



## Ansible® 463 February 2026

From **David Langford**, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU, UK. Website [news.ansible.uk](http://news.ansible.uk). ISSN 0265-9816 (print); 1740-942X (e). Logo: **Dan Steffan**. Cartoon: **Brad W. Foster**. Available for SAE, or the fate of any man who's once been set his tryst with Tristero.

### The Courier's Tragedy

**Margaret Atwood** told a *Wired* interviewer that she was especially fond of the spurious 1960s/1970s rumour that she 'dressed up in pre-revolutionary French court dress, including the wig, and prowled the streets of Toronto at night in this getup.' She could only guess that 'the rumor was supposing I'd been alive since 1780, and was still wearing the same outfit while looking for my prey.' (*Wired*, 6 January) [F770]

**J.G. Ballard's** story 'Chronopolis', in which clocks are banned, was echoed in a competition to design a new time-of-day indicator thingy for UK railways: 'Network Rail has purposefully elected to use the generic term "timepiece" rather than "clock" for indicating and measuring time in a room, on the wall of a building, or on a computer screen. Network Rail wishes to avoid the conventions and connotations associated with referring to such instruments as "clocks".' (RIBA) [PE] Apparently that was just a guideline: the 'iconic' winner unveiled in late 2025 is called Rail Clock.

**Patrick Nielsen Hayden** announced his retirement from Tor Books – except for 'a couple of projects I intend to finish' – after 37 years as a full-time editor there. (Facebook, 5 January) What will he do next? John Scalzi: 'Maybe he will fight crime!' (Whatever, 5 January)

**Terry Pratchett** was the subject of a Loughborough University research study that analysed the 'lexical diversity' of 33 Discworld novels and found that – although 'To most readers, nothing would have seemed amiss.' – their range of vocabulary had begun to narrow almost ten years before the sad diagnosis of dementia. (*The Times*, 27 January) [PF] Since this was the period of some of Terry's best books, it's not certain what the change implies: was he perhaps improving and writing more precisely?

**J.K. Rowling's** lawyers may be interested in a news story headlined 'Boffins probe commercial AI models, find an entire Harry Potter book'. This reports that one Meta product "entirely memorizes" *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and that from various LLMs, cunning prompt design could extract 70.3%, 76.8% or even 95.8% of that novel's text – figures which 'do not represent the maximum possible'. (*The Register*, 9 January)

**Sheila Williams** of *Asimov's SF Magazine* entered hospital in January following a brain aneurysm. She's doing well and a full recovery is hoped for; meanwhile, managing editor Emily Hockaday is acting as interim editor. [F770] The *Asimov's* announcement on Facebook could perhaps have been better phrased: 'We are sad to share the news that editor Sheila Williams is recovering from a health episode.' (13 January) [PNH]

### Conscripte

6-9 Feb • **Scotiacon** (furry), Crowne Plaza Hotel, Glasgow. Western theme. According to [www.scotiacon.org.uk](http://www.scotiacon.org.uk), *registration has closed*.

8 Feb • **BSFA EGM**, online. Sign-up details emailed to members.

13-15 Feb • **Akumakon** (anime/manga), U of Galway, Ireland. €25 reg; students €20; under-18s €15. See [www.akumakon.com](http://www.akumakon.com).

14 Feb • **WrexCon** (comics), Wrexham University, LL11 2AW. 10am-4pm. £11 adult; other rates via [www.ljeventsentertainment.com](http://www.ljeventsentertainment.com).

27 Feb - 1 Mar • **UK Ghost Story Festival**, QUAD Centre, Derby. Also 6-8 February online. See [www.ukghoststoryfestival.co.uk](http://www.ukghoststoryfestival.co.uk).

5-7 Mar • **Frightfest** (film), Glasgow Film Theatre, Rose Street. Fri/Sat pass £88; for single tickets see [frightfest.co.uk/filmsandevents/](http://frightfest.co.uk/filmsandevents/).

7 Mar • **Picocon 42**, Imperial College, London. Rates and online presence awaited. (Although it's been held in March for several years, the ICSFS home page still clings to the traditional February.)

19-22 Mar • **Camp SFW**, Vauxhall Holiday Park, Great Yarmouth. £95 Fri-Sat or £130 Thur-Sat at [www.scifiweekender.com](http://www.scifiweekender.com).

