

ISSN 0112-6989

Per Ardua Ad Alta

Phlogiston

Price : One Dollar

Issue Eleven

1st November 1986



Contents

Editorial – The New Fantasy	Page	1
The Bearded Triffid – A Column On Science Fiction Topics – Alan Robson	Page	3
States of Grey: Unreal Shades of America – Graham P. Collins	Page	6
Arliese – The Country Squire	Page	8
Trizer – The Country Squire	Page	9
Nights at the Circus – Tim Jones	Page	13
A Beginner's Guide to Dragons – D.W Burton	Page	14
Letters	Page	16
Mutterings – Alex Heatley	Page	18

Art Credits - Cover and page five – Glenn Young.

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Copies of back issues available for \$1.50 each.

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All subscriptions, contributions or enquires should be sent to:

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NEW ZEALAND

Subscriptions are available at the rate of four dollars for four issues.

Overseas Subscriptions: contact the editor for details.

Next publication date is **1st February 1986.**

Deadline for Contributions **1st January 1986.**

Readers are invited to submit material for publication, however, no promise is made of publication.

Any published material entitles the contributor to a free copy of the issue in which it appears.

Thanks to Nicky McLean – Ye Remorseless, but Humble proofreader – who helped.

Phlogiston is also available “for the usual” or by editorial whim.

*Please note: Due to increased costs, as of January subscriptions will be **five** dollars for four issues.*

The New Fantasy

Alex Heatley

Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic".

There is a new form of fantasy about. A fantasy that might just affect you and me, even though we don't read it. Indeed, a new fantasy that has already affected us if Ronald Reagan is to be believed.

This "New Fantasy" is "High-Technology" – Clarke's third law with a vengeance. It seems that the SF field has decided to retreat from the problems of the world into a fantasy where every problem has a technological solution. We're heading towards a nuclear war with those godless commies? SDI will save the day! Concerned about the smog in the air? Don't fret, my friend, that pollution in the air is all that stands between us and another ice-age. Your power bills are rising? Invest in the future! By and by there'll be power from the sky.

Regrettably, like any drug-addict hooked on a drug, those addicted to this form of fantasy soon begin to offer rationalisations for their habit, they stifle their own doubts by attempting to convince everyone that High-Tech is the answer to every ill - both global and individual.

A good example of this is the story **Involuntary Man's Laughter** in Spider Robinson's latest book: **Callahan's Secret**. The story is fairly simple. The problem: a person afflicted with a disease that forces them to twitch uncontrollably, grunt like a gorilla and bark like a dog. The premise is that these symptoms, taken together, are so laugh-inducing that anyone observing the afflictee cannot refrain from laughing at them for more than twenty seconds.

The solution to the problem is, of course, obvious: buy the afflictee a computer and have them communicate with other people via computer. The afflictee types messages into the computer, they appear at the other computer, and as nobody can see him or hear him they aren't forced to laugh at him.

Unfortunately, odious as this story is, it also has a moral: "I've always hated that hairy old nonsense about high technology being inherently dehumanising". Spider, that is precisely the point! You have reduced a human being to typing messages into a computer, you have taken away their ability to physically interact with other people, you have taken a human problem and solved it by removing a person's humanity!

A better solution I feel, would be for people interacting with the afflictee to learn not to laugh. People are endlessly adaptable and are quite capable of learning to accept another's afflictions. A classic example of this is Thalidomide babies - you may stop and stare at someone with malformed arms but after the third or fourth time you cease to notice. People can adapt to the unusual - all it takes is time, tolerance and patience. But that isn't a High-Tech solution.

I'm not sure what Spider Robinson intended with this story. I choose to interpret it as being an attempt at justifying High-Tech. But Spider has to so twist and constrain the premises of his story to make his solution and moral plausible that he ends up making the opposite point to the one he intended. It would be nice, Spider, if we could shut all our malformed, diseased and spastic people in homes and only communicate with them by computer. But I suspect it would be more merciful just to shoot them.

A more inane and potentially more damaging example of this rationalisation of High-Tech is a recent article in **Analog** (The October 1986 issue). Entitled: **A little More Pollution Please** it puts forth the proposition that all that stands between us and another ice age is the millions of tonnes of pollution that we spew into the air every year. It further suggests that any successful attempts at reducing air pollution have had, as a side effect, the promotion of colder and harsher winters. The author offers as evidence of this...

"The British Isles are a good place to begin. For centuries London has been famed for its impenetrable fogs which swath (*sic*) the city for days on end during winter months. Starting around 1950 the English began switching from sooty coal pots to electricity for heating. Much of this power comes from clean nuclear sources, the rest from emission-efficient generating systems. By 1960 the English countryside had become mostly soot-free and the notorious London fogs were largely a memory. But so were the warm, rainy winters which used to characterize the British climate. Instead the air is clear, the ground heat quickly dissipates into space, and temperatures have become abnormally cold with heavy winter snows commonplace."

This passage is interesting for some of the more fanciful statements made within it. "Clean" nuclear sources can only be described as such if you are considering air pollution. The safe disposal of the nuclear waste produced by these "clean" sources appears, in Britain at least, to be neither very safe or very clean – indeed the words "messy" and "dangerous" spring

to mind. As for those emission-efficient generating systems – “Emission Efficient” must mean that the acid rain falls in Europe and not England.

Throughout the article is a tone of what can only be described as “smarminess”. The author takes great pains to try and prove that all those well-intentioned people who advocate controlling and reducing pollution are really pushing us towards an ice-age. Thus they are the real villains of the piece. Strangely there is no mention of the author's credentials or sources for much of the seemingly pseudo-fact that he spouts. All this rationalisation reaches its peak with the following passage:

“Observe that in burying spent nuclear waste we actually are returning less radioactive material to the ground than was originally taken out and they stare blankly. They are so caught up in their fantasy of pollution they cannot grab the elemental idea that when we extract energy from something we necessarily wind up with less energy than when we started with. We may increase short term radiation, but no matter how we want to cut it the sum total of radiational waste is less than was initially extracted. Sorry about that, but it's the truth”.

I'd write off this comment as not being worth the time to refute except that someone recently presented it to me as a valid fact. As we all know, materials that come in contact with nuclear radiation eventually become radioactive themselves. This is known as “Neutron Activation”.

What that means is that you fire enough neutrons at an atom you can succeed in adding enough neutrons to its nucleus to make it unstable. And unstable atoms are radioactive – they breakdown to more stable atoms and in the process release radiation. One of the more important uses of this effect is in the production of weapons-grade Plutonium. An unfortunate by-product of this effect is nuclear waste, thousands of tonnes of it.

The other important point that must be considered is that there is a great deal of difference between Uranium ore buried in the earth in the middle of the Australia outback where any radiation that might manage to get out into the open air is unlikely to harm anyone (the miners, of course, are a different story) and nuclear waste, in the case of the Windscale reprocessing plant at Sellafield, being accidentally dumped into the Irish Sea.

It is disturbing that an article like this can be published in a magazine that supposedly prides itself on hard, scientific thinking. Yet, it is typical of the New Fantasy that seems to be running through American SF.

This retreat into fantasy would be of no importance if it did not affect anyone but the people who indulge in it, but just like the drunk driver that you meet coming towards you on the wrong side of the road, it can have far reaching consequences.

Recently, Ronald Reagan refused to sign a treaty with Mikhail Gorbachev that would have dramatically reduced nuclear stockpiles from overkill levels to mere overkill levels. Reagan's excuse for playing with world security was that the Soviets had made an impossible demand. They wanted America to give up SDI – America's insurance policy against Soviet duplicity (the question immediately springs to mind: what about the USSR's insurance policy against American duplicity?) And that is the great danger of the New Fantasy – it provides a way out for those who do not want to make hard decisions. Instead of facing up to the fact that he has to trust the Soviets, that he has to offer them real concessions, Reagan would rather commit his whole nation to a multi-trillion dollar chunk of High-Tech. He would rather live in a fantasy world of an impenetrable shield against Soviet missiles than a harsh reality where he actually has to extend a small amount of trust towards the Soviets.

And while this is going on, magazines like **Analog**, which supposedly are read by the more intelligent people in America, are pumping out propaganda that High-Tech is a solution, that High-Tech has no bad side-effects and that the only way to insure the continued existence of our race is to establish colonies on other planets. That *is* escapist literature, and the escapism is leaking over into real life.

So the next time you pick up a SF magazine, have a good look at it. What is it really pushing? Likely as not it's fantasy, not SF. Good entertainment, but a lousy way to run a country... or a world.

