

SKELTON

OUSFG NEWATER
LATE HILAR 1.

FILE

NEWS

Library Meetings

Still on Sundays at 8.15 pm in 22 Museum Road rm 6, or later in the Larkin room near St John's bar.

Discussion Meetings

Come with your Forge of God, (any blunt instrument will do, we baptise on the spot), and exact revenge on those fatuous punsters.

5th week Ivan on John Crowley
6th week Mark Hirst : Welcome to the real world - Data download on cyberpunk
7th week Jen on Fantasy or Juveniles
8th week Desert Island Books, everyone to choose their 3 books, and explain the reasons why. No bringing Donaldson in the vain hope of using them for shelter, signal bonfires, rafts, vegetable mulch etc

Next term is free, start preparing your white papers now.

Video meetings

Venue still in doubt, listen out at library meetings. Current plans are for:

6th week Monty Python and the Holy Grail
8th week Star Trek 4

AGM and Election

9.00 on Sunday of 6th week (19/2/89) in the Larkin room in St John's, vote early, vote often. Details of candidates and motions elsewhere in this epic.

Banquet

After heroic efforts by Mo and John, we've confirmed the banquet for Friday of 6th week (24/2/89) in Exeter. Arrive at 7.30 for 8.00 in black tie, bring a pen and a witty comment to scrawl on all those banquet cards. The damage, £15 to Penny, with reductions for non-alkie

Menu: Salmon Mayonnaise
Duck in Red Wine with Morello cherries
Pineapple Benedictine

The chef is happy to do anything the vegetarians want, so get your heads together and let us know by Monday of 6th week (20/2/89). Cost, strangely enough, will depend on the meal.

Paul McAuley

A rising star in hard SF, Dr McAuley will be coming to talk on Thursday of 7th week, venue to be announced. Anyone wanting to eat with him beforehand, contact Mo.

Sfinx

Jane will be taking it over (with Paul Marrow and Mo if around), and wants to run a workshop early next term, so get scribbling over Easter, and bring your theses along for sacrifice at the altar of literary decency. (We're not like the Iranians, we don't execute blasphemers against the great god Sciffy)

Sweatshirts

Penny has now closed this term's order so tough titties. Try again next term.

Mugs

We're planning to bring out an OUSFG mug with a new design, anyone interested see Penny.

Ties

Matt has discovered that the sweatshirt people do ties too, would you buy a tie from this man?

CUSFS Visit

Again we'll be off to Cambridge for their Christmas party, now on Saturday of 8th week (11/3/89). Adrian is liaising, heartily recommended.

Red Nose Day

This year on Friday of 8th week, we'll be running some wild and whacky events. (if anyone has found any W&Ws recently, could they return them to the committee, as they all seem to have escaped us.)

Newsletter

Well, this the end of the road, all you crap fanciers. Next term Matt and Adrian will hitting the streets, but to leave I'd like to thank all those who helped over the year.

Editors: John Bray, Mel Dymond, Paul Cray
Menials: Matt Bishop, Adrian Cox, Simon McLeish, the Maths Comp millions
Contributors: John Bray, Mel Dymond, Paul Cray, Adrian Cox, Matt Bishop, Mark Hirst, Penny Heal, Mo Holkar, Ivan Towlson, Melissa Joseph, Jason Stevens, Paul Marrow, Graham Harper, David Lane, Neal Tringham, Tim Adye, Simon McLeish, and of course
Technical: Penny's sychophantic typewriter, PCW, Sun microsystems, Canon, and (why I started it in the first palce), John's wonderful wordprocessor, now bigger, better, even more features, flash fonts, and this interesting modification to the

