

→ 150 → VECTOR → 150 →

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

JUNE / JULY 1989



95p

150th Issue: Birth of the BSFA Memoirs of the Survivors

Gaiman: Comics Genius

PLUS

Book Reviews and Letters

VECTOR

JUNE/JULY 1989

C O N T E N T S

3

EDITORIAL

And it's goodbye to him...
with a final rail against conformity

4

LETTERS

Your thoughts on Stoke Poges and the Horribles,
censorship, artistic freedom and Salman Rushdie

9

QUITE SERIOUSLY WEIRD

Neil Gaiman (*Violent Cases*, *Sandman*, *Black Orchid*)
Interviewed by Alex Stewart

12

VOICES FROM THE ARCHIVES

The BSFA and Vector were born in 1958.
Rob Hansen and Vinf Clarke listen to the taped birth-pangs

14

NOT A ZOMBIE IN SIGHT?

A host of past editors, BSFA stalwarts and SF luminaries
(assorted) celebrate the 150th issue of Vector

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Artwork on p 10 Dave McKean (*Violent Cases*)

pp 9 & 11 Sam Kiehl & Mike Dringenberg (*Sandman* 1)

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*** ARTICLES AND ARTWORK WELCOME! ***

Please send, for the time being,
to the editorial address below

20

REVIEWS

Edited by Paul Kincaid

Gribbin on Dick, Newinger on Gribbin & Chown
plus three new books by Gene Wolfe

Edward Ashpole - THE SEARCH FOR EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
INTELLIGENCE

A.A. Attanasio - WYVERN

Greg Bear - ETERNITY

Ben Bova - MILLENNIUM

Ray Bradbury - THE THIRTEEN CONVECTOR

Ramsey Campbell - ANCIENT IMAGES

R. Chetwynd-Hayes - THE HAUNTED GRANGE

Courtney Davis - THE CELTIC ART SOURCE BOOK

Philip K. Dick - BEYOND LIES THE WEB

Ben Elton - STARK

Christopher Evans & Robert Holdstock (Eds) - OTHER EDGERS
II

Stephen Gallagher - DOWN RIVER

John Gribbin & Marcus Chown - DOUBLE PLANET

K.W. Jeter - IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD

Garry Kilworth - HUNTER'S MOON

Dean R. Koontz, Illustrations by Phil Parks, Created by
Christopher Zevis - OODONS

Asy Myers (Ed) - THE FOURTH BOOK OF AFTER MIDNIGHT
STORIES

Robert Silverberg (Ed) - ROBERT SILVERBERG'S WORLDS OF
WONDER

Robert Silverberg - PROJECT PENDULUM

E.J. Stewart (Ed) - THE BOOK OF MERLIN, MERLIN AND WOMAN

Gene Wolfe - STORIES FROM THE OLD HOTEL, FOR ROSEMARY,

THERE ARE BOOKS

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EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT



NEVER ACTUALLY APPLIED FOR THE JOB OF EDITING VECTOR. I put in for *Paperback Inferno*. Alan Dorey (then chairman) had already offered *PI* to Andy Sawyer (who has done a brilliant job with it), and asked me to take on Vector; as part of a team. I was about to change job and home; I'd never edited a magazine before; I had no idea of what it entailed; I said yes.

Just over four years ago Paul Kincaid and I met for the first time in an hotel in Cirencester, and discussed our plans for Vector. How long did we think we'd stick with it? Well, it would be fun to take it through to issue 150, wouldn't it: celebratory issue, go out with a splash and all that.



David V Barrett

Countless times over the last four years — certainly at least once every two months — I've regretted that over-enthusiastic decision and thought of jacking it in. But then we reached the 140s, and the higher 140s, and however much of a struggle it was becoming to put each issue together in the time left from my increasing freelance activities, it seemed such a shame to stop when *V150* was almost in sight.

So here we are, the 150th issue, and my last as editor. For various reasons I'm not being allowed to softly and suddenly vanish away — okay, so I'm not a boofum, though sometimes I suspect I may be a snark; I've been asked to stay on in a consulting rôle for the next few issues.

Looking at the list of former editors, it's clear that I've been editor for both more issues and more years than anyone else. There's a very simple reason for that: I've had an excellent team. Most previous editors, in addition to commissioning, selecting, editing and writing material, also did all or most of the typing, and the layout and paste-up; I haven't pasted up a single issue, and have had a lot of help with the typing.

I'd like to thank Ann Morris, Sharon Hall, Sandy Eason and David Cleden for all their keyboard work; and Hussain Mohamed, Simon Nicholson and Harriet Monkhouse for the mammoth job of designing, laying out and pasting up every issue from *V127* to *V150* (and Alan Dorey for *V126*), always getting the camera-ready copy to the printers in time, even when I'd been late in delivering material to them. However good or bad the content, it's the presentation that makes the first impression, and that then makes reading through the magazine a pleasurable activity. I'm sure that a lot of the praise I've received for Vector should really be redirected to Hussain for the redesign four years ago and to him and Si and Harriet for their work since then.

Paul Kincaid has done a magnificent job as review editor through the whole period, and I'm delighted he's continuing in this rôle. From our first meeting, Paul and I discovered we shared fairly similar tastes in reading,

similar views on what SF is all about, and similar aims for Vector. This has enabled us to work with each other, rather than against each other, over the last four years.

I've also had continuous support from the committee in its various line-ups, and particularly want to thank John and Eve Harvey for their advice in the early days, and Maureen Porter for her enthusiasm and friendship over the last two or three years.

Vector wouldn't exist without the unpaid sweat and time not only of BSFA staff, but also of the dozens of people, fans and big name authors, who have written articles, interviews, reviews and letters, and contributed artwork. It's in the nature of all journals, professional as well as amateur, that the editor will harass you to produce something for a deadline — and then sit on it for months without publication, often without even the courtesy of a simple acknowledgement of receipt; and I've probably been worse than most in this respect.

I'm not going to do the BSFA thing of thanking everybody else from my mother to the gaffer's boy, but I do want to express special thanks to two other people, Mary Gentle and Michael Fearn, for their support, friendship, encouragement, guidance and patience for so many years, when Vector has taken over more of my life than it should have done; I owe them both a great deal.

Kev Smith was editor when Vector hit 100, and did an excellent celebratory issue; the idea was that this one should be similar. I tried contacting every previous editor, and people who'd been around in the BSFA/fandom since the year dot; I wish I'd been able to get hold of more of them, and that all those I did manage to contact had responded (note to the editor of *V200*: start work on this at least six months beforehand!). A goodly number did respond, however, sending their thoughts on the last few decades of the British SF scene. We didn't do anything special for the BSFA's 30th birthday last year, so this issue belatedly celebrates that as well; there isn't a written history of the BSFA, but I hope that any future historian will find valuable source material here. Thanks to Rob Hansen for permission to quote from *Then 2*, his history of British fandom, to Viné Clarke, Keith Freeman, Peter Mabey and Dennis Tucker for lots of useful addresses, and to everyone who has contributed to this historical overview.



Paul Kincaid

So, what will I do with all my new spare time? Most of it is already committed: I'm reviewing for the *Independent* and *White Dwarf*, and more occasionally for *Foundation*, *New Scientist* and other magazines; I'm doing the odd interview for *Interzone* and *Fear*; I'm about to deliver my first anthology to NEL; I'm working on a novel I'm very excited about, and producing a few short stories; I've just had to turn down a non-fiction book I very much want to write.

through lack of time; oh, and I have a day job as well, as special projects editor on *Computer Weekly*. How have I found the time to edit Vector? I really don't know.

There's a lot I haven't achieved on Vector that I'd like to have done, and there's a lot I have done which I wish I'd done better (and there is no health in us, for those who remember the much-lamented *Book of Common Prayer*). On the whole, though, I'm reasonably pleased with the last four years' efforts; while none of them is perfect, there's a lot of good stuff in those twenty-five issues. I'm not going to select any particular issue or article or layout or cover that I'm most proud of; I'd like to have done more those issues, but they're notoriously difficult to organise. For example, there was to have been a comix special issue round about V148, which for various reasons never happened; one of the pieces from it is in this issue, and others will probably trickle into the next few.

It's remarkable how many former Vector editors are still involved professionally, in one way or another, in the business: Ted Tubb, Mike Moorcock, Rog Peyton at Andromeda, Ken Slater at Fantast Medway, Malcolm Edwards at Gallancz, Mike Kenward, editor of *New Scientist*, David Wingrove... and Paul Kincaid and I seem to be moving more and more that way. But that's always been one of the things that's special about SF: there isn't a dividing line between amateurs and professionals, more of a great wide fuzzy band. Another facet of SF that I love is the kookiness of most of the people involved in the genre: writers, agents, editors, publishers, critics, and readers. I've made a lot of good friends over the last four years. See you around.

FOOTNOTE TO V149 EDITORIAL

"OH NO, NOT AGAIN!" HALF OF YOU SAY. "RAH-RAH-RAH!" I HOPE the other half say. Barrett gets on his soapbox again. Well, okay, I can't resist this last opportunity, but I will keep it short this time. Promise.

Early in May Channel 4 showed a 1967 film I'd not seen before: *Privilege*, starring ex-Manfred Mann vocalist Paul Jones and Jean Shrimpton, based on an original story by Johnny Spelght. The Shrimps beautiful and I'm an unregenerate aging hippy, so I watch it, and it turns out to be heavily political SF.

A near-future British government is using a pop star, first in a violent on-stage act, to channel the kids' violence off the streets and into the (controllable) concert halls; then in advertising, to persuade every man, woman and child to eat six apples a day throughout the summer, so the apple mountain doesn't go rotten.

A new policy: State and Church get together, the Union Jack and the Cross side by side in a Christian Crusade: "We'll get Steven Shorter to say these things" — repent, law & order, stability — "because we want the youth of Britain to say them also." "They've got to be harnessed, guided. They identify with you. You can lead them into a better way of life, a fruitful conformity."

An establishment play even more invidious than the suppression of artists is the use of artists to further the establishment cause.

The Rally is chilling: "Jerusalem" (a stirring and beautiful song I don't think I'll ever hear again without

these connotations) sung by a rock band, with cannon accompaniment, followed by a raised arm salute, and thousands of young people shouting "We will conform".

In the end Steve rebels, publicly, against being used, and the adoration of his fans turns to hatred. He's barred from ever appearing on TV again, "so that he cannot use his position of privilege to disturb the public peace of mind."

Yes, artists do have a position of privilege. People listen to rock music, watch plays and films, read books, and are influenced by them. Musicians, actors, writers, poets, artists — of all kinds — have always been on the fringe of society, slightly off the edge of respectability. We need Harry Enfield's Loadsmoney to point up the crassness of yuppieedom. We need *Spitting Image* to stop us taking politicians seriously, to help us spot their lies (of whatever hue). And we need the sharp cutting edge of radical science fiction to help us to look at ourselves and the world we live in from a different angle; not to indoctrinate us, but to encourage us to think for ourselves.

It can be uncomfortable, yes; rethinking, real thinking, always is. But when artists are no longer allowed to disturb the public peace of mind, the public is no longer allowed to have a mind — or rather it is: a mind, one mind, a conforming, uniform mind.

I've tried, over the last four years, to get us all (including myself) to look at SF, and at SF-and-the-world-we-live-in, from different angles. Some members have objected; others have supported. Over 900 of you haven't let me know either way.

I'd like those 900+ who haven't so far been stirred to write to or for Vector, to take their turn and do their bit for the new editorial team. Write letters. Write articles. Vector is your magazine. For 31 years it's been run by a few hardworking people, with the active support of a few more. If you've never written an article for Vector, and you've got something to say, write it.

And if you have to step out on a ledge to do it, so much the better.



LETTERS

DENNIS TUCKER

20 King Edward Park, Badesley Rd, N Badesley, Southampton SO52 9JU

I FOUND LJ HURST'S ARTICLE "ANYWHERE BUT STOKE POGES" (V148) to be particularly interesting. The point on which he speculates is a fascinating one.

I vaguely remember *If Hitler Comes* but, in fact, there were a number of similar publications throughout the war designed — obviously — to keep the public's resolve

and morale as high as possible. I consider that by far the best of these was the briefly mentioned *I, James Blunt* by HV Morton, published by Methuen in 1942, 56 pages, sixpence (28p). Far from being a "pamphlet", it was rather a superior little paperback, printed on hardback paper in hardback-size print. Its descriptions of German troops marching up The Mall and the Gestapo at work in Britain were extremely vivid, believable and, in fact, frightening (which was the intention). It was also rather

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LETTERS

If they complain? It should be also noted that they did not use "the law": their protest was a form of direct action. The moral majority, despite the name, is not a majority, and Mary Whitehouse is not expressing the "majority" opinion so much as making a stand for morality in a basically amoral society. The proof is that she is a freelance news-maker rather than the Editor-in-Chief of a big publishing house, and it is the Murdoch and Maxwell's of the world that run the papers. *Reader's Digest*, in my opinion, is another story, but you don't have to read it if you don't want to. Anyway, what can you say to one hundred million people who think it is a good thing to be doing and thinking the same thing as one hundred million other people?

News is shocking, right? Shock-horror makes good headlines. We all deplore sensationalism, right, but we all read it, right? We want to know the dirt about the real world out there. Being shocked is a good thing, because it makes you think, right? But maybe that's all wrong. Maybe we've become shock-addicts, so accustomed to shock that we can see a dozen people blown away (fictionally) in an evening without flinching. Our sensibilities are dulled. You've heard it before. It is almost impossible to shock and shake us any more, so what's the argument for Art being shocking? Well, I wasn't shocked by *Driller-Killer*, in which a man-gone-crazy goes around murdering old people and drunks with a portable power drill. It was amusing, and, considering that it was banned, it makes me wonder about all the films that weren't banned where women are systematically and sensationally murdered. Are old people and drunks more "shocking" targets? Or was it banned because it wasn't shocking enough? Or because the killer was presented as a human being with obsessive but comprehensible motives, while it is more acceptable to have faceless motiveless incomprehensibly evil killers? The film was a comment on the whole murder/horror genre, and it did make me think. But I wasn't shocked. I ask myself: were the people who were shocked made to think?

To speak of artists "shocking and shaking people out of their cosy complacency" puts the artistic statement on a par with a terrorist act, which has those motives. Nevertheless, Art claims immunity from reprisal because it is Art, while wishing nevertheless to continue the revolutionary project. What if The Enemy gets wise to the fact that there is no point putting the activists in prison if the artists remain at large? Artists, like everyone else, live in a real world where the powers of law and media are used in support of the prevailing ideology and values of the society, and why not? What are they for in the first place, if not to do precisely that? Artists should perhaps take heed of David Cooper's advice to those of us driven schizophrenic by the modern world: be discreet, and you won't be interfered with.

You won't achieve such either. I'm reminded of EJ Phelps' famous "The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything." If you're entirely happy with the world as it is, then don't try to change anything; however, artists (of all kinds) are an onerous load of buggers. I have a lapel badge showing a dagger ending in a pen nib, with the legend "Spill ink not blood"; artists aren't the same as terrorists — but their power and influence are recognised when the pre-Gorbachev USSR put writers in psychiatric hospitals, and when Hitler encouraged the burning of books. And note that I'm not saying that to shock is the only function of Art — just as I'm not saying that all totalitarianism is governmental.

But I am saying that SF, which more than any other genre specialises in originality of thought and in setting the world on its head, can have a special rôle and responsibility here. The "thin cut" that fiction makes is a far more potent means of changing society than the knife or the bullet or the bomb; it also allows the reader the option of rejection — which an exploding aircraft doesn't.