The Bearded Triffid – A Column on Science Fiction Topics

Alan Robson

I have just moved from Wellington to Auckland (ever the trendy!) and the process of shifting has given me a new insight into exactly why Roger Zelazny introduced the Courts of Chaos into the Amber books. He had just moved house – a process which consists largely of standing vacantly in the Courts of Chaos and going “Wurble, wurble, wurble” as the universe disintegrates into cardboard boxes.

In between nervous breakdowns, however, I've been reading the new novel by Phillip Mann – **Master of Paxwax**

Phillip Mann, you will recall, is the New Zealand author who wrote **Eye of the Queen** a few years ago. That book received general critical acclaim. In a sense it was probably unfortunate that his first book was such a critical success, since it provides far too good a yardstick to measure his subsequent works by. Critics love to do this and authors hate them for it, because they never seem to realise that they aren't comparing like with like. To say that **Master of Paxwax** is or is not as good as **Eye of the Queen** makes about as much sense as saying that Michelangelo's **David** is not as good as (or is better than) the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Such a statement implies the existence of an absolute standard, and of course there is no such thing. Nevertheless, for thirty years, whenever poor old Frederick Pohl published a new novel, everybody told him that it wasn't as good as **The Space Merchants**. Then he published **Gateway** and started the whole cycle off again. I suspect that Phillip Mann is going to find himself in much the same situation. For his sake, I hope it lasts less than thirty years.

Having just proved that I haven't got a leg to stand on, I will now put my foot where my mouth is and say that **Master of Paxwax** is not as good as **Eye of the Queen**. But what do I know about it for goodness sake?

At this point however, I want to qualify the previous paragraph AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE – I thoroughly enjoyed **Master of Paxwax**. Saying that it is less “good” (whatever that means) than the previous book does not imply that it is bad. On the contrary, in fact, I intend to praise the book with very faint damns indeed. It is a book the author can be very proud of.

I think that my major reason for saying that it is not as good as **Eye of the Queen** is (paradoxically!) that **Master of Paxwax** is much more straightforward, much more of a “good read”. There is more concentration here on pure story, on plot happenings and events, and less on the multi-layered levels of subtlety and development that characterised **Eye of the Queen**. As a consequence, **Master of Paxwax** seems thinner to me, it lacks body, but it *moves*; and that makes up for a lot.

The book is the first in a series of two (diptych?? dualogy?? How dare the man write a book that belongs in a class I don't know the name of!) The sequel, **The Fall of the Families**, will be published next year.

So what's **Master of Paxwax** all about?

At some time in the past, during humanity's expansion among the stars, the alien races that were encountered there have been systematically wiped out. Genocide on a vast scale. The worlds of humanity are now ruled by eleven families. Society is rigidly stratified and a person's position in the pecking order is determined more by the predefined status of his family than by his own intrinsic merit or worth. This status is not subject to change, at least not in an absolute sense. Power and influence may vary as the families jostle and manoeuvre for advantage, but social standing does not.

Meanwhile, unknown to humanity, the remnants of the alien races hide out on the remote, barren world of Sanctum and plot and conspire to bring about the downfall of the human power base.

Pawl Paxwax, the second son of the fifth family, is the alien's chosen instrument in their struggle. Pawl, of course, knows nothing of this. All he wants to do is marry Laural Beltane – but she is of the fifty-sixth family and he is of the fifth. It is unthinkable – such a scandal.

Pawl's elder brother and father die suddenly and Pawl (rather to his surprise) inherits the Paxwax domain. It proves to be rather a burden, his father left things in a mess!! His passion for Laural Beltane doesn't help matters either.

Pawl must hold Paxwax against both his human enemies (specifically the family of Xerxes de la Tour Souvent who have engineered many of the mysterious incidents leading up to his inheritance in order to have some chance of securing Paxwax for themselves) and also against the aliens who would use him and his power for their own purposes. The first threat is obvious, the second less so as the aliens and their mysterious “Inner Circle” manipulate both Pawl and the Xerxes de la Tour Souvent.

The details of the two conflicts are the major plot threads of the book. The first, the machinations of the other families against the Paxwax domain is resolved in the novel. However the ramifications of the alien power plays are more far reaching. These are not resolved (or, more accurately, they do not reach a conclusion; they simply reach a breathing space) and will obviously form the subject of the second novel.

The story is well and excitingly told. The details of both plots, the interactions of the eleven families with each other (and unknowingly with the aliens) have a pleasing complexity which itself adds to the feeling of realism. Many years ago James Blish coined the term “idiot plot” which he defined as being the sort of plot which which can only take place if all the characters involved in it are idiots. It is a very common fault and is not confined to solely to SF although it crops up within the genre with alarming regularity. There seems to be something about spaceships and time-travel that turns off the critical faculties of otherwise good writers. **Shikasta** by Doris Lessing is a perfect case in point. That reads like it was written by some 50's flying saucer contactee. But I digress, the point I started to make was that **Master of Paxwax** definitely does not fall into that trap for young players; which is a excellent point in its favour. It is one of the book's major strengths and I was very pleased to see it. The other major strong point is the solid characterisation – and are the characters ever weird!

Again it is very common within the genre to find that the inhabitants of the far future are simply Mr and Mrs Smith next door. They commute by spaceship rather than by bus; but you'd know them if you met them. Their ideas and life styles are very familiar – after all, society and social mores don't change, do they?

Well they do, and Phillip Mann knows that and takes account of it. The nature of the beast is not really subject to fundamental change (“A man's a man for a' that”) but society and societal manners are. Could your grandmother have envisaged punk rockers?

The eleven families are bizarre in the extreme. It would seem, for example, that at some time in humanity's history customised genetic tailoring has become the norm. This is never explained in the novel – it is simply one of the givens of the society and everyone takes it for granted and doesn't really talk about it – which is exactly the way it would be treated in “real life” of course. I was reminded of the Robert Heinlein novel **Beyond This Horizon** where, as the hero approaches a door, it dilates to let him through. Nothing more is ever said about about it anywhere in the book, and it is thrown off so casually that your eyes skims past it and then does a double take. The door has an *iris* in it? Suddenly you know that you are living in the future and that this future is lived in. Other people have made exactly this comment about that door – it is probably one of the most famous doors in Science Fiction. After that door dilated, the Gernsbackian travelogue of the future where the reader is shown around by some future incarnation of an Intourist guide (“Today we will see the velocipede factory where they fit the anti-gravity engines and I will explain everything about the process to you”) was dead. The door dilated and let in reality. As Mary Poppins said, “I *never* explain anything”. The characters of **Master of Paxwax** take these sort of things for granted, just like you and I take microwave ovens for granted (When did you last explain a microwave oven to a visitor? Come, to that, do you even know how a microwave oven works? What is a microwave? Is it something microbes do when they say goodbye?) Consequently it comes as a little bit of a shock when the reader eventually realises that Clarissa Xerxes de la Tour Souvent has feathers, that Laural Beltane is piebald and that Pawl Paxwax himself is a crooked legged hunchback.

Then there are the aliens. In **Eye of the Queen** Phillip Mann created some of the most alien aliens in SF, and in here he has done it again. The Gerbes, the Diphilus, the Spiderets and the Silver Tree are all very nicely odd (I'm highly suspicious of the Silver Tree – I think it may be up to no good. But that's the next book, so I'll just have to wait).

I said I had some faint damns to praise the book with. Pawl Paxwax is given to writing poetry when the muse takes him. We are treated to some samples of his verse during the course of the book and I rather wish that we weren't. He is not much of a poet (though the other characters to whom he reads his poems think that he is – more fool them). However there is some doggerel verse included, and that is really very good. When Phillip Mann is not being a serious poet, he isn't a bad versifier – and they are two very different things as I'm sure he would be the first to admit. One disappointment – I heard Phillip read some extracts from the Paxwax book a year or two ago (while it was still being written) and one of the these was a delightful parody of **Eskimo Nell** (among other things). I was sorry not to see it in **Master of Paxwax**. I suspect that it may well be in the sequel however, since it concerned the history of the exploration of a region of space called Elliot's Pocket. This is mentioned in passing in **Master of Paxwax** and it is hinted that Elliot's Pocket become very important in later developments of the aliens' plots. If it is in the sequel, then you all have a treat in store for you, because it is a very clever (and funny) piece of verse. But poetry it ain't.

