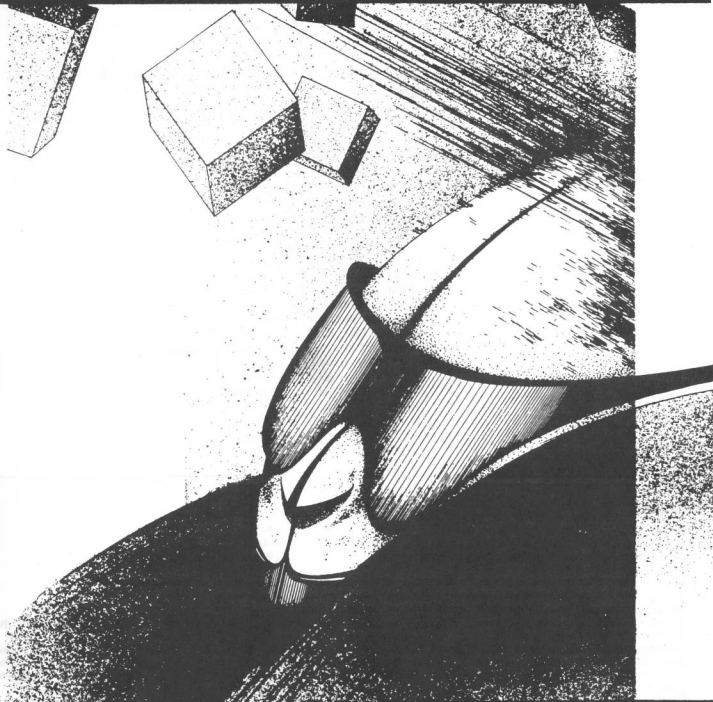


# Vector

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Issue 159

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association



- Interview: William Gibson & Bruce Sterling ●
- Articles from K. V. Bailey & Simon Ings ●

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# EDITORIAL

"Keep watching the skies."

If you've read Bruce Sterling's account of the cyberpunk bust, either in *Interzone* or here in *Vector's* interview with Sterling and Bill Gibson, then you will have seen one particularly disturbing example of the interaction of Science Fiction and Real Life.

If you've followed any of several recent court cases against musicians and artists in the USA, you may have seen some of the most surreal legal arguments and weird/obsessive theories around. This is Real Life, not Fiction, and you will have seen a large body of supposedly intelligent and educated people demonstrating their inability to distinguish the two.

(Background note: British heavy metal band Judas Priest were acquitted of causing the suicide of two teenagers by incorporating the backwards message "Do it, do it!" on their records; US rap act 2 Live Crew were acquitted on charges of obscenity in their records. The evidence against Judas Priest included an "expert" who had previously "found satanic messages" in such inherently evil places as the stripes in his toothpaste. A Florida court convicted a record store owner of selling an obscene record by 2 Live Crew, despite the aforementioned acquittal.)

In Hampshire a group of "concerned parents" have submitted a list of subjects about which they ask that their children should not be taught to Headmasters. The items which might "open the way to Satan", include Halloween and Spiritualism, which I can understand if not agree with. It is the inclusion of Oriental Rugs, Care Bears, The World Council of Churches, CND, The Beatles (but, apparently not The Rolling Stones) and ET which struck me as both confusing and frightening.

I was beginning to think that, at the very least Kafka was right, and perhaps, that they were even naively optimistic.

Then I read a book labelled non-Fiction, Steve Erickson's *Leap Year*, which gives the author's personal account of the 1988 US Presidential Election campaigns with interstitial appearances from the ghost of Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress Sally Hemmings, which gives the whole a weird perspective through fantasy devices. I was re-assured that, at least, things aren't yet as bad as they might have been.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch... the cowboy rode off into the sunset, the iron maiden was scrapped, surely things would improve? Not so. We went to war for oil.

There are few subjects that SF has failed to tackle in some way. Ray Bradbury, for instance, considered whether Extra-terrestrials had souls to be saved, in *The Silver Locusts*, which ought to satisfy those Hampshire parents about ET at least. There are even fewer subjects which SF has tackled more frequently than war, from HG Wells' *The War Of The Worlds*, through Doc Smith's *Lensmen* to Jerry Pournelle's *There Will Be War* anthologies and Lewis Shiner's anti-war an-

thology *When The Music's Over*. I don't know of any story dealing with a war closely resembling the current so-called Gulf War, though it seems that it might easily have been predicted. There is an Arab attack on the USA in Richard Kadrey's *Metrophage*, and there are other similar examples. Nevertheless, I am beginning to think that this could be the first science fictional war.

Certainly at the time of writing it has had a definite existentialist feel to it, not simply from the home viewpoint - the "it isn't real until it affects me" attitude has been common to most wars, I suspect - but even amongst the direct combatants. Several American aircrew have reported that their view of the tracer fire and Anti-Aircraft shelling over Baghdad was more akin to a 4th of July party than to a war as they expected it. One British pilot even expressed his great surprise when one shell exploded close enough to shake his craft.

In some ways the war may actually be far more "real" to us at home than to many of those fighting it. For us the war is on our TV screens "Live" and hourly. The same satellite technology which aids the military intelligence gathering system is transmitting pictures around the world. Pictures which show spectacular lights in the sky, aerial battles "worthy of Star Wars" (the Lucas film rather than the Reagan technofantasy) and images beyond any contemporary SF depictions of war. Video film of American bombing raids sits alongside computer graphic projections whilst experts analyse and contradict the propaganda from both sides. There is, through this journalism, and as a legacy of Viet Nam, a new honesty to the official reports of the war, which at times sits awkwardly with the lies which preceded the conflict, and which seek to justify it.

Perhaps the most optimistic signs, in this war which should never have happened and can never be won, are the unity of the allies against the Iraqi invasion, and the measured response of Israel. This is the first time that a military force has been sent into a region under the aegis of the UN Security Council Resolution rather than a General Assembly resolution, and is thus an achievement, for the first time, of one of the UN's stated aims. It may look inconsistent with identical resolutions against Israel (1967), Turkey (1974), and Indonesia (1975) continue to be ignored, but it is a potential new start. Of course, if it is only the oil America is interested in then future aggression elsewhere will remain unchecked.

Most depressing sign is either the refusal to either honour sanctions and to enforce them for a significant period, or the insulting nature of *The Sun* and other newspapers' editorial stances. *The Sun*, would you believe, has called for "housewives" to send "our brave boys in the Gulf" photographs of themselves "flashing their knickers".

Also in a science fictional vein have been some of the Illuminati-esque conspiracy theories, most of which appear to have

at least some factual basis. Coincidences abound: George Bush has neatly avoided his Budget crisis; John Major has a similar distraction from criticism of the British economy and European Unity; Gorbachev can go unnoticed into Lithuania and Latvia with his troops; China has suddenly put dozens of dissidents on trial, the first such trials since Tiananmen square; South African military continue to kill or allow the killing of peaceful black protestors without the world's disapproving gaze; and India's religious disputes grow unheeded. An article in *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* magazine alleges that Bush actually provoked the Iraqi invasion by sabotaging talks between Iraq and Kuwait last July (after Iraq accused Kuwait of territorial encroachment.)

So, as real life becomes Science Fiction, what role can SF play. Is it really true that SF is, in effect, obsolete? No. JG Ballard, and others have produced telling analyses of contemporary reality (which is different to real life, incidentally) which enlighten or caution. There have been SF stories like Judith Moffett's "Tiny Tango" which successfully convey some of the problems of a person who has HIV+; novels like Elen Galford's *Quendom* Come which vibrantly ridicule the government's sexual morality laws (yet more of which might be sneaked through in Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill under cover of war) and privatisation policies; and Jeanette Winterson's wise and witty depictions of religious extremists. These writers, and many others like them, have, as I said earlier, tackled many issues. Who is going to use SF to challenge this ludicrous, and very dangerous war that our glorious leaders have dreamt up? It is probably too late now, hopefully this war will be over by Xmas, to write about this war directly. It is not too late to examine future scenarios which don't encourage further wars, unlike many of the peace treaties of the past. It is not too late to learn just a little bit about other cultures, to develop a little understanding of each other, as stories like Bruce Sterling's "We See Things Differently" endeavour to do.

"My country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

- Thomas Paine, *Rights Of Man*, 1791.



Kev P McVeigh

# Letters

## Digital Dreams

John Gribbin has done us all a great favour by going into print to attack the exploitative nature of the cover typography of NEL's edition of David Barrett's anthology *Digital Dreams*.

Such marketing crassnesses have been for too long a feature of published sf and fantasy — haven't we all got on our shelves a few books by LARRY NIVEN and Steven Barnes, or some such combination? Such typographical manoeuvres are detested even more by authors than they are by readers — for financial readers, above all: they decrease sales, and hence royalties, because potential purchasers assume, often correctly, that BIG NAME has had very little to do with it and that little name they've never heard of is 99+% responsible for the book.

Where Gribbin seems to misfire, however, is in blaming Barrett for the situation. As Gribbin must know from personal experience, authors (and anthology editors) very rarely have any control whatsoever over the covers of their books. At the last resort they can refuse to have their names put on an offensive cover, but this they can only do if they have had sight of the cover design in advance. As all contributors to *Digital Dreams* know, the copy to which Gribbin refers was added without Barrett's knowledge, so that the first time he became aware of the problem was when he saw the finished copies of the book. There was nothing he could do about it except insist that the eyesore be eliminated in future printings.

It is a pity that a long overdue protest should have been turned into some kind of personal vendetta, thereby taking away much of the force of the protest itself.

John Grant  
Exeter, Devon

From Ray Girvan & Steve Jones

As co-authors of "Lord of the Flies", one of *Digital Dreams* contributions, we were astounded at the venom of John Gribbin's review. While we also disapproved of the blatant use of Terry Pratchett's name as an eye-catcher, it is highly unfair to condemn the whole book for it.

Nor is it fair to single out this one example as the worst-ever offender. For instance, the recent reprint of *The Evolution Man* similarly credits author Roy Lewis and foreword by TERRY PRATCHETT; and it's practically obligatory for coffee-table science books to have an ASI-MOV/CLARKE/SAGAN introduction obscuring the author.

The deception theory — that buyers will think this is a book largely by Terry Pratchett — doesn't wash. Books are hardly sold in sealed wrappers, and the alleged deceit only lasts as long as it takes to look at the back cover and contents page.

It is also an unrealistic idea that David Barrett could somehow have stopped the publishers from "getting away with" the cover design. While editors have some input over the packaging and production, John Gribbin is over-estimating the control they exercise in this area.

We're not surprised that the piece didn't make the reviews section. How about a proper review that concentrates on the book's contents rather than devoting 95% to a critique of a small section of the front cover?

Ray Girvan & Steve Jones  
Birmingham

A review of *Digital Dreams* is on page 19 of this issue of *Vector*.

From Paul Beardsley

I recently joined the BSFA in the belief that magazines like *Vector* would offer mature, informed, informative, and generally helpful criticism. I have had one story in print (in *Digital Dreams*) and am waiting the appearance of half a dozen of my stories in a variety of magazines. At this stage in my career, I thought, a little constructive criticism would go a long way.

John Gribbin's "review" of *Digital Dreams* was not informative. It told us nothing about the book except for the scandalous packaging.

It was not informed. It's pretty clear to most people (including other reviewers) that the misrepresentational use of Terry Pratchett's name was a publisher's trick, not an editor's. (As a matter of fact, when *Digital Dreams* appeared, I received a form letter from Dave, saying how pleased he was with all aspects of the book, except for one — namely the manner of the use of Terry Pratchett's name, which had annoyed him intensely.) Mr Gribbin is the only one who seems to think Barrett had anything to do with it. The editor's job is to edit, and a publisher's job is to publish. (And a reviewer's job is to review. As Mr Gribbin seems to have a woolly interpretation of what a review is, it is perhaps not surprising that this subtlety has escaped him.)

It was certainly not very mature. Without checking his facts, Mr Gribbin urges the BSFA to throw Barrett out of the Association. If his attitude is typical, then I feel that BSFA

members should be exempt from jury service.

It was not a helpful review. Besides myself, several people placed their first stories in that book. Successful writers who agree to his suggested boycott should cast their minds back to the ordeal of their first sale. Think how disillusioned you'd have been if your work had been banned!

I agree that the packaging of the book was immoral, and unfair to buyer and contributor alike. I would even (reluctantly) agree to a boycott of the book, until such a time as NEL rectify the misleading cover. But I don't agree that being angry is reason for not doing a proper review. And I certainly don't agree to the indiscriminate dishing out of blame for the state of affairs.

Paul Beardsley  
Havant, Hants

From Dianna Wynne Jones

I was astonished by John Gribbin's ill-informed attack on David Barrett and *Digital Dreams*. Does the man know nothing of the way publishing house work?

To explain: David Barrett as editor of an anthology has no final say in what goes on to the front of the book. Publishers may make a show of consulting an editor or author about a jacket, but they always jealously reserve the right to do as they please after any consultation. Sales staff are quite unscrupulous about this. In the case of *Digital Dreams*, what seems to have happened is that the Sales Managers decided unilaterally at a late stage that the name of Terry Pratchett, writ large, was likely to improve the sales of the book. So they put it there regardless, without bothering to consult either David Barrett or Terry Pratchett, or even the editor at NEL who was handling the book. I gather all three were furious, but there was nothing they could do. By that time the thing had been printed and sent out.

This is a glaring example of something publishers do all the time. I have reason to know. Similar things have happened to every book of mine. If John Gribbin wishes to vent his bad temper in a profitable way, he should direct it at the real offender and write to the Sales Manager at NEL. Everyone connected with *Digital Dreams* would be delighted if he did.

Dianna Wynne Jones  
Bristol

From Chris Bell

I'm amazed that you printed John Gribbin's extraordinary personal attack on David Barrett, even as a letter; I'm relieved that you

were unable to regard it as a review of the book in question, since it was concerned so determinedly with the front cover and with the character of the editor.

If (as seems likely) Barrett was not responsible for Terry Pratchett being given disproportionate importance on the cover of *Digital Dreams*, then Gribbin's attack should more properly have been directed at the person(s) who did the dreaded deed, and at Barrett.

If Barrett was responsible, he should be the object not of savage criticism but rather of awe and admiration. Never have I met an author or editor who would willingly see someone else's name writ larger than their own upon the cover of their book! David Barrett must be seen as a prodigy, unique, and entirely laudible in his phenomenal self-abnegation, had he done such a thing.

Whichever view you take, that "review" stinks. I shall go out immediately and urge WH Smith to order me a copy of *Digital Dreams*; it seems to me that if the worst that can be said of it is that the front cover has upset John Gribbin, then it must be worth a read.

Chris Bell  
Bristol

#### From Humphrey Price

I'm writing in response to John Gribbin's piece about our anthology, *Digital Dreams*. Naturally I'm upset by this and regret the offence that our packaging of the collection has obviously caused Mr Gribbin; and in particular I regret the difficulties this has caused David Barrett, who laboured long and hard to put together what I consider to be an excellent anthology.

