

THROUGH

THE DECADES

SIXTY

YEARS

OF THE

B S F A

1958 - 2018

EDITED BY ALEX BARDY

Through The Decades - Sixty Years of the BSFA 1958-2018 (Best of Vector Vol. II)

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Foreword by Rob Hansen

To succeed a national science fiction organisation needs a clearly stated purpose that fits with its times. In the case of our first, the pre-war Science Fiction Association (1937-39), it was to be an umbrella under which the country's few, thinly spread fans could come together and help promote the cause of science fiction, a widely disparaged genre read by weirdos who actually believed that man would one day set foot on the surface of the moon. The SFA was suspended following the start of World War II, but that conflict was to lead to the formation of another national organisation, the British Fantasy Society (1942-46). This has no connection to the current organisation of the same name, 'fantasy' then being a catch-all term that encompassed science fiction and other forms of fantastic literature rather than just the particular genre the term later came to be associated with. The need for the BFS becomes obvious when you consider the desire of fans to stay in touch even when most were in uniform and spread across the European and Pacific theatres of war. The BFS just about succeeded in helping them do that, but after the war its purpose had gone and it faded away.

In 1948 yet another national organisation appeared, the Science Fantasy Society (1948-51). Created more because it was felt there should be such an organisation than with any very clear mission, the SFS was ill-conceived from the start and eventually sputtered out. So it was that from 1951 to the creation of the British Science Fiction Association in 1958 we had no national organisation in this country, and on the surface we appeared to be getting along just fine without one. During the 1950s the UK experienced a flowering of fannish activity and saw the appearance of what are widely considered by those familiar with them as some of the best fanzines British fandom ever produced. Yet all was not well. To appreciate why you have to understand the nature of fandom at that time.

If you get on a bus or a train nowadays the sight of someone reading an SF or fantasy novel is unremarkable (well, beyond the fact that they're reading a book rather than staring at their phone, at any rate), and our film and TV screens are filled with the stuff, but it wasn't always that way. Back in the day being a fan of science fiction could be a very lonely affair, so discovering others who shared your enthusiasm for our beloved genre could be heady indeed. (Even now, forty years after it happened, I can still remember how I felt on attending my first convention and realising I had finally found my 'tribe'.) Not surprisingly, contacting other fans either in person or through the pages of fanzines usually led to an interest in fandom itself and, over time, the majority of fanzines became more concerned with fandom itself than with SF. This was particularly true in the 1950s. Anyone who has ever published a blog or taken part in online communities should understand the attraction in interacting with like-minded people and see how this could come about, and the pro/fan community that developed was fascinating. (As someone who wrote a 400 page, 228,000 word book

covering the first fifty years of SF fandom in the UK, my own bias here should be obvious.) So long as the annual convention continued to focus on science fiction thus bringing new people into the fold this was fine. But, in the middle of the decade something happened.

Up through 1953 the annual convention always featured a formal programme centred on science fiction into which all present would dutifully troop, saving their partying for the evening.

However, the following year all that changed. The programme at Manchester's Supermancon, the 1954 national convention, was such an organisational shambles that it eventually collapsed. Far from the disaster it could have been this proved to be the con's salvation, the chaos being so complete that both committee and attendees treated it as a joke. This marked the end of the traditional lecture-hall convention. From this point forward fans felt free to only attend those items that interested them and to spend the rest of their time socialising. However, this shift to a more social emphasis had a consequence that became apparent over the next few years: falling attendances. It was realised something needed to be done to reverse the decline and bring in new blood. Enter the BSFA.

The original constitution states that "it shall encourage the reading, writing and publishing of good literature in this class, shall assist and encourage contact between enthusiasts, shall provide liaison between its members and the SF profession, shall endeavour to present science fiction and associated art-forms to the Press and general public in an advantageous manner, and shall provide such amenities as may prove desirable for the use of members." Whether any small, amateur organisation could have achieved all this at the time is debatable, but as a channel for recruitment the Association did its job.

Within a few years the decline had been arrested and numbers attending the Eastercon began to climb once more, helped by the fact that the convention was now explicitly tied to the BSFA. When bringing the Association into being, the fans of the time decided that though it would still be organised by groups of local fans as it had always been, the convention would henceforth be run under the auspices of the BSFA, and from 1959 to 1967 it was. Loncon, LXIcon, Roncon, Bullcon, Repetercon, Brumcon, Yarcon, and Briscon were the 1960, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, and 67 Eastercons respectively, but most of these were names they were given after the event, sometimes many years after. What they were called at the time and identified as such on badges and in convention literature was the British Science Fiction Association Convention of their particular year. As the face we presented to the world this gave the cons an imprint of respectability they might not have otherwise have had, as did choosing as Guests of Honour people such as Edmund Crispin (BSFA member 171) and Kingsley Amis (BSFA member 224).

Despite collapsing in the mid-1970s the BSFA quickly bounced back, and within a few years was enjoying one of its most productive periods under the leadership of Alan Dorey thus proving it still had life in it.

And its been with us ever since.

The BSFA eventually moved beyond its founders' original hopes for it, becoming the organisation we know today. In doing so has it also evolved with the times, adapting to what is now a vastly changed landscape to that in which it was originally created? That's for you to decide. What I do know is that in 2020 UK science fiction fandom will be ninety years old, the first meeting of our first local fan group having taken place in Ilford on 27th October 1930. The BSFA has been around for two thirds of that period and lasted an order of magnitude longer than any of its predecessors. This volume celebrates that remarkable achievement.

- Rob Hansen, January 2019
(see more at www.fiawol.org.uk/fanstuff/)

Editor's Preface by Alex Bardy

Founded in 1958 by Dave Newman and several others, the BSFA has a long and varied history. While there are some that would roll their eyes and wonder just how it's managed to last, there are many more that are not in the least bit surprised, especially given its turbulent past and continued perseverance in the face of adversity through the decades...

Thanks to the brilliant work of historians like Rob Hansen, we also know for certain that this wasn't the first-named British Science Fiction Association – that would be the Hayes Science Fiction Club that changed its name to the BSFA in 1933 – but thankfully, this 1958 incarnation of the BSFA is the one that's still going strong, and the *raison d'être* of this BSFA special publication today.

This volume has been designed first and foremost as a 60th birthday celebration of the BSFA, with the focus firmly on looking through the history books, and in particular, looking at them through the pages of *Vector* magazine: the official organ of the BSFA since its inception back in 1958. Incidentally, the title *Vector* was suggested by Terry Jeeves, one of the first secretaries of the BSFA, who took over editing duties on the publication following the abrupt resignation of former editor Ted Tubb (aka E.C. Tubb) after the very first issue: one of so many challenges the organisation had to overcome in those very early days.

I'm pleased to say that at time of writing (September 2018) *Vector* magazine is still going strong, with over 285 issues now under its belt, and a new editorial pairing in the form of Polina Levontin and Jo Lindsay Walton.

Before we get started, let's take a brisk walk through history...

"Once upon a time, somebody just happened to notice that fandom was going to the dogs. Whereupon he said so. To his great surprise, everyone immediately agreed with him – even the dogs – and one and all except, of course, the dogs – promptly entered into serious and earnest discussion about how to go about saving it. As a direct result the BSFA was born amid a surge of popular enthusiasm at Kettering over the Easter, 1958. Overwhelmed by such an untypically fannish burst of constructive activity a lot of fans hastily decided to re-appraise the situation."

[Archie Mercer, *Orion* #21, Feb 1959]

Indeed, it was this same 'somebody' – Vince Clarke – whose article 'Don't Sit There...' in issue #6 of his *ZYMIC* fanzine, dated 6th Dec 1957, called for a rejuvenation of fandom to try and bring new fans into the fold. The response Clarke received was said to be overwhelmingly positive: "I feel like a man who has casually pushed a button and seen the ICBM take off with a Whoosh!"

The George Hotel in Kettering was of course where it finally happened. This was the setting for Cytricon IV, aka the UK's annual national science fiction convention, Eastercon. Eastercon itself was still fledgling in those days: there had only been eight or nine previous Eastercons (depending who's counting). From all accounts, Eastercon 1958 proved a turning point for British fandom: buoyed by all the positivity Vince's article had received, Dave Newman chaired a lengthy and involved discussion that ended on the evening of Sunday 7th April, 1958 with the founding of the BSFA.

"For a moment we see that fandom is slipping away, and with a unity of action and lack of heroics that is rare in fan politics, we do something about it. The feeling of the meeting is extraordinary. This is the third national fan society I've seen, and the most likely to succeed where the SFA [Science Fiction Association] and BFS [British Fantasy Society] have failed."

[Sid Birchby, quoted in Rob Hansen,
'The Roots, Birth, & Early Days of the BSFA', April 1985]

Of course, we now know that Sid Birchby's extraordinary faith has been proved correct. But despite the rabid enthusiasm and support for Vince Clarke's suggestions, the man himself – the so-called 'father of the BSFA' who had put forward the idea in the first place – was curiously absent from this meeting.

Ironically, Vince Clarke chose not to join the BSFA in its early years. Although he provided the initial spark, he was missing from the crucial meeting, and struggled to participate in what resulted from it. This would be just one of many challenges the newly formed BSFA would face in terms of recruiting new members...

Compiling this book hasn't been easy, and has involved by turns many late nights and early mornings trawling through the BSFA Archives in an effort to find material that reflects and represents what was going on within SF fandom at that time. The majority of the articles and extracts included herein have by necessity been truncated and trimmed significantly, but in all instances I have tried to retain the original gist and tempo of the work, and in many cases – especially with the earliest material – also had to retype entire pages, so if any errors have crept in they are more likely my own rather than those of the original author.

I should add here that a lot of this work could never have been completed without the ongoing help and support of Kevin Smith (not to be confused with the former *Vector* editor of the same name). Kevin has diligently scanned huge swathes of old *Vector* magazines from cover to cover for inclusion and upload to the BSFA Archives, often at great financial and personal expense, and I am truly both grateful and awestruck by the amount of man-hours he has personally invested in helping me to gather and maintain an up-to-date archive collection. Kevin keeps an online gallery of old magazine covers for *Vector* and other BSFA publications (and indexes thereof where possible), and continues to do so with seemingly boundless enthusiasm! Donations of older magazines from the personal collections of Rog Peyton, Mark Plummer, and Greg Pickersgill proved invaluable in plugging many of the gaps, and Greg also helped put me in touch with several former BSFA members, as well as pointing me to the more obscure historical BSFA sources to be found online (see **Sources**, page 172).

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Polina Levontin and Mark Yon for their help and contributions to this publication, and especially Joseph Lindsay Walton and Donna Scott for editorial advice and support. Thanks also to Dave Langford and Rob Hansen, too.

I originally intended to spend a lot more of this special publication examining some of the controversies that suffused the BSFA throughout its tumultuous history, many of which were enacted through the letter columns of those early issues of *Vector* magazine. But the sheer weight of that content (and the potential risk of reigniting those self-same controversies!) put paid to that idea. It was hard enough choosing what articles to include, without fully exploring the ins and outs of the heated exchanges that sometimes occurred because of them, oft-times despite them. Perhaps that is a project well worth pursuing, hopefully by a more discerning and capable editor, but I'm happy to accept that it won't be me.

Many of the writers featured herein have since passed away, hopefully onto pastures of time and space we don't even know exist. But many older writers are also still around, and hanging on with a resolute and dogged insistence – an unquenchable fire, if you will. Perhaps some are still waiting for their work to be fully appreciated, or just need to know that it will continue to be respected and given due consideration for better or worse, or maybe, just maybe, that it'll continue to live on and be discussed long after they're gone. Regardless, the work of these writers is presented here with minimal comment, and in the hope they will leave a lasting legacy upon science fiction fans new and old alike. Some of them are typically 'of their time' as well, but amazingly, many of those issues remain relevant and strangely resonant even today...

Introduction by Polina Levontin

What is science fiction, what is 'good' science fiction, what – if anything – is science fiction 'for'? What definitely isn't science fiction?

From its inception, *Vector* has participated energetically in theorising the past, present, and future of the genre. The magazine came into existence in 1958 around the point of inflection from the Golden Age era to the New Wave movement, heralding further dissolution of the genre boundaries between science fiction and literary fiction. It is impossible to summarise all the various strands of literary criticism that *Vector* published in its first sixty years and nearly three hundred issues. *Vector* has been an open forum for many debates under a series of editors, each with their own views on the potential of science fiction to shape and be shaped by the wider world.

Vector's first editorial by E.C. Tubb is devoted to the term 'science fiction', discussing its origins, its implications (negative at the time, since genre fiction came with an expectation of a lesser literary value), as well as various attempts to define it. The term 'science fiction' eluded a consensus definition in 1958, just as it does in 2018. Tubb's editorial concludes on an optimistic note, predicting that cultural production in the mode of science fiction will gain significance. This was prescient. Science fiction has indeed grown and expanded in all cultural directions over the last sixty years, escaping the pulp magazine industry to proliferate across movies and games, on the stages of opera houses and national theatres, through art galleries and in academic institutions. The boundaries of the genre, never fully agreed, have become more visibly blurry, with works such as Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* recognised equally within and outside the fandom (winning not only the 2017 Clarke Award but also the 2017 Pulitzer and the 2016 National Book Award).

Vector had never espoused a single approach to theory: Marxism, feminism, queer theory, ecocriticism, etc. have all made appearances in various issues. It might be observed that attention devoted to theory has increased over time: both through the growth of science fiction studies in universities, and through the spillover of academic ideas into fandom more generally.

Vector's relationship with universities has also shifted around over the years. Unlike the scholars of the more solidly academic SF journals – such as *Extrapolation* (est. 1959), *Foundation* (est. 1972), and *Science Fiction Studies* (est. 1973) – critics writing for *Vector* have often stormed wildly across disciplinary boundaries, responsibly or not. Often they've not only been interested in what it's like to read science fiction, but also in the nuts and bolts of writing it, and in general news, gossip, polemic and tomfoolery from the world of fandom. And *Vector* critics, of course, have usually seen themselves writing for a general audience

of fans, whereas scholars may sometimes have mainly addressed their peers. Maybe all this once formed a distinction between amateur and professional SF criticism, but that distinction is no longer so sharp. Academics in the arts and humanities are increasingly looking for ways to involve the wider public; deliberately personal, situated reflections on literature enjoy academic respectability; Creative Writing is flourishing as an academic discipline; and the so-called 'new humanities' – Environmental Humanities, Health Humanities, Digital Humanities and others – are seeking to engage directly with science and technology. Maybe Vector's job has always been to be ahead of the university curve ... ?

The timeline below might create an impression of an evolution or trends in these debates, but at a cost of simplifying the complex web of arguments that make up Vector's explorations over the past six decades.

1950s

"Read the magazines of five years ago and compare them with today's. Go further back and the trend is even more noticeable. The stories are getting better, the writing is improving, the plots and characters are more believable. [...] Science fiction is growing up."

[E.C. Tubb. Vector #1]

In the 1950s Vector gave a lot of attention to the magazines, which is where most fans would find science fiction at the time; the market for novels and books would not mature till the '60s. Discussions of the admissibility and desirability of certain texts within the genre were dominant, creating a discourse by which readers and contributors would judge the value of innovations (mostly pertaining to technology) or related plotlines in various stories.

Terry Jeeves edited #2-#4, and issues #5 to #7 were co-edited by Michael Moorcock joined by various others: George Locke, Sandra Hall, Roberta Gray, and John T. Phillifent.

1960s

By the time Rog Peyton had taken over as editor from #26 onwards, Moorcock had gone on to become a key figure in the New Wave movement, which brought a modernist sensibility of literary experimentation to science fiction, and expanded intellectual matrix which included the work of psychologists, sociologists and political philosophers alongside that of physicists and biologists.

Vector editor Rog Peyton expressed what current editors would consider a reactionary position, attempting to retreat from a diffusion into the literary, and to defend science fiction's territory as pertaining to a specific kind of technological, 'hard sf' type of imaginary. In the editorial of Vector #35 he wrote:

"What is needed in Britain is another magazine with opposing views to those of the editors of NEW WORLDS [Michael Moorcock] and SCIENCE FANTASY [Kyril Bonfiglioli]. At the present rate of change, it will not be too long before the stories in these magazines are unrecognisable as the science fiction we know. The editors claim that this is the trend and that if science fiction is to 'grow up' it must change. But surely when the majority of us started reading SF, it was for the ideas to be found in the stories rather than the literacy of the authors? By all means be literate – but not at the expense of the ideas!"

Peyton does hint that there could be science fiction filled with original and well-developed ideas, which is also written with literary sophistication. But he nonetheless assumes

these two things are separate, and locked in some kind of rivalry. In fact, the ideas that appear in science fiction, and the special kinds of fascination and contemplation they provoke, are not separate from science fiction's literary qualities: they are precisely part of how science fiction operates as literature. The risk, when you impose an artificial separation between science fiction as literature and science fiction as ideas, is that you will fail to notice the new ideas that are right under your nose, if they appear in unfamiliar forms. Still, despite the mixture of nostalgia and the hostility toward the 'unrecognisable' – perhaps referring to the more outré experiments of writers like Ballard and Burroughs, not to SF with literary merit per se – Peyton does recognise that science fiction must change. And in the same issue #35, he gives his editorial seal of approval to an article which elevates the form to the same level of importance as the plot. Bob Parkinson has this to say of Borges' storytelling innovations:

"In fact, it seems to me that the manner in which the story is told should be as relevant to the idea of the story as the developments on the plot and should provide an equal basis for criticism. Science fiction has too long suffered from a uniformity of style that can tell almost anything, but because of that same ubiquity has relevance to nothing."

There are a variety of editors in the late 1960s: Steve Oakey edits #40; Doreen Parker edits #41 to #43, joined by Ken F. Slater for the first two issues; Darroll Pardoe is then editor for one issue, Phil Muldowney for two, Tony Sudbery and Vic Hallett for one and Tony Sudbery for one more.

In 1968, the BSFA publishes *Vector* #50, edited by Michael Kenward, who goes on to take *Vector* into the '70s.

1970s

As a critical journal *Vector* began to look backwards, constructing histories of the genre and evaluating the legacies of previous decades. Brian Stableford publishes an excellent and still relevant history of robots in literature in *Vector* #66. And in *Vector* #76-77, he theorises two distinct approaches to science fiction, modelled after the two writers who lived at the same time: H.G. Wells and Alfred Jarry. Essentially, according to Brian Stableford, one tradition is characterised by logical and linear thinking while the other embraces conceptual leaps in the dark. Interestingly, Stableford does not divide the history of the genre chronologically – for example, the Golden Age versus the New Wave – but claims that the two strands have always coexisted, with dominance established via critical attention or commercial success.

1980s and beyond

In the beginning of the 1980s, in *Vector* #100, we find a critical article by a woman, Helen McNabb. It may not have been the first – and in the early days of *Vector*, editors included Roberta Gray, Sandra Hall, Ella Parker and Doreen Parker – but over the first three decades contributions by women were definitely unusual. If there is a clear trend, it is in terms of gender. *Vector* #288 was an issue devoted to economics in science fiction, and there were as many critical articles written by female as by male authors.

Since the 1980s, *Vector* has often been the work of editorial teams: among those who have been involved are Mike Dickinson, Joseph Nicholas, Alan Dorey, Eve Harvey, Paul Kincaid, Geoff Rippington, David V. Barrett, Hussain R. Mohamed, Simon Nicholson, Harriet Monkhouse, Boyd Parkinson, Kev McVeigh, Chris Amies, Catie Cary, Stephen Payne, Maureen

Kincaid Speller, Tony Cullen, Andrew M. Butler, Gary S. Dalkin, Anna Feruglio Dal Dan, Niall Harrison, Martin Lewis, Kari Sperring, Boyd Parkinson, Geneva Melzack, Liz Batty, Paul Billinger, Steve Jeffery, Tanya Brown, Gary S. Dalkin, Alex Bardy, Niall Harrison, Glyn Morgan, Anna Macfarlane, Jo Lindsay Walton and myself.

In the last two decades, the range of themes appearing in *Vector* continued to expand to cover nearly as much ground as other literary journals or cultural magazines while still talking about the genre. This attests to how pervasive, culturally, science fiction has become. Globally, writers and artists are turning to science fiction as simply one of the available approaches. For example, in *Vector* #216 we find a discussion of a comic which still feels very here and now:

"It was the Transmetropolitan comic that first appeared in September 1997 that established Warren Ellis's reputation as a major writer. Transmetropolitan is an unmistakably political comic. Although set in a future City, very much a science fiction environment, it is a protest against the inequalities and injustices of contemporary society. In an interview with Mark Salisbury, Ellis made clear how he had first approached the idea of Transmetropolitan:

I started by thinking about the kind of science fiction I had always liked when I was reading it, which was easy because it was the science fiction that approached social fiction; a tradition that came from H.G. Wells of using the future as a tool with which to explore the present."

Ellis's rage is fuelled not just by the way the rich and powerful abuse their power, but by the way the majority of the population put up with it. His vehicle for all this is one of the most remarkable characters in comics today, the gonzo journalist, Spider Jerusalem, a sort of cross between Hunter Thompson and Nick Cohen. He is a bald tattooed egoist, given to drugs and drink in considerable excess, a misanthrope with a passion for justice, a lover of humanity who is continually let down by the object of his affection, a relentless and ruthless crusader. After years of living as a recluse in the country, Spider has returned to the City, looking for work as a journalist. He is taken on by The Word to write a weekly column. The editor warns him that he must not repeat his notorious article covering the result of the last Presidential election: the word 'fuck' typed eight thousand times.

In the last couple of years, *Vector's* critical territory has expanded to new mediums and other forms of 'text', including fashion, film, music, poetry, art, and architecture. It has also expanded in geographical terms; for example, *Vector* #289 explored African and Afro-diasporic science fiction.

Polina Levontin

A Quick Trip Down Memory Lane...

Dave Langford

I'm pretty sure that the first Vector I received as a member was the double issue 67/68. A great introduction to BSFA membership, with Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls all talking about Tolkien, plus Aldiss on Sheckley, "Letters from Amerika" by Philip K. Dick, and much else. This was edited by Malcolm Edwards, now a greasy eminence of London publishing, whose editorial chatter had just the right relaxed tone to encourage this newcomer, and who contributed a good review of two recent Jack Vance novels which I immediately resolved to buy.

Mark Plummer, BSFA member 4462

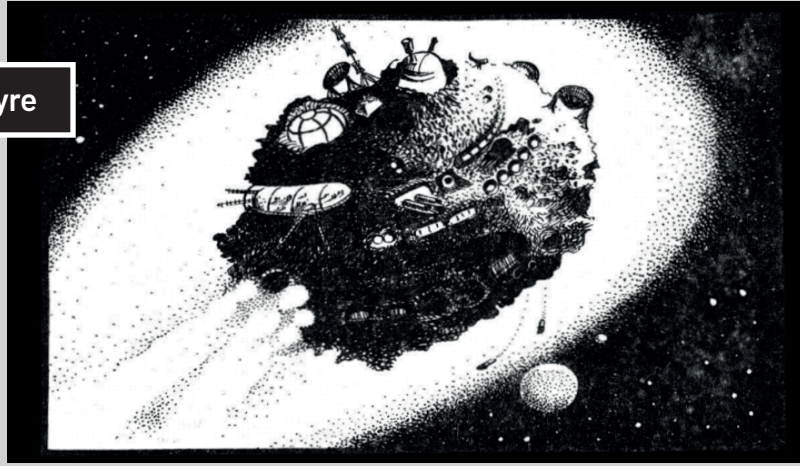
It only recently occurred to me that I have been a member of the BSFA for pretty much exactly half its sixty year history. The Association was founded at the Easter convention in 1958, and it was thirty years later at the 1988 Easter convention that I decided to join. It's possible that it was a month or two after that when I actually became a member, which rather disrupts the neatness, but on this occasion I'd rather let narrative momentum triumph over the truth.

In 1988, when the Eastercon was called Follycon as it is again this year, Greg Pickersgill was the fan guest of honour. I recall his keynote interview, conducted to an underlying blues and jazz soundtrack, during which he spoke about his early days as a fan and about the sort of commonality of experience that then existed. Everybody read Analog, he said, and everybody joined the BSFA – because, after all, if you were a British science fiction fan it seemed preordained that you should join the British Science Fiction Association. That made perfect sense to me too, and so shortly afterwards I sent off my cheque for £10 and started attending the London meetings.

I also put in a few appearances at the bi-monthly collation sessions. At the time each BSFA mailing contained at least three magazines – Vector, Matrix and Paperback Inferno – with an additional fourth (Focus) two or three times a year. The printers supplied these publications as uncollated A3 sheets, so for one weekend every two months a band of volunteers, rarely more than half a dozen people as I recall, would assemble in a Portakabin in Reading under the direction of Keith Freeman to turn these loose sheets into magazines. We worked as an assembly line

in which I usually operated the collating rack, a primitively ingenious device whose smooth running was disproportionately reliant on elastic bands. Others wielded jam-prone long arm staplers, or folded the magazine using the side of a biro to get a clean crease. I tried that latter activity once, and literally wore a pen in half while doing so.

It was a labour-intensive task, but it had the virtue of imposing a discipline on BSFA mailings. Each issue of Matrix would advertise the date of the next collation session and so, with no practical means of notifying a change of date to everybody who might turn up, the magazines had to be ready on time. And that, I think, speaks to a great part of the value of the BSFA in the papernet era, when a printed newsletter delivered every two months would genuinely tell you about stuff you didn't already know and were unlikely to learn about otherwise: about award winners and new book deals, information about conventions, events, fanzines and clubs, and the inevitable obituaries (the first Matrix I received noted the recent deaths of Robert Heinlein and Clifford Simak). The BSFA as it existed in 1988 had evolved considerably in the thirty years since that ur-meeting in the George Hotel in Kettering, and it's changed further in the thirty years since. I suspect its evolution is not yet concluded.



BSFA Launches Vector Magazine In 1958...

It all starts here...

Editorial of Vector #1 by E. C. Tubb (aka Ted Tubb) [Vector #1, Summer 1958]

When Hugo Gernsback launched *Amazing Stories* back in April 1926 he started something new. For many years stories of a fantastic nature and dealing with odd aspects of science had been published in various magazines but, until *Amazing* made its debut, there had been no vehicle specialising in such literature. But Gernsback did not call his new magazine a 'science fiction magazine' – that term had yet to be coined.

Hugo must have felt the need of a specific generic term for he ran a competition in order to find one. The prize went to 'Scientifiction', apparently the best which could be devised and for a time his magazine ran that word as a banner on the cover. It didn't last long. It was too unwieldy, too openly a manufactured compromise. It died and 'science fiction' took its place. Now it is too late to change, Science fiction is what we read and that is the name it is stuck with.

I use the term 'stuck with' advisedly. Unfortunately it has acquired such a bad odour among certain critics and other 'experts' that they use it as a term of derogation. George Orwell, they will take care to point out, wrote a wonderful book when he wrote *1984* but, of course, it isn't science fiction. Huxley's *Brave New World* is superb, nothing like that trashy science fiction. Wells and Verne wrote – what? Not according to the experts, science fiction. Even the B.B.C. [sic] when they put on a play about men in a rocket ship took care to make sure that their listeners knew that this effort was not to be confused with science fiction. Science fiction, to these critics and experts, is something no adult and certainly no one of intelligence and discernment, can or would be bothered with.

Why this should be so isn't hard to discover even though it is grossly unfair. Science fiction is a new baby and is considered by many to be an illegitimate one. To them it is trash, rubbish, utter nonsense and it is condemned because of the medium in which it first appeared. Pulp magazines have never been considered the vehicles of good literature and they are not. But Westerns aren't damned because the majority of Western writing appears in pulp magazines. Detective stories aren't considered rubbish because there are magazines specialising in them. And the same applies to Romances. Why then should science fiction be treated differently?

The answer is that it shouldn't be but it is. Science fiction demands a certain amount of co-operation from the reader and no one without imagination can enjoy it. The 'experts' are usually men without imagination. They are experts only because they adhere to the norm. They will praise a thing if their fellows praise it and they will damn it if their colleagues so

decide. It takes imagination to have the courage to walk alone and it takes imagination to criticize something new.

Science fiction is usually criticised for being what it is not. Stories are judged, not on the basis of what they set out to do, but what the critic thinks the author should have done. Books, novels and short stories which are, by any standard, science fiction, are never called so by those, outside the field, who praise them. It would help, perhaps, if the 'experts' had a definition of what science fiction is so that they could judge such material on the basis of what it sets out to do. There have been many attempts to define it. H. J. Campbell did so and, fairly, I think:-

"A story is science fiction if it deals with the development, extrapolation or disproof of phenomena which are the source material of scientific enquiry and experiment, in such a way that the ideas, claims and assumptions are not at variance with current scientific knowledge and speculation, unless such variance is explained and supported by logical reasoning or experiment."

That is a definition of science fiction. It may not be your definition, but it is a good one. It is not a definition of fantasy. Fantasy can be entertaining and even acceptable to the critics but science fiction is not fantasy. Fantasy is the modernisation of fairy stories in which magic replaces science. They can be fun, yes, but only as ghost stories are fun. And no critic that I can remember has ever condemned ghost stories because he didn't believe in ghosts. It would be nice if they could be as tolerant towards science fiction.

Partly, of course, the field is to blame for its own reputation, but only partly. Perhaps, if the new baby had watched its step a little more carefully, there would have been time for it to have grown 'respectable'. But it was a new medium and, before the hard-cover books could be produced, the authors had to learn how to handle it. Now we have the hard-cover books, we have noted authors who first appeared in the pulps but who now, so say the experts, do not write science fiction. The difference even the authors couldn't tell you.

True, there has been the most outrageous rubbish printed under the name of science fiction. There have been comic strips which would make any scientist recoil in disgust - and stories which drives anyone with any sense of reason and logic into head-beating frenzy. There have been covers which, apparently, have tried to sell anything but the stories they are supposed to represent. But equally so the same applies to Westerns with their chronological distortions, their absurd characters and ludicrous plots. Detective fiction the same. Romances also. All three fields of 'superior' literature have produced as much rubbish as our own. Why then is science fiction judged only on the worst of its kind?

I think that it could be because the ratio of good to bad is far lower in science fiction than in any other field. Let's face it, no other medium has supported so much sheer crud to so little notable [sic] work. It is nice to claim that we who are possessed of the imagination needed to enjoy science fiction have also the critical faculty for assessing its real worth. We haven't. We have accepted poor writing, terrible characterization, creaking plots and outworn situations in our hunger for literature that is 'different'. Like a mother defending her child we have been unable to face self-criticism and have tried to protect the new baby against outsiders. Now, when we are at last getting the type of story we have been waiting for, we must allow the critics a little time in order to re-evaluate their concepts.

We must be as tolerant towards them as we would like them to be towards us.

In this time is on our side. Science fiction seems to have a boom and bust cycle which, on the face of it, is not good but which is having a rather peculiar effect. This effect is very noticeable in this country, at least. I am referring to the constantly rising spiral of better writing reflected in our magazines.

In order to survive, to stay in business, science fiction magazines, books, anthologies and pocket books have got to sell. Pocket books regularly give up the ghost. Anthologies depend on a backlog of good material. Hard-cover books follow the trend. Only the regular magazines are faced with the sheer necessity of finding good material or going out of business. And I think, in this country at least, the editors are finding such material.

Read the magazines of five years ago and compare them with today's. Go further back and the trend is even more noticeable. The stories are getting better, the writing is improving, the plots and characters are more believable [sic]. They have to, there is no longer a market here for bad material. Perhaps, during the next boom, the demand will again exceed the supply but it doesn't matter. Once a standard is set it is not easy to persuade editors and publishers to lower it. And each cycle of boom and bust raises the standard just a little more.

The signs are healthy. Science fiction is growing up.

E. C. Tubb

In the same issue, E. C. Tubb wrote a lengthy article trying to help new writers submit their work to editors and publishers in a format that would avoid instant rejection... How do these standards sit with authors today?

Handbook for Beginners by E. C. Tubb [Vector #1, Summer 1958]

One of the perpetual troubles which plague editors is that they are always short of material. Every editor has his own idea of the stories he would like to print; too often he has to print what he can get. An editor has, in his mind, a rising spiral of desirable quality. The acceptable of today he wants to make the rejected of tomorrow. The demand is for brilliant ideas coupled with smooth writing, real characters with real emotions, tense plot development and believable situations. Stories which will be praised and remembered for years to come.

But, because of the rising spiral of desirable quality, he will never get enough of them.

Science fiction is peculiar in that it is both easy and, at the same time, very difficult to write. It is easy because, with all of time and space to play around with, confined only by his own imagination, and unhampered by any accepted mores, an author isn't bound in any way other than by the limits of good taste and scientific knowledge.

Good taste because that applies to any story no matter on what subject. Scientific knowledge because he has to know what he is writing about. It is this latter which provides the usual stumbling block.

A story, no matter how well-written, is laughable science fiction if it ignores what is known of the physical universe. No couples strolling bare-headed, hand-in-hand on the moon. No ignoring of the effects of acceleration when taking off in a rocket. No casual using of the radio to call a friend on Sirius. Not ordinary radio, that is, and certainly not on Sirius which is a somewhat hot star. Unless, of course, he has made provision for his friend to be protected in some way.

These complications, to an author who knows nothing of science fiction, can become more than irritating trifles. Each time he drops a brick he reveals his own ignorance and it is surprising the number of good writers, good outside the field, that is, who have written hopelessly poor science fiction because of that. An author must not only be able to write but he must know what he is writing about.

Research is, to a writer, a tedious, time-consuming and irritating business. It can hardly be expected that a writer who knows nothing of rockets and their effect, limitations and capabilities, is going to sit down and read a dozen books on the subject before he writes a story centered around a rocket ship. Not a short story, and not for low rates. It just wouldn't be worth his while.

Authors then, tend to write about things of which they have knowledge; they specialise. This may not be a good thing for a writer to do, in fact it isn't, but it does gain him a name and it does help the editor who knows that his contributor can write sense even if he can't write all that well. And writing well is something that can be learned.

It is no accident that the reader-turned author percentage is higher in science fiction than in any other field of literature. Science fiction demands an active imagination if it is to be enjoyed and an active imagination is the one thing an author must have.

But, unfortunately, an active imagination isn't enough.

A story is, in essence, a means of communication. You, the author, are trying to tell the reader something; to communicate an emotion, perhaps, or a mood, or depict a strange civilisation, anything. No matter what you are trying to say, if the reader doesn't understand it, then you have failed. A piece of poetry may be the ultimate in style and form with tremendous emotional impact and a haunting grace but, if it is written in Chinese and the reader doesn't understand Chinese, then, to him, it is so much waste paper.

So an author must have something to say and say it so that others can understand. He must be able to communicate without any possibility of misunderstanding.

But even that isn't enough.

A story can be crystal clear and without the slightest trace of ambiguity but, unless it is read, then it will be a failure. A story then, must also entertain. That, after all, is what stories are for.

E. C. Tubb goes on to suggest what defines "a good story"...

A story can be broken down into three basics; plot, presentation and padding. Plot is what happens, presentation is how the author tells the story and padding is most of the wordage between the first word and the last. Authors are paid by the thousand words, so padding, obviously, is of no little importance.

And talks about characterisation...

Not mentioned as one of the basics but probably more important to a good story than anything else are characters. More stories have been rejected because of their lack than for any other reason, and I speak of the entire field of writing, not just science fiction. Stories, basically, are about people, not about things. You can't write a moving story about the moon; only about the people who are affected by it. You can't feel sympathy towards an inanimate object: you can only feel sympathy towards people.

People are real, characters in most stories are not. Do not depict men and women as you have seen them depicted in other stories. If you do it well, you are imitating. If you do it badly, you have created a stock character. Create your own people, that is the art of an author, and it is one of the rewards of fiction writing. Make them speak and feel as they must if they are as you have made them in the situations you have provided. Let the reader feel for and with them, let them have human weaknesses and human strength, do not make them shadow-shapes, names, gestures or people fashioned from cardboard. Hard? Perhaps, but you are surrounded with models. You live, work and exist surrounded by real, living characters. You are one yourself.

He then talks at length about style, presentation, and dealing with flashbacks, before discussing the three tenses: past, present and future, again at some length. He couldn't resist returning to the subject of padding again, however...

Successful padding is an art in itself and, when done as it should be, doesn't seem to be padding at all. There hasn't been a story written which couldn't be padded to greater length and the converse is also true. Padding is simply the extra words used to spread out the plot and gain the required length. However, not all writing is padding and should not be confused as such. The test is, is it essential to the story either for the development of mood, atmosphere, character or action. If not, then it is padding. The operative word being 'essential'. If it is essential then it cannot be dispensed with. Padding is always expendable.

Tubb also cites the overuse of adjectives as a common fault, before coming up with a couple of quotable gems...

"Words are the flesh which clothe the bones of plot. Padding can be likened to the unwanted fat."

"Padding is unessential either to the development of plot, mood, character or atmosphere."

More talk of padding and tempo is followed by a discussion of the need for conflict in a story, and a return to what makes a good science fiction story and how to go about writing one...

Every reader of science fiction, in order to enjoy it at all, has to be willing to 'suspend disbelief'. He knows darn well that there is no regular service to Mars - but he must be willing to accept the author's contention that there is. He must be willing to accept the author's say-so on a host of similar matters and not until then can he enjoy the story. It is this willingness to suspend disbelief which makes a science fiction reader. The great majority are unwilling to meet the author on his own ground and they, with reason, cannot see any sense or satisfaction in science fiction at all.

Unfortunately, we are also up against the fact of the rising spiral of desirable standard. This is an excellent thing from the standpoint of the reader - he wants the best that is going, but it does mean that the would-be author has to work that much harder to get into print. And that too, is a good thing - if the potential author has what it takes to make the grade.

Some have, that is the only way to account for the high percentage of reader-turned author in the field. But, and we have to face it, it is a small field. In small fields, it isn't hard to become a big fish in a small pond. What we want are big fishes in a big pond and the only way to get it is to increase the field which means more and better stories from more and better authors.

Now, it isn't hard to write. Every reader has that ability and every reader has a groundwork in what science fiction is, wants, and can use. Everyone who has written a holiday letter has, in effect, written a story. He has glossed over the low-spots, accentuated the high-points, fictionalised a little in order to gain drama and all the rest of it. This is done sub-consciously whenever we write anything to anyone. No-one has ever written a completely honest letter - and fiction is not honest reporting. In fact, no-one has ever done any honest reporting - the best they can do is to report honestly what is told to them.

It would be interesting to know just how many science fiction readers have flung down a magazine in disgust and sworn that they could do better than this crud!

It would be even more interesting to know just how many have tried and learned the hard way that it isn't as easy as it seems.

But the ability to write a readable story isn't an inborn talent. It has to be acquired. It has to be learned. And the best way to learn to write - is to write. In fact , it is the only way.

Beginnings and dialogue are covered next, as is presentation and formatting, and an interesting suggestion for determining the word count...

The story must be typewritten on one side of quarto paper, and double-spaced. (Quarto is preferable to foolscap).

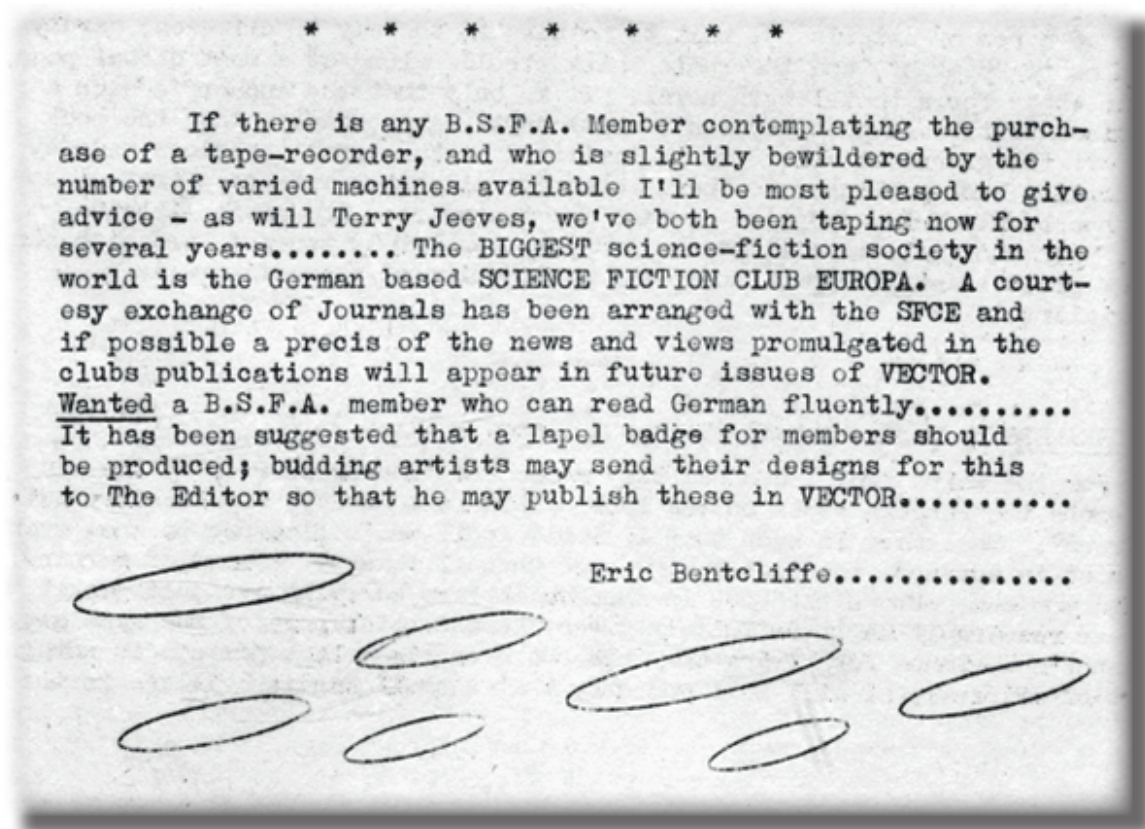
Pages should be numbered, and each submission must carry the name and address of the author, the length of story in thousands of words, the title and nom-de-plume of author if one is wanted.

Paragraphs must be indented and it is usual to allow three spaces after full stops, two after colons and semi-colons, one after commas.

Word counting is easy when you remember that you only have to take an average. Using a pica-faced typewriter, allowing an inch margin on either side and typing double-spaced on quarto paper, you will, if you type 26 lines to the page, have produced an average of 250 words. If in doubt, count the words on several lines, divide by the number of lines counted, multiply by the number of lines in the story, and there you have it. But don't claim, say, 2,957 words - you can only find that out by actually counting each word. Amateurs do that, professionals never. Take it always to the nearest 250 words.

Ready to start? Then what are you waiting for?

Alas, issue #2 (Autumn 1958) was hurriedly put together with Terry Jeeves as a stand-in editor, and carried this advert...



Issue #3 (Winter 1958) of Vector featured a couple of interesting movie reviews from one E. C. Tubb...

These films are a double feature in every sense of the word. Both are made by Vogue Productions; both are released by United Artists; both in black and white; both screenplays are written by Jerome Bixby, and naturally, both are X films.

IT! The Thing From Outer Space

IT! is the better of the two. A space ship crashes on Mars and there is only one survivor. A rescue ship is sent to pick him up and return him to Earth where he is to be court-martialed for murdering his companions. The crew of the rescue ship - including two women - do not believe his story of some weird, unseen thing which has snapped up all the first crew but himself; a disbelief heightened by the discovery of a bullet-holed skull.

However, just prior to take-off, an emergency port is discovered open - the thing has entered and hidden itself on the ship. The ship takes off; the thing emerges, murder is done and desperate efforts made to kill the thing. It resists grenades, bullets, gas, electric shock and atomic radiation and only towards the end do the remaining crew members figure out that, as it breathes, then evacuating the ship will cook its goose.

They do. It does. Fade out to clinch.

The Curse Of The Faceless Man

A workman excavating Pompeii discovers a strange, stone like figure of a man. The figure is alive, commits a murder or two before investigating professors suspect what is happening. A beautiful artist happens to be the reincarnated girl friend of the shape and it wants her. It kidnaps her and makes for the beach. Impervious to bullets, it wades into the sea and is promptly dissolved; the girl is saved by her fiance; fade out.

As set out, the plots are sheer corn, but photography and acting are good. Bixby has tied up loose ends and made the plots credible. In IT, he makes clear there is artificial gravity in the ship. In THE CURSE, he gives a reasonable if pseudo-scientific explanation of the life of the Faceless Man.

And several responses to the request by editor Terry Jeeves in #2 for answers to the question "What do you want from the BSFA?" in the letter-column...

ETHEL LINDSAY — "I never wrote after Vector No.1, and so feel a little guilty. Anyway, I can now say that I see a vast improvement. Much as I love Ted, I hope you are to remain editor ((I love you... Ed.))

As a member, I want a society, what I want is a society which will introduce folk to fandom as I was introduced through Operation Fantast. I am grateful enough for that entry, to subsidise an association that will do the same for others... I'm pleased to see Ken Slater associated with you... Give book reviews, and mag reviews, but add some fanzine notes and club news... Ken's best idea, was welcoming letters. Eric's article on "What's it got to do with s-f" was just the type of thing wanted. I think printing the list of members and the selected items from a fanzine, were good ideas too."

"I like the welcoming idea too. How about everybody dropping a line to one member who is a complete stranger to them. Further on those lines; would anyone like to welcome new members to the BSFA? Fanzine reviews... who wants them? Who would like to tackle them?"

Editor

Dr. A.R. WEIR DSc. — "What I want from the society, is mainly means of getting in touch with other people who read s-f. Means of finding how to get second-hand and reprint stuff to complete my own collection; also a nation-wide society of good repute which will cut more ice in getting rid of the 'holier-than-thou' attitude that some people adopt towards s-f... Tape recording competition - good idea... Time Capsule, excellent idea. I think we should continue to print reviews of the current s-f magazines, for the following reason. The BSFA should sooner or later, be regarded in foreign circles as representing the best trends in British s-f, so that foreign s-f circles will take in Vector, and will look to it to supply a worth-while and impartial criticism of British and American s-f."

"Another supporter of the 'meet-the-members' idea, and the idea of the future of the BSFA is a pretty sound one, as the alliance with the SFCE shows. Dr. Weir had no knowledge of this, at the time of writing, so it looks as though his prophecy is already coming true."

Editor

E.C. TUBB — "Many thanks for Vector No.2, and if there's one thing I'm now sure of, my yielding the editorship was a good thing. The issue, as a whole, was far more satisfying than No.1 maybe because it wasn't No.1, but I'm speaking more of the atmosphere of the thing, the editorial policy, call-it-what-you-will. Anyway, congratulations on a fine piece of work. Let's hope you are inundated with 'what you want from the BSFA'..."

"Which makes me feel nice and warm inside. Even so, it's a great pity that Ted couldn't stay with us, and I hope he can still appear from time to time, as he does with the competition entries in this issue."

Editor

Issue #4 (Spring 1959) was the last issue to be edited by Terry Jeeves, with Roberta Gray taking over the next three issues. She had considerable turmoil to cope with for those issues, assisted by Sandra Hall (#5 and #6), George Locke (#6), and John T. Phillifent (#6).

Issue #5 and #6 were both late, although worth noting is that a young chap called Michael Moorcock was also assisting with the editorship at this stage.

Despite being late, issue #6 had a lot of buzz about it as arrangements for the 1960 Eastercon were underway. In her Editorial, Roberta Gray was talking about costs and associated stuff, but veteran Con organisers (and hoteliers) might be shocked to discover how short a lead time they were working with back then...

Editorial of Vector #6 by Roberta Gray [Vector #6, Winter 1959]

We had hoped to have Vector ready for you by Christmas, but one or two holds up [sic] have occurred so we can only say now that we hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and wish you the very best for a happy and prosperous New Year.

Once again, we have Mike Moorcock to thank for helping with the material and arranging for the artwork with Jim Cawthorn.

The main subject that members will no doubt be interested in is the forthcoming Convention. This will be held in London over the Easter weekend and a tentative booking for a hotel has been made. The manager is Convention minded and has no objection to a little more noise than usual and, if possible, will book all Convention members into one block, but we can book as many rooms as wanted. No doubt the price will sound high to some members, but for London it is reasonable. Bed and breakfast is thirty-five shillings. but we are hoping to persuade the manager to let us have a reduced rate where there are several beds in a room. This is to help out the eighteen year olds and under, who would not otherwise be able to come. Anyone who wishes to attend the Convention should make their own bookings with the manager and should head their letters "National Science-Fiction Convention, Easter, 1960." As soon as all arrangements are finalised a newsletter will be issued to all members and fanzine editors. This, we hope, will be early in January.

Convention entrance fees will be 15/- for non-members of the B.S.F.A. and 10/- for members. Members and non-members who are eighteen and under, will be charged half these fees. No doubt these prices will be criticised in some quarters, but it is suggested that if members' pause and consider for themselves they will realise that the B.S.F.A. is doing its utmost to put on a really good Convention for them. Start saving now and it will be easier on your pocket at Easter. Our method is to put all our sixpences and threepenny pieces in a milk bottle and you will be surprised how quickly they mount up.

One other thing concerning the Convention. We have heard that some people are concerned because inexperienced people are running it. It should be pointed out here that we do have an Advisory Committee, consisting of Roberta Gray, who was Secretary of the 1957 World Science Fiction Convention, Ken Bulmer and Frank Arnold, both of whom have had a deal of experience in running Conventions. The Secretary of the 1957 Convention has given the B.S.F.A. Secretary advice based on her own experience and at the moment is trying to get someone as Guest of Honour whom you have all heard of and some of you probably know him. When the Newsletter is sent out we hope to be able to tell you the name of the Guest of Honour and also the winner of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund.

Note that the Tran-Atlantic Fan Fund is something that was started back in 1953 and is still going strong even today...

From the TAFF website: "The Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund was created in 1953 for the purpose of providing funds to bring well-known and popular [science fiction] fans familiar to those on both sides of the ocean across the Atlantic. Since that time TAFF has regularly brought North American fans to European conventions and European fans to North American conventions. TAFF exists solely through the support of fandom. The candidates are voted on by interested fans all over the world, and each vote is accompanied by a donation. These votes, and the continued generosity of fandom, are what make TAFF possible." (see Sources, page 172)

Michael Moorcock helped with the typing and layout, too, even contributing an article about juvenile SF in #5 and one about author L. Sprague de Camp in #6...

Masters of Fantasy (Third Series) No. 1 by Mike Moorcock [Vector #6, Winter 1959]

You can't 'take-it-or-leave-it-alone'. You have to like it or hate it. Perhaps that's a compliment to the work of an author. Anyway, if you don't like the work of L. Sprague de Camp, well then, you can't stand it. On the other hand, if you like it, you'll read him voraciously.

I guess I'm one of those voracious people, ever since I read *The Queen of Zamba*, serialised in ASF during the late summer of 1949.

For all my admiration of this gifted writer, I think that probably his best work was written in collaboration with Fletcher Pratt; particularly the hilarious Harold Shea stories published in UNKNOWN during the early 1940s.

Recently, de Camp's weakness for name-making has rather spoiled his latest (and possibly last) Krishna story. This is *The Tower of Zanid*, which, in places, becomes little more than a confusing Krishnan travelogue. The plot is certainly weaker than most, even though the main character involved is one of my favourite rogues, Anthony Fallon. For all of that, it's still streets ahead of a lot of stuff of this type.

L. Sprague de Camp was born in New York City on the 27th November 1907. He took an M.S in Economics and Engineering at college and later turned his hand to a number of different jobs. After working in a shipyard, a sawmill, and having a go at surveying, he travelled through the U.S.A, Europe and the Orient, returning to become editor of several journals in the U.S. Eventually he became editor for the American Society of Engineers and around 1937 decided to try writing fiction, becoming a free-lance in 1938.

When America joined the second world war, he entered the U.S. Naval Reserve as a Lt. Commander assigned to engineering and continued in this capacity for some time after victory.

He is married and is still an active attendee at SF Conventions in the U.S.A. He has remained a free-lance writer ever since he began.

De Camp is, above all else, a professional. Like Alfred Bester, Tony Boucher and our own Sam Youd, he does not simply concentrate on the SF field. Sometimes, when a fantasy author, often excellent within his chosen genre, leaves the SF field and tries his hand at, say, a western novel or a detective novel, he falls down hopelessly. It is these professionals who generally turn out the most competent SF stories, possibly because they can draw on experience gained from writing in other mediums. The success of *The Stars My Destination* and *Death of Grass* tends, I feel, to prove this point. Although, of course, to compare properly Bester's classic with Christopher's best-seller is well-nigh impossible.

As did Boucher and several others, de Camp made his fantasy debut in the now sadly defunct UNKNOWN. Campbell should be complimented on 'discovering' such a host of talent during UNKNOWN's wonderful career.

During those years, de Camp turned out innumerable shorts and many lead novelettes of the quality of *Nothing in the Rules*, *Land of Unreason*, *Wheels of If*, and (with Pratt) *The Castle of Iron*. You don't find stuff like this anymore, which is a great shame. Campbell seems at present to be taking his SF just a little too seriously.

Probably the most popular series de Camp has penned outside of his Pratt collaborations, are the Viagens Interplanetarias stories, which, of course, incorporate the Krishna novels and shorts. I remember that a while ago someone asked de Camp whether he actually thought Brazil would become a principal power in a world of the future. He replied that he didn't give a damn one way or the other - he simply decided to have a change from the normal set-up

which generally makes America the leading power and English the official language. Whatever his reasons, de Camp certainly presented a far better balanced picture of things as they might be in a couple of hundred years. Most writers, admittedly for the sake of what they are trying to put over, create their future civilisations in extremes of black and white. Viagens, without losing any of its sense of wonder, can be accepted as commonplace in the same way in which a description of England's Empire-to-be, at a later date dominating half the known world, could be accepted by a Roman soldier doing his stint on Hadrian's Wall.

Another interesting point is that de Camp has had a great deal more of his stories published in hard covers than most writers of SF and fantasy. Which obviously proves his popularity with the public. Publishers might put out one or two novels by an author before they find he does not 'sell', but it is unlikely that any hard-headed business man would back a novelist beyond this limit. De Camp is the author of some twenty works of fiction and non-fiction in hard-covers (in cases collaborations with Pratt, Miller, Howard, and Nyberg) and quite a few soft-covered books and collections. These include Viagens and Harold Shea stories, *The Undesired Princess*, *Divide and Rule*, *Lest Darkness Fall*, *The Wheels of If*, *The Carnelian Cube*, *Genus Homo*, *The Return of Conan*, etc. and in the non-fiction field: *Lost Continents*, *The Evolution of Naval Weapons*, and *Inventions and Their Management* (with Alf K. Berle). Few writers in the fantasy field can claim such an impressive list of books to their names, outside of old 'masters' like Haggard; Edgar Rice Burroughs and Abraham Meritt.

De Camp, I have said before, is a professional. Being such, he depends entirely on his writing for his income. So who can blame him when he states, as he did in a recent letter to me, that he doesn't plan to write any more Krishna stories 'except in the fantastically unlikely event that somebody will pay me ten cents a word or better to do it'? SF isn't a well-paying field and I know of few writers who can exist entirely on an income deriving solely from it; unless they are in the lucky position of being editors as well. Payment is better in the States than in this country, but nevertheless, you are lucky if you make three cents a word (about the highest) and the general rate is two cents or one cent - no better than rates existing in 1939!

Thus, de Camp hasn't written any fantasy or SF for nearly three years. And it isn't likely that he will do so for some time. He is at present concentrating, 'for crassly commercial reasons', on historical novels - and when not doing this, his time is taken up by picture-books for children.

De Camp's first historical novel, *An Elephant for Aristotle*, was published by Doubleday in April 1958 and for those who are interested, it is still in print. Its successor, *The Bronze God of Rhodes* will be published by the same firm about January 1960. The third one, de Camp is currently working on. It will be called *The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate*.

Some mention should be made of de Camp's connection with the Conan saga. Around about 1952, de Camp found himself with a number of Howard's unfinished manuscripts. One or two were Conan stories, the rest were not. Gnome Press had by this time published some of the Conan stories in book form and it was obvious that Howard fans wanted more. Thus, posthumously, de Camp teamed up with Howard to polish up the Conan tales and rewrite the suitable non-Conan manuscripts into stories featuring the Cimmerian. These included *The Black Stranger*, *The Road of Eagles*, *Hawks Over Shem* and *The Frost Giant's Daughter*. Originally published in magazine form, they were later incorporated into book form and published by Gnome. A young Swedish airman, a great admirer of Conan, was meanwhile trying his hand at a Conan story, he sent it to de Camp and this was later published, after seeing magazine publication in *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*, as *The Return of Conan*, Gnome, 1957. Since then, I believe, *The Legacy of Conan* has been written, and will be published eventually by Gnome.

It is an unhappy thought, but it is unlikely that we shall be seeing much more of de Camp's remarkable and wholly original Fantasy and SF stories, his time these days is devoted to keeping his wife and kids in bread and butter, and this can be done more successfully in other fields.

However, there is a wealth of material by de Camp and I haven't managed to read it all, yet.

What's more these stories can be read over and over again, they never cease to entertain. De Camp is truly fit to be called a Master of Fantasy.

Roberta's follow-up Editorial in #7 laid the groundwork for what she hoped was to become the flagship model for the BSFA, for new and old SF fans alike...

Editorial of Vector #7 by Roberta Gray [Vector #7, Winter 1959]

This time round *Vector* has a new look and we would like the members to tell us how they like it. Unfortunately, as we are still judging the costs of the new method we have had to cut down a little and there are only two pages of letters this time. These are the first which were received when the last issue of *Vector* came out - all those received later are being held over.

But talking of letters, Eric Bentcliffe's article on Psionics has sparked off a correspondence, as readers will see by the letter column. This is as it should be - the journal should help to spark off scientific discussions among the readers and help to keep an interesting letter column going. It will also aid the professional editors by keeping them in touch with what sort of story or article is currently wanted by the readers of their magazines. So a letter column which engages in scientific discussion serves a double purpose. It helps to keep readers interested and gives professional editors and writers an idea of what the reading public wants. I would like to mention one thing, though. And that is to try and keep your discussions in layman's language as much as is possible. The readers want to be illuminated by science not blinded by it.

The B.S.F.A. has now been in existence for two years and despite teething troubles (plus the sickness at one time of two of the officials) it is gradually building itself up. In fact, it has now gathered into its fold not only what we call "fans", but also others with a deep and sincere interest in sciencefiction [*sic*]. The Association can - and should - be a way of bridging the gap between those enthusiasts who are "fans" and those who are not. The B.S.F.A. can keep in touch with the active ones and be a means of introducing passive members into the activity of the "fan" world should they wish to be a participant. For the member who does not wish to become a fan the Association is a method whereby he can be kept up-to-date with the S.F. world. This is one of the main reasons why *Vector* must remain on a fairly serious level. It is not a "fanzine" and should not be regarded as such. The "fans" have their own amateur magazines, but *Vector* is for the "fan" and non-fan alike.

Any nominees for the official posts should keep this in mind and also be warned that the B.S.F.A. can take up quite a lot of time. The possibility that club activities and the publishing of a regular amateur magazine may have to be put by while in office should be considered. Trying to do all three can be a strain that may be unsuspected until it is almost too late. My own opinion (and it should be remembered that this is my opinion and no one else's as far as I know) is that the best type of official is an active member, but one not too deeply involved in other projects. The main thing to remember is that first consideration in everything must be given at all times to Association members. After all, they pay to belong to the B.S.F.A. and have that right. If the new officials need help there are many experienced members within the Association [*who*] will be quite willing to offer assistance. However, this is for the membership itself to decide at the Annual General Meeting at Easter.

Best wishes to all of you and to the future of the B.S.F.A. and I hope to see a goodly number of you this Easter.

Roberta Gray

Back then, the BSFA probably felt like a very large extended family (as can be seen from the following Secretary's Report), but life in the hot seat of the BSFA remained something of a rollercoaster, so it's nice to know that some things never change...

Secretary's Report by Sandra Hall [Vector #7, Spring 1960]

This is the last issue of *Vector* to be produced by the current editors and the last in which I shall be doing the Secretary's Report. First of all, I should like to thank all those members and non-members who have helped out with the work over the last hectic months. Some have cranked the duplicator handle and others have collated through the night. All, however, deserve a tribute here.

It has been a complaint amongst members that past issues of *Vector* have looked too much like fanzines and not enough like 'official organs'. In response to this, we have attempted to re-design this magazine. The size of the type may possibly be a bit harder on your eyes than previously - but if the same method of production is used next time, the type will be larger. We think this issue is an improvement on earlier issues - hope you think so, too.

At the moment it is still in the balance whether or not this issue will be out in time for the Convention. Illness seems to have dogged our footsteps more than usual. Here it is, less than a fortnight before Easter and the Secretary is down with 'flu. Just in case I don't turn up - happy convention to you all. Mike Moorcock is also sick. He's had to make several visits to hospital recently. He is currently a trifle pessimistic about being able to attend the Con. Until recently only dogged determination has kept him going on the production of *Vector*.

New members are duly welcomed. Just recently there has been a rise in membership. Which proves something, I think.

Candidates for Editor currently standing are Gerald Mosdell (who is producing the Convention programme this year), John Phillifent and Jimmy Groves. There is a rumour that Ron Bennett may stand for Secretary. Ella Parker is standing, I believe, also. Either of these people would make ideal secretaries. The voting will take place at the Annual General Meeting of the B.S.F.A. on Sunday 17th April (during the Easter Con).

Congratulations to Ken and Pam Bulmer on the birth of their daughter Deborah Louise whose birthday was ----- [details removed by Editor AB]. I was also very pleased to hear of Terry Jeeves' engagement to Miss Valerie Williams. Good luck to you both!

And Good Luck, also, to the next Secretary and other future B.S.F.A. committee members. You'll probably find the work hard - but it's worth it!

Sandra Hall

NEW MEMBER: --- Moorcock, M --- Sutton, Surrey [details removed by Editor AB]

Coincidentally, Vector #7 had an article by Gerald Mosdell, the same chap who was standing as a candidate for the new Editor spot. Perhaps he was already setting out his stall for the future direction of Vector magazine?

The Arts and the Future by G. W. Mosdell [Vector #7, Spring 1960]

It is fairly clear to everyone that the world as a whole has already entered what will probably be its greatest Romantic Age to date. Sputniks are up, there are rockets on and round the moon, and a bathyscope has descended into the deepest trench in the Pacific Ocean. Not since Elizabeth I and England has there been such adventure ahead, and here once more are the circumstances for greatness in the Arts.

What leads have we so far? Beatnick authors and poets, Action painters, and Musique Concrete. No one denies that these mediums have a valid say in matters, but will they provide a useful lead into our future? No, the arts must resume their proper course – Romance.

My impression of the field at present is as follows.

In art, there is but one painter sure of his immortality, Picasso, who measures up to his stature? Albert Camus who recently died in a car crash near Paris, seemed to me the brightest light on the horizon of letters; with Camus gone the field seems very open. Ezra Pound is surely the major poet of our time, for all his obscurities and symbolism. Epstein, of course, is the sculptor of modern times. and his influence will be felt for many years to come. In the world of music Stravinsky will give any backer a run for his money.

Now to S.F. Following the tradition of Swift, Wells and Verne, and towering above all these and present S.F. authors is J.R.R. Tolkien, whose "Fellowship of the Ring" is a major masterpiece of all time ranking with the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Balzac, etc. etc. Ray Bradbury is a poet who writes prose, and may well in the future be regarded as a major author of our time. We now come to the, what one might call, straight novelist of S.F, here are many good writers including John Wyndham, John Christopher, Isaac Asimov (whose ideas and imagination are brilliant, but lacks the sophistication of Wyndham and Christopher) and many others.

Where to from here? I have given an extremely brief resume of people who can give a lead to the arts of the future. Inspected closely it will be seen that they, as all genuine artists, poets, writers and musicians are, whether they acknowledge it or not, basically romantic. Now is not the time for experiments in abstractions as many talented young people think, but a time for Romanticism in its finest tradition, looking forward, feeling the times, observing an age being born!

Alas, Gerald Mosdell didn't succeed in his bid, and when Roberta Gray finally departed with the advent of Vector #7 (Spring, 1960), it was Jim Groves who took up the mantle, and he wanted to get down to business straight away...

Editorial of Vector #8 by Jim Groves [Vector #8, Spring 1960]

Since this is my first editorial you're probably curious as to how I intend to run it and Vector. Well actually much of my editorial policy will be decided by what you, the readers, want – that is if you let me know what it is that you want. However unless there is opposition from you over them I have certain ideas. Firstly since I am editor I can't feature my own work outside of the editorial – so in it I'll ramble on about any subject that takes my fancy. Secondly there is my policy regarding articles, of course I'd like to feature original material only, but this looks like being impossible so there will be a certain amount of reprint material. This will be from amateur sources (fanzines that is) and will consist of serious articles about sf and related material that most of you would not otherwise see.

What sort of thing do you want in *Vector*? I've been told that I should keep everything on a serious plane since you don't like humour - is this so? It's also been suggested that I should ignore Fandom altogether - is that what you want?

The only way that I can learn what you want is if you write, even if you only say 'I liked this, I didn't like that' it helps, although it doesn't make a very interesting letter. Constructive criticism is even more welcome and articles for these pages will probably send me delirious with joy.

Some thoughts on the BSFA

Now, after over two years of existence, it's time to critically examine the association's organisation, aims and activities and if necessary change them. To start the ball rolling here are a few ideas.

To start with I'll define one or two terms that I'll be using so that those of you who may not be familiar with them will know what I'm talking about.

First, Fans and Fandom. Fans are sf readers who, brought together by this mutual interest, correspond about it and other subjects, write for, edit, and publish amateur magazines (fanzines) and hold annual conventions. Fandom is in fact a world wide group uniting people of similar interests. Fans are therefore not only sf readers but also members of a loosely organised group whose activities cover a wide range of interests.

On the other hand by Readers I mean those people who read and enjoy sf but who do not belong to Fandom. Therefore one could say that Fans are Readers but that Readers are not necessarily Fans.

Now as to the formation of the Association - this was done entirely by fans - necessarily so since they were the only group around organised enough to start with. One of the major reasons for the formation was that for some time previous Fandom had been running short of members. It was hoped that of those joining the Association some at least would want to go further and join Fandom (as some actually did). I am myself one such new member. However in order to justify the name of the association the purpose was stated to be that of promoting the writing and publishing of good sf. Actually this was only half the case, the other half being difficult, if not impossible, to explain to non-fans.

I feel that the only way to resolve any conflict of interests between the Fan and Reader types, especially in *Vector*, is to concentrate on the thing that they have in common - a love of sf. This then is what *Vector* should and, if I have my way, will do. Fandom will not intrude to any great extent; just enough to ensure that you know that it exists and can be contacted if you want to find out more about it. *Vector* will concentrate on the sf interests of both Fan and reader and leave the fannish side of things to the fanzines I mentioned earlier on. Both fans and readers can cooperate on the task of boosting good sf whether or not they see eye to eye on other things.

