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hospitality, Rob Carter for obtaining artwork, Simon for sympathetic
drinking company, all at the One Tun for vigorous criticism and (of course)
Joni for singing so sweetly while I typed all this. Dave W. (12. 2. 78)

THE ANDROID'S DREAMS (3)

Another duplicated issue, you'll note. I could explain, but it isn't the job of this editorial to do that: Tom does that elsewhere. I find this format flexible but frustrating; it satisfies the needs of the Association in that it means we can continue to provide stimulating reading matter whilst on a treacherous financial footing, but it leaves something to be desired from an aesthetic viewpoint. And packaging, unfortunately, seems to mean much more than the internal product these days. A few internal illos this time, too, but I was conscious all the while, when putting together this issue, of a lack of balance. No humorous article (though future issues will see a constant return to the episodic adventures of various writers in the genre, I hope), though that, I feel, is compensated for by a slightly wider casting of the critical net. I make no excuses for including the article/review on Hesse, nor, at the other extreme, for returning to the theme of the spaceship in SF. Both have their place in a genre whose only constant is its lack of a definable and tangible aetiology. Which is a handy point at which to begin this editorial.

Have you ever stopped to consider why we have this separate, quite distinctive genre called Science Fiction? Oh, you'll say, I know the history of Science Fiction, so why bother to regurgitate that? That isn't what I mean. I'm back to aetiology, the philosophy of causes. What caused Science Fiction? What is it that makes us separate our faculty to extrapolate from our more mundane but no less important grasp of immediate reality? Who amongst us lives entirely in either state (beyond those locked away for their asserted lack of reason)? So why do we have this oh-so-neat categorisation and division? Wells could write novels that were accepted as romances, as could Verne. In fact, until 1926 (that infamous year) there was no consciousness of this genre, and even after that time there were many who worked in the old tradition (Stapledon is a prime example) and without too great a consciousness of pulp scientific adventure. Is it a basic need to simplify and reduce in order to understand? Is it simply that we cannot correlate the real with the 'fanciful'? I doubt it very much. The more cynical will say that it is a publisher's label, a packaging facility. That argument has a certain appeal. There are many writers who ignore the label and yet write what is almost pure SF. Others blend the fantastic with the real and are accepted by the literary establishment as visionaries. But that again is a simplification of the situation and, to all effects, a red herring.

What then? I do not want to commit the act of tautism by returning to the arguments of P. M. Westran in the last issue, but when talking of SF, the 'other' genre of fantasy must be taken into account. Fantasy provides the clue to the categorisation, to this 'false' division. Man seems a practical, adaptable animal, and yet, unlike all other animals, he has the faculty of reason. He produces ideological blueprints in his head and even, occasionally, sets them down for posterity. These ideals, according to their degree of practicality, are taken as politics, philosophy or fantasy. Beyond the simple blueprint is the subtler attempt to trace the flaws of the chosen ideology, often by means of a 'story'. A character is placed into the realm of the idea and left to flounder. By his actions we can judge the strengths and weaknesses of the idea. We gauge the practicality of the ideology. Meanwhile, all around us (sat on a tube, in a library, in bed in our own rooms) reality persists. It is a comfortable journey, without personal hazard and yet (as Paul Kincaid points out) there is the vicarious experience. The curious blend of the didactic and the adventurous adds to our total perception of not only the realm of ideas, but also of the strange world immediately impinging upon us.

Indeed, from out of the genre have sprung many important ideas that shed light upon our own internal functions. Specific themes echo specific reactions occurring within us. But that, again, is not enough to justify a separate genre termed Science Fiction. A genre obsessed with change? Again, there are far too many examples beyond the genre of the predilection for 'change' to

warrant sf's exclusive use of that 'excuse'. Again and again people fail to define the beast properly simply because its origins are so uncertain. It echoes needs within us, quite distinctive needs it seems, because it has taken on a quite definite form at core, but what needs? Why cannot these needs be satisfied by the mainstream, by detective fiction, by nurse romances and anarchist textbooks? Why does SF attract the philosopher and the mechanic, the eccentric and the straight-laced? Part of the answer lies in its diversity (its perversity?). It is a marvellously varied microcosm after all.

