

95p *Matrix* 93

The Newsletter of the British Science Fiction Association

Clarke Award
Goes To Colin
Greenland

Science of SF
Cyberspace

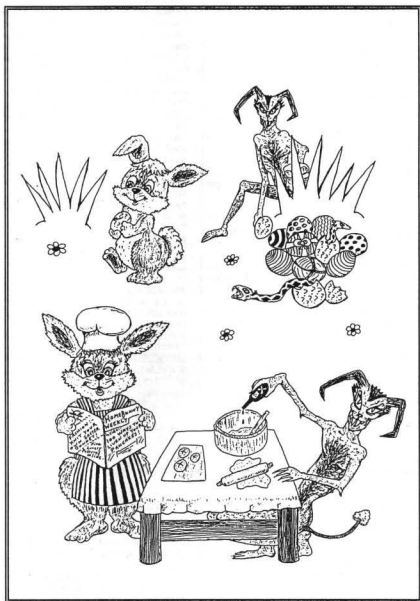
BSFA Survey
Your Replies

A Small Step
Briton Goes To
Space

SF Clubs
A National
Network?

**New SF for
Children**

**News &
Reviews**



*The Golden Apples of the Sun,
Akira, Edward Scissorhands,
Highlander 2, Frankenstein Unbound*

April—May 1991

BSFA membership costs £12 (UK & EC), £15 (non-EC Europe), £18a/£25air Australia, \$25a/\$40air US per year from:

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The cover art is by Lesley Ward, specially designed for this seasonal *Matrix*.

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Determinants

The time for number crunching has passed and now comes the time for interpretations. Your questions are answered in a special agony column and there are reactions from Andy Sawyer, editor of *Paperback Inferno*, and Ken Lake, articulate and informed reader. The reactions to *Matrix* are pleasantly flattering, though of course they refer to the previous editor, Maureen Porter (who would prefer now to be known as Maureen Speller).

It is noticeable that the answers refer to the situation about two years ago when Cecll Nurse had just taken over *Focus*, Kev McVeigh and Boyd Parkinson had just taken over *Vector* and when Maureen Speller was in line to be the new co-ordinator. No situation can or should remain static and several of the points you pick up on have been remedied or at least noted. For example, Collin Davies has designed a new BSFA flyer, which is available on request to the editorial address. Potential advertisers are beginning to take notice of this brave new BSFA market of SF readers: with this issue there should be a catalogue enclosed from the indefatigable Roy Peyton of Andromeda Books.

Thoughts on the Survey

To start with the comments about *Matrix*, the "Desert Planet Books" article where BSFA members chose the books they would regard as indispensable if about to be marooned on a deserted planet, was obviously successful. Some people went for nostalgia and page count with *Lord of the Rings* ("it's certainly weighty enough to warrant inclusion for a lengthy stay" wrote Andy Mills) or Mary Gentle's *Ancient Light* ("it makes the reader wish it was longer, despite being over 700 pages long (no mean feat)" wrote Rob Matthews).

It struck me that thoughts of escape were a low priority. The readers were expecting to be marooned for a respectable time: they showed no indication of dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, no desire to escape, though several carefully fantasised and made the conditions bearable—with tropical climates, cuckoos and reed huts. I've often wondered what to do in this sort of situation: should one concentrate on adapting to the changed conditions or rush round in a vain attempt to restore the thoroughly lost *status quo*?

Turning to what the members did not like about *Matrix*, I notice art mentioned, with typos, politics and infighting. *Matrix* is proofread on screen, sometimes on hard copy, depending on the time available. Yet typos still creep in. They probably still will there is such a small editorial team (Steve and I) and such a limited time between magazine and print deadline. The remedy for proud authors who want to admire their words in print without seeing them possibly marred by errors is therefore simple: send the article in early, or, at the worst, by the deadline. I work and have young children: I just can't hold up production of *Matrix* because an article has not arrived.

The ideal is to reduce the degree of politics and infighting to zero: since we are all human, it is more reasonable to simply reduce the degree of mentioning them, by concentrating on more positive things. I don't imply that politics are negative: merely that the aim of *Matrix* is to convey news and views of SF, not to convert readers to one's preferred political philosophy. Likewise, I don't want artwork to be relegated to the odd bit of white space, I want it to enhance the text. I want to know something about the artists, what inspires them, why they chose that subject. And the cover must catch your eye with contortions of black and white.

Where help is concerned, there are quite a few people prepared to help with con desks and this was much appreciated at Reconnaissance at Cardiff in February. The desk was situated just inside the con bar, next to space for Friends of Foundation and created a lot of interest. A grand total of seven memberships were sold along with a small pile of magazine back issues. One new member was so keen to get reading that she took a complete mailing worth of back issues. There is a desk planned for Speculation, provided free with the compliments of the Speculation committee, and the helpers are getting ambitious about targets for new memberships. Sitting behind a BSFA desk combines the maximum of fun with the minimum of physical effort. There is someone to chat to and people seem drawn to hover nearby, eager to at least take away a flyer or ask just what the BSFA is. It is a civilised place to sit and watch the world go by.

At the time of writing, there is still no co-ordinator. It is perhaps a good time to assess just what a co-ordinator is, does or should do. There are various possible volunteers and the whole thing may be settled at Easter. It has been an odd time, with no co-ordinator. The active part of the committee have been

thrown back on their own resources and have had to communicate with each other more than usual. We have all certainly got to know each other better.

No Focus this time around

Time for the obligatory change of subject. Cecll Nurse phoned today to say that there would not be a *Focus* with this mailing. He is extremely apologetic and tempted to blame the Gulf War for diverting everyone's attention. There have been several technical difficulties, but he promises that there will be one as soon as possible — and that it will be worth waiting for.

Contributors this time

It has been marvellous to see so many people contributing to the News Column and there is now a US contributor too: Laurie Mann, a technical writer and as yet unpublished SF writer (but she's working on that) who also edits *Proper Boskonian*, the club fanzine of the New England Science Fiction Association. The media team of two journalists and two professional media persons are producing some mouth-watering work for your delectation. Ben Wharton writes: *I think some opinions from readers of "Matrix" would be a valuable reference to have while deciding upon which stylistic approach to take. Please write with your thoughts.* Dave Gillon is investigating how the cutting edge of science fits into Science Fiction, starting this time with *Cyberpace*. Dave has also produced a piece on Project Juno, as the first Briton may be off to space as you read this. There is the first of (I hope) several articles describing SF facilities in different parts of the country, your questions answered about the Survey and one of the last bits of writing from Gareth Davies, a reviewer for *Vector* and potential SF writer, who recently died unexpectedly. I am much indebted to Keith Freeman and Stan Nuttall for reporting the sad death of Bob Shaw's wife, Sadie. She was very much liked, and although I only knew her slightly, my thoughts are with Bob. May she rest in peace.

Storage of Back Issues

Maureen Porter (now Speller which is going to take some getting used to) wrote to say that she is now recovering from the illness that precipitated her resignation as BSFA co-ordinator. She wishes to continue storing the back issues (approximately 25 boxes, which weigh approximately 25 kg each) and will be reporting on the scintillating London BSFA meetings.

Back issues are available from Maureen. Please send an A5 or bigger envelope and a 30p stamp for lists of magazines available.



News

(provided by Laurie Mann and Molly Brown, with the assistance of LynC, editor of *Thyme*, Mike Holmes, Chris Bell, Bridget Wilkinson, Cyril Simas, Liz Holliday, Maureen Speller, Stan Nuttall, Roy Peyton, Cecll Nurse, Dick Jude, Chuck Connor and your editor)

Nebula Shortlist

The Nebula awards will be announced on April 27 at the Nebula banquet at the Vista Hotel in New York City. The short list is as follows:

NOVELS:

Le Guin, Ursula: *The Last Book of Earthsea* (Atheneum)
Martin, Valerie: *Mary Reilly* (Doubleday)
Morrow, James: *Only Begotten Daughter* (Morrow)
Simmons, Dan: *The Fall of Hyperion* (Doubleday/Foundation)
Stith, John E.: *Redshift Rendezvous* (Ace)
Yolen, Jane: *White Jenna* (Tor)

NOVELLA:

Bujold, Lois McMaster: *Weatherman* (Analog)
Cadigan, Pat: *Fool to Believe* (Asimov's)
Haldeman, Joe: *The Hemingway Hoax* (Asimov's)
Kelly, James Patrick: *Mr. Boy* (Asimov's)

NOVELETTE:

- ab Hugh, Dafydd: *The Coon Rolled Down and Ruptured His Larkinks, A Squeezed Novel by Mr. Skunk* (Asimov's)
 Chiang, Ted: *Tower of Babylon* (Omni) (This was his first sale, written when he was 21; he heard of the sale when he was at Clarion, the US writing workshop)
 Le Guin, Ursula: *The Shobies Story* (Universe 1)
 McLeod, Ian: *1/2nd Scale* (Weird Tales)
 Resnick, Mike: *The Manamouki* (Asimov's)
 Rusch, Kristine Kathryn: *A Time For Every Purpose* (Amazing)
 Schwartz, Susan: *Loose Cannon* (What Might Have Been, Volume 2)
 Soukup, Martha: *Over the Long Haul* (Amazing)

SHORT STORIES:

- Bisson, Terry: *Bears Discover Fire* (Asimov's)
 Cadigan, Pat: *The Power and the Passion* (Omni)
 Fowler, Karen Joy: *Lisler!* (Asimov's)
 Murphy, Pat: *Love and Sex Among the Invertebrates* (Alien Sex)
 Robinson, Kim Stanley: *Before I Wake* (Asimov's)
 Rusch, Kristine Kathryn: *Story Child* (Aboriginal SF)

Ditmar Shortlist

Voting for the Australian SF achievement awards (Ditmars) is now open and the shortlist is given below:

BEST AUSTRALIAN NOVEL OR ANTHOLOGY:

- Turner, George: *A Pursuit of Miracles* (Aphelion)
 Whitmore, Andrew: *Fortress of Eternity* (Avon)
 Sussex, Lucy: *My Lady Tongue & Other Tales* (William Heinemann)
 Dowling, Terry: *Rynoseros* (Aphelion)
 Whitford, Wynne: *The Specialist* (Ace)

BEST AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION:

- Turner, George: *Generation Gap* (A Pursuit of Miracles, Aphelion)
 Sussex, Lucy: *God and Her Black Sense of Humour* (My Lady Tongue & Other Tales, Heinemann)
 Sussex, Lucy: *Red Ochre* (as above)
 Egan, Greg: *The Carress* (Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine, January 1990)
 Love, Rosaleen: *Turtle Soup* (Eidolon, December 1990)
 McMullen, Sean: *While the Gate is Open* (F&SF, March 1990)

Thyme produced short reviews of all the above pieces, mentioning that George Turner's style is "forthright" and "gritty"; Andrew Whitmore describes his novel, *The Fortress of Eternity*, as "not your standard sword and sorcery, wish-fulfillment fantasy"; Lucy Sussex is a very hot newcomer, a "merry ironist" whose stories "begin with the familiar and end up in the unfamiliar". *God and her Black Sense of Humour* concerns a search for a couple of female vampires, in *Red Ochre*, Australia has been at war with Indonesia, who spread mutagenic viruses, leading to a severe lack of wild animals. *Rynoseros* concerns the Australia of sand dunes with sand ships, a world of mythology; *The Specialist* is hard science fiction set in Hawaii; *Generation Gap* appears to concern the relationship between an art historian from a "newly (re)emerging backwater planet Earth" and his "Guide", which takes place in an extraterrestrial art gallery. *The Carress* is a thriller, hard science fiction and a mood piece and is described as "subtle" and "delicate"; finally *Turtle Soup* is concerned with "Ecoterrorism", it seems that "nature is red-fanged and clawed in the pursuit of vengeance".

William Atheling Jr. Award

This Award is also presented by the Australian Science Fiction Convention for specific pieces of Criticism or Review. The short list is:

- Blackford, Russell for: a) "Analogues of Anomie: Lee Harding's Novels" in *Science Fiction 30*; b) *Australian Science Fiction Review* (Second Series)
 Gillespie, Bruce for: "The Non-SF novels of Philip K. Dick" presented at Nova Mob and published in ANZAPA

Nicholls, Peter for: "Fantastic World" reviews in the Melbourne *Sunday Herald*

Stewart, Alan for: Reviews in *Ethel the Aardvark* and *SF Commentary*.

1991 Caldecott Award

This is an award given by the American Library Association at its annual convention and has been won by David McCaully, an artist much appreciated for his books like *Cathedral* and *Unbuilding*. It was his latest book, *Black and White* which won the award, which honours the best-illustrated children's book of the year.

1991 Arthur C. Clarke Award

Following a meeting in Whitehall, the jury, who consists of Dr. Maurice Goldsmith and Professor George Teeling-Smith of the International Science Policy Foundation, David Barrett of *Computer Weekly* and Cecil Nurse, representing the BSFA, and writers and critics Neil Gaiman, Roz Kaveney and Maxim Jakubowski (Chairman), selected the following shortlist:

- Banks, Iain: *Use of Weapons* (Macmillan)
 Gentle, Mary: *Rats and Gargoyles* (Bantam)
 Greenland, Colin: *Take Back Plenty* (Unwin Hyman)
 Misha: *Red Spider, White Web* (Morrigan)
 Jeter, K.W.: *Farewell Horizontal* (Grafton)
 Murphy, Pat: *The City, Not Long After* (Pan)

The winner was announced on March 20 at a reception at the Groucho Club, Dean Street, London and was Colin Greenland. Mary Gentle and Pat Murphy came a joint second.

The following message was sent by the BSFA President, Arthur C. Clarke, and read by Mr. Fred Clarke:

Greetings from Sri Lanka to all those involved with the Fifth Arthur C. Clarke Award Ceremony, especially, of course, to the authors shortlisted, and to the winner him/herself.

I wish I could read even ten per cent of the Science Fiction being published nowadays. As I have said many times in the past, this was a golden age: the previous one was only Gilt though the very best gilt!

I have been so awed by a few recent books (I won't mention any names for fear of making fifty enemies) that I wonder if I would have a chance if I were starting nowadays.

Incidentally, I have just done an essay on Science Fiction for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: not the main entry, which I would not dream of attempting because my current knowledge of the field is totally inadequate.

One of the fringe benefits of this job will be the 1991 edition. But it is going to be a terrible bore photocopying every tenth page for my Agent, Scott Meredith, as his commission ...

Once again, my best wishes, and I only wish I could be with you on this occasion, which I hope will be a regular item on the Science Fiction scene.

Iain Banks Nominated As Rector For Eedinburgh University

Iain Banks was nominated by the University SF club. Iain was extremely laid back and indicated that going to the Hustings may be altogether too organised. The campaign possibly adopted a humorous approach. It seemed hard to tell, but while Iain may be a bit of a showman in public, he would probably adopt a more appropriately serious (within limits) attitude if elected.

The Rector's primary task is to represent the students at Senate meetings and to represent their interests in public affairs. Other candidates were Richard Demarco, the local arts impresario, who has stood before, frequently; Maria Fyfe who has strong Labour sympathies and Donny Munro, member of *Runrig*, a Scottish pop band.

Munro was probably favourite, simply because he is well known. He also used to be a teacher, so perhaps it is not a bad candidacy. He did step down and then was persuaded to stand again by his record company. What that implies is uncertain — perhaps either they'll give him time off to attend meetings or that they reckon it's good publicity.

Donny Munro subsequently won, but Iain Banks came an honourable third.

New Editor For F&SF

The energetic Kristine Kathryn Rusch, who is editor, writer, founder of *Pulphouse*, winner of the Campbell award for best new writer, and even sleeps occasionally, is the new editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* now that Ed Ferman has retired. She started on March 1: first female editor of *F&SF*, and one of the first females to edit a major Science Fiction magazine: not forgetting Shawna McCarthy who edited *Isaac Asimov's* for a few years.

Obituary: Sadie Shaw

Stan Nuttall writes: We have to bring you some very sad news in this issue. All of you know Bob Shaw from his writings and/or from meeting him at conventions. If you have met him, or been fortunate to visit his home, you will, no doubt, have met his charming wife, Sadie. You will be grieved to hear that she died on Friday, 8th March, in hospital after a very short illness. Those of you who knew her will remember her as a very attractive and vivacious lady with a delightful lilt to her voice and a ready sense of humour. At home, she was an excellent hostess and a splendid cook, as those who left with an expanded waistline can attest. She was also a very caring mother to their three children, who are, fortunately, with Bob at this time. As a grandmother, too, she played her part well to her eldest daughter's two children.

For those of you who never met Sadie, you missed meeting a fine lady. And now she will be missed by us all.

For whatever comfort Bob and his family may derive from them, our heartfelt condolences at this saddest of times.

It often seems harder to be left and my thoughts are certainly with Bob. He has requested no telephone messages for the time being.

The Rose Has Thorns

Further to the press release from Alex Stewart concerning the situation of the book packaging company, Midnight Rose, Chris Bell has also issued a statement correcting a number of statements in the above press release. Fox did not see a final document concerning the copyright of *Redfox*; various names were given wrongly; and no one suggested litigation against anyone. The present situation is unclear: with any luck the readers will not suffer through this lamentable lack of communication. Alex Stewart, however, says that Midnight Rose stand by the above mentioned press release.

Shortlist for National SF Promotion

A ballot held at the SF convention Reconnaissance towards the Eurocon awards (in Cracow, Poland, in May) announced the present British shortlist to be:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| BEST NATIONAL AUTHOR: | 1) Iain Banks
2) Geoff Ryman |
| BEST NATIONAL PUBLISHER: | 1) Unwin Hyman (by a really long way)
2) Gollancz |
| BEST NATIONAL ARTIST: | 1) Josh Kirby
2) Dave Hardy |
| BEST NATIONAL PROMOTER OF SF: | 1) BSFA
2) David Pringle |
| BEST NATIONAL SF MAGAZINE: | 1) <i>Interzone</i> (miles ahead of)
2) <i>Foundation</i> |
| BEST NEW WRITER/ARTIST: | 1) Eric Brown
2) Kim Newman
3) Ian McDonald. |

Magazines: Death and Birth

It is reported that both *Skeleton Crew* and *Amaranth* have folded, however Liz Coulthart announced a new magazine, *Scheherazade*, to be launched this Spring with stories by Sue Thomason, and Haydn Middleton with an interview with Jane Gaskell. It will be fantasy oriented, perhaps aimed slightly more at women than men with at least two professional writers per issue and professional artists. It will cost £1.75 or £6 subscription for 4 issues and details

are available from St. Ives, Maypole Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 1HL. Paul Brazier's *SF Nexus* has also been published and is reported by roving nautical reporter, Chuck Connor, as being glossy, elegantly designed and full of literary SF articles.

Courses and Workshops

READING AND WRITING SCIENCE FICTION is a course to be held at Deben House from April 19-21, tutored by Colin Greenland. Fees are £50 for residents of the London Borough of Newham, £40 for unwaged or retired Newham residents. Details and booking forms from: The Secretary, Deben House Centre, Deben Green, Loughton, Essex IG10 2PA.

HORROR EVENING at the Readers and Writers Festival, Midlands Art Centre will feature Ramsey Campbell, Lisa Tuttle and Peter James in panel format, chaired by Chris Morgan on May 10.

RESIDENTIAL WRITING COURSES AT PEN FARM are sponsored by Eastern Arts. Courses last 5 days, are limited to 8 people, and cost £175 including food and accommodation. Courses will run through April, May, June and July on varied subjects including Roger McGough on poetry, Fay Weldon on Fiction, Colin Greenland on "Writing Science Fiction" (dates: July 29 to August 3) and Mary Scott on "Starting to write Fantasy and Science Fiction" (dates April 29 to May 4). Details from Sally Worboyes, Resident Writer, Radio, TV and Youth Theatre, 10 Angel Hill, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, tel 0284 753110).

TY NEWYDD offers various workshops and courses, each with two tutors and a maximum of 16 students, running Monday evening through Saturday morning. Details from Sally Baker Jones, Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy, Cricieth, Gwynedd LL52 0LW, tel 0766 522811).