Jim then goes on to cite his scientific education and question the validity of psi powers and associated gumf, and rails against what he and others call 'Psionics Fiction' as presented by John W. Campbell, Jr. in the pages of Astounding Science Fiction. The Secretary's Report in #8 was by Ella Parker, and the Treasurer's Report from Archie Mercer proudly showed that the BSFA had a provisional balance of approx. £17, no shillings and 11p following Eastercon...



Black & white rendition of
Kevin Smith's BSFA Badge

The 1960s: Education. Education. Education.

Long after Jim Groves' initial rants about the New Wave, this rousing article appeared, aimed at educating children at an early age...

An Alien In The Academy by Geoffrey D. Doherty [Vector #13, Autumn 1961]

As a schoolmaster, a teacher of English to be precise, who happens to have a taste for sf, I have certain difficulties to contend with that would never occur to the average addict – whoever that may be. For instance, as a guardian of the moral virtue of the young and a custodian of the ancient monuments of Eng. Lit. I have certain responsibilities to the Establishment which make me very sensitive to some of the more obvious weaknesses of sf.

It is easy enough for the addict who is only concerned with his own amusement etc. to brush off or turn a deaf ear to those attacks on sf which deride and criticise such elements as:

- i. obscene sexual elements,
- ii. sensational overwriting,
- iii. mere escapism,
- iv. interstellar cowboys and indians,
- v. lurid presentation,
- vi. general puerility,
- vii. vampire horrors, and so on.

The list could be extended ad nauseam. Of course, we all know such ideas are firmly based, for the most part, on ignorance. What I have to contend with in school, however, is the evil *image* of sf which exists in the academic mind. Evil *image*, note, not bad name. There are considerable advantages, financial and social, in having a "bad" name, like Brendan Behan, for instance, or the "Angry Young Men". It's a good thing to know (sort of) about avant garde stuff. Sf, unfortunately, is neither that nor on the O.K. list of Eng. Lit. This is probably because it has never shaken off its associations with pulp magazines and those deliciously provoking, technicolour pictures of monsters, hirsute, tentacled, bug-eyed, dragging off some naked pneumatic wench to a fate obviously worse than death in a polyhedral spaceship poised for blast-off on some unlikely lunar crag...

New Maps of Hell by Kingsley Amis

Reviewed by
Brian W. Aldiss

[Vector #11,
Autumn 1961]

It was the Duke of Wellington who regarded the reinforcements sent him and uttered the now classic remark, "I don't know what effect they will have on the enemy, but by God they terrify me!" ... this venture into the cartography of sf, inspires a similar feeling in my breast: I don't know what it does to the general public, but by God it impresses me!

No longer should it be possible to say "science fiction" as if it were a term of abuse rather than a category. No longer should it be possible to think of sf as "spaceships", or as a sort of gilded pill for those wishing to brush up on quantum theory, or as a fiction companion to *Popular Mechanics*, or as a prediction machine, a kind of Old Moore (not Patrick) in a space suit.

We are exceptionally fortunate that Kingsley Amis wrote this; without ever mentioning it by title, he sweeps much of the pretentious nonsense in Modern Science Fiction down the sink.

The author rambles on a fair bit about poor writing and suggestive imagery, before finally getting to the crux of the problem...

... one of the most difficult hurdles for the non-addict is the plethora of bewildering conventions which the fan calmly takes for granted. Concepts such as psionics, hyper-space, stasis, time-warps, are gibberish to the uninitiated, but as common-place as radio and television to the regular reader. It would be quite easy to explain how and why these conventions arose if this were a treatise on the history of sf. Here, however, it is sufficient to say that too much reliance on this kind of gimmicky approach soon causes mental indigestion in the reader, and it is true to say there is now plenty of good sf in which they do not appear at all. At the same time, the general reader will not get very far with sf without a working knowledge of astronomy and general science - a point in its favour I should have thought.

I have tried to point out some of the *particular* failings of sf: it would be easy enough to dwell on general literary weaknesses that apply equally well to any kind of popular writing today. To be constructive is a good deal more difficult. Before we go any further, I think sf should be distinguished to some extent from fantasy - horror, supernatural, out-of-this-world by magic or pseudo-science. Generalising wildly, in all true sf, there is a scientific or technological factor integral to the story and very often the story will have some sociological or philosophical interest as well. For the purposes of this definition, I would accept psychology as one of the sciences. The best sf today is closely related to Utopian literature and the old philosophical tale. Occasionally sf and fantasy have so much in common that it is impossible to distinguish them. Indeed, it is a well-established bardic function to convert mankind's inner fears and frustrations to legend and myth. This kind of material is easily debased, and in sf and fantasy, just as in any other kind of contemporary writing, some authors make the worst use of their material for the worst reasons: *Shamblau*, *A Voyage to Arcturus* and *The Lord of the Rings* exist in parallel, so to speak.

Having trimmed and carped like this in deference to academic scepticism, we are left with a considerable body of worthwhile reading, of which, I think, Wells and Verne were the true pro-genitors. They were the product of an age. How does the imaginative man, agnostic but not unaffected by "those thoughts that lie too deep for tears", react to an age of scientific materialism? Who will deny the poetic element in, say, *The Time Machine*? This is typical. The future symbol refers back in some way to the present. It would be pleasant to expand upon the "poetic" symbolism of sf. We might just say, however, that the imagery of sf is drawn from a 20th century urban and technological civilization, and is consequently valid for, and available to, an ever widening audience.

Perhaps my defence of sf has now become more clear and my reasons for its inclusion in the Eng. Lit. syllabus in school more understandable. Not the least important of the English teacher's many functions is to induce his pupils to consider themselves, their society, its problems moral and philosophical - in other words to become thinking human beings. Sf is frankly popular fiction with a high entertainment appeal, but at the same time it opens more interesting vistas than all but the very best in accepted literature. Many will go on reading sf: few will even start reading the latter.

Of course, one has to know where to look for good material and what to advise one's pupils to read. Personally, sf has given rise to some of my most interesting lessons - some excellent classroom dialectic, particularly in the middle school. Impartially, I observe its growing popularity, even amongst the forms I do not teach!

Having handed the Editorial reins over to Ella Parker from Vector #16, Jim returned briefly again for #18, applauding a certain well-known SF publisher for their excellent efforts...

Editorial of Vector #18 by Jim Groves **[Vector #18, Winter 1963]**

The beginning of a new year is traditionally the time for reviewing the dieing [sic] year and awarding merits, or demerits, to anything that has taken your fancy. And so, bowing to custom, I too will survey the past year in the sf field and mention those things that have affected me in it.

By far and away the most notable event in 1962 was the emergence of a new, and important, name in the sf field. Not a writer this time, nor even an editor. Last year's biggest name was that of Victor Gollancz, the latest publisher to take to sf in a big way, and in my opinion the best yet in the British field.

Not since Sidgwick and Jackson published much of Arthur C. Clarke's sf writing in hard-cover has a British publisher published so much good sf. Averaging one a month we have had a series of excellent books - the two anthologies *Spectrum I* and *II* from Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest, *Twilight World* by Poul Anderson an after-the-bomb story expanded from a story in *ASF*. And then there is Arthur C. Clarke's latest 'documentary sf' novel *A Fall of Moondust*.

One of the more exciting points about this series of sf books is the fact that Gollancz have grasped a point that seemed to pass most of the other British publishers by, that a lot of good sf is published in America and that there is a market for British reprints of it. And so we have such books as Zenna Henderson's stories of the 'People', *Pilgrimage*, Frank Herbert's *Dragon in the Sea*, and Damon Knight's collection *Far Out*.

Among this array of talent there is even the occasional experiment. As for instance the excursion into our field of a mainstream novelist Naomi Mitchison, with her novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*. Though I've not yet seen a copy of this myself I gather from the reviews that it is an excellent piece of writing. On the face of it we have here an addition to that select band of mainstream writers who have made the grade in sf.

The above books have the usual Gollancz jacket of plain yellow paper with red and black lettering. Recently there has been a variation however. The cover of *Catseye* by Andre Norton is illustrated, and the advert for *Farmer in the Sky* by Heinlein on the dust jacket flap of *Catseye* also mentions that it is illustrated. These are both juvenile sf books so I suppose illustrated dust jackets will be limited to them which is a pity.

Keep your eyes on this publisher this year. If they maintain the standard of 1962 into 1963 then we are in for a real feast of delights, and if they improve on it... well! More power to their elbow.

Jim Groves

Sf, as Kingsley says, is not "a massive body of serious art destined any moment to engulf the whole of Anglo-Saxon writing".

Dearly as we love it, sf is only a small part of contemporary fiction. There is no progress in the arts, as Wyndham Lewis has pungently demonstrated; nor is contemporary fiction stagnating - both tenets frequently aired in fanzines. True there can be progress in the pre-art stage; this is what we have been witnessing in sf over twenty or twenty-five years, the climb from crudity to literacy. Kingsley Amis's book is a symptom of the climb rather than a medal of honour for shinning up the literary Everest of Parnassus. This is what makes it a lovely and an exciting volume.

Put it this way: the importance of Kingsley Amis's book is twofold. He has opened a window for the general reader on to our lively branch of fiction. And he has provided a mirror in which the sf writer and reader can see the perspectives of our curious and colourful nether world.

Whether you are a visitor to or a resident in the hells he charts, here is one item to cherish among the flames.

**Starship
Troopers
by Robert
Heinlein**

**Reviewed by
Brian W. Aldiss**

**[Vector #13,
Autumn 1961]**

This is the second-rate novel about which there has been all the third-rate talk.

Most of the comment I have seen on *Starship Troopers* suggests that it glorifies war. A careful study of the text (a truncated version of which appeared in *F&SF*) suggests this is not the case at all. Although warfare certainly enters the book, its chief subject – the one on which Heinlein works up his most delicious sweats – is the subject of harsh discipline.

Only by keeping this firmly in mind can any critic, amateur or otherwise, talk meaningfully about the novel.

Finally, what of that unimportant point on which some people have concentrated: is *Starship Troopers* pro-war?

Shortly thereafter, Archie Mercer took to the Editor's Chair, and held it for quite some time... from #19 to #25 in fact. One of the things he introduced, was The Author's Lot, where authors were invited to explain why and how they came to write science fiction...

***The Author's Lot by Brian W. Aldiss
[Vector #19, May 1963]***

You know what happened to Lot's wife? According to the Old Testament, she looked back and got turned into a pillar of salt. We like more science with our fantasy nowadays, but somehow the old story sticks. Giving this essay the title I have, I warn myself what may happen if I look back.

And then I look back.

I look back and try to see what made me a writer. To put it in an inaccurate nutshell: in my surroundings, it was a lack of something; in me it was a surplus of something. But lacks and surpluses are what have made man man. They're what continue to make man man. The man who is content with his surroundings is deficient in the vitamin of dreams. It means among other things that he will not want to read science fiction.

Many children write and draw until the talent gets squeezed out of them by stupidities and restrictions – some of them unconsciously self-imposed; I ask myself why I kept on writing. The answer may be that I was a shy child. My father had a sarcastic way of picking other people's remarks and turning them about until they looked ludicrous. This talent I admired, for it was genuinely funny, even when the laugh was against oneself. Nevertheless, it made one think before speaking, and often decide not to speak for fear of saying something foolish.

But if you write! Why, then you have the chance to look it over first and expunge at least some of the idiocies! If you think in this cautious way for a number of years, and act accordingly, then you find that you express yourself as if by instinct more cogently on paper than in speech. In conversation, you have to observe the tacit rules of team-work; on paper, you only co-operate with yourself...

***The Author's Lot II by Harry Harrison
[Vector #22, October 1963]***

When I read the first Author's Lot in *Vector 19* I was stirred to rush into the confessional behind Brian and reveal the whole of my truth in the same manner. But work piled up and we were getting ready to leave for Trieste (a lovely blast that our President has reported on in greater detail)... So nothing was done. Then *Vector 20* arrived and I made the pleasant discovery that the rest of the membership seemed to have enjoyed The Author's Lot as well. Stirred by my own revelatory needs and called on by name by those Old Mancunians Edwards and Nadler, I will attempt to open the locked book of my past.

The beginning is dull. The direct linear progression that Brian reveals never existed for me. At an early stage in life I felt drawn to both writing and art, and after much infantile soul searching decided on art. It took twenty years to realize this was a mistake, and it was science fiction that finally saved me from continuing existence as an ink-stained drudge. I read my first SF story at the ripe age of seven and was instantly hooked: you must have all had that experience. The growing golden light that fills the room as you realize that this... THIS is it. Through childhood, school, army and school again the SF enthusiasm never waned. I read, letterhacked, collected, traded, joined clubs, went to conventions (including the first: those were the days...) and was fannish in every way.

At the same time I was building a career in art. My interests were Classical and my training was done on the antique and I leaned towards portrait painting. However I watched my maestro, the incomparable painter John Blomshield, starving himself to death and had second thoughts. Easel painting is only for those with private incomes. Recognizing the handwriting on the canvas I went to a series of commercial art academies and emerged able to do a competent job of magazine illustration, book jackets, advertising layouts and comic books, all of which I drew with varying degrees of commercial success. I eventually found my niche in the comic books which paid the most money for the least work and gave golden premiums for speed. (I once inked a standard nine panel 15" by 20" comic page in 25 minutes and became known in our professional circles—not without a certain amount of jealousy—as Harry the Hack.) I would probably still be there, buying India ink by the gallon instead of the quart and inking with a bigger and bigger brush, if it hadn't been for the enduring SF interest.

A writer's job is to turn the dross of his daydreams into gold. SF is the most exacting form of fiction, making all the demands of ordinary fiction *plus* the science-fictional rationale. Therefore when it is successful its rewards to the author are that much greater. (Not in *money* of course — that is expecting too much.) I really cannot see what pleasure can be exacted from the writing of yet another bed-sitter novel. Without giving away any secrets I can reveal that writing SF is just as much fun as reading it — and even more therapeutic. Remember; those guns go off louder for me, the blood is redder, the machines shinier — and the phallic spaceships reach up to the clouds.

The Author's Lot III by Eric Frank Russell ***[Vector #25, March 1964]***

Unlike Lots One and Two I cannot say that interest in s-f came first and was followed by a desire to write it. The approach was from the opposite direction, by which is meant that the urge to write preceded an appetite for s-f by a few years. And when the writing of s-f did begin it was, in a way, somewhat accidental.

My first piece of deathless prose was published upon a back-alley wall. It employed certain recently-discovered words more common to barracks than bethels. With appalling lack of appreciation my mother threatened to wash my mouth with soap. She also promised a bloody battering from my father who—when the matter was reported to him—rolled on the floor and clutched his crotch.

The next step was decidedly higher up the intellectual ladder; I produced dollops of precious verbiage for the school, scout troop and parish magazines — and almost any other printed periodical that wanted something for nothing.

This rise in wasted effort became visible when slightly more ponderous versions began to be featured in a couple of glossy business-house magazines. Today, no doubt, they'd look very much like Arthur Clarke's original application for membership in the B.I.S. — a document that must be seen to be believed.

There's one bee in my bonnet that I'd like to exhibit to public gaze: that being my belief that science fiction could have been helped more in the past, and gained readier acceptance, had it been better named. Editorial awareness of this need is evident in the face of magazines with titles such as *If* and *Science Fantasy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. After all, the stuff is speculative fiction not necessarily related to scientific theories that can be adopted in one decade and abandoned in the next. Speculation is and always has been legitimately part of the mainstream of literature, not the separate thing that s-f pretends itself to be. What is wanted is a self-explanatory label less suggestive of literary apartheid — but I fear me the old s-f tag has been stuck on so long it's there for keeps. Which is a pity.

Purely as a guess, I'd say Heinlein wrote this in disgusted reaction against the soft aimlessness that threatens democratic countries as severely as Communism. He knocks over a pair of straw dummies, the old platitudes that 'violence never settles anything' and that 'the best things in life are free', but what's controversial in that?

No sir, this novel is guaranteed not to harm a fly, despite a few unhealthy mother- and father-things floating in its shallows. It's quite drinkable, but very small beer.

**Penguin Science
Fiction anthology
edited by
Brian W. Aldiss**

**Reviewed by
Harry Harrison**

**[Vector #13,
Autumn 1961]**

Somebody down there at Penguin must have his head screwed on right, because it was a stroke or genius on their part to get Our President to put together an anthology for them. For 3/6 they have put out the neatest package of SF you can possibly imagine. The sort of volume that is just made for propaganda. Keep a few extra copies on the shelf and press them into the hot hands of possible converts.

To begin with there is a compact little introduction that is as easy to read as the stories themselves. I was most pleased not to see Munchausen's *Flight to the Moon*, Aristophanes' *The Birds*, Bacon's *New Atlantis* and all the others that usually mar introductions, and in the attempt to give authenticity to SF give it instead the touch of death. None of that.

It's probably worth adding that during these early years of the formation of the BSFA and the publication of Vector, there was always a lot of space given over to letters, annual reports, magazine and book reviews, and so on and so forth... and several about 'the state of affairs', prompting one member to record his personal apocalypse...

New Road Maps To Chaos by C. P. McKenzie [Vector #20, July 1963]

In this article I am going to raise a plaintive voice in a direction totally opposed to the current general flow. Of late, a lot has been said and written about ways and means of getting sf popularised, and recognised generally for the high form of literature it is. Most of the recent *New Worlds* guest editorials have been in this vein; month after month sf writers are putting into black-and-white the problems facing sf authors, editors and publishers: the need for better stories, higher quality writing, and, mainly, more readers.

Vector, too, has its share. Although not so apparent as in *New Worlds*, the general tone is for improvements all round, more letters, more articles, more members... etc. The letter column tries to point out what is wrong with the B.S.F.A. and ways to correct these faults, and improve it, and *Vector*, generally. This in itself is good. I think I'm in the majority when I say I like *Vector*. It has its faults, of course, but they do seem to be corrected soon after their appearance. Okay; but there are further-reaching implications too, and these are what I want to explore in this discourse.

To start off with, let's have a look at the world's population as a whole. It depends on who you are to determine how you view the division of the people. For instance, educationalists say 'literate or illiterate', South Africans say 'black or white', Frenchmen say 'man or woman', and so on. I tend to see the world as being sharply divided between people who do, and people who don't, read sf. However, it's not an even division; in fact it's decidedly lop-sided, with the bias in favour of the 'don'ts'. This is particularly true of Great Britain and the United States, although not so true of some other countries.

So the line is drawn. Just now I said it was a sharp division; but is it? How do you define an sf reader? Where does the line come? *The Day of the Triffids* was a best-seller; twenty million people watched *A for Andromeda* on television; *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* was one of the cinema box-office draws of last year. And yet the membership of the B.S.F.A. is only about 150. So the general public must appreciate sf, even if they don't know it. Somewhere inside most people, there must be a little spark of Fandom trying to get out. And the professional publishers know this! If they can only convince people that sf is good, then they're going to achieve one of their biggest aims.

The B.S.F.A., too, wants more people to become paid-up members. Each year, successive Committees are baffled by 'The Silent Ones' who come and go, people who apparently decide to join, pay the sub, and then, mysteriously, disappear when the next sub is due. Is it because they're hard up? I doubt it. The real reason is because their contact with sf was just a mere flirtation, induced through an overdose of *James Bond*, and the chance discovery of one of the sf classics.

So, the potential must be there: not in everybody by any means, some people just will not adapt to sf, but there is a large body of people who have the possibility of becoming avid sf readers.

I have only recently come to this conclusion, but sf publishers have been aware of it ever since the days of Hugo Gernsback. For the last forty years the covers and blurbs of sf books and magazines have been alternately toned down and tuned up, as fashions changed, in search of wider readership. The publishers' angle is plain to see - more readers, more

profits. But, taking the long view, is this what we want? Is it such a good idea to get the non-discriminating majority into our select midst? I say "No", emphatically. My reasons will be plain to see if you just follow my lines of thought as the inevitable, chilling logic of it all unwinds itself. Let us imagine a state of affairs in the none-too-distant future; say in six months. Overnight, the potential spark of sf Fandom in millions wafts itself into a roaring furnace of sf-devouring fervour, the magic number 451 proudly flaming.

One of the first visual things to become apparent is the sudden demand for sf in the book-shops. The immediate result – all available books are sold. People ask for more, and they get them. Publishing houses reprint their current titles and eventually revive most of their old. So far, so good. Everything looks fine. The bewildered devotee finds that the titles that have been eluding him for years are suddenly popping up in his local book-shop, resplendent in new covers. This is great, the unsuspecting fan thinks to himself, heaven on earth. But, unbeknown to him, the thin end of a very stubborn wedge has been well and truly placed.

All our favourite hack/crud writers are awakened, led gently up to a room bare of all but a chair, table, typewriter and paper, and told; "Write ... you'll be paid by the ton." The door is then locked, collections made daily, and the results rushed at high speed to the printers. With quite alarming speed, "science-fiction" books appear on book-stalls. Magazines, too, find a new market, and encouraged by this new mags pop up, crammed with stories by 'new' authors and stories 'by the author of...'

The B.S.F.A. cashes in on the boom, too, with rising membership, monthly *Vectors* in coloured covers and on glossy paper, weekly Newsletters, and, best news of all, the 1964 Convention fills every hotel in Peterborough.

Just what the sf industry needs. Authors wear out their pens writing, publishers wear out their hands rubbing, readers wear out their eyes reading. Guest Editorials in *New Worlds* reflect the need to find more material, and deplore the fast-diminishing store of ideas. The British edition of *Analog* reappears with letters in 'Brass Tacks' from Americans saying they've built and tested a Dean device, and that the view from the Moon is just swell. *Private Eye* takes over Nova Publications. Kingsley Amis writes the inevitable sequel to *New Maps of Hell*, sympathising with the now-defunct satire industry. Charles Clore takes over *Private Eye*. Elizabeth Taylor is invited to open the 1965 Convention, which consequently fills every hotel in London.

In other words... chaos. In the midst of all this lunacy, it is still just barely possible to find the occasional thoroughbred fan, still clinging desperately to his sanity, buying with discretion, a supercilious leer on his face as he watches the teeming plebs clamouring for space-opera. It couldn't go on for ever. Inevitably, the boom grinds to a halt, as fast as it was born. Magazines fold, publishing-houses close, book-shops hold 'Closing-Down Sales' and, accompanied by loud cheers from a faceless minority, all the hack/crud writers are one by one returned to a dreamless slumber. The few remaining genuine sf writers suffer a stunning blow to their ability to sell their material. A slump, no less.

I ask again; do we want this to happen? Publishers – we know you're good, and we'll keep it quiet if you will. Just don't try to widen your markets. It's not worth it.

(P.S. Have I been reading too much cataclysmic sf?)

Subsequent issues covered all manner of SF concepts that barely warrant a second glance nowadays...

Instead, a witty little essay that nudges the reader delicately in the ribs and fills him with the desire to read on. And when he does there are many pleasant surprises. Here is Steinbeck's 'The Short-Short Story of Mankind' for all those who missed it in *Playboy*. And Schmitz's fascinating experiment in symbiosis, 'Grandpa'. There are a lot more – twelve stories in all – from many different sources over the last twenty years. Yet there is an even flow of pace and interest [that] I'm sure was no accident. A nicely composed and evenly balanced work. Don't be put off if you see old favourites like Asimov's 'Nightfall' here. It fits, and that is reason enough.

An interesting fact, and one that might be long pondered on, is that the best story in the volume is by the anthologist himself, 'Poor Little Warrior'!

**The Stars
Like Dust
by Isaac Asimov**

**Reviewed by
Beryl Henley**

**[Vector #26,
May 1964]**

Political intrigue in and out of hyper-space. It gets a bit involved at times, and one might be pardoned for thinking that one was reading van Vogt. Certain characters start off as 'goodies', are made to appear 'baddies', and end up in the original category (and vice-versa!). But each character is, again, well rounded, having a distinct personality of his/her own. The hero, heroine and their allies have faults; the villains have some likeable qualities -- or, at least, motives with which one can almost sympathise.

The reasoning processes of the leading characters are logical and well thought out - and all the clues are there for the reader to pick up for himself.

Hyper-Space: The Immutable Concept? by Philip Harbottle ***[Vector #21, September 1963]***

Hyper-space. A concept that is probably meaningless to the ordinary reader, yet is at once identifiable to the sf initiate. Together with bems, time travel, and mutants, hyper-space can take its place as a fixture in the genre.

Hyper-space goes back a very long way in the annals of sf, back into the '20s at least. Today, though it be known variously as nulspace, overspace, or subspace, it is still the same old hyper-space that is employed by our modern authors. The treatment may be new and sophisticated, but the idea is still the same. And in the new school of writing, hyper-space is today a mere backdrop, a plot device that is dismissed in a few glib lines.

That hyper-space has lasted, whereas other old-time concepts have languished and fallen into disrepute, is due largely to one fact: it remains the best device our authors have to negate Einstein's speed-of-light laws. Oddly enough, the first stories to override the speed limitation did not employ hyper-space at all. *Skylark of Space* probably saw the first manifestation of this, wherein famed author Edward Elmer Smith simply said, in effect, that the Theory of Relativity which embodied it was after all only a theory. And that the theory was demonstrably untrue. His famous characters, Seaton and DuQuesne, roamed the universe at whatever velocities Smith's epic plots demanded. This device still has its advocates. But it is the magical realm of hyper-space, where natural laws no longer apply, that holds sway.

To create a hyper-space concept at once gripping and tangible, with real situations and memorable locale, may prove impossible. The subject itself is seemingly intractable. It will take an author with the imagination of a Fearn, the facility of a Leinster, the story-telling of a Williamson, and the treatment of a Heinlein to approach it. And such an author would then have created the most important sf story for decades. For make no mistake: with science fiction now crowding fictioneers beyond the solar system, hyper-space is here to stay.

Practical scientists have called hyper-space a dream. I contend that to be of little consequence, for when the Dream dies, then so must science fiction.

March Of The Mutants by Philip Harbottle ***[Vector #23, December 1963]***

In the development of science fiction, many ideas have come to prominence such as giant ants, anti-gravity spaceships, etc. only for them to fade into oblivion as tastes and standards change. The idea that the hidden side of the moon may harbour alien life has been shattered by reality. Notwithstanding, several basic themes remain. One reason for this permanence - taking the mutant instance alone - lies in the probability, indeed actuality, of the concept. For reality does not always serve to blight science fiction: it can also strengthen it. Verisimilitude, not wonder, is the forte of much modern science fiction.

Initially, mutants were introduced in magazine stories merely to provide colour and a garish denouement. They were almost invariably baleful monstrosities, and it took both authors and editors a very long time to realise the wider implications of the concept.

Today it is beginning to look as if the mutant story needs a new slant again. Too many authors are continuing to mark time, witness Gordon Dickson in *Necromancer*. Atomic aftermath, now an ominous possibility, is old hat to blasé sf readers. True, mutations in parapsychology provided a tremendous impetus to the concept, in such classics as Shiras's *Children of the Atom* and Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, a disquieting study of the symbiosis of a group of supernormal children. But it seems doubtful that this particular vein can be improved upon.

The most promising new frontier in mutant fiction would appear to lie in space travel. Space, with its abundance of virulent radiations, is a likely agent for mutation. The idea is not new, having appeared as far back as 1941 in Robert Heinlein's *Universe*. As yet, it has not been memorably exploited, although Brian Aldiss came near in *Non-Stop*.

What forms the new mutations will take, no one can say at present, but the fictioneers will have to move quickly. The next mutants may not be fiction at all. They may be fact.

Roger Peyton took over the editorship with #26, and this led to sweeping changes, not least in the standards of presentation and artwork... And a return to discussing what the American and British magazines at the time were printing. This had long been the subject of copious discussion and countless reviews already in Vector...

Editorial of Vector #35 by Rog Peyton [Vector #35, October 1965]

Due to the recent upsurge in the membership, the financial state of the BSFA is at a point where the committee feels the Association can afford a professionally printed journal. This has been something that the present and previous committees have strived for since the first issue of *Vector*. One issue, the seventh, was professionally printed, but at the time, the membership was not large enough to carry the cost. Now, we are happy to say, the membership has reached the 350 mark and with a number of advertisements due to appear within the next month or so, that figure could easily pass the 400 mark before the end of the year.

The state of science fiction in general is, I'm pleased to note, improving immensely. Magazine SF particularly. I think that *If* will be the main contender for the Hugo Award for the Best Professional Magazine. This year has seen a tremendous improvement in its presentation and quality. It's a great pity that the British magazines won't be in the running. I feel they are no longer publishing the type of science fiction that most of us enjoy. While the American magazines, led by *If*, *Analog*, and *Worlds of Tomorrow* are publishing good solid science fiction, full of *ideas*, the British magazines abound in stories that are written for their literary rather than their science fictional content. What is needed in Britain is another magazine with opposing views to those of the editors of *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*. At the present rate of change, it will not be too long before the stories in these magazines are unrecognizable as the science fiction we know. The editors claim that this is the trend and that if science fiction is to 'grow up' it *must* change. But surely when the majority of us started reading SF, it was for the *ideas* to be found in the stories rather than the literacy of the authors? By all means be literate – *but not at the expense of the ideas!*

Interestingly, Edmund Crispin became the new President of the BSFA at the tail end of 1965, the Association having languished without one for several months following the departure of Brian Aldiss from the chair... Sadly, tributes to writers who had passed away also became a regular thing...

The scope is Galactic, reaching right into the limbo of the Horsehead Nebula. Much of the action takes place in space, including Jumps through hyperspace, and an almost hopeless search for one particular planet. From this angle, there is more technical data than is contained in *The End of Eternity* – which is all right if you like that kind of thing!

Collectors' item: "Observe the Universe, young man. If you can't force amusement out of it, you might as well cut your throat, since there's damned little good in it."

The Naked Sun by Isaac Asimov

**Reviewed by
Pete Weston**

**[Vector #26,
May 1964]**

For me, this book did not have the impact of its predecessor, *The Caves of Steel*. The earlier book relied for much of its effect upon the background of the 'Caves' - the vast cities of the future. In this later book, the fascinating backdrop is missing and in its place is the unconvincing and rather shallow world of Solaria. Somehow, the idea of a world of individuals with almost no contact did not come over.

In *The Naked Sun* Asimov seems determined to show the future Earthmen as subterranean dwellers with a positive fear of surface life. There is also a scene in which Bailey is shown the outside world; he watches falling rain with unconcern – a different reaction to his first glimpse of outdoors in this later book.

***A Tribute to 'Doc' Smith by Edmond Hamilton* [Vector #36, November 1965]**

Probably no-one in all the field of science fiction will ever be so missed as 'Doc' Smith. He was an assiduous attendant at SF conventions and gatherings, so that almost everyone in the field got to know him and to hold him in deep affection. It is over twenty-five years ago that Bob Heinlein, then a brilliant new star in SF, introduced me to him. I bowed low, declared my admiration for his great stories, and assured him, "Doc, this is like a parish priest meeting the Pope." He gave me his wry grin and retorted, "But which of us, in your opinion, is which?"

He was, indeed, so well known and loved that I hardly need say much about his personality. His fatherliness towards everyone in SF was a tradition, and yet there was an inextinguishable boyishness about him. And on occasion, his eyes could suddenly crackle with frosty lightnings when something aroused his indignation.

It is of his writing that I would like to speak. Too many people offhandedly mention his stories as sweeping space-adventures, without going further. To make my point I shall have to delve into the history of science fiction; and that is not inappropriate since Doc Smith himself was such a large part of that history.

The day of the myth-makers faded when just before World War II there was a sudden efflorescence of SF magazines and the appearance of a whole galaxy of fine new writers... Heinlein, Bradbury, Kuttner, De Camp and a host of others. They, and the readers by then, were less interested in going farther out than they were in making sounder stories out of the materials of science fiction. But Doc Smith, although he admired them, seemed little influenced by them, and it is a testimonial to his fiction that in this day of new styles and standards, he never lost his public.

In closing, I will lapse briefly into the personal. I have been writing science fiction for forty years and the best reward it has brought me has been the friendship of a host of wonderful people. . . from A. Merritt, one of the finest men I ever met, to youngsters I met only this year. But among them all, Doc Smith will always stand out in memory. He, if anyone was, was Mr Science Fiction.

Great things remained on the horizon in 1965, however, as Vic Hallett reported in his ongoing series looking at SF cinema and TV...

***The Visual Side by Vic Hallett* [Vector #36, November 1965]**

I mentioned at the start of my last article that the most promising film on the cinema horizon was Stanley Kubrick's Cinerama production, 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. It becomes more promising with each piece of news that is released and I hope to keep you informed of future developments as I hear of them. The latest is that it takes as its starting point, Arthur C. Clarke's short story "The Sentinel", but that it goes much farther than the story did. Clarke himself is co-author of the screenplay with Kubrick and so far the cast includes Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood as astronauts. Locations are planned for Germany, Switzerland, America and Africa, with studio and process work being done here in Britain.

Those of you who know the story will remember that it concerns an exploration expedition to the Moon who discover that an alien artifact is already there. This is a sentinel or, as Kubrick describes it, an interplanetary burglar-alarm. The film moves on to discover who or what put it there and why, and embarks on a journey through the solar system and, finally, on a light-years long interstellar ship. As one would expect from Clarke, care is being taken

to ensure scientific accuracy. Kubrick has so far shown that he is a director of honesty – when he says that the film will be about the majesty of space, then we can be sure that it will look majestic and not studio-bound and cardboard.

One of the other things Vector always prided itself on, was its ability to examine and criticise the work of SF authors...

Ray Bradbury – A Short Critique by Bob Parkinson [Vector #39, April 1966]

It is possible that we may have to give up the idea of Ray Bradbury as a writer of science fiction altogether. That, or give up the idea that science fiction was something special, invented by Hugo Gernsback in 1911. For while it is true that Ray Bradbury 'grew up' as a writer within the science fiction tradition (which is to say that he wrote for SF magazines), the roots of his work grow further back than that. The fantasy and childhood landscapes have their forebears in the fantasy of Edgar Allan Poe and the Mississippi world of Mark Twain. The interest which has been shown in Ray Bradbury outside the 'SF' field, coupled with the misunderstanding which has occurred within it, suggest that being known as an 'SF' writer has hindered, rather than encouraged, the appreciation of this man's art. That he can be reviewed under the 'general fiction' columns of the Sunday newspapers can only be considered as a good thing.

Besides, a writer – especially a writer of short stories – needs outlets for his work; and for short stories the only real outlets are magazines. So what more natural than that a young writer, seeking print, should choose to write for the 'pulp' science fiction magazines spreading through the country? He was not the only one to do it.

The Real Ideas of Philip K. Dick by Michael Moorcock [Vector #36, April 1966]

The demands of the science fiction field have been, until comparatively recently at any rate, somewhat detrimental to an author wishing to develop his work in any 'serious' or 'artistic' way. Primarily, this detrimental influence is due to the fact that any individual author is never expected to repeat his ideas. He must write a story speculating in biological and social developments one month and a story about the problems relating to an experimental space-drive the next. He is praised for this butterfly-ability in much the same way as a magician who never repeats a trick is praised and he is as often as not attacked if he uses the same theme, or 'trick', twice. He can use the same backgrounds, however, time after time and never come in for strong criticism – he can even use the same basic plot formula repeatedly without being attacked very much.

A typical formula is the one involving an Exploration Team landing on a new planet, discovering some mystery regarding the behaviour of the inhabitants, becoming involved in some action stemming from their attempts to unravel the mystery and finally solving the problem and blasting off again. Another involves the space war (usually between Earth and Aliens from another system or group of systems) in which a decisive point has been reached (usually, Earth is up against it) and a device has been invented which can, once certain problems have been solved, swing the balance in Earth's favour. You can probably think of several more basic formulae involving psi-powers, time paradoxes, collapsed civilisations and so on.

The formula, the usually cardboard characters and the familiar backgrounds are acceptable in most SF circles so long as the 'idea' is different – the social set-up on the New Planet

These are objections I have raised because I would have liked Asimov to keep the same background in both of these very good books. For *The Naked Sun* is a good book in spite of the faults I have found above, and in spite of the fact that the 'detective mystery' setting is not as substantial as that of *The Caves of Steel*.

At the end of the book there is a very good opening for a follow-up, when Bailey asks to be sent to Aurora. After seven years, it seems that this opening is not to be used – a great pity for I rate both *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun* among Asimov's best books.

Earthworks by Brian Aldiss

Reviewed by
Vic Hallett

[Vector #44,
May 1967]

This book is one of the very best that Brian Aldiss has yet written. It is not an easy book to like because the world it pictures is so dislikeable; it is, however, a book whose 120 intensely written pages contain more ideas and more sheer good writing than most other science fiction books put together.

Knowle Noland, the narrator, tells us that his intention is to picture the world he lives in, but by doing so tells us a great deal about himself and emerges as one of the most complex characters in the whole of the genre.

The world Noland inhabits is full of the sickness of aridity; aridness of the soil, aridness of ideas; and Aldiss' writing skill is such that aridity and sickness are the main feelings generated by this book. That does not mean that the book itself is arid or sick.

or the device which will win the war for Earth. These are what many people in science fiction mean when they talk about 'ideas', but this is not really what the term means in mainstream fiction and there is sometimes confusion aroused when it is discovered that what some SF readers would call an 'idea' is not the same thing as what others would call an 'idea'.

To the reader of good mainstream literature the 'idea' of the average SF story is nothing much more than a 'notion' or 'story gimmick' for ringing the changes on an old theme - in much the same way as a mystery writer rings the changes on the locked room murder mystery by coming up with yet another ingenious explanation of how the corpse came to be alone in the room locked on the inside. This notion can be inventive, startling, highly entertaining or merely dull depending on the skill and invention of the particular author, but it remains merely an ingenious gimmick.

An 'idea' in literature is usually considered to mean something different and much more general. Briefly, it is taken to mean the essential outlook and obsession which dominates a particular work.

When I say that Dick has been more successful than the other writers, I am in no way making a comparison of the quality of their work - I am simply stating that Dick has successfully managed to entertain the average reader without, on the whole, puzzling him. To a large extent this ability has cut him off from the success enjoyed by the other writers outside the limited world of science fiction because his work has, until recently at least, not been obviously allegorical and people who have seen his work have accepted him as a good SF craftsman rather than a 'serious' writer working in the medium of SF. Also, by not puzzling the average reader (at least, not very much), by producing a well-rounded superficial plot, he has failed to some extent to show the reader the way through to his underlying themes.

Earlier I explained how the demands of the science fiction market have hitherto hampered writers from developing their work in the accepted literary ways by forcing them to flit from theme to theme, from 'idea' to 'idea', without ever developing whatever literary obsessions they may have.

With a writer like Graham Greene, for instance, it is perfectly acceptable for him to develop one dominant theme through all his novels, from his first to his last, returning time after time to a single obsession or group of obsessions to probe, re-investigate, look at from a fresh angle and so on. Such a writer is respected for doing this rather than denigrated and he is judged not by whether his 'idea' is new for him, but by how successful he is at creating a fictitious 'reality' - whether his backgrounds come 'alive', whether his characters convince and 'live', and so on.

Even a non-intellectual writer like Dickens could return to a theme (the persecution of the innocent, for instance) time and time again and escape criticism of repetition because he was able to give reality to his situations and vary the circumstances of his characters sufficiently to give the theme fresh power and insight.

Where a science fiction writer refuses to give in to the narrow demands of the field, he tends to come under attack. J. G. Ballard, for instance, is subjected to a great deal of intolerant and unintelligent criticism of his 'repetitiveness' of theme and background - and characters, for that matter - primarily by people who demand sensation alone from literature and are either incapable of understanding the essential themes of his work or too impatient to bother to look for them. Yet outside the science fiction field, as I have shown, it is expected of an author that he returns to the same themes over and over again, so long as he looks at these themes from a fresh angle, as Ballard does in his three books *Drowned*, *Burning* and *Crystal World*. Part of Ballard's obsession involves questioning the nature of reality and wondering if the yardsticks by which we judge 'reality' are necessarily the best ones.

This is the dominant theme in the work of Philip K. Dick who deals with the theme much more specifically and without the highly individualistic vision of Ballard - substituting for it,

however, almost as remarkable an ability to manipulate standard SF trappings to produce wholly fresh, superficially entertaining stories with abstract, intellectual underlying themes. Dick, perhaps because he is working with more conventional backgrounds, has on the whole escaped the kind of criticism levelled at Ballard.

Like Ballard, Dick works without pretension. He is not out to impress; there is no virtuoso display in Dick's work, none of the literary posturing which so mars the work of Vonnegut, who manages to state the obvious so brilliantly that one is very often fazed by it for a while. What is so admirable and agreeable about books like *The Man in a High Castle*, *The Game-Players of Titan* or *Dr. Bloodmoney* is the solid, skillful craftsmanship with which they are written. His characterisation is never brilliant, he does not create great, bizarre characters that live in the mind long after the books are finished (Bunny Jingadangelow in *Greybeard*, Strangman in *The Drowned World* or Gully Foyle in *The Stars My Destination*), but his characters are exceptionally easy to identify with and they are convincing. They are almost always 'ordinary' people, even if they possess psi-powers as many of them do, and while their personalities do not impress us, they are exactly the right kind of characters needed to convince us of the 'reality' of their existence. Their problems are ordinary problems to do with sex, money and prestige and it is these problems that tend to lead them into the bigger issues involving the fate of many.

In virtually all his novels Dick is interested primarily in the workings of the human mind and how these relate to the world in general. In an early novel, *Eye in the Sky*, he takes a group of 'ordinary' people and gives them the ability to create their ideal worlds. These worlds are then shown up in all their many defects – they are the worlds of various sorts of American Dream and one by one Dick picks them to pieces and reveals them for what they are.

The element of satire in Dick runs through almost all his work, often in the form of little cameos as in *Dr. Bloodmoney* where, in the early part of the book and with quiet amusement, he shows us various representatives of the world about to be blown up – the American Liberal boasting of his liberalism is one of many such cameos.

Dick's clarity of vision and his accuracy of observation can be seen at their most impressive in the Hugo-winning *The Man in the High Castle*. Here is an America occupied in the North-East by the Nazis and in the South-West by the Japanese. The plot does not hinge, as one might expect from standard science fiction, on an underground resistance organization out to overthrow the conquerors, but on the subtle differences in national character between the conquered Americans, the occupying Japanese and the Nazis. Dick's Japanese and Germans are not so much 'real' Japanese and Germans as the popular idea of what Japanese and Germans are, except that Dick's admiration for the Japanese tends to make them much more sympathetic than the Germans, perhaps fairly so. This doesn't matter, for it emerges that the world Dick has built up so successfully and with such excellent detail is probably not the real world at all – a world where the Japanese and Germans were beaten is probably the real one, though even that is not the same as ours! This information comes from the *I Ching*, the Chinese Book of Changes which many, including Dick, I understand, believe capable of prophecy and communicating advice to those who consult it.

What is 'reality'? is the question we are left asking in *The Man in the High Castle*.

It would be impossible to deal with all the books Dick has written – there are nearly twenty of them – and I'd like to concentrate now on his latest, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (Doubleday in US, due from Cape here this year).

It is in this novel that Dick makes use of his technique I described of leaving the reader apparently in the air on the last page. Here it is not for specific purposes of allegory so much as to make the reader wonder just what the nature of reality is.

Palmer Eldritch himself is one of Dick's few bizarre characters. The stigmata referred to are his artificial eyes, artificial hand and steel teeth. These blemishes seem to have some

The writing is superb, and images which linger in the mind abound. It is the humanitarian Aldiss who emerges, although one feels that all the odds are against it.

It is an easy book to read, but not an easy one to accept or assimilate. It is, as I said, one of Aldiss' best. It is one of the best novels of any type I have read during the past year. It is available in most bookshops. Go and buy it.

**Make Room!
Make Room!**
by Harry
Harrison

**Reviewed by
Phil Muldowney**

**[Vector #46,
September
1967]**

To anyone who associates Harry Harrison with fast moving adventure SF like *Deathworld* and *The Stainless Steel Rat*, this book will come as a complete surprise. It is a harsh, almost documentary like book at times, with no happy endings, in a very downbeat style.

The time is 1999, the place a New York with 35 million inhabitants, in a U.S.A. with a population of 344 million. An overcrowded hell, people crammed together like sardines, living on lentils and soya beans, and nutritional diseases rampant.

sort of symbolic significance to do with sin and redemption, but I must admit to not being able to relate this element to the rest of the book.

The plot is never resolved in the formal sense and the reality of the events which have taken place is left in question, but nonetheless the novel is complete once it becomes clear that it is Dick's intention to leave you guessing.

It may sound easy to write a book like this, once the initial idea has been worked out, but it says a great deal for Dick's craftsmanship that the story, even at its most confusing, never loses its pace and never loses its ability to keep disbelief suspended until the last possible moment. The reader expects some kind of ingenious denouement - as in a van Vogt novel, for instance - but it never comes. The only explanation is implicit in the novel itself.

Dick's work is not profound in comparison with established philosophical literature like Goethers Faust and so on, neither does it have the sense of depth found in contemporaries like Borges. It lacks the intensity of vision and powerful symbolism of Ballard and the elegance and ability to create mood of Aldiss. What it does have is a seriousness of purpose, an unfaltering intention to get at the truth as Dick sees it, the power to create everyday environments which gradually shift in perspective until every aspect of the particular environment is held in question; the same is done with character - a man may begin by feeling that he knows himself, but gradually Dick will whittle away at that belief, leaving the man totally unsure even that he exists. Dick uses all the skill of an excellent science fiction craftsman to produce books which are more than just craftsmanly pieces of escapism. He is not toying with half-baked, half-understood notions like so many contemporaries who have managed to impress so many readers with their oversimplified social and 'philosophical' gimmickry and who are so dull, so far away from making any sort of true observation about anything that one is bewildered by their lack of even the simplest insights.

Dick is quietly producing serious fiction in a popular form and there can be no greater praise. It's time he got the critical attention he deserves.

Malcolm Edwards' 'fan column' also made its first appearance during the Rog Peyton years, in Vector #38, but worth noting is that "Malcolm Edwards" was actually a pseudonym used by Peter Weston at the time, which allowed him to review his own fanzine in the column ...

Behind the Scenes by Malcolm Edwards [Vector #38, March 1966]

A recent columnist exposed a long-held and festering belief that the BSFA was only a recruiting station, that the Association had no purpose other than to provide cannon-fodder for the Big Guns of Science Fiction Fandom. Now, that's an extremist attitude (one not to be encouraged, semaphores the outraged committee behind the scenes, pulling the strings that give a quality of pseudo-life to this puppet column), yet I'll stick out my tender neck and say that it does have more than some elements of truth. Like it or not, this is a dual-purpose organisation, and there's been no end of dispute as to what really is our *raison d'être*.

The obvious purpose of the BSFA is defined somewhere in those dusty passages of the Constitution (dusty because I haven't opened, or seen, my copy since it arrived in 1961). The Association was founded to publicise and encourage the writing of science fiction, or words to that effect. That's the motive behind such innocent-appearing innovations as Your Devious Editor's recent change to a 'professionally' printed *Vector*, and its predominance of formally-written material, All About science fiction. It's a worthy aim, at that, and the BSFA's effectiveness has surprised more than myself.

Second in clarity is the aim of the Association to promote friendship and camaraderie among fellow science fiction fans; and a lot of trouble is caused because no-one will decide whether or not this second objective is secondary in importance. This phase of activity overlaps into, and becomes part of, that microcosm of its own, 'science fiction fandom'.

Rather naturally, fandom doesn't let science fiction worry it as much as does this journal. Fandom has many of the aspects of a glorified correspondence club, and while a common background of interest in SF is necessary for introduction, it is not essential for continuing and maturing friendship.

Behind the Scenes by Malcolm Edwards [Vector #39, April 1966]

Hugo Gernsback, so I am told, created the Universe and began magazine science fiction in an off-moment when his mind wasn't really on the job at hand. In any event, it is at his door that the blame can probably be laid for the birth of an attendant science fiction fandom. For Uncle Hugo was convinced of the value of reader-participation in his enterprises, and his early pulp magazines used to feature long pages of readers' letters. When these correspondents began to short the circuit by writing to each other direct rather than through the pages of the professional magazines, fandom had come into being.

Subsequent years saw the proud boast that a viable SF fandom no longer needed the professional magazines (for it is quite true that 'fandom' is something more than just a fan-group in the normal sense of the term). But every sword has two edges and this statement backfired when the pro-mags discovered that they didn't need the fans. Over a period of roughly five years, economy -or prestige-conscious pro-mags ended the symbiosis. *Galaxy* never had a letter-column, *Astounding* had long since turned "Brass Tacks" into a technical discussion feature and when finally Sergeant Saturn could vibrate the ether by not so much as a ripple, it was, with very few exceptions, the end of an era. It only remained for the remaining concessions to the minority - the few fan-review columns - to be dropped and the regular channels of recruitment into fandom would have been closed.

There were sporadic attempts to halt the tide as some of the magazines fell into the hands of editors who, if not themselves fans, were at least sympathetic to the cause. Readers often never realise that those names so glamorous in the credits of a prozine are in their own right keen fans, often enthusiasts from way back in the beginning.

After six years wandering in the wilderness, fandom may now be getting a new outlet in print. The wheel has come full circle - in the April 1966 issue of *If (Worlds of) SF* there is the introduction of a fan-feature, "Our Man in Fandom" by Lin Carter, a name of bygone days. This feature, along with *If's* growing and improving letter-column, is enough to bring tears of joy into the eyes of an old reactionary and perhaps reflects somewhat on Editor Fred Pohl's own background as a 'Big Name Fan' of circa 1934. History doesn't repeat, of course, and I doubt if every other magazine remaining in the depleted field will make haste to emulate *If*, but this development is very cheering for one who finds fandom itself to be more entertaining than the parent science fiction.

The style is down-beat, Harrison illustrates the results of overpopulation quite frighteningly, hammering the message home with a bludgeon like intensity. It is a superb style, and very good writing producing a bleak and depressing mood. It is meant as a message, and it certainly is that.

There will be those who will ask 'is it SF?'

I don't really know, because a novel is set in the future is it necessarily SF? It would be sad though, if such a good novel as this does not reach the audience it deserves because of the SF label.

Ironically, this Malcolm Edwards column appeared in an issue where the letters page had been formally dropped, coinciding with the appointment of a new editor in the form of Steve Oakey, who went on to write his first Editorial in #40 and generally bemoan the lack of correspondence and support...

**The Moon is a
Harsh Mistress
by Robert A.
Heinlein**

**Reviewed by
Phil Muldowney**

**[Vector #47,
November 1967]**

A new Heinlein novel. An occurrence, a happening, a time for critical wailing and gnashing of teeth. Or perhaps just an anti-climax.

Heinlein is an old pro; this makes the major flaw in this book all the more evident. It is just too long. The book cries out for the editorial blue pencil. The ideas and most of the writing are of the standard that we have come to expect from Heinlein, but the plot just does not support this length of story. From a fast paced and exciting start, it slows down to a crawl; the characters fade into the background, and one is left with a dissertation on "how to organize a revolution." The book could do with a cut of a hundred pages and a tightening up of the pace and plot.

Editorial of Vector #40 by Steve Oakey [Vector #40, June 1966]

The main function of the letter column is not to provide patting on the back; this is required by the authors rather than the letter column. The letter column is to enable people to express agreement or disagreement with views expressed in articles, etc. If someone publically makes an incorrect statement, this should be pointed out; if someone holds what seems to you to be an absurd viewpoint, you should give people a chance to hear your views. The best way to do this latter is to write an opposing article, but a letter should always be written; if an article is to follow, then make this point in the letter.

I hope that this pep-talk will have some results by way of hundreds of letters. I doubt it though.

Alas, this didn't have the desired effect, and a year of immense transformation and upheaval followed, with the editorship of Vector changing hands with almost every issue. Spats between the current and former editors also occurred, but a select few articles really broke new ground and hit some raw nerves...

Will 21st Century Children Be Allowed to Live? by Audrey Walton [Vector #45, July 1967]

One thing should be clearly understood, I am not a vegetarian, so therefore have no meat-axe to grind! This article is merely the extension of an idea sparked off by the arrival of a yellow form through my letter-box last week. In words as colourful as the paper on which they were printed, it urged me to join the British Vegetarian Association and stated that I should: 'Live and let live!' This jolted me and set me thinking hard; will wars in the 21st Century be fought, not for power or glory, but simply for food? If so, this surely opens new and rich fields of speculation to the science fiction writer.

Will overpopulation force Mankind to feed himself by artificial and vegetable means in the next Century? This really is a terrifying thought; when you consider it carefully.

The question provides endless material for the sf writer's ingenuity and wit. Plots without end could be based on this all too real problem. A world famine caused by the need to feed too many mouths on dwindling resources, is a very dramatic background against which an exciting situation could be beefily enacted. Just imagine, a clash between the vegetarians and the meat-eaters. The vegetarians claiming that one meat-eater was depriving five of their own fraternity of essential food, and demanding that all agricultural land given over to meat raising should be used for the cultivation of rice or grain. Think what a marvellous villain a mad farmer in control of the world food supply would make! There he would be, sneering into his thick black beard, and glorying in his castration chambers, his doping factories, his sweat boxes and his batteries, completely unmoved by the pathetic plight of the starving populace, striving desperately to depose him.

The United Nations' Survey at the end of 1965 definitely stated that six times as many people could be fed on land given over to vegetable rather than animal culture. Perhaps, even more could be fed today, when we have highly mechanised machines capable of harvesting root crops and even cabbages; this amazing automation is achieved by using various attachments on a base unit. This unit can also be used, in a limited degree for harvesting fruit. A hero whose job is to remote control one of these tractors by using an electronic box of tricks, will not be at all unlikely in the 21st Century.

Any writer could delve with hopes of rich rewards into the possibilities opened up by remote control systems. After all, the many varied forms of automation are just as exciting as the dangers of space flights and planet colonisation, which are now beginning to get a bit dull and everyday. On the other hand, one need not look farther than the sea for another source of inspiration galore. There is no doubt in my mind that one day, a great part of Mankind will live permanently under water, with, perhaps, short holidays on land. What a wealth of ideas there is! Yes, the sea is alive with material for wonder stories and fantasy. The utterly remote strangeness of the Deep provides the mind with a great stimulus for imaginative fiction.

Another field of interest is the need to fight against the introduction of opiates; here, the sf writer could obviously have influence. Mankind, at this moment, stands on the threshold of a new way of life. Changes as radical as the discovery of fire and the mechanical inventions of the Industrial Revolution at hand. Writers, now, today, could help prevent a repetition of the disastrous effects of the social and economic changes that are bound to come.

How can we hope to end War, when Mankind's killer instinct is pandered to by the slaughter of defenceless animals for food? Even non-vegetarians like myself must often have had feelings of revulsion against the idea of factory farming animals, and the gory horrors of the abattoir. Remember, these distasteful practices will have to be stepped up as the population increases. What then?

In primitive times, it was a question of kill or be killed, and Man was both the hunter and the hunted. There was then some dignity in the situation, because the odds were even, and besides, Man had not yet learned how to support himself by growing and harvesting grain. But, when the first grain was sown, Mankind laid the seeds of his release from the sordid bonds of the grim necessities of survival within the animal kingdom. How many centuries will it take before he gathers his rich harvest; a wholesome livelihood based on a respect for all living creatures? The sf writer need not look far for a crusade, if he wants one.

There is no longer any need for Mankind to slaughter in order to live! Of course, in the very beginning, vegetable and grain cultivation was much bedevilled by hazards; bad weather could cause famine and great hardships, while Winter brought with it an inevitable shortage of vital food supplies. Small wonder that very few early Men survived beyond the age of twenty!

Today, however, Mankind faces no such dilemma, for instance, the drastic effects of famine in India could have been prevented if the modern resources available had been used to the best advantage. It is hard to credit that life-giving grain was allowed to rot because the taste was unfamiliar, surely there was some method of changing the flavour? But early Man had no resources to fall back on; he could not plan ahead because he had no records, nor technology or mechanisation. Advance knowledge of the weather is now available to farmers; food can be preserved and stored indefinitely, and winter brings few hardships that cannot adequately be solved by modern technology and know-how.

The Oceans are teeming with untapped supplies of plankton and it is now possible to manufacture artificial protein from a fantastic number of very unlikely sources of material, such as feathers, etc. It is quite obvious that nobody needs to starve in the 20th Century let alone the 21st, however big the population explosion happens to be. Here again, we find ourselves with stupendous scope and unlimited material for story backgrounds!

It is clear that food wastage might create very serious problems in the next Century. No doubt, there will be still unscrupulous people who will try to create artificial shortages for their own ends. Speculation as to how the ordinary person of the future will protect himself against overcrowding, social injustice and even shortages of the bare necessities of life, could lead to an entirely new sort of hero and heroine in science fiction instead of a near super-human glamour boy, so unattainable in the vastness of space, our hero could have his feet firmly on the Earth's rich brown surface.

Reading this book one can perhaps understand some of the irritation that the new school of sf writers has with Heinlein. Though his scientific, political and sociological ideas have developed over the years, his style, the slang, the humour, the narrative technique etc. have changed very little since the early forties.

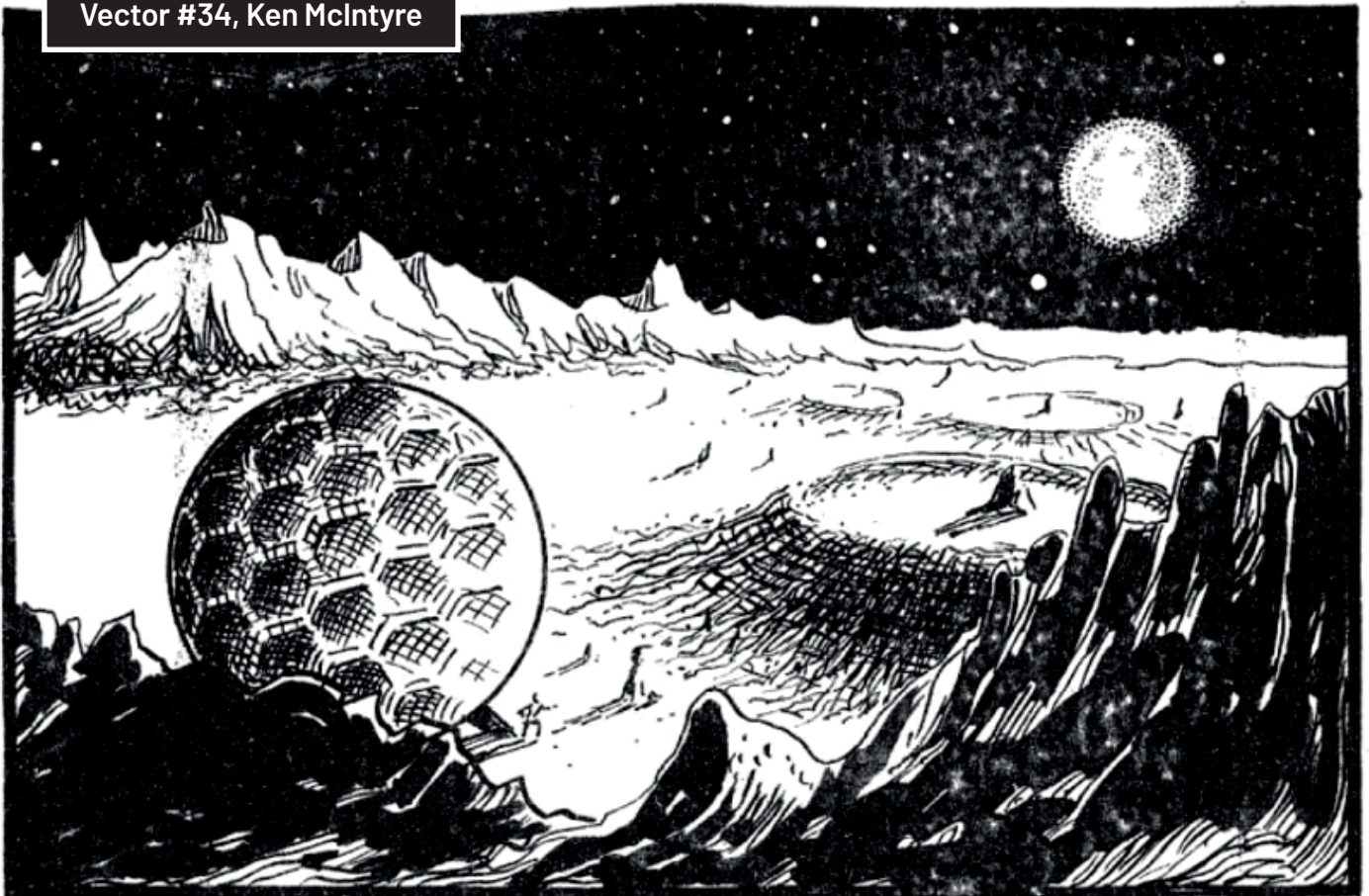
These new type people will certainly face a hostile environment right here on Earth which could prove even more difficult to cope with than on any alien planet's territory. The science fiction writer does not need to seek for the Moon, there are hundreds of plotworthy [sic] problems that might arise in simply defending the basic human rights against the crushing onward march of an indifferent technological advance. This inhuman monster, which if it is not tamed by forethought and much soul-searching, may cripple mankind far more horribly than any bug-eyed colleague on Lunar's dark side.

One trembles to think what it will be like when the heat is really on and there are more than twice as many hungry mouths to feed! Who will be in charge of our vital food supplies in years to come? Who will prevent great cities from gobbling up the precious agricultural land as more and more people demand houses? There is a very great danger that future generations may have to face famine and disease merely through mismanagement of vital resources. What an Aladdin's cave of plot and counter-plot we have before us! What vast possibilities for drama, pathos and sheer human interest! My mind simply boggles at the endless permutations.

Surely it is a worthy cause to draw attention to these facts? Only an enlightened public opinion will ensure development along the path to human plenty *and* human dignity. It would be pathetic if Mankind has clawed its way to Outer Space merely to become well-fed slaves! Human dignity in the midst of plenty is well within the reach of Modern Man, if he will only stretch out his hand and take it. The writer's responsibility is perhaps, greater than it has ever been before and the last three decades of the 20th Century offer him a field so vast, so bursting at the seams with new ideas that he should shout with joy at being privileged to ply his pen, (or typewriter), in times of such great moment and adventure!

The phrase "Be careful what you wish for," springs to mind here...

Vector #34, Ken McIntyre





1970s Content Header,
Paul Dillon

The 1970s: BSFA's 'Golden Age' Starts Here...?

When Malcolm Edwards took over the Editorship role with Vector #59 early in 1972 (not to be confused with the author of the 'Behind the Scenes' fan-column - see page 40), arguably the BSFA entered a 'Golden Age' of its own, with many recognisable names starting to pop up regularly...

An Introduction to Stanislaw Lem by Franz Rottensteiner [Vector #59, Spring 1972]

Let us begin by admitting that I consider the interest shown by fans in sf writers quite unhealthy. Too much in sf criticism depends on the contact between writers and fans, on the writers visiting conventions etc. Personal acquaintance is likely to cloud one's judgement. This may be the reason for the abominable state of sf criticism, and the reason why criticism tends to get better the further the critic is from the places infested with sf pros (e.g. British criticism as a rule is much better than American, and Australian better than British, though of course there are such exceptions as A.J. Cox in the U.S.A. and Brian Aldiss in the U.K.). The important thing about fiction is the work itself, not the man who created it.

Lem is a writer who developed apart from fandom and apart from the sf field, its pulps and paperbacks: an almost essential prerequisite for any good work – the intellectually sterile atmosphere of the sf field is too big a hurdle for most new talent. Lem, thank god, wasn't exposed to this stifling influence, although he read enough sf to learn what to avoid. Some people, like Suvin, like to claim that he was influenced by the sf of the 40s and 50s, and this may be true of some of his early (and mediocre) work; but his best efforts owe nothing to commercial sf. From the beginning, he was a part of Polish letters – although he always held a rather unusual place in Polish literature. The fact that his development reflects (and transcends) that of the whole field has made his position particularly difficult.

Lem is a highly original writer. These days he only tries things which have never before been tried in literature, and it is from this position that he wonders about the bad company in which his writing got him. The popular success of a writer like Heinlein and his influence on his colleagues is based precisely on the banality of his method: it can be emulated, perhaps with less success, by any writer who isn't quite a hopeless case. But where are the people who could follow Lem, even if they wanted to, and did recognize what he does as valuable? I see nobody in sf who has the knowledge, the depth, the width of interest, this unique set of talents. What so enhances him to me is that he is a systematic thinker: there is nothing of the fuzzy thinking, the inability to recognize even the most trivial consequences and implications of an idea, that mars the work of the people who are today acclaimed as "sf thinkers".

Pavane
by Keith Roberts

Reviewed by
Chris Priest

[Vector #51,
October 1968]

Pavane is a magnificent, miraculous novel. There is no better way to describe it.

It feels right; if anything is artificial about it, it doesn't show. Once an author achieves this kind of rapport in his work, it is of no consequence how many tiny faults one may find for the looking.

The subject: revolution against an all-powerful Papal Catholic church. The treatment: a sectionalized, personalized, narrow-field view of a section of Dorset directly affected by the Church's regime. The style: a clear, direct English with a richness of tone and detail that has a visual imagic [sic] power of Panavision proportions.

To read *Pavane* is not to find a story as some may think of it. There is no overt plot holding the action together. Instead, this is a novel of incident ... magnified and heightened by its attention to colour and detail.

But the same things I admire in him, the average fan will object to – this much I can already say from the reactions to *Solaris* (and it is amusing to see how well these reactions confirm my opinion of the people who write them). In a field where a Niven is a “thinker”, a writer of “hard sf”, and where a Sturgeon or a Heinlein are significant writers, a Lem isn't likely to get very popular.

***Through a Glass Darkly* by John Brunner** **[Vector #60, June 1972]**

Science fiction, it seems to me, is like a mirror—a distorting mirror, admittedly, yet one which like all mirrors reflects what is set before it: our hopes and fears, our aspirations and our doubts.

Although, ostensibly, it deals with the future, when I am writing I am always conscious of the fact that I am thinking in the present and by the time my reader sees what I have written it will belong to his past. Already, in the twenty years or so I've been writing SF, I have seen many, many of my imaginary futures overtaken by events, so that they belong neither to the future nor to the past, but to a limbo of unrealisable possibilities.

Yet the commonest raw material for SF is speculation about what's to come, and here I am confining myself to that aspect of it.

However, it's notable that an increasing degree of interest in social consequences becomes discernible at this time. We begin to move away from the stock figures of the twenties, the handsome rich hero who builds a starship in his private laboratory and provides three cabins, one for himself, one for his fiancée [sic] and one for the elderly scientist who goes along as chaperone.

With the advent of World War II, and ultimately of the atomic bomb, we reach a stage where disillusionment begins to coexist with optimism. I have said elsewhere that the chief attribute of the science fiction hero is that he knows what he's doing – an enviable talent – but, faced with the possibility that we might destroy ourselves, the irritating question arose unavoidably: “How the hell did we get into this mess?”

