FöCUS *october 1991*

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Editorial

SOME YEARS, YOU JUST DON'T FEEL LIKE DOING ANYTHING

I must first apologise to everyone for the non-appearance of FOCUS. The fault is mine entirely, and cannot be attributed to the BSFA in general or in perpetuity, so I trust no-one will do an Ings about it *(see Vector April/May 1991)*. This is the issue that should have appeared in April 1991. The proximate causes for the delays are these: in April, less than half of the material I was expecting had arrived by the deadline. In June, my monitor unit went pfft! shortly after the deadline, while I was finishing it off, and it took me a while to decide to purchase a new one. As I write this now I as well overdue for the August mailing. Why I have left things to the last minute three times in a row is another question, and has a different answer.

The fundamental attribute of the BSFA is that it is an amateur organisation: no-one's livelihood depends on it (except perhaps the printers'), and there is no Boss with the power to make people do what they don't feel like doing, or indeed to sack anyone who isn't doing what they are supposed to be doing. Fans and enthusiasts do pay £12 a year to receive from the BSFA what it offers, but the BSFA does not pay anyone to provide those things. What keeps it going is good will, a sense of fun or community, a desire to 'put something back in', to make some sort of impact or statement, perhaps to make a name for oneself and hope for a role or job in the industry itself. Whatever the reason, it must represent some value that cannot be measured in financial terms, and that means that involvement with the BSFA is vulnerable to disruptions of personal perspective whereas hard economic reasons would be immune. Which brings me to the Gulf War.

The Gulf War upset me. I don't mean that the images or the fact of warfare were disturbing: I've seen it all in movies, imagined it all through books, and it is by no means the only war to have occurred in the last few years. I would be a hypocrite if I were to say that the 'reality' of it meant that I could not enjoy the show, on some level. But it was closer to home than Vietnam or even the Falklands. It was done in my name, that is, in defense of Western interests against encroachment by Third World bad-guys, both in fact and as an example to others. It was done in defense of a bureacrat's pencil line (the Kuwaiti Border), and not in defense of people: witness how the military might of the West stands aside as long as people are being destroyed within their own boundaries and by their own governments. All that money, all those lives, all that world-wide glee and rage, and for what? To punish a regime that was created by immense oil revenues, by immense arms purchases, by vast disparities between rich and poor, from the greed for power and wealth of both the rich and the hopeless poor. It's a tragedy, but I can accept all that as the way of the world. The war didn't create all that, and certainly made no difference to it.

What upset me was the realisation that 'There Will Be War' (the title of a continuing anthology series under the editorship of J Pournelle) does reflect a real and powerful attitude: that conflicts with aliens can and must be resolved by force, that anything and everything can be done to them as long as they are aliens. Imagine aircraft carriers standing off Britain, bombing the water supply and power generation plants, an embargo on shipping, cruise missiles searching out Westminster... there would be Death in the British Isles, perhaps hundreds by military action, millions by starvation and civil disorder. You think it couldn't happen, but what prevents it? It *has happened* to other people, and not just in science fiction.

Does that sound confused? Well, it is. Imagine yourself an Arab, but otherwise doing the same job and living in the same house as yourself. During the war, you would have lived in fear of public aggression against you, as if somehow the war was about being an Arab instead of about a regime and a dictator and an act of invasion. That is more than confusion, that is injustice, victimisation. And painful: up until that time, you didn't think of yourself as an alien. When I watch (on TV) a sane concerned citizen go white when all but threatened with the charge of treason by an otherwise worthy MP with whom she disagreed, I realise that all it takes is a distant war for our cherished freedoms and decencies to start to disappear. How can that happen? Because, I begin to realise, we don't actually believe that other people (aliens) should have those freedoms, or be treated decently. What other explanation can there be?

I could go on, but you have before you at least the flavour of my dismay. SF appreciation is a gentle and civilised practice, but it becomes difficult to summon enthusiasm when both I and it seem to be no more than tiny cogs in a vast ridiculously murderous machine. I do not mean that sf appreciation is like 'fiddling while Rome burns'; I mean that it is like 'fiddling while Rome rules the world', supposed proof of the admirable nature of Roman civilisation. In a state comparable to bovine misery, I refuse to move.

Cecil Nurse

Notes From a Blue Pencil

pam creais

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT A FANZINE THAT INSPIRES IN the reader a feeling of 'involvement'. This is a feeling totally apart from that which they might experience browsing through the articles in a greater circulation genre magazine, which no matter how reader-friendly it attempts to be, always remains slightly detached from its audience; usually this is not a fault of the magazine's own making -- its very success can work against it. Publications with a large circulation can often seem impersonal to the avid horror/SF afficionado, and its style and contents can be a world apart from things as they appear at a gross-roots level.

Which brings me back to the fanzine.

The zine, as it's commonly called, is a more accessible medium to the fan of the macabre. What chance, say, the amateur writer getting into print with fiction or articles in a publication such as *Fear* or the long-running *Starburst*? But there's every chance that such an amateur enthusiast can get a piece of their work included in the flourishing underground of fandom. Which is not to say, therefore, that standards are lower in the fanzine scene; exactly the opposite in many cases. Professional writers who scratch away for megabucks often get slack and turgid in their ways, maybe not trying quite as hard as they used to, knowing that their work will sell anyway. But the amateur writer, often having no more incentive than the possibility of seeing their name in print and receiving a complimentary copy of the zine in which their work appears, will move heaven and earth to deliver the goods, literarily speaking.

This rather lengthy preamble leads on to a partial explanation of why I decided to start a fanzine myself. The first issue of *Dementia 13* appeared in June 1989 with an initial circulation of 25 copies. The artwork was crude, but the stories inventive, and the intentions behind the whole package totally sincere. At the current time of writing (Mar 1991) D13 is now approaching its sixth issue, has a circulation of 100 and rising, a tighter layout, quality illustrations and material by a broad range of writers whose work is, at worst, a pleasant diversion to the horror fan and, at best, an exercise in challenging and thought-provoking fiction.

I could be said to be biased, but then I don't determine the quality of my submissions. Of course, I want D13 to be successful and noted as a worthy outlet of horror fiction but I can in no way make this happen without receiving consistently good contributions, which a section of the zine's readership now submit on a regular basis. Monetary remuneration is no incentive as no fee is paid for submissions accepted.

One of my aims when I began D13 was to provide a forum for the talent that I knew lurked in the depths of fandom, but was often overlooked in the professional arena. Being as mine was not the only zine doing this, I subtitled D13 'An Illustrated Journal of the Arcane and the Macabre', which I hoped would put across some impression of the 'feel' I wanted to create with it. Later I came up with specific guidelines when I felt the need arose.

Another reason D13 was started was simply for the pleasure involved in being in on the creation of something. As a sometime writer myself (albeit unpublished!) this task of putting a zine together gave me something to channel my creative energies into.

And I think the zine's a success. Certainly the feedback I receive from my readers would indicate such.

