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the Texas SF Inquirer

The best little newszine in Texas!

ISSUE 19
DECEMBER 1986

Editor: Pat Mueller **Assistant Editors:** Neil E Kaden, A.P. McQuiddy, Dennis Virzi
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NEWS

Late-Breaking News ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

●●● This just in from Austin: in addition to GoH Bruce Sterling, Fan GoH Mark Olson, Toastmaster Pat Cadigan, and special Guest Beth Meacham, other ArmadilloCon 10 guests include Orson Scott Card, William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, and Howard Waldrop. (See ad on page 24.)

Pro News ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

●●● Dallas area artist Mel. White's book is finally out! Duncan & Mallory, the first in a new graphic novel series from Starblaze Graphics, is written by Robert Asprin and illustrated by Mel.

Starblaze also plans to release a graphic novelization of C.J. Cherryh's Gate of Ivrel, illustrated by Jane Fancher, in April 1987.

●●● Watch for the first issue of Science Fiction EYE, a new magazine of sf and fantasy criticism and speculation. Edited by Steve Brown and Dan Steffan, the January issue will contain a "comprehensive look inside sf's most volatile literary movement" (yes, the C-word fiction) -- "Requiem for the Cyberpunks," incorporating Takayuki Tatsumi's interviews with William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, in which victory is declared and the provincial government is established; a transcript of an infamous C-word panel from the 1986 Science Fiction Research Association Convention, featuring John Shirley, Norman Spinrad, Gregory Benford, Jack Williamson, and the "interruptions of David Brin"; and a reader's guide to the fiction that started it all. Also presented in the first issue will be an unpublished essay by Philip K. Dick, followed by Lou Stathis' definitive article about this legendary writer. Rounding out the contents will be a tribute to the late Jack Gaughan, a column by Bruce Sterling, reviews, graphics, and much more.

Science Fiction Eye will be published three times a year (January, May, and September). You can subscribe by sending $7 for one year ($12 overseas) to Science Fiction EYE, Box 3105, Washington, D.C. 20010-0105.

●●● George Alec Effinger was injured in his French Quarter home on the evening of September 18. Apparently, George suffered burns on his back and arms while trying to fight the blaze. Another source says he wouldn't have been burned at all, had he not stopped to put on his pants. The fire began when his couch spontaneously combusted (perhaps from a mixture of cat-pee and upholstery cleaner), and spread rapidly. George lost almost all of his books, but fortunately an aquarium explosion saved his manuscripts from incineration.

Several auctions have been held at sf conventions to help George; the auction at ArmadilloCon in Austin in October netted over $400, and David Hartwell's pants were auctioned off at DeepSouthCon for George's fund.

●●● Collector's Corner, a Dallas area art gallery, will feature guest appearances by Anne McCaffrey, Real Musgrave, and Tim Hildebrandt on Saturday, April 11, 1987.

Bruce Sterling & Lewis Shiner Interview -- p.5

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The gallery is owned and operated by Karl and Roberta Simon, and is located in the Forum 303 Mall at Hwy. 360 and 303 Arlington, in Arlington, TX, phone (817) 640-8576.

●●● Former Austin writer Leigh Kennedy was mugged and robbed during a visit to Madrid, and "rescued from dishwashing" only by the heroic mercy dash of Chris Priest, according to the latest Ansible...

Fan News ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

●●● Bill Bowers has moved! His new address -- and that for Corflu IV -- is 1874 Sunset Ave., Apt. 56, Cincinnati, OH 45238, phone (513) 251-6870.

●●● Harry Andruschak has a new address: PO Box 1422, Arcadia, CA 91006. He no longer works at JPL; in the wake of program cutbacks caused by the Challenger disaster, he is one of at least 25,000 contractors and support personnel laid off by NASA and its centers. "Thirteen years at JPL have come to an end," Andy says...

●●● And yet more COAs! The Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc. is now crammed into PO Box 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408. (Isn't it a bit crowded in there, folks?) Jeanne Mealy's new address is 4157 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55429. Craig Chrissinger has moved to 915 Idlewilde Ln. SE, Albuquerque NM 87108. Robert Whitaker Sirignano can now be reached through PO Box 11246, Wilmington, DE 19850.

●●● Alan David Laska is spearheading a movement to honor the late Rod Serling with a commemorative postage stamp. He urges you to send your letters, petitions, and comments to the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, Stamps Division, United States Postal Service, Washington DC 20250. For any help you might need (questions, etc.) send a SASE to Laska at PO Box 832113, Richardson, TX 75083.

●●● The International Fantasy Gaming Society is a live role-playing organization founded in Boulder, Colorado to run SAFE, fun, consistent and fair games. According to their literature, the Society has a "detailed, well-tested system for the running of live games that describes a variety of character professions, a relatively safe combat system (using foam padded bamboo or PVC weapons), and a workable magic simulation." The group is sanctioned by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes from their novel Dream Park. The I.F.G.S. is now establishing a chapter in Dallas; if you're interested in joining or finding out more about them, call Roger at (214) 363-7750 or Rich at (214) 503-1737.

●●● A flyer for Seattle's Corflu Bid for 1988 notes that they need pre-supporters because they are "in a BIDDING WAR." (Their emphasis.) Dallas area fanzine fans (mostly Neil Kaden, Edd Vick, and Pat Mueller) are also bidding for Corflu in that year, and it looks to be a close contest.

The Seattle Corflu bid committee consists of Jerry Kaufman & Suzle Tompkins, co-chairs; and Steve Bieler, Jane Hawkins, Janice Murray, Anna Vargo, Gary Farber & Tom Weber, co-chairs emeritus. Pre-supporting members include William Appleck-Asche-Low, Elinor Busby, Randy Byers, Diane Goldman, Mike Hargreaves, Denys Howard, Linda Jordan Eichner, Carrie Root, David Singer, and Fran Skene. If you'd like to become a pre-supporting member of the Seattle Corflu in '88 bid, send $3 to Jane Hawkins, 4121 Interlake No., Seattle, WA 98103. (Make checks payable to "Jane Hawkins," not "Corflu.")

The Dallas bid is not selling pre-supporting memberships, but if you'd like to have your name listed on their next flyer as a supporter, drop a postcard to Pat Mueller, 618 Westridge, Duncanville, TX 75116.

the Texas SF Inquirer

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE:
Words: Shelly Corzine, Fred Duarte, Joanne Wood (news); A.P. McQuiddy, Lewis Shiner, and Bruce Sterling (interview); Pat Mueller.
Art: Jeanne Gomoll (p.28); Noreascon 3 Progress Report 0 (p.3); Stu Shiffman (p.4); Kip Williams (p.27).
Next Issue: Letters, ConFederation and ArmadilloCon reports, and various responses to Dennis Virzi's "Open Letter to British Fandom" from issue 17, plus all the FACT stuff you have no doubt missed from this issue: club news, meeting schedules, minutes, etc... look for it in January!

The Texas SF Inquirer is published on a more-or-less bimonthly schedule (hopefully, on even-numbered months) by FACT, the Fandom Association of Central Texas, Inc., a 501(c) 3 nonprofit literary and educational organization, for the science fiction community and FACT members. All opinions expressed herein are the personal opinions of the contributors and editors, and do not necessarily reflect those of FACT.

The Texas SF Inquirer is available for "the usual" (artwork, articles, columns, reviews, etc.; arranged trades with other fanzines; letters of comment; news; useful and newsworthy phone calls; and mimeography/collating help) or by subscription.

A six-issue subscription is $6.00; sample copies are $1.50 each. (Some back issues are still available, as well.) If you join FACT ($15/year), a year's subscription to the Inquirer (at least six issues -- maybe more!) is included with your membership.

The EDITORIAL ADDRESS for the Texas SF Inquirer is 618 Westridge, Duncanville, TX 75116, (phone 214/780-7662). Please mail all trade zines, letters of comment, and contributions there.

The main FACT address is P.O. Box 9612, Austin, TX 78766. That's where you should send all FACT-related mail, as well as TSFI subscriptions.

About a week after each issue of the Inquirer is published, the main articles and reviews from that issue are posted on the SMOF-BBS, a FACT-sponsored computer bulletin board system (300/1200 baud) based in Austin. To call the SMOF, dial (512) UFO-SMOF.

The F.A.C.T. Board of Directors consists of: Willie Siros (chairman), Fred Duarte (comptroller), Pat Mueller (publications), Robert Taylor (Armadillocon), and Dennis Virzi (administration). Mimo Siros is the corporate treasurer.

About a third of the copy-count for last issue was collated at ConFederation by David Herrington, Pat Mueller, and Dennis Virzi. The rest of the issue was collated in Duncanville by Pat Mueller, Edd Vick, and Dennis Virzi. Whew!

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Voting for the 1988 Corflu site will take place at the 1987 Corflu in the Cincinnati area.

eee On August 31, 1986, Pat "I am not a bookkeeper!" Mueller totalled up the record sheets from the Fanzine Sales at ConFederation, and discovered that $1306.64 worth (relatively speaking) of fanzines had been sold! Of this amount, TAFF and DUFF split $879.81, and $426.83 went back to the editors (big winners in this area included Marty Cantor for "Holier Than Thou", the "Twilight Zine", Brad Foster, Martin Wagner for "Son of Wagnerama", and FACT for the "Texas SF Inquirer"). Special thanks go to all those folks who helped out in the sales area, including Bill Bowers, Fran Booth, Jon Green, Marty Cantor, Mel. White, et alia.

Of special note: $68 worth of raffle tickets were sold for the TAFF and DUFF raffles. Both drawings were won by the editor of this newszine, to cries of "Fix! Fix!" ... The loot included a Heicon button, a copy of the Nolacon I program book and a Pacificon combozine, two Double:Bills, and an uncorrected proof copy of Alexis Gilliland's Wizenbeak.

Further reports of ConFederation will appear in the next issue of this newszine.

eee The Dragon Society is a quarterly newsletter published by Rosanne Allen of Albuquerque, and edited by Jodi Stinebaugh. It contains some rather strange dragon-lore, brief mentions of dragon "sightings" (e.g., "DRAGON STOUT BEER label of beer distributed in the U.S.A. from Jamaica, W.I."), and a catalog of dragon-related art, sculptures, t-shirts, rubber stamps, etc. The newsletter is available for $1.22 from 2430 Juan Tabo N..E., Suite 142, Albuquerque, NM 87112; it's free to members of The Dragon Society ($5/year).

eee Houston area FACT member Shelly Corzine reports that The Texas Fan Network, still in its infancy, will be an organization to assist some smaller clubs in organizing themselves and their projects. Fund-raising, and other projects which work best on a large scale, will possibly be a joint venture between the clubs. Specifically, the group is publishing a monthly calendar of club events, to be distributed throughout the Houston area and beyond. She foresees it to be a channel of discussion between clubs, as well as a means of promoting better communication among fandom in general. Shelley's cohorts in this project are Katharine Scarritt, Brad Frank, Clif Davis, and a few other assorted interested parties. For more information, write to Shelley at her new address: 3300 Pebblebrook #111, Seabrook, TX 775866.

WorldCon News eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

eee News on the Worldcon '89 front: according to Joanne Wood (who heard it from Tony Lewis), Andre Norton is Noreascon III's GoH. Fan Guests of Honor are "The Stranger Club," the first sf club in Boston, which ran the first series of Boskones in the 1940s. A number of the original members are still active fans, and include Louis Russell Chauvenet, Harry Clement Stubbs and Art Widner.

As 1989 will mark the 50th anniversary of the first World Science Fiction Convention (Nycon I in 1939), all those who attended (or attempted to attend) Nycon I will be given a free membership in Noreascon III. Programming related to the anniversary is also planned.

As of September 10, there were 1454 members to Noreascon III, with 4 children's admissions.

Memberships in Noreascon III are $40 to 2/15, $50 to 9/7, and higher afterwards.

The Mad 3 Party has been the Boston in '89 bidding zine for the past three years. Now that Boston has the Worldcon, they're continuing the zine, now edited by Leslie Turek, as a "working tool for the convention planning process." It will be sent to all of their convention staff, and it will begin to include detailed discussions of their convention preparations. If you're not on the Noreascon III staff, but are interested in the details of convention running in general (and Noreascon III in particular), you can subscribe to this bimonthly zine by sending $6 for six issues to Massachusetts Convention Fandom, Inc., Box 46, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139.

eee News on the Worldcon '88 front: Guy H. Lillian III, Nolacon II publicity, is instituting a series of press releases for distribution to the various newszines, to keep in touch with the fan press. He's doing something very interesting in the way of rumor-squelching, too. If you (yes, YOU) have heard a rumor or story about Nolacon II which you'd like to have verified or squelched, write to Nolacon at PO Box 8010, New Orleans, LA 70182. Within ten days, they'll send you back a letter giving you the truth! Job appointments, for instance, will be verified by a written statement over the signature of convention chair John Guidry.

If you'd like to volunteer to help on Nolacon II, write to the address above with a statement of your interests and experience. If you've already volunteered, don't rely on something you thought you heard at a convention -- get your verification in writing. Sounds like a wise policy to me.

Linda Pickersgill is Nolacon II's British agent; European fans should contact her at 1 Entropy Gardens, 7A Lawrence Road, South Ealing London UK W5 4XJ for membership rates, t-shirt orders and so forth. Linda is an ex-Orleanian who has lived in the UK for several years, and attended ConFederation, the Atlanta Worldcon, with her husband Greg Pickersgill (the 1986

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TAFF winner).

Nolacon II will be publishing a general progress report in January. Their rates for attending memberships are $40 until 12/31, and will go up afterwards. Supporting memberships are $20 until 12/31, and $30 afterwards. You can write to them at the PO Box address given above.

Convention News ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

●●● Due to an unusual oversight on the part of the detail-conscious NESFAns, the 1988 and 1989 Boskones will be held in late January/early February. It seems that the dates for confirming their function space reservations for those years with the Sheraton-Boston slipped past NESFA... and since the Sheraton is the only hotel in the Boston area large enough to hold the monster that Boskone has become, a date change was the only solution.

●●● The Southern California Institute for Fan Interests, Inc. (SCIFI), which is bidding for the 1990 Worldcon for Los Angeles, is setting up an "Associate Bid Committee" (ABC) made up of "experienced people with good ideas" to act as an advisory board. They're getting a bit nervous about the stiff competition from the Netherlands bid, and want as much firepower from US fans as they can muster (advice on GoH selections, throwing parties at regional conventions, and Names on Ads).

As they're not using LAcon II profits for bidding purposes, each member of SCIFI pays an assessment of $25 per quarter towards the bid, and they have asked that each ABC member makes a one-time contribution of $25 (which will be refunded if Los Angeles wins the bid).

The LA in '90 Steering Committee consists of Bobbi Armbruster, Mike Glyer, Craig Miller, Bruce Pelz, and Drew Sanders. Their address is PO Box 8442, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

●●● The Holland in 1990 Worldcon bid was phenomenally popular at ConFederation -- they arrived in Atlanta with about 400 pre-supporting members, and gained an additional 300 (!) pre-supporters at the convention!

Upcoming Conventions

When writing to conventions for more information, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope!

January 17, 1987. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions (see address and phone number below).

January 30 - February 1. Sercon. Claremont Resort Hotel, Oakland, CA. "A Serious, Constructive Converence on Science Fiction." Featured speakers: Samuel R. Delany, Ian Watson, Malcolm Edwards, Donald A. Wollheim, and Vincent di Fate. "... some of us feel that there should be a time and a place where people with a serious interest in science fiction can gather in comfort and with conviviality..." A convention along the lines of World Fantasy Conventions, with attendance limited to 750. Memberships $30 to 1/10, $40 at the door (if at-the-door memberships are available). Info: PO Box 1169, Berkeley, CA 94701-1169. Conference organizers include John Douglas, David Hartwell, Greg Ketter, anad Craig Miller; committee includes Debbie Notkin (programming), Tom Whitmore (operations), Bruce & Elayne Pelz (art show), and Greg Ketter (dealers room).

February 13 - 15. Boskone XXIV. The Boston Regional Science Fiction Convention. Sheraton-Boston Hotel, MA. GoH: C.J. Cherryh; Official Artist: Barclay Shaw; Special Guest: Tom Clareson. Memberships $17 to 1/16, $27 at the door. Info: NESFA, Box G, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139-0910.

February 20 - 22. WisCon 11. Concourse Hotel, Madison, WI. GoHs: Connie Willis, Avedon Carol. Special guest: Samuel R. Delany. Attending memberships $14 before 1/15. Info: SF3, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624.