One of the major alien characters is a Gerbes called Odin. Now here I get very annoyed. If you call a character Odin then whether you wish it or not, you immediately invoke all the cultural associations that have accreted themselves onto that name over the centuries. Now the Gerbes may be many things, but one of them is not a Norse God. Every time I read “Odin” the magic spell was shattered and I was outside the book again. Zelazny did the same trick with his Egyptian and Hindu deities and I didn't like it there either. It just doesn't work. If the name is meant to suggest aspects of Godhood or

something, then show them explicitly in the text. Don't rely on a name because there are too many irrelevancies associated with it – they get in the way and block your view of what is going on – one black mark.

Pawl Paxwax father is called Toby Paxwax – but as far as I was concerned he was really Baron Harkonnen from **Dune**. He had many of the Baron's attributes and for the me the correspondence was too close. I kept expecting Paul Atreides instead of Pawl Paxwax; and again the spell was broken. I suppose that you could argue that any novel which is concerned with political complexities (as are both **Dune** and **Master of Paxwax**) is bound to have some sort of Harkonnen figure in it: the unprincipled manipulator. And I would agree with you, but does he have to float around in a harness? The reasons for the harness are completely different in both books (indeed they are almost exactly at opposite poles; which may or may not have been intentional) and the final effect of the harness on Toby Paxwax is nicely nasty – but I still don't like it. It seemed derivative – and one thing that **Master of Paxwax** as a whole is *not*, is derivative. Therefore this one little touch of it annoyed me.

But in the end, these are niggles, **Master of Paxwax** is a thoroughly enjoyable, exciting and interesting story. **Eye of the Queen** was all that and a bit more besides. Somedays however, I prefer story values to any other; and the day that I read **Master of Paxwax** was one of those days. On that day I didn't want to read **Eye of the Queen**. My mood was all wrong. It is the mark of a first class writer that he can produce different books for different times. Too many people write the same book over and over (Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote **Princess of Mars** about fifty times). That is a small talent. It is to Phillip Mann's credit that his talent is a large one.

And now my cardboard boxes are calling me. I must go and unpack.



States of Gray: Unreal Shades of America

Graham P. Collins

In which we are obliquely introduced to the author's quantum operator, fire drills and alcohol problems.

Hi there, long time no interaction. Indeed, our operators have been commuting for some time (that's just a little joke for all the readers who've done a year or two of quantum physics). In fact my operator commutes daily between the place some people laughingly call reality and the place where my head is at, so to speak. A place Alex reckons is a surrealistic version of reality (kind of like a story from Roz productions). Of course this commuting is quite illegal, breaking as it does several laws of physics and kosher. Fortunately the DA's technical advisers haven't figured out how to express the breaches as religious equations so I haven't had to fork out any fines yet. My operator's shady deals with the Parking Violations Bureau have also helped (a little joke for New Yorkers). Hang on – did I call the NY Parking Violations Bureau a *little* joke? A slip of the word-processor I assure you.

Anyway, a little while ago I was thinking about writing home to various friends and it occurred to me, “This would be good enough for **Aotearapa**”. Then I got really big-headed and thought “This would be good enough for **Phlogiston**” (That bit of ego-boo should be enough to make Alex agree) (Heh, Heh, I can see him now: with ego-boo on his face).

I've been living in America for (checks digital watch) four months and nine (\pm one) days now and/but/so (choose one) I'm not even tempted to begin at the beginning – that would have no spontaneity. On second thoughts I won't even attempt what I had in mind with “**Phlogiston**”, “spontaneity” and “combustion” – I'd probably get fired.

Talking of fires, a few weeks ago near the end of the semester (semester: from semi-ester, half an ester. The school year over here has a certain characteristic odor (odour)) (a little joke for etymologically inclined chemists) we had a few fires alarms in Wagner. “Wagner College” or “D” is a residence building in a group of buildings known as “Stage XII Quad” or occasionally “The foreign ghetto”. I've read somewhere that everything at Stony Brook is named after famous dead locals but I've never found out who Stage the Twelfth was.

Fire alarms are pleasant events that get you out of bed between two and five in the morning. For a real thrill, try one at five in the morning the night before your finals or the day after a Helen Caldicott address on Nuclear War (no, this siren can't be the balloon going up; Long Island would already be so much glass). When it's a drill, legend has it that if you get caught in your room you get thrown off-campus, housing-wise, for good. Back in a winter fire drill I heard tales of people hiding in closets to escape detection. I must try it some day – I'd feel so smug knowing that instead of shivering in the snow with the nerds, I was cleverly crouching on a stack of suitcases, suffocating from the smell of dirty laundry, trying not to sneeze and wondering if the building was really burning down around me.

The last two alarms of the semester weren't drills and the public safety officials (campus police/firemen/ ambulancemen) looked as pissed as we were. “Pissed”? I hear you saying in bewilderment. Over here “pissed” always means “pissed-off”. A lot of conversations made a lot more retroactive sense after I learned that – for a while I thought that everyone had a serious alcohol problem. Turns out they just have a serious aggravation problem instead. Come to think of it, everyone *does* have a serious alcohol problem because to comply with NY State's alcohol laws (you must be over 21 years old to drink) the sale, consumption, and even possession of alcohol in a public place is banned on campus. Even a residence hall kitchen or hallway qualifies as public.

Furthermore, you can sue the bar where you got drunk if you have a d.w.i (driving while intoxicated) accident or, indeed, an anything w.i accident. Hence every pub has to have several million dollars of liability insurance, thus the graduate student lounge went dry when it could no longer afford the insurance. This is a common problem on college (university) campuses. In fact, liability insurance is one of the current Problems with the American Way of Life that hurts everyone except the insurance companies and successful litigants. Read Time magazine, Kiwis don't know what a gem the Accident Compensation Commission is.

If you're desperate for an accident w.i outside of your cramped living quarters there is still the “End of the Bridge” bar on campus. But the security to ensure that you're over the legal age is reminiscent of Nazi Germany: stamps on the hand, plastic wristbands and people with flashlights guarding the borders between the “dry” and “proofed” areas (proof: Long Island verb, to verify someone's drinking age).

You get some amazingly petty bureaucracy – like one of the flashlight toters telling you “No, you can't go through this way because you might be taking alcohol through to the dry area”. It is impossible to make him confirm or deny that he has an alcohol detecting incapacity. So you go back against the tide, through the masses of people about to be told the same thing, through the crowded bar area to the other end of the room. There you wait for the guard at that end to finish explaining to

people on the dry side that he is blind to their “proof” stamps and wristbands before he will pass his X-ray vision over you to check you're not smuggling alcohol across to minors.

At Icon V – Stony Brook's annual SF con of a few thousand attendees – I recall Norman Spinrad exclaiming loudly at the entrance of the meet-the-pro's party: “You wanted to proof Jack Williamson??!” An order was quickly relayed back to the gopher: “Don't proof anyone who's obviously over the age of forty, unless it's a woman and you want to make her day”.

Stage XII had a barbecue near the end of semester – we were having plenty of fire alarms so why not have a real fire to go with them? In the quad with the barbecue proper there was a plastic garbage can full of icy water and cans of revolting sodas like “No Frills Diet Root Beer” and “Pathmark Brand Diet Cream Soda”. After about half an hour the organiser reappeared in a car (a big American tank, of course) and quickly hustled a keg out of the luggage compartment and into a nearby building. Most of the people at the barbecue watched this with mixed expressions of relieved rapture and nervousness . “Thank God!” and “Gee, I hope public safety and the RHD aren't watching” (RHD: Residence Hall Director, a paid position, usually a grad student). This is not a great exaggeration of how anxious most Americans and some foreign students are about being caught violating the liquor laws. There seems to be a real fear of The Authorities unlike the casual disrespect typical in NZ.

So, when our cans of one-calorie carbonated artificial sugar-water were empty (one way or another) we went on the quest to fill aforesaid Grails with the holy liquor. The route for the quest was... across to B building, up half a flight of stairs, along a corridor, into a men's washroom, past the basins and toilets to the shower alcove and there in the shower stall, behind the shower curtain, was the keg. A steady trickle of people were following this route (pronounced “rout” in California), kind of like ants to spilt syrup.

Problem was, the after-taste of the soda was such that the American beer – sorry, US beer; Canadian's is okay – tasted even worse than usual. Which made the whole thing, like many of the parties I've been to here on campus, a silly joke. The Europeans and I laughed quite a bit but the Yanks didn't get it at all.

Excuse me, my operator is complaining that this hasn't been surreal enough. I'm afraid it's quite right. I've just told it as it was.

Next issue: the end of spring, The Easter Bunny, Kosher Coca Cola for Passover, illiterate “patriots”, Commencement and migrating refrigerators (a little joke for General Electric shareholders).

