Vector 165

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The Critical Journal Of The British Science Fiction Association

WINGROVE:

THE PORNOGRAPHY DEBATE

Love & SF ● James Herbert Interview
Reviews ● Letters ● More

Vector

February/March 1992 ⇒ Issue 165

Contents

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editorial

By Kev McVeigh

I don't know just how many of you have already seen David Wingrove's response to Catie Cary's editorial in **Vector 164,** but it has provoked a remarkable response from you in return. Honestly, I never expected Bruce Sterling's exhortations to be taken so seriously, it is just a shame that it had to be over such a farcical issue.

Wingrove's letters to Catie and myself were, it seems, slightly different to those you received. I quote:

As you'll see from the attached circular letter, I have very little expectation of receiving any right of reply in the next issue of the magazine, especially in view of comments like Paul Kincaid's in Vector 154, where he wrote, "Quite frankly, faced with a decision of what to leave out in such circumstances, I'm not sure I would have printed any review of Chung Kuo." However, I am asking herewith that you print the enclosed, verbatim, in the next issue of Vector.

Strong stuff? Perhaps if Wingrove had bothered to contact either myself or Catie, we could have discussed his right to reply. We would have asked him to do one of two things: to write a short letter for publication in the letter column, or a longer article disclosing his view of his work. Instead we received something which falls between the two, as is printed in this issue.

We might also have reminded David Wingrove of the opportunities for right of reply that have been granted over the past 14 issues of **Vector**. Remember the John Gribbin letters, which saw both John and his publisher Humphrey Price quoted in subsequent issues? How about when I criticised Tad Williams, and his publisher Deborah Beale phoned me to discuss the matter and then sent a letter for the next issue? Simon Ings has twice appeared in our letter column, once with Charles Stross, after we published things he disapproved of. And Paul Kincaid, Ken Lake, and David Wingrove had letters published in the wake of Ken's review of the publicity material accompanying **Chung Kuo**.

Wait a minute, David Wingrove? So having had one such letter published, and seen the same opportunity afforded to several others, it is easy to see where he got the idea that we wouldn't publish his reply. His imagination. Having no basis in fact whatsoever.

Well, I am deeply insulted by this unfounded accusation, as is Catie Cary. Mr Wingrove also insults my former co-editor Boyd Parkinson with this slur, and brings Paul Kincaid's remarks into it also (without the courtesy of a copy to Paul.) Paul has had no editorial involvement with this magazine for over a year now. Furthermore the quote used above, from a letter to the magazine, is taken totally out of context. The letter was written in the context of **Vector**'s former reviews policy where far fewer books received much longer reviews, and the reviews editor had to decide which books to omit. These are the circumstances Paul Kincaid was considering, and as I read it, he was saying that he **might** have considered other books more worthy of inclusion than one which had already seen a feature article in **Vector** by Brian W Aldiss as well as a great deal of publicity elsewhere. I have re-read the letter and cannot see how Mr Wingrove sees this as an indication that **Vector** would deny him a right to reply.

But I also read an interview with him in **Territories** where he complains about the British SF establishment as a whole deciding to pick on him, to give him bad reviews and to jeer his every word. I am not going to say that he is wrong in this, I wouldn't know, though it seems a little far-fetched. I will say this: somehow Wingrove has irritated several people I know in UK SF criticism by his frequent outbursts at every bad review, but the general consensus would seem to be "OK take your ball home, we've got plenty more to play with." No amount of whingeing is going to change that, but I also believe that most reviewers are fair - I know of one who asked not to be sent Wingrove books because she felt unable to be fair to him - and have not time to waste on rubbishing Wingrove. And why should they?

Basically his continued insistence on responding to every bad review makes David Wingrove look very uncertain of himself, overly-possessive of his work, and maybe even paranoid. "You won't publish this but....." letters are remarkably childish. One wonders if he demands that his editors at NEL publish his work verbatim, if he allows them to criticise or dare I suggest, to edit?

I recall Garry Kilworth writing to Vector once:

I once asked Chris Priest what I should do about a scathing review. He advised, "Try not to retaliate." The trouble is, the critic never knows when one is remaining aloof. Therefore I should like to finish by saying that I read the review in Paperback Inferno of Split Second and I am remaining aloof. **(Vector 105)**

Let us be clear on this: anyone who wishes to write to **Vector** will be published if they write well enough and the subject matter is appropriate, factual and not libellous. Occasionally we make mistakes, but we do not reject material simply because the author thinks we might. Catie and I await Mr Wingrove's full apology.

❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋ ❋

I'd like to comment briefly on Catie's editorial since it has raised such a response. I would have written a different piece on the subject, and I don't agree with all that Catie wrote. That is irrelevant, she was expressing a personal opinion, and using it as a starting point to ask a very important question: what do we do about books which offend us? Her tongue-in-cheek definition sums up the problem, one man's meat is Mary Whitehouse's pornography, or something.

Avedon Carol in **PULP 19** argues the case for less censorship. She asks telling questions such as "How do you know what (other) men think when they look at pornography?", "How can pictures of erect penises deprave or corrupt?", and "What do pictures of models sitting around with no clothes have to do with violence?".

At present pornography is a catch-all term thrown carelessly at Sex Education videos, at Page Three models, at Snuff movies (if they exist, none have ever been found), at anything involving sex, and some things involving violence. At the very least we ought to make the distinction that sex, a warm act between consulting adults is a positive act (as portrayed in difficult- to obtain comics such as **Omaha The Cat Dancer**, or magazines like **Quim**); whilst violence, as seen in films such as **Die Hard, Robocop**, or **Terminator** and novels like **Hammer's Slammers** is disturbing and harmful.

I don't know if this makes Wingrove's book pornographic or not, I haven't read it, and his own opinion is both irrelevant and discredited. I do know that I wish he'd kept quiet about a trivial perceived slight so that more people might have attempted to answer Catie's questions without the distraction of his outburst, because I'm just as confused as Catie seems to be.

LETTERS

Please send all letters of comment to:

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Censorship!

From Erwin Blonk

I think censorship is a very dangerous thing. Firstly, you give away nearly all freedom to a relatively small group of people. Secondly, what kind of world is it in which people can claim diminished responsibility because they read a (forbidden!) book or watched a movie? To me they can only claim irreparable insanity for letting themselves be influenced.

Censorship ain't necessary either. I can assure you no-one will go around raping after reading **Chang Kao III** or become sadistic to women. The few who do, would have done so without reading it. Censorship will not make the world a better place.

Having warnings on books, records etc is okay by me as long as removing them doesn't do any damage ("This book is likely to damage your health, removing this warning is likely to damage this book"). Better is to make it a sort of categorisation, ie saying on the cover it contains sex, violence, Barry Manilow etc without any further message whatsoever. I still don't think it makes any sense but it's a compromise. And when that's all done, lock up those knights of hypocritical morality. Oh well, on the other hand, let 'em have their say, why not?

I do realise, Catie isn't advocating censorship, but certifications are a suggestive form of censorship. Take X-rating: not every sexually explicit work of art (books, movies, sculptures etc) is automatically degrading to anyone , it can be quite the contrary.

Erwin Blonk
The Hague

From Robert Gibson

I expect most readers will have noticed something fitting in the combination of Bruce Sterling's 'Holding The Invisible Hand', on the inhuman aspects of the victory of the Free Market, and the two articles - editorial plus 'Savoy Seizure' - on aspects of the eternal freedom-and obscenity debate. Whatever you are inclined to define as filth, and whatever you intend should be your reaction to it, one thing seems likely - you're going to get a lot more of it.

Me, I'm for censorship. Not*principled censorship, you understand; that would be far too dangerous, and vulnerable to all the liberal criticisms. I advocate unprincipled censorship which is the same as saying that I am in favour of reality, of what has always been and always will be: individuals and collectives exercising their sense of responsibility as much as they can, nakedly, without the flimsiest garment of formulae, though they usually pretend to be wearing them.

What needs to be met head on is the spurious assumption that there is something especially grown-up, mature, responsible about liberalism. Like all "isms", it is a formula. It can be defined. Since it can be defined, then - if we adhere to it - it tells us what to do. The liberal robot fights for the right to publish! Automatically.

You may ask, what is the alternative, if we wish to guard against the principled censorship which I also admit should be resisted? The answer is that there is no safety anywhere. The craving for a formula is hopeless. The debate may be refined but like an asymptote will never reach conclusion. Any freedom you care to mention means having a cake rather than eating it, or vic versa; and by this I am not referring merely to the hackneyed question of how to reconcile personal liberty with social needs. Freedom is like money. You can hoard the coin or spend it. You can gloat over the prospect of making a free choice; but once you've made it, that particular freedom has gone, replaced by the commodity - commitment - which you have purchased with it. Construct a soaring architectural edifice to express your spirit of freedom: it'll occupy a site which then can't be used for something else.

Thus, finally, we arrive back at the subject of culture. Here it should be evident that it's inconsistent to criticise James "God's Cop" Anderton for undemocratically appointing himself guardian of the moral order. Democracy will remain impossible until time machines are invented; for under our present system the inhabitants of the Twentieth Century may unilaterally decide to destroy a culture cherished by a far larger number of other centuries. The dead and the unborn are denied votes.

So, as a citizen of the continuum, I squirm. Juxtaposing the humane, dignified, leonine greats of literature with our period, I decide, for instance, that I'm not scared by the Bradford bookburnings any more. As Dean Rusk explained on TV, talking of his time in JFK's Cabinet during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it's important not to humiliate one's opposite numbers too far: for if they lose all stake in their own personal future, this might provoke a desperate reaction. Pushed to the limit, Kruschev might have pressed a nuclear button. As I suffocate in the ordure of liberalism, I gurgle a despairing hurrah for James Anderton and his like.

Robert Gibson
Windermere

Psientific Query?

From Lesley A Hall

Re Pete Darby's letter in **Vector 164**.

I should like to know a bit more about any institution which can align "Darwinism" with "astrology and scientology". I find this vaguely sinister: what sort of belief system does it espouse itself? Or am I seeing fundamentalists under the bed when what is really there is radical sociology of science? (and what constitutes a "real" rather than a "pseudo-science" [? psience - Freudian misprint?])?

Lesley A Hall
London

Bland Response

From Herve Hauck

I would like to reply to Ms Helen Bland (who answered my previous letter in **Vector 164**) and state two things:

- First that I also find the Steve Baxter interview quite interesting (If she had read my letter carefully, she would not have found any judgement), but my point was to say that this kind of interview of an "unestablished" writer seems to me more suited to **Focus** than to **Vector**. For me, the latter is a sort of "flagship" designed (in a way) to attract newcomers to the field. And I doubt that they know or have heard of Mr Baxter, thus lessening the appeal of **Vector** to them.

- Second, I'm really happy to have found someone who knows best what **Vector's** readers (including me, I suppose) want or want not (I advise you to hire her, she'll be infinitely precious). In fact, I really dislike and distrust this kind of person who always wants to think for others. This sometimes leads to some nasty events. In short, I wonder why Ms Bland is not already in charge of **Vector**, she'll do surely a terrific, and perhaps a bit *dirigist*, work.

Herve Hauck
Marseille

Market, What Market?

From Steve Palmer

Bruce Sterling's speech, while possessed of many good points, still clings to the fatal flaw of this type of discussion, which is to assume that the market exists.

A market is a place where groups buy and sell things. These buyers and sellers are subject to the laws of the market: competition, supply and demand, etc; and this is all very well if the market happens to be small and local. The global market Sterling refers to is not a market at all; it is the smokescreen for a fully planned

economy. It is absurd to imagine that global corporations would place themselves under the vagaries and uncertainties of a market; there is far too much at stake for them to do that. Instead, they plan: they advertise, they devise phenomenal sales pressures, they cajole, they research; they do everything possible to ensure their own survival and growth.

Sterling's kidney sale example *is an example of a market operation, because of its scale. It *does* involve an oppressor and an oppressed. But the global market is fully controlled. It is in the image of the corporation.

And to assume that money alone is the end goal of these corporations is to be blind to other facts. Corporations do not seek to maximise profits; they seek to ensure a sufficient supply. The goal of modern corporations is growth: growth at the expense of the natural and human environments. Money is now merely the method of growing, not the final goal. If it was the goal, why have compact discs remained at 11-12 pounds each since they first appeared? Because that price was researched and then fixed, so that just enough money would flow into the corporations from their sale, regularly and securely.

So while, Sterling is right to bemoan the age of commodity totalitarianism, which undoubtedly exists on the global scale, he is wrong to think that an invisible hand, uncontrolled by human beings, runs everything. Consumer needs are not innate within people, to be met by a market; they are created by corporations. Corporate goals are social goals, now, and that is the true danger.

As for the remark, "no literature can survive which is intellectually dishonest", what about the romantic novel genre?

Steve Palmer
Luton

Funny Bones
From Ken Lake

Andy Robertson's reasoned expansion of my expose of the Gould *kitschereti* is most appreciated, and gives us much to think about - always welcome these days when kneejerk, unreasoned, politically biased reactions like Joseph Nicholas' "infantile drivel" are so common.

I have a feeling that somewhere between Robertson, upcoming contributors and myself we may find the truth about the Burgess Shale mystery; equally, I'm sure the solution does not lie in screaming abuse at Ken Lake and muddying the water with confusion.

But one thing does worry me: does no-one in fandom have a sense of humour? My article fell into three parts: an explanation of the contradictions and stupidities in Gould's thesis; a detailed synopsis of the myriad wild guesses and dubious interpretations that he attempts to force into his Procrustian bed of nihilism - and three increasingly unlikely humorous alternatives, intended to make you laugh and to realise that even these are no crazier than Gould's invalid extrapolations.

Pratchett lives! Let's hear it for fannish humour!

Ken Lake
London

No Fool?
From Celestine Johnson

The speech by Bruce Sterling. You want to know what I think? That man's no fool, but he's no musician either. If he was he might have known he was opening too much of himself. The printed word comes off the paper differently to how a spoken word sounds in the ear. A transcription from tape of a speech by a man flying by his list of notes is not very much like a considered essay. It's done in the real time, the same as music, so all the faults come singing out.

Maybe it's the Afro-Caribbean woman's experience in this country that tunes the inner ear to elitism, propaganda and self-advertising, but I know what I heard in that speech. And what did his heart reveal that his head would never have said? Listen in.

Like all good politicians and stage artists he starts by saying what amounts to "Love me, I'm like you." Somewhere he picked up there's a hate of London going around, so he hits that chord, and then down to a little ridicule of "yankee cyberpunk." Now he settles into his stride. You can just tell this man is really straining after a more-cool. He thinks he's pretty smart. He got to the forefront of the SF book business, didn't he. (Like most genre writers about this time careerwise start in with "I reached the top and had to stop", because their forward-looking insecurity is whether they can be taken seriously as a "literary" writer, or a scriptwriter, or some such other higher plane.) It's jealousy makes him rubbish movies and videos with all those cute figures of speech like "the old baloney factory." The fact he can't get it up over space opera anymore is real tough. Maybe it's the midlife crisis. Most of it's written for fifteen to twenty year olds, Bruce. Maybe you're twice that age.

Nobody spends so much spleen on something they don't either fear or secretly love. What Bruce secretly fears (and he's right on this now) is getting there and staying there. What he fears is some competition coming up and kicking his behind.

He's confusing two very different things: pulling yourself up above the rest by your efforts, and trying to push down the competition all around. The first is a good way to behave, but you have to know you have talent, and trust in that. The second way is the way a frightened man behaves. Now the problem is that Bruce Sterling doesn't have a whole lot new to say about the future direction of SF, and he can't make any more sense out of big world events than you or I can. That's a problem for a man who wants to be taken for an oracle. And if he did have something new, you wouldn't expect him to give it away free of charge at a convention. That would be throwing pearls away. Instead he has a try at blinding us with science fiction, bemoaning the state of humanity with its bad-sex and bad-drugs and bad-kidney transplants, badmouthing the world like a old time Jeremiah, or a new time media person. (Didn't I tell you that's where he's looking?) This is not the mode of expression of a person who is trying hard to explain difficult concepts to his audience. It's a man trying to pull a few of the right levers, and thinking he's getting away with it. You can't argue with the man who preaches that he hates bad things and wishes there were more good things in the world. But you can yawn. He knows that if you use plenty of buzzwords and make them overlong, then most people will take you for an intellectual. He says 90% of everything is of no account. He must think that of people too.

I guess by this time he's seeing a few fidgety people in the audience who are lost but don't like to say anything. Time for a change of movement. Time for some backward-looking insecurity. I think he must have come up the hard way, earning a few writing dollars here and there for years, selling a story at college, (I don't doubt that he went through college) or a book review, or some articles, that kind of thing. He can write. That's plain from the page, but the insecurity's still eating him up. That's why he's looking over his shoulder, and saying to people in the audience who might be potential competition, "Look, there's no money in SF, and anyway it's hip to starve." That's sweet coming from a man who I guess lives very well off his book writing nowadays. He can't kick the habit and do what a truly comfortable writer would do, which is try to encourage the new talent out there, (and maybe sympathise with the poor old "never dids" of which there must have been a few in his audience?)

Like I said, Bruce Sterling is no fool. He knows his congregation and he's learned some of the elements of rhetoric. (Who is going to boo you down if you make an acknowledgment of the writer-president of Czechoslovakia? Despite nobody listening ever read a Vaclav Havel book!) We're all brothers and sisters in the ghetto, right? So now it's time to wind it up. And he knows that having rubbished the people over that way with their space opera and their movie deals, and rubbished the people over the other way with their glittering whatevcrpunk, it's time to point at his own pedestal. What does Bruce Sterling want to do? Well, he wants to make you "actually think." (More than that, he wants to make you actually think in italics, which I guess is a whole lot more thinking than is usual for us dumb suckers.) He also says he wants to write for "people who want to think." (That's like saying, if you read my books you'll be showing that you were taken in by a patent medicine salesman.) He wants to be excused for wanting to write things that make people think. (Well, excuuuuuse me!) And, finally, he wants to "write for people who have been made to suffer for their imagination."