On a final note, yes, the title of the zine *does* derive from the old 60's Roger Corman flick of the same name. Being aware of what he could come up with on a limited budget, I can only hope to be able to emulate him in that respect. I certainly would enjoy editing D13 for many years to come.

Dementia 13: £1.75/sample from 17 Pinewood Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA15 8BB

NEW SF ALLIANCE **UPDATE**

Recent additions to the NSFA catalogue include:

From the UK:

Peeping Tom #2 £1:50, 4 Issues £5:50

A magazine of bizarre tales of horror and the macabre that is already proving popular with readers and writers alike.

This issue features fiction by Ian Watson, Simon Clark, Philip Sidney Jennings, Duncan Adams, Joyce Smart, Conrad Williams, Sara Townsend and C.N. Gilmore, and is illustrated throughout by Dallas Goffin.

Works #7 £1:60, 4 Issues £5:50

Favouring mood-oriented fiction and poetry, *Works* has quickly established itself as a magazine to be reckoned with, featuring contributions by many big-name writers.

This issue features fiction by David Vickery, A.M. Smith, D.F. Lewis, Mark Haw, Mike O'Driscoll, Steve Widdowson and others, with verse by Andy Darlington, Joy Oestreicher, Ray Jon and Dave Thomas. Illustrations come from Kevin Cullen, Steve Walker, Alan Hunter, Toby Dyter, Dallas Goffin, Anne Stephens, Andy Watkins, Roger Morgan and Jack McArdle.

From the USA:

Quantum #38 £2:50, 4 Issues £9

Formerly known as *Thrust*, *Quantum* is a highly respected review magazine, aimed at SF fans and professionals who enjoy taking a serious look at the field of fantasy and science fiction.

This issue features interviews with Connie Willis and Michael Kube-McDowell, articles by Kim Stanley Robinson, Michael Bishop, Andrew Weiner and Darrell Schweitzer, and is illustrated by Jim Garrison, Rodney Marchetti and Alfred Klosterman.

Uncle Ovid's Exercise Book
by Don Webb £6

"Uncle Ovid's Exercise Book is a lively *Book of the Dead* for the 1990s, chanted by a chorus of uniquely demented voices. Imagine Sir James George Frazier meeting William S. Burroughs and H.P. Lovecraft for a quick round of whoopie cushions. Don Webb's wit, erudition, and imagination seem to have no limits as he pulls (at least) 97 different rabbits out of a single hat. He creates entire worlds with a few luminous details, then shatters them to glittering fragments. I wish I could write this well" – Lewis Shiner.

Order from the NSFA, c/o Chris Reed, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY.

Please make cheques payable to "Chris Reed".

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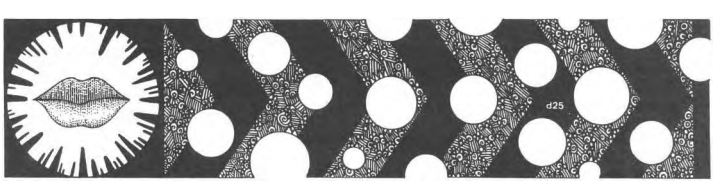


Full Face:

eric brown

ON PLANET EARTH IN AN ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE, ERIC BROWN did not emigrate to Australia in 1974. He remained in Yorkshire and fulfilled his childhood ambition of becoming a professional footballer. He played on the left wing for Bradford City -- First Division Champions and FA Cup winners five years in succession, and perhaps the greatest club team in the world.

Then one day in February 1991, while on a visit to the West Yorkshire village of Haworth, he stepped through a threadbare patch in the weft and weave of the tapestry of the Space/Time continuum, and found himself in an Alternative Earth -- though only when he happened upon Eric Brown², on his ritual morning walk, did he realise that something was very, very wrong. They hit it off immediately, and EB² -- of all things, a Science Fiction writer -- invited EB¹ back to his house to conduct an exclusive interview for the magazine FOCUS. What follows is a transcript of that interview.

EB¹: Well... first time I've done this kind of thing -- is the tape running? -- Ahh... [clearing his throat] So you went to Australia in '74? When did you start writing?

EB²: In '75. I read my first book in May that year, and it was a miraculous conversion.

EB¹: [Chuckling] Yes, never one for reading, me. Read the paper now and then. Sports pages. Match reports. See what they're saying about me. Anyway, can you remember what book it was you read back then?

EB²: Yes, it was a detective novel called *Cards on the Table* by Agatha Christie. I had a few weeks to kill before starting work, and my mother suggested I *read a book*. The concept was alien, too much like hard work, but the picture on the front of the Pan paperback, the face of the devil, caught my interest. Reading that book changed my life. I was converted instantly, and from that day on wanted nothing more than to be a professional writer. Over the course of the next few months I bought every book by Christie, some seventy in all, and lost myself in the fantasy world of painless murder and detection set in the never-never land of the English countryside.

EB¹: [Incredulous] You read *seventy* of her books? Just hers, no-one else's?

EB²: [Laughing] No, just her books. There's a strange reason for this -- one you might understand. It has to do with the concept of loyalty. Until that time (as you well know), I'd expended all my energy in the mono-maniacal pursuit of one thing -- Leeds United. I lived and breathed United. The thought of switching my allegiance, favouring, say, Bradford City, never crossed my mind. Now, as a reader, I carried with me the ludicrous notion that I had to be loyal to *one* writer. The absurdity of this occurred to me only when I'd read the last of her books and began looking around for other things to read -- I would have realised it sooner had I started reading Ralph Ellison, say, or Malcolm Lowry. Then I moved onto other writers -- but only writers of detective stories (faithful to the last!) I read Allingham and Sayers and Chesterton and Doyle and all the rest. At the same time, over the period of two or three years, I was writing my own watery pastiches of these writers, two thousand word twist-in-the-tale stories without theme or characterisation.

EB¹: When and why did you begin to read more widely?

EB²: In retrospect, I honestly can't recall how I discovered H E Bates, Roald Dahl, Graham Greene, and others, which I read towards the end of my four years in Australia. Somewhere in there I read a story from Robert Silverberg's middle period, and it blew my mind. (It might have been 'Hawksbill Station' or 'Nightwings' or something else from the Futura paperback edition of *The Best of Robert Silverberg*.) Then I began writing Robert Silverberg imitations.

EB¹: [Glancing across the room at the bookshelf stacked with files of old manuscripts) When did you write your first novel?

EB²: I began it in September 1978, a couple of months before I returned to England. It wasn't SF, but a big, bawdy comic novel heavily influenced by two of my favourite writers at that time, Leslie Thomas and Tom Sharpe. I borrowed the sex and slapstick from Thomas, and the cruelty and construction from Sharpe. It took me a year to write and weighed in at eighty thousand words, and I was inordinately proud -- of it, and of the fact that I'd finished it. I began typing it out but realised after the first couple chapters that it was very bad. So I began another novel.

EB¹: Science Fiction this time?

EB²: Yes. One of the reasons I thought the first novel so bad was that it was too long and too influenced. So I did what I thought was 'a very wise thing' and decided to write an Ace Double.

EB¹: [Confused] ...An Ace Double?

