

Vector

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Issue 153

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association



- Broken Bubbles: the fiction of Philip K Dick ●
- Lewis Shiner & Greg Bear Interviewed ●
- Who Remembers... Patrick Moore's SF ●

Vector

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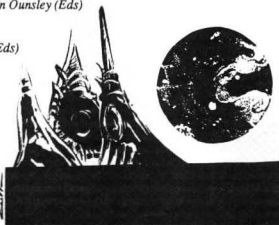
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Cover photograph of Philip K Dick, courtesy of Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Photograph of Lewis Shiner on page 11, courtesy of Lewis Shiner.

Photograph of Greg Bear on page 9, courtesy of Victor Gollancz Ltd.

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Welcome to the last *Vector* of the 1980s.... And where does that leave us? In the 90s how will we remember the 80s? To see that, we need to see where we are now, at the very end of the decade, to see the platforms that might be built upon in the next few years. As I see it, the 80s have been too long to be considered as a perfect whole, but there have been features recently which offer clues about the future.

We have been through a period of hype based around one novel, *Neuromancer*, but in the main all that cyberpunk has left us with in the UK is the concept of "William Gibson - Superstar", the disturbing news that John Shirley may be quitting the genre, and Charles Stross telling all who will listen about a *soi-disant* "Technogoth" movement in Britain. And yet, I'm not entirely opposed to this hype because it has brought some very interesting writers to my attention. These are writers who have been linked with cyberpunk, but in general are so much more than that, who don't fit categories easily. In the 90s I expect great things from Lewis Shiner, Pat Cadigan, Paul DiFillippo, Richard Kadrey, and Marc Laidlaw. They are writing hard SF, Horror, Fantasy, mainstream... and making it exciting again.

In Britain we have a range of emerging writers who are well-versed in literature, and who are taking their SF and Fantasy away from the established formulae. Not only are they producing alternatives to the American traditions, but they are also developing new British styles, so that there is very little predictable about the next few years for these writers: Colin Greenland, Garry Kilworth, Gwyneth Jones, Geoff Ryman, Storm Constantine, Ian McDonald, Ian Banks, Mary Gentle and Paul J McAuley (to name but a few), except that they will be worth our considerable attention. Even further from the British "norm" are a couple of writers I came across recently: Martin Millar and Jeremy Clarke are both published by 4th Estate and write bizarre novels about a crazy low-life which takes in fragments from all directions and throws out vivid whole images which might be ourselves in a magic mirror.

I note also the resurgence of the short form. It has been said for years that collections and anthologies don't sell; yet now they are everywhere. Until recently the only outlet for short stories in the UK was *Interzone*, a magazine which I personally believe has lost all the interest it once had. I think back to the memorable stories by Richard Kadrey, Paul J McAuley, David Langford, Eric Brown, Geoff Ryman, Ian Watson, John Shirley, and a few others, to realise that the most recent of these was over two years ago, a dozen issues back. Most go back to issues in the early teens. Recently the most radical things appearing have been David Brin and Terry Pratchett, and most issues are an effort to read. I speak to too many people who read John Clute's reviews and Charles Platt's columns, and then, unless there is a story by a particularly favoured author, they put it back on the shelf.

The other side of this is the number of

EDITORIAL

By Kev McVeigh



Artwork by Kevin A. Cullen

authors getting short story collections published, particularly in the USA, from where I recently acquired collections by John Shirley, Connie Willis, Karen Joy Fowler, Pat Cadigan and Ian McDonald; whilst in Britain Mary Gentle, Scott Bradfield, Lucius Shepard, Leigh Kennedy, Howard Waldrop and Tanith Lee add to the list.

You will see then, that there a lot of writers I believe will help to maintain a healthy genre over the next few years, and there are others I have yet to read. There are bad signs too: the failings of *Interzone* as mentioned above; the proliferation of trilogies, tetralogies, interminologies... most of which take seven volumes to say less than would fit on a postage stamp (though Samuel R Delany, Gene Wolfe and a few others have produced worthwhile series); the formulaic nature of the majority of the paperbacks in WH Smith, etc; the ludicrous amounts some publishers will pay for crap Fantasy such as *The Dragonbone Chair*, that they then print in some bizarre size that fits no known bookshelf at a price equivalent to the GNP of Bolivia because they spent too much in the first place (and again, there is still good Fantasy from Tim Powers, Megan Lindholm, Storm Constantine etc); the absence of good quality criticism outside of John Clute, Colin Greenland and a couple of others.

This last point is something which has concerned me for a while; I believe that a thriving critical body is essential to a healthy genre, hence the ad in our last issue regarding the setting up of an Orbiter-type group

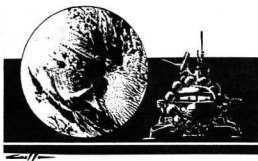
devoted to developing skills necessary for writing non-fiction. So far there are two people interested besides myself, which is disappointing. To work properly, at least one more member is necessary, so please write to me for details. Hopefully this will lead to a better standard for *Vector* in the future.

So far the response to the Parkinson-McVeigh *Vector* has been very good. It seems that most people like the new look, with only a couple of dissenters who don't actually explain what we are doing wrong for them, and so Boyd and I will continue as we have begun, making improvements as we see the need and/or develop the skills necessary.

The material is coming in steadily and I am particularly pleased to be able to use articles by writers who have not featured in the pages of *Vector* before, as well as by established novelists, reviewers and critics. Hopefully we can continue to give new writers their first tastes of fame and fortune (though no money, sadly!). In the next few issues we hope to have articles by or about Colin Greenland, Kim Newman, Mary Gentle, Paul J McAuley, Michael Moorcock and others. There is such a wealth of talent in British SF that, if Boyd and I can keep up what feels to me an amazing success (I was terrified about the first issue), then *Vector* will be the magazine to read in the 1990s. Thanks to all those who have helped, or offered encouragement or articles etc, this looks possible. If you are interested in SF's progress through the 90s, stick around. ■

LETTERS

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Artwork by Kevin A Cullen

Firstly, held over from last issue....

Tree of Life....

Judith Hanna's critique of Pamela Zoline (V151) was a delight, not only for its imagery and metaphor (from billiards through hail-storms to pastoral), but for its clever analogic structuring which moved the essay from ordered appraisal to ethical comment and then on to an "entropically" disordered conclusion, her text disintegrating into "scribbled hints".

It's worth pausing, however, on this Tree of Life trope. In her essay, as in Zoline's story, the Tree is regarded chiefly in its genetic aspect - genes, like sub-nuclear particles, playing a kind of Russian roulette in a no-man's land lying between causality and chaos. So viewed the Tree, producing "off-spring of compounded improbabilities", may for a time exhibit buds of unusual order, but such a "vanishing improbability" is not worth betting on. There is yet no certain exemption, as Shelley wrote, "From chance, and death, and mutability"; or from what Gerard Manley Hopkins described as a Heraclitean Fire in which "million fueled, nature's bonfire burns on" until "world's wildfire leave but ash".

On the other hand, a near-universal framing icon common to shamans and mystics, poets and painters, is the Tree of Life as image and symbol of a structured and enduring renaissance - enduring (anomalous word) perhaps atemporally in defiance of what may in the processes of time come "spiralling down like eddies of dust". In religious literature there is the Tree standing eternally in the New Jerusalem at the apocalyptic end of time; and in genetic/mythopoeic vein there is the Tree of Jesse, sprung from ancestral sleeping loins, but crowned in a theophany. Hopkins transfigures "ash" and "matchwood" to "immortal diamond", and sees through his "Ash-boughs" a regenerative flow between "heaven" and "earth".

From mundane base to crown the ascent of the Tree symbolises passage from "earth" to "heaven". Climbing the Tree (or its analogues - Pillar, Ladder, Cosmic Mountain) in many mythologies represents substitution of one mode of consciousness for another. Consciousness related to the Tree's crown and manifesting an active and often intense awareness may perceive a "reality" different from that which is perceived at its roots. When such poets as Blake and Traherne wrote out of experience of what Blake called

the "Divine Human Imagination" and Traherne the "Inward Work", they conjured up perspectives attained by the exercise of "tree-top" or "mountain-top" faculties. In the light of what is sometimes termed "cosmic consciousness", apprehensions of space and time may become radically altered. Blake wrote of being raised "Upon the chariots of the morning, Contracting or Expanding Time." Traherne wrote that "...in the Mind an endless Space / Doth nat'ally displace its face". Our own familiar "sense of wonder" can on occasion at least claim cousinship.

Two particularly striking employments of the Tree archetypes in contexts of elevated consciousness are Barrington Bayley's story "The Ur-plant" (Goethe's *urpflanze*), in which, as the arboreal, dextric, multiple appearances of the Plant are made to bloom, "the machine becomes what it sees - and it saw a god!". What then falls from far above is not "eddies of dust" but "a gift", a "fecundation", a "golden, fermenting haze". In Robert Holdstock's *Zenith* anthology story "Time of the Tree" (a variation on a time-illusory/metamorphic episode in *Lavondyss*) the arboreal perception is that of "some slumbering god". In both of these instances there is an imaginal and anatomical coincidence of Tree and Man, exemplifying the Goethean concept that every creature "is only a tone or shade in one great harmony"; exemplifying also the fact that a great deal of very interesting SF and Fantasy currently concerns itself with holistic (man-inclusive and man-interactive) and even trans-temporal images of the universe, or universes.

A "closed" mechanistic universe is ultimately imprisoning and possesses only the certainty of a final state of disorder. Varieties of "open" and multidimensional models in which mind is an integral and operative component are explored in such books as David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* and are reflected in science fictional imaginings as varied as James Blish's approach (apocalyptic) in *A Clash of Cymbals*, Ian Watson's (fantastical) in *Queen Magic, King Magic*, and Brian Aldiss's (wittily acerbic) in such stories as "Oh for a Closer Brush with God".

All this is not only apposite to Tree of Life symbolism, but leads me up to take up, more or less supportively, one thread of argument in Cecil Nurse's article in V151. None of the fictions I have just cited are likely to advance thought or debate on how applied science might make or mar our planet's future. Yet,

however and whatever definitions argued, consensus would I suppose allot them honoured places at appropriate points along the SF spectrum. They all read admirably, and they all direct imagination and thought towards areas where various sciences other than applied science are either central or peripheral. But there is also imaginative energy of a high order operative in many novels where extrapolations from current applications of science - technological, political, military - are thematically dominant and realistically treated, even though there may be other levels of symbolism or metaphor present in them. I'm thinking of such novels as Pohl's *Man Plus*, Dick's *The Penultimate Truth*, or Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*.

Cecil Nurse writes (for me acceptably): "Science fiction is about the imagination, and imagination is real... Our imaginations shape the world..." In arguing against negatively-aspected fragmentation of the image of what, in the dictionary's prime meaning of the word, is a *catholic* genre, I take the liberty of both remoulding and expanding that message. Science fiction *manifests* the imagination *specifically yet diversely oriented*, and imagination is real... Our imaginations shape the world - to say nothing of the universe, as some physicists and metaphysicians appear now to suppose.

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Imago Imagery

Stopping momentarily to deprecate Dave Langford's unkind demolition of Philip E High (literary overkill - the poor chap's quite harmless, it's merely *Boy's Own Paper* SF), I would like to thank LJ Hurst for opening my eyes to a whole new vision of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy.

I too received Imago for review (for *Critical Wave*) and viewed it as I did the first two parts of the story: as the fascinating unfolding of a new and superior lifeform subsuming, absorbing and replacing humankind.

Hurst is right in a way: so skillfully does Butler tell her tale through Oankali eyes that one can be blinded to the sub-plot - the heedless destruction of humankind by a race which, though different, is still a usurper and a destroyer.

Hurst, however, pussyfoots out of direct accusation by using the (strictly correct in that the Oankali are not humans) term "mis-

anthropy" to define Butler's heedless espousal of Oankali philosophy. To be honest, Butler is preaching *racism* in it's most virulent, Hitlerian form - the enslaving, neutering and concentration-camping, and ultimately the total destruction or transportation to another planet, of the entire human race.

This, of course, poses a most interesting question, for Octavia Butler is black: is she recapitulating her African peoples' treatment by pre-Wilberforcean whites, or is she preaching some black revenge upon post-Wilberforcean whites?

Without considering the genesis of *Imago* - that is, the preceding novels *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites* - one may be left facing this dichotomy. It is, however, my belief that the message they give us is that what is being told here is the unavoidable clash of two totally dissimilar races - neither of them inherently superior or inferior. Butler gives her Oankali a racial-preservation drive stronger than that of her versions of humanity - and here indeed I quarrel with her, for I cannot believe that we would in fact crumble and degenerate in the way she depicts.

To be honest, I found *Xenogenesis* gripping as a story - taking it, in other words, at face value. Digging below the surface, Hurst gives me a new slant, but following it up I reach different conclusions from him. I think she has deliberately, or from some shortcoming in her own psyche, sold humanity short: so enamoured is she of her own Oankali invention that she can't bear to see them bested.

Perhaps LJ Hurst can be prevailed upon to give us "The Alternate Xenogenesis", in which the humans either come out on top, or reach an acceptable *modus vivendi* with the Oankali, or end up exiling them to Mars. Or, perhaps, we have to face it: mankind really is inferior, Butler is right, we are blinkered by our own shortcomings and some Supermankind - alien or mutated right here - will come along and simply displace us. Meanwhile the debate is thrown open: how should we read Butler?

Ken Lake

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Reviews

I appreciate the attention I'm given in *V152*, but surely this must be the first time *Vector* has ever run a review of advertising material. What the hugely erudite Ken Lake makes of me or my work I've little interest in, particularly as he deigns to think he can judge a work not even by its cover but by its associated material.

I know any number of people have commented before, but it is a lovely looking *Vector*. My only long-running gripe is with the Reviews section, which, as ever, seems to run a one-third SF to two-thirds Horror/Fantasy diet. That doesn't "open up" the boundaries of SF, it merely ropes in two more genres and ignores the fact that it is the British Science Fiction Association. I wonder if anyone has ever asked how many people leave the BSFA because they find too often it isn't dealing with SF? Why not deal

with some of the new American SF novels as they come out? It's possible now, particularly as the specialist bookshops stock many of them. It's also ludicrous that every review should be 300 words long. The essence of works by writers like Lucius Shepard can't be got by in 300 words.

