I must be talking to my friends

Scanning in the nineties

During the 1990s, I kept adding more and more material to the computer files for *SF Commentary*. Whenever I was sure I would publish the next issue, Something Happened, and the next issue spent another few years mouldering on a computer disk. My patient contributors, such as Colin Steele, Doug Barbour, Ros Gross and Alan Stewart, continued to send me material. I've collected in my files a snapshot of SF and fantasy in the 1990s, seen from the perspective of a number of writers. I intended to publish the views of all these writers in one issue. This is what has stopped me from publishing during the 1990s. If I had the time to publish a large issue, I did not have the cash. Or the next issue of *The Metaphysical Review* was more urgent. If I had the cash, I had no time to publish.

So at the conclusion of this issue you will find Part 1 of 'Scanning in the nineties', a selection from the vast amount of material that Colin Steele, SF and fantasy reviewer for *The Canberra Times*, sent me during the 1990s.

I trust that his reviews, ranging in length from four lines to a column, will remind you of the buzz of excitement that crept back into science fiction during the 1990s. Australia underwent its SF boom, thanks to the work of Aphelion Books, the *Eidolon* and *Aurealis* collectives, and the major publishing houses, who suddenly realised that Australian fantasy and SF (a) exists, (b) sells large numbers of copies. Meanwhile, Britain was exhibiting an extraordinary boom in both quality and quantity of interesting SF titles, helped no doubt by the growing importance of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the intensive fan and academic critical activity that exists in Britain. A fair amount of good material came from America during the decade. In the cracks between the dump bins of fantasy blockbusters one could always glimpse an interesting title or two, usually published by Tor Books or one of the small publishers.

The book itself seems threatened: by price rises that outstrip the general inflation rate, by the elimination (in Britain and Australia) of the hardback in favour of the clammy-to-the-touch-but-still-very-expensive trade paperback, and by the electronic book, whose effects are still to be assessed. Yet there are still vastly more books published (and sent to me as review copies) than I or any other person can absorb and assess. Hence, again, my thanks to people such as Colin Steele, Alan Stewart, Doug Barbour, Ros Gross, Paul Ewins and others who have been keeping an eye on the field for me. After I run the 'Scanning in the nineties' series, I won't bother to 'keep up' with the field, but will revert to the medium-to-long reviews that have been *SF Commentary*'s staple since its beginning.

Mr Perrin and Mr Traill

Dick Jenssen rang earlier in the evening. 'Have a look at *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill*,' he said. 'It's a nice little British movie, and it starts about 12.15 a.m.' I'd last seen this film thirty years ago: if I remember correctly, Marius Goring and David Farrar star as the older and younger teachers at a British public school at the beginning of this century, men who hate each other at first sight, and fall out rather badly.

I had been reading, so I did not turn on the TV until 12.30. Channel 2 was not showing *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill*. Instead, it showed a picture of vast clouds of smoke billowing off the end of Manhattan Island. Cut to a picture of smoke rising from the middle of one of the towers of the World Trade Centre. Then to the picture of the space where the World Trade Centre tower was. Where the towers had been. Finally, most astoundingly, the picture of a giant jet ploughing into the side of one of the towers, and exploding in fire on the other side. Unbelievable.

Then Channel 2 showed the first pictures of the burning hole in the side of a Pentagon. A voice of an Australian journalist in Manhattan: 'Everybody is ducking each time they hear the sound of an aircraft.'

I've talked to other people who had been watching TV that night. They were watching *West Wing*. In the episode, the President was dealing with an incident of terrorism. The TV channel cut to the pictures from New York. Where did the fiction finish and the actuality begin?

Unbelievable; that's still my only reaction to what happened. Since everybody else, including every fan on every email list, has emitted all the possible clichés about the situation, I don't want to add to them. I could trace the line of my own thinking, but I don't believe I have any special insights on the matter. On the night I thought: this is straight out of science fiction books and disaster movies. We've read and seen all this. The terrorist in *Stand in Zanzibar* who lets off bombs for the pleasure of it. The disappearing towers at the end of *Fight Club,* a film that is a satire on American fascism, but also provides a blueprint for attacks on centres of world trade. Whoever planned the operation of 11 September has read the same books and seen the same movies as I have. The perpetrators must be Americans, who know their own country intimately. They know how to stick a screwdriver into the guts of their own system.

Christopher Hitchens and Robert Fisk were interviewed by Phillip Adams on ABC radio the night after the bombings. Hitchens pointed out that, in the endless CNN coverage, nobody asked *why* the bombings had occurred. Just who are these people who can kill many thousands of people casually, *and themselves as well?* It's this latter fact that points to religious zealots, rather than right-wing Americans. Robert Fisk, a roving reporter for the *Independent* in Britain, said that the people who planned this operation won't make demands. They have no demands. They are nihilists in the nineteenth-century meaning of the word: they don't believe that the modern world should exist, therefore nobody can make bargains with them. The Bush Administration has no understanding of such people, therefore all the current military action will fail. If fifty people (at most) can carry out such an operation, it probably only takes fifty people (who understand their enemy) to destroy them. Instead, Bush uses jets and missiles. The final death toll of innocent people will be much higher than that of people lost in New York, the Pentagon, and on a field in Pennsylvania.

In the SF world, we don't seem to have lost anybody from the events of 11 September. We've heard tales of people who were late for work, were held up in the underground, were late for or caught a plane before or after one of the hijacked jets. Still, there could easily have been an SF convention being held in one of the World Trade Centre hotels at the time, or one of the publishers might just have moved there.

Seven thousand people didn't return that night. They might have been us. They might still be us. I suspect that the only American who understands what has happened and what is likely to happen is a humble American SF writer named M. J. Engh. Her book *Arslan* (1976), the best SF book of the last thirty years, and her story 'The Oracle' (*Edges*, edited by Ursula K. Le Guin and Virginia Kidd; Pocket Books; 1980) show that Marjorie Engh should be interviewed about what is happening at the moment.

And *Mr Perrin and Mr Trail*? I guess I'll catch up with the movie eventually. Its theme is the peculiar ability of human beings to hate and seek to destroy each other, although to any outside watcher they are the same sort of person and share the same interests. Any dispassionate alien observer would assume that human beings, collectively, could only cling to each other on this delicate, threatened ball of gas and water and try to stop the disasters to come. But people are the disaster. Happy twenty-first century, everybody.

Discover'd and surpris'd

In the nineties and through 2000 and 2001, the SF world has lost many of its most valued citizens. I can't mention them all, because I can't remember them all. A year or so ago, it seemed that fandom was losing a legend a week. During the early to mid 1990s, Australia lost Roger Weddall and Ian Gunn, two great friends and much-valued members of Melbourne fandom. In 1997, Australian SF lost George Turner, then Frank Bryning only a year or so ago. In 1999, world fandom lost Mae Strelkov, although the news took some time to arrive from Argentina. Fabled Irish Fandom has been cut down, one by one: George Charters during the seventies, Bob Shaw some years ago, followed by James White and Walt Willis recently. Only the English John Berry (a member of IF in the early fifties) is left. I can't believe that Buck Coulson, from Indiana, has gone; his last letter to me was as irritating, funny and entertaining as ever. And the writers keep saying farewell: John Brunner, most spectactularly, the first writer to die at a World Convention; and Poul Anderson most recently. Suddenly the young turks and New Wavers are SF's senior citizens.

As a recent unpleasant reminder that suddenly we have become older, John Foyster was admitted to hospital recently, suffering from a suspected stroke. As I write, he's recovering well. But he's only sixty, fghodsake. Damian Warman, Juliette Woods and Yvonne Rousseau celebrated his birthday earlier this year with a celebratory seventy-page fanzine telling of John's exploits. John Bangsund and Lee Harding, the two other members of the *ASFR* team, also recently suffered health problems shortly after their sixtieth birthdays. Peter Nicholls announced at his sixtieth birthday party that he had been diagnosed as having prostate cancer, and includes further melancholy news in his letter in the 'Pinlighters' column. Eric Lindsay, who is of my generation, and Nick Stathopoulos and James Allen, quite a bit younger than I am, have both suffered heart attacks in recent years. All this lies before us!

Terry Frost wrote somewhere on the Internet that although the nineties were pretty bad, at least they weren't dull. I watched in horrified fascination as successive Australian governments, in the name of economic rationalism, destroyed the livelihoods of people who once considered themselves comfortably middle class, and made it almost impossible for the poor to live. Elaine and I and many others have had to suffer the July 2000 changes to the Australian tax system, seemingly designed to bankrupt everybody but the very rich. During the 1990s I often decided that the world had become stale, flat, and definitely unprofitable.

Yet people kept forcing pleasant surprises on us. When he died in 1997, George Turner made me his Literary Executor and Heir. George had never mentioned the possibility to me, but he had it written there as a codicil to his will. No explanatory note, of course. 1997 was a bad year because we lost George Turner, and Elaine and I were burgled for the first time in our lives (the news of George's death reached us five minutes after we returned home to find that our house had been burgled). However, George handed responsibility for his works to me — and the guidance of Cherry Weiner, his American agent. Nobody wants to publish George Turner in America at the moment, but in time people will rediscover his books.

During the nineties Yvonne Rousseau introduced me to Acnestis, the British apa (amateur publishing association) for people who (still) read. In Acnestis I found a powerhouse of fans who read vast amounts of everything, including SF and fantasy, review for their own fanzines and magazines such as *Vector* and *Foundation*, run the British Science Fiction Association, sit on the Arthur Clarke Award annual jury, form a centre of SF fan activity, especially based on London, and are all-round good people. Unfortunately, Yvonne dropped out of Acnestis some years ago.

When many Acnestis members visited Australia in September 1999 for Aussiecon 3, I enjoyed their company. Two of them, Maureen Kincaid Speller and Paul Kincaid, agreed with me over dinner one night during Aussiecon to begin a new intercontinental fanzine. *Steam Engine Time* No. 1 appeared in March 2000, and No. 2 exists in computer files. We decided to concentrate on the long critical article, what George Turner calls the 'theme article', instead of reviews of individual books. Which means that *Steam Engine Time* will be published side by side with *SF Commentary*. Maureen, Paul and I are busy people, so the trick will be to keep either or both publications going.

Elaine's garden, seen from the back south corner. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane)

The highlight of the 1990s was that day in late 1995 when I received a letter from Jean Weber inviting me, on behalf of the Aussiecon Bidding Committee, to be its Fan Guest of Honour if Australia won the bid in September 1996. I was shocked and delighted then. I still don't quite believe that I was given this honour. As I said in my Fan Guest of Honour Speech, I can name a large number of people who should have been given the honour instead of me. Well, they weren't. Thanks again to the Committee, and to all the people who worked on Aussiecon 3. It was one of the great weeks of my life.

Here at 59 Keele Street, Elaine became a freelance maths and science editor in 1992. Since she is one of the few in Victoria, she has been very busy since then. To keep herself sane, she spent eight years digging over, in order to remove vast amounts of rubble and bricks, the next-door block of land that she bought at the end of 1991. (A photo of the block as it was then appeared in the Garden Party edition of *The Metaphysical Review*.) She has been stocking the new garden with Australian native plants. All this activity has been closely supervised by the cats. We still have five cats. During the decade, we lost Monty and TC, and gained Polly, the second most recent arrival, who hates Violet, the most recent arrival.

After he suffered an abrupt change of career and lifestyle in 1992, Race Mathews took the trouble to get in touch withus and other SF people in Melbourne. Thanks to him, we've kept in touch with lots of people we might not have seen regularly otherwise, and caught up with Dick Jenssen, who had dropped out of fandom in the early seventies, and Bill Wright, who disappeared in the early eighties. Dick is a generous man. Thanks, Dick, for the good company, fine meals, movie education, computer rescues and dazzling graphics, and involvement in the development of DJFractals.

Thanks also to Richard Hryckiewicz, who would really rather not have to save us from computer disaster every few years.

Early this year, I received the following letter:

MICHAEL LEVY

Dear Bruce,
It is my great pleasure to inform you that your essay 'The Good Soldier: George Turner as Combative Critic', has been named a runner up for the Science Fiction Research Association's Pioneer Award for best critical article of the year. The Pioneer Award winner and two runners up will be officially announced at our annual meeting to be held the end of May in Schenectady, NY, USA.

My working assumption is that you aren't likely to be interested in travelling all the way from Australia to New York to receive a paper certificate (albeit a very nice one) and a few words of praise (although you would be welcomed if you wished to come). Assuming this is the case, could you provide me with a mailing address so that we can send you the certificate.

Although I played no part in the choosing of the Pioneer Award winner and runners up, I am very glad that your piece was chosen as I enjoyed it very much when it appeared in *Foundation*.
Sincerely,

Michael Levy, President
Science Fiction Research Association

(19 April 2001)

I waited until the annual SFRA conference had taken place . . . and waited. I made enquiries, and eventually the certificate arrived. I still could not find out the names of the winner and other runner-up. *Locus* published only the name of the winner, and the envelope containing the certificate contained no other publicity material. Even the SFRA's own Web site includes only the winners, not the runners-up!

I said to myself: I didn't know this award existed; I didn't apply for it; so I'll enjoy the glow anyway, even if nobody else knows I'm a runner-up.

Eventually Michael Levy, who has proved a good friend over the past few months, sent me the following information. I didn't recognise the names. The winner was De Witt Douglas Kilgore, 'Changing Regimes: Vonda M. McIntyre's Parodic Astrofuturism' (*Science-Fiction Studies*), and the other runner-up was Anne Cranny-Francis, 'The Erotics of the (cy)Borg: Authority and Gender in Sociocultural Imaginary' (in Marleen S. Barr (ed.), *Future Females: The Next Generation*).

What was my near-award *for*? My article 'The Good Soldier', about George Turner's criticism, appeared in *Foundation* 78, the special Australian edition. Thanks to Jenny and Russell Blackford, guest editors of *Foundation* 78, for publishing my essay. So far its only Australian appearance has been in *Tirra Lirra* ($40 subscription; send to Eva Windisch, PO Box 305, Mt Evelyn VIC 3796).

Mountains of books

When I was a child, I thought as a child, read as a child, but already had the twisted soul of a book collector. In 1959, all the books I owned filled one shelf of one cupboard. In 1959, I discovered science fiction and the bookshops of the city of Melbourne. In 1965, I first earned enough money to begin cruising the secondhand bookshops of Melbourne. By 1967, I owned what seemed then quite a few books, had read all but a few of them. For my twenty-first birthday, my father built me a large bookcase. It was supposed to house all the books I would ever own. In the middle of 1968, I entered the large front room of the Bangsunds' flat in Redan Street, St Kilda. All of John's books stretched up to the ceiling, covering an entire wall. The twisted soul of a book collector within me became fully alive. One day, I would have a room such as this!

Beware one's ambitions. Some of them come true.

When Elaine and I got together in 1978, we put together our book collections. In 1979, when we moved here, we had built quite a few floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcases. Surely they would house all our books for the rest of our lives! In 1981 we counted the books. I had read about one-fifth of them and Elaine had read about one-seventh.

By the early 1990s, our combined collection filled most walls of most rooms in the house. We put in new built-in ceiling-to-floor bookcases, but there never seemed to be empty space on the shelves. I begin to store books in boxes. The boxes began to pile up in my workroom. The CD collection began to take over the shelves occupied by the paperback collection. I stopped visiting secondhand bookshops. I tried to stop buying new books, but found that Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass Books could still track down nearly every book I ordered. Every year the percentage of books read to books owned dropped.

In 1995, Yvonne Rousseau introduced me to Acnestis, the British apa for SF fans who (still) read books. From them I learned of the concept of the 'book accident' — the simultaneous emptying of the wallet in a secondhand bookshop and the filling of large numbers of bags with books. I was quite impressed to see this phenomenon in action when, the day before Aussiecon 3, the Acnestids descended on Carlton's secondhand bookshops.

The book mountain, early 2001. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane.)

I felt very smug. I no longer suffered from book accidents. I rarely entered secondhand bookshops, except to sell books. At last, I had controlled my evil book-collecting soul!

A year later, the book-storage problem is much worse. No matter how much I swap around books in boxes, no matter how fast I read, books form ever higher mountains in my room. One range of boxed books threatens to fall on top of the computer table. The other range, piled-high books on the table, began as a tiny 'urgent urgent' selection. Now they rise as an endless vista of columns of books stretching towards the ceiling, ever threatening to bury me forever.

And whose fault is this?

The postie's, for a start. Day after day, he appears at the door with large numbers of cardboard boxes. He's a very puzzled man.

The publishers'? Most of them haven't noticed the lack of *SF Commentary*s in recent years. They do keep receiving feedback from me — I fill in the little leaflets that ask me which books I would like to review, and I send copies of *The Metaphysical Review* and my apazines. I could always write telling them not to send any more books. I don't, of course.

Are the book mountains possibly *my* fault? Do I really want to be forced out of the front door, pushed by ever-advancing landslides of books? Not really. Recently we saw an advertisement in the local newspaper for a bluestone cottage tucked away in Clifton Hill, near the Yarra River. Some cottage. Nine rooms, plus a vast garden. Imagine filling every one of those rooms with floor-to-ceiling bookcases. All our publications would be accessible. As Barry Oakley wrote in his column in the *Australian* in 1994: 'I particularly liked the [picture] of Ruth and Eddie Frow in their Manchester bedroom with some of their 10,000 books. Ruth and Eddie, both white-haired, are reading in bed, surrounded by bookshelves, in a room so small they could reach out for another volume without having to get up. I imagine them putting out the lights, and, when they'd settled into sleep, a myriad muted sounds beginning, like those of mice or crickets, as all those bound books loosen their ties and start muttering to one another'.

Like Ruth and Eddie Frow, Elaine and I like to be surrounded by our friends, all muttering to one another.

Not that all the books I receive are the kinds of books I would call friends. Out go the thirteen-enormous-volume fantasy series and the blockbuster SF novels. Alan Stewart donates them to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club on my behalf. Recently the Club's magazine, *Ethel the Aardvark*, showed photos of members building floor-to-ceiling bookcases at the Brunswick club rooms. Soon the MSFC could well apply to take over the old Fitzroy Town Hall, which has walls 20 metres high.

The unpalatable truth is that the mountains rise because I can't let go of many of the books I receive. Yes, I'll review them, I say to myself. They look so tempting. But when I say that to myself, I'm ignoring my single most regrettable

disability (apart from my inability to sing like Roy Orbison): my lack of rapid-reading skills.

The only way to level the vast range is to review the books, whether I've read them or not. Here goes . . .

I'll start with the books I read years ago, although they have just been reissued by Gollancz Millennium. These reissues are appearing under three different labels and cover designs: the Millennium SF Masterworks (sturdy paperbacks with excellent cover paintings), the Millennium Fantasy Masterworks (ditto, but omnibus editions; prettier covers than the SF series), and the Gollancz Collectors' Editions (a revival of the old Gollancz plain yellow-jacket format, but trade paperbacks, not hardbacks).

NON-STOP by Brian Aldiss
(Millennium SF Masterworks 1-85798-998-8;
first published 1958; 241 pp.; £6.99)
was Brian Aldiss's first novel, his first ironic adventure, and the Aldiss novel that some people still say is his best. Without rereading it, I remember it as an absorbing adventure of the discovery-of-the-real-nature-of-the-world type, with a rousing ending.

SIRIUS: A FANTASY OF LOVE AND DISCORD
by Olaf Stapledon
(Collectors Edition 0-575-07057-9;
first published 1944; 200 pp., £9.99)
is, as I wrote in *Steam Engine Time* No. 1, Stapledon's best novel, although it will never have the same impact as the two documentary-style adventures, *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*. Sirius the super-intelligent dog seems much more human and interesting than any of the characters in Stapledon's other books, but he's also totally doggy. This overlay of and conflict between qualities gives piquancy to the novel. Sirius, driven from his society, voices some of Stapledon's feelings about British society during thirties and forties.

STAR MAKER by Olaf Stapledon
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-807-8;
first published 1937; 272 pp.; £6.99)
is the Stapledon novel that, with *Last and First Men*, will keep his name famous, if not forever, then certainly while readers love speculation for its own sake. It's a pity that the book's ponderous tone belies the wonder and delight that give power to its every page. It's as if Stapledon didn't want to be caught out enjoying the fizz of his own imagination. Despite the later efforts of admirers such as Clarke, Aldiss and Baxter, Stapledon beats them all every time for profusion of ideas and splendour of vision. Special pleasures of owning this edition are Les Edwards' cover illustration, Brian Aldiss's Foreword and Stapledon's Glossary, published in this form for the first time.

WAY STATION by Clifford D. Simak
(Collectors Edition 0-575-07138-9;
first published 1963; 189 pp.; £9.99)
contains the original interstellar way station idea that, I suspect, was pinched by the makers of *Men in Black*. If Clifford Simak were still alive, his best friends would tell him to sue. His original way station is set deep in the American back country, not in the middle of New York. It is guarded by the anonymity of its rural surroundings and by mild-mannered Enoch Wallace, not by a gang of big jerks in black suits who spout funny lines. I suppose *Way Station* is a bit too sweet and down-homey a tale to be made into a film aimed at Generation Y, but the rest of us can still savour the book's slow uncurling of plot, beauty of setting, and unexpectedly exciting ending.

DARK UNIVERSE by Daniel Galouye
(Collectors Edition 0-575-07137-0;
first published 1961; 154 pp.; £9.99)
is nearly as famous as *Way Station*, but I don't quite see why. When I read this book as a serial in *Galaxy* in 1961, I guessed from the beginning that it tells of a group of primitive people living underground after the Final Nuclear Catastrophe, and that somebody's sure to pop a head topside at some time and find that things aren't as bad as the legends told. And there didn't seem much of interest apart from this central idea. It's a pretty dull plod, with rather dull characters. But somebody must remember it fondly, or it wouldn't be re-printed in this series.

NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR by Philip K. Dick
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-701-2;
first published 1966; 225 pp.; £6.99)
is from Dick's most fertile period (middle to late sixties). A fusion of his SF ideas and his ambiguous feelings about marriage, it is a dark tale about a man (Eric Sweetscent) who in anger injects his wife with a drug that casts her adrift in time and condemns her to inevitable slow death. Because of remorse and a desire to redeem them both, the main character follows his wife through a series of dizzying time paradoxes and reversals. I'm not sure whether the ending, a conversation between Sweetscent and his taxi cab, is supremely tragical, comical, or sentimental, but it's Dick's most memorable last page, other than that of *Martian Time-Slip*.