EB²: A short novel published in the sixties in the same volume as another novel, each one upside down in relation to the other.

EB¹: If they were published in the sixties...

EB²: Yes, I know. This was 1980, and the last Ace Double had been published perhaps a dozen years earlier. But I didn't know this at the time. I'd read and enjoyed a few Doubles and decided I could write one, so I did. It was called *Deadline* and was about the first Faster-Than-Light starship, and what happened on its maiden voyage to follow a generation starship to Alpha Centauri. All hackneyed stuff, but lots of fun. I wrote it in three months, typed it up single spaced, and realised that it wasn't very good after completing the task. Which, I suppose, saved me the embarrassment of sending the 45,000 word ms off to Ace and announcing that it might go very nicely, thank you, with a Silverberg on the back. I wrote four other novels that year, two SF, one thriller, and one children's book.

EB¹: Five novels in one year -- isn't that a lot? And if they didn't sell, how did you keep yourself?

EB²: I had a job working as a packer in a trouser factory. I wrote nights and weekends. Over the course of the next two years, until I left in '82, I

wrote eight or nine SF novels, a play for children, and a hundred or so short stories. I could write a couple of thousand words a night, and complete a 60-70,000 word novel in three weeks. I'd decided from an early stage that I didn't want to (or couldn't) produce literature, but enjoyable, entertaining fiction, with solid, believable characters and plenty of colour and action. Churning out all this garbage for years did teach me how to write (I know, I'm a slow learner), so although I spent a long time locked away writing, I don't regret doing it.

EB¹: You left work in 1982? Odd, that — same year I moved from Liverpool to Bradford City Anyway, why did you leave your job?

EB²: I hated the place I was working and the job I was doing, and I had the mistaken belief that I could make it as a full-time writer.

EB¹: Never having had anything published?

EB²: I'd sold a children's play the year before to Holt-Rheinhart Educational. So, flushed with success and using this miniscule sale as a diving board I conceived the notion of writing a mammoth series of novels set on various colony worlds. I contacted many editors and informed them of my plans to write seven novels initially, and perhaps in time twenty. The publishers I contacted were the likes of Robert Hale, Kimber, Elmfield Press, Millington, Rex Collings... They wrote back kind letters of disinterest, obviously assuming they were dealing with a megalomaniac. Not to be disheartened, I decided to go ahead with the project anyway, and in '83 wrote four Colony novels. These were much better than previous efforts, but not of a publishable standard. They were influenced by Michael Coney's beautiful novels *Brontomek* and *Hello Summer, Goodbye* and *The Girl with a Symphony in her Fingers*. I sent a couple of them out, to Hale (who'd stopped publishing SF) and DAW, to no avail. That year I also wrote a children's book and a non-series SF novel, plus a dozen shorts — two of which were deservedly rejected by *Focus* (an earlier incarnation that did publish fiction — Ed).

EB¹: What were all these novels about?

EB²: Oh, characters in crisis of relationships — with big spleadges of mystery and intrigue thrown in, and some fantastical sf-nal devices for good measure, brought to the boil and stirred vigorously. They were all well plotted and had unity, but the writing was superficial and the characterisation shallow. Some had a few good ideas at their core, to the extent that I've reused ideas in later projects.

EB¹: Weren't you depressed or disheartened by your slow progress, all the rejections?

EB²: No, not really. You see, there was a part of me that secretly knew that someone like me, from my background and with my lack of formal education, could never become a published writer. Submitting mss was an exercise in futility, as was, I realise now, the initial act of writing. But the strange thing was that I *had* to write. It was an odd compulsion, a drug that gave me a high. I actually hated, and still do, the writing part of writing, but having completed something was the greatest feeling in the world. I never allowed myself to dwell on the rejections because no sooner had I sent something out than I was busy with the next project.

EB¹: You were telling me earlier that you spent '84 in India.

EB²: That's right. I felt that perhaps I might improve as a writer if I had something to write about. I bought a return ticket to Delhi, took £900 and toured India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Other than keeping note-book and writing one story, I wrote nothing that year, and though I felt guilty about this, I knew I was benefiting from the experience. Travel is a wonderful, enlightening, remarkably easy thing to do. I came back a better person. One of the by-products of the trip was the number of friends I made. Many of my best friends I met in '84, and I still see them regularly.

EB¹: Must admit, I've only travelled over to Europe for Cup competitions. What happened when you got back?

EB²: I got a part-time job working for Keighley library and began writing again. I don't know whether it was a direct result of the trip, or the fact that I'd passed the Bantar Limit, but I started writing stories that worked, and a year later sold my first story to *Interzone*.

EB¹: Just a minute -- the 'Bantar Limit'?

EB²: Alfred Bester -- an SF writer who said something along the lines that a writer has to write a million words of crap before being publishable. I read this when I'd written about three quarters of a million, so I took heart that I didn't have far to go...

EB¹: And did you begin selling after a million?

EB²: I began selling to *Interzone* after one million, one hundred thousand words. And that just about brings us up to date. I have my latest novel -- the nineteenth or twentieth -- with my agent now, so now it's make or break time...

EB¹: (Uneasily) Ahh... what now? Should ask you a few intellectual questions, like why do you write and what you think about the state and progress of contemporary SF? --

EB²: Please, spare me...

EB¹: Good. Tell you what, let's go for a pint. One thing, though. I'm curious -- did you play football in Australia?

EB²: Yes, for four years, first for the District League team Mordialloc-Mentone, and then for the third division team Prahan City. On the footballing front I had the time of my life.

EB¹: But you gave up when you came back from Australia?

EB²: That's right. I was injury prone anyway, and writing took up so much of my time. I stopped playing for twelve years. Last year I started again, and I must admit I sometimes regret the lapse. I'm too old and slow now -- but you never know, if only I'd kept on playing...

EB¹: Aye, you might be playing First Division soccer with the City —

EB²: (Laughing) Not on this Earth, Eric. Bradford are still in the third. Which reminds me, how do you plan to get back to *your* Earth?

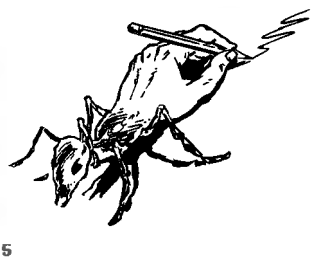
EB¹: Haven't really thought about that. I think I'll just wander back up the lane and try to find that thingummyjig you told me about.

EB²: The rift in the Space-Time Continuum.

EB¹: Exactly...

EB²: And if you're stranded here, I'm sure Bradford City could do with your help. (Wistfully) So... you're a big star on your world? But tell me, why the hell did you sign for Bradford after supporting Leeds like you — we — did? Just a sec, I'll turn off the tape. I'm sure the readers of FBCUS don't want to

[TRANSCRIPT ENDS]



sylvie denis

Tell me about sf in France. Is it a popular genre?