JOANNE RAINE

33 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 9EW

ALMOST A YEAR AGO, I BECAME A MUSLIM, JOINING THE AHMADIYYAT Community. Acceptance of Islam colours your view of many issues. In particular I noticed how my religion is portrayed in the media. Islam = fundamentalism = terrorism = death, appears to be the current equation, as best exemplified in the reaction to Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

Although I have read (and enjoyed) Rushdie's previous work, I have not yet had the opportunity to read *The Satanic Verses*, though I fully intend to do so. I believe that it is, like Rushdie's previous works, a work of Fantasy, continuing his love/hate relationship with the Islamic subcontinent and the religion he was born into, but no longer follows — Islam.

In choosing to write about a character that could be equated with Mohammed, the Holy Prophet, Rushdie must have realised that there would be adverse reactions to his book. It may be that he deliberately set out to create such a reaction, though I doubt whether he could ever have realised that it would go as far as a bounty of over £3 million being offered for his death, and protests in which over 20 people have already met their deaths.

The Koran is, like the Bible, ambiguous about the treatment of its detractors. Forgiveness and revenge are two sides of the same coin. It is the death threats to Rushdie and the burning of copies of his book that have done more to damage the image of Islam in the Western world than Rushdie's book could ever have done.

A little over a year ago we were treated to similar scenes in America from Christian fundamentalists over the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, because it dared to speculate that their Holy Prophet imagined having a carnal relationship with a woman. Throughout the ages, blasphemies have occurred in the eyes of various world religions. Admittedly, no-one has been put to death for blasphemy for quite some time, but the notoriety they have achieved has been equally destructive to their lives. The Rushdie affair has grabbed the headlines because of the violence of the emotions that have been aroused and the continued prominence of Islamic fundamentalist countries on the world stage.

Personally, I think that the death threats that have been uttered against Rushdie and the attempts to ban his book are as big a crime against Islam as anything contained in the book itself. Mr Rushdie is in hiding, under police protection, and will probably always live under the shadow of reprisals from the Ayatollah's followers. That is more than adequate punishment.

Freedom of speech is protected by long tradition — it is a fundamental right and should always be so. The affair has also shown up the ineffectiveness of the so-called "blasphemy" laws in this country. They should either be extended and updated to include all religions or

L E T T E R S

dropped altogether. In this age of enlightenment, I believe that the latter is the best course.

Islam is a world religion. It has been around for 14 centuries, has been attacked many times and has survived and grown. It will survive Mr Rushdie and his book. The hysterical claims of those who claim to be defenders of Islam will in the end do more damage. Islam needs no defenders.

«As a non-Muslim, I have little to add to that (beyond what I've already said as general principles), except to say that I'm nearly halfway through the book, and am finding it far more readable and enjoyable than Gnosis. It is a Fantasy, in genre terms, hence its specific relevance to SF & Fantasy readers. By the time this Vector is published, the London demonstration will have taken place; I sincerely hope it will have been peaceful.»

GAVIN DIXON

WHY ON EARTH SHOULD IT BE THAT "FICTION IS CONCERNED WITH the study of personality" only and not with other things such as "society" as Rob Hogan suggested in V149? This seems to be a reflection of the political view which he apparently espouses. I am tempted to characterise that as "Anarchism", but not pejoratively. That is, society doesn't matter, only the individual is real.

We'll argue that point in a minute, but who would wish to confine fiction or any other literary form to the examination of one aspect of life? Surely the richer the better. If you wish to confine your own reading to one strand of thought, long may you have that freedom, but please don't legislate for others. Science fiction is a particularly rich form since it is multi-dimensional, not being confined to a time or kind of reality or cultural

matrix. (No genre is actually confined in that sense except voluntarily by the conventions it accepts.) It has room for examination of personality (actually, traditionally of less concern to SF than to other forms; I wonder what attracts Rob to SF), society, technology, exotic ethics (which have a habit of becoming less exotic rapidly, eg genetic engineering), adventure, sexuality etc.

Am I allowed to confess in the columns of as literary a journal as Vector that I read fiction principally for entertainment? The fact that occasionally along the way I also receive enlightenment simply means the entertainment is of a very high order. Enlightenment is fun.

To return to the political point, I think it odd to suggest that the view that personality is only a product of society is Thatcherite. I would have thought that to be an essentially left view and that Thatcherites if anything tend to the other extreme. I too as a child of the 50s and 60s like Rob and my perceptions are entirely contrary. For me the 60s were lunatic, chaotic and superficial and hideously unilateral and intolerant (except for the passions of the time, of course). The 80s by contrast emerge as sane, rooted in reality and liberating both for the individual and society.

Anyone, by the way, who suggests that in espousing the politics I do I am exhibiting fascist tendencies is likely to find that I immediately conform to his stereotype and need restraining. Can anyone explain the intimate series of connections that link militant feminism and Norman Tebbit?

I too should like to confirm that I am not an aging hippy. (I think).

"as literary a journal as Vector." — I do like discerning readers, even when I don't agree with everything they say! I'll miss your letters; any sent to me about this issue will of course be passed on to the new editor. And do write to him; your feedback is essential.»

THE EDGE

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You've been around the SF/Fantasy scene for a long time, yet you burst into comics as if from nowhere.

That has more to do with the way things are published than it does with me waking up one morning and deciding to write comics. *Violent Cases* came out at the end of '87, then there was a year and a half's worth of work for DC, all of which came out in the same week. *Black Orchid* 1, *The Sandman* 1, and the *Poison Ivy* story in *Secret Origins*. I was impressed.

So were the readers.

It's only just started to trickle down. I've just finished a signing tour with Dave McKean, and that one person would want to stand in a queue in the rain for three hours, let alone four hundred of them, just to get my signature, seems very strange to me.

The thing I got the biggest kick out of was the number of people who'd come up and say "Black Orchid's all right, and I love *The Sandman*, but *Violent Cases* is still my favourite."

That was your major breakthrough as a comics writer. How did it come about?

I'd always wanted to write comics, but by the time I was 17 there was nothing around I even wanted to read, let alone write, and I figured books were my destiny. I went off and wrote books, and short stories, and worked as a journalist. Then I saw what Alan Moore was doing, and I realised you could write comics with the depth and subtlety of a mainstream novel. I met Alan, he showed me what a script looks like, and I went away and wrote a couple.

A few months later I met someone else who told me they wrote comics. This turned out to be not entirely true, but he was putting together a comic magazine. It never came out, which wasn't the fault of any of the people they had working for it, who were all new talents, and very good, and mostly still working in comics today.

Two of the people involved in this were me and Dave McKean, working on separate strips. Then Paul Gravett from *Escape* asked if we'd like to do something together. Now it'd be pointless writing a normal script, page 1 panel 1, and so on, for Dave, because he has a far better visual imagination than anyone I've ever met, with the possible



exception of Bill Sienkiewicz. So I thought I'd write something as prose, leaving a lot of room for visual work, and that's what I did. I wrote *Violent Cases*, and we gave it to Paul. Then we had to wait eight months, because *Escape* was being taken over by Titan at the time, and it came out at the end of '87.

You've said it's one of your own personal favourites.

It is, because it's totally personal, as opposed to *Black Orchid* and *The Sandman*, and practically everything else I've done. *Violent Cases* is just what it is, and it's what me and Dave wanted to start off doing; something as well drawn as mainstream illustration, hopefully as well crafted as any mainstream literature, and easily accessible to a non-comics-reading audience. I think the comics-reading audience didn't really know what to make of it, they're only now catching up with it, but the non-comics-reading audience loved it.

Is that why you started doing more conventional comics? Although "conventional" hardly describes *The Sandman*...

Yes, *Sandman* is quite seriously weird, and I'm enjoying it no end. I knew *Black Orchid* was going to be a hit. I mean, drawn by Dave McKean, out in this prestige format, it could hardly be otherwise. But with *Sandman* I'm doing my own thing. I'm doing the kind of not-exactly-a-superhero comic, not-exactly-a-Fantasy, not-exactly-a-Horror comic I always wanted somebody to do, and nobody quite did. So I'm doing it now, and I'm astonished at the number of people picking up on it.

In fact I heard from DC the other day that they're up to issue 4, and they're still getting re-orders in for

QUITE SERIOUSLY WEIRD

ALEX STEWART
talks to
comics genius
NEIL GAIMAN



number 1, which is almost unheard of. So they want to do a big relaunch, probably with number 8, because that's the first "new readers start here" issue. It'll be no adverts, four pages of text from me at the beginning, then the *Sandman* meets Death.

But it's been great fun so far, because the first eight issues are just putting down a very solid base. It gives us the points of reference for the *Sandman*, it gives us an idea of what's going on, all the stories do different things. Number 1 sets him into historical context, number 2 puts him in the DC horror host dressworld, number 3 places him firmly in the John Constantine milieu, and lets me have a quick bash at doing a straight-forward Horror comic. Number 4 is set in hell, and draws very heavily on the *Unknown Worlds* fantasies of the late 40s.

Like several of the new generation...

They're calling us the Brit Pack in America...

You seem to be influenced by sources outside the comic field, rather than what's been happening within it.

The reason mainstream comics almost died between the late 60s and the early 80s was that you had the gradually diminishing spiral of comics writers who were learning to write from other comics. I mean, who needs a third generation clone of Stan Lee? *Black Orchid* was influenced by Lou Reed, Andy Warhol, David Lynch, ee cummings; very definitely ee cummings, when I was trying to work out how she thought. You know the little purple passages in the little purple word balloons?

Yes.

It astonished me, in a recent review, they hadn't noticed we'd coloured the balloons with the purple passages purple. We knew what we were doing... Piles of stuff on the Amazon rain forest, Alice in Wonderland, of course, and also things like *Watchmen*, to some extent.

Influences on *Sandman* tend to be different for each comic. Future plans are for a series of stories set vaguely around a New York apartment block, and we're going to get all the stray ideas that might go well in *Sandman*. Things like the serial killers' convention, which is an idea I've wanted to use for a while. You'll have all the little serial killers lining up for the big names' autographs, and having panels on the role of women in serial killing, and that sort of thing.

We're also going to be meeting the *Sandman*'s family. Currently the lineup of the family is Destiny, Death, Dream, and the curiously missing Destruction, who hasn't been seen for about three hundred years, in the first division, and the rest of the family are Desire, Despair, Delirium, and possibly Disease.

The nice thing about *The Sandman* is that I can do whatever I want, and for their own peculiar reasons, people just seem to be following along with me. It was great fun designing the way I wanted the character to look, for instance, this very pale guy with huge masses of dark hair in a black cloak, or a black robe, or sometimes just a black

hundred and thirty thousand copies of each of the three comics to people who might otherwise never have picked up on any of this. And when it comes out in book form, we'll reach even more. People are willing to go with us because we've got a visual track, and that makes it very palatable. Comics these days seem to have two lives: first they appear in monthly chunks, then as a single book.

It's a question of market forces. What would be very nice is for the mainstream publishers to get into producing comics, so we can be paid enough to go away and spend a year writing and drawing a comic and have it come out as a book. I'd rather have someone sit down and read



Black Orchid all the way through than in separate chunks a month apart, because they'll lose things like the visual definition; moving from a grey story in number 1, with little flashes of natural colour in it, to these little grey people in number 3 moving around this immensely colourful environment. It's not a particularly subtle point, but it's a way of bringing something that would otherwise be buried deep in the subtext much closer to the surface.

So one of the advantages comics have is this ability to use almost subliminal cues?

Sure. It's a wide vocabulary. Take lettering, the fact that different characters can talk in different typefaces. In *Sandman*, I've given the Sandman this white on black reversed typeface, which I like; it gives you this vague feeling that something is being said almost abstractly.

Like the way *Rorschach's* voice changed in *Watchmen* when he took his mask off.

Exactly. If you did that in a novel, had him talk in italics whenever he had his mask on, like Terry Pratchett has Death talk in Hollow Point capitals, you might just be able to get away with it, but you couldn't use it that much. Whereas here I've got Lucifer talking in this elegant, gothic script, I've got Beelzebub talking in this scratchy, buzzing tone, Azazel has these strangely shaped word balloons, and so on. At the end of the day it's a technique I can draw on that I wouldn't have available to me in fiction without typographical tricks which would draw attention to themselves. In this, the whole point of the thing is that it isn't drawing attention to itself, so it goes in on another level.

Do you ever feel you want to challenge the conventions of the comic?

There's a level on which it's fun to subvert the traditions of the mainstream market. For example, it took a lot of arguing to get DC to agree to the portrait gallery covers on *The Sandman*. I'd discussed it with Dave, and we'd thought that, after *Watchmen*, there would have been no problem with this. But DC had never done it before; they had a rule of thumb that in an ongoing comic title you have the lead character on every cover. But we held out for our portrait gallery, with a different character on each issue, and in the end they agreed. Now they're gradually getting more abstract and more weird, which is probably something they wouldn't have let us do if they'd known, but now we've started there's very little they can do about it.

Has your success left you in a better negotiating position when it comes to this kind of creative difference? I suppose so, but then nobody knew *The Sandman* was going to be a success. Everybody's been very surprised by it, especially. I thought it was something I could go off and practice on, and experiment with different storytelling techniques without anyone looking over my shoulder. That I'm actually doing this in public is something I haven't got used to yet.

The main thing about comics is that I'm still learning. It's not like literature, in which you've had hundreds

and hundreds of years of people going off and trying things out. If I wanted to write an epistolary novel I'd have models to look at. Whereas in comics I get the feeling that we've really only begun to scratch the surface. You can certainly do some very exciting things, achieve effects you couldn't achieve in any other medium. I'd hate to be misquoted on that; I didn't say you could achieve better effects, just different ones.

In *Black Orchid*, for instance, we decided she and Phil would be the only characters allowed interior monologues. All the others were seen from the outside; there was no third person narrator, no one telling the story. In that respect it was very filmic.

So comics are being influenced by other media now?

I think it's a mistake to try to use comics to make films on paper, because film can do it better. It's the areas where you can interface techniques that are fascinating, where you can mix literature and visuals.

What you're talking about is a sequence of static images. You have no sound, so you have to make the reader furnish the soundtrack, and you have to make the reader create the illusion of movement. You don't necessarily do this by trying to create a film storyboard. You do this by giving the reader the information, and having them put it all together.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a minor trend of comics writers turning to novels or screenplays. Do you see yourself working in other areas in the future?

Oh sure. But that isn't to denigrate what you can do with comics, it's just that they're other media. I can do things in prose I can't do in comics. I've written three or four books so far, I think it's about time I did a novel. I have various people asking for short stories, and I'd like to do more of them.

What I think is hopeful is that the prejudice against comics is eroding. If you enjoy Horror, or you enjoy Fantasy, you'll probably enjoy *The Sandman*. You probably always would have done. But now we're getting people who enjoy Horror or Fantasy picking it up, and they aren't necessarily embarrassed to be seen reading it on the Tube. I'm very heartened by the fact that we're starting to get comics reviewed in the book pages of the quality papers.

Neil Gaiman, *thankyou*.