A WREATH OF STARS by Bob Shaw
(Collectors Edition 0-575-07147-8;
first published 1976; 189 pp.; £9.99)
If *A Wreath of Stars* is a classic example of anything, but it was a sterling example of that absorbing, always interesting but never very exciting type of novel that Shaw made very much his own during the late sixties and seventies. In another guise, as a proto-Dave Langford, Shaw was the funniest after-dinner speaker in fandom, so I've always regretted that none of his humour escaped into the novels. As the blurb says, the main character considers himself 'the human equivalent of a neutrino', which could have led to some interesting variations, except that the author sends him off to Africa, which was not a very good idea. Good adventure, but Shaw did write better novels, such as *Vertigo*.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS by Gene Wolfe
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-817-5;
first published 1972; 252 pp.; £6.99)
When Elaine finished wrestling her way through Paul McAuley's novels, in preparation for writing a talk for a recent Nova Mob, she turned next to *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, because George Turner had recommended it highly in *SFC* 76. She said, 'McAuley's writing style isn't too bad, but Gene Wolfe's is a joy to read.' Apart from *Peace*, this is Wolfe's best novel, although it is actually three novellas written in very different styles. What is the true nature of this planet and its inhabitants? Wolfe seems to suggest that everything we believe about ourselves might be entirely false, but we still must hold to our best beliefs about ourselves.

Paradoxes abound, yet the novel has solidity and dignity.

THE EYE OF THE QUEEN by Phillip Mann
(Collectors Edition 0-575-07238-5;
first published 1982; 264 pp.; £9.99)
is one of the most carefully worked out and interesting alien contact novels of the last thirty years. 'Marius Thorndyke is dead' is the novel's first sentence. That sentence is written by Dr Thomas Mnaba. Marius Thorndyke makes contact with the Pe-Ellians. He leaves behind him his diary and other messages, to be followed up by Mnaba and the Contact Linguistics Institute. It's all worked out very nicely, if perhaps not entirely to the satisfaction of the terrestrials.

BRING THE JUBILEE by Ward Moore
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-764-0;
first published 1952; 194 pp.; £6.99)
is discussed by Paul Kincaid in the next *Steam Engine Time* among other SF novels about the American Civil War. Without having read all the main works in the sub-genre, I suspect that Moore's remains the best — not just because of its ideas about an alternative ending to the Civil War and hence an alternative American century, memorable though they are, but because *Bring the Jubilee* is one of the few SF novels with memorable characters, especially Barbara Haggerwell, the woman that Hodge Backmaker meets in the 1850s although he was born in 1921.

THE CITY AND THE STARS by Arthur C. Clarke
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-763-2;
first published 1956; 255 pp.; £6.99)
is one of those books about which older SF fans nostalge a lot, especially in Damien Broderick's recent anthology *Earth Is But a Star*. To the nostalgic I say: go back and read it again. Maybe it was fabulous stuff to read when you were a teenager, but when I read it a few years ago, on the wrong side of forty, I found that it's at least 100 pages too long. It includes a tour of Diaspar, the utopia that proves to be a dystopia (because it bored its population to extinction, I suspect), the gradual enlightenment of its rather wet main character, and his escape from Diaspar. Perhaps the original short version, 'Against the Fall of Night', is the text that readers actually fell in love with.

THE FOUNTAINS OF PARADISE by Arthur C. Clarke;
Foreword and Afterword by Arthur C. Clarke
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-721-7;
first published 1979; 257 pp.; £6.99)
On its surface, *The Fountains of Paradise* is as dramaless as *The City and the Stars*. The main character decides to build a space elevator from Sri Lanka to a satellite in the sky. The novel simply tells how he assembles the resources to carry out this project. *The Fountains of Paradise* works because Clarke has imagined every detail in his head, then sets down these details clearly and logically, without fudging. It's all a daydream, yet the daydream comes true in front of us.

THE CONAN CHRONICLES: Vol. 1: THE PEOPLE OF THE BLACK CIRCLE
by Robert E. Howard; Afterword by Stephen Jones
(Fantasy Masterworks 1-85798-966-1;
2000; 548 pp.)
THE CONAN CHRONICLES: Vol. 2: THE HOUR OF THE DRAGON by Robert E. Howard; Afterword by Stephen Jones
(Fantasy Masterworks 1-85798-747-0;
2001; 575 pp.)
I became a non-fan of Robert E. Howard when I read some of the 'Conan' stories that were reprinted in *Fantastic* in the 1960s. What could be interesting about an ancient dumb bastard with big muscles who was good at fighting with a sword? And how could I ever warm to a writer who writes sentences like these (my random selection, right this minute): 'Suddenly the man rose and towered above him, menace in his every aspect. There was no room in the fisherman's dull brain for fear, at least for such fear as might grip a man who has just seen the fundamental laws of nature defied. As the great hands fell to his shoulders, he drew his saw-edged knife and struck upward with the same motion. The blade splintered against the stranger's corded belly as against a steel column, and then the fisherman's thick neck broke like a rotten twig in the giant hands.' If that sort of thing turns you on, here are the collected 'Conan' stories, in chronological order, in two volumes. Stephen Jones' two-part Afterword is a useful introduction to a writer who was odder than any of his characters. Jones reprints a letter from seventeen-year-old Robert Bloch, writing to *Weird Tales* (publisher of the 'Conan' stories) in November 1934: 'I am awfully tired of poor old Conan the Cluck, who for the past fifteen issues has every month slain a new wizard, tackled a new monster, come to a violent and sudden end that was averted . . . in just the nick of time, and won a new girl-friend . . . I cry: "Enough . . ."'

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON by H. G. Wells;
Introduction by Arthur C. Clarke
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-746-2;
first published 1898; 196 pp.; £6.99)
This is a strange edition of *The First Men in the Moon*, because although the Introduction by Arthur Clarke is credited, an epilogue essay, 'H. G. Wells and His Critics', bears no byline. The copyright is assigned to the H. G. Wells estate, but it's not clear who edited this edition. (Certainly not David Lake, who was prevented by the Estate from editing the British editions, but who is thanked for his advice on the last page of this edition!) The book itself is not a favourite of mine; I remember little of it, although I read it about twenty years ago. Chris Moore's cover painting is perhaps the only reason for preferring this edition to the many others that are available.

TIMESCAPE by Gregory Benford
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-935-X;
first published 1980; 412 pp.; £6.99)
When it appeared, *Timescape* was praised most for (as Paul McAuley's cover blurb to the new edition puts it) 'perhaps the best fictional account of scientists at work'. Since I've never worked as a scientist, I was never able to back up this observation. I remember it mainly a rather slow-moving, but absorbing account of one group of scientists' experiment impinging on the work of another group. The group of scientists in the early sixties slowly realise that colleagues from the future have found a way to communicate with them. The scientists in the past must then Take Action. Some time I must reread the novel to discover whether or not its solutions still seem realistic and sensible.

THE LAND OF LAUGHS by Jonathan Carroll
(Fantasy Masterworks 1-85798-999-6;
first published 1980; 241 pp.; £6.99)

It's reassuring that *The Land of Laughs* is now regarded as a 'Fantasy Masterwork', since it is Jonathan Carroll's best novel. Carroll's first, it is also the only one of his novels that works at all levels. Thomas Abbey tries to write the biography of Marshall France, a fabled children's writer who, as the blurb says, 'hid himself away in the small town of Galen and died of a heart attack at the age of forty-four'. France's magical talent is revealed only slowly, as Abbey and his girlfriend Saxony investigate the very strange town of Galen. Some critics hate the 'Epilogue' to this novel, but I think I know what Carroll is doing here. That's more than I can say for the endings of most other Carroll novels.

FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON by Daniel Keyes
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-938-4;
first published 1966; 216 pp.; £6.99)

I've never read the novel-length version of *Flowers for Algernon*, because the Hugo-winning short story is perfect, and surely cannot be improved upon. In the short story, Charlie Gordon, IQ 68, suffers the improvement of his intelligence by artificial means. Inevitably, the effect of the treatment begins to wear off. We experience everything from Charlie Gordon's point of view. Much of the novel, however, is written from a third-person point of view. I've seen the movie version, *Charly*, only once. From what I remember, it contained only material from the short-story version. Yet the novel version has had its own long-term success, and is back in print.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE by James Blish;
Foreword and Appendix by James Blish
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-924-4;
first published 1958; 192 pp.; £6.99)

Like many other SF 'novels', *A Case of Conscience* is a commercial 'fix-up'. Readers who admire the book are really remembering the novella 'A Case of Conscience', which appeared in 1953. The second half of the novel is unmemorable, but it did make this into a book that keeps being reprinted. Blish, an atheist, asks straightfaced questions about Christian dogma, and comes up with answers that were, for 1953, unconventional. If he had asked his questions in any other form but science fiction, he would not have been published, or he would have been dismissed as a satirist. At heart, I suppose, *A Case of Conscience* is a ferocious satire of dogma, but it reads as an exciting SF adventure, despite all the heavy discussion. Its concerns are echoed in Mary Doria Russell's recent novel *The Sparrow*, but Russell swears she hadn't read *A Case of Conscience* when she wrote her novel.

VALIS by Philip K. Dick; Appendix by Philip K. Dick
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-339-4;
first published 1981; 271 pp.; £6.99)

As Andrew M. Butler points out throughout his *Pocket Essentials Philip K. Dick*, Dick always had an interest in matters esoteric, eschatological and religious. But his powers of observation of the peculiarities of human behaviour led him to keep a tight rein on his subject matter until the 1970s. Suddenly, all sorts of unsightly bats started flapping around his capacious belfry. The ghastlier bats can all be found in *Valis*, which is why I don't like it much. The novel form breaks down; not only does the centre not hold, but the edges get fuzzy as well. The book's Appendix, which is a brief summary of Dick's famous 'Exegesis', does not inspire confidence. Much better is Dick's political thriller *Radio Free Albemuth*, which is based on many of the same premises.

MAN PLUS by Frederik Pohl
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-946-5;
first published 1976; 215 pp.; £6.99)

I read this novel when it first appeared, but I cannot remember anything about it. All I remember is that it added up to much less than its premise — that the main character has been biologically engineered to enable him to survive on Mars.

THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN: Vol. 2: SWORD AND CITADEL (THE SWORD OF THE LICTOR and THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH) by Gene Wolfe;
Appendix by Gene Wolfe
(Fantasy Masterworks 1-85798-700-4;
first published 1981 and 1983; 615 pp.; £7.99)

There are some critics who claim to know what Gene Wolfe was up to in the 'Book of the New Sun' series, but I'm not one of them. The main character claims he can remember everything eidetically, then leaves out most of the details we want him to tell us. His interpretations of events are so at odds with the meanings we might take from the same events that often we cannot say with precision what is happening at any particular moment. Yet much other detail of this far-future Urth is so realistic that reading it feels like looking at a de Chirico painting. Gene Wolfe creates a world to which only he has a key, yet instead of alienating his potential audience, he had us waiting anxiously for each of the four novels (and even for the fifth, still not gathered into the new two-volume set). I suspect the puzzles always were insoluble, but Wolfe is a magician and a torturer, and we enjoyed being pixilated. Now a new generation of readers can enter the world of the New Sun.

THE LATHE OF HEAVEN by Ursula K. Le Guin
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-951-1;
first published 1971; 184 pp.; £6.99)

This is still my favourite Le Guin novel (apart from the 'Earthsea' books) because it wrestles clearly and elegantly with a fantasy premise, rather than with the more overtly sociopolitical premises of, say, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*. Because it is less weighed down with a sense of its own importance than most of Le Guin's other long works, it actually has more human meaning than they have. A man's dreams alter reality. Another man, a psychiatrist, who wishes to alter reality in order to improve it, finds out how to influence the other man's dreams. As I say, an elegant premise, yet so supple that it allows the exploration of a wide variety of situations. Le Guin writes a series of dramatic tableaux showing the paradoxical results of each transformation of the world. Some changes are comical, others disturbing, and others intolerable. The moral point is obvious — that one must take responsibility for the evil effects of all one's actions, even those that are meant well — but the novel is resolved dramatically, even melodramatically, in a fine burst of science-fictional fireworks.

PAVANE by Keith Roberts
(SF Masterworks 1-85798-937-6;
first published 1968; 279 pp.; £6.99)

Many readers love *Pavane* because they feel, after they have finished it, they have lived completely in its alternative-

timetrack society, with its alternative technology. Yet all we catch are glimpses of the whole society. What we do experience are crises in the lives of a series of main characters at various periods in the development of this society. Keith Roberts was a short story writer, not a novelist, and *Pavane* is structurally a fix-up. Yet it is easy to forget that one is reading a book of short stories; the world itself becomes the book's main character. Jim Burns's cover illustration provides just about the best cover for any of the SF Masterworks.

THE EMBEDDING by Ian Watson
(Collectors' Edition 0-575-07133-8; first published 1973; 254 pp.; £9.99)

The Embedding is perhaps the most spectacular debut novel from any SF writer of the last thirty years. (Except Gibson's *Neuromancer*, of course, but I've never been able to read past page 70 of *Neuromancer*.) Watson's frothing brew of social theory, Chomskian insights about language, clashing political forces and intense melodrama makes this into an unputdownable near-future thriller. Nobody has improved on it, because few SF writers can lay down the words and concepts as well as Watson did at the beginning of his career. It's a pity that most of his later novels show little of the same sparkle. (Many of the short stories do, though.)

Talking to his friends

From: Dick Jenssen ditmar@mira.net
To: gandc@mira.net
Subject: I must be talking to my friends
Date: Thursday, 24 August 2000. 2:37 AM

Bruce,
To make your day. I hope.

PRIMARY SOURCE (I guess)
Old Woman. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When the people see me quiet, they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.
W. B. Yeats, 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' (1902)

FROM THE SITE:
http://metalab.unc.edu/sally/yeats1.txt

USED BY
Mac Liammóir, Mícheál (1899–1978)
b. Cork, actor, writer, painter and theatre impresario. A child actor, became a renowned painter and designer. Founded the Gate Theatre in Dublin with his lifelong partner Hilton Edwards. The theatre company capitalised on new Irish writing, drawing inspiration from and staging European drama, as well as the classics. Played Iago in Orson Welles' film of *Othello* (1949) and was the narrator in the film *Tom Jones* (1963). Also published fiction, plays and memoirs in both English and Irish. His one-man shows during the 1960s drew critical acclaim in Ireland and internationally.
Works include *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1960), *I Must Be Talking to My Friends* (1963) and *Mostly About Yeats* (1970)

FROM THE SITE
http://www.local.ie/content/20972.shtml

RECORDING:
I Must Be Talking To My Friends (Argo RG493)

I used Google, and searched on 'i must be talking to my friends'.
Simple.

Dick

See also
http://metalab.unc.edu/sally/Cathleen.html
http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/y/yeats/cath.html
http://www.gmu.edu/org/ireland32/houlihan_essay.html

(The search string on Google was 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan')

Now you're on your own...

Dick
ditmar@mira.net

Thanks, Dick. I searched for the phrase 'I must be talking to my friends' more than a year ago, using HotBot, but found nothing. Somebody (Robert Lichtman?) on Trufen recently mentioned the miraculous Google search engine. I mentioned Google to Dick, who had the bright idea of looking for 'i must be talking to my friends'.

I heard the phrase first while sitting in my flat in Ararat in late 1969 or early 1970 listening to the radio. It was the title of a monologue by Micheál Mac Liammóir. It had begun as a stage show, and was later recorded on LP. The ABC played the LP. A few years later I bought it. Meanwhile I had used the phrase as the title of a new personal/news/opinion column in *SF Commentary*, based on the format of Bill Bowers' new fanzine *Outworlds*. In the monologue, Mac Liammóir does not say where the phrase comes from, merely that it was first said by 'Ireland's greatest poet'. I assumed he was referring to W. B. Yeats. When last year I mentioned this to Yvonne Rousseau, she consulted a concordance of Yeats' poetry, but could not find 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. The answer, as Dick Jenssen and Google have discovered, is that the phrase is from a Yeats play, not a poem.

Barry Jones (right) launching Judy Buckrich's (left) *George Turner: A Life* at Aussiecon 3, September 1999. (Photo: Cath Ortlieb)

Criticanto

Marc Ortlieb * Roslyn K. Gross * Ian Mond * Steve Jeffery * Bruce Gillespie

Marc Ortlieb reviews:

GEORGE TURNER: A LIFE
by Judith Raphael Buckrich
(Melbourne University Press 0-522-84840-0; 1999; 214 pp.; $A45.00)

[First appearance: *The Instrumentality* (Australian Science Fiction Foundation), December 1999, p. 4.]

I must preface this review with the caveat that, while I wouldn't presume myself a friend of George Turner, I am one of the many people who was in awe of him and who took a great deal of delight in those occasions I met him, or had the opportunity to listen to him speak. Nova Mob meetings at which he was present were very special events. Thus I am not an impartial reviewer. I review this book as a person who is bound to look on anything giving further information about George with approval.

That caveat considered, Judith Buckrich has created a valuable resource, both for those who, like me, welcome the opportunity to learn more about George and for those who are serious students of George's work. It also presents a conundrum for the reviewer. How should one review a book about the doyen of reviewers? I rather suspect that George would chuckle at the problems this causes. Certainly George would have scorned the pedantic sort of review that carped on the caption errors in the photographs, but George would, no doubt, have been annoyed by these simple errors in copyreading. (For the benefit of historical accuracy, the photograph opposite page 23 of George receiving an Award in 1976 shows George receiving the first William Atheling Jr Award, not a Ditmar, and the second photograph after page 150 was taken at Unicon IV in Melbourne in 1978, not at Unicon 5 in London in 1976. I'll ignore the spelling errors.)

I found the book most valuable in dealing with George's life prior to his discovery of Melbourne science fiction fandom. Despite having read a couple of George's mainstream novels, I had little idea of his early life, and Judith's research has provided interesting and detailed information on some of George's early background and influences. It was compelling reading, and I resented having to put the book down in order to get off at my tram stop each evening.

My main objection to the book is that it seems to rush the end, when dealing with the time I knew George. I suspect that this is at least partly because of the degree to which Judith used George as her major source, and, like most of us, George tended to be more detailed in his descriptions of his early life, while the later parts of his life tended to get concertinaed together. Given George's role as a critic and reviewer, I would have liked to have seen more than one chapter devoted to his critical work and perhaps to his letters.

One further minor quibble before I wholeheartedly recommend this book to any serious reader of science fiction. The George I knew had a wry and slightly twisted sense of humour and I didn't find this much in evidence in the biography. Certainly he dealt with serious issues and he had his personal demons to exorcise, but he didn't do this in a po-faced manner. One always got the feeling that there was

a grin lurking behind his serious facade.

I miss George and regret that he didn't live long enough to fulfil his promise and that he and Bruce Gillespie would dance on the table at Aussiecon Three. In a way, Judith's biography brought George back for a while and I could imagine his voice in the passages Judith quotes. It is a good introduction to George. I rather hope that there will be more; certainly a book dealing George as a critic would be a valuable companion to this volume.

Roslyn K. Gross reviews:

THE MARRIAGE OF STICKS

Jonathan Carroll
(Indigo 0-575-40249-0; 1999; 282 pp.; £6.99/$A24.00)

THE WOODEN SEA

by Jonathan Carroll
(Gollancz 0-575-07060-9; 2000, 247 pp.; £16.99/$A54.00)

Since Jonathan Carroll's writing debut with *The Land of Laughs* back in 1982, his work has continued to contain familiar patterns and themes, while also diverging in interesting ways. Renowned as a writer of speculative fiction or magic realism, Carroll dispensed with fantasy elements in books such as *After Silence* and, more recently, *Kissing the Beehive*. Moreover, although *The Land of Laughs* is arguably a work of horror as much as it is fantasy, Carroll seemed to increasingly favour horror as his medium. In fact, I personally sometimes suspected that Carroll was more and more trying to shock for its own sake. Some novels seemed to be both gratuitously confusing and gratuitously horrific, though I freely admit the possibility that I simply failed to understand where Carroll had taken me.

With the publication of *The Marriage of Sticks* (1999) and *The Wooden Sea* (2000), Carroll seems not only to have returned to the incorporation of fantasy in his writing, but also seems to have returned to the kind of relative clarity evident in *The Land of Laughs*. Carroll's work has always contained strong doses of ambiguity, a powerful tool in his skilled hands, but in some of his novels it seemed to me that a kind of fertile confusion sometimes replaced conscious ambiguity. In *The Wooden Sea*, he approaches the kind of coherence seen in *The Land of Laughs*. Together with *Kissing the Beehive*, *The Marriage of Sticks* and *The Wooden Sea* are loosely connected, in that the events in them all take place in the town of Crane's View and they have a character in common. Francis (Frannie) McCabe, a minor character in the other two novels, is the protagonist in *The Wooden Sea*.

Many of Carroll's trademarks are present in these two latest novels: quirky characters with whom one strongly identifies, the intrusion of the shockingly extraordinary into the totally ordinary, and Carroll's own chatty, casual style disguising extraordinary craft. Above all, it is the latter that makes a Carroll book so compelling to read. He has a way of including a host of the personal and concrete details of life, dragging the reader into the point of view of the narrator (who nearly always speaks in first person in Carroll's novels) and creating a feeling of complete ordinariness, which is ultimately illusory. By the end of the novel, Carroll has usually managed to pull the rug from under the reader, questioning our notions of normality, but at the same time inviting the reader to treasure the small normalities of everyday life.

This, then, is the pattern of most Carroll novels: he builds up a wonderful sense of the mundane world and of one ordinary human life, which usually includes a masterful description of a relationship or marriage, then he brings in some cataclysmic element that threatens this heaven, and finally attempts to find some transformation or revelation that can restore the universe to some kind of meaning. Very often, the central character discovers that he or she is not the person he/she had always thought she was, and often her real role is essential to the well-being of the universe. These themes prove to be present in both *The Marriage of Sticks* and *The Wooden Sea*.