It is true that the old future-vision continues to inspire many writers; I've earlier mentioned Larry Niven, and there are several older authors who have simply continued to express views which they held in their younger days and don't feel inclined to change. Poul Anderson is one of them; Gordon Dickson is another; Robert A. Heinlein must also be included in this class, I feel, despite his unconvincing bows to “permissiveness” and “withitness” in *I Will Fear No Evil*. (That's a curious novel, because despite the lawlessness and violence, not to mention the pollution of the larger world, its action is played out in an enclosed area protected by the power of money. One thinks of Marie Antoinette and her court playing and shepherds and shepherdesses while the real peasants were listening to the call of revolution.)

But it's becoming more and more essential for a writer of SF who wants to project an optimistic future to show, or at least hint, how we got there from here. In other words, it's no longer permissible to take for granted a bright future of interplanetary and interstellar travel, where dirt and disease are unknown and racial prejudice is a forgotten aberration; on the contrary, the dirt, disease, prejudice and so forth must be taken for granted, and the alternative depicted as stemming from some special cause which interfered with the foreseeable course of events.

Alternatively one may revert to Haldane's view, and decide that it may indeed take millions of years for us to evolve into fit company for each other...

In the distorting mirror of SF, we have seen many facets of our successive presents reflected. At each stage we have seen a loss of confidence. It is as though the future, of which we had each high hopes, has let us down when it actually arrived. Each stage of this loss of confi-

dence can be matched with a pattern of present–time events. The First World War; the Second; the Depression; all the other little wars – so-called – from Algeria to Viet-Nam; and, on our own doorstep, the terrifying rise in drug-addiction in the States and elsewhere, not to mention the brutal religious war in Ulster and the racial conflicts in the US and in Southern Africa... It is only too typical that the first practical application of a rocket-design intended to launch men into space was to deliver a ton of high explosive at a time on a great city.

We are going to have to throw away a lot of our old misconceptions, and as I've said our conviction-carrying view of the future is currently being turned topsy-turvy. But although I'm rationally a pessimist, I'm congenitally an optimist. We can find a way out. Even if it means postponing the realisation of our stock SF dreams to the third millennium, that's a minor hardship compared with drowning in our own waste products.

The distorting mirror is at present reflecting the sores and scabs on our body politic. That may, eventually, help us to pluck up our courage and call the doctor.

The Arts in Science Fiction by James Blish ***[Vector #61, Sept/Oct 1972]***

I was asked to discuss the arts in science fiction. I was a bit puzzled at first as to whether or not I was here confronted with a non-subject – this, of course, partly because I was raised in the pulp era, when the only arts we were interested in were those of constructing one cliff-hanger after another, and if possible keeping the story moving by dialogue rather than anything else, because we had no faith in the reader's ability to follow more than three sentences of description. But this, of course, is not a question of art at all; it is simply a question of minor technique. Actually the subject has several sub-divisions: one of them being the role of the arts in sf proper; then the effects of the arts on sf; and finally – though this may really be a non-subject in truth! – the influence of sf on the arts.

The fact of the matter is that until very recently few of the arts were mentioned in sf, and certainly not in commercial sf. It's quite commonplace in mainstream fiction to find references to painting, to other people's writing, to music, and so on; in sf there is a tremendous dearth of this, with one exception (and probably not really to Kingsley Amis's surprise) – there has been quite a lot of writing about jazz in sf.

But when you try to survey the field as a whole since, say, 1926 (when magazine sf began) you really find very little reference to the arts at all, and when you *do* something very curious crops up – you find that the artistic tastes of the future are decidedly worse than our own. I realise this sounds like a vast hyperbole, but when you read some of these descriptions it's astonishing how stomach-turning they are. One of my favourite examples of this is, in fact, a Sturgeon novel called *Venus Plus X* (which I hope most of you have read): a thoroughly experimental novel, done in a series of slices, or alternate takes. The alternate slices are pictures of contemporary suburban family life in the United States, each of them designed to show the blurring of the traditional roles of the sexes in modern America.

There are some honourable exceptions here. Among others I would mention Jack Vance, who is apparently an instinctive anthropologist with an instinctive aesthetic sense. He never fails to describe an alien culture and make you *feel* that it is alien, and to invent two or three art-forms – not just try to transform Earthly ones – and do so with great colour, elan and flair. It is a pleasure to read even a bad Vance story – of which there are not very many – simply because of the intricacy and flamboyance and consistency of the way in which he invents art-forms.

On the whole it would seem to me that one of the rather big changes we see taking place in sf now is an increased consciousness of the existence of other arts besides pulp narrative, and of the fact that what is going on in contemporary art is *not* necessarily chaos and

Reading it again in this finely-produced volume, one thinks what a wonderful film it would make. But then it virtually is a piece of cinema as it stands. Here are all the aspects of an epic film.

This is not a book to be merely read, but to be savoured. It is too rich, too intensely personal, too damn good to be read once then forgotten. Not that it can be forgotten after one reading. There are too many disturbing images of pain, love, fear, grandeur, nostalgia and wonder for that to happen.

Long after you have closed this book your mind will be full of memories: the maroon livery of the Strange traction-engines; the phosphorescent glow-worms in the keep of Corfe Castle; the blind quarryman hewing his stones for the Church; the dying signaler and his guardian faery; the steam driven Bentley and the colourful butterfly cars weaving in and out of jangling cavalry in the narrow Dorset lanes.

This book has the appeal of magic, being simple, yet complex. It is melodious and discordant. It is fantasy, and philosophy. And at a time when sf groans and creaks, it is very, very welcome.

**Rendezvous
With Rama
by Arthur C.
Clarke**

**Reviewed by
Malcolm
Edwards**

**[Vector #66,
July-August
1973]**

It's been a long time since we had a new Clarke novel. Not quite a hiatus of Asimovian proportions, but if we dismiss *2001* as the literary byproduct of a film (which I prefer to do, as it is noticeably substandard), we have to go right back to 1961 and *A Fall of Moondust* to find the last one. It seemed unlikely that Clarke the sf novelist [sic] would ever return but here he is with a brand-new novel and at least two more to come.

In the last dozen years sf has changed in a lot of different ways, and one of the fascinations of a new work by a writer who has been largely absent from the field during that time is to see whether their work is still vital, or whether time has turned them into relics. Clarke has the advantage of being a purveyor of a type of sf where the demand has always greatly

is not necessarily to be looked upon with pessimism. If it is taking the boys a little while to catch up with the Thirties so far as technique is concerned, well, please bear in mind what they were *doing* in the Thirties: they were writing "Monsters of Mars", "The Revolt of the Machines", "Hell's Dimension", "The Exiles of Time" — I could go on forever if I were to abandon my mind to it.

When it comes to painting I should defer to my wife, who is the expert in the family. But I have seen myself — little attention though I pay to this art, quite a bit of influence of modern painting which comes either from sf or from the space programme — I cannot exactly tell which. A fair amount of modern painting that I have seen reproduced in magazines is suddenly full of astronomical symbols, usually of pretty good accuracy. It is as though Chesley Bonestell, at his advanced age, has suddenly crept into the forefront of at least some part at modern painting. This is an interesting phenomenon, and one which, I suspect, will continue to develop as we go farther into space and find odder things than we ever dreamed of on the covers of pulp magazine — such as what we have recently discovered on Mars. Artists may seize upon this material for imagery, and may also draw more and more from the stories themselves, now that the audience for the medium is spreading.

So on the whole, though I thought that what I had here was a non-subject, as I said at the beginning, there does actually seem to be quite a bit to be said about it — and, what is probably a great deal more important, quite a bit to be watched for. We are standing effectively at the beginning of the invasion of sf by the arts, and the invasion of the arts by sf — these are two complementary processes. Where it will all go only God knows, but I think it is an extremely interesting process, and it is something that I am watching with great fascination.

***The Android and the Human by Philip K. Dick*
[Vector 64, March/April 1971]**

It is the tendency of the so-called primitive mind to animate its environment. Modern depth psychology has requested us for years to withdraw these anthropomorphic projections from what is actually inanimate reality, to introject — that is, bring back into our own heads — the living quality which we, in ignorance, cast out onto the inert things surrounding us. Such introjection is said to be the mark of civilization in contrast to mere social culture, such as one finds in a tribe. A native of Africa is said to view his surroundings as pulsing with a purpose, a life, which is actually within himself; once these childish projections are withdrawn, he sees that the world is dead, and that life resides solely within himself. When he reaches this sophisticated point he is said to be either mature or sane. Or scientific. But one wonders: has he not also, in this process, reified — that is, made into a thing — other people? Stones and rocks and trees may now be inanimate for him, but what about his friends? Has he not now made them into stones, too?

This is, really, a psychological problem. And its solution, I think, is of less importance in any case than one might think, because, within the last decade, we have seen a trend not anticipated by our earnest psychologists — or by anyone else — which dwarfs that issue: our environment, and I mean our man-made world of machines, artificial constructs, computers, electronic systems, interlinking homeostatic components — all this is in fact beginning more and more to possess what the earnest psychologists fear the primitive sees in his environment: animation. In a very real sense our environment is becoming alive, or at least quasi-alive, and in ways specifically and fundamentally analogous to ourselves. Cybernetics, a valuable recent scientific discipline, articulated by the late Norbert Wiener, saw valid comparisons between the behaviour of machines and humans — with the view that a study of machines would yield valuable insights into the nature of our own behaviour. By studying what goes wrong with a machine — for example when two mutually exclusive tropisms function simultaneously in one of Grey Walter's synthetic turtles, producing fascinat-

ingly intricate behaviour in the befuddled turtles — one learns, perhaps, a new, more fruitful insight into what in humans was previously called “neurotic” behavior. But suppose the use of this analogy is turned the other way? Suppose — and I don’t believe Wiener anticipated this — suppose a study of ourselves, our own nature, enables us to gain insight into the now extraordinarily complex functioning and malfunctioning of mechanical and electronic constructs. In other words — and this is what I wish to stress in what I am saying here — it is now possible that we can learn about the artificial external environment around us, how it behaves, why, what it is up to, by analogizing from what we know about ourselves.

Machines are becoming more human, so to speak — at least in the sense that, as Wiener indicated, some meaningful comparison exists between human and mechanical behaviour. But is it ourselves that we know first and foremost? Rather than learning about ourselves by studying our constructs, perhaps we should make the attempt to comprehend what our constructs are up to by looking into what we ourselves are up to.

I have, in some of my stories and novels, written about androids or robots or simulacra — the name doesn’t matter; what is meant is artificial constructs masquerading as humans. Usually with a sinister purpose in mind. I suppose I took it for granted that if such a construct, a robot for example, had a benign or anyhow decent purpose in mind, it would not need to so disguise itself. Now, to me, that theme seems obsolete. The constructs do not mimic humans; they are, in many deep ways, *actually* human already. They are not trying to fool us, for a purpose of any sort; they merely follow lines we follow, in order that they, too, may overcome such common problems as the breakdown of vital parts, loss of power-source, attack by such foes as storms, short circuits — and I’m sure any one of us can testify that a short circuit, especially in our power supply, can ruin our entire day and make us utterly unable to get to our daily job, or, once at the office, useless as far as doing the work set forth on our desk is concerned.

And — here is a thought not too pleasing — as the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we — the so-called humans — are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that we are led, directed by in-built tropisms, rather than leading. So we and our elaborately evolving computers may meet each other half way. Someday a human being may shoot a robot which has come out of a General Electrics factory, and to his surprise see it weep and bleed. And the dying robot may shoot back and, to its surprise, see a wisp of gray smoke arise from the electric pump that it supposed was the human’s beating heart. It would be rather a great moment of truth for both of them.

I would like then to ask this: what is it, in our behaviour, that we can call specifically human? That is special to us as a living species? And what is it that, at least up to now, we can consign as merely machine behaviour, or, by extension, insect-behaviour, or reflex behavior?

Becoming what I call, for lack of a better term, an android, means as I said, to allow oneself to become a means, or to be pounded down, manipulated, made into a means without one’s knowledge or consent — the results are the same. But you cannot turn a human into an android if that human is going to break laws every chance he gets. Androidization requires obedience. And, most of all, *predictability*. It is precisely when a given person’s response to any given situation can be predicted with scientific accuracy that the gates are open for the wholesale production of the android lifeform. What good is a flashlight if the bulb lights up only now and then when you press the button? Any machine must always work, be reliable. The android, like any other machine, must perform on cue. But our youth cannot be counted on to do this; it is unreliable. Either through laziness, short attention-span, perversity, criminal tendencies — whatever label you wish to pin on the kid to explain his unreliability is fine.

What has happened is that there has been too much persuasion. The television set, the newspapers — all the so-called mass media, have overdone it. Words have ceased to mean much to these kids; they have had to listen to too many. They cannot be taught, because there has been too great an eagerness, too conspicuous a motive, to make them learn. The anti-utopia science

exceeded the supply — the story of middle-weight scientific extrapolation, not so technical as to deter scientific illiterates like myself, but complicated enough to keep anyone so inclined happy.

The plot of this book could hardly be simpler. Rama is detected by instruments outside the orbit of Jupiter. At first it is thought to be a wandering asteroid but when a space probe investigates it is found to be an alien spaceship — a perfect cylinder fifty kilometres long and twenty across. A manned crew is sent to explore it, but since it is set on a course which will swing it close round the sun and away again at high speed they have a maximum of about three weeks in which to explore it. They do so.

That’s a taste of it (nicely visualized, incidentally, on the Bruce Pennington jacket painting — Gollancz have given this a rather more lavish appearance than their standard sf, which is nice for Clarke; but I can’t help wishing that, having been such good friends to sf over the years, Gollancz had plucked up courage to put the magic words ‘science fiction’ somewhere on the book). If it stirs you at all — there’s plenty more where it came from.

High-Rise
by J. G. Ballard

Reviewed by
James Goddard

**[Vector #72,
February 1976]**

The Atrocity Exhibition, *Crash*, and to a lesser extent *Concrete Island*, are all novels of extreme obsession.

As these works have come nearer the present, the obsessions have loosened and the form of the novels has become more conservative. *High-Rise* breaks somewhat with this tradition of obsession, but comes down even more strongly on the side of what is, to me, the major over-riding theme through all Ballard's fiction: humanity in search of an idealized self, characters writing lapel-badges declaring "this is me, this is us, take note."

Ostensibly, *High-Rise* tells the story of the inauguration and dissolution of life in an exclusive, expensive and massive apartment block. The monolith contains one thousand apartments, and all the amenities of modern life: banks, supermarkets, launderettes and swimming pools.

fiction writers of fifteen years ago, and I was one of them, foresaw the mass communications propaganda machinery grinding everyone down into mediocrity and uniformity.

The totalitarian society envisioned by George Orwell in *1984* should have arrived by now. The electronic gadgets are here. The government is here, ready to do what Orwell anticipated. So the power exists, the motive, and the electronic hardware. But these mean nothing, because, progressively more and more so, no one is listening. The new youth that I see is too stupid to read, too restless and bored to watch, too preoccupied to remember. The collective voice of the authorities is wasted on him; he rebels. But rebels not out of theoretical, ideological considerations, only out of what might be called pure selfishness. Plus a careless lack of regard for the dread consequences the authorities promise him if he fails to obey. He cannot be bribed because what he wants he can build, steal, or in some curious, intricate way acquire for himself. He cannot be intimidated because on the streets and in his home he has seen and participated in so much violence that it fails to cow him. He merely gets out of its way when it threatens, or, if he can't escape, he fights back. When the locked police van comes to carry him off to the concentration camp the guards will discover that while loading the van they have failed to note another equally hopeless juvenile has slashed the tyres. The van is out of commission. And while the tyres are being replaced, some other youth syphons out all the gas from the gas tank for his souped-up Chevrolet impala and has sped off long ago.

The absolutely horrible technological society — that was our dream, our vision of the future. We could foresee nothing equipped with enough power, guile or whatever to impede the coming of that dreadful, nightmare society. It never occurred to us that the delinquent kids might abort it out of the sheer perverse malice of their little individual souls, God bless them.

The continued elaboration at state tyranny such as we in science fiction circles anticipate in the world of tomorrow — our whole pre-occupation with what we call the "anti-utopian" society — this growth of state invasion into the privacy of the individual, its knowing too much about him, and then, when it knows, or thinks it knows, something it frowns upon, its power and capacity to squash the individual — as we thoroughly comprehend, this evil process uses technology as its instrument. The inventions of applied science, such as the almost miraculously sophisticated sensor devices right now travelling back from war use in Viet Nam for adaptation to civilian use here — these passive infra-red scanners, sniper-scopes, these chrome boxes with dials and gauges that can penetrate brick and stone, can tell the user what is being said and done a mile away within a tightly-sealed building, be it concrete bunker or apartment building, can, like the weapons before them, fall into what the authorities would call "the wrong hands" — that is, into the hands of the very people being monitored. Like all machines, these universal transmitters, recording devices, heat-pattern discriminators, don't in themselves care who they're used by or against.

Once it has been established that the authorities can search you for illegal drugs because you're returning a book to the library, I think you can see just how far the tyranny of the state can go — once it has provided itself with an electronic hoop that registers the presence of something we all carry on us: keys, a pair of fingernail clippers, coins. The blip, rather a quaint little sound, which you set off, opens a door leading not to the county library but to possible imprisonment. It is that blip that ushers in all the rest. And how many other blips are we setting off, or will our children be setting off, in contexts that we know nothing about yet? But my optimistic point: the kids of today, having been born into this all-pervasive society, are fully aware of such devices.

If, as it seems, we are in the process of becoming a totalitarian society in which the state is all-powerful, the ethics most important for the survival of the true, free, human individual would be: cheat, lie, evade, fake it, be elsewhere, forge documents, build improved electronic gadgets in your garage that'll outwit the gadgets used by the authorities. If the television screen is going to watch you, rewire it late at night when you're permitted to turn it off...

A quality of the android mind is an inability to make exceptions. Perhaps this is the essence of it: the failure to drop a response when it fails to accomplish results, but rather to repeat it over and over again. Lower life forms are skillful in offering the same response continually, as are flashlights. An attempt was made once to use a pigeon as a quality control technician on an assembly line. Part after part, endless thousands of them, passed by the pigeon hour after hour, and the keen eye of the pigeon viewed them for deviations from the accepted tolerance. The pigeon could discern a deviation smaller than that which a human, doing the same quality control, could. When the pigeon saw a part that was mis-made, it pecked a button, which rejected the part, and at the same time dropped a grain of corn to the pigeon as a reward. The pigeon could go eighteen hours without fatigue, and loved its work. Even when the grain of corn failed — due to the supply running out, I guess — the pigeon continued eagerly to reject substandard parts. It had to be forcibly removed from its perch, finally.

Now, if I had been that pigeon, I would have cheated. When I felt hungry, I would have pecked the button and rejected a part, just to get my grain of corn. That would have occurred to me after a long period passed in which I discerned no faulty parts. Because what would happen to the pigeon if, god forbid, *no* parts were ever faulty? The pigeon would starve. Integrity, under such circumstances, would be suicidal. Really, the pigeon had a life or death interest in finding faulty parts... Anyhow, to me, the authentically human mind would get bored and reject a part now and then at random, just to break the monotony. And no amount of circuit-testing could re-establish its reliability.

To refer back a final time to an early science fiction work with which we are all familiar, the Bible: a number of stories in our field have been written in which computers print out portions of that august book. I now herewith suggest this idea for a future story: that a computer print out a man.

Three Views of Tolkien 1. The Staring Eye by Ursula Le Guin [Vector #67-68, Spring 1974]

They were displayed on the new acquisitions rack of the university library: three handsome books, in the Houghton Mifflin edition, with beige and black dust jackets, each centred with a staring black and red Eye.

Sometimes one, or two, or all three of them were out; sometimes all three were there together. I was aware of them every time I was in the library, which was often. I was uneasily aware of them. They stared at me.

... I think I had gone to the library to return *Born in Exile*, when I stopped to circle warily about the new acquisitions rack, and there they were again, all three volumes, staring. I had had about enough of the Grub Street Blues. Oh well, why not? I checked out Volume I and went home with it.

Next morning I was there at nine, and checked out the others. I read the three volumes in three days. Three weeks later I was still, at times, inhabiting Middle Earth: walking, like the Elves, in dreams waking, seeing both worlds at once, the perishing and the imperishable.

Tonight, eighteen years later, just before sitting down to write this, I was reading aloud to our nine-year-old. We have just arrived at the ruined gates of Isengard, and found Merry and Pippin sitting amongst the ruins having a snack and a smoke...

... This is the third time I have read the book aloud — the nine-year-old has elder sisters, who read it now for themselves. We seem to have acquired three editions of it. I have no idea how many times I have read it myself. I re-read a great deal, but have lost count only with Dickens, Tolstoy, and Tolkien.

The height of the block itself becomes of hierarchical significance, and the higher one lives in the block the more socially respectable and enviable one is. Dissidents on low levels hatch plans to rise up the block, to achieve social status by ruthlessly climbing from level to level. The upper levels, fearing these activities, plan counter measures.

This is not a novel for the narrow-minded or the self-righteous. These apart, it will appeal to all those who have a mind to read about the human condition in microcosm; for that is what the novel is, a magnificent and literate monument to the perversions of human desires, hopes and failings. If, at the end of the story, the reader still hasn't identified himself, or at least a part of himself, then only one course of action remains: forget about Ballard, forget about sf literature, sneak quietly away and read Asimov's *Foundation* series all over again.

I envy those who, born later than I, read Tolkien as children – my own children among them. I certainly have had no scruples about exposing them to it at a tender age, when their resistance is minimal. To have known, at age ten or thirteen, of the existence of Ents, and of Lothlorien – what luck!

Malcolm Edwards had done a grand job, to be sure, but as evidenced by his editorial in Vector #67-68, things couldn't continue much longer, and after a huge gap, Vector finally reappeared in the Summer of 1975, with a triumphant sigh of relief and a new editor in the form of Christopher Fowler...

Editorial of Vector #69 by Christopher Fowler [Vector #69, Summer 1975]

...it is with a certain sense of triumph, and not a little joy, that I can report what should be obvious to you from the magazine you now hold in your hands. VECTOR is back. The gap in publication has been far too long – about 17 months by the time you read this – but has been no fault of the previous editor, Malcolm Edwards (or myself). It has been entirely due to the collapse of the BSFA which occurred shortly after Easter 1974, when the new Committee took over. The reasons for this and the explanations of the long delay in sorting things out, are to be found in the Newsletter which should accompany this VECTOR. I don't really wish to comment on this, further than to say that in my personal view, and that of many of the BSFA members to whom I have spoken, the performance of last year's Committee demonstrated a staggering incompetence and a cynical lack of responsibility to the BSFA and its members which is unparalleled in my experience. I think the most irksome aspect of the affair is what Malcolm Edwards characterised as the "self-satisfied apathy" of certain leading Committee Members.

As some of you may know, I have been standing ready to take over the editorship of VECTOR from Malcolm Edwards since he made it apparent that he wanted to resign, at the Tynecon at Easter 1974. It's been a long wait, but I feel that it has been worth it; I hope that as the months progress, and you see what I am doing with VECTOR, you will feel that it has been worthwhile too. It is not going to be an easy task following such a fine editor as Malcolm. He built the magazine up to the point where it commanded serious critical acclaim from many quarters. He worked tirelessly and conscientiously for the good of the magazine and for the benefit of BSFA members for two years, and we all owe him a deep debt of gratitude. Perhaps my personal part of the repaying of that debt will be maintaining the standards of excellence which he set.

Step Inside Love by Eric Bentcliffe [Vector #72, February 1976]

MANKIND USING UP EARTH'S RESOURCES AT ALARMING RATE ... ALL FOSSIL FUELS EXPECTED TO BE EXHAUSTED BY 2060 ... PLANET EARTH IN DIRE DANGER OF BECOMING A USELESS HULK ...

At one time science fiction writers were heralds of Bright and Brave New Worlds; these days most of them are joining computer-inspired futurologists in prophesying Doom real-soon-now. If Armageddon isn't next Tuesday, it *will* be the one after... They could be right, of course, but I do wish they would apply their vaunting imaginations just a little more in respect of the current forecasting of doom through pollution of our planet and depletion of existing resources. It appears to me that they are worshipping the mechanical abacus rather than using those aforementioned "vaunting imaginations". Particularly as regards the latter possibility.

I'm no scientist, but even I know that a computer can only extrapolate from the (known) facts fed into it – its prophesies are only valid as of today's knowledge. I expect a science fiction writer to take the whole thing a few steps further...

Certainly, we are using up our (known) resources at an alarming rate, but we are sitting on an imaginable variety of others. Don't ask me what they are... I don't know and what I've learned from reading sf isn't helping me any. I'm pretty sure that we won't find Edgar Rice Krispies world of Barsoom down there – even if Tarzan *has* seen it for himself. I have sincere doubts about S. Fowler Wright's pale-and-slimey slug-like humanoids – I don't even *want* to find those, they'd put me right off *filet mignon*. And as for Richard S. Shaver's benevolent race of galactic-refugees, they've been down there for so long I'm sure they've gone mouldy and wouldn't be of any use if they did exist.

As for underground cities of Atlantis and Mu, and possibly Shangri-La, if they really existed I'm sure they would be connected up to the Circle Line by now; after all, you can even go to Watford by tube these days, and you can't get much farther-out than that!

Science fiction writers are quite keen on using the phrase "Inner Space", as a description of what they think they are writing about currently, but unfortunately their concept of its meaning is not what I should like it to be. I'd like it to deal a little more literally with what is inside the earth, and the potentialities of using what there is. Oh yes, I know that there have been a few stories dealing with this idea "realistically", but unfortunately they all seem to use that which is there as a mere background prop – usually to a story of men and mole-machines who are drilling a new transportation system; or making a really safe haven from the doom they wrote about in their previous story. Surely, gentlemen, hell isn't really down there (even if Australia is...) and the Pope won't blackball your Italian sales if you actually write about it.

I mean, I'm sure there's a real *mine* of ideas to be investigated.

Certainly there's got to be a whole new technology invented for doing so, but there are fairly good guide-lines already existing... we have lasers for the blasting away at the crust, and with everything the US of A has exploded in the Carlsbad Caverns there should be a nice deep hole there to start from (even if we have to wear radiation suits for the first few miles...)

Like I say, I don't know what's down there, but I'm sure there are a lot of things we can use.

For instance, if the few small pin-pricks we've made in the planet's crust can supply our energy needs for about a century... For instance, even I know that immense pressures exist under the crust and pressure equals energy... For instance, if the only thing you find down there is extinct(!) dinosauri, well, we get a lot of usable commodities from Whales; but I'm sure your imaginations are now better than that and now that I've pointed you in the right direction – yes, right there beneath your feet – you can come up with something useful. If you'll excuse the metaphor.

W(h)ither Science Fiction? by Ian Watson ***[Vector #78, Nov/Dec 1976]***

I was on a panel at a science fiction convention recently, where I said that I thought that science fiction ought to aim to put itself out of business; that the ambition of sf should be to become obsolete. This suggestion caused a certain amount of surprise in the audience, and it was apparently misunderstood by those people, since some of the feedback afterwards was that I'd said that SF is now obsolete because Man had now advanced scientifically to the point where there is nothing left to speculate about any more. We've landed on the Moon, unravelled the Genetic Code somewhat, transplanted hearts, etcetera – so SF can now shut up shop.

**Logan's Run by
William F. Nolan
and George
Clayton Johnson**

**Reviewed by
Brian Stableford**

**[Vector #76-77,
Aug-Sept 1976]**

Logan's Run first appeared in 1967 to the sound of fanfares – movie rights had been sold in advance for a large (pre-inflation) sum. Now, the movie itself is about to put in a belated appearance. According to Nolan it has, during the long interim, drifted so far away from the book as to render any resemblance negligible, but the re-release of the novel was nevertheless inevitable. It's a very readable book – a cavalier, slightly gaudy, escapade in a future where euthanasia is compulsory at twenty-one. It is, essentially a playful book.

Cur[i]ously, it now seems a little dated, perhaps because it reflects too accurately the temper of the sixties, perhaps because I'm nine years older than I was when I first read it, and even less playful now than I was then. Anyhow, it's worth reading as entertainment – a pleasant literary confection.

**The Chronicles
of Thomas
Covenant the
Unbeliever
by Stephen R.
Donaldson**

**Reviewed by
Douglas Barbour**

**[Vector #92,
March-April
1979]**

Donaldson has created an epic fantasy which holds your attention on the whole. He uses the negative power of fear more than the positive power of hope, but both are present to keep suspense high. By this I mean that what we are afraid will happen happens more often than what we hope will happen; this is one specific effect of the anti-hero as protagonist. Covenant is an intriguing fantasy protagonist, yes, but he is a bit too much as well: of course, he must forever torture himself with his thoughts of weakness, inability, fear and sickness, but as I began to count up the number of times he reminds himself (and us) of his basic quandary as a leper, I began to wish Donaldson would trust us to remember it on our own.

I'd like to expand on what I said on that panel, because it is open to misunderstanding, and it is rather a vital point. So I'm entitling this article "W(h)ither Science Fiction?" to ask two questions in one. Firstly, which way should SF go? And secondly, what's all this business about SF aiming to wither away, like the Marxist vision of the State?

Beginning with the idea that Man has advanced scientifically to the point where there's nothing left to speculate about... I know there's a school of thought which points out that 90% of all scientists who have ever lived are alive today – and that we've nearly reached bedrock in Physics, Astronomy, Biology. We know roughly what to look for to get the Final Answers. In Physics, give us a few more years, a few more particle accelerators, and we'll know what the ultimate basis of matter is; we aren't remotely in the same situation as in the 19th Century before the splitting of the atom. In Biology, we know what the genetic code is; we just need more refined techniques to read it perfectly. Or in Astronomy, a few more radio telescopes or satellite experiments and we'll be able to estimate the total mass of the universe at last and decide once and for all whether it's expanding towards Heat Death or will collapse back in again. 100 years ago scientists hadn't the foggiest idea about subatomic structure, DNA, red-shift, radio and X-ray astronomy and all today's fundamental building blocks. But for us today, possessing this knowledge, it's only a matter of fine tuning henceforth; 90% of really fundamental breakthroughs have already been made.

Well, I don't agree with this for a moment. Nor does the history of modern science lend much backing to this view. Essentially it's a view based on the idea that science progressively discloses Absolute Truth to us. That science is objective and rational in method; that its findings are based on a hard, cool look at raw data, and represent The Facts.

But scientists never look at "raw data" in an unbiased way. There's no such thing as raw data. Scientists have to have a theory before they set out to prove their theory. That theory is usually conditioned by the dominant orthodoxy of the time – and heretics can be punished as sternly as by the Spanish Inquisition; only not with burning at the stake, so much as by cutting off research grants, rejecting research papers, refusing tenure at universities.

How does this apply to SF? I would say that working within the framework of what we know scientifically at the moment, and what we can extrapolate as possible, SF has every right – and duty – to re-invent science, provided that this is loosely within the compass of Reason, baseline 1976, 77, 78... By this I mean that Faster than Light spacedrives are *on* for me (even though current calculations prove their unreasonableness, as of now) not merely as plot devices for getting from A to B – because Faster than Light drives are not outside the compass of Reason; they can be thought about, lucidly enough, as possible future technology. I say "loosely" within the compass of Reason, because actually SF can be *too* technically accurate. It can be accurate in the context of its time – and plain wrong.

We must remember that science is still very junior; the human race is very junior. Sf can contribute to the growing-up of Man – entertainingly, if it is a sort of toy; and there's nothing trivial or unserious about toys, they're vital to the learning process – and artistically, for there's no reason for it to be crafted clumsily or carelessly. Sf is about perspective: the view into distances. To put SF itself into perspective, it is a small part of a very long process of change and evolution of human life and consciousness. Right now it can and should be a growth-tip of that process... its real role is an evolutionary one, and if there's to be any evolution, there must be a withering away of the earlier stages – which we are still at, right now.

We are at an early stage in human history; an early stage in consciousness... Nature has equipped us with an enormously cerebral cortex of seemingly unlimited capacity. Yet we use only a minute part of it. We are only partially aware of ourselves. I think that human physical science is only in its infancy; life science and the science of consciousness are only in their infancy, too. I think, I hope, that we are on the brink of the most exciting break-

throughs in our understanding of the Cosmos, of our own consciousness – and in what way cosmos and consciousness may be related.

This is basically what my own SF books are about.

This is the area I intend to go on exploring in my own SF in the future. I look forward with the greatest excitement to what we will find out directly about Mars, Jupiter and if at all possible (and I hope it will be possible) the Stars – and don't see this as a contradiction of the expansion of human consciousness, but rather as a complement to it. The really stupid and dirty waste is the whole nuclear weapons, missile, bomber, submarine and general warfare expenditure – compared with which the money spent on Space is really very small indeed.

We are very like a baby with a live hand grenade for a rattle. To be realistic, tragedies and disasters are a very plausible part of our future soon. So I haven't felt able to write purely upbeat books. They wouldn't be an honest model of where we are at present.

August 1977 saw Vector celebrating the US and forthcoming UK release of a landmark in science fiction film and cinema history with covers, stills, and an extended written appreciation...

STAR WARS: George Lucas's Space Fantasy Examined
Steve Divey: "A masterpiece of the genre. Do not miss it."
[Vector #82, August 1977]

When I was eight I religiously attended Saturday morning pictures with hundreds of others to be thrilled by the adventures of Flash Gordon. These cheap umpteen part serials were by then twenty years old and still exercised the power to rivet legions of rowdy and sticky kids to their seats for fifteen minutes as each weekly cliffhanger approached. The charm of these serials comes from the fact that their excitement and thrills were almost completely purified of extraneous paraphernalia like plot, depth of characterisation, morality, acting ability, wittiness of dialogue, magnificence of sets or technical scope of special effects by the economic exigencies of production.

George Lucas, the writer and director of *Star Wars*, was inspired when young by Flash Gordon. His interest in the comic-strip end of the sf spectrum leads him today to run a New York book-shop specialising in sf ephemera as a sideline to his movie career. His aim in making *Star Wars* was to construct an imaginative piece of escapism, to perpetuate and update the tradition of Flash Gordon and to "provide a playground for fantasy and imagination, for the exercise of vicarious adventure." His total success with this film is due to the avoidance of pretension and the pitfalls listed above. Where Flash Gordon suffered through cheapness, Lucas has been able to afford a superbly glossy look to *Star Wars*. It cost ten million dollars yet Twentieth Century Fox permitted him sufficient independence to fulfil his original intentions without betraying the essentials of the genre.

Where *Star Wars* goes far beyond what has been done before is in the model-work and animation of the space-flight sequences. The advances of technology since Stanley Kubrick's *2001* (1968) have allowed the use of computer-controlled cameras figuratively to fly and soar with the starships. The carefully choreographed space battles, based on aerial movement patterns of World War II dog fights, put you right in the middle of the action rather than grounding you as an observer watching things fly past. The list of technical credits at the end of the film go on for a long time, yet the anonymous army that created this film's amazing and unique appearance deserve all the praise they get.

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever is certainly head and shoulders above such a monstrosity as *The Sword of Shannara*, but it is nowhere near the level of *Lord of the Rings* or *Earthsea*, or, to point to a fantasy which engages us entirely through the wit and linguistic complexity of its style, Brian Aldiss' glorious *The Malacia Tapestry*. It is a pretty good read (though not I think a work to reread as those others are) and the fact that it is a first work suggests we may look forward to better work from Donaldson, if he can learn from his mistakes. Let us hope so.

Star Wars' appeal is broadly based. It is a family film but by no means a children's film. It is perfect for young people of all ages and resembles at times a cross between a roller-coaster ride and a complicated electronic TV game. It is very pleasant to relax and enjoy the exhilaration and adventure without fear of impending nastiness that so many films like to use these days.

STAR WARS: George Lucas's Space Fantasy Examined
Chris Fowler: "A stunning vision of the unlimited future..."
[Vector #82, August 1977]

Star Wars is a space fantasy adventure film, and like all good fantasies it has a beautiful princess as its heroine. But in Princess Leia Organa, George Lucas has created a heroine with a distinct difference, giving her a winning lead over her competitors: she has guts.

For whereas the usual fantasy heroines faint at the sight of violence, fall over at the hint of a chase and wouldn't know one end of a laser pistol from the other, Princess Leia is the opposite. When rescued from her prison cell, and with a gun at her disposal, she proves herself to have as steady a hand and a somewhat better head than her male companions. Leia Organa defies all the sexist stereotypes of (generally male) science fiction and fantasy writers. She's a winner all the way, and as such is one of the great strengths of *Star Wars*.

On the face of it, the plot of *Star Wars* is simple and basic enough: it could be readily translated out of the space opera genre into, for example, the detective thriller, or any other recognised cinema genre.

Stated baldly, the story – of a heroic quest to save a beautiful woman and defeat oppression – hardly seems adequate for all the superlatives which have been heaped on *Star Wars*. It looks very much like the kind of thing which dozens of science fiction writers have been churning out in *Ace Doubles* and *Planet Stories* serials for the last thirty years. But it is in the contrast between the written form of science fiction and its cinematic version that George Lucas' achievement can be seen in its true light. It is Lucas's success in doing this – in realising on the screen what sf readers and writers have been collaborating to produce inside their own heads for years – that makes *Star Wars* such a signal achievement, not only in science fiction cinema, but in the development of cinema as an art-form.

Star Wars shows what can be done when a talented director not only gets the money he needs to provide first-rate special effects but also the freedom to cast his film in the manner he wishes.

With *American Graffiti* George Lucas created a brilliant vision of the past of American youth; with *Star Wars* he has created a stunning vision of the unlimited future of all youth.

Christopher Fowler broke incredible ground in his tenure as Vector editor from issue #69 (Summer 1975) right through to #82 (August 1977), producing many issues a year, and sourcing heaps of material and countless book reviews from some very big names at the time. Indeed, everything seemed to expand and improve under his editorship, including the size of the magazine from A5 to A4, the length and depth of the interviews with authors, the ballooning BSFA membership numbers, the bustling letter column, and the overall standard of material and presentation. Indeed, the sheer quantity of material is hard to convey in this brief traipse through the decades, and it was a legacy continued under new editor, David Wingrove, who bravely took up the mantle at the end of 1977, and continued to edit Vector until 1979.



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Vector masthead,
originally introduced
with Vector #127

VECTOR

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

The 1980s: The First 100 Issues...

Presentation had taken a bit of a nosedive following Fowler's departure (even if quality of content hadn't – an emphasis on issues dedicated to specific writers was a mainstay of David Wingrove's editorship), and the magazine returned to its neat and tidy A5 format once again when Mike Dickinson stepped up to the plate for a handful of issues.

Dickinson's very short reign still saw plenty of great content appearing, and included Dave Langford, Roz Kaveney, Simon Ounsley, Paul Kincaid, Cy Chauvin and Christopher Priest among the contributors.



Kevin Smith picked things up as 1980 came to a close, just in time to oversee a celebration of the first 100 issues of Vector which also saw a spot of wild blue colour on the cover... Listed inside were no less than 25 different Vector editors over the first 22 years of the BSFA!

Letters also returned to the pages of Vector, and the search for literary 'acceptance' continued to rattle everyone's cage...

The Shape of Things To Come by Joseph Nicholas [Vector #101, April 1981]

Once upon a time, as we all know, SF was a despised minority literature – but then came the bomb, television, rock music, Moon landings, future shock, academic respectability, *Star Wars* and mass popularity, with the result that the very label has entered everyday speech as a jargon term for anything futuristic, high-powered and (often) unlikely. Not that the public mind has much more than a hazy idea of what it means anyway: conditioned by endless re-runs of *Star Trek* and the recent flood of big-budget cinema spectacles, they conceive of it as but a saintly wonderland of spaceships, aliens and ray guns, ignoring the imaginative core of which these are the external trappings, and hence dismiss it as no more than juvenile escapism.

And the trouble is that altogether too much current SF seems not to warrant any other treatment.

It has been claimed that SF is the only true literature of our age, and it does indeed have the ability to dramatize and examine the problems that now confront us with a scope not possessed by any other 'form' of fiction. The energy crisis, sexual politics, the microchip revolution, genetic engineering, the threat of nuclear war... these are the things that the so-called 'mainstream' can only deal with (should it ever choose to deal with them at all) as the background to its usual parade of character interplay and personal catastrophe – and when it comes to more abstract concepts, like the nature of consciousness, the evolution of intelligence, and the entropic disorder which ultimately overtakes all civilisations, it is clear that SF is the *only* medium for their expression. Not to put too fine a point on it, [SF] has a potential and a novelty that all other 'forms' of fiction seem to have long ago exhausted.

... One of the particularly besetting sins of a genre literature is the way it encourages its authors to repeat themselves, both by circumscribing their compass of discussion and by accustoming its readers to expect only a limited set of themes and approaches – as the truism has it, the readers want no more than another dose of what they're already getting. In the days when the magazines constituted the only outlet of genre SF, this 'more of the same', played up to by the authors, often expressed itself as a series of stories about the same characters and/or situations; but with the magazines having faded from prominence we now get instead series of *novels*: sequel upon trilogy upon quartet upon future history upon... It goes almost without saying that no single novel of such a sequence can ever stand alone, can ever be 'autonomous', but must be read in conjunction with all the others – sound commercial logic, to be sure, but is it art?

For the reader, of course, the escape value of a series is high: the more of it there is then (in theory) the more detailed its background, the more complex its plot, the greater and more rounded its cast of characters, and thus the more the reader can lose himself in it. The same is naturally true of single large novels, and it was this sort of book – most notably Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Herbert's *Dune*, not forgetting Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* – which crossed the genre boundary and made a wider audience more aware of SF's existence. And now that, post-*Star Wars*, the potential audience is even wider, we seem

**The White
Dragon by Anne
McCaffrey**

**Reviewed by
Chris Morgan**

**[Vector #94,
July-Aug 1979]**

The latest of Anne McCaffrey's dragon books is about a little white dragon and his youthful rider managing to outdo all the adults on their full-sized dragons.

That does sound awfully like the plot-line for a juvenile novel, doesn't it? In fact, *The White Dragon* is a compromise between juvenile and adult levels. It lacks the toughness of *Dragonflight* and *Dragonquest*, even though it continues the grand saga of life on Pern. Nor is it an unabashed juvenile like *Dragonsong* or *Dragonsinger*. But the air of sentimentality which affected those last two creeps into *The White Dragon*, as well. The main protagonists are not children but they are immature adults – teenagers with teenaged emotions and outlooks. This accounts, in part, for the shallowness of the book, for the lack of insight into character and situation. Only in part, though, for all the characters here are over-simplified.

to be getting even more single large novels, marketed as an escape route for both SF and non-SF readers. Bova's *Colony*, Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Vinge's *The Snow Queen* – all good blockbusting stuff, you might think. No, actually, because as novels intended to expand the frontiers of SF they are anything but, enlarging it only in terms of its readership and not in terms of its compass of approaches and concepts. They are, to give them their aptest possible label, bestsellers.

The desire to reach a wider audience probably motivates part of the 'fight' to reintegrate with the mainstream, but certainly not all of it: literary, artistic and critical factors have more part to play than the mere commercial desire for increased sales.

One might reasonably argue that, in attempting to reintegrate with the mainstream, SF is likely to run up against much the same objections as would be voiced by an audience accustomed to bestsellers: don't give me anything challenging, just give me something I don't have to think too hard about. The SF writer who aims for a mainstream audience can't adopt the sort of completely subversive stance we expect from the best SF for fear of alienating that audience altogether – for example, what would the readers of Graham Greene and Iris Murdoch novels make of the schizophrenic reality shifts of Philip K. Dick and the piled on metaphysical speculations of Ian Watson?

One might also argue, perhaps in line with certain SF authors themselves, that any reintegration with the mainstream would result in SF's suffering a certain 'loss of identity': a diffusion of the drive which its categorisation, for all the isolation thus imposed, has at least concentrated and intensified, allowing it to sustain and extend itself while all other genre categories – westerns, horror novels, gothics and the like – have more or less withered on the vine, declining into ever more uninventive pastiches of themselves (although, as described above, this is what SF itself is showing distinct signs of doing already).

Which raises the obvious question, do we really want such reintegration, and if so then how far do we want it to go?

***Survival of an Endangered Species: Science Fiction
and the Post-Literate Society by Mary Gentle*
[Vector #102, June 1981]**

Why are there so few good SF books?

Because what's good is rarely pure 'science fiction'. The simple answer is that SF is a genre like any other, and not a unique form of literature. Like romance, crime and westerns, SF is subject to the limitations of formula fiction; the formula being that a reader knows what he or she has enjoyed in previous books, and expects to buy more of the same. The true representation of SF *per se* is something like Niven's *Ringworld Engineers* – plenty of hard science, breath-taking if gimmicky concepts, and very little human (or indeed alien) interest. This is the inheritance of what is (in the USA at least) the bastard child of the pulp magazines.

Therefore the usual state of SF – so accurately portrayed by Joseph Nicholas (in "The Shape Of Things To Come" – *Vector 101*) as being non-literary, right wing and escapist – neither can nor should be reformed. Let the undiscerning readers have their bubblegum books, let the 'Old Guard' publishers and editors retreat behind the fortifications of outdated credos; the search for a critical standard must begin outside the ghetto walls.

And yet, though they're few in number, there are books published as SF that have all the literary qualities associated with mainstream and other worthwhile fiction. Consider Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, a seamless blend of science, politics and human relationships that transcends the category of science fiction. The mark of any good book is that it transcends its genre. (Joseph Nicholas cites *Guns Of The Timberland* as a western that succeeds in this.

I would add, for crime, Janwillem van der Wetering's *The Japanese Corpse*; for the spy story, John Le Carré's *The Honourable Schoolboy*; and possibly James Clavell's *Shogun* as a best-seller/historical novel.) These aren't 'mainstream' but non-classifiable fiction, and much recent SF isn't classifiable as such. Why is this?

It would appear that pulp SF has, like a nest for a strange cuckoo's egg, fostered an entirely new form of fiction. The New Wave (to continue the metaphor) was the cracking of the shell, such works as the recent *SS-GB* by Len Deighton, Sheila MacLeod's *Xanthe And The Robots*, and Doris Lessing's *Shikasta* are the first sight of the new chick. It's going to be a hard time – but any process of birth inevitably is so – while this New SF breaks away from its pulp history and begins to be published without labels, simply as fiction. Perhaps the process will be easier in England because the split between mainstream and SF was never so great as in the USA.

It may sound as though I think SF is reintegrating with the mainstream: far from it. 'Mainstream' itself, the novel of character and society, has become so sterile that it's almost certain to die out. Then I think the New SF will totally supersede mainstream fiction.

However, the split between quality and pulp – to use two easily recognisable terms – isn't confined to SF. In all fields of writing the split is between those who see literature as a craft of escapism and entertainment and those who see it as something more – an art.

It's as well to distinguish here between the attitudes of writers, publishers and readers. Writers can be divided into those who write to make a living, and those who write because it's a compulsion. The former are word-technicians, businessmen, at best entertainers and at worst hacks. The latter are themselves less classifiable, having a vocation for communication by the printed word, using fiction less for escapism and entertainment than for commitment and disturbance. Publishers, of course, are the great categorisers. It's not their business to be concerned with the quality of their commodity, except in so far as it affects selling large quantities of it to the public. As with the current phenomenon of 'hyped' bestsellers, formula and predictability establish a large market. (Though it may be that in SF the bestseller – as typified by *The Snow Queen* – is a hedge against the crash following the post-*Star Wars* boom. Publishers want to survive – and we need them to. SF must be published somehow.) As to the readership, I leave it to your personal experience. Some books are entertainment and nothing else; some books are entertaining and a hell of a lot more. They stay with you, affect your way of thinking, maybe your way of life. When that happens some good writer has got through the barrier of publishers (and critics) and reached the reader.

There remains a more disturbing view.

All discussion of SF, mainstream, genres, and new forms of literature may turn out to be superfluous. If you want to know why, the harbinger is in your home already, and has been for some years; it's been changing the habits of this society and (no surprise) it's the television set. Because of it and similar technology we may be entering now a post-literate society.

It's possible to claim that we'll always use the printed word, no matter if telephone and cassette take over from letters, TV from newspapers, and computer terminals from text books. Of course, that's true, but that printed word will be solely used as an information tool. A child can be taught to read, but if all its education, information and entertainment comes from visual images that child will lose a certain quality of the imagination. To read fiction is to actively participate in the most flexible narrative form ever created. To watch any two-dimensional medium of sound and vision is to become a passive and helpless recipient. A reader has time to think, consider, recap and disagree; but the form of TV and associated media precludes those things. Put simply, TV is easier than books. That's why it breeds lazy minds.

Ask yourself, if fiction is to survive into the post-literate age, what kind of fiction should it be?

Anne McCaffrey has deliberately written this book to appeal to a relatively unsophisticated mass audience – for children of all ages, if you like – and she has achieved great commercial success with it.

More interesting is Anne McCaffrey's insistence that this is science fiction rather than fantasy. She's trying too hard to convince the reader that fire-breathing dragons can be explained away in a perfectly scientific manner, that mankind came to Pern in spaceships and that the present level of civilization represents a resurgence from barbarism towards technology under difficult conditions (a shortage of metal, falls of Threads, etc). It isn't giving away too much to say that one of the areas in which Jaxom and Ruth's story intersects with that of Pern as a whole is in the discovery of ancient technological remains belonging to the first settlers. And it isn't giving away anything to suggest that these archaeological triumphs pave the way for sequels.

It is far from being high class literature but it's undoubted popularity may win it a Hugo at Seacon.

The Snow Queen by Joan D. Vinge

Reviewed by
Chris Morgan

[Vector #100,
Dec 1980]

It is impossible to take this novel seriously; it is high romance, quite closely based on the Hans Andersen fairy tale of the same title. The setting is an almost fairy-tale background where most people neither comprehend nor make use 'of technology, although a few possess such magical gadgets as interstellar spaceships and stunner handguns, and know the secrets of immortality and human cloning. This is a seductive type of setting -- glamorous and likeable but far from being realistic or in any way believable. One looks in vain for another level which one can take seriously -- allegory, myth, philosophical principle, some form of analogy with aspects of our own world -- and in its absence one has to conclude that *The Snow Queen* is solely a work of entertainment, and a fairly shallow one, at that.

Pulp literature, of whatever genre, competes with TV's images on their own terms; being unsophisticated, uncomplicated and undemanding. A study of any book-of-the-film (especially those dependent on visual action for their effect, such as *Star Wars* and *Hawk The Slayer*) suggests that in such a competition fiction of the printed variety must inevitably lose.

The only way literature can survive is by offering something unique -- a window on the human psyche, mind-bending concepts, a cast of thousands, impossible worlds -- that no visual medium can provide. The strengths of literature will ensure its survival, if it does survive, not the weakness of formula. And that means -- whether in SF, New SF, mainstream, or whatever -- a literature of quality and high standards: higher than 90% of the books that are being published today.

There had already been a welcome and noticeable increase in the number of female voices and contributors both in the letter columns and articles under Kevin Smith's editorship, and this continued throughout the 80s... under multiple editors, but chiefly under Geoff Rippington who remained in charge until 1985...

Acknowledging Debts by Josephine Saxton [Vector #110, August 1982]

I owe a large personal debt to what is loosely or very tightly termed Science Fiction. This goes for a lot of other good writers too, and countless lousy ones (note which class I put myself in there -- I have to try to see it that way in spite of lack of world acclaim). Self-annihilation is anathema in any of the arts as is self-advertising, but I regret to say I have spent far more time on the former to date and only recently made some feeble attempts at the latter.

If it was not for Science Fiction per se -- yes, I mean as such (excuse me while I have a fit of hysterics) I would not only in all probability not have got into print, it is even possible that I would never have persevered in writing at all seriously -- or, as I would prefer, hilariously, my intention often being comic. Some of my readers, bless them, laugh with me instead of scoff at me in peevish incomprehension.

I write signposts, mostly from the interior of the psyche but some of them from the future, therefore it does make sense that the only editors who consider my work are in Science Fiction. SF being what it is (what is it?), the editors who reject me most fiercely are also from that field, upon which are played some weird games. And yet, do I not fit within SF brackets?

One has only to take a look around a Science Fiction convention to find it closely comparable to the boat-trip scene in the film of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. A crowd of utterly disparate highly-individualised people, all with something in common, on parole from Life, which really should be one long convention, 365 days per month, Flat Earth time. Do I see Science Fiction people through a warped vision, or can readers agree that SF is not only a literary ghetto, but a home for what 'normal' people would term loonies, freaks, oddities, eccentrics, weirdos, etc? No, I am not meaning to be insulting -- I'm asking a rhetorical question. Is there, or is there not, a feeling of homecoming at Conventions?

We, you, the Science Fiction readers, writers and critics, are a minority to which I am grateful to belong.

I am not ashamed of being brought up amongst lower working class people any more than I am proud of it -- many of their values are false -- and I have never tried to cultivate my voice, but I did get caught out wasting time explaining that I was not a science fiction writer; I did not want to be identified with hack writers of genre rubbish. None of that matters to me now; if I discuss the matter at all it will be to point out that some of the best work written at all is published under a Science Fiction label, and by many definitions I am from that family.

Arthur C. Clarke is actually my father. He may not wish to know this any more than other relatives to whom I now claim kinship such as Uncle Ray Bradbury, Great-Uncle Eric Frank Russell and numerous other cousins and half-cousins such as Algis Budrys, James Blish, J. G. Ballard, Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight and all the others whose names you know and many of which I have forgotten, having completely lost touch as one does with family. These writers may, if they know of my bastard existence at all, think I am not really of their clan, not connected to the tree, try to cut me off without a shilling, but they have scattered their images in places they'd rather not know about and given life to a lot of oddities, paupers, freaks, and here is one returning to say thank you.

I must of course while claiming origins, for which may be read 'influences', point out that I also owe a great deal to mainstream literature of every kind and to other genre fiction; I have always been an avid reader but had only one temporary literary obsession: Science Fiction.

Where except under the label of Science Fiction would my first work have got into print? Not since the nineteen-thirties have there been patrons for such literary oddities. Not that I knew I was writing literary oddities. Science Fiction publishers and readers do sometimes give a chance to work which nowhere else would be understood at all and conversations at conventions confirm this. One feature of science fiction people is the enquiring mind, a phenomenon not found everywhere. My first convention impressions took a while to mature into the realisation that while I was not only gawping at eccentricities, I was enjoying myself very much, and that this was because I was not an onlooker, I was part of the scenery.

Science Fiction sometimes nurtures winners who then try to forget their origins. It is becoming fashionable also to write Science Fiction but to have it published with a mainstream label, for example recent work by Doris Lessing and D. M. Thomas's wretched hotch-potch, *The White Hotel*, which apparently was first published in *New Worlds*. But it was not fashionable or even possible when I first started writing SF seventeen years ago. SF reaches out and claims William Golding, Russell Hoban but I wonder how they feel about that? They should be glad that they are exceptions and did not first see print with a genre label.

I caught the obsession from Colin Saxton who is long cured but who at that time, about twenty-five years ago was a powerful influence in my life. By way of conversation he would, with his memory for detail, relate to me the entire plots of science fiction novels and movies and short stories, often using the words 'fantastic', 'amazing', 'weird', 'otherly', 'incredible' and so on; what young woman in love could fail to be affected? I began to read for myself, remembering childhood H. G. Wells thrills, and then it was too late. An 'O' level in English Language and Literature does not equip a person to discriminate and criticise so I read eclectically, goggling and boggling, damaging my mind forever. Thank heavens I did *not* get near a department of English Literature when I was young and impressionable, or I would probably have turned from all SF as trash, as so many brainwashed graduates have done.

Now I will try to get to a crux in this: my earlier attempts at writing had not been science fiction in any sense, it was only when I began to write things which seemed to me to have an affinity with science fiction that I began to get into my own real seam. The truth began to dawn that I was interested in science fiction because it was littered with visionary ideas, connected with my religious or mystical foraging and experiences, which naturally led me into every branch of psychology, and easily embraced Atlantis, Vel[i]kovsky, topology and witchcraft.

So my fate was sealed; I became some kind of an SF writer, not then realising that I was cutting myself off from the mainstream but that worse, I would be rejected so often within the genre as some awful cross-breed. I had read everything without carping and categorising within SF, swallowing the lot; I was not even, apparently, a typical reader.

So thank you my few Science Fiction publishers, my editors and all eight staunch fans; without you I would be even more obscure than I am. Where else except in SF anthologies

It is a critic's task, though, to look past a novel's façade – however flashy that may be – and to check its foundations for holes, cracks and other signs of instability. And it is when one examines the fine detail and underlying assumptions of *The Snow Queen* that its imperfections show up.

For most of this novel the author is clearly manipulating her characters. While some degree of predestination seems correct, all their decisions and moves seem contrived to further the plot (which is itself pretty predictable for too much of the time), and everything is tied up far too neatly at the end.

The Shadow of the Torturer by Gene Wolfe

**Reviewed by
Paul Kincaid**

**[Vector #102,
June 1981]**

Those who are not particularly enamoured of fantasy, as I am not, may find the first chapter of *The Shadow of the Torturer* disconcerting as they wend their way through the traditional paraphernalia of strange names and mysterious meetings loaded with dark significance. Fans of fantasy, on the other hand, may find the rest of the novel disconcerting as they discover that it bears no more than a superficial resemblance to their beloved genre. Both should forget any preconceptions and prejudices.

Every so often a reviewer comes across a book that amply repays all the rubbish he must normally read. Sometimes it is one that turns out much better than expected; sometimes, more rarely, it is one that manages to live up to high expectations. *The Shadow of the Torturer* belongs in the second category.

would I have had the amazing distinction of being between the same bookcovers as Jorge Luis Borges, Alfred Jarry, Roald Dahl, and luminaries such as J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss and many others, and to have had a rave review by Theodore Sturgeon, that writer who as a young woman I adored. I am aware that it is said Ted Sturgeon gives everyone good reviews, but let's ignore that.

If readers have the idea that I write only very soft science fiction of the mystical-fantasia-dream-inner-space-depth-psychology-surrealist-picaresque kind, I would draw attention to my few but properly researched extrapolations on scientific fact, my few invented planets, my few space vehicles, my forays into physics. I have a passion for biochemistry dating back to 'O' level nutrition – utterly fascinating that the difference between a cretin and a normal baby was merely iodine – and once invented a large number of anti-gravity devices, all of which were demolished by a Professor of Physics and which dammit I have now lost. But I think they must be in my brain somewhere, and I hope so, because your strange spawn has matured into a writer who feels she might. If she can bring herself to write anything at all, might well return to Science Fiction, although I expect it might have strong overtones of what Mike Moorcock once called my work, defining it as Psycho-fic. Spoken in mocking jest, but accurate. Even though many mainstream writers use science fiction ideas, with more or less success, it is still only within SF as such (oh dear) that really wild and stimulating ideas and visions can be employed.

That SF label, all embracing: I'm ashamed that I ever attempted to disclaim it, whatever it might mean.

The 80s in general were a time of significant change and upheaval across the world, with wars aplenty, famine in Ethiopia and an enduring Cold War between the US and USSR (Soviet Union), and an article by Barrington J. Bayley pulled no punches ...

***Into The Arena: My Thoughts on the Bomb... by Barrington J. Bayley* [Vector #116, September 1983]**

Many people will not know that I was trained for nuclear war. No, I wasn't arming the bombs or speeding bravely Stalingradwards in a subsonic bomber. I was to be on the receiving end. But not quite, either. With luck, and the lengthy prewarning politicians then and now insist will precede nuclear attack (with what justification I have never been able to fathom) I would have received my reserve call-up notice and be placed outside the target areas.

This was in 1957, still close enough to World War II for atomic war to seem, well, almost natural. The cold war, then, had a paranoid quality it is hard to appreciate now. A few months after the time I am speaking of, I was hauled out of a pub by Scotland Yard on suspicion of being a Soviet spy. That was what you got for discussing atomic tests in West End pubs in those days – some eavesdropper had made a phone call. (Previously I had also been a guinea pig at Porton Down, where I was dosed with nerve gas.)

What happened was that at the end of our two years national service loads of us air force blokes were sent on a month-long course in firefighting. After nuclear attack a lot of the country would be on fire, and it was to be our job to put it out. As you can imagine, rather more water would be required to deal with the conflagration than was likely to be found in any particular spot, so it was to be pumped from the sea, through a network of pipelines we were to set up in hours. We practised clipping together lengths of big polythene pipe as they were thrown out of the back of a lorry, connecting them at intervals to very efficient portable pumps powered by an adapted racing car engine, or something like that.

Remember the Green Goddess fire engines that were trundled out during the firemen's

strike? This scheme is the reason they were there. We were trained on them, and a vast number were stashed away somewhere to await the Day. I shudder to recollect it. Any sprog among us who had ever driven anything, whether he had a licence or not, was allowed to take the wheel of one of those things and go careering about the countryside.

Five strikes were anticipated: London, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, and I forget where the fifth was due (I will not unkindly suggest making doubly sure of either Glasgow or Birmingham). It was assumed they would be big bombs.

Well, here we are a quarter of a century later, the Green Goddesses are out of date, I don't know what happened to the Great Firefighting Scheme but I imagine it has been quietly discarded, and the bombs still haven't arrived. What went wrong?

Of course, there are wars and wars. Some are no more than scuffles, usually over some piece of territory somewhere (such as the recent scrap in the south Atlantic) where the winner takes the prize and the loser retires with bad grace to lick his wounds, muttering that there will be another time. The Argentinians could have felt no nervousness that we might nuke Buenos Aires (we wouldn't do that, would we, chaps?). Then there are more serious wars over who if anyone is to dominate or rule the region where the belligerents both live. These can get quite bitter, and Europe has been the scene of many of them. Finally, there are wars to the death, where one nation seeks to obliterate another. Such was the Hitler war against the Slav nations of eastern Europe.

It is war type 2 that the current argument seems to be centred on. Myself, I think the whole debate is a *non sequitur*. The only logical aim I can see in the currently peddled political line of 'multilateral disarmament', which means mutual disarmament by the western alliance and the Soviet Union, or of 'raising the nuclear threshold', is 'let's find a way not to use nuclear weapons so we can have a bloody good war, like we used to.'

Ask yourself what's new weapons about nuclear weapons. The razing of cities, the wilful extermination of populations, the destruction of civilisation? None of these things are new. They are not even nearly new. They are old, old traditions.

Two things are new, and I will take newness No.1 first. It is that all this, instead of taking a long time, can now be accomplished in half an hour; and, at present, no one can defend himself against it.

Would the death-struggle between Germany and Russia have taken place if both those countries had been armed as we now are? No, it would not. But don't take my word for it. Listen to the master of terror himself: Adolf Hitler, the man who described 'the overwhelming fear of immediate death' as the most effective political instrument.

When Peenemunde finally got the V1 working Hitler went to have a look at it. At the same time, Hitler made an interesting remark to his aide. "From now on wars will become impossible. Humanity will not be able to bear it."

Though not knowing whether the atomic bomb was even practicable (sic), he had correctly prophesied the nuclear age.

It is largely on Hitler's reassurance that I fail to feel that we are tottering constantly on the edge of annihilation. One has to distinguish here between the irrational and the merely wicked. Despite being 'a monster of wickedness', as Churchill called him, Hitler was rational. Of course, it might be debatable whether the war-preventing properties of the Bomb are in all circumstances a good thing. Be that as it may, I base my lack of real alarm on the belief that the leaders of North America, Western Europe and the Soviet Union, however else they might be criticised, are at least as rational as Hitler. Some evidence of their rationality comes from the fact that the 'arms limitation' agreements are in reality the reverse – what they ensure is that there *remains* no defence against nuclear attack.

Wolfe is one of the finest writers in science fiction, and he doesn't let us down.

To appreciate all this you must go out and buy the book: it is the best literary investment SF has produced for a very long time, right up to the cliffhanger ending and the tongue-in-cheek author's note. Now all I can do is fret away the time until I can lay my hands on the next volume of *The Book Of The New Sun*, my usual antipathy towards sequels overcome by the fact that it was all planned in advance, that Wolfe finished writing all four volumes before the first was published, and by the brilliance of this first part. I feel as though I have taken part in Severian's odyssey, as though I know the world through which he travels, and I look forward to resuming the journey.

2010 Odyssey Two by Arthur C. Clarke

Reviewed by
Peter Stockill

[Vector #117,
Dec 1983]

When I first heard that Arthur C. Clarke was writing a sequel to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I was disappointed. This may sound strange coming from a SF fan, but I felt that 2001 did not need a sequel. True, both the film and the book constitute one of the most baffling pieces of work in the history of science fiction. But that is, I believe, its great strength - 2001 is an enigma, as strange as the mysterious monolith on the Moon defying all attempts at explanation.

The culmination of this epic mythology is that the experiment with man on Earth has been a failure, and that the aliens try again on Europa. At the end of the book we have two worlds in the solar system with intelligent life - Earth and Europa, and Clarke gives a hint that the solar system cannot hold two civilisations, and that one will have to perish.

Newness No. 2 is only slowly emerging. It is that the capability for mass destruction ceases to be the special preserve of large, powerful nations. It becomes available to all, even to poor, ill-organised states, or to private armies.

There is no guarantee of rationality in the weltering world at large. Racial nationalism (the political foundation of those two small nations said already to have equipped themselves with nuclear arsenals), fanatical religion, wanton violence, holy war, insane pride, crazed dictators with as little regard for the survival of their own countries as for anyone else's, emotionally unstable, with every kind of mental aberration - the wide world has them all, and the Bomb will shortly be at their service.

It is mainly countries like ourselves, long possessors of these weapons, who proceed to sermonise on how abhorrent they are.

Man has an instinct for war. To believe otherwise is a species of religious delusion, like believing that the natural food of the tiger is grass. Man is what he is: at his worst, the worst of the beasts in a savage world, capable of every conceivable... shall we say, unpleasantness?

One can predict with fair probability the political shape of the 21st century. It will resemble the 19th, in being an age of empires. The imperative of security will cause the major powers, whoever they happen to be at the time, to divide the rest of the world up between them, and rule it - firmly. It really is hard to see how else the world can be made safe.

What will happen next is another question; history is persistently mutable. One argument CND has, I believe, is that if nuclear weapons continue to exist then the worst will happen sooner or later. If that is so then the case is hopeless, because the only way for them to disinvent themselves is to destroy the societies that know how to make them.

The Cold War and thoughts of imminent destruction finally started to fade when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 – he tried to rebuild both the Soviet economy and advocate reform, and changed the political climate forever ...

Upon Geoff's 'retirement', Paul Kincaid stepped in for a special interrim issue mid-1985, with considerable help from Alan Dorey (who had been helping behind the scenes for quite some time), and one of the things that also appeared therein (and persists to this day in Vector), was the 'Best of the year' lists...

1984 Books of the Year [Vector #124/5, April/May 1985]

Chris Bailey chose **Empire of the Sun** by J. G. Ballard.

Colin Greenland chose **Divine Endurance** by Gwyneth Jones.

Helen McNab opted for Philip K. Dick's **Time Out of Joint** and **A Maze of Death**.

Joseph Nicholas also chose **Empire of the Sun**, but added Robert Holdstock's **Mythago Wood** and Dave Langford's **The Leaky Establishment** to his picks for the year.

Andy Sawyer included **Empire of the Sun** and **Mythago Wood** among his picks, too.

