

Dead Dog With Maggots...

JOHN BRAY
EXCUSE

THE OUSFG NEWSLETTER, MID-TRINITY TERM 1988 NEWS

Library Meetings - These are still held in Paul Cray's room, which for those of you who had managed to forget is at St. Anne's College, 60 Woodstock Road room 2. 8:15 pm to 8:45 pm Sundays, then on to New College Undercroft. Please bring all books back by Sunday 8th week - unlimited borrowing is allowed over the summer vacation; this will be available in 8th & 9th weeks but will require a £1 deposit for each book.

Discussion Meetings - Still in Mark Davies' room, Trinity 11:8, 8:15 pm every Wednesday. Meetings for the rest of this term :-
5th week : Paul Cray - The Debris (Dermatitis?) of SF.

6th week : Paul Marrow - Frank Herbert, or Daily Info Ate My Title (which amounts to much the same thing)

7th week : John Bray - About Time (and about time, too)

8th week : Marcus Tye - Space Stations, or BR in Orbit...

Sfinx - The Best Of Sfinx (price £1, in A5 format) will be dropping through the news stands in 5th or 6th week, so buy one. It contains wonderful stories (and art work) that their authors (or indeed artists) would no doubt wish forgotten. Sfinx 5 (and 6) needs authors and artists urgently - SF versions of Proust (in French, naturellement) especially welcomed. There will be a writer's workshop in Mark Davies' room (same location as discussion meetings) at 2:30pm on Sunday of 6th week (29th May) - so get scribbling! (literally, in Paul's case - typist with a headache). Contact Paul Cray for more details.

Punt Party - the long-awaited world premiere (Evening Standard) of "The Ring of the Nealebung". Your chance to star - as a table, or possibly as one quarter of a horse... Starts from Cherwell Boathouse at 2pm on Saturday 4th week (21st May). PBAB and munchies (no, not the cat food!) If wet, this wondrous event (Daily Express) will take place in St. Hilda's Hall J.C.R. Copies of the script of this dramatic tour de force (Sunday Times) will be available after the event for the princely sum of 50p - contact Penny Heal.

Conine - The Social Event of the Season (it says here). Oxford Polytechnic, 5th-7th August 1988. Attending Membership £9, Supporting Membership £4. Rooms £11.50 per night, excluding breakfast. Can you afford not to be seen there? Contact John Bray for more details.

MERCHANDISE!!! - The sweatshirt order has now been dispatched, and should arrive by 7th week. Jane McCarthy still has some of those lovely OUSFG mugs for sale at £2 each; remember, the more mugs you have, the less often you have to do the washing up...you know it makes sense. Sweatshirts / T-shirts may be re-ordered next term if enough interest is shown.

Rag - OUSFG raised a total of £47 for Rag. If you would like a copy of the "Daleks on Acid" new album, "Live 88 at no. 84" then contact Matt Bishop, who should know something about it. Includes "Don't Throw Up"....just think, next year will see the return of the outrageous 60 Woodstock Road OUSFG parties, as Paul Marrow recolonises Room 12. You too can stick your head down the very same toilet mentioned in the song...(I have! - P.M.C.)

Video Meetings - will continue in St. Hilda's South J.C.R., Monday 6th & 8th weeks, 8:15pm. Films to be arranged. Contact Matt Bishop again.

GOOD LUCK TO ALL EXAMINEES - "LET'S BE VERY CAREFUL IN THERE!!!"

BLOOD AND GUTS IN HIGH SCHOOL (PLUS TWO) - Kathy Acker

(Ivan Towlson)

The title of this story instantly signals a reference point in the beat writers, but it is something of a misdirection. Acker's work on sex mirrors not that of Hunter S. Thompson on drugs, but more that of William Burroughs. It is, however, far more revolting than Burroughs ever dreamt of being; I found one or two scenes in the Naked Lunch slightly twisted, but Blood and Guts in High School was consistently unpleasant almost from beginning to end. It was also one of the most exciting novels (novellas?) I have ever come across. Prose narrative alternates with play script, the handwritten "Persian Poems" (the notebook of Persian phrases learnt by the heroine/protagonist), "A Map of my Dreams", poems by Propertius translated by the heroine, poems which read like Patti Smith lyrics written by the heroine, a freaky illustrated section involving a book of transformation, advertisements and childlike but graphic and explicit illustrations. Janey's short life involves her in incest, pelvic inflammatory disease, rape, slavery, cancer, abortions and God knows what else; the novel also features Catullus, President Carver and Jean Genet in less than flattering roles.