Because Carroll takes his readers through such unexpected twists and bizarre revelations, and leaves open many levels of interpretation, giving much more than the bare bones of plot is always difficult with a Carroll novel. In ***The Marriage of Sticks***, Miranda Romanac appears to have everything she wants. This is often the case at the beginning of Carroll's novels. She has an interesting job she loves, and a close friend (who, strangely, though a genuinely loving person, has a life full of bad luck). As always, Carroll describes the emotional lives of his leading characters with great skill. At a high school reunion she learns something shocking that begins a questioning of her whole life. Soon thereafter, she becomes involved with a married man, Hugh Oakley, who leaves his wife to be with Miranda. At the same time, she meets an elderly eccentric woman who is to be central to her future. The rest of the book is a spiral of revelations and shocks that leads to Miranda questioning the very basis of her life and to her making an important decision that changes her profoundly. As in his other novels, Carroll is profoundly concerned with the meaning of life and the nature of morality, and leaves the reader with an unsettling sense of dislocation.

As is very often the case with Carroll, the first half of this novel contains little in the way of overtly supernatural events; the intrusion of the strange creeps upon Miranda slowly and with subtlety, until the usual laws of everyday logic are called into question by the reader. The experienced Carroll reader knows that what appear to be explanations to supernatural events may be only yet another level of reality.

On a personal level, I found aspects of *The Marriage of Sticks* a little confusing (though nowhere near as confusing as some other novels of his), over and above the ambiguity that is part and parcel of Carroll's work. Miranda is supposed to discover something about her motives that I just don't see in the earlier part of the book. But perhaps that is the point; Carroll's sly and ironic style makes that highly probable. In either case, I found the novel powerful and haunting. As usual, Carroll makes the reader, along with his protagonists, question everything they know about themselves and their universe.

In ***The Wooden Sea***, the intrusion of the extraordinary begins much earlier, very soon after the book begins, and the supernatural elements in the book are perhaps more noticeable as fantasy. Frannie McCabe, the crossover character from *The Marriage of Sticks* and *Kissing the Beehive*, feels he has everything he wants in his mellow middle age. From the moment Frannie finds and elects to look after an old three-legged dog, bizarre events take over his life. The dog dies, but refuses to stay buried. Both a book written centuries ago and the sketchbook of a young girl prove to contain pictures of this very dog. Frannie encounters a version of himself as a tough teenager, visits the future, and meets a being called Astophel who may be an alien. He discovers he has a week to answer the question, 'How do you sail across a wooden sea?'

We are offered some answers, but as any seasoned reader of Carroll will already know, there can be layers of contradiction and complexity behind Carroll's statements. And yet there feels to me a certain confidence and clarity here that was shaky in several of Carroll's previous novels. Nor is he shocking us for the sake of shock, something I felt he was doing in *After Silence*, for instance. Here is the clarity of *The Land of Laughs* with the additional complexity of maturity, a particularly potent mix.

Ian Mond reviews:

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS

by James Morrow
(Gollancz Collector's Edition 0-575-07101-X;
first published 1986, new edition 2000;
319 pp.; £9.99/$A29.95)

I love *Dr Strangelove*. I know it's a dated film, dealing with issues that no longer apply to today's Internet-obsessed world. But there's something about the imagery in the film, the comedy and complete absurdity of it all, that makes me smile and feel just a tad disturbed. Because a part of me sometimes thinks, that no matter how over the top the situation in the film, you could . . . just about . . . imagine such a circumstance occurring.

The same has to be said for James Morrow's ***This Is the Way the World Ends***. Like *Dr Strangelove*, the novel is completely over the top. From its opening page — a framing story starring Nostradamus — Morrow makes it quite clear that this book is not going to be couched in reality. Yet, despite the impossibilities that appear and disappear throughout the book, one feels that Morrow is saying something very serious and important about nuclear weaponry — a message that is still valid, years after the end of the Cold War. Humanity is responsible for its actions. And no matter how many times we try to blame other things for the destruction we cause, at the end of the day, when the proverbial dust settles, the finger of blame can only be pointed at Us.

But Morrow doesn't necessarily want to belt the reader over the head with that message. I mean, what's the fun in that? No matter the dark nature of the subject matter, he can't help but play with the reader's expectations with a bevy of jokes and setpieces. Yes, *This Is the Way the World Ends* is an apocalyptic novel, but Morrow refuses to let that drag the book down into a morbid dissection of human stupidity. Because that would be boring. And if there's one thing I've learnt from reading Morrow's novels — he's rarely ever boring.

As I've mentioned, the book begins with a framing story that features Nostradamus and a young Jewish boy, Jacob. Despite being a cantankerous, cynical old man, Nostradamus takes the young boy under his wing and decides to show him the future. With the help of a wondrous machine invented by Da Vinci, and a series of glass plates painted by Da Vinci, Nostradamus begins to relate to Jacob how the world ends.

The star of this future story is Unitarian tombstone engraver George Paxton. George is a simple person, an average joe, the sort of guy who is completely devoted to his wife and child. So when he discovers, with a heavy heart, that he can't afford a scopa (Self Contained Post Attack Survival) suit, he feels quite anxious for the future of his beloved daughter. So when he is offered the deal of a lifetime — a free scopa suit, as long as he signs on the dotted line — George is quite willing to acquiesce. Because in his mind it means that, no matter how many bombs fall, his daughter, his precious, precious daughter will be safe.

Except that, on his way home after purchasing the suit, the bombs do fall straight on his home town. And in one of the most harrowing scenes in the novel, George Paxton realises that he's too late, that everyone he loves is dead, that the suit in his hands will never be worn by his beautiful daughter.

That's only the beginning.

Because George is about to find out that the contract he signed to purchase the suit admits that, as a 'passive citizen', he did nothing to avert nuclear holocaust — and therefore by the stipulations of the contract, George is guilty for the destruction of the human race . . .

There is much, much more to the novel, but I refuse to say any more, on the off chance that someone reading the review hasn't read this wonderful book.

As I said earlier, Morrow is never boring. At no stage does he allow the subject matter to bog down the book in cynicism and ideology. And that's surprising, considering that a good half of the story takes place in a courtroom. What could easily have been a boring question-and-answer session turns out to be entertaining reading. (Which is more than can be said for Morrow's later work *Blameless in Abbadon*, which uses a similar courtroom style, but is nowhere near as slick and clever and interesting.)

What really grabbed me was Morrow's matter-of-fact narrative voice. While at times you feel he's quite upset at putting George in such a predicament, he very rarely allows the melodrama to infiltrate the book. At the same time, Morrow is quite careful not to show all his cards at once. The book is never predictable, with Morrow quite happy to throw something bizarre, surreal and downright strange into the mix.

And that's what, I suppose, impressed me most about *This Is the Way the World Ends*. It is not a straightforward science fiction novel — on the contrary, at times it veers towards the world of magic realism and fantasy. What's more, although the book drips with the weird and surreal, at no time does the situation, the unfolding events of the book, seem ludicrous, no matter how strange the setting. Like *Dr Strangelove*, the book has a sense of verisimilitude, and the paradoxical feeling that no matter how bizarre the proceedings, there is something disturbingly real about the events being portrayed. Therefore *This Is the Way the World Ends* is a fantastic novel.

Steve Jeffery reviews:

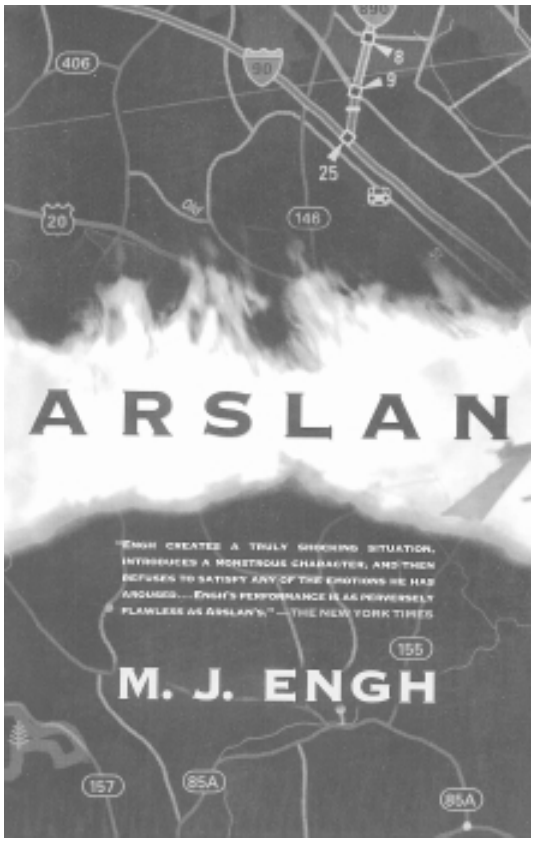
ARSLAN

by M. J. Engh
(Orb 0-312-87910-5; 2001, first published 1976;
296 pp.; $US14.95/$A35.95)

[This review first appeared in *The Virginia Wolfsnake and Other Deadly Creatures*, August 2001]

M. J. Engh's ***Arslan***, first published in 1976, has now been republished as part of Tor's Orb line of 'classic' reprints (among which are included Joan Sloncewski's *A Door Into Ocean*, Steven Brust's *To Reign in Hell* and, most recently, Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks*).

Arslan is a Turkmenistan military leader who manages (although quite how isn't explained until the end) to become absolute dictator of the world. He arrives on a whim in the small Illinois town of Kraftville to set up his base of



operations. Rounding up all the town's inhabitants into the school building, he immediately stamps his absolute power over everyone by forcing them to watch one execution and two rapes, one of a young girl, Betty Hutton, and one of a thirteen-year-old boy, Hunt Morgan. He then imposes a curfew, billets a soldier in every home, and threatens that any attack on one of his men will result in the summary execution of every member of that house. He himself takes over the house of the town's mayor, Franklin Bond, taking Morgan and Hutton with him as slave hostages.

What develops from that brutal beginning is a disturbing and absolutely gripping novel, as Franklin, a prisoner in his own home, tries to understand all the unpredictable nuances of Arslan's behaviour, in order to keep his townsfolk safe, and as Arslan first systematically breaks Hunt Morgan, then rebuilds him as his own creation. Alternating sections of the novel are told from Franklin's and Hunt's viewpoint as the power balance shifts between the two, and then all three main characters.

It is the complex three-way relationship between Franklin, Hunt and Arslan that makes this novel stunningly effective. (It is Hunt, perhaps, who is the real focus of this novel, becoming a surrogate son whose loyalty and soul becomes a prize contested between Franklin and Arslan.)

Arslan is a complex, enigmatic central figure, revealed through the shifting (and at times unreliable, self-serving and self-justifying) perspectives of Franklin's and Hunt's changing relationship with him and each other. He is not just the barbarian he first appears, although he certainly can be when it serves his political needs. He is more like Kurtz in the film *Apocalypse Now!* (more so, perhaps, than the Kurtz of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), a leader who understands the effective use of fear and terror, but at other times can be disarmingly courteous and cultured (he has Hunt read to him constantly, anything from Greek history to modern science). Franklin has to tread a fine line between placatory cooperation and subtle resistance in order to protect his townsfolk from Arslan's occupying forces, and from themselves.

This is an incredibly powerful novel, which constantly reveals new and unexpected facets (and even shocks) as you get deeper into the intertwined relationships of its three central characters. I guarantee that if you read it, it will haunt you for a long time.

Steve Jeffery reviews:

VIRICONIUM

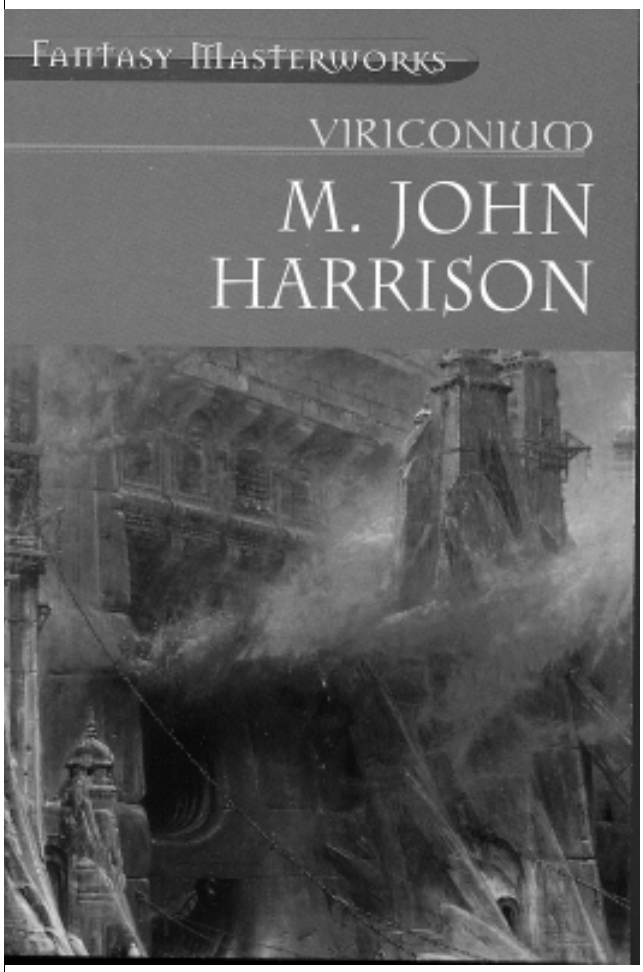
by M. John Harrison
(Millennium Fantasy Masterworks No. 7; 1-85798-995-3; 2000; 562 pp.; £7.99/$A24.00)

[This review first appeared in *Paradise Temporarily Misplaced*, August 2000.]

'Viriconium!' is the exultant cry (of affirmation? of longing?) that ends M. John Harrison's short story collection *Viriconium Nights*, and Millennium's somewhat confusingly named omnibus edition *Viriconium*, No. 7 in the Fantasy Masterworks series. Confusing because there is already an omnibus edition titled *Viriconium*, first published by Unwin in 1988. That collected the novel *In Viriconium* (Gollancz, 1982) and *Viriconium Nights* (Gollancz, 1985; in the new edition called *Viriconium Knights*), and ends on the same cry (of triumph? of despair?). The more substantial Millennium edition also includes the two fantasy novels *The Pastel City* (NEL, 1971) and *A Storm of Wings* (Sphere, 1980; my edition Unwin, 1987). And really, I think, it should have included the three interviews under the series 'The Professions of Science Fiction' from *Foundation* Nos. 23, 57 and 58, and it would have been the definitive edition concerning that extraordinary, contradictory, mutable and immortal city.

We start with *The Pastel City*, Harrison's attempt, full of early *New Worlds* iconoclasm and enthusiasm, to turn the whole sword and sorcery genre on its head. Actually, Harrison succeeds splendidly at writing a tale that stretches the boundaries of S&S without quite overturning it. That would come in *A Storm of Wings*, which I think will come as a shock to anyone reading the Millennium edition straight through.

Somewhere in the ten years between the first and second novel, MJH made a conscious decision to try to push style as far as it would go. ('I deliberately overdid it. I remember sitting there and thinking, "Right, this time we're going over the top" ('The Last Rebel: An Interview with M. John Harrison', *Foundation* 23, October 1981). The style of *A Storm of Wings* is dense, overloaded with imagery and description; practically, to use a favourite Harrisonian word, gelid. It was meant to be deliberately offputting, to affront and irritate the reader who tried to approach it as another escapist sword and sorcery fantasy. After a while (the first 30 to 40 pages are the most difficult), it settles down in to a mad quest across a decaying landscape (the shadow of *The Waste Land* hangs heavy and omnipresent over the Viriconium novels) accompanied by the floating ghost of the legendary and long-lost airshipman, Benedict Paucemanly, farting and hooting and speaking gibberish. *A Storm of Wings* has no place for heroes or heroic actions; here are, indeed, no real enemies, just two races whose realities are inimical to the other. Neither wants to be there. A sense of constant, unresolved pain, like toothache or terminal arthritis, hangs over the whole of *A Storm of Wings*. If John Clute holds that fantasy is 'restorative', then *A Storm of Wings*, although it uses the tropes and trappings



of the sword and sorcery sub-genre, is something else.

The Wounded Land/*Waste Land* theme carries through explicitly into the third novel, *In Viriconium*. Here I lose sense of the time scale between the books. All are set in some post-high-technology future (whose artefacts still turn up in places like the Great Rust Desert) in one of the so-called Evening Cultures (a nod here, I think, to Moorcock's 'Dancers at the End of Time' series). *A Storm of Wings* takes place 80 years, we are told, after the death of tegeus-Cromis, reluctant poet swordsman of *The Pastel City*, although we are not sure how long he lives after the first book. It may be 20 years or 200. Certainly, his former companion, Tomb the Dwarf, and Methvet Nian, Queen Jane of Viriconium, are still alive. The city of *In Viriconium* seems a different place: more like *fin de siècle* Paris, with its bistros and whorehouses in and around the Artists' Quarter. The Low City is in the grip of a plague (a tubercular consumptive epidemic, allied to a psychological ennui) that threatens to spread to the High City, despite quarantine, containment and the eventual torching of infected houses. The plot revolves around painter Ashlyme's farcical and bungled attempt to rescue fellow painter Audsley King from the Low City. Meanwhile, the adopted twin Princes of the city, the laddish Barley Brothers, belch, stumble, throw up in alleyways and run riot around the city until, in anger and frustration at their taunting and slobbishness, Ashlyme knifes one of them.

In Viriconium is a strange book. The style is much sparer than that of either *A Storm of Wings* or *A Pastel City*, and this continues through most of the stories of *Viriconium Knights*. What all the books share, though, is a rejection of any solution through 'heroic' action, or indeed the possibility of that action (although most of the tragedy stems from the characters' inability or unwillingness to act). Violence, when it happens, is unexpected, sudden, often pointless and sordid. This is nowhere more explicit and shocking than in the story 'The Lamia and Lord Cromis', in which the title character, the closest Harrison has come to a hero (albeit unwilling) murders his companion at the end over an incomprehensible point of family honour.

Viriconium is a deliberate and overt slap in the face of the typical escapist fantasy fan in both style and content. (It is also, in its macabre, bleak absurdist way, often extremely funny.) It demands its readers work hard to understand (even if they don't get all the allusions). Characters, images and events recur through the series, but as frequently contradict the history and actions of previous stories: the poet Ansel Verdigris dies in two stories in completely different ways: Harrison appears to have an obsessive fascination with the disturbing image of a 'stripped and varnished horse's skull' with glazed pomegranate halves as jewelled compound eyes (which echoes the heads of the giant alien insects of *A Storm of Wings*), while both the card reader, Fat Mam Eitella, and the bird Lord, Cellar, are seemingly immortal.

Bruce Gillespie reviews:

TIME FUTURE

by Maxine McArthur
(Bantam 1-86325-194-4; 1999; 454 pp.; A$15.95)

Unusual attention has been paid to ***Time Future***, the first published novel by Sydney writer Maxine McArthur, because it was the second winner of the annual George Turner Memorial Prize and because the first winner was felt by some observers not to be 'the sort of book to which George would have given a prize'.

Each of these same observers would, of course, have a different idea of the sort of book to which George Turner would have given the nod, quite ignoring the fact that the judges each year try to give the Turner Award to the best manuscript that turns up the post.

So how did the judges go in 1999? My feeling, based on reading the SF press and looking at email discussion groups, is that the SF community feels that, although *Time Future* is hardly the Great SF Novel that Transworld claims, it is certainly a novel of which George Turner would have approved. This feeling is based on the denseness of detail that McArthur uses to tell her tale. She takes more than 100,000 words to describe the events of slightly more than three earth-length days, and not too many words are wasted. The only noticeable weakness is that McArthur's narrator spends a bit too much time repeating all those 'Why?' questions that remain unanswered until the last pages of the book. Even the best mystery writers do this.

The richness of detail is based on the strength of McArthur's 'I' character, Commander Alvarez Maria Halley, called Halley. We see everything through her eyes. She doesn't miss much, although she's dead tired for most of the three days and we keep wishing the author would let her sit down for a minute or two. But Halley is not the sort of person to let herself off the hook. She has taken on the responsibility for running a space station in serious trouble. She never shirks her duty.

Halley is the commander of a vast interspecies space station that is trapped. Spaceships crewed by the mysterious Serouas race surround the space station, Jocasta, attacking all outgoing and incoming craft. Jocasta finds itself cut off

Karen Reid, media manager, Random House (left), hands the 1999 George Turner Award to Maxine McArthur (right) at Aussiecon 3, September 1999. (Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz)

from the rest of the Confederacy of Allied Worlds, an interstellar group of four boss civilisations, which have technology incomparably superior to that of the nine other members, including Earth. Systems within Jocasta are not up to the strain being placed upon them. There are signs of internal sabotage, and some sections of the station are being repaired after the initial Serouas attack, the motive for which remains a mystery.

Time Future, then, is the story of interlocking circles of entrapment. At the centre of the circles is Halley, who had thought of herself as young and capable until the crisis began, but now, when she stares into the mirror, 'a pale, ageing stranger stares back at me'. Each tightening of the situation brings out new strengths, including unexpected flashes of grim humour. 'Oh for hot running water,' she says, 'and twelve hours uninterrupted sleep.' She stops for a moment at the hairdresser's shop run by 'Mr and Mrs Giacommitti', who are actually members of the Lykaeat, a mimic race. 'Even aliens drink tea,' thinks Halley.

Halley feels trapped because few people on the station are trying to help her solve the situation. Most of the population of 10,000, from a variety of alien races, shrug off the danger they face. As Halley hurries through the corridors of Jocasta, she finds most people preparing for a large festival. 'Don't they know we're under siege?' Many blame her for the situation, without offering solutions.

Worse, 'while [the Serouas] take nothing from the station, [they hold it] hostage for my good behaviour and vice versa, send for me arbitrarily on average of once a fortnight, wring me sometimes to the point of insensibility for whatever they get from our "conversations" . . . and then let me return. Why, if they needed nothing, were they here? . . . All we can do is wait, while the station falls apart around us.' The central mystery of the first part of the book, the role of the Serouas, also seems the least amenable to solution. When Halley visits their ship, she is fitted with a neck device that enables her to breathe in their ship, but finds herself covered in the green slime that is the habitat of the Serouas. She is interrogated?/probed? by creatures she can barely see in the murk.

Because of its tactile ickiness, Halley's experience within the Serouas ship is very disturbing, and emblematic of everything that is powerful in this book. Halley's experiences among the Serouas yield no results, yet leave her without a sense of smell, and feeling constantly nauseous, so she can barely eat or drink. Yet she needs to keep drawing on reserves of strength she didn't know she possessed.

A small spaceship, which has been nearly destroyed in space by a jump mine, actually makes its way through the Serouas defences. A K'cher trader named Keveth claims salvage rights over the ship, brings it into port, transports onto Jocasta the three cryogenically stored people who had survived the jump mine, then disappears.