22 Mar • **SF, Comic & Toy Fair**, Leigh Sports Village. 11am-4pm. Tickets £3, children £1. See [www.msevents.co.uk/](http://www.msevents.co.uk/).

27-28 Mar • **TFnation** (*Transformers*), Pendulum Hotel, Manchester. Adults £15 Fri, £40 Sat; under-18s £10 and £25; accompanied under-16s (up to 3 per adult) free. See [tfnation.com/TFN-Manchester-2026](http://tfnation.com/TFN-Manchester-2026).

29 Mar • **Chorley Comic Con**, Town Hall, Chorley PR7 1DP. 11am-5pm. See [www.msevents.co.uk/](http://www.msevents.co.uk/).

3-6 Apr • **Iridescence** (Eastercon), Birmingham NEC Hilton. £90 reg; £50 concessions; under-18s £20; under-7s free; £40 supporting or

virtual. See [eastercon2026.org](http://eastercon2026.org).

11 Apr • **Ainmhícon** (furry), Clayton Hotel, Liffey Valley, Dublin. €80 or perhaps €90 reg until 28 February. See [ainmhicon.ie](http://ainmhicon.ie).

11 Apr • **Liverpool Horror Book Con**, Liner Hotel, Liverpool. 11am-4pm. Free. See [indiehorrorchapter.uk/ournextevent](http://indiehorrorchapter.uk/ournextevent).

24-26 Apr • **Springmoot** (Tolkien Society), annual dinner and members-only AGM, Townhouse Hotel, Manchester. Room and dinner bookings at [www.tolkienociety.org/events/agm-and-springmoot-2026](http://www.tolkienociety.org/events/agm-and-springmoot-2026).

16-17 May • **Amikon** (anime/manga), Dublin City University, Glasnevin Campus. Registration awaited at [amikon.me](http://amikon.me).

27-31 Aug • **LACon V**, Anaheim Convention Center, California. Now \$250 adult reg; \$200 first Worldcon; \$125 YA (18-24); \$100 teen (13-17); \$85 virtual membership; \$50 child (6-12); accompanied infants free. \$50 WSFS membership only. See [www.lacon.org](http://www.lacon.org).

28-31 Aug • **Asylum 16** (steampunk), The Lawns and other Lincoln venues. Tickets awaited at [www.ministryofsteampunk.com](http://www.ministryofsteampunk.com).

3-6 Sep • **Oxonmoot** (Tolkien Society), St Anne's, Oxford. £140 reg; other rates at [www.tolkienociety.org/events/oxonmoot-2026](http://www.tolkienociety.org/events/oxonmoot-2026).

9-11 Oct • **Fantasycon**, Crowne Plaza, Glasgow. £90 reg; £60 concessions; £45 child. (BFS members £75, £45, £35.) Further details at [britishfantasyociety.org/events-calendar/fantasycon-2026](http://britishfantasyociety.org/events-calendar/fantasycon-2026).

23-25 Oct • **Festival of Fantastic Films**, Pendulum Hotel, Manchester. Ticket sales awaited at [fantastic-films.uk](http://fantastic-films.uk).

25 Oct • **Stars of Time** (comics), LC, Swansea. 9am-4pm. £11.55 (under-14s £7.21) at [www.starsoftime.co.uk/swanseacomiconautumn](http://www.starsoftime.co.uk/swanseacomiconautumn).

14-15 Nov • **Thought Bubble Comic Convention**, Harrogate Convention Centre, as part of comics festival. £42 weekend; £30/day; under-12s, over-65s and carers free. See [thoughtbubblefestival.com](http://thoughtbubblefestival.com).