It may sound a familiar tune, but I'm sure that Mr Gribbin is aware that publishing is a commercial business, both for publishing companies and their authors. Publishers are there to sell books and would be doing all their authors a disservice if they didn't explore every possible avenue for doing so. In difficult economic times, such as these, it's very tough indeed to sell almost any writer in any considerable quantity — let alone new writers. I am pleased that WH Smith have ordered *Digital Dreams*; many new anthologies were not ordered this year by the UK's largest bookseller. In most bookshop accounts, the average amount of time a rep is able to spend in selling a book to a buyer is less than a minute; we've got to do everything possible to ensure that the bookseller decides that this particular book is a book worth buying, and that the 21 authors involved, many of them published for the first time, get some sales.

I accept that some people won't like our solution to this difficulty; John Gribbin makes this perfectly plain. If, however, people can be drawn into reading sf through this short story collection, then I for one will be pleased.

Humphrey Price  
Senior Editor

Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, London

It seems to me that somebody at NEL went over the top with the cover of *Digital Dreams*; such tactics seem contemptuous of both writers and readers, but it is a commercial world, and some unpleasant things may occasionally be necessary.

As critics and reviewers, we are entitled to criticise all aspects of a book, but the general agreement is that John Gribbin went as far over the top as NEL had. Abusive, personal criticism is easy and tempting, but has no real place in a serious discussion.

— KM

### Editorial — V158

I was disappointed to read Kev's quite unnecessary editorial in V158, and almost tempted to apply to him that derogatory black epithet of "Crow Jim", one who (the antithesis of Jim Crow) exalts the black American above all others.

Molly Rachel, by the way, is not black but is half African, half Pacifican in a PanPacific culture — she's also killed halfway through Mary Gentle's book, in which one does become quite tired of the reiterated "six-fingered brown" adjectives used whenever the Ortheans' hands are mentioned. This kind of harping on a single aspect of a character was flogged to death by the ancient Greeks with their "rosy-fingered dawn" and suchlike.

Turning to books received today, I opened a Spider Robinson collection and, in *High Infidelity*, found both hero and heroine to be black and revealed as such only on the last page in a delicious twist which was nothing at all to do with the ostensible theme of the story at all. To suggest that this is unusual is ridiculous.

Virtually all future-civilisation novels feature racial mixtures and always have done; near-future stories nowadays have Chinese, Japanese, black, brown and heaven knows what other characters, and I suggest that the last thing our literary field needs is books that set out to preach racism, anti-racism, inverted-racism or any other kind of fascism. And to quote Neale Vickery's contemporary *Paperback Inferno* review of Robert Anton Wilson's hilarious trilogy, "even its main characters kept changing — nothing serious, just such incidentals as sex, colour and personality."

I'm sure that Terry Bisson's *Fire on the Mountain* is an admirable work, and look forward to reading it, but I fear Kev does it a pronounced disservice by hanging unnecessary and irrelevant racist comments around its neck. However, I cannot ignore his final crack about there being "only a half-dozen black faces amongst about 350 white faces at Novacon." For God's sake — at the biennial "Stampex" exhibition in London, among 10,000 attendees, one sees Orientals and Europeans of all nations, white Americans and Canadians galore, but virtually not a single "black" face. Does Kev suggest we should go out into the highways and byways and

force uninterested "blacks" to visit a philatelic show, or an sf convention, or any other gathering that doesn't happen to appeal to them?

I happen to find traditional New Orleans gospel music among my favourite musical experiences — but I know that I would not be made very welcome at the American "black" churches where this is to be heard. They have their cultural eccentricities, we have ours, and one hopes that while the differences remain the antipathies will disappear. Rubbing our noses in them is not the way to improve matters: when "blacks" choose to attend our gatherings, we shall welcome them.

Ken Lake  
London

No, Ken, we don't try to coerce black people into sf fandom, but nor should we ignore their absence. Why aren't they interested in sf (or philately)? Is it, for example, that these are predominantly middle class hobbies (or are perceived as such) whilst most black people are still relatively poor? Is it that sf concerns are considered irrelevant to black culture? Who knows? The Rushdie farce has shown that there are wide gaps between cultures, and I suggest that any book which makes us recognise our own prejudices (and yes, I have my own as much as you do) is a good thing.

Molly Rachel is, as you say, half-African and half-Pacifican, which does not make her non-black. Nor does her death change her colour, any more than eating Chow Mein would make you or me Chinese.

— KM

### Gareth Davies

Vector readers will be saddened to learn of the very sudden death, at his home in Bristol, of Vector reviewer Gareth M Davies a fortnight before Christmas. He was 31.

Gareth was an sf addict, both as reader and writer. He was almost a permanent resident of his local sf shop, frequently buying yards of the latest imports. His memory was astonishing — he could recall the detail of most of the books he'd read at a moment's notice.

As a member of an Orbiter group, Gareth contributed short stories and also reviewed them. He had recently started to take his writing seriously, sending stories to various magazines and competitions. He had high hopes of a story completed shortly before his death.

Gareth's sf interests were wide-ranging, but he preferred those with a scientific basis. Favourites were the works of the cyberpunk authors, Greg Bear, and anything based on the latest New Scientist revelation.

He will be a great loss to the world of sf and is sadly missed.

Barbara Davies  
Cheltenham, Glos.

# Homo-Eroticism, Llamas & (a little bit about) the C-Word

Bruce Sterling  
and  
William Gibson  
Interviewed

Waterstone's Bookshop, Manchester, 20 September 1990

**T**he sky above the bookstore was the condition of a *Bladerunner* out-take, dark grey and leaking heavily. In the basement office three characters lounge across a rubbish strewn table. The authors of *The Difference Engine* are drinking tea and red wine alternately, discussing Martin Miller with Kev McVeigh. Soon they were joined by Boyd Parkinson and Vector assistant Paul Macaulay

**Kev McVeigh:** *The tape's running, let's go.*

**Bruce Sterling:** Oh just make it all up, Kev. Feel free to misquote us.

**McVeigh:** *Why collaborate?*

**Sterling:** Jesus, why write in the first place? Do you have any answer to that, Bill?

**William Gibson:** I didn't wake up one day and say "It's time to collaborate".

**McVeigh:** *You do seem to do it quite often. More often than most.*

**Gibson:** Maybe, I'm not sure about that. Well, I guess it's sort of traditional. It has a long and not particularly honourable tradition in the history of American science fiction. People have always done it freely, promiscuously even. Usually to no great ends, though there have been some exceptions. I know it kind of runs counter to the auteur theory of literature that seems to be dominant these days, but it's sort of like a marriage, you have to look at it case by case. In our case we'd been having a dialogue about Babbage and the Babbage Engine for a couple of years, and at some point we thought "Oh, that's a

book." Actually, what we were doing at first was saying "You write it."

**Sterling:** It's up to you, Mr Auteur. No No, you're the one whose deathless masterpiece this must be. No, you take three years out of your busy schedule to write about Charles Babbage. No, I can just imagine the pleasure you'll have frolicking through maps of London, 1855.

**McVeigh:** *Couldn't you just call Tim Powers for those bits?*

**Sterling:** Well, I know Tim, and with all due respect, he really does frolic through the maps and things.

**Gibson:** Bruce had the University of Texas library right down the block, which was a real good thing. Bruce likes to go to the library, I don't. He would emerge from there with these teetering stacks of Xeroxed Victoriana which he would then mail to me, and I'd just toss 'em in the pot.

**McVeigh:** *I'd imagine that collaborating when it's a project which doesn't need a great deal of external research, just an internal consistency, like some far-future epic, must be a lot easier logistically than where you have a large amount of extant research.*

**Sterling:** There was some pretty serious leg-work on this project, it really was two-man thing, it took us a long time to do it and we really did put a severe division of labour into it.

**Gibson:** It's even more labour intensive than it might seem to be when you read it, because a lot of the weirdest aspects of the story we're

telling have a basis in historical fact. That came out of Bruce following funny trails. When he was following Lawrence Oliphant he found Mori Arinori — and got backed into some really odd corners. You know there are books sitting in libraries that no one anywhere ever reads. By the time we got to Mori's biography we were into books in English that are seldom read.

**Sterling:** They're published for an audience of perhaps twenty specialists. So researching the thing was a lot of work, but then so was writing it. We went through many, many drafts. It was retouched and redone and smoothed out and smashed. Like those Samurai swords that they fold up and whack them out again till they end up with all these layers in them which supposedly makes them sharper and more supple at the same time. By the miracles of modern word processing you can actually do that, you can put a manuscript through thirty or forty drafts without smashing it.

**McVeigh:** *So what's the hold up with the US edition?*

**Gibson:** It was a matter of timing. If we'd turned it in, if we had finished the book a month earlier, the Americans would be releasing it now for the Christmas market. But we just managed to come in as the garage door was closing. So they said, we'll release it the week after Christmas, but we said no. So then it meant March, which we said was OK.

**Sterling:** It's not so much the American delay as that the British were very fast off the dime with this book. We turned in the manuscript at the same time to all the three people

who had gone for it. The British, the Americans and the Japanese. Hell, you call 'em Americans but it's Bantam-Bertelsmann — a West German global multi-national in a Japanese skyscraper in downtown Manhattan, right? And the mills of the Bertelsmann grind mighty slow. They're not a beast of particularly fast reflexes.

**Gibson:** Gollancz is, it's small, fast and archaic.

**Sterling:** It's English. Small, fast, archaic and English. From the beginning when we first turned it in we thought it was very likely that Gollancz would have the world first edition on the book, and to be quite frank we were pleased at the prospect. It is a book set in London, all the characters are English, it's being excerpted in the *Science Fiction* magazine, nowhere else will have an excerpt.

**Gibson:** The British edition has the anglicized period spelling that we originally wrote it in. Bantam are switching it back, they didn't want to publish the book with British English in it.

**Sterling:** Yes, Tires with "y"s and centers with "re"s.

**Boyd Parkinson:** That's how it should be.

**Gibson:** I found it very disappointing actually, because originally they had agreed to do it that way. Casually at least they said "Sure we'll do that." Since the thing purports to be a Victorian narrative I wanted to have that spelling. So in a very real sense the Gollancz edition is the definitive text, which I couldn't say with my other books, just because Gollancz went with the spelling. They even corrected some of ours, anglicizing it that much further.

**Parkinson:** You often find with American books brought over here that they haven't changed the spelling.

**Sterling:** Well they often use the same plates, of course and you see the same both ways.

**Gibson:** I think they should have both spellings available, so you use the one from the country of origin. If you change to American spellings I think the effect is sort of like that Elton John song about life in the Mid-West. It's a Bernie Taupin song and it sounds very American until he talks about the hedgehogs. You know, it's a pop song that's permanently embedded in the woodwork of American life and I'm sure there's millions of people walking around at some level thinking "What hedgehogs?"

**Paul Macaulay:** Don't they have hedgehogs in the USA then?

**Sterling:** Well, there are probably some rich men in Texas who have their own. There's a lot of strange imported stuff running loose in

Texas, like greater kudu and nilgai. All these monstrous African antelopes that maddened eccentric oil billionaires bring in. Like nilgai which are like eight feet high at the shoulder, and they let them loose on their ranches, they multiply like rabbits and now they're running around freely.

**McVeigh:** Haven't they got camels somewhere as well?

**Sterling:** There was supposed to be some feral camels in New Mexico for a while.

**Gibson:** It was fashionable to bring in llamas at one time. Every once in a while you see one, I saw one in Tennessee, and one in Washington. You just see them off in the fields, and apparently they're very flexible towards the climate. There's a certain amount of market for their fur, I think you can knit llama wool.

**McVeigh:** We could probably talk for days about American llamas but I'm not sure it's what *Vector* readers are most interested in.

**Sterling:** Go on, Kev, educate your readership!

**McVeigh:** Bill, were you deliberately looking for something different to your previous work?

**Gibson:** Yeah, I didn't want to do a *Cyber-space* volume 4. The peculiar thing is, however, that as a different as this thing is at the top level of the text, when you get into what it's about conceptually there's a lot of the same obsessions. I think the ways in which it really differs from my previous work aren't that apparent. For one thing, I think it's much more overtly political. It's more of what I think of as a classical science fiction story. It has that more rigorous form. That what it's supposed to be anyway.

**McVeigh:** Did you find you wanted to make more dramatic historical changes, or did you restrict yourselves to a few?

**Sterling:** Oh no, we just bottled the fuck out of it, we beat it into submission. I mean there were certain points we wanted to make, and it was a question of fitting tabs into slots. We came up with this kind of toolkit that could make it really ductile in a way that's hard to describe but has a lot to do with the use of language. It's not a question of a tinkertoy kit where every variation is explained, its more of a classic cyberpunk technique of if you have a train as a McGuffin in your narrative you don't stop that narrative to say "Wow, this what we call a boiler, these are what we call pistons, this is a smokestack." You just have some guy hanging out by the side of the tracks and this great metal thing comes roaring and crunching by, and you tell by his reaction that it's a matter of some indifference to him, some interest, no interest, right. That's sort of a technique I call Idea As

Character, but we have a pretty good working toolkit of techniques between us now, and you can use them to create a future or you can use them to warp the past. It was an interesting challenge to take one of the other directions and see how hard and how far you could push it, and how much it would work.

**Gibson:** To the extent that we had certain tools in common, because we have different toolkits, we're not the same, we're not the same kinds of writers in some ways. There are scenes where the character steps out, you're in this Victorian track and you're following this young Whitechapel prostitute and she steps around a corner and there's just a glimpse of these towering construction cranes. A brief but strange description of the skyline and you're suddenly taken out of the street level that's still essentially Victorian, but you can see beyond that to where they're tearing this down and rebuilding something new. It's constant though. She just thinks "Yeah, I always see this. They're always digging things up and building new towers." She just takes it for granted.

**McVeigh:** Would you say that this is something that science fiction regularly does well? Making both the character and the reader accept the unusual reality?

**Sterling:** No, I think it's something that science fiction traditionally does very clumsily. It's far more likely that the narrative would just stop whilst captain Nemo or the Professor comes out and says "This is what we call the whale milking station." Essentially it's what Gardner Dozois calls the grommet factory tour: "This where we bake the grommets, this is where we make the grommets, do you realise that these grommets could change the very shape of society? Well, that can't be allowed to happen. Yes, but it can." And then there's a moral debate until at the end if it's *Analog*: the grommet manufacturer beats the bureaucrats and goes onto become a rich right-wing billionaire; and if it's *Asimov's*, then the grommet maker has an attack of moral cowardice or his girlfriend talks him out of it, or something. It is rare that anyone ever extrapolates it to the level of everyday life, but you're right to mention it, because it is an extremely powerful tool and it is one that is unique to science fiction, but it's not one that is very often handled well.

**Gibson:** It's not one that has been handled very skillfully, the only story that I can think of that be seen as really predictive in terms of what we think of as *The Media* is probably EM Forster's "The Machine Stops". It's something that your average American science fiction reader has never heard of and is probably never gonna read anyway. Look at Television, the basic mechanics of broadcasting TV were there for science fiction writers to access for years, they had it at the World's Fair, they had it years before in London. They did some kind of transmitter

between two garrets in London, it may only have been a flickering picture on a screen, but it was about the earliest TV transmissions. So the idea was there, people knew about it, and people were talking about it in the popular science magazines, but no one envisaged anything like what we've got today. The closest is probably the picture phones, which we've got today but nobody wants. They're no good for anything. We were playing with one over in Austria recently but nobody has one, nobody wants one. If you get one you need to get your friend one too. Everybody wants a fax machine which is something any science fiction writer could have dreamed up. I wish I'd thought in 1975 to write a story which just mentioned in passing that this guy had a Xerox machine that would work through the phone lines. I could say I invented the fax, like Arthur C Clarke or somebody. I could live in Ceylon... That doesn't happen in real life.