Occasional glimpses emerge in discussions of the genre and its purpose, but only glimpses, as if seen briefly through a door in a Simak story. And, before I forget, there is always the Toffler theory of Future Shock. That too could account for the emergence of a genre solely dedicated to ideal states, the effect of change, the alien, and extrapolated social trends. But Toffler's assurance rather disconcerts me. The theory looks pretty but it seems far from convincing. Each of us is alien to the world at birth and adapts. I feel Science will never get to the stage where it is daily impinging radical changes upon us. The plateau will be reached, or will be constructed, at the point where we are most comfortable. An echo of that is also in SF which abhors too great a change in its own shape, and fights desperately to avoid its natural evolution. None of which gets us any nearer. We are back to comfort and reassurance, and perhaps there is a reason for the genre. Perhaps the genre has developed from the need of technological man to assure himself that the nightmare ahead is just a fiction. Disaster books (DELUGE is a great example) are an expression of that need. Perhaps the paradoxical truth is that the warnings of the SF writers of the fifties (ecology, the bomb, etc) were really reassurances, as Greg Benford observes in his letter. It is a fascinating thought to consider that SF may well be the means of making science into magic for the common man, whose faith in wands and spells has been shattered.

I'll leave it there and let you all fight amongst yourselves for a while. Meanwhile reality impinges itself here in this room. For those of you who don't know my habits I'll enlighten you somewhat. This is being typed on an Adler Tippa 5 with elite cubic typeface, balanced upon a drawing board which in turn leans upon my bed. The drawers of a small filing 'thing' are crammed with unanswered letters and the contents of the next few VECTORS. The time is approaching eleven and Joni Mitchell is singing 'Harry's House' from the HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNs album. A picture of her hangs on the wall with others. Tomorrow is Valentine's Day and a single biscuit rests on a plate next to an empty cup. Files, books, clothes and records make up the rest of the furniture, barring a small wardrobe. This is a small room in which to sleep, rest and work, but it suffices. Around me the family goes its energetic way. On the walls are a thousand dreams locked in print. At any moment I have the option to lose myself in one of them. Reassurance? Yes, perhaps that explains it all.

Pause for an announcement (even if Malcolm forgot to write): Since his appointment as Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation has now taken effect, Malcolm Edwards has asked me to tell all BSFA members who have written to the BSFA Library over the last few months and not received a reply, to write again if they still want whatever it was they wanted before. The massive pile of mail Malcolm has acquired on taking over the job is going to be placed in a separate file marked 'Ignore' in view of the impossibility of dealing with it all alongside the rest of his chores. Oh, and any BSFA members who want to assist the Foundation have only to write to Malcolm at the North East London Polytechnic, although I'm unsure as yet how we can help out.

Last point: Please, if you have criticisms, write to me, not to Andy - or at least send me a copy of your diatribe. Okay? Dave W. (13. 2. 78)

" BRAHMIN AWAKENING "

- Phil Dick and the metaphysical picaresque.

by David Wingrove

In a recent review in SFR, Phil Dick discussed the nature of his work from the creative viewpoint. (1) With any writer it is always fascinating to discover not only influences but intentions, for the latter, moreso than the former, must be taken into account when evaluating the writer's success in communicating his world-view. Dick's is a complex perspective - one that is often confusing but, throughout the body of his work, cohesive. There is a recurrent vocabulary of Dicksonian imagery - images that hint at Dick's intentions but nevertheless remain elusive.

In the interview Dick talks of the oriental theological concept of the two cycles of Brahmin. In one cycle Brahmin is awake and dancing, and in the other he is asleep and dreaming. Dick interpretes our world as the second cycle. We are part of Brahmin's dream, and when Brahmin wakes we shall slowly dissolve and become nothing. It is this interim stage wherein Dick sets his work - where Brahmin is waking and our 'reality' (Brahmin's dream) is fading. This is Dick's own interpretation of his work - one that has not yet been echoed by any of his critics. Angus Taylor in his booklet, 'Philip K. Dick & The Umbrella Of Light' comes closest to this view, although he approaches Dick by way of existentialism; the idea that 'reality' is a thin crust over the abyss, a crust that Dick's characters are continually falling through.

" Dick's special province has been the estrangement of man from his authentic nature under the reign of modern social organisation, and the struggle to regain his authentic being and establish a viable world-view in the face of new revelations about the world brought about by the radical impingement of the unknown. " (2)

The 'radical impingement of the unknown' is the very core of Dick's work. Reality is questionable, Dick is saying to us. It is a state we can never depend on.

