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# SGLODION

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SGLODION 2 from Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, England, RG1 5AU.

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## ME AND WHITLEY AND THE CONTINUUM

This is a special low-frivolity issue of Sglodion. Instead of fighting to maintain my status as fandom's number-one hate figure (according to the statistics of "S.V.O'Jay" in Arrows of Desire 4), I've been poking around in arcane places, thanks to the continuing and very silly repercussions of my 1979 UFO spoof. I must confess to having re-entered the eldritch regions of UFO controversy with tongue firmly in cheek, and with my tones of outraged dignity concealing a justified urge to make mischief (see Part 2). This did not last.

In the course of pulling legs, I stumbled on something which has made me really angry and should do the same for anyone in the SF, literary or scientific communities. Consider this:

It's a truism of the SF world that the bloody awful media will invariably assume us all to be spaced-out believers in little green men from flying saucers, har har har. (Not as bad as the predicament of those caught playing fantasy games, which in the tabloids equates to diabolism, human sacrifice, disrespect for the Queen Mother, etc.). Naturally, serious UFO researchers suffer the same problem with huge luminescent knobs on, even if they favour unsensational theories of strange mental states.

The difference is that when SF fans are invited by journalists to converse about little green men, and make the traditional responses of "Rubbish!" and "Boliocks!", the subsequent distorted write-up (if any) does not normally lead to their being sued for vast sums by other fans who claim to have been damaged by this slur on the scientific credibility of their passionate belief that Aliens Are Indeed Amongst Us (And What's More There Are Three In A Deep Freeze In Virginia).

Yes, a lawsuit is indeed under way, aimed at a poverty-stricken British author/ufologist who has attacked just this cretinous theory. I'll return to the case and its victim Jenny Randles later, and warn you that I'll be passing round the hat. First comes the tale of how I wandered into all this (written for The New York Review of SF and Australian SF Review).

### Part 1: Muddying the Waters

Towards the end of 1989 I heard the rumours. In 1990, confirmation came in the form of a big, fat and much-hyped hardback. Yes: I, humble and obscure

Langford, had been selected from millions of other SF authors as an influence on that god amongst men, Whitley Strieber. It is a proud and lonely thing....

It is time for a flashback to 1978.

The original daft suggestion came from Paul Barnett, now better known as the author John Grant but then my editor at David & Charles Ltd, and struggling to break free of this publisher's relentless specialization in trains and canals. Constantly editing things called 20<sup>1</sup> Interesting Stretches of Canal Visible from Norfolk Railway Lines can make you yearn for new horizons.

His brief to me was: write a spoof book about a nineteenth-century UFO encounter. "Examine" the "evidence" as a physicist would. Lambast modern ufology for its lack of scientific rigour. Make the Victorian UFO sufficiently over the top that no close reader could believe it. What larks, what larks!

More than one sceptic has been tempted in this way to exert the happy irresponsibility of the SF writer, only to find the resulting satire embedded (like a fly in ointment) in the pseudoscience which was supposed to be satirized....

For the antique UFO report, Paul lent me a period style-book in the form of Thackeray's Adventures of Philip. My wife searched her family tree for an impeccably documented ancestor: William Robert Loosley, undertaker and craftsman of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, and provider of posh furniture to Disraeli. Unearthed from the dusty recesses of my typewriter, Loosley's first-person narrative (in tone oddly reminiscent of Thackeray, with a random larding of Biblical phrases) had, it seemed, been miraculously preserved for more than a century, just handily for publication in 1979.

A surrounding commentary by that little-known savant David Langford proved quite inconclusively that during his carefully recorded encounter in the Buckinghamshire woods, Loosley was exposed to advanced knowledge of nuclear physics, quantum mechanics, general relativity, black holes, and indeed everything else I could remember from an Oxford physics course.

No, this isn't a plug for the book, long out of print despite its snappy title of An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World, 1871 (David & Charles, 1979; St Martins Press, 1980). I come to bury it, not to praise it, and as usual my publishers had the same idea. There was an abrupt change



of editors, and the new chap combined integrity with economy by omitting two key elements of the original plan--simulated pages from "Loosley's manuscript", and a non-zero publicity budget. Instead he wondered whether the book could make its own way as a jolly good SF novel. In the face of this rampant indecision about how and whether to promote it, my squib passed away quietly to that remainder shelf from whence no traveller returns.

