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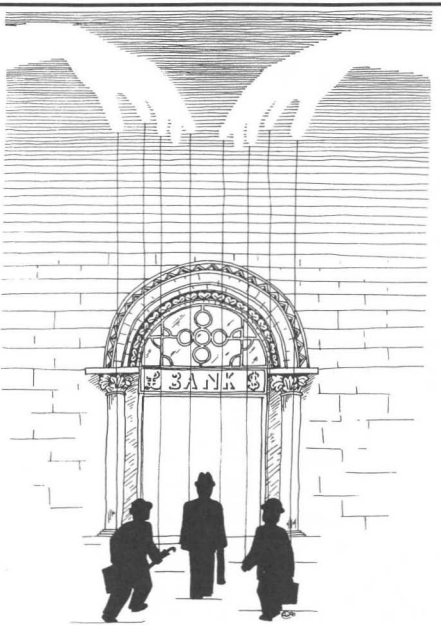

Bruce Sterling Speech

Jonathan Wylie Interview ● Flesch Test
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Vector

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Editorial

By Catie Cary

Pornography according to all the dictionaries I tried, is writing about whores. This clearly **is** a root definition of the word, but is at the same time too wide and too narrow for modern usage. So to make it clear what I'm talking about, let's agree that whereas **erotica** is what turns you or me, (normal people) on and **smut** may turn other people on but does not offend us, **pornography** is the nasty stuff that only perverts like. As a working definition, this is even looser but emphasises the subjective nature of the beast.

Several things have recently conspired to set my mind on the trail of pornography:

I watched a television profile on Andrea Dworkin, a very sincere passionate American campaigner against pornography, who asserts that pornography damages the lives of the people involved in producing it, and the minds of the people who consume it. She appears to be campaigning not for censorship, but for compensation for those individuals whose lives have been damaged. The pornography under consideration by Ms Dworkin appeared on the whole to be filmed material, often involving the filming of acts that were in themselves illegal.

I watched the television reconstruction of the OZ trials; attractive, intelligent, witty young men defending their right to publish; the issue under consideration was, of course, produced **by** (but not necessarily **for**) schoolchildren. The material they were called upon to defend included sexually explicit drawings and language in the text of the magazine

I read for review The third Book of David Wingrove's **Chung Kuo** series. When I say that this was without doubt the most pornographic book I have ever read you will probably think me an innocent flower; however it is not the explicit sexual nature of the scenes in the book (many of which in fact **do** involve whores) to which I object; it is the unpleasantly sadistic nature of **most** of them, and the dismissive attitude to women displayed throughout the book. Possibly, like Science Fiction, pornography is most easily defined by the "Look and Say" method. If I go back to my working definition, I could probably refine it now to say that what makes it **nasty** is the fact that it is degrading to the participants.

It is not so very long ago that you could hardly find a sexual scene in an SF book. I certainly am not advocating a return to that state. Is it a sign of the genre growing up that it now includes pornographic material? Andrea Dworkin believes that consuming pornographic material is damaging to the mind. I certainly did not feel like reading much for a week or so after finishing Mr Wingrove's book. Richard Neville and his colleagues argued persuasively that they should have the freedom to publish whatever they wished, elsewhere in this issue Kim Cowie does likewise. The problem with freedom is always defining where one person's freedom infringes upon another's.

The rule of law under which we live is in fact bounded by a series of compromises, designed to impose consensus morality on our actions. However, we pride ourselves that we may be free with our thoughts. The role of censorship with published material, therefore, is where it is believed that that material may cause individuals measurable hurt, whether physical, emotional, or of the "deprave and corrupt" variety. Whereas most people would accept the first case, many would say that adults should be capable of taking what comes with the other two. I, for one, am thoroughly confused.

Should books likely to damage our mental health carry government health warnings?

Should printed material be certificated in the same way as films?

Should we be fighting for the right to publish material which we ourselves find offensive?

I'm looking to you to put me straight!

Artwork By Martin Brice

Letters

Please send all letters of comment to:

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RIP Yearbook
From David Garnett

In his review of Gardner Dozois' **Year's Best SF (Vector 163)**, I was pleased to see Martin Waller recommend "this year's David Garnett **Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook** sight unseen" - but, alas, that is the way this year's volume must remain: unseen.

After publishing three volumes, the series has been cancelled by Orbit/ Futura. With the death of Donald Wollheim, there is no longer an annual "best" from Daw Books in the USA. This means there is now only one such English-language volume covering the "year's best SF", the one edited by Gardner Dozois. But there are *three* such volumes of horror stories!

I've spent a great deal of time and effort attempting to find a publisher willing to continue the **Yearbook** series. I've approached every likely publisher, and many unlikely ones. Everyone agrees this is a worthwhile series, that it ought to continue - but no one is willing to make the necessary commitment to publish it.

And no, I won't make any comment on the kind of books that publishers believe are *really* worthwhile bestowing upon the great British reading public. . . .

It was fun while it lasted, but now I've more time to devote to **New Worlds!**

David Garnett
Ferring

Infantile Drivel
From Joseph Nicholas

I read Ken Lake's 'Palaeontology and the Pattern of Hollywood Kitsch' in **Vector 163** with mounting indignation - indignation at both his bowdlerisation of quotes from Stephen Jay Gould's **Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History** to support his case, and at the fact that the editors of **Vector** had seen fit to squander three pages on such arrant nonsense. You may not be palaeontologists, but was it completely beyond your wit to check Gould's text against the uses Lake makes of it?

Lake's suggestion that Gould espouses the cause of a "divine tape player" who oversees all history, and his reinterpretation of Gould's rhetorical references to a "Burgess architect" and a "Great Token-Stringer" to claim that Gould is promoting God as the motive force of evolution, is absolute nonsense, and a complete inversion of what the book actually says. The simple theme of **Wonderful Life** is that evolution has no pre-ordained path, and that if the tape of history were erased back to the start there is no guarantee that, when set in motion once again, evolution would eventually give rise to the human species, or indeed to any intelligent species at all. Gould's consistent argument about intelligence (Lake presumably couldn't be bothered to read any of his other books) is that it is an accidental by-product of evolution, not its inevitable end result, and that it confers no identifiable biological advantages. Thus, when Gould attacks traditional concepts of progress and predictability, he is not, as Lake claims, attacking "flow palaeontologists but seeking to dislodge the human species' arrogant opinion of itself as the natural pinnacle of what it likes to think of as "the evolutionary process" - as indeed Lake himself grudgingly admits a few lines after claiming otherwise. Lake is clearly so offended by what he calls Gould's "anti-humanocentric" stance that he is unable to recognise his own contradiction - or to do other than pretend the book says something completely different to what it actually does, even to the extent of describing Gould as anti-evolutionist; an astounding insult to one of biology's most accomplished contemporary exponents.

Yes, there are problems with the Burgess Shale creatures, both in their manner of preservation and their interpretation. The record is indeed incomplete - but then so is the entire fossil record. Further work will be required to resolve what Gould identifies as "the Two Great Problems" of the Burgess Shale, and will take considerable time. Lake, by contrast, prefers to leap ahead to an explanation that would be cut down by nothing more exotic than Occam's Razor: that they were brought here by an alien spaceship whose operators built the Earth and its inhabitants for their own amusement.

This is so laughable as to be beyond contempt. Lake is presumable happy to think of himself as an alien plaything, and to believe that now he has seen through the sham he will be rescued by flying saucers which will carry him off to Planet Zott in the Galaxy of Xprgl where he will become immortal and ascend to a higher sphere of being; but that's no reason for the editors of Vector to inflict such infantile drivel on the rest of us.

Joseph Nicholas
London

Burgess Response
From Sue Thomason

I haven't read Gould's book and know very little about the Burgess Shale apart from what Ken's article says. I *like* the idea of fossils from Outside; but Ken asks for alternative explanations for various anomalies: here are some, which may well be obviously untenable because I don't know all the facts (or even most of them).

1. *no tracks , no burrows, no organisms eating each other*

Suppose the shale (which would be mud beds when the creatures now fossilised in it first encountered it) was not where the Burgess creatures lived? Suppose they were all free-swimming, living in a thick algae "soup", or clambering around on strands of soft free-floating plant material near the water's surface? The mud bottom of their environment would then simply be a graveyard; where the bodies or body-parts that didn't get eaten by other life-forms ended up when they died. if an appreciable proportion of the Burgess remains are actually half-eaten, that may explain why some of them look incomplete.

2 *soft tissues preserved as silicates of alumina/calcium, not carbon*

Suppose the Burgess creatures didn't have soft tissues like ours. Suppose they don't fit in very well with the currently accepted evolutionary model because they're not part of it. They represent an unsuccessful independant development of life, or a very early-branching (and again unsuccessful) evolutionary line that failed. a kind of failed marine Australia, where a lot of divergent lifeforms developed but didn't have a very long species-lifespan. I can think of two situations in which a "marine Australia" might develop and eventually fail:

a) a landlocked sea which eventually dried up due to climatic change or upthrusting of land or both. If it lasted for a (geologically) reasonably long time before drying up, its water might get very heavily mineralised which might encourage the evolution of strange-to-us lifeforms.

b) I understand that there are present-day "marine-life islands" on the deep ocean floor, around the seafloor magma vents that occur at plate boundaries. (Another mystery: the present-day vents are quite shortlived, tens of years only, and when they close up the life around them dies. Nobody is quite sure how life gets to newly opened vents. I postulate a hardy, maybe viable-dormant "seed" stage of life which either simply drifts around in the water until it

encounters favourable conditions, or has a heat-tropism.) Here the barrier to communication with other lifeforms is temperature gradient, not the land-water barrier. I wouldn't find it surprising if, in an environment with pressure and temperature and again possibly mineralisation very different from the conditions *we* think of as "normal", some pretty strange-to-us lifeforms developed.

The snag with *this* idea is obviously the short life of the hotspots. I don't know what geological conditions might dream a long-lived hotspot. My understanding is that Terra was more geologically active in the Cambrian (which is the Burgess era, isn't it?), which would suggest *more* instability, not less, wouldn't it? Or maybe magma flows were commoner then, and the Burgess shale deposits are from somewhere where there was enough heat for long enough to promote these weird life-forms.

Or let's modify one of Ken's ideas slightly, and postulate a marine "natural nuclear reactor" like the one found somewhere in Africa. This ought to show up pretty clearly in the geological record, though.

A sideline-thought: I know the "deep ocean hotspot" lifeforms are supposed to be pretty weird. I also know that the deep ocean environment has provided a couple of "living fossils" like coelocanths. Has anybody thought of comparing contemporary deep ocean hotspot lifeforms to the Burgess shale fossils, to see if there are any interesting similarities?

The article also seems to be saying that a hell of a lot of the "reconstruction" of the Burgess lifeforms is pure guesswork and extrapolation. Suppose it's *wrong*?

Sue Thomason
Whitby

Are things as they theme?

From Stephen Baynes

Imagine the setting: The scattered parts of a collapsing civilisation are kept alive by the last few remaining starships. these ply between the surviving outposts on an erratic schedule dictated by their own ageing unreliability and the uncertain shiftings of the patterns of space. These vast starships are themselves communities, market towns packed and bustling with traders buying and selling all sorts of goods from the mundane to the exotic....

I am sure you can think of several stories which use one or more of these elements, perhaps even some that have dared to use them all. the funny thing is that it is not fiction. I have just described an article from November's **National Geographic**! OK, I admit I used "space" instead of "Zaire river" and "starship" instead of "Riverboat and barges". Thinking about it I am not sure why I even needed to make that much change. I need only to have said that the river was on some other planet, the author someone like Jack Vance and everyone still would have said "Yes, I have read that one."

To the question and the point of the letter, how many of SF's well worn themes are nothing but a transposition of something terrestrial to a new setting?

Stephen Baynes
Romsey

100%, I would have thought. Where else is the author to start from? Surely it is what the author does with her theme that makes good SF? See also Pete Darby's comments and Ken Lake's letter below CC

Bully For Him

From Pete Darby

In my time-honoured tradition of letter writing, I'll deal first with the letters, then ramble insanely (More Bull indeed!).

Further to Maureen Speller's comments and Martin Brice's letter, I think it should be stressed that for many fans, and myself in particular, the BSFA magazines provide virtually my only point of contact with fandom. Having only been to two, and fringe, at that, conventions, and being a very infrequent member of the local SF group, writing to and for the BSFA publications is a lifeline to the organisation and fandom as a whole. This is especially true since my fanzine reading and contribution has sunk without trace. Yet, to look at recent BSFA publications, you may well imagine me part of this "clique" of regulars. This is simply through my love of letter writing, communication, and lack of funds for con-going, zine-buying, etc.

As for Mark Powlson's challenge for spoiling book covers - how about the new covers to the **Dune** books? Spoilers all over the place. Bastards.

But what about spoilers in blurbs? The worst must be on Mary gentle's **Golden Witchbreed**, which manages to spoil half the plot in one paragraph. In the other direction, there's the blurbs on the back of the **Illuminati** novels - little or no relationship to the plot, and quite rightly so! But now it's been done once, I suppose we can't do it so well again....

As for Hervé Hauck's complaints, I can only refer him to:

Mr Cooper's Law:
If you do not understand a particular word in a piece of technical writing, ignore it. The piece will make perfect sense without it.
&
Bogovich's corollary:
If the piece makes no sense without the word, it will make no sense with it.

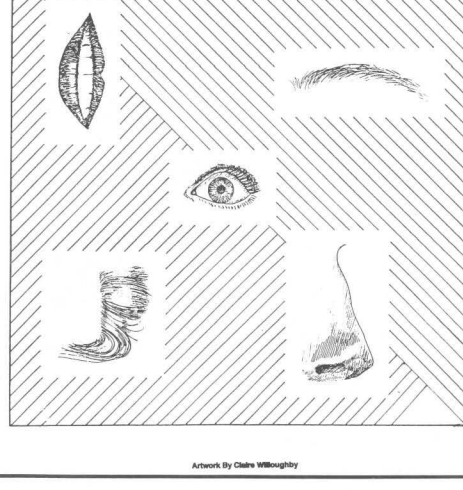
Enough said?

Helen Bland reiterates Sturgeon's law (90% of everything is crud), then goes on to cite examples. I'm just curious as to whether any writer has produced a believable *alien* religion. Heh, challenge time....

Why the Burgess Shale article? Well it just so happens that in one of my courses, we're treating Darwinism as a pseudo-psicence, in the same stream as astrology and scientology. The problem with Darwinism is that no evidence could possibly be given to disprove it; this makes it Very Bad Science, as it cannot be tested for falsehood. Thus the Burgess Shale and the Peterborough Pit could only force a mild modification of the theory, while allowing the principles of natural selection to continue.

As for A N Green's final piece . . , as far as I can see, the purpose of futurist fiction is to reflect modern society, as a continuation of the Utopian/ dystopian tradition. All our tomorrows, from Verne to Gibson, have been based on our todays. Just as, I suppose, all our histories have been written with the background of today's news. .