February 21. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

March 6 - 8. FutureCon 87. Ramada Hotel, 1055 Regal Row, Dallas, Texas. Featuring: Astronauts Alan Bean and Dr. Owen Garriott; Fan Guest: Bjo Trimble; Media Guests: Robin Curtis, Bruce Hyde; Authors: C.J. Cherryh, G.Harry Stine, Mike McQuay, Robert Vardeman, Warren Norwood, John Steakley, Lillian Stewart Carl, George proctor, Carole Nelson Douglas, Katherine Eliska Kimbriel, George Alec Effinger, Ardath Mayhar, Neal Barrett Jr.; Artists: Real Musgrave, Kelly & Polly Freas, Cat, Mel. White, Sassy,, Darla Tagrin, Jean (JEM) Elizabeth Martin, and more! Memberships $19 to 2/15, $23 at the door; one-day memberships $9.

oooooooooooo (continued on page 26)

Eyeball Kicks, Prigogine's Theory and Re-Thinking The World

an interview with Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner

conducted by A.P. McQuiddy

TSFI: Bruce Sterling has been described variously as "one of the sharpest and most original young writers around," "brilliant," "daring," and "one of the best in the business." Lew, how would you describe Bruce -- as a writer, stylist, co-conspirator, collaborator, and friend?

Shiner: Walton Simons and I were discussing Bruce the other day, with his new-found critical reputation, and all that. Everybody sees him as this towering, omnipresent, threatening figure looming over all of science fiction. You know, everyone's terrified, everyone's reeling in awe of stuff like SCHISMATRIX... And if they only knew Bruce personally, they'd know that it is very easy to make him cry. You pick on him a little bit, and he's got this great first line of defense, but after a while, if you keep niggling at him, he'll completely break down into a sniveling heap of jelly.

Sterling: I did ask for God to kill me, but only in the most dignified, and adult way... (laughter)

Shiner: However, as far as his writing and stuff goes, he is brilliant. And not only as a writer, but as a human being. He has a really monstrous intellect, and all that stuff. He's not only a very dedicated craftsman in his work, but he also has the most important thing --

Sterling: A good agent. (laughs)

Shiner: He's got stuff to say. He has a moral quality in his fiction.

Sterling: He's got friendly editors. (laughs)

Shiner: You know, he doesn't just crank out lightweight entertainment. Virtually every single thing he's written has some kind of subtext to it that's a worthy thing to be writing about. That's why I'm proud to know Bruce Sterling. As a collaborator, he's a pain in the ass.

Sterling: It's true...

Shiner: He found out the same thing about me. The interesting thing about our collaborations is that both of us sat down assuming the other guy was writing this stupid shit for no reason at all, and we found out that both of us were really set in our ways, and had good reasons for all the "stupid shit" that we were doing. It was really an amazement to both of us.

Sterling: I learned a great deal from collaborating with Lew.

TSFI: Well, since you've started it, I was just going to say, you heard Lew pass judgment, and most of what I said about you fits him in as many ways...

Sterling: True enough. That's why we're linked together in one way or another. He is a very hard-headed guy, you know. He's very sharp, and very stubborn. He's a good debating partner because he has these sharp edges on him. There is an area there that is simply a "no compromise" place -- it's a really flinty struggle...

I don't agree, by any means, with everything he says, but he does have a reason for everything he does, and can explain it. Which is something that is really quite rare in writers. You see a lot of guys who are running around on right-brain intuition -- they can write stories but they have no -- I mean, there is an Iron Fist under the rhinestone glove where Shiner is concerned. He can grip and squeeze an idea. And I don't know of anybody, even those writers whose work I respect, that you can go up to and say, "Why did you do this?" and "Why did you do that?" and get a real answer. They simply have no idea... They just produce stories the way a tree trunk sloughs off fungus or something.

Shiner: I think this comes back to the left-brain/right-brain dichotomy, which is one of my current hobbyhorses. I am very much a left-brain writer, and I think it is my greatest weakness. But someone like Howard Waldrop, who writes in the Philip K. Dick method -- he gets an idea, it becomes fully formed in his right brain, and without any sort of conscious or critical step being applied to it, it grows and gestates, and

then it leaps, fully formed, Athena-like from his forehead. It leaps onto the page in this huge burst of glory. He changes a word or two and types it up, and that's it. If you ask Howard to change it, he can't a lot of the time. It'll take him six or eight months to make two or three line changes in a story, because it's a complete, organic whole. Whereas I think the only real strength that I bring to my writing is as a critic.

Sterling: Lew is a very accomplished critic, there is no doubt about it — it's true. I consider myself also very much an analytic writer rather than an intuitional one, and I see that as a weakness. But I think it is a weakness that is typical throughout SF, especially hard SF. At least, the harder branches of SF, which are analytical and scientific, rather than intuitional and fantastic. I agree that is a difficulty, and something you need to work on. Obviously, you want to be able to have a knock-out punch with both fists —

Shiner: Both hemispheres even... (laughs)

Sterling: Yeah, a knock-out punch with both hemispheres.

Shiner: We can put that as a blurb on the cover of the next Gibson book... (laughs)

Sterling: Yeah, I like that... But the point is, the person who is an analytical writer makes a far better critic, than a person who merely cruises around on intuition. So, as a critic and co-conspirator, Shiner is really quite without peer. It's very true. I don't know anyone, especially among the Cyberpunks — the people I correspond with mostly — who can match him. There's simply no one in his league. Gibson, for instance, is a very gifted writer, but he is very much an intuitional writer, he has a sort of graphic grasp. There are weird areas where he has total inarticulateness. He can't really describe what he's doing, or what he's trying to approach. He can only make sort of air-waving gestures, sort of sketch out silhouettes in mid-air, and so forth... And Rucker has ideas of what he's doing, but they're just so demented, so idiosyncratic —

Shiner: And very after-the-fact, too. He writes it, then he concocts a silly name, and silly explanation for how he wrote it that may bear no resemblance at all to actual process.

Sterling: Well, it's all very interesting and highly entertaining to look at, but it's completely unusable. Whereas Shiner can take a story, and really lay it out on the table, and fetch out its quivering entrails, and say, "Look, the problem's here in the thing's gallbladder." Nine times out of ten, he's either right (or close enough to right) that you have to reassess everything in it by his comments...

Shiner: The one time out of ten I'm wrong, of course, is when I'm referring to one of Bruce's stories. (laughter) This is something that came up at Turkey City [a local writers' conference held on occasion]. Bruce agrees with everything I have to say about a piece, unless it's one of his stories...

Sterling: That's right! Everything he says about every one else's work is dead-on, but when it comes to my work, there are serious drawbacks —

Shiner: It's just a blind spot... (laughter)

Sterling: Yes, he has this curious blind spot when it comes to my work... But, really, Lew is the person people should be afraid of if there is to be any quivering, knee-trembling FEAR among the SF community, of someone who is supposedly endowed with enormous critical gifts, then Shiner is definitely the man... he is without pity.

TSFI: I'd like to touch on something: About being well-educated, and the whole mystique of the Cyberpunk writers having this enormous intellect, accused of being these highly intense, highly educated demigods of wisdom. Just how much education did you have? What do you read now — exclusively nonfiction in bulk loads, or what?

Sterling: I don't know — it seems to me that when people make sweeping statements about Cyberpunk they almost always make equivalent sweeping statements that say the exact opposite. I mean, people will say, "Gosh, this Cyberpunk, you know, it's so densely crammed." I think that's what you're really talking about, that's what people see in it: the crammed prose.

Shiner: Informational density...

Sterling: Yeah, the "informational density," as Rucker puts it. The bells and whistles, the eyeball kicks. That's a good catch-phrase for you...

Some are, some aren't. I have a degree in journalism, so that hardly makes me Einstein, but I do keep up. Most of my reading is non-fiction, and I consider myself, at least in some sense, Technologically Literate. I don't have a degree in science or any academic stuff. My knowledge is all miles wide and an inch deep — I know a little bit about a lot of different things, and a lot about very little.

But I think this is something people see, the willingness of the Cyberpunk writers to really give the reader both barrels... To be pitiless, and especially to work out the backgrounds of stories in this really excruciating detail. I was talking to Ellen Datlow about this recently. I was describing some of the work in the MIRRORSHADES anthology, and she was talking about Pat Cadigan's story. And I don't think anyone's ever accused Pat Cadigan of being a nuts-and-bolts hard-SF writer — I mean, she's not overly burdened with technological obsession or anything. Her story, "Rock On," is set in the future, and it's written in a sort of future-jargon, and there are just dozens and dozens of assumptions behind it that you don't see. They're never really made clear; they're just sort of present within the story. So, as you read it the first time, it really is a very difficult work in a sense. I mean, it's entertaining, and interesting, and it's nicely written, but it's just so DENSE — it's intricate. It's like looking at a Persian rug. Well, there's some maroon there, and some

> ***"[Cyberpunk is] not what most people say it is... it's not fiction about women who have artificial arms, who have razorblades under their skin, and guys who wear black leather, okay? It's not a film noir type of thing, and it's not really a sub-genre."***
>
> ***— Bruce Sterling***

blue there, some white there -- but you don't really see it. It's not until you've passed out drunk on the rug three or four times that you've actually gotten a look at its baroque detail.

Shiner: The difference between me and Bruce is that Bruce has a considerable amount of knowledge. He has all this stuff in his short-term memory, right up there where he can get at it. I don't know anything ... (laughter) What I did, you see, is got an English degree; and what academia will teach you in an English department is how to do research. So you can put stuff in your vault just long enough to write a story, then it's gone again. But, you have the illusion -- or create the illusion, hopefully -- of having a tremendous amount of knowledge about something.

Those are the things I tried to do with FRONTERA -- create this sense of knowing a tremendous amount of stuff in a tremendous number of areas, and it was all bullshit. But it was done through careful research, and through picking up basic buzzwords and stuff like that. It was just a matter of scampering constantly. You know, I accumulated these dozens of research books -- I must've read over a hundred books just to do FRONTERA -- and constantly going from one book to another, pulling stuff out, and not having any real knowledge about any of it... Just having learned in college how to fake that kind of stuff, and how to fake that detail in there, and pack it in as densely as possible.

Sterling: Well, it's all in the mix, it's all in how you can integrate things from many different sources -- that's what gives it that sort of "polymath" type of thing... I was talking about this to John Kessel a while ago, because he is an academic -- he's a professor of Literature -- we were talking about scholastic discipline, and academic discipline, and that sort of thing, and it struck me at the time that although I had devoted many years to reading all sorts of different works of research, that because it's not a discipline, it's not communicable. In other words I can't go forth and tell people, I can't convey to people what I know, within an academic context -- I couldn't just simply get up on the podium and say, "All right, I want to start talking about life forms of the Triassic, and now let's move on to the sex-life of a scorpion." It's all patina-thin, see, and the role of a scholar is to transmit the heritage of the past to new generations, so that the corpus of human knowledge is refined, and advanced. Whereas, the sort of thing I've done is incommunicable.

Shiner: It's Frankenstein work -- it's bits and pieces. I remember the first time I tried to explain Prigogine's Theory of Dissipative structures to somebody... And I'd already been cribbing from it, extensively, but when I tried to explain the theory to somebody, I fell completely on my face. I ended up, having read Prigogine's ORDER OUT OF CHAOS, having to go to a secondary source and get a precis of it so I could explain it to somebody else. Because what I was getting out of it was just details...

Sterling: Yeah, just a sort of feel for it. It's a sort of intuitional data transfer. This is the difference between an artist and a scholar, I think. Yes, there are artists who can teach art, but what they're really teaching is a sort of scholastic art, and people who teach writing do very much the same thing -- they teach a scholasticized version of writing. There's a limited repertoire of things that you can actually communicate, but most of it is just sort of -- it really is a mystery in a sense. It's in the hands of the muse. I don't want to come off all granola-mystic here, but I mean, this is fact.

Shiner: I agree...

Sterling: You know, if it's there, you can do it; and if it's not there, it's very difficult to fake.

Shiner: Actually, most of the writing classes I've been familiar with were back-patting sessions. I've seen very little constructive stuff -- and there are constructive things you can tell people, there's a lot of things...

Sterling: Well, there are certainly ways you can learn things about writing, but I don't know if they can really be taught. It's a very sort of zen thing...

Shiner: I could teach you some things!

Sterling: Well, I've learned a lot from you, as far as that goes.

Shiner: But I've lately come to find some rules that are working for me, that are helping me to change--

Sterling: Now, you're just saying this because you're a left-brain writer. If you were a right-brain writer, you'd be saying, "Oh, I just sit there with a cookie in my mouth until, you know, --"

Shiner: Well, I can tell things to right-brain writers, too -- dialogue and detail. It's what makes a story work. Details are basically what we're talking about here -- the reason for research...

Sterling: I was just reading Anthony Burgess' thing on the 99 best novels since 1939. He was talking about stuff that sounded very Shinerian to me, saying, "This is what makes a Pop Novel work; however, an Art Novel is entirely different." And, "This is how you write Art Novels -- you do this and that and the other; and if you're doing Pop Novels, then you're doing it all with careful research. But an Art Novel is a thing of beauty," or whatever. And this from Burgess, who admires Pop Novels, and who has several science fiction novels on his Best 99.

Shiner: But, I don't see that distinction. I think that the goal should be to write a Pop Novel that is Great Art. And I think we're in agreement on that.

Sterling: Uh-huh.

Shiner: One of the ways that you make a Pop Novel into Great Art is that sense of detail.

Sterling: I don't know... There was a brief flurry of novels in the '70s which were being called "Faction." Right, because they were fiction, but they were so full of facts and research that they came across like autobiography... Guys like Hailey who wrote AIRPORT, HOTEL ... John D. MacDonald's CONDOMINIUM is a book that's exquisitely researched. It's a Pop Novel.

Shiner: It may have research, but it has no good fictive qualities -- the characters are very shallow...

Sterling: Well, you have about forty of 'em, and you never really get to see them. I mean, the condominium itself is the main character.

Shiner: The writing had no style or class to it. It was extremely --

Sterling: Yeah, but it was like reading journalistic prose. It was like reading about a condominium scandal, you know -- HURRICANE HITS CONDOMINIUM! DOZENS DIE! WHAT WAS THE TRUTH? EXCLUSIVE TO THE HERALD-TRIBUNE! IT HAS NOW BEEN REVEALED THAT THIS CONDOMINIUM WAS ACTUALLY... It was a dirty, inside deal, and the

whole thing was built with bad concrete, so it went boom, and ...

Shiner: But the journalistic prose works mightily against it as a work of art.

Sterling: Well, sure, but details can do that, too.

Shiner: No, I disagree.

Sterling: Anyway. Well, you can see here he is disagreeing. We do this quite often — you can tell by this sort of tit for tat. This is how we bootstrap ourselves up to wherever it is we think we're going. And this is necessary. And if we were not the wonderful fellows we are, we'd be sitting here saying, "Gosh, Lew, what a genius!" and he'd be saying, "Wow, Bruce, your book is so nifty!" "Yeah, what about that agent?!" "Tremendous, baby!"

TSFI: Since you brought it up earlier, let's go into a little more detail. Much has been made of the controversial label of "Cyberpunk" or "Mirrorshades" or "Neuromantics" or "The Movement" or what-have-you —

Shiner: Never heard of it.

Sterling: Really... (laughter) What's he talking about...?

TSFI: How would you describe this sub-genre?

Shiner: Oh, you should just use the squib from the MIRRORSHADES anthology introduction. That's as good as you'll find...

Sterling: Yeah, that's probably <u>the</u> definitive statement on Cyberpunk. It's not what most people say it is, first of all. It's not fiction about women who have artificial arms, who have razorblades under their skin, and guys who wear black leather, okay? It's not a film noir type of thing, and it's not really a sub-genre. There are people who would like to make it a sub-genre, but it's not.

Shiner: Secondly, it's not a club. And it's not that everybody who's in the club writes this all the time. It is a mode of writing, if it's anything... It's a mind-set that you sort of put yourself into.

Sterling: Yeah.

Shiner: And I think that it's <u>the</u> most appropriate way to write about technology, if you're going to. If you want to write about technology, you should take your clothes off, and grab it up, and get down with it. Which is what Cyberpunk really is.

Sterling: That's true...

Shiner: If there's a definition, then it's getting down there and having sex with technology.

Sterling: It's bringing technology right into your fucking house, through the door, into your bedroom, and under your skin — because that's where it <u>is</u>. I mean, it's not somewhere on a pedestal where we can come up and pet it briefly at the General Motors 1937 Dynarama. It's not going to be there comfortably where Mom and Dad and the kids can look at it, and all smile and then go out for a peanut-butter sandwich. I mean, this is an <u>invasive</u> force, which is truly cultural in every way... And Cyberpunk is a way of treating that in a way that acknowledges the true social impact of technology — not just the techie sub-culture of people who are actual technocrats, but the areas where the street and the sciences overlap. This is a false distinction that people make between the two cultures ... The Humanities and The Sciences.