Nevertheless, An Account had made its mark. The grottier sort of newspapers and magazines ran Amazing UFO Proof stories, their devotion to investigative journalism being amply shown by the fact that not one asked the obvious question, "How about giving us a look at this 108-year-old manuscript, then?" Enshrined in many a footnote, plus two pages of the doubtless deeply scholarly The World's Greatest UFO Mysteries<sup>1</sup>, Loosley has passed into history--at least, that peculiar alternative history beloved of so many ufologists<sup>2</sup>. My finest hour came when I was attacked for the excessive caution and scepticism of my own commentary on Loosley's narrative.

Later I found that I wasn't the only SF writer to have gleefully muddied the waters of research. John Sladek, as "James Vogh", had gone to the extent of inventing the lost 13th sign of the zodiac. His books on the sign Arachne, he told me, "were conceived as jokes, but very quickly turned into moneymaking enterprises. Only they didn't make a lot of money, either. So finally they turn out to have been a gigantic waste of time." I probably picked a slightly better market. Astrology already has its fact-proof theories and doesn't require more, while ufology seems prepared to assimilate any odd incident whatever, declaring it to be further conclusive confirmation of something or other.

(And as we all know, an explained or exploded incident never attracts the same attention as the original enigma. Even the Skeptical Inquirer displayed no interest in an offer to confess my own folly in their pages --though they did condescend to report the revelation when, instead, I published it as an essay in New Scientist<sup>3</sup>.)

The moral seemed to be that SF authors writing with tongue in cheek should stick with SF. In offtrail phenomena as in bodice-ripping romance, the book market sniffs at jokesters but rewards sincerity, even misguided, self-deluding and totally barmy sincerity. (I do not, at this juncture, mention Whitley Strieber and Communion.) It felt vaguely depressing to have contributed another snippet of disinformation to the already over-large folklore, without even the compensation of getting rich. I ended my first confession with apologies to all, most especially my bank manager. Now, the sequel.

Personally I still incline to the opinion that any true first contact with alien thingies will be as clear and unequivocal as the message beamed Earthwards in my and John Grant's disaster novel

Earthdoom: "YOU EARTHLING SCUM ARE THE DREGS OF THE UNIVERSE. WE COME TO ANNIHILATE YOU PAINFULLY AND RAPE YOUR PLANET." However, I do admit that there are ufologists of integrity... which according to me means a readiness to entertain the wild supposition that UFO does not necessarily stand for Alien Space Vehicle Piloted By Little Putty Men With Enormous Eyes.

One such researcher, Jenny Randles, contacted Paul Barnett with the glad news that the story of An Account had been incorporated--without any visible criticism of its content--into the latest work by no less than Whitley Strieber.

(Later, still rocking with laughter, she passed this on to the even more noted ufologist Jacques Vallee, who is supposed to have slowly said: "Oh. God. You mean that An Account's a spoof, then?")

For the first time in my life I became frantic to get hold of a book by Strieber. Luckily, before I could do anything terminally rash such as part with money, his British publishers sent me a copy of Majestic (Macdonald, London; 1990; £12.95 hc; 318pp). This I skimmed avidly until I found the good bit, which is on pages 46 and 47.

In what some might call a dramatic break with his former practice, Strieber presents this as a novel, though one very closely based on truth. This allows him to tinker a little with his source material, and indeed to omit source references which might be checked. Although his two good pages are a direct condensation from An Account, there's no mention of the book itself, or of its being copyrighted in my name. Perhaps being a major bestseller puts you above things like literary ethics.

Again, because Strieber is going on about the purported UFO crash in New Mexico in 1947<sup>4</sup>, he carefully backdates the discovery of William Robert Loosley's fabulous manuscript from the 1970s to 1941. (The 1979 edition of An Account says that it was found "only a few years ago". which by no stretch of the imagination includes 1941. Internal evidence is arranged to indicate a date later than 1975. Of course it had been, as it were, found in 1978.)