Pete Darby
Colchester



Artwork By Claire Willoughby

Female Deities
From Helen Bland

Oh Dear. how did you resist telling Hervé Hauck to go back to le **Dandy**? the thing M. Hauck misses is that **Vector** readers aren't just interested in the books they have already read, but in a wide range of aspects of SF. Steve Baxter wasn't really talking about **Raft** in his interview, he was talking about himself and *writing* **Raft**. I for one, enjoyed the interview.

But, I'm mainly writing in response to Pete Darby. Pete wonders why synthetic religion is still male-dominated. There are two factors, one is that everything bar childbirth is male dominated (and even there men are the top gynaecologists etc. usually), the other is more interesting. I suspect that many women who have looked beyond conventional religions have re-discovered the various female deities, from Ishtar to Bride; the Mother Goddess is coming back into popular focus and these women may well turn to her. men, perhaps for the same reasons that they eventually overthrew the matriarchal cultures, are reluctant to follow this path. Hence the male trend towards synthetic religions?

I'd recommend Pete to read Rosalind Miles' **The Women's History of the World**, and SF readers everywhere to try Ellen Galford's **The Fires of Bride**.

Pete also describes the SF community as predominantly Agnostic. I'm not sure, but I do know that a great number of SF authors have a religious background: names like Asimov, Silverberg and Ellison have a Jewish heritage (as the latter demonstrated in 'I'm looking for Kadak'), C J Cherryh grew up in the bible belt, O S Card is a Mormon, there are anthologies of Jewish and Catholic SF, I could go on... but I'm sure Pete gets my point.

Helen Bland
Edinburgh

He might, but I'm not at all sure that I do... upbringing and actual belief are surely two different things? CC

Money Making Suggestion!
From Ken Lake

The October 7th issue of **The Daily Telegraph** contains an excellent summary of the 150-year process for terraforming Mars, with considerable useful detail. This is based on a recent eight-page article in **Nature**, according to the writer.

For those who missed the account, perhaps I can briefly summarise the summary:

Stage 1 (2015-2030): First expedition arrives, conducts primitive agricultural experiments under domes. Temperature -60C.

Stage 2 (2030-2-80): Warming begins - orbiting solar mirrors of Mylar warm icecaps which are also sprayed with soot to decrease reflectivity. Carbon dioxide, oxygen, nitrogen and water vapour are released from crust; CFC gases start greenhouse effect, temperature rises to -40C

Stage 3 (2080-2115): Hardy genetically engineered plants introduced to break down carbon dioxide; clouds appear, sky starts to turn blue; temp. -15C.

Stage 4 (2115-2130): Lakes and rivers from melting icecaps, small seas containing plankton to absorb more carbon dioxide; evergreen forests formed; temperature now freezing.

Stage 5 (2130-2170): Towns multiply, farming and hi-tech industry, air completely breathable, temp. now +10C.

The authors stress this uses no technology not currently available; I'm not sure why they need 15 years for a 1 year stage 1 visit, but doubtless there's more in **Nature**. Apparently colonists would live mostly on green vegetables and cereals plus occasional tinned meat from Earth.

OK, you say, so what? Well, two points strike me. First, this is no longer SF but science-to-become-fact, and heaven knows we've waited long enough for it.

Secondly and more importantly: what a wonderful framework for the first really reliable science-based novel of Martian Settlement. The author could build in a ''no children until you reach 30 '' scheme and so have exactly 5 generations over 150 years, though not exactly stage by stage, and each generation would be facing new problems both within the family and in relation to Mars, while different characters would come and go as antagonists and local colour for each generation.

Of course, I would expect any SF writer worth his salt to introduce some changes - probably speeding up the process with imaginative new concepts, but then slowing it down with major disasters - but it seems to me that there is scope for something that, by reprinting the **Nature** paper as a fore- or afterword, could make someone an awful lot of money by appealing to a non-SF readership.

It's a pity I'm not a fiction writer: I could do with the money! but in a spirit of disinterested fannishness, I present the idea to anyone prepared to take it up. Here we go, into the future!

Also, a comment on Brian Stableford's article in **Vector** 163: In telling us that most modern SF is dystopian, Brian overlooks the fact that it's fiction, and as Joe Haldeman tells us in **Matrix** 96, ''Violence isn't necessary to fiction, but you can make a good argument that *conflict* is .... I think that most stories written without conflict are *tours de force* - pun intentional - or workshop demonstrations.'' In a Utopia one does not, by definition, have conflict, hence no ''plot,'' hence no fiction; Butler's **Erewhon** may be an amusing *tour de force*, but modern fiction it ain't, and the same goes for all utopian fiction of the past.

Ken Lake
London

Fantasy Readers
From Catherine Steel

Just a brief note in response to Brian Stableford's generally excellent article about H G Wells and the future. While I accept that Brian does not intend any slur on women or on medievalist fantasy by his suggestion that they make up a large part of the audience for this kind of book, and I can also see that this assertion fits in neatly with the rest of his argument, I would like to question its validity. In my experience as a librarian, the majority readership for these books is in fact young men. Women do not appear to read them in any greater proportion than they do any other form of ''speculative fiction''. I seem to recall that the recent BSFA poll, published in **Matrix** bears this out.

Catherine Steel
London

Correction

Regrettably a number of typographical errors crept into Brian Stableford's article in **Vector** 163. Most of them were insignificant, and I suppose all you intelligent people must have coped since I have received no letters of complaint. However if you will all creep up on your copy and make your way to the penultimate paragraph, you will find a sentence which begins as below, but lacks the words emphasised in bold text:

"These are kinds of optimism **which** compromise with likelihood, but that is hardly **surprising**, given that the science fictional view of the future - which is I believe, the realistic, honest and sensible view of the future -is that whatever world we find ourselves in will be the product of a vast number of compromises ..."

Please make a guilty woman happy and insert them where they belong. It will bring a wealth of new meaning to the text... Sorry Brian.

CC

Artwork By Claire Willoughby

The Burgess Shale - A Reply

By Andy Robertson

I was interested in Ken Lake's piece on the Burgess Shale. I believe he's wrong in some respects, but his ideas are pretty sharp, and I think his distrust of Gould's rather misleading book is justified.

Let me explain. I'll start by dealing with Ken's possible explanations of the Burgess Shale fauna:

1) There is no chance that the Burgess Shale animals are the result of some concentration of radiation or other mutagen. Massive radiation induced mutation does not work like that - it doesn't produce sophisticated and visible "monsters", but simply creates deficient, deformed, or sterile versions of the parent. (See Dawkins' **The Blind Watchmaker** for a good explanation of this.) The Burgess Shale fauna cannot be derived from conventional forms by any conceivable random mutation, and anyway many of them were obviously fertile, because we have multiple fossils of the same animal.

2) There is very, very, very little chance that the Burgess Shale fauna are an alien zoo. To be discovered at all after 600 million years these animals must have been widespread. In all the time people have been looking at fossils, less than one square kilometre of the Precambrian rock has been studied. So if a spaceship had landed on the Earth that far back, the probability of us digging it up would be one in tens of millions.

3) Is just silly.

Ken is right when he points out that some of the strange forms may be fragmentary or misinterpreted. Several examples of this have come up in the last few years: the most notable is *Hallucinagena*. This was originally described as a long caterpillar-like animal walking on seven stilt-like pairs of spines, with a single, vertically-pointing, row of seven short tentacles in its back. In fact the fossil was just carelessly examined - the row of tentacles is double and the fossil reconstruction was upside-down, so the "tentacles" are just ordinary paired legs, while the sharp spines pointed upward for protection. *Hallucinagena* is very similar to a modern group of animals, the "velvet worms", and is very likely their ancestor.

Despite this, there is no real doubt that there was some sort of explosion in animal forms 600 million years ago. After a long, long period during which living things were all single-celled, many different sorts of multicellular species arose quite suddenly. These have been dug up in many places, not just the Burgess Shale. Only a few of these multicellular body plans seem to have left modern descendants. The real questions are:

1) Why did multicellular animals not arise earlier?

2) Why have few new body plans arisen since?

3) Why did most of the Precambrian forms die out?

Gould tries to give some answers to these in his book, coming down on the side of "just history". I suspect that Ken is correct in detecting the smell of bullshit here. I will try to give the answers that I believe are the most probable. I will start by dealing with the first and second questions, and then go on to the third, which is the nub of Gould's argument.

Why did multicellular forms not arise earlier? There is a fairly obvious reason for this: there wasn't enough oxygen. (See **Scientific American** October '91). Large animals have problems getting oxygen to their insides. 600 million years ago, photosynthesis really got under way and the proportion of oxygen in the air (and the water) started to rise toward modern levels. Before that time, there was very little, and anything larger than an amoeba would probably have suffocated. It's worth noting that this is a consideration of *physics* and Gould persistently ignores such constraints on animal design - a reflection of his specialisation in palaeontology, no doubt.

Why have few new body plans arisen since? Again, I think there is a fairly strong consensus: they did, but they got eaten. When multicellular life was just getting going, there were plenty of chances to dawdle about experimenting without becoming someone's dinner. Once fast predators like *Anomalocaris* were swimming around, that was the end of the window of opportunity.

And finally, why did some of the precambrian forms persist and give rise to many descendants, while others became extinct? The only honest answer to this is that we have no idea. The pruning may have been random, as Gould tries at great length to convince us, but there is absolutely no way of telling this from the fossils we have. The point here is that, even if we agreed with Gould that the form of the animal does not seem to correspond with its success, one species may have survived while another died out for reasons that have nothing to do with their gross physical shape. They could have had better digestive systems, better senses, better immune systems, better respiration, better nervous systems ... you name it. None of this can be determined by looking at a smudge, five centimetres long, and I think Ken makes this point very well in his article.

It's worth reprising just in what ways evolution is, and is not deterministic. Look at an example in a human population. In the region of Africa where the ancestors of most black Americans came from, the proportion of the sickle cell gene is about 8%. This is because, though the sickle cell gene weakens its carrier (and kills if it is homozygous), it confers an immunity to malaria. Black Americans have about 70% African ancestry: but among them today the proportion of the sickle cell gene is not the 5-6% you might expect, but less than 2%. This is because there is less malaria in America, so the gene on average confers much less of an advantage, in fact a disadvantage. This change was not "just history" - it was inevitable. Once they moved out of an area where malaria was common it was *certain* that the frequency of sickle cell gene would decrease. The "experiment" could have been repeated a thousand times over, and it would have given the same result every time.

Or to take another example, this time one of competition between different species rather than changes in gene frequency within a single species. Grey squirrels, recent invaders, have displaced red squirrels over most of the UK, except in a few upland coniferous areas. Again, though we don't understand exactly how this happens, we know it is not "just history", because it is repeated anew in every new region the grey invades.

Note that I have chosen two very extreme examples here. The advantages or disadvantages that most genotypes have are much slighter than this. But evolution *is* at least partly deterministic, in the sense that at least some genes will spread, and some species will displace others, in a repeatable way, in any given environment. It's important not to be misled because we may not be able to *predict* this: that's just because we don't know enough, not because the process is intrinsically unpredictable and random. We may not have been able to predict beforehand that cane toads would take over Australia, but it was a dead cert that they would, whether or not we knew it!

However, what is ***not*** deterministic is the variation that gives rise to new genes or new species in the first place. This is completely random, and no-one can predict, even in theory, what mutations will arise. Because it is random, it is impossible to predict even ***in theory*** what new species will evolve, even in the short term. And there's more to it than this: the environment of any living thing is largely made up of other living things, and so the evolution of every other. Therefore, very small changes with random causes might be amplified by feedback to make very large differences over the long term. In this sense Gould is completely right.

But in other senses, Gould is completely wrong. An animal is a machine adapted to carry out certain tasks. For any given task, like for instance running, or swimming, some sorts of animals, some body plans, are completely, unambiguously and objectively superior to others. This is not a humanocentric view: it's a matter of basic physics, something in which (as I said above) Gould is a bit weak. I will give a few examples of this as well.

The first example concerns fish and squids. About 300 million years ago, squids were dominant in the sea: there were few large fish. After that time fish became steadily more numerous, until today they make up 95% of the large animals in the sea. This is probably (not certainly) because fish can swim much faster and more efficiently than squids. The reason for ***this*** is that squids swim by means of a syphon, which squirts a small stream of water very fast, while fish swim by using their tails, which propel a large mass of water quite slowly. The energy required to move the water is proportional to mass times velocity squared, while the thrust obtained is proportional to mass times velocity, so a fish gets more bang per buck. Fish ***really*** are superior to squids at least, at swimming fast. Or rather, tail-fin-swimmers really are superior to syphon-swimmers. It's not just a matter of environment, and it's not a matter of chance - it would be equally true for beasts that swam in liquid nitrogen, plasma or lava.

The second example concerns the methods animals use to walk. Lizards, crocodiles, and amphibians have a body which is slung between pairs of legs which point out sideways. If they have a way of life which involves fast movement on land, they have to support their bodies clear of the ground, which requires constant muscular tension in their limbs and a consequent loss of energy. Because of the square-cube rule (too long to explain here, but again a matter of basic physics), this cost increases faster than the body mass - it is trivial for small animals, but gets very serious for large ones. Mammals and birds have (and dinosaurs had) bodies which are supported by legs which are positioned underneath them, pointing vertically downward, and they don't have to bear this cost. The legs-under body plan is ***objectively*** better than the legs-out plan, at least for large, fast, land animals. There was a shortish period when most large land animals had the legs-out body plan, but they were replaced by animals with the legs-under body plan long before the era of dinosaurs.

I could multiply examples, but I think that's enough. The basic position can be summarised as follows:

1) In any given environment, some genotypes will outcompete others. This is not a random process: it is observed to be consistent and repeatable, though it may be too complicated to reliably predict.

2) But, the mutations that give rise to new genotypes are completely random, and the mutual interaction between different species may amplify this randomness over long periods. Therefore evolution cannot, even in theory, be predicted over any long period.

3) However, the forms that living things can evolve into are ***constrained***, not only by their history, but by basic physics, chemistry, and mechanics. For a given life style, some forms really are better than others, and these will tend to become the most numerous in the long run.

Let me give an analogy to describe this: think of a rockslide, starting in a mountain valley somewhere. One rock slips, sets off others, and finally the whole valley side falls. Is this predictable, or is it totally random? You can't say when it will happen, you can't say in which order the rocks will fall, and you can't say which ones will end up on top: and a very small variation in the place where the first rock slips might make a big difference to the final configuration. In this sense the rockfall is a totally random thing. But on the other hand, it is constrained by physics and mechanics, so you can make limited predictions about ***some*** things. You know the rocks will on average end up lower down the mountain: you have some idea of how the size of the individual rocks will influence their final position in the heap of rocks that is the result of the slide: and you know approximately the angle the final body of rocks will lie at; and you know that, even though collisions may send some rocks bouncing upwards for a short time, most rocks will spend most of their time moving downward. You don't have to be able to make a detailed prediction of the path of every rock to have a good idea of the outcome.