**Parkinson:** Have you seen this Paul Di Filippo piece in the latest *New Pathways*?

**Sterling:** Oh that quote? Yeah, I think I actually sent that to Paul. It was that thing that came out of the homoerotic nature of male collaborators.

**Parkinson:** It says, "Men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse and the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union and their shared women."

**Sterling:** Goddamn!

**Gibson:** Well it's got me all hot and bothered.

**Sterling:** The guy is obviously full of crap. I'm not bothered, it's harmless really.

**Gibson:** I don't know if you guys know this, but that book that Di Filippo was quoting has been held up to all the Pseudos Corners and all the ridicule and abuse in the States. It was held up as an example of the most bogus bullshit imaginable.

**Sterling:** How about the issue of homo-erotic relationships between the author and the reader? Or for that matter, the author and the interviewer? He's actually in the room with you, as opposed to us, where the book was carried out by means of floppy electronic mediums and Federal Express. Homo-erotic sex with out secretions. Safe sex at it's best I guess.

But this is a book that once we'd half the idea between us, it had to be written. We couldn't let somebody else do it. I mean nobody else would have wanted to.

**Gibson:** Yeah, they would but they would've done it really badly. There are already a couple of sf books out with Babbage in.

**Sterling:** There'll probably be a rock opera

soon.

**Gibson:** We weren't trying to time it, but it is his bi-centenary next year.

**Sterling:** They're building his machine, they're going to see if it works, it's quite wacky really. They're building it from the ground upwards with Victorian technology. They've got all these old craftsmen, so they're not cheating. You know sand castings and all that.

**Parkinson:** British industry still does that anyway.

**Sterling:** But the Japanese could probably do it for 1% of the cost.

**McVeigh:** Byron crops up a lot at the moment.

**Sterling:** Yeah, he's been done to death.

**Gibson:** And Keats too.

**Sterling:** We've got Keats but he's sort of this nasty little career guy. He's basically a hard little nerd. It's so sick how people go on about him because he died when he was 26 you know. [affects voice] Oh, the literary genius, slain in his youth.

**McVeigh:** It's quite necrophilic at times.

**Gibson:** This is where Romanticism never happened, the only person who came close to that is Shelley, who is always referred to as PB Shelley the vicious atheist, who is either dead or locked up in St. Helena. Nobody knows, there's just a load of rumours floating around that he's written a load of really great poems.

**Sterling:** The Movement was stillborn because Byron went into politics. You get the Rev Wordsworth and Professor Colridge, who are running a Phalanstery somewhere in Pennsylvania. The Susquehanna Phalanstery. They've gone off and formed a New Age commune on the banks of the Susquehanna.

**Gibson:** When the Potato Famine hits Ireland the rest of the Radicals don't want any problems so they just load up their boats and feed them. There are little bits of oral history at the end of the book, like he says: "You never heard of the Potato Famine." He produces all these computer-generated bills of lading, and finishes up by saying "They don't ever forget a favour, our own loyal Irish."

It's funny... I usually don't like the books that I write that much, but one of the great things about a collaboration is that it frees me up to like it.

**Sterling:** It's part of why I collaborate, but I asked William Burroughs about this — did he really believe what he'd written about the Third Man Syndrome. He's fascinated by collaborations. This book purports to have been

written by a machine intelligence, so the Third Man is the narrator of the book.

**Gibson:** It's never mentioned in the text, but we called it the Narratron.

**Sterling:** I like to collaborate because I hate my own work so much. There's a certain freshness in my old collaborations that my other work hasn't got. It makes me sick at heart.

**McVeigh:** Is it just because you've moved on so much?

**Sterling:** It's just because you remember what you were aiming at and it always falls short.

**Parkinson:** What about the society in the book?

**Sterling:** There's a lot of obsessive gambling in the book, it's one of the main themes. I think that's because any kind of technological innovation is really a gamble. It's a crap shoot. I read something by Terence McKenna recently in which he said that if they'd known that the invention of the motor car would lead to the destruction of the extended family, they would never have allowed it to be built.

**Gibson:** Oh, balls! What a weird view. They couldn't have known. You can't see where anything like that's going to go, and that's the kind of impossible thing that good science fiction should try to do. It's hopeless, but you have to try.

**Sterling:** In the long run we're all going to die though, so what do we care about the long run. Go to James Watt and say "don't you know this will destroy the ozone layer?" Sorry, back to the horses. He's just trying to earn a living here.

**Gibson:** Tell the Chinese not to build refrigerators.

**Sterling:** "Sorry, you can't have those, they're bad for you. We have them and they're bad for us, but we can't give them up. We're addicts, but do as we say, not as we do." You can't say that.

**McVeigh:** If it isn't doing that, then what is happening in sf at the moment?

**Gibson:** The main core is just product, it's not doing anything. It's like Country & Western music... you have to have Country & Western because there are slots to fill, and people keep doing it, and every once in a while you get a great Country & Western song, but most of it is just product. Every once in a while there are some great writers who produce great books. I don't follow it that closely, but people tell me this. Mainly it's product and slots.

At one level there's the stuff where people get what they want. The pre-Marxian Fan-



tastes where everyone wants a glass of beer but nobody has any money to buy any, but it doesn't seem to matter. The cod-Tolkien stuff, essentially right-wing American power fantasies.

**Sterling:** I think that's a dead thing, it's not going to work. I see the coming thing in science fiction as eco-geek boots, techies waking up to the Green Revolution suddenly. I think we'll see a lot of that.

I also see a general trend towards pastiche in the field. There's a really quite remarkable book called *Swordpoint* by Ellen Kushner that I think may very well represent where the field is going right now. It's New Wave Sword & Sorcery, but it's an example of an alternate world that's got no bones, it's a sort of vast pudding. It's got the duelling of the 17th century, and the castles of the 12th century, and people wearing lace cuffs and drinking tiny cups of chocolate. A made-up world with essentially no history. Like Storm Constantine's books where you have a desert, then a forest, then another desert, then another forest, and so on and so forth. It may actually be an improvement on all those meticulously worked out fantasies where you sense some guy in a basement inventing genealogies on a table covered in file cards. I used to really like those, but now I regard them as a kind of mental illness. It really bugs me that this guy has sat down and figured out who the pope of the elves was.

*[At this point a loud buzzing noise interrupted the interview. After a few minutes idle speculation we were told that it was the fire alarm and we evacuated the building. The remaining portion of this interview was conducted during the Questions & Answers session at the Signing, with questions from the general public.]*

**Audience:** I've read somewhere that you've said that cyberpunk is dead, is this just a rumour?

**Sterling:** I think you need to define your terms first of all. The interesting development in the States is that the term "cyberpunk" has been stuck on people who are computer criminals rather than innocent literateurs like ourselves. The New York Times had a front page article, "Cyberpunks Menace America". Then there was the cyberpunk bust which occurred in my home town of Austin, when the US Secret Service busted a local adventure games player, Steve Jackson Games, because they were putting out a game called *Cyberpunk*, which the Secret Service mistook for a handbook on computer crime. This was no laughing matter for Steve Jackson Games, because they came in and took all their computer equipment, modems, hard disks, thousands of dollars worth of equipment, and essentially bankrupted the company.

**Gibson:** It was well-to-do little publishing company grossing around a million-and-a-half a year, and now they're dead.

**Sterling:** They were essentially massacred by the Secret Service. The author of the *Cyberpunk* game, Lloyd Blankenship came in for an especially harsh time because the Secret service showed up at his door accompanied by four Austin police with drawn guns at 5 in the morning, came into his house, roused his wife nude out of bed, seized all his computers, all his floppy disks, and took them away. Mind you, none of the people involved in this bust (which was part of a larger operation called "Operation Sun Double") have been charged with any crime. They were not arrested, they won't be taken to court. This has just been a standard police anti-hacker action in the States for some time now — seize their equipment and make them stop operating.

**McVeigh:** The same sort of thing happens at Acid House parties over here — 300 people get arrested and only two are charged.

**Sterling:** There's a new amendment going through at present about Acid House parties, to chase people who set up Raves. I think they call it "Conspiracy to Commit a Public Nuisance", or something like that. Hang 'em All! Let God decide!

**Audience:** Does that mean that the FBI has so terrified Cyberpunk writers that they won't write it anymore?

**Sterling:** Well, for us this is the kind of free publicity that no amount of money can buy. But we're not hackers, we hang with these people and to an extent they're our natural audience. I'm not saying that computer crimes do not exist or that they're not a serious social problem, but this whole thing is very fluid and peculiar.

We were just recently in Linz, Austria at the Ars Elektronika Festival where they did have a bunch of artificial reality/cyberspace people there. That was very interesting; there were about 300 of them ranging from European Social Critics to Acid-dazed Silicon Valley multi-millionaires. It was a very interesting and intense little scene, where we did a small presentation. The people who are into this in a big way often a cyberpunk science fiction readers, as well as hacker-mathematicians.

**McVeigh:** Geoff Ryman has remarked that *Interzone* has a lot of stories by people who have read and admired Gibson, but not the people Gibson's read... how do you feel about the pseudo-Neuromancers and Technogoth-types that are springing up everywhere?

**Gibson:** I think "Technogoth" is such a great name, so much better than "Steampunk".

**Parkinson:** You're a "Steampunk", now, aren't you?

**Gibson:** No, I think one label is enough. I don't have to have more than one label. I'm sure at this very moment there are journalists clustering around Sir Kingsley Amis asking

him: "How does it feel to be an Angry Young Man?" You only have to do that once.

**Audience:** So what is coming to replace *Cyberpunk*?

**Sterling:** I don't think it needs any replacing really, just like the Angry young Men didn't need replacing. One of the interesting things about science fiction as a form of pop culture is that people who are inside science fiction tend to hang on forever — they don't die like Jimi Hendrix. Science fiction is a much more generous mistress than, say, Rock'n'Roll. We'll probably be around for forty years, for Christ's sake. It's a horrible thought. The top guys in science fiction are in their 70's and 80's; it's become a gerontocracy. Their books sell more than ever now.

**Gibson:** We did go out of our way to ensure that none of our publishers described us as "young".

**Parkinson:** In the publicity for *The Difference Engine*, they call you "Young, Controversial Writers".

**Sterling:** No, now we're just controversial writers. [Editorial note: in issue 40 of *Interzone*, the inside front cover advertisement described them as "...science fiction's most talented and controversial young writers."]

**McVeigh:** Do you court controversy?

**Gibson:** I don't really know. If you don't generate controversy, then there's no publicity. We got the most baffled, and baffling review that I've ever had for a book from *Locus*. The guys say: I don't get it — these guys are really talented, and there's some really good stuff in here, but I don't get it. He's managed to stumble over the three or four key moving parts in the book, which I think nearly everyone will see easily, but he's asking why do they do this. Fortunately, some of the reviews we've seen over here have shown people do actually get it. It's not like a joke in the dark, that we then have to explain to everybody. That's the ultimate fear with something like this.

**Sterling:** If you're looking for the next group of young writers to be controversial, I think there's a good chance it will happen in Britain. There's a sort of a reservoir of untapped genre talent here, which isn't the case in the States. I won't name names, it's hard to tell. A lot of my contemporaries who became overnight sensations had been people who were writing professionally for five years or more. It takes time to get off the ground.

The *Difference Engine* is published by Gollancz in hardcover at £12.95, and was reviewed in V158.

A review of Bruce Sterling's *Crystal Express* is on page 21 of this issue of *Vector*.

# Cyber - and some other - Spatial Metaphors

K. V. Bailey

Space, as of its nature it must, enfolds the action of Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers* — but space, even interplanetary space, is experienced (created!) there in many modes: space hallucinatory, space eidetic or dreamlike, space memorial, space catoptric or mirror-imaged, space holographic, space cybernetic. About half-way through the novel there is a dream-and-waking incident which conveniently explores some of these modes. Rebel Elizabeth Mudlark, walking the corridors of sleep, is seized by her reflection's hand which tries to pull her through the surface of an ornate Victorian mirror. She looks into the space beyond the blank eye-sockets of the reflection. The reflection is the likeness of her alter-self, Eucrasia, who tells her that the only ways to avoid being overwhelmed by this alter-self's memories are either to recreate and admit Eucrasia as a secondary persona, or to record her own persona in order to reprogram herself every few weeks — though this latter expedient would preclude chance of personal growth. Having refused either option, Rebel is pulled further into the engulfing mirror and threatened with the slow dissolution of her personality. Escaping, by waking to her room in the orbiting Eros "Kluster"'s sherton complex, she sees on its "turned-on" walls a glowing starscape piped in from outside; and strung along the plane of the ecliptic are the industrial haze-smudges of other asteroidal "klusters" (Ceres, Juno, Vesra etc.), destined to link into one enormous smoke ring round the sun.

I've cited that episode at length because it provides something like a Chinese-boxed package of spaces. There is first ambient solar space containing the asteroidal ring. That ring is itself paradigmatic of such electronically linked technological units as Bruce Sterling has defined (IZ 41) as "communities ... dwelling as neighbours in nonmaterial space — "cyberspace"; and has in his own novel, *Islands In The Net*, described as constituents of a terrestrial global "Net", a concept he equates with what Gibson terms the "Matrix". Here in *Vacuum Flowers* even exterior "astronomical" space is, within the asteroid's living complex, experienced holographically. But before waking to that kind of

experience, Rebel has had two dream encounters: first with mirror-space ("the reflection reached out and yanked Rebel's head into the mirror"); then with cybernetic space as a databank analogue of memory (Rebel's memories would all be shunted over to the Eucrasia persona unless she evaded this by constantly reprogramming a recording of her own persona).

Three of these concepts I will now look at in more general perspective: (1) mirror-space; (2) holographic space; (3) that 'space' which has certain features in common with both cybernetics and memory.

## Mirror-space

Speculation', as in speculative fiction, shares origins with Latin *speculator* (= observer) and *speculum* (= mirror). The mirror in fantasy and myth has a long history of offering the observer entry to worlds which may be duplicating, distorting, or interpreting the time-structured three dimensional world in which he/she moves. Perseus, scatheless, beheads Medusa in that three dimensional world, while his actions are in reverse, performed and observed in a burnished two dimensional one. The mirror of Snow-white's stepmother, asked to bolster illusion, separates the subjective from the objective. Lewis Carroll's looking-glass gives on to a reversed room, a reversed house and a reversed world. This is also a circular or cyclic time-world, not only in the sense that Alice has started dreaming while playing with Kitty and the Red Queen chess-piece, and wakes again to do so, but because within the mirror-dream-time itself her passage is circular. This Alexander Taylor has pointed out in his book *The White Knight*. He remarks that the door which gives on to the final incident of Alice's dream (the disintegrative banquet) is both front door and back door, equipped with both "Visitors' Bell" and "Servants' Bell". Moreover, as the White Queen says, although the effect of living backwards in the Looking-glass world "makes one a little giddy at first... there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways". The Queen then starts screaming, remembering that she is

soon going to prick her finger. William Gibson (in *Interzone* 9) has spoken of cybernetic systems as a metaphor for the workings of human memory. Ian Watson engages the metaphor in his story 'Jewels in an Angel's Wing', using the term 'cyberfugue' to indicate a perpetual looping of memory imposed on human victims arbitrarily collected by a spacefaring alien 'angel' to become psychic jewelry — a mosaic of effulgent and mutually memory-reflecting precious stones. This, like the White Queen episode, could allegorize the functioning of mind in a deterministic universe; though I shall later trace another and different psycho-spatial dimension basic to Watson's fantasy.