Even in this book's brief summary, Strieber's keen critical intelligence can be shown by his rendering of a rather carefully phrased comment about this hard-to-locate MS:

"I can only declare that the manuscript has so far withstood every test of authenticity to which it has been subjected." (An Account, 1979.)

"The ms. has been authenticated by British antiquarians." (Majestic, 1989.)

Exercise for the beginning student: which of these sentences admits the possibility that the number of "tests of authenticity" might have been less than one?

Exercise for the advanced student: how closely based on "true incident" can be a book whose reconstruction of 1947 US Intelligence documents incorporates a text which I didn't draft until



1978? Come to think of it, why wasn't the Loosley story publicly expunged from UFO legend after the appearance of my 1988 New Scientist article?

Exercise for a weary reviewer: do I really have to struggle on to page 318 and its plea for me to rush in a letter telling Strieber about all the occasions on which I've been abducted and/or offered little yellow flowers by passing aliens?

Exercise for you all: if someone reproduces a story and believes it to be factual, does he perhaps have a responsibility not to tamper with the facts? Conversely, if someone does so while believing it to be fiction, might the word "plagiarism" not conceivably apply?<sup>5</sup>

I suppose that I should at least be cheered by the prospect of reaching, for the very first time, a readership numbered in the millions. Surely this is every pure-souled author's dream. Before long I will learn not to chafe at anonymity, and to stop making the obsessive calculations which begin: "two pages out of 318, that's... that's... I wonder how much 0.63% of Whitley Strieber's royalties would be?" [23/1/90]

#### Notes

1. Nigel Blundell and Roger Boar: Octopus, London, 1983.

2. It still goes on. For example, the Plymouth Western Evening Herald for 30 January 1990 carried a piece by the "mystic" Marilyn Preston, which links the flattening of grass by Loosley's mother-ship with the recently famous phenomenon of "crop circles". Tra la.

3. 26 May 1988. No need to look it up; the important bits are incorporated into the above.

4. You have to be a pretty hard-line ufologist to put much credit in an incident chiefly attested to by documents--the MJ-12 or "Majestic-12" records of a supposed US government investigation--which appear to be such embarrassingly bad forgeries. See for example Philip J. Klass's "New Evidence of MJ-12 Hoax" in Skeptical Inquirer (Winter 1990), the latest in a sporadic series about these dubious papers. Now you know where Strieber got his title.

5. The extremely general and hypothetical phrasing of this paragraph has no connection with a certain author's alleged fondness for lawsuits. Well, not much.

These notes' mentions of the Octopus book and MJ-12 turned out to be prophetic, as will emerge.

#### Part 2: Letter to Putnam (USA) and Macdonald

Dear Sir or Madam,

Majestic by Whitley Strieber

Looking into this novel recently published by you, I find that two pages are devoted to a detailed condensation of my book An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World, 1871, published by David & Charles (UK) in 1979 and St Martin's Press (USA) in 1980.

This is also a work of fiction, though presented tongue in cheek as an account of a Victorian UFO.

It is entirely my own work and is copyrighted in my name. (Its fictional nature is a matter of public record, by the way--see for example "Myths in the making" in New Scientist for 26 May 1988, to which the attention of American UFO researchers was called by an abstract in the Fall 1988 Skeptical Inquirer.)

Pages 46 and 47 of Majestic are chiefly occupied by what amounts to a brief adaptation in Reader's Digest fashion of the central narrative in my book, the difference being that Reader's Digest would routinely ask permission and pay a substantial fee. In this case, no permission was asked nor fee offered.

At the very least, normal professional courtesy surely requires that future editions of Majestic should carry an appropriate credit for the use of my original creation, as the present one does for a few lines of Rilke. (Was a permission fee paid for this?) Using this existing acknowledgement as a guide, I would suggest something along the following lines:

The condensation from An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World, 1871, as by William Robert Loosley, edited by David Langford, appears by permission of the copyright holder. Original version copyright (c) 1979 by David Langford.

Since Majestic purports to be firmly "based on fact", I don't ask that such an acknowledgement should stress the fictional nature of An Account, or the backdating of the "Victorian" narrative's supposed discovery from the 1970s to 1941 in order to make it fit Mr Strieber's plot.

