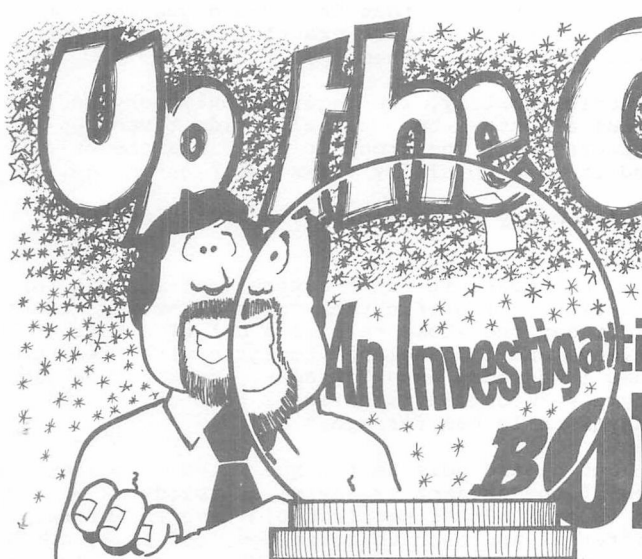




Up the Conjunction



An Investigation into Astrology by
BOB SHAW

JIM BARKER.

The following article which you are, I hope, about to read was originally given as a talk at the Skycon in London---and for that reason it is written as a talk. There is a vast difference between material which was written to be read and material which was written to be spoken. Choice of vocabulary, sentence structure, type of humour, pacing, emphasis---all these things are affected, with the result that a speech comes out looking rather different from an article proper. Possibly these considerations are important only to the author, but I thought I'd let you know...

The science talks I've been giving at conventions in the last year or two have---as well as making Isaac Asimov start fretting about the competition---been reprinted in a few magazines. This pleased me no end, except that some letters of comment accused me of occasionally wandering away from the point. I took the criticisms to heart and included in my New Year resolutions a stern directive to myself: Always stick to the point during talks!

It's important to me that I keep this resolution because I had more of them than usual this year, and broke them sooner than usual. You know how it is... you start off the year full of high hopes and lofty ideals... 1978 was the year I was going to save some money, 1978 was the year I was going to get more exercise, 1978 was the year I was going to read *Dhalgren* right through to the end...

They've all gone by the board, except for this one about sticking to the point, so I'm not going to start off with one of my usual preambles about what I was doing at room parties last night. It was just the same old routine, anyway---about two hundred people all crammed together, drinking, smoking, making a hell of a noise, falling down, being sick---and that was just in the lift on the way up!

Actually, when I did get into a party in one of the bedrooms it was so noisy that we got a lot of complaints---from the pilots of Concordes. This afternoon they're going to hold a protest march to stop science fiction fans landing at Heathrow... (They tried phoning the Noise Abatement Society, but the people at the other end of the line couldn't hear them because of the noise.)

Anyway, I mustn't stray away from the point of this talk, which is about astrology and all its underlying facts and fallacies, and a fascinating new scientific truth I have uncovered about the relationship between human affairs and the movements of the planets. My old sparring

partner---the German-Irish writer and researcher, von Donegan---is going to be sick with jealousy when he hears what I've found out. Old von Donegan (VD, to his friends) is quite peeved with me, you know---over those jokes I made about him in my last talk.

He wrote to me from Germany and threatened to make me into sausage meat, but I wasn't scared. I wrote back and said, "Do your wurst." I thought he would have enjoyed that little bilingual pun, but he told me he had seen it before---on a 20,000-year old tablet he dug up in Africa.

However, that is beside the point and I promised that all my remarks would be relevant and pertinent. You'll note that I've given the talk a concise clear title---if there's one thing I detest it's this modern propaganda technique of the tricky euphemism which allows unscrupulous people to disguise their true motives with fancy words. Like that society that was in the news lately, the one for people who like interfering with small children---Paedophile Information Exchange! It sounds so respectable it could be the governing body of the British Medical Association, or even the British Science Fiction Association.

And there's an even sneakier one on the go now!

The other night I was having a drink in a pub in Bermondsey when I was approached by this shifty-looking character who asked me if I was interested in necrophilia. I said to him, "Do you mean having sex with dead people?"

He looked a bit uneasy at that, glanced all around the place, lowered his voice and said, "Actually, old boy, we prefer to refer to it as posthumous caring."

Horrible and underhanded, isn't it?---but that's the technique they use. I'll bet that if you set up a Society for Posthumous Caring you could get it established as a registered charity and get a member of the royal family as your patron.

Dear me---have I wandered away from the point again? No more of it! Belief in astrology has been with us since ancient times and it is deep-rooted in our thought and language. Men have always had the desire to know what the future held for them, and they have tried many different ways of getting this advance information. They used to, for example, poke around the insides of chickens, inspecting their entrails for signs. Or sometimes they used to sit and inspect the palms of their hands---which is what I'd do if I'd had mine stuck inside a chicken all day. It was a filthy habit, that, though no doubt its practitioners had a great fancy name for it which

made it sound respectable. Prediction and Prognostication by Poultry Manipulation, perhaps.

But of all the traditional ways of trying to know the future---cards, divining, consulting oracles, subscribing to the "Racing & Football Outlook"---the stars seemed to offer the best prospects. They were a mysterious and ever-changing spectacle, quite obviously connected with the gods in some way, and it was only logical to assume that they influenced men's destinies. Thus the profession of astrologer sprang up, and it has been with us rather a long time---in spite of the fact that the stars have an infuriating habit of telling us things we don't really want to know, and of presenting the information in language of such peculiar vagueness that any value it might have had is completely dissipated.

Imagine what it must have been like to be an ancient Roman general leading an army which was going to face another army in battle the following morning, a battle whose outcome could shape the future of the world. He goes to his astrologer and asks him for advice about how to run things the next day, and should he throw in his cavalry first and keep the archers till later, and will the barbarians overthrow the empire or will the guttering candle of civilisation be kept alight for another decade. The astrologer does a quick horoscope and gives him the following inside dope, straight from the Horse's Head Nebula: "Personal relationships at the office could be difficult this month, but an old friendship could lead to a new outlook on life. Don't conceal anxieties from your steady boyfriend, and your lucky colour is blue."

That's the sort of thing they always say! Sometimes, in an effort to avoid a general air of vagueness, they particularise a bit by saying things like, "If you were born on a Thursday and have red hair and blue eyes---don't fall out of any tenth-storey windows. The outcome could be distressing." Nobody's going to argue with him on that one, especially anybody who has ever fallen out of a tenth-storey window. Or anybody he landed on. Or sometimes they say, "Wednesday is a day for being careful in business dealings." Of course it is! Every day is a day for being careful in business dealings---although, strangely enough, astrologers themselves don't always appreciate that simple truth.



One of my prized memories from my days as a full-time journalist is the one about one of the big Fleet Street publishing empires which, about fifteen years ago, decided to cash in on the general superstitious interest in astrology by starting a new weekly magazine devoted to nothing else but horoscopes and predictions. It was called, I think, *Your Stars* and they got about a dozen of the very best astrologers in the country

on the payroll so that they could guarantee to tell all their readers exactly what the future held in store for them.

Unfortunately, the magazine only survived for about a month---because sales didn't come up to expectations! The irony in that is so beautiful, and it sums up all my views about astrology.

Astrology as we know it is all a load of bunk.

"That means it isn't a very good subject for a serious scientific talk," you might say. Others might say the whole talk is a bit of a farrago, anyway, and I'm inclined to agree with them because I was born on a Thursday. You know the old rhyme---"Wednesday's child is full of woe; Thursday's child has farrago."

But please note that I qualified my condemnation of the subject by saying astrology *as we know it* is bunk. Other people could have an entirely different approach to astrology, and it is worth remembering that some of the thinkers of old were men of genius. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, was ahead of his time in many ways. I have revealed elsewhere how he created the world's first blue movie. Also, he was famous for his anatomical studies, but not many people know of his connection with early diagnostic medicine...

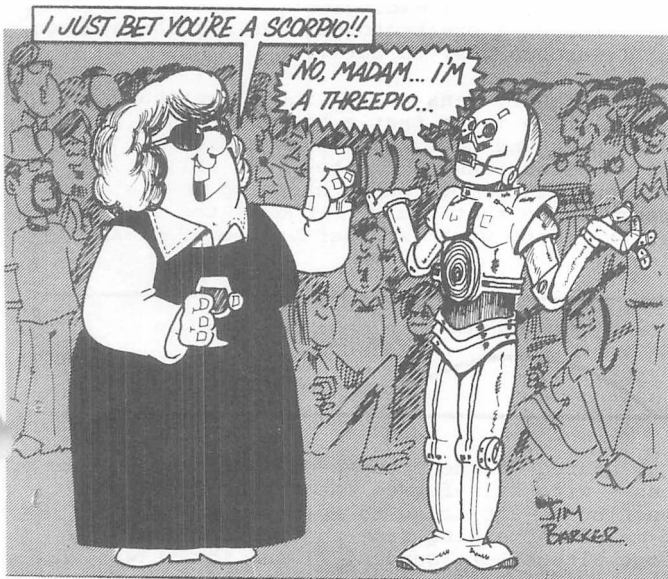
It came about because he liked working in tempera, which is a type of paint which has eggs as one of its constituents. He also liked working *alfresco*---he had some funny habits, old Leonardo---and once when he was living on a hill outside Florence he covered the entire outside of his house with a magnificent painting which all the townsfolk used to admire. Unfortunately, the land around his house was infested with a kind of insect which was attracted by the egg in the paint and kept climbing up the wall and eating Leonardo's painting away from the bottom upwards.

He used to counteract this by going out and repainting the picture day by day, but on the days when he wasn't feeling too good he couldn't do that, and the picture used to slowly disappear from the bottom. The townsfolk would look up at his house, shake their heads and say, "Leonardo mustn't be well today---his tempera-chewer is rising." And that's the true origin of that saying.

But that's beside the point... The discoveries I made about astrology came about because I'm an amateur scientist and therefore do not go in for narrow specialisation in one subject. The professional scientist often fails because he channels his mental energy into knowing more and more about one limited subject, whereas I go in for the interdisciplinary, broad spectrum approach. In fact, it's got to the point where I now know practically nothing about almost everything. In this case, I succeeded because I brought in my experience in the apparently unrelated fields of neurology and optics.

