

Focus

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Editorial



Through a telephoto lens, lightly...

As you will gather from the advert in this magazine and also in *Matrix*, Julie and I have decided to call it a day on editing *Focus*. We've enjoyed ourselves tremendously over the six years we've been looking after the magazine, and feel we've come far from the evening when we sat in Carol's living room looking through back issues of the magazine and wondering if we dared to offer to edit the magazine. We dared, and you've seen the results of our bravado over the last 12 issues. We hope you've enjoyed it.

But it's time for us to move on. Julie has become green-fingered and started an allotment and Carol is branching out into working with crafts and glass. Also, we feel that it is time to let someone else brave the opportunity of editing *Focus*. Somewhere out there, there are people like us, who are sitting reading this wondering if they dare. We dare you! If you are interested, but not sure how to go about it, get in touch with us. We're not going straight away – we hope to be able to help edit an intermediary issue of the magazine with issue 36, and we'll always be here to help if needed – so reach out, pick up your pen and write to us, or email us, or even phone us: we don't bite, honest!

In this – which is probably our last – issue, we look at the Small Press. We're pleased with the response to our request for writers, editors and publishers to tell us about their experiences of writing and working in the Small Press field; we hope you enjoy reading about them.



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Contributions to Focus are always welcome.

Fiction should be of a very good quality and no longer than 5,000 words.

Articles about all aspects of writing are always needed, up to 5,000 words. Please contact the editors if you are unsure whether the article fits our remit.

Contributions should be submitted on A4 paper, double-spaced on one side of the paper only. Email contributions can be accepted, if compatible. Please check on metaphor@enterprise.net first. Disk may also be submitted – please contact the editors for more information in the first instance.

Cover art, illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

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Dr Greenland's Prescription

Which words do you use most often?

It might be *dark* or *sudden*, or *back* – my characters are always thinking back, going back in, sitting back down.

Which words do you use too often?

Putting the final touches to a book for Orion's Dreamtime series, about a young Indian girl and her baby brother, I discovered that every time the baby is happy, or annoyed, or simply exuberant, he squeals. In a 30,000-word book, he squeals with delight on three occasions (and once, so do some little children in a school playground). Once he pulls his sister's hair, and makes her squeal.

Squeal is a good word. It's direct, and vivid. Six or seven squeals, though, cease to be vivid and become automatic. Glitché, in fact.

Even. But. As if.

First drafts often have too many qualifications, traces of the vagueness or uncertainty with which ideas – descriptions, comparisons, pieces of action – first make themselves felt.

Almost, slightly, quite, rather, possibly, some kind of.

Pruning them will make your writing more concrete, more authoritative.

He looked as if he was –

Have you decided yet whether he was or not?

If he was, can you just say so?

Getting stuck, and how to avoid it.

You know what it's like. You have a brilliant idea, you put it down, you are seized with inspiration and go on for pages. Then you slow down, and stop – and somehow it's run out halfway through. You're bored, or baffled. There doesn't seem to be any more.

Here's an interesting technique from screenwriting. When you have an idea, try looking at it from the other direction.

It's no longer the beginning of a story. It's the end of one.

Beginnings and endings are fictional conventions anyway. Real life is simply And then, and then, and then... Every moment is the end of the one before, and the beginning of the next.

What is your idea the end of?

If a thing is going to happen, it's always more interesting if we know beforehand that it rarely happens, that it couldn't happen, that it's the last thing anyone expects or wants to happen.

Think of all those movies and tv shows where our hapless, put-upon hero or his recalcitrant girlfriend or the worn-out ex-cop next door says "There's no way I'm coming with you. Absolutely not. Forget it." Jump cut, next scene, on the road hero/girlfriend/cop is driving the car

Work from scarcity to fulfilment. What conditions is your idea the fulfilment of?

An idea for a story.

A man is abducted by his ex-wife and taken to Mars.

So: start with the happy couple together on the Moon.

Then things go wrong. She gets a new job, their relationship changes, they split up. Lots of unfinished business, resentments, a series of failure. George stays on the Moon,

working on the hydroponics project, while Jane goes off to dig up the desert on Mars, which George has always hated and despised. George finds comfort in resuming his old bachelor life, but Jane won't leave him alone. She's always at him, interfering from afar, making demands, raking up old quarrels. He starts to think she's becoming deranged. One day she arrives without warning and drags him away – to Mars, which is not horrible at all, but much more fun. Just what they needed. They fall in love all over again.

All right, that's pretty crappy. I'm sure you can do better.

Think of this, too:

If your idea's a good one, and you work towards it instead of away from it, then you know the story will end well, and leave a good taste behind. A weak ending can ruin a terrific book. A good finish can redeem a shaky one. We're surprised and pleased how well it turned out.

"Never mind Dr Greenland's Prescription about character, plotting and dialogue (excellent though it all is), what the professional writer needs is PATIENCE."

That was Jenny Jones, venting irritation about her publisher's continual failure to answer queries, honour commitments, return phonecalls. In this age of superfast communications, improved business practices and streamlined management systems, it takes much longer to get anything done. Even on commission, you can spend months and months waiting and nudging and complaining before you get a reply.

Pro or no, you need patience with yourself too. Work takes time. Work takes energy.

You need patience to reach the end of the work. Every story is a journey, every novel, even the most thoroughly planned, an odyssey, filled with wandering and waiting, hanging about in uncongenial corners, wondering where your luggage has got to.

You know I'm a great believer in craft, in techniques devised to solve problems and achieve effects. That's why I write these articles. The reason technique is so important, though, is that the process itself, the work of imagination, is so mysterious and elusive and untechnical. You have to engineer what you can, because you certainly can't engineer the raw material.

Some problems you can't work out. You can't even work out what's wrong, let alone what you should do. All you can do is wait for the solution to arrive. And sometimes it does. You battle for days against some knot, some block, some gaping flaw, and retreat in disarray, only to wake up two days later knowing exactly what you've got to do. Familiar? I bet it is.

Well, that takes patience. Especially since you never really know it's going to happen.

Work takes time. Time to think, and rethink. Not all progress is cumulative. The other day I wrote two thousand words. That's a good day, for me I was exhilarated. The next day I wrote ten words. I was not happy. The best I could think was: Oh, well, maybe I'm recovering from yesterday's exertion. The next day I cut three hundred of the two thousand. I was delighted. It was so much better!

Colin Greenland

Slicing the Hamburger: Some thoughts on writing non-fiction — part two

by Andrew M Butler

"Prolonged, indiscriminate reviewing of books involves constantly inventing reactions towards books about which one has no spontaneous feelings whatever"

— George Orwell, *Confessions of a Book Reviewer*

It's a cold wet morning in February, and you're at a multiplex on a blasted heath facing a morning of Chris Tucker, Jean-Claude Damme-Blast and someone from *Friends* in (galk!) a romantic comedy.

It's another cold wet morning in February, and you've decided to have a lie-in, except that postie has rung the bell and woken you up for a jiffy bag which he's been trying to squeeze through your letter box for ten minutes. You nip it open and find it's Anne McCaffery's *Whistle Blowers of Pern* and your editor would like three hundred words by next Tuesday. Somehow. More bloody dragons written a hundred times won't cut it.

It's early March, it's still wet and cold and you can't decide between *Vanessa* and *Trisha*. Fortunately, some kind TV PR people have sent you a tape of their new adaptation of Johnson's *Dictionary* with that Peter Capaldi chap as Boswell. To watch and review, or tape *Vanessa* with?

In Tom Stoppard's play about critics watching a murder-mystery play *The Real Inspector Hound*, Birdboot declares: 'Me and the lads have had a meeting in the bar and decided it's first class family entertainment but if it goes on beyond half-past ten it's self-indulgent.' It seems unlikely that there is such a world conspiracy of critics, but anyone who noted all the mentions in reviews of *Shakespeare in Love* of the line 'I had that Marlowe in the back of my boat once (or whatever the line was)' may well think otherwise. From my experience of book reviewing, it's just you and your notebook.

There is an unconscious pressure at work. I approached Jeter's *Blade Runner 2* with a huge amount of scepticism and a sense of someone, somewhere, turning in his grave. The word of mouth was that it was a stinker. Do I feel brave enough to be the one out of step in declaring it a literary masterpiece? Of course, it wasn't, but it was certainly more than hack work and it made some interesting comments on the film and the original novel, even if it failed to be the two together as the advance publicity declared. I gave it a thumbs up, as did the *Foundation* reviewer as I recall.

Alternatively if you are reviewing the greatest thing since sliced bread, say something like *The Sparrow* which sometimes felt like nobody had a bad word for it, do you dare to be the one to note the emperor's new clothes and damn it? Some people, like Tom Hibbert build a whole career on never liking anything, but do you want to emulate him? Somewhere along the line you need to listen to what your own voice is telling you, not what it is polite to write.

At the same time, some things are predetermined before you write the review, predetermined even before you read the book or watch the film. Pick up any Sunday broadsheet and peruse the reviews, and you'll find that much of it is non-fiction coverage. There'll be a few featured novels — the new Le Carré (good if outdated), the new King (he's coming to the end of his career), the new Pynchon (there's this thing called the Discworld, involving elephants and a turtle) — but mostly novels will be lumped together in round-ups. Ten years ago Tom Shippey and Dave Langford would review half a dozen or so of novels for *The Independent* or *The Guardian* in something like two hundred words (then apparently cut down by subeditors to 150 by leaving unimportant words like 'not out'.)

The non-fiction review will probably be a short article, which somewhere along the line acknowledges that someone has written a book on the subject (subtext: I stole all this information from it). You'll

read the review in vain to discover whether the reviewer liked it, although you'll know that the author failed to address x or got y wrong.

I've only fallen into this trap once, in a review of a monograph for *Foundation*.

