



-HARDBELL-93

Play Me Some Shipyard Blues...

Salutations!

Yeah, it's me again. Thought I'd disappeared into the fannish undergrowth again, hadn't you? Nah, I just went into hibernation for a while, starting last August and only waking again with the onset of spring. This year, up came the daffodils, the tulips and the Owen. So, apologies to all of you who were expecting this issue last November, especially the contributors, who've had to wait six months longer for their material to see the light of day (or to see the egoboo from last issue).

You may have noticed that this issue is a wee bit larger than normal: call it guilt! Having made you all wait, the least I could do was give you a bit more to be going on with, so it's up to fifty-six pages for this issue only.

Tempus Fidgets

Well, it's been an eventful nine months, hasn't it? The overthrow of the Ferrous Lady (there must be something about Autumn in Europe nowadays that plays merry hell with iron – the year before it was the Iron Curtain, last year the Iron Lady, this year who knows, but I wouldn't climb the Eiffel Tower come October); her replacement by the Grey Major (com-

plete with grey policies); the return of Tarzan to the Government, followed by the collapse of the Poll Tax into farce (now playing at every British council office, in multi-million pound productions); the unification of Germany; the advent of Pres Bush's 'New World Order' (celebrated in style by taking on Saddam Hussein in a spectacular soap opera war brought *live* to your TV screens – maybe the longest running commercial for Western arms manufacturers ever screened, proving conclusively their superiority over mere Soviet/Chinese weaponry) and (sadly) the falling from grace of Gorbachev, as his accommodations with the more reactionary forces in Soviet politics put the brakes on the formation of independent states from the Soviet monobloc – the states will still appear, only the hard way.

The legacy of all this frenetic activity will be with us for sometime, none more so than the fruits of Saddam's Kuwait adventure: five hundred blazing oil wells point up an act of ecological terrorism on a scale not seen before even in this mad world. It gives the Iraqi leader what he wanted, too: increased oil prices. What a shame the alliance bombed his own oil industry to hell, and that his civil war prevents

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any restoration work taking place (or that reparations may sequester Iraqi oil income for the next twenty years). In the meantime, in Kuwait the incidence of respiratory disease rises steeply, flora and fauna go into rapid decline, and the skies remain darkened, as the three year (or more) task of extinguishing the fires begins. And further afield, the fishing industries of the Gulf wait to see what effect the massive oilslicks released during the war will have on their livelihoods, while black snow falls on the mountains of Nepal. One thing for sure: studying the effects of this madness on the environment of the Gulf (and beyond) will keep ecologists gainfully employed for years to come.

And all the while the feeling mounts that maybe, just maybe, Bush was wrong to stop the Allied troops on the road to Baghdad. Saddam's bully boy government still has the military might to crush civil disturbance, and thus prevent a change of leadership, even if his threat to other nations has vastly diminished. An Allied victory that deposed Saddam Hussein and left the way open for democratic government might, in the medium and long-term, have been more stable than the current volatile situation, whatever the short-term effect on Arab or Soviet opinion. It might be just that the White House didn't want a pro-Iranian Shi'ite government, of course. Not impossible.

Wot's Bin Did, And Wot's Bin Hid

What have I been doing while I've been away? Well, not a lot would be the immediate answer that springs to mind, though that wouldn't be the whole truth (and nuthin' but). No, what I have been doing is working (too much of that and the urge to pub yer ish kind of sidles off when you are not looking) and looking after an ailing wife, who has needed lots of support to keep her cheerful in the face of a sapping illness that has gone on for eighteen months now. She's still got problems, but manages to keep going on the daily round of work and home chores, only failing when it comes to leisure activities like walking (much reduced now) and cycling (disappeared altogether). I wish I could say that there was definitely an end in

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Bert Warnes (British proto-fan from the '30s). Bert co-wrote a piece (with George Airey) on Douglas Mayer for *Crystal Ship 14*. He died in February.

Also to Don C. Thompson (long-time fan and publisher of *Don-O-Saur*), who died in December.

sight to her suffering, but we live in hope. I've managed to stay healthy over the last year and a half, despite the pressure, though the lack of exercise is starting to make itself felt in the shape of a small (but annoy-

ing) spare tyre round my waist – or is that just middle age spread settling in?

I have managed to get stuck into the book pile while I've been off the fanning, though I'm nowhere near caught up on the ginormous backlog on the shelves. (I keep telling myself I'm stocking up for the inevitable col-

lapse of civilisation as we know it – when the printing presses stop rolling, I'll still have years of print to catch up on.) But there is plenty of good stuff around at the moment, so I'm adding to the pile almost as quickly as I read from it. My favourites of the past six months or so are as follows:

1. Mary Gentle: Rats & Gargoyles, one of the most original fantasies of the last ten years – I read it twice through straight off!

2. Joe Haldeman: The Long Habit Of Living, first novel for a long time by Haldeman, and apparently already lined up for a film.

3. Dan Simmons: Hyperion, a SF recasting of Chaucer that works brilliantly – shame it's only the first half of the story (grrrrrr!!)

4. Ursula Le Guin: Tehanu, a worthy addition to the Earthsea books, but you need to read it with the others to see the connections (quartet divides into 2 pairs).

5. Iain MacDonald: Desolation Road, a delight, coruscating SF brimming over with neat ideas and bright images. SF to rock'n'roll by!

6. Terry Pratchett: The Nomes trilogy (Truckers, Diggers, Wings), juveniles, I know, but a solid chuckle from beginning to end.

7. Geoff Ryman: The Child Garden, supreme SF, dazzling ideas, told superbly.

8. Greg Benford: Tides Of Light, sequel to **Great Sky River**, but excellent, full of thought-provoking incident and cliff-hanging suspense.

9. Gardner Dozois (ed): Best New SF 4 (in the USA, the 7th collection), a selection of SF/F shorts from 1989 that's full of amazing stories: it was

obviously a vintage year.

10. Robert B. Parker: Any Spenser novel – I've read loads of them this past year, and they are all marvelously tough private eye stories with wit and drive.

Another drain on the exchequer has been records (CDs are so expensive, but I'm hooked on them). Best of those as follows (not all new releases – sometimes it takes me a while to get around to appreciating someone):

1. Robert Cray Band: Midnight Stroll (marvellous urban blues, proof enough that it is not a dead artform.)

2. Neil Young & Crazy Horse: Ragged Glory (industrial guitar, killer vocals, great album)

3. REM: Out Of Time (lighter sound than usual, but still wierd)

4. World Party: Goodbye Jumbo (Ghod knows why, but I like it! Takes me back to the 60s, I guess.)

5. Georgia Satellites: In The Land Of Salvation And Sin (good time music, played with heart)

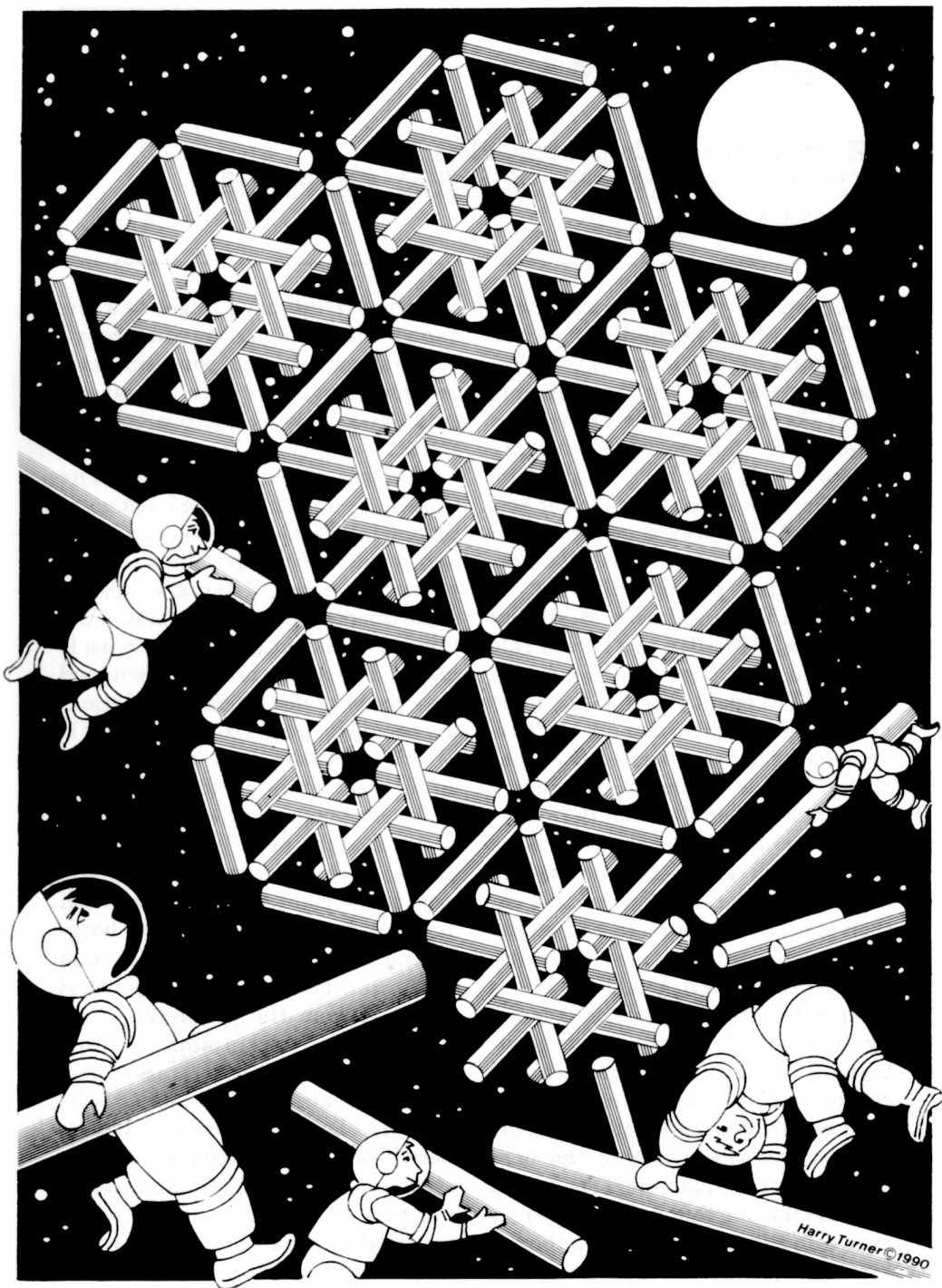
6. Band: Moondog Matinee (the Band do their favourite oldies – and you can really see where they were coming from)

7. Bo Diddley: Chess Masters (one of the seminal forces in sixties beat music – the tracks here are his best)

8. Living Colour: Time's Up (Living proof that there are black musicians who can rock)

9. Joe Ely: Live At Liberty Lunch (a good ol' boy who can really move your feet, with wit)

10. Mozart: Loads of it – mostly borrowed from the OU CD Library, symphonies, concertos, quintets, quartets – all great. I've steered clear of the vocal stuff, naturally.



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A column by Skel

Worth Series Consideration 2:

CLAP HANDS, HERE COMES CHARLIE

A couple-of-years-or-so ago one of the TV channels in the UK screened the Euston Films/Thames TV co-produced film **Charlie Muffin**, featuring David Hemmings as the eponymous hero. After this lapse of time my memory, such as it isn't, retained no specifics with regards to plot or setting. All I had was a general good feeling associated with the title. Fortunately that proved sufficient, so that when I chanced upon **Madrigal For Charlie Muffin** in a library sale I snapped it up. That was three weeks ago and I've spent much of the intervening time in the company of Charlie, seeking out and reading the other books in this series of Spy/Crime thrillers by Brian Freemantle.

Now one thing you have to be aware of with series – the hero is going to win. If you haven't figured this out then you are too dumb to be reading this fanzine, or in fact anything more complicated than basic treatises about cats sitting on mats or 'B' being for 'Ball'. I don't see any point in getting to know and care about a fictional character if they are going to fall to their death in the last chapter, and the best way of knowing that the hero comes out of the back end of this book alive is knowing that he subsequently goes into the front end of another. If knowing that the protagonist, some-

one you are intended to get to know and care about, is going to win through bothers you I suggest you skip these columns of mine entirely, and go and catalogue your collection of hair shirts.

As this series gets under way Charlie is an established agent of British Intelligence. A senior and once highly valued field agent he is now not a happy camper. After a couple of departmental debacles the head of the this particular intelligence service is replaced by a new broom determined to sweep very clean indeed, and one of the people he wants to sweep away is Charlie. Charlie is a constant reminder both of the previous, now discredited management, and of the inexperience of the new Director and the people he has recruited. Also, and more to the point, Charlie does not fit in. He is from a working-class background and has progressed through sheer ability. The new regime of course is from the privileged class, with a social background of Eton, Oxford, and the Guards. This in itself isn't the main problem, as Charlie worked well with the previous department head, Sir Archibald Willoughby, who came from a similar background, but who recognised and rewarded ability wherever he found it. The new Director and his associates however

feel that despite their relative inexperience Charlie should defer to them and know his place.

Charlie will have none of this and, being an inverted snob, rubs everybody up the wrong way by refusing to toady. and in fact comports himself just a hairsbreadth short of insubordination.

The new Director inherits an ongoing operation that Charlie has brilliantly put together, which results in the breaking up of a very important KGB spy ring in the UK and Europe. Charlie and two of the new men have to cross over into East Berlin in order to dot the 'i's and cross the 't's on a final aspect of the operation. The Director has also decided that the operation will be more successful, the Russians lulled into a false sense of security, if there is an 'incident' at the border and one of the agents, Charlie, gets shot trying to return. This has the added advantage that the new agents will take the credit for the operation and hence it will be presented as entirely due to the current administration. But things don't go quite as planned. The Director is simply the first of many men to underestimate Charlie Muffin.

From this one incident, and from an aspect of Charlie's character, the entire series follows with inexorable logic. People who cross Charlie Muffin must be made to pay. In the first book Charlie is crossed by his own department and by the close the Director is revealed as incompetent and forced to resign, as is his CIA counterpart who officiously dealt himself into the business. We of course, with our inside knowledge can see that in bringing this about, in revealing their incompe-

tence and engineering their removal before they could cause serious damage, Charlie is in fact performing a singular service to these intelligence agencies. The powers that be however take a less enlightened view of Charlie's 'treachery' and the innovative alliance through which it was brought about. Nor are they too happy at having inadvertently provided the funds to finance Charlie's early retirement. Both US and UK Intelligence now have Charlie at the top of their 'Most Wanted' list. You can see that they haven't properly learned their lesson, namely that you don't mess with Charlie Muffin.

Now there is a strange 'timelessness' about most true series. Events in an earlier novel may be mentioned in a later one, or characters may return, but generally the plots are 'stand-alone', and can be read in any sequence. This remains true even for this series, despite the fact that the events of one book virtually dictate the circumstances of the next. This is true because the events themselves, what happens, is never as important as how it happens. I'm not revealing in this piece for instance significantly more than can be found in the blurbs on the books themselves. Confirmation of this, I guess, can be found in the fact that they hooked me completely despite the potential drawback that I read them in a random order dictated by which ones happened to be on the library shelves on the day I called in for my fix.

Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie takes up the story two years later. Charlie isn't doing too well. The strain of being constantly on the run and the loss of his sense of self-worth brought

about by his inability to utilise his talents in some worthwhile endeavour has driven him to drink, dulling his instincts. He makes a visit to the grave of his ex-chief and friend Sir Archibald, where he meets the latter's son, a Lloyds of London underwriter. He is also spotted there by an agent of MI6 who was in position for just that eventuality. When they want you as badly as they want Charlie, they can be awfully patient. Meanwhile, not only are the two intelligence departments under new management, but so are both countries' governments, and the new incumbents of their highest offices are keen to see that they aren't embarrassed by any skeletons left in the intelligence closet by previous administrations. An example is to be made of Charlie and the CIA and MI6, humiliated by Charlie in the first book, come together again in another joint operation to seek both revenge and the restoration of their international credibility.

It isn't enough to just kill Charlie. He's to be an object lesson. He must be broken first, as must Willoughby the insurance underwriter who helped him subsequently, and the KGB must be discomfited too for their part in the events of the first book. First they engineer a robbery of the safety deposit boxes at the bank where Charlie had the bulk of his ill-gotten gains tucked away. The rest was invested with Willoughby, so an exhibition of Tsarist Crown Jewels is organised in London and it is arranged for the insurance cover to go to Willoughby's firm. The Russian jewels are then stolen, the idea being to sell them back to the insurance company, thus hitting Willoughby in the pocket, par-

ticularly his investors such as Charlie, who will be cleaned out, and then leaking the information on the international grapevine so that every country would know how the Russians had been used by British and American intelligence in pulling off this particular coup. The plan was foolproof... almost. How Charlie turned it around, had the various departments of officialdom at cross purposes with each other, how he effectively faked his own death, how the agencies lost even more agents and how their chiefs were once again humiliated and forced to take what they felt was a premature interest in the 'Situations Vacant' column..... is the story of this second book. Obviously they weren't paying attention back there when I said "You don't mess with Charlie Muffin".

What was also established in the second book was Charlie's business link with Willoughby, the insurance underwriter, which was to provide the basis and direction for the next three novels in the series, beginning with **The Inscrutable Charlie Muffin**. Being aware through his late father of Charlie's area of expertise, of his father's high regard for Charlie's abilities, and in need of help he approaches Charlie. In urgent need of capital Willoughby has underwritten insurance of a steamship, for lucrative premiums, that he can't cover. The ship is destroyed and when the claim is presented he will be bankrupted and disgraced. In desperation he turns to Charlie. He doesn't really suspect fraud, but he's a drowning man and Charlie is the only straw at which he can clutch. More years have passed and Charlie, partly out of a sense of obligation, and partly out of his own

need to utilise his abilities, agrees to go to Hong Kong to investigate the circumstances of the claim.