The first time I read the book, I seemed to miss the solution altogether. The second time I read it, I realised that the proferred solution is almost incomprehensible (except to readers who are much cleverer than I am). It's enough to say that McArthur plumps for realism over neatness every time. Although Halley thinks she is investigating a case of conspiracy, what she discovers is a case of long-term massive fuck-ups by races that believe they are totally superior to each other and to humans. All the fuck-ups just happen to focus upon one place (Jocasta) at one time (a hundred years after quite another scenario had been planned).

Halley pushes upwards, slowly and carefully, through all the levels of entrapment. There are no miracle revelations, no easy solutions. Halley is really just a good administrator who gets on with the job and knows what to do with information she is offered. She has some help, such as Murdoch and Eleanor, and the three people rescued from the hundred-year-old spaceship. Rachel Griffis, an able Greek chorus to Halley's antiheroics, says: 'It's ironic . . . that we should come so far [100 Earth years], only to find ourselves back at the starting point . . . you have so many similar problems to Earth in our time — overpopulation, resource management, recycling, isolation. All the problems of a closed system . . . We didn't expect the familiar.'

Halley and her staff find, in turn, that the origins of their entrapment lie in the political situation that governs their universe. 'Nobody likes being at the bottom of a hierarchy, but that is where Earth and the other Nine Worlds have been for the entire sixty years of the Confederacy's existence. When the Invidi started sharing their technology and the K'Cher their wealth, something was going to give.' Not that the Invidi and K'Cher are willing to share a thing. For sixty years, they've given Earth enough resources and fancy tricks to enable them to take part in the 'Confederacy', but offered no real power. Hence Halley's constant feeling of being stuck at the negative end of a deep funnel of political power.

Every good science fiction novel reflects the time when it's written as much as it speculates about any future time. When we read *Time Future*, we realise that the title is as mocking as the meaning of many of its events. New structures of colonialism and overwhelming power have emerged during the last twenty years. *Time Future* reflects many of these structures with wit, precision and a heartening belief that a small person, acting for the best in a rundown environment, can still sort her way through a few of the problems that the powerful don't want us to know about. *Time Future* shows that Maxine McArthur has an astute mind, a ferocious sense of detail, and the capacity to become one of the world's most distinguished SF writers.

ROSLYN K. GROSS is a Melbourne writer, who reviews anything intelligent and imaginative. She also teaches English, and lives with her husband and two children. She writes that her imaginative life is a lot more interesting than her outer life.

Vivid and dangerous magic

by Roslyn K. Gross

THOMAS THE RHYMER
by Ellen Kushner (London: Gollancz; 1991; 247 pp.)

Over the past few years a number of novels and short stories have been based on the old English/Scottish ballads and folk stories about Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin, interrelated tales that seem sometimes to be about the same person, but at times also diverge quite widely. Two novels that use the tales, *Fire and Hemlock* by Diana Wynne Jones and *Tam Lin* by Pamela Dean, are both brilliant and creative adaptations, placing various strands of the legends in modern times, in very different ways giving the old stories new life and vigour. Although I had enjoyed both these novels enormously, I felt I had had my fill of Thomas for the moment. Therefore I confess that I wasn't overly enthusiastic about reading this book.

I was very wrong, however. ***Thomas the Rhymer*** is a beautifully written but entirely unpretentious and absorbing story, set firmly in its own time, envisaging how it might really have happened, and telling its story from the points of view of four central characters.

The old ballad of Thomas the Rhymer tells how 'true Thomas', sitting on a grassy bank, is visited by the Queen of Elfland, or Faery, who takes him with her to live in Elfland for seven years, after which he is returned to the ordinary world. Kushner sticks closely to the ballad, interweaving her own explanations and elaborations so skilfully that the resulting story feels as though it really could have happened that way. Kushner has included a few sub-plots of her own as well, giving added interest but still remaining compatible with the original ballad. It is told in a way that is true to the time of the ballad, the fifteenth or sixteenth century, without the intrusion of twentieth-century ideas, and including small details of both the historical background and the everyday life of the time.

The story is told first, in the first person, from the point of view of Gavin, an old crofter, who, together with his wife Meg, and a neighbour girl, Elspeth, befriend Thomas the Rhymer, an up-and-coming harper and singer who wanders from court to court, singing old folk tales (Kushner actually reproduces bits of these in the book) and his own compositions. A deep affection grows between them. Then one day, walking out on the moor, he disappears and never comes back. Each of the characters comes fully alive as vivid individuals, especially Meg, whose sharp down-to-earth wisdom helps to make the whole thing believable, as does Gavin's colloquial style of telling the tale, with simply but sharply observed details and emotions.

The tale is taken up next by Thomas himself, telling of his abduction to Elfland and his experiences there. This is the most lyrical and powerful part of the book, filled with strange but believable images and feelings. Kushner is able to make believable a world far from human understanding, elusive yet vivid, neither good nor bad but beyond human categories, and we are made to understand both Thomas's wonder at this achingly beautiful world and joy in being with the Queen and making love with her, and his loneliness and pain at his isolation from all things understandable, ordinary and human.

One image from Thomas's stay in Elfland is particularly haunting and poignant: that of his invisible servant, spoken of by the Elf-people as a horrible, ugly monster, and who, when Thomas finally sees her, turns out to be an ordinary middle-aged woman. To the Elves, with their eternal youth, her ageing body and fading beauty is the ultimate obscenity. The woman's shame at her 'ugliness' and her hopeless love for Thomas, and Thomas's keen compassion for her, are some of the most moving images in the book.

The next section contains Meg's account of Thomas's reappearance after seven years and his eventual marriage to Elspeth. Kushner brings alive Thomas's joy in returning to the human world, as well as his pain in re-adapting to it, and his discovery of the Queen's final gift to him, the gift of never being able to lie, of seeing the truth and having to tell it. Thomas is indeed a changed man, and through Meg's sharp eyes and feeling nature we see Thomas come painfully to terms with his new life.

Finally, there is Elspeth's account of their life together and his growing fame as a seer and prophet as well as singer and harper. Kushner lets us see the painful implications of having true sight. Do you tell someone what is to happen to them in years to come? Do you tell your wife that you yourself are going to die soon? In the end, the Queen of Elfland makes a last vivid, haunting visit.

Thomas the Rhymer is interesting because it shows that you don't need a complicated plot, or a completely original one, in order to write a compelling, moving story. The novel feels quite low-key and matter-of-fact, neither trying to boast brilliance nor pretending to 'do something new'. It is a simple, vividly told story about characters who feel as though they might really have lived all those years ago, and about the way it might really have felt to have had the dislocating, alienating but transforming experience of removal to an

alien world that the old tale evokes. There is nothing pretentious or unnecessary in this novel, only much that is honest, well-crafted, vividly imagined and moving.

GREENDAUGHTER
by Anne Logston (New York: Ace, 1993, 215 pp.)

GIFTS OF BLOOD
by Susan Petrey (New York: Baen, 1992, 192 pp.)

PRINCE OF WOLVES
by Susan Krinard
(New York: Bantam Fanfare, 1994; 456 pp.)

A TASTE OF BLOOD WINE
by Freda Warrington (London: Pan; 1992; 446 pp.)

Elves, vampires and werewolves: fantasy's perennial favourites and a universal fascination. But though fantasy and SF writers love to write about them, very few manage to present them in a truly effective and powerful way.

Elves can be the immortal, beautiful beings of the 'Thomas the Rhymer' variety, inhabitants of a world we humans can never hope to understand, living by standards that are incomprehensible to us. This is not the case in Anne Logston's ***Greendaughter***. The novel is set in some indeterminate time and place when the forests are inhabited by various clans of elves, each in a specific area of forest, each with its own way of life and customs that nevertheless have features in common with other clans.

Outside the forest live humans, but humans and elves understand little about each other. When a group of humans ventures into the forest to seek the elves' help, it is obvious that some kind of culture clash is about to occur.

Logston's elves remain annoyingly human to the reader. Despite an attempt to show their different attitudes — for example, the elves have a totally uninhibited attitude to sex — the reader gains the impression that these elves are nothing more than another species of human. There is nothing really alien about them. They may have pointed ears, be able to speak to each other through silent mind-speech, or communicate with animals, or live for centuries, or make love freely in front of all and sundry, but they never come alive as something different from human beings.

The fantasy elements of the novel actually contribute very little of real substance to its theme of two different groups finally coming to understand and accept each other — which just as easily could have been achieved in a non-fantasy way.

A major reason for this novel's failure to create a sense of wonder and awe at the alien in our midst, 'the other', is simply its uninspiring writing. The plot is predictable and trite, the language competent but pedestrian, and lacking in vivid images to move and bring the elves alive. As for the dialogue, it is banal and stilted. Chyrie and Valann, elves who are 'mates', are mind-speaking:

> (Does my she-fox-in-heat mate grow impatient? Then we will go — quietly if you can!)
>
> Chyrie wrinkled her nose. (You speak so to me, you who rustle the leaves like a stumble-footed human in your passing? And to think I would wish to couple with your overly furred body —)
>
> (Ah, peace, my own spirit.)

And so on. Admittedly, this is one of the more extreme examples in the book — it is rarely quite as dreadful as this — but it's not hard to see why the characters remain one-dimensional and why the elves themselves fail to excite the imagination.

On the other hand, the vampire-like people in Susan Petrey's ***Gifts of Blood*** are made to feel very believable. The book consists of a collection of stories, all but one of them connected, about the Varkela, a race of nomadic people living on the Russian steppes among the Cossacks and other tribes, mainly set in the last century. Unlike the vampires of folklore and film, the Varkela are peace-loving and ethical, trading their healing skills for the blood they need to survive, countering the prejudice and fear they encounter with reason and rational explanation.

The strength of the stories lies in the science that Petrey employs and explains. For the most part, then, *Gifts of Blood* is science fiction rather than fantasy, and it is the carefully explained science of it that makes the reader feel the Varkela could really exist. We are told, for example, that the relatively small amounts of blood the Varkela need are sucked up through special hollow teeth (the vampire fangs protruding over the lower lip we all know so well) which are retracted when not used, making it possible for the Varkela to pass as ordinary humans most of the time. We find out that the Varkela's salivary glands excrete two types of saliva: one is a rapid clotting agent and the other an anticoagulant. There are many other interesting details. The author had worked as a medical technician and apparently knew her stuff well.

Unlike the vampires of folklore, the Varkela never take blood by violence or exploit people. Because they are scientifically explained and explainable, and indeed, see themselves in rationalistic terms, the Varkela do not really feel like alien beings. In fact, their emotions and psychology seem completely human — they are like a variant race of human beings. But though they would seem to be tamed, comprehensible vampires with the mystery taken out of them, there is something about them that is nevertheless alluring and compelling, perhaps because we feel that they could very well exist.

My main problem with *Gifts of Blood* stems from its introduction. The editors explain that Petrey's stories have been compiled as a memorial to her after her death at the early age of thirty-five. This makes it rather uncomfortable and difficult for a reviewer to criticise the stories. But the truth is that, though competent enough (nearly all the stories have been published before), the writing itself is really rather ordinary. It has a one-dimensional quality, lacking the overtones and undertones, subtleties and evocative nuances that can make writing so rich and interesting. The characters appear interesting enough, but lack that special quality that can make characters leap from the page in vivid aliveness.

The best story is one of the two that are not about the Varkela at all, but is a sad, haunting tale about a spider that lives in a lute and makes music. This story, which was a nominated for a Hugo Award, is much more evocative than the others, and is also about a creature made differently from ourselves.

Gifts of Blood may not be a work of genius, but it does leave vivid images in the mind of people different from ourselves, images made all the more interesting because of their biological explanations. ***Prince of Wolves***, by Susan Krinard, on the other hand, contains no explanations that could be considered scientific: it works in an entirely different way.

Prince of Wolves is an unusual and surprising novel. Looking at the cover and the blurb and the notes on the author, I expected to find a novel in the genre of clichéd romance with a dash of lurid fantasy. Some parts of the book do read that way, but *Prince of Wolves* is much more than that, and turns out to be much more powerful than you would expect.

The writer, we are told, 'is an admirer of both romance and fantasy, and enjoys combining these elements in her books'. Something about the particular way she combines the two produces a strange and heady effect in this novel. It is written more in the romance tradition than the fantasy mode, but seems at some point to transcend them both.

Prince of Wolves begins with some of the clichés of the romance genre. The hero is portrayed in true Mills and Boons tradition as wild, savagely handsome, with compelling eyes and a sexy, taut physique. The two main characters are drawn together with an almost uncontrollable sexual attraction, but all is not what it appears . . . Well, even if the blurb hadn't given it away, it wouldn't take a genius to guess that Luke is one of an ancient race of werewolves, rapidly dwindling, and that he is terrified at what he sees in Joelle and its implications. A sexual relationship erupts anyway, and Joelle discovers his and her own true identity. Luke tries to manipulate her using his magnetic wolf power, and Joelle leaves him. Will their relationship survive?

Prince of Wolves sometimes uses purple prose and the language of Mills and Boon (I forget how many times the hero's eyes 'raked over' the heroine's body), and there are far too many sex scenes, and indeed, the whole novel is too long. The plot is simple and there are few real surprises. Nevertheless, it is very readable and quite compelling, because of the effectiveness and surprising quality of its writing in general. Its prose is certainly much more alive and vibrant than the writing in either *Greendaughter* or *Gifts of Blood*, and this alone helps to make us believe in Luke as werewolf. Unlike the love scenes in *Greendaughter* between the two main elf characters, which are stilted and uninspiring, the sexual scenes in this novel are genuinely erotic. They are so explicit as almost to be called pornography, except that there is not a hint of smut or coyness or dirtiness anywhere. At times, Krinard's writing is surprisingly powerful. Despite its faults, there is life and feeling in every word of the novel.

The werewolves in this novel are, like the vampires in *Gifts of Blood*, not the werewolves of legend and film, although they retain the hint of savagery and wildness of the old stories. They are never half man–half wolf, but always one or the other, although their animal nature does imbue their human form with some wolf abilities. We are never told much about them, their origins, way of life or the precise way their two forms, human and wolf, interact in everyday life.

But the fantasy element nevertheless does more than just add an exotic interest to a romantic story. The intensity and power of the erotic scenes is partly the result, for instance, or Luke's nature as werewolf.

What I find fascinating about *Prince of Wolves* is the way the fantasy theme gives to the novel additional power and mystery. Without it, it would have just been a mediocre sexy, romantic book about a relationship; with it, the book has added levels of meaning and power. Most writers from the SF/fantasy genre could never approach werewolves in this way. We would be told all about the werewolves' origin and culture, be given names, intricate customs, family trees, glossaries, till the werewolves had been made alive and clear but were no longer a mystery. In this book we are given only a glance at the werewolves (there is a whole community of them, but Luke is the only one we get to know properly). But, somehow, partly because the novel is set in the here and now, and because Luke himself comes so alive and feels so real, the existence of werewolves feels like a distinct possibility. At the same time it creates an impression of the werewolves as truly a different species from ourselves, although in their human form they *are* human, for the most part.

But to my mind, the most interesting aspect of the novel is that it opens the issue of categories, of the boundary between SF and 'mainstream' writing. If this novel, which hardly explores the nature of its werewolves, manages to form a gestalt in which werewolves and human relationships add to each other's mystery, why bother about categories? Yes, superior SF/fantasy at its best can do this, and more, although there are far too few such books. But this novel shows that sometimes fantasy elements can be more effective when not handled by writers of traditional fantasy. *Prince of Wolves* is hardly a work of genius, but it could well start writers of mediocre, conventional SF/fantasy, like *Greendaughter*, asking themselves why they keep on doing things the same way, time after time.

A Taste of Blood Wine, by Freda Warrington, is far superior to any of these books, and shows what fantasy/SF writing is capable of in the right hands. This writer finds her most effective voice in this-worldly settings.

Set in the period just after World War I, it vividly evokes the social attitudes of that time, and its characters are wonderfully alive and real. The vampire Karl becomes friendly with a famous scientist and his family in order to try to understand what stuff vampires are made of. He hopes to find a way of defeating Kristian, a twisted tyrant who controls Karl and all other vampires. Karl and Charlotte, one of the scientists' daughters, fall in love, but how can a relationship between a human and a vampire possibly survive? Surely Karl's love itself will destroy her. The resolution, which is tied in with metaphysical and scientific speculations, also depends on Charlotte's growing independence from her family and her society's values. *A Taste of Blood Wine*, like *Prince of Wolves*, is about relationships as much as it is about its supernatural creatures. We become totally involved in the Neville family, and in Charlotte and Karl's longing for a real relationship, despite the almost impossible odds.

But *A Taste of Blood Wine* is much richer and has greater nuance than *Prince of Wolves*, and its vampires are much more real and vivid than Krinard's werewolves. *A Taste of Blood Wine* is full of passionate and sensual images, both beautiful and shocking. The combination of passion and dark danger is a compelling and erotic one. Beautifully written, it has a breathtaking visual and sensual clarity that makes its vampires electrifyingly alive. Although ultimately not unlike humans in their feelings, Warrington's vampires have the original Gothic feel of terrifying yet attractive creatures with a world view and experience of life totally different from ours. Indeed, perhaps this is the secret behind effectively portraying alien beings: what can make them genuinely different from us is their *experience*: of themselves, of the world, and of us. Warrington's metaphysical explanation of the existence of vampires is one of the most original you will find and yet, far from detracting from the mystery of their otherness, as in *Gifts of Blood*, only makes them more tantalisingly possible.

While not a flawless novel, *A Taste of Blood Wine* shows what good fantasy and SF can be like. I can never think of vampires in the same way after reading this book. Although individual vampires in the novel may, like humans, be attractive or repulsive personalities, what seems evil per se about

vampires may only be what is truly *different*. There are scenes in which we are given a glimpse of the physical world, and of the human body itself, through vampire eyes. Stunning images such as these challenge conventional notions of good and evil, life and death. I found it powerful and electrifying, and it made me look at everything in a different way. And if that isn't what fantasy and SF are basically about, what is?

THE CYGNET AND THE FIREBIRD
by Patricia A. McKillop (New York: Ace; 1993; 233 pp.)

Also by Patricia A. McKillop and mentioned in this review:

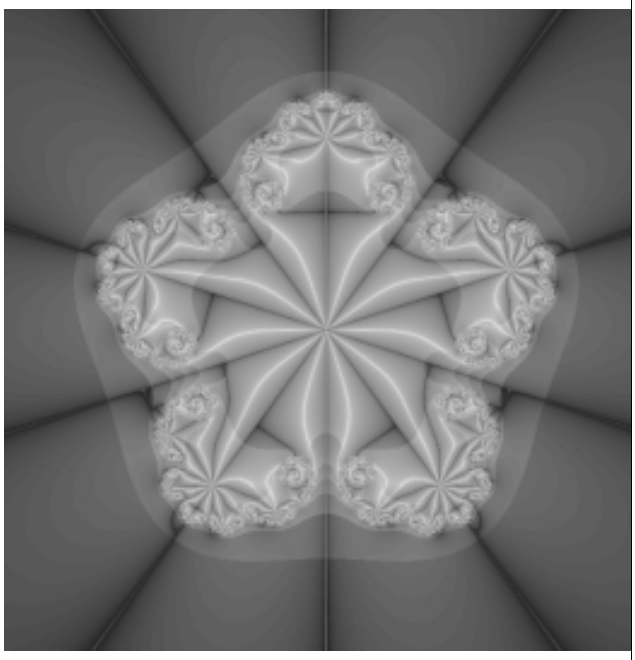
THE SORCERESS AND THE CYGNET
(New York: Ace; 1992; 248 pp.)
and
'THE RIDDLE-MASTER OF HED' trilogy:
THE RIDDLE-MASTER OF HED
(New York: Del Rey; 1976; 228 pp.)
HEIR OF SEA AND FIRE (Del Rey; 1977; 213 pp.)
HARPIST IN THE WIND (London: Futura; 1979; 256 pp.)

Patricia McKillop's ***The Cygnet and the Firebird*** is a sequel to her previous novel, *The Sorceress and the Cygnet*. The latter is an extraordinarily subtle yet powerful novel, filled with both richly symbolic figures and breathtakingly alive human characters. It deals with the nature of myth and story, and with the nature of real power and one character's discovery of it. The world in which *The Sorceress and the Cygnet* is set is never fully explained to us, but is allowed to exist without too much analysis, like the mystery of story itself.

Like McKillop's earlier 'The Riddle-Master of Hed' trilogy, *The Sorceress and the Cygnet* avoids self-conscious explanations of its culture, but unlike the 'Riddle-Master' books, it does not even have a map or glossary to help shape and pinpoint the world in which it is set. It is as if the novel is so much about the nature of story and myth that the exact nature of its world has been kept deliberately low key and vague. Like a dream, it resists precision. Judging by at least one review I have read, some readers have found this a drawback and a flaw. It seems to me, however, that it is a quite deliberate strategy. Moreover, the characters are so vivid and attractive, the writing so dreamy and vivid at the same time, that the reader is drawn fully into the resolution of the story and what it means.

The Cygnet and the Firebird is set in in the same world and begins with the same characters, three weeks after the end of *The Sorceress and the Cygnet*. There is a touch of stiltedness in the early pages of the novel — a rare quality in McKillop's writing — where she refers back to the events of the earlier book. While there is still no map, no glossary, and few background explanations, the world of this novel does feel more concrete, somehow, than it did in the earlier one. The main characters visit another land, for example; this does help put the world of the novel into clearer perspective, although many of the enigmas from the earlier book remain.

Like the first book, and like the 'Riddle-Master' books, this sequel presents us with a riddle, then goes on creating riddles within riddles, a complex tapestry of riddles and symbols and characters. In this book the initial riddle is a firebird that comes flying over Ro Holding (a kind of royal household where most of the characters from the previous book live), turning things and people at random into jewels with its heart-rending cry. At moonrise the firebird is transformed into a man, a prince under a curse. A golden key can help unlock the secret, but a powerful mage is also after the key. Is the mage responsible for the curse? What did the prince do to bring this upon himself? Nix, a mage in her own right, and her cousin Meguet, who seems to have mysterious powers that even she doesn't understand, undertake to help the firebird. Again we are drawn into a web of riddles that, combined with McKillop's magical ability to make characters feel like real, breathing people, makes for irresistible reading.