Is the evolution of life like this? We have only got one life-system to study, so we can't tell, but I think that, to some extent, it is. I believe there are some pointers, at least in the evolution of large mobile animals (ie bigger than a centimetre).

1)***simplicity of gross body plan*** - Large animals have one or two of each major organ - for instance, one mouth, one anus, and one head. Most large sea creatures are shaped like teardrops, following a simple streamline. Large land vertebrates have only four limbs, the minimum number practicable.

2) ***increasing mass of nervous tissue*** - This doesn't mean that animals with small brains die out - they remain the overwhelming majority, and most of them are very successful - but large brained animals tend to become more numerous through time. This is a pattern that has been followed independently by at least two major groups on Earth, molluscs (squids/octupi) and vertebrates.

3) ***increasing speed*** -. Fish swim faster than squid: birds fly faster than insects: and wolves run faster than lizards (but maybe not much faster than some of the dinosauria, at least for short bursts). Again, there are plenty of slow animals around, but the fastest animals do seem to be getting faster and more numerous as time goes by.

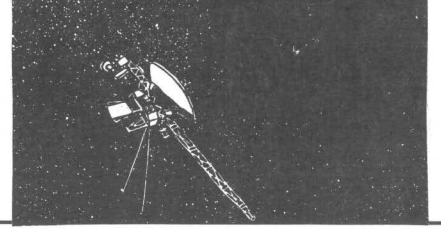
4) ***linear organisation*** - Animals usually have a front end and a back end. This isn't universally true - the starfish, for instance - but it is the most usual plan. It is much the best organisation if you intend to move about.

I wouldn't be happy making any more predictions than that: but I think it is pretty certain that being straight, streamlined, fast and smart, are ***objective*** superiorities, and I think that the fossil record bears this out.

So how should we regard Gould's book? Well this is where I am going to resort to politically-motivated abuse. Gould is a noted left-winger: he has, for instance, been a leader in the long (and largely successful, but completely untruthful) campaign to publicly discredit IQ testing. His bizarre position is not that intelligence is not heritable (given the evidence, no-one can believe this) but that intelligence is a "cultural specialisation" rather than a measurement of "real human worth", whatever that means.

Gould is a lefty: and as such he is deeply ill at ease with notions of objective, intrinsic, inherited, superiority or inferiority, even where these deal with the differences between ***species*** rather than the differences between ***individuals***. Hence **Wonderful Life** - an attempt to give the impression that it's ***all*** random, that the dominant position held by some groups of animals today is just luck, not predetermined, and to undermine the popular idea that evolution represents a triumph of the ***genetically superior*** over the ***genetically inferior***. Well, as we saw earlier, even if we can't predict the details of evolution over long periods, some animals (and some genes) do reliably outcompete others. The popular idea is partly correct, at least in the short term. And even if the details of evolution cannot be predicted over long periods, the final forms are constrained, to a degree, by the absolute considerations of physics: evolution is ***not*** "just history".

This doesn't mean that when we get to other planets we will be greeted by erect hairless bipeds. There is a great deal of truth in Gould's book - the teleological view of evolution, which thinks of humanity as the predetermined final form is right out, but I'd be willing to bet that when they come from space they will be straight, streamlined, fast and smart, and it won't be any sort of coincidence.



Artwork By Jeremy Elford

Dear science fiction fans, have you ever lived in a country where the authoritics burn books? Not because they are unwanted, not because they have been judged in an open court of law to be unacceptable to the people, not because they have woundingly libelled some individual - but because the police don't like them? where there is a police censorship of books?

Do I mean **Fahrenheit 451**? Some dystopic world of the future? Or the repressive epochs of our past? Or do I refer to that great Satan, the Soviet Union? Not at all; when I was in Moscow recently I saw with my own eyes Russian naughty books on the bookstalls. Nor am I referring on this occasion to the Muslim fanatics.

They do it here. The more astute or cynical of you will have guessed I was leading up to this. For the rest of you, a little history....

In 1989, David Britton completed a novel, **Lord Horror**, a savage, fantastical work, devised to confront the bestiliness of Fascism and Jew-hating by satirising it, by throwing its beastliness back in its teeth. He sent it to all the major publishers in Britain, and, probably little to Britton's surprise, they rejected it as being utterly beyond the pale. After collecting about twenty rejections, Britton and his co-director Michael Butterworth decided to publish **Lord Horror** themselves, under the imprint of their own Manchester publishing house Savoy. They also brought out a darkly brilliant series of comics, or graphic magazines, under the **Lord Horror** name, and an equally offensive if rather less brilliant offshoot, the comic series **Meng & Ecker**.

By this time Savoy had been for years a thorn in the side of the Manchester police, those self-appointed guardians of the moral order, led by James ''God's Cop'' Anderton. On many occasions they were raided by the police, and stock seized was not returned. In 1982 David Britton was sent to prison for one month, for selling Charles Platt's **The Gas** and Samuel Delany's **Tides Of Lust**, both widely available outside Manchester.

One of the characters in **Lord Horror** is a Manchester police chief called ''Appleton''. Britton admits to satirising the Manchester chief of police by substituting ''Jews'' in Anderton's rantings about ''gays''. Are we surprised then, when on 26 Sept 1989 the police raid the shops again and seize all the remaining stock of the **Lord Horror** novel and the **Horror** and **Meng & Ecker** comics.

The raids were authorised by Manchester stipendary magistrate Derick Fairclough. On 28 Aug 1991, a court hearing was held at which the same magistrate (what a coincidence) decreed that the seized matter was obscene and was to be destroyed. The public, you will note, was not involved; just the police and one magistrate. Savoy are currently appealing against the destruction order; a process, as those of you who know anything about British law will appreciate, is likely to be fairly costly.

And why should we care about this? Why should we care about an unpleasant book from a little-known author and publisher?

Because **Lord Horror** is in its way a great book; probably the most concentratedly and savagely surreal work of the imagination published in our generation. Michael Moorcock said of it ''A novel of literary merit...**Lord Horror** is one of the most authorative indictments of the holocaust and our moral responsibility for it.''

Colin Wilson wrote ''Brilliantly funny... compares with some of the best work that came out of France and Germany between the wars.''

In Britton's book, Hitler survives the war, but is afflicted by an unruly seven-foot long spitting penis, ''Old Shatterhand'', with a fondness for eating shrimp. **Lord Horror** is a William Joyce-like figure who kills Jews with his twin razors. And there is a steam-powered airship crewed by ''nigger androids''.

It is hard to imagine anybody taking any of this literally, or, despite the rather unpleasant contents, to believe anybody is likely to be depraved or corrupted by it. Britton, of Jewish descent, says that ''if you are going to do an anti-semitic character, you have to do it to the one-hundredth degree. There is no point in pretending that these sort of people do not exist.'' Britton also has said that the novel carries on the spirit of such **New Worlds** stories as **Bug Jack Barron**, which had questions asked about it in Parliament, but its central premise is speculative - Auschwitz as a ''role model'' for the future. He adds that it is also ''a homage to the pulp swords & sorcery of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard''.

If **Lord Horror** is obscene, the law allows that it be prosecuted by the Director of Public Prosccutions, with a jury trial, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. In fact British juries have been singularly reluctant to bring in guilty verdicts for obscenity, and such prosecutions have been virtually abandoned. If ''Linda Lovelace'' isn't obscene, then what is? If Anderton thinks he has been libelled he can sue. If **Lord Horror** is racist, then action can be brought under the Race Relations Act. All these laws have been passed by a democratically elected parliament. I have little quarrel with them. What I do object to is the use of Section Three of the Act being used by the police to seize and destroy anything they don't like, without a trial.

I don't want to get into the pro/anti pornography argument here, for **Lord Horror** is not pornography; its intentions (and its market) are quite different. There is a telling sequence in one of the comics where (after the speech bubbles have fallen whitely mute and following a plain text of compressed surrealist horror) we see what are all too clearly authentic photographs of people done to death by the Nazis; the real obscenity.

I would merely urge a sense of proportion.

And how does this relate to you? The police in Manchester and London increasingly see themselves in the role of moral guardians and have broadened their interpretation of acts like the Obscene Publications Act to include just about anything and anyone they disagree with, and done their bit to promote a climate of moral hysteria. Freedoms won in the 60's and 70's have been systematically eroded in the 80's by a reactionary Government which blames the country's ills on ''permissiveness''.

Recently the Metropolitan Police, under Michael Hames, the new head of Scotland Yard's Obscene Publications Squad, using Section Three raided Island Records and seized the entire pressing (25,000 copies) of a record by NWA (Niggers with Attitude) an American hardcore rap group. The police lost the appeal. They seized copies of ''Lovers Guide'', an explicit sex education video. They raided a comics shop and took away copies of **Viz**, Knockout Comics has been raided. A bookshop was prosecuted, unsuccessfully, for selling the ReSearch book **Modern Primitives** (about nipple & genital piercing). Drug-related literature has been seized, a possibility that Parliament never envisaged. Lesbians and male gays have been jailed for appearing in private videos of bizzarre acts which are not in themselves illegal. How long before the police take an interest in those quaintly-titled Horror fanzines and start seizing them? Recently W H Smith have forced the publishers of a horror anthology and a horror magazine to withdraw or modify their publications. Smiths clearly felt that seizure of their stock was something they definitely didn't need.

Arrow Books, who this year bravely re-issued De Sade's novels, had better watch out.

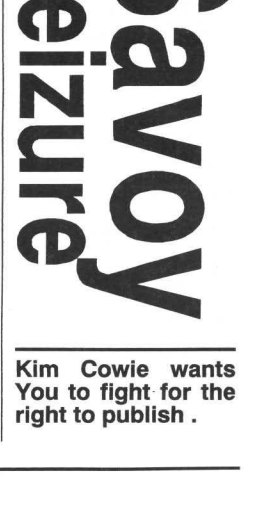
Spare a thought for the dilemma of writers who, when faced with the whole of human experience and imagination, want to draw on all of it and not just the parts that won't offend anyone, as raw materials for their fiction.

Savoy are appealing against Fairclough's decision - probably in the New Year - but there will still be no jury. If it loses, the books and magazines will be destroyed.

Savoy have recently announced that since mounting an appeal for help, their case has been taken up by Geoffrey Robertson QC. That this expert on free speech, and successful defender of the NWA case has decided to become involved, is a sign of how seriously this further threat to liberty is regarded by the liberal establishment. Robertson was not hired; Savoy cannot afford his kind of fees; he offered his services for expenses only. Vigorous support for Savoy is now coming from Article 19, the powerful freedom group who are the mainstay of the international support for Salman Rushdie. Savoy now also has Legal Aid for the forthcoming appeal, but they have not closed their appeal for funds as legal bills from earlier hearings in this affair are still unpaid.

Send all donations to the "Savoy Freedom to Publish Fund", c/o Livingstone & Co solicitors, Bridge St, Manchester.

This is your territory. This is your fight. Fight it.



Kim Cowie wants You to fight for the right to publish .

Bruce Sterling
Holding The Invisible Hand

WINCON II was an event to remember: the weather was beautiful, the beer was cheap, the panels were interesting, and the guest speakers of exceptionally high quality. The highlight however was undoubtedly this speech by Bruce Sterling which held the audience utterly spell-bound. We are grateful to Bruce and to the organisers of WINCON for their help in bringing you this transcript.

Now Read on....

When you're an American writer visiting Britain, you generally end up in London somehow or another, that's because your publishers make you, but it seems that most of the real action in British SF takes place in Brighton and Oxford and even unlikelier places like Leeds and Reading and Telford and possibly Winchester. So I plan to avoid London this time. It took me quite a while to figure out that nobody really lives in London except editors and publishers and the Victorian undead. The laudanum-soaked spirit of Wilkie Collins is loose in London right now ready to strangle me for rudely disturbing his literary grave with my word processor.

So, to hell with London, let's move right on to our big hotdog topic of the day which is "The Wonderful Power of Storytelling". I had two choices of topic for my big deal Guest of Honour speech. (This *is* my big deal Guest of Honour speech, in case you were wondering). My choice was between "The Image of the Future" and "The Art and Science of Storytelling". I like to choose unlikely possibilities, so instead of trying to dazzle you with a lot of high-tech yankee cyberpunk bullshit I plan to wax extremely literary today. At the back of my notes somewhere, when I was contemplating this speech, digging through my filing cabinet in Texas, I found this really snappy speech by my friend Orson Scott Card of North Carolina. Scott's speech was all about how us bare-knuckled Sci-fi American popular writers are going to show cissy high-brow left-wing wimps like Gabriel Garcia Marquez how to write novels. I also had some swell reference material cribbed from an Ursula LeGuin article... It was all about how elves and dragons can really impress and terrify the oppressive patriarchal war-mongering power-structure.

But, you may have heard speeches about science fiction's wonderful power of storytelling before and you probably swallowed this line to some extent because otherwise you wouldn't be here listening to some author talking. You'd probably be off watching videos like a sensible late 20th century consumer or maybe you'd be playing computer games or reading comics. I happen to be quite a fan of computer games and comics myself. I think the real roots of popular science fiction, the pulp tradition of the 20s and 30s with its blood and fighting and adventure is much more alive in computer games and comics today than it is in written SF. I think if Henry Kuttner or Robert E Howard were alive today they'd probably be writing for comics.

There's a certain amount of swashbuckling blood and fighting and pulp action-adventure in written SF nowadays, but it seems to me that it's become very lifeless, very pro-forma very much yardgoods. I can scarcely understand why anyone would read a standard fantasy trilogy or share-cropping book in 1991, when they could be renting great special effects videos for a third of the price. I myself don't read these books; I doubt I'd read them even if I were a teenager today. I mean why the heck should you read another paint-by-numbers quest trilogy when you can play a terrific computer game like **Wing Commander** by Origin Systems. A simple paper and dice role-playing game delivers a tremendous adolescent power fantasy kick and with a halfway decent Dungeon Master a role-playing game is far more stimulating to the imagination than a bad fantasy trilogy. I think this should be openly confessed. And you get to hang out with your friends to boot, and possibly develop some useful social skills.

It's very much an open question *why* written science fiction actually exists at all in 1991. I think a lot of the reason is simple habit, you can see that one of science fiction's main props - the fantastic adventure yarn has migrated into different media with very considerable success. And another of science fiction's main props is also under severe attack - this is science fiction's traditional role as the booster for technology and the popular handmaiden of scientific culture.

Today NASA is rotting on the launchpad and for good reason. If manned space exploration is a boost to the economy and a super charger for technological development as was often said, and if space exploration feeds the spirit of national adventure and national enterprise as was also often said, then why is that great pioneer of manned space flight, the Soviet Union, in such awful shape in 1991? And I must also add that the other major space power, the USA, is now the world's greatest debtor nation.

Science fiction played up space exploration for all it was worth, and then some, for 50-60 years. This romance of titanic engineering projects, is the sort of thing 20th century science fiction truly excelled at; you never saw much science fiction written about seizing trade advantages through dogged small-scale improvements in traditional industries. Though, that's what Japan actually did with the later 20th century. Japan in 1991 looks a hell of a lot better than Japan did in 1946, which was the heyday of Robert Heinlein. Maybe the Japanese weren't reading enough traditional American and Russian science fiction. I do notice that Japanese science fiction comics, computer games and videos are going great guns in 1991, however.