So now Charlie's up against Tongs and Triads, and there's a great sense of 'Just you guys wait!', as you watch these assorted crooks and sharks swimming around thinking they're going to make a meal of Charlie Muffin. Obviously Charlie is rusty, and inexperienced in insurance scams, but that's all the bad guys have going for them....and it isn't enough. Charlie creams 'em, pulling Willoughby's chestnuts from their five fathom fire. It also gets Charlie back up to speed, which is a good job because in the next book he has to be really on his toes.

A continuing theme of the Charlie Muffin books is that big and powerful (and unaccountable) organisations try to shaft individuals. Not as a matter of policy, but from expediency, and the appeal of the series is that in Charlie we have an individual who refuses to be shafted, a champion who fights back. The government can send me a Poll Tax bill, and there's nothing I can do but pay it, but if they sent Charlie Muffin one they'd be in Deep Shit. By the end of the book we'd have a Prime Minister from the Green party and Margaret Thatcher would be signing on at the Dole Office and asking Cecil Parkinson, behind her in the queue, "Who was that masked Insurance Investigator?"

In **Charlie Muffin's Uncle Sam** it's the FBI's turn to seriously underestimate Charlie. They're out to entrap a Mafia bigshot, and the cheese they parade for this particular mouse (who has philatelic tendencies), is an exhibition of stamps from the collection of the very late Tsar of Russia,

that said Mafia bigshot couldn't resist trying to steal. The plan is brilliant, and the only fly in the ointment is that a collection of such value must be insured for a staggering sum. The FBI's bad luck is that the Lloyd's underwriter that picks up on it is Willoughby, and he sends Charlie out as a relatively cheap way to protect his investment.

The sting was to be simple. Terrilli nicks the stamps, and the FBI nick Terrilli - but they can't do it without the exhibition, and Charlie gets suspicious and threatens to withdraw the cover, effectively shutting down the operation. So they make their most serious mistake. They modify the plan. Now they are going to nick Terrilli for knocking off the stamps and for killing Charlie. They didn't oughta have done that. Charlie gets mad. He improvises. He involves the Russians (on the strength of the Tsarist connection) who 'awaken' large numbers of Latino sleepers in the area (from their Cuban connection). In the ensuing mayhem the local police also become involved, and even the CIA are dragged into the picture. Lots of mobsters get dead. Lots of Cubans get dead. Lots of FBI agents get dead, shot by the Cubans, the mobsters, and the local law. The body count is phenomenal, the whole operation ends up a total shambles, and an up and coming Senator who saw his involvement in it as a path to rapid future advancement, and who crossed Charlie, ceased to be up and coming, and became down and going.

In fact the only people who haven't tried to stitch Charlie up so far are the KGB, at least not on a personal basis, but in **Madrigal for Charlie Muffin**

it's their turn to make the mistake of underestimating him. They have an agent that MI6, once more run by competent people, is very close to identifying. The KGB need to point the finger of suspicion at someone else, whilst at the same time muddying the waters. Knowing that by now the western intelligence agencies practically salivate at the mere mention of his name they decide to use Charlie Muffin and through his connection with Willoughby engineer his appearance on the scene, both to distract British Intelligence and also to point them in the wrong direction. It would have worked too, except for Charlie being Charlie. He works out who the traitor really is and though MI6 finally capture Charlie, he does a deal enabling the KGB agent to be turned and left in place as a conduit for disinformation, thus turning the tables on the KGB. He also impresses the new head of MI6, Sir Alistair Wilson, who knowing the background to Charlie's original 'treason' decides that the service might benefit from rehabilitating him. At least that's the deal as Charlie sees it, but unfortunately it's one where, having delivered his side of the bargain, he's totally at the mercy of the establishment.

Charlie Muffin & Russian Rose takes up the story just over a year later with Charlie in prison doing fourteen years for his 'treason', and apparently shafted yet again. Charlie in prison is just like Charlie on the outside; refusing to give an inch to the authority figures, whether they be official in the shape of nasty and malicious warders, or unofficial in the shape of the senior hierarchy among the prison's criminal element. Unfor-

tunately though, in prison Charlie is trapped. He simply doesn't have the room for manoeuvre that he needs, and he is becoming increasingly aware that it is just a matter of time before the machine crushes him in more ways than one, and he suffers a serious 'accident'.

At the behest of MI6 though he joins another 'traitor' in an prison escape and accompanies this latter all the way to Russia where the KGB, unaware of Charlie's rehabilitation, try to make use of him in training their agents, thus handing him on a plate the knowledge required to blow many of their future operations. The MI6 scheme fails precisely because Charlie is better than his bosses thought he was, but Charlie's individual success, along with the KGB provided bonus, makes for his successful return to the intelligence fold.

So with **Charlie Muffin San** we, and Charlie, have come full circle. Once more a trusted and valued intelligence operative Charlie is sent to Hong Kong again, this time to supervise the British end of the complicated defection of a KGB assassin (to the USA) and his Intelligence Analyst wife (to the UK...I told you it was complicated). Nor do the complications stop there. Charlie and his UK masters may have kissed and made up, but the CIA not surprisingly still bears a grudge, and when it comes to things of which one should beware, Greeks bearing gifts are not even in the same league as the CIA bearing grudges. Nor, as Charlie soon surmises, is the defection all that it 's cracked up to be. Things get so ravelled you might think it would take divine intervention to sort them out,

and if Charlie had sent a postcard home it would probably have read "Vishnu were here". But he doesn't grouch, even though in this caper Kali would have been more appropriate, for it'd take somebody with as many arms as said Indian deity to keep all the balls in the air, mend the fences, build the bridges, and at the same time prevent the CIA from slipping on a particularly humiliating banana-skin. Lucky it was Charlie on the job really.

With **The Run Around** you get the impression that both Charlie and the author are marking time. Sir Alastair's bureaucratic number two has ensured that Charlie has twice been passed over for salary upgrades and has finally got him suspended for fiddling his expenses, and Charlie has to set in motion a scheme every bit as machiavellian as anything he's ever done in the line of duty just to get his pay rises. The suspension though is set aside very early in the book when an exceedingly reliable KGB double-agent is forced to flee to the West, and reveals a tantalisingly incomplete piece of information. The Director briefs Charlie that there's to be a very public assassination...

"Who?" asked Charlie.

"He doesn't know."

"When?"

"He doesn't know."

"Where?"

"He doesn't know."

"How?"

"He doesn't know."

"Who's the assassin?"

"He doesn't know."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Stop it happening, of course."

Fuck me, thought Charlie. But

then people usually did. Or tried to, at least.

...and so far so good. A nice puzzle, but one which unfortunately is unravelled with a little too much ease, leaving the bulk of the narrative involved with the agencies' attempts to carry out or thwart the scheme. Well enough done, but you get the impression that of all the books only this one doesn't break new ground of some sort. In the end everybody wins and everybody loses, but Charlie manages to win a bit more and lose a bit less than everybody else. The Russians though end up with enough egg on their faces to make omelettes for the population of an entire seceding republic... which stimulates their appetite for a much colder dish. Charlie Muffin has got to go, and on the very last page we see the seeds which they hope will grow into Charlie's wreath. Roll on the next book. After all, his enemies haven't really got the better of him yet.

I guess there's one enemy Charlie couldn't beat though – the forces of reality, in the shape of that famous Russian double act Glas Nost & Perry Stroika (I used to think 'perestroika' meant 'two Irish soccer forwards' until I tried Smirnoff). Whilst reading the stories it's possible to forget that 'spy-fi' (as the blurbs so charmingly have it) has recently had the credibility rug yanked out from under itself. An untold number of authors must have suddenly discovered that they've wasted up to twelve months writing anti-KGB thrillers that the tides of history have left washed up and stranded on the beaches of literary fashion. I hope Charlie Muffin isn't one such piece of flotsam, but it's been a long time since **The Run Around**,

and the next book is definitely way overdue.

Bibliography:

Charlie Muffin (1977) – Jonathan Cape; **Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie** (1978) – Jonathan Cape; **The Inscrutable Charlie Muffin** (1979) – Jonathan Cape; **Charlie Muffin's Uncle Sam** (1980) – Jonathan Cape; **Madrigal for Charlie Muffin** (1981) – Hutchinson; **Charlie Muffin & Russian Rose** (1985) – Century;

Charlie Muffin San (1987) – Century Hutchinson; **The Run Around** (1988) – Century Hutchison

Some (if not all) of the earlier Jonathan Cape releases were subsequently reissued under the Century Hutchinson imprint. All books in the series published in paperback in the UK by Arrow. Alternative titles:

See Charlie Run (aka **Charlie Muffin San?**) **Charlie Muffin USA** (aka **Charlie Muffin's Uncle Sam?**)

Dave Langford **CRIMEWATCH**

For a long, long time I've had a crazed liking for both hard SF and "traditional" detective stories. It's easy to fudge up a few comments on how both appeal through a kind of intellectual *frisson* which rather too often involves ludicrous gimmickry. "My God, Holmes, you mean to say that the murderer escaped the hermetically sealed chamber using a sleight-of-hand trick which happens to be workable only on a gas giant orbiting an anti-neutron star with radar mirrors placed at the Trojan points?" Crime puzzles often hinge on offbeat snippets of science, while hard SF writers are addicted to mystery plots in which the hidden arch-villain is likely to be a recessive gene, a gravitational quadrupole interaction, or a dimensionless constant.

One admits guiltily that the frequency of addiction to either genre for

pure relaxation and entertainment is a hint that the "intellectual" bit may sometimes be a trifle spurious. Don Marquis said it: "If you make people think they're thinking, they'll love you; but if you *really* make them think, they'll hate you."

Nasty-minded people can find a confirming parallel in the tradition of enthusiastically amateurish criticism. Here for example is the much-respected Ellery Queen duo, whose **Queen's Quorum** (1951, revised 1969) makes familiar grandiose claims for its genre's antiquity (you know, the first detective story ever published was "The History of Bel" in the Apocrypha, etc) and explains the virtues of chosen "cornerstone" books in such terms as:

Melville Davisson Post's **Uncle Abner** is second only to Poe's **Tales** among all the books of detective short

stories written by American authors. This statement is made dogmatically and without reservation: a cold-blooded and calculated critical opinion which we believe will be as true in the year 2000 as we wholeheartedly believe it to be true today. These four books [the other three are by Doyle, Chesterton and Poe] are the finest in their field – the *creme due creme*. They are an out-of-this-world target for future detective story writers to take shots at – but it will be like throwing pebbles at the Pyramids.

You may begin to get the impression that the Queens sort of liked the Post book. If you were waiting for some actual justification of all that windy hyperbole, tough luck: as with so many paeans about the supreme and unsurpassable wonderfulness of cyberpunk (remember cyberpunk?), this level of critical analysis is all you get.

But then, I rather like trivia. One of the most fascinatingly useless books in my collection is **Locked Room Murders** by Robert Adey (published by Ferret Fantasy in 1979). This consists of a long numbered list of 1,280 books and stories about “impossible” crimes, with an appendix giving all the solutions. Some of these terse plot giveaways make pretty boggling reading, and often induce a powerful urge never ever to read the book. Here’s a selection of my favourites. These are the solutions only. What the problems were... is going to be your problem.

19. In one instance the victim had been killed earlier than had originally been thought the case. The other solutions... all depend upon the victims being hypnotised into doing things or believing that they had done them.

26. [The gold was] siphoned off through a dummy electric wire conduit.

64. Victim, while in bath, was tricked into handling a copper spider through which an electric current was passed.

That reminds me that one of Colin Wilson’s detective novels had an even nastier trick with an electrified beetle attached to a wall. The wall was made of porcelain and formed the back of a gents public lavatory. According the Watson, there is an almost psychological urge to *aim* for any foreign body such as a fake beetle... whereupon, *fzzzzzzt!* Something similar happened without any need for interposed beetles at the Eastercon in 1975, where the De Vere Hotel’s new nylon carpets charged everyone up to millions of volts and did fearful things to the virility of male fans who failed to earth themselves before visiting the loo. But let’s return to the list...

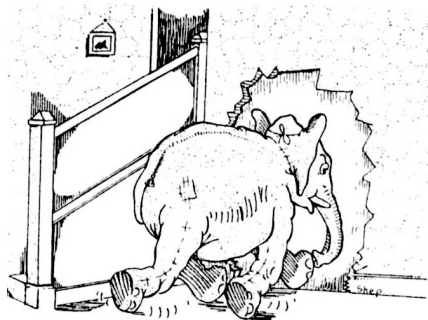
68. After killing, the murderer stepped into an incinerator and incinerated himself.

70. The body, still “alive” but in a state of suspended animation, was hidden in a false laboratory bench.

75. The killer, a midget, was still in the room hidden in a leather hatbox when the door was broken down.

91. The deaths were engineered by a person dressed as a werewolf...

100. The killer bought and left a block of frozen nitro-glycerine which exploded as the fishmonger attempted to



break it with his hammer.

131. The killer entered the house disguised as an elephant, and escaped down a secret tunnel which he later nailed shut...

132. Victim accidentally threw a live cartridge into a live electric light socket. The metal base of the cartridge melted and it was fired as though from a revolver.

139. The mask had been smuggled out in the pouch of a stuffed kangaroo...

146. A ventilator above the corpse was removed leaving a small hole through which an armadillo, rolled into a ball, was lowered. It proceeded to deface the dead man.

147. Murderers got past guard to victim by impersonating a horse.

366. The killer, an African pygmy, was hidden in a coal basket when the entrance was forced.

369. The victims were strangled by a hybrid creeper.

519. The victim was killed by the lid of the old Victorian bath in which he was sitting, which fell on him when he picked up a rigged loafah.

534. The jewels had been stolen by a trained white rat whose hideaway was a footstool with a false compartment.

540. Webs spun across the magnifying lense of a telescope by a pet Venusian spider caused brain damage to the victim when he looked through it...

542. The bus was hidden under a stairway with a secret opening.

574. The house was built around the corpse.

628. Victim strangled himself while under the influence of poisoned cigarettes.

634. Dagger was made from a plastic ashtray which after it had been used reverted on application of hot water (in a teapot) to its original shape.



683. The deceased had drunk whiskey containing a radioactive isotope before he entered the locked room. The whiskey had been considered harmless because the murderer had already partaken of it, but he had taken care to immunise himself before drinking.

706. The victim was being poisoned by a faulty central heating system and, in rising with desperate suddenness to escape it, struck his head on the pointed base of a chandelier.

I heard about another version of this cunning trick, in which the insidious gas filled the victim with such insane strength that, starting flat on his back, he leapt ten feet out of bed and impaled himself on a spike in the ceiling. Scotland Yard, I am reliably informed, was baffled.

787. The murderer wore a tartan kilt and blended in with the scenery.

855. A line was looped under the victim's armpits and was attached at the other end to a captive shark. When the shark was released it raced off and dragged the victim overboard.

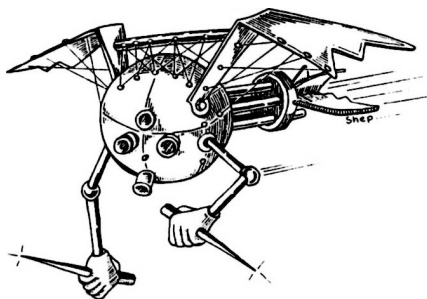
861. Victim is dehydrated, stuffed through the cell bars and then, once back inside, rehydrated.

889. The platinum dust was taken out in honey consumed by bees owned by the thief.

890. The murderer drank the water in which he drowned his victim.

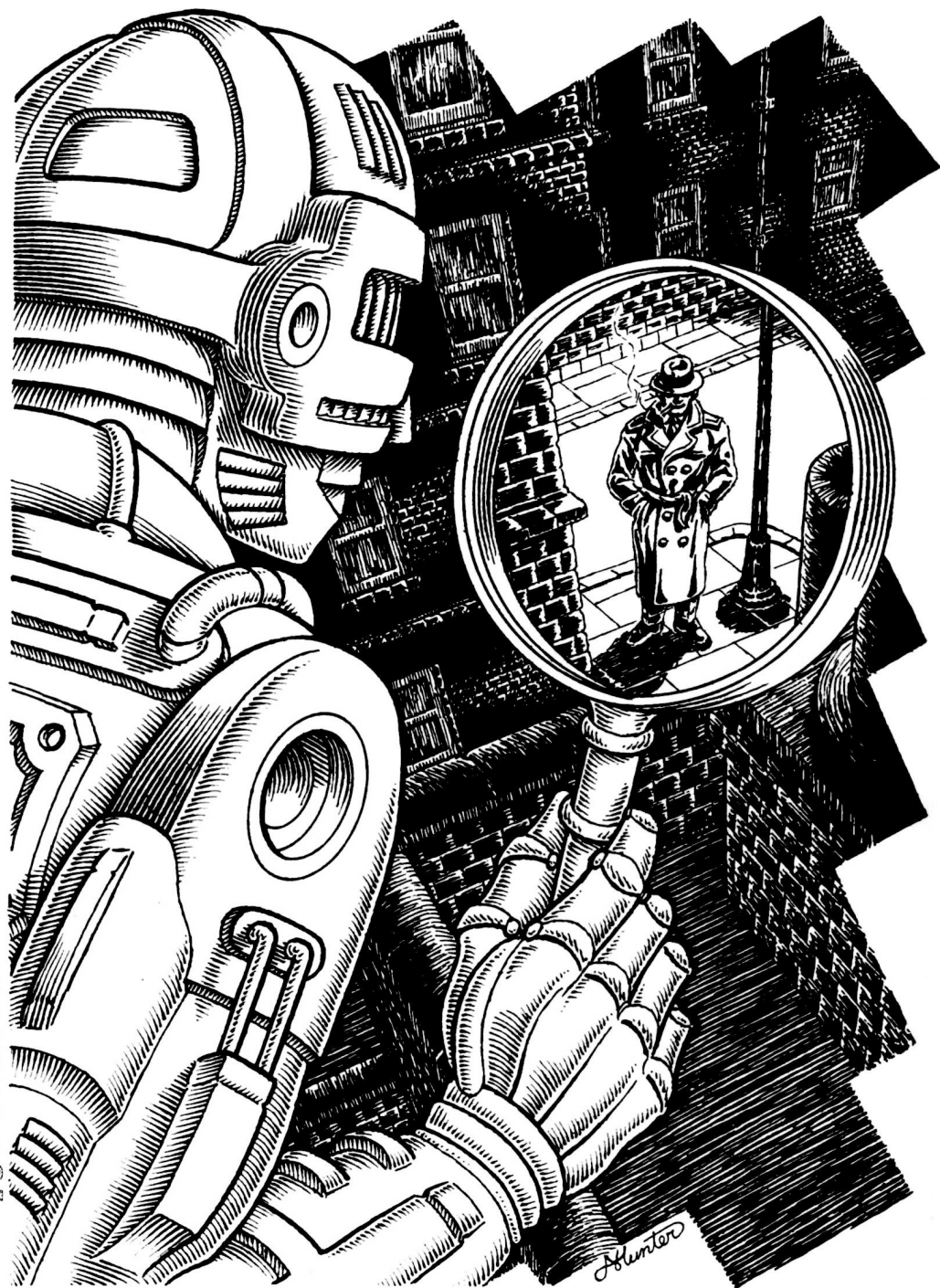
954. The victim, who had the peculiar habit of eating grapes from the wall-paper design, was poisoned by someone who knew of the habit and put cyanide on [them].