To re-read Delany with the postmodern in mind is to be struck with a catalogue of the postmodern's concerns: the self, the other, difference. The self: languages lacking the word for "I", amnesiac heroes, gender-bending hero(in)es. The other: the outsider, the rebel, the slave, the feminine. Difference: gender and sexuality (often different sides of the same coin), race, class, culture. And half a dozen new forms of economics, myths and uncertainties.

The author, I later heard from Edward James, the editor, was aggrieved that I'd written so discursively and objected that 'I said all this in the book'. True, and I was precis-ing it for the review. Most of the sentences included. As Z suggests: 'And it is in this context that Z's book' and Z notes how but this was evidently not enough. I was clearly trying to demonstrate that I was more aware of the situation or cleverer than they were.

Some books invite that approach. Faced with a two thousand page bibliography, what can you do? There's no plot to speak of, there's no characterisation. All you can do is note its criteria for including items, debate those criteria, see if it fulfils them and catch any mistakes. Faced with something as impressive as *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, all most of us could do was complain that it left out all our favourite authors whose names began with J.

In other words, the kind of review you write will be dependent on the house style of the organ you are writing for, and you'd better have a good idea of your target audience. Take the film *Pi*, a psychological, mathematical thriller which took the idea that real life can be modelled with mathematics given the location of the correct algorithm and linked this idea to the finding of patterns in the chaotic stock market and the *Torah*. It's a low budget, black and white sf movie with a techno soundtrack and a grisly ending. In other words, your granny won't enjoy it.

Its blend of high-contrast black and white, jerky cutting and intellectual claptrap made it a hit at America's Sundance Festival and will doubtless earn its maker a clutch of good reviews. Not from me though.

The biggest weakness of the movie — apart from a rambling repetitive structure and unattractive hero — is its supposedly happy ending in which our hero [snip].

You get the feeling that this critic (Christopher Tookey in the *Daily Mail*) doesn't want you to see it. He ruins the ending. And this from a man who on the same two page spread complains that Gus Van Sant ruins *Psycho* by telling you who dies by listing Anne Hache as Marion Crane on the opening credits. I haven't checked, but I'm 99% certain that Janet Leigh is credited in the same way. Note that he's writing for an audience that wishes to identify with a particular kind of hero when they watch a film (in his review of the *Psycho* remake he complains that there's no one for the audience to care about). He also clearly wants a linear, well-made plot, rather than something that is more modernist in tone.

Jonathan Romney, in *The Guardian*, is clearer about the movie's antecedents.

Narratively there is nothing new in this delirious remix of

Philip K Dick, Umberto Eco and *The Twilight Zone*. What makes the film thrilling is the sheer facility of Aronofsky's [the director] style – he cuts like a true scion of MTV, but the onslaught of sound and image achieves genuine warp speed, and Matthew Libatique's uncompromisingly dirty black and white photography makes Manhattan look scuzzier than it has since Travis Bickle left town.

In his mixture of high (Eco) and low (*The Twilight Zone*) allusions, the reviewer here clearly assumes a shared knowledge of twentieth-century culture. His unexplained reference to Travis Bickle – although the actor who played him is later mentioned – assumes that the reader is familiar with *Taxi Driver* and forms a short hand cue to suggesting the borderline sanity of Pi's central character (incidentally the clauses he cuts like a true scion of MTV, but the onslaught of sound and image achieves genuine warp speed are clearly meant to be praise, but would serve to put off a *Daily Mail* reader).

I reviewed the same film, in the context of *Cube*, although this was rather undercut by the way the review appeared in *Matrix*. Perhaps a repetition of that review might illuminate how I go about reviewing.

Pi on the other hand, takes a grainy black and white as its palette, veering between bleached out to pitch black. It was also made on a shoe string, this time raised from a string of hundred dollar stakes from the director's friend and relatives (since repaid, with interest).

Here I'm recycling the press release, telling the reader about the context of the film's production: Is this relevant? Well, it does situate it within a recent tradition of the ultra-low budget movie (Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, Robert Rodriguez's *El Mariachi*) but that isn't necessarily something that I'd follow through for a *Matrix* review. Note that here I'm comparing and contrasting with what I said about *Cube* as a way to mention the black and white cinematography.

Maximilian Cohen (Sean Guillette), temporarily blinded by the sun after ignoring his mother's orders not to, is a mathematics genius, working on trying to find the patterns in the chaotic fluctuations of stock market prices. He is convinced that the world – containing as it does expressions of the golden spiral, mean and rectangle, as well as Fibonacci numbers – is defined by mathematical laws and that the underlying pattern can be found. This is something which has already left his mentor Sol (Mark Margolis) recovering from a stroke induced by trying to locate the patterns in pi.

A three sentence summary of the set-up of the film, using mathematical terms lifted from the movie which I presume *Matrix*'s audience, being interested in science, would have some knowledge of. That third sentence is a mess, and ought to have been rewritten, but so it goes. I missed the link between the sun and Sol (which Paul Kincad pointed out to me in an APA), but this was possibly not the place to make the point.

The practical side of Max's work is seen by an investment company who wish to give him money and a new chip in return for his predictions. But he is distracted by a chance meeting with Lenny (Ben Shenkman) in a bar. Lenny is obsessed by the numerology contained in the Torah and introduces him to Kabbala, the mystic branch of Judaism. A recurring two-hundred-odd digit number from the Torah seems to echo a sequence of pi, and the number which Max's old computer spat out before it died. This number clearly has great significance and consequences.

Note the assumption that the Torah is known and understood – possibly a mistake – and the deft definition of Kabbala. I'm still telling the plot here, hinting at the central mystery, but that's a given in the title so I can give that much away.

Max's descent into madness suggests either that this is just paranoia (but then both the stockbrokers and the cabal of Jews are after him) or that this number is just too

dangerous to know. It's all played with a straight bat: I suspect any attempt to insert the tongue into the cheek would destroy it. The central performance is utterly convincing, and I suspect he has a great career in David Lynch movies (or Shinya Tsukamoto, should he start making movies in America). And he like all of the characters, isn't particularly likeable.

At the start I seem to be avoiding the old cliché/joke, Just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean they're not out to get you. This was fortunate, given it got used as the tagline for *Enemy of the State*, although I didn't know that when I wrote the review. I'm assuming that the readers know their film directors – the Lynch reference is shorthand for weird and inexplicable – in particular to *Erasurehead* and the *Tetsuo* reference a hint at cinematography and the films' visceral natures. Like Tookee, I note that the central character isn't likeable, but I'm not really making a value judgement about that.

Pi, like the other great sf movies of 1998, treads a fine line: it engages the brain as much as the senses, it makes you think as well as gasp. On the other hand, like all of them it probably breaks down under too much scrutiny. Pi and *Cube*'s calculations defy credibility, *Gattaca* and *The Truman Show*'s back stories were thin to the point of non-existence. But even these near miss truly sf films are infinitely preferable to the brainless pap of the disastrous blockbusters which self-destruct before the opening credits are over.

Here I'm putting the film in the context of the rest of the year's output, and making the value judgement that it's 'great'. I limit this by noting a failure, which I trace briefly in those other great films. My mention of back story is an invocation of one of cinema's critical terms: the story of how the world and its characters came to be that way. Arguably that is not how sf works, but rather sf presents us with a given world. But that is a speculation for an article not a review, although I may not use that term again.

My dismissal of blockbusters announces a prejudice: a reader who follows my work will not expect me to like the next *Star Trek* or *X-Files* movie, so I'm likely to be raving (take that word as you like) if I do give it a thumbs up.

Although I've never sat down to write it this way, I suspect that my sense of a good review is that it falls into four sections:

- Pre-existing context
- Plot summary / the gimmick
- Assessment of success of work
- How the work fits into a wider context

It's worth beginning by situating the book or film or play or whatever within a wider context, be it the career of a veteran novelist or the context of the latest post-post-cyberpunk subgenre, or the first work of a new author. I'd be upfront and acknowledge any prejudices at this point, a dislike for horror, a rival book in the field, being published by the same imprint. Well, maybe not the latter and admitting that you're drinking pals with the author could look like name-dropping if you come clean or earn you a place in *Private Eye* if you don't.

Even if you don't draft this introduction first then it should be borne in mind as you read the book for the first time. As you read have a notebook to hand and scribble down notes as they occur to you, you won't remember later on. I've spent countless hours looking for, you know, that description of fog at the bottom of the right hand side of the page about a third of the way in. If you've time, read the book again, although that won't always be possible. Plays, films and operas will probably only be seen once. If you can read the book in a sitting, fine, you need to get an overall impression uninterrupted by other works.

As clearly as possible, and as uncluttered with detail as necessary, establish the situation of the novel (inevitably this will be a plot summary, but be careful about giving too much away – the true identity of the narrator, the person who does it, the setting of the Third Foundation). Check your details, one review of *The Sparrow*

got the name of the main character wrong, which can't help but make you wonder about the rest of the judgement expressed. This might be a temporary blemish, or an editing error, but it undercuts the critic's credibility.

Then you need to give some indication of whether the book achieves what it sets out to do: as far as this can be established. Is the plot and setting convincing? Does the dialogue ring true? Is the author consistent or do eyes change colour between chapters? Does it adequately cover the field of Albanian science fiction or has someone vital (or marginal but important) been ignored? At this point you need to be aware of the tastes of your audience: if only to know what to explain and what to leave to their already existing knowledge. And finally a summary, if only a sentence. Some publications

clearly have a set form for this: who do you recommend it for? It might be excellent, but for completists only. It might be a vital reference tool (if you are into Albanian sf, that is). You might wish to look forward to the author's career, or reminisce about how you prefer his early comedies. Or you may be moved to make a statement about the field as a whole. But don't let this get out of hand: or you'll end up writing an article.