Now what on earth does that mean? He might not have to explain it to the folks at the convention, but he certainly does have to explain it to me. I really don't know what he's talking about! And I bet you a pound you don't know either, and you know what, he's banking on nobody saying so, because he doesn't know what it means either. But I tell you this much, if I'd written: "If you've never suffered because of your *skin* I bet you no ill will, but you really ought to get the hell away from real *black* people before one of them damages you." I guess I'd be taken for a real bad example.

No, I never saw so much foolishness in all my born days. All this stuff about Adam Smith's invisible hand paying off if you get too subversive, and real artists being hypersensitive about great .... it's a total crock. And he's telling other people to "act as if your life were worth living, act as if you were a real person and your life actually mattered." Maybe people don't need to be told that. Maybe if he acted a little less synthetically, he'd be doing something right by himself in that regard. I always get a queasy feeling when I listen to some multi-millionaire rock artist sitting there in his worn-down denims singing, "I'm just a poor boy with nowhere to go ...."

Listen, Bruce Sterling, you judged us wrong when you decided you could get away with your kind of clever-clever preaching. Sure you're no fool, but some of us might just be hipper than you are. Ever think about that possibility, smart guy? You might try to remember it next time you stand up to give a speech to a bunch of dumb morons. Why don't established writers like you just relax and start trying to help the new generation with a little truth and good advice? Doing work for free, and giving things away? Ever hear that before?

To hell with that idea! Why not do what Bruce Sterling does best, make sure you get paid for everything, and fuck the rest.

Celestine Johnson
London

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Mail from Milnthorpe has been going astray. If you have recently sent contributions to Kev's address, please contact one of us urgently or send a copy direct to **Catie's** address to ensure a chance of publication in **Vector 166**

Head Over Wheels in SF

By Steve Palmer

Recently a friend said to me, "These science fiction authors, they may know about technology and machines, but they don't know about people being in love, do they?"

She made a fair point. I did not argue it. But it prompted me to think about how science fiction and fantasy have treated love, and being in love. By and large, particularly in science fiction, this has been with one of two feelings: incomprehension or embarrassment - actually, three feelings, since in most science fiction it does not even surface into consciousness, and thus counts as flat repression.

An argument could be made that, in science fiction, the main character - the hero in practically all cases - is technology, and the actual human beings who populate its pages are a supporting cast, depicted in two, or one, dimensions, and with scant regard for their deeper feelings. This would apply to Theodore Sturgeon's 90%.

But there is a small zone in the science fiction world, a sort of rump, where real people live, and where they sometimes fall in love with one another. In this zone such authors as Isaac Asimov, the Niven-Pournelle axis, and Bruce Sterling appear rarely or never; instead we come across Gene Wolfe, Tanith Lee, Jane Yolen and John Crowley.

Nor is it accident that since most science fiction writers are men, science fiction shows the same insight into human love as does the typical bicycle.

What insight science fiction does have into love is interesting, and it says more about the human condition than everything ever written by Barbara Cartland and Mills & Boon put together. In **The Book of the New Sun**, Severian makes several comments on the subject, such as:

"When we [men] are talking to women, we talk as though love and desire are two separate entities; and women, who often love us and sometimes desire us, maintain the same fiction. The fact is that they are aspects of the same thing..."

"But no one can say from what it is that what we call (almost at our pleasure) love or desire is born."

Here, Severian, though he cannot escape his male chauvinism, understands that, in a society where there is sexual inequality, men conceive of love and sexual desire as different things; and he realises that some women do the same, though many do not. Severian shares the common male trait of separating the mind and the body, though he calls this a fiction.

Though Severian does not understand from where love comes, he does have some intuitive knowledge. He says:

"... but even if I were to pour myself into her [Agia] a hundred times, we would part strangers."

Here, Severian realises that there can be no full union between himself and the woman Agia, and that it is this union that marks love. He understands that any bond between himself and Agia would be a forced tie of necessity, rather than a union of independents; so they could never be in love.

But still he is separating love and sexual desire, though he does understand that emotions are a form of communication, of connection, as when he remards, "[Dorcas] was so delighted to see me that I felt happy myself, as though joy were contagious as a pestilence." Perhaps it is no coincidence that he talks of joy between himself and a woman in terms of a disease.

For Severian, the deepest love is experienced for Dorcas, with whom there is an "intimacy of thought and feeling". Union is experienced by Severian in different ways with different women according to the women and to circumstance; but in each case, particularly with Agia, Severian does not fully understand them, and, missing this experience of understanding, does not fall fully in love. Forced to hide his emotions, as when he and Dorcas part in Thrax, he can never fully communicate.

Other men are luckier. In **Little, Big**, a fantasy book more suffused with love than almost any other in this field, Auberon, under the tutelage (though it does not seem like tutelage to him) of Sylvie, realises that the male problem of internal division, of a gulf between feelings and deeds, does not exist for her:

"Whatever other terrible problems life put before [Sylvie]... that one at least she had solved; or rather she had never felt it to be posed. Romance was real, as real as flesh; love and sex were not even woof and warp in it, they were one indissoluble thing..."

Auberon only feels astonished at this discovery because, as a boy, he was brought up to become a man, not a human being. He once considered strong passion to be childish - a complete inversion of the truth, as he realises - and imagined the adult world to be calm, companiable, and cool. When he is in love with her, Auberon feels a deep union, and yet he can also feel independent; as can Sylvie. They have their problems, their ups and downs, but because they become more complete people, more independent, their love is not plagued by the childish jealousies and selfishnesses of couples tied to one another by bonds of necessity. Auberon and Sylvie fall deeper in love because they become free, not because they have good sex or need one another to complete holes in their selves.

And Auberon is wise enough to allow himself exultation at being in love. Remembering his childhood friend Cherry Lake, he realises that he has been taught to pretend, as though he was a shell, a preordained character programmed by outside forces, whereas Cherry Lake was always involved in life. It is this overcoming of the internal divide that is his achievement.

Modern trends in science fiction, notably cyberpunk, have created a literature of almost complete disconnection, where people are entities bouncing around the globe like ball bearings in a box, never uniting. In this ultra-masculine science fiction there are few connecting emotions and an almost total absence of love, though there is plenty of sex, the participants suitably disconnected from one another. Humanity has become fragmented, has become a game of inwardly-turned people unable to unite. In **Schismatrix**, one of the more modern characters, an artificial Shaper woman called Kitsune, knows something of human emotions:

"Shame. Pride. Guilt. Love. She felt these emotions as dim shadows... She was not incapable of human feeling; it was simply too mild for her to notice. It had become a second unconscious, a buried, intuitive layer below her posthuman mode of thought."

For Kitsune, the less modern protagonist Lindsay is "handicapped by his primitive mode of thought." It is no accident that Lindsay is to her someone to be exploited and controlled. Irreversibly selfish, she and the other posthumans have little or no experience of love, and can never form a bond of union; they can never experience what it is like to understand somebody else.

In cyberpunk novels, what is most significant from the point of view of union is that so many characters, particularly those who are important, are inextricably bound up with some external organisation; united with them. It is almost as though their need for union is gratified by these organisations. Their identities come from them. The great zaibatsus and global corporations give sustenance, at the price of demanding total dependence, and in doing so manage to achieve union with mere mortals. Perhaps these mortals love them.

One of the best depictions of people in love is Tanith Lee's science fantasy **The Silver Metal Lover**, in which little rich girl Jane finds happiness with a silver android. In this scenario human beings have been dehumanised by authoritarian government and the business world, and there are huge class differences; it is some robots who are equated with people.

So it is understandable that Jane feels of Silver:

"My joy was his joy. I'd been crazy to say what I had, that he couldn't love. He can love

all of us. He is love.''

Having been trapped in her world of riches, Jane experiences a first glimpse of real union. Previous to this feeling, as she makes love with Silver, somewhat regretful that she ''won't climax'', it is this very admission and the implied lifting of one veil of self-deception that allows her to experience sudden sexual union. By communicating a natural human truth previously hidden by her own selfishness, she achieves a union. She still feels, however, at this stage in the relationship, that Silver is unknowable.

Having received love from Silver, Jane proceeds to give love:

''... I lay a long while, caressing him, exploring him, making love to him.''

and in the process she turns Silver away from his machine heritage, as when he experiences what human sex is really like:

''So I knew what he'd known before, the joy in my lover's joy.''

It is this urge to find out what pleases Silver that marks Jane's love as real; she knows that he has needs, but that he has denied them all in the service of others. She could so easily use Silver, the technically perfect lover who shows nothing of his inner self until near the end of the novel (Silver could almost be an analogue of the typical man), but she does not. Their form of love, of union, is full in the sense that they become interdependent, giving and taking equally and of free will. Jane fools herself into trusting Silver much earlier in the relationship, but she does not really trust him until he begins to reveal his intimate, inner self.

For Silver, love changes from a shallow need to make people happy – Jane complains that he could do this with anybody and everybody, and so it is not what she means by love - to a real love of Jane the individual. The universal love has been augmented by a deeper, interpersonal love. Silver has to learn about this, and he does it through experiencing Jane, through understanding Jane simultaneously transcending his machine origin. Their love is doomed, however, since big business has no use for humanised robots, and the novel, slightly improbably, becomes a tragedy.

For Jane and Silver, love deepens as they become more complete human beings. Jane's initial bond with Silver exists because she is starved of love in her cosy, cushioned, unreal home of Chez Stratos; his initial bond is one almost of duty. But as they grow in stature, and become both more free and more independent, their love grows, and this paradoxical two-ness and one-ness experienced simultaneously, which is the essence of love, is depicted as the novel progresses.

One of the problems faced by English speakers is that there is only one word for love. There are some related words, such as compassion (though that word has more to do with suffering - *com*, with; *path*, suffer), but no fundamental variations on the word love. This is unusual among languages, and it suggests that the culture in which it occurs has less interest in free union and more in control and exploitation. Examination of British culture and history bears witness to this.

In **Always Coming Home**, a community of future Californians speak a language in which there are six separate words for aspects of love:

1. *weuun*: to want, desire, covet ('I love apples')

2. *lamaweuun*: sexual desire, lust, passion ('I love you!')

3. *kwaiyo*: heart goes to, to feel an impulse of warmth toward. ('I like him very much')
kwaiyo - woi daa: to like

4. *unne*: trust, friendship, affection, lasting warmth ('I love my brother') ('I love her like a sister')

5. *iyakwun*: mutual connection, interdependence, filial or parental love, love of place, love of one's people ('I love you, Mother') ('I love my country') ('God loves me')

6. *baho*: to please, to give pleasure or delight ('I love to dance')

With this expanded vocabulary the Kesh can

explore love. Of course, they do not need words to do this, but words are useful, and so the Kesh language has evolved separate meanings of love. There is a complete range: possessive, immature love; lust; activating union; complete union (being); interdependence learnt through the social circumstances of life; joy. Implicit in all these words is the uniting of people, and it is significant that only one of the six is what might be called a "twisted" form of love, that of coveting.

The Kesh still seem to think, however, that some love is an emotion. The sixth word makes love a felt emotion. Love is not in itself an emotion. People do not feel a love emotion, they feel joy, awe, happiness. Love is a deep-seated source of emotion, a concept grasped by the third, fourth and fifth words, words which imply love to be a state of being from which other feelings flow.

Do we need words to express love? Even the most intense and moving of love affairs, for example that of Steven and Guiwenneth in **Mythago Wood**, seem to need words; this is perhaps an injustice to human nature. Steven remarks:

"But she needed to say things to me, and she could not find the English words to express how she felt, how close to some aspect of nature she felt, how like a bird, or a tree she felt. Something, some way of thinking that I can only crudely translate could not be put into English..."

And yet for Steven (in the same paragraph!), "... every single thought and mood was understood by the other". There seems to be something of a contradiction, here. It is implied that thought can be conducted ony with the aid of language, something that is, perhaps, untrue. There is again an implied separation between word and feeling, between mind and body, that is, perhaps, a product of our present and past civilisation and not of human nature.

Steven understands, however, the non-verbal, deep root of love that most often appears when loss is imminent:

"Here was that wonderful part of her which, as in all people, had deep and helpless need of another"

though why he calls it helpless is something of a mystery. Calling it helpless implies that there is some other state, a controllable state, in which need of another does not exist; it implies that the urge to union could be controlled, when really it is central to human nature, and even a foundation of consciousness (which is often characterised as understanding of the self through the understanding of others, in which case love, or some form of union, is a natural and inevitable consequence of all human life).

Most science fiction does not attempt to challenge the myth that love is blind, one noble exception being **The Silver Metal Lover**. In the **Dune** series, love becomes the ultimate confuser, the force that can, for the Bene Gesserit, ruin their centuries of plotting. They say things like, "Hope clouds observation". It is love that makes Jessica bear a boy, not a girl as the Bene Gesserit wanted, and this love is seen as a form of pride, of selfishness, by the Bene Gesserit, when in fact the true selfishness is theirs, masked by the old patriarchal device of duty.

Yet, love is the way in which human beings bring other real human beings into the model of reality which they carry in their minds. **Dune** takes little account of this, for love is, by and large, imagined as a deviation from perfect observational ethics, which, among the plethora of plotters, is the most desired mode of being. It is love that the Bene Gesserit discard, perhaps because their organisation was set up to fear it, and they thus lose the possibility of deep understanding through participation. The scores of acting, masked, ever-alert characters cannot find union because they are banned from human participation: in short, emotional distance breeds distrust and aggression, while proximity breeds love. **Dune** is a perfect illustration of this.

Thousands of years later, the Bene Gesserit Odrade faces similar problems as she waits for the girl Sheeana:

"Love!

It could be so easy and so dangerous."

Reflecting, Odrade recalls the Bene Gesserit saying that a loveless life can be devoted more completely to the Sisterhood. And she envies those in her organisation who can live their lives with one partner, for this is the normal human condition. Odrade understands, too, that such a life is an inevitable human need, as when she remarks that those Bene Gesserit males who are sincere in their charm and affection are much in demand. The inescapable conclusion is that selfish power-wielding through an organisation, or interpersonally, can only be achieved through emotional distance and through denying the free union of love. The Bene Gesserit control their emotions, just as all people, men for example, must in order to wield power over others.

So Odrade must not love Sheeana, because her mind has been formed to observe "deeply" over a distance and create an understanding through the synthesis of tiny components. The "deep knowledge" that some Bene Gesserit have of one another is merely "deep knowledge" of pre-programmed character; not of potential human character. An emerging human being can only be understood through love; through concerned human knowledge.

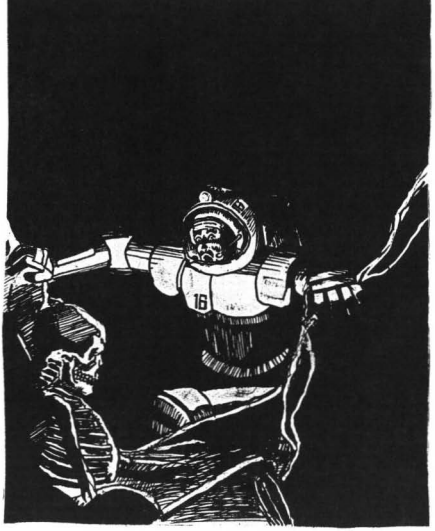
"We are taught to reject love," Odrade reflects. "We can simulate it but each of us is capable of cutting it off in an instant." And this is how the Bene Gesserit are capable of their feats of manipulation: they are no longer human.

The connection between knowledge and love is best illustrated by a section in **Cards of Grief**:

"I learned as much as she could teach - and more. For even when she did not teach, I learned from her by watching and listening and - as I learned later - by loving."

Books quoted from:

The Book of the New Sun, Gene Wolfe, Arrow
Little, Big, John Crowley, Methuen
Schismatrix, Bruce Sterling, Penguin
The Silver Metal Lover, Tanith Lee, Unwin
Always Coming Home, Ursula Le Guin, Grafton
Mythago Wood, Robert Holdstock, Grafton
Dune series, Frank Herbert, NEL
Cards of Grief, Jane Yolen, Orbit



Letter to Catie

From David Wingrove

Dear Catie

What can I say? That I'm sorry you didn't like the book? Not really, because I'm not so unrealistic as to believe that everyone is going to find **Chung Kuo** to their taste. Indeed, after your profile in **Matrix 96**, I should have expected it. What does concern me, however, is a failing - both in your editorial and your review - to come to grips with what the whole thing is about.

As you've aimed some very specific charges against me, and you've chosen to do so in the form of an editorial - setting me up as a disgusting instance of a general type - I feel I ought to answer you, even if, in doing, I lay myself open to that old charge of lashing out at anyone who "dares" criticise me. In the circumstances I feel I can't remain silent.

First off, **The White Mountain** isn't pornographic. Of course, I would say that, wouldn't I? But let me give my reasons why I believe that, before coming to the more specific things you say about the book.

Your "definition" of pornography - "the nasty stuff that only perverts like" - sets the tone. Subjective it certainly is, a definition it isn't. Apart from the fact that, by inference, it brands me a "pervert" (a matter which we'll come to in its rightful place) it says far too little about the nature and effect of "pornography". I have no doubt that certain forms of "adult entertainment" - written and photographic - are pornographic, and I have specific reasons for believing so. Acts of sadism, child sex, and physical cruelty, when presented simply for titillation or gratuitous pleasure - that is, ***where there is no other content*** - are, I believe, genuinely pornographic. As Dworkin argues, they tend to harm not merely the participants of the acts, who are very often crudely and unthinkingly exploited by those who make money out of these activities, but it also degrades the consumer by either pandering to socially harmful tendencies or by reinforcing a false image of omen and children as gratification objects.

Thus far, I'm almost certain, we wouldn't disagree.

Now, within **The White Mountain** there are several scenes hich deal with this side of things. With immoral men (bastards, basically) acting upon their baser instincts. Now let's be absolutely specific about this. There are three scenes (and perhaps one off-stage reference, which I'll come back to) which fall into this category. All three are to be found in Chapter 11, "The Tiger's Mouth", a full 234 pages into the book, and all three are closely linked. Now, the material involved takes up a full 11 pages in a book of 439 pages. A book in which, it should be noted, there are long passages (90-95% of the book, I'd estimate) in which there's not even the slightest mention of sex - try looking at pages 9-38, 43-183, 185-217, 249-323, 326-351 for instance - which must be some kind of record for "most pornographic book I've ever read".

