



Pinlighters

Please accept my customary apology: I've tried to mention everybody who has sent a letter of comment, or an email or letter that might be interpreted as a letter of comment. Emails get mislaid, and so do letters.

I won't list traded fanzines.

Do fanzines posted on the eFanzines.com Web site count as 'trades', or do I merely post a .PDF file of *SFC* to the same site and hope you read it?

Thanks very much to those people who subscribed or donated.

Chris receives the little invisible prize for sending the first letter of comment to *SFC 77*:

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
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Many thanks for *SFC 77*. Glad the Sladek article was of use to you, and it was no problem to give permission. Perhaps you've heard that Big Engine will be publishing *Maps*, a selection of John's previously uncollected stories, edited by Dave Langford. Sure to be a collector's item.

The problem with big, late copies of fanzines, as you no doubt know, is that all sense of continuity between one and the next is lost. The result is maybe something that you don't plan and wouldn't much want if you knew it was going to happen: the material acquires a certain quality of isolation. Difficult to define too closely, but it's the sort of feeling I used to get from George Turner's material that you used to publish: that he was talking to himself rather than to an audience. This is the feeling I get from the latest *SFC*. And on this subject, whatever happened to *Steam Engine Time*? I thought the first issue was pretty good and you made me want to see the one after and the one after that.

But another Gillespie evolutionary aeon appears to have descended. Maybe if you did shorter editions more often?

(11 November 2001)

The length of this letter column, and the difficulty of chopping it to less than 40,000 words, shows that people are out there listening.

The 'Gillespie evolutionary aeon'? Here's my description of the last twelve months: publish *SF Commentary* in October 2001 — blip — catch up on publishing some apazines — blip — endure Christmas — blip — return to *Paying Work* in January — blip — it's October again! That's not an aeon, or even a year; it feels like a couple of weeks.

Since Paul and Maureen are effectively the editors of *Steam Engine Time*, and you live down the road from them, wax enthusiastic about *SET* to them. At the moment, Paul and Maureen seem to be too busy to breathe, let alone publish fanzines.

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I have decided to drop *Quarber Merkur* because of the difficulty of getting the stencils, etc., and all the work involved with cranking an old Gestetner, but I received an offer from the First German Fantasy Club, which wanted to produce my magazine, and so it continues as a printed magazine in a smaller format (half that of the old one). I'll put you back on the mailing list.

I was saddened to hear of George Turner's death. We had our quarrels, but I was rather fond of his later SF novels, which I found intellectually stimulating. I hope that your being now his literary executor means some money for you, and I am sorry that I am now not in a position to do anything further for his work. You may know that I published

The Sea and Summer in Germany in Suhrkamp paperback series, but it didn't do very well. I failed to get it in hardback. I got *Brain Child* into hardback, but unfortunately that novel did even more poorly, and when Suhrkamp put it in paperback they priced it out of the market, I fear. And of course they did nothing for the book. If the publisher I worked with for some 16 years hadn't left, I am sure that I would finally have managed to get George's books into print again, but now it is impossible. I spoke up especially for *Genetic Soldier*. But I am looking forward to George's last novel.

I am not loath to speak about the Lem problem, and some day I'll surely write down what I know about that man, who was surely the biggest mistake of my life. My greatest error was perhaps that I thought it a good idea for him to come to Austria, even when he didn't want to live in Poland after the state of war was declared there in 1982. I don't really know why he left, since he never was in any danger, while the best Polish minds and writers were incarcerated in the camps. He had always taken great care not to run afoul of the authorities, and he often said to me that he didn't want to become a martyr, although he detested the Communist system — from which he profited. I think that he just thought he could do better business if he were in a German-speaking country, since then he was at the height of his popularity in Germany. But when I got to know the man better, and to experience him in an everyday environment, I became disillusioned about the author of 'SF: A Hopeless Case', which I had taken at face value when I published it. But I came to see that all that talk about literature was just hot air where money was involved, and I also began to have my doubts about the quality of much of his work. Mr Lem appears to be a man disappointed from life; he never seemed content with his achievements, which were considerable, and seemed always to ask for more, and a good deal of his criticism seems to me now to be the result of a lack of information, envy, and vanity.

For instance, he is inordinately proud of his reading several popular science magazines, such as *Scientific American*, claiming that the 'science fictioneers', as he quaintly calls them, are not interested in such information. In a German interview, he denied Gregory Benford the qualification to speak about cosmology, one of Lem's pet subjects. This is grotesque, since I could name without checking at least a dozen American SF writers who can consult genuine scientific sources and need not rely on the popular science magazines — sources that would be closed to Mr Lem, since he is, mathematically speaking, illiterate. He simply lacks the mathematical tools to evaluate any physical theory, and yet he is arrogant enough to deny a practising physicist the qualification to speak on matters of cosmology, in which he himself is an absolute layman.

He is embittered by his lack of success in the world (or relative lack), and has been hit hard economically by the demise of Communism. In Communist Poland he created in a protected environment, with almost no competition, and books were cheap, so a Lem edition of 100,000 copies was no rarity. Now, of course, he sells only a few thousand copies (with the exception of those books that are forced upon pupils, since they are required reading in schools), and he is just one writer among hundreds, many of which sell much better . . .

I now understand Philip K. Dick's allegation that Mr Lem considers others to be his servants. Lem's main problems seem to be that he doesn't have the feeling that something is done for him, but that he feels like a feudal lord who is

granting favours to his subjects by allowing them to handle his precious copyrights, although in the international markets Mr Lem is a very minor player, who has had many translations, but whose books do not sell. They sold only in Germany, but even there Mr Lem is now a writer of the past, no longer accepted by younger readers, who prefer William Gibson.

The law suit that Mr Lem brought against me had its origins in a trick that he pulled upon me . . . The whole thing has been going on for four years, and in all this time Lem's new agent apparently has not been able to sell further Lem books in the USA (at least, none has appeared or been announced), and since Lem has meanwhile also broken with Harcourt Brace, I wonder how many Lem books American readers will see in the future. Lem's English language editions have always sold very poorly, and most American publishers would have pulped his books long ago. Harcourt has kept his trade paperbacks in print, although it cannot have made any money from them, but since it controls English language rights in his most interesting books, Harcourt will decide their fate, so it wasn't very intelligent of Mr Lem to annoy the company, for the books still untranslated will be of very little interest for English-language readers. But perhaps Mr Lem doesn't care whether his books are in print and read, now he is convinced that Steven Spielberg will film him.

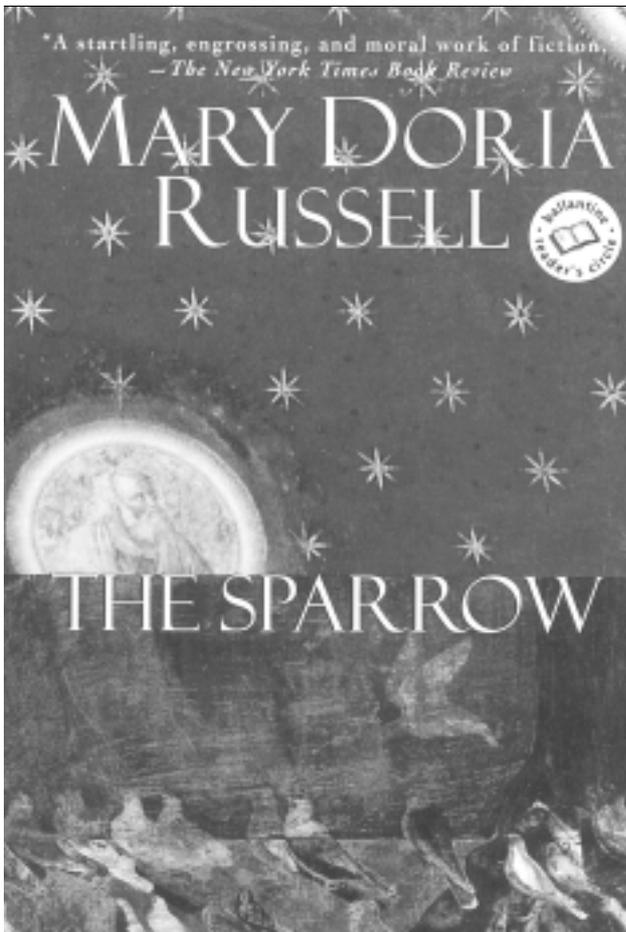
(12 August 1998)

To say that I 'survived' a potentially very expensive lawsuit brought against me by Stanislaw Lem is not quite exact. I won the lawsuit on all points. If I had lost, I would have been out of some \$US25,000, but it would not have affected my survival in any way. It might be of interest to note here that Stanislaw Lem has meanwhile, in violation of his contracts, ordered his publishers (mostly with success, including Harcourt Brace) to make all payments and accountings for the books sold by me only to him, and that he is pocketing my commissions. He also sold *Microworlds*, a collection of his critical writings put together by me for Harcourt Brace, without my permission to Japan. Now this is a book that was conceived, selected by me, and whose title was my idea. I leave it to your readers to give Mr Lem's actions their proper name.

As I know him, and as readers of Orwell can guess, he will have purged any mention of my name from the book. For people who don't allow Mr Lem to do to them what he intends to do don't exist for him any more.

Surely there's no non-English-language author who owes more to an agent or literary champion than Stanislaw Lem does to Franz Rottensteiner? In the late sixties, Franz sent John Foyster some translations of sections from Lem's *SF and Futurology* (the book itself is still untranslated into English) and articles from *Quarber Merkur*. In turn, John and Franz allowed me to reprint these articles in *SF Commentary*, and Franz began translating a wide variety of material especially for *SFC*. For several years, this magazine was almost the only way of reading Lem's non-fiction in English translation, which boosted the reputation of *SFC* and helped it gain three Hugo nominations.

Now I'm trapped because of this falling out between author and agent/translator. Franz won't let me republish his translations of Lem's articles (not only for personal reasons; it's likely that Lem would charge reprint fees whose translation component would not reach Franz). If I wanted to publish a *Best of SF Commentary*, I could hardly do so



without including at least three or four Lem articles. Liverpool University Press asked for such a *Best of* (because of Brian Aldiss's recommendation), but nothing has come of it because I never hear from LUP. Deleting the Lem articles would have knocked the concept of the book on its head anyway. I suppose I could publish a *Selection from SF Commentary*, but that's not the same as a *Best of*.

One project that badly needs doing is a second edition of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. The centre of the first edition was Lem's article 'SF: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions' (Dick being the exception). Translated by Werner Koopmann, the article would be the centre of the second edition as well. However, Franz sold this to Harcourt, to be part of the *Microworlds* collection, and I suspect it would cost me a small fortune to buy back rights to the article.

Meanwhile, many English-language authors will have a bit of a laugh when they read the above letter, having been told for 30 years by Franz Rottensteiner (and Stanislaw Lem himself) how much superior Lem's work is to anybody else's. Not that Lem's fiction, as translated by Michael Kandel, has been diminished in my eyes because of the split with Franz. Our heroes not only have feet of clay, but often they prove to be made of clay throughout. Even writers made of clay often write very well.

It's Steven Soderbergh, not Spielberg, who is making a new film of *Solaris*. (With George Clooney as Kris Kelvin. The mind boggles.) Might the novel finally receive a new translation from the Polish?

What I found most interesting in *SF Commentary 77* was David Lake's remarks about Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*.

This is exactly my own view, and I think that Russell's melodramatic and sentimental tale has more in common with *The Thom Birds* than with James Blish's *A Case of Conscience*, which, for all its faults, poses some intriguing and valid questions. My main objection to Blish is that a community of highly intelligent beings that has no concept of God is highly improbable, indeed impossible. It is another thing to reject the idea of God, but never to have had it? All truly intelligent beings must have some sort of philosophy, ponder the question why there is something and not nothing, and ask about the origins of the world. And to this there are only two answers: immanence and transcendence, or some sort of creator, prime cause or movens. Not to have arrived at this obvious answer would be a logical impossibility, a sign of stupidity. I found Blish always a writer who came up with interesting ideas, but wasn't able to explore their logical consequences to the full.

While Blish was well aware of the theological problem, Russell ignores it completely. Her Jesuit hero (and the Jesuits were very astute and tricky theologians; it is not mere chance that Blish made his hero a Jesuit) wastes not a thought on the beliefs of the aliens, and their theological consequences, which is highly unlikely. And the general problem of why God allows evil in the world is reduced to the sentimentalised, personalised problem of why God allows one of his servants to be raped and humiliated.

Now, worse has happened to believers all the time — one just has to read up the lives of the saints — and thus Emilio's reaction to his plight appears to be philosophically a bit naïve: and you do not need an alien planet and Jana'ata to have a priest bugged; similar things must have happened on Earth often enough.

I also agree with your short review of Aldiss's *The Secret of This Book*; when I read this collection for a German publisher, I was so impressed (unlike some other Aldiss collections) that I bought the British hardback for my own collection, something that I normally do only with books by J. G. Ballard.

(26 November 2001)

I like *The Sparrow* because it's one of the few SF books whose characters are interesting in their own right. By contrast, many SF novels are boring because their authors manufacture them (out of very good ideas sometimes) as if they were ticking mechanisms.

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I was much taken with David Lake's reading of Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*, and heartily concur that it has huge holes in both logic and style. Blish did it better! — and far truer to the Jesuit thought pattern. The entire opening, with Jesuits inventing the first space ship, is very poor. And then, as Lake so dryly notes, the Alpha Centauri system is totally wrong! These, like Jesuit theology, she could have just looked up, and didn't bother. Laziness, I deduce, from speaking extensively with her (Mary Russell) at the Templeton Conference in London 2000. She just doesn't care about authenticity, and says she hadn't read any of the earlier work; didn't know C. S. Lewis, Walter Miller Jr or Blish!

(16 November 2001)

TERRY JEEVES

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The Mountains of Books you mention struck a chord as I, too, have walls completely covered with bookshelves. All of these books and magazines (including *ASF/Analog* 1935–1995) I am trying to sell in preparation for a move at some indeterminate point in the future. I wrote to the publishers who had been sending review copies to *Erg* and told them to drop me from their lists. Apart from there being too many titles, a very large percentage of them were sword and sorcery, which I can't abide — especially those trilogies and tetralogies full of princesses with supernatural powers opposed by evil magicians.

I enjoyed the David Lake letters, and go along with his suggestion that 'religion' is the root of much of the world's troubles. I became an atheist as the age of fifteen and since then have had no reason to change that view. It amuses me that both sides in a war will pray to some deity to aid their side. As for those who pray for some sort of succour, how many actual concrete responses can be recorded?

SFC 77 disproves my idea that you had gafiated. Welcome back to the fanzine fold, and I can now mail *Erg* to you once again.

(15 November 2001)

Terry, surely you know by now that I never gafiate; I merely have long intervals between issues of my fanzines. Please continue trading all-for-all.

DAVID LAKE

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I've been writing a 38,000-word novella on the love life of St Augustine, which I have called *Lusts and Loves*. That took me just over a month — two drafts — and during that time I was really almost shut off from the world.