**Rumblings.** *Reconnect* (Eastercon 2025, Belfast) released its financial report. There was a surplus of close to £22k; £10k has been divided between the 2026 and 2027 Eastercons as pass-along funds, and a remnant of about £10k – after late-breaking expenses – is held by the new Irish convention Nornicon (Belfast, May). Some of this is intended for the even newer Belfast horror con Northern Dark, details to be announced. [TF]

### Infinitely Improbable

**As Others See Us.** Switchboard operator at the London publisher Chatto & Windus *circa* 1980: 'a keen reader of science fiction, specializing in apocalyptic works about inter-galactic warfare and the imminent destruction of mankind, he referred to even our most eminent authors with a patronizing sneer, as if they were the fossilized remains of a frivolous civilization that should long ago have been consumed by fire and molten lava.' (Jeremy Lewis, *Kindred Spirits*, 1995 memoir)

**Awards.** *Golden Globe* genre winners include *KPop Demon Hunters* as best animated film and *Sinners* for cinematic/box office achievement. • *The Nibbles* (British Book Awards) are being expanded this year with three new categories for graphic novel, science fiction or fantasy, and romance. [PE] • **Oscar** nominations: *Sinners* has sixteen, a record for a single film, and the del Toro *Frankenstein* nine. (*Bloody Disgusting*, 22 January) These films also have thirteen and eight BAFTA nominations respectively. [F770]

**Publishers and Sinners.** Tor has announced the new imprint Wildthorn, devoted to 'commercial stories' (including paranormal mystery and historical fantasy), as presumably distinct from the uncommercial fiction they've been publishing all these years. (*Reactor*, 21 January)

**R.I.P.** Scott Adams (1957-2026), US cartoonist best known for the long-running *Dilbert* strip whose satire of office life and corporate stupidity often used sf/fantasy devices, and who also published the sf or sf-adjacent books *God's Debris* (2001) and *The Religion War* (2004), died on 13 January aged 68. [LP] • Roger Allers (1949-2026), US Disney animation writer/director who worked on *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (as co-director, 1994) and others, died on 18 January aged 76. [AIP] • Andrey I (Andrey Khoroshev, 1959-2026), Russian director of and actor in the avant-garde sf horror film *Nauchnaya sektsiya pilotov* (*Scientific Section of Pilots*, 1996) died on 1 January aged 66. [AM] • Sal Buscema (1936-2026), US comics artist (like his brother John Buscema, 1927-2002) active from the early 1950s,