No, not really. The only time when Science-Fiction really took off in France was between 1975 and 1981. I don't mean to say that sf doesn't exist in France today. There are books published and readers ready to buy them. But each time I go to England I have this impression that people are more aware of the existence of sf as a literary genre than in France. You see the books in the bookshops and you look at the tv and radio programmes and you get this feeling that there's more of it around. Over here, most people still link sf with the cinema and bad tv series. And that's all. They don't consider it as a genre with a history, a criticism, and classics. All they know is Star Trek and Star Wars and Asimov. But I'm not very optimistic...

Is there a lot of American or British sf available in translation, or in English?

It's difficult to give numbers, but there are quite a lot of things you can find, especially when you start reading. I don't think that young or new readers have too much difficulty in finding the books they want to read. There are authors who haven't been translated, or books that are out of print, but you don't realise that until you know the genre a bit. In my view, the problem really begins when you have read all the Sanfords and the Silverbergs and the Dicks, and you want something different, or more recent, and you see that it has not been translated. That's how I started reading in English, more or less, because I was getting fed up with waiting for two years for the second part of a trilogy, and because what was published at the time didn't satisfy me.

I've heard that Philip K Dick has been very popular.

That's true. Writers like Michel Jeury are said to have been influenced by him. And most of my friends seem to love his books. But I'm not a Philip K Dick fan myself. I guess I didn't read the right books at the right time, so they never impressed me as they should have. I also suspect a lot of people of liking Dick work for the wrong reasons, but that's too long to explain here.

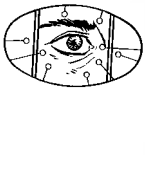
My impressions, from an article in *Foundation*, is that French sf tends to be 'political' rather than, say, space adventure. Is that how you see it, and more importantly, is it any good? (That is, do you enjoy it?)

You're probably referring to Pascal J Thomas's article (in Foundation 34). It's a good summary of what happened at the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s. It's true that French Science-Fiction has had a political period. What really happened -- at least the way I see it -- is that a group of people took hold of the genre and used it as a mouthpiece for their left wing anti-nuclear-power ecologist views. When everybody realised that most of the texts were crap it was too late: the readers had fled in horror and most editors were convinced that French sf (if it was still sf) didn't sell. As a result there was a strong reaction from some writers: they thought that style was the most important. Experimental writing, which uses sf images. Some of them have formed a group called 'Limite' and have published an anthology entitled *Malgré la Monde*. In the meantime fantasy and horror have become quite popular. This more or less sums up the evolution of French sf until 1988. I must add that in the meantime our only monthly magazine, *Fiction*, died, as well as our only annual anthology *Univers*.

I find the current situation quite interesting. Political French sf is quite dead, thanks god, but there has been a reaction both to the 'formaljet' school and to the development of fantasy. I think it culminated one year ago, when Jonathan Carroll's *The Land of Laughs* was published under J'ai Lu SF imprint. There is no professional magazine in France at the moment, so everything went on in fanzines and conventions. People protested that Science-Fiction was Science-Fiction, not experimental surrealistic writing, not fantasy trilogies, not magic realism, and so on. Fleuve Noir authors such as Roland Wagner or Don Herial (the Fleuve Noir is our most commercial sf line) started doing good old space opera, Presence du Futur (who published the Limite anthology) split their sf collection into two lines 'Presence du Futur' and 'Presence du Fantastique', and Ailleurs et Demain (the most prestigious collection) is preparing a 'real sf' anthology. They asked for strong, idea-oriented, well-written, science-fiction stories. Not a very original thing to ask, in my opinion, but we haven't had a lot of them lately. So, to conclude, the sf scene in France is quite lively. The only problem, as far as the authors are concerned, is the lack of professional outlets, especially for short stories.

When did you start writing, and why? What draws you to sf?

Almost at the same time as I started reading sf, which was sometime during my thirteenth year. I had more or less already decided that I would be a writer, but I didn't know what I would write. I knew it wouldn't be mainstream. So, when my mother bought me *Slan*, and a friend lent me some Perry Rhodan books, I knew that this was what I would write. Science-Fiction, not Perry Rhodan... I had that shock, you know. The Revelation. The feeling that this was a literature which dealt with the really important things, the things that had been shaping the world for the last two hundred years. I thought that sf was the only literary genre which was truly relevant to the modern world. And that is what I still think. Why I write is something different. I don't have the choice, really.



I write because I write. There is no origin to it. It's without cause and, it seems, without end. I have always written. Since I was born. Writing is a state before being a form of art.

This is a translation of a text by somebody called Henri Raczymow, about whom I know nothing except that this text, which appeared in a review called 'Autrement', expresses exactly what I feel about writing. It's something I do because I have found it is the best way to relate to myself and to the world. That's the way I function, that's all. I walk, I sleep, I eat, I breathe, I talk, and I write. Because I write ..

What are your working practices? Have you ever considered writing in English?

I have this fantasy, that I would get up in the morning at about seven or eight, work from nine to one, do whatever I have to do in the afternoon, go back to work in the evening. What I actually do is write on week-ends and during holidays, more or less at these hours. I need time to get started, and I need to know that I will have the time to write for as long as I want. As for writing in English, I wish I could do it, but it's just too difficult. I have translated a novella for Francis Valery and it sold to Universe 1. That's one thing I'm terribly proud of, really, but it was a translation of somebody else's work, not a creation.

Do you begin with an idea? a character? a sentence?

I can't really say what I begin with. The process is more holographic. I think a lot about a short story before I start. It's like in that Gérard Klein quote: "An idea is born of the meeting of a desire and an information." Before I wrote 'Caroline', I had this idea that I wanted to write something about surrogate mothers, test tube babies, frozen foetuses and all that. I had absolutely nothing else, no character, no plot, nothing at all. At the same time, I also wanted to do something about a cyberpunk prison. I think I was also reading Arsène Lupin, so one day it all suddenly merged together like a big three-dimensional puzzle: the character started talking inside my head, telling me how she had been a thief and had been caught and was now in prison, in fact plugged into a hospital system. A hospital where they treated sterile women, so that the lady thief could fiddle with the machines she was running and fertilise a woman not with her own foetus but with another one, chosen at random. Because she didn't believe in genetic parenthood. So 'Caroline' is her daughter, because she caused her to live, and she takes care of her via computer networks. But that's one story. 'Adrenochrome' is quite different: it started because Roland Wagner, who is a writer and friend of mine, decided to do an all-fiction issue of his more or less dead fanzine, and told me "I've got a title for you, I'm sure you can do a short story for it," so I started thinking about it and it sort of gelled around the title 'Adrenochrome'. In the end the fanzine didn't get revived and I sent the story to *Solaris*. .

Have particular writers inspired you?

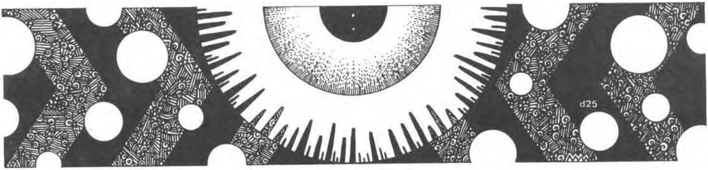
I'd rather say that schools of writing have had some influence on me. I had a new wave, experimental period, then a Herbert period (I drew maps and wrote glossaries) The last one must have been the Gibson fixation, but I have stopped reading right in the middle of *The Difference Engine* without even blaming it on Bruce Sterling so I must be cured. And there are people I definitely admire, such as Ellison, Silverberg, Disch, Delany, the early Ursula Le Guin... many others, but I can't really talk about influences. That's for other people to say.