THE LEGEND OF THE GREEN MAN is a study day at the University of Keele on Saturday May 4, 9.30am-5.30pm led by John Levitt and Bill Parkinson. There will be special attention paid to the poem *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and a visit to the Roaches and to Ludd's Church, using the topography found in that poem (closing date April 25, fee £10.50, details from Angela Boon, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Keele, Keele, tel. 0782 625116).

Keele also offer a SHORT STORY WRITING WEEKEND June 1-2, 10.30am-5pm each day at the Chancellor's Building, aiming to plan and formulate stories which can be written in full later. The tutors are writers Tamar Hodes and John Toft (details as above, fee £15.60, lunch not included, closing date May 23).

The University of Nottingham also offer a CREATIVE WRITING course in their summer school from July 20-27 (details from Sylvia Stephens, Learn at Leisure, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham NG1 4FJ).

Contests

SWANAGE ARTS FESTIVAL literary competition offers cash prizes of up to £150 for winning short stories (up to 3,000 words) and poems (up to 40 lines), entry fee £2 (story) or £1.50 (poem). Details from Lewis Hoesgood, 42 Benlase Way, Swanage, Dorset BH19 2SZ, closing date April 15.

SPECULATION SHORT STORY COMPETITION is for science fiction and fantasy stories up to 7,000 words. Offers 3 prizes of £15, plus publication in *Xenos* magazine, entry fee £1. Send entries to *Xenos*, 29 Prebend Street, Bedford MK40 1QN, closing date May 30.

THE BOOKSHELF/VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD FIRST FANTASY NOVEL COMPETITION is to find new writers of fantasy. £4,000 is on offer for the best novel in the form of £2,000 cash outright to the winner plus a £2,000 advance against royalties for worldwide volume publication rights. Two runners up will receive £500 each with the option of being published at a later date. Judges are Richard Evans, the publishing director of Gollancz's SF division, Faith Brooker, the senior SF editor at Gollancz, Nigel Forde, the editor of *Bookshelf* and authors Mary Gentle and Terry Pratchett. Entry forms are available from Gollancz at 14 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8JQ and the closing date is July 30.

Book Signings

John Wiley have arranged a media tour for Donald K. Yeomans, author of *Comets: a chronological history of observation, science, myth and folklore*, published on April 18.

Forbidden Planet in New Oxford Street, London, have arranged the following signings:

- April 13 Brian Aldiss *Dracula Unbound* at Forbidden Planet 1pm
 April 27 Michael Moorcock *Revenge of the Rose* at Cafe Munchen 1pm
 May 16 Stephen Lawhead *The Paradise War* at Forbidden Planet 6pm

Copies can be obtained through mail order (tel: 071 497 2150) and Forbidden Planet offers regular signings.

Reg Poyton of Andromeda Bookshop, 8A Suffolk Street, Birmingham B1 1TA, has arranged the following signings:

- April 19 Rob Grant & Doug Naylor (*Red Dwarf*) 4.30pm
 May 18 Steven Lawhead *The Paradise War* 1pm
 June 1 Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman *Good Omens* probably 12 noon
 June 8 Michael Moorcock — not confirmed yet — probably 12 noon

Copies of signed books, including probably Anne McCaffrey's *Renegades of Pern*, *The Rowan*, *Pegasus in Flight* and *Sassinak*, can be obtained from Andromeda (tel: 021 643 1999).

Signings in Peterborough (of which more later, as the area is examined for SF interest by Cardinal Cox):

- May 3 Ramsey Campbell 5-7pm at the House on the Borderland, 32D Lincoln Road
 May 11 Graham Sayle, Brian Stableford, Freda Warrington 11am-1pm approximately at the Penguin Bookshop, Cathedral Square
 May 18 Iain M. Banks 12noon to 2pm approximately at Sherratt and Hughes, Queensgate
 May 25 Ian Watson 12noon to 2pm approximately at Sherratt and Hughes, Queensgate

New From the Publishers

This is a selection of the new books, including reissues (mostly in paperback) which tends towards Science Fiction rather than Fantasy or Horror. It does not pretend to be exhaustive or perfect — yet.

ALDISS, Brian: *Dracula Unbound* (Grafton £12.99 April): Bram Stoker's "visitor" joins him in a crusade to exterminate all vampires starting in Utah, SF merges with horror in this "sequel" to *Frankenstein Unbound*.
 ANTHONY, Pierce: *Phaze Doubt* (NEL £13.95 pb £7.95 April) which brings the history of planets Phaze and Proton to a "stunning" conclusion.
 ASIMOV, Isaac: *Robot Visions* (VGSF £5.99 May); also *The Asimov Chronicles* (Legend £14.99 April), a collection of 50 stories including many of the classics.

Banks, Iain M.: *The State of the Art* (Orbit £12.95 March). New (to the UK) novella and other short stories; also *Use of Weapons* (Orbit £7.99 pb C format March).

BAXTER, S.M.: *Raft* (Grafton £13.99 July).

BEAR, Greg: *Queen of Angels* (VGSF £7.99 March).

BOVA, Ben: *Orion and the Dying Time* (Methuen £13.99 March). More about the timeless hero/warrior from Orion and Vengeance of Orion. This time the protagonist is transported back to the Cretaceous period.

BROOKE, Keith: *Expatia* (Gollancz £13.99 May).

BROSNAN, John: *The Fall of the Sky Lords* (Gollancz £13.99 June), Volume 3 of The Fall of the Sky Lords trilogy, described by Terry Pratchett as "aerobics for the imagination".

BUTLER, Octavia: *Mind of my Mind* (Patternmaster II) (VGSF £7.99 March); also *Clay's Ark* (Patternmaster III) (VGSF £3.99 July).

CARD, Orson Scott: *Maps in a Mirror* (Legend £14.99 pb £7.99 April). A "giant" collection to combine his short fiction with new material on the author's life and work; also *The Working Saga* (Legend £12.99 May).

CHERRYH, C.J.: *Heavy Time* (NEL £13.95 June), a hard-edged adventure story, a brutal vision of life in space set in the 23rd century; also *Chernovog: Ruskalki III* (Methuen £15.99 May).

CLARKE, Arthur C. & BENFORD, Gregory: *Against the Fall of Night* and *Beyond the Fall of Night* (Gollancz £13.99 March).

DOZOIS, Gardner: *The Legend Book of Science Fiction* (Century £14.99 July).

GENTLE, Mary: *Architect of Desire* (Bantam £13.99 July) which continues the story of White Crow, started in *Rats and Gargoyles*.

GIBSON, William & STERLING, Bruce: *The Difference Engine* (VGSF £7.99 July).

GRIBBIN, John: *Blinded by the Light* (Bantam £14.99 March). Non-fiction investigation of the secret life of the sun.

GRIBBIN, John & CHOWN, Marcus: *Reunion* (Gollancz £13.99 March), set one thousand years in a post-technological society faces environmental catastrophe and social uprising.

HARRISON, Harry & SHECKLEY, Robert: *Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Bottled Brains* (VGSF £3.99 June).

HARRISON, Harry & BISCHOFF, David: *Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Tasteless Pleasure* (Gollancz £13.99 June).

HILL, Douglas: *The Colloghi Conspiracy* (VGSF £3.99 March).

HOLDSTOCK, Robert: *The Bone Forest* (Grafton £13.99 March). Selection of short stories ranging through English history, with the novella *The Bone Forest* as centrepiece, starting with the events which precede *Mythago Wood*.

HOLT, Tom: *The Flying Dutch* (Orbit £12.95 July) which has the elixir of eternal life, a BBC film crew, conversation in a Southampton pub and the obligatory beautiful girl: and it's funny as well.

JONES, Jenny: *The Edge of Vengeance* (Headline £14.95, pb £7.99 June), first of all Eleanor Knight gets landed accidentally in a bad weathered world, now she gets landed with a wailing baby.

HARRIS, Steve: *Wulf* (Headline £14.95 July), where a nightmare disease afflicts a village.

LE GUIN, Ursula: *The Eye of the Heron* and *The Word for World is Forest* (VGSF £3.99 June); also *The Dispossessed* (Gollancz £14.99 April).

LEM, Stanislaw: *One Human Minute* (Mandarin £4.99 March).

MAULEY, Paul J.: *The King of the Hill* (Gollancz £13.99 March), a collection of short stories. Also *Eternal Light* (Gollancz £14.99 June), radical hard SF which "fuses cosmological speculation with a detailed depiction of society undergoing change"; also *Secret Harmonies* (Orbit £3.99 June).

MOORCOCK, Michael: *The Revenge of the Rose* (Grafton £13.99 May) new Elric novel, longest to date which continues from *The Vanishing Tower*. Elric and his demon sword Stormbringer do a good deed which has more than the usually dramatic consequences.

MORROW, James: *Only Begotten Daughter* (Legend £12.99 June) — when Murray Katz makes a sperm donation, he doesn't anticipate generating the next son of God.

NIVEN, Larry et al: *The Man-Kzin Wars II* (Orbit £3.50 pb May).

POHL, Frederik: *Narabedla Ltd.* (VGSF £3.99 May).

POWERS, Tim: *The Stress of her Regard* (Grafton £13.99 May) featuring Dr. Michael Crawford whose first wife dies accidentally and whose second wife dies far more savagely the night of his wedding. He appeals to the poets Keats, Shelley and Byron for help and the result is "a masterful blend of the poetic and the grotesque".

PRATCHETT, Terry: *Reaper Man* (Gollancz £13.99 May), a Discworld novel. SHAW, Bob: *The Shadow of Heaven* (Gollancz £13.99 March), a revised and expanded form of this SF thriller; also *Orbitvile* (Orbit £3.50 July).

SHEPHERD, Charles: *Summertime* (VGSF £3.99 April); also *Divergence* (Gollancz £13.99 April), book 2 of *The Heritage*, a sequel to *Summertime*.

SILVERBERG, Robert: *The Face on the Water* (Grafton £13.99 May), in the year 2450 humanity is scattered through the stars and Earth was destroyed two centuries ago; also *The Second Trip* (VGSF £3.99 April).

SIMAK, Clifford: *City also Cafface* (both Mandarin £3.99 March).

SIMMONS, Dan: *The Fall of Hyperion* (Headline £14.95 pb £7.99 April), Artificial Intelligence attempts to create an ultimate god of machines: humanity is as ever in danger of extinction.

SLONCZEWSKI, Jan: *The Wall Around Eden* (The Women's Press £5.99 March).

TEPPER, Sheri: *Raising the Stones* (Grafton £13.99 July).

WATSON, Ian: *Stalin's Teardrops* (Gollancz £13.99 April), a new collection of short stories.

Children's SF

For the younger market, SF this Spring kicks off with Diane Duane's *So you want to be a Wizard?* (Corgi pb £2.99 February) where Nita and Kit each independently find this particular book and after following the instructions find they can understand the language of dogs. Then other animals and fishes. In this book they brave a parallel universe, but in the second of the trilogy, *Deep Wizardry* (Corgi £2.99 July) the intrepid duo go underwater and find that that sharks are — well — human. Trilogies being fashionable, Corgi are publishing No. 2 in the Trucker series, Terry Pratchett's *Diggers* (Corgi £2.99 May) about the little people called "nomes" and Diana Wynne Jones produces *Wild Robot* (Mammoth £2.50 April) about a handsome chyme who returns after 350 years and "transforms" Heather's life. In *Welcome to the Giants* (Anderson Press £6.99 May) a town is threatened by aliens: they could have done with *Metalings* (Anderson Press £6.99 March) who is, of course, a robot teacher. *Mungo Moonboots* (Dent £7.50) concerns a spaceman's mission to save the universe accompanied only by Spare Parks, his faithful companion and Nicholas Fisk produces *A Hole in the Head* (Walker £8.99 July) about holes in the ozone layer.

Black Holes and Uncle Albert by Russell Stannard (Paber £7.99 April) will be backed by a massive publicity campaign, probably justified after the success of *The Time and Space of Uncle Albert over Christmas*. Madeline L'Engle's *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* (Hodder and Stoughton £2.99 June) relates how time travellers race to save the world from tragedy: with some rather bizarre encounters. *The Drowned* by Gary Kilworth (Methuen £8.95 July) is about a boy whose age remains untouched by the passing of years, a Dorian Gray, who hopefully has a happier end, while Alan Moore's *The Ballad of Halo Jones* (Titan £9.95 May) follows the extraordinary life of Ms. Jones in the futuristic Hoop where even shopping and finding a job are dangerous activities.

There is a Grimm exhibition at the Museum of the Moving Image underneath Waterloo Bridge, with sets from the Rik Mayall TV programme, puppets and some of the videos. Having started on March 15, it should last for about three months (details from MOMI tel: 071 928 3535).

Potpourri

Gerald Schaber, a geologist with the US Geological Survey, reports that there are more landmarks on Venus than names available, and appeals for help. Under strict international conventions, all features on Venus must be named after women: ordinary craters are given names of famous mortals, such as George Washington, a photojournalist killed in Vietnam, huge geological formations are named after mythical goddesses of fertility and war, like Ceres. By the time the satellite Magellan has finished mapping Venus' surface, over a thousand new features will need names. "They just have to be famous, they don't have to be good" pleads Schaber, who asks for suggestions to be sent with a brief biographical sketch to Joel Russell, USGS, Flagstaff, Arizona. USA. Mary, Queen of Scots has been used, so has Amalanthus, the Ostrogoth queen and Schaber adds, with a touch of panic, that "We're running out of goddesses".

The latest edition of *Book and Magazine Collector* (March, edited by John Dean, 43-5 St. Mary's Road, Ealing, London W5 5RQ) has an excellent article on John Wyndham by Steve Holland which reveals how Wyndham discovered SF at prep school with *The Time Machine*. He wrote his first story at 13 — flying armoured cars fired huge fish hooks into enemy Zeppelins — but his break came when he started selling to US pulp "sci-fi" magazines, having accidentally found a copy of one in a hotel lounge in 1929. Although he wrote several detective stories including *Foul Play Suspected* (clue: invention of deadly gas), he is best known for his SF, though he preferred the term "logical fantasy" and once remarked that SF was a term which "some editorial clout converted from a trade definition to a literary classification". Steve Holland reveals that John Wyndham wrote three possible endings for *Web* and left the choice to the publishers, provided it was not published for at least ten years after his death.

Japanese robots are now into sumo wrestling, reports *The New York Times*, although many of the ceremonies of "real" sumo are omitted: robots find it unnecessary to purify the ring with pinches of salt and can not or do not unnerve their opponents with glares. The rules stated that no robot could be bigger than a medium-size waste basket, could not be plugged in while fighting and gasoline engines were strictly banned. Any amount of internal memory was permitted. Half the contestants were radio controlled, the other half were autonomous, relying on their electronic wits to muscle their opponents out of the dohyo, or ring. The eventual winners were both shaped like low wedges of smooth metal, so could jam underneath an opponent's spinning wheels and flip him (it?) and both winners were students at Waseda, a private Tokyo university. The winners' final words were "We'll have a party, drink some beer. The rest of the million yen prize money will go to next year's robot".

Hank Cermonka, backlist buyer for *The Tattered Cloak*, the specialist shop in Denver, reports that a local university did a survey and found that women who read SF tended to be "younger", while men were of all ages. "I think a lot of people are coming back to SF" he added "maybe they read it as teenagers and gave up on it. But now they are trying it again. It helps that the publishers are upgrading the image of the field with better art, with covers that say *this is not just pulp*".

Now that Piers Anthony has completed his *Apprentice Adept* series with *Phase Doubt* (published this month), he is working on a new series, *Mode*, "whose framework is such that the whole of the Proton/Phase frames can be considered a subset of it". British born Piers now spends his time writing deep in the forests of Florida, and can be contacted on 010-1-800-HI-PIERS.

SF readers and fans meeting at the January '90 in London were electrified to be visited by two Ukrainians, Alexei Antonov and his father, who had come

from Kiev in search of the ZZ9 *Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy Club*. Alexei also visited other SF meetings, including ones at the British Club and wrote home that "It's bad that you were not there" a sentiment heartily agreed with by all other members of the Zorany Shlysh SF Club.

Californian specialist bookseller, Barry R. Levin, has named Stephen King most collectible author of the year and the limited edition of *The Stand* (Doubleday) the most collectible book.

Grafton publish an anthology of horror and suspense stories: *Scare Care* this April (£4.99). Edited by founder of the Scare Care Trust, Graham Masterton, with three other writing colleagues, it aims to provide new hair-raising horror stories in an attempt to raise funds for charities which care for abused and needy children. *For most of us, frightening ourselves is something we do for fun* writes Graham Masterton but for thousands of children, being frightened is a daily and nightly reality. And while you and I can close the book, switch off the video, and put an end to our feelings of fear, these children can never escape from the nightmare in which they live. The stories, which are mostly totally new, are: Kit Reed "Mommy"; James Robert Smith "Things Not Seen"; Ramsey Campbell "The Perries"; D.W. Taylor "Good Night, Sweet Prince"; Celeste Pat Seifranek "Printer's Devil"; Bruce Boston "Mummy and the Piles"; John Burke "The Tourists"; Roald Dahl "The Wump"; J.N. Williamson "Monstrum"; James Herbert "Breakfast"; Darrell Schweitzer "Clocks"; Steve Resnik "The Stranger"; William Relling Jr. "Table for None"; Peter Valentine Timmel "Little Miss Muffet"; C. Dean Anderson "Night Watch"; Peter Tremayne "The Last Gift"; James Kinsler "Manny Agostini"; Jeff Gelb "Family Man"; Giles Gordon "A Towpath Tale"; Marc Laidlaw "Mars Will Have Blood"; William F. Nolan "My Name is Dolly"; Alan Rodgers "The Night Rhys First Met His Love"; John Macley "Models"; Guy N. Smith "Crustacean Revenge"; Roderick Huddins "Sarah's Song"; Harlan Ellison "The Avenger of Death"; Frank Coffey "Cable"; Felice Picano "Spices of the World"; David B. Silva "Down to the Core"; Stephen Laws "Junk"; John Daniel "The Woman in the Wall"; Ruth Rendell "Loopy"; Gary A. Braunbeck "Time Heals"; Brian Lumley "David's worm"; Chris B. Lacher "The Pet Door"; Charles L. Grant "By the Sea"; Graham Masterton "Changeling"; Roland Masterton "In the West Wing".

A Small Step

Dave Gillon

Finally, thirty three years after the launch of Sputnik 1 and thirty after Yuri Gagarin's historic single orbit in Vostok 1, a Briton is to go into space. On May 12, Helen Sharman will lift off from the Soviet Union to become the UK's first cosmonaut. Sharman was named at the end of February as the prime crew for the Project Juno mission with Major Tim Mace as backup crew.

Intended to be commercially sponsored, Project Juno was troubled for a long period when British industry displayed its customary lack of imagination and failed to produce the required sponsorship. Now, however, the London based Moscow Narodny Bank, the driving force behind the mission, has secured an agreement with NPO Energiya, which salvages the mission in a reduced form.

Sharman, or Mace, will lift-off with two Soviet cosmonauts as part of the crew of Soyuz TM-12. Once in orbit, the Soyuz manned ferry will rendezvous with the Mir space-station and the Soyuz crew will join the resident crew of Musa Manarov and Victor Afanasyev. The Project Juno cosmonaut will carry out a full scientific programme while resident on Mir and will then return to Earth with Afanasyev and Manarov on board Soyuz TM-11 on May 20. Due to the uncertainty of the mission, the British microgravity experiments are now not included, but experiments will include tissue culture, plant growth and some work on human physiology under weightless conditions.

So, after all of the initial euphoria has evaporated, what good will Project Juno have accomplished? True, a Briton will have flown, but the science programme could equally well have been carried out by a Soviet cosmonaut without the trouble of conducting *ad initio* training for the Juno crew.

From the Soviet point of view, the Juno mission is only the continuation of a long standing, and essentially political, policy: guest cosmonauts from the Warsaw Pact and other friendly nations such as Cuba, Vietnam, India and France have already flown missions on Soviet spacecraft, usually following a similar pattern to that planned for the Juno mission. The only real change for Juno is that following the changes of *Perestroika* the mission is on a commercial basis. The exact details have not been made public, but the cost of a recent flight by a Japanese journalist was put at around £5 million.