The metaphoric potential of infinitely angled pathways of light is suggested by the title of Michael Ende's fantasy *Mirror In The Mirror*, and by its original, *Der Spiegel: Ein Labyrinth*. Such reflectiveness, and reflexivity, in mirror or crystal is a trope many times used by HG Wells. There is metaphoric subtlety in Wells' early story 'The Crystal Egg'. The image of the winged Martian in the crystal is so compelling that Mr Cave actually looks for the creature behind the crystal. Later he realizes that a Martian is looking into his face as he gazes through the crystal into its face; and there is a brilliantly realized image of Earth seen from Earth in the Martian skies at the same time as Earth (which contains Mr Cave looking at Mars) is being observed from Mars via the same medium — a variety of reflective feedback. Bolaris in Wells's *The Brothers*, described as being, like Dromio of Ephesus, "the glass" of his twin, constantly uses mirror metaphors of distortion, cloudiness or refraction in discussing the mind. He speculates that: "all the views of life and its courses are no more than echoes made by the patterns in our eyes and brains. We are just prisms who sort out the rays of life in our way, bent mirrors that reflect them into relevant forms". Symbolically, as Bolaris falls, a cut glass mirror is "shivered to a cloud of sparkling dust" by the fatal bullet.

In contemporary SF mirrorshades have virtually been the badge of cyberpunk. "Cyberpunk" said John Shirley, interviewed by Richard Kadrey (IZ17), is a mirror you

can edit." — not a bad depiction of the mirrorshade which will only reflect the face of the observer, looker-in, while allowing a certain power and anonymity to the observer, the looker-out, able clandestinely to select the focus of his/her gaze. As Key McVeigh has it in his critique of cyerpunk (V144): "They hide the eyes, our one window onto the soul" — an empty soul, he speculates. There may be an emptiness, or beyond may be an unknown world or entity. The mirrorshade is a culminating emblematic artefact in Bruce Sterling's post-punk, extrapolative-realist 'cybernovel', *Islands In The Net*. There it takes the form of the intimidating videoshade, "the new bit-mapped kind with a million little pixel lenses! threaded along a "fine-etched golden spiderwebbing in the opaque lenses". The videoshade is a medium for representing whatever lies beyond the mirror-lens to a distant monitoring agent who is able, by audio link, to direct the wearer's observing movements so as to bring objects and subjects into view. Remember how Alice climbed on to chair and mantelshelf trying to observe through the mirror what lay behind the hearth and the clock, only succeeding when the mirror mistily melted. Sterling's actual mirrorlens-wearers experience unreality, feel isolated in "a kind of shellac of television". Alice, too, suffered existential trauma, ultimately uncertain whether she dreamed or was dreamed by a character behind the Looking-glass (the Red King). Such are the regressive complexities of mirror-space, observer and observed equally and ambiguously separated and co-joined.

## Holographic Space

The dimensions of holographic space are no less complex. When in Wells's *The Brothers* the cut-glass mirror, analogue of Bolaris's mind, is shattered, each fragment may be thought of as a potential reflector of what the whole glass mirrored; and what the whole glass mirrored may be thought of as being identical with what the individual slivers might show. That is a crude holographic paradigm. In William Gibson's first published story, 'Fragments of a Hologram Rose', the protagonist, Parker, as his wariness sinks towards "delta", recalls that in a hologram each fragment, recovered and illuminated, will reveal the whole image; and he sees himself as the rose hologram-card he has just shredded, each of his scattered fragments — stolen credit cards, astrological babble, corpse by the highway etc. — revealing the rose from a different angle. It is a theme and metaphor implicit in very many of the states of consciousness, expanses of inner space, portrayed in Gibson's novels: is, indeed, worked into the very structure of the novels themselves.

What Danny Rirdan berates as Gibson's obscurity (in *Foundation 43*) largely arises out of a technique of feeding his readers fragments and requiring them to become involved in discerning narrative unities. The technique is applied as much to episodes as to

whole novels. It exists in that vivid dream sequence in *Count Zero*, when Turner, snatching sleep in the bunker prior to his Mitchell defection raid, finds "fragments of Mitchell's dossier as "a brain, greyish pink and alive beneath a wet clear membrane, pulsing softly in Mitchell's hand". The iconic use there of the brain chimes with current theory that the brain in its coded storage of recorded images may functionally resemble a hologram. In the 'Soul-Catcher' chapter of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* the *loa*, Pappa Legba, tells tale after 3Jane tale, "and the tale is one tale, countless strands wound about a common, hidden core". An archetypal Gibson story is his 'New Rose Hotel'. It is only a fragment, but in it the entire saga of the Maas-Hasaka wars appears to be embodied. Considered holographically it is the major trilogy; and its own internal structure is no less holographic. In action occurring in each of its remembered settings, the streets and hotels and terminals of Yokohama, Vienna, Amsterdam, Paris, Marrakesh, the whole story seems implicit. Set into the story are several passages themselves constituting small holographic models. For example:

I understand Fox's laternight habit of emptying his wallet, shuffling through his identification. He'd lay the pieces out in different patterns, rearrange them, wait for a picture to form. I knew what he was looking for. You did the same thing with your childhoods. In New Rose tonight, I choose from your deck of pasts.

Those patterns, that deck of pasts, are of the substance of holographic space. Sequences of dream and reflective thought permeate the narrative, and this is particularly appropriate in the light of recent theory that in its progress a dream serially repeats and repeats what is significant for the dreamer, this significance both spanning the whole dream and also being rehearsed microcosmically in its successive incidents. A significant dimension of Ian Watson's earlier cited *Jewels* story is that the angel programmed structure in which the humans are psychically embedded contains every experience of every human 'jewel', while every human jewel subjectively experiences and re-experiences (and reflects in its every facet) the whole. As the narrator says: Just as light shifts within a gem, so our adventures scintillate, the huge flying aliens being "wrapped round with convoluted sparkling sails and veils, shimmering with powers and forces we couldn't fathom".

One of the most striking images in CS Lewis's *Perelandra* is that of the phenomenon observed by Ransom at the conclusion of his interventionary ordeal on Venus. This is the cosmic Great Dance or Great Game, in which a spatial relationship between the scattered "Dust" and "Malcedii", the defile centre, both exists and is absent. The vision is of a chaos, but only in the sense that: There seems no plan because it is all plan: there seems no nature because it is all centre." As Ransom looked at the mutually embracing arabesques and flower-like subtleties of the

weaving Dance, each individual figure became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle ... the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated". In Romanesque, Viking and Celtic art, in Persian architecture and carpet design, in both Impressionist and oriental painting, as well as in the intricate structures of crystalline and of organic forms, there is to be found just such fractal phenomena with order implicit in an apparent chaos of parts, each part in some measure a microcosm of the whole.

Fractal, a word originally descriptive of the replicative irregular sub-forms discernible in natural forms, has only been in use since the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot coined it a decade ago. It has since become generally applicable in the practice of spatial computer configuration, where an equation is programmed to generate graphic art by a progressive magnification of fractal components. This may produce natural-looking organisms, landscapes, cosmoses, the developing whole infinitely enfolded in the parts in ways analogous to that in which each separated part of a hologram contains the whole — an analogy sustained by the physicist David Bohm in his book *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*. We can, however, go much further back than a decade to find intimations of such structures. Two hundred years ago, in the epic poem *Milton*, William Blake's 'Fourfold Vision' saw things this way (in Blakean code "Los" = creative energy, and "vegetable" = material):

For every space larger than a red Globule of Man's blood

Is visionary, and is created by the Hammer of Los:

And every space smaller than a Globule of Man's blood opens

Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow,

The red Globule is the unwearied sun by Los created

To measure Time and Space to mortal men every morning.

Three hundred years before Blake, the artist and scientist da Vinci was holistic in his vision of the universe, and perhaps prescient of Chaos Theory, when in his *Notebooks* he wrote: Every part is disposed to unite with the whole, that it may thereby escape from its own incompleteness; and his perception of fractal structure in such phenomena as cyclones, whirlpools, mountains and plants, he expressed in drawings with marked resemblances to the computer-generated art I have mentioned. The insights of contemporary writers of SF are intensified by their access to holographic and Mandelbrotian theory and experimentation. Thus in that passage of AA Atanasios *In Other Worlds* where Carl is informed of the nature of his photonic transportation from New York City to be re-created in the black hole embedded "World", the "eld skyle" says:

Every molecule of your form has been explored by my five-space con-

sciousness and compared to the anthropic ideal enfolded in the hyperspace of your genes. The flaws and variances of the genetic ideal were the rough edges of your individuality: your soft stomach, weak eyes, bald head, and bloated kidneys. These deviations from the perfection implicit in your chromosomes are actually food to a being like me — an eld skyle. I eat the strange. You see, my five-space experiences you wholly, shining with the full possibilities of life.

AA Attanasio's brilliantly inventive imagination creates hells and heavens as mindstretching as some of Blakes; and his "five-space" perceptions have something in common with Blakes non-reductionist "Four-fold Vision". Both exemplify an effectively extravagant use of images and metaphors of scientific derivation to explore a holistic universe envisaged in the dimensions of what may now be termed "holographic" space.

## Meeting Spaces of Cybernetics and Memory

You come to a strange city, as it might be London. Your various work journeys involve the tube. At first you concentrate on the right stops and interchanges, using maps, station announcements and direction signs eventually you dispense with these save for memory-held impressions of the map. Then a subliminal recognition of patterns of stops, of passage-way and escalator routes, is maintained by an automatic counterflow between memory and sensed environment, enabling you switch trains, change levels without really taking thought. Should you make a wrong turn or proceed on a wrong line, the environmental feed-in doesn't get the required feedback, and you have consciously to take stock and steer your required course. You, your memory and your perceived environment are every day engaged in cybernetic operations, with smoothly functioning feedback normally controlling the steering. The coined word "cybernetics" has its origin in the Greek word *kubernetes* (= steersman); and cybernetic theory has a range of applications, able to account for the adaptive approach of bee to flower, or of traveller to tube. It accounts also for the alternative-stating menus a word processor screens in response to unacceptable instructions. Memory, or something analogous, is throughout involved, though where brains are concerned the hologram now appears to provide a better model than the linear processes and loops of machines.

However, when William Gibson uses fictionally the word "cyberspace" he envisages brain-originated and subliminally recalled spatial patterns, such as those that will accompany and steer a seasoned traveller around the Underground, fused with the informational "spaces" that computer memories can make available through combinations of networking and graphic representation. Gibson's instrument for his fictive development

of such concepts in *Neuromancer* is the "cyberspace deck". Let his console jockey, Case, be once jacked-in to a deck, and it "projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix", permitting to his inner eye "the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity". Consciousness and human memory are associated synaptic/neuronic processes: computer information and AI with electronic processes. A quantum universe may indicate for these processes a common ground or field, lending some plausibility to Gibson's imaginings. These open up fascinating areas of fictive experience, particularly when we find the processes either alternating or functioning in tandem. In fact Gibson writes that "the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium": this at the opening of the Memory Lane library foray in *Neuromancer*, during which Case works in several experiential modes, accessing cyberspace by deck, and identifying with Molly at the point of action by simstim switch set into the deck. (In the following extract my annotations are italicized and in square brackets):

Cyberspace slid into existence from the cardinal points. Smooth, he thought, but not smooth enough. Have to work on it... [Two modes of consciousness of the matrix and of his own memory-based comparison of the quality: an adjustment needed - cybernetic looping.]

Then he keyed the new switch. [Alteration effected.]

The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color... She was moving through a crowded street... For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became a passenger behind her eyes. [Consciousnesses at work in tandem.]

Such cybershifts continue throughout that piratical exercise. Elsewhere in Gibson the same narratorial technique is taken to exhilarating extremes; and notably in the 'Cranes' chapter of *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. There one ceases to be sure whether cyberspace is drawing for its constructs on coded memories or whether memory resonates in perceptions of cyberspace. In the speculative last chapter of that novel, cyberspace, as the sum total of data in the human system, is regarded as a sentient matrix receiving input from another, an alien matrix. These are holistically oriented concepts geared to an age of electronic and cybernetic theory rather than the same way as not dissimilar concepts of sentient planetary or stellar systems in Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* were, half a century earlier, geared to dialectical and evolutionary discourse. And in some of his imagined universes Stapledon came quite close to the *Mona Lisa* structurings of cyberspace, as in the *Star Maker* cosmos where beings had not only omnipresent volition:

They could take action in every region of space, though with varying precision and vigour according to their mental calibre. In a manner they were disembodied spirits, striving over the physical cosmos like chess players, or like Greek gods over the Trojan Plain.

In that last chapter of *Mona Lisa* the *loa*, the voodoo Horsemen are represented as phenomena accompanying splinterings of the human matrix as it becomes selfaware through encounter with an other than human matrix, a transforming event; and earlier it is tentatively suggested that alien entities inhabiting or visiting the terrestrial cyberspace matrix may have "characteristics (which) correspond with the primary mythform of a 'hidden People'". There is also the possibility that the matrix itself has certain godlike characteristics — omniscience, incomprehensibility, omnipotence but these unconformably with the more comprehensive cultural definitions of 'God', are temporally limited and only locally valid.

## A Convergence of Spaces

We are with such metaphors bordering a quasi-metaphysical threshold. There is an interesting passage in Stanislaw Lem's comparatively 'hard' SF novel, *Flasco*, describing a "last generation" computer assisting the SETI scout ship *Hermes* in its approach to the planet Quinta. It was named DEUS: Digital Engrammatic Universal System. "Note every one believed that the acronym was accidental. It is, however, a human creation as much as is Gibson's cyberspace, and it is an ultimate generation computer because its functioning has "reached the limits imposed by such properties of matter as Planck's constant and the speed of light". It is an AI which, while the crew are in the sleep of "embryonization", is cybernetic 'steersman', adjusting the ship's state as it meets unforeseen contingencies, renewing in a terasecund the ships shield when a handful of cosmic dust has destroyed it. Only when it is faced with an unknown factor indicating a choice of courses anomaly of body/mind interface in the first reanimated human does it use "random generator", the equivalent of a human flipping a coin. Thus, though in interstellar space no problems arise in the expected functioning of the cyber system, when it confronts the neuronic and synaptic 'spaces' basic to a human organisms awareness, it finds only the logistics of chaos and randomness appropriate. In Lem's earlier novel *Solaris* an alien planetary ocean models both chaos and a species of universal memory, and is at the same time analogous to cyberspace in that it feeds back semi-hallucinatory, yet disturbingly real, "Phi" creatures according to the recurrent loopings of guilt-ridden or expectant emotions projected unconsciously by the ocean-orbiting scientists. Eventually there is ambiguity as to whether 'reality' is vested in the unstable and unsatisfactory constructs which are the personae of the scientists, in the profound chaos

of the fragmenting ocean, or in some psychic 'space' subsuming both.