In his short story "Adjustment Team", a piece written in 1954, at the beginning of Dick's writing career, he is already dealing with alterations in the fabric of reality; creating his own images of what lays behind the facade. Here we have a team of men in white coats altering a 'sector' of the world to fulfill an obscure design. Ed Fletcher, the man who is left out of the 'sector' when it is changed, is given a glimpse of the abyss; de-energised matter, grey-ash people and artifacts waiting to be re-sculptured by the adjustment team. His reaction is human:

" The public phone. Ed ran into the phone booth. He dragged the door shut after him. Wildly, he dropped a dime in the slot and dialled. He had to call the police. He held the reciever to his ear, his heart pounding. Warn them. Changes. Somebody tampering with reality. Altering it. He had been right. The white-coated men...their equipment...going through the building.

'Hello!' Ed shouted hoarsely. There was no answer. No hum. Nothing. " (3)

Though Dick undermines the impact of this particular tale by assigning it a trite rationale, it is an early sign of his constant predilection with the 'fabric' throughout his career. His approaches to this question of 'the reality of reality' have been many. Drugs and religious experience are two of the most dominant in Dick's stories, though he has also toyed with the concepts of reversed time, ersatz people, time travel and parallel worlds in this way.

All of Dick's critics have mentioned his overt shunning of realism in his fiction. There is no attempt to create credible extrapolations of our world - Dick chooses his ingredients at random and uses them erratically. In places it can be a serious fault, in others it serves to accentuate his predilections for entropy and the illusion. Theodorus Nitz commercials buzz into your car and lay the foundations of your psychoses; people regurgitate their food into bowls in pristine condition; machines discuss theology and their 'feelings'. These things exist in the worlds Dick constructs:

" ' What would you do, ' Eric asked the robot cabdriver, ' if your wife had turned to stone, your best friend were a toad and you had lost your job? '

' Robots have no wives, ' the driver said. ' They are non-sexual, Robots have no friends, either. They are incapable of emotional relationships. '

' Can robots be fired? '

' Sometimes. ' The robot drew his cab up before Eric's modest six-room bungalow. ' But consider, Robots are frequently melted down and new robots made from the remains. Recall Ibsen's PEER GYNT, the section concerning the Button Moulder. The lines clearly anticipate in symbolic form the trauma of robots to come. '

' Yeah. ' The door opened and Eric got out. ' I guess we all have our problems. '

' Robots have worse problems than anybody. ' (4)

This exchange, irrelevant as it is to the demands of the plot, is a single example of Dick rendering the absurd significant.

A single Dick novel, read in isolation, is an enigma. Images are raised and apparently discarded, unused. Examples of this are many. Frequently Dick's characters lapse into German, spout German poetry. In isolation this seems irrelevant, even annoying. But this single quirk is echoed in many of Dick's novels and is a manifestation of his liking for German philosophy from which many of his ideas originated. The novel which, perhaps, best illustrates this particular predilection is his recent collaboration with Roger Zelazny, DEUS IRAE.

The novel revolves around the idea that after the holocaust all belief in a good God has been shattered by the nature of the catastrophe.

" And now, he thought, we know. The Catharists had come bleakly close, had guessed one piece: that the world lay in the control of an evil Adversary and not the good god. What they had not guessed was contained in Job, that the 'good god' was a god of wrath - was in fact evil. " (5)

Deus Irae, the God of Wrath is, in this changed world, also the God of Life. This is the core of the book - yet around it a curious tapestry

of teutonic influences exists. All of the main characters can speak German, are well acquainted with Goethe and Spengler. Germany is the place from which the ter-weps (terror-weapons) that caused the massive destruction, originated. The cult of SOWers that develops around the Deus Irae is a distinctly teutonic institution. Finally, the Deus Irae himself is Carl Luftenfel, an Aryan Messiah figure. It is all as if Dick is fascinated with the distinctly German concept of racial destiny - a concept perverted in Nazism (and in this case by the Holocaust and its resultant zeitgeist).

Another example is Dick's use of Mars in his novels as a place to which his characters might emigrate. What America was to the poor, unsuccessful of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mars is to the poor and unsuccessful of Dick's late-twentieth century societies. It is a metaphor for 'the last hope'; the rough life of a settler, facing the elements at subsistence level. For Dick's characters it is the last vestige of individual freedom, the glimmer of hope in the midst of despair.