Shiner: You know, we've got this article sitting here, where John Shirley is trying to explain this very concept to a bunch of thick-headed people. One of the things that comes up in this article is that everyone's denying any sort of similarities between New Wave and Mirrorshades or whatever.

I think there are a lot of similarities... You've got a cluster of writers who know each other, you've got someone who's a very prominent critic — in this case, Vincent Omniaveritas — who's holding up particular writers in the way that, for instance, Moorcock held up Ballard, and says, "This guy is onto something that's new and exciting, and we should take a lesson from him." I think that's very much what's happening when Vincent Omniaveritas says, "Here's William Gibson who's doing something new and exciting, and let's pay attention to what he's doing. Let's see if we can learn something from him."

Sterling: It's not a club. Anyone could do it. It's just a way of looking at the world, and it's a way that's native to the 1980's. There's a level of integration now that you <u>see</u> in people's lives that you just didn't before. A lot of it has to do with the home technology, and really quite personal technology — things like Walkmans, and portable televisions, and home computers. If you could see it from a different perspective, and realize how many wires there are around you, how many microwaves pierce this building. And it's all going on 24 hours a day, and it's increasing, sort of covering the world in a little grid of information and electrical power and interchanges, and so forth and so on... And it can't really be ignored.

TSFI: Kind of like Gibson's "matrix"...

Sterling: Yeah, like that. And this is a prominent attitude in the writing that most people would call "Cyberpunk." But, on the other hand, there are a lot of people who would call stuff "Cyberpunk" that I would just consider to be pretty much straight, male, action-adventure fiction. The story of some guy shows up in black leather on another planet, walks into a bar, there's a woman there — he has quick, casual sex with her, and then some baddies show up and he blows them away with a laser implanted in his forefinger, and you're off, you know... And then at one point he gets into a tank, and plows his way through a million baddies... Maybe he's got a plug in his head, or something, and people say, "Gosh, this is it! Look, these characters sure are tough and alienated! So, this must be Cyberpunk..." The thing is, it's not really at all. It lacks the essential true quill — it lacks any real <u>insight</u> into the modern predicament.

Shiner: And it's not about technology.

Sterling: No, it's about power-fantasy...

Shiner: And I think that whatever the movement is, it's a way of looking at technology. Which I pretty much see as Science Fiction's job...

Sterling: So do I.

Shiner: Science Fiction is really in a very narrow area of fantastic literature... And you've got occult fiction which has the same sort of aisle, but it works wholly in magical systems or something. Science Fiction's job is to deal with technology.

Sterling: But you don't see that very often... People have fallen down on the job, because it's a very difficult job. A lot of people don't understand what technology —

Shiner: A lot of science fiction isn't about anything...

Sterling: Yeah.

Shiner: A lot of science fiction is about itself, it's about the story, it's about stuff, but there's no ideas there...

Sterling: A lot of it is about being shunted out of society, and being picked on, and then becoming a superman, and beating the shit out of all the people who made your boyhood miserable. That's science fiction on the level of fable — that's Robert E. Howard killing his schoolmates disguised as Conan. It's a function, and a lot of people buy it exactly for that, so they can forget their personal problems, and their feelings of inadequacy. But they don't really buy it in order to seriously study what's going on in technology, or to react to it. There's more to it than that.

The people who write science fiction are not pamphleteers. Despite everything, they're artists, they're writers... If I want to talk about the impact of television on something, I'm not going to write Gerrymander's "Four Arguments For The Elimination of Television" because I'm not a sociologist... I'm a writer, and I'm trying to react to this, to push back at it in the same sense that it's pushing on me. It's a contemporary thing...

Cyberpunk would not be seen in the light that it is seen, if there were more writers around. It seems like a clique because there are only about a dozen people who you could say, "Well, these people have actually written Cyberpunk work, and can be legitimately called Cyberpunks." It's taken a long time for those who are serious writers nowadays — most of them are in their 30's, a couple in their 40's — who are just now becoming known. There are a lot of different factors, but for some reason these people were never really allowed to shine — they've always been grossly underpublicized, and perhaps, not ripe yet, not sufficiently in control of their craft. But if there were more of us, it would seem like a generational thing rather than a sort of personal thing...

I don't know how many writers there are native to the 1980's, but there are maybe a dozen who you can call real Cyberpunks, and maybe another dozen who would call themselves Humanists without really blushing. And then you have to sprinkle in several dozen other people who are commercial writers who just aren't possessed of that much literary ambition, but are just sort of the midlist writers who always exist, and always will exist.

But if there were 200 of us, there would not be this clique thing... Instead it's like, "Gosh! Look at the five of you guys ganging up on the 600 of us here in SFWA."

Shiner: Another problem that I notice is that there's just nobody behind us... There's no next generation coming up. There's nobody being published who is younger than us.

Sterling: That's true. I mean, we're considered "hot young writers," and I'm 32, and Lew here has a couple of years on me, and Gibson's moving along toward 40, and all these guys are grey, and have kids... The thing is, if you looked around maybe six or seven years ago, and asked who's coming up, you wouldn't have seen anybody then either. Yet, here we are. Such as we are... Unless we can get something going within SF that look like it's worthy of the attention of people — besides the ones who are already reading it, and have been reading it from the '60s on, too brain-damaged to read anything else — it really could just sort of peter out.

Shiner: I think you could go five or six years back and easily find a bunch of people — in Galileo you had John Kessel, Connie Willis, me, Jim Kelly, and a whole bunch of other people who were selling their work, but weren't able to break into decent markets...

"... but now that we're in a repressive political situation in this country again, I think that it's fiction's duty to get off its ass and DO something about it... We've got a situation in Central America that we really can't ignore, we've got religious problems... there's censorship... and science fiction is sitting there with its head in the sand."

— Lewis Shiner

Sterling: Yeah, if you look around, I'm sure you could find people — I mean, Interzone is full of people who've never had another word published. What about the "Writers of the Future" contests — there must be 87-zillion young—

Shiner: Have you tried to read any of the stories in there?

Sterling: Well, you know, my first stories aren't readable either... My first story has never even been published, and hopefully never will be!

Shiner: It's a lot better than anything I've read in the "Writers of the Future" books — that stuff is really GRIM! It's really b-a-d...

Sterling: Well, I don't know. I haven't read it..

Shiner: There's an editorial prejudice going on here, too. I was reading somewhere today about Budrys—

Sterling: It was probably in REM magazine. Giving Budrys a hard time.

Shiner: Yeah. And justifiably, too. They were much too narrow in their definitions of what they wanted in that contest. They were really emphasizing old-fashioned, hard-line science fiction values over —

Sterling: If SF can be made to seem an exciting and valid form of expression, then there are going to be people who are willing to do it. But if it looks like a closed world where all the money, and all the awards, and all the acclaim goes to guys who are in their seventies, whose work nobody is really that interested in, then it's going to seem like a sort of subcultural appendage that should be allowed to quietly wither and die.

Shiner: Well, frankly, I don't really give a damn about SF, myself... I don't have this sort of mystical reverence that both Bruce and Gibson seem to have for the field -- this idea that we have got to keep the field alive, that we've got to keep all this fresh blood coming in here. I just want to write what I want to write... I've pretty much said what I want to say about technology, and there are other things that I want to write about. What I'm writing now has fantastic elements in it, which makes it difficult for me to find a non-SF publisher and to find a non-SF audience. But I don't really have any desire to stay in the ghetto and rebuild... I just want to go wherever it's going to take me.

TSFI: Humanity seems doomed to categorize everything it gets its hands on. But, labels and genres aside, what would be your vision of a utopia for you, the writer, both aesthetically and materialistically? What do you look for as the perfect world for a writer -- the perfect surrounding, and so forth...?

Shiner: I'm not ambitious as far as money goes. At all. I'd be perfectly happy to stay in the house that I'm in for the rest of my life... I would like to reach the widest possible audience.

Sterling: Yeah, I'd go along with that... Anybody who thinks they are going to make money writing science fiction ought to have their head examined. It's not really a profession, it's more like an affliction.

Shiner: Well, writing anything.

Sterling: Well, yeah, writing anything for that matter... That is a difficulty.

Shiner: You've got a better chance making a good living writing science fiction than just about any other field--

Sterling: I would, essentially, like to kick the walls out of the sandbox in SF. I would like to see it break the circle of autism that holds it, and make some sort of contact with society, again. Of course, I say this now because I'm writing a novel which is a heavily political novel. In ten years I might completely change my mind... I might be writing crap about dragons for all I know... Wouldn't put it past myself.

I would like to see a greater social integration between technology and society. I would like to see society grab hold of some of these threatening forces. We can no longer afford a kind of technological laissez faire, because the stuff we're going to build is just going to Chernobyl. And somebody's got to keep an eye on this...

We need to take our destiny into our own hands, essentially, and if we're going to do that intelligently, and sensibly, we're going to have to know what's going on, and not just some dry reports which are read by a tiny, technological elite. But really a sort of socially-based re-thinking of where the human race is, and where the human race wants to end up. Right now, we're at the mercy of techno-social dynamics that we have no understanding of whatsoever. SCHISMATRIX is sort of my vision of what happens if this goes on... A situation where humanity is completely at the thrall of the march of science -- the march of science becomes an uncontrolled stampede because of competing interest groups, and soon all definitions of humanity are essentially erased or rendered irrelevant. Now, it's a very grim book. It's not completely grim, but--

Shiner: Largely grim. 76% grim, anyway... (laughter)

Sterling: It's not really a dystopia, per se, because at least a part of me believed at the time I wrote it that this is inescapable -- but my attitudes have changed a bit since then. I now think, that even if it <u>is</u> inescapable, morality <u>demands</u> that we make at least some sort of effort to deal with it intelligently.

Shiner: It's kind of off the subject, but let's rephrase your question... I think good fiction needs to be socially active, which is what Bruce is saying...

Sterling: Yeah.

Shiner: Good fiction needs to be active as fiction. I grew up in the '60s -- and was in college during the Kent State situation and all that -- so I'm very politically oriented in a lot of ways. And like most people, it was a kind of silly thing in the '70s, but now that we're in a repressive political situation in this country again, I think that it's fiction's duty to get off its ass and <u>do</u> something about it... We've got a situation in Central America that we really can't ignore, we've got religious problems going on in this country, there's censorship and stuff like that. They're all very important, and science fiction is sitting there with its head in the sand. Not only are people going to lose interest in reading it, and it's not going to reach a real audience because it's being so self-reflexive... It's going to get crushed by censorship -- censorship's going to say, "Well, we don't need stories about rocketships, and we're going to put pressure on the retailers to stop selling science fiction books and magazines," and bang! It's gone.

Sterling: Yeah. I've been wondering when the day is going to come when one of the anti-drug groups is going to point out how many drugs are referred to in science fiction novels, and "sold openly to the nation's teenagers." Books like Philip K. Dick's works...

Shiner: Not to mention the satanic elements...

Sterling: Yeah, the satanic elements --

Shiner: -- rock and roll...

Sterling: People are already down on <u>Dungeons & Dragons</u> and that sort of thing. Unlike Lew here, I really do feel more of a genre-loyalty to science fiction, but I guess it's just sort of gratitude. Because in some sense, Science Fiction really did save my life, and I think that it can have a very liberating influence on people...

Shiner: Well, I do think that Science Fiction does have a unique opportunity to address all these social issues...

Sterling: Yeah, and where else are you going to see these?

Shiner: It's much easier to take on something difficult or controversial in a science fiction context than it is in a mystery novel. You can <u>really</u> go after them! And I think it is Science Fiction's duty to do that. And it's not happening.

Sterling: I'm not really all that concerned that everybody should follow my own political line --

Shiner: Yeah, I wouldn't enforce the political rightness of a work, but I want to see somebody going beyond plain entertainment value -- I want to see people really getting in touch with how they feel about this stuff.

Sterling: Yeah! Make 'em WAKE UP! Let people confront this --

Shiner: Even fight a little bit...

Sterling: Yeah, let's fight a little bit. Let's not go down without a struggle, here... I mean, people ought to see this, and SF really is in a very well-advantaged, subversive role in society, because it's an invisible literature. Yet, it's distributed everywhere, and it already has a sort of cultural underground that goes along with it that I think needs to be build on.

Now, I don't like to become too dogmatic about this, or to restrict people, here. I mean, Lew has written mysteries and other stuff and I also write fantasies, and satirical stories, and even a little journalism on occasion, literary criticism, whatever — I like to feel that I am free to turn my hand to anything that strikes my fancy. But if an art form is to survive, it needs periodic infusions of vitality. You can't just keep copying your old designs, and wait for the axe to fall.

Shiner: If there's one thing that Bruce and I really jump on our contemporaries for, it's regurgitating the same old stuff. It's people who grew up on science fiction, re-writing the science fiction they read as kids.

Sterling: Yes...

Shiner: Not addressing the issues of the eighties -- that's the worst thing.

Sterling: This is what I call "decorations on a moldy cake." Which I think is very typical of a lot of our contemporaries — and not only the work of our contemporaries, but people in general, writers in general in SF today...

There's a literary gospel that holds that well, you don't really have to take the SF ideas seriously, what really matters is the treatment of characters and so forth and so on. That's a very crippling difficulty. You do have to take the ideas seriously. How many stories have you seen that are predicated on really threadbare sci-fi notions like the galactic colony which has reverted to barbarism? This is a complete throw-away, it has no relation to reality at any time. It's just a completely threadbare excuse to avoid thinking about an actual society, and a situation like this. How many stories have you read about guys coming down out of a spaceship, landing on the surface of an alien planet, getting out and breathing the air, and walking around, and talking to aliens? This has no relationship whatsoever to the realities of space-travel...

Shiner: I went into Austin books the other day, and the guy says, "What do you think of C.J. Cherryh? She's got a new book out. Oh, boy, wow..." And I pick it up and look at it, and in the first sentence, the guy is going down to the galley of the big spaceship, and you know, the captain's in there, the big, brawny captain's swilling back the -- whatever made-up name for what was obviously coffee. It was a brown, hot, steaming liquid out of a mug, it was stimulating, etc... But we have to have this stupid, made-up name for it, because "coffee" isn't sci-fi--

Sterling: A "cuppee of coff"...

Shiner: And they were sitting there in the goddamn galley of the goddamn spaceship, and it was absolute horse-opera in space. I'm so sick of westerns in space and all this sort of same tired crap people keep writing.

Sterling: Well, you know the weird thing about it is, it's like SF has managed to sort of bootstrap its way into a situation where you can make a living at science fiction writing — more so than the people who really suffered during the '40s and '50s. You can afford to write SF now, and maintain some sort of literary pretense. The thing is, though, that if you are going to write a story and try to survive, and write it for $120 or something, there's no way you can actually think about anything, so naturally you're going to fall back on the total pulp conventions of the horse-opera — what Blish called the "smeerp" dynamic.

Shiner: Right.

Sterling: I mean, you're in there on some alien planet, and some alien thing goes by, and someone shouts, "Oh, it's a smeerp!" It actually serves the same fictional role as a rabbit. And if we're ever to escape the manacles of our pulp existence, it's going to be because we really have to re-think these things. We really have to RE-THINK them! — not just sort of fake re-think them, or patch them together, or supposedly upgrade them in some way—

Shiner: Call a "smeerp" a "wuzzle"...

Sterling: Yeah, and we can't really upgrade it by having the characters suffer more, or having more inter-character struggle, or better dialogue. They have to be re-thought... It doesn't matter — if you're in the C.J. Cherryh galley, and the guy is drinking a cup of coffee, within the spaceship, it doesn't matter if he's going to start talking about Proust, or make an offhand reference to Nietzsche, or something... That doesn't really elevate the situation you're in at all. You can't really graft the whole sort of fretwork of modern, contemporary, literary novels onto that, because it won't bear the weight. It's essentially pulp bullshit. It's just a framework to tell a tale with, and it's going to collapse under the freight — the decorations on a moldy cake.

Shiner: The problem here is the same thing that's wrong with most bad fiction. It's badly visualized. This is where the sense of detail becomes really important, and this is the conscious effort that I'm making right now... To sit down, and instead of just stringing words together, taking old, tired concepts and writing purely on the verbal level, instead of on an imaginative, and visualized level. Because it's easier — a facile writer can string words together throughout an entire book without ever once having to put their brain in gear... But when you stop, and you start constructing a world in your mind, and try to walk around in it, and try to imagine yourself being there, and forcing yourself constantly: What does it smell like, what does it feel like, what is the air temperature, what are the colors, what am I seeing, what's in the corners, what's hanging on the walls, what's coming out of the ceilings? And force yourself to actually live inside that environment as if it were a real place. Suddenly all this tired old bullshit won't work any more. Suddenly you're right up against it, and that's when things start happening. But you have to work!