So I think if you look at written SF objectively today, you can see that it has had quite a bit of the stuffing kicked out of it. Most of the stuff marketed on the science fiction racks is in fact Fantasy; medieval fantasy, sword and sorcery, fannish comedies full of puns and in-jokes and sword and planet adventures. People are openly afraid to contemplate the future today. It's very hard to work up any kind of honest enthusiasm for technical SF boosterism today. It certainly does not fit the *zeitgeist* of the 1990s. It sounds very *bogus* today, when you talk about better living through chemistry, or better living through engineering, or better living through physics, or better living through biotechnology. It sounds like you're a paid spokesman for Exxon.

The *zeitgeist* of the 90s is not kind to science fiction. The secret heart of the 90s is partial to horror, horror is 90s and splatterpunk is very 90s. There may not be a whole hell of a lot of future in writing splatterpunk, and horror as a genre seems far more dark and narrow than science fiction, but it does fit the tenor of the times. There's not a whole hell of a lot of future in the 1990s either. There's no vision; there's no *vision-thing* in the 90s, no sense of a better society beckoning, no sense of a brighter future for the next generation. Just more of the same; kinder and gentler, louder and stupider.

So what kind of wonderful power is really left to the storytellers of SF? What wonder? What power? Why bother? Well, I'm here today to argue strongly on the side of bothering. Bothering rather more intensely than ever before, SF in the 90s has to find a cultural role far different from SF in the 30s, or the 60s, or even the 80s. As different as those decades themselves are different. Written SF as the disposable fantasy machine; what Damon Knight calls "the old baloney factory" is going, going, *gone*. That role really belongs by right to the new media, just as SF pulp magazines and cheap SF paperback books were themselves new media once; cheap, irrepressible, popular media in their own glory days.

The baloney factory may go entirely and it may take all of written SF with it, if written SF can't find another viable role. But SF's role of techno-booster and glamouriser is history. What

honesty there was in this role is gone. No literature can survive which is intellectually dishonest. At this point in the ongoing technological revolution we can do without more empty *agit-prop* and real estate promotion. It is not that there is no promise in new technologies; there is great promise in them, but mere promises should not be trusted. We SF people have been around the block a few times with these modern miracles of science. In 1991, we shouldn't gawk and gee-whizz like a bunch of *rubes*.

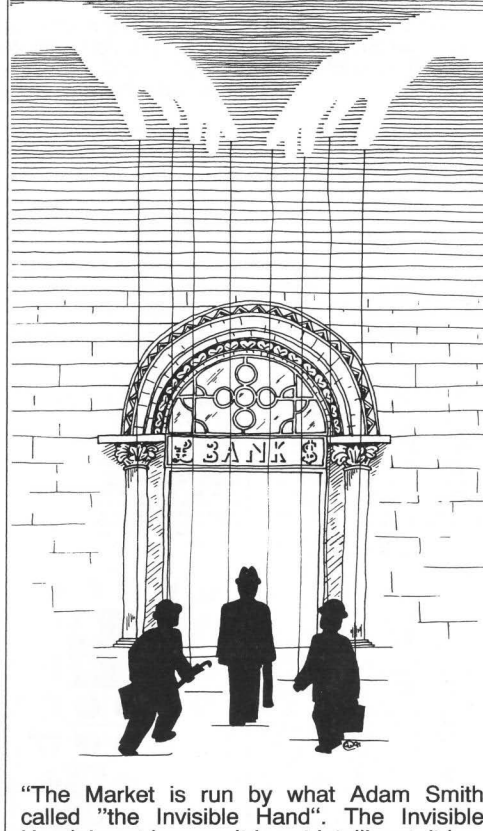
Written SF today needs to have a lot more spine and brain, written SF needs to take on the role of a genuine literature. It needs to criticize and inspire and inform, written SF needs to keep the imagination alive. SF must fight for the righteous cause in the ongoing war against popular literacy and popular intelligence. But SF needs to do more than defend old ground, SF needs to carry the war to the enemy. It needs to set a thousand brushfires in the most far-fetched and apparently pathetic corners of our society. SF needs to invent alternatives and publicise alternatives and keep alive in people's minds the possibility of real alternatives.

We certainly entered a new world after what our friends in eastern Europe like to call "the events of 1989", Communism is dead, the 19th century left is no longer an alternative. Centrally controlled economies are no longer an alternative, the dictatorship of the proletariat is no longer an alternative, the Market has won. And we now need to understand that, and we need to undertand what the Market can do for us, and what the Market can do *to* us.

We have entered an age of global post-modern Capitalism. There's no need to get all dark and gloomy and terrified about this prospect. There's no need to panic, and invent loony conspiracy theories, and despair, and curse God, and *die*. But the Market has won and the Market is global, and not local and the Market is post-modern and not merely modern and the Market is not merely efficient but very technologically advanced and getting more so. When the Market had a competition in the Eastern Bloc, the Free World was very highly politicised; human rights and democratic values were strongly emphasised, sometimes, even when it meant giving up some money.

A truly global Market will be quite different from the partially global Market of the Cold War era free world. A lot has changed since the Cold War started in 1945. Thanks to techn-ological advancement, vast new sections of the human body and human psyche and human culture have become commodities; creatures of the Market, things that are offered for sale. Information, cultural images, even thought can now be reduced to dollars, yen, deutchmarks and ecus. The entities we call governments are not global. The rules we call civil rights are not global. Human individuals are not global. The Market is global; the Market is far larger than any government. There are multinational corporations flourishing today that are larger and more powerful than many nations with seats in the United Nations. But even these great enterprises do not control the Market. Nobody controls the Market. Nobody has any real idea how to control the Market. Those who try to control the Market have not done well against those who are willing to let the Market have its own way.

The Market is run by what Adam Smith called "the Invisible Hand". The Invisible Hand is only a metaphor and perhaps should not be taken too seriously, but it must be recognised first and foremost that the Invisible Hand is not human. The Invisible Hand is not intelligent, it has no compassion, it is not a moral actor. To expect compassion from the Invisible Hand is like expecting compassion from a coral reef.



"The Market is run by what Adam Smith called "the Invisible Hand". The Invisible Hand is not human. It is not intelligent, it has no compassion. To expect compassion from the Invisible Hand is like expecting compassion from a coral reef".

"Written SF today needs to have a lot more spine and brain, written SF needs to take on the role of a genuine literature. It needs to criticise and inspire and inform, written SF needs to keep the imagination alive."

When a woman in Pakistan today, draws aside her sari for the video camera and shows us a large and well-healed incision where her left kidney used to be, that kidney was drawn from her body by the Invisible Hand. It is all very well for us to say that a doctor did it and should be blamed for it, but that doctor, or that medical entrepreneur as perhaps we should call him in more justice to actual doctors, took that kidney because there is a global Market for healthy organs, today. A desperately ill millionaire in Abu Dhabi, or Brazil can make a phone call, and a villager in Pakistan can be presented with three years' income and an antiseptic transaction takes place across national borders in almost total anonymity. The oppressed, so-called, and the so-called oppressor never see one another's faces .

We are approaching a time of Commodity Totalitarianism. This is very different from political totalitarianism, political and cultural activities will not be directly restricted by state police; they will just be swept aside, bought out, overstepped and rendered irrelevant to the Market business at hand. Commodity totalitarianism essentially means that enough money can buy most anything, including a great many things that used to be considered beyond price, such as national cultures and politics. The Market will supply a wealthy person - a wealthy financial entity let's say, it need not be any human person, with anything that can be denominated in money. Drugs, human organs, skin and hair, foetal tissue, human hormones, political power, newspapers, magazines, publishers, chain book stores, videos, video distributors, computer games, computer publishers too; All for sale.

Sex can be bought of course, nothing new about that. Except for the scale of it. Thailand has become a huge jet-age brothel today. Children are available through money, human fertility treatments will see to that. Day care for your children; you can rent a commercial substitute for parental care. You may want to pay someone else to bring up your children, more likely, you will be forced to do this by so-called economic realities. You can buy a dumping ground for toxic chemicals if you need one. Respectability is for sale. Absolution for one's sins, whatever *those* were. Today, you can buy a satellite hotline to the holy gospel, and help make christian evangelism one of the most bald and repulsive of post-modern commercial enterprises. You can buy justice, and buy injustice. Money will bring means of legal and extra-legal harassment for one's enemies. It can buy information, including supposedly private and personal information. It buys arms, including nuclear arms and nerve gases. Certain global banks it seems, will even supply you with black bag private espionage units. This is an *astounding* development to see outside the pages of a William Gibson novel.

It is the nature of the Market to endeavour to meet the need. Most of the time the Market will succeed. If the Market is global, *as it is*, and the Markets would-be regulators are merely national, *as they are*, then the Market will succeed *much* more often than ever before. Putting over a million of its own citizens in prisons, as the United States has done, has not stopped the multinational drug Market. It has given the United States, (land of the free and home of the brave), the largest *gulag* in the present day world, but it has not stopped the drug Market. Entities that share the Market's multinational aspects will flourish and survive. Entities that respect nationhood or feel loyalty to regions or neighbourhoods will tend to suffer.

Here are some things that the Market can *not* buy for us: A pound of stratospheric ozone; a quart of seawater without heavy metals and pesticides; an extinct species; genuine community feeling; a sense of tradition and place; respect for human rights or any other form of political conviction. The Market can buy politicians, but the Market is not inherently political in its true sense, because the Market is simply not human. The Market has no morality; it cannot answer the political questions posed by Socrates or Lincoln or Ghandi. A Market has all the moral depth of a buffalo stampede.

Human beings are not particularly well designed as cogwheels for Market operations. If the purpose of human life is to fulfil economic imperatives to survive economically in the harsh world of global competition, as some of our leaders would have it, then we humans are very ill-designed for that purpose. The Market will therefore offer us huge financial incentives to redesign ourselves. It used to be physically impossible for us to redesign ourselves, but now it is entirely possible. Hollywood actors and actresses, whose face and form are their fortunes, have been redesigning themselves for years now in surgery clinics. Our former president is said to have had two facelifts; his wife is rumoured to have had four. Hollywood people are not afraid of the knife.

A Pakistani farmer can function quite adequately with only one kidney, he can have instead one kidney, a scar and an account at the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. If you are in Britain, you can walk about with a stranger's kidney inside you and a large account at the very same Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The bank may crash, it may be rotten from top to bottom, but that's considered one of the vagaries of the global Market. Something farmers and sick people simply have to put up with.

The human race needs to soberly decide what it is willing to do to "survive economically". As individual citizens in the modern world, we ourselves are already commodities to a very great extent. We will go where money tells us and do what money requires of us. We spend most of our lives at work, male and female, and the number of hours we spend working is no longer declining, as it did in the 40s and 50s, but has lately been going up steadily. Electronic communicators, such as fax machines, cellular telephones and home computers, now tie us ever closer to the workplace. It is *much* harder to simply get away from it all.

Bad credit can now follow us across the planet. Bad acts will be tallied and faultlessly remembered as long as we live. We may live in anonymous bedsits and rental houses and highrises, we may lack all sense of taking part in a living human community, but we will certainly not be anonymous. The Market knows our worth to the last penny, and will follow us wherever we may go with magazine subscription offers and credit card deals. Money hungry machines will call us on the telephone and badger us for sales. It is easy to imagine a

Artwork By Claire Willoughby

"Written SF as the disposable fantasy machine is going, going, gone.That role belongs by right to the new media, just as SF pulp magazines were themselves new media once: cheap, irrepressible popular media in their own glory days"

perfectly competitive economy made up entirely of these phone machines, ceaselessly exchanging money by reciting tapes at one another, and indulging in electronic funds transfer without human interference or intelligence of any kind.

The human race needs to decide where and how it will resist being made into plastic. It is not that one should be *against* plastic, there are great advantages to being made plastic;- I myself have a ceramic tooth and silicon lenses, and I *swear* by them. The human condition has never been such a splendid thing that we should cherish it merely for its own sake. But the problem is not so much means but ends. Let's take a concrete example: throughout human history, and before human history, a woman's gift of a birth to a child was a deep and primal event; for the parents, the child and the community. Women can now rent their wombs. They can give birth for hire, to a child that is not a genetic relative. There are definite advantages to this practice. Some people want this service *direly* and a lot of money will be paid for it. That is why it happens. If it is denied in one country by legal action, the Market will meet the demand elsewhere.

Renting childbirth erases many of our ancient definitions of what it means to be a human being and a citizen. The logical next step, commercially speaking is to remove the unskilled labour and simply manufacture wombs commercially. Aldous Huxley foresaw this many years ago, what he did not see was that it could be done simply and cheaply. Huxley imagined that a repressive government would be required to inflict this horrible indignity on us. He didn't foresee that it might be done simply because it *pays*.

Science fiction as a literature can resist commodity totalitarianism. This may sound absurd, why should we claim any such virtue? Science fiction is a *powerless* literature and the province of an eccentric minority. But SF is not yet entirely afraid to extrapolate; it is not entirely afraid to see what is coming and talk frankly about it. Some SF writers, unlike most other writers are intelligent enough and ruthless enough to understand how weird this world is actually becoming. And SF also has a very powerful tradition of non-commerciality, SF doesn't sell very well and its best writers have an ancient and *laudable* tradition of starvation.

If SF's best writers were truly making pots of money, we'd probably have a real problem. We'd have to worry seriously about being co-opted. Not just by half-assed billionaire churches like Scientology, but by serious commercial entities like British Petroleum or General Dynamics Corporation. But breadhead writers can go to Hollywood and TV, they don't hang out at cons, writing for a few people for a few cents a word. And fandom is not a normal phenomenon, fandom is a global phenomenon, but thank God it has never to date been Fandom Incorporated. It strongly resists co-optation. SF is not about money, SF has never been about money, anyone who enters the SF field in search of money is seriously misguided and probably too *stupid* to form a real threat to our best traditions. SF is about imagination. As imagination is crushed out of the rest of society by so-called economic realities, then SF's candle in the darkness will glow brighter and brighter.

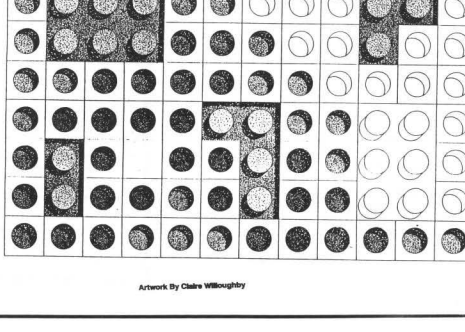
In the struggle against Commodity Totalitarianism, we in the West have a great deal to learn from artists in the Eastern Bloc. We have a great deal to learn from people like Vaclav Havel, the first thing we need to learn is that we're reforming a gigantic inhuman system bent on its own senseless aggrandisement. It's not something that one does with lapel buttons and bumperstickers over a three day weekend. It is a genuine lifelong commitment, it is serious and earnest, it is hard work and it is *dangerous*.