What, then, is an article? Is it the last refuge of those who can't, allowing them to stomp on those who can? Or is it a way of starting a conversation about a book? Tune in, next time, and find out.

TREASURE MAP

by Alice Galley

It was a piece of paper.

A genuine piece of paper, printed with coloured symbols and words.

It was sandwiched inside protective coverings, smoothing out the creases where the paper had been folded, leaving behind lines of dirt. There was even a date, in the corner, along with an explanation of the symbols.

It sat on the table in the cafe like a large place mat, faded against the bright modern colours of the cafe's interior.

A waitress began moving between the tables, a trail of aroma following her from the jug of coffee she was carrying. "Everything OK?" she asked, each time she refilled someone's cup. "Anything for recycling?"

She stopped beside their table and Mark reached into his pocket and pulled out a sweet wrapper he had been carefully saving. The waitress opened what looked like a handbag slung over her shoulder and popped the torn piece of plastic inside. "Thank you," she said and snapped down the lid again. She gave Mark her first genuine smile of the morning. She glanced down at the map and, not recognising it, ignored it and moved to the next table.

The two men sitting together at the table were no different from anyone else in the cafe; they appeared to be talking over coffee, the higher fines for not returning bottles, the cost of fresh fruit and veg, the government, the latest health scare.

The map slid across the table as the dealer retrieved it. "Viewing over," he said. "Are you interested?"

"Of course, but I need to confirm it is genuine."

"You haven't asked the price."

Mark snorted, "It'll be more than it's worth."

"But I think you'll pay."

"How did you come by it?"

"It isn't stolen," the dealer said.

"I'll need to carry out a few tests before we buy."

"Naturally," he handed Mark laser scissors. "Cut off a small segment." Mark lifted up the map and shone a thin beam of light down on the edge of the plastic. A silver separated with a slight snarl that drew the attention of the people at the next table. A few scallops showed where others had done the same. Mark pointed at them questioningly.

"I have other buyers interested: closing bids tomorrow please."

Mark handed the scrap of paper, still within its protective plastic, to Caroline.

"It's a very small piece," she said doubtfully.

"He had a second pair of laser scissors ready to slice off my fingers," Mark explained.

"You could only cut from the edge? It could mean the centre is not genuine."

Mark nodded. "As far as I could see there were no joins."

Caroline carefully removed the fragile paper and placed half of it into the analyser. She asked the machine to identify the sample and determine its age. "We'll keep this," she said, "if there is any doubt I'll use the main machine in the lab."

Several workers were still in the main lab, but Caroline was senior enough to have her own office, with small, but efficient machines. If this came good then they would both leave the company and set up on their own. They had enough contacts now to make it work.

"We do have some other insurance. I got an image of the map."

Mark could not keep the triumphant note out of his voice.

"How?" asked Caroline. "It was only the knowledge that there were people who could see them that stopped Caroline from hugging him. They were trading with one of the most cautious of dealers."

"A waitress came along at just the right time." They loaded the image into the computer. Caroline instructed it to do search words: bp, waste, refuge, dump, coup and recycling. It found five locations Mark whistled, "if this is genuine, then it's worth all the money he's asking for."

Both turned back to the analyser. "Results," said Caroline and the machine responded promptly with "late Twentieth Century paper."

"Right time, right material, now let's see if we can catch Century location, were you given any indication of the area the map covered?"

"He would only say it came from the south east."

Caroline asked the computer to give a best match between the locations on the map and present day. It superimposed the old map on top of a recent image. She sighed, "our luck's just run out, half of the region is now under the sea." She swung the monitor around to give Mark a better view. She asked the machine to highlight the relevant names. Both watched as the key words were picked out in red.

"Three on land."

"And one close to the shore," Mark pointed out.

"I'll call up the satellite image of these sites, see what's over them."

The waitress recognised him, and pointed to the dealer, already sitting at the table. "Anything for recycling?" she asked hopefully.

Mark shook his head. "Sorry." Claiming the rewards on the recycling pot probably made up the bulk of this waitress' wage. "Next time, then," she said. "Can I get you anything?"

Mark asked for coffee and then weaved his way between chairs to join the dealer.

"Are you interested?" he asked, before Mark had even sat down.

"Yes."

"Do you have the credit?"

Mark handed across his card. The dealer placed it inside his mini-computer and looked at the read-out. "Do you have anything left after you have given me this?" he asked and, caught momentarily off-guard Mark told him the truth. "No."

"Consider yourself penniless." For a fraction of a second Mark thought the dealer meant just to take his money, but from under the table he produced the map, which had been set against the chair, like a tray. The waitress brought the coffee for Mark, the dealer handed over his own credit card and the waitress quickly debited it. Mark reminded himself that instinctive things, like ordering coffee and handing over credit cards, would have to stop for a while. At least until the first deposits were coming out of those old abandoned waste tips. Then they would be rich.

The Small Press

Small Press Voyager

by John Light

[In John's poem there are 145 titles (plus repeats) of Small Press titles, can you find them all? Turn to p14 to see if you're right]

Sipping star wine from an amber goblet,
I dreamed a dark dream of strange adventures
Carried away by dreams and visions,
swept far beyond the eastern rainbow,
Challenging destiny and fearless of
enigmatic tales of deadly beauties,
making a sublime odyssey to find
The silver branch of tree spirit's black bough
In pursuit of the ultimate unknown.

Reading by light of a candelabrum
from the Crimson Chronicles' dust-filmed tome
and thin pages of the Little Red Book,
scribed with the bloody quill of the curlew,
from the arcane lore of old moon letters
and the weird chronicles of disorder,
until in cyphers from the data dump,
I happened upon the raven's tale
of the green egg of the salamander,
the Dragonsphere, dragon's breath of emerald.

Then at last I become a voyager,
sailing the crystal ship through space and time,
Guiding myself by strange mathematics
of indefinite space and overspace,
on the quest for the legend of Dreamshore

Setting course south by south-east to landfall
on the island of the green queen, then on
across the peninsula of granite,
a nightmare journey traversing badlands,
through the dark regions of sandstone chasm
by the mirage of nomad's oasis.
Then south of the new stone circle I stride
through temble beauty of sepia smoke.

BBR and The NSFA

by Chris Reed

I founded **Back Brain Recluse (BBR)** magazine in 1984 after a brief stint on the school magazine. I've also been distributing other small press items since 1989, and the sheer scale of the project has caused **Back Brain Recluse** to appear less and less frequently, administering rather than editing seems to have become my primary role. These days BBR is more of an anthology than a magazine, and issue #24 – a special collaborative project with the US speculative fiction publisher Wordcraft – is currently in production.

Running a small press magazine is a very solitary, individual activity and that individuality is very much a two-edged sword. On the one hand because of the individuality of everybody involved, you get such a wide variety of products. That's probably why the small press is frequently championed as perhaps the most innovative and

The dawn of Dana's sun, rising, at last
blazes forth the burning light of daybreak,
above the black planet's dark horizon.
The new dawn fades and nightfall comes too soon.
In the violet night the yellow moon
draws forth strange plasmas of swamp root vapour
into a vortex of the macabre,
The silver web spun by the shadowdance
of the dread lords of eternal darkness
who use their iron-forged blade, called shadow sword,
to harvest jet black petals of black rose,
of the black lily and the black lotus.

Through window panes of the Mermaid Tavern,
between the interpreter's house next door
and the house of three cheers that lies beyond,
I hear footsteps, and then other voices
utter words of wisdom in a whisper
that makes me shiver: I'm scared to death.

Beyond the boundaries of dusk and dawn,
outside the zone of dreams and nightmares
and swiftly fading stardust memories,
Of unicorns and space stations, all gone,
I see the eclipse of the rising sun
revealing the full moon and the Skinklin star

Passing the gatekeeper at the portals
of the fortress of the sacred city,
past the mausoleum of the plastic tower,
Beyond the spiral chambers and stone rose,
I reach the treasure house that I have sought.
I see emeralds and dark diamonds,
malachite and agate, moonstone and pearl,
and obsidian laid on yellow silk

Through the veil my dark eyes will focus on
transcendent visions of twilight endings
and hear old songs of the time of singing,
of the troubadour and warrior poets,
The poetic knight, the age of wonder
when various artists had their visions,
chanting their auguries of the future
of dream weaver's ethereal dances
In darkness eternal of evernight

interesting area of publishing, because people are willing to set aside the accountancy-led nature of the business and do things more for the love of it

The other side of the argument is that it's very self-centred, which often reveals itself through ignorance, naivety and – most commonly – overexpectation as to what can be achieved. That's why one of the biggest complaints leveled at the small press is the number of magazines which come on to the scene with a blaze of publicity and then fold after only a handful of issues.

Another example of ignorance, naivety and overexpectation is not being aware that (from my experience at least) 90% of the people who buy small press magazines are potential contributors. That means your sales may never be as high as you expect because 90%

of sales are generated by a relatively small group of people, and so there's only so much money going round.

So much for magazines you never hear of again, but what about the writers? I've found that if you consistently reject a potential contributor, they'll probably just send their story off to someone else. But if you accept their story, then you're often just another notch on their bedpost, and you never hear from them again. For an editor there's *nothing* more soul-destroying than your post box being chock-full of submissions every week from time-wasters who haven't taken a blind bit of notice of your submissions guidelines. All these people seem to do is scour the market magazines like *Scavenger's*, *Zene* or *Light's List* for the addresses of potential new markets, and just add them to the list of editors they blindly send stuff out to. So rather than improving with time, it sometimes seems to me that the quality of small press submissions is more like water finding the lowest level.