It is possible that I might write at greater length about the repercussions of An Account, and with this in mind I also ask formal permission to reprint in its entirety the version of my story which begins on the third line of page 46 of Majestic (British edition) and extends through most of page 47. Under the circumstances, I do not think that such permission can reasonably be refused.

I look forward to your reply. [15/2/90]

#### Part 3: Secrets of UFO Research

Chris Priest suggested the knife-twisting request for reprint permission, as a result of which I can now confirm that Whitley Strieber and his US publishers will not grant me permission to quote the version of my original story which he and they used without permission from me. One can lie awake at night meditating on the sublime beauty of this.

Paul Barnett chimed in with a gratifyingly fiery "To whom it may concern" letter which it's perhaps as well that I didn't spread around. "I am shocked that another novelist, Whitley Strieber, should have gutted the plot of David Langford's novel and pretended that it was his own.... I hope that Mr Strieber has sufficient integrity to issue, at the very least, a public apology." No, Paul, Mr Strieber has no intention of doing any such thing.

Jenny Randles comes in here because I nervously



sent her the Part 1 article, in case she objected to my dropping her name. She didn't, but suggested some rephrasing to avoid the original implication that dear old Whitley had "swallowed the spoof hook, line and sinker". This would have suggested that he was a gullible and incompetent researcher, and might thus have been an actionable remark.

Oh, surely not, I thought. I then heard about the great Strieber lawsuit threat. Apparently, even if you have written the book whose account of an "abduction experience" first inspired WS to remember being abducted by anally fixated aliens (Science and the UFOs by Jenny Randles and Peter Warrington), and even if this massively profitable inspiration or influence is acknowledged by Strieber (see Communion) and his biographer (see Report on Communion by Ed Conroy), it is still most unwise to make jokes about it all on the radio. Jenny was required to publish and broadcast an apology, but escaped an actual libel suit because, in Strieber's compassionate words, "she has no money."

At this point I had a few bad nights myself. After all, although I might have dull truth on my side, WS had a very expensive firm of Mayfair lawyers. For example: could I, if it came to the crunch, prove that I'd made up the story? In 1984, when Private Eye was carrying correspondence on An Account and how it had been ripped off by Nigel Blundell for his UFO compilations, Paul Barnett had written in to observe that although I might have supposed myself to be inventing the tale, he personally believed that Langford was the mere channel for alien intelligences who wished the facts to be known. (He also accused me of naughty indiscretions with one of his female pseudonyms... but I digress.)

A month after I'd written to Macdonald (UK) and Putnam (USA), responses started to arrive. The faceless manipulators here proved to be old acquaintances, Peter Lavery and Nick Webb, who wrote in friendly terms and promised a credit to me in the British paperback. They also enclosed a faxed copy of Whitley Strieber's non-apology to Putnam, which explained much and had me rolling around in merriment.

It turns out that Whitley Strieber, the most famous UFO pundit in the known universe, actually does his research in such quick-buck compilations as The World's Strangest Mysteries (Octopus UK and Gallery USA, 1987). This contains the exact text and typography of "my" recounted story in Nigel Blundell's and Roger Boar's The World's Greatest UFO Mysteries (Octopus, 1983); I seem to remember from Private Eye that Blundell was not above recycling his own as well as others' material.

Strieber also explains that he wrote to Octopus, not of course bothering to ask permission since as a Victorian story this was antique and out of copyright, but merely to check whether the tale could have been available in 1947 and usable for his book. (The Octopus text mentions the date 1871 and

begins: "For nearly 100 years, the secret of what undertaker William Robert Loosley saw in an English wood remained locked away in his desk drawer." Add "nearly 100 years" to 1871, and...well, at the least you get a non-antique date on which the MS was first published and, one might infer, copy-righted.) Receiving no reply, he simply went ahead regardless. Ho hum.

It would be asking too much of any researcher to suggest that he might have tried looking up the person whom Blundell/Boar called "science fiction expert David Langford ... [who] later wrote a book about it"--in, say, the 1986 Twentieth Century SF Writers, which gives my and my agents' addresses.