It started a few months ago when I got a bit tired of writing SF and decided to have a break from it. Actually, I was *advised* to have a break from it---by my agent and publisher. Looking back on it, I don't see what my agent got so annoyed about. I had just outlined to him what I thought was a great plot, all about how Winnie the Pooh developed a third eye in the middle of his forehead, a third eye which, naturally, gave him second sight, the way it always does in stories. In the plot he used this extrasensory perception to spy on two meetings of the London SF Circle in the One Tun. My agent seemed a bit uncertain about the commercial value of the proposed story, and he seemed to blow his top altogether when he heard I was going to call it, "One Tun, One Tun, Middle Eye Pooh".

Anyway, the upshot was that I turned my restless inquiring mind to other activities for a



while. I didn't delve into astrology immediately, or even neurology or optics, because I had got involved with the mystery surrounding the legend of the Flying Dutchman. I have always felt sorry for that poor bloke, condemned to sail around the oceans and seas of the world forever, never able to take a minute's rest, like somebody working his way through college by selling subscriptions to *Science Fiction Monthly*.

Eventually I proved to my own satisfaction that he wasn't haunted or anything like that---he had simply lost control of his ship. The culprit was a wood-boring parasite (related to da Vinci's insects) which originated in Holland and which had a special liking for the hardwood used in the steering wheels of all ships built in Holland. It used to eat them away, leaving the captain with no means of steering. You may have heard the name I gave it---Dutch helm disease.

Having disposed of yet another famous mystery, I was looking around for something else to do when Joe, the owner of a local lawn mower factory up in Ulverston, telephoned and asked me to have lunch with him to discuss a problem. He sounded as though it was pretty urgent, which surprised me because one of the things I like about Ulverston is that nothing ever happens there in a hurry. The town's chief claim to fame is that Stan Laurel was born there. When I first went to Ulverston I used to think it was quite remarkable that Stan Laurel should have been born there, out of all the places in the world---then when I got to know the place I realised he couldn't have been born anywhere else. It's a sleepy Stan Laurel sort of a town, where there's never any rush about anything. In fact, I said to one of the men in the local pub, "The philosophy around here seems to be *mañana*." He said, "What does *mañana* mean?" I said, "You know---it'll do tomorrow." And he said, "Oh, there's nothing as urgent as that around here."

But Joe was obviously in a hurry, so I arranged to meet him that day, quite pleased at the prospect of a slap-up business lunch. My wife didn't seem too pleased, though. She warned me that I had a habit on occasions like that of eating and drinking far too much.

"It's all right," I quipped, "I'll put it on my Excess card." (She believes in moderation, but I think moderation is only all right in moderation. Excess is better, provided you don't have too much of it.)

I then went out and jumped into my new car. I have to jump into it---there aren't any doors. That's because it's a souped-up job---a Morris Oxtail. The thing I like most about it is that it has a very reliable Italian engine whose manufacturers didn't put it into production until no less than two thousand Italian engineers had

checked the design and given their approval and consent. That means, of course, that it is a two thousand *si-si* engine.

All that aside, I went and met Joe for lunch and, to give him his due, I must say he really lashed out. He missed me though. Actually, it was a pub lunch and he bought me a Cumbrian pheasant, which is a sausage with a feather stuck in it. I had been recommended to him by a mutual friend, a fellow journalist who is the science correspondent for the *Beano*, but he seemed a bit doubtful about my qualifications, especially my connections with science fiction.

"Science fiction," he said, "isn't that those magazines with covers showing girls dressed in nothing but little bits of brass?"

"Yes," I leered, "but just think of the new dimension that gives to the hobby of brass rubbing."

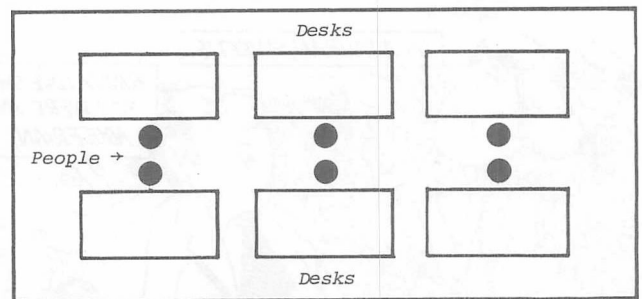
That seemed to reassure him, because he was a really lecherous looking character---the sort of person who could think impure thoughts about Margaret Thatcher. He said, "Doesn't James White write science fiction?"

"Yes, but not only science fiction," I told him. "He's now working on an Irish political musical called 'Don't Cry For Me, Ballymena'. It's a follow-up to his successful nude review, 'Oh, Balbriggan'."

That seemed to allay all his fears, so he told me about his problem, which was that his firm had built a new office block, but when the staff had moved into it their productivity had fallen away to almost zero.

"They don't seem to think properly any more," he said. "The only time they seem to get any good ideas is when they're in the lavatory."

It was obvious from the look on his face that he thought the problem was insoluble, and when I asked him to sketch a typical layout for one of his offices he complied without much enthusiasm, and did a drawing like this:---



"Aha, I thought so," I said triumphantly. You should have seen his little face light up---he looked like a NASA official being told that the Mars landers had dug up definite proof of the existence of Ray Bradbury.

"Do you mean," he said, with a hopeful tremor in his voice, "you know what's wrong?"

"Of course," I said. "It's a clear-cut case of encephalic field interference."

It may have been my imagination, but it seemed to me that the look of joy died out of his face a little when I said that. I went on and explained to him that the active human brain is surrounded by a faint electro-magnetic field which extends several feet beyond the skull. (The only known exception to this is in the case of fans of the TV show *Space 1999*. Their skulls are too thick to allow anything to pass through.)

When people are crammed too close together their brain fields interfere with each other and that causes a severe damping down of the powers of thought---as you will be able to prove for yourself if you go to any of the room parties tonight. I explained to Joe that all he had to do was move his staff round to the other side of their desks, thus separating them enough to allow their brain fields full play, without any unwanted reflection from walls either, and everything would be all right.

"This is marvellous," he said, finally convinced. "The firm has lost so much money lately

that I can't pay you in cash, but if you like I'll give you a lawn mower out of my factory."

I said, "No mower for me thanks---I'm driving."

We parted and I returned to my study to embark on some more vital scientific research. On the face of it, it appeared that I had wound up yet another successful case---and yet something was troubling me. I had a feeling that I had been on the verge of a major scientific discovery, that something that had been said during our meeting had contained a small and apparently insignificant clue to something else, a clue that I had missed. And as anybody who watches *Horizon* and similar TV shows will tell you, small and apparently insignificant clues are the very best sort for scientific researchers. Big significant clues are a complete waste of time---but when you get a small and apparently insignificant clue you know you're really on to something good.

With the small voice clamouring at the back of my mind, I got down to work on another project of mine---the design for a spaceship engine powered by the heat from continental quilts. Continental quilts, or duvets, are marvellous things, you know---even though they're so expensive. When I was a kid, and this shows how times have changed, every bed in every house in the country, even the poorest, had a duvet on it---only we didn't know they were duvets. We called them eiderdowns.

And because we didn't know how they worked---there were no Sunday colour supplements to explain it all to us---we used them wrongly. In the wintertime we put a sheet on the bed, followed by about twenty woollen blankets, and put the duvet, or eiderdown, on top of all that---and we still froze every night. What was happening, you see, was that the duvet was heating the top ten layers of blankets, but that heat couldn't filter all the way down to us.



I worked on the spaceship engine for a while, but my mind wasn't able to grapple properly with the problem. I put it aside and dabbled a little with a paper I was writing on criminology which puts forward the theory that, just as some people claim that sex education in schools can lead to juvenile rape, the teaching of economics can incite schoolboys to go out and rob banks. But my heart wasn't in that project either, so I picked up a book on the science of optics and was idly glancing through it when, by purest chance, my gaze fell on a paragraph about Fresnel lenses. There was a diagram there showing what a Fresnel lens was like, and as I looked at it I felt something strange and powerful begin to well up inside me. It was the sausage I had eaten in the pub at lunchtime. A couple of indigestion tablets calmed my stomach down a bit, and I began studying the diagram again with the beginnings of a

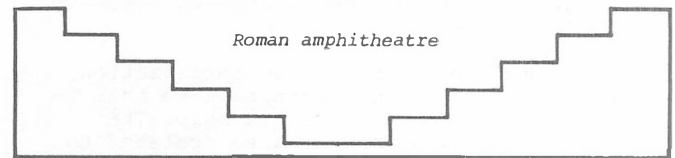
heady intellectual excitement. I knew I was on the verge of a breakthrough. (So was the sausage, but I was too busy to care.)

An ordinary lens has a single continuous curve, which means that a big lens tends to be very thick and heavy, which is a drawback in most applications. A Fresnel lens follows the same curvature, but keeps stepping down at close intervals so that you get roughly the same focussing effect with far less volume of glass or plastic.



I stared at the cross-section of the Fresnel lens---with half-formed ideas heaving in my subconscious---and tried to identify what it reminded me of, something from another field of knowledge altogether. Suddenly I had it! It was all there in front of me! No, not the sausage---I don't believe in flogging a joke to death---but the answer to the questions that had been niggling me all afternoon.

The Fresnel lens resembled nothing more than a cross-section through an ancient Roman amphitheatre!



Like a man in a hypnotic trance, I heard Joe's voice once again saying, "The only time they seem to get any good ideas is when they're in the lavatory." That was the small and apparently insignificant clue I had missed. People *do* tend to think well when they are in the toilet, but according to my theories of encephalic field interference that should have been impossible because of the notorious smallness of office toilets. It dawned on me that I had made the mistake of thinking like a Flatlander---only considering the brain field in the two-dimensional terms of a plane. And the solution to this sub-problem lay in the fact that office toilets, although small in floor area, are usually high-ceiling affairs---and that allows the brain fields to extend upwards without hindrance. I had been making the mistake of forgetting all about the third dimension.

What has all this to do with Fresnel lenses, Roman amphitheatres, and astrology?

Well, just imagine thousands and thousands of people packed onto the terraces of the amphitheatre. It's just like a lens---or, more correctly, a mirror---focussing all their brain fields upwards into a psychic beam of unimaginable power. A concentrated torrent of human mind force which is being shot into space like an invisible searchlight beam!

The mind-shaking question was: What effect would such a beam have on any distant planet it happened to strike?

With trembling fingers I got out the calculator I had borrowed from Robert Silverberg---it's the one he uses to calculate how many novels he can write in a week---and did a few sums. A minute of high-speed computation showed me that at 3.15 on the afternoon of July 2nd in the year 80 AD... just as the newly-completed Colosseum in Rome was being used for its first gladiatorial combats... with the terraces filled with 100,000 blood-crazed spectators... the planet Mars was precisely at zenith.

We may never know what Mars looked like before that fateful moment.

It may have been a green and pleasant world... a place of tinkling streams and peaceful meadows, where colourful birds chattered among the gently nodding trees---but in an instant it was transformed, by the ravaging force of all those minds filled with images of blood-stained sand, into the Mars we know today. The planet of endless red deserts.