Okay, if you're a writer you'll say it's too much to expect every potential contributor to buy a sample copy of every magazine to which they're thinking of submitting. That's fair comment – as I said before there's only so much money to go round. But, if potential contributors at least *paid attention to writers' guidelines*, I believe fewer small press editors would decide to call it a day after only a few issues.

The public/private dichotomy of small press publishing has other facets too. In a corporate publishing environment the roles of editor, publisher, production, marketing and circulation are all carried out by different people – maybe even different *departments* – within the company. For the small press publisher, however, these roles invariably fall on a single person, who then has to juggle all of those roles and then try to fulfil each of them adequately.

While there are plenty of magazines to help new writers learn the ropes, there's nothing like that specifically for new publishers. Working in isolation we have no choice but find things out by trial and error, and learning the hard way can be costly and demoralising. It was partly as a response to that lack of resources that the New Science Fiction Alliance (NSFA) came into being.

A group of small press editors met up at the Iconoclasm convention in 1989 and shared a table in the dealers' room. None of the small press groups at the time really provided the infrastructure we were looking for, so we decided to join forces and set up our own. Sales at the combined table at the convention showed that people liked the convenience of buying different magazines from a single contact point, and that's how the NSFA Catalogue was born. (Sadly, BBR is the only one of those magazines still publishing, so although I'm often described as the 'founder of the NSFA', it's more accurate – and more of a mouthful! – to say 'last surviving founder member'.)

At around the same time, I was reviewing a lot of American magazines in BBR. Readers complained that it was impossible to get hold of these exciting titles in the UK, so I started importing two fiction magazines, *Space & Time* and *New Pathways*, the range of overseas titles we represent has grown from there.

At the moment there are two catalogues, the NSFA Catalogue and the BBR Catalogue, though on our website their content is combined in one on-line facility. The NSFA Catalogue is just for British publications, and features only the most recent issue of each magazine we stock. It gets updated every month, and includes 15 to 20 magazines plus assorted other books and chapbooks – a perfect way to get sample copies if you're looking for new markets for your work.

Meanwhile, the BBR Catalogue features all the magazines and books we carry from outside the UK. As it's a lot of hassle for people to send money abroad we try to keep a comprehensive selection of

back issues in stock, as well as all the current issues of the 40-plus titles we represent.

Quite often a new publisher will say to me, 'Here's my wonderful publication. If I come to you as a distributor, how many copies can you guarantee to sell?' On the one hand it's extremely flattering that people think I have that much influence over the market, but on the other it's quite disheartening, because it gives me the impression that people think, 'If I get Chris Reed to distribute my magazine, I'll get instant subscribers – I won't have to worry about that side of things any more.'

I feel the BBR and NSFA Catalogues should *complement*, rather than *replace*, a publisher's existing marketing and advertising. With our website we've tried to make it as easy as possible for people to respond to a magazine's publicity, especially with regard to non-UK customers and/or those who prefer to pay by credit card.

Within that brief, I certainly hope that BBR's activities are making a positive contribution to promoting and stimulating the small press in the UK and overseas. We've been around long enough to learn from our own – and other people's – mistakes, and many of the schemes we run (such as the standing order facility, which avoids tying up your money in multiple subscriptions, and protects you against a magazine closing down) have been introduced as a direct result of customer feedback.

Yet there's still a great need to raise awareness in many ways. Outside the small press community there's a perception that it's just the testing ground where new writers learn their trade and polish their skills. It's called sometimes the 'amateur' press, with all the negative connotations of the word 'amateur'.

By comparison the North American scene appears much more vibrant. Small presses seem to be taken much more seriously over there, with many independently published speculative titles outselling genre titles from the big New York publishers. Maybe part of the British problem, then, is that our small press does too good a job at breaking in new writers, with the result that authors regard it as a stepping stone to wider recognition, rather than as a valid outlet in its own right.

Even so, there are considerable benefits for small press publishers who are conscious of, and conscientious about, the wider public image of the business. Since the collapse of the Net Book Agreement, for example, high street bookshops have been discounting heavily and marketing themselves aggressively. They're not interested in smaller publishers because they won't sell enough units to make it worth their while. Smaller bookshops can't compete against the muscle of the larger chains, and need to offer something different. If we can get the message across, I believe that 'something different' will be the smaller independent publishers and their magazines and books.

Within the small press community, we can improve the way things work by raising awareness of what other people do within different sectors. In that respect the small press stream at the 1997 European SF Convention in Dublin was such a ground-breaking event, because it brought writers, editors, illustrators and publishers together to discuss the dynamics of small press publishing and get a better awareness of how individual roles fit into the wider context. Let's hope there'll be more such events in the future.

Even though I could never have guessed how my personal involvement has evolved over the past fifteen years, I see no dwindling of appetite for independent publishing, either in myself or those I work with. I'm looking forward to seeing the small press fulfil its potential in the years to come!

Small Pressures

by Chris Amies

You start by submitting your story to the top names (Asimov's, F&SF, *Odyssey*, *Interzone*?) and if it doesn't sell to any of those, you work your way down through the ranks – ranked by payment levels or public perception – towards the small press. Only hold it right there, because there is a little matter of definition to deal with. Some ostensibly small press magazines, for example *Crank!*, are extremely well respected and have been around for a while. Some small press magazines pay. Others don't, or pay in copies, which is

probably what most people think of as Small Press; the authors and publishers are in it for the love of it (which is what 'amateur' means after all). The trouble with this is not so much that nobody gets paid – though not getting paid is not going to help the writer who's trying to go pro – as that the small press has very small circulation and little profile in the world of Literature, even Genre literature. Not being paid may not matter to you, the author, although it's nice to be paid this may not be the be-all and end-all of it. Writer's egos, however,

are more volatile things and the bigger the circulation of your writing the better the egoboo

The result is that nobody wants to be known as a small press author. Let's imagine an author, call her Jane Smith. Favoured by the small press who like the way she writes and will publish a few of her stories, she becomes a bit of a name in the kind of magazine that doesn't last very long and is only sold by word of mouth or through mail order. Stunned at having a halfdozen tales on the racks, she suddenly realises five years or so later she is about to become known as Small Press writer Jane Smith. The Small Presses are sometimes seen as a ghetto and ghettos work both ways. They are safe warm places for people who would otherwise find the big bad world a very unpleasant place, they are perilous hard to get out of. Or so the rumour goes. Then again, there are plenty of writers who started out in the small press and are none the worse for it. Stephen Baxter and Peter F. Hamilton were big in the small press in the late 1980s, and have made the transition painlessly. Others such as DF Lewis have enormous – almost ubiquitous – presence in the small press and have only occasionally appeared in the professional press.

The small press is also a resource. It has two functions, not mutually exclusive: to allow writers to be published who have not yet made it into the professional league, and to allow experimental writing to be published. How much 'experimental' writing gets into the mainstream depends on what the mainstream is doing. I don't think you get the deeply experimental stuff these days that you used to get during the 1960s; publishers are a lot more careful nowadays.

Once you have been published, you have been published, and unless it's vanity publishing (which the small press isn't, not in the way we're defining it here), then it still counts as Being A Writer. The important thing is to keep going, keep an eye on the comings and goings of magazines (places to look **Locust Matrix Scavenger's Newsletter**), keep a tally of what you've sent where and when, and what is currently out, so as to avoid embarrassment when you send the same story twice to the same person, or even worse, simultaneously submit it to more than one market at once, which is a Bad Thing.

If the small press is a ghetto, it is also the result of many people

doing what they like to do, and getting very little money out of it, and contrary to general rumour our society looks down on amateurs because, their argument goes, unless you make money out of something how can it be other than a sideline? How can you make it your principal activity? As though being published by the big boys made you somehow more of a writer than you would be otherwise. The trouble is, I think, a cultural perception. It has to do with this business of sharing a language with those people 3000km to the west. It also has to do with the perception of Writing, as something that an awful lot of people think they can do (double that for Poetry where the monetary rewards are few and so many believe they can do it). Painters make their own space by splashing paint about. Sculptors weld together a few sheets of steel and hey, presto, it's Art for Art's sake. Musicians can bask. Writers, however, seem to be required to be pros to be taken seriously at all.

I used to have this theory that if I ever got a story accepted it would kill the magazine it was going to appear in. **New Moon** went under due to its editor dying. **Beyond** simply stopped appearing. This is not limited to the UK, one of my stories and one which I am quite pleased with, is due to appear in an American anthology called **A Different Beat**, but so far no sign of it. This may have something to do with contract problems, they claimed to have sent me a contract – twice. Maybe my postal address wasn't clear – it's been known. Because of the shoestring resources of the small press the magazines do tend to come and go, this is true higher up the ladder in the professional field, in places, but in the small press it is exceptionally so, especially if the magazines concerned want to look more impressive than a stapled A5 fanzine. And unfortunately the look of the magazine does matter to many people.

Robert Heinlein's advice was to keep the stories out there until they sell, and that advice seems to hold good. This serves to get your name known. If an editor keeps receiving well-presented (A4 double-spaced etc.) stories from this one author, that author is no longer just a random name who's picked on the magazine but someone who really means it, and has a better chance of being published.

Growing Your Own: DIY Publishing for Fun and Penny

by Steve Jeffery

As with most things involved in fandom, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

There are many reasons for getting involved in DIY Small Press publishing: a desire to see your name in print, an act of desperation after the 2009 rejection, identifying a small niche market, or for profit, kudos, fame and honour.

But first, a salutary tale.

Regarded by many as the first genuine little mag (**The Germ**) paid neither its editor or contributors. Five hundred copies were printed of which forty were sold. It ran for four issues and then folded in a state of financial loss. As a model for small literary magazines it has been followed, to greater and lesser degrees, ever since.