" ' It's this way. ' Duncan found himself mumbling. ' I don't have a head for abstractions; I mean, all this religio-political philosophy - it makes no sense to me. Couldn't I just concentrate on concrete reality? I ought to be baking bricks or turning out shoes. ' I ought to be on Mars, he thought, on the frontier. I'm flunking out here; at thirty-five I'm washed up. " (6)

The effect of reading a single Dick novel in isolation, therefore, is that the reader suffers a confusing overload of half-realised images and concepts. It is this 'overload' that results in some critics writing-off several of Dick's books as 'pot-boilers'. What Bruce Gillespie says of *THE SIMULACRA* is typical of this kind of 'isolationist' reviewing.

" The result of this disintegrative process is something like his 1963 failure, *THE SIMULACRA*. That book includes about ten characters too many, a vast number of disconnected settings and occurrences, and the final 'climax' is only a disappointing anti-climax. " (7)

This single book is about the illusion of government and, far from having too many characters, is blessed with examples of all the Dick character archetypes; the 'actress' who plays Nicole, the matriarchal leader of half the world; her simulacra husband, der Alte (teutonic references again!); the enigmatic Goltz, both ruler and rebel; scheming, hard women and prevaricating men. Here are all the large and small people of Dick's worlds exhibited in one book - interreating with their strengths and weaknesses. We even have the marvellously insane psychokinetic pianist, Richard Kongrosian, whose illnesses prove to be more than psychosomatic:

" ' I'm turning inside out! ' Kongrosian wailed. ' Pretty soon if this keeps up I'm going to have to envelope the entire universe and everything in it, and the only thing that'll be outside me will be my internal organs and then most likely I'll die! ' " (8)

The 'confusing' plethora of detail is in fact a complex mesh of cross-references to others of his novels. The referents are never explicit - in the manner that some authors connect tales by use of common characters and settings (Dick's characters and settings are far too tenuous to begin with in any case) - but implicit in the subject matter. *THE SIMULACRA* deals with the facts of government by non-appointed committee; the illusion

of leadership and the power of multi-national cartels in shaping people's individual destinies. The distinction drawn in the book between Geheimnistrager (those knowing the secrets - those involved directly in perpetrating and perpetuating the illusion) and the Befehlstrager (those upon whom the illusion is perpetrated - and who merely carry out their instructions) is strong. The echoes of Nazism are stark, bare. The power is in the great German manufacturing cartel, Karp und Sohnen Werke. Hermann Goering is brought forward in time for his knowledge of secret service methodology. Nord Amerika is the name of the continent.

To dismiss the novel out of hand as a 'failure', thereby ignoring the links with the major part of Dick's work is a considerable disservice; and in any case the book is highly successful in creating an atmosphere of ill-ease and in hinting at the 'veils behind veils' of reality.

" ' Oh yeah, ' Luke agreed. ' On TV she looks around twenty. But go to the history books... except of course they're banned to everyone except Ges. I mean the real history texts; not the ones they give you for studying for those relpol tests. ' " (9)

" ' Listen', Ian said. ' If Nicole Thibodeaux is ninety years old no psychotherapy is going to help me. '

' You're that much involved with her? A woman you've never seen? That's schizophrenic. Because the fact is you're involved with - ' Al gestured. ' An illusion. Something synthetic, unreal. '

' What's unreal and what's real? To me she's more real than anything else; than you even. Even than myself, my own life. ' " (10)

It is necessary, perhaps, to make the seemingly obvious statement that the work of Phil Dick cannot be understood from the reading of a single novel. His writing is very much a ragged fabric of idea and image that demands participation by the reader - that pieces together only after his central propositions have been restated from numerous vantage points. And however ragged the arguments, it is a genuine philosophy that Dick imparts. As Phil Dick himself says:

" Science Fiction allows a writer to transfer what usually is an internal problem into an external environment. " (11)

In DEUS IRAE he is questioning the nature of the World; whether good could come from absolute evil. In THE SIMULACRA he is examining the manipulation of society by cartels and multi-nationals. In the third novel I wish to use by way of illustration, COUNTER CLOCK WORLD, the theological discussions of DEUS IRAE are merged with the political speculations of THE SIMULACRA to produce a work of metaphysical power. But at the core of each of these books - and whatever the approach - Dick is describing one thing alone. He has, perhaps, best expressed this in a letter of comment made to Bruce Gillespie's SF COMMENTARY:

" Everything is on a small scale. Collapse is enormous; the positive little figure outlined against the universal rubble is, like Tagomi, Runciter, Molinari, gnat-sized in scope, finite in what he can do.. and yet in some sense great. I really do not know why. I simply believe in him, and I love him. He will prevail. There is nothing else. At least, nothing else matters. That we should be concerned about. Because if he is there, lik.. a tiny father-figure, everything is all right. " (12)

The Australian critic, George Turner, has criticised Dick for this obsessional pursuit of the unreal, unaware perhaps that obsession is the essence of all great art, whether presented in classical or kipplised form. Turner's is typical of the arguments ranged against Dick's writings. He criticises the illogical structures that Dick creates as settings for his jousts against the cosmos not because they are illogical, but because they are only 'partially logical'. He makes this argument against COUNTER CLOCK WORLD where Dick is guilty, admittedly, of over-emphasising the effect (often comic) of the reversed flow of time - the Hobart effect.(13) But in so doing, he omits to recognise the metaphysical import of the book (as if he were to say "It's a nice painting but I don't much care for the frame"). The idea content is rather inept (when judged by plot requirements alone) but despite the flaws Dick manages to say something important. One of the people ressurected as time flows backwards is a charismatic religious leader, the Anarch Peak. His seems a simple message of 'merging' - of unity through the dismissal of authority.

" ' He says there's no death; it's an illusion. Time is an illusion. Every instant that comes into being never passes away. Anyhow - he says - it doesn't really even come into being; it was always there. The universe consists of concentric rings of reality; the greater the ring the more it partakes of absolute reality. These concentric rings finally wind up as God. He's the source of the things, and they're more real as they get nearer to him. It's the principle of emanation, I guess. Evil is simply a lesser reality. It's the lack of absolute reality, not the presence of an evil deity. So there's no dualism, no evil, no satan. Evil is an illusion, like decay. ' " (14)

The idea 'gimmickry' is never what matters within any of these books, and any critic who dismisses Dick because the icing is inept when the cake is sound needs to re-evaluate his critical position.

Turner does, however, unearth one partial truth about Dick's work. Its attacks on the 'fabric of reality' are firmly grounded in reality. It could be no other way without becoming purest fantasy. Indeed, I must return to Dick's own commentary on his work and state that whilst he undermines the cosmos and the enormity of 'the Collapse' he firmly believes in basic inter-personal relationships and uses these in his books as islands of sanity amidst the dissolution. 'The positive figure outlined against the universal rubble' is achingly real. It is with him that we have sympathy. It is towards him that Dick channels our caritas.

The contrast between the 'enormous' and the 'small' in Dick's work is striking. We are frequently presented with the spectacle of the helpless individual hemmed in on all sides by the Organisation. It is an inelegant but effectively-used symbol. In the same way there are two types of character - the essential and the historic. The former are genuine but are too ineffective to change the system. The latter are larger-than-life, forming the patterns of history; but they are, more than often, shown by Dick to be ersatz, simulacra. Ges and Bes again. The curious interplay between these two castes occasionally breeds a recognisable character (Tagomi from THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE; the Benefactor in FAITH OF OUR FATHERS; General Buckman in FLOW MY TEARS) who is simultaneously on both sides - both rebel and institution.

I could well develop this into a discussion of what sf is; for Dick's work possesses nothing beyond what can be found in the works of medieval and modern philosophers. It is not, by any manipulation of the label, science fiction. Dick's trappings are straightforward gimmicks. But whilst

he does dismiss technology as a repressive trend, he does not ridicule sf per se.

"What a valuable tool this is for us - to grasp that we do not all really see the universe in the same way, or in a sense, the same universe at all."
(15)

This raises the question of whether Phil Dick would have been able to construct the tapestry of his written philosophy outside of the sf genre. In writing A SCANNER DARKLY he has preserved the ideative content but has dismissed the sf trappings. But without the initial acceptance by genre readers of his bizarre ideology would he have been able to lay the foundations for SCANNER?

