

TNB

I think we're all bozos on this bus...

# The First Reformed Church Of BENE RODMAN WOLFE



PARISH NEWSLETTER incorporating the Monthly Journal Of The  
Srecon & Radnor Sheep Appreciation Society

Early Michaelmas, 1987

Produced in collaboration with Oxford University  
Speculative Fiction Group (remember that list you put your name down on  
at Freshers'/Societies.Fair?)

## SECOND COMING IMMINENT?

Attendees at the World Science Fiction Convention (Conspiracy 87) in Brighton this August reported hearing the VOICE OF GOD. "It descended on us for fifteen minutes during a talk on the space race," explained Neal Tringham of St John's College, Oxford, "in the person of His prophet Arthur C Clarke. Then the satellite link went down." A spokesangel commented: "He couldn't make it in person because he was too ill to travel from Sri Lanka."

Mr Tringham is 63.

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT: NOSTALGIA

Neal Tringham pontificates on how the past lingers with us (cf. Peace) and how childhood memories can be brought back by something as simple as finding an old book in a dealers' room (cf. Proust on biscuit-dunking). Although he phrases his case in terms of a review of the said book, what he is clearly getting at here is the blessing of memory, and the joy of that rush of returning memory thought lost. Should we envy Severian because he never forgets? Or should we pity him because he can never know the joy that is described here? How complex and provocative are the works of Wolfe! Read Neal Tringham's article, then pause... and think about it.

Joseph Green: Gold The Man. This, as I was reminded in the Conspiracy dealers' room, was the book that first introduced me to the concept of the toilet in SF. As my earlier reading had been largely confined to E E Smith and Edgar Rice Burroughs, this came as something of a revelation. During the course of this superb piece of scientific extrapolation, a superman (American) and the ex-lover of a dead superman (Russian) have to carve out the upper half of a 100 ft tall giant's brain and replace it with something resembling a luxury penthouse flat. This was in fact the first time I had seen an SF spaceship/submarine/building/etc description which included a toilet, and I distinctly remember the overwhelming sense of wonder that swept me at the time. No doubt this is what Peter Nicholls would call a conceptual breakthrough...

## "I OBJECT TO BEING QUOTED..."

The deranged traditions of science fiction fandom are overwhelmingly attractive, particularly to those few boys and girls who are the outcasts of their high school classes because of wonky thought processes, a flair for the bizarre, and physical appearance that denies them the treasures of sorority membership or a position on the football team. For the pimply, the short, the weird and intelligent... for those to whom sex is frightening and to whom come odd dreams in the middle of study hall, the camaraderie of fandom is a gleaming, beckoning Erewhon; an extended family of other wimps, twinks, flakes and oddballs.

—Harlan Ellison, All The Lies That Are My Life

Contributed by Neal Tringham

Neal on Dave Langford:

"A kangaroo."

"I've heard all the funny stories about the production, so I don't need to read the book." (This could lead to a whole new theory of the function of literature. —Ed.)

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTEREST TO SOME, POSSIBLY EVEN YOU

The first week library meeting will not be as other library meetings are! Instead of going to St John's college bar, there will be a party, hopefully in St Anne's somewhere (details will be posted on the library door). Please bring a bottle—OUSFG will be providing drinks, but we can only run to so much.

You have been warned.

## OUSFG Committee 1987-88

For anything to do with OUSFG (questions, ideas, help with organisation, etc), get in touch with the following people:

President: Ivan Towlson (New) (84 Bullington Rd; tel 727903): newsletter, Sfinx (fiction magazine), conventions, discussion meetings, information, suggestions

Secretary: Fiona George (St Hugh's) (84 Bullington Rd; tel 727903): information, suggestions, administration

Treasurer: Mo Holkar (Hertford) (63 Aston St; tel 242278): membership, Xmas party, Hilary term banquet, information, suggestions, merchandise

Librarian: Paul Cray (St Anne's) (60 Woodstock Rd, rm 2): library meetings, problems with library borrowing, Sfinx

Neal Tringham (Exeter) (Stapledon Hse, Iffley Rd, rm 40): Sfinx, videos

Graham Harper (Exeter) (4 Maidcroft Rd; tel 711214): general randomness, guinea pig fandom

## MEANWHILE BACK ON THE POVERTY LINE...

The OUSFG sweatshirt is an indispensable fashion accessory available only to an elite few, and one that virtually guarantees that you will be stared at, ignored, or spat upon by mundanes envious of your membership of this select band. You can see it at meetings modelled by a tasteful selection of hairy and/or strangely-proportioned young men and women. It comes in a wide variety of shades of black (depending on what water temperature you wash it in) and the usual sort of sizes. Cost will probably be about £8—sign your soul to the treasurer in part exchange if necessary.

Slightly less indispensable, but easier to clean, are the all-new OUSFG mugs, never before made available to the public... Yes, after all these years of talking about it, we are finally getting round to selling coffee-carrying implements of crockery—an ideal way to wash the taste of library meetings out of your mouth! Chris Hughes has provided us with an excellent design—all we need now is a list of people interested in buying the things. Estimated cost is around £1.50; the person to contact is Mo Holkar (Hertford).

We can't quote exact costs yet as the printers will charge us different rates depending on the size of the order; if they're higher than the above, then we're sorry, but none of the profit goes to us. You pay cost price only.



OUSFG is a

MISSION EARTH FREE ZONE

## MADNESS & GUILT WRITTEN ALL OVER HIS FACE DEPT.

This newsletter was edited by Ivan Towlson, printed on the New College photocopier (I hope), and collated and distributed by a bunch of people who I shall try to assemble at the time (Tim, Chris, Fiona, Mo, Neal, are you listening?). Written except as stated by Ivan Towlson; thanks to Neal Tringham for the verbiage and all; special thanks to Jez Keen for the use of this nice typewriter...

Until next time, FIATOL, y'all, and don't you forget it.

If there is a cross or other scrawl below, your membership has lapsed. If you want to rejoin, see the treasurer. Otherwise, it's goodbye forever. Can you afford to let that happen...?



### Library Meetings

Sunday, 8:15 pm, St Anne's College, 60 Woodstock Rd rm 2 (guides will be provided in 1st and 2nd weeks). Come and borrow your books, then wander along to St John's functions room (bottom of sc. TW6 or 7) to talk to people and sneer at their choices... At closing time it's back to the library for highbrow conversation and cheap instant coffee.

Stacks: some of what have been euphemistically described as our 'less popular books' have been decently hidden away in plain brown cardboard boxes (banned from open shelves). You are welcome to search through these and borrow the books, but it's really not worth the effort...

Suggestions lists: On the back of the library door.

### Discussion Meetings

The power of pontification, and the meanness of the CUSFG committee in matters of instant coffee will be displayed every Wednesday at 8:15 pm in Trinity 11/8 (guides in 1st and 2nd weeks), courtesy of Mark Davies. You are cordially invited to watch the self-styled literati expound upon such topics as:

1st wk: Crap-p! —or, How It Became Necessary To Destroy Science Fiction In Order To Save It (Ivan Towlson)

2nd wk: The Cults Of Skiffy (Neal Tringham)

3rd wk: The History Of SF (Paul Cray)

and, indeed, to expound upon topics of your own choice (see Ivan if you want to give a talk).

### The Christmas Party

Our annual joint party with the D&D Society. Details to be finalised, but should be toward the end of term, costing about £3-£4. There will be a disco, but we don't plan to get a DJ, so if you've ever wanted to clear floors and annoy dance freaks, now is your chance... Details in the next issue.

If you intend to come in fancy dress, by the way, as about half the attendees usually do, you could do worse than start thinking about it now, as there will be (small) prizes.

### Not The Christmas Party

Attention all those planning to go to the first week library meeting! We won't be going to the bar; instead, we'll be holding a Fresher-Luring Party (hopefully in St Anne's somewhere; there will be details on the library door, but I don't have them yet). Non-freshers and others already lured, please bring a bottle...

### Strictly Unofficial

CUSFG will most definitely not be having anything to do with a K.A.O.S. game planned for circa 6th week, and disassociates itself utterly from anyone who might possibly be handing out details of this despicable act at library and discussion meetings.

Nor do we know anything about the fact that Ivan Towlson (New) is trying to assemble 6 or 7 people for a game of Civilisation this term sometime, and should you contact him the Group cannot take responsibility for the consequences.

### The Magic Toyshop

"Far more subtle and striking than Neil Jordan's comparable The Company Of Wolves, The Magic Toyshop is likewise adapted from a story by modern fabulist Angela Carter... Set in London in the mid-1950s, it draws out the symbolic themes of legend and fairytale as they have been identified by anthropology and Jungian psychology... Three children are orphaned when their parents die in a plane crash, and so go to live with their mysterious uncle, who...makes old-fashioned wooden marionettes and toys chiefly for his own delight and reluctantly for sale. Through Uncle Philip is enacted the artistic process whereby living material is gouged, tamed and reanimated in a different form. He also represents the family autocrat, the male principle that wrongly aspires to divinity, and the forces of anti-life repression. By contrast, Melanie (the eldest child) is emblematic of sex, female fecundity and the free-floating imagination. Fantasy and reality merge at every level; extraordinary special effects make tangibly vivid the mind's flights of allusion and fantasy, leaving the rare afterglow of a film you'll ponder and relive for ages.... It is a classic of imagination made celluloid. \*\*\*\*\* —Mat Snow, Q magazine

### Hellraiser

"The film opens with sleazy Frank Cotton in an Eastern bazaar, purchasing a mysterious puzzle box that promises to open the doorway to the ultimate pleasure. Eagerly traversing this threshold, Frank is literally torn apart by the experience and his soul is captured for an eternity of torture by a quartet of androgynous sadomasochistic demons known as Cenobites. Then his brother Larry unwittingly releases him. Only Frank needs blood—lots of it—to complete the reformation of his body and make good his escape. Resolving this dilemma is Larry's wife Julia, willingly seduced into luring victims up to the attic and dispensing them (sic —Ed) with a handy claw hammer... Eschewing the archetypal conflict between good and evil, director Clive Barker focuses his tension on the blurring of such polarised concepts as fear and desire, love and lust, devotion and blasphemy... I would trade almost every horror film of the last ten years for the single haunting image of a lone Cenobite inexplicably preoccupied by the task of reassembling the jigsaw-like pieces of Frank's shattered face. \*\*\*\*\* —David Taylor, Q

## Parish EVENTS

### Speaker Meeting

The legendary Dave Langford, ex-President of CUSFG, editor of the award winning "news"zine Ansible, Hugo-winning fanwriter, author of the BSFA award winner Cube Root and the novel The Space Eater, co-author of The Third Millennium and Earthdoom, and so on and so forth, will be coming to talk to us on Friday 16 October at 8:15 in New College Lecture Rm 6.