Venus got the treatment next. It strayed into the beam from the big amphitheatre in Tunisia, but it was during the interval and there was nothing going on in the arena---so it just got turned into a big ball of hot white sand.

Jupiter was unlucky enough to be caught in the beam emanating from one of the very earliest Welsh poetry and song competitions, held in a natural amphitheatre in Glamorgan, and it got turned into a huge ball of hot gas.

My researches haven't yet revealed what happened to the other planets in the Solar System, but at least now we know that there is a direct link between human beings and the planets and stars. The only trouble is that the astrologers, not being coldly logical thinkers like me, have got everything backwards. Astrologers on distant worlds must be important people because they can warn their customers about *Earth* being in the ascendancy. When they talk about *Earth* being in the seventh house, you'd better sit up and pay attention. *We* influence the heavenly bodies---and what a dreadful responsibility it is. Just think what the audience at a Linda Lovelace film could do to an unsuspecting little planet like Mercury. It hardly bears thinking about.

The only bright spot I can find in all this is that in September next year when the Worldcon is being held the Moon will be high in the sky above Brighton. If the convention hall is the right shape, and if we all work very hard at it and think the right kind of thoughts, we might be able to turn the Moon into a permanent science fiction convention. It seems to me that that's the sort of noble, yet practical, common cause which is just what the science fiction community needs to prove to the rest of the world that we aren't merely impractical visionaries.

I'll see you up there!

Bob Shaw



BITS

"The English instinctively admire any man who has no talent and is modest about it."

James Agate

Brian 'Brian' Aldiss's story in *Vector 87* had already been rejected by Rob Holdstock for *Earthshine*, his proposed magazine in association with the BSFA.

Famous pseudonym Chris P. Carlsen is embarrassed by the fanmail passed on to him by Sphere: "Dear Chris, I think your violence is wonderful. You really have a great eye for blood and slaughter. Everyone in my form thinks the same..."

Now that another of the Pieria mob has been trapped into matrimony (Chris Morgan by Pauline, *née* Dungate) sidelong glances are being cast upon the remaining exponents of the single life. Will rumoured favourites Kev Smith or Andrew Stephenson beat all others to the altar? Will Pickersgill-hating Allan Scott (aka The Berserker) fall victim to one of his many women? Will dark horse Joe Nicholas show streaks of unsuspected form? The fallen ones (Holdstock, Kilworth, Langford and Morgan, to name only the most despicable) watch with keen interest.

Among the telegrams sent to Chris and Pauline was this one from Chris Priest: CONGRATULATIONS AND ALL BEST WISHES STOP MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU TONIGHT. They were looking remarkably well at Pieria 21 a fortnight later, so perhaps it was.

At the same Pieria, Garry Kilworth produced an immortal line in his story: "There were many desperate women but only a few willing men." Sounds like the mirror image of an Eastercon. Pauline struck a telling blow at Joe Nicholas's story. "It's middle-class," she said. It was, too. Kev's editorial (following) was pre-circulated well in advance, to allow plenty of time for arguments against it to be developed and

matured. Chairman Allan programmed the discussion for the tea interval and the total comment turned out to be Deb Rohan's saying "You're wrong!" through a mouthful of chocolate cake, whilst Dave and Joe nodded.

"Crétain and Gasparde always began the first sentence with a long dash, as everyone does who speaks good conversational French. It is the first indispensable rule; whoever ignores it is exposed as a conversational barbarian before he has uttered a word."

Carl Linderholm: MATHEMATICS MADE DIFFICULT.

"'Fruit flies like a banana' is a proposition in entomological gastronomy, whereas 'Fruit flies like a banana' is a proposition in horticultural aerobatics."

Ibid.

Dave, by the way, recently received the world's finest rejection slip, as follows---

RAYMOND B. JANNEY II

Thank you for the attached,
but it is not necessary.

AVCO EVERETT RESEARCH LABORATORY, INC.
Everett, Mass. 02149
(617) 389-3000

Concerning

A Sense of Wonder

If you ask a group of sf fans why they read sf, what it has that other forms of fiction do not, what makes it special, then it is likely that one of them will come up with the phrase "sense of wonder", and the others will not agree. Certainly the phrase has a good pedigree. Damon Knight's book of critical essays was called *In Search of Wonder*, for example. It's a handy sort of phrase, easy to remember, and it certainly seems to express that "something extra".

"Sense of wonder" implies imagination freewheeling through all the might-bes and might-have-beens, encompassing the entire universe, spanning eternity. It implies a cosmic scope within which anything can happen. This is something that mainstream fiction, fettered to observable reality, cannot do. But what is this sense of wonder really?

"Wonder", my dictionary says, is a noun meaning "the state of mind produced by something new, unexpected, or extraordinary". As a verb it means "to speculate". There are other meanings, mainly to do with doubting, which I do not think are applicable in this context. (If they are, Damon Knight must be credited with greater subtlety than I had thought.)

These are, of course, meanings entirely appropriate to sf. Isn't all sf new, unexpected, or extraordinary? At this the old hands snigger to themselves, or fall in the aisles, depending on their nature. They have seen it all before. New? Unexpected? Extraordinary? Not at all. How, therefore, can it induce sense of wonder? "Ah," says the young fellow discovering sf for the first time, "but it is new, unexpected and extraordinary. I've never seen anything like it." There's sense of wonder there all right.

But it was obvious all along,

really. Sense of wonder lies in the mind of the beholder, and must be defined for each person individually. More than that. My choice, as an example, of a "young fellow" as the one to exhibit sense of wonder was quite deliberate. The same young fellow might easily find Jane Austen or Homer just as wonderful, would no doubt be finding the big wide world something to wonder at also. I think it is fair to say that sense of wonder can be evoked most easily in the young, so that we have to bring a time element into our definition of sense of wonder, as well as a personal element. People change with age. I think we remember that evocation whenever we read sf, rather than having it evoked anew; that an adult appreciation of sf is without a sense of wonder for all but the most exceptionally outstanding works.

"Sense of wonder" implies a certain naivety, I think. But is that the correct frame of mind with which to approach a form of literature? It is easy to say that it all depends on what you want out of the literature, but it isn't terribly useful. The linguistic study can take us only so far. In this case it brings us unavoidably to look at sf itself before we can form any valid conclusions.

The cosmic scope of sf makes it possible for anything to happen in an sf story. Anything at all---there are no rules. Of course, not everything does happen in a single story. What we find is that the author makes up his or her own rules and fits the story into that manufactured framework. Our assessment of the story depends on two factors: first, on whether the rules make sense, whether the framework is convincing; secondly on whether the story sticks to the rules, remains within the framework. For sf criticism as a specialised form, these two factors are good starting points.

How often is a story praised for a convincing background, or framework? And how often condemned for a weak one? Such condemnation is entirely justified. When given the opportunity to invent new rules, to throw out the rules which govern our everyday

existence, the very least the lucky author can do is stick to them. For him not to do so implies a lack of respect for his craft, which cannot be forgiven.

That, I think, gets rid of about half the sf ever written.

What remains? Well, about another half of the sf ever written is entertainment sf. With this I have no quarrel; in fact I avoid it as much as possible. It is unpretentious, written with no thoughts of higher literature, no aspiration to be classified as such. This is just as well, since it fails utterly if judged by literary standards. It is a genre, much as the detective story is a genre or romantic fiction as perpetrated by women's magazines is a genre. And like those other two, it is largely an intellectual fiction.

That requires some justification. Detective stories are quite obviously intellectual. Their characters are merely pawns to be moved about by the complex plot; the plot is the "lead character". Romantic fiction is intellectual in that the romance, the emotion in it, is ersatz and can be understood only intellectually. On an emotional level the emotion is hollow and worthless.

Sf-for-entertainment comes somewhere in between. It contains ideas and complex plotting, like detective stories. Asimov writes both with equal ease and similar style. It also contains ersatz emotion, in such stories as Godwin's "The Cold Equations". Often it contains a mixture of the two.

But under no circumstances should sf for entertainment be held out to the unbeliever as the best that sf can offer. To do so is to invite ridicule from lovers of literature. In *Black Hole 14* John Nixon wrote of how he was attempting to convert a friend of his, a student of English Literature, to sf. He was going the right way about it, by offering the best that sf has to offer---Le Guin, Kuttner, Sturgeon and such like.

So let us look at the best of sf in terms of literature.

As a start, we can say that the "value" of literature lies in the way it illuminates aspects of life---the way people think, feel and react, and what motivates them. If a work of literature does not shed light on some characteristic or other of people then it does not deserve to be called literature; it is not literature. To be sure it should also entertain; or else no-one would bother to read it. But entertainment value is rather like the sense of wonder, too subjective, too personal, to assess in terms of literary merit. For example, I find John Fowles's novels extremely entertaining because I become so absorbed in them. And he is certainly writing literature.

We have seen already that sf can do things the mainstream cannot. But we can take this further and say sf must do things the mainstream cannot. Why? Because otherwise there would be no need for it to be sf at all. As James Blish said, if an outer space story could have been set in Australia it should have been set in Australia. A story set on Mars because it requires desert and loneliness could just as easily be set in Australia---plenty of desert there, and the outback can get mighty lonely. A story set on Mars because it requires desert, loneliness and an absence of air could not be set in Australia without inventing some facts about Australia's well-known lack of atmosphere. (That should annoy a few Australians.)

In terms of our definition of the value of literature, sf can impose extraordinary conditions on ordinary people and show how those people react. Certainly this shows us something new about people. Alternatively, sf can impose ordinary conditions on extraordinary people and illuminate ordinary people by contrast. Two of George Orwell's novels illustrate these approaches. In 1984 the people are quite ordinary; the pressures they are under are not. In *Animal Farm* the lead characters are not ordinary people, but animals; the farm, however, is absolutely normal.

(To have extraordinary people in extraordinary conditions may be entertaining, as in *Lord of Light* by Zelazny, or may not, as in *Perry Rhodan*

by a cast of thousands. But however much entertainment is provided, such a story cannot be literature as defined. There is simply nothing real enough to hold on to.)

I used to think that this ability to utilise the extraordinary was the answer, that this was where sf scored over the mainstream. No doubt many fans would agree with the idea. But it is only a half-formed idea, only partly thought out. The best fiction, of the mainstream, is removed from reality simply because it is fiction. The characters are not real in that you could not meet them in the street, though they may well be very realistic. We can say that such a fiction has one stage of unreality. This is unavoidable, and should not cause us any problems.