Almost, but not quite. I've been following the progress of World War III with interest. I am quite clear in my own mind that this *is* WW3 — not quite as we imagined it, but it is clearly going to escalate into a war of extermination between the West and Islam. It's the same war that has been going on with little truces for nearly 1400 years. The enmity between the Christian and post-Christian West and Islam is the most basic rift on the whole planet — much more serious than 'Capitalism' versus 'Communism' — because Islam is essentially dedicated to slavery on all levels, whereas the West, for about 500 years at least, has been following a project whose essential idea is freedom — freedom to think, to explore new ways, to work out the logic of freedom as far as it will take us — including the recent liberation of women, whom Islam fiercely retains as slaves.

This does not mean I like America. Americans have been so pig ignorant, so insular, that they have brought this on themselves. I loathe much of what America (on the pop level) stands for; but I hate Islam much worse.

I agree that Philip Dick's *Valis* is not a good *novel*, but the book gave me enormous pleasure, because I was amused by his (thinly disguised) life style and the weird religion. I think books are not good absolutely, but good for certain people at certain times. (I enjoyed *The Left Hand of Darkness* more than *The Lathe of Heaven*, again because of the religious angles — I was much into Zen when I first read the book.) When we say that Shakespeare is Good, we mean he has pleased and impressed an enormous number of people in the Western nations (and even some Japanese, not to mention Indians, who love him). I feel the same way about

Mozart — absolutely central to Western civilisation — but the Muslims ought to hate him, because all his operas deal favourably with good sex, the free pairing of men and women as lovers.

I have been feeling a bit more cheerful lately, as my poetry classes have made me a few good friends; I have been overwhelmed by their liking for me and what I am doing. This is much better than a good deal of my career before I retired in 1994.

I read very little fiction of any kind these days; perhaps the last novel was Atwood's *Alias Grace*, which I loved. At present I am reading Ariel Dorfman — amazing man — he was in Santiago de Chile on the other 11 September — 1973 — when the coup killed Allende and nearly killed Dorfman too. His play *Death and the Maiden* is terrible and wonderful. How do you forgive people who have raped and tortured you?

(12 December 2001)

E. D. WEBBER

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Thanks for the comment in *SF Commentary 77*: 'Where did the fiction finish and the actuality begin?' I, too, had difficulty at first seeing the events of 11 September 2001 as real rather than a fantasy produced for our viewing pleasure by the American Military–Entertainment Complex. Even now, I'm sure that said complex was green with envy while watching such an encroachment of market share. Perchance had Orson Welles come back to haunt his detractors? Had *Wag the Dog* taken a more sinister twist than even its writers had imagined?

Having adjusted to reality mode, however, to me the attacks did not come straight out of the proverbial blue. Mega, as opposed to fine tuning says so anyway — and not just because of the proven infallibility of the third law of physics. It's been noted, for instance, that any mention of American foreign policy in general and in the Middle East in particular having had anything to do with it has either been rebuffed or suppressed.

I'm being cynical, I know, but it comes from having lived through more than a bit of what we used to call Sam's War when I was a soldier with at least once eye open. As a matter of fact, there's an article of mine called 'Sam's War', which predicts the big battle to come to be between Sam and Islam. Monotheism and its discontents aside — which Bush, Blair and Howard are managing to do — there is also the matter of oil and other opiates to which the American Empire — another essay called 'Notes for an Off-Shore Island' — are hopelessly addicted. For that matter, there's another called 'The View from Beaufort Castle', written during the Gulf War, and about when I ran contact patrols from a Crusader castle 30 years before. Needless to say, our leading critical journals don't publish that sort of thing, though I can lay claim to being a member of the patient class published by a medical journal. Trying to tell the doctor class what's wrong with them is not easy. Harder than taking the mickey out of the Drug War by far.

No, like Pete Beagle's character, who has difficulty with the difference between fact and fantasy, there's not much I don't find believable. Palatable is another matter entirely. Which is another way of saying that the election is still causing me indigestion.

(20 November 2001)

Ed Webber is an American who now lives in Sydney. The election to which he refers is the Australian election of late 2001, won by John Howard's conservative coalition in the

shadow of the 11 September events in America and coincidental unsavoury events on the high seas to the north of Australia.

GERALD MURNANE

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A passage from a letter by David Lake in *SFC 77* has stayed in my mind for several days since I first read it. 'I think I already know as much of the world as I want to . . .' (p. 43).

David, of course, is still mourning for his wife. I haven't lost anyone recently, but I can understand a person's declaring at a certain point in his or her life that he or she has learned enough about the mass of abstractions and generalities and vague imaginings that goes by the name of 'the world' for most of us.

For much of my life, I thought I was obliged to learn about the world, to keep abreast with the world. I'm somewhat embarrassed even to type these expressions, so little do they mean to me now. I fulfilled my self-imposed obligation mostly by reading newspapers and such weekly publications as *Time* and the *Bulletin*, whatever. (I have never owned a television set or listened much to radio — except for broadcasts of horse-races — or discovered what the Internet is.) Just now, for whatever reason, I remembered a sunny morning in either 1958 or 1959 when I was annoyed with myself because my tram had arrived at its destination and I still had not fully understood from my reading of the *Age* why Walter Lippmann predicted the eventual collapse of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland as a result of the ineffectual policies of its Prime Minister, Sir Roy Welensky. Walter Who? Sir Roy Who? The Federation of What?

It's all too easy to scoff at your younger self and to take pride in knowing what that poor, ignorant bastard was ignorant of. I don't scoff. I pity poor young Gerald, trying to keep himself informed but reading about things that were never going to mean doodly squat to him. He would have done better to have spent his time on the tram reading about medieval Arabic philosophy or the breeding behaviour of Australian arachnids.

More and more, nowadays, I remember the saying attributed to Blaise Pascal. All our troubles arise from our being unable to keep to our room. He must have used a sort of royal plural. Or, in my typical unscholarly fashion, I've mucked up the quotation. But you get the point. I get it, anyway. I keep to my room. I try to spend no more than ten minutes looking through the newspapers. I still don't own a television set. I still don't listen to radio (except for the occasional broadcast of a horse-race), and I still don't know what the Internet is.

I suppose it wouldn't be fair to leave it at that. Anyone reading these boastful statements would surely want to ask, 'What the hell do you *do* in your precious room?' Well, Bruce, as you know, I've been studying the Hungarian language these last few years. Much of my day is taken up with reading and writing in Hungarian. I've also written two pieces of short fiction this year. One of them was published in *Southerly* early in the year. But I don't expect to write much more fiction. I don't even read much fiction nowadays, unless it's in Hungarian.

(17 November 2001)

The 'world', to me, is the brick out of the blue that clots you over the head when you're least expecting it. News of some of these bricks (such as the detestable GST) can be found in newspapers. Other items in newspapers seem to be

bricks, but in the long run they prove to be soap bubbles. I read newspapers and magazines because I like to keep up with the story of the world, even if much of that story is fiction, and much fiction tells the real story of the world.

SKEL

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Already a major decision. Do I write this in Word or do I do it directly as an email? I decided on the former, because it's so long since I used it for pleasure. I use it regularly at work, where it annoys the hell out of me by deciding it knows better than I how I want to lay out my documents, in some cases being so intractable that I am forced to give in because I don't know enough to make it stop what it's doing and do what I originally intended.

Oddly I never have any problems when using it for fannish purposes, though some of the things it does are baffling. Why, for instance, is there a squiggly green line under the 'an e' near the beginning of the second line? It has also put the same squiggly green line under the entire rambling last sentence of the first paragraph. Is this some mild form of literary criticism? As well as a Spell-checker, does it have a Style-checker? Oh boy, am I in trouble!

Another reason I chose Word is historical. I rarely remember to save things as I go (unless reminded of the tendency by writing about it), and in my early use of emails for longer missives I would invariably hit the wrong key somewhere along the line and find, usually towards the end, that the damn thing had disappeared, and I would be faced with typing it all again.

The third and final reason for choosing to go the Word route is that I tidied up my den on Friday. Hence this letter, and my choice of software. I will explain (even though it is *very boring*). But where to start?

Relatively recent Skelhistory first. I've been busy at work, taking on a new project that has involved me working away from home two or three days almost every week for much of the past 12–18 months. Keeping my normal responsibilities going has resulted in much overtime (I think, for instance, I have worked most Sundays this year) and a tendency to come home brain-dead. Most fanzines that have arrived over this period have merely been glanced at and placed on a pile, a singularly small pile, given the time it has had to grow. Even the few that have been read have not been LoCed (which habit has not been restricted to the last year or so, and which goes a long way to explaining why the pile was not larger).

Anyway, with no warning everything was put on 'hold' for three weeks. Three glorious weeks of not being sent to Coventry. As the overtime has enabled me to stay on top of my other work, I am taking advantage by booking the Fridays of each week as holiday, for three consecutive weeks of long weekends, the first Friday of which was ***Tidy-up-Time***.

Among the zines and correspondence of course, as you'll obviously have realised, was *SF Commentary 77*, and also coincidentally a letter from David Russell, who claimed he was moved to write me a letter of appreciation because of my 'wonderful' letters which have appeared from time to time in *TMR*. When I wrote back to tell him what a nice discerning chap he appeared to be (you should always humour the apparently insane), that was the last occasion I'd used Word in private correspondence, so it seemed only appropriate to use it again here. Your zine and his letter of course reminded me how right Robert Lichtman was (in this *SFC*), because the

last *TMR* was so overwhelming that I never did respond (and of course I am quick to seize upon his observation as proof that my failure to do so is actually *your fault* for sending out such awesomely magnificent fanzines and not my fault (no, never that) for being a snivelling, good-for-nothing, lousy, idle ingrate). That's all right then.

It's a glorious day today, so short interlude whilst we take 'The Boys' out for a squiggle. That's the current nonsense word for 'walk'. We are down to nonsense words. You wouldn't believe how quickly two Yorkshire terriers can learn the words 'perambulate' and 'peregrination'. We 'squiggle' at least once a day, and sometimes twice, but from their reaction you'd think they only went out for a walk every ten years or so. Once they realise, they go bananas! They bark like crazy, they run around in circles, they jump up and down from the furniture. It's the barking-like-crazy that drives me mad. We tried spelling. 'Get their El-Ee-Ay-Dee-EsSES', Cas would say. I swear the damn dogs learned to spell in three days flat. Taking them for a 'doubleyou' (Walk) or 'doing the 'doubleyou' thing, lasted about the same length of time. So, having run out of words for 'walk', we're down to nonsense. When 'squiggle' loses its impenetrability, in your honour, we will 'bruce'. The trouble is they are so quick to pick up cues. The moment you decide that it'd be a good time to 'squiggle' you suddenly find that, even though you have not yet mentioned this to Cas, you are suddenly never more than three inches away from something small and furry, with pricked-up ears, which refuses to take its eyes off you for a second. End of segue, back to letter.

Still on the relatively recent Skelhistory: Running in parallel with the above was another thread in my personal tapestry. I don't have your problem with books. I used to have, but unlike you I was never a 'collector' but rather an 'accretor'.

Short interruption for a correction. I've never been a 'collector', in the sense of a person who collects books for some purpose other than reading. Like you, I am an 'accretor', for exactly the reason you describe below. Every book I've bought I've meant to read one day.

I would buy books and magazines, on the assumption I would one day read them, but like you hope outstripped the deed. By many, many laps. But one day I called a halt. Except it wasn't one day, it was several days. The first time I suddenly decided to 'clear the decks' was after a fannish weekend at our place, many years ago. I suddenly decided 'everything must go', and proceeded to sell all my books and magazines at 10p a time. Mark Bennet wrote me out a cheque for over £200, representing in excess of 2000 books. As we carried them out to the car one fell, and Mike Glicksohn, picking it up, remarked, 'You're selling a first edition of Heinlein's *Puppet Masters* for 10p?'

'Damn right!' I replied, feeling more free than stupid. Of course, I still had all my US *Astoundings*, and a lot of other stuff.

On the next occasion, a few years later I contacted my good friend Mike Meara and told him to bring his indexes the next time he and Pat came to visit, because anything I'd got that he wanted, he could have. That took care of most of the good stuff. Nothing was said at the time, but I just kind of assumed that he would reciprocate if he ever decided he'd no more interest in his fanzine collection. Free again!

Except there was still a huge volume of stuff, and it continued to grow. Eventually I snapped again, and everything (above the 'core' stuff I had to keep) went to the

local Oxfam shop. Free again!

All this time, my fanzines were growing beyond my means to shelve or access them. I had over a dozen large cartons of them confined to the loft. Then came a seismic event. My friend Brian Robinson died. One side effect of his death was that Cas and I had a few short days to go into his home and clear out all the SF material to give to TAFF. TAFF at the time was in dire straits, as Abi Frost had just rendered it insolvent. We salvaged a phenomenal amount of material, which I felt should have realised a couple of thousand pounds, but because of both the volume and TAFF's then current problems, it was essential to move it quickly to a dealer for a thousand quid. One thing we didn't get was any useful fanzines, because Brian, in his psychological mire, had taken every fanzine (and he had some good stuff) and ripped it in half and binned it.

But I realised that, although TAFF was taking away all Brian's SF, it could also take away my surplus fanzines. So I did a cull, and ruthlessly chopped my collection right back to the absolute minimum. And boy, was I ever ruthless! I think I started out with 20 boxes of fanzines and ended up with four.

Fast forward to about April 2000. Mike Meara wrote me that he was wanting to dispose of his fanzine collection, and could I help him (for a commission)? I wrote back that I had no idea how to do such a thing, offered to put him in touch with Dave Langford, who could presumably help and, very boldly for me, expressed my disappointment that he hadn't chosen to gift me with his fanzines in the same way I had gifted him with my SF mags. He obviously appreciated the correctness of this approach, because he subsequently wrote that when they came to visit, over Christmas 2001, I should be prepared to receive an inordinate number of boxes of fanzines that he proposed to leave with me, free and gratis. Sometimes it pays not to let things fester.

Anyway, my excitement at this was because Mike used to go to auctions and buy fanzines. I didn't. To me a fanzine was something you didn't have to buy. I paid for *Warhoon 28*, and at a convention auction for three issues of *Richard E. Geis*, and for a couple of TAFF trip reports, but other than that, all my zines were free. Anything decent in my own collection was probably a duplicate of something Mike had passed on, or basically I just got lucky.

Anyway, suddenly I had 27 boxes of fanzines. Again I was brutal in my selections, and managed to get the 'keeps' down to about 12 boxes. This time, though, I carefully indexed everything. I heard that they were offering Bill Bowers a 'deferred' TAFF trip, and offered him all the stuff I didn't want, so he could auction it for that. Bill replied that he was pretty much sure his ever-worsening health problems would prevent him making the trip, but that he'd love some of the stuff for his own collection, and that yeah or nay on that, he'd still be happy to auction the rest off for me. This struck me as a fabulous idea as we were (and indeed still are) intending to visit the USA and Canada in the summer of 2003 and any dollars raised would make the trip more affordable, especially as we already have enough BA Miles to get us there and back for free. Bill took about 7.5 kg of the best stuff off the top. At the time Mike Glicksohn said that without all that good stuff I'd be lucky to make any significant return and shouldn't get my hopes up. But I wasn't unduly concerned, as my main aim was simply to get rid of the damn things, and any financial return would just be a bonus. At least, with an auction I knew that any zines sold would be going to fans who'd really appreciate them. There was still some good material left, and I told Cas, 'With

any luck we'll maybe make £1000/\$1500. That would really help towards the trip costs.'