Graham P. Collins is a Kiwi studying for a PhD in Physics at S.U.N.Y at Stony Brook, New York. He currently shares a room on campus with three refrigerators and several undetected but imminently doomed cockroaches.

WindyCon '87

Aotearoa National Convention – 1987

Taking place at the St George Hotel in Wellington during Easter, WindyCon '87 will be another great convention in the proud tradition of small, friendly Aotearoan conventions. Fan Guest of Honour will be Alan Robson (The Bearded Triffid). Pro Guests of Honour: Joe Haldeman (Author: **The Forever War**, **All My Sins Remembered**, **Worlds**, etc) and Gay Haldeman.

Admission fee is a mere thirty Aotearoan Dollars (\$NZ 30.00)

All enquires to: 51 Coromandel St, Newtown, Wellington 2, Aotearoa.

See you there!

Arliese

The Country Squire

I look up into his face. Two tears glisten in the corners of his eyes and slowly drip down his young cheeks, leaving a shining trail. I can see the slight age wrinkles at the edges of his eyes. Those old, old eyes. They were what first attracted me to him.

Two years ago I was wandering through the East Park, as usual it was a beautiful day – The City never let the weather be anything other than beautiful. He was sitting on the grass watching a flower grow, or so he said. I'd never seen anyone so still. He was in the Lotus position in front of a yellow flower, an Orchid he called it. I sat beside him and looked at his face. It was then his eyes grabbed me – he must have been only three years younger than I and quite cute. I was intrigued by the wisdom and sorrow in those eyes. Slowly his eyes focused on my face, he didn't say a word, he just looked at me. From top to bottom, front to back, he seemed to drink in my image and swallow it.

“Hello”, I said, and instantly regretted it. A great steel shutter closed over his face, the feeling of being shut out was instant and frightening.

The memory of that bright day disappears as he shifts his grip on my arm.

“In here, Arliese”. He pulls me into the room off his own. His other hand brushing the lock panel, hissing smoothly, the door slides into place with a somehow final thump. I gasp as his fingers tighten again, it hurts! The dust in the room is disturbed by our feet and drifts into the air, creating crazy patterns against the lights of the machine. That ugly thing that has ruined everything we had together.

He first showed it to me seven days ago, was it only seven? It was the day before my thirtieth birthday – “The Day of Ascension”. We'd tried to celebrate by going to dinner but his face became more and more closed as the evening progressed. All of a sudden it cleared, he seemed to have reached a decision. He looked at me for a long moment and placed his hand on mine.

“Arliese, I've been thinking about your Ascension”.

“What about it?”

“I don't want you to go”.

“What do you mean, 'not go'? You have to go”.

“No. There's another way”

“What – ”

“Come!”

Then he dragged me back to his apartment, carefully locked and set the alarms and slid a panel on the side of the wall up a few minims. There was a soft whooshing noise, part of the wall opened and a horrible smell of dust and decay flowed out of the hole in the wall. He stepped through and gestured to me to follow. I went, not expecting what I saw.

In the corner of a large dusty room was a flat, dull grey machine. Green, amber and red lights flickered across a board near where we had come in, while under two tubes coming down from the ceiling, sat a chair and a plate with a small button. There was dust everywhere, our movements made it drift into the air, tickling my nose and making my eyes water.

“What is it?”

“A machine that let's you bypass Ascension”.

“How?”

“I ... I don't know know, I've used it eight times and each time I've had another twenty-five years or so until Ascension came around again”.

“But that means that you're very old, about... ”

“Over two hundred years”.

“No wonder your eyes look so wise”.

“I want you to sit in that chair and when I tell you to, push the button”.

“No. It's unnatural”.

“Listen Arliese. I love you. I don't want you to lose you too!”

“But ...”

His eyes started to burn as a look of fierce determination came over his face. “Just do as I say†!”

“No”

“YES!”

He gently but firmly pressed me into the chair, and busied himself behind the control panel. A hum filled the filled the air. Suddenly he looked up. “I love you, Arliese, now push the button”. My hand slowly went towards the panel on which the button seemed to glow with a malevolent light of its own. “COME ON PUSH IT!”

My finger was on the button. I had pushed it al-ready. The machine didn't work. My finger jabbed down and I felt a terrible lurching, twisting feeling. All went dark.

I was in the nursery rooms. how had I got here? Had something gone wrong with Trizer's machine? I stood up, then I noticed the room seemed bigger than I remembered it. I looked down and fainted. Suddenly it wasn't funny anymore. It wasn't a game. I was small, five years old, and no longer an adult!

Trizer hadn't remembered something in his excitement. Something, so obvious now. The machine shifted you over into the body of one of the newly formed children. I started to laugh, he thought we would be together forever. Now he was twenty-seven and I was five – my laughter turned to tears.

That was seven days ago. I'm crying now. He's hurting me, my arm is sore where his fingers grip it. Looking up into his face I see his eyes, those old, old eyes. Something is glinting, his hand is shifting to my throat, in the other he has a knife, it's coming closer, a tear falls off his cheek and onto mine. It seems to bite like acid.

His eyes are burning fiercely, he can't cope with what he's done. He's put me on some sort of pedestal, thinking that his love will last beyond Ascension, he didn't realise that Ascension ends everything, his machine ends everything. I'm small, I'm five and he can't cope with it.

“Why Trizer?”

“You told them all, you couldn't keep it secret, you told them”.

“What did I tell them?” His voice is harsh, grinding out the words –

“You told them about my machine”.

“No. I told no-one”.

“They know, they're coming to break it, you told them”.

“No Trizer, no-one knows except you and I”.

Now I can see love and hatred and confusion and murder glaring from those eyes. I know what he is going to do, I struggle, his grip tightens and there is a sharp, burning line across my throat. All goes grey and silent except the voice in my mind crying helplessly ... “I love you, Trizer, I love ...”

Arliese The Squire's Lady

Memories rush towards the front of my mind
Pushing away the darkness
Forcing my consciousness to accept
The unacceptable

What's happening to me?
I think I must be going mad
Just a short time ago
I was alone with my lover, and now...

I feel like I'm in a 3D movie
Having gone into the theatre in one time
And emerged in another
A whole new person, a whole different place

What wry twist of fate
Has cast me, a woman
With a woman's thoughts
Into the body of a child

A whirl of images dizzy my mind
As my thoughts clear
Trizer! The machine, I'm reborn
As an infant

Oh, my love, my foolish love
To what avail now our passion?
You thought to make our love eternal
Only to trap us, inescapably
In a love that can now never be.

Trizer

The Country Squire

Trizer gave a deep sigh as he approached the machine. Its dull, matted grey surface belied its power. The warning lights gleamed dimly through the dust drifting lazily in the air.

He sighed as he sat in the control chair and went through his mental checklist, as he had so many times before. “Alarm circuit on, Privacy light on, door locked, phone on privacy mode, beeper off...”

Tomorrow was his thirtieth birthday: “The Day of Ascension”, or more correctly, “The Day of Discorporation”. He thought of how strict the city had become of late. Only he, through his discovery of this monstrous machine, was able to escape the finality of the thirtieth birthday.

He tried to remember how many times he'd used the machine – thirteen, or was it fourteen? That made him at least four hundred and twenty years old.

He sat, his thoughts drifting from face to face in his memory. All the thousands of friends he'd had, the joys he'd experienced over and over again, the sadness as his friends had been taken. He could have saved them, he could have shared his machine with them. But he never had – except once.

Arliese and he had had such a wonderful relation-ship, he couldn't bear the thought of ending it, so the day before her thirtieth birthday, he had brought her here and shown her the machine. He'd used it on her and she had been reborn with all her memories intact. But suddenly he'd realised what should have been obvious, he was twenty-seven and she was five. Even though he remembered and she remembered, there was nothing they could do, she'd started to tell everyone and he'd had to kill her to protect his secret. He could still feel the blood oozing over his hands, spurting from her throat – the look on her face...

Slowly, he drew back from the memories to his surroundings, in one and a half hours he would be thirty. If he wasn't in the Hall of Ascension by then, the charge inside his head would be triggered and he would cease to exist. One and a half hours to set the machine to transfer him into one of the children in the nursery, his memories intact. Memories of her, her blood, her look, her fear.

Automatically, he reset the machine, again following his checklist. Rising, he walked over to the transfer chair and sat under the electrodes. Pulling the trigger switch closer, he prepared himself for the twisting lurch that pulled his memories, his soul, out of his body and into one of the New-Born in the nursery.