Besides which, I am (I think justifiably) annoyed that Paul Kincaid should run the Lake piece. It isn't a review. If Ken Lake wants to sound off about the PR behind *Chung Kuo* (which he's perfectly justified in doing) he should do so in a letter in *Matrix* or an article there. But the fault lies squarely with Paul. He should know better.

Ken Lake should try working out sometime how much it would cost for four people (me, my wife, and my two children) to travel about China for several months, particularly when one would have to give up their job and when both had huge overdrafts after converting an old Victorian house. But that's really to miss the point. When did anyone ever complain that a writer hadn't travelled in time, hadn't been to other planets, hadn't been President Lincoln in another incarnation, hadn't murdered anyone, hadn't lived in the 11th Century? - to give but a few instances. Nonetheless it's still the one question I get asked regularly. So Lake's "Don't confuse me with facts" is a nonsense.

Oh yes, and there is one SF novel in which the Chinese have taken over America (not the world) and that's Fred Pohl's recent *Black Star Rising* (1985). But try finding any thing truly Chinese in the book. Ken Lake might try backing up his "[not true]" with solid fact. Even the Chinese novelist Lin Yutang when he wrote his one SF novel, *The Unexplored Island* (William Heinemann, 1955) chose to write about Greece after World War III.

David Wingrove

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Ken's review in V152 is too much Paul's department, so I don't feel qualified to reply to this. As for the length of the reviews and their subject matter: many SF readers are also interested in Fantasy and Horror - the genre boundaries are often blurred anyway. If you look through the Reviews section, you'll more than likely find that it is generally well-balanced along these lines, that each book under review is of some interest to an audience with a common yet varied taste. American imports we would have to buy, pushing our budget farther than we can find acceptable. If we can get American publishers to send us review copies, we'll gladly use them. And we would gladly have longer reviews (it's 400 words, not 300, by the way), but this would then mean having more pages, which we can't afford to do, or cutting the Horror/Fantasy content, which we don't want to do and would put us in the situation of having to actually define SF.

And talking of definitions...

- BP

Internal Consistency

Perhaps "internally consistent" is better than Ken Lake's "believable" as a requirement of SF. Who said fiction had to be believable? Certainly not my dictionary. Okay, so much SF is plausible, but there's a lot which isn't and doesn't pretend to be. Surely what matters is the reader's willingness to suspend his or her disbelief and this can best be achieved by the writer's work being internally consistent. Nor does fiction have to be literate or structured - good fiction, yes, but fiction doesn't have to be good. Having said this, I did like the distinction Ken makes between ordinary fiction and SF. Obviously, though, the next question is how different does something have to be classed as SF?

AP Mills

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And again, from KV Bailey...

Corrections

I thought David Pringle's piece on the origins of *IZ*, a unique contribution to the documentation of British initiative and achievement in SF publishing, and *Vector* is to be complemented on making it available.

I like the illustrations to my Dante article, while indeed not quite sure how appropriate they were; but why did I have such a strong sense of *deja vu*? Could I possibly have seen them, particularly the heading one, somewhere before? Mike Rollins is a truly talented artist and the reprise of his drawing from *V151* for the page in *V152* devoted to David Wingrove's novel was a nice use of graphic motif.

I do have one small worry about my Dante article. The last sentence, which is important in that it pulls together and finalises strands of argument and evidence, had somehow got so misprinted that its omissions and additions deprived it of any meaning. On the copy sent to you the sentence reads, as it should have been printed:

It indicates also that literary and imaginative lines thought by CS Lewis to have become, in their descent from Dante, irreconcilably divergent do continue to find SF and fantasy many innovative mergings and meeting places.

[p 18, *V152*]

Pity - but partly my fault. The punctuation in my original (as above) was not immaculate and could have led to confusion. I guess, however, readers who read as far as that may have been able to construe what was meant.

KV Bailey

Apologies - but I must admit some confusion with the punctuation. I should have discussed this with you, and thus the fault lies squarely with me.

Apologies also to Erwin F Blom, Jim England, and Robert Gibson - too many letters and not enough space!

- BP

Broken Bubbles

Paul Kincaid examines the progress of Philip K Dick from mainstream to SF

In retrospect, it is not that difficult to see why Philip K Dick's mainstream novels, written in the 1950s, were not published at the time. They use words like "fuck"; they examine sexual relationships, often between couples whose liaisons would have been social anathema at the time anyway, between black and white, between different age groups; they question and condemn the social codes of the time. No, it would take a decade or more for these books to become publishable, but by then they were pushed into a bottom drawer and Dick had become categorised as a science fiction writer, and in the sixties and seventies it was difficult if not impossible for an SF writer to escape the ghetto and be recognised as a mainstream writer. We should be grateful that Dick did turn to SF, however, not only because he was so bloody good at it, but also because the popularity and critical acclaim he acquired has allowed the subsequent exhumation of these novels.

The latest to appear, *The Broken Bubble*, along with the first British hardback edition of one of his SF novels from the fag-end of one of his most prolific periods, the mid-to-late sixties, *Our Friends from Frolix 8*, provide an ideal opportunity to look at the

way the influence of the mainstream fiction stretched into the science fiction.

The Broken Bubble may have been among his earliest writings, but I consider it as one of the best books he ever wrote, alongside *Mary and the Giant*. Perhaps because, like *Mary*, and the best of his SF, such as *A Scanner Darkly*, it confronts issues and obsessions head on.

This novel was originally called "The Broken Bubble of Thisbe Holt", drawing attention to a very minor sub-plot, but one which provides the symbol for the rest of the book. Holt, a would-be entertainer, climbs naked into a clear plastic ball to be pushed around by businessmen letting their hair down after a convention. It is a humiliating action, which arouses the businessmen in ways she will not later satisfy. In a childish move to sublimate their lusts (and Dick often associates lust with childishness), the businessmen subsequently fill the bubble with garbage and push it out of the window of their hotel room, an event which has consequences for the other characters in the main plot. But essentially this is a story of bubbles of desire and humiliation, bubbles which are all broken during the course of the story.

Jim Briskin is a DJ on a local radio station in California during the early 50s who is suspended for refusing to play a tasteless advert for a used car dealer. During the period of his suspension Briskin, and his ex-wife, Patricia, become involved with a young married couple Art and Rachel Emmanuel, still in their teens and suffering the curfews and social disadvantages that young people suffered in that place at that time. It is outrage at these restrictions that first pulls Briskin into the orbit of the Emmanuels, and he draws Patricia in with him. But Briskin is attracted to the plain but cool and knowing Rachel, while Patricia gets involved in an affair with Art that is at first passionate and then violent. That their actions jeopardise both the growing reunion between Jim and Patricia and the new but fragile marriage of Art and Rachel is known to all four of them, but it is beyond their power to control their actions.

The novel is a very powerful and effective blend of social comedy and social criticism. Patricia and Art's madcap escape, meant to be a sexually charged experience, finishes with Art, still a child-man, spending a night out with the lads at a bowling alley while Patricia languishes in a dingy motel room



and ends up calling for Briskin to come and take her home. Jim and Rachel, meanwhile, circle each other endlessly, but while Rachel is a strong-willed individual who cannot abide any nonsense, Jim is unable to break through the social and moral ties that bind him. It is a notable feature of this book that the two female leads are far more strongly and sympathetically drawn than in practically all of Dick's science fiction.

Moving from the oppressive, sharply delineated world of California in the early fifties to the future where earth is ruled by a dictatorship of New Men with incredibly more powerful brains and Unusuals with psi powers, and where help for the downtrodden Old Men is coming in the shape of aliens from Frolix 8 led by the military adventurer Thors Provoni might seem an astonishing leap. In fact reading the two books together reveals an unexpected continuity.

Our Friends from Frolix 8 is not one of Dick's best novels. First published in 1970, it came when his work was trailing off from the mid-sixties heights of *Martian Time Slip*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and *Ubik*. It came in the same year as the distinctly lacklustre *A Maze Of Death*, and the only book to follow it was the very disappointing *We Can Build You* two years later, before the late flowering of his work was heralded in 1974 by *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*. In other words, *Frolix 8* comes from a time when he was winding down, and frankly the book shows a lack of the old creative spark. Not that it is a bad book, just not up to his usual standard. Though for that very reason it helps to display the mechanics of his creativity.

I suppose in common with just about everyone who grew up with the science fiction of Philip K Dick I quickly learned to spot his obsessions. Reality, that was the key to his work. Everything was about ontological doubt: drugs, twists in time, simulacra, madness all changed the world as we see it. We are



left desperately trying to make sense of a world which is liable to change at the drop of a hat.

All of that is in *Frolix 8*. There is a social inversion of the world we know; drugs are freely available at bars but alcohol is proscribed. There are the shifts in perspective brought about by use of alcohol. There are the differing world views that result from the extraordinary scientific and mathematical leaps made by the New Men. And there are the aliens who come along at the end of the book and literally change the world. But is that truly the core of what Dick is saying? After returning to his science fiction after reading the non-SF which predates it, I have started to change my mind about what is the key to his work.

In this future world, the domestic life of Nick Appleton and his wife, or later the scene when Nick and Charley watch the return of Provon on TV at the apartment of Ed and Elka Woodman, could come straight out of California in the 1950's. Appleton's break-up with his wife to go chasing after the younger Charley is very much a reflection of the affair between Patricia and Art in *The Broken Bubble*, and despite the future setting would seem to be in exactly the same moral light as that relationship from the fifties.

The scene in which Appleton is brought before the all-powerful political leader and telepath Willis Gram is simply unbeliev-

able if we are to accept the premise of the supposed setting: Gram would not allow Appleton such leeway, Appleton would not regard Gram so insouciantly. But in terms of a discussion about the social and moral concerns of the novel, a confrontation between Old Man and Unusual, it works with considerable dramatic power. Yet if this scene is pivotal, if indeed it deserves this dramatic power, it is because the key to the novel is Dick's social and moral concerns. What he is doing is following up on the subjects that were at the heart of his early mainstream books: people forced to the edge by the rules of the society they inhabit, people who transgress because being true to their own humanity must take precedence over the rules they break. There are consequences incurred, bubbles are indeed broken, but if they had failed to follow their nature, if they had not stepped beyond the borderline, then the consequences, at least in terms of their own humanity would have been worse. Thus the quartet of Briskin, Patricia, Art and Rachel all transgress, and pay the price, but by the end of the book they are better off for it. Thus Nick Appleton needs to assert his humanity by transgressing the rules, chasing after Charley in a moral framework, becoming associated with the outlawed Under Men in a political framework, taking alcohol on a personal level.

Oh, the questioning of reality is still there, but it is the tool he uses, not the subject he is

writing about. The characteristic shifts in reality that decorate Appleton's story are there to establish the reasons for his breaking of the rules, and to throw those transgressions into sharp dramatic relief. To make a strong story out of them by making it all extreme. And looking back through all his work, whether it's *Phil in VALIS* or *Fred/Bob in A Scanner Darkly*, *Ragle Gumm in Time Out of Joint* or *Rick Dekard in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, what is central is that the character is forced to question or transgress the rules, to question or transgress the "real" world.

If we take reality as normality, a consensus view of the world around us, as the set of rules by which we define our world, then the link between the two theses might be more clearly seen. In the social novels his characters are pushed to the edge and break the rules which hold the social world together. In the science fiction novels his characters are forced to the edge and break the rules which hold the real world together. And it is the science fiction which has grown out of the mainstream. ■

The Broken Bubble - Philip K Dick
[Gollancz, 1989, 246pp, £12.95]

Our Friends From Frolix 8

- Philip K Dick
[Kinnell, 1989, 211pp, £11.95]

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Interview with Lewis Shiner and Greg Bear

In June of this year Leeds University hosted a conference entitled "Fiction 2000", at which several noted critics including Professor Tom Shippey, Eric Rabkin, Van Ikin and George Slusser presented papers relating in the main to the cyberpunk phenomena, and in specific, to William Gibson's Neuromancer. Amongst the authors present were Geoff Ryman, Harry Harrison, Gregory Benford, Greg Bear and Lewis Shiner.

After the final session Charles Stross spoke to both Lewis Shiner and Greg Bear, two writers who came to prominence in the 1980s.

Can you give me some background details about your careers as writers?

BEAR: I sold my first story when I was 15, it was published when I was 16. I didn't sell anything for 5 years, then I started writing good stuff about 5 years after that... first novel published in 1979: *Hegira*. I've wanted to be a writer since I was about 7 or 8 years old; basically, I just never had a choice as to what I was going to be. And it was always going to be science fiction.

And what do you do apart from write?

BEAR: Nothing, just be a daddy and live a normal life.

SHINER: And be president of the SFWA.

BEAR: That's not a normal life.

SHINER: I'm actually pretty similar in terms of background. I started reading at 3, started writing about that same time. I started my first novel when I was 7, and started actually submitting stories to magazines when I was 12. Got my first sale when I was 26, and since then 50 short stories and 3 novels sold.

You've [Shiner] been cited as being involved in the Movement from very early days, contributing to *Cheap Truth* under the name Sue Denim, until Charles Platt ripped it off. Have you any thoughts on the matter? Were you associated with the Movement from its very beginnings or were you dragged in by Bruce Sterling?

SHINER: This is part of the paper I gave here. In brief what I said was that yes, there was a sense of a movement going on. I was in it in the sense that I've been in contact with Bruce in Austin since 1979, and been in workshops with him. Bruce was already in contact with John Shirley and Bill Gibson by mail, and they'd been exchanging arguments and ideas and so forth. I don't know to what extent I've really been part of the Movement.

I know I've argued with all those writers, and Rudy Rucker is also included. We've hammered out certain things we hold in

common: like believing in extrapolation, in near-future stories, the importance of taking technology seriously, looking on the positive side of technology - what it can do for us, how it can be addressed by real people - the business of using what I call the edges of ideas, which is how technology and stuff like that affects real people, gets into their daily lives; not just the idea of television but how we have video rentals on every corner: the everyday details that fall out of ideas. Bill Gibson came to Austin in 1982, and at that point there was a sense that we were all in this together.

Another aspect of it is that Bruce is a very canny marketing intelligence that was able use things like *Cheap Truth* to promote the Movement, to advertise for all of us, and I think that I enjoy writing criticism and *Cheap Truth* was an outlet for that. In the years that have passed I've come to realise that the little work I did for *Cheap Truth* was pretty much irrelevant; it was largely overshadowed by the revolution that I got involved in with Bruce.

Did you [Bear] find that your writing grew up in isolation, or were you part of any movement?

BEAR: I went to my first convention when I was 16, and like a good many SF writers I've been heavily associated with fandom, although more literary fandom than media fandom.

