

# Ansible



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## Bright November

**James Cameron's** sf film *Avatar* seems strangely reminiscent of a Poul Anderson classic from *Asunding*, April 1957: 'Like *Avatar*, Call Me Joe centers on a paraplegic—Ed Anglesey—who telepathically connects with an artificially created life form in order to explore a harsh planet (in this case, Jupiter). Anglesey, like *Avatar's* Jake Sully, revels in the freedom and strength of his artificial created body, battles predators on the surface of Jupiter, and gradually goes native as he spends more time connected to his artificial body.' (Lauren Davis, io9.com)

**John Clute**, with David Langford and their co-editors, celebrated passing 10,000 entries in the third-edition-in-progress of the *Encyclopedia of SF*. The 1993 volume had 6,571. Owing to differences about the nature of the project, the editors have amicably parted company with Orbit/Hachette and acquired enthusiastic new backers from outside the conventional publishing world. Keep watching the skies!

**Harlan Ellison** announced on 22 October that his action against CBS/Paramount (for not paying royalties on spinoffs from *The City on the Edge of Forever*) has been settled: 'The Star Trek lawsuit is over. I am pleased with the outcome. [...] Three years' litigation is completed. Lordy, I am tired. Smiling at last.' (Harlanellison.com) [DKMK]

**Erin Karpluk** on her Canadian TV series, *Being Erica*: 'Erica is an over-educated, under-achieving woman who gets the change to go back in time and fix all the bad decisions she made in the past. [...] It's not sci-fi—the time travel is just a catalyst.' [SJ] Which cries out to be satirized by Ursula Le Guin. 'The galaxy-spanning FTL spaceliner is just transportation. The psionic talking cabbages are just a metaphor.'

**Ursula K. Le Guin** was 80 on 21 October. Belated Happy Birthday!

**Rog Peyton** tells me that the A263 report of his retirement from book dealing is, though it came from him, greatly exaggerated: 'I had intended retiring completely after Novacon but having to have the house completely rewired, resulting in every room having to be redecorated, along with a new bathroom, new floors in the kitchen and utility, finding we had woodworm ... well, all that has left me broken! I can't afford to retire! So I shall be selling at Heathrow—and every other Eastercon and Novacon for a few years yet.' (21 October) Is this an attempt on the Sam J. Lundwall multiple retirements record?

**Carl Sagan** Day will be celebrated in Davie, FL, on 7 November—the 75th anniversary of his birth. Speakers include James Randi. [WCW]

**Cordwainer Smith** is interestingly mentioned in recent bookish reminiscences: 'Most of the collectors whose libraries we bought were dead years before the libraries came to us, so the only way we could judge the level of eccentricity in the collectors was the books themselves, or from other evidence. [...] An Orientalist named Paul Linebarger, whose father, we were told, had been Sun Yat-sen's lawyer, had absolutely wonderful books, but he had other things, too. He was an early expert on psychological warfare, which I believe he later taught. In one of his closets, for example, we found a huge pile of anticommunist comic books in Mongolian. Paul Linebarger also wrote science fiction, under the name Cordwainer Smith. And he had an interest in ladies' lingerie. One of the more unusual things we bought from his estate was a bra mannequin, complete with bra. Several drawers full of bras we let lie.' (Larry McMurtry, *Books: A Memoir*, 2009) [EV]

## Conze

6-9 Nov • **IDWcon 09** (Discworld!), Falls Hotel, Ennistymon, Co. Clare, Ireland. Now €45 reg, €36 under-18s/students, €19 junior (7-12), €15 supp, under-7s free. Contact Church Rd, Tuila, Co. Clare.

11 Nov - 5 Jan • **Terry Pratchett's Nation**, National Theatre, South Bank, London. SE1 9PX. Box office 020 7452 3000.

13-15 Nov • **Novacon 39**, Park Inn, Mansfield Road, Nottingham. Now £45 reg at the door; day £10 Fri, £20 Sat, £15 Sun. Contact 379 Myrtle Rd, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Novacon has reclaimed novacon.org.uk after its lapse and some five years in the cruel hands of a cybersquatter.

17-21 Nov • **Unseen Academicals** (play), Abingdon. Sold out.

25 Nov • **BSFA Open Meeting**, The Antelope, 22 Eaton Tce, London, SW1W 8EZ. 5pm for 6pm. With Michael Marshall [Smith].

19-22 Nov • **ThoughtBubble** (comics): Leeds Sequential Art Festival with 1-day con on 21st. Tickets £8. Contact thoughtbubblefestival at googlemail dot com. Bookings: www.thoughtbubblefestival.com.