For the UK it must be hoped that Juno will act to popularise space technology and exploration, not to mention science in general; unfortunately at the

moment all that it has achieved is to demonstrate how embarrassingly low on our list of national priorities space research really is. As a nation we have a strong space industry, British Aerospace is a major satellite manufacturer, it's subsidiary Royal Ordnance manufactures rocket motors and we have important stakes in Ariadne and the other major European projects through our membership of the European Space Agency; we also have a British National Space Centre, from which we hear pathetically little. Where is the industry sponsorship for Juno? More damning still, where is the government support, both financial and moral?

Even NASA, with all its instant recognisability, felt the need to engage in popularisation of its mission, leading first to the flight of Senator Jake Garn on *Discovery* and ending tragically with the loss of Crista McAuliffe on *Challenger*. Proving payoffs from space research is always a difficult task, but no one would doubt it's importance to the US aerospace industry or the benefits that earth resources and weather satellites have brought. The industry is already important in the UK, it could be more important still, taking up the slack from the "Peace Dividend" which is likely to put the UK aerospace and defence electronics industries under increasing strain.

I want us to go to the planets and then onwards to the stars, a goal I probably share with most of the BSFA. Hopefully we will one day, but at the present moment I see little hope of the UK playing any significant role in that achievement. Twice the UK has developed an independent satellite launch capability and failed to exploit it, the BNSC is the biggest non-event I can remember and the mould-breaking single-stage-to-orbit HOTOL has been reduced to air-launch from the back of an Antonov transport, its revolutionary RB-656 air-breathing rocket left on the backburner for lack of government support. The record is grim, let us hope that Project Juno can shatter it.

On a more hopeful note, NASA's plans for a Mars mission are showing some progress, with the result that the space agency's next manned mission may well be to Antarctica. An agreement has been signed between NASA and the US National Science Foundation under which the NSF will develop two bases on the continent for NASA. It is intended that the sites will be used to develop the technology required for a manned Mars base. Although Antarctica has a breathable atmosphere and a far higher surface pressure than Mars, there are parallels between climate, temperature and terrain and a comparable degree of isolation which should yield valuable experience. Reportedly one of the bases will be sited in the Dry Valleys area of the continent which is shielded by mountains and is almost snow free, thereby providing an even closer match with Martian terrain.



Information Service Update Phil Nichols

Two familiar questions have arisen with some frequency in the last few weeks. Something to do with the time of year, perhaps. The first is "Can you provide the address of ...? [Insert name of favourite author]". And the answer, I'm afraid, is usually no. If you write to an author's publisher, they will generally forward your letter. If you don't get a reply, it doesn't mean your letter hasn't been forwarded; it may be that the author has neither the time nor the inclination to reply. If s/he took time to reply to all fan letters, s/he wouldn't have time to write those wonderful novels in the first place, would s/he?

The second question is "Where can I find an agent who deals with SF?" Well, lists of agents appear in such tomes as *The Writer's Handbook* and *The Writers and Artists Yearbook*. But remember, your work will have to be of a sufficiently high, saleable standard for them to take an interest — and I suspect most agents care more about the saleability of your work than the genre category it happens to fit into.

Last issue's column on radio SF generated quite a pleasing response. This has prompted me to get on with a change in this column which I've contemplated for quite a time. Although I will continue to deal "publicly" with the odd question that's flung my way — and the Information Service will definitely continue to "privately" answer your questions — next issue should see a shift to a new format as we launch a mini-guide to SF. Watch this space!

Do you have any questions about anything related to SF? If so, then please write to me, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope:
Phil Nichols, 57 Grange Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 8PB.

But now for **Phil Nichols** as reviewer, as he examines a recent series of Bradbury adaptations on radio:

The Golden Apples of the Sun

BBC Radio 5, January — February 1991

This series of short dramatisations of Ray Bradbury stories must rank among the best media adaptations of the author's work.

Bradbury has a long history of radio adaptation, from the *Dimension X* programmes of the '50s through to the present day. Radio tends to have been kinder in the process of adaptation than have either the cinema or television. The literariness of TV's *The Martian Chronicles* and cinema's *The Illustrated Man* concentrated on Bradbury's plots, ignoring the style that sets the author apart. Just occasionally have the visual media got it right, with flashes of brilliance in the like of Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* and Jack Clayton's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. But on radio, the author's only tools — words — come to the fore.

This series presents Bradbury from a slightly different angle to the usual with the emphasis on story-telling. Most of the fifteen-minute plays retain a narrator, setting this series apart from the previous best adaptation — Mike McDonough's *Bradbury 13* (National Public Radio, 1984). There, the aural texture of the production was of primary importance, giving the stories a lavish gloss, the exact sound equivalent of what Hollywood has been unable to achieve with this author. Here, however, the BBC have given us Ray Bradbury, Story-teller.

With stories like "The April Witch" (pure spirit fantasy) and "Hail and Farewell" (a touching tall story), it works well; the plays are pure voice, with everything said. But when the space fantasy of "The Golden Apples of the Sun" is done this way, something is missing: some stimulus of visual imagination. The same is true of the slightly modified "The Fruit At The Bottom Of The Bowl", where Bradbury's third person narrative of paranoia is transformed into a virtual monologue. In this case, the irony is that the original story — read well, in third person — can be more intense than this change allows.

Listening to the plays on AM/Mono Radio 5, I longed for the technical finesse of previous BBC productions. But even given the limitations of the medium chosen for these broadcasts, the series has helped further convince me that radio and Ray Bradbury were made for each other.

Ray Bradbury — Radio Adaptations

(I'm sure there are more — if you know of any not listed, please let me know)

SUSPENSE: Zero Hour (CBS 1977)

DIMENSION X: The Veldt/Kaleidoscope/And The Moon Be Still As Bright (NBC 1951)

X MINUS ONE: Mars Is Heaven/The Veldt/There Will Come Soft Rains/Zero Hour/Marionettes, Inc./The Last Martian (NBC 1955-56)

LEVIATHAN '99 (BBC Radio 3 3.5.1968)

AUGUST 2026: THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS (BBC Radio 4 11.5.1977)

FAHRENHEIT 451 (BBC Radio 4 13.11.1982)

CBC PLAYHOUSE: BRADBURY TIMES 5: Frost And Fire/The Lonely One/The Veldt/The Day It Rained Forever (CBC Vancouver)

BRADBURY 13: The Ravine/Night Call, Collect/The Veldt/There Was An Old Woman/Kaleidoscope/Dark They Were And Golden Eyed/The Screaming Woman/A Sound of Thunder/The Man/The Wind/The Fox And The Forest/Here There Be Tygers/The Happiness Machine (NPR 1984)

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES (Creative Media Consultants 1985)

THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN: The Golden Apples of the Sun/Hail and Farewell/The Flying Machine/The Fruit At The Bottom of the Bowl/A

Sound of Thunder/The Murderer/The April Witch/The Fog Horn (BBC Radio 5 1991).

Echoing reviewer Joseph Nicholas's words that "Unfortunately, I haven't been to see any SF films since returning from Egypt, perhaps because there haven't been any ...", Ben Wharton comments on the few (this piece has been edited with the equivalent of a super power drill to fit in the space, to concentrate on SF films and because there are only 24 pages in "Matrix"). Ben wrote considerably more, fascinating stuff...

Media File

Although cinema is a wonderful medium for exploring the themes and possibilities of SF, few films made today or in the past can truly be termed "Science Fiction". Most films hitting our now increasing number of cineplexes and dwindling number of three-in-one theatres are merely action-thrillers and detective stories set in the future or in alien environments. Out of approximately 100 major films which are currently on general release here and in the United States or in production, I estimate there to be around 6 projects which have SF overtones.

William Shatner and Co. return as that crew for probably the last time. Shooting on *Star Trek VI* has just started under the guiding eye and pen of *Wrath of Kahn* director Nicholas Meyer. *Alien III* is now shooting at Pinewood Studios. David Fincher (not music video director) helms the troubled project. The script is officially by John Fasano and Larry Ferguson, but in reality has been re-written by Walter Hill and David Giler (two of the executive producers). The story is from the third director on the project, Vincent Ward, and apparently Sigourney "I won't do another" Weaver has shaved her head a la Sinéad O'Connor for the film. Expect a very different kind of *Alien* story.

Nostromo, the Joseph Conrad novel (not the space tug from *Alien*) has finally foundered in its adaptation to the screen. Due to director David Lean's undisclosed illness (near death perhaps), the project has not been cancelled and has left the well-known/distinguished cast without anything to do. Hollywood must be jumping for joy ... A real tragedy for the cinema as the film would have probably been Lean's great farewell.

The unlikely trio of Antony Hopkins, Emilio Estevez and Mick Jagger star in *Free-Jack*, a futuristic adventure. How futuristic director Geoff Murphy can make the city of Atlanta, Georgia look (perhaps with the help of Olympic development?) remains to be seen. Chevy Chase in a serious role? Cult director John Carpenter obviously thinks he's up to the task in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* as a security expert who becomes hunted by the CIA after an experiment goes wrong.

Steven Soderbergh made it big with *Sex, Lies and Videotape* and turned down Robert Redford for a project a good friend had been working on. *Kafka*, inspired by the life and work of author Franz Kafka, is described as a paranoid thriller, is being filmed in Kafka's hometown of Prague with Jeremy Irons, Theresa Russell, Joel Grey, Armin Mueller-Stahl and the wonderful Alec Guinness as Kafka's boss.

Transplants can be a tricky and unnerving experience, especially when the new part - a very ex-killer's arm - decides to continue it's former owner's wishes without him. Jeff Fahey, recently of *White Hunter, Black Heat*, has to fight against "his" body's impulse in *Body Parts*.

Steven Spielberg's next project is *Jurassic Park* based on Michael Crichton's dinosaur novel. Will the novelist finally get a good translation of his ideas to film?

The long-awaited adaptation of William Burroughs's hallucinatory novel, *The Naked Lunch*, is finally under way care of that master of internalism, David Cronenberg. The film doesn't attempt to stick closely with the novel's storyline due to limited budget and good taste, but is still supposed to offend most. Ex-*Robocop* Peter Weller stars with Roy Schneider, Judy Davis and our own Julian Sands.

Predator II hits our shores soon. Danny Glover takes on the master hunter this time in the streets and on the roofs of LA with the help of Bill Paxton. I've read the script and well ... it's a disappointment especially as it came from the original authors. Watch out for the Predators vs Aliens (the comic) in-joke at the film's end. Oscar, De Niro, is there a difference? He tries for it again with Robin Williams in *Awakenings*, based on the book by Oliver Sacks, M.D. Patients in a state of coma awoken with the use of the unfortunately named L-DOPA to a cruel world, a few women which they can only visit. Penny Marshall, one of Hollywood's top world women [on the right side of the camera], directs.

Bryan Brown and Brian Dennehy return in *Pix II*, a sequel that never would have happened were it not for the immense success of the film on video. The big questions are, have they got the blood colour right this time and what other parts of *Three Days of the Condor* can they still use?

Those mutated terrapins (care of the late great Jim Henson) strike their second and doubtless less lucrative blow for xenophobia in *TMNT II: The Secret of the Ooze*. Be prepared for more Creature Shop creations.

The Hills Are Alive ...

A Review of Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990)
Ian Mundell

Cinematically speaking, there is more to the Frankenstein myth than the scientific romance set out by Mary Shelley in 1818. However, when market research suggested to a team of Hollywood producers that a film called *Roger Corman's Frankenstein* would pull in the crowds, it failed to stipulate just what version of the myth it was talking about. The film that emerged, Corman's first as director for nearly twenty years, has all of them.

From the Universal period of Boris Karloff come the storms, the Burgermeister and the laboratory; from the Hammer cycle are taken the casual, but not excessive, violence, and the melt-faced monster; from the 1980's authentic film, the ultra-real yet totally unconvincing landscape and townspeople; and Raul Julia's Victor Frankenstein, looking like a young Sigmund Freud after a night on the tiles.

Add to this the other legend of Frankenstein — Mary Godwin, Percy Shelley and Byron living it up by the side of Lake Geneva — and what you get is a spirited but confused mess.

To begin at the beginning: Dr. Joe Buchanan (John Hurt) is a physicist from 2031 whose research into particle weapons has created a "rupture in the fabric of time" (ahem!). The slight side effect does not impress his publicity-shy military patron, since the rupture manifests itself in the upper atmosphere as a huge cloud resembling the female external genitalia.

So, spurned by the establishment, the scientifically poor and well meaning Dr. B goes home; in his driveway he is attacked by a stray Assyrian horseman, and then sucked back in time to nineteenth century Switzerland, through the cumulo-vaginus of his own creating.

This is a world where Mary Godwin and Victor Frankenstein co-exist, the spending her days on Lake Geneva penning the beginning of SF-as-we-know-it, while he tries to pacify his monster, which has already reached the fiancée-threatening stage of demanding a mate.

Buchanan comes from a world which admits both of these precursors. "I'm familiar with your work" says he on learning Victor's surname, but in a tone that suggests he read about it in *Nature*, rather than saw it on the Midnite Movie. "You are a great poet" he tells Mary Godwin, before having his car (which was also time-shuffled) produce a loose-leaf printout of her novel (the *Frankenstein* unbound of the title, perhaps).

Whenever out of sight of his car, Buchanan loses all scientific rationality, and consequently spends most of the film being flung from pillar to post, rescuing persecuted serving girls, getting beaten up by the peasants and knoodling with Mary Godwin ("Shelley and Byron preach free love — I practice it"). Finally, he finds himself up a crumbling turret with the Monster, rigging up cables for the coming storm.

Just as the "Unbound" part of the title is a little slow to appear in the opening credits, so the most of the story takes some time to rise to the surface. In the context of what has gone before, it is a most unlikely twist, since it returns to the idea of moral responsibility that is central to Mary Shelley's book. This idea — that science without conscience spawns monsters, regardless of how enlightened the society thinks itself — is missing from most cinematic versions, leaving them mere horror films, with mad scientists and monsters.

Throughout the film, Hurt always appeared the better choice for a convincing Frankenstein, in the Shelleyan sense of the name. As he confronts the Monster in an abandoned technopolis, under the icy wastes of the far future, this thesis is plainly stated:

"What am I that you must destroy me" asks the Monster.
"An abomination in the eyes of God!"
"What are you then?"
"I am Frankenstein."

If I were being charitable, I would say that Corman's film plunges Frankenstein, in the form of John Hurt, into the mess of interpretation that sixty years of cinema has produced, to rescue the message of Mary's books. The alternative to charity — that Corman has spent ninety times his usual budget to half the effect — is less pretty.

Sons Of The Future City

A Review of *Akira* (1988)

Ian Mundell

A fireball erupts from the middle of a city; growing in size, it spreads outwards and upwards, tearing buildings up by the roots. The screen tells us: Tokyo, 1988, the beginning of World War III. Twenty years ago, the focus of attention would have been the explosion — the bomb; today, the focus is the city.

Akira is a Japanese animated film, re-worked by comic-book artist Otomo Katsuhiro, from his epic graphic serial of the same name. Set in Neo-Tokyo, thirty-one years after the devastation described above, it charts the rivalry between two members of a teenage bike gang — Kaneda and Tetsuo — who get mixed up in a covert military programme to develop latent psychic powers.

Tetsuo, captured and experimented upon by the military, is soon struggling to master his considerable new-found abilities, while Kaneda, alternatively driven to save or stop his friend, falls in with a band of terrorists.

Over all this hyperactivity hangs the shadow of *Akira*: the cause of, or perhaps the reason for, the explosion in 1988; the ominous power — more divine than nuclear — that the military is trying to harness; the saviour taken in error by the disaffected people of Neo-Tokyo.

Rather unusually for an animated genre film of this sort, *Akira* was extensively premiered by London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, after a first English showing at the Bristol Animation Festival.

"Both the film and the comic present an incredible representation of the city" says the ICA's cinema director, Simon Field, explaining why he was attracted to *Akira*. The film also fits well with the ICA's developing interest in Japanese cinema culture, and its continuing policy of showing ground-breaking animation — it was responsible for premiering Jan Svankmajer's extraordinary *Alice* in 1988.

Otomo's approach to fitting the expansive vision of his graphic series into the two hours of film involved an attention to background unusual in animation.

"I created Neo-Tokyo to frame and enhance the image I had of *Akira*" he has written. "In order to show spectacular scenes or extraordinary powers, the artist has to depict normal backgrounds and scenes with a great sense of reality. In doing so, the scenes of devastation take on an added sense of realism".

To this end, 2212 shots were taken of 160,000 individual cells (more than twice that is usual) and 327 colours were used, 50 of which were newly formulated for the film. Having created such a vivid cityscape, Otomo makes it work for him like any live-action location, pursuing his characters through it as flesh, mind and the social fabric of Neo-Tokyo are transformed by events.

His animation apes all the moves of live-action camerawork, and yet does not forfeit the perfect "film still" frame composition of his graphic novel origins. Most animators seem to be oblivious to the image handling tricks that cinema has developed during its short history, being more concerned with making nice walk like perfect men. It is time they woke up.

Despite the post-modern credibility that *Akira* shares with films like *Blade Runner*, the response from the national papers has been somewhat muted.

"I think the art-house press did not know what to make of it" suggests Simon Field. "I would have liked to have seen more major articles, but I think the combination of animation and the 'low' genre put people off. You hear a lot of talk about the graphic novel growing up, but when it crosses over into cinema, there are problems".

One such problem in the case of *Akira* is that it is perceived to be excessively violent — *The Late Show's* discussion of it was exclusively on this point — despite having earned a 12 certificate. "Sometimes, when violence is shown in animation, people think it is a crude representation, and they step back" says Field.

However, the film has proved popular with the London public — after five weeks there have been more than 8,500 attendances, breaking all records for the ICA cinema, and the film is to be released around the country this month.

The one flaw in the film — and not Otomo's fault — lies with the translation. Leaving aside gaffes like calling police "the fuzz", the interpreter's most serious breakdown occurs at the expository wedge, at which point all should become clear. Out of a sequence with suspiciously more Japanese than English comes a fist-full of GCSE pseudoscience which is less than enlightening and sounds hollow when compared to Otomo's otherwise sophisticated vision. I suspect the explanation is not garbage in Japanese. However, as a flaw it is not a great one — a broken thread in an otherwise seamless film.

Distribution details from the ICA (tel: 071 930 0493).

Satellite TV

Mark Ogier

I wonder what Arthur C. Clarke makes of it all.

After all, it was he who, in the mid-1940s, suggested that a satellite placed in a geosynchronous orbit around the Earth could be used for communication purposes. Whether he suspected that it would eventually be used to flood the globe with 24 hours a day films, news, weather and "light entertainment" is another matter. Whatever Mr. Clarke thinks of the idea, the simple fact is that in the last ten years the satellite TV industry has mushroomed, bringing all manner of third rate — and in some cases, tenth rate — programming into our homes.

Britain's contributions to the new era in home entertainment were Sky Television and British Satellite Broadcasting (the latter being the "official" British satellite channel). After several months of acrimony between the two networks came the shock news that they were to merge into British Sky Broadcasting, cease transmitting from BSB's Marcopolo satellite, and axe several of the programmes and channels set up under BSB.

At the moment subscribes to either network are still able to use their equipment and are getting a range of programming from both channels.

To set yourself up with an Astra system could cost you, on average, between £300 and £500. So what does BSkyB have to offer for your money? If you're a sports fan, the answer is obvious — three channels will eventually be available to those with Astra systems: Eurosport, Screensport and The Sports Channel (this is one of the two channels being "rescued" from the old BSB). If you enjoy channel hopping, Astra offers an entertaining diversion, although most of the time the programmes you will come across will be in German or Dutch. Occasionally an American or British film will be broadcast on one of these channels with subtitles.

Those who are interested in the pop music scene will enjoy Music Television, which provides a diet of almost endless pop promo videos — great to watch if you enjoy the music, can stand the presenters (the Video Jockeys, or VJs) and have ten minutes to spare. The odd "rockumentary" is slipped in, as are programmes about the latest cinema films and screenings of the American comedy series *Saturday Night Live*.