Sterling: You have to work. And in the past, except in the case of a very small number of people who had other jobs or something, you really could not work and seriously write science fiction, and be known as a Science Fiction Writer, because no one would pay you for it, and there was no way you could afford to do it. But now you can. So we have a chance to really upgrade this thing, and to make it take its own assumptions seriously, which it never has before. Except on a very few spendid occasions, there has never been an attempt by

the genre to take its own rhetoric seriously -- The Literature Of Ideas! Where is this "literature of ideas"? There's a Literature of Pulp Storytelling, which has decorations of a certain kind, but it's never really been seriously considered with the intensity, and the prolonged extrapolation that it really needs. And even when they have, it's been in the terms of sort of nuts-and-bolts gadgetry -- some guy with a blueprint saying, "Well, I'm really going to work on this spaceship. It's going to have a galley here, AND a galley there..." But it's never really carried into the texture of daily life.

Shiner: The thing is, when you're talking about the assumptions that science fiction makes, one of the hardest things for me to ignore is the Galactic Empire novel. Because the assumption there is so incredibly enormous -- no one really thinks about how enormous that assumption is. How can you assume that things are going to be exactly the way they were during the days of the Spanish Main, when you're talking about inter-galactic distances? It's inconceivable that they'd be the same -- even in a movie like Aliens. I couldn't watch it, because there were so many assumptions there that were just completely ignored... The fact that you've got faster-than-light travel in there, people are hopping from star-system to star-system, yet there is no sort of disorientation from Einsteinian problems, there's no sense of things going out-of-whack from the huge time-lapses that are being experienced here... The concept of simultaneity is never dealt with -- all these things are raised and just ignored!

"... if there's one thing about Cyberpunk that makes it stand out, it's that the writers who are doing the real thing are trying to relate to the world around them. And I think that most science fiction is not."

— Lewis Shiner

Then you take a book like SCHISMATRIX... The thing about SCHISMATRIX is that it takes just a Solar System Empire, and it shows completely and devastatingly the kind of technology you would have to have for people scooting around between the planets, or scooting around various colonies. That predicated technology would change people gigantically! and that's what Bruce does in his book -- he at least gets under the surface of that for the first time, to my knowledge, in all of science fiction. He's got a book that really deals with the consequences of the stuff that it raises.

That's where FRONTERA falls on its face -- because it raises all these technological issues that it can never really properly deal with. The idea of this matter-transmitter is just too big. And that's a little thing compared to the assumptions in a Galactic empire book -- and trying to handle just this one small issue, bungling it intimidated the shit out of me.

Sterling: And by the standards of Science Fiction Movie-Making, Aliens is a very well-developed movie... I mean, hell, it's got actual characters in it whose activities are somewhat affected by the experiences that they've gone through -- instead of being brawny Space Captains or whatever. And, by the standards of SF Novels, FRONTERA is a very well-developed book, too. It has an actual future history in it, one that looks different -- it has different politics, different national borders, different assumptions behind people's everyday activities. People have died, the balance of power has shifted, and so forth... And in most SF novels, you just don't see that at all, because most SF novels do not take their assumptions seriously.

Shiner: And to tie this back to something we were saying earlier, these assumptions have been handed down from generation to generation -- Science Fiction is itself becoming like a bad science fiction novel... It's Heinlein's "Universe" stories, about these guys who are out there adrift in a ship, and they had all this stuff handed down to them about the Earth, and where they came from, the traditions and legends, and soon there was no semantic value. So, now we've got a Galactic Empire and it's a phony with no semantic value... you don't have to think about it -- it's like a piece of stage furniture that's been handed down from generation to generation, and now it's just a piece of furniture. You've got all these Space Marines going around fighting all these Space Battles, and being Rambo In Space, and they're just fighting in somebody else's used furniture.

Sterling: This situation has gradually become intolerable. It's one of the few points of friction that the SF subculture actually does have with the larger culture outside. Like Lew says, it is an abandoned spaceship. It's like an ice floe which has cracked off and drifted off into the arctic somewhere -- it's an insular, ghetto-ized subculture... The number of ties it has with the larger culture are fewer and fewer -- the larger culture has diverged so radically from that of the subculture, that when you try to mesh them together now, it seems quite ludicrous. The whole thing just has to be re-thought.

Shiner: You can see a lot of the same thing going on in comics right now... Suddenly you've got an entire generation -- and I'm talking 10, 15, 20, 30 artists working for major comic book companies whose entire experience with art has been based on other kids working for Marvel Comics. I mean, their idea of a Fine Artist is Jack Kirby! And so, they came to comics with no other experience, and roll over the cliches of other comic books. So, when they come to approach storytelling, their concept of it is based on -- oh, we've got to have one fight per issue, preferably toward the end, etc. All these sort of assumptions that other people like Stan Lee and Jack Kirby invented as a sort of shorthand stencil for their work, have suddenly become Biblical Moses-engraved-on-the-stone-tablet stuff that's been handed down to them. Comic books are really in bad shape! The only really interesting stuff is being done in the independents or limited series now, because mainstream comics have been taken over by these fan kids who've grown up with no other sort of outlet. It's like you've got a generation now of people writing for TV who grew up with TV, and so they're perpetuating the worst of the previous generation's mistakes... And you see this same thing in SF.

Sterling: Well, we've actually gone a little past that now -- I would say that it is the previous generation that has grown up with SF. And this genera-

tion, the generation of the '80s, not only have we grown up with SF, we've actually grown up in a kind of science-fictional world...

There's a dichotomy there that we're trying to resolve -- the dichotomy between ourselves as citizens of a current cultural milieu and people who are writers within an SF framework -- genre writers, if you will. It becomes increasingly difficult to sit down and watch an event like Chernobyl on television, and then go back and write a story about a Galactic Empire with any kind of internal conviction. It just becomes impossible! You can no longer maintain that kind of double-consciousness...

And the only way out of this is to look at it deliberately and at least make some attempt to integrate it. You have to open yourself up to influences outside the genre. Not literary influences, mind you, but cultural influences on the broadest possible terms. This is why I read Science magazine every week, and yet there are many science fiction magazines that I don't read. I read Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine now, because I consider Asimov's to be a really hot magazine this year. Until now, I have found that my work has vastly improved by reading as little science fiction, and as much "invisible literature" as possible -- the actual documentation of the age that we're in...

And even when I did write a novel that was predicated on Space Opera tropes (which is what SCHISMATRIX is) the reason that it works, and the reason that it looks original is that it's all been re-thought from a 1980s perspective. There aren't any guys with pointy silver suits, and knife-switches, and bronze Space Captains, and all that shit. They're people who are trying to scratch out a living, just people who are really struggling to survive. I mean, it's an unsentimentalized book! It's not people zipping about with sunbursts on their lapels, and all saluting one another, and Captain This, and Captain That, and "How many drops have you made?" It's all a political super-power struggle, which is much like the sort of thing we see now. And when that is translated into an SF context, it looks very original and novel, but that's because SF has nothing whatsoever to do with the world! And when you introduce an element that is from the "real world," you get responses like, "Gosh, how shocking! How original!"

Shiner: I think that's a valid point. Simple as it is, if there's one thing about Cyberpunk that makes it stand out, it's that the writers who are doing the real thing are trying to relate to the world around them. And I think that most science fiction is not.

Sterling: Yeah.

Shiner: I think Cyberpunk is making a real attempt to deal with contemporary stuff. In the real world. Which is why Gibson has gotten so much attention. Gibson is the first writer I know of who took Japan seriously... Back in "Johnny Mnemonic." Somebody is suddenly waking up to the fact that America is becoming Japanized in many ways -- not only Japanese products, which are so much better than American products, but Japanese ways of thinking and doing business. He foresaw the tremendous impact that was just starting to happen.

Sterling: He didn't have to foresee it, he could SEE it right in front of him...

Shiner: Because he's paying attention to the real world.

Sterling: Exactly... It's just a necessary thing. The funny thing is, even within mainstream literature, I don't see fiction written which really is about the world. Even a lot of mainstream novels, which I am struggling to read more of, seem to have less and less to do with any kind of actual social milieu that is at all recognizable.

Shiner: I disagree. I read more mainstream than Bruce does --

Sterling: That's true.

Shiner: And that's the attraction of the mainstream -- the good writers like Robert Stone, Kem Nunn, Donald Hayes, and people like that, who are (to my mind) really the best writers. Charles Portis, etc... These people are grappling with the contemporary problems, contemporary society. Stone foremost of them...

Sterling: Well, I've read several mainstream novels recently which I thought fit this more or less... MONEY by Martin Amis, which I consider to be quite a brilliant book. There's a book called TOURIST SEASON by Carl Hiaasen which is a genuine, contemporary, '80s novel. But the so-called Art Novel seems to have drifted pretty severely from its mooring... There are increasingly more novels about novelists-writing-about-writing-novels, novelists-arguing-about-novelists-writing-novels...

Shiner: But that's always been the case. Proust writing his stuff ... you've got John Fowles writing it.

Sterling: Well, even when they are done very cleverly, they are essentially a kind of insular mind-game which seems to me to be quite detached. They're not of use. They're not ammunition, okay? They cannot be propped up and fired. They're just sort of bijous which you can put on a shelf and look at...

Shiner: But then again, they're not meant to be something that's going to be made into a big and popular movie, either. This is not influential stuff, except to a certain cadre of intellectuals who are masturbatory, and very ghetto-ized themselves.

Sterling: You know, writing in general is increasingly less and less influential. Especially compared to some of the writers in other cultures. In the Soviet Union, for instance, writers -- though they are not able to do anything -- they're very much respected because they're considered to be dangerous. Their government doesn't want writers to say whatever they want to, because the government just doesn't want it heard -- I mean, it could be grim, it could have an effect. Poets go and recite to a packed soccer stadium, and so forth. You're not going to find any American poets filling up the Super Bowl, and recite to 20,000 people -- you'd be lucky to get 200 people nowadays...

Shiner: But that's a function of those people -- they're desperately deprived in countries like that. I mean, Christ, who wants to go to a stadium and hear poetry -- who wants to hear poetry under any circumstances in this country? I think there is a lot of writing that has a profound influence -- God knows there's a lot of people who read Stephen King. He's not doing the kind of job that someone like Robert Stone is, but he's not hurting people, either.

TSFI: Well, you've been throwing around the term "influence" so much here that it seems almost passe to mention it, but who do you cite as your literary influences; or even, what writers would you like to influence with your work?

Shiner: Well, if you want my influences, I can rattle them off for you... THE HUSTLER by Walter Tevis, DOG SOLDIERS by Robert Stone -- those are the two biggest influences on me, along with probably DROWNED WORLD by J.G. Ballard. I'll think of some more as we go...

Sterling: As for my influences, I'd have to say most of them are genrewriters... Especially British SF writers — Brian Aldiss, Ballard, Moorcock to an extent; I like Barrington Bailey a lot, but I discovered him fairly late--

Shiner: I would call Philip K. Dick an influence on me — big influence.

Sterling: Yeah. For me, Phil Farmer, Niven, Van Vogt, H.G. Wells.

Shiner: In terms of style, the influence is going to be mostly mainstream, because I don't find much writing in the SF genre that's up to my standards. Not the standards of what I'm writing, but the standards of what I want to read. Right now, I'll tell you, a really big influence on me is Neal Barrett, Jr. That son-of-a-bitch is writing the best stuff that I have ever read! He's got a story coming out in Omni called "Diner" that is just one of the best short stories in the English language... Neal knows what he is doing, he's on top of it, he's writing prose that is just brilliant, detailed, insightful, clear, and unbelievably wonderful to listen to — just the sounds of the words.

Sterling: I don't have very many contemporary prose influences right now, but I do have several friends who I bounce ideas off of. I would call them the main influences on my work. The main influences I have right now are conceptual rather than in terms of style... I think my style, per se, is pretty much settled. There are different phases of it, but when it comes to the actual putting of words on paper, I think that after ten years of writing it's sort of gelled.

Shiner: I've been writing for thirty, and I think my style is still undergoing drastic changes.

TSFI: Well, what are your goals as a writer? What do you try to accomplish?

Sterling: Well, I'd like to learn more — I'd like to know more, have more of a sense that I actually know what's going on. I mean, here we are talking about preaching to the multitudes and so forth... But let's speak realistically. Here I am, middle-class origins, sort of semi-educated, my daily life consists of mainly sitting on the couch reading science magazines and drinking beer. And how many guys are there in the United States who are willing to actually read what some guy in Austin has to say? A guy who's just sitting back in his sandals and jeans, and knocking back a couple of brews and thinking strange thoughts about this and that... Well, it so happens that I can answer that. There's about 20,000. That's how many people there are who are willing to yank a Sterling novel off the rack... Maybe even 30,000 now.

Shiner: Maybe even 40,000...

Sterling: Maybe for the next book, maybe 40. Realistically speaking, that's what we're doing. And how many of those 40,000 will remember who Sterling is, or even recognize the name if they ever see it again? Who knows? But on the other hand, I'm only one guy. I'm not losing anything by writing this. It seems to me that if I speak to one person, and affect that person's thinking, then I have doubled my influence!

Shiner: What he said — I very much agree with that. The goal for me is to do that to as many people as possible... To fuck as many people up to the largest extent I possibly can. (laughter)

Sterling: Yeah, I would go along with that.

Shiner: I want to put them through the most intense experience that I can. I don't want to help people kill their afternoon. If at all possible, I want them to come out of the book absolutely fucked-up, devastated, in anguish, confused, not knowing what time of day it is, stirring around their apartment and running into things. I'm not there yet, but that's the goal -- to absolutely fuck them up! To deconstruct their entire world, and force them to sit, at the end of the book, with the ruins of their world about them, and try to put the goddamned thing back together again. And not know if they're going to be up to it. That's what I want to do.

Sterling: I have had that done to me by books in the past.

Shiner: Those are the books I like best.

Sterling: And I would like to re-create that experience. I read the works of Ballard when I was really young, and in some sense it still holds onto me. I have not yet fully internalized the sort of standard writer's attitude of "Well, what kind of advance did you get? Who's your agent? Get on a book cover blurb? Are you going to go on a signing tour and be on Merv Griffin?" That doesn't mean anything to me yet — to me, it's still a one-to-one type of thing. It's me, and that bastard that's going to be exposed to this manuscript, alright? I want this person to pick this thing up — and I don't feel that I'm sort of throwing bread on the waters, here. I mean, I have an idealized notion of who my real, proper reader is, and in some sense, I guess my proper reader is myself at the age of 14. Because that's when I was reading stuff that really blew me away. When I picked up J.G. Ballard's THE CRYSTAL WORLD, I was, I guess, 13 or 14, and it blew my mind! When I read that thing, it completely changed my idea of reality — it just sort of broke me out of a shell. And then I went looking for that sort of stuff...

Shiner: What more could you ask for from a book than that?

Sterling: Yeah. And I imagine my proper audience being some person whose mind is open to new experiences and who's looking for something strange and outre, and who's going to pick my book up and open it. And I want them to read the first page, get hooked, read the entire thing, and just be — I want to dynamite their brain! If I can...

There are stories that I've written that are meant to flatten people — they're Stapledonian in scope, and full of wonder. But then there are other things that I've written that are in a much more minor key, and are just meant to establish some kind of mood or something... Those are what I consider "left-hand" pieces, in a sense. I enjoy writing them, and they are good training. I'm still expanding my range, hopefully, because I want to know what it is that I can and can't do. So I have to try everything, essentially.

TSFI: Well, you've touched on this briefly already, but can you more fully describe the kind of person you're trying to reach, to target...

Shiner: Sure, I think that any writer — and this probably goes for Arthur Hailey, and Harold Robbins, and Judith Kranz, and everybody else — who's writing honestly, is trying to please themselves. They're trying to write the sort of book that they'd like to read. I think that's true of just about everybody, so in a sense, your ideal audience is yourself.

Sterling: Yeah...

TSFI: Who do you think you are actually hitting? Is that different from those you are aiming for?

Shiner: Hmm. That's interesting... The reaction to FRONTERA that I got was mostly from people who were looking for a light, escapist read, and they seemed to enjoy it on that level, and they found it sort of suspenseful and stuff.

TSFI: But it's so much deeper than that!

Shiner: Thank you... But the one piece of real serious criticism that I got from one reviewer was "I wish he hadn't kept up with all this sort of mystical bullshit and mumbo-jumbo, and just stuck to the story." That seems to be the reader that I'm getting, and that mainly had to do with Baen Books... There were certain assumptions that go along with being published by Baen, and the cover copy and stuff like that supported that attitude — it was assumed that the book was not about real ideas or anything, so any ideas that were in there were seen as an intrusion.

