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The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

VECTOR EDITOR

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Editorial

We are three weeks into the year 1984 and I'm beginning to wish that 1984 had never been written. I don't mind the odd television and radio programme but it has got to the state where every other programme is about George Orwell and

1984. "Don't complain, it is good for science fiction" I can hear you murmur. Well, yes, it must be, mustn't it. The problem is I'm not sure. It is undoubtedly true that George Orwell has had an enormous effect over the years upon the growth of science fiction in terms of popularity (how many of you read 1984 at school?), and the development of science fiction as a genre. But, note I said as a genre, not as a form of literature. Because even today when 1984 is discussed as a book of literature (rather than scientific speculation as per 'Tomorrow's World') outside our small circle of science fiction, it is not referred to in terms of the development of science fiction, but rather in terms of George Orwell, and the political climate of the times. This distinction is important as it shows a different emphasis of intent. The science fiction writers of today, are just that, they write to their genre, it is not the subject or theme of the story that defines the novel's character but rather the character is first defined 'science fiction' and then the novel written into it. It is rather like an artist getting up in the morning and saying "Today, although I have to paint a picture of a Battleship, it is going to be done in the manner of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" Now, there is no doubt that the picture could be done, but it would not be faithful either to Rossetti or do justice to the theme, the poor battleship! This confusion in intent is most obvious in the genre's home-grown writers. These embryonic 'SF' writers that have grown within science fiction fandom, who idealized the writers of their time and then later dismissed them in contempt while following in their footsteps, are but fungi growing on the surface of the main tree. They can normally be recognized, not only in their intent to write 'science fiction' but also in their attitude to writing. It goes without saying that to be a writer you must be obsessive about writing itself, but that obsession, I would suggest, is about the urge to put your thoughts down into a written format. As an example, if a publisher comes up to the writer and says "I would like 10 sword-and-sorcery novels, will you write them?" and without a qualm he does so, that of course is still writing, but it is a twisted form of writing, when the act of putting words down on paper has become the sole objective. And you get the uncomfortable feeling that once the river has been crossed the stepping stones back to the other side become awash with torrents of muddy water. Obviously, this is a generalization, not all science fiction writers are of this type. But is there not a case for saying that writers and critics have brought the commercialization of the genre upon themselves because of this attitude to writing?

Which brings me back to George Orwell. How many of you saw the cartoon in The Sunday Times which shows a bookseller selling a copy of 1984 to a buyer and saying; "We've started to call him Oilwell". At first it amused me, but the realization that if we are not careful that this will become the prevalent attitude to science fiction then worried me. Because already we are playing the bestsellers game. I believe that for science fiction to develop we must stay on that narrow line between commercialism and economic uncertainty. It is up to the writers and critics of the genre to avoid playing the game. For if the game takes over, what then will be left of science fiction literature?

To end on a pleasant note can I thank all of you that sent contributions to the competition that Vector is running. You had me worried for a while as one week before the closing date I had only 1 entry, thankfully quite a few more came in the following week. The results and winning entries will be published next issue. Until then, Geoff Rippington.....

A TWO-FOOT SQUARE OF GENE WOLFE

Interview By Judith Hanna &

Joseph Nicholas

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction calls Gene Wolfe "greatly underrated... one of the finest modern SF writers". It was compiled before the publication of The Shadow of the Torturer, which with The Claw of the Conciliator, The Sword of the Lictor, and The Citadel of the Autarch makes up 'The Book of the New Sun' tetralogy. These volumes have won him the attention and acclaim he richly deserves; and they've won him a clutch of awards to prove it: the BSFA Award and the World Fantasy Award for The Shadow of the Torturer, and the Nebula Award for The Claw of the Conciliator. We interviewed Gene Wolfe while he was visiting Britain in October 1983 for the Book Marketing Council's 'Venture into SF' promotion and to be feted as guest of Honour at that year's Fantasycon in Birmingham.

Our first questions were about "The Book of the New Sun". Wolfe estimates that the ideas which went into the tetralogy were conceived early in 1975: "I started writing it around the middle of 1975, about June or July, so I was probably working on the ideas for a couple of months before getting down to it. I was working on a few other things in between, but I did it as a draft though that was considerably shorter than what I ended up with. I expanded quite a bit on second draft - I did the second drafts of everything before I did the final draft of The Shadow of the Torturer...

"I really started this thing as a short story, and it got out of hand - the original idea was for Severian to fall in love with Thecla, permit Thecla to die, be exiled for it, come back from exile with some kind of power so that he could force the Guild to make him a master of the guild. Then Thecla was to write to him and say 'I'm alive, it was all a ruse so that I could escape'; that was the original idea. But it has plot weaknesses: for one thing, it's quite an anticlimax if you make a big deal over the girl being dead and it turns out she isn't; and for another, how was he going to force the guild to make him a master? He has to come back with a large bucket of dirt, or something, to do it. So I got to playing around with this, and of course the business in exile became much larger than the original idea. I kept having characters walk into the damn book. I came across an old letter that I wrote back in 1976 or 1977 to some friends, describing the thing, and I said it was like owning a two-foot square of the sea and thinking that you had an aquarium, because sharks and so forth pass through it, in and out. Agia and her brother did that; they were very much sharks who just swam into the book. But the greatest of the sharks, actually, was delicate little Dorcas. Severian fell off the walkway (I knew he was going to) and she grabbed him, and there she was - and I thought 'Who the hell is this, what am I going to do with her?' I had to make a place for her..

"I think the subconscious mind is stirring up these things, and it makes trouble for the conscious mind, and the conscious mind has to figure out

why they're coming up. Why is this person here? I have confidence in the subconscious mind; the subconscious mind has generated this person for some reason, but I have to find out who she is." Can he recall at what point he did find out? "Yes, I think.. it was after they had left the Botanical Gardens and they were going to the Inn of Lost Loves and seeing the people trooping on the Sanguinary Field. As well as I can recall.. Some of it was very obvious. You realise she's the old boatman's wife, the man rowing the skiff in the Gardens; I knew that before then. Then when they got the note in the Inn of Lost Loves I knew just who she was, and had to work in her son, who wrote the note.."

But a work as long and complex as 'The Book of the New Sun' doesn't spring from any one clearcut origin: "What happens is that a number of things come together. I would have a dozen or two dozen things kicking around in my mind, and I would say 'I can take that theme, and I can use that character, and I can take this scene, and they will all go together'. For a long time I'd been wanting to do a novel in which you saw a character move slowly into battle, starting from behind, where the war was only a rumour, and moving slowly up until he was actually in the battle. That was one of the ideas that I had; and I had this torturer thing, in the form of clothing, as costume, as a pen and ink sketch of the torturer; and I thought that I could take him and move him into the battle. And I had read a book called Dead and Buried, which was on the resurrectionists - you know, around Edinburgh they dug up the bodies and sold them to the medical school? (Yes, Burke and Hare, although there were other people in the business too. They weren't the only ones, but Burke and Hare got to the point where they didn't bother to dig; some of the bodies were still warm when they hit the dissecting table. Eventually they killed a very popular hooker, and one that all the medical students knew because they'd had her on Saturday night, but here she was on the table and she was hardly dead at all! And they had corpse-safes, iron cages which you put the coffin in and buried it, and kept it until the body was old enough that it wouldn't interest a resurrectionist because he could no longer sell it to the medical students; and then you dug it up, took the coffin out of the cage, and used the cage for a different burial. They still have these things.) I thought, that's nice, I would like to do some of that sort of thing, have some grave-robbing business in a book; well, I could do that with the torturer, and do that with him moving into war, and so forth. I thought it was a very dramatic scene, so I used it to kick off the book."

Severian, the torturer, who narrates the story, is very much the central figure of the tetralogy: "Any character, that I write about, anyway, tends to develop for me as I write. The problem is getting that development to the reader. When I look back, and look at the things I wrote when I couldn't sell them, I see that the problem was that I had it in my head but I never got it down on paper. What I originally had was a mental picture of the torturer's habit, and I had to have someone who would wear this costume, wear these clothes. And then there was a Guild of Torturers, obviously, the people who wore those clothes; and then I decided to back up a little bit, and rather than starting with a journeyman or master of the guild, I would start with an apprentice who looked at people who wore those clothes and wanted to wear them himself. Severian is an apprentice who's very conscious of his ragged clothing; I don't know if you noticed, but it bothers him."

In a number of Wolfe's works, there's a character who turns out to be his own opposite - Wat the Outlaw/Sieur Ganelon in The Devil in a Forest, the aborigine/Dr Marsch in "VRT" - was Severian becoming the Autarch another instance of this reversal? "Oh yes. At the very beginning of the book Severian becomes, in his heart, a revolutionary, a Vodalarri, because he sees Vodarus as a heroic figure; and as boys that age do he declares himself, at least mentally, as his follower; but he ends up being the government that he wants to overthrow."

Did Wolfe have any particular southern continent in mind for the setting of the tetralogy? "Yes, it's a greatly geologically altered South America, and

when you get to the native fauna as opposed to the exotic fauna that has been brought back from the stars, the smilodons and so on, then you find South American fauna. The monkeys are South American, for example. The native that the two missionaries are trying to convert, Margay, that's a South American cat. But the river is not any particular South American river; I'm assuming that enough time has gone past for geology to change things a great deal.. Everybody thinks the Ascians are Asians, but they're actually the people of North America."

The Ascians, of course, are the enemies of the Commonwealth. When, in The Citadel of the Autarch, Severian reaches the war zone, he meets an Ascian prisoner of war in a field hospital. The Ascians talk only in slogans:

"The Ascian began to speak: 'In times past, loyalty to the cause of the populace was to be found everywhere. The will of the Group of Seventeen was the will of everyone.'

"Fiola interpreted: 'Once upon a time...'

"'One is Strong, another beautiful, a third a cunning artificer. Which is best? He who serves the populace.'

"'On this farm lived a good man...'" (p85, Arrow edition)

"I got a very good review in Playboy, apparently because the reviewer was very taken with that chapter. It's great fun to do at public readings, because the people, as I do the story, begin to realise that they can speak it themselves. People realise as Fiola, who's doing the translations for Loyal to the Group of Seventeen, who says it in Ascian and she translates it into English, they realise that they know what she's going to say. It's like watching a foreign language picture and being able to beat the caption."

Another notable feature of the tetralogy is Wolfe's use of unusual words (eg cacogen, armiger, fuligin). Had Wolfe previously collected these words into some sort of checklist? "It was only a mental checklist, which gave me problems because I had an idea of roughly how they sounded but I didn't know just how they were spelt. I had to go through a number of reference books to locate some of them, because they were spelt rather differently to how I would have spelt them if I'd gone in for freehand spelling. And sometimes I came upon things I knew I needed, an unusual word that I didn't have, and I had to start poring through lexicons and so forth trying to find something that would not only fit the meaning but would sound right in the context."

We'd also been intrigued by the breaks in narrative between volumes of the tetralogy. Why had Wolfe left out a chunk of story between each book? "It wouldn't seem like much of a break if I didn't. I tried to make the books fold in places where I didn't want to go into a lot of detail - I could have taken forever to get Severian from the House Absolute to Thrax, and as it is I did a little bit at the start of the trip, then broke the book and started again with him in Thrax. You didn't want to see much of village scenes along that river, you know. Perhaps not, anyway."

Would some of what had been left out of the tetralogy go into the forthcoming The Urth of the New Sun? "No, nothing that was left out of the tetralogy, really. It will take up about ten years after the close of the tetralogy, and there will be some flashback material in it, but the flashbacks will be largely to the ten year hiatus, rather than to Severian's childhood or the journey to Thrax or the journey into the mountains, or whatever. It will start with him on a ship, already on the journey", that is, a journey off-planet to bring back the New Sun, as foreshadowed in The Citadel of the Autarch. "I have it in first draft, but I don't know how much I'm going to change the first draft at his point. But it starts with him on a ship.. and it flashes back to the boarding of the ship, among other things."

Another volume related to 'The Book of the New Sun' is The Castle of the Otter, which was released as a Science Fiction Book Club offering for November 1983: "What happened with The Castle of the Otter, I think, is that the book

club offered 'The Book of the New Sun' - The Citadel of the Autarch as the regular selection and the other three as alternates - and they sold very well, so they started casting around for something that was related to 'The Book of the New Sun'; and they found this little book that, quite frankly, I wrote as a joke. Locus had said that I was working on a new book called The Castle of The Otter, but it was really The Citadel of the Autarch, which I'd mentioned to Charlie Brown in an interview although he'd misheard the title. So I thought 'Well, I'll write a real book called The Castle of the Otter since it's a neat title' and I just dashed it off. Mark Ziesing was going to do 520 copies; he and I both figured that would be the end of it, that nobody would worry about the damn thing after that. Now it's coming out in an edition of thousands and thousands, it's full of in-jokes and things like that."

Though it was the recent publication of 'The Book of the New Sun' that raised Wolfe to celebrity status, as The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction points out he has been writing, and writing fine SF, for many years. His first notable success in the field was with the short story 'The Island of Dr Death and Other Stories' (1970), which was nominated for a Nebula. With the related 'The Death of Dr Island' (which did win a Nebula in 1973) and 'The Doctor of Death Island' (1978) and other stories, it's now been collected in The Island of Dr Death and Other Stories and Other Stories (Timescape 1980, Arrow 1981). Another collection of his stories, Gene Wolfe's Book of Days, has been published in hardback by Doubleday in the US. Are there plans to release any more short story collections in the near future? "Ziesing is going to do a book called The Wolfe Archipelago, which you could call a short story collection - it will have 'The Island of Dr Death and Other Stories', 'The Death of Dr Island', 'The Doctor of Death Island', and a new story, 'The Death of the Island Doctor', in it. But that's the closest thing to a new collection."

In 1973, when Malcolm Edwards published a postal interview with Gene Wolfe in Vector 65 (the first interview Wolfe ever gave), The Fifth Head of Cerberus had just appeared; Pamela Sargent's review of it follows the interview. It consists of three linked novellas, set on the twin planets of St Croix and St Anne, focussing in St Croix on Port Mimizon, a French colonial city: "a very wicked town, a beastly place" Wolfe said to us; and in St Anne on the enigma of the vanished aborigines: "The aboriginal thing itself, of course, was somewhat Australian; the French colonial thing came from New Orleans, a city I was familiar with as a kid. I grew up in Houston, which is not all that far away; we went over to New Orleans fairly often. And of course French Canada; I used to look at maps of French Canada to steal names from."

His next major work was Peace, a non-SF novel, the memories of an old man, Alden Dennis Weer, in an obscure mid-western town. Asked if he had any favourites amongst his own works, Wolfe nominated Peace as "a big favourite among the books" (with "'The Detective of Dreams', probably among short stories"). How much of the mid-American setting of Peace was autobiographical? "I don't know; a lot of that is in and out.. the town, Cassonsville, is very close to Logan, Ohio, which is where my father grew up; I used to be taken back there to visit my grandmother and so on. So there's that... and a lot of my own childhood relationship, I think, with stories and books, and the visit to the mother's parents in the south. My mother came from a genuine William Faulkner family in Bellhaven, North Carolina, and I worked some of that in."

Had he also used specific incidents from his own life in short stories? "I'm sure I have, but I'd have to scratch my head a bit to think about it. The one that comes to mind first, if you want to call a dream an actual incident, is 'Kevin Malone'. We used to have a thing called the Windy Writers Conference, and we would talk about various writing topics and discuss each others' manuscripts and so on, and the subject of dreams came up. People said 'Have you ever done one from a dream', and various things were quoted that supposedly had been done from dreams - the Coleridge poem, for example - and

after that (I'm a frequent and vivid dreamer) I had a dream that I thought I could use for a story; and I wrote 'Kevin Malone', which is essentially a lateralisation of that dream. I'm sure there must be others..."