20-22 Nov • **WexWorlds** (sf/fantasy festival), Wexford, Ireland. About 25 events in the Arts Centre, Library, hotels etc; most free (three workshops each cost €5). Contact: info at WexWorlds dot net.

2-5 Apr 10 • **Odyssey 2010** (Eastercon), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, London. £55 reg, £45 unaged, £25 supporting or junior (<17), rising on 16 November to £65, £55 and £30; £75, £65 and £30 at the door. Unchanged: £5 child (<11), £1 infant (<5). Contact: 5 Langhau Rd, Crookston, Glasgow, G53 7SE.

11-13 Jun 10 • **SF Foundation Critics' Masterclass**, Middlesex U, London. £180 reg. Apply by 28 Feb to farah dot sf at gmail dot com.

27-30 Aug 10 • **Discworld Convention**. Now £55 reg, £36 concessions. £20 supporting as before. Contact PO Box 4101, Shepton Mallett, Somerset, BA4 9AJ; info at dwcon dot org.

9-10 Oct 10 • **NewCon 5**, The Fishmarket, Northampton. Hotel: Park Inn. GoH Pat Cadigan, Paul Cornell, Paul McAuley. £40 reg (£45 after 9 April 2010); under-16s £30; £25 day. Contact 41 Wheatsheaf Rd, Alconbury Weston, Cambs, PE28 4LF.

## Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Some Of Us**. Why a non-fantasy bestseller is so very laudable: *The Help* is ... a beacon in the darkness of contemporary book publishing—in a time when a vampire is the main character in a young adult novel responsible for four out of every twenty-five books sold in the first quarter of this year ...' (*Huffington Post*, 26 October) [RF]

**World Fantasy Awards**. NOVEL (tie) Jeffrey Ford, *The Shadow Year*; Margo Lanagan, *Tender Morsels*. NOVELLA Richard Bowes 'If Angels Fight' (F&SF 2/08). SHORT Kij Johnson, '26 Monkeys. Also the Abyss' (*Asimov's* 7/08). ANTHOLOGY Ekaterina Sedia, ed., *Paper Cities*.

COLLECTION Jeffrey Ford, *The Drowned Life*. ARTIST Shaun Tan. SPECIAL/PROFESSIONAL Kelly Link & Gavin J. Grant (Small Beer Press, Big Mouth House) SPECIAL/NON-PROFESSIONAL Michael Walsh (Old Earth Books).

**Contrast**. When the interestingly named Ms Marmite Lover staged a Marmite-themed dinner at her London home restaurant, the Marmite people sent product freebies and earned some useful goodwill. When she planned a (non-profit) Harry Potter dinner whose guests would dress as wizards etc, Warner Bros sent a lovable cease-and-desist letter: 'your proposed use of the Harry Potter properties [...] would amount to an infringement of Warner's rights.' (*Telegraph*, 25 October) [MPJ]

**Magazine Scene**. Blackfish Publishing's *Filmstar* and the *SFX* rival *Death Ray* ceased publication in October at issue 5 and issue 21 respectively. • *Lightspeed*, a new on-line magazine from Sean Wallace's Prime Books, launches in June 2010 with John Joseph Adams as fiction editor.

**R.I.P. Frank Coghlan Jr** (1916-2009), US actor who played Billy Batson in the 1941 *Adventures of Captain Marvel* film serial—shouting 'Shazam!' and magically turning into another actor—died on 7 September aged 93. [PDF] • *Louise Cooper* (1952-2009), UK fantasy author whose debut novel was *The Book of Paradox* (1973), died unexpectedly on 21 October. [SN] Her scores of fantasy and supernatural novels include the popular Time Master and Indigo series (the former extended with prequel and sequel trilogies), plus much work for younger readers. Stan Nicholls writes: 'She was 57, and is survived by her husband, Cas. A fine writer and a very nice person.' • *Dean Ellis* (1920-2009), US artist and illustrator responsible for many sf book and magazine covers, died in October; he was 88. [WCW] • *Barry Letts* (1925-2009), UK producer, director and writer who was involved with *Doctor Who* since 1967 (as producer 1969-1974; he also wrote scripts and spinoff novels), died in early October aged 84. [SR/O] • *Vic Mizzy* (1916-2009), US composer who wrote, scored and sang the famous finger-snapping theme song of *The Addams Family*, died on 17 October. He was 93. [SD] • *Don Ivan Punchatz* (1936-2009), noted US artist and illustrator who

appeared in many major magazines (*National Geographic*, *Newsweek*, *Time* etc), died on 22 October aged 73. His genre work included 1970s Avon covers for the Foundation and Riverworld series, and package art for the original *Doom* game. (SFScope) • *George Tuska* (1916-2009), US comics artist who worked on many titles from the late 1930s to mid-1980s—including ten years with Marvel's *Iron Man*—died around midnight on 15/16 October. He was 93. [PDF] • *Ed Valigursky* (1926-2009), US artist who in the 1950s and 1960s painted many sf covers for *Amazing*, *Fantastic*, Ace Books (especially the Doubles) and other publishers, died on 7 September; he was 82. [AIP] Favourite subjects included menacing robots and needle-nosed spaceships.