The second thing that we can learn is that dark as it may seem, the struggle is definitely not hopeless. Resistance at any particular moment may seem muted or absent; but people are not happy being treated as pawns. People are not happy without their dignity, without control over their own lives. They resent being worked to death and having their family lives destroyed by forces they scarcely comprehend. They resent seeing their cities crumble and rot and seeing their streets fill up with derelicts, and their skies with acid rain. They resent being told that the answer to these problems is to work harder and obey the rules better. In East Germany, we had the *amazing* example of a very highly organised and thoroughly oppressive system that simply gave itself up in a matter of months and dissolved out of sheer self-disgust. Scarcely a shot was fired, no bombs were thrown, no hostages were taken, no assassinations carried out. Forty years of mind-numbing propaganda proved useless. It all just *went*, it's history now.

The third thing we can learn is that winning the struggle does not end history. The triumph of unrestrained Market forces is a serious problem for us right now, but it is not the only problem. It just happens to be an important problem at this historical juncture. Victories are pleasant, but victories are not permanent; neither are defeats. Vaclav Havel may be president of Czechoslovakia now, and that *is* wonderful, but the future of Czechoslovakia and the happiness of the Czechoslovak peoples and the very existence of Czechoslovakia as a political entity are all very much in doubt.

Problems are not dangerous *per se*, problems are simply politics. Problems unrecognised, problems unconfronted or hidden from view; those are dangerous; those are the source of crisis. We should give up easy answers and utopian solutions, that rhetoric belongs to a dying century. Science fiction in particular is very guilty of the crime of utopianism. We should wash our hands of that crime and confess our failings with a contrite heart, and honestly try to do better now. We should be honest now, we should be honest even when it hurts, we should be honest *especially* when it hurts.

Science fiction will never run the world. Our ambitions and rhetoric may be *insane* in their scope, but our real world abilities are quite limited. We won't run the world and we shouldn't run the world, because we're no damned good at practical things. But there are things we can do, and things we ought to do. We need to do a lot more than provide empty fantasies for people who are so hurt by our moronic system that they have a hard time maintaining their quotidian daily lives.



Artwork By Claire Willoughby

There's nothing much wrong with providing colourful fantasy. But, if you're a science fiction writer today, and you're doing that, you're very likely in the wrong business. Go into the new media, go for it, go for entertainment and colour and soundtracks and rocketblazes, and entertain the hell out of people. You have my blessing. No hard feelings, *really*. I'll be among your *major* fans.

But as a science fiction writer, I want to use the great advantage of the written medium, which is that it can make people actually *think*. I want to create work for people who want to think. I realise that this an annoying activity, but I feel that if it is carried out on a modest scale, in the palpably declining written medium I may perhaps be excused. And furthermore I want to write for people who have been made to suffer for their imagination. When I say *suffer* for imagination , I don't mean anything particularly dramatic or draconian, but I doubt I have to explain what I mean to anyone in this room. We all know very well what this means. If you've never suffered because of your imagination, then I bear you no ill will, but you really ought to get the hell away from real science fiction people before one of them accidentally *damages* you.

In the world of Commodity Domination, it's a very common slur for artists to attack other artists as greedheads and sellouts. Artists are very aware of the illness that has attacked our society and are hypersensitive about it. If you, as an artist, somehow earn a lot of money, the true believers will write you off. But if your message begins to make any kind of *real* dent, the Market will definitely see to it that you are given a lot of money. It's a Catch 22 and one that has done a lot of damage to morale.

Well, if you're a writer, or an artist, or just an imaginative person, and you're worried about your integrity and the State of your Soul and the Empire of Mammon, then, I have an answer for you; do something for free. Write something for nothing, give your art away. Try writing something without a copyright on it. Write for fanzines, write electronic mail, write letters, write criticism, (that doesn't pay worth a damn and will earn you a *world* of interesting trouble). Write political rants, coin slogans, do T-shirts, bumper stickers and lapel buttons, if you have to. Even that beats the hell out of sitting on your hands, watching your life tick away while the world goes to hell in a handbasket. Do things for *free*, do things for the love of it, light a candle *and* curse the darkness. Do gratuitous things. Try to create a world full of random kindness and senseless acts of beauty. Exercise your right to imagine, act as if your life were worth living, act as if you were a real person and your life actually mattered. Support individuals like yourself. Support small publishers, odd magazines, off-beat bookstores. Learn to value commitment more than gloss and public relations scams and seek out those others who do likewise, they're there. Stop being afraid. That bears repeating I think. If the worst happens, its just the worst. The worst may happen no matter what we attempt to do, we should do what we can, stop being afraid. We're going to win this one, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Historical Note

This speech was recorded on the weekend **before** the failed coup aginst Gorbachev in the Soviet Union.

A Pound Of Flesh

Leslie J Hurst Assesses the Readability of Science Fiction

A formula called the Flesch Test is designed to indicate the readability of a text. It can be used to show whether a style is appropriate to a genre - you'd expect a textbook to be more difficult to read than a novel, but you might want to know whether your textbook was written in a difficult way. And, the test can be used to discover the origin of a text, by relating the figures to other books written by the same author. It may be because of this that it has been one of the tools that have been used in analyses of alleged confessions, etc., that have been brought back to the Court of Appeal recently, as it indicates something of an author's individual style. I've come across references to it in several places, and been driven to try it out on a number of SF classics and not-so-classics.

Flesch calculated Ease of Reading with this formula:

RE = 206.835 - (SYLL x 0.846) - (SL x 1.015)

SYLL is the number of syllables per 100 words in the text, and SL is the average sentence length, calculated as the number of words in the text (147) divided by the number of full stops.

This gives a number on the scale from 1 to 100, with anything less than 30 being considered difficult, and anything over 90 very easy.

In his 1987 book **Diagnosis and Detection** (Associated University Press), Pasquale Accardo gives an analysis of all the Sherlock Holmes stories and novels, and of the Holmes pastiches. He produces results like these:

	SL	SYLL	RE
The Speckled Band	15.4	131.4	76
Silver Blaze	24.0	145.8	57
Wisteria Lodge	11.6	133.8	80
Hound of the Baskervilles	15.4	135.0	74

The average for the canon, Accardo calculates, is:

15.1 137.0| 3.1

He also gives the averages for the five collections: the **Memoirs**, the second volume, is lowest:

17.1 137.3 70.8

and the last collection, the **Casebook**, is highest:

12.2 134.4 78.1

but the range overall is quite tight. Comparing the figures with those for other authors who have taken over the charactr is onc indication of how close they were able to come in adopting the character and the style. If we look at four of the books, written with SF associations, we can get an idea of their verisimilitude:

	SL	SYLL	RE
Manley Wade Wellman **Sherlock Holmes's War of the Worlds**	14.7	146.6	66.0
Loren Estleman **Sherlock Holmes versus Dracula**	15.3	140.4	70.0
JP Farmer **Adventures of the Peerless Peer**	14.9	144.3	54.2*
Michael Kurland **The Infernal Device**	12.0	144.8	71.0

* I calculate a figure of 70 for this book.

The four authors have written books that have a different Ease of Reading, or are more demanding on the reader, falling at the edge or outside Conan Doyle's range. They use longer words in longer sentences. In other words, they have not manged to imitate Conan Doyle's style.

Now to turn to SF itself. Here are my analyses of a number of SF novels and a few short stories. These are not based on the full text, but (following a statement on the Flesch formula in **Writers' News**) on a sample of 147 words. In each case the sample began at the fifth paragraph of the fifth chapter, or at just the fifth paragraph in the case of short stories. I have listed them in descending order of readability.

First, the novels:

	SL	SYLL	RE
Robert Heinlein **Have Spacesuit, Will Travel**	6.7	132.0	88.4
James Blish **A Case of Conscience**	9.2	131.3	86.4
Aldous Huxley **Brave New World**	13.7	136.7	77.6
Joanna Russ **The Female Man**	16.3	133.3	77.5
Gene Wolfe **The Shadow of the Torturer**	14.7	136.1	76.8
AE Van Vogt **The Voyage of the Space Beagle**	14.7	138.1	75.1
Mary Gentle **Rats and Gargoylee**	16.3	137.4	74.0
HG Wells **The Time Machine**	18.4	141.5	68.5
John Brunner **Stand on Zanzibar**	21.0	53.1	56.0
JG Ballard **The Drowned World**	29.4	151.0	49.2
Ursula LeGuin **The Dispossed**	36.8	143.5	48.1

Now, the short stories:

	SL	SYLL	RE
Arthur C Clarke 'The Nine Billion Names of God'	10.5	133.3	83.4
Poul Andersen 'Sister Planet'	10.5	146.3	72.5
James Tiptree, Jr 'I'll Be Waiting For You When The Swimming Pool Is Empty'	21.0	153.1	56.0
Cordwainer Smith 'The Game of Rat and Dragon'	21.0	155.1	54.3

The novels obviously fall into four groups, which I can't really explain. You can understand the classic professionals hitting the two top slots (and the short story, too). The Heinlein might be considered a juvenile and so aimed at a market demanding easier reading, and Blish would have been used to writing for a wide public at the end of the pulp era, but why the bottom of the list should be occupied by three or four dystopiae is not so clear. Although dystopiae are traditionally more demanding (though Aldous Huxley managed to avoid that - perhaps because he is writing satire), and all the four authors are usually regarded as intelligent, they are never written about as if they are hard or obscure. There is little to distinguish between the sexes, and not a lot between periods of writing (unless you suppose that things started difficult with Wells, grew better up to the fifties and then fell away in a sort of bell curve, except that people like Huxley and Van Vogt should be the other way round to really prove that).

A couple of things may challenge the idea that the Flesch test is objective: firstly, that the books cover such a wide range, and they don't seem that separate on reading them and, secondly, the list came out not as I expected before I began the calculations. Miscounting a syllable or two would not account for the extent of the differences.

What I have not done is attempt to measure a number of books by one author as Accardo did for Conan Doyle but, as the examples from his analyses show, the attempted scientific examination of these texts can provide some thought-provoking results. And, it provides a way of emulating the writing style of an author you like. To have written more like Dr Watson, Philip Jose Farmer should have written longer sentences and more monosyllables.

Dream-Weavers

Andy Sawyer Talks to Mark & Julia Smith About "Jonathan Wylie"

Jonathan Wylie is actually two gamekeepers turned poacher. Mark and Julia Smith now live in remotest North Norfolk and write full-time but in their former incarnation were an editorial team at Transworld Books, working separately and together on their fantasy line....

This wasn't quite meant at first, they explain, but their interest in fantasy snowballed until they were working together as a team. Mark had joined Transworld seventeen years ago; Julia some time after that and both ended up with editorial posts. Their responsibilities eventually included David Eddings, Terry Pratchett and Mary Gentle: a formidable stable which might daunt anyone with ambitions to go off and write books themselves.

The Smiths were undaunted. They had been writing for six years, anyway. While with Corgi, they had written two fantasy trilogies, **Servants of Ark** and **The Unbalanced Earth** which "had done quite well and been translated into several languages. We got a larger advance for **Dream-Weaver** (their most ambitious story to date) and took the chance to fulfil our dream: to move out of London and write full-time". So now comes **Dream-Weaver**: described as Jonathan Wylie's "break-out" book and one which it is hoped will be the first of many "independant" works.

But first, what is it like, living on the other side of the publishing scene? "Great! We're not exhausted any more. Our previous novels had been written at weekends and evenings while working all day, and now we can organise our lives around our writing rather than our jobs." And the gamekeeper turned poacher idea? "It's been a great help having been a gamekeeper. It actually helps in both directions. Being writers anyway helped us deal with the writer's point of view, and having been editors helped us to organise our writing in the way editors expect. Julia (Mark explains) is fanatical about presenting a 'clean' manuscript: making sure every word is correctly spelt."

Their writing is a collective act: a bit like the way that they react to an interview, where ideas are picked up and tossed back and forth between the pair. Some collaborators have a clearly marked line of demarcation: one does the characters, another the plotting; one writes first draft, the other polishes. This isn't the case with Jonathan Wylie.

It all goes through several stages. First is going through ideas, often disconnected ones. Julia's ideas, for instance, will often come from vivid dreams. Next comes putting the shape together, with lots of ideas being discarded as the story comes through,

Then it's a matter of talking to each other and tossing ideas about, then going through the storyline, characters, chapter by chapter descriptions, getting down to the hard work of writing and eventually editing and polishing.

Does one half of the writing team stick to one task? "No, there's no hard and fast rule about who does what." It's a true collaboration rather than a division of labour.

Dream-Weaver is a big novel, containing the usual fantasy fare of magic, swordfights and romantic heroines, but with a central idea so simple yet brilliantly effective that it's tempting to think that it was put in to subvert the entire genre of fantasies in which the characters are acting out a combat long-prophesied. Apparently this isn't directly so (although long-term Jonathan Wylie fans will note that the Smiths don't seem averse to standing a few notions on their heads for dramatic effect). I'm not going to give away what this notion is - though you might care to guess - but Mark says "It wasn't a conscious idea to subvert the genre but to build up a sense of tension - and then to try to find a way out."

What is Jonathan Wylie's role in the fantasy market? "Not necessarily as a specific sub-genre of fantasy, but we like to produce good storytelling in the heroic fantasy field. Like many writers, we write what we like to read. There's a readership for Jonathan Wylie as proved by the sales of our previous books, and fantasy seems well-established still, although hit by the recession as everything else is."

"We do want to get away from writing trilogies, into writing one-off novels. Our first novel developed quite naturally into a trilogy, and we wanted to break out of that then, but we were persuaded to continue with another. **Dream-Weaver** is a one-off. Our next, **Shadow Knave** is another, not connected to **Dream-Weaver** - and not as long."

What's next? "We're taking a break for a more relaxed lifestyle!" Jonathan Wylie is staying with heroic fantasy - "it's what we like to do." **Shadow Knave** is completed and being submitted to their publisher, with luck, it should be out next year. At the moment, it's more tossing of ideas back and forth for the new novel. "We'd like to do a children's / young adult fantasy eventually, but at the moment it's probably another adult novel." The poachers are at work setting more snares for their unwary readers....