Graphic by Elaine Cochrane, using DJFractals.

McKillop's greatest strength is her ability to magically weave words into subtle patterns of images and meanings. This book is no exception. The Luxour desert is full of mystery and magic and invisible dragons. Blending fact and metaphor, McKillop evokes the most subtle nuances and feelings, and at the same time the most compelling, vivid images.

It is in the resolution of the plot that McKillop puts a foot wrong — again, something she very rarely does. Unlike the resolution of *The Sorceress and the Cygnet*, which is truly surprising and moving, the end of this new book is just a little pat, almost trite. Though written as beautifully as the rest of the book, the drawing together of all the threads is a little too neat, too easy. This flaw does not really spoil the novel, however. Even if McKillop makes the resolution somewhat too neat and stilted, she does not go too far: for instance, the man who was the firebird certainly does not forgive the maker of the spell, and Nix does not quite end up 'happily ever after' with him — at least, not yet, through there is a suggestion it may happen. In any case, the ending never quite spoils this novel, which has everything else going for it: mystery and riddles, life-sized characters, and lyrical yet economical writing that is a joy to read.

— Roslyn K. Gross, 1994/1997

Pinlighters

SF COMMENTARY No. 73/74/75

SF Commentary 73/74/75, the last one before the George Turner special, appeared in August 1993. Therefore any letters to that issue will be commenting on matters that have faded from the minds of all but hardiest readers. One of these hardy readers in **Scott Campbell**, who has just re-subscribed (thanks, Scott). In 1993, he sent a long, long letter and an article disputing my views about the works of James Morrow. Without reprinting my article, which inspired Scott's vitriol, there doesn't seem to be much point in reprinting the ensuing correspondence. However, if any readers recall the article, and would like to read Scott Campbell's letter and article, I would be happy to supply photocopies.

The following letters to *SFC* 73/74/75 still have some interest and relevance:

GREG EGAN
GPO Box J685, Perth, Western Australia 6001

Amazed — but glad — to hear that you liked *Distress* so much. It had a couple of good reviews in *Locus*, but most of the others have ranged from mild bemusement and disappointment to downright derision. Glad, too, that you noticed that everything was meant to work at a metaphorical level; apart from Russell Letson in *Locus*, most reviewers seem to have been quite oblivious to that, and treated the whole thing as a kind of failed techno-thriller.

Millennium did enter it for the Clarke Award. But I'm not really surprised that it wasn't shortlisted. Dave Langford, for one, judging from his *Ansible* announcement of the Aurealis Award, seems to have found it All Rather Silly. And though the Campbell Award [for *Permutation City*] was very welcome — especially since Gregory Benford, who I greatly admire, was one of the judges — neither of my publishers seems to have found it remotely exciting, and I had to beat Millennium about the head to get them to mention it, even in fine print, on the back of the hardback of *Distress*.

Diaspora is still going too slowly, and if I don't finish it by the end of May (six months late) I'll be very, very unpopular with my editor. I'm not sure you'll like it much; it has multiple viewpoints, mostly software characters, and as little relevance to any current human concern as possible. This one's 100 per cent speculative science, and screw everything else.

(21 April 1996)

Now I remember why I haven't read *Diaspora* — the author warned me away from it! *Diaspora* has been sitting on a shelf for years, daring me to read it. Soon, soon.

Greg is responding to a very short version of my thoughts on *Distress*, but I really must write that long review I've been promising myself all these years.

JOHN BROSNAN
Flat 2, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 0DA, England

I was pleased by that flattering review of *Primal Screen* by Colin Steele. And I was also pleased with the way the book itself turned out. For a time it looked like I was going to have a rare success with it, but after a good start, things went wrong when Maxwell, who owned the publisher, Macdonalds, went down the drain. The publisher went into a kind of receivership for a time and everything came to a halt, including the selling of my book. To add insult to penury, the printers, no doubt in a huff at not being paid, deliberately lost most of the photographs, many of which were irreplaceable.

The review of *Bedlam* was less than thrilling, but then, Harry Adam Knight has never pretended to be anything other than a hack horror writer. Incidentally, Harry is not just me; for the record, Leroy Kettle has been involved in the writing of three of the Knight novels. He came up with the basic idea for *Bedlam*, the last HAK to date, but because he's busy these days being a high-ranking civil servant he doesn't have much time for writing, so I wrote the bulk of the novel.

Astonishingly, it's been made into a movie, and not a bad movie at that. Called *Beyond Bedlam*, it was made by a new British film company on a very small budget (no one got paid; everyone did it for deferred payments). Considering the budget limitations, it's fairly faithful to the novel, though some might say that that probably works against the movie. In the beginning, the producer told me that the one of the reasons he liked the book was because it was set in Harrow on the Hill, where he grew up. Much of the climax of the novel involves the hero and heroine making a dangerous trek up the actual hill in order to confront the source of the evil, and I was curious to see how they were going to film it. When I was out at their production base — a huge mental hospital emptied of all its patients the year before by Virginia Bottomley — I asked one of the associate producers when they were scheduled to shoot the Hill sequences. 'What hill?' he asked me blankly. In the end, there are just a few brief shots in Harrow, and no sign of the Hill at all.

I was amused by Steele's comment, in his review of the Steve Jones book about Jim Herbert, about Herbert's membership of Lloyd's Insurance. Poor Jim was quite proud of being a 'Name', but subsequently, like so many other Names, he got his financial fingers burnt. Hence the disparaging paragraph about Lloyd's in his awful novel *Portent* as his protagonist is driving by the Lloyd's building. The paragraph ends with the words: 'There were some who took satisfaction in the knowledge that the Lutine Bell, rung whenever a ship was lost at sea, had rung metaphorically for Lloyd's itself.'

Actually, I thought that book on Herbert, *By Horror Haunted*, was quite funny in places. As you may have guessed, I don't have much time for ol' Jim. I think he's a prat, and the feeling is mutual — though he went as far as calling me a prick in print.

Wish I had the space to comment on George Turner's piece

on 'The Receiving End of Criticism': I still haven't forgotten his bitchy review of my book *Future Tense* back in '78.

(9 February 1994)

RALPH ASHBROOK
303 Tregaron Road, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004, USA

SFC 73/74/75 brought me one particular pleasure: Andrew Whitmore's quote from *Now Wait for Last Year*. I have seen almost no references to this Phil Dick work in the never-ending journals (*For Dickheads Only*, *Radio Free PKD*, and the late *PKDS Newsletter*). It is my favourite Phil novel because it confronts the oddness of morality, which is similarly addressed in the dungeon scene of Faust and Margaret/Gretchen.

In both cases an inhuman agent has posed or created the question of correct action. It is the somewhat irrational commitment of Faust and Eric Sweetscent that shows, but doesn't explain, their humanness in subtle contrast to the taxi and the Devil. The love they find themselves feeling is an anchor and a mystery.

(January 1994)

Now Wait for Last Year is one of Phil Dick books revived by Gollancz Millennium in its SF Masterworks series.

GENE WOLFE
PO Box 69, Barrington, Illinois 60011, USA

If things were normal, I would tell George Turner that he knows not of what he speaks. Someday I may publish *The Worst of Gene Wolfe*, a volume stained with barrel-bottom stories of such appalling badness that their being paid for and published is all the condemnation needed of a system hopelessly decadent and corrupt.

But things aren't. I hadn't heard about George's stroke; I am heartily sorry. I shouldn't have to say this, and perhaps I don't — but the fact that the author likes the revewer does not oblige the reviewer to like the book. I have had reviews that I feel quite confident were, in actuality, acts of petty vengeance. This isn't one of them.

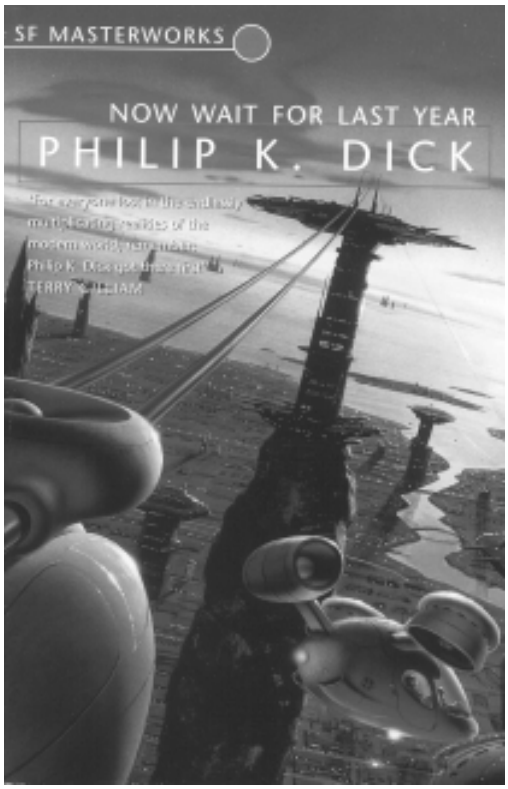
(15 December 1993)

George's stroke, in 1992, slowed him down for a year or so. Although he had written the first half of *Down There in Darkness*, the stroke removed all memory of what he had planned for the second half. Hence the rather odd tone and structure of that book, which was to be his last. Although he could no longer write with his right hand, George learnt how to use a computer so that he could keep writing. His last piece of fiction, unfinished, appears in *Dreaming Down Under*, edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS
15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

As a contribution to your George Turner bibliography, you might like to know that the very first issue of *FTT*, published in December 1985, contained a review by George of the operas *La Bohème* and *The Barber of Seville*, put on by the Victorian Opera. The review was entitled 'Select Evenings of Tory Entertainment', a title chosen by Leigh Edmonds, then one of *FTT*'s co-editors.

(27 January 1994)



Until I looked at your card, Joseph, I had forgotten about that article about the Victorian State Opera. I remembered that George had written an article about music other than the piece about Melba that appears in *SFC* 76. He has not left a carbon copy of the *FTT* article in his papers, and *FTT* No. 1 was not among the fanzines I came across during my researches in the month before Aussiecon 3. Thanks to Murray Moore from Canada for finding his copy of *FTT* 1 and sending me a .PDF of the article.

FRANK C. BERTRAND
(CoA) PO Box 7050, Nikiski, Alaska 99653, USA

In *SFC* 73/74/75, I was most intrigued by Dr Tolley's review of *In Pursuit of Valis* (pp. 100–2). In fact, I could even understand it. There were very few convoluted sentences or sesquipedalist circumlocations. My compliments. It is a refreshing change from the likes of *On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles from Science-Fiction Studies*, a dense tome from the heartland of the burgeoning Philip K. Dick 'critical industry' meant for other scholars, not the average PKD reader/fan. Does *more* scholarship necessarily mean *better* scholarship?

One might reasonably ask, then, what *purpose* does *In Pursuit of Valis* serve. To answer this embroils us in whether or not evaluation and explication should refer to the writer ('intentional fallacy') and/or the reader ('affective fallacy'). Dr Tolley indicates that 'I will subscribe so far, at least, to the popular view that authors do not know all of what they are doing when they write'. This should, of course, apply as well to Dr Tolley and myself. Reviewers and letter writers are not sacrosanct entities.

He ends his review with the curious assertion that 'The Exegesis must now be considered integral to any scholarly understanding of this great modern writer's work'. *Why* 'scholarly' understanding? Surely there are other kinds of understanding by which one can explore and enjoy Philip K. Dick's work, including his non-fiction. *Why* 'integral'? If Phil Dick does not know all of what he is doing when he writes, to

include the so-called Exegesis (a word that initially meant the critical explanation of scripture), it would seem that rather than being essential to a complete scholarly understanding, it is but one part of his non-fiction corpus. If it is essential to anything, a case might be made that the Exegesis is integral to understanding his 'Valis' trilogy.

What Dr Tolley more aptly notes is 'Dick's dualism' and the fact that he can be characterised as an autodidact. A studied pursuit of these two factors would yield a far more viable and valid explication than most of those already proffered. In particular, Dick's dualism is intriguingly manifested via a variety of doppelganger characters in many of his stories and novels. These in turn connotatively lead to various philosophical and psychological implications connected to two of Phil's 'intellectual heroes', Immanuel Kant and C. G. Jung. As Dr Tolley states it, 'going through unfamiliar territory several times is a good way of learning one's way about in it'. And Phil's fiction *and* non-fiction are definitely unfamiliar territory.

(11 February 1994)

Frank disappeared after sending me this letter. *SFC* 76 returned to me, marked Address Unknown. A few months ago, Frank sent an email to **Lucy Sussex**, who put him in touch with me. Frank had just moved to Alaska. This has already led to Frank's interviews with Lucy, me, and other Phil Dick aficionados, such as Andy Butler, appearing on the philipkdick.com Web site.

Frank and I are unexcited by the reverence paid to the 1970s latter-day guru Philip K. Dick, whose strange exegetical writings seem to have become more important for some critics than the lithe, brilliant earlier writings. As Frank says above, much of the critical apparatus applied to Dick's writing during the last twenty years seems to have little to do with the writing being operated upon. Time for a new edition of *Electric Shepherd*?

DIANE FOX
PO Box 9, Hazelbrook, New South Wales 2779

Substituting 'sucked' for 'suckled' sounds like one of the classic unfortunate typoes. The most famous unfortunate typo was the one that was supposed to have appeared on the front page of a British newspaper over a hundred years ago, describing the royal opening of a new bridge. The heading stated that 'Queen Victoria Passed Over the Bridge'. Unfortunately, the letter 'a' was replaced by 'i', resulting in Her Majesty not being Amused, and the newspaper editor landing in a good deal of trouble.

To Kim Stanley Robinson: Will terraforming be regarded as an ecological crime in the future? Probably there will be very little opposition to the terraforming of a lifeless planet. If there are animals, it will be a different story. Olaf Stapledon, in *Last and First Men*, described a worst-case scenario — to survive, the human race must migrate to Venus, which must be terraformed to make it habitable. Unfortunately, the fully sentient Venusians will be exterminated by the terraforming. Stapledon was a tragic and realistic writer, there was no last-minute solution, and genocide was committed against the Venusians (described as slightly more intelligent, though less technologically advanced, and almost certainly morally superior to humans).

In your discussion with Michael Hailstone, I was interested by the use of 'caring/sharing' as derogatory terms. After all, what is the opposite concept, which this particular usage is implied to praise? 'Apathy/ignoring/uncaring' might do for one half, but perhaps might seem a little wimpishly passive. What about the opposite of 'sharing' — would it be 'hoarding' (to cover the concept of the opposite of 'sharing' of possessions) or 'isolation' (opposite of 'sharing' of emotions)? Again, a little passive and wimpish. However, anyone genuinely holding the opposite of 'caring/sharing' views would be very reluctant to put it into words, in case potential suckers were warned off, or to avoid unpleasantness. (The Marquis de Sade was probably one of the few exceptions, and even he seems to have mostly set his views out in full after he was jailed for life as a madman, and nothing more he said would have harmed him further.)

(15 March 1994)

MICHAEL HAILSTONE
(CoA) 8 Durie Street, Lithgow, New South Wales 2790

You ask me what I mean by 'sixties values'. Rather than talking about 'sixties values', it would be better to ask what the sixties were really about.

My brothers told me that nothing much happened of the sixties in Australia until the very early seventies. Since I was overseas for the last two years of the sixties, I felt I couldn't argue with that, but on thinking about it, I feel that's quite untrue. Although I don't denigrate the Whitlam years, I see them as a phenomenon that followed the sixties, not part thereof. The sixties were not about having a benign government in power; they were about rebellion against an unfriendly government and the Establishment. The Vietnam War was a divisive issue in Australia from 1965 on, culminating in the great moratoria in 1970. Furthermore, there was a quite bohemian movement around Sydney's Kings Cross as early as 1967, although I felt I didn't really belong to it myself. Also, I remember an atmosphere of gentleness prevailing in Sydney from 1966 to 1973, when that nasty yobbishness so characteristic of the fifties actually disappeared for a while.

Greenpeace and other Green organisations may well have the right politics, but they seem pretty ineffectual to me nowadays, just playing the Establishment's game.

(3 November 1993)

My own experience of the 1960s is that very little changed in the lives of ordinary people in Australia until 1970, when *The Sunday Review* and *The Sunday Observer* suddenly appeared, heralding a new approach to politics and lifestyle. (Germaine Greer used to say: 'Australia has the best journalists in the world — and they are all living in London.' In 1971, suddenly they were living and writing in Australia.) By the time I began working again in Melbourne, in February 1971, rapid changes in assumptions were taking place. The Pram Factory theatre had begun its ten-year heyday, the Much More Ballroom had become the centre of the establishment-challenging rock scene, and every public personality and TV star suddenly sprouted long hair. Of course, the way must have been prepared for these changes during the late 1960s. It's just that I hadn't noticed them, not even when Whitlam nearly won the 1969 Election (which many political pundits see as the true beginning of the Whitlam Era, because of the considerable changes that the 1969 Election forced upon Liberal Party policy). Perhaps somebody who was living in the inner suburbs during the late sixties can help with a bit of detailed reminiscence?

PATRICK McGUIRE
7541-D Weather Worn Way, Columbia, Maryland 21046, USA

Damien Broderick reviews the revised *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. A schedule conflict or something kept me from attending Peter Nicholls' presentation on the Encyclopedia at Conadian, which was a pity, because report has it that it was a very good program item, and also because I never did manage to run into Peter elsewhere at the con (3000-plus people may be modest by modern Worldcon standards, but it's not exactly a small circle of friends, either). I did see Peter collect his well-deserved Hugo, at least. The revised edition has also made me aware of a bibliographic peculiarity. The US edition, or at least the US paperback edition, of the old version was called *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, whereas the old British edition was *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. The revised US edition, however, is using the latter title. It all gets rather confusing.

(19 November 1994)

Not meeting Patrick McGuire at Aussiecon 3 was disappointing. He was there. He came up to me at the end of my presentation of the George Turner talk ('The Good Soldier', which became the *Foundation* article that nearly won me a Pioneer Award) and introduced himself. I was surprised and delighted, but didn't talk much because I assumed we would meet again sometime during the convention. I didn't give him my phone number or address in Melbourne, and didn't get his room number. I didn't see him again, but after the convention I thought he would get in touch (there's only one 'Gillespie BR' in the Melbourne phone book), as he had said he would be staying in the city. But this didn't happen, and we made contact again only a few months after he had returned to America. I met Jack Speer and Waldemar Kumming at Aussiecon 3, and didn't know what to say to them, but had a good yarn to Rusty Hevelin, seemingly unchanged from his visit in 1975 to Aussiecon I. But I didn't get to talk to Patrick McGuire.

Patrick sent a quotation from the *Washington Post Book World*, 18 September 1994. The columnist, predating Nick Hornby by some years, mentions interesting lists that readers of the paper had sent to him. Wendell Wagner (from Washington) 'furnished a hall-of-fame roster of his 20 favorite science fiction and 20 favorite fantasy novels. For sf, he opens with Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, noting that he likes "BIG IDEAS in science fiction and Stapledon's are about as big as they come". This brace of books — favorites of mine, too — follow man's evolution into the distant future; the range of time represented in the film *2001* would hardly make up a brief chapter in *Last and First Men*. In his fantasy list Wagner recommends the perennially underrated Mervyn Peake, author of the baroquely extravagant *Gormenghast*, *Titus Groan* and *Titus Alone*. Why are these books not as well known as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea books (both of which are also on Wagner's list)?' In 2000, large numbers of people have now seen the TV version of *Gormenghast*, but did they ever get around to reading the books?

STEVE SNEYD
4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

The SF/speculative poetry I should read and reread, let alone catching up on 'proto-SF' poets I'm years behind on, means that my connection with the reviews in *SFC* is voyeuristic at best. I was tempted by some things mentioned, but not enough to face the struggle of trying to find them in our library. It has the unhelpful habit of ghettoising SF, unalphabeticised, in the Light Fiction room. I have a vision of the proverbial little old lady seeking a light read, and ending up with *Valis*. The library has an 'equal opportunity/feminist' section, yet ghettoised Suzette Haden Elgin's feminist icon tale *Native Tongue* into the Light Fiction room. They put Aldiss's 'read with lefthand'ers, such as *The Hand-Reared Boy* alphabeticised on the main shelves, yet his serious work (the SF) in the Light Fiction room. Only Dick's non-SF novels get on the main shelves. I could multiply these crazed instances of misfiling, but they make it a nightmare actually trying to find any particular book.

(4 December 1994)

Steve also suggests reinstating the Index to *SF Commentary* — it will be here if I can find room at the end of the issue.

Steve's specialty is SF poetry, or any other poetry from the alternative/slipstream area. He publishes a wide range of magazines and books, so write to him at the above address if you'd like to see what he has available.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM . . .

Eva Hauser, GUFF winner from 1991, who wrote to me in 1993 to say that she has left SF publishing in the Czech Republic and is now working on a variety of other projects, including her own fiction and books of feminist essays.

Graham Stone reports that his famous bibliography of Australian SF continues to be updated.

Ed Meskys is still publishing *Niekas* regularly, despite facing far more severe problems than have ever faced me in publishing *SFC*.

Gordon Van Gelder and I corresponded about the works of Kate Wilhelm. I sent him what I thought was a pretty good article about Wilhelm, who is one of Gordon's favourite writers. Gordon was her publisher while he was still working at St Martin's Press. Gordon sent a page of corrections to my article, plus a copy of *Death Qualified*, which was then Kate Wilhelm's latest novel. Gordon made sensible suggestions, but I've never had time to do the mountain of work needed to update my article.

Syd Bounds keeps in touch. Among other comments about *SFC* 73/74/75, he said: 'I was impressed by this issue . . . That was before I reached "Critical Mass". Then Langford so dazzled me that the rest of the issue was dimmed. Obviously this is unfair to your other writers.' 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. No sign of that book in Australia yet.

Terry Dowling thanked Damien Broderick for his review of *Blue Tyson*, and apologises for the 'unfortunate truncation of our MS for *Mortal Fire*. We did have a final page (335), but this was summarily cut by the new publishing director so the book could make a 1993 release date. *SF Commentary* was included on that page, as were several other publications we wanted to recommend.' I want to thank Terry publicly for arranging for me to publish an obituary for George Turner in *The Australian* in 1997, shortly after George died.