But this aside, let's look at the "offensive" and "disgusting" scenes and see whether they actually constitute genuine pornography.

Two of them are intimately connected; those dealing with Hsiang K'ai Fan, the Minor Family prince, and his behaviour in Mu Chua's House of the Ninth Ecstasy. In the first scene Hsiang surprises Mu Chua by asking her for special pleasures - to be specific, he wants to slit a girl's throat while making love to her. This nastiness - the very height of amorality - horrifies Mu Chua, yet she is trapped by circumstances. If she says no, she will have to face Hans Ebert, the powerful young General who hired her (who we've already seen is quite ruthless in his dealings), yet if she agrees it will be to comply with the murder of one of her girls. This is a moral dilemma which she solves - or attempts to solve - by sacrificing herself (something which, incidentally, the amoral Hans Ebert, cannot, for the life of him, understand). What she doesn't know, and isn't to know, is that the odious Hsiang will run riot and slaughter a lot more of her girls: the aftermath of this, which we witness in the second scene.

First let's look at the contest. All of the contest. Mu Chua is the madam of a brothel. A good brothel, catering for Above clients. Throughout the first three books we witness the slow degeneraion o Mu Chua's house from a place where the girls were happy and well treated to a place where violence and sadism has become an awful commonplace. This degeneration - sketched out in all its stages throughout the first 1300 pages of **Chung Kuo** - reflects a development in the world of **Chung Kuo** itself; a social degeneration which is one of the major themes of **The White Mountain**. Things, morally, are finally falling apart. It is a society out of control. A ***Tang*** society, where the male, hierarchical system is slowly failing, and nothing - yet - is taking its place. This is an important point, not touched on in your review or editorial. Hsiang's response is, to a degree, the response of his world which, because it has lost control of its female element, turns on it and kills it. Paralleling this is the scene where Li Yuan, unable to control his wife, Fei Yen, kills the horses, and where Hans Ebert, unable to control his feelings about Jelka Tolonen, Kills the double DeVore has had made for him.

And before you think I'm putting a gloss on this that doesn't exist in the text, you might look again at the chapter, "Chen Yen", where this and many other such matters are discussed explicitly and in some detail by the sage, Tuan Ti Fo, as he concludes: "Chung Kuo was an entity at war with itself".

Let's also look at the social strata from which Hsiang K'ai Fan originates - the Minor Families. They are an elite, superficially a pillar of this great society, but in effect they are powerless, and, like the aristocracy of many cultures in many ages, have fallen into decadent ways. The discreet "entertainment" which follows - the third of our scenes - hammers this point home. It is not just Hsiang, but his class which is at fault here. They have no morals, no feeling for the distress of others. They it is, not we the readers, who are seeking instant gratification at any cost.

Now, I'd argue that, whilst the acts themselves described might - and perhaps ought to - be described as pornographic (and - need I say it? - I condone neither animal sex nor the killing of young prostitutes) the context in which they are presented is not. Far from it, in fact. I do not present this material gratuitously, merely to titillate, but to instruct. In other words, this is part of the greater Taoistic scheme of **Chung Kuo**. In **The White Mountain,** the world of Chung Kuo is sick, as is said explicitly several times in the book. There is a disease in its veins. Moreover, it is a world seiously out of balance. A lost worl of confused ideals, desperate actions and tragic consequences.

It seems almost perverse to me that I have to make this point, but let me make it absolutely clear: the world portrayed in **Chung Kuo** is not ***our*** world, of twentieth centuryliberal values, but an authoritarian, rigidly hierarchical world. As I've said before, it is a world lacking its female - its ***Yin*** - element, and I have to be true to the rules and values of that world. That doesn't mean I have to like those values, nor that it's my purpose to glorify or champion them, but I do have to depict them accurately, if only to get across to my readers the true nastiness of such social templates.

Now, even the most casual reading of history shows that sexual deviancy is a certain sign of a society on the brink of collapse, along with social unrest, terrorism, inner-circle power-plays and attempts to "turn the clock back" to a spurious "Golden Age" when all was well and the sun shone day and night. All of these elements are there in **Chung Kuo**. All are part of the wide canvas. And to portray the book simply in terms of these eleven pages - o characterise it as "pornography" because these elements are part of my social portrait, is, I feel, mistaken, if not malicious.

My intention, here as elsewhere, is not to titillate but to disturb. To try to show something of the real horror of the situation. Anyone following Mu Chua's "life" with any degree of sympathy must feel a real horror at the outcome of the scene. Moreover, to believe that there is any real pleasure to be derived from the gross Hsiang K'ai Fan's activities is pure nonsense.

Before moving on, let me make a comment on the only instance in the book which deals with violence towards children. The scenes concerned are late in the book - in the final part, in fact - and are to do with the activities in The Dragonfly Club. Now, what actually happens in the club (and we learn this only through what we're told, not what we see) is that a group of rich, amoral, hedonistic young men meet there to have sex - nasty, violent sex - with young boys; unwilling victims for the most part, taken from their parents. We see this first through the eyes of the terrorists who attack the club and "execute" the perpetrators, then through the eyes of the Security forces who have come in and sort out the mess afterwards. The sense of revulsion for these activities is strong, and there is nothing either gratuitous nor titillating about what is presented to the reader. Moreover, a very strong moral point is being made here. This is the moment when Karr, leading the Security team, has to confront, for the first time, a genuine inner conflict between moral instinct and duty to his lord, his T'ang, as he sees the result of the incident being reported by one of the T'ang's Ministries (see pages 364/365 for his thoughts at this point).

As you can see, my interpretation of this material - of its form, use and content - differs quite substantially from yours. Indeed, what worries me isn't that I might have written an offensive, disgusting book. I know that I haven't but that such lazy, ill-informed criticism might dissuade a more perceptive reader from making their own mind up about what I actually *have* written.

However irksome these things are to my shoul, they worry me somewhat less than your comment about "the dismissive attitude to women displayed throughout the book". In your review you are even more specific about what worries you: "Most of the victims are women and children. Women are treated in a very curious fashion; most of them are prostitutes, wives and daughters, seen only through their relationships with men."

Now a writer isn't supposed to tell a critic her job, but I'll make an exception this once. *Read The Book Properly.*

Apart from the fact that the general context - a male heirarchical society which treats women as second class citizens - might explain why women are dealt with as they are, there's also the curious fact that, well, to put it simply, they *aren't*.

Let's look at the women characters in **The White Mountain**, who I'm presuming to be dismissive of. Well, first off, there's the headstrong Fei Yen, wife of Li Yuan, who has an affair, defies her husband, and finally leaves him, confronting him with the fact that the child she's expecting isn't his. So much for one doormat. Okay, then what about Emily Ascher? She turns out to be a strong, capable, single woman and one of the leaders of the terrorist Ping Tiao, who, when crossed by her own people, confronts them angrily (see the scene page 36 on) and breaks with them. Or there's Jelka Tolonen, the Marshal's daughter, who, when her father tries to force her into marriage with the odious Hans Ebert, defies her father, and is finally proved right. See the scenes on pages 86-88 and 210-11 and then tell me that she's dealt with dismissively! And then there's Marie Enge, the serving woman at the Dragon Cloud tea-house, who takes on three Triad runners on her own and beats them soundly. Finally, there's Ywe Hao - "Fine Moon" - another terrorist, who takes on the great hierarchy and, though she is eventually destroyed by it, remains unbowed before it. Chen's wife, Wang Ti alone can be said to epitomise the "good little woman", and even she has changed by the end of the book.

Of these six (and when did you last come across six strong female characters in a so-called "'Sci-Fi' B-Movie" book of this kind?) Only three - Fei Yen, Jelka Tolonen and Wang Ti - can be said to be defined by their relationship with men. A far more natural percentage, I'd argue. Moreover, two of them struggle hard *not* to be defined thus. Of the other three, only Marie Enge finally enters a relationship with a man, when she marries Karr, and even there there is a strong suggestion that it is a partnership of equals.

All in all, then, and considering the variety and range of women dealt with in the book, I'm surprised that you can characterise the book as you do. It suggests one either a very shallow or a heavily biased reading of the text.

Let's move on. To the cast of "monsters" who people my book, who, in your words "perform evil acts simply because they *are* evil." Well, once again, this is so silly that I'm tempted to say "believe me" and leave it at that. But let's have a look at a few of these evil bastards and see what makes them tick.

There are, undoubtedly, a number of evil men in **The White Mountain**. I don't argue about that for a second. DeVore, Stefan Lehmann, even, perhaps, Jan Mach: these are bad men - very bad men, indeed - whose acts reflect what they are. Then there are the flawed characters - Marshal Tolonen, Li Yuan, Bent Gesell, Axel Haavikko and others - whose thinking and thus whose actions are wrongheaded. But there are also good people in the book: Jelka Tolonen is essentially a good person, so too are Kim Ward, Kao Chen, Emily Ascher, Marie Enge, Tuan Ti Fo, Wang Ti, Yuan Hao, Mu Chua, and where they stray from the path it is usually because external pressures have forced them into straying. Haavikko seems himself in this novel. Kao Chen has a moral awakening. Jelka comes out of the book changed and renewed. Tuan Ti Fo gives us an example of how to behave when the world is falling apart about one's ears.

Once again, your caricature of the novel is gross, bordering on the idiotic.

As for the rest of the review, I don't intend to contest you re matters of style, plot, political background, characterization and so forth, not because I agree with you, but because this is quite long enough as it is. Besides, It's quite clear that you hadn't an ounce of sympathy for the book and never intended to give it even the ghost of a chance. That's fine. That's your prerogative as a human being - part of a species with fuddled brains and unreasoned bigotries. What's worrying, however, is that you set yourself up as a critic, and in that role your failings are glaring ones. I'm appalled, for instance, by the total absence of any real critical apparatus, and the lack of anything other than unsupported assertion and naked bile in your piece. Look for instance, at all the tell-tale nasty keywords in your review - "gratuitous", "lurching", "crude", "bodged", "salacious", "wanton", "revolting", "turgid", "disgusting", "offensive" - and acompanying them all the snide put-downs you could think of. Against which there's not a single word about what's actually within the book, apart from that dismissive and misleading "However, Wingrove apparently has nothing to say." It's all black and white, isn't it, Catie? 440 pages of shit.

Well, the truth is, It's the kind of piece that gives reviewing a bad name; that's no more, in effect, than a kind of childish name-calling. That doesn't deal with issues either because it doesn't want to (through sheer bigotry) or because it can't (through sheer stupidity). There, a bit of name-calling for you, but at least I've actually bothered to set out my critical stall for all to see. You can at least see where my arguments are coming from. Not so in your case.

As for the inference that I'm some kind of pervert - for after all, don't you argue that "pornography" (and you say my book is pornographic) is the nasty stuff that only perverts like and that I, as producer of it, am part of some kind of degraded supply and demand system, pushing out what I like to people who like the same? Well, you'll forgive me, I hope, if I say that I find your comments personally offensive. I don't treat women badly, I'm not a sadist, and I certainly don't go in for sexually deviant practices. Besides which, as I've said elsewhere, as a father of three young girls, I've a personal stake in trying to create the kind of world where my daughters can grow up unmolested and strong and valued for themselves, not for their use as sex objects or kitchen fodder. And that's not some kind of bullshit liberal stance. I try to act on my beliefs. That's one reason by I houschusbanded-played mummy, if you like - for six years, and why my daughters have their mother's surname, not mine.

But once more, I guess It's simply a case of shoddy criticism; of you mistaking object for subject, theme for personality - in simple terms, of believing the author *is* the fiction (and look how wrong you are about that!) Sometimes It's true. Sometimes the work and the writer are the same. In extreme cases. But It's damned poor criticism to make such an assumption without proof.

A final word re **Vector** and the kind of reviews that have come to dominate its columns in recent years. This kind of criticism is something one tends not to notice, or to overlook, until one becomes the subject of its lazy, ill-informed malice, of its ignorance masquerading as profundity, and of its bigotry masquerading as liberalism. It would be nice to see things change - to see some kind of honesty and method creep back into the way books are dealt with, nut it seems as if I'm asking too much. Indeed, it would be nice never to have to write a letter like this again, but unlike you, catie, I'm a realist. I know how the real world is, and face it, nastiness and all.

Yours,
David Wingrove

I suspect that most of you will have received a copy of this letter from David Wingrove already, It is here reproduced for the convenience of those who did not. Letters received in response to this mailing are reproduced over the following pages.

Due in part to the personal nature of many of David Wingrove's comments, I have decided not to respond myself to his letter. I do not wish to drag out what seems to me to be already a ridiculously over inflated affair any further than necessary.

I have however read all of your letters very carefully and taken note of many constructive comments for future use. Ladies and gentlemen the forum is yours....

Catie Cary

From Andy Sawyer

Catie's editorial, her review of **The White Mountain** and Kim Cowie's article are obviously linked and raise a few good issues. I think she is wrong in describing **The White Mountain** as "pornographic", though I would agree with words like "harrowing" in that as I see it the author is describing unpleasant people in an unpleasant society. Like so many future-societies based on an extrapolation of a currently existing one (Judge Dredd's Mega-City One would be another example), Wingroves's **Chung Kuo** is a world where existence means conforming to a set of rules which are totally different to those of Western Liberalism. How well Wingrove portrays this world in the reader's opinion is a different matter, but it seems to *me* that in **The White Mountain** we see quite clearly the instability of the Middle Kingdom and the awakening of some of the characters - notably Karr and Chen - to the idea that the society to which they owe their loyalty in all aspects of life is in fact a deeply corrupt one. Equally corrupt, however, is the opposition, as pictured by DeVore and his cronies - from whom a great deal of the overtly sexual sadism emanates.

In fact there are certainly women in the book who counter the picture Catie gives; the revolutionary Ywe Hao, Jelka Tolonen and - potentially - Karr's wife Marie, are women who for different reasons are more "independent" than the admittedly prevalent whores and concubines. Even though Ywe Hao's fate is horrific, it does serve to emphasise the dreadful perversion of culture which is the society she lives in. I don't think that what happens to women in the book shows a "dismissive" attitude, though It's perfectly proper to argue that Wingrove doesn't *succeed* in achieving what I believe he is trying to do, in using the reader's feelings of shock and - yes, disgust - to give some insight into the motives of why some of the characters in the book (on both sides) act in the way they do. This is, though, a different matter from describing **The White Mountain** as a "pornographic" book which has overtones of worthlessness. If I were to define the word "pornographic" as an adjective for a book, I suppose I'd mean something like a *delight* in the unpleasant activities performed. This is certainly not the case here, and indeed the perversions - the brothel scene, the Dragonfly Club scene (these were more implied than stated, but the more horrific for that) - are flagged as *being* signs of deeply sick minds in a sick society.

I am, by the way, writing from a (very) slight position of "interest" (see p.440 of the book). While however, I'd certainly argue that a lot of the criticism that has been levelled against **Chung Kuo** in this country is based upon the mode of production of the book as a cinematic/ thriller-based/ multi-volume "bestseller" rather than generic or even "literary" SF, I'm not intending here to produce a defence of this particular book other than to suggest that it is better than many seem to think and contains a great deal of suspense and invention while in the overall unfolding of the multi-volume epic there is certainly more sense of uncontrollable social forces exerting their influence on even the most powerful individuals and more moral depth than many critics have seen. Criticism of the series has taken on a partisan nature which I think is unhelpful, and has tried to force a final judgement on something which is still ongoing, though I'm not accusing Catie of this. Rather, I'd want to concentrate on the way she's used as an example of a question she's not sure of (the value of "pornography") a book she disliked, in which she felt the author had failed. Given that she doesn't like series, and finds explicit sex and violence offensive - Is there a way in which the author could have presented a similar picture in a way which she found acceptable? Or would she say that motives which depend on distressing or disgusting the reader are necessarily suspect?

My reaction to what Kim Cowie describes of the **Lord Horror** books is a kind of mirror-image of that. Again, to dismiss the books because they are unpleasant is probably to miss the point, though I have not read any of the Savoy material he describes, and I'm even not sure that I particularly want to read it. I don't actually agree with the implications of the statement quoted from David Britton, which suggests that *all* satire should flay without benefit of anaesthesia. In the end, no-one is going to be converted by **Lord Horror**; people who read it are going to find their views confirmed. Most people who know anything about the Holocaust know that the reality of what happened is considerably more awful than anything they could imagine, and while anything which offends liberal complacency is probably all to the good, very few rabid fascists are going to suddenly become good people through reading **Lord Horror**. Without knowing any more, that's all I can say. I've read numerous reviews of the stuff, though, and find myself uncomfortably close to the kind of people who call for immediate bans on books and films which offend them - without ever actually seeing them. Except in my case, I'm calling for their *availability*.

Kim may, of course, be entirely wrong about the satirical nature of the **Lord Horror** material, and it could be a load of racist garbage, but it seems to me that, given the background of the police force involved and the kind of material which is, apparently, regularly seized in such raids, we ought to be given the opportunity to judge for ourselves. What is unclear is how far, in these cases, is it the case that the police are interpreting the law to suit themselves or responding to genuine complaints by members of the public: if the latter, on what grounds do they decide an action is worth taking? (Personally I am more offended by some of the public statements of the Chief Constable of the force in question than I am by the contents of the books he is taking action against). It does seem that the tenet of "innocence until proven guilty" does not hold for writers and publishers.

As Catie says, the rule of law we live under is bounded by compromise and even beyond the range of material which is in fact excluded by the present laws we live under, there will always be material which we as individuals are unhappy with, both personally and on behalf of others. This is no bad thing: it does mean we have a basis for arguing about what we feel about certain kinds of subjects and their portrayal. This is what reviews and criticism are all about, and though there's every difference in the world between calling for a complete ban on something and urging people not to buy it because we think that it is pernicious rubbish, I think that some of us are possibly too careful to avoid the latter because it might be confused with the former. While there are categories of material which I would hope society would not accept, my own immediate stance is that there are still far too many people prescribing for others what they should or should not read, often in ill-informed and prejudicial ways. A recent letter in the **Library Association Record,** for example, made reference to a recent flood of "pornographic" books written for teenagers (naturally without giving further reference to authors, titles, or even contents. All I can say to that one is that as a professional children's librarian and father of two well-read teenagers I've missed these: damn, just when I was looking for something spicy to read.

