

Ansible



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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: Sue Mason. Available for SAE or the inner secrets of —ing the —.

On the Beach at the Ritz

Brian Aldiss wrote to *The Times* about the advantages of denying that one writes sf: 'Had she [Margaret Atwood] neglected this strategy, there would have been for her no more literary festivals, no more reviews, no more appearances on BBC breakfast programmes. [...] It is a truth widely acknowledged that SF is not worth consideration by sane minds.' (16 October) 'Disgusted of Oxford' adds: 'Of course they cut my letter. The conversation with the ignorant little baggage who does *Desert Island Discs* ran as follows. She said that SF readers were nerds who dressed badly, were poor and could not, in her elegant phrase, "get a woman". I asked, "How about Bill Gates?" Her reply: "He's a nerd too." Fortunately, the producer was a sensible middle-aged middle-class experienced woman, who cut out this exchange and similar insults.'

Peter Davison, regarding his 'Tenth Doctor meets Fifth Doctor' reappearance (a *Doctor Who* scene in the 16 November *Children in Need* special), mysteriously confided: 'I can feel the hand of history on my shoulder, even if I can't do the buttons up.' (BBC, 21 October) [PM]

Stephen King's publishing category in Austria is 'Horror, Blut und Panik', according to the shelving system of at least one bookshop. [RD]

Doris Lessing won the Nobel Prize for Literature, despite her unashamed acknowledgement of having written sf; she was a guest of honour at the 1987 UK Worldcon. "The critics didn't like my so-called "Science Fiction", she said on Channel 4 News after the win: "They'd never come across anything like it, they didn't know what to make of it.... I consider it to be some of my best work." [RC] US pundit Harold Bloom rose to the occasion: '... pure political correctness. Although Ms. Lessing at the beginning of her writing career had a few admirable qualities, I find her work for the past 15 years quite unreadable ... fourth-rate science fiction.' (AP) The bookies' choice for this year's Nobel author was Philip Roth. (BBC) On first hearing the news, Lessing responded: 'Oh Christ! ... I couldn't care less.' Later: 'I can't say I'm overwhelmed with surprise.... I'm 88 years old and they can't give the Nobel to someone who's dead, so I think they were probably thinking they'd probably better give it to me now before I've popped off.'

Anne McCaffrey knows how to survive conventions: '... she wears a protective crystal under her shirt, 'to absorb the energy; of her fans' demands.'" (Robin Roberts, *Anne McCaffrey: A Life With Dragons*) [MMW]

Robert Ronson, author of a children's sf novel called *Olympic Mind Games*—set at the 2012 London Olympics—was sternly told by the Olympics 2012 committee that he wasn't allowed to use the O-word, nor such protected terms as 'London 2012' or even just '2012'. What's more, they complained, 'there is no such thing as Olympic mind games'. Ronson ignored this bluster and seems to have got away with it. [FM]

J.K. Rowling surprised a Carnegie Hall audience with the news that her Hogwarts headmaster was gay, and had been in love with his rival Grindelwald. Fans tried hard not to remember the comment by JKR's character Rita Skeeter about Dumbledore and his legendary duel of magic with that rival: 'After they've read my book, people may be forced to conclude that Grindelwald simply conjured a white handkerchief from the end of his wand and came quietly.' [ML]

George Takei is an asteroid: 7307 Takei, discovered by Japanese astronomers in April 1994 and now at last officially named. [SFS]

Conquedle

2-4 Nov • **Novacon 37**, Quality Hotel, Walsall. Just turn up: £42 at the door, or day rates £12.50 Fri, £22.50 Sat, and £17.50 Sun.

9-11 Nov • **Armadacon 19**, Novotel, Plymouth. £30 reg; £27 concessions. Day rates £18 (£15) Sat, £12 (£10) Sun; £5 for any evening only. Contact 20 Pinewood Close, Plympton, Devon, PL7 2DW.

9-11 Nov • **Thought Bubble** aka Leeds Sequential Art Festival (comics). Includes Comic Con in Leeds Town Hall crypt, 10:30am-5:30pm Sat 10th: £3.50 reg, £4 at door. Advance tickets from Travelling Man shops in Leeds, York, etc. or by phone: 0113 2243801.

9-11 Nov • **Tolkien's Birmingham**, Plough and Harrow Hotel,

Edgbaston, Birmingham. Residential weekend. Cost inc food & 2 nights' stay: £150 sharing, £190 single. Contact GilraenBham at aol dot com.