The other major reason people buy satellite is for the films on offer (other than the late night "adult movies" shown on the Scandinavian Filmmat channel, that is). Currently, Astra has one film channel, Sky Movies. This broadcasts 24 hours a day and shows films between about 10am and 6am (at other times trailers and behind the scenes items are shown).

Such is the nature of satellite broadcasting that you end up with a movie being shown three or four times a month at different times. This allows you to either sit down and watch it at, say, 8pm or 10pm, or, if all else fails, you can video the 4am screening. SF, fantasy and horror are pretty well represented, although the latter is undoubtedly the most common genre alongside comedy. Looking through the schedules for February, one finds such gems as the bizarre "comedy SF", *The Final Programme*; the "true story" of stomic tests in the 1950s, *Nightbreaker*; Arnie Schwarzenegger in *The Running Man* and *Predator*; *The Return of the Incredible Hulk* and *Steel Dawn*. No doubt many SF fans will snort with derision at the fare on offer, but if you are selective it is possible to find the odd gem among the garbage which may not be a genre film. There will be a wider choice of films when the other channel to be rescued from BSB — The Movie Channel — starts transmitting, hopefully in early April.

The two remaining Sky channels are Sky News and Sky One. The former is a 24 hours a day news channel that has replaced ITN and the BBC in my estimation, thanks to its extensive coverage of events and the fact that it is always there when you need it, with news bulletins on the hour, every hour.

Sky One is BSkyB's answer to ITV. This is the "general entertainment" channel, with a heavy dose of soaps and quiz games and the uncategoryable "Sky Star Search" talent show. However, it does show a fair bit of drama, mainly American in origin, some of which has never been screened on the terrestrial channels.

Recently it screened the original *Star Trek* series, in its entirety, with episodes twice a day. I understand that Sky also plan to screen the cartoon series, and will eventually go on to show *The Next Generation*, presumably only when BBC2 has finished with it. Other "SF" nostalgia on Sky One is *Lost in Space*, *The Bionic Woman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Man from Atlantis*, *ALF* and *The Outer Limits*. It is interesting to note that the majority of SF programmes seems to be aimed firmly at the teenage market.

There are two new series being shown for the first time in Britain that could hold some interest for adults, although one is a horror series rather than SF. *Alien Nation*, based on the cinema feature film, is set in the near future, and on the surface looks pretty much like a buddy-buddy cop series, where one of the cops is an alien. (I can't comment on this, as I've not seen it). The half hour horror series *Werewolf* falls into the old trap of being just another chase show, with the protagonist being pursued by a bounty hunter who just misses catching him each week.

Quantity does not, of course, equal quality, and although I find a lot to enjoy on satellite, I am very selective in what I watch. My system was bought on the strength of Sky Movies and MTV (yes, I admit it!), and I am delighted that there will be another movie channel available soon. But if you prefer to see your films in the cinema, rent videos infrequently and are not keen on music videos, sport or news coverage, you might as well stick with the terrestrial channels for the time being.

Media Reviews

Ian Nathan

EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (12) — Directed by Tim Burton

Tim Burton refrains from normality, after all it is such a tiresome place to be, and with literal spreads of oddity, weird and the decidedly unreal he presents us with a moral fable. How our regular folks deal with one who just don't fit in. And the guy in question, Edward, certainly has his peculiarities: he's artificial — the creation of wizened inventor Vince Price (inspiration: a biscuit making machine?) — but to make matters worse the old man croaked before replacing his progeny's temporary hands (a clatter of scissor-blades) with the prosthetic ideal.

Impose our hampered fellow, golden hearted nevertheless, into a typical suburbanite community and Burton's study of fitting-in ensues. Quirky as it may seem, the idea, played as a modern fairytale, is quite endearing. The juxtaposition of fantasy and topicality is constant throughout right down to the small town setting, beside the common or garden middle-class estate (made up of bungalows painted in various garish shades — then again, this is America) lies a huge sugar-mound hill on which rests the inventor's gothic mansion.

Edward, rescued from his lonely abode by Avon lady Diane Weist, is brought to live with the family, including pretty daughter Winona Ryder (for some reason transformed to an ill-fitting blonde) and of course lurv is born. Neighbours at first take to his obvious talents, including masterpieces of topiary and hair dos with angles, but after being framed by the jealous boyfriend, poor Ed gets hounded out.

Amongst all this glittery excess, Burton seems to have an inability to sustain his good idea. His message is made pretty swiftly: accept people as they are, it's only what is underneath that matters, but there is only so far you can go with a guy with blade fingers and every option seems to revert to the accidental slash routine. About midway, the film has exhausted its charm and we've had our moral lesson, now where? The answer is more of the same and it has become a bore.

Yet due where it is due: Johnny Depp is novel and sympathetic in a central role with few lines, he pervades all the mix of emotions and confusions at being immersed in the deep end of society with a poignant little smile and a delicate squeak of the scissors all topped up with acute Chaplin stride. The support from Weist, Ryder and especially Alan Arkin as a salt-of-the-earth

father is excellent. The film is fresh and easy on the eyes, Burton's inventive visual flare is never in doubt and along the way there are some golden moments. But the greatest sin is left until last: with nothing left to say, the script whimpers out to a ruthlessly hollow finale, ever felt undernourished by a film? Come on, Tim, you are allowed happy endings, you know.

HIGHLANDER 2 — THE QUICKENING (18) Directed by Russel Mulcahy

The question is: did *Highlander* really merit a sequel, how on earth could they have possibly made a sequel anyway? For *Highlander* neatly tied up what little plot it had, hero victorious, villain dead, everything hunky-dory, but the great inevitable came calling and sequelitis took hold. And it took some work to pry loose all the nails from the original's lid, a reputed fifteen scripts were proposed over the three years of development before they arrived at this.

Highlander 2 is a dire concoction of half-baked ideas laid out into a chaotic plot more full of holes than a Rotweiler's supper. An artificial ocean layer has been created — the old one finally giving up the ghost — giving permanent night-time and inclement weather, and to top it, the darn thing's controlled by corporate corruption. With the dafest of convolutions (some prattle about a magic energy called the Quickenings), Lambert regains his immortality and Sean Connery returns from the dead (for no other reason than to flog the movie). The most unfathomably of all, all-round bad guy Katana (Michael Ironside) comes to earth in an effort to have a punch up with the hero, along the way, taking a tube for a joyride and amassing a vast body-count. About how bizarre and irrelevant activity, the inevitable climatic sword fight arrives and it also transpires that the genuine ocean layer has made a comeback (why or even how?) consequently there is a desperate attempt to pull the plug on the artificial variety.

Granted it is all executed with some visual extravagance: taking on that noisier sci-fi canvas and having more pyrotechnics than the 4th of July. But this disastrous sequel can have no guise thick enough to hide the fact that it is complete and utter nonsense.



The Periodic Table

The two con reports here have more content than their mere words imply. The Gareth Davies piece was one of the last he wrote and inevitably has a poignancy in his sheer optimism in looking forward to future conventions he will now never attend; and the Dave Bell article is a mischievous fantasy puzzle hiding names of songs in seemingly innocent text. People often ask me what I want them to write for a con report: others say that they are a waste of time. What I want is something that helps to convey the excitement and thrill of a convention. It is a feeling unlike anything except, perhaps, superlatively good love-making. Not everyone can get to a con: not everyone wants to. The pieces in *The Periodic Table* are designed to be entertaining reading rather than tracts aimed to convert BSFA members into avid con-goers. (That's merely a secondary motive!)

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The Worldcon: Until Next Time

Gareth M. Davies

The 48th World Science Fiction Convention was held in the Hague at the end of August 1990. It was my second Worldcon — I also went to Brighton in '87 — and the first thing I noticed was how much less well organised it was. In particular, none of the panels I attended had a full quota of the people advertised, and most of the rest had last-minute changes of personnel. The Hugos were a farce: virtually none of the Americans, who as usual won most (or all?) of the awards, had bothered to turn up, so the awards were being accepted by other people on their behalf. After the first half-don or so, this became a little obtrusive. The bookstalls were nothing special, compared to what is available in specialist shops in England.

Having said that, I did enjoy it very much. I found myself forcibly introduced to Joe Haldeman — we ended up discussing our common interest in cycle touring — sitting at the same table as Ian Watson and his family, seeing a lot of Brian Stableford, who is a Manchester lad like myself and far more amusing in person than you would gather from reading him, and rubbing shoulders with

the great and the good from all over: David Brin, Greg Bear, Pat Cadigan, George R.R. Martin, Dave Langford (he seemed to turn up everywhere, Anne McCaffrey (a vision in purple), Poul Anderson, Larry Niven and many more. I attended all the bid parties and indulged in such delights as Canadian moose milk, met a lot of people from Europe and America, and generally kept going all day every day until I was pretty much worn out. I liked the Hague and the Dutch, though their idea of coffee is my idea of engine lubricating fluid.

I am not really a fan in the extended sense of the word, I don't do fanciest things or speak the language, so I gave those sorts of events a miss; nor did I manage to see the Masquerade (I was out at a Chinese restaurant in Scheveningen with some Scots and a British Indian). The best thing about it is the atmosphere, which I can't really convey in words. You know that everybody shares your interests; you can start a conversation with anybody about anything. Everybody is friendly and just a little weird. It's five days completely out of time, culminating in me sitting in my hotel room on the final evening watching a fuzzy BBC transmission of the Test Match. If anybody ever thinks "Shall I go to one of these?", my answer is "Yes". If you get the chance, go.

Till next time, best wishes Gareth.

Gareth died suddenly, a week or so after sending the above con report to other members of his Orbiter writing group, led by Jim England, in December 1990.

Treble: The British Filk Convention

A partial and biased account by David Bell

Eastbourne, the Burlington Hotel, February, and the wind was blowing off the sea into my face as I tried to follow the map enclosed with the last Progress Report. How many places are there where you can't see the street signs from after dusk until before the dawn? At least some of the shops in Eastbourne do display the street number. Eastbourne in February sounds a slightly crazy idea: but that's okay because I'm going to a science fiction convention. I am going to the British filk convention, for a weekend of seeking out new songs and new singers. Fill in the rest of that joke yourself.

The con was called *Treble*, and it was the third con in a year that has lost its membership list on a computer. The committee were suitably embarrassed, and had managed to sort things out. They had had to move to a different hotel as well, but at least they were in the same town, and Beethoven's Fifth was on the speakers in the cafe round the corner. There are not all that many fantasy or SF films which are also musicals, so *Phantom of the Paradise* was going to be shown twice, at both ends of the weekend. Apart from that, the programme was going to be continuous filking. Unlike ordinary cons, where the filkers spend the dark hours of the night in some isolated room, filking was the main event. Some enthusiastic fools still stayed up all night though.

Bill and Brenda Sutton were the American guests, which isn't bad going for such a small con. It helps to find a guest who works as a travel agent. A little more surprising were the Americans who had come over on their own money. Imagine, if you will, three Americans striding about the precincts of Battle Abbey and singing *Song of the Shieldwall*. At the other extreme was the New Zealander, and the Eastbourne resident who said *Wild Thing* to a devilish little soft toy. Zander Nyrdon was the British guest, surrounded by hi-tech keyboards which never seemed to quite behave as they should. When everything worked, the sound was wonderful, but it sometimes needed some seriously obscure fiddling amongst the electronics.

Filk, far more than other sorts of science fiction fandom, is a do-it-yourself activity. It also attracts people with a wide range of interests, about all sorts of strange things, from obscure American comics to South American bus timetables. There were at least three people there who had been in the same ill-fated APA-zine, and the most proper of "sercon" fans (who has also written a filk based on events also recounted by Ursula K. Le Guin's mother). But music has a strong magic and, for once, nobody was complaining about an excess of Star Trekking. The tech crew had a case suspiciously marked "Filled with Explosives", if no actual black powder, and alcohol flowed as freely as usual. Well, as free as you are likely to see south of the Watford Gap.

There were strange t-shirts, from "The Hutchmen" to depictions of the blazons resulting from dropping an asteroid on Milton Keynes. Phil Allcock, who will filk things not actually nailed down, had barely managed to recover from meningitis, and a potential requiem, acquired on a ski holiday. Lawrence Dean appeared to have said something offensive to his barber, and was almost unrecognisable. Talis Kimberley took a flying lesson, and worried more about her mandolin than about herself. The Americans were discovering what we had done to some of their songs, and we were discovering that their

patriotic songs use stolen tunes. And did you know that the emblem on the Atlanta Olympics sweatshirt is a cunningly disguised pentacle?

Next year, the filk convention will be called *Fourplay*. Yes, you do get some dreadful puns unleashed at a filk convention. (Details about *Fourplay* can be obtained from Alison Scott, 2 Craithie Road, Vicars Cross, Chester CH3 5JL).

Contour Mapping

MEXICON

(Harrogate, the Cairn Hotel, May 3-6 Guests Howard Waldrop, Ian Sinclair and Paul Williams, £15 attending membership, details from Mike Ford, 27 Stanmore Crescent Crescent, Leeds LS4 2RY).

Mexicons focus on SF as a written genre and there is a strong programme with the aim of exploring how SF got to be where it is today and why, the programming team aims "to cause some serious mind-expansion, without benefit of chemical agents" writes committee member Dave Hodson.

EUROCON

(Cracow, May 9-12 Guests Poul Anderson, Gianfranco Viviani, Roelof Goudrian, Boris Zavorodny, free membership to foreigners, details from Wiktor Bukato, PO Box 963, 00-950 Warsaw, Poland).

A convention is a time to relax, a haven, a chance to forget about what's going to happen on the concluding Sunday: a hangover, a life not worth living, or the end of the world. Cracow is one of the oldest towns in Poland, where a big steel mill is built almost at the doors of Wawel, a medieval castle — writes committee member Wiktor Bukato.

CONFUSE

(Linköping, June 14-16 Guest Brian Stableford, details from Andreas and Carina Björklind, Tröskaregatan 53, S-583 30 Linköping, Sweden who promise that it will be "LOTS of fun!").

MABINOIGCON

(Bangor, Neuadd Rathbone UCNW, July 26-28, Guest Anne McCaffrey, attending membership £11, details from 9 Friars Avenue, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 1BB).

For this, the XIIIth Union, the room rates are reasonable: £10.52 per night (but only single). From the Roman camp, it is possible to see Snowdonia, if you want. There will be an examination of the links between music and SF, Celtic influences in fantasy and the different treatment of the dragons.

WINCON II

(Winchester, King Alfred's College, August 16-18, Guests Brian Stableford and Josef Nesvadba, £18 attending from 38 Outram Road, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 1QZ).

The programme will aim for the twin peaks of *Images of the Future* and *The Art and Science of Storytelling*. Winchester is surprisingly accessible transport-wise and accommodation will be under £20 per night.

PORTMEIRICON 91

(Portmeirion "The Village" September 6-8, details from Six of One, The Prisoner Appreciation Society, PO Box 60, Harrogate, with sse please)

OCTOCON 91

(Dun Laoghaire, Royal Marine Hotel, October 4-6, details from Helen ryder, 30 Beverley Downs, Dublin 16, Ireland). This will be the 2nd National Irish SF Convention. The first Octocon, last year, was apparently a great success.

XASM

(Leeds, Metropole Hotel, November 29-December 1, £10 attending from Jenny Glover, 16 Aviary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP).

November 30 is St. Andrew's Night — a far cry from the original seasonal theme "Merry Xasm", so there may yet be a Scottish flavour then: but the committee aims for a serious SF flavour, even if it is whisky tinged.

The Survey: Your Questions Answered

Q: Can you comment on the 6:1 ratio of male to female members?

A: There were 40 female responses to the survey (from a total of 270) which does broadly echo the ratio for the entire membership. But what the female responses lacked in quantity, they made up for in quality: practically all wrote clear answers with constructive comments. Most were in the 30ish age zone (8 were younger than 30, 6 were older than 40) and they were mostly career-oriented (5 had a computer job, 9 a writing related occupation); plus 15 had

first degrees and 13 post graduate qualifications which were relevant to their careers.

The women showed no signs of being overwhelmed by the male majority. Women have been represented well in BSFA affairs with Maureen Porter, until recently *Matrix* editor and BSFA co-ordinator; Jo Raine as membership secretary; Alison Cook as collator supreme; Liz Holliday, former editor of *Focus*; Sue Thomason as Orbiter writing workshops co-ordinator; C.M. Cary as *Vector* editorial assistant; assorted *Vector* and *Paperback Inferno* reviewers; Laurie Mann and Molly Brown as *Matrix* newshounds and your editor.

Q: Who did the survey?

A: The survey was initiated by Maureen Porter. Liz Holliday, who has experience with market research, clarified the questions and then helped to analyse it with a team of helpers I know only by initials.

In November 1990, Maureen handed me (Jenny) the material with a view to printing the results in *Matrix*. In preparing the tables, I probably duplicated some of the previous work, so can appreciate what was involved in the processing.

Q: One of the preconceptions floating around is that men read (hard) SF and women prefer fantasy. Do your results support this idea?

A: No. The men in the survey did prefer SF (152), though 67 read SF and Fantasy equally. Only 11 came right out and expressed a definite preference for Fantasy. (See detailed figures given below). But of the female responses, 18 preferred SF, 19 liked both equally and only 2 openly preferred Fantasy. When the figures are broken up further, it is obvious that the women in this survey prefer specific sorts of SF or Fantasy.

	WOMEN ONLY			MEN ONLY			Total
	SF	SF/F=	F	SF	SF/F=	F	
SF							
Alternative History	5	5	—	10	62	3	18
Time Travel	5	6	—	11	53	4	16
Space Opera	3	—	—	3	38	1	6
Near Future	12	5	—	17	81	5	24
Hard SF	5	2	1	8	79	4	24
Robots	3	—	2	5	28	2	12
Future Worlds	—	—	—	0	18	1	8
Cyberpunk	3	2	—	5	47	2	14
Feminist	8	10	3	21	32	2	18
Other Worlds	10	10	3	23	77	5	35
Alien Invasions	1	1	1	3	28	3	6
Environmental SF	6	4	1	11	36	4	8
Social SF	6	6	2	14	54	3	13
Humorous	5	5	2	12	49	4	31
Film Novelisations	1	1	—	2	2	—	2

FANTASY

Sword 'n' Sorcery	—	1	1	2	5	1	19	25
Quests	1	3	1	5	4	3	23	30
Talking Animals	—	1	1	2	—	1	4	5
Celtic Fantasy	1	5	4	10	5	2	21	28
Humorous	5	5	5	15	38	3	35	76
Dark Fantasy	1	3	3	7	13	3	23	39
Romantic	—	1	1	2	—	1	7	8
Magic Realism	2	6	4	12	18	1	34	53
Film Novelisations	—	2	—	2	1	1	2	4

Q: Going back to the male responses, do men who prefer SF also read Fantasy and vice versa?

Again the figures (above) show certain clumps of preferred reading, whether SF or Fantasy. As far as I can see, men are least keen on film novelisations, romantic novels, books on alien intelligence or future worlds. In fantasy, the men seem less keen on the sword and sorcery or celtic fantasy books; results echoed by women for sword and sorcery but probably not for celtic fantasy.

Q: If the survey was done again, should there be any alterations?

A: Maureen Porter, the co-ordinator, wrote in the survey introduction that she hoped to make the survey an annual event, but the response was far more than anticipated (which is, of course, a good thing), consequently the survey took a disproportionately long time to be analysed.

I would suggest strongly that if a new survey was designed then it should be designed in conjunction with a database and that a team of workers should only analyse a limited number of forms — one member suggested that 25 would be a reasonable number. Various members had queries attached to their forms, like wondering what an Orbiter writing workshop was, or how they could start a group in their area, and these could be answered with the letter acknowledging receipt of the form. Some parts of the form were considered irrelevant, like the "job title of Head of household (if different)". That particular one was included for advertising reasons.