The memories came back, so many times he'd sat there. Arliese, where are you now? Young Todd, the boy he'd befriended four or five years back, he'd been tempted to tell him about the machine too, but hadn't. Why not? They'd been so close, they'd shared everything, except this one secret. Somehow he'd been very jealous of it then. It was his and his alone. He'd always been a bit of a loner. His memories a barrier between him and the older ones, always a barrier to be overcome. Only four times in four hundred years had he broken through that barrier. Arliese, Todd, Banru and Logan. Logan who had renounced the city forever and died of old age. Maybe that was the secret of happiness, not constant rebirth but constant living.

His hand was shaking as he reached for the control pad with its single, ominous button. He glanced at the clock and was startled to see that only twenty seconds of his life remained.

Twenty seconds and the charge would go off, only ten now, he concentrated on placing his finger on the button and pushing it, his mind screaming at him to hurry, five seconds, four, three, two, one...

He pressed the button, feeling the start of that familiar lurching twist that meant transfer.

His mind screamed “Nooooo...” But it was too late.

Trizer – The Squire's Lady

Waiting alone in silence
As the ghosts of a thousand lives gather
Also to wait and to watch
As the time draws nearer
Ever nearer to when he must again
Use the machine that only he knows about

It was so long ago
An eternity in mind if not body since his discovery
Memories blur as the ghosts crowd closer
Urging him on to yet another life
A new rejuvenation

So old, so young, so old
So tired of being an ageless mind
Inside a ageless body
What worth this fountain of youth
When the soul cannot cope with more memories
More lives

Yet the machine still waits
Glowing knowingly, invitingly evilly
Offering once more the gift of life
Take one more bite of the apple
Before the hour passes and the choice is gone
It is time, is time, is time time, time, time. . .

It is finished

Nights at the Circus

by Angela Carter

Reviewed by Tim Jones.

Hardback: Catto & Windus, London, 1984; Paperback: Picador

Step right up, you, madam, yes, and you, sir too! You don't know what you're missing, likely as not, else you'd not dally out there in the cold night air but throw yourself bodily through this entrance, this aperture, this, in short, *opening* which has been made available to you and explore the delights within. The Cockney Venus, friends, six foot two and wings of blue! The Strong Man with little to show for it, the tigers, the woman transformed by song, the self-actualising apes, the painted face that hides the tears, the anarchist witch, all gathered together and waiting the end of this most industrious centuries, the N-N-N-Nineteenth, and the bursting forth of old and new glories in the Twentieth.

And don't think you'll simply be stuck in this one locale, hard by Tower Bridge, for the whole three hundred or so pages you'll spend with us! No, we'll be crossing Siberia by train, with excursions into the past, the presents – some of them most elaborate – of a Grand Duke and a shaman, and the edge of the future. Siberia, under you might say the margin of Tsars, where the possibilities of the new century gather to await their turn upon the stage of the world: the prison camp, the republic of free women, the bandits and the dying tribe.

And who keeps these wheels turning, these balls in the air? Well, there are those as *do*, and those that *thinks* they do! The powers of capital and in the person of Colonel Kearney, think they can keep everything together; but, to let you into a secret, the shaper and mover of these marvels is one Angela Carter. Now, she's hardly new to this game, as you'll know if you've experienced some of the other ambiguous delights she's put before us – **The Passion of New Eve**, say, or **The War of Dreams** – but inside the Big Top she's at her very best.

Now, you, madam, will be pleased to hear (deny it though you may in front of this gentleman, for I see he frowns, and shakes his head, and motions silence) that the movement of this watch upon the world's joy and pain is largely that of women. They are struggling against long odds and patriarchs of all description, with at least the promise of success. So, step inside, madam, and you too, sir, for I fear and hope you may learn something of yourself. There is a hero, by the end.

But look! The curtain's rising on a new performance, a new sensation, a new century. Won't you take the stage?

A Beginner's Guide to Dragons

D.W. Burton

It's really a pity that the medieval scientific community didn't take the chance to study dragons when there were plenty of the animals around. I suppose their reluctance was understandable, but the result is that present day investigators have to rely on a few rather dubious fossils and on the accounts written by the early workers in the field, such as St. George.

These accounts don't give a very balanced picture of life in the dragon community, as they deal only with the maiden-chasing and knight-incinerating programmes instituted by the dragons, and even here the accounts appear to be biased, inaccurate, and very unfavourable from the point of view of the dragons. In each account, the knight (cast as the hero) always vanquishes the dragon (cast as the villain), and this, of course, is against all common sense.

First of all, the knights rode horses, and the horses would have been understandably dubious about the whole affair. Second, the knights had an odd habit of encasing themselves in portable metal ovens, a practice which the dragons probably greeted with loud hoots of delighted enthusiasm. After all, when such a handicapped combination is pitted against an armoured two-hundred-foot-long perambulating incinerator, the outcome is inevitable, and peasants who were keen students of form must have made a lot of money betting on the dragons.

A dragon which has breakfasted in elegant style on four cows, three maidens, and the village idiot, and has casually burnt down a couple of barns, a haystack, and a chicken coop complete with chickens just to keep in practice is not likely to allow one insignificant knight to come between him and the prospect of a similar breakfast the next day. One good WHOOOOOSSHHHHHH at a range of seventy yards to the accompaniment of mingled cheers and groans from the assembled peasantry, and the round table has another vacancy.

There are, of course, several important points to be considered. How did the dragons produce fire? Why did they become extinct? Why was maiden such an essential constituent of a dragon's diet? Most puzzling of all, how did the dragons distinguish maiden from non-maiden without asking them first?

As both dragons and maidens are notoriously intractable and hard to handle in a laboratory situation, the early investigators made little attempt to answer any of these questions. In fact, when confronted by a dragon or a maiden, their immediate response was to eliminate it, although the two required quite different techniques. There are cases on record in which knights, in the heat of the moment, have used the dragon-elimination technique on a hapless and palpitating maiden, and there is even a record of one dithering idiot who tried the method for eradicating maidens on a dragon, to the delight of the dragon and the puzzlement of the assembled peasantry.

Broadly speaking, dragons fell into two major groups – the large, fire-producing, knight-incinerating, maiden-masticating monsters, and the smaller dragons which concentrated solely on chasing maidens with no particular end in view. This beginner's guide deals only with the first group.

This group can be divided into three genera, each genus being distinguished by the method of production of combustible materials. The first genus (and by far the most successful of the three) was the genus *Ignisaurus*, the members of which produced methane in the stomach. The methane, when it was required, was belched into the closed mouth, inhaled into the lungs, puffed out, and ignited. This rather involved procedure gave the prospective barbecue a useful five-second warning between the belch and the blast, and so dragons of this genus spent much of their spare time practising quiet burps.

There were two species, the first of which lit the methane by flicking the tip of the horny, ridged tongue across the upper teeth to produce a shower of sparks. This method was incredibly inefficient, and it is surprising that the makers of modern cigarette lighters haven't thought up anything better. Very often the methane failed to light, and so dragons of this species used to wander dolefully around the countryside, reeking quietly to themselves like enormous mobile compost heaps. As they suffered from such monumental halitosis, the species has been given the name *Ignisaurus foetidissimus*. Even though they didn't often burn anything, they were still regarded as a considerable menace. A fast burp from a large specimen could asphyxiate a knight standing fifty yards upwind, and a few lingering eructations could wipe out an entire village, cows, pigs, ducks, maidens and all. Fortunately this species carried the seeds of its own destruction – very few of the dragons ever mated, as the dragons themselves couldn't stand the smell of each other.

The other species in the genus was *Ignisaurus raptor*, which could be distinguished by its great grey-green gruesomely-gnarled gnobbly gneecaps. This species was a much more advanced and better designed model, and each dragon was equipped with a pilot flame which ignited the methane blast with devastating effect. These were by far the most dangerous and successful of all the dragons, and they cut a large swathe through the maiden and knight population of Europe. In an attempt to reduce the dragons' depredations, the local inhabitants started a wholesale campaign of maiden eradication. Deprived of an essential part of their diet, the dragons finally became extinct, each gigantic corpse testimony to the success

of human application of biological principles. Oddly enough, maiden eradication in Europe is still a hallowed ritual, and maidens are extremely difficult to find.

The next genus, *Pyrosaurus*, burned alcohol rather than methane. The production of alcohol by fermentation in the gut is easy enough, but the extraction and storage of the alcohol must have presented the early dragons with a staggering obstacle to evolve around. In *Pyrosaurus intoxicans* the alcohol was stored in a muscular bladder and piped to the nostrils when required.