Langford will be recycling his Review Of SF Since '79 (see Worldcon report) under the title Trillion Year Sneer. This is the closest he got to doing a Goh speech, and he describes it as "merely [covering] the things I wanted to be rude about in recent years..."

A number of people will be taking him out for dinner beforehand—if you'd like to come, please let me know, so I can estimate numbers, and we can sort out where to go.

### Video Meetings

...are in something of a ~~mess~~ state of flux. For the time being, they will continue to be held in the Sir Christopher Cox room in New College. This is more than a little difficult to find, so guides will be posted in the Holywell Lodge from around 8-8:30. The videos should start around 8:30 if nothing goes too badly wrong. Meetings will be held on Mondays of even weeks (19 Oct, then every other week), and we plan to show:

2nd wk: Brazil—possibly (probably?) the best sf film ever made...

4th wk: Star Trek—the banned episodes (and possibly something else)

6th wk: possibly Blakes 7 or Dr Who, but suggestions are welcome

### Newsletter

This major literary artefact is going downmarket—at least it would be if it could get any further down... Why not contribute to its decline by sending reviews, quotes, poisonous rumours, unsubstantiated gossip or indeed anything of any possible interest to anybody to the editor, viz. Ivan Towlson, New College? Answers on a postcard only please.

### Sfinx

To paraphrase the NME: "If you're not reading Sfinx, you're not reading science fiction today." Indeed not, as the editor will quite probably claw your eyes out if you don't buy a copy... Sfinx is the society's fiction zine and at only 70p for a copy of the jam-packed, beautifully-produced and surprisingly worthwhile issue 4 is compulsory reading (see above on eyes, clawing out of). Or why not send your Interzone rejects in for Sfinx 5? Contact: Neal Tringham (Exeter), Paul Cray (St Anne's), Ivan Towlson (New)

## FILMS

### Superman IV: The Quest For Peace

By all accounts unredeemably atrocious...

## Coming Attractions

### PENULTIMATE PICTURE PALACE

Fri 30 Oct: Subway (w./ Empire State)

Sun 15 Nov - Sat 21 Nov: Blue Velvet

Tue 24 Nov: Repo Man (w./ Paris, Texas)

Thu 26 Nov: The Man With Two Brains (w./ After Hours)

Sun 6 Dec - Sat 12 Dec: Little Shop Of Horrors

Anyone interested in seeing any of the above should advertise the fact at meetings as other people may well be going as well.

### NOT THE MOULIN ROUGE

Thu 22 Oct - Sat 24 Oct: B\*ck To The F\*t\*re (w./ Pee Wee's Big Adventure)

## MUSIC (in a fairly loose sense of the term)

L Ron Hubbard: Battlefield Earth (OST)

"For the first time ever, a soundtrack is created from a book... Using melodies and lyrics to create a music soundtrack for a book is a first and only tomorrow's state-of-the-art musical computers could create today, the dynamic sound and pulsating beat of the Battlefield Earth music soundtrack... Prepare yourself for a dynamic milestone in music... You can't afford not to experience it, for it has set the trend of our music for decades to come."

"Dynamic and pulsating." —Orson Scott Card

"Just my dish." —Gene Wolfe

"I am amazed by his dynamism and pulsation!" —Arthur C Clarke

"Marvellous melodies and lyrics by a master composer." —Anne McCaffrey

"Unlistenable drivel." —everyone I know who's heard it

—from the  
sleevenotes



The boys are good, but the way  
is lousy—sort of the science  
fiction equivalent of a Big Mac.  
—Terry Pratchett

"Zoids, from the planet Zoid, in the galaxy of Zoid.

The Continent of programming. This deals with modified during to entertainment one; that can be modified who is asked to find one; on a dream reviewer that divides entertainment one; side of the line that divides entertainment one; read of this were good, but I can only find one; last paced and with more twists than a corkcrew.

the form of the cephalopod, a bean  
stream desired to be just on the wrong  
at appears. All the reviews I've  
and control. All the reviews I've  
'an excellent book, rich in imagination,  
blending a hard world with dark and  
menacing characteristics' - T.A.  
Wilkinson - a review  
by Neal Tringham

Norse god who spends his time hiding in a kitchen fire to keep warm except when he emerges to engage in (censored by the author) activities with the local girls sticks in my mind, at any rate. The usual mixture of action, sex and humour, but if you haven't read any of the books before try and get hold of Swords Of Lankmar, which is much better. —Neal Tringham

—the end the whole thing is more or less abandoned <sup>rather</sup> than completed.

Discussion meetings  
ChCh Meadows 6:12, every Wednesday at 8:15. Meetings lined up for this term include:

- 1st week: 'Arthur C Clarke' - Paul Cray
- 2nd week: 'Film and tv sf: a personal view' - Dave Bate
- 3rd week: 'Gene Wolfe: a man with a Sfinx' - Ivan Towlson
- 4th week: The wit and wisdom of Mr Philip Raines
- 5th week: 'Lord Dunsany: At The Edge Of The Frequency Range'  
—Becca Heddle
- 6th week: 'The aliens among us: the case for unicorns' -  
Neal Tringham
- 7th week: 'Orson Scott Card' - Chris Hughes (TBC)
- 8th week: Space for rent! Any takers for a 'theme' talk?

Also, who wants to host the discussion meetings next year?

The Monavari Tapestry by Guy Gavriel Kay  
Going by book 1, The Summer Tree, Kay is a promising  
genre-bending fantasy writer—it's not hack stuff, but it  
isn't too clumsy to be admirable. Given the 'first-novel'  
status, I'd suggest waiting, but watching closely.  
—Ivan Towlson

BOOK MEMS BOOK MEMS BOOK MEMS BOOK MEMS

And, innards willing, Alan Garner should finally make it here this term...

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          so, who wants to host the discussion meetings next week?



## Conventions

Insidious OUSFC member: No--I'm going to be staying in a four-star hotel, actually.  
Unsuspecting parent: Oh, that's nice. (Pause) Don't they provide beds, then?

Conspiracy: the 45th World Science Fiction Convention

## Follycon 88: The Eastercon

Contrivance 89

1987 conventions... Others include Congregate (Peterborough) in June--no other details--and Albacon, also in June (GoH Brian Stableford and Josephine Saxton--this is part of a continuing series of Glasgow cons and should be very good indeed). Sorry, cancel that: Congregate is in 1988.

SIFA, the Hatfield Poly SF group with whom we hope to arrange some sort of exchange in the near future, are running a tenth anniversary con called X-Con, but I can't find any details of this. STOR PRESS this seems to be October 1988, but I'm not sure still so other details

unnoted: see Ivan Towlson or write to Trinity College, Cambridge, CB2 1TQ  
 conspiracy: POBox 43, Cambridge, CB1 3JJ

contrivance 89: 63 Drake Rd, Chessington, Surrey  
 others: see Ivan Towlson, who will try to ferret

a merciless plug by Neal Tringham

Interzone is ~~now~~ now five years old and on issue 19 (yes, it's a quarterly, you can put your calculators away now). In that time it has published Ballard, Bayley, Benford, Carter, Harrison (M John variety), Moorcock, Shirley, Sterling, Watson, Wolfe, etc. etc. It has also been responsible for the first publication of the people who are (as far as I can tell) the only two good British writers to appear in about a decade—Geoff Ryman and Neil Ferguson. Granted, much of what they publish is pretty bad (the editors themselves complain that all they seem to receive is stories about despairing near-future lovers staring at heavily symbolic baked bean cans in devastated supermarkets) ((boggle —ed.)) but this is true of any magazine to quite a large extent. The fact remains that at £1.75 an issue you are not paying all that much to read all of what remains of British sf—and some of it is actually very good.

So what are you waiting for?

We hope that will help you navigate the jungle of literary jargon...

- this book has no plot  
It's got lots of good ideas (Phil Baines) - this book hasn't got a plot either  
It's interesting (Phil) - go away and read it, Ivan  
Accessible (Ivan) - trivial

I don't know, I haven't read it (Chris) - not written by Orson Scott Card  
It's excellent, how dare you criticise it? (Max(TM), O'Connor) - ideologically sound  
I think it's marvellous--the characterisation, the style, the atmosphere... (Ivan)  
- this book has no plot

Lovely (Becca Heddle) - targeted at a reader with a mental age of 5  
Brilliant (Chris Hughes) - written by Orson Scott Card

Well, I can't defend it, but I quite enjoyed it (Neal) - so awful it's not funny  
Critically credible (Ivan Towlson) - (i) Tedious crap but Phil said I ought to read it; (ii) Written by Gene Wolfe

Quite fun (Neal Tringham) - awful

has compiled this little guide to help you get by (now will you buy a copy?). The perpetrators are credited.

Literary Language: a Guide for the confused



—NESTLE'S MILK—

President: Ivan Towlson (New) - the vague one  
 Secretary ~~Secretary~~ Vice-President: Fiona George (St Hugh's) - the illiterate one  
 Treasurer: Mo Holkar (Hartford) - the

Ivan Towleson is still Librarian and is now newsletter editor. In between all this he helps edit Sfinx and does his own fanzine... he also works as Oxford "agent" for Connors and co-chairs Conline with Maria Hamilton.