Let us now consider a very good sf story. The characters in it are just as realistic as those in the mainstream. The story has one stage of unreality. But, being sf, it has something else. This is its extraordinary feature, and because it is extraordinary, not to be found in this world, it is also unusual. Thus we have added a second stage of unreality. This is also unavoidable, in sf stories, and does cause us a problem.

The problem is this: can a story with two stages of unreality tell us as much about the real world and real people as an equivalent story with only one stage of unreality? My short answer to that is: no, it cannot. Although sf can put people under much greater and more varied pressures than the mainstream, and examine their reactions, those greater and more varied pressures are entirely fabrications.

They are themselves unreal, and therefore they are of no use in illuminating the real world. To put it another way, sf can invent new rules and new backgrounds all day, but at the end of the day they tell us nothing new about the old rules, and by them we have to live.

That was the short answer. The long answer recognises that there are exceptions to this dismissal of sf. One

exception is that new, unreal rules can be of value in themselves, in that they can encourage re-examination and reappraisal of the real rules, and thus promote a greater understanding of them. The other main exception is that the new rules can be exaggerations, or extremes of the old. Thus we can emphasise or isolate a particular aspect of the real rules, the better to understand that aspect and peoples' reaction to it.

It is no coincidence that two forms of sf or fantasy that perform these functions are the two forms of sf or fantasy most readily accepted by the mainstream. The first is children's fantasy, long a major part of children's literature. The second is allegory, such as 1984, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Lewis's *Perelandra* trilogy. (His "Narnia Chronicles combine both, and are excellent.)

So the question I want to ask now is: Why try to write good sf that aspires to literature? Why not ignore sf altogether and jump feet first into the mainstream? The writers I have in mind are quite capable of it. Ursula Le Guin has done it, with the very good *Orsinian Tales*, and her "The Day Before the Revolution" won a Nebula because Ursula Le Guin is an sf writer, not because it is sf. It isn't. Brian Aldiss has done it with his *The Hand-Reared Boy* novels. But what about Chris Priest, and Samuel Delany, and Kate Wilhelm, and John Brunner? Why do they write sf? And the new writers---Rob Holdstock and Garry Kilworth, say---why do they bother with sf? I hope it's not fear that the mainstream is too big, too hard---if Melvyn Bragg can get on in it, anyone can.

Or do they have an answer that I haven't seen? If so, I want to hear it. Sf has been a part of my life for too long for me to throw it off easily, but that is the way I'm headed unless someone can convince me that sf does not have to fall short of the mainstream. Can they?