My own feeling is that a survey should be conducted every two years; that each form should be acknowledged and that offers of help should certainly be noted and preferably taken up; that the relevant committee members should be made aware of the membership feedback; and that each member to complete and return a form should have some tangible return, like an extra month on membership.

Q: Were there many queries?

A: Yes. About 10 people asked what an Orbiter writing group was, so I asked the co-ordinator, Sue Thomason, to explain them, which she did for *Matrix* 90. Other people did not know about the BSFA services — the library and the magazine chain, for example. Keith Freeman explained the magazine chain in *Matrix* 91. As far as I can gather from Roger Robinson, the library is kept with the Foundation library and is, at present, purely a research library. It is gradually being catalogued.

Other members asked about the classifications of SF and Fantasy — wondering what "Dark Fantasy" was came up often as did questions about "Magical Realism".

But the major queries concerned the Committee: very few people knew who they were or what they did. However, the "active" part of the Committee are writing profiles on themselves and how they perceive their roles, to be all printed in *Matrix* 94. Andy Sawyer, editor of *Paperback Inferno* has already provided his. The Committee are as accessible as possible, but we all have other lives, jobs, problems, and some have children, so the BSFA cannot be a permanently major factor in our lives.

Q: Was the survey analysis affected by the Data Protection Act?

A: No. It was all done "the hard way". However, I would recommend very strongly that future surveys have a clause to sign giving the BSFA permission to store the results on computers and I think it is vital that there should be a working database ready to slot the results into.

Q: How did this survey compare with others on the same subject?

A: Very well. The most directly comparable is the *Locus* poll, which gives much stricter definitions of occupation, type of computer, classification of genre and other subjects of interest. For example, SF is sub-divided into hard science, social science or adventure (as opposed to 15 classifications in the BSFA survey) and Fantasy is sub-divided into high/heroic, humorous or romantic, whereas the BSFA survey sub-divided it into 9 classifications — though *Locus* does ask for nominations on the best SF novel, novella, magazine, publisher etc. of the previous year.

The *Locus* poll allows very little space for "other" which might be other genres one might like reading or what kind of computer one has. But the "other" parts of the BSFA survey were among the most informative (and entertaining) showing the vast breadth of interests in the membership. One thing I did like in the *Locus* poll, though, was the last question inviting responses to which author one would most like to meet, publish, marry — or murder. The answers could be very thought-provoking there. Also *Locus* provides a free issue for a filled out ballot for "subscribers of record". (The *Locus* poll questionnaire can be obtained from *Locus* publications, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA).

Richard Hole, who edits the Mensa SF special interest magazine, *So it goes*, sent me a copy with results of a questionnaire he conducted for readers. His results broadly parallel the BSFA results — where they can be compared — but, while he naturally asks questions on Mensa and on the magazine, some of the questions are more thought provoking than can really be answered by a simple yes or no. He asks, for example, whether *Star Wars* was a better film than *Blade Runner* or whether people regularly read SF by female authors or whether Philip K. Dick was a more important writer than Jane Austen. *SIG* is unfortunately only generally available to Mensa members, but details can be obtained from Richard Hole, *SIG* secretary, 7 Howland Garth, St. Albans, Herts. AL1 2NY.

Finally, the BSFA survey asked specific questions about the future of the BSFA and to what extent members were able to help. This information will be invaluable to the new co-ordinator.

Q: The survey results were very interesting, though somewhat predictable, I thought. The last time this was done, a few years back by Maureen, I think the results were basically the same: hard SF, no women and couldn't be bothered getting involved. Could you comment on that?

A: The last survey was conducted by Nik Morton in 1986 and mostly concerned membership retention problems within the BSFA. It referred to the situation during and prior to 1986, when the Chairman, Alan Dorey, had just resigned. Alan did not or could not delegate, which led to a lot of problems. Nik reported his findings in *Matrix* 73 (December/January 1987/88) and did not mention any of the points mentioned in the question.

There was a separate questionnaire for ex-members and the conclusion Nik came to was that the significant issues were a lack of "corporate identity", dissatisfaction with some of the Committee, no major contact except by mail and then only bi-monthly and that adequate BSFA funds had to be safeguarded by adjusting the subscriptions.

I don't think it is fair to compare the two surveys, although it is noticeable that members are still commenting on the "anonymity" of Committee members.

Q: What were the cutest/oddest responses?

A: When asked how they first heard about the BSFA, one response was "a tall dark stranger in a pub — it's true". On a more fantastic level, when asked what the BSFA should be doing in future, answers varied from travelling through time to meeting on the moon, though there was a strong minority suggestion to set up a live planetarium restaurant in Leicester. On being asked whether one would prefer a single magazine to the present four magazines, one member replied that "a monolithic magazine would not let a hundred flowers bloom (or more than a few)" while another said that if there was only one magazine then the whole lot would be lost when she dropped them in the jacuzzi. Finally, when asked about skills of use to the BSFA, one member replied dismally that he "could eat four shredded wheaties and sing in Gaelic".

An Editor Speaks: Andy Sawyer

It's good to see the result of the survey officially presented in *Matrix*, and although perhaps the bulk of the discussion ought to be left to the membership at large. However it's interesting to see what people have actually concluded about the BSFA and who (statistically) they are.

And what a sensible lot you are, with few readers of "occult" material — wot, no UFO? — and film novelisations. I thought the vast predominance of Science Fiction to Fantasy in readers' tastes was interesting: yes, I know it's the British SCIENCE FICTION Association, but received wisdom has always suggested that people like fantasy as well, so the suggestion that received wisdom may in this case be wrong is something worth taking on board. I know, moreover, that we're meant to be a literary society, but some of you buy even more books than I do: publishers take note, we have a market out here; though not so much, it seems, with cyberpunk — or is it that everyone's read the only three books which come under that category? The most popular subgenre seems to be "other worlds", what's wrong with this one? DON'T REPLY! I can read the newspapers too.

And you're inventive too — just what are these "extremely imaginative" uses of computers that are hinted at? The mind boggles, the green screen quivers ... Was the person who claimed an interest in near-death experiences the same one who "often" read film novelisations? I think we should be told. As for those suggestions about future activities: start a film company? Well, I have this really terrific idea about adapting a series of SF books into blockbuster films. £20,000,000 should get the first on off the ground. Any offers?

More seriously, there are some interesting basic conclusions. Many of you look favourably on the idea of more publications, such as bibliographies, readers' lists/guides etc., but are more cautious about the idea of merchandising. It's perhaps more worrying that use of some of the BSFA services — such as the magazine chain — is low, and more so that even with more publicity, many people are still dubious about whether they would use these services. There are a lot of good ideas for activities/services, although many of these depend on some financing which means — at least — diverting funds from other activities and most really depend on the energies and devotion of you — the membership — in setting up and carrying out these activities. Some of these ideas — book swaps and the like, simply depend on the people who are

interested letting others know through the medium of the *Matrix* noticeboard. Others are more contentious — given the current range of the small press, with new magazines being set up it seems every couple of months, do we really need the BSFA to sponsor another fiction magazine?

One recurring topic which has rumbled on for years to my knowledge has been the question of whether we should regroup our magazines and produce "one big mag". It would seem that basically the opinion is against this. One thing that needs to be said about the topic is that it is almost certain that the range of material covered within the current four magazines could not appear between the covers of one. Even with four "sub-editors" responsible for different sections, one person would have to co-ordinate putting everything together; it's hard enough doing 16 pages of *Paperback Inferno*. I wouldn't wish a jumbo bi-monthly schedule on anyone!

Of course, I was particularly interested in what people said about *Paperback Inferno*. You liked the reviews best — I hope so, as that's the purpose of the magazine. Three people preferred the Index — come on, now: you must be librarians! Several people, it seems, felt that particular genres or sub-genres were given too much space. It's my policy to present as wide a coverage of SF and related genres as I can. Obviously some people will not want to read, say, horror reviews, but there are books in any such genre which I would feel are worth presenting to a wider audience. You never know, you might like them! In fact, I do try to keep the major emphasis towards SF, but I assume that people would prefer to read a good fantasy than a bad SF novel. Am I wrong?

Some grounds for adverse criticism I have been well aware of and I have, in fact, addressed them since the questionnaire was distributed (though "Paperback Purgatory" will keep going). I don't actually know what is meant by "news unrelated to books" which somebody wanted less of — I didn't know that was featured. And who said *Paperback Inferno* was "too literary" — I haven't made any post-structuralist literary-criticism jokes for ages!

Obviously, it's difficult to keep people happy; what pleases some will displease others and we'll never get it right for everyone. But the best way we can try is through feedback and positive suggestions, so please let us have some. I'm sure Jenny is just asking for plenty of letters to *Matrix*, but I certainly welcome letters of comment on all aspects of *Paperback Inferno*. I can't promise to print them all, but I do read and take note of everything I get. (I do reply where necessary, honest, though pressure of time may drag things out a bit. A s.a.e. enclosed when you want a reply is a useful hint: it makes me feel incredibly guilty if I delay over responding).

In a sense, now, it's over to you: the membership. Do you think this survey is a fair reflection of the BSFA? If you think things should be done — are you going to help do them? There are a lot of constructive suggestions about the function of the BSFA and things it could be doing; personally, I think that we should be acting more as an informative nexus: though how many members are aware of the listings and surveys we have produced fairly recently. Perhaps back issues of our publications should be indexed and/or particular listing run off? Any offers? Changes only come from people willing that things should change and prepared to make them change: in literary associations as in all other walks of life. Let's hear from you.

A Reader Replies: Ken Lake

(115 Markhouse Avenue, London E17 8AY)

The results of your Membership Survey were a constant joy. There are those who admit to reading fanzines that died long ago, those who count *The Economist* as SF-related, and those who joined the BSFA to get the Strugatski to the UK.

Who, I wonder, was the one member who never read *Vector*, and who the one who wanted an "all purpose SF leaflet (!)" The request for an *Encyclopaedia of SF* was somewhat more perceptive, except that we already have one. The comments on *Focus* seem unlikely to lead anywhere, since neither of the last two editors answers letters or acknowledges articles on the specific topic of writing for publication.

I am much obliged to whoever liked "Ken Lake reviews" best in *Paperback Inferno* (we strive to serve), and amused at the one member who consistently asked for fewer Ken Lake letters in all three major magazines. And no, it was not I who voted thus.

What the survey does show clearly is that the BSFA contains a high percentage of cranks — or, if you prefer, eccentrics — and they are indeed more welcome, embodying as they do "untapped creativity" according to a

recent *Daily Telegraph* survey which, however, concentrated only on an unrepresentative "10,000 eccentrics" in this country.

Researcher Dr. David Weeks pointed out there that they "are extra ordinarily creative but their contribution is often ignored", a conclusion anyone reading of orthodox "scientist" denunciation of the pioneering work on Chaos Theory will know (James Gleick: *Chaos*, Cardinal 1988, £6.99, highly recommended).

We eccentrics/cranks can take comfort from Dr. Weeks' comment that "they also have a more outrageous sense of humour", from Fritz Schumacher's superb definition that "a crank is a piece of simple technology that creates revolutions" and ultimately from the knowledge that one day they will have to admit we were right all the time.



Fire And Hemlock

In place of the fanzine listing, there are two fanzine reviews this time. The first is concerned with the specialised world of University Society fanzines and the second, though edited by an ex-editor of a University Society fanzine, is much more general. While Steve Jeffery was comparing two University fanzines, another two were received: *The Edge* from Imperial College, London and *TTBA* from Cambridge University, which will perhaps be reviewed here in the summer.

DYING TITLES, LIVING ZINES?

Steve Jeffery

Two university "clubazines" which represent rather different ends of fandom are *New Dawn Fades* and *Black Hole*.

New Dawn Fades 9 from Edinburgh SF&F Society, precedes *NDFS* and editor Gavin Boyter apparently continues an editorial tradition of idiosyncratic number of issues. *NDFS* concentrates on contributions of fiction, poetry, artwork and comic strips, the two non-fiction pieces being Adele Hartley's review of the Black Sunday Manchester film festival and a piece by Dave Green on the rather disturbing fiord activities of the weird Mondo "BoB" cult of the Dallas based Church of the SubGenius. Eccentric, certainly — but harmless as they pretend?

"Dead Souls" by Paul Cockburn, prepares the scene with the opening part of a series set on an off world mining operation. The plot is slightly reminiscent of the start of the film *Outland* with safety inspector Sonia Bamber taking the place of Sean Connery's marshall as the outsider called in to investigate, although the idea that a Safety Commission would accept their representative making a twelve hour drop to the surface from orbit in a jury rigged re-entry suit with a five hour design maximum seems a bit odd.

John Miller's "Witchfinder" is a nicely observed story of nostalgic time travel which unfortunately falters badly in the transitional link between the past of the 1970s and the 1990s present.

In "Revenge", by Andrew Ferguson, the competent heroine neatly reverses the role of predator and prey when being hunted by a killer android as a not-altogether-credible way of terminating her employment contract with its designers.

Thomas Evan's fantasy "The Green Knight" didn't seem to go anywhere.

Some nice artwork throughout, though the two comic strips won't cause Alan Moore or Neil Gaiman much loss of sleep, with plot and artwork taking a poor second place to cramming in as many in-jokes as possible (though I did like the subtitle *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*).

Black Hole 30 from Leeds U, is more traditional zine fare. No fiction, but a strong letter column and book reviews alongside the straight and spoof articles.

While Ian Creasey's editorial has some valid points on authoritarianism in RPG and fantasy scenarios, that phrase "crap fantasy" (like "Dunn Yankos") occurs yet again as a knee jerk reaction to the genre, unthinkingly condemning a whole collection of authors who don't choose to write about ion drives, hyperspace and aliens to the trashcan. Anarchy is not "true freedom" as Ian

blithely concludes, but a political system based on self responsibility and self control.

A debate on children's fiction continues in the letters pages, alongside a listing of brief reviews of children's titles by Ken Cheslin.

Jonathan Crow's look at Von Neuman machines in SF was tantalisingly brief and surprisingly missed Saberhagen's self-replicating Berserkers or current ideas in nanotechnology and cellular automata allied to this theme.

Adrian Rankin apparently spent his entire EastCon trekking between the video room and the bar, and sounds as if he attended an entirely different convention to the one I recall.

Some of the humorous pieces work better than others, like the "Secret Diary of Piers Anthony, Aged 56.75", "Masters of SF Criticism No. 5" (John Clute); the Anne McCaffrey guide to book reviewing and the "Are You a Famous Author?" checklist, "Lord Fowl's Barn" which invites comparisons to Adrian Cole's own *Vulgarlad* spoof of Stephen Donaldson and the classic *Bored by the Rings*, didn't quite live up to its promise, but had some nice moments.

The letters pages seem to be designed to promote controversy with the adoption of abrasive quotes (A Piece of Shit, Conceited Pretentious Prat) to title the letters. [These were quotes from the letters themselves — Ed.] One of the problems of stumbling into the middle of personality feed (apparently centred on the organisation of LUCON) such as this in the letters pages of a fanzine is not having the previous issue to see what sparked it off. Allowing for the fact that *Black Hole* is a clubzine, with a presumably more limited range of circulation, does this sort of thing in a zine do any good, or ever resolve anything?

New Dawn Fades 9 A4 46pp £1 plus see from Gavin Boyter, 2 Woodfield Avenue, Edinburgh EH13 0HX.

Black Hole 30 A5 42pp 50p from The Editor, Leeds University Union, PO Box 157, Leeds LS1 1UH.

Oddly enough, the editor of the above mentioned "Black Hole" now writes on other fanzines, including "All our Yesterdays" mentioned in last "Matrix".

FANDANGLE

Ian Creasey

All Our Yesterdays is a collection of the writings of Harry Warner (but different to the fanzine history of the same name), edited by Chuck Connor, and retails for £4.50 (\$15 overseas). But although it's a Harry Warner omnibus, the subject he mostly deals with is other people's fanzines, with extensive quotations, so that what you actually get for your money is a survey of early fandom, in the days when fan magazines (the term "fanzine" having yet to be invented) were the main channel of communication between fans (other than letters in the professional magazines).

It's not a comprehensive collection, and there is no attempt to give some sort of overview to put the individual fragments into perspective. This lack is perhaps a flaw from the historical point of view, but as the collection is not intended as a fan history it cannot really be criticised for not being one (though more attempts to give context might have lent the collection greater coherence).

The typical article here has Warner rummaging around in his attic for the various issues of a particular old fanzine. Having found them, he briefly mentions their look and production techniques, and says something about the editor and the time in which the fanzine was extant. He then selects some quotations, and gives a critical assessment.

Perhaps because the items were first written as individual columns elsewhere, there is a slight predilection for overpraise: various fanzines being described as "one of the finest of the fanzines of those days", "the most consistently, enduringly excellent fanzine ever published" and so on. But the author never descends into uncritical flattery; though there is a lack of critical anchor, in that he concentrated on the excellent and did not lambast the dire.

As these old fanzines are almost all unavailable and obsolete, the collection cannot hope to hold interest merely through its subject matter; it must also entertain through its content and style. Warner's writing is uniformly competent, but it does not scintillate. There is a tendency to be overly serious and inflate the importance of what is, after all, just a goddamn hobby: "Some day, when a fan universe exists ..." But there is an occasional levelling spark of humour: a comparison of a new group of fans to the emerging Greek

philosophers ends: "besides, the Greek thinkers never succeeded in publishing fanzines, probably due to the lack of mimeographs in Athens at the time".

One can be forgiven for asking What Is The Point of it all. The atmosphere is nostalgic. Warner does state that he believes the overall standard of fanzines has risen slightly but steadily over the years, but throughout there is an air of looking back on past glories, the like of which shall never be seen again. The intrinsic value of the artefacts is not called into question. Things do not acquire value simply through being old and fondly remembered. As exemplars the fanzines examined fall short in several respects — not least the fact that if everyone was required to read all the old stuff before writing new, nothing would ever get done. Warner's is the magpie approach. There is a collector's mentality at work, a lust to possess everything that has ever been written regardless of its merit. (This is prevalent, of course, as the profitable release of books and records in unmet different editions shows). But given that Warner is a critic, some criticism of his own attitudes would have been welcome and put weight into the edifice's critical foundation.

Not all the collection is about fanzines. There are also a number of portraits of leading fans of days gone by, and miscellaneous other articles; and these are, in my opinion, often the more interesting of the pieces. Some of them even remain relevant today — for example, I enjoyed Sharyn McCrumb's recent humorous novel *Bimbos of the Death Sun*, about a murder at a convention; Warner's portrait of fan, editor and writer Anthony Boucher concentrates on a novel of his, *Rocket To The Morgue*, of exactly the same subject and published in 1942, thus informing me that McCrumb's novel was not as original as I had thought.

Perhaps the highlight of Warner's omnibus is the account of the Cosmic Circle. This was a fanzine movement led by Claude Degler — "a fan whose enthusiasm exceeded his judgement" — which briefly flourished in the 40s. Cosmic Circle publications were liable to carry manifestos such as this: "Someday soon we will have our own apartment building, then our own land, our own city of Cosmen, schools, teachers, radio programme — later: our own laws, country perhaps! Our children shall inherit not only this earth — but this universe!" By astute selection of quotations, Warner tells the story of the Cosmic Circle with a warm sympathy which invites the reader to laugh with, not at, the antics described. And he reserves judgement on the nature of the Circle itself — was it really entirely serious, or just a huge joke on fandom? The question is left open, and is unlikely to be resolved now, but Warner's account ranks as a masterpiece of the historian's art. It's one of the items in the collection which made me wish that I was around in those days.

Overall, the lasting impression of *All Our Yesterdays* is that fandom is eternal. Despite its actual beginning, it has always been around, and always will be. For instance, at one time the author laments a decline in fanzine numbers. *Plus ça change ...*

From the old to the new, and Kev McVeigh's *Xmas in February*. I follow with this because a similar kind of collector's mentality is evident here, though in this case it seems that McVeigh is determined to collect and enshrine himself. The lead piece of this fanzine is *NOISE: a keyboard conversation with Simon Ings*, which is moderately interesting, but really no more than what any two moderately informed fans might say to each other at a con or in a pub. Bar-room talk should stay at the bar.