972. The stabbing was done by an already present diabolical floating machine which afterwards burnt itself out.



977. The poison had been administered by a red ant enticed by a scent on an envelope delivered to the victim.

The one glaring omission from this shortlist is, "Brain death was induced by reading a lengthy sequence of improbable gimmicks selected from Robert Adey's book by the fiendish criminal Dave Langford". It's a fair cop, guv.



John D. Owen

Robocops, Robodicks and the Fallacy of Isaac.

Isn't it strange how the imaginings of the SF writers and film makers are so far removed from reality when it comes to robots? Since SF writers began to dwell on the possibility of making machines that could act in place of humans, then the design of the robot has always been that of the humanoid, the direct replacement for a human, in size as well as form (discounting, that is, all the numerous pulp SF and Japanese cartoon monster robots, which are of but passing relevance). Even that master of SF, formulator of the Three Laws of Robotics, the good Doctor Asimov himself could not break out of the mindset that said "robot=human-shaped machine". All of the robots in his many 'robot' stories were humanoid, even when exploring areas of the Solar System as disparate as the surface of Mercury and the moons of Jupiter.

In the real world, however, robots are rarely in any way humanoid. Most robots used in factories are merely extensions of existing machinery, black boxes with hydraulic arms sticking out of them to weld car bodies together. They come in all shapes and sizes, dependant on the task that needs to be done. Recently announced is a project to build a surgical robot,

specifically designed to operate on the human brain with a greater degree of precision than is attainable by mere human surgeons.

Watching films like **Robocop** and **Short Circuit** confirms the view that the popular conception of the robot is still generally humanoid. Granted that Robocop himself is a cyborg, half-man, half-machine, the 'pure' robot in the film, the Enforcement Droid, ED209, while purposefully squat and mean-looking, nevertheless seemed to follow humanoid lines: two legs, bipedal movement (it even wiggles its toes!), a body-cum-head (no neck, but there are plenty of humans of similar composition), even arms (albeit ones ending in machine guns and rocket launchers). ED209 illustrated the major problem faced by designers when emulating the human chassis – making it small enough to follow a human downstairs. ED209 fails miserably, feet too big to use the stairs, and takes a tumble, ending up on its back, squalling like a baby. Like the Daleks in an old cartoon from years back, one feels that an invading army of ED209s would arrive at the first flight of stairs, look up at them and think: "Well, there go *our* dreams of world domination."

Johnny Five from **Short Circuit**, on the other hand is a much more practical machine (tripedal, tracks instead of legs), while still obeying humanoid principals (head, with eyes, torso, arms with hands), and designed for a similar purpose (ED209's mentor, after all, only saw law enforcement as a proving ground for what would ultimately be a military machine). As surrogate soldiers, I suppose the two designs make sense: as law enforcement officers they're a bit heavy-handed, and to fight crime properly (in the sense of solving crimes, collecting evidence on the perpetrators and arresting them) a much more subtle form of robot would be needed, one capable of a multiplicity of roles, not just the flush 'em out and blow 'em away principle of Robocop or ED209 (or Dirty Harry, for that matter).

Just think what you could do with purpose-built robot detectives. If you assigned a robodick to a case it could gather information in any number of disguises. Oh, not the tired old Sherlock Holmes ritual of false beards and make-up, but of total conversion to another form altogether, retaining only the central intelligence-gathering brain of the robot. Like those Transformer® toys kids are so fascinated by, a robot could enter a criminal's premises in a thousand different ways. As a vacuum cleaner, perhaps.

No, don't laugh – a vacuum cleaner could be a very useful disguise. If the criminal was suspected of being a drug dealer, a robot vacuum cleaner that analysed everything it was sucking up in the process of cleaning could detect signs of the drug in the dust from the carpet, sniff out the main stash, then call in the heavy mob – the Robocops

or the ED209s (as long as it was on the ground floor) – to make the arrest. Or it could do it straight away itself. Imagine the shock of being arrested by your own vacuum cleaner. Even worse if your state-of-the-art standard lamp joined in, having read your most sensitive documents over your shoulder!

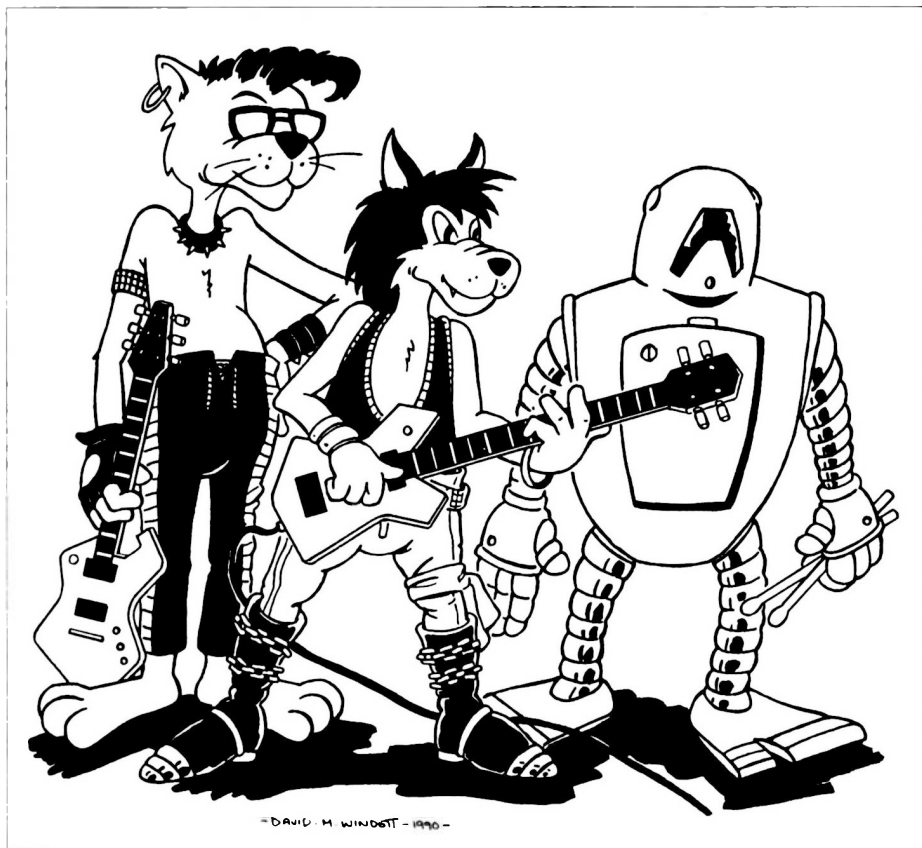
That's the trick, you see, with robot detectives: they can come in any size and shape. They don't have to have much of a brain, either, just enough to gather information and pass it back to some great detective AI stashed safely away back at headquarters, rather like that Rex Stout detective, Nero Wolfe. He solved cases from the comfort of his apartment, while consuming gourmet meals, having sent out his minions to gather information. That could be the real robot detective of the future: the Artificial Intelligence with a myriad component parts, that scurried around doing the mastermind's bidding. "Gather dust from the accused's apartment": off go the vacuums. "Bug his telephone": hell, the whole exchange can be an adjunct of the police department! "Read his mail": the standard lamps muster, or the photocopyers or the faxmachines, or even the microcomputer. Anything comes to light, no matter how irrelevant, and the info goes back to the AI, *zap!* into the database, which churns around all the time looking for correlating information to sew the case up.

You want to really bug the guy? Send a nanorobot in, to really get under his skin – he'll think he's been bitten by an insect, while all the time the nanorobot listens in to him, analyses his blood stream for illegal substances and maybe even administers a

knock-out drug if he commits a crime while the nanorobot is watching. The guy falls over, the nanorobot calls the big boys. They sweep up the body, recover the nanorobot, and feed the evidence into the AI judge at the courthouse. Before the criminal wakes, he'll be tried, convicted and delivered straight to jail. Such efficiency!

No, the worse thing you can do to a robot is build it in its master's form. The human body is versatile – it can do a lot of things adequately. But a robot doesn't need to be restrained to one shape: if you can swap components around, alter the shape while retaining the brain functions, it can become

much more versatile. By giving it lots of different add-on features (some of them capable of independent activity) the robot can become *more versatile* than man, restricted only by its available component parts. And for a law enforcement robot, that ability to modify appearance and function rapidly would be most useful: one minute it's the patient detective sifting the minutiae of evidence, the next an armour-plated unstoppable assault machine. I think I can guarantee, if they start building robots to my specifications, then the Mafia will *really* have to go legit to stay in business!



Andy Sawyer

Around The World In 80 Minutes

Your Spaceflight Manual by
David Ashford and Patrick Collins
(Headline, £10.95)

First Contact edited by Ben Bova
and Byron Preiss (Headline, £16.96)

Isn't it time we planned our holidays? Not the next fortnight in Greece or Spain, or even the round-the-world tour, but the OFF-world tour which we may well be able to take in twenty years time.

So suggest the authors of **Your Spaceflight Manual**, two consultants who have been trying to spread the word that there's life out there – or will be once the orbital hotels are in place. Far-fetched? Perhaps: but so were visions of passenger services by air in 1904, when none of the Wright Brothers pioneering flights had stayed airborne for longer than five minutes. Yet the world's first scheduled airline service was in operation by 1914, while wealthy socialites were paying large sums for the privilege of flying on the London-Paris Express by 1919.

David Ashford and Patrick Collins think that we could be at the beginning of a new era of tourism. If the governments which control present-day space research could be persuaded to replace missile-based non-reusable rockets with the "spacecab"-type of shuttle-craft described in their book, travel to and from orbiting space-stations could be made considerably cheaper and safer. Much of the technology for such a craft is already

theoretically available through the development of the present Space Shuttle and high-speed airliners such as Concorde. Eventually, say Ashford and Collins, the Spacecab could be cheap and safe enough to take passengers. "Cheap", they admit, is relative. At first, it would be only the super-rich who could afford to pay for a seat, but within twenty years "Spacebuses" and "Spaceliners" could be catering for a million passengers per year.

Since the book was published – and since this piece was first written – the first passenger, a Japanese journalist, took his seat in a spacecraft. By all accounts, the \$12,000,000 ticket was hardly a profitable investment for his employers, who apparently got less from sending a man up there to see for himself than they could have got from listening to a *Hawkwind* album. However, where one goes, another will follow; and especially if one filthy rich obsessive could persuade NASA to allow him to subsidise a flight: why, then a whole new industry could – well, take off.

Space stations could recover a considerable proportion of their costs by becoming orbiting hotels, where tourists could experience such delights as low-gravity swimming or gazing at the spectacular views of the Earth below; the varied patterns of land sea and cloud (as instanced in the book by some astonishing colour photographs). True, it would still be a luxury, but a luxury no more un-

thinkable than air travel was not long ago. Persuasively argued in language which covers the technology and economics involved without alienating the non-specialist, and comprehensively illustrated, **Your Spaceflight manual** offers a fascinating glimpse into the future – though will Space Traffic Controllers' strikes, long queues at departure desks, and – more seriously – even more opportunity for terrorist activity be a feature of this new industry? If you would take the risk, start saving now for quite definitely the holiday of a lifetime.

One question Ashford and Collins don't address is whether we're likely to meet *Anyone Else* out there. **First Contact** is a collection of articles and meditations on the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence (or SETI). Perhaps the greatest question faced by science, after that of how the universe began in the first place, is whether we share the cosmos with other forms of life. For many scientist, the answer is a firm "Perhaps. We don't know. But there's only one way to find out, and that is to look."

The joke about exobiology – the study of life outside the confines of our Earth – is that it's the only science so far without a subject matter. It's a joke, by the way, which exobiologists are careful to get in first, I interviewed David Brin shortly before he was about to address a conference on the subject. I'd even *written down* the joke to make sure I remembered it. And as soon as I mentioned the word... Bloody exobiologists!

Much of the activity of SETI is speculation on what *might* be the case – it's no coincidence that many of the scientist-contributors to **First Contact**, such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, David Brin and Gregory Benford, are also writers of science fiction. But it's speculation with feet on the ground rather than in the air. SETI projects typically involve the measurement of 'wobble' in stars to

detect any planetary companions or the painstaking analysis of electromagnetic signals from space – radio waves, microwaves and the like – to see if it is possible to discern from the mass of natural radiation any sign of artificially produced signals. Anyone coming along with tales about UFOs or evidence that aliens are drawn on Saharan caves is liable to be given short shrift.

First Contact asks some of the questions SETI workers are involved in. How could intelligent life develop elsewhere in the universe? What is the nature of intelligence? How would we recognise an alien signal? What should we do if we make contact?

As several of the contributors point out, the success or otherwise of these projects depends on whether they are able to detect anything, whether they are looking in the right places, whether other beings are signalling in the first place or whether there *are* other beings to signal. So far, none of the SETI projects have come up with anything other than some interesting possibilities which deserve a second look even though they are unlikely to be positive results. But the stakes are high, the argument for continuing with the search persuasive, and the editors have assembled a gripping series of documents which even include instructions for amateur involvement in SETI. But do be careful that those strange signals you've picked up aren't beamed from your local radion station...



Musings by Pamela Boal

Being A Live Wire Isn't All Fun

My son David and I are really very compatible souls yet when we pass each other the sparks literally fly. David or I will get the occasional tingly crackle when touching my husband Derek or my daughter Christine but real sparks flowing from one to the other only occur in this house twixt David and I. My other son, Steven, seems to be totally immune from the static bite that so affects his brother and I.

Touching wood is not a matter of superstition for me but necessity. If I don't thus discharge myself, a television, a radiator or any number of seemingly innocent objects, can shock me so severely as to leave my left arm numb for some time. Given my creaking joints, when I disrobe at night I am a one woman Son et Lumiere. This latter phenomenon occurs whether I'm wearing all natural fibres, all man made fibres or a mixture of both; the mixture gives rise to the greatest show.

Knowing my electric personality I'm always very careful to run an antistatic duster around my computer VDU and equipment before I turn the power on. Yet still I managed by a moment's carelessness to loose an entire afternoon's work, not to mention blowing my printer to the extent

that it was cheaper to purchase a new one than to get the damaged one repaired. I can't keep my office as dust free as I would like as I need to take periods of horizontal exercise every so often and have a bed in my office for that purpose. Somehow, despite my care, a piece of fluff floated on to my VDU screen, and without thinking I reached to flick it away. While my finger was still centimetres from the screen there was a flash and a crackle and the image on the screen dissolved into a kaleidoscope of little multicoloured squares. I turned off the power, had myself a quiet little nervous breakdown and turned everything on again. Happily the computer, the VDU and even the disc I had in the drive were all still working perfectly but my poor printer was as dead as John Cleese's parrot.

Yes I am aware of all the conditions of humidity, nylon fabrics, etc, that aggravate the problems. I'm also aware of the advisability of wearing rubber soled shoes and the availability of antistatic sprays. It's people rather than these known facts that interest me. Some of you may recall the Easter Convention (I think it was Coventry about thirteen years ago) which was enlivened by the new carpeting through out the hotel. Some

attendees, like our Steven, seemed immune, others, like Derek, get occasional shocks from the more obvious objects, while others like myself, unless standing isolated from every one and every thing seemed to be in the throes of Saint Vitus Dance. No I didn't check their footwear and as I spend most of my time suspended above four rubber tyres footwear may not be quite as relevant as personal physical idiosyncrasies.

There are pundits out there ready to pontificate on every environmental problem. Deep studies on the use of modern materials in office environments and their effects on the staff. All sorts of antistatic measures to be observed by every person in computer rooms. People eager to sell ionisers, bracelets to ward off rheumatism, gizmos to affix to cars to prevent the build up of static, which is believed to make some people car sick. The lists of gizmos and studies are endless. Yet I

have never heard of a study measuring my perceived differences in individuals all subjected to the same static inducing environment. If this difference is a fact does it have any effect upon the individuals' health? Can they, should they, take extra precautions? What causes this difference? One obvious clue is that David and I talk not only with our hands but our whole body where as Steven is a very still person.

It would be interesting to hear others knowledge and notions on this subject. Yes, scientific fact but hopefully some fun as well. How can we live wires help the energy crisis? Not to mention the esoteric; are healers controlled live wires who store up their static and deliver it at will rather than accidental discharge? Meanwhile, if any one out there has heard of a personal gizmo that would relieve me of the necessity to touch wood I'd be glad to hear of it.



Shipyard Blues 6

Cecil Nurse

Flogging A Dead Horse (or Fingering an elephant's asshole)

I come not to flog that horse 'nuclear energy' and its rider the dream of unending wastefulness. Its knees have already given way, its head is already on the ground, overcome by the smell of its own shit. The new road is not hi-tech but sly-tech, the clever, the clean, the small, no longer the gigantosaurus but the insect. I come instead to flog the 'huge bulk-food carrier', mentioned by Terry Jeeves (SB2) as second best to the sadly unattainable fusion-powered aircraft. Thus:

There are three necessary conditions for an HBFC. One is that somewhere there is an awful lot of excess food grown. The second is that there is somewhere else with an awful lot of excess people to be fed. The third is that the food-growers must have an incentive for going to the trouble of growing all that food. Each of these conditions are fulfilled at the moment, but each of them will cease to apply within my lifetime.