Sue Thomasson selected **Lost Dorsai** by Gordon R. Dickson, **The Name of the Rose** by Umberto Eco, and **The Compass Rose** by Ursula K. LeGuin as her choice reads for 1984.

And finally, Paul Kincaid also picked **Empire of the Sun** and **Mythago Wood**, but added **Nights at the Circus** by Angela Carter, **1982, Janine** by Alasdair Gray, and Christopher Priest's **The Glamour** to his choices.

Mid-1985, David V. Barrett took over as the editor of Vector and remained in place for several years (up until 1989). The magazine had also since returned to an A4 format, but at this point the text and font sizes were tiny, and the sheer volume of content and amount of reviews every issue had grown considerably... but the future remained a core focus...

What Do We Do Now That The Future Is Here? by Elizabeth Sourbut [Vector #126, June/July 1985]

The reasoning behind this choice of title seems to be something like the following: Science Fiction is about the future. Science Fiction is full of spaceships and robots and computers and giant metropolises. Those things are now with us in the real world. Ergo, the future is here. I would take issue with all those statements, starting with the last.

The future is here.

What a frightening proposition. It seems to reflect the mood of a world which looks ever backwards, which celebrates another anniversary every week, and talks of a mythical Golden Age in our fathers' time. If the future is here today, what of tomorrow? This statement seems to imply that it's all over, we've caught up with the future, we've had our ration. Old grandfather's clock stops here.

But the reasoning which brought us this proposition is false. Most of what was 'predicted' in early science fiction has not come to pass. We'll never see Heinlein's millionaire hiring one mechanic to do up a derelict spaceship to take him to the Moon **(1)**. Nobody's building humanoid robots, except for the movies. Many of the standard science fiction ideas have been either written to death or overtaken by events, but in no real sense is the future *here*. We still don't know what will happen tomorrow; we still do know, with a reasonable degree of certainty, that tomorrow will come. Science fiction, the literature of change, the literature so often set in an imagined future, seems to be going through a phase of defying its own past. We speak of a Golden Age, the greats from those years still dominate the popularity polls, and sequels to books written twenty or forty years ago are immensely popular. Certainly there *[was]* some excellent fiction written in those days. I was weaned on reprints of the stuff, and I loved it. I still love it. But it would be a mistake to glorify it. It was of its time and we should no longer try either to emulate it or to turn our backs on it altogether. Science fiction isn't really about the future. Ursula K. Le Guin **(2)**, amongst others, has argued convincingly that science fiction is descriptive of the present, as seen by the author in question. The power of science fiction is that by setting a story in the future, or on a distant world, or a parallel world, we can look at the present from a different angle.

... Science fiction *has* changed the world. If it hadn't been for all those pulp magazines of the 30s and 40s and 50s would Americans ever have walked on the Moon? It was a quixotic adventure, not driven by hard-headed economics, but by a dream. A dream created by hundreds of stories about the glories of conquering space. That's the key. An individual novel, however brilliant, can do very little, but in its sheer quantity, all pushing the same message, fiction can sway popular opinion and desires.

Science fiction is a product of its time. It could never have grown without the changes in ideology begun by the Industrial Revolution. The technological triumphs and erosion of religious beliefs stemming from that time led to an ideology justifying scientific research as intrinsic to the nature and purpose of human existence. Scientific optimism was perhaps at its height during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it seemed as if science could solve all the world's problems. By 1939, Bernal **(3)** was already commenting on a general loss of enthusiasm for scientific progress. Gernsback, Campbell, and their stable of writers resisted this and tried to convert American youth to the scientific world-view via science fiction. In the 1960s the swing towards individualism and Eastern thought was

This is Darwinian selection at its most ruthless - the aliens creating two intelligent civilisations in one solar system and waiting to see which one survives, like spectators in a zoo.

Clarke does not give the answer. He ends the book by saying "which it will be, not even the Gods know - yet." Is this Clarke sequel-mongering, giving us a deliberately ambiguous ending which will enable him to eke out his mythology yet further in another sequel? Perhaps even Clarke, the giant of modern science fiction, like the god-like beings he has created, does not know - yet.

The Colour of Magic

by Terry
Pratchett

Reviewed by
Ken Lake

[Vector #119,
April 1984]

A disc world, supported on the backs of four giant elephants who are standing on the shell of the Great Turtle A'Tuin who swims, slowly but endlessly, through the interstellar gulf.

But how do the inhabitants know of their existence? Simple - the rimward kingdom of Krull, which has mountains projecting over the rim, built a gantry and pulley arrangement and lowered pioneer astrozoologists to peer over and report back.

So much for background. A failed wizard, Rincewind, is involved with a naive actuary, Twoflower, who is his world's first tourist and who is accompanied by his luggage - which merits a capital "L" as it is in a multilegged trunk made of sapient pearwood.

mirrored in stories of the transmutation of consciousness, sexual frankness, and a subjectivity apparently alien to the scientific world view. Since then, science and technology have been increasingly mistrusted by the majority of science fiction writers. The faith in science *per se* has vanished, and is yet to be replaced by a new faith. "It is now a commonplace," says Patrick Parrinder (4), "that science fiction in England and America is largely pessimistic". John Griffiths (5) tells us that many writers, chief amongst them the immensely influential J. G. Ballard, have despaired. His depressing conclusion is that tomorrow has been cancelled.

But why should science fiction writers have despaired at all? Klein (6) gives what I find a very suggestive explanation. After the expansionist optimism of the pre-1940s, and the "confident scepticism" of 1940 to 1960, the technologically orientated middle class found itself as a proletariat. Science is no longer a revolutionary force, but a servant of big business. At the same time, science fiction has ventured out of its ghetto, and has itself been taken up by big business. Its questioning subversive drive is being diluted by a publishing industry which is interested only in making a quick few megabucks. Is it not possible, then, that this despair stems, not so much from the fate of the world, as from the fate of the science fiction author?

If so, it's about time that we snapped out of it. The world is not interested in our self-indulgent breast-beating. Science itself is not to blame. For science fiction authors to attack, or turn their backs on, science, is to mistake the root of the problem. To react against technology is absurd; remove it all today, and most of us die tomorrow. But it is undoubtedly true that technology has been misused, and is being misused in terrifying ways. One of the major challenges of modern science fiction is to show how it can also be used constructively, and how it is being used constructively.

It is currently fashionable to prophesy doom, and large numbers of science fiction writers have jumped on the band-wagon. Doom, in any of its myriad guises, is always a possibly to be guarded against, but to court disaster, to glory in it, is the action of a lunatic. It is also to deny much that is hopeful and constructive in our world today. Surely it makes sense at least to postulate an attractive future, and to strive towards it.

If the popular fiction is all post-holocaust novels and escapist fantasy series, if when people turn to more "serious" works by respected authors all they get is gloom and despair, then it will strengthen their depression about the future. The idea of human and machine working together to shape a future suitable for the human rather than the machine seems to have been abandoned, both in the pages of science fiction and in reality. Mankind should have the upper hand; machines, computers included, are important tools which can make our tasks easier. The increasing subjugation of human to machine must be overcome. Often life mirrors art; science fiction can open up new possibilities, readying them to be explored in reality. Why don't we concentrate some of our attention here?

Science fiction, like any branch of literature, is only of importance when it is dealing directly and relevantly, in whatever guise, with the current concerns of its readers. Western civilisation, and in its wake the world, is passing through a time of change, and the literature will inevitably reflect that change. If we wish to see science fiction vital and thriving, we should root it in the concerns of the present, and not the past.

Isaac Asimov has split the history of science fiction into four periods, according to the dominant features (7). He suggested: adventure-dominant (1926-1938), science-dominant (1938-1950), sociology-dominant (1950-1965) and style-dominant since then. We all seem too self-conscious these days, too eagerly pursuing the chimera of literary respectability. Style is important, but only insofar as it helps to strengthen mood or reveal character. Once it becomes an end in itself we run the risk of sinking into decadent self-indulgence. What was once a powerful medium full of ideas and fine storytelling becomes merely a collection of clever plays on words and dazzling emptiness. Let us keep our style, but the content must come first.

If I could propose a fifth period, to begin in 1985, and pick out its dominant feature, I would suggest that we concentrate on people, and in all our stories ask ourselves, what would this change mean to the family down the street? Let's think more about small-scale technology, here and abroad. Let's think about a world suited rather to people, than to big business corporations. So the fifth period: people-dominant, or if you prefer, grass-roots-dominant. 1985 onwards.

It's time we stopped looking exclusively backwards, and began to face the immediate future. We take with us the lessons that we have learnt from the last sixty years of science fiction and the dreams that those stories have awakened in us. I believe that we *can* get there from here, and science fiction writers can help to show the way.

1. Robert A. Heinlein "Requiem" (short story, 1939, Street & Smith Publications)
2. In her introduction to the 1983 Ace edition of ***The Left Hand of Darkness***
3. Bernal, J. D. ***The World, The Flesh, and the Devil*** (reprinted Jonathan Cape, 1970)
4. Parrinder, P. "Science Fiction and the scientific world-view" (essay)
5. Griffiths, J. ***Three Tomorrows: American British and Soviet Science Fiction***; Macmillan 1980
6. Klein, G. "Discontent in American Science Fiction"; ***SF Studies* 4**, part 1 (March 1977) pgs 3-13
7. Quoted in ***The Road to Science Fiction 2: From Wells to Heinlein***, James Gunn, ed., New American Library, 1979, p5

There remained a kind of 'backdoor levity' throughout David Barrett's tenure, as typified by Colin Greenland writing about reviewing as an artform...

"Yes, But Did You Like It?" by Colin Greenland [Vector #129, Dec 85/Jan 86]

So many writers seem to see reviewing as a bloodsport, a kind of licensed and ritualised savagery in which the hounds are let loose, once a week, to harry and rend the tender flanks of the heart. You've sweated and starved for year after year to produce your literary offering. In three minutes and three hundred words some smarmy Oxbridge tyro has pounced on it, torn off a couple of careless gobbets to quote out of context, misunderstood the irony, misrepresented the intent, compared you unfavourably and insinuatingly to someone you've never even read, given away the plot and pinched your best joke for a punchline. Reviewers are idle, shallow, ill-informed creatures. They wouldn't even exist if it weren't for you and your fellow novelists; and to make it worse, they've every one of them got an unfinished novel on top of the wardrobe gathering dust, it's called *Landscape with Figures*, written half like James Joyce and half like Ernest Hemingway, and it is truly *terrible*. And they dare to come it with their "intermittently convincing" and their "shakily constructed". If you know so much about it, snarls the novelist at bay, go away and write your own novel.

Even inside literary circles, where glamour's reserved for people who appear on *The Book Quiz*, it still makes a difference if a reviewer has a claim to be a novelist too, however minor and embryonic. It doesn't even seem to matter that your own effort is shakily constructed and intermittently convincing, as long as it's there. You feel more qualified to pronounce, more real, somehow. Whether or not you should is another question.

It may be quite proper for reviewers never to have completed novels of their own, because their skills lie in analysing rather than synthesizing, taking fiction apart rather than putting it together. Perhaps that might also be the reason why the harassed novelist mistrusts and resents the reviewer, the two of them working the same ore but at cross-purposes.

The feckless Gods of the discworld are using them - and peripheral characters which include dragons, barbarians and princesses - as pawns in a celestial boardgame.

Had enough? Or does it sound fun to you? Like all Terry Pratchett's books, this one can be read on two levels - simple fun, or pleasant satire. At times it's hard to separate them, and on this occasion punning and general knockabout humour overbalance the cleverness of the plot.

Despite its faults - mainly of excess - this is a most readable book with a host of enjoyable characters and a wealth of carefully invented detail. It would make an ideal antidote to an overdose of too-serious, too-clinical mainstream fantasy or science fiction reading, but will for all that remain in the reader's memory as something of a flawed tour de force by a young and promising writer.

The Anubis Gates by Tim Powers

Reviewed by
Mary Gentle

[Vector #121,
August 1984]

Tim Powers, for those who don't already know the name, wrote *The Drawing of the Dark*, a truly [sic] individual fantasy novel – the kind of book that has you expecting great things of the next one. Too often that leads to disappointment. *The Anubis Gates* is good.

It's also screwy. Roughly speaking, you could describe it as a combination time-travel and historical novel. It begins with an Egyptian sorcerer just outside London in 1805, and what happens when he attempts to summon the god Anubis.

The Anubis Gates is a flux, a masque, a minuet of identity-changes; and comes close to saying that identity itself is just a point of view in time. And, fittingly, for a book so concerned with magicians, it's also a top-hat of a novel, out of which Powers pulls a succession of quite amazing rabbits. It's [al]ready won the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award in the USA. It deserves all the awards it can get.

The much-lamented inability of academic literary criticism to come to terms with or even recognise the existence of science fiction was what first stimulated SF authors to supply their own. Fed by the traditions of open debate at cons, and in fanzines, including *Vector*, there has been quite a line of practitioners who have also worked as commentators: James Blish, Damon Knight, Brian Aldiss, Samuel Delaney, Ursula Le Guin, Brian Stableford, Joanna Russ, Kim Stanley Robinson... I wouldn't be at all surprised if the same thing were true of feminist fiction writers and reviewers in the last ten or fifteen years.

First and last, the professional reviewer has to provide good copy, and copy to fit. Critical insights give way to column inches, every time.

Non-literary people tend to assume reviewing is a cushy number. Getting paid for reviewing books and saying what you think of them: what a doss. My next-door-neighbour, self-employed like me, will get home in the middle of a sunny afternoon, tired and dusty from humping carpets about, to find me lounging on the lawn with an iced drink and a book.

"You don't half work hard", says Jack, meaning the opposite.

And I say, well, yes I do, but I can tell he's not convinced. He'll say it again tomorrow.

It's one thing when the book in question is the new Fred Hoyle or Frank Herbert, and he can hear my pitiful groans and see me clawing at the daisies in despair. The corollary to the Protestant work ethic is that, to be perfectly dignified, labour must be *unpleasant*. So it's hard to make a satisfactory show of toil and sweat when the book is the new Angela Carter or M. John Harrison and I'm loving every line.

Jack doesn't see me after midnight, still at my desk, struggling to justify the ways of Josephine Saxton to the readers of the *Times Literary Supplement*.

How can it be hard work to read a book and say what you think about it?

Reviewers have to read a *lot*, far more than they'll ever have cause to mention in a particular review. This creates a professional problem when you're reviewing so much you don't have time to read anything else. I'm continually coming up against new books by authors whose previous work I simply don't know. This week it's A. N. Wilson and Anita Brookner. Last week it was Damon Knight and Robert Aickman. There's something to be said for the innocent eye, the fresh appraisal of somebody's eleventh book just as it stands, alone irrespective of the accumulated achievement and reputation of the previous ten; but you'd better make sure you do the research if you're not going to commit some ignorant gaffe which will alienate your editor. (I'm almost certain *Gentlemen in England* is the first novel of A. N. Wilson's set wholly in the nineteenth century, but oh god is it?) Reviewing is educational, not least for the reviewer.

Reviewing is also analytical. Here, opinions, approaches and working methods differ widely. Every writer has a position, or range of positions, whether they want to sing and shout about them, like Marge Piercy and Robert Heinlein, or keep you guessing, like Thomas Disch and Gene Wolfe. When the assumptions or the message of a book do not measure up to my experience of the world, I shall want to say so; though I hope the day when all fiction in Britain has to conform to preset ideological standards is further off than it sometimes seems.

Reviewing also, despite everything I said above on the difference between writing and writing about writing, requires a kind of creativity itself. In a sense, a review is an expression of a personal experience, the experience of reading a book. But reviews are signed, as a matter of course, and they still consist of subjective appraisals of books, though the subjective response will be that of an informed, conscientious sensibility, with any luck.

The book trade, however, tends to treat "the reviewers" as though we constituted some sort of tribunal, sitting together in judgement on a book. Despite the incestuous nature of the literary coteries and the amount of professional cross-checking that inevitably goes on, such a consensus rarely exists. When disagreements vacillate wildly, there are sales to be

made on the strength of “controversy”. Futura’s paperback of Iain Banks’ first novel *The Wasp Factory* opens with three whole pages of quotes from strongly-worded reviews, violently for, violently against, and violently both (it’s that sort of book).

One of the things we should treasure about the informality of fan criticism in *Vector*, *Paperback Inferno* and elsewhere, is the freedom it allows the reviewer to declare personal prejudices, circumstances and accidents that influence and interrupt the actual experience of reading. In the proper professional world you’re really not at liberty to say “I wasn’t really able to concentrate on this book because the cat was being sick” until you get to the exalted region of Auberon Waugh and Bernard Levin. Then subjectivity becomes a strong suit, declared instead of disguised, and the personality of the star reviewer starts to cannibalise the author, which is a nonsense.

However you go about it, as a reviewer you are trying to say what each book *is*, often in a very few words, for an audience pre-selected by the nature of the publication you’re writing for, only some of whom will actually be interested. That can be, and really should be, hard work, even with the slimmest and slightest of novels; harder still with fat novels and anthologies, because you must either review the stories individually, which soon gets bitty and boring, or struggle to come up with comments which are appropriate to all the stories generally without being uselessly vague. And it’s hard to review *anything* by Garry Kilworth, if you’re to stay friendly with him, that is, because after you’ve toiled to articulate your reading of his book, convey its qualities, locate it in its philosophic and literary context, etc., he’s liable to come up to you at some inconvenient occasion and say, petulantly, “Yes, but you didn’t say whether you *liked* it”. My moment of justification was when I’d gone through and through his collection *The Songbirds of Pain*, and decided to say that “the shadow of crucifixion, immolation, sacrifice, lies darkly across all thirteen stories”.

“I never realised that!” said Garry, pleased. At least I *think* he was pleased.

It was a decade in which the term ‘cyberpunk’ became commonplace, and pop culture exploded, too... Author interviews and discussion had by this time become a staple for Vector, and every new issue saw another featured writer being interviewed (often by Paul Kincaid!) – the list is extensive and exhaustive, so this is just a taster of Paul’s hard-line questioning...

The View from the Mountain Road: An Interview with Bruce Sterling by Paul Kincaid [Vector #138, June/July 1987]

Let’s start with an easy question: What is science fiction?

Jesus, that’s the easy question? I don’t know. I mean there are functional and conceptual definitions of science fiction, and the functional definition can be anything that has a rocket ship on the cover.

But how do you see science fiction, since you obviously have very definite views of it?

Well, I see it as a form of popular culture that is a societal response to the stress of technological change. That’s what I call science fiction.

So what should science fiction be doing that it isn’t doing now?

It should be talking about real things for one thing. It should be discussing topics that are of importance to the contemporary milieu, to be preparing people for what is to come, to be giving people conceptual tools to deal with the stress of change, to be suggesting what direction change should go in, what’s workable, what paths for the future might work. We’re surrounded by precipices on all sides, it does very little good to say we might fall off a

**Count Zero by
William Gibson**

**Reviewed by
Mike Dickinson**

**[Vector #133,
Aug-Sept 1986]**

Gibson’s first novel, *Neuromancer*, won last year’s Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick awards. More importantly, it changed many perceptions of SF, brushing away a certain jaded feeling and re-interesting many who had drifted off to fantasy and Latin surrealism.

So how do you follow a book like that? The answer is a sequel. The smart money though – and Gibson is smart – is on a quasi-sequel. In other words, Gibson seems to have followed his own interests while exploring further the dimensions of his world.

Gibson is not just a genuine science fiction writer but also a humanist in that tradition which has done much to prevent the genre from becoming engineers’ bedtime stories. He is on course to being the most indispensable writer in his field: his achievements are already tremendous’ his potential, stunning. Even if you never buy hardbacks, buy this one and treasure it.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Reviewed by
Paul Kincaid

[Vector #133,
Aug-Sept 1986]

The right-wing fundamentalist backlash that hovers in the background of the modern American psyche has won. A strict masculine rule has been instituted in a land now called by the biblical name Gilead; and the role of women is carefully ordered. The pampered wives of the ruling elite wear blue, the 'Marthas' (domestic servants) dull green, and the handmaids red. Women of proven childbearing ability, their role is the true role of women, the propagation of the species. Assigned to the household of a Commander, their duty is to open their legs for their lords and masters for a joyless coupling that it is hoped will produce children to be taken from their true mothers and raised as loyal servants of the state. It is Genesis and fascism run riot: no aspect of a handmaid's life is without the control of the state, and the state has made every effort to expunge pleasure and love, even sex is reduced to the linking of automata.

precipice. A book like Orwell's 1984 assumes the existence of a liberal democracy, that you can warn people against this particular development. Nowadays it seems to me that potential 84's are a dime a dozen, they lurk in almost every cultural direction, so the stakes are much higher now, this is a much more hazardous situation.

So cyberpunk is one route across the mountains?

I would say so, yeh. When I think of cyberpunk, if there are positive aspects to the term itself – which I didn't invent and which no-one likes – it's the idea of fusion, it's the idea of integration between technology and popular culture.

If you don't like the term [cyberpunk], what would you prefer to call it?

I would prefer to call it 'modern science fiction', or functionally speaking I would prefer to call it 'commercial science fiction'. A workable kind of science fiction which simply does what science fiction is supposed to do.

You've also said that you're not writing cyberpunk any more.

Well, I am and I'm not. I'm not writing work of a particular kind which people have identified as being cyberpunk. But on the other hand, I think I am carrying the basic principles out.

What's what I wanted to get at. I wanted to know if you were thinking there was another direction to follow, and that's what you were intending to do.

Well, it's the same direction. The only thing is that it's going to seem different because a lot of people have not grasped the basic direction. They can identify Gibsonian gloss, but they can't really identify the underlying tenets, and when it goes into the next cycle of permutation it's going to seem very strange.

I've also got the impression that you see considerable faults in Schismatrix now. Would you care to elaborate?

In some sense *Schismatrix* is very much a Gedanken experiment, sort of a question of what one can do with the form, and the form is distorted in the sense that say The Ramones or The Sex Pistols would have distorted a rock 'n' roll form. In other words you turn up the amps to 11 and step on it as hard as you can.

Have you ever considered bending the form, inventing a new form?

Oh, that's what I'm trying to do, in a sense. But it's a difficulty. As I say, I'm not really that gifted a theoretician, and whereas I can see that it ought to be done I'm simply too dirt ignorant to be able to do it with the kind of facility that it needs.

I know how much you admire Ballard, for instance, as a writer. What are your views on the British scene, British writing in science fiction?

Well, they're in a state of flux at the moment. I always have admired British science fiction writing a great deal and you know I consider the British science fiction tradition to be the finest tradition, most British writers are very formally gifted and can write reams around American science fiction writers. I mean, prominent American science fiction writers are scarcely fit to unlatch the shoes of really good British science fiction writers. They certainly succeed in writing *qua* [sic] writing, but whether they are really able to get that sort of pop cultural energy across is another question.

I just wanted to know if you consider the pop culture quality of cyberpunk or whatever you want to call it is in any way appropriate for a British form of science fiction?

Well, it could be. The only question is who will be the first Briton to attempt it, and who will be the first to do it successfully? One can very easily see a sort of third-hand British sci-fiberpunk in which they merely lift convenient images and play with them as they rearrange their literary metaphors. It's a sort of Bach harpsichord transposition of literary tropes, which seems to me quite bloodless and very typically British at the moment. The only question is: are you going to get into the mud pit and wrestle the alligator, or are you going to stand behind the wall and toss it bits of bread? The difficulty is that the alligator will

eventually bite someone's leg off, and it could very easily be Britain's leg. I can very well imagine, fifteen years from now, should conditions continue the way they have, American science fiction could be very much a thriving and going proposition whereas British science fiction could have vanished and be exclusively an American province. Britons will still read it, but it will have slipped entirely from their hands.

Well, science fiction in America slumped ten, fifteen years ago.

Oh yes, it's been dreadful for many years. But on the other hand it's really hopping right now, and Britons don't seem fully aware of this, they don't seem to know where the action is.

But in a way the British movement – and New Wave is a prime example – was not towards the centre of science fiction as cyberpunk is going, but away from science fiction into the literature. One very slick and simple way of looking at cyberpunk is, it's transposing a sort of Chanderlesque narrative onto traditional science fictional forms, whereas New Wave was transposing a Joycean narrative onto traditional science fiction forms.

No. For one thing I have never written a Chanderlesque thinking in my life. And I really doubt very much if you could understand what cyberpunk was unless you had read at least some Sterling, some Cadigan, some Greg Bear. People aren't aware of this. People in Britain have read *Neuromancer*, but they don't really see the full picture.

Yes, our perception of cyberpunk tends to start with Gibson and work out. That sounds like it's not the American perception of cyberpunk?

That's not how I see it. To my mind, I'm a big fan of Ballard and I think in a sense Ballard is the only true science fiction writer that era really produced. To my mind he integrates science into the social structure in a way that's very similar to cyberpunk, and deliberately because the cyberpunks are copying his moves essentially. We have studied Ballard's work quite closely and a lot of our ideology is adapted from what he said.

So you're working from a basis of Ballard and going in another direction? Maybe British science fiction should take you and go in another direction?

I would definitely advise you not to go in my direction. It would be a very rough ride. And there is nothing to be gained from parodying America.

What is your attitude towards America?

It's a very ambivalent attitude.

You don't feel uncomfortable with the ambivalence?

I don't see how you could live in America now without feeling uncomfortable.

Is the political element something you consider basic to your fiction?

I don't expect miracles, neither do I have some vast social, ideological framework that I would care to impose on everyone else. But on the other hand it's very difficult to observe one's government behaving shamefully and moronically over a long period without becoming radicalised by the sight.

Do you find science fiction a good mode in which to express radical opinion?

I think it's the best mode in which to express radical opinion. It's the only way you can truly express truly radical opinion in a way that by-passes people's instinctive objections. I think you'll find this is very much true in the case of feminist science fiction, which I don't really read that much of, and don't enjoy that much when I do read it, but I find it a very encouraging sign of science fiction's potential.

But there's also a very strong right wing element in the classical science fiction. Do you find yourself hampered by expectations of galactic empires and the Heinlein thing?

I find it kind of loathsome, but I'm glad it's there too in a sense, the mere fact that Heinlein is there. Heinlein gets a pretty bad press, you know, because he's very right wing, but on the other hand there are plenty of other science fiction writers whose ideas are just as nutty as his. I mean, essentially he's a crank... a guy with pronounced opinions which don't really fit

The horror of this dictatorship is recorded by one of its victims, the handmaid Offred (she is the property of Commander Fred, even her name has been taken from her). Once, before things changed, she had a husband and a child, now she has nothing.

Margaret Atwood has written a weighty and distinguished fable that in places achieves real power. Gilead is frighteningly convincing, its institutions and beliefs always plausible. It is a feminist book, yes, the brutalizing of women is its subject: yet it is not strident, neither does it attack men indiscriminately. Atwood is at pains to show that women are among the most enthusiastic supporters, and indeed instigators, of the Gilead regime, and many of the most restrictive practices are in the hands of women.

The result is a truly shocking dystopia. It is written with a doleful rhythm, precise of detail, often repetitious, listing minutiae until the reader too knows the emptiness, the sterility of Offred's life. Yet, bleak though it is, *The Handmaid's Tale* is not an entirely black vision – it ends with a note of hope, even humour that seems appropriate in this distinguished and effective novel.

**Trillion Year
Spree: The
History of
Science Fiction
by Brian Aldiss
with David
Wingrove**

**Reviewed by
Paul Kincaid**

**[Vector #137,
April-May 1987]**

First of all, in case my later criticisms give the wrong impression, let me say that if you only have two books about SF on your shelves, *Trillion Year Spree* should be one of them. (The other, of course, should be the [Peter] Nicholls *Encyclopedia*). It is an excellent history of SF from wherever you might think the genre begins, almost to the present day.

I've only mentioned Aldiss throughout, but his collaborator in producing this major rewrite and expansion of *Billion Year Spree* (1973) should not be forgotten.

in with anyone else's universe. And in a sense the mere fact that he's standing there dragging science fiction in one particular direction loosens the boundaries and gives other people the opportunity to promulgate other ideas, equally odd but in the other direction.

It gives you something to fight against?

I don't really see [me] fighting against Heinlein, that would just be internecine warfare. On the contrary, I very much suspect that Heinlein and I would end up on the same side of the barricades. The first thing that would happen that would really cause me to take up arms would be if a government were to crack down on the press and freedom of speech. That's where I really draw the line, when censorship begins I'm out in the street with a rifle. And I very much suspect that Heinlein would be out there, and he'd probably have a bigger rifle than mine, and better ammunition.

I remember in this country a couple of years ago when Gibson's work and your work and Shepard's started getting distributed over here, a real wave of excitement, as if someone was saying "Thank God someone's doing something about science fiction". Did the same thing happen in America?

I think very much so, yeh. I think to a certain extent it's still happening, it's starting to broaden. This is a sign of people taking science fiction seriously on its own terms. These are people who prefer to work in science fiction because they believe they can do things with it that other forms of writing can't do. And I believe this is true, there are things you can do in science fiction that are impossible in other forms of writing. There are topics you can discuss that are undiscussable in straight literature, and there are solecisms you can commit that are impossible in straight literature.

Cyberpunk remained a topic of discussion several times throughout the history of Vector...

***Schism, Mirror, Lens by Kev McVeigh
[Vector #144, June/July 1988]***

Cyberpunk? Or Cyber Junk? Opinions differ as to what it was, is, or even if it existed. I suggest that there ought to be little doubt that it happened: what is in question is its status and importance. Was it just a nice easy label for a small stylistic group, useful only for reviewers and, mostly, publicity departments. Or is it the 80s New Wave, the movement that all SF needs to follow? Has it even been already superseded by something new?

I believe it was Asimov's magazine editor Gardner Dozois who *first* used the term "cyberpunk", but attempts at definition have come from all sides, with none of them really satisfactory.

Bruce Sterling has been one of the most vociferous champions of cyberpunk. In *Interzone 10* he called for "more clarity in prose" and "stories that can stand up to rough handling", then under his pseudonym of Vincent Omniaveritas he went further in IZ 14:

"It is a question of approach, of technique. And these are its trademarks: Technological literacy... as opposed to pseudo-science guff of past decades. Imaginative concentration... extrapolations thoroughly worked out... visionary intensity.

A global, 21st century viewpoint not bound by the assumptions of middle-aged, middle-class, white American males.

Fictional technique which takes the advances of the New Wave... yet asserting content over style."

Who are the cyberpunks? *The Independent* (17-10-87) referred to William Gibson as “the inventor and sole practitioner of cyberpunk”, but Sterling in *Vector 138* listed Greg Bear, Pat Cadigan and himself. Other sources add John Shirley, Lewis Shiner, Michael Swanwick, Lucius Shepard, Kim Stanley Robinson and a few lesser names. This certainly begins to sound like a major movement in modern SF.

Sterling mentions Robinson as a contemporary but not an ally, yet the interviewer, Paul Kincaid, draws out strong links in theme between the two. These similarities include a “strange ambivalent attitude towards America in so much contemporary American science fiction”. Sterling admits this is his view, and mentions Robinson’s *The Wild Shore* as a similar example.

Sterling has strong views, and has made claims about the ideology behind the cyberpunks; these are his grounds for rejecting Robinson, for instance. In fact Sterling tends towards the radical viewpoint, though he intermittently denies it. Greg Bear seems to me to be a long way right of the supposed cyberpunk stance, however. On the other hand, Robinson and [David] Brin have a quite liberal view, but none of these newer writers seems content with the state of the Union at present. Again this echoes the New Wave to some degree.

Style seems to be a large part of Omniveritas’s claims for the new science fiction, as well, though he has stressed the importance of content first. The work of Chandler is frequently cited, as is Ballard, but the first cyberpunk novel is frequently described as being Alfred Bester’s *Tiger! Tiger!* which in 1956 predated *Neuromancer* and its fellows by almost 30 years. It may be exaggeration about Bester, but more recently John Brunner’s *The Shockwave Rider* employs many of the mannerisms of cyberpunk, as does Ridley Scott’s film *Blade Runner*.

A lot has been made of the street-credibility of cyberpunk, with particular reference to its “gutter-dialogue”. What this seems to mean is that characters say “fuck” a lot. There is nothing wrong with this when done properly, and in many ways it is an improvement on Heinlein or Niven’s imaginary swearwords, *Tanstaaf!* and *Tanj*. [“There Ain’t No Such Thing As A Free Lunch” and “There Ain’t No Justice”]

Content-wise it might be possible to isolate cyberpunk more easily than by style: cyber-implies computers but it’s not just computers, of course, and one could hardly call *2001* a cyberpunk work for all its great qualities. There are no computers in Lucius Shepard’s stories, nor in Sterling’s debut novel, *Involution Ocean*.

The musical analogy with punk rock has been used frequently, and to take up this point John Shirley says in *IZ 17*: “a more intense level of ideation, information input and imagery. It’s also more contemporary in feel than the average science fiction. And probably more energetic. And that is like punk.”

[K. W.] Jeter has mentioned the yuppie aspect, whilst the cyberpunk panel at Novacon 16 decayed into a debate about how little the punks and the hippies achieved. And so has cyberpunk failed to succeed the New Wave, which in its turn had failed to overthrow the Old Guard.

Fashion-wise punk is often described as post-apocalyptic, something which shows clearly in George R R Martin’s *The Armageddon Rag*, despite its pre-punk references, and in the setting and styles of Storm Constantine’s *Wraeththu*.

So these roots have influenced other strong and valid forms of the genre. The reliance of Shirley, and others, on music in their work too often reads as an apologia, or merely a gratuitous namecheck for favourite bands. Stephen King has been doing this for years, most blatantly in *Christine*, and in asking AC/DC to provide music for *Maximum Overdrive*.

Some of the cyberpunk supporters will be leaping to defend themselves; they may question my references to Ellison, Delaney et al, yet they accept the attachment of Bester, Ballard and Tiptree, to name three from whom it is a very small step to the New Wave.

Every critic, including Aldiss, has the right to be opinionated, to have favourites, to pursue obsessions. David Wingrove (a former editor of *Vector*) has, I feel, tempered Aldiss’s prejudices to some degree, making this a more balanced, substantial and worthwhile book than it might otherwise have been.

As I said at the beginning, *Trillion Year Spree* is essential reading for anyone serious about SF. If you haven’t already, go out and buy it. It’s annoyed the hell out of me in places – but I certainly wouldn’t be without it.

The Player of Games by Iain M. Banks

Reviewed by
Maureen Porter

[Vector #147,
Dec 1988-Jan
1989]

I was going to say that *The Player of Games* is a more mature work than its predecessor, *Consider Phlebas*, but in view of my recent discovery that *The Player of Games* was written first, I'm not so certain this is a good idea. However, I also know it was extensively rewritten, so maybe that observation still holds true. I hope so, because *The Player of Games* rises head and shoulders above *Consider Phlebas*.

It's a thoughtful, somber sort of story, less reliant on action, but redolent with a careful attention to plotting which reflects the central image of the novel: the game. In this case Azad – a game which has so much importance in the society in which it is played that it actually determines the whole structure of life within the Azadian Empire. Economic theory, promotion, political factions: the fates of all are controlled by the

There is another link with Ellison et al: collaborations, of which Harlan Ellison did many, including an entire collection, *Partners in Wonder*. In similar fashion Gibson writes with Sterling, Shirley and Swanwick in his collection *Burning Chrome*, whilst Sterling and Shirley produced *The Unfolding* together for IZ 11.

This spirit is hardly unique to cyberpunk though, Pohl and Kornbluth, Kuttner & Moore, Niven & Pournelle, come most readily to mind. It may be that the youth of so many of these new writers is encouraging such experimentating, which seems to be especially strong amongst the Texas area writers such as Sterling, Cadigan, Lisa Tuttle, George R R Martin, Howard Waldrop and the late Tom Reamy. These writers all worked together to help each other develop as writers. Undoubtedly a "good thing", it is equally certain not a "cyberpunk thing".

So we see that each new attempt at defining cyberpunk brings in someone new and rejects as many from previous versions. Where does this leave us? Our first definition from Vincent Omniaveritas has provided the most detailed set of "rules" for the movement; yet has he, the theoretical guru of cyberpunk (Spinrad's phrase) got it wrong as well?

We keep returning to *Neuromancer* because it won so many awards and is the most widely read of the works in question, but it has been said that it, and its sequel *Count Zero*, are factually very inaccurate about computers. Rudy Rucker dismisses this in IZ 20: "I think it's a stupid argument." His point is that the errors are irrelevant, and the critics are missing the essence of the book. This is true, of course, except within the framework laid down by Omniaveritas, where it violates the "First Law", forbidding pseudoscience guff. These same guidelines later refer to non-male, non-white viewpoints, but with Pat Cadigan as the token female and no coloured writers that come readily to mind, this all sounds a little unreliable. The ideals are nice but are the writers up to it?

Seeing all this leads to the conclusion that there is no great new movement anywhere in SF at present: not cyberpunk, or the Humanists; just the usual new waves that come along with each new story or novel. Tiny ripples mostly. Cyberpunk had a good standard bearer in *Neuromancer*, and great hype from Bruce Sterling, but so many of its stars are denying it, notably Gibson, Bear, Jeter and Rucker. Even Sterling, who produced cyberpunk like *Schismatrix*, has left it behind with his recent story "The Little Magic Shop".

Almost all the writers who have been linked with cyberpunk have written as much that isn't; personally I await what William Gibson offers us after *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, which may be a collaboration with Sterling in an historically set "steam-punk" novel à la Tim Powers, James P. Blaylock and K. W. Jeter, *The Difference Engine*.

For all the hype it is still the case that cyberpunk is just another small amorphous lump of science fiction, as valid as any other but no more so. It is Orson Scott Card, Tim Powers, John Varley and so on who are producing many of the major works of recent SF.

Nor does cyberpunk appear to have spread to Britain, Mike Cobby and Charles Stross apart, and Sterling has mentioned this need to be accepted, "otherwise it will remain a clique situation, whereas I feel that science fiction is in need of multiple viewpoints. We do need Britain."

The new British authors like Iain Banks, Gwyneth Jones, Storm Constantine, Paul J. McAuley and Geoff Ryman are all pursuing different lines. Again this echoes the New Wave: where Ellison and Delany fought taboos, Priest and Ballard explored style. Certainly there is more than this but the separate development of the two streams develops into the 80s.

A final comment, on the cyberpunk anthology: why *Mirrorshades*? They hide the eyes, our one window onto the soul. Have the cyberpunks got something to hide? An empty soul perhaps? Or just the same soul as the rest of science fiction? One thing separates cyberpunk, and that has been the hype supporting it, which is something else picked up from music. Perhaps we need somebody to actually write it, or something as radical as Sterling claims, though since he so often contradicts himself his views should be treated with scepticism

anyway. All the books I have mentioned are good SF, and a few are great fiction, but nowhere is there anything worth calling a “movement”. I hear rumours of a cyberpunk-orientated RPG (role-playing game) being written, which may be quite welcome radicalism in that genre, but otherwise the writers are still writing, the readers still reading, and the hype moves on to something new.

Cyberpunk’s sole feature so far is all the talk about it, so I’ll close here and let it go away.

David Barrett’s excellent editorial tenure came to an end with issue #150 (June-July 1989), and previous regular contributor Kev McVeigh stepped in with Boyd Parkinson for the next few years. Alas, there remains a gaping hole in the Vector Archives between issues #151 and #181 which makes it difficult to summarise what was going on in the BSFA during the early part of that decade, but Catie Carey took over as assistant to Kev from #161 (June-July 1991) before assuming the Editor’s post on her own from #166 (April-May 1992). Carie remained in the role for three years, before handing things over to Andrew Butler and Gary Dalkin with the publication of #185 (Sept-Oct 1995)...



Vector #121, Alan Hunter

outcome of the game. The ultimate winner becomes Emperor.

The Culture, having established contact with this civilization, approaches Jemau Morat Gurgah, expert in all games but seeking a new challenge, in the hope of persuading him to play the game for them. The Culture’s interest in Azad is perhaps ambiguous, but no more so than the nature of the Culture itself, probably Banks’ finest creation in these two SF novels. It’s a communistic society (that’s with a small ‘c’ for the politically aware) with a penchant for meddling discreetly in the affairs of others, particularly the authoritarian regimes they despise. Banks’ portrayal of the Azadian Empire as a corrupt and decadent monarchy is particularly chilling, and his presentation of the Culture as an attractive alternative is very skillful, pointing up the undesirable nature of each in its turn. Gurgeh stands in the middle, the observer and commentator.

Neither novel offers any real answers, but they amply illustrate that there is more than one side to a story.

The 1990s: A Decade Of Cultural Reflection?

Feelings ran high on a great number of issues related to SF as the 90s rolled on... and although this first article was later denounced as a spoof by the new editors ("written under transparently false names"), one can't help but see a tangible link with modern thinking regards the lack of LGBTQ protagonists in the SF genre...

Can SF be PC? by Verity di Staff & Ernest Newman [Vector #184, Summer 1995]

It is accepted that the majority of literature studied today throughout the English speaking world is the product of *Dead White European Males*. It is equally true that the majority of science fiction seen as characteristic of the genre was written by *Dead White American Males*. It is therefore not surprising that the genre is rife with *Americocentrism* and *technophallism*. For many readers this seems a necessary support to their besieged egos in the face of the rise of feminism and ethnic diversity. The question facing the politically correct reader of science fiction is: Is SF capable of anything better? Or is it so intrinsically riddled with inappropriate and outdated cultural baggage that we must turn our backs upon it in the search for the literature of the new age.

Science fiction in its American format grew from the power fantasies of technophilic white adolescent males. Fictions were dominated by male heroes who were Intelligent, handsome, heterosexual, decisive and white, and operated within the world of male-dominated science. Women were there to provide ego support and to be rescued (screaming) from many-tentacled rapists. Persons of other races provided either threat or comic support. People challenged by physical or mental handicaps were unlikely to be seen on central stage.

And this was the so-called Golden Age: the age of a pulp industry supported by adolescent males, who consumed their gaudy pleasures in solitary secret between torchlit sheets. Most would now be repulsed by these sleazy unhealthy products of an unhinged masculinity; but has the genre progressed since then?

Throughout its development, science fiction has remained the preserve of White American Males. That current SF has yet to learn the lessons of PC thought is in part a result of this. It is also a consequence of the perceived market for the genre - in the mind of the public, SF is still read chiefly by spotty, sexually-repressed, anorak-clad nerds.

The advent of the New Wave did little to change the face of populist SF: it was no more than a stylistic exercise and made no attempt to change the underlying assumptions of a

pumped up masculinist genre. A thin veil of irony was occasionally laid upon the technophilic fantasies of a white male writer's long-vanished youth.

The Eighties saw the origination of Cyberpunk. Although touted as revolutionary, this was once again a stylistic gloss applied to the same warped techno fantasies. Instead of thrusting penile rockets, we had cyber probes; male penetration fantasies elevated into virtual worlds. Women achieved a higher profile, but the language and style of Cyberpunk insidiously relegated them to the role of boy-toys: stiletto-heeled whores with empty mirrorshaded eyes. And still they inhabited a monocultural, white bread world.

Despite its self-proclaimed counter-cultural sensibilities, Cyberpunk simply reiterated the fears and attitudes of American middle-class society – the increasing power of the Japanese in the US market place, the trend amongst multinationals for acquisitions and mergers, the usage of designer drugs and the increasing personalisation of technology.

Heterosexuality is dominant throughout SF. A few books have been published which feature overtly gay protagonists, but these are few and treated as tokens by the homophobic mass readership, who appear unready to explore their own sexuality in the full and open manner which will become the norm when we have sloughed off the redundant behaviour patterns inculcated into us by the old paternalist society.

Very little SF is directed at those who are differently pleased – for instance, there are no SF novels with transvestite lead characters. There are examples of SF with supporting characters that could be described as such, for example *The Dreaming Jewels* by Theodore Sturgeon or John Shirley's 'Wolves of the Plateau'. And there have been novels that explore gender roles, using either characters that change gender through biology, such as Ursula K LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, or F. M Busby's *The Breeds of Man*; or those that change their sex through choice or accident – the works of John Varley, Robert Heinlein's 'All You Zombies' and *I Will Fear No Evil*, *The Passion of New Eve* by Angela Carter, and Samuel Delany's *Triton*. There have also been SF novels where gender differences have been used as mere gimmicks, such as Thomas T Thomas's *Crygender* or Samantha Lee's *Childe Rolande*.

Bearing in mind the nature of the genre, it can be seen that by treating gender role exploration as mere speculation, SF writers condone the extant situation and act as proponents of the conspiracy against which we, the *sans-culottes* of the Politically Correct revolution, must direct our endeavours.

Americocentrism is certainly still rife within science fiction. John Kessel notes that William Gibson's *Neuromancer* does not mention the United States, or even an American brand name in *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1988. This view is expounded further by Orson Scott Card, another White American Male. In a review of Australian author George Turner's *Brainchild* he writes: "Science fiction has long had as one of its givens that the near future will be dominated by the United States..." (*F&SF*, 02/93). He goes on to say "[it] is taken for granted that anything that matters in the world of the future will be American." These statements typify the attitude of the men who produce the mass of commercially available science fiction. In most science fiction novels where a technical endeavour is detailed, the lead character is a white American male; other nationalities play minor roles or even supply the villains.

At its most obvious, technophallism is displayed in the magazine covers which sport penis-shaped rocket ships. Weapons of destruction are equally prevalent – whether as planet-buster bombs or hand-held laser weapons. A whole subgenre, militaristic SF, is devoted to fiction based around destruction and its technical means.

Technophallism is a function of both the male need for control and the image of technology as substitute penis. Even when technological or scientific tools are used as literary devices, they are camouflaged as technophallic signifiers. Few writers are so subtle. In David Nighbert's *Timelapse*, the hero has the "fastest spaceship in existence". And even more insulting, this spaceship has a "sexy, contralto" voice.

Vurt
by Jeff Noon

Reviewed by
Max Sexton

[Vector #182,
Spring 1995]

Vurt by Jeff Noon is one of those well known books that I suspect will be more talked about than actually read. Which isn't to say that it's opaque, far from it. The prose is lucid although, stylistically it is difficult to follow, and for someone still trying to come to grips with cyberpunk, I found that this slowed me down.

Nevertheless, this is an important book at the cutting-edge of sci-fi. Its main themes are related to the dissolving of absolutes and the increasing cross-breeding of different realities; themes and images that cyberpunk has captured ever since *Neuromancer*.

Vurt is a book that is difficult to read quickly because of its complex plotting, but give it time and it will grow on you, and justly deserves the critical praise that has been heaped upon it.

**Neuromancer by
William Gibson**

**Reviewed by
Paul Kincaid**

**[Vector #183,
July-Aug 1995]**

So this is the book that launched a thousand cyberpunks, that bequeathed the word 'cyberspace', [and] turned a first-time novelist hammering at an old-fashioned typewriter into the guru of computer nerds everywhere.

It is a helter-skelter of incident, a breathless rush that feels like it is carrying you away on the sort of wild adventure that sf hadn't actually delivered for many years. The jump cuts and surreal virtual experiences, in reality a sign of nerve or lack of technique on the part of the author, actually read like a new way of storytelling for a new sort of world. And the timing was perfect. As late as the 1970s the overwhelming philosophy of the computer world was that computers belonged in places of work.

So when John Brunner introduced notions of linked computers and viruses in *The Shock-wave Rider*, it was a world that didn't impinge on his readers beyond the pages of the book.

The development of science has sought to explain our surroundings, whilst technological development has been geared to controlling and exploiting them. This is a masculine endeavour. and SF has not seen fit to challenge this or even raise it as a point for discussion. It holds this dubious philosophy dear to its hollow technophilic heart.

Genre developments, such as New Wave and Cyberpunk have had little effect on populist SF. The American style co-exists with a number of splintered sub-genres. That some of these sub-genres make use of PC thought to a limited extent is irrelevant.

The majority of SF is still written by (Dead) White American Males. SF written in such a tradition can not be PC. Writers may seek to challenge the reader's attitudes and prejudices, but when the underlying assumptions of the genre operate to confirm the self-same prejudices and assumptions, then nothing has been achieved. We fear that it is impossible for science fiction to embrace Political Correctness, and believe therefore that the genre is without a future. It is therefore the responsibility of all right thinking authors to abandon this outmoded and culturally retarded genre and to build a new form of future fiction, freed from the white male constraints of story, plot or characterisation.

In an interesting and totally unrelated aside to the above, my own first appearance in Vector magazine came with issue #184, in the form of an advert in the letter column for a fanzine called Sierra Heaven: "a fantasy, horror and science fiction magazine for the 90s" that I edited from 1996 to 1999...

Sierra Heaven, a fantasy, horror and science fiction magazine for the 90s, is coming!

We're currently on the hunt for quality fantasy, horror, and science fiction mss, all lengths up to 20,000 words considered. We're particularly interested in submissions for our "Short Shorts" column. If you think you can spin a decent yarn in any of the genres mentioned, *in 250 words or less*, then we want to hear from you!

For further details , please contact:

Alex Bardy, [REDACTED]

That fanzine went on to see fiction appear from the likes of Neil Asher, Cherith Baldry, Chris Bell, Kim Padgett-Clarke, D. F. Lewis, David Murphy, Roy Gray, Tim Lebbon, Tony Lee, Robert Neilson, Anthony Barker, Philip Reeve, Steve Sneyd, Ian Sales, Andrew Darlington, Mark Gale, Cathy Buburuz, Heather Douglass and so many more!

Andrew M. Butler took over the editorship of Vector from #185, and unfortunately his debut issue was overshadowed by the death of John Brunner at the 1995 WorldCon in Glasgow...

Tomorrow May Be Even Worse
John Killian Houston Brunner (1934–1995) by Andy Sawyer
[Vector #185, Sept/Oct 1995]

I have been a fan of John Brunner's writing since the mid-1960s. I met him only a handful of times, most recently at last year's Eastercon. Like several people I spoke to afterwards at Intersection, I saw John across a room but we were both engaged on separate errands, and so I never got a chance to speak to him again. So it goes.

So I never knew John well as a person, but his writing was important to me in several ways. First, his 1960s fix-up novel *Telepathist* was one of the books which confirmed me as a science-fiction fan rather than someone who read a lot of science fiction. Put crudely, its story of a deformed but gifted individual appealed to my own particular wish-fulfillments at the time, but it was also quite clear that Brunner was not re-writing the stories I had already read in which telepaths were either overt superheroes or coded emblems of social persecution. The science-fictional "given" of the story is simply that the mental powers of telepaths can be used to resolve international conflict, that super-powers are never enough and that the mind has its own prisons and temptations. While I was soon to discover, for example, Alfred Bester's wonderfully baroque explorations of psi-fi, Brunner's near-future realism had room for compassion of character and what is now a rather chilling understatement. I have just re-read the book on a day when explosions thundered again in what was Yugoslavia, and the introductory pages, describing the protagonist's birth in a country recognisably Western, recognisably in crisis, and recognisably kept from complete disintegration by UN peacekeeping forces sound eldritchly familiar.

"Where had it all gone? How? the safe calm world of a few weeks back had split apart, and they said 'crisis' without explaining anything. To most people it meant nothing of itself; it was just that a bus didn't show at your regular stop, and the electricity failed in the middle of cooking dinner, and there was a slogan half-finished, smeared letters of red paint, on the sidewalk, and a monument to a dead hero had titled crazily on its shattered plinth, and the prices of food had soared, and the radio groaned old records and said every fifteen minutes that people should be calm."

The void implied by those few sentences seems far closer since they were written. And this leads me to remember just why John is so important as a science-fiction writer, why he, as an exponent of the art, was writing in a mode which demanded its own ways of expression. His later masterpieces, such as *The Sheep Look Up*, *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The Shockwave Rider*, express the late twentieth century in a way no mere realism could ever hope to emulate. They are, I think, among the few important works of science fiction. Not "classics of the genre" in the manner of, say, Asimov's "Foundation" series or "undiscovered major literature" in the way that many of Philip K. Dick's novels are apparently becoming. Rather they are novels of ideas which isolate some of the major currents of the time and create futures built upon them. They are our times. The first two are certainly propaganda, but they give the lie to the assumption that propaganda must be bad art, and it is difficult to conceive of any other way than Brunner's focused angry, despairing, alternate-futures science fiction mode in which the issues of environmental damage and over-population could be treated. The third is only "not" the defining novel of cyberpunk and all it has to say about the coming data-overload because at the time it was published we did not know the term (and perhaps it is not quite "punk" enough).

By 1984, computers were finding their way into homes as something other than sophisticated toys. *Neuromancer* took us into a world we could begin to feel at our fingertips. The glamour of characters like Case and Molly was that they were the sort of action-heroes in the sort of mean streets we had read about in Chandler and Hammet, and we could get to be that way through the computer screen in our own home.

Neuromancer was the outstanding novel of the 1980s not because it was the best (there were many better books) but it was one of the most exciting. In the underworld and Sprawl it gave us a glimpse of a decayed urban landscape we thought we knew, and in cyberspace it gave us a glimpse of escape. And because it moved so fast, because at the end we actually know nothing about these worlds, they can be whatever we want them to be.

In a very real sense, *Neuromancer* allowed us to dream; in a very real sense, *Neuromancer* was a dream.

The Time Ships by Stephen Baxter

Reviewed by
Paul Kincaid

[Vector #184,
Summer 1995]

More than any other writer, H. G. Wells shaped science fiction. Whether he created the genre or not is irrelevant, what matters is that the scientific romances he wrote, particularly at the start of his career, gave us the themes and hall-mark[s] of most science fiction. From utopias and dystopias to future warfare, from travel to other planets to alien invasion, Wells set the pace the rest of us have followed ever since. But it was his first novel which somehow seems to capture the imagination more than any other.

The Time Machine [was] a slim volume in which an unnamed inventor — after a haunting, resonant visit to the end of time — had returned to his own time, recounted his adventures to his dinner guests, and departed again on his errand to rescue Weena, armed with some carefully selected supplies and three books.

"What was it like," (I fantasise some future inhabitant of Utopia asking) "living in a world which seemed to [be] heading for destruction?" I say nothing, and hand them one of John Brunner's novels. It is not sufficient. Brunner was far more as a writer than those few books, far more as a political activist than those few causes, far more as a person than I am qualified to say. It is not sufficient. We live in the future charted by his writing in which the questions he raised still have to be answered. New questions have arisen since he wrote the books. But he raised the questions he did — the hard ones, the terrifying ones, the ones which may not have any comforting resolutions.

For too many reasons, over the past few years John was not as productive as his friends and fans would have wished. You enthuse about his novels, and find them out of print. You explain this status, and people confess that they have not read him. But his achievement was and is *real*, and we continue to need his books. His best science fiction was about making people think about the world in which they live and where it may be going: and that sounds an awful lot to me like a definition of the best science fiction.

The subject of public indifference to the increasing popularity of 'science fiction' and the adaption of well-worn tropes by other media caused consternation, too...

Sciphobia by Gary Dalkin [Vector #186, December 1995]

It is a sad fact that we all know someone who does not just dislike sf, but claims to hate it. Yet such people will often express a love for *Dr Who*, *ET* or *Star Trek*; on the grounds, perhaps, that these are so universally popular they hardly count as genre fictions. Ironically, having noted such exceptions to their rule, such a person will likely justify their sciphobia by denouncing the genre as embarrassingly stupid, trivial and childish. Of course such an attitude implies an ignorance of what the genre has achieved in the past, of the richness of the genre today, and the possibilities it offers for the future. Or alternatively, our sciphobe may say that they are afraid they will not understand sf if they try to read it. Either way we are faced with a false, because limited, perception of what sf is. A misperception grounded both in technophobia and cultural values regarding what 'literature' is and should be.

It can only be due to sciphobia [which you may take to mean fear or hatred of science, science-fiction, or 'sci-fi', depending on context and preference] that works by writers which appear to those within the sf community to belong to the genre are increasingly being marketed as something other, whether it be as thriller [Robert Harris, Pierre Oullette], general fiction [Michael Crichton], or 'literary' fiction [J.G. Ballard, Ray Bradbury]. Some sf currently sells better in disguise. It might even be bought by those people who 'know' that they don't like it, and they, we presume, form a significant part of a general market which accounts orders of magnitude more book sales than the hardcore sf readership. To understand why such prejudices against sf exist we need to explore the attitudes of the prevailing culture, and the most public face of sf itself. We need to go to the movies... or perhaps not, considering that this year has seen the release of more bad big budget/high profile sf films than any previous year.

Sf has enormous scope. It can be set at any time, anywhere in the universe, or in any other universe. Sf may discuss any aspect of the sciences, or journey crossways into metaphysics and religion, tell a love story, recount an adventure, detail a detective story, narrate a tale of war or politics, evoke any emotion known (or unknown) to any species. Sf may satirise, horrify, predict, amuse, outrage, mystify, or fill with wonder. Sf can work upon the grandest of all canvases, the entire compass of reality. It is a genre with a potential grandeur of scale beyond the reach of almost all other fiction; a grandeur both of concept and geography. Unfortunately this very

scale, the portrayal of epochal events against vast settings, presents almost insurmountable problems of realisation in cinematic form. Perhaps realising this very few films even try, and when they do the result often an inspired shambles. For all David Lynch's brilliance as a filmmaker, *Dune* was simply too big, in all senses, for anyone to shoehorn into a Hollywood movie. Cinema does not have time for world building. It is almost impossibly cumbersome to deliver the necessary of scene-setting information. Truly 'alien' societies are all but impossible to clarify sufficiently that the audience itself is not alienated. Hollywood, always happiest when recycling successful formulas, is not comfortable with ideas, and as sf is essentially a 'what if' medium, Hollywood and sf are fundamentally incompatible. It is a marriage of convenience. The futuristic visuals occasionally capture something of the sf imagination, but mainly serve as backdrops to simplistic action and FX driven adventures.

The situation is a little different on TV. Though by cinema standards both the budgets and the screens are tiny, there is one significant advantage in that serials permit the running times to develop thematically complex narratives. We are currently seeing, with *Babylon 5*, perhaps the first fully developed TV future. However such programmes are the exception - TV sf usually functions at a level of equal mediocrity to its cinematic kin - and have a low profile against the saturation hype which accompanies each new cinema release. It is through the inescapable - even if you don't go to see them - presence of the movies that sf has come to be seen as concerned largely with killer aliens and cyborgs, virtual reality, spaceships, time travel and massive explosions. A Boy's Own techophallic fantasia.

If the very ambition of the best written sf makes the prospect of filming it almost impossibly daunting, finding a large enough audience prepared to follow the concepts is more so still; mass audience cinema appears to be becoming more inured to imagination by the year. Despite this, from a mainstream critical perspective there are many excellent films made in a variety of genres [genre is much more acceptable in cinema than literature, an issue I will deal with in the second part of my argument]: westerns, crime/detective stories, romantic dramas, which are comparable with the standard of the written form, so much so that we might understand why the mainstream critic might reasonably assume written sf can be equated with the quality of its cinematic incarnation. And with films such as *Timecop*, *Star Trek Generations*, *Waterworld*, *Judge Dredd* and *Species* being commercially successful [despite] a general paucity of invention, coherence and intelligence, we can understand why sf might be held in such low esteem by those who have not explored its less public faces.

But beyond the most public incarnations of sf, there is another reason why sf is held in low regard. The root cause of the problem rests in several dichotomies in Western culture. The arbitrary and artificial divisions between art and science, between imagination and rationality, between literature and genre.

This latter division is self-defining. What is good is literature, therefore everything else must be bad and must be genre; which can then be stigmatised as being written by grubby talentless hacks for filthy lucre. Perhaps the most blatant example of this cultural schizophrenia is the marketing of the works of Iain Banks [black and white covers equal literature] and Iain M. Banks [colour for the downmarket genre stuff]. The blurb for his latest black and white claims *Whit* is 'exploring the techno-ridden vacuity of modern society', despite the book itself featuring nothing more technological than a CD player, a VCR and a portable phone. *Whit* reads as [a] trademark Banksian comedy of family betrayal, albeit this time melded to an sf writer's analysis of the sort of exploitative pseudo-religious cult which associates itself with the fringes of the genre. However, in a technophobic and genrephobic society a genre literature expressly concerned with science in all its manifestations is perforce doubly damned, and *Whit* is clearly packaged to distance itself from the author of books which carry the legend A Science Fiction Novel in bold silver letters. To quote Harry Harrison in *SFX3*, expressing Brain Aldiss's summation of a common mainstream view: 'if it's sf it can't be any good, and if it's any good it can't be sf'.

That open ending, coupled with the sheer novelty of a time travelling device, has made this a book that other writers have come back to time and again. Now Stephen Baxter has celebrated the centenary of *The Time Machine* by producing a sequel that starts just at that point where the traveller disappears for the last time. Wells's slim original has grown to a book many times the size of the original, but along the way Baxter manages to pay homage to virtually all off Wells's science fiction while conjuring a vision of time as grand and cold and immense as anything in Olaf Stapledon.

This is the best novel that Stephen Baxter has so far written, for his cold, mechanistic science fiction is put at the service of a story which benefits from this detachment. And Baxter is still incapable of writing a line of dialogue that isn't a poorly-disguised lecture; but in this pseudo-Victoriana that doesn't matter too much. In the end the pace, invention and audacity of the novel carry it through triumphantly.

**A Game of
Thrones
by George R. R.
Martin**

**Reviewed by
Steve Jeffery**

**[Vector #192,
March-April
1997]**

George R.R. Martin's return to the field after a number of years editing the *Wild Cards* and *New Voices* anthologies is nothing if not ambitious. *A Game of Thrones* appears with all the distinguishing features of the fantasy blockbuster, as *Book One of A Song of Fire and Ice*. Those distinguishing features include a map, cunningly divided into The North and The South, an Appendix listing a cast of Cecil B. DeMille proportions, and the obligatory jacket blurb announcing 'the most imaginative, ambitious and compelling fantasy epic since *Lord of the Rings*' and Martin as yet another 'true heir' to Tolkien.

Technology is confused with science, and the literature best suited to addressing the issues surrounding both suffers the fate traditionally reserved for messengers bearing bad news.

Given this situation a massive act of doublethink is required to deny the sf content of the work of many writers firmly ensconced within the mainstream; Amis, Lessing, Fowles, Hoban, Weldon, Carter. If such works as, for example, *The Cloning of Joanna May*, or *The Handmaid's Tale*, were admitted as being sf, then it would be difficult to continue to deny the relevance of the genre to the contemporary world. However, to do so would be tantamount to an admission that we now live in an sf world. An apparently self-evident truth, yet anathema to the pro-art, anti-science axis which encompasses 'serious' press review supplements, TV/radio arts coverage and the academic notion, firmly entrenched within the English departments of our universities, of canonical 'great' literature. It is this broad culture which defines what the well-educated middle-classes should be seen reading, and by omission defines that which is beyond the pale. The implicit sciophobia ignores that many achievements in the sciences depend at least in part upon inspired imagination, and that the sciences may ultimately illuminate the 'artistic' side of humanity by revealing the universe for our wonder and contemplation; that for every scientist who is a materialist, reductionist, there is another who is an imaginative holoist. Within such a culture of technophobic machine addicts there is but begrudging acceptance of the benefits of science, heavily laced with contempt for that which is accepted. No one likes to admit dependency, especially on that which they do not understand: the inability to programme a VCR or operate a PC can be a badge proudly worn. The ability to operate these machines without problem should be downplayed. Everyone will be much more comfortable if both technology and sf stay in their perceived places and conform to the expectations laid upon them by the Hollywood vision, i.e. that they remain remote and distant and do not intrude over much upon our real lives.

If genre is without honour, most despised of all are the fantastical and imaginative genres. Character is valued above story, idea, atmosphere, entertainment. An arbitrary formulation, now almost cast in tablets of stone. If it were not so the BBC would have spared us a second adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in just 15 years, perhaps offering instead in this centenary year a version of *The Time Machine*. However, the dominant culture harbours a distrust of the genuinely imaginative, ironically because such is the perceived triumph of a rationalistic science, that in the eyes of many the universe has been successfully demythologised. So much so that there remains no room for the numinous, the curious, the speculative. Our collective imagination has been deleted. Made obsolete. Folk-tales and myth-cycles have been denigrated into fairy-stories, TV skits and advertising fodder, considered only suitable for the very young in sanitised Disney versions. To retain a sense of wonder at the mystery and beauty of the universe has come to be regarded as 'child-like.' 'Science' has so successfully demythologised the world that it's literature can not be taken seriously by many who consider themselves intelligent, informed adults. Such a view sprang from a myopic extension of a Newtonian clockmaker's universe, rose to full power with the victory of all things mechanical in the late glory years of the European empires, and bears no relevance to our post-Einstein relativistic reality of superstrings, black holes, and potential parallel universes. The dominant culture, as usual, has yet to catch up.

I mentioned J.G. Ballard earlier. I will end with him, one of the finest of all sf writers. With the publication in 1984 of *Empire of the Sun* Ballard, suddenly found his work on the best-seller lists, embraced with fervour by those who had previously never heard of him, despite his having been a prolific genre author for over 30 years. It took a historical semi-autobiographical 'mainstream' novel to bring Ballard to general notice, and then the re-writing of his career began. When the critical establishment turned to appraise his back-catalogue it was found there was nothing else that could be admitted to the brave new world of serious literature, for - Dear! Oh Dear! - Ballard used to write that dreadful sci-fi nonsense! This clearly would not do. Then sometimes sf director Steven Spielberg filmed the book, and suddenly everybody wanted to read Ballard. What was to be done? The answer was to co-opt the

author retroactively into the mainstream, repackage all his earlier titles in pretentious covers bearing no conjunction of the horrible words science and fiction, and meanwhile desperately hope no one noticed most of the stories had originally appeared in magazines bearing such disgraceful titles as *New Worlds* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. History was re-formatted with Orwellian thoroughness. J.G. Ballard the sf writer ceased to exist. Walk into a bookshop today and you will search the sf section in vain for his books (but then you won't find 1984 either). *The Terminal Beach* and *Vermillion Sands* have been blown by the *Wind From Nowhere* to *The Disaster Area* known as 'contemporary writers'.

Ballard is perhaps the most noticeable (by his absence from genre shelves) example of the mainstream trend to appropriate that which is approved from sf. He is far from the only one. Many libraries and bookshops now keep LeGuin, Lem, Priest and others in General Fiction. The repackaging of genre titles into large-format, deliberately 'literary' volumes, complete with a commensurate price increase, is a device designed to target a readership more affluent than the sf constituency, and which sees itself as above that readership, as being of more elevated 'taste'. Brian Aldiss once served on the Booker Prize committee and tried to nominate Michael Moorcock's *Gloriana* for this country's most prestigious literary award. He was not allowed to. He reported other committee members were offended that such a book could even be suggested as being of merit. Whilst such an attitude exists, and there is no sign of a change, quality written sf will remain a derided minority interest, and the finest tool developed this century for understanding an ever more rapidly changing world, together with some of the best writing of the century, will be denied to a wider readership. The attitudes which have given rise to this sciphobia have much to answer for. While there is nothing that can be done about the general mediocrity of media sf, the perceptions it gives rise to can be addressed. It is well past time our literary peers learnt to read, and so stop judging an enormously diverse body of work by ill-informed, culturally fascistic, prejudice.