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* * * * *

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CYTRICON IV WAS HELD OVER EASTER 1958 (APRIL 4TH-7TH) at the George Hotel in Kettering. As usual it was unprogrammed, but this time it was hardly without purpose. In the sixth issue of his *Ompazine* (an APA of the time) *Zymic*, which went out with the December '57 mailing, *Vinif Clarke* railed against the prevailing apathy of British fandom and the falling numbers of both fanzines and fans. The response to that issue surprised even him:

"I appear to have struck a spark and started a conflagration. The case for Doing Something about the apathetic state of British fandom has certainly been put before, and I'm surprised that the response to *Don't Just Sit There* has been so great; I feel like a man who has casually pushed a button and seen the ICBM take off with a whoosh."

The Liverpool group and in particular *Dave Newman* and *Norman Shorrocks*, had been so taken with the idea that they sent *Clarke* a tape of their discussions of the possibility of setting up a new national organisation and urged him to start up a round-robin tape correspondence with everyone interested in the idea. This *Clarke* did, and his ideas and those of the others who had participated in the correspondence had received enough circulation to enable *Newman* to put a strong case for the new organisation during the discussion that took place at *Cytricon* on the Sunday...

[*Vinif Clarke*:]

The Liverpool group were of the opinion that organisations don't work, except small ones, as the average fan has an anarchistic outlook; when an organisation is suggested there's some difficulty in getting people to "keep their feet on the ground". In the experience of the LASPS there must be something for new fans to come to something solid, a club or something similar to give the newcomer a sense of belonging.

They think the major difficulty is in the setting up of an organisation which would have to be run by fans who have been in the swim for years and have great difficulty in meeting the neo-fan on his own ground of SF appreciation...

I, in a sense, straddle two types of fandom, the serious-and-constructive and the lightly-humorous, as do several *Ompazines*. There are, however, people whose fanning is always pretty serious, concerned mainly with SF criticism and so on, and it's this type, rather than the new reader-cum-fan, who are the natural basis for an organisation. I'm terrified that there should grow up any split between fanzine fans and the serious types (using fanzine fan in its present form as one who puts out a 'zine of a primarily light type). My own viewpoint is that SF is interesting and absorbing, and I can discuss most facets of it, but after a while it palls. This may seem impossible to those who've been reading for, say, 2, 3, or 5 years, but after 20... Ghod!

If one is not to become bored, one has to look for other things in SF, and that's where fanzine fandom presents a small microcosm of the outside world; fandom is gradually increasing its likeness to this outside world though on an exceedingly small scale and that, for me, is where its fascination lies.

But there are people who can keep on reading SF and do know of fanzine fandom but who for various reasons don't want to get mixed up in the fanzine field. We have, for instance, the Cheltenham group, who are busy evolving a type of fandom which is peculiarly their own, largely slanted towards ceremony because of an interest by some of its members in ceremony. I say good luck to them, but my own main interest in fandom is communication between fans, and if you're looking for definitions I call an active fan someone who not only attends a club and reads SF but by some means does something to amuse or interest his fellow fans... that is, he's in contact with more fans than there are in his local group...

In the *Zymic* I advocated a Society because it not only implies a group which can undertake activity through being organised (bearing in mind that most active fans are busy individuals already) but offers a name and a sense of belonging... I remember that the old BSFA (1951-52) was going when I first encountered fandom, and I didn't join. It's also as well to remember that the greatest organised event in British fandom, the World Con (1957), was widely advertised in prozines so that no SF reader could have

missed it, yet they stayed away in droves. I'm wondering if those of us who have sufficiently conquered any basic shyness to communicate via this and that have given sufficient thought to the shyness (and in many cases inferiority complexes) of the SF reader before he contacts fandom. The fact that even in this day and age the SF enthusiast is regarded as slightly nuts may influence the lone wolf's attitude to other readers and fans. He, he thinks, has slightly eccentric tastes, but the other fellow is clean crazy...

This Journal could contain current news in the manner of *Contact* and *SP4*; it could handle a Reader's Query Section of the SF side ("When did this story/series appear?" and so on), naturally advertise the other leaflets available from the Bureau, and generally keep the neo-fan in his pre-fan stage in touch with what was going on. It would also contain plenty of plugs for current fanzines.

I've also thought that such a Journal could be part of a somewhat larger serious fanzine which could contain contributions from fledgeling fan anxious to try their wings, and from old-timer BNF willing to do it for amusement only, but, and this is an important point, ready to fall back on reprinting serious articles from past fanzines if need be. You could always, therefore, have a material backlog, and might possibly attract more enthusiasm from the usual fanzine fan — whom I think can appreciate a well-written piece on SF as much as anybody — into the bargain...

[Then 2:]

In the debate that ensued it was decided that most of the fanzines being published no longer had any real connection to SF and were hardly likely to attract new people, and also that conventions themselves had moved so far from SF that they were not likely to attract new people either. There was evidence to support this in the attendance figures of the previous few Eastercons. Those attending in 1954 had numbered 150, but there were only 115 in 1955

VOICES FROM THE ARCHIVES

and 80 in 1956. This drop coincided exactly with the shift in emphasis of Eastercons from strongly SF events to largely social affairs, and the fifty or so fans who turned up at *Cytricon IV* realised that drastic action was called for.

The almost complete absence of channels of recruitment to British fandom, particularly since the demise of *Operation Fantast*, was a cause of such concern and a number of ways by which the situation could be improved were explored.

[*Zymic* 7:]

Dave Newman said that one point brought out in correspondence was the theme that fandom must "get back to SF" and the present type of fanzine fan wasn't much help in bringing newcomers into fandom. He said that he wondered what an innocent *New Worlds* reader would say on having a copy of *Ploy* shown to him and being told that this was SF fandom.

Bennett: "The mind boggles!"

Dave continued that the same thing could be said of *Triode* and practically every other fanzine. The point was, how could we attract the reader of SF who will gravitate from reading to the more interesting and entertaining type of sociable fan?

The ice having been broken, a discussion on ways and means followed...

Dave said that we needed to create a new fandom that would supersede the present one, and which would have

room for the serious and constructive fans and the social fans. The Liverpool Society had a number of members who were not strictly SF fans, but were valued members of the society, and this type should be fitted in as well...

Eric Jeeves said that if an organisation had to give the newcomer something, why not a central SF library?

Bob Richardson announced that the Cheltenham Club library is being made into an open affair, and will be advertised locally as for the use of all SF readers in the vicinity; they will also be invited along to Club Nights. Apropos of this, Dave remarked that the Liverpool and Cheltenham groups offer something for the neo-fan anyway...

Eric Jones said the Cheltenham group were contemplating putting out a semi-serious fanzine for members. Ted Tubb asked if it was proposed to make it the organ of a central organisation, were they going to speak as a corporate body? Eric: "Yes, we've got to have a central body... that is a thing that's got to be done." Ted: "And I think that has to be decided and here and now is as good a time as any to rough chart who is going to run it." [The argument went on...]

Ted Tubb said: "I think basically we agree on the fact that there should be a strong organisation with a subscription and the Bureau incorporated in it and an elected advisory body, though I'm not too happy about the advisory body because you just waste a lot of time arguing with people about the way that a job should be done..."

The question of expense and general support then gave rise to a suggestion from Peter West that a show of hands be taken, the question being how many of those present would be willing to join a Society and pay a membership subscription of a pound (£1) per year. Out of 30 there were 4 dissentients (one of whom is asleep anyway)...

It was agreed that a library should be started with two Cheltenham fans, Dave Jones and Peter Mabey running it, and fans would be asked for material contributions. The discussion then wandered around the choosing of further

material about fandom, the hope being that those hooked and nurtured by the organisation would eventually provide fandom with vital new blood. Having taken this decision they then proceeded to elect officers.

Over some reluctance Jeeves and Bentcliffe were persuaded to take the job of secretary as a joint position, Ted Tubb was elected "by acclaim" as Editor of the Official Organ (which Jeeves suggested should be called *Vector*), Archie Mercer was persuaded to take the job of Treasurer, and Dave Newman became Chairman. There was some debate over whether the organisation should have "science fiction" in its name with Tubb opposed and Newman for. Their arguments, as revealed by a transcript of the debates, were:

[Zymic 2]

Ted: "Consider what the BBC did at the World Science Fiction Convention. They did not go there with the idea of worshipping at the feet of idols but of making augs out of people who'd come a long way to do something they thought highly of. We don't want that to happen every time we meet the Press, and every time we meet the Press that is what happens."

Dave: "Well aren't we calling ourselves 'The Imaginative Fiction Society' or 'The Fantasy Society' is not going to make any difference; the Press immediately say 'This so-and-so Society, they call themselves -----'; well what are they? Oh, they're science fiction readers.' The damage is done..."

"The name we've got is the name we're stuck with, it's the name we're known by, and we might as well learn to live with it, and try to make other people accept it as a respectable name."

Sid Birchby: "The point is, the term 'science fiction' has become debased and it's our job to try and make it a bit more passable."

Ted Tubb: "No book reviewer will admit that 1984 was science fiction, or Wells or Huxley."

Dave: "My personal feeling about this is that avoiding the use of the name 'Science Fiction' in the title is cowardice in the face of the enemy, and I strongly disapprove of it."

[Then 2]

On a show of hands Newman carried the day. It was further agreed that the organisation would henceforth be responsible for the annual convention, the 1959 con to be held "at the seaside", place unspecified, at Whitson. Ignoring the fact that the name had surfaced twice before in fandom's past, it was agreed by a show of hands that the new organisation should be called the *British Science Fiction Association*. Sid Birchby was in that audience, and later wrote:

"For a moment we see that fandom is slipping away, and with a unity of action and lack of heroics that is rare in fan politics, we do something about it. The feeling of the meeting is extraordinary. This is the third national fan society I've seen, and the most likely to succeed where the SFA and BFS have failed."

Perhaps so, but in the months and years to come this BSFA was not always to be the docile and obedient beast those who created it might have wished for...

The first issue of the BSFA's official organ, *Vector*, didn't appear until the summer of 1958 and was edited by Ted Tubb. In a circular issued shortly before titled *The Chairman Speaks* that called for memberships at an annual fee of £1 (considered high at the time), Dave Newman had apologised for the silence from the BSFA since Cytricon IV and explained that they had needed the time to properly formulate the organisational structure and responsibilities before seeking members. Ironically, not long after *Vector* appeared Tubb announced that he didn't have time to continue editing it and Newman resigned as Chairman following a move from Liverpool to Bournemouth. This left Bentcliffe as *de facto* Chairman and Jeeves took over *Vector*. Hardly a complaint was heard about this quiet coup d'état. Not long after this the BSFA got involved with fandom on the Continent. Neither group was to profit by the experience...

The BSFA held its first AGM at the con and new officers for the year were elected. Bobbie Wild took over as *Vector* editor with Sandra Hall her assistant, while Doc Weir became Secretary, and Archie Mercer remained treasurer. Arthur Rose "Doc" Weir was a member of the Cheltenham

This account has been compiled from Then 2: British fandom in the 1950s by Rob Hansen, and from Zymic 7, Viné Clarke's June 1958 fanzine.

officers. Some dislike was expressed that more of the active fans weren't present, especially from the London area, although Ted Tubb decried London as a possible source of activity. It seemed to be felt that unless the discussion was to dwindle away to vague resolutions to settle matters by post something positive would have to be proposed, and Peter Chappell framed a motion, verbally edited by Dave as follows:

"This meeting proposes that a national science fiction society should be formed, whose aims and objects will be the encouragement of readership of science fiction and liaison and general social and literary contact between SF readers, and that the persons present in this room shall, when called upon to do so, fork out a sum of money (to be later agreed) to set up a capital fund for the formation of this society."

This proposal, from the Chair and seconded by Peter West, was passed unanimously...

[Then 2]

Eventually, after hours of debate, it had been decided that a new national organisation was the only answer to the problem, one that was ostensibly devoted to the serious study of SF but whose publications would also carry

Circle, and somewhat unusual in that he discovered fandom, in 1958, when already in his sixties. Age, however, did not stop him from fully and enthusiastically involving himself in all that fandom had to offer.

The BSFA was getting some useful publicity at this point from *New Worlds*, long the British prozine most resistant to printing fanish news. In an issue of *Ploy* that appeared not long after the convention, Carnell explained that *NW* had never carried a fan column because he considered it would be of too little interest to the majority of readers. However, he was plugging the BSFA because:

"It seems to me that here is the basis for new members of fandom and that in the Association's quarterly journal all the fan magazines which are reviewed will be brought to the attention of such new members of the Association who join from the general readership."

(From *The Chairman Speaks*, quoting the Rules of the BSFA:) The Association shall exist for the benefit of those interested in science-fiction and allied branches of imaginative literature.

It shall encourage the reading, writing and publishing

of good literature of this class, shall assist and encourage contact between enthusiasts, shall provide liaison between its members and the science-fiction profession, shall endeavour to present science-fiction and associated art forms to the Press and general public in an advantageous manner and shall provide such amenities as may prove desirable for the use of members.

(And a final comment from *Vin Clarke* in *Zyzz* 7:3

I can't for the life of me see why one should be serious about SF fandom other than its worth as a hobby. I'm ready to spend hours of time and most of my spare cash on SF fandom, but to be serious in the sense of setting up an organisation to "improve the standard of SF" strikes me as sheer egotism; SF criticism, yes, but it's up to the pros to improve the output of the stuff itself. I'm for fandom first, and SF second; so would you be if you'd been reading it since '36. I sincerely hope the BSFA won't forget it originated at a "social" Con.

(There's definitely some food for a hell of a lot of thought in the above. Comments, anyone? - DVM)

NOT A ZOMBIE IN SIGHT?

ARTHUR C CLARKE
President, BSFA

I'M AFRAID I'VE LOST TOUCH ALMOST COMPLETELY WITH THE science fiction field in the last few years — I gave up subscribing to the magazines decades ago, and the only one I see now is *Isaac's*, which he kindly sends me. But I do read *Locus* regularly, and, of course, the BSFA publications. A few times a year I order an outstanding book, and still get a lot sent by editors and authors with requests for "puffs". I'm finding it hard to refuse these, because some extraordinarily good stuff is being published now: I was absolutely stunned by *Iain Banks' Consider Phlebas* (what a stupid title — what the hell does it mean?) which is one of the most amazing novels I've ever come across.

And the recent anthology *Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook* is absolutely first-rate, containing one of the few stories I've reread immediately after first perusal since "A Martian Odyssey" in 1934. In case you're interested, it was "Friend's Best Man" by Jonathan Carroll (several of the others were almost as good).

So my contact with 0.1% of the field suggests that science fiction is probably in a better state than it's ever been, both quantitatively and qualitatively. And that's not only in the UK/US — I've just been sent *Science Fiction 1988* by the Writers' Union of the USSR, and it contains some excellent stuff, as well as a lot of amusing non-fiction, eg an entertaining article by Vladimir Gekov called "Travel Notes: In America — Alone and Unarmed".

So I'm still an unreconstructed fan, and it saddens me that I shall never be able to attend another convention. My health and strength prevent me from meeting more than half a dozen people at a time, and now I have to sleep not only in the afternoons, but in the mornings as well. And as you know, the ability to go without sleep for several days at a time is a minimum requirement for attending an SF convention...

I'm happy to note that the ACC Award is building up its reputation — I'm delighted that it is so widely spread. My God, just suppose *The Satanic Verses* had been nominated — and had won!

E C TUBB
Editor *Vector* 1

FOUR YEARS AND 25 ISSUES CAN BE ENOUGH AND WHAT STARTS out to be a labour of love turns into a demanding chore, so I can't blame you for wanting to devote more time to other things and the best of luck and all success to you.