A very, very interesting feminist tract, but not a pleasant one. I think I enjoyed it. I don't think that I will be able to assimilate it for some time. Which is, I imagine, exactly what Acker intended.
(The Picador edn. also contains Great Expectations and My Death, My Life By Pier Paolo Pasolini) (of 120 Days in Sodom fame, ed.)

CUSFS VISIT REPORT

(John Bray)

An OUSFG party visited our counterparts in Cambridge last weekend and were right royally entertained, though what their impressions were of some of our number, I dread to think. Arriving midday Saturday (it takes a coach 3 1/2 hours to cover 66 miles, with the tedium only interspersed with excessive penguin references from Penny et al., and Paul enthusing on cricket, and on, and on,...) we enpunted and were treated to an exhibition of speed punting, puntjacking and lurid tales of Cam water so laced with typhoid, cholera and chemicals that Uzis filled with it rot within a week. Victims to the Cam ran one all excluding unmentionable parts of Marina; I had the thankless task of being mother, and their president, Richard Crook, showed admirable talent scaling bridges that I hope Mo will emulate on Saturday.

Then on to their "Christmas Party", where their newsletter editor was ceremonially burned for libelling our committee (meep! - ed.), Ivan and Mike Abbott tied the Astral Pole contest, Matt and co. rang the Jesus porters to Gurk, Neep, Howl, Whimper and Grunt them to sleep, and George and Penny's efforts to scalp Jason for Rag resulted in their unscrewing a cubicle in the Gents to get at him, and Jason curled up on the gravel moaning about the Demons. Then after a tussle with the Death Porters of Trinity, and Jason's Puko-Hiccups - "Hic-Bleurgh" - we retired to yet another hard floor.

Sunday gave us Waffles (oh, why can't we have our photos in Go Dutch or somewhere?), a visit to Cambridge's hill, a promised trip round King's College toilets, apparently one of its most impressive architectural features, mmore damn punting and a chat with Mungo about sewage farms and attempts at embalming - "I rather mucked it up, but luckily it was a closed coffin, once we forget to do one, but the smell reminded us in the end..."

We hope to invite them back next term for our Christmas Party (at least ours is at the right time of year - ed.), failing that WE MAY SEE THEM AT CONINE!!! (subtle eh?)

And this seemed appropriate (blame Penny)

We Can Bore You: A little-known P.K.D. work, this unusually violent novel deals with the antihero (P.M.C., a pontificating librarian)'s bloody murder at the hands of bus passengers who can't take any more. The scene with the biros & the ventilation systems is particularly nasty but the book remains a deeply effective piece of wish-fulfilment. Highly Recommended.

PHOTO EXCLUSIVE!! PAUL CRAY IS REALLY
AN UNDERCOVER JESUIT!!!



IN MEMORIAM – ROBERT ANSON HEINLEIN (1907 – 1988)

Robert A. Heinlein, one of the best loved and most hated SF writers of all time is dead, at the age of 80. Heinlein was born in Missouri and educated at Kansas City Central High School, the University of Missouri and the Naval Academy before entering the US Navy. Pulmonary tuberculosis forced his early retirement in 1934. A variety of occupations then followed before he took up writing in 1939. He was immediately successful. From 1941 until 1945 Heinlein worked at the Naval Air Experimental Station, Philadelphia (with Isaac Asimov and Theodore Sturgeon) and was a full-time author from then until his death.

Heinlein's writing career may be divided into three broad periods. The first was an initial period of short story writing, which lasted from 1939 – 1942. Heinlein was here enormously influential, particularly with his style, which today seems laboured and old-fashioned but at the time was new and exciting; a slick melding of technical ability both in the construction of stories and in their content. At his best, Heinlein is one of the most fluent of SF writers, and many writers have tried to copy this trait.

In his second period, 1947 – 1958, R.A.H. concentrated on producing juvenile SF novels which were also greatly successful and influential, while retaining the best characteristics of Heinlein's early material. Part of their success was due to Heinlein's ability to pander to his readers' (mostly teenage boys) basic drives – for instance, the desire for omniscience and the need for father figures. These images reappear constantly in Heinlein's third period, from 1959 to the present, in which he mostly produced increasingly long-winded novels, ostensibly for adults, although his main audience remained teenagers. Heinlein enjoyed great popular success, especially in the 1980's.