Sterling: I don't know who reads SCHISMATRIX... I think I know who buys SCHISMATRIX. It's just people who are essentially sci-fi junkies — people who will pick up just about anything that has an SFish-looking cover. Who knows? It may be a lot of guys who pick up SCHISMATRIX, and their eyes travel over every word in the book, and they put it aside with a feeling of satisfaction — like, "Well, I finished that one!" — or throw it away, or whatever, and didn't really understand it, or didn't really grasp it. These are people who can "read" anything, no matter how impenetrable. I've known people who can do that... A book is like a cultural artifact — it's like putting on a record, or something, for a lot of people. They put on a Bach album, and they aren't hearing Bach do counterpoint, they just hear a bunch of more or less melodious noises, and they think, "Oh, that's nice." And that's the end.

On the other hand, I know there's a certain number of people who have read it, and who have been seriously damaged by this book. Because I do get letters from people, a lot of them writers, who write in and say, "Look, I understand what you were trying to do with this, and it's not at all what I thought it was going to be from what I heard of your reputation. It's really something extraordinary." And the reviews were very kind, and so forth.

But as far as a lot of the themes that were worked into it, everybody sees something different in the book. I see different things in a book than what the author intended to put in it...

Shiner: And I think most good writers try and put different levels of stuff in there.

Sterling: Yeah.

Shiner: I think you try to make it reflect life, and life is something that everyone is going to see differently, and you want to have it work on a bunch of different levels... I'm consciously doing that, for instance. And there are certain people out there who reacted to FRONTERA the way I did. And, boy, there's nothing that makes you happier than having someone say, "Boy, I really love that stuff about Ouspenski in there, you know?"

Sterling: Yeah, I did have one review of SCHISMATRIX about Dissipative Structures and Prigoginic Physics...

TSFI: Wasn't that in Krome magazine?

Sterling: Yeah, it was in Krome... And that was the only thing I've seen that even mentioned it — it was saying, "Here's a guy who's using a brand new scientific doctrine" — which I really was, as it hasn't really been touched in SF, although Lew here is going after it with hammer and tongs. And that review was very pleasing. It didn't say anything about the characters, or the plot summation, or any of that sort of thing...

I really don't know who the hell I'm reaching. I mean, I know I'm reaching this purported 30,000 people, but I don't really know who they are. And among that 30,000, there are probably a great many of them who didn't want to be "reached"... I know, for instance, there are people who have read "Swarm" — I guess it was my most widely-published story, because it was out in two or three of the Best of the Year collections, and a cover-story in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, too [April, 1982] — who were really rather upset by it... I mean, it was gross, and sort of horrible, made their skin crawl, and it wasn't at all what they expected.

"When people come up to me and talk about work of mine that they've read that is maybe one year, two years, or three years old, I get VERY impatient, because I just want to say, 'Wait! That's not really typical of what I'm doing now!' ... I want them to understand what it is I'm aiming at, rather than the really quite inadequate stuff that I've accomplished."

— Bruce Sterling

Shiner: Well, yeah, but in a sense, those readers gave an entirely acceptable reaction to "Swarm".

TSFI: Right — after all, you're dealing with bugs, here.

Shiner: It means that they were, to a certain extent, convinced by the story — it got through to them, it stopped being words on paper and started being an actual experience... And you can't complain about getting that kind of reaction.

Sterling: Well, it wasn't a pleasant experience, and I would think that they would complain about it — for a lot of these people, it would be enough to turn them off. They don't really want to read stuff that is that intense; they'd rather read, you know —

Shiner: They want to read mind-candy...

Sterling: Well, they want to read Piers Anthony. They want to read something that's nifty, and has puns in it, and "Gosh, it's funny," and "Look! There's a flying ostrich that can talk!" It's non-threatening and it's sort of witty, and makes you feel like you're part of an "in" group, and you think, "Gosh! How nifty!"

And you don't really want to be plunged into a situation where you're going to have to go blind among thousands of swarming, alien insects who don't have your best interests at heart. I mean, that's not a happy situation, you know?

Shiner: I'd much rather have a small audience that does want to be wrung out, than have a massive audience that I have to please on a superficial level. It all comes back to the same thing — I don't want to read mind-candy, I want an author in there who's really, seriously trying to hurt me... (laughter) Otherwise, why bother?

Sterling: Yeah, I don't read stuff now that I would have loved when I was younger. I won't even consider reading that stuff now...

Shiner: "Don't touch me unless you want to break my heart." (laughter)

Sterling: Well, I wouldn't go that far, because I do read a lot of stuff which is just straight non-fiction, and so forth. And I like comic novels, and that sort of thing — I do have a sense of humor.

Shiner: He does have a sense of humor, it's true...

Sterling: This really is quite startling, now that you brought it up. Because I did take a funny story to Sycamore Hill [an SF Writers' Conference] earlier this month, and people were laughing at it, and saying, "Gosh! I didn't know you could write funny stuff!" That sort of struck me as peculiar.

Shiner: That's what happens when your reputation precedes you.

Sterling: Well, I have written funny stuff, and I consider my books to have humorous passages in them. I'm not by any means a "wag," but I've written stuff which is amusing... I think "Storming The Cosmos" is extremely funny!

Shiner: Yup. I agree... It's a thigh-slapper.

Sterling: Yeah, it is! It's a hoot, essentially... I think "The Beautiful And The Sublime" is funny in a smarmy sort of way — it's funny the way a Wodehouse piece is funny, in a social context and all that...

Shiner: Should I go on record with how much I loathe "The Beautiful And The Sublime?"

TSFI: Sure...

Shiner: Just so the world will know that we don't sit here patting each other's backs all the time? Bruce didn't talk to me for about three months after I told him what I thought of that story. There was just dead silence.

Sterling: You didn't understand what I was trying to do with it.

Shiner: I didn't appreciate what you were trying to do with it...

Sterling: Yeah, okay, he understood very well, he just thought it was treason. It was rank, deviationist terrorism for me to have written that story. I'll have you know, Lew, that Nancy Kress -- who you admire — liked it very much...

Shiner: I'm sure she did.

Sterling: ... recommended it for a Nebula award, even...

Shiner: I'm not surprised. I'm sure you pulled the wool over many eyes with that thing, nevertheless --

Sterling: I got a fan-letter for that story...

Shiner: I'm sure you did.

Sterling: Some kid in North Carolina wrote to Asimov's — it was forwarded to me just yesterday — saying, "Dear Mr. Sterling, People think I'm stupid, but now that I've read your story which is about Artificial Intelligence, I know that I'm really an O.K. guy..."

Shiner: Actually, he probably is stupid if he liked the story that much (laughter) — no, I'm just kidding. that was cheap, and I withdraw that... Anyway, I just wanted to point out that we're not in utter agreement on everything...

TSFI: But that's healthy.

Shiner: Well, it's not only "healthy," it's desperately important!

Sterling: It is important — it's the only way we can get anywhere.

Shiner: Yeah, the whole object is growth — I think I can speak for Bruce, here -- both of us are not happy with the stuff that we've done in the past... We look back on our published work, and some of it is adequate, but when I look back on my entire ouvre of published material, I feel it's not representative. I feel that I'm a vastly better writer than that, and that the stuff that I'm doing now is a tremendous improvement over it. I think that's a kind of necessary attitude to have.

Sterling: Yeah, I feel the same way.

Shiner: You have to feel like you're making great leaps and bounds over what you've done before, or you're in trouble...

Sterling: What Lew says about it not being representative: I really do feel that way, too. When people come up to me and talk about work of mine that they've read that is maybe one year, two years, or three years old, I get very impatient, because I just want to say, "Wait! That's not really typical of what I'm doing now!" I mean, that's all discredited, it's just juvenilia, pay no attention to the man behind the curtain... I want them to understand what it is I'm aiming at, rather than the really quite inadequate stuff that I've accomplished.

Shiner: When I have sort of ego-difficulties that I'm not getting adequate recognition for my work and stuff, I stop and look at the stuff that's actually come out, and say, "Well, no wonder." (laughter)

Sterling: Yeah, I feel the same way...

Shiner: I haven't done anything yet that's truly worthwhile — the stuff that's come out, I don't feel represents the image I have of myself as a writer.

Sterling: I think that's true of most science fiction that's written. I mean, a lot of science fiction authors bitch about, "Well, why don't we get the recognition we deserve? Why aren't we reviewed in The New York Times Review of Books?" and so forth...

Shiner: And a lot of writers are getting exactly the attention they deserve: that is, none...

Sterling: Yeah, there is no "free ride" here. If we're to have more social importance, and reach a wider audience, then we're going to have to earn that audience!

Shiner: It's amazing how many SF writers feel that they are the literary and intellectual equals of the big guys in the mainstream. They just don't realize that there are values of style, quality of prose, that they're just not living up to because they're deaf to them -- they've grown up in science fiction where a lot of this stuff isn't important.

Sterling: This is one of the many difficulties which lurk in our field. The thing about Science Fiction is that we didn't end up in this ghetto because we were lazy, or we were shiftless, or whatever -- like any ghetto, there are social forces that support it, and sort of prune off people who are getting above their place in one way or another.

Shiner: Well, I think a lot of us were drawn to this ghetto by the ideas, and then we grew up enough that we still love the ideas, but we're being very much hampered by the low quality of what's being done with them. And, in my case, it makes me want to get outside of the field to get to better writing, better verisimilitude, a better sense of contemporary issues. Yet, I keep getting drawn back to the ghetto by the ability to deal with great, sprawling lengths of time or space, and the lack of fetters on the imagination despite the fact that most of the writers fetter themselves.

TSFI: How important is public relations to your career -- not advertising per se, but communication directly between you and your readers, personal appearances at conventions, etc.? Do you enjoy hobnobbing with fans, or do you dread it?

Shiner: I think that I've gotten a certain amount of name-recognition from going to conventions, being on panels, and stuff like that, because you end up with certain self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, I was laboring in complete and utter obscurity, until suddenly Gardner Dozois decided that I was okay. Then, he proclaimed me a Hot Young Writer -- which, of course, I wasn't at the time, but once he proclaimed me as such, then I was. And that's a completely self-fulfilling prophecy... By getting the attention of those sort of editors who are in a position to make those kind of announcements about you, it does you a certain amount of good. Whether that was accomplished by meeting him or not, I sincerely doubt it. I think in Gardner's case, it was simply because he liked the stuff I was writing.

I think the reason for Bruce's current notoriety and hot-streak is the fact that he's influenced so many important writers and important critics. People like Charles Platt, who does exert a tremendous amount of influence in the field, who's been pushing Bruce for quite some time now. The fact that Gibson is clearly indebted to Sterling is a big factor -- when Gibson gets hot, some of that heat is going to pass off onto Bruce. Writers like Rucker, people like that. When you get so many important people in the field acknowledging their debt to him, then other people are going to take him seriously. And I think that that's it...

Bruce in many ways is a Writer's Writer. You can just see how many ideas are in operation there, in his work -- original, wonderful ideas. In many cases where your average reader just wants entertainment, just wants escape, it takes a writer -- someone of greater sophistication in their tastes -- to appreciate the fact that this guy's got ideas dripping off of every page. They say, "Geez, I could take this page out of a Sterling novel and do an entire trilogy on it! Or maybe even a science fiction dekalogy!"

Sterling: Well, Aldiss is also a writer's writer, and I admire his work a great deal, so what Lew says may be true... I mean, there aren't very many writers, so I guess that kind of limits my audience! (laughter)

Shiner: Well, of course, it's not your only audience, but I think it's the people who are responsible for your current notoriety.

Sterling: I tend to wonder if this "notoriety" amounts to really anything. Who's to say what things are going to look like in another five years? My hope would be that SF would really get a head of steam and just take off, and that it would attract some young people who are writers of real talent, who would consider it worth pursuing and really devote some energy to it... because of the work that I and my contemporaries have done, which made it seem worthwhile. I know there have been SF writers in the past who made it seem worthwhile to me -- they demanded respect, and they earned respect. When I saw that a person of this obvious intelligence and conviction had devoted their entire life to doing this, I thought, "Well, this has got to be okay!" We have to "win" the next generation in the same sense that the earlier generation "won" us. If we fail to do it, then the genre will collapse.

TSFI: If we could for a moment, I'd like to get back to conventions again. You explained what you look for as a pro -- mainly cross-fertilization of ideas, and interacting with other writers -- but what do you look for as a fan?

Shiner: Well, ArmadilloCon has always been a good time for me, and I'm not sure exactly why...

Sterling: ArmadilloCon is a great pro's convention! There's always lots and lots of writers there... Enough that you can buttonhole one another, and it's small enough to be friendly and convenient...

Shiner: And frankly, Texas has the most literate, intelligent, normal, human-type fans than any place I've ever seen! (laughter) People who can dress decently, can form an English sentence, and who you wouldn't be ashamed to introduce to your parents.

Sterling: That's right -- it's what people from out-of-state refer to as Texas' "low geek factor." You know, it's easy for Lew and I to come on all high-and-mighty with our earnest talks about hammering out literary difficulties with our fellow pros, but when I was a fan -- and I was for several years before I sold anything -- I went to conventions all the time, and I hammered out literary difficulties with my fellow fans! You know, "Who do you read? Why is he any good? Is he a good stylist?" That sort of thing... I sold my first story at a convention [to the LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS anthology].

Shiner: Some day, it might even come out...

Sterling: Yeah, some day it might even be published... I hope it isn't! (laughter) The thing is, I did, and still do meet interesting people at cons. And it wasn't like I was co-opted into a group of already-established writers or anything. In the early '70s there was this sort of general fan impulse -- people who were really just science fiction fans who wanted to become writers, and a couple of them had sold stories, but there was certainly no one who was walking around cast-

ing a shadow like a colossus. It was essentially a populist fan movement. A kind of cultural effervescence on a small scale, like Liverpool in '62, you know? It was Austin in '72, in '74, in '76, and so forth... The early '70s here were a very lively sort of thing, because there were people who were becoming Texan SF writers, and in some sense there had never been such a thing as a "Texan SF writer." And the stuff that was published was different from a lot of the others, not necessarily a regional flavor, but it was very different stuff. We were just as likely to write about Mars or the far side of the moon as write about armadillos and oil rigs, but at the same time, there was some sort of general influence there.

Shiner: I had a great time at AggieCon this year, because there were really interesting, great guests, there were real good panels, and there were really interesting fans... And there were some good dances. One thing I really look for in a science fiction convention is a good dance.

Sterling: Yeah, if there's a good dance, then things are hoppin'; if there's no good dance, then it's just a bunch of guys standing around clutching wet saltines...

There's something about being a professional SF writer, and really having it be a business, that removes a lot of the sort of peach-like bloom from conventions... This is sad, but true.

Shiner: But a good convention can really put that all back — I mean, there were real ideas being discussed at AggieCon. They were talking about Art, you know? Talking about literary standards — "Are there self-evident literary standards?" as Charles Platt was talking about in the latest issue of REM.

"... what I think Bruce is trying to do in his book, and what I'm trying to do in mine — and maybe even Cyberpunk itself — opening yourself up to stuff that's happening now, instead of constantly looking to the past, and saying how much better things used to be, to SEE what's happening now that IS exciting, and interesting, and new..."

— Lewis Shiner

Sterling: Are there? Well, these things need to be debated, we need to teach old dogmas new tricks... (laughter)

TSFI: Many works of literature are unreadable a few decades after they are written. Yet others survive intact. Will your works be considered readable, or merely quaint, fifty years from now, or a hundred years from now...?

Shiner: I make every attempt to write as cleanly as possible. I think that part of the key to writing an enduring book is to make it accurately contemporary. This is one of the reasons that I don't get involved in writing far-future SF. I can't believe in it, I can't find a comfortable language to do it in. I have to keep it pretty close to the present. I think if there's a certain genuineness to the dialogue, and to the style of the period, then it won't necessarily get out of date. You can read Joseph Conrad today, and I think he holds up just fine.

Sterling: No he doesn't...

Shiner: Yeah he does.

Sterling: I don't know — I just read VICTORY. I don't think it held up at all well.

Shiner: VICTORY's not one of his better books...

Sterling: Greg Bear swears by it.

Shiner: HEART OF DARKNESS still holds up.

Sterling: Maybe so. And the aptly titled NIGGER OF THE NARCISSUS -- that one seems well past its comprehendability. The title alone seems more than unfortunate nowadays.

One of the things that's interesting about SF is the guys like Burroughs and Lovecraft are still in print, and still read quite avidly by a certain number of people. And these were guys whose work was considered real gutter trash during the time in which they were writing. Robert E. Howard, there's a real trash writer for you, still quite well known, and certainly not because his writing has anything like Conrad's literary merit. It just hits a particular niche in some way that nobody else has hit.