Contributions by popular writers were many and have been a regular occurrence throughout the history of Vector...

***alt.space* by Stephen Baxter [Vector #197, Jan/Feb 1998]**

In the last couple of years a number of works have appeared dealing with alternate histories of space exploration: *alt.space* – how it might have been, had some crucial technical discovery or political decision been made otherwise.

I plead guilty myself on several counts. My biggest effort was my novel *Voyage* (1996) about a NASA post-Apollo Mars programme culminating in a landing in 1986. But on the charge sheet I also have several short stories.

In *Pilgrim 7* (1993) astronaut Wally Schirra is in orbit in his Mercury capsule in 1963 ... just as the Cuban missile crisis erupts in war. This was my first attempt at this mode of writing. *Moon Six* (1997) is a long story in which an Apollo astronaut is dragged across a succession of alternate realities, in some of which there is no space programme at all, in others the Russians win, in still others the Brits get there first with *Prelude to Space* nuclear ships. In *Sun-Drenched* (1998) Apollo astronauts are stranded on the Moon, by the kind of technical failure which came perilously close to wrecking many of the real-life missions.

The US space programme has, of course, been the most spectacular. But I've also meddled with other nations' efforts. *Zemlya* (1997) shows Yuri Gagarin being sent on a quixotic mission to Venus. *Prospero One* (1996) (written with Simon Bradshaw) tweaks British history of the 1970s slightly to allow the technicians to launch one British manned space mission, before being shut down (in reality, we managed one unmanned satellite launch). *The Wire Continuum*

This sort of gushing hype does no favours to anybody, least of all Martin. It merely confirms the view that publicity copywriting at Harper Collins Epic Fantasy has only the most tenuous links to the editorial process, and lives in its own world of instant packaging clichés. *A Game of Thrones* deserves better.

This is all pretty much the stuff of widescreen epic fantasy, well delivered and competently told. Martin manages to keep track of a sizeable cast, although, as a number of plot threads start to develop independently towards the end, things become more episodic, underlined by Martin's technique of alternating chapters between a number of major viewpoint characters. But you do need to be aware that this is Book One in a series, and it finishes, if not on a cliff-hanger then with enough threads left hanging to carry the action through into the next volume.

There, between the coming of Winter and the rebirth of the Dragon Kingdom in exile across the seas, the Song of Fire and Ice promises to emerge more fully.

(1998)(with Arthur C Clarke) takes Clarke's 1937 short story *Travel By Wire* as a starting point; Britain develops teleport capabilities in the 1960s, and the space programme is reduced to single-shot efforts to deliver teleport terminals.

I am not alone, however. Allen Steele in particular has produced a major body of work – culminating in his novel *The Tranquillity Alternative* (1996) – dealing with an alternate space history in which the Nazis developing a sub-orbital capability during WWII, so that Wernher von Braun's most extravagant post-war dreams are fulfilled... but still, by the 1990s, the (different) US programme is in terminal decline. And William Barton's story *In Saturn Time* looks at a post-Apollo programme which might have delivered Americans to Jupiter, for real, by 2001.

Why should writers take the extraordinary step of devoting major chunks of their creative effort to realities which never existed?

We'd all grown up with an extraordinary expansion in spaceflight capabilities – only 8 years earlier, after all, the best the US could manage was to send Alan Shepard into a sub-orbital lob that lasted all of 15 minutes. And now, here were Neil and Buzz walking on the Moon. I for one firmly believed I was watching the future and had no reason to believe it wasn't just going to carry on, growing and expanding.

I wasn't the only one who thought so, of course. As late as 1968, Arthur Clarke in *The Promise of Space* was able to list an optimistic catalogue of future uses of the Moon. In fact, "the future of lunar and... solar system... exploration... depends on our ability to find supplies of all kinds on the Moon. The most valuable substance of all – as it is on Earth, when in short supply – would be water." Water would support life, and could be cracked into hydrogen and oxygen to supply rocket fuel, a filling station outside Earth's savage gravity field, which could be used to fund a general expansion into the Solar System.

And, said Clarke, water "certainly exists on the Moon; the question is where, and in what form ..." Perhaps there was ice in underground caves, and there were lunar formations which might indicate the presence of permafrost. And so on. "These are the optimistic assumptions, which may be wrong. If the worse comes to worst, it will be necessary to extract water from the minerals in which it occurs; straightforward heating would be sufficient in most cases ..." Not only that, perhaps there were metallic ores which could "pay for any lunar exploration programme a hundred times over".

Tragically for the future, however, all this would prove dead wrong.

The analysis of even the first Moonrock samples returned by Apollo 11 betrayed not the slightest trace of lunar water, either now or in the past (leaving aside traces in polar cold traps). Not only that, the lack of water during the lunar crust's early melting periods ensured that big hydrothermal ore deposits – the type which produced much of Earth's mineral wealth – are completely absent from the Moon. There are no massive gold deposits, no huge diamond mines, no El Dorado on the Moon – only low-grade aluminium ore.

To many, even inside the space programme, it appeared that Apollo – a first step into the cosmos – in the end served only to prove that we *cannot* colonise space. And the Moon wasn't the only disappointment, lest we forget. For many space programme insiders, the moment when the future was lost came in 1964, when the first fly-by of Mars by Mariner 4 – a spacecraft sent over an area thought likely to show canals – showed *craters*.

Suddenly, there was nowhere worth going.

Even so, in 1969 NASA put forward ambitious proposals for its post-Apollo future. The Space Shuttle would have been just one element in this grand vision, with a space station, lunar bases and expeditions to Mars in the 1980s to follow. This was the clearest articulation, by NASA for God's sake, of the future we'd been led to believe was on its way.

But, though the technical logic was there, the political logic had vanished. In the event NASA's

manned space programme came close to being shut down altogether; Nixon allowed one element of it, the Shuttle, to survive, a space bus with nowhere to go. (In *Voyage* I have Nixon make a different compromise, picking out another element, an Apollo-style Mars programme.)

All this, of course, was a crashing disappointment for me. The fact that the deadly wind-down in the US space programme – no manned flights *at all* between 1975 and 1981 – coincided with my own adolescence and growing up didn't help either. Suddenly, expansive dreams of spaceflight came to seem like memories of childhood games: neat at the time, but to be put aside now.

If 1970s Space Cold Turkey was bad for me, it was hell for some of the Americans, and they have found a variety of ways to work it out of their systems (see my essay *Rusting Gantries and Lawn Ornaments*). And one of those ways is alt.space.

William Barton's short story *In Saturn Time* (1995) is a spectacular exercise in historical revision. It starts with Apollo 21 on the Moon in 1974; Apollo has been saved from cancellation by a (non-McGovern) Democrat White House which reverses Nixon's Space Shuttle decision and reinstates Apollo "... because we spent forty billion dollars acquiring this technology. Let's get the benefit of it before we go ahead and buy another one." The story from then on is told in a series of compressed fast-forwards. The continued Apollo impetus induces the Russians to make it to the Moon by 1977. By 1988 the Americans are landing on Mars, by 1993 the Saturn V has evolved into reusable and cheap access to orbit, and by 2001 (of course) Arthur Clarke, Walter Cronkite and Wally Schirra are watching the US's first Jupiter mission reach orbit.

But while he plugs every nostalgia button (Walter Cronkite on the Moon in 1984), Barton barely explores the issues unturned by his spectacular future – for example the role of the military, and the impact of such a gigantic space effort on the US economy and its position in the world. Maybe Barton's lost future has something to teach us, but if so he will have to return to it and show us the downsides as well as the up.

The Tranquillity Alternative by Allen Steele (1996) is much more interesting: "Parnell looked away from the plaque and cast his eyes around the abandoned Moonbase ... The flag was a little crooked ... He managed to get the staff to stay straight. Not that it mattered; by this time tomorrow, he would be pulling down the flag, folding it and taking it home to a glass case at the Visitors' centre at the Cape, where tourists could stare at it with blank stupidity." (*The Tranquillity Alternative*, Chapter 16).

Tranquillity is the story of the declining days of an alternative American space programme. In 1944, Germany launches an 'Amerika Bomber' – a Eugene Sanger space glider – to strike at the continental US. But America responds with a secret spaceship of its own. Thereafter the US programme, fuelled by the Cold War, follows the generous lines set out by Wernher von Braun in his famous *Colliers* magazine articles of 1952. There are men in orbit in the early '50s, in huge winged descendants of the V-2; by 1963 there is an immense Wheel spaceship orbiting the Earth, serving as a calling port for direct-descent lunar ferries and providing a military surveillance platform. The Americans go to the Moon, but only to build Teal Falcon, a second-strike nuclear silo, in the Sea of Tranquillity; and in 1974 Neil Armstrong and Alexei Leonov lead Project Ares, the first – and only – manned mission to Mars. Thus, 1950s dreams are realised in full, at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Steele's research is impressive – there really was a 1950s US plan to put nukes on the Moon – as is his use of detail: burst seat padding and worn instrument consoles evoke the decay of the great von Braun spaceships, for instance. And, like Barton's story, the text is studded with evocative symbols of the era – like Walter Cronkite on the Wheel.

Like many Americans expressing a sense of the Loss of The Dream, Steele seems unable to distance himself from the sense of hurt national pride which suffuses the reaction of space buffs in the US to the turndown in their national space effort: "The United States – one-time

**Eon by Greg
Bear**

**Reviewed by
John D. Owen**

**[Vector #202,
Nov/Dec 1998]**

It's a hard life being an sf author, and tougher still when you deal with stories set in the near future. The future has a nasty habit of turning around and confounding your 'predictions' in short order. That is certainly the case for Greg Bear and his 1985 novel *Eon*. The novel has a magnificent central idea of awe-inspiring proportions, but today it is difficult to get past the fact that history caught up and surprised Bear within four years, with the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. As a result, *Eon* now reads like an alternate history, telling of a timeline where Brezhnev clones ruled the USSR into the 21st Century, and Gorbachev never took the lid off the Soviet pressure-cooker.

world leader, now suffering from premature senescence, mumbling to itself as it played one endless Sega game after another while pretending that its undisputed position as the numero uno global exporter of exercise videos actually meant something – fell headlong towards the inevitable rude awakening" (Chapter 10). We must accept without discussion the assumption that the replacement of the US as space leader is a bad thing. Working within this mind-set, Steele's ability to analyse the historical processes which shaped the space effort is thereby diminished, and the rest of the world is seen through this filter; but on the other hand, sitting here in post-Imperial Britain – *our* space programme died in 1964, before it really got going – we might envy this emotional conviction, like agnostics excluded from a religious celebration. But the novel fails to evoke in us a sense of longing for this lost reality; it is hard to believe America lost very much by not spending so much money on such Strangelove follies.

Tranquillity Alternative, if flawed, is a fascinating book, especially when one remembers it comes from the head of the writer of straightforward post-Heinlein near-future-space extravaganzas like *Orbital Decay* and, more pertinently, *Lunar Descent*.

As for me, it was only much later – after *Pilgrim 7*, in fact – that I became interested again in the space programme, whose heroic days were by now receding into history. I came across references to the old lost plans for Mars (harder to find than you might think) and began to wonder how it might have been, after all, if ... So I began to gather notes for the project which became *Voyage*.

I started with the technical possibilities – enhanced Saturn Vs, nuclear rockets, 1980s Mars landers, the works – and how it would have been to have walked on Mars in a 1980s NASA EVA suit. It was wonderful, as if I was going there myself – or at least watching it on TV.

But by now I was in my 30s and I had come to see that technical logic is only a part of the story. I had spent much of my adult life working for large organisations, comparable in many ways to NASA. I had come to believe that the Apollo project was fundamentally crazy: the Americans went to the Moon for geopolitics, not for anything they hoped to find there. To reach outwards to Mars I was going to have to find ways to extend that craziness.

On the other hand, my broader experience of the world by now had taught me that the human race is pretty much crazy anyhow.

In *Voyage*, my astronauts reach Mars in 1986 ... but the book ends on the first words spoken on the surface, rather as the logic of Apollo was fulfilled when Armstrong made his one small step. *Voyage* is really about building the political will, the ships, and getting there; it was (according to one reviewer) an institutional drama. But then, so was Apollo; *Voyage* reflects my belief that the Apollo project actually represents the norm for how modern humans behave en masse, when they try to achieve great things. (Similarly *Titan* (1997) has the Americans, in the near future, going all the way to Saturn to put one over the Chinese.)

I don't accept, for example, William Barton's arguments of *In Saturn Time*. We are *not* a rational species, and it's no good the space lobby – or anybody else – behaving as if we were. People who achieve large-scale things with their fellow humans understand this essential fact. That applies, for example, to John Kennedy, to James Webb (the political wheeler-dealer who successfully steered NASA through Apollo) and, more recently, to Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. And that's how it works in *Voyage* and *Titan*.

And though in some ways *Voyage* for me was an exercise in wish-fulfilment, I found I could no longer believe whole-heartedly that throwing humans at Mars regardless would necessarily be a Good Thing.

Apollo has many lessons for us. Apollo dominated other space programmes in the 1960s – often to their detriment. The Lunar Orbiter and Surveyor lander programmes were effectively downgraded to serve as mappers for Apollo. If the Mars option had been followed it is not impossible to imagine that Viking might have been compromised in a similar fashion,

and unrelated programmes – such as the unmanned exploration of the other planets – might have been put under even greater funding pressure than they were.

On the other hand, the abandonment of Mars and NASA's other great plans did *not* free up funds for other projects; the funds simply did not make themselves available at all. If a Mars programme had gone ahead, it would surely have brought many benefits in its wake, such as the need for the US to build up expertise in orbital assembly and long-duration missions.

And in the end, what a shame we lost the great spectacle we should have enjoyed had John Young walked on Mars at Mangala Vallis in 1986.

Costs and benefits: the adult view of the world.

To me alt.space is not really nostalgic, it is about our own growing up. And in these works, as in our own world, the post-Apollo Moon, with its collection of decaying artefacts, footprints and fallen flags, is a potent symbol. We live in strange, unforeseen times indeed.

As the year 2000 reared ever closer, 'dark' Vampires and the Millenium Bug shared equal billing within the magazine...

***Storyteller for the Millennium:
Storm Constantine's Grigori Trilogy by Helen Knibb
[Vector #199, May/June 1998]***

At this late stage of the Twentieth Century, and whether or not we subscribe to the Christian faith by which our calendar is dated, one of our Western cultural obsessions is the impending Millennium. It cannot be ignored, if only because the date stares us in the face daily. It is everywhere, from the title of Chris Carter's follow-up to *The X-Files* to *The Dome*, and perhaps most spectacularly, the Millennium Bug, which threatens to crash the globally interlocked computer net at midnight 2000. At the same time, the last few years have seen an upsurge of interest in angels; books and images abound, many of them saccharine. Interest in the Dark Angel is also rife; from role playing games and films to vampire novels, the dark side is arguably more prevalent than the chubby cherub.

Storm Constantine's recently completed trilogy comprising *Stalking Tender Prey* (Signet 1995), *Scenting Hallowed Blood* (Signet 1996), and *Stealing Sacred Fire* (Penguin 1997) explores the ancient mythology of the Nephilim in the light of the approaching Millennium. Here eternity proves to be measured in millennia, as close to the Year 2000, angels walk the earth again. Briefly: In the earliest days, the Anannage [the author's interpretation of the Biblical Nephilim by another name], known as the Sons of God, used relatively primitive humans as a labour force. The Anannage had superior knowledge and technology, and their own laws forbade any sharing of knowledge with humans. Led by the rebel prince, Shemyaza, some of the Anannage rebelled, took human wives and shared with them secrets of their race. Shemyaza's human partner was Ishtahar. Retribution was dire; some were buried alive, Shemyaza's body was burned and his soul imprisoned in the constellation of Orion for eternity. The angels fell. In this century, all that remains of the Anannage are human/Nephilim hybrids known as The Grigori.

The idea of the fallen angel is one of enduring appeal; Milton made Lucifer his most sympathetic character in *Paradise Lost*. The Grigori are angels from a different branch of mythology, yet nonetheless we recognise them because their characteristics are similar. (It could be argued that they both spring from the same root.) Using The Grigori, Constantine puts her finger on the prevailing twentieth century obsession with psychoanalysis, and the concept of the divided self. Her protagonist, Peverel Othman, is a figure we can understand if not sympathise with; the individual who lacks self-knowledge in the most profound sense,

If you do forge your way past the Cold War perceptions of our recent past to the nub of the story, then *Eon* still holds a lot of fascination. Bear handles the story with a muscular ease, pushing everything along at a steady, easily assimilated pace, while throwing plenty of surprises into the mix. His characters are not spectacularly well-drawn, but are serviceable, malleable pawns in the bigger game of gob-smacking the reader.

Eon may not have worn well thanks to paradigm shifts in the political world, but it still makes for an amusing, amazing story, if you treat it as an alternative history.

Revelation Space
by Alastair
Reynolds

Reviewed by
Paul Billinger

**[Vector #211,
May/June
2000]**

On first appearances this appears to be routine space opera with another 'big dumb object' just waiting to be explored. But don't be fooled, or put off, this is much, much more – complex, intriguing, always gripping – and one of the best sf novels I have read for years.

This is Reynolds's first novel, although his short stories have been appearing in *Interzone* on a fairly regular basis since 1990, and to have produced such a mature, well-paced novel shows great promise for the future. Common errors with this type of fiction are skillfully avoided; it is only when you have finished that you realise that there is no info-dumping – so easy to fall into when world building – but the future society is still fully realized and communicated to the reader.

who is unaware of who he is, or what he is capable of. At this level there are similarities with many of the protagonists of Clive Barker's epic metaphysical dark fantasies.

By making the Grigori Trilogy a contemporary series, Constantine is able to explore the idea of angels on earth in both the present and the past, the ancient story being told in flashbacks which inform present-day events. In this way the reader is able to follow both threads, enjoying the dramatic irony which often comes when the reader knows more than the characters. The flashback device also adds resonance to the exploration of another cherished idea of the last several hundred years; that love can transcend death, endure millennia and cross incarnations. Not only romantic love, but familial love. In addition to love from the past, injustice and pain span the generations to affect the present.

The Grigori are strange and terrible, dark and beautiful. They have occult powers and are a controlling force in the human world. They can be mercilessly destructive. Their sexuality is different; they make no distinction between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. For the humans in the story, to have sex with a Grigori is to be irrevocably changed; to become a dependant, unlikely to ever want a sexual relationship with another human again.

The Grigori are different things to different people; to the fundamentalist Christians in the story, they are demons incarnate; to some humans, hope of longevity and beauty, possibly even the salvation of the planet itself. In the Christian tradition, people have always feared the end of the world; we now have the technology to make it happen, but this makes us no different from a medieval person being certain that God could destroy everything tomorrow. It could be argued that this is one of the main stresses of the approaching Millennium, that associated with Armageddon, it could herald the end of the world, perhaps, through the actions of an individual or group deranged and determined enough, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Though to the rare optimist, The Millennium may be a new beginning.

Constantine weaves all these late twentieth century concerns into a tapestry of desire, faith and power. While, from middle-eastern despots to Cornish witches, her characters are as well-rounded as they are different, her darkly erotic prose is captivating and the breadth of her vision astonishing.

Afterthoughts: Reflections on having finished
Chung Kuo by David Wingrove
[Vector #201, Sept/Oct 1998]

As I write this, it is the first day of June, 1998. Fourteen years ago, to the day, I was making a list of things to buy and things to take into the hospital, where my partner, Susan, was recuperating after having our first child, Jessica, by Caesarean. As I pottered about the house, I was also contemplating an idea I was working on, about an artist who had created the 'perfect art' – a virtual reality program more compulsively real than reality itself, and of a wife who wants to murder him... because he had become obsessed and 'lost' himself within the artform.

By early 1986 I'd given up the doctorate and the paid work and was working full-time (that is, when I was not playing at being 'Mum') at what by then was called *A Spring Day At the Edge of the World*. I had something like seven hundred and fifty thousand words of text and had decided to shift the emphasis of the whole thing quite dramatically by giving the story a Chinese future world as backdrop. Abandoning myself to research, backdrop became foreground; the Chinese element – which had at first been mere exotic coloration – was seeping into every single aspect of the creation until, in a moment of absolute clarity, I realised that my tale was no longer a simple VR story, but was about China itself. A China that might possibly overwhelm the present-day world, and, in doing so, bury the old world – our world – beneath it. Of course, such a notion was ridiculed back then, even by the experts. Only a

damn fool science-fiction writer would have had such an absurd idea. The work was about China, so I called it... 'China'... *Chung Kuo*... which is the word the Chinese or Han use for their land – The Middle Kingdom.

Two years of hard work followed in which I rewrote acres of text, researched hundreds of facts, read a mountain of books on China and continued to grow and shape my concept. And then, on the eighth day of August 1998, I handed in the first volume and an overview of the rest.

It was always meant to be a single and singular work; not a series or a sequence of sequels, but an integral whole. The story of a life – Li Yun's – and of how the great world changed during that life time.

Over the next nine years I wrote and rewrote the whole – eight lengthy volumes of a work which, when finished, was both better than and less than I'd envisaged. Better than, because the close attention I paid to it, and the obsessive care I took in getting things right – from the colour of characters' hair to details about Han behaviour – made it a far richer work than I could ever have hope for. Yet also less, because, having finished it, I can see clearly now that the 1,800,000 words of *Chung Kuo* are, in fact, a kind of cartoon, in the artistic sense – a hastily-sketched study for a much finer, grander work. Reading K V Bailey's overview of the work in last issue's *Vector*, I was conscious that for all the things I'd achieved in *Chung Kuo* – and Mr Bailey identifies them accurately and with a gratifying sympathy – it was still lacking in all manner of ways. There are many places where it could have been better written; where haste or the demands of plot made me abandon the literary high ground. There are also numerous plot strands and characters who simply *did not work*. And – perhaps most important of all – there are whole aspects of the great world of *Chung Kuo* which I did not deal with properly and which, if I came to rework the beast, I would give attention to.

All of which begs the question, am I happy with the final shape and form of *Chung Kuo*?

It's strange. When you work so hard at something for so long, when you are forced constantly to defend it against unjust comment, or simply suffer the common ups-and-downs of publishing (new and unsympathetic editors, publishers who don't give a damn etc.) then it's actually very hard to sustain any kind of intense feeling about a work – even one on such a scale as this. For almost a year now I've 'written off' *Chung Kuo* in my head. If I looked back at all, it was to something I had finished with and which, to a large extent, 'failed'. Forget that the work is out in eighteen countries. Forget that people want to make CD-Rom games out of it, and films, and comics, and...

No. If I've any single afterthought it's this. I want to rewrite the bugger. I want to do it right next time. But...

Well, it's like this. As a writer you grow. You move on. Thus I've spent the best part of this last year writing and rewriting a new work, which I delivered to my agent this very morning. It's called *Imagine a Man*, and it's *vaguely* science fictional. It has a HUGE idea in it. But it's actually about one single man. About his life. And my next book will be similar. And then there's the TV series I'm working on, and the film and...

You see, it could be hard fitting in a rewrite of a 1,800,000-word work, even if I do it evenings and in the odd moment, fitting it between other projects. Because if I *did* do it, I'd want to do it right second time round, and I don't think I've another fourteen years to spare, I'm 43, almost 44, and that gives me, say, thirty more years as a working writer and that would be half of my remaining time.

And besides, I've got four daughters now and a new house to look after and a football team to support and mates to see and...

You get the idea? Something like *Chung Kuo* can only ever be done once. And whilst I feel a kind of humility when people write nice things about it, I guess what I'm saying is that, good as it is, I missed my aim. I intended it to be the very best. I wanted to do what Asimov

The book, although high in page count, also never feels long, with words used sparingly, a great joy when the publishing industry is forever favouring longer books. Characterisation is similarly strong and even though the most sympathetic character is a professional killer you still come to believe in and care about them.

Dan Simmons's *Hyperion* was the last novel of this genre, one in the finest tradition of sf, I remember enjoying so much. That *Revelation Space* can stand up to comparisons such as this is praise indeed. An excellent example of the storyteller's art and a book I can whole-heartedly recommend. I can only hope that Reynolds will be returning to this Universe very soon.

had failed to do, or Heinlein and Herbert, in making the future seem real... as real as any environment in any so-called mainstream work. I wanted to make it both a pure piece of science fiction and – at the same time – something akin to Balzac or Zola: a portrait of real characters involved in real historical change – the kind that we might realistically expect in the future. And maybe that can be done, and maybe it can't, but that's what I intended, yes, and failed, to do. So now I move on. I have to let *Chung Kuo* speak for itself, find its own admirers and detractors and leave alone. My days of fighting for the beast are behind me.

Then again, who knows? If the film ever gets made...

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The Critical
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Vector #222,
"It's Full of Stars"

Post-2000s: Science Fiction Goes Mainstream?

Back in Vector #186 (Dec 1995), Paul Kincaid had started writing a series of articles under the umbrella title of 'Cognitive Mapping', aiming to cover "many of the key topics and issues of the genre" – five years later it was still going strong, and part 20 appeared in Vector #214 (Nov/Dec 2000) with the focus on Mars...

Cognitive Mapping 20 – Mars by Paul Kincaid [Vector #214, Nov/Dec 2000]

In 1898, when H.G. Wells subverted the popular invasion story by turning the attacking fiends into literal aliens, it was almost inevitable that the invaders should be Martians – in fact, for a long time 'alien' and 'Martian' were practically synonymous. Mars was our neighbour, the red planet symbolically linked with war; through optical telescopes astronomers had detected areas of blue-green amid the red and in 1877 Giovanni Schiaparelli had identified *canali* which the popular imagination continues to translate as 'canals'. Only two years before Wells' story of invasion, the American astronomer Percival Lowell had published a book (*Mars*, 1896) which completed the image of Mars as a hospitable, survivable world, a world suitable for humanity, or for its own indigenous life.

The image of Mars imperfectly absorbed from the ideas of Schiaparelli and Lowell turned the planet initially into the setting for colourful, romantic adventures. Starting with *A Princess of Mars* (magazine serialisation 1912, novel 1917), Burroughs's series of eleven Barsoom novels featured exotic landscapes, beautiful princesses, evil opponents, an upright, dependable hero and all the other trappings of swashbuckling adventure. It may have owed little to the Mars known to science, but in its role as a second Earth it wasn't that far from what Lowell and his fellows had been looking for.

During the 1930s there developed a contrasting view to the Wellsian model of implacable, inexplicably hostile aliens, stories that presented Martians as loyal and friendly, and as a contrast to Barsoom these same stories were rather more conscious of how Mars did differ from Earth. Stanley G. Weinbaum's 'A Martian Odyssey' shared many of the characteristics of the romantic vision of Mars: the planet, imagined by its first Earth visitors as a desert, is in fact bursting with colourful and exotic life. This short story is actually quite important in the development of science fiction, exulting as it did in the sheer variety and mystery of possible alien life; it was one of the first stories that suggested alien life forms could be very, very different from the human form, and that they might be mysterious or even incomprehensible to humankind. But beyond this playful odyssey through a wonderland of alien creatures, the

**Terraforming
Earth by Jack
Williamson**

**Reviewed by
L. J. Hurst**

**[Vector #220,
Nov-Dec 2001]**

This is a novel from a man who invented the word “terraforming” in his novel *Seetee Ship* (1942). Familiar as the idea may seem, it is still unfamiliar enough to be rejected by the spellchecker of my word processor, but Williamson might not be surprised that different technologies fail to stay in step. He published his first short story as long as ago as 1928, yet has continued to produce science fiction that is still relevant – he also invented the term “genetic engineering”, for instance, and where would the news headlines be without that term?

“Terraforming Earth” sounds oxymoronic. The jacket blurb – “after a catastrophic impact by a huge meteor ... successive generations undertake the enormous challenge of restoring life to a barren planet” – is inaccurate. The significant thing about this story is that there is no succession.

story also paid careful attention to the nature of Mars as we knew it at the time. The lower gravity, thinner atmosphere, lack of water and lower temperature are all taken into account, anticipating the more realistic approach to scientific principles and understanding demanded by John W. Campbell's *Astounding*.

This approach, perhaps best exemplified by Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* (1951), still didn't end the more romantic vision of Mars. In fact, in stories from Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* (1988) to Terry Bisson's *Voyage to the Red Planet* (1990) to Paul J. McAuley's *Red Dust* (1993) Mars has continued to provide a primarily romantic, non-realistic backdrop closer to fable than fact. But, in one of the rare instances of scientific discovery feeding directly into science fiction, the detailed information about the Martian surface and atmosphere provided by the Mariner and Viking missions, and the studies which concluded in 1985 that enough water might exist to sustain prolonged missions, have prompted a rebirth of more realistic, factually-based fictions about Mars. These have tended to focus on the establishment of a colony (as in Ben Bova's description of the first manned mission to the planet, *Mars* [1992]) or on the politics of the relationship between an established Martian colony and distant Earth (as in Greg Bear's *Moving Mars* [1993]).

However the work which has done most to re-establish Mars as an important landscape for science fiction writers to explore has been Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy, *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993) and *Blue Mars* (1996). This is a huge work which encompasses the first two hundred years of the Martian colony, from the landing of the First Hundred to a time when colonists can breathe without assistance and sail across Martian seas. At first glance, the Martian trilogy is firmly in the mould of the factually based hard sf approach to Mars fiction. It describes in minute detail the measures taken to terraform the planet, records with extraordinary even-handedness the political arguments between the Reds who wish to preserve the Martian wilderness and the Greens who want to transform the planet, and explains each new scientific development from particle physics to longevity treatment in a manner to suggest that we are getting insights into scientific research two hundred years before it happens. Indeed, at times the scientific extrapolation can be breathtaking in its daring. It conforms to the pattern also in using as a trigger for most of the drama in the three books the worsening relations between Mars and Earth resulting in violence and armed conflict.

But what makes Robinson's Martian trilogy such a resonant work is that it re-works and updates the romance of Mars (Robinson follows what has become a familiar science fictional tradition of naming his Martian settlements after sf writers who romanticised the planet, from Lasswitz and Burroughs to Bradbury and Clarke). What we witness across three volumes and getting on for 2,000 pages is the slow but inexorable transformation of Mars from the bleak, unwelcoming desert that NASA has shown us into the exotic landscape of canals and forests and seas that has been the dream of science fiction for the last century. By the closing pages of *Blue Mars*, when much of Earth has been flooded by a series of natural disasters and half of Mars is under the waters of a new sea, the two planets are almost literal twins – Mars has become a second Earth where romantic adventures can indeed be played out – and the scientists, the explorers, the rational hard thinkers of rational hard sf have already set forth for the next terraforming challenges among the asteroids and the outer planets and on to neighbouring stars.

This homage to the sf writers who have already explored Mars in their imaginations is also present in Robinson's 'Exploring Fossil Canyon', one of the early stories which set the scene for his trilogy. Here, in what is effectively a hymn to the sterility of Mars, he recounts all the forms of life that these writers have imagined on our neighbour. Although Robinson is saying, very firmly, that such creatures do not and cannot exist in the real Mars, the long list of impossible creatures emphasises how much we want our neighbour to be inhabited. Whether they are Wells's invaders or Weinbaum's comical allies does not matter, what matters is that they should exist. So when NASA declared that it had found signs of life in a Martian asteroid

discovered in the Antarctic it was as if a dream had come true: our loneliness was at an end, and life was (or at least had been) there on the very place we had always looked to find it: Mars. Already, this new excitement at the idea of Mars bearing life is beginning to seep into the literature, notably in stories such as 'A Cold, Dry Cradle' (1997) by Gregory Benford and Elisabeth Malartre. Whether or not Mars does prove to contain life, it always will in our imaginations; we can never get away from the need for that intelligence watching us from space.

Confessions of A Science Fiction Addict by N.M. Browne ***[Vector 219, Sept/Oct 2001]***

You've probably read more science fiction and fantasy than I have. I don't have a problem – but then I did the maths – a book or two a week for thirty years, more than half of which have been in the genre. I've probably read over a thousand science fiction and fantasy books. I know, other people do more, but it's got so bad that I can't even remember what most of them were about, let alone what they were called and who wrote them. Then, I started to think about what I could have learnt if even a fraction of those volumes had been non-fiction. I began to realise how many substantial reading lists of literary, prize-winning and classic fiction I could have read instead and I panicked. I wondered if I should have, could have, read otherwise.

It's not even as if I'm well-read within the genre. Of all those thousand plus books only a fraction of them were good or well respected by aficionados. If you were to run through the list of your favourite science fiction and fantasy books, it's unlikely that I would have read more than a couple of them. I have read compulsively and indiscriminately – stuff you buy in second-hand bookshops and jumble sales, whatever was in the rack at the local newsagents, whatever I could find in the library. Considerations of quality have rarely featured in the buying decision – length and the possession of a full complement of legible pages have been more significant; "Reduced to clear!" is one of the most exciting phrases in the English language. That's what I mean by addiction.

There is a further element to this compulsion; if you were to ask me what I'm reading now, the answer is, as always, nothing – I wouldn't answer your question, I wouldn't be writing this, I'd be reading. This is antisocial, addictive behaviour. When I read a long book my children subsist on frozen oven chips, which I barely manage to heat through. I speak mostly in grunts and will do anything required of me "in a minute..." Reading *Ash* could have ended my marriage if my husband were less understanding. I read a book at one sitting, and if that is physically impossible then I read it in two or three. I will give up sleep and endure daylong headaches to do what must be done. I have always done it and I have always felt guilty about it: I took five fat books on honeymoon; I took *Get Off the Unicorn* into the labour ward – as a form of pain relief for the first stage of labour it was as good as entinox, though less effective for serious pain (It's too hard to strangle your partner, scream and still turn the pages).

I discovered *Vector* rather late in my reading career, so have always felt that this habit is not something a middle-aged mother of four ought to have (not in Richmond anyway).

I know this is ridiculous but, before you judge me too harshly, in the sure knowledge that the value of such work is self-evident, you must know that mine has always been a furtive, solitary habit. I have never attended a convention. I can't think of one friend, apart from my husband, who shares my taste in fiction. I live in the kind of place where people join book clubs. I have lots of friends who talk intelligently and knowledgeably about books and the subject of my preferred reading is an embarrassment; for a start, I always have to explain that 'fantasy' in this context does not involve pornography. I can see them wondering if it's polite to ask what I'm reading at the moment then, having asked, wondering what the appropriate reaction should be to the revelation that I've just finished reading part seven of an epic called

From a Moon-base hastily occupied at the time of the disaster, robots grow cloned children to return to Earth when the conditions seem possible. Over and over, new clones tell their stories of the return and their discoveries (the robots are not close enough to see what is happening in detail). And over and over, sometimes after only a half page – there is silence as a new disaster kills the clones. Of course, in the centuries between the robots' decisions, geology and evolution take their manifold paths and each time the humans return they find something new.

With so much repetition we could be in the world of Nietzsche and his philosophies. I would have thought that the robots should have a copy of Olaf Stapledon's *Last And First Men* in their Moon library, as it uses this idea on a universal scale, but they don't. So to end on a point of comparison – anyone who likes *Terraforming Earth* should also read *Last And First Men*, to see how Williamson's view of human evolution diverges from something more visionary.

something like *The Path of the Unbeknighed* that is about the size of the London Yellow Pages with embossed silver lettering all over the cover.

This reaction has got worse since I started writing fantasy for children. I modestly explain that I've written a story about magic and sword fighting and that kind of whole Celtic thing and friends look concerned, worried even. Is this (moderately) normal-looking woman actually hovering on the edge of those nether worlds of madness we all fight so hard to avoid? Has she never outgrown *The Hobbit*? Has she no literary aesthetic?

Whatever is the stumbling block to understanding why someone might read this stuff becomes a boulder in the way of understanding why anyone should want to write it. Everybody knows that writers should write about what they know.

"But do you know about that stuff?" asked a friend, a successful writer of sex comedies, in a tone of bemused incredulity.

"Well, you know..." I began vaguely, "arrows thud..."

"Yeah," she agreed "and penises throb." We shrugged in acknowledgement of our shared grasp of the value of cliché. I'd be surprised if she's done all the things she writes about, but, working in a recognisable version of this world, friends might question her sex life but not her sanity.

Writing a book is generally seen as good; lots of people do it, have done it or are about to do it any moment soon, if they could only find the time. Writers are everywhere, but children's fantasy? It might just about be OK – if I were J.K. Rowling.

In this milieu even the least analytical person would start to ask "why?" What is it that makes me keep reading this stuff and still loving it even when it's bad? (If you are looking for complex critical analysis here, stop reading now. This is not that kind of article.) You might read science fiction and fantasy for more profound reasons but my justification for four or five thousand hours of my life not spent mastering the piano/tennis/nuclear physics is:

1. I like storytelling – There can sometimes be too much story and not enough telling but too often in non-genre books it's the other way round. When I've read four or five pages of the main character's musings on the inside of their fridge/diary/record collection, I long to cut to the chase or at the very least to an alien abduction – that would put things into perspective.
2. I like escapism – my life is fine, but that leaves me free to imagine another one totally unrelated to the one I lead, where the question of what to cook for dinner has more to do with the availability of hydroponics, the biodiversity of a new planet or hunting in the Elven forest than the shelves at Sainsbury's and Jamie Oliver/Nigella Lawson. When I read I want to go places I could never visit.
3. I like ideas. I like stories that explore what it is to be human, what may or may not distinguish us from an alien, an orc or a neurologically/chemically enhanced *Hom. Sap.* I like twists that make you reassess the story you've just read, the universe and one's own suppositions about it. I like to be made to think about the world I think I know by being shown a world I don't. I'm still haunted by books I read in my early teens: *Dune*, *Foundation*, the Mars of Ray Bradbury, the strange sensibility of Alan Garner and the looming presence of Gormenghast.
4. I like strangeness: images of flying dragons, wingless garuda, distant suns. I may never have seen attack ships burning off Orion's Belt but I think I have and that's what counts.
5. I want to be someone else when I read, someone really different, unique extraordinary, not another middle-aged character reflecting on a mid-life crisis and lost youth. I want to be an explorer, a stunningly intelligent scientist, an interspecies diplomat, a

telepath, a space cadet, a sorceress, and a mercenary soldier. I want to fly, dive, battle for the good of humanity, take on the evil power-crazed magician, restore world peace and end alien domination. I want it all and I don't want to get off the sofa.

I don't know if that's enough of a justification, but I know that nothing will change even if it isn't. I couldn't stop if I wanted to. I knew *you'd* understand.

Inside Lovecraft's Mind: The Importance of Style by Mark Greener ***[Vector #220, Nov/Dec 2001]***

When I first read Lovecraft, I couldn't really understand his popularity. I couldn't even understand why I, a jaded dark-fantasy fan, found Lovecraft profoundly disturbing – and still do. After all, his prose breaks just about every stylistic rule for good writing. Indeed, some people even find his prose unreadable.

However, I believe that Lovecraft's prose style is a critical element in his enduring appeal. By breaking stylistic rules, by challenging our preconceptions of narrative form, Lovecraft creates a sense of displacement, distance and disorientation in the reader. This allows us to share his character's neurosis, inducing a deep sense of unease. In this way, he parallels some attempts by avant-garde artists to *share* an experience rather than communicate information *through* an artwork.

Certainly, even the most ardent Lovecraft supporter must accept that he can be difficult to read – even obscure – in places. *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (published 1941), Lovecraft's only novel, offers perhaps the best example. After all, you can get away with linguistic murder in a short story, and the reader is more willing to follow writers' experiments. A novel – even a relatively short novel – is a different proposition.

The opening of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is hardly punchy. In the second sentence, of fifty-one words, Ward's father watches his son's "aberration grow from a mere eccentricity to a dark mania involving both a possibility of murderous tendencies and a peculiar change in the apparent contents of his mind" (p. 5). Today, a sentence like that would never get past the sub-editor. Indeed, many sentences in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* are long, rambling and complex. Sometimes very long, rambling and complex. And it's not a stylistic device confined to his novel: his short stories use the same tone.

Indeed, in many places, Lovecraft's prose, if not purple, is at least mauve. "...the slanting sunlight touches the Market House and ancient hill roofs and belfries with gold, and throws magic around the dreaming wharves where Providence Indiamen used to ride at anchor. After a long look he would grow almost dizzy with a poet's love for the sight..." (p. 12). Lovecraft's almost-purple prose is, perhaps, most apparent in the descriptions of horror. "A wailing ... protracted ululantly in rising and falling paroxysms. At times it became almost articulate, though no auditor could trace any definite words ... then a yell of utter, ultimate fright and stark madness wrenched from scores of human throats" (p. 41).

However, by this stage, you're so engrossed that the prose style works. You almost feel the "utter, ultimate fright" and wonder if you're surrounded by "stark madness". In other words, you begin to *share and experience* rather than just read *about* the madness. And I believe it's this difference, which we'll return to later and is consistent with aesthetic theory, that makes Lovecraft such a powerful writer.

Lovecraft breaks many other rules loved by creative writing teachers. For instance, he often ignores the principle of 'showing, not telling'. There's little speech, which serves to further alienate the reader from the conventional rules of storytelling. There are few sympathetic characters. Lovecraft's worlds are dominated by the mad or obsessed. However, for me, Lovecraft's description of mad and obsessed mental states is unsurpassed in fantastic fiction.

Certainly, part of Lovecraft's attraction is the fascination of watching a neurosis work itself out on page.

However, many writers and artists explore their neuroses. So why do Lovecraft's neuroses strike such a powerful chord? Why are they so deeply unsettling? As I've begun to suggest, I believe that part of the explanation lies in his prose style. Whether by serendipity or design, Lovecraft's prose creates a sense of alienation from the mundane world. The steady drip of prose that differs radically from that in the creative writing textbooks induces displacement, distance and disorientation. As a result, you begin to *share* rather than *read* about the neurosis.

Clark Ashton Smith is, perhaps, Lovecraft's closest stylistic contemporary. Smith's prose is, however, considerably crisper. Smith's writing is unjustifiably ignored and is certainly more accessible than Lovecraft's style. But to me the form of Lovecraft's prose, especially as it accumulates over the course of a novella or a long short story such as "The Dunwich Horror" (1929) or "The Whisperer in the Darkness" (1931), induces a shared experience. (In other words it's more than just reading a story.) The cumulative effect of the writing style creates alienation that allows you to share Lovecraft's interior world. He makes few concessions for the reader: which is presumably why he can engage in this shared experience with some readers and not others.

The approach is similar, but less obvious, than William S. Burroughs' famous cut-up technique (and might explain why Lovecraft is almost as unfilmable as Burroughs). It's similar to the use of discordant music – by some modern classical composers as well as the extreme death metal bands – to create a sense of unease. And it's similar to many of modern arts attempts to force a re-evaluation of the objects around us and our sensibilities by challenging conventional form.

Against this background, in a paper published recently in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Saam [sic] Trivedi, a philosopher at Simmons College in Boston, ponders the nature of modern arts engagement with the punters. He asks why so many "appropriately backgrounded" people find avant-garde art "arid or baffling" – even when, as in the case of composer Schoenberg's serial techniques, for example – the approach aimed to improve communication with the audience.

In contrast, Lovecraft also commutates a mental state, but as I've argued, I believe the disorientation and distance from narrative norms means you *share* and *experience* his neurosis. It's a different approach to, attains a similar effect to, but is some ways more powerful than the stream of consciousness style of Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. Reading Lovecraft's fiction you share and experience the same virtual mental space as his "self-involved neurotics" (Moorcock p.117) rather than reading *about* them.

Whether Lovecraft developed his prose style deliberately or whether it came naturally, it's sometimes difficult to read and I doubt if it would survive sub-editing today. Indeed, I doubt if a modern Lovecraft would manage to escape from the slush pile of a mainstream publisher – and of course even during his lifetime Lovecraft wasn't widely published. Today, Lovecraft would be, if he could get published at all, an avant-garde writer. But his unique prose style allows communication through a shared experience and might explain why so few writers induce the same sense of deep unease that Lovecraft's best stories seem to manage.

Editions Used:

Lovecraft, H P, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (London: Panther, 1973).

Moorcock, Michael, *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (London: VGSF, 1988).

Trivedi, Saam. "An epistemic dilemma for actual intentionalism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2001;41:192-206

The topic of 'Juvenile SF' had appeared many times in Vector, and with the overwhelming popularity of a certain wizarding school for youngsters still going strong, Vector #227 was an extra-special issue dedicated to keeping younger readers enthused...

The View from the Children's Lit Section by Andrew M. Butler [Editorial extract from Vector #227, Jan/Feb 2003]

It can't have escaped anyone's notice that we are surrounded by Harry Potter. Books, toys, games, mugs, bubblebaths, notebooks, diaries, calendars, all manner of memorabilia and merchandising. The fourth novel has long since gone into paperback and there's no sign of the fifth title (perhaps he's proving particularly stubborn as he hits puberty), and it seems as if every third cinema screen is showing the second movie.

Meanwhile, much is going on in the children's literature section of bookshops. There were the Web novels a few years ago, which attracted authors like Stephen Baxter (author of *Omegatropic*), Ken MacLeod and Pat Cadigan, but more recently Neil Gaiman and Clive Barker have written for children, and Terry Pratchett has written an eighth novel for children (see my piece on it in this issue).

At the same time there are a whole series of writers who are primarily writing for children. Ben Jeapes is published by Scholastic, having more or less fallen into writing children's fiction – a story he recounts in these pages. Philip Reeves is another Scholastic discovery, his *Mortal Engines* offering a steampunk future. *The Borribles* trilogy has been revised and re-released. The (alas pseudonymous) Lemony Snicket is taking us through the traumatic life of the Baudelaire children in the multi-volumed *A Series of Unfortunate Events* – and who dares say that this is mainstream or historical or horror or fantasy fiction? Meanwhile British ex-pat Gillian Rubinstein has been producing novels of genre interest for over fifteen years, sometimes quietly, sometimes controversially. She even achieved the dubious honour of a review in *Private Eye*, where her originality is called into question (as if any of her alleged models were entirely original) by someone who had a rather confused notion of her publishing history.

From picture books to Young Adult fiction, there is something to read in sf, horror and fantasy – and you don't have to acquire a child to read it. Things seem to be booming, as the pendulum swings back from the new realism of the 1970s and 1980s to a modified fantasy. We hope to come back to children's fiction in the near future – if only because a number of pieces never quite made it in time for this issue (not that there was any spare space). Feel free to send ideas, comments and articles to the editorial address.

Video Games had by now taken hold as part and parcel of regular entertainment in the home, and this article still resonates today...

The Games by Gwyneth Jones [Vector #227, Jan/Feb 2003]

Once Upon A Time

Once upon a time, long ago, there were no videogames. Young human animals played like kittens or puppies – blundering around, climbing, tumbling, fighting, finding out what their bodies could do: gradually building stronger muscles and bones, sharper responses, through the selective power of successful accident. After the first year or so, they would progress (as kittens or puppies progress within days or weeks) to imitations of adult

behaviour; sometimes with overt adult instruction, sometimes not. The little girls (predominantly) played 'house' and 'mummies and daddies' – practising scraps of overheard dialogue on each other, miming the fascinating actions of the adult world, putting imaginary clothes in the toy washing machine, pouring imaginary tea... The little boys (predominantly, allegedly) preferred to continue running around, but now with the addition of imaginary or facsimile weapons. Children of both genders moved on up to traditional family leisure pastimes – card games, board games, model making; and whether or not they had the aptitude, they were forced to continue their physical education – swimming, gymnastics, team sports; the various forms in which weapon training and survival training had endured into the predominantly urban, peaceful, developed world of the twentieth century. Around the time that they progressed to the card and board games they also learned to *read*, a practice which had become the main medium for social transfer of culture and knowledge, supplanting previous traditions. Reading was a vital, functional social skill, but to some (though not all!) of the children it became a particularly seductive form of play: a strange activity which consists entirely of sitting still, alone, and letting your eyeballs rove to and fro, with some slight movement and weight-bearing involving the hands.

Then, a few years later, the games came to a halt. A minority of the children would grow up continuing to practice some organised sport or craft, either professionally or as amateurs: playing Sunday football, painting water-colours, maybe a Bridge Club or a Chess club membership. Maybe board games would persist, played with relatives at Christmas or on a rainy holiday. A substantial minority would continue to practice the solitary vice of reading. Nearly all would become the passive, though often thrilled and emotionally involved, audience for the mass-market drama of TV and the movies. But no one could play make believe, the way children were allowed to play. No cowboys and indians on the street corner, no mimed-out murder and mayhem, no imaginary acts of courage and prowess. That had to stop. You can watch fantasies played out, or read them in print, but after puberty you can't enact: that was the message. This is not acceptable behaviour for adults or even teenagers. This is likely to result in a referral to a psychiatrist.

Personal History

I was born into the strange world I've just described. I can remember it clearly. I can't remember exactly when I played my first game of make-believe. Arguably I was fantasising before I could talk: certainly by the time I was two (you can read about this on my webpage) I was following my six year-old sister in imaginative play that involved me as Sherpa Tenzing Norgay and herself as Ed Hillary, climbing Everest up the stairs to my parents' bedroom; over the furniture to the final push, the steep ascent of my father's tall desk. We *always* played make-believe. We were never content to climb a tree or cross a stream, we had to be explorers, naturalists; or characters from our favourite fantasy fiction (Narnia, Tolkien, Robin Hood, William Tell). When I was a little older, maybe six or seven, my older sister dropped out, and my younger sister and I (not such proto-Lara types) invented the concept of an ensemble of fantasy characters, and choreographed their adventures indoors. Better still, there were the characters we made out of coloured Plasticine, a group that remained stable for years. They operated in units of three: a main character, a sidekick and a strong beast of burden, who would also have a voice and a personality. There was Bumfit and Pedro, with their pony Gress. Nerissa the mermaid, whose maidservant's name I don't remember, and her steed, a plastic toy camel; there was Lancaster Sprite, who rode around on a flat pebble I had taken as a souvenir from Lancaster Castle (a pebble I treasured because I believed it was stained with the blood of tortured witches). Most of the characters had tails rather than legs, like the tail a genie has when rising from the magic lamp, because tails are more easily kept in repair.

These games were *intense*. Some of you may have come across the story of the Brontë sisters and their brother Bramwell, and the make-believe games they played with tiny toy soldiers, through their childhood and adolescence, in the isolated parsonage at Haworth. Our scenarios did not become so complex: we did not invent coherent countries like Gondal and Angria, we didn't devise political systems or hold revolutions. Exploration was our simple template. The Plasticine people made enormous journeys around the furniture, on which they faced perils and battled monsters. It was very real. Emotions ran high, tempers were lost; tears were shed, the hideous murder by squashing of someone else's characters was not unknown... This was my first world of the imagination. It was untaught. We didn't pick it up from the tv. It was only many, many years later that I realised that I'd come across the whole set-up in folktales and myth: the hero with his ensemble of companions and his epic adventures, Gilgamesh, Arthur, Fin MacCool: somehow, we had been plugging-into the cultural unconscious, recapitulating the evolution of story... It was from this world of physical, kinetic enactment that I *descended* (maybe!) or *retreated*, into the practice of building imaginary worlds from words alone – when childhood was over, and I was no longer permitted to create and enjoy fantasy the way that came naturally.

The ability to build an imaginary world in your mind, and have a set of characters who live and breathe there, is immensely seductive. The action is *physical*, you can feel it in your heartbeat, in quickened breath, in tears that rise to your eyes, in stomach-gripping tension. It's wonderfully addictive, as sensual as the barely-recognised, polymorphously perverse sexual fantasies of early childhood. I had the innate tendency, so I was probably bound to become a fantasist in this sense. I became a *writer* of fantasy fiction, because it was a permitted outlet... and becoming a film or theatre director would have taken a far greater leap of self-belief, for someone of my class and gender, in those times.

Everything's Different Now

When I was a child, the explosion of leisure as a concept, as an industry, had barely begun, even in the developed world. Freed from industrial slavery, and with religious duties slipping away into oblivion for most, we often literally didn't know what to do with ourselves. Families would sit looking at each other through the desert wastes of an English Sunday... maybe go for a drive in the afternoon? We'd watch the sober, improving television that was bestowed on us by the great and the good, and it never entered our heads that we could talk back... But then mass-market affluence came along, and everything is different now. In the last twenty years every kind of *play* has undergone a huge change of status. Organised sports are big business, transformed by the dead Midas touch of major investment from passion into product. Young people who never go near a gym or a playing field – and adults old enough to remember the time when they'd have considered such behaviour bizarre – throng the shopping malls dressed in sports training wear: Adidas, Nike, Reebok. Primetime TV viewing is dominated by masochistic quiz shows and very strange trials of daring (eat the live worms to win a holiday in Jamaica). As the work ethic finally releases us, the buried instincts of our hunter-gatherer past rise again, and *shopping* (roaming around, collecting desirable objects, foodstuffs, trade items) becomes a pleasurable activity, an end in itself. Elaborate sex-games once hidden away in shame and embarrassment are served by high street retail outlets for bondage gear and bizarre lingerie. Even our legendary workaholics freely admit that the work they do has little intrinsic value: the sixteen hour a day executive is performing status-establishing display, like the spread of antlers or a peacock's tail.

This bizarre cultural shift, this commodifying of the imagination, began when I was growing up: and continues today. But arguably the strangest development of all, the phenomenon that isn't just a swollen, steroid-pumped version of previous activities, has been hidden away, unregarded, in the evolution of the videogame.

Personal History #2

By the time I was an undergraduate, fantasy gaming had appeared, Dungeons and Dragons style. It was too late for me to be ensnared. Dungeons and Dragons seemed to me no more than a game of chance, played with dice: essentially just a kind of Monopoly (which bores me stupid), with the added attraction of being ordered around by a megalomaniac. There was nothing for me, there, compared with the worlds and the dramas in my head.

As far as I recall, the first time I played a computer game was in 1980, when I came back from a three year trip to Singapore, and played Pong, in a friend's house in Bristol. I remember being mildly scandalised by the way this minimalist tennis rudely took over *the television screen* – the sacred hearth of the modern home, and mildly amazed that I found the game enjoyable. One big reason why I liked make-believe as a child was that I was hopeless at all forms of sport, and therefore totally uninterested (I'm never one to try to fit a square peg into a round hole, me)... but somehow Pong seemed able to access an avid desire to hit a moving object with a moving bar, at a level before (in neurological terms) my pitiable hand-eye co-ordination kicked in.

A couple of years' later I met the primitive adventure games. *You are in a maze of twisty passages all the same*, became something of a favourite epigram, a life statement: but I wasn't hooked. I preferred to drive myself crazy as a Pacman munching dots and dodging ghosts: hunting beasts and gathering berries. I continued to play puzzle games and abstract games throughout the Eighties: Tetris, Aquanoids, Lemmings... But I had become a professional writer of science fiction and fantasy, and in this capacity, I was very interested in the concept of computer gaming. I wasn't alone in this, of course. William Gibson, the writer of *Neuromancer*, famously claimed that his idea of cyberspace was based on watching kids playing arcade games, and becoming convinced that they desperately wanted to project themselves *into* some imaginary space inside the machine. I never played arcade games. But (like many other sf writers) I spent my life sitting in front of a computer screen.

When I wanted to write about my own activity (creating adventures in imaginary worlds) in futuristic terms, it was natural to invoke the games:

Computer games in fiction can simply be a means of accessing a seamless Narnia, or a *Star Trek* holodeck, where fancy dress and make-believe can be enjoyed without consequences for future episodes. In the mid-eighties *Ender's Game* (1985), massively successful at the time, Orson Scott Card came up with an eight year old boy whose freakish skill at playing the videogame dogfights is used in the real interstellar war Earth is fighting the insectoid Buggers: and the game scenario emphasises Ender's corrupted innocence.

But though many sf writers have been intrigued by videogames, the imaginary games in the books/TV/movies work the way they do for fictional reasons: to make a point, to advance the plot, to carry a metaphor, to display some ingenious fantasy psychology; or some cool fantasy technology. What has happened to the games themselves, now that the future is upon us, is something different.

Final Fantasy

The game goes like this. *You* are the cartoon character with the questionable haircut and the enormous sword. *Your* name is Cloud Strife, but if you want to give the character a different name you may. This isn't like reading a book. *Final Fantasy VII* is in many ways only minimally 'intuitive'; most of the scenery is just painted flats. But your gameplay, within the elaborate maze that the writers have devised, will be unique. Here you are, in a shabby inner-city environment that strangely favours Walt Disney more than *Blade Runner*. You meet a girl, a flower-girl, her name is Aeris and she's going to be very important... Then you're off, with other members of the terrorist resistance group Avalanche, to launch an assault on one of Shinra's

main reactors in the city of Midgar. Shinra are the bad guys. They are sucking the life force out of the planet, with these Mako reactors. You, Cloud, know that you were once a member of the Shinra elite militia, called Soldier, but you have changed your allegiance. Your new friends tell you they can see the Mako glow in your eyes. Members of Soldier are exposed to Mako energy when they're recruited, and it never leaves them... The simple and direct strong man Barratt is suspicious of you at first, but easily convinced; the hard-fisted bar girl, Tifa, was your childhood friend. There are other characters you will meet along the way, but you will always travel in a team of three. Choose your partners and away you go... There are fights, with a truly *amazing* (unrivalled in the annals) variety of demons, insectoids, robots, malignant pumpkins, infectious frogs, rocking horses, caterpillars, giant locusts. There are puzzles, kinetic and numerical, for you to solve. There are stray items of value lying around; or inside chests that you can open (the fossilised traces of ancient adventure game lineage lies here): there are minor figures who will divulge vital information if approached in the right sequence, their dialogue and yours presented in lines of white type in blue boxes... There are captivating little interiors, full of doll's house furnishing which is mostly fake (like plaster hams and pies in *The Tale Of Two Bad Mice*). There are hotels, tents, caves, hostels, where you will find a room with three little beds or sleeping mats where you can 'spend a night' and restore your strength; to the tune of a little lullaby of which I have become very fond. There are the Chocobo, giant birds that can be trained and ridden and bred and raced. There's a casino called the Golden Saucer, where you'll ride in your first Chocobo race; there are friendly enemies and treacherous friends. There is a remarkably convoluted plot, which is revealed to *you* through cut scenes, in flashbacks, and in extended passages of idiosyncratic and character-driven dialogue. *You* don't have an over-reaching mission, your quest grows on you as the action unfolds: and as it does, *you* discover things about yourself that bewilder and terrify you...

When I decided to look at videogames again, I started with Eidos's *Lara Croft Tombraider* series. I soon discovered two things. The first was that I didn't have the game play skills to get Lara off the ground (the poor woman! I gave her such a hard time, getting nowhere!). The second was that Lara, alluring though she is, was essentially an elaborate counter, marking spaces on a board. The 'plot', carried in computer generated FMV scenes (full motion video) isn't part of the game, it's a series of more or less interesting interruptions. Steven Poole, the author of *Trigger Happy*, one of the few analytical studies of videogaming so far available, would agree. In his view, the *raison d'être* of a videogame is the gameplay; the skills you need to develop and the hits you rack up... Forget the new drama form: a game that tries to be fiction is making a mistake, and is doomed to fail.

But then I turned to *Final Fantasy VII*, on my fourteen-year-old son's recommendation, and immediately, I knew I'd found what I was looking for. It was an extraordinary moment, actually, when I took the console in my hands, when I took my three oddly assorted characters off on their adventures; and saw them *merge into one*, into the single self from which they came, as 'I' left the fighting-lek, and set off into the cartoon landscape.

Final Fantasy VII (FFVII) can only be described as an epic experience. To complete the three discs is going to take you anything from fifty to ninety playing-hours, depending on how much of the sub-plots you decide to explore: and though it is now so ancient its graphics seem utterly bizarre (the strange little megacephalic cartoon characters; the doll-house furnishings), it is still deservedly rated as something very special. It came out in 1997, as the first English-language *Final Fantasy* game [1-6 never made it out of Japan]; was released near the launch of Playstation 2 [Sony's then current game console], and entranced the fantasy game-playing public - many, though not all of them, children under the age of fourteen. 'It took me about as long as reading Philip Pullman,' said one of my child-respondents (I asked around). 'It's a lot of hours...' When I asked one of my son's friends to tell me the *difference* between playing *FFVII*, and reading a big engrossing book, the child said, 'In *FFVII* you have a personal experience when playing... When two people read the same book they read exactly the same words, and meet the same characters. In a *Final Fantasy* game there

are a lot more things to do. Only the most dedicated player would completely complete a Final Fantasy game.'

Perhaps only the most dedicated reader could extract the whole meaning from a novel of comparable length and sweep. I don't suppose I'll ever 'completely complete' *War and Peace*, or *À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu*. But though many readers of large, commodious science fiction or mainstream novels might be startled, I think the comparison is just.

Imaginary Worlds

Animals and humans like to play: it makes them feel good. There's a reward of pleasure, we could say, which reinforces our desire to jump and run and fight; and to practice hitting the target. Every time you reach the level of intuitive expertise in something technically challenging, whether it's craft work, playing a piece of complex music, or getting Lara's jump and roll to take her exactly where you want her to go, your brain issues the pleasure, under the impression (so to speak) that by getting this new skill locked down you will be increasing your chances of survival... which is why people will go on driving their cars, until the planet is paved over. The brain doesn't have any moral objection to your 'heathen joy in destruction', and doesn't know or care if you are playing a game for fun, so you get the pleasure anyway, even if you're just powering Lara through another level (although, arguably, videogames skills are transferable, and maybe you deserve the pleasure).

Human interaction techniques (listening to what people say, realising what they mean, observing their actions, calculating their trustworthiness, spotting their alliances) are equally survival skills: indeed, it may be that our particular brand of intelligence was honed and developed by a feedback loop between the individual and the human group. The natural environment of people is people. Therefore, it makes sense that we should take pleasure in reading a novel, following a soap opera, or playing an RPG. What amazed me, was to observe how closely the game play of *Final Fantasy VII* mirrored the naked processes of make-believe that underpin my fiction. This is exactly the way I go to work: this story that moves from one cluster of vivid incident to the next, with spaces in-between where my readers must wander, admiring the décor and following my clues, while they gain the experience and prowess they need for the next boss-fight of elucidation I have waiting for them (and I know from anecdotal evidence, this punctuated narrative development is to say the least, fairly common: we set out with a handful of dreamlike moments, we stitch them laboriously together). I know there'll be sections of any novel of mine that some readers will never reach, because they'll never find their way to the metaphysics from the murder scene. I know that there will be a linear plot that must be followed, and the reader will be guided along this groove, while given (ideally) an illusion of the free interplay of incident, error, confusion and coincidence in a real world.

I even know how the dialogue works. My dialogue, just like the lines of type in the little text boxes in *FFVII*, is *actually a set of instructions*, carefully embedded in a matrix of hopefully natural seeming conversation. (I will craft a whole scene around one line that I know must be spoken, for the sake of my characterisation or my plot. My triumph is when you, dear reader, can't tell the difference...) In short, I realise that *FFVII* had both a single author and a string of developers: that decisions were made in committee, that hordes of people were involved. But it plays like a child's game of make-believe: the germ plasm of all dramatic fiction.

Our themes and plots are standard. Nobody invents them, they have all been used and reused thousands of time. The story that I write is a transcription of the imagined scenes that I have lived, vividly, in my imagined world: an observer magically able to experience the viewpoint and the emotions of the characters. The plausible, smoothly connected plot, the agreement with the conventions of mimesis: these are illusions, laboriously created after the fact. And finally, when my story pauses, when one of those climactic action points is over (or about to start), I will relax, and gather my forces, in the stillness of a passage of pure

description. Another quote from one of my young teenage players: 'You really look forward to the cut-scenes, because they are things of beauty...'

At first glance it is startling to find the mighty Sony Corporation peddling a passionate plea against the brutal over-exploitation of natural resources; and that validates the Gaia theory through Shinto religious beliefs. Stranger still to find them openly confessing their more intimate thievery. When Cloud discovers the secret of his origins, this is what he is told:

"... you don't belong to yourself, son. You belong to the corporation. Everything you do, everything you think, everything you think you want: the corporation did it to you. You have no free will."

It's quite remarkable, isn't it? Sony need have no fear. Fairytales do not foment revolution, fairytales do the opposite. They are the opium of the people... However, *FFVII* is one of those stories that acknowledges the evils of the world, and redeems them (whether or not they deserve redemption) by weaving them into a rich tapestry of heightened experience: and this complexity itself is a corrective. Just giving the players more to think about, more alternatives, more chances to lose their ego in sheer delight, might have some effect on the brutal ideology of our century; without even reducing profits.

The watchdogs of society should certainly be paying attention to videogames, because a generation of young people (predominantly, not exclusively, the boys) is growing up, has already grown up, addicted to ultra-violent interactive cartoons. Waste your enemies, collect tokens. The heathen joy of destruction: that's all there is. The games did not invent the ideology, but they reinforce it, in the lab rat sense of the term, like nobody's business, and they support, inexorably, the spread of that ideology into other media: it's not an accident that fans of sf print fiction today are greedier for torture and brutality than ever in the genre's history. Steven Poole suggests as a corrective that players of violent games should be made to suffer the consequences of their actions if you betray a friend, if you leave your wounded behind, if you kill without reason, or do anything in contravention of the Geneva Convention, the game will swing around and give you a heavy shot of instant karma; and you'll know not to do *that* again. 'Doing wrong should hurt...' It's nice idea, and intrinsically it should be acceptable to the players (good deeds are just a different form of currency, aren't they?). Sadly, I've a feeling you'd have to change the assumptions of your society first, or nobody would buy your sissy game. But I don't know... There could be something in it.

End Here, It Sounds Hopeful

I don't know if I'll ever play through *VIII*, *IX* and *X*. I don't know where I'd find the time, and I never did care for sequels. From what I've seen of them, *VIII* may have some merit, but *X* is nothing more than a watered-down version of *VII*, with 'proper' human figures and voiced acting, a computer-generated movie you can play; and as slight as the movie itself (*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*). But *FF VII* convinces like a clunky form of AI, that looks like a shoebox and talks like a duck, and yet, discernibly, the team is on the right track this time. And it cuts both ways. How often now, when I come to a fight-action sequence in an sf or fantasy novel, I find myself flipping through: not interested. What's the point in this in print? It ought to be game play. Huge special effects sequences have the same effect (notably, the last battle in *The Amber Spyglass* (2000))... On the other hand, apart from *FF VII*, all the games I've played have been grossly deficient in dramatic content, both in the detail of interaction between characters and in the intensity of the emotion. The plots are devoid of the essential pleasure of unexpected yet satisfying resolutions. But somewhere up ahead, along this track, there's a game which is going to be as different from a novel as a novel is different from an epic poem, yet it will be a complex and satisfying work of art. One day

**Redemption Ark
by Alastair
Reynolds**

**Reviewed by
Peter Young**

**[Vector #230,
July-Aug 2003]**

Alastair Reynolds is one of the few authors who now go immediately to the top of my reading list, and I know I am not alone in this. If there are lovers of space opera who have still not sampled the dark Reynolds universe, then the best point of origin is of course *Revelation Space*, though the 1999 short story 'Galactic North' is also an excellent place to start (and is, one suspects, where the entire story arc has to finish).