For a long time I thought that fandom had changed; that the early enthusiasms had, somehow, become diluted

with the introduction of "outsiders". A dreadful word and even to use it presents a paradox because to gain "outsiders" was the initial reason for the forming of the BSFA. What I, and maybe others, hoped for was an extension of what we already had: a close community of friends who knew each other, shared the same tastes and could get together at conventions to enjoy sharing the same, heady atmosphere. I think it was probably a result of simple

Vector editors:

1	Ted Tubb
2-4	Terry Jeeves
5	Roberta Wild
6-7	Roberta Gray (née Wild) & Michael Moorcock
8-15, 18	Jim Groves
16-17	Ella Parker
19-25	Archibald Mercer
26-39	Rog Peyton
40	Steve Oakley
41-42	Ken Slater & Doreen Parker
43	Doreen Parker
44	Barroll Pardoe
45-46	Phil Muddoway
47	Tony Sudbury
48-49	Tony Sudbury & Vic Mallett
50-55	Michael Kewward
56-58	Bob Parkinson
59-68	Malcolm Edwards
69-83	Chris Fowler
84-94	David Wingrove
95-97	Mike Dickinson
98	Alan Dorey, Eve Harvey, Joseph Nicholas & Kevin Smith
99-106	Kevin Smith
107	Alan Dorey
108-123	Geoff Rippington
124/5	Paul Kincaid
126-150	David V Barrett

loneliness; most readers of that time were either first or only children. In SF they found escape from reality, and in many cases that reality was far from gentle. And, too, there was hostility towards the medium. SF was not "respectable". The pulp magazines, gaudy as they were, invited derision. So, for those who read them, there was a common bond — us against them. A bond which helped to unite the early fans. Which made us a "special" group. It was the loss of this selectiveness which made me feel that



fandom had changed. The truth, of course, was that fandom had matured while I had not.

Fans are still a "special" group, but now they are special in an entirely different way. The basic drive to read SF and Fantasy is not what it was; the need to escape is not as strong. Loneliness could remain but perhaps in a less restricting form. The pulps have been replaced by "respectable" books and no one is derided for reading SF and Fantasy. Those interested in the medium are expanding their imaginations but doing so on the basis of a far better education than early fandom had known. Hence the demand is for a higher quality product and, because fans now have the purchasing power, publishers are ready to supply that need. But that very supply is dictating the attitudes of the new fandom. Readers are guided by what they read and critics are always eager to tell the reader what is good. They need not always be right.

So, to me, something has been lost. The early enthusiasm, the magic, the excitement of finding this wonderful new world of imagination and action and romance in its truest sense. The close community of kindred types who all fed from the common bowl. One small enough so that each had read the same stories, knew the same sage and

theses are treated with careless banter; logic doesn't exist, no one really takes it seriously — and it shows. They, the film makers, don't even bother to get the terminology right. "Galaxy" "Universe" "Dimension" are interchangeable. Aliens don't come from another star system but from another galaxy. And... and...

But why go on?

All right, I'm looking back and wanting what no longer exists. The village has grown into a metropolis and fans have proliferated beyond number. But wouldn't it have been nice to have seen the medium grow as once it was hoped it would grow?

But that's a dream of another kind.



TERRY JEEVES
Editor Vector 2-4

I FANCY THE BSFA BEGAN TO SURFACE AT KETTERING IN 1957 and finally emerged at the Eastercon there in 1958. Ted Tubb rode roughshod over any sort of opposition or delaying tactics and at the end of a cyclonic weekend, astonished fans found they had created the British Science Fiction Association. As far as I recall, Archie Mercer was treasurer, Dave Newman the chairman, Eric Bentscliffe and I joint secretaries and publishers (my membership number was 4) and Ted Tubb had accepted the post of editor for the then un-named Official Organ.

I fancy it was at a Committee meeting in Liverpool that I proposed the name Vector — as something we hoped would have both magnitude and direction. It was accepted and I prepared to stencil the first issue as material arrived from Ted Tubb. I was shattered when only 18 pages arrived — along with Ted's resignation owing to pressure of work. Automatically, I became editor for Vector's first year.

I have the first four misused issues before me now. I had done a two-colour cover for No. 1. Then came Ted's editorial, an article by him on writing and a competition. Jim Ratigan wrote on films, Dorothy Buckmaster on SF after Sputnik. Lawrence Sandfield covered "Characterisation", Roberts Wilde and I reviewed magazines and there were adverts and a news page.

The issue ran to 42 pages, so in between helping Eric Bentscliffe with secretarial chores (as well as producing Triode), I had a whacking great load of stencil cutting, duplicating, collating and mailing out to do. On top of all this, chairman Dave Newman gaffed into limbo. It was a miracle the BSFA survived. Between Eric, Archie and I, it did.

Vector 2 was my first issue as editor. Another 2 colour job featuring a superb Jack Williamson illustration and articles by George Locke, Eric Bentscliffe, John Roles, Ken Slater, Roberts Wilde, Ken Bulmer plus a list of our 66 members, a Treasurer's Report, a lettercol and Convention news (I ended up as Chairman).

Number 3 had a Cawthorn cover, interior colour work, competition results, German fandom news, a piece by Doc Weir. Eric Jones on peonics, book, fanzine and magazine reviews, letters, a BoSh "Glass Bushel" reprint and other departments. My final issue (cover by me) in Spring 1959, was crammed with "names" including two Doctors and a wide assortment of news, articles and reviews.

But during that year, we had also produced the first BSFA Checklist to New Worlds, and in addition, Karl Dolner had compiled a Galaxy Checklist. This had been typed out by Keith Freeman, and I had wangled a Foreword out of H. Gold. All this was passed on stencil to my successor... and it vanished for several years. When it finally did appear, not one of the people who created it got a credit — and the H. Gold letter had vanished.

The original avowed intention in forming the BSFA had been to introduce "new blood" into fandom. Whether or not it achieved this, I don't know. I suspect that the increased attention to SF by the media had more to do with increasing numbers.

The BSFA itself had been more of an old pals club formed by a few frogs in a small puddle. Virtually all members knew each other as personal friends. This changed as the membership grew until newcomers predominated. They

BSFA Pioneers tell their stories

books, the artists and publishers. A miniscule world which echoed the greater one outside; a world which held its triumphs and tragedies. A village, in essence, with everyone knowing everyone else and, even though spanning the world, a community with a common interest.

That has gone. Conventions with an attendance of 40 have grown to ones with an attendance of 4,000. The trickle of available material has roared into a flood. No



one can read it all. No one can know everyone else. The inevitable result of progress, some would say. But, as always with such progress, something gets lost. We see it on the bookshelves: rows of titles, massive volumes, prestigious names, works of deep and momentous import — but by whose definition?

So, for me, SF has become less and less exciting. The films haven't helped — none seem to be made by anyone with any idea as to what really lies out there. SF

brought new ideas with them. Fasanish ideas and offshoots. New Wave attitudes and a general hostility to the old codgers who had started things off. I decided that although I was in favour of the BSFA, I wasn't so happy with the new attitudes, so I reluctantly resigned.

Sadly, this new look seems to be getting at traditions such as the Doc Weir Award. When Doc died, to perpetuate our memory of a kind and friendly soul, we raised a fund, bought a cup and presented it each year. To keep it as simple as possible, we made only TWO rules. 1. Voting was to be open to anyone registering for Eastercon (they needn't attend, just register). Rule 2 concerned eligibility qualifications for the Award recipient. To avoid any ambiguity, this was phrased as... "Vote for the fan you would most like to see get the Doc Weir Award". Once, it was an honour, but sadly, the last time I heard of it, people were bad-mouthing the idea.

Oh well, times change. I haven't had much contact with the BSFA in recent years, so I hope it is still well and bringing new lambs to the fold.

—yup, despite this:

ARCHIE MERGER
First Treasurer, BSFA; Editor Vector 19-25

SOME TIME IN THE LATE 1960s THE BSFA DIED, AND I WAS satisfied that it was clinically dead. A couple of years later some well-meaning people tried to revivify the corpse.

A zombie, however, is still a zombie.



—but one very early member is still taking an active part:

KEITH FRIEDMAN
BSFA Collation and Mailing

I WISH I COULD REPEAT THOSE FAMOUS WORDS "I WAS THERE" — but I wasn't! Through peculiar circumstances I won't repeat here I'd leapt from the status of keen SF reader to that of fan, very much neo, but fully paid up member of the Cheltenham Group. The trouble was that I hadn't been a member for long enough for their insidious propaganda to work. I had the choice of going home for Easter, or attending a Con at Kettering. To my eternal annoyance I missed the last Kettering Con (and incidentally, the founding of the BSFA). Thinking about it maybe I was responsible for the founding of the BSFA... for my understanding is that it was founded with one very simple aim — to get more people to come to conventions. Attendance had been dropping and a simple graph (courtesy Peter Nabe) showed that there would be a negative attendance in two or three years time! If I and two or three other new fans had gone to Kettering that wouldn't have been so — and the BSFA might not have come into existence — what a thought...

So what happened; well a week or so after Easter I was made to feel properly jealous of the members of the Cheltenham Group who had been to the Con — and also heard of this mysterious BSFA that had been formed in a welter of bonhomie, blog and hangovers. It was going to revolutionise conventions — why, there were hopes that in years to come the Easter Con would have 50 members or (whisper it carefully) even more...

When "official" news leaked (via fanzines) there was a lot of guff about "improving SF as a literature" and "encouraging the reading and publication of SF" — but underneath all that was the hard fact that the BSFA would run conventions and increase the size of fandom. In my innocence I rushed off my 10/- and became member number 28. Whether I was the 28th member is a moot point — starting as it has gone on the BSFA had a phantom chairman for the short period of time it took for everyone else to realise he'd inflated!

Looking back I sometimes wonder whether those dedicated souls who thrashed out the high sounding (and somewhat differently intentioned) "aim of the BSFA" would really accept, today, whether it had been a success or

otherwise. Voting with their feet most members who joined before I did have left (Numbers 3 and 10 being the honourable exceptions). Others (like Bob Richards, the first BSFA Easter Con Chairman) have sadly died. The face of fandom today is (and has to be) vastly different from what it was "pre-BSFA" — the question, really, is what effect the BSFA has had (for good or ill) on today's fandom — and that is something I can't decide — I'm far too closely involved to be able to make an unbiased decision. Maybe it'll be clearer in my article in Vector 300!

I should add a rider here — I've done no research (my early copies of Vector are out of reach) — the above is purely from memory and though I believe there are no serious factual errors if anyone disputes what I've put I might not argue too strenuously...



DENNIS TUCKER
BSFA Membership No 10

SO THE YEARS HAVE ROLLED BY AND I CELEBRATE HAVING BEEN with the BSFA since its formation in 1958 and before that the Science Fiction Association of Great Britain and before that the British Fantasy Society, which has no connection with the present body of that name and which used to be the leading body in British science fiction. I started reading SF via the quite normal route of Wells and Verne when I was about 12 and soon discovered that there were SF magazines. In 1940, when I was 15, a wondrous day! — I found out that there were other odd folk like me who organised themselves into something called "fandom". (In those days — I kid you not — if you read science fiction then you were a crank, pure and simple, — a nut of the first water. It's nice to have attained respectability at last...)

During the war, of course, there were no bulk imports of American magazines, any more than there were bananas; there were a few British reprints, notably of *Astounding* and *Unknown Worlds*, always smaller than the originals, (due to paper rationing), which we would devour while we consumed our snook, dried egg or whale-meat and listened to Dame Vera singing that popular song of the time: "Whale-meat Again". I will always remember with gratitude the great generosity of our American friends, who supplied us with many magazines (by post) which we would circulate like chain-letters until they fell apart. One of these kind folk — John M Cunningham of Beaumont, Texas — even went so far as to set up an organisation which he called the British Science Fiction War Relief Society! Later John joined the USAF on a term enlistment and he was eventually posted to Britain, where many of us had the pleasure of meeting him and showing our appreciation of his efforts...

Knowadays, I have to confess, I am a rather peculiar science fiction fan, in that I read very little science fiction. The trouble is not that I have lost interest in the subject, but that almost every time I read a piece of SF I get a feeling of déjà vu: this is not too surprising, I suppose, when one considers the amount of stuff I have read over the years and the fact (we are told) that there are only six (is it six?) basic plots. However, it does make me very selective. For example, the latest SF I have read at this moment is Dave Langford and John Grant's hilarious *Earthdoom!* (Congratulations, fellas, — I have certainly never read anything quite like this before!...)

Strangely, although I did not like Horror stories at all in years gone by, I find that I now really enjoy a helping of well-done Horror, for example, some Stephen King, Robert McCammon, F Paul Wilson, some James Herbert and a few others. I have also developed an interest in factual mysteries: the Himalayan yeti and the American bigfoot, the Tunguska explosion, the identity of "Jack the Ripper", the riddle of Anastasia, the Mary (not Marie) Celeste, UFOs, the murder of President Kennedy (I dislike the use of the word "assassination" for political murder: to me it always seems to endow the act with a dubious sort of respectability)...)

My ill-time favourites in science fiction? I choose three works but give no order of preference; I like them all equally.

(1) *Bring the Jubilee* by Ward Moore. (An alternative-universe novel in which the South has won the American



Civil War. I have heard several times that Winston Churchill once did something on these lines but have never been able to track it down. Information, anyone?)

(2) The original *Foundation* trilogy (as it was then) by Isaac Asimov. (Although it seems to have become almost fashionable to denigrate The Good Doctor these days on the basis of his recent works, which I haven't read yet, so can't comment on, I consider that in his early years he was a very fine SF writer, indeed I would almost say a great one.)

(3) *Rendezvous With Rama* by Arthur C. Clarke. (Pure, beautiful SF, superbly constructed and written.)

Speaking of alternative-universe stories, — always one of my favourite themes, — I have thought a number of times in the last eight years of an alternative universe in which Ronald Reagan, in 1941, accepts rather than refuses the role of "Rick" in *Casablanca*; now if he had played that part (1) would he have gone on to become the great star that Bogart did? In that case, would he have remained in movies instead of turning to politics? Or (2) would *Casablanca* have become "just another movie" and sunk without trace?... Having watched RR in some of his old films on the box, I strongly suspect (2)!

Finally a brief comment on fandom in the years I have known it. Someone once said "The more things change, the more they remain the same". And so it is with fandom. Nothing that happens today is new: the arguments, discussions, feuds which we see now have all happened before, not once but many times. The same topics are dissected ad infinitum, which, of course, is inevitable, there being only a finite number of subjects. This is fandom. I wouldn't have missed it for the world!



MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI

Writer, editor, publisher, critic & bookseller

I'D RETURNED FROM FRANCE WITH THE SCIENCE FICTION BUG IN my life, mind and genitals (could this be a way to meet girls?) and attended my first convention. Giddy days. In Peterborough, I met that early comedy double act Aldiss and Harrison, drank — too much — with Lang Jones and Mike Moorcock, was co-opted onto a panel as French delegate (although I was born in deep suburban Barnet...), was seated on the platform next to Kingsley Amis and filmed by TV, hey, folks, I'm almost famous! In the throes of enthusiasm, I even bid for artwork in the auction (where are those Aldiss and Harrison graffiti now?) and when the BSFA trawled high and low for committee volunteers, I raised my hand or voice and, lo and behold, became Hon Secretary.