**With Friends Like These ...** 'There are nerds. There are science fiction nerds. And then there are American fans of *Doctor Who*—those who dare to combine the exquisite dweebery of Anglophilia with the delicious dorkdom of old-skool [sic] SF. I'm of that last tribe, a real Who-head. I can tell you what Tardis stands for (Time and Relative Dimensions in Space), and, more important, I can say "Tardis" over and over again—not just with a straight face but with reverence. Bargain-basement BBC values? Alien monsters made from trash cans and toilet plungers? Anachronous kibitzing with Shakespeare and Dickens? That's my flavor, mate ... I suppose US culture simply isn't advanced enough to appreciate the longest-running, most successful, and yes, the cheesiest and chintziest science fiction series in television history. And by ADVANCED, I mean defeated.' (Scott Brown, *Wired*, November) [MMW]

**Outraged Letters.** *Simon R. Green* on the possible beatification of John Wyndham (A266): 'There's a Walk of Stars in Brum? Wonderful, just what an author needs; knowledge that after he's gone, people will walk all over him.' • *Andy Sawyer* has the dirt on Prof John Mullan (see A267), who scorns the sf reader as 'a special kind of person who has special weird things they go to and meet each other.' Take it away, Andy: 'Do I detect pique? Obviously this is not the same John Mullan who *next weekend* [written 2 October] will be found hanging about with a very special fandom, aka the Jane Austen Society of North America. I don't know if there's a masquerade, but there's certainly a competition: "Which two brothers and which two sisters, created by Jane Austen, would JASNA members like to have as their own brothers and sisters?" And the programme includes: "Fashion Demonstration, "Dressing Mr. Darcy", "Workshops: Dance, Reticule, Silhouette", and the rather mournful combination of "4:30pm to 5:30pm Social hour (cash bar) / 5:30pm to 8:00pm / Dinner on your own".'

**C.o.A.** *Lilian Edwards*, 39 (1F2) Viewforth, Edinburgh, EH10 4JE. *Anton Sherwood*, Post Office Box 1853, Bellingham, WA 98227, USA.

**Health & Safety.** *Joe Haldeman* (see A267) is out of danger, has moved from intensive care to rehabilitation, and by 26 October was walking and doing exercises: 'He was tired ("Why is the gravity so strong on this planet?"), but he bounced back quickly.' [GM] • *Jay Lake* announced his alarming diagnosis online: '... lung mass is officially a tumor, surgery in the next few weeks, chemo decision to follow. I've had better days.' (26 October) [BB] Wish him luck. • *Graham Sleight* broke his leg while stepping off a train at Euston on 6 October, with the prospect of 4-6 weeks of crutches; he asks *Anisble* to record his 'gratitude at all the kindness I've received from fanfish folk.'

**With Friends Like These (II) ...** Review of *Defying Gravity* by someone determined to establish insider status: 'Time to come out of the geek closet, I'm a sucker for sci-fi, so imagine my excitement about a new show in which astronauts explore the solar system 50 years from now. The disappointment was swift and brutal. This really, really stinks: it's pretty much unwatchable from minute one. And that's the big thumbs down from the fanboy core demographic—heaven knows what normal people will think.' (*London Lite*, 21 October) [BA]

**Random Fandom.** *Tommy Ferguson* and *Leslie* have sad news: 'As some of you may already know our son Joshua was still born three months ago at 41 weeks, on 22 July 2009.' Much sympathy. • *Pádraig Ó Mealoí*, former Octocon boss, was unexpectedly banned from Octocon (Dublin, 10-11 October) at very short notice, apparently for criticizing its organization, with no appeal allowed. For a couple of days All (Online) Fandom Was Plunged Into War; but swift diplomacy by James Bacon led to unbanning and a joint Pádraig/Octocon statement full of astral peace and cosmic harmony. Which was a great relief.