This is not a bad book, it is not particularly good but it is not actively bad. Certainly it is highly readable if you like Clarke's rather individual style (as I do), much more entertaining than most skiffy novels I have come across. As usual, the plot is little more than an extended travelogue through the Solar System. It is 2061, and Halley's Comet heads in towards the Sun. The most advanced ship in the Solar System, the "*Universe*", complete with celebrity passengers, including Heywood Floyd, now 105 years old (living on a low-g space station since his return from Jupiter after 2010: *Odyssey 2* has slowed his aging) makes a rendezvous with the comet. Meanwhile, among the satellites of Lucifer (formerly Jupiter, converted into a ministar by the omnipotent aliens at the end of 2010), the *Universe's* sister ship "*Galaxy*" is hijacked and crashlands on Europa, the Jovian moon interdicted by the aliens because of the presence of indigenous life, where a mountain-sized lump of diamond has been discovered. The reader is treated to loving descriptions of both Halley and Europa before "Universe" (being the only ship fast enough) travels to Europa to rescue the stranded crew.

The book has perhaps two main flaws. Firstly, the almost complete lack of tension (the rescue is completed without any interference despite the known warnings that the aliens will not permit landings on Europa) and secondly, the absence of the philosophical implications which gave weight to the earlier books in the trilogy.

At the novel's end, David Bowman (changed into the Starchild in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*) and the now-independent and sentient computer HAL-9000 do appear and, for no readily explicable plot reason, Floyd is converted into a Starchild. What is worse, this occurs off camera (so to speak) and is really only mentioned in passing in the text. I assume this is part of the setting up for the inevitable 3001: *Odyssey 4* (implied by the book's final chapter).

Certainly this is better than Clarke's previous novel, *The Songs Of Distant Earth*. Clarke is much more at home in the Solar System, where his cosy, chatty style can operate with a matrix of assumed cultural knowledge, but like that book this should have been so much better than it is; there are so many missed opportunities. Arthur should have taken more time and thought over the books. I dread to think what *Cradle*, written with (by) Gentry Lee (male) is like. Now that it has been found that Clarke has not got amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (the disease that crippled Stephen Hawking (who only got a 2nd in Mods)) but rather post-polio syndrome, apparently much less severe, perhaps he will jettison Lee and get down to some real writing.

This book borrows many ideas: ideas reminiscent of Hoyle's "*A for Andromeda*" and Clarke's "*2001: A Space Odyssey*" among others.

Despite this, and despite the number of people who have been able to tell me what a bad book it is simply by seeing who the author is (OK, I'm a little unfair; it *is* billed as "The number 1 bestseller" – hardly a good portent) it conveys very well Sagan's enthusiasm for the idea of receiving a message from an extraterrestrial intelligence. Sagan gives us many ideas on the problems and methods of communication without recourse to Earth languages, culture or assumptions.

His style and preoccupations remind me vividly of Clarke's "*Imperial Earth*". "*Contact*" is also concerned with SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) and draws character in a similar manner. The scientists' world is accurately portrayed, concentrating on how it differs from that of the politician, the military and the evangelist. In particular there is a lot of discussion on the relationship between science and religion and how they might be resolved: contact with another intelligence has as many religious as scientific implications.

His final idea on where a message can be left for all to read (I won't give it away) is very nice and beautifully ties up SETI with religion. I don't believe it (please contest this point!) but it is clever.

In conclusion: Don't read this book if you never enjoyed Clarke (if Sagan used a ghost-writer, and I didn't know any better, I would say it was Clarke), but if you are interested in SETI or a scientific look at religion, then add "*Contact*" to any list containing Clarke's best.

Hardwired - Walter Jon Williams

Take the grit and gloom of Gibson, add some character, a pinch of relationships, political intrigue and a great plot and what you have is Hardwired. No more are the characters strutting about, posing their street cred, self assured, with plenty of favours to trade-in. This is the story of real people, real fears, heartbreak, and pervasive but unabtrusive technology.

Set on an Earth of the near future, where orbital corporations have control over governments, America has been broken into its states and corporate engineered scarcity of drugs produced by the same companies encourages the running of supplies across the country, first in stealth deltas, and then in high speed hovercraft. The story centres about the lives of two people, Sarah and Cowboy.