Did you have any sense of being part of a movement? Were there any contemporary writers you were working with?

BEAR: No, I was part of a tradition that went back at least 50 years. That was the tradition of hard SF; and also a lot of Fantasy, a lot of Horror. I've loved all of these things and I've tried to write Horror and science fiction. The first novel I finished was a fantasy, it might even be called Magic Realism today.

I rebel against the notion of movements, because I feel that every writer is a private individual who has to work within their own soul. That's the lonely, and there is a real urge amongst writers to get together in groups; there are some benefits to this - they can talk

to each other, they can workshop each other, they can help each other. I never liked workshops, but I'm doing it more now because I see all these enormous resources out there, people with incredible critical faculties who can firm up the writing. But I've always been a lone wolf, never liked joining even the boys scouts.

In my teens I got picked up by people like Bjo Trimble - I was an illustrator, as much as a writer, back then and got involved with certain groups of people in film and so on. I really wanted to be a special effects artist, and then I found out that was terribly hard work and I wasn't as good a sculptor as I thought, so I went off into what I'd always been primarily associated with - the storytelling - but I did have association with people who were mentors, and there's quite a few of them out there, though I wouldn't say they were literary mentors; but they helped me get into different things, go places and meet different people.

Can I ask the two of you how the technical underpinning of your writing manifests itself, how the hard SF tropes underlie it? I've noticed Lew, for example, in the beginning of *Deserted Cities of the Heart* you cite a fair amount of technical research, particularly on helicopters; while it seems obvious, Greg, that most of your novels fall within the category of hard SF to the extent that most of them have a fair amount of hard science underlying them. Can I ask you how that technical underpinning developed into the fiction? Was it there from the start?

SHINER: I think, based on what I think you're asking... that the fiction comes to me in terms of scenes; generally the first stuff I see is interaction between characters. The characters then develop more and more as I see the relationships between those characters. From those relationships develop actions, from those actions develops a plot, from which develops a novel. However, I feel that anything that plot touches which is verifiable, I will try to verify. I will do immense amounts of research, but I enjoy doing that; that is almost the reason why this

is the profession that I've chosen, that I will sometimes get into the plots something I want to learn more about. I will pursue a particular area of research for a novel because that increases its intrinsic interest.

I wanted to learn a little bit more about quantum physics, so I put a lot of quantum physics in *Frontera*. I read a fair amount about it and I tried to be very selective about what I chose to use and what I didn't choose to use. It's a very controversial area: you get somebody like Heinz Pegells who is absolutely dismissive about some theorems.

BEAR: There are some very interesting theories and I wouldn't just dismiss them.

SHINER: Yeah, and I found it interesting but I wasn't going to go all the way. I had to take into account that if I was going to listen to somebody like Fritzjof Capra, then on the other hand I have to listen to what Pegells has to say to refute him.

So your writing is character driven: the science speaks through them afterwards?

SHINER: I think that any time you have characters set in a real world, to make that real world convincing you have to do some research; if that real world involves science, you will have to do some science, and you have to understand not just the nuts-and-bolts of theorems and mathematics and so forth. I think one of the passages in *Frontera* that struck me as best, that I felt worked well, that got across a particular mood, was one of the characters doing some math on the computer, and talking about physical beauty - from that character's perspective - of the way these equations were formed. If you don't appreciate the fact that a mathematician gets off on the actual equations themselves, can look at those equations and see beauty in it - in fact you will hear mathematicians talking about the fact that if there's not an eloquence to the way that equations are written out, then there's probably something wrong with the theory - getting into that kind of head, the head of the mathematician, makes the story work.

So technology is manifest in feedback from the "edge of ideas" into the characters?

SHINER: Yes, and it all comes back down to the characters. In order to portray a scientist convincingly you have to read science.

BEAR: I've written all kinds of stuff, and to be classified as a hard science fiction writer is a reduction in terms of whatever evolution I'm undergoing. I started out writing Fantasy and all sorts, and also a little SF; I read a bit of hard SF, and now I write a bit of hard SF. I've got a number of literary fathers in science fiction - Ray Bradbury is one - but I've always fluctuate back and forth.

When I write in the Fantasy mode, I try to do the most rigorous kind of mythological or myth-making and self-conscious stimulating kind of Fantasy. When I write hard science fiction it too comes from similar sources, but it's going to have an underpinning that's

somewhat more intellectually convincing than Fantasy; it's going to be more socially important, I think. I take the most important, not personal, but social themes that I can see, things that I see happening in society, and try to feed it back into society in terms of hard science fiction, while deep personal things I will put in terms of Fantasy. Sometimes the two will overlap. But very seldom will I try to make a major social statement in terms of Fantasy; I think Fantasy is there for the joy of playing, for the literary artistry, for mythological statements. When I do the hard SF, I research.

And yet it looked as though there were some hard science ideas, in the shape of quantum mechanics, in *The Infinity Concerto* and *The Serpent Mage*.



"We've had some very good writers and lost them, because science fiction eats its authors."

- Greg Bear

BEAR: The weirdest stuff in quantum mechanics is far weirder than the strangest stuff I could invent in Fantasy. *The Serpent Mage* and *The Infinity Concerto* are arguably SF but may not be in our personal universe.

SHINER: To take the opposite there, for example, *Frontera* is equivalent to some of the Fantasy stuff in which quantum mechanics is the magical system. If you are going to write about Mexico, you need to understand what to then constitutes their system, what are their rules; and likewise, if you start to think of quantum mechanics as a magical system, there are rules that those shamans operate under, and that's how I approach it.

There's a certain irony to that; I consider everything I've ever written to be fantasy, everything in the Fantasy and SF genre is fantasy, but if you start to write Fantasy, you

still have to play by the rules. Any Fantasy writer will tell you that internal consistency is as important in Fantasy as in SF.

BEAR: But Fantasy has an element of the dream-like, and the dream can play a role. Now I'm not either liberated enough or foolish enough - I'm not sure which - to allow the dream element to take charge, so I don't want to end up doing anything like David Lindsay. These are real visionaries, and my Fantasy will only have moments of vision.

But to get back to the Movement, and cyberpunk....

SHINER: The whole business of movements is just a marketing handle, but I don't really want to talk about that. The last people you should be talking to about the Movement are the people who are said, or thought to be, in such a movement. You want to talk to me and Greg about cyberpunk, but we were both on the periphery of it; this is one of the arguments I've had with Sterling. Sterling has the real determination to try and control the Movement as perceived, and in fact the genuine literary movement, which somehow this seems to have become out of Sterling's attempt to create one, has to come with the perception of the outside. You cannot control that perception from outside; they will decide what to make of you, and a completely artificial attempt at this is going to fail unless it somehow manages to persuade people on the outside to take it seriously. At that point, Sterling loses control of it, and Sterling can no longer say what cyberpunk is, which is why what happened in cyberpunk in many ways is going to exclude Sterling.

BEAR: Sterling lost control when TSR came to him and said: "We want to do a game called 'Cyberpunk'."

SHINER: He had the chance then to establish a precedent. If he had then taken money from TSR, he would have had some kind of real control over the word. But he stumbled over the vision of it.

BEAR: Well I gave him an option which I thought was politically defensible, which was that he takes the money, keeps half of it, and gives half of it to the SFWA Emergency Medical Fund; that way he's distributed it to charity, has got some kind of control over this game they're going to do, and Sterling says "that's a brilliant idea!" - but he still couldn't come round to doing it.

And so he lost control of even the marketing concept?

SHINER: I would basically say that in fantasy TSR had done a trademark on the name; the closest they could find was the title of *Mirrorshades*, the anthology sub-title. That gave Bruce some kind of tentative court-room status. What Bruce could have done is trademarked the term early on, but-

There was originally a story called "Cyberpunk", wasn't there?

SHINER: By Bruce Bethke, which came out early in '83. True. Bethke could have come out and made himself a court case, but the fact was that by appearing on *Mirrorshades* it obviously belonged to the Movement. As a matter of fact there's a TSR cyberpunk game out, and their modules are by Walter Jon Williams... the thing is that the writers themselves need to forget about that kind of stuff and just go back to writing.

BEAR: Bill [Gibson] has got this to overcome; and it happens that science fiction readers and critics sometimes eat their young. They adore the first few works of an author, and that can almost destroy the author.

SHINER: Orson Scott Card.

BEAR: Yes. You know what happened to him! He went to a peak of suddenly making tens of thousands of dollars for books and then having them fail for reasons not necessarily of his own making.

SHINER: Look at Barry Longyear, who had to go and dry out from severe alcoholism which was exacerbated by the SF.

BEAR: The worst thing that this amorphous monster can do is say that an author is the new Robert Heinlein; it's the kiss of death. Look at Joe Haldeman; it hurt him. Spider Robinson still hasn't overcome it. David Palmer and other people... that's also what they did to Ted Sturgeon. They adored Sturgeon so much in the 50s and early 60s that he just went off... his whole career fell apart. We've had some very good writers and lost them, because science fiction eats its authors.

And Gibson's in danger of being a victim of his own success?

BEAR: I don't think so: he's pretty well controlled. He started out pretty old. He's got a family, and shows no signs of being terribly impressed by all this crap. But it's irritating.

Now that was an interesting feature of the Movement: in the past, in the 50s and 60s, it was certainly normal for SF writers to begin breaking through into print at a comparatively young age. You, Greg, say that you sold your first story at 15; Michael Moorcock sold his first novel at 18 or 19. Then during the 70s, certainly in the UK, there was a tendency for writers to be older when they broke through. I've noticed that members of the Movement do seem to be older than their predecessors when they achieve breakthrough.

SHINER: That's more common throughout the field. There's a statistical survey out next month in the *New York Review*, and they try to put the statistics down confirmed that the average age for the first sale is getting older and the average age of first novel sales is getting older still, and my number one reason is simply that there's no room at the top; there's only a limited number of niches, and it takes much longer for someone to get the attention of an editor and break in.

I'm thoroughly convinced that a good story is no longer enough to get you broken into SF; I see friends writing stories that I know are very good work and they can't get the attention of the editors. (I'd like to see this in print because I'm now on the other side, where I have to decide whether a story is good enough to sell, because editors aren't going to do that for me.) The first time an editor sees a genuinely good story they will assume it's an accident. The second time they may notice, and the third time they may turn it down with regrets, and on the fourth really good story they see they might actually buy. It takes that long, and that much persistence, for somebody to break in.

BEAR: That's pretty common with my experience. I started out before you did, but my novel took four years to sell. That was because there was an awful lot of resistance to a basically not terrible novel. Michael Bishop said of that fact that this novel didn't sell for three or four years that this was a real shock in this field, because there was much worse stuff being published. I'm not sure how you explain that.

SHINER: Well, first of all let me take exception to the use of "worse stuff". The fact is that a lot of stuff that you and I despise will still sell well despite the fact that it's crap.

BEAR: It might not be crap. We might be wrong.

SHINER: But that's the point; we're not wrong. It's just a question of taste, that's all.

BEAR: It's the publishers' fault; the field is glutted. We've been through a couple of gluts-

SHINER: And there are enormous numbers of people who want to start writing, and so many writers who are established in ways that have nothing to do with their literary abilities, but publishers know can deliver the same sort of product year after year. These are people who will work for the same advance for book after book. And SF publishing companies love this sort of writer. They never have to take any chances. They pay the same advance, they get the same returns, and sell to the same audience who buys the book over and over. And this kind of thing occupies so much of a publisher's schedule that it's very difficult for a new writer to break through that, because every time you take on a new writer, you have to take a chance. It means there's some other established name that you're not going to buy, to put this new guy in.

Can you account for the fact that in the UK now we have publishers and a couple of magazines who are actively searching out new authors to print?

SHINER: You hear a lot of this; you also hear a lot of publishers claiming they like to print new writers and sometimes they do. Gardner Dozois was listening to anything from new writers, from my personal experience;

but I've seen good stories go across his desk and get rejected.

BEAR: Even Ellen Datlow has rejected stories sometimes, to her regret. And Ellen is also looking for good new authors.

SHINER: All these editors tell themselves that they're looking for stories by new writers, but they read new writers differently to stories by established authors.

BEAR: Of course they do. They're only human.

SHINER: This is my point: these editors may be making all these claims about wanting to bring on new talent, and they may be sincere, but it's also a politically correct thing to say, because SF guys have this tradition of doing it; and maybe they are, maybe they're not. Surely it is a good thing to do, eventually the old masters are, and let's face it, quickly dying off. Heinlein has gone, Herbert has gone, Clarke is in shaky health, and everybody gets to move up as these guys go.

BEAR: It's very much like the Chinese bureaucracy, except in this case it's benevolent. We revere our older people; we may criticise them, say they're not writing as well as they used to, but we still owe a lot to them, and we're sorry to see them go. Nevertheless there is an ecological truth about this, when they pay Heinlein \$1m and promote it with another \$3m, and it sells about \$500,000 worth; that is an enormous ecological niche and it is taking that chance away from another writer.

SHINER: Only in a cashflow sense, in the long run.

BEAR: In the long run they may get the money back, but in the immediate future it crimps the cashflow a lot.

Staying with ecological niches, do you think that the burgeoning development of Fantasy since the 1960s has been at the expense of science fiction, or has it actually expanded the market?

SHINER: As far as I can tell, it seems to be a different audience. I hope this doesn't sound too sexist, but at SF cons when I first started going, there were never any women there. You have a much larger female audience now, partly because Fantasy has brought them in.

BEAR: That really started with Star Trek.

SHINER: That's as maybe, but I think you do have a different audience, and it's not an us or them situation. The increased amount of Fantasy has just brought an increased readership.

BEAR: Personally, I'm bored with mediocre Fantasy, but I don't see it eating into my readership because I don't think that people who read mediocre Fantasy are all that interested in real hard SF. They're not even

terribly interested in my Fantasy, they want the same thing as a mystery reader or a romance reader: they want *genre*. They want stuff that gives them the feeling of what they've read before. They're not sophisticated enough readers in any sense of the word.

It's a genre based on symbols rather than on ideas.

BEAR: That doesn't matter. It's a genre based on pure emotions, and they want those emotions to be aroused again and again.

SHINER: A reader of Carole Nelson Douglas or someone else who's writing that kind of Fantasy probably wouldn't want to read one of my books.