Bill put in a phenomenal amount of effort on that auction, running it for over a year and greatly exceeding my financial expectations. Also greatly exceeding my 'getting rid' expectations as, now it is concluded, I have less than three cartons of surplus fanzines, and I hope to reduce this even further by offering what's left on a 'free-to-good-homes' (i.e. P&P only) basis to the UK auction participants (for whom the cost of postage would be relatively insignificant). After the auction I gave Bill another 7.5 kilos of material he'd subsequently discovered an interest in.

Bill wrote that he'd generally enjoyed the process, but I do know that it was a lot of work by him, and that during certain health 'troughs' it became an onerous obligation. At the start he'd been running my auction in parallel with one of his own, but he'd had to put that on hold, as the sheer volume of stuff he was shifting for me was overwhelming. No *Outworlds*, either, you'll notice, though I don't think I'm entirely to blame for that. In comparison, I had it easy humping boxes up and down from the loft whenever we had visitors, keeping up with Bill's regular updates, going through the boxes, picking out the zines that had been sold, and putting them into plastic carrier bags with the winning bidder's name on, and whenever anyone's 'winnings' looked to be approaching the 5 kg international weight limit, making up and posting off a shipment. So that's what all my fannish energies have been devoted to for the past 18 months. I'll miss it.

'What'll you do now it's over?' Cas asked.

'Read some fanzines again. Maybe send out some long-overdue LoCs.'

Starting with this one. One of the runs of fanzines that sold was some old *SFCs*, various issues from 4 through 66, for \$100. That seemed a lot at the time, but for 31 zines (43 issue numbers) that's probably pretty cheap. Particularly since a batch of twenty-plus 1960s *Vectors* went for \$650. Of course we all thought that was ludicrous, but the guy that lost out in the bidding on that is making noises that he wished he'd held out another couple of rounds. What would the *SFCs* have fetched if only there had been two guys who wanted them?

That paragraph makes me groan with frustration. I would have been a bidder, since I have only one complete collection of my fanzines, and, thanks to Derek Kew, another near-complete collection. But I desperately need another complete collection, which I could perhaps store off the premises.

You see my attitude to 'sercon' matches that of Jerry Kaufman's, and when you switched from sending me *TMR* to sending *SFC* I was distraught. I don't want to read about SF. I want to read about you, but because you've transferred 'I Must Be Talking To My Friends' successfully to the new zine, then I don't see as how it matters.

But you are going to have to stop sending me your fanzine. I cannot believe I read 'Four Reasons for Reading Thomas M. Disch'. This is a writer I cannot bring myself to read, ever since reading *The Genocides* and being depressed beyond reclamation. Yet here is an article that makes sense, yet I will never read the guy for pleasure.

But wait. Your zines have not changed, but I obviously have. I no longer need a week-long holiday to respond (I noticed that earlier LoCs always used to be written during long Xmas holidays). Now a three-day weekend will suffice.

In fact, even the final day will do. Please do not take this as a failure on your part, but rather as a triumph on mine.

(12 May 2002)

You cannot escape from my fanzines as easily as that. Who said that I had stopped sending you *The Metaphysical Review*, just because I haven't time and money to publish an issue since 1998? I have about 100,000 words of material for the next issue, including some superb articles and at least 50,000 words of letters of comment. Meanwhile, *SF Commentary* is still just another Gillespie fanzine — it includes lots of personal stuff as well as articles about SF and fantasy.

Skel, like Dave Piper you are one of those people for whom I publish my magazines. Now he's gone, I have no choice but to keep sending you my fanzines.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

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I can't remember how long ago *SFC 76* arrived, but I do know that it had languished unread until *SFC 77* turned up — not from lack of interest, but straightforward lack of time.

(Which means, having gone downstairs to check the date of publication — I've filed it in with the rest of our small collection of litcrit — that it must have languished unread for at least a year. Bloody hell!) And the same has been responsible for my failure to open *SFC 77* until very recently. Not until the past week, in fact — although I have to confess that I skipped over most of the book reviews, because I know that I'm never likely to read any of the titles reviewed. Again, not because of lack of interest, but lack of time — in theory, I'm still interested in science fiction, and still like to know what's going on in 'the field'; but in practice, such SF-related news as I imbibe is confined to *Ansible* and the BSFA's *Matrix* (I stopped reading *Locus* at least a decade ago). It must be over a year since I last opened an SF novel.

At least, I suppose so — I can't remember what SF title I last read, or when! These days, I find it difficult to make room to read fiction of any kind. I'm slowly working my way through the late Patrick O'Brian's series of novels about Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin (one constant pleasure of this on-again, off-again summer has been to open a bottle of wine of an evening, slip a baroque concerto into the CD player, and read a chapter or two of O'Brian); I've discovered Iain Pears's series about art detective Jonathan Argyll and the Italian Art Squad (oddly inessential works, but satisfyingly convoluted and clever); I've read all four of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels (manufactured nostalgia for a lost England that never was, but plotwise getting darker all the time); I've got Lemony Snicket's *Series of Unfortunate Events* awaiting my attention (the blurbs alone are an absolute hoot); and there's a pile, 30 to 40 books strong, of SF paperbacks from the last five or six years still to be read (but the pull they might once have exerted — science fiction! urgent visions of the next five minutes! — is conspicuous by its absence). Never mind the 30 to 40 non-fiction history and archaeology texts still to be absorbed (carefully sorted, like the shelves of history and archaeology which have been read, by geography and period — a classification that baffles everyone but myself) — all reasons why, apart from occasional lapses (Pears and Snicket), I've largely given up buying books. (So has Judith, for that matter.) Oh, there are times when, as we say, we find that a book or two has followed us home, but we manage to avoid

'book accidents' of the kind you describe by the simple expedient of very rarely going into bookshops, and then only shops selling new titles; never secondhand bookshops. (This avoidance strategy is greatly helped by there not being any secondhand bookshops in Tottenham and Wood Green, and only one new bookshop, a branch of Ottakar's, in Wood Green High Street. There are, of course, bookshops in central London, where I work, and Peterborough, to which Judith commutes most days, but — paradoxically — they seem to require more effort to get to. I have no idea why this should be so, unless it's mere inertia that keeps me at my desk at lunchtimes. Besides, it's easier to read the newspaper there: no breeze to keep blowing the thing about.)

The consequence is that I'm largely ignorant of what happened in science fiction during the 1990s, and most of the writers I still follow were those I was reading in the eighties (although even then I'm a book or two behind their actual output). Innumerable new writers have emerged and flourished without my ever having read a word of theirs — anything by Paul McAuley, for example (I suppose I must have read his early short stories in the early issues of *Interzone*, but have no memory of doing so), or Ian McDonald, for another. I've read a couple of novels by Stephen Baxter, a couple by Ken MacLeod (and intend to read more, since I like his politics), have heard of China Miéville (someone who I think I ought to read, again because of his politics), but beyond that . . . (Jon Courtenay Grimwood? interesting name, but who he?)

None of this was deliberate: the product of conscious choice, several years ago, to pursue other paths; it's just the way life has turned out. I remember (with affection!) my years as an active fan, in the late seventies and early eighties; but the chance of my ever being as active again is remote. Indeed, beyond occasional socialisation at parties and the like, we seem not, now, to have much contact with other fans. I don't even go to the monthly London pub meetings any more, and haven't for three years. (Three years ago this very month was in fact the last. Three years ago next month, BBC2 began broadcasting the second series of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* on Thursday evenings, with the first series of *The Sopranos* following later on Channel 4, and I stayed home to watch them in real time rather than record them for later. And once you've stepped off the regular first-Thursday cycle, it's hard to resume the habit.) But in those three years, fandom as I knew it seems to have undergone some fairly profound changes — the inexorable and continuing rise of online fandom, which scarcely existed even four years ago, and in particular the emergence of interactive online weblogs and diaries, most featuring a slew of people virtually unknown to me. (Live Journal? Webbing the Surf? How does anyone have time? Are they all unemployed and rich, or have incredibly indulgent employers who don't care what their employees get up to?) Print fanzines seem almost to have been extinguished.

But don't stop sending us your fanzines (however infrequently they're published)! We're not really gafiating, really! Like all fans who burned brightly for the first few years (you were undoubtedly one of them), we've just dropped back to a less intensive level of activity, putting our energies into other things (as I dare say you have too). For example, I edit the newsletter for our local museum's support group, and Judith does stuff for Haringey's Local Agenda 21 from time to time. We both have fairly demanding fulltime jobs. There's also the garden (last weekend, I replaced the plastic arch installed during our first summer here with a sturdier wooden one of bespoke design and construction)

and the allotment (a bucketload of strawberries to turn into jam; so many onions that we won't need to buy any until next spring; the few platefuls of what looks to be our largest potato crop to date). And we spent the first week of July in Orkney, where it rained several times and where the wind blew strongly when it didn't, but where we saw lots of archaeology and wildlife and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. In September we're going to Tallinn for a few days, simply because it's there and looks interesting.

(Mind you, we're also going to Tallinn because we saw an advert for the trip in *The Guardian*. By contrast, the Orkney holiday was something we organised for ourselves via the web, email and the telephone. It was also the holiday we've taken in the past decade for which I have felt least prepared, because I hadn't had time to do more than glance through the relevant guidebook (Caroline Wickham-Jones's *Historical Orkney*) and map out a detailed itinerary in advance. (I had so wanted to read the Orkney chapters in Barry Cunliffe's *Facing the Ocean: A New History of the Atlantic and its Peoples* in advance, too.) But once we got there, time seemed to slow tremendously (we didn't watch the television news, didn't buy a paper, didn't care what was happening in the outside world), and I read Wickham-Jones's book on the ferry to and from Mainland to Papa Westray on our second full day in Orkney, in effect mapping out our program for the rest of the week. We returned, I suppose I should be sorry to say, with another 10–15 cm of historical material to slot into our history and archaeology shelves — mostly booklets rather books, but interesting all the same.)

But I'm conscious that after all these paragraphs I still haven't said much about the fanzines.

And after a long pause in which I went off to acquaint myself with their contents — re-read some of George Turner's reviews, for example — I'm not quite sure that I can. I admire the rigour with which George sets out his stall (why he is saying what he says), but I'm not sure that I agree with all of his conclusions. As someone who's written a hell of a lot of reviews himself (most of them when I was editing the BSFA's *Paperback Inferno* (which no longer exists) in the first half of the 1980s), I can readily sympathise with his argument that there's too much crap out there and that fans ought to be discerning in their choices; but on the other hand, why suggest that bad writers should be given the benefit of the doubt for their first couple of novels? Bad writers should be stamped on immediately — recall, for example, Brian Aldiss's assault on Chris Boyce in the first (or was it the second?) issue of *SF Horizons*, in response to which Boyce promptly abandoned fiction. When he resumed, ten years later, he was still no fucking good, and the reviewers told him so. (I was one of those reviewers, although I didn't catch up with him until 1980.) He has since wisely remained silent.

I should undoubtedly say more. But unlike Alan Sandercoc et al. (I shared a room with him once at a British convention in the late seventies), I shall not promise to write more in a few days' time, because I know I won't — once I've spoken, that's it. Not because I don't care, but because there simply isn't the time.

(3 August 2002)

ALAN SANDERCOCK 2010 Desmond Drive, Decatur GA 30033, USA

We got back to Atlanta last Sunday evening at 6.30. Interestingly enough we actually left Adelaide at 6 a.m. on the same day, so Sunday was a very long day for us.

I have to say that I had an absolutely wonderful time in

Australia, spending it almost strictly as a tourist from America. Sydney was a real eye-opener for me this time around. I'd never actually taken the time (since about 1968) to look at the so-called tourist attractions, and even in 1968 I missed out on places like the Blue Mountains and the Rocks.

After Sydney, we hired a car and drove north to stay with Joy Window and her partner Andrew. Once again we had an interesting time, since Joy took us into a rainforest and showed us Byron Bay and other beach destinations. These people live out on a one-time farm in the middle of nowhere.

The final third of our trip was spent in Adelaide. This is the week where I saw Jeff Harris, Paul Anderson, John Foyster and my old friend John Hewitt. Of course, I had a few cousins to meet as well.

While in Adelaide we went to see *Dirty Deeds*. I thought it was a very interesting and exciting film, and Jane and Maria both thoroughly enjoyed the film for slightly different reasons. They identified with the two Americans coming to Australia and being confused by the local customs — especially the anti-tipping rule. And once again I was amazed by Toni Collette's versatility.

(11 August 2002)

One day we'll meet again, Alan. As I said to you when you announced that you would be visiting Australia but not Melbourne, Melbourne is where the fans are. It's obvious that I will never have the money to visit you in Georgia.

JOHN BROSNAN

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Many thanks for *SF Commentary 77*. Once again it's like being on a starship and receiving mail that was sent from Earth years before. Lots of good stuff as usual. Particularly liked the Thomas M. Disch piece written by the sadly missed John T. Sladek. And, of course, I appreciated the reviews of my books, some of which I don't remember writing.

Odd experience reading my letter of February 1994. I note with amusement that back then I was desperately trying to find good things to say about the movie *Beyond Bedlam*, based on my book — or rather Harry Adam Knight's book — *Bedlam*. I even said that it was fairly faithful to the novel which, in retrospect, is pretty funny. There are some scenes from the book that are reproduced in the film, but the basic premise of the novel, which was inspired by Jerome Bixby's story 'It's a Good Life', is entirely absent from the movie. The idea that the characters are trapped in a separate world created by an omnipotent psychopath is never introduced, with the result that the events in the movie make no sense at all. It's now regarded as one of Elizabeth Hurley's all-time worst films, which is saying something, and her then boyfriend at the time, Hugh Grant, described it as a 'chancre'. But it's a better movie than *Proteus*, made by the same producer, which was based on HAK's first novel, *Slimer*. I get sole scriptwriting credit, unfortunately, but everyone and their dog obviously contributed to the screenplay (the dogs wrote the better lines). My screenwriting career fizzled out after that for some strange reason.

Last week I received a letter from a producer who said he wanted to film all three of the 'Sky Lords' novels, but no mention of any option money. I'm not holding my breath.

(7 May 2002)

It's a coincidence you mentioning the possibility of Ortygia

House finally being done up. The builders have been in for months now. The house is not only being rewired but the empty flat next to mine is being entirely refurbished. (Colin Greenland used to live there.) The noise has been driving me crazy. But Ortygia House went upmarket some time ago. I'm the last of the old guard, and my flat does resemble the Bates Motel, but the rest of the house is full of people who drive BMWs and pay a fortune for their flats. I suspect that when the owner, the ancient Mrs Smith, died some years ago, she left instructions that any of the tenants who moved in when she was alive should have their rents frozen; my rent has stayed the same for years. You couldn't afford to rent a room in Harrow for what I pay monthly for this flat.

I've been in a financial crisis for over a year now and have been on income support (that is, the dole) during that time. The last book I had published was *Scream*, which, as the title suggests, was about the 'Scream' movies. Hack writing at its worst. Didn't help that I hadn't seen the third movie in the series by the time I had to deliver the book.

Then I wrote a book about Hannibal Lecter that got dropped by the publishers for copyright reasons. However, I have sold an idea for a big SF novel to Gollancz/Orion. It's called *Mothership*, a cross between a generation ship saga and *War of the Worlds*. Already written 30,000 words . . .