The Architecture of Desire
Mary Gentle
Bantam, 1991, 192pp, £13.99

There's a particular kind of chocolate dessert which lurks in the small print of menus, waiting to pounce on the unwary. It's fluffy and smooth, and goes down so easily you hardly notice how rich it is; until it turns to solid lead in your stomach at four in the morning. **The Architecture of Desire** is the literary equivalent of one of these culinary time bombs.
Everything about it is calculated to lull the reader into a false sense of security. Familiar characters, Valentine and Casubon, in what might be considered a familiar setting; except that this isn't quite the seventeenth century, or a conventional parallel one, and it certainly isn't the world of **Rats and Gargoyles**. There's swordplay, and derring-do, but people's motives are muddled, and likable people do appalling things, and nothing turns out the way it's supposed to.
The writing, however, is so skilful, the characterisation so deft, that the full implications of what you've just read only strike you after you've finished the book. Probably at four in the morning, after some very peculiar dreams...
In short, this book is a *tour de force*; Real Literature posing as swashbuckling escapism. If you only buy one novel this year, make sure it's **The Architecture of Desire.**
Alex Stewart

The Legend Book of Science Fiction
Gardner Dozois, Ed.
Legend, 1991, 672pp, £8.99

With any enterprise such as this there are bound to be quibbles. Why, for instance, chose Cordwainer Smith's 'Mother Hitton's Little Kittens' as opposed to, say, 'The Ballad of Lost C'Mell'? Why Edgar Pangborn's 'The Golden Horn' and not 'Angel's Egg'? What ranks Ursula LeGuin's 'The Barrow' above 'The Day Before the Revolution'? And so on.
There are other questions of selection also: why include L. Sprague De Camp, Jack Dann, John Kessel and Michael Swanwick but exclude Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Orson Scott Card and Kim Stanley Robinson?
And there is most certainly one story which should never have been included: 'The Worm that Flies' is Brian Aldiss at his most unutterably pretentious; practically anything else Aldiss has written would have been preferable. Yet this is balanced by the inclusion of one story which could not have been missed: 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' by Gene Wolfe is quite possibly the finest achievement we have so far seen in science fiction.
The point is, **The Legend Book of Science Fiction**–like every other major retrospective anthology–lays itself open to quibbles and queries. Everyone is going to have their different theories about which stories from the last 30 years or so should be included if the collection is to be representative. It would be cause for endless fruitless debates around the campfires as we man the barricades late into the night. However you slice it, any anthology, even one as massive as this, which attempts to present a cross section of the genre over the last 30 years is bound to raise howls of dissent.
So Gardner Dozois avoids too many grand claims; this is a determinedly personal selection, stories which have touched him, moved him, stood out in his memory. It is perhaps some definition of his skills as an editor that an amazing number of the 26 stories have had a similar effect on me. It may be a reflection of one man's personal taste, but it feels like this is what science fiction has been doing since the end of the 1950's. The end result, the mighty tome which we hold with block and tackle before us, is as good as you could wish for and a damn sight better than a lesser editor could have achieved or a jaded critic might have anticipated.
Yes, you can quarrel with it over the fine detail, but the broad sweep does science fiction a tremendous service. It must be congratulated, for instance, for rescuing Richard McKenna from the undeserved oblivion in which he has too long languished. It must be welcomed for, in the main, chosing stories which are not the usual anthology fodder, yet which represent their era and their author a well as many others. 'This moment of the Storm' may not quite equal 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' yet it is still a fine example of Roger Zelazny at his mid-60's best.
Dozois's introductions to each story are models of their kind–a succinct summing-up of a career, a swift assignment of context, and enough pointers to other works to make this an ideal starting point for an absolute beginner in the genre. In fact, if you are new to science fiction this is perhaps the best history lesson you could hope to find. But even if you reckon yourself well read in the genre there are probably enough surprises included here to make you see science fiction afresh. There are can be no higher praise.
Paul Kincaid

The Alpha Box
Annie Dalton
Methuen, 1991, 192pp, £8.95

A Kind of Thief
Vivien Alcock
Methuen, 1991, 197pp, £8.95

These are both children's books aimed at young teenagers, with young teenagers as protagonists. Both books have protagonists with family crises which become the pivots to turn them in new directions and which are the starting points for both stories. Both books are well written, with convincing characterization, though the Alcock is stronger than the Dalton: I did have doubts about the speed of changes of character in the Dalton.
Only one of the two is fantasy. The Alcock Book is a straightforward real life story of a middle class girl uprooted by her father's arrest and sent to stay with her aunt, taking with her a case belonging to her father which she believes contains the stolen money. What becomes of Elinor, her preconceptions and her family, and what is contained in the case make up the story.
The Dalton is a fantasy in which the Alpha Box of the title comes to Asha in exchange "for everything she has", just as a blue guitar comes to Josh, bringing with them dreams, visions and a path they must take to save the world. I am unsure whether my reservations would be those of a young teenager reading it. I found the forces of good and evil too vague, too weak and less than fully convincing. The lack of suspense disapointed me too, because the ending was fairly predicatable from half way through. However, for a twelve year old reaction see below. Both these books are well written, literate and tell a good story, which is saying a great deal in their favour.
Helen McNabb

The Alpha Box
I thought this book was quite good, but most people my age group like funny books, whereas this book appears to be rather dismal. I enjoyed it after the first few chapters but most people would get fed up by then. It has suspense and mystery which I like in a book, but mostly I prefer funny books. It is not a book I would pick up off the shelf, but I quite enjoyed it.
Kate McNabb (age 12)

Fear
L Ron Hubbard
Bridge, 1991, 188pp, $16.95

In, it seems, a desperate attempt to prove that their mentor could actually churn out half decent novels, New Era publications (did you mention Scientology? I didn't) have re-issued this 1940 thriller. While adding various pieces to the text to a) bump up the page count, and b) allow renewal of copy right, they have left what amounts to a 175 page (large print) novella, which, surprisingly, isn't all that bad.
At first, the story of super-rationalist ethnologist James Lowry plods in its heavy handed way for a chapter or so. However, once he goes in search of a lost hat and four hours, and appears to fall into a fantasy/horror alternative world, things start to pick up significantly. Yes, once he gets detached from reality, old Lafayette isn't all that bad (oh, what a giveaway ...)
The ending, while guessable from the introduction, is in no way foreshadowed in the text, a point I find annoying. Also, the new illustrations live up to the, ah, subtlety of the writing style. But, all in all, deserves a look for being Hubbard's readable book, and also from the hilarious biography on the back ... from the exotic childhood of a navy child, to becoming the author of the SF "satire" **Mission Earth** without mentioning Dianetics once!
Pete Darby

REVIEWS

Edited By Chris Amies

Dream Finder
Roger Taylor
Headline, 1991, 436pp, £14.95

A journey of adventure through a wild land beset by ruthless barbarian invaders; long and bloody battles as ferocious as any conflict between Celt and Angle; a powerful tyrant who fears both usurpers and invisible menace; a sightless seer who can see clearer than the far-sighted: all the typical ingredients of high fantasy are here.

What made this book different for me, is its first half where I learned about Antyr. He is a Dream Finder, one of a Guild of gifted and specially-trained persons of all ages, who can enter other people's dreams and find out what is disturbing them. Both Dreamer and Dream Finder fall together into a trance, awakening prematurely from which can cause the Finder great harm.

Protecting the Finder during this critical state, is the duty of the Companion and Earth Holder. This is an animal-familiar who, while remaining on guard in this world, is also able to project his imagination into the Finder's Dreamworld. The Finder, physically holding onto his Companion in his Dream, is thus able to return to this world at the end of the Dream.

Awake too, Companion and Finder are in constant telepathic contact. Meanwhile the Companion is also able to read the thoughts of people they meet. He thus acts as the Finder's conscience and mentor, throwing into his mind such advice as "Stand up straight!" and "The Prince is superstitious. Say something quickly. He knows he's shown fear, and it'll be face-saving anger next if we're not careful."

Antyr's Companion is a wolf called Tarrian, but Companions come in all shapes of animal. One is a very bad tempered rabbit, who in fact gets on well with Tarrian because they both hate cats. What exasperates Tarrian most though, is to be called a dog; still, he has heard the insult so often that he is almost resigned to it. And besides, he can get his own back by telepathically making sarcastic comments in Antyr's mind.

The cover is an impressive view of the city of Serenstad towering above the river-ketches like a medievally-turretted Chungking above the Yangtse; only when one realises that the tiny doorway in the wall is in fact a massive portal, can the true size of the city be appreciated.

Martin Brice

Great Mambo Chicken and the Transhuman Condition
Ed Regis
Viking, 1991, 308pp, £16.99

One of the oldest truisms in the futurologist's game is that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. It's less commonly said, but no less true, that any sufficiently brilliant new concept is initially almost indistinguishable from madness. **Great Mambo Chicken** is a book concerned with both categories ... and the uncomfortable twilight zone where they overlap.

In these sunset days of the second millenium, the oldest dreams of humanity are thriving on new intellectual soil. Goals which in former days appeared insane are now mundane. It's therefore no surprise that some dreams, hitherto seen as implausible, are now receiving practical attention. This is a book about such dreams, and the people who seek them by means of the eyes of science and the hands of technology.

The dividing line between lunacy and genius is a thin one. All of the protagonists of this whistle-stop tour of the futurological underground are bright; a smaller but indeterminate number are also as nutty as a fruit cake. Regis starts with a look at the space merchants, the men (they *are* mostly men) who intend to sell us the moon ... and are spending a (surprisingly small) fortune of private money building rockets that might someday get there. Next, he looks at cryonics--which some people contend amounts to murder, and others equate with eventual immortality. Subsequent chapters deal with nanotechnology, personality uploading, space colonies, and hints for the better management of the cosmos: and the one thing they all have in common is that they hold *some* water.

To his credit, Regis makes no attempt to pass judgement. At this stage in the game it would be foolhardy to venture what lies just around the corner of the next mellinium; **Great Mambo Chicken** provides an entertaining introduction to the biggest new ideas now in circulation, and a vital briefing to any would-be hard-SF writers out there. Invaluable.

Charles Stross

The Ring of Charon
Roger MacBride Allen
Orbit, 1991, 500pp, £14.95

Publishers' blurbs are dubious guides. Here the author is compared for "breadth of vision" to Clarke and Stapledon. Hardly. Yet--and I'm not labelling this inventive novel pastiche--there is something Clarkean about its form (diversely orientated chapters with such graphic titles as 'The Eye in the Stone'); and its ingenuity in locating alien consciousness is quite Stapledonian. Reminiscent of Clarke are a hijacking of the human species, a dissolution of planets, an alien recorder deep within the Moon; and its aliens like Stapledon's Martians are made to function collectively by radiated signals. But Clarke's best works are at heart mythic; Stapledon's visionary; while **The Ring of Charon** is essentially a fast-moving planetary adventure which, rather than manifesting "breadth of vision", explores as many contemporary scientific notions and speculations as possible in the hard s'f'n'l equivalent of a Munchausenly tall tale.

The reader should be prepared for this by the novel's epigraph (the White Queen's boast to Alice): "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Among its required beliefs are: that a percentage of asteroids and comets are aliens in pupal form; that planets, probes and even radio waves can change spaces via wormholes; that a "graser" will do in terms of gravity what a laser does in terms of light. Get these under your belt before breakfast and the rest is no problem.

Charon, satellite of Pluto, is girdled by a particle accelerator constructed to allow gravitational research to be carried out from a laboratory located on Pluto. The station is about to be shut down, years of specialist work having produced no results, when young genius Chao arrives. Defying orders of the station' geriatric boss, he clandestinely achieves the hitherto unachievable, focussing a beam of artificial gravity on each of the other planets. When it reaches the Moon this deceives a hidden alien monitor into believing that it has received orders from its controlling Dyson Sphere, situated on the far side of a black hole, to start chains of command which activate aliens disguised as asteroids and bring in others through a wormhole. These organic/inorganic aliens are "Worldeaters" operating as Von Neumann machines. The wormhole-facilitated abduction of Earth, the ongoing, though eventually halted, dismemberment of the remaining planets, and the reasons for the apocalyptic frenzy fill the rest of the book, which ends with the founding of an apparently hopeless project to rescue the home planet--for the novel's inevitable subtitle is **The First Book of the Hunted Earth.**

Such a condensed account will necessarily exaggerate clichedness (though over-familiar, even trite, situations are there, as are such phrases as "Earth. Dear God, *Earth*.") Nevertheless, the shifting viewpoints, alien and otherwise, and the many necessary references to glossaries, sustain involvement, while unflagging action carries you enjoyably along. A great cosmic vision it is not; but it leaves you feeling as Alice did after falling down the rabbit hole (an image and allusion significantly featured) that "so many out-of-the-way things had happened ... that (she) had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible."

KV Bailey

Chung Kuo Book 3: The White Mountain
David Wingrove
NEL, 1991, 440pp, £15.99

Cards on the table: I dislike gratuitous violence, I don't care for series and I *loathe* soap opera. Bear this in mind.

This book is an amalgam of Gilbert and Sullivan Chinesery, Mafia thriller, 'Sci-fi' B Movie and high-camp US soap opera. Its heart is in the filmed rather than the literary medium. The plot strands are unbelievable; fuelled by coincidence and auctorial dictat rather than internal necessity; lurching from one artficial crisis to another. The politics are crude, the characters one dimensional, the history bodged together like Frankenstein's monster - although Wingrove 'explains' that it's all lies anyway.

Wingrove describes a society rotten to the core and peoples it with monsters, who perform evil acts simply because they *are* evil. The salacious descriptions of degraded sexual acts and wanton violence are truly revolting, and all the more so because we are given little reason to sympathise with any of the victims. Most of the victims are women and children. Women are treated in a very curious fashion; most of them are prostitutes, wives and daughters; seen only through their relationships with men. Although it is several times admitted that they might be quite intelligent, they are in fact treated as things and possessions throughout.

The style of the book is appalling. Wingrove never uses one sentence where he can stretch it out to three. Characters converse about nothing in order to fill space. We wait while characters wibble endlessly over decisions, and wince as they take another couple of sentences to justify them.

The White Mountain appears to be quite well researched and some of these faults could be overlooked if it was a book of ideas. However, Wingrove apparently has nothing to say; this turgid, digusting, ***offensive*** mish-mash is presented as ***entertainment***. I'd rather watch a road accident; it would be cleaner and it wouldn't last as long.

Catie Cary

Xenocide
Orson Scott Card
Legend, 1991, 463pp, £14.99

First there was **Ender's Game**, when little Ender Wiggin destroyed the Buggers and their world; then **Speaker for the Dead**, when Ender, the repentant xenocide (and Christ-figure), learns to understand the alien Piggies, decides to resurrect the last Bugger and assists at the birth of yet another alien race, that of the AIs. If you missed them, then you missed two Hugo winners and, as John Clute said in **Interzone 52**, "some of the most hauntingly brilliant genre writing of the decade". Many find some of Card's obsessions rather repellent; many find him manipulative; but he comes up with some compellingly readable science fiction.

Xenocide possibly completes the trilogy; more likely it continues the series. A battle fleet sets out to destroy the Piggies' world, before their virus is let loose on other human-settled planets; the existence of Jane, Ender's AI, becomes known and her existence too is

threatened; meanwhile, the Buggers begin to breed .... The *deus ex machina* (or *machina ex deo*?) which brings the events to a temporary conclusion is as implausible as only Card can make it. The action is there; the suspense is there; ''it is haunting, compulsive, urgently readable'' (Clute again). But it is more of the same; there is no new concept, like the world of the Piggies, to capture the imagination and the curiosity. There is a new world, the Chinese world of the young genius Qing-jao (Card's worlds are littered with young geniuses); another strangely tortured world, like that of the Piggies (tortured, that is, by Card himself, yet one that distracts from as much as adds to the plot. The problems which are resolved in the book are basically those which were set up in **Speaker for the Dead**; in that sense it is much more of a sequel than the earlier book was of **Ender's Game**.