How do you view the relative importance of scientific accuracy, characterisation, political or philosophical themes, in your own work and in sf in general?

I could write a book out of that question. A good balance between all these, I guess.

What are your intentions for the future? Are you thinking of writing novel length work, or staying with short stories?

That's a very interesting question, one I've been pondering about for quite some time now. I have written a novel, but I'm still waiting for an answer from the editor I sent it to, so I'd rather not talk about it. On the other hand, my various attempts at plotting and writing novels left me quite frustrated. I've realised that short stories are really what I prefer writing. What's more, my favourite authors are not novelists, but short story writers. I think that -- lots of people think the same -- that the ideal form for science fiction is the short story or novella, not the novel. Basically, it is a concept oriented literature, and you don't need five hundred pages to outline the consequences of a single extrapolative concept. So perhaps I'll write novels, but not immediately.



steve sneyd

I defy you to spot anything odd about this paragraph. It contains, as you'd expect of a paragraph, the traditional contents of a few sentences, hopefully fairly coherent and not blatantly ungrammatical. It begins where it begins, goes on to where it ends, and then, at the appropriate point, stops.

On the other hand, here is 'something entirely different':

Space/time in science fiction can
go where we never go
to buy our groceries, beer,
papers to lie about lives
we otherwise would scarcely know
we lead at all until
some frontier-type event disrupts this
routine we hate but fear
to leave. Anyway, why change
when SF changes for us?

Now that, considered as a paragraph, is clearly odd. Hands up who said poetry? Don't all ask to leave the room at once. Honest, it won't bite!

Yet those two groups of words have one point in common they each contain, unless the gremlins get at them before you read them, exactly fifty of the essential ingredients of all text. Yes, 50 words precisely.

What, if anything, is the point of this?

A tiny bit of history is in order here. SF has had a long tradition of short-short stories. It has been disputed whether the shortest meaningful story requires three words or only two -- and that question is in any case irrelevant here. But stories of 50 words or less have for long been a recognised sub-genre, a notable anthology being the 1962 Nieskas Press anthology from America *Fifty Extremely SF Stories*, featuring stories by pros and fans.

Coincidentally, the same year, Brian Aldiss, having devised a testing structure for a more strictly bounded variant of the same idea, one which he called the *minisaga* and has elsewhere been called μ (Greek letter mu) fiction, persuaded the Sunday Telegraph to launch a competition for the form. This competition has since been repeated several times, more recently in conjunction with Radio 4, attracting many thousands of entrants each time.

A personal note now has to intrude. My late mother drew my attention to the competition I entered (totally without success -- you will be glad to learn that this is not a "how I won the coconut and was interviewed by Melvyn Bragg" story) -- and became fascinated with the challenge of this form: fifteen words maximum for the title, fifty words precisely for text.

The years went by, I wrote hundreds of minisagas, and eventually had fifty of them collected into a chapbook *Fifty-Fifty Infinity*.

Two odd things happened. One was that many of the reviews of the chapbook treated the texts as if they were poems, or at least prose-poems, rather than stories. The other is that increasingly, whenever I tried to write another minisaga, I found it twisting like a rope of sand into a 50-word poem.

Why should this be?

One possible explanation is that compression, after all, is what poetry is all about -- and the very fact that a poem *can* compress data, because it does not need to supply all the grammatical links of prose, all the spelling out of information, but can instead function far more like our own thinking processes, which seldom structures itself into sentences, but instead juxtaposes by leaps and bounds, like the jump-cutting of film or TV, means that, where every word is vital when a whole picture must begin, develop, and end in just 50 words, makes poetry a more natural use of the minisaga form than conventional, or even non-conventional prose.

My purpose here, however, is not to explore in detail how or why minisagas appear, for preference, to mutate from prose to poem. It is instead to use this experience to signpost one gateway into the land, to many adherents of either medium most mysterious, land where science fiction and poetry intertwine lascivious limbs and produce .. children, monsters, changelings, mutants, wonders ... currently, the shapes gambolling within the mysterious garden of science fiction poetry are in a state of almost constant flux.

Once upon a time -- for this particular mating is no recent one -- the majority of the material produced would have been readily recognisable for its content to most SF fans, and for its form to most poetry lovers. The argument that SF is a continuation of the true mainstream of human literature, and the 'focus on individual salvation' novel born of Puritanism and today the preferred fodder of lit-crit an aberration, is an old one, not to be refought here. But there is a curious parallel to the state of poetry, today an art with 'more writers than readers', but for thousands of years the mainstream form of writing.

Go back and back, and the Gilgamesh Epic, or the Odyssey, or Sir Gawaine and The Green Knight -- or come to that, The Tempest -- are arguably all both SFnal, in the sense that they breach the confines of the everyday 'unities' of individual life, and poetry

The poem which has been claimed as 'the true beginning' of British SF poetry, Byron's "The Darkness", however, provides a more accessible starting point. Setting aside the argument that Byron in fact drew upon experience of skies blackened by huge volcanic eruption, and thus was not being truly SFnally imaginative in his poem of a world which has lost its sun, the point here germane is that his poetic structure was a conventional one for his period. The same is true of the pioneering SF poets who worked at the time of SF's 'golden age' -- Clark Ashton Smith, Stanton Coblentz, that great woman SF poet the sadly almost forgotten Lilith Lorraine -- they used conventional poetic structures like the sonnet to encapsulate images which were within the mainstream of SF at the time -- whether they paeaned the prospect of space travel or forewarned of atomic danger. ...

SF poetry in this country came later than America. The example of the 'Futurian' poets who published in Wollheim's pre-war Pantegraph in New York inspired A C Clarke to say in the British fanzine 'Novae Terrae' in May 1938 that "Verse is probably a better medium than prose for expressing the ideas of Fantasy and Science Fiction", but words were only fitfully followed by deeds

There was a scattering of poetry, mostly conventional in ideas and form, much of it humourous, in British fanzines from the war years to the mid-fifties (covered in some detail in my article 'Poems and Pomes' in *Critical Wave* 16, May 1990). Then silence fell until Michael Moorcock, a couple of years after assuming the editorship of *New Worlds*, succeeded in his deliberate quest for submissions of poetry that shared his vision of a transformed SFnal literature. This 'New Wave', in poetry as in fiction, brought writers not part of the SF establishment, and with no time for its shibboleths, into play. In the case of poetry, Moorcock has deliberately approached 'mainstream' poets, ones deeply immersed in the freedom of form and language which had transformed the nature of 'mainstream' poetry in the 20s and 30s, and such writers as Peter Redgrove and D M Thomas applied these same transforming tools to writing within their vision of the SF genre.