BEAR: Sometimes they'll cross over. I do get letters from Fantasy readers who say that they just dipped into *The Infinity Concerto* and sometimes they're quite astonished. But I don't think they go out looking for weird original Fantasy, because there's very little of it out there. They're also not going to go out and look for the greats of the past, the adult Fantasy series that Ballantine put out years ago sold very few copies. They're much sought after now, but they sold poorly then.

So they're just going to take the *Lord of the Rings* clones?

BEAR: It isn't even *Lord of the Rings* clones. There's such a diffusion down from Tolkien that we've ended up with quest novels. They should just call them "Quest" novels instead of Fantasy: the young-apprentice-meets-up-with-the-old-wizard-gets-told-to-make-this-mysterious-trek-and-you-will-achieve-knowledge.

Joseph Campbell could have explained that very easily.

SHINER: It's called the Plot Coupon system. I forget who said that, it wasn't Langford, but it was someone in one of Langford's 'zines who came up with that brilliant line.

BEAR: The fact is, that if you look at this from a really high level, it's just how all myths were made. The old story-teller would sit down, and tell the same old stories again and again to different audiences, because they had learnt to know what would get them a better meal. You can bet that *The Odyssey* was hashed out over several hundred years at least and several different story-tellers probably picked it up and passed it on in their own way. The only difference is that these books get pulped, they don't have a chance to go on. There's no oral tradition anymore. It all gets more and more diffuse and fades out like a river coming to ground.

It's the appeal of the familiar then, against the new.

BEAR: Yes, people don't like the new. They actively resent it.

SHINER: That's common everywhere. Look at network television: there's a strong resist-

ance to anything that will shock. When I talk to people about this, and some of my best friends are this way, they say I come home from a hard day's work, I want something I don't have to pay any real attention to. I can turn my mind off. To me that isn't relaxation.

BEAR: You're a different type, you see. The person who goes out to do a hard day's work is so exhausted by the time they come home, they've exerted all their mental efforts on simply keeping a job and doing it well enough.

SHINER: Yes, I've done that. I've worked construction for years.

BEAR: You're not a normal individual in that sense. And when you worked construction, you weren't expending you're entire



"I'm thoroughly convinced that a good story is no longer enough to get you broken into SF"
- Lewis Shiner

mental effort on the job.

SHINER: There are plenty of people who are not working construction, who are intellectual, but they still don't want to read anything challenging.

BEAR: Well, that is despicable. If they're not digging in the dirt, they're slogging through office politics or whatever.

SHINER: Yes, but what I'm saying is that there's an attitude that escapism comes from stuff that numbs you're brain. The only thing that allows me to escape is something that challenges because my synapses have to be stimulated for me to get involved with a thing. I can't watch network television.

Does this aim for a challenge directly

stimulate or influence your fiction?

SHINER: Yeah, this is a major concern for me. I want my books to get in people's faces. I want them to shake and assault them.

BEAR: And there must be an audience to appreciate them or else Greg Benford, or myself, or you wouldn't make as much money.

SHINER: There's no question in my mind that Greg [Benford] is after the same thing. There's no complacency in Greg's work at all, or he wouldn't write the stuff that in some places is openly offensive to people's ideas. And more power to him.

BEAR: Well, that's what I want to do, but offend them in a traditional way.

So we have a paradox, in that both of you are fighting on the same side of the barricades, in writing challenging, innovative fiction, and yet you're both come to it from virtually opposite directions. Greg is a kind of loner in the tradition of hard SF, and Lew is a sensibly peripheral member of the Movement.

BEAR: No, I *evolved* into hard SF; I started writing Fantasy. I made a commercial decision to finely tune a variety of different enthusiasms into the area that I felt I could most express myself in. And that's a difficult philosophy. I could be a Horror writer right now, but I wouldn't enjoy it nearly as much, it's not nearly as intellectually stimulating. I wrote one Horror novel, and it was considered science fiction and so that told me something: "You probably are best suited to SF."

SHINER: I see an attempt in your question to show Greg as a Lone Wolf and me as part of the Movement, as if the Movement had been there all my life, that I was born and bred and came out of it. I'd been writing actively for years before I got involved with Sterling and those people.

BEAR: It's an insult to refer to someone like Lew as a sideline of cyberpunk, as if their career depended upon it.

SHINER: I'd already sold stories to major markets before I got involved with Bruce, before there was a Movement. I had stories in F&SF.

BEAR: Cyberpunk was an attempt to describe something that was already happening, from a group of people who did not grow up together and did not suck from the same teat. Cyberpunk fails as an active description of what's happening really. It only accurately describes one book.

SHINER: Which is why, at a cyberpunk conference, *Neuromancer* was so much in discussion. If your sitting down to write a paper on the cyberpunk idea, you ask what's the canon. *Neuromancer* is it. Which is why, in my paper I felt I had to draw a distinction between what I feel is a legitimate literary movement, and cyberpunk, and then

from the terms of "Fiction 2000". They're three different topics.

BEAR: I have been characterised far too often in recent years, as one of the aspiring dinosaurs. I'm not here to make anybody complacent, least of all literary critics, I'm here to blow people away if I can possibly do so.

SHINER: And if you want to talk about a congruency of ambitions, you and Sterling are actually very similar writers. You're both, leaving Fantasy aside, very much at home in SF, you're grounded in SF. You like hard, extrapolative SF; both of you aspire to being top of that particular heap.

BEAR: Sterling has expressed great admiration for the career of Arthur C Clarke, which isn't something you'd expect from a so-called denigrator of the past. But what he was doing was establishing a literary rhetoric in *Cheap Truth* that excluded a lot of people I admire. My father-in-law in particular.

So the rhetoric was actually counter-productive.

BEAR: No, it was meant to be provocative. It was meant to establish a stance, like combing your hair a certain way. It was the kind of tactic that a rock group would use, rather than a literary person, though we see it far more often than people will admit; we saw it in the lost generation; the stance was so strong it destroyed F Scott Fitzgerald, it ate Hemingway.

SHINER: And in SF, Ellison survives.

BEAR: Well, Ellison was a natural, but other people took a stance following him which hurt their careers a little bit. Ellison was not a poseur in the same sense that a lot of cyberpunk people have been. Ellison was just an absolute bundle of total energy trying to find a direction, and then he found it.

SHINER: It didn't stop him from striking poses.

BEAR: Because that was the natural thing for him to do, I don't think it's natural for Bruce to strike poses. I think Bruce - if we are to talk about "Chairman Bruce" here - is basically a fairly conservative individual with an enormous amount of energy that sometimes cannot be channelled away. And he's also frustrated as nearly all beginning writers are, because their careers haven't earned them enough to live on. It's frustrating getting the suckers to listen to you, so grab them by the shoulders and say: "Hey sonuvabitch, listen to me! I'm talking to you! I'm in your face!" This is true of all of us, we just express it differently.

SHINER: That was certainly one of the major motivations for Sue Denim. It was just the frustration I felt at not being heard. Whereas now that my career is doing better, and I can sell what I like, then I can express myself through the fiction.

Can I ask you then, if you have any observations on the current British SF scene? Particularly the way that cyberpunk seems to have entirely passed the UK?

SHINER: Thank God for that!

BEAR: There's a lot of good writers here who I hope are going to be able to find a market and then be able to sell in the USA. It's a crying shame that you have some very fine writers who simply haven't made it in America.

SHINER: The name that of course comes to my mind is Paul McAuley, because I know Paul personally, and I'm publishing a story of his. His novel *Four Hundred Billion Stars* just won the Philip K Dick Award, and that's a major thing for a British writer - to come in with a first novel, a paperback original form DelRey of all people. He tied with Rucker, but he still got that first prize. I think for the British SF scene, Paul has shown that you can do it. And Bruce is a big Ian McDonald fan.

BEAR: There's a lot of Ians out there. It could be a whole niche in the market, if they don't get glossed over in the confusion. There's Ian Watson, Ian McDonald, Iain Banks-

SHINER: Iain McEwan.

BEAR: Yeah, there's a lot of Ians out there. Not too many Shiners, and there's only two Bear's, and the other one isn't writing all that much now.

SHINER: I hadn't thought of it like that. It is very tough; obviously things are changing with *The Gate* and some other 'zines that are going to live things up. For a while, *Interzone* was the only British SF 'zine, and it had a very strict agenda. So there's no room at the top, and the American magazines rarely take them.

BEAR: Ian Watson and one or two other Ians have sold to *Asimov's*.

SHINER: But not their entire output; if it gets too British then there is no interest in it. Watson's novel *The Power* hasn't been able to sell in the States because it's specifically a Horror novel concerned with American military bases in Britain. You can't sell that in the US.

BEAR: Well I can't sell *Psychone* in Japan, because it deals with ghosts from Hiroshima and that sort of stuff. An American writing about that is going to have difficulty no matter how deeply felt and thought out it is. A lot of British writers have taken stances which reflect the end of empire, or the late twilight conditions of a country in economic trouble. That's not what most American SF readers want to read.

So what is going to come out of a nation converging with one of the great economic superpowers of the 21st Century, which is rapidly being ideologically polarised?

BEAR: Britain and Europe? What's happening is that the British publishers have suddenly started being extremely aggressive in the world market. There are great sums of money flowing out of Britain to America. If they divert some to the English writers, it will be a really healthy thing.

SHINER: If the EEC does really happen it will be interesting to see it in terms of writing because you've got these monstrous problems of translation.

BEAR: A lot of readers out there read English.

But what about the psychological effects of an inversion of the way that people look at things?

BEAR: In England? there will be a tremendous boost to morale, and you people have been depressed for far too long.

SHINER: Which is another reason why cyberpunk didn't catch on here: it is in many ways a literature of affluence. If you look at *Neuromancer* as you're main example, you assume a lot of idle time, a lot of upper-class people making a layer of money for these other scam artists to come and live off. You assume a level of computer technology, when actually you even had trouble finding a plug for the tape recorder.

BEAR: England was dealt a horrible blow at the end of World War II; the US did quite well.

SHINER: It can be hard to figure out how England won the war and still has not recovered, whilst Germany has done well. There is the same irony about Japan losing the war and still becoming a major power.

BEAR: 1984 is really 1948 from an extremely dark perspective. Now I enjoy dark visions like these, but commercially speaking it's a sure death in the States. I hope this is changing, because America isn't the only country with a voice. ■

Lewis Shiner is the author of *Frontera* and *Deserted Cities of the Heart*. His latest novel *Slam* will be published next summer in the US, though he has been unable to find a British publisher for it as yet. He recently edited an anti-war anthology, *When the Music's Over...*

Greg Bear is the author of a variety of novels, of which *Blood Music* and *Eon* have been compared favourably to Arthur C Clarke, whilst *Psychone* and *The Infinity Concerto* show his ability to vary his work to great effect.

Charles Stross is one of the hardest working and vociferous of what might be called the "Interzone generation" of new British writers. I am informed that several publishers are looking at his novels.

- KM

Who Remembers Bruce Talbot and Maurice Gray?

Fay Symes takes a trip down memory lane to when men were space-cadets, and women made steak-and-kidney pudding; when space-ships lurch-jerked, and adventure lay in every moon-crater....

My husband and I once took a suitcase full of Patrick Moore's old first editions along to a book-signing session for one of his new, non-fiction publications. His publisher looked at us as if we'd produced a load of toilet paper (which in her opinion was all they were fit for), but Patrick was delighted. He said he hadn't seen some of them for so long he'd even forgotten he'd written them. You could see his eyes light up as he took them one by one and autographed them with great pleasure.

I first started reading his books at an early age, borrowing them from the local library, and having been nurtured on *Dan Dare* and totally smitten by anything to do with space travel, I adored them. Well, I was only about ten at the time. So I spent the rest of my life tracking them down to keep in my own personal library, where I could have them to hand like old and trusted friends.

If you exclude the most recent Scott Saunders adventures, there is a consistency to all his books. A genial, public school image of the early fifties pervades the characters, no doubt drawn from Moore's early career as a schoolmaster. The space ships are redolent of prep school dorms, with mid-night feasts and the odd master telling you to behave, you're supposed to be grown up:

"If you call me sir again," said Mellor, "I shall bend you over my knee and give you six of the best, toughened spaceman though you are."

The young hero has the obligatory age of around seventeen; older than the readership they were aimed at, but answering every boy's wish-fulfillment of finding himself cast in the mould of heroic space adventurer. A kind of Jennings in Space. If Maurice can do that so could I, the audience think, and avidly read on, with their scabbed knees and grey flannel shorts.

The heroes are all so totally gob-smacked at the prospect of space travel being a reality, they frequently utter such gems as:

"Phoo!" Maurice gave a breathless grin. "I - I just can't believe it. Do you seriously mean my uncle's up - up there?"

But inevitably their destination is "up there" themselves.

The boy-wonders usually come in pairs, promoting the ideals of true friendship, self-sacrifice and the usual buddy-buddy heroic

rescues from monsters and disaster which no boy's adventure can be without.

Maurice set his jaw. "Get this into your head Bruce. I'm not leaving you here, and that's final. It's both or neither."

He succeeds of course, and won't accept any thanks. All such rescues are received with a terribly British reserve:

"I won't embarrass you by trying to thank you, old fellow, but you can guess probably how I feel. It was a pretty good show."

So says one unbelievable eighteen-year-old recipient of a space rescue. Did people ever really talk like that?

The goodies are totally good, heroic, clean-cut, and often prone to fainting when the danger has passed; juggling their characters between a combination of feeble youth and "in spite of his slim figure he was as tough as a whipcord". The baddies are usually German or Russian, and speak in broken English. "Ach, I have the cramped limbs." (German) "Ach, you lying puppy! You jest, eh? Well you shall suffer for it. Give him a taste of the belt." (Russian) Not a lot of difference can be detected; "Ach!" seems to be universal. But even though they engage in dastardly tortures and fling around death-rays with abandon, they are seldom killed off intentionally. That wouldn't be cricket. They get their come-uppance when their own machinations misfire.

An admirably cosmopolitan flavour abounds in the Moon-bases and other communities, which seem to be populated by every imaginable race: Americans, Russians, French, East and Western Europeans, Scandinavians, Japanese, Australians; all foreigners using the same ubiquitous broken accent. But the ideals of one world government and world peace are always promoted, and the baddies are the ones trying to make war. Beasty Huns to start out with in the early fifties, changing later to Russians and Chinese.