1. Excess Food. Generally this means the grain-basket of the US, vast sparsely populated plains whose natural richness has been plundered for the last 200 years by a few men and their machines. Three facts: a) in American agriculture, about as much energy is put *in* (by way of fertiliser

and fuel for the operation and manufacture of machinery) as is taken *out* in the way of crops. This makes it one of the least efficient forms of cultivation known to man. Rice cultivation in the East, by comparison, produces as much as eleven times what is put in. It also means that productivity is also entirely dependent upon the input of petrochemicals. b) Monoculture is desperately bad for the soil. Something like 65 billion tons of topsoil wash off the American plains into the sea every year and, according to some experts, most of it will be gone by 2020. c) The US has started to import food, that is, its population has gone up and its agricultural productivity gone down enough to be running a deficit. Who is supposed to grow surpluses, then? Europe has mountains of certain foods, and is also very heavily populated, and also imports vast amounts of food grown on land in the (starving) Third World.

2. Excess people. Most of the population growth that now plagues Third World countries dates from after WWII. We are not looking at or suffering from some long-standing problem, but a problem of recent provenance that people have not yet fully grasped. Thus the many hasty food-aid and technological packages (band-aids)

that only now are being found to be and to have always been counter-productive, contributing to the collapse of local livelihoods in food production and the introduction of techniques that provide a boost in income for a few years then die a horrible death. Desertification is intimately linked to over-population, just as a wolf-pack starves if it kills too many deer, and the process has been aggravated by inappropriate technology imported from the West. It will no doubt always be the case that there are a few who eat well while the rest starve, but over-population is simply unsustainable. To put it bluntly, excess people die off; there is no other way around it.

3. The trade in food makes money, at the moment. That is, to pay off their huge foreign debts Third World countries sell their raw materials (including food) in order to buy food. As they start to run out of money, as they are now doing, the day of reckoning is put off by giving them food (the exporting farmers are sponsored by their home governments).

Somewhere along the way, someone is going to wise up. "Hey", that person will say, "I can't eat money! I can't eat technology! I don't think I want to sell you my food anymore." No exports, no imports. The free-food trade collapse, among other things.

Am I being cynical? An international trade in food is an anomaly, not least because the transfer of nutrients off the land (to cities, to other countries) impoverishes that land in the short or long term, and because the control of food supply as a life-and-death matter for food consumers and not happily left in the hands of others. How will the nutrients that HBFCs

transport across the world to be returned to the soil? Who will control that trade? At the moment the nutrients are restored with fertiliser, and the West controls the trade, but this is only because the rest of the world is in shock. One generation is not enough to terms with disaster.

Just think about it. If "the world" were really compassionate enough to grow megatons of food to feed people elsewhere just because they ought to have food, it would be compassionate enough to import the food where it grows. Doesn't happen. HBFCs demand a future world where vast populations without food in one place are fed by vast amounts of food grown in another, a world where vast tracts of land are empty of everything except farm machinery while people are crammed into cities or kept at bay on other continents. Interesting thesis for an SF novel, and maybe not even a not-too-inaccurate picture of our present-day world, but hardly grounds for praising the nuclear technology that might make HBFCs possible. On the contrary, grounds for finding ways to make that technology unnecessary. Still, even an elephant's asshole might look beautiful if you ignore everything else about it.



Steve Palmer

CARTELS

A curious thing happened last week. Texaco reduced of their petrol by a few pence during the Gulf Crisis (as it is uniformly called by the media). This struck me as odd. The multinational oil companies were accused of profiteering and one of them actually responded.

Why do the world's oil companies occupy the position that they do? I think the answer to this question is power.

Two sorts of power are exerted by these bloated companies; reciprocal and conditioned power. These come about because the companies have access to two sources of power: property in the form of oil, and organisation in the form of company institution.

With their oil the companies can exert power over people in a reciprocal manner, giving them what they need, petrol, in return for submission to their purposes. With their organisation they can condition people into accepting things as they are without complaining.

The reciprocal form is particularly potent in the case of oil companies since they preside over a captive market. Petrol is considered by the majority of the population to be an essential product, largely because the car is such a convenient invention,

and this allows oil companies to wield tremendous power over petrol consumers. If cars were less important to people, if they were less entrenched in Western life, so the power wielded by the companies would be less.

But in my opinion the conditioning practised by these companies is even more potent. One method of conditioning is simply to deny that there is any form of cartel operating; to deny that power is exerted over people. It would be expected that this was a pretty poor form of argument, merely pushing aside the problem, but in fact it is efficient that very reason; people find it hard to imagine that a small number of giant corporations are fleecing them for every penny they can grab. When 'rational' arguments are added, the conditioning becomes tougher. Then there is the 'facts' argument; the companies mention that they have to keep minimum stockpiles, that they have to increase prices at no notice because the oil market is such an uncertain one, and so on ad nauseum.

The other conditioning argument used by the oil companies to prove that they are not operating a cartel is the argument from capitalism. Ah, the companies say, we are not operating a cartel because we are all subservient to the market, and the market decides what prices shall be asked for petrol.

Cobblers, I reply. Capitalism says that competition is the mechanism which ensures that monopolies do not emerge in markets. But there is manifestly no competition at all amongst the various companies; if one company puts up its prices for petrol, the others follow suit instead of remaining put to achieve competitiveness. In addition, it is quite untrue to say that the oil companies are subservient to the market; rather they create the market themselves. It exists in the image they want.

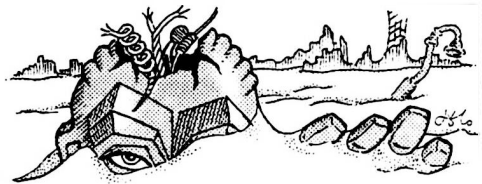
One other argument put forward by the oil companies is the recent investigation into petrol prices which concluded that there was no cartel in operation. Though I have not seen this report, I understand that it was interested in facts, precedents etc. It did not seem to occur to the investigators that such a cartel need not be a physical entity, a covert operation, and was instead an understanding based on the childish old-boy rules of a few rich men.

Oil companies are superb at exploiting people for their own ends. The Green boom allowed them to make absurd claims about lead-free petrol being good for the environment. Carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and unburnt hydrocarbons were all conveniently forgotten. And now we are bombarded with gift offers – a nice little earner for the oil companies, who don't want to give us cheaper petrol, and who no doubt get their glasses and fluffy toys at prices so low you would need a microscope to see them.

What can be done to disempower the oil companies? Not a lot, mainly because people don't care at the

moment, don't feel as though they have any effect, and anyway can't be bothered. There are three possibilities. The first is to set up organisations to challenge the companies – there are some motoring groups that do this, but in comparison with the might of the companies they are woefully inadequate, in part because they have so many other concerns. The second is to show what the companies are doing, but again this requires organisation and the will to exert power; to a certain extent the Green Party and environmental groups are doing this. The third is quieter and long-term, but in this age of environmental concern has more potential, and that is to hit the companies where it hurts and not buy petrol, or at least buy less. Don't use the car on short journeys when the engine guzzles fuel, etc, etc.

The chances are, of course, that the oil companies will lose power when the oil runs out rather than before it runs out. Since the purpose of these companies in wielding power is to extract as much money as possible from trapped car-users (though, of course, management likes wielding power because this is the only act that makes sense in their lives), and since everybody has much the same aims in life, they are not likely to be stopped. Are they?



Dorothy Davies

We Have Four Minutes.....

The stunningly beautiful girl came through the gates, a handkerchief held to her eyes. She sat on the wall, sniffed a few times, then thrust the handkerchief into her bag with a determined gesture. She stamped her foot and marched off down the High Street. An elderly lady approached her.

"Are you all right dear? I thought you were crying."

"It's all right," said the girl, "we're making a film."

The Director standing behind his camera looked at his assistant.

"And the guy who got between you and her looked right into the lens!" The assistant was obviously irritated. The star got into the back seat of the Mercedes, next to me.

"Why does he want to film me in a summer dress on a cold day and warm clothes on a hot day?" she asked.

I shrugged. "No accounting for men, is there?"

Outside on the pavement, the assistant was endeavouring to move a board advertising guided tours around the Oxford Universities. A yellow notice about parking was somewhat intrusive, and the board would have done a good job of concealing it, but the guide came storming out and put it back.

"What's going on?" Red faced with anger, he confronted the director who

was standing by the side of a tripod which held a very large camera.

"We're making a film" said the Director, with admirable calm in the face of such an obviously silly question.

"What about?" demanded the man.

The star and I burst into a fit of giggles.

"Tell him!" she called out. We don't know what the Director said. The truth was, we were working on the opening scenes of a blue movie which I had just written. I had been offered the chance to go along and see some of the filming and act as Location Manager. I didn't say no.

(Actually it was surprising the star was doing so well with her acting. Earlier she had gone shopping, escorted by the assistant, who spotted the butchers in Oxford's Covered Market.

"Did you see **Watership Down**?" he'd asked her. "Well, there's the cast."

"Disgusting!" she came back into the Randolph Hotel to relate the story, swearing she was turning vegetarian.)

Oxford is a city of contrasts. Expensive shops vie with Macdonalds; universities sit uncomfortably alongside stationers and Gas Board showrooms. Expensively dressed people walk the pedestrian precincts alongside people who look as if they have

bought their clothes from Oxfam (and probably have).

In the luxury of the Randolph, the star puts on her elaborate makeup and slipped into her revealing summer dress.

"People will stare at me." She applied another slick of lipstick.

"Don't worry about it" I assured her. "Oxford is full of strange people."

"Don't tell her she's strange!" shouted the Director.

I tried again. "Some of the students wear strange clothes, no one will look at you."

Another mistake. Anyone that beautiful wants to be looked at – much more of this and I'd be sure not to be asked out on location filming again!

"In a city like this, anything goes." No one said anything. I sighed a sigh of relief.

The Mercedes rolled majestically out of the Randolph car park and began a sweep search of Oxford for locations. Yellow lines, single or double, appeared to be invisible; the solid Mercedes wheels sat on the regardless. The assistant hurried around with cables and equipment pulled from the capacious boot while the Director directed.

"You just walk along there, sweetheart, stop at the shop, push your hair a bit and walk on."

When she did it for a second time, the people in the shop began to stare. So did the people in the street. Fortunately the one person who didn't stare was the traffic warden; after writing a ticket for every parked car he could find (except the Mercedes) he marched off in a different direction, leaving me wondering whether the yellow lines were indeed invisible under the Mer-

cedes' wheels.

"Lincoln University?" someone asked the assistant.

"Pass."

The man walked off, laughing. No one took any notice of *him*.

On to the High Street, and more filming. And another audience. I watched, wondering if this was indeed the city where **Inspector Morse** was filmed, where the Comic Strip wreaked havoc, where many others had come with cameras and stars since Oxford and the film industry had discovered one another. Or was it that Oxford people never got used to the sight of a camera?

"River, I want some river, and scenery." The Mercedes swung across the street, the Director acknowledging another driver allowing him to continue. The guy had no choice, we were blocking two of the three lanes...

"Look at the bikes!" The assistant hadn't been to Oxford before, city of potholes and bikes. "They've got targets on them for you to hit them!"

"I want that." The car swung down the side of a bridge, the electric window purred down, a ticket extracted. The barrier swung up, we were through. All the equipment came out again.

"Two hours filming and I've not seen any tits," moaned the assistant. I said nothing. In the first place I was only the writer of this potentially Oscar-winning piece of film history, and in the second place...

Well, it was bloody cold...

Twenty minutes later, after the star had walked onto the bridge more times than Captain Bligh, all the equipment was once again stowed and we tried to leave.

"£5!" shrieked the Director. "Damned if I'm paying £5 to park!" Someone should have noticed it was a hotel car park. The assistant tried pretending he was a car, leaping up and down on the pad. It didn't work. The he had a brainwave. With much waving of hands he directed us backwards and forwards until the car was in precisely the right position; then with an Incredible Hulk display of strength, he forced the barrier up just enough for the Mercedes to slide under...

Back around Oxford.

"I see a bridge!"

"No, that's the skating rink!"

"Looks like a bridge..."

"More river!" demanded the Director.

"Magdalen Bridge" I suggested, producing my torn-from-Yellow-Pages street map of Oxford and passing it over to the assistant. I hate navigating, especially from the back seat. I can't read maps, either.

I said "Maudelen Bridge" – the assistant said "Magdalen Bridge." With pronunciation like that, I hoped we wouldn't have to ask our way...

Magdalen Bridge was no go, scaffolding and wood everywhere, massive appeal boards for renovation funds.

"I know what we'll do." The Mercedes did it's 'please let me cut across your path' move again, and got away with it.

We parked in the road opposite the Randolph Hotel. Don't tell anyone, but that's where the original script started, until the Director said he wanted somewhere prettier than that. Now the Randolph was all right, red buses and all, for our American cous-

ins.

We attracted a crowd of French teeny boppers.

The star was required to walk across the road, climb the steps of the monument, and sit down. Completion of this small move was met with whistles, screeches and applause. Every one of the six times she did it.

Perhaps the French aren't used to people making films, either.

Cold and tired we all tumbled back into the car and drove around the block. A woman in a long flowing black cape crossed the road in front of us.

"Where's Robin?" the assistant shouted out of the car window.

The star turned to me.

"I see what you mean about the way people dress."

I was glad people had looked at her; she could do with the publicity, all actresses can.

We all collapsed in the hotel room, waiting for Room Service. The Director looked at me.

"Well, we have four minutes" he said, looking pleased.

And I thought – only another 96 to go...



Loccin' The Blues

[A bumper loccol this time – the delay in production allowed more locs to come in, and I've had even more blood on the floor than normal, and still come up with a huge loccol. With all this post-literacy, illiteracy, etc around, I'm surprised to find so many can still write so well. What a good place to start!]

Post Literate Reaction

Joy Hibbert: 6/8/90

Literacy, whatever prefix you attach to it, implies, to me, a state of "being (or not being) able to". What you are talking about when you discuss post-literacy is "not wanting to". Of course, we were nearly all discouraged from reading as a hobby, going by what other people have written, "get your nose out of that book and go outside and play". These days it would seem that people discouraged from reading go and watch telly instead, and perhaps this is exacerbated by the perception that outside is a less safe place for kiddies to be than it was in the past.

...I think you miss an important point about visual vs written information. Visual materials have a greater gut level impact. The message in a visual image is more likely to be assumed true than the equivalent written down. When it is being assumed true, its opposite is being assumed not true. A picture is worth a thousand descriptive words; a picture is worth a million persuasive, well crafted words. (11 Rutland Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, ST1 5JG)

Kev McVeigh: 7/8/90

I'm not sure precisely what "functional illiteracy" means, but let me tell you about a guy I know who is in his early forties and last read a book when he was sixteen. He says he can't afford newspapers either, so whilst he can read, he doesn't. He has never heard of most comics beyond **Batman**, and hasn't had a TV for several years. This is surely post literacy, but the effects are identical to illiteracy as far as I can see.

The most disturbing aspect is his opin-

ion that my friends and I who read regularly and talk about books are narrow-minded elitists. His conviction that my conversation is restricted to SF and Pop music betrays his own inability to communicate even passively as he neglects the discussions of football, cricket, politics, film, theatre, drug culture, history and travel, and fails even to realise that there is a wider range even within our talk of pop music (Joan Baez, Sonic Youth and Dread Zeppelin, anyone?) than in his entire conversation.

That is my criticism of him. How do I help him (or more probably the next generation before they become set in their ways)? I could lend him books, but he simply isn't interested, he ridicules the idea. I try to talk to him but he sneers at the idea of knowledge per se being interesting. He isn't unintelligent, he is quite simply apathetic, or perhaps even antipathic towards anything literate or creative.

Comics, on the other hand, are widely regarded as encouraging an early literacy because 'readers' want to understand the captions.

What might be very interesting to see would be a study examining the decline (if there is one) of advanced literacy which television may have caused. It seems as though most people *can* read, at least to **The Sun/Sport** level, but very few read further. (37 Firs Road, Milnethorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF)

Mark Nelson: 13/10/90

With the ever-increasing pace of technological progress, the emergence of a new post-literate class will change society. In theory, the ability to access more information from a wider source than ever before should lead to a more informed public better able to tackle complex issues... In practice, of course, this new information media will be aimed at the lowest possible level to access the biggest possible market.

[Such cynicism of the media marketplace is, of course, totally justified.]

Terry Broome: 5/8/90

We're living in a largely post-numerate society. Calculators and computers do most of the routine stuff these days. Head and pen calculations are no longer necessary in most areas of life/work, and few people – including me – could do their sums without aids. I was never very good at maths and you really do need to do be better organised than I am to keep neat and accurate records. You are right, we're now moving solidly into a period of post-literacy too. When both are viewed in conjunction like this you have to question why. Is it because we now have machines to take these chores off us, and hence as we grow more reliant on them for news and information we become less able to live without them as we lose our numerate and literate skills. We're becoming a post-numerate and post-literate society because these are the skills we *have less need of*... This is a symptom of an advanced tool-using culture: its increasing dependence on Mother Industry. Which means it is becoming increasingly precarious for Mother Nature. The prescription is, of course, a return to grass roots, in a very literal sense. Mother Industry must go. To use Moorcock's 'Multiverse 'Scales of Balance', Order (Man) and Chaos (Nature) or Yin and Yang. We've now gone so far along the line towards order we're becoming unstable and could slip into utter chaos (or Nature). Total control can only last a short time... look at chaos theory and you'll see why. It's a great idea to apply to politics, anthropology, etc. (4 Zermatt Street, Chapel Allerton, Leeds, LS7 3NJ)

Steve Jeffery: 11/10/90

Things may come, and things may go, but the post literacy debate goes on forever.. I must admit, when I first saw Alan Moore's comment on graphic novel as being a 'valid post literate Art Form', my immediate response was 'What?', and the distinction between illiteracy and post literacy failed me...