In the thank-you department, we would like to make nice to Pita Enriquez and David Harris for the last year of newsletters; Maria, Max and Dave for keeping the society on its last legs; and of course Becca and Tim for being indispensable. (But what did you do with them, Ivan? you ask, repelled.)

Written (except as credited),  
edited, published and distributed by  
Ivan Towlson (New). Local  
agents: Neal Tringham (Ex),  
Graham Harper (Ex) and Chris  
Hughes (ChCh)

Picking up where the legendary newsletter competitions of 1984/5 left off—over the vacation I saw that the BBC showed an Arena programme with the title "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" That's the question—a small prize (we're talking Becca Hedde proportions here, possibly stretching to a Mars Bar if finances permit) for the most obscene/fatuous/amusing answer to reach me by, say, the beginning of 5th week.

Video Meetings  
To be confirmed, and subject to attendance holding  
up in the face of exams, come to New College 12 NB 3  
at 8:00 on Mondays or even weeks; we go from there to  
the Sir Christopher Cox room in N.C., where we actually  
watch the thing. We hope to have the BBC's excellent  
nuclear thriller Edge Of Darkness in 2nd week, and  
possibly Burial in 4th week (this was Neal's idea)  
--after that, if you have any suggestions we'd love  
to hear them. Withn reason and the dictates of  
common decency, that is.

# SONET 77

LET visit  
On Saturday 30 May (end 5th wk)  
we will be paying a visit to the  
Joint European Torus at Culham  
(nr. Didcot). There is no charge  
for this, but you will have to  
pay your train fare to Culham and  
back. If you want to go, you must  
let the President know by 23 May  
since we have to supply a list of  
visitors beforehand. I'll need to  
know your nationality if you're not  
British (sorry, but they demand  
this).

Newsletter news,  
 Newsletters, be  
 Contributions will  
 etc. received beg.  
 gratefully beg,  
 the editor.

Library meetings  
New College, 12 MB 3, every Sunday at 8:15. The  
'pub' we'll be moving to should be St John's bar  
throughout the term. For those who haven't been  
along since we moved back there, as official Social  
Leapers to the JCR (by appointment), although we can  
get drinks from the bar, we have to drink them in the  
~~Faculty's~~ ~~Dress~~ ~~Pres~~ ~~st~~ ~~vich~~ room at the bottom of  
staircase 6. Mind you, last year we ended up on the  
lawn... (ahem) Anyway, after that it's back to the  
library for articulate literary debate, or more often  
Neal and John trying hopelessly to defend 'The Number  
Of The Beast', and instant coffee of uncertain  
description. Least said, soonest mended.

Somewhere on the banks of the Cherwell, sometime this term (Saturday 4th week?). Last year saw exploding Rainbow Brites (for Live Aid), naval engagements on the river, and a... well... odd performance of a Hitch-Hikers' episode. No doubt Becca will dream up something even more implausible this time round... eek... Oh yes: bring your own bottle, and if you could bring a punt it would be nice—let me know, please.

"Every time I breathe, my feet fall off." --Becca Heddle  
 for a 1982 committee meeting: "The committee look even stranger  
 than above." --Keith Clement  
 "I threaten you?" --Samantha Fyle  
 "I threaten you?" --David Lane (Eventually Neal  
 "I've been many  
 awful things in my  
 life, but, that being  
 said, I've never been a black! I  
 fan." --Terry Patterson

Found in the minutes of the C.C.  
"It was one of those parties  
of anything more interesting  
"Excuse me, do you mind if  
"Phil, are you eating the C.C.  
no, he was only eating the men's

(better) Neal, the fourth of the new series, is out and on sale—see Ivan Towlson or  
stories in the issue. Spend a happy evening counting how many of the editors have  
(we won't even mention. If you'd like to write for Slinx, the same people would theoretically like to buy one...)  
in there—certainly enough to justify 70p. Actually there's some worthwhile stuff  
He also said he was impressed by the cover, which is another reason so, so it must be true.  
from you but in practice will probably remember Slinx 4 and run a mile.  
If you'd like to write for Slinx, the same people would theoretically like to buy one...)  
OK, maybe a couple of (a) too for the benefit of (a) tourists and (b) charity.  
possibly something to do with Bag Week, but probably just Neal's warped sense of fun.  
Neal's warped sense of fun.



# CONINE

A student-run convention, to be held at Oxford Polytechnic on 5-7 August 1988

Guest of Honour: Terry Pratchett

£4 supporting

£9 attending

Contact Ivan Towilson or Maria Hamilton

The last time a convention was held in Oxford was Oxcon 5 way back in 1984. That makes Conine the biggest thing OUSFG has taken on for four years, and there's no reason why it shouldn't be bigger. Of course, the convention is not officially associated with the Group (no point; it has nothing to gain, since it will be turning over money it would take OUSFG five years to get its hands on, and its independence to lose); but when you consider that the steering committee consists of two Presidents and a Treasurer of OUSFG it's clear that we'll be relying a great deal on support from students here.

So what can we offer you for your £9 membership? Let's kick off with the film programme: four, maybe five, sf films ranging from the crowd-pullers to the obscure and pretentious (we hope; the actual programme won't be finalised for months yet, but that's what we're aiming for). Going to see that many at a cinema would cost you £8 at least—if you could find that many films. And if we can sort it out there'll be videos to go with them (all-night showings of *The Prisoner*? *Classic Quatermass*? *Dr Whos* from the distant past? Again, we'll see what we can do).

So that covers the media angle for the time being. What else? We have lots of ideas for programme items both serious and silly: in the former category come the standard panels and discussions, workshops on the various aspects of fandom (probably including an instant fanzine) and gaming events such as a speed D&D (for which read role-playing game and possibly a Star Fleet Battles tournament, in the latter a Killer game (Poly permitting), massage and cocktail workshops, a filksinging session (featuring a Rocky Horror show without the film and/or a musical in the tradition of... er, well (ahem))), and of course the legendary breakfast parties.

We already have Terry Pratchett. Those of you who heard him talking to OUSFG last term ain't seen nothing yet. His "Alien Christmas" after-dinner speech at Eastercon was funnier by far (my cheek muscles haven't been the same since). And those of you who left when the meeting broke up missed the chance of a friendly, personal chat in the OUSFG library—till 2 in the morning... But friendly and funny isn't the be-all and end-all of the man; he's quite capable of serious discussion—we hope to put him on a panel or two—and if we can talk him into it he'll be helping out in the role playing department too.

We don't yet have any further guests, but if we get the members (ie. the money to pay for them) we will be trying to attract day guests and special speakers. We don't know who, or how many—that'll depend on how much money we have and who we feel would best fit into the programme—though the name of Geoff Ryman has been mentioned and a media person(ality) of some sort has been suggested.

Not to mention the social aspect (that is, the bar...), the book room, the art show, the fan room, and who knows what else...

We need your support. We are certain you'll find it worth your while to join. Cheap, cheerful and challenging? You bet it is.

If there is a scrawl, cross or other death-threat below, your membership has expired. If you don't send us some more money (or query our records), your membership will lapse and you will receive no more copies of this newsletter. Should you be mad enough to allow this catastrophic event to take place, please return all your library books (or we'll send the boys round). And if you've had any books out over the vacation, please note they're due back by Sunday 2nd week. Thanks a lot.

This year's Arthur C Clarke award, for the best novel published in Britain during the last year (sf novel, you understand) according to a panel of critics or somesuch, went to Margaret Atwood for *The Handmaid's Tale*, apparently by the skin of its teeth from *The Ragged Astronauts* (though that could have been made up to pacify our Bob...)

CONSPIRACY CORNER - or, Worldcon Wackiness...  
...straight from the Sorenson's mouth...  
From Conrunner 6 (April 1987): The programme is deliberately set firmly in science fiction as literature, mainly to increase the contrast between Conspiracy and the American-style Worldcons. There are fewer film/tv oriented items, though there will be films and videos showing throughout the convention...

...Here are just some of the items we intend to put on that aren't mentioned in Progress Report 3:  
What made the Athenians so smart? - Gene Wolfe  
Visions of the near future - Matheson, Milgrom  
Ethics of organ transplants - Niven, Gould  
Tomorrow belongs to the illiterate ((glances sideways at Fiona)) - Bayley, Haldeman, Robinson  
SF is history's dustbin - Silverberg, Wolfe  
All that and the Big Bang too - Gribbin, Pohl  
Magical sex - Carter, Garner, Charnas  
Whatdunnit? - Niven, MacAvoy, Varley  
Building a better man - Clement, Gunn, Dixon  
Hacking at the Enterprise - Ford, Hamby, Bear, Duane  
Other celebrities appearing include Ursula Le Guin, Diana Wynne Jones, Louise Cooper, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Norman Spinrad, Kim Stanley Robinson and Iain Banks.

"There has been a lot of speculation as to who will appear at the Friday rock concert. As yet nobody has been booked, but it will not be Peter Gabriel as rumoured a while ago." A pity, but I'm a bit dubious about the idea anyway. I'd much rather have sf; if I want a rock concert, I'll go to one. —Ivan

The more I hear about this convention, the more convinced I become that it is cheap at the price. Pre-registration closes on 1 August, and membership at the door will be £45-50, so do yourself a favour and join up soon.

STOP PRESS (again)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons are now confirmed for June 13 (Saturday 7th week). I realise this clashes with exams, but it's very rare for Moore to do this sort of thing, so please do support it.



Conspiracy  
87

## THE BRIGHTON WORLDCON REPORTED BY NEAL TRINGHAM

### THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOKS WITH 'W's IN AND OTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE A...A...