A set of floodgates had opened. From this experience came landmark anthologies of SF poetry. From it also came a rebirth of poetry within the non-profit SF publishing field, in this country, though this time round increasingly within an SF small press as much as within publications like *Zimri* or *Relativity* which could still be regarded as fanzines -- and this time a poetry willing to look sideways at SF conventions and to break away from traditional poetic forms, often at the cost of arousing bitter hostility in certain quarters (a hostility met, in the case of *Ugly Duckling*, by moving from a fanzine role to being a mainstream small press magazine; by *Titan* in transforming itself into the acclaimed critical magazine *Arena*, and by *Zimri* and *Relativity* with a Buddhistic indifference.)

Though thinning in the late 70s and early 80s, the ranks of the SF 'small press' swelled enormously again in the late 80s, and though *Interzone* has never used poetry, nor sadly will the soon-to-be-reborn latest incarnation of *New Worlds*, and two of the flagships of the *NSFA HBR* and *Dream* have recently dropped it, a number of others continue in the tradition of finding that poetry and SF make successful bedmates.

But my comment about the state of flux can perhaps be most clearly illustrated from the American experience. Muriel Spark may have said that "a short story is a lazy way to write a poem", but many American SF poets, Andrew Joron being perhaps the most vocal, deny that narrative structure has *any* place in what they prefer to call 'speculative' rather than 'SF' poetry.

In America, where Isaac Asimov's and other pro magazines use poetry regularly, there is a flourishing tradition both of 'conventional' and New-Wave-descended SF poetry. But there is also a growing trend to try to shatter boundaries still further with structures of experiment reminiscent perhaps of the experiments of Dada, or repaying the surrealist enthusiasm for SF with surreal disintegrations of data. And nearer still to 'the cutting edge', there are experiments afoot with hypertext, homolinguistic translation, and other phenomena influenced by the latest developments in computing and information theory, such as dual texts, half aimed at the left brain hemisphere, half at the right, which are perhaps better experienced than described.

It has been a curious journey through the shapeshifting maze of the modern garden shared by SF and poetry, and the end of the transformations that are occurring is nowhere in sight. What can be said is that as long as SF and poetry share those key attributes, a sense of wonder and a willingness to change faster than the world itself, there will be no need of a flaming sword (or even rocket!) to be used by either to expel the other from The Mutating Garden.

F8CUS
for SF writers
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(also, previously uncredited pg 13 in F22)

Scavenger's Newsletter, a monthly US market listing zine particularly concerned with the sf/fantasy/horror small press continues to be available from the editorial address: E5/6 issues. A limited number of back issues are available for 50p postpaid. *Scavenger's Scrapbook*, a bi-annually updated listing of all current markets, can be obtained through us for £2.

4 Exercomp 4

From F8CUS 22: Write a TV news report featuring (or mentioning) the 'Chunnel', circa 2045. 100-500 words.

There were 5 entries.

'We are making our way through the Chunnel Tunnel, as the entrance terminal to the Channel Tunnel is known now in the year 2045.

'This whole area is as sleek as sleep, saying which introduces the fact that we intend to go on reporting as we dream. All this is possible because of the new technology of the Sleek Sleep.

'Painted along the inside of the Chunnel are pictures of the developments that finally led to its creation, starting with the original suggestion of M Mathieu to Napoleon Bonaparte that a roadway should be built under the English Channel and that this Channel Chunnel would be a feasible way of riding by horse from France to England. From then on the pictures showed the future development of the Chunnel tunnel until it had finally come into existence following plans to build it between Westhanger and Ashford in Kent with the French terminal between Calaise and Sangatte. Somewhere beyond Westhanger the dreams of the paintings on the walls of the Channel Tunnel take over. Thus Napoleon Bonaparte at the beginning of the concept of the Chunnel is transferred into Napoleon Blownapart while at the other extreme of the Tunnel cracked Black Holes, White Holes and Grey Holes appear mysteriously.

''We are the few going through the glue to the view of the Rue True Blue to meet our new beau!' the passengers call out as the Channel Tunnel nomorail seems to prance beyond France and the Channel to the Canal of Mars which has been built for the same purpose.'

Gordon Abbott

cont on page 11

True Stories

Whose Idea Was It, Anyway?

THE HULL SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS' GROUP CAME INTO EXISTENCE IN OCTOBER 1988 after the Beverly Science Fiction Festival. It then had five members, but is now down to a core of three. We don't meet on a regular basis, but get together whenever we find the time. This is difficult at the moment since one of our members is temporarily living in Leeds. We also run weekend workshops, until the last one, just for ourselves.

In February 1989 we went to a Science Fiction Writing Weekend at Horncastle, Lincolnshire, with Lisa Tuttle, Iain Banks, and Nicola Griffiths as tutors. It was fun, but not really what we wanted. We needed time to *write* to actually get something concrete out of the weekend. So, taking a deep breath, we decided to organise our own.

We booked a couple of rooms at Hull University Union, and away we went. All four of us who took part felt that we had achieved something, if only renewed enthusiasm. We'd each submitted a story for comments and these were passed around during the weekend. The rest of the time was spent writing, based to some extent on provided inspiration -- photos cut from newspapers, lillies, and opening lines.

We decided to see how things went a second time. The next one was held, again at the University Union, in March 1990, but only three of us took part. Despite being down in numbers, we felt ready to move up in scale.

We decided to open a workshop up to other people, with a maximum of twelve participants. This was a good number because it could be easily divided into smaller groups where necessary. Due to other commitments, we were not able to hold the event until 16-18 November 1990. We wrote to all the addresses we had of the people who had attended the Horncastle weekend. We also advertised in *Matrix*, but missed the F8CUS deadline and got half an advert (minus the address) in *Octarine*.

The response? Not much. Perhaps everyone from Horncastle has moved or given up on SF, or we upset them all. Or all the letters vanished in the post. We had two rejections, one reply from *Matrix*, and interest from two people we know from the university. Not even twelve replies. Perhaps because we aren't 'Big Names', people weren't interested.

We decided to go ahead, and sent the stories out for comments at the beginning of October. We had decided that doing this in advance would free more time on the weekend. But two of us had just started courses, all three of us were now students. It was going to be hard work. The good news was that Stephen Gallagher had agreed to come to talk to us. He had co-founded the University SF society, back in the mists of the 1970s, and we had got in touch with him some years previously.

We received a letter from Radio 4, asking if they could come and observe us. They were making a series 'Great Lift Journeys of the World' and one of the programmes was to be on lifts in SF. What did we know about that? But it sounded suitably weird, so we wrote back to invite them. We decided to add a brainstorming session on lifts, during the Saturday morning, to see what we could think up.

One participant dropped out of the weekend at the last moment, but the five remaining participants gathered in one of our homes. Fortified by takeaways and a bottle of wine, we got to know each other, then did an exercise in description, based on the ideas in Craig Raine's 'A Martian Sends A Postcard Home'. Centre of attention became the woman from Radio 4, looking somewhat bewildered.