28 Nov • **BSFA Open Meeting**, Physics Lecture Theatre, Imperial College, 1 Prince Consort Rd, London. 7pm. With Iain Banks. *Note one-off venue charge. As usual, there will be no December BSFA meeting.*

20 Dec • **London Open Xmas Meeting**, usual venue: the Melton Mowbray, 18 Holborn, EC1N 2LE. Cellar bar booked all evening. [RN] 1-2 Mar 08 • **Microcon**, Exeter University. More TBA. Contact SF Soc, Students' Guild, Devonshire House, Stocker Rd, Exeter, EX4 4PZ.

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

Rumblings • Sue Donym on Octocon (Maynooth, Ireland): 'About 80 people. (Average would be 300 normally.) ... No venue or guest of honour for 2008. Dave Lally GoH in 09, George R.R. Martin GoH in 2010. Con committee looking for a new venue, perhaps a move back into [Dublin] city centre. Quote of the con: "What's this got to do with science fiction?"' • A 2010 Irish Eurocon/Octocon bid was proposed by Dave Lally and Pádraig Ó Méalóid, the latter stipulating that no other Irish con should take place that year (howls of protest from Mecon and P-Con) and that he as instigator must chair the event—opposed by the existing Octocon 2010 committee and chair. So, no Eurocon bid. [JB]

Infinitely Improbable

Fifty Years On. 'When Sputnik was launched [...] my friends and I already knew how the future was supposed to unfold: Arthur C. Clarke (Sir Arthur now), Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and Ray Bradbury, among many others had laid it all out in stories and novels that we stole from the local drug store: the space stations, the Moonbases and Mars colonies, the lonely asteroid prospectors, the nuclear wars back home, the eventual dispersal of humanity to far flung stars where Earth is only a dim legend. / The great space visionaries like Wernher von Braun, Robert H. Goddard, Hermann Oberth and Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, as well as the men and women of NASA, all drank the same Kool-Aid.' (Dennis Overbye, *New York Times*, 25 Sep) [MMW]

Retro BSFA Award. Next year, amid the general whoopee attending the 50th anniversary of the founding of the British SF Association, an extra BSFA award is to be presented for the best sf or fantasy novel of 1958 (including magazine serializations ending that year). Also, the on-and-off nonfiction category is on again. Further treats are promised.

R.I.P. Marc Behm (1925-2007), US author of offbeat thrillers and co-scriptwriter for *Help!* (1965), died on 12 July aged 82. His novel *The Ice Maiden* (1983) has a vampire as its central character. • **Robert Bussard** (1928-2007), US physicist whose theoretical starship drive the Bussard Ramjet was adopted in sf by Poul Anderson, Larry Niven and others (it even appears in *Star Trek*), died on 6 October. Jim Benford writes: 'I knew Bob for about 40 years. We collaborated on several fusion matters and talked often about space propulsion. I always liked him for his open attitudes and deep technical insight.' • **Alan Coren** (1938-2007), UK humorous writer, broadcaster and former *Punch* and *Listener* editor, died on 18 October aged 69. Several of his squibs played with sf/fantasy tropes: his Orwell pastiche 'Owing to Circumstances Beyond Our Control 1984 Has Been Unavoidably Detained ...' (1974) made it into an Aldiss/Harrison *Year's Best SF* anthology. • **Calvin W. Demmon** (1942-2007), US fan writer and journalist, died on 10 October aged 65; all sympathy to his wife India. Robert Lichtman introduced him to fanzines when they were both 16: 'In short order he became one of fandom's premier humorists, inventing a form of whimsical short story he called the "Biffable" (because he referred to himself as "Calvin W. 'Biff' Demmon") which he published in his fanzine, *Skoan* (for "some kind of a nut"). He went on to sell seven short sf stories (to *F&SF*, *Amazing* and *Fantastic*) and a career in journalism.' • **Deborah Kerr** (1921-2007), UK actress who starred in the chillers *The Innocents* (1961, based on *The Turn of the Screw*) and *Eye of the Devil* (1966),

died on 16 October; she was 86. [SG] • **Hank Reinhardt**, long-time US fan (Southern Fandom, SCA) and medieval arms and armour expert, died on 30 October aged 73. [GHL] With Gerald W. Page he co-edited the 1979 anthology *Heroic Fantasy* (1979). • **Simeon Shoul**, regular reviewer for *Infinity Plus*, died unexpectedly on 16 October. [KB]

As We See Us. *Mastermind*, September: one contestant's subject was David Eddings. Under John Humphries' probing interrogation, she admitted: "It's not great literature, it's not *Lord of the Rings*." [DG]