Thus began my life of shame and pride in the BSFA. I looked older than my age then and the BSFA hierarchy thought I was a lecturer at my college, when in fact I was still just a student. I was now part and parcel of the SF establishment! Little did I know then what I know now about the arcane, almost masonic volunteer rites of the BSFA, but there I was in charge of the recruitment drive, going for the feigned goal of a 250 membership. I typed seductive letters by the dozen to trap other innocents into the glorious ranks of SF. "Dear Mr Jakubowski," one letter read. "I read a lot of Sci Fi and want to meet others like me." The letter was signed Roger Peyton and came from Birmingham. So now you know who's to blame for unleashing Rog onto an unsuspecting reader...

Seriously, though, 150 issues of *Vector*. No wonder my hair is turning grey. So, a happy birthday of sorts. As for me, I've never regretted a single moment.



DAVID WINGROVE
Editor *Vector* 84-94

LOOKING BACK, I FIND IT REALLY QUITE ASTONISHING THAT *Vector* has reached the grand old age of 150 issues. Back in 1976, when I first entered the lists of its reviewers, the BSFA had just emerged from a long period in the doldrums — following a collapse from which, it seemed, the society looked unlikely to survive. Survive it did,

however, thanks to the hard work put in by such as Keith Freeman, Tom Jones, Phil Stephenson-Payne and Chris Fowler, who took over the reins of *Vector* which had fallen from the hands of the previous editor, Malcolm Edwards. Between V67-68 in the Spring of 1974 and issue 69 was a 17-month gap in which not a single publication was issued by the BSFA. Chris Fowler, for all his subsequent excesses, set *Vector* back on its feet and, in the course of a dozen issues created a vibrant, entertaining critical magazine which was often controversial but never dull.*

The mid and late 70s were exciting years to be reviewing SF. Silverberg, Dick, Wolfe and LeGuin were all producing fine work, and new writers like Bishop and Crowley were just emerging. Each post brought something interesting, it seemed. But even then the British SF scene was in slump. *New Worlds* had finally given up the ghost and *SF Monthly* was hardly the vehicle to fill the gap. A dark cloud had settled over British SF. That's not to say that good — often exceptional — work didn't come out of this country; simply that most of it was produced almost in defiance of the prevailing mood.

Which was?

Well, to begin with, the standard hardware of science fiction was frowned upon; rockets and robots were out; the introspective, self-obsessed, small, non-event novel was in, as typified perhaps by Chris Priest's *The Affirmation** (surely one of the most ironic titles ever put to a book). That mood was endemic. It filtered through to the early issues of *Interzone* where the great god Ballard was set up as "the way to do it". It wafted into editors' offices throughout the land, where the immediate response was to look to America for new writers.

And in America?

The American view of British SF in the late 70s and 80s is easily summarised. British SF is dead. There are a few good writers — Aldiss, Clarke, Watson, Holdstock, Roberts — but beyond those nothing. Nothing at all. The future belongs to the Americans. As they'd always said it did.

And over here a whole generation of young writers — myself included — felt somehow betrayed by that prevailing mood and impotent to change it. A self-fulfilling prophecy of gloom and doom had cast its dark and fatal spell upon British SF and there seemed nothing we could do. So it still seems, for all the small signs of revival. Which is not to say that the talent isn't there. It is. Simply that until the spell is broken and we can get away from small-think and negative-think and non-event-think and that's-beneath-us-think (the kind of nihilistic crap that argues that there ain't no such thing as SF and even if there is it's rather a shame that we have to write that), then there isn't going to be a resurgence of British SF. And that would be a shame. A great shame. Because there's real talent here. Talent that needs unlocking. That needs inspiring. Talent that needs a focal point.

If *Vector* is to be anything in the next few years, it ought to be that. A focus for a genuine resurgence. A great clonk on the forehead. A champion of the positive virtues of British SF*, not a chronicler of its post-Ballardian decline.

I'll end on a personal note. You asked in your letter for my impressions on *Vector*; the BSFA or UK fandom, and I've gone on about British SF. Well, perhaps that's not so strange. That mood I've talked about above percolates down from the writers and critics into fandom. As I said, it's endemic. It colours our thinking in SF circles over here. Which is why, perhaps, I've been so wary about partaking in the British SF scene these last eight years or so. To break the spell I've had to look outside the British scene for my own models; to ignore the well-intentioned advice of friends and colleagues and challenge the prevailing ethos.

To put it simply, I'm sick of Ballard and *New Worlds* and smallness. Which is not to say I've suddenly gone ape-shit for Hubbard and Asimov, simply that I want British SF to be ambitious — to take on the world and beat it. And if I'm out of step in wanting that, then perhaps I can encourage a few more to be out of step. Then things might change. And not before time.

* I agree, and I hope mine have been the same; Chris Fowler was still editor when I joined the BSFA in mid-1977, and his *Vectors* were worth reading.

* *Vector* 93, a Chris Priest special issue, was edited and



largely written by David Wingrove, who seems to have changed his mind since then. The Affirmation was reviewed in V104 by Joseph Nicholas, who described it as "Priest's finest work to date... one of the best SF novels that I have read." I agree with Joseph.

* What does he think Vector has been doing for the last few years?

- DVB



JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Editor PI vol III no 3 - 54

(Cno, I can't understand it either.)

I EDITED PAPERBACK INFERNO FOR SIX YEARS, FROM AUGUST 1979 to June 1985; 36 issues of what I like to think was reasonably solid and entertaining and sometimes memorable criticism, written by people who thought that if science fiction stood any hope of being treated as literature then it had better be subjected to some real literary criticism, to see how well it stood up.

All too often, of course, it barely stood up at all, and great were the howls of rage, in the early days, from readers who seemed to have some inexplicable aversion to seeing their idols exposed as having not only feet of clay but brains of sawdust as well. This man has won six Hugos! they cried. So damn what, we snarled, does that make his junk any more acceptable?

I can't say that I exactly pioneered this approach — Damon Knight and James Blish got there three or four decades ago — but for a time, in the early 1980s, the magazine collected about it a group of people who, arriving at roughly the same time, might have disagreed on the fine details but shared a drive to Make The Stuff Better; to junk all the shibboleths, forget the received wisdom, sneer at the special pleading advanced by those reluctant to leave the ghetto, and ask themselves one simple question: is this book good? And then tell us, in detail, why or (more often, alas) why not.

It was fun for a time, even occasionally exhilarating — to pool ideas and sharpen skills and judgement in a common project always is — but after a time it became too much. Six years is probably two years too long to run anything at the same pitch of intensity, and despite a steady influx of new people to replace those who dropped out and a mid-term redesign of the whole magazine, I had begun to go stale well before the end. There's only so much you can say at any one time before you start repeating yourself; and the last few reviews I wrote were just going through the motions. Then, too, science fiction itself had become rather boring, and although there were signs from across the Atlantic that it was about to become exciting once again, my own persistent attempts to relate it to the real world — not just of criticism, but of political and social issues — had only made the real world more interesting. So it was with an immense sigh of relief that I eventually handed PI over to Andy Sawyer and went off to fight the good fight against Thatcherism for the next three years.

Was it worth it, in retrospect? Echo answers: don't know, because the editor is never in the best position to judge. In retrospect, I wish I could have found some way to recharge my creative drive and stay on for another couple of years: because although it wasn't obvious at the time, the cyberpunk wave that was about to break over Britain would have fulfilled a great many of the critical tenets that we'd been dealing in for the previous six years — if only because cyberpunk related more closely to the real world than such other SF, and it would have been fun to talk about it from that perspective.

But would I do it again? someone asks. Well, probably, I reply — although I'd probably do it all a bit differently...

* ... which is why I'm leaving now, before I grow stale. Joseph's account of editing PI echoes in many ways (not all) my own aims for Vector, and some of my reasons for retiring.

KEVIN SMITH
Editor Vector 99-106

EIGHT OR SO YEARS AGO I FOUND MYSELF WRITING TO OR TELEPHONING all sorts of people who had in common that they had once edited Vector. (For some this was quite literally true — just the one issue.) I was preparing the 100th issue, and wanted to hear all about their time as editor. Now I find myself on the receiving end as David Barrett bows out with V150.

"Write something," he says, "about SF or the BSFA or fandom, and your part in it, and how it affected you and what you are doing now."

"Sure," I say.

"By a week on Monday."

"Right!"

If you're reading this now, I did it. If not — what else do you do with your copy of Vector?

Actually, it shouldn't be too difficult; if I learned anything from editing Vector it was how to write copy (the editorial usually) at speed (to meet the printer's deadline) to length (because I'd pasted up the rest of the issue already). These days it's business reports or notes rather than editorials, but I can still do them fast. In one job I wrote about a dozen reports a year, each of 5,000 to 10,000 words; for the rate of pay, it beat the hell out of short stories, I can tell you.

When I was doing Vector I was an active fan — publishing my own fanzines (intermittently), going to conventions, supporting my local (and not so local) breweries. I had, though, already taken the vital step of giving up reading science fiction.* As Vector editor I felt it was important not to have my prejudices confused by the facts.

I was also trying to write SF, and had been a founding member of the Pieria writers' group that included Dave Langford, Rob Holdstock, Gary Kilworth, Bobbie Lanning, Mike Scott Rohan, Chris Evans, Andrew Stephenson, and several others who have not yet become household names. Actually, one of the others became a very important name in my household: I married her.

Diana Reed and I met at Oxford, through the SF group there, and kept in touch at Pieria, before we married in 1983 and went to live in Manchester. We had our first child within a year, and whether it was the family responsibilities or the Manchester air, I more or less gave up fandom then. If you're going to be fanish, you have to do it full-time. I'm still a member of the BSFA (as DV Barrett Esq was surprised to discover), and still try to write SF, adding to my collection of rejection slips at infrequent intervals. An interesting and involving job with Shell and a growing family (one recent addition) don't leave as much time for writing.

Looking back, I can't recall a single SF novel or story that has changed my life or thinking (though I recall, for some reason, being powerfully moved on completing Delany's *Dhalgren*). But many of the most important things in my life since I left school have been to do with SF, so in that sense SF has been fundamental to me. Without it I'd be nothing like the same person, in nothing like the same situation. I'm happy it is that way. Who knows, I might have become a boring accountant at BP or something...

* I never took that step; I'm probably reading more of the damn stuff now than ever before...

- DVB



ALAN DOREY

BSFA chairman 1979-1985, Editor Vector 98, 107

THE BSFA AND I BURST UPON THE WORLD IN 1958, AND ALTHOUGH I intend to be around for many years to come, it looks like the good old BSFA will just keep rolling along. Vector 150 already indeed! I well remember the planning stages of Kevin Smith's centenary issue in 1979; can we afford a different colour ink for the cover, can we have a glossy cover — indeed, can we have more pages than usual! Such are the decisions that need to be made when celebrating the history of the BSFA*.

Over the years, the BSFA has embraced many different facets of fandom — sometimes clutching it tightly to its bosom, whilst at others, holding it away at arm's length. Currently I think the balance is about right, and as usual



it's the unsung heroes who get on with the job, who solve all the problems, put in the hours of effort and bring you the mailings every two months. Having been a member of the BSFA since (I think) 1977, it's interesting to see the cyclical phases — you can't satisfy everybody all of the time, and whilst it is vital to supply a good quality "product", the BSFA council and officers do it for the love of it.

For the newer members, you've probably never known anything else other than regular mailings, clean printing, staples (yes, there was a time when the BSFA couldn't afford a decent stapling machine — some of us even wrote and complained) and Keith Freeman's handy little reminders when your sub becomes due. There's always more that can be done, there's always new blood that can come in, but is there always the commitment — especially in the often adverse working conditions of the average BSFA bod — to go with this? Dave Barrett has done a superb job with *Vector* and will be a hard act to follow; let's hope that he gets a good response to his plea for applicants.

So, it's *Vector* 150 — another milestone and proof that the BSFA can still have a rôle to play today. I stepped down as chairman in 1985 and the stability and changes wrought since then have all been to the good; so keep making the BSFA your organisation, but also give the folk who run it a chance, too. I'm sure that in another ten years' time, we'll be celebrating 200 issues of *Vector*, and by then both the BSFA and I will be on the Phyllosani!

* Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.



PAUL KINCAID

Editor *Vector* 124/5, Reviews Editor *Vector* 126 +

NOT SO LONG AGO I DID SOME CHECKING UP. IT WAS QUITE A shock to find I've been reviewing for *Vector* for over 10 years. What was less of a surprise was the fact that, all those years ago, the books being reviewed were almost exclusively by American authors.

There seems to be something of a controversy at the moment about how lively or moribund the British SF scene is. Quite frankly I'm astounded that there is any sort of debate on the matter; it is blindingly obvious that British SF is in a healthier state than it has been at least since the 1960s.

It is something that can be traced simply by looking at those old reviews in *Vector*. There I was, starting out in my career as a tyro critic, and the books that were coming to me were *Operation Aries* by Gene Wolfe and *The Girl with the Jade Green Eyes* by John Boyd, and a handful of others. I remember a very familiar catalogue of writers, Frank Herbert, Larry Niven, that sort of stuff. I don't remember any British writers.

Oh, they were around. We used to whisper their names in a hushed litany, as if scared of shattering their precious, fragile existence: Aldiss, Ballard, Cowper, Moorcock, Priest, Roberts, Shaw. They were, one and all, glorious exceptions to the rule rather than flagbearers of a stirring British revival. Oh, and other names, Clarke, of course, though he often seemed more American than the Americans, and Brunner, whose books only seemed to be available in American editions, and newcomers like Holdstock and Kilworth and Watson. But even that list barely exhausted the fingers of two hands.

Their short stories appeared in American magazines, because there was nowhere else. Their books launched tentatively onto the British marketplace almost buried under an avalanche of American titles. New writers appeared in dribs and drabs, but they seemed to glide smoothly from newcomer to big-name status without rousing so much as a bow wave, possibly because there wasn't that much in the way. It was dispiriting.

I can't, offhand, remember how long I was reviewing for *Vector* before I received a book by a British writer, but it can certainly be measured in years.

I don't quite know when things changed. But change they did. For a while new British writers slid onto the scene and fitted neatly with their fellows so that one was

hardly aware of any increased British presence. It was almost as though the whole idea was not to be noticed.

I'm not saying they were poor writers, quite the contrary. But there was no sense of British writers making an impact. Indeed, there was no sense of weight of numbers, the British writers remained the exception, the lone survivor, the brave individual, with the emphasis very much on the individual.

In America everyone started getting very excited over cyberpunk. In Britain, *Interzone* appeared on the scene and seemed to be an attempt (sometimes limp, sometimes extremely effective) to combine cyberpunk with the shadow of British SF's last wave of greatness in the New Wave. This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of *Interzone*, but it did provide one lasting service: a British SF magazine. It could be that this was the focal point necessary to revitalise British SF, even if the fruits have been rather a long time coming.

Whatever, when I now consider the books that come into *Vector* for review, the balance is completely different. British work is no longer the exception, British writers' names are no longer whispered with wary reverence. That is not to say that glory days are here again, that everything in the garden's lovely (how can that be when the most exciting new British writer in years, Ian McDonald, can win tremendous acclaim in America but be virtually unknown and unpublished in this country?), but it is to say that British SF once more has a life, and a character.

From my chauvinistic point of view, that has been the development that has given me most pleasure during the years I've been associated with *Vector*: When I get a British SF book to review it is no longer an event.