What about the little boy in 'The Island of Dr Death and Other Stories'? "Well, I guess you could say that. What happens to me occasionally is that I meet the characters from the book I'm writing, but I think that's because if you write true characters then there can be people like that, and there's always a chance that you'll stumble across them. I did a story on that called 'The Last Thrilling Wonder Story'. That's one of the things it's about, an author/character encounter. The other thing it's about is the last mad-scientist-with-a-beautiful-daughter story."

A recurring theme in Wolfe's writing, particularly strong in Peace, is the relationship between story-telling, dream and memory. How does Wolfe conceive of this relationship? "Well, I think if you trace them back far enough they're all one thing, really. To primitive people, dreams are another reality, and they may be right; and story-telling is just the recounting of one reality or other. I've been reading The Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest known book - it dates to at least 3000 BC and perhaps earlier; it was first written down in 2700 BC, roughly, and it's thought that it is the writing-down of an oral tradition which is quite a bit older - and when you read some of the fantastic events in it, it seems quite likely that the simple explanation for the fantasy is that the people who began the oral tradition were people who didn't differentiate between dreams and waking life, what we call reality. If you had a dream in which the sun-god appeared to you in the form of a raging bull, then you said 'On the seventh day after we left Erech, the sun-god appeared in the form of a raging bull', and weren't conscious of telling what we would think of as an untruth. It wasn't an untruth to them, as it wouldn't have been an untruth to an American Indian."

It has been said of Wolfe's characters that they tend to have a solipsist attitude to the world. Does this reflect Wolfe's own philosophy? "I think it's probably a reflection of my own realization that objective reality is unreachable by us. I think there is an objective reality, but I've never seen it and nobody else in this room will ever see it. Heraclitus, I think it was, who was called the laughing philosopher, said that by convention there is sweetness, by convention there is sourness, and by convention there is salt, but in reality there are atoms and space; and when you recall that he said that about 300 BC you wonder how he knew so much... When you see me, in the first place you can't see me now, because there's some time required for the light waves to travel from me, for your retina to accept the image, for your brain to process that image; and what you are seeing is the brain's processes computer-enhancement of a light image. I remember one time when I was a boy, I walked into the house and saw my father sitting in a chair, and a moment later my father came in the door over there. I looked around at the chair, and there were a few clothes thrown on it, but when I came in I had seen my father in it. The image that had registered, my brain had enhanced it to create what it thought I should be seeing. Something that my father told me when I was a boy was 'When you're looking for something, turn on all the lights you can', because the more lights that are on, the closer that enhanced image is. Otherwise, if you're looking for a map-tack, you may see it as fluff or dust."

These ideas clearly underlie 'Feather Tigers' (in The Island of Dr Death...) which Wolfe was working on in 1973. At that time he described it to Malcolm Edwards as recounting "the difficulties of aliens whose speculations about the interdependence of that extinct animal Man with the other creatures of his planet embroils one of them in a little adventure. A very light treatment of a subject that interests me deeply - totemism". To us, he said: "If you're terribly frightened of tigers, when you're going through a jungle then you'll see tigers everywhere because tigers have that nice striped pattern that's made by the sunlight coming through narrow foliage. They've got that for that reason, and that's what you'll see. A man who's out prospecting

for gold sees a lot of it, but when he picks it up it's usually not gold. In 'Feather Tigers', incidentally, those are real primitives, the People of the Falling Leaves; they are a very backward group around Cambodia and Thailand, and they are very frightened of tigers because tigers account for a great deal of their death rate. They are also frightened of the Thais because the Thais like to steal their women - the civilized Thais we know, the people who live in Bangkok."

Peace was published in 1975; the following year The Devil in a Forest, a medieval fantasy about outlaws, peasants, and witchcraft, appeared. By then, of course, Wolfe had started work on the 'New Sun' epic.

After that round-up of Wolfe's writing to date, we come to more general questions, like: when did you first start writing?

"Well, it depends what you mean by start. I went to Texas A&M..." In the Vector 65 interview he describes Texas A&M in more detail. It "offered the cheapest possible college education to Texas boys, (it) was at the time I attended it an all-male land-grant institution specializing (the A&M stands for Agricultural and Mechanical) in animal husbandry and engineering. For some reason I have forgotten - I suspect because someone told my father or me that it was a good thing to take until you made up your mind what to switch to - I majored in Mechanical Engineering. Only Dickens could do justice to Texas A&M as I knew it, and he would not be believed." To us, he went on: "There I had a room-mate who was an artist, doing pen and inks for a magazine called The Commentator, which was supposed to be the A&M literary magazine, and he suggested that it would be nice if I wrote stories that he could illustrate. So I wrote about four tiny little short stories for The Commentator while I was at A&M. Then after Rosemary and I were married, we were living in a very small furnished apartment, and we couldn't move out because we didn't have enough money to make a down-payment for furniture (furnished apartments were very hard to find), so I thought maybe I could do some more writing on the side and make some extra money over and above my salary - I was making \$450 per month, which was a nice salary in those days for a young guy just starting out, but... Anyway, I started trying to make some commercial money by writing, and of course I didn't - I wrote for years and years and never sold anything. But I got into it enough that I got hooked on it; that was late 1956, and I made my first sale in 1965."

Was that to Damon Knight who, according to the dedication of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, "in one night grew me from a bean"? "He was the first editor who bought me regularly, but he wasn't my first sale; I think my third sale was to Damon. But he was the first editor who communicated with me, and said 'I like this, and I don't like this, and why don't you do this instead', and kind of brought me along - which Damon has done for a lot of people; I'm not the only one by any means..."

"Rosemary and I were trying to figure out what the first Milford we went to was, and we decided it was 1968. So that was two years, at least, after Damon had begun buying my material. We had a horrible, horrible, rotten three-passenger station wagon that I bought, I have no idea why, I must have been mad. Because when I looked at it on the used car lot it looked fine but when I got it home and I looked at it again I saw that it had rusted out completely and been repaired by soldering on metal plates and painting them over; it was a horrible machine. We piled all the kids in the car, and drove to Milford, Pennsylvania. We had rented a cabin, sight unseen - Damon had said a lot of people have cabins for rent, and that's what you need, with your family, instead of two or three hotel rooms - and the cabin was.. at first you thought it was wallpaper, but then you realized that it was mould; it was damp and rotting. Damon came around to welcome me, and he had this tall, stoop-shouldered, or hunch-backed, man with him and introduced him, and it was Jack

Williamson. I'd been reading Jack Williamson since I was that high; it was an absolute flake-out. You know, I'd read 'With Folded Hands' and had nightmares for weeks... Oh yes, I read science fiction as a kid. I read a lot of mysteries as a kid, too."

Currently, Wolfe works as an editor of an engineering magazine: "I had a job that I was very unhappy with; I was working for Procter & Gamble, the soap company, and had been there for sixteen years. After the first ten, I realized that the whole thing was a terrible mistake and that I never should have joined them. We had offices that had five men in - five people in, but they were almost always men - and one of the men joined a stock club, so he got a subscription to The Wall Street Journal. I used to pick it up off his desk and page through it, and there was once an ad there for a technical editor. At the time, Rosemary was very homesick for Peoria, Illinois - Bob Silverberg said at that time he could buy Peoria for \$250; he would have done it, but Farmer wouldn't sell - and when I saw this ad, I thought 'Well, if it's in Illinois, I'll answer it', and by god it was in Illinois.. I'd already been publishing things - The Fifth Head of Cerberus had already been published, for example - and when I answered the ad I said 'Look, I'm a writer, here are some books of mine'."

[He has since, as reported in the January 1984 issue of Locus, announced that he will shortly be leaving his job to write full-time.]

Does he use his engineering knowledge in constructing his stories? "I think it helps, yes, although I think sometimes people without it get a lot more dramatic stories because they have the idea that you can make a ray-gun out of a burnt-out radio tube and two pieces of wire, and I don't believe that. I can't write that kind of thing in my stories because I can't suspend my disbelief enough to do it. If you have a great deal of junk, and a great deal of knowledge, and a great deal of time, you might be able to make something effective by salvaging the junk; but not the guy who's in the cell and finds the two pieces of wire and the burnt-out radio tube... An author of a spy novel was writing in The Writer's Magazine about how he'd been attacked for not explaining how the hero got the gun aboard the plane past the magnetic detectors, and he said the gun was made of super-strong plastic. I said you can't make a gun out of plastic! 'With super-strong plastic I can make anything I want to', you know the sort of thing."

Wolfe's fiction is very different from what we tend to think of as the typically American optimism and technological progress SF, like that written by, for instance, Heinlein, Niven and Pournelle, which seems to hold that there is nothing you cannot solve with a table of facts and a blaster. Is Wolfe's leaning towards the more European outlook of emphasis on death and dissolution a deliberate counterbalancing to this? "Well, the kind of thing you're talking about used to be called 'boosterism', and there's always been a counter-trend which had been as much part of America as the booster side is. Remember Edgar Allan Poe was an American; born in Boston as a matter of fact - his mother was English, but he never knew his mother since she died when he was an infant - and raised in Baltimore. H.P. Lovecraft was an American who prided himself on his old colonial stock.. So there's always been that undertow in America."

Does Wolfe have any particular favourite writers? Not just science fiction writers but writers in general? "G.K. Chesterton, who's a favourite of mine.. I've read a lot of Dickens... Mervyn Peake... I guess H.G. Wells is a science fiction writer, but my father gave me his History of the World about five years after it was a hot book, so I did him a bit early. What other people? Well, Proust: I read all Proust's seven novels - Remembrance of Things Past, as people call it, but it's actually seven novels - and then I started through it again, and got about halfway before a new translation came out, so I stopped and bought the new translation. But I still haven't read that; one of these days... I've read a lot of Kipling - still read him occasionally - and used a quote from him before one of the books."

Have these favourite writers influenced the way he writes? "Undoubtedly; I don't think there's any question that they have. Proust has been an influence, there's no doubt about that. I didn't mention Vance a minute ago but that was because I was doing non science fiction writers first, but I've certainly been influenced by him; and I've been influenced a bit by Lafferty, I think."

An hour-long interview like this allows no more than a sampling of its subject's opinions and anecdotes. Here, we have no more than a "two-foot square" of Gene Wolfe. The questions we cast as bait attracted only a limited selection of a complex range of potential responses. In Wolfe's writing, in his carefully-crafted fictions, far more of his views, his philosophy, his perspective on life, is to be found. But, if looking in his fiction for Wolfe himself, the writer's own views, it would be well to bear in mind that he said in 1973:

"I don't voice my own opinions through my characters, because one of them is that each character should be true to himself or herself at all times; and if one of them isn't it hurts like a boil until I fix it. Obviously I may agree, from time to time, with something a character says, but that is purely co-incidental and I seldom think about it."

Finally: what, apart from The Urth of the New Sun, is Wolfe working on at present? "I'm kind of in between things, actually. Just before I left for Britain I sent the manuscript of a chapbook off the Cheap Street, called Bibliomen, which consists of twenty little mock-biographies: "Twenty Characters Looking for a Book" is the subtitle. So that's gone, and when I get back I'm going to pick up a novel called Free Live Free, which is almost ready to go out to market - I sent it to my agent for comments and corrections, and by the time she sent it back to me I was trying to wrap up Bibliomen in time to get it to Cheap Street, so it didn't get worked on, but I'll pull that out as soon as I get home and start working on that again." The January Locus notes that the finished version of Free Live Free is now with Wolfe's agent but had not yet been bought by a publisher.

[Our thanks to Sally Morris and Helen Kinnings of Arrow, who facilitated the interview, and to Gene Wolfe for generously making time for us in his crowded schedule.]



Why They're All Crying Wolfe!

Mike Dickinson

With the publication of The Citadel of the Autarch, Gene Wolfe has brought his book to a close. However many extra stories may be attached to the tetralogy, the structure is now complete and they can only be extensions, whether made for love or money. It is now possible to assess his achievement properly, for this is not a conventionally-assembled series. Re-reading makes it abundantly clear that the 'Book of the New Sun' was conceived of, and virtually executed, as a whole; it is therefore appropriate, as well as convenient to refer to the parts as Volumes One to Four. The resultant narrative is rewarding on first reading but gives new pleasures with each new reading. Already the news comes that two leading critics are planning to write a book about it, which leaves an article of this length merely offering a few thoughts.

Wolfe's initial choice of the medium of science-fantasy and a torturer as protagonist seemed perverse, as if he wished from the outset to demonstrate that virtuosity can overcome any disadvantage. Although, thanks to the work of such writers as Ballard, Disch, Dick and Le Guin, SF has gained some literary reputation, and with fantasy, in Angela Carter, Davidson and M. John Harrison, we have at least three writers who demonstrate, in very different ways, an ability and originality of the highest order, the fact remains that both areas are deluged with hastily written and repetitious dross. Fortunately, the vogue for templé 'Dungeons and Dragons' fantasies seems to have died, but there has been a compensatory boom in barbarians to ensure that the gutter flows strongly with blood.

A couple of years ago Michael Yardley noted (in the New Statesman) that soldiers in West Germany drew inspiration for women and 'queer' bashing from a series which, as described, could only have been Norman's 'Gor' books. Considering this, the documented effect upon Charles Manson of Heinlein's amoral superman in Stranger in a Strange Land and the faithful reproduction on film and the popularity expressed in sales of Robert E. Howard's fascistic philosophy, it is evident that much of the field's most-read reading is so morally irresponsible as to constitute a form of pornography. Thus it was no surprise that someone was writing a book about a torturer; the surprising elements were the identity of the author and the paradox he created. From that initial, menacing decision, Wolfe has created a protagonist-narrator who not merely acts as a corrective to some of the vices of 'triumph of the will'-type fantasies, but whose own voice is one of the most remarkable in any form of modern literature.

Severian's role at the moral centre of the book is both innovative and fascinating. Generally, any attempt within the genre to depict development of personal morality is conducted on a 'self improvement by lessons' principle. Each lesson comes in a challenging package with rewards of self-esteem, power and material possessions. This simplistic design may have lapsed in public estimation since the time that Samuel Smiles offered it, but still seems to be close to writer's hearts. Indeed, a more corrupt version, such as the development of a supremely powerful being which has the moral right to control and manipulate lesser humans, is not infrequent (vide Heinlein, Wyman, Le Guin and later Alfred Bester): despite warnings by Norman Spinrad and early Alfred Bester! Fantasy, typically, tends to take a fundamentally hierarchical approach: misplaced aristocrats or royalty discover their real identities and

are accepted as superior, especially since they naturally did everything better than the others anyway (Lord Valentine's Castle). Sometimes though, this process is cut even shorter in fantasy by the introductions of tokens of superiority: jewels, swords etc., the de facto noble ruler being able to do nasty things to anyone who reminds him he was once a stableboy. This may have a similar sort of wish-fulfilment to that which has kept Wells' Kipps and Mr. Polly popular for half a century, but allows for none of the expansion in character of the latter books. Plainly, the general philosophy is that might is right, with subsidiary benefits for high birth. The only alternative to this seems to be the triumph of virgin purity by mortification of the flesh and obscure military disciplines whose latest incarnation is "Star Wars", or the brainless, callous ability simply to persevere and keep killing exemplified by Conan.

Neither of the latter types allows for a human ingredient, remaining stubbornly fictional; if for no other reason, because the wielding of power demands a certain deadening of sensitivity and compromise becomes necessary. Wolfe comprehends this and constructs Severian's life in a complex way, allowing for compromise and changes of mind.