These dragons were not very successful, as they depended on lightning to ignite their alcohol. All dragons deposited metallic iron in their scales as a form of added protection, but in *P. intoxicans* this iron was restricted to a narrow strip running from the tip of the tail to the nostril on either side. From the centre of each strip nerves ran to the alcohol bladder and to the diaphragm. When the weather was right, *P. intoxicans* would emerge drooling from its lair and lumber off in search of a suitable maiden in a suitable place well out in the open.

After tiptoeing furtively up behind its prospective barbecue, the dragon would raise its tail to the vertical to act as a lightning conductor, drop its head towards the victim, stand rock still on its four feet, and wait for the lightning to strike. The electrostatic discharge running down the lateral iron strips caused reflex contractions of the alcohol bladder and the diaphragm, resulting in a blast of air and alcohol which was lit by the current arcing across the nostrils. By this time, of course, the maiden would have wandered off, and by the time maiden, dragon, and lightning all coincided the dragons was usually too puffed to huff.

St. George, who tempered his undoubted courage with a certain measure of low cunning, made *P. intoxicans* his speciality. He is always depicted spearing the dragon through the mouth, and is obviously puncturing the alcohol bladder. This would release large quantities of alcohol into the dragon's blood stream, and when the dragon was in a suitably receptive frame of mind it could be despatched at leisure.

The third genus, *Coprosaurus*, was not technically a fire-producing dragon, but it was dangerous enough in its own way. On the side of each nostril in *Coprosaurus eruptus* there was a large electric organ, similar to those found in electric eels. So large were these organs, in fact, that they were capable of maintaining a continuous electric arc across the nostrils. Nitrogen in the air burned in the arc to produce nitric oxide, which then combined with water in the throat to form nitric acid. This combined with plant cellulose in the stomach to produce the explosive compound nitrocellulose, which was ultimately stored as football-sized pellets in the rectum. This dragon was normally peace-loving and inoffensive, but if it was disturbed it would fire a ten-pound charge of high explosive at anything that moved. Unfortunately for the dragons the explosive tended to become highly unstable after a while, and the slightest jar could set it off. There is no record of this species chasing maidens – it was probably too scared to move. The sight of dragons exploding violently and spontaneously was too much for the ancients, who made nonplussed remarks about thunderbolts and accelerated their maiden-eradication programme. It is believed that the species became extinct after an outbreak of dysentery. The fossil record is fragmentary.

Closely allied to *C. eruptus* was *C. ignipodex*, perhaps one of the most idiosyncratic and aberrant monstrosities ever to grace the earth. Compared with the general run of dragons, this one was built in reverse, with a small electric arc across the anus. This allowed it to set light to the gaseous products of its rather peculiar digestive processes, with unfortunate results for any hapless knight who happened to be sneaking up from behind. It also had a disastrous effect on the underside of the dragon's tail, but it did allow jet-assisted takeoff in an emergency, and the sight of a screaming dragon ascending heavenward on a pillar of fire was not uncommon. It appears that the invention of the rocket was a spin-off from dragon technology.

This dragon was effectively dealt with by the local peasantry, who would creep up and cork it while it was asleep. When the dragons were plentiful and the peasantry brave, the resulting sight of dozens of constipated dragons all straining in unison, and emitting stentorian groans of deep distress (also in unison) would stir the hardest heart (although precisely to what is not specified in the records).

Perhaps its just as well that dragons are a thing of the past. True, they did act as a check on the knight population, which occasionally gets a little out of hand now that dragons are no longer around. All the same, life is quite dangerous enough without the added complication of a scaly monster the size of a small goods train leaping out from behind a bush and turning one a rapid sizzling brown on both sides. Dragons, anyone? No, thank you very much.

Letters

(We may not have many letters, but they are certainly both of an interesting length and worth reading. More letters of this nature are requested/begged).

Tim Jones, Dunedin

Dear Alex,

Well your letter noting the disparity in my article distribution policies, and your corrected version of my GUFF material, have stirred that subterranean beast, the Jones conscience, into action. However, my mind didn't alight on a specific topic for an article, but rather settled ponderously upon some unrelated points from **Phlogiston** Ten. To cut the crap, this is a letter. But it will be quite a long letter and I hope it will satisfy your cravings for material for a while! As you can see, I'm having to use a rather battered portable typewriter to turn this letter out, as our Bondwell computer has gone on the blink for the second time in three weeks.

As someone whose fanzine may reach double figures just before the millennium, please allow me to offer my congratulations on **Phlogiston's** achievement. You've done it in style, too, with an issue that's pleasantly varied in material and approach. Furthermore, various people have written things I'd like to have written, had I the time or energy.

Alan Robson's books are arranged on his shelves alphabetically by author. Our bookcase is arranged in a shambolic parody of the Library of Congress, but the science fiction/fantasy/horror section forms an outpost of alphabeticality. And, as Alan, there are lots "K"s, and nearly all of them are by Stephen King.

The only King book I've brought myself is **Danse Macabre**. The rest belong to my flatmate Allan, and my reaction to the King collection when I first moved here was similar to Alan's: "hmm, King, writes best sellers – can't be any good". When, through boredom or curiosity, I tried one of the books, I quickly became hooked. Like Alan, I found the basic themes of the books fairly unexceptional, and spent some time thinking about why they were, on the whole, so effective.

One reason is that, despite working in horror fiction, Stephen King is very much a naturalistic writer. He has said that he was heavily influenced by "mainstream" naturalists such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, and his stories are very much set in a particular time, a particular place, a particular social environment. The constant references to brands of clothes, shoes, food and drink, the use of events in recent US history to signpost the passing of time, the frequent use of a specific area of Maine as the setting for his tales – all these ground the stories heavily in the real mundane world. The sudden onset of horrific events, or the gradual building of awareness that something is terribly wrong, are thus much more effective than they would be against less closely realised backgrounds.

On the other hand, I feel the background sometimes gets in the way of the story. Although parts of **Pet Semetary** are very scary. I feel that the horror story and the everyday details of white middle-class American life don't sit well together. Much of King's work, and his introductions to his stories and novels, imply a strongly autobiographical element to his characters and situations, and since Stephen King presumably does not have to go through the gruesome events his characters experience the horror is sometimes less convincing than the routine it disrupts. King's novella collection, **Different Seasons**, contains a story called **The Body** which is about the kind of young male adolescents who crop up in **Christine**, **The Talisman** and so forth, but contains no horror elements. Maybe King would like to ditch horror for a while and go for out-and-out naturalism, but is being frustrated by his publisher?

King is also very successful in getting me to identify with the protagonists of his stories. These tend to be young males – that is, the story is told by young males and from their perspectives. Whether because of this, or King's own attitudes, or both, I find that King's books tend to have an ambiguous attitude to women and to female sexuality. I'd be interested to hear what other people have to say about this, and I wonder whether King is as popular with women as he is with men.

Which brings me, sort of, to Trish Crowther's letter. **The Dispossessed** isn't my favourite Le Guin book – that honour goes to **The Left Hand of Darkness**, although it's many years since I read the latter – but it is a fine novel. A couple more examples of feminist/socialist/anarchist SF by women are **The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You** by Dorothy Bryant, and **Woman of the Edge of Time** by Marge Piercy. These aren't well known by SF fans, I suspect because they aren't marketed as SF. In that context, it's interesting that the Woman's Press have opened an SF line, with authors such as Joanna Russ.

A more surprising example is C.J (Carolyn) Cherryh's **Forty Thousand in Gehenna**. I understand that Cherryh has a reputation for being rather right-wing, and she has certainly been an enthusiastic supporter of the L-5 Society, but unless I'm severely missing the point this novel, which in its second half pits a non-sexist, non-hierarchical society against a male-dominated, militaristic, hierarchical one, comes down firmly in favour of the former (try saying that fast!) Interestingly,

Cherryh's enthusiasm for this comparison gets the better of her normally excellent control, and the book turns from a standard-variety Cherryh SF novel, rather drier than most, into a sociological tract. Set against Cherryh's earliest work, which strongly emphasises the heroic individual, **Gehenna** marks quite a change.

A few other left-wing, or at least not horribly Heinleinish, writers who come to mind include Tom Disch (in parts), Brian Stableford and John Brunner, who has been active in CND in the UK. Personally, I love the Strugatskis and am delighted to see more of their work appearing in translation. I can't make sense of Lem, though.

Your con report was one of the best I've read, Alex. Most con and trip reports are little more than lists of wheres beens and whats done, but yours got across the spirit as well as the substance of what happened. As for my talk, although I'd done quite a lot of preparation for it I was feeling pretty fuzzy at 11 am Sunday and couldn't seem to make it stick together properly. I should have learnt by now that the more I prepare, the worse I speak. Anyway, when things aren't working I tend to stick in lots of little fillers whilst my mind attempts to stay ahead of my mouth, like, you know? Thanks for drawing my attention to this bad habit.