One further point on the "pornography" issue, though. You mention the campaign work of Andrea Dworkin. I think a lot of the "harm" that alleged porn does to the consumer is unproven. Even being offended by something hardly classes as "harm" - people are offended by a whole range of things. But where Dworkin is spot on - and this is probably grossly offensive to good old liberal complacency in itself, but tough - is where she points out the effect of the "porn industry" on the lives of its workers. At this level, we are talking about not images of fantasy which don't have any real effect on reality but people who are paid to be the surrogate (and in some cases real) sex objects of others. Even on the basis that these people are workers in an industry, the conditions under which they work and the nature of their work are legitimate objects of concern.

Write about what you like, is what I say, but once you start filming people doing it then I want to know if they actually had a free choice to take part. Linda Lovelace says she didn't. That seems to me to be the issue.

From Marcus L Rowland

Catie's editorial re censorship and **Chung Kuo III** was recently brought to my attention by David Wingrove. He requested comments, and I am pleased to oblige.

David Wingrove has his own reasons for disliking Catie's review and editorial; I dislike them because I feel that the review would have been sufficient, and that the use of the editorial steam-hammer on this book (rather than on offensive brutality in general) has just given the third volume of a painfully boring series some unnecessary publicity. Would Catie have gone to these lengths if these scenes occurred in the third volume of a fantasy tetralogy by an unknown author? I doubt it.

Chung Kuo has been promoted as a major novel series, with advertising budget to match. I can't recall any other recent NEL SF titles, though there probably were some; this may mean that NEL simply can't afford to publish much else, or give other books much publicity, while this white elephant plods its interminable way towards the remainder shelf. Each volume of **Chung Kuo** must take the place of four or five normally-sized books that NEL might otherwise have published, because that's the way that publishing seems to work in Britain. British reviewers have given it a disproportionate amount of attention because of this publicity, and the negative reviews that

followed were a natural consequence of applying these publicity methods to a series that simply doesn't deserve it.

I won't be buying **The White Mountain**, but Catie's review and editorial have nothing to do with this decision. I made it shortly after reading the first few hundred pages of the first volume, and confirmed it when I looked at the second. If anything, she might have persuaded the uninitiated (ie, those who haven't already looked at earlier volumes) to buy the third in expectation of an erotic treat. I would suggest that the next volume might more fittingly be give the coverage it deserves, rather than the publicity that NEL and David Wingrove would like it to receive.

I suspect that Mr Wingrove may not be delighted by this letter. I have written it because he asked for comments. Similarly, NEL's publicity department have sent out copies and requested your comments. Catie's review and editorial may not be quite what they were expecting, but that's one of the risks of publishing.

From Kim Cowie

I was pleased to see my **Lord Horror** article appearing in **Vector**. It will be interesting to see what feedback results.

Since reading that issue of **Vector** I have read Wingrove's **The White Mountain**. I have also received the open letter which Wingrove seemingly sent to all **Vector** readers (I'd like to know how he got hold of the addresses.) All things considered, I'm not surprised that Wingrove is very annoyed. It's obvious that Catie hated the book, but her comments were intemperate and misleading.

I didn't think this book was especially pornographic; It's no worse than dozens of others on the racks; It's not even very explicit. Wingrove says that the offending scenes are there not "to titillate, but to instruct." To what extent he has achieved his aim is a matter for critical argument.

One of the heariest dictums in fiction writing is "Show, don't tell". Wingrove is not the first writer to have run across the problem of how much to show.

Let me correct any impression that I'm writing because I liked the book; I found it an unattractive work; an ambitious failure.

From Sue Thomason

This letter is my reply to David Wingrove's response to the review of **The White Mountain** in **Vector 164**, and the editorial on pornography in the same issue. I am sending identical copies to David Wingrove and to **Vector**.

I have not yet read **The White Mountain**, nor the other books that have so far been published in the **Chung Kuo** series. (I am now very much inclined to read them , for curiosity's sake if nothing else! But as I understand (from previous correspondence in **Vector**) that the series was conceived of and written as just that - a long, but close-ended series of novels - I would rather wait and read the whole series in order, than read **The White Mountain** on its own and form a distorted impression of what is in effect a chunk out of the middde of a long story.)

It seems to me that Catie Cary's review of **The White Mountain** in **Vector 164** is not at all objective. (I write as a reviewer myself, for **Paperback Inferno**.) What comes over most strongly is her extreme dislike of what she has read. She herself recognises this in the first paragraph of the review. What objective information is provided by Cary seems to be confirmed by Wingrove. For example, Cary says "Wingrove describes a society rotten to the core". Wingrove himself says that at this point in the story the world of **Chung Kuo** is in a phase of "social degeneration... A society out of control." Perhaps Cary's extreme reaction comes from reading **The White Mountain** out of its context as the third book in a long sequence. To come upon graphic descriptions of unpleasant acts "cold", without the preparation of having read the previous novels, must produce a different impression to that the author intended! That is, if they are powerfully written, which Cary's reaction suggests.

I feel that it is, of course, perfectly in order for **Vector** to run a review in which the reviewer has reacted strongly against the work being reviewed. However it is more informative for readers if the review is accompanied by a more "objective" assessment of the work in question, so that they can determine whether or not It's the kind of book **they** might like despite the reviewer's dislike of it .

I can understand how David Wingrove might feel very upset, hurt and angered, to read this review of his book. If Cary's review had been about something I had written, I would feel devastated and find little "constructive criticism" in the review to help me take a positive approach to perhaps reworking the material. Furthermore, I would expect Wingrove to feel more than usually sensitive (perhaps aggressively defensive) when apparently attacked in this way in **Vector** which has previously carried an attack on the **promotion** of the **Chung Kuo** series (as opposed to the actual content of the books). If Wingrove has not yet decided that the BSFA are out to get him, it can only be because he is an exceptionally stable and fair-minded person. His response to the review is certainly well-presented, factual and objective in tone and content, and requires a well-reasoned response.

On the other hand, I also understand what it feels like to be very deeply offended by something I have read, so deeply offended that I want to write a very unobjective review. I think Catie Cary was right to record her reactions to the book as honestly as possible, and **Vector** was right to run the review however , as I said earlier, I'd welcome a more positive review, to balance Cary's, or even a review which simply gave some factual information about the book/series, a plot summary etc.

I think Wingrove's reply to Cary should be printed in full in **Vector**. How far the debate should be continued after that depends on the response received.

And now to the final, most important issue, and the one on which I cannot give a personal opinion (as I have not yet read the book) - is **The White Mountain** pornographic? In the most litcral sense of the word, obviously it is; "porno-graphy" means "writing about prostitutes". That in itself does not, to my mind, seem undesirable or disgusting; writing about prostitutes can be good, bad or indifferent, erotic, boring, or consciousness-raising in a non-erotic way.

I am very worried by Cary's definition of "erotica" as "what turns you or me, (normal) people on" and "pornography" as "the nasty stuff that only perverts like". For one thing, there are **plenty** of "normal people" who define my sexual preference as "perverted". And there are infinitely many ways to write about sex and sexuality; one can write with the intention of arousing the reader's sexual feelings, with the intention of describing cts which are necessary to the plot or which add depth to particular characters or to their background world, one can write to titillate, thril or disgust, one can write to evoke a genuinc deep catharsis.... What I suspect has led to Cary's review and Wingrove's response is that Cary believed Wingrove had written from a "shallow", perhaps a voyeuristic viewpoint, merely to titillate/thrill/disgust the reader. Wingrove's reply shows he had in fact written from a "serious" viewpoint, wanting to describe the excesses of an out-of-balance society. My own idea of what is good in such writing steers a middle course between the blood'n'guts, let-it-all-hang-out sensationalists, and the Platonic censors who want all the nasty (interesting) stuff to happen offstage. I am usually much more upset by violence (including sexual violence) than by sex per sc. Whether the sexual violence in **The White Mountain** is (in my opinion) gratuitous or necessary, whether it forms a disproportionate part of the book or whether (in my opinion) it is Cary's response which is out of an opposed letter from David Wingrove, author of **Chung Kuo III** (which was discussed by Catie Cary in her review and editorial of **Vector 164**), imploring them to reply to Ms Cary. I'm sure there'll be a veritable Desert Storm of response.

Firstly, I have read the book.

Secondly, only one dictionary in seven I consulted defined pornography as "writing about prostitutes".

Thirdly, I'm writing this under the assumption that **Vector 165** should and will print David Wingrove's reply in full.

Chung Kuo III, **The White Mountain** is *not* pornographic, not even remotely. Frankly, the only reason I can think of for Catie calling it pornographic was that she wanted to be controversial in the pages of **Vector**. The book would only be pornographic if there were lots of sadistic sex scenes rather than a couple, and if there were no attempt to tell a story, which there is. In the same way, Primo Levi writing about the Nazi extermination camps is not pornographic, whereas somebody just describing the horrors that went on there, with no attempt to put it in a historical context, for example, or doing it from an Aryan viewpoint, would be writing pornography.

It is true that the scenes in question are repulsive, but they are meant to be, since that is one way a society such as David Wingrove's OTT male society can be conveyed. You cannot simply identify an author's personality with whatever horrors they are describing.

Pornography is a method of dehumanising human beings, usually women. (Although it is dehumanising to be forced by society to be People-Who-Use-Sex-Objects just as it is to be Sex-Objects.) So while David Wingrove does describe the dehumanisation, his form is the novel, and that form is not in itself pornographic. This does not mean that the scenes describe OK behaviour. They do not. It means that they have been used in an attempt to say something about people.

So, what about the book itself? Well, it is dull, dull, dull. Terribly dull. I'm sorry, David, Imalise an awful lot of work went into it, but I found nothing to involve me. No sense of a society disintegrating was conveyed because so few of the characters were women or ordinary members of the populace. It is all very well this initial yang phase of **Chung Kuo**, and of course that would be male dominated, but if mostly male elite characters are used then how can the consequences of their actions be portrayed? Unfortunately, the only difference between the main characters is their degree of ruthlessness/anger/sadism, which does not make for involving or illuminating reading.

What the book *does* illustrate is that point made most vividly by Andrea Dworkin in her programme. The First Amendment does *not* guarantee the right of free speech. It guarantees that the government will not prosecute somebody for what they have said. But you have to be able to speak first. What if you can't, like women, blacks, hispanics? The First Amendment was written by slaveowners in 1791. Just as those slaves could not speak, neither can anybody in **Chung Kuo** except the ruling male elite.

I presume that a yin society is about to be born in **Chung Kuo**, or maybe a dual yin/yang one. If this is the case, I'll read volume IV and see how things are progressing.

From Camilla Pomeroy

I recently received nine pages first class from David Wingrove complaining about Catie'syour "diatribe" in **Vector**. Actually, what she wrote

didn't disturb me particularly - from her review, **The White Mountain** doesn't sound so different to lots of other books currently on the shelves in Smith's... But boy am I pissed off now. I think I am capable of imagining how blitherly upsetting bad review can be, and how furious someone must feel when their work has been unjustly represented. Most writers seem to take it on the chin and look big; probably because we've all seen letters in magazines trying to answer a negative review, and we all know that, however justified, the author usually comes out of it looking diminished. Obviously unfair, but It's true, isn't it? And then along comes David Wingrove, who has chosen to deal with the trashing review he got in **Vector** by sending a six-page rebuttal to every member of the BSFA.[Sigh.] How many people are going to believe in this kind of response? It's not the sort of reaction that comes out of "well-considered" and "straight up" already stamped all over it, is it? Before anyone even starts to consider the arguments for and against **The White Mountain**, they are going to have put some kind of an interpretation on David's response. Well, haven't you? What did (also) think, is it: (a) an extreme and ultimately rather pathetic piece of self-justification that any writer worth his salt would have destroyed before it got as far as the envelope; b) a moderately excellent publicity exercise; (c) other? If (c) please specify. As for myself, I'm not going to argue for or against a book I haven't read, but I'll spell out for the right of anyone to review a book in BSFA publications in whatever terms they see fit, without being told *"Read The Book Properly*"; "your caricature of the novel is gross, bordering on the libelous"; "you hadn't an ounce of sympathy for the book and never intended to give it even the ghost of a chance"; "I'm appalled, for instance, by the total absence of any real critical apparatus, and the lack of anything other than unsupported assertion and naked bile in your piece"; "I find your comments personally offensive"; "This kind of criticism is something one tends not to notice, or to overlook, until one becomes the subject of its lazy, ill-informed malice, of its ignorance masquerading as profundity, and of its bigotry masqueradng as liberalism". Well... I may not have read **The White Mountain**, but I *have* read the editorial and review that prompted these remarks. I read them again. I just don't know how David got there from here. Far from redressing the balance, his response has done more to discredit him in my opinion than anything another person could have written. And as he acknowledges "that old charge of lashing out at anyone who dares criticise me", I assume I'm not the only one who ever came to that conclusion. I don't like getting this kind of stuff unsolicited.

From Terry Broome

I've not read David's books, so I can only comment on the faults of Catie's writing, in so far as she imparts information.

In her editorial she uses **The White Mountain** as a straw-dog to be set up and knocked down in her campaign for greater censorship. By failing to maintain an unbiased position she abandons the truly objective role needed to encourage a debate on the subject - readers disagreeing with her might feel it would be a waste of time writing in if she is going to be the one responsible for presenting their views.

Her use of stylistic tricks: Dworkin, with whom she sympathises, is a "very sincere, passionate American"*, whereas Wingrove's book is condemned for its explicit sexual content, "which involve whores" (shock!), As "the most pornographic book I have ever read". This is clearly a moral judgement and will not inspire membership confidence in having their views seriously considered if they are in conflict with Catie's. One suspects the same colouring of the issues might be used to tar any dissention (as **Matrix** has a habit of doing). Without concrete examples we cannot trust Catie's objectivity. We can't even evaluate her disgust, because we don't know what other pornographic novels she has read. There is a world of difference between **Gor**, a past subject in **Vector** for scorn (Vector 139, Mary Gentle, "Heads I Win, Tails You Lose"), in which she said: "Gor is arguably inherently immoral or harmful about sexual fantasy: what matters is what fantasy. I'm not advocating censorship. You don't get rid of a disease by eradicating the symptoms". Gentle abhored the books, but would rather have them in the open so they can be confronted. I wonder if she believes that freedom of expression is too important to be compromised by banning them? This is the thin edge of the wedge) and **Alice In Wonderland**, which I believe has been banned in some American states for being pornographic (in the sense that it is supposed to pervert Christian values). If Catie's, idea of pornography is **Alice rather than Gor**, but with a cover scrotnign (certificates and health warnings?!) Is not only ingenuous and dangerous, but horrifying and perverse. personally find it worrying that someone else should be allowed to dictate to me what is morally healthy and "right", when their views should carry no more weight than my own.

Whether or not all pornography is truly degrading to the participants is debatable, and a question only they can answer. Has Catie read some pornography herself, or does she have first-hand experience? Onlookers (so to speak) may find it degrading, but only the participants themselves can tell us how porn has affected them.

Catie should be more aware of saying things in her editorial and reviews for affect rather than in the sincere and honest desire to impart information or instigate a meaningful debate. Her statement that she couldn't read for a week is questionable as truth, but doesn't advance her argument or impart lack new information, anyway. Her criticism should be straight and direct, not underhand, as in her weighted use of adverbs and adjectives in her editorial. Usually unexplained position: Dworkin is "very sincere, passionate", whilst Wingrove is "salacious". She says things unnecessarily: any work of fiction is pornographic whether you agree with it or not, and I'm sure she would rather *not* watch a road accident. I'm a victim of a road accidentand can honestly say it isn't a pretty sight. If this opinion of hers was truthful, it would brand her a bigger pervert than she call s Wingrove, a singularly inappropriate riposte to his alleged perversion. Catie's comments in this way occasionally border on the personal when she could have better used the space to illustrate her arguments by use of quotes and other references.

I've largely addressed Catie. Now, I must make clear once again that I have not read David's books. I cannot judge whether Catie's perception of the novel as sick would be one I shared, regardless of David's intentions (and I see no reason to doubt his intentions. "The criticism, if any, would be in how well he communicates this to his readers). Catic comes across (I should hope wrongly) as prudish, biased and bitter. I'm not convinced that, had she been aware of the errors in her style, she could not have come up with a cogent argument against the book. The BSFA, after all, is only an amateur association, a learning experience for many of its participants. This isn't to excuse the faults we have - I am probably as guilty as Catie for the faults in my work, despite trying to look out for them - but I share some of David's worries about the falling standards of the editors' work in particular. I have had my words twisted in **Matrix** to a degree I find appalling. I now no longer write to **Matrix** or read it. I used to be the reason I stayed in the BSFA, I would hate to see **Vector**'s standards fall so low. The basic problem is that the editors sometimes seem indifferent to the response they receive, are not checking to see that what they actually say is what they mean to say, and by editing and interjection unwittingly alter and distort what others say in response. A little more thought would improve both **Vector** and **Matrix** to a point where I could read them again. If things continue the way they've been going, I will leave the BSFA in 1993. I don't want to, I still value **Paperback Inferno** -Andy Sawyer does a good job on it, and he listens. He knows which side his words are buttered.

* Sincerity and passion do not automatically prove that a person is right. According to Avedon Carol's **Splinters** in **Pulp19** Dworkin believes that women are destroyed by enjoying porn. Carol's views of pornography are cogent, learned and very interesting.

From Ken Lake

Like most BSFA members, I received from David Wingrove a six-page self-defence of his allegedly pornographic book **The White Mountain**, the third part of his **Chung Kuo** blockbuster, together with a covering note soliciting my own support; the latter was addressed "Dear BSFA member," but bore a manuscript postscript "Go to it, Ken!"