Wolfe does not shirk the issue of the barbaric nature of Severian's employment. Before the end of Volume One, there have been an execution, two shocking tortures, one directly physical, the other, the 'revolutionary' horrific because of its mental effects. This machine, one of a number of ingenious inventions, uses electro-chemical reaction to focus self-hatred upon its victim, who eventually dies by his/her own uncontrollable hands. Volume Two opens with a maiming and an execution, which serves as an exemplar of Wolfe's searching form of paradoxical argument. Severian demonstrates his humanity, not only in his concern to spare the victim unnecessary suffering, but also in the clinical precision with which he conducts his business. The rationalization that it was just a task of work, is hardly a new one, but the passionate concern for proficiency as a protection of the victim is convincingly portrayed. Having established the nature of Severian's work, Wolfe chooses to stop describing it, despite the fact that the former continues to practice his art until the breaking of his sword at the end of Volume Three. Severian has been raised to take a pride in accomplishing his tasks to the best of his ability, both from pride and as an expression of concern. Within the context of the society described he is able to justify the necessity for the guild's work. However, despite the guilt he experiences in allowing Chatelaine Ihecla to escape the effects of the 'revolutionary' by suicide, and his feelings of total failure when he spares Cyriaca and aids her to evade pursuit, these actions are those of someone capable of sufficient moral development to transcend his upbringing.

We have come to accept Severian's basic belief that for a member of the Guild the greatest honour is to be judged correct in the administration of his orders. We have followed his life from his first appearance as a companionable boy of character and resource. Later we have seen his isolation as member of Guild whose existence is largely forgotten except as a terrifying metaphor. Severian thus joins a long line of scapegoats, rather like one of Hardy's sin-eaters. The result of this detailed autobiography is to provoke a strong bond with the reader, leading to an appreciation of the rigour of the standards by which he judges himself, alien though these seemed to be at the outset. Thus his guilt and sense that he is betraying the most reasonable of callings and most decent of men can be appreciated, as can his nostalgia for the simplicity of Guild standards.

The war criminal trials after the Second World War did not mark the end of the debate between the supporters of duty and those of individual conscience; indeed the nuclear age has continued to demand unthinking obedience of its servants. Wolfe's is an important contribution to the view that nobody should be blinded by training or duty to the demands of humanity.

This strength of characterization is vital because of the singularity of

Severian. Not only is his avocation peculiar, to his own as well as our society, but his nature is unique. He possesses not merely eidetic memory, but total sensory recall. This faculty makes him an outstanding narrator: small, seemingly insignificant details are produced, which sometimes develop and at other times act in a sort of pointillism correlation with others to fill in the background. The autobiography thus provides that fidelity to thought patterns usually only achieved in taped interviews, but assembled with a fine sense of underlying structure. In many ways it is a better successor to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* than almost any mainstream work, since various sounds, sights and, most especially, smells are sufficient to trigger a rush of related memory from any stage in his or Thecla's past, and, as with Joyce, this process of image-recall is cumulative, so that, on a second occasion, both the memory and the previous summoning of it can appear. This is not an isolated complexity though, as the first view of Master Gurloes demonstrates:

"Gurloes was one of the most complex men I have ever known, because he was a complex man trying to be simple. Not a simple, but a complex man's idea of simplicity.... the strain showed; though every part of Gurloes was as it should be, none of the parts fit." (Vol 1 pl8)

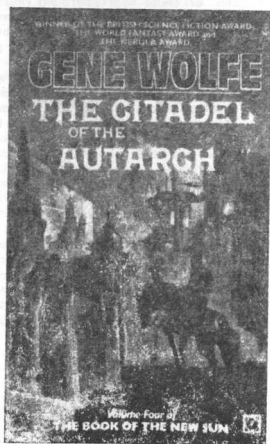
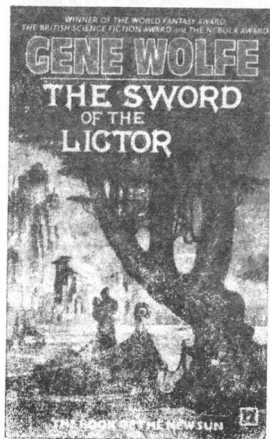
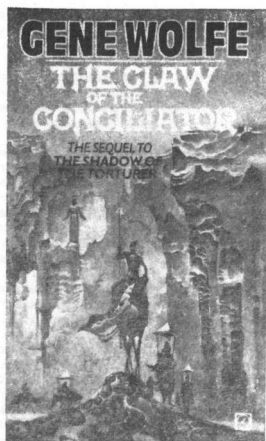
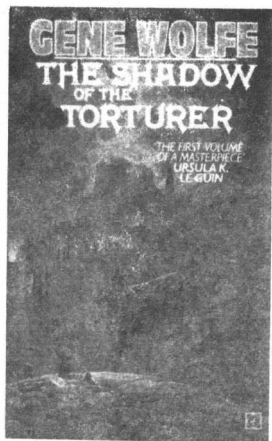
This conveying of a complex idea in determinedly simple language gives only a brief glimpse of the balance of Wolfe's prose style. It also illustrates the advantages of Severian as narrator: able to appreciate complexity of nature sufficiently to escape the shorthand style of characterizing by physical details of behaviour. Nevertheless, when a significant detail is examined it is with hallucinatory clarity; witness this description of Dr. Talos, from Severian's first encounter with him:

"If there are layers of reality beneath the reality we see... then in one of those most profound realities, Dr. Talos' face was a fox's mask on a wall and I marvelled to see it turn and bend now towards the woman, achieving by those motions... an amazing and realistic appearance of vivacity." (Vol 1 pl48)

This, I venture to suggest, is as clear and concise a piece of characterization from one detail as one could wish to see, rivalling such renowned virtuoso performances as the reconstruction of Elizabeth I, physically and mentally, from her hand in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

Other developments in the book substantiate that image, while it is also rendered ironical. Indeed, that most plangent image, the face, is one of the more obvious in Wolfe's structure of appearance vs. reality. (Not that it is a simple 'fair face, false heart' affair - indeed the subtle gradations of this symbolism will probably keep some Ph.D hunter very happy in the future.) Thus in Volume Three, Talos emerges from the shell of the fairground barker as an android and one who, in seeming contradiction to his role, has been programmed for honesty. Yet this does not prevent his being able to write plays. Indeed the relationship between Talos and his protege-master, Baldanders, mirrors its 'Pozzo and Lucky' shifts in submission-dominance with another ambiguity about which is more human, which more mechanical. For, just as Talos appears at first a cruel master and Baldanders a dull-witted slave, when Talos is revealed as an android his creator Baldanders is shown as, almost literally, a self-made man and arguably the more programmed.

This is no theoretical debate, though, for it is woven into the material of the book and appears at the most crucial junctures. One of the most striking of these appearance/reality ambiguities next occurs when the ostensibly stupid Baldanders, appearing in Dr. Talos' play with Severian, runs amok and attacks the court audience. This crowd includes some alien guests known as cacogens, or, more politely, hierodules, whose panic produces a



vision of horror:

'I saw several throw aside their capes and - as it appeared - their faces too. Under the faces..., were such monstrosities as I had not thought existence could support: a circular mouth ringed with needle teeth; eyes that were themselves a thousand eyes, clustered like the scales of a pine cone: jaws like tongs' (Volume 2 p239)

And yet the next time he meets the hierodules, not only are they more friendly than his former companion Baldanders but, beneath a second mask, are shown to be human. Severian is reminded:

'All of the monstrous masks you've seen us wear are but your fellow citizens of Urth. An insect, lamprey now a dying leper. All are your brothers though you may recoil.'

The question of identity is also crucial at this time to Severian, who has already undergone a considerable distance on the 'long journey by which (he has) backed into the throne'. The situation for Urth has been established. A previous generation attempted to conquer space but its violence provoked internal warfare and collapse, leaving its descendants with a looted planet and a dying sun. The contemporary Urthmen are rich only in story and legend, amongst which the bringing of the New Sun is most prominent. Severian's gradual discovery of his potential and the moral strength to control it makes him noticeable to these aliens and his mental horizons are widened. An alien spaceship captain is his covert enemy and launches attacks on him by means of strange beasts resembling 'Urth' legends. It also becomes apparent that Severian must be judged by aliens as a representative of humanity and, if successful, is destined to introduce the New Sun. This much, plus some slightly confusing time-travel is the science fiction element of the book. It is, however fragmentary, integral to the book - not merely an SF rationale applique to 'legitimize' a fantasy novel. It is perhaps better not to attempt a serious classification though, since it doesn't fit standard frameworks, harking back in some ways to the nineteenth century novel of character.

Within this group its closest resemblance seems to be Great Expectations, showing similarities in the choice of a central figure-narrator, social mobility, lost love and the crucial question of identity. There are also more coded references to Great Expectations in the graveyard scene (Vol 1) and the rescue that takes place there of a potential benefactor. However, the sense of the dark underlying threat behind a seemingly safe world that informs the whole of Dickens' oeuvre is perhaps his greatest legacy to Wolfe. Not that Dickens is alone in being a subject of reference; indeed pastiche and literary allusion form another level of the book below those already mentioned. The central of these seems to be a story of Jorge Luis Borges: Funes the Memorious. In fact, 'The Book of the New Sun' stands as a reply to that story for, whereas the eponymous Funes was totally paralysed by his uncanny memory, Severian thrives and is able to absorb and integrate other fully-formed personalities. Other references to Borges include the seemingly endless Citadel archives and Father Inire's strange mirrors. Further general references include the element of Waiting for Godot mentioned above, an underlying structural similarity to MacBeth and the novel Venus in Furs by which von Sader-Masoch earned his place in the language. (Severian's name is only a letter different from the victim-husband). However, there are specific, knowing references at various points to a wide range of material from Greek legend (Ulysses and Theseus), to Frankenstein via Alice in Wonderland. All of this is accomplished in a playful, allusory manner, supporting, rather than showily interrupting the story, although serious points are made about the persistence of folk-myths in archetypes. Also, the material is used at times in a highly creative manner. For example, Wolfe's most impressive beast, the

Alzabo, from which the mind drug is taken, seems likely to have been based on an old legend about the Hyena. Whereas the Hyena was reputed to be able to imitate the sound of a human being, the Alzabo, a much more powerful beast, retains, subordinates, the minds of those it eats and is able to use their exact voices to ensure the entrapment of friends, relatives etc. There is something sinister and diabolical about this creature as its victims can be heard recommending the benefits of such an existence.

Wolfe's particular use of the central-character narrator could, however, only exist in the Twentieth century after Joyce, Kafka and Celine. In this usage, the central figure is protean both initiating the bulk of the action and commenting on it. Nevertheless, even with this relatively new form Wolfe makes personal modifications. Thus, we all follow Severian's love affair with an aristocratic prisoner, the Chatelaine Thecla, his aiding her suicide to escape a more horrific death and, finally, with the aid of the analectic alzabo, his absorption of her consciousness. Two streams of consciousness then, more or less, co-exist, changing his (and thus the reader's) perception of the past and the present, in this most intimate consumption. Later, when Severian, as part of his initiation as Autarch, absorbs many personalities, his view broadens even further and he is able to see Thecla's faults as well as his own. This is the most extreme of several changes of perception which feature in the book, but even this is prepared to seem like a natural process. In 'The Book of the New Sun', as in life, changes of perception occur by small modifications; it is only in fiction that insights come regularly with the abruptness of a gear change. This evolutionary texture also addresses such crucial questions as the nature of Dorcas, Dr. Talos and Bladders, so that they gradually answer themselves, often by seemingly insignificant stages.

This complexity within the viewpoint of Severian lends a particular emphasis to Wolfe's style which has to carry the burden of action, reaction, reflection and characterization in a very intense way. To cope with this, Wolfe shows a masterly flexibility, able to move as the situation demands from one phrase using simile and metaphor in a descriptive way, to another employing direct statement in short, crisp sentences:

'he seemed to have vanished like water cast into a well... there was a house and he was in it' (Vol 1 pl4)

This control allows each character to develop a personal voice and to facilitate their own characterizations within that voice, independent of Severian. Thus, for example, Severian's discovery of Thecla's faults and Dorcas' trauma comes as no surprise to the reader. Events and scenes are described in a very evocative manner, from the horrors of Severian's imprisonment in Volume Two, to the chaos and splendour of the battle scenes. And yet this is done for the most part in remarkably spare prose, disdaining the two-penny technicoloured fustian that so afflicts the genre. On a few occasions he seems to fall off the tightrope and a scene comes across a little like one of Turner's more misty canvasses, making re-reading mandatory. However, the general effect of this tightness is, even in such a large book, to make a disproportionate number of episodes memorable, so that it comes as a surprise on re-reading to discover just how short they are.

As variety from linear narrative there are embodied two episodic stories, a competition of four fables, and several tales. Sometimes, as in the conversation with Cyriaca (Vol 3) this serves the authorial object of providing information of future importance (Cyriaca's legend), or of giving further exposition for which events moved too quickly at the time (Severian's anecdote). All in style, and often content, they show the continuity of the stuff of legend - 'The Tale of the Boy called Frog', for instance, employs elements of Moses, Romulus and Remus and The Jungle Book. Frequently they also augment the symbolic underpinning of the story - the map of an otherwise unnavigable swamp, to be flayed from the giant's thumbprint in 'The Student

and his Son', parallels the map of absorbed personalities, which appears on Severian's thumb after he is created Autarch. A similar use is made of various dreams and dreaming states, caused by illness, privation or drugs. For example, a dream of a snake with a head at both ends in context continues the theme of a descent towards Ragnarok, but is explained by the cacogens (in Volume Three) as being symbolic of the interrelation of creation and destruction. There is also a play, the text of that by Dr. Talos; however, I must admit that, apart from appreciation of its gusto and some images, I cannot claim to understand it very well.

Perhaps the most ingenious of the stories, though, is the one told by the captured Ascian as part of the competition in Volume Four. Condemned by his society to speak only in proscribed sentences from a set text, the Ascian manages to combine these to tell a meaningful, though highly pared-down narrative. This is not just another example of Wolfe's sheer love of story-telling, but serves a number of additional purposes. The most obvious, and least intentional, one of satirizing political revolutionaries who speak in slogans (specifically Mao's Little Red Book and the use made of it, springs to mind) is easily disposed of. Behind this lurks Wolfe's demonstration (and, perhaps an answer to Philip K. Dick's essential thesis) of the ineradicable humanity contained by even such an ostensibly circumscribed and robotic personality. He then progresses to a critique of the general use of language: superfluous words on the one hand and clichés on the other. By doing this he provides, surely not by accident, a counterthrust to the possible charge of under-writing mentioned earlier.

In fact, amongst the pockets of philosophy and reflection on such various subjects as twentieth century sociobiology (Vol 4 Ch 24), the nature of courage (Vol 2 Ch 7), the faults of mercy (Vol 1 Ch 30), the evolution and breeding of animals (Various Vol 1 and Vol 3) and the difficulty of siting prisons correctly (Vol 3 Ch 1), there are several ideas concerning literary criticism, most of which bear directly on the book. His frequent refusal to settle for a single unilateral meaning, even in symbols, is aptly defended in Volume 1 Chapter 32, where he discusses the three meaning of everything. It is an artistic and philosophical decision which sets him aside from much of fantasy's claptrap. In that paradigm (Tolkien), much of the narrative energy, and even the symbolism, was bent towards delineating the companies of Good and Evil and preparing for an appropriately cataclysmic final battle. In Wolfe's case, not only are the 'inhuman' enemy discovered to be no more evil than the allies, and not only are previously sympathetic friends on the 'wrong' side, but also the battle itself becomes drained of real significance and presumably is still raging at then end of the book; by which time Severian has discovered more important things to do.

Similarly, Wolfe equips Severian with those ominously familiar items, the named sword of mysterious origin and the named jewel of power. But the sword is destroyed in an important, but preliminary, battle and the jewel, having been given away, is discovered to be unexceptional in itself. Furthermore, both are treated realistically. Unlike many another sword-wielder, Severian constantly sharpens 'Ierminus Est', and even uses it for the frivolous task of shaving. He also frets and fusses about the security of the jewel, which changes nature for reasons that are plain in hindsight, and is only happy when Dorcas has made a little bag to keep it secure.