There have been other developments, within the magazine itself, which have pleased me. Some of them, I think, can be laid at the door of David Barrett and myself. Like the broadening of the definition of SF. We can now encompass a broad literary scope, from Horror to the mainstream, which would have been virtually unheard of 10 years ago. And that's not just two editors imposing their own tastes upon the magazine. At least I hope not. I believe it is a reflection of the range of tastes of *Vector* readers in particular, and SF readers in general. And it is precisely because the range has become so broad, I think, that writers like Kilworth and Priest are venturing so successfully into the mainstream, while others like Banks and Ackroyd are venturing into the genre with equal success. And maybe it is because there is so little in the way of genre expectations to fetter them that British SF writers are now so many, and so good.

Conversely, maybe it was because we were so constricted by the American expectations of the genre that British SF was such a fragile creature 10 years ago.

Maybe. Or maybe it is just coincidence that British SF is blossoming while the ghetto walls are cracking. Either way, I've been witness to changing times during my years with *Vector*; I wonder where the changes will lead.



DAVID V BARRETT

Editor *Vector* 126-150

OCTOBER 1997: THE OZONE LAYER HAS ALMOST GONE, THE TEMPERATURE and the seas have risen, the clouds have thickened; Mrs Thatcher, surrounded by Riot Police and Thought Police, steps down as Britain's Prime Minister, proclaiming "We are delighted to become Empress of Europe" (the parts of it that are still outside the Islamic Republic of Europe); fundamentalist Christians burn Michael Moorcock's books, finally realising that many of his characters have the holy initials JC; and *Vector*, now a proscribed publication distributed in dark alleyways, reaches issue 200.

When I passed on the mantle eight years and four months ago, it was with a profound sense of relief, leavened with sadness, and a large dollop of exhaustion. I gave a lot to it, and I gained a lot from it. And I am still grateful to the 1000 members (most of whom I never met) for allowing me the privilege of editing one of the best critical journals in the business (and not just in SF and Fantasy).

Thankyou again, and may *Vector* continue far into the next millennium.

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Paul Kincaid



THE SEARCH FOR EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE - Edward Ashpole
[Blandford, 1989, 170pp, £14.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

WHAT QUESTIONS WOULD THE INTELLIGENT reader require answered in such a book? Surely, what has been done and discovered, what will be done, what do we expect to learn from it?

What we get is a witty, speculative, often condescending and unhelpful text, addressed to "my old Mother and Aunt who thought that 'extraterrestrials' is something to do with your stomach" - and to my wife, Patricia, without whose help this book would have been completed years ago!

Pay me £1 for every "if", "may", "could" and similar here and I'll be very happy; make it a tenner for every time such words are converted into "can", "must" and so on with no visible means of proof, and I'll be loaded. Frustration is the major product of any attempt to follow this winding and often irrelevant course through the (to my mind often fallacious) arguments that life-as-we-know-it must be the only life there is. Ezekiel's chariot may well have been (or not been) a spaceship, and space colonies are a prerequisite of all interstellar life. With Arthur C. Clarke's "principle of technical perfectibility" dragged in for no good reason at all.

I was asked to provide "the response of an SF fan but not an expert in the subject"; after reading Ashpole's views on Mars landings, habitable zones and high-gravity life-forms, I lost what little patience I had left after finding him using the words "Personally I cannot envisage ..." as the introduction to a fairly definitive statement that something is impossible, and came to the conclusion that (a) I would dearly love to see the existence of ETIs proven, but (b) I am at present just as much an expert on the subject as the author, and a darn sight less dogmatic to boot.

Basically, Ashpole sells his whole book down the river on pages 11 and 13 with charts that demonstrate the virtual impossibility of any space-faring race reaching Earth while there is intelligent life on it (on a 155mm span from the Big Bang, the arrival of

"bipedal apes" on Earth, and the present day, are happening at the same time).

And by page 14 he has already informed us that "there is a convincing theoretical case for the existence of ETIs, but not one item of direct evidence has yet been discovered," further destroying the reader's confidence with the fatuous claim that "We have the kind of anticipation that must have preceded the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions: a feeling for the truth without proof." Tell that to the people who threw out phlogiston, terracentricity and all the other exploded "truths" of the past.

WYVERN - A.A. Attanasio
[Grafton, 1989, 422pp, £12.95]
Reviewed by Martin Waller

"MARKING A FICTIONAL TERRITORY BETWEEN the classic high seas sagas of Robert Louis Stevenson and the apocalyptic works of Carlos Castaneda," it says on the label.

Marking the thin line between Jean Plaidy bodice-rippers and those airport-pulp historical novels with Chinese characters for titles which offer you all the barbaric splendour of such-and-such an empire and end up on TV starring Richard Chamberlain, is more like. Mr Attanasio is best known for a couple of baroque space operas, as I remember, but this time he has gone for the fully-fledged historical novel with mystical overtones.

As self-elected Pirates Correspondent for *Vector* - after praise for Tim Powers' *On Stranger Tides* - I suppose I was a natural for this one. To get comparisons out of the way, Powers' pirates of about the same era but a hemisphere away were convincingly deranged and nasty. The crew of the good ship Wyvern, under Captain Attanasio, are sweethearts to a man, fired by a fierce anti-colonialism more common to NW3 than the early days of the East India Company.

Jaki Gefjon is born in 1609 in the jungles of Borneo, three-quarters Dutch and a quarter native. The author at once attempts to set up a tension with which he single-mindedly persists throughout the novel, with Jaki rejected by his own tribe, unhappy with Europeans and taking refuge with a jungle shaman who initiates him into the mysteries.

The Dutch enslave the country, and Jaki is off for a life of rum, sodomy and the lash. The rum is courtesy of the Wyvern's booby, one-eyed captain

whom Jaki cures of a long-running - and quite disgustingly described - injury. The sodomy is provided by some obliging Arab corsairs. The lash is in limited supply, these being Nice Pirates, until the entry of Jaki's arch-enemy, Captain Quarles of the Royal Navy.

All this would be fairly amusing, set in an interesting period of history and long on local colour. But it is ruined for me by Attanasio's sloppy, juvenile style. "Jaki chopped at them remorselessly, and their blood sprayed. With the scream of the last of them cut loose from his life, Jaki bounded over their corpses ..." The pedant in me is forced to point out that the "his" in the last sentence apparently refers to Jaki, making a complete nonsense of it.

The pedant also explains that mudskippers (p.244) are fish, not snakes, so much for the local colour ...

It is all rather cruel and bloody - even the poor mudskippers are employed to chew somebody's eyes out - and gets more so as Jaki and Quarles' daughter, with whom he has eloped, trek across a Moghul India ravaged by civil war. By the end the daughter is dead, Jaki and Quarles are - unbelievably - reconciled, and our hero owns a large chunk of what will one day be Brooklyn, New York. As I recall, this was itself ripped off from the native Amerindians, for a handful of beads, but I suppose anti-colonialist principles only go so far.

ETERNITY - Greg Bear
[Gollancz, 1989, 399pp, £12.95]
Reviewed by Marilyn Taylor

ETERNITY, THE SEQUEL TO EON, takes the tale of Thistle-down, that time travelling asteroid which somehow stretches for ever, and the scatterings of post-Apocalypse Earth on from the end of life as we know it to the possible end of all life. Bear gets there by way of godlings, alternate universes and the beginning of another war with the Jarts. Whatever the failings of his writing no-one could ever fault Bear for the audacity of his imagination.

Eon was "classic" SF on the grand scale, never mind the characters, feel the immensity. It worked until Bear got bogged down with the politics of our descendants. The gizmos worked just fine all the time. *Eternity* also aspires to classic status but tries too hard. Bear's grip slips too often. We find Patricia Vasquez's grand

BOOKS

daughter struggling in an alternate universe "Gaia" (sparkingly imaginative choice of name) where Alexander did not die young. She doesn't know whether she wants to study or use the instruments to go into The Way. Back on "Earth" Pavel Mirsky returns from the end of time to tell our superman descendants that The Way will have to be destroyed if the whole eternal house of cards is not to come tumbling down, with only his bluff Soviet colonel's personality for ammunition. Olaf finds the catalogue of a captured Jart, cracks its code and proceeds to absorb its "personality" for study, the better to understand the Jarts and defeat them when The Way is reopened. Olaf is a very proud man ...

The trouble with *Eternity*, apart from its length, is a lack of excitement. There is action but I found myself uncaring about the outcome. The characters did not involve me the way they had the last time we met. Then there are the gizmos - The Way, City memories, people who are alive before they are born - and the schizoid Thistledown society. Bear refers to the Hexanon, the neo Gensels, the strict Noderites, Axis Euclid, which I recognised only because I read *Son Gaia* appears more to display the author's Greek scholarship than to satisfy any plot imperative.

I found *Eternity* a disappointment; ambitious certainly, but a failure because those ambitions seem to have blinded the author to the bare necessities of plot, drama and character. Interesting, perhaps, if you have read *Son*, probably incomprehensible if you haven't.

MILLENNIUM - Ben Bova
(Methuen, 1986, 296pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Terry Broome

CHET KINSMAN, SUFFERING FROM HIGH blood pressure and a weakened heart, is now a colonel in charge of the American half of the Moon colony, Selene. The super-powers are poised on the brink of nuclear war, regretting the trust which led to the Russian and American Moonbases being built side by side, and are determined to extend the conflict to them.

Kinsman, cast as a Christ figure, still tortured by his murder of a cosmonaut, seeks redemption by teaming up with his Russian counterpart, Leonov. Proclaiming Selene's independence, he aims to halt the war before the Earth is wiped out.

On Kinsman's side is his lifelong love, Diane Lawrence, now one among Selene's military personnel. Against him is his old friend, Colt, who - driven by his determination to prove his skin colour makes him no less worthy than the white Americans around him - takes on the rôle of Judas.

Selene is in a strong bargaining position. The colony gains control of the unfinished SDI networks of both

super-powers, it will soon have the power to control the weather on earth (for good or bad), and it can mine the materials on the Moon and the asteroids which will keep the Earth's economy going. It uses this position in an attempt to bring about a world government. It is this exploration of the meaninglessness of national barriers and the danger of divisive nationalistic feelings in the face of satellite communications, global warfare and the expansion of the human race into space that is the main, underlying theme of the novel. Considering that *Millennium* was first published in 1978, when the SDI was still the American military's idea of a wet dream, it has remained remarkably fresh and current to today's problems.

Don't expect anything deep, however, as the plot gallops along at such pace that at times it reminded me of "B"-movie serial cliffhangers. Bova should have relaxed his pace to explore the characters in more depth. The situations, no longer confined to a contemporary Earth setting, do not suffer from the type of clichés which marred the first volume, but the melodramatic air remains.

A touch rushed, maybe, but it still left me thirsting for more, and it's very rare that I ever feel that about a story.

THE TOYNBE CONVECTOR - Ray Bradbury
(Oraston, 1989, 277pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

IN THE COURSE OF THESE 23 STORIES WE often find ourselves taken up to the attic or down to the basement: prevailing architectures of narrative whether the hideaway is located in a mid-western small town dwelling, is a graveyard, or is ante-chamber to future vistas. Nostalgia/dissolution, boredom/reurgence are complementary themes: nostalgia perhaps colouring all. As the frustrated character in "One Night in Your Life" has it: "When everything is repeated, and over, and familiar, it's the first things rather than the last that count." Some of the evocations are quite slight: domestic tragi-comedies, canons of conventional horror; but even so predictable a psychological melodrama as "At Midnight in the Month of June" is, in its poetic imagery, intensely moving.

Four stories I would single out as quintessential Bradbury; each a novel reprise of some particular almost obsessional theme; all proclaiming an undimmed genius. "The Toynbe Convector" attempts to rescue the American Dream, weaving together a strand from Wells, an EPCOT-like strand, and a strand from the spongy historian, to yield a fable at once both ironic and upbeat. "The Last Circus" is also at heart "A Study of History". At one level it is Bradbury writing hick-town boyhood nostalgia at the top of his bent; in depth it mourns the passing

of civilisation's brave parade, the fading of the cosmic show. For one for whom *The Silver Locusts* remains one of SF's half-dozen greatest, "The Love Affair" must top the collection. This bitter and beautiful story singles allegorically in a Martian landscape the motifs of culture-shock and fatal attraction. In "West of October" members of the Family have their territories in the "attic keep" of Grandfather's head, John "shuttling from fleshpot to fleshpot", Philip settling down "to read all the books Grandpa ever read."

Bradbury frequently suffuses his work with the light of other literatures and media: in "On the Orient North" with ghostly emanations from *Hamlet* and *Wuthering Heights*; with poignant cinematic emanations in "The Laurel and Hardy Love Affair". Other times he is himself illuminating literature - Jokey critiques of Pausanias, and on through Dickens to Huxley and Asimov, in "Long Division"; or, in the hilariously erotic "Junior", adroitly juxtaposing film scores. All basement or attic-content, much-rumaged, maybe; but, like the magically patched-together composite of "Colonel Stone-steel's Truly Egyptian Mummy", when, in the words and mood of that story, the last fireworks are gone, and the last fire balloons sail out among the gentle stars, it can indulge you with "time talk", or promise a surprising future.



DOWN RIVER - STEPHEN GALLAGHER
(New English Library, 1989, 272pp, £10.95)

ANCIENT IMAGES - RAMSEY CAMPBELL
(Legend, 1989, 299pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Alex Stewart

ONE OF THE MAIN INFLUENCES ON the contemporary horror novel seems to be the contemporary horror film; a trend most obvious in the drifts of down-market dump bin fodder cluttering the bookshelves, which read like novelised screenplays cobbled together from the crassest clichés of the direct-to-video turkeys devoured insatiably by the bubblegum and zit brigade. It's far rarer to find intelligently written novels deploying this kind of cross-fertilisation to real artistic effect, and an extremely pleasant surprise to come across two very different authors doing so in different, but complementary, ways.

Gallagher is clearly influenced by the structure of the screenplay, developing his story in tightly written scenes centred on a single view-

BOOKS

point character. Everyone seems in a state of perpetual motion, either literally, as in the nail-biting car chase which kicks off the physical action, or emotionally, as they struggle to make sense of events and personal relationships which seem to be spinning away out of their control.

With Campbell, the movie references are far more explicit. The McGuffin in *Ancient Images* is a long-lost Karloff/Lugosi horror film, suppressed before its release, which holds the clue to a powerful and malevolent force at large in the Lincolnshire countryside. When Sandy Allen, a young film editor, sets out to find the last surviving print of *The Tower of Fear* she finds herself threatened by abhuman forces beyond her understanding. The tension builds slowly as she gradually assembles the jigsaw, while friends and allies are frightened off or worse.

By contrast, Gallagher's monster is far more down to earth: Johnny Mays, a corrupt policeman believed dead after crashing his car, but resurrected by a near miracle. Partially amnesiac, his psychopathic tendencies now completely out of control, he begins to murder his way across the Pennines in pursuit of his ex-partner and boyhood friend Nick Frazier. Structurally the book is reminiscent of Gallagher's earlier *policier*, *Valley of Lights*, (itself in the process of becoming a feature film), transplanted from the Arizona desert to his native North West, and without the explicit supernatural elements. (There is, however, a strong hint towards the end that at least one of the characters is a ghost; and not necessarily the one you first think of.)

Ofhand, it's hard to decide which of these books I found the most satisfying. Gallagher scores, as usual, on sheer narrative drive, although Campbell's precise imagery and carefully evoked sense of omnipresent danger had me glancing over my shoulder more often. His characterisation of the walk-ons is more quirky, and his description of the all-important movie a delight for at least this particular film buff; I believed in every frame of *The Tower of Fear*, and would love to be able to see it.