A Guide to Poetry and Small Press Magazines Introduction Small Press Guide 1997



Small Press publications are, by definition, relatively small circulation budget operations. There is a grey area that separates them from fanzines (in which an active response, via letters, comment or trade is the main reason for publication), although some, like Ken Cheslin's **Fables of Irish Fandom** reprints can be equally argued as fanzines or small press magazines. At the other end of the spectrum, the Small Press shades into aspiring prodom, from self-published novels to magazines that turn sufficient profit to pay modest contributors' rates.

Back in the mists of time, ignorance, and alcoholic enthusiasm of Novacon 19, Vikki (France) and I raised the idea of the Storm Constantine Information Service, part fan club, part writers/artists collective, and started the fanzine **Inception**.

We had a fairly definite agenda for the magazine, as a forum for

discussion of themes which interested us at the time: gender, androgyny, fantasy, storytelling.

Almost immediately people started sending in stories, hand-written in coloured ink, for us to stun the world with their genius.

There is nothing like offering criticism of plot, grammar, character and plotting to sort out the real writers from those who are convinced their genius is fully formed and should not be meddled with, even unto the lowliest comma.

Gratifyingly, a number of people stayed the course, to form part of a project that started as an apa/Orbiter style writer's workshop. *Initiation*, which went through several incarnations, (and one small press anthology edited by Tanya Brown) *Initiation* fell by the wayside after an ill-fated change of administrator, but then Eloise Coquo and Storm Constantine started their **Visionary Tongue** writers' workshop and several *Initiation* contributors migrated across for the first issues.

Inception, meanwhile, had gathered an impressive roster of artists who contributed to the magazines.

At some point the idea came together to combine these with one of Storm's short fantasy stories in an illustrated limited edition chapbook. Storm had a short fantasy story **An Elemental Tale**, an alchemical fairy tale. The magical elements and symbolism seemed ideal for several of our artists, the length, about 8,000 words, was about right.

This is the point at which kitchen table economics come stomping in with leaden boots. We were fairly confident we could sell around 100+ copies through the **Inception** grapevine, and perhaps that many again over a slower period through other sources, bookstores, adverts etc. We halved the difference, and made that our break-even figure.

While we didn't expect to make a lot of profit, there were two reasons for this. One, we didn't want to be out of pocket for much more than six months, a year at the outside, two, we were already

thinking about this being the first of a series, and the longer term profits could generate seed money so that next time we wouldn't have to dig so deep into our own savings

Then we looked for a printer by the simple expedient of scanning through **Exchange and Mart** and getting a dozen or so quotes with price lists and sample booklets. There was quite an astounding range, with prices differing by a factor of three or more. The best were offered by specialist short run booklet printers, and the highest tended to come from high street copyprint shops or high volume business printers. One of the reasons is the production method. Short-run (less than 1,000) printings tend to use plastic, rather than metal, litho plates. These have cheaper set-up costs, but they are non-reusable, so if you want to go for a second printing it will cost the same as the first. Metal plates are more expensive (and often necessary for photo artwork) but most printers will actually hold them for six months or a year after the first printing, so a second printing has a min mal overhead on set-up costs

In the event, for a low print run of around 300, and with black and white line artwork, one-time plastic plates are far the most economic option

Most printers will send guidelines about marking up copy, adequate margins, artwork etc. And most, if not all, reduce from A4 to A5 as standard with no extra charge. Take advantage of this: The line scanners used to prepare plates are much higher resolution than the one on your desktop, or even your 600 DPI printer, and the printer can reduce your copy to A5 at a much higher degree of resolution and sharpness than you can. Print and line art look sharper and blacker

Back in '92, though, affordable personal desktop scanners were rare and naff, and our artwork was directly pasted in with traditional glue-and-scissors technology, either from the original artwork or a good, resized photocopy

If your booklet or whatever is going to have a price marked on it, then you need an ISBN (or ISSN for magazines). This is a free service, and merely a matter of writing or phoning to get the relevant forms where you list the details of your publication, and the name and address of your imprint. This is how we came, by default, also to be Inception Press

LI

And so to press

Another little wrinkle is that some printers will give a discount, perhaps 5% or more, if you pay up front, or others offer free delivery. Ask around, and try and negotiate

Always send copy recorded delivery. Be clear about any special instructions (return of artwork etc.). When laying up for the printer (especially with unnumbered or blank pages etc.), I tended to use a belt and braces approach, marking both each sheet, and its facing page, on the back (for black and white printing, I noted the printer marked these up in yellow pen, presumably being invisible to the photographic/scanning process for making the plates). We also sent a photocopy rough proof version of the booklet itself to show how it should appear when finished

Incidentally, a strange wrinkle in the revenue rules is that finished

booklets are VAT exempt, but uncollated loose sheets and photocopies are subject to 17½% VAT, so it's actually cheaper to have a booklet made up than collate and staple it yourself

Although we had produced six issues of **Inception** at this point, there is still something different about receiving a big box and opening it to find several hundred properly printed copies of something you've produced. This is the point (unless your printer has offered to send you a pre-production sample for checking) to look through the whole print run very thoroughly for blank, misprinted, missing or mislaid pages and decide whether you need to get back to the printer. There are always a few, but usually there are enough overrun copies (maybe 12 or 16) to make up the difference

Because **An Elemental Tale** was always intended as a signed and numbered limited edition, any overruns and slight seconds were clearly marked as 'Proof' or 'Review Copy Only' before being sent out

Colourates a collection of poems, followed in 1995, in much the same format, and another short story, **Dancer for the World's Death**, in '96. Getting slightly more ambitious. **Dancer** had a wonderful airbrushed cover by Dave Mooring which cried out for move to a heavier satin gloss cover

OK, so now you need to sell it. Inception had the considerable advantage of an established and supportive fan base of between 150-200 people, so we hoped to break even through direct mailing. Other avenues were review copies to sf and genre related magazines (e.g. **Vector**, **Interzone**, **Odyssey**, **The Edge**) and small press review/listing magazines, such as **Bypass**, **Zene**, **Dragon's Breath** and **Dreamberry Wine**, or adverts and mailing flyers (usually arranged on a reciprocal basis with other fanzines, small press publications) and also on the Inception web site

Remember, advertising in the small ads in **Matrix** is free to members, and for other adverts the BSFA has a cheaper 'fan' rate for non-profit traders. Some specialist bookstores, such as **Forbidden Planet** or **Andromeda** will also put them on their shelves, but note that the retailer may want anything to a 30 or 40% cut on the cover price, which might mean you're giving them away if you are operating on a tight budget

Other small presses can be invaluable, both for advertising and reviews, and as sources of information. For genre poetry, Steve Sneyd's **Hilltop Press** is probably the prime UK clearing house, while for dark/gothic fantasy there are a number of related magazines, such as **Crimson**, **Lowlife** and **Monas Heiroglyphica**

In a way, once you start to get involved, and start to think about distribution and getting your publication into the hands of people who will most appreciate it, 'DIY' becomes a bit of a misnomer, the Small Press starts to look less like a confusing jungle of myriad independent publications, and more like an interlocking network whose shared ethic is art over commerce, and communication over profit. That has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of the whole process. Be careful, though; it can become seriously addictive

There are too many publications listed above to give full details of each, but if you want to know more, I'll be happy to pass on names and addresses of these and others of particular interest

Alternative 'I'

by Fay Symes

I was interested to see that you are covering small press publications in a future issue. Having received a pile of rejection slips for our mainstream SF novels, my husband gave up writing, and I turned to fan fiction

I started out by writing for other publishers, but a few years ago set up on my own as Triffid's Leg Press. I turn out between one and two 120+ page zines a year, both novels and anthologies. I write myself, collect outside submissions, edit, proof-read, set up print, punch, bind and sell, as a single-handed operation with occasional assistance from two friends who proof-read and one penfriend who is a retired professional editor. This is non-profit making media fan fiction, so I am only allowed to cover expenses, but even if I could, it would never make a real profit. Fanzine publishing is a labour of love combined with masochistic insanity

The genre I am publishing at present is alternative, 'I' also known

as 'slash' fan fiction, in which the characters display homosexual tendencies or engage in sexual activity. 'Slash' began in the sixties in America with **Star Trek**, as is probably well known to all fan writers, and is variously accepted, ignored, or despised. However, it persists, and there is an enthusiastic market for it in most countries, including America, Australia, Europe and Japan

I believe that very few 'slash' publishers would come forward to explain their involvement, they all seem to be strangely reticent about what they publish, or afraid that their friends or family will discover their 'wicked' secret hobby. It seems a pity to spend one's valuable free time and energy on something one has to be ashamed of, and although I wouldn't tell my employer about it, I certainly put my home address in all my zines – and the thought police haven't raided me yet

I personally fell into 'slash' writing by accident, discovering that it

was amusing to write. It was saleable. I appeared to be good at it, I received wonderful feedback from my readers, and fanmail from persons eagerly awaiting my next offering (as well as fanmail from hell). What more can a writer ask?

Although I'd much prefer to be writing 'real' science fiction and selling through a mainstream publisher, this is definitely better than

nothing, and it is quite satisfying to be a big fish in a little pond. Most of all it's fun, and I have made myself a small niche as a writer while gaining vast experience in editing and improving my own personal style. There may be a long way to go – but this is definitely a solid rung on the ladder.

GETTING THERE

By Neal Asher

The first time novelist or short story writer is up a certain well known creek without even a canoe. If you're a politician, a film star, or a model (you don't even have to be able to write), the big publishers will provide you with a nice fat cheque and a power boat. The catch for a new author is that they might publish you if you're known and as a new author you'll only get known if they publish you. It is also a sad fact that the likes of Harper and Collins receive two to three hundred manuscripts a week out of which they might publish two or three a year. Many large publishers freely admit that they will not even look at work unless it is submitted through an agent. It would seem that these publishers are now run primarily by accountants and financial directors. Editors wanting to take on something new have to present this work to these people to justify the expenditure. As such justifications usually begin with 'Well this is like...' the chance of anything groundbreaking being taken is minimal. The fact, I think, that all writers should be aware of is that these large publishers are not out to make books, they're out to make money. So, what other options are there? There are: thankfully, the small presses, and through them the gradual struggle up the ladder in the hope that you'll reach a point where you can no longer be ignored.