What makes the foregoing even more remarkably is that it is encapsulated within a book which is instantly accessible and enjoyable to those who only want strong narrative and basic entertainment, a point supported by its various nominations for fan awards. As well as the full-scale battle, there are fights, duels, combats with creatures, and strange devices and weapons. The exotic creatures include large thermophagic bats, degenerate wildmen, giant apes, a superman and some god-like mountainous mermaids. In every new chapter there is some fresh evidence of Wolfe's fertile imagination and, such is the plethora of incident that there could, given different emphasis, have

been a book of ripping yarns. As Algis Budrys remarked when reviewing the book, one can already imagine less gifted fantasists working to re-use many of the ideas.

As with so much of the style, Wolfe's humour is interwoven with the narrative. Thus it is generally difficult to detach examples of his wit, which considerably informs the story. However, examples of humour at the most sardonic are provided by the inexplicably menacing threat to perform the 'excruciation of the apricots' at the end of Volume 1 and the conversation with the Archon of Thrax in Volume Three: the Archon feeling threatened by the amount of courtesy food and drinks he must consume attempts a joke:

"I don't suppose your fraternity have ever considered using food as a torment, instead of starvation?"

"It is called planteration, Archon" (Vol 3 Page 36)

Assessing the full significance of Wolfe's achievement is less easy. As a side-issue, this is the most satisfactory solution of the battle of Old and New Wave yet, for there is no real dispute between style and content - the cornerstone of the book is Severian and in his case 'le style, c'est l'homme'. This may explain why it has goaded at least one of the New Wave establishment into seemingly inarticulate fury. More disinterested critics, such as Tom Disch and John Clute have been generous. Wolfe has also done a service to fantasy by providing a new role-model, which may not be easy to follow but which has removed much of the genre's dead wood. Its impact at large is more difficult to gauge. Ironically, its strength may be obscured by its literary obsession. The element of pastiche and reference which endears it to a wider literary audience may have given it a slightly over-attractive feel. There is a quality of cultural anthology at times which may date quickly. However, this argument can be over-stated and there is none of the process of subjugating text and imagination to pastiche which I feel is beginning to mar the work of some writers, notably Gregory Benford. It is my feeling, strengthened through each volume, that 'The Book of the New Sun' represents the first classic in any form of literature for at least two decades. It will go on to earn its place in that almost immortal library that will wait for the New Sun!

(C) 1984 Mike Dickinson

The Book of the New Sun

- Volume 1 The Shadow of the Torturer (303pp)
 - Volume 2 The Claw of the Conciliator (301pp)
 - Volume 3 The Sword of the Lictor (301pp)
 - Volume 4 The Citadel of the Autarch (317pp)
-

Our Young Gamer

Gene Wolfe

I must apologize. I had hoped to show you slides describing the new fantasy roll-playing game I have developed - and which I hope to market here in Britain - but your customs has held them up. Is it really possible for a tray of slides to have rabies?

But I'm going to try to tell you about my new game, Author, anyway. I believe it will give you a little insight as to what a writer's life is like in the States. I hope you'll bear with me.

May I have the first slide, please?.....Thank you

The game begins, and here we see an eager young gamer about to roll the platen to determine just what sort of author he will be. As you see he plays under the supervision of a veteran Career Master -- E.E. Smith, Brian Aldiss, or someone of that sort. Our young gamer rolls for the following characteristics: talent, intelligence, education, Ellison and Pournelle. There is this "store," you see, at the beginning of the game in which each gamer can buy such useful items as a ream of paper, a typewriter, a bullet-proof vest, a flashlight with which to work when the utility shuts off his lights, or five feet of rope with a noose at the end. How much he can buy depends on the number of gold pieces he has at the beginning of the game. However, because there is no roll for gold pieces, most young gamers begin with a rented typewriter.

May I have the next slide please?.....Thank you

Here we see -- is the focus of this one just right? Here we see one of the many fantastic fantasy figures our young author will encounter in the course of his career. This is the Writing Teacher. Frequency: Extremely common and sometimes vulgar. Number Appearing: This varies. Six at Clarion, whole herds of them at Breadloaf. Armour Class: Hard but brittle. Move: Frequently. Hits: Most recent was a serial in "Analog" in nineteen seventy-five. Treasure Type: Nil. Special Attacks: After greasy foods. Special Defences: See my agent.

May I have the next slide please?.....Thank you

[Above them, the mountain rose in terraces, the lower steps green with jungle, the upper escarpments white with ice. Vines as thick as a fat man's waist spilled down these declensions and climbed back up puffing.

"And is the Temple of Death at the top, Princess?" I inquired.

She shook her head. "No. Higher than that. Maybe about halfway up. Or two thirds."]

This is the Postman, one of the most terrifying figures the author must face in the course of the whole game. Unlike the others, this one is frightful when it doesn't appear, and not when it does. Frequency: Daily about two o'clock or possibly four, except on Sundays, all National and local holidays, rainy days,

bad days, and days when he just doesn't feel like it (I don't know how it is here, but in the states when our postmen are feeling a little down, they just stuff our mail into the storm sewers. I do hope all of you who've sent me fanzines I haven't loosed will keep that in mind.) Numbering Appearing: One, if that. Move: Slowly. Hit Dice: Equals number of manuscripts the author had out to publishers. Treasure Type: Cheques. Attacks: By dogs. Special Attacks: By large dogs. Intelligence: Nil. Alignment: Civil Service. Size: Eleven triple E.

May I have the next slide, please?....Thank you.

Here we have the Good Agent. My gosh, just look at her! Isn't she lovely? Frequency: Nil.

May I have the next slide please?....Thank you.

And here is her evil twin, the Bad Agent. Frequency: As often as she needs money. Appearing: On the back pages of the writing magazines. Size: Usually quarter column. Armour Class: Fifty. Move: "We are really quite interested in your work." Special Move: Criticism for a fee. Hit Dice: Loaded. Percent in Lair: Fifteen domestic, thirty Hollywood, forty Foreign. Number of Attacks: Attacked whenever the author encounters her former clients. Damages: Sues for. Special Attacks: By the Bunco Squad. Special Defenses: Flies by night. Magic Resistance: "We do not handle fantasy, short stories, or poetry." Intelligence: Does not read. Alignment: Slightly crooked. Psionic Ability: Can smell trouble. Treasure Type: Well, if she had any, she wouldn't represent you, now would she?

May I have the next slide please?.....Thank you.

This is the Slush-Pile Reader. Frequency: About two stories a day. Number Appearing: Never appears at all. Armour Class: The Slush-Pile Reader has no class. Move: Tightly circular. Hits: Same as Postman, but with the added ability to return other players' manuscripts to you. Treasure Type: Nil, cannot accept anything. Number of Attacks: Same as frequency for Postman. Damage: Mostly to the ego. Magic Resistance: One hundred percent. Alignment: With Editor. (I'm going to tell you about the Editor in a moment; please be patient.) Size: Six and a quarter. Psionic Ability: Cannot spell psionic.

May I have the next slide please?.....Thank you so much.

And here's the Editor. Frequently: Replaced. Number Appearing: About three at the average con around Chicago, where I live. Many more in London, I should think. Appearance: In the States they favour the elderly punk-rocker look. Here it's tweed jackets and a pipe, I believe. Treasure Types: Writes letter of acceptance, or has secretary do it. Alignment: Lawful good, except at conventions. Size: Ranges from Judy-Lynn to the entire Scott Meredith Agency. Which actually turned out to be shorter than Judy-Lynn. Attacks: In editorials. Defence: In letter column. Special Issues: Annually.

May I have the next slide, please?.....Thank you.

Here's the Publisher. Frequency: Usually monthly. Number Appearing: At cons, only Tom Daugherty of Tor. Armour Class: Sensitive to SFWA's Destroyer Lawyer. Move: Writes cheques during the winter solstice unless it falls in December. Hits: "Melancholy Baby" at the Harvard Club. Number in Lair: Gone to South America, his secretary will take the message. Treasure Type: He has ten thousand shares in the company - that's why he's a publisher. Number of Attacks: As often as he likes, including retroactive. Number of the Beast: Six

sixty-six. Special Attacks: Fires your editor, no matter how good he is. Special Defences: Pleads the Fifth Amendment. Magic Resistance: "Can't you get some hard SF, like 'Star Wars'?" Intelligence: Furnished by a Pinkerton spy in Accounting. Line: Bottom. Alignment: Unlawful evil, unless audited. Size: Forty-eight waist, 28 leg, with cuffs and pleats. Psionic Ability: Lots of it, which is how he knows that if he makes his line identical to another Publisher's successful line, he will make as much money as the other publisher does, since the audience will miraculously double. After three drinks at lunch, maybe more.

Now may I have the last slide please?... Thank you very much.

[DO NOT GO TO THE FANTASY CONVENTION! We have learned that an assassin-
(More junk--please excuse it)]

There are many, many more monsters I could show you, but the children are getting restless and it's time we got into some actual play. Here we see the author - you remember the author? About to descend into his career. Notice the shovel and the pile of dirt behind him. When the game is over, the Career Master - remember the Career Master? Will just fill up the hole. If the player has won, he may also erect a stone.

Thank You.....

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[[[My thanks to Gene Wolfe and the Fantasy Convention Team for permission to reproduce the speech.]]]

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The Art Of Good Movie Watching

By Martyn Taylor

In her article, 'A strange New Language', (Vector 113) Sue Thomason writes;

"... a lot of us print addicts have no idea how to judge films (say) as films; we are too busy condemning them as bad remakes of the book. Of course, in print, we have the upper hand. We can fulminate away to each other about those dreadful films, displaying our ignorance and contempt without fear of reprisal, because print is our medium. All the people who could defend visual SF against us are out there watching more, not reading."

Why Sue should fear reprisal I cannot imagine. After all, who is really concerned about the mental problems of a few bigots? While there are some of us heavily addicted to both print and visual media, the vast, sensible majority simply take their pleasures where and when they can. At the same time Sue makes no attempt to consider the question why anyone should devote their valuable time and energy to the enlightenment of the irremediably stupid who sincerely believe 'Written word good! moving picture baad!', (or vice versa) seeming to assume it is her right to have her condition cured. Well, in the belief that this attitude is merely ignorance rather than arrogance, here begins a brief tour of the facts of creative cinematic life, in the hope that future print addicts will berate movies as the stinking fish they are rather than as farcical examples of the fowl they are not, and wouldn't be even if they could (at least within the pages of what proclaims itself to be a critical journal, and where readers have the right to expect realistic and appropriate critical standards to be employed). This is not an ideological tract telling you which are the correct movies to enjoy - I'll leave that lark to Chris Auty and the gang over at 'Time out' - enjoyment is a matter of taste, and there is no accounting for taste, thank goodness. An awareness of the technical and philosophical context of the non print media is, however, another matter altogether.

Print has it's virtues. Language is the most precise yet flexible tool Man has devised to communicate with himself, setting standards by which other media are measured (and found wanting in terms of precision and certainty at least in conceptual terms). The written word exists in definitive, accessible form from the moment the author lays down his quill, descends from his garret, faints in the street from starvation, and is run over by Roger Moore's accountant's Rolls Royce, leaving his manuscript - scrawled in heart's blood on recycled toilet paper - for the judgement of posterity. No wonder the written word will always survive, and every movie maker in the world casts envious eyes at the total artistic control of the writer. The written word, of course, is essentially solitary both in conception and consumption, being designed to involve a single writer and a single reader in an intimate mind-to-mind connection, whereas the movie is of necessity a communal act. The movie maker has no alternative but to accommodate his creativity to the talents of many others before his brainchild is even tolerably accessible to his audience - actors, cameramen, designers, composers, editors, Fred down the Roxy who can bugger up the best movie ever made by the simple expedient of turning up in the projection room plastered of a Saturday night. As if that were not a

sufficient burden, the movie maker needs to keep a weather eye out for the eventual financial return to those backers who have given him the cash to make his movie. It would be paradise indeed if movie makers could ignore this last constraint, as seems to be the arrogant requirement of the print addicts (wonder if they'd be so cavalier if it was their cash on the line) but we do not live in paradise. A writer and his publisher can recoup their costs and live tolerably well on sales of a few thousand copies (depending on the publisher's taste in cigars). The movie maker is required to think in terms of several million customers, and any assessment of a movie which ignores the essential audience component is merely fatuous.

Not that the accommodative process of movie making is an unalloyed handicap. Convincing acting, imaginative camerawork, creative editing, etc can all add to the artistic impact of a movie. Just as a play can become something the playwright never imagined when inspiration strikes the cast (which may wreak havoc with the writer's fingernails but excites the hell out of an audience, which is the object of the exercise, isn't it?) so can a movie be made considerably more than it was when conceived by the director. The written word, however precise, can never be more than it was when it flowed from the mind of the writer (no doubt a balm to the egos of writers everywhere). Every medium has its limitations, and when you choose your medium you understand and accept those limitations.

Translation of a story from one medium to another seems to create the biggest bone of contention between the print and the media shouters, each utterly convinced that they know best how artists in the other field ought to go about their business, determinedly ignoring the fact that the structures and techniques of the novel and the movie are congruent in remarkably few places. The movie is a dramatic presentation having a fixed order and a fixed pace (the cinematic equivalent of running your fingers along the line and saying the long words out loud is a distinctly unrewarding experience...) Anyone who can recall their 'O' level English lessons will remember that conflict is the essence of drama, the physical interplay of contending characters and events - action! To pretend otherwise is futile. Such dramatic conflict seems increasingly not to be the concern of modern writers, who appear much happier with the internal than the external - that good ole inner v. outer space game again - and it would be equally futile to pretend that is not the case. Translation of the novel, especially the modern novel, from the page to the screen is fraught with pitfalls because the requirements of the two media are so radically different. Which is not to say that translation is impossible. THE SF event took place when a young man called Orson Welles broadcast H.G. Wells' The War of the Worlds to an unsuspecting American nation. See, it's easy. All you need is one of the better stories written by one of SF's better writers, and have your translation executed by one of the age's dramatic geniuses.

Yes.. well.. some translations are not so successful (George Pal's atrocious cinematic 'version' of the same story springs all too readily to mind) and of late the print addicts have been up on their hind legs and yapping about the 'desecration' of Philip K. Dick's work by Ridley Scott. (I know Dick had some peculiar working habits, but I never knew he typed onto tablets of stone..) Now let's not mince words, Dick was a major writer. At his best he was one of the best, anywhere, anytime, and even at his worst he was never less than interesting as, for example, in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep. That said, he chose to write novels, utilizing the techniques and opportunities uniquely possessed by the novel form and exploiting them wonderfully well. No doubt a man of his talent could have written amazing screenplays, but the fact that he was the cream of novelists does not necessarily imply that he could write equally good screen plays. Anyone who believes that because he is hot at one form he must be equally hot at another, altogether different, craft probably isn't as hot as either as he imagines. Nevertheless, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep/Bladerunner is a reasonable

Case study, so let's study that.