Lawrence Watt-Evans letter (8/5/90) makes a valid point, in that illiterates don't read, period, although I'm not sure about the maths he brings to bear in support of his point. The figures themselves seem reasonable, and colleagues in the US tell me that functional illiteracy in the shop floor

workforce is (to UK ears) alarmingly high, so 10% would be a reasonable estimate.

Personally, when I see the variety of books on the returns shelves each week at the local library, I feel more confident about the reading habits of the general public than the prophets of doom and the decline of literacy would have us believe.

A similar situation seems to be reflected lately in the scramble in the computer world for a virtually 'text free' operating system, with the promotion of one or another of the various GUIs (graphical user interfaces, or 'gooeys'? – about as appealing as they sound). No longer will we need to remember such obscure commands as COPY to copy a file from one place to another, instead we can chase a pointer all over the screen, Pacman style, using a mouse, select a picture of a file, and drag it across to another picture of a disk. Such is the progress of computer literacy that comics and graphic novels now seem positively highbrow literary forms because they still use words.

The fun of this comes in the justification of such pictorial interfaces as being targeted to senior managerial staff, to protect them from the difficulty of having to cope with any text on screen or from a keyboard. There seems to be a generally acceptance that senior managers somehow become functional illiterates when faced with a computer, and therefore need such a 'Janet and John' interface, while secretarial staff have the necessary skills for such a taxing task.

Presumably the current phrase GUI was chosen because the older acronym 'WIMP' (Windows Icons Mouse and Pointer) was felt to be too appropriate in this case.

As they used to say in the music halls: 'If you can't applaud – just throw money..' (44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxford OX5 2XA)

[Now there speaks either a mainframe man, or an early PC fanatic – the main benefit of a GUI interface, Steve, is the reduction in training time (you don't have to teach the arcane language of MS-Dos) and, when properly done (ie, Macintosh rather than early MS Windows), consistency between different programs (ie, you don't have to learn X number of different sets of commands, only one.)]

Matthew Freestone: 16/9/90

I don't believe that control of TV will have the influence you suggest. What a Government needs is not control of the images people receive, but control of how they interpret those images. Take a simple example: a scene is broadcast in the news of the leader's rapturous reception by cheering crowds when she visits a certain town. The scene is watched by a supporter of the leader's party, who sees in it the confirmation of the rightness of her views. It is seen by a dissident, who believes it shows the foolishness of the herd who follow the leader. And it is seen by a party official who believes it shows the cleverness of her party in manipulating the media, for she hired the crowd earlier in the week.

I'm not saying that television cannot influence people's views about anything, but I do not believe it can alter their deep-seated convictions, since the images received will be interpreted in the light of those convictions. (*Grosvenor Lodge, Scothern Lane, Sudbrook, Lincoln, LN2 2QJ*)

[Moving on now to the biggie – the response to Ken Lake's piece on Tribalism]

Troubling the Tribes

Jim England: 24/11/90

Ken Lake's erudite article seems to be saying, at some length, that Tribalism is OK. I looked in the dictionary and found "tribe" to be defined as a "group of (primitive) families under recognised chief and usually claiming common ancestor". But the word can, of course, be used loosely to refer to almost any group of people with something in common. Readers of SB belong to the "tribe" of people who read SB, in this sense. English-speaking people belong to the "tribe" of those who speak English in Britain, Australia, Canada, the USA ("divided" from us by a common language) and anywhere in the world. Despite speaking Spanish, the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of the USA belong to the "tribe" of people living in the USA.

What I am saying is that it is not possible any longer to keep members of all tribes together, separated from other groups by forms of apartheid. The groups intermingle and it would take an impossible Maxwell's

demon to unmix them. Suppose we have someone speaking English with a Yorkshire accent, whose mother is a Jew, whose father is Hindu, but who is himself an atheist, a reader of science fiction and (say) a keen philatelist. Where would you put him so that he would be in the appropriate "tribe"? If there were no others with similar background, belief and interests, he would not have a single tribe.

Suppose we narrow the meaning of "tribe" so that we have something closer to the original meaning. Let's say the world is divided into discrete tribes A, B, C, D and so on, each with its own recognised chief or ruler, its own language, religion and system of laws. I can imagine Ken saying: that would be fine so long as neither tribe decides to invade the territory of another; let them do what they like so long as they don't interfere with *us*. One can imagine an ideal world in which people can choose which of a great number of tribes to belong to, which country to live in, like selecting a number out of a phone book. ("Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.") But in the real world it is not (and probably never will be) like that.

What will we have instead? In country X, there will be an absolute dictatorship, with cruel and unusual punishments for anyone who steps out of line, nobody allowed



to leave. In country Y, a bunch of people will run things with terrible inefficiency, so that a large proportion of the population will be starving or dying of disease at any given time. In country Z there will be a supposed theocracy in which nobody knows the truth because they are all taught a load of crap from year dot, barred from listening to foreign broadcasts, expected to engage in sacrificing children to the "gods" every full moon whilst wearing funny hats... And you name it, it will happen.



Can we really say, as tribalists or nationalists, that we have no concern for what happens in the "internal affairs" of other "sovereign" tribes or nations – whether it is torture, bungling, the spread of disease, lies, pollution? (Think of the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer, the testing of nerve gases or atomic weapons.) We surely can't. We all belong to the human "tribe". When the bell tolls for other guys it ties for us. Ethics and idealism need not be dragged into it: only enlightened self-interest. The whole idea of "sovereignty" needs to be re-examined in the same way as the old "Divine Right" of Kings. Otherwise we are all dead. (*Roselea*, *The Compa*, *Kinver*, *W. Midlands*, *DY7 6HT*)

Andy Sawyer: 11/8/90

Ken's piece was interesting, but what defines a "tribe"? A linguistic group? A religious group? Ethnicity? Are the travellers on their way to Stonehenge every year, who defend themselves in "tribal" language, a tribe? Can people belong to more than one tribe? Events in the Middle East (again) would suggest so. Thinking about nationhood – what is a nation but the hegemony of a superior tribe? Could Ken's vision of a federation of tribes hold up, or would the larger tribes start expansion again? I'd add the rider, if such a system were in operation, that no tribe would be granted "status" unless its members were also members of other tribes – so that, for example someone of particular national origins would have much in common with non-nationals who followed the same religion – or some other trans-national cohesive bond. But tribalism itself is too elusive a concept. Is there an English tribe? In terms of the perceived hegemony of the English over the Scots, Welsh, Irish, perhaps, but what about the famous North/South divide? It's not that long since the cultural divisions between geordies and cockneys were almost enough to warrant talk of different countries; perhaps they still are. Tribalism is an interesting concept to work with, and its of great use when we're thinking of those "unofficial nations" such as Scots, Basques, Bretons, Kurds who live within and between major nation-states, but I think it does tend to overlook certain factors in society. I think it's a pity, for instance, that with the so-called "decline of communism" the concept of class as defined by Marx is being shrugged away as irrelevant, but by definition, Marxist socialism is one of these trans-national groupings which offer people more than the tribal. It seems to me that people want more than just to be "members of small, inward looking tribes" and that the aggressive defensiveness of tribalism can often outweigh the benefits of the cohesiveness it brings. (*1 The Flaxyard*, *Woodfall Lane*, *Little Neston*, *South Wirral*, *L64 4BT*)

Bruno Ogorolec : September 3, 1990

What made SB5 particularly good for me was Ken Lake's piece on tribalism. Ken has pinpointed the tribal nature of human-

kind quite accurately. In his shoes, however, I'd be a trifle less confident in my ability to devise The Answers to global problems. The simplistic and self-contradictory "solution" he has offered detracts from the article.

He ignores all the various causes of intertribal strife to concentrate solely on the oppressive nature of national governments. The recognition by the United Nations would be a pleasant balm for hurt tribal feelings but nothing more than that. As for strife, it would just get localized – instead of world wars we'd have hundreds of small-scale Soweto-sized bloodbaths. Perversely, the Mutually Assured Destruction (to the considerable dismay of knee-jerk leftists) seems to have been a better barrier to strife than anything else we've been able to come up with so far, including the *laissez faire* tribalism.

The latter – according to what little history I know – flourished on the North American continent before the European colonization. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the American Indians waged an almost perpetual warfare among their tribes, despite the fact that the continent was sparsely populated, offered ample natural resources to all, and no national governments existed to spoil tribal fun and games.

What's needed is not a new organizational principle for the United Nations; we need cultural progress. We have to learn to respect the other guy's need to be different. Alas, you cannot make that happen by decree and/or organizational charts. It has to grow incrementally, step by painful stumbling step over the centuries. (*Kopernikova 10, 41020 Zagreb, Yugoslavia*)

Kev McVeigh: 7/8/90

Ken Lake (as he often does) confused me. My first reaction was to accuse racism, then I wondered if he was. In the end, and bearing in mind his loc professing a love of controversy, I decided on an open verdict, but felt that either way his conclusion was ultimately negative. He also made an error talking about Scots independence – the people of Scotland voted *for* devolution, but the poll was fixed in advance with an arbitrary hurdle which was not reached.

Ken neglects too, the fact that after 1992

British people will be entitled to live anywhere in Europe in the same way that any European may live in Britain. This, to me, leads to the ultimate ideal of any human being allowed to live anywhere on Earth. Ken may say this is unrealistic but it is far more hopeful than his fragmentation view.

Take his hypothetical Year X declaration by the UN; I am a member of at least three, maybe many more, separate tribes which I could join – I'm English (or even Westmorian, come to that); my family are Irish Catholics; I'm a fan; all these groups could succeed as tribes. What about followers of Chelsea Football Club, or devotees of rock music, or stamp collectors – they could form tribes that overlay greatly. At this point, you get poaching, and then war.

The only way this can be avoided is to abolish all tribes, so that rather than have the big 'nation' tribes of today, or the smaller (?) tribes Ken proposes, we are all members of single-member tribes, who may or may not form alliances with other single member tribes. Remember Thomas Paine's "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good".

Perhaps I'm being unfair to accuse Ken of racism on *this* occasion, as space may have constrained him, but *all* his distinctions appeared to have been along racial (or possibly religious) lines. In seeking evidence on this point I was undecided as to his motives in asking if the reader would prefer Australian, Vietnamese or Baltic immigrants to Caribbean, Indian or Pakistani. One possible interpretation is that Ken would prefer this, but it may also be that Ken wanted his readers to consider their own racism. Was he grumbling about saying "Salaam" in the mornings, or expressing joy at the infinite diversity of human culture? The tone was inconsistent and inconclusive.

Then he raises the hoary complaint about the lack of churches in Islamic countries. So what? Just because they may be intolerant (and in fact most Moslem countries *do* allow Christians to worship) why should we lower ourselves to such a state? If we are superior (a debatable point) then we ought to act it, rather than imitating our alleged inferiors.

Nor does this racial/religious tribalism

explain Ken's assertions about Stalin, about the present Chinese government repressing *their own people*. This is merely the corruption of power just as it was in the UK under Mad Cow Disease.

So Ken certainly stirred me up, as he no doubt desired, but not with what he said so much as with how poorly he argued his case.

Martin Helsdon: 10/8/90

Unfortunately, I fear that Ken Lake's *Let Tribalism Flourish* fails to take note of some of the negative aspects of tribal existence. True, a tribe gives a true feeling of belonging and a sense of identity, but it also demonstrates a tendency towards creating a sense of exclusive membership. It may be that human beings have a desire to belong to such tight-knit groups which is why there are clubs for like-minded people, be they rose-growers or football fans. No doubt there are many positive benefits from this, but, just as it has a common identity, so a tribe excludes everything outside itself, turning inwards maybe, but also turning outwards to defend its own existence and institutions.

This aggressive posture does not result necessarily from external threats, but as a result of creating a mental limit – I am of the tribe, *you are not*. Whether we like it or not, a nation enforces a common identity upon its members and insists on a degree of unity. Tribes and nations do not mix, but perhaps what is really needed is a common ground between distinct groups, a merging so that instead of a distinct border there is a degree of integration. At the centre of each group there are differences, but there must be a common base. In a world as diverse as ours, where the agents of mass destruction are very easy to fabricate, tribes are lethal. Nations may disagree, but being larger perhaps their conflicts are more unusual (though very nasty when they happen). Conversely, tribes are going to squabble all the time because their "identities" are more extreme, and more vulnerable. (32 *Burns Crescent, Chelmsford, Essex.*)

Walt Willis: 8/8/90

Ken Lake's piece on tribalism is original and well written, though I'm not sure to what extent it is purely satirical. For instance he suggests that the origin of the Northern

Ireland trouble lies in "a unilateral decision to separate an integral part of Ireland and govern it by what a sizable part of its population has always seen and experienced as an alien and discriminatory group dedicated to the destruction of their beliefs and customs." This appears on the surface to be a statement of the classic Irish Republican cause, but it requires only the substitution of "the British Isles" for "Ireland" to become an equally valid statement of the Unionist view. Ken may be making the very sound point that it is as wrong to attribute ethical superiority to one tribe as it is to attribute racial superiority. All are groups of fallible human beings caught in the traps of geography and history.

The real problem is how to escape from such traps, and I don't see what Ken's solution is, unless his piece is as wholly satirical as I suspect. The solution offered by the multi-tribal nation state is impartial arbitration of intertribal disputes. Sometimes this works, as in Italy, which before unification resembled the Balkans. Sometimes it doesn't, as in Lebanon. But without the nation state the only solution may be the classic one of massacre. (32 *Warren Road, Donaghadee, N.Ireland, BT21 0PD*)

John D. Rickett: 24 October 1990

So Ken Lake solves the problems of the world at a stroke with his advocacy of Tribalism. His heart is certainly in the right place, but the article is all heart, and no head. We (humanity) are in the mess we're in precisely because of Tribalism. The folk from Latium figure they can defeat the other Tribes in the Italian peninsula (and, most importantly, keep 'em defeated) and hey presto! – the Roman Empire. Ditto Muscovites, Angles, Saxons, Arabs, Aztecs, Incas, Goths, Vandals, Hellenic Greeks, Persians, Medes, Huns, Tatars . . . the list is depressingly long enough already. Ken's thesis is reminiscent of Communism: a wonderful idea that, if implemented in its pure form, and maintained that way, would bring peace and happiness to the great mass of humans. Like Communism, it simply fails to take into account the fact that humans also seem to be hardwired for greed, envy, lust for power and domination over others, and the desire to

improve their own lot at the expense of others, to mention only a few of our minor failings. True, Ken does say "within the UN" and "so long as your own interests are protected": Yet the UN's record of preventing strife is hardly admirable, and any other "defender of last resort" would be in a temptingly powerful position. Ken had a nice idea, but I can't share his vision of this perfect ordering, nor could I even if I did believe in the perfectibility of man: such perfection would need to have been actualised before Tribalism would stand the chance of a snowball in Hell of lasting longer than the time it takes to find something offensive about the Tribe next door. (41 *Forest Court, Snaresbrook, London E11 1PL*)

Peter Tennant: 14/9/90

Ken Lake's article puzzled me. He makes a very good case for doing something about the plight of persecuted minorities but is rather vague in stating what that something should be. We're all to form our own tribal collectives and live happily ever after among like-minded individuals. And how long do you think that would last Ken? Until the first person questioned the tribe's mores and was ostracised for it. Many of the minorities whose plight Ken bemoans were in the first case fugitives from their own cultures. It is in the nature of any culture to fragment and diversify, which inevitably results in persecution of those trying to buck the dominant ethos. Even more amazing is Ken's statement that 'peoples would no longer have the need, the desire or the excuse to fight', which shows a total disregard of human history so far. If Ken wants to know how well tribes get along let him look at South Africa, and Northern Ireland. Most of the nations he deplores are formed by one tribe subduing its weaker neighbours. Why does he think things will be any different because of a UN statement in year X? This really is cloud cuckoo land.

People function best as individuals, with respect for the differences between individuals and appreciation of the things they have in common. Trouble starts when individuals allow their personalities to be subsumed in gangs (and by gang I mean any collective, be it nation, tribe, religion, class, sex even). The

tendency is to look down on anyone not in the gang, to see them as alien and inferior. (9 *Henry Cross Close, Shipham, Thetford, Norfolk, IP25 7LQ.*)

David Redd: 11/8/90

Tribalism would only work if all tribal-government units were the same size or had the same weight of influence in inter-tribal



affairs. Otherwise the usual processes of accretion and discrimination would have the usual result: unfamiliar = strangers = enemies = conflict. I can point to a village not a million miles away from this typewriter where people would routinely hurl rocks at strangers within living memory (or "pile" rocks at them, in the Pembrokeshire dialect of my young days). And Tribes, like Nations,

are just magnified villages. You cannot make a sweeping statement like “people *want* universal peace and collaboration”. A significant proportion have always wanted war and domination. And as our Tribes are not all equally balanced the effect of Ken's proposal would probably be to make *every* Tribe feel threatened by those outside the Tribe. Also, in modern Western Civilisation at least, many people have become so rootless that they no longer feel allegiance to any particular Tribe, or to any particular social standards. But that's another problem... (*Plas Hyfryd, 48 Cardingan Road, Haverfordwest, Dyfed, SA61 2QN*)

Gene Van Troyer: 17/11/90

Ken Lake has some telling points to make in his piece..., but I have a couple of peeves to direct at him. First, he asserts, “What is a Nation but an area of land arbitrarily defined by conquest and forcible incorporation of unique Tribes?” I should suppose he means “What is a Country?”, something very different from a Nation. Perhaps my idea is strictly idiosyncratic, but to me a Nation is defined by a shared set of political beliefs, values and ideals, as well as a system which allows them to function for the polity, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. Is that a peculiarly American way of looking at it?