who worked on *Captain America*, *Hulk*, *Spider-Man* and others for Marvel, plus some DC titles, died on 23 January aged 89. • T.K. Carter (1956-2026), US actor in *The Thing* (1982), *Turbo Teen* (1984), *Space Jam* (1996), *My Favorite Martian* (1999 film) and others, died on 9 January aged 69. [MRY] • Thomas Causey (1949-2026), US sound engineer whose films include *Escape from New York* (1981), *The Thing* (1982) and *Star Trek: Generations* (1994 plus sequels), died on 12 January aged 76. • M. Christian, author and anthologist whose works include erotic sf and horror, died on 1 January. [PS-P] • John Cunningham (1932-2026), US actor in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1981), *The Survivalist* (1987) and *Starship Troopers* (voice only, 1997), died on 6 January aged 93. [AIP] • Gregory de Polnay (1943-2026), UK actor in *Doctor Who* ('The Robots of Death', 1977), died on 1 January aged 82. [GC] • Patrick Delahunt (1953-2025), former US literary agent for various sf/fantasy authors including Karen Joy Fowler and Kim Stanley Robinson, died on 23 December aged 72. [L] • Marian Diamond (1936-2026), UK actress in *The Little Mermaid* (1974), *The Lord of the Rings* (BBC Radio 4, 1981) and *Tale of a Vampire* (1992), died on 5 January aged 89. [SJ] • Marcus Gilbert (1958-2026), UK actor in *Biggles* (1986), *Chameleons* (1989), *Army of Darkness* (1992) and genre tv series including *Doctor Who* ('Battlefield', 1989), died on 11 January aged 67. [SJ] • Bret Hanna-Shuford, US actor in Broadway productions of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Wicked*, died on 3 January. [AIP] • Mark Jones (1953-2026), US screenwriter whose credits include *Superboy* (11 episodes 1989-1992), *Leprechaun* (1992), *Rumpelstiltskin* (1995) and *Night Man* (1997), died on 16 January aged 72. • Victoria Jones (1991-2026), US actress in *Men in Black II* (2002), died on 1 January aged 34. [SG] • Tim Kask (1949-2025), US games-industry editor and writer who was an early D&D play-tester, TSR's first full-time employee and editor of their *The Strategic Review* (later *The Dragon*) until 1980, died on 30 December aged 76. [JDN] • X.J. Kennedy (Joe Kennedy, 1929-2026), US fan active from the 1940s and author of two children's fantasy novels, better known as a poet and critic – his co-edited anthology of bad verse *Pegasus Descending* (1971) is much revered by Thog – died on 1 February aged 96. [RH] • Fruma Klass (1935-2026), US author of several genre stories since 1989 and widow of William Tenn (Philip Klass, 1920-2010), died on 24 January aged 91. [GVG] • Johnny Legend (Martin Margulies, 1949-2026), US actor in *Prison Ship* (1986), *Re-Animator 2* (1990), *Children of the Corn III* (1995) and others, who also directed the Bela Lugosi documentary *Mondo Lugosi – A Vampire's Scrapbook* (1987), died on 2 January aged 76. [SJ] • Yvonne Lime (1935-2026), US actress who co-starred in *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), died on 23 January aged 90. [AIP] • Catherine O'Hara (1954-2026), Canadian actress in *Beetlejuice* (1988), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), *Monster House* (2006), *Penelope* (2006), *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), *Frankenweenie* (2012) and others, died on 30 January aged 71. [SG] • Con Pederson (1934-2026), US fan (active in the 1940s and 1950s) and special effects director whose credits include *2001* (1968), *Impostor* (2001) and *Scooby Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed* (2004), died on 2 January aged 91. [SG/SB] • Jean Rabe (1957-2026), US author, editor and game designer who wrote many novels set in shared worlds including the 'Dragonlance' fantasy franchise, and received the 2020 Scribe Grandmaster award for media-tie fiction, died on 19 January. [GVG] • Tim Robertson (1944-2025), Australian actor in *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974), *Bliss* (1985) and *The Time Guardian* (1987), died in December aged 81. [GC] • James Sallis (1944-2026), US author whose first story 'Kazoo' appeared in 1967 in *New Worlds* (which he co-edited 1968-1969) and who continued to publish in sf venues up to 2026 – though better known since the 1990s for crime fiction – died on 27 January aged 81. [GVG] Genre anthologies include *The War Book* (1969); the definitive collection is *Bright Segments: The Complete Short Fiction* (2024). • Sergey Slyusarenko (1955-2026), Belarusian physicist and sf author (writing in Russian) whose 13 novels are mostly in the 'S.T.A.L.K.E.R.' franchise, died on 6 January aged 70. [AM] • Aleksey Ustimenko (1948-2025), Uzbekistani-Russian author of the sf novel *Za koltsami dalekogo Saturna* (*Beyond the Rings of Distant Saturn*), 1989), died on 7 December aged 77. [AM] • Erich von Däniken (1935-2026), Swiss author whose best-selling 'nonfiction' *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968) and follow-up volumes claimed in defiance of actual historical evidence that ancient alien visitors were responsible for all significant human advances, died on 10 January aged 90. [LP] • Dean Williams, US still photographer for *Starman* (1984), *Poltergeist III* (1988), *Freejack* (1992) and many more, died on 30 December. [AIP] • Yuen Cheung-yan (1957-2026), Hong Kong actor, stuntman and martial arts choreographer whose many such credits include *The Super Inframan* (1975), *Daredevil* (2003), *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *Vampire Cleanup Department* (207), died on 1 January aged 68. He directed *Funny*

*Ghost* and other supernatural films. [SJ] • Igor Zolotovitsky (1961-2026), Russian actor in *Antisex* (2008) and the supernatural thriller series *Bibliotekar* (*The Librarian*, 2023), died on 14 January aged 64. [AM]

**Prediction Corner.** Long, long before *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: 'I once knew a man who was gored to death by an angry rabbit.' (A.A. Milne, *The Holiday Round*, 1912) • J.P. Martin's children's fantasy *Uncle and His Detective* (1966) features a building which thanks to a House of Usher-like structural defect is prophetically known as Crack House.

**Award Shortlists.** *Philip K. Dick: Sunward* by William Alexander, *Outlaw Planet* by M. R. Carey, *Casual* by Koji A. Dae, *The Immeasurable Heaven* by Caspar Geon, *Uncertain Son* by Thomas Ha, *Scales* by Christopher Hinz, *City of All Seasons* by Oliver K. Langmead and Aliya Whiteley. • SF Poetry Association Grand Master: Denise Dumars, Geoffrey A. Landis, Joe Haldeman, Mary A. Turzillo and Ruth Berman. [F770] • *The BSFA Awards* for 2025 work are at the longlist stage; members-only voting to choose the final shortlist opened in January and closes on 19 February.