In the SFR interview he states

"People have no criterion left to evaluate the importance of things." (16)

Philosophy, in the act of defining itself, has detached itself from the common man. Its ideas have become jargonised and specific - unrelated to basic 'reality'. Dick's work, because it is marketed as vulgar sf and liberally salted with 'gimmickry and adventure 'hooks', presents those same ideas in accessible form. A sugar-coated pill, if you like. He tries to recreate the criteria by which people can evaluate the world about them. In an age of illusion (The Media, Advertising, The Product) we should be grateful for such as Dick for showing us new perspectives - for teaching us to mistrust everything bar the most important: basic feelings and relationships.

I could talk of the role of the alien and alienation in Dick's work, but Angus Taylor does it so much better in his book. I could criticise the 'icing' of gimmickry, but Turner and Gillespie manage that quite adequately between them. Neither of those approaches would give evidence of Dick's basic caritas. For, in the midst of the augenblick - the interim wherein Brahmin wakes - real people are confronted by the enormity of their illusions and their misconceptions. The reconciliation of Man with his authentic nature - a process coincidentally generated in any sympathetic reader of Philip K. Dick - stems from this confrontation.

If Dick does too often seem to play incomprehensible and ethereal metaphysical games, it is merely to accentuate the earthy stability of his 'tiny father-figure'. And, in so doing, I believe he is the most expressive and original of this genre's writers.

Notes:

(1) SFR 19; Dick Geiss: Philip K. Dick interviewed by Daniel De Prez. September 10th 1976.

(2) Philip K. Dick And The Umbrella Of Light - Angus Taylor (c) 1975. T.K. Graphics. From the introduction.

(3) THE TURNING WHEEL AND OTHER STORIES: Page 88 "Adjustment Team". Coronet 1977; 189 pages; 80p. ISBN 0 340 21829 0.

(4) IBID. "A Present For Pat" (Page 146)

(5) DEUS IRAE: Page 17. Gollancz; 182pp; £3.75; 1976; ISBN 0 575 02307 4.

- (6) THE SIMULACRA: Page 21. Methuen Paperbacks; 1977; 75p; 220 pages. ISBN 0 417 01970.
- (7) PHILIP K DICK: ELECTRIC SHEPHERD; Edited by Bruce Gillespie. Page 12. (Best Of SF Commentary; No.1) 1975. Norstrilia Press; £4.25 106pp.
- (8) IBID. Page 201.
- (9) IBID. Page 117.
- (10) IBID. Page 119.
- (11) FINAL STAGE: The Ultimate Science Fiction Anthology. Penguin Books; 1975; 284pp; 75p; ISBN 0 14 00 4039 0. Page 283. Afterword to Dick's "A Little Something For Us Tempunauts".
- (12) PKD: ELECTRIC SHEPHERD. Page 45.
- (13) IBID. Page 48.
- (14) COUNTER CLOCK WORLD; Coronet; 1977; 158 pp; 70p; Page 144. ISBN. 0 340 21830 4.
- (15) FINAL STAGE. Page 283.
- (16) SFR 19. Page 11.

* * * * *

VECTOR QUOTATION COMPETITION

As I type this I've had only a small response to the competition in VECTOR 84, although the only formal entry was a winner. All the others mumbled in their letters about it being so difficult and then managed to avoid mentioning who could have written the pieces. Herewith the result and the winners:

- Page 13: BEHOLD THE MAN - Michael Moorcock.
- Page 16: CHILDHOOD'S END - Arthur C. Clarke.
- Page 26: A TIME OF CHANGES - Robert Silverberg.
- Page 36: INVERTED WORLD - Christopher Priest.
- Page 58: PAVANE - Keith Roberts. ("The Signaller")

The winning entry was submitted by Alan Fraser of Bramhall, Stockport. He chose A DREAM OF WESSEX by Chris Priest as his prize and asks me to mention to Mike Dickinson that the story "The White Boat" is part of the PAVANE cycle (not included in the book). Next competition should be in VECTOR 86 and I think we'll make the prize two paperbacks next time...

* * * * *

" I believe that the moment is near when by a procedure of active paranoid thought, it will be possible ... to systematise confusion and contribute to the total discrediting of the world of reality. "

- Salvador Dali (1930).

* * * * *

Today is Thursday January 19th. Day after payday for me and thus am listening to the new Joni Mitchell album and ploughing through a surfeit (truely amazing!) of material I've been sent. Am already cursing Tom and Keith for keeping me to 48 pages this time out. Oh well. So it goes...