The wealth of spatial images and metaphors to be discovered in SF naturally serves a variety of narrative purposes, from naively futurological to sophisticatedly ideational; but as I have tried to show there are many cases where a fiction's essence has been exploration of reas of fragmentation and randomness, with attempts to determine what universes and experiences of order, if any, may be implicit in them. This fragmentation may be represented through psychocybernetic, mirror, and holographic metaphors to all of which the concept of memory has relevance. Exploration through such spatial metaphors may involve the imagery both of building-up and breaking-down. Examples of the building-up process occur among the musically oriented metaphors of Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Memory Of Whiteness* (a book much regardful of the Pythagorean tenet that music and mathematics are the mediators of chaos and order). Such an example is Arthur Holywelkin's visionary/miraculous experience of standing naked within a crater of the asteroid Icarus, then at perihelion, so that in 'real' spacetime every atom of his being must have been disintegrated. He perceives fragmentation in the sky-filling solar disc; but then his experience becomes one of confident order and unity:

The swelling tree, white glassy currents in the thermonuclear ball, emanating pitches, melodies just on the edge of understanding ... and in a time without time I knew what it was to be a bronze man, part of the sun for all eternity.

And he returns from this existence in a universe "where all is vibration" to his destined role, "(His) mathematics the expression of the mind of Mithras. (His) orchestra the model of the voice of Sol".

There could be few better examples of the breaking-down metaphor than the following from 'The Detective's tale' section of Dan Simmons's *Hyperion*. The hacker BR is explaining to Brawne why "personality retrieval" exercises had invariably ended in chaos:

Even with the best sim control ... you can't factor all the variables satisfactorily. The persona template becomes self-aware ... I don't mean self-aware like you and me, but self-aware that it is an artificially self-aware persona — and that leads to terminal Strange Loops and non-harmonic labyrinths that go straight into Escher-space.

The existential and paradoxical irony evident there belongs to 'the Red King syndrome' the classic origin of which I earlier cited from *Through The Looking-Glass*. It also points back to Rebel Elizabeth Mudlark's predicament in the incident from *Vacuum Flowers* with which I opened this article. One further illustration from that novel serves to draw together some of the article's strands while enlarging its 'meta-

physical' purview. Rebel, after an ocean crossing, is at the heart of the wolverine-targeted, "Comprise"-inhabited, island. She experiences empathy with it as an organism; she senses coded messages in the inter-connected tangles of leaf and twig, and feels that walking through them she 'might well be walking through the confines of a mind that mirrored her own, wandering the mazy wretours of memory and persona'. She clutches the ceramic wafer, a flake which carries a recording of her own persona, and as she penetrates the thickest she projects her mind towards tree and wafer, speculating:

Perhaps where a human brain operated at electrochemical speeds, a tree would operate at the biological speeds of metabolism and catabolism, its thoughts slow and certain as the growth of a new branch. The ceramin wafer could only operate on the level of atomic decay, each complete thought eons long, its lifespan greater than the stars.

*Vacuum Flowers* is an intricately woven cyber-hallucinatory narrative. It is also one given (often playfully) to literary reference and allusion. The above quotation envisages reciprocity between spaces, times and speeds of interrelated, perhaps inter-related, perhaps interactive, complexes — cellular, electrochemical and electronic/neuronic. There is also a half-heard echo of those lines of Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' which follow his fantasies of spacefree wandering through historic time: 'My vegetable Love should grow/Vaster than Empires, and more slow.' Marvell goes on to prescribe ever-increasing spans of time for the praising of fragmented parts of his Lady (eyes, forehead, breasts, heart) before disintegrating her (and himself) into the dust and ashes of mortality, only lyrically to recall them both to present and instant love and ecstasy, that they may: 'Rather at once our Time devour./ Than languish in its slow-chapt pow'r.'

Marvell's writing is singularly on the nerve of our own times, especially as here in his metaphorical use of history — a usage recognized by Mary Gentle in an interview with Colin Greenland (IZ42) when she says "History is what you make it ... History is a mirror and a metaphor." This is a concept to which she gives fictive form in, for example, the esoteric interactions between the cosmically backgrounded planes of existence of the "Lords of the Shining Paths" and the hierarchical/dialectical transformations of the "City" in her story 'The Knot Garden'.

Edward James, himself a professional historian, thinks it arguable (Foundation 35) "that history has been more of a protagonist in science fiction than science itself". But if the spaces and times of history can generate speculation and metaphor, so also may those of science — as they do in Roger Jones's *Physics As Metaphor*. There he regards contemporary notions of space as metaphorically embodying "all our concepts and experiences of separation, articulation, isolation, delimitation, division, differentiation, and identity.

He perceives, on the other hand, in the pre-Newtonian mind a sense of space as being something more like "a web of organic and reflexive relationships". The examples of spatial metaphor I have selected from works of SF and fantasy, in their combinations of and variations on those two modes of perception, fractal and holistic, reveal characteristics both oppositional and complementary. They reflect the paradoxes of a quantum universe, where subatomic particles have the characteristics both oppositional and complementary. They reflect the paradoxes of a quantum universe, where subatomic particles, and are perhaps best thought of as indicators of the existence of interacting fields. My examples have variously shown attempts to avoid and to embrace what Roger Jones has called "the horrendous experience of oneness, of the ultimate state of unity to which mystic seers and philosophers of all ages have referred". It is an experience of one such seventeenth-century (Thomas Traherne) wrote: "The best of images shall I / Comprised in Me see; / For I can spy / All Angels in the Deity / Like me to ly." A rather neat Chinese-boxish, catoptric, almost cybernetic, and quite perfect holographic spatial conceit!



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# Flabby Engineering

Simon Ings

Now it's official: *Interzone* is edited by a megalomaniac. In *IZ* 36 of that esteemed publication editor David Pringle analysed the results of a recent readership questionnaire.

Which of the following magazines or newspapers do you read regularly?

... What is interesting is that the American sf magazines... all have relatively low scores, as do such fringe British magazines as *Fear*, *GM*, *Starburst* and *White Dwarf*, leading us to conclude that *Interzone* is the only magazine which reaches the core readership for science fiction in the UK.

What, we cry, of those who read *Omni* et cetera but never buy *Interzone*? Clearly, such people do not exist — or if they do, then they can't matter very much.

"Europe's only English language science fiction magazine" (?), erstwhile publisher of "radical hard science fiction" (a *soi disant* concoction defined purely in negatives) has never been one to let (ideo)logical consistency stand in the way of its bid for a wider readership. It has never taken up a prescriptive role, never, since its early days, courted notoriety. Over the years it has labelled itself according to the spirit of the time. While it was a small publication, radicalism was its watchword. The radical tag made its modest beginnings so much more glamorous for its readership. Now it claims centre-stage, colouring its commercial success with ephemeral hints at its own literary supremacy. It has not become mainstream; it has *subsumed* the mainstream.

Its current chatty, Ferman-esque editorial style is the latest in a series of changes that have increased the mass market appeal of the magazine. Literary "beauty contests", questionnaires, a series of articles on best-selling writers and a film column give *Interzone* the catch-all feel of a true mass market monthly magazine.

Of course, the arty types don't like it. They pine for the fried egg covers, Colin Greenland's Burroughs parodies, cunningly disguised as reviews, the redolent 60's minimalist settings of the early stories. Solicit opinions of *Interzone* from a representative

sample of fans, editors and writers at a convention sometime, you'd think they were describing *White Dwarf*, not a magazine devoted to the written word.

If Pringle's worried about this, he's not showing it. Why should he? *Interzone* has gone monthly. *Interzone* has a rapidly expanding readership. *Interzone* is one of the more highly prized magazines among US science fiction critics.

Is the carefully nurtured rumour of *Interzone*'s literary demise just another case of that peculiarly British contagion, fickleness? Or, as Mr Pringle might say in *Interzone*'s inimitable corporate manner, why does everyone who is no-one bad-mouth *Interzone*?

One wonders if those who criticise *Interzone*'s "conservatism" have actually read the competition. The themes, approaches and generic roots of its now monthly selections are consistently more challenging and eclectic than those found in its competitors. Issue 36, for example, features three relative newcomers to the field — Egan, Reynolds and Widdowson — writing about paradoxes of intention, viral spacetime, and an alien contact that subjects the macroscopic environment to the symmetrical uncertainties of quantum theory thereby revealing the memetic primacy of Poe's "Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket".

Asimov's it ain't.

*Interzone*'s emphasis on new writers is its most significant hallmark. The past year has seen some remarkable debuts and some excruciating pratfalls. This is how things should be. A magazine that makes no mistakes is a magazine that has ceased to develop. And sometimes, of course, the pratfalls pay off. Ian Lee's "Driving Through Korea" must rate as *Interzone*'s most facile debut, a shaggy dog story dressed up in the motley of cod post-modernism. Come *IZ* 37, however, Lee, whose earlier association with the late and much-unlamented *Jennings Magazine* can't have helped his narrative skills any, has begun teething. "Once Upon a Time in the Park" is set in a generic Gilliamesque *future naive* wobbling uncertainly between fairy tale and parody. His narrator (a wheelbarrow) uses the diction and and stylistic construc-

tions of parody throughout, without ever honing in on specific targets. Believing that this tale of murder and vegetables is the medium through which some parodic subtext will emerge, however, one finds oneself taking on board whatever absurdity Lee cares to throw into the text. In the final analysis, "Once Upon a Time in the Park" is nothing more than an exercise in suspension of disbelief taken to a mischievous extreme. Lee at least, of all those benighted *Jennings* contributors, has learned that you can get clever without behaving like a patronising pain in the butt.

Along with Lee, we met Ian MacLeod and Keith Brooke, two new writers who were next to appear in *IZ* 34. It is said that Brooke nearly became an accountant. In this we share a blood bond — one that no future rivalry may blacken, and this is made doubly sure by "Adrenotropic Man" (*IZ* 30), the tale of a yuppie who achieves a hippy-style enlightenment by coming to terms with his own assassination.

I'm not going to let them beat me. It's now 27 hours since my assassination and I have stayed in control. My mind is relaxed. My adrenalin has not reached that fatal level. I am in command.

Maxwell Riesling's assassins have injected him with something rather peculiar. The upshot: if he gets angry, his adrenalin production goes up exponentially until he dies, quite literally, of rage.

Riesling's reply is to get cool, contemplate the sunshine and the birds and wonder, when the assassin returns to finish the botched up job on his life, "how he'll kill me this time?" One may imagine Brooke himself, a complacent escapee of yuppieedom, asking much the same question on receipt of his poll tax bill, and with the same note of disinterest. A little freedom is a wonderful thing. "The Greatest Game of All" (*IZ* 34) is another admortuary dissection of the upwardly mobile ethos. Morgan, a man with the obsessive distrustfulness and suspicion one might reasonably expect of a personnel officer, finds an answer to his emotional insecurity: love — chemically induced — with himself.

There isn't much here to suggest the range of Brooke's competence, but the stories are

clearly written, with strong ideas that work not only as science fiction, but as metaphors for the current condition of real people. He has the potential to become that rare thing, an sf author with a truly sympathetic vision of the real world. For now, we must judge him more modestly; as the purveyor of a truth most pertinent to all hungry writers — that death ain't nothing but accountancy misperceptions.

Ian MacLeod is another matter entirely. "Through" (IZ 30) and "Well-Loved" (IZ 34) demonstrate an enviable competence with emotional effects and a narrative control which not only elucidates the most tortuous paradoxes ("Through" is a tale of subtle psychological betrayal set against a collapsing time-line) but can also hone and embitter the most familiar of melodramatic devices in the fantastic canon ("Well-Loved" tells of a whore who swaps ids with a well-loved teddy bear — at the very moment the little girl who tends it grows bored with it).

If any science fiction ever deserved the "radical" tag, then surely it would be that which deals, at whatever level, with the real concerns of the people it was written for. Sf which *isn't* escapist. Sf which *isn't* about the non-human world.

MacLeod demonstrates just such a vision, just such a belief. It's there in the very construction of the sentences, in the minutiae of observation — a desire to synthesise on the page a human perception of the world. This from "Well-Loved":

You finish your drink and he gets you another, and you start to think that maybe this one is kind, this one understands. The whole luggage of hope spills out and you're dragging it around the room with your figure and your smile. And when you sense he's anxious to start you ask What's It To Be and you feel his doubt. There's even a moment when you hope he's not going to want to Swap

But

Let's Swap, he says. It comes out like it's a great new idea. And that's how you take it: freshly minted for this baby pink and blue room, for this special occasion.

Richard Calder's "The Lilim" in IZ 34 is another remarkable second showing, and another demonstration of prefalls made good. "Mosquito", now to be reprinted by Omni for reasons best known to Ellen Datlow's conscience, was, when all is said and done, an exercise in forced characterisation, cod sexuality and an awful lot of cyberjunk. "The Lilim", however, hammers out, with only the odd bruise to the thumb, a unique psycho-ecological niche far from the guano-rich back-alleys of the Movement. "The Lilim" is a phantasmagoric assembly of toys, dreams, visions, intimations of corrupted innocence, literary and artistic metaphors, *belles epoues* depictions of grandeur in decline and delightful little subversions of the Gothic matrix of signification from which it draws its metaphorical power (milk replaces blood as the

food of the undead, graveyards become milk bars).

The literary and phantasmic figures of an Edwardian childhood have been given new birth — dolls, fabricated on a subatomic level by toymaker *virtuosi*, dressed by Chanel, adorned by Faberge, doted on by the rich the world over, have come to spin a clockwork charm about the crumbling facades of a once indomitable European capital.

"Such pretty automatons. Pantalone, Harlequin, Pierrot... How your father spoils you! But beware of her, Peter." And she would pick up thrashing Columbine, image of my inamorata. "Beware of dead girls. Their too-red lips. Their hearts of ice."

For, seeded within the dolls' recombinant mechorganic fibre are the codes for other dreams, other literatures, other aesthetic systems — systems from which the seemingly innocent pastel visions of an Edwardian childhood were teased ("Sexless he wanted us, your priceless Papa. But his subconscious desires made us whores. Virgin whores, forever deflowered!"). Within every Alice, there is a vampyric succubus, behind every comforting and homely pink-pantalooned countenance, a dreadful, demonic beauty.

The draught became a wind. Her lips parted and she grew saucer-eyed. Spittle dropped onto her chin. The wind blew through me, a divine mistral, turning me to stone. Still kneeling, I clutched white knuckled at her skirts, petrified by her cold beauty. Her hair, black and opulent, lashed about her face, now like a malefic greenie's; and her eyes shone like green ice. The wind howled, and the ice was in me.

"No!" she shouted, "I won't, I won't!" The wind died, sighing with exasperation. Her tongue, darting lizard-like across her lips, licked away a lather of white froth.

Calder's story is not without its demerits. Towards the end we are treated to too many dumpings of unnecessary information regarding the rationale of this world. Save it for the novel, Mr Calder. With an aesthetic grasp such as yours, this nightmare works quite well enough without the knobs on. Indeed, if the last three pages of the narrative are disregarded in their entirety, something positively Victorian flexes itself beneath Calder's admirable prolepsis. This caveat aside, Calder's talents ably illustrated in this tale.

So many good new writers — well, three — and yet, and yet...

Why, alongside the works by Calder and MacLeod and Brooke, do we find sillies like Matthew Dickens who in "Great Chain of Being" (IZ 34) demonstrated an unenviable capacity to let his metaphors go walk-about all over his precious text? The words "computer virus" just beg to be elided to a pseudomedical theme, and Langford's "Blit" how amusing — and chilling — that process could be. Metaphors are fun. Poor research, however, is unforgivable, and Dickens's word-games are just that — word-games.