If you have not read the earlier books, don't bother with this. But anyone who has read them is going to be drawn into **Xenocide** regardless; there is a fascination in the growth of this beautiful yet sickly monster which is, whether we like it or not, going to be seen as one of the monuments of SF in the late twentieth century.

Edward James

Ragnarok
D G Compton & John Gribbin
Gollancz, 1991, 344pp, £14.99

Going by the cover of this book, its title is ''Ragnarok The countdown to nuclear winter has begun ... a novel.'' So even Gollancz can get it wrong. This novel concerns the possibility of producing the *effect* of a nuclear winter *without* any actual nuclear exchange. And whether you're for 'em or agin 'em, when a group of woolly-minded green liberals decide to act on the lesson hi-jackers and, latterly, arabs have taught so well, and get tough with a world that doesn't take them seriously, you can't help but sympathise. I mean, what can you do if no-one will listen, except hold them for ransom.

Whether this is science fiction or not is hard to tell, because I have no idea if the central scientific tenet is correct or not. It certainly is plausible, and scares shit out of me, and it is not marketed as SF by Gollancz, which is just as well, as it is, finally, propaganda for the green cause. The outcome of the book is a foregone conclusion once the establishment starts cutting up rough, and that took any narrative tension out of it for me. But finally, the style is of the thrillers of the fifties. I identified the influences of Hammond Innes, Ian Fleming, Alastair Maclean, and, strangely enough, John Blackburn. Which given the lightness of said authors' works, is to say that it is a well-written, well-structured story whose message is too heavy for the simple narrative structure intended to convey it. I liked the locations, and I quite liked the characters, only one of whom deserved his fate, despite their faults.

The only bit of real science fiction here is the epilogue. Thus, for me, the entire novel felt like it was only a prologue to this bit, and I felt rather cheated. But I can't really complain. The novel delivers its message in no uncertain terms, and is vastly more enjoyable than some work which sees print nowadays. I could only wish that Messrs. Compton and Gribbin weren't preaching to the converted, and that someone who could change these things might actually read this book.

Paul Brazier

The Divide
Robert Charles Wilson
Orbit, 1991, 249pp,£3.99 pb

Black Sun
Robert Leininger
Avon, 1991, 309pp, $4.50 pb

The Divide is a very silly book. Yet the blurb says it reveals ''mature talent'', that the author has written three other novels, and that the book is ''Reminiscent of **Flowers for Algernon.**'' This is because it is about a supposed superman, John Shaw, ''the product of secret government research into enhanced intelligence.'' It is silly because it seems that a Dr Kyriakides, having produced John Shaw via ''intrauterine injections'', hands him over, at the age of five, for adoption by a Canadian couple who don't *want* a clever child. The result is that John has developed a dual personality, turning at times into a dimwit called Benjamin. At the start of the novel, Kyriakides has sent a young woman to find out belatedly what went wrong, and at the end she finds out. But it is all very implausible. Neither the characters nor their conversations ever seem quite real. Wilson often tells rather than shows. he writes in debased English, in a waffly style, in very short sections, for ease of digestion, and has a tedious habit of repeating many things three times.

It is ironic that the description of Wilson's first novel, given at the back of **The Divide**, that it ''is both science fiction and literary love story and thriller ... trancending the genre'' may be more applicable to **Black Sun**. Again, ironically, the cover of **Black Sun** describes it as a ''Thriller'' and makes no mention of SF, although it belongs quite clearly to that genre.

Black Sun is a terrific book. The blurb sums it up: ''Brilliant scientist Maurice Tyler tried to warn the world about the approaching solar disaster, but no one listened''. But this gives no inkling of the amount of hard science about sun spots, catastrophic theory, etc. that has gone into it, along with expert knowledge of ballooning. The high point is a balloon flight across the western United States, but the whole book is unputdownable, full of breathtaking excitement, wisecracking humour, soul and intelligence. Sure, there are flaws in the writing, but it's so good it deserves to become a classic of apocalyptic SF. It's a joy to read, from start to finish. Read it!

Jim England

Terminal Velocity
Bob Shaw
Gollancz, 1991, 160pp, £13.99

Originally published in 1978 as **Vertigo**, this new edition has been expanded to include the short story 'Dark Icarus', previously published in **Science Fiction Monthly. Vertigo** was awarded three stars in Pringle's **The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction** where he commented ''an ingenious plot with interesting characters.''

It's the one about the Air Policeman, robert Hasson, who is recuperating from a severe flying accident. While spending time in Canada as the guest of his Canadian equivalent, Al Werry, he becomes involved in Werry's problems - both personal and professional. Flying, as you've probably guessed, has nothing to do with planes; Shaw's story postulates the invention of an anti-gravity harness. Personal flight has many benefits - but also several drawbacks not immediately apparent, like the existence of airborne hooligans playing their own version of ''chicken''.

It's debatable whether the inclusion of the short story adds much to **Vertigo** except to flesh out Hasson's original accident. The novel explained the vital bits anyway, so there is a slight overlap. Still - Shaw completists will welcome it.

Shaw's characterisation is, as usual, excellent - although he does tend to describe characters' teeth in detail, a minor idiosyncrasy which would't work in America where most have their teeth capped! Hasson and Werry are complex and believable, and the other characters are convincingly sketched too.

The plot is intriguing and logical, the ramifications of the CG-harness being fully explored. What's all this about health food though? - did Shaw have shares in a ginseng and brewer's yeast company? This is the one element that has dated since the original publication- we take health foods much more seriously now.

Conclusion: **Terminal Velocity** thoroughly deserves Pringle's three star rating. It is readable and exciting, well-written and logical - and even though I'd read it before, I couldn't put it down.

Barbara Davies

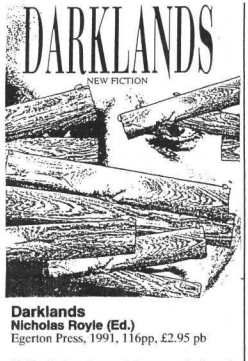
A Small Killing
Alan Moore and Oscar Zarate
Gollancz, 1991, £8.99pb

It's very easy to make a splash in contemporary fiction by taking a simple SF, fantasy or horror idea and dressing it up with some pseudo-psychological motivation or a bit of post-modernism. Kingsley Amis did it with his parallel world novel **The Alteration**. It was old hat to SF buffs but like a fresh breeze to mainstream critics. he must have known it wasn't original; after all, he did write one of the seminal works of SF criticism, **New Maps of Hell**. His son Martin has just pulled off the same trick with his Booker Prize nominee **Time's Arrow**. A man who is travelling backwards through his life to a traumatic event in his past; how brilliant! Except that Roger Zelazny used the same idea for a short story back in the Sixties. God help us, even **Star Trek** used the idea in one of their animated episodes. And lest anybody suggest that Martin Amis is unfamiliar with SF, his script for the movie **Saturn 3** showed a depressing familiarity with the lower levels of the genre.

Alan Moore's new one-issue comic strip (sorry, graphic novel) **A Small Killing** also concerns a man travelling backwards through his life (metaphorically this time). Written as one of Gollancz's attempts to convince people that comic strips are part of mainstream literture, it also revolves around another hackneyed and trite idea - this time bottowed wholesale from horror fiction - that of a person haunted by a grown up version of the foetus they had aborted many years ago (see Tim Powers' **Night Moves**, 1986, for instance). The story, clumsily illustrated by Oscar Zarate, is told as a stream of consciousness in a series of flashbacks and dreams by an unreliable narrator. The symbolism is so heavy handed as to be wilfully destructive - the narrator's egg collection is smashed at a party, prefiguring the revelation of the abortion, and later he digs up a container full of insects that he buried when he was a kid, only to find them still alive after all these years. Ah yes, suppressed guilt! Tick in the box, got that one in, move on to the next cliche.

In one of the sub-plots of **A Small Killing** the narrator realises that he has lost the simple creativity of his younger days in a welter of stolen style and overused images. More of a hidden message than a small killing, I think.

Andy Lane



Darklands
Nicholas Royle (Ed.)
Egerton Press, 1991, 116pp, £2.95 pb

Darklands is not presented as a collection of horror fiction, though that is the category you would expect from the authors involved (including Stephen Gallagher and Mark Morris). Ramsey Campbell's introduction speaks of "tales of the macabre which are not easily categorised"; the cover hints only at "new fiction". For here, though horrors there are, they often lie beyond the end of the story, glimpsed past the final line, the reader projected into a shifted mindset where the *implication*, not any catalogue of grue and spatter, is horrific. This, if you like, is where the ghost story is now hanging up its cloak and hat, though there aren't exactly *ghosts*, either, not in most of the stories. Surreal fantasy, dark fantasy, weird tales.
The grudge-bearing narrator in Julie Akhurst's "Small Pieces of Alice" never actually *does* anything about cutting Alice into small pieces, but the feeling is strange - and familiar - enough. Brian Howell's 'The Vanishing Point' is a mannered and erudite little story involving the Dutch masters. 'The Fertilizer Man' by Mark Morris is sort of SF, and if he tells me he's never read **The Brestford Triangle** I shan't (allotments! Aliens in business suits!) believe him. 'Sweet Nothing' by Derek Marlowe is a stylistically perfect story of shattered illusion. "The Visitor's Book' by Stephen Gallagher works out his concept of horror fiction as "the need to work up solid metaphors for unformed anxieties." The dark lands are really inside ourselves, working on our imaginations, the bit that sees the lord of the flies nailed to the front door when we go down to collect the mail...
The stories I've named are the most memorable but there isn't a weak 'un here. Like Nick Royle says, don't read it with the lights out, you won't see anything.
Chris Amies

Twilight
Peter James
Gollancz, 1991, 316pp, £14.99

Twilight consists of two lives brought together by a third person's death. Harvey Swire was knocked off his bicycle when at public school, and was so close to death that the ghost of his mother had to be very firm about his going back. Harvey grew up to be a successful anaesthetist, and to either murder or not some of his patients so that he could experiment with their near-death experiences.

The book begins with the exhumation of one of Dr Swire's ex-patients, and journalist Kate Hemingway's increasing suspicion that there has been a cover-up of a premature burial. Later on, Kate herself is involved in an accident, and is able to rise above her body and watch Swire, by chance on duty in casualty at the time, as he swaps medicines and injects her with something nasty. As an unconscious extra-corporeal, however, does not make a convincing witness in court, Swire has to be stopped in other ways, and plucky Kate nails the villain and scoops the story.
Twilight is a very mainstream thriller, with little horror attached to it (although I haven't mentioned the worst thing about the premature burial). However, Peter James has very slickly hidden the inconsistency of his story - Swire has his near-death experience, reaches the entrance to heaven, and returns to earth to become a psychopath; Kate Hemingway, has her experience, solves the murder mystery and saves a little bit of the world. Swire's medical experiments scientifically induce very exact conditions - why should a glimpse of heavenhave the opposite effect?
I did read to the end, though.
Leslie J Hurst

Foundation's Friends
Martin H Greenberg (Ed)
Grafton, 1991, 511pp, £4.99pb

Foundation's Friends is a collection of seventeen stories in honour of Asimov's fifty years of contribution to science fiction. Each of the stories is located within the universe of the Foundation epic.
This is an ingenious idea, rather like a second generation of scientists working on and extending the discoveries of the previous one: a notion appropriate to the genre. It is also a demanding task for the writers. They must work with the characters and locations of the original and more importantly, with the laws and logic of that universe. Perhaps it is this last constraint which has left the stories seeming dated in their philosophies. It is disappointing, fifty years on, to rediscover such outworn attitudes to gender, science and technology when so much writing since has revolutionised our attitudes to all three.
However, this collection is a tribute to Asimov, and dedicated fans will no doubt enjoy the time-trip back to revisit favourite places, characters and events such as Trantor, Dr Susan Calvin, Dr Urth, Hari Seldon and the vexed laws of robotics. Undedicated fans might find the hand of Asimov something of a dead weight on the imaginations of contemporary writers.
This is a collection for Asimov fans.
Lynne Fox

Riverrun
S P Somtow
Avon, 1991, 259pp, $3.99 pb

The School
T M Wright
Gollancz, 1991, 245pp, £3.99 pb

The horror genre is a broad church, everything from the gentle frighteners of, say, Maupassant to the blood'n'gore of the splatterpunks. What the works have in common is that moment when the hair rises on the back of your neck.
If that is the criterion, neither of these books are horror stories.. In the case of **Riverrun** this is due to an absence of anything resembling an original ingredient. Whereas **The School** is simply too flatly written and then blows whatever credibility it retained by having the heroine rescued from her fate. C'mon guys, in a modern horror story people just gotta die!
The School has a middle aged couple buy an old school building for their new home (Why? Your guess is as good as mine.) The school may have a horrible past about which no-one is talking (*mais naturellement*) and it may lie on a psychic faultline. Ghosts appear and the Hitchcocks eventually escape when the "earthquake" hits. Me? I didn't give a damn and I don't like novels which read like film scripts, especially the scripts of bad films.
Riverrun sees a contemporary American family tpicture "The Wonder Years" only Dad is an alcoholic minor poet and Mom is dying horribly) translated into another continuum where the role of **King Lear** is being acted out with the fate of creation at stake. Little Theo Etchison is a "truthsayer" and can remake the passage of the eponymous river which connects all said creation. Variously aiding and hindering him are a vampire prince, a dragonlady, their wimp brother and a cop who is really a Navajo shaman who is really ... Blood, guts, death and poetry there is in plenty - everyone dies horribly at least once - but I was never involved in their fates. In a genre which relies upon the almost visceral reaction of the reader to the plight of the characters this is a most signal failing.
This could have been a good book, though, if it did not lack the colour necessary to breathe life into the clay. In a genre given to the overlong, this book is just too short by half.
I dislike having to be negative in my conclusion, but I cannot honestly recommend either of these books.
Martyn Taylor

Needful Things
Stephen King
Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, 698pp, £15.99

For the last time we return to Castle Rock, the fictitious town based on Bangor, Maine, and scene of several King books and short stories.
Those familiar with King's books will remember some of the Rock's residents; Ace Merrill whose uncle, "Pop" Merrill, we met in "the Sun Dog"; Sherriff Bannerman, who died in the jaws of **Cujo**; Tad Beaumont, the writer with a dark half.
Knowing that there are to be no more Castle Rock novels suggests that King is going to destroy the town. On reading it, fans of the master of the macabre may be disappointed. The story begins with great promise, an "old-timer" of the Rock welcomes us back as though we were long time friends and warns us, "You've been here before, but things are about to change. I know it. I feel it. there's a storm on the way."
The title refers to a shop which sells everything, and is run by a new-comer to the Rock, Leland Gaunt. But for everything, there is a price. The only problem is nobody realises how steep the true price of their particular wont is. For deputy Norris Ridgewick, it's an expensive fishing rod; for young Brian Rusk, it's a 1956 baseball card.
The story slowly builds to what, sadly becomes an anti-climax. To this reader's disappointment, the story raised more laughs than any real sense of horror, and one has to ask; Is King parodying himself? The work is too long and too drawn out. More could have been made of Sherriff Pangborn's final confrontation with the villain, Gaunt.
One can only hope that the pen that brought that chilling masterpiece, **The Shining**, will be back on form with his next book. **Delores Clairbourne**, next summer.
Martin Webb