Many of the social maladies Ken discusses, aside from being rooted in historical animosities between one ethnic group and another, result from the imposition of one set of values held by a particular group upon another. No Nation can endure, unless its system of political interaction not only has been freely chosen by its participants, but is guaranteed to be open to all participants, regardless of ethnic origin. That is the ideal. The grubby reality is that one group is always trying to shut out another, usually for economic reasons, which is why it behooves all groups – especially the minorities – to recognise common cause in spite of their differences. Those who ensure the rights of others ultimately ensure their own rights, be they individual rights, or the rights of the group or Tribe as a whole.

My second peeve is Ken's sweeping statement, “The whole southern United

States is becoming a foreign land to English-speaking Americans...” apparently because of the Spanish language. Firstly, he means the American Southwest and the southernmost tip of Florida (in the former case, parts of Texas, Arizona and Southern California, and in the latter case primarily Miami and environs). Spanish has, in fact, been spoken in the Southwest for more than 400 years, and was the dominant language there through at least the 1850s. As a practical matter, however, both English and Spanish are used equally, as often as not by Anglophones who've seen the economic wisdom behind learning Spanish, and Hispanophones who've done likewise – with the further realisation that unless they know English, they'll remain at the bottom of the job market. American's legal, professional, and political worlds are driven by English powered engines. The American South, by the way, is composed of Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and North and South Carolina. Spanish is not common in those states, though French is still spoken in areas in and around New Orleans (which also looks a bit like a foreign country...) (*Ojana 554, Ginowan City, Okinawa-ken, 901-22, Japan*)

Keith Brooke: 9/8/90

Ken Lake is something of an enigma. He gets upset at what he calls ‘the obligatory knee-jerk response’ to his opinions (in a recent letter), yet, by his own admission, he writes as ‘in depth and controversially as [he] can’. I'm sure there will be plenty of response, knee-jerk and otherwise, to his piece on tribalism, so I'll be brief. *Is Ken serious?* Does he really think that these ‘tribes’ will live peaceably side by side in one great global village? Might not the Welsh ‘tribe’ want to be divided between north and south, for example? He says people want to be part of their tribe, that they don't want to be part of a nation; has he asked them? What would they say, if they had a vote on it, I wonder? Or, is it that they don't really understand their own wants (and Ken does) — they want it but they don't know that they want it? (As an aside, one of the most irritating things about Ken's writing is the inevi-

table throwaway aside, such as 'Of course we all realise now that MAD... now stops us from destroying civilisation...' — apart from arguing about the validity of the MAD proposal, Ken isn't stupid enough to think that 'Of course we all realise...' when CND has been such a popular cause for so long, so why does he say it?) Knee-jerk over. (54 Hawthorn Way, Northway, Tewkesbury, Gloucester GL20 8TQ)

Mark Nelson: 13/10/90

Ken Lake suggests that we need "universal peace and collaboration, the destruction of Customs barriers and armed forces, the rationalisation of world finances, the



universal acceptance of the fundamental equality of all peoples and their equal right to whatever they can produce and sell and enjoy without harm to others". Yet his article did not explain why any of these things are desirable, or in fact who wanted them to occur and why. In fact, the majority of these things are undesirable and unobtainable except (perhaps) through some kind of world dictatorship.

Furthermore, whilst there are always a minority who wish to break up established nations on the grounds of some supposed injustice, Ken does not consider the implica-

tions for the majority. As a proud Yorkshireman I might consider that Yorkshire (with the old boundaries) should become independent from the rest of the UK so we can maintain our own values and purity. Yet I do not because this would not be beneficial to the majority of people in Yorkshire or in the UK as a whole.

There is a conflict between the greater good of increasing nation size and the persecution of minorities which Ken discusses. There is also a conflict between splitting up nations and fragmenting them and the welfare of the majority. There comes a time when the interests of the majority outweigh those of the minority. The problem is deciding when such a time has been reached...

The problems that are occurring in the States, and to some extent in the UK, do not reflect on the need for fragmentation. They reflect on the moral wrongness in allowing mass-immigration of people from one culture and background into a country of another culture. If there is one thing that the present government can be congratulated for, it is cutting down on 'unwanted' immigration.

So I would agree with Ken that there is a time when a nation becomes too big. The Soviet Union is too big and is undesirable, as is the thought of some kind of federal Europe. But nations cannot be split up into ever decreasing blocks.

Finally, would a UN of separate tribes be free of the problems that plague a UN of separate nations? Of course not, there would be even more conflict and even greater problems in attaining consensus. There would still be plots and intrigues, disputes and conflicts, and at the same time the ability of the people to work together would have been lost.

Matthew Freestone: 16/9/90

I disagree with Mr Lake fundamentally here. I tried his test at the end — I tried to think of myself as a member of a tribe, and I could not. I could think of myself as an individual, or as a member of various interest groups, or of various political groups, but not one "small, homogeneous group sharing basic attitudes" sprang to mind. Why is this? The answer is that I do not find difference



threatening, but stimulating. I wish to know people unlike myself, people who are individual. For this reason I find Mr Lake's tribalism threatening – the tribe would suppress the individual who did not fit into its structure. Mr Lake's tribes are closed thought systems, they cannot tolerate diversity, and they make us see the other as a threat. Tribalism is not the natural state of humanity, freedom is.

Theo Ross:

So how big is a tribe? Desmond Morris answered that: about 60. (I was immediately struck with the fact that that was the size of house at my old school: the residential unit with corporate identity.) Get any special-interest club rising much above that, he said, and it'll subdivide – G&S versus musicals, say, in an amateur operatic society. Deep down inside, where we're all still running on a stone-age programme, we're comfortable in a tribe of up to sixty. There's an awful lot of sixties in 5,000,000,000. But now let's spread out again. We are all (sweeping generalisation) members of many tribes. Within fandom (the "villages" of SB5's loccol) I myself belong to the BSFA (1,000 and look how divisive *it* is!), two APAs (each c.20), two Orbiter groups (one 5 currently 4, the other 2 both in the 5 but also active separately) and, if you can bear the thought, your own Shipyard. I have less than sixty really close, inner-circle friends, from 8 to 12,000 miles away, hardly any of whom have met any other to whom they're not already related. I have a great-great-great-grandfather in Danzig, all of whose living descendants are in more-or-less loose touch with a central archive (150, 200?) which thanks to Yalta isn't in Danzig (we'd been there since 1485, when it had already been a German Imperial city for 260 years). I have the Old School Tie network, former professional networks ... This far from unusual pattern of course strengthens Ken's thesis immeasurably. It's been said that no human being is more than half-a-dozen links of acquaintance from any other. Those are the kind of tribe we have now, and they build up a pretty tight network of humanity – hey, and we can work in your illegal data-bases too! – just get everyone to list everyone (s)he knows, and good ol'

MYCROFTXXX will give you the connection . "Hi there, Your Holiness! I'm Theo, a pal of Jimmy's. Listen, I godda pal's godda pal knows Ahasuerus, and boy has *he* got some news for you ..." (2 Dalriach Park Terrace, Oban, Argyll, Scotland)

Jack D. Stephen: 18/1/91

Most of the issue I found informative, stimulating and interesting, but Ken Lake's piece was an exception. It is not the first time he has committed the error that principally annoyed me (I have written to **Matrix** to set the record straight there, so apologies if you have already read some of this.)

Ken seems to be labouring under the misapprehension that Scotland voted *against* devolution in 1979 when the reverse is the case. A (small) majority for devolution was the actual result – by a greater percentage than those who voted than has been achieved across the U.K. (and even just in England) by the Conservatives at the last three general elections.

What prevented devolution was Margaret Thatcher's implacable opposition to any diminution of the Union (which the *people* of Scotland didn't vote for in 1707 – there were riots against it in several Scottish towns – and which all subsequent attempts to reverse have been voted down by the U.K. Parliament despite the provisions of the treaty of Union having been broken many times by that same Parliament. Wales, of course, was conquered.) An example of this voting down was the provision in the devolution bill that only if more than 40% of the *whole electorate* of Scotland and Wales voted for devolution would the result be binding on the U.K. Parliament – hence dead people effectively voted no. Such a provision at general elections would have meant that the eventual government would not have won in most British general elections, certainly in those since 1959. Straightforward majorities are enough when the result suits it would seem, but not when it might not. (Britannia waives the rules again.)

I should forgive Ken Lake his lack of awareness of such things, he after all does not live in a country forever overshadowed by its more powerful neighbour and is probably not aware of the anger such lack of

knowledge, shared by most English people until they come to Scotland and grow to love the place, can produce. (*Dalserf, 43, Ava Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife, Scotland, KY1 1PN*)

Ken Lake: 11/7/90

TRIBALISM: POSTSCRIPT

Dateline 11 July 1990: Bulgaria holds its first freely-elected Parliament for 65 years – and nationalist protesters try to stop the 23 freely-elected Turkish “ethnic minority” MPs from attending. Up to 800 people are missing after ethnic clashes during June alone in Kirghizia and Uzbekistan. Kenya’s Daniel Arap Moi is murdering anyone who proposes democracy; Mugabe has been following the one-party rulers of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and other African states in attempting genocide against minority tribes.

Amnesty International’s latest report, released today, accuses the governments of Ethiopia, Burma (Myanmar), Sudan and Somalia of “using ethnic origin as the sole reason for killing peasants.” Tonight’s TV promises revelations of ethnic violence in peace-loving Sweden. In East Germany, Vietnamese and other “guest workers” are stoned and killed. Amnesty International claims “a major increase worldwide in human rights abuses against people *because* they are members of ethnic minorities”, citing also Moscow’s suppression of the Baltic States and Transcaucasia.

When I wrote my article on Tribalism, the subject was still regarded as visionary, impracticable, unnecessary and divisive. Now Adebayo Adedeji, Nigerian executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, told the Organisation of African Unity at a summit meeting in Addis Abeba that:

“Africa must go back to its deep-rooted democratic tradition, where all public issues were decided after the usual palaver.” His argument was that if African countries do not chuck out their OAU attempts at “unity,” and revert to tribal custom, “other nations” would impose their own ideas of democracy on the continent as a condition for economic aid – as in fact we see today in the US reaction to Kenya’s attack on John F Kennedy award-winning human rights activist

Gibson Kuria who has had to take refuge in the US Embassy in Nairobi. What kind of “democracy” such tribal “palavers” (why, I wonder, use a Spanish word for them?) would create is really by the way: the trend here as everywhere else is toward a gathering together of the peoples, like unto like, and the breakdown of the concept of the “nation” in favour of the obviously-like-minded and culturally united tribe.

What, I wonder, will I be reporting under dateline 11 July 1991, or 1999? Might we even see the rights of the oppressed Catholic minority in the artificial military dictatorship of the Six Counties finally recognised – preferably by allowing them to join their co-religionists across the artificial border, leaving the Protestant minority on the island to join or stay apart, but no longer to murder and repress in the name of a bogus “loyalism” to a country where such practices are illegal and hated? Or shall I be telling you of the Free Moslem State embracing Bradford, Wolverhampton, Hounslow and a few other areas, where Rushdie’s fatwa is law and where shoplifters in Sainsbury’s have their hands amputated? What price Tribalism, when it appears right under your nose? (*115 Markhouse Avenue, LONDON, E17 8AY*)

[*Enough of tribes and tribulations, on to something a bit more literary.*]

Machiavellian MGs

Andy Sawyer: 11/8/90

Good article from Mary – Machiavelli yay! – he would have smiled at tribalism and started taking bets on the bigger ones. I was interested to see that the final scene of *Ancient Light* was seminal (ovarian?) to the whole. How about something on the world of *Rats And Gargoyles* (which I still haven’t read, but know from the previously published *Scholars and Soldiers* stories). But second thoughts make me pause... it’s fun working these things out for yourself. Part of my delight in Mary’s work is recognising things I’ve read, people I’ve met in the same plays and history books and realising how well transformed they are.

Keith Brooke: 9/8/90

Mary Gentle’s ‘Machiavelli, Marx and

the Material Substratum' was probably the most interesting thing in this **Shipyard Blues**, even though I've yet to read her Orthe books (shame on me). Her world-building was fascinating, seen in comparison to my own for the two *Expatria* books (to be published next year, so this is probably irrelevant to just about everybody...). *Expatria* is a planet that has been colonised for some 200 years; when the ark-ships arrived there was a dispute between those accustomed to the ship environment who wanted to stay in orbit, and those who wanted to stick to the original plan and land, moving into the alien environment of the planetary surface. They landed and, as a result, there was a backlash against the old thinking and generation after generation has gone through this rejection of technology, the intellectual and emotional struggle between science and superstition/religion. I spent a lot of time constructing the world of *Expatria*, but it was the *social* world; the technophobic conventists, the freewheeling, theatrical Death Krishnas ('We're all going to die, but then death isn't the end so what the fuck....?'), the freeform religion of the Pageant of the Holy Charities, and so on. I had great fun.

Sure, I spent some time on the basics, too: the map, etc. *Expatria* is cool, with vast polar ice-caps (ice-age? Probably – they haven't been there long enough to know and, anyway, they're not exactly doing a scientific assessment of it, are they?); the city of Newest Delhi is only a hundred kilometres south of the equator (why are so many fantasy/skiffy novels set in *northern* hemispheres?), yet it has a climate something like a Bank Holiday in Great Yarmouth. I had a great time setting up the basic fauna and flora, too, but I think there are two reasons why I was less concerned with the physical side of world creation. Firstly, I have a fairly recent degree in Environmental Sciences, so I am more confident that, given a well thought out framework, I can improvise to better effect than if I was to plot out every detail of geomorphology and ecology and meteorology. And secondly, although *Expatria* is a different world to our own in a number of ways, it's still only a way to ex-



plore the religion/science divide: it was the *people* that interested me, I wanted to know why they were so divided. I suppose what I'm really saying is that *Expatria* is more of a social construct than a physical one. But, then again, it's got some really neat tree seeds and bat-like creatures.

Gene Van Troyer: 17/11/90

Mary Gentle's piece struck close to home. Inevitably, most SF and fantasy writers are involved in the game of World Building. Her approach to the subject is special to her, as with every author, and she stated as much. For myself, I like to start out with a map and a solar system, then populate the terrain and imagine what life would be like there. Mary's really talking about the internal logic of an invented world, and by extension the internal logic of a story, which is crucial to the believability of invented-world stories. I suspect that one of the reasons fantasy is drowning in third-rate imitations of Tolkien is because the third rate authors, who lack the skill or inclination to create their own worlds, find it easier to borrow templates from Tolkien, whose Middle Earth is so widely known and richly detailed that vague references to it trigger a ready-made sense of familiarity in the readers' minds.

Mary's comment that her world of Orthe has its roots in our Earth: I would

extend that to say that nearly every invented world in fabulative literature, if not all, are really metaphors of this world in which we live. As drastically different as the imaginary topographies may be, what brings them alive is the psychological truth of the characters who inhabit those worlds. If we are able to comprehend them, they in some measure become a reflection of ourselves, their world a reflection of our own. I think the best writers of either fantasy or SF intuitively – if not consciously – understand this.

Theo Ross:

Mary Gentle on world-building – marvellous. I don't see myself ever matching **Golden Witchbreed**, not by light-years, but that's how my settings grow too: places seen or dreamed, academic knowledge in stock or dug for, this explaining that and pointing on to the other ... must try Machiavelli: if he's one of the well-springs of Orthe he *must* be good. But we'll all be clamouring for an expansion of that last sentence on p.18, so get on the phone to MG at once.

Martin Helsdon: 10th August 1990

Not at all sure what to make of Mary Gentle's piece. Perhaps it was intended, but the ending of **Ancient Light** left me feeling betrayed and unwilling to trust the author again. Having experienced her world through several hundreds of pages, to have it destroyed (perhaps my understanding of the end is wrong) without any hope of turning back a destruction that leaves nothing at all left me feeling very depressed. It may be a valid statement, but it still feels wrong.

Terry Jeeves: 4/8/90

Mary Gentle on creating a fictional world was interesting... but since such plans are only incidental to a story, they lack the importance of a good story line, plot and a well-written text. Oh, if you have a good story going, such additional background will enhance it, but such detail won't make a silk story out of a sow's bad one. World creation is only another step along the road of credible furniture factories, clothing styles, transport systems and the like. They make good background, but *not* main foreground material. (56 Red Scar Drive, Newby, Scarborough, YO12 5RQ)

Jane Yolen: 13/9/90

Thank you, Mary Gentle, but you didn't go far enough. How do you build a world? A world is built on stories: myth, legend, ballads, saga, tales, histories, alis – often contradictory as well as supporting. At least that is what I tried to do building the world of the Dales in **Sister Light, Sister Dark** and **White Jenna**. We are a jerry-built continuum of story. We retell our histories, we remake our past, in stories to support our present and warn our future. (31 School Street, PO Box 37, Hatfield, Massachusetts, 01038, USA)

John F. Haines: 13/8/90

Loved Mary Gentle's excellent article. She obviously takes a great deal of care over her writing. Fascinating to see how a world can be built up, from apparently nothing. To move to her LoC comments, I'm sorry if I gave her the impression I thought creating 'period' language easy – I don't, I know just how difficult it can be. I was merely putting a plea in for writers to *try* and make things a bit more authentic, and avoid Gadzookery. Incidentally, I think Mary is underestimating the reader a little when she says authentic language would make the readership plummet – most fairly intelligent folk can get to grips with Shakespeare OK, and how many SF fans have succeeded in mastering the strange languages of **A Clockwork Orange** and **Riddley Walker**? Has anyone researched the link between historical fiction and fantasy? There is a connection, isn't there? Recommend Mary should try John James (**Votan, Not For All The Gold In Ireland**) and Graham Selby (**Imperial Governor, Knight In Anarchy**) – those two I reckon *do* manage to completely avoid gadzookery and show how it should be done. (5 Cross Farm, Station Road, Padgate, Warrington, WA2 00G)

[A quick change of genre, from SF to Crime, and Skel's piece.]

It's Criminal. Skel!

Ian Covell: 18/8/90

Skel: hm, a column devoted to non-sf fiction, that's *really* asking for argument I don't mind. Although I've tried, but not been persuaded to pursue Estleman, I consider

that several 'thriller' writers produce work as consistently entertaining as any fantasy or SF. I just think the latter pair have the edge on the former. Chauvinistically: a bad thriller is a bad book; a poor SF/F book is at least worth the time for reading. (Yes, exaggerated, but).