Nothing to do with the story at all, which for that reason seems decidedly half-baked.

Pringle dishes out rope enough in his search for new talent and sure enough even the more reliable of *Interzone's* new authors are only too ready to string themselves up. Royally.

Nichola Griffith writes fiction for Games Workshop, those world-renowned purveyors of lead figures and sexist rulebooks. Hand Griffith a Games Workshop manual, however, and you will be surprised. She will twist it like taffy till it resembles something like literature. What's more, the purveyors of lead figures and sexist rulebooks will publish it, gay content, feminist ethos and all. They once complained about there being too many female authority figures, but you can't have everything. Why does she write for this uncoloured of uncoloured outfits? Because she takes he work seriously. While others scoff, she struggles. And, most of the time, it pays off. Meanwhile, back in *Interzone*, she gets to write in a more direct fashion about the problems and concerns that confront her readership. Radical sf again — sf about people, and this time, this one time, it makes no difference. Because "Down the Path of the Sun" (IZ 34) sucks.

In a dying world, a family of women settle uneasily beside a warehouse stocked with supplies. The protagonist's sister is brutally killed (we do not witness the killing, but we accompany Karo in her hunt for, and discovery of, her sister, who by now has been dead for some while). The attackers are not seen, they do not return, and life, we must suppose, will go on — halting a little. Maimed.

It is, if you like, a requiem for the Un-named Woman, for the innocent victim of violence. It is safe to assume (and Griffith trusts us enough not to tub-thumb the message) that the violence we are talking about here is the kind that (some) men in our society wreak upon (some) women (the parentheses here are not, by the way, are not the typographical symptoms of abrogated social responsibility, but since Griffith understated her message the better to express it, far be it from me to do otherwise).

There are no men visible in this story, few men indeed in the world the story outlines. That they are mentioned at all, that the Sapphic family Griffith describes is put into this kind of geo-sexual context, is clue enough that men have at least some metonymic contribution to make to the text. That the numbers of men are dwindling, and that once ubiquitous "gangs" have more or less wiped themselves out, begs us to make the unproven but reasonable linkage between men and violence in the story itself. It's the reader who formulates that equation, not Griffith, and that is important. Griffith's care for the surface ambiguity of the text goes further. We can never be sure that gangs such as those mentioned in the text are responsible for the death of the protagonist's sister. The destruc-

tion of the food stores which accompanies the murder of the girl suggests an attack so utterly without logic as to become, quite literally, inhuman. The protagonist, Karo, may be convinced a human agency did this, but the reader takes a little convincing. The murder takes on (for want of a more comfortable and fantastic hypothesis, for which Griffith most certainly does *not* give the reader sanction) the immanent mantle of a natural disaster — were it not for the torn blouse, the way her neck has been broken — our protagonist supposes she was bent back over the roll of paper where she's found dead.

Again, it's the reader that solves the equation, not Griffith herself. It's the reader who is forced to accept Diggy's death for what it is, and without the usual conventions that surround and glamourise our fictional murders it takes a certain amount of courage. Murder isn't about rage, and justice and horror. It's about shit, and torn clothing and breaking the news to mother.

The meat of this story is certainly not in the murder, that is, not in the procedures of the killing — though these are the off-stage events on which the story turns. The story itself is about the relationship between Karo and her murdered sister, Diggy, it is about the alienation that accompanies loss, and also about the minute by minute strength that terrible and terrifying situations bring out in some people — in this instance, in Karo. The identity, the motives, the procedure of the murder is, in a profound and disturbing way, irrelevant. On one level that's a good thing — it desensationalises the act, it makes room for the victim.

But.

Let's face it. We are not talking about murder. We are talking about a ripped shirt pulled up over the head of a girl stretched over a roll of paper. We are talking about what is twistily known as a "sexual" killing. In that sexualising an act of violence dehumanises the victim and glamourises the procedure of the act, it may seem indeed mete of Griffith to decentre the roles of the perpetrators. The logic runs: desensationalising the act likewise desexualises it.

That is all very well — but there is a yawning divide, philosophically and morally speaking, between the ending of life and the spoliation of the body, and the aesthetic procedures undertaken to depict one act in a certain way, by no means necessarily work when applied copy-book fashion to another act, however close a neighbour it might be in the narrative sequence. People die in many circumstances; that a human being is murdered is somewhat less significant than that she is dead. Decentering the procedure of the murder is as good a way as any to concentrate on the victim, to mourn, to assess, to heal.

An attempt to desexualise a "sexual" crime has obvious ideological currency. Desexualising a "sexual" attack by employing invisible attackers, though, is one step on the logic ladder Griffith should never have taken. Terrorising, brutalising and degrading a fellow human being is not a sequence of

physical events leading to a conclusion. It is a psychological process in which the perpetrator takes his cues from the perceived nature and extent of the psychological stress placed upon the victim and wreaks his harm by manipulating that knowledge. There's a shorter word for all this, and the word is "sadism". Griffith has, whether she likes it or not, landed herself with a corpse who, for maybe a few minutes, maybe only a few seconds before her death, was made less of a person than the Diggy of her sister's remembrance, by — and this is important — *being made aware that her ordeal was one of degradation*. In the absence of hints to the contrary, we are asked to believe that Karo still feels confident in her possession of her sister's memory. In doing so she denies the nature of her sister's death. Such crimes do not dehumanise only in the way they are usually portrayed. They can dehumanise in fact, also. In avoiding the first trap — indeed, in building a story which specifically denies the currency of that first trap, Griffith has fallen straight into the second — by sweeping aside the real and terrible possibility of Diggy's dehumanisation in a soft-focussed funeral.

Stephen Baxter improves not at all. On one hand he has a good and chilling line in the depiction of men (always men, mind, and usually three of them) grown hostile to each other under stress.

He shrugged and turned away. "Anyway, I guess we've solved the problem of who's going home and who's not."

I recoiled from the casual chill of his words. "You know, I felt sorry for you. I tried to protect you. But I was wrong, wasn't I? The way you goaded and provoked him, systematically — Pack never stood a chance."

He coughed and clutched at his ribs. "I don't need to listen to this."

— "The Jonah Man" (IZ 28)

Certainly, "Raft" (IZ 31) broke new ground in its hurried yet entertaining whimsical saga of a raft balanced between astral bodies in a universe where gravity is a million times stronger than it is on earth. But come IZ 35 he's back to his old habits — this time there are three men in a tram.

One can only suppose Baxter was traumatised by an out-of-the-body encounter with Fritz Capra while he was writing this. The macrocosmic and microcosmic worlds are *not* scale models of each other. Because silly things happen to subatomic particles, this is *no* excuse for the same silly things to happen to people who talk about subatomic particles. Baxter knows this. You know this. I know this. Pringle surely knew this. What is worse, the entire tale hangs upon an unasked-for tell-me-professor that doesn't belong in the mouth of the character who uttered it and makes no sense coming when it does anyway. Worse: we are told that Spline warships are "physically spherical" which is a relief to them, I am sure, as much as it is to us. Worse,

Baxter has been reading Herbert again. Frank Herbert can get away with lines like "their urgent talk washing past his awareness", largely because he's dead and therefore beyond our mortal wailing and gnashing of teeth. Mr Baxter is not yet free of this mortal coil and would be doing everyone a favour if he'd learn to redraft his stories a bit more.

Charles Stross isn't really a bad writer. He just can't tell the difference between form and content. "Generation Gap" (IZ 31) illustrates the point perfectly — a tale scribed in a near-autistic conglomeration of semiotic exotica, edgy, half-hysterical smiles, slang credible and slang ridiculous, words bent out of shape and words put back to the literal meanings we don't use any more, puns, sound-bites and metaphors drawn from art, politics and cybernetics, and now and again, when he feels like it, punctuation. But for all the inventiveness of the scenario, the colossal scale of our heroes' childish prank (genocide), we are still left with a curiously hollow feeling — the kind of curiously hollow feeling that gets Stross near bottom of *Interzone's* readers' poll every year. Just as we learn a new language with every new depiction of the future, so it is possible for us, after two or three readings, to deconstruct that language, retranslate it, up to a point, into our mother tongue, and if we do just that with "Generation Gap" we are left with — nothing. A story where all significant action after the first decision making is off-stage, and the punishment for our off-stage genocide (a barely forgivable piece of power pornography) is that our heroes are going to be made to feel very very sorry for what they did for a very long time.

Stross has been called a copycat or would-be cyberpunk. This is unfair. He was writing this weirdness years before Gibson ever got published. He was just very young and it was all rather dreadful. Stross's settings are his own, honest. His plots, though? Well, there was once this writer called Enid Blyton...

Then of course there are the clones. Glenn Grant in IZ 34 reads like Charles Stross forced to explain what he means after being administered a healthy dose of morphine — vacuous referents deconstructed ad nauseam reach their apogee with the line: "ResetMin just revoked our permit for Finnegan. The Christmas have a monastery about one click to the east. They filed a complaint." A relatively simple piece of technogabble to decode and draw sociological referents from but which proves, alas, to be a column-long explication of what John Cleese has memorably termed "the bleedin' obvious."

Jamil Nasir's "Not Even Ashes" (IZ 31) is a splendid, rollicking tale of science fantasy wedded to modest cyberpunk tropes, but couldn't someone have pointed out to the poor lad that half his story followed the script of *Bladerunner*?

It's not a serious problem. *Interzone* is, by and large, not a magazine of predictable fiction. Its new writers can be very good indeed.



Curious though it may be that material of poor quality is sometimes accepted, certain though it is that Pringle, by his encouragement of certain new writers, seems to be cheering on the damned in the face of literary decency, the fact remains that *Interzone* is a good science fiction magazine. It is, slowly but surely, engineering the future of the genre in Britain. *Vorsprung durch technic* it is not — *Interzone*'s products are not the chrome-edged blades of prescriptive vision, but more the bendy playthings described by Yoshio Aramaki in "Soft Clocks" (IZ 27) — artefacts of "flabby engineering", a bit rubbery but nonetheless of immediate commercial potential.

And, ah, there's the rub. It's good *commercial* science fiction, and when it's not it's bad *commercial* science fiction, but science fiction is not the stuff of which those who deride *Interzone* are made. There are those who once forsook a possible flowering of a new kind of science fiction, a slipstream genre that spoke about the human condition with the metaphors of the scientific realm. A radical science fiction that was about people — that would address its readers, rather than sending them to Never-Never Land. Ideas outside of their human context would be of no value to this new and radical conception of science fiction's future. That vision is not Pringle's. It is time we (for indeed, I will confess it, I count myself a very junior member of that whingeing brood) left the poor man alone with his success, his fame, and his money — and searched, if we're so cocky about our abilities, for fresh pastures, and cleaner air.



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# Book Reviews

## Unicorn Point

Piers Anthony  
NEL, 1990, 305pp, £13.95, £7.99

## Labyrinth of Worlds

Adrian Cole  
Unwin, 1990, 341pp, £6.99

Every now and then, one comes across writing of such low quality that only a four-letter word (not "good") comes to mind to describe it. One is amazed that publishers are prepared to publish and readers to read it. I find *Labyrinth of Worlds* to be such a piece of writing. But then both the above books are sequels to other books I have not read, which poses problems.

Persons seeking to know what *Labyrinth of Worlds* is about will presumably read the blurb, which starts off:

"Raw, primal powers, fused from the darkest elements of Innasmorn, awakened by the coming of Man and the alien Csendook to the Mother of Storms, they strain for absolute freedom." It conveys very little.

They will read the preface which summarises the previous three books. In it, the words "power" and "force" are repeated *ad nauseum*: "dark and forbidden powers", "ancient powers", "absolute power", "elemental forces", "destructive forces", etc. Then they will turn to the first page, which begins:

"Silence and darkness. They were one, like the great emptiness before time, before the birth of the first world. Complete and utter, infinite". This is fairly typical of the narrative prose. When characters enter the story, they "pale" or "swallow hard" on the slightest pretext, and their speech is an amalgam of stiltedness and modern idioms like "Are you telling me...?" It is very hard to suspend disbelief. To his credit, Cole makes valiant attempts to create a sense of atmosphere but, on the whole, he achieves only a vacuum (like the one "before time") his ignorance of physics leads him to imagine?) in which wooden puppets clump around. Nothing is made real. If you can read this, as the saying goes, you're "a good 'un"!

The cover of *Unicorn Point* shows a unicorn with a Gormenghast-like castle in the background. The blurb describes it as "a thrilling continuation of the struggle for power in Piers Anthony's parallel fantasy worlds of Phaze and Proton." Crude maps of

Phaze and Photon appear on early pages, on which there are White Mountains (as in *The Lord of the Rings*) but also Purple Mountains and features described as Red, Orange, Yellow, Green and as having other colours. An impression is easily gained of this being pure tongue-in-cheek fantasy making an attempt to be anything else, but there are many sf ingredients such as robots and cyborgs. (On p202, Anthony refers to "pseudo-organic matter".) There is much humour and the twin worlds are more fully realised than Cole's. The narrative style is more confident and skilled. The dialogue is believable. Anthony's ideas can be bizarre and ingenious. On the debit side, he is self-indulgent and plays games which might be thought silly. An Author's Note at the back tells how he follows certain rules, such as that every third chapter relates to the same generation, and how receptive he is to readers' suggestions as to how the Adept series should continue. "Don't rush me", he says. I wouldn't.

Jim England

## Robot Visions

Isaac Asimov  
Gollancz, 1990, 383pp, £12.95

This is the second book collecting Asimov's robot stories in a rather disorganised way. It is described as the companion piece to the earlier *Robot Dreams*, and like that comes with Ralph McQuarrie's illustrations.

The title story is new and two other stories out of the eighteen are previously uncollected, we also get the only short story written about R Daneel Olivaw. The book ends with 16 short essays, a good number of them actually the introductions to the "Robot City" shared world novels, and many of them repetitive.

As with the earlier book, McQuarrie's illustrations do not seem really appropriate — his robots look too lovable, and in the future world of Lije Bailey and Robot Daneel Olivaw, people hate robots. (McQuarrie also gets things wrong — his illustration to "Robbie" shows the little girl wearing pedal-pushers when she is described as wearing a dress, for instance), but they may help to introduce fans of R2D2 to harder stuff.

What the illustrations tend to hide is the division in Asimov about the future of robots.

For decades people pointed out that the future of the Foundation and of the robot stories was at variance. There are, though big discrepancies between robot stories — the 1956 story "Someday" describes crude robots not made by US Robots and Mechanical Men, and has a very different atmosphere to the Susan Calvin stories collected in *I, Robot* and *The Rest of the Robots*. US Robots was building time machines there, how was that lost by the time of *The Caves of Steel*? And, as Asimov admits in his introduction, while he wrote about computers he never related them to robots.

This is a book that will complete many people's robot collections, but I would have preferred something in a better order.

LJ Hurst

## Embryo

Keith Barnard  
Souvenir Press, 1990, 299pp, £14.95

## Four Past Midnight

Stephen King  
Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, 676pp,  
£14.99

When Doctor Simon Robinson sees something awful in an ultrasound scan of a young pregnant student awaiting a termination, his life is changed beyond all recognition. So opens *Embryo*, the first novel from GP, Keith Barnard. This is a novel that seems to fall in the grey zones between genres. In that it is about genetic research, it could be borderline sf, the mysteries and action point it towards thrillers and the bloody bits tip it towards horror. But on balance I think this is one for the thriller fan. Barnard writes competently, but a bit clumsily. And it's a bit too medical for me (although reasonably accurate). I've never really liked "genuine" blood...