Terry Jeeves keeps in touch, although he has had health

problems in recent years. 'I enjoyed Damien Broderick's review of the *Encyclopedia*, but must admit the book itself had a few omissions — once you got past Clute's incomprehensible opening comments. Fancy, no entry for Kimball Kinnison, yet Elric gets a big spread. Did personal taste creep in there?' Probably. John Clute has been accused of making the more recent *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* a highly personal, even idiosyncratic book, but, like the Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, it is a necessary reference.

Stan Robinson thanks me for the interview published in *SFC* 73/74/75. He wanted to meet me when he reached Australia in the 1990s, but didn't. He did catch up with George Turner.

Scott Campbell has continually sent new addresses during the last eight years: 'Why do I keep moving all the time? Don't let this get around, but Salman Rushdie has been living in Australia for the last few years, and I got the job of looking after the old devil. We don't like to stay in one place for too long.' I've never met Scott, but he's been sighted by British fans in a London pub.

Tony Joseph, who is M. K. Joseph's son, wrote asking for a copy of Stanislaw Lem's review of M. K. Joseph's *The Hole in the Zero* (*SFC* 24, November 1971). Tony had also obtained a copy of *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. I sent Tony the material he asked for, but haven't heard from him since.

Tom Whalen was hurtling back and forth from Germany to New Orleans when last I was in touch with him, but I didn't hear from him after the publication of *SFC* 76.

Chris Priest and I were still discussing Chris's *The Book on the Edge of Forever* in 1994. I've reviewed it, but it's in a large block of my 'Scanning in the Nineties' reviews that will appear next issue.

SF COMMENTARY No. 76

Email has made things both easy and difficult for the fanzine editor. Lots of people send emails as soon as they receive an issue. They tell me they will send a long, full-blooded letter of comment 'as soon as possible'. They rarely do.

Other people took advantage of my offer to send the whole issue as a .PDF file (all 1.8 megabytes of it). I did not keep a list of these people, unless they sent a letter of comment.

So I'm willing to send you this issue, and probably the next, on the strength of the fact that you got in touch with me. However, I'm not going to list you as a correspondent or contributor if all you did was promise to send a letter.

And you might not find your name in the WAHF section. You haven't been left out on purpose, but you may have disappeared under the electronic scrum. Apologies if this has happened.

BOB SMITH
37 St Johns Road, Bradbury, New South Wales 2560

I don't know if ever met George Turner — perhaps at the Tenth Australian SF Convention, University of Melbourne, 1–3 January 1971, if he was there. Because of the tyranny of distance, he has always been a shadowy person for me. Since he appeared in *Australian Science Fiction Review* (First Series), and I was receiving it (I cringe to remember that I actually had a column in it — 'Smith's Burst'), I should remember all controversial things he wrote . . . but my memory will not come up with anything.

Until recently I had read no Turner fiction, but I found the Sphere paperback of *Beloved Son* in a book exchange for 50 cents. I guess I raised a jaundiced eyebrow at the 'SF Epic of the Year' blurb, and at this stage I haven't quite finished reading it. It does not inspire me to dash out and find more Turner, I'm afraid, although I realise that I did read 'I Still Call Australia Home' in a Hartwell anthology.

The Sea and Summer (*Drowning Towers* in the American edition) is the Turner SF novel to read first, not *Beloved Son*.

I am not rapt about George's criticism, early or recent, but find his lighthearted writings entertaining. The interview at the end of *SFC* 76 hints at darker moments in his life, and most of the examples you provide indicate, to me, that he was a writer and definitely not a 'fan' in the sense I am familiar with.

What happened to the large dog Bangsund mentioned?

(2 November 2000)

If you read George's autobiography *In the Heart or in the Head* or, better still, Judy Buckrich's biography, you would find the full story of Caesar. When George returned to Melbourne, broke, after his disastrous year in Sydney (in 1969–70), he found that Caesar, who had been staying with a friend in St Kilda, had been fed a poison bait only a week before he returned. That was George's lowest moment. He made Caesar into the main character of his most passionate non-SF novel, *Transit of Cassidy*.

JOHN BROSNAN

Just a short note thanking you for *SF Commentary* 76. Very impressive tribute to that old bastard Turner. Hope he's suitably impressed, wherever he is these days. Perth, isn't it? (I occasionally watch *Neighbours*, just to keep in touch with my cultural roots, and whenever a character is written out of the series people say that he or she has 'gone to Perth', which I've deciphered as being a metaphor for being dead. I should know.)

Oddly enough, when I originally read much of the material you've reprinted of Turner's I'm sure I was extremely irritated by his opinions, but now, decades later, I'm in complete agreement with him. Part of the ageing process, I guess . . .

(29 November 2000)

CY CHAUVIN
14248 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan 48213, USA

I had a Christmas party on Saturday, and got a chance to talk to Patrick O'Leary, who I never really talked to before. He mentioned how much he enjoyed reading *The New York Review Of Science Fiction*, and how he hadn't found anything else that really was up to its standards. So then I went upstairs and I brought down *SFC* 76. 'Have you ever seen this before?' I said. 'I think it's the best magazine about SF anywhere.' So Patrick began to flip through it. 'Oh, I have to read this,' he said, seeing George Turner's review of Gene Wolfe. 'And this,' he said, seeing the piece on Thomas Disch. And then he saw the piece on *The Dispossessed*. 'Oh, you don't mind if I sit down and read this here, do you?' he said. And of course I didn't. I understood. We talked a little afterward about how much we admired *The Dispossessed*, and I said that George Turner was the only one who ever really explained why she

BRIAN ALDISS
39 St Andrews Road, Old Headington,
Oxford OX3 9DL, England

Dear Bruce
SF Commentary 76 — the George Turner issue — is a triffic effort, colour covers back and front and all. Full of interesting reading.

But I am going to pick on one small point. Even worse, I have picked on it before. However, it appears again so I pick on it again. It is a remark that defames my first publisher, Faber & Faber. It is made by Peter Nicholls on page 98. I don't know where he got the idea from; he claims that I sold my first SF novel, *Non-Stop*, including World Rights, for £60.

This was not the case. Faber would not stoop so low. In those days, honourable men ran publishing houses. *Non-Stop* worked its way round the world; at every stop I collected. Just a month or two ago, Millennium, an imprint of Victor Gollancz — in the shape of my old friend Malcolm Edwards — reprinted *Non-Stop* as an 'SF Masterwork'. As ever, I was paid.

It gave me no pleasure to correct this defamatory remark the first time. This time, it gives me even less pleasure!

Sorry, this is incidental and has nothing to do with the monumental Turner!

Regards, Brian.

(8 November 2000)

PETER NICHOLLS
'Monsarrat', 26A Wandsworth Road,
Surrey Hills, Victoria 3127
To: BRIAN ALDISS

Dear Brian,
I do now faintly remember you setting me right many years ago on the error I apparently made about your sale of *Non-Stop*, and I should have picked it up when Bruce asked permission to reprint my ancient discussion with George. I do apologise. I assume Bruce will carry your justifiably cross letter of repudiation in the next issue.

What mystifies me is where I got the story from, which now I cannot remember at all — see below. It must have been a source I trusted, or I wouldn't have used the story. Anyway, I'm once again relieved to learn that *Non-Stop* rights remain safely with you. And I too look back sadly to the days when one could say without irony that British publishers, all in all and most of the time, were honourable men.

My memory is shocking these days though. At sixty-one, I'm comparatively young, but memory loss is pretty well crippling my ability to write anything more ambitious than the occasional book review. This is probably not unconnected, I'm sorry to say, with the Parkinson's disease I was recently (two weeks ago) diagnosed as having. Indeed, looking back at symptoms I didn't understand at the time, I've probably had it for about five years now.

Good to hear from you, even if indirectly.

All best, Peter Nicholls.

(13 November 2000)

Peter's reply to Brian was the first news that Peter had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. When last I talked with Peter, he was in a mellow mood, resigned to his fate but not below his usual intellectual best. In the same period as Peter has been suffering severe health problems, Brian has lost his beloved wife Margaret, published his autobiography, and locked horns with Stanley Kubrick. Kubrick based his film *AI*, eventually made by Steven Spielberg, on Brian's story 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long', which is also the title of the new Aldiss short story collection. Both Peter and Brian have been longtime supporters of *SF Commentary*, for which much thanks.

structured it the way she did. (And it was amazing to me to read the article now after so many years — somehow I missed it on original publication.) It's been a long time since I've had such an enjoyable conversation about science fiction. And Patrick took down your address and subscription information and said he was going to rush something off to you, so you may have another reader in Detroit soon!

As far as I can remember, Patrick O'Leary didn't get in touch with me, but you did, Cy. This was a most gratifying letter of comment, because it showed that the old Turner magic still works — he pretended to damn all the works of SF, but often made people enthusiastic about works they would never have read otherwise.

I've been trying to cope with going back to work myself after being off for a couple months on disability. I hurt my back while exercising, and couldn't take the long drive to work anymore. Our office was bought by a large corporation from Atlanta, Georgia, and we were moved from a very convenient location downtown to a traffic-clogged location in a distant suburb. This happened about a year and a half ago. And now our corporation has been bought by an even larger international company. I never imagined that anyone would ever buy our small, family-owned magazine, but sometimes what you never imagined comes true. I do resent being in a place where there are no sidewalks or traffic lights, making it impossible to walk anywhere. Even the woods and field across the parking lot from where I work which gave a nice view are being cut down for another one-storey office park, and the last advantage of this place over the old is being lost.

(20 December 2000)

TOM COVERDALE
25 Docker Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121

I was interested in your comments on telepathy on the Eidolist a while back: 'The real problem of telepathy, raised by George Turner in his famous essay about *The Demolished Man*, is that in a society with a large number of telepathic people, it might not be possible to shut out other people's thoughts, therefore leading to society-wide madness. Bester in *The Demolished Man* had some tricksy way of shutting out other people's thoughts, a solution that Turner thought was quite specious, and used inconsistently in the novel. So any 'rules' of telepathy in your book would have to be absolutely

consistent, or involve violent changes to society.'

Seems to me this problem of everyone's thoughts hitting the telepath at once might become reality if the so-called hardware/wetware interface is ever realised. That is, once our brains are connected to the internet, won't we all be telepathic? Presumably the medium for transmission would be radio or microwaves, rather than psi waves, though.

Can you remember where the Turner essay was published?

(7 February 2001)

Tom, recently moved to Melbourne from South Australia, decided to seek out SF people here. His email query about *The Demolished Man* led him to write a letter of comment to George Turner without having read George's 'The Double Standard' essay first.

Tom seems to have disappeared recently, although he was attending the Nova Mob early in 2001.

VAN IKIN
Department of English,
University of Western Australia,
Nedlands, Western Australia 6009

I've just been reading the latest *overland* (No. 160), which begins with an excerpt from 'an autobiography in progress' by Dorothy Hewett, and on page 9 there's a reference to George Turner.

You might be aware of this already, but if not, let me know and I'll send you a photocopy as soon as I can. (But that might take a week or so as I was diagnosed with glandular fever a few weeks back and my life has been changed — and slowed — ever since.)

Of course, this condition is not without its 'silver lining': it has given me more time to read, and right at the time when *SFC* 76 is available. It's fascinating having this chance to review George's critical career.

Needless to say, I understand your apologies about the dating of the issue. 21 months late? A hanging matter, to be sure! You'd never catch *me* dragging the chain like that . . .

I'm looking forward to the coming 'surprise' issues!

(28 October 2000)

This was the first news I had had that Van had been suffering from glandular fever. Elaine contracted it in her early twenties, and was unable to do anything much for six months except eat and sleep. It seems as if Van has recovered, as I've received two fine issues of *Science Fiction* recently.

Fortunately, editor Ian Sysons has placed me on the *overland* trade list, so I was able to track down the reference to George Turner. Dorothy Hewett remembers meeting George when he was the Industrial Officer at Bruck Mills in Wangaratta, way back in the early fifties. George must have appeared as a bit of a shock to Hewett. He sent her a letter, wittily rude about her work, and they seem to have kept writing to each other for some years.

STEVE JEFFERY
44 White Way, Kidlington,
Oxford OX5 2XA, England

I don't know whether to thank you or curse you. *SF Commentary* 76 arrived in the post and pretty much distracted me for all of yesterday when I really ought to have hitting an apa deadline (worse, it's Vikki's apa) but I proved unable to resist the lure of reading the 30th Anniversary issue just about cover to cover (although in a fairly wayward order).

Fascinating. I really must see if we have a copy of Wolfe's *Peace* somewhere, and, if not, add it to my list of books that touch on Memory Houses (along with Crowley, Yates, and now the Jack Dann I picked up at Fantasycon.)

I'm still working my way through thoughts on Turner's various pieces on SF criticism and reviewing, not at all sure I totally agree with him, especially when he makes seemingly disparaging remarks about 'academic'-sounding pieces by, amongst others, Greenland and KVB as not doing much to progress the understanding of SF, but then does something almost indistinguishable himself in his article on the structure of *The Dispossessed*. I'm not at all convinced (and maybe George wasn't, towards the end; I'd have to check the date of the article) that it is any good or worth the struggle trying to promote any critical acceptability of SF outside the genre (it might make writers feel better, but I doubt one in 100 readers really gives a fig what critics in the *TLS* or *Observer* might think of the genre if they even bother to mention it).

So I have never really been convinced about this straining for litcrit respectability anyway. The proper target for SF reviews and criticism, to my mind, is the readers and (assuming they take notice) the writers. And I'm beginning to think writers are largely impervious anyway. They have an immediate turn-off response to negative comments about their books (based on the half dozen or so I know who have mentioned this and their reaction to poor reviews). It's one of the reasons I never review books by authors who are friends — the other side of which is that if it's a very glowing review I might be thought unduly biased, which I hope I'm not.

GT's pieces do set me thinking about why I do reviews, and even why I edit the *Vector* reviews section. I don't think it's because I have any personal critical agenda or manifesto, or that I think it affects many authors or publishers in any real way. *Vector* gives some of the new reviewers a place to practise and hone their own critical and writing skills. We all have to start somewhere, as I did when Paul Kincaid asked me to join the *Vector* reviewers' roster some years back, and I think that should be encouraged. It has the possible downside that it does tend to make you lose some of the uncritical and perhaps naive enjoyment you used to read sf with in younger days.

(25 October 2000)

You caught the Turner message, Steve, even if you disagree with much of what he said, as we all did. I don't think George cared all that much for literary respectability, although he knew that the best SF books would be well regarded if only they weren't the victim of the perpetual literary prejudice against SF. He was annoyed when SF fans claimed literary respectability for crappy SF books. They hurt their own cause. They often showed that they wouldn't recognise a good book if they fell over one. That's why he talked about 'standards', not because such standards would change the behaviour of the writers or publishers, but because a bit of critical thinking might change the attitudes of readers.

TIM JONES
87 Ellice Street, Mt Victoria,
Wellington, New Zealand

Thanks for sending me *SF Commentary* 76, and, a few months ago now, *Steam Engine Time*. I enjoyed both very much, but *SF Commentary* 76 was particularly memorable. I had read a great deal about George Turner's SF criticism over the years,

and have a copy of *The View From the Edge*, which I bought at Aussiecon II. Based on what I'd read about his criticism, I viewed the prospect of actually reading some with considerable trepidation — but what struck me most about it was its common sense and, in most cases, moderation. Compared with the worst excesses of the 'kill the fuckers' school of British fanzine and SF criticism, George seemed positively restrained — and, as in those of his novels I'd read, the appeal to reason was a striking characteristic. For all George's words of wisdom, it was his quote from Arnold Green that most struck a chord with me: 'The chattering of one's teeth is often mistaken for the approaching hoofbeats of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' (p. 27). That's a comforting thought to take with one into the darkest of nights.

Although I don't know whether I will ever get around to putting another *Timbre* into print, I have started putting some reviews that would otherwise have gone into *Timbre* up on my web site at http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~timjones/zine_reviews.html. The reviews that are currently there cover zines I received in 1998, but over the summer holidays, I intend to put up reviews of zines received in 2000, including *SF Commentary* 76 and *Steam Engine Time* 1.

(19 November 2000)

JERRY KAUFMAN
PO Box 1786, Seattle, Washington 98111, USA

SF Commentary 76 arrived on Saturday, and I took it with me on a little trip Suzle and I took in the North Cascades, to examine it during odd moments. It's quite an amazing zine, and I thank you for sending it. I'll probably read at it during odder moments in the future. I find my interest in sercon has waned a bit, and my concentration flags after shorter periods than before.

I did read the several major articles that open the volume, and bits of scattered reviews. I find I always agreed with George in principle, but disagreed frequently with him in specific applications. I was always a big Delany fan, while George plainly wasn't. (I remember disagreeing with him about *Triton*, for instance, but don't recall having seen his remarks on *Nova* before.)

I don't recall having read his structural analysis of *The Dispossessed* before, either, but I noticed the structure of the book myself. Another SF book with the same structure was *Who?* by Budrys, though I don't know if his purpose was the same as Le Guin's. I will assume that George would have appreciated the comparison, since he liked *Rogue Moon* so much.

(25 October 2000)

LLOYD PENNEY
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke,
Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

What a treat to receive in the mail, namely issue 76 of *SF Commentary*, the George Turner Memorial Issue and Thirtieth Anniversary Issue. It really is a beautiful magazine, well produced, and with a great cover.

It is rare these days that a science fiction writer keeps such close contact with his readers and with the local fandom in his area, and participates in their projects because of the same love of SF. (Perhaps not in America, where more writers emerge from fandom, but it is certainly rare in Canada, and I suspect, in Australia.) It sounds like George was that rare bird, a pro and a fan, and active in both. I regret that he died when he did; his appearance at Aussiecon 3 would have revealed his talents as a writer to the whole world. I know he was well known in Australia, but I don't think he was in North America.

George's self-introduction on page 6 sounds quite familiar, as so many fans remember what their first SF book was. For many people, it was Heinlein's *Red Planet*; for Yvonne, it was *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke. For me, it was probably a Wollheim or Carr anthology or a collection of Asimov stories; I don't really recall. As Graham Greene said, the books needn't necessarily be good, but at least make an impact. I am hoping that yet another generation of readers may claim the same beginnings, and I suspect the book that made their beginnings would be a 'Harry Potter' book. I think we can agree that no one will even call the Rowling books fine literature, not ever Joanne Rowling, but they have obviously made an impact on hundreds of thousands of young people [100 million at last count], and as they rediscover the joys of reading, I hope they will discover the joys of SF&F as we did long ago.

As I read George's early criticism, especially his criticism of critics and reviewers, I see that he falls into his own traps. Constructive criticism of a book (and anything else, for that matter) is rare indeed, by so-called professional reviewers, or the fan who prints his own reviews in his fanzine. I'd prefer reviews in plain English, with exploration of a book's strengths and weaknesses. I don't think I'm alone in that desire. Besides, gutting a book, and its writer in the process, serves no purpose except to exercise your own frustrations in print. I find George's reviews so full of such flowery language as to be nearly unreadable, and his attitude as expressed in his writing comes across as harsh, snotty and arrogant. Instead of learning more about the book being reviewed, we learn George's dislike of the writer, the massive affront he had suffered at the hands of the author, and the enormous extent to which he did not like the book. This teaches the reader or the author nothing, and as a result, is totally unconstructive and uneducational. (I see that George himself admits in later years to poisonous reviews in his earlier years, and that he did so because it seemed to be expected. Such is the background negativity of fandom. He later on says he didn't even enjoy reviewing books. Perhaps it was the inherent negativity of his reviews that influenced his later choices in writing.)

I will agree with George on one thing . . . the promotional blurbs on the jackets of most SF books are often fantastic on their own, fantastic as in not having much to do with reality. The excesses of such promotions (they make the phrase 'The greatest SF novel ever!' look mild) have made reviewers, critics and most readers cynical and negative. We always knew, given the marvellous art that adorns most books, that one cannot judge a book by its cover. Often, the art has nothing to do with the contents. Now, one cannot judge a book by what praise is written on its cover, or on the initial pages of the book, or one will invariably be disappointed or feel cheated, or foolish for swallowing such blatant advertising copy. At least, he showed his support for Australian SF and wrote glowingly about up and coming writers. I did wonder for a moment if George disliked American SF or just disliked Americans. But then, it is difficult to write objectively all the time.

I have read through the entire zine, and find it nearly impossible to comment on George's reviews of books I've read anywhere between 10 and 20 years ago. I also find it impossible to take personal offence at an author who may

A desultory email conversation

between ROBERT LICHTMAN (RL)

and BRUCE GILLESPIE (BRG)

BRG:
I'm trying to work out the best way to get publishing again. Everybody has told me for a long time that it's those giant issues that stop me in my tracks, and now they really have stopped me, because I cannot ever get the three or four weeks in a row I need to do one of them (i.e. four weeks without earning anything) combined with enough money in the bank to publish and post the giant issue that results.

RL:
My fanzines aren't such giants compared to yours, but I take a longer view of their financing and their preparation than you seem to be doing above. Except for a slight burst of activity at the very end of preparation (and, later, the gruntwork phase of collating, folding, stapling, mailing), I proceed at a very gradual pace between issues, doing the input as the articles come in (although these days almost everything arrives electronically except for around half the LoCs), deciding the playing order, arranging for artwork, etc. I also build up my bank balance gradually, setting aside/reserving so much per month until I've got the $500 or so it takes to get an issue printed and mailed. However, I have regular salaried employment as opposed to the freelance work that seems to be your sustaining income, and that probably makes a difference in the money department because I can predict what my cash flow will be.

One thing about giant issues, besides that they stop you in your tracks, and that's that they tend to stop readers in their tracks, too. Faced with 100-plus page fanzines . . . not just yours but things like Guy Lillian's *Challenger* . . . I tend to pull the shorter items out first, read and comment on them, and file them away. It took me months to get around to the two huge *Metaphysical Review*s when you sent them out, and I expect it's going to take a while to get to the new *SFC*, no matter how inviting it looks. Meanwhile, however, buoyed by reading the two most recent issues of your apazines, I've dug out the two previous issues that you sent me along with *Steam Engine Time* No. 1 and am reading those. I really enjoyed the lists article that I began last night, especially the parts about your childhood/teen music list-keeping. I will be including these issues in that omnibus LoC I keep referring to.

BRG:
So I think, after twenty years, I might go back to using *SF Commentary* as my basic fanzine, and get the damn thing out often and small. Which means using up the back files slowly, which will annoy contributors, but I can't see any other way of returning to publishing. I don't know what to do with the 100 pages of *Metaphysical Review* letter column, however (remember those two giant issues I did almost exactly two years ago?): type it all up and hope that somehow someday I will be able to publish it? Meanwhile, as soon as there is some spare money, I will get a 20-page issue out, and try to keep up the momentum. Two things that might suffer, however, are my memberships of Acnestis and Anzapa. We'll see.