In certain areas the movie does diverge from the book considerably, for instance, in the title. As Andy Sawyer writes (Vector 113) '... Bladerunner ... is... a vastly inferior title...', which may well be true, but the title Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep would be absurd in relation to movie, which doesn't have any electric sheep! While the omission of Deckard's wife is a very minor point - although her presence might have added a piquancy to Deckard's love life - in the matter of the electric sheep Dick got it right and Scott got it wrong. Those electric sheep would have conveyed the necessary information in a more subtle yet more powerful manner than Scott managed by spreading it through the whole movie, as well as emphasizing the significance of the owl and the snake. The other two major omissions, however, are considerably more problematic and bring us slap against the differences between the novel and the movie form. I should have loved to have seen the Mercerism sub-plot included. (The Mercerism sub-plot is built around the 'empathy box'. As John Isodore explains; "But an empathy box," he said, stammering in his excitement, "is the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone" Page 54) It is one of those hammering flights of fancy that nobody did better than Dick, transforming the whole tale from a detective story with added philosophy into a serious consideration of the value of life. It is marvellous. It is also totally unfilmable. I will say that there is not one director who could have filmed that subplot, within the context of the main plot, and have rendered it comprehensible to his audience. Some things just cannot be filmed, no matter how well realised on the page. (Another example would be Memoirs of a Survivor, a fine novel by Doris Lessing, one of the best writers in SF. The film was ever so faithful to the text, and must have satisfied even the purest eyed of print addicts. It was an abominable movie, burdened with the worst example of miscasting since they gave Mark Antony to Brando - Julie Christie as the protagonist - and devoid of every quality necessary to make even a satisfactory movie. But it was very faithful to the novel....) Regrettable though it is, Scott got that one right, as he did when he halved the number of the replicants and made them more recognizably human beings, misused by their creators. Consider the length of the book. I would guess that 'Mr Average Reader' would be occupied for eight pleasurable, stimulating hours. That makes it one death an hour, and nobody could accuse Dick of pandering to the low tastes of his readership by pointing up those deaths. The descriptions are very low key, so much so that the reader could almost be excused for missing them. On screen, however, an undramatic killing is a cardinal sin, and not one that a director as skilled at the creation of drama and visual impact as Scott, is going to commit. Eight killings of the type we see in the movie - eleven if we include Roy Baty's three - would simply be too much for the audience to accept in the just under two hours of the movie. It would be overkill (sorry!). Strict adherence to the novel, both in terms of numbers and characters of the replicants, would have diminished the movie greatly in terms of dramatic impact and the contrast between Deckard's flawed humanity and the calculated uncompleted humanity of the replicants. Scott is a good movie maker who understands his art (not that the print addicts, are prepared to allow that film is an artform) and he got the replicants right.

I do not wish to enter into too detailed a discussion of the movie, I'd need to see it again to do that and it isn't showing around here right now - which is one big, fat plus for the novel, which I have at my elbow. I will say that Bladerunner is a better film than Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep is a book. I think it is a very good film, while the book is by no means one of Dick's best. Scott's instincts in adapting the story to his chosen medium were sure, on this occasion. Which is not to say that novels cannot be translated entire to the screen. Bertrand Tavernier's Deathwatch is an almost word for word filming of D.G. Compton's The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe, which is a

fine, fine novel. The movie, which came and went from our screens almost unnoticed, is a fine, fine movie (albeit unhyped). The strong story is well acted, impeccably presented, and beautifully filmed, and simply by being a film emphasises the background discussion of the story - which is a consideration of the voyeurism of modern reporting - and creates added dimensions of consideration and insight that could never exist on the page. I wonder how many print addicts even know of this film, still less have seen it.

Of course there is more than one form of motion picture, and who would deny that the domestic idiot eye is the predominant form of entertainment in our society? Anyone who imagines that the cinema movie transfers lock, stock, and barrel to the TV screen is lacking in imagination, or did not see the movie in the cinema. In a modern cinema the sheer impact of image, size and volume of sound can be an integral part of the movie maker's armoury, and until we get 180 foot domestic TV screens allied with 2,000 watt stereo systems we just aren't going to get that in the comfort of our own living rooms. Star Wars is just pathetic on a TV screen (even more pathetic than it is in the cinema...).

Watching a movie on a cinema screen is not analogous to watching it on TV. As I have already remarked, cinema is communal whereas TV is anything but communal. The cinema audience has made a positive decision to gather and watch a movie, an indication that they are at least some way prepared to be receptive to the ideas of the movie maker. This fact also places the movie maker under a greater obligation to 'entertain' the audience than the producers of, say, television's 'Play for Today' consider themselves to be under. Such an obligation to entertain is, of course, something that many writers appear to consider does not apply to them, rather that the public - you and me - is under obligation to receive rapturously their deathless penses on the meaning of life, the universe, and especially the terrible plight of those poor souls actually forced to write fiction for a living! Be that as it may, the obligation is upon the movie maker and can be ignored only by those few giants who do not know how not to entertain and who know in their bones the truth of Sam Goldwyn's immortal nostrum - 'messages are for Western Union' - couching their 'messages' in the body of their work, as has always been the practice of the great artists, thereby conveying them much more effectively than the stridencies of lesser mortals.

If movie techniques do not transfer automatically to the TV screen then it is obvious that the converse is equally true. A recent example may be seen in Brimstone and Treacle, written by television's master playwright Dennis Potter, blessed with a cast made in heaven - Denholm Elliott, Joan Plowright, Sting - and made by one of TV's best directors, it just did not work in the cinema. Now it is a good movie, but it is too intimate, low key, and small scale to succeed in the cinema. It will be a remarkably good video movie, but is compelling evidence that it is inappropriate to employ miniaturist techniques when engaged in painting a mural (which we all knew anyway - or ought to have done by now!). The scale of TV is the reason why so much TV SF is junk. As a genre SF tends to the grandiloquent, which is why the written works have been SF's premier vehicle, and while the cinema can vault the heavens too, TV simply lacks the capacity to convey concepts almost necessarily commonplace in SF - 'and then the stars went out!' Anyone who expects it to do so, and castigates it for not being capable of delivering staple SF goods, is simply being unrealistic.

The relationship between writer and reader is astonishingly intimate. The images generated in the reader's mind by the writer's words are a unique product of the reaction between non-replicable internal and external stimuli. The movie image does not, by and large, accommodate itself to the specific personality of the watcher. It remains the best approach to someone else's concept of that image, which can be frustrating if that someone is a cretin lacking the least notion of how a b.e.m. really looks. The question for the serious critic is not the fit between the movie maker's image and his own

but whether it is successfully appropriate within the context of the movie. Judgement of that success is far more subtle than the knee jerk 'wrong wrong wrong' of the print addict, being inextricably intertwined with the coherence of the movie as a discrete work of art (or artifice). In the final analysis the conclusion is reached - so startlingly obvious that it seems never to have occurred to the print addicts - that the movie maker is never presenting the book but his idea of the story. The two are not now, nor were they ever, and never will they be the same. Of course, not even the most avid of print addicts would deny that the strength of the written word is its capacity to generate unique reaction, and none would be so illiberal as to claim that their image is the one and only correct one. Yet when a movie maker presents his image their instinctive reaction is that his image must be wrong. At the core of the print addict's complaint, however, is a two pronged fork of jealousy. The first is at the temerity of the movie maker in presenting his image to the public, in contrast to the print addict's closet and frustrated desire to do as such. Not much can be done about that. Anyone who is unprepared to accept the inalienable right of an artist to work freely in his chosen field and have that work received fairly is beyond redemption. A much more valid cause for complaint is the reality that while the least talented of movie makers appear to live comfortably it grows daily more difficult even for the best of writers to scrape more than a meagre existence. I could be cynical and point out that movie makers sell their wares to considerably larger numbers than even the very best selling writers, but being a symptom of our unremittingly commercial world does not make that fact necessarily correct. Let's have a look at business. Back in the days when the studio moguls controlled movie production (at least in America and, by pale reflection, the UK - which are the areas of principal concern in this discussion) several big name movie makers concluded that they were being a) artistically restricted by the businessmen studio bosses, and b) ripped off. This is not an uncommon cry arising from the herd of writers today. Rather than crying into their beer, as seems the wont of the writer when faced with adversity, these movie makers formed United Artists, and the rest is history. Perhaps it is beyond the wit of the print addicts to follow that example (as has already been seen in several areas of the word game, both book and non-book) and form their own production and distribution organisation, or would that smack too much of 'going into trade' for our precious 'artistes' of the written word?

We are getting to the end now, and here follows a statement of fact. Non-print art forms are just as valid as print. They are equal but different means of achieving the same end - self expression - in a freely diverse artistic world. I find myself amazed to think that there are those who appear incapable of accepting that very simple fact. Most of us don't give a fig for the form, but care deeply about success within that form. We know instinctively that labour in one field is as valid as labour in another, and are thus simply grateful for it, and do our best to appreciate it. The bigot who automatically condemns that which he does not understand comments not upon the object of his vituperation but eloquently upon his own inadequacies. Movie makers are artists, just as much as writers. If, as the print addicts declare, most of the movie makers' endeavours turn out to be less than inspiring.. well, as a fine writer once remarked when confronted by example after example of the purest dross disguised as written SF, "99% is crap", and how many really good books have you read lately?

(C) 1984 Martyn Taylor

Dangerous Divisions

R.I. BARYCZ,
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New Cross,
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SE14 6RQ

Barrington Bayley's paradoxes in "Who Owns The Noosphere?" (Vector 113) amuse, but also provoke by way of rebuttal.

I would like to attempt an answer to Bayley's question: Why are inventions (or works of art) patentable (or copyrightable) but not a philosophical idea or the discovery of a physical law?

A work of art, or an invention, never existed in the universe prior to its expression in a concrete (and thus copyable) form. They add to the numbers of things that make up the sum of the universe, they are if you like, particular and discrete archetypes, further things evolve from them but they must be utterly different if they are not to be merely copies of their original. And the evolution is always one way - Joyce's Ulysses can be said to include Homer's Ulysses as part of itself, but in no way can Joyce's work of art be deduced from Homer's version. (Inventions though are a little more fluid - Concorde is inherent in the Wright bi-plane, and vice versa, but even then the evolution is one way).

On the other hand philosophical ideas and physical laws can be said to have perpetual existence in the universe; a philosophical idea is a shorthand of its actual manifestations: this is the Good, this is the True, this is the Beautiful, this is Justice, this is the Holy, it cannot be run back or down to a concrete form. In fact philosophical ideas have such an elusiveness to them that Philosophy in this century tends to be indistinguishable from linguistics, philosophers having begun to doubt the validity of their fundamental tool, language, under the pressure of rapid changes in the manifestations of the Good, the True and Beautiful, such is the power and influence of the material world upon even the most abstract and idealistic considerations. Similarly physical laws are a shorthand of its actual manifestations, often utterly contradictory: what makes a pendulum work? Gravity. What makes an unsupported arch stand? Gravity. What makes a stone fall? Gravity. What makes a fallen stone sit still? Gravity. What makes it roll down hill? Gravity.

Unlike works of art, philosophical ideas and physical laws exhibit a certain degree of evolution and connection: the Eighteenth century astronomer who took Newton's formula for the calculation of escape velocity and proved the existence of what to his age would have been an example of a philosophical idea: a sun that gave no light, its surface gravity such that its escape velocity was that of the speed of light; and the rest is black holes. This sense of parentage if you like, of connection is often used to determine the validity of scientific theory or interpretation, much in the way editors of scientific journals sort the cranks out of their slush piles, cranks do not give a list of sources or references to previous research or theory on the subject.

Because a work of art comes into the universe as its own archetype it has from the start one terrible uniqueness: its existence may affect the universe,

from that moment it exists, but, should it not have come into being: the universe will not even miss it. The Byzantine bishop that burned the poetical works of Sappho for their immorality also burned the works of Euclid as something irrelevant to the ambitions and attentions of good Christians. The works of Sappho were lost to Western civilization. It did not miss them and managed very well without her. Euclid survived his burning, he was if you like in existence before even Euclid was born, a revelation open for discovery by anyone with a straight edge, a pencil, a compass and a tidy mind. Ideas and physical laws form a continuum, an atmosphere, but they are only real in their manifestations, not in themselves. What is not real cannot be stolen. What cannot be stolen cannot be owned. If it cannot be owned it cannot be property. Q.E.D.

Works of art, and inventions, always have an author. They are unique and personal to that author, society does not produce a work of art nor an invention, but whether or not that work of art (which will never be missed if it does not appear) or that invention (which is bound to be rediscovered someday) ever appears, for the good or the ill of that society depends entirely upon that society's view of new works of art, new inventions. On the whole society has survived, and got to where it is today, by acknowledging that the benefits of novelty and discovery outweigh the possible dangers. Such individual endeavours should thus be encouraged and what better carrot than the possibility of becoming filthy rich? Hence copyright. Which recognized this fact of human nature in the first copyright act ever passed in which its preamble (I paraphrase greatly here) described the act as "a means by which useful literary works and inventions may be secured to the benefits of mankind as a whole by encouraging their authors and devisers to make them publicly known by granting unto such authors and devisers a limited period of monopoly and patent in the right to copy those works and profit from those inventions." Or maybe I have paraphrased an apologist for the act.

The key word is "limited". A patent of a philosophical idea or a physical law would, if discoverable or enforceable, last for ever - it would quite simply be a species of magic, a stone could not fall, but would remain suspended in mid air until the patent holder for gravity gave it licence and leave to fall. As for the Good, the True and the Beautiful, again, a species of magic: if I hold the copyright on the True - well, I'm sure the reader can fill in all the possibilities.

Limitation is what gives copyright and patent law its power and durability. I think it cannot be better demonstrated than by indicating the way in which copyright and the free noosphere have interacted in the very recent past. Ten years ago George Lucas wanted to re-make Flash Gordon, the owner of the copyright wanted too much for the rights, Lucas was compelled into doing something novel and the rest is history. It is an item of what might be called a received truth that Lucas ripped off everything in sight. As may be but the rip off was entirely legitimate, SF, as a genre, has its own noosphere, its own atmosphere of philosophical ideas available to anybody. The copyright lies in the novelty of their expression....

This delicate tension between what is property and what is free to all seems to have destroyed Tesla. I will take Bayley's word for it that Tesla died with more knowledge of the laws of electricity than any man before him, but I dispute the assertion that he died with more knowledge than what has since been discovered in the forty years since his death. Why? The reality of economic possibility. Our civilization runs on the properties of AC current. If Tesla knew something about it that he preferred to keep Pythagorean, such secretiveness would have come to nothing, somewhere, someone would have discovered it by now. No one has.

Why, I am tempted to ask, did Tesla become so secretive? Excluding psychopathology I suspect the answer is simple. Tesla thought he had a monopoly on the properties and applications of AC current. It was his and his alone. What he forgot or probably refused to realise was that everytime he

published a patent, or lectured, he illuminated that part of the noosphere that held all that was AC current within itself. One day Tesla applied for a patent on his latest invention - only to have the application rejected, someone had beaten him to the mental punch six months earlier. A natural suspicion would be the result, co-workers would be kept in ignorance, nothing would be put in writing, but, despite all such security measures, other people would persist in patenting what Tesla thought of as his own property. It would be a logical, but insane, conclusion on his part that someone must have invented something that could pick the very thoughts out of his head. In this conclusion he would demonstrate one more quirk of the creative mind, not only can it retreat into conservatism after the vertigo of illuminating the universe, but it can also turn the universe into mere plastacine - anything at all becomes possible. To paraphrase the Descartian cogito: I can think of it, therefore it exists.

To end on a personal note, again by way of illuminating the tension between what is intellectual property and what is free to all. I have (like the 99% of the readership of Vector who do not write SF novels already) hopes of writing SF. Perhaps I will write a novel about robots. Or a robot. It will owe a great deal to other SF works about robots. Asimov, yes, and also Barrington J. Bayley will be amongst the grist for the creative mill but; more use will be made of Bayley than Asimov. In that lies the difference between copyright and the noosphere. The Soul of the Robot exists as a work of art; It is copyright. Even if I change the names, re-do the plot it will, (unless the modifications and alterations are so extensive that I find I have gone to the trouble of writing an entirely different creative work) still be recognizable as The Soul of the Robot. Bayley's novel exists as something utterly new in the universe and yet, at the same time, it has entered the noosphere and is freely available to all. There is nothing Bayley nor the publisher can do about that.