Sarah is an ex-prostitute who with her drug-triggered adapted nervous system finds work as a bodyguard, assassin and odd-jobber. Sarah is a wonderful blend of the characteristic cyberpunk hard girl, and the caring lonely woman who only wants to escape with her pathetic brother to a better life in orbit.

Cowboy is the ex-delta pilot and latter day hovercraft driver. He takes the precious drugs across America, nervous system wired into his hovercraft (hardwired) to give him the edge. He is looking for a better life, but by destroying the system, by ending the tyranny of the orbitals.

So begins a complex and dangerous political game in which people, guns, aircraft and stockmarket shares all play a vital role. The relationship between the orbitals and Earth is an interesting parallel with our own power over the third world. The plot while suggesting gradual development, maintains a steady level of tension right up to the surprising conclusion.

I couldn't put this one down; dare I suggest that this book is better than Gibson?

Mark Hirst

Islands in the Net - Bruce Sterling

This book is set in the near future in a world where nuclear weapons are a thing of the past and where ecological and social forces govern the activities of corporations and government alike. Aside from the implausibility of achieving such a dramatic turn around in the way nations and governments have behaved for time immemorial, we begin to trace the domestic and cosy life of Laura Webster.

She is an 'associate' of the Rizome Corporation, a so-called 'democratic capitalist' organisation. The company has decided to have secret talks with the 'data pirates', small island nations that harbour, collate and then sell information, taken from the Net, the all pervasive world communications system.

Laura runs the Lodge where the meeting takes place and very soon is taken from her family and friends and plunged into the turmoil and intrigue of the worlds, the First world with its 'Vienna Convention' police, and the Third world with its terrorist organisations.

An interesting though perhaps, 'pedestrian' story with extensive description and background. It is marred however, by the way Laura appears to go from crisis to crisis in a haphazard and implausibly lucky way.

An interesting story and a clever background portraying the new world divide, north and south, but a little disappointing. Definitely worth reading but it is currently in 'rip-off' format so try and borrow this one.

You Bright and Risen Angels: William T Vollman

Paul Marrow

"This book was written in urine, lime and vitriol, under circumstances of hunger and death."

I let the author, in his Note, commence the review of this book: one which almost defines definition. What generalisation can you make of a book which deals with a decades-long conflict between insects and the 'blue globes', animate souls of electricity, taking in computer programming (oh no! not again) [yes, yes - ed], plant-people, Martian tycoons, polar bears ("The terrestrial managers of the reinsurance syndicate") and British survivors of the 1812 war among others on the way?

In their colossal struggle againsts the electrifiers of America, co-ordinated by the immortal and omnipresent Dr William S Dodger, the bugs are aided by a dedicated group of revolutionaries, the Kuzbuites, who leave a trail of almost casual violence across America in their quest to root out the blue globes. Much of the book is the story of the founding of their group, the ending leaves the future unsettled, but with a 'Transcendental Cabaret [contents? - ed] (pp 625+) listing a possible sequel.

Over all lies the omniscient figure of Big (corgi), adventurer, programmer, writer/character, whose narrative interludes compete with those of the author. [should that have been George earlier? - ed]. This is not a book with a simple and comprehensible structure [and so cleverly imitated in the review - ed]. This book is at once a paean to the triumph of computers, a history of the rise of modern America, and a warning to those who have technology control all our lives. Of course, just because it is all of these, does not mean that it has to be taken seriously. Funny, bizarre, and practically undefinable, it deserves a review about five times as long, but unfortunately [!] I'm not Ivan.

O-Zone - Paul Theroux

(Paul Marrow)

Once again a mainstream writer crosses the borders of sf and receives acclaim for his 'shatteringly brilliant new bestseller' (I quote from the cover). Unfortunately, the critics haven't read any science fiction, and neither has Mr. Theroux.

O-zone is not about a gas, but about an sealed-off wilderness, the Outer Zone, from which all the population was evacuated fifty years previously after a leak of radioactive waste. The central characters, richer Owners (such is the terminology) from the fortified towers of New York City, come to O-zone for a party. While in O-zone they come into contact with aliens (have-nots) and this alters their perceptions of the world and each other.