Shiner: I think that Howard's work does seem quaint in some ways... You can't read it as contemporary literature. The thing that overpowers it, though, is the intensity of Howard's vision. That's the difference — you read Lovecraft, and maybe it is tough sledding for a while on the first couple of pages, but soon you're swept up in his craziness. Because it is so heart-felt.

Sterling: I don't know — some Lovecraft isn't heart-felt at all. I think a lot of Lovecraft is very calculated. You're right about the craziness, though. It's saying something in a tone of voice that you just can't hear from anyone else... I've always thought that if my work were to last any length of time, it would be because I would hit some very peculiar niche.

Shiner: If my work survives, I'd like to think that it'll be for the same reason that Philip K. Dick's work will survive. Even though they're science fiction, they so perfectly capture the period in which they were written -- not necessarily in which they were set. You can read them right now, and get such a '50s rush off of some of his late-'50s stuff, that it's still valid. Even though it's science fiction, it was intended to represent the era, by extrapolation or whatever. He was taking snapshots of his own time. And you can still read that, and recapture what he was trying to do, which is vividly recreate his own era. That's what I want to do in my fiction — by being contemporary, I think, you can "live on." You can be eternal, in a sense.

Sterling: Well, I disagree pretty violently with that. As Lew presumably knew I would...

Shiner: Yes, I did. But let me put it this way — I don't think you can write, right now, for an audience in 2010. The best you can do is write as

perfectly as you know how for an audience of today, and hope that the audience of 2010 will be able to look back on it, and still make some sense out of it. I'm not really writing for the future...

Sterling: Well, I actually did try to write SCHISMATRIX "for the future." In many ways it is an epistle aimed at a future generation. I'm not pretending that it'll be considered a literary classic in, say, seventy years, in the sense that Melville is. I would like for people of that period to look at it and say, "Well, here's somebody who's thinking about what the future might have looked like." I was really trying to think what society might be like in a period like that. I mean, I know it's going to be mistaken, but I would hope that there will be elements in it that will be prophetic in the same way that some of Jules Verne's works were prophetic.

Shiner: Do you think, for instance, that when H.G. Wells wrote WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES that he was trying to "write to the future"? I think that he was trying to write explicitly to his contemporaries to make political points.

Sterling: Well, I'm sure that Wells was a very political writer, but I can't vouch for what Wells did...

Shiner: But people are still reading WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES, and I think that they're reading it with the eye to get the contemporary stuff out of it. Seeing how his vision of the future represented his own time, finding out what message he had for his contemporary readers...

Sterling: I was trying to strip away as much of that sort of thing as I could, deliberately. I know it's going to seem a very '80s novel, because it does represent the socio-political thing, but it's not supposed to be a book about the 1980s as seen in a funhouse mirror. It seems to me that if you want to write a book to capture the flavor of the 1980s, you ought to write a book that's set in the 1980s! And I don't like to have my work interpreted as some sort of allegory of the modern situation when that's really not what it is at all. I mean, I really was trying to seriously extrapolate these ideas, and project them into the future, and leave them there as sort of an artifact.

TSFI: An artifact of the future...

Sterling: Yes, an artifact of the future — not for contemporaries, but for people many years from now, who might derive some amusement from where I have gone wrong, or who might derive some amazement from how accurately I have forecast what was coming up...

Shiner: It seems to me that Bruce has got the pure science-fictional attitude there.

Sterling: Yeah, maybe so. Anyway, I could be utterly mistaken... All it would take is to let one Third World War to break out, and... There are just so many things, that it really is impossible to predict the future, because it's an occult act — I mean, tomorrow we could hear that the aliens had been contacted...

Shiner: My attitude toward that is, "Who cares?" I'm not interested in predicting the future at all. I don't think it can be done, and I wouldn't be interested in it even if it could...

TSFI: How accurate do you think your visions of the future are? Are domed Mars colonies and Shaper/Mech conflicts on the horizon?

Shiner: Well, as I said, I really don't care. It had to be as accurate a prediction of the future as can be made in the 1980s. In other words, I was not willing to consciously break any rules that were known about science at the time that I wrote the book. Except maybe some of the stuff that had to do with probability, but that was deliberate. The probability of having that many mutant kids according to most geneticists now is ridiculous, but that was thematic. That had to do with meaningful coincidence, synchronicity, and stuff like that. But since it was part of the thematic content of the book, I was willing to go against known science on that particular point. I wanted it to be accurate, but only accurate to the point where someone couldn't come up to me and say, "This couldn't possibly happen because of so-and-so..." But I had no intent of trying to predict the future, accurately or inaccurately.

In FRONTERA. I'm dealing with world-wide issues — Why are we constantly provoking wars? Is there a way to get out of constant political confrontations that lead to global conflict? Is there a way to short-circuit this process by which almost inevitably, any time there is a technological breakthrough, it becomes a weapon and brings you into confrontation? And what I tried to do with the book is say that, if everybody stands up and says "No," then maybe you can short-circuit that. Which is an extremely contemporary idea. To my mind, it's about the nuclear arms race, in many ways. I don't think that anybody got that out of it, but that's okay — it's in there for me. It's entirely a contemporary type thing.

I think there are certain questions that I think will still be important in forty or fifty years... If you're going to write about a period — I was setting the book in approximately 2020 — then you have to find the stuff that's true today and will still be true then, in terms of the larger thematic stuff. There is that conscious thing, but I didn't want to write about stuff that would be true then, but isn't true yet. Whereas I think Bruce is capable of making that sort of intellectual leap, and I am not.

Sterling: One of Lew's earlier statements really is the crux of what I was getting at... There are issues which I think are not going to go away. In terms of the Mech/Shaper thing — the issues in SCHISMATRIX about the boundaries of humanity are genuine issues, and one of the reasons that it takes the particularly virulent form that it does in the book is because the earth, the natural world, is forbidden. So, everyone is living in completely artificial environments. It's like the mechanization of the body is connected with the colonization of space, because the colonization of space is the mechanization of the environment. Although it's improbable that these sort of people will call themselves Mechanists and Shapers, and although one won't live in the asteroid belt, and the other in the rings of Saturn — I'm not even sure that the rings are habitable; there are a lot of terrible radiation problems there that I just sort of mumbo-jumboed through in the book — so on a point-by-point basis, it's going to be utter mish-mash, but in terms of the actual conceptual trends there, I think these things bear truth. And these are problems that we're not yet facing, except you can see the slight glimmerings of it in the medical profession... People trying to decide when someone is alive and when is he dead, or whether a fetus is a human being, and so forth. But we're not seeing people voting, and making political decisions when people ask seriously, "Well, are they human? Do they have the right to be considered as a person? Or are they something Post-Human, or are they animal, or an aberration?" Which is essentially what you see in SCHISMATRIX — it's a techno-racial hatred that breaks out between groups whose styles of life technologically diverge so radically that they feel they no longer have any common ground.

And if that sort of activity is allowed to develop, I think you're almost certain to see an ideological struggle of that sort. I doubt that they'll call themselves Mechs and Shapers, and may not even have anything to do with cyborg technology or bio-engineering, but the principle is going to stand.

Shiner: For me, prediction was just another research problem... To me, it's exactly the same to say, "If you're going to build a colony on Mars, what will it look like?" (and I believe if you were going to build a colony on Mars, it would look exactly like the one in FRONTERA; according to my research, that is the closest approximation that I could figure out — it was all based on NASA stuff) as "If we had guerrillas in the hills of Mexico, what would it be like to go down and visit their encampment?" It's the same, predictive sort of thing... You make your best guess based upon the research material that you have. When you get to thematic issues, the question comes down to -- maybe there won't be domes on Mars, maybe there won't be a conflict where the Martian colonists get a weapon that they can use against Earth. But I still think that at some point in the future, some splinter group is going to end up with some powerful weapon, and their first inclination is going to be to use it... So, in terms of larger issues, perhaps, I feel that it's valid.

Sterling: Well, when you talk about the "predictive function" of SF, it's all tied in with the "warning" aspect... And I would like to think that there would be a day some time in the future, when someone is sitting at home watching television, and they see a guy who's got one of the new artificial arms or something that's been invented in '95 or whatever, and that the viewer would suddenly sit up on his couch and say, "Wait a minute! We've got a potentially SCHISMATRIX-like situation developing here, and we're going to have to watch it!" In other words, that people would be conceptually armed to think about and deal with the situation because they had read this book...

Shiner: Alvin Toffler has said that science fiction is the best preparation you can have to prevent future-shock.

Sterling: Yes, it's a defusing mechanism for future-shock.

Shiner: We Cyberpunks really like Toffler... (laughter)

Sterling: Next subject...

TSFI: Well, you should enjoy tearing this one to bits. There is a strong Right-Wing militarism sweeping through SF, perhaps mirroring our current political leanings. Do you find this dangerous? Satisfying? What, if anything, will change it and its effect on SF?

Shiner: Well, of course I find it dangerous... This is a set-up, as you know — you set up a cardboard figure for us to convulsively empty our shotguns on! (laughter) Round after round slamming into the flimsy target until it's reduced to nothing but splinters... (more laughter) But, sure, I think it's killing SF, that the field is being overwhelmed by this. I think it's essentially the times — it's not just SF that's doing it. Most people are living in crowded urban conditions, they get out on the freeway every day, they get very frustrated and angry. And they escape by reading right-wing military fiction where they kill a lot of bugs, or go see Aliens instead, where they do the same thing, or go see Rambo where they kill a lot of orientals, and it makes them feel like they've got some kind of power over things.

Sterling: I tend to think that this whole right-wing issue in SF is pretty much a paper tiger, because, frankly, I don't think these right-wing writers can compete — they're not up to scratch.

Shiner: But I think they're filling a real need, there's a tremendous amount of frustration —

Sterling: Well, there is a male, macho, shoot-up sort of thing that happens, but people may see a lot of violence in our work, too. There's violence in Shiner's work, the stuff he's doing now — gunfire everywhere, people are hit, people are shot up. There's some long sections in SCHISMATRIX that are really brutally violent scenes...

Shiner: I'd like to respond to that accusation. There's such a complete difference, hopefully, in the violence in my work, and the violence in something like Rambo or Aliens. It's dealing with the consequences of the things that you bring up. Hopefully, by the time you get to the end of something of mine that's got violence in it, you're repelled and sickened by the violence. Instead of getting some sort of release from it, the violence itself will provide no release at all. That instead of seeing explosions from the gun and people being blown back, you're seeing wounds that smell bad, and you're seeing people that are dying... You're dealing with the consequences of the violence, not with wonderful release of the violence in itself, and to me, that's completely different!

Sterling: I think that it dates back to the Adventure Fiction tradition... There's nothing like the sudden breakout of gunfire to capture someone's attention.

Shiner: I just feel that there is absolutely a moral imperative when you are dealing with violence, as to how you deal with it. The danger, to me, of the sort of Right-Wing fiction that Baen Books and folks like that are promoting — down to the very titles of the damn things: stuff like the THERE WILL BE WAR series of anthologies that Pournelle does. Well, maybe there doesn't have to be war... Let's stop a second and try to find an alternative.

Sterling: How many people do you think will buy a book called MAYBE THERE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE WAR? (laughter) Volume III. It's not Action/Adventure Fiction.

Shiner: Haldeman had a great article on this in a recent Asimov's -- he said that you don't have to write what you know, you just have to visualize it properly and you have to deal with the consequences of it. That, to me, is the danger of all these war books -- they're not dealing with the consequences...

TSFI: Today we're experiencing one of the largest booms in SF popularity ever. What is the future of SF commercially?

Sterling: I personally think it's quite grim...

Shiner: No-no-no-no-no — I think it's quite grim, you think it's the mainstream literature of the future. (laughter)

Sterling: Well, it could be, it could be. But I think it's in desperate need of reform, and people are misled very much by the fact that SF makes a lot of money. It's making a lot of money that is being taken away from other forms of writing. There are now genre forms of writing, and that's about it — it would be very difficult to market a book like, say, Steinbeck's

GRAPES OF WRATH now. I mean, what is it? Is it a Ninja book? Is it a Thriller? Is it Sci-Fi?

Shiner: No, that's not true... You could market GRAPES OF WRATH very easily right now as Contemporary American Literature. That stuff has got quite a few publishers. You're wrong...

Sterling: Well, I would hope that you are correct there — that Contemporary American Fiction is going through a renaissance...

Shiner: It is.

Sterling: If it is, then it's long overdue, and it's very unwise of us to become overconfident at the thought that Sci-Fi is really making a lot of money these days, so that must mean that it's a worthy thing...

Shiner: Also, I think you're wrong to a certain extent about the big money in SF. I don't want to say that the big advances that name authors are getting eats up all the younger talents' advances — because, in effect, it doesn't work that way. But the field is so glutted right now, that for instance, first novels by not particularly well-known writers are selling less than they used to.

Another instance is that it used to be that any SF novel published would sell at least 20,000 copies. Then I come along and write a novel that gets nominated for both the Nebula and the Philip K. Dick award, and it didn't sell 20,000 copies. Howard Waldrop has a considerable reputation... His novel THEM BONES was published as an Ace SF Special, it was nominated for the Dick award, some Ditmars, and some other stuff, it was his second novel — if you count his collaboration with Jake Saunders on THE TEXAS-ISRAELI WAR — and the thing sold 17,000 according to Ace. If you can believe Ace. And it's now out of print...

You've got hundreds of thousands of people buying the new Donaldson and the new Heinlein, but you've got fewer people buying first novels. People are buying particular kinds of fiction — they are buying the hell out of military SF. John Steakley's ARMOR sold a quarter of a million copies — no real publicity, it sold by word-of-mouth. It sold because it's well-written, it's got a good, clean, cinematic style, and it gave the people what they wanted.

TSFI: What's in store for us, Shiner— and Sterling-wise? Tell us what you're working on.

Sterling: I'm working on a political novel right now.

Shiner: And I'm working on a political novel right now. Gee! (laughter)

Sterling: Mine is sort of a straight, extrapolative SF novel. Kind of in the vein of STAND ON ZANZIBAR, but by no means as pyrotechnic...

It is a book with a more or less global scope, though, which is addressed to a broader, contemporary audience than my last book was... It's not so dependent on straight, SF tropes, but it really does represent my idea of what the future might look like, if some intelligent political and social decisions were made within the next few years, and what the effect of those would be. It's not a dystopian novel, yet it's by no means a utopian situation, either. But it is a livable world, where people feel they have some control over their destiny — it's a livable vision of the future...

It's set about twenty years after the turn of the century when all my contemporaries are all a bunch of old geezers, and the book is about the old geezers — as there's more of them than there are of anyone else. At least in the developed world. It just extrapolates a lot of the trends that are present now, some of the better ones. It's about politics, it's about political decisions, it's about people's relationship to their jobs, to technology, what they think of, how they eat and what they own, what they wear, and what they do for amusement, and so forth and so on... It's a book that takes the assumptions of SF very seriously, and I just try to carry them out in as straightforward a way as I can.

"The Apocalypse is boring! Why lie about it? Even if you KNEW the world was going to blow up in twenty years, it's your moral necessity to at least protest! Not to sit with folded hands, or to dress up as an elf because you can't take it — it's an act of cowardice!"

— Bruce Sterling

Shiner: My book will probably disappoint people who enjoyed FRONTERA. It's not SF in any traditional sense. I guess you could say that it's an alternate world, because it takes place in August, 1986 in a Mexico which is undergoing a violent socialist revolution. Some of the events are similar, but it has a lot of current events that have been telescoped and switched around... You've got the Mexico City earthquake that's happening at the same time as the fixed elections along the border. It's basically a political book based more on what's going on in El Salvador than what's going on in Mexico right now.

You've got time-travel, except the time-travel is entirely subjective, it may be hallucinated... It's a novel of ideas. And I'm grappling with what I think is some pretty weird, significant stuff — Prigogine's Theory of Dissipative Structures, which has currently formed the entire structure of the novel: it's saying that contemporary society is a Dissipative Structure in Prigogine's terms. It's a structure which tends to be very stable. As it gets more and and more unstable, it will try to stay stable to a certain point, then it will suddenly, and drastically, re-organize itself into a new form.

What if our society were at that stage — it's showing a lot of instability: what if we were about to re-organize in a very drastic way? Bruce introduced me to Prigogine. Bruce pushed me toward dealing with not just the end of the world, but what comes after it... And Bruce has shown me a lot of what he thinks could come after it. And he pretty much inspired me to try to write a book about a drastic social change that would be for the better.