DESCENDING ON A POINT OF FLAME:

The Spaceship In Science Fiction

by Steev Higgins.

One of the most common images in SF is the spaceship. It is how non-readers tend to think of it ("Oh yes, all these spaceships and things."); one of the cliches so beloved of cartoonists within the field, and probably one of the most powerful technological symbols (and not just for that, Dr. Freud.) They are still the most frequent subject of SF art, especially on paperback covers, as they were in the pulps.

Between the thirties and fifties they were symbols of Man's power over nature and the universe, or equally of unity and camaraderie between men. Such feelings come over in many passages from that period (See Aldiss' "Billion Year Spree", pp 262-4).

Some of the earliest pieces claimed as SF - the interplanetary journeys of Lucian and his successors - contain ingenious modes of transportation. The first true spaceship was probably created by Daniel Defoe in "Consolidator: or, Transactions from the World in the Moon" (1705). In this appears a device which conveys a man to the Moon (believe it or not), whose function is based on Newton's Celestial Mechanics. Here we have the first example of a device for space travel based on contemporary, factual scientific principles. Less factual were Cyrano de Bergerac's various devices, which drew more on folk superstitions, such as the belief that the full moon drew up the marrow from animal's bones. His transport to the Sun was more 'reasonable' than that, though just as comic. It is a booth-like object topped by a crystal which focuses light at the ship's centre, creating a vacuum. Air rushing in through a hole in the floor to fill this drove the ship upwards! Full of glib explanations, 'L'Autre Monde' is both a parody of previous such journeys and a social and religious satire on his times. But its parodical aspects are almost as applicable to modern SF. There is a wealth of such trips, but it is when we get to the nineteenth century that we encounter more recognisable spaceships, particularly that of Jules Verne.

Verne is of course notorious for his scientific accuracy (on which he based his comment on 'The First Men In The Moon', "Show me Mr Wells' Cavorite.") His moonship was fired from a huge gun, foreshadowing modern hydrogen/oxygen ignition techniques. However, despite the much vaunted accuracy, he neglected the fact that the forces involved would have crushed his unfortunate explorers.

In 1901 H. G. Wells wrote his inevitable moon trip. Like a great deal of the early stuff, he was more interested in the society his travellers, Bedford and Cavar, found there. His method of travel is the ingenious development of 'Cavorite'. This is a substance which blocks gravity, just as opaque substances block light. When the panels of it are pulled down the ship leaps up and away. As the first Antigrav it is very interesting to note a passage from Clarke's 'Rendezvous With Rama' in which it is stated that for a spacedrive "Anti-gravity...would do very nicely." (p108)

There have been a multitude of spacedrives which have emerged. One of the biggest problems is, of course, overcoming relativity. Writers like E.E. Smith and A. E. Van Vogt have at times ignored it. Smith once positively thumbed his nose at it (see the chapters on the 'Boise' in TRIPLANETARY). Spaceships fill his novels; each of the 'Skylark' series is named after one, and the Lenseman series is jam-packed with spectacular space battles, each one fought with newer, bigger and more devastating ships and weapons.

Others have brought up devices like Asimov's hyperspace 'Jumps' and various types of fifth-dimension beneath-space modes, including the famous (or infamous) space-warp. Brian Stableford's 'Halycon Drift' has a veritable crowd of different FTL drives; none, however, explained. The FTL drive, whatever form it takes, can cover a wide range of treatments, from being a mere convenience, a lip service to Einstein contained in a throwaway clause, or less, to a seriously considered piece of technology whose affect on a society possessing it are well considered and explored.

One of the best in terms of verisimilitude comes from Morgan and Kippax's 'Stars' series, whose spaceships use the American physicist, Professor Wheeler's hypothesis of 'wormholes' in space.

One of the major spaceship novels of recent years is Arthur Clarke's 'Rendezvous With Rama'. It is a discussion of the sort of ship that will be needed to actually travel to the stars. By describing the exploration of such a ship when it enters the solar system, source unknown, he presents a blueprint for ships like it, dealing with many points also discussed in essays 8-12 of 'Report On Planet Three'.

One of Clarke's first novels, 'Prelude To Space' was his moon-trip. He used a dual ship similar to the space shuttle. A chemical rocket takes the actual moon-ship to the edge of the atmosphere, which then detaches and travels lunawards on its own nuclear engines.