When the first part of this burgeoning - and to my mind both boring and offensive - work was published, I was sent both a review copy and two wildly inaccurate press releases. With editorial approval I reviewed the latter, only to bring a load of vituperation about my head from Wingrove and his supporters. Now strange, then, that he should approach me for help now, the more so since - as he must be aware - neither I nor most BSFA members will have read his book. Once again, then , I am forced to pass comment only on Wingrove's own strongly-worded response to Catie Cary's denunciation of **The White Mountain** as - specifically within the constraints of her own clearly explained definition of the term - "without doubt the most pornographic book I have ever read."

I want to stress this first: Catie wrote both an actual review (**Vector 164**, p 18) which is wide-ranging and damning in every way, and an editorial because, obviously, she felt this was a matter that deserved more discussion than a brief review would permit. She ended the latter by asking readers to "put me straight" if they disagreed, and I would have expected that Wingrove would have waited to hear our verdict before attempting to pre-empt membership response by a costly and biased direct mailing.

In her review, Catie attacks the plotting, the literary style, the characterisation, the sexism and the sheer offensiveness of the book; in his riposte Wingrove chooses to take umbrage only at the allegations of pornography; are we to assume that he accepts all her other strictures? If so, how can he have the sheer chutzpah to ask for our support of what Catie calls "an amalgam of Gilbert and Sullivan Chinesery, Mafia thriller, 'Sci-Fi' B movie and high camp US soap opera"? But he does: let us examine his arguments.

For a start, he denies that the book is pornographic, and attacks Catie's definitions because they brand Wingrove himself a pervert. I have to say that I cannot accept Catie's precise definition either - to me, something pornographic depraves and harms the reader whether the writer set out to do so or not, and if I accept Wingrove's own descriptions of the contents of the book then yes, I would regard it as pornographic.

Twice he calls the male characters "bastards" yet I gather they are not illegitimates; if this is the standard of accuracy he espouses, how can we accept his other claims? He argues that because he has created an imagined world in which men's "base sexual instincts" are given full play, the description of those those instincts are allowed to lead to vicious sexual practices, mental and physical torture and murder is fair and reasonable. I cannot accept this one little bit: I am old enough to remember when one gained a far greater *frisson* from a row of dots than one could ever obtain from detailed descriptions of the physical processes of rape, bestiality, torture and murder.

Next, Wingrove excuses these aspects by arguing that they form only a small part of the

book. I do not see this as an excuse: the whole book is, he admits, an exposure of the reader to a paranoid, vicious society in all its aspects; the specifically sexual aspects form an integral part of the story so the book must be judged as a whole, and Catie believes that the imagined society itself - the society which Wingrove admits condones and encourages such viciousness - is so offensive as to make the whole book pornographic in her eyes. I see no need to remind him that **Lady Chatterley's Lover** was banned for decades as pornographic while there too only a meagre few pages described sexual activity: surely the prallel is obvious, as can be seen from the way that any old paperback edition automatically falls open at those few places.

Remember, says Wingrove, we aren't talking about ordinary citizens, we are talking about a brothel - "a good brothel, catering for the above clients." This apparently makes it all OK: the clients are the rulers, the "girls were well treated and happy" he assures us, so by the rules of the game he is allowed to introduce "violence and sadism" as a means of developing his plot. Many of you will construe this as starting from degradation, hoping to make it sound acceptable, and then proceeding from filth to more degradation: I would not wish to argue with that belief, though I happen to believe that properly run commercial brothels, freed of pimping and medically supervised, would be A Good Thing in our own country and time as anywhere else in human history.

In other words, I accept that Catie has the right to be offended and to express her disgust in his insistence on his own probity. Wingrove demands that we must accept his decisions on what we may find unacceptable. Like **Last Exit Freemarketplace**, this book tells us of a society that is sick from its roots up, and begs us to applaud the author for exposing us to such an inhuman environment.

I do not deny that many may find Wingrove's socio-political hypotheses fascinating; many may find his novel expounding the results of such a *Weltanschauung* fascinating; many may not b disgusted by his decision to provide them witch explicit examples of the results, explicitly described with what appears to be an excess of repulsive detail. Those same people must surely accept that Catie and many others will be repelled, and that they have the right to denounce the book in terms which they find reasonable and logical.

Many an author takes refuge as does Wingrove, in a demand that any critic should "read the book properly"; all that he means by this is that the critic should don the author's own rosy spectacles and see it only through his eyes. Such demands are unsupportable: every reader comes to every book as an individual, and takes from it what the reader's own background and conditioning make it possible to absorb. Every book reviewer knows that every review is invisibly prefaced with the words "in my opinion," and we all have the right to our own opinions. If enough people agree with Catie, then Wingrove has failed to provide readers with the book he may think he has written; if enough people support Wingrove's writing then Catie still has the right to differ and to express her dissent. By sending a reviewer a book, the publisher leaves himself open to criticism, and he can only complain if that criticism is faulty in *facts*; interpretations are the personal privilege of the reader, not the writer or publisher.

What frightens me, to be honest, is that Wingrove seems to have enough intelligence to write a blockbuster, no matter how hackneyed or unbalanced it may be, but lacks the ability to realise that readers are free - they are not there to be told what they must think, merely because he wishes them to. He asks for our sympathy on the grounds that he believes himself to be a good father to three daughters, without realising that even there we have no access to the young ladies themselves to learn how *they* see this houseshusband.

The final irony comes when Wingrove accuses Catie of "liberalism" - when her stance borders on the illiberal in suggesting that books like his should at least be "certificated" like pornographic movies, might carry government health warnings, might even (whisper it) be censored or banned. What kind of "liberalism" is this? Just how *does* Wingrove define terms that we all think we understand? Is Catie perhaps right in warning us? Do we really need our writers to direct-mail us with self-serving denunciations in their own defence? Just what are the proper functions of authors, reviewers and editors? Is the BSFA a trade society or a pressure group? Is it in the interests of the genre and of fandom to espouse pornography (if that is what it is) or to seek to define its terms, and to take a stand on ethical grounds rather than those of personal profit?

I cannot answer all these questions: I can only point you at the path round your own decision-making, freed of the joint propagandist pressures of Catie and of Wingrove. Now It's up to you.

From Jim England

The saying goes: all publicity is good publicity. So I imagine that the review of David Wingrove's book **Chung Kuo** (like most reviews in **Vector**) will do no harm to the author. But I was interested both in Catie's editorial and in the article by Kim Cowie which invites us to :

"Spare a thought for the dilemma of writers who, when faced with the whole of human experience and imagination, want to draw on all of it."

The point is that, no writer draws on the whole of human experience. Cowie's argument is pure sophistry and rationalisation, akin to the argument that writers have a duty to "reflect" reality. Those who adopt this altruistic pose of wanting to "reflect" reality or tell us something fictional and filthy for our own good are usually trying to kid us, themselves or both. What they usually want to do is make money. To this end, they don't try to sell a thesis on thermodynamics or number theory or the life-style of some obscure insect. They're not that daft. No, they write to entertain people (of whom there are a great many) who would like to do nasty things to a lot of other people.

Result: a kind of wish-fulfillment fantasy in which the victims of violent and unpleasant acts are reified and degraded.

Now, of course, there are two schools of thought about the effects of this stuff on consumers. One says (1) it provides a harmless outlet for perverted desires. Another says (2) it encourages the idea that these are normal and acceptable. Either way, the producers of the stuff are not being noble but pander to the worst side of human nature and are to be condemned.

From Brian W Aldiss

I can hardly credit the review of David Wingrove's **The White Mountain**, with its flourish of mid-Victorian values.

Any reviewer who says they would rather watch a road accident than read a novel belongs in the AA, not the **BSFA**.

From Maureen Speller

I am sure I cannot be the only person to be irritated by the recent mailing from David Wingrove concerning his latest novel **The White Mountain**. Quite apart from anything else, what gives him the right to drag me into his disagreement with the editors of **Vector** about the expression of an honest opinion? What does he expect me to do about it? Clearly, having expended a lot of time, energy and money (conservative estimates suggest that if, as suspected, he mailed the entire **BSFA** membership, this must have cost at least £500 and I find it amusing that he assumes they won't have seen a magazine which is regularly included as part of their mailing) he expects some sort of return, and presumably a favourable one. But does he have the right to either ask for or expect this?

From time to time, and I have to say this is usually prompted by one of Wingrove's over-defensive outbursts. I stop to consider the role of the author in publishing a book, and exactly where that role begins and ends. There can be no doubt that the author is the creator of the work but what happens once it is turned over to the publisher? Quite simply, it is no longer the author's sole responsibility and property. Many other influences are brought into play - those of editors, publicity departments, sales and marketing people. It is a fortunate author, and a rare one, who manages to retain complete control over the finished product. I would be very surprised to learn that Wingrove as a fairly new author, has that kind of clout.

And what happens once the book is published? It becomes the property of the bookseller, the reader, the reviewer and the critic. The bookseller chooses whether or not to stock the book, the reader whether or not to buy, whilst the reviewer or critic offers an opinion on its success or failure as a novel, which others are in turn in a position to accept or dismiss as they wish. The point is that the author is in the public domain and the author no longer has complete control over it. The author may conduct interviews, do signings, make personal appearances, and do his or her best to promote the book, but cannot force people either to like the book or to buy it. Nor does s/he have complete control over what is said about it in print. Nor, in my opinion should s/he have that right.

It seems to be generally and tacitly agreed that while an author will carry out promotional activities on behalf of his or her book, s/he does not leap to the work's defence every time s/he feels that the book has not been represented exactly as s/he intended it to be. Were it not so, the reviewing industry would almost certainly have disappeared years ago in a welter of litigation. As it is, most authors are sensible enough to understand that comments made about their books are, for the most part, simply opinions, to which any person is entitled. As a result they confine themselves to correcting factual misunderstandings. They may not like the opinions being offered but they are wise enough to keep quiet about it.

Unfortunately this is a lesson which seems to have escaped Wingrove and we are consequently treated, and not for the first time, to a lengthy, embarassing and inevitably biased justification of his work. I know of no other author so quick to rush to the defence of his darlings.

More annoyingly, he clearly expects me to support him in this otherwise he wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of enlisting my interest by sending me his mailing. However, to comment on the actual works under discussion would require me to buy and read them. As Wingrove is so quick to point out, one must read the novels in order to judge them fully. For reasons which are no concern to anyone but myself, I have not read the previous novels and nor do I intend to buy the latest opus at present. Consequently, let us be clear that I am not judging the contents of the book, but I am exercising my right to comment on Ms Cary's comments on the book and Wingrove's response to them.

Let us now consider what it means to be an editor and/or a reviewer. An editor, in compiling a magazine, is frequently assembling material expressing opinions which differ wildly from his or her own beliefs. In editing a magazine, s/he accepts the responsibility of achieving a representative balance without showing bias one way or the other.

A review is an opinion expressed by an individual in response to a book. Let us be clear about this. A good reviewer seeks to be objective and balanced in his or her judgement but at the heart of the review is still an opinion. I like this book because..., I don't like this book because.... There is no obligation on the reviewer to either like or dislike a book and the author shouldn't expect him or her to automatically review it favourably. It would be

a strange author who didn't hope for a favourable review but all s/he can do is to hope. In the same way, the reviewer can't expect anyone reading the review to automatically accept his or her opinion. S/he is telling them what s/he thinks but it is up to the reader to make the final decision of reading the book, or not doing so. Reviewers do not exercise omnipotence quite in the way Wingrove seems to suppose they do, for that matter, neither does he seem to trust his readers to make their own judgements. Fearful of their opinion being swayed by Ms Cary's review, it seems to me that he is now seeking to make their minds up for them.

It is more difficult for an editor to express an opinion. The general tenor of a magazine can sometimes convey an editor's opinion, but more importantly, the editor has the opportunity to express his or her opinions in the editorial, as Ms Cary has done. As an editor and as a reviewer she has expressed her opinions in the appropriate places. Nothing wrong with that, so far as I can see. She doesn't like the book, she has said so, she has said why. She has been explicit on the nature of her dislike.

The problem, clearly, is that David Wingrove does not like what she said. Fair enough, I'm not going to criticize him for that, he is entitled to his opinion as she is to hers. I do however criticize the public nature of his response and his justification of his position.

To start with, why is David Wingrove in particular entitled to a right of response which, I suspect, most other authors wouldn't think to ask for in similar circumstances. I'm not aware that it is standard practice to offer an author right of reply simply because his or her name is mentioned in a couple of paragraphs in an editorial. If we had to offer immediate right of response every time an author's name is mentioned, then publishing would be so complex a matter that little if anything would ever appear in a non-fiction context. Had the offending item been an outspoken and critical article of some length, then yes, right of reply is in order and ought to have been offered, but not for this. I can't detect what is so particularly remarkable about David Wingrove that he is entitled to what others aren't.

Much of Wingrove's argument in support of the non-pornographic nature of his book relies on definitions of pornography and on supplying us with copious background to the novel to demonstrate that it is not pornographic. All this demonstrates to me is that David Wingrove does not believe the novel to be pornographic. Ms Cary, in possession of all this background, chooses to disagree. The problems of achieving a working definition of pornography are well-known in a situation where opinions are so widely-ranged that for some people, a woman breast-feeding her child in public is grossly pornographic while for others complex sado-masochistic acts are entirely acceptable. I fear Wingrove is being ingenuous if he expects us simply to toe his line on what constitutes pornography, and accept that, therefore, his work is not pornographic. This is not acceptable as a justification and he should not expect to enlist our agreement on this basis. In the same way, he expects us to accept that his portrayals of women show them as strong characters simply because he says they are. This is hardly acceptable. Readers do not automatically respond to a book as the author imagines they should and Wingrove ought to know that.

Again, in taking to task Ms Cary's reading of the book, his automatic assumption is that she has not read the book properly, and he then presumes to teach her, and by implication all other reviewers who do not take his line, how to review. This is simply patronising, as Wingrove ought to realise. How can Wingrove know what Ms Cary did or didn't do unless he was present throughout the entire reviewing process, as he obviously wishes he had been? From personal experience, I know Ms Cary to be an honest and conscientious person, concerned to do a good job. This is what I believe she did. That it doesn't meet with Wingrove's approval is beside the point.

And lastly, yet again, Wingrove rallies his domestic circumstances in defence of his work. Wingrove appears to belong to a school of critical thought which believes that an author's personal biography is totally germane to the writing. There is nothing wrong with this belief insofar as it functions for those of the readership who are aware of the author's personal circumstances and feel it necessary to bring these into play when judging a book. Most readers, despite Wingrove's best efforts to the contrary, are almost certainly still unaware that Wingrove has a wife, three daughters and has been a househusband, and even if they were aware, would doubtless find it as irrelevant to their reading of his fiction as the possibility that he might kick dogs and refuse to give money to beggars in the street. I presume that Wingrove's motive is to demonstrate what a right-on sort of guy he is but again, we are left with only Wingrove's word for it. I'm not calling him a liar, please note, but simply saying that short of us all moving in with him to observe, we have no idea of what Wingrove is like as a personal consequently it is of no relevance to our reading of his fiction.

In conclusion, I can only say, once again, that I wish that David Wingrove, like other authors, was sufficiently confident of his own work to allow it to go out into the world and make its own way. The thought of having to go through this kind of performance another seven times is too much to contemplate.

From David V Barrett

Let me welcomeCatie to the select band of writers and critics who have brought the wrath of the Wingrove down upon their heads: Chris Priest (for reasons I have never clearly established); Roz Kaveny (for saying in **Foundation** that **Trillion Year Spree**, Wingrove's rewrite of Brian Aldiss's **Billion Year Spree**, was not as good); Ken Lake for reviewing the publicity material for **Chung Kuo** I in **Vector 152** and Paul Kincaid for (as reviews editor) allowing him to do so; and myself for giving an honest opinion as a reviewer of the same book (not the publicity material in **Fear** 11 and **Foundation** 46.

Nobody likes their work being criticised, but most writers don't make such a fuss about it. In each case David Wingrove has leapt to the offensive (in his letter of complaint to **Fear** he libelled me at least twice), over-reacted and (unfortunately but inevitably) made himself look a little silly.

I haven't read **Chung Kuo III**, or **Chung Kuo II**, and I will not read **Chung Kuo IV** to gods-know-how-many unless I am specifically asked to review one of them and can't get out of it, for one very simple reason: I have read **Chung Kuo** I, from cover to bloody cover, every execrable word of it (despite Wingrove's public assertion to the contrary). As I said in **Foundation 46**, that book had "major problems: the lack of depth of culture, the clumsiness of the plotting, the flatness of the language, except where It's livened up by dreadfully Mills-and Boonish overwritten prose, and the weakness of inter-character relationships."

Re Catie's remarks on pornography in **Chung Kuo III**, I also pointed out one particularly brutal scene in **Chung Kuo I**, in which one of the main characters, wearing a king-size steel-tipped leather condom, repeatedly shafts a peasant worker so violently that he splits the wall between her anus and vagina. We already know the guy's a bastard, this degree of unpleasantness is simply gratuitous.

One peripheral point: Once again (see **Trillion Year Spree** pp 486-7) Wingrove tells us about his years of being a house-husband, as if he expects a medal, or at least our amazed admiration. As a freelance writer I'd be delighted if my partner (if I had one) went out to earn a decent and steady income to support our family; and the mothers I know with small children manage to get a surprising amount of work done during the day — It's justa case of organising their time, they tell me, and being very flexible. Okay, so let's give him a medal - the same one deserved by *every* mother. Oh, and another one for allowing his daughters to take their mother's name... Though, er, David, what the hell does that have to do with bad fiction? (Note: I am making the possibly entirely unwarranted assumption that **Chung Kuo III** bears some resemblance in style, plotting, characterisation, etc, to **Chung Kuo I**.)

From Bridget Wilkinson

I, like most of Britfandom have a copy of the dreaded Wingrove letter. He has gone completely over the top.

However, I think it is unwise of Catie, *both* to write a bad review of a book *and* to use her position as editor to attack aforesaid book, however bad it be. He talks of this as an abuse of power and he has a point, she'd have done better not to have put herself in a position where such attacks could be made. As it is the whole episode looks like developing into a huge game of pots and kettles.