And apart from my ritual plea to you to trade your fanzine more so it will garner the respect it deserves, that is that. Oh – a progress report on GUFF – if I can get twenty or so more votes I may just win. So if you'd like a local at the Brighton Worldcon in '87, the voting form was in the last issue. Isn't self-promotion tacky?

Best regards, Tim Jones.

(Indeed the tripewriter was so battered that I had to brush up on my ancient Egyptian to read it. Thanks, Tim, for the Ego-Boo and here's hoping that you make it to Brighton. And now a letter that I think should be of interest to many people)

Phillip Mann, Wellington

Dear Alex,

Thank you for sending me Alan Robson's review for **Master of Paxwax** and inviting me to make any comments. I do not wish in any way to answer or query any points that he makes. I found it an extremely well written review, judicious and thoughtful, and I am naturally glad that he enjoyed the book for it was written to please. As a result of my work in the theatre I have been the recipient of many reviews, good, bad and indifferent and the only thing that finally matters to me is that the work in question be taken seriously.

I will however, take this opportunity to expand on some of the processes that lay behind the book in the hope that this will be of interest to your readers and will use Alan Robson's comments as my guide for he has pointed to some most important issues.

Alan is quite right when he complains about the use of the name Odin. I share his dislike for the use of mythological names without proper vindication. I should really have called the creature Oddin or Od-in or even Odyn, for when I was writing the book, that was how I chose to pronounce the name in my mind. Of course, the reader can't be expected to know that.

Names are very important in the writing process and you can't call someone Joe or Hattie or Azzrilgb without intuitively feeling that the name is right. In **Master of Paxwax**, Songteller was originally called Karlesbrooke and under that name was quite a boring operator. When he changed name he also grew his special brain and acquired his peculiar lack of passion. Dame Jettatura of the Xerxes was originally called Fabiola and I might add that both the Xerxes ladies caused me a great deal of trouble. Fabiola accepted Jettatura without any trouble, but when I attempted to tamper with Clarissa I had bad dreams. Characters in a fiction have a strange life. They don't complain about their fate but can be very demanding (insistent indeed) with regard to details.

So back to Odin. When I typed Odin, I heard in my mind Oddin. It became so natural that I never thought to question it. I know about Odin the Norse God and Oddin the creature I was writing about and there is really no point of contact between them. I do not know what power I have in this matter but in any future editions of the book, where I have the opportunity to change the name, I shall do so. Meanwhile, perhaps any of your readers who obtain the book will make the mental leap and say Oddin when they read Odin.

En passant I might mention that when I do use names with a classical or mythological pedigree, I try to take advantage of the extra power the names possess or make clear my own particular use of the name. Thus, Thantor in **Eye of the Queen** is derived directly from Thanatos, the Greek for death. In **The Fall of the Families**, the name Ultima Thule will be encountered. It is used to suggest an end, a final resting place. Beyond that it takes its specific meaning from the context of the book and there I shall leave the matter – for the book is not yet published.

I was very interested in Alan's comment on the similarity (and dis-similarity) between old Toby Paxwax with his chandelier and Baron Harkonnen in **Dune**, for the editor in England, Malcolm Edwards, once hinted at the same comparison. I never bothered to follow it up. The truth is that I read **Dune** when it was first published years ago and did not see the film. I have a very vague memory of the book except for the marvellous description of the worms and the effect of the spice. I can absolutely guarantee that **Dune** had no influence on **Master of Paxwax**.

The wider point is interesting however, and that is that writers inevitably create parallels and stumble over coincidences. Once one starts writing one's own Science Fiction one tends to stop reading other works. The danger of being dragged into another writer's orbit is very real and ignorance is bliss. Plagiarism is, I suspect, very rare.

For myself, were I ever to come perilously close to another writer's creation, I trust my editor would warn me and I would certainly endeavour to make changes. I prefer not to, but it does not bother me unduly, if I cross the tracks of another writer. Consider the whole domain of Science Fiction as a vast snow covered mountain rising from a lush tropical plain. All writers climb there. Some die there. And it is exciting when paths cross.

Poetry. I knew when I hammered out my first lyrics that I was venturing onto thin ice. I made Pawl into a poet, or versifier, in order to make him *strange* to myself. I wanted his mind to be slightly out-of-step with everyday reality. All poets, it seems to me, have something of the anarchist about them. Pawl's words are intended to be, as Wordsworth maintained, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" albeit in his case, not "recollected in tranquillity".

Setting Pawl up as a poet is typical of the kind of challenge which a writer sets up before himself (cf Anthony Burgess in the Enderby novels). It is an obstacle which calls forth particular strengths.

It would have been easy for me to make Pawl more sarcastic and to have included some of his little poems of invective against members of the Families he does not like. But, at the point at which the novel begins, that period of his writing is over and all his creative energy is focused on Laurel. Had I made him into a balladeer, I think I would have been avoiding the challenge I set myself, and Pawl would have become a different man; more professional, less instinctive. He is not a nice man but he is fiercely true to his own feelings and he does love Laurel even in a way that that woman might find a burden.

Adopting a wider, more general point of view, my hope was that the inclusion of different types of verse would give the entire work a richer texture. In writing to Malcolm Edwards I once likened the book to a "richly coloured carpet" which I wanted to unroll before the reader. This concept included the literary style. That hope remains true and I suppose the full dimension of the work (successful or otherwise) can not be judged until **The Fall of the Families** appears in January of next year. All I ask finally is that those readers who jump over the verse in order to get on with the story (cf Tolkien) go back and take a second look for I laboured long and hard to make the verse say what I meant, and perhaps a bit more besides.

The reason why this book is in two parts is because the original manuscript was over nine hundred pages long. It was a chaos of a book and the Gollancz editor suggested that I chop it into two parts. He was completely right. I found the restructuring extremely difficult but felt that at all points what was emerging was a more coherent and complete work. Of necessity I have had to recapitulate some of the events in **Master of Paxwax** in **The Fall of the Families** in order to make the story comprehensible to new readers. I hope this repetition does not mar the book too greatly for those who want a straight read. However, it is important to realise that both books stem from a single inspiration and represent a cyclic whole rather than just first book and second. The original title of the work was **The Gardener**. As Alan has detected, part two takes us much more into the alien world, but I defy anyone to predict the outcome.

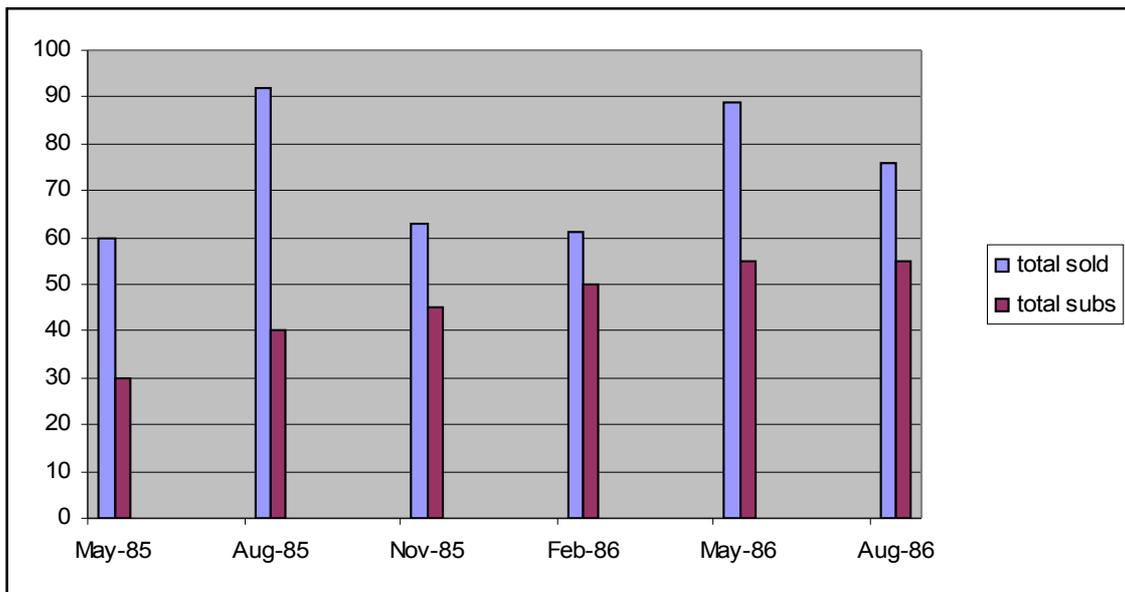
Finally let me return to the verse in the book. I have asked Gollancz to publish **The Ballad of John Death Elliott** as an appendix to **The Fall of the Families**. If it is not published in that work I shall be happy to offer it to Alex to be published in a future edition of **Phlogiston**. I do not want to disappoint anyone, but the parallels to Eskimo Nell are very few. It is basically an adventure ballad. I wrote it as an attempt to make the history of Elliott's Pocket more interesting.