Small press publications range from illiterate productions of stapled-together A4 sheets to some magazines indistinguishable from what you'll find on the newsagent's shelf. There are presses that produce paperback books of a quality that exceeds that of mainstream publishers (How often have you had one of these mainstream paperbacks fall apart in your hands as you read it? How often has the cover picture and blurb borne no relation to the contents?). It is worth noting exactly what 'small' means in the latter cases. It usually only refers to circulation, editor's bank balance, and advertising. They are not necessarily small on enthusiasm or professionalism. Don't be fooled into thinking that you can get any old crap published here, but also be aware that if you are good, you stand a better chance here than with one of the lumbering giants that has a stranglehold on the newsstands and bookshops.

Unfortunately the SF, F and H (magazine) small presses are pretty much a closed circuit and it is quite possible for you to be very well known in them but not known outside. Very often the magazines published have a circulation that can only be numbered in the hundreds and not very many of them. The closed circuit is due to a large proportion of their readership being writers and by the mags only advertising in each other (no doubt due to cost). What are you after, though? If it is money then forget it. Payment ranges from a free copy of the mag your story is in, to, if you're lucky, ten or twenty quid. The most I have achieved for short story publication was £60 from a magazine called *Scheherazade* and that was ten thousand words divided over two copies. If it's an audience you're after then the most you can hope for is that for ten or fifteen minutes you will have the undivided attention of each of those hundreds of readers. Better than nothing.

A problem you'll face, writing for these small circulation magazines, is their proliferation and their swift demise. I have frequently had stories accepted by magazines that have then folded before publication of said story. There is no fault here in the enthusiasm or even financial acumen of the editors. It is just that a circulation of any more than a few hundred seems a tough barrier to break. Some have managed to, but for every one that does it seems that twenty others go to the wall. That barrier I think is ultimately heart-breaking for many editors.

Another problem can be lengths of time involved. In some cases you will not receive a reply for a few months, thereafter, if your work is accepted, it can be months and even years before you see your work in print, and see any cheque that might be involved. This is because small press editors have to work for a living and that job

ain't in publishing. They have piles of stories to read through and reject before they find your gem. And often they might only bring out their magazines quarterly or even yearly. You'll often notice when looking at these magazines that they have an issue number, but that the editor has not been brave enough to put on a date. In one case I had to wait three years from acceptance of one of my stories until publication. But let's face it, if you're a writer, you should be thinking about your next story on the way back from the post box.

Why write for the small presses if your ultimate aim is big time publication? To begin with the small presses are a superb training ground for the wannabes. Very often the editors of these magazines will take the time to offer some criticism of your work (remember, if that criticism is 'this is drivel' that's more than you'll get elsewhere). You'll also get a fair amount of feedback in the letters pages and even in other magazines. In this sense the closed circuit will work for you, many of these magazines have review columns and as well as reviewing films, and large circulation books and magazines, they review each other. Also, because of that proportion of writers in the readership, you'll know that if you do get published it is not because of lack of submissions to the magazine. The small presses are essentially a proving ground for the wannabe.

To break into the small press market you do have to buy magazines. Some magazines will only publish stories written by subscribers: a form of nepotism brought on by a desperation to get subscribers. Once you've bought a few magazines, you'll have a feel for them and from adverts in them you'll find other mags to which you may send your scribbles. Each time you send something off (with an SAE and covering letter) you'll quite probably get letters from yet more magazines with your rejection or acceptance. It is quite easy to build up one hell of a list of possible markets. If you want to increase that list then get hold of publications like *Zene*, *Light's List*, or *Dragon's Breath*. In the fifteen years I've been writing for the small presses I've felt no need to submit work outside the UK, but then I'm not someone who produces a story a day.

Once you've broken into the small press market (meaning that you have proven your worth to yourself, not that you have learnt the funny handshake) it's worth looking at the small press book publishers in the hope of having something longer published. As you do these things take note of your achievements and utilise what leverage they might give to get you higher up the writing ladder. Unfortunately, though, you'll find that small press book publishers face similar difficulties to those of the magazine publishers. So far I've seen three of them get into difficulties. Club 199, a publisher aiming to produce cheap paperbacks (£1.99 hence the name) had the printing side of things organised but not the advertising side. New Guild whom I was under contract with made the same mistake. Tanjen has recently ceased taking on any new work. Sadly these small publishers are up against the huge advertising machines of the large publishers, the clout they have with the likes of W H Smiths and Waterstones, and the spreading of costs over huge print runs.

For me my writing has been a gradual struggle up that ladder, the small presses being the first few rungs. Too often we hear of someone getting the x-thousands advance on their first book and hearing this lose sight of the fact that they are the exception. There is a lot of truth in the image of the writer struggling away in his garret then drinking himself to death. The reality is that writing is hard, getting published is hard, and that if you want easy money your best option is to become an estate agent.

It took me five or more years to get my first short story accepted and then that magazine folded before publication of my work. After this slight boost (and it was a boost, someone had actually wanted my work) I got more and more stories published, the occasional novella serialised, and a one-off novella published for a single cash payment. For my short stories my reward was a copy of the

magazine and some complimentary letters (mostly). After another five years I was getting the occasional cheque – about enough to pay for a toner cartridge a year – then in the following five years finally gained some notoriety through the publishers Tanjen, with the

THE DIARY OF NOESIS, AGED 1 ISSUE

by Lesley Milner

Let me introduce *Noesis* – a new SF Magazine that just wants to get back to cracking good stories! It's been started by Robin Wadding and I, who both live in Falmouth, Cornwall. I am a primary school classroom assistant who's been reading SF for as long as I can remember and have been wanting to start my own magazine for some time now. Robin is a Senior Teacher, formerly a Head of Science Faculty with a track record in educational publishing.

Easter 1998 – Conception

Celebrated with Robin the arrival of payment for our astronomy article in *Quest* magazine. It took a threat of the Small Claims Court to extract the cash! Decided that rather than being at the mercy of any more reluctant-to-pay editors, we'd start our own magazine. I've always wanted to start an SF magazine and so I was very pleased when Robin said that he'd enjoy the challenge of it too. We got out my collection of small press magazines and anthologies to get an idea of what's available at the moment.

May 1998 – Birth

We have very quickly agreed that the magazine should include science fact as well as fiction: after all, our previous publishing successes have been with astronomy articles. No other publications in this country seems to be doing that, so with any luck, we've found a hole in the market. Any SF writer worth their salt should be keeping up with scientific news: how else can they be innovative? Name hunting has gripped us – many emails pass between us with suggestions but nothing really grabs our attention until late one night. We were thumbing through thesauri & reference books when one of us found the word 'Noesis'. Neither of us knew what it meant and a look in a standard dictionary revealed nothing. We resorted to the massive two volume *Shorter* (!) *Oxford English Dictionary* which gave the following definition: 'an intellectual view of the moral and physical world'. We looked at each other and smiled in total agreement: this was it. *Noesis* was born! A little further investigation revealed the correct pronunciation – No (as in nobody) e (as in see) sis (as in sister). Within a few days, Robin found and acquired our logo image via the Internet, the eye peering through a ripped sheet of paper. All we need now is a name for our publishing empire!

June 1998 – First Impressions

Our roles with the magazine are taking shape. I am going to deal with the literary side and the desktop publishing. Robin will sort out the science fact part and create and manage our website. Our spouses – whilst still being totally sceptical about the whole proceedings, have agreed to get involved. Alison has said she'll get involved with distribution and marketing and my husband (being a banker) has had no choice but to be in charge of finance. I suspect they both think it'll all peter out and they'll never have to do anything!

A first look at printing costs has been a bit daunting, but there's plenty of other places to look yet. Robin has been working hard on a first run-through of our science news page (Science Slice) and I have produced a whole variety of page styles for the stories, with different fonts and type size. A style has started to emerge – crisp, clean and uncluttered. Robin has taken the same approach with the first draft of the website and it's looking good.

I've been emailing a few people for general advice and information on magazine production. David Pringle of *Interzone* gives good advice on choosing stories (go for what you genuinely like). Chris Reed of *BBR* and the *NSFA* is a mine of information on topics from the size of the first print run, details of ISSN numbers, the legal requirements that go with them and the need to avoid 'sale or return' like the plague!

July 1998 – First Steps

Found it, we now call ourselves 'Perceant Press'. This lovely word means 'keen and piercing', we like it! Confirmation from Chris Terran (*Matrix*), David Pringle (*Interzone*) and David Langford (*Ansible*) that our adverts in their respective magazines (calling for story

production of another novelette (*The Parasite*) then a short story collection (*The Engineer*). My story, I warn you, has been one of relative success.

submissions) will appear at the end of this month. Our writers & artists guidelines are ready, we've had fun defining the sort of SF we're looking for, just got to wait for some response now! Right at the end of the month, the website goes live and Robin gets going on putting us up on all the search engines and posting news on all the message boards that he can find. This is exciting stuff, the adverts and the website mean we're not playing anymore. Bit of a downer – our advert in *Matrix* doesn't appear as this is the 'missing' *Matrix*. Oh well, it'll just have to wait.