No, I can't claim to be the matchmaker between Liz Hurley and Hugh the Hair. They were an item long before *Beyond Bedlam*. Ironically, the movie came and went in cinemas just three weeks before Liz wore That Dress at the premiere of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and became instantly famous.

At John Baxter's suggestion, I wrote an outline last year for a book about Liz (I was that desperate) but the agent I sent it to said she was yesterday's news. This was before the Liz's Baby saga began. But even so, I heard nothing more about my outline. Probably a good thing. She sues at the drop of a Versace pin.

Baxter has been keeping me up to date about John Foyster. How is Peter Nicholls doing?

You've probably heard that John Murray aka Richard Cowper died a couple of weeks ago, just three weeks after the death of his wife. And Joan Harrison, wife of Harry, has also recently died.

I've been thinking of returning to Australia, but somehow I don't think that's a good idea.

(8 May 2002)

I had no idea that George Effinger was dead until I got your email. I then checked the latest *Ansible* on the net and saw that Cherry Wilder had also died. Bloody hell. You, Effinger and I are (were, in Effinger's case) the same age. Talk about intimations of mortality. I hadn't even heard about Bangsund's heart attack. My health is okay apart from high blood pressure and alcoholism. I also smoke heavily, so it will be a toss up as to what will kill me first. Probably the alcoholism. A close friend of mine who used to run my drinking club, died of liver failure at the end of 2000. Alcohol gets you one way or the other.

I was in detox twice in 1998, but I'm still drinking. It goes in cycles. I can control it for a few weeks at a time, then something sets me off on a binge and I end up in hospital. Needless to say, my local hospital is getting pretty fed up with me. No, don't suggest I join AA. I abhor the whole organisation for various reasons.

You're probably right about me moving back to Australia would be professional suicide. It's just that I have a pressing need to escape somewhere.

(9 May 2002)

I told John that Peter Nicholls seemed quite chipper at the recent launch of a film all about him. *The What If Man* is a film about Peter and science fiction, but he doesn't exactly hide his warts and all. He speaks in the film about contracting Parkinson's disease, which does not seem to have proceeded as quickly as he had feared. During 2002, John Foyster returned to publishing his electronic fanzine *eFNAC*. Peter McNamara and Barbara Winch are editing a sequel to the collection *Alien Shores*.

I'm sure you'd be welcome back in Australia, John, but there's much less writing work here than in Britain.

PATRICK MCGUIRE
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SFC 77 arrived in the mail on 10 November. It was a pleasant surprise, both intrinsically, and because it arrived at a moment when I was happy for a change in reading matter, since I had been housebound for four days with a severe cold, and had been going through a lot of books. (It's now going on five days of houseboundness, and the symptoms were coming on for several days before landing me at home, but the thing does seem to be easing off gradually. And the symptoms do not seem to be those of flu, so it's presumably not anthrax either!)

I caught the cold at a convention, which I seem to have a habit of doing in recent years. I got back from the Philadelphia Worldcon unscathed in September, but the Bouchercon (the mystery-fiction worldcon) happened to be in the Virginia suburbs of Washington DC this year in early November, and it seemed worth attending. (I had been vaguely meaning for years to go to a Bouchercon, and this one was conveniently close.) The onset symptoms of the cold seemed remarkably similar to those I experienced after Chicon last year.

I said convention above. Actually, even though the Bouchercons were founded by SF fans on the model of SF convention fandom, there has been a degree of differentiation over the years, notably in terminology, perhaps as the mystery fans feel a need to distinguish themselves and assert their independence, or perhaps just through random drift. Thus 'con' tends to be expanded as 'conference' rather than 'convention'. The con suite becomes the hospitality lounge. The con members become conference participants.

Sure and it niver entered me poor head that 'I must be talking to my friends' was in the Irish style of English (page 18), with the extended Irish use of the present progressive tense. Thus it means something like it is time for me to talk to my friends — not it must be the case that at the moment I am talking to my friends, which was how I had always read it. The latter seemed to raise the question of just what were the symptoms by which it could be discerned that Bruce was talking to his friends, as distinct from talking to other people. A relaxed attitude? Openness on which topics he was willing to address? But now all the mystery and nuance evaporates, and it's just Irish dialect! On the other hand, according to the Primary Source, there *are* symptoms (when the people see me quiet) whereby it can be discerned that the Old Woman is talking to her friends, so perhaps we recover by literary allusion what is lost in direct implication.

These days the SF community has become the fantasy/SF community, and the whole thing has gotten so bloated and

diluted that it is often hard to detect important new SF writers. Greg Egan (page 29), as local talent, got a fair amount of publicity at Aussiecon Three, which caused me to pick up a book of his, which then sat around for a long time even after the books I had mailed myself arrived, but which I finally got read about a year ago — at which point I starting rounding up as many of other Egan books as I could find. I very much enjoyed *Diaspora* and *Permutation City*, although aspects of them did remind me of the thought variant story in the Tremaine-era *Astounding*: they put forward a Mind-Bogglingly Big Idea, but one that, on reflection, the reader is likely to reject in the Real World as implausible. Since this is a matter of subjective plausibility rather than of logical flaws, this could be taken as merely a sign of the reader's lack of Cosmic Mindedness, but on the other hand, I can't think of any of the thought variant ideas that has much currency today, and many of them have been refuted. (For instance, atoms are not solar systems, galaxies are not atoms.)

I seem to be bogged down in Egan's *Distress*, but I'll probably get it finished sooner or later. I'm not sure of the reason, and it could be just me — I sometimes bog down partway through a book for no strong reason, and what with all the other books around, it may take me a while to pick it up again.

I have had nothing directly to do with Sisters in Crime, and I share a degree of unease with their official genderedness, but they do have male members and even have a 'Misters in Sisters' subgroup, so it's not like they're radical man-haters. If they were running the only mystery convention on my continent (or even my city), I expect I would give them the benefit of the doubt and see if they had anything interesting to offer. Bouchercon was at least two-thirds female anyhow, and the local mystery convention here, Malice Domestic, which focuses on the 'cozy', may be as much as 90 per cent female among fans, about 75 per cent among attending authors. So one is going to be rubbing shoulders with a disproportionate number of women at any mystery con — the flip side of what was true in SF until perhaps the 1980s. (The local SF group I belong to is at least 70 per cent male, for that matter, although US conventions now seem to be about 50-50, in part thanks to fantasy, I think.)

(12 November 2001)

From time to time I've thought about the possibility of organising mystery fandom here as a complement to SF fandom. Sisters in Crime is the closest equivalent, but whether its members mean to or not, it sends the message that it doesn't want me, a mere male. When a lot of Australian academics began writing crime novels during the nineties, the mystery field picked up the whiff of respectability. Thank ghod there's still nothing respectable about SF fandom. But there's also no Australian mystery fanzine in whose letter column one could natter about the latest book by one's favourite mystery writer.

RICHARD E. GEIS
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This latest *SF Commentary* is beautiful and impressive and depressing, because my eyes have gotten so bad I can't read it much, and that produces guilt and that produces anger: 'How dare you send this thing to me to cause me anguish and pain?' You see how the mind works. I've just given up my book review column in *SF Chronicle* because of the eye problems, and now this.

Seriously . . . I'd prefer you to not send any more *SFCs* and thus save a lot of money and postage. I know we have a looong tradition of sending all for all, but I'm 74 now and I think I've given my all. So, again, stop sending these fine magazines. My ego can only stand so much abuse, you sadist! See how I twist things around! Think of me as a politician.

(12 November 2001)

Richard E. Geis, all four issues of it in 1971 and early 1972, was one of the greatest influences on my fanzines. (Others include John Bangsund, in *ASFR*, John Foyster, in all his fanzines, Pete Weston, in *Speculation*, Richard Bergeron, in *Warhoon*, and Bill Bowers, in those crackling early issues of *Outworlds*.) There's always been a Richard E. Geis. And now he writes to say he can't read what I'm sending.

Later, he sent a general email that he was going into hospital from some fairly drastic back surgery, and nobody heard from him for a long time. I note in the latest *Ansible* that he has made contact with Dave Langford. I did receive one final message from Dick Geis:

My eyes tire very quickly and lose focus. As of now, freed of most reading, I'm beginning to write a bit of fiction again; sporadic spurts is a good Geisian description of the process. Essentially I write until the big type on the screen is blurry, and then quit for an hour. Thank Ghod for adjustable type fonts.

LEIGH EDMONDS

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Your comments on all the recent deaths in the family (if you know what I mean) reminds me that Valma and I missed the departure of some of the people you mentioned. We welcomed the arrival of the new year in the hope that, even though it may be no better than 2001 in most ways, it will not be filled from first day to last with the awful drabness of overcoming what happened to us in October 2000. Only recently have we begun to notice what is happening in the rest of the world, and it seems that, in general, most people would have been more than happy to go straight from 2000 to 2002, giving the intervening 365 days the big miss.

One of the things that I have achieved in the past couple of months is to get our books back into order. In Perth they were all organised nicely in the numerous bookcases we had around the house, but when we arrived here I just emptied books into the nearest bookcase to get rid of the boxes (which was better than when we arrived in Perth, where all the books sat in a huge pile for a couple of years until I made new cases for them all). So now all the fiction is in the lounge room and spills into the hall, where it is joined by the stuff on literature, poetry, drama, etc, etc. In the dining room is all the Australian history, sociology, politics, etc.), various other forms of history, historiography, books about cricket and music and lots of books about cooking (right by the kitchen door where, in theory at least, they are readily available). Upstairs, just outside the door to my room, is the history of technology and aviation history as well as all those computer manuals that you can never quite bring yourself to throw out just in case you might want to use Windows 3.1 again. Inside my room is the 40 or so folders of material that I collected for my PhD that I must mine again one of these days. Now, finally, I can lay my hands on that Sladek novel I was thinking about, that monograph on Swedish iron bridges that I need to borrow a thought from or that Cabinet Agenda from September 1938 that says

something interesting. Goshwowboyohboy.

After all the books were lined up I discovered that somehow (and I have no idea how it happened, but it is the honest truth, do books shrivel up as they get older?) I have about two metres of empty shelf space. This is likely to remain empty for some time to come because Valma and I have more or less taken the pledge and don't buy books — more or less. We got given three books for Christmas and I bought one book last year (Harold Poulton's *Law, History and Politics of the Australian Two Airline System* that I picked up in a secondhand shop in Daylesford, since you asked). At some time we came to the realisation that we had a house full of books, many of which remained unread decades after they were bought. Of course, for books that are tools of the trade, such as monographs on Swedish iron bridges, this is no problem, but for other books, the process of buying is more about consumption than about the pleasure of reading, and the hope that one will live forever to enjoy them all. The problem with taking the pledge is that you can tell when we stopped acquiring fiction (in about 1988) and general texts (around 1997) by the gaping holes in what we have on the shelves. It is a pity, to be sure, but at least there is space on the wall for some paintings (not that we have got around to putting them up yet).

What did I enjoy in this issue? I liked Colin Steele's reviews, which I used to enjoy reading in the *Canberra Times* when we lived there. If I thought I might live to be 120, there are some books written about here that I would like to indulge myself in — Chris Priest's *The Prestige* sounds particularly juicy.

It is.

As usual, the letter column is full of all kinds of oddities that deserve some comment. I cannot resist the urge to tell you that you should read more history after reading your comments to Michael Hailstone that nothing much happened to ordinary people in Australia until 1970. You do preface that comment with 'My own experience . . .', and all of us with long memories will dredge through them to recall that neither of us was too much in touch with the real world in that period. Or perhaps it is that change did not become obvious until around 1970, though it had been occurring beneath the surface from the early 1960s. Let me recommend Stuart Macintyre's *A Concise History of Australia* (1999), which has most of the problems of a one-volume history, but is still a very enjoyable read. (That's the kind of thing that I've been reading these past few years, along with lots of what we call 'evidence' in the trade. At the moment I'm trawling through old issues of *Australian Aviation* (well, I'm not; I'm avoiding it by reading *SFC* and writing this at the moment) for a major project, and after a day of doing that, the last thing that is likely to appeal to me is to spend the evening reading too. So instead I indulge in my other hobby.

Remember, Leigh, that I spent two fulcrum years, 1969 and 1970, in sleepy old Ararat. I was attempting to teach, and I published 18 issues of *SF Commentary* during those two years. I saw little of Melbourne. I couldn't even pick up most Melbourne radio stations. The 1969 election, immortalised in David Williamson's play and film *Don's Party*, had little impact up country. The Coalition won again in 1969, just as they had always done. I had no idea that many people expected Labor to win that year, rather than have to wait until 1972. The first sign of something changing were Adrian Deamer's editorship of *The Australian*, and, much

more radically, the copies of Barton's Sunday newspapers that my flatmate brought back from his weekend trips to Melbourne. Censorship was breaking down; journalists were starting to make fun of politicians instead of covering up for them; and the great political cartoonists were strutting their stuff. It was on; whatever it eventually turned out to be, and despite the fact it lasted only a few years.

I enjoyed reading the David Lake letters. At the conclusion he seems to be looking towards the kind of future that Wells depicted in *The Time Machine* (because our books are now in order I could check my recollection that Lake had dealt with the topic at some time, and indeed there is a book of his titled *The Man Who Loved Morlocks* that I don't recall reading) with everything gradually running down — good old entropy. But the one thing that historians and science fiction writers should both know (those who look to the past and those who look to the future) is that the future will be nothing like we imagine it to be, and the past wasn't either. My guess is that people will make it into space on a permanent basis, and that eventually millions or billions of people will be living there, but that the earth will also go the way Lake suggests.

I also liked Lake's previous paragraph about how there has to be an objective truth. When I was doing my PhD, most historians around me were discovering postmodern thought and wandering off into all kinds of relativities. This led to a very interesting confrontation between me and another person at a symposium, where he pulled out his theorist to support his postmodern view and I pulled out mine to support my less imaginative view. In the end, I commented, it came down to whose theorists were bigger, and while everyone in the room had read the obligatory Baudrillard, Derrida, and Habermas (does anyone still read them?), nobody had read Hughes, Pinch, or Leo Marx, and so I was on my own. This led me to write in the subsequent issue of *Studies in Western Australian History* (vol. 17), if you will allow me the indulgence to quote myself:

A real world apart from human desires does appear to exist, at least to those whose job is to make things work in the world, such as engineers and medical practitioners. They have to proceed on the assumption that the world imposes non-negotiable constraints on what people can and cannot do such as gravity, electricity, chemical bonds and entropy. (To express this simply, the laws of nature mean we cannot socially construct the ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound; the best we can do is negotiate the meaning of the word 'tall'.)

(2 January 2002)

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
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SFC arrived when I was feeling low, and it cheered me up to hear from you. Many memories were stirred in me of good times and vivid life. I have been living a slowed-down existence here in Warrnambool for nearly three years now, and have been immersed in introspection (not necessarily a good thing). I have been reading quite a lot of books, many of which are science fiction. Greg Bear I particularly like, and Doris Lessing I always enjoy. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* and *Green Mars* were a good read, but at times a bit heavy going. Lately I've gone back to rereading early Asimov,

which is fun, especially as I see more of the man in the writing. Philip Dick or D. G. Compton are not available at the library here. Probably considered too controversial in this very staid (but often wild) town.