At the core, R.A.H. retained the attitudes of his childhood (albeit in a distorted form) for his entire life. He ultimately failed to grow up intellectually or emotionally. Consider his inability to handle female characters in any convincing or non-offensive manner, especially in such later books as "I Will Fear No Evil" (1970) or "Friday" (1982). However, one should not denigrate him too much. Heinlein's work, with its easily digestible prose, has proved a great liberating experience to many young minds – R.A.H. always championed essentially non-conventional social institutions, and his books, in particular "Stranger in a Strange Land" (1961), did much to open up American campus society in preparation for the hippie culture.

Heinlein's best novel is undoubtedly "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress" (1966); the story of a revolt on a lunar colony told in an original, fast-moving style, combined with exciting action and thoughtful discussion making for a complete work. His subsequent novels are of limited value or interest – R.A.H. increasingly descended into turgidly flatulent quasi-self-plagiarism. However, he will long be remembered in the genre, perhaps not so much for his own highly individual writings, but indirectly for his influence upon other writers, and on the field as a whole.

(Paul Cray)

HEINLEIN – In Death Yet Writing – a preview of some of Heinlein's (as yet) unpublished manuscripts.

"Do Androids Dream Of Clockwork Penguins?" – a manuscript which Heinlein nobly donated to Philip K. Dick to help him out of a tight spot, and which was later filmed as "Blade Waddler". Bounty hunter Marina McDonald is assigned to hunt down or "retire" six androids (led by Matt Bishop) who have come to Earth illegally from the outer planets. This Earth is sometime in the next century, after a nuclear war has wiped out the world penguin population and most of the humans have left the planet. An interesting religion has sprung up, based on empathy with the TV personality Mo Holkar, who spends all his time trying to push a very big rock up a steep hill for no readily apparent reason...I wonder why I feel for the guy...

Nice, but I preferred Dick's version.

(Ivan Towlson)

"A Boy And His Penguin" – Through the wastes of a radioactive city hunt Vic, a streetfighter, and Blood, his vicious mutant telepathic penguin. One day Vic meets Quilla-Sue, a beautiful sub-terranean girl. Is she the love of his life, or just penguin pack-lunch?

(Penny Heal)

"The Penguin Is A Harsh Mistress" – Set in a colony of anarchic penguins on the Moon, based on the principle of TANSATAAFL – "there ain't no such thin as a fish lunch" – this mid-period work concerns the revolution against the dead hand of the International Vile Association of Nigelists which oppresses the Moon for Urth. Armed only with fire, water and the power to pontificate, the revolutionaries are victorious and live happily with their penguin ever after.

(Paul Marrow)

DRAGONLANCE HEROES VOLUME ONE – THE LEGEND OF HUMA

(Graham Harper)

This is the tenth book of the Dragonlance Saga, if one includes the three books of (very bad) short stories "Dragonlance Tales". It is not written by Margaret Weirs and Tracey Hickman as are the first six books which may be a mixed blessing – the narrative which deals with the story of Huma, who will be recognised as the legendary first "Hero of the Lance" by those who have read the other Dragonlance books, is fast moving (unlike this review) but the threads holding the plot together at some points can be a little tenuous. I think those who, like myself, enjoyed the first six books will find this one readable, if not particularly intellectually stimulating.

"That is NOT what I meant... honestly... ouch!" – yes, it's that part of the newsletter again..

Jason Stevens – "I don't find Neal's testicles any more exciting than Neal's forearms"

Adrian Cox – "This situation calls for a reinforced codpiece"

Neal Tringham – "We could try eating Jamie Delano" (who he? – ed)

Kath Mort – "We were a group of fish fingers"

Matt Bishop – "You drop to your knees and sod the pole"

Matt Bishop – "Talking fast before your voice goes is a bit like knitting quickly before the wool runs out"

Matt (on explosives) – "I'm going for extreme safety – I'm writing to Hugh (Mascetti)"

Jason Stevens – "Crash (see elsewhere for review...) made me cross my legs once – it was the bit about the handbrake creating an exciting new orifice"

Stuart Aston – "I live in the real world"

Paul Marrow – "Michael Moorcock is the better writer, but Arthur C. Clarke is the better book"

Adrian Cox – "OK, so then we've all got sexual hangups"

Matt – "You're not dragging me upstairs again!"