From Peter Tennant

I haven't read any of **Chung Kuo** and as I share Catie Cary's aversion for long series of novels It's unlikely that I shall. Nevertheless It's hard not to sympathise with David Wingrove, who seems to be getting a raw deal from **BSFA** reviewers. The first volume of his magnum opus was dismissed unread by Ken Lake simply because the promotional material didn't agree with him and now Wingrove is being labelled a pornographer in **Vector** editorial.

Well no, I don't regard Catie Cary as an innocent flower but I do wonder if she's ever read **The Story of O**, anything by the Marquis de Sade, **Last Exit to Brooklyn**, or, closer to home, **The Tides of Lust** by Samuel R Delany and **Blown** by Philip Jose Farmer.

And I wonder whether the dictionaries she uses. My own (Collins English) gives the root of pornography as "the writings of harlots" rather than writing about them, a different thing entirely and one in line with the modern definition of pornography which is "writings, pictures, films etc, designed to stimulate sexual excitement."

Catie's three sub-divisions don't work too well. Smut to my mind has more to do with humour than sexual excitement, while what Catie refers to as pornography most people understand as obscenity. As for erotica being what turns normal people on, leaving the question of normality aside, I can envisage forms of pornography that neither offend me or stimulate me but are undoubtedly erotic in intent eg gay sex acts. Under Caties scheme such things would be smut. No, I'm sorry, but It's all pornography, even the stuff that turns Catie and me on.

What I think Catie is really getting at is that Wingrove's book is obscene, rather than merely pornographic ie capable of depraving or corrupting readers. The crux is were the incidents to which Catie took exception gratuitous and did the author invite our approval of them. To decide on that I'd have to read the book. Wingrove says no to both charges and I'm inclined to believe him, but I await other readers views with interest.

Talking generally, although the majority of us may deplore such behaviour, violence against women and their humanitarian concern facts of life, and therefore fit material for the writer. There is no reason *per se* to assume that just because he writes candidly about these things Wingrove approves of them or is seeking to appeal to practitioners of such abuses. Isn't it more reasonable to believe that he's holding them up for our disapproval, examples of how not to act. After all, no-one accused Agatha Christie of promoting murder, at least to my knowledge.

I often visit art exhibitions locally and sometimes these feature paintings of nude women. On such occasions It's always instructive to read the comments in the Visitors Book.

Continued on page 23

Reviews

Edited By Christopher Amies

All The Weyrs of Pern
Anne McCaffrey
Bantam, 1991, 494pp, £13.99

It's ten years since I last read a dragon book, and nothing's changed. The cover seems to promise a different slant to life on Pern: dragons frolic in a spaceship surround. A mixture of high-tech and dragon-lore... Would we find a touch of steel here, something gritty and tough?
The inhabitants of Pern discover AIVAS (Artificial Intelligence Voice Address System) still functional after 25,000 years. This *deus ex machina* gives them their Genesis, how they came to be on Pern, the origins of the dragons. The first third of the book is concerned with everyone coming to terms with this: their reactions are predictably narrow. There is a minor, speedily defused episode of luddite activity at the start of the book, a more serious attempt towards the end, but nothing gets seriously in the way of the dissemination of knowledge and skill from the all-wise, all-knowing AIVAS.
And this is the flaw. There is no possibility that the advent of AIVAS will be anything other than marvellous. McCaffrey has always engaged her readers in close identification with a character who is battling against external forces. No such character exists in **All The Weyrs Of Pern**: no external presents any threat. Even the dread Thread becomes only something to place beneath the microscope.
There is no understanding that knowledge can be dangerous, no equation between knowledge and power, no intimation that scientific advance is a double-edged tool. There is a nod towards green issues when the requirement for paper entails the destruction of forests, but handily some other fibrous weed is found just in time.
AIVAS has a grand plan, to divert the orbit of the Red Planet so that thread should no longer fall on Pern. This is a daring scheme, and involves dragons and riders taking themselves into space, and through time. At last the narrative focuses on Jaxom, whose dragon Ruth has unique abilities, but even here the time paradoxes mean that we know It's all going to work out just fine.
There are little jokes and ironies, enjoyable scenes of people failing to save their work on computers, of the Pernese finding that space-suits get sweaty under tension, of decoding genetic material in terms of springs called "zebedees". As always, the dragons provide the best bits, fooling around in free fall, fascinated by the sight of the planet beneath them, confidently executing AIVAS' will with a minimum of fuss.
AIVAS plays, as the only example of music from humanity's past, 'Home on the Range'. The people of Pern refer to themselves as "folk", they chuckle (constantly) and quip and even chortle. When truly pressed, they become testy.
It's all about as stimulating and challenging as a warm bath. McCaffrey's fans will find nothing to upset them at all. This is familiar territory in every way, although lacking the personal identification of McCaffrey's better stories. Wristwatches and VDUs do not a new world make.
Jenny Jones

Dream Park: The Voodoo Game
Larry Niven & Steven Barnes
Pan, 1991, 346pp, £8.99pb

I sometimes wonder whether too many books aren't being written for so-called "young people". Particularly materialistic, sex-and-violence-orientated kids you wouldn't want to meet on a dark night. Aren't mature adults supposed to read?
Oh well, the blurb sums it up: "Blending together hard SF with fantasy, ideas with action, and adventure with suspense, Larry Niven and Steven Barnes continue with the thrilling **Dream Park** sequence from the monumental bestseller, **The Barsoom Project**". Described also as "unadulterated wish-fulfillment" (whose?) It is set in the Californian desert in 2055 and is about "25 gamers, lined up against the most sophisticated forces in modern technology... Their task: to stop Tata Nkiti, undead Man-Demon and descerator of corpses, and his insatiable army of devils... Only the strongest will be allowed to survive".
I would say that the book could benefit from being made into a film. That way, the artefacts so hard to describe could be seen at a glance; the characters, so obviously plastic, could take on a substance of humanity, and potential readers would not have to wade through so many words.
An example of how characters are reified is (p16): "Corby Cauldwell was as nimble as a somnambulant geriatric. He had the personal hygiene habits of a water buffalo. A bumper crop of potatoes could be grown on his scalp".
Characterisation is non-metric, ie it commonly involves weights in pounds and heights in inches, as well as accounts of the bulging muscles of both males and females. The giggling of characters is extremely common, regardless of age and sex.
In an afterword, the authors admit that since the book was published "Virtual Reality has become a buzzword", making the hologram technology of the illusions seem rather outdated, but that "Writing novels is a lot more fun" than prophesy.
Jim England

A Graveyard for Lunatics
Ray Bradbury
Grafton, 1991, 285pp, £3.99pb

Pandora by Holly Hollander
Gene Wolfe
NEL, 1991, 198pp, £3.99pb

Gene Wolfe is undoubtedly best known for the **Book of the New Sun**, a story I enjoyed for its richness of character and plot but you'd hardly call it fun. Reviews of his other books convinced me they too were not going to be fun and so I've never been drawn to read them. One thing about **Pandora**, It's fun and having read it I've decided that **New Sun** was also a mystery story.
Pandora is a "true" story written by Holly Hollander and redone by Gene Wolfe, an unusual but not unique plot device. Holly is a keen reader of detective stories and uses that to help her solve a murder for which her father is the main suspect. The actual detection is done by Aladdin Blue, a criminologist, ex-lawyer and criminal.
At one point Holly complains that life isn't like detective fiction in that they have a constrained set of suspects who can be gathered together for the *denouement* when all is revealed. This, of course is actually what happens in this book.
I said this book was fun and I suspect Gene Wolfe got the most fun from writing it by winding the motifs from the detective story into this supposedly true story. I thought it was a quick, undemanding read, and there's nothing wrong with that.
But Ray Bradbury's book is better, It's centred on a Hollywood film studio and the book's structure and style reflect that of a movie. In particular the rapid changes of shot, viewpoint and scene in a movie are echoed in the story structure with short chapters, some only a few lines long.
The appearance of a papier mache figure of a long dead studio mogul in a graveyard next to his studio triggers off a frantic sequence of events including several murders. Our hero is a young script writer who is deliberately flung into this madhouse by an anonymous invitation

and things really hot up after he and his friend Roy, a maker of models for movies, spot a hideously mutilated man who Roy uses as a template for the Beast in a new film.
The book is populated with stock characters: the cop, the ex-movie actress with a heart of gold, the German director and so on; but Bradbury's pace and sureness of plotting overcome these, and what shines through is his love of the movies and his knowledge of this world within a world. Whilst you're probably going to figure out at least part of the answer long before the end, I don't think that matters. This is still a book I'm glad I read.
Tom A Jones

Letters From Home
Pat Cadigan, Karen Joy Fowler & Pat Murphy
The Women's Press, 1991, 233pp, £6.95pb

A collection like this introduces three good new writers to readers of The Women's Press who would not normally read SF and to SF readers who would not normally brave those shelves in the bookshop colonised by The Women's Press. In this case, everyone goes home happy.
The three are well chosen. They will be familiar to readers of the main American SF magazines and those who only get as far as the annual Dozois anthology. Both Cadigan and Murphy have published two well thought-of novels including Murphy's **The City, Not Long After**, one of my personal **Vector** choices for last year, and Cadigan's **Mindplayers**, nominated for the Philip K Dick Memorial Award. Fowler is best known for her **Artificial Things** collection. More significantly, Murphy also picked up a brace of Nebulas for her novel, **The Falling Woman** and the short story 'Rachel In Love.'
All three are located on the more "literary," less technophilic wing of the genre. Although SF tropes are used - aliens here, precognition here - there is little to exclude the three from the mainstream. Fowler is the most allusive, least literal; Cadigan kicks in three effective and disturbing horror stories, 'The Pond', 'The Coming of the Doll,' and 'In the Dark,' that show a mastery of that oft-abused genre. 'The Coming of the Doll,' in particular, is a truly horrifying depiction of post-natal depression.
The book is dedicated to the memory of James Tiptree Jr, and as Sarah Lefanu points out in her introduction, at least one story, Cadigan's 'After the Days of Dead-Eye Dave,' explicitly mirrors one of Tiptree's, 'The Women that Men Don't See.'
The comparison, however, is not a helpful one; Tiptree, at least at the start and the end of her career was hemmed in and ill-served by the limitations of SF, in a way that Cadigan, Fowler and Murphy are not.
But are they feminist? Well, only in the way that any intelligent person at the tail end of the twentieth century is feminist. Some stories externalise and dramatise a strong feminist viewpoint: Murphy's 'His Vegetable Wife,' a (presumably unconscious) replay of John Wyndham's 'Trumpet Martian,' SF archivists might note, or Fowler's 'Lily Red,' or Cadigan's '...Dead-Eye 'Dee.'
Others have other concerns. Fowler's 'The Faithful Companion at Forty' parodies popular culture amusingly and effectively from the viewpoint of the second on the bill, in this case Tonto. She misses the best joke, though: surrounded by screaming Indians, The Lone Ranger turns to Tonto and says: 'Now we're for it.' Tonto replies: "Who's we, paleface?"
I digress. I like the idea of three strong writers getting together in one volume to publish the best of their work, and I could bear to see it extended, under whatever banner. Meanwhile, this one comes recommended.
Martin Waller

Only Begotten Daughter
James Morrow
Legend, 1991, 312pp, £13.99

Murray Katz is a sperm donor. One of his donations contains its own nucleus, and starts to grow. Murray steals the cctogenesis machine containing his foetus just before a group of fundamentalists opposed to Artificial Insemination blows up the clinic where Murray has been helping out. Julie Katz is not of woman born and decides she is the daughter of God.
Julie's theories of her relationship to the first mover are helped when she discovers that she has thaumaturgic powers and starts helping the blind to see. Like Thomas Covenant she has difficulty coming to terms with her abilities and becomes a rather eccentric agony aunt for a New Jersey newspaper. Unfortunately, things don't work out perfectly - someone without a nose gets two, for instance - and Julie changes tack. She decides to serve in her own kind of Peace Corps, by descending into Hell. Only four people in the history of the world are not there, so there is plenty to do and a lot to upset her.
When Julie comes back to Earth the fundamentalists have taken over the eastern seaboard of the USA and on TV you now get shows like "The Monday Night Auto-Da-Fe".
After falling in with a group of heretics who keep bootleg copies of her column as a new Bible, Julie is eventually caught and gets to appear on prime time TV, being burned.
Luckily for Julie, The Devil, who is a gentleman, and has been following her all through her life, takes her away from all this, and she finds the literal truth of WC Fields' epitaph, that she'd rather be in Philadelphia, and he takes her there.
Confused? I was. Quotations on the cover call this book satirical and brilliantly funny, but none of it seems new, and one book recently covers the area very much better - that is John Irving's **A Prayer for Owen Meany**, where his hero is also a columnist and born parthenogenetically. It may not deal with the fundamentalists, but I can think of quite a few which do, and if you go back to Nathaniel West's **Miss Lonelyheart** you get a very deep study of the problems of the broken Christ figure unable to cope with the fallen world.
Only Begotten Daughter is nothing like good enough to stand in as a condensation of those other books. If you read this, really you ought to read them to find out what It's all about.
I.J Hurst

The Brains of Rats
Michael Blumlein
Scream/Press, 1990, 224pp, $14.95

This book is published by Scream/Press, which is appropriate because there's more of a horror element in this enigmatic collection than Blumlein's previous output would suggest. A collection of his short stories, it follows the novel **The Movement of Mountains** in placing Blumlein as the most enigmatic of the current generation of West Coast American SF/Fantasy/Horror writers.
Blumlein first exploded on the printed page with the incomparable 'Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration: A Case Report', published in **Interzone** in 1984. That was back when **Interzone** was the cutting edge of speculative fiction, and even then Blumlein was a bit close to the handle for comfort. His finely-turned, delicate prose is as precise and sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, and serves to lighten the horror of his obsessions until they're *just* bearable. His insight into character, sexuality, the darkness in our souls, is merciless and precise. 'The Brains of Rats', the title story (and a world fantasy award nominee) has one of the most pitiless - yet, strangely compassionate - portrayals of male sexual self-criticism in recent fiction. The horror stories 'Keeping House' and 'The Promise of Warmth' exude a claustrophobic miasma of introverted, psychotic obsession that is barely describable but clearly the work of a master. Finally, there is that strange category of medical fantasy in which Blumlein is so definitively supreme. In these fictions - 'Shed his Grace', 'The Thing itself', 'Bestseller', and 'Tissue Ablation' - can be seen a bizarre, microscopic attention to detail which reminds me of nothing so much as a hybrid of JG Ballard at his most outrageous and William Burroughs playing the straight guy.
If you like alternative horror, buy this book. Hospital will never be the same again.
Charles Stross

Patterns
Pat Cadigan
Grafton, 1991, 299pp, £3.99pb

Buy the book. What can I say to urge you to do so? Pat Cadigan's stories belong to the same tradition of excellent speculative writing as the New Wave fiction of the sixties. In many ways Cadigan's fiction can be compared to JG Ballard's. (High praise indeed from this Ballard fan.) They both share a fascination with the complex, shifting realities of contemporary life and the technology which shapes it and us. Way back in the sixties Ballard was urging science fiction to write about the "now" in terms of the "now" and this is exactly what Cadigan does. Her stories are about cable TV, Baldeo, rock 'n' roll, jogging, drugs, nightclubs, psychopaths. All of this is the furniture of a recognisable reality until Cadigan, again like Ballard, approaches it from such an oblique angle that she cuts across our conventional notions and shocks us into new insights. This element of shock is fundamental to the stories. Plots which seem to lead inevitably to one conclusion suddenly twist to produce a surprise ending. Characters who begin by compelling our sympathy acquire a horrible power. A reality which seems like the media-familiar late twentieth century America we all know is adroitly shifted into an altogether strange place. Cadigan finds reality a strange and shocking experience and she makes us see it that way.
But although the stories centre on familiar technology, what Cadigan is most interested in is the effect on people; she is concerned with the relationship between human beings and the realities they create for themselves, especially as internal and external realities become more and more difficult to distinguish. Is what we see on the TV screen real? What really happens when the media "make" a video star? Cadigan's concern for people is evident in her characters. Many of the central characters are women, almost all of them related to other characters as wife, sister, friend, or lover so that the central vision of the stories is a passionately concerned one. Her heroes are active interferers or participators in the events of the story; engaged with life. It's this engagement which is the source of the energy of Cadigan's writing, whether the tone is the sly humour of 'The Day the Mouse got the Cable', the violence of 'The Power and the Passion' or the haunting sadness of 'Eenie, Meenie, Ipsatecnie', 'Two' or 'Angel'. There is energy in the pace and twists of the stories which continually surprise the reader and in the detailed locations of these shifted realities.
Patterns is science fiction as it should be; thought-provoking, engaging and compulsive reading.
Lynne Fox

The God Killer
Simon R Green
Headline, 1991, 187pp, £3.99pb

Quozl
Alan Dean Foster
NEL, 1991, 344pp, £4.50pb

Quozl is a book written about rabbits. Large, intelligent rabbits from another star system who arrive on earth during the Second World War. They have come to colonise the planet, only to find it is already inhabited by extremely warlike inhabitants that do not seem ready for contact. While the Quozl are more scientifically (and socially) advanced than the bloodthirsty natives, they are forced to conceal their arrival for fear of humanity's apparently uncontrollable predeliction for violence. By way of a contrast, they have displaced their inclination into art, ritual and sex, and now live in a society where it is socially and psychologically impossible. They quite correctly assume that their appearance on Earth is almost certain to provoke attack and so resolve to stay hidden underground, for perhaps hundreds of years until humanity is mature enough to welcome them.

Quozl plans to remain in hiding are betrayed, however, by the adventurous activities of young Runs-Red-Talking. Despite all the prohibitions, he regularly makes secret visits to the surface and eventually becomes the close friend of a young boy, Chad. This friendship eventually compromises the Quozl, exposing their burrows to danger.

So far the book is a generally lighthearted satire of human weaknesses looked at through Quozl eyes. It provides an entertaining account of Quozl society, of its customs, mores and sexual activities. Moreover, the main characters, Runs and Chad, are quite engaging individuals.

Then we come to the story of the Quozls' betrayal. Without giving everything away, knowledge of their secret existence is sold for money, to get rich and have plenty of possessions.