The notes below are the result of an experiment in reality alteration performed without the aid of any of our normal methods—e.g. drugs, self metaprogramming, extremely silly ideas copied from Timothy Leary, etc. Instead, only the more traditional methods of sleep deprivation, underfeeding and subliminal programming were employed. Nevertheless, and despite the subject's partial awareness of the process, a number of deep distortions of subjective reality were produced. We reprint below extracts from the subject's diary, written during the experiment.

#### 27th August (the first day)

I. Trip down to Brighton made uniquely interesting by the fact that I was sharing the boot of a hatchback with a gigantic mattress (in case Tim [Ade] decided he wanted to sleep in the back of his car with five other people), a large duvet (in case he found the back of the car cold without any warm companioning bodies), a sleeping bag (in case he had the offer of sleeping in a hotel room with five other bodies), three people's luggage and a small green insect resembling an economy-size praying mantis. This last I was regretfully forced to render up to the mercies of the slipstream on the M—something [1], since I suspected there might not be enough oxygen to sustain us both over the whole length of the journey. After tracing an interesting variant on the Lissajous spiral through Brighton's one-way system [2], we found a car-park and I crawled out, only to realise that none of us knew where the convention was... We eventually agreed to head for the smell of fish and chips [3], on the grounds that this should guide us to the refreshing air of the seafront, and eventually found the Brighton Conference centre, which I promptly and confidently identified as the Metropole Hotel (very modern, isn't it? Just look at the size of the foyer...).

II. Having entered through a little-known auxiliary door [4], I stared in horror at the apparently unending stream of people leaving the opening ceremony (my gift for timing had evidently not deserted me). "My God," I thought, pausing only to pick up my mass of registration material and L Ron Hubbard adverts, "how am I going to find anyone in this?" Unfortunately my question was answered all too soon by the discovery of Matthew Brock, waving his antennae thoughtfully while chewing on the programme book (all right, I exaggerate).

III. I can remember very little of the rest of today, most of my memory space being taken up with Kim Whysall's graphic description of how she had gone to a party, got drunk, and woken up next to a man who was recognisably not her husband. Unfortunately, I later discovered that the man in question had been Tony Hammond, her husband, made unrecognisable by the removal of his beard (as a result I was only able to identify him myself by detailed examination of the structure of his forehead). My other clear memory is of attending Geoff Ryman's "Disappearing Acts" (a dramatisation of four of Alfred Bester's short stories). As far as I can tell, I was very impressed by this, the uncertainty being introduced by my total inability to understand half of it... And so to bed. (Well, chair.)

#### 28th August (the second day)

IV. A worrying feature has become evident in the sleeping accommodation provided by the Bedford Hotel. The all-night film programme (for the benefit of those who may wish, for whatever reason, to stay awake all night) is showing a set of films which I can only describe as (dare I say it?) not really very artistically very impressive [5]. The first one last night (Forbidden World) showed its credentials early on by the impressively avant-garde characterisation of the female scientists at an isolated research base, who, on discovering that a young and well muscled troubleshooter has arrived, promptly take the first available opportunities to strip themselves naked and throw themselves into his arms [6] (individually rather than together, I must add. The film is avant-garde, not tasteless [7]). This daring attitude is reflected in the hero's Heinlein-esque view of nonhuman sentients, of whom the hero says, "I've got a motto—if it moves and it's not one of us, shoot it." In order to preserve a balanced presentation of different points of view, the chief woman scientist does sneak off to try to communicate with IT [8]—the nasty product of bioengineering, which keeps eating people—despite the hero's attempts to prevent anyone considering such a stupid action... IT eats her, of course. But the day is saved when the Heroic Old Scientist has his cancerous liver cut out (without anaesthetic, thus demonstrating his heroism) and fed to IT by the Heroic Young Troubleshooter, whereupon IT promptly dies of indigestion, leaving the coast clear for the H.Y.S. to reap the rewards of his heroism with the surviving Piece Of Female Flesh.

Fortunately I can remember only scattered glimpses from the succeeding

films, from which I note that (1) Hollywood Boulevard parodies itself so well that one becomes worried where all the action shots from films in progress actually came from; (2) the future is built from eggboxes and spray-on plastic, according to Cyborg 2087; (3) Captain Invincible (which I watched all of) is actually quite a good superhero spoof (recommended).

Nevertheless, I cannot avoid a certain amount of concern as to the likely effect of all these strange and disturbing images, projected directly into my semi-conscious brain...

V. In an attempt to restabilise my perception of reality after the depredations of the night, I resisted the possibly counterproductive attractions of the Christian Fandom meeting and hearing David Brin tell me (again) how in thirty years' time we will all be superintelligent dolphins (assuming we currently have the intelligence to keep his books at the top of the bestseller lists, that is) in favour of plunging myself deeply into the book room. I was soon reassured as to my grip on reality as I noted the slightly damaged and just barely out of print paperbacks going for £5, the copy of Little, Big for 4 times £23 minus 3 times £3, the immense piles of stories about 'Why Mr Spock Would Want To Marry ME' [9]... Everything was as I had come to expect it.

VI. Nevertheless, I found myself unable to resist such obviously honest and essentially factual programme items as the Doris Lessing interview (which I found far more enjoyable than her books, and distressingly accurate on the subject of the West's dismissal of Afghanistan, which has now provided something like half the world's refugee population) and the Langford review of SF since '79. It was at this point that a menacing synchronicity began to manifest itself. In this case it took the form of an overwhelming conviction that I had heard this talk before [10]. Surely a man as inventive and humorous as D. Langford [11] would not have to reuse old material? [12] No—it must be some sort of illusory deja vu effect... Further evidence was provided at dinner, when a detailed discussion of The Continent Of Lies caused a strange looking individual to lean over from the next table and say, "Are you talking about my book?" Surely, I thought, this sort of thing only happens in Woody Allen movies...

VII. Fortunately, I escaped any further incidents of this nature (not to mention the prospect of a panel on 'Fannish Sex', a prospect sufficient to reduce strong men (well, me) to hysterics... After watching a set of episodes of Sapphire & Steel made more confusing than absolutely necessary by the fact that I kept falling asleep (very good, though. Almost as good as The Prisoner...) I staggered off to my sleeping quarters, where I write this before succumbing to what I am sure will be a dreamless sleep...

#### 29th August (the third [13] day)

VIII. I can remember absolutely nothing about last night. Is this good or bad? I am no longer certain... [14]

IX. Not wanting to risk a repeat of yesterday's disturbing synchronicity experience, I spent the morning in the art show and hanging around the CONINE [15] desk. Nevertheless, anomalous events continued to intrude. The art show (despite a large number of very nice pieces) also featured a remarkable number of semi-naked females and—on a brief survey—no semi-naked males whatsoever, an inexplicable statistical anomaly... Furthermore, it also contained a picture called 'Han and Leia - The Awakening' which featured a male and a female, with their eyes shut and extremely silly expressions on their faces, exploring each other's tonsils with great enthusiasm. I am still baffled by this work. Is it, for example, a metaphorical representation of the discovery of tonsillitis? I cannot shake off the feeling that it may all have been a ghastly hallucination...

On returning to the CONINE [15, again] desk, I told Maria [Hamilton] about this, only to be informed (to my shock) that she found it 'nice' and was familiar with the genre. Not only this, but the mention apparently inspired her to new heights of bizarre behaviour, offering her body (loudly) to anyone who would sign up for a CONINE [15—still] membership [16]. Despite my discreet attempts to prevent this (regrettably foiled by her swallowing most of my hand) I only in the end succeeded in stopping her by protesting that I had always thought she was a gentle, innocent young woman. This, unfortunately, led to a description of the possible uses of banana liqueur about which I can only say that it made me very glad not to have eaten lunch... I fled as the words 'belly fluff' and 'brandy' began to emerge...

X. I was almost successful in avoiding these unpleasant mutations of reality throughout the rest of today, their incidence being limited to two minor recurrences of the deja vu experience (one during—and indeed throughout—the Ansible Review Of The Year, the other when I found myself having the same conversation as to where to eat for what I now realise was the fifth time, discovering that there is in fact no place anywhere in which fifteen people will agree to eat and can be served—something I had generally realised during the previous two days only on arriving at one place or another). I approach the film programme with as much calm as possible under the circumstances...



30th August (the fourth day)

XI. Regrettably, matters took a turn for the worse last night. I feel I could have coped with Shivers (a film describing how the inhabitants of an apartment block are possessed by internal parasites intended as replacements for missing organs to indulge in an impressive sexual orgy, thus spreading the parasites—this isn't a joke, it's Cronenberg), particularly after earlier watching the uncut Videodrome (all of two minutes—odd added compared to the video version). Unfortunately, for reasons of which I am still uncertain, the video operator chose that night to perform what I can only assume was an improvised performance in modern kinetic art, using the lights in the film room for instruments. This had the effect of keeping me awake during the next film, meaning I had to watch most of it (although occasionally one of the lights flared bright enough to make the pictures on the screen invisible to me and, indeed, anyone else).

XII. This film was Idaho Transfer, an epic marked out by the invention (unique in sf as far as I know) of a time machine which only works on people under twenty, and even then ONLY WHEN THEY HAVE TAKEN THEIR TROUSERS OFF. [17] Unfortunately we were never given an adequate description of the scientific explanation underlying this fascinating idea, although the fact that only two people were seen using the machine and both of them were female may provide a clue for the quick minded...

XIII. Despite a number of enjoyable and reassuringly normal programme items (the excellent Dreamchild, a talk on weird physics by Dr Robert Forward, an interview with the Strugatskys in which they proved how funny they are and John Brunner proved how ~~prevalent~~ [sorry —Ed.] cultured he is), several new sequences of events have emerged which I find difficult to fit into ordinary reality. For one thing, I find that the numbered sections of my diary are growing shorter and shorter. Could I be suffering some form of psychotic breakdown (which, I am assured, produces shorter sentences and thus, perhaps, shorter sections)? Or is what I instinctively feel to be true actually correct, and some invisible power is controlling the length of the sections I write for some unguessable purpose? [18] Who Can Decide???