Kath – "You've not tried to get Matt to bed twice"

Rob Sadler – "I had two big juicy ones and lots of lemon"

Mo – "Get me 2 ravens and an 8-legged horse and I'll do it"

Rob – "I can't imagine having something that big in my mouth"

Adrian – "If it's got 4 legs and hair I'll take it"

Matt – "I'm Mel's ideal woman" (whimper – ed, quiver – typist)

Alex Meerovich – "I love hairy toes"

John Bedford – "Sex is a bit, you know, predictable"

"Sex can be boring" (please, please, Rob, not the Sex is boring joke Aaaahh)

Tim Adye – "Each was dressed in black leather and spike-heeled boots... I could just imagine Penny in that role"

John Bray – "Matt Bishop is rather androgynous, isn't he?"

Penny Heal – "Rope! Rope! I meant rope!" (see the last issue...)

Matt – "I don't want to be sat on by Mel" (no comment) (there better hadn't be! – ed.)

Penny – "It could be ... interesting" (on the Ring)

Andy Elliot would like to give the following piece of advice to all innocent Ousfg members:

"Go for the fly first, then the thing . . ."

This is, of course, assuming that there are any innocent Ousfg members...

Paul Cray – "I'm impressed by the size of John's – I think it's a form of penis envy"

Paul Cray – "We're not having a willy-wanking contest"

Penny – "My neighbours will all think I'm weird, being chased across Somerville by a maniac waving a water pistol and shouting, 'Now will you believe I'm not a psychotic?'"

"THE ANIMALS WENT IN TWO BY TWO – but only OUSFG came out..."

Tim Adye – A gecko

Stuart Aston – A SteveDallas (what on earth is this? Ed.) (oh, I see – ed, after having it explained)

Lawrence Barker – A saluki

John Bedford – A coot

Matt Bishop – A Haguennenon

John Bray – An enthusiastic Olde Englishe Sheepdogge

Adrian Cox – A big, stupid golden retriever

Paul Cray – A sealion

Mike Damesick – A snail

Mark Davies – Half of Love's Young Dream

Steve Davies – A Vogon

Mel Dymond – Garfield

Maria Hamilton – A hamster

Graham Harper – A fluffy guinea pig (with a receding hair line)

Marina McDonald – A salamander

Paul Marrow – A horse (...radish? Ed.)

Rob Sadler – A lion

George Spary – A red squirrel

John Styles – A penguin

Neal Tringham – A highly sentient cabbage

Tommy Wareing – A vampire Yorkshire terrier

THE DAY OF CREATION - J.G. Ballard

Dr Mallory arrives to set up a W.H.O clinic in the small town of Port-la-Nouvelle, but soon finds himself without patients due to the fighting between Captain Kagwa's troops and General Harare's guerillas. Mallory turns his attention instead to drilling for water, dreaming of a third Nile and a green Sahara. Then Mallory sees a miracle. A tractor extending the airstrip removes the roots of a forest oak and water comes to the surface. This initial trickle of water is joined from inland causing a river to flow. Mallory becomes obsessed with the river, thinking of it as his own creation and as part of himself, to be named, to be owned and to be destroyed by him.

He travels to the source of the River Mallory, accompanied among others by a teenage girl, Noon, who he associates with the river, and a documentary producer, Sanger, who sees Mallory's journey in terms of a film. The river begins to dry up, and Mallory finally reaches the source at the exact moment it fails. The river "dies in his arms".

At the end of the novel, the river may not be dead for ever. Though he has not seen Noon, who is a personification of the river to him, since the river died, and he is no longer sure that she existed to anyone but him, he finds her footprints in the dried river bed, giving him hope that the only one who did not abuse the river may return, bringing it with her.

As they travel up river towards the source, Mallory's viewpoint towards Sanger's documentary making changes. At the start of the novel, Mallory views television as "vanity, the death-warrant of the human race written in 625 lines". By the end of his journey up the river, Mallory has accepted Sanger's viewpoint, asking him to describe the final stage of the journey in documentary terms, which he finds comforting.

There are echoes of "The Drowned World" in Ballard's description of the river, as in this passage from Chapter 14, Out of the Night and Into the Dream -

"We were entering a world without time. For six days we had moved upstream, against a slow amber current that slid smoothly between the forest walls. The immense softwood trees shut out the sun, whose fierce presence floated far above us in the jungle canopy, the travelling rose window of an inflamed cathedral."

Comparison with "The Drowned World" is interesting, as in many ways this book is a reversal of Ballard's disaster novels. Something is created, which the central character fights against. The creation dies, but not as a result of his actions, and the novel ends with his waiting in hope for it to return. This is an interesting, well-written book. Recommended.