One thing you can say about Paul Theroux, he certainly knows a lot about characterisation, as you would expect from a mainstream professional author. Unfortunately, this asset is more than cancelled out by the unimaginative use of science-fictional plot devices, and the fairly predictable plot. If this novel had just been set inside the head of one of the characters it might have been good; we would not have missed the background.

If you think it sounds a bit like cyberpunk - well, it isn't. Paul Theroux does not have the imaginative, if unoriginal, grasp of technology possessed by writers in this field. However, I'm afraid I have seen this somewhere before, and it didn't really work then. Don't bother finishing this - I haven't.

Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels; David Pringle

(Paul M. Cray)

This is a sequel to Pringle's 1985 "Science Fiction: The Hundred Best Novels". Both books (inspired by J.A.B. Wilson's "Ninety-Nine Novels: The Best in English since 1939") have as their aim to bring to the reader's notice some one hundred of the best books published in their respective genres since the Second World War; some well-known, some obscure. One presumes that it is Mr. Pringle's hope that the reader will then search out and read some of the titles, a hope that will not prove unfounded in every case.

Each book has a two page review. Unfortunately, especially in the fantasy book, the reviews are on the whole very poor. They generally consist of a somewhat desultory precis of the story, padded out by irrelevant and boring quotations with a spicing of cliches. They certainly are not the pithy, incisive and informative reviews that one may desire (what, like you get in 'Dead Dog'? - ed.). Both books also contain an introduction giving a short history of their subject and an overview. These are better written than the reviews, but much too brief. Mr. Pringle was formerly editor of "Foundation" - I feel he should stay with his editing.

In conclusion, these books do provide a useful reading list, although some may argue with many of the selections ("Mythago Wood", an inept and unoriginal Celtic-style fantasy, for instance), but, had a reviewer of some skill written them, they could have been much more useful. Borrow and browse, at most.

YOU TOO CAN
FILL THIS SPACE
WRITE A REVIEW
FOR MATT OR ADRIAN,
SEND TO ADRIAN COX
ST JOHNS, OR SEE HIM
AT A LIBRARY MEETING

Their Master's War is a restatement of the futility and waste of warfare, which, if not new in theme is handled reasonably well in content.

The narrative is from the point of view of the laser-cannon fodder, with scant mention of the officers, who are viewed as scarcely human. The troopers are pressed into service for a largely unseen commanding race, against an enemy they know nothing about, except they must destroy or be destroyed.

The main protagonist is recruited as a god-fearing primitive, reminiscent of an Amerind, who is forced to embark on a ritual journey as a penance. The culmination of the trek, intended to offer him and his companions to the gods, is the herding of them and pilgrims from other tribes into a spaceship. This deception raises questions as to the artificiality of their culture and traditional religious beliefs. The insight into this is dealt with cursorily, although their Masters, the Therem, and the enemy, the Yal, are to remain mysterious in their origins, purposes and the extent of their interference.

The section which follows is a fairly fast-paced description of training and a series of battles, which is neither stunningly original nor completely derivative of either the Science-Fiction or Vietnam War genres. Some inventive points are the symbiotic space/combat suits, and the variety of non-human ground troops of the opposition. The suits aid the troopers with chemical stimulants, but can also give more physical pleasure if the individuals are on good terms with them. The Yal opposite numbers are exotic bio-androids, which are manufactured to be of limited intelligence; the implications of humans battling sentient killing machines are deeper than sympathetic support of the troopers massacring mindless aliens. The Yal could be considered the more humane, despite their alienity, as they have not forced a potentially independent, intelligent species into fighting for their unstated causes.

The breaking away from the Therem oligarchy occupies a shorter part of the book than might have been expected. This possibly could have benefitted from some expansion after the initial revolt, which is well handled to retain a taut narrative, as the ending is somewhat abrupt.