Two fictionalised episodes from McVeigh's past further illustrate his tendency to wrap up his life with words and mail it out to other people. It seems to me that he feels an event hasn't happened, or its full significance has not been elucidated, if he does not stretch it out on the page for dissection. The articles are interesting, but as much for what they reveal of the author's attitudes as for what they are in themselves.

The rest of the fanzine has a Gulf editorial, a look at the short fiction of Jayne Anne Phillips, and an analysis of Snow White in ancient and modern retellings — all worthy stuff. McVeigh's writing is always well worth reading. It's just a pity he doesn't put as much effort into tedious organisational tasks such as counting the pages correctly so as not to leave two blank pages in the middle, making sure the text doesn't spill off the edge of the page, folding the pages in half with any sort of accuracy, and stapling them somewhere near the fold.

There is a refreshing lack of pretension in Ken Cheslin's fanzines, which elevate inconsequentiality to the level of an art-form. The letter column of *A Child's Garden of Olaf*, which had been bound separately for some time, has now gained its own title *Out House*, so here we have both.

With this issue, *ACGOO* has acquired some outside contributors: in fact, a moderately impressive array of names. Probably the best of the bunch is James White, whose account of quasi-religious ritualistic preparation and consumption

of marshmallows is a near-perfect piece of fanzine writing. Bob Shaw contributes "a little something" — which is all it is — about conventions and the Novacon hotel. And Ted Tubb, unfortunately. Boringly rambles on and on. In disjointed incomplete sentences.

Ken's own contributions include a history of Robin Hood, which I found a little too scholarly and dry for my liking, and another Hemlock Soames story. Soames and Flotsam are truly unique characters, and you either have a taste for them or not; however, I think these stories are wonderfully refreshing.

But no review of *ACGOO* is complete without mentioning the hand-colored cover and interior cartoons. Many of you will have encountered these already, so I shall merely say that they are of their usual high standard.

ACGOO's letter column has developed such a personality of its own that hiving it off seems an eminently logical move. The letters are highly readable, and the existence of *Out House* is a sufficient testament to the quality and accessibility of *ACGOO* over and above anything I could write.

This brings me to *Don-o-Saur*. There is a recipe for producing the perfect fanzine and it goes like this: "Write some brilliant articles, and provoke some letterbacks to do excellent letters of comment". Of the fanzines I have seen, *Don-o-Saur* came closest to that ideal.

I have to use the past tense, as the day before I received issue 60, I got the news that editor Don C. Thompson had died. Many people will feel his passing as a personal loss. Although I have only seen the last four issues of his fanzine, I, too, will miss him.

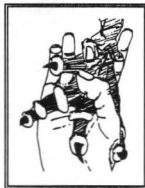
He had the gift of insightful observation, which, wedded to a lucid, unobtrusive style, produced articles other writers could only envy. Whether writing of his own life, such as his battles against nicotine and alcohol, or on more general subjects, he was always entertaining, informative and engrossing.

But that was only part of the fanzine. The other constituent was the feedback from readers. Here the key to excellence was selectivity: there were always as many people mentioned as having written as letters quoted, and that was a substantial number. And given the example of the editor's own fine writing, the loccens perhaps tried harder to write well than they might otherwise have done, and this also helped to maintain the quality of the fanzine.

In future, if anyone ever writes any tome similar to *All Our Yesterdays*, Don C. Thompson and *Don-o-Saur* will certainly be included.

All Our Yesterdays — available from Chuck Connor, Sildan House, Chediston Road, Wissett, near Halesworth, Suffolk IP19 0NF, \$15 or £4.50 plus p&p. *Xmas in February* — Kev P. McVeigh, 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7QE.

A Child's Garden of Olaf & Out House — Kev Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 1LA.



WriteBack

Letters are welcome from members on subjects ranging from Science Fiction to whatever. Please write to Jenny Glover, 16 Avary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP, and the deadline is:

MAY 24, 1991

There is a varied bunch of letters this time, but the first correspondent sent a cutting from a Tunbridge Wells local paper (which mightn't seem odd until you consider that he does not live in, or near,

Tunbridge Wells) and the following call to action:

Crusader Seeks Companions

from Steve Grover, 10 Seyton Lane, East Kilbride G74 4LJ

Has anyone else purchased a paperback copy of Joe Haldeman's *Mindbridge* in the last few years ...? The Futura edition with the opening-shot-of-Star-Wars-type view of the belly of a ship above a green buggy on the cover? If you have, then I advise you to check that it includes section: "53 For They

Should Be Called the Children of God". According to the contents list, this should be on page 186. There is no page 186.

It gets worse.

I bought a copy about two years ago, but only seriously noticed the omission in August '89. I wrote to the publishers, Futura/Oliver/Macdonald, a very pleasant letter — or rather letters, since the address listed in *Mindbridge* was wrong — and was told to send the title page and my complaint to a certain book distribution company, which I did. And they sent me a replacement copy very promptly but, you guessed it, it had exactly the same fault.

I have been sending letters to Macdonald ever since and have yet to receive any reply. I tried the Consumer Trading Standards Authority, but they didn't want to know because too much time has passed since the original purchase. And they do not have the authority to take out an injunction preventing further distribution.

This book is still on sale. Between them, Joe Haldeman and John Jarrold (the editor at Futura) have decided that the problem will be solved when this edition is sold out ... do you agree?

Concerted pressure might make them change their minds, but as far as I know, I'm the only cheated buyer who has complained so far. If you own a copy of this edition, or if you think something should be done, write to John Jarrold at Orbit House, 1 New Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1AR. If you feel really strongly, then go out and buy a copy, then complain to your local Consumer & Trading Standards office or equivalent. (Only recent purchases will interest them.) They'll get your money back and put pressure on the booksellers, who will pass the pressure on to the publishers.

Mindbridge is a great book, but whether it's to your taste or not, if you read and buy books, then this concerns you.

Stop Press: John Jarrold wrote to offer Steve two books of his choice from the current Orbit list. And my, very old, copy of "Mindbridge" has the missing page ... Which leads on to the Soapbox last time on "What's Wrong with Science Fiction?" and a long letter from a fellow editor, a letter which lies up neatly with the BSFA survey results, mentioned elsewhere:

Knowledge Comes From Experience

from Richard Hole, 7 Howland Garth, St. Albans, Herts. AL1 2NY

I have pondered Jim Provan's question "What's Wrong with Science Fiction?" coming to the conclusion that the problem is in Jim Provan's appreciation of SF — or lack of it. How can you visit Forbidden Planet and say that there is nothing worth buying, and how did he know unless he has already read all the books?

He admitted that he didn't know what he was looking for. This means he must have been judging the books purely by their covers. So what he really means is that he doesn't like the covers, i.e. the marketing. What he really wants is an intellectual looking cover with praise from *The Sunday Times*, or *TLS*, or even better something along the lines of "the greatest 20th century novel" which would be found on *Ulysses*. This type of snobbery should be out of place in the BSFA. It is also interesting that the only novels mentioned that he liked are not SF. He ends up by spending his money on a latest top ten best-seller and a "modern classic". The conclusion is inescapable — he no longer likes SF (I assume he must have at one time).

To suggest that anyone who reads popular fiction must be thick is incredibly narrow-minded. I happen to run the SF Special Interest Group of Mensa and know that highly intelligent people have a wide range of taste in SF ranging from the popular (Asimov, Clarke, Eddings, Anthony, Pratchett, etc) to the esoteric. One's likes and dislikes in fiction are not necessarily related to intelligence.

I do think that 90% of the fiction on the shelves is rubbish, but that is a personal choice and someone else would think that my 10% is rubbish. If, for instance, the only SF available was that which was considered good by an individual (e.g. Jim Provan, or David Pringle, or Kev McVeigh), then 90% of current SF readers would think that ALL SF was crap. In a recent poll that I conducted among members of the Mensa SF SIG, I asked the question, "Is most SF in the shops crap?" About 45% said yes, 48% said no, and the others were non-committal. I also asked "Do you like series, trilogies, etc.?" and was surprised to find that 75% said yes. It is clear that some of those who think most SF is rubbish are not the same people who think that series, trilogies, etc. are a bad thing. Perhaps the truth is that an individual's taste only covers 10% of the genre and that each individual's concept of what is "good" only

encompasses what they like. I think I must be part of the "mindless audience just waiting to be manipulated by cynical publishers" and I think that a novel that is "set in space or castles or the future" isn't necessarily "semi-literate rubbish". In fact, if we burnt all books which were in these settings, we would have a lot less than 10% of SF left. I am a fairly discriminating reader, but I don't think that SF should aspire to be "literature". There are some authors who concentrate on style and form rather than plot and ideas — they are not for me. If the greatest poet that ever lived attempted to write SF, what would the result be like? Nothing that I'd want to read, I suspect, and I have no desire to read SF written in the style of ... James Joyce, etc. There is a lot more "literate" SF around today than there has ever been before as literary writers take up the themes popularised by the pioneers of SF. Personally, I'll stick to the real thing.

I'll leave Jim Provan to consider the following pairing:

Foucault's Pendulum by Umberto Eco and the *Time-Lapsed Man* and other stories by Eric Brown. Clue: "...anyone who thinks that quality is necessarily related to popularity is sadly misguided".

Richard modestly added in a further letter that he hoped there would be more suitable letters than his, then adds:

I did have further thoughts about why there is so much crap on the bookshop's SF shelves. I have observed that there are many people who read a variety of popular fiction and only scrape the surface of what is available. When they read SF, they tend to buy books by authors they perceive as being the best, eg Asimov, Clarke, Eddings, Pratchett, Adams, etc. To use a music analogy, I like Heavy Metal/Heavy Rock but the leading names in this "genre" of music seem bland and boring, eg AC/DC, Bon Jovi, Guns n' Roses and a whole host of recent clones. My theory is that these bands are acceptable to many people whose taste is more pop oriented, but if you look at the preferences of people who like mainly HM/HR, you find that bands like Metallica, Helloween, Cinderella, etc. are very popular. In a similar way, big names in SF are enjoyable by general readers, but authors like Rudy Rucker, Christopher Priest, P.K. Dick or John Varley are too eccentric for the general reader. Imagine someone who has been on a diet of Len Deighton, Dick Francis, Jeffrey Archer, etc. trying to read something like *Mist of Death* by P.K. Dick. Of course they wouldn't buy that book, they'd buy the latest best-seller from Isaac Asimov. But there are a lot more general readers than there are SF readers, therefore the big sellers will always be those that please a lot of people some of the time.

More reaction from the Soapbox came in a piece from a possible flower child. Do you remember the hysteria of the Rolling Stones in the late '60s? The feeling that the world was for you, just waiting for you to grab it and run? Science Fiction was a challenge then ...

from Peter Tennant, 9 Henry Cross Close, Shipham, Thetford, Norfolk IP25 7LQ

You're an impressionable teenager and you discover Science Fiction. The images it conjures up before the mind's eye are instantly appealing. For whole years you read nothing else, except for the occasional bit of fantasy on the side. But anything can go stale, even that most wanted product sense of wonder. What do we have here then? Ho hum, it's just another telekinetic mutant/alien invasion/time paradox/what ever. You're older and you've been around a bit (in a Science Fictional sense, at least). You've learnt that it takes more than a vivid imagination to make good literature. One day, you wake up and, like Jim Provan or Steve Rothman, wonder why so much crap gets published under the Science Fiction/Fantasy banner. The genre has deteriorated. It's easier to think that than to believe things have always been this bad, only you didn't realise it before. Easier then to admit that Asimov and Burroughs and others, on whose books you cut your teeth and about which you still cherish fond memories, were the literary equivalent of muzak.

For many people like me, raised in the 60's, Science Fiction has a similar appeal to rock music. It was an art form that called up frowns of disapproval from the older generation, as represented by parents and teachers. At school they sat us down and made us listen to classical music, made us read Shakespeare and Dickens and Austen. They told us what to like and why, then had us take exams to prove we'd learnt the lesson. Outside the classroom we wanted something to call our own, something unsullied by association with the "adult" world. We wanted the Beatles, and Elvis, and the Stones. We wanted Science Fiction. We wanted the colour and spectacle that it seemed to provide. Any teacher worth his salt could point out its shortcomings as literature, but that didn't matter, was even part of its appeal. These girls and boys were writing about the future and that was where we were headed, which was why

Science Fiction was important to us in a way that the social observations of a Jane Austen never could be. Literary standards hardly came into it.

The world has changed a lot since then. Science Fiction, once the black sheep of the family of genres, has come good.

It's come good financially. However much some of us might deplore Science Fiction's commercialisation, there's no denying that it's now synonymous with big money. Ideas and themes that were once exclusive to the genre are now common property. Films like *Alien*, *E.T.* and *Star Wars* break all box office records. Purists might object that these films are only fantasy/horror in Science Fiction trappings, but in the public mind the product is firmly identified with its brand name. From children's toys to larger adverts, comic books to ice cream lollies, Science Fiction has permeated Western culture.

It's come good critically, too. A new generation of teachers is running University courses and seminars, a possibility once unthinkable. The publishing of bibliographies, textbooks, works of criticism and reference, is an industry all by itself. Increasing cross fertilisation with the mainstream has taken place, so that Science Fiction ideas appear in "literary" novels and writers such as Doris Lessing, Gore Vidal and Ian Banks can move into genre territory without calling down the ridicule of the literary establishment. Everything is in a state of flux, with genre labels losing significance to the point where it is often impossible to differentiate between forms.

Faced with rampant commercialism on the one hand and critical appraisal on the other, it's only natural that those of us who love Science Fiction should be concerned at its possible trivialisation and more conscious of the genre's flaws than previously.

In his *Soapbox* article, Jim Provan seems to reach two conclusions I can heartily endorse: that there should be more good Science Fiction and that we should not read Science Fiction only. Yet I'm uncomfortable with the article's elitist tone (perhaps flattered also, as I suspect that Jim and I like the same authors) and wary of the assumptions it contains.

In Jim's Scenario, the reading public are "so backward [thick?] that they will gladly lap up whatever is provided for them". The villains of the piece are the publishers, always good for a kick or two, who shamelessly dump rubbish on a captive audience when they could just as easily force feed them the genre's equivalent of Dostoevsky. As arguments go, this is pretty flimsy, tending to ignore both human nature and market forces, while being unfair to publishers and public alike.

Publishers are not the short sighted robber barons that Jim would have us believe. Recent interviews with Science Fiction editors in *Interzone* and elsewhere have shown that they are concerned about the quality of their product and ready to invest in the future by encouraging new talent. At the end of the day though, publishing is a business and profits have to be made. Publishers' marketing techniques are geared to this end and primarily it's achieved by giving the public what they want, as demonstrated by market research and sales trends. It's a simple question of supply and demand, not a matter of publishers maliciously promoting a bad book when a good one would sell in equal numbers if given similar treatment.

Jim enjoys writing that is intelligent and stimulating, books that challenge his preconceptions about the world. So do I, but that's far from being all that I read. Sometimes, like Tommy Ferguson, I simply want to be entertained, taken out of myself for a few hours without having to think too deeply about what's on the printed page. There's nothing wrong with taking cheap thrills where you can get them, though perhaps it's regrettable if cheap thrills are all that your reading consists of.

To understand the popularity of poor quality literature fully, though, you must look at the audience for which it is intended. Jim talks of "a nation of people who are content with their lot and seem to be afraid of change", but I think the people he has in mind are watching soap operas and tv game shows rather than reading books, an activity that requires a degree of imagination (nothing pejorative intended). No, my impression is that the appeal of Eddings and his ilk is primarily to the young and ingenious, teenagers mainly lacking the critical faculties that we oldersters have developed with time. After all, I was reading crap at a similar age and I expect Jim was too. We went on to better things and probably many of Eddings' fans will as well. Perhaps they'll end up moaning about the poor quality of genre work compared to the good old days of 1991.

Unfortunately the crux of this matter is that little word "good", which we all baby about so freely. Jim is convinced that he knows what good Science Fiction is. So am I and so are all the other members of the BSFA. So are all

the millions who read Asimov, Hubbard and Eddings. But literary quality is a matter of opinion rather than something quantitative that we can measure. All any of us can really know is what we personally like. Let's talk about what we like and why. Let's try to convert others to our way of thinking. But let's not become so rigid in our thinking that we dismiss as stupid everyone who disagrees with our opinions. Attitudes like that are as foolish as they are self-defeating.

In the 60's, I was reading Asimov, recommended by a visiting cousin who wanted to get back to necking on our second best sofa: I was enthralled by "Foundation" and gave him plenty of privacy. The last word on the subject comes from the Black Country and:

from Julian Bills, 3 Roseville Gardens, Codsall, near Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV8 1AZ

Jim Provan in his *Soapbox* article states that he gets his reviews from the quality papers. He's obviously more astute than me. The Establishment ignores anything remotely SF to such a degree that finding a review is like snow in the Sahara, a problem not shared by thrillers or detective genres because they are set in the present however deficient the plot may be. Part of the problem of improving a genre is *Them Out There* (points a finger over his shoulder) allied with the Science Fiction reading public's "if it's literary, it must be boring and difficult". Usually I suspect a problem sadly inherited from experience of O level English Literature.

There is good intelligent SF by Kim Stanley Robinson, Lewis Shiner and Dan Simmons. Will the public realise it? I doubt it. Without the recognition through reviews and without the books on the shelves in Smiths they will remain the preserve of the few. In light of this sorry state the question of quality is not does it exist, but why does it exist at all?

I take the point about genre labelling and trying to transcend the genre barrier, but I have qualms about the actual results (Bruce Sterling put together a list of so-called Slip-Stream works in *SF Eye* #6). All the verbal pyrotechnics used by these writers (Alasdair Gray, Vonnegut and Russell Hoban among them) leave me with the insidious feeling that the characters only exist to demonstrate the feeling that the characters only exist to demonstrate the virtuosity of the author. I'm not opposed to using experimental techniques as a rule, just making the point they should be icing on the cake — not an end in themselves. To appreciate a book should not require semiotics any more than a working knowledge of physics. If this makes me in other people's eyes a literary degenerate, then so be it.

Yours truly, an unapologetic, presumably, middle brow reader (of all fiction).

There was an interview with Douglas Adams in "The Independent" (Monday 11 March) where he talks about the worst moments of his life and relates how it was poverty and despair that made him write "Hitch Hiker..."

For further reading on the motivation of people who read and create best sellers, Claudi Cockburn's "Bestseller" is highly recommended. It is an easily readable book and raises questions of the reader's psychology in choosing one book above all to be "that" bestseller.

The Handmaid's Reaction

Joseph Nicholas reviewed "The Handmaid's Tale" on the basis of the screen play, deliberately mentioning that he had not read Margaret Atwood's book. On acknowledging his reviews, I warned him that other readers might pick up on this and ignore the rest of his review, especially considering the recent debate in this letter column over how faithful "Total Recall" was to P.K. Dick's short story. Other readers did:

from Debbie Shaw, 25 Shepperton Road, Islington, London N1 3DH

I feel compelled to write in response to Joseph Nicholas's review of *The Handmaid's Tale*. He hasn't read the book and I, admittedly, haven't seen the film so I am forced to conclude that either the film has failed to address the most fundamental issues of the story or (what I suspect is nearer the truth), Nicholas expresses his philosophy served up on a plate with the spade work already done.

What Margaret Atwood was trying to demonstrate was how the structure of patriarchal society undermines all who are part of it. A simple hierarchy with men at the top and women at the bottom would not have allowed her to illustrate the subtle interplay of power structures which, in the case of the Commander's wife, for instance, gives position and wealth to women as reward for "catching" a highly eligible man while disempowering them in the

most fundamental aspects of their lives, ie as mothers and deprives them of the love and support of other women by setting them against each other in competition for the most "rewarded" roles.

As to Kate/Offred's previous life as a member of a normal (7) nuclear family, this is offered as an explanation for her psychological/emotional state (presumably if she had never known any other life the form of her rebellion would have been quite different and the story, therefore, different again) and as a starting point for the sociological extrapolation which is manifest within the text rather than assumed. What is left to assumption is the war/revolution that has precipitated the social psychosis that Gilead exemplifies — presumably Margaret Atwood judged that her readers could work that one out for themselves and the whole point of the story is that women are blamed for infertility, the assumption being that men could not possibly be "at fault". This is why the Handmaids turn secretly to younger men in an attempt to do their "duty" and become pregnant.

