times and pick out his mare's hooves, but at least it wouldn't be the thick, forelock-deep goop that could suck the shoes off a horse ...' (Raymond Feist, 'The Riftwar' in *Legends II*, 2003) [LG] ● *Neat Tricks Dept*. 'He kissed Bridget lightly on the cheek and there was an awkward moment as he pulled back while she leaned forward to kiss the other.' (John Darnton, *The Darwin Conspiracy*, 2005) [PB] ● *Dept of Lingering Heat*. 'It was hotter than Hamish thought it could get anywhere beyond a volcanic caldera.' (Kurt R.A. Giambastini, *Unraveling Time*, 2006) [PM] ● *Massage Dept*. 'Elizabeth crossed her legs and stroked Ariel's spine with a frown.' (David Weber, *Field of Dishonor*, 1994) [AC] ● *Dept of Chemical Arcana*. 'He wasn't a chemist, but he had spent a couple of years studying organic chemistry. Changing just one number or a couple of letters, he knew, could mean two very different compounds.' (Ian Smith, *The Blackbird Papers*, 2004) [PB] ● *Fortuitous Furniture Dept*. 'He was sitting on a chair which happened to be near him.' (John Brunner, *The Shockwave Rider*, 1975) [LH]

Ansible 238 © Dave Langford, 2007. Thanks to Paul Barnett, Hamish Bruce, Jonathan Cowie, ½r Cruttenden, Paul Di Filippo, Paul Dormer, Keith Freeman, Lisa Goldstein, Steve Green, John Hall, Jake Haney, Niall Harrison, Chris Henrich, Lyle Hopwood, Steve Jeffery, Barry N. Malzberg, Petrea Mitchell, Catherine R. Moore, Chris Moore, Carol Pinchetsky, Neil Rest, Jim Steel, Edd Vick, Gary Wilkinson, and our Hero Distributors: Rog Peyton (Brum Group), Janice Murray (N.America), SCIS, and Alan Stewart (Down Under). 4 May 07