Youthful heroes, ramrod spacemen, continental villains, aged professors sucking on their briar pipes; stereotypical cardboard cut-outs? Well, yes, to a degree, but I've seen worse in contemporary adult SF. I always felt I knew each character intimately, what they looked like and how they felt - to an extent not possible with many other comparable



juvenile novels. My favourites were Maurice and Bruce from the *Mars* series, starting out aged sixteen and eighteen in *Mission to Mars*, and ending aged over forty in *Raiders of Mars*, still, naturally, talking like schoolboys. Our heroes never grow up. Intimidated by such aging stars, Moore introduced Rick Rawn aged sixteen to the series in *Peril on Mars*, who takes over the task of heroic life-saving.

An interesting departure from the norm is *Quest of the Spaceways* and its sequel *World of Mists*, where the seventeen-year-old Nigel Whipperfield (yes, really) is only a secondary character to Lieutenant Gregory Quest and his sidekick Lester Vane.

Gregory Quest never wasted words. Like Vane, he was tall and dark. His lean, wiry body seemed to be without an ounce of spare flesh, while his features were clear-cut and his eyes a curious, rather piercing blue.

Quite a dishy pair.

Accident-prone in the extreme, Moore's characters spend their lives crashing ships, running out of oxygen, being attacked by aliens and coshed by buddies. You can bet that if there's a hole anywhere within twenty miles, someone's going to fall in it. More blood is spilt than would have been acceptable on screen or in comics of the period, and the injuries sustained in many and varied adventures are relatively realistic. Broken bones, innumerable concussions, anoxia, poisoning, shooting, truth serums, the ubiquitous sprained ankle - he had the lot. There are no "one bound and he was free" cop-outs. People tend to be bashed on the head every five minutes, but they don't just get up and walk away.

Bruce had hit his head hard against the panel and it was almost certain that he was suffering from concussion, which meant that he might be unconscious for hours.

And David Mellor in the *Mars* series, being an older man (an ancient forty-four) suffers a damaged heart from too long in space, and cannot return to Earth. In fact Moore labours the point that after years away from Earth's gravity, none of the heroes can survive there again. They become the new men of *Mars*.

A stiff upper lip might have been encouraged, but the seventeen-year-olds are

allowed to display feelings that their twelve-year-old readers might be expected to share. They're often terrified: "Sweat was running down his face; never before had he known such ghastly fear." (And this was only the quicksand) Or: "He screamed and wondered dimly whether he would live long enough to feel the burning heat melting the tough vacuum suit..." Although there seems to be some confusion between abject fear and indignation: "I feel all funny inside," admitted Nigel. "Rather like the feeling you get after eating too much."

Reactions to their heroics and harrowing escapes have them falling around like ninpins in a manner which would disgust even a modern twelve-year-old. "Barry gulped; it was no good - he was going to faint, and there was nothing he could do about it." Or they freely admit: "Sorry, I wasn't hurt. I passed out from sheer funk I reckon." And although no one actually weeps openly, they do come close to it: "Hang it all, I never felt quite so much like making an idiot of myself," admits Gregory. The rocky heroes become quite unsteady when faced with the imminent death of the statutory juvenile lead, or their best friend: "Jock's tongue seemed to be glued to the roof of his mouth. 'Is he - all right?'" Aged professors lose their bearing:

"Dear me Stanford, it is an immense relief to see you alive and well - dear me yes." He blew his nose violently. "I - I have been most disturbed on your account."

And even the hardy spaceman Quest is quite overcome when young Nigel recovers from his dose of deadly radiation:

Gregory half rose and pitched forward. Relief overwhelmed him, and for the first time in his life his consciousness slipped from him in a natural faint.

No men of steel here.

Nigel flushed with pleasure and relaxed on his couch.... But no, let's not encourage any Batman and Robin smears against these wholesome boys. If no hint of homosexuality was implied or intended then, it shouldn't be recognised now. This was an age of innocence, when no reader and no writer would have entertained such a thought. These are all Boy's Own adventurers, fixed firmly in the safe and optimistic post-war years, having what used to be known as good clean fun. (Does it still exist in this future of glue-sniffers and muggers?) Long before the dawning of sexual awareness. We're following firmly in the steps of Henty and Rider Haggard when you saw only what you read:

Kit and David scrambled up red-faced and sheepish. Playful wrestling was hardly suitable for two commissioned officers of Space Command, even if they were only nineteen.

There were no girls either. (What, girls? Yuck!) apart from the occasional kindly housekeeper back on Earth, hovering well in the background to provide steak and kidney pudding and apple-pie.

The only disturbing incident is a sequence

of prolonged torture in *Invader from Space*. The aging Charters is subjected to agonising radiation in an attempt to cure a mutated infection. His friends watch in helpless horror as he writhes about in agony for several pages. "It's murder," whispered Rex. "It's murder I tell you. Make them stop for Heaven's sake!" But they can't, and the generators go on whining, pumping deadly rays into his body. He's cured, of course, but it doesn't really excuse the glee with which this passage appears to have been written. Perhaps some modern readers would find some meat here after all.

Comparisons can be misleading, but for me Moore's characters have the edge over the pedestrian blandness of WE Johns' space adventures. They aren't quite as silly as Kemlo, who floats around in space without a suit, and come much closer to home and reality than Tom Corbett on Mars or Martin Magnus on Venus. In fact only Mary Pratchett surpasses Moore in characterisation - and being a woman writer, I'm afraid that's only to be expected.

One of the great delights of Moore's works are the onomatopoeic exclamations given by his characters. More fitting perhaps for a Batman comic, but nonetheless indispensable. It's almost impossible to actually say: "Woof! Ouf! Ugh! Poof! Wh-oo! Poo-oo!" or "Ph-oo!", but the books abound with them. "Ph-oo!" Maurice spluttered. "and "Ph-ew! My stars!" says almost everyone else. Wonderful convention turkey readings can be made from this material if anyone feels brave enough. Stronger expletives were of course entirely forbidden, and those allowed are the "Oh my gosh!" variety, the most favoured by many characters being "Oh my stars!", with "Phew! Confound it!" and the occasional "By Jove!" and "Oh my Aunt!" thrown in for good measure.

The adventures follow well-worn patterns. Either two friends come upon the imminent space launch in some way that makes them acceptable passengers, or the youngster is a newcomer to the base, primarily there to find a missing relative. In this scenario the new recruit is not accepted by either his superiors

or his peers until a brave sacrifice saves someone's life, and suddenly he's everyone's best friend:

The rescue of Bruce made a tremendous difference to his companions' attitude towards Maurice. Formerly they had regarded him as a boy who was with them because he was small and light; now he was accepted on equal terms.

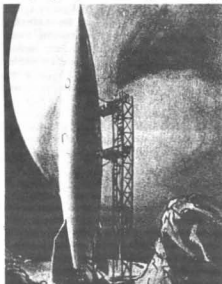
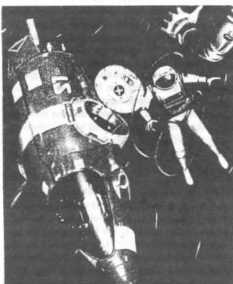
Maurice started out like this in the Mars series, as did Rex in the Moon adventures, and years later so did Scott Saunders. Not very original, but how else can the young whippersnapper get to be hero in the first chapter.

Then of course there are the obligatory simple science lessons for the supposedly ignorant reader. "Wouldn't the Moon attract the rocket and pull it down like a whacking great magnet?" Bumbled the idiot no one would want to identify with. The worst examples are in *Destination Luna*, where the cretinous hero hasn't the faintest idea about space travel or anything else.

"Going..." Derek blinked in amazement. "Do you mean you're going right outside the Luna sir? But..." Derek stammered. "Look here sir, we're whipping along at six or seven hundred miles a second aren't we? Well, hang it all, you'll just be left behind."

There is so much more like this, the book is barely readable. The copy in my library was indelibly inscribed: "Patrick Moore is foolish. Surely he has the sense to know that Derek would have more knowledge of astronomical details? I knew more than he did and I'm only twelve." Good for you kid, wherever you are now.

All Incidental Astronomical Information Is Accurate", proudly boast the cover blurbs. And in keeping with his own astronomical knowledge, Moore never had his characters floating around in space with no suits, exploring solar system planets with breathable atmospheres, wandering on Venus in an Amazonian jungle, or whizzing off through hyperspace to distant galaxies. They



were certainly the most realistic of all the juveniles of that period, relying on the wonder of what the planets might really be like, and how space travel might feel. Descriptions of the moon and other planets are based on what information was available at the time, with very little artistic licence. Along with the gung-ho frolics there's the occasional hint of something better.

Maurice kicked at the dry moss with his foot, and disturbed a cloud of dust that clung in the air for some seconds before settling again.

All of a sudden Mars feels real.

Quest of the Spaceways had a virulent creeping plant life on Callisto, which ate both yoursuit and your spaceship, and there are varied species of lower animals in all of the other novels. Without exception they are all "Confoundedly ugly brutes", bent on mindlessly attacking humans with claws, stings, fangs or slime, but these are the limits of the monsters he allowed.

As for the space hardware, the ships have the feel of Jules Verne, flying through the imagination in gothic splendour with their rivets brightly gleaming. The earlier ones are shaped like true fictional rockets, but later they evolve into ungainly collections of cylinders and Lunar Module shaped vehicles, according to real advances in technology. Some bear proud mythical names like "Canopus", "Ares" and "Elektra", while others are nicknamed "Lizzie" and "Mabel". Without exception they are all powered by the ubiquitous atomic engine, beloved of the science-loving fifties. The atom is a friend here, and even in its worst scenario, accidental radiation poisoning can be cured by one injection. While a quick tug to remove the shields makes them very handy for frying nasty alien lifeforms. The spacecraft are also prone to bad landings and mechanical failure, there's rather a lot of "Thud - jerk - thud!" or alternatively: "Lurch-jolt!" as in:

The spaceship pitched wildly, while the electronic generators screamed and warning lights flashed on the control panel. Lurch - jerk!

At least one spaceship crashes in every book, and has its buckled legs or warped panels repaired - desperately - by the adventurers in the nick of time to escape their impending doom.

Video links were unthought of, and all communication is made by morse code (which all the heroes have been fortunately taught at school) with a great deal of "His - crackle!" hindering the process. But there's always a reasonable delay in transmission between Earth and Moon, or Earth and Mars, which adds to the reality.

Moore's first published fiction was *Master of the Moon* (1952). Two seventeen year old mechanics, who stumble upon the professor's spaceship, are invited along on his first voyage to the Moon. Although they're not even sure where it is: "My gosh," he said simply. "A trip to the moon. How far is it sir? A million miles?" Pursued by the baddies,

their ship falls through a crater and they discover the Moon's interior to have air and water, plus giant spiders and two species of aliens. Little green men with spindly bodies, double-jointed arms, three fingers, no hair and flattened faces, who speak in squeaks. At least some improvement on the beautiful golden supermen in vogue at the time.

After these realms of fantasy, Moore literally comes down to Earth. *The Island of Fear* is a sequel set in the Arctic, where Jock, Noel and the professors have decided life will be safer. No such luck. They find a lost island populated by dastardly Huns, Cavern Men and dinosaurs.

Sorrell relighted his pipe. "Well you have the doubtful honour of being the only Englishman ever to have been scratched by a pterodactyl!"

The Frozen Planet (1954) is a real gosh, shades of Lionel Fanthorpe where space-madness is beamed from a satellite of Neptune in the Twenty-Third Century. Then came *Destination Luna*, better known as Derek's science lesson, with a tedious Moon jaunt and worse writing.

1955 saw the beginning of his better work. *Mission to Mars* - first of the five *Mars* books, and *Quest of the Spaceways*. Between these in 1956 came *Wheel in Space*, another pseudo science lesson, almost as boring as Derek's, about sabotage attempts against the first space station, and then *Quest's* sequel, *World of Mists*, with a not too accurate Venus.

The *Mars* series continued with *Domes of Mars*, *Voices of Mars*, *Peril on Mars* and *Raiders of Mars*. He abandoned Maurice and Bruce in their forties in *Raiders*, and began again with a new pair of seventeen-year-olds in the five books about Rex and Robin: *Captives of the Moon*, *Wanderer in Space*, *Crater of Fear*, *Invader from Space* (an asteroid called Percy made of anti-matter) and *Caverns of the Moon*. Solid adventures all set on or around the Moon, with as much realistic detail as he could describe.

Moore's last book of the middle period is *Planet of Fire* (1969), where a new sixteen-year-old motor cyclist is taken along on the first rocket to Venus. A delightful place of boiling lava like crimson porridge, where they stagger around in metal pressure suits.

Leaving juvenile fiction to pursue his career in television and as a straight science writer, Moore put his heroes back in their box; but when he dusted them off again, eight years later, things had changed. Gone were the days of the gosh and tally-ho frolics. Fact was catching up with fiction, and he had to try to adapt.

The Scott Saunders novels published in paperback from 1977 to 1980 attempt to be less goshier in style, and suffer for it. They lack blood and bones compared to the Fifties style of adventuring. Sixteen-year-old Scott Saunders and his pal Nigel aren't a patch on the original boy-wonders and fail to make any real impact, except to show how out-dated Moore's style is by now. "But," Scott gasped; everything seemed suddenly unreal.

"You don't mean that - that your one of them?" (No, sorry, he's only a traitor.) "Scott was almost beyond speech. 'You - you rat,' he breathed at last. 'If I ever get hold of you... I'll...'" And fortunately per-haps, words fail him.

Restrained by modern scientific knowledge, the plots can only revolve around espionage on the Moon and runaway asteroids, plus the odd black hole which transports our heroes for a short time into a completely black and boring other universe, populated by some indescribable evil which they may never actually encounter. Scott's adventures seem tame with no monsters or ray-guns. But good heavens, what's this, a woman? Madame Yang, Chinese commander of Space Station Six. She appears briefly on one page and then conveniently vanishes into her office and is never seen again. Times had changed, but Patrick hadn't, and that was the end of his career in fiction. When I asked him about it recently, he said regretfully that publishers would think his books too old fashioned now, and I'm afraid he's right.

Let's make no mistake about it, I passed my first childhood a few years ago, but I can still skip through them with pleasure, recalling the scenes they painted for me at a tender age.

It seems a pity that only one edition has ever existed of most of these books, and they are long out of print. But would today's blasé juveniles fed on Judge Dredd and *The Living Dead* find any meat in them? I doubt it. There's probably not enough blood and gore in the whole lot to match one page of 2000AD. The old values and the optimism are eroding into dust, and it seems somehow a warning of some basic decline in the quality of life.

Nostalgia remains however, for those who can suspend disbelief long enough to re-enter their first childhood. Sniff the scent of one of those musty pages and the years roll back.