August 1998 – First Words

The Interzone and *Ansible* ads appear and within a couple of days, we get our first submission. Unfortunately, this story is a complete no-no and is returned very rapidly along with our review slips. We've decided to give brief review slips with each story submitted as a change from the policy of many magazines. Some only give a scribbled 'sorry, we don't want it' and others send stories back with no comment at all. How are writers meant to improve their writing if no-one tells them what they think of the stories? Writers should, I hope, know that any review or criticism is always subjective and even if we reject their story, another magazine might think it's the bees knees and snap it up. This goes back to David Pringle's advice to choose stories I genuinely like. Long discussions take place on the subject of magazine price and author payments. We desperately want to pay something, even though it'll push the costs up, as it is so much more rewarding for writers to get a cheque, however small. Eventually we agree to give a free copy of the magazine for the first 1 000 words and £3 per 1 000 words thereafter. Stories tinkle in and we buy two by the end of August and another from a local writer who I have long felt is worthy of publication.

September 1998 – First Pictures

We've found our 'Website Patrol' site for the first issue. It's all about why famous people think the chicken crossed the road. My absolute favourite has got to be Torquemada's (Spanish Inquisition) reply – 'Give me ten minutes with the chicken and I'll tell you why!' An artist replied to one of our adverts with some very attractive samples of his work. We sent him a story to see what happens. Stories have been coming in now at about three or four a week. We've bought two more, one of which we decided to hold on to for the second issue as it has a similar theme to one of the first ones we bought. Also, Robin found a smashing front cover on a Canadian art website and negotiated a price for using it for our first issue.

October 1998 – First Setback

Oh no! Just found out that although *Writer's News* has printed our details in their news pages, they've misprinted 'Noesis' as 'Neosis'. They've done the same in the website address too. A quick telephone call gets an apology and a promise of a correction in the next available issue. Oh well, at least it gets us in there twice. Meanwhile, I've started to get a lot of guideline requests addressed to 'Noesis'. We've got the illustrations back for the story 'Private Heaven' from the artist Ian Storer and liked them so much that we've sent another story to him straight away. Another two stories bought. This has completed the complement for the first issue and I could finally get cracking on producing the master copy. Alison found us the best printing deal and we've fixed on a price of £2.75 per single issue and £10.50 for an annual subscription. It would be nice to be cheaper, but I can't see how we can do it at the prices being charged for printing. I've sent the advert off to *Interzone* saying that the first issue will be available in December. As I posted it, it all felt really scary. This means we definitely have to do it now.

November 1998 – First Friends

Robin has put some of the artwork up on the website and upgraded the site to show what's in the first and second issues. Our hit rate has increased weekly and continues to rise. Just too late for

him to have the chance to do much more than illustrate a couple more stones, we recruited artistic editor Mike Donovan. Look out for his influence in issue two! On the 16th, the first cheque for a single issue arrived and two days later, the first subscription cheque! Hooray, someone believes in us! The master copy is completed and Alison and Dick, who've not read much of the interim work, are put to work proof reading. As the cheques start to flow in, it's back to work inputting all the corrections. Time is getting short if we're to get our first issue out next month.

December 1998 – Out in the Big Wide World

5th – Robin and I delivered the master copy to the printer in Truro. We eventually chose this printer as he seems to regard the printing as a challenge rather than just a job. He says he'll get onto it as soon as he's finished doing a cat magazine.

10th – Still doing the cat magazine

16th – The cat magazine apparently took longer than he thought. We go to Truro straight after finishing work and pick up the finished *Noesis*, and here's the painful part: hand over the cheque. On the way home I flicked through a copy and couldn't quite believe that I finally had the finished item in my hands. April seems a long time ago now and a lot of hard work has been done between then and now. It

all seems well worth it.

17th – The great day arrived and Alison packed up and posted *Noesis* to those who have pre-paid and the free copies to all the authors and artists. They should get it just before Christmas. I feel incredibly tired now the big effort is over and decide to go into retreat for Christmas!

January 1999 – One down, infinity to go!

Completely recovered and raring to go! Looks like we may have a much cheaper printing deal on the horizon, which means we can increase the page count to 40 and not raise the price. Twelve stories have arrived in the post over Christmas and numerous guidelines sent out. At the latest count, we've sold nearly half of the print run not including the free ones sent to authors. The next job is to send out a stack of copies to various places for review and to get it listed with the New Science Fiction Alliance in their catalogue. Also, we're planning to attend Microcon at Exeter in early March. I'm looking forward to getting feedback now, it's very hard to get an objective view of something you've been so close to for so many months. I just hope that people genuinely enjoy reading *Noesis* as much as we've enjoyed putting it together.

Small Press – The Curate's Egg

by Pamela Stuart

Why write for the Small Press?

Maybe you've been scared off by a series of rejections from the 'big' magazines. Maybe you look at it as a step up the ladder towards higher things. Maybe it seems the only market-place for your particular field of writing. Whatever your reason, you will find it as fascinating as a trip round the stalls of the Portobello Road!

What do we actually understand by 'Small Press'? Personally, I thought at first that it was the same thing as the American 'pulp' of my younger days, then I thought it referred to size: both conclusions were wrong!

The Small Press publications range in actual size from A4 pages stapled together in one corner or gathered in a plastic slider, to A5, stapled in the middle like a 'normal' magazine. Some come from the hands of a professional printer, some are, only too obviously, the output of a home-computer with a fading ink-cartridge in the printer, run off by a wannabe editor in his/her spare-time. Some have taken the 'small' a stage too far, and print in such small type that you need a magnifying-glass to read them.

The names are fascinating, but can be misleading if you don't read the description of what they actually publish. Things like *Raw Nerve*, *Scared to Death*, *Severed Limbs* speak for themselves, but when I first saw the title *Peeping Tom* I thought it must be salacious. 'What the butter saw' stories, and was surprised to find it went in for horror, not naked females. The title *Strix* also called up a wrong image in my mind, since it reminded me of advertisements in foreign newspapers, 'Madame Strix – spanking a speciality'. In fact it is a sci/fantasy/dark humour publication.

As the Small Press is usually a side-line to somebody's day-job, the editorial address is either their home or their workplace. I remember sending a story to one (sadly defunct now) purely because the address was at a tattoo-parlour! And who could resist writing to *Masque Noir* at Spit Junction in Australia, or *Calliope* at Toad Suck in USA? Some are really trying to offer a market to a specialised field that is ignored by the Big Boys. There are dozens of small magazines catering for the sci/fantasy/horror/ghost enthusiasts, that never see the light of a bookstall; you have to be a subscriber. Nice for the writer, nice for the reader, even nicer for the publisher who usually is of the 'payment one copy of the issue your story is in' variety. Sadly, being published in one of these does not count when you want to join the Writers' Guild, or some such organisation; they demand, brutally, that you have been published in paying magazines of a certain minimum circulation – and these specialised subjects usually have a very limited number of readers.

The reasons to start up a Small Press magazine seem as varied as those of the contributors. One, *Good Stories* seemed to be the path by which the editor/publisher made his entry into the writing world. At a certain point, the contributors/readers noticed that most of

the published stories and articles were by himself. As he was among those who actually paid a small sum to the published writers, it could have been a money-saving-campaign – but many of us regarded it as a disguised form of vanity-publishing, and I doubt if many mourned its passing.

Another 'stepping-stone' publication is *Raw Nerve*. I imagine the subscribers must have been terribly frustrated when they found there was more than a year's gap between issues. Between 6 and 7, the editor bought his own printing press and became so busy publishing that he could not find the time for the magazine. Contributors whose only payment is an issue of the magazine were justly incensed when its arrival was delayed on the excuse 'I'm busy publishing a book and haven't time to send them out'!

Sadly, many of the small magazines fade away and die after only a few issues. One such was *Violent Spectres*, a horror magazine which started like a rocket and faded like a damp squib after only three issues – cause unknown, as it was to be a new shoot from another publication. Others die from drop-off of subscribers, ill-health or personal problems of the editor/publisher, lack of funds to publish. *Saccade* openly admits that they publish as and when they can afford it. *Butterflies and Bloomers* (lovely name!) is temporarily suspended. *Freudian Variant* has died. If you write for the Small Press it is vital to keep an up-to-date catalogue of titles and addresses. *Light's List* is to be recommended, as it is updated annually and gives the date 'last-heard-of' for each title listed. It is also advisable to put a return address on the back of the envelope when submitting work, particularly to other countries. Those SAs or IRCs cost good money and if the outer envelope is returned 'addressee unknown', at least you have your return-postage saved. Another good reason to put a return address on every envelope with a submission, is that if it is not returned by the post office, you can be reasonably sure it did actually reach the publication targeted. Some of these editors take up to a year to get around to answering leaving the writer in doubt: did it ever arrive? If the Post Office hasn't returned it, it did!

Lately, some of the Small Press publications are trying to pay at least a tiny fee. *Noesis*, *Peeping Tom*, *Kimota* are among them. It may not add much to the exchequer, but it bolsters the self-confidence. Another good point about the Small Press is that the editors tend, on the whole, to be much friendlier than those in the Big world! Even a rejection-slip often comes with a friendly letter, even an invitation to a conference or workshop next time you are in the region. Some of them do copy the Big Press by sending rejection-slips with a check-list of points they disliked about your offering; *Noesis* has a panel of 'readers' and sends comments from two of them even with an acceptance. I was amused to find that of my two attempts for them, one reader was full of praise each time, and the other very

critical. It reminded me of the 'Hard guy - Soft-guy' approach of interrogators in the spy-stories! I presume the Editor has the casting vote, as one of my stories was published in spite of the 50/50 for and against result! One major drawback of these small magazines being published as a sideline is that the editor evidently has no spare time to proof-read a final time before printing. It is infuriating for a writer who delivered 'perfect copy' to see the piece appear with spelling-mistakes, wrong punctuation, even horrors like split infinitives. Some editors have solved that one by asking the writer to resubmit the piece on disk – that way any mistakes are entirely the author's! A good idea in my opinion.