CRASH - J.G. Ballard

This is not a pleasant book. It contains "a ripening anthology of perverse possibilities", coupled with an abnormal obsession about car crashes and injuries sustained in them. Individually, I could cope with either of these, but when they are presented tightly entwined as they are here, even I quail. The book deals with the narrator's homoerotic obsession with Vaughan, and in turn with Vaughan's obsession with the violence and sexual connotations of the car crash. The narrator, called Ballard as usual, first meets Vaughan in hospital where he is recovering from an accident in which a chemical engineer was killed. Before long, Vaughan brings Ballard to the viewpoint "the deviant technology of the car crash provides the sanction for any perverse act". To illustrate this statement, all of the sex scenes (and there are plenty) take place in cars. Ballard and the engineer's widow, Ballard and his secretary, Vaughan and Ballard's wife, Ballard and a girl crippled in a previous accident and finally Vaughan and Ballard are all involved in pretty graphic sex acts, all revolving around the car. The climax (!) of the book (in the first and last chapters) is Vaughan failing and dying in his ambition to kill Elizabeth Taylor in a crash.

The car is used fairly blatantly to symbolise not only sex but the whole of modern life. Outside the car the characters seem bland and sterile - only when behind the wheel do they live. Ballard (the author) goes into this more deeply (and with rather more style) in his own introduction. The book shows its age (it was first published in 1973), as drugs play a prominent part in it. And it is the joining of the themes - drugs and mutilation, violence and desire and ultimately orgasm and death - that makes the book so nasty and compelling to read.

You probably won't enjoy this book. But it's still very worthwhile.

"I read it while waiting in the garage for my car, and it didn't do me any harm" - Adrian 'Odie' Cox.

THE KILLING JOKE - Alan Moore (script), Bolland and Higgins (art)

As Alan Moore's revision of the ideas of Batman and the Joker, "The Killing Joke" inevitably attracts comparison with Frank Miller's "Dark Knight" and Moore's earlier "Watchmen". The first of these comparisons is not really justified - unlike Miller, Moore glosses over Batman and the society around him to concentrate on the Joker, who, it turns out, is a considerably more interesting character, as well as one who offers a natural hook on which Moore can hang his psychological speculations. On the other hand, the Joker is clearly a close relative of "Watchmen"'s Comedian, and the two stories have many ideas in common.

The plot is perfunctory, weaving together an attempt to kidnap Commissioner Gordon and drive him mad and an origin story, but what emerges from Moore's handling of it is a powerful insight into the Joker's psychosis and an often-asked (notably by Philip K. Dick, and by "Watchmen"'s Comedian and Rorschach) but still disturbingly unanswerable question about where the edge of madness lies. What is impressive about "The Killing Joke" is that it also functions very well as a psychological horror story; though it is far, far simpler than "Watchmen", and covers less ground, it does so more effectively, perhaps because it is more single-minded, perhaps because Moore's Joker is so much more vivid than Rorschach or the Comedian (subjective judgement), or perhaps because "The Killing Joke" is much denser in the succession of its images than "Watchmen" could afford to be.

The book should, I think, have ended exactly one page earlier than it did, with the Joker's distressingly apposite little story, cutting the twee, saccharine Reconciliation Through Laughter sequence (which would have been more at home in "He-Man", "Thundercats" or some other banal, Japanimation kiddie program). In spite of this, very strongly recommended, at least for those of an Alan Moore, Philip K. Dick or Ramsey Campbell disposition. As for the rest of you: you poor, ignorant fools...

DON'T PANIC - THE OFFICIAL HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY COMPANION - Neil Gaiman

This book is written entirely for complete hitchhiker's freaks (who else but a complete freak would want to know that the American edition of Life, the Universe and Everything has the word spelt 'Wop!' in the English edition spelt 'Whop!' throughout). It is the "devastatingly true (except for the bits that are lies)" story of Adams' life while writing Hitchhikers, with bits from early versions of the various radio scripts. The best of these is the TV script idea for the bit where the sperm whales and petunias are created. Originally, this transformation was to happen filmed from outside the ship, and the cutting to the bridge of the Heart of Gold, which was going to be completely filled with melons. Also created would be a goat with a scale model of the Eiffel Tower strapped to one horn. This would then follow the characters about for the rest of the series without ever being mentioned... One can quite obviously see why most of the ideas were cut. The book also contains answers to letters, a chapter on how to leave the planet, with phone numbers:

- Phone NASA
- Phone the White House
- Phone the Kremlin
- Phone the Pope
- flag down passing flying saucer

and a plot summary of a Doctor Who series called 'Doctor Who and the Krikkibmen' (which eventually became Life, the Universe and Everything)

Not worth buying unless either:

- You already have all the books, all the radio shows on tape, the albums, the TV series on video and the computer game (or at least most of the above)
- You have a burning desire to find out what Marvin did for 576000000000 years (I'll spoil it for you: He went through the 5 billion things he most hated about organic life forms)
- You want to know the address of where to buy a HH Towel (page 127 footnote)
- You can afford to spend more than 1000 Albarian Dollars per day.

THE KING OF THE MURGOS - David Eddings

As most of you probably know, I really like David Eddings. In fact I like him so much I actually bought this book in hardback (sucker - typist). Having spent all that money, I can't really say it's no good. So ...

The plot is Nothing whatsoever happens. To those of you who say "what's so new about that?" I can only say that the middle 3 books of the last series, which also had virtually no plot, were quite fun to read for me because I enjoy Edding's quirky little bits of humour (which is why I prefer the Belgariad to Lord of the Rings). This was almost entirely missing from this book. The plot is basically summed up by the fact that in the middle of the book he admits that the plot of the Malloreon was to be exactly the same as the Belgariad (something I had in fact already noticed - I am not stupid). There is only one surprise in the plot but it is a very minor one (the real identity of Urgle the King of the Murgos) apart from the fact that the villain is female. (equivalent aren't they - a male onlooker). Overall, however, I found the book readable if not up to previous standards.

WRITERS OF THE 21ST CENTURY SERIES: PHILIP K. DICK - J.D.Olander / M.H. Greenberg

This book, published in the U.S.A. in 1983 and never published in Britain (to the best of my knowledge) has recently appeared in various remainder bookshops in Oxford; it is the first collection of P.K.D. reviews and critic pieces to be published in about ten years.

The format itself is rather odd; Olander and Greenberg have gathered together all sorts of essays on the work of Philip Dick, by eleven different authors including Dick himself, and consequently the style and tone vary wildly from chapter to chapter. Some chapters, such as "Taoism & Fascism in 'High Castle'" are outright literary criticism; considerably more chapters are general pieces about the broad themes of Dick's work. At least two of the pieces form introductions to other books (namely Dick's introduction to "The Golden Man" and Aldiss' introduction to "Martian Time-Slip"); the book also contains a two-page biography and, best of all, a bibliography of Dick's work.

First, then, the good news. The book is very readable, if you have read at least some of Dick's work before. The variety of authors has the distinct benefit of not presenting the reader with two hundred pages of the same critical viewpoint, and the authors spend a lot of time analysing the linking themes of his work. Not only that, but at least half the essays would be perfectly accessible to someone who had read none of Dick's work at all, but wanted to know more about it.

Of course, there are disadvantages to this style of book; the principal such disadvantage being the overwhelming bias towards two specific novels ("The Man In The High Castle" and, oddly enough, "Ubik", each of which receive two entire essays of analysis). A lot of extremely wonderful books ("Three Stigmata", "Maze Of Death" and "A Summer Darkly", to name but three) are fobbed off with a few pages each.

Philip Dick had been dead for a year when this book was published, but his output has not yet stopped, nor even slowed down appreciably. Consequently quite a few of the newer books are never mentioned at all (roughly speaking, everything he wrote from about 1978 onwards is missing).

Despite these few drawbacks, reading this book is a rewarding experience; once I finished, I wanted to go and read all his novels again (well, maybe not "Counter-Clock World"). For that matter, the bibliography in the back makes buying the book worthwhile; this one's a must.

The Annals Of The Anthologies

Strange creatures, these anthologies. A lot of the time, they tend to be random collections of and/or popular stories of the day, possibly grouped around some theme such as time travel or ghosts or whatever; but occasionally they can act as excellent samplers for some particular part of the genre, offering the reader the chance to try something new without risking everything on one author, or committing him (or her) to ploughing through a possibly difficult novel. In at least one case, a single anthology has sparked a significant new movement in sf, opening up the genre in ways previously thought impossible.

I'd like to offer a list of anthologies which, between them, seem to cover most of the areas OUSFG is supposed to cater for: they are all worth reading on their own merits, of course, but they are more valuable as maps and signs for the various fields within sf.