Their Master's War is by far not one of Farren's best, the main criticism being a general feel of déjà-vu, or even déjà-vu, since there are some blatant borrowings from the film Aliens, and the Dune books, as well as the inclusion of H.G. Wellian tripods. Even so, it makes an entertaining if undemanding read, and since it is not over-long, there is hardly opportunity for the attention to flag.

Lanark - Alisdair Gray

(Paul Marrow)

This book, subtitled "A Life in 4 Books", is actually two lives in two books. These are the lives of Duncan Thaw of Glasgow and the man named Lanark, of the alternative city of Unthank. Duncan Thaw's tale is a story of alienation and failed aspirations, from his unhappy childhood through to adulthood as an artist overwhelmed by his creative urges. Thaw is undoubtedly in our world, and his story serves to underpin and counterpoint the fluctuating and unreliable reality which permeates Unthank, the main setting of the rest of the book.

Here is the speculative fictional core of the book, a land where the sun has ceased to shine and conventional time has been abandoned, forcing people to rely on their heartbeats. Mysterious organisations, the 'Council' and the 'Institute' jostle for power, all the time competing with and yet supporting the obscure corporate entity known as the Creature. Minions of the great wander through the story talking incomprehensible jargon: as Lanark and the reader begin to understand these snatches of plans, the relationship of Unthank with the real world begins to be revealed.

In Lanark, Alisdair Gray has sublimated more than just what - I am sure - must be part of his own life, to comment on humanity as a whole and the problems of the modern world in a sometimes almost painfully powerful way. This book makes me think of many books - (it's a shame I couldn't figure out what they were supposed to be - readers had better ask Paul - typist). Extraordinary - not a light relaxing read. Any review of this book cannot fail to be inadequate -

How could one ignore the only sf book to be found in The Times' Literary Editor's list of the top ten of 1988? The fact that it was the top ten silly titles of '88 surely makes it more suitable for OUSFG's attention.

The book itself is a slim volume in every sense, the sort of thing one might expect as a novella in a Best of the Year collection, which is where I read Benford's 'Doing Lennon' which this story resembles, like, lots. Where was I? Probably avoiding telling you anything useful. Plot. Well, this computer centre decides to do a computer simulation of Byron, well known 18th century Sexual Tyrannosaurus (tm) despite being overweight, club-footed and having no cheekbones at all; hero of 'Gothic' and 'The Anubis Gates' and little known early sf writer (it's true, I tell you, just read "Darkness", probably the first known nuclear winter story, reads like Asimov's 'Nightfall' written in doggerel;

"I had a dream which was not all a dream,
The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless and pathless; and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came and went - and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation."

Anyway, the sweet but feeble-minded programmer, Anna, who was a Byron fan to begin with, takes over the task of 'talking' to the program, which is programmed with all known facts about the poet's life plus various 'personality parameters'.

"Sir, he keeps clamming up when I ask him about the choirboys"
"Well, adjust the cultural-homosexuality-taboo level down a few points then"

(reconstructed dialogue)

In the intervals we get the private musings of the program, which is slowly developing a consciousness but is unable to work out what has happened to it. Whilst Anna becomes emotionally attached to it, the computer personality tries to fill in the gaps in its memory, ending up with a fascinating but deeply silly theory concerning one particular choirboy...

In the end it's not a bad novella but I'm sure that you can find something better to read in the time. However, for Byron fans (like me) it's a must, and can be found in Oxford Central Library from time to time.

Wyrd Sisters: Terry Pratchett

Mel Dymond

The sixth book in the Discworld series made its punctual appearance last November, with the usual wonderful timing that enabled it to miss DDWMFVCH by about two days.

Borrowing liberally from the more hackneyed parts of Shakespeare the plot concerns kings, fools, murders, plays, droits de seigneur (is the plural right?) and divers alarms & excursions, with the usual sprinkling of puns and footnotes. Granney Weatherwax makes her second appearance in the series along with the other two members of her coven, Magrat Garlick (not as naive as she seems), and Nanny Ogg, who reminds me of several members of OUSFG with her tendency to sing strange ditties when inebriated.