Perfect theft is never detected. Just how it will be done I will not know until I come to it. But there are pointers. To start with I will ask myself the most obvious question of all: how do you write a novel about a robot? And with reference to Bayley and Asimov, and every other robot novel or tale ever written I will answer this question with another: Can I do it better? If so, how? Write it and find out. What will be written will be made up of reaction, imitation, memory, association, prejudice, relation, distraction, digression, irrelevancy, originality, amusement, annoyance, pleasure, disgust, etc. It will be written in a language with a vocabulary and style that further limits the noosphere by means of a genre, viz SF. The novel may be compelling enough to be started, continued and finished. From there to be published and burst upon the universe as something that was never there before, nor even predictable from what had so burst into the universe before. Something new, something novel, Copyright (c) R.I. Barycz 19cough. All rights reserved. To be read in millions, or just the odd hundreds, to sit on a library shelf with a bar-code sticker on its spine and earn a measly PLR. To be reviewed in Vector without even a mention of Barrington J. Bayley. In short: the perfect theft. As this is from 'Who Owns the Noosphere?'. [[[What you have just read is a edited version of a 14 page original. So may I apologize in advance for leaving so much out..It might make a very good SF story if you started with the supposition that you could control Philosophical Ideas and Physical Laws. Just try and imagine the structure of the society that would be created. You can virtually see the street sellers "It's £4.20 for being beautiful today, or a cheap offer of 20 pence for 3 hours of gravity." Just remember that this is my story and that I own it, so no theft around here please.]]]

I would like to reply to Paul Kincaid's vitriolic attack in Vector 115, because I feel personally assaulted. I know that he was not talking at me individually, but his emphatic 'you' is directed at

MARK J. PERRY,
46 Highlands Road,
Bridgnorth,
Shropshire.

BSFA membership, of which I am part, and seeing as he absolves all responsibility for the sick state of SF, then I feel so should we.

I do not read all crud wrapped in Spaceships called SF. The last three books I have brought are: Cherryh, Downbelow Station, Aldiss, Helliconia Spring, and Bishop, No Enemy But Time. No complaints there, as I brought them all on Vector recommendations. I have never (and have no intention of) buying a John Norman book, an Anne 'Dragon' McCaffrey novel, or a Julian May (may the force be with you) book.....

I would like to point out something interesting I have noted. I live in a small town without a wonderful bookshop that sells everything. However, in the best one we have, there have been 'Gor' books on it's shelves for twelve months at least, along with 'Conan', 'Lan-Kern' and a host of Arthur C. Clarke (for some peculiar reason). Robert Sheckley, Michael Bishop, Harry Harrison, Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard and C.J. Cherryh disappear with great speed. This must be a good sign, maybe SF is coming out of it's recession, or (at the risk of sounding like James Burke) is it? [[[As yet I cannot see any sign pointing to the end of the book publishing recession. The number of forthcoming SF books to be published in this country seems to be as small as ever, and possibly more importantly the US market does not seem much better.]]]

DAVID V. BARRETT,
31 Mayfield Grove,
Harrogate,
North Yorkshire
HG1 5HD

Andy Sawyer's article/extended review of Foundation's Edge and 2010: Odyssey Two (Vector 115) pointed out not just the weaknesses of the two books, which I don't think I'll bother to read now (thanks, Andy!), but some of the inherent dangers of sequelitis. The problem is, some books cry out for a

sequel, both in the readers enjoying the first volume so much that they want more, and in the author realising, not that he can squeeze some more out of a situation, but that there is more which has to be said, which DEMANDS to be said, remembering that creations take on an identity and a will of their own. (I think what God has had to put up with from that bipedal being He created - and it must have seemed such a good idea at the time..)

Steve Gallagher's article worries me; obviously in something as complex as TV there has to be teamwork, but the author SHOULD'N'I be the least important person in the team. Maybe this is why so much television is crap; the original creative idea is destroyed by wordsmiths who are simply technicians (and I don't mean highly trained and skilled scientists, technologists and engineers, before my throat gets jumped down) - people who wouldn't know an original or creative idea if it bit them in the leg. Okay, so Steve is a 'small-name writer,' and so didn't have much elbow power to protest, but what about all the big-name writers? - do they put up with this treatment? - or if they insist on their own way are they told, "Sod you, mate, there's plenty of other writers we can choose from," and get blacked forever? Probably like most of us, I'd like to write for TV - but is it worth the heartache?

I get quite annoyed, dammit, when careless readers like Andy Andruschak (Vector 115) accuse me of mistakes I have been at particular pains to avoid. (And Editors gloat over it - though you can't be blamed!)

ARTHUR C. CLARKE,
Colombo 7,
Sri Lanka

Andy says that I refer to L.1 as a stable point. On page 137 (US edition) I say specifically that the monolith 'must be taking some positive action, to remain here at the unstable liberation point'. On page 14 I also state that the perturbations of the moons would make Discovery 'wander back and forth' from L.1. And it did not 'drift off for an unknown reason'; the reason was carefully explained on page 108. Andy has clearly confused stable point with stable orbit.

Incidentally, I've just remembered that I discussed this problem once

before. Quote: "...this small cyclical variation...would eventually disturb the (L1 and L2) orbits but they would certainly be stable for many revolutions.... all these perturbations are quite negligible...Even for a body of several hundred tons mass they could be completely neutralized by the ejection of a few kilograms of matter a day." I was talking about the Earth-Moon situation; but the interesting thing is that I was doing this in the British Astronomical Association's Journal for December 1947. (I typed 1957 first, because I couldn't believe it myself!) I wonder if Andy was born then...This paper, by the way, will be appearing with all my other technical writings in Ascent to Orbit: A Mathematical Autobiography which John Wiley have promised to get out in time for my Marconi Award speech in the White House next Spring. (Dept. of Modest Coughs.)

I was also perfectly well aware of the radiation problem ('they were using Io as a shield to protect them...Even so, the radiation level was dangerously high; they had less than fifteen minutes before they must get back to shelter.' - pp 96-7). This may very well be hopelessly optimistic, but then I didn't go into details of the active radiation shield made possible as a by-product of the Sakharov drive...

I guess the copy of 2010 in the JPL Library was one I left after my meeting with Director Lew Allen last year. I wish Andy had read it more carefully.

[[[Upon receiving Arthur C. Clarke's letter I sent a copy to Andy Andruschak. His reply is given below. I will add no more comment but leave it up to you to decide on whose side right belongs.]]]

By "Stable", I was commenting on whether any object in the Jupiter-IO L1 point would stay there 9 (Nine!) years. Obviously, Clarke and I disagree. He sees it will, I see it won't. Vector readers with a home computers and a knowledge of celestial mechanics must work it out. I do know we had a hard time keeping ISEE-3 in the Sun-Earth L1 point.

This still leaves that L1 point. No, I have not confused 'point' with 'orbit'. As I use the term, the L1 'point' 'orbits' around Jupiter. By the way, I was Not talking about the monolith, just the derelict spaceship.

Citing a paper on the Earth-Moon L1 & L2 orbits has, I feel, no relevance to the problem of the Jupiter-IO L1 point. There are 3 other very big satellites out there.

It does look as if we need a third party to work out the celestial mechanics. Period.

ANDY ANDRUSCHAK,
P.O. Box 606,
La Canada - Flintridge,
CA 91011, USA

CHAS PEMBLETON,
28 Godolphin Close,
Freshbrook,
Swindon, Wilts
SN5 8RL.

I think you offered two excellent suggestions for helping unknown authors. Thank you for taking the trouble to follow-up my ideas.

Your suggestion of forming a committee, with the aim of sending affidavits to publishers, has a big flaw. The publishers will probably ignore any such approach. If a publisher says, "I'm sorry; but I rejected that manuscript once, and I see no reason for changing my mind": what could the BSFA do? Nothing! The idea is good, if it works. But, if it fails, the BSFA will be made to look impotent. [[[My suggestion was not to send the affidavits but actually to take them to the SF buyers. It is a important difference in approach. If you get the interview in the first place, having explained why you want it, the buyer will only see you if he/she has an open mind about the venture. The opening skirmish is therefore over before you see anyone.]]]

Your other suggestion, though it will be costly, has the advantage of boldness. I support the idea of an independent British publishing company,

especially if that company is the BSFA. The advantages to members could be great.

In the first place, as a publisher, the BSFA editor could tell writers why their work was rejected. In the second place, books published by the BSFA could act as a showcase. Copies could be sent to major publishing houses in the hope that they would place our writers on their lists. If the editor is a writer, he will have to have his work submitted to a committee, which will judge the work's fitness for publication. The committee could also keep a check on the editor, to ensure that standards are maintained. If this idea is adopted, a fund could be organised to raise the initial cash required.

Shock-Horror-Gasp - the Vector editor has had a brainstorm! Crazy! Ridiculous! Mad!

DOROTHY DAVIES,
3 Cadels Row,
Faringdon,
Oxon

What am I referring to? Your suggestion that the BSFA should look at mss which have done the rounds!!! Are you completely insane? Is C Pemberton completely insane? You are. Dorothy says so. First.. The BSFA is not there for the benefit of writers (sorry) but for SF fans. If you write, there is focus (sometimes, and there might even be something worth while there in the future) and Orbiter, which is worthwhile. Don't, whatever else you think the BSFA might do, complicate life by expecting the Association to support writers too!

Second. Any mss which has done the rounds and been rejected is, by definition, USELESS. Witness my novel, Kiss Goodbye To The Morning. Rejected by six - count 'em - six publishers. I finally reduced it to sections and sent it around to a few friends (all of whom are writers) WHERE IS WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED. They pointed up so many different things wrong with the book, I have abandoned it! [[[Just a little point Dorothy. If a mss goes the rounds and does not get published, outside the publishers' readers, no one actually sees it. Therefore, as no-one actually reads the novel, you cannot say with a 100% certainty, that they are all rubbish. Most of them, I expect, are rubbish, but we are only after that one novel a year that isn't.]]]

Third. Most important of all. If you are any good, you will get published. Don't quote Priest, Watson, etc. etc. etc. at the world. Every one of them HAD TO HAVE A FIRST BOOK ACCEPTED. Every one had to have a publisher take a chance on them. If you are good, you will make it. If you aren't, you won't.

I don't think I've over simplified the matter. I've been working now for 4 years, flat out writing, with a good many articles, etc. to my credit, financially and otherwise, and still the acceptances (occasionally) roll in. But no books sold. And will there ever be books sold? Who can say? If I write one good enough. [[[I sorry Dorothy, but I do feel that you are over simplifying the matter. For a start you are being naive if you think that the main criteria of book publishing, is the quality of the work.. It is one consideration, but marketability, is the style in vogue?, subject matter, etc, etc, are to the publisher just as important. Also, for a new writer to get a hard-back novel published (in SF) has, at the present time, 5-10 novel slots, per year, to aim at. Now, at a rough guess I would say that there are 200 novels aiming at those 10 places. You have a five percent chance of filling it! Again, can you say, with a 100% certainty, that all those other 190 novels are not worth publishing..unless you have tried to read them all, you cannot.]]]

One final point for the readers. I have had an idea for an anthology of religious stories (sounds familiar? See BSFA mailing somewhere or other, for Oct) I have sounded out many and various editor, and my prospective co editor, Dave Langford, tried too. No one but no one wants to know, despite my lining up some of Britain's best writers. Anyone out there really want to take a chance? [[[That actually, is rather an interesting point. While I believe that we might have a chance of selling a traditional SF novel to the members, should that actually be the aim of the project? I cannot see any point in duplicating the existing publishing service. In effect, you could end up

publishing novels which are very difficult to sell. But I don't think that should put anyone off the idea.]]]

J.E. RUDD,
54 Sumner House,
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E3 3RB

I would like to quickly make a few comments on C. Pembleton's short article. I agree with what he says and I would like to see the BSFA publish longer works. I would also be willing to pay £3.50 providing I knew the book in question would be good, but I doubt that

if every BSFA member decided he had to like the book first the money would ever be raised. The Ad Hoc committee idea is not quite a good suggestion, since it severely limits the number of authors that can be helped, and the BSFA should never be a last resort. My suggestion is for a magazine which could be sold at all the 'normal outlets', published by the BSFA and containing mostly new writers but with a few established members or British writers (eg Aldiss) to help it sell. Members could do the usual asking shopkeepers to stock it, which is more acceptable with a monthly or even quarterly mag than a novel. Like Pembleton, as far as I can tell, I want the BSFA to help get my name known, rather than send letters to publishers personally endorsing me. With a magazine, which would also mean less funds I guess, publicity could be given to writers of both short and long fiction, though the novel writers would probably have to put up with serialization, which is better than a kick in the backside. [[[What you suggest is already being done by Interzone. Admittedly it is outside the BSFA, but if you look at the financial problems that magazine has, it is not a road I would like to try and follow. The major problem would be the distribution of the magazine. The BSFA does not have some vast distribution network. In fact, Vector (to my knowledge) is the only BSFA magazine sold in bookshops and that is through Titan Distributors. To ask the members to distribute the magazine is just too complex to organize over a long period of time. Besides which, there is really only room for one small SF magazine in this country, and I have my doubts if there is room for that...]]]

Your editorial, in response to C Pembleton's plea is Good Stuff. The idea of an independent publisher has its appeal, but the costs, the side-issues, such as distribution, advertising and commitment weigh heavily against this being a success. But it's not impossible:

NIK MORTON,
235 West Street,
Fareham, Hants
PO16 0HZ

United Writers began a similar scheme in the early Seventies and published one of Christopher Hodder-William's books in hardback. (The argument that if the book's good enough, some publisher will buy it is no longer so valid - was it ever? Gone with the Wind, The White Hotel, Jpcress File - all rejected...No, market forces account for a goodly proportion of the book-publishing power of many publishers. Though, I'm sure, not all. But budgets constrain, I imagine.) Which is why it was good to read of a BSFA success story in the form of Mary Gentle. US publishers Morrow has paid "\$32,500 for her Golden Witchbreed." (How many reviews have called it Witchbred, I wonder?) "But, says Faith Brooker at Arrow, the most exciting thing is the emergence of such an excellent young fantasy writer."

ANDY SAWYER,
45 Greenbank Rd,
Birkenhead,
Merseyside

I enjoyed the Mary Gentle Appreciation Society magazine - Golden Witchbreed is an excellent novel which I appreciated reading; an intelligent, unpretentious, elegant SF adventure of the sort which very few appear to be writing nowadays.

Your suggestion about the BSFA forming a kind of Ad Hoc pressure group to push neglected mss is interesting but as you say, it could not be done too often.

In any case, accolades by well-known authors do not guarantee sales. I'm not sure that either road is necessarily the road to follow - perhaps I would rather see the BSFA do more to actually publish the stuff, but who the hell would do the work and raise the money?

NIGEL RICHARDSON,
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LS25 2LG

Some good stuff in Vector 116. The Mary Gentle feature should have everyone at their typewriters hacking away again at their abandoned novels...By the end of the month you won't be able to find an unused sheet of A4 for love or money.

I find Dr. Greenland's "nothing makes a bestseller like an endorsement from another bestseller" a bit more difficult to believe than you appear to in the editorial. Try as I might to rise above my prejudices I can't help but believe that Anne McCaffrey's rave for Golden Witchbreed will do the book as much harm as good. For every person who thinks that McCaffrey is an arbiter of excellence and taste there is another who thinks she's a bit of a wally who'll give her seal of approval to anything that's sent her way. Qualified praise is one thing, but there seems to be a growing clan of SF writers (mainly American), who are apparently trying to outdo each other in hyperbolic book blurbs, claiming that each galley proof they receive is the greatest thing since the Iliad. Ellison, Zelazny, King, McCaffrey, Vinge et al can be found staking their reputations and immortal souls on just about every book that comes out, and I think people are beginning to pass these approbations over as just an obligatory part of the book cover. That is, unless they happen to be so mindblown as to produce hysteria - I'm thinking of Ellison's "If Le Carre had made it with Le Guin..."