KEVIN SMITH

~~~~~  
While you're at it, tell the other editor too. He's getting worried. [Dave]



# INVADERS FROM KELOS

## Allan Scott

At last it can be told: how the great Alscott survived the unmentionable tortures inflicted on him by the filthy barbarians of Mount Vernon.

This may need translation. About two weeks ago I got my summons to go into hospital for plastic surgery. Yes, I quite agree: it was about time, but since they were out of spare faces they went to work on my back instead.

You see, about six or seven years ago some very strange things started happening there. I suspect some humour-loving person must have stuck a sign on my back saying *Aliens Welcome*. Well, they came. They liked it (the perverts) so they settled, building little purple houses like the ones they had had back home under their beautiful red sun. The houses grew into villages, the villages into towns, the towns into cities. One day I looked at my back and discovered nine alien metropolises, ranging in size from half an inch to three inches, and in height from an eighth to three-quarters of an inch. I didn't mind too much, but every time I turned over in bed I could hear rioting in the streets and a sort of gentle pressure on my flesh would persuade me this was not a good idea.

Inspiration! I went to my doctor.

"Christ, what's that?" he said, reaching for the brandy.

"My back. I thought you might be interested. I seem to have aliens."

"Hrp." he commented, leafing feverishly through a book marked *Specialists* and writing a letter with the other hand. After a few minutes he looked up, then looked hastily down again. "You can put your shirt on if you like," he said. "Thanks," I replied wittily, "they did seem to be

getting a bit cold back there."

I went to a specialist. It said on the sign he was a dermatologist. I looked the word up in my Collins Gem Dictionary, but it didn't say anything about aliens.

"Hi," I said. "I think I've got aliens."

He looked at me as though I'd just popped out of a Wheaties packet.

"Take your shirt off," he quipped.

"I warn you, they don't like fresh air," I said, taking my shirt off.

"My God," he said.

"Care for some brandy?" I asked.

"Erm... look here. I don't think I can help you."

"I know," I said. "What I need is a xenologist and a removal van."

"Where do you live?"

"Somewhere near the arsehole of the world: call it Watford for convenience."

"Right. Get your doctor to send you to Mount Vernon."

"Is that a top-secret government lab run by scientists familiar with UFOs and extraterrestrial phenomena?"

"No, it's a bloody hospital. Er... you can put your shirt on if you like."

"Very kind of you," I said.

I waited two years. The gears of the NHS ground slow but sure. Forms were formed. Documents were docketed. Commands were given, received, filed and forgotten. Papers were typed, decorated with office tea, and thrown away. Then, one day, something crept through the letterbox. My summons. I packed my bags, said goodbye to my friends and relations, turned round to say goodbye to Sue, and realised she left nine months ago. I don't blame her. It's no fun being a xenophobe in my house.

I arrived at a place called the Ivor ward. Looking at some of my fellow-sufferers I reckoned someone couldn't spell. Igor ward, more bloody like it.

"Hi," I said merrily, "I'm Allan Scott, the one with aliens on his back."

The nurse looked at me. She'd seen my type before. I thought she looked a bit worn at the edges.

"In there und sit down. Ze doctor vill see you at vunce."



Christ, I thought, Transylvania was never like this.

Mick...

After a few minutes a man in a white coat arrived.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning Victor---er, Doctor," I said, looking at him suspiciously. No signs of hidden electrical apparatus, life elixirs---was this man genuine?

"Let's see it then," he said.

You mad fool, I thought, this sight has made strong men blench. I unveiled the metropoli.

"Ah," he said, "keloids."

Keloids! At last I understood. All the way from distant Kelos, fifth planet of a dying red giant, they had come to seek refuge on my back! At last, a man after my own heart!

"So that's what they are," I said. "Fine. Now how the hell do we get them to go away?"

He smiled. A chill ran down my spine, six times round my pelvis, and settled in an unmentionable spot. I brushed it away, impatiently. "Well?" I said.

"We'll have to cut them out, I'm afraid. Then we'll take some skin---heh heh, yes, I think we'll peel a bit off your bum, and slap it over what's left. That should scare them off."

"Sorry," I said, "I'm against chemical and biological warfare. If you want skin you can take it off my legs, you inhuman swine!"

"Ooh, you old spoilsport you," he muttered. "All right, then, off your legs. See you in surgery."

Was it my imagination, or did I hear faint ghostly laughter as he limped away through the ward?

That night, having nothing else to do, I got smashed. Deep in conversation with a six-foot Mick and a five-foot Black about sex---someone came through the door. "Woman!" moaned Mick, lunging. Tom and I sat on him.

"Anything we can do for your sister?" I said.

She looked me over with warm blue eyes. "What's going on here?" she said in a low contralto.

"We were talking about sex," said Tom. "Care to join in?"

"Trouble with you bloody niggers," I said, "is that you've no bloody finesse."

"Shut up and pass the whisky," said

..."Want a cup of tea?" said the voice at my elbow. "Bugger off," I said. "It's six o'clock in the bloody morning and I have a bloody hangover."

I turned over, and opened half an eye. A not unattractive brunette was poutingly withdrawing a cupful of strange and disgusting watery liquor.

"Oh hell," I muttered. "Erm. Sorry. Yes. I could really use some tea. Help me wake up. Great. Ha ha." It didn't even convince me. She passed the cup with a cold expression that froze as she saw something above my bed. The cup withdrew.

"Don't be shy love. My aliens are very friendly."

She shook her head, and pointed. Maybe they had decided to leave, and were now embarked in a tiny spaceship circling my head. I looked up. Instead, I saw a sign saying *Nil by mouth*. Some detestable practical joker must have hung it up there during the night. I turned to take it down.

"Aargh!" she said.

"Sorry," I jested.

"That... that means they're... they're going to operate today."

My hangover disappeared. "Operate!"

"Yes," she said. "I wouldn't mind, but I'm on theatre duty..."

Two hours later the anaesthetist came to see me.

"Hallo," she interpolated.

"Hallo yourself," I said. "Sit down. I'm sorry, we're a bit short of furniture, all we seem to have is this bed I'm in."

"Never mind," she said.

"Quite," I agreed. Never argue with your anaesthetist. "Do you drink?" she asked.

"Er... pardon?"

"Do you drink?"

"Is it going to come between us?"

"Have you cleaned your teeth this morning?"

Damn. Smell of Mick's whisky on my breath. Oh well. "No. Yes. I do drink. Now and again. Ha ha."

I wasn't convincing anyone today.

"Smoke?"

"I've never looked."

She winced. I don't blame her. She started putting a strange rubber device on my arm. This was getting interesting.



"That's to check your blood pressure," she said. I must say her approach was certainly scientific. "How's it going?" I asked. "Rising," she said. I'm not surprised.

She looked me over. "Are you fit?"

"You bet," I said. "Are you willing?"

"Sorry," she said, "I only get five minutes with each patient. Time's up."

I cursed. "Will you hold my hand?" I asked. "Maybe," she answered, gently unwrapping my paw from her thumb. "But first you'll have to get shaved."

"It took me four bloody weeks to grow this beard."

"It wasn't your beard I had in mind, love. Francis!"

I moved, but too late. A male nurse brandishing a razor approached and got to work. Fortunately I looked too butch to be his type, so he confined himself to comments on the chap next door. At last I understood: "Ah, so that's what the racket was. I thought it was a sperm whale with diarrhoea."

"No, he just likes a good spit now and again. H'm, don't we all."

I winced.

"Careful," said Francis. "nearly got you that time."

"Keep your eye on the job," I told him.

They came to take me away.

"You are Allan Scott?" said the nurse.

"Yes, the one with aliens," I said.

"Wish them a safe journey back to Kelos for me."

I blacked out---

---and woke up lying on my face in bed, with a hump on my back. What did they do, put the whole bloody population of Kelos in there? And there was something screwy about my leg.

"What happened?" I mumbled: difficult to do much else with my mouth full of pillow.

"It's all right, love."

"Francis?"

"Here, put your glasses on."

"Sorry, nurse."

"They've done it. It's all over."

"Good. Did they get back all right?"

"Who?"

"The aliens."

"I think you had too much to drink last night." She went away. I

heard a voice.

"Did I hear you talking about aliens?"

"Yes," I wisecracked, "the ones that were on my back. They've moved--- gone to a classier neighbourhood."

"Do you read SF?" said the voice.

My God, I thought, I've found Man Friday.

"Yes," I said. "Do you?"

"Yes."

Livingstone and Stanley weren't in it. I looked round---quite a gymnastic feat, that. I was looking at a guy in a wheelchair with a Frankenstein job on his leg.

"Nice," I said.

"Free flap," he commented, informatively. "Tell me more about SF."

I had found an addict. Maybe this place wasn't going to be so bad after all...

To cut a very long story short, they let me out the other day with purple welts all over me instead of purple lumps. I prefer the welts, especially as they won't stay purple. A nice job by a nice lot. I shall reserve the rest of the tale for another time...!

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*Will the creatures from dread Kelos return? Will our hero Allan succumb to the dread Purple Weltschmerz? Will the still more dread DRILKJIS editors have the sense to reject the next instalment? Who knows? Who cares? [Ed.]*

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FROM FREDERIK POHL'S GATEWAY---

*Dr Asmenion: ...Thirty million centimetres per second... which is...?*

*Question: Uh. The speed of light?*

*Dr Asmenion: Right on...*

[page 262]

This exposes a subtle difference between Gateway's universe and ours: c is 1000 times smaller. A transatlantic phone-call there suffers 32-second lags in two-way conversation; Apollo signals from the Moon can receive no reply for 43 minutes. All this would excite our Sense of Wonder to a greater degree if the point were developed further in the plot...



# samuel r. delany

## and the cult of incomprehension

★ JOSEPH M. NICHOLAS ★

I used to like Samuel Delany, purple prose and all. The Fall Of The Towers was one of my favourite novels, until I discovered Nova, which then displaced it. But now, however, having read--- or more precisely, struggled through ---the uncontrolled chaos of Dhalgren and Triton, I've found that all his previous works, stuff that I could devour in a single sitting with sustained chortles of glee, have become transformed into barren, unreadable deserts.

And, with the dubious advantage of a jaundiced hindsight, it occurs to me that there wasn't really all that much in them in the first place.

Now, in the post-Dhalgren period of his career, I find myself sick and tired of simply standing by and watching a seemingly endless procession of mongs falling over themselves in their rush to congratulate the producer of such tawdry and inconsequential rubbish. There are better prose stylists with greater and more original imaginations than Delany working in the sf field. Why should he be getting the lion's share of the kudos that should be going to them?

I don't think the answer to this question is all that difficult to find. There's a lot of glitter in his work, a superficial but nevertheless attractive gloss that cleverly conceals the paucity of ideas lurking just beneath. Take Nova, for instance, a novel stuffed full of gaudy galactic technology, rich young playboys with money to burn, detailed but decadent social conventions and a cast of characters as unbelievable as those found in the Old Testament. And, beneath it all, just exactly what is there?

Not a lot. There's a spaceship,



and some pseudo-science worthy of anything E.E. Smith ever dreamed up, and an interstellar power structure so flimsy that even The Mote in God's Eye seems detailed by comparison. The whole thing is more reminiscent of Planet Stories in its hey-day than the Sixties' New Wave.

Yet this used to be one of my favourite sf novels...well, we'll come back to that later. For the moment let's look at that other previous favourite of mine, The Fall Of The Towers.

This is much more cogent, much more readable, despite a certain simple-mindedness of plot. Yet, in a way, the plot can't help itself, compounded as it is of elements looted wholesale from a dozen different sources ---the forgotten galactic empire, the dying city, the alien invasion, the beserk computer, all of which have been used and reused and overused many times before. But in stringing them all together, Delany managed to come up with what looked like a



reasoned allegory of the inevitable dead-end nature of twentieth century western civilisation.

But did he? Was he writing an allegory, or unconsciously preparing the ground for a reworking of the dead city motif in Dhalgren several years later?

Authors of any real worth have certain pet subjects to which they return time and time again throughout their careers---Philip K. Dick and the nature of reality, Robert A. Heinlein and (the peculiar mish-mash that masquerades as) the Heinlein Philosophy of velvet-gloved fascism and muddy thinking, Michael Moorcock and the concept of the Hero, to name but a few. In this case, then, Samuel R. Delany and the fall of twentieth century western civilisation.

Dhalgren is about little more than a dead city, populated by a generation of rebel youth that bears a striking resemblance to the Now Generation underground of the late Sixties. It strives mightily to become the kind of allegory that The Fall Of The Towers was meant to be, and fails dismally without saying anything allegorical---or even anything about the Now Generation underground. From Haight-Ashbury and Woodstock to Chicago and Altamont...Delany must have felt as defeated as the students when a conclusion to the Vietnam War was brought about. With nothing left to unite against, dissipation is the obvious result.

Whether or not Delany is aware of this is a moot point. But it is painfully evident that he is only too aware of his much-praised talent. He flaunts it at every conceivable opportunity, demonstrating over and over again how clever he is at invoking fear, anger, hatred and love amongst his unmotivated characters, playing around with the arrangement of the words on the page just to see how impenetrable he can make his sentences and then, finally running out of things to do, throwing in irrelevant words and phrases and crossing them out again just to show what a smart-ass editor he is. Narcissistic over-reaction at its worst. I got through