The books runs along at Pratchett's usual lively pace, with possibly even more background ideas than usual. But there's not much that sets this one apart from the others; if you liked them, you'll like this, and vice versa. Those with no sense of humour will hate it, those who take there reading seriously probably despise Pratchett already for the lack of deep and meaningful prose, and the fact that you can read, and enjoy, a Discworld book in a day without much effort. But I enjoy that, anyway.

(Yes, my copy is signed. Just like everyone else's, I suppose...)

Simon McLeish (Worcester, 2nd year Mathematician): "I don't like the way it was printed, all those black marks all over the page" - "They're called letters" (Penny)

Simon's talents as a versatile and able crap-fancier have frequently been revealed in these pages - he is currently undergoing surgery to have his Eddings and Antony fixations removed (and replaced with one for Hubbard).

Jason Stevens (Wadham, 2nd year Engineer): "I can see spots in front of my eyes, like a firefly orgy"

Still retains the fetish for the colour pink which has often been commented upon in D.D. - now rivalled for supremacy by an undeniable talent for the writing of grotesque and nauseating rhyme. Catch the Daleks on Acid's latest waxing "Thrackle and Spung", at all blasphemously insane stockists.

Metrophage Richard Kadrey NEAL TRINCHAM

Amongst the various strains of cyberpunk, from Sterling's and Swanwick's hi-tec popular sf to the action adventure of many of the later followers, the original inspiration has strangely remained almost unimitated. Gibson's *Neuromancer*, along with the other stories of the Sprawl, present a highly distilled imagery of today in the West, the essence of our popular culture. (Or so Gibson thinks, at any rate.) Almost all of his fellow travellers, however, use his inventions—a world ruled by corporations, a glossy, vivid style—while leaving out the heart. *Metrophage* has both.

Not only that, but Kadrey successfully employs Gibson's approaches to present his own original themes. The novel, set in a heavily decayed future Los Angeles, follows the adventures of its tough streetfighter protagonist as he is alternately employed, double-crossed and beaten up by the bosses of the local underworld and overworld as they play out the moves of their bizarre conspiracies. The title refers both to an artificial virus unleashed on the city by some unknown agency and to the psychological malaise that afflicts the urban population, trapped in their masters' deadly games. The pop imagery works well, from the use made of the AIDS like metrophage disease to the presence of the Alpha Rats, mysterious aliens who have occupied the moon and who provide the ultimate demonstration of the power of the 'Spectacle', Kadrey's term for the illusions that the strong use to maintain their strength.

Of course, there are some flaws. The future feels thinner than Gibson's (though the Sprawl is certainly unusually solid). Characterization, as so often with cyberpunk, is something of a problem, particularly as the main character must remain essentially helpless, pushed from place to place by his manipulators, so that the novel's point is not contradicted by its plot. Nevertheless, the hero's existential anomie can become excessive—particularly when he announces to the reader that he himself doesn't know why he's doing something...

Still, this may be the first major cyberpunk work directly in Gibson's own tradition. And who knows? It might even (considering the essentially limited nature of many of the approaches involved) be the last.

Simon McLeish: *Being a Crap Fancier*

(Karol Ohm)

Simon McLeish has written quite a few reviews, some of them quite long, others quite short. This book ("reminiscent of the work of every pop sf critic" as the blurb says - and it is at least as hackneyed as that suggests) continues the series with few surprises, most of the earlier ideas and adjectives coming round again in a different order.

Set in what appears to be typical suburban mid-west cliché-land, the book concerns the hero's quest for something original or interesting to say about quite a lot of books by quite a variety of authors, although it will come as no surprise to McLeish fans when I reveal that he fails quite dismally in almost every instance. Basically a book that I found quite interesting (but did you buy the hardback? I hear you cry) but this of course means very little. Some good descriptions overcome by quite wishy-washy qualifiers. I'm certainly quite looking forward to his next review.