Brian Aldiss ed: *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus*

Originally published as three anthologies in 1961, 1963 and 1964, this still seems to be one of the best collections of "traditional" or "old wave" science fiction. None of the stories are noticeably experimental; virtually all exist simply to put forward ideas for the reader to marvel at, though a few do try to tackle the larger themes that modern sf now handles easily; some are excellent, most are readable, the odd one or two are execrable. It is a warts-and-all description of sf as it stood before the New Wave.

Recommended stories: *Command Performance* (Walter M Miller), *An Alien Agony* (Harry Harrison; aka *The Streets Of Ashkeion*), *The Country Of The Kind* (Damon Knight). Other personal favourites include the stories by Steinbeck, Maclean, Schoenfeld and Tenn. Asimov wins the bozo award for the idiotic *Jokester*.

Moderately essential reading.

Langdon Jones ed: *The New SF*

This "original anthology of modern speculative fiction" documents the state of the British New Wave in 1969, five short years after the last Aldiss anthology. And what important years they were; the cultural revolution of the late sixties gave writers like Ballard, Sladek, Moorcock and Disch the opportunity to explore the possibilities of experimental writing (see such predecessors as William Burroughs), and in the pages of *New Worlds* a small group of authors noisily blew science fiction up into speculative fiction, made it a form of literature as daring as any of the day and covering a far wider range of ideas than the old wave seemed able to conceive of, and generally created sf as literature.

This is difficult writing. The style of many of the stories offers the reader little or nothing to hang on to; in several cases they seem pointless (George MacBeth's *Fast Car Wash*) or nonsensical (Jakubowski's *A Science Fiction Story For Joni Mitchell* does rather look like silly, self-indulgent meandering at times). The ideas are hidden behind an obscure, unconventional surface. Plots and characters are rarely visible. Sladek's dazzling *The Communicants: An Adventure In Management* is the most accessible story, in case you're not sure how you'll react to this sort of thing, and is moreover bloody good.

This, or something like it, is absolutely essential reading.

Harlan Ellison ed: *Dangerous Visions*

Another original anthology, and one of the most important in the history of science fiction. Here Ellison not only takes a snapshot of the American New Wave at the moment of its birth, he delivers it and thrusts it upon a novelty-starved world... Lacking the aggressive stylistic experimentalism of the Jones book, *Dangerous Visions* collects together stories that in terms of content stepped beyond the bounds of what the "old wave" was able to deal with. Nowadays they seem pretty tame, but there is still a lot of good stuff in there (and even more in the follow-up, *Again, Dangerous Visions*), and as a historical document it is, once again, absolutely essential reading.

Alberto Manguel ed: *Black Water*

As mentioned in the last newsletter) Manguel here attempts to cover the fuzzy area in which the mainstream bends slowly towards sf and fantasy. Although many of the stories have inferior sf content, they are good examples of more mainstream concerns--style, character, "literariness" (ugh)--and as such suggest directions in which sf must move if it is to gain more widespread critical acceptance; or, on the other side of the coin, in which the mainstream must move if it is not to become sterile and dry up. Manguel calls this "the anthology of fantastic literature"--I prefer Robert Scholes' more precise term "fabulation", which not only covers most of these stories (if not all) but hints at where to find better examples (John Barth isn't in here; nor is John Crowley, but then he's only published one short story...). A welcome signpost to the way out of the ghetto.

"I haven't read it but..." I would also recommend to your attention the following more specialist collections: first, Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu's *Despatches From The Frontiers Of The Female Mind* (for feminist sf); and George R R Martin's *Night Visions*, which collects together new stories by the leading writers of the new wave of British horror, Ramsey Campbell, Lisa Tuttle and Clive Barker. You could also do a lot worse than Aldiss and Harrison's *Decade* series for a brief overview of sf history; the 60s one, which includes both *The Assassination Of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered As A Downhill Motor Race* and *The Heat Death Of The Universe*, is a must.

Ivan Towlson

EON - the greatest science fiction story of our time? Greg Bear

(Mark Hirst)

When I saw the distinctive cover of this book with the asteroid obscuring the Earth, I gave it the once over and read the back cover blurb. Weird structures within? Oh, no, could this be an 'Rendezvous with Rama' clone, with lots of strange things to wonder at, hmm, guess I'll buy that tape instead. Some time later....

"Hey, that's nice, a book for Christmas, I've seen it in the bookshop but I wasn't sure what it's like", OK, here goes.