And this has led me down a lot of weird aisles... I've gotten into this whole New Age stuff, with Aquarian Age Philosophy — what if the ideals of the sixties aren't dead, but went underground, and are about to explode? What if there's going to be a drastic reorganization of society along the ideas of the experiments they're doing in things like the New Alchemy up at Cape

God? This whole New Shelter concept, and other stuff like this... There are interesting, exciting new ideas that are happening right now that could make the world habitable, and give us a means of surviving into the 21st century. Some of it is the same stuff that Bruce is doing in his book, but it's a completely different approach to it.

Sterling: These are ideas for what they call Sustainable Society, Sustainable Economies and that sort of thing... "Green Days In Brunei" was very much along these lines, and my novel is a larger picture of what's going on. A lot of the book takes place in the Third World. The population structure is very different there. This book, like Lew and his new book, will disappoint — or at least, change the minds of — a lot of the people who read SCHISMATRIX. Anyone who read SCHISMATRIX and expects space opera at eighty decibels — louder, faster, stronger, thrash harder, more feedback — well, that's not what you're going to see.

Shiner: Both of us, I think, are consciously trying to do the unexpected here. To go into new directions, to force ourselves into new stuff.

Sterling: Well, it's not necessarily a forcing — this is the sort of thing we pursue throughout our careers. I wrote two sort of straight Galactic Empire Adventure novels — I didn't really deal with "empires" per se, but these were pretty much guys fighting beasts on alien planets, and so forth... And I just became completely disenchanted with that, even though at the time I had thought, "Gosh, what a neat thing!" I mean, I was only 20 years old... I didn't know any better — this was the sort of stuff that I'd read, been brought up on. And it seemed really nifty to be writing about fighting whales on an alien sea...

TSFI: But INVOLUTION OCEAN was so different — it was much more than that. True, it owes a lot to Melville, but...

Sterling: Yeah, well, okay — the books do have somewhat of an individuality, but they've very much off-the-rack sort of sci-fi adventure.

Shiner: Except that it's like Robert E. Howard — they're shaped by the intensity of Bruce's personal vision, which is what transforms them from standard SF into something of real merit.

Sterling: Well, they may have <u>some</u> supposed "merit," but the structures are so —

Shiner: Come on, Bruce! The merit is obvious. Even in INVOLUTION OCEAN, the relationship between Newhouse and the alien Dalusa, and that weird sex scene and stuff — that's classic Sterling, there! No matter what anybody else says... It's still good reading.

Sterling: But it's not the sort of thing that I'm working on now. Now, I'm really trying to cover all sorts of different ground -- I want to turn over every log and every rock in SFville, and I want to see what's <u>useable</u>! I want to find out what can be rescued and made into effective things, and what is really rusted and corroded beyond repair.

Shiner: It's funny. I think in some ways, Bruce and I are pursuing real similar visions here... Bruce has this idea of what he calls the Mainstream Literature of the Future — in other words, what if you could teleport back a mainstream novel from 2020 to right now, what would it look like? I think that's what Bruce is trying to write here.

Sterling: Yeah...

Shiner: Whereas, I want to write a mainstream novel — a novel that someone who reads Stephen King or Len Deighton or whatever, could pick up and find entertaining — stylistically and everything else. It would have a lot of the mainstream tropes, but would still deal with ideas on the grand scale that SF can approach them. Like, the new book explains the Mayan collapse in terms of Prigogine's Theory of Dissipative Structures, for chrissakes — that's not the kind of stuff that Stephen King deals with, or even Deighton deals with. But, hopefully, there's going to be a lot of human truth in there, that distinguishes mainstream writing from the rest. So, I'm out there in the twilight zone between genres, trying to get what I consider to be the best stuff from all the kind of books that I like to read, and put them all into one book.

Sterling: I'd like to get after what Lew said about mainstream novels of the future. In some sense that really is true... The first part of the book that I'm working on is very intimate — it's on an intimate scale, as opposed to SCHISMATRIX, where you were sometimes propelled seventy years at a jump, and you have to leave a whole society, rebuild a whole society, cities fragment, worlds fall apart —

Shiner: And Olaf Stapledon comes up and talks to you...

Sterling: ...populations surge, and you're addressed directly by the narrator, "And then, eighty years passed, and lo, it was a fruitful time..."

Instead of that sort of thing, this really is a much more intimate and character-obsessed book... It's all about living in the year 2023, and having to get up and do your job. Because that's how people <u>live</u> — it's about daily life in 2023, and some of the social problems of the period as they inflict themselves on a person who happens to be in a particular sort of situation. Something that SF often gets away from, I think... Especially the tradition of future, predictive SF has always been utopian or dystopian — it's always got to be like 1984. The future is never really real in the same sense that a novel about the contemporary milieu is real...

Shiner: Except in Philip K. Dick, who Bruce doesn't care that much for. That's the charm of Dick — that he is really writing mainstream novels set in the future.

TSFI: What would you like to be remembered for when you're gone?

Sterling: I would like to live a very <u>long</u> time...

Shiner: I would like to not cop out...

Sterling: Yeah, me too. I would like to be a very old, very dangerous, and very weird old geezer...

Shiner: Yeah, because most writers cop out sooner or later. There's a few who haven't... Nelson Algren — died in his seventies — was a cantankerous old fart right down to the fucking end. He was insulting and pissing-off interviewers, and writing ornery, upsetting fiction — the last novel he wrote was defending Hurricane Carter — the guy was right in there slugging to the very end. William S. Burroughs, a cranky old fart — he's never sold himself out that I could tell... Guys like that are the ones that I admire. I'd like to go out still swinging — I don't want to be fat and old writing FRONTERA 6, FRONTERA 7... I want every new book to completely upset my readers, so they'll say, "What the fuck is he doing now?"

Sterling: That's sort of a weird principle that you see take over a lot of writers. Because, essentially, if you're going to become a writer, you're taking your destiny in your own hand, you're telling respectability to go fuck itself, because you know you're going to be doing some time in a garret, right? So, these guys do their time in the garret, and suddenly the day comes when they're famous. The thing is, once you have earned respectability, after having turned it down, it becomes very seductive...

Shiner: It does. We've watched this with Bill Gibson... Both of us have gotten panic phone calls from Bill very late at night, saying, "Oh, my god! I'm respectable! Oh, my god! People are giving me money! Have I sold out? Am I an old fart?" I've talked with Bill for a long time about this kind of stuff, and it really does change you when all of a sudden people are talking in six and seven figures about your work. When suddenly, this stuff that you were eking out a mere existence on for so long is suddenly a million-dollar property... Suddenly, people are no longer judging you by the standards that they judged you by before. Can you get an honest evaluation of what you're doing any more? You can lose perspective -- I've seen it. I didn't really appreciate it until I sort of babysat Bill through some of it. I can understand how it really, desperately changes your life to have that much money suddenly.

Sterling: It's like the Second Album Syndrome in rock bands... You see a lot of ways of destroying yourself in rock bands, because rock eats you in ten years. Whereas Science Fiction is a much more gracious mistress, it'll keep you around until you're a drooling old dotard, and still give you lots of money. In fact, by tradition, you make a lot of money as an old science fiction writer. That's one of the ways to get lots of money —

Shiner: Just endure!

Sterling: If you live long enough, and keep publishing, your name becomes a recognizable quantity...

Shiner: And the quality's no longer an issue...

Sterling: Quality never was an issue!

Shiner: The size of the back-list becomes more important than the quality.

Sterling: Yeah, you've got thirty books, they're going to be popping up here, and popping up there...

Shiner: Issued in uniform editions, and collect big bucks, doesn't matter what shit's inside the covers...

Sterling: Well, it never has to the people who make money from printing SF -- it's always just been product...

But, to get back to the point about Rock Stars, this Second Album Syndrome -- you get some guy and his band, and they've tried to be rockers, which is a very tough gig indeed, and they do this one album which sort of crystallizes their experiences up to date, and then the second one is done in the studio. You've got 20 years to do your first album, and six months to do your second... You start to dry up, and you start writing songs about "Gosh, isn't it great to be on the road" and "Gosh, I'm sorry girl, but I'm a travelin' man." And every cliched rock song you've ever heard — "Rock will never die!" "R-O-C-K in the U.S.A." Rock songs about rock, rock songs about rock stars, rock songs about rock stars' girlfriends, rock songs about rock stars' tour buses... Like writing metafiction about writer's block.

That's the same problem with writing, and the difficulty is that you want to become a writer for a long time. And then, you get that down, and become a regular freelance writer, and the people that you talk to most of the time are your agent and your publisher — that is your business environment. And these people's attitudes subtly influence you over a long period of time, until you really do realize that hey, you're not in there to talk about your ideas — you're in there to make some product! And you start thinking things like, "Gosh, ARMOR novels are great this year! And I'm going to write me some of this 'Cyberpunk' stuff — they say that stuff's really selling..."

Shiner: Either that, or you start believing the publicity — you know, "Now I'm an established writer! Now, I'm in the club! Therefore, I am important. And therefore, what I write is important. Therefore, writing itself is important!" So, you start writing these tertiary, involved things about writers with writer's block writing novels about writers with writer's block — metafiction, and all that kind of crap. Because that's what they know now — they've become a fulltime writer. They're no longer having to go out to the shop and turn sheet metal. Instead, they're sitting alone with a typewriter, and all they've got left to look into is the mirror!

Sterling: Being a professional writer is like being in the studio -- unless you make a really longterm deliberate effort to take off your Rock Star gear, and go out and walk in the streets and actually talk to people who are people, or at least be open to something outside your field — you wither.

Shiner: It takes a continual effort — I think this is true of everybody, not just writers -- once you pass the age of 30 or so, to keep yourself open. I have all these friends who are always saying, "There hasn't been any good music since the '60s" and shit like that. It just means that they shut down after about age 30... It's too much trouble, too risky, to keep open. I think it may not be the mechanics of the business stuff that does it to you — it's simply growing old! It's very hard to keep open. You've got to kick yourself in the ass all the time to keep yourself open...

Sterling: Yeah, and eventually, you will get tired... Unless you're William Burroughs, or Nelson Algren, or something. There are a million ways to destroy yourself as a writer... There's as many ways as there are writers.

Shiner: But it doesn't have to happen... There's great music still being made — I buy new music, I read new books. People are always saying that American Contemporary Literature is dead -- bullshit! These people aren't reading what's being written! It's out there -- you just have to open yourself up to it...

This business of keeping yourself open is the single most important thing -- it's not just that there's no great music since the '60s, and no great writing, or anything like this — everybody sees the world going to hell. The older they get, the worse everything is...

But, what I think Bruce is trying to do in his book, and what I'm trying to do in mine — and maybe even Cyberpunk itself — opening yourself up to stuff that's happening now, instead of constantly looking to the past, and saying how much better things used to be, to see what's happening now that is exciting, and interesting, and new... You look at the advances in genetics, you look at this environmental stuff that they're doing at New Alchemy, and it's actual, hopeful stuff for the future!

The people who are sitting around, with this sort of "New Wave" attitude that everything's gloom-and-doom, blow ourselves up and we're all going to die anyway, so fuck it. This is the SF equivalent of the people who say that there's been no good music since the '60s — they've shut themselves down. Because there is stuff out there for the aggressive science fiction writer, for people who will keep in touch with some of the new stuff that's going on. Prigogine, and people like that — exciting stuff happening, fruitful ground for SF that's encouraging about the future! And I think that one of the things that Cyberpunk is doing, one of its positive messages, is that it's saying that there will be a future, which the New Wave was denying. We're saying, one way or another, we're going to muddle through... It may transform us drastically — in fact, probably has to — but there's going to be a future!

Sterling: Well, it's boredom with the Apocalypse... (laughter) The Apocalypse is boring! Why lie about it? Even if you knew the world was going to blow up in twenty years, it's your moral necessity to at least protest! Not to sit with folded hands, or to dress up as an elf because you can't take it — it's an act of cowardice!

Shiner: That's right -- and I believe in self-fulfilling prophecies... That if you can visualize a world where it doesn't have to happen, it won't. A lot of the reason the world is going to hell, is because they can't visualize any alternative... And if you can visualize a better world, then you can make it happen. And the duty of SF, by god, is to help us visualize this kind of stuff, and not sit around and tell us we're all fucked up and going to die! Because if that's all we can visualize, then that's what's going to happen...

Sterling: Yeah, because if we're fucked up, then SF is the last place that you'd want to hide! Because if there's any kind of profound social disturbance this snug little ghetto will be the very first to go...

SF and literature in general is a hot-house blossom. The first thing that happens in any kind of social difficulty is that they line up the intellectuals and shoot them, then burn all the books! You're not going to be able to hide from these people when they kick down your front door — you're not going to be able to hide behind your piles of Amazing SF. That is no shelter at all...

You've got to go out there, and make sure it doesn't happen in the first place. We've got amazing potential to do things — we're definitely not down for the count yet. And people who talk about that don't realize what real suffering is — they've never been to a Third World country and seen what real hopelessness looks like... I mean, the people in the developed world are just enormously empowered compared to somebody who's a squatter in Calcutta. Or someone in a refugee camp. These are people who can't read, who can't write, have no food, who have no place to stay! That is desperate poverty... In the developed world, you have access to information, you're probably literate, you have your health, you have protein — there's just a myriad of possibilities! And the only limits you put on it are your own!

****

(Many thanks to Lewis Shiner and Bruce Sterling for participating in this interview, and for reading it over afterwards to remove the "pointless gibblegabble" and errors in transcription. Also, my thanks to A.P. McQuiddy, for conducting the marathon three-hour interview, and transcribing it afterwards. — Pat Mueller)

A Note From The Conductor

interviewer's notes by A.P. McQuiddy

The date was Sunday night, 24 August 1986. After several dry runs that sputtered out, I'd finally succeeded in arranging the interview. "Interview" is probably the wrong word for what I intended to put together, though -- "verbal sparring match" was much closer to the goal I had in mind.

I mean, here were these two guys that I've known for a few years, two guys who are finally starting to get deserved recognition for their fiction, two guys who are pyrotechnic enough alone, that when you bring them together -- well, the result speaks for itself. We went into the living room of the duplex I was living in, with our Kirins and cokes, and for three hours I sat back and watched the fireworks.

The final product so perfectly capsulizes their motives and attitudes, that -- even if you've never heard of Lew Shiner or Bruce Sterling, even if you haven't read a lick of their work -- you'll get a crystal-clear picture of who they are, what they think, and where they're headed. And I find that watching where Bruce and Lew are going, watching that leading edge of SF, is very valuable and extremely rewarding. I think you will, too...

The novels that they're working on now, the ones that they talk about near the end of the interview, are as follows:

Lewis Shiner, Deserted Cities of the Heart. Just sold to Bantam Books. They'll market it in mid-1988 as a mainstream quality trade paperback, part of their New Fiction line designed to compete with Vintage and Penguin Contemporaries. "Low print-run, review-intensive," says Lew. Eventually, it will be reprinted in mass market format as SF from Bantam-Spectra.

Bruce Sterling, Islands In The Net. Sold a while back to Arbor House, and forthcoming from them in hardcover. An educated guess would put its release around late '87 or early '88.

Finally, I owe some people my thanks (God, you'd think this was a novel, or something): First, Pat Mueller, for being patient with my slow typing of the transcript, and for doing a great job printing it; Nance and Edie, for letting me borrow these two nuts on a Sunday, of all nights; and to Bruce and Lew themselves, for looking over the manuscript, streamlining their remarks, and just for putting up with me.

-- A.P. McQuiddy

The (mostly complete) Bruce Sterling Bibliodata

Novels

INVOLUTION OCEAN, 1977, HBJove
THE ARTIFICIAL KID, 1980, Harper & Row
SCHISMATRIX, 1985, Arbor House; reprinted 1986, Ace
ISLANDS IN THE NET, forthcoming, Arbor House.

Short Stories

"Swarm", F&SF, April '82; NEBULA AWARDS #18, ed. R. Silverberg (Arbor House); 1983 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF, ed. D. Wollheim (DAW); BEST SF OF THE YEAR, ed. T. Carr (Pocket Books).
"Spider Rose", F&SF, August '82.
"Spook", F&SF, April '83.
"Red Star, Winter Orbit" (with William Gibson), Omni, July '83; THIRD OMNI BOOK OF SF (Zebra), '85; BURNING CHROME (Arbor House), '86; MIRRORSHADES: THE CYBERPUNK ANTHOLOGY (Arbor House), '86.
"Cicada Queen", UNIVERSE 13, ed. T. Carr (Doubleday); YEAR'S BEST SF; FIRST ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '84.
"20 Evocations: Life In The Mechanist/Shaper Era", Interzone #7, Spring '84.
"Sunken Gardens", Omni, June '84; YEAR'S BEST SF: SECOND ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '85.
"Telliamed", F&SF, September '84.
"The Unfolding" (with John Shirley), Interzone #11, Spring '85.
"Dinner In Audoghast", IASFM, May '85; YEAR'S BEST SF: THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '86; YEAR'S BEST FANTASY STORIES #12, ed. A. Saha (DAW), '86.
"Green Days In Brunei", IASFM, October '86; YEAR'S BEST SF: THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '86.
"Mozart In Mirrorshades", Omni, September '85; MIRRORSHADES: THE CYBERPUNK ANTHOLOGY, ed. B. Sterling (Arbor House), '86.
"Storming The Cosmos" (with Rudy Rucker), IASFM, mid-December '85.
"The Compassionate, The Digital", Interzone #14, Winter '85-'86.
"The Beautiful And The Sublime", IASFM, June '86.
"Edo No Hana", Hayakawa's SF Magazine, October '86 (Japan)

Nonfiction / Critical

Bruce Sterling interview, Interzone #15, Spring '86.
Preface to Burning Chrome by William Gibson (Arbor House), '86.
Editor of Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology (Arbor House), '86.