Unfortunately they don't make them like that any more...

THE HAUNTED GRANGE - R. Chetwynd-Hayes

(William Kimber, 1988, 184pp, £9.95)

THE FOURTH BOOK OF AFTER MIDNIGHT STORIES - Amy Myers (Ed)

(William Kimber, 1988, 192pp, £9.95)

Reviewed by Martin Brice

I REALLY MUST RECOMMEND R. CHETWYND-HAYES as an author; and not simply for his ability to build up and maintain the tension and mystery, so that you know something is going to happen, yet are still surprised by what does actually happen. There is also his port-

royal of times past, conveying both atmosphere and attitudes. He tells us more about the earlier decades of the 20th century than many an exercise in nostalgia. *The Haunted Grange* and "Regression" ought to be read by students of social history as well as by fans of the macabre. The former is a novel in the Clavering Grange series. Young Brian Stratfield goes to live there in 1959 and becomes what is now known as a toyboy - but of whom... or what?

"Regression" is a short story in a collection of 16 works, only one previously published. The other authors are Patricia Daly, Barbara Joan Eyre, Elizabeth Foust, Janet S. Goldfinch, Brian Lumley, Ross McKay, Alma Priestley, Joan Rees, Derek Stanford, Frances Stephens, Jean Stubbs, J.C. Trewin, Fred Urquhart, John Whitbourn and Mary Williams. If nostalgia involves searching for some happy time in the past, then these stories are the very antithesis of nostalgia. In them, bygone sadness or malevolence reaches forward into the present and future. The past might be as far back as Ancient Greece or King Arthur; it might be as recent as 120 seconds ago. Its channel of contact might be a doll's house or a sporting trophy, perhaps as big as a mountain or as small as an apple core, but beware - one day the past will catch up with you. And all family historians ought to read "The Woodshed Door"; genealogy can be bad for your health.



BEYOND LIES THE MUB - Philip K. Dick

(Gollancz, 1988, 404pp, £12.95)

Reviewed by John Gribbin

GOLDEN NUGGETS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE. Philip K. Dick was one of the giants of the genre, the group who invented the modern form of science fiction. He has been described as "under-rated" so often, by so many critics, that he must be the most highly rated underrated author of all time, and he produced classics such as *The Man in the High Castle* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick died in 1982, and now Gollancz are in the process of putting everything of his that they can lay their hands on into print. This first volume of his collected short stories contains 25 tales, all but one written in an intense burst of activity over a period of nine months in 1951 and 1952.

Dick is not a cosy author. His stories often involve strange characters in uncomfortable situations, and shifts of viewpoint that leave even the imagined reality of the story moving beneath your feet. Many of them are as fresh now as they were nearly 40 years ago; a few of the tricks seem a little hackneyed until you remember

that this is the archetype which so many other authors have copied. The message of all Dick's work, he once said in an interview, is that not only do we each inhabit our own unique world, coloured by our experiences and points of view, but that the subjective reality of one person can overlap with and alter the reality of another individual. His stories are likely to impinge upon, and alter, your own personal reality.

This is the kind of book that anyone who is interested in SF as literature ought to read; unlike some of the books that fall into that category, it is also the kind of book that someone new to the genre might pick up and enjoy without any inkling of Dick's pioneering role. Some of the stories, indeed, would sit quite happily in the pages of *Interzone* today.

As a nod towards the historical importance of the collection, the book includes a Preface extracted from a letter written by Dick in 1981, an Introduction by Roger Zelazny quoting extensively from his own earlier writings on Dick, and a minimally informative set of Notes with some anecdotes about how a few of the stories came to be published. But never mind. The stories stand up well in spite of all that. The title tale, one of telepathy and cannibalism (a particularly nasty combination); "Prize Ship", which starts out like E.E. Smith, leans in the direction of (late) Robert Heinlein, and ends up as pure Dick; "The Variable Man" and "The Preserving Machine", two of his best known stories; my own favourite "The Indefatigable Frog" (which provides insight into the minds of scientists, as well as into the mysteries of science); and a whole heap of others full of entertainment and ideas. Read, enjoy - and then reflect on the fact that the stories were turned out by one man, at a rate of more than one a fortnight.

STARKE - Ben Elton

(Sphere, 1989, £3.50)

Reviewed by Martin Waller

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ALTERNATIVE COMEDY equates for most people with the Golden Age of Science Fiction, coinciding with the onset of puberty. So it is with us. The Goons are lost in the mists of prehistory, Monty Python set the standard, and the Young Ones and their bestial, foul-mouthed offspring were a juvenile, unappealing irrelevance.

But Elton did pen Blackadder as well, so there is hope for him yet. And his first, science fictional novel is really rather good.

It is a funny, fast-moving, sprawling tale of capitalist conspiracy, if not to destroy the world then at least to survive its demise by setting up home on the moon for the duration.

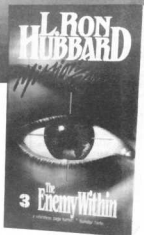
On one side is a convincingly described, and in places immediately

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recognisable collection of the super-rich, their assorted wives and mistresses and some of the most powerful rockets ever built.

Ranged against them is a motley collection of greens and peaceniks, comprising a loony Vietnam vet, a tedious hippy, a complete pratt, assorted overweight Australian aborigines and a financial journalist or two.

It is to Elton's credit that he realises how absurd his green terrorists look, ranged against the capitalist hordes. He only loses his grip towards the end, when the requirements of a hastily-concocted plot require scenes of derring-do beyond the capabilities of most of us, financial journalists excepted. But Elton redeems himself. The capitalists get away into orbit, where the most sympathetically-drawn expatriate through sheer loneliness. Back on Earth we all die. Slowly.

For this is nothing if not a didactic novel - you guessed that, didn't you? Elton only makes it clear right at the end that all this is happening a couple of decades hence

'If only, ' people sighed, 'if only we had done something, acted when we still had time, even just ten years ago.' They said, 'back in the late eighties, the early nineties when there was still time...'

Stark was written and set in Australia. So, oddly enough, was the great ecological warning of recent years, George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*. Elton nowhere approaches the detailed anguish of that masterpiece, but he would clearly approve of Turner's explicit appendix, with its sign-off line "Sleep Well".

Stark took ten weeks to write, apparently, and in places it shows, with numerous page-consuming digressions and detours. It must be wondered whether a fast, cynical comedy is the best method of getting the green message across. Elton would argue that any method that hooks the reader's attention is justified.

OTHER EDENS II - Christopher Evans & Robert Holdstock (Eds)
(Unwin, 1988, 269pp, £3.95)
Reviewed by Cecil Nurse

I'VE BEEN OFF SHORT STORIES FOR MANY years now, mainly because they lack the ambience and rhythm of a novel, and tend to boil down to an idea that I would have found more enticing as a sentence or two. Thus I was agreeably surprised to find several pieces in this volume with atmospheric and philosophical depth. John Clute's "Eden Sourding", an ornate and esoteric as his reviews, works for me perhaps because it is the first chapter of a novel. Tanith Lee's "A Madonna in the Machine" portraying the first moments of a world machine evoking its own transcendence. M. John Harrison's "The Gift", a moody, jagged mystery, and Kim Stanley Robinson's "Remaking History", humorously making his point on many levels. The best was Scott Bradford's

"Dazzle", a dog with intelligence running on his life and the world he lives in. "Sometimes Dazzle just lay on his blanket for hours, contemplating the meaninglessness of dead cats." Surely the best line in the book.

Others were interesting without being enchanting: Gerry Kilworth's "On the Watchtower at Plateau", where observers from the future come in search of the truth of the past; Brian Aldiss's "Confluence Revisited", which is little more than a list of definitions of alien words, surprisingly effective; Michael Moorcock's "Wars", with Earthmen returning from some skewed dimension; Ian Watson's idiosyncratic "The Resurrection Man".

Most of the rest did not work for me. In particular Graham Charnock's "She Shall Have Music" suffers from a glob of explication of his "idea", Michael Cobley's "Waltz in Flexitime" gets wrapped up with unseemly haste, and Anne Gapp's "Roman Games" is a bit smug for my taste, like a story written down to children. These last were about what I expect of short stories: the strain of writing for magazine publication distorting the writer's voice, perhaps; somehow thrown away because they are short. Maybe the real secret of writing good short stories is to write a novel or two first, or is that just my bias showing?

The editors, in pursuit of a transatlantic alternative, seem to have elected for the elegant and colourful rather than the energetic and hard-edged. Fine with me. More please.

DOUBLE PLANET - John Gribbin & Marcus Chown
(Gollancz, 1988, 220pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by John Newinger

THE EARTH HAS SUFFERED SOME SORT OF nuclear catastrophe and human society is in decline, undergoing a process of slow regression as government and economy run down. Space exploration has ended, the moon bases have been abandoned and the remaining space shuttles are used for weather forecasting and crop prediction: mankind has "after three million years of expansion ... (turned) its back on the last frontier, perhaps for ever". A world government, the Council of the Reunited Nations, led by the ruthless perandol, Yevgeny Ustinov, is desperately trying to hold things together. The government is beset by Soviet intrigue and American survivalist terrorists ... indeed the Russians are secretly sponsoring the survivalists (a nice touch). Then as if things weren't bad enough a comet is discovered to be on a collision course with the planet.

The Council's scientific advisor, David Kondratieff, urges that the government's remaining shuttles are used to place fusion engines on the comet to shift it away from the earth. In fact both Kondratieff and the expedition's commander, Frances Reese, have

another plan in mind, a plan that is only revealed as the novel progresses. For Reese and her fellow astronauts this is probably the last chance to maintain humankind's toehold in space, the last chance to give the human race a purpose. Fearing a plot against himself Ustinov does his best to sabotage the expedition once it is already under way.

Double Planet is the work of two scientists turned journalists. It is a peculiarly old-fashioned and very British novel with more of the feel of an old BBC TV serial than of a modern day science fiction film equipped with state of the art special effects. Despite the best of intentions, it is unfortunately only a slight novel, only mildly interesting.

IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD - K.W. Jeter
(Morrigan, 1989, 204pp, £11.95, Special Edition £40.00)
Reviewed by Neale Vickery

PRIOR TO READING THIS BOOK I KNEW K.W. Jeter's work by reputation only. After years of neglect that reputation is now increasingly impressive, and he has some influential supporters. The late Philip K. Dick wrote gushingly of *Dr Adder* and in a postscript to the Special Edition of this new book Ramsey Campbell writes in similarly respectful tones. Campbell has been drafted in to provide his seal of approval since *In the Land of the Dead* is being squarely marketed as a horror story. And horror it is, of an especially gloomy variety.

It is set in the California of the Great Depression and is told exclusively from the perspective of the vagrant Cooper. He has been caught perpetuating a small time con trick, and as an alternative to imprisonment is put to work on a citrus farm handling the dirty work of old man Vandervelde and his son Bonnie, a pair of degenerate West Coast rednecks.

He is befriended by the apparently crazy Fay, similarly seconded from an institution (though of the mental variety) to cater for the sexual needs of the old man. She claims to be able to talk to the dead, though (surprise surprise) nobody believes her. Fay plots revenge against her exploiters and drags a reluctant but compelled Cooper along with her. Cooper ultimately escapes Vandervelde, but breaking loose of the unerving Fay is not so easy.

In fact, the plot is almost incidental to this book. It depends for its horror upon the hopelessly futile lives led by all the characters, for Jeter derives his horror not from the supernatural but from the narrowness of human existence.

Jeter depicts with depressing effect the suffocating narrowness of life on the margins of this vicious, uncaring rural society. His prose is dark, brooding and intense but never des-

BOOKS

cends to trite gothic. In fact, it derives much of its power from the deliberate avoidance of hyperbole. It is written throughout in Cooper's own idiosyncratic slang, and the flat connoisseurial tone underlines his resigned acceptance of the fate that has overcome him.

This is not an easy book to read, not least because of the unremitting darkness and despair which permeates the whole story. It is told without humour and devoid of any spark of real hope or optimism. None of the characters is sympathetically drawn and none has any redeeming features.

But Jeter blames the world, not the people: "The world was full of crazy people: it made them that way ...", and throughout he describes a world both familiar and strange whose horrors shape the human lives it overrules.

I am no lover of horror, but I agree with Ramsey Campbell that this is how contemporary horror fiction should be written. It takes the horror of the real world as its subject and illuminates the fears of the people haunted by it.

HUNTER'S MOON - Gerry Kilworth

(Unwin, 1989, 330pp, £12.95)

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

GARRY KILWORTH IS PERHAPS BEST KNOWN for his SF novels. His latest book is in an entirely new vein: he had intended to write it under a pseudonym until persuaded otherwise by his editor. To quote the author, *Hunter's Moon* is a "non-quest animal fantasy", the writing of which was triggered by reading Ted Hughes' poems - apparently foxes appear frequently in these.

Hunter's Moon is the story of the vixen, O-ha, and her friends, relatives and enemies. Chief amongst these are Casio, the American Red dog fox, Gar, the badger, Breaker, the lead hound of the hunt, and last but by no means least the villain of the piece, Sabre, the Ridgeback. It is also the story of the relationship between animals and humans.

We follow the fortunes of these animals, especially the foxes, as they pass the milestones of life: mating, giving birth, illness and finally death. One particularly strong thread concerns the lifelong enmity between Sabre and O-ha's family.

I was irresistibly reminded of Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* and Richard Adams' *Waterhip Down*; the former has the strongest similarities, possibly because the perils that others face are similar to foxes, whereas the latter is similar only in its approach to mythology and religion. Kilworth has invented some fascinating world-creation myths for not only the different animal species but also the same species from different countries.

There is plenty of plot to get your teeth into: rabies, fox hunting,

fox farming, fox observation - to name but a few strands. The animals can communicate with each other in "Candide", represented by English, but different species have different tongues, represented by German and French etc. I particularly liked the way that the humans are referred to as "barking" rather than speaking, a nice touch. In fact, the incomprehension of the foxes towards human motives and actions is convincing and sometimes quite striking.

Kilworth has certainly done his research as far as fox habits and habits are concerned, their characters are nicely rounded; his dogs are not so lucky, and unfortunately sometimes verge on caricature. The style is lucid; the pace is brisk. It kept my interest at all times.

In conclusion, I enjoyed *Hunter's Moon*. While it is not earth-shatteringly original, it is readable and craftsmanlike non-quest animal fantasy.



COOKING - Dean R. Koonz, Illustrations

by Phil Parks, Created by Christopher

Zavisa

(Headline, 1988, £12.95)

Reviewed by Darroll Pardoe

THIS STORY IS SUBTITLED "A FABLE FOR ALL AGES", and does indeed have something to offer both the child and the adult. It has the black and white moral clarity of the classical fairy-tale, and you are never left in any doubt that the good toys will come out ahead in their race to reach the new Toy-maker before the bad toys can stop them. Of course they do, and although the plot is a simple one it holds the interest and has moments of real dramatic power. I let fall a tear or two over the last chapter. The true ecotrophile will be delighted by the excursions into theology (the nature of the soft toy soul) and medicine (Gapok transfusion). The illustrations by Phil Parks are excellent, set off the text admirably and are an essential ingredient in the charm of the story. This is a book I recommend unreservedly to readers of every age.

ROBERT SILVERBERG'S WORLDS OF WONDER

- Robert Silverberg (Ed)

(Gollancz, 1988, 349pp, £12.95)

Reviewed by Ken Lake

NOT ONLY IS THIS AN INCREDIBLE BARGAIN for a hardcover that you'll refer back to again and again; it's well produced and a credit to the whole genre of SF.