"Derek grinned happily. There was nothing more to be said."

Bibliography of Juvenile Fiction:

Master of the Moon	[Museum Press 1952]
The Island of Fear	[Museum Press 1954]
The Frozen Planet	[Museum Press 1954]
Destination Luna	[Lutterworth 1955]
Quest of the Spaceways	
	[Frederick Muller 1955]
Mission to Mars	[Burke 1955]
Wheel in Space	[Lutterworth 1956]
World of Mists	[Frederick Muller 1956]
The Domes of Mars	[Burke 1956]
The Voices of Mars	[Burke 1957]
Peril on Mars	[Burke 1958]
Raiders of Mars	[Burke 1959]
Captives of the Moon	[Burke 1960]
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1. Spy in Space	[Armada 1977]
2. Planet of Fear	[Armada 1977]
3. The Moon Raiders	[Armada 1978]
4. Killer Comet	[Armada 1978]
5. The Terror Star	[Armada 1978]
6. Secret of the Black Hole	[Armada 1980]

Book Reviews

Edited by Paul Kincaid

Nemesis

Isaac Asimov
Doubleday, 1989, 364pp, £12.95

Take the author's name (Isaac Asimov), the somewhat uncharacteristically punchy title (Nemesis), the length (364 pages), the date of publication (1989), and the fact that this is not part of the Foundation, Robot, or Empire series (yet), and you'll have a fairly good idea whether you'll like this book. Me, my heart sank when I received it, having read a recent Asimov (I forget which now) and hated it. But I set aside my prejudices, revved up my empathy motor, and gave it my full attention. I wish I hadn't. The book wasn't as bad as I feared, but I don't trust Asimov any more.

If I was in my early teens I think I would have enjoyed it wholeheartedly. It has a young, ugly-duckling, misunderstood, intelligent and talented heroine (and her senselessly unreciprocated but "loving" mother), a number of other intelligent but ugly adults who have happy endings, and a straightforward (i.e. physical, non-moral) threat that eventually proves avertable, thanks to Man's technological ingenuity. The plot moves along two strands (one on Earth, the other on Rotor: the escaped Settlement orbiting the invading star Nemesis) to a convergence/climax; a challenging structure if I was seven years old but apparently worth an apology and foreword in the Author's Note.

The emotional landscape is deeply childish: pique, obstinacy, and the unilateral/autocratic wielding of power at the forefront, adults often characterised as obsessive and small-minded, a preoccupation with attractiveness vis-a-vis appearance/intelligence, and an unquestioned vision of the world as a place where mutual distaste and secrecy rules. All of which I would have swallowed with out an aftertaste. I wouldn't have noticed the repetitions/recapitulations nor entertained the suspicion that they were there as much for the author's benefit as my own. Nor would I have come to the conclusion that it has an idiot plot, rigged to allow a magical technological solution at the expense of any faith in humanity, a solution that does not solve the problem so much as erase it entirely. This isn't about how future technology will affect society, this is about how technology will run interference for the Earth-child like any responsible protective parent should. There are lapses in logic which I don't have the space to enumerate, none of which would have bothered me. Twenty years on I've grown up, but what on earth has happened to Asimov?

His ghastly Author's Note says it all:

I have given up all thought of writing poetically or symbolically or experimentally... I would write merely clearly and in this way establish a warm relationship between myself and my readers, and the professional critics. Well, they can do whatever they wish.

Think about it. Does writing "merely clearly" excuse writing unreflectively, displaying a range of attitudes that seem to have fossilised in the thirty years since he first expressed them?

Professional critics? Does he perchance mean people who discovered and loved Foundation, I, Robot, and The Caves of Steel many years ago and cannot disguise their disappointment with his later work? It may sound like humility to you, but to me it sounds like a bad conscience: somewhere in amongst his 400 books his evolution as a writer/thinker came to an end, and he knows it. A new generation of young readers will no doubt like this book, and there is enough in it to repay some rigorous textual analysis, but I'm not at all sure I can forgive what amounts to a white lie at the heart of science fiction.

Cecil Nurse

The Mammoth Book of Golden Age Science Fiction Short Novels of the 1940s

Isaac Asimov, Martin H Greenberg & Charles G Waugh (Eds)
Robinson, 1989, 504pp, £4.99

The editors have given themselves a hard task - to justify and establish with 10 short novels what Asimov, in his introduction, calls "The Age of Campbell" and "the foundations for quality science fiction". This task is made harder, as again mentioned in the introduction, by the fact that some choices were omitted because of "difficulties over permissions" or because an author was, in the 1940s, writing only short stories.

Tastes change, styles change, even stories regarded today as classics were not always thought so good (and, indeed, may not be considered as such in a few years time). This book can be regarded as worthwhile in the historical, not literary, sense - aimed at the SF reader who wants to understand what's happening today by looking at what it's descended from (with the proviso that short

stories far outweighed short novels in both number and significance). However, the majority of people buying this book require more than an insight into what today's stories and styles have grown out of - reading these stories purely for enjoyment I found them hard going. Most of the authors are well known and almost all went on to produce stories that are better than these.

No matter how the final choices were made - we can only read and comment on these 10 items: "Time Wants a Skeleton" by Ross Rocklynne (1941); "The Weapon Shops of Isher" by AE van Vogt (1942); "Nerves" by Lester del Rey (1942); "Daymare" by Fredric Brown (1943); "Killdozer!" by Theodore Sturgeon (1944); "No Woman Born" by CL Moore (1944); "The Big and the Little" by Isaac Asimov (1944); "Giant Killer" by A Bertram Chandler (1945); "E for Effort" by TL Sherred (1947); "With Folded Hands" by Jack Williamson (1947).

Thus it is revealed that the stories come from, essentially, the early 40s and the Rocklynne story struck me as very much a 30's one in style and content - internal in consistencies jarred and all characters were cardboard stereotypes!

Perhaps it's a pity the first impression is bad, for the stories do get more acceptable as their copyright date gets later though Sturgeon's "Killdozer!" is probably irreparably spoilt for any reader who saw the appalling film made from it.

Keith Freeman

Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror: 1987

Charles N Brown & William G Contento
Locus Press/Meckler, 1989, 417pp, £34.00

The New Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction

James Gunn (Ed)
Viking, 1989, 524pp, £17.95

These two books represent the right way, and the wrong way, of producing a work of reference.

The right way is represented by the Brown and Contento bibliography. It's subtitled "A Comprehensive Bibliography of Books and Short Fiction Published in the English Language", it is precisely that, a painstakingly compiled list of just about every book and story that appeared in Britain and the US in 1987. There maybe the odd omission, though I didn't notice any blatant errors, in fact the only irritating thing about this otherwise solid and workmanlike tool is the tendency to include interviews in with short fiction. Still, that is a minor irritation compared to that engendered by the Gunn encyclopedia.

From the title, it is presumably intended to serve as a replacement for the Nicholls encyclopedia - do not be fooled. This is a book with many virtues, no book whose contributors include Maxim Jakubowski, Richard Dalby, Edward James and Brian Stableford among a slew of equally respected American critics can be all bad. But you have to pay

very careful attention to the writer of each article, because they are not all written with the same level of knowledge and care.

But herein lies the first problem. There are eight pages listing contributors, but one of those pages is repeated, and one page is missing. An act of gross carelessness that is made all the more astounding by the fact that exactly the same error was perpetrated in the original American edition of this book. When mistakes such as that are committed, one can have very little faith in either the editor or the publisher.

Moving on to the articles themselves. The page and a half devoted to the Brian Aldiss manages to list *Life in the West* twice; once dated 1980, and once dated 1964. The same article manages to devote a paragraph of what passes for critical attention to his non-SF Horatio Stubbs novels, but only lists *Greybeard*, *Barefoot in the Head*, *The Malacia Tapestry* and *Hothouse*. Somewhere there has been an odd lapse of judgement. Presumably the same sort of lapse which, for all his qualities, allots John Brunner twice the space allotted to JG Ballard. Keith Roberts rates exactly the same amount of space as Kenneth Robeson and Stephen Robinett, and rather less than Frank Robinson or Kim Stanley Robinson (and less than half that devoted to Jack Chalker, who stangely happens to be a contributor). An example, one feels tempted to suggest, of a distinctive pro-American bias throughout the book.

Yet against that one must set short but informative and rigorous accounts on such broad subjects as Ecology, Scientists and Science Fiction, and Cataclysm and Catastrophe. In short, it is a curate's egg, enter with care.

Paul Kincald

The Black Reaper

Bernard Capes

Equation, 1989, 192pp, £3.50

Stories In The Dark

Hugh Lamb (Ed)

Equation, 1989, 223pp, £3.50

Bone To His Bone

E G Swain

Equation, 1989, 192pp, £3.50

Three more of the always interesting and often superlative "Chillers" from Thorsons, which maintain the standard set by those I reviewed in *Vector* 149. It's a shame that the publishers appear to be discontinuing this line. All three books deserve purchase by anyone interested in weird fiction and ghost stories.

Like AM Burrage, Bernard Capes is a forgotten "master" of the early 1900s, but unlike Burrage he lacks the unerring touch which illuminates what would otherwise be simply good melodrama. Hugh Lamb's enthusiastic introduction gives an intriguing picture of an unhappy failure who found a measure of success, if not fulfillment, in the literary trade. *The Black Reaper* is a varied collection of macabre stories, certainly inventive in a disilluminated surreal way ("The Moon Stricken" reminded me of some of the

more visionary moments of WH Hodgson's *The House On The Borderland*, which it pre-dates by some years) but in some cases imagination is clogged by then-conventional literary poses and turns of phrase. Still, "An Eddy on the Floor" is one of the bitterest tales of (self-) loathing I've read.

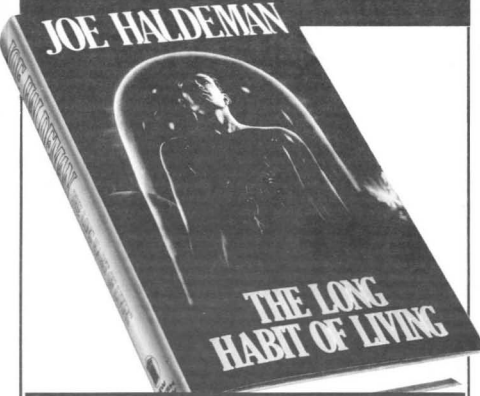
It's not quite as surprising as all that to discover that Jerome K Jerome wrote weird fiction: horror is often allied to humour and the ending of "The Snake" is actually pretty funny in a cruel sort of way, and "The Haunted Mill" comes with an introduction which is beautifully urbane parody. But as a whole, the urbanity of his humour is not a feature of Jerome's chillers: "Silhouettes" is a quite extraordinary (personal?) narrative of dark and brooding childhood visions. Jerome's tales are accompanied by a selection of sto-

ries written by two of his friends and fellow magazine-writers. Pain's strange stories and Barr's plots and twists are well worth discovering, particularly Pain's "Smeath", about a hypnotist-and-clairvoyant partnership; and Barr's "Alpine Divorce" in which a murder plan goes wrong, or is it right?

Most eagerly awaited volume, I'd imagine, would be the reprint of Swain's *Stone-ground Tales*, written under the influence and friendship of, and dedicated to, M R James. In fact, these entertaining tales of a country parson's encounters with spooks rarely reach the levels of terror implicit in James (though the title story has some very chilling moments) replacing it with some finally-drawn character study of the antiquarian Reverend Batchell, of which his encounter with the seductive "Lubrietta" is

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the most revealing example. Very welcome are six further stories from "Stoneground": David Rowlands' additions to the canon are notable for the outre ghost in "One Man Went to Mow", a convincing return of two Catholic shades first encountered in Swain's "The Place of Safety", and the lecherous hussack in "Providing a Footnote". Rowlands captures the inventive and subtle, almost whimsical air of the originals perfectly, and the entire book is a delight to read.

Andy Sawyer

Red Prophet

Orson Scott Card
Legend, 1989, 311pp, £11.95

This is the second volume in the Tales of Alvin Maker, set in Card's version of the emerging Mid Western states of the US at the start of the 19th century. The cycle continues, therefore, but some of the gears are slowing down.

By the end of this volume, which largely deals with an abortive Indian rising, Alvin, the eponymous hero, is still not into his teens. The action in *Red Prophet* hardly advances the cycle; at its start Alvin is on his way to his apprenticeship, by its finish, after a violent interruption, he is about to set off again.

The book is published as Fantasy, under the Legend imprint. Inevitably, and mercifully, there is nary an elf or a hobbit to be seen, the only easy comparison to its American pastoral setting perhaps being the post-Holocaust Pelbar cycle by Paul O Williams, with its similar underpinning Amerindian influences.

Card, however, coats the book with an all-enveloping mysticism that is one of its weaknesses. His ideas hinge around that of the Noble Savage, whose "pure" culture, attuned to its environment, is under threat from the white man. This has always struck me as a very dubious notion; life among the American plains tribes, for example, involving regular if low-level warfare, disease, poverty and the like, was undoubtedly far more nasty and brutish than anything available in Europe at the same time. Civilisation does have its advantages - such as the printing press, Mr Card please note.

That said, Card does state his case well, which is for a civilisation linking the best in the European and Amerindian cultures, and the alternative is graphically displayed in the form of a vision:

...the Red men dwindled, confined to tiny preserves of desolate land, until the whole land was white, and therefore brutalised into submission, stripped and cut and ravished, giving vast amounts of food that was only an imitation of the true harvest, poisoned into life by alchemical trickery. Even the White man suffered...

At the start of the book Alvin and his brother are kidnapped by hostile Reds sent by the token bady to stir up the settlers against the Indians. Alvin falls in with and is influenced by the Red Prophet, a former whisky Indian who is his teacher, the Golden Man,

in the first volume. The Prophet's brother, Ta-Kumsaw - one of a number of real historical characters in the book - favours a military solution to the problem of the White man. The book ends in his defeat, and that of a French army from Canada at one stage led by Napoleon Bonaparte, at the hands of the settlers. En route is a massacre of thousands of peaceable Indians, who are led by the Prophet.

Another of Card's strengths is to show how fundamentally decent people, with decent ideals, can be led into evil, and how those ideals, while decent, can be entirely in opposition to each other.

I praised *Seventh Son*, the first book, for its originality, in a field noted for anything but. It therefore seems curious to take Card to task for providing more of the same. But a little more acceleration would be appreciated next time around.