The next day, at 9 am, we went to the union building and started to write. We all had different methods of getting started, usually involving drinking gallons of tea and coffee and going out to buy another packet of biscuits. These ideas simmered whilst we found we could improvise on the theme of lifts for at least an hour.

Steve arrived at noon and the afternoon was his. He talked us through the history of his first novel, *Chimera*, and more especially its filming for television. He then showed us all stages of the writing of *Down River* from initial idea to cover art. He even told us where he got his crazy ideas from.

We spent the evening more informally, chatting over a meal in a local Indian restaurant. By then, another participant dropped out due to ill health. And overnight a third person vanished, leaving us with the core three again. Sunday was devoted to writing, to discussions of great philosophical issues (coffee, tea, and biscuits) and general feedback on the stories and the weekend.

Steve had been very generous with his time and showed us you can make it, in unexpected ways. Comments on individual stories reached consensus in some cases, and flatly contradicted each other in others. It helped that three of us knew each other sufficiently well to respond sensitively. A too structured approach to commenting -- under specific headings of character, dialogue, plot, and style -- proved to be imbalanced: different stories require different responses.

Would we do it all again? Certainly, but not for a while. We were disheartened by the lack of response, and annoyed by the casualty rate. We had planned well in advance, but one of us had spent two months in America which set the organisation back. Despite being students, free time was extremely hard to come by to devote to written preparation.

In the meantime, we will meet when we can. We would like to open the group out to other people; it will too easily become incestuous, and a story we understand because we know each others' psychology might be incomprehensible to outsiders. The aim of each weekend was to obtain feedback, encouragement, and inspiration, by spending time with other writers. The challenge is to balance this with food, accommodation, workspace, personal commitments, and egos. Only by holding the event can we solve these problems.

If anyone wants to organise a similar venture, wants to attend any future event of ours or just generally correspond, we would be delighted to hear from you. We all need all the help we can give each other.

Andrew Butler, Julia Grosvenor, Carol Ann Green

Contact Address: Carol Ann Green

5 Raglan Ave, Raglan Street,

HULL HU5 2JB

Orbiter Reports

Well, here am I, A A Eastwood, in my fifth year as an Orbiteer, having read and offered my opinions upon seventy-four different stories by nine other writers. Gosh, is it really that many? It is.

Why do we do these things, you ask. Yes, YOU, that shy writer hiding in the thicket, clutching your beloved stories to your chest, wondering how anyone could possibly circulate their own work, allow other people to actually *read* it.

With ten orbited stories and extracts from five novels behind me, I'll tell you why I'm still here, why I await that battered, triple-labelled envelope as keenly as ever.

Some basics first. What is an Orbiter? It is a small group of people like you (well, almost) who like to, or are compelled to, write SF stories and would like to get better at it. You help them, they help you.

Now, as you may have noticed from presenting you latest epic to your Aunty Flo, people who don't write (or even read) SF can't usually find much to say about it. Not helpful things, anyway; about the characterisation of arthropods, aesthetics of refuse, intercutting of multiple plotlines, or the pacing of stories where time runs backwards and forwards ... all the things you struggled to write and would now like to know if they work or not.

Yet how is Orbiter better for you-as-writer than reading Isaac Asimov's latest SF collection? Well, even if you do paste your own ripping yarn inside the back cover, the good Doctor and his friends won't offer any suggestions on how to improve it. But we will (if anyone can).

Even though the aim of writing is communication, the act of writing is a terribly isolated occupation, so that I welcome the opportunity to be part of something, to receive several differently-biased opinions about my own work. Also, there are other people's stories for me to dismantle and put back together, comparing my suggestions with those of the rest. Get into the habit of checking over other people's stories and you'll not only start treating your own work in the same way, but you'll be better for it. Plus, the cycle of orbits is a powerful encouragement to keep on writing.

Writing is not easy, lucrative, or glamourous. Nor is it something which I necessarily get right first, or even twenty-fifth, time. But to get it right, to raise that tower of ideas, turn a stack of blank A4 into a whole living world, spun up out of nothing, now that's beautiful. And that's what Orbiter is for.

A A Eastwood

I'm new to Orbiter but I've been a member of several other postal writers' workshops for some time. Orbiter will probably not be very different except in one important respect -- we're all sf/fantasy writers. I write for two reasons: one is for my own pleasure, the other is to sell. With regard to the first reason it's not necessary for me to belong to a writers' group and to allow my work to be seen, yet I've found that my pleasure and enthusiasm is greatly enhanced by being a member of a workshop. For commercial success it is important that I gain feedback and criticism upon my work -- something I rarely get from magazine editors, and even more rarely from readers. Also, being a member forces me to write and to make sure I have some work ready for when Orbiter comes around. One of my biggest bugbears is spelling and my fellow Orbiteers pick me on quirky mistakes in spelling and sometimes in grammar. Having had a disastrous experience of a writing school, I've come to the conclusion that postal writers' workshops are a far superior way to learn to write. Writers in other genres have always been helpful, but they're not on the same wevelength, hence Orbiter is filling a gap in my education.

Cathie Gill

Exercomp

cont from page 10

My Newshound flashed at the edge of the screen, then grew at a command into the talking head of a live-news station.

> "...our next story. In Europe, today, fans are looking forward to the arrival of audiovid star Jiml Jean Jones at the Cannes Festival. Jones, whose perverse obsession with personal privacy drives honest news-teams gazza, has laid a dozen false trails from her Scottish retreat. Whilst other stations wait in vain at airports across the continent, we at CTCN go live to a security camera in the Channel Tunnel, in front of which JJJ's private car on the London-Torino express will shortly pass. Yes, I see the..."

The camera panned down the 50-year-old tunnel, lurid colours of time-delay re-enhance painting and repainting an eerie Dante-esque scene. It was in stark contrast with the soundtrack of excited CTCN techs as they prepared their systems. I snatched a look round to see if Nat had wised. Not yet, Nat always grumps about my infatuations with the latest teen vid idol.

> "...approaching now. It will slow as it reaches our remote, waiting for security to open the next section's flood doors."

The head's voice hushed as he counted off car numbers over transmission. I couldn't help my quickening heart rate and sweaty palms as I squirmed closer to the screen. The techs went into overdrive as JJJ's car came level; hackers overrode the camera's autoscan and targetted it at the car window; gigabytes of real-time re-enhance cleared a voyeuristic view into the plush interior.

And Jones was there, curled, asleep, and so heart-breakingly young and innocent that I could only hold my breath and watch, captivated. Truly timeless, the stolen moment did not end as the car pulled off, but looped back into itself and cycled screen left as end-of-news-team credits took over the main view, unnoticed.

Clive Jeffery

...and as the train carrying the King disappears I hand you back to the studio in London.

Thank you John. And now, to continue our report of the celebrations on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the channel tunnel we go over to our reporter in Paris, Geoff Smythe.

Thank you Carol. Paris is nearly deserted. Only a handful of Parisians are left and none have come here to look at the wreckage of the Eiffel Tower. A holiday air built up at the weekend and there was a last minute rush to the coast. The SNCF pulled in every spare TEV from its Transalp route. The King's popularity has never been higher since that incident in Chantilly. A lot of people here don't believe she's over eighteen. So, to give us first hand experience of all the excitement we go over to Calais.