So. Farewell then, Whitley Strieber. I retire with a chuckle slightly soured by the final, icily legalistic letter from Putnam/Berkley. I'd have been content with the offered credit in future editions plus a nice letter of apology. I'd have been delighted with this plus a nominal \$100 permission fee. But any such further gesture would, it seems, be an Admission of Liability, and they're not risking that. Bloody lawyers.

Of course, although they don't know it, Strieber and Putnam/Berkley are (thanks to my lack of money and retention of a sense of humour) quite safe from any stupid and frivolous transatlantic lawsuit. Unfortunately this isn't true for Jenny Randles.

#### Part 4: MJ-Balls!

The "MJ-12 debate" is the most murky and contentious issue in current ufology. Unravelling it is a bit like coming late into a Swedish fan feud, and very nearly as soporific. The idea is that there are all these amazing leaked secret papers which confirm that an alien space vehicle crashed in New Mexico back in 1947, thus adding to other and more plausible evidence that something funny did occur.

To the huge annoyance of what you and I would call the non-loony researchers, ufology is plagued by people with an enormous will to believe and a tendency towards paralogical thinking. Some sightings cannot easily be explained away; therefore they must have been extraterrestrial. Something funny apparently crashed in 1947 and there were signs of a US government cover-up; therefore it must have been an alien spacecraft. (What about an early US failure to adapt German rocket technology? That would have been simultaneously embarrassing enough to be covered up and--unlike a crashed UFO containing little green bodies--unexciting enough to stay covered up through umpteen subsequent US administrations.)

Most British ufologists prefer theories of "atmospheric lights and strange psychological states". But lots of Americans, their numbers swelled by Strieber's vast influence, cling to the "extraterrestrial hypothesis". Support for this comes from the "MJ-12" papers which have been mysteriously appearing here and there, and which supposedly detail the doings of an utterly secret US governmental committee called "Majestic 12"



which concerned itself with fun things like autopsies on little green bodies.

These xeroxed marvels seem deeply shoddy. One is marked TOP SECRET RESTRICTED, which even I can spot as an unlikely and never-used combination of the highest and lowest classifications. Another, dated 1947, was typed on a machine that didn't exist in that year, and has President Truman's signature--detectably photocopied from a particular "real" autograph accessible to the public.

Fortunately I don't need to plunge into the vast morass of theorizing about where these papers came from, and why. (Practical joke? Fanatics piously manufacturing evidence for what they devoutly believe true? A straight money-making scheme? The peculiar distribution methods have even led to theories of official disinformation, with British ufologists being offered "secret documents" by mysterious "ex-Army" or "Intelligence" people.) Can we just agree that, offhand, most of us are likely to greet the resulting hodge-podge of flying saucers and global conspiracy theories with rousing cries of "Rubbish!" and "Bollocks!"?

One of the key discoveries made by the MJ-12 committee, incidentally, is supposed to have been that aliens just love strawberry ice cream. It is amazing what autopsies can reveal.

Visiting the USA in 1987, Jenny Randles was boggled by the level of lunacy attained there. Incredible dossiers were in circulation--I particularly admired one about how the US government had done a deal with the alien hordes, agreeing a formal quota for the number of people to be abducted by UFOs in each following year. As a natural result, the credibility of serious UFO research over there is at an all-time low.

The rest is soon told. Stanton Friedman, the chief US apostle of MJ-12, was scheduled last year for a UFO revivalist meeting in Manchester. Jenny (who happens to live in Stockport) at once told the Manchester Evening News what she thought of all this, with particular reference to the US insanity and the smearing of more sensible researchers.

This was dismally written up as a story beginning: "A space invader war has broken out between UFO watchers in Greater Manchester. / A meeting featuring an American expert on the subject of 'crashed UFOs' was condemned today as 'about as factual as a Steven Spielberg movie'." And so on. In his eagerness to jazz up the story with the idea of a bitter feud, the wretched reporter phrased many general remarks about daft US excesses so that they could be taken as personal comments on Friedman and his cronies. This--despite Jenny's immediate complaint to the newspaper--is the essential basis for the lawsuit.

It is claimed that, as a result of this wounding criticism in one local newspaper, Stanton Friedman has suffered dreadful damage to his valued reputation as a scientist. I add that the only national newspaper coverage he received on this British visit was a big splash in that guaranteed enhancer

of scientific reputations, the Sunday Sport.