**Fanfundery.** *TransAtlantic Fan Fund*: nominations for the 2026 race from North America to the Berlin Eurocon (MetropolCon, 2-5 July) closed on 1 February. Two candidates have declared themselves; the ballot form and online voting are expected soon at [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk). • *European Fan Fund*: nominations for the 2026 trip to MetropolCon (as above) opened in January and will close on 15 March, with voting from 23 March to 30 April. Details and sign-up form at [effund.github.io](http://effund.github.io). • *GUFF*: the 2026 plan is reportedly to run a southbound race from Europe to Swancon (Perth, Western Australia, 29 May - 1 June) with nominations opening very soon and voting to close before Easter. More to come at [taff.org.uk/guff.html](http://taff.org.uk/guff.html).

**The Dead Past.** *60 Years Ago*, celebrity syndrome had already set in: 'Arthur Clarke on TV, Sunday 6th Feb – in advert for *Daily Express!* (*Skyrack* 86, February 1966) • *50 Years Ago*: For the first time in the long history of TAFF both candidates have received the same number of votes. The final count was as follows: / BRITAIN: BOWERS 20, TACKETT 15 / AMERICA: BOWERS 52, TACKETT 57.' It was decided that both candidates should come to the 1976 UK Eastercon; in the event Bill Bowers couldn't make it and Roy Tackett could. (*Checkpoint* 64, February 1976) • *30 Years Ago*: 'Robert Rankin, nameless spies inform us, has heard about the BSFA Awards and dropped a subtle hint: "As a British writer of Science Fiction for the last sixteen years, who do you have to shag at your place to get an award? Yours hopefully...." Meanwhile David Garnett reported: 'Looking through a copy of Michael Legat's *An Author's Guide to Getting Published*, I came to a section on the kind of books which can't be published commercially: "poetry or **science fiction** or treatises on unpronounceable compounds or a manual of Pig Sticking, or even an account of your package holiday ..." (*Ansible* 103, February 1996)

**Random Fandom.** *Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards (FAAns)*: voting in the usual categories for work published in 2025 opened in January and will close at 23:59 Pacific time on 14 February. Any interested fan may vote. Blogs and podcasts are still excluded. More in the latest *The Incompleat Register* at [efanzines.com/TIR/Incompleat2025.pdf](http://efanzines.com/TIR/Incompleat2025.pdf).

**Magazine Scene.** Must Read Magazines (*Analog*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*) has reportedly amended its standard contract to remove such objectionable clauses as the waiver of the author's moral rights and overreaching media/merchandise rights grabs. (*Locus*, 14 January) • But lifetime subscribers may be out of luck: John Lorentz, with a life subscription to *F&SF*, was ominously told that 'we are conducting a further review to confirm whether lifetime subscribers will continue to be honored'. [F770]

**Thog's Masterclass.** *The Penetrating Gaze*. '... the other guard drilled fretwork patterns in Monach's face with his eyes.' (K. J. Parker, *Shadow*, 2001) [BA] • *Neat Tricks*. 'In London, amid the fray of the summer party, I ran to find Richard Fletcher, *The Times*' business editor, whose astounded eyebrows disappeared up his forehead.' (Katie Prescott, *The Curious Case of Mike Lynch*, 2025) [NW] • *Acronym Watch* (or, *An Instalment That Didn't Appear in Analog*). 'After the Christmas battles between the People's Union for Righteous Excellence and the Friends Upholding Closer Kinship had run their bloody course ...' (Poul Anderson, *Tales of the Flying Mountains*, 1970) • *The Future of Farm Machinery*. 'Atomic power allied to my tractors could prove very interesting.' (Terence Haile, *Space Train*, 1962) • *Hard-Boiled Dept*. 'He felt as though copper-colored flames a foot long were shooting out of each of his ears.' '... you'll be so flat broke that a pancake with a harelip could spit right over you.' (James Blish, *The Quincunx of Time*, 1973)