Central to the story are of course the Inhibitors, whose fearsome and remote nature was only hinted at in *Revelation Space*, and they are here revealed in full. They were worth the wait.

soon, the games will be able to tackle the viciously complex variables of human emotion and motivation as fluently as SSX handles absurd snowboarding tricks. I don't know what that will look like, or how we will play: but it will be an unstoppable revolution. What's more, it will genuinely be an advance on the project of bringing works of the imagination intact into the real world. It will be a story full of deceptive 'simplicities' that conceal multiple tricks of the trade, but much closer to the original, endogenous virtual-experience. The message will be very old, it just took a long time to get through.

Steve Jeffery had been the Vector Reviews Editor since 1999 (having taken over from Paul Kincaid), but after the publication of Vector #228 he handed the reins over to Paul Billinger, with a suitably positive spin on his decision...

**Editorial by Steve Jeffery
[extract from Vector #228, Mar/Apr 2003]**

There is an effect that judges of the Arthur C. Clarke Award commonly describe as "sf burnout". Reading anywhere from fifty to eighty novels in the few short months before the shortlist selection deadline can leave a residual numbing effect on the sense of wonder. Too much, too quickly. It's similar to working unsupervised in a chocolate factory. After a while (for sf fans, it may be a longer while than most) you think you'll never want to see another hazelnut praline ever again.

A few desert the field completely, and run screaming to the high ground of 'literary' mainstream novels, others slide sideways into other genres (crime, mystery, romance...), some even cry off fiction altogether for history, biography or science books, but most feel the need for some sort of sabbatical to recoup their energies and enthusiasm.

And so it is with *Vector* reviews editors.

I'm not so burned-out that I can't face the idea of sf anymore, and there are still authors who can intrigue, amaze, entertain and even thrill me (see my own 'Best of 2002' selection), both older and established writers and rising stars of the genre. In fact I think I took over the editorial chair at just the right time, just as the resurgence (or 'Renaissance') of British science fiction (and fantasy) was getting started, with new writers like China Miéville, Alastair Reynolds, Roger Levy and Jon Courtenay Grimwood, while more established writers including Gwyneth Jones, Brian Stableford, Christopher Priest and, perhaps particularly, M. John Harrison, have not been content to rest on their laurels, but have demonstrated that they can still show the Young Turks a thing or two. It's been fascinating to watch.

Standing down from, and finding people to step into, the various committee and editorial roles within the BSFA is a bit like the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, or one of those square puzzle blocks which you have to arrange in numerical order (but with the added complication of not having a vacant square to let you do the shuffling). Unlike the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, though, no one cries, "No Room! No Room!" The BSFA are always open for, and desperately in need of, new blood and volunteers. (Go on. You know you want to).

From the next issue, Paul Billinger will be taking over as the new reviews editor. Paul will hopefully have new ideas of his own about the direction and shape of *Vector's* reviewing policy, as I did when I took over, in some trepidation, from Paul Kincaid, who edited the column for an astonishing 12 years. One thing I do hope Paul keeps is the wide coverage of all aspects of science fiction, fantasy and horror that *Vector* has maintained to date. Indeed, *Vector* is arguably the only UK sf magazine which gives a comprehensive coverage of the genre in terms of the number of reviews it carries each issue. Looking back over the last four years, I note we have carried something over 1200 reviews over those 24 issues.

There are things I would also have liked to do – duplicate or multiple reviews of particular books (like *Locus*), longer ‘feature’ reviews – but weren’t always possible given the constraints of space, budget and resources.

One thing I have always held is that reviewing is different from criticism. Proper criticism is an art. It requires, apart from the ability to talk about books as ‘texts’ and narrative tropes without blushing, a wide range of reading, detailed knowledge of the subject and a good grounding in literary and critical theory. It is a high-wire act that requires skill and (when it is particularly successful) some daring. At its best it can be invigorating and exciting. In less skilled hands, an equally spectacular disaster.

Reviewing, on the other hand, is something any reasonably perceptive, well-read and articulate reader should be able to have a go at. (Go on. You know you want to). Reviewing is, at heart, a consumer guide. It treads a fine line between opinion and promotion. Publishers send us review copies of their books in the hope that we will say positive things about them and encourage people to buy more copies.

To my mind the only constraint on a reviewer is that they should be honest in their own opinions of the work being reviewed. We have never followed Thumper’s mother’s dictum (“if you can’t say nuthin’ nice, then don’t say nuthin’”) as a policy for printing only positive reviews, and I have never encountered any hint from any source that we could or should do so.

Given those 1200 books mentioned above, not even the most obsessive sf fan could be expected to read them all (though some of us will have a damn good try). A review is as much about what type of thing a particular book is, allowing you to filter for your particular tastes, as how well done it is of its kind in the eyes of the reviewer. That last is important. A review should be approached from a position of caveat reader or ‘know your reviewer’. Which is one reason we include an annual reviewers’ poll – see later in this issue – partly as a round-up of the year, partly as a list of recommendations, but also so you can gain an idea of each reviewer’s tastes and preferences and how they coincide with your own.

Before I hand over to Paul, I’d just like to say thank you to all the reviewers, editors and BSFA people I’ve traded books and words with and who have helped make the last four years an interesting and enjoyable gig. I’m now off to marvel at all the empty carpet space in the spare room. Take care.

Astonishingly, Andrew M. Butler had remained one of the key editors of Vector right through to the end of 2005 (an amazing 10 years at the helm), before finally retiring with the publication of Vector #244...

The View from Retirement by Andrew M. Butler [Editorial from Vector #244, Nov/Dec 2005]

No one would have believed, in the last years of the twentieth century, that BSFA affairs were being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man’s and yet as mortal as his own; that as editors busied themselves about their magazines they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as an author with a new book might scrutinize *Ansible*. With infinite complacency subscribers went to and fro this globe about their little reading, serene in their assurance of their subscriptions. Yet across the gulf of space minds that are to ours as ours are to the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded these magazines with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans to edit them.

Unfortunately someone else got there first.

Reynolds also teases us with references to tales which are very likely yet to come: a brief re-emergence of *Revelation Space*’s transformed protagonist Dan Sylveste, messages received from a lost future, dark and mysterious technologies never fully explained.

A prior read of the short stories ‘Great Wall Of Mars’ and ‘Glacial’ would give the reader a better feel for Nevil Clavain’s character in particular, though they are certainly not required reading. As for Reynolds’s novels, he has occasionally been singled out for providing too much background so that things sometimes run a little slower than they might, but this is a well-realised and detailed universe and worth spending time in. Until his next novel *Absolution Gap* appears in October, *Redemption Ark* provides enough action, conceptual depth and good storytelling to please anyone. This is definitive space opera.

In the early summer of 1995 Maureen Kincaid Speller, then chair of the BSFA, was looking for a team to edit *Vector*, as Catie Cary was to retire. Paul Kincaid and Stephen Payne were already the reviews editors, and Tony Cullen was keen to hammer the magazine into some kind of layout. Both Gary Dalkin and myself were approached to look after features, despite the fact that neither of us had any experience other than writing the odd review for *Vector* or *Foundation*. And both of us accepted, leading to a sticky moment when both of us assumed that we would be the editor with the other as lackey. (Or perhaps I assumed authority which Gary rightly laughed in the face of). Maureen would review magazines, and came in for a couple of issues as a figurehead to keep us on track.

I hadn't met Gary at that point – indeed it would be a few years until we did finally meet – and so all editing would be done on the phone or through the post. Yes, my children, in those days we did have email but it was a limited service, and Gary as I recall wasn't online until a year or so later, moving through a bewildering array of email addresses – I kept more or less the same one, but half the time it wouldn't work as my employers kept assuming I didn't exist. This inevitably happened just before a deadline. We would have lengthy phone calls, usually lasting two hours, in which we would discuss the minutiae of editing *Vector*, only after we'd talked about what movies we'd seen.

In those days I was still living in Hull, renting a room from friends, and was gearing up to submit my PhD. I was scraping together a living from various part time jobs teaching and doing web thingies, and trying not to dream of murdering one of my bosses with a baseball bat. Remarkably, life wasn't as tight as it might have been, the Hull SF Group were around me to call upon for help, and Chris Terran was an hour away in Leeds editing *Matrix* into the small wee hours. It all seemed possible, for two young turks. Well, young-ish.

I don't recall any grand plans, but we certainly wanted to pay more attention to non-written science fiction than had been the case in the past. We also wanted to celebrate British fiction – not in any strictly patriotic sense, but because British writers seemed more likely to produce the sort of singletons or loose series that we preferred to the franchises and wookie books that were dominating US outputs. We did, however, begin to notice and push what was later christened the British Boom. I, at least, had a platonic ideal of an issue of *Vector*: an interview with an author paired with an article on or by that author (ideally both, and a bibliography), an in-depth article, an entry-level piece, and something on film, comics or television. We looked toward the *New York Review of Science Fiction* for one way of how to do it, but also allowing ourselves the publishing of the occasional article which would not look entirely out of place in *Foundation*. We wanted to take sf seriously.

In the run-up to the 1995 Worldcon we put together some ideas for an issue, and asked Paul to have his interview with Samuel Delany recorded so that it could appear a couple of issues down the line. What we didn't anticipate, of course, is that John Brunner would die at the convention, and that our first job would be to try and compile a series of appropriate tributes when at that point our address books were more or less blank. We found the material, somehow, and didn't have to write as much of it ourselves as we'd feared for a couple of days. A rather spiffing layout came back from Tony, we haggled over typos, and issue 185 went off, whilst we wrestled a special issue on Delany into shape – and this time most of the issue was written by Gary, Paul – the interview – and myself.

Then silence fell. As Christmas 1995 approached, and we considered our third issue, we realised that neither of the ones we had done had appeared, and, well, we'd no idea if we were doing the right thing. All of us do this in our spare time, none of us are paid, and every so often there is a logjam that nobody quite notices. The BSFA held a Council of War, and we hammered out where we were to go in the next five years. Gary and I began to get into a rhythm, not quite alternating duties, but his times of distraction were balanced by his compensating for me when I was busy. We colonised more of the magazine, so that the editorial, letters and features went up to the central staples rather than just covering a third of the pages. This also meant

we could shift from articles which were two thousand words to an average of four thousand words. We could devote six thousand words to interviews with established authors, and two thousand or more to newcomers. The zenith of this was Steve Baxter's article on the Warhammer series, which was originally budgeted at about ten thousand words and as I recall came in at about fifteen. It was worth clearing the decks for. Meanwhile I'd first moved into my own flat, then out of Hull back to Nottingham thanks to a nightmare experience with a sixteen-year-old stripper – a story for another place, buy me a pint – and spent a few years commuting between part-time jobs. It was tough, but somehow *Vector* kept going, and we passed the milestone of issue 200 by going into glossy covers – an innovation we've maintained with one exception, a Chris Priest special where the combination of paper and the cover's print quality suggested a modern re-run of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. (This was the second of several unintended upsets of Christopher Priest. The first had been the appearance of a review article under the suspicious name of Seri Fulton.) At some point Gary decided that he need[ed] to focus on earning a living, and I decided it was easier for me to go solo on the features as to work out a relationship with a new co-editor.

I knew I wouldn't do it forever, although I quite liked the idea of being in the post continuously for longer than anyone else – although this was made more complex by the fact that I was a mere features editor whereas features had usually been the province of the overall editor. Life has filled up over the decade with full-time jobs and almost a dozen books being produced in addition to writing too much of my own copy. I decided it would be good to retire rather than be fired or leave no replacement in place, so I started scribbling around with schedules to find a suitable point of departure. My fiftieth issue seemed like a good moment, but I still had enough enthusiasm that it felt too soon. Issue 250 would be a big splash, but that felt too far away and I'd already done *V200*. I realised, however, that despite the shaky start we'd done six issues a year, and autumn 2005 would mark my tenth anniversary. I remember Michael Moorcock – a predecessor in this post for a couple of issues – saying that no editor should stay in an editorial post for longer than a decade and whilst clearly I'm not in the same league – being more Northern Conference than Premiership – that seemed good enough for me. I handed in my notice and started the countdown. Tony, of course, will beat my record with the next issue. So it goes.

I'm not sure how I feel about how easy it was to find two ~~suckers~~ editors, nor that these turks are younger than we were when we started, and of course turks is probably not the term used by the kids on the street any more. In a couple of years they've already become bigger names in fandom than I've reached in a decade, and these are more than capable hands to leave features in. Welcome and good luck to Geneva Melzack and Niall Harrison. I hope they'll invite me back to contribute the odd article, the embarrassing old fart who hasn't quite grasped that things have moved on and he doesn't have his own office any more, and who hasn't yet gotten around to his long cherished dream to keep bees on the Sussex Downs. I will be seeing you around, and I'll likely be editing something else, in another place. I'm also playing my part in Serendip, the organisation set up to support the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

It only remains for me to thank all the people who have contributed material over the years, and to shrug my shoulders at those who have got away – I won't name names but you know who you are – and apologise for those interviews which never happened or were lost in transit. Because I won't mention them later in this paragraph, a special thanks to Steve Baxter, Kev McVeigh, Andy Sawyer and Steve Sneyd for their generosity and enthusiasm in offering articles over the years, and to Colin Greenland who helped draw me into the loop by commissioning reviews for *Foundation*. My co-editors on *Vector* have been almost entirely painless to and infinitely patient with me – a shout out to Paul N. Billinger, Tanya Brown, Tony Cullen, Gary S. Dalkin, Steve Jeffery, Paul Kincaid, Stephen Payne and Maureen Kincaid Speller, and everyone who has been part of the BSFA Committee. More people than I can do justice to have offered floors or shoulders at difficult times, a partial list would include Elizabeth (and obviously Paul) Billinger, Mark Bould, Robert Edgar, Carol Ann Kerry Green,

Edward James, Steve Kerry, Michelle Le Blanc, Andrew Macrae, Farah Mendlesohn, Colin Odell, Dave Roberts, Estelle Roberts and Chris Terran, many of whom have also suffered at the nib of my blue pencil.

Lest this start to look like the dead of two world wars, I will stop, and apologise to anyone inadvertently omitted. There are also people outside of science fiction, with no interest in the subject, whose names would mean nothing to this audience, but who nevertheless have been there for me. They would almost certainly not see this editorial, but I hope that if they did they would instantly know who they are, and that they get even a fraction of the comradeship from me that I've received from them; love, peace, light and hugs to all of them.

Two remaining people contributed to this whole enterprise in differing ways, and it would have been impossible without them. Sadly, neither are with us any more. KVB showed the way to be enthusiastic, open and eclectic about the field and was generous in his material. I don't recall JDR ever actually sending us an article, but there were letters – long letters – phone calls, and latterly emails, but he pushed me to be always rigorous and to treat science fiction and fantasy as seriously as I would literature. Their presence and wisdom is missed.

Thank you all, it's been.

Andrew M. Butler – Canterbury [via Hull, Nottingham and High Wycombe
and points in between, Autumn 1995/Autumn 2005]

Niall Harrison was one of those editors that took over from Vector #245, with the help of Geneva Melzack, and that issue had a hotchpotch of new manifestos and aims/ideas, and also saw the introduction of "Torque Control" as the title of the Editorial: one that remains in place to this day...

Frequently Asked Questions About Mundane SF by Trent Walters [extract from Vector #245, Jan/Feb 2006]

What is Mundane SF?

We're a group of writers who think sf is presently too much like fantasy, who'd like to create fiction about the future without psychic powers, FTL, messianic aliens, unlimited energy/resources, and so forth. For more detail, see Geoff Ryman's serious if tongue-in-cheek manifesto elsewhere in this issue. Essentially we ask, "Does this speculation have either evidence to support it or similar precursors observed in the universe?" This excludes, for example, all-purpose magical nanobots but allows some practical and projected uses of the technology.

The term 'Mundane' refers to our reality, to the real, and to "of or pertaining to this... Earth." It is, of course, not without irony, tongue firmly placed in cheek, for we hope that our work will prove that real science can be every bit as wondrous as the less probable. Or to put it another way: Must we only lie to the genre to excite it?

(Some members of our group insist on calling Mundane SF 'Real SF,' as in, "We're using real science to examine the future"; or 'No Exit,' as in, "Science may force us to examine real futures on Earth and perhaps the local solar system if humans are able to incorporate themselves into the ecology of Earth first." But they all amount to the same thing.

The Mundane Manifesto (by Geoff Ryman) ***[extract from Vector #245, Jan/Feb 2006]***

The undersigned, being pissed off and needing a tight girdle of discipline to restrain our sf imaginative silhouettes, are temporarily united in the following actions:

The Mundanes recognize...

That interstellar travel remains unlikely. Warp drives, worm holes, and other forms of faster-than-light magic are wish fulfilment fantasies rather than serious speculation about a possible future.

That magic interstellar travel can lead to an illusion of a universe abundant with worlds as hospitable to life as this Earth. This is also unlikely.

That this dream of abundance can encourage a wasteful attitude to the abundance that is here on Earth.

That there is no evidence whatsoever of intelligences elsewhere in the universe. That absence of evidence is not evidence of absence – however, it is unlikely that alien intelligences will overcome the physical constraints on interstellar travel any better than we can.

That interstellar trade (and colonization, war, federations, etc.) is therefore highly unlikely.

That communication with alien intelligences over such vast distances will be vexed by: the enormous time lag in exchange of messages and the likelihood of enormous and probably currently unimaginable differences between us and aliens.

That there is no evidence whatsoever that quantum uncertainty has any effect at the macro level and that therefore it is highly unlikely that there are whole alternative universes to be visited.

That therefore our most likely future is on this planet and within this solar system. It is highly unlikely that intelligent life survives elsewhere in this solar system. Any contact with aliens is likely to be tenuous, and unprofitable.

That the most likely future is one in which we only have ourselves and this planet.

The Mundanes rejoice in...

The bonfire of unexamined and unjustified sf tropes that these recognitions piles up and sets alight. This bonfire of the stupidities includes, but not exclusively:

- Aliens: especially those aliens who act like feudal Japanese/American Indians/Tibetan Buddhists/Nazis or who look or behave like human beings except for the latex
- Alien invasions
- Alien Jesus/enlightened beings
- Flying Saucers
- Area 51
- Any alien who is a vehicle for a human failing or humour
- Aliens who speak English
- Devices that can translate any language

Nova Swing by M John Harrison

Reviewed by
Gary Dalkin

[Vector #253,
July-Aug 2007]

Nova Swing is described as a sequel to Harrison's *Light* (2003). It is so in the sense that it is set in the same future, a generation later with different characters. There is no direct continuation of the story from *Light* and the book can be read independently. Where *Light* involved heavy-weight quantum physics, space battles, a serial killer and a storyline set in the present to balance the future space opera, *Nova Swing* is a smaller scale work set entirely in one city on an alien planet in the year 2444AD.

As M. John Harrison's *The Centauri Device* parodied space opera, so *Nova Swing* parodies the hard-boiled detective novel.

- Radio communication between star systems
- Travelling between galaxies without relativity effects on a consistent scale
- Slipping sideways into worlds other than this one where just one thing or all of history is different only the clothes look a bit better, the hero is more powerful, the drinks are more delicious and Hitler...
- Continue at will

We also recognize...

The harmless fun that these and all the other Stupidities have brought to millions of people.

The harmless fun that burning the Stupidities will bring to millions of people.

The imaginative challenge that awaits any sf author who accepts that this is it: Earth is all we have. What will we do with it?

The chastening but hopefully enlivening effect on imagining a world without fantasy bolt holes: no portals to medieval kingdoms, no spaceships to arrive to save us or whisk us off to Metaluna.

A new focus on human beings: their science, technology, culture, politics, religions, individual characters, needs, dreams, hopes and failings.

The awakening bedazzlement and wonder that awaits us as we contemplate the beauties of this Earth and its people and what will happen to them in time.

The relief of focusing on what science tells us is likely rather than what is almost impossible such as warp drives. The relief will come from a sense of being honest.

An awakening sense of the awesome power of human beings: to protect or even increase their local patrimony ... or destroy it.

The number of themes and flavours open to Mundane fiction including robotics, virtual realities, enhanced genomes, nanotechnology, quantum mechanics ... Please continue.

The number of great writers or movies which independently work within these guidelines, indicating that the Mundane Manifesto produces better science fiction. These works include:

- The greater part of the works of Philip K Dick
- *1984*
- *Neuromancer*
- *Blade Runner*
- *Timescape*

The Mundanes promise...

To produce a collection of mundance science fiction consisting of stories that follow these rules:

- No interstellar travel – travel is limited to within the solar system and is difficult, time consuming and expensive
- No aliens unless the connection is distant, difficult, tenuous and expensive – and they have no interstellar travel either

- No Martians, Venusians, etc.
- No alternative universes or parallel worlds
- No magic or supernatural elements
- No time travel or teleportation
- Not to let Mundanity cramp their style if they want to write like Edgar Rice Burroughs as well
- To burn this manifesto as soon as it gets boring

Further reading:

<http://www.mundanesf.com/>

<http://mundane-sf.blogspot.com/>

Mundane SF aside, the 20th birthday of the Arthur C. Clarke Award loomed, and Award Administrator Paul Kincaid had this to say in Vector #248...

Twenty Years After by Paul Kincaid [Vector #248, July/Aug 2006]

We didn't know what we were doing.

Or, to be fair, we knew what we wanted to do. We just weren't too clear about how to go about achieving it.

The goal was to promote British science fiction. That was the aim laid down by Arthur C. Clarke when Maurice Goldsmith approached him for funds. What that might entail was less clear. A new magazine? But there was already *Interzone*. So, an award? But there was already the BSFA Award. Would a juried award be different enough? But if we are promoting British science fiction, should this be an award for British sf only? At the time that was unrealistic. Besides, how do you promote British science fiction by fencing it off from the whole of the rest of the world?

So we ended up with a cash prize (to make sure it was worth winning) for the best science fiction novel receiving its first British publication during the calendar year. We were very careful not to define 'best' or 'science fiction' or 'novel', which has led to a number of fairly intense jury discussions in the years since then, though I think it has also led to the variety and the vitality of the award. (More recently, in these days of print-on-demand, internet publication and e-books, 'first British publication' has also become a problematic term in ways we certainly didn't anticipate back in the mid-1980s – but that is an issue for the future).

If the Arthur C. Clarke Award began in uncertainty, hesitation and ill-definition, however, what it has achieved in the twenty years of its life is clear and beyond question.

For a start, the award has indeed managed to promote British science fiction. I first became aware of this not long after I took over as administrator, when I started getting contacts from a number of agents who specialise in selling books into overseas markets. It seems that winning the Clarke Award was already invaluable when it came to selling translation rights. Then came the so-called 'British renaissance', and suddenly the whole world was taking notice of British science fiction. There were far too many causes for this upswelling of quality, involvement and excitement to enumerate here, but the Clarke Award was undoubtedly one of them. Whatever the cause, the end result has been that this year we could have had two totally different high-quality shortlists made up entirely of British authors.

There is in this sometimes sordid, sometimes tender story a sense of bleak ennui, a middle-aged or elderly regret, of the passing of possibilities with the passage of time. This can be depressing, or a salutary wake-up call to the fact that life is not a rehearsal.

Nova Swing is a slowly paced, deliberate novel. Though it is well written it is not overtly literary. It is in places absurd, deliberately, knowingly, ironically so. It is a book which gradually gets under the skin, worms its way into the imagination and has a cumulative impact, such that I found myself thinking about it for days. It is not a likeable book, but it is an intriguing one which reserves surprises right to the final page.

Nova Swing is a true space oddity.

That, however, is to take a rather parochial view of things. The Arthur C. Clarke Award is now recognized as one of the most prestigious awards in the world of science fiction. The first time I ever saw a bookshop display of the Clarke Award shortlist was at a university bookstore in Seattle. The American Library Association recently compiled a list of recommended science fiction by the simple expedient of bringing together the winners of the major sf awards, Hugo, Nebula, Tiptree, etc. The only award on the list that is not based in America is the Clarke Award.

Above all, the Clarke Award has compiled a list of winners that stand out as among the most significant works of science fiction of the last 20 years. Add in the shortlists, and anyone who read all 127 titles would have received a superb introduction to the key developments in science fiction during that time.

As I write this, there is a little over a month to go before the 20th winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award is to be decided and announced. Whichever of the six shortlisted authors carries away the engraved bookend and the cheque for £2,006, they will be joining an exclusive and very prestigious club. Membership of that club has not always come without controversy, the choice of the jury has been met with dismay and on at least one occasion with cat-calls from sf circles in this country. It's easy to understand: the heated jury debates and even the make-up of the juries (which have nearly always included at least one person from outside the usual science fiction world) have encouraged bold and distinctive choices. Clarke Award juries have never settled for a safe, traditional, comfortable view of what science fiction is, or could be. They have always pushed at the envelope, which has meant that popular favourites have often lost out to work that is more challenging, more unconventional, or simply different. But looking back with the benefits of 20-20 hindsight, it is amazing how significant those unconventional, unexpected winners have been in shaping our ever-changing views of what science fiction can do.

The very first book to win the Clarke Award, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, set the tone for what was to come, though not in ways that critics have assumed. Those who have simply remarked upon the 'controversial' decision have presented it as the Clarke jury turning its back upon traditional science fiction, a stance that they see replicated throughout the Award's history in the crowning of Marge Piercy and Amitav Ghosh, or more recently in the shortlisting of works by David Mitchell and, this year, Kazuo Ishiguro. That couldn't be further from what actually goes on in jury meetings. The judges have always been eager to applaud good, traditional science fiction, and you can see that reflected in every shortlist. But time and again, as the arguments turn about the fine distinctions which separate the books, the question is raised: is doing well what science fiction has always done enough to carry off the prize? Once or twice the answer might well be yes, but more often it is no, more often some extra ambition or daring in the work, something novel or unexpected, will make the difference when it comes to the final vote.

After twenty years my memories of that first judging meeting are somewhat hazy. I would, however, be surprised if, at some point during the day, we did not discuss how the shortlisted titles might be presented to a non-sf reading audience. That would be a dreadful reason to award a prize, but an awful lot of ideas and comments go into the melting pot that is the jury system. And looking at the books from outside the genre can be a useful way of deciding what the book is doing with genre, how it is using the devices of science fiction. I've deliberately used such strategies in the judging meetings I've chaired since then, not because I think the winner should serve as an ambassador for the genre to those who know little and care less about science fiction (if that happens, it's a bonus not an intent of the award), but because it highlights whether faster than light travel appears in the book simply for the sort of gosh-wow effect we expect of science fiction, or for some other and perhaps more interesting reason.

In the end, then, that first jury awarded the prize to Margaret Atwood not because we were trying to ingratiate ourselves with the mainstream, but because we felt that the mainstream sensibilities informing the book brought something new to science fiction. Since then, of course, Atwood has used sf devices in several of her novels and stories and, fatuous remarks about 'squids in space' aside, has often written in an informed and intelligent way about science fiction. And *The Handmaid's Tale* has gone on to be acclaimed as one of the finest science fiction novels to come out of Canada, has become the subject of endless critical studies, and has become so significant a part of the history of science fiction that it's difficult to see what all the fuss was about twenty years ago.

For the last several months I've been busy editing an anthology of critical essays on the first 18 Clarke Award winners. It is an experience that has forced me to look again at each of these books. Some seem destined to remain high profile, books such as Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow* or China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* which still keep being mentioned in serious essays and passing conversation. Others seem to have slipped from our consciousness (I strongly suspect that Elizabeth Billinger's essay in the anthology is the first critical attention Rachel Pollack's *Unquenchable Fire* has received since it was published). But all excite an interesting response, and all are very different from each other. When you actually look at the books which have won the prize you realise that it is impossible to identify a typical Clarke Award winner.

It used to be said that the award went to science fiction books with mainstream pretensions, a statement that doesn't hold up even when you look at those books to which it was especially applied, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, say, or *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh. But it is even less true of such exuberant and overtly science fictional works as Colin Greenland's *Take Back Plenty* (a novel which dug back into science fiction's hoariest past in order to reinvent the genre – I am on record as saying that I believe the so-called British renaissance began with this book) or Jeff Noon's *Vurt* (which finds an unlikely home for the tropes of cybepunk in the grittiest streets of Manchester).

Even when books have taken similar topics or ideas there is no uniformity in the result. Can you imagine two more different ways of examining the impact of the past than Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver* or Christopher Priest's *The Separation*? (I recall one judge remarking of *The Separation* that where a good book can be read differently every time you approach it, with *The Separation* every time you approach it you approach a different book. True, I think, but true of many of the winners, it is one of the qualities that make them stand out to the jury). And the political novel finds radically different expression in, say, *Bold As Love* by Gwyneth Jones and *Iron Council* by China Miéville.

This difference is something that the judges have to confront every year. How do you compare books that are as contrasting as those on any of the Clarke Award shortlists? Even more difficult, how do you then decide that one is best, whatever we might mean by 'best'? Certain things are a given, of course; you look for writerly skills, interesting prose, vivid characterisation and so forth; and you look for fluency in handling the devices of science fiction. But by the time a book has made the shortlist, we can pretty much take those for granted. What then makes the difference, as often as not, is 'difference'. Something bold and new in the novel, a sense that the writer is stretching after something fresh, interesting, exciting. That, of course, is exactly how we would describe those key works which shape the course of a literature, which stand out as the books anyone should read for a basic understanding of what a literature is about and how it has changed over time. In other words, though it is a concept I dislike: the canon.

It's not so easy to spot, year in, year out. Though I would hesitate to suggest that any jury got it wrong, I suspect that several could have made other choices and got it just as right. But on the whole, and in retrospect, the list of Clarke winners provides a pretty canonical

The Name of the Wind by Patrick Rothfuss

**Reviewed by
Estelle Roberts**

**[Vector #253,
July-Aug 2007]**

This is a highly entertaining novel written in a very readable style. It does, however, feel as though Rothfuss has used a high fantasy checklist to make sure that all the necessary elements are present and correct: evil arachnid creatures (tick), huge, extremely destructive beasts (tick), a young hero struggling against the odds (tick), an older mentor with magical powers (tick) and a beautiful, independent and talented heroine (tick), as well as another young woman, who is in love with the main character without him actually noticing it (tick).

The story ends on a very interesting twist, with one of the characters beginning to show his true colours, something that will, no doubt, be developed later in the series.

I am certainly keen to continue reading this series, and to see these ends tied up.

list of the key works of science fiction over the past twenty years.

But that raises one final question: of these twenty books which one stands out as the Clarke of Clarkes? We have a shortlist of twenty titles. You are the jury. Which are you going to pick as the most significant work of science fiction in the last twenty years?

The winners of the Arthur C. Clarke Award:

1987: *The Handmaid's Tale* – Margaret Atwood

1988: *The Sea And Summer* – George Turner

1989: *Unquenchable Fire* – Rachel Pollack

1990: *The Child Garden* – Geoff Ryman

1991: *Take Back Plenty* – Colin Greenland

1992: *Synners* – Pat Cadigan

1993: *Body of Glass* – Marge Piercy

1994: *Vurt* – Jeff Noon

1995: *Fools* – Pat Cadigan

1996: *Fairyland* – Paul J. McAuley

1997: *The Calcutta Chromosome* – Amitav Ghosh

1998: *The Sparrow* – Mary Doria Russell

1999: *Dreaming in Smoke* – Tricia Sullivan

2000: *Distraction* – Bruce Sterling

2001: *Perdido Street Station* – China Miéville

2002: *Bold as Love* – Gwyneth Jones

2003: *The Separation* – Christopher Priest

2004: *Quicksilver* – Neal Stephenson

2005: *Iron Council* – China Miéville

2006: *Air* – Geoff Ryman

Paul Kincaid administered the Arthur C. Clarke award for 11 years. He is also an esteemed reviewer and critic, and has just been awarded the 2006 Thomas D. Clareson Award, for "outstanding service activities – promotion of SF teaching and study, reviewing, editorial writing, publishing, organizing meetings, mentoring [and] leadership in SF/fantasy organizations." He also edited The Arthur C. Clarke Award: A Critical Companion, Neil Gaiman's preface to which appears elsewhere in this issue.

Issue #250 saw a suitably bold celebration of all things Vector, but Graham Sleight's regular 'The New X' continued to try and look at the now rather than looking back at the past...

The New X Column by Graham Sleight [Vector #250, Nov/Dec 2006]

It's now a year since I started writing columns for Vector, and looking back I realise the subjects I've picked have dotted around a bit. So, in the retrospective spirit of anniversaries, let me try to step back and put forward a bigger picture of where I'd suggest the speculative fiction field is right now.

First, in North America – its homeland as a self-conscious genre – science fiction is in relative but not absolute decline. Looking at *Locus's* figures for original books published in

the US, about 250 original sf novels have been published per year since 1990. Fantasy, by contrast, was at about 250 a year in 1990, and is now closer to 400. This is reflected in, for instance, the Hugo results: before Robert Charles Wilson's superb *Spin* won the Hugo this year, the last time a widely-acclaimed science fiction novel won that award was Vernor Vinge's *A Deepness in the Sky* in 2000. Other wins have either been fantasy novels (Harry Potter, Strange & Norrell) or best explained by the circumstances of a particular Worldcon.

Second, the short-fiction magazines which have historically been the field's proving-ground for writers and ideas are in a sharp circulation decline with no obvious signs that this can be arrested. The *Locus* figures are sobering: the paid circulations of *Analog*, *Asimov's*, and *F&SF* are currently around 31,000, 21,000 and 19,000 respectively (*Asimov's* lost 23% in 2005). In 1990, the same figures were 80,000, 80,000, and 50,000, and most of these magazines had higher peaks than that in recent memory: *Analog* spent several years above 100,000 in the 80s. That's not to mention the deaths of any number of venues for short sf – *Omni*, *Aboriginal SF*, *Amazing* (repeatedly), and most recently, Ellen Datlow's *Scifiction*. Even people who are bullish about the continued health of sf have taken to proclaiming at every opportunity, as Gardner Dozois does in the most recent instalment of his *Year's Best*, "I'm urging everybody who reads these words, if you like there being a lot of short sf and fantasy out there where it can be easily found, to take the time to *subscribe* to one of the genre magazines... Subscribe *now*, if you want to help ensure the survival of print sf/fantasy magazines as we know them." Moreover, since the last edition of Patrick Nielsen Hayden's *Starlight* in 2001, there has been no non-themed anthology series from a US trade publisher – a far cry from the 70s days of *New Dimensions*, *Orbit* and *Universe*.

Third, some of this slack has been picked up by the burgeoning small-press scene in the US. I've gone on in the past about how the barriers to entry for those wanting to publish their own books and magazines have dropped, I think this is one of the reasons for what I identified in *Vector #248* as an excessive number of tools in the field for working out its meta-story: year's bests, recommended reading lists, awards, endless blog chatter. Perhaps we need some of this (though not, please, all of it) to make sense of a field which is too diffuse and diverse for any one person to grasp.

Fourth, the small-press scene (and therefore the interests of the young writers coming into the field) is skewed heavily away from what would be considered traditional genre stories. *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, the obvious leader of such magazines, publishes almost nothing that would conventionally be recognized as sf and fantasy. The most interesting young American writers, like Kelly Link or M. Rickert, take the tropes of the fantastic for granted, as tokens that neither need to be explained or dwelt on. So we have an increasing body of work which derives its force from its liminality, from the knowledge that, this late in the day, readers knowledgeable in genre protocols respond to stories that play with those protocols.

Fifth, almost none of this applies to the UK. Since, say, 1987 the archetypal UK novel of the fantastic has been the big, slightly-ironic-but-nonetheless-joyful widescreen space opera. (Paul Kincaid suggested a few years ago that US and UK sf have swapped attitudes since the 70s, when we were reading gloomy post-*New Worlds* stories of constraint and limitation, and Americans were having fun with their tropes. It's a little too neat to be true – there's plenty of exuberant US sf, certainly' at novel length. But I find it unarguable that most of the genre-mixing work is happening in North America; next time, I'll talk about some of the reasons why it's registered so little over here).

Sixth, the big success story of the last decade has been Young Adult fiction. I'm not just talking about *Harry Potter* and Philip Pullman, or even notionally non-fantastic work like Anthony Horowitz's *Alex Rider* books. The establishment of specifically YA imprints like Firebird or Tor Teen represents a series of votes of confidence in this market, that it's going to remain at its current levels of success – as do the increasing numbers of YA books by "adult" writers.

Twilight and New Moon by Stephanie Meyer

Reviewed by Penny Hill

[*Vector* #254, Nov/Dec 2007]

What happens when a Mormon writes a teen high-school romance vampire novel? If you've ever lain awake at night asking this question, then wonder no more. As with a hippo dancing Swan Lake, it's not how graceful or otherwise the hippo is that matters – it's the fact that it's dancing at all. The same is true of *Twilight* and the sequel *New Moon*. I've read them so you don't have to (unless you're looking for unintentional humour).

Even bad examples in the genre are better than this – This is like a pale imitation of Buffy and Angel's relationship with the teeth drawn.

If *Twilight* is an 'international bestseller' then who is buying it? With the lack of romance or plot complications and the ostensible threat watered-down, this becomes a young adult novel that would only appeal to adults looking for something safe to buy for their children.

**Moxyland by
Lauren Beukes**

**Reviewed by
Niall Harrison**

**[Vector #263,
Summer 2010]**

"Full of spiky originality," declares Charles Stross, on the cover of *Moxyland*. "A new kind of sf munching its way out of the intestines of the wasp-paralysed caterpillar of cyberpunk." We've heard this too often, haven't we? And it's not true of Lauren Beukes' first novel. To the contrary, it's a book that would be all too easy to reduce to a string of buzzwords: Individuality, conformity, conspiracy. Wired, urban, dense. Terrorism, gaming, marketing. Cadigan, Sterling, Stross.

The word missing from this list is knowing. The cast of *Moxyland* know their world is artifice; they know that everything, every interaction and object, is probably designed to sell. That's the air they breathe.

The novel's conclusion is never really in doubt; *Moxyland* wears its cynicism on its sleeve. But it's a sharp, sly ride, not new but proficiently done. You've heard this too often, as well, but indulge me: Beukes is one to watch.

Lastly, science fiction and fantasy remain profoundly conservative genres, at least in terms of literary technique and approach. The stylistic experiments of the Moorcock/Ellison new waves of the 60s have been largely rolled back. The default style of an sf novel these days may be cyberpunkishly dense, but it tends to tell a story in a straightforward, beginning-to-end way. {Although this isn't true of some of the genre-mixing US writers I've referred to above: people like Alan DeNiro or Theodora Goss are strongly interested in playing with the formal structures of their stories}. Similarly, the mainstream's preoccupation with beautifully-turned phrases has, by and large, failed to infect the fantastic. Creators of graceful sentences like Lucius Shepard or John Crowley remain the exception in sf rather than the rule.

Some of this undoubtedly falls into the category of stating-the-bloody-obvious, and I'm sure I've omitted as many trends as I've included. But I think it sets out a few bases for a discussion of where the field might head in the future- which I hope to get to in the next couple of columns.

Vector #255 saw a major change in the way the BSFA delivered information to members, with its companion publication, Matrix, switching to online only under the editorship of Ian Whates... 'Torque Control' has remained

Torque Control by Niall Harrison [Editorial extract from Vector #255, Nov/Dec 2007]

...The main reason is simply that online publication will help *Matrix* to remain timely and relevant. As you've no doubt all noticed, we've had some problems with the distribution of mailings over the last eighteen months or so – the last mailing, for instance, was delivered to the printers in November, but did not appear on doorsteps until mid-January. Because *Matrix* focuses on news, film, and TV, much of the content in that issue was out of date by the time it was published. For similar reasons, we're also switching the mailings to a quarterly, rather than bimonthly schedule – although *Vector* will be getting bigger to compensate.

The committee didn't make these decisions lightly, but at the end of the day the reason there is a committee is to take decisions like this. To respond to the most common objection to the *Matrix* move, we do realise that even in the 21st century, even among science fiction fans, internet use is not all-pervasive, and that some people will now not see *Matrix*; but we also have to recognise that there are a lot of new members who expect an organisation like the BSFA to be able to provide information and features online. Until now we haven't been doing enough to engage these members.

In addition to the launch of the forum, it's good to be able to announce that *Vector* is getting bigger – growing from 36 pages to 48, which means that even with the quarterly schedule the decrease in content overall is minimal (192 pages a year, rather than 216). Some of this space will be taken up by regular *Matrix* features which aren't as time-sensitive as reviews – notably Andy Sawyer's "Foundation Favourites" column and Stephen Baxter's "Resonances" column. Saxon Bullock's new TV column "Transmission, Interrupted" will also become a regular feature, taking a more in-depth look at its subject than reviews usually have either time or space for. The revitalised *Focus*, of course, continues on its usual bi-annual print schedule.

And we're looking into additional publications. The BSFA, after all, doesn't exist to publish magazines – it exists to support a variety of activities to promote and discuss science fiction and fantasy. The magazines are a crucial part of that, but so are the Orbiter writing groups, so are the awards, so are discounts on sf books such as those announced in the last *Matrix*, and so is the website. This year, look out for additional activities to mark the BSFA's 50th anniversary – in particular, an anthology of original fiction, to be launched at Eastercon,

including stories by Brian Aldiss, M. John Harrison, Stephen Baxter, Liz Williams, Tricia Sullivan, Alastair Reynolds, Adam Roberts, and half a dozen more.

Vector #256 was released in the Summer of 2008, and was dedicated to the memory of Sir Arthur C. Clarke, who remained listed as the reigning President of the BSFA for that issue. We have a celebration of Sir Arthur C. Clarke's long-term association with the BSFA elsewhere in this publication, but the retirement of the Space Shuttle just a few years later is also worthy of celebration, and arguably distantly related, too...

Falling From Orbit by Stephen Baxter [Resonances column from Vector #264, Autumn 2010]

Twenty-nine years after its first flight to orbit the space shuttle is being retired. At time of writing the final mission, by Discovery, is scheduled for September 2010 – after which the three surviving orbiters will be destined for the museums.

After the expensive heroics of the Apollo Moon-landing era the shuttle was supposed to be a space truck, its goal to make access to space safe and routine. It never worked out that way. Many missions were flown and the International Space Station got built, but the shuttle, probably always too ambitious technologically, never achieved its strategic objective of drastically reducing the costs of manned spaceflight. And some would argue that the flaws that doomed two shuttles (Challenger in 1986 and Columbia in 2003) were inherent in the compromises involved in its design at the inception of the programme forty years ago.

In February 1969, even before the first moon landing, Apollo was doomed to be scrapped. President Nixon appointed a Space Task Group, chaired by Vice President Spiro Agnew, to develop goals for the post-Apollo period. The programme envisaged was visionary, to lead to a 1980s Mars mission. The shuttle would be a reusable spaceplane, to replace the one-shot Apollo-Saturns which were seen as too expensive.

But in January 1970, a Harris poll reported that 56% of Americans believed the Moon programme was too costly. Nixon could not make an expansive space programme a priority. Eventually Nixon chose to approve only the shuttle, with the key objective of bringing down the costs of space transportation. In Agnew's plan the shuttle had been meant to be a ferry to support the orbital assembly of space stations and nuclear Mars rockets. Now it would be a space truck with nowhere to go.

The shuttle configuration as we know it today is a compromise, shaped by the tight fiscal constraints and agency in-fighting that followed Nixon's decision. At the beginning of the design process at the end of 1969, the base assumption was that the shuttle would be a two-stage, fully reusable system with both stages piloted; it would have looked like one aeroplane piggybacking on another. But the development costs were frightening. The idea of a flyback first stage was soon dropped, leaving a much smaller single-stage spaceplane with a smaller payload, and a throwaway propellant tank and strap-on solid-rocket boosters – cheaper to develop, but more expensive to fly.

Meanwhile the US Air Force exerted a lot of pressure on the design teams, for the spaceplane was supposed to have military applications, such as orbital surveillance missions. There were even proposals for the capture of enemy satellites and orbital bombing runs. The final compromise design was capable of lifting great weights into low earth orbits, but clumsy for anything else. And though no USAF flights have been flown since the Challenger disaster, the military flavour is obvious; the shuttle's low orbits are ideally suited to USAF missions.

Those early compromises had long-term consequences. From the beginning the astronauts were unhappy about riding solid rocket boosters which, once lit, can't be put out –

Elfland by Freda Warrington

Reviewed by Lynne Bispham

[Vector #263, Summer 2010]

This beautifully written novel creates a scenario where Aetherial characters must deal with the concerns of the Otherworld alongside the more mundane family problems that might be experienced by their human contemporaries.

Not only does Rosie discover that there is more than one reason for the hostility between her family and the Wilders but circumstances propel her to undertake a central role in the wider conflict that threatens to destroy the Aetherials.

The imagined world of the novel is entirely convincing, and the characters simply leap off the page.

Elfland is an outstanding novel and a must for any reader of fantasy, once opened it is simply impossible to close.

**Rule 34
by Charles
Stross**

**Reviewed by
Paul Graham
Raven**

**[Vector #269,
Spring 2012]**

You've been reading *Rule 34* by Charles Stross, and as a result your internal monologue has shifted into the second person present tense. On balance, this is a good indicator of how well Stross has got to grips with this difficult narrative mode because - as disconcerting as the experience is once you stop reading and try to go about your normal routine - the time you spent subsumed by the book's pantheon of viewpoint characters flew by remarkably fast.

You've read many jeremiads against the second person as a high-friction narrative mode and wonder whether Stross's success with the form is due only to his dogged persistence and characteristic desire to fly in the face of conventional wisdom or to some additional fundamental change in the modern sense of identity.

and, unlike all previous American manned spacecraft, the shuttle had no system to allow the crew to escape in case of a launch mishap. It was a solid booster fault which doomed Challenger. Columbia was destroyed by a complex sequence of faults relating to carrying a tank of cryogenic fuel strapped to the spaceplane's belly; falling ice damaged fragile heat-shield tiles during the launch.

The shuttle as a space truck has never seemed glamorous, but it has inspired some fictional depictions. Some early portrayals accepted the designers' projections of routine fast-turnaround missions. In the film *Starflight One* (1983, directed by Jerry Jameson) the shuttle flies three rescue missions in 48 hours: 'Columbia has lift-off, after a record turnaround time of two hours!' In 'War Birds' (*Interzone* 126, 1997, and in *Phase Space*, 2002) I look at the way the shuttle programme was supposed to turn out, orbital bombing runs and all.

The shuttle has had some romantic uses. In Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven's *Footfall* (1985) shuttle orbiters are carried into space on an Orion nuclear rocket, and heroically hurled against the invading aliens. In *Back to the Moon* by Homer Hickman (1999) Columbia is hijacked and flown to the Moon - and in my own *Titan* (1997) I sent Discovery all the way to the moons of Saturn.

But many shuttle stories have been disaster-oriented; *Titan* opened with Columbia crashing. *Moonraker* (1979, directed by Lewis Gilbert), the eleventh James Bond movie, featured the shuttle being hijacked from atop its 747 carrier. *Shuttle Down* (1981) by G Harry Stine (as Lee Correy) shows an orbiter making an emergency landing on Easter Island - and in fact the shuttle did have a series of emergency landing sites around the world, including Easter Island. Clive Cussler's endearingly daft Dirk Pitt adventure *Cyclops* (1986) saw Soviet agents attempt to force the shuttle Gettysburg to land on Cuba. A fictional crash of the Endeavour kick-started a new space push in a book by a real-life astronaut, *Encounter with Tiber* by Buzz Aldrin and John Barnes (1996). In *Ignition* (1997) by Kevin J Anderson and Doug Beason terrorists attack the Atlantis on the launch pad. Even an episode of *The West Wing* screened in 2000 featured a shuttle trapped in orbit.

In the real world, in the wake of the loss of Columbia the US manned space programme was rethought from the ground up. In January 2004 President Bush announced a new space exploration strategy which would depend on a new manned spacecraft system. The Ares/Constellation design would have had a manned 'capsule' mounted on top of an expendable rocket - just like the old Apollo/Saturn design paradigm, abandoned in 1969. But this plan, accused of being technologically backward, over budget and behind schedule, was cancelled by the Obama administration in early 2010. In the longer term there will be a new heavy-lift vehicle to carry humans to the asteroids and Mars, but for now this leaves US astronauts without a way to reach orbit once the shuttle is retired. The gamble is that NASA will be able to buy rides to orbit for its astronauts on commercial launch vehicles.

Maybe this is a wise decision. Space launch technology has hardly evolved since the 1940s; the shuttle was like a V2 with wings. We are overdue a revolution in this area. What we need is a true spaceplane capable of taking off unaided from a runway like a conventional aircraft, reaching orbit, and then gliding back to land - 'single stage to orbit'. This is an old dream. Before the development of Project Apollo the US Air Force dreamt of spacecraft with wings. It flew the famous X-15 rocket plane, and it did extensive research into 'lifting bodies', capable of very high speed flight. Some of this research fed into the space shuttle programme, and even today the USAF is experimenting with a scaled-down spaceplane known as the X-37B.

Today there are technologies on the horizon that could be developed to achieve single-stage-to-orbit flight. The trick is not to carry all the oxidiser you need to burn your fuel on board the ship. A conventional jet airliner doesn't need to carry liquid oxygen; it draws in oxygen from the air. Similarly, a 'scramjet' rocketplane would extract its own oxidiser from the Earth's atmosphere, achieving huge weight savings. A compromise design with some

potential is Skylon, being developed by a company called Reaction Engines Ltd. Based in Bristol. Skylon is a hydrogen-powered aircraft that would take off from a conventional runway, use atmospheric air to accelerate to five times the speed of sound at twenty-six kilometres altitude – and then switch to an internal liquid oxygen supply to complete the climb to orbit. As of February 2009 ESA (the European Space Agency) announced that it was funding a million-euro development of the engines, planning to produce a demonstration engine in 2011.

Flawed or not, to see a shuttle launched, as I did while researching my novel *Voyage*, was an unforgettable experience. One very early Florida morning in July 1995 my wife and I sat in the Cape Canaveral press stand, looking out at the launch gantries on the horizon some three miles east. Discovery sat on pad 39-A, the old Apollo launch gantry. In the mist the launch complexes looked like bits of an oil refinery, but we could see the gleaming white of the orbiter against the orange external fuel tank and the battleship grey of the gantry, like a von Braun 1950s vision of a spaceplane.

The launch was just 55 seconds late. At main engine start, a bright white light erupted at the base of the orbiter, and white smoke squirted out to either side. Then the stack lifted off the ground, startlingly quickly, trailing a column of white smoke that glowed orange within, as if on fire. The plume of yellow light from the solid rocket boosters was incredibly bright – almost dazzling, like sunlight, liquid light. After maybe ten seconds the shuttle threaded through an isolated thin cloud. The sound started to reach us after ten or fifteen seconds, a cracking, thundering sound from the sky. We all applauded; it was a very physical, immense event, and a very joyous moment, even for the battered old hacks covering this routine mission. The smoke column was still there, slowly dispersing, when we drove away.

By the time this is published, if all has gone to schedule Discovery has made the last shuttle flight of all. Flawed, too expensive, too risky it may have been, but over three decades the shuttle did carry hundreds of people into orbit, many of them far removed from the military-pilot paradigm of the Apollo days, and it managed to deliver some magical spectacles for space buffs like me.

When you see the surviving birds, downed forever in some air and space museum, look on them with affection.

The following issue of Vector (#265) celebrated all things Stephen Baxter, and it feels like the magazine had come full circle at this point, with themed issues up to now being the norm, but change was on the horizon...

The second person mode reflects the dissociated sense of self provided by networked virtual worlds and there's an argument to be made that anyone who spends a considerable time in (or is it on?) the metamilieu of the internet – right in Stross's crosshairs, in other words – might be more attuned to the experience of projecting their identity into the immediate experience of another, while still retaining sufficient sense of self to understand and appreciate said experience as narrative and puzzle-quest at once.

You know that this is an untestable and navel-gazey kind of theory but that's never stopped you before. Indeed, as time goes by you feel that "unresolved fragments of your untidy life are sliding towards an uncertain resolution" which is as neat a description as you could write of the vibe toward the end of *Rule 34*, as numerous threads entangle their way to the denouement. Its wiry hybrid vigour belies the care lavished on its construction, while its deadpan gallows humour leavens the socio-economic meat-hooks of its imagined future. You suspect it's the best novel Stross has written so far.

Vector

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

Beyond 2010: Reinventing The Wheel?

After four years in charge, Niall Harrison handed ownership of the editor's chair to Shana Worthen with Vector #266, Spring 2011, and a number of changes were implemented almost immediately: the first of Paul Kincaid's new "Kincaid in Short" column appeared in #266, and in the very next issue (Vector #267, Summer 2011), Ian Whates announced the closing down of Matrix for good, citing the struggle to stay on top of the rapid developments and genre news as a constant source of annoyance and disappointment. A rebirth of a different kind remained on the cards, however, with a revamped and larger reviews section called The BSFA Review introduced in the same issue, this section to be helmed by Martin Lewis (who had already been in charge of the reviews for a year or so at this point).

Ironically, despite the boundless wonders of modern technology, Vector #270 had Melanie Keen talking about Victorian fairytales...

Modern Marvels: The Fairytales of Victorian Science & Technology by Melanie Keen [Vector #270, Spring 2012]

The novel technologies and scientific discoveries of Victorian Britain were often compared with the magical devices, wondrous transformations, and curious creatures of fairy tales. Who needed seven-league boots when you had the railway train? Surely the electric telegraph provided more reliable means of communication than rubbing an enchanted ring, and could send a message around the world faster than Puck? Reflecting telescopes showed the face of distant worlds far better than any magic mirror; antediluvian monsters clashing in primordial seas supplied a gorier tale than the fiercest dragons of lore. Used as a rhetorical flourish, a statement of superiority, and a familiar reference, these frequent comparisons also betrayed a serious claim: that, far from driving away the supernatural and fantastical, scientific and technological developments provided better fodder for the imagination, and more modern marvels. In this short article I shall analyse how fairy tales were used in discussions of the nineteenth-century sciences and technologies; and ask what they can tell us about the shifting relationships between facts and fancy, reason and romance, and early works of science fiction.

Victoria's Laureate, Alfred Tennyson, had coined the resonant phrase 'the fairy tales of science' in his 1835 poem, *Locksley Hall*. A meditation on time and love, an evocation of place and envisioning of the future, in its lines Tennyson infamously misunderstood the mechanism by which the railway worked, hailing the 'ringing grooves of change' down which his train carriage thundered. Such 'fairy tales of science', claimed the poem's narrator, rendered 'youth sublime'; alive to a deeper knowledge of the past, the inventions of the present, and the limitless possibilities to come. Tennyson was just one of many figures in the period who reached for fairyland when confronted with novelty. Indeed, fairy-tales in general were in the ascendant in Victorian Britain, as the nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of activity in and around the literary form: new translations were made of classic works such as *The Arabian Nights*; collections of tales and legends were made at home and on the continent, following the Brothers Grimm; and new stories were written, famously by Hans Christian Andersen. Fairies were converted into our modern diminutive ideal, and disported themselves in painted scenes of fantastical worlds, in periodical discussions of mankind's development, and on the stage, when the stars of Gilbert and Sullivan's latest operetta, *Iolanthe*, illuminated the Savoy Theatre by wearing costumes bedecked with the first fairy-lights, supplied by the Swan United Electric Lamp Company. It is even said that Prime Minister Disraeli referred to the monarch as the 'fairy Queen'.

For some, including Charles Dickens, the collision of modern society and imaginative writing was a spurious attempt to dress-up dull moralising, and ruin fantastical stories: notoriously, he derided a rewriting of *Cinderella* as a temperance tract as one of these dreadful 'frauds on the fairies'. The fairy tales of science could similarly have been attacked for their combination of detailed technical knowledge and imaginative presentation; yet Dickens himself lauded the magical discoveries of the sciences. Scientific stories, he claimed, provided 'ample compensation' for the gnomes and genies they had supposedly chased away. But why were the sciences and technology different from other sources for new fairy tales? And how did authors such as Charles Kingsley feel able to make the claim in the early 1860s that 'fairy Science' would be 'queen of all the fairies for many a year to come'?

The sciences have a long tradition of magical and wondrous associations, from alchemical transformations of substance and hue, to optical illusions that split light into rainbows, or made objects shrink and bulge alarmingly. New technologies of the nineteenth century deliberately played on these older connotations, such as in David Brewster's choice of title for his 1832 riposte to Walter Scott's 1830 *Letters on Demonology* for John Murray's Family Library: *Letters on Natural Magic*. Brewster had invented the kaleidoscope early in the century, and contemporary satirical prints showed how peering into this seemingly innocuous tube could 'astonish' unlearned observers who were not aware of the optical principles and angled mirrors that lay behind its shifting prismatic colours. Another common instrumental revelation revealed the 'Monster Soup' of microscopic animalcules lurking in every water-drop; arguably the real nymphs and naiads of classical lore. Hans Christian Andersen himself based his 1848 fairy-tale on the increasingly common domestic experience of looking down a microscope: red carmine dye was renamed 'witches' blood', and used to stain a specimen of 'puddle water'. With this specimen, Andersen's magician protagonist, Kribble-Krabble, could trick a visitor into believing he was peering at a magnified microcosm; a teeming and violent city that resembled in miniature the uprisings occurring across Europe's streets in that year of revolutions.

For John Cargill Brough's 1859 *Fairy-Tales of Science*, 'Modern Alchemy' was achieved every day in the laboratory, as metals were extracted, and colours created, by 'analysis and synthesis'. Chemistry itself was the 'philosopher's stone', making money and curing diseases; and the alchemist now looked 'for all the world like an ordinary person', wearing 'a most unpicturesque black coat'. Aladdin's lamp could be equated with the 'lamp of science'; steam power one of its 'attendant genii' willing to be summoned and serve Victorian Britons. As Brough claimed, 'the miracles wrought by this slave of the lamp transcend all the wonders

**A Dance With
Dragons
by George R. R.
Martin**

**Reviewed by
Alan Fraser**

**[Vector #269,
Spring 2012]**

There have been six years between *A Dance With Dragons* and its predecessor, *A Feast For Crows*. This new book was actually expected to follow 2000's *A Storm Of Swords* around 2002 but Martin split it into two, geographically: *A Feast For Crows* was set mainly in the South of Westeros; the over 1,000 pages of *A Dance With Dragons* start with the Northern sequel to *A Storm Of Swords* and then continue the story beyond that book, told from many old and new viewpoints.

This is a hard book to put down, even when it's finally finished. The series will continue with *The Winds Of Winter* and hopefully conclude with *A Dream Of Spring*. I'm hooked on it yet again and hope that it won't take Martin another eleven years to complete!

conceived by the Oriental romanticists [sic]. From such marvels as the Leviathan steam ship, to the printing and manufacture of *The Fairy-Tales of Science* book itself, the objects and processes of modernity were lauded as superior to the devices and narratives of old.

Nonetheless, however indebted they were to fairyland tropes, Brough's tales were mostly non-fictional, lecture-style introductions to the various scientific disciplines. It was through fanciful comparisons and references, rather wonderful illustrations (by Charles H. Bennet) – and not to mention that Tennysonian title – that introductory factual expositions were enhanced. A similar strategy was used by, for instance, Arabella Buckley, whose 1879 *Fairy-land of Science* in which forces were fairies, and gravity a great giant, encouraged using 'the wand of imagination' to enliven details of scientific practices and domestic experiments. Other writers, however, decided to write new stories themselves about the sciences. At mid-century, Henry Morley's periodical article for Dickens' *Household Words* narrated the aquatic adventures of the 'Cloud Country People': in a familiar scenario, various suitors from the land of Nimbus for the hand of Princess Cirrha (daughter of King Cumulus) travelled the London sewerage system in 'The Water-Drops: A Fairy-Tale'. This work skilfully blended medico-scientific reports on the state of communal drinking facilities ('Report of Dr. Gavin'), as well as meteorological terminology (those names), into a wider fairytale-like story.

Another incorporation of new-fangled ideas or devices into a fairytale narrative was to be found in 'The Master Key' by Frank L. Baum, better-known for writing *The Wizard of Oz*. In this 'Electrical Fairy-Tale' of 1901, Rob, an American boy, inadvertently conjured the 'Demon of Electricity' whilst messing around in his bedroom with currents and wires. The supernatural creature bestowed on the boy a series of electrical gifts (including a weapon, a travelling device, and sort of proto-television), with the aid of which Rob embarked on a series of daring deeds around the world, from visiting a cannibal island in the Pacific to meeting a cockney policeman and a rather unscrupulous French man of science. His travels did not have the Demon's desired effect, however, in advancing the knowledge of mankind. Instead, they got the boy into trouble, and upset his mother; thus, upon the Demon's return, the story ended when Rob relinquished the power of these new technologies. Living ahead of his time was not so fantastic after all. Such stories, then, both applauded and condemned new scientific theories, objects, and practices: Baum's ambivalence over the potential benefits but also dangers of electrical technologies played throughout his story. Indeed, electricity was particularly contested ground in the later nineteenth century, and its personification as a fairy, sprite, imp, genie, or Demon, was used both in place of a coherent expert theory of how electricity actually worked, and to attenuate concerns and advertise products.

The first use of the term 'science-fiction' is usually credited to William Wilson's 1851 *An Earnest Little Book Upon a Great Old Subject*. Yet at mid-century, scientific romance and technological fantasy had yet to develop into a coherent genre; in fact, the kinds of works that Wilson was discussing were exactly these fairy tales of science. Another passage from his *Earnest Little Book* made this clear, claiming how the 'modern discoveries and applications of Science, throw deeply into the shade the old romances and fanciful legends of our boyhood. The Arabian Night's Entertainments – The Child's Fairy Tales – Oberon and Titania – The Child's Own Book – are all robbed of their old wonder by the many marvels of modern Science.' However, Wilson went on to claim that though old wonders were no longer marvellous, new technologies including the 'almost Omnipresent Electric Telegraph' had 'more magic' in their 'reality, than the wildest creations of child-fiction and legend have in their ideality'. In an echo of my opening quotation in which what was, once upon a time, a fairy tale becoming a quotidian occurrence, Wilson concluded the passage by marvelling at what could be achieved using this new technology: 'The Fairies never fancied anything more wonderful than holding conversations thousands of miles apart, and they only effected such things in Story; yet such conversations are now every-day common-places'.

Wilson's commentary asserts a confidence in the superiority of scientific understanding; or, as Brough put it, that 'truth is stranger than fiction ... the revelations of science transcend the wildest dreams of the old poets'. However, the very reliance on and comparison to fictional entities demonstrated that these novel scientific productions – be they animal, vegetable, or mineral; phenomenon, substance, or property – themselves had a rather precarious existence. Out-of-sight in time and space, or only rendered visible through specialist instruments, practices, or rational processes, it was in fact the closeness of invisible forces and monstrous beings to their fairytale forbears, rather than their difference, that was striking, and that needed to be acknowledged and superseded. And, as Brough's lines demonstrate, this superiority was granted on the grounds of 'strangeness', or of 'wild dreams' as much as by morality or veracity: truth-to-nature was advocated as the most impressive source of wonder, spectacle, and imagination; facts were more fictive than fiction. By 1912, another commentator claimed that if he wanted fairy-tales, he now went to the 'geologist, the chemist and the astronomer': the sciences were the best source of wondrous tales about the surrounding world, and provided 'a vast store of food for the imagination'. Scientific objects, theories, and personages were points of departure for fantastical voyages that posed questions about contemporary society, and speculated as to its future development. Ideas, of course, that would find their clearest expression in the burgeoning genre of science-fiction.

Vector #271 saw news that the World Science Fiction Convention was coming back to London, prompting an impromptu celebration of all things London-based...

Memories of Future London by Philip Reeve [Vector #271, Winter 2012]

As a children's author, I am sometimes invited to visit schools, where young readers ask me such searching questions as, 'Where do you get your ideas from?' and 'What football team do you support?' But one young lad recently asked something that set me thinking. He wanted to know why the motorised city at the heart of my first novel *Mortal Engines* is London. It's a perfectly reasonable question. I could have told much the same story based around a made-up city, perhaps one rumbling its way across an alien planet. But from the instant the notion of a predatory city on wheels dropped into my mental in-box, I knew it could only be London.

Part of the reason is that London is the only city I really know. (I have never lived there, but I grew up in Brighton and I was always aware of London squatting just out of sight at the far end of the railway line, frighteningly vast and confusing, but studded with the sites of magical childhood days out; museums; parks; the zoo). But partly, I think, it's because London is a Science Fiction city; indeed, for British Science Fiction, it's more or less the *only* city. Alien invaders arriving in the US have a wide range of urban centres to park their flying saucers over. New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington DC all have important landmarks waiting to be death-rayed. For those invading the UK there is really only one destination; they must follow the itinerary of the original alien invaders, HG Wells' Martians in *The War of the Worlds*, and descend on London.

The War of the Worlds was one of the first SF stories I ever read. I never forgot its images of a ruined London choked with alien weeds, where the last of the Martians stands hooting mournfully on Primrose Hill, the rubble and the siren blending eerily in my mind with my father's tales of life during the Blitz. And the Martian Invasion was just a taste of things to come for poor old London, which does seem to have very bad luck in SF. If it isn't being trampled by aliens it's being drowned or frozen by climate change, or falling under the jack-boot-heel of oppressive regimes. I have a dim childhood memory of more positive visions,

Empty Space by M John Harrison

Reviewed by
Dan Hartland

[Vector #272,
Spring 2013]

In a suburban London garden, a summerhouse is on fire. It belongs to Anna Waterman, a woman in late middle age who lives alone with her cats a couple of decades from now. She is drawn repeatedly to the dilapidated old construct, hearing the voices of her past there – most especially of her first husband, the theoretical physicist Michael Kearney, who disappeared on the eve of the millennium, leaving only a hard drive of data which Anna has never passed on to his erstwhile research partner, Brian Tate. She is therefore understandably distressed by the summerhouse's pending destruction – and yet the flames that lick around it resemble the static fires seen in woodcuts of Marian martyrs: standing iconically and heatlessly, one suspects, for something else.

where perspex skyscrapers rose decorously around the Palace of Westminster – perhaps it was in *Dan Dare* – but they were far from typical. Most of the future Londons I came across while I was growing up were much darker. *Dr Who* dealt with an infestation of robot yetis in the Underground, while *Quatermass* unearthed Martian spacecraft in South Kensington or dodged warring militias in third-world London suburbs. In John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* a blinded populace is at the mercy of killer shrubs, and in his excellent alien invasion novel *The Kraken Wakes* the melting of the polar icecaps leads to catastrophic flooding. The journalist narrator, left behind to report from the evacuated capital, lies in bed 'listening to the echoing splash of the wavelets that the wind was driving along Oxford Street'. Similar imagery recurs in a more surreal and dreamlike form in J G Ballard's *The Drowned World*. There the city has become a sun-struck tropical swamp, where hoodlum explorers power their motor launches through the flooded streets while divers descend like astronauts to explore the sunken hulk of the Planetarium.