Stephen King, on the other hand, is instantly categorisable, isn't he? Or is he? This huge book is a collection of four stories, all of which could easily have been marketed as novels, so in terms of value for money, this is a bargain at £14.99 for 676 pages (2 and a half times the length of *Embryo* at £14.95...). The stories in this collection are just as difficult to pigeon-hole as was *Embryo* (ignore King's statement in the introduction that they are all horror. What does he know, he's just

the author.) All of them can be seen as horror, but all of them also work on a different level. "The Langoliers" is firmly in the mould of King's earlier novella, "The Mist". An airline pilot cadging a lift home in one of his company's jets wakes up to discover that everyone who wasn't asleep has disappeared. "Secret Window, Secret Garden" leads us into the shattered world of a newly-divorced writer faced with the possibility that he has either plagiarised another man's story, or that he is being pursued by a madman. "The Library Policeman" is a classy monster story that does for libraries what King has done to everything else he writes about. "The Sun Dog" does for Polaroid cameras what "The Library Policeman" does for libraries.

These stories reaffirm Stephen King's position as one of the best of the popular writers. His situations have enough basis in reality to make you see just what he is getting at. Here, he shares with Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett the ability to point out that perfectly normal and serious places, people, things have another side. Except that King sees the Dark Side. I couldn't put this down. Honest.

Jon Wallace

## Digital Dreams

David V Barrett (Ed)

NEL, 1990, 347pp, £4.50

This collection of twenty computer-related short stories presents problems to a reviewer limited to 400 words (20 per story). The general standard of the book is high, and the wide variety of styles and plots makes reading it, from beginning to end a multicoloured multitextured experience. Only occasionally does amateurishness protrude into view; but even this serves to illuminate the better pieces more brightly. For example...

"The Machine It Was That Cried" by John Grant is a haunting love story about an android and an astronaut in a space probe on a 60-year voyage, told by the female android. Its dry, warm pragmatism is reminiscent of Wyndham and Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man" and to my mind it's the strongest story. "The Lord of the Files" by Ray Girvan and Steve Jones is a sort of unlikely marriage between Poe and Steve Martin — sf and humour normally leaves me cold, but in this story the combination is successful and witty. I enjoyed Andy Sawyer's "The Mechanical Art" for its belching demystification of Elizabethan drama, in which a time travelling academic tries to tag performances by selling a Shakespeare simulator to a theatre manager. Josephine Saxton's "The Great Brain Legend" lulls the reader into a quiet, subtle story suggestive of Le Guin, but too short. Paul Kincaid's "Where He Went" is an intriguing series of arguments, interchanges and conversations examining the victims of computerisation at the amoral hands of Corporation. Terry Pratchett, the Big Name on the cover, contributes " #if deDEBUG +

'world/enough' + 'time' ", which is OK but not special (I admit I'm not a convert). Keith Roberts' "Measured Perspective" is a sound, safe story about where art meets science (I admit I am a convert).

That's 7 stories — buy the book and read all 20 of them. It is British, contemporary sf which anyone reading this review will relate to, and if there are places in the book where the literary or intellectual voltage is low, the basic current of interest generated by the fact that these stories are entertaining and relevant to life in our society galvanises *Digital Dreams* into a highly commendable present to oneself. Or to your Amstrad.

David Mitchell

## Strands of Starlight

Gael Baudino

Orbit, 1991, 372pp, £7.95

## Wilderness Moon

Penelope Lucas

Bantam, 1991, 396pp, £12.99

Henceforth, I shall try not to read publicity material before the book. 250 words listing every medical, mental and domestic crisis in the author's life prejudiced me against it.

Which is a pity, because there is a lot of work in *Wilderness Moon*, and at no time did I sense the intrusion of the author's personal life. What is apparent is the extent to which Penelope Lucas has researched and absorbed the ideas and practices of shamanism, the primitive but exceedingly complex beliefs and rituals of people trying to understand and come to terms with the universe and history and their place in both. Human beings are not only part of nature, but through dream and concentration, actually become birds, animals, trees, rocks, returning to their own bodies to employ their trance-acquired lore to direct or serve their tribe.

*Wilderness Moon* is set in Siberia 30,000 years ago. Suffering many vicissitudes, shifting in and out of the spirit world, Injya becomes high priestess of her downtrodden people and leads them into a new land to fulfil their destiny. It is a long book and I found it most exciting when the journey began. And when they reached their destination...? "Why, yes! Of course! Why didn't I realise before that that was where they were going?" All the clues were there but it was so skillfully written without benefit of hindsight that it came as a complete surprise to me.

*Strands of Starlight* is also an historical fantasy. It is set in the Europe of 1350, fictionalised in the same way that Thomas Hardy's Wessex is a real but fictionalised 19th Century England. Gael Baudino portrays Burgundian princes, freethinking city-states and a wide-ranging Inquisition. The book describes the adventures of Miriam who, because of her healing powers, is regarded by those whom she cures as a saint; by the authorities as a heretic or witch. Along the way, she encounters the Elves; she becomes one herself. But who are the Elves?

Early Protestants? Socialist pioneers? The last survivors of the pre-Celtic inhabitants of Europe? Ordinary humans with psychic gifts? Truly magical representatives of Faerie? I could not make up my mind. You will have to read the book and decide for yourself.

Martin Brice

## Voyagers III: Star Brothers

Ben Bova

Methuen, 1990, 341pp, £14.99

As this is the final part of the *Voyagers* trilogy there are people who have read *Voyagers I* and *Voyagers II* who do not need this review. This, therefore, is directed at those who have not, for any reason, read the earlier books. Perhaps the most important point is that you do not need to have read the earlier books — *Voyagers III* stands on its own. Ben Bova has integrated points elucidated in earlier books with great skill, much as background information has to be presented in any story.

The scene is set on Earth and the Moon in the near future. The hero, Keith Stoner, is an ex-astronaut who was resuscitated fifteen years before this book opens after lying frozen in an alien starship for eighteen years. In those fifteen years he has tried to make the Earth a more peaceful and stable place. His powers emanate from his "Star Brother" (nanotechnology) which he shares extremely sparingly with the few leaders he considers powerful and inherently good enough to cope. The book's opening chapter shows him successfully "recruiting" a Brazilian leader and he appears to be slowly succeeding in his plans. Unfortunately at the same time as nations are becoming peaceful some huge multi-national conglomerates are set to clash. Keith Stoner's wife is the head of one such conglomerate (Vanguard) and another, led by Li-Po Hsen, is trying to take over Vanguard and also to discover the secret behind it (which is, of course, Keith Stoner).

The plot now takes on four strands — the board level manoeuvrings, the semi-clandestine conglomerate security operations, the extraneous world events and the Hsen/Stoner conflict. The action is, in fact, fast and furious with events on the Earth leading to further revelations before all the key characters gather on the Moon for the final denouement.

Taken individually the plot lines and gimmicks cannot be said to be stunningly new — but the packaging and skill in writing make this an enjoyable book well worth reading.

Keith Freeman

## The Little Black Box

Philip K. Dick

Gollancz, 1990, 395pp, £14.95

This is the fifth and final volume of the *Collected Stories* of Philip K. Dick. The twenty-five stories cover the period 1963 to

1981, and four of them are previously unpublished. As one of those four was actually a fix-up and abbreviation of *Dr Bloodmoney* which perhaps Dick was trying to sell as extra publicity or income, his success in publishing during his lifetime was obviously considerable. On the other hand, this collection also suggests some of the problems Dick was facing, as most of the pure sf stories come from the mid-sixties, then come a second group, much bleaker, with sf only as a sort of sugar coating for the angst, from the seventies.

The title story contains the seed elements of *Do Androids Dream*, and another became part of *Counter-Clock World*, and "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" has become *Total Recall*.

What I ought to emphasise is the continuity of Dick's work, and I imagine the editors only split the final four books into the chronological groups they did, because of their physical size; otherwise, Dick's work falls into three, the first short apprentice period, the long fertile middle period, and the last ten or fifteen years when he wrote very few short stories and fewer novels and spent his time worrying about metaphysics. He spent a lot of time preparing for death whether he knew it or not, but as far as the contents of this book go, the first ten fall into that middle period (which means that three or four volumes, over sixty percent of his output altogether fall into that classification) and the last fifteen included here make up the record of that unhappy third stage.

What Dick lost or changed was his sense of absurdity. A story like "The War With The Fnools" from 1964 where the world is invaded by aliens who assume the forms of filling station attendants and real-estate salesmen involves just as much analytical thought as the alter stories, but compare it with the need for love or inability to love in "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" (1980, which became part of *The Divine Invasion*), and the latter seems much more tired, and also demands less of the reader.

In his introduction, Thomas M Disch describes one of Dick's skills being the creation of Future Drabness, and that is true, but more important than that I'd say was Dick's descriptions of how we hurt ourselves, and how we can treat those injuries. At some time he gave up looking for solutions that the rest of us could understand, but for a long time he described both the problem and possible solutions, and made entertainment of it.

LJ Hurst

## The Gap Into Conflict: The Real Story

Stephen Donaldson  
Collins, 1990, 173pp, £12.95

Like some strange time-warped fugitive from a past universe, The Gap is set in a space-operatic milieu of bars, mines and interstellar chase sequences strongly reminiscent of the late great Doc Smith. It

concerns, chiefly, the extremely unpleasant asteroid miner and part-time criminal Angus Thermopyle, and his mistreatment of former spacewoman and castaway Morn Hyland. It contains lines like, "The firm line of her thighs... haunted his dreams; he was kept awake by the way her breasts lifted to him despite the intensity of her loathing." Classic stuff, eh? Angus can get away with this because he's given Morn a zone implant, a techno-zombie remote control device. Zone implants are justified by saying that FTL jumps occasionally make people act irrationally, so those subject to such weakness are given implants. Why not just give the rest of the crew stun guns? Donaldson then has to tangle himself up with explanations of how the misuse of these implants is prevented by interstellar law, so nobody else makes use of the plot possibilities, trust me, I'm the author. Similarly, all starships have sealed black-box flight recorders in their datacores, but Angus is capable of editing his, but nobody else is, honestly, trust me... The framework for this pointless and unpleasant tale is twofold. Firstly, Donaldson presents the plot in summary as seen by an outsider, prior to going through and explaining what really happened (hence the title). In fact, summary and expansion differ so little as to make the unravelling uninteresting. Secondly, in an extended and shattering pretentious afterword, the author laboriously explains how plot and characters are derived from the Ring cycle, and how impressed he is with this idea. Whether or not you're a Wagnerian, the comparison between one of the greatest works of the operatic genre and this very dated proto-hard-sf story is unlikely to carry conviction. Finally, the style is laboured in the extreme, with leaden paragraphs thudding against the ear and rhetorical questions on every other line. While this was understandable in the interior monologues of the Covenant books, whose whole motif was disbelief, in a book of this sort it serves only to strain the reader's patience. If this had been produced as some sort of parody of 1940s hard sf, it wouldn't have been very amusing. It's violent, sexist, clichéd and self-satisfied, and will not enhance its author's reputation.

Gareth Davies

## Machine Sex and Other Stories

Candas Jane Dorsey  
Women's Press, 1990, 164pp, £4.95

## Moving Moosevan

Jane Palmer  
Women's Press, 1990, 150pp, £4.95

These two books from The Women's Press could not be more different.

*Machine Sex* contains 13 short stories, 6 previously published. The stories vary enormously in both subject-matter and style. Some are experimental snippets, some straightforward sf tales. All are well written, some making every word count.

Six of the stories are an acquired taste, written in an experimental way. I admit to being baffled on several occasions as to what they were about. The remaining stories alone are worth the price of the book.

My particular favourite is "Johnny Appleseed on the New World", about the attempt to grow fruit trees on a desertified planet. Dorsey is very fine at creating atmosphere; I could feel the textures and hear the wind. Runner up is the mainstream "Time is the School in Which We Learn, Time is the Fire in Which We Burn", the thoughts of a woman in hospital, dying of cancer. Powerful and poignant stuff. Favourable mentions also go to "Willows", Earth as seen from an alien viewpoint, and "Black Dog", at first sight a variation of the last people on Earth but really concentrating on the relationship between a young and older woman. Next come a pair of connected stories in a feminist vein, "The Prairie Warriors" and "War and Rumours of War". Finally, making up the batch is the title story, a feminist pseudo-cyberpunk tale of programmable orgasms. Enough variety for everyone.

*Moving Moosevan*, on the other hand, is a lighthearted sequel to *The Planet Dweller*. It climbs aboard the green bandwagon with its anti-pollution wish-fulfilment. It is a very fast and rather gimmicky sf, full of throwaway comments on Thatcher's Britain. The plot contains aliens, androids, terraforming, planets changing orbit — everything but the kitchen sink really. There are some nice concepts, such as when the planet dweller decides to move the UK and Ireland a few degrees further south, but I found it rather hard to care about the characters as they go through their hectic paces.

It would be fair to say that *Machine Sex* is the better book. Dorsey has attempted more, and although she fails on some occasions, on the whole she succeeds magnificently. *Moving Moosevan* unfortunately pales by comparison. Its aim is different and it achieves it well enough — a frenetic romp — but who really cares?

Barbara Davies

## The Hemingway Hoax

Joe Haldeman  
NEL, 1990, 155pp, £12.95

Hemingway. You know. The guy who wrote about bullfights and war. Blew his own brains out with a shotgun. You know?

Now, suppose that Hemingway wrote some stories he lost. Or never published. Or didn't feel right in his *cojones*. Not for Paris in the 1920s when Henry Miller was turning out pornography (lots of *cojones*) for \$100 a month. Or suppose he didn't. But someone tried to invent them. Old paper, lampblack; spells forgery, amigos.

John Baird's idea: present the tales as a Hemingway pastiche. Sylvester Castle-maine's: take the world for a ride with them as real. Which is where the trouble starts. The forgeries, if taken as genuine, will alter his-

tory and leave the world a blackened shell in the first years of the 21st Century, via a cult of *machismo* engendered by revived interest in Hemingway. Quantum travel launches itself via a glass of absinthe (do not adjust your set — reality is at fault). Baird gets offed by a Hemingway-lookalike transdimensional being. And wakes up in the universe next door. Gets iced again. And again. Of all the books I've read, this has to be the one where the main character gets killed most times. Wakes up in different layers of the Omniverse, where his war wound is in different places, where the world is subtly different. All with Hemingway, and the pseudo-Hemingway who kills him yet again. And Castlemaine, who put him up to the con, getting more brutal and sinister with each change until finally he and Baird blow each other to bits and Baird loops back to become the Hemingway of that 1920s Paris, or at least one of them.

There is, as there must be with Hemingway (and with Viet-vet Haldeman, also wounded in war) an ambiguous attitude towards violence: *it's bad, but let's have some*. It's like the bullfight: you may admire the style, but the thundering macho bloodlust is something you can do without. There's no mystique to violent death. It's just death with violence.