Martin Walker

A Child Across The Sky

Jonathan Carroll
Legend, 1989, 268pp, £11.95, £5.95pb

Philip Strayhorn, creator of and actor in the increasingly formulaic, but highly successful, sequence of "Midnight" horror films, disobeys a supernatural (?) command to stop; runs on into a cul-de-sac of life; puts gun to mouth and ends it. Unloved evil has apparently been let loose. From beyond the grave, by means of strangely manipulated tapes, with on-the-spot assistance from Pinsleepe, an eight year old pregnant angel (or eilolon), Phil directs his friend Weber, "quality" film producer and poet, to reverse the malefic situation by completing redemptively the last unfinished "Midnight" film, an act which also miraculously save Strayhorn's pregnant mistress and their common friend, the TV clown "Finky Linky", from cancerous fates. This he does, using artistically superb but morally repellent editing inserts to make the film's viewers "love evil".

With such a work of considerable psychological complexity and metaphysical density, any plot summary courts absurdity. What was meant as metaphor or archetype will appear as crudely literal. Nevertheless, even while experiencing the novel fully, readers may often wish that Carroll would affirm the nature of his "reality". If the author can be excused ambiguities, it is because he has contrived a potent, yet fragile, fictional "magic" which overt commitment might easily destroy. Carroll is adept at revealing largely by concealing. This is epitomised in his treatment of horror elements in the "Midnight" films. He intensifies them not by gory detail, but by description of the central figure, Bloodstone, ever shadowy and amorphous save for his child-like fingers. With no nails.

Lisa Tuttle is quoted on the book's cover saying that "reading Jonathan Carroll is like dreaming with your eyes open". And when at the end of his pseudonymous namesake's *Wonderland* the dreamer's sister closes her eyes and re-dreams Alice's dream, "she knew that she had but to open them again, and all

would change to dull reality." Carroll's everyday reality is never dull. It abounds with sensuous vitality. You experience it opened; but at any moment, justifying Ms Tuttle, Pinsleepe may show up, or a mongoloid street-urchin transform to tree-top angel ("a child across the sky"). One effective, though sparingly employed, device is the cine-like technique of montage - intercutting stories, using differing type-faces for these, for taped communications, for crescendos of dialogue. On the mundane front the book is electrically alive; on the metaphysical it is seductively obscure. Faustus, Zoroaster, Hieronymus Bosch, and the angels and ghosts of Rainer Maria Rilke are its presiding guest-genies, allusively providing precedents and clues.

K V Bailey

Interzone: The 4th Anthology

John Clute, David Pringle
& Simon Ounsley (Eds)
Simon & Schuster, 1989, 208pp, £12.95

I have to confess that I do not anticipate the arrival of *Interzone* with eagerness. I do not find it welcoming, even if, once opened, the magazine always provides its fair share of rewards. I did not understand my attitude until I read this volume, this distillation of a year's publication. Forget the nonsense about *Interzone* being a torch bearer for the long since dissipated New Wave, or the putative vehicle for any Next Wave. Alienation may be the theme of our age but it can be heavy going, however well executed. And stories in *Interzone* are always well executed, serious literature.

But we all knew that, didn't we. Which is another element in its intimidating facade. There aren't many laughs here at the borderline. John Sladek contributes "Stop Evolution in Its Tracks", a thoroughly obvious one-liner and not to my taste. Kim Newman's "Famous Monsters", though, is an expert jiving his passion, and doing it wonderfully.

Two light-hearted stories out of fifteen. Hm.

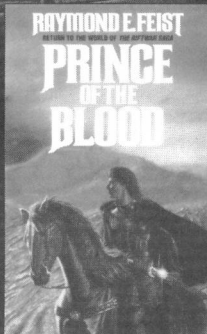
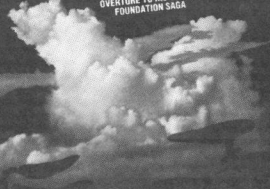
David Langford contributes a snappy vignette of terrorism tomorrow in his fractal "Blit", the nearest to a "hard" SF story here. Funny it isn't. Richard Calder's "Toxine" is a curiously old fashioned nasty which alienated me by its thoroughly arch idiom despite a new twist on *Frankenstein*. Lisa Goldstein's "City of Peace" uses Jerusalem as a metaphor for future relations with aliens and confirmed my view of her as being someone who doesn't quite get there now, but one of these days she will get it all together spectacularly.

My favourites in this collection are those which ring emotional bells. Rachel Pollack's "The Bead Woman" is state of the art feminist SF but it did not touch me. Eric Brown's "The Time-Lapsed Man", to my mind, defines the "Interzone Story" and I advise everyone to watch this man. He's good. Greg Egan's "The Cutie" is about technology and parenthood and, as a parent, had me in tears. Which leaves JG Ballard and

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"The Enormous Space", fear and loathing in deepest Suburbia. Some of the details don't quite ring true (driving into the City? Where would our hero park?) but they don't matter. This is another of those stories which is the last word, in this case about the alienation of a suburban salary man. As with "The Cutie", this one hit me hard.

Good short stories defy analysis in anything less than their own length, and these are all good in their own ways. The volume is recommended, if not required.

Martyn Taylor

Dracula's Brood

Richard Dalby (Ed)
Equation, 1989, 348pp, £9.99

This volume follows hard on the heels of *The Penguin Book of Vampire Stories*. However, the two should be regarded as complementary to one another, particularly as only one story is duplicated, and only two authors are represented in both collections. While the Penguin collection offered a broad historical perspective of the genre, Richard Dalby's intention is to explore the wide Victorian interest in vampire literature prior to the publication of Stoker's *Dracula*, and also to demonstrate the effect of this novel on the genre in the early part of the twentieth century. To do this he has assembled an excellent collection of rare or little-known stories, one previously unpublished, featuring a variety of vampires, including two man-eating plants as well as the more usual bats and beautiful young women, all of them far removed from the cliché expectations of bad vampire movies. Each story is accompanied by a scholarly note, drawing attention to any connection with Stoker as appropriate, and the whole is prefaced by a very readable introduction. Indeed the entire volume is very readable and, after its own fashion, entertaining, should your taste be for weird and fantastic literature. My one regret is that the Equation imprint is to be closed down. This book is typical of the standard of its output, and the imprint will be greatly missed.

Maureen Porter

Winter in Aphelion

Chris Dixon
Unwin, 1989, 220pp, £6.99

This has been a year of hype, with the *Batman* movie and *The Abyss*, among others. Books have been at it for years, though, so I shouldn't be surprised when I am disappointed in a book whose blurb proclaims: "World First Publication. A brilliant work of fantasy by a young British writer". Chris Dixon lives on the land in North Wales with his wife and son, raising crops and livestock; this is his first novel and "reflects his strong concern for the environment and the future of our planet".

Skarry is a fairly simple chap, tending sheep and goats, though he had always yearned to be a hero. Heroes cropped up a lot, because the wars between his tribe and the

Ice Warriors had been going on for so long that peace had become a myth. Myth, sadly, is not really given much semblance, here: it's reported, in a stage-managed half-page stories, in a tale which is a pity, for much feeling for the rugged inhospitable mountainous land is conveyed: Dixon has an affinity with the land. But it is not sufficient to carry a story and characters which in contrast are flat.

Adventures, mostly journeying and talking, take Skarry to a number of cities and towns, to meet eccentric and violent people: surprisingly, he ends up being presented with mysterious stones, to join the one around his neck which he often sucks when thinking. I found this part ludicrous: I don't normally quote from the end of a book, but the last page reads - "Then he felt the weight of his stones (round his neck!) as though for the first time and it drew his gaze once more downwards..." The end isn't far off when:

He thought of the suffering of people, of the creatures of the world, of the land itself beneath the weighty tread of men yet in that moment the joy surpassed all this and blew it tumbling away and he could only laugh and then roar with Felder rearing and whinnying beside him and of itself the sound took on form.

There are plenty of sentences like that; the author's intentions cannot be faulted, but the execution, I'm afraid, is wanting.

I wanted very much to like this book, a first novel - after all, many of us would one day like to see our first novels in print... But I found the potential wasted: a blind girl, a love-interest squandered; Skarry's reactive stance - things happen around him, are done to him, he hardly ever acts... It could be considered a pastoral fantasy, of course, but I feel it fails because I had no feelings for any of the characters. If you must read this first novel, wait for the cheaper edition.

Nik Morton

The Best of Modern Horror

Edward L. Ferman & Anne Jordan (Eds)
Viking, 1989, 403pp, £14.95

Dark Fantasies

Chris Morgan (Ed)
Legend, 1989, 319pp, £11.95, £5.95 pbk

Modern Horror fiction seems to be going through a crisis of self confidence, the most visible symptoms of which are its adoption of the label Dark Fantasy, and an ostentatious disdain for what it seems to believe are the tropes most easily recognised and despised by people who never read the stuff anyway. This trend is epitomised by the editorial to *Dark Fantasies*, which promises "No Slime, No Chainsaws," but which might as well be titled "No Tension, Not Much Horror". Although none of the 16 original stories collected here fails in what it sets out to do, virtually all of them set out to do the same thing: dismantle the *petit bourgeois* lifestyle of the main protagonist by an eruption of the irrational. With the whole collec-

tion relying so relentlessly on one thematic note, I soon came to feel that each successive story was trundling efficiently down the tram tracks towards its ending, where Rod Serling would be waiting to wrap it up with a neat little homily, and longed for a couple of ichorous elder gods to vary the pace.

To be fair, the fact that I was reading this to review, and to a deadline, meant I hurried through it faster than I would otherwise have done; with more of a gap between the stories, each would probably have more impact. As it was, with only a few exceptions, I found myself admiring the writing techniques, rather than being drawn into the tales themselves.

On the whole, I found *The Best of Modern Horror* a somewhat grandiose title for a collection culled from only one magazine, far more satisfying in this respect. As the subtitle makes clear, this is a nostalgic retrospective selection from 30 years' worth of *F&SF*, and, as such, it has the confidence not to be coy about its own contents. Instead of *Dark Fantasies*'s National Trust ruin against the setting sun, the cover gives us a grotty painting of *chez Bates* illuminated by a vomit green lightning flash, the title being rendered in the typeface made famous by a thousand low budget movie posters.

Being reprints, many of the stories were already familiar to me, either from previous anthologies or from the magazine itself. Nevertheless, far more of them, even when it was the second or third reading, still had the power to spark the tingle of unease I read horror stories for. On the other hand, this was balanced by a much greater proportion I found arch, contrived, or just plain naff. In sum, then, both collections are well worth a look, but I'd recommend saving your pennies for the mass market paperbacks.

Alex Stewart

Zenith

David S. Garnett (Ed)
Sphere, 1989, 298pp, £3.50

Any form of art or writing prospers by attracting new adherents, and an anthology is the ideal "way in" for those who would not necessarily read a whole novel in an unfamiliar genre. Perennially, the non-reader of science fiction has argued that its writers seem in love with the ideas and expect this to excuse a lack of attention to their writing. In *Zenith*, three stories keep both qualities in balance. Others exhibit one or the other: sometimes to a very high degree.

It will come as no surprise to many people that "White Noise" by Garry Kilworth is definitely the outstanding story. It is a very neat commentary upon the way that late twentieth century man has allowed technology to explain the world for him. In this particular instance, it is that very technology which brings him face to face with Old Testament reality in a way which is quite a shock.

In "Feminopolis" by Elizabeth Sourbut creates a human society in which the males are non-existent. Visitors are scandalised by the treatment the males receive, and attempt to (in their terms) rectify the situation. This

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back some of the lost magic.'

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but Bob's cheerful space version has less
blood on the carpet.'

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'A gripping whatdunnit, with a scary look at
future pathologies.'

BLADE RUNNER

'Well, I've seen the movie — and if the book is even
half as impressive . . .'

WEST OF EDEN

'A tour de force of humans v aliens — all Earthborne!'

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

'The Red Planet we knew and loved, before NASA's
space probes blew it out of the sky.'

THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH

Er, yes — but the publishers simply insisted . . .
The book I'd like to be remembered by.'

THE SHAPE OF SF AND FANTASY TO COME

GRAFTON BOOKS

could be a very clever warning of the dangers of the over-enthusiastic promotion of feminism, but it achieves its effect by challenging one of the simplest assumptions of humanity. The simplest ideas are usually the best.

It quite often seems in modern society that anything is explicable or excusable if one can ascribe to it a label in either a foreign language or in sociological jargon. "Cinéma Altéré" by Andrew Stephenson presents us with a morally questionable way of making a film. This is to create a disaster on an alternate time-track. Thus a real disaster is filmed and the "home" reality unchanged.

Storm Constantine and Christopher Evans contribute stories which are very clever and whose standard of writing is high, but they do not have the immediate appeal of the above. The ideas behind the stories of Lisa Tuttle and Barrington J Bayley appeal, but I suspect that they may have suffered, in common with some of the other stories, from what seems to be slightly unhelpful editing. This is somewhat unfair on the authors who would hope to attract new readers by being anthropologised.

David Garnett states in his rather coyly titled "Foreword and Forward" that he has tried to select "stories for the next millennium." He has succeeded in a way which would make the dozen stories featured an indispensable part of the library of the aficionado. To what extent it would attract new readers is debatable. At their worst some of the offerings are annoyingly self-referential,

mirroring the over-technical approach of a composer who tries to let technique carry him when he has, in fact, nothing to say.

Michael Fearn

Angel Fire

Andrew M Greeley
Legend, 1989, 301pp, £11.95

Greeley's quick-fire humorous style makes *Angel Fire* an easy book to read. However, it relies too much on a hackneyed idea - aliens as biblical "angels" - and fails to build any more than a lightweight story on this unpromising foundation.

The book revolves around the relationship between Professor Sean Seamus Desmond, Nobel winning biologist and bogus Irishman, and Gabriella Light, higher alien life-form and (literally) Desmond's guardian angel. "Gabby", arriving apparently out of nowhere, employs her angelic powers to protect Professor Desmond from various threats to his life. In fact, she is also using him as bait to trap some evil ex-Nazis who are attempting to control all "angel-kind" and, incidentally, to subvert the next stage of man's evolutionary development.

Everything comes right in the end, as you always knew it would. The goodies are all good, the baddies all bad, and the guy gets the girl (sort of) in the final chapter. It's a little too sickly sweet for my taste.