RL:
If you were able to publish zines at least two or three times yearly with that approximate page count, I'm sure it would work in your favor in terms of momentum. You would probably attract more response, too, for the reasons I mention above regarding the problems dealing with big zines for at least this reader.

But if you did a frequent *SFC* and also continued to do your part of *SET*, wouldn't that be something of a duplication of effort on your part, in that both zines are 'sercon' oriented? If your finances are limited, wouldn't it make sense to concentrate on one title?

But whatever you do to increase your genzine frequency, would you then go to minac in the two apas, drop out of one or both, or what?

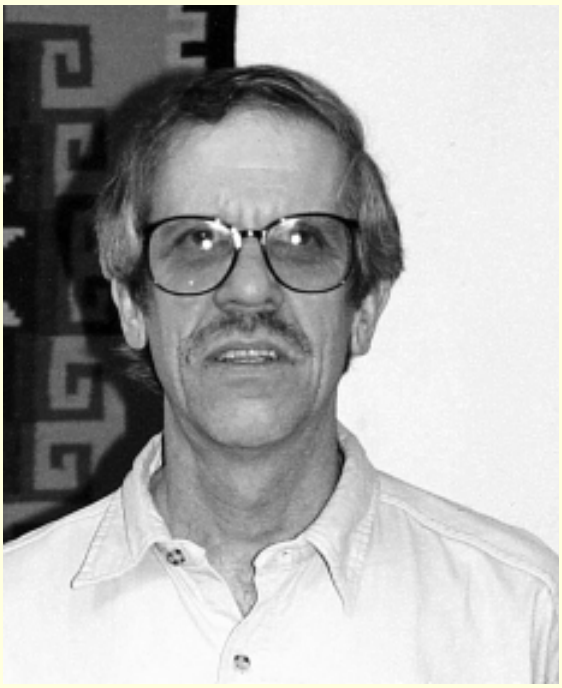
BRG:
For *Steam Engine Time* No. 1, I printed 350 copies and sent out the Australian copies and to all the Americans on my list. This set Paul and Maureen off, and they sent out the British and European copies, and to another group of Americans who were on their lists but not on mine! There seem to be about 700 copies out there somewhere. Paul, however, is busy about a million matters, so I'm not sure if *SET* 2 will actually go out in November. That will be my next expense, of course: my half of *SET*. We'll see.

RL:
Ohmighod, 700 copies! *Trap Door*'s print run is 250, its initial circulation 230, and of those, somewhat under 150 are Americans, 55–60 are Brits. I would be hard pressed to find 700 people to whom I'd wish to send it.

(1 November 2000)

BRG:
The real satisfaction from the huge issues of *TMR* has always been that people have eventually dragged out the giant issues and written giant letters of comment. Which leaves me in a quandary (but not quandry) about how to deal with immense riches that flowed in after the most recent *TMR*. I suspect I do have to keep it going as a separate entity — *TMR* gains that extra response and buzz that not even classic *SF Commentary* attracted.

RL:
I think that's because in many ways it's a much looser, more accessible fanzine than the more narrowly focused



Robert Lichtman. (Photographer unknown, but probably Tvonne Rousseau/John Foyster.)

SFC. Sometimes I wish you would combine them, Ace Double-like, so that the best elements of both would appear simultaneously. And it'd be great if eventually those 100 pages of letters you got, or at least the best parts of them, were eventually to see print.

BRG:
Don't worry — the idea of doing large print runs of *SET*s 1 and 2 was merely to put up the flag. Our idea is to lower it after No. 3, and cut the print run to suit those people staying in touch.

RL:
Wonder how many that'll be? Out of curiosity, what's your average circulation been for *SFC* and *TMR*? I print 250 copies of *Trap Door* these days, with initial circulation around 230. I cut off some people every issue due to non-response and add some new ones, achieving a steady-state situation. In the past I've had higher print runs and circulations, but I'm trying to hold it even. And frankly it's pretty easy because so many of the fans whose LoCs I see in other lettercols aren't so interesting to me that I want my own personal supply of their, er, golden verbiage. (And/or I suspect from what piques their comments to those zines that they wouldn't be interested in *Trap Door*.)

BRG:
And Paul and Maureen have a very particular idea about the future direction of *SET*, which precludes short to medium reviews of particular books. There are certainly enough people wanting to contribute review articles and longer think-pieces for us to be able to keep to the policy. What I mainly have in the *SFC* vaults are shorter reviews and good 1000–2000-word reviews.

RL:
So is this the reason you envision continuing *SFC* and participating in *SET*?

BRG:
I wish I were disciplined enough to do a bit each day — but I like to collect the whole magazine in my head after I've typed all the bits. The real time is taken after all the bits are gathered together.

RL:
My own method is somewhere in between. I like to work in bursts, dealing with articles as they come in. I save the letter column and my editorial to do near the end of the process. By then, I have a good idea of how much space the articles are going to take, and can then tailor the rest of the issue to work with that. I generally get some really good, almost article-like letters, so I try to be generous with the space allocated to the lettercol. While I'm doing the lettercol, I'm concurrently working on the first draft of my editorial, but until I determine how long the lettercol needs to be I don't really know how much space to leave for myself. I budget for a minimum of four pages (to include colophon and ToC), but in the new format I'll be expanding that to five pages because of smaller pages. (New format is half-letter rather than half-legal.) And now you Know Everything about how I do *Trap Door*.

(3 November 2000)

have disappointed me or bored me with a book. George seems to find it easy. Perhaps that's not why I'm a critic. I'm barely a reviewer. Perhaps I tend to gravitate to those areas of fandom that are the least negative (I find few areas inherently positive, for they are often written off as childish and naive), and that's why I have come to gravitate around conventions and fanzines, both constructive products of fandom.

Thanks for a wonderful book to read through and make some subjective comments on, Bruce, even if what I found in George Turner wasn't all that positive. I never knew the man, and many others did, so perhaps my comments are couched in ignorance not of my own making.

(27 October 2000)

Your comments, Lloyd, are pretty much the same as those of many readers when they first encountered George's reviews and criticism more than 30 years ago.

George liked to annoy people. It was, he thought, the only way to make them question their own assumptions about their favourite reading matter. I should have printed in *SFC* 76 Andy Dunwoodie's eulogy at George's funeral; Andy said that at some time during every Sunday lunch at the Dunwoodies in Ballarat, 'George would *disagree*'. He didn't want people to agree with him; agreement only made for dull conversation.

John Foyster (left), Franz Rottensteiner (middle) and Hannah Rottensteiner (right), Vienna, 1996. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau)

DAVE PIPER
7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip,
Middlesex HA4 6BZ, England

Thanks for the exceptionally beautiful issue of *SF Commentary*. It would be difficult to convince a passing Martian that issue 76 is the latest in a long line stretching back to January 1969 and that Issue 1 . . . on visual grounds, that is. As far as content goes, George was strongly present in Number 1, and although the production values were . . . er . . . a wee bit poor (!), the sheer quality of the writing doesn't reflect badly on that thirty-year-old issue.

Mind you, I don't believe it that it's been more than 30 years since I received that first issue. I've just checked my mirror, and I don't look a day over thirty-seven (forget about the nights!). There must be some kinda chrono-synclastic-infundulumbum-thingy happening. At this rate I'll find a Victorian penny in me change from the local Regal after seeing the latest Clint Eastwood sex comedy: *Birth of a Nation*. I think I should have a lie-down.

It was a great idea to make the thirtieth annish a Turner extravaganza. My only cavil is that I wish there more words I hadn't previously read. I always enjoyed George Turner's writings, even if I didn't always say so often enough, and I regret there will be no more.

You mention Malcolm Edwards reprinting those 1950s items. As I started reading SF in the early fifties . . . my fifties were your sixties, which is probably the reason for my considerable liking for Sturgeon, Pangborn, Kornbluth, Simak, Kuttner, Bester, et al., and probably explains why I can still re-read their books with enjoyment, rather than the bulk of present-day writers. Colour me bleedin' old' git!

(10 November 2000)

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060 Wien, Austria

I myself are guilty of not appreciating George Turner enough while he was still alive. He really seems to have had a consistent philosophical and aesthetical view of science fiction, and to have expressed it in a convincing and entertaining way. I hope that you will succeed in getting Turner's writing on SF into print in book form; and to get some of his novels into print again, although I am afraid that they are contrary to the current trends in science fiction, and really thoughtful works are getting rarer and rarer, although a series such as Gollancz/Millenium's 'SF Masterpieces' seems to do well enough. But I doubt now very much that the field as a whole will ever gain respectability, or that major SF works will be accepted as general literature.

How are you? *SF Commentary* must have cost you a pretty bundle. Have you work enough to get by? Here the possibilities in the SF field are decreasing steadily, as they are in the book industry in general, but the German book industry is good, and old connections still hold.

(2 November 2000)

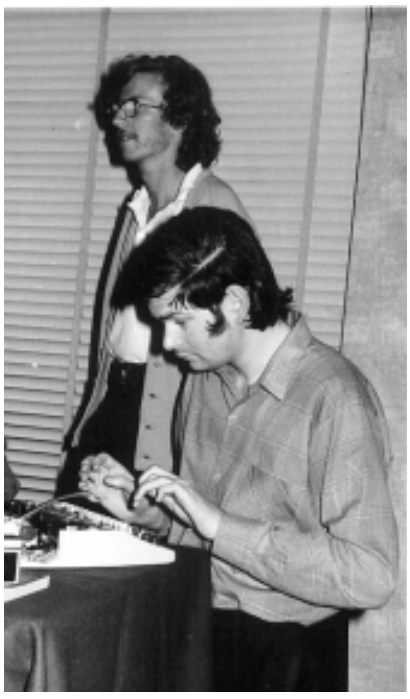
I lurch along from one freelance assignment to another, Franz. None of them has anything to do with science fiction, or even with fiction. I edit school and college textbooks because that's what Australian publishers usually publish.

You'll notice that I haven't published your very long letter about your bust-up with Stanislaw Lem. Many readers would like to hear the messy details, but I'm afraid that publishing such a letter now might only set off further litigation. (Franz has survived a potentially very expensive law suit brought against him by Stanislaw Lem.) You seem to have found that one's literary heroes can prove to have not merely feet of clay.

ALAN SANDERCOCK
612 Clairmont Circle, Decatur,
Georgia 30033, USA

I thought I'd reply quickly to your email, although I've still had it for a couple of days and so I obviously could have sent something sooner! It's actually Monday evening here in Atlanta as I write this. Today has been a federal holiday in memory of Martin Luther King. I'm an employee of the State of Georgia and also got the day off. By the way, I saw your message sometime on Saturday when I checked my email and I also had a message from Paul Anderson and Joy Window. This puts me in mind of the fact that I soon have to email Joy reminding her that it's been thirty years since she first turned up at the inaugural meeting of the Adelaide University Science Fiction Association.

This coming Easter it will be thirty-one years since I saw a rather younger Bruce Gillespie wandering around the Murrumbeena Theatre at the Melbourne Easter SF Convention.



Melbourne Eastercon 1972: Alan Sandercock trying to look the other way while Bruce Gillespie commits a solecism (typing a stencil at an SF convention). (Photo: Gary Hoff)

Now I just did something interesting, Bruce. I wasn't sure about the spelling of Murrumbeena so I went and did a search on Eastercon and Melbourne in the Google search engine and I got intrigued by a web site that announced itself as *Emerald City*. This destination is being run by one Cheryl Morgan, and I notice that there are a couple of pictures of you in there. I guess I don't have to trust you on the hair going a little bit grey. I must say that the same thing seems to be happening to me, although so far it's the beard that's changing colour.

By the way, I would really love to have you send me your fanzines again. Everything you mentioned in the email sounds good to me. I've often found myself thinking about your writing and your interesting lists of best things of the year, and I must say that I've been missing them of late. In case I forget, you should send material to the address at the head of this letter.

I know that it's been a while since we've communicated, but this seems to have happened to me with other people as well. However, I seem at least to have gotten back in touch with the people I used to know in Adelaide. At the moment I'm corresponding (via email) with Jeff Harris, Joy Window, John McPharlin and (most recently) Paul Anderson. My daughter Maria (who is now a lot bigger than when you last saw her) is a pen pal of my old school friend John Hewitt.

I'll write again within the week with more details of what I've been up to over the last few years. I can also then tell you how my new friend Jane discovered a novel by one George Turner and perhaps tell you about my being in the same small room with Gary Farber and Patrick Nielsen Hayden.

(16 January 2001)

I haven't heard from Alan since the beginning of the year, but I hope he enjoys this issue, and can get back to Australia again soon.

SUE THOMASON
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North Yorks YO22 5EN, England

I was particularly impressed with George Turner's clarity and fairness in 'On Writing About Science Fiction'. I review SF regularly myself (for the British Science Fiction Association's *Vector*). I don't think I'm a particularly perceptive or intelligent reader/reviewer, but I do try *really really hard* to present as full and evenhanded a description of a work as I can manage, without simply giving a precis of the plot. I try really hard to say 'this book doesn't work for me because . . .', rather than 'this ill-informed and annoying piece of trash . . .', and I am continually (well, fairly often) disappointed to find that Book X doesn't profoundly move me. (As a fiction writer myself, someone who has never come anywhere near finishing a novel, I cannot understand how other writers put so much time and energy into creating works whose highest ambition is apparently to be moderately diverting.) In future, I intend to re-read George's comments before sitting down to review.

There are two particular problems that George Turner does not mention. For one, I find it hard (sometimes impossible) to read simultaneously 'for enjoyment' (which is what I do when I read a book for the fist time) and 'critically' (mentally standing back and trying to work out what's going on, what is good, how this effect is achieved . . .). I am completely absorbed into a good story. It's my closest experience of 'virtual reality'. I am not aware of the process of reading. I'm not usually aware of the print, the prose style. When I am aware of this on first reading, it's usually an unpleasantly distracting intrusion. This makes me feel really stupid when I resurface from reading something and all I can say about it is 'Wow!' I have to wait for days, sometimes weeks, before I can step back far enough to start 'engaging the critical process' (or whatever).

The second difficulty that George does not mention is the technical one of writing to a prespecified, usually fairly short word limit. I have usually got 400 words to convey some sort of impression of a whole book — every aspect of it. It's impossible.

I really enjoyed all of George's writing on Le Guin, probably because I already have a deep and sustained enjoyment of Le Guin's writing, and it's good to hear somebody talking intelligently about something I love. And also occasionally hate. How can someone who is so perceptive and right about most things be so blind and wrong about others? I feel in particular that Le Guin has had a 'blind spot' about feminism. I admire her attempts to engage with contemporary political and ecological concerns, and her attempts to picture some variety of 'healthy society'. (It's much easier to write either a God-ain't-it-awful dystopia, or a neatly totalitarian utopia, than to envisage a society where *people who aren't like me* might be happy and fairly treated.) My current main grumble with Le Guin boils down to 'Where are the Hainish when we need them?' It's all very well to have a future dominated by a super-ethical alien Parent Race, but I wish they'd hurry up and rescue us before we make too many more species extinct. (Actually, Le Guin says it gets much worse before they arrive). SF ought to providing us with the mental tools to grapple with our current challenging situation, and it isn't. Trying to envision a hopeful future is hard work, if not impossible, right now.

(20 November 2000)

That's the best distinction I've ever heard between 'speculative fiction' and merely 'utopian fiction': that 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.

CASEY JUNE WOLF
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Vancouver V5N 3P2, Canada

Solaris, the Russian movie (in retrospect) made me think of you. Not that anyone in it reminded me of you, I hasten to add. It seems like such a dopey movie in many ways. And it is very long (162 minutes), very slow and often appears meaningless — such as the very long drive into town. But in the end I really liked it, and it made me curious to read Lem's book some day.

That sounds a lot like me — long, slow and often apparently meaningless. The trouble with the novel *Solaris* is that it isn't Lem's book; it's an English translation of a French translation from the Polish. A new translation should have been done twenty years ago.

I have been asking people what ten books they would recommend to best represent the history of science fiction from their point of view. Or, if not that, their ten favourites. I am amazed that a group of people so willing to give opinions on everything, normally, are so unwilling to answer that question. The only one who gave me titles, I don't believe him. I think he was answering from his library, not from his whole experience but maybe I'm wrong. Anyway, the

Russell, Turner and God

The David Lake letters

David Lake and I have been exchanging letters over the last few years, first while his wife Marguerite became increasingly stricken by Parkinson's disease, then as David faced life alone after Marguerite died. In these letters we've discussed life, death, and the meaning of almost everything.

The Sparrow, by Mary Doria Russell, a non-genre writer, was first noticed by Rog Peyton and other British fans about three years ago. *The Sparrow* won the Arthur C. Clarke award, become a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic, and has been optioned to be made into a major film. I enjoyed the book as much for the vividness of its characters as for its ideas, and sent a copy to David Lake:

I finished *The Sparrow* at 11.20 p.m. last night, and now I'm writing this at 6.30 next morning. I've just woken from a colourful dream, certainly suggested by the book.

In my dream, I and some others were guests in the house of an alien species. The species was polymorphic, and some of its forms were rather deplorable. There was tension and some fear, but this was not a nightmare. Oddly, one of the women of our party wanted to go out at night. I began escorting her round the garden, then, at a corner of the house, we met a large dog that talked to us — in English. Its head was striped, badger fashion, but red–yellow–black; otherwise it was very much like a German shepherd. It seemed to be friendly; I think it was giving us a warning . . . Then I woke up.

I suppose the speaking dog was suggested by the Runa, and the house was a Jana'ata palace. I must thank you for sending me a book that was a good read for several days, very colourful, and a suggester of colourful dreams. Before I went to bed last night I turned to *The New Dinosaurs*, the book Russell acknowledges as one of her inspirations (I own a copy), and found on pages 48–9 pictures of the two species: the vegetarian Cone-eater, with its five fingers (both the outer two opposable), and its mimicking predator the Jinx, three-fingered, with a foot clearly based on the actual fossil Deinonychus (much like the Velociraptor of Spielberg fame). The two species are not at all closely related, but the resemblance (even in smell) is startling.

In the end, I got furious with *The Sparrow*. First, Russell made a complete mess of the Alpha Centauri system — I know that system, because in 1973 I wrote a huge novel, *Doubleworld*, set on a planet of Alpha Centauri A. This was the novel I never offered for publication, but cannibalised for several of my published novels. So I know that the only viable planets in that system would be at about 1.15 au from the brightest star, A, or about .66 au from B, the K-class yellow-orange star that is about .4 of the Sun's luminosity. Whichever orbit you choose, Proxima is .2 light years away, 4.5 magnitude, a star so dim that you wouldn't even notice its colour, and only astronomers with telescopes would realise that it had a parallax of about 16" arc, making it a likely companion. You couldn't go about at night under its 'redlight'! The two main stars, A and B, are about as far from each other, on average, as Uranus from the Sun; but the eccentricity of .5 means the distance varies, over an eighty-year cycle, between the distance of Saturn and that of Neptune. Even when the stars are closest together, the far one gives hardly appreciable heat to the viable planet — not more than about one per cent of the heat of the planet's own sun. The daily cycle is divided into Day, Dimday, and Night. Once a year, when the planet is directly between the two suns, there is no Night, and Dimday begins at sunset with the rising of the Daystar (or Firestar — it is noticeably yellow-orange in my novel because it is B).

Russell could have made all this precise and interesting, but she prefers falsity and vagueness.

But that's not what annoyed me. If vagueness suited her, fine . . . What I hate is the way she avoids the *theological* point. She is too damn kind to Catholic Christianity. The existence of *any* alien intelligent species would be a terrible problem for Christians. The first question a Catholic would ask would be: are they Unfallen, or in a state of sin? Or have they any conception of God at all? If they haven't, then Christianity is in the worst kind of trouble. Yet in Russell's novel none of these Jesuits asks that question! C. S. Lewis and James Blish were much more on the ball. *A Case of Conscience* is therefore a better novel than *The Sparrow* — it asks the right questions.

As for the story, the Jana'ata must be very stupid if the best thing they can think of to do with an alien visitor is to bugger him . . . really, that is material for a wry, satirical short story, not for a novel. And Emilio should have said at the end, 'There is no God', but he doesn't.

The whole thing is not much more than a colourful shaggy dog story. It leads you up the garden path to — nothing.

I am losing patience with people who are polite about the religions of Yahweh — Judaism, Christianity, Islam. They are all hellish (literally) lies, and the causes of more suffering on this planet than any other bad idea. If I were a bit younger, I would seriously consider founding a rival religion. You know what it is — the religion of the Lady of Life. If you want a name, Isis. It would be explicity anti-Yahwist, and might do parodies of Yahwist texts. I believe some 'pagans' have actually revived a cult of Isis — but I would have nothing to do with anything superstitious or merely feminist, certainly nothing that involved Nature worship. Bugger nature! Gaia is almost as cruel a deity as Yahweh. No; we must worship the goddess in ourselves, our humaneness. This for me is best symbolised by a female figure.

It's best not to found a new cult at all — because it would certainly be perverted and abused. This is why my hero William Blake did not make an institution of his own very peculiar and fascinating religion.

I wish I could draw and paint properly. I have no real talent that way; I just do careful semi-copies, rather two-dimensional pastiches — that's why I paint on walls. Now I would like to paint a parody of Michelangelo's *Pietá*, with an older woman and a man, rather in the style of Goya. The woman would be my Lady of Life, but old, and in sorrow. The man would be old, too, his dead eyes staring at the viewer. Since I can't paint, I can only describe this unrealised work.

There's no more I can say just now. *Iomen!*

(25 July 1998)

Many letters later, I suggested to David that he put in an entry for the competition in the original edition of *Dreaming Down Under*, edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb. Readers were asked to complete 'And Now Doth Time Waste Me', the story that George Turner left uncompleted at his death:

I have now read George's piece. It's very good, but I am amazed that anyone could think I could do anything to finish it. There are a heap of reasons why not: (1) I am no good at puzzles of any kind, and now avoid them all — even crosswords; (2) when I used to write novels, plotting was one of my greatest weaknesses; and (3) I admire George's ability to project a grotty (and alas, all too likely) future, but that is the kind of thing I have always avoided writing. Most of my fiction, indeed, is wish fulfilment of one kind or another. And I have alwasy avoided the time band of the near future on this Earth.