But Friedman is not suing the Sunday Sport. He isn't suing the MUFON UFO Journal, an American newsletter which in January this year published a blistering attack on his lack of interest in "reporting his alleged research accurately, honestly and objectively" (yes, many Americans are on the side of the angels too). He isn't suing the reporter who actually hacked out the offending story. He isn't even asking its publisher the Manchester Evening News for much--a paltry £500. His wrath is reserved for Jenny, who (if I may reach for my onion) has only a tiny income from writing, supports two disabled parents, and is being sued for £10,000.

A writ was also served on BUFORA, the British UFO Research Association, on the ground that it's considered responsible for evil J.Randles, who is a member. This is as though, when the L.Ron Hubbard publicists were supposedly thinking of suing me for aggravated and disrespectful reviews, they had extended the curse to the BSFA, the SF Foundation, the Society of Authors, and the Eastercon.

It would undoubtedly be libellous for me to so much as suggest that this choice of victims and amounts sued for could be interpreted as malicious legal harassment--an opportunistic attempt to "get" the Brits who dispute the ludicrous MJ-12 theology. I suggest no such thing, but I note that MJ-12 proponents have been heard to gloat about this being "the Scopes trial of ufology".

(Not, surely, the happiest of analogies from their viewpoint. In the 1925 Scopes trial, those who used the law to silence their opponents--who in that case were teachers of Darwinian evolution--ended up looking very silly indeed.)

As a lapsed scientist, I'm appalled that vigorous criticism of what is supposed to be a scientific theory--please excuse my passing giggle--should lead to court action. When the cold fusion affair got acrimonious, anyone who disputed the experimental results could logically have been sued by Pons and Fleischmann for impugning their scientific competence and/or integrity. But science isn't done that way. Friedman, who to my utter astonishment turns out to be a Fellow of the British Interplanetary Society, is not behaving like the scientist he so loudly claims to be.

(I haven't been able to verify a rumour from the USA that Friedman and/or his colleagues have been dropping hints to other ufologists critical of their work, warning that further lawsuits might well follow if people persist in their dissent from the One True View.)

As an author and SF fan who has talked to the Press and regretted it, I'm dismayed that anyone can be sued for vast sums on the basis of a newspaper's creative distortions. (I'm also very glad that the MJ-12 story didn't come to my attention while I was publishing shit-hot gossip in Ansible.) In fact, Paul Barnett and I became so angry that we foolishly committed ourselves to organizing a



defence fund. Seriously. Pay attention, now.

This awesome movement is called (in memory of Private Eye's famous libel funds) MJ-Balls.

#### 5: The Boring Old Sales Pitch

You can imagine all the rest. Yes, it's another bloody fund-raising exercise. An author who is trying to do sensible research in a very mucky area of knowledge is likely to be financially wiped out unless something is done. (The case may cost thousands to fight. Legal aid is not available in actions for alleged defamation.)

If you sympathize, do help by sending something, even if only a couple of quid. Publicity for the fund is also needed. If you are a known author, scientist or pundit, and are willing to be listed as a supporter of the defence committee, that too might come in handy. Authors whose lofts are insulated with huge piles of remainders are urged to donate a signed few for sale through a glittering mail-order list not long to be denied you. Money, ideas, offers of help, and indeed anything else can be sent to me or Paul Barnett, 17 Polsloe Road, Exeter, Devon, EX1 2HL.

Donations should be made payable to MJ-Balls.

If any money remains when all the legal dust has settled, you have our promise that it will go to a Very Worthy Cause. We hope to produce an occasional newsletter recording progress and listing the roll-call of the virtuous.

Keep watching the skies!