Tempter
Nancy A Collins
Futura, 1991, 299pp, £4.50 pb

Dark Brigade
Chris Westwood
Headline, 1991, 340pp, £4.50 pb

Two modern vampire stories datestamped by rock music. Both well-written but flawed.
Dark Brigade is about vampire beings who use rock music to attract their victims. The story is seen through the eyes of a rock journalist, who, disgusted with the current music scene is interested in the apparent attempts to revive the spirit of '77 - the Summer of Hate. The book appears to take for granted that rock music is an inherently bad thing and that people who listen to it are susceptible to mental control - taking the basis of the recent Judas Priest court case to ludicrous lengths. The plot strains credulity to the limits and then some; many of the set pieces are silly and there is a scene in the Morrison Hotel for dead famous people featuring a banal conversation with John Lennon which is totally side-splitting. Westwood is curiously prudish about violence, which mostly occurs offstage; all we see is the resultant mess. However the book is stylishly written and the author probably one to watch.
Tempter, by contrast, creates a genuine *frisson*; the book is solidly based in the Voodoo scene in New Orleans. We follow the career of Adam Rossiter, a vain failed rock star with an inordinate hunger for power and for sex. Rossiter is a bit of a bastard and is tempted into allowing himself to be possessed by a vampire spirit by promises of immortality and the satisfaction of his desires. The story flicks back from time to time to the last century, providing background history of the vampire and of the family of voodoo priestesses who aim to keep him confined. The story is gripping and well realised, paced to build to a suitable climax, but pretty short; the typeface is far larger than any I remember seeing in an adult novel before. I could also have done without the embarassingly self-conscious references to dead rock stars but these are minor quibbles; this is a good light read.
Catie Cary

The Keys To Paradise
Robert E Vardeman
NEL, 1991, 540pp, £6.99pb

Take an ageing, world-weary ex-scrgeant, Giles Grimsmate, who was a Golden Key to the Gate of Paradise in a game of chance.
Take a womanising thief, Keja Tchurak, who has stolen the second Golden key to the Gate of Paradise.
Take Petia, a beautiful Trans (evidently short for "Trans-Species") whose feline characteristics make her a skilful cat-burglar, and whose ambition is to relieve Keja Tchurak of his treasure.
Send them off in search of the Flame Key watched over by a cave-dwelling fire sorceress ... the Key of the Skeleton Lord, devil-guarded in a desert-place of scorpions and snakes ... and the Key of ice and Steel, fast-locked in an underground smithy, protected by a frozen demon-prowled maze. Let the three main characters encounter supernatural happenings, strange creatures and other-worldly powers - and be pursued by a range of worldly law-enforcers and *vendettori*
Yes, this book has all the ingredients of a standard quest.
Yet there is something about this book which makes it different from other quest novels. i think it is the main characters. They may have extraordinary gifts, but most of the time they are ordinary people who get tired, bicker, don't see the point of going on ... and yet they *do* go on; just perhaps to get the next key and then they'll give up ... or only until they've got out of this particular difficulty - and *then* they'll give up.
Only they don't give up. Like soldiers of 1918 moving up to the Front Line for on Last Push ... like Christian talking just one more step on his **Pilgrim's Progress**, they keep going; often without hope of success and often without really knowing what their reward will be.
Martin Brice

Reprisal
F Paul Wilson
NEL, 1991, 332pp, £14.99

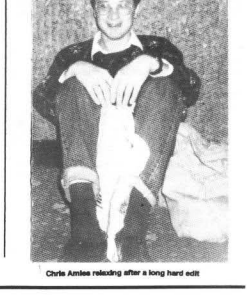
"Who am I? Why, I'm you. Or parts of you. The best parts...."
The antagonist created in **The Keep** of which this is the third installment, is back; but he is no longer as frightening.
Molasar has changed his appearance yet again. the vampire in **The Keep** became an anti-Christian demon in **Reborn** possessing Jim Srevens' body. Carol Stevens' mind and then her unborn son's body and soul. In **Reprisal** he is the instigator of worldwide chaos, changing sex twice.
With an omnipotent being such as Molasar (aka Rasalom, Losamar, Sara Lom) we can accept his powers of disguise, possession and meta-morphosis, but we are led to believe he has no sense of logic, that he is stupid; he doesn't understand the ageing process. The man he fought in 1941, Glen Glacken (aka Gaston Villeurs), he is old and weak, but Molasar believes him to still be at the height of his powers.
The story starts well and promises to equal its predecessors. In part two, recollections from **Reborn**, we only learn one new piece of information which could hve been told in just a few paragraphs and slotted into the narrative of part one.
As in **Reborn**, Wilson kills most of the key characters and there is no happy ending of good defeating evil, the good guy embracing the heroine.
The ending is left open presupposing there will be a fourth book. It will be a shame if Wilson continues to ride this dying horse, which should have been laid to rest after **The Keep** and turns it into the literary equivalent of movie sequels of sequels *et al.*
Martin Webb

The Ghost from the Grand Banks
Arthur C Clarke
Orbit, 1991, 253pp, £7.99pb

Clarke's works have always walked a tightrope between mystical transcendence and nuts-and-bolts hard SF. In **The Ghost from the Grand Banks**, a relatively minor piece, the emphasis is on the engineering.
2012 will be the centennial of the sinking of the Titanic. Clarke supposes two rival rescue teams bidding to raise the great liner from the ocean floor.
He is predictably good on the mechanics, as both teams devise different and equally ingenious ways of lifting the ship. He is less good at evoking the awful ocean deeps, despite the cover blurb, promising "an environment more alien than deep space," apparently left over from James Cameron's **The Abyss**.
Clarke has kept up as ever with his science, and sprinkles Mandelbrot sets, Gold's theory on the origin of hydrocarbon reserves and the like throughout the text. I have no idea how to explain the continuing fascination with the Titanic - possibly it symbolises the abrupt end of the privileged Edwardian era ahead of the Great War - but clearly Clarke shares that fascination.
Yet as a work of fiction **The Ghost** epitomises the gulf between the SF of the so-called Golden Age and what is being produced now. Heaven knows, no one ever read Clarke for his characterisation, but this is pretty thin stuff, barely one of the characters staying in the mind beyond the book's close. He retains the familiar clunky, gosh-wow prose style: sample, "when the sobbing Ada had been sent to her room, Edith and Donald Craig stared at each other in mutual disbelief."
Clarke has clearly not sunk into the conspicuous dotage that has claimed several of his contemporaries. This is no way as wearisome as late Asimov or as plain toe-curlingly awful as the final two decades of Heinlein.
But he has just as conspicuously failed to keep up with the genre he helped to found. Considered in the cold light of 1991 **The Ghost** never gets off the ocean floor.
Martin Waller.

Blue Moon Rising
Simon Green
Gollancz, 1991, 448pp, £7.99pb

The blurb tells me this is about a king, princes, princesses, a dragon, the Darkwood, demons, a High Warlock, Quests, a unicorn and magic weapons (which turn out to be swords). Oh my God, what have I done to upset Chris Amies that he sends me this sub-Tolkien fantasy to review!
With the book roundly pre-judge I set to the task, after all reviewers have to be made of strong stuff considering what turns up for review.
The book is about all these things and even more standard fantasy plot devices; do not expect innovation. Even the little twists of difference, such as the dragon collecting butterflies rather than gold and having to be rescued by Prince Rupert from Princess Julia, who is a very forceful person and damn good with a sword, aren't too novel in modern light fantasy.
By light fantasy I mean the sort that has a sense of humour, that does not take itself too seriously but is none the less telling an action story in a fantasy context. This is in contrast to those who take it seriously and say, Terry Pratchett where the parody and humour come first. So whilst there is nothing new, the story is told in an easy to read manner. There are few instances where the plot flags and it encouraged me to turn the pages, even though the ending is obvious (good guys don't loose in this type of novel) as is the method of winning.
This is not a book to analyse but to read. it is written to entertain and why not, I wish more books were. Tolkien this isn't and nor is it meant to be, and whilst it isn't likely to become a classic I did enjoy it.
Tom A Jones


Chris Amies relaxing after a long hard edit

Particles

Short Reviews by Chris Amies

Bury My Heart at WH Smith's -
Brian Aldiss [Coronet, 1991, 220pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Chris Amies in V158. Aldiss' 'writing life'.

Voyage to the Red Planet -
Terry Bisson [Avon, 1991, 236pp, $3.50 pb]. An unlikely space adventure; why make movies on Mars anyway?

The Fall of the Sky Lords -
John Brosnan [Gollancz, 1991, 284pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Martyn Taylor in V163. The concluding volume of the **Sky Lords** trilogy.

War of the Maelstrom -
Jack L Chalker [NEL, 1991, 360pp, £4.99 pb]. Book 3 of the **Changewinds** series.

Nemesis/ Inferno/ Infanta/ Nocturne -
Louise Cooper [Grafton, 1991, 246/ 241/ 318/ 291pp, each £3.99 pb]. The first four volumes of the **Indigo** saga; there are now a fifth and a sixth volume (not seen); the cover carries a quote from **Locus** describing the series as 'a powerful epic'.

Purpose of Evasion -
Greg Dinallo [Headline, 1991, 494pp, £4.99 pb]. Military thriller based around the US bombing of Libya in 1986.

The Other Sinbad -
Craig Shaw Gardner [Headline, 1991, 375pp, £4.50 pb]. Reviewed by Barbara Davies in V162. Like she said, 'faintly amusing pastiche of the **Arabian Nights'**.

The Hemingway Hoax -
Joe Haldeman [NEL, 1991, 155pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Chris Amies in V159. An intriguing tale of literary forgery and homicidal transdimensional beings. Do not adjust your set; reality is at fault.

Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of 10,000 Bars -
Harry Harrison and David Bischoff. [Avon, 1991, 214pp, $3.99] ''Can Bill survive an entire planet of blondes, booze, and bathtubs of champagne?'' Can the reader survive any more of this derivative tripe without recourse to at least one of the above? Please Harry, a joke's a joke...

The Frighteners -
Stephen Laws [NEL, 1991, 461pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Alex Stewart in V158. Small-time con goes after the gang boss who put him in jail and then tried to have him killed. And he has help from something very unpleasant...

One Rainy Night -
Richard Laymon [Headline, 1991, 410pp, £4.99 pb]. More of the usual, carve-ups in a small town. Not his best.

To Speak for the Dead -
Paul Levine [Coronet, 1991, 282pp, £3.99 pb]. A neat little piece of murder, mayhem, and medical malpractice.

The Power -
James Mills [Headline, 1991, 406pp, £4.99 pb]. Not another Cold War novel? **The Power** also involves psychic research and astral projection.

The Revenge of the Rose -
Michael Moorcock [Grafton, 1991, 233pp, £7.99 pb]. Reviewed by Andy Sawyer in V162. Yes, another Elric novel! But this is the Moorcock of the '90s, not of the '70s.

The Covenant of the Flame -
David Morrell [Headline, 1991, 564pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Martin Webb in V161. Morrell goes in for conspiracy theory in a big way, and this is no exception. Religion, up-to-date weaponry, and environmental vigilantes putting the world to rights.

Kiss of Death -
Daniel Rhodes [NEL, 1991, 261pp, £4.50pb]. ''Succubi, incubi, lemures, imps, devils: psychic vampires, they cluster in the dark places of the mind and feed on human pain and fear.''

Orbitsville Departure -
Bob Shaw [Orbit, 1991, 252pp, £3.99]. Everyone's gone to Orbitsville, and its ancient purpose is about to be revealed. Sequel to **Orbitsville**, next is **Orbitsville Judgment.**

Summer of Night -
Dan Simmons [Headline, 1991, 634pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Jim England in V162. The versatile Simmons (**Song of Kali**, **Hyperion**, **Phases of Gravity**, etc.) ignores genre boundaries and gives us the haunted-schoolhouse riff. But will it play in Peoria?

Soul/Mate -
Rosamond Smith [NEL, 1991, 281pp, £3.99 pb]. Contemporary crime novel (the charming young man who is not what he seems...), but the style is reminiscent of Jane Austen...

Moon Dance -
SP Somtow [Gollancz, 1991, 564pp, £4.99pb]. Reviewed by John Newsinger in V162. Sucharitkul's werewolf novel brings in the opening up of the American West and the strange events at its edge... werewolf wars?

The Stephen King Quiz Book -
Stephen Spignesi [NEL, 1991, 203pp, £3.99 pb]. Test your knowledge of the opus.

The Warlock's Night Out -
Christopher Stasheff [Pan, 1991, 576pp, £6.99p pb]. A compilation of **The Warlock Wandering**, **The Warlock Is Mis - sing**, and **The Warlock Heretical.** Irreverent fantasy with time travellers and spaceflight.

Othersyde -
J Michael Straczynski [Headline, 1991, 405pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Alex Stewart in V162. Schoolkid gets possessed by supernatural forces and starts in on the school bullies.

Survivalist No. 20 - Firestorm -
Jerry Ahern [NEL, 1991, 192pp, £3.50 pb]. It seems people buy enough of this stuff for there to be twenty books of it.

Felimid's Homecoming -
Keith Taylor [Headline, 1991, 280pp, £3.99 pb]. The fifth in the **Bard** series sees the bard return to Ireland, and it may as well - the author tells us - be an Irish historical novel, as be a fantasy.

Otherwhere -
Margaret Wander Bonanno [St Martin's Press, 1991, 317pp, $19.95]. Sequel to **The Others**, a story of alien civilisation with a scientific rationale, but there is still a fantasy feel to it, and maps.

The Flies of Memory -
Ian Watson [Gollancz, 1991, 220pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Ken Lake in V159. The aliens have come to Earth to remember it. Communication, as you might expect, is near impossible. As Ken said, ''A real novel that just happens to be SF.''

The Unwilling Warlord -
Lawrence Watt-Evans [Grafton, 1991, 349pp, £3.99 pb]. The epigraph is from Tolkien, so are we to compare one with the other? Both share a fascination with invented languages, at least.

Forbidden Magic -
Angus Wells [Orbit, 1991, 586pp, £4.99pb]. Volume One of 'The Godwars'. "It cannot get worse" says one character towards the end; another replies, "you forget the dragons - we're promised larger specimens." So they're for volume 2.

Heathern -
Jack Womack [Grafton, 1991, 255pp, £3.99pb]. Reviewed by Gareth Davies in V158. Post-Collapse America ruled by a monolithic corporation (where's its power base, though?) brought down by a messianic revival with real messiahs.

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