Futurology Corner. *Serious Nonfiction Dept.*: 'In 1970 there will be hardly any natural oil left and the coal deposits will probably be reserved for the chemical industries that need them much more than anybody else.' (Willy Ley, *Astounding*, January 1936) [PDF]

Plagiarism! David Gemmell (1948-2006) has been plagiarized. At first the culprit seemed to be US writer Lanaia Lee—real name Mary Kellis—whose forthcoming novel *Of Atlantis* had a prologue virtually identical to chapter 1 of Gemmell's *Dark Prince* (1993); characters are renamed, though at one point an original name slipped through. In fact, despite her mysterious reluctance to remove the text from websites when its origin was revealed, Lee was apparently a victim here. Her agent Cheryl Pillsbury takes fees from authors for the not very taxing effort of placing books with vanity presses; Lee also paid hefty sums for the notoriously dodgy UK 'literary agent' Christopher Hill to ghostwrite parts of her novel, and eventually received a hasty retyping of Gemmell. In her own words from her website, 'I write because I feel each person has something unique to share with the world and writing is my gift to share.' Repeatedly demanding sympathy because she has suffered strokes and uses a wheelchair, Lee shifted position from 'Of Atlantis is totally mine. I have the original manuscript, and witnesses to my work.' to 'When I first started *Of Atlantis*, I hire a ghost writer Christopher Hill. I see what he did now ...' Online discussion of all this at Dear Author, Making Light and Writer Beware led Lee and Pillsbury to issue threats of reprisals including—in Pillsbury's case—legal action for 'deformation of character and slander' and fearful Wiccan curses. As Jane Little of Dear Author remarked, 'it is hard to feel sorry for someone who is threatening me with lawsuits and boils.' Lee has since reworked *Of Atlantis* to eliminate what was presumably the good part. But that prologue remained a close paraphrase of *Dark Prince*; outlines of further chapters, allegedly provided by Hill and proudly posted online by Lee, are littered with Gemmell's characters, settings and plot turns. Oh dear.

Ghastly Fates. *David Brin*, who lives in the South California area ravaged by wildfires, was forced like many others to evacuate; happily his house was spared. [MMW] • *Phil Foglio's* comic *Xenophile* (1991) is listed among porn seized by the Canadian Border Services Agency in the third quarter of 2007. [DKMK] • *Jon Langford*, my little rock star brother, celebrated his 50th birthday last month. • *Barry N. Malzberg* tripped and fractured his pelvis in three places; though suffering great discomfort, he's mobile and on the mend. [MR/PDF] • *Marion van der Voort* was in hospital for most of October with 'pneumonia and some other problems'. [KFS] • *Ian Whates* is the new editor of the BSFA's news (or as they've taken to subtitled it, media) magazine *Matrix*. Contact 41 Wheatshaf Rd, Alconbury Weston, Cambs, PE28 4LF.

As Others See (Some) SF. Paul Grimstad of *The Brooklyn Rail* defines a whole new subgenre: 'Avant-pop does not shy away from the immediacy of the mainstream hit, and insists on hooks at their most puerile and perverse. AP does not feel the need to deform catchiness into a grimace [...] but rather re-sequences the Legos of song structure, so that (a) none of the charm of the tune is lost, but (b) this very 'accessibility leads one to bump into weirder elements welded into the design. Accordingly, AP does not translate into mere complexity (though it can be complex), and its most memorable effects are often the results of blunt simplicity Also: AP need not be confined to music—Raymond Chandler, William S. Burroughs, and Philip K. Dick are totally AP, as are Jean-Pierre Melville, *Star Wars*, and David Lynch. The gastronomic equivalent of the AP is a whole pack of SweetTarts washed down with an ice-cold Canada Dry seltzer water.' (September 2007) [ND]

Outraged Letters. *Andy Cox* rebuts my foolish A243 guess that the eye-catching splash title of his renamed magazine *Black Static* is in 8-point type: '9.5 pt actually. You wait, soon everybody will be doing it!' • *Richard E. Geis*: 'Thanks for Thog's Eyeballs which dredged a forbidden memory of a passage from one of my very early novels: "His eyes lingered on her naked breasts and feasted on her swelling nipples." An L.A. fan brought it to my attention. Naturally I killed him.' • *Kip Williams* channels Jeanette Winterson: 'I enjoyed the latest issue, and the note about Ms Le Guin. / Of course, though, this is not a letter of comment. Please make no mistake, though it is a letter and it comments

(see above), it is not one of those shallow "gosh-wow Flash Gordon" LoCs that dwell tediously on the minutiae of ... I don't know ... margins or staples or something. No, it deals fearlessly with real human issues and emotions, using, perhaps, some elements also found in letters of comment, but in a much more real and relevant and humanly worthwhile sort of way. / I could go on about the differences between this and letters of comment, but as I haven't really read any, I can only presume that I am blazing new trails in literature with this humble missive, which owes nothing to anything that has come before. Behold the future! / Well, I'll let you get back to your letters of comment now. I expect they must seem silly and shallow to you now, but carry on.'