And, finally, there is no proof ever given that the "outside world" that Kate and her friends dream about actually exists. It is often the last result of people in extremes of oppression to fantasise anything beyond their limited world of stasis which is also why some women have seized upon SF writing as a chance to give structure and permanence to their utopian visions.

I suggest that Joseph Nicholas first reads the book and then, if he still wants to discuss "philosophical depth", I am all ears.

My contact with Joseph Nicholas suggests that he is well able to judge philosophical depths; an opinion echoed by another letter commenting on his review:

from Joy Hibbert, 11 Rutland Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 5JG

A few thoughts on Joseph's review of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Though I often have much to disagree on with Joseph, I usually have a lot of respect for his style of argument, and can only conclude that he wrote this on a bad day.

It is true (isn't it always?) that this film was not as clear as the book of the same name, but even so, he finds bits of unclarity that do not really exist.

Gilead came about by a combination of factors, the main one being the religious right wing backlash which has been happening in the USA for some time. Another factor is the increase in sterility. It is important to realise that what we are told in the film about the causes of the infertility are Gileadean propaganda, to try and make the Handmaids content with their lot. It is true that there is an increase in sterility among women in the real world, but it is not to do with "defective ovaries" or radiation, but to do with lateness of the first baby, use of non-barrier contraceptives and undiagnosed disease. And in itself it is not a demographic problem. However, in Gilead, they evicted all the people who are even to the slightest degree black. Many people were killed in the fighting which turned the USA into Gilead, and the fighting is still going on. Many more succeeded in fleeing the country. The shortage is not just of fertile women, but of people. All about the increase in sterility and the rightwing backlash in the USA is information which is available in the real world.

"He isn't a rapist — he's one of us, a political" says Ofglen of the man involved in the Participation. Contrast this with Joseph's statement that he is "hardly likely to feel threatened by a future which gives absolute power to men." Only the right sort of men will do. Men with a long history of left wing and pacifist views are not the sort of men who survive to oppress women in Gilead.

I didn't notice women who had the power to order around large numbers of men in the film or the book. The Aunts, who control the Handmaids, have men to do their heavy or dirty work. In all societies oppressed people who have sold out get a show of respect from the oppressors — why should things be different in Gilead?

Yes, it is difficult to see Gilead happening here, but more for the religious factors than anything else. We live at a time when steps are being taken by government and judiciary to narrow the sort of people who can adopt and foster; narrow the sorts of sex that are in any way legal; criminalise paganism; make public shows of affection illegal. And very few people seem to be paying attention.

For philosophical depth, read the book.

Regional Spotlight

There's a lot of SF events and specialized shops and conventions in various parts of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and I want to feature them for the benefit of members living in that particular area. Next time, I want to investigate the south of England to find out exactly what sort of amenities are available south of Bristol, but here is:

Posh SF: One area's slice of the action

Cardinal Cox

Say "Cambridge-shire" to a SF club member and the chances are that they'll think of C.U.S.F.S. or the Jomberg. Admittedly, they are both damn fine groups that have been behind some damn fine conventions in their time, but Cambridge is not the whole story. While the county seat might well have the University and the cultural heritage, it is Peterborough, only forty eight kilometres away, that is our county's centre of industry.

The Peterborough SF Club was founded in 1976 by Christine Wakelin. In the past, it has sponsored author visits and has run a convention (Congregate '88). The aim has always been to promote Science Fiction, but many of our members are fans of fantasy and horror, so these genres are also supported. Subs are 50p per meeting and these are every Wednesday. The first Wednesday of the month is always at the Bluebell Inn in Dogthorpe for an organised discussion. The third Wednesday of the month is a social night in the Posher's Bar of the Great Northern Hotel, directly opposite the city's B.R. station. Other meetings are for gaming or watching videos round members' houses. Members get irregular newsletters detailing club events, theatre trips or conventions in the area. The club fazine has lapsed over the last couple of years from its regular schedule, but is hoped to be re-launched soon. This May is the club's fifteenth birthday, and many events are planned. These include competitions, an art exhibition and visits by several authors including Iain Banks, Ramsey Campbell, James Follitt, Brian Stableford and Ian Watson. In July, Congregate II is being run at the city's Most House Hotel, with Guests of Honour David Gemmell, Adrian Cole and Freda Warrington. (membership costs £16 from Chris Ayres, 118 Cobden Avenue, Peterborough PE1 2NU. The theme is "heroes" and all facets of the theme will be discussed including poetry, psychology and stereotypes. On the lighter side, there will be a "Design your own Superhero" and the Rocky Horror Time warp Warm-Up. Buster Crabbe will be appearing several times daily. The hotel's leisure centre has a heated pool, jacuzzi, sauna, solarium and mini gym free to residents. The actual con weekend is July 5-7).

The House on the Borderland at 32d Lincoln Road, Peterborough (next to the tattoo parlour) is our local specialist bookshop. It is run by Pete Wells, who opened his first shop in the early eighties (it has Brian Lumley's *Necroscope 2: Wampyr* dedicated to it). Before that, it had run as a market stall since the mid-seventies. The opening times are from 10.30am each day until 5pm, except Fridays, when they are open until about 7pm. Primarily a comic shop, they stock almost all titles from most of the publishers in America. Their book section includes most of the main names in horror, SF and Fantasy, and their second hand section regularly offers up long lost treasures. They stock all the main American magazines and a number of small press publications from there as well. Combine this with a large and eclectic record section and an ethnic/alternative clothing line and you've a shop that is a refreshing change from High Street banality. They don't do a catalogue, as the stock is too large and changes too often for the small number of staff to compile one. Instead, send a list of your wants to the mail order address of 61 Langley, Bretton, Peterborough.

Peterborough's other specialist shop is The Dungeon at 137 Dogthorpe Road, Peterborough. This started in the mid-eighties as a market stall and after moving into the shop, they organised a Games Fest in 1988. They are open from 10am to 5pm most days except Tuesdays when they open at 12 noon and Saturdays when they open at 9.30am. The stock is the usual fare of board and role-playing games and accessories. A catalogue is available for £1.

Peterborough is also the home of the SF fiction magazine, *The Gate*. This is produced by W Publications at 28 Saville Road, Westwood, Peterborough PE3 7PR (tel: 0733 331500) and owned by Richard Newcombe. The position of editor is still vacant after Maureen Speller's departure. Subscription is £6 for four issues of this A4 44 page magazine of SF and Fantasy stories. From issue 4 it should be printed on glossy art-paper for better quality reproduction of illustrations. The print run is around 5,000 and it is intended to come out more regularly now that it has a distribution deal.

Peterborough has also got some gaming groups that meet at various venues around the city. We did have a Dr. Who group, but little has been heard of

them recently. All of which goes to prove that fans can have an active life in the wasteland between Cambridge and York. So if you are ever travelling on either the A1 or between Norwich and Birmingham or by train from King's Cross going north, there is reason enough to break your journey and enjoy the Peterborough Effect.

ART EXHIBITION David Holmes Gallery, Eastfield Road, Peterborough (April 30-May 25).

JAMES POLLETT Great Northern Hotel, opposite BR station (Wednesday May 15, 7.30-9.30pm £2).

Cry "Fanac"

The more astute of you will have noticed a slip in the word processor when last time I said that the next mailing would not be out until May. Of course, I meant April. Anyway, last time there was an article by Bruno Ogorolec about his views of Science Fiction. He is a runner for the fan fund, TAFF, which will pay for one person to represent European fandom and SF readers at the Worldcon in Chicago later this year. The other two runners are Pam Wells and Abigail Frost. I had asked both for representative articles and am pleased to print them here. The deadline for voting is May 15. Voting forms are available from Christina Lake, 47 Wessex Avenue, Horfield, Bristol BS7 0DE; Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA; or the editorial address.

The Transatlantic Headhunter

Abigail Frost

Why me? I've been around fandom for 13 years, so this is your chance to say boo to superstition. I'm a fanzine fan first (*New River Blues*, *Tales from the Slag Heap*, *Chicken Bones*, plus the semi-available *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Mexico 2: the fanzine* and my current campaignzine *Election Special*). Between issues, I've designed *Interzone*; been on three Mexican committees; been a founder-member of *The Women's Periodical* and *Frank's Apu*; helped set up the British Worldcon newsletter team, which published *Jersey Yarns* and *The Intermediate Repile*, then amazed the world's fans with our energy, news-sense and obsession with ribbon jokes at ConFiction; and produced the odd scurrilous flyer. I've even reviewed a book for *Foundation*.

I have no acknowledged ambitions to storm SF prodrom (though I am a writer/editor in other fields by trade), but I enjoy watching the whole circus perform, from workshoping wannabes to Serious Persons. I might even write about it one day. If there is a current SF book I'd recommend, it must be Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*.

Will that do, I ask myself? It seems to be typical.

TAFF candidates down the ages have tended to make a pitch along the lines of "I'm a wonderful person, who's done wonderful things, and I really deserve this trip". Now, some cynics might seriously question what sort of person — Richard II, Pol Pot, Fungus the Bogey Man? — could be said to deserve a trip to a US Worldcon, noted for alienation, expense and general horror. But I can't really say until I've seen it all for myself.

However, the electorate is entitled to look to the other side of the equation. What will the voter get for his or her money? TAFF must be more than a lollipop for a well-loved fan figure (or even a scourge for a well-hated one), or why should people continue to fund it? There are plenty of good causes (even fan ones, such as Books for the Blind) which relieve genuine deprivation; TAFF is doing something else.

I think fans support TAFF because they recognise (consciously or not) that it is part of what drives fandom. It is a focus for activity, and a channel of communication. Sometimes the benefits are tangible: Dave Langford's trip report, *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid*, is a fanwriting classic. TAFF candidates often produce fanzines, and the pressure of self-promotion tends to ensure their punctuality, an improvement on normal practice. TAFF auctions, hustings and other stunts are popular and entertaining convention items. A good TAFF race generates an atmosphere of friendly but intense rivalry which gives the rest of fandom plenty to gossip about.

Splendid as all that is, most of it is directed towards either getting a particular candidate elected or raising funds for the next race. Fandom benefits almost as a side-effect. A good TAFF delegate must surely do more.

In theory (I don't think there are any rules, beyond the one about attending the next US Worldcon) a TAFF winner has four major obligations: to publish a

trip report (often more honoured in the breach, this one), to raise at least enough money to replace what he or she has spent, to organise two further races (North America-Europe the following year and Europe-North America the year after that), and to publish the results of both. In addition, the idea persists that TAFF winners are representatives of their fandom; this is surely why we use the rather pompous word "delegate". The TAFF delegate is a point of personal contact between the two continents, someone who (it is hoped) will further mutual understanding and communicate on behalf or others.

It is this aspect which candidates risk neglecting if we see the whole thing in terms of me, me, me: what a wonderful person I am, what a great trip I'll have, how many new friends I'll make. We are asking other people to pay for our fun and our egoboo, and we should expect to put some work in for them.

For example, to win TAFF, you have to make yourself fairly well-known "over there", and this is often a matter of luck, or of being in the right gang at the right time. TAFF delegates could do much more to introduce fans in the host country to younger, newer or non-British fanwriters (or indeed, bright, interesting people who in the present fragmented state of fandom haven't been shanghaied into writing for fanzines yet) by publishing examples of their work.

This process of headhunting and facilitating contacts should continue in the two years after the trip. With "Eurofandom" on everyone's lips since ConFiction, many hope TAFF will eventually pay more than lip-service to the word "Europe". We should begin to think of the TAFF administrator as a point of contact within Europe, to help give the electorate a genuine, informed choice (not just "two Brits and a foreigner"). This means work; I think two years' labour is a fair exchange for a wonderful trip.

There are practical problems — for example, transferring bank accounts between countries. This should be easier after 1992. Is it reasonable to ask fans in Eastern Europe to pay sterling or dollars to vote? Again, the situation may be very different by the time of the next race. But such problems were made to be solved. The most important thing, if TAFF is to continue as a focus of activity, is to make sure it doesn't dwindle into a popularity contest between established members of a small group in one country.

Note: *The Transatlantic Hearing Aid* is available from Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading RG1 4AU price £2 (for TAFF) plus 30p postage. The May issue of *Election Special* will be available at Mexico, or send SAE for it (and maybe back numbers if any) to 95 Wilnot Street, London E2 0BP.

Pam's article is completely different. I think it is one she likes and she says that it is representative of her light-hearted approach:

Bargain Basement

Pam Wells

I'm a sucker for special offers. You know the sort of thing — buy thirty tins of ex-lax and get a carton of toilet rolls free! I wouldn't be at all surprised to find some deep-seated connection between this and my fluctuating compulsive eating syndrome ...

Come into my chaotic flat, if you will. That's right, follow me — oops, don't fall over that pile of old papers, I'm saving them ... mind your head! Now, do sit down. No, not on the settee, it's broken, try that chair over there — yes, I know it looks a bit tat, but I'll get round to re-covering it one day. Now, coffee? Only instant, I'm afraid, I'm collecting the labels — only another four and I get a free £1 voucher, not to mention all those matching storage jars!

Unusual mug, with that vivid Kit Kat logo? Yes, I've got two of those, and six tupperware lunchboxes to match. WHY THE HELL HAVE I GOT SIX BLOODY LUNCHBOXES? Well, they were a bargain. You know, send ten wrappers and a couple of quid ...

I've got a polystyrene yoghurt container courtesy of Ski, a set of kitchen knives for applying for a Kaleidoscope credit card, six cups and saucers as an agent's gift from Marshall Ward, a cheap and nasty china bell for spending £30 on my Grattan catalogue, a fake gold necklace and bracelet for holding an Oriflame make-up party ... but I won't show you any more, I can see that look on your face. That look which tells me it's time to talk about something else.

But before I do, can I interest you in a biscuit? Buy four packs, get one free. Or perhaps you'd like some of my home-made apple pie? Eighteen Cooken wrappers for a free shopping bag. Are you sure you won't stay the night? We can have cereal for breakfast — eight back-panels for three children's books. No? Another cup of coffee, perhaps?

Now, if you're sitting comfortably, we can start the small-talk. How have you been lately. I haven't seen you in ages. How are the kids? The neighbours? The cats? Shame about the weather, isn't it? Still, maybe we'll have a mild winter this year. And what about the price of eggs? I was only saying to my mum the other day, "Mum" I said "Mum, the price of eggs is just disgusting!" I mean I'd buy something cheaper, but you just can't get anything else to scramble quite the same way eggs do, can you?

Sorry, am I boring you?

There, you've finished your coffee. Would you like to see the rest of the flat before you go? I'm afraid it still needs a lot of work done on it, but you must admit it's got a lot of potential. The trouble with potential is that it needs a hell of a lot of effort to be realised. Anyway, this is the living room. Quite a nice size, don't you think? Shame about the wallpaper, though. And the furniture ... Still, here is the bedroom. A bit cluttered, but you know how it is ... It's quite a nice room really, or at least it will be when all this stuff finds its way back into the wardrobe! Now through here is what's going to be the dining room. It used to have a carpet, before I flooded the bathroom and the water ran under the door into here. The fridge is in that corner because the kitchen's too small to cope — oh, that's the kitchen. We'd better go in one at a time, there's not really room for both of us at once. Compact, isn't it? Still, it's quite big enough for one. Did I ever tell you about the time I cooked Christmas dinner for six in here? That was quite a juggling feat, I can tell you! Now through here is the bathroom. This used to have a carpet, too. Yes, I know the bath is somewhat shorter than normal — it's no problem really, you just can't lie down properly in it. As you can see, a full sized one just wouldn't fit in, would it? Straight through, and turn right — that's the loo. If you need to use it, for heaven's sake be careful. The seat's not attached any more ... the garden out near misses brings tears to your eyes!

That's my garden out there. We'd better not go out, the steps are crumbling away. If you miss your footing, you'll fall straight through the roof of the glass lean-to downstairs! I planted the lawn myself just after I moved here, two and a half years ago. Do you think it needs moving yet?

Oh, do you really have to leave already? Yes, I quite understand. Of course, your cats must be really hungry by now. By the way, may I have the cat food labels when you next come round? You never know, there might just be a Kite-Kat lunch box offer one of these days ...

The Clubs Column

Tommy Ferguson

The more devoted of you will have already noticed a slight change of direction from what was previously considered the norm for the clubs column. Rather than give small snippets of reviews of what groups have done, or plan to do, I've been concentrating on the clubs themselves and on the people behind them. The reason for this is simple: if club members and committees don't write with these details, you simply won't have a column. I don't think that my articles are mere space fillers, though, but provide various groups and clubs with some radical prodding in certain well proportioned areas.

Clubs need to take themselves, and what they do, more seriously. You simply can't rely on the same old faces turning up, week after week, month after month, that becomes boring. Nor can you be certain that the people who currently organise meetings and events will retain their enthusiasm indefinitely. By taking ourselves more seriously, we can project a more serious and professional image to others, whether they be potential members, enthusiastic committee members or the public at large. By thinking more about what we are doing and why we are doing it, we can be more certain of this future.

That future is a Clubs Network. I believe this is a vital next step in promoting Science Fiction in the UK and getting the message of the BSFA to a wider audience. I also believe that it is extremely important that a Clubs Network becomes very informal in its major role and retains a more formal role for when it deals with the public. Nearly everyone knows that getting too formal, too quickly, is fatal to any new organisation and that those which survive the test of time are based around a successful social or more informal structure (eg the 'Tun in London and even the fairly rigid UNICONS, whose base is firmly set in having a good time).

So what could be the basis for this network? I think there are a number of different roles and functions that it could assume:

First, and perhaps foremost, is the exchange of ideas. Ideas about running a group, things to do at meetings, who to invite as speakers, joint meetings and, for certain societies, how to force money out of bureaucrats. At the moment,

this is what the clubs column is attempting to do, but in future it is a role more closely linked to a wider grouping than the BSFA reaches. The most obvious forum for this is a large convention, Eastercon logically, but perhaps even Novacon or the Unicorn. It provides a social base, a wide membership and a regular, pre-determined location and time. Developments and communication could then follow on from what was discussed.

Secondly, a Clubs Network could present a united, serious and (dare I say it?) respectable face to the "great British public". At one level this can mean a logo and Network identity on letterheads, press releases and publicity; on the other hand it could mean potential sponsorship for SF events organised by local and regional groups. How about the Gollancz Novacon, the BSPG/Andromeda Reading or even, as we tried, the Guinness Nicon? You may laugh, or not think it could happen, but why not? I think it is because we are not taking ourselves seriously and therefore no-one else is. A serious Clubs Network would be able to portray clubs as an investment, something worthwhile to help and with tangible returns. The opportunities could be immense.

Finally, the Network (now, there's a title) could provide an interface for new groups just starting up, old groups looking to rejuvenate their image and membership and the average SF reader. As a first contact it could help alleviate a lot of problems that "neons" encounter when first venturing into the den of fandom. It could provide the introductions to people, places, events and, the old bug bear, terminology and then point them in the direction of their local group and its welcoming committee member. If this were to happen the fantastic drop-out rate of new members could at least be smothered somewhat, if not completely halted.

If. That is the most important word to use in the same sentence as a Clubs Network. At the moment, it is simply something that I'm obviously very keen to see happen, and some of my enthusiasm may rub off because of this and Eastercon, but it is also important that other people share that enthusiasm, even if only to get "something" off the ground. Then it can be worked on, these ideas and roles discussed, elaborated upon, rejected, implemented or whatever. As I said at the start of this piece, we first of all need to get talking and communicating. Remember: Write Early and Write Often.

"... and before *All Kinds of Everything* a little word from our sponsors ..."

The Garret Club: Science Fiction in a Social Setting

A new club for fans in the Greater Belfast Area where you can talk about SF (and not about "fannish" things) with other SF fans in the comfort of a huge lounge and open fire. Tommy Ferguson tries out a few ideas at 107 South Parade every other Thursday at about 8pm, phone 0232 642003 for further info and dates. Look forward to seeing you.