That apart, this book is really entertaining. It's a short and a slick little tale, no mistake. Zips along so fast I read it in an hour and a half first time. The reader ends up wondering which universe he's in, but then why not? We share the character's cross-dimensional vertigo; we don't like him, so we don't want to hold him down, but we do want to see what happens.

Christopher Amies

## Crystal Express

Bruce Sterling

Legend, 1990, 317pp, £12.99

**B**ruce Sterling's first short story collection is altogether more successful than, say, William Gibson's *Burning Chrome* simply because it has been delayed until there was sufficient quantity of the author's best work available. This collection omits much, whilst the Gibson contained all but one of his stories then published.

Further evidence of the care behind this selection is the arrangement of the stories into three sections: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and the work Sterling is best known for, the Shaper/Mechanist series. The stories date from 1982 through 1987, and a clear progression is noticeable.

The Shaper/Mechanist series consists of five stories here, plus the novel *Schismatrix*. The differences between the two leading factions in Sterling's Posthumanist universe are not clear in these stories; all we really learn is that one group uses cybernetics to enhance the human body, whilst the other uses genetic manipulation. Both are really representative of a technophobia concealed behind an artificial aura of technophilia, signifying a general

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body-disgust typical of much sf. "The plots of many of these stories hinge on humans becoming machines or aliens (there is no real difference in Sterling's view). Nevertheless, these are entertaining and well-written stories, though it is ironic that "Swarm", the oldest story collected here, closes with the line, "I would have missed your conversation" as it contains some very clumsy dialogue.

The other stories in the book are very different, with the fantasy in particular, showing a greater maturity in the author. "Flowers of Edo" reflects his fascination with Japan, and is perhaps the best work here, alongside "Green Days in Brunei". Of the rest, "Spook" is a tense, near-future psychotriller with cyberpunk trimmings, "Telliamed" a mythic historical fantasy which may well have been aimed indirectly at contemporary religious fundamentalists and scientists alike, and "The Little Magic Shop" is a retelling of the old story with a touch of mischievous fun.

**Crystal Express** is an interesting and thoughtful collection (hiding behind the most dreadful, cheap plastic looking, and totally irrelevant cover art) but the progression of Sterling's writing is such that one is left anticipating the delights which may make up a second collection in a few years time. Already there are excellent stories which came too late for this volume, which one cannot say for many of Sterling's alleged peers.

**Kevin P McVeigh**

**S**terling's *Islands in the Net* was one of the best novels that I read last year. How well does this short story collection compare? The answer has to be: not very well.

The volume is divided into three sections: first a number of stories all set in Sterling's Shaper/Mechanist universe, second some miscellaneous Science Fiction stories, and lastly a handful of Fantasy stories. All the contributions were originally published between 1982 and 1987.

There are five stories in the Shaper/Mechanist section: "Swarm", "Spider Rose", "Cicada Queen", "Sunken Gardens", and "Twenty Evocations". They explore what can perhaps be best characterised as a "cyber-ryppie" reality, a technologically advanced future universe where the market has replaced society and human beings have become competing economic units, genetically or mechanically enhanced, with no other relationship with each other than the economic. Technology has smashed society, we are told, and created a situation where the only natural laws are individual ambition. We are in the realm of the post-human here.

All of these stories are competently executed and contain nice observations, but only "Twenty Evocations" really stands out as anything special.

Of the three miscellaneous sf stories, "Green Days in Brunei", the longest story in the collection, explores the same world as *Islands in the Net*, but with nothing like the same intensity and power. My interest

flagged as Sterling's writing failed to sustain a weak story-line. "Spook" is a nice idea, well-written, but spoiled by its too stark and abrupt ending. And "The Beautiful and the Sublime" is too knowingly clever for such a light-weight piece.

This brings us to the four fantasy stories: "Telliamed", "The Little Magic Shop", "Flowers of Edo" and "Dinner in Audogast". These are the best stories in the collection, with "Edo" and "Audogast" being quite memorable efforts.

Overall, though, the collection has to be judged a not very inspiring failure. Sterling does not speak with a distinctive enough voice here for me to lay out money. Too much ballast and not enough cargo on the *Crystal Express*, I'm afraid.

**John Newsinger**

## Characters & Viewpoint

Orson Scott Card

*Robinson, 1990, 182pp, £5.99*

## Plot

Ansen Dibell

*Robinson, 1990, 170pp, £5.99*

**W**hat are workshops for anyway? Much of the grounding of our craft is unconscious but the art must be polished, practised. Nobody expects a painter or musician to reach the best potential without training; so why imagine that the writer must hone the art in darkness, emerging to shine wetly for a possibly indifferent audience?

So here, **Plot and Characters & Viewpoint**, both by sf writers. As the Red King said, and as does Ansen Dibell: a story starts at the beginning, goes along until it reaches the end, then stops. **Plot** seems to include the notion of **Character** within it, for me anyhow.

Sf doesn't really influence what is here. Both writers go in for a fair amount of generic cross-pollination; *Star Wars* figures largely in discussion of parallel stories, *Lord of the Rings* in scene-setting and purposeful meandering. *Gormenghast* in disquisition, or how to be eaten by owls from the comfort of your armchair... Gene Wolfe's *Soldier Of The Mist* gets a mention for its unique viewpoint; Card (at least) goes for the unfortunate observation that in sf characterisation is usually poor — he says "unnecessary", though he does say, "there isn't a specific form of characterisation for sf." Which is why there is no point looking for genre-specific points here. To write is to write is to write and the requirements of sf are handled somewhere else.

Books like these are useful, but saying "How to..." on the cover as though this were some kind of Snake Oil designed to cure everything except death could be misleading, or even worse, dangerous. Let it encourage, so long as it doesn't fool us into thinking there's such a thing as a free story. From the introduction to **Characters & Viewpoint**: these books are no cupboard of ingredients,

but a set of tools.

And from the end of **Plot**: Now quit reading. Go write.

**Christopher Amies**

## Homegoing

Frederick Pohl

*Gollance, 1990, 279pp, £13.95*

**S**andy Washington has grown up in an alien ship. The Hakh'li have tried to make his environment as Earthlike as possible, with the result that he thinks of himself as human. However, all he knows of Earth is from television broadcasts recorded over fifty years ago, which the aliens, of course, have censored for their own reasons. Finally sent to Earth with a small group of his Hakh'li contemporaries, he discovers that all is not quite as he had been led to believe: the Earth people are able to track the lander as it comes down, they are recording, but not yet able to decode the tightly beamed transmission from the lander to the mother-ship, the picture Sandy has always treasured is not of his mother but of a certain mid-twentieth century film star, and even more unsettling facts about his provenance emerge. And what do the Hakh'li want with Africa?

What we have is a jolly, old-fashioned, adventure story. To make it relevant to today's reader however, there are trendy references to AIDS, the greenhouse effect, nuclear war and a bloody great hole in the ozone layer. Though nominally about first contact, most of the alien Hakh'li are stock characters, such as the lovable, childishly impetuous Obie, the annoyingly bossy and patronising Polly and the pompous ChinTekki-tho. The two main Earth humans are portrayed as rather ambiguous characters and are thus more convincing as people, while Our Hero is an amiable ingenue.

I have some quibbles with the story. I find it hard to believe that such small communities surviving a nuclear war could still be as technologically advanced as the ten thousand commonwealths appear to be. And surely if Sandy was raised by the Hakh'li from birth, as the story suggests, (his mother is supposed to have been kept alive artificially until Sandy was born), then surely he would be mentally Hakh'li, not human?

However, Fred Pohl is an excellent yard spinner, and despite this being a bread and butter novel, it is still very good entertainment, fluently written with the suspense maintained until the end. It does not pretend to be great literature, it does not explore Earthshattering new avenues of thought, but it will make a long journey pass pleasantly.

**Valerie Housden**

## Orbitsville Judgement

Bob Shaw

*Gollance, 1990, 281pp, £13.95*

**B**ob Shaw is the Dick Francis of science fiction; every year another competent,

journeyman entertainment comes out, aimed squarely at the middlebrow sf market. He has never sunk to the depths of some of his peers at the pulp end of the game; neither has he yet come close to justifying the claim that he is one of our few home-grown greats.

One or two of his earlier entertainments stuck out from the pack. *Other Days, Other Eyes* and *1 Million Tomorrows* were clever examples of the technological school of sf, dwelling on the social implications of a particular invention. Also notable was *Orbitsville*, although it came along with a rash of giant alien inventions in space and their discoveries. *Orbitsville* was Niven's *Ringworld* writ large, a Dyson sphere which enclosed an entire star to provide billions of planet's-worth of living space.

Many years later we had *The Sequel: Orbitsville Departure*. Such is the way of things that now along comes "the brilliant concluding volume of the *Orbitsville* trilogy," *Orbitsville Judgement*. The great flaw, even more so than with the average outbreak of sequelitis, is that the first *Orbitsville* was clearly and compellingly a stand-alone vision; its ending, with the human settlers destined to live out "the quietness of the last long Sunday" until their eventual extinction, hardly allowed a sequel.

Shaw is a popular novelist with a living to earn. No blame can be attached to his decision to return to the scene of one of his greatest triumphs — the first novel won the British Science Fiction Award for 1975. But by continuing the series Shaw is required to ratchet up the marvels and the cosmic revelations to the point where the reader ceases to be convinced.

Shaw is not helped by his workmanlike prose style, which fails to rise to the challenge of the last section of *Judgement*, with its Stapledonian talking galaxies and cosmic planners.

At the end of the second volume, *Orbitsville* and its myriad counterparts had been transferred to a new universe, for purposes unknown. *Judgement* starts off at the time of the transfer, with Jim Nicklin, footloose freelance engineer in one of the far-flung communities on the Big O. Such communities, Shaw tells us, are deliberately based on "the idea of a small town in the American mid-west, circa 1910," which neatly absolves him of any taxing sociological extrapolation.

The naive Nicklin is relieved of his savings by a passing religious maniac, who believes *Orbitsville* to be the spawn of the Devil. Vowing No More Mr Nice Guy, Nicklin then tags along for the purposes of revenge, helps repair one of the few remaining spaceships and watches the transmutation of *Orbitsville* into billions of separate planets and their diaspora around the home Universe. A final question and answer session ties up the loose ends. "Why did the Ultans construct *Orbitsville*?" asks Nicklin. "In an attempt to alter the fate of the entire cosmos," comes the reply.

By this stage the reader is reminded that

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Shaw's other trilogy, which started so well with *The Wooden Spaceships*, is already, by the end of the second volume, mired in some equally high-flown metaphysics. Perhaps the best solution might be a return to more minimalist works.

Martin Waller

## The Flies of Memory

Ian Watson

Gollancz, 1990, 220pp, £13.95

Charles Spark, a Scotsman, reads body language so well governments use him to disentangle what foreign diplomats really mean. His former wife Martin, a black-brown-maybe-even-black American, is crazy and draws mythic gnomes and dwarfs superbly. The American Olivia is high in the White House; she senses shadows of the near future. Lew is in the CIA; Tarini is a Sicilian Mafioso. Sister Kathinka is a Dutch nun with a specially trained memory.

And the Flies have landed on Earth in their vast pyramidal spaceship. They have come to REMEMBER the things of Earth — forever — and while mankind officially welcomes them, trouble breaks out during their visit to the Vatican and the centre of Munich ends up on Mars, whither our major characters must follow it.

To tell you more would be to spoil a superbly told story, a novel which "just happens" to be about a science-fictional subject. For this is not your archetypal — let's face it — adolescent sf novel. Nor is it spattered, like recent Arthur Clarke collaborations, with adolescent sexual symbolism and naive pubescent descriptions.

These people are adults. They express adult concerns, have adult worries, and through the skill of Ian Watson we are taken into their world with consummate confidence, to find ourselves constantly off balance as we experience this or that facet of their thought patterns, this or that twist of the plot.

Ian Watson has always been a maverick amongst sf writers, but too often in the past

his genial or maniacal imaginings have failed to tie themselves to the world we know, leaving the reader awash in fable. This time he has it just right: the people, the places, even the aliens all *feel* right, all convince us of their place in the pattern of things. If this novel does not gain every award that's going, there is something seriously wrong with the judges — or, *mirabile dictu*, we are to be given yet more examples of real writing for real readers. Dare we live in hope, or is this novel to be savoured, returned to, discussed and praised while most of today's sf literature is discarded?

That memory is the key to all that happens in this book is fitting, for it is indeed a memorable experience. Try them.

Ken Lake

## Chung Kuo 2: The Broken Wheel

David Wingrove

NEL, 1990, 433pp, £14.95

Action extends over the year 2206-7. It perpetuates the endemic palace machinations, barrack-room rivalries, and bedroom and brothel manoeuvres of David Wingrove's anti-utopian, world-spanning sino-city. Though repetitive of the kind of incidents to be found in Book 1 (eight books are now projected), these episodes do graphically characterize a pervading corruption and articulate the complex story of mutually suspicious factions striving the regime of the Seven, the continent ruling T'ang. Focal centres of conspiracy are on Mars and in the Alpine "wilderness" (locations exercising Wingrove's library talent for landscape description); but undercover operations penetrate all of the interconnected levels of City Earth.

Impossible here to detail the plot; sufficient to say that pressures and strategies successfully weaken the vulnerable hegemony. By whom this is achieved, and at whose expense, is made much clearer by a now provided comprehensive and annotated

cast list. If the successions of knife-fight, assassination, bribery and rape make for a somewhat routine sameness, there is also a more positively aspected iteration — that which restates and elaborates the large symbolic dimensions of the work. The moves of the game of *wet chei* model those of the global antagonists; and the dichotomy of a concealed past and a fraudulent official version of it keeps open the fundamental question of whether the heritages are "true". (A descent from the warrens, walkways and malls of Oxford Canton to historic Oxford's ruins, hidden on the lowest "Clay" level, is potent metaphor.) Above all, there is the opposition of freedom and manipulation, represented most vividly by contrasts of life within the City and in privileged enclaves outside the ice of its towering walls, and this depicted mainly notably in two "romantic" interludes, one pastoral, the other nordic. The other is the brother-sister idyll played out along the sunlit Tamar estuary; the other is Jelka Tolonen's retreat to her origins, islanded and tower-sequestered off the stormy coast of Finland.

Within the City certain role-assigned characters question the reactionary ethos of its oligarchy. These are not so much the revolutionaries, who use much the same terrorist tactics as their enemies, as the outsiders — Ben Shepherd, the artist, and Kim, the Clayborn intuitive scientist. Scenes such as Shepherd's encounter with the funerary "Oven Man" and Kim's holistic vision in the Heilbronn observatory, are imaginatively positive, and balance those many negative scenes of brutality, so many as eventually rather to diminish their dramatic impact — though admittedly they are integral to the novel's structure. The *yin-yang* elements in the structuring of the series constitute a dimension which intriguingly transcends dystopian confines.

KV Bailey

# New Reviews Editor

From next issue onwards (V160, April/May 1991), **Vector** will have a new Reviews Editor, Christopher Amies. Chris has been helping with the production of **Vector** for some time now, as well as reviewing for **Vector** and writing fiction (his first professional sale was in the second issue of **The Gate**, called "Terminal Velocity"). All books for review should now be sent to:

Chris Amies  
56 More Close  
St Paul's Court  
London  
W14 9BN

The Editor's wish to thank Paul Kincaid for the work he has done over the past six or seven years as Reviews Editor, and wish him the very best of luck for the future.