I think there is one grave danger in writing for the Small Press. The market is so wide-spread, with most of the publications owned separately, that it is easier to find someone ready to take your work if one turns it down, well, there's a whole list of others to try. This is quite a different situation from the Big magazines, where one publisher owns a whole string. With those a reject from one of the string means, don't try any of the others – you may have the experience I did when a story sent to one magazine was returned, with rejection-slip, from a quite different one! This makes the Small Press seem a much softer option, especially when you are suffering from 'rejection-slip trauma'.

The fact that you get a far higher percentage of acceptances gets you hooked, and you stop asking the big publications in UK or USA. It's so much easier to find a Small Press market to fit your style, than to try to tailor your offering to a big magazine's guidelines. My advice to anyone wondering whether to write for the Small Press would be, ask yourself why you are writing. If you want to make a living out of it, this is the wrong shop. If you want to write because you enjoy it and can't live without doing it, and getting paid the occasional small fee is a pleasant bonus, then welcome to the Small Press – it's fun!

From the Plotting Parlour...

We received a couple of letters which refer to the small press scene, and reproduce the relevant comments below. The first is from Lloyd Michael Lohr

"I have two (quality small press magazines) that I would like to mention

The first is a small press fanzine published monthly here in the States. It is entitled **Pablo Lennis, The Magazine of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Fact**. It is a quality small press publication of fiction and poetry, that occasionally delves into topics of a more controversial nature, ie UFOs, government conspiracies et al. It also publishes book reviews and other small press/fanzine reviews. The editor, John Thiel, is a caring editor who is willing to work with a beginning writer. I would recommend it both to read for pleasure and for submitting fiction and poetry to. Short poetry is a specialty, just ask Steve Sneyd. Payment is one copy. The mailing address is

Pablo Lennis Magazine John Thiel, Editor, Deneb Press, 30 North 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana 47904 USA

The second is a German-language small press magazine entitled **Solar X Science Fiction** published by editor Wilko Müller Jr. It publishes science fiction, horror and fantasy fiction as well as genre poetry. **Solar X** also publishes the latest on sci-fi movies, television shows and has book reviews. The German-based magazine is very writer friendly and a good place to get published. Wilko is a very writer friendly and professional editor who, like myself, is also a member of the Science Fiction Club Germany. Payment for contribution is one copy. The mailing address is

ASFC, c/o Wilko Müller Jr. (Wilko Mueller@t-online.de), Volhardstr. 20, D-06112 Halle, Germany"

Andy Cox, though not having time to give us an article, has mentioned that he "wishes" the small press as a whole was referred to as the independent press, because it's a much more flattering term (as in independent cinema, indie music etc.)"

And now, to put you out of your misery, here is John Light's poem once more, this time with heavy hints as to the small press titles. How many did you get?

Small Press Voyager by John Light

Sipping Star Wine from an Amber goblet
I dreamed a dark Dream of Strange Adventures
Carried away by Dreams and Visions,
swept far Beyond the Eastern Rainbow,
Challenging Destiny and Fearless of
Enigmatic Tales of Deadly Beauties,
making a Sublime Odyssey to find
The Silver Branch of Tree Spirit's black bough,
In Pursuit of The Ultimate Unknown

Reading by Light of a Candelabrum
from The Crimson Chronicles' Dust-filmed tome
and thin pages of The Little Red Book,
scribed with The Bloody Quill of the Curlew,
from the arcane Lore of old Moon Letters
and the weird Chronicles of Disorder
until in Cyphers from the Data Dump
it happened upon the Raven's Tale
of the Green Egg of the Salamander
the Dragonsphere Dragon's Breath of Emerald

Then At Last I become a Voyager,
sailing the Crystal Ship through Space and Time
Guiding myself by Strange Mathematics
of Indefinite Space and Overspace,
on The Quest for the Legend of Dreamshore

Setting course South by South-East to Landfall
on the Island of The Green Queen, then on
across the Peninsula of Granite,
a Nightmare Journey traversing Badlands,
through the Dark Regions of Sandstone Chasm
by the Mirage of Nomad's Oasis
Then South of the New Stone Circle I Stride
through Terrible Beauty of Sepia Smoke

The Dawn of Dana's Sun, Rising, At Last
blazes forth The Burning Light of Daybreak,
above the Black Planet's Dark Horizon
The New Dawn Fades and Nightfall comes too soon
In the Violet Night the Yellow Moon
draws forth Strange Plasmas of Swamp Root vapour
into a Vortex of the Macabre.

The Silver Web spun by the Shadowdancer
of the dread Lords of Eternal Darknes
who use their Iron-forged Blade, called Shadow Sword,
to Harvest jet Black Petals of Black Rose,
of The Black Lily and the Black Lotus

Through Window Panes of the Mermaid Tavern,
between The Interpreter's House next door
and The House of Three Cheers that lies Beyond
I hear Footsteps, and then Other Voices
utter Words of Wisdom in a Whisper
that makes me Shiver. I'm Scared to Death

Beyond the Boundaries of Dusk and Dawn
outside The Zone of Dreams and Nightmares
and swiftly fading Stardust Memories,
Of Unicorns and Space Stations, all gone
I see the Eclipse of the Rising Sun
revealing the Full Moon and the Skinklin Star

Passing The Gatekeeper at the Portals
of the Fortress of the Sacred city,
past the Mausoleum of The Plastic Tower,
Beyond the Spiral Chambers and Stone Rose,
I reach the Treasure House that I have sought
I see Emeralds and Dark Diamonds,
Malachite and Agate, Moonstone and Pearl,
and Obsidian laid on Yellow Silk

Through the Veil my Dark Eyes will Focus on
Transcendent Visions of Twilight Endings
and hear old Songs of the Time of Singing
of the Troubadour and Warrior Poets
The Poetic Knight, the Age of Wonder
when Various Artists had their Visions
chanting their Auguries of The Future
of Dream Weaver's Ethereal Dances
In Darkness Eternal of Evernight

Focus Small Press Guide

Some of the details listed below were provided by contributors: Chris Reed, Steve Jeffery, John Light and Fay Symes; the rest are from our files

Albedo One, 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co Dublin, Ireland. email bhry@iol.ie web site <http://homepages.iol.ie/~boba/> – £10 for 4 issues/£2.95 single issue

The **BBR** and **NSFA** Catalogues are free for A5 SAE from Chris Reed, BBR, P.O. Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY, UK (distribution@bbr-online.com) and can be viewed via the Internet at <http://www.bbr-online.com/catalogue> BBR also operates a special website of resources for writers at <http://www.bbr-online.com/writers> as well as the BBR Directory, a free monthly e-mail and web newsletter – to subscribe go to <http://www.bbr-online.com/directory>

Fay Symes and the Triffid's Leg Press f.symes@argonet.co.uk
TLP web site at <http://www.argonet.co.uk/users/df.symes/index.htm>

Hilltop Press Steve Sneyd 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, W. Yorks HD5 8PB

Inception Steve Jeffery and Vikki Lee France 44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA Email pevere@aol.com
web <http://members.aol.com/pevere/>

Light's List of Literary Magazines 1999 contains the names and addresses of over 1300 UK & overseas small press magazines £1.50 postage included from John Light, 37 The Meadows, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1NY

Noesis Science Fiction Magazine, 61 Pengarth Rise, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2RR, email Lesleyml@aol.com web site <http://www.ndirect.co.uk/~rwadding/noesis/index.html> – £10.50 for 4 issues/£2.75 single issue

Scavenger's Newsletter Janet Fox, 519 Elinwood, Osage City, KS66523-1329, email foxscavi@c.net website <http://www.cza.com/scavindex.html> £11.40 for 6 issues available from Chris Reed, PO Box 625 Sheffield S1 3GY

Scheherazade The Magazine of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Gothic Romance, 14 Queens Park Rise, Brighton BN2 2ZF – £B 50 for 4 issues/£2.50 single issue

Small Press Guide published by Writers' Bookshop, 7-11 Kensington High Street, London W8 5NP

The Third Alternative TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB, email ttapress@aol.com – £11 for 4 issues/£3 single issue

Visionary Tongue Eloise Coquo, 6 St Leonards Ave., Stafford ST17 4LT Email vtongue@compuserve.com
web <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/vtongue>

Zene TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB - essential if you want to know what is going on in the world of the small press – £12 for 6 issues (subscription only)

Leeds Alternative Writers A group of SF/Fantasy writers aiming at paid publication meeting on the second Saturday of the month at 2pm in central Leeds For details please ring Ian (0113 266-9259) or Sean (0113 293-6780)

New Editors needed for Focus

This issue of **Focus** is our 12th issue and our sixth year of editing the magazine. We have decided that it is time to hand the baton on to someone else and are now actively looking for new editors for **Focus** in time for the year 2000. We are hoping that a new editorial team will be available to do a transitional issue with us on issue No. 36 and pass it over completely with issue No. 37.

Are you interested? Do you want to get involved in editing **Focus**? If so, write to Carol Ann Kerry-Green at 278 Victoria Avenue, Hull HU5 3DZ, or email metaphor@enterprise.net or telephone on 01482 494045 (fax on this number as well), giving your ideas on editing **Focus**. We will look at all interested parties and get back in touch with you to start the ball rolling.

After six years we will miss editing **Focus**, but feel sure that there is someone out there just waiting to get their hands on the magazine. If there is, we want to hear from you.

...And the Winner is...

Competition Competition Competition

We are pleased to announce that the **Focus** front cover competition attracted five entries overall. There were some interesting pieces of work, but we both felt that the most outstanding piece was by Woody Patrick, and he therefore wins the book token, and his entry graces our front cover this time round. Many congratulations to Woody, and commiserations to the other entrants.