With Best Wishes, Phillip Mann.

Mutterings

This issue may be a bit thinner than the last. I can't say for sure as I'm writing this on the 20th of October and who knows what might come in the next few days. Still, it looks like **Phlogiston** will be lucky to have more than twenty pages this time around. It's not that I'm not getting material to publish but people seem to be writing shorter articles these days. Even my editorial, which tends to be at least four pages long, has shrunk to a tiny two pages (which is just as well, people were beginning to grumble). Perhaps it's the summer shrinks, I'll have to start doing my budgets on a block of ice with a walrus tusk. This issue aside, what I am most worried about is the February issue. In past years, by the time January turns up I've generally chewed my fingers down to the toes having watched the trickle of material that I normally get dry up in the summer heat. Hopefully this year it won't happen, but the portents are not good.

Anyway, enough of my worries, on to other matters. A number of people have asked me how well **Phlogiston** is doing. Well, as you can see from the pretty graph below, **Phlogiston** is proving to be moderately successful. Circulation is showing a steady climb, most of which is due to subscriptions. As a side note, **Phlogiston** has subscribers/contributors in Japan, America, Canada, and Australia. If the trend continues, **Phlogiston** might crack the magic hundred before the end of the year.



It's not easy to compare this progress with the other fanzines about. Fanzines from overseas tend to have much larger circulations but tend to not work on the subscription principle. Which means that the circulation may be as large as the editor(s) can afford. Indeed, I've never seen any overseas fanzine mention how big its circulation was, which leads me to suspect that I'm committing another crime against "real" fanzine fandom by even discussing such concepts. No matter, my crimes are many, another won't make much difference.

In Aotearoa, the only fanzine that I can compare **Phlogiston** with, is the official clubzine of the National Association for Science Fiction: **Warp**. Here circulation figures have always been a matter of conjecture, as the number of members actually in NASF at any particular time has never really been established. Still, giving them the benefit of the doubt, there are about 100-120 members out there, making **Warp** the largest circulation fanzine in New Zealand. However, that's not the best effort. Rumour has it that at **Noumenon's** height it had a circulation of about 600. If that's true (and nobody except the infamous Thurogood knows for sure) then **Phlogiston** has a long way to go. Maybe one day... but for now, small is beautiful.

Turning now to a different sort of narcissism, according to Tim Jones – **Themazine** is scheduled to re-emerge in the near future. And what is **Themazine**? I hear you ask. **Themazine** was started by Frank Macskasy Jr several years ago to serve as an outlet for those among us who wanted to have their SF writing published. The principle behind **Themazine** is basically that of the Vanity Press, those wanting their stories published, contribute towards the cost of the issue in which their story appears. When Frank went overseas, Tim took up the responsibility for **Themazine** and managed to squeeze out an issue about two years ago. While I have my doubts about this type of fanzine, its re-emergence may signal a resurgence in NZ fanzine publishing. I'm hoping so.

Prone, as I am, to constant tinkering with **Phlogiston** to try and improve the layout (there's only so much I can do about the content). I've recently made a major change in the layout of each and every page. The first of those those eagle-eyed enough to detect it and motivated enough to write in will receive the coveted Chocolate Fish award for extreme diligence. That's all for this issue. See you in February.

FFANZ (New Zealand to Australia)

FFANZ – The Fan Fund of Australia and New Zealand – was started in 1982 to encourage closer ties between the fans and fandoms of New Zealand and Australia. With host countries theoretically alternating with each vote, there have been to date three exchanges of fan representatives, two from New Zealand and one, most recently, from Australia. FFANZ exists solely through the support of fandom and the candidates are voted for by interested fans all over the world, each vote being accompanied by a voting fee of at least two dollars in the voter's national currency. The money raised by these votes, as well as other donations, and monies from fan fund auctions at conventions is what makes it possible for FFANZ to send fan representatives to overseas conventions. The continued interest and generosity of fandom is what makes FFANZ possible.

Donations : FFANZ always welcomes material for auction, and donations of money. These may be brought along to conventions, or sent to the local FFANZ administrator. Anyone may contribute, even if they are currently ineligible to vote – donations in excess of the voting fee are gratefully accepted. Just as important as donations is publicity – in fanzines, letters, convention booklets and by word of mouth – to increase voter participation and fandom's overall interest in and awareness of fans.

Who may vote : Voting is open to anyone who has been active in fandom (through involvement with fanzines, conventions, clubs etc) since before 1986. Only one vote per person is allowed; proxy voting is not permitted and your ballot must be signed. Details of the voting are, of course, kept secret. If you think your name may not be known to either of the administrators, please include the name of a fan (but not one of the current candidates) or the name of a fan group who can vouch for you.

Voting Details : FFANZ uses the "Australian" optional preferential system of voting, which guarantees an automatic run-off and a majority win. What you do is to rank the candidates in the order which you wish to place them, first to last. If the candidate with the most votes does not poll a majority of the total votes cast, first-place votes of the lowest ranking candidate are dropped, and the second preferences on those ballots are distributed to the candidates marked second on those forms. The process continues until one candidate has a majority of votes.

It is important, therefore, to indicate your second and third preferences, especially if you decide to “write-in” a candidate of your own choosing. This is in case that candidate does not win and the votes have to be distributed further. Use of this system insures that it is a waste of time to put a candidate in more than one place. It is, however, not necessary to put a preference number beside *every* candidate's name.

Hold Over Funds : Is an option which gives the voter the chance to vote for the funds to be held over to the next FFANZ trip, should the candidates not appeal to them.

Deadline : All votes must reach an administrator by the 2nd of January 1987.

The Candidates have each promised, barring acts of Ghod, to travel to the 1987 Australian National SF Convention (CapCon in Canberra, 25-27 April) if elected, have posted a \$10 bond and have provided a “voting platform” which appears overleaf.

Please send ballots and donations to :

Australia : Roger Weddall, P.O Box 273, Fitzroy, VIC 3065

New Zealand : Nigel Rowe, P.O Box 1814, Auckland

FFANZ 1987 Candidate's Platforms

Alex & Karen Heatley: So what do you say in one of these platforms? Hi, my name is Alex Heatley and the woman on my right is Karen Heatley. We both want to win the '87 FFANZ fund, travel to far off, interesting places to meet far off, interesting people. Our fannish credentials are few. I edit a fanzine called **Phlogiston**. Karen has been involved on the organisation of the Dunedin NASF club for many years. We've also helped organise conventions and both belonged to the local APA. We are both well-known in fannish circles and almost completely unknown in Oz. So what do we intend to do if we win FFANZ ? I intend to give Kevin Dillon that copy of **Shatter** that I promised at AussieCon II (note the big-name-con-dropping). Apart from that we hope to enjoy ourselves and return to NZ with lots of cute, warm fuzzies. Vote for the complete unknowns and be surprised! Oh and by the way, Tim Jones for GUFF!

Nominators : Mervyn Barrett, Mark Loney.

Frank Macskasy Jnr: I can honestly give one helluva good reason why you should vote for me... but it's not because I've edited **Warp** and **Themezine**; created the National Association for SF here in Godzone; acted as Fan GoH at a couple of cons; been contributing to **Aotearapa** for the last four years; and have generally been active in this wonderful, mythical Land of Madness we call Fandom. It's because the cops are after me, I'm such a nice bloke and I'd like the chance to make half a million bucks on your dole system as well...

Nominators : Pauline Meinung, John Newman, Rex Thompson.

Lyn McConchie: Years ago I wanted to sail to Australia on a balsa raft but my guardians wouldn't let me. I've never had another chance. I am a fan editor/publisher (**Dum Vivimus, Vivimus**; **Fan'attic**; local SF newsletter; etc), printer and contributor to 'zines in Australia, Belgium, Canada and England. I've been an officer, committee member or Librarian of NASF and a local SF club since 1983. I would love to find out what Aussie fandom is like, and promise to write a long trip report. I am amiable, house-trained, deserving and nuclear-free. What more could FFANZ want?

Nominators : Linette Horne, Michelle Muijsert, Keith Smith, Jean Weber.

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