One of my favourite books has always been Damon Knight's *In Search of*

Wonder, essays on modern SF without which I would go so far as to say no reader can truly appreciate what the genre offers. Now we have something even better, for Silverberg combines three strands in this compilation.

First there are the 13 stories - from Knight, Beeter, the Kuttners, Shackley, Blish, Aldiss, Dick, Vance, Bob Shaw and others. Stories we have all read but will relish reading again, which is why they have been chosen.

There are Silverberg's erudite, amusing, painstaking, enlightening and enjoyable criticisms of each work. There are basically two schools of criticism, or of explication, or of teaching the writing of fine SF - the Milford or Focus system, where you take patently improbable stories and work on them together, and the Silverberg approach where you show just what is superb about the examples before you, and merely expand, annotate, explain, analyse and occasionally add a lot of improvement to them.

Whether in fact we treat Silverberg's essays as pedagogical material or simply an aid to better enjoyment of fine fiction, we can all gain something new, fresh and encouraging from these pages.

What a pity I cannot be as enthusiastic about the third component of this book: the initial autobiographical discussion. The reserved and self-respecting British psyche finds something inherently unavoury in his juvenile egocentricity, so if you don't want to puke all over your copy, skip pages 1-3, pick up the tale with Lovecraft on page 4, and from there to page 18 try and avoid every sentence containing the word "I". From there on in it gets useful, culminating in his complaint - echoing one I constantly make in these pages - about "a plot that functions only because everyone acts like a total nincompoop".

But perhaps the most important aspect of Silverberg's study lies right at the beginning on page iv where he quotes, of all people, Damon Knight saying that "science fiction means what we point to when we say it," and goes on to give his own interpretation of that meaningful but perhaps too broad definition, an interpretation on which the rest of the book hangs and one that you will find eminently satisfying even if you wish to argue with it.

Please buy this book - you won't regret it, and Gollancz deserve to be encouraged by truly massive sales of the best book of SF criticism to appear in perhaps a score of years.

PROJECT PENDULUM - Robert Silverberg

(Hutchinson, 1989, 139pp, £6.95)

A DARK TRAVELLING - Roger Zelazny

(Hutchinson, 1989, 109pp, £6.95)

Reviewed by Jessica Yates

THE MILLENNIUM SERIES OF SF/FANTASY for teenagers originated in the USA.

BOOKS

and consists of novels commissioned from well-known authors for adults.

Zelazny's *A Dark Travelling* uses the concept of parallel worlds, created when history reaches a turning point. The teenage hero-narrator belongs to a family which has for generations had secret access to ways of travelling into alternate worlds. The hero's father disappears into a parallel world without warning. The plot concerns a war on that world between the baddies who want to exploit alternate-world knowledge in order to rule, and the goodies, who want that world to develop normally without importing inappropriate technology. The goodies are aided by patrollers from the other alternates, and our hero gets projected on to the world at war in order to save the day - and his father.

Not then an original concept, and recently used by Diana Wynne Jones in her *Chrestomanci* series. I felt there was too much formal, passive narration, not enough exposition-in-action. The story didn't come alive for me, and I needed a second reading to understand it!

For teenagers who haven't read much SF, of the two I would recommend the Silverberg first. Time-travel in the pendulum mode involves twins, one going into the future, one the past, simultaneously, and then crossing over, first five minutes ahead/behind, then 50 minutes, 500 minutes, 5000 minutes etc, right up to 95 million years in the past and the future. Silverberg really enters into the minds and bodies of the two all-American boys undergoing the experiment.

How topical this book is, as one boy finds himself on Earth in 2111 AD during the greenhouse effect when everyone wears an oxygen breathing pack. One in-joke is the appearance of Benjamin Balthurst in 951,000 AD, claiming to have been kidnapped in 1809 - wasn't he the man who "walked around the horses"?

These children's books will be of interest to teachers and librarians, but not to adult SF collectors unless hooked on the works of Zelazny and Silverberg.

THE BOOK OF MERLIN - R.J. Stewart (Ed)
(Blandford Press, 1988, 192pp, £5.95)
MERLIN AND WOMAN - R.J. Stewart (Ed)
(Blandford Press, 1988, 190pp, £14.95)
THE CELTIC ART SOURCE BOOK - Courtney Davis
(Blandford Press, 1988, 128pp, £14.95)
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THE TWO MERLIN BOOKS (THE FIRST NOW in paperback) come from the first two Merlin Conferences in 1986 and 1987; these seek to explore all facets of Merlin - historical, mythological, mythic, magical, whatever - equally, without value judgements as to their "authenticity". They ask what we can learn from the Merlin myths for the 1980s. And they certainly cover a wide

range of material, though unfortunately not all of the same standard.

In *The Book of Merlin* Geoffrey Ashe examines the earliest records of Merlin, points to three distinct historical origins, and asks whether Merlin (or Myrddin) is more a title applied to several people, than one man's name. John Matthews, a writer on the western mystery tradition, discusses Merlin in modern fiction, including Robert Nye's *Merlin*, Jane Yolen's *Merlin's Book* and the film *Excalibur*. Stewart's own essay on *Merlin, King Bladud and the Wheel of Life* is interesting, but his arguments are cluttered and repetitious, and the pages on Celtic religious beliefs and practices would have been far better separated out.

I found Gareth Knight's "The Archetype of Merlin" the most fascinating section. Knight draws links between Merlin and Gandalf which may annoy many readers, but the main value of his essay is his drawing the significance of Merlin right up to the present day, and his vision of the Merlin archetype as a bridge between the material and the spiritual world.

Merlin and Woman dispenses with the view of Merlin as a crotchety old chauvinist, and examines what we can learn of the Feminine Principle from the Merlin mythos. In many ways it is a less satisfactory book than the first; its individual parts are at times excellent, but they fail to knit together comfortably. Stewart describes his own Merlin Tarot (which illustrates the book), and Rachel Pollack tells a story based on a reading from this Tarot; there are three other tales of different types in the book. Gareth Knight writes on John Dee, and Kathleen Raine on Blake's vision of Albion. Caitlin Matthews includes a thought-provoking study from her forthcoming book *Arthur and the Sovereignty of Britain* on Mabon, the Celtic Divine Child, who is often known as Mabon, son of Modron, or Son, Son of Mother; the parallels with the Christ-Mary myth are startling.



Both Merlin books are interesting curate's eggs; but *The Celtic Art Source Book* is quite untainted by salmonella. Using source material from the Books of Durrow, Kells, Lindisfarne and St Chad, from the 5th to the 8th century, Davis has produced not just a useful catalogue of Celtic designs - knotwork, spirals, borders, crosses, initials - but a work of art in its own right, including 50 absolutely beautiful colour pages. The text includes discussion of the symbolism of the designs, historical detail, and Celtic myths. For either artistic or

spiritual inspiration, this book is worth every penny.

STORIES FROM THE OLD HOTEL - Gene Wolfe
(Kerosina, 1988, 299pp, £13.95, Collectors Edition £40)
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

WOLFE SAYS THIS COLLECTION IS "SOME of my most obscure work ... stories that I feel are good, but that have received little or no praise". I'm happy to redress that and praise them highly. This is a collection to browse through rather than zip through. There are too many stories, too many styles, too many ideas to do it any sort of justice if read in a sitting. In the introduction Wolfe gives brief but revealing information about each story - where or how it was written, what it relates to - the sort of background that can be nearly as fascinating as the stories themselves. For readers who have found Wolfe obscure or baffling some of these stories will come as a surprise and may act as the beginning of a reassessment, because there is something for most people among the 31 stories which comprise the collection. With so many it is impossible to mention them all but unfair to single out some.

To be basic they are, as I expected, beautifully written, original and provocative. They are stories I read with great pleasure and to which I will return regularly. Among the lighter stories are two Sherlock Holmes pastiches "Slaves of Silver" and "The Rubber Band"; a pointed tale of the hazards of having a literary agent in "From the Desk of Gileas C. Merton"; another detective story in "Cherry Jubilee"; two Llawell stories in "The Green Rabbit of S'Rian" and "Choice of the Black Goddess". There are stories which will puzzle like "Civis Lapetus Sun", or "To the Dark Tower Came"; stories to chill like "Redbeard" or "Checking Out" (which is a version of hell) or "Last Day" which sees another end of the world. There is something which will suit most tastes and most moods in this rich trove of storytelling and imagination.

If you like Wolfe you will probably read this anyway. If you've never read any then I recommend this collection wholeheartedly. If you dislike Wolfe I still recommend this. Try it. It may just make you change your mind.

FOR ROSEMARY - Gene Wolfe
(Kerosina, 1986, 46pp)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

38 POEMS FROM A GENUINE PROSE MASTER. Many, as he says, flow from intense personal emotion and have autobiographical significance. In others he casts around a sardonic but visionary eye. There is an introductory dis-

claimers of poetic success. Yes: the occasional flat note, metrical uncertainty, over-forced rhyme. Not perhaps the work of an unflawed poet, but the work of a poet, nevertheless, able to produce something as unforgettable as "The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps", as exquisite as the concluding "Hoss Gellicia Officialis" - verses of one who with Blake might say: "To Me the World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination".

Two quotes. "Science-Fiction Poem", complete in six lines, states a credo, concentrates a vision, and with almost folk-rhyme stiplicity demonstrates Gene Wolfe's gift for word-play:

No earth I own,
No earth ones see,
No earth I own.

Though here I be.

My passport names another star
Where brothers not for burning are.

From "The Computer Iterates ...",

the verse "Trump (7)" bears the stamp of the New Sun's maker and illustrates again his logodanadetic talent:

The lovers seen birth as well as lust,
Read ye that riddle as ye must:
Men from seen, O ye people!
Dust from dust from dust from dust.

Only a brave rhyme-experimenter could write "Why Private War", its title rhymed 34 times. Elsewhere, with wit, he out-Browning Browning:

You know another week!!

Take us to the fin de siècle.

That from "On An Album Cover", the work of a fantasist-satirist. It is, however, in more intimate lyrics that the most sensitive artistry shines - "After the Runaway", "To My Wife" (its succession of interwoven Valentine images "Encircled with leaves, / Graven with words"), and the dazlingly reflexive "Our Speaker Tonight".

Congratulations to Kerosina on making available a collection so beautifully produced and containing in small compass so many fresh insights.

THERE ARE DOORS - Gene Wolfe
(Collins, 1989, 313pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

GENE WOLFE'S COMEDY IS AN ODD THING.

For a start it is not that easy to distinguish it from the rest of his fiction - is this comedy, or is it just the playfulness evident throughout his work? If you smile at the word games in the various permutations of "The Island of Doctor Death" and so on, you will probably smile at this. If you laughed at his previous comedy, *Free Live Free*, then you may well laugh at this. But it won't be a belly laugh.

There is too much that is worrying, too much that is uncertain, to make this other than a sly, subtle, far from uproarious work. And, as in so much of Wolfe's work, it begins with the narrator. You always have to pay attention to the nature of the narrator before you can begin to unravel the complexities of a Wolfe novel. The starting point for *The Book of the New Sun* has to be that Severian remembers



everything, while for *Soldier of the Mist* it's that Latro remembers nothing. In *There are Doors* Mr Green may be, indeed probably is, mad, and that inevitably casts its own distortions upon the story told.

For Mr Green, who is, despite his name, a rather colourless shop assistant, has fallen in love with Lara. When she disappears, he follows her through a doorway into another world where she may be a goddess. The action is at breakneck speed - it's a feature of Wolfe's comedy that incident crowds upon, leads directly into, incident, and only at those moments when Mr Green may be assumed to be relatively sane does the pace slow to allow any sense of time passing.

In *Free Live Free*, Wolfe fashioned a scene in a mental hospital that could have come straight from a Thorne Smith novel. Now, in another comedy that revolves around mental instability, the impetus again seems to owe something to Smith's work *Rain in the Doorway* springs to mind. But he has made something from it that is uniquely his own, for there is a level of unease, a questioning of our assumptions and an undermining of our attitudes that make this, on any but a superficial level, a disturbing book to read.

It is not, to be honest, Wolfe at his very best. There are passages where he seems to be coasting, and the work on the other side of the doorway could have been far more intently and interestingly explored. We get glimpses of talking dolls, political agitators, a curiously deserted and isolated hotel, and above all a society in which men die on the point of orgasm. But that is all we get, glimpses, suggestions and hints of what lies beneath, what ties it all together, but no thorough exploration. And it is a wonderful creation that demands more thorough investigation. Still, for all this carping, you can't keep a good storyteller down, and Wolfe certainly knows how to spin an enchanting tale.

NEVERNESS - David Zindell
(Grafton, 1989, 444pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

IT IS MY OCCASIONAL LUCK TO OPEN A book and know, within a few lines, that I've hit upon something rare and precious. *Neverness* is such a novel, and having said that, I'm stuck with the problem of distilling my rapture

and total immersion in the text into several hundred well-chosen words which convey the exquisite flavour of this novel, and have you running for the bookshop just as fast as you can go. Fesh, well, I like a challenge.

On the most basic level, Zindell has created a diverse and astonishing society whose intelligentsia are entirely preoccupied with the nature of time and mortality. A society of pilots and scribes and all the infrastructure they require, set on a planet of ice and snow; analyse it minutely, and the whole thing seems vaguely improbable, but it works, take my word for it. It feels right. Or, one might say that the novel is the story of Mallory Ringes, a novice pilot, told in the first person, with the consequence that one sees the world from a pilot's point of view, working through his time as a novice to the moment when ... but of course, Mallory isn't any old pilot, and he also happens to be one of the more objectionable narrators I've encountered. His efforts to learn some humility are an entertaining side-light, investing the novel with an engaging kind of humanity.

Or, one could say that this is a novel about mathematics, mathematics as a language, mathematics as a way of moving through time and space. I'm no physicist, and I have to confess that on the ordinary level, I don't understand the majority of concepts offered in this novel; it is a measure of Zindell's writing that, whilst I was reading *Neverness*, I felt I did. The Solid State Entity made perfect sense, so did the number storms, and the fear of being caught in an endless decision tree, not to mention the idea of mental maths being used to propel a ship. At a distance, I'm not so sure, but I know that I have only to pick up the book, and it will all make perfect sense once again. And more than that, it makes beautiful prose. It is rare to find someone who can write "scientific" science fiction, and invest it with the literary qualities so prized by those who live out on the borders between genre and mainstream. This novel can explain to the non-scientific why some people regard mathematics as beautiful in a way that no mathematician adequately can in any amount of non-fiction.

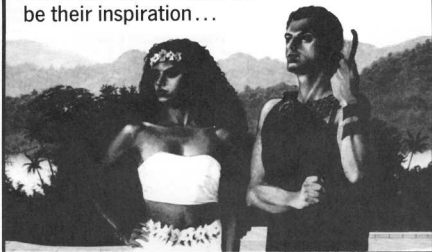
As you may now have gathered, I rate *Neverness* pretty highly. The cover proclaims it as "the science fiction masterpiece". I doubt I would be quite so definitive, but it is certainly a masterpiece. It is a shame however, that the blurb writer felt unable to let us mere readers find this out for ourselves, and insisted on telling us the whole story, and I seen virtually everything bar the final document, and that includes the first major mystery of the novel. I can't think how Grafton's editorial department can countenance this flagrant breach of the function of a blurb, but there you are. Do yourselves a favour, get straight into the book, skip the blurb.

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