The (as far as we know, complete) Lewis Shiner Bibliodata

Novels

FRONTERA, 1984, Baen Books; reprinted 1985, Sphere Books (British).
DESERTED CITIES OF THE HEART, forthcoming, Bantam Books.

Short Stories

"Tinker's Damn", Galileo #5, October '77.
"Black As The Night" (with Joe Lansdale), Mike Shane Mystery Magazine, September '79.
"Deep Without Pity", Mike Shayne, June '80.
"Rake-Off", Skullduggery, May '80.
"Kings Of The Afternoon", Shayol #4, Winter '80.
"Stuff Of Dreams", F&SF, April '81.
"Blood Relations", Twilight Zone Magazine, May '81; Twilight Zone Special (Night Cry #1), 1984.
"Tommy And The Talking Dog", TZ, July '82.
"Brujo", F&SF, August '82.
"Lifelike", Mike Shayne, August '82.
"The Circle", TZ, November '82; HORRORS OF HALLOWEEN, ed. Waugh, etc. (Avon), '83.
"Snow Birds", Analog, November '82.
"Premises", F&SF, December '82.
"Things That Go Quack In The Night" (with Edith Shiner), IASFM, January '83.
"Plague", IASFM, April '83.
"Nine Hard Questions About The Nature Of The Universe", F&SF, December '83.
"Man Drowning" (with Joe Lansdale), Pulpsmith, Autumn '83.
"Deserted Cities Of The Heart", Omni, February '84.
"Twilight Time", IASFM, April '84; YEAR'S BEST SF: SECOND ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '85.
"Till Human Voices Wake Us", F&SF, May '84; MERMAIDS!, ed. J. Dann and G. Dozois (Ace), '86.
"Mozart In Mirrorshades" (with Bruce Sterling), Omni, September '85; MIRRORSHADES: THE CYBERPUNK ANTHOLOGY, ed. B. Sterling (Arbor House), '86.
"The War At Home", IASFM, May '85; YEAR'S BEST SF: THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION, ed. G. Dozois (Bluejay), '86; IN THE FIELD OF FIRE, ed. J. Dann and J. Dann (Tor), forthcoming.
"Stompin' At The Savoy", Shayol #7, 1985.
"Jeff Beck", IASFM, January '86.
"Cabracan", IASFM, October '86 (Chapter 3 of CITIES).
"The Long, Dark Night of Fortunato", WILDCARDS, ed. G.R.R. Martin (Bantam), January '87.
"Six Flags Over Jesus" (with Edith Shiner), IASFM, forthcoming.
"Pennies From Hell", ACES HIGH (Wildcards #2), ed. G.R.R. Martin (Bantam), '87.
"Rebels", Omni, forthcoming (Chapter 2 of CITIES).
"Americans", yet to be sold (Chapter 1 of CITIES).
"Dancers", Night Cry, forthcoming.
"Love In Vain", JACK THE RIPPER, ed. G. Dozois and S. Casper (Tor), forthcoming.
Fortunato segment as yet untitled, JOKERS WILD (Wildcards #3), ed. G.R.R. Martin (Bantam), forthcoming.

NEWS

(continued from page 4) ●●●●●●●●●●●● Info: Rainbolt Productions ("For Fans, By Fans"), PO Box 291, Lewisville, TX 75067, (214) 436-7378.

March 13 - 15. KingKon 7. Embassy Suites, 7290 Commerce Center Dr., Colorado Springs, CO. GoH: Robert Vardeman; Fan GoH: Don C. Thompson; TM: Somtow Sucharitkul. Memberships $15 to 1/1, $17 through Feb., $20 at the door. Info: PO Box 16597, Colorado Springs, CO 80935, (303) 520-1241.

March 20 - 22. Houston Fantasy Fair. Houston Marriott Astrodome, 2100 S. Braewood. Memberships $20 through 3/1, $25 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

March 26 - 29. Norwescon's Alternacon. SeaTac Hyatt Hotel, Seattle, WA. Northwest Regional Science Fiction Convention. GoH: Orson Scott Card; Art GoH: Dan Reeder; Fan GoHs: Marty & Robbie Cantor; TM: David Hartwell. Memberships $25 to 3/1, $30 at the door. ($3 off for NWSFS members.) Info: PO Box 24207, Seattle, WA 98124 (please make checks payable to "Norwescon's ATC").

March 28 - 30. CoastCon X. Biloxi Coliseum and Convention Center. Guests include L. Sprague de Camp, Catherine de Camp, Real Musgrave, Dave Dorman, and "Surprise Designer from Iron Crown Ent." This year's Con will also include continuous movies, a costume contest, dance and NSTL displays plus much, much more. Memberships $15 to 1/1, $20 at the door. Info: PO Box 1423, Biloxi, MS 39533.

April 2 - 5. AggieCon 18.. Memorial Student Center, College Station, Texas. GoH: Ben Bova; Artist GoH: Rowena Morrill; Media Guest: Kerry O'Quinn; TM: Steven Gould. Other guests include Howard Waldrop, Lewis Shiner, and Ed Bryant. Events will include a live Lovecraftian quest, dancing, a SFWA Regional Meeting, a create-a-movie panel series, a guest roast, game shows, a masquerade ball and much more silliness in addition to the traditional panels, readings,

art show, auction, movies, videos and banquet. AggieCon is the largest annual science fiction convention in the Southwest; expected attendance is 2,500. Full-con passes are $10 until 3/1, and $13 thereafter. Passes will be available at Ticketron outlets until March 1. Supporting memberships are $3 and SFWA members get in free. Info: AggieCon 18; Box J-1, Memorial Student Center, College Station, TX 77844.

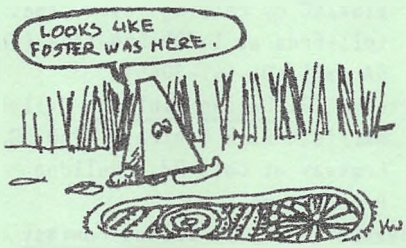
April 3 - 5. Corflu IV. "Worlds of Corflu." Quality Inn Riverview, Covington KY (across the Ohio River from Cincinnati). Special Guests: Leah Zeldes Smith, Gary Mattingly, and Joe Wesson; TM: Taral. Memberships $25.25 until 12/31/86; supporting membership $5.25. (Please make checks payable to "Bill Bowers", not "Corflu"...) Info: Bill Bowers, 1874 Sunset Ave., Apt. 56, Cincinnati, OH 45238 (note COA).

April 11. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

April 17 - 19. Minicon 22. Radisson South Hotel, Bloomington, MN. GoH: David Brin; Fan GoH: Fred Haskell; Musician GoH: Jerry Stearns; Artist GoH: Erin McKee; TM: Robert Bloch. Memberships $13 to 3/22; $25 at the door. Supporting membershp $5; children's memberships $6. Info: PO Box 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408 (note COA).

April 17 - 19. Fen Faire. Sheraton New Orleans Hotel and Towers, New Orleans, LA. GoH: Anne McCaffrey; Artist GoH: Frank Kelly Freas; TM: C.J. Cherryh. Special event: Kidcon I, a complete convention (dealers room, art show, masquerade, panels, film program) for children under 12. Memberships $20 to 3/1, $25 at the door; supporting membership $5. Info: PO Box 740187, New Orleans, LA 70174.

April 24 - 26. 4-Play & Beyond. Slash/Con. Safari Hotel, Scottsdale, AZ. "This is the craziest, sleaziest, sexiest con of the year featuring any and all Fandoms ... all in the spirit of the Houston Idicons." You must be 18 years or older to attend this convention. Pre-registration only; no at-the-door memberships. $20 to 2/15, $25 afterwards. Info: PO Box 5189, Glendale, AZ 85312.



May 1 - 3. AmigoCon 2. Holiday Inn-Sunland Park, El Paso, TX. GoH: Stephen R. Donaldson; Artist GoH: Real Musgrave. Memberships are $12 until 4/15, and $15 at the door; one-day memberships are $7.50. Info: El Paso Science Fiction and Fantasy Alliance, PO Box 3177, El Paso, TX 79923.

May 1 - 3. RoboCon. Houston, TX (location TBA). "All New! From the creator of DOCTORCON. See all of your favorite robots from the movies, television, and Japanese animation." Info: PO Box 540982, Houston, TX 77254-0982.

May 1 - 3. Newfangled Contraption. Southfield (MI) Hilton. Pro GoH: George R.R. Martin. Fan GoH: Mike Glicksohn. Fish & Ships Players musical. Memberships $12 until 4/15, $15 at the door. Dealers tables $15 each. Send checks or write for information to Contraption, PO Box 2285, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

May 9. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

May 15 - 17. KeyCon '87. The Delta Winnipeg, 288 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba. GoH: Keith Laumer; Honored Guest: Barry Longyear; Art Guest: Ken Macklin; Fan Guest: Mike Glicksohn. Memberships $18 to 4/26, $24 at the door. Info: PO Box 3178, Winnipeg, MB CANADA R3C 4E6.

May 22 - 25. BayCon '87. The San Francisco Bay Area Regional Science Fiction & Fantasy Convention. San Jose Red Lion Inn. GoH: Barry Longyear; Fan GoH: Mike Glyer; TM: Marta Randall. Artist Guest TBA. Memberships $25 to 1/31, $25 to 4/30, $35 at the door. One-day memberships $15, available at the door only. Info: PO Box 70393, Sunnyvale, CA 94086.

June 5 - 7. Dallas Fantasy Fair. Hyatt Regency, 300 Reunion at I- 35, Dallas. Memberships $20 through 5/15, $25 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

June 27 - 28. Readercon. ("The sercon without shame!") Holiday Inn of Brookline (MA). Attending membership $10 to 6/5, $15 at the door; supporting $5. Info: P.O. Box 6138, Boston, MA 02209.

July 3 - 5. Austin Fantasy Fair. Austin Marriott, 6121 I-35 at U.S. 290, Austin. Memberships $15 through June 15, $20 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

July 18. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

July 31 - August 2. WeaponsCon. Holiday Inn, Atlanta, GA. GoH: L. Neil Smith; MC: John Maddox Roberts; Special Guests: Jerry & Sharon Ahern; Artist Guest: Dan Barry. "You must wear a weapon at this con at all times, even if only a paper dagger." Membership $15 through 7/11, $20 afterwards. Banquet $15. Info: Irv Koch, c/o 835 Chattanooga Bank Bldg., Chattanooga, TN 37402; (404) 767-7360 (Atlanta #).

August 7 - 9. Houston Fantasy Fair. Houston Marriott Astrodome. Memberships $20 through 7/15, $25 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

August 15. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

August 27 - September 1. ConSpiracy '87. 45th World Science Fiction Convention. Brighton, UK. GoH: Doris Lessing, Alfred Bester,

NEWS

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky; Artist GoH: Jim Burns; Fan GoHs: Joyce and Ken Slater; Special Fan Guest: Dave Langford; TM: Brian Aldiss; Film GoH: Ray Harryhausen. Membership rates $50 attending, $15 supporting, $25 child, to at least the end of December, 1986. U.S. Agents: Bill & Mary Burns, 23 Kensington Court, Hempstead, NY 11550 (East); Bryan Barrett, PO Box 6202, Hayward, CA 94540 (West).

September 3 - 7. CactusCon. 1987 NASFiC. Hyatt Regency, Phoenix, AZ. GoH: Hal Clement; Fan GoH: Marjii Ellers. Memberships $35 through 12/31/86. Info: PO Box 27201, Tempe, AZ 85282, (602) 968-5673.

September 12. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

September 18 - 20. San Antonio Fantasy Fair. location TBA. Memberships $15 through 9/1, $20 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

October 2 - 4. DragonCon '87. Lanier Plaza and Convention Center, Atlanta, GA. "The Southeast Fantasy and Gaming Convention." Guests: Gary Gygax, Gaming; Richard Garriott ("Lord British"), Computers; Robert Asprin and Lynn Abbey, Fantasy; Brian Herbert, SF. Very Special Guest: Michael Moorcock. Other guests: Sharon Webb, Ralph Roberts, Tom Dietz. MC: Brad Strickland. Fan Memberships $20 through 4/15, $25 through 9/15; Gaming Memberships $25 through 4/15, $30 through 9/15 (includes four tournament entries). Info: PO Box 148, Clarkston, GA 30021; VISA/MC by calling Tevex, Inc. toll-free at 1-800-554-1162 (in GA call 404-441-3045).

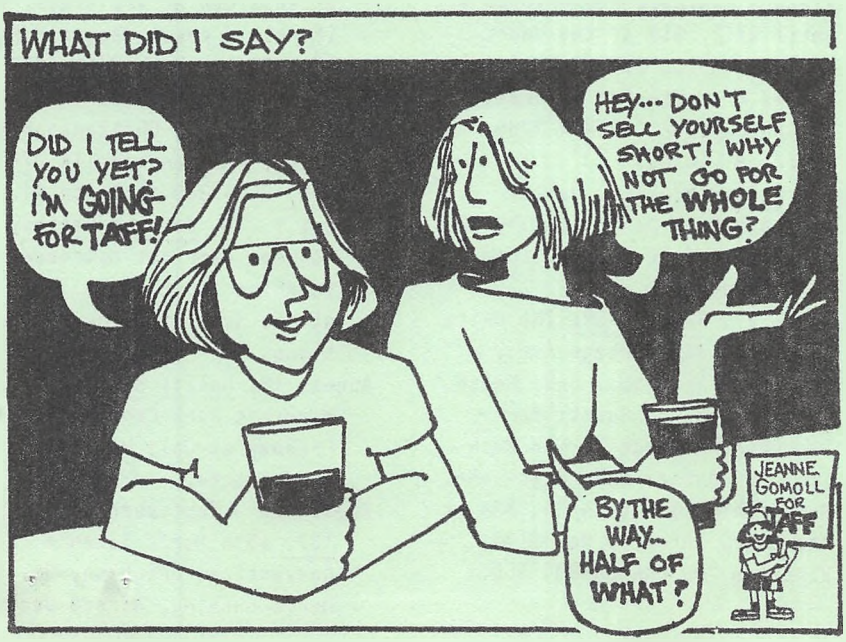
October 17. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

November 13 - 15. Dallas Fantasy Fair. location TBA. Memberships $20 through 11/1, $25 at the door. *Bulldog Productions.

December 12. Dallas Minicon. Dallas Marriott Park Central, 7750 LBJ Freeway at Coit Rd. *Bulldog Productions.

•••••••• 1988 CONVENTIONS ••••••••••

September 1 - 5, 1988. Nolacon II. The 46th World Science Fiction Convention. New Orleans, LA. GoH: Donald A. Wollheim; Fan GoH: Roger Sims; TM: Mike Resnick. Attending membership: $40 to 12/31/86, $50 to 6/30/87, $60 to 12/31, $70 to 7/14 (Bastille Day). Supporting memberships $30. Info: PO Box 8010, New Orleans, LA 70182.



•••••••• 1989 CONVENTIONS ••••••••••

August 31 - September 4, 1989. Noreascon III. The 47th World Science Fiction Convention. Sheraton-Boston Hotel/Hynes Convention Center, Boston MA. Membership rates $40 to 2/15, $50 to 9/7/87. Supporting memberships $20 always. Info: PO Box 46, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139.

* The address for all the above Dallas Fantasy Fairs, Houston Fantasy Fairs, San Antonio Fantasy Fairs, Austin Fantasy Fairs, and Dallas Minicons is: Bulldog Productions (Larry Lankford), P.O. Box 820488, Dallas, TX 75382, (214) 349-3367.

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IMPORTANT NOTE

The January meeting of the Fandom Association of Central Texas will be held at 1:00 p.m. on January 11, 1987, at the Austin History Center. A complete listing of all scheduled FACT meetings will appear in the next issue.