#### Outraged Letters

ABIGAIL FROST: "I have decided that you are woefully under-educated and shall in future be setting you TESTS from time to time. This week it's Cultural Studies. You have 30 minutes to complete the question. Write on both sides of the paper simultaneously. Below is an extract from a publisher's catalogue (RKP. actually). Read the extract carefully:

"Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration. (Wayne Koestenbaum, Yale University.) Wayne Koestenbaum's startling interpretation of literary collaboration focuses on homosexual desire: men write together, he argues, in order either to express or to evade homosexual feelings. Their writing becomes a textual intercourse. Double Talk, with these controversial observations, offers a bold new understanding of collaborative literature. In recovering the sexual impulses behind Studies in Hysteria and Sexual Inversion, Koestenbaum shows, among other things, how psychoanalysis was erected out of Freud's urge to bond with other men. Drawing on the work of feminist critics, Koestenbaum connects male collaboration and the exchange of women within patriarchy; he peers into both medical texts and novels, disturbing our ready acceptance

of the co-authored work. His technique gives us a surprising view of The Lyrical Ballads and a brilliant unveiling of The Wasteland [sic]. (September 1989.)

"Comment on this extract, with particular reference to the implications for (a) the literary practice of David Langford, or (b) the fact that Prof. Koestenbaum wrote this book all by himself. Advanced students might like to comment on the fact that this is the only book listed in the entire catalogue without a paragraph headed 'Readership'.

"Empathy section. Discuss the sentence beginning 'Drawing on the work...' from the point of view of: Dorothy Wordsworth; Vivien Eliot; Mary Pound or Olga Rudge; Frau Freud; Jane Stableford or Clare Coney or Mrs Paul Barnett; Hazel Langford." [95 Wilmot St, London, E2 0BP: 8/89]

Why do I feel this urge to change the subject and speak of Greg Benford and David Brin, or Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes? Mr Barnett comments: "It does cast a whole new light on that poem of Coleridge's subtitled 'After intercourse with the Wordsworths'.... I wonder if it's too late to put the RKP quote on the title page of Guts?"

PETE LYON struggles to elevate the tone: "Many thanks for the receipt of your esteemed organ. Coincidence or fate, I know not--but have only just finished reading an article on the size of your brother's dick. (NME 8-7-89, if you must know). Reputed to be long, tacky and pitted--like unto your Hugos." [9 Church Ave, Leeds, LS6 4JX: 7/89]

PAUL J. MCAULEY: "I met Lew Shiner recently, well-known American ex-c\*b\*r\*u\*k exponent who like Bruce Sterling now goes around telling everyone who asks that the Movement is 'dead as a nail'. He bemusedly reported an encounter at the Leeds academic conference on the 21st century in which he was trapped in a corner by someone claiming that cyberpunk was the only interesting thing happening in British SF and the only interesting new writers in Britain were cyberpunk writers. Yes, you've guessed it, Shiner had had his first close encounter with Charles Stross...." [Lost his address: 8/89]

PETER NICHOLLS: "Sglodion won't win a Hugo, for the same reason that Americans order more Volnay than Puligny Montrachet in restaurants, figures prove, so as not to embarrass themselves in front of sneering frog waiters.

"Your flattering words about my review of Urth of the New Sun were very kind, and moved me to re-read the review, which I like too, unlike Mr Jeremy Crampton of Philadelphia who in Foundation 43 called it 'gushing'. 'When a critic loses his head and becomes fulsomely generous...' is the opening of his last, crushing paragraph. He clearly thinks I'm in the pay of Wolfe himself, and through him, no doubt, a hireling of, yes, you've guessed it, the scientologists, your friends and mine. I'm



reworking this and other past reviews of Wolfe into a 20,000 word essay, or perhaps only 10,000, on the New Sun books for the collection of Wolfe essays Clute is editing for Serconia...."

[To which J.Crampton is a contributor.]

"Australian fandom has nice people, but tends towards the melancholy and lugubrious among its older members, and towards neo-Trekkies among the younger set. I have written a red-blooded attack on Australian fandom in general, and its total inability to organize conventions in particular, for Jack Herman's Sydney fanzine Sweetness and Light, and look forward to receiving the abuse which will subsequently be my lot. I attended Swancon in Perth in 1989 (so did John and Eve Harvey, Bob Shaw, John Berry, among other old mates) and it was certainly the worst convention I have ever attended." ["Mon-serrat", 26a Wandsworth Rd, Surrey Hills, Vic 3127, Australia: 2/90]

RICHARD O'KEEFFE: "I am a playwright by profession and am rather keen on writing the libretto of an opera based on a book edited by you, and for which you wrote an introduction and commentary, entitled An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World by William Loosley. This probably strikes you as an insane idea...." [3/89]

It did. Mr O'Keefe lost interest on seeing a certain New Scientist article from May 1988.