Of course, many of the writers whose work I encountered in my formative years had spent their own formative years watching civilization collapse for real. Ballard famously passed his boyhood in a Japanese internment camp, but most British SF writers of that generation must have served in the forces or grown up, like my own parents, on the Home Front. I suspect it lent a certain matter-of-fact believability to their depictions of London under martial law, or Big Ben and St Paul's in ruins. And when the invading aliens marched (or, in the case of the Daleks, trundled menacingly) across Westminster Bridge, it was an attack not just on London, but on the fading yet still potent myth of London as the capital of free Europe, standing alone against whatever the *Luftwaffe* could hurl at it. If Daleks could succeed where even Nazis failed, these images told us, they must be *really* dangerous. (The same myth is up-ended rather more literally in Hilary Bailey's 1963 story *The Fall of Frenchy Steiner*, set in a grim post-war London under Nazi occupation). Just as elements in *The War of the Worlds* seem to foreshadow World War Two and the London Blitz, much of the post-war British SF that I grew up on reverberates with its echoes.

I think those echoes began finally to fade in the 1980s. London changed enormously in those years too. As a student, I watched Dickensian labyrinths of old warehouses in the east of the city being bulldozed to make way for *Blade Runner*-ish towers far shinier, and more brutal than anything *Dim Dare* ever steered the *Anastasia* past. The culture of the place has changed too. That mustn't-grumble, London-can-take-it Englishness which leaches out of wartime Ealing movies to find its way into *Quatermass* and *The Day of the Triffids* seems quaint now. London is a world city, and Londoners are as likely to be poor Somalis or Russian oligarchs as chirpy cockneys.

How well this change has been reflected in Science Fiction, I can't say: I stopped reading the genre around the time those glass towers were sprouting in Canary Wharf, and have returned to it only recently. A few reports from future-London did reach me, emerging out of the shadowy border-zone which separates lit-fic from sci-fi. Ballard's strange imagination continued to transform the city, focusing upon its outskirts, a world of high-rises and slip-roads soundtracked by the thrum of tyres on the concrete overpasses of the westway. Michael Marshall Smith's *Only Forward* takes place in a City called The City, divided into districts governed according to the tastes of those who choose to live in them; the reader recognises it as a future London only when the characters stumble upon the abandoned and derelict Trafalgar Square. Will Self's *The Book of Dave* visited more climate-driven catastrophe on the capital: the plastic-strewn lagoons where his primitive characters live, worshipping a long-dead London cabbie, hark back to Richard Jeffries's *After London*, which predates even Wells and imagines the city lost beneath a toxic swamp. And is Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, set in a future London? It certainly seems to be heading that way, with its sub-plots about terrorism and genetic engineering, and it remains as vivid a portrait of the modern city and its diverse inhabitants as I have yet read.

But when I embarked on the imagining of my own future London it was the SF of my childhood and teenage years that inspired me, so it's scarcely surprising that my mechanised city began as a dark place of clanking machinery and state oppression, motored by memories of HG Wells and wartime. While I was writing it I pinned above my desk a copy of the most Science Fictional of all London images (which also happens to be completely real). Herbert Mason's famous 1940 photograph of St Paul's cathedral rising from a sea of fire.

I hope it's not too much of a spoiler to reveal that London doesn't make it all the way to the end of *Mortal Engines*: like the Londons in so many other SF stories, it ends up in ruins. But somehow I couldn't quite leave it there. Writing about it had reminded me of all the things I love about London; those parks and museums; the juxtapositions of old and new, rich and poor; the diverse and teeming cast of characters. I had to return to it in sequels and in prequels, in which it has risen again. In my own books, and in Science Fiction generally, I see London as a kind of Eternal City, forever being destroyed and rebuilt in different forms. And I think that in this way SF reflects an essential truth about the place. It maybe dirty, absurd, and sometimes violent, but it has a spirit that weathers storms and a complexity of character that attracts storytellers. Long may they continue to project its images upon the future.

Around the tail end of 2012, I started taking a more active personal role in the development of BSFA publications, and Vector #272 (Spring 2013) was my first issue as the design/layout guy (aka Production Editor). I was also the stand-in production editor for every other BSFA publication at that time, and spent the next three years trying to cajole authors into guest editing issues of FOCUS magazine in an effort to revitalize it before Dev Agarwal took over as permanent FOCUS editor.

Glyn Morgan replaced Shana as the editor of Vector (with the help of Anna McFarlane) from issue #275 (Spring 2014), and just one year later politics found its way into Vector magazine...

Vote Janeway in 2015! by Peter Allen [Vector #280, Summer 2015]

'So who are you going to vote for this year?'

'I'm not voting for anyone because nothing ever changes.'

If there is a more tragic indictment of democratic apathy, I've yet to find it.

Science Fiction and fantasy not only offer us engaging stories filled with the 'What if?' scenario, they also provide social and political commentary on present day events. From Ray Bradbury to Ernest Cline, from *Star Trek* to *The Walking Dead*, popular entertainment thrives on science fiction and fantasy. Today in the UK we have a 'Walking Dead' electorate: disengaged, unhappy and generally apathetic. But what if we didn't? What if everyone engaged in political and social debate like the United Federation of Planets aspires to in *Star Trek*? What if we set aside culture, class and other personal differences like Rick and co. in *The Walking Dead*? What if one person was able and willing to influence change for the better like Wade in *Ready Player One*?

Science Fiction often provides keys to the voting hearts of millions that modern politicians never seem able (or willing) to find.

The power of *Empty Space*, and of the trilogy which it caps and defines, is in establishing a style robust enough to represent the self as a kind of illusion – a superposition observing events it cannot understand in isolation. One of the novel's innumerable superlative grace notes is its treatment of the near future, in which no one has anything left to sell to anyone else. A young doctor visiting Anna's home in the final chapter reflects that she "had seen the world when it was still proud of its future"; her daughter sees books from that time on Anna's shelves, in which "the self figured largely... even books by a man calling himself Self".

Empty Space is a gloriously realised novel, perhaps more downbeat than *Light* but ultimately with the same, rather less gaudily-lit message: there is a better space for us to occupy, stranger and more communal. In *Empty Space*, the wanderlust of Ed Chianese – and of M John Harrison – leads the way into it.

Blackbirds by Chuck Wendig

**Reviewed by
Donna Scott**

**[Vector #272,
Spring 2013]**

You'd be hard-pressed not to judge this book by its cover with its exquisite monochrome portrait of a messy-haired, black-eyed girl; a composite of body parts, road and motel signs and hundreds of sinister silhouetted birds. It seems the brief inspired artist Joey Hi-Fi to pick out some very Hitchcockian themes – that's a lot for any book of horror to live up to.

Wendig's writing is full of the slickness we might expect from a classic Tarantino movie but behind the patter he gives us rounded characterisation; Miriam is painted for us in impressionistic style and we come to learn she's not quite the toughie she makes out. The murderers are more cartoonish, emphasising the lack that makes them different to the flawed characters we are meant to sympathise with. Likewise, the most grotesque aspects of horror are limited to the dream sequences that pepper the book.

The Present Day

Electoral turnout in the UK has been declining since the end of the Second World War. Barring a few peaks in the 1970s and another in 1992, the percentage of registered voters casting a vote in General Elections has declined. The 2010 turnout of 65.1% might have been an improvement on the 2005 and 2001 turnouts of 61.4% and 59.4%, but we are still a long way off the 1950 peak of 83.9%. To my knowledge there is yet to be a 100% turnout.

All writers are told to write what they know. Science fiction often hides behind the veneer of fantasy in order to voice an opinion on the present and the potential future. The 'What If?' questions posed by great writers are best when filtered through the prism of science fiction. Ray Bradbury warned against the dangers of state suppression of free speech and information in *Fahrenheit 451*. Gene Roddenberry idly wondered what humankind could achieve were we to work more closely together in *Star Trek*. Isaac Asimov was thinking about the potential benefits and dangers of Artificial Intelligence long before anyone had a PC or an iPhone. Socio-political commentary is prevalent throughout most science fiction. It's possible to view the genre as a 'guidebook', covering what different sections of society truly care about. Yet present day politicians rarely, (if ever!) pay attention to it.

So what can politics learn – if anything – from science fiction?

Star Trek in 2015

At the same time the US goes to the polls to elect a new President in 2016, *Star Trek* celebrates its 50th birthday. The small budget show pitched as 'Wagon Train to the Stars!' is only 3 years younger than *Doctor Who*. To date there have been 726 episodes, twelve films (a thirteenth is planned for release in 2016), an animated series, and thousands of books. This isn't bad for a show that only ran for three years in the 1960s. Like a lot of science fiction, *Star Trek* is more popular than any elected politician of the modern age. So what can an MP learn from science fiction like *Star Trek*?

Captain Kirk

'Gentlemen, I have no great love for you, your planet or your culture. Despite that, Mr Spock and I are going to go out there and quite probably die in an attempt to show you that some things are worth dying for.'

William Shatner's portrayal of the first Captain of the Enterprise was one of idealistic (possibly naïve) brashness. Kirk would try and communicate with a new alien or planet, but if he ever felt threatened he didn't hesitate to fire phasers. Despite this, the original series portrayed a ship and crew boldly exploring uncharted areas of space, seeking out new life and new civilisations (I'm paraphrasing just in case a Trekkie highlights the inaccuracy). In reality they were exploring new ideas and new ways of doing things. Kirk might have been a bit trigger happy, but his mission was essentially peaceful. He boasted a multicultural crew and his first officer was an alien. Perhaps if the UK Parliament represented the many different sections of our culture and society as it is today, people might be more inclined to vote.

Captain Picard

'No being is so important that he can usurp the rights of another.'

Patrick Stewart took the helm of the new Enterprise D as a very different sort of Captain. Focusing much more on diplomacy and understanding, Picard led the crew on

a voyage to explore humankind's very nature. There are many examples of socio-political commentary throughout *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In one episode the Federation signs a treaty with a neighbouring species. The result changes border lines and displaces millions of the Federation's own citizens without consulting them. The story illustrated a common flaw in centralised government – that of failing to take into account the wishes of the people it has been elected to govern. In another episode Picard has to learn to communicate with a man so alien that they cannot understand one another at all. Yet if he fails, they both die. Politicians give up trying to understand another point of view far too easily.

Captain Sisko

'It's easy to be a saint in paradise. But they do not live in paradise. Out there, there are no saints, just people – angry, scared, determined people who are going to do whatever it takes to survive, whether it meets with Federation approval or not.'

Ben Sisko wasn't only the Commander of a strategically important base; he was a father and a religious icon. Throughout the show, Sisko had to try and maintain a fragile peace in a region of space that was highly contentious. He had the highly spiritual Bajorans (angry survivors of a fifty year occupation) versus the seemingly cruel but highly nuanced Cardassians (a race trying to hold onto fading political influence). Many instantly drew parallels between Israel and Palestine. Yet the show was more about demonstrating the futility of ongoing conflict and unwillingness to try and understand another view point. Sisko epitomised a leader we would all like to see in modern politics – someone able to bridge the gap between diametrically opposed viewpoints. The show dealt with race rows, social class, disengaged and angry citizens, and war. This should sound familiar to any modern politician.

Captain Janeway

'It never fails to impress me. No matter how vast the differences may be between cultures, people always have something that someone else wants, and trade is born.'

Kathryn Janeway had to deal with being cut off from the support of the familiar. Stranded, alone and surrounded by millions of new species, this Captain spent seven years leading a mixed crew of rebels and officers home from an uncharted area of space. Janeway was both practical and pragmatic – someone trying to hold onto their own principles whilst negotiating with races that had none. In a very real way *Star Trek: Voyager* mixed the original series theme of exploration and understanding with relatable questions of survival and conflict. How do you negotiate with people you don't like whilst maintaining your own principles? Janeway dealt with the dilemma of trying not to interfere with other cultures. At the same time, she tried not to overlook oppression and brutality. Her decision to prevent the genocide of an alien race by destroying the only technology that could get Voyager home is a case in point. She rescued several species from annihilation and even helped rehabilitate a victim of rape (Seven of Nine). Janeway explored the unknown and recognised the only way to positively influence people was to set a good example. How often do we wish current politicians had the self awareness to do the same? Instead we get MPs behaving like eight-year-olds, more interested in yelling and talking over each other in Parliament. Our MPs have more in common with naughty school children than they do with elected officials of state.

But that is not to say that the supernatural elements of the story are negated by these dream sequences but rather the effect of real/not real is sharpened, emphasising that the worst horrors in Miriam's life are all too human in origin.

The narrative itself is pure road-story and moves in a linear fashion along that road from start to end but with a final denouement that provides scope for taking the character elsewhere in the further books that have been commissioned, the next of which is *Mockingbirds* – a development that is much needed to be able to take Miriam's character further after this story, which is presumably why it is there in a novel that would work perfectly well by itself as a stand-alone.

Whilst the novel has a simple structure, the writing is strong and engaging and Miriam's character is one you can take to your heart. The cover does not deceive.

An Oasis of Hope

Star Trek is merely one example of how politicians can learn a great deal from science fiction. There are many others. Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* was published in 2013 and has since been optioned by Hollywood. Not only is it a great story, it shows a very plausible future in which society as we know it is in a state of near collapse. Business has been reduced to two huge corporations vying for control of the planet and everyone spends most of their time in a virtual reality world called 'Oasis'. Without giving away too many plot details, the story is told through the eyes of Wade, a poor kid living in the stacks (converted caravans sitting on top of one another). Wade is not happy with his real life and lives a virtual life within Oasis. There he goes to school, has friends, and enjoys himself. When the creator of Oasis dies, his death activates a hidden Easter egg style quest within the virtual reality. The winner of the three hidden challenges inherits control of the designer's company and money. When Wade figures out and resolves the first challenge it triggers a hunt for him by the rival company.

Ready Player One shows us a world where politicians have become so enthralled to big corporations, that big corporations are all that's left. People have become cut off from reality as a result and live out their lives within a facsimile of something better. Wade himself starts off as a disillusioned teenager completely uninterested in the real world around him. All that matters is Oasis. It is only as he begins to connect with other people through the VR world, that the real world becomes slowly more attractive.

The book is primarily a work of fiction, but it does posit a believable futuristic world. *Ready Player One* serves as a frightening reminder of what could happen if we lose total interest in politics and voting. Wade doesn't believe there is anything worth fighting for until he realises what would happen if one company gained control of everything. Hitler tried to do something very similar in the 1930s.

Lessons from the Future

'It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried'.

- Winston Churchill

Sometimes Churchill had his tongue firmly in cheek, but not when it came to matters of free speech and democracy. Whilst flawed, we have yet to find a better way in which to govern ourselves. Science fiction manages to explore new ideas and new ways of thinking that show us potential paths. It doesn't claim to hold the answers to all of life's problems, but it does teach us to open our minds and imagine the possibilities. You only need to look at the advances in technology to know how influential science fiction has been in this area. So it is with politics. The only difference is in terms of subtlety.

To Boldly Go Forward

If we are to stand any hope of a bright and wonderful future, we must continue to ask the most interesting question, 'What if?'; that is the question the best stories ask and the question great science fiction often works from. What if we all voted in elections? What if we taught children about politics in school in order to engage them in democracy from an early age? What if one day we are all able to come together to celebrate our differences instead of fearing and demeaning them? If that day is to ever come, it will only dawn whilst people like you and I continue to read and tell stories asking us all to think 'What if?'

Churchill once said 'Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen'. Perhaps it is time we all, politicians and voters alike, listened to the lessons that science fiction can teach.

I remained in the design and layout/production role right through to late 2017 (Vector #286, Autumn 2017), before cutting back on my BSFA commitments and sticking to just the annual Awards booklets and the online-only BSFA Review.

Vector also changed hands around this time, with new editors Polina Levontin and Joseph Walton at the helm. Their first issue was a bumper #287, and fittingly a Best of 2017 issue.

Polina has also kindly agreed to contribute to this BSFA 60th Birthday Celebration, and her selection of articles covering modern perspectives of science fiction can be found in the next section.



SF Theory and Criticism edited by Polina Levontin

Vector has often sought to position itself as a standard for SF criticism that recognises and respects, but does not rely on, the academic field of SF studies. To showcase Vector the critical journal, we republish below four abridged articles on subjects that are still very much at the core of the conversation: collective intelligence, catastrophe, national identity and the politics of gender. Hope you enjoy the selection!

Genetic Politics: Hive Minds in Science and Science Fiction by Stephen Baxter [Vector 235, May/June 2004]

Based on talks presented to the H.G. Wells Society Weekend Conference on 'Wells and Fantasy', University of Westminster, London, 14/9/02; Newcon 2, Northampton, 4/10/03; Utopiales: Festival International de Science Fiction de Nantes, France, 9/11/03.

The 'hive mind' is one of the classic tropes of sf. A colony of social insects is the most famous biological example, with a queen, the only 'mother', served by sterile workers. In sf the term is used to imply any situation in which beings are linked in some way so that the whole dominates the parts – and very often the 'drones' are intelligent. I've been exploring the idea of human hives in my novel *Coalescent*. **(1)**

In this essay I want to talk about the history of the idea in sf and in science, and present some speculation about human hives. But to do so I have to go back to H.G. Wells, for, in sf, all roads begin and end with him. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) **(2)** was the first attempt to show an alien hive-mind society, and Wells depicted sinister insect hives in 'Empire of the Ants' (1905). **(3)** Since Wells's day the scientific understanding of how hives work has moved on hugely. But I will argue that Wells, at least intuitively, managed to foresee some of our modern fears. The science has moved on, but Wells's dark imagination endures.

Wells's *First Men in the Moon* is great science fiction, of course, but it's also a horror story, and the way Wells unravels his horror tells us a great deal about our reaction to the notion of the hive.

There's nothing subtle about the shock of our first encounter with the Selenites, herding their mooncalves during the lunar morning. [The Selenite] seemed a trivial being, a mere ant, scarcely five feet high [...] a compact, bristling creature, having much of the quality of a complicated insect, with whip-like tentacles and a clanging arm projecting from his shining cylindrical body case' (67). Why was H.G. Wells writing about bugs? Because we don't like them. For mammals like us there are surely no more alien creatures on our planet than the insects. And as Wells knew, creepy-crawlies are even worse when they are huge.

But the Selenites do not grow with their specialisms in place, as the ants do; they are engineered - like cyborgs. Cavor glimpses this transformation process, as 'machine-minders of a special sort' are 'confined in jars from which only the forelimbs protruded[...] The extended "hand" [...] is stimulated by irritants and nourished by injection, while the rest of the body is starved [...] In the earlier stages these queer little creatures are apt to display signs of suffering in their various cramped situations, but they easily become indurated to their lot'

(p169).

This specialisation is horrific because we humans prize our individuality. It would be of no comfort to know that 'each is a perfect unit in a world machine' (167), or that we would be force-fed the motivation to fulfil our task. And it is worse that the Selenites, trapped in their machine society, are aware of their lot.

But are hives all bad? A hive isn't for the preservation of individuality. What then is it for? Hive creatures work in harmony with the rest of nature – of course, or else they could not survive. The ants, for example, spread seeds, and actually shift more soil than all the earthworms. **(10)** Hives, for all their strangeness to us, create and sustain life; in their intricate interdependence, indeed, they are models of Gaia. And they are certainly successful.

If hives have their positive side, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad to be in one.

In the lush far future of Robert Silverberg's 1989 novel *The Queen of Springtime* **(11)**, vanished humans have left a world peopled by races uplifted to intelligence – including the hjjks, hive folk, human-sized and intelligent, but derived from ants.

And a hjjk hive is a place of love. For 'every one [is] woven together in an inextricable way [...] in the service of the totality' (373), and 'over everything else there sweeps that even higher and more all-embracing force, which even the Queen Herself acknowledges as supreme, the great undeniable inescapable torrential energy that is Egg-plan, the fundamental power of life, the ineluctable universal femaleness that drives all existence endlessly forward' (159). It's a huge green love-in. And not only that, you are immersed in order: 'Without a sound the myriad dwellers of the Nest go about their tasks [...] Nothing like it exists in the chaotic random world outside; but nothing is chaotic or random here' (159). Humanoid inductees into the hive never want to leave.

And it's not just love and peace you can get from a hive, but maybe a kind of immortality.

C.J. Cherryh's 1980 novel *Serpent's Reach* **(12)** features the majat: intelligent hive folk, united by the chemistry of taste. The drones live only eighteen years, but for the hives, 'a billion years the memories went back, and the specific memory of [the hive] saw the hills rise and the lake form and drain several times, and form again' (21). From us they even have to learn of death: 'The concept still troubled the hive, the idea that individual death could extinguish an intelligence. It was still only dimly grasped' (21).

But for all they might offer - ecological creativity, order, immortality - hives are almost always depicted negatively. You have to give up too much, we feel. And then there's evolutionary destiny. Even Silverberg's portrayal of his loving hive folk eventually becomes negative, because hives are an end point: 'What was it they most

wanted, after all? Nothing more than to dig holes in the ground and live in the dark, performing endless repetitive cycles of birth and reproduction and death [...] Perhaps the world will be [the humanoids'] after all [...] Simply because we are so uncertain in our ways' (353-4). On the whole, as a destination of a species, the hive is generally seen as something best avoided.

I claimed that Wells foresaw some of these themes, and foreshadowed how we might feel about them.

Wells frequently draws metaphorical parallels between insect societies and aspects of humanity. From an elevated viewpoint, such as from a bomber plane or an invading alien spaceship, human cities look just like hives. In *The War in the Air* (19), a devastated New York is compared to a kicked-apart ant hill. To the Artilleryman, *The War of the Worlds* 'isn't a war [...] any more than there's war between men and ants' (810). (20)

And, says Wells – never mind metaphors and fanciful parallels – it could actually happen to us.

Back on the Moon, Cavor says, 'That wretched-looking hand-tentacle sticking out of its jar seemed to have a sort of limp appeal for lost possibilities; it haunts me still, although, of course, it is really in the end a far more humane proceeding than our earthly method of leaving children to grow into human beings and then making machines of them' (170). Cavor's complex reaction to the Moon hive brings us to the central purpose of *First Men in the Moon*. In 1933 Wells would write that his intent, as well as an 'improvement on Jules Verne's shot', was 'to look back on mankind from a distance and burlesque the effects of specialisation' (21). Cavor is able to suppress his humanity and accept the cruel engineering of young Selenites in the name of such goals as industrial efficiency. And if on the Moon, so on Earth. Wells shows us the hive Moon and tells us that through men like Cavor, we could build this.

He even sketches how this might happen. In 'A Story of the Days to Come' (1905) (22), twenty-second century London has been turned by a rampant capitalism into an inhuman arcology of 33 million souls. The social organisation of such 'swarming unhappy cities' (360) is quite hive-like, especially regarding the labouring poor shut away from the daylight in 'tremendous [...] basements' (349). But nobody meant it to be this way: the city is unthinking, emergent, 'a vast lunatic growth' (384). Wells's protagonist Denton, fallen from the middle classes, is a particle of humanity trapped in the machinery of the hive-city: 'His little voice rose in that little room, and he shook his fist, this animalcule of the earth, at all that environed him about, at the millions about him, at his past and future and all the insensate vastness of the overwhelming city' (387).

Note the word 'insensate' – unthinking. Wells's city operates above anybody's control, for the benefit of itself, not the individual or even the human race as a whole. Denton, a mind, is trapped in a mindless machine.

Wells could know nothing of sociobiology or emergence as we currently understand them. But I believe that Wells's intuition was deep enough to set out emotional truths that remain relevant today, even in areas where our understanding has moved on far beyond the science of his time.

And, finally, perhaps there is a deeper metaphoric level yet that ties into Wells's wider concerns.

The shock of modern science is a wellspring of sf. Wells was writing at the end of a century in which, through the work of the geologists and biologists, western civilisation had had to absorb the notion that the Earth and the wider universe have not been created for us – indeed there seems to have been no creator at all – that everything we see, even self-aware creatures like ourselves, has emerged from the blind working of natural law. A hive society is a perfect exemplar of the relentless machinery that spawned us but overwhelms us – and cares nothing for us, because it cannot care.

All this is speculation, of course. Perhaps there can never be hive societies among creatures as smart as us. And of course I certainly don't believe we live in a hive society now.

But as a good drone I would say that, wouldn't I?

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Cognitive Mapping: The End by Paul Kincaid [Vector 244, Nov/Dec 2005]

One of the staples of the first few years of my regime at Vector was the theme articles written by Paul Kincaid, which managed to distil a lot of knowledge and insight into a short space. A couple were drafted but never used, for reasons which are lost to me now, but it was always anticipated that additional columns would be written to produce a book. I stumbled across the files a while back, and thought that this one was too appropriate to let go.

Stoddard and Arnold sat huddled together watching the groping figures grow dimmer and dimmer until the last ray of light was extinguished in the dense impenetrable blackness. But hours later they knew from the sound of voices and the pressure of hands and bodies, that thousands were still crouching in their seats waiting hopefully for the light that had always returned.

Arnold dozing against Stoddard's shoulder found himself repeating a phrase from Friedmann's last remark: "There is no hope — There is no hope —"

Philip Latham, "The Xi Effect" (1950)

George looked at his granddaughter's empty suit. He thought of Job. Satan lacked imagination. To crack a man's faith, one need not resort to burning his flesh, ruining his finances, or any such obvious afflictions. One need only take a man's species away from him.

James Morrow, *This is the Way the World Ends* (1986)

"A woman is sitting alone in a house. She knows she is alone in the whole world: every other living thing is dead. The doorbell rings." This short short story, "A Woman Alone with her Soul" (1912) by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, is just one of many versions of this brief scenario, and its very ubiquity is an excellent illustration of science fiction's uneasy fascination with eschatology. We are drawn to notions of the end of the world, but find it difficult to confront the end of humankind. That final ring isn't just vaguely comic because of the domesticity of a doorbell, and vaguely disconcerting because we wonder *what* it might be; it betokens continuation, that life goes on beyond the catastrophe.

The Gothic imagination, with its romantic attraction to images of ruined castles and storm-blasted nature, was naturally drawn to notions of the end of things. As British science fiction grew out of the Gothic, therefore, writers such as Mary Shelley (*The Last Man* (1826)) and Richard Jeffries (*After London* (1885)) contemplated, with surprising equanimity, a time after our civilisation, one lone representative of our race approaching the wilderness with the sort of fortitude with which a contemporary would have approached a journey into the dark heart of Africa. So H. G. Wells's famous image of a black creature flopping across an empty beach under a final sunset in *The Time Machine* (1895) is unusual in drawing a line not only under humanity but under all life. Yet when Stephen Baxter continued the story in *The Time Ships* (1995) he went beyond the end of time into a new beginning. Even on such a cosmic scale it is easier to think that life, in whatever form humanity might have adapted by then, will continue rather than that it will come to a complete stop.

Contemplating a time after the catastrophe wasn't just a prerogative of British scientific romance, Jack London presented a world in which a handful of survivors decline into barbarism in "The Scarlet Plague" (1912). But it was after two world wars, followed by the immediate possibility of global nuclear destruction, that the catastrophe became a universal theme. American writers from George R. Stewart in *Earth Abides* (1949) to Edgar Pangborn in *Davy* (1964) competed with British science fiction from John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) to Keith Roberts's *The Chalk Giants* (1974) in presenting the results of nuclear catastrophe, either directly or through a fairly transparent metaphor. But in the main these are not stories of the catastrophe itself, but of humanity's survival afterwards. In the sort of rural idyll that Stewart presented in *Earth Abides*, for instance, the small body of survivors may face trials and threats but they are also rid of the sprawl and poverty of big cities, the pressures of urban life. The earth does abide, life does continue, we may see the loss of human civilisation, but that has not always been presented as an unalloyed virtue in science fiction and at least the chance to start again in the sort of close community that we haven't seen since the early days of the American West makes nuclear catastrophe almost attractive.

The British equivalent presents a revival of the Dunkirk Spirit as a small bunch of survivors has to pull together to survive the depredations of giant plants or giant wasps (in Keith Roberts's *The Furies* (1966)) in order to restore a cosy suburban way of life.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s there was a spate of stories in which the last survivors of the catastrophe turned out to be Adam and Eve promising, with little genetic justification, the rebirth of humankind, the best of them being Alfred Bester's ironic variant on the theme, "Adam and No Eve" (1941). Sometimes, of course, there are stories that suggest that human

history on Earth has come to an end, as, for instance, in Clifford Simak's *City* (1952) where humanity abandons the planet. But here the dogs who step into the ecological niche we have vacated take on sufficiently human characteristics for us to identify with them: they are human in all but name. Or Isaac Asimov's stunningly doom-laden "Nightfall" (1941), in which an advanced civilisation watches the inevitability of its own destruction and madness; though here, too, we are contemplating the end of civilisation not of life, we already know they have climbed to this peak before and will probably do so again. The overwhelming message that came from the vast majority of science fiction that assumed the mantle of nuclear warnings in the 1950s and 60s was that the holocaust could be survived, and though it might be a bit difficult at times, man would come through and everything would get back to the way it used to be. (Occasionally, as in such varied stories as Piers Anthony's *Sos the Rope* (1968) or Lucius Shepard's "Human History" (1996), this post-Holocaust idyll would contain within it a group of scientists in a redoubt who maintain all the old, bad medicine of nuclear physics and who must not be allowed out to despoil our world again. But even this mildly anti-scientific message tends to be ambiguous, in *Riddley Walker* (1980) by Russell Hoban, for instance, the rediscovery of gunpowder is a bad thing but also an inevitable process in the redevelopment of human civilisation.)

Of course, the archetypal central figure in science fiction is the competent man, and the idea of defeat, the idea that no solution can be found, runs directly counter to such competence. Which makes Philip Latham's "The Xi Effect" so unusual for its period. Here the metaphor for nuclear disaster is a gradual but inexorable shortening of wavebands which steadily wipes out everything from radio to light. Latham's competent scientific heroes are allowed to explain the effect, but not to find a solution. The final statement of hopelessness must have been almost unique in sf of that era.

If science fiction's message of catastrophe was essentially palliative, it was left to writers outside the genre to be more honest and more despairing. Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) denies any hope of survival, as does Peter George's *Dr Strangelove* (1963), while the film *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) left an ambiguous ending but little real sense of hope. Such negative messages were coming at a time when the science fiction of comic books was pretending that nuclear accidents might turn ordinary mortals into superheroes such as *Spiderman* (1962).

During the 1960s increased nuclear tension triggered by events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, increased public awareness of the effects of nuclear weapons, coupled with a mood of protest and alienation, allowed a new generation of science fiction writers to present a bleaker canvas, though the threat was more likely to take the form of ecological spoilage as in *Earthworks* (1965) by Brian Aldiss or loss of individual power, as in "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" (1967) by Harlan Ellison. More recently, the renewed ecological threat of BSE and CJD has prompted a revision of Jeffries's notion of an Earth returning to natural fecundity in the absence of humanity in Ronald Wright's *A Scientific Romance* (1997), while one can only assume the approach of the millennium lay behind such apocalyptic visions as the total social and environmental breakdown portrayed in Elizabeth Hand's *Glimmering* (1997). Nevertheless, when incidents such as Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and the increasingly obvious instability of the Soviet Union revived nuclear fears in the West, it was again writers from outside the genre who presented the starkest pictures. In the TV films *Threads* (1984) and *The Day After* (1983), the graphic novel *When the Wind Blows* (1982) by Raymond Briggs and the novel *Golden Days* (1987) by Carolyn See we get a graphic representation of the sores, sickness and inevitable death that is the lot of those unfortunate enough to survive the initial blast.

Science fiction, meanwhile, was now happy to present the destruction of the Earth, either comically as in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978) by Douglas Adams or more seriously and more uncomfortably in *The Forge of God* (1987) and *Anvil of Stars* (1992) by Greg Bear or

the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987–1989) by Octavia Butler. Nevertheless, no matter how darkly and uncomfortably Bear and Butler and Hand presented the moment of catastrophe, such stories still presented survival, with the aid of aliens (or in Hand's case, ghosts or intruders from some otherwhere), as an option for their heroes, and through them for humanity.

Again it was a lone voice, James Morrow in his bleak novel *This is the Way the World Ends*, who, alone of science fiction writers, was prepared to follow the notion of destruction through to the obliteration of humanity. Science fiction has often claimed to think the unthinkable, but just as individual death is clouded with visions of immortality or rebirth, so it seems that humanity's death can only be presented in hopeful colours of survival or rescue.

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Paul Kincaid is a former reviews editor of Vector and is the administrator of The Arthur C. Clarke Award – Eds.

British National Identity and the Phenomenon of Doctor Who by Andrew M. Butler [Vector 232, Nov/Dec 2003]

23 November 1963 was a curious day in history. The legend goes that everyone – everyone in their mid-40s or older that is – know what they are doing that day, or at least the day before when not only did Aldous Huxley die, but John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Elm Street, Dallas. Saturday 23, part of the shocked aftermath [*also*] saw the debut of a mysterious new science fiction programme, which would survive for the next three decades. The series, along with the various ones created by Gerry Anderson through the 1960s, are part of the bedrock on which contemporary British science fiction is built, an incalculable influence. As a minor example, references to the series made their way into Gwyneth Jones' *Bold as Love: A Near Future Fantasy* (2001). Unpicking such references is beyond the scope of this article; what I wish to do initially is to argue that the phenomenon of *Doctor Who* can act as a barometer of British national identity and the changing fortunes of British television.

After the invention of radio, it was very quickly apparent that this new communication medium could be used for patriotic purposes (if we did it) or propaganda (if they did it). As early as 1923 the Sykes Committee of the government felt that "the control of such a potential power over public opinion and the life of the nation ought to remain with the State" (1). Not only would the programming have an impact on the listeners within the broadcasting country but, because radio waves are no respecters of political or national boundaries, it would reach people in neighbouring countries.

As early as the late 1920s Canada was worried about the Americanisation of their airwaves thanks to the presence of a growing industry to their south. Nazi Germany was skilled in the black arts of propaganda, most notoriously in the example of Lord Haw Haw's broadcasts from Germany aimed at Britain. The British Broadcasting Company, in the meanwhile, established under a Royal Charter as the monopoly broadcaster in Britain, was involved in monitoring foreign signals for the government and to this day the BBC World Service is funded through the government rather than the licence fee. In the era of the Cold War both the West and the Communist bloc would jam each other's signals and the Voice of America and Radio Moscow could act as conduits of national cultures.

Even today, under the banner of protecting frequencies for the use of the emergency services and safeguarding business, illegal or pirate broadcasters are tracked down and stopped; access to the broadcast spectrum from amateur radio to stereo analogue television is still governed by the state or agencies acting on behalf of the state.

The perception of radio, and then television, is that, alongside any incidental benefits of information and entertainment, the output would form a national identity, which is to say: 'any given set of language practices, myths, stories, and beliefs propagated to justify a dominant group in maintaining power, or to justify a competing group in replacing them or shifting power among them' (2). It would make such cultural practices both attractive to those who could participate within them, and thereby attractive to people from other countries who might wish to participate, and would make such practices look normal, part of the heritage.

In Britain, the BBC was not a straightforward wing of the government but saw itself as a bridge between government and people, which could set out to engage the public's interest in the issues of the day, especially where government policies and legislation would have an impact upon them. As British deference loosened, broadcasters could also act as the viewers' or listeners' proxies in holding the government (and others) to account for their actions and ideologies, with this eventually resulting in the current crisis engulfing both the BBC and the Prime Minister's office over the claims in a dossier on Iraq's war capabilities.

Until the mid-1950s, the BBC were unchallenged in their broadcasts in the UK, but a series of commercial broadcasters were established with regional licences and they began broadcasting on 22 September 1955. The BBC, clearly not viewing its youthful and commercial rival with benign eyes, committed a spoiling tactic by choosing that night to kill off Grace Archer in a barn fire on the radio soap *The Archers*. Despite the commercial imperative on the independent television stations, they had to same imperative to entertain and instruct as the BBC, enshrined in the 1964 Broadcasting Act: 'to provide a public service for disseminating information, education and entertainment ... to ensure that the programmes broadcast ... maintain a high general standard in all respects, and in particular in respect of their content and quality, and a proper balance and wide range in their subject matter'. By the end of the 1960s the ITV broadcasters had established for themselves a reputation for news – with *News at Ten* more popular than the BBC's evening news, and the two BBC channels (BBC2 having started on 20 April 1964 with a remit in part to reach minority audiences) were most successful in light entertainment.

If such programmes provided some sense of national identity in terms of their content and their underlying ideologies, then this was further boosted by the ostensibly private act of watching the programmes themselves. The 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II had boosted television sales in the post war years, and there was a sense of the nation coming together not only to watch her enthronement, but her annual Christmas message to the Commonwealth and other national events, especially the Grand National, the Boat Race, and various cup finals. Families would come together in one room to watch the programmes and discuss them, before these became part of the social intercourse outside the house, on the doorstep, in the corner shop, in offices, in bars and so forth. Individual landmark programmes became part of the cultural heritage – the classic example being the emptying of churches during the broadcast of *The Forsyth Saga*.

During the age of the duopoly broadcasts from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s viewing settled down to a series of straight-forward choices between programmes, perhaps along class lines. Saturdays were special though. After *Grandstand* or *World of Sport*, the family could settle down to children's programmes, such as Basil Brush (who debuted on ITV in 1963, designed by Peter Firmin), the more family-orientated *Juke Box Jury*, and then a mix of variety programmes, some comedy, perhaps a film and more sport. BBC1 was the Saturday night broadcaster – especially with the chat show *Parkinson*, the Saturday night movie and football highlights in *Match of the Day* during the 1970s. There was the sense that everyone was watching – even if this was clearly not true.

The never had it so good 1960s were a period of the opening up and redefining of Britain. British film was experiencing a last period of greatness, with successes in historical melodramas – a constant reimagining of the Victorian era – and comedy – the end of a golden age of

Ancillary Justice

by Ann Leckie

Reviewed by

Gwyneth Jones

[Vector #274,
Winter 2013/14]

Already an assured short story writer, and a long-time active and savvy member of the US SF community, Ann Leckie's new space opera series promises to give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people. The opening episode, *Ancillary Justice*, with its classic, deftly updated storyline and a brilliantly original central character (not to mention that striking John Harris cover) has been greeted, predictably, with popular acclaim. But *Ancillary Justice* isn't just any well-crafted crowd pleaser. This debut, like Breg, its central character, is more unusual – and more daring – than at first appears.

The universe of *Ancillary Justice* is not historically situated; the gap between the Radchaai empire and 21st Century Earth can't be bridged.

Space opera, however – despite the ahistorical borrowed cultures, the costumes, and the abyss where 'how we got there from here' ought to be – obviously is historically situated and it always shows.

Ealing Studio's comedies – as well as a burst of fantasy/horror in the shape of Hammer Films and a burst of social realism shepherded by more northern and working class directors and writers. Such categories were not distinct in terms of their personnel, as editors, directors and photographers such as Seth Holt and Freddie Francis worked both on Hammer Horrors and films such as *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*. Revues such as *Beyond the Fringe* and then Peter Cook's *Establishment Club*, not to mention *That Was the Week that Was* contributed to a satire boom that repositioned the public's relations to politicians and other public figures, and slowly led to a less formal society. A series of high profile obscenity trials, such as the one surrounding the Penguin edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the sex scandal engulfing John Profumo and the teenaged hysteria over the Beatles ushered in a new, permissive society.

What was or is the British national identity, then? There is the sense of the past greatness, the Empire we had and lost, leading us to still feel that we are major players on the world stage. Our status as an island nation gives us a fierce sense of independence and community, which can verge on the xenophobic, an 'us and them' mentality best expressed in the newspaper headline FOG IN CHANNEL – CONTINENT CUT OFF FROM BRITAIN. Our small size and apparent international power contributes to a sense of pluckiness, of resourcefulness, but bringing with it a sense of fair play – we exported not only our system of government and law to our empire, but also God's own game, cricket. Along with our resourcefulness came a stoicism, a stiff upper lip reserve that limited the expression of emotions, and kept sex firmly out of sight. (This repression paved the way for the voyeuristic success of James Bond and *Alfie* [1966], whereas films which drew attention to the repression and voyeurism such as Powell's *Peeping Tom* [1960] were suppressed.) At the same time, these characteristics might actually turn out to be English rather than British proper – and I am probably guilty here of conflating the two.

It is in this context that *Doctor Who* can be seen as, in retrospect, the perfect format. In intent it would try to deliver a wider audience to the late Saturday afternoon, in particular extending the family viewing further forward in the day, but also setting out to entertain (through the action adventure and thriller format) and instruct (in science and, initially at least, in history). A craft that could travel in time and space allowed the creative teams to choose anywhere for their narratives, from the dawn of humanity to the end of time, whether on Earth or in some far-flung gravel pit on the far side of the galaxy. Whilst they may not have thought in such terms, it gave them a generic flexibility which would constantly refresh the show, and allow them to creatively riff on (or steal from) all existing narratives. One adventure could be a travelogue accompanying Marco Polo, another could be political intrigue in high places. Evil dictators could be overthrown, entire races saved and young people helped to work with animals and for world peace. We could witness the fall of Atlantis (at least three times, as it happens) and penetrate the mysteries of the Yeti and the Loch Ness Monster (twice, as it happens). We could take part in the fall of Troy, the shoot out at the OK Corral and even wander around on a curiously still light Saturday afternoon in late November 1963.

The Police Call Box, then a familiar piece of street furniture, was an inspired choice for a spaceship disguise, bringing with it the connotations of reassuring law and order, as well as the incongruity of a familiar shape in unfamiliar surroundings. In recent years the Police have tried to trademark the shape, but in truth it is BBC Enterprises who have kept the shape in the public eye. The fact that this high-tech ship can change shape to blend in with its surroundings is perhaps a triumph of British thinking – the fact that it has broken and no one has got around to fixing it for forty years is typical of British practices. (One of the government buildings in Croydon has had scaffolding around it for as long as anyone remembers, certainly for several decades. No one is entirely sure why the scaffolding is there, and whether it is in some sense supporting the building – and so no one is brave enough to dismantle it.) The faulty steering mechanism on the TARDIS is familiar from dozens of product recalls and to anyone who has tried to steer a supermarket shopping trolley (3). In the early days of year-round broadcasts rather than seasons, such unreliability could add to

the suspense as to whether the team could get back to 1960s Britain, as well as the useful dumping of them into one crisis after another.

It is curious that the interior of the TARDIS has not been more explored as a space for adventure. The two-episode 'Edge of Destruction' (aka 'Inside the Spaceship', broadcast 8 and 15 February 1964) took place entirely onboard, and we have had more than one control room, but it was not really until 'The Invasion of Time' (4 February–11 March 1978) that we ventured further than a few corridors into the ship's interior. It is clear that the craft is attuned in some way to the Doctor, and can help in the regeneration process, but mostly it remains a device to get the characters to a situation and then strand them there rather than a narrative location in its own right.

The character of the Doctor was initially mysterious, and rather sinister. He kidnaps the two teachers who have discovered his and his granddaughter's secret, and later puts them all in danger by stranding them on Skaro. In William Hartnell, they were casting a mainstay of many classic British films – he's there as a gangster in *Brighton Rock* (1943), for example, and most disturbingly as an elderly talent scout somewhat interested in Richard Harris's body in the British New Wave classic *This Sporting Life* (1963). The Doctor's character is firm, dogmatic, patriarchal and moral, given to addressing people.

Some of the narrative interest came from how little we were told about his origins; we knew he was in exile but not why or where from, and we would not meet another member of his species until the Meddling Monk in 1965 – the species not being identified as Time Lords until 'The War Games' (19 April–21 June 1969), the planet not being referred to as Gallifrey even then. By the 1970s and 1980s renegade Time Lords were more common than sightings of Lord Lucan, but in the early days the Doctor and Susan (Carole Ann Ford) seemed alone in the universe, although they might one day return home.

Susan was ostensibly the Doctor's granddaughter though we've never had a clear sense of the Time Lord social patterns or their reproductive strategies. Whilst subsequent doctors have shown affection for their companions – such as perhaps for Jo Grant (Katy Manning), and let's draw a veil over the ninety-minute adventure with one of the McGanns – the Doctor seems to have taken a vow of chastity along with his exile. Susan was clearly there as a point of identification for the younger members of the audience, who presumably share her love of The Beatles and other classical music, and also as the first of the long line of damsels in distress and screamers who would be menaced, kidnapped, imprisoned and put in peril. Part way into the second year of the series she was abandoned by the Doctor in twenty-second century Earth, to help David (Peter Fraser) rebuild after the Dalek invasion. As far as I know it remains unexplored as to whether she could regenerate without a TARDIS nearby, or whether she simply died of old age.

The remaining two characters of the initial series were both teachers, who again the young audience could identify with. Barbara (Jacqueline Hill) was a bit of a maternal figure, and a teacher of history, which would allow for information to be fed to the audience where necessary. Ian (William Russell) on the other hand was a science teacher, and could be used to explain the science, or have the science explained to him. As the effective juvenile lead, he could be physical in a way that this incarnation of the Doctor was unable to. The two characters lasted through to almost the end of the second series, using a Dalek time machine to get home.

Through the first three seasons, the Doctor and his companions helped out in key points of Earth history, saved the world on several occasions and brought rapprochement to various alien races. They were a plucky crew, who became major world players – perhaps a metaphor for the way Britain saw itself in international politics. But almost as successful as them was the first alien menace they faced – the Daleks.

The concept of the Daleks was that of Terry Nation, who was at the time (briefly) writing material for another British institution whose shows united a nation, Tony Hancock. Nation's

In romances of future empire, US or other national politics can leap the gap like nothing else: we have Manifest Destiny scary totalitarian galactic empires; Sixties Liberal galactic empires; cynical, sarcastic Scottish Left galactic empires; resigned, ironic Equals under Brussels galactic empires; insanely Divided galactic empires, collapsing from within. It all depends on what's playing at home.

So it's refreshing to feel the strong presence of developments in fiction and social culture for a change. The Radchaai's dismissive attitude to assigned gender is a given at first, an arbitrary convention. But when we meet them on their own turf, and Breq surveys the humans whose ways she knows best, "an eddying crowd of unnervingly ambiguously gendered people", the derivation seems obvious. Online, nobody knows for sure; gender is just one of the variables people play around with, when building avatars. I've no idea if Leckie would agree, but the Radchaai seem to be asking us: for better or for worse, isn't this ambiguity fated to be our future?

vision of the Dalek broke from the man in the rubber suit alien which had plagued much television and film sf previously and remains a problem even in these days of CGI. The scenario of the post-nuclear war mutant would be very much in people's minds in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis and an apparently unstoppable arms race. The demand was clearly there for them to return, which they did in the previously mentioned 'Dalek Invasion of Earth' (21 November–26 December 1964), which transferred Daleks from the alien metal cities of Skaro to Westminster Bridge. A third appearance marked the second season, 'The Chase' (22 May–26 June 1965) and a fourth and fifth the third ('Mission to the Unknown' [9 October 1965], 'The Daleks' Master Plan' [13 November–29 January 1966]). Just as the Quatermass serials from the 1950s had been remade for the large screen, so were the first two Dalek serials, with Peter Cushing replacing William Hartnell as the Doctor, and Roy (Recordbreakers) Castle and Bernard Cribbins becoming comic relief companions in *Doctor Who and the Daleks* (1965) and *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150AD* (1966) respectively.

The dropping of the eponymous Doctor from the title of the second film may say something about the BBC's uneasy relationship with the film industry in this and subsequent decades. But on the other hand there was the marketability. The Daleks had guaranteed the continuance of the sf series, and brought it the ratings the BBC wished for to steal Saturday evenings from ITV, but it was the Daleks that dominated merchandising with Terry Nation rightly exploiting his creation. Alongside Beatlemania there was now Dalekmania as school-children in playgrounds across Britain began to imitate the deadly pepperpots. Toys, sweets, comics, wallpaper and so on featured Daleks, and even the BBC got in on the act as David Whitaker, the series script editor, wrote the first of the novelisations *Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure with the Daleks*. One of the shared characteristics of the series is the *fort-da* experience of watching it from behind the sofa, or through a hand half blocking the television. We were scared out of our wits by the series, but were compelled to watch.

Nation withdrew the rights to using the Daleks during the early Pertwee era, in an attempt to get a spin-off series off the ground in the United States, but this failed. By all accounts Pertwee was unimpressed by a nemesis which could be defeated by a flight of stairs. Eventually they returned and then revisionism set in – in one of the darkest sequences of the entire run, 'Genesis of the Daleks' (8 March–12 April 1975) we discovered that the Daleks came from Kaleds not Dals, and the Doctor is sent by the Time Lords to intervene to prevent the creation of the Daleks by Davros (the Time Lords' non-intervention policy by then being as much observed as the *Star Trek* prime directive). The Doctor weighed up the pros of a genocide which would spare countless millions against the cons of alliance against the Daleks no longer happening to bring people together. Subsequent Dalek narratives were further weighed down by continuity, and the recurring figure of Davros who, as politically incorrect evil crippled geniuses go, seems pretty indestructible. How many protective forcefields does one paranoid megalomaniac need?

But this is to get ahead of ourselves. The increasing ill-health of Hartnell might have seen the end of the series, until a bright spark had the idea of regenerating the hero – or, rather, rejuvenating him – into Patrick Troughton (final episode of 'The Tenth Planet' [29 October 1966]). Troughton was a much more whimsical figure than the rather po-faced Hartnell version, and was described as a cosmic hobo, complete with recorder and Beatles haircut. This was British as jokester, never quite taking things seriously, and perhaps less in control. After 'The Highlanders' (17 December 1966–7 January 1967) provided a new companion, Jamie (Frazer Hines), purely historical adventures were left behind and monsters took prominence – the Daleks, naturally, but also the Cybermen who had seen off the old Doctor, and new menaces such as Ice Warriors (one of many species to inhabit Mars over the millennia) and the robotic Yeti. The second encounter with the Yeti, on and under the streets of contemporary London, saw the introduction of Lethbridge-Stewart (Nicholas Courtney) who would later command the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce (UNIT) just in time to rescue Earth from a series of alien invasions.

When Troughton moved on, he was replaced by Jon Pertwee, man of a thousand voices and cast here as a dandy figure, in a series of frilly shirts and opera capes, and now in glorious colour. For most of his first three seasons (1970–1972), the Doctor was confined to Earth (exiled by those pesky non-interfering Time Lords), although not necessarily in the present. As scientific advisor to UNIT he saw off no end of alien invasions, and faced down but never entirely defeated an evil Time Lord the Master (Roger Delgado) who was meddling in the affairs of Earth. Supposedly the series had a greater realism, its UNIT being perhaps a cousin of UNCLE and the money saved from building locations going into James Bond gadgets – a souped-up vintage car, Bessie, gyrocoptors, the Whomobile – and Pertwee turning to action heroics (Venusian Aikido) perhaps closer to *The Avengers* than Bond, but clearly part of a British tradition of action fantasy.

Producer Barry Letts and script editor Terrance Dicks together oversaw all but the first of Pertwee's adventures (Dicks had been there for much of the final Troughton season) and celebrated the tenth season by bringing back Hartnell and Troughton for 'The Three Doctors' (30 December 1972–20 January 1973) – albeit Hartnell was limited in what he could do – and then got the Doctor back into space. The greater emphasis on the military during the whole era, as well as its contemporary setting frequently brought the show into conflict with Mary Whitehouse of the National Viewers and Listeners Association, who condemned the series' violence. This was, after all, the era of the ultraviolent or horrific film – the era of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). With killer teddy bears in one episode and giant spiders in another, rather more domestic fears were being played on than exterminating pepperpots.

Tom Baker was brought in to replace Jon Pertwee in 1974, and largely continued this horror, albeit in a more gothic vein. In the context of the Troubles, the on-going industrial unrest and the oil crises of the first half of the decade it was only natural to retreat into such fantasies. Where Pertwee had been English dandy, Baker was English eccentric – although he brought a very non-English alienness to the rôle, with his piercing eyes. With his jelly babies, his broad brimmed hat, his long coat and his even longer scarf he was instantly recognisable and open to parody – indeed in his later seasons self-parody as a hat could disable a Dalek or a scarf trip up an enemy.

His companions continued to reflect the strides made in feminism in the real world. Both Dr Liz Shaw (Caroline John) and Jo Grant had their moments of strength, but risked being patronised by the Doctor; Sarah Jane Smith (Elizabeth Sladen), who first appeared with Pertwee, continued into Baker's reign, and was a card-carrying feminist. She was even smart enough to bemoan the fact that she seemed to spend a lot of time crawling through ventilation ducts. In time she was replaced by Leela, speedy with the knife and very self-reliant, but also very much there to bring the dads and uncles and even the occasional grandfather in to watch the programme (my own certainly perked up when he saw her). No sooner had Leela decided to stay behind on Gallifrey, when the Doctor was provided with Romana (Mary Tamm), a Time Lady, to help him in his new mission, to track down the pieces of the Key to Time. Romana was much haughtier than previous companions, less willing to bow to his wishes and when she reincarnated (into Lalla Ward), she was more of an equal to the Doctor than someone who needed everything explaining.

But changes were afoot, in the wider world and in *Doctor Who*. After seven years Baker tired of the rôle and was replaced by an actor best known for being a hapless vet in *All Creatures Great and Small* and advertising all manner of things on ITV, as well as being the presenter of *Button Moon*. Peter Davison was clearly a name who could boost the ratings – unlike Alexei Sayle who had lobbied for the job in the unlikely venue of *Foundation*, and had to be content with a rôle in a Colin Baker Dalek story. The ratings needed to be boosted, because the duopoly was about to be broken.

For the best part of twenty years the BBC and the various ITV franchises had divided the television airwaves between them. A new commercial but state-owned channel was set up,

Channel 4, linked by a complicated formula involving advertising to the ITV companies, and with a remit (like BBC2) to offer broadcasting for minorities, especially ethnic minorities and the disabled, although it is difficult to see what minority audience is reached by *Friends* and *The Salon* today. They started broadcasting on 2 November 1982 with an episode of *Count-down*. The ground was also being cleared for satellite broadcasts and opening up the market to a multi-channel environment, although this did not actually happen until the 1980s. Under Thatcher everything was up for grabs, and that included the Royal Charter and the tv license – which the Peacock report suggested should be replaced with a pay per view system.

In the new marketplace a BBC that made programmes that people wanted to see would be accused of dumbing down, being too commercial, and using its position to compete unfairly, whereas a BBC that made programmes nobody watched would be accused of wasting the licence fee. It was still the favoured broadcaster in times of crisis – the BBC was the channel to watch the Falklands War on, for example – or to watch at Christmas (and many Christmases feel like crises) but it consistently lost out to ITV's *Coronation Street*. Eventually it hit back with Terry Wogan's thrice weekly chatshow and a new soap set in the East End of London, but in the mean time it experimented by showing *Doctor Who* twice a week – putting a end to the tradition of the Saturday night and undermining the suspense of the drama.

Peter Davison, playing again a very English doctor, with a love of cricket, in cricket whites (but what looked like pyjamas) and sporting an inexplicable stick of celery (explicked in his final story as a plot device), promised to bring a new vulnerability to the part after the super-human efforts of the late Baker years. This of course explained why he was able to float around in space with little more than an aqualung and use a cricket ball to bounce himself into moving in the direction he wanted. At the same time, some of the scripts were the best in years – Eric Saward's *The Visitation* (15 February-23 February 1982) and *Earthshock* (8 March-16 March 1982) being particularly fine, even if we did lose the sonic screwdriver and Adric in the process. The Cybermen returned, the sea devils returned and the Daleks returned, although inexplicably the latter was in a two part adventure with fifty minute episodes.

The series limped towards its twentieth anniversary and, as ten years before, there was an attempt to make an adventure which would bring all the previous doctors together. Hartnell, who had of course died, was replaced by Richard Hurndall, and then Tom Baker, still too close to the rôle, refused to be involved and so was represented by footage from the uncompleted 'Shada'. Alongside the eponymous five doctors were a variety of past companions, some still looking remarkably young, and past adversaries, but the overall problem was that it was so busy trying to shoehorn everyone into the narrative that it did not do anything interesting in itself. The BBC helpfully pushed the showing back from the anniversary itself to 25 November 1983, which happened to coincide with the BBC Children in Need Appeal. Perhaps the feeling was that the public service broadcaster was delivering an audience to a worthy cause, but the drama was rather undercut by a recurring phone number and scrolling appeals – this was in the days before permanently onscreen logos.

There was a growing sense that the BBC had lost faith in the programme. Other sf series were tried out including two series of *The Tripods* in 1984 and 1985 which were given that all important Saturday tea time slot where the sf narrative traditionally belonged. The Tripods were here to stay and replace the Daleks – although sooner or later they would have to leave the source books by John Christopher behind. This usurper never did get the ratings the BBC hoped for, and Michael Grade pulled the plug. In 1987 a series called *Star Cops* tried to combine sf and crime narratives, to mixed results and indifferent ratings. Only an sf sitcom, *Red Dwarf* (1988-), seemed to have the legs to get beyond a second series. If a series did not get the viewers immediately, then the plug was pulled.

Doctor Who was living on borrowed time; Davison was replaced by Colin Baker who had previously played a Time Lord (Maxil in 'Arc of Infinity' [3 January-12 January 1983]), and brought what I felt was a refreshing contrast to Davison's earnestness: the self-centred-

ness and pomposity which occasionally rose to the surface in the Doctor's character was given full rein and this was a Doctor who wanted you to know how often he saved the world. After his first complete season in 1985, Baker found the series he was in suspended thanks to Michael Grade's axe. When the series returned after an eighteen month hiatus, it was to a fourteen episode story arc consisting of a number of narratives told at the Doctor's trial by the Time Lords. The first story was one of the last to be written by Robert Holmes, one of the series' best writers, but this was not one of his finer hours; in contrast the parts of final two episodes, which echoed Dickens by way of Franz Kafka, were among the very best things he had written. Unfortunately the season made no sense, and the recruitment of Bonnie Langford as a new companion was a sign of worse things to come.

I confess I have a prejudice against Sylvester McCoy, who replaced the sacked Baker, after seeing him in *Buster*, one of the worst plays ever. I drifted away from the series, especially as Bonnie Langford was replaced by Ace, a youthful tomboy who was a dab hand with the dynamite and who seemed to fly in the face of the series's stance on violence. Richard Briers was in one episode, Ken Dodd in another and even Nicholas Parsons (although he acquitted himself admirably). In one serial the villain even appeared to be Bertie Bassett, although I must have dreamt that, surely. If there was a sofa to hide behind, it was from fear for quality, not the quality of fear. It was also perhaps odd to see a quintessentially British character (which in this case probably means English) having a Scottish accent. The BBC's patience finally ran out in 1989 about three years after mine; in the multi-channel world, the audience was much too fragmented to waste time on a series as much concerned with its own past as reaching new audiences.

Doctor Who from then on would be a product, allowed occasional repeats (but the BBC even messed around with those, pulling them from the schedule, interrupting them for sport) on terrestrial channels, and a mainstay of repeat channels on satellite. The series could be exploited on video, and in time on DVD, and books could be licensed, although at times the BBC decided that they would much rather do them themselves. What there would not be was a new series.

Let's face it, *Doctor Who* was always ramshackle in its writing, acting, sets and effects, and always worked within a limited budget. And yet working within the budget produced a remarkably good, and intriguing series which rang changes on many classic ideas of the genre. It was typical British triumph in adversity, succeeding against all odds.

After years of rumours the worst thing happened: the BBC entered into a co-production with Universal to make a ninety-minute pilot (broadcast 27 May 1996 – entirely inappropriate for a programme that belongs to dark, early evenings). In a sense this could never have worked. There is something about the rhythm of *Doctor Who* that requires a cliff-hanger after twenty-five minutes or so, and the forty-five and fifty minute episodes had just felt wrong, as indeed had the ninety minutes of 'The Five Doctors'. *Doctor Who* never shared the glibness of *Star Trek* which could save the world in forty-five minutes (plus advert breaks). Casting Paul McGann from *Withnail and I* (1986) was an interesting touch, although casting Withnail (Richard E. Grant) rather than I would have been better. And just to annoy us they starting playing unfair with things we thought we knew – suddenly the Doctor was half-human.

Britain has changed much in forty years, of course. It is much more ethnically diverse, it is much more open to non-British influences, and strides have been made towards gender equality. We are no longer so deferential to politicians. We are much more cynical. But also, we spend less time as family units watching television together – event tv is limited to the occasional state funeral and finals of *Big Brother* or *Pop Idol*, and some episodes of soaps. TVs in bedrooms, videos allowing us to time shift, up to five terrestrial channels, hundreds of cable, satellite or digital channels, and the internet have fragmented the viewing figures so there is no longer the sense that everyone is watching a particular programme. The BBC lost the rights to many of the sports it could show unchallenged in the 1960s, first to ITV and

Binti
by Nnedi
Okorafor

Reviewed by
Susan Oke

[Vector #283,
Spring 2016]

The opening of this novella effectively sets the scene, contrasting the use of high-technology with the protagonist's in-born traditional beliefs, placing the narrative clearly on its path. The book examines difference via the clash of cultures and belief systems, both Earth-bound and inter-planetary.

Binti has been offered a place at a prestigious off-world university—the first of her tribe to receive that honour—but her tears of joy soon turn into tears of frustration when her family refuse permission for her to attend. She sneaks away from home in the middle of the night, and arrives in the spaceport, out of place in her otjize covered skin and ankle bracelets.

then to Sky. Parkinson is a spent cultural force. In other words, the Saturday that *Doctor Who* was part of no longer exists. We cannot go back.

Of course, in the unlikely event that the BBC do manage a fortieth anniversary special or ten years from now a fiftieth anniversary one, I would be tempted to watch it. But I'm not holding out much hope. *Queer as Folk* might have made the Dr Who cool again, and Russell T. Davies has written sf, but that moment, too, has passed. One day, perhaps, the BBC will find an sf format as interesting as *Doctor Who* was for two decades – but it won't and it can't be the same. Because we have also changed.

Postscript

I've left the previous paragraph unchanged, but in the period since I wrote it, the BBC announced a revamp of *Doctor Who* under the supervision of Russell T. Davies, although it will be 2005 before we are likely to see anything. The name being bandied around to play the Doctor is Bill Nighy, so the female Doctor seems not about to happen. Nighy is an excellent choice – I was first aware of him in Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, but I suspect he was the William Nighy who played Sam in the classic Radio 4 adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. He was excellent in the film of *I Capture the Castle* (2003), and he does come from Croydon, which is qualification enough. Predictably, given Davies's record, the media are suggesting a camp *Doctor Who*, but let's wait and see.

Like Chris Hill (see his article), I am sceptical of it happening, and hope to see it in a double bill with Terry Gilliam's *Good Omens*, something else which several have assured me will most definitely happen, oh yes. Just as I could not be the same child who watched *Star Wars* (1977) when *The Phantom Menace* (1999) was released, so I cannot hide behind the sofa anymore (even if the space weren't taken up by books and videos). The children, the teenagers, who watched the last regular series are old enough to have their own children, but the dynamics of family viewing have changed. In a post-*Buffy*, *Roswell High*, *Dawson's Creek* world we are much more used to see the kind of cross-over programme that *Doctor Who* has always been, but with teenagers (albeit eighteen going on thirty in its choice of actors) at the centre, and adults more peripheral. These programmes are also more sexual than *Doctor Who* ever was. An alternate model might be *The X-Files*, which was able to maintain a non-sexual relationship at its heart for many years. And there are the models of *Jonathan Creek*, *Strange* and the remakes of *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* to consider.

It could happen, of course, but the best we can hope for is either pastiche, or a transformation into something else.

Notes

1. Monroe Price, 'Loyalty and Identity'. In *Television, the Public Sphere and National Identity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 6.
2. Ibid.
3. Of course the supermarket trolley is a time machine in Pratchett's Johnny Maxwell trilogy, especially *Johnny and the Bomb* (1996).

I am also indebted to Mark Campbell, *Doctor Who Harpenden: Pocket Essentials*, 2000 for broadcast dates.

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Andrew M. Butler's latest two books are *Postmodernism (with Bob Ford, Pocket Essentials)* and *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod (edited with Farah Mendlesohn, Science Fiction Foundation)*.

Family Frontiers: The Space Age Fiction of Marge Piercy and Ursula K. Le Guin' by Sue Norton [Vector 277, Autumn 2014]

There is a short but striking passage in Ursula K. Le Guin's 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* that relates to the artificiality of culture. It is written in the voice of Ai as he contemplates the political caginess of a Karhide demagogue. The demagogue had 'talked a great deal about Truth..., for he was, he said, "cutting down beneath the veneer of civilization"' (91). His rhetoric prompts Ai to ruminate that:

"...it is a durable, ubiquitous, spacious metaphor, that one about veneer (or paint, or pliofilm, or whatever) hiding the nobler reality beneath. It can conceal a dozen fallacies at once. One of the most dangerous is the implication that civilization, being artificial, is unnatural: that it is the opposite of primitiveness.... Of course there is no veneer, the process is one of growth, and primitiveness and civilization are degrees of the same thing." (91)

His thesis is an interesting one. If, for instance, we allege that a particular family form, such as the so-called nuclear one, is merely a product of "civilization" or "culture", does that mean we are also calling it unnatural? Yes we are, but in a limited sense. The artificiality of culture needs to be qualified: instead of categorically regarding culture as unnatural, it is considerably more useful to see it as the continual reinvention of itself as "natural" in accommodating the next evolution in material human circumstance. Such an understanding of culture and society is outlined by Levi-Strauss's argument that it is impossible to refer without contradiction to any phase in human evolution as lacking in culture, since humankind would always have practiced activities that exceeded the requirements of nature (3). Thus a primitive "then" and a civilized "now" are degrees of the same thing.

Since civilization is so thoroughly, and so conspicuously, constructed, it is spurious and politically or ideologically motivated to claim with certainty that any social formation is more or less "natural" than any other, given that the category of "the primitive" is equally a product of civilization and therefore utterly constructed as well. What is of interest to literary and cultural critics is the identification in fiction of the points where one culturally generated form competes for privilege with another. These competitions take place across time (linearly), of course, and also across human cultures and sub-cultures (laterally).

And literary and cultural criticism are socially instrumental, for it is by carefully and methodically delineating difference, and the forces that shape it, that spaces are cleared in which change can be allowed, charted, narrated, and new forms "naturalised". By examining the devices and practices through which such forms take shape, the constructed, artificial, or narrated complexion of the world we live in is emphasised, thus highlighting the enabling potential of critical fictions (to use bell hooks' well-known term) to effect "real" change.

Perhaps attempts to expose the constructedness of unsavoury social formations, institutions, racial[ized] (and gender[ed]) pecking orders — which are symbolized and practiced as "natural," that is, as logical expressions of "human nature" — as a way of challenging their ideological dominance will always fall short of their project. Even as feminist fiction writers, writers of feminist sf, and feminist critics manage to "denaturalise" the patriarchal nuclear form, manage to reveal it inarguably as a product of "civilization", we are still left with the problem of the natural, or, rather, inevitable, momentum of culture, and all that that implies. If Ai is right, if primitiveness and civilization are degrees of the same thing, and the 'process is one of growth', then there is little to be gained in arguing that a seemingly

Binti is a member of the Himba tribe; a people steeped in tradition, living on the edge of the desert in a future Namibia. Given the scarcity of drinking water, this tribe continues the ancient practise of cleansing their skin and braided hair with otjize (a mix of red clay and aromatic oils).