to the end of the whole dreadful far-rago by a combination of plodding determination and muted curiosity---mainly curiosity to see whether he could salvage the thing before he ran off the bottom of page 879. Need I add that I was sorely disappointed on that score?

Expecting the worst I bought and read Triton, a slight but wearying fable with so little background in its 300-odd pages that even Nova seemed detailed... Even Heinlein's boredom inducing I Will Fear No Evil handled the sex-change idea in a more competent fashion; his method may have been coy, but Delany's was merely cute. And not just cuteness, but narcissism on an even grander scale, with appendices of all the bits that he left out of the final draft (a change from simply drawing lines through them, I suppose) and some extraordinary 'lecture' that purports to be a criticism of his own two articles in Foundations 6 and 7/8. Self-criticism I can stand, and will welcome when warranted, but in this case, where the 'criticism' is thinly disguised outright praise, it fills me with a feeling little short of disgust.

Triton is pure, unadulterated rubbish. Somewhere in his appendices (I don't have the patience to look it up right now) Delany admits as much. If he's going to admit that then why the hell is he bothering to write at all? Can't he think of anything better to do? Or has he become something akin to the earlier A.E. van Vogt, writing sf from sheer force of habit without having the slightest idea why?

It is always possible that there's something like this lurking around in his subconscious. After all, he only started to write sf because his wife Marilyn Hacker, a sub-editor for Ace Books at the time, complained about the standard of the work she was expected to read; knowing nothing whatever about sf he sat down to do better. I suspect that the cliched themes of his novels and stories are, to him, as fresh as daisies.

The fact remains that he is an



author of great importance, one with a large cult following, and to dismiss him so off-handedly is futile in the extreme. I'm not a learned critic by any means, but I have a theory which, however generalised it may be, accounts ---at least in part---for his following.

Psychology has demonstrated that glitter and gadgetry have a great fascination for the young and adolescent---one of the reasons why we all get hooked on Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein as pimply teenagers, and one of the reasons why adults who should know better sneer at SF for being so juvenile in both tone and content. Delany's stories have a lot of glitter in them. And a large part of his following is composed of the young and adolescent....

Which comment might well speak for itself, were it not so condescending.

I don't pretend to know the reasons for Delany's popularity, and I have no particular desire to search them out and analyse them in detail. Whatever they actually are, it's evident that a lot of people get a lot of pleasure from his books. And, while I used to, I don't any longer. As far as I'm concerned the Great White Hope of SF has written himself into the ground ---and then six feet under it to boot.

---

Here follows an editorial pause, during which readers may prepare themselves for the second stage of Joseph's counterblast to New Wave Punk SF. Together, the sections give valuable insight into Joe Nicholas, if nothing else. Part 2 was originally submitted as a review of something wittily called---

"AGAIN, DANGEROUS TEDIUMS".

---

The trouble with things like this is that they date very quickly.

Look at Philip Jose Farmer's work, for example---his cleverly-written tabu-breaking work of the fifties, such as The Lovers and the stories in Strange Relations, now seem somewhat dull and insipid, even painfully contrived. So it was with the original Dangerous Visions anthology when it finally appeared in paperback over here in 1973; Philip

Dick postulated that God was a Chinese Communist and Theodore Sturgeon talked about incest and Harlan Ellison said "fuck" in his contribution, but so what? It might have been daring in 1967, but six years later?

And now we're faced with much the same problem. Since 1972, some of the ideas in Again, Dangerous Visions will have been appropriated by other writers, some themes will no longer be relevant, some guesstimates of social, political or technological trends will have been proved totally erroneous. And it's no good retreating five years in an attempt to judge the anthology in the context of its first publication; it's here today, and has to be viewed in today's context.

Bearing this cautionary note in mind, then, what exactly do we have before us? Forty two stories of varying lengths and variable qualities, each one buttressed by an introduction by Ellison and an afterword by the author, each bearing an illustration by Ed Emshwiller above its title.

I have no intention of reviewing all forty two stories; neither space nor stamina permits such an extravagance, and they're not all worth an in-depth review in any case. In point of fact, forty two is probably too great a number for any anthology, and it is difficult to think of anything that really stands out from amongst the general mass. But I'll bow to subconscious prejudice and tackle a favourite first.

In 1971 ecology was all the rage; now it's rather passe. Which is a pity, because it instantly dates the unspoken message of Ursula LeGuin's 'The Word For World Is Forest', the idea of the industrial combine versus the natural environment being a common subject for the newspapers these days. The saving factor here is something that she doesn't even mention in her afterword---the effect of "civilisation" on "primitive" societies, which actually becomes submerged by the actions of the characters in the story. The trouble with these particular characters is that, although they are perfectly realised, they are also a bit stereo-



typed, and the somewhat implausible nature of their activities---an interstellar lumberjack operation---doesn't help to rectify this. The ansible and the Hainish get a mention and show up as more than mere background detail for once.

Ecology rears its head again in Chad Oliver's 'King Of The Hill', Kurt Vonnegut's 'The Big Space Fuck' and Greg Benford's 'And The Sea Like Mirrors'. Of the three, Vonnegut's is the most self-indulgent (as you might expect), Oliver's the most angry and Benford's the most thought-provoking. Unfortunately, Benford's contribution is really too short to do more than simply provoke; it's as though the author himself were reluctant to follow through with any of the things that his afterword claims the story was all about. Never mind the fact that the themes of all three make them dated; not so much dangerous as tedious...

But Benford is not the only one to squander his ideas on a mere squib of a story. Gene Wolfe, James B. Hemesath, T.L. Sherred, Lee Hoffman, Joan Bernott, Evelyn Lief, James Sallis, Ken McCullough....the list could go on and on, and in an anthology of this size I don't think it should. At £1.60 for both volumes you expect something that you can get your teeth into, and time and time again you damn well don't! In many cases Ellison's introductions are longer than the stories they preface, and this is a dangerous imbalance in a project of this nature, where the authors are supposed to be given their heads to say what they like, not the editor.

Another imbalance is the author who says more in his afterword than he does in his story. A particular example is Bernard Wolfe, who has to be a prime candidate for the position of Imbecile Who Said The Most Cretinous Possible Things About Science Fiction. He manages to misread completely the nature of the genre, claiming it to be no more than a propaganda device for the popularisation of science and technology, which thus ignores almost everything that's been written since the bombs were dropped

on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since he also mentions that he hasn't even thought about SF since 1948 this sort of attitude reveals him as a bigger fool than you'd have thought possible. One can quote Isaac Newton's reply to his critics: "Sir, I have studied the subject; you have not."

The two stories that he foists on us under the collective title of 'Monitored Dreams And Strategic Creations' he claims as representative of subjects that SF isn't thinking about, railing mightily about the evils of modern warfare with all the blindness of someone who has brushed against Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers and believes it to be the Standard Science Fiction Gospel On The Subject Of Killing People, and rabbitting on about the insidious advances of the totalitarian state with an attitude so blatantly condescending that I can only assume that he thinks we're too cloistered to have heard of George Orwell. And SF isn't thinking about warfare and the totalitarian state? Next thing you know he'll be telling us he never heard of Newton...

In fact, his afterword is much more interesting than his stories, which are banal and pointless in the extreme. Far better to skip them altogether and read James Blish's 'Getting Along', which is neither dangerous nor a vision, but is hugely funny anyway. Don't ask me what it's supposed to be about, but I found it to be one of the best "stories" in the whole anthology, despite the rather incessantly intellectual nature of its subject material. Blish was showing off, of course; but at least he had the grace to do so with his tongue firmly in his cheek (unlike Bernard Wolfe, who would be unintentionally funny if only his beliefs weren't so fervently misplaced.)

Richard A. Lupoff's 'With The Bentfin Boomer Boys On Little Old New Alabama' just isn't worth the effort involved in struggling through its verbatim reproduction of the Southern States' conversational mode. Once you've disentangled the plot from the pyrotechnics you'll realise that it's nothing more than an overblown reworking of William Tenn's classic short



story "Down Among the Dead Men" (which at last has a UK printing in Brian W. Aldiss's Evil Earths), with racialism thrown in in a halfhearted attempt to bring it up to date.

Ellison stuck his neck out over this one, claiming it was going to win all the major awards in the novella category and become one of the most talked-about pieces of fiction ever. Yeah? Not only did it not win any awards but it didn't become one of the most talked-about pieces of fiction ever. Nor will it; it's so completely devoid of anything remotely approaching originality that I find myself asking why Ellison ever bought it in the first place. Maybe he was undergoing a sudden lapse in critical standards while editing the anthology; at least that would explain the high proportion of dross on display here...

One story from A, DV that did win an award was Joanna Russ's "When It Changed", although I can't overlook the fact that Russ gave up writing SF in favour of women's liberation polemic many years ago. This particular story is an early example of the polemic; all anger and no sense, chock-full of something that could be described as adolescent wish-fulfilment if it wasn't for the fact that she's not an adolescent any more.

Edward Bryant's "The 10:00 Report Is Brought To You By..." is worth a special mention if only because its postulate is fast becoming fact. But then what else would you expect from American TV? Piers Anthony's "In The Barn" is similarly excellent, and should have been an award-winner. Its message is quite clear, and wisely saved as the sting in the tail; although the story itself is so closely-detailed that *deja vu* sets in and it becomes a coda more than a sting. A pity, because this is a fine story, representative of the best of modern SF.

A muffed ending is evident in Kate Wilhelm's "The Funeral" which---like Piers Anthony's contribution---is about a form of exploitation. It's the last paragraph alone which is responsible for this muffing; up until that point, the story has more controlled power

than anything I've read in the past twelve months, capable of manipulating your emotions to suit its purposes.

The rest, I'm afraid, is no more than average---in some cases, plain awful. John Heidenry is pretentious, Ross Rocklynne unmemorable, Andrew J. Offutt silly, Ray Nelson incomprehensible, Ray Bradbury contributes a poem (I have no liking for poetry, so I didn't even read it); K.M.O'Malzberg is preoccupied with all the usual Malzberg impedimenta, David Gerrold unreadable, Gahan Wilson yawn-making, James Sallis buried in self-pity... and so on down through the levels of quality to the absolutely mediocre (Andrew Weiner's "Empire of the Sun", which reads as though it had been written by a discarded trainee J.G. Ballard surrogate). Josephine Saxton, David Kerr, Burt K. Filer, Richard Hill, Leonard Tushnet, Dean R. Koontz, A. Parra, Thomas M. Disch, M. John Harrison, Robin Scott... all are competent, but no more than that. Terry Carr has to be innocent to imagine that cryogenic time-tombs will go un plundered by dispossessed future generations ("Ozymandias"); Ben Bova can't bring himself to use the word "fuck" ("Zero Gee") and his whole idea of sexual intercourse in free fall was first used in one of John Gardner's Boysie Oakes thrillers anyway; and James Tiptree is typically Tiptree with Ellison gleefully telling us how many awards his story was going to win and it not winning any at all.

So is the anthology really worth the money? In terms of quantity, yes; quality, no. It's possible that Ellison's status as an SF editor went to his head; there's a lot of junk here and out of 42 stories we only get one award-winner... not a very good average, considering the success rate of DV back in 1967. Mind you, the field, having been shocked once, is less susceptible to being shocked again...

In the context of 1977, Again, Dangerous Visions is, as I said at the beginning, dated. Nevertheless, I suppose it's worth a place in your collection as one of those landmarks that has made SF what it is today. After all, without E.E. Smith, there wouldn't be any space opera; without anthologies like this, authors would still be unable to fuck their sisters and call God a Chinese Communist.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS



# SPSP.

Society for the Protection  
of Small Persons

GARRY KILWORTH

When I first decided to form the SPSP (the jingle is unintentional) I wanted to call it the Society for the Protection of Small Creatures. This was at the time of the "accidental" annihilation of the city birds, when all major cities were evacuated for two days because the enemy at the time threatened to N-bomb United Europe. The scare died without a chirp, as did millions of sparrows, pigeons and maybe other species of city-dwelling birds. They starved to death when their only food source, the housewife, failed to appear with her crust of bread.

However, birds already have several societies to protect them and anyway the stress is on the word "small". A sparrow is small compared to an eagle, but if he is an average sparrow, not to another of his kind. What I mean is, I am quite willing to afford sparrows the protection we are able to offer provided they are small sparrows. This is the criterion for entry. After all, a person is small when compared to some other animals---even the biggest homo sapiens oaf would have a tough time with an elephant. So, if you are comparatively small, you are in. Big is Bad, we say.

Why did I want to form such a society?

This question has been put to me many times, usually by large bumbling idiots, with the inference that I was doing so because I am myself supposed to be a small, insignificant and insecure person. This is not so. I have not, and never have had, a complex regarding my stature. I am what God made me. A sensitive and highly intelligent creature capable of anything except ill-manners, unlike the gentlemen that frequently ask me this question. It

is true I cannot break a four-inch thick spar of wood with my bare hands but that does not make me envious of the human beings who can indulge in this superfluous and pointless pastime. Hands are delicate instruments, to be well cared for. They have raised us above the level of apes, who incidentally can also break spars with their bare hands! Hands are not for brute force, they are for performing the intricate tasks composed by Man's brain. The painting of pictures, the writing of philosophies and the scoring of music. If I want a piece of wood snapped in two (but to what purpose?) I use a tool designed as a supplement to my hands. An axe---or a hammer.

No, I did not form this society for malcontents or neurotics. I formed it because small people are usually bright people. They are people with active minds. Intelligent, sensitive and resourceful. I think it a good idea to have this intellect concentrated in one group---who knows what may come out of it?

If there are any large men reading this paper I can imagine them laughing behind their thick stubby fingers and thinking "little twerp, I could probably break the runt in two with my fingers". The same fingers that they use to snap their four-inch thick spars of wood? These are the people I wish to keep out of my society. To let it be known that there is one club they cannot join, somewhere they cannot enter. They can laugh all they wish. We will be protected from them by our Society.

I can hear the draught of breath rushing from your throat. Protected? But why? you ask. You may well ask! Since a child I have seen small people bullied and driven insane by taunts from blockheads twice their size. They, the small people, are made to feel they are not normal. They are made to feel incomplete, when it is really the imbeciles who jeer at them who are not completely whole. The latter lack reason and understanding: the two main qualifications for membership of the human race. Who are the abnormal ones? Can you see what I mean?

This human society must not follow the dinosaurs. We must not allow the large mindless creatures among us to



drag us down to their level and on the path to extinction. They will do it if they can. They will pull us down into the swamps to drown, and not one among us will have brain enough to lift his head for a breath of air.

So really you see, this Society I have formed is for the protection of the human race as a whole. Not just for small people, but everyone. To protect us all from the giant fools amongst us. They show us their hairy chests and laugh because we are smooth skinned! Do they not realise one of the noblest and strongest creatures amongst us has hair everywhere but on its chest. The gorilla, of course, can break men in two, never mind four-inch spars of wood.

I want this Society to be a haven for the gentle people of this world. We are the inheritors to whom God promised the Earth, and by God we shall have it. Even if we have to use force to carry out God's commands. We are the meek---which, though it rhymes, is not synonymous with weak. To be meek is to be humble and gentle. It does not mean stepping aside in case a Flashman shoulders us from the kerb.

I must admit, I was weak once. I stood by while a bully snapped my model boat in two. It was a beautiful wooden boat, about four inches thick, carved by the small, delicate hands of a pigmy fisherman. One of the little people of this world. One of God's gentle creatures. But I was weak only for an instant. I waited. Perhaps for a few days, I cannot remember the details, and then I struck. I planned my moves and acted with the decision of an intelligent, resourceful human being. You see why we must band together now? Why we must strike? If we do not destroy them, they will destroy us. Join now, and strike a blow for gentleness and humility.

I say to you, the small persons, the Jacks of the real world, arise! This planet must be cleansed---we must rid it of the ogres and giants that foul its surface. We have no use for moronic fiends that stamp around our delicate environment. An axe or hammer will cave the strongest

skull. It works. I know. I have proved it!

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth!

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We have not previously shown that Garry Kilworth piece to anyone---as Garry himself has reminded us some 482 times over the last two years. The following item from a Tall Chauvinist has to be a coincidence. Be that as it may, Drilkjis is happy to grant equal time.

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## A SHORT STORY (APOCRYPHAL)

Christian Lehmann

It was a cold and windy night up in wherever Garry Kilworth lived. Our hero, whom we will affectionately call Garry, was sleeping, or at least trying to. But in fact he was too terrified to risk going back to sleep, for he knew---as you soon will---that if he did the dream would come back. (Threateningly muted violins in the background.) He couldn't face it again. If it hadn't been for his wife he might have committed suicide right then by holding his breath for a long time.

He felt thirsty. Falling out of bed for the third time that night he decided to get himself a glass of water. He was stumbling down the stairs when he heard it. A sound at the door. Something scratching outside on the massive oak door. He tiptoed to the door, put his ear to the keyhole.

"Help! Let me in," said a thin voice on the other side. Assuming correctly that nothing very threatening could possess such a small voice, he opened the door. The dipterodon fluttered inside, shaking like a leaf. (Dipterodon: small dinosaur often mistaken for a large butterfly.)

Garry knew the powers of such an animal. He crouched down on the porch and looked at the beast.



"What do you want?" he said, trying to assemble his thoughts.

"The Good Fairy has sent me to your rescue," said the dipterodon.

"I don't care for no fairies," mumbled our hero.

"It seems you have a problem concerning your dreams," said the beast, leafing through large pieces of paper in best Kev Smith fashion.

"Well, yes... actually, I keep dreaming I'm stuck in a lift with Rob Holdstock and Andrew Stephenson. And they go on talking and don't notice we're stuck, so I try to push the emergency button, but... I'm too small to reach it..."

"Ah, ah," said the dipterodon, "I think I know a cure for that."

"What, what?"

"Well, for one thing, concentrate on small things."

And the dipterodon went on all night long (up to 4 am) talking about how nice small things are. Garry, who was a very polite hero, said thank you very much and went back to bed. He tried to concentrate on small things.

Next morning he woke up and ran into his work room. The dipterodon was dozing on the table. As Garry came in it woke up.

"How did it go, then?" said the small beast.

"You stupid clod!" said Garry, who was getting less and less polite. "I spent the whole night dreaming about Peter Weston!" And he swung the London telephone directory (L to P) with all his might on the doomed insect.

\*\*\*\*\*  
(from Robert Benchley...)

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Ice is not really ice at all, but a vegetable organism which forms on the surface of water to prevent it from freezing solid?

An ordinary hen's egg is the result of hypnotism?

Mt. Washington, in the Presidential range, is really a depression in the earth's surface which looks high only because the surrounding country is so much lower?

Eel-grass, such as is now used to entangle oars, was a delicacy in Egypt?

## LETTERS

\*\* Letters on Drilkjis 2 are mostly cobwebbed and untopical, however much appreciated then and now. A recent note from BRIAN ALDISS is perhaps worthy of attention...

"Just back from Singapore, Australia, and the blessed waters of Lake Tova in Sumatra. What better greeting than your invaluable convention booklets and the thought that by travelling fast I had missed Skycon? Thanks for sending them along.

"However, on behalf of a fellow author, I must protest at the unkind satire slipped into the con booklet as a real advert and obviously intended to satirise the grass-roots cultural commitments of one of our leading and best-dressed practitioners. I refer of course to the so-called "South Petherton Folk and Craft Festival". Even regarded simply as humour, the references to "Miracle Players" and "Balkan Groups" are overdone to the point of clumsiness, while the cartoon of the author in his Somerset retreat is positively cruel. Some malicious person owes John and Marjorie Brunner an apology; the whole thing is in very bad taste."



WE ALSO HEARD FROM, in the order in which we find the letters: Edgar Belka, Chris Morgan, Ray Harrison, Andy Darlington, Steve Sneyd, Pamela Boal, Ian Garbutt, Phil Stephensen-Payne, Brian Earl Brown, Paul Ryan, Alexander Thynn, G.W.Copp, Keith Seddon, Ben P.Indick, Jenny Laney, Bob Day, Celia Parsons, Adrian Smith, Boris Lawrence, Tom Jones, Terry Jeeves, Dave Bridges, Derek Harkness, Jim Linwood, David Lewis, John Welsh and others misfiled/lost...



## People Who Like Books Like

### This Will Like This Book

I have a guilty secret: a pile of review copies fifteen inches tall, the accumulation of two years' inactivity. Senders of unsolicited copies can hardly complain (though Lord Weymouth, aka Alexander Thynn, does so incessantly---such are the joys of being patronised by the aristocracy); those from whom I requested books are entitled to be querulous. It all began when Pamela Boal's newspaper *Passion*---a dreadful acronym which unravelled into something about the disabled---was so desperate for material that I volunteered a review column and sent requests on *Passionate* paper to hordes of publishers. Heinemann thought "Gosh, a paper for disabled people! Obviously they only wish to read of illness and mortality": and along came a copy of the 20-year-old *Arthritis and Common Sense* by Dan Dale Alexander (World's Work, £2.50), from which I learnt that the author cures arthritis by judicious doses of mingled orange-juice and cod-liver-oil. Undoubtedly the ingredients of this vile drink are less important to the cure than a resolute belief in its power. So much for arthritis---common sense is shown by not buying the book, since I've now revealed the totality of its message. [It has since been discovered in paperback---a Pan Original. (K)]

\*

Jonathan Cape Limited, true gentlemen, sent their Spring '77 catalogue with an invitation to choose; your reviewer condescended to accept two books which duly arrived the week after *Passion* folded. One was Clive James's *Visions Before Midnight* (Cape, £3.95), an entertaining selection from his *Observer* TV column. Though lacking a television, I read this column devotedly each week, revelling in gems like his poke at the "economic Haruspex", Herman Kahn:

"Kahn speaks a personal language featuring units of time and distance otherwise unknown to science. In par-

ticular, the auto-extruding temporal unit 'fivetenfifteentwennytwennyfive--yearsfromnow' crops up often enough to be worthy of a name. On the analogy of the Fermi (the diameter of an electron) I propose it should be called the Hermie. Kahn's First Law of Ecodynamics can then be simply stated. In the space of one Hermie, anything that is happening now will still be happening only more so, unless something stops it. (The Second Law states that the fee for being told the First Law will be very large.)"

This is highly characteristic James: accurate and funny attack with a hint of the slipshod, this time the confusion of the Fermi with the ten times larger electronic diameter it's used to measure. James has since proved incapable of distinguishing silicon, silica and silicones, but cunningly makes a joke of this. He delights in the trivial, believing the lowest-common-denominator material of TV to be the true index of our culture. Perhaps DRILKJIS editors should read more junk sf. Recommended, though you are permitted to wait for the paperback.

\*

The other Cape book is Adrian Berry's *The Iron Sun: Crossing the Universe through Black Holes* (Cape, £3.95), dealing with one of the happiest of recent speculations. Black Holes, if they exist as predicted by the General Theory of Relativity (GTR), may be aids to travel; one can theoretically enter a spinning black hole and emerge into apparently normal space having covered an unspecified distance instantly. Viewpoints: [a] it's absurd and therefore there must be something wrong with GTR; [b] it may be so, but the hole's "blackness" (demanded by GTR) is effectively maintained, the ship "emerging" only into a universe which from our viewpoint is within the hole---and from which there can be no return; [c] Adrian Berry's view. Berry hopes that GTR will fail just slightly, permitting the transport without forbidding the return. He notes glumly that such a gateway to the stars doesn't seem to exist near Sol, but brightens up to suggest



that we gather interstellar dust from several cubic lightyears around to manufacture a hole of up to ten solar masses. He doesn't dwell on the famous tidal forces which for these small black holes (6 to 60 km across) will infallibly kill anyone venturing near. It's an effect of varying gravity---if the variation is so swift that your head "weighs" a tonne and your feet ten, then even in free fall there's a force of nine tonnes tearing you apart. Gravity-insulators like Cavorite could prevent this, but we can have Cavorite only if GTR is flawed---in which case we can't have black holes.

*The Iron Sun*, like Berry's earlier *The Next Ten Thousand Years*, is a work of almost pathological optimism. It's refreshing to read futurology without the obligatory sense of doom; the scientific content is well-researched; but again and again speculation topples into silliness, as in a fantastic dialogue between purblind politicians and a scientist who has fooled them all by not mentioning that once an artificial black hole starts to grow, the project can't be cancelled... Naughty Mr Berry, blowing the gaff years before We Scientists will be able to put our plans into effect.

\*

In 1977 I found myself in the coveted position of advertisement-seeker to Novacon 7 and Skycon, and despatched many begging letters. Publishers' responses were richly varied. Dent dropped out of the sf market; Penguin confessed that they didn't publish enough sf to make it worth telling anybody about it; less imaginative firms skulked in silence, unable to find excuses for not supporting the cons; and Arrow, unique in inscrutable reasoning, started to send me review copies.

Their James Blish collections, *Testament of Andros* (Arrow, 60p: formerly *Best SF Stories of James Blish*) and *Anywhen* (Arrow, 65p) are obligatory reading. Both show the constant warring of Blish's intellect against the Pulp Monster which still stalks zombielike about the lower levels of sf. Sometimes the dead

pulpy hand holds down the story, as in the fascinatingly flawed "A Style in Treason", whose introspective traitor-hero seems almost embarrassed at having to deal with the vombs of the evil Green Exarch. Sometimes the intellect stabs through to transcend cliché: "A Dusk of Idols" flows from its familiar opening (man with obsessive Mission on strange world) to that cloacal apocalypse of falling totems which must be one of Blish's most unforgettable passages. And sometimes the pulpy monster is erased entirely; "How Beautiful with Banners" is a love story of sorts which contrives to be off-beat, perverse, unique and even beautiful. It also contrives to be in both books: the only duplication. Thus the high points of *Anywhen*; *Testament* includes the title story, "Surface Tension", "A Work of Art" and the incredible "Common Time". Damned if I review them; I'm going to go and read them again.

\*

It seems mere years since DRILKJIS 1 and Kevin's editorial assault on series sf books, an attack which had far-reaching effects. *Hook* and the *Expendables* withered at once; *Space 1999* came and went, as did *Steeleye* and the unbelievably awful *Lemmings*; and now even Ace Books can no longer stomach *Perry Rhodan*. The hardcore sf series which has endured longest, buoyed up perhaps by Malcolm Edwards's perennial enthusiasm, is E.C. Tubb's *Dumarest* saga. It is formula fiction built from simple elements: a galaxy of usually feudal worlds, an endless quest for lost Earth, an inexhaustible supply of baddies (the Cyclan) and one continuing character, Dumarest himself, who lifts the series slightly above yer average rubbish by being neither mindless nor amoral.

In *Mayenne* (Arrow, 50p) Tubb and Dumarest struggle nobly against one of those omnipotent sentient planets so common in our galaxy, and manage to win through at the expense of everyone else in the plot. *Jondelle* (Arrow, 50p) pits Dumarest against more routine opposition, a mere city-state of blood-crazed armed psychopaths---easy meat for our hero. These, ninth and tenth in the series,



are on a par with the first. The recurring paragraph where the evil cyber attunes himself to oneness with the cosmic mind is pleasingly absent from both, but everyone is still incredulous about Earth: "As well call a planet dirt, or soil!" ---a line whose hilarity dims with each book.

The planet Darkover has more variety than all Tubb's worlds, and Marion Zimmer Bradley's chronicles thereof have steadily improved in the eleven years between *Star of Danger* (Arrow, 80p) and *The Shattered Chain* (Arrow, 95p). A tiny example: in each book two travellers confront the formidable banshee-bird. In *Star* the Darkovan native panics while the Terran instantly evolves a bloodless strategy which leaves the monster twitching in a nervous breakdown. In *Shattered Chain* the Terran is restrained by her Darkovan "sister" from making a foolhardy attack; they keep agonisingly quiet while the banshee tears into their horse and, gorged, waddles away. I submit that the second version is much more credible (better written, too). *Star* is entertaining but slight, with lots of action and a simple message concerning the value of cooperation. *Shattered Chain* has more pages, less action; time is taken in the building of solid characters; and it tackles complex issues of female dependence and independence. This fashionable feminism comes without hatred and didn't (for once) set me clutching my testicles for fear that Joanna Russ was sneaking up with a gelding-knife. Second-best Darkover novel to date (the best being *The Heritage of Hastur*); watch for the buried reference to *The King in Yellow*, source of the names Hastur and Hali.

Many things could be said about Arrow's Darkover covers, few of them tactful. The worst so far, on *Star of Danger*, shows a half-clad woman chained to a mushroom and screaming with the effort of weight-lifting. Darkovan custom should deter her from showing the b\*ck of her n\*ck, never mind this welter of thighs and cleavage.

Here's an award-winner: Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (Arrow, 90p). Um. Not as good as her *The Clewiston Test*, I'd say. Simple tale of how cloning and Strength Through Joy may be good for you in the short term but rugged all-American individualism will win out in the end. Wilhelm has to stage a planetary death from pollution and plague (offstage) to set up the situation, but Earth recuperates quickly and mysteriously in time for part II. Extremely well-written, this being Kate Wilhelm after all, but not entirely satisfying. For post-holocaust reading I'd prefer *Dr Blood-money* (Arrow, 80p), an insane Philip K. Dick farrago of psi, mutations, *Angst*, homeostatic vermin traps, a warranted genuine phocomelus and people who stay *real* despite every implausibility and eccentricity.

Gordon Dickson's *Il Mondo Dei Sonnambuli* (Omega SF, Milan) I couldn't understand at all; either I'm drunk or this book is in Italian. Out with it! By devious routes I've also acquired free copies of [a] Robert P. Black's amazing *The Satanists* (Eutawa, 75p)---this is mysteriously inscribed "For David Langford, whose innate sense of decency and honour will not allow him to make *any* fun of this book wotsoever!!!"; [b] Chris P. Carlsen's *Shadow of the Wolf* (Sphere, 65p), inscribed "Any friend of Rob Holdstock's deserves this"; [c] Carlsen's *The Bull Chief* (Sphere, 85p), an uninscribed work which yet achieves true greatness in the superb Druidic passage beginning on page 70. These fine books by Carl P. Blacksen are worth every penny he paid me; I can hardly wait to read his recent *Raven 2: A Time of Ghosts* by Richard P. Kirk.

★

Finally, the one you've all been waiting for: *The King is Dead* by Alexander Thynn (Longleat Press, £4.00). I've had several postcards asking when my review of this will be published; clearly the author is in an agony of self-doubt, unwilling to begin another book without Langfordian encouragement. It's thumbs down, I'm afraid. The book is pri-

★



vately printed, which doesn't necessarily mean "bad" but is perhaps why the text seems innocent of copy-editing. We are inured to "millenniums", and "stimulate" where "simulate" is obviously meant, but here are "schitzoid", "ideology", "echalons", "monoblock", "extra terrestrial" and more, all used consistently. The narrative itself is divided into three sections per chapter---as the author notes for the benefit of readers too dim to notice. The first section is space opera rather less mature and sophisticated than Doc Smith's, told in mangled prose ("...An acute connoisseur of the distinction between which side his bread was buttered.") and overdone to the point of bad parody. The second section features the dribble-of-consciousness of a Crown Prince whose whole life oozes before his eyes at his father's deathbed. The third is interpolated by super-evolved beings who are great, steaming lumps of "blurping purple jelly" responsible for carrying out the book's avowed aim of having the reader "gradually initiated into a new concept for religion". This is all a test, they blurb: the reader, poor sod, is merely a (simulated) resurrected consciousness who *thinks* he is reading the book. The author himself steps in near the end to reassure us that this mind-wrenching concept for religion is only fiction. He seems just as unbelievable as every other character in the book, and he presumably exists; so perhaps my critical judgement is faulty. Let the jellies have the final blurb: "This book has been prescribed to you as the most suitable method of initiating you into the cultural climate of the after-life." Dante had a word for it.

DAVE LANGFORD

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And now some extracts from a book no-one dares review: *The Troglodytes* by Nal Rafcam, published by... A prize to the man who said Digit Books.

"Kurt Semen had repeatedly been jailed for disturbing the peace and inciting unnecessary pathos."

"The echoing of the lesser explosions left the commandos effete."

[Researched by OUSFG]

The other editor also has his guilty secret, which is not too different from the first editor's, namely a pile of paperbacks accumulated over the last year and a bit. What with one thing and another, such as Skycon, not all of these have actually been read. This is a sort of honourable mentions column. The books, fourteen of them in all, are all from Eyre Methuen under their Magnum imprint. All were priced at less than a pound. (This is so I don't have to state the publisher and price each time.)

There are five books by Clifford Simak amongst them: *Way Station*, *Time is the Simplest Thing*, *Cemetery World*, *Time and Again* and *So Bright the Vision*. This seems to be placing a heavy reliance on an author who has been producing some pretty poor work of late, but the danger has been largely avoided by reprinting old stuff rather than new. When I read *Way Station* something like six years ago it seemed quite good. And it did win a Hugo, after all.

John Brunner's *The Traveller in Black* is also a reprint. First published in 1971, this is a collection of four earlier, related stories about a mysterious being attempting to pull order out of chaos and generally seeing to it that the bad guys get their come-uppance. An enjoyable book, though not a great one.

The presentation of the old continues with two Damon Knight collections---*In Deep* and *Off Centre*. *In Deep* was first published as a collection in 1963 and the stories themselves go back to 1951. Still, they aren't bad.

Other books received by people of whom you will have heard are: *The Simulacra* by Philip K. Dick, *Galactic Medal of Honour* by Mack Reynolds, *Flight to Opar* by Philip Jose Farmer, and *The Castle Keeps* and *Messenger of Zhuvastou*, both by Andrew J. Offutt. Just yesterday arrived *Shiny Mountain* by David Dvorkin. David who? That's what I said. Haven't had time to read it yet, of course, but it looks quite interesting, though a little cliched.

KEVIN SMITH



# Afterthoughts

"Something jumped in the back of Morgan's throat. It was huge, broad as a farmhorse, with a deer's delicate, triangular face..." [Patricia McKillip: *The Riddle-Master of Hed*]

But turning from the contemplation of these great-thewed, great-throated fantasy heroes, we must at length admit to certain errors in the text of the fanzine you have been reading. On page 8, col 2, para 3, line 10 please read "then" for "the". Page 24, col 2, para 2, l.3 should have "cemetery" rather than "cemetary" [KJS apologies for his momentary lapse into illiteracy]. Pages 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 were of course printed in error, while on page 20 we forgot to say "WAHF Mike Glicksohn". And on page 22 [col 1 para 2 l.14] please note that "cnacelled" should of course be "canceled".

Astute readers (and who else peruses *Drilkjis*?) will also note certain inconsistencies in typography. Some stencils were cut in remote and misty 1977, using the good old Adler 21c responsible for D1 and most of D2; this year, with colossal egotism and a Sperry-Remington SR101, we tried for the suave multiple-typeface image. Though carefully tested on *Twll-Ddu*, the SR101 wasn't happy with the odd stencils left for *Drilkjis*. There are equally good reasons for the use of *light italic* here and *Courier italic* there: the latter golfball became useless after typing Kev's editorial---no comment---and spent some time being carefully replaced by IBM craftsmen. We cannot understand the ink's propensity to sink through the paper and ooze out of the other side. Forget the repro problems: concentrate on the text!

DEAD PAST DEPT... The interlineations in Jim Linwood's fanzine reviews last issue were supplied by Jim himself. The dig at Harlan Ellison was deplored by Mike Glicksohn and also drew comment from Ben Indick: we ourselves considered it to be in the best

British tradition of flyting...

Keith Seddon was nearly featured in this issue, but his searing expose of the Vortex fiasco has now appeared several times in only slightly different words, in other fanzines: far be it from *Drilkjis* editors to re-use material thus contaminated.

On August 1st, Martin Hoare finally gave in. For month after month he had struggled to find enough time to send out the Skycon programme booklets to non-attending members; now at last the awful task was to be transferred to Hazel Langford. Martin came to the Langford house at nine that evening, dumped the envelopes and computer-printed address labels, and asked both Langfords out to the pub. He rushed home at 11.30pm, pressed as usual for time. Next day Hazel began the arduous Skycon work, finishing 35 minutes later. Martin is still struggling for a free moment in which to mail the Novacon 7 programme booklets.

"As servant I had an Arab with a villainous face and a bad foot, Lakh-dar Ben Bouchagour, whom I called Partington for short." [John Foster Fraser: *The Land of Veiled Women*]

Independent Radio News has become a little confused in its time sense of late, as evidenced by this remark heard on Capital Radio at midnight a while ago: "And so the future of Concorde seems assured, at least for the present."

The total assurance is quite endearing.

"I am going to run for TAFF and I hope I bribe both of you to vote for me. What do you want: worms or snails? (The two most common elements in the Hughes back yard.)" ---Yes, this is the integrity-laden voice of Terry Hughes himself, the TAFF candidate whom UK fans have actually heard of. Vote for him and save us postage in sending him this exceedingly heavy and expensive-to-mail issue of our *Drilkjis*.

"OK, Kev, three lines to go. What have you got that's three lines long?"

"Not a lot, Dave."

"Let's stop, then. Champagne?"