Tom Holt: *Expecting Someone Taller Who's Afraid of Beowulf?*

Penny Heal

I defy you not to enjoy these books, especially if you have ever known anything about Norse mythology, Saxon sagas or the Ring Cycle. If not, they're still great books to read in the bath, on the bus and in less demanding lectures. The plots are similar, nondescript hero(ine) discovers relic of Old Norse/Saxon times, whereupon Gods, Heros and Dark Lords plotting to take over the world (characters may be more than one of these) all crawl out of the woodwork or wherever they've been lurking for past millenia and chaos, magic and general Gotterdammering ensue.

Of the two, *Who's Afraid ..* is much better but is still out only in hardback (it's in Oxford Central Library, but not often). It scores over the first book by having two disreputable energy sprites loosely attached to the plot who spend most of the time playing Goblin's Teeth, an awesome game with insane rules that ends up as a cross between every other game except Mornington Crescent [and Harry Harrison I hope - ed]

"OK, I'll raise you twenty and see your giblets, now .. Double seven! Right I'll move my rook up the beanstalk and take Mrs Fredriksen the Berserker's wife to Upsalla to check your Queen"

"Hah! I've got three longships on Upsalla, that's six million gold pieces rent." (reconstructed dialogue)

Expecting Someone Taller is great on characterisation of Wotan and the Valkyries though, and more to the point it's in paperback and the OUSFG library. Borrow, read, enjoy.

Mirrorshades - The Cyberpunk Anthology; edited by Bruce Sterling

(Simon McLeish)

This book is an attempt, in less than two hundred and fifty pages, to "present a full overview of the cyberpunk movement, including its early rumblings and the current state of the art". Although it is perhaps a laudable effort, it is difficult to see how Sterling could succeed in just twelve stories to give even an incomplete account of what is an ill-defined and vague movement - if it is indeed cohesive enough to be called a movement, about which I have my doubts.

Nevertheless, the stories are well chosen and quite varied - though perhaps for a couple of them, the best description would not be cyberpunk. The twelve picked are *The Gernsback Continuum* (William Gibson's first published work), *Snake-Eyes* (Tony Maddox), *Rock On* (Pat Cadigan), *Tales of Houdini* (Rudy Rucker), *400 Boys* (Marc Laidlaw), *Solstice* (James Patrick Kelly), *Petra* (Greg Bear!), *Till Human Voices Wake Us* (Louis Shiner), *Freezone* (John Shirley), *Stone Lives* (Paul di Filippo), *Red Star*, *Winter Orbit* (Sterling and Gibson) and finally *Mozart in Mirrorshades* (Sterling and Shine). Most of these stories have been anthologised before, so I will just describe a few of the best.

The Gernsback Continuum provides an imaginative beginning to the collection. It is about an artist who begins seeing an alternative America behind the familiar modern culture, an America that appears to have based itself on the covers of Gernsback's pulp magazines. But is it just a hallucination, or something more sinister? *Petra* is very good, despite being written by Greg Bear. It is about the search for religion after the death of God as seen by a creature half stone, half flesh. *Freezone* is perhaps one of the most cyberpunk stories in the book, about fashion, rock'n'roll, drugs, politics and assassination.

The very best story in the book is *Mozart in Mirrorshades*. Here, people travel back in time and build a huge factory in the middle of eighteenth-century Salzburg. They completely change history, what with vaccines, science and transistor radios. Mozart, a young man at the time, decides he wants to return to the future to top the hit parade. But this is against Company rules...

All in all an interesting collection, but perhaps best in small doses. Sterling is hopelessly bad, however, at writing introductions; those for other people appallingly sycophantic, those for himself hideously coy. The general introduction fails to say anything interesting - but he is good at picking stories.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Your guide to the runners and riders in the fabbo OUSFG Elections

President

Penny Heal (Somerville, 2nd year Mathematician and Philosopher) :
"Rope ! Rope ! I meant rope !"