The Himba people are also masters of complex mathematics and are obsessed with innovation and technology. They produce a highly sort after artefact called an astrolabe. This is a type of 'hand-held 'super computer' that is keyed to an individual.

Despite this the more numerous Khoush—pale skinned, in their veils and turbans—treat the Himba as second-class citizens. The Khoush travel the galaxy, whereas the Himba have never left, and never want to leave, their ancestral lands. Okorafor is adept at showing the ingrained nature of prejudice in us all.

In just ninety-six pages, Okorafor presents a story that is both thoughtful and thought provoking. Highly recommended.

omnipresent but oppressive form of social organisation is unnatural. For in a certain sense (Ai's sense) all forms of social organisation are indeed, and despite their obvious social construction, natural. Thus, one form of family necessarily replaces another as the "natural" dominant practice, and, given the nature of representation, the practice of backgrounding and foregrounding persists.

Nevertheless, fiction has the power to be both enabling, insofar as it can expose the constructedness of seemingly natural social formations, and disabling, to the extent that it often reconstructs the ideologies it critiques. Serious writers acknowledge, in their very enterprises, the importance of fiction in the formation and de-formation of social patterns. It is not surprising that many writers write stories according to principles that have a broadly-based appeal. In other words, the deliberate alienation of the reader, post-modern obfuscation, and abandonment of navigational aids are not practices employed by writers who seek wide readerships in order to prompt broad social reflection or change. Instead, these writers endeavour to work within the coordinates of their genre, and to make their stories attractive and accessible. Speculative texts are especially apt to participate in the process of the symbolic naturalisation of burgeoning family forms. They are able to identify myths in the unmaking, and myths in the making.

The baby-boom era novels of Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin are especially engaged with myths of the family. Their speculative representations of family come not only out of the social revolts of the sixties, but also of the explosion of science fiction which, during this era, mirrored the landing on the moon, the space race, and such popular television series as *Star Trek*. Their work, like the work of African American female writers during the same period - writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker - makes immediately apparent the artificiality of the nuclear configuration of family because it overtly assails the heavy, and now crumbling ideological structure that has held it in place. Certainly other writers assail that structure as well. For instance, Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* series, which began in *The San Francisco Chronicle* in 1976, takes account of gay and lesbian efforts to replace nuclear families with surrogate ones. Native American writing, especially the work of Leslie Silko and Louise Erdrich, also offers strikingly different models of family. But such accounts do not pose direct contrasts to what has been accepted in mainstream American culture as "normal", whereas blackness has often been constructed as the binary opposite of whiteness. Likewise, science fiction and speculative fiction (sf) generally pose direct contrasts to what we know, or think we know, about dominant reality.

Thus, delivering characters that are untrue to type is one of the primary aims of feminist writers of sf. Like "raced" writers who create characters that resist behavioural resemblance to racial stereotypes, feminist writers of sf construct female characters whose traits are often, in the phrase of Marlene Barr, 'alien to femininity'. Barr, a prominent scholar in the field, has observed how contemporary female sf writers 'address themselves to three broad, sometimes overlapping themes: community, heroism, and sexuality/reproduction', and, in doing so, create protagonists who change their worlds by defying behavioural models of femininity. She says:

"Women who form communities, become heroes, and take charge of their sexuality behave in a manner which is alien – opposed, estranged, repugnant, outside – to the concept of femininity [...] When women conform to the requirements of "femininity", they bolster patriarchal ideologies upholding exclusive male power at the expense of their own effectiveness and power [...]. Female speculative fiction writers use two forms of exaggeration or hyperbole to speak against the imposition of femininity upon women: their characters either become overwhelmingly negative and feminine, [...] or overwhelmingly positive and unfeminine. [...] Both methods decry femininity's imposed limitations, restrictions, and indirect routes as they show women displaying mastery and competence."

Feminist writers of mainstream or “realistic” (as opposed to speculative) fiction have, of course, always created female characters who behave in ways that are ‘alien, opposed, and estranged’ to femininity. One need only consider *Jane Eyre*, for instance. But the speculative genre frees the writer of the historical, psychological, spatial, and temporal requirements of realist fiction, thus allowing greater narrative latitude for the revision of gender roles. Because writers of sf are released, as Barr says, from the ‘constraints of patriarchal social reality, they can imagine presently impossible possibilities for women’ (Barr: 1987: xi).

As for women, so too of course, for family. The future visions of female sf writers tend to involve renditions of family that are fundamentally alien to conventional notions of “the family unit”. They are, to use Barr’s descriptors, estranged, outside, and repugnant to the concept of the patriarchal nuclear family, which depends so heavily upon a maintenance of “the feminine” and “the masculine.”

By blurring the usual distinctions between male and female subjectivity, works of a speculative nature sometimes create future-perfect families that are, among other things, gender neutralised. The didacticism of such texts is often unequivocal. They aim, as Robin Roberts has observed, to ‘teach us to rethink traditional patriarchal notions about science, reproduction, and gender [for] only in science fiction can feminists imaginatively step outside the father’s house and begin to look around’ (2).

One might argue, in fact, that only in science fiction, or in sf more generally, can *any* writer step outside the father’s house. When non-speculative writers attempt deviant renditions of family (or of other societal institutions), they must do so within a context of the world as we know it, not as we might imagine it. The store of images available to them is quite limited. A realistic writer must create family scenarios that conform to reader expectations of a plausible world or else risk exposing themselves to charges of implausibility.

Challenging, then, must be the task of the realistic writer who seeks to deliver plausible plotline *and* independent character, when fidelity to social reality insists upon the marginalisation of character. When, in his 1989 novel *S*, John Updike sought to liberate Sara, his latter-day Hester Prynne, from her upper-middle-class marriage to an inattentive New England doctor, he needed to create a kind of alternative reality for her by sending her to a utopian commune in the Arizona desert. Rather than posit either a distant future or a distant world, he devised this remote but parallel space in which his heroine could “find” herself (before fleeing, nevertheless, to a life of solitude in the Bahamas – also a remote but parallel space). For Updike, as indeed for any writer of realistic fiction, female liberation can be imagined only *to a certain extent*, before it collapses into the implausible. If an author is to remain mimetic to a world we recognize as our own, then certain wished-for plot gestures are apt to be compromised. Sf, by contrast, offers the possibility for radically re-visioned social landscapes without upsetting readerly expectations. Its conventions simply allow for the extraordinary. As feminist writers of futuristic sf, Marge Piercy and Ursula K. Le Guin rebut patriarchally sanctioned representations of family. With reference to the so-called “family unit,” they, quite simply, attempt to split the atom and explode the nucleus entirely.

Discussions of late twentieth-century fictive representations of family invite such atomic metaphor, given the political context in which the American nuclear family entered its heyday. As historian Elaine Tyler May has argued, the politics of the American nuclear family in the 1950s were intimately linked to the politics of American nuclear weaponry during the same period. The family’s ideology of closure replicated and helped to sustain the nation’s cold war policies of “containment” and its general warding off of “foreign influences” (11). She reminds us, furthermore, that ‘the legendary family of the 1950s, complete with appliances, station wagons, backyard barbecues, and tricycles scattered on the sidewalks, represented something new. It was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of “traditional” family life with roots deep in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home

**All The Birds
in The Sky
by Charlie Jane
Anders**

**Reviewed by
Dave M. Roberts**

**[Vector #284,
Summer 2016]**

The debut novel from Charlie Jane Anders is a captivating story of the tensions between the spiritual and physical worlds, while keeping the narrative firmly at the human level. The spiritual aspect is represented by the inherent magic of nature, and the physical by advanced physics. Although it could be said that Clarke's third law does come into play here, as the boundaries between the magic of nature and that of science start to blur.

While this is a book about the relationship between science and magic and the impending apocalypse, even at its most pyrotechnic it remains about the people involved and their own search for identity. This is a very fine debut indeed.

that would fulfil virtually all of its members' personal needs through an energised and expressive personal life' (11).

What Marge Piercy in particular seeks to show in her futuristic reworkings of family is that *all* of the members of the nuclear family have hardly had their needs fulfilled or, for that matter, considered. Her manicured lawns surrounded by white picket fences in the dystopic *Body of Glass* (1992) implicate the ideological framework Tyler May refers to, holding its legacy responsible for the misogynistic, socially dysfunctional society she projects onto the year 2061.

Tyler's May's analysis of the connection between cold war politics and the dominance of the American nuclear family after World War II is a convincing one. She argues that 'postwar Americans fortified the boundaries within which they lived' (13). She continues at length:

"They wanted secure jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages in a secure country. Security would enable them to take advantage of the fruits or prosperity and peace that were, at long last, available. And so they adhered to an overarching principle that would guide them in their personal and political lives: containment. Containment was the key to security. The word was used only in its foreign policy version, first articulated by George F. Kennan, the American charge d'affairs in Moscow, in 1946. The power of the Soviet Union would not endanger national security if it could be contained within a clearly-defined sphere of influence. But the term also describes the response to other postwar developments. The terrifying destructive potential of the atomic bomb would not be a threat if it could be contained, first in the hands of the United States and later through peaceful applications.

***[...] In the domestic version of containment, the "sphere of influence" was the home. Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, where they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which postwar women and men aspired. [...] More than merely a metaphor for the cold war on the homefront, containment aptly describes the way in which public policy, personal behaviour, and even political values were focused on the home."* (13-14)**

In such ways, the Cold War encouraged the seemingly "natural" nuclear family - that next evolution in material human circumstance - as rootless Americans scrambled from the cities of enclosed spaces and extended kin to the sprawling suburbs of private property and professional security, both deftly supported by fixed understandings of masculinity and femininity. While Soviet women were headed to the factory, American women continued to keep the home fires burning.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) Le Guin makes more literal the Nuclear Age's metaphor of "Cold War politics" by casting her futuristic vision of family and society on the ice-covered planet of Winter, where two rival nations maintain an epoch of, for the most part, bloodless political hostility. We learn that Winter's people are a mutant, androgynous strain of humanity produced as an experiment of Earthlings who, long ago, may have been trying to eliminate human aggression. On Winter, any adult can become pregnant, and children are raised by the clan. Neither of Winter's rival nations privilege the "copulating couple" to use Germaine Greer's phrase, but instead configure family as an extended network of kin spanning 'hearth and domain', the two primary sub-sections of Nation. The sibling relationship, rather than the conjugal one, enjoys the greatest degree of status.

Piercy and LeGuin's visions of family reflect a number of the concerns present in much late twentieth century female-authored sf. Not least of these is a deep cynicism of heterosexual monogamy leading to exclusivity in parenting. *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978), *Body of Glass* (1992), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and its sequel of novellas *Four Ways to Forgiveness*

(1995) seek, for the most part, to herald in an age of open partnership and a village-approach to child-rearing. They operate very much in the late '60s and early '70s consciousness-raising tradition reflected in Joanna Russ's influential speculative short story "When It Changed" (1972), in which the tranquillity of an all-female, parthenogenically reproducing society is threatened by the sudden arrival of four men from earth. Details are revealed sparingly, but the reader can surmise that, heretofore, life on Whileaway has been a largely agrarian and thoroughly harmonious matter of lesbian partnering, cottage industry, highly participatory local government, and community-based parenting. When the earth-men arrive, this Adam-less Eden must shrink from impending masculine imperialism. Characteristic of much feminist utopian fiction, the text is preoccupied with the significations of clothing and its relationship to the construction of gender. At one point in the story, 'the man passed around pictures of his wife, who looked like the priestess of some arcane cult' (414). At another, he says to his inquisitors, 'where I come from, the women don't dress so plainly' (413), leaving the narrator to reflect upon the one question 'those four men hedged about all evening and never quite dared to ask, looking at the lot of us, hicks in overalls, farmers in canvas pants and plain shirts: *Which of you plays the role of the man?* As if we had to produce a carbon copy of their mistakes!' (416).

By these and other exchanges, "When It Changed" implies that sexual difference is largely cosmetic, put on from without, and therefore possible to eradicate, the result of which would be a more just social order. Heterosexual monogamy is taken to task in this and more extended feminist utopias, owing not to any of its inherent features, but because of its pride of place in the history of the patriarchal nuclear family. In "When It Changed," the earth-men are seen to regard themselves as humane, rational, scientific, and eminently *reasonable*, yet they think nothing of the all-male composition of their mission, nor of their unabashed pride in having well-ornamented (read ornamental) wives. The biases latent in their unexamined assumptions become subtly apparent to the reader each time one of them innocently professes that 'sexual equality has been re-established on Earth' (414), as though it had ever been a *fait accompli* to begin with. The reader is left wondering just how *unequal* things must have become on Earth before some of its women resorted to the founding of Whileaway.

Representations of ambisexualism and androgyny in female-authored utopian and sf are prevalent. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* the desire for gender neutrality can be found in the 'reformed pronoun 'per' to mean both him and her, and also in the proclivity of both men and women for fanciful attire. Mattapoisett is a society that embraces all forms of aesthetic creativity, and welcomes the expression of personal identity through elaborate costuming. Bisexuality is the norm, and parenting involves three 'co-mothers' of both sexes who have not given birth to their offspring, but who have adopted them in embryonic form from a community 'brooder' which serves as a massive artificial womb. The mores of Piercy's future world expect that parenting be a shared responsibility of both sexes, and its ethos anticipates and accommodates the desire of men and women to nurture.

Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, though it also presents an ambisexual, gender neutralised world, one which certainly has its advantages, is nevertheless concerned to reject the naivety inherent in utopian projections, especially feminist ones. It was written before *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but emerges from, and helped to comprise, the same literary movement — the feminist utopianism of the late '60s and early '70s.

As Barr and others have critically documented, these decades produced a wealth of specifically feminist sf that challenge received wisdoms pertaining to family life. Authors and titles of note include Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1979), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* (1971), Mary Staton's *From the Legend of Biel* (1975), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978), as well as Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978).

These writers and their fictions allow readers to view alternative societies that hold “corrected” and seemingly alien, but adoptable, counter-notions, or else they rehearse the familiar in the extreme. In instances of the latter, the tactic of the writer is, as Barr suggests, simply to exaggerate our most common assumptions into nightmarish proportions. This is Margaret Atwood’s approach in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986) in which she depicts the dehumanising results of a rigidly enforced patriarchy. Like a good number of other female-authored sf, including *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* links the politics of cold war containment to the politics of the nuclear family. The post-apocalyptic Republic of Gilead insists upon the nuclear configuration of family in a world that has so long been negligent of female health and well-being, that its women can no longer bear children. A small minority of reproductively healthy women must, in servitude, conceive, carry, and deliver the offspring of the elite as it wages war to preserve its insular values.

But Le Guin’s novel stands in contrast to these and numerous others of its kind in that it is neither facile of argument nor simplistic of plot. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is not wholly utopian, and it isn’t wholly dystopian either. It represents, as Ellen Peel has observed, a kind of ‘sceptical feminism’ (35–49). It does not, for instance, behave as though the elimination of gender roles alone will lead to a Golden Age of Feminism and the erosion of all things patriarchal. Problems of family organisation and gender equality may have been satisfactorily resolved on Le Guin’s planet Winter, but social imbalances of power remain. If such imbalances can no longer be attributed to a ‘patriarchal social reality’, then to what can they be attributed? LeGuin’s novel would appear to suggest that the human race is fundamentally desirous of conflict and would generate it even in a sexually equal world.

Piercy’s two novels are also driven by conflict as are, of course, all fictional narratives (or, at least, all that are worth reading). Utopian projections become stultified if they are left unchallenged by either external marauders or internal insurrections. Without some sort of lurking threat, any fictional utopia (for, is there any other kind?) risks becoming a scene as lovely and as flat as a picture postcard, or, in Peel’s words, a site of ‘chilly perfection’ (34).

And for every threat to every utopian vision, we find ideological “fallout”. At the risk of over-punning, the context of Cold War nuclear weaponry is a notable one in mid- to late-twentieth century sf by women, relating, as it does, to isolationist family values. As the nation hunkered down beneath its anti-ballistic missile shield, so, too, did the family. The Regan administration made much hay of “family values”, a rally cry that took hold and promoted the sanctity of heterosexual marriage as the only safe space for reproduction, until the Clinton Administration proclaimed that “it takes a village to raise a child”. The stories, novellas, and novels of feminist sf writers of the latter decades of the twentieth century, such as Piercy and Le Guin, seek, quite simply, to unmake the myth of the nuclear family. They endeavour to radicalise American family values through the socio-political constituencies of their characters, those who resist stereotype, embrace the androgynous, and run far away from the house of the father.

Marge Piercy’s Future-Perfect

Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* foregrounds, in no uncertain terms, its resistance to the nuclear family. In her future society of Mattapoissett, children are randomly selected from an amniotic tank by three co-mothers of either sex who have no romantic involvement with each other. As Luciente, Mattapoissett’s ambassador to the past, tells Connie, Bellevue Hospital’s (allegedly psychotic) traveller to the future, ‘co-mothers are seldom sweet friends if we can manage. So the child will not get caught in love misunderstandings’ (74). Thus, most adults in Mattapoissett have several ‘sweet friends’ with whom they share sexual love, and two ‘coms’ (co-mothers) with whom they form a parenting triad. There is a further network of kin called ‘the core’. Each adult has “per” own hut, and therefore does not live *in* a family but, as

Luciente explains, 'among our family' (72). Children live not with any of their three co-mothers, but in 'the children's house' with professional childminders. Such an open configuration is meant to prevent the emotional stranglehold of the old-style families of Connie's past, described by a minor character as 'unstable dyads, fierce and greedy, trying to body [i.e. embody, in Piercy's future-speak] the original mother-child bonding' (125).

Piercy's simple (if not simplistic) rearrangements have effectively freed the implied psychological hostages of the nuclear family. In Mattapoisett, one's children need not experience maternal separation as emotional abandonment because the mother, though loving, has become a fairly peripheral figure (one of three, in fact). Adults, though they may have several 'sweet friends', need not form 'unstable dyads, fierce and greedy' because parenting has become a communal act of giving, rather than a home-enclosed struggle for power enacted, as Greer says, by the 'copulating couple'. Piercy's Native American-sounding Mattapoisett does not idealise "the unit" but privileges the tribe.

Indeed it would appear that in *Woman on the Edge of Time* the nuclear configuration is the strict, and blessedly archaic, form and function of patriarchy - an outmoded way of life that had both sustained and been sustained by the house of father.

Nevertheless, Piercy shows us that a second, far less blissful future is possible when Connie accidentally time travels to the New York of 2137 where she finds a 'cartoon of femininity' with 'enormous sharp breasts' and oversized hips and buttocks (288) called Gildina, a sex-slave of the future, who services 'the richies', and is held in captivity by an armed cyborg. If Gildina's, rather than Luciente's, future comes into existence (depending on certain actions Connie may or may not take in New York in 1976), the egalitarian principles of Mattapoisett will never take hold and flourish. The future's military-industrial complex will, in Piercy's dystopian projection, depend upon the sexual containment of woman, and the unharnessed momentum of a free market economy that yields nothing more sustaining than shrink-wrapped food and gleaming white teeth. Her ugly depiction strategically places blame for gender encoding and social dysfunction at the feet of a global capitalism, thus shifting culpability away from anatomy and toward alterable institutions. Patriarchy is thereby freer to appear as a social phenomenon that can indeed be undermined, overthrown, or at the very least, ironically subverted.

We see an instance of its subversion later on, when we learn that a group of scientists in Mattapoisett has ironically called itself 'The Manhattan Project', enabling Piercy to render the founding fathers of nuclear warfare, the symbolic - but significantly obsolete - protectors of all things patriarchal. Mattapoisett's appropriation of the name metaphorically wrests power away from a male scientific establishment and grants power to male and female bi-sexual eco-scientists who inhabit a world of amorphous social structures and open families. The new Manhattan Project is directly antithetical to the original Manhattan Project, which enabled Cold War isolationism through its development of nuclear weaponry.³ In her creation of a utopian, flower-child world devoid of marriage, private property, and any and all sexual taboos, Piercy is, in distinctly 1970s fashion, seeking to allay lingering American Cold War fears of sexual chaos. Far from chaotic, though, Piercy's Mattapoisett is, through its sexual liberation, serene, harmonious, and anti-nuclear in every sense. Patriarchy, by implication a purely ideological structure, has effectively been toppled.

Clearly, consciousness-raising is a special aim of *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Piercy's later novel *Body of Glass* (1991), however, probes gendered family arrangements even more decisively through its use of cybernetics. First published in the United States under the title *He, She and It*; *Body of Glass* is an inferior work to *Woman on the Edge of Time* owing to its several convoluted plots, and its frequent slips into sentimentality and melodrama. But it is more intriguing for its exploration of the nature of identity, and of the implications of science and technology on family and society. It centres on the story of a cyborg who is made in the metaphorical image of a Jewish golem, which, in Hebrew,

**Dreamsnake
by Vonda N.
McIntyre**

**Reviewed by
Nick Hubble**

**[Vector #285,
Spring 2017]**

During the 1970s, four novels managed a clean sweep of the Hugo, Nebula and Locus Awards for Best Novel: Larry Niven's *Ringworld* (1970), Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joe Haldeman's *The Forever World* (1974), and Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake* (1978). On the basis of this company, *Dreamsnake* should be considered one of the unquestioned classics of the genre. However, while not unknown, it is clear the novel does not have the same name recognition as these peers, nor has it been republished like the others as part of a series of classics, such as Gollancz's SF Masterworks. Indeed, this reissue from Jo Fletcher Books appears to be the first mass market paperback edition in the UK since Pan published it in 1979.

Similarly, despite being at the centre of American feminist SF in the 1970s, McIntyre does not have the same renown as Le Guin or Joanna Russ or James Tiptree Jnr.

means literally a "shapeless man". Piercy's reliance on centuries-old Jewish myth and legend emphasises her text's thematic pre-occupation with social and biological evolution - with time's ability to "program" us - for it tells the stories of two such shapeless men, a golem named Joseph of early 17th century Prague, and a cyborg named Yod of mid-21st century Massachusetts.

It is this second figure, Yod, who is especially relevant to a discussion of the fictional representation of social organisation and family configuration since, using the body of the cyborg, feminist sf has become increasingly able to ponder the construction of identity and gender. Because a cyborg, usually depicted as a creature comprised of both human and animal tissue as well as of inorganic materials, is programmed by humans, its subjectivity is to a large extent pre-determined by the will of its creators. However, because a cyborg has a human genetic makeup, it is also meant to be read as susceptible to the inheritance of any "innate" characteristics possessed by its human ancestors. By positing an androgynous cyborg, the product of both genetic and cultural programming, as a self-proclaimed person (for Yod insists he is a person, if not a wholly "human person"), Piercy prompts consideration of the extent to which identity, and therefore gender, is comprised of cultural influences. Theoretically, Yod ought to be duplicable. His maker, Dr. Avram Stein (a name that prompts association with Dr. Frankenstein), ought to be able to make several Yods, each just like the other, provided he uses the same materials and programs the chips identically. In the event, though, Yod becomes highly subjective and non-reproducibly unique through his interactions with others and exposure to his surroundings. Thus the novel suggests that, genetic mapping notwithstanding, we are what we consume of our environment.

Yod, unlike his human counterparts, inarguably has no gender-specific essence. So he is fundamentally un-gendered except to the extent that he is *en*-gendered, so to speak, by the humans who spawned and programmed him. He becomes aware of the gendered expectations of humans only as he interacts with them. Even then, his exposure to gender categories is limited because the setting in which Piercy places him, Tikva, is so nearly devoid of them. Piercy's deployment of an Edenic trope in *Body of Glass* serves to impress her reader with an equation between innocence and androgyny. Tikva operates as Piercy's version of the garden, where, as Shands points out, 'the role of housewife or homemaker has simply been dismantled [...] Women's work outside the house is seen as highly meaningful [...] With everyone in Tikva over fifteen being in the work force, work is in fact central for everyone, and with housework mostly automated, women's old conflicts are reduced or resolved. Children are in day care even if mothers work at home because of the value seen in the socialisation that day care offers' (145). Yod, in the end, gives his life to preserve this futuristic Eden, and, in doing so, enacts the part of a revised pre-lapsarian (because androgynous) Adam who sacrifices himself to free the world from the sins of the father, especially from the implied "original sin" of gender encoding. When Yod self-destructs to save Tikva, he intentionally triggers an explosion that simultaneously destroys Avram, who, like Connie's "patriarchal construct" called God, had been observing events from the detached perspective of his laboratory.

Thus, as in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *Body of Glass*'s utopian possibilities are ultimately consecrated by an obliteration of the patriarchal stance. But where *Woman on the Edge of Time*'s technological innovation, the brooder, verges on reinvesting the notion of fixed gender identities, *Body of Glass*'s technological innovation, the cyborg, thoroughly problematises the notion of fixed or "natural" identities by allowing a "shapeless" man to acquire attributes solely through acculturation. Because this "shaped" man is, at various times, the lover of two of the novel's heroines, Shira and Malkah, the reader comes away from the text with a sense of endless possibilities for social and familial reform.

Le Guin's Complications

Where Piercy's narratives gesture toward genderless worlds, Le Guin's depict them though, interestingly, Le Guin's are less utopian. She is a prolific writer, so her novels, poems, and stories do many things. But her penchant for delivering moral grey areas has often been noted by critics.

The Left Hand of Darkness is a meditation on social morality that sets up several hypotheticals to which it offers scant solutions. Le Guin's two essays, "Is Gender Necessary?" (1976) and "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" (1988) clarify some of her positions and, of course, shed light on intent. The first she wrote in defensive response to critics who had objected to what they felt was her fairly masculine style of androgyny. The second she wrote as a qualified retraction of the first, for she later came to agree, in some measure, with her critics. In "Is Gender Necessary?", Le Guin said the novel was meant to pose a 'thought experiment'. She writes:

"Because of our lifelong social conditioning, it is hard for us to see clearly what, besides purely physiological form and function, truly differentiates men and women. Are there real differences in temperament, capacity, talent, psychic process, etc.? If so, what are they? Only comparative ethnology offers, so far, any solid evidence on the matter, and the evidence is incomplete and often contradictory. The only going social experiments that are truly relevant are the kibbutzim and the Chinese communes, and they too are inconclusive – and hard to get unbiased information about. How to find out? Well, one can always put a cat in a box. One can send an imaginary, but conventional, indeed rather stuffy, young man from Earth into an imaginary culture which is totally free of sex roles because there is no, absolutely no, physiological sex distinction. I eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human. It would define the area that is shared by men and women alike."

("Is Gender Necessary?": 138)

What would be left, we are encouraged to conclude, is a human race that still tends toward domination and exploitation, but which carries with it the prospect of hope for a more socially just future.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the character of Ai, though flawed and naïve, represents such hope. He is a representative of the Ekumen, the federation of worlds that coordinates contact and communication among the various Hainish planets for the exchange of goods and knowledge, and what he finds on the planet Gethen is an international power struggle between two rival nations. The mere fact that all of Gethen's people truly have been created equal, in that anyone can become pregnant and give birth, does not eliminate the potential for strife, conflict, and conquest. Karhide and Orgoreyn are, at Gethen's present point in history, engaged in a contest for world domination even though there is no battle of the sexes upon which to model, or from which to derive, their behaviour. On Gethen, there has been no original division of labour based on sex since, as Le Guin says, 'the mother of several children may be the father of several more' before returning to a perfect state of androgyny ("Is Gender Necessary?" 137). Nevertheless, there exists great ideological division between nations, with Karhide gradually assuming an imperialising position.

Given its premise of ambisexualism, then, the text is heedless of the hypotheses of Socialist and Radical Feminism, such prevalent discourses in the '60s and '70s, which tend to attribute most forms of hegemony and exploitation to an original sexism. As Le Guin herself explains:

She tends to feature in critical accounts of that period as a bit-player: one of the other participants in the 'Women and Science Fiction' symposium organised by Jeffrey Smith and published as *Khatru 3 & 4* (1975); one of the co-editors of the 1976 anthology *Aurora: Beyond Equality* in which Tiptree's story 'Houston, Houston, Do you Read?' and Le Guin's essay 'Is Gender Necessary?' were both first published.

The world she depicts [here] is one where all humans can learn to exercise control over their own bodily processes. Crucially to the generally egalitarian nature of the societies McIntyre depicts, it is considered to be men's responsibility to ensure contraception through 'biocontrol' of the temperature in their testes. This key social norm is supported by one that is even more fundamental: the necessity for consent in all human interactions. It is this relevant and timely principle, rather than its historical status, that makes *Dreamsnake* demand to be read today.

"...on Gethen, the two polarities we perceive through our cultural conditioning as male and female are neither, and are in balance: consensus with authority, decentralizing with centralizing, flexible with rigid, circular with linear, hierarchy with network. But it is not a motionless balance, there being no such thing in life, and at the moment of the novel, it is wobbling perilously"

(*"Is Gender Necessary? Redux"*: 141)

Why that balance has begun to wobble is not made explicit by the text, or by either of Le Guin's essays, but clearly the cause has nothing to do with biological sex, nothing to do with gender. For Le Guin, unlike for Piercy, utopia is not an automatic outgrowth of gender neutrality.

What happens to family as a result of Le Guin's thought experiment in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is intricately bound up in her treatment of gender. Yet any specific treatment of family in the novel is conspicuous by its near-absence. Le Guin would eventually come to see this absence as a failing of the text, but it is not a failing that prevents *The Left Hand of Darkness* from *implying* certain things about family, family as it might exist in an androgynous world. Indeed, what it implies may be more interesting for its lack of authorial intent on the matter: Le Guin is not found trying to re-write the family in this novel; she is found trying to re-write gender. What happens to family as a result of that re-writing is therefore somewhat haphazard and, therefore, happily unburdened by politicising intent. It is also happily compatible with most feminist aims and objectives in relation to child-rearing practices and the non-division of labour, suggesting that a hierarchical, a nuclear, or an otherwise closed family structure in a genderless society is an imaginative improbability. Le Guin, however, found fault with the novel. She wrote:

"...for the reader, I left out too much. One does not see Estraven as a mother, with his children, in any role that we automatically perceive as 'female': and therefore, we tend to see him as a man. This is a real flaw in the book, and I can only be very grateful to those readers, men and women, whose willingness to participate in the experiment led them to fill in that omission with the work of their own imagination, and to see Estraven as I saw him, as man and woman, familiar and different, alien and utterly human."

(*"Is Gender Necessary?"*: 146)

But despite what Le Guin described as this 'real flaw', we do learn several things about family organisation on Gethen. We learn, for instance, that the basic unit all over the planet is a group of two hundred to eight hundred people, called a hearth. We also learn that anyone can and will have sex with anyone else who is in a state of fecundity called kemmer. We learn that there is no marriage requirement, either for purposes of fidelity or child-rearing, but that some people elect to 'vow kemmer' for life. Otherwise, there exists group sex, group "marriage," or pair-bonding without vows (*Left Hand* 91-92). 'Such commitments have intense moral and psychic significance, but they are not controlled by Church or State' (*Is Gender Necessary?* 143). The closest bonds tend to be between siblings, who can, and do, form sexual couples at times, but who are forbidden to 'vow kemmering'. Lifelong incest, then, is the only taboo (*Left Hand* 83).

Such family values are, it is safe to say, generally at home in feminism, especially feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. But it would seem that one threat to the possibility of a gender neutralised utopia is symbolised by Gethen's frozen landscape which suggests not just stillness, but stalemate. Le Guin's use of a literally frozen setting on which to cast the drama of two nations perpetually on the brink of conflict, is suggestive of Soviet/American relations during the Cold War. The plot's frequent references to military paranoia, espionage, and

Siberian-type prison camps, prompt such an association and work well in a moral tale that bears a political resemblance to the extra-textual world. That Karhide is a feudalistic/capitalistic type of country, and Orgoreyn a repressive communistic type of country, makes the similarities to the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R fairly compelling. In terms of family, we also learn that in Orgoreyn, 'no child over a year old lives with its parent or parents; all are brought up in the Commensal Hearths. There is no rank by descent. Private wills are not legal: a man dying leaves his fortune to the state. All start equal' (103). Karhide, however, family – the clan, the hearth – remains detached from government.

This familiar dichotomy assists Le Guin in depicting family as socially and politically determined, and, therefore, as remediable. She reproduces Cold War conditions of political polarity, suggesting, however inexactly, ideological parallels with the extra-textual world. By rendering the textual world genderless, she clears a space in which it is possible to imagine the emergence of new forms, of new family configurations. She clears a space but builds nothing more than a foundation: sexual equality, communal child-rearing, hearth schools. In a clear echo of the feminist discourse of the decade, she offers a symbolic manifestation sexual equality, but she rejects the naïve conclusion that the elimination of class, dominance, and aggression will follow from the elimination of sexism, or vice versa. Where Piercy would choose in both *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *Body of Glass* to consistently and favourably illustrate aspects of feminist theory, Le Guin reveals a scepticism.

Thus, *The Left Hand of Darkness* remains in a kind of default collusion with patriarchal modes of thinking, even as it operates as a force against them. Yet as a sf work, of specifically science fiction, it uses what was once a typically male mode of writing to allow women, both its author and its man-woman characters, to enter a man's world. Le Guin's much later Hainish fiction, *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (1995), goes further, in one of its stories in particular, toward positing a more sexually integrated society, even though it makes no revisions to human anatomy. Similar to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it finds itself, even in its ideological subversion, reconstructing patriarchal narrative practice.

The collection's third story, "A Man of the People," features families in which the mother/father dyad is replaced by a mother/brother dyad, with the brother of the mother being called "father". The biological father is a peripheral figure, who may know his offspring, but who has no real involvement with them. He may, however, be a part of a parenting dyad with his sister. Thus the story's central character, Havzhiva, is the son of a woman named Tovo, and her brother, Granite. Tovo leads a richly public life of lecturing and performing rituals at other 'pueblos'. She is so respected by her people that she is called The Heir of the Sun. Granite, whose very name pointedly suggests strength and masculinity, takes domestic responsibility for the children. In most families, the women perform paid work and the men perform domestic work, but both roles are highly valued, and neither is invisible. Homes are inter-generational, incorporating grandparents. The 'pueblo' system of tight, small-ish communities ensures plenty of intercourse between households and eliminates the potential for suburbaneseque isolation.

Le Guin's utopian depiction of family in "A Man of the People" prompts both association and agreement with the post-Cold War political slogan of the '90s mentioned earlier, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child'. Furthermore, its male/female role reversal is strategically delivered in such a way as to appear nearly wistful in its ease of accomplishment. Certainly the story seeks to garner wide appeal and invite reader assent to its social/familial vision, not, specifically in terms of mother/brother dyads, but in terms of imaginatively reconfiguring family in any number of ways. By first estranging, and then favourably impressing us with the brother/sister dyad, it suggests the arbitrariness of our systems. However, again unwilling to deliver too facile an argument, here as in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin problematises her utopian scenario, her mid-'90s thought experiment, and sprinkles her narrative with suggestions of unrest.

Havzhiva, born in harmony, raised in harmony, and the product of a perfectly serene childhood, concludes in his late adolescence that 'existence is fundamentally arbitrary' (127) and goes off into the wider universe beyond the pueblo, to worlds where people have 'no lineage, no relatives, and no religion' (127). He becomes a student of history, a seeker of truth, and in that wider universe he finds societies far less tranquil than had been the pueblo of his childhood. It is in that wider universe of unrest that he cultivates his ability for diplomacy and leadership, and there finds his life's work in heroic action. Galaxies away from the village that raised him, he tells a fellow freedom-fighter about his pueblo, 'about his father who was his uncle, his mother the Heir of the Sun, the rites, the festivals,' and he says to her, 'when you have to sit still, you want to fly' (164).

It is in this simple moral that we find both the distillation and the reconstitution of an ideology. For here the child of feminist fiction, the child it took a whole village to raise, the un-triangulated child of amorphous social structures and personally and professionally contented parents, is neither mother-hungry nor father-bound. He is not bound by iron curtains, stone walls, or nationalistic ideologies. Nevertheless, he becomes restless with his freedom and goes in search of other worlds to reform. As in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin has cleared another space, only to leave it blank. Anyone reading the story with attention to its potential as a fiction to invite social or familial formation, will be left standing with "a man of the people" on the precipice of unpredictable change. Light-years away from where we would expect to find him, stands the American quest hero, alone in a feminist landscape, perfectly free to quest. He intuits the absence of any 'supposed nobler reality beneath' to return to Ai's phrase, but still he goes forward to reveal another frontier in which change can be allowed, charted, narrated, and new forms "naturalised."

Notes

1. See the Preface to Barr's *Alien to Femininity* (Westport: Greenwood Press Inc., 1987).
2. See "Science Fiction Critiques of the American Space Program, 1945-1958" by Albert I. Berger, *Science Fiction Studies*, 15, Vol. 5, Part 2, July 1978.
3. Elaine Tyler May's assertions regarding the Cold War American ideology of the enclosed family are apropos of Piercy's implications here — i.e. that patriarchy is *not* an inevitable, permanent consequence of biology; that the nuclear family is a by-product of patriarchy, and therefore also not inevitable; and that the insular nature of both the nuclear family and of Cold War nationhood is linked to patriarchal priorities, including a desire for containment and closed borders.

Tyler May's research indicates, for instance, that the mid-twentieth-century ideology of the nuclear family required that "it was not just nuclear energy that had to be contained, but the social and sexual fallout of the atomic age itself" (93). Among other compelling documents, she cites a major article published in the *Journal of Social Hygiene* in 1951 on the dangers of atomic attack, written by Charles Walter Clarke, a Harvard physician and executive director of the American Social Hygiene Association. She summarises the article and its implications as follows:

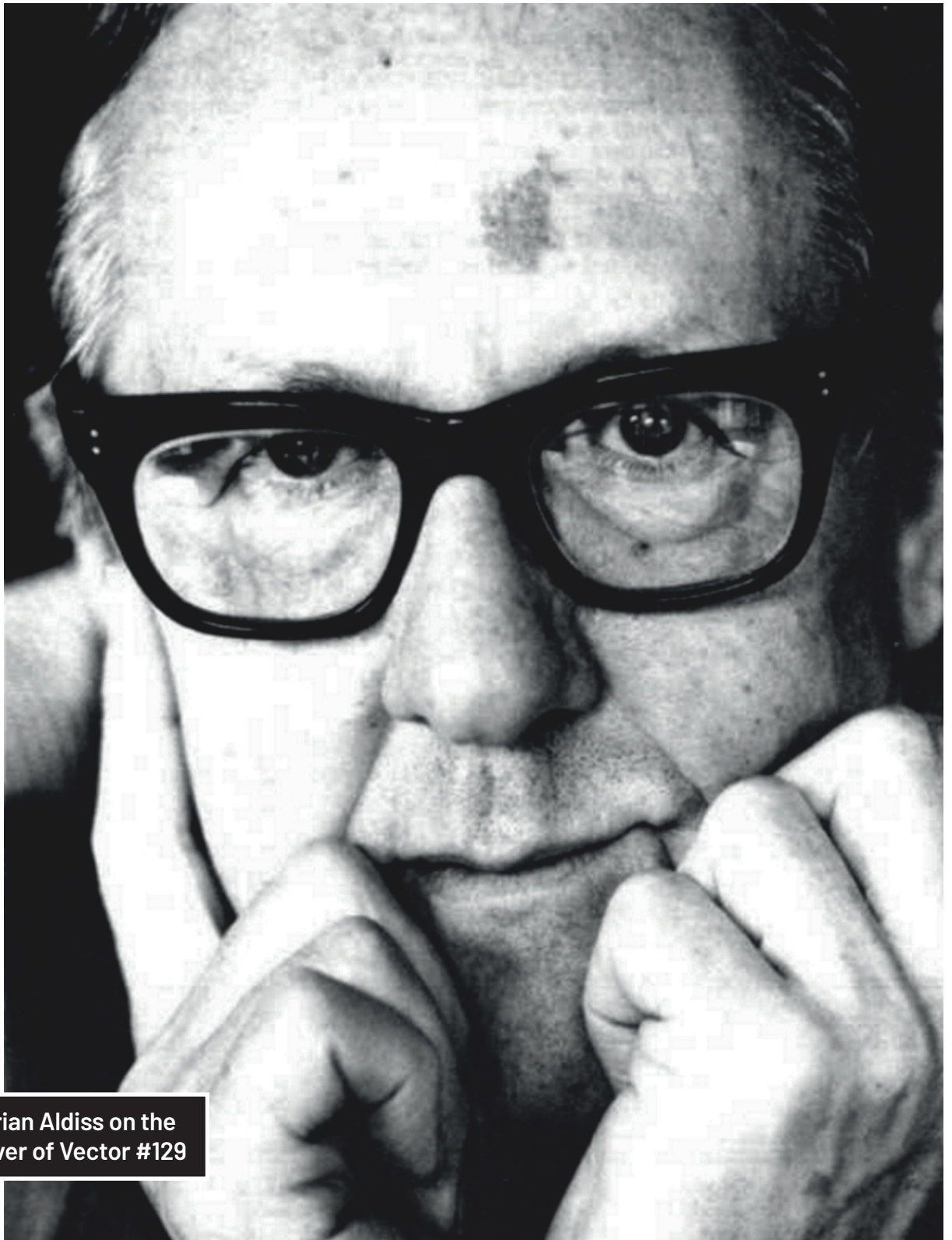
'Following an atomic bomb explosion' [Clarke] wrote, 'families would become separated and lost from each other in confusion. Supports of normal family and community life would be broken down.... [T]here would develop among many people, especially youths ... the reckless psychological state often seen following great disasters.' The preparedness plan that Clarke devised to cope with this possibility centred not on death and destruction or psychological damage, but on the potential for sexual chaos. 'Under such conditions,' he continued, 'moral standards would relax and promiscuity would increase....'

Clarke's preoccupation with sexual chaos may seem absurd in the face of the incomprehensible nuclear holocaust. [...] Nevertheless, his ideas struck a responsive chord among many fellow professionals who shared his concern for sexual order in the atomic age. [...] By linking fears of out-of-control sexuality with the insecurities of the cold war era, Clarke articulated a symbolic connection that found widespread expression in professional writings, anti-communist campaigns, and the popular culture. (93)

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Brian Aldiss Remembered by Mark Yon



Brian Aldiss on the
cover of Vector #129

I guess we should start with the basic facts: Brian Wilson Aldiss OBE (1925–2017) was a prolific author of fiction and non-fiction, an editor, a poet, a painter, a critic and a popular raconteur to many a science fiction event. Brian won BSFA Awards in 1971 for his collection, *The Moment of Eclipse*, and in 1973 won a special award for his history of science fiction, *Billion Year Spree*. In 1982 he won the Best Novel award for *Helliconia Spring*, repeating the win in 1985 for *Helliconia Winter*. He became a Grand Master of Science Fiction, awarded by the SFWA in 2000.

In stark prose that all seems rather straightforward. But I feel that such a brief description of his literary achievements doesn't really get to the essence of Brian's contribution to modern British science-fiction, much of which is often not as well known.

So let's start at the beginning.

Brian Wilson Aldiss was born in East Dereham, Norfolk, on the 18th August 1925. His young life seems settled and domesticated, neither "violently sad" nor "radiantly happy". He lived initially with his parents above the draper's shop his father ran. He clearly enjoyed reading and writing from an early age. Brian has claimed in interview to have been a writer from the age of three, writing stories that his mother, Dot, would then bind and keep. He once said that one of his earliest memories is of looking at one of these stories that he had made. Many of these were exciting adventure stories, designed to entertain.

Life at home with his siblings seems very normal. According to Brian, writing in *Vector 17* (May 1963) and reprinted in *Vector 94* (July–August 79) as *The Author's Lot*, he wrote:

"My brother wanted me to play goodies and baddies with him; I just wanted to make jokes or be funny. Who ever heard of cops and ribbers?" (Vector 17 & 94)

In fact, I might have co-operated better with myself if my childhood had been violently sad. It was not, any more than it was radiantly happy. A lot of it was simply faintly dull..."

The wonder of science – and presumably from that, science fiction – was instilled early into the young Aldiss. He has said that one of his earliest inspirations was at the age of about five, when he experienced an eclipse with Granny Aldiss – something which he remembered throughout his life.

By the age of eight Brian's writing had progressed to science fiction. The Introduction to his *Collected Essays* (2015), also in *The Detached Retina* (1995), begins:

"WARNING: These essays are written by a man who produced his first SF short story at the age of eight."

It has clearly always been important to him. When writing about himself in his *Collected Essays* (2015), he said that:

"Writing has brought him joy and possibly saved him from a life of crime."

His relationship with his father was complex. It was his father, Bill, who sent the young Aldiss to boarding school, no doubt with good intentions but something which affected Brian for the rest of his life:

"My father was very unfeeling when I was growing up, and sent me off to boarding school when I was six. I was so upset that I used to wet the bed in the dormitory."

Judging by the comments made in many interviews Brian hated most of it, although in Vectors 17 & 94 he was a little more sanguine about the experience:

"As a child, I was never any good at playing other people's games... When I got older. I liked the games at school well enough - rugby in particular I enjoyed when the pitch was ripe with good Devon mud and one could wallow about in the scrum as if evolving into some sort of super-beast. But what I lacked was the team spirit. I made a better touch judge than hooker. Swimming was okay- you only co-operated with yourself."

(Vectors 17 and 94)

At the age of eleven Brian was writing and illustrating made-up stories in school exercise books for his six-year-old sister Betty to read. He kept these throughout his whole life. To cope with the harshness of boarding school, Brian wrote more stories to entertain the other boys:

"To stop other boys teasing me, I told terrifying stories. If any of them cried out in horror for me to stop, I had triumphed; they were never going to mock me. Eventually I wrote the stories down."

It was also Brian's first introduction to the harsh realities of publishing:

"I intended to charge a penny per read, such was the demand. Unfortunately, everybody wanted to read, but they weren't so happy to pay."

Brian's real beginnings in the world of literature were rather modest – in 1948, aged 22, and recently discharged from military service in Asia, he took up badly paid employment (£3 a week!) in Sanders, a "stuffy bookshop" in Oxford. Brian explains his humble beginnings as an author in his typically entertaining article *Early One Oxford Morning...* in Vector 69.

"I read avidly poetry, novels, essays, biographies, psycho-analysis, diaries, everything."

(Vector 69)

For all of the difficulties, there was one advantage in his work at Sanders – he could feed his broad interest in literature, spending his lunch money on books rather than food. He did eventually trade up, moving to a bigger shop (Parkers) with better wages. At about the same time, and clearly following the advice of the old adage, "Write about what you know", Brian started writing fictional diary entries based on those early years about the life of a bookseller's assistant, and from 1954 found them published in *The Bookseller*. In 1956 this also led to Brian getting these entries assembled into his first book, *The Brightfount Diaries*, (in his words) a utopian view of bookselling, written under the pseudonym of Peter Pica ("a very small type!"). He was able to give up bookselling in 1956 and focus on what was, up to then, his "part-time writing".

To some extent this road to publishing summarises Brian's career. From the outset, it was obvious that Brian was determined not to be pigeonholed into the genre stereotypes of science fiction. He was as much at home with Leo Tolstoy and Marcel Proust as with H. G. Wells and E. C. Tubb, and this wider view of 'literature' rather than 'SF' is seen throughout his body of work.

According to Mike Ashley in *Transformations* (2005), his history of the science fiction magazines, it was this distinctive style and his ability to poke fun at the sf archetypes that made Brian, as 'Brian W. Aldiss', a recognised name. His early stories such as "But Who Can Replace a Man?" and "Poor Little Warrior!" (both 1958) were generally good-natured and humorous, though not afraid of making a satirical point. Many often show a concern for ecology and the environment, appreciating the wonder of strange lifeforms and simultane-

ously warning of the dangers of mistreatment, which is a theme that can be seen in much of his work, from the jungles of *Nonstop* (1956) and *Hothouse* (1961) (also known as *The Long Afternoon of Earth* in the US) to the *Helliconia* series (1982-85), *White Mars* (1999) and beyond.

Of his own writing, Brian summed much of his early work up as:

"When I began writing science fiction, about 1955, I was in a nervous and in some ways repressed situation, and I channelled many fears into my writing. One example was my early story "Outside" (reprinted in my Space, Time and Nathaniel and in Crispin's Best SF Two): I was there putting into alien guise my own dread at the time of betrayal by other people. I did not realise I was doing this when I wrote the story: I realised it when I saw it in print. The therapy worked, however, for the fear of betrayal passed; nor have I been irrationally afraid of the dark since then.

Writing those early stories was a health cure for me. At about the time that Space, Time and Nathaniel was published, I ran out of phobias; they had all been expended on the stories that made Damon Knight say "Aldiss is most enjoyable when being most objectionable"; dragged out into the daylight, the shy little things withered and dies like bluebells stolen from the woods. That would have been much more of a hiatus in my writing life if I had not by then learnt a little of writing itself, the eternal fascination of trying to perfect the individual sentence and – how rare the successes! – the individual story."

(Vector 17 & 94)

As well as writing his own stories, Brian's interest in promoting science fiction outside the usual places had also begun. In 1958 Brian's reviews of other people's science fiction novels were also beginning to appear in *The Oxford Mail*, and it was clear from the start that Brian had an agenda. As he said in Vector 69:

"Just to make things difficult, I believed in the possibilities of science fiction as an art medium, as a form in which one could do new and startling and beautiful things. I was aware that most of its practitioners were slob; that awareness gave me hope of excelling, although it meant also that the form was held in disrepute. It is still not entirely respectable, but neither am I."

(Vector 69)

With such focus, Brian's work became more popular and greater noticed. Brian began to gain a reputation for writing material that was obliquely science fiction, not the usual clichés wrapped up in an adventure tale, but something of wider social interest. *Hothouse* (1962) won the Hugo Award for Best Short Work Series in 1962, five stories about a future Earth with a locked orbital rotation, which were fixed-up into a novel in 1962.

His contribution to the SF of the early 1960's is quite nicely summarised by Andrew Darlington in his reviews of Brian's "exuberant apocalypse" novel *Hothouse* and later novel *Cryptozoic* (with its "intellectual gymnastic meddling with temporal concepts") in Vector 82 (July 1977): "Following the success of *Hothouse* came *The Airs of Earth* (1963), *The Dark Light Years* (1964) and *Greybeard* (1964), Aldiss's evolving style was distinctly English, following firmly in the cerebral Wells-Stapledon-Clarke lineage, conceding little to the dilution of Americanism in ether vocabulary or concepts."

But such effort had a price and not all was wonderful for Brian. His first marriage broke down and his ex-wife and children moved away to the Isle of Wight, which deeply affected him. In an interview in *The Telegraph* in 2015, it was said that:

"Aldiss can trace the genesis of much of his work to the events of his own life; he describes one of his most popular novels, *Greybeard* (1964), as "a metaphor for the loss of my dear children."

Greybeard is one of Brian's most well-known novels today and still in print. It is an elegiac tale of a dystopian future, with an aging population made sterile after atomic bomb tests. Adam Roberts, in his introduction to the current edition (2011) in the Gollancz SF Masterworks series, says that it is "*bleakly brilliant.... a potent elegy for the human condition*", like Cormac McCarthy's "*later masterpiece The Road but... with 'a weird plangent beauty'*" and better than "*P.D. James' derivative Children of Men.*"

In my recent re-reading of the 1960's *New Worlds Magazine* for the *Galactic Journey* website (it's now 1963!), I have been reminded and occasionally surprised as to how important Brian was to science fiction in 'The Swinging Sixties'. Although not the founder member of the BSFA, Brian was given the #1 membership number very early in its days, and he was elected as the first President of the BSFA in 1960, a sign of his interest and influence in the genre.

Brian was always an intelligent writer, a writer with knowledge beyond his writing who infused this with a certain mischievous sense of humour. His deliberately over-the-top diary entry, *One Man's Weak in Vector 84* reflects this, as the initially rather timid description becomes more absurd the more you read. In his Author Profile in the May 1963 issue of *New Worlds*, he displayed his typical wit further through a series of photo snippets on the cover.

As Brian's reputation grew, both here in the UK and internationally, he also became known not only for his fiction but also for his critical opinion on the state of science fiction. A lot of his efforts were often without credit, and like many of his peers Brian would occasionally use pseudonyms for his work. Feel free to look up writing by C.C. Shackleton, Jael Cracken, Brajan Oldis and John Runciman, for example.

Brian was also to be found in early issues of *Vector* (see *Vectors 23-30, 1963-65*) lurking as "Dr. Peristyle", under the title "*Now What Seems to be the Trouble?*"

These columns are fascinatingly good fun. Looking back now, there are comments that do read like 'the voice of Aldiss'. The anonymity of 'Dr. Peristyle' allowed the character, if not Brian, to revel in answering wide-ranging questions on the nature of ghosts (*Vector 29*) and why SF readers read SF, (*Vector 28*), examine intellectual puzzles such as the nature of time (*Vector 23*), and even make judgments on fellow writers:

"Heinlein is possibly a non-writer's writer, his work being on the whole unenthusiastically received by his fellows, who find a shoddiness in his approach to fiction that is not apparent to the general reader... J. G. Ballard is possibly a non-writer's writer; to his fellow professionals, his incisiveness and wit are readily apparent, although someone in a recent Vector called him a 'dismal johnny'."

(Vector 25)

The *Vector* columns also introduce us to "*Peristyle's First Law of Science Fiction*" (*Vector 22*), which seems to very much speak with the voice of Aldiss. When asked to define science fiction, "Dr. Peristyle" said:

"I prefer to say, even now, that a story is science fiction if you think it is. And if you think it is, and you think you are enjoying it, it probably is, and you are."

(Vector 22)

It soon became pretty obvious that Brian was more than a science fiction writer. Around 1964, he and long-time collaborator Harry Harrison started what is regarded by some as the first ever journal of science fiction criticism, *Science Fiction Horizons*. Though it only lasted two issues, it was a sign of the way things were changing in science fiction. It was ambitious and controversial. In its first issue *Horizons* published articles and reviews by such authors as James Blish and featured a discussion among authors as diverse as Brian, C. S. Lewis, and Kingsley Amis. There was an interview with William S. Burroughs in the second.

Along with authors such as Jim Ballard, John Brunner, and Mike Moorcock (who Brian says made 'a wonderful blaze of it' in *Vector* 42) Brian was one of the few authors who tried to move science fiction away from the usual hard science towards something more literary – a deliberate move away from those shiny needle spaceships to a fiction of human relationships and an exploration of the human condition.

Under his own name, both within *Vector* and out, Brian throughout the Sixties and Seventies was rather dismissive of the rather more conservative and staid views portrayed by the American pulp magazines, and even some British ones:

"I'm very pro-American myself, but it helps nobody if we over here are half-baked copies of them over there; our contributions must be an original one or it is nothing."
(*Vector* 94)

Now happily remarried, to Margaret, Brian in the Sixties was a voice railing against conformity, and the stagnating safety of complacency. He is widely attributed as the originator of the pithy accusation that John Wyndham wrote 'cozy catastrophes', for example.

"The essence of cosy catastrophe," he said, "is that the hero should have a pretty good time (a girl, free suites at the Savoy, automobiles for the taking) while everyone else is dying off."

'Jane Rogers's top 10 cosy catastrophes', *The Guardian*, Thurs 5th July 2012

It was this determination to push the boundaries of what was accepted as 'science fiction' which led to Brian becoming one of the heralds of "the New Wave", which allowed him to stretch his own imaginative style with flair. As Andrew Darlington in *Vector* 82 says,

"Unlike other writers in that position he was able to grasp at the expanded possibilities offered by the then-embryonic New Wave, and use it to write some of his best work."

As James Blish put it in Vector 69, the movement was a "group of people who are largely scientifically illiterate, but write very well indeed. They like to say what they do is speculative fiction rather than science fiction... The stuff is often very well worth reading, but not for its scientific content."

In his *Collected Essays* (2015), Brian summed it up as "... that anarchic, sublimish decade when we discovered the Present" and summarised the movement reflected in the British magazines as follows:

"SF Impulse faded out, but New Worlds went from strength to strength. Aided by a dedicated editorial team, including such lively men as Charles Platt, Mike Moorcock kicked out the old gang and installed the new. Galactic wars went out; drugs came in; there were fewer encounters with aliens, more in the bedroom. Experimentation in prose styles became one of the orders of the day, and the baleful influence of William Burroughs often threatened to gain the upper hand."

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the traditionalists, especially across the Atlantic, regarded the New Wave with suspicion:

"If there was ever a blind spot among American SF readers, and many British ones, it concerned the New Wave, even though American writers such as Norman Spinrad, John Sladek, Pamela Zoline, and Thomas Disch came to England at the time and were involved with it and with its flagship, the magazine New Worlds. The New Wave aroused as much hatred as if it had been a Commie plot; in reality it was only a

revolution. There was even a move afoot to boycott any New York publisher who dared publish New Wave authors; the names of Sam Moskowitz and Isaac Asimov somehow became involved in this shamingly practical zoilism, which happily got nowhere. If ever there was a time to weep in the Malzberg way, it was then."

(Collected Essays)

Over time though, the initial momentum in Britain, inspired by this change in the nature of science fiction, was short-lived and the magazine sales of the time began to reflect this. This was also shown in Brian's sad report of the state of UK science fiction magazine publishing in *Vector* 42 from 1967. By this time Brian's "favourite" magazine *Impulse* (previously *Science Fantasy*) had gone and *New Worlds Magazine* had declined in sales, changed ownership and was on the brink of bankruptcy, only kept going under the editorship of Michael Moorcock by a grant obtained by Brian from the Arts Council.

At the time of writing his article in *Vector* 42, describing the situation, the money had not yet been granted, but he was hopeful. Pulling in support from literary writers such as Kingsley Amis, J.B. Priestley, Anthony Burgess and Angus Wilson (who was on the committee of the Arts Council) Brian feels that he has made a good case for the continuation of the magazine, even though "they always manage to carry a fair amount of nonsense, particularly the Wilde (sic)-coloured nonsense that Moorcock addictively enjoys."

By the 1970's, despite these troubles, it can be said that Brian's aim of bringing science fiction up to date did succeed. Brian himself was still a regular at events, and regularly went to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, something which he maintained throughout the rest of his life, being a consistent presence at the society's Novacon and eventually honorary vice-president. In 1973, summarising how he saw the state of the genre, Brian wrote in *Vector* 69:

"The rise of science fiction in England has been rapid. The crude native product of the fifties, which aped the worst American writing and generally consisted of adventure on other planets, has virtually disappeared. We have instead a much more supple literature, capable of reflecting and analysing the fears and pleasures of our times. New writers and publishers are appearing on the scene."

He also championed the international nature of the genre. His Introduction to *This World and Nearer Ones* (1979), reprinted in *Vector* 94 (July-August 1979) reflects Brian's concern that, even in the late 1970's, science fiction is still too centred on the USA and Western Europe and makes the point that other countries have science fiction too:

"I have been able to travel about the world a good deal in the last decade... and have wandered as far as Iceland, Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, Japan, Brazil,

**Brian
W.
Aldiss
Oxford**

Still climbing the ladder of successful authorship, Mr. Aldiss will have another new collection of stories published shortly by Faber & Faber (in USA by Signet) and is hard at work on a new monumental epic novel which we hope to see in the near future.



In Cambridge they're superior and wear their ski hats like this . . .



In Oxford we prefer a lowbrow approach like this . . .



But mine suits me best like this . . .



Get me out of here ! There's a Martian in here like this . . .

Sicily, Mexico, Australia, Sumatra and now Brighton. Over the last twenty years, the few of my writing career, science fiction has developed remarkably all over the world... Despite all the expansion, readers and writers have managed to remain closely in communication, as this Convention indicates."

Brian was the "Permanent Special Guest" at the annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA) from 1989 through 2008. He was also the Guest of Honour at the conventions in 1986 and 1999.

By this time he expanded his own writing interests, not only writing fiction but also poetry and non-fiction books. This was in addition to his work as critic, editor and anthologist. His lengthy working partnership with friend Harry Harrison as writer and editor is one of note at this time as well.

"Harry was a rebel... I was never a rebel. I just did what I wanted."

(BSFA Tribute)

His collection, *Penguin Science Fiction* (1961-64), expanded into *The Science Fiction Omnibus* in 2007) is often regarded today as a benchmark collection, though there were others.

"Although my first loyalty is to literature, I owe a great deal to a field to which I have been able to contribute something."

(Vector 94)

In his history of science fiction, *Billion Year Spree* (1973), "the synthesis of years of reading and practical experience", according to Brian in Vector 69, later revised and updated to *Trillion Year Spree* (1987). Brian advocated that the origin point of modern science fiction was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and *Frankenstein* (1818), a view that many disagreed with. Tom Shippey said that Brian was "a trifle over-persuaded by Mary Shelley." Nevertheless, it won a Hugo Award, Brian's second, in 1987.

At times, such critical opinions meant that he was often seemingly a voice alone, and his thoughts were not always widely agreed upon, but they did at least generate debate. In 2017 Neil Gaiman described Brian as "a genially opinionated giant", which I think would have amused Brian greatly.

"I am regarded as a difficult author, because I write non-fiction as well as fiction, ordinary fiction as well as science fiction, and occasionally what is considered a difficult book; but in my experience the readership of sf, on its more informed level, is remarkably patient, and will always endeavour to comprehend what they at first find incomprehensible."

(Vector 94)

Later in life, he moved more into writing in other mediums (poetry, art), though he never forgot his love of the genre. His genre works were less common, but often worth reading. His life settled into a comfortable routine. In an interview with *The Telegraph* (2015) he described his typical day as:

"I get up at around 7am and have a bit of toast before settling down at my desk, starting by filling in my journal of the previous day. I've been doing it for decades; there are nearly 100 volumes now. After that I write and research until about midday. The rest of my day involves time with friends, a spot of gardening and often some fun in the evening – a cinema night or party."

My own personal favourite from this later period is the sprawling epic made up of the three *Helliconia* books – *Helliconia Spring*, (reviewed in *Vector* 109 in August 1982 by Mary Gentle, admittedly not too kindly), *Helliconia Summer* (1983) and *Helliconia Winter* (1985). In *Vector* 127 Joseph Nicholas summarises the trilogy and suggests that the concluding volume “doesn’t quite fulfil the expected pattern of showing us how humanity at last comes to break the tyranny of the seasons”. In typically Brian style, *Helliconia Winter* becomes a novel that is not what is anticipated or expected, and as a result there are questions unanswered – “which means that if we want to know any more about it then we’ll have to imagine it ourselves.” The enigma gives the story a greater depth.

For me, one of *Helliconia*’s strengths is that it reflects the author’s ability to describe landscapes. From *Hothouse* to *Helliconia*, Brian excels at describing the physical landscape and the ecology there. As in the finest planetary romances, the place is as important as the characters, although, unlike some of Brian’s contemporaries, he often develops characters into something more than caricature.

Brian kept writing science fiction, up to *Finches of Mars* (2013), which he regarded as his last science fiction novel. It was as unpredictable as ever – Adam Roberts described it in his *Guardian* review as “an odd one”. It is typically Brian: written on his own terms, as challenging and as enigmatic as ever.

In the end, it is perhaps this that kept Brian as “The Grand Old Man of SF”, one of the genre’s best-kept secrets. He was never keen to be labelled, and it is this spreading of his talents, to deliberately not write the same story over and over, that led to broad admiration, if not blockbuster-type sales. The respect from his peers was unmistakable, though. The Science Fiction Writers of America made him its 18th SFWA Grand Master in 2000 and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame inducted him in 2004. He was given an OBE for Services to British Literature in 2005.

Despite Brian’s passing, the presence of Brian is still here in the 21st century. There is a website, still active, appropriately at www.brianaldiss.co.uk. He appeared in 2007 on the BBC’s *Desert Island Discs*, which is still available to listen to ([BBC’s Desert Island Discs](http://www.bbc.com/1/audiobook/desert_island_discs/20070701_brian_aldiss)). If hearing Brian’s mellifluous voice is not enough for you, then there is an enormously entertaining series of 79 (!) videos out on the ubiquitous *Youtube* of his reminiscences, collectively under the name of *Web Stories – Life Stories of Remarkable People*, which are worth watching, if you have the time (Brian Aldiss – Canoodling among the carpets...).

With the publication of *Finches*, Brian and publisher Harper Collins began to bring back into circulation much of Brian’s earlier work in “*The Friday Project*”, which is an ongoing print and e-book publishing venture, intending to bring over fifty of Brian’s older works back into print or make available in e-book form. So far, the short stories from the 1950’s and, in four volumes, much of the Sixties have been published, as well as most of his novels.

In summary, Brian’s cumulative body of work and his appearances in *Vector* here show both his love of science fiction and, almost as much, his enjoyment of *talking* about science fiction. That alone should be why we remember him and celebrate his contribution to the genre.

You may wish to remind yourself of his talent by reading or re-reading *Non-Stop* (1958), the Hugo Award-winning *Hothouse* (1962) or *Greybeard* (1964). You may even wish to tackle the poetic grandeur of *Helliconia* (1982–85), the short stories of *Space, Time and Nathaniel* (1957) or *The Canopy of Time* (1959), or be bamboozled by the text of *The Eighty Minute Hour* (1974) and the psychedelia of *Barefoot in the Head* (1969), New Wave sf at its greatest and weirdest. There’s plenty out there to choose from. Look at the website for ideas.

But for me, like many others I am sure, it is more personal. Christopher Priest’s blog, written on Brian’s death, is a wonderful example of this, as too the many warm comments made at the BSFA tribute to Brian in January 2018 (A Tribute to Brian Aldiss). Myself, I knew

him less but, for me, just as memorably. I consider myself lucky to have had the chance to sit with Brian at a number of conventions and talk books a few times. I will always remember how his face lit up when I bumblingly asked him to sign a couple of books! He was always willing to chat, often with a glass in hand, and he did so with humour, charm and grace (and with his own fountain pen, something he always seemed to have coincidentally close to hand).

For as important as his work has been, for me and countless others, the thing I will remember most is Brian with that shy grin, that twinkle in his eye and his many mischievous stories of how the genre of science fiction has been, many of which would be libellous if put into print.

You will be missed, Brian.

Alternative Sources and References

Greg Pickersgill's GOSTAK pages...

- <http://www.gostak.org.uk>
- incl. BEHIND THE SCENES: <http://www.gostak.co.uk/bts/index.htm>
- incl. SKYRACK Archive: <http://www.gostak.co.uk/skyrack/index.htm>
- incl. Peter Weston's ORIGINS: <http://www.gostak.co.uk/bsfarchive/BSFAorigins.htm>

Peter Weston's RELAPSE/PROLAPSE archive...

- <http://www.efanzines.com/Prolapse/index.htm>

Rob Hansen's FAN STUFF...

- <http://www.fiawol.org.uk/fanstuff/>

Dave Langford's long-running Ansible newsletter...

- <http://www.ansible.uk>
- incl. Peter Roberts' CHECKPOINT Archive: <https://checkpoint.ansible.uk/>

The TransAtlantic Fan Fund Unofficial Home...

- <https://www.taff.org.uk/>

The BSFA's Facebook page also has a great selection of resources to draw upon, including Kevin Smith's astonishing collection of epub files showing the covers and contents of the majority of Vector and other BSFA publications...

- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BritishScienceFictionAssociation/files/>