(Anyway, the thriller field is wide enough to have something for everybody; those who dismiss all thrillers are losing an immense amount. It happens I am not convinced the newer detectives are as good as some classics (eg, I think Parker's continuation of **Poodle Springs** is an insult to Chandler) just because they have updated and even questioned the basis of the PI genre, but I do think anyone who doesn't like Lawrence Sanders or Donald E Westlake or Gregory Macdonald or the rest simply has no taste.) (121 Homerton Road, Pallister Park, Middlesbrough, Cleveland, ST3 8PN)

Sydney J. Bounds: 5/8/90

I was more than a bit surprised that Skel mentioned only male writers since the ladies moved in to take over the private eye novel. Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky and Linda Barnes are more interesting than the writers he names. (27 Borough Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT2 6DB)

[Shifting gears into a sort of fannish mode, and Andy Sawyer's Con-trick.]

Conning the Librarians.

Shep Kirkbride:

Andy Sawyer likes conventions!

However much he says his article is about the Assistant Librarians Weekend school of 1986, it's written from a fan's viewpoint of an SF convention. Quite rightly too. I think I recognised every fannish type there too, Andy.

Reminded me a lot of a course I was on in Swindon in September of last year. Although entitled 'Managing People' and very informative, the image of twenty to thirty people, from all branches of the advertising and printing world enjoying a good argument and chin-wag around the bar until the early hours of the morning is still the most memorable. Apart from being the most enjoyable part of the course I suspect it was also the most useful.

Stick another label on it and it was the Librarians Weekend school or maybe an Eastercon. (42 Green Lane, Bellevue, Carlisle, Cumbria)

Ian Covell: 18/8/90

I was fascinated by Sawyer's article, and not just because I've got close friends in the system. I always wondered what they talked about at conferences, I may have supposed they took up their new books and bragged about how many they'd bought or something simplistic like that. Proving, like too many others, I don't understand the complexity or range of the library system... and I *should* have, knowing people as I do. I suspect his deep dark secret of being an sf fan would have elicited the response that many of his colleagues were the same. Counting mentally among the few dozen people I've met from library staff, I'd guess.. hm, 40%, read sf or fantasy on a regular basis. Many buy-in specific authors and titles to ensure they can read the next book. (The newest librarian in my local is emphatically not and has recently slashed the number of sf books by half, and refuses to buy more than 'bestseller' relevant like Asimov, Herbert (Frank), and those sf books which don't seem to be sf. Horror has enlarged though, suggesting the future perhaps.)

Joy Hibbert: 6/8/90

I wonder what it is about fandom that makes us want to believe that everyone else's hobbies, conferences (professional or social) etc are just the same as ours? I can remember arguing this point myself, in respect of bellringers and their behaviour - character assassination, getting drunk etc.

I wonder if the other hobbies and conferences work on the same slow timescale as fandom. After all, what has Pickersgill done lately to be worth character assassinating? Come to that, what have I done lately ditto? Nothing. And would we be at the con we were being assassinated at? Probably not. Whereas Messrs Hendry and Saunders etc seem to be current stars in the Librarianship firmament, rather than ex-supernovae.

Certainly, if I tried to write a comparison of stop the clause conferences, national bisexual conferences and re-evaluation co-counselling workshops with fandom, I'd

grind to a halt almost immediately. I wonder if these things genuinely are more non-fannish than bellringing, librarianship etc, or whether I simply no longer need to pretend the whole world is really fannish?

Pam Baddeley: 28 August 1990

The ratecapping mentioned in Andy Sawyer's article reminded me of Waltham Forest libraries, which offered a good service in 1975-78 when I worked there as an assistant, but are now cut to the bone with shorter and shorter opening hours and dwindling stocks. However, other authorities offer an inadequate service for other reasons: I've had correspondence with the Chief Librarian of Hampshire Country Council over their refusal to reserve fiction. I ordered Dave Langford's collection of parodies but they subsequently deemed it to be fiction and confiscated my fee. When I obtained it via Berkshire Libraries, it turned out to be classified in the 820s (Literature): therefore, non-fiction. To add insult to injury, Hampshire classes the Adrian Mole books under the same number though most people would regard them as fiction. (5 Union Street, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 7PX)

[Slipping into another gear, my 'How to save the world' piece got some response.]

Environmentalities

Alexander R. Slate: 16/10/90

You have hit a number of the problems right on the head. I for one am not only *not confident* that the major governments will not make the hard decisions, I'm quite sure they won't. I don't think that US citizens will make the major sacrifices in the standard of living required for these decisions, and the developing world isn't going to be satisfied with the bare survival level of living that they now have. Major corporations in the US have no vision of the future, beyond that of short term profits. I'm afraid that the US isn't the place to look for visionary handling of this problem.

Of course, one of problems involved with this entire mess is the rising world population. Population growth needs to be curtailed, and soon. I don't just mean slowing the rate of growth, but halting it altogether. In fact lowering the world's total population

is an even better idea. Unfortunately, what this will require will be a horrible bureaucracy and some drastic inroads into the personal freedoms enjoyed by most people around the world. (1847 Babcock #406, San Antonio TX 7-229, USA)

Keith Brooke: 9/8/90

It's all very well to talk about taxing the polluters but the major problem isn't so much how to hit the polluters (the technology is, on the whole, available; taxes or some other form of penalties for polluters would make it a good business practice) but how to get the world to agree on some goals. Pollution taxes in the UK, or even Europe, are essential, but they won't achieve a thing unless they're adopted worldwide. The big problem is how to get the nations of the world to set realistic targets for the reduction of pollution: we can't just say 'lets all cut CO₂ emissions by 25%', when some nations are already far more energy-efficient than the likes of the USA, and when the developing countries still have so much catching up that they naturally want to do.

Mark Nelson: 13/10/90

I think that environmental issues face three main problems. Firstly, environmental issues are long-term, their effects are not usually felt now or even in the immediate future but in the longer term, after the politicians who are around now are no longer going to be around. Hence, politically, there is no-one who is responsible.

Secondly, there seems to be a growing gap between politicians and scientists, in fact between scientists and non-scientists. Almost fifty years after the Education Act, the scientific knowledge of non-scientists seems to be decreasing at an alarming rate. It's kind of hard explaining scientific problems to people who don't even know basic science. This is something that recent educational 'reforms' are supposed to cure, but I am not too sure that they will achieve that. The image of the scientist as a crank who lives well away from reality and serves no useful purpose seems to be gaining credence.

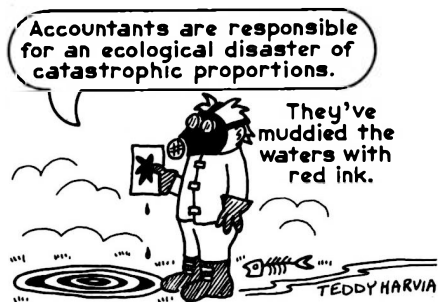
Finally we reach what is the most important problem. Suppose that there is sufficient public opinion and political will-power

to create changes in policy in any one country. If the other major industrialised nations do not change policy at the same time then it is not too difficult to envisage a situation where a pro-environment country's industry becomes uncompetitive leading to problems...

In the old days this would not be much of a problem, just introduce a few anti-import policies; but as markets become increasingly intermingled this is no longer possible.

Alan Sullivan: August 1990

On ecological and nuclear power issues... Governmental silences and lack of action surprise me not at all. They're only going to make a noise when there's something in it for them, I fear, and we can only



hope that we all last long enough for Something To Be Done. Thing is, it has to be done quickly, or it'll be too late. Maybe the WWF have got the right idea – despairing of stopping ivory poaching, they sent out helicopter gunships to hunt down the poachers. I know such a view is going to be unpopular, but if you want results promptly, you sometimes need direct actions. There's no guarantee that sailing rubber dinghies in front of 'illegal' whaling ships will have enough effect in time to save the whales. Sinking some would stop the hunting now. I'm not advocating such methods. Just pointing out that if the situation doesn't improve, desperate measures could all too easily be taken. The polluters and poisoners could easily fit filters or change their production systems to save the environment. But when they won't even

invest to save their own industry from unprofitability (British industry particularly lags behind in this respect – and it has nothing to do with 'Unpatriotic Consumers' and 'Lazy, Greedy Workers' – greedy profit-minded management more like), then they're hardly going to give a monkey's for the environment. They're making their profit, and don't care about improvements, because improvements cut profit – at least initially – and Mr Industrialist is too damn nearsighted to see the long term benefits, even when they're explained to him in detail.

[And now, from pollution to a closely related subject.]

Power Plays

Pam Baddeley: 28 August 1990

Firstly, to answer David Bell: the sources I quoted do take the 3rd World's burgeoning energy needs into account. Secondly, in answer to M K Digre, I "ignored" comparison of the cost of nuclear to fossil or other stations because that wasn't the point of the article. If the cost is comparable then why should the Director of the Rocky Mountain Energy Institute, Amory Lovins, among many others, say that nuclear power is too expensive to interest investors: so expensive in fact that the USA can save 4 to 5 times as much energy through energy efficiency measures as all the US nuclear stations produce, at *one eighth* of the cost of running one such station, *even if the cost of building that station was nil*.

I don't believe I'm weighing the scales unfairly against nuclear: for example, I'm aware that 1 KW of energy produced by a coal fired station also produces 1 Kilo of CO₂. Neither am I unaware of the human cost of mining coal, having lost a grandfather to it. I would simply like to point out that there is *no answer on the supply side of the equation*, even considering alternative sources and whether your greatest concern is global warming or the prospect of energy running out altogether.

I was puzzled when Terry Jeeves seemed to think that my article said that reducing CO₂ was the prime motive in building nuclear plants when I was actually pointing out how apologists for nuclear power have been rushing to hail nuclear as the

"answer" to global warming and how this is untrue. Perhaps he didn't see the TV coverage some months ago of the meeting between concerned scientists and the government when Thatcher and her ministers reported the supposed consensus of scientific opinion: that nuclear power would be the most important means of combating global warming. The scientists protested to the newspapers afterwards that they had said no such thing: energy efficiency and reduction in use are far more important.

It amazes me that some people still view nuclear power as the sole solution to the exhaustion of fossil fuels, let alone the CO₂ problem, despite all the estimates showing that the number of new plants needed would be insupportable, especially in view of the general inertia of governments and their reluctance to commit to spending heavily on anything but arms. An almost religious faith seems to be involved when you consider that nuclear power produces only 3% of world energy needs, that only 15 % of energy is generated as electricity anyway and that most is in a multiplicity of forms in transport, industry and domestic heating. (Not to mention the political clout of the oil and car lobbies which have systematically bought up and suppressed any promising patent for electric powered vehicles. Speaking of which, the energy to charge the batteries of M K Digre's electric powered vehicles has to come from somewhere. His solution does somewhat beg the question.)

The idea of supplying 3rd world needs by the Western model of expensive plants distributing energy via grid systems is inappropriate in view of their enormous debt burdens, lack of foreign exchange, vast land masses and scattered populations. Some experiments are underway – in India with small oil-fired plants which supply their local village; in Africa with photovoltaic solar stations also supplying a very small area – which are designed to be maintainable by the local people. However, photovoltaics still have a way to go with cost and efficiency (though if the true cost of other sources were used, the difference would be greatly reduced).

Because there is simply no supply side answer, concerned people are now turning to

an end use approach: trying to introduce efficiency in how people use energy. A few figures can give some idea: the UK wastes at least half the energy it generates: conventional light bulbs convert only 6% of the energy they use into light whereas fluorescent ones are 4 times as efficient and last 10 times longer (thereby reducing the energy needed to produce them).

Terry Jeeves: 4/8/90

I'm not sure that you are correct in your words anent Nuclear Power and Salter's Ducks. The latest figures I've seen for nuclear powered electricity list no less than *fifteen* countries which find it cheaper than fossil fuel systems. The figures are the ratio between coal and nuclear power and read: Belgium 1.79, Canada 1.33, Finland 1.2, France 1.45, Germany 1.42 to 1.1, Italy 1.43 to 1.07, Japan 1.28, Turkey 1.05, and Eastern USA 1.07. And as coal runs out and oil hikes ever higher before doing likewise, those figures will escalate even more. As for the ducks, whilst agreeing it is ridiculous to ask the Nuclear Authority to evaluate them, I fancy that here again, your figures may not be the full story. £10,000 seems high, but £850 too low when you add in the construction, installation and maintenance costs – plus transmission power lines and the equipment needed to transform the irregular (and low) voltage from the 'ducks' into a grid-ready 250v AC. (*Costs quoted were raw material costs only. JDO*) Then of course you'll have to factor in legal suits fighting all the environmental groups opposing each scheme (as has already occurred in at least two alternate energy sites: the Mersey tidal scheme and a windmill (*one*) somewhere up north.

[Arguments are still going on over 'professional vs amateur'.]

Pro-Am Pourings

David Redd: 11/8/90

"Mayer and the Pros" shows how successful the lettercol-by-subject technique can be. The comments are almost as fascinating as the original article. What a lovely semantic tangle the mutating meaning of words are giving us. A future translator's despair, no doubt. "Professional" meaning of

"respectable quality" is now separate from the meaning "earning a living by it", hence the appearance of phrases such as "professional foul" and "professional burglar".

So how about this quote from Brian Aldiss in *Hell's Cartographers*: "I have never typed out the final draft of any of my novels or stories; that surely is a job for a professional".

Ian Covell: 18/8/90

I hadn't guessed there could be so many diverse views on professional vs amateur. It refers to the author.. to the story.. to the pay.. to the market.. to the approach.. with so much disagreement, simple statistics says there is no real division between them. If an author sells everything for some years, then can't sell anything because nobody wants to publish (but his old stuff, perhaps, reprints), is he *still* professional, or has he reverted to amateur? Can't be answered, depends on the person.

Keith Brooke: 9/8/90

Interesting stuff from Andy Sawyer, too. This professionalism thing seems a bit extreme to me. So many words have two or more meanings, yet here we are with some people saying that professionals have to make a living from writing and others saying professional is a yardstick for quality. Likewise an amateur doesn't make any money from their work or they're slipshod and substandard, depending upon which sense of the word you're using. Mary Gentle gets to the heart of the matter by pinning professionalism on attitude: in that way *Shipyard Blues* is as professional as *Interzone* which is as professional as *Omni* – you all want to get it right, not just get it out, if you see what I mean.

[Now for the really contentious issue!]

Pounding Parker.

Mat Coward:

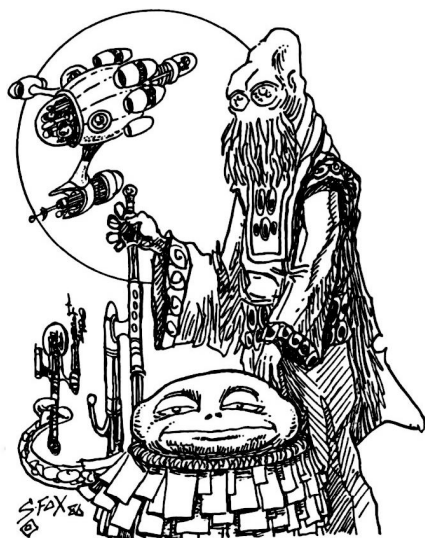
James Parker's letter made me vomit. Glad to see his isn't the general view amongst your loccers, although it's widely-enough held, in what would no doubt call itself "the liberal community". Where the fuck does this idea come from that "offending" people is wrong? Nobody ever died from being offended. I'm such an intolerant mad-



man, I'm offended on average every five seconds. Tough for me. Ben Elton offends me, for being so indifferent to his own ugliness, but I wouldn't kill him for it. "They are racist by definition anyway, being English" – has James ever met a Muslim? His use of the word "anglicised" reveals *him* as racist, which probably explains his embarrassing need to open his anus up to the mullahs. I don't have any respect for "sincerely held" religious views, for the same reason I don't have any respect for sincerely held nazi views (in any case, nazism is just a sub-church of christianism). The stalinists had the right idea about religion, even if they did misuse it slightly: religious belief is a mental illness, and therefore its sufferers should be confined in hospitals until they can be cured, or until they die. (57A Meadow Road, Pinner, Middlesex, HA5 1ED)

Richard Brandt

There's James Parker again, avowing "one man's intellectual freedom cannot be put above the needs of society..." Of course, the prompt in this particular instance is Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*, and we'll overlook for the moment that it is a work of fiction whose "offensive" passages are presented as the ravings of a couple of lunatics. More to the point: What is the crime Rushdie has committed, which is so vile that the right to free speech must be



suborned to prevent it? Has he issued a summons for violence?

Has he called for the overthrow of governments, for genocide against races? Has he declared certain ethnic, racial, political or religious groups unfit for fair or equal treatment by society? No. What Mr. Rushdie has done is this: He has written a work of satire which some persons have interpreted as ridicule.

In other words, Mr. Parker would have it that society is obliged to see to it by force of law that no one is made fun of.

This is the momentousness of issue which some people see as sufficient reason to suppress liberties. Of course, Mr. Parker comes from a nation whose civil liberties are not so ingrained in its origins... (Shame! Shame, James Parker!

Oh, the guilt of it all!)

I'll leave it to you to decide what statements of mine above are in all earnestness, and which are conveyed with satiric intent.

Martin Helsdon: 10/8/90

James Parker seems to be confusing the history of Great Britain with the modern United Kingdom. If racialism and exploitation are our heritage, then this true too of the rest of our European neighbours and anyone else who has been through a period of expan-

sion and empire – the Japanese, the Turks, the Chinese, the Zulus, the Indians... It just happens that our imperial sunset isn't so distant that it's ripples have faded from the world stage. Slavers and drugs-traders we may have been, but were we any worse than anyone else? Perhaps we were better in some respects, because at least we tended to set up shop using local structures, the princes in India for instance, and when we left, we left fairly peacefully, with many aspects of the territory unchanged. What remained of the Aztecs, the Maya, and the Incas after the fading away of Spanish power? So worse wrongs don't make a right, but it is surely incorrect to judge historical events by today's values.