More Awards. *Gaylactic Spectrum*: Hal Duncan, *Vellum*. • *Aeon* (short by new author, to appear in *Albedo One*): Nina Allan, 'Angelus'. • *WSFA Small Press*: Peter S. Beagle 'El Regalo' (*The Line Between*).

The Realms of Fantasy. Joe McNally writes: 'You'd think Disney would learn after the "mountains of Norfolk" howler in *Reign Of Fire*, but no. Their recent tv movie *Twitches 2* features twin teenage witches who divide their time between our world and their original home in the magical kingdom of ... Coventry. This makes the official movie site particularly hilarious: "For twenty-one years the magical kingdom of Coventry battled the forces of Darkness ...", "In the Earth dimension, Alex is a serious college student majoring in English Literature, with a flair for writing and a cute new guy friend, Marcus. In Coventry, she's a princess ..." &c.' Somehow I doubt this is a deliberate homage to the Coventry role-playing game that was all the rage among US fans of the late 1950s and early 1960s (see Harry Warner's *A Wealth of Fable*).

C.o.A. Little Brown Book Group (including the Orbit and Atom sf imprints), 100 Victoria Embankment, London, EC4Y 0DY.

As Nobel Winners See Us. Harvey Blume: 'You got savaged when you started writing your series of science fiction novels. John Leonard, in the *New York Times*, wrote about *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, that, "One of the many sins for which the 20th century will be held accountable is that it has discouraged Mrs. Lessing.... She now propagandizes on behalf of our insignificance in the cosmicrazzmatazz." He felt you had ceased to care.' Doris Lessing: 'What they didn't realize was that in science fiction is some of the best social fiction of our time. I also admire the classic sort of science fiction, like *Blood Music*, by Greg Bear. He's a great writer.' (*The Boston Book Review*, 1998)

Magazine Scene. Warren Ellis posted the sf magazines' monthly circulation figures from the end of 2006, as reported in the new *Year's Best SF* anthology ed. Gardner Dozois. *Asimov's*: 15,117 subscription (13% down since 2005), no newsstand sales figure. *Analogue*: 23,732 sub, 4,587 newsstand (7.3% down). *F&SF*: 14,575 sub 3,691 newsstand (< 1% down). *Interzone* circulation is said to be in the 2,000-3,000 range.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Evolutionary Theory.* 'It will be interesting to see whether Nature perpetrates the dinosaur [sic] and marsupial blunders again, or whether she's learned by experience.' • 'We can trace how the vegetable became animal, but nobody's yet discovered what impulse makes the mineral organic.' (Clive Trent [Victor Rousseau Emanuel], 'Human Pyramid', *Spicy-Adventure Stories*, April 1941) [DL] • *Metaphor Dept.* 'When I heard you'd freed yourself, I put out the breadcrumbs and waited for the wolf to come knocking.' (dialogue from *Smallville*, Oct 2007) [DG] • *Dept of Er Um.* 'I could see from the crown of the hill where I stood that the city was dead. There was no sign of life in it. The people of Palmira's kaygan could be seen, moving slowly and steadily along its streets.' (Gardner F. Fox, *Escape Across the Cosmos*, 1964) [AR] • *Eyeballs in the Sky.* 'Her eyes ... rolled a little in her sweet face, wildly, as if she had lost all control over their muscles. Her eyes rolled with insane movement and then went backward.' (*Ibid*) • *Tom Swifties Dept.* '... the wetlanders, he thought dryly ...' "I'll have Somara send for some water," he said drily.' (Robert Jordan, *Lord of Chaos*, 1994) [CL] • *Dept of Time Units.* '... modify the laser, he told himself. Get its pulses down into the petasecond range. The shorter the pulses, the more power in each pulse.' (Ben Bova, *The Aftermath*, 2007; as any fule kno, 1 petasecond is nearly 32 million years) • *Gutsy Simile Dept.* 'The thought felt like a tapeworm lodged in the gut of his mind.' (Brian Ruckley, *Winterbirth*, 2007) [PP]

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