XIV. Strange rumours circulate that a thousand attending members have not turned up (later determined to be 700), prompting theories about the Scientologists fixing the Hugo voting... But why would they need to, I ask, baffled.

XV. Hearing William Gibson talk about the new wave of writers (again!). He has just told an interesting story about a batch of Japanese magazine reporters who interviewed him and Bruce Sterling and spent the whole time asking them about fashionable clothes and furniture design, to the authors' confusion... Hmm... Perhaps the Japanese know more about cyberpunk than Gibson does...

XVI. An unidentifiable (but female) person wanders up to the CONINE [15] desk, picks up a flyer nearby for some American con named Myclone 3 and promptly tears it to shreds. Slightly startled, I express my disapproval by letting my mouth hang open and looking baffled. She mutters something about the proper name being Myclown 3, turns a piercing gaze on me and asks if there are any more about. "Umm... I don't think so," I reply, refraining from mentioning the large pile three feet away in the interests of general pacifism, whereupon she turns on her heel and stalks away. I am baffled. Was this a real event? Did anyone else notice? Am I hallucinating or have I just met someone else who has been sleeping in the film programme?

XVII. Had a nasty moment this afternoon when I realised that Ivan [Towilson] hadn't insulted me all day. [19] However, I later remembered that Gene Wolfe had voluntarily stopped to chat to him earlier, and concluded that he must still be in the ecstatic state of one who has SEEN HIS GOD... [20] On the other hand, I do notice that these entries appear to have slipped out of temporal sequence. I am sure something like that happens in Martian Time-Slip, and the results aren't at all good (admittedly hardly surprising in a Dick novel).

XVIII. I am also suffering from an increasing certainty that the solid structure of the hotel itself, that symbol of security and... well... solidity, is beginning to dissolve around me. For example, I keep trying to find the Fan Programme, but the correct room appears to be partially disassembled [21]. And the more I look, the more areas of the Metropole seem to be in a similar condition... On mentioning this to other people, I find they are surprised. "Didn't you notice before?" they inquire with shocked looks [22]. But I am left with a serious difficulty—if this is real, when why didn't I notice before? And if it isn't, then WHY IS EVERYBODY LYING TO ME? Meanwhile, problems with synchronicity continue. During Bob Shaw's Serious Scientific Talk, I find that at least two paragraphs are complete in my memory after I hear the first line. What is going on? Could it have anything to do with my reading the speaker's Who Goes Here two days before going to Brighton?

XIX. The final blow! Emerging from the filksinging to see the (very impressive) fireworks display (which I seem to have entered under the curious delusion that I could hold a tune [23]) I am told that Black Genesis failed to win the Hugo. "What?" I cry, appalled and reeling back against the wall for support. "You mean it went to a good book?"

"Speaker For The Dead," they reply, grinning mockingly. Moaning faintly in disbelief, I sink to the ground. Not even the discovery that Tangents has won both the Nebula and the Hugo can restore my faith in the Hugos as I know them... Groaning, I limp off to the film programme and collapse into stunned sleep, undistracted even by the gooey inside bits of the aptly named Inseminoid. However, the familiar theme song of Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes wakes me a couple of hours later and I am able to finish this description of the day's events while they still have that strange, hallucinogenic clarity...

31st August (the fifth [24] day)

XX. The morning started well with an interesting (if not totally convincing) talk by Dr Charles Pellegrino on how to build an antimatter starship (when asked what was the exact composition of the magnetic droplets he intended to spray ahead of his ships in order to magnetise the interstellar dust so that it [?—I don't think this is right. Other evidence suggests the author may be talking about radiation. Possibly. —Ed.] could be deflected rather than going straight through the ship he replied cheerfully, "Err... we're not sure of that yet." Still, better than calling it Universal Repelling Fluid<sup>TM</sup> I suppose) [25]. The morning was also marked by the interesting discovery that Iain Banks, having provisionally accepted a provisional invitation to talk to CUSFG, had just been arrested for trying to climb the outside of the hotel during a party (I'm not sure if the funds will stretch to bail money. Perhaps we could ask Clubs Committee for a loan?) [26]. Nevertheless, even this seemed within the bounds of normal reality [27]. Perhaps sleeping during most of the film programme had helped, I thought. But as soon as I got back from my usual early morning drinking trip to the Metropole toilets' washing basins, everything had changed...

XXI. The first intimation that reality was again in a non-ordinary mode came when, sitting down before wandering off in search of the man who would hopefully give me a lift, I started to read the new Corgi books leaflet. I was first shocked to note the description of Benford and Brin's Heart Of The Comet as "blending visionary science with compelling human characters"... this is the novel where Heroic Scientists Young and Old and Beautiful Females fight off nameless monstrosities in the middle of Halley's Comet, I thought, twitching faintly. Nevertheless—an isolated incident, I thought. That's all. However, as I flipped the pages I came across something which, even now, I can only interpret as being due to the influence of some semi-educated monkey in charge of leaflet production and with its finger stuck on a typewriter key [28]... Coming in the near future, I was promised, were novels called Wordsmiths and the Warguild, Women and the Warlords, and Wizard and the Warlord (some, though not all, of these are sequels to a book called—what else?—The Wizards and the Warriors). But worst of all, we can apparently expect next year a novel entitled The Walrus and the Warwolf [29]... The visions this engenders are almost too horrible to contemplate... It is this that finally convinced me I must be hallucinating, that the tail had invaded even my last sanctuary, my help in ages (well, years) past, the printed word...

And wherever I look, it seems, there is confirmation. Flipping casually through the last con newsletter I come across an article by the latest (American) TAFF [for the ignorant/innocent: Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund] winner (the first part of her report) which can only be described by the quote "Gee whiz!!! I've won TAFF!!! ALL THOSE PEOPLE OUT THERE REALLY LOVE ME! In fact, they love me so much they're willing to pay to send me to England for a month!" (paraphrased from memory). Here too the printed word has become infected by the projections of a sick and diseased mind which I can only conclude is my own...

Then comes the terrifying discovery that during the convention a total of 15 copies of Sfinx 4 have been sold (note the connection with the printed [30] word). "Impossible!" I moan, staring at Paul [Cray] and Paul [Marrow] and Tim in a seriously shocked fashion. In reply they only smile, revealing sets of immaculately brushed teeth (in marked contrast to my own at the time, I must add). Shattered, I turn away...

XXII. After this final revelation the rest of the day passes in a sort of blurred haze. I hardly notice Matthew announcing that he is going off to visit the local dolphins, apparently in the hope of effecting some sort of soul transference with one... Wandering through the Business Meeting, I hear the Americans baying for the hotel manager's blood [31], arguing grimly over whether hanging or boiling in oil would be more suitable... One cowardly soul does suggest complaining to American Express, but is promptly shouted down. However, even this admittedly pleasurable prospect fails to rouse me from my stupor... And then it is time to go, and I crawl back into the car, fighting off a swarm of local beetles that have apparently also decided Brighton is a good place to leave, and it is all over at last. Or so I think...

XXIII. [32] I am scribbling these final entries as the car approaches its destination, despite the fact that a combination of Tim's driving technique and my position mean that roughly every minute I am forced to absorb considerable stress through my neck and spinal column... What worries me is this. The further I go from Brighton, the more I am possessed by a ghastly conviction. In the real world, I am sure, Black Genesis would have won the Hugo (I neglect even to mention the failure of that gripping piece of contemporary sociology, The Dark Knight Returns, to win the nonfiction). So, I must conclude, at some time during the past five days I, in some indescribable fashion, slipped from the true reality to some weaker imitation—a nightmarish phantasm, a mere shadow of the real... a place where I might actually HAVE TO READ the Hugo-winning novel...

## media

### DR WHO: TIME AND THE RANI

Words fail me. Numerous attempts to describe this have given me phrases like "extremely silly," "ignominious self-parody," and "appalling." But none of these come close to capturing the sheer awfulness of the whole thing. Retch, bletch.

I saw a 1-minute clip from the next story, and it doesn't look quite so bad—in fact it had the potential to be quite good—but...

Perhaps they should improve the quality of the scripts by commissioning an adaptation of Mission Earth...