So, it's a complete no-no from me.

It's a pity George didn't leave notes. I can understand that. I almost never wrote notes either, for any of my fictions. (What I did devise was 'supporting matter' — maps, sketches of imaginary languages, and so forth. But not outlines.)

So, the puzzle remains, and I wish someone would offer a solution. Here are my thoughts about the ?novel:

- It does indeed look like a short story that expanded. The end-scene/first scene is especially like that.
- I am not sure the first bit would have been the ending of the plot. The police have now got their immortal; what are they going to do with him? If I were the authorities, I would certainly not kill such a person. He would be a tremendous resource for historians and biologists. Perhaps there would have been more action to follow. And the comments by the snoopers on Colson's oral narrative set up a tension — I don't think they are right to despise him as much as they do. This tension asks for a resolution. Hence, it could be a very long novel indeed: Colson's narrative plus further developments.
- What is the main focus of interest? Is it immortality or the ghastly future? I incline to the ghastly future. After all, immortality in itself is a pretty old theme. What makes it especially nasty *now* is that it's exactly what the world doesn't need — maybe not what anyone needs, if the future is going to go so horrible.

All readers of SF know that immortals have to either (1) be stealthy wanderers, like the Colsons — not a nice prospect, or (2) form a picked and isolated society, in a commune or a spaceship or wherever, away from mortals, or (3) be tyrants ruling over mortals, who would be their slaves or pets. I think all these options have been treated before. That's why I think future society is the main focus.

And that would not provide any easy plot resolution. To a short story, maybe; to a novel, no.

(23 December 1998)

Thank you for *SF Commentary* 76. I read the George Turner issue with avidity. I agree with nearly all that George says/said — except that he can't convince me that *The Dispossessed* is *not* a political novel. If it were merely the individual bucking the system — any system — there'd be no need to invent Anarres. As it is, Anarres is the most brilliant portrayal I know of an Anarchist society.

I think George is too severe about Vonnegut. For me, at least, *Cat's Cradle* is a masterpiece. It's SF, but that's the least important thing about it. It's a philosophical novel — a terrible picture (and a true one) of the human predicament: 'the heartbreaking necessity of lying about reality, and the heartbreaking impossibility of lying about it'.

I suppose I am a thorough Bokonist: I'm an atheist who is also deeply religious. I live my life now on a basis of Duty — 'Stern daughter of the voice of God' — or something-or-other. I do social work two or three times a week (and now one of my clients is lying paralysed in hospital after a bad stroke, and I visit her). I run a successful poetry course, and work on Greek and Latin (have just done a nice translation of an episode in Ovid into 214 lines of English couplets). And it's all not enough; my life doesn't seem to be *for* anything or anyone.

I guess I always wanted the approval of God or some God-figure: my mother, my wife, or He/She up there. But my mother and my wife are dead.

I keep worrying about the problem of God. You can easily disprove the loving Father — he is disproved every day by the terrible things that happen to people, including many we know. The Creator, or at least some pervading intelligence, as a concept, seems to be indispensible to our civilisation, to our science. Without that, trying to read 'the Mind of God', our science would have got nowhere. The postulate of divine or ultimate rationality gave us the confidence to investigate objective truth. I think, God is objectivity. We keep on making objective statements every day — 'Shakespeare is a great writer', 'Hitler was a bad man' — and none of them is justifiable unless you postulate some (divine?) viewpoint outside individuals. This is bothering me personally, for I've been suffering from feelings of unworthiness, and then I think, 'There is *no* objective judgment — I *am* neither worthy nor unworthy — and neither is anyone else'. But, what is truth? I respect some human beings enormously — Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln. Is there no objective truth about them; are they just *my* pinups?

There has to be objective truth about physical facts. It simply is true that the Sun has a certain mass, much greater than that of the Earth, and so on. The furniture objectively *is* there for you to trip over in the dark house at night. It is only a tiny step from physical objectivity to the viewpoint of God. (Perhaps that's what bothers the postmodernists, who can't accept any objectivity.)

I'm afraid I don't read SF at all these days. All the present prospects of the future seem appalling. There is not going to be a Space Age, because there is no money in it. The window of opportunity will be lost when the fossil fuels run out. Earth will be a pullulating mess, and it will

only be worse if there are spectacular lengthenings of the human lifetime — for the rich mostly, I presume. Information technology doesn't excite me in the least. I think I already know as much of the world as I want to, and I have almost no one to communicate with. This is why I don't have a computer, and don't intend to get one. I tried a fax and found it useless. What do I want with emails, when I enjoy writing letters like this one, on paper?

I was sorry to hear of the death of Margaret Aldiss. This is a thing one never recovers from. I am still living my life with reference to my Marguerite, even though it's nearly two years since she died, and more than that since she was a whole personality. I now think with remorse how much better I could have been to her. I keep on saying, 'I love you, and I would like to love you and know you better', but she can't hear from me.

(7 November 2000)

pick of the litter for him was *The Space Merchants*, because it introduced a number of concepts that would later be expanded by many writers. It isn't one I ever would have picked up myself, but I enjoyed reading it, and feel like a better fan because of it. (That part was a joke, Bruce.)

My point was to mention the movie *Solaris* to you. It is strange that I hesitate to say — oh, it's great, I think you'd like it, because it would be a leap to presume that anyone would. It is not gripping in the way we expect movies to be, yet I (who practised giving up hoping anything would happen in a movie last week by watching Hirokazu's *Maborosi*) was happily able to suspend not only disbelief, but everything but the decision to enjoy whatever this offering was, and consequently I *did* enjoy it and am quite delighted that I saw it. But I am *so* sick of the overstimulation and predictable plotting and morality of American films, and even most British, Canadian, and Australian films I've seen (which are not legion — I've been too broke for many movies till recently) that I am willing to tolerate a lot in order to get a very different feeling of how the world can be perceived.

Casey, I'm pleased that you've discovered *Solaris*, which I've seen three times. Lots of SF people don't like it, but usually they don't like other long, slow, meditative, beautiful films with a J. S. Bach soundtrack. No sign of it on DVD yet.

PS: One of my friends who refused to recommend any sort of book as Important in Science Fiction nevertheless pointed to *Soldier of Arete* (Gene Wolfe) in a used book store and said, 'That's good'. It was also cheap, and I like Gene Wolfe, so I bought it. I soon realised it was the second in a series, but since even the protagonist can't remember what happened in the first book, I don't feel at a terrible advantage. This is an American novel that is very slow-moving and constantly backfills, yet it a page-turner, and provides a little of that 'different point of view' that I am thirsty for.

(26 February 2001)

WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Because of email, I simply no longer know Who I Also Heard From. I have all the old-fashioned snail-mail letters on paper in front of me. I think I have on hard disk all the emails that people sent me, but I'm not sure. I did not keep a record of emails from people who asked for .PDF versions of this issue. Most of them did not send letters of comment. And then there are some nice people in Acnestis and Anzapa who commented on my magazines in those apas. Thanks in particular to **Claire Brialey**, who said that *SF Commentary* 76 was Her Favourite Thing for a whole day. Sigh.

Special thanks to the many people who have sent subscriptions and donations in the last eight years. It's been a long wait for a return on your investment, although you should have received all issues of *The Metaphysical Review*, the Turner Issue of *SFC*, and one issue of *Steam Engine Time*.

Thanks also to the people who have sent me books over the years. To name names would risk offence by leaving out some people. (But for surprise value nothing quite resembles the annual **David Russell** birthday present.)

Rick Kennett bought a copy of Judy Buckrich's biography of George Turner on the day it was launched at Aussiecon 3, and had it signed by Judy, who was, along with Rick and many others, a member of the 1979 Writers Workshop in Sydney. In reply to a query about his writing career, Rick wrote: 'I've had a story reprinted in the recent edition of *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror* (No. 12), another reprint in the new SF zine *Orb*, launched at Aussiecon, and a new story in *Aurealis* No. 24. Ash Tree Press of Canada has accepted a story of mine for their triennial journal, and a collection called *472 Cheyne Walk*.' Rick also sent me an article for a future issue of *SFC*.

Russell Blackford has never been George Turner's greatest fan, but 'It's great having so much of George Turner's best stuff published in one place. Even where I think he's being idiosyncratic in his standards, George writes in a plain, well-argued style that I find compelling and enjoyable'.

Damien Broderick thanked me for 'the immense GT Object [which] arrived in the post. Golly. Will read with great pleasure (and probably occasional grinding of teeth)'.

In the Program Book for Aussiecon 3 I saw an advertisement greeting me on behalf of the collective Fan Guests of Honour at World Conventions. I wrote to the address given in the advertisement, and received a reply from **Andy Porter**, editor of *SF Chronicle* and himself a recent Worldcon Fan Guest of Honour. 'I've been running these adverts for several years now, starting in 1992. Dave Kyle thinks I should make it a real organisation, with gatherings at worldcons.' Andy, the longest-running overseas supporter of Australian worldcons (he can claim to have invented the idea of the first Aussiecon), has still never been to Australia. He had his trip planned for September 1999, but his mother became very ill just before the convention, and died on 13 September 1999. Commiserations from all of us.

Ned Brooks: 'The things you learn in fanzines — not only that George Turner had met Dame Nellie Melba, but that her secretary at the time was Beverly Nichols. I have several of Nichols' books and actually read one or two of them. I thought he was a good writer — for mainstream.' Nichols' novels seem to be reappearing in Britain, as the people in Acnestis keep mentioning them.

Terry Jeeves sent me *Erg*, and particularly enjoyed George Turner's comments 'on John W. Campbell, who we all adored in the good old days. I had one brief but memorable chat with him in 1957'.

Andy Butler, also known as **Andrew M. Butler** when he's wearing his best t-shirt, thanked me for *SFC* 76, and mentioned 'a little package of goodies to send you some recompense; I seem to recall you read and enjoyed Christopher Brookmyre — do you want a copy of his latest volume, *Boiling a Frog*, and if so, hard or soft cover?' He delivered the hard copy when he revisited Melbourne in July. Thanks for that,

Andy, and the copies of your 'Pocket Essentials' books on *Philip K. Dick* and *Cyberpunk*.

Steve Sneyd actually apologised for not knowing quite where to review *SFC* 76. I'm sure he'll think of somewhere, since he publishes quite a few magazines and booklets, some of them handwritten.

Marty Cantor was finding it hard to keep up with *SF Commentary* 76 because he was finding it hard to keep up with all the fanzines he received last year. Fortunately Marty is not too busy, however, to publish *No Award*, his own fanzine.

Ahrvid Engholm took the trouble to post an email in praise of *SF Commentary* 76 on Memoryhole and Trufen. That's one way to stay on the mailing list, Ahrvid.

Steve Green wrote: 'Bruce R Gillespie wrote: "Now that the Monster Issue is out of the way, on to other things." Monster? Is that any way to talk about George . . . ?'

Terence M. Green, novelist, otherwise known as **Terry Green**, friend and *SFC* supporter for nearly thirty years, wrote: '[George] had a way of cutting through the crap, didn't he? And did I mention my latest news: I'm about to, excitedly, enter geriatric parenthood (I'm 53, my wife is 39). Due date is November 22, but we've been told to expect early. We also know (amniocentesis) that it's a boy. I already have two sons, so . . . At any rate, we're thrilled. I've been a father before, and ain't yet experienced anything quite like it . . .' Baby was in due course born, and mother, father and baby are well.

Amy Harlib: 'I can't thank you enough for sending me this most recent *SF Commentary* devoted to the undeservedly unsung George Turner. This was truly a book disguised as a zine, a book of literary insight worthy of standing beside the works of John Clute as an exemplar of SF lit crit! I loved the wit of his reminiscenses and his incisive analysis of specific works: even as he "ripped apart" books by formerly favorite writers.' Glad to have you on the mailing list, Amy.

Arthur D. Hlavaty was so excited by *SFC* 76 that he gave it a half-page rave review in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*. Much thanks.

Tony Thomas is just a bit younger than I am, but somehow he's managed to retire, lucky sod. Because he's retired, he's had to find a fanzine to publish, so he now produces *The Melbourne Shakespearean* for the Melbourne Shakespeare Society. Tony has what I would call a 'radio voice', so he is also producing and presenting programs on 3MBS, Melbourne's volunteer- and subscriber-based classical music FM station.

Mats Linder is a Swedish fan I thought I had lost forever. However, he popped out of an email one day, and sent him *SFC* 76 and *Steam Engine Time* 1. He enjoyed them.

Syd Bounds was particularly interested in George Turner's description of the 1977 Writers Workshop, 'perhaps because I did some tutoring for a correspondence writing school at one time'. Syd, who must be about eighty, was still doing tutoring until recently, and is still writing new fiction and having older stories republished. 'I remember reading the *Magnet* and *Nelson Lee*. I saw copies of both papers on sale recently at the vintage book fair in London. There were, of course, some vintage people on view as well: Ted Tubb missed this time as he was celebrating his eighty-first birthday; but present were Phil Harbottle, Mike Ashley, George Locke, Basil Copper and Stephen Jones. I heard that Ron Chetwynd-Hayes is now in a home. Try not to get old too soon.' The inside of my head never gets old, Syd, but the outer body just keeps crumbling.

Sir Arthur Clarke confesses that he does not remember the meeting with George Turner in 1979, described vividly in *SFC* 76. 'George was certainly an extraordinary guy — but I'm rather relieved to find that George never reviewed any of my books!' He did, actually, in *SFC* 73/74/75, the last issue in which he appeared before he died. Since I have no spare copies, I must remember to send Sir Arthur photocopies of those pages.

'I am now completely wheelchaired, but feeling fine and can stand for a seconds.'

Eric Lindsay might not yet have read *SFC* 76. Whenever I hear from or about him, he and Jean Weber are either (1) traipsing their motor home round the backblocks of northern and central Australia; (2) visiting a convention in Seattle or London; or (3) gazing out over the Whitsunday Passage from the window of their palatial apartment at Airlie Beach. Eric and Jean are so determined to show off their lifestyle/palatial pad that they are holding a relaxacon at Airlie Beach next year, just after Convergence, the national convention that will be held in Melbourne on the first weekend of June, 2002. The New Zealand national convention will be held the week before Convergence and the Airlie Beach gathering.

John Litchen said: 'I realise that I've read probably all of [George Turner's essays] in many of yours and John Bangsund's earlier publications. Of course, over the years I've forgotten what George wrote, so seeing it all again in one volume is an eye-opener. And reading it again is like reading it for the first time anyway. I feel very tempted to go back and dig up some of the books he reviews, even though I read them years ago, and see how I feel about them in the light of George's reviews.'

Robin Pen, Western Australian cinema reviewer, fan and former *Eidolon* staff member, enjoyed *SFC* 76. 'Did I tell you that *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* was a key book for me back in my tentative days of trying to understand SF rather than just reading it?' Glad you could get a copy, Robin, because *Electric Shepherd* did finally go out of print (except at outrageous prices in the catalogues of overseas secondhand book dealers).

Greg Pickersgill had disappeared from sight for some years. Now he's back, managing the Memoryhole Internet list, exchanging old fanzines so that they become available again, and supporting Gillespie fanzines, especially *SFC* 76: 'great production, excellent design, always full of interesting stuff. I can honestly say I always feel a better person after reading them. And I am *not* exaggerating! The only thing I've read in recent weeks to come close . . . is the latest *Fantasy Commentator*, which I think is an absurdly undervalued piece of work, and people really ought to wake up to Langley Searles before its too bloody late — he must be getting on a fair bit by now, and I don't believe he's ever had the praise he deserves.' I agree, Greg. I have no idea why *Fantasy Commentator* is not much better known among fans who still read about SF.

Langley Searles keeps in touch, but only because Australia Post performed a small miracle of decoding the mailing label of a recent *Fantasy Commentator*, so it reached me. All is now fixed.

Mark Plummer wrote: 'It was one of those days in the office yesterday that just dragged on and on, and so it was about half past seven by the time I got home, clutching my takeaway Singapore noodles and crispy beef with chilli, to find one of those orangy-brown envelopes which usually mean another American fanzine. But no, this one's Australian — which is pretty rare these days — and from you . . . and it's *SFC* No. 76, which is an all-round splendid thing indeed. Almost makes me want to send off a Philcon mem-

bership on the spot so I can nominate *SFC* for a Hugo . . .' Not enough people felt the same way. No Hugo nomination, not even for George Turner. And no Ditmar win, not even for George Turner.

David Russell also thought *SFC* 76 was a shoe-in for a Hugo. 'When people in future study George Turner's work, your zine is going to be one of the most referred-to sources of information, along with *George Turner: A Life* and *In the Heart or in the Head*.' I'm nearly out of copies of *SFC* 76, but thanks to the Wonders of Modern Science, at least I can still send out copies by email on .PDF file.

Peter Fogarty from New Zealand was pleased to receive a bundle of fanzines from me, including *SFC* 76, so I hope he stays in touch.

Andy Sawyer told me about the letter of comment he was going to write, but it didn't arrive. But it would be hard to dislodge Andy from the mailing list, as he's been there since the mid 1970s.

Alison Scott wrote, making arrangements to cover trades for all the *Plotka* crew. *Plotka* is regularly nominated for the Hugo for Best Fanzine these days, deservedly. A recent issue included the first CD-ROM of electronic goodies to distributed in a fanzine. She wrote: 'I'm perfectly happy to have *SF Commentary* by .PDF file instead of paper; that way you could just send a paper copy to (for example) Steve Davies as a representative of the Plokta cabal, and we will all pass it around and admire the perfection of the printed version — but the email's just as good for actually *reading*.' In a few years time, all *SFC* readers will probably be able to download .PDF files and print them. Until then, I hope I can still afford to print and post the paper version. 'At the moment we [at *Plokta*] have no plans for another CD-ROM, but offers of material are always welcome. We'd certainly be happy to put some (or indeed all) of your zines on a CD-ROM if we do another. (This one had about 200 Mb of material on it, which was everything good that we could rustle up in a hurry. So there's plenty of room for more.)'

Garth Spencer was impressed by *SFC* 76, and particularly enjoyed George's essay on *The Dispossessed*. He said he would be reviewing it for Vancouver's *BCSFAzine*, but I haven't seen a copy yet.

Steve Stiles, one of the world's best-known fan artists, is a card-carrying George Turner fan. Therefore he was pleased to receive *SF Commentary* 76 and *In the Heart or in the Head*. I still have plenty of copies left of *ITHITH* — $20 to Australians, or the equivalent of $US15 (which includes airmail postage) to overseas enquirers. Thanks to **Peter Macnamara** (Aphelion Books), I also have for sale lots of copies of *A Pursuit of Miracles*, George Turner's collection of short stories, at a similar price.

Jan Stinson took, with good humour, a bit of flak for daring to enter fandom through the N3F (National Fantasy Fan Federation), which, despite its name, has a reputation for being a backwater of American fandom. I sent her a copy of *SFC* 76 on a .PDF, and she sent me back a copy of the N3F's magazine *Tightbeam*, in MS Publisher format. She also now publishes her own fanzine.

Michael Tolley wrote: 'George Turner's comments on meeting the great writers at Seacon are particularly amusing. You secured two good covers from Dick Jenssen. George as an Australian sphinx still seems an appropriate image, despite the biography . . . [Now that I've retired] we have enjoyed our visit to Alice Springs to visit our son Philip and his family. We were very lucky that the weather was not hot, and that we even collected some rain, a surprise when we woke up and emerged from our underground hotel room in Coober Pedy! We were able to see something of the Flinders Ranges in our car trip. The wild flowers were spectacular, even if Patterson's Curse was the major exhibit. We were very surprised to see a lot of dead kangaroos and wallabies along the road north of Port Augusta, and even more to find groups of wedge-tailed eagles, the vultures of the Antipodes.'

Bob Tucker wrote: 'That magnificent magazine just arrived and I'm stunned. Man, when you publish you go all out!' Since October 2000, Bob has revived *Le Zombie* as *eZombie* and had his life and work celebrated in a special gathering in Bloomington, Indiana. I've seen the photos: all in white tux, Tucker was the youngest-looking and snazziest person at the gathering. I have plans to reprint the Tucker Issue, but haven't yet received the one major new contribution, a Tucker biography by Toni Weisskopf.

William Vennell made contact through the Internet. 'Brief bio: I live in Wellington, New Zealand where, amongst other things I help run an independent radio station (www.radioactive.co.nz). I've been reading SF all my life. One of the things the net has done for me is bring a lot more information about SF right to my doorstep, as it were. Bibliographies and the like. This has been great for my collection but lousy for my bank balance. I'm lucky enough to have a uncomprehending but tolerant girlfriend who doesn't mind the house being stuffed with books. I'm currently corresponding with **Cherry Wilder**, who I met through **Lucy Sussex** (on line), and I belong to a couple of SF-related lists. I love the way the net enables me to belong to a community of people who actually understand what I'm talking about. I'm also a writer (glacially slow) but isn't everybody? Also unpublished.

'Danielewski is an American who has written *House of Leaves* — which has been described as the literary eqivalent of *The Blair Witch Project*. Worth a look. We interviewed him last month, which went down very well — both with Danielewski and the cast and crew of *Lord of the Rings*, who are apparently fans of the book. I had to courier a CD copy down to them in the wilds of the South Island.' Mr Vennell sounds an interesting bloke, but I haven't heard anything from him since.

Arlen P. Walker received *SFC* 76 in .PDF form, but I haven't heard yet whether he liked what he received.

Frank Weissenborn wrote: 'A package arrived in my mailbox on Friday. Opening it, I was to discover *Steam Engine Time*. But there was more; the George Turner edition of *SF Commentary*! Once more, very excited, I drove my hand deep within the envelope. Surely I would find steak knives? an amazingly innovative food blender? perhaps a vegetable grater? But no. I drew forth another magazine, slimmer, but made substantial with good comment. Thank you. Should I make the cheque out in your name or to Demtel?' Just send folding cash, Frank, and I'll decide where to stash it.

I've been in touch with **Michael Waite**, who is a George Turner fan. In return for the bits and pieces I've sent him, Michael has sent me some wonderful gems, including his own FAPAzine, *Trial and Air*, which seems to be one of the few fanzines with mutliple colour pages. Michael also sent me lots of American folding money, which was very useful in paying this year's subscriptions for magazines such as *NYRSF* and *Locus*.