I have been virtually out of contact with any intellectual life, and the only conversation I get is almost exclusively in pubs. Many recent years of my life have been like living in a stimulus vacuum — not really an ideal life for an artist — but I'm certainly getting experience of a large cross-section of people. I attempted to assimilate as expanded a view of the world I now occupy as I can, but horror of much of it overwhelms me. I am sickened by the extent of lies and propaganda that the media try and force us to swallow, and I tend to take it as a personal affront. The real horror is that the vile misinformation is working on many people, and anything other than regurgitation is frowned upon or argued with. I should have been told when I was young and choosing the path of the artist that freedom of thought and expression are not necessarily socially acceptable behaviour (but my eternal stubbornness would have rejected this anyway).

I would like to have a decent conversation with you when next I come to Melbourne. I do want to discuss science fiction literature and its perceived effects with you, because I do see it having extensive social consequences. Witness especially the ideas of Gibson on cybertechnology. I've closely watched developments since reading *Neuromancer*. Some of his original ideas and expressions are now in everyday use. The artist as self-fulfilling prophet? Heady stuff. And scary.

When we met that day in Acland Street in 1997 I was saddened to hear of George Turner's death. Apart from enjoying his writing, I met George in his working environment (for our work coincided once) and on social occasions, and I came to like and admire the man himself. His sharp pen was needed to deflate some writers' swollen egos, and let's face it, some science fiction is unreadable.

Thanks also to Gene Wolfe's address. I will write to him, and ask if he still has and enjoys the painting that I gave him at the 1985 Aussiecon. They were good days with Rowena (Cory Daniells) and Chris (Johnston) and the graphic arts business going well. I read the 'Long Sun' trilogy recently and, as usual, was stimulated by Gene's worlds. I've also read *334* by Tom Disch, *Vacuum Flowers* by Michael Swanwick, *Pacific Edge* by Kim Stanley Robinson, *What's Bred in the Bone* by Robertson Davies, *Nostramo* and *Victory* by Joseph Conrad, and many other old publications of SF and the classics, and enjoying most. Cordwainer Smith is always worth rereading.

Please give my warm regards to Elaine, and best wishes to all of those people I haven't seen for so long. You are not forgotten.

(2 December 2001)

Stephen Campbell was my sidekick in Ararat during *SFC*'s first two years. I lost track of him for a couple of years. He then lived in St Kilda for a long time, had a bad accident in the late eighties, then disappeared from everybody's sight. As Elaine, Judy Buckrich, John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland and I were walking from George Turner's funeral in St Kilda to Sheherezade Restaurant on that freezing day in June 1997, suddenly there on the footpath in front of me was Stephen Campbell, looking very little different from when I had seen him last! I was so astonished that I said all the usual non-sayings, and didn't think to invite him to lunch with us. (Sudden surprises bring out the worst in me.) He



(15 November 2001)

One of the most memorable trips of my life was the drive from Chicago directly south to where Bob Tucker was living in 1973. The sky was dark by 4 p.m. The ground was absolutely flat. The sky became a vast bowl, and we were crawling along its floor. I still would like to explore the midwest US states properly, but doubt I ever will.

JAN HOWARD FINDER

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In *SFC 77* I found Sladek's article on Disch interesting and misdirected in many areas. Minnesota has no need for pyramids. Actually, it does have the Mall of America, which is pretty close to being a pyramid. The Midwest is dull only to folk like Sladek. The interesting thing is that maybe the so-called dullness is a great cause for inspiration. It is just possible that a writer needs just such an environment in order to dream and imagine. This is something found to be lacking in folk living with pyramids. Boring folk mistake plains and the like for dullness.

I don't seem to recall folk like Banjo Patterson, Henry Lawson or Arthur Upfield living in the Big Smoke, or on hilly interesting (?) countryside. Actually, I found my travels through the Australian Bush quite interesting. Of course, while I was raised in Chicago, it was in the middle of the Great Plains.

I went to a grad school which was listed as being 300 out of 300 as a party school among major universities. Funny, I had no problem finding parties or delightfully interesting young women to give backrubs to.

Sladek and Disch mistake militarism for the military. The media is a great font for misinformation. Oh yes, Hitler and British kings and religions and the like would force folk into the military for dubious reasons. Belike I'm looking at it from too short a perspective. Military schools are to the military as schools are to concentration camps. They sometimes seem to be great places for folk who like to abuse little boys. Funny that so many military schools are run by religious orders.

For the most part, in a non-draft situation the military in a few countries such as Australia, the UK, the States, Canada and New Zealand is *not* the place you get your first pair of shoes. Almost all military personnel in these countries' military are devoutly anti-war. They know how well a war could ruin one's whole day. They have to fight when the civilian yahoos have thoroughly screwed up and the military is called on to save their bacon.

Yes, assholes exist in the military. Of course, they exist in business and politics as well. Y'all have blessed us with Murdoch. Gee, thanks! Is it true that everyone in the Australian military is an automaton? They live to follow the wonderful rules laid down from on high?

I think Sladek and Disch paint interesting portraits of futility. Maybe that is why I never really cared for Disch's work. It is relatively easy to ask what is the purpose of our actions. You can then get into interesting, maybe, discussions about the purpose of life and the afterlife. If one looks at their impact on the world/universe, it is really a downer to realise that one makes no impact on life and the universe. However, some folk can and sometimes do make an impact.

Of course, one must remember that there are two purposes to the universe: (1) partying and (2) shopping. Everything else is just details.

disappeared along Acland Street. I had no idea where he had gone until I met Rowena Lindquist at Aussiecon III. She gave me the address of Stephen's mother in Warrnambool, and an *SFC* sent to that address finally reached Stephen. But he hasn't visited Melbourne since then, and I haven't visited Warrnambool (although I now know several Warrnambool SF people, who don't seem to know each other).

MARK L. OLSON

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I really regret that I never had a chance to meet Sladek at Minicon. (I'm not sure the local fan community even knew he lived near by!)

I grew up in the Mississippi River valley on the southeast edge of Minnesota, which is hilly and wooded, so that's my image of the state. The north is heavily wooded also, mostly with pine and dotted everywhere with lakes, big and small. As you go west and south, the land becomes rolling prairie (all farmed, of course), which is hardly flat by Nebraska standards, but flat enough by most peoples'.

The open sky is one of the things I most miss living in New England — during the middle of October, Priscilla and I went to Ditto in Bloomington, Illinois (about 100 miles south of Chicago), and driving back to Chicago to catch our plane we were treated to thunderstorms off in the distance. In New England, a storm is upon you with little warning because the pervasive trees and hills make the horizon close. Out there we could watch storms ten or twenty miles off. Lovely!

On other matters I enjoyed your ramblings. Mike Levy is a very good person. Too bad you didn't drop me a line on the awards. I could have given you Mike's address. He was a big help as I chaired the Science Fiction Research Association conference in 2001. For persons who are interested in SF, be they academics or not, the SFRA is a good organisation.

As to reviving my fanzine *The Spang Blah*, I keep thinking about it. I'm a little bit daunted by the material, some of it decades old, I would have to scan in.

Who knows?

I have seen *The Fellowship of the Ring* twice now. I'll probably see it a few more times. I really enjoyed it. It is not the book, but it is one damn fine movie. It brought back memories of when I was much involved with Tolkien fandom in the sixties and early seventies. I wrote a tribute to Tolkien which Ernest Lilley was willing to print in his eZine, *SFRevu*, <http://www.sfrevu.com/2001/9795%20December%20Cover/index.html>.

If you are interested, you can find a summary of my travels in Australia from 16 August 1999 to 4 February 2000 at http://www.lastsfa.org/finder/wombats_wanderings.html.
(10 February 2002)

Jan Howard Finder, who answers to the name of Wombat, was at Aussiecon III, but I can't remember meeting him there! Which is strange, because I remember meeting him at Aussiecon I. He was one of the first American fans to join ANZAPA, kept in touch through *Spang Blah* for quite a few years, then disappeared from my sight. When Michael Levy emailed me last year to say that I had been awarded a citation in the Pioneer Award (see *SFC 77*), I later discovered that Wombat was chairman of the SFRA Conference at which the award was going to be presented. Which is how I got back in touch with him after all these years.

Also, it turned out that he had custody of the Aussiefan films that were passed from one convention to another during the early 1970s, and then in the early 1980s, and were a major factor in winning the right to hold Aussiecon I and Aussiecon II. Wombat made copies of the films, then arranged to send the films to Australian fandom, via Mark Loney. The films now reside in the National Film Archive, and VCR copies have been made for those interested.

As for Tom Disch: I read his works because he is one of our field's most skilled practitioners of the fine art of pasting words on the page in the right order. It's a rare skill in any field of writing, let alone SF and fantasy.

Disch's opinions about SF are another thing. His *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of* has impelled two friends of mine, quite separately, to hurl the book across the room. I accepted the Hugo Award for this book at Aussiecon III on behalf of Tom, and I didn't feel at all tempted to hurl the Hugo across the stage. (I should have written my review of *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of* three years ago. I'm way behind in my reviewing schedule.)

BOB SMITH

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I am enjoying hot ham and pea soup and *SF Commentary 77* propped up in front of me. Between slurps, and trying not to spill any on that striking cover (and believe me, at 71, and recovering from a kidney op and heart damage, spills are not unusual), and some stimulating music on ABC FM, again I marvel at the Gillespie handiwork.

I have never read any Thomas M. Disch, which, I guess, is a shameful thing for an ancient SF fan to admit, but then again, when I look at all the SF authors paraded across the

coffee-table visuals I realise that — up through the years — I have missed quite a few. Bit late now, since catching up is not my game any more. However, Sladek's article makes absorbing reading in its own right. 'Military life' certainly fascinates grownups, but I suspect Sladek and Disch never struck an army other than the more-often-than-not gunghoism of the USA. It may saturate our TV screens at times, but ex-service people from other countries smile with amusement.

Your point taken with regard to the September 11 events; and not being on the Net means I probably avoided all the clichés you mention. Radio and TV were (and still are) bad enough. As one who was brought up in England on the problems and tragedies of going into Afghanistan (in a recent book, the writer said that the bones of old British regiments could still be found where massacres had taken place during three Afghan wars), I suppose I imagined a clandestine operation would have achieved better results.

That bit of garden shown in your last issue looks lovely, but that book room looks absolutely shocking. It's with smug satisfaction I can declare that the only books lying around in our house are the ones I am reading. (Currently by my comfy chair are two by Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* and *Seven Days in New Crete*, and the hefty *Oxford Classical Dictionary* is within reach). Quite a few of the science fiction titles you mention are, of course, on my shelves, for instant delectation. The very top shelf of your photograph shows what appear to be prozines lying flat . . . ?

One section of the fanzine collection is lying flat on the top shelf in that photo. (Other large sections are scattered throughout the house.) The shelf of books below it contains a few of my favourite writers: Philip Dick fills almost one half of the shelf, and Brian Aldiss almost the other, with some space for some of the many Le Guin and Disch books I own.

The prozines I own are hidden behind the other books of those shelves. Since I began collecting prozines only in 1960, most of my prozines are digest sized. I've never had the opportunity to buy pulps.

I thoroughly enjoyed browsing through all the books reviewed, and particularly appreciated the way you split them into their subgenres. I am surprised that Frank M. Robinson's *Science Fiction of the 20th Century: An Illustrated History* wasn't mentioned.

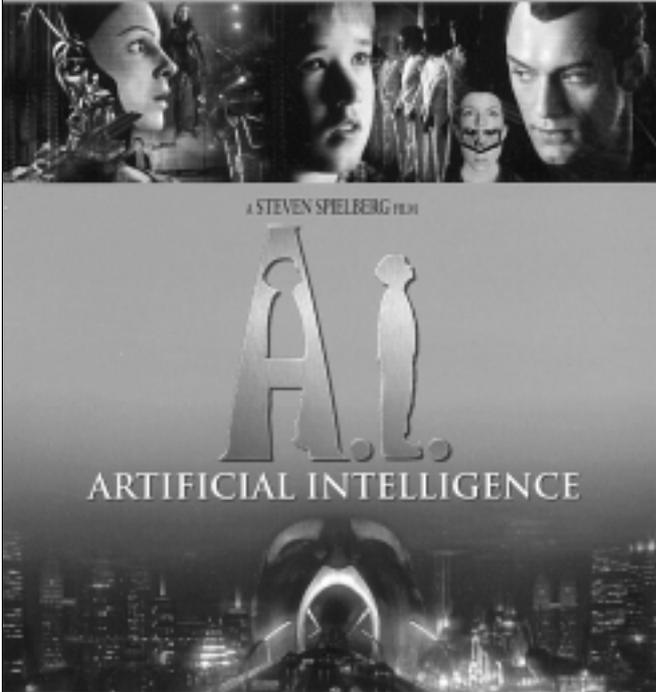
The email conversation with Robert Lichtman was most enlightening. I suppose the question I would ask both of you (remembering my own feeble attempts at fanzine publishing long ago): is it still *fun*?

David Lake, in particular, gave much food for thought, although much of his letter(s) was steeped in a sadness. I don't know what his age is, but mentally I was trying to grab him by the scruff and yell 'Wake up!' Hasn't anything *nice* happened to this fellow over the intervening years? Why nitpick the finer astronomical details of what is nothing but a work of fiction? Perhaps he would like to tidy up the spelling, grammar and punctuation of the poems of his hero William Blake!

(20 November 2001)

BRIAN W. ALDISS

HALEY JOEL OSMENT JUDE LAW



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SF Commentary 77 is a tremendously interesting issue, beating all such journals as *SF Studies* and *Extrapolation* by a mile. This is the tradition of good amateur talk about SF such as we thought used to exist.

On the subject of *A.I.*, opinions seem to vary. But certainly it is an attractive and intelligent movie, raising many interesting questions — for which we are not likely to find the answers yet awhile. Have you thought what the response of the Muslim world would be if we in 'The West' ever produced androids that were effigies of human beings? Well, it's my boast that I'm the only guy on the planet to sell a story to Kubrick and Spielberg. And, of course, when I did that I expected my written words to be translated completely for the screen. Nevertheless, it's curious to see the Swinton household in the first hour of the film rendered more or less as described in a story I wrote back in 1968!

My belief is that Kubrick left much material on the film behind him when he died and that Spielberg tried to work within Stanley's parameters. Certainly the photography is beautiful, and some scenes very haunting.

(6 December 2001)

When I wrote a review of the *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* collection for the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, I mentioned that a great deal had been used in the film *A.I.* from all three 'Supertoys' stories. Elements left out of the stories when the film was made — for example, that the father of the household is also the inventor of the boy android (played by William Hurt) — would have helped the film if they had been included. Most people I know hated the last section of the film, and regard it as 'Spielberg's bit'. Which means that the rest still looks and plays as a Kubrick film, especially the scenes at the beginning. Play *A.I.* on DVD, and one can always stop the film at its greatest moment, at the bottom of the sea. I see *A.I.* as both the essence of romanticism (that is, the search for the unattainable) and a critique of it. Almost all the current aims of hyper-techno-

logical society are self-contradictory, and romantic in the most fragile sense. If eventually you get what you really want, by manufacturing it, you might receive it for only one day. *A.I.* is one of the most beautiful films I've ever seen, one of the very few I can watch over and over again. So thanks to the technological ghods for DVD!