# NOTES ON THE AFOREGOING by Ivan Towlson

- 1: Forty.
  - 2: The navigator explains: I told Tim to turn right along the sea front; with creditable imagination, he interpreted this as 'turn through 135° and go back away from the sea front'. By the time I was able to work out where we were, we had already missed at least seventeen turnings, at which point we got lost again. We were eventually saved when I managed to lead Tim into getting onto a main road and driving in a reasonably straight line until he got to the sea. Not my fault.
  - 3: As I recall, we found a shopping centre, democratically picked a decision at random, attempted to follow the Gollancz ~~zipp/ly~~ balloon and eventually got into the right general area by running up and down lots of stairs in a deserted car park. (Sort of like a Blakes 7 episode.) I certainly don't remember anything about fish and chips.
  - 4: Actually it was the front door.
  - 5: The phrase Neal is groping for here is 'formulaic low-budget drivel'.
  - 6: Oh, I thought real life was like that.
  - 7: Prudery no longer punishable by death in England and Wales.
  - 8: Frankly I object to using my initials to identify the Blasphemous Monstrosity.
  - 9: Ziesing Free Live Free \$45... Biblioman £70 (but a beautiful, beautiful book)... The Urth Of The New Sun £11.95... lust, lust...
  - 10: And, fair maid, you will, in all probability, hear it again when Langford comes to OUSFG.
  - 11: Spelt 'Kangford' in manuscript.
  - 12: No... not have to as such...
  - 13: Surprise!
  - 14: The answer is: good. You were lucky enough to miss Without Warning, which I was unable to sleep through despite its clumsy, clichéd sub-Fanthorpe acting, directing and plotting. I passed the others by in merciful semi-oblivion, but the glimpses I caught were... off-putting.
  - 15: Spelt 'Connine' in manuscript.
  - 16: See elsewhere in the newsletter for details of this exclusive offer (while stocks last).
  - 17: Yes, that sentence did say what you thought it said.
  - 18: Hey, editors have to work for a living too, Neal.
  - 19: Even the most dedicated of us have our off days.
  - 20: This is an unfair portrayal. I do not regard Gene Wolfe as a god, nor do I worship Him; it's just that... that... er... oh, all right, I do regard Gene Wolfe as a god. And why not?
- Actually all that happened was that He wandered up to the CONINE desk, asked, "What are you doing here?" and, while I struggled to prostrate myself properly before Him at the same time as explaining in duly reverential tones that I was watching a desk and trying to sell memberships, wandered off again after His wife.
- Truly a formative experience.
- 21: It was disassembled, which is why they moved the programming down the corridor. Besides the Ansible Review Of The Year was in the fan programme and you found that, didn't you?
  - 22: Neal, they were disassembling the main junction of the convention hotel. You passed it on the way to the fan room within half an hour of arriving. How come you didn't notice?! Are you blind, or dead, or both? (Check only one box.)
  - 23: You don't mean you tried to sing? After all the time we've spent training you not to?
  - 24: And final.
  - 25: A word of explanation may be in order here. As far as I can tell from Neal's descriptions, the idea is that you put together some matter and antimatter a LONG way from the passenger/crew area (to avoid frying them in gamma rays—e.g. at the end of a miles-long string, behind a few yards of concrete). To get the thing to work properly you apparently need a magnetic screen—hence the fluid to magnetise interstellar dust. For details please don't hesitate to get lost.
  - 26: Some people will do anything to get out of being invited to Oxford... (ask me about Rob Holdstock sometime). For anyone interested, Banks was apparently led away shouting "It was me, guv! I did it!", never to be seen again until he popped up in the audience of the sf vs mainstream panel being eulogised by M. John Harrison.
  - 27: Allowing for the fact that there was a room party going on, I'd say it was positively mundane. (Some people do similar things as a matter of course. Hey folks, let me tell you about the night Neal tried to get into Frewin...)
  - 28: No. Not me.
  - 29: Neal has tried to adapt The Walrus And The Carpenter to serve as an epigraph, but can't get it to scan.
  - 30: Photocopied, actually.
  - 31: When Malcolm Edwards handed out the eulogies at the closing ceremony, he thanked all the hotel staff except the hotel manager. That got the biggest cheer of the day. Not a popular fellow.
  - 32: Note significant 23 sections. Also note the number of notes... Coincidence?

Conspiracy

## 1987 Hugo Awards

Novel: Orson Scott Card: Speaker For The Dead  
 Novella: Robert Silverberg: Gilgamesh In The Outback  
 Novelette: Roger Zelazny: Pennafrost  
 Short Story: Greg Bear: Tangents  
 Non-Fiction: Brian Aldiss/David Wingrove: Trillion Year Spree  
 Dramatic Presentation: Aliens  
 Pro Artist: Jim Burns\*  
 Pro Editor: Terry Carr\*\*  
 Semiprozine: Locus (ed. C.N.Brown)  
 Fan Writer: Dave Langford\*  
 Fan Artist: Brad Foster  
 Fanzine: Ansible (ed. D. Langford\*)  
 John W Campbell Award (Best New Author): Karen Joy Fowler

\*Conspiracy Quest Of Honour—treat with caution  
 \*\*Died this year ("my-God-he's-~~just~~ dead" award)

See elsewhere for details of Langford's triumphant return to Oxford (this is being typed immediately after Conspiracy and we don't have details yet). We expect to have Aldiss visiting us next term as well.

## MEANWHILE BACK AT THE CONSPIRACY...

Some things we probably weren't supposed to quote, but what the hell.

"For an alternative film programme it's very good." —film type commenting on the selection of movies being shown

"It's like being in a natural history museum where not all the exhibits have been stuffed yet." —Ken Livingstone on the House of Commons

"That bloke's bought me more drinks since he died than anyone else I know during their whole lives." —unknown stallholder, on receiving his invitation to the L Ron Hubbard party [Ah yes, the Mission Earth publicity experience—drink it and believe it... —Ed]

"Humanity comprises a number of races—from Kalahari bushmen to computer programmers." —Terry Pratchett

"Ah Gene, I was just propounding you as a prime exponent of whatever it is we're talking about." —Robert Silverberg, as Wolfe wandered late into the panel on "SF is History's Dustbin", looking a little the worse for wear after the previous night's partying... (I liked the attempts to decipher the title too; suggested were "The History of SF's Dustbin", "History is the SF of the Dustbin" and "The Dustbin is SF's History".)

## NOT TO DO WITH CONSPIRACY

### STRANGE PERVERSIONS AND LITERARY LUNCHESES

Sooner or later, it happens to us all. We get tired of mousing off at a small circle of acquaintances, and feel an all-consuming urge to mouse off at the world at large. (Or, if we are Neal, we have so many acquaintances to mouse off at that it's easier to do them all at once, and besides, Dave Langford will cancel our Ansible sub otherwise.) We lay siege to Maria Hamilton's biscuit tin until she coughs up that article on H\*\*n1\*\*n. We rummage through the Sfinx back files. We ask people to lend us their discussion meeting texts. And then the fateful day arrives... we sit down with a typewriter and hack out sixteen sides of hatred, cynicism and prejudice, duplicate them in the cheapest and nastiest way possible, staple them together, and send them into the wild blue yonder with little notes around their scruffy little necks saying, "Here is a fanzine I did. Please be nice to it."

We don't?

Oh, sorry. Well, I did (and look what happened to me). As a result I am growing increasingly afflicted with the vague guilty feeling that it's time I put out a second issue. And I want contributions.

I'm not fussy—I'll take almost anything that's either (a) reasonably funny, (b) reasonably interesting, (c) generally worth reading or (d) slags off Robert A Hardloin [spung!] or L Ron Hubbard [squelch]. Of course, it might get severely mangled in the editing process... Preferred topic is skiffy or fandom, but deviations are welcome (in evry sense of the word) as filler bits if nothing else.

The title of the zine is Strange Perversions And Literary Lunches; copies are available for show of interest (ie. free), and anybody who contributes or writes a letter of comment gets one too. If you're interested in doing a fanzine of your own and want things like addresses, I'd be happy to help (though there are people around who know more about this than I ever will). Fanzine fandom is a good way of getting to people you don't know or hardly ever meet, and because it leaves you with something you can point to and say, "I did that," it's a bit more satisfying than just going to conventions (now, running cons...).

And yes, oh bright spark, the description "literary perversion" has been pointed out to me...

Ivan Towlson

### THEATRE: 'F.A.B.' FAB

Thunderbirds F.A.B. was a clever spoof of Gerry Anderson's International Rescue series presented by the Mime Theatre Project at the Pegasus Youth Theatre on Oct 3. The plot was something to do with Mysterons wanting to take over the world, but that wasn't the point: the stress was definitely on parody of the original, with the actors brilliantly simulating Anderson's puppetry effects (jerky movement, lack of synch between body parts) and a well-thought out background of sound and lighting (props were strictly minimal, apart from attaching the Thunderbirds to one's head and rushing around the stage going 'eeeeaaaauuuuuuuuuuu'). The audience loved the whole thing, especially the shootout between Capt Scarlet and Mr X in which members were used as hostages and shields. Quite wonderful.



# Convention Corner

FURTHER DETAILS OF  
CONS - ASK IVAN

Terry Who?

## TERRY PRATCHETT

Author of "The Colour of Magic"  
and "Equal Rites"

Will be Guest of Honour at

## CONOPOLY

The Coventry Poly  
S.F. Mini-con

5th December, 1987

Attending membership - £3.50  
(NUS/UB40 -£2.50)  
Plus anybody else who can  
give a good reason - £2.50

### Contact:

Kev McVeigh  
SF Group  
Coventry Polytechnic  
Priory Street  
COVENTRY.

### CONVENTION DIARY

CONOPOLY, 5 Dec 87, Coventry Poly. £2.50 students/UB; £3.50 others.  
GoH Terry Pratchett. A small, one-day mini-convention, very cheap and not too far away from Oxford, held conveniently on the last day of term. OUSFG members will be attending.

NECRONINECON (Shoestringcon IX), Oct 30-Nov 1, Hatfield Poly. £4 students etc; £5 others. GoH not announced. "A celebration of the macabre" run by PSIFA (Hatfield Poly SFG) which should be cheap and very enjoyable. Although it's in term time, I for one hope to attend, if only to meet up with the PSIFA people.

FOLLYCON 88 (The Eastercon), 1-4 Apr 88, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £12 S, £18 A [S=supporting, A=attending]. GoH Gordon Dickson, Gwyneth Jones, and others. The British National SF Convention. Expensive, but big, and fun.

CONGREGATE 88, 10-12 Jun 88, Peterborough. £5 S, £11 A. Not cheap, slap bang in front of exams, and generally not recommended. GoH is Terry P., but he's also at CONOPOLY and CONINE, so... An OUSFG contingent is not expected to attend. (Before someone accuses me of bias—maybe, but I've read their PRI and been unimpressed, and it is in termtime.)

ALBACON 88, end July 88, Glasgow. £5 S, £10 A. Albacons are good, albeit not cheap... but they're a long way from Oxford. If you'll be in the North next summer, do make an effort.

CONINE, 5-7 August, Oxford Poly. £4 S, £9 A. GoH Terry Pratchett. Cheap, hopefully very enjoyable, generally unutterably wonderful. Run by OUSFG people including the entirely unbiased yours truly. I recommend you join up if only to stop me pestering you about it...

WINCON (Unicon 9), 19-21 August 88, Winchester. £4 S, £8 A. GoH Patrick Tilley, Micael de Larabeiti (sp?). I have to be diplomatic about these people, but there will be a fair number of OUSFG people going.