If the United Kingdom is so soaked in blood, why do so many of the descendants of our Empire's unwilling subjects want to come here?

[A little egoboo for the artists next.]

Artwords

Peter Crump: 21/9/90

Good artwork as usual in SB5. I especially like David Mooring's pieces – an artist new to me. It helps having an editor prepared to countenance the use of large areas of black – in this case it lends a strong atmosphere to the half-seen vampire figures. An eye for composition and telling detail (the lamppost and cathedral the ship) sets the scene simply and effectively without crowding the main subject with extraneous detail – like a good short story.

Shep's in there doing his bit (p10). I appreciate the serious sentiment of this piece (and I like the title), but I feel it falls short of his best work for SB. The faces represent humanity, sure, but does the circle/sphere represent the Earth? Why is the ascent of mankind depicted on a flag? And does that guy really appreciate the spear stuck in his head? I think the basic idea is good, but the symbology needs to be thought out for Mister Oblivious (i.e. me). Perhaps I'm being unfair, because it is good to see Shep having a crack at serious work, like the ATom tribute on the cover of SB4 which was superb and incredibly touching. (Incidentally, now I know why Shep Kirkbride features so heavily in SB – Shep is really

a pseudonym for that fine OU illustrator Pam Owen! (Seriously, why don't we ever see Pam's work in **SB**) (11 Hazel Drive Penryffordd Near CHESTER Clwyd CH4 0NF North Wales)

[Denials all round - You'll have to accept my word for it that I have seen Shep and Pam in the same room together, so there!]

Terry Broome: 5/8/90

The Krischan Holl illo isn't as good as some of his: one detects the woman was drawn from a nude study, probably a "men's" magazine - the breasts are obviously *not* covered, and yet they are shown as being covered. The arms, too, don't seem to fit with the body and neither do the legs... rather like a wierd jigsaw or patchwork. Still, the art as a whole is very good, with lots of interesting bits in it.

In this case the cover is unnecessarily graphic, and hence (by its subject matter) sexist, because of the breasts. She is wearing a fur/leather top, but her breasts are *very* well defined, suggesting a material as thin as cotton (if not thinner) and one which religiously follows the contours of the body, like shrink-wrapping. Leather doesn't shrink-wrap. Hence, the breasts are well-outlined not because the subject demands it (as, say, a naked woman does) but because the *artist* demands it. Not only is it unnecessary, it's a serious flaw in the composition of the artwork. For an artist to ignore the 'reality' of his subject in favour of a cliché suggests a certain ingrained sexism in this case. Which, had he drawn a naked woman without a sword, could not so easily have been aimed at him (as one can always suggest valid reasons for the state of the woman, the interpretation of the scene, etc, which makes internal sense). Ironical!

...The Teddy Harvia was very clever and well drawn. He has true wit and insight, and I feel he's not as appreciated as he should be.

David Redd: 11/8/90

The cover I shall refrain from comment on, except to ponder on how a pre-synthetics civilisation managed to weave such a seamless figure-hugging upper garment, and to point out that her midriff looks undernour-

ished compared to the excess fatty tissue above. N.B. If that's her dinner burning beside her, time her dimension invented the microwave...

Shep Kirkbride:

The loccol was interspersed nicely with Atom illos.

Can I just say at this point that I would like to see this as a continuing trend, not only in **SB** but in other fanzines as well. Keep treating us old fossil-fans and new blood entering fandom to the continued appearance of Atom's much-loved illos.

When I did the Atom cover tribute it was drawn from the heart. As a fellow fan-artist I knew that he put a bit of himself into every one of his little BEMs.

Every illo scattered around the globe is a piece of Arthur Thompson. He immortalized himself in his work.

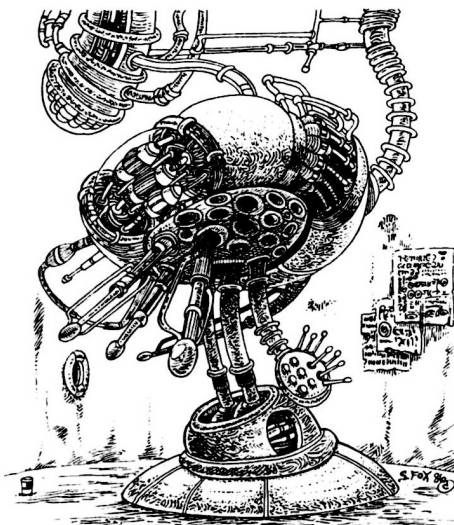
He left fandom a wonderful gift...Let us all treat it with the respect it deserves.

[To charge or not to charge, that is the next question.]

Footing the Bill.

Steve Jeffery: 11/10/90

While the Letter of comment or the fanzine in trade is the conventional method of exchange, there are a lot of people who would like to read fanzines, but would be put



Shipyard Blues 6

off if a LOC is demanded of them to get hold of a copy. An option to donate 50p or so to the production coffers seems a good way as any if you don't feel that comfortable with LOC-ing.

I don't see that one way is any more 'pernicious' than the other when it comes to fanzines, and applying some sort of profit and loss equation to a fanzine would seem to be a particularly pointless exercise, reminiscent of the Monty Python sketch where a charity collector tries to explain the concept of freely donating money to Cleese's uncomprehending bank manager.

Buck Coulson: 20/9/90

Interesting you didn't have many takers on your **Crystal Ship** subscription rates. Smaller country, of course, and subs sent to another country are a nuisance, but **Yandro** had probably more paid subscribers than "the usual", and the subscribers also wrote letters and occasionally sent articles and artwork. (For which their subscriptions were duly lengthened.) Of course, I frequently responded to locs personally, working up a lot of correspondence – I happened to be looking over an old issue and noted that after one letter I commented that if it seemed disjointed it was because the published items had been excerpted from 45 pages of correspondence. (This was after we'd quit publishing monthly, of course.) But surely we couldn't have had the *only* fanzine with large numbers of subscribers?

Derek Pickles: 26/1/91

As the guy who started "The Usual" (**Phantas**, 21 June 1954), I have a sort of invested interest in the argument as to whether you pub a fanzine for love or money. All I know is that if you want to publish a fanzine, you'll publish a fanzine. Whether you can afford to is immaterial, and whether you have vast number of readers is also immaterial. It purges the soul and cleanses the wallet, so it can't be all bad. And in forty years time you'll be able to read your name *several times* in Rob Hansen's **Then 6**.

[Now there's a sobering thought, for both me and Rob Hansen.]

And now, a small skip through the remaining topics.]

The Odds & The Sods

Buck Coulson: 20/9/90

I definitely disagree with Mary Gentle about anonymous reviewers. Anyone who has an opinion should also have the courage to stand behind it. In my fanzine days I was never known for bland reviews, and I had no worries about what to say to an author if I met him. I got cut off from Ace books once, for trashing one of their novels (I wasn't aware that Don Wollheim had written it under a pseudonym, but if I had been, I'd have trashed it anyway.) Never got another Ace book for review until Terry Carr joined the editorial staff – but when Don left to start DAW, I got boxes of everything DAW published. I don't think I made all that many enemies, because when I praised somebody's effort, everyone knew that I meant it. (I once reviewed John Brunner's **Atlantic Abomination** by saying "It certainly is" but when he wrote a good book I said so, and John was always friendly.) These days, professional editors, or at least the ones I've worked for, don't want killer reviews, so if I like a book I say so, and if I don't like it I don't review it. Anyway, who wants to meet an author who writes bad books? Or his fans? (I've not read Mary's books, though I did buy the British hardcover of her first one and fully intended to read it. I may manage it yet.)

I'm actually proud of some of the enemies I did make; shows I have discrimination.....

A. None, Reader

Dismissing an article because you don't know its source is like rejecting a meal because you haven't met the chef. To those who think I got my facts wrong: *everything* in the article is accurate and can be substantiated by example. I don't demand that everyone agree with my judgments but to say I lacked decency or courage, was offensive and dishonest, and should have used my own name and 'accepted the repercussions', suggests some people can't separate commentary from combat.

Walt Willis: 8/8/90

I liked Earp's reminder of the prediction that by the middle of the 20th century we would be three foot deep in horse manure. Of

course the prediction was quite correct, except that the source was bulls instead of horses,

Ian Covell : 18/8/90

Mary Gentle: her argument that magic is not trying to be science is true, but I would suggest that magic – as portrayed in fantasy (for the most part) – is an arbitrary accumulation of effects, rules and symbols. If you get *Interzone*, check out my review of Aldiss's book a few months ago (last page); I felt I managed to show how sf and fantasy could be defined and separated.

("fantasy is the imagination given form; science fiction is the intellect given form. Fantasy is a set of disparate visions formulated into a coherent story; science fiction derives a story from a set of proposals. Fantasy is arbitrary, sf is systematic." – *Interzone* 35, May 1990.)

Andy Sawyer: 11/8/90

Possibly the best thing in this issue was Dorothy Davies' revelation in the loccol that she writes blue video scripts. I seem to remember Dorothy writing in a previous issue about her children's reading-scheme books... no, it can't be – but yes; I also think again about her article on the Post Office and it all falls into place, a scenario in which the wrong package is delivered to Dorothy's publishers, and some very interesting reading schemes hit the market. Suddenly, the reading ability of primary school children soars ahead of all known records as kids clamour for the new books. Educationalists are baffled. Cabinet ministers are wreathed in smiles. At last the Education Reform Act is working: we *knew* our policies were the right ones. Parents report how pleased they are that their children are so far ahead in their reading books. Meanwhile, hot and sticky fingers unpack the latest videos from Strand Films International... and find that *their* reading improves too! You never know... it could work.

Derek Pickles: 26/1/91

Eric Bentcliffe comment of the 50's Village: yes, I think there really was a community feeling, only trouble was the population seemed to consist of village idiots. Eric's reference to the speed of the mails was due to

two things: a/ the GPO sacked me, and b/ the remarkable efficiency of the post. I worked in Bradford town centre and I have sent a postcard to my mother (posted before 10 am) to tell her I was coming home for dinner (and it was only called 'lunch' in films and the effete South) and she would get it at 11.30 am, the second post. People I worked with complained about it and said that when *they* were young (pre-First WW) there were seven posts a day. I also regularly wrote to someone in the US of A and got a reply within a week – on the 6d aerogramme form.

Mike Glicksohn: 14/9/90

Just for the record, the fabulous Toronto Skydome has been open for just over a year now, not the "few years" that Lloyd mentions. Never believe a fan when it come to sports information unless it's me or Harry Warner or one of our designated substitutes. The average fan knows less about baseball than the average baseball knows about fandom!

Keith Brooke: 9/8/90

Do you know one of the most difficult things about admitting to being an sf writer? The commercial fantasy fan. It's like when you're in a bookshop and someone else is at the sf/f section and you think 'Ah! A kindred spirit!' and then they pick up a Gor book and thumb through it for the juicy bits. Someone asks what you do and you say, 'Yes, well I'm a writer, actually.' They ask what sort, and you wonder whether to say speculative fiction or something hip like that, but 'sf' slips out before your brain catches up. And their eyes light up and they say, 'Hey, I read it all the time, have you read the latest Eddings/Brooks (absolutely no relation)/Anthony?' What do you say (when you've stopped trying to choke back on the manic cackle)? I cope better now, I suggest the original Tolkien, or real writers like Rob Holdstock or Mary Gentle, but every time you can see it going straight through. At least they read, I suppose.

Bruno Ogorolec : 3/9/90

I have a bone of contention to pick with you, too. You say, referring to the downfall of communist regimes, that "... no one, but no one, expected the collapse of 1989". Hmmm.

How about Robert Heinlein? The February 1952 issue of *Galaxy* ran his article on things to come by Year 2000 and among a score of things predicted was the disappearance of communism.

Thirty years later, in 1982, his predictions were reprinted somewhere (damned if I can remember where) and Heinlein was asked to comment upon them, particularly upon the wacky-sounding conceit about the end of communism. Soviet Union seemed to be at the pinnacle of power then and poised for even further advances. Heinlein, however, was unimpressed. He acknowledged the Soviets' apparent might but nevertheless chose to stand by his predictions. Year 2000 was still eighteen years away he said; plenty of time left for his predictions to come true. A damned shame that he had to die such a short time before being proved right in such a spectacular manner.

I hope the grand old man regains the kind of recognition he deserves. Nowadays he is mostly ridiculed (and not without reason, I hasten to add) and few people are prepared to acknowledge his remarkably acute grasp of sociopolitical processes. He wrote of aggressive religious fundamentalism way back in the forties when that, too, sounded a bit ridiculous. In *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1965) he described a conflict between the Lunar farmers, rich in grain but politically disenfranchised, and the mighty but grain-hungry nations of Earth. Less than a decade later (in 1973) the conflict over oil between the OPEC countries and the industrial West followed Heinlein's script with an almost uncanny accuracy, the government ministers and heads of states on both sides seemingly shamelessly cribbing their arguments straight from the old master.

[But Bruno, I was referring to Sterling's Mirrorshades anthology at the time, not the whole of SF.]

Brian Earl Brown : 29/11/90

...A local TV station has begun showing *Red Dwarf* over here, and in addition to the noticeable thick accents of the actors (making it hard to follow the show) I'm amazed by the characterisation of the Cat as a 40s zoot-suited Harlem Beau Jangles. Such racial

stereotyping could not be gotten away with over here.

Shep Kirkbride:

Can I offer some sort of explanation on the Were-duck illo. *[Printed opposite]* I was so taken with Eric Bentcliffe's idea of a were-duck that I had to have a go at it. The result is what you see before you. I originally intended just sending it to Eric but thought you might like to see it, as it originated in your very own letter column. When you think about it, the idea is so ridiculous, it works. I mean, the duck isn't exactly a creature of the night is it?

How do you inflict such a curse on a person...I cannot imagine a bite doing it can you? A peck on the night of a full moon doesn't sound too convincing does it?

...And how do you kill 'em? Silver bullets don't sound appropriate. I suppose a good covering of orange sauce would be the order of the day. Yes, silly isn't it?

That's what I liked about the idea.

Onto the illo itself. He's got four fins, rather than a pair of wings and a pair of webbed feet. It works better that way. In my own defence, I didn't set the rules, Eric just happened to question them. So anything goes as far as I'm concerned. In a world were a Were-duck could exist, it's got to be a pretty weird place, so who's gonna correct me? Oh, and just for the hell of it....the shadowing is all wrong, the candle throws it out completely.

Wahfs:

George Airey, Chris C. Bailey, Sid Birchby (no, Sid, I'm no relation that I know of to the Liverpoolian fan of past repute – anyone know what *did* happen to him?), Sheryl Birkhead, Pamela Boal, Judy Bufery, Ian Byers, Ken Cheslin, Michael Cobley, Chuck Connor, Chester Cuthbert, Dorothy Davies, Gary Deindorfer, Bernard Earp, Brad Foster, Steven Fox, Harold B. Gordon, Teddy Harvia, Ethel Lindsay, Ian McKeer, John Miller, Peggy Ransom, John D. Rickett, Hilary Robinson, Skel, Laurel Slate, Steve Sneyd, Bridget Wilkinson, David Windett.

If there's anyone I missed out, profuse apologies – the record-keeping hasn't been 100% this last six months or so. Sorreeee!

"...Momentarily all his senses blacked out as his body spasmed... stretched... re-shaped itself... with the anguish he'd suffered... he screamed... and screamed again... as his webbed foot slipped unable to get purchase on the smooth surface of the floor. His veins bulged with eldritch power, but all that came out was a forlorn quack!!"



Shipyard Blues

The Man who thinks himself faster...

"The more you do, the more you want. The more you need, the more you find out about yourself and the more you understand. There is no end to the knowledge you can get or the understanding or the peace by going deeper and deeper..." *Ayrton Senna interviewed in The Sunday Correspondent (RIP), 24/6/90.*

(And if that's not guaranteed to send a chill down the spines of Senna's Formula 1 rivals, I don't know what is – the self-perfecting driver!)

Organised religion: a contradiction in terms?

"The difference between a true religion – and there are many which share aspects of truth – and a dangerous cult is only this: in the one the individual is freed to grow and live and learn; in the other, the individual is subordinated to the will of the hierarchy, forbidden to learn except what the cult would teach..." *Sheri S. Tepper, from The Marianne Trilogy.*

The Chaos of Equilibrium

"...An act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted the earth is lighter, the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends. The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is within the balance of the whole. But we, in so far as we have power over the world and over one another, we must *learn* to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the balance. Having intelligence, we must not act in igno-

rance. Having choice, we must not act without responsibility..."

Ursula Le Guin, The Farthest Shore, 1973. (The Le Guin quote is interesting because it seems to understand the import of Chaos a decade or more before scientists came up with the theory.)

Books for Bulgaria

I've had a plea come in from a Mrs R. Mileva, who is trying to set-up an SF library for Bulgarian fans in Sofia. She points out in her letter that Bulgarian SF fans haven't had the chance to read anything except books approved by the Communist Party for over four decades now, so many of the fans know very little about the English language SF of the last fifty years. And that's a lot of catching-up to do! I'm already sending SF-Aid parcels: why not do the same? The address for Mrs Mileva is: 51A, Bigla Street, Sofia 1126, Bulgaria

Credits

On the writers' side:

John D. Owen, pp 2-4, 17-19
Skel, pp 6-12
Dave Langford, pp 12-15
Andy Sawyer, pp 20-21
Pamela Boal, pp 22-23
Cecil Nurse, pp 24-25
Steve Palmer, pp 26-27
Dorothy Davies, pp 28-30

On the artists' side:

Harry Bell, cover, pp 39, 43, 49
Harry Turner, pp 5, 40
Shep Kirkbride, pp 14-15, 55
Alan Hunter, pp 16, 21, 27
Dave Windett, p 19
John Miller, p 23
Peggy Ranson, pp 25, 30, 33, 34, 37
Teddy Harvia, p 47
Steven Fox, pp 50, 51

Phew! That's all folks! Next issue should be out during the summer, with luck, but after the delay this time, who knows?