Initially, I was pleasantly surprised by this book. As the back cover and front fly sheet imply, the asteroid is not as alien as you might think. Set in the near future with political divisions that we know so well, a squabble over the asteroid's secrets precipitates the Death, the Third World War. The story follows the lives of the American scientists and soldiers and their Soviet counterparts. One of the chambers appears to be a vast space-time tunnel in which human descendants are living with weird alien creatures in ultra-high technology splendour. It is at this point that we are introduced to parallel universes, a theme that returns at the somewhat anticlimatic end. The main character appears to be Patricia Luisa Vasquez ("All I need to know is just one thing, where they are"), no resemblance to science fiction's toughest female whatsoever. Considering her apparent importance, she is not well explored. Most of the other characters are dealt with superficially too. While the book was fairly addictive as the story unfolded, the story flattens out and moves at a rather pedestrian manner from then on. I had difficulties working through the rest of the book, and it looked as though it would take an Eon (arrgh - typist) to motivate myself to finish it. Some interesting ideas but perhaps not put across too well. I would borrow this one from the library.

(N.B. - Mark has kindly (?) donated his copy to the library for public consumption.)

STOP PRESS

Punt Party / Ring of the Healebung report

Paul Marrow

Basically the fundamentally essential point about this is that it is difficult to write a review without insulting everybody. ("So insult everybody" - PMC)

The 1988 OUSFG punt party could be said to consist of three things: punting, blowing things up, and the Ring Cycle. Punting first: from the Cherwell Boathouse to a field, and later from a field up to the ring road, and then back down south again, menaced at most points by gangs of psychotics with water armaments of various shapes and sizes. In the process of such running gun battles whole new uses for punt cushions were dreamt up. It was a good thing your reviewer had not neglected the protective clothing... Fortunately no innocent civilians were affected ("There are no innocent civilians" - Stuart 'I am NOT a psychotic' Aston)

On arrival at a field we were treated to that classic of modern day opera, The Ring Cycle. I only managed to survive half an hour of the original on the radio, so naturally it was an improvement. Mo was particularly good as "so much for bloody omnipotence" Wotan, and Chris Hughes showed a remarkable aptitude for dying (something to do with looming finals) which was useful since he nearly had to do it twice.

On the whole a good effort - the plot was almost possible to understand, and almost everything was still audible in the recorded version, especially Penny's ultra loud stage-direction. A good time was had by all (as they say), and I'm sure the party across the river enjoyed it as well, especially when Matt B and co went and gunked at them!

Ah, that reminds me of something I left out - blowing things up. The resurgence of this alarming tradition of pyrotechnic insanity in the Society causes great alarm in those right-thinking members etc... But it was great fun to watch, and probably scared the shit out of the punters coming up river too! I dread to think what will happen next year - rumours that Heal and Towlson are collaborating on a musical Mission Earth are completely speculative... [Gormengast; Watchpenguins; and The Book of the New Sun also mentioned, god help us...]

That's the end.

Sorry about that.

(This sentence is on loan from Neal Tringham Enterprises)

FFF Science Film Season - Zip-i-de-do-da

Friday 27 May	6.00 Solaris	& 8.30 Brian Aldiss & 8.45 2001
Saturday 28 May	3.30 No Blade of Grass	& 5.15 Slaughterhouse 5
	7.00 Alien	& 9.00 Dr Strangelove
Sunday 29 May	3.00 ET	& 5.00 Forbidden Planet
	6.45 Lost Horizon	& 9.00 Last Year in Marienbad (SF???)
Monday 30 May	3.00 Star Wars	& 5.15 Things to Come
	7.30 Frankenstein	& 8.45 Frankenstein must be Destroyed
Tuesday 31 May	7.30 Coma	& 9.00 Westworld
Wednesday 1 June	6.30 Capricorn One	& 8.45 Brazil
Thursday 2 June	7.00 The Valley of Gwangi	& 8.45 The Golden Voyage of Sinbad
Friday 3 June	7.00 Close Encounters	& 9.30 Duel

And don't forget, Blues Brothers in the Phoenix 11.00 pm Friday 27 May, and Rocky Horror there Saturday 28 May at 11pm

Credits

Mel, John Graham Cumming, John for typing
John and Paul for pasting up, photocopying and distribution
Paul Marrow for the photo
Irving Berlin for hanging on in there

Send material to JOHN BRAY at EXETER