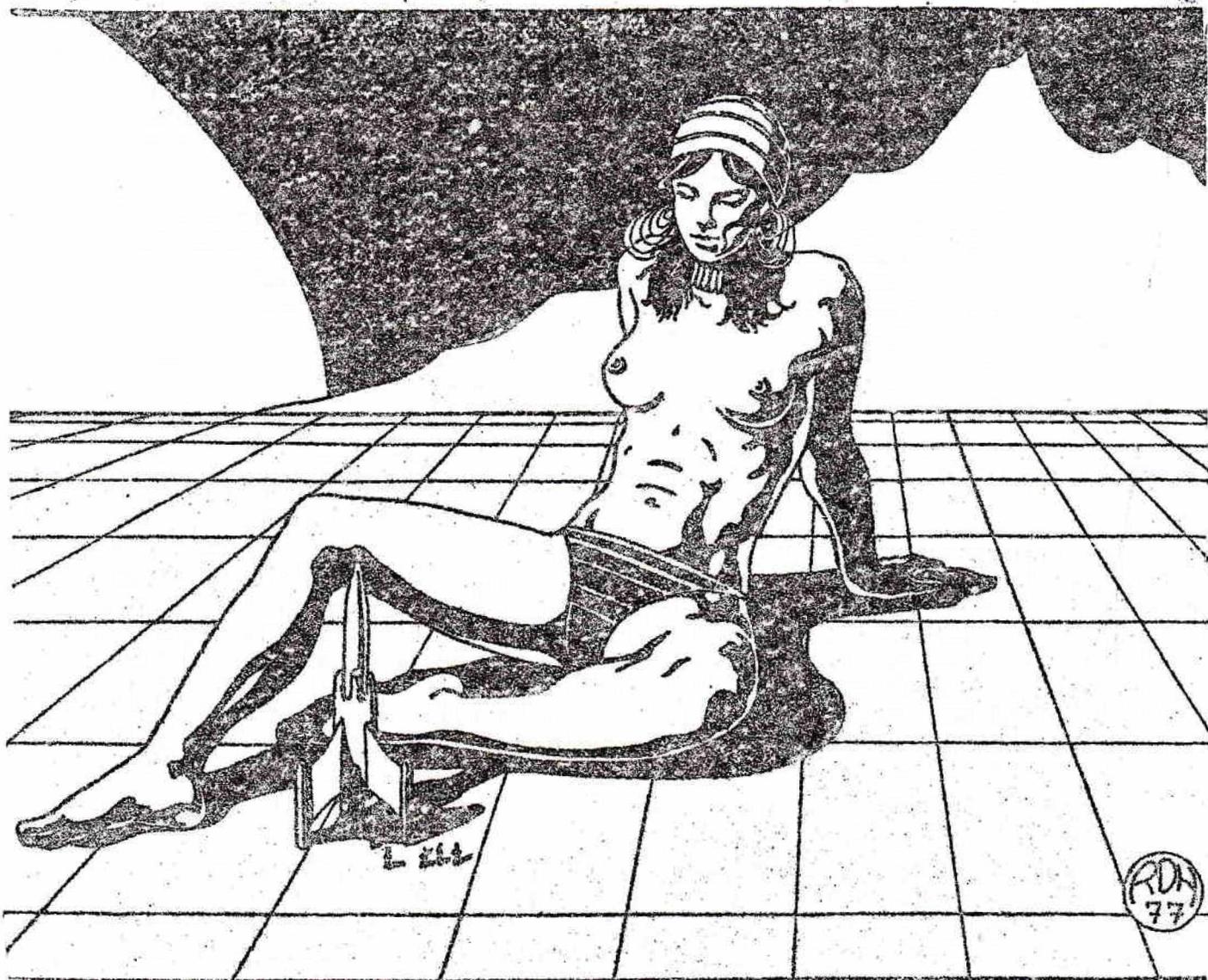
One fascinating method of propulsion is the 'light sail'. This would be a vast, highly reflective sail pushed forward by the force of impinging photons. Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle describe the idea in their novel 'The Mote In God's Eye'. The sail of their ship is the size of the moon, making feasible the use of the energy available in the form of 'light pressure'. It is launched by a battery of high-powered lasers which push it onward in flight and of course have the advantage of being both replaceable and repairable with all the resources of the home planet, "Like leaving your motor at home". These are kept on until sufficient momentum has been gained. Deceleration is effected by