CONTRIVANCE 89 (The Eastercon)—see poster for details —————→

CONFICTION (The Dutch Worldcon), 23-27 Aug 1990. All Worldcons are expensive, but everyone should go to at least one. Czechoslovakia in 1993, anyone?

Addresses: NECRONINECON: PSIFA, c/o Students Union, Hatfield Poly, POB 109, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB. // FOLLYCON: 104 Pretoria Rd, Patchway, Bristol, BS12 5PZ. // CONINE: c/o Ivan Towilson, New College, Oxford. // WINCON: 11 Rutland St, Hanley, Stoke... I think. // For others see posters or ask me to dig them up.

# CONINE



### CONINE

A science fiction convention in Oxford

Guest Of Honour  
TERRY PRATCHETT

Oxford Polytechnic

5th-7th August 1988

£4 supporting  
£9 attending

Room rates from £11.50/night

# CONTRIVANCE '89

*The Eastercon with a difference!*

In 1989 the annual British National Science Fiction Convention is going to fly south for Easter. The destination is the 100-year old Hotel de France in St Helier on the island of Jersey.

## ANNE McCAFFREY

One of Contrivance's guests will be best-selling author Anne McCaffrey. Ms McCaffrey had planned to take 1989 off, but she is making a special exception for Contrivance.

### P.R. ONE OUT NOW!

Progress Report 1 is now generally available, giving further information on rooms, travel, hotel etc.

In recognition of Anne McCaffrey's efforts in improving the public image of dragons, Contrivance are planning to make a donation to the reptile house at the Jersey Wildlife Trust. We are hoping to adopt a basilisk, so all donations will be gratefully accepted.

## HOTEL de FRANCE

The Hotel de France, St. Helier, is high on Contrivance's list of assets. The de France has just completed a major refurbishment and building programme which has doubled the size of the hotel, while retaining the de France's reputation for spaciousness and comfort. With the hotel comes the adjacent conference centre with theatre, cinema, health studio and night club, all available to convention members.

Room rates are not yet finalised, but will be around £20.50 per person in a twin room, with prices in the overflow hotel approx. 25% less. Even cheaper accommodation can be found nearby in St Helier for those who need it.

## M. JOHN HARRISON

Also guest of honour at Contrivance '89 will be famous British writer M. John Harrison (author of the 'Viriconium' series and was involved with New Worlds magazine).

### RATES

£12 Attending  
£6 Supporting

(£1.00 discount for pre-supporters)  
Rates will rise in  
September to £15  
and £8

JERSEY: Home of  
- Bergerac  
- Gerald Durrell  
- No sales taxes (VAT)  
and now  
CONTRIVANCE!



This booklet is a Viridian Press production



Iain Banks: The Wasp Factory (Futura, £2.50)  
Walking On Glass (Futura, £1.95)  
The Bridge (Pan, £2.95)

The Wasp Factory, Iain Banks' debut novel, provoked a storm of controversy when it was released in 1984, with critics' opinions varying from "a truly remarkable novel" to "the lurid literary equivalent of a video nasty"; perhaps the Mail On Sunday came closest to an objective judgment when it commented:

If a nastier, more vicious or distasteful novel appears this spring, I shall be surprised. But there is unlikely to be a better one.

The novel is about sixteen-year old Frank and his bizarre life on a Scottish island, its narrative thread beginning when his older brother Eric escapes from a mental hospital and ending with his return home, though there are many, many, digressions and flashbacks. Frank lives a sort of dual life; a reasonably normal child to his father, but otherwise a sort of savage, like the children in Lord Of The Flies, with his private rituals and—almost—religion, giving his own names to places on the island and anthropomorphising if not deifying his tools and implements of destruction (eg. Stoutstroke the trowel, Black Destroyer the catapult—one tries not to think about Max O'Connor's bike, the Golden Liberator [ancient CUSEG history, folks—ask me at a meeting]), setting up Sacrifice Poles and creating the bizarre implement of death and prophecy that gives the book its title.

Frank is a strange child. Castrated by the family dog at the age of three (light is thrown on this at the end of the book), he went on to murder three people between the ages of five and nine and has spent his life since then building up stocks of armaments for wiping out the local fauna. One of the first things we see him doing is wabbit-wasting—I beg your pardon, leading a punitive raid against a bunch of bunnies. Yes, seriously. Well, they did attack first.

The Wasp Factory is a catalogue of the insane, repulsive and grotesque. The way Frank kills gerbils, mice and hamsters for the Sacrifice Poles is vaguely horrible; the event that drove Eric insane is pretty damn nauseating. On the evidence of this book, Banks has a brilliantly inspired and utterly demented imagination.

Is that it? Is it just a particularly warped horror novel? Is it indeed "the lurid literary equivalent of a video nasty"? Certainly not. Horrible as the events described are, they are as nothing compared to the horror of Frank himself. Because Banks is so much more explicit and direct than Golding, the horror that should have appeared in Lord Of The Flies is here exaggerated and thrust to the fore; and if that's not enough for you, how about the marvellous style of his writing, or the allegory on the "male military establishment" that he claims is present (and it's not too far under the surface either—but it's never really intrusive)?

A masterpiece.

Walking On Glass is a different matter. Here we have three apparently entirely separate narratives: the tale of love-lorn Graham Park, infatuated with the mysterious Sara ffitch, and trying to win her away from the biker Stock; that of paranoid sf reader Steven Grout, first seen being sacked for, among other things, hacking a cat to pieces with his spade (shades of The Wasp Factory); and that of Quiss, forced to play interminable impossible games (one-dimensional chess, spotless dominoes, etc.) until he either suicides or solves the paradox "What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object?" (yes, he has read his Asimov; it doesn't do him any good). Eventually the three strands are linked as Park's life intersects Grout's at a tangent, Quiss' endeavours are tied into Grout's paranoid fantasy (fantasy?), and Park's story is found in a book by Quiss' opponent alongside Peake's Titus Groan, Kafka's The Castle and Borges' Labyrinths. Grandiose claims from Banks, but damn near justified. Walking On Glass is a powerful and compelling book, and while it won't grab for your guts the way his first novel did, it'll impress the hell out of your head.

But while Walking On Glass improved on The Wasp Factory while moving in a different direction, The Bridge improves still further while using similar technical devices and atmospheres as Walking On Glass, thus making the latter kinda redundant. (But you should still read it!) Here we have a well-defined main narrative: a man without a memory, stranded on a mysterious, possibly infinite bridge, being treated for his amnesia by dream therapy. Embedded in this are dream sequences, some invented, some real, and including the continuing adventures of Conan the Glaswegian and his laconic familiar, a hilarious little series...

Aw aye, I forgot to mention that if I try takin it aff ma sholder or if a dinny feed it itill tolk ded loud oll nihgt an keep me awake, so seein it disnae eet mutch an its been luky fir me I just leeve it thare now an we get on as well as can be expected. Wish it didnae shite doon ma bak thow.

"Interesting point actually; I'm sure you won't have noticed it, being so single-minded—well, almost single-minded if the truth be told..."

The main narrative is itself embedded in the story of a young man retreading his life towards a car crash and a coma. How these various lines tie together is clearer than it was in Walking On Glass: what we have here is the young man, lying comatose in hospital, exploring the layers of his own unconscious mind—and, in the coda to the novel, carrying out his own 'dream therapy' (tying back to the beginning of the "bridge" story).

Banks' writing in The Bridge is even more compelling than in his first two novels; I got four or five pages into the story and was hooked. His images, symbols and technical skills are excellent; his bridge will sit happily alongside such creations as Peake's Gormenghast or Harrison's Viriconium. (I am told, by the way, that Le Guin in The Dispossessed, was, among other things, plugging walls as a sort of Universal Symbol—and failing to make the case at all convincingly. I wonder if Banks' bridge is a more optimistic stab at the same thing? Certainly the image recurs again and again, explicitly and implicitly in many different contexts, nevertheless, I'm pretty suspicious of all such enterprises on principle...) The story of Conan the Glaswegian's trip to the Greek underworld is alone worth the price of the book, because it is, quite simply, very very funny. With the rest of The Bridge tacked onto it, it becomes not only funny but clever; and while the rest of the novel isn't as amusing, it is interesting, entertaining and intelligent.

Book of the year, without a doubt.

[A postscript on science fiction. Of these three books, only Walking On Glass is explicitly science fiction, and even that is placed on Futura's (real) fiction list. The Wasp Factory is about non-supernatural horror, and the sf elements of The Bridge are restricted to dream sequences (but, since the main narrative is itself a dream sequence, why not call it sf and be done with it?), but will be of interest to science fiction readers. Speculative fiction they most certainly are; realistic or naturalistic they most certainly are not. Banks' most recent opus is a space opera entitled Consider Phlebas, which isn't in paperback yet. I have the horrible suspicion that it will turn out pretty routine; if it doesn't, then I look forward to a book which will do for space opera what The Book Of The New Sun did for the dying earth subgenre.]

Review by Ivan Towlson

Viido Polikarpus and Tappan King: Down Town (£2.95)

No, I'd never heard of them either. Well, I had heard vaguely of Tappan King, an sf editor in the States; Viido Polikarpus is, apparently, an award winning illustrator. Down Town has a number, but not an excessive number, of his works gracing it; so it looks pretty nice, at least. The content is a different matter.

After his parents are separated, young Cary Newman has to move to New York City with his mother. But he gets lost in a rush-hour crowd and ends up in Down Town, a strange realm where the past lives on, from gaslight and the Crystal Palace to the evil Gnomes of Wall Street, who are planning to take over the place. But (gosh) Cary holds the secret that can save Down Town from tyranny—if he can only use it before he is hunted down (shock)...

Actually it's not really all that bad, but it is a bit schizophrenic, in that it's quite clearly a juvenile that wants to grow up. Hence the satiric Gnomes and the rather clumsy tying in of their plot with a scheme to privatise Central Park (or somesuch)—which would probably go over the kiddies' heads—and the revolting sweetness-and-light of the ending or the general niceness that pervades (or, indeed, perverts) the whole thing—which mark the book as: Suitable For Nice Young All-American Brats.