Greeley's slightly breathless style is well

suited to the fast paced humour he affects. However, I soon got tired of pages of one line paragraphs intended to move the reader quickly along, and he has the annoying habit of lazily repeating descriptions (at least four characters "sighed as if he were about to experience an asthma attack").

The theological questions Greeley raises (he is also a Roman Catholic priest) are never seriously pursued. They simply provide additional opportunities for (admittedly witty) one-liners and a series of hackneyed von Daniken-style reinterpretations of Judaeo-Christian mythology. The effect is lightweight.

More seriously, Gabriella is an idealised male fantasy figure: a beautiful, intelligent woman but appealingly vulnerable. She has a mind of her own but bows to what the man wants, and never makes him feel guilty about his alcoholic and sexual transgressions.

The racism is pretty hard to swallow too. The Irish are loveable rogues, the English snobs, the Swedes boring and the Germans Nazis. There is a hefty side swipe at Thatcher's Britain, neatly balanced with some crude anti-communist drivel.

Read as satire it almost works, but lacks the cutting edge. There is a competent, intelligent writer here who has unfortunately turned to SF as a rest from having to think seriously and work hard at his writing. He is using SF as a light-hearted break and he does neither himself nor the genre justice.

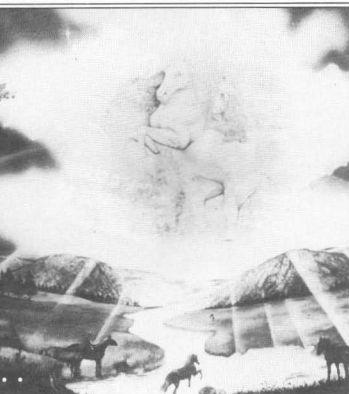
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The Total Devotion Machine

Rosaleen Love

Women's Press, 1989, 167pp, £4.50

If the tag "feminist SF" means anything, it defines a style of writing as far from the Gernsback continuum as possible. It occupies some indefinable terrain between SF and Fantasy, and foregrounds human conditions against a background of a changed and changing universe.

The stories in Love's *The Total Devotion Machine* range from virtually hard SF to outright Fantasy. Here are hard and soft sciences, magic and realism in collision, and sometimes in collusion. The style is witty, concise, stream-of-consciousness at times, and always flowing, easy to read.

Her characters are constantly on the verge of changing, and of changing sides. Tired of living in a man-dominated world, her women join the other, non-destructive, side of creation, be it machine, whale, or dolphin, or even something quite new. In "Bat Mania" a middle-aged woman, known as "the old bat", becomes literally that, and the world is better for it: "bat values of companionship... will spread more widely throughout the human population." Stella, the narrator of "The Invisible Woman", subverts her own subservience to men by reflecting them and showing them as they really are.

In the title story, when Mary Beth sets off to fly the solar wind to Mars, she leaves her children in the care of the Total Devotion Machine which proves more capable than human parents, at child care and parent care as well. Technology can be nurturing, or as in "Power Play" and "Tanami Drift", the source of disaster. "You are free. Fly to the ends of your knowledge, though your knowledge may end us all." It is one of many background forces controlling human relationships, playing tricks on humankind and forcing us to re-evaluate the universe.

This is a constant theme: alien-controlled electric fish in "Where Are They?", a prehistoric skull in "Trickster", a peculiar macro-economic vision in "The Bottomless Pit", all contribute to shifting the sands of consciousness, sliding panels so that the new reality seems as real as the old and who is to say which is better? "So human life retreats and consciousness moves on, sometimes down the long tunnel to an afterlife, and sometimes sideways move across the species barrier." The world rearranges itself, and moves on.

Rosaleen Love is a confident, fluent writer with plenty of imagination. This is her first collection of stories and it is well worth reading.

Christopher Amies

The Warlord's Domain

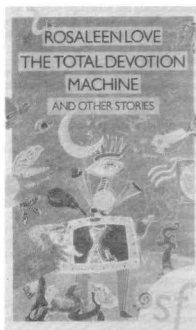
Peter Morwood

Legend, 1989, 283pp, £11.95, £5.95 pbk

Fourth volume in another ongoing fantasy series: the heroic Aldric Talvalin and his lover, Kyrin, make their way to Drakesburg to confront Voord, the Drusalan Empire's new Grand Warlord. Along the way they are

attacked by incompetent professional assassins, perform an emergency appendectomy, and after changing their minds about retrieving the magical jewel Voord possesses, are captured by him.

The book fails to hang together on almost every level. It is poorly written, edited, paced and plotted. In the first chapter, for example, a series of melodramatic and clichéd scenes shift too quickly for any depth, and end on familiar cliffhangers, the construction of which, in narrative terms, seems nonsensical.



Cover for *The Total Devotion Machine*
by Rosaleen Love
(The Women's Press, 1989, £4.50)

ical. In the second chapter the scenes are longer, but also tend to end on cliffhangers. And from there on each chapter contains some thrilling action, ploddingly delivered, that does little to advance the story.

The characterisation is inconsistent and misleading. The king who betrayed Aldric in the previous volume is presented as a formidable enemy on page 16, but by page 36 he is killed off. An assassin is described in his first scene as an extremely cunning and competent character, but 68 pages later, when he next speaks, he is a defeated man who gladly accepts a fatal poison. The intelligent characters are stupid and the stupid characters are complete morons.

I suspect that Morwood's aim was to paint Voord as a villain with virtues, but because he provides insufficient depth and motivation for the Grand Warlord's personality and actions, Voord is an embarrassing creation whose inconsistencies lie less with his insanity than with the author's inability to create a character who is more than a cobbling together of disparate elements.

Individual scenes give a novel veneer, as when Voord figuratively and almost literally spills his guts to his doctor, Giorl, who is also a torturer; but they only make sense when

isolated. Taken as a whole, the poor pacing, plotting and characterisation combine to give a misleading impression of depth and originality to what is the literary equivalent of a cored and half-digested apple.

The fact that Morwood is prepared to ring some changes on a well-worn theme does him great credit, though I do wish he hadn't rushed it so much.

Terry Broome

Jane Saint and the Backlash

Josephine Saxton

Women's Press, 1989, 167pp, £4.95

In 1969 Josephine Saxton's novel *The Hieros Gamos of Sam and An Smith* was published, and in 1980 there came her novella *The Travails of Jane Saint* (later reprinted as the title story of a collection). 11 years separates the books, but they are linked by this slim volume. Here we find a novelette, "The Consciousness Machine", which sprang from and made use of themes and elements in *The Hieros Gamos*; and a novella, "Jane Saint and the Backlash", which is a direct sequel to *The Travails*, and both, we are informed in the introductory essay, are linked because they employ in concrete terms the Jungian idea of the Collective Unconscious.

That, quite frankly, does not come as a startling revelation. Even someone who had only heard of Jung by reputation would have not the slightest difficulty working out that such an idea underlies these stories, and indeed just about all of Josephine Saxton's work. It explains the rather bare backcloths and bizarre shifts and coincidences that are a feature of her work. It also explains why her works get classified as science fiction, though they really only qualify because they don't fit into any other category.

But that quibble aside, any new book by Josephine Saxton is an event worthy of celebration, and this is no exception. "The Consciousness Machine" is a fascinating examination of a device used by psychiatrists to project scenes from the unconscious of the patient which, in this instance, is used to explore the expanded consciousness of one of the psychiatrists. While "Jane Saint and the Backlash" reintroduces her most recent heroine, who discovers solutions to the problems of sexual equality by exploring the surreal realms of the collective unconscious. This time there has been a backlash to the reforms produced by her previous adventure, so she returns with Mr Rochester the cat, Merleau-Ponty the dog, Zip the demon, and the various witches and alchemists and unusual characters to find a more lasting solution. As ever, the characters and situations she encounters are archetypes, and no logic controls the escapades that make up this very episodic tale, but that doesn't disguise the vividness and vivacity of the characterisation, and the sheer exuberant fun of the writing. This is very much a book to be relished, and it is only when you reach the end that you realise it has planted the seeds for some very serious thoughts in the process.

Paul Kincaid

Killer Planet

Bob Shaw
Gollancz, 1989, 105pp, £8.95

Plague 99

Jean Ure
Methuen, 1989, 150pp, £7.95

I've always liked Bob Shaw's work, but I haven't been able to keep up with the current **Ragged Astronauts** series. So I was pleased to receive for review this, his first attempt at a book "for young people".

What a disappointment. It reads as if it was written in 1950, except that wire-guided missiles form a vital part of the plot. However, while setting a story in a galactic empire where "myriads of deadly alien life forms... contest the ownership of each newly-discovered world" might be forgiven, changing plot horses in mid-stream cannot.

Jan Hazard sets off to find his brother, a space marine who is missing believed dead on the "Killer Planet". Jan is accompanied by his friend, the lovely Petra. On arrival, they see no-one could have survived, exactly as they had already been told, and so decide to leave. But they have come under attack, deduce therefore that there is an alien present, and set out to kill it. Thus, half way through the book, fraternal loyalty is abandoned in favour of xenophobia as the central plot line. After a couple of episodes of survival-by-running-away-extremely-fast (am I conveying how trite this is?), they find the alien and destroy it. There is an overt moral lesson about compassion along the way, and Jan discovers that perhaps he feels more than mere friendship for Petra. Gosh!

In contrast, these faults are well avoided in **Plague 99**. For all its equally hackneyed plot - most of the population of England is wiped out by plague, leaving three modern teenagers among the few survivors - it is an interesting, up-to-date and thought-provoking tale. The characters are real. A proud but thoroughly Anglicised adolescent Bengali boy who carries condoms in his pocket, all to the intense disapproval of his Moslem family, is thrown together with two English girls. The real story tells how, under the pressure of their situation, their emotional relationships are realigned from late school adolescent frivolity and pettiness to something altogether more adult, caring and enduring. One girl can't cope with this, and runs away to join the people dancing round the burning cars in Trafalgar Square. But the other two characters begin to like one another, and the book ends on a surprisingly optimistic note. The multiple contrasts of character and motivation here are at once pleasing, informative, subtle, and totally at odds with the cardboard cussed jiggled about in Bob Shaw's book.

I had never read anything by Jean Ure before. I will be actively seeking her books in future. Conversely, I shall be equally actively re-evaluating Bob Shaw's work.

Paul Brazier

The Network

Laurence Staig
Collins, 1989, 177pp, £6.95

Dark Toys and Consumer Goods

Laurence Staig
Macmillan, 1989, 151pp, £6.95

Digital Vampires

Laurence Staig
Collins, 1989, 144pp, £6.95

Laurence Staig has seemingly popped up from nowhere this year, with two novels and a collection of short stories appearing in the space of a few months. So, is this a fresh new talent, or another wildly over-hyped phenomenon? On the strength of the short story collection, **Dark Toys and Consumer Goods**, I'd be inclined to plump for the former. **Dark Toys...** is a tremendously useful commentary on our own society's consumerist tendencies. Shopping becomes a patriotic duty, the multi-storey car park is an inescapable terror, whilst the credit card literally becomes the man. It's frightening, more so because it is so close to home, just around the corner in fact. It doesn't take much to believe that TV advertising could become a recognised medical condition, or joy-riding a capital offence, and that's where the strength and power of these stories lies, in their exploitation of modern fears and preoccupations.

However, the two novels, while they employ similar ideas and motifs, somehow never take off in the same way. Partly, I suspect it is the longer length. Both use a lot of words to say comparatively little, and while they are supposedly hard-driving thrillers, I find them rather flabby and tired. Staig is particularly interested in the idea of an older magic using modern technology for its own purposes, and while this is intriguing in itself, he just doesn't have the skill to carry it through. Of the two, **The Network**, set in the London Underground, is a better story, though the horror is highly sanitised, perhaps as a sop to a projected teenage audience, and the characters are as papery as the litter which pervades the story. But **Digital Vampires**, his most recent offering, is a technological embarrassment. Vampires, CDs and rock music don't seem to go too well together - the plot tries much too hard to appeal to the modern youth, veering wildly between the ridiculous and just plain uncomfortable, eventually falling apart in the lamest of conclusions.

Reconciling the writer of such hard-hitting and tautly-observed short stories with the producer of such limp and comparatively unexciting novels is a difficult task, and I'm not certain I can offer a solution to this problem. The strong hand of an editor, a talent more at home in the short story form perhaps? Who can tell? Yet I still maintain that Staig's is a talent worth watching for, always bearing in mind such reservations as I've expressed.

Maureen Porter

Them Bones

Howard Waldrop
Legend, 1989, 218pp, £11.95, £5.95 pb

Examination of the bibliographical details in this hardcover would give you no hint that it appeared first as an Ace Original paperback in November 1984 with an introduction by the late and much missed Terry Carr. I find this worrying, and hope something can be done to stop this misleading practice.

My initial reaction to the plot, the style and the format was "Wowie, this really takes me back!" Setting aside the post-holocaust depression that forms an unfortunate part of so much modern SF, this book boils down to straight 1940s pulp fiction in the time-travel, alternate-history mould.

Waldrop does use the slightly more modern format of intercutting very brief snippets of happenings in three different time periods to three different groups of people, but they are clearly signposted and do offer a welcome change of pace and style. Having said that, one has to admit that generally speaking the tone is flat and underplayed, the characters' speech laconic and unemotional; Chandler would have been proud of the throwaway lines, and a great deal of the telling is remorselessly light-hearted - not exactly a laugh a minute but plenty of slight giggles to take the weight off the death and destruction.

Even the disasters are sanitised. Introspection is minimal, action is all - and there's plenty of it, interspersed with just enough fiddling archaeological and sociological detail to sketch in the backgrounds.

Heading for the Louisiana bayous of 1942 or thereabouts, Our Hero finds himself leaving the doomed world of 2002 to land in an alternate past - back in the 13th century, in fact, in a world where Christianity never existed. Islam rules the known world in collaboration with ferocious Vikings, woolly mammoths still stalk the American swamps and the Mexicans are into ritual slaughter.

His 146 comrades, however, end up somewhere else - and in 1929 the New Orleans-jazz-loving Dr Kincaid digs up their remains while excavating a burial mound. This main body of 21st-century escapees rapidly gets into deep trouble, with little help from their CIA contingent as you may imagine; our lone hero has a lot more fun, and a much more varied life, before Götterdämmerung sets in and it all falls apart.

I hope I haven't been too hard on the author: this is a rattling good tale, the time-travel and alternate-history aspects are well thought out, everyone behaves exactly as you would expect according to their lights, and I can recommend the book to all "traditional SF loving" fans.

Ken Lake