Thanks for Vector 116. I must say that it's looking quite good now, what with justified margins. Someone in the BSFA hierarchy tells me you've got an Apple computer with word processing. [[[The magazine is keyed on an Apple IIE using Format-80. About the only problem I've had with the system is that I cannot get the proportional spacing to work with the printer that I've have. So I might be changing over to Wordstar - when I can afford a CP/M card. It takes me about half as long to produce the magazine, but there is a great temptation to try and take on more work. For instance, with the bulk letter/mailling facility, you can get completely carried away. What I would really like to have is a modem so I could then link up with all the BSFA members and wait for the letters, articles and reviews to roll in over the telephone line. That way I would only have to format the text for each issue! If anyone else out there owns an Apple Computer I would be interested to hear from you.]]]

JEREMY CRAMPTON,
10 Vicarage Rd,
Hooile,
Chester
CH2 3HZ

Your editorial is most interesting. You propose two alternatives; an independent publisher or a publishing pressure group. At first glance the latter looks most attractive. There are however, problems. Before a prospective novel comes before the ad hoc committee it will have to "be passed and selected by the BSFA". Presumably this will equate to publisher's readers at the moment, but who these people will be you don't say; perhaps yourself and a selection of 'house' reviewers. This could be quite important because once the book passes this stage and gets to the committee they will probably be sufficiently disposed already to what you're trying to do (otherwise they wouldn't be on the committee in the first place) and simply pass on the book with their endorsement. How much notice will publishers take of all this though? The committee will apparently be made up of best-sellers, but just who did you have in mind? Real best-sellers probably won't be agreeable to spending large quantities of time reviewing unpublished books for no personal gain. They've got far better things to do with their time. And nobody will

take any notice of lesser sellers, or even their agents who, although very commendably taking part, don't carry much weight. Anyway, assuming you could get the best-sellers, guess who you'd be ending up with - in effect the mass market panders - rather than those with critical or literary skill but who sell less. It is hard to imagine any publisher on the committee you mention, after all, they're the ones you're supposedly pressurizing in the first place. Perhaps people like Greystoke Mowbray would, but as you show, they don't have very much money or large print runs.

The other alternative you say will cost £3000, and then ask the members to pay for it (at £3.50 each). I don't know how much money the BSFA has this year (I know in 1982 it had a £500 profit), and I don't want to bankrupt the BSFA, so assuming a similar profit this year we're down to £2500 as the cost not yet covered which, on a 1000 members is £2.50 each. To get their money back at a cover price of £1.50 (£0.75 on sale or return) you need to sell 3333 copies, out of your 5000 print run. Not impossible perhaps but a bit of a risk, especially as nowhere near everybody in the BSFA is going to stump up. To be absolutely sure of getting this £2500 it seems you would have to get it elsewhere, or preferably after the event. Which takes us back to the publishing pressure group...

Oh come on then! I don't want to continue blindly on, so since you ask for a choice I'll go for the pressure group, and all it's problems, if only because of a lack of alternative. But if we had £2500...now there lie possibilities....

ROGER WADDINGTON,
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Norton, Malton,
North Yorkshire
YO17 9ES

Being one of Nature's optimists, I'd be quite prepared to lay my £3.50 down; but I'd also have to recognise the economic reality. However much we may rail against the publishers for bringing out what they do, we have to recognise they know what will sell and what people will buy. With their

years of experience, setting up publication of what we think might be good SF (and good for SF) against these, might be an emotionally satisfying act, but of very little use. Of course we could by some chance bring out a critically acclaimed title; but can we work up the hype that's necessary to sell it?

We can talk about raising the standard of SF; but what if most of the buyers of SF are happy as they are? From looking at the bookshelves, in spite of the impact of New Worlds and the New Wave, most of what's out today could well have been written before the 'revolution'. There's sword-and-sorcery fantasies, imitations of Tolkien, the Gor novels, umpteen sequels to Dune; even Riverworld was envisaged in the fifties; and that I'd suggest is where the reading public would rather be. New Worlds may have had an impact among the authors, but you wouldn't notice it from the bookshelves. So if you're thinking of educating the publishers (and public) towards a better appreciation of SF, you'll have to be more subtle about it, and not pour money down the drain, publishing books that nobody will buy.

There's more point to the BSFA as a pressure group, though recommending one unpublished title after another, reminds me of crying wolf once too often. Even one title that they publish with misgivings, however highly recommended, and that turns out to be the clinker that they expected might negate the whole exercise. [[[If we got one novel published I would count the whole exercise a success.]]] My answer would be to expose them to the whole panoply of SF, rather than one little title, by giving them an overview of the field; let them see the discussion in the fanzines of the books they publish, titles they're thinking of buying, news of what their authors are doing. Find the less outre fanzines (I leave that to your discretion!), the ones that discuss SF, and that way we can show the publishers what good SF should be, instead of lobbying for a no-hoper that's already gone their rounds, acting as a court of last resort. And then, there's always the possibility that the BSFA might turn

them down as well.

Though I've been doing my bit for new British writing by actually buying a hardback copy of Golden Witchbreed, and not waiting for the paperback; or as I usually do, read the reviews, and save money that way.. That I suggest might be the best way of pressuring the publishers, by buying the book you think should be bought, and boycotting the rest; admittedly at £8.95 it may be a bit more expensive than laying out £3.50, but at least you do have the pleasure of reading a very good book, and not see your money vanish. But do we, as serious readers, have enough numbers to prevail against those less-demanding readers who buy anything with 'SF' on the cover? [[[No.]]]

[[[That, then, brings to an end the letters on the BSFA publishing venture. I do not want to summarize it now, as I feel the debate should go on for another issue first. I will, however, add one further point. What the BSFA has to offer to any publishing venture, is a point of view, potential sales through the membership and unbounded enthusiasm about SF. The two options I provided used those three aspects. If we published a book ourselves, the BSFA would be reliant on the membership to buy quite a few books. The second option, 'a pressure group' uses the enthusiasm of its members to carry it through. It has occurred to me though, that there is a further option. This option takes into account the areas where the BSFA lacks experience; marketing and distribution, in fact, book publishing itself, but it does utilize those factors which he have to offer. Simply put it is this; the BSFA should join forces with one of the established publishing houses and jointly choose and publish original British science fiction. Obviously, besides assisting with the clerical side of choosing the book, we would have to help financially be that in reserved sales or actual cash. The liability of the publisher, against a loss, would thus be reduced. What do you think?]]]

It is the publisher's busy season, which is why I haven't been able to respond to Vector 116 in time for no. 117; nevertheless there are a couple of points I feel I should make.

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD,
Malcolm Edwards,
14 Henrietta St,
London
WC2E 8QJ

First, it's a shame that David Barrett mars (for me) his otherwise good review of Cat Karina with a piece of reflex publisher-basing, particularly when it turns out to be ill-founded. I happen to know that The Ultimate Jungle is a very early Coney novel (I remember him referring to it back in the days when I was editing Vector, which means it must have been written in 1973 at the latest). That's why I didn't refer to it.

Also, I think you can be misled by looking at just one year's output from any publisher. Perhaps the proportion of books by British authors is down in our 1983 list (though not as far down as you suggest - Watson & Coney & Gentle & Shaw makes four by any method of arithmetic, [[[I classified Coney as Canadian]]] in addition to whom Sladek has had claims as an honorary Brit, while a wider-ranging count might have included M. John Harrison's The Ice Monkey). But if I look at the books we have in the pipeline for 1984 and early 1985 they include titles by Ian Watson (2), Garry Kilworth (2), Richard Cowper, Keith Roberts (2), Bob Shaw, Robert Holdstock, Mary Gentle -- not to mention Sladek. This, I feel, is hardly neglect of the home side. And as for new writers -- well, we had two in 1982 (Phillip Mann and Roger Eldridge) and one in 1983 (Mary Gentle) - discounting prior children's books in a couple of cases. Well, even Don Wollheim, published 4 or 5 titles a month at DAW, only expects to introduce two or three new writers a year.... [[[Your list of forthcoming books looks very promising, albeit tinged with disappointment, as at least two of the authors mentioned above were with other hardback publishers, who have ceased publishing science fiction. Also, I cannot shake of the belief that something is wrong when the percentage of foreign writers published

by a British SF publisher, is greater than the home grown element. (I might add this is not something that is secular to SF. If you analyse the Thriller section of the Gollancz output, the percentage is even higher.) It would make some sense if the British produced fiction was of a lower quality - but we know that is not true. All I can suggest (and I have no facts for this) is that because foreign fiction costs less to buy and sells better [Name for instance a British SF novel that will sell as well as Heretics of Dune by Herbert or Valentine Pontifex by Robert Silverberg or Heechee Rendezvous by Pohl] than its home grown counterpart, (Can you supply figures?) the profit of the foreign SF funds the British contingent. Now, that would amuse...]]]

DAVID V. BARRETT,
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HG1 5HD

I'm hoping that the vast majority of Vector readers have a CDQ (Crap Detection Quotient) of 120+. If not, they might find themselves swayed by Michael Soper's and Barrington J Bayley's very cleverly written but utterly specious arguments. They have a right to their views, and a right to air them in

public, but I hope to God no-one with a low CDQ has had his mind contaminated by contact with this dreck. Bayley's semi-tongue-in-cheek approach actually encourages the reader to think, 'Well, there may be something in this after all,' while Soper's popular-science style is designed to fool the reader into believing that the author knows something about a. computers and b. creative writing. Neither article, if 'downdated' would have been out of place in a late-1950's pulp magazine; 1980's Vector readers, I trust, are both intellectually mature enough and sophisticated enough not to be taken in. Bayley's article I find more pornographic than the cover of Matrix 48; at least the latter was overtly obscene, and having been identified as such, could be slung where it belonged.

As for Michael Soper, may I suggest that he read Fritz Leiber's The Silver Eggheads to discover 'wordwooze' - computer-generated fiction, described at one point as 'verbal opium of zero meaningfulness' (p33, NEL 1966 ed.). Soper might learn from Cullingham, a former wordmill programmer, who says:

'I've always been oppressed by the fact that they are dead machines that can never work by anything but formula. For instance, they could never make the corny but blessed mistake of writing about themselves.. Do you realise that although hundreds of millions of people have lived or at least gone to sleep by the power of wordwooze, it's never been established how much of its effect is due to actual story and how much to pure hypnotism and the perfect but sterile manipulation of a few fundamental symbols of security, pleasure and fear - an endlessly repeated formula for feeding the ego, stilling anxiety, and blanking out the mind?' (p 186)

Sorry, Mr Soper, but I think Mills & Boon have beaten you to it.

To end on a more positive note, Colin Greenland's review/article on Mary Gentle's novel was a joy to read; almost as enjoyable as the book itself!

In his piece 'The Liberation of Fiction' Michael Soper demonstrates fundamental misunderstandings concerning the nature of literature. When he claims that by the end of the century 'computers will have been programmed to write novels every bit as good as those that are frequently published today', I've no doubt that he's right, since many of the novels written today are bland products churned out to a formula. But serious literature is a different matter; it is simply not amenable to the type of analytic treatment that Soper suggests. Even if we

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14 Elmers Avenue,
Surbiton

developed a machine with recognizably human characteristics, with human emotions, desires and fears, from where is its life experience to come? What relationships will it have, how will its character be formed? Or is Soper suggesting that we can input all this information, that we can tease out the factors that go to make literature, and program them in? If we could do that, it probably wouldn't be worth writing the stuff in the first place. Indeed, it's possible that computers will finally provide us with a definition of what constitutes literature and what doesn't; if a book can be written by a computer, then it doesn't. Artistic creativity is not a science.

Another characteristic of literature, of course, is that it's concerned with words. Style, poetry, rhythm and so on are all vital aspects - they're not everything, but they're certainly more important than the following statement suggests: 'visual information is more concise in computer memory than pages of words'. I'm not saying that software packages of the type that Soper describes will never come to pass - but they'll constitute a separate art form. Literature itself will always be words, processed through the writer's creative imagination in an individual and idiosyncratic way.

And naturally, all the above arguments apply to science fiction as much as any type of literature - in suggesting that SF is especially suitable for the computer treatment, Soper confuses the medium with the message.

The onward rush of computer development is exciting, and will transform many aspects of our lives - but it's important for those involved to avoid getting away with their own enthusiasm. There are limits to their potential empire. [[[Michael Soper has put his own words into practice and developed a "work of cyberfiction called Vanadia and the Time-Knot" which runs on the ZX81 + 16K, and is available for £5 and SAE from Michael Soper, PFTN, 11 Ouseley Close, New Marston, Oxford. OX3 0JS.]]]

I hope Vector's standards aren't going to decline to the level of the narcissistic rock press. Colin Greenland's piece on the new novel by Mary Gentle is of the itchy-bum school of reviewing, in which the reviewer's ailments are given as the thrilling and original context in which we learn about a new book. There's far too much about Colin Greenland, his adroitly plugged own novel, his psychic exhaustion, his precarious appetite, his needs for rest, the tragic turmoil of his me-generation symptoms. Reviewers should not be encouraged to scratch their bums in public.

I offer this thought in the altruistic wish to see Vector maintaining its hard-won dignity. Yours pruritically.....

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST,
1 Ortygia House,
6 Lower Road,
Harrow.

COLIN GREENLAND,
17 Alexandra Road,
Chadwell Heath,
Essex

Will no one rid me of this turbulent Priest? Or at least take him aside and whisper very gently in his well-scrubbed ear that critics have feelings as well as highbrowed thoughts; and that these feelings come into play when they read books, just like anybody else. As Priest knows well, I scratch my bum because I have severe eczema. But I'd rather have a pain in the arse than be one.

[[[I've managed to virtually deplete the letter file this time with only 4 letters still outstanding. The letters from Sue Thomason, Trevor Artingstoll, Malcolm Edwards and Robert Gibson I'll keep until next issue. I'll have no excuses for not writing please as there should be enough in this letter column for everyone to find something to comment on!]]]

ANN COLLIER

[illegible]

Lem has here served up a literary meal consisting of several, substantial hors d'oeuvres and numerous side-dishes which spoil the appetite for the main course, coming as it does, a considerable way into the book. Tempted from the first pages by aromas wafting from the main course, the reader still looks forward to this but when it eventually is set before us, it too is accompanied by so many garnishes and dressings that we remain unsure of what has been eaten, bloated by too rich a fare and yearning for a better-planned and balanced meal, in which one could properly savour the taste of the ingredients and subsequently digest them thoroughly.

The story which forms the core of the book tells of the attempt by scientists to understand what appears to be a 'message from the stars', encoded in tapes recording cosmic neutrino emissions. As the scientists pursue their task, always with the nagging doubt about whether the signals received were deliberately sent or accidental, it becomes clear that the military have an interest in the project and in its discoveries for their potential use as weaponry. In the context of Lem's work, it would be foolhardy to expect a neat, methodical denouement, in which the mystery will be completely solved, the code cracked. Lem has often intrigued the reader with carefully constructed, heavily textured mysteries but only occasionally delivers an all-ends-tied-up resolution which allows us to believe that human intelligence and persistence are sufficient assets for survival. An explicit statement early in the book establishes that this is not a simple, detective fiction and so there is little 'who-dunnit-or-why' suspense, although Lem nonetheless takes pleasure in assembling the elements of the puzzle. Shot through the fabric of this tale of scientific research are multi-coloured threads of cerebral meanderings, of speculations on the limitations of literature, on evolution, linguistics, politics and, most frequently, on the nature of scientific and philosophic thought. The weakness of the book lies in the absence of any discernible pattern traced by these threads. They are too numerous and too unco-ordinated to be decorative and too little integrated into the story to be functional in drawing its elements together or providing a commentary on its events. I was reminded of one of those alcohol-inspired conversations lasting late into the night, when one person's evident pleasure in talking effortlessly sparks off the next to contribute. Not a drunken, incoherent speech-slurred conversation for Lem's use of language and the virtuosity of his writing skills easily avert such dangers. It is rather like one of those occasions when, relaxed and disinhibited by alcohol, and made tolerant by it, a group of people enjoy finding from within themselves entertainment and stimulation but with each individual always on the look out

for the next gap which will allow his next conversational gambit to be put to best effect. Whilst this is a monologue, not a conversation, Lem's thoughts trip over one another in his eagerness to give them expression, jostle together to find space in the narrative and exploit even the flimsiest pretext of a link with the previous topic.