What is Foster's attitude towards this? It is the American way, he says, and anyway everything works out all right in the end. "Everything's a product to be sold" is the ethos that the book ends up espousing. It celebrates a free market in friendship, trust, integrity, honesty, commitment. They all have their price and if the price is right, what's the problem? Indeed the selling of the Quozl turns out to be the saving of them.

Reading this book is like biting into a not unpleasant apple only to find that it is rotten at the core. One can't help feeling that this dollar morality is the reason why an accomplished writer like Foster has never actually written a really good book.

This brings me to Simon Green's **The God Killer**, a detective story set in the magical city of Haven. When the citizenry get out of hand in Haven, you send for the SWAT (Special Wizardry and Tactics) squad. Not all the jokes are as bad as this though. The crime that confronts Hawk and Fisher in this volume is that someone is murdering the city's Gods. A slight but entertaining read.

John Newsinger

The Luck in the Head
M John Harrison & Ian Miller
Gollancz, 1991, £8.99pb

I've been a comics fan, in a low key kind of way, since I was about ten. My taste always has run pretty much to the mainstream though; I've never had much interest in experimental comics. Thus, when I heard that various mainstream book publishers were planning graphic novel lines, I held out no great hope that they would be to my taste.

The Luck in the Head pretty much matches my expectation. It is an adaptation by M John Harrison of his own short story by the same name. As such, I presume it is faithful to its source, or at least that any changes are ones Harrison intended. I don't know because I haven't read the story.

I find myself mostly bewildered as to why he bothered. An awful lot of the story is told in prose. The pictures illustrate the story, rather than move the narrative along. They are deliberately ugly and fractured; as such, they match the tone of the piece, but I found them so repellant that I ended up just turning the pages as quickly as possible so as to avoid them.

The story itself is simple enough. It is set in Uroconium, and is about Crome's dreams and how they force him to attempt the murder of the ruler of the city. Maybe it worked better as a prose story, but in this telling I could not find a single character that engaged my sympathy or interest; nor did the actual plot arouse my curiosity.

Usually, I am fascinated by folk-lore, legend and mythology. Here they form the core of the book, and they do have a ring of authenticity. Unfortunately they also seemed posturing and pretentious. I have no doubt that there is some kind of logic here, some key that would be revealed with diligent study of the book. That would require me to read it again, however, and it just didn't make me want to expend the effort required.

Liz Holliday

Witches Abroad
Terry Pratchett
Gollancz, 1991, 252pp, £13.99

Authors face two dangers when they reach double figures in the number of books published. The first is that they are beginning to write to a formula; the second is that some critics/reviewers will start to denounce the books because they perceive the author to be too successful. Terry Pratchett has an undeniable style and formula that has been very successful and I see little reason why he should try and change.

Those readers who are dedicated fans of Terry Pratchett only need the title so they can rush off to get hold of it, either by buying it or borrowing it and will then be interested in placing it as the "best", "next to best" or whatever. Those who have read others of Terry's books know what to expect and so the next paragraphs are really only for those who haven't yet read any of his books - and those lucky people have yet to find out that the plot is the last thing you read a Discworld novel for!

We join the denizens of the Discworld just as Fairy Godmother Desiderat Hollow is about to die. She bequeaths her wand (and thus the Fairy Godmothership) to a young, inexpericenced witch called Magrat Garlick along with a quest and strict instructions to keep two other witches - Nanny Ogg and Granny Weatherwax away from the task. It is not surprising therefore to find the three witches plus one cat on their broomsticks and venturing into foreign parts. Quite a large amount of the book is then taken up with their travels and expeditions - usually to the consternation of the locals and amusement of the reader.

The journey finishes with their reaching Genua and getting down to the task of stopping a princess marrying a prince. The action becomes hectic and yet, paradoxically, the pace of the book seems to slow as plots, counterplots and subplots intermingle and the good/bad Fairy Godmother does battle with the bad/good one. Yes, it's complicated and designed to turn everything topsy turvy from what one would have expected from any other author.

Not, in my opinion, the best Discworld novel but an amusing tale to while away an hour or so.

Keith Freeman

The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction
Phil Hardy (Ed)
Aurum, 1991, 478pp, £30

In 1968 Stanley Kubrick's film of **2001, A Space Odyssey** achieved for SF in the movies what SF on the page is still struggling towards: critical respectability and commercial success. Henceforth science fiction would not be restricted to B-pictures where, with occasional honourable exceptions, it had previously been stuck. Now, with a succession of big films like **Star Wars**, **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**, **Superman** and **ET**, SF was going to be blockbuster material and still win plaudits from the critics.

The reason is easy to see. The vision of science fiction translates easily to the screen. Too often this has been interpreted as "special effects", but when film makers look beyond the glitz the real effect can be powerful and haunting. It would be tempting but misleading to say that SF has found its true medium in the movies, but it would be equally wrong to say that SF film has not made a major contribution to the genre.

That contribution is celebrated in this large book. It is not a place to turn if you are looking for an in-depth analysis of SF on screen - the entry on **2001**, one of the longest in the book, is little more than 600 words. But if short the entries are pithy and pertinent.

There is an occasional tendency to score easy points, but on the whole a selection of contributors including Kim Newman and Denis Gifford provide a precise overview of the genre on film.

The book lists films chronologically, from the Lumiere Brothers' **Charcuterie Mechanique** of 1895 (not only the earliest but, at 1 minute, one of the shortest films in the book) to **Total Recall** in 1990. There are over 1,400 films listed in all from all over the world, which must make it one of the most comprehensive surveys of the field available - though the occasional omissions can be extraordinary; how can any reference book on SF in the movies miss out **King Kong**? I can find little to quarrel with in the assessments of the films I know; I have a greater affection for **Charly** than is displayed here, for instance, but that is a matter of personal taste. But I do protest that nothing has been done to correct or update earlier entries in this new edition. When you read in a book published in 1991 that a film of **2010** has been announced for release in 1984/5 you do wonder whether the majority of the book has been proof-read.

Paul Kincaid

The Fetch
Robert Holdstock
Orbit, 1991, 376pp, £13.95

In a comment of David Pringle's in a recent **Interzone** "Wessex School of SF" controversy he placed Robert Holdstock firmly within that school. Granted the existence of such a school, it surely must imply the shaping of plots and fantasies out of the soils, myths, historic lore etc of counties lying in a kind of Severn-Thames-Channel embrace (Alfred the Great's greater Wessex). This is Holdstock territory, physically and of the imagination. In the "Bone Forest" fictions his stamping (shamanising!) Ground was a Herefordshire oak wood. Now he shifts to the chalky channel edge of the North Downs. The Wealden Forest, along with its geological past, is also part of the environment (and there are "fetches" from Hadrian's Wall and from a Scottish peat bog) but the focal point of action is no time-enfolding wood, but a chalk quarry, where the salt-tang of the Cretaceous lagoons is continually intrusive.

"Fetch" as just used signifies a reaching into the "dark backward and abysm of time" to bring

back, usually, an artefact. Other relevant definitions given are "an apparition of a living person" and (in Kentish dialect) "a fetish". The "fetching" talent resides in Michael, pre-pubertal, illegally-adopted son of an archaeological photographer and a doll artist. His "fetches" develop from chaotic babyhood smotherings of soil to sought-for jewels and icons, snatched from the very deeds and rituals of bygone cultures. These are said to be a father whose greed has displaced love, but whose love Michael hopes to win by bringing "pretties", the nature of which could be the Grail. The base from which Michael and/or his elemental "twin" Chalk Boy, emerge into past situations is the imagined, but materially marked-out "castle" he constructs in the quarry. The nature of Chalk Boy, mediator of Michael's time-forays and "fetches", is only made clear by Susan, a "psychic archaeologist", at the strong climax of a singular and disturbing Grail quest.

As always, Holdstock's ambiguities intrigue. Saurians of the ancient Wealden Sea invade the shores of Limbo which Michael/Chalk Boy cannot avoid crossing. The monsters are created "neuronically" out of a child's book of geology, just as a Romano-British apportation seemingly stems from the telling of a **Pack of Pook's Hill** story. Yet this is not wholly so. Susan, probing Michael's mind, finds she has to distinguish between "the memory plane where his dream structures are stored" and "the actual psychic event associated with each apportation". The apportations are real and physical; the primal Limbo may be accessed hyperphysically, but its life and dangers are tangible, material. While in **Lavoudyn** a literal/symbolic fence separates mythage-haunted Ryhope Wood from "real-world" Shadoxhurst, here there is a rather closer interlocking of everyday and occult, sometimes with terrifying effect. Revelation of the nature of the holistic, "neuromythogenetic" (a Holdstock word) ambience within which Michael, the Fisher King, and Chalk Boy exist and operate belongs to the novel's last pages. Don't fail to read them and what precedes them. Beyond fantasy and horror, **The Fetch** is a bold excursion into those Jungian regions of "psychoid reality" where consciousness in its various modes makes junction with the psychically encoded past.

K V Bailey

Garden of Rama
Arthur C Clarke & Gentry Lee
Gollancz, 1991, 398pp, £14.99

In 1973 one of the classic works of alien contact in science fiction was published. Arthur C Clarke's **Rendezvous with Rama** works so well because the aliens themselves are never present. There are tantalising clues, but by the very nature of things we can never understand the aliens and they remain mysterious. This concept, that what is truly alien can never be fully comprehended in human terms, was startlingly original. Hitherto any creature, no matter how strange in outward appearance, had always been readily understood by the hero. It was so strong an idea that Frederik Pohl re-used it a few years later in one of his best novels **Gateway**. But Pohl could not resist returning to his creation, and the more he revealed about the Heechee as the series went on the more the power of the original was diminished. Unfortunately Arthur C Clarke, aided and abetted by Gentry Lee, is now following the same route.

There are aliens galore in the third book in this series, and though the actual "Ramans" remain off-stage throughout, the sense that what is alien to unknowable has long since been lossed out of the window. A great pity, since without that dramatic impetus this series has become just another standard SF adventure.

The latest plodding step in the ongoing saga falls into two distinct parts. The first picks up where **Rama II** left off, with three humans trapped aboard the Raman cylinder as it heads away from Earth. Actually, it begins with one of the three, Nicole, giving birth, something she seems to do quite frequently during the next thirteen years of their interstellar travel. Nicole is the sort of heroine who feed it hard to stomach in a Mills and Boon romance. She, is of course, beautiful, she is of African descent so this novel is racially right-on, she is a former Olympic champion, her first child was fathered by a future king of England, and she is inevitably (because after all this is a novel by Arthur C Clarke) brilliant when it comes to science and technology. Everyone of worth in Clarke's universe is skilled in one science or another, the nearest this book comes to a tragic figure is noe of Nicole's daughters who sacrifices her brilliance for a life of pleasure.

Rama takes our growing family to an alien way-station where we get some routine gosh-wow effects. This other-worldly place is made out to be an object of wonder not because of anything strange or incomprehensible about it, but simply because of its size. Here an awful lot of mystique is shed from the aliens. They are that least mysterious of all SF cliches: watchers, observers, compilers of information. After the standard bits of alien-encounter Nicole and most of her family are dispatched back to the solar system to pick up more Earthlings for more detailed observations.

This is where we enter the second part of the book, and where it becomes really groan-worthy. Spaceship Earth is made literal with a colony established in an enclave on Rama called, to ram the point home, New Eden. Here, in extraordinarily short order, we get pollution, AIDS, prejudice, lynch mobs, xenophobia, crime lords and militarism. This is a child's guide to the evils of humanity, painfully facile stuff which pretends to be deep even while It's glancing off the surface.

The two halves do not make one whole story, not that you'd wish any novel to be composed entirely of what is in either part. The whole is littered with cliches and I lost count of the borrowings from Clarke's other work. And at the end one is left with an overwhelming sadness that such an original SF invention has been thrown away so negligently.

Paul Kincaid

Flying Dutch
Tom Holt
Orbit, 1991, 252pp, £12.95

This book comes back to me several months later, perhaps unsurprising given its central character for somc reason shortened into his mere nationality. Our Dutchman, see, is condemned to sail the world's seas - and not just those polluted by acid rain and radioactivity, and yes there are some left, like the Andaman Sea, though for how much longer one asks - by dint of the niff he exudes as trade-off for his immortality. Immortality can be bad for morale, as witness the crew taking fruitless nosedives off the crow's nest (source of the mysterious thud... Thud... Thud repeatedly heard from the Dutchman's ship). Vanderdecker (the Dutchman) is the owner of an insurance policy which has been gathering interest since the 16th century (imminent collapse of all financial institutions if discovered). His main concern, though, is finding the equally immortal alchemist who gave him the elixir in the first place, in the hope that there is a cure.

Flying Dutch, like **Who's Afraid of Beowulf**, mixes it with the conscious use of myth, which has to be fun or else run the risk of complete po-facedness, as the author attempts to face down everything that's been done to the legend in the intervening centuries. How else to rerun this particular story after It's been hauled over by Wagner? Fortunately, this is inventive enough to make the grade.

Chris Amies

The Angel of Pain
Brian Stableford
Simon & Schuster, 1991, 400pp, £14.99

This is the second volume of a trilogy, after **The Werewolves of London**, and before **The Carnival of Destruction**. It is less a continuation of **Werewolves** than a commentary on the first volume, although the events described begin in 1893, twenty-one years after **Werewolves** ends. David Lydyard, subsumed into the will of creatures who may be gods, or angels, or demons, spends much of the time of the novel in opium-analogue sleep undergoing the ravaging embrace of the Angel of Pain. Pain is the gods' communication with mortals; pain the medium and the message. Although he sees the Angel of Pain as illusory, he is drawn into its being and carried by it through an already dying Hell. Mortals are beginning to break their chains; the era of gods is past, so the chthonic spirits break their ancient covenant of minimal interference and embark upon their own crusade to ensnare the souls of the living. The key may - or may not - be read in the **True History**, written by the undying Adam Clay. Like most of the icons the characters find themselves searching for, this fades away into fiction once discovered; discredited, like the gods themselves, and discarded for a goal still further away.

The Angel of Pain does not read like a novel in the usual sense. Gone is the linearity of its precursor and of **The Empire of Fear**; the narrative surface curves in on itself, like space, and is in parts broken with the presentation of Jason Sterling's treatise on the nature of pain. The werewolves have departed; reports of their attacking one character or another are dismissed as hearsay. In this stasis, of the Spider's web or in the claws of Machalalel - the ur-creator - 's creatures, they can only await the outcome of the battle which will disgorge them, presumably, into the third volume. This does not make the novel easier, or even amenable, to read. Brian Stableford has opened the floodgates of his considerable baroque and philosophical imagination and gone for the mistreathed flicker at the edge of consciousness.

Chris Amies

We Can Remember It For You Wholesale
Philip K Dick
Grafton, 1991, 495pp, £5.99pb

Divine Invasions - A Life of Philip K Dick
Laurence Sutin
Paladin, 1991, 352pp, £8.99pb

For something like eight years in the nineteen-fifties Philip K Dick and his wife, Kleo, were so poor that they ate horsemeat sold in a petshop. During the day he read classic literature in German and Latin in the original and he wrote through the night, listening to classical music, especially Wagner, all the time. He had been married once before and he was married another three times before he died. If you've read his books - the SF, let alone the mainstream novels published posthumously - you already know a lot about Dick's life; what he wrote was largely autobiographical, even the SF by which he made his name, and if the SF was original so was his life, though not many would wish to repeat it.

Dick is one of those writers whose life is recreated every so often (Wells is another). When his weird novels were published in the sixties they fitted in well with the drug scene, but I never got the impression that Dick himself was an acid-head, instead it seemed that Dick

understood those things because he had a comparable but different world-view; then came his religious books like **Timothy Archer** and **Valis**, suggesting a deeper seriousness; finally, came the long unpublished realistic works which indicated a continuity with Dreiser and Steinbeck. Dying has helped him enter superstardom, along with films, and re-publication.

When it came out in hardback, Volume 5 of the **Collected Stories** was called 'The Little Black Box', but it was 'We can Remember It For You Wholesale' that was turned into **Total Recall**: Dick wrote very few short stories after 1968, and those he did write are not very good, or even Dickian, but the first three-fifths of this collection are classic.

Given that gap in his work it may be surprising that it was not until the spring of 974 that Dick had the experience that he called 2-3-74. Dick thought he met God (a sort of heretical Christian God) and spent almost all the rest of his life trying to understand the experience; almost all his last books are actually drawn from his "Exegesis", a collection of philosophical questionings about good, evil, existence etc in all of which Dick seemed to think he had a central role to play. Other explanations of his experience are that he had a stroke, or that his longtime abuse of prescription and non-prescription drugs finally caught up with him (something I'd never appreciated before). As Dick had a history of mental problems from childhood, as well, I would leave God out of it, unlike Lawrence Sutin who quotes the "Exegesis" wholesale.

Divine Invasions gives us a new Dick, in which all his work was a transmigration of his religious suffering (the cover photograph shows him looking Christ-like, though publishers' advances alone meant he suffered), and his realism is played down. I still think this world is more important than another uncertain speculative one, but Sutin will tell you how Philip K Dick felt about it.

Leslie J Hurst

Mortal Mask
Stephen Marley
Legend, 1991, 404pp, £8.99

The ideal reviewer is perhaps a dispassionate animal with no strong personal tastes or preferences, able to look at any piece of prose placed before him or her without undue prejudice. Fortunately, none of us can ever hope to reach this state of perfection; in this case I had decided that I wasn't going to like **Mortal Mask** long before I opened it. The blurb on the book's cover is bad enough, but from a single A4 sheet inside the review copy we learn that Marley is proud to list his interests as "Spending nights in haunted houses, erotic sex, boxer dogs, and all animals except sewer rats and big, hairy spiders!". We also learn that Marley was expelled from "a despotic Catholic boys school at the age of 15 for kissing girls and perhaps going even further during school lunchtimes." And this sort of material is released on purpose, presumably in order to encourage sales? I can only conclude that the intended market is one consistingentirely of pre-pubescent adolescents.