**As Others See The Bottom Line.** With Hollywood's film output falling, the *Guardian* paints a ghastly vision of the future: 'As cash for new movies dries up, a greater proportion of the shrinking resources is going into a tiny range of sci-fi, superhero and mystic titles.' / Coppola said that even if studios survive the upheaval, "they will just make certain kinds of films like Harry Potter—basically trying to make Star

Wars over and over again, because it's a business". (18 October) [LW]

**Fanfundery.** *TransAtlantic Fan Fund*: voting has begun in the 2010 race from North America to the UK Eastercon (Odyssey), and closes on 22 December 2009. The candidates are Anne KG Murphy & Brian Gray, standing jointly, and Frank Wu. See [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk) for ballot forms.

**Whop's Blattners.** *Distributed Middle Dept.* 'Jackson could see one of the enemy soldier's [sic] midsection splatter red against the brick behind him and then fall forward dead.' (Travis S. Taylor, *One Day on Mars*, 2007) [MB] • *Dept of Self-Reference.* 'The boys at the college were delightedly scared and did their very best to heighten their fear with fantasised stories of the more macabre genre.' (James Herbert, *The Survivor*, 1976.) [KN] • *Escapology Dept.* 'I felt my eyebrows crawling up my forehead.' (Timothy Zahn, *Night Train to Trigel*, 2005) [GS] • *Simile Dept.* '... he searched the desk. His hairy hands fluttered methodically through the contents of its drawers with spasmodic rushes, like a couple of apoplectic tarantulas ...' (Robert Wells, *Right-Handed Wilderness*, 1973) 'It revealed Selinda as painfully young. Her nipples were still pink like goldfish snouts ...' (*Ibid*) [BA] • *Dept of Neat Tricks.* 'I shift forwards, stretch out my legs and lean back so that only the base and the top of my shoulders make contact with the chair.' (Clare Dudman, *One Day the Ice Will Reveal All Its Dead* aka *Wegener's Jigsaw*, 2003) [FB]

## Stage-Struck Supplement

**Beyond Our Ken.** David V Barrett was there: 'Last night I went to a tribute to Ken Campbell, at the Olivier Theatre at the National. In the audience were more half-recognized loveys than I've ever seen in one place (it was a show by actors for actors), but many of them genuinely quirky ones—they'd have to be to have worked with Campbell! • The show was extracts from his works over the years—one-man-shows, the 8-hour *Illuminatus!*, the 22-hour *The Warp*, the pidgin *Makbed blong Willem Sekpia* etc. Lots of surreal, genuinely weird and plain silly stuff, all of it superbly performed by about 25 actors in different combinations, ending up with audience-prompted improv—and with a small piano-led jazz group at the back of the stage. Compiled by his daughter Daisy Campbell (who also took part, though I didn't recognize her), compered by John Sessions, directed by Sir Richard Eyre—who near the end helped on stage a very doddery Warren Mitchell to narrate a piece on the baboon's bottom he did for Ken years ago. Utterly brilliant from start to much-later-than-advertised finish. • They filmed it, but I think only for archive rather than broadcast—though if it is ever shown, it'll be well worth watching. A loving tribute to one of the last great eccentrics. I'm glad I was there.' (13 October)

**Birth of a Nation.** Pat McMurray at the preview: 'Imagine yourself sitting with about 50 others around the edge of a rehearsal hall in the National Theatre. There are some Polynesian-themed pictures and props around the walls and a slightly raised area in the middle, but generally the hall feels quite bare. You're about to see a scene from *Nation*, from 11 November at the National Theatre, directed by Melly Smith, based on a novel by Terry Pratchett, adapted by Mark Ravenhill. • The director sits on the bare stage, introduces the scene you're about to see—set late in the novel, which she also quickly summarizes for those who haven't read it, about a quarter of the attendees—she apologises for the lack of music and sound effects, and the absence of a seven-metre-tall god. Later she'll also explain what the stage setting, costumes, props will look like. But none of this matters now. • The action starts—forgive the cliché, but the play suddenly explodes in front of your eyes like the birth of a universe, not just the birth of a nation—immediately you're transported to the South Pacific where you witness cannibals, hand to hand combat, ancestors, a shark attack, underwater scenes, an encounter with a god, and a boy becoming a man, and a hero. It feels like 30 seconds have passed when the actors bring you back to your own life, but a lifetime has been lived. It was spectacular, energising, thought-provoking, even the small piece we saw—amazing work. • In the Q&A at the end we caught a glimpse of the hard physical and mental work that had gone into what we had just seen. There are still many surprises to come in the play itself, including but not limited to the music, the tsunami, the seven-metre-high god. • I walked out and went to buy the novel to read it again. This rehearsal scene showed all the makings of another successful adaptation at the NT. (30 October)

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