Brian also sent me a superb self-produced collection of meditative, rueful, heartfelt and often funny poems, *I Went to the House of the Sun*; and the fiction collection *A Cluster of Small Stories*, including 'Never'. Thanks.

ULRICH SPIEGEL

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Thank you very very much for sending me *SF Commentary 77*. It provided useful information not only about my favourite Australian author George Turner but also:

- For the first time I could see a quality photo of Franz Rottensteiner (I have only some photos, of much worse quality, in some German magazines.) By the way, Mr Rottensteiner told me that a review of mine of *Down There in Darkness* will appear in the next *Quarber Merkur*.
- I read about Engh's *Arslan*, which seems to be prophetic about the incidents of 11 September 2001.
- I read about one of the highlights of the days when I first began reading SF: *The City and the Stars*, which is in my memory the most popular novel by Olaf Stapledon not written by Stapledon.

Students of this year's Abitur course of mine had to deal with the beginning of Turner's 'The Fittest'. I like the short story and the novel version, *Drowning Towers*. German teachers tend to think that *Brave New World* is the only SF novel worth knowing.

(11 November 2001)

You complain that many people shy away from telling you their Top 10 lists.

That's to balance people, such as Chris Priest, who've begged me to drop the Top 10 lists.

Here is mine:

- 1 Jules Verne: *Journey to the Moon/Around the Moon*: maybe the most influential SF book, as it influenced engineers such as Werner von Braun and Herman Oberth, who set standards in rocket launching.
- 2 Arthur C. Clarke: *The City and the Stars*.
- 3 Stanislaw Lem: *Solaris*.
- 4 Stanislaw Lem: *The Star Diaries*. The German translations of both Lem books are direct translations from the Polish. I read some of Michael Kandel's English translations. They are quite good.
- 5 Olaf Stapledon: all his books.
- 6 Franz Rottensteiner: *Polaris Almanac*: only available in German; provided substantial criticism as well as fine (and not well-known) stories.
- 7 Strugatski Brothers: *Roadside Picnic*. An American writer would have made a 700-page book out of this material; but *Roadside Picnic* leaves out more than it says.
- 8 George Turner: *Drowning Towers*: Turner is the Dostoevski among SF writers, not Lem.
- 9 Ursula Le Guin's novels, especially *The Left Hand of Darkness*.
- 10 Kurt Lasswitz: *Auf der Sciftenblase* [sp?]

Some German writers deserve wider recognition, not only the forefather, Kurt Lasswitz (*Auf Zwei Planeten*):

- Alfred Döblin provided a good example of a writer of great variety. He wrote *Berge, Meer and Giganten* (*Mountains, Oceans and Giants*), which became a model for Gunther Grass. It's difficult reading, even for German readers. I don't know if it has ever been translated into English.
- Gisbert Haefs wrote seven 'Barracuda' books, later compressed to a trilogy. They are set on a Hainish-type world corrupted by three different feminist/fundamentalist/fanatical groups. In some ways he describes the present world situation. The hero, Barracuda, is very human, described fully. Haefs himself regards Jack Vance as a model.
- Andreas Eschbach's *Haarteppisrhuipfer*: also due for translation into English. This book is set in a distant future on a different world, and tells about the efforts of people to make their life worthwhile by weaving a carpet from the hair of their children. The narrative technique is a pattern of short stories (carpet-like). The solution leaves some readers perplexed. Other Eschbach books provide more action.

But why should English or American publishing houses print any of the current German writers? It is much cheaper to publish a third- or fourth-rate American writers. That's what German publishers think, too.

MATS LINDER

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Norrtälje, Sweden

It is always fun to read other people's lists of favourite works in one aspect or another. I started thinking and came up with I would really, really want to reread. (For instance, I want to reread *Crime and Punishment* but not *The Idiot*.)

Here, then, in no particular order, is a list of SF and fantasy novels that may not be among the 'best' or 'most important' ones that I have read — but that I am looking forward to reading again. (And which, in some cases, may turn out to be a disappointment . . .)

- High Rise: J. G. Ballard. Will not disappoint me; I've read it twice already. A fascinating counterpart to *Lord of the Flies*, but this time with adults; riveting and disquieting. (Just read the first paragraph!)
- Echo Round His Bones and *Mankind Under the Leash*: Thomas M. Disch. The only thing I really remember about these books is that I found them very interesting. And well-written, of course.
- The Owl Service: Alan Garner. A beautiful, sad and moving little book.
- Skallagrigg: William Horwood. Bought on a whim many years ago, it proved to be an original and gripping story about people affected by cerebral palsy; contains a slight fantasy element; should be well known in the SF/fantasy world.
- Hard to Be a God and *The Second Martian Invasion*: A. and B. Strugatsky. Masterpieces by the masters of stories with a moral content (but without a boring moment); will keep you thinking for a long time afterwards.
- Some of Your Blood: Theodore Sturgeon. I remember very little of it, apart from how very good I thought it was.
- Pillar of the Sky: Cecelia Holland. Another underrated masterpiece; one of the best stories about political power (although set in Stonehenge times) I have ever read.

- The Man in the Maze: Robert Silverberg. A 'minor' work from his golden age, probably, but such an original story.
- Untouched by Human Hands, *Citizen in Space*, *Pilgrimage to Earth*, *Notions: Unlimited*, *Store of Infinity*, and *Shards of Space*: Robert Sheckley. Short stories that are fun to read.
- Gloriana: Michael Moorcock. Simply marvellous; this is what 'historically inspired' fantasy is all about.
- Nature's End: Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka. I have a soft spot for environmental-disaster stories; this is one of the best. (Two other fine ones, Wylie's *The End of the Dream* and Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up*, I have already reread enough.)
- The Prometheus Crisis: Thomas N. Scortia and Frank M. Robinson. Another disaster novel; this time about nuclear power. Very realistic and insightful, as I remember it.
- Last and First Men: Olaf Stapledon. How could I not include it?
- The Once and Future King: T. H. White. Such a masterful combination of fairy tale and real people, anachronisms and realism (at least so it seemed to me).
- Dune: Frank Herbert. I would like to see if it is still as exciting as when I first read it more than 30 years ago.
- 1984: George Orwell. Such good writing; such an interesting story.
- Castle Crispin: Allen Andrews. A moving, adult sequel to the more YA-oriented (but still fine) *The Pig Plantagenet*. Why is it not better known?
- The Food of the Gods and *The Island of Dr Moreau*: H. G. Wells. I have already reread *The Time Machine* and *The First Men in the Moon*.
- The Lord of the Rings: J. R. R. Tolkien. Have not read it in 30 years — will I still enjoy it as much?
- Glimpses: Lewis Shiner. A fascinating story, in particular for those of us who were young at the time of Hendrix, Doors, Beatles and Beach Boys, by yet another underrated fine sf writer.
- Jack of Shadows: Roger Zelazny. Great fun 25 years ago.
- Zodiac: Neal Stephenson. Another story about environmental problems, written with such vitality and humour as to make it still my Stephenson favourite, even above *Snow Crash*.

Most of the books I most want to reread are not SF or fantasy books. I tend to reread SF and fantasy favourites anyway, when I write articles for magazines like this. But nobody has ever commissioned me to write about Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, or Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* (the greatest Australian novel), or Patrick White's *Voss*, or Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, all of which bubble away in the mind, begging me to return to them.

I last reread Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* in 1976, and that was a startling experience. In 1965, when I read it first, none of the events in that book had happened to me. By 1976, a few of them had. This made it a different book. So how different a book would, say, *Voss* be in 2002, thirty-two years after I first read it, or *Richard Mahoney*, twenty-eight years after I first read it?

JOHN HERTZ

**236 S Coronado Street, No. 409,
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It's no use my putting down what you put up. You already know what I think of Disch, and *Bring the Jubilee*, and you can guess what I think of *The Prestige*. You also know I think *The City and the Stars*, which I have indeed reread recently, is an enduring classic; I could put up what you put down, although you kindly printed Colin Steele's praise. I quite agree with you that 'Flowers for Algernon', which was masterly, should never have been bloated into *Flowers for Algernon*.

In your Recommended Nineties list, I don't know what to make of, for example, *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy*, which, like the Davidson *Treasury*, was resplendent but written before the decade began.

The *Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* volume, containing the 'young Doctor Eszterhazy' stories, was published in the nineties, quite a bit later than the *Investigations*, the paperback version of the first series of stories.

You say gaps stand where you haven't read. I can't tire of calling R. Zabor, *The Bear Comes Home*, best fantasy novel of 1999; it came from without our community, and has been ignored by us, though it's done well enough, all told, to appear in paperback. I think Tim Powers' *Expiration Date* the best fantasy of 1996, and I commend Damon Knight's *Why Do Birds* (1992). Where is Niven? *Destiny Road* (1997), *The Ringworld Throne* (1996), *The Gripping Hand* (1993) and *Fallen Angels* (1991) all deserve applause.

Steele, in his scannings, deftly skewered an academic who bleated that SF is 'narrative manipulations in the interests of imaginative gratification'. Roscoe! It had better not be! This backlit your restatement from Sue Thomason a few pages earlier, 'Fiction about a viable, imaginable future should show how that future will benefit people who are not like me and don't share my assumptions'.

(11 November 2001)

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

**27 Borough Road, Kingston on Thames,
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Talking of friends: Phil Harbottle tells me that Peter Hamilton, who edited *Nebula* back in the fifties, is now seriously ill, and at the last vintage book fair, I met Philip High for the first time.

A few recent recommended books:

- The *Prestige* by Christopher Priest.
- Any of the 'Cat Who' books by Lilian Jackson Braun.
- The *Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* by a Tibetan, and first published in India. It concerns the missing years in Holmes's life, when he visited India and Tibet. A fascinating adventure yarn of the Victorian age, with a Kipling character acting the role of Dr Watson.
- The *Amsterdam Cops: Collected Stories* by Jan Willem de Wetering: Dutch police in action.

(2 December 2001)

No sooner had I typed in your recommendation of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* than Dennis Callegari walked into the usual Friday night Melbourne gathering with a copy under his arm. He had found one copy in a book discount store and thought it looked interesting.

BERND FISCHER

Damiansweg 95, D-50765 Koln, Germany

Though I rarely read SF these days, I enjoyed *SFC 77*. There is always something in it reminding me of the old days (sixties, seventies) and the authors I used to read (Disch, Wolfe, Dick, Aldiss . . .) back then.

I would like to read the details of the Lem-Rottensteiner dispute. In one of the most recent issues of Rottensteiner's *Quarber Merkur* (the other SF magazine I subscribe to) I read, to my astonishment, a harsh dismissal of Lem's literary qualities made by Franz Rottensteiner. I couldn't make any sense of it, since FR was the one person who made Lem popular (at least in Germany and Austria), starting in the sixties in his own magazine, and in numerous others.

I trust you've already read Franz's letter at the beginning of 'Pinlighters', Bernd.

I read much crime fiction these days: Swedish authors, such as Mankell, Nesser and Erickson; and Andrea Camilleri, from Italy, with his Commissario Montalbano (four of his novels have been successfully adapted for TV). Mankell is a big name in Germany. His last three novels have reached No. 1. His latest, *Firewall*, the final Wallander novel, will do the same, no doubt.

Some recent albums I liked include *Love and Theft* (Dylan), *Ten New Songs* (Cohen; I'm a long-time admirer of his works, and www.leonardcohenfiles.com is my favourite web site), *Heretics and Prophecies* (John Kay, of Steppenwolf fame; I just learned that his three brilliant solo albums from the seventies are available as CDs from www.steppenwolf.com).

I remember a letter you sent me some nine years ago where you wrote about songs you don't have on vinyl or CD but would like to have. Internet was not available to us then; these days you could try to search for these songs on such sites as Gnutella, Audiogalaxy, Morpheus and WinMX. I found many songs, mainly from the sixties, that were only available on vinyl as mp3 files.

(12 November 2001)

Not even my favourite CD pusher, Steve Smith from Readings, has ever been able to track down the two old 45s I would most like to own and hear again: Jerry Byrd's 'Memories of Maria', an instrumental (Hawaiian steel guitar solo and orchestral backing), written by Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, issued on Monument in 1962; and Floyd Cramer's 'Heartless Heart', a C&W version of a Chopin prelude, released in 1962 on RCA. Maybe some German collector has them and would be willing to sell them. (My third must-have, David Box's 'I've Had My Moments', also written by Roy Orbison and Joe Melson, turned up in a collection of old 45s sitting on the desk at The Last Record Store, just down Smith Street, a few hundred metres south of our place.)

ANDREW WEINER

**26 Summerhill Gardens, Toronto,
Ontario M4T 1B4, Canada**

George Turner in *SFC 76*: quite a fearless critic. And rather hard on Bester. I suspect that if I reread *The Demolished Man*, I might well agree with some of Turner's complaints, which is why I have no plans to do so. *The Stars My Destination*, on the other hand, remains the one true masterpiece of American SF, although I probably shouldn't reread that one either.

Indeed, who has time to reread anything? I was quite alarmed at that photo of your to-read pile. I break my books-to-be-read down into smaller piles and scatter them around, but there are still an awful lot of them.

The Sladek piece in *SFC 77* made me want to reread a lot of early Disch (although I probably won't), and also made me wonder why I never did read *334*, despite owning it for more than two decades. Or more accurately, why I never got past page 39, where I last turned over the corner of the page, all those years ago. But that's more than I ever read of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, a book I've been carting around since around 1969.

I look forward to the next *SFC* and/or *TMR* to find out what you've been listening to lately. Bob Dylan's *Love and Theft* has been getting a lot of airplay around here, once I finally tore myself away from CNN. Otherwise I've been playing a lot of gloomy alt-country (Walkabouts, Handsome Family, Gillian Welch) and 60s psychedelia.

PS: I'm thrilled to squeak on to a Gillespie best-of list, but the title of the book is actually *This Is the Year Zero*.

(30 November 2001)

I must have read *The Stars My Destination* too late in my life, because when I finally got around to it at the age of 27, it seemed to me merely an extended comic strip, without any interesting ideas about the future. I still like many of Bester's short stories, but I've sold both his novels.

When I read Disch's *334* in the same year I read *The Stars My Destination*, it seemed to have the most interesting characters I'd ever encountered in a science fiction novel. It also had that just-off-the-present-day feeling that I like so much in SF novels.

I could give you long lists of CDs I've bought recently, but I don't seem to have listened to many recent purchases. CDs that stay in the ear include Warren Zevon's *My Ride's Here* (although his prescient *Life'll Kill Ya* (2000) is a lot better); Solomon Burke's *Don't Give Up on Me*; an anthology of Australian female singers titled *The Women at the Well: The Songs of Paul Kelly*; the Blasters' *Complete Slash Recordings* (two CDs); Cassandra Wilson's *Belly of the Sun*; the 4-CD version of the Band's *Last Waltz* film soundtrack; Jay Farrar's *Sebastopol*; Kevin Welch's *Millionaire*; and Blind Boys of Alabama's *Spirit of the Century*.

I loved the music in *O Brother Where Art Thou*, although it sounds less interesting on CD than when used in the film. But it's great background music all the same.