The writing is OK, and there are some nice moments, but the novel is fatally flawed by its general clumsiness and... well... juvenility. Worth reading, if only to look at the pretty piccies—but not much more.

Review by Ivan Towlson

Gene Wolfe: Peace (Chatto, not £3.95)

This 1975 novel was only published in the UK two years ago. It has now been remaindered and can be found new in Book Bargains on the High Street for 99p. The novel itself, for those who don't know, is a plot-free excursion through the life of a very ordinary man; depending on taste, it is either a tedious waste of time or an unmissable masterpiece, and those who think it's a tedious waste of time are wrong.

The book that kept the critics fooled for six years. ["Why is Peace on your sf list?" "Isn't it obvious?"]

Review by Ivan Towlson, currently staring sullenly from behind a copy of the Remembrance Of Things Past at a hostile world... Gene bloody Wolfe... grrr...

CORNER

LIT. LIBRARY



Bob Shaw: The Ragged Astronauts (Orbit, £2.95)

Shaw has carved himself a special niche among the legion of sf writers: rather than creating High Art, he turns out adequate but unremarkable stories distinguished by marvellous images or ideas. Only very occasionally does he transcend this (an example being the near-perfect short story Light Of Other Days). The Ragged Astronauts, 1987 BSFA award winner and Hugo nominee, is firmly in the Shaw mould, but is one of his best efforts to date.

The setting is the planet of Land, a metal-less world where mankind is threatened by a species called the puertha who have suddenly turned hostile and very poisonous. Some bright chap suggests emigrating to the sister planet Overland, which hangs in the sky 4000 miles away and shares Land's atmosphere. By balloon.

It's a standard Shaw adventure in a very imaginatively conceived setting, and despite the slightly preachy tone in certain bits (Don't let Those Nasty Priests Stop You Getting Off The Planet And Into Space—quite true, Bob, but couldn't you have been a little less blatant about it?) it basically lets the reader sit back and watch the ideas fly. My main criticism is that I kept wanting to wander off and prove that the Land-Overland system didn't work; but I didn't, partly because I didn't care, it was such a perfect symbol, and partly because I wanted to keep reading (I was on a roll; grok, this was the sixth book I'd read in the past 48 hours).

A very good Shaw novel—it doesn't have the depth or intensity of Other Days, Other Eyes, but if you liked or even just tolerated Orbitsville, this one is definitely worth looking at.

[Yes, this is book one of a trilogy. It's not very clear where the next two are coming from or when they'll appear, but I'm looking forward to them, and if anybody has any information on the subject, could they please pass it on to me?]

Review by Ivan Towlson

William Gibson: Count Zero

This is the sequel to the much acclaimed Neuromancer (the essential cyberpunk novel) by the much acclaimed W. Gibson (the essential cyberpunk author). As such it shares a large number of both faults and virtues with the earlier novel. The strength of both books lies in their description of a highly technological future which is saturated with hard science gadgets of interesting and innovative kinds (drugs, cyborgs, 'cyberspace' (the informational space inside a computer), etc.). The overall pattern of the society is much like ours, except that large industrial conglomerates - 'zaibatsus' - have replaced countries as the most influential large groupings, but Gibson chooses to concentrate on the flash, sleazy underside in a way reminiscent of a vast number of sub-James Bond novels and films. Characterisation is, as usual, weak, though not nearly as bad as Neuromancer's, where I suffered from being completely unable to distinguish the character who has had his mind wiped by a computer defence system ('flatlined') and been brought back as a low grade simulation from any of the others. [John Styles once defined neuromancy as the dread art of being able to turn defenceless men and women into cardboard. --Ed. bent on wrecking Neal's "organic whole"] The gimmicks themselves are fun, and include the reintroduction of the Artificial Intelligences from Neuromancer in a nicely unusual way and a good idea for a new form of art.

In addition, Gibson attempts to integrate these elements in a way I have not seen him do before. All his stories set in the common future of Neuromancer are about a society in a process of extreme and constant change. As one character in Count Zero points out, silicon (as in computer chips) may not wear out, but it does become obsolete. In five years a piece of equipment can go from superb to laughably out of date. In this novel the process is seen as one of speeded-up evolution, with the gadgets and characters all involved in a frantic struggle to stay ahead, keep themselves fitter than the opposition, survive. Socially, the zaibatsus are portrayed as having out-evolved the individual billionaire and the family clans of industrialists. However, evolution proceeds not only by gradual steps but also by sudden jumps; and by recognising and encouraging such jumps those who (like a billionaire industrialist) are apparently caught in a losing pattern can leap out of it and ahead. Some fail, others don't—to avoid giving away too much of the plot I shall only say that the squirrels are among those who succeed...).

So, in conclusion—an excitingly plotted novel with a high density of interesting ideas and an undeniable sense of style, saddled with deeply doubtful [Neal has always believed in taking tact to excess --Ed.] characterisation and some fairly silly bits (I am still unable to think of cyberspace as anything other than a fairly complex video game, and as far as I can see anything the much idolised cyberspace pirates do a nice simple program could do far better). Apparently we can look forward to a sequel called Mona Lisa Overdrive in the near future...

Review by Neal Tringham

William Gibson: Count Zero (again)

Too many adjectives!

Review by sophisticated literatus Tim Adye

Gene Wolfe: Soldier Of The Mist (Orbit, £2.95)

Latro, a mercenary soldier in the Persian War, receives a head wound which destroys his long-term memory. He therefore has to write a record of every day as it happens. Soldier Of The Mist, the first in an open-ended series, is Gene Wolfe's translation of the first of the scrolls which comprise this record.

As compensation for his loss of memory, Latro is able to see gods, monsters, etc. invisible to ordinary mortals—this adds a touch of fantasy to the novel, and gives Latro the hope of regaining his memory. He also acquires a magic sword, which plays no discernible part in the plot, and was apparently put in because Wolfe was so pissed off at people continually referring to Severian's "magic" sword.

Soldier Of The Mist has the impeccable literary pedigree typical of Wolfe novels, and the excellent characterisation and writing we have come to expect from him (though it is curiously less classical in feel than the definitely-not-479BC Book Of The New Sun); but somewhere along the line it rather fizzles out. Nothing in the book is really strong enough to keep it going and I suspect it will only come into its own as part of a completed series. It has its moments, but this is Gene Wolfe at play, and while the worse aspects of that come through, the better—the obvious interest and enthusiasm he displays for the setting—do not.

[I was tempted, by the way, to pontificate on Wolfe's somewhat erratic genius—for genius he undoubtedly is, in spite of the above—based on the premise that outside the New Sun canon his only worthwhile book is Peace, which isn't sf, while everything he does within the New Sun framework does have the magic touch. Unfortunately, I reread Free Live Free and The Devil In A Forest, and discovered that Peace was sf after all, which rather screwed up the whole idea. Folks, if this man is erratic, it's in the way he wavers between genius and super-genius (we will ignore the inconvenient case of Operation ARS)... no praise is too high... slobber, drool, revere...]

Review by Ivan Towlson

Robert Sheckley: Victim Prime (Methuen, £2.50)

Up to 1977, Sheckley was churning out funny, satirical novels and short stories studded with 'wacky' characters and strange ideas, and in the process writing some of the best sf of the time (I still think The Status Civilization is one of the best books I've ever read). Then he produced his surrealist epic Options, a bizarre, brilliant, complex and subtle work which, in my opinion, few have ever bettered (Wolfe, Crowley and possibly Banks are the only names that spring to mind). And apparently that took a lot out of him: in 1978 he overhauled the Humours novella into a rather uninteresting novel, and then after a 5-year silence offered the world the thoroughly appalling Dramocles (the world, quite rightly, returned it to sender). Four years on, we have Victim Prime, another tale of Killing As Organised Sport (see also Seventh Victim, La Decima Vittima, Immortality Inc, The Prize Of Peril and others I am too lazy to look up).

Distinctly unpromising territory, you might think, and you'd be right. Apart from the odd half-interesting idea and one marvellous character who the author unwisely ditches after about 10 pages, it's utterly forgettable. The ending leaves subplots dangling in hope of a sequel, and Frontier Crossings implies that one is, indeed, on the way; and the whole thing never really ignites. Pity.

Ivan

John Crowley: Little, Big (Methuen, £3.95)

Little, Big is a history spanning six generations of a family who live in the eastern U.S. and/or faery. It opens with Smokey Barnable making his way to Edgewood where he is to be married into the family, and thus become entangled in what they call "The Tale", which, as the book unfolds, is slowly told in a series of leaps forward and flashbacks that nevertheless flows smoothly, one segment into another. A series of characters from the family are introduced, each with his or her own story, from the dreaming Sophie to the strong, self-sufficient Ariel Hawksquill, a mnemonist who dabbles in magic and keeps her soul in a very interesting place.

The plot twists and tangles like an English hedgerow, all written in a beautiful prose style that continually sustains the tension between reality and faery with dense imagery which makes it a delight as well as a necessity to read every word. Ideas echo from scene to scene and the plots and subplots build together towards a climactic finish that incredibly manages to tie everything together in a satisfactory way and leaves you simply wanting to reread the whole thing.

Methuen have produced the book in the style it deserves, with baroque pieces of decoration within, and even a well-suited cover illustration. As far as I can tell, this book is perfect in all respects bar one—it has an Ursula LeGuin recommendation on the front.

Read, and then re-read.

[I asked Chris to do this review because I'd tried and failed to describe the unutterable wonderfulness of the book. He has failed to do justice to the story, but through no fault of his own—there is just so goddamn much in Little, Big. "Perfect" is, indeed, the only adjective that fits.]

Review by Chris Hughes (to commemorate the--six years after publication--acquisition of a copy for the OUSFG library)