CHARLES PLATT: "Re Michael Moorcock: I'm puzzled that he feels I am 'obsessed' with his life and work. As I recall, I have written maybe two or three very small items about him in my own little magazine during the past five years. Maybe the problem is that so few other people have written about him, my output seems overwhelming by comparison; in which case, your readers might help him by giving his self-indulgent posturings the attention they cry out for. Personally, I must admit, I do worry about him sometimes, much as one worries about aging parents who are no longer able to look after themselves but insist on trying to do so. I feel like admonishing him to be careful not to slip in the bath, and not to smoke in bed. He was the only person in my British apartment when it burned down a few years ago, so this is less frivolous than it may sound. Of course, he has Linda Steele to take care of him now, so perhaps I should concern myself less than I do." [9 Patchin Place, New York, NY 10011, USA: 7/89]

CHRIS PRIEST: "Envelope received from one Susan Ellison. Contents: several xeroxed sheets from a magazine called Christopher Street, about a new and deadly disease called CIDS. This is the latest thing in California: endogenous depression and Chronic Epstein-Barr are, like, yesterday, man. CIDS is today and tomorrow. Not mere Acquired Immune Deficiency etc...but CHRONIC. The symptoms are hell: tiredness, depression, headaches, susceptibility to head colds and allergies...the main

thing it does is stop you finishing anthologies, while allowing you to travel the world, write stories in shop windows, etc. So far this terrible disease has been confined to Southern California, but it might break out at any moment. (The only known defences are scepticism and loud derisive hooting noises.)

"What interested me was the discovery that Harlan Ellison has become a case history. Indeed, Mr Ellison, whom we once mistakenly thought was a science fiction writer, who turned out instead to be a noted futurist, now reveals himself to have been a magic realist all along!" [5/89]

[When I'd sadly declined Interzone's invitation to write them a "Big Sellers" article:]

"No blame attaches when a refusal to work is connected, even remotely, with Piers Anthony. You know, we bandy about the names of writers who constitute the litany of Bad Guys: Pornoele, Chalker, McCaffrey, Gerrold, et bloody cetera...but when you get right down to it, when you dig the deepest pit, then scrape a stick across the filth at the bottom, then dig out the pus from the scab that lies therein, what you find is the new Piers Anthony novel. Anthony's books are the lowest of the low: badly thought out, miserably styled, full of vanity and arrogance, carelessly written, laden with puns and witless remarks. His work is too poor even to attack in print...." [78 High St, Pewsey, Wilts, SN9 5AQ, 7/89]

Oh, I think he must have a nice self-deprecating sense of humour. You know Nabokov's novel Pale Fire? This consists of a 999-line poem with endless notes by an "editor" who steadily reveals himself to be vain, arrogant, self-deluding and paranoid. In 1989, Anthony republished his 1976 Laser Books novel But What of Earth? with endless notes complaining about the editing of the first edition, notes which remorselessly reveal their writer to be.... Well, isn't it rather witty of him to invite this comparison?

I also heard from BRIAN ALDISS, in San Marino--"See Sglodion 100 on sale everywhere here. Congratulations on the new colour supplement...& the article on the David Garnett/Kylie Minogue scandal is a real scoop. How amazing that the Prime Minister had to intervene!"; BRIAN EARL BROWN--"Publishing...the latest trend seems to be 'instant remainders'--books to be mixed into the discount/remainders table without a prior higher-priced sales period. Makes me glad I work for an immoral and cynically corrupt city government."; MALCOLM EDWARDS--"I hate to contradict Ian Watson, but he's wrong about bestseller lists. The lists in The Bookseller and Sunday Times (drawn from the same database) are compiled from sales reported by a varying sample of 60-70 bookshops, and they produce lists showing actual figures in numbing detail."; KEV McVEIGH--"I discussed the aesthetics of Paper Machine Pre-Dryer Cylinders with Paul J.McAuley at Mexican--hard SF eh?"; ANDY SAWYER--"Re Ian Watson's comment, the