I actually saw Bob performing in Toronto a few weeks ago. He was in full arena mode, a little too heavy on the 60s classics for my liking, but he did a great 'Sugar Baby' and one of the best versions of 'Just Like a Woman' I've ever heard, and I've heard quite a few on tapes and bootleg CDs. He also did a bunch of his (anti?) war songs, including 'John Brown', which I've always found painfully simplistic, and 'Hard Rain'.

My writing career? Actually I don't do journalism any more, not in years. I mostly I work with my wife on her consulting business: we sell career planning materials and seminars for organisations (details, if you're interested, at www.bbmcareerdev.com). In theory, this leaves me enough time to write fiction part of the time. In practice, I'm very good at wasting time. I did recently finish a new novel that is starting to make the rounds of publishers. My last novel ended up being published only in French! — SF publishers said it was too mainstream, and vice versa. I do have an idea

for another, plus I'd like to write some more short stories, but once you stop writing for awhile, it's hard to get going again. Any day now, maybe . . .

At the recent Australian national convention, there were lots and lots of bright, young, earnest wannabe writers. I'm sure they all feel they have fabulous careers ahead of them. What will happen to their bright happy smiles as they slowly realise, during the next few years, that *no matter how good they are as writers* and *no matter how much effort they put into their writing*, almost nobody Out There is interested in publishing high-quality novels and short stories? I'm thinking of the recent experience of Chris Priest, as outlined in his Acnestis fanzine. He had great trouble negotiating the sale of his latest novel, *The Separation*, despite the quality of the book and his status as a major British novelist.

MEREDITH McARDLE

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I found *SFC 77* on my doorstep when I staggered in after midnight, and intended just to have a very quick flick through before continuing the stagger towards bed. I resurfaced about an hour later having been quite unable to resist the temptation to read the articles properly.

Apart from making me realise that I don't know nearly enough about George Turner and Thomas Disch, *SF Commentary* has also brought home to me how much excellent Australian SF and fantasy there is, although I have never before heard of it.

I recently read and enjoyed *The Resurrectionists*, by Kim Wilkins, who is Australian. The blurb on the front of the book from the *Herald Sun* says; 'Move over Poppy Z. Brite — Australia has its own madam of horror.' I'll be looking out for more of her stuff. Also, I believe Garth Nix is to be published in Britain soon, so at least there's a bit of cross-culturisation.

I'm told that Kim Wilkins is doing well in Britain, and Garth Nix's *Sabrael* and *Lirael* are selling large quantities in America.

I'm a sucker for short reviews/comments. They either confirm my own views, give an interesting insight into alternative views, offer ideas on authors and titles I might want to look at myself, or put me off books for life. So I loved your Best of the Years lists and the Scanners columns. In return, I'm going to tell you about the best books I have read recently. They're in no particular order, but all count as brilliant in my view:

Fantasy

Tim Powers: **Declare**

You never know what to expect in a Tim Powers book, apart from the fact that magic and mystery are going to wander into our world in the most fantastical and weird way possible. At the same time, Powers can make it seem perfectly normal and acceptable, which is part of his own magic. This book is set in the mundane world of spies, but the hero soon finds out that there are other forces affecting his progress in the 'great game'. The book skips about in time and place, but Powers never lets you lose track of what's going on. The only disappointment I found is that the book ended too soon. It has a deep and brooding atmosphere, and while there isn't an awful lot of action, what there is is exciting and intense.

Steve Cockayne: ***Wanderers and Islanders***

A fantasy, more magic realism than dragons and unicorns, set in an alternative world that is in some ways like ours of about 100 years ago. There are gas lamps and electricity, but there is also a science of magic used to predict future outcomes, and normal children don't know how to stand on their heads. There are three central characters — an impoverished, genteel ex-soldier, the king's counsellor in magic, and a young boy, whose stories eventually intertwine in a gentle and unassuming way. Although I was completely baffled by the ending and, in fact, by the meaning of it all, it draws you in so thoroughly that I really didn't care that I didn't understand it.

Lois McMaster Bujold: ***The Curse of Chalion***

Although it is set in a sort of post-medieval, pre-industrialish kingdom, this is another totally unusual fantasy book, showing that there is still originality in the field. Bujold's great strength is in creating characters that the reader becomes interested in. She lets them develop in front of us so that we empathise with their feelings and motivations, and begin to care about them. Here, the focus is on Cazari, traumatised by his experiences on a slave galley, who is trying to ease himself into a quiet, unassuming life when he finally returns to his home country. Instead, he finds himself thrown into the centre of a political and supernatural maelstrom. As the backdrop to this world, Bujold has created a religion that is logical and believable.

Dave Duncan: ***The Gilded Chain***

Young boys devote themselves to an order of swordsmen to become 'king's blades' — warriors magically bonded to their king or one of his favourite courtiers. This concept could have degenerated into Conan-style swashbuckling, but instead Duncan is concerned with personal honour and commitment to a cause. The actual fighting takes very much second place to the interplay of personalities and an exploration of the ethics of loyalty. In that, it reminded me quite a lot of Bujold's *Curse of Chalion*.

Kevin Crossley-Holland: ***Arthur: The Seeing Stone***

This is told as short diary entries by Arthur, a young boy living in 1199 in the Welsh Marches, a dangerous 'between place' separating England from Wales. He belongs to the feudal aristocracy of the time, but his sharp and sweet observations are shared between his family, the villagers, the priest and the strange 'between man', Merlin. When Merlin gives the boy a 'seeing stone', he begins to glimpse in the stone the story of a long-ago king with his own name. So two stories entwine in the book, but for those of us who know the Arthurian legends already, the medieval Arthur, with all his problems, sorrows and joys, is far more absorbing. The first in a trilogy.

Diana Wynne Jones: ***Year of the Griffin***

I can't mention great recent fantasy books without including my favourite author's most recent book, even though it came out ages ago now, in 2000. This is a sequel to the well-received *Dark Lord of Derkholm*, and is best enjoyed if that book is read first. The world of the Dark Lord has thrown off the yoke of Chesney's Magical Tours, which has turned it into a fantasyland for off-world tourists. Now people are trying to settle down and look to a normal future. The university of magic, in particular, has plans to beg extra funds from the parents of all the year's new students.

Unfortunately for the university, a whole bunch of students desperately don't want their families to know where they are. With good reason, as assassins, regiments of soldiers, grasping dwarf chiefs and bandits are just some of the people who then descend upon the university head. And all he wants to do is research for a trip to the moon. This is great fun, hugely enjoyable and light-hearted, yet including serious points about responsibility and growing up.

Science fiction

Neal Stephenson: ***Snow Crash***

A friend persuaded me that I'd given up on cyberpunk too soon, and that I should try reading *Snow Crash*. Was I grateful! Like all cyberpunk books, it's fast paced, and there are plenty of future technologies, a virtual world, gangsters and street-smart youths of all sorts. There are also plenty of absurdities that seem like side-tracks, such as an android dog and the section devoted to whether the pizza-delivery man will make the delivery in time. However, everything ties up neatly, and the plot actually works. I may not return to cyberpunk, but I'll certainly read anything by Neal Stephenson.

Neal Stephenson: ***The Diamond Age***

Stephenson is certainly versatile. *The Diamond Age* is completely different from *Snow Crash*, or from anything else for that matter. Here we have a future where our world has redivided itself into autonomous enclaves, but not necessarily along racial boundaries. There can be corporate countries, or ones based on historical cultures. In the Victorian enclave, its residents try to reproduce the manners and order of Britain's Victorian era, without, however, the associated hypocrisy and social horrors. Its ruling hierarchy sits physically next to an overcrowded, mainly ethnic Chinese area, and threaded throughout the world are underground, non-geographical groupings, such as the Drummers. When a Victorian engineer is hired to create an intelligent guidance manual for young ladies, he doesn't realise how much he has exceeded his commission. But when he loses his own illicit copy and it falls into the hands of a waif, individuals and nations are going to learn just how powerful the teaching aid can be.

Vernor Vinge: ***A Deepness in the Sky***

Although one of the same characters appears in Vinge's awesomely good *A Fire upon the Deep*, this space epic can happily stand alone. Vinge goes to a lot of trouble to create realistic aliens with a full, logical and truly alien world, as well as varying humans and sciences. Although *Deepness* is a book of alien contact, most of its conflict comes from the clash of different human societies. On several levels, it is a tense adventure story, but I enjoyed it mostly for the development of the characters — both human and alien — for the twists and turns in the plot, and for the thought-provoking use and misuse of technologies.

There are probably more items that should go in my own hall of fame, but these are the ones that suddenly sprang to mind.

(15 February 2002)

I 'met' Meredith over the Internet because Ros Gross suggested I get in touch with her, and that's because Meredith, Ros and I are all admirers of the great Diana Wynne Jones. Ros gave a very enjoyable Nova Mob talk about Diana Wynne Jones at the end of 2001.

WENDELL WAGNER**9146 Edmonston Road, Apt. 201,
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(24 February 2002)

On page 32 in issue 77 of *SF Commentary*, you quote from a column in *The Washington Post* by Michael Dirda that quotes from the letter I wrote Dirda about my list of favorite science fiction and fantasy novels. I thought you might be interested in seeing my lists. These aren't quite identical to the ones I sent Michael Dirda back in 1994, since I periodically rethink my list of favourites.

My 20 Favorite Science Fiction Long Works (longer than 25,000 words)

- 1 Olaf Stapledon: *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*
- 2 Philip Jose Farmer: The 'Riverworld' series
- 3 Frank Herbert: *Dune* (and maybe its sequels)
- 4 Walter Miller Jr: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*
- 5 Alfred Bester: *The Stars My Destination*
- 6 Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- 7 H. G. Wells: *The Time Machine*
- 8 Philip K. Dick: *The Man in the High Castle*
- 9 Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth: *The Space Merchants*
- 10 Theodore Sturgeon: *More than Human*
- 11 Roger Zelazny: *Lord of Light*
- 12 Arthur C. Clarke: *Against the Fall of Night*
- 13 Stanislaw Lem: *Solaris*
- 14 Ken Grimwood: *Replay*
- 15 Joe Haldeman: *The Forever War*
- 16 Michael Frayn: *The Tin Men*
- 17 Larry Niven: *Ringworld*
- 18 Robert Heinlein: *Stranger in a Strange Land*
- 19 Clifford Simak: *City*
- 20 Isaac Asimov: *The End of Eternity*

My 20 Favorite Fantasy Long Works (longer than 25,000 words)

- 1 Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*
- 2 J. R. R. Tolkien: *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*
- 3 Peter Beagle: *The Last Unicorn*
- 4 Mervyn Peake: The 'Gormenghast' trilogy
- 5 C. S. Lewis: *Till We Have Faces*
- 6 Ursula K. Le Guin: The 'Earthsea' books
- 7 G. K. Chesterton: *The Man Who Was Thursday*
- 8 Madeleine L'Engle: The 'Time' quartet (*A Wrinkle in Time*, *The Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, *Many Waters*)
- 9 Ray Bradbury: *Dandelion Wine*
- 10 John Fowles: *The Magus*
- 11 T. H. White: *The Once and Future King*
- 12 Patricia McKillip: *Stepping from the Shadows*
- 13 C. S. Lewis: The 'Ransom' trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*)
- 14 R. A. McAvoy: *Tea with the Black Dragon*
- 15 H. P. Lovecraft: *The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath*
- 16 John Myers Myers: *Silverlock*
- 17 Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman: *Good Omens*
- 18 L. Frank Baum: *The Wizard of Oz*
- 19 Daniel Pinkwater: *Borgel*
- 20 Mark Twain: *The Mysterious Stranger*

You mention Nick Hornby in regard to the making of lists. When I saw the movie *High Fidelity*, my reaction was 'Hey, this is about my life'. I live in an apartment full of my collections and I make lists of my favourites.

I suppose every Gillespiezine reader knows that I've been making lists since 1959, when I was twelve years old, starting with pop music hit parades. I added a book list in 1962, a film list in 1965, and various others since. In the 1970s, I built a retrospective list of favourite short stories.

I first started concocting an LP list (later CD list) for a Foyster fanzine in the early eighties, but this list poses some problems. Should I list CDs bought during a particular year? But that means waiting for several years until I've listened to everything I've bought in any year. CDs heard for the first time during a particular year? I could do that, but that's not how I list my incoming CDs. Perhaps I'll go back to 1985, the first year we owned a CD player, and start all over again.

TERENCE GREEN**154 Randolph Road,
Toronto ONT M4G 3S4, Canada**

In one of those bits of synchronicity that makes no sense, this morning I mailed out a copy of my latest novel (*St Patrick's Bed*) to you, and this afternoon, *SFC 77* dropped through the mail slot. Life continues to amaze.

A quick browse flatters, in that I see *Shadow of Ashland* and *A Witness to Life* both in the number 3 spot in your Recommended lists for 1996 and 1999 respectively. Many thanks for the kindness. Too bad most in Australia are unlikely to see copies.

The new one, *St Patrick's Bed*, is the sequel to *Ashland*, set 11 years later. Forge Books once again did a fine job of packaging it, and they make a splendid threesome.

Shadow of Ashland will be broadcast on CBC Radio, on the show *Between the Covers*, as a single-voice reading, in fifteen 15-minute episodes, spanning three weeks, sometime after Christmas. Short wave, anyone?

(14 November 2001)

I've still never written a good long review of your recent trilogy. That's a potential subject for a Nova Mob talk. I just hope I've conveyed how much pleasure your books have given me over recent years.

PATRICK O'LEARY**2701 Douglas Drive, Bloomfield Hills MI 48304,
USA**

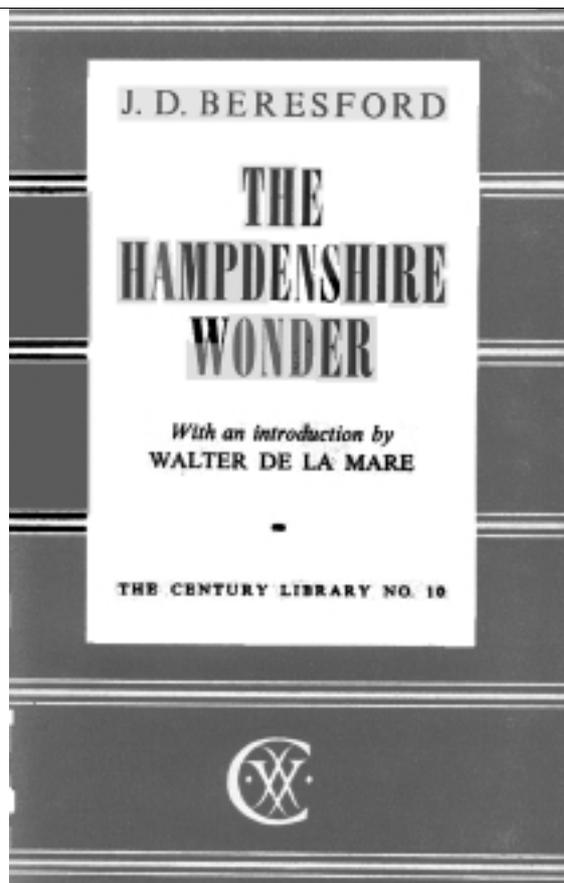
I've got the .pdf file of *SFC 76* and *77* — thanks very much. Boy, I love my cable modem. I loved Turner's breakdown of the narrative structure of *The Dispossessed*, which I always thought set a high standard of ingenuity and achievement. I loved your comments about Engh's *Arslan* as well as Jeffery's review, and Sladek's Tom Disch article. I just met Disch in March at the ICFA in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Seems a nice guy, and his work is aces.