But this is not supposed to be a review of the blurb. **Mortal Mask** is set in China in the second century AD, and primarily concerns Chia, or "Chia Black Dragon - powerful, sexy, lonely. A goddess who walks amongst mortals." Before the opening of this book, Chia killed her brother Nyak, another quasi-immortal, but now Nyak's spirit has returned seeking revenge, and resurrection.

In fact, the book isn't quite as bad as I'd been led to expect. We first meet Chia on page 58, and personally I'd have dropped the first 57 pages; these are largely introduction, and any essential material could have been included later on. Chia is the only real character in the book, and it is only after we have met her that the story is injected with a little life. We learn that Chia has had a bad press; for instance, while It's true she was a vampire, she never drained her victims dry, but always left them enough blood to live on. How kind.

Mortal Mask isn't the best book I've read this year, but it isn't the worst either. The cover blurb concludes by assuring the potential reader that the book "marks the emergence of a powerful new British talent." Well, not quite. But there is potential here, and the ending does leave room for a sequel, or two...

Michael Pont

Jago
Kim Newman
Simon & Schuster, 1991, 537pp, £14.99

Jago is one of those big, fat books with a cast of (literally) thousands. Before the story is over, a lot of the characters will be dead. (Of course, some were dead to begin with - like Badmouth Ben, a hideously deformed biker whose flesh comes off at the touch and who smells of burnt, rotting meat, yet still manages to find a girlfriend!)

There's something for everyone in this book: there's sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock and roll, sex in couples, sex in groups, sex between a farmer and his field. There's seances and time travel, cannibalism and government agents with psychokinetic powers. There's more sex. There's violence. There's a plucky little kid named Jeremy. There's a werewolf. There's punks, goths, hippies, ritual murder, and some of the most disgusting jokes ever told. And to top it all off, there's the end of the world.

It all starts in the 1880s, when a village minister announces that the world is ending and gathers his congregation on the top of a hill. They light a bonfire on which they burn all their soon-to-be-unneeded possessions, including their clothes. It degenerates into an orgy, and when the world is still there the next morning, the minister throws himself onto the fire. A hundred years later, a charismatic minister and his followers move into the same tiny village, establishing a commune at the old manor house.

History repeats itself, and once again, it is time for the world to end. But unlike his predecessor a century earlier, this minister, the Reverend William Anthony Jago, has the power to make it happen. And he's not afraid to use it.

The commune hosts a massive annual rock festival, and that's when the fun begins. The sun turns black, the moon turns red, and a local landowner turns into a malevolent tree. Homicidal demons ride the backs of giant locusts, monsters rise from beneath the earth, the skies fill up with an assortment of flying beasties, and everybody goes crazy, except for three people: two undercover government agents, and a writer with a toothache. It's up to this indomitable trio to save the world, but can they do it?

Read the book and have a great time finding out.

Molly Brown

Particles

Short Reviews by Chris Amies

Darkness Audible - Graham Andrews [Excalibur, 1991, 213pp, £7.95 pb]. "Are the 'voices' that influence the writings of Howard Saxon conjured up by his Belfast-haunted imagination or do they carry messages from some place beyond the Earth itself?"

Barrow - John Deakins [Pan, 1991, 336pp, £4.99 pb]. "The Old Man dwells in Barrow on the Plains of Elsewhen. An immortal mage who alters destiny at will..."

A Bad Day For Ali Baba - Craig Shaw Gardner [Headline, 1991, 280pp, £14.95]. Second in the **Arabian Nights** trilogy, after **The Other Sinbad**.

The Boy from the Burren - Sheila Gilluly [Headline, 1991, 343pp, £4.99]. "The First Book of the Painter."

Wulf - Steve Harris [Headline, 1991, 595pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Martin Brice in **V163**. A kind of West Country Western with BSE, AK-47s, and the now-obligatory teenage central character. Not 'arf bad.

Farnham's Freehold - Robert A Heinlein [Orbit, 1991, 299pp, £4.50]. Middle-period (1964) Heinlein at his most controversial.

The Silver Branch - Patricia Kennealy [Grafton, 1991, 555pp, £4.99pb]. "Ancient past and unknown future meet in the epic tales of **The Keltiad**". Fantasy as an attempt to rewrite American history into the canon of Celtic myth; in which the colonisation of America is part of the natural progression of the Celtic peoples westward, and the migration into space a progression of that?

Cold Fire - Dean R Koontz [Headline, 1991, 506pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Alex Stewart in **V160**.

The Door Into December - Dean R Koontz [Headline, 1991, 312pp, £14.95]. Another Koontz reprint, this one originally as by Leigh Nichols in 1985.

Sorcery In Shad - Brian Lumley [Headline, 1991, 246pp, £4.50 pb]. Tarra Khash the unpronounceable investigates the dark arts of fish.

Wulfsyarn - Phillip Mann [Gollancz, 1991, 287pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Maureen Speller in **V161**. The only survivor of a spacewreck tells his story to Wulf the autoscribe, and in his turn Wulf tells his own story. Subtitled 'a mosaic', this is a novel about communication and understanding between different forms of intelligence.

The Ghost Now Standing On Platform One - Richard Peyton (ed.) [Futura, 1991, 382pp, £4.99 pb]. Reviewed by Maureen Porter in V158. A collection of excellent ghost stories on railway themes.

Homegoing - Frederik Pohl [Gollancz, 1991, 279pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Valerie Housden in **V159**. There was once a Hakh'li named John William Washington... but why are the Hakh'li so keen to be humankind's benefactors?

The Face of the Waters - Robert Silverberg [Grafton, 1991, 348pp, £8.99 pb]. Reviewed by LJ Hurst in **V162**. A group of humans on an ocean planet go in search of a city under the sea.

The Wall Around Eden - Joan Slonczewski [Women's Press, 1991, 288ppp, £6.95 pb]. Reviewed by Nik Morton in **V156**. At the outbreak of nuclear war, the inhabitants of a small town find themselves prisoners of an alien forcefield.

The Mirrorwell Express - Derek Taylor [Droylata, 1991, 63pp, no price]. Tabloids battle in space? **Red Dwarf** with Beatles lyrics? Something of that

Index

Continued from page 15

The paintings can be hailed as celebrations of female sexuality or dismissed as blatant pornography, and usually the determining factor is the gender of the artist. Men painting nudes are pornographers, but women are enlightened. I wonder if Catie thought **The Handmaid's Tale** by Margaret Attwood was pornographic. If the humiliation of women was the issue then it surely qualified. But of course nobody would imagine Attwood approved of women's humiliation and abuse!

I am not in favour of any form of censorship, other than for the protection of minors. The problem is who decides what is offensive and what is not. Where does censorship stop and the curtailment of our freedom to experience different ideas begin? The Savoy Books affair demonstrates this, as did the case of Salman Rushdie. I think we should let publishers print what they will and use discretion to avoid what offends us, though on occasion it can do you good to be offended if you have the sense to ask why you felt that way.

Yes, I am aware that some people may be badly affected by what they read, go out and shoot their neighbours or stay at home and beat their wives. If that's the price we must pay for freedom of expression then so be it. These people are a minority and, while not wishing to provoke them, I am not agreeable to society being organised solely for their benefit.

Freedom is precious and easily lost. We may start by banning things which are almost universally offensive, such as accounts of paedophilia, necrophilia etc, but I doubt if it would end there. After all, who's to say that it wouldn't be for our own good if we all believed in God, Heaven and Hell, Victorian values etc. Already in America Christian fundamentalists have burnt books by the likes of Vonnegut and King. Let's not pretend that the warts in human nature don't exist. Let's have them out in the open for all to see and discuss and hopefully understand.

From Tom A Jones

In **Vector 164** Catie asked to be put straight; so be it.

First let me say that I am a friend of Dave Wingrove, we've known each other since our days on the **BSFA** committee. My objectivity is thus in question and for that reason I've stayed out of the **Chung Kuo** argument until now. I could just about restrain myself from criticising the review of the first book (which was actually a review of the publicity material which accompanied it and thus meaningless to the majority of people who like me would never see it) but I can't let Catie's review go.

Catie is obviously entitled to her opinion of the book but any book reviewed that harshly is entitled to a second opinion. Her criticism of style is clearly subjective and I find most SF stylistically pretty dull, **Chung Kuo** moves along. Certainly it uses techniques from the cinema, from mainstream political thrillers and from journalism but what's wrong with that? (And if she saw Gilbert and Sullivan in the "Chinesery" she obviously saw different versions of the opera to me.) The point of the book is that the society is rotten and It's telling us that any autocratic bureaucracy goes that way, not original but worth reminding ourselves about. You say everyone in the book is evil; not so. I think few people in the book see themselves as evil, they are doing what they think is right. Certainly some of them are monsters but that's the way the world is, you only have to read your newspapers.

Yes the book has violence in it and yes some of it is pretty strong although much of it is off stage. But I could find little which was "gratuitous" in that the violence was integral to the plot. As for sex I cannot remember any explicit sexual acts, and certainly no "salacious" descriptions of them. Again off stage there are acts of perversion (well I think they're perverted) which are to make concrete the perverted nature of the society. Could Dave have done this some other way? Maybe, but could he have done it as powerfully some other way? Maybe not.

You are right, women are treated as things and possessions and seen only through their relationships with men. This is meant to be a world based on China and that's the way it has been in China for centuries and probably still is now. Face it, It's the way it is in most of the world, not just something I like or support, but if **Chung Kuo** is to be any sort of reflection of China, that's the way it has to be.

Let me leave the review and turn to protocol. Catie is not just a reviewer, she is the editor of **Vector** which is not her fanzine but the magazine of the **BSFA**. If she intended to attack the book in her editorial then she should have asked someone else to review it for the review column; that would have been the fair thing to do. It is **Vector**'s job to present a balanced picture, not to be a reflection of the editor's view of the world.

The general views she expounds in the editorial give me grave concern. I accept there is censorship and I even feel we need censorship - for example I don't believe anyone has the right to publish material which deliberately exhorts people to hurt others but censorship must be used with care and on the whole It's probably safer not to bother. As for this suggestion that people be allowed to sue authors if they think the book has done them harm that could only have come from the USA. I'm afraid you couldn't convince me that someone did something just because of a book. A book (film, play, TV) may be the final trigger but the predilection has to be there and if a book could trigger it then probably anything could.

No doubt many people disagree with me and that's the nub of the matter, this is all subjective. There's no objective guide to what's a good book, or what's pornographic, so we're into consensus or majority view and thank goodness the current view would ensure that the **Oz** trial would be very unlikely to happen now.

From Paul Kincaid

I was, like many other members of the BSFA, recently the recipient of a long letter from David Wingrove in response to two contributions from Catie Cary in **Vector 164**. I find this disturbing on many points. In the first place I don't know where or how Mr Wingrove obtained a **BSFA** membership and address list. Although there is nothing particularly secret about this information I know that the **BSFA** has been very careful with material, as a whole, available to anybody and I am concerned that there might be data protection act implications alongside the gross invasion of my privacy by Mr Wingrove to which I object very strenuously. Secondly, I find it insulting to an organisation of which I am a member and a magazine with which I was, for a time, editorially involved to assume no right of reply. Furthermore, my own involvement with the **BSFA** began as a reviewer for **Vector** under Mr Wingrove's editorship, in the decade or more since then I have never known any author respond so extravagantly and at such length to what is generally reckoned to be the fair comment of a reviewer. Certainly I have attacked works far more vehemently than Ms Cary attacked **The White Mountain** and the worst response I have received from any author has been a grudging acknowledgement that we see things differently.

As to the content of Mr Wingrove's letter: this is a dispute in which I would not normally wish to have any involvement, but since he has seen fit to drag me into it by sending me his letter, then this must also count as fair comment. I should point out that I am writing this letter to **Vector**, though in acknowledgement of Mr Wingrove's personal approach to me I shall do him the courtesy of sending a copy of this letter to him.

Let's get one petty little point out of the way: anyone who reads, for example, **Justine** by the Marquis de Sade will find long, turgid, egregious passages devoted to the author's philosophy. Without a copy of the book to hand to check up on this I would estimate that the philosophy takes up about as much space as the sex. Quite frankly, if we are going to say that books can cause offence, their size doesn't matter.

On to the substance of the letter, Mr Wingrove is at considerable pains to say that the sexual scenes - which he chooses to spell out again in his letter - must be understood in their context. This social, political and moral context he feels he must describe at some length. However, one of the points being made in the review was that this context did not come across to the reader. The impression I get from reading the review (and I must emphasise here that we are talking not about a 439 page novel but a 400 word review) is that Mr Wingrove expends many words on trying to present his society but that the only things to emerge clearly from the mire of words are the scenes of sex and violence. Now, if that is Ms Cary's honest opinion - and despite the crudity of some of Mr Wingrove's attack he does not actually accuse her of lying - then this must count not only as fair comment but as a spotless example of the reviewer's craft. And if that is Ms Cary's honest impression of the book, then perhaps the fault lies with the author, not the reviewer.

Mr Wingrove ends this part of his letter by accusing Ms Cary of "lazy, ill-informed criticism", an accusation for which he offers no evidence whatsoever beyond the fact that her interpretation of the book differs markedly from his own. He then goes on to offer another gratuitous insult by teaching her that a reviewer's job is to "**read the book properly** (his emphasis). Well, let's look at what a reviewer is really supposed to do. 1) Read the book thoroughly. By Mr Wingrove's own admission Ms Cary has referred to events which come close to the end of the book, which (suggests) that she was indeed thorough in her reading. 2)Think seriously about the book. Well Ms Cary clearly did think seriously about it since it aroused uncomfortable questions about pornography and censorship which she felt she had to return to in an editorial. 3) Form an honest judgement of the book and 4) express that judgement in the limited number of words available in such a way that readers will be able to gain a clear impression of the reviewer's admittedly subjective opinion. I, for one, as a reader, gained a very clear impression of Ms Cary's opinion of **The White Mountain**, and of her reasons for forming that judgement, so I would consider that she succeeded in this.

However, I must question whether Mr Wingrove is not being a little ingenuous when he claims that a reviewer's job is to read the book properly. This suggests to me that the reviewer's concern is with the text alone, a view I happen to share, and that outside matters and *ad hominem* arguments have no place in the reviewer's judgement. Yet if this is so why did Mr Wingrove feel called upon to write extensively about such matters as his brush with the King's Cross fire and his household and family? This material was included with review copies of the first volume of **Chung Kuo**. In all my years as a critic I have never seen even a fifth as much publicity material accompanying one book before and it was clearly there for the purpose of providing an extraneous influence upon the judgement of the reviewer. Information about his private life, which I did not wish to know, is also included in this letter, which I did not ask to receive. Why? By his own arguments he would have us believe that material of this sort is totally irrelevant to the matter at hand.

By my estimate Mr Wingrove has spent over 3,000 words in response to something less than 600 words by Catie Cary, yet I can't help feeling that he is writing about how he wants other people to see his book not about the way it actually is. His letter is vindictive and insulting,but it does no damage to Ms Cary or her review and shows only that Mr Wingrove does not have enough faith in his own creation to let it stand up for itself.

Ratrace to Rats

James Herbert

Interviewed by Martin R Webb

To talk with James Herbert, one could hardly picture him as the creator of some of the most horrific stories to be published over the last sixteen years. James (or Jim, as he prefers), now lives on the outskirts of Brighton, with his wife, Eileen, and three daughters, Kerry, Emma and Casey. With estimated sales of his books around 25 million, he is one of, if not *the* most successful British author of fiction.

Prior to publishing his first best-seller, **The Rats**, in 1974, he was art director in a London advertising agency. Was the transition easy for him?

"Yes. It was like, out of one ratrace and into another".

When asked why he had not written any more humorous stories like **Fluke**, his 1977 best-seller, he commented:

"I know what you mean, but there is humour in a lot of my books. **The Magic Cottage** has humour in it; so does **Haunted**. **Creed**, my new book, is intended to be humorous as well as a horror story".

Like most people, he starts work in the morning (usually around ten), takes a lunch hour and then returns to his study until six-thirty or seven. He prefers to write in longhand, while his wife types his manuscripts. But why, when he is so financially secure, does he stick to such a rigid regime?

"It's a job, and I feel I have to work to justify my existence. I used to say, I work to feed my kids; but now they've grown, I work to clothe them."

Although he designed the original cover for **Fluke**, it wasn't until **The Jonah**, his sixth book, that Jim began to design all of his own covers as part of the deal with his publishers, Hodder & Stoughton.

As inspiration and influence, he names HG Wells, Richard Matheson and William Goldman. "... I don't read a lot of horror, because I don't want to be influenced that way. But, I do enjoy Steve King's work."

Like Stephen King, Jim plays guitar "... but it's only a hobby. If you heard my playing you'd understand why."

His reply to the question of his following Stephen King, and playing cameo roles in films of his books, was an emphatic "no".

Our talk returned to **Fluke**, which is about a lonely dog trying to discover a past life he is convinced he had, as a man.

"I personally saw it as a cartoon with, maybe, a voice over by Michael Caine as Fluke. But I don't think that's how it will end up. Carlo Carlei is producing the film," he told me. "It's being made in America, and you can be sure there are some changes incorporated into the script."

Was he disappointed in the film treatments of his earlier work?

"Yes. With **The Survivor**, the two hour film was cut to ninety minutes and that spoiled the story for me. David Kirschner (producer of **An American Tale** and **Child's Play**) will be producing **The Magic Cottage** in the States, and again, there have been some changes made in the story."

He is happier with the screenplays being filmed in the UK: **Shrine**, which is to be produced by Robert Watts and directed by Ian Sharpe of Everyman Films; and **Haunted**, of which James' own screenplay was dropped by the BBC two years ago. As yet no actors have been signed up for the film.

I asked him if there was a conscious effort to change his style of writing, pointing out the difference between earlier works and his latest.

"Not changes, exactly, but new approaches. I've tried to look at the stories from different angles. There are a lot of ways a story can be told. I want to make each book as different from the previous one as possible".

Are there likely to be any sequels to his books? I noticed that, among others, David Ash (**Haunted**) and Joe Creed might well return in a later book.

"It is possible, but it's a very slim possibility."

In conclusion, he promised his next book would be different from anything else he has done before.