All Kinds of Everything

Roger Waddington

There Is An Alternative, if you're tired of sorting through the 90% of SF on the shelves (or even shelf) of the local bookshop or the station bookstall. Yes, there are the specialist stores where they try a little harder, though ruled by the same laws of economics, but what if you haven't one that's local? The increasing number of comic shops might well provide a useful alternative; perhaps more willing than most to accept the blurring of the boundaries, they stock all manner of SF material, fiction as well as comics, fanzines as well as graphic novels.

Most of the following were found on the shelves of the Forbidden Planet shops, and they're perhaps the most well-known; but for the more isolated or indigent fan who can't afford the fare to London, there's often a store much nearer home, which might not have the same wide range, but where you can just as easily make happy discoveries. So often they're the launching pad towards fame, or even the only source for those magazines that don't want to go any further; perhaps *Weird Tales* is the best example of the latter, a quality product that doesn't want to meet, or be subject to the publishing pressures of the wider world; whereas you can now find *Interzone* in even the smallest newsagents.

The New York Review of Science Fiction is said by its editor, David Hartwell, to be a new evolution of "The Little Magazine, which is now 22 years old and too expensive to continue"; a new evolution indeed, for one who remembers it as a literary magazine. In its title, it carries echoes of *The New York Review of Books* (and its British cousin, *The London Review of Books*) and like its heavier counterpart, is as much concerned with discussion as review; in fact, "Review" might be a misnomer for anyone expecting something along the lines of *Paperback Inferno*. The major part of this issue is given over to an excerpt from *The World Beyond the Hill*, the history of Science Fiction by Alexei and

Cory Panshin; an article by Robert Kilheffer on the later novels of Robert Silverberg; Michael Swanwick's tour of a bookstore; and a response to an earlier article by various authors, noting their first sales and earliest ages; leaving room for just four reviews of recent novels. And lists of Recommended Reading: which just might include this, if you're on the sercon side. (And what odds for a London Review of SF?)

Author's Choice Monthly is one of the many offshoots of Pulphouse Publishing; they started on a high note, offering limited editions of each issue of their magazine, *Pulphouse*, which might yet be a good investment for the monied among us; and their confidence hasn't been misplaced, judging from the reviews in other prozines, and attracting famous authors right from the start. Other publications are a Writer's Chapbook series and *Monad*, a critical journal edited by Damon Knight; their *Author's Choice* selections of previously-published stories are not so much from the second league of writers, but from those who haven't had the exposure, or length of service of the others. The first in the series featured George Alec Effinger; later selections are by authors such as Karen Joy Fowler and Edward Bryant. This particular selection (No. 4 in the series) is by Lewis Shiner, of stories from 1982 to 1990 and notes of how they came to be written from *Snowbirds* to *Nine Hard Questions about the Nature of The Universe* (its alternative title). It might be a case of buy while you can; as reported in *Matrix 91*, they're trying to reach the parts other magazines cannot reach, by going news-sheet size as *Pulphouse Weekly*; and much as I'd like to see them succeed, I can't be too optimistic about their chances.

Nothing deterred, there is another new American magazine putting a feeler in the market. This calls itself *The 14th Alternative*, described as "The Midwest Journal of Speculative Fiction"; it's maybe a useful reminder that "America" isn't a single entity; for all its image of unity, it's a country of regions, some more favoured than others, and this seems to be an attempt to redress the balance. I don't know whether it's set the standard, become a role model for all new prozines since, but this resembles nothing so much as an issue of *Aboriginal SF*, but in its use of full-page colour illustrations and the layout as a whole. Distinctly short of big names for a first issue, except Todd Cameron Hamilton and Phil Fogio with the artwork; the only one that I can recognise is Lois Tilton, but that's no handicap; what authors there are (Fred Schepartz, Tom Traub, Nick Pollotta) do reach professional standards. And, laying claim to its Midwest title, a good deal of fan and conventional coverage for that region.

The media side of Science Fiction is as much in evidence on the shelves; one example is *DWB: The British Journal of Telefantasy* As its DW label suggests, the main content is on and about the Doctor Who series, past and present, but that doesn't mean all others are neglected; there's an interview with Richard O'Brien, famed for the *Rocky Horror Show* and an ongoing series about *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Also a column reviewing all the other Whonozines, in a vaguely incestuous way, noting their split into two different types, the glossy, picture-filled semi-prozines and the old stalwart duplicator-fed efforts. This is one of the former, it's really talking glossy and photos, and filled to bursting with three or four columns to the page. In fact, one criticism they level at another zine could be targeted at this, that "inside, the constant change of typeface looks awful"; not that they change that much, but four columns are tiring enough to the eye anyway without the present small, lightly printed typeface.

Of the duplicated, more fanfannish efforts, *Overpace* has reached its tenth issue; which for such zines, more prey than most to suddenly fold, is a respectable total; which proves that they must be doing something right. There seems to be quite a collective behind it, which means that they need never run short of material; but in its own right, the contents are excellent; "The Gesture" by John Townsend, particularly so. (For a runner-up Andrew Eastwood with "Humans", maybe trying a little too hard). One quibble, for me, is having three serials running at the same time, and so only being able to give two or three pages to each; no sooner does each start getting interesting that it's over again. Surely it would be better to run just one serial, and thus give it adequate space, no matter what howls from the relegated authors? Though that said, there's enough for everyone in this issue; poems as well as fiction, reviews, an overview of the music scene; I can certainly appreciate why it's been popular enough to reach a tenth issue.

Cobweb, reaching its seventh issue, is the kind of zine that you're more likely to find at your local Arts Centre; it has familiar authors like D.F. Lewis (also in *Overpace 10*) and Steve Sneyd, but gathers in from a wider world than the SF community, perhaps with ambitions of being the next *Stand or Ambit*, more poetry than fiction, and most of its writers are the still unknown. Maybe with ports of call ranging from New York and Bonn, to Taunton and Huddersfield, unknown to each other before this issue. In the totally subjective world of

poetry, I can find those by Richard Vetere, the most effective; but they can all reach their audience with the minimum of effort.

And there's one curiosity, a novelty as far as SF publishing goes; a little booklet containing the first three chapters of *Midax* by Wolfgang Jeschke from New English Library, originally from Czechoslovakia, but now writing in Germany. It's a practice known well enough in the greater world of publishing, perhaps best with the *Sunday Times* series of first chapters, giving publicity and perhaps further sales to books lagging behind in the best-seller lists. There have also been similar "taste" booklets in the W.H. Smiths (perhaps a collecting sideline for bibliophiles?); but what all these have in common is that they're precursors to the increasingly expensive hardback editions, where you have to make a conscious decision as to whether you can afford it anyway. But the *Midax* booklet is designed to herald a paperback costing just £2.99; of course, there are those among us who have to make heartfelt decisions about buying paperbacks, but surely this wasn't intended for us? Perhaps another case of prejudice, that we might not be so willing to buy a paperback by someone called Wolfgang Jeschke rather than Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clarke, without sampling it first. Or perhaps intended as a deterrent for the bookshelf browsers, leaving their wares thumbled and greasy? An interesting trend, anyway.

Addresses and Information:

The New York Review of Science Fiction (monthly): Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, New York 10570, USA (single copy \$2.50, annual subscription \$24, overseas \$36).

Pulphouse Publishing: Box 1227, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA

The 14th Alternative (quarterly): PO Box 51, Elmhurst, Illinois 60126, USA (single copy \$3.50, annual subscription \$12).

DWB (monthly): PO Box 1015, Brighton BN2 2YU (single copy £3.50, annual subscription £28.50, USA \$27.95 (s), \$69 (a); Australia £39).

Overpace: Sean R. Friend, 25 Sheldon Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 0BP (single issue 75p).

Cobweb: Cobweb Publications, 57 William Morris House, Margravine Road, London W6 8LR (£4 for four issues).

War of the Words: A Sampler of SF Pomes

Harry Bond

For the uninitiated, a "pome" is merely a poem written in the fannish idiom, generally humorous, and generally dealing with Science Fiction. This little booklet is a collection of these items, ranging from the 1930s onwards.

As a collection of pomes, it's good: the authors represented include both professions (Sam John Christopher Youd, John Brunner) and good amateurs (Vince Clarke, Archie Mercer). Clarke also provides a running commentary on the earliest and best pome included, a loving and amazingly close parody of Omar Khayyam by Youd, and the notes are a great help with some of the more esoteric 1930s references.

Unfortunately, there are some bad points when the actual presentation is taken into account. Can £1.25 really be justified for such a thin publication? For not only does the booklet only run to 20 pages, but there is lots and lots of white space included; which makes the layout look neater, but also means that relatively few words fit on a page.

The typesetting, too, is execrable: either John Brunner is a much worse poet than can be expected, or an entire line has been accidentally omitted from one effort. For these reasons, I cannot justify telling you to procure a copy immediately, but can still say that this item is a worthwhile publication dealing with a field scarcely covered elsewhere (apart from in fanzines, of course). For all those who know that doggerel does not necessarily mean writing of the quality of McGonagall (who, nevertheless, appears in the *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* - Ed.).

War of the Words edited by Steve Sneyd, available at £1.25 from Hilltop Press, 4 Novell Place, Almondsbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PD.

Cyberspace — Motif Or Prophecy?

Dave Gillon

"Fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Flight Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America".

With these words in *Neuromancer*, William Gibson introduced us to Cyberspace and gave Eighties SF one of its most vivid motifs. But is Cyberspace more than just a motif, more than the plot device it forms in *Neuromancer*, is it actually a prophecy of the way in which computer systems will develop? Can fiction direct technological development?

Cyberspace reflects the directions that computer systems were already moving in the early Eighties, Gibson's pyramids and cubes are direct descendants of the folder and trash-can icons that computer users have come to know and love. The "black program" technology of Ono-Sendai cyberdecks, Maas-Neotek bio-chips and Chinese icebreakers mirrors the explosion in hacking, the viruses and worms that plague the computer industry.

Like any computer system, Cyberspace operates on multiple levels; hardware and software like any other computer system, but in Cyberspace's case we need to add a third, human, element and a fourth, ICE. The hardware for Cyberspace is available now: Gibson never made the mistake of detailing his systems, thereby avoiding the trap of built-in obsolescence, but the descriptions imply a global computer network with massive computing power on its individual nodes. The network is there now, computers are increasingly enmeshed with each other and the global disruption caused by the worm released in the States a couple of years ago shows just how wide their net has been cast. The computer power is also there, large and costly supercomputers such as the Cray II are increasingly giving way to more affordable mini-ones such as the Hypercube and the Meiko Computing Surface — the Cray-on-a-deck is effectively here.

As for the software, user programs will probably be little different to what they are today, the essence of Cyberspace lies in the operating system, the layer of software lying between the user's software and the hardware that controls features such as networking — and security. Where unique features were once selling points in the computer industry, compatibility and interoperability are rapidly becoming key features of any sales pitch. There are still vicious legal battles to be settled over intellectual property rights and such like, but the advantages may well make the final step to a single, standardised and dominant operating system inevitable. Gibson's concepts present us with a vision of how such a system might be organised and presented.

Looking at the wetware, the actual human interface, we find problems. Gibson's cowboys jack into cyberspace via 'trodas, a logical development of Gibson's other innovation, sim-stim. Gibson's direct brain-to-computer interface is simply not possible with current or near term technology. We can link into individual nerves to some extent, cochlear implants provide a certain degree of hearing to some profoundly deaf people, but the transmission of high quality images into the optic nerves is simply levels of magnitude beyond us. But help is at hand, something new has emerged from the technological hot house of America's west coast: Virtual Reality removes the need for some 'trode equivalent by subverting the user's senses into perceiving a reality that does not exist, precisely the "consensual hallucination" that Cyberspace calls for.

Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics, Black ICE, the devil in the dark that can reach out and snare Gibson's cowboys, leaving nothing but a flatline on an EEG as a reminder of their mortality. This is the real problem in putting together a Cyberspace system, legal problems in brainwashing trespassers aside. Security programs are becoming an increasingly essential part of the programmer's toolkit, Black ICE is simply this trend carried to its extreme, offering peace and security through good-old-fashioned fire-supremacy, the problem is how to do it. Electrocuting won't work, something would blow in the network long before the pulse got to the hacker, but other possibilities present themselves. Sensory assault is one, subjecting the hacker to some virtual reality that literally blows his mind. Flashing lights can trigger epilepsy, certain frequencies of sound reportedly have unfortunate effects on the sphincter muscles of the bladder, who knows what other possibilities are available? Dave Langford's short story "Bilt" even raised the intriguing possibility of lethal fractals which lock the visual cortex into a self-destructive loop. Another suitable violent possibility, though a less plausible one, might

be to send a signal in at the harmonic frequency of the deck causing it to literally vibrate itself to destruction.

Most of the concepts behind cyberspace could actually be implemented, the question is whether we would want to. As a software engineer, the potentials excite me, but the potential havoc that could be raised by some pimply Count Zero look-alike with a bootleg icebreaker worries the hell out of me. In the end, the choice may not be ours to make. Cyberspace is so graphic a concept that it impresses itself into the thinking of anyone who comes across it. Gibson commented during an interview that "If nothing else, I have put a strut in the step of computer programmers". I know people for whom this is true, computer engineers who would take to Cyberspace like a cowboy to his element; Gibson may well have done what many writers have dreamed of doing, changing the way in which a section of the population perceives itself through his writing. The results will be interesting to see.

Noticeboard

Nefarious Artists Vol. II: The Vexed Generation: a 30 minute cassette of comedy sketches written and performed by M.J. "Simo" Simpson (contributor to *Matrix*, *New Scientist* and the *Icono-Chronoclam* cabarets). All profits to Comic Relief. Buy one or be boring. Send £2 + 40p postage to: 52 Bernard Street, Carrington, Nottingham NG3 2AE.

Wanted: British SF paperback of the '50s is Scion, Curtis Warren or Hamilton's Panthers. I am a nostalgic collector, not a rich American or a shrewd dealer so I cannot pay outrageous prices, but am prepared to pay a reasonable price. If anyone can help, please contact: Tom Filby, 35 Gernon Road, Ardleigh, Colchester, Essex CO7 7NU (tel 0206 230470 during working hours).

Orbiter: Please would the following Orbiter co-ordinators get in touch with Sue Thomason, 190 Coach Road, Sleights, near Whitby, North Yorkshire YO22 2EN and a) confirm that their group is still running and b) let me have the current addresses for each member of your group: G. Cowie, K. Keers, William King, Christina Lake, Simon Lake, James McLean, Joanne Raine and Roy Speight.

For Sale: New paperbacks from 25p, hardbacks from £2.00, magazines 50p. P&P extra. SAE for lists to P. McKay, 20 Queen Anne Avenue, Bromley, BR2 0SB or telephone 081 464 2343 between 7-10pm for specific requests/enquiries.

SF Wanted: 1985 by Anthony Burgess, *A Modern Utopia* by H.G. Wells, *Snail on the Slope* and *Beetle in the Anthill* by A. & B. Strugatsky and *Mate of Death* by P.K. Dick, also the short story "Land of the Blind" by H.G. Wells. P.J. Vincett, Flat 3, 41 Highbury New Park, Islington, London N5 2EN.

For Sale: Old/New Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery, Adventure, TV, Romance, Westerns, General etc. Fiction/Non-Fiction, pulps, Digests, Fanzines, Comics etc. Send wants list, free search, no obligation. Trading for same material. John S. Schneider, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, Wisconsin 54130, USA.

Bulgaria Seeks New Contacts: Although you probably never suspected it, there are many ardent SF readers in Bulgaria. Their major problem, though, is that for the last fifty years they haven't had the chance to read anything except the books approved by the Party and the Leader. Would you believe that the Bulgarian translation of *Lord of the Rings* was published in 1990? Thus, most Bulgarian fans know very little about the English-language SF of the last decades, though many of them would be able to read, were they given a book. We, the English speaking and reading fans in Bulgaria, have embarked on the ambitious project of building up a library of SF books and movies, so that East may meet West at last. We appeal: send us books, new or used, video tapes, if possible (VHS only, please). You probably won't get a Good Conduct medal for helping us, but you will have our gratitude and the knowledge that you have helped spread the light of SF. R. Mileva, Co-ordinator, 51A Bigla Street, Sofia 1126, Bulgaria. (Note from Ed.: It is best to send books registered to Bulgaria).

"Captain Kingsley": There were two handsomely produced children's SF books published in England in the early 1950s. Each collected the adventures of a Captain Kingsley, each was profusely and superbly illustrated by Chesney Bonestell, and among the series of stories in each volume was one dealing with Atlantis and one dealing with fiery sun beings. Does anyone have any bibliographical facts and/or recollections about these books? If so, please contact Maureen Speller initially, at 60 Bourmouth Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ.

Competition Corner

Roger Robinson

Results of Competition No. 92 - Anyone for Cocoa?

Once again a select band of entrants, with as usual at least one new entrant. Any ideas on how to persuade more of you to enter??!!*!??

The following entries were received: each with appropriate prospectus and suggested inclusions and exclusions.

Gill Alderman

AUP
LASSES Association of Under-Privileged Lady Authors and Scientific Sisters in Eminent Societies
WITCHES Women Into Technology, Conventions, Hedonism, Excess and Science

P.J. Ellis

BUGGERS British Union of Go-Get-'Em Robot Smashers
SADDAM Society of Arrogant Demagogues Demanding Attention with Menaces

Nic Farey

BOLOX British Orthodox Legion of Xenophobes

Sean R. Friend

SEWAGE Society for Exudation of Worthless and Gratuitous Excrement
GABBLE Guild for Appreciation of Bruce Baker's Literary Eccentricities
GOD BALLESD
UP Group of Devottes who Believe the Almighty Lord Labour'd Six Excruciating Days Utterly Pissed

Garry Noble

SELF Society of Egotistical Literary Fellows
SCUD Society for the Creation of Undesirable Dogmas
COPOUT Committee for Over Production Of Untenable Theories
HOHUM Honorary Order of HOpeful yet Unpublished Manuscripts

Eleanor Piper

PURPLE Popular Union of Real Purple Lovers Everywhere

Mark Powelson (as part of a short story!)

ARSE Association of Rabidly Senile Editors
CLUTE (mentioned in passing, but unrevealed: any suggestions?)

and lastly (alphabetically) but firstly (on merit) Dave Wood with the entry in full:

HELLO

SAILOR Harlan Ellison Literary Lion Observers Sharing An Idiosyncratic Love Of Re-iteration
A group of American window shoppers who claim to have dangerous visions, usually that of seeing their favourite author writing masterpieces behind plate glass.

Included: HE, H*!n *!l*a*n, the ghost of *m*st H *m*ngw*y, *a*c *a*m*v (and, according to some, God, which is not necessarily the same as HE)
Excluded: Ch*at*ph*r Pr**st

HELLO

VICAR Hardly Everyone's Living Legend Officants Vilifying Idol's Cant and Rabidity
A group of desperate Brits who suffer from deadloss visions

Included: Ch*at*ph*r Pr**st

Excluded: Kilimanjaro Corporation officials.

Well done, Dave, well worth the usual five pound book token!!

The following people were among those on the inclusion and exclusion lists of the entries above (other than Dave's). I leave it as an exercise for the reader to fit the names to the lists: The Devil, God, Lovecraft, The Queen, Terry Pratchett, Bridget Wilkinson, Edwina Currie, Gill Alderman, Saddam Hussein, Asimov, Bester, "the men who put in my central heating system", Sauron, etc. etc.

Thanks to all entries for an entertaining postbag.

Competition 93 "Sign Here, Please"

This issue's competition is one I'd planned to do some time ago, but never got round to it! All you have to do is say why SF fans should recognise the 12 logos shown here. They are not all to the same scale, and I have omitted some giveaway signs such as words which usually accompany some of them.

I think this may prove very difficult, so much so that I will add £5 from my own pocket if the winner gets all of them correct. The winner will as usual receive the BSFA £5 book token.

Entries and comments to:
Roger Robinson,
75 Rosslyn Ave,
Harold Wood,
Essex RM3 0RG
by May 24, 1991.