Perhaps I can coax David Hartwell to send you a reviewer's copy of *The Impossible Bird*. Let me know if that doesn't work out.

(21 November 2001)

Moshe Feder from Tor sent me a proof copy, and Steve Jeffery has reviewed your book.

STEVE JEFFERY**44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxon OX5 2XA UK**



Assuming John Crowley doesn't unexpectedly rush into publication with the fourth part of the 'Aegypt' quartet in the next few days, you stand a good chance of being the Best Thing Ever in Kidlington for a whole week. (Which may or may not be better than being declared the Best Thing Ever in Croydon for a day — I'll leave you to decide).

Wondrous indeed is *SFC 77*, as is the sight of your bookroom, circa 2001, and I feel slightly less intimidated by our own, where it is (just) possible for a cat to pick a path from door to windowsill.

FRANK WEISSENBORN
Flat 17, 9 Kooyong Road,
Caulfield North VIC 3161

Any silence I've expressed over *SFC 76* is actually a compliment. George Turner's writing, and the way you constructed this issue, has given me much cause for thought. I've found myself reduced to silence by voice and commentary to which I feel I'm too young or innocent to pass sound comment upon.

I'm left floored by this paradox: even before knowing about Turner or his views, three of my favourite books were *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed* and *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*. Here I agree with George, but I have to contend with his dislike for a lot of New Wave literature and a list of authors for whom I have a high respect.

Again re George Turner: I forgot to mention Beresford's *The (Hampdenhire) Wonder* on my list of favourite books. I discovered it at Slow Glass Books last year before I'd read *SFC 76*, and bought it largely because it came in such a handsome edition and seemed quite rare. What a superbly constructed work. It reminded me of everything I love about fiction, and I mean any kind of fiction. So here is where I take my hat off to you and George. You have both held true to the importance of SF, not been afraid to carry on a fight

to make its voice heard.

(14 November 2001)

I wouldn't have known about *The Hampdenhire Wonder* without George referring to it from time to time. I was over the moon when he gave me his copy, and the book proved as interesting as he had always claimed.

RAY WOOD
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Tom Coverdale is alive and well [and sighted at a few meetings of the Nova Mob during 2002], and we continue to collaborate on this crazy book, tentatively titled *The Hook Book: How Writers Begin their Books*, but hope to finish it soon. We'll be working together on it through his coming long vacation.

If you or your readers happen to have in mind any truly great openings to any books (no shorter than novella-length) at all — 'literary', genre, non-fiction — we'd love to know about them; we're still looking for them. (We regard a narrative hook/introduction/opening to a book as being maybe as much as its first three pages; and also accept them to either prologue or chapter one if a book has a prologue/prelude.)

(15 November 2001)

The book hasn't appeared yet, so I presume you and Tom are still looking for candidates. I could list plenty of favourite first paragraphs from SF stories. A few years ago, when you first mentioned *The Hook Book*, Ray, I promised to write some of them down, but I didn't have the time. The best anthology of story hooks would be the complete short fiction of Cordwainer Smith, *The Rediscovery of Man* (the giant NESFA Press hardback, not the short Gollancz paperback), but you've ruled out short stories. The 'proem' at the beginning of Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* is probably the best novel introduction in Australian literature, but you would want to quote it in its entirety.

STEVE SNEYD
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West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, UK

The *Viriconium* review reminded me of a long-term intention to track down (if it exists) a portal from 'our' world to Viriconium in a Meme England cafe in Huddersfield. (There are four ME branches here, and Harrison has spent time in the area, so it's possible that he describes this link point.)

Recently I had a mini-jag of rereading Moorcock's 'Jerry Cornelius' books. They seem much darker when reread than at the time of their first appearance. Indeed, the 11 September bombings seem a very Cornelian act, even if Osama Bin Laden had a very different ideological cloak from that of Jerry Cornelius and his fellow multiverse anarchists. Which morphs to the reviewer's description of Banks's 'culture' as 'a loosely knit socialist utopia' (re *Excession*, p. 61). If humans being, in effect, amusing pets of immensely more intelligent, powerful machines is a socialist utopia, I wonder what a slave dystopia would look like? 'Loosely knit', yes, but only in the sense that the supermachines follow their own rival agendas, like Greek gods or Afghan warlords, but tangents socialism at no particular point that I can see.

(16 November 2001)

Race Mathews and Murray McLachlan have both given

papers to the Nova Mob on Iain Banks's SF novels, so I hand your question over to them. I'm still hoping that Murray will submit his paper to *SF Commentary* or *Steam Engine Time*.

In your editorial you mentioned the book collection of Ruth and Eddie Frow. Their library now has, we hope, permanent status as the Working Class Movement Library (wcml.org.uk). It welcomes donations of relevant material (I've given them a few things kept from long-ago leftie activist days). In SF terms, after all, from Shelley on, one strand of Utopian SF relates to the WCM.

(28 November 2001)

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I really haven't made any comments on John Foyster's illness, but thank you for keeping us all informed via the listservs. So many of our numbers have been in bad health and worse.

September 11 . . . we are living in interesting times, in every sense of the curse. You're right; the perpetrators may be Arab in descent and lineage, but the ideas they carried out are all American in origin. One of my first thoughts after this disaster was that we are living in a Tom Clancy novel, and within a day, CNN had interviewed Clancy himself about this. He admitted that this was something he had thought up to put in a novel, but thought it too fantastic, even for one of his books. Movies, novels, television shows . . . America provides the plans for its own damage and potential destruction. Canada took on many redirected planes once air travel was halted within North America, and folks from Texas and Oklahoma got to see places like Gander, Newfoundland. Koreans on a KAL flight got to see Whitehorse, Yukon. They saw that civilisation and hospitality existed far outside their borders. Some people did ask why this horrible thing happened, and they were branded as unpatriotic and treasonous for not wanting to join the mob and Get Them Back Immediately. A university professor on the west coast nearly lost her job when she described the reasons for this attack as being continuous American meddling in others' business, and their foreign policies being soaked in the blood of innocents. So much for freedom of speech.

I found fandom at the age of 18, and I mark 24 years of fannish fun and follies in a couple of weeks. Do the math; I'm a hoopy frood at the age of 42. Yet, I feel old. I am older than many local fannish friends, and my interests would seem to belong to someone 10 or 15 years older. My interests include fanhistory and fanzines, and few here share them with me. Yet, I have tried to be younger by knowing younger friends a little better. With a little work and understanding, I have tried and largely succeeded at understanding the attractions inherent in anime and manga, filking, horror, vampires, furies and more. (My start in fandom was in *Star Trek* and other media fandom, so at least I can understand that, too.) Saw the Harry Potter movie yesterday, too! I have tried to treat my incursions into unfamiliar fandoms as continuing education. I have learned about Bardic circles, plushies, j-pop and cosplay, muggle that I am, and there's still lots more to know. Perhaps with a knowledge of fandom young and old, I'll stay a little younger myself. (Keeping more active, and at least trying to diet, and trying to live a little outside the usual sedentary fannish lifestyle has helped, too.)

My finances aren't sufficient to give a home to books as

much as I'd like to. So many books, so little time and money. However, we do have semi-organised clumps of books here and there about the apartment, full of science fiction, fantasy, mystery/detective, astronomy, space, humour and religion. As you and Elaine did, Yvonne and I put our respective book collections together, and have built them up over the years. Most of them are used, but still contain those marvellous stories intact. I am making a serious dent in my To Be Read shelf, so I'll be able to justify buying more books soon. My shelves are about full, and I don't want to start boxing books and moving them to storage space.

I see a name from the past . . . Eva Hauser. I met Eva a couple of times at Worldcon, once in Holland, and I think once in Chicago. Lovely lady, and very pleasant to talk to. She was editing a pro SF magazine in Czechoslovakia at the time. I hope she'll come back to SF some time in the future.

I'm very happy that you're willing to send me a real, paper edition of *SFC* to me in Canada. I think I work best when I have a paper fanzine beside me, and a computer in front of me. It's much more difficult when the fanzine isn't in the In box, but somewhere online, and waiting to be responded to. It's easy to forget it's there. When I do receive a .pdf file, I usually print it out and make it as fanzinish as possible. Eric Lindsay's newest *Gegenschein* needs some response, and I must remind myself to get with it from time to time. Thank Ghod for a Palm Pilot; otherwise, I'd never remember. A zine's physical presence is usually reminder enough for me.

As I read more about George Turner, I find myself making comparisons between him and Judith Merril. Judith was the grande dame of SF in Toronto for some years, although some had other names for her. I remember working in a green room at a convention in Ottawa, and Judith was there, discussing and tearing down our local convention to anyone who would listen. She proudly admitted she'd done it for years, and I couldn't hold myself back. I blasted her for ruining the efforts of people she barely knew, and if she was such an expert at running cons, she could start being more constructive than destructive. Or words to that effect; I don't remember exactly. I got out of there before I said anything I might have regretted; I certainly didn't regret anything I did say, and I still don't. Judith and I had little further interaction, and it stayed that way until she passed away.

A word to Casey June Wolf . . . are you a member of BCSFA in Vancouver? I find it strange sometimes that someone who lives in the big city will not know about the local club.

Casey has been in Haiti all year, and has sent two despatches via her friends in Vancouver. I suspect she'll get in touch with you when she gets back.

In the WAHF list . . . I first met Terence Green at a course he was teaching at a public library about science fiction. That may have been close to 15 years ago.

The SF reference books Colin Steele mentions would be quite handy for me. I often lose track of trilogies and other series of books because I never know which books to read in sequence. Perhaps there's a website that could answer these questions for me? I'm sure those local fans more scholarly than me would have known about the Aurel Guillemette reference work; I didn't. The book *Science Fiction Audiences* is not new; there have been several other books on participatory fandoms, such as those on *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and other movies and television programs, all of which have a fandom that produces conventions, fanzines, clubs and

other ways to share the experience of being a fan of the show/movie. (Hmmm, they're not that different from us . . .)

So many books to read . . . One I have finished recently was William Gibson's *Idoru*. The usual gritty and hyper-described backgrounds and characters, with the usual lack of action and plot. It's a shame, for I want to like these books more, but there's got to be more there for me. Because it lacked in action, it reminded me of Larry Niven's *Integral Trees*, which was more description than anything else, and served as setting up the universe for the sequel, whose name escapes me.

I hope to have official word for you soon on a project I've been working on. I haven't done any voice work for close to 20 years, but I saw the call for auditions for a spoken word CD, and I went for it for a lark. I got the audition, and I got the roles. This spoken word CD will contain six short horror stories written by Canadian horror writers such as Edo van Belkom, Tanya Huff, Peter Nickle and Nancy Kilpatrick, so far, and the stories are being converted to radio-style plays. Two more stories need to have their permissions settled, and then the rest of the tapings can be done. The production company (and the CD, I think) will be called *Fears for Ears*, and I'm also assisting with the marketing. We're hoping that the CD will be available for sale in February.

(20 November 2001)

DAVE LANGFORD

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I found myself mentioned on page 32, with your remark 'The main reason Dave Langford's reviews no longer appear here is that (a) he put them on his web site, then very recently (b) has included them in his own large book of his critical writing.' My own explanation would be more in terms of (d) not having written that kind of regular multi-book review column since the days of 'Critical Mass'; (e) feeling flattered but almost guilty that you allowed me such a colossal spread in successive issues of *SFC*, to the extent that I'm nervous of taking up so much space again!

In theory there are to be two large books of Langford critical writing, in addition to all the polemical speeches and articles in *Let's Hear It For The Deaf Man* (NESFA Press 1996). I actually have a hardback copy of *The Complete Critical Assembly* (Cosmos Books 2001), which collects all 101 'Critical Mass' columns, and am now awaiting the affordable trade paperback edition. The second tome was finally delivered to Cosmos in October 2001, and with luck will appear in 2002: *Up Through an Empty House of Stars*, comprising 95 assorted essays and reviews from 1980 to 2001. If you want to run a few extracts in *SFC*, no doubt something can be arranged . . .

I admit that there is also the further factor that your majestic publishing schedule, vaster than empires and more slow, does mean that when I dash off a topical review I tend to forget *SFC* and send the piece to *Foundation*, *Vector* or *The New York Review of SF*.

Presumably you won't want to recycle anything that's been in these august skiffy journals — otherwise I'd try to persuade you that *SFC* Really Needs the hefty introduction I wrote for the John Sladek collection *Maps*, just published in slightly adapted form in *Foundation*. (This is not the same as my article on researching Sladekiana for the same book, which, after a preliminary airing in *Acnestis*, appeared in *NYRSF* and then *Vector*. All brilliantly timed publicity for the Autumn 2001 appearance of the collection itself, were it not that Big Engine's schedule continues to slip: they've just published their fourth title, originally announced for April

2001, and *Maps* is to be their ninth.)

However, I have submitted to *Steam Engine Time!* A longish review of a new translation of Alfred Kubin's surreal novel *The Other Side* (*Die andere Seite*, 1908), sent to Maureen in September 2000.

And appeared in *Steam Engine Time* 3, December 2001.

I really must do some research about the availability of my own books. Cosmos sent me only a hardback of *Guts* (horror spoof with John Grant, written in the 1980s; like *Earthdoom*, but much ickier) and I was amazed to see a few trade paperback copies in the Novacon dealers' room this month. Even the publisher claims not to have had trade paperback copies. The ways of print-on-demand are strange.

(21 November 2001)

This is just a glimpse of the email correspondence that led to the republication here of Dave Langford's fine article on James White. Somewhere in this discussion, I remember writing 'But just how do you make a living from writing, Dave?', to which the reply was the Internet equivalent of 'mumbledly mumble mumble'. Dave says he does make a living from voluminous freelance writing, although he submits many pieces to non-paying markets (such as *SFC* and *Steam Engine Time*) and to markets that take forever to pay. *Maps* has just appeared, and I must throw away my amazon.co.uk virginity and buy a copy. Likewise Big Engine's republication of Dave's novel *The Leaky Establishment*. These books have not been sighted for sale in Melbourne.

TEDDY HARVIA

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Ditmar's colourful astronomical art on your covers is surreal, all the more on a fanzine, but who is the character on the front shushing and why?

All is explained in Ditmar's explanation of the cover, on page 2 of *SFC* 77 — unless you're one of the people who received a copy without a page 2. If so, apologies. The character on the front cover is Elaine.

The interior art is equally fascinating. I'd like to have a closer look at the tattoo of the Celtic wildlife in the photo of Thomas M. Disch. And I can't tell if that's eye or an orifice on Joe Szabo's drawing of an alien creature. Strange stuff.

(23 November 2001)

If fabulous fannish cartoonists don't send me their drawings, I use the art that people do send me: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), Robert Mapson, and Joe Szabo specialise in computer graphics, while Frank Weissenborn sends me paintings by his friend Guy Browning. Elaine continues to generate amazing fractals using the DJFractals program. The great Steve Stiles has offered to draw me some cartoons if I send him copies of laid-out pages — but that assumes I'm well enough organised to lay out the pages long before the issue appears.

SUE THOMASON

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Ditmar's covers of *SFC* 77 are wonderful. I particularly like the back cover, which is a very arresting image, but the front