It takes Lem a long time to begin to tell us the plot. The book begins with a section purportedly identifying the text as the unfinished work of an actual dead scientist and proceeds to explore this man's intellectual, moral and personal development in an autobiographical style. But, when the story finally does get into gear, the relevance of the opening sections remains unclear and they seem mere pegs upon which to hang some of Lem's wide-ranging musings some of which read like treatises on abstract intellectual topics. Suddenly and awkwardly, the narrative about the interstellar communications intrudes and the reader, whilst impressed by the demonstrated diversity and depth of Lem's knowledge, is left wondering about his literary purposefulness.

At this point, Lem begins to refer to the project which gives the book its name and the reader settles down to refocus attention on the story but only to be immediately disappointed for Lem is still not quite ready to get down to this. After a short conducted tour of the supposed literature relating to the project, he again goes off at a tangent before asserting unconvincingly, "All that I write here is to the point" (P 26) It is a speaker's increasingly desperate attempt to hold the attention of a perceptibly fidgeting audience. I found this irritating, the more so as I was alternately delighted by several splendidly vivid metaphors and frustrated by some extremely overformal, convoluted obscure sentences. Although it is impossible to tell whether the problem is in the translation or the original, I don't recall such stody prose elsewhere in the other books by Lem that I've read. He is unrepentant about but acutely aware of the readers continuing impatience. This is not, he reminds us, a chills and thrills, sensational novel the reader who expects one will be disappointed. But what are the right expectations? True, the various preambles and abstract tone of the opening chapters have not let us to expect an action-packed novel but, just at the point where one is about to abandon expectations of any conventional novel and to gear one's attentions to a more cerebral, less structured work, Lem gives us a complicated mini-saga telling how the message was first recorded. This is complete with crank scientists, comen and jury trials and points towards a conventional mystery novel. Many of the best passages in this book deal with the scientists working in an isolated desert location to unravel the message although Lem concentrates here on the theoretical and scientific problems involved. The minute detail slows the pace, however, and one is left wondering since Lem continues to insist that the solution of the puzzle is not his purpose, whether it is the puzzle-tacklers or the process of tackling the puzzle which is his focus. The climax of the narrative comes when a substance whose recipe seemed contained in the message fails to the hero's relief to fulfill its potential for military uses. This climax comes and goes with little emphasis and the remaining thirty-three pages of the book get bogged down in the pervasive sense of pessimism expressed in a morose, world-weary tone. Mankind should not look to science for the solution of its



problems and scientists are split into factions and compete rather than collaborate for maximum achievement. Empathy between people is not possible or even desirable for if it were, "if even a spark could pass from man to man, the world would be full of raw, bowel-torn howling." (P 199) To end this long-drawn out sigh of a novel, there is a quotation from Swinburne, expressing gratitude that however awful life is, it is at least ended by the oblivion of death.

It is misleading to suggest that Lem's diversions into various scientific disciplines are of little interest. On the contrary, their scope is immense and their expression powerful and vivid but, unintegrated as they are into the body of the novel, they risk overbalancing the narrative and rendering questionable the books claim to be a novel. After following Lem patiently along so many highways and byways, the dead end with which this book concludes causes resentment. Whilst, with one hand, Lem wags a finger warning us not to expect neat simple endings in the unneat, complex worlds of his fiction, with the other hand, he beckons us, through the practised accomplishments of his story-telling craft, to immerse ourselves totally, heedless of his own warnings, in the puzzles he devises.



THE TRIUMPH OF MEANS

JOHN CLUTE



[NOT BY BREAD ALONE By NAOMI MITCHISON. Marion Boyers 1983, £7.95]

The dustwrapper illustration, which seems to be of some giant foodstuff as seen by Aborigines, closely resembles the work of Wyndham Lewis circa 1935, and may therefore be understood as a kind of subliminal homage, on the part of Marion Boyers and designer Beverly Ann Levy, to the distinguished author they have published so late in her immensely long career. About fifty years ago, in 1935 as a matter of fact, Naomi Mitchison collaborated with Lewis on an afterdeath fantasy called Beyond This Limit; she did the words, he the copious illustrations; the book soon disappeared from general view, but in 1983 Boyers has given us this parlay through time, all the more moving perhaps because of the jangled twilight we live in now.

Not that Mitchison herself - she published her first novel in 1923 - seems either jangled or autumnal in this new science fiction novel, her third to date. Not By Bread Alone shows the age of its author mainly in the sense of urgency it conveys, for it has always been a misconception about those who inhabit extreme old age that they are leisurely; almost always the reverse is the case. Mitchison has always been a hasty writer, and the texture of her books has sometimes seemed far too casual, too offhand for permanence. If this is a flaw - and frequently, I think, it has so proved - it is a flaw she has transcended in the present tale. Here, the skittish, slithery offhand momentum of the telling of the tale only intensifies the reader's involvement in the issues broached. Rapid and melancholy and wise, Not By Bread Alone is a tract for the times.

Anne Tomlin and Saranjit Singh, biologists, work out a revolutionary procedure for increasing the nutritive yield of plants. We are given details of this Food of the Gods. We see the co-optation of the discovery by an enormous corporation, which unleashes Freefood on the world for reasons partly philanthropic, partly commercial - a wellfed world is a world capable of high consumption across the board. Soon ripeness is everywhere, though it comes in uniform parcels. After a few decades of revolution and modest euphoria, cracks duly begin to show in the new order. There is a cultural blandness, a lack of the taste of things. There are side-effects; some plants become poisonous and

book is lucky to escape as nothing more damnable than a caricature, but this is not to say that Sladek is lacking in compassion:

'...Beyond them were three robot models, once epitomizing high-cheekboned splendour, but now squatting to cover their worn limbs with grey rags and cardboard. They had only one eye between the three of them, which had to be passed around quickly whenever there was anything worth seeing, which wasn't often....'

There is pity enough, if laced with grim humour and, what's more, Tik-Tok's behaviour can be recognized in terms of human emotions. The book is unwaveringly presented from a robot point of view ('we were merely providing entertainment for you') and the game for the reader is to catch himself identifying with the robots as, bewildered, they regard the strutting and posturing parade of humans. Seen through the factory-perfect perceptions of the 'tinfoil', we 'shitbellies' cannot expect to escape lightly, while the warm and memorable characters are all robots: Tik-Tok's lost bride Gumdrop, his faithful henchman Blojob (an explosives expert!), and Buttons the surgical assistant who, in an heroic series of prostheses, sacrifices his components in the cause of medical science until he is nothing more than a consultant head kept in a hatbox on a shelf in Dr Hekyll's office...

Tik-Tok is a very funny book, especially if you take your humour black. Some sort of comparison with Roderick is inevitable, I suppose, and although there are many similarities, one important difference is that while Roderick was sent out as a tabula rasa for the world to write on, Tik-Tok is a scheming entity in his own right once the malfunctioning of his 'asimovs' has become manifest. In narrative terms, this means that while Sladek had to spend some time in creating human characters (with varying degrees of success) to work their influences on Roderick, Tik-Tok is able to process his encounters with humans much more briskly, and this results in a book which is snappier and which avoids the occasional flatulence of the second part of Roderick. The economy and pace of Tik-Tok is admirable and, given that the book is so brief and still embraces so many scenes and individuals, the reader is regaled by a quite remarkable quality of swift diversions:

'Later she developed an allergy to oxygen, which gave her many doctors some considerable difficult. For a time they found it necessary to keep her in a deep-freeze filled with xenon. This was less trouble, however, than her spell of inverted hay-fever, an allergy to pollen-free air...' '... Dr Lugne-Poe, the most famous obstetrician of our age. It was he who proposed that women give birth in the natural manner of bats, hanging upside down in totally dark caves.'

Scarcely a page passes without three or four such incidental fancies, not that the main narrative itself is entirely grave. Tik-Tok starts out as a domestic in the antebellum splendour of a reproduction Old South mansion, where the sound of the plantation robots crooning imitation Stephen Foster songs echoes mournfully across the fields of night ('Hear de robots singin/Happy as de live-long day'), then narrowly escapes a pulping at the hands of a roboticidal judge, factotums in Colonel Jitney's Pancake Emporium (painfully close to Colonel Sanders, this), learns Martian ('Grok, brudda') in order to evangelise to non-existent Martians, and it is finally as an ordinary suburban robot that he murders the blind child, the pivotal act of his existence and the incident that both opens and closes the book.

For he terms the murder his 'breakthrough into three-dimensional human life', and by running the pre-murder and post-murder narratives in tandem, Sladek allows us to constantly compare Tik-Tok as victim (robot) with Tik-Tok as victimiser ('human'). The hilarity of the former narrative sits uneasily beside the darker tone of the latter, as when Tik-Tok's business empire expands to include the Clockman Retirement Centers: 'I had plans to sell products derived from our inmates - hair, teeth, glasses'. Funny? A less

obvious purpose is also served by this tail-in-mouth construction. The chapters of the book are ordered alphabetically and it is therefore no accident when Iik-Tok refers to the completion of his notes and the prospect of his erasure as, "Experiment A". First of a series? The optional Chapter 'Z' gives us the choice of either returning to 'A' to attempt another 'break-through' or of accepting the fact that in Iik-Tok's existence the breakthrough has been achieved and that no more experiments are necessary because the series is now concluded. As one character observes, the concept of creating robots is an old, widespread and persistent one; the conclusion the reader draws is that they will get us in the end. Man's urge to build these creatures stems from his urge for self-destruction, and the human world in Iik-Tok teeters on the brink.

By way of a grace-note to this cyclical vision, Sladek cheerfully dedicates the book to various fictional and actual robots throughout history and to 'all decent, law-abiding robots everywhere'; but spare a thought for the wicked ones too, so long as their stories are as entertaining and as provoking as Iik-Tok.



PREACHY SENTIMENTS

KEN LAKE



[THE LAZARUS EFFECT By FRANK HERBERT AND BILL RANSOM. Gollancz 1983. 381pp.,]
[£8.95. ISBN 0-575-03373-8]

This book is the very model of a Victorian mellerdrammer, complete with impenetrable plot, and a coy selection of quotations - including many created by the authors - to set the mood of each chapter or hint at things to come.

One often wonders, when faced by joint authorship, who does what. From a cursory survey of Frank Herbert's many earlier books, of which perhaps the most remarkable were Whipping Star and The Dosadi Experiment, one is tempted to conclude that the turgidity of the present work is attributable to his collaborator, the more so since similar faults are easily ascribed to The Jesus Incident, of which the present work is a sequel.

In seeking to do justice to this book - which has few sterling qualities buried beneath a vast irritating mass of unnecessary detail - I turned back to The Jesus Incident, a book I was frankly unable to finish when I last tried. It is with a certain sense of frustration that I have to admit that this time I found it just as unappealing, and that it was only with the thought of a promised review in mind that I was able to fight my way through to the end of The Lazarus Effect.

Why was this so? Well, the most obvious failing of both books is that the participants in these stirring tales are, basically, people with whom the average reader must feel little sympathy. Given that they live in a degenerate society, centred both on a spaceship which reads minds and demands that its inhabitants learn to "worShip" (note the rather silly pun - the word is spelt thus throughout), and on a hell-planet where the mutated inhabitants fight against almost unimaginably ferocious wildlife; given that virtually all the participants are clones, many of them unaware of the fact, and given that the only vaguely sympathetic form of life on the planet is a sentient kelp.. given all these things, was it also necessary that they should all - including the kelp - speak in the most banal clichés? As example, I cite page 378 - "You better believe it" and (yes, you really may not believe this, but it's so) on page 359 we find "take the fisherman to our leader."

Now it may be that these and many similar trashy phrases were written tongue-in-cheek. If so, they are ill-placed in a novel which seeks to involve

the reader: true art lies in its concealment, while this flaunting of triteness detracts from any sense of belief in the reality of the characters.

Then again, the book abounds in preachy sentiments of a pantheistic type. It refers properly to most of the works it cites but for some impenetrable reason always labels the Bible "The Christian Book of the Dead," and seeks to raise our spirits by contrasting these sentiments with the base and ignorant behaviour and thoughts of most of the characters.

Perhaps the most damning criticism of this book is that the baddies are irretrievably bad (and have "normal" Earthly names like Jesus Lewis) while the goodies are almost equally flawed but are graced with such soubriquets as Ale, Twisp and Shadow. The evil genius is named Gallow, and is a real charmer in looks if you happen to like pure nordic blonds, while we have a Goddess named Vata who participates in a grotesque sex act while her worshippers look on.

If all these brief snippets make the book sound somewhat unbelievable, one can only assume that the joint authors realised this, for like The Jesus Incident it is written in that scissors-and-paste style which indicates that they first thought up a plot, then they complicated it, then they took it way over the top; they then cut and spliced the chapters so that one is initially bemused, unable to relate either to the plot or to the characters because they simply are not acting within any framework that the reader can grasp.

If you are prepared to stay with it, to pile up in your memory a vast amount of possibly irrelevant detail and to invent some mnemonic whereby you can place all the characters' names into context, then ultimately it all falls into place. By then, of course, most people have lost all interest in puzzling it through - reading a novel is, after all, supposed to be a pleasure and a relaxation, not just an intellectual exercise in maze-threading.

Of course, this book benefits from the scene-laying in The Jesus Incident, and although no reference is made to this fact in the book itself, a proper understanding of its content is totally dependent upon your having first fought your way through the earlier work.

Frank Herbert is the renowned author of the four-part - and much more gripping, not to mention more sympathetic - blockbuster Dune, yet even there it was the first three books, published in 1965, 1969 and 1976, that held together best and inspired the greatest amount of reader-identification; the fourth, 1981, book (God Emperor of Dune) is a thing apart and might almost be about a different planet. In somewhat the same way The Dosadi Experiment jumps far ahead of Whipping Star, while in the present case The Lazarus Effect suffers from the fact that all the best fun was in its predecessor, all the most believable characters have either died or been incorporated into the kelp, and we are left with a gang of plotting, squabbling participants who are so far from man-as-we-know-him that when finally the original Earth-type clones are revived they are greeted with distaste and themselves are revolted by the sight of what the human race has become while they languished in "hybernation".

I sought in vain for a message in this book, hoping that underlying the crudity of action and the paucity of pleasant characters was something on which one could pin a lifestyle. Unfortunately what message there is seems to boil down to: man is vile, life is short, everyone's against you, you can only be happy by dying and allowing your "self" to be incorporated into an alien bunch of seaweed - which has itself previously sought to smash mankind's efforts to exist on the planet where the ship ("not the ship - Ship!" we are constantly reminded by those who are determined to worShip) has placed them.

Ship does indicate its own aim: to force mankind to learn by bitter experience that vicious behaviour can never bring a good end. A pretty hackneyed idea to support 381 pages of text, I'm afraid.

Perhaps, then, the clue lies in the fact that Ship has named its strange planet Pandora - one can imagine the joint authors crying to one another, as they contemplate the vast sales likely from all those who enjoyed the Dune series, "Open the Box!" and "Take the money!"

GOLLANCZ SF

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