As OUSFG Treasurer, Penny took the concept of efficiency to new heights, managing to defraud RPGSoc out of the vast losses sustained at the Christmas Party. Her "creative accounting" was also responsible for terminating the dread Grantian Virtual Cornetto, which had been hanging over the head of the Petty Cash for over a year. Penny hopes to continue the trend of sitting Treasurers who win the Presidency being incredibly generous, popular and good-looking. [Unlike the Secretary, where we break with tradition, but I'm not saying which way - ed]

Treasurer

Mark Adams (Lincoln, 1st year Mathematician and Computationist) :
"The bubbles reacted with the leather, and the daffodils ruined the carpet..."

Probably the most careful of the election candidates, as he's supplied the most cryptic quote - hence an ideal Treasurer. Mark has come out of the closet about his "Greenism", but hasn't yet been observed talking to dolphins.

George Spary (Mansfield, 2nd year Politician, Philosopher and not at all Economical) : "All that effort and it's still wrinkled!"

Often described as a small, furry creature from Alpha Centauri, but this scarcely does her justice ; "small, furry creature from Alpha Centauri who waves her hands a lot and wears clothing not of our dimension" might be more apt. George has been involved with the fund-raising campaign to turn Mansfield from the ersatz article into a real college, so is an expert on hopeless causes, such as trying to decipher Penny's book-keeping technique.

Secretary

Matt Bishop (Jesus, 2nd year Mathematician): "Talking fast before your voice goes is a bit like knitting quickly before the wool runs out"

Remember those all-time classic OUSFG videos, like "The Man who Fell to Earth", "Whoops Apocalypse" and "Star Trek: The Next Degeneration"? Matt it was whose unerring taste sought them out and brought them home. Also responsible for the vilest and most necrotic merchandising suggestion of the year - the OUSFG tie!!!! If you vote for Matt for Secretary, this so-far nebulous monstrosity will almost certainly be compulsorily concretised around your quivering neck.

Jane McCarthy (Hilda's, 2nd year Classicist): "That's not fat, it's just fold skirt and penguins"

One of those fortunate people who's managed to con four year's worth of grant out of their LEA. Jane became official OUSFG Mug (rep) last year - rumours are circulating that she has managed to persuade Chris to do an "OUSFG Mug #2", even less comprehensible than the first. She also suggested that this august organ be printed on recycled paper - presumably to make it easier to digest (that was a joke).

Committee Member Without Portfolio

Stuart Aston (lives in the "real world"; he is a practitioner of Oriental medicine): "I am not a psychotic!"

Stuart has been in OUSFG for much longer than anyone would believe, given his baby-faced good looks, and will, if pressed, regale the company with tales about former committee members' habits of blowing themselves up, threatening each other with loaded guns, being vegetarians and so on. His platform is one of forcible acupuncture for anyone who votes against him.

Mark Hirst (also in the "real world", in his case a computer keyboard): "Stand for What?"

Mark is very old indeed (count those grey hairs! measure that receding hairline!). He has been a leading light in the RPGSoc committee, and of course edits their excellent magazine, which some of you may have seen. Mark would play the role of disciplinarian, if elected to the OUSFG committee.

Colin Johnson (Queen's, 1st year Biochemist): "Sit on my knee and I'll tell you all about it, sonny"

As soon as the forthcoming OUSFG elections were announced, Colin coincidentally decided to throw a huge party for the electorate...sorry, membership...this man clearly has what it takes to get to the top. Colin stands for equal rights for spiky-haircuts.

Eoghan Maher (Greyfriars, 2nd year Historian): "He's got lovely eyes" (Jane)

The biggest hack of all the current candidates, Eoghan stood for JCR President at Greyfriars in his 1st year - he managed to get a staggering 5 votes. This was enough to win, however, as the JCR only had 14 members and half of them were ineligible to vote. Eoghan is hoping to get a job with Guinness, in quality control.

Marina McDonald (Jesus, 2nd year Anglican): "I'm the shy, retiring, introverted type"

Mah-jong and Peake fiend [sounds like a kind of biscuit - ed], Marina has managed to endear herself to the society with her winning ways and sunny disposition. I hesitate to add more - let her speak for herself.