Yes it's really exciting here. Huge crowds, and not just French. There's lots of Germans now that OB have relaxed tunds for their UHST in Kent from a rights issue on their eaglev route to Copenhagen. Here on that in Eurobusiness 21 on Sat16 tonight. The President of France has just left for the terminal and refused to talk about those monsters in the Pacific, so I'll hand you over to Philip in Coquelles and get on with the serious business (holds up champagne).

Thank you Mary. This is an exciting moment for the French. They chose today to unveil their TUEs and the President will return to Paris a bit faster than her helicopter! The rumour is ... 29 minutes! Mach 1 here we come! Yes, yes, here she comes!

cont over

cont from p 11

Exercomp

I'll pass you over now to a colleague with TF14 as the President arrives here in Coquelles.

Ah merci Philippe. As you can see (entrance to Eurotunnel in distance), there is a lavish exposition here for everybody to look at. Everybody's very sad that your stock market crashed again just when you so wanted to have a nice exposition of your own too. Anyway, while we wait for your King to arrive here from under la Manche, ha ha, we French think your word, ow you say, chunnel, is a little parochial! The Caesunrise is now also more than fifty years old but you British still don't like Eurothings. Ah, I think my colleague Jeanne is with the Presidential party...

Merci Claude. I'm standing here next to Jacques Dupont. Jacques, you were the driver of the TGV at the opening of the tunnel and now you're 98. Tell me, what are your feelings about this and all the progress you've seen in your long life? (close-up to J) Pardon! Qu'est ce que vous avez dit? Pour quoi nous ait end ons?

Peter Lancaster

[From an STV news bulletin, 8th Nov 2048]

'... said he still believed there was hope of achieving a cease-fire before Christmas.

'As guests begin to assemble at the Palace of Holyrood for the King's hundredth birthday celebrations, Edinburgh is being treated to a spectacle unique in aviation history. Among today's arrivals were the Duke and Duchess of York, whose necessarily roundabout flight from New Zealand has added another 'first' to the impressive record of the Blue Riband holder *Princess Royal*. As the airship crossed the German coast east of Danzig she was joined by the veteran *Graf Zeppelin III*, the previous holder, carrying Kaiser Friedrich, the Empress, and Prince Heinrich, Near Paris they were met by the newly-launched *Jeanne d'Arc* on her maiden flight with the Duc d'Orléans, representing Queen Louise who is still unable to travel. Cruising in silent majesty over Brittany, Cornwall, Wales and Kent, the three ships were in striking contrast with a less welcome visitant nearly eighty years before -- one which the West Highlands too have good cause to remember. With scant regard for local feeling, the supersonic airliner *Concorde*, symbol of the short-lived friendship between the then French Republic and the English majority-partner in the United Kingdom, inflicted the double thunderclap of its sonths of test-flights almost exclusively on their Celtic neighbours. Riding serenely at their masts above Edinburgh Castle, Calton Hill and Arthur's Seat, the airships bear witness tonight to a more gracious age and a more lasting international friendship. And if the giant *Graf Zeppelin* is the largest and the *Jeanne d'Arc* perhaps soon to prove the fastest aircraft afloat, few who have seen them together will dispute that the *Princess Royal*, the pride of the Clyde, is still the fairest of the three.

'The successful race to have the *Jeanne d'Arc* made ready in time has disappointed a group of English enthusiasts who are trying to raise support for the completion of the Channel Tunnel. A spokesman said yesterday that they had hoped the Duc d'Orléans might choose this occasion to travel the whole length of the tunnel by submersible, as he did some years ago as far as the mid-Channel breach left by the 'No to Europe' bomb of 1992. Asked whether the Duke would not be likelier to respect His Majesty's lifelong distaste for superfluous technology, to say nothing of the unsuitability of his travelling between the twin kingdoms of the Auld Alliance by way of the English Republic, the spokesman replied: "The old what?"

'And now the weather. In tribute to the Royal Birthday the Weather Bureau has arranged. ..'

P T Bond

[Voiceover (in French). Film shows changing shots of cloud chambers and massive particle detectors, nuclear power plants, the original drilling work and the slowly decaying Chunnel of today, a symbol of the decay spreading through our poorest neighbour.]

'A spokesman for CERN, the Centre European de Recherche Nucléaire, speaking here in Paris, confirmed today that the new Superconducting Supercollider will indeed be built to the so-called Chunnel option. The Chunnel option is a radical proposal to revitalize the recession-hit province of Grande Bretagne by routing CERN's new particle accelerator through the little used Channel [tunnel] or Chunnel. The Chunnel was a major achievement for French industry in the late years of the Twentieth Century, but ultimately foundered due to lack of investment in infrastructure by the then independent, provincial government in Grande Bretagne. Recent years have seen the employment situation in our poorest province worsen rapidly and a spokesman for the Elysee later stated that the President felt that the new investment, supported by generous Government subsidies, could only help the local economy in its slow progress towards recovery and full integration into our Community.

'The CERN spokesman went on to elaborate on the details of the project. The accelerator ring will consist of two large loops, one orbiting Paris outside the radius of the Route Peripherique, the other around the provincial capital of Londre and constructed on the course of the decaying Autoroute Provinciale 23. The two loops will be linked by parallel sections running Northwest from Paris to the Channel coast and passing under the Channel through the two former rain tunnels of the Chunnel, the sections will then continue overground through the Kent countryside to link into the loop north and south of Londre. It is anticipated that several dedicated power stations will be constructed to support the Collider, likely sites for these are thought to be the Normandy coast or the Pas de Calais. Cables passing through the Service Tunnel will be used to supply power to the segments of the Collicar located within Grande Bretagne. A major new research centre will also be built to support the work of the scientists engaged in the project; a site was announced for this on the Northern outskirts of Paris.'

Dave Gillon

Comments: This text itself is multi-layered work, not only the 'story' and new technologies, but also social and political comment about Euro-issues and the media. I find myself looking at the 'density of implication'; how much comes across between the lines, or in passing in the 'characterisation' of the news, about the state of the world 50 years from now.

FIRST PRIZE -- a copy of Keith Brooke's interesting first novel *Keepers of the Peace*, kindly donated by Gollancz, -- goes to (wow) Clive Jeffery. The Runner-up, who receives a £6 NSFA voucher, is P T Bond.

EXERCOMP 5

In *Foundation 51*, Gary Westfahl suggests that science fiction writers have tended to evade 'the true novelty of life in space' by portraying space-stations as comfortable and familiar environments, in which humans can remain comfortable and familiar characters. Responding to this, Exercomp 5 challenges writers to make the connection between 'living in a strange environment' and 'being strange':

Portray an ordinary incident or encounter on a space station. Up to 300 words.

Deadline: unlikely, say Sept 10, 1991. NSFA voucher and a copy of Eric Brown's collection *The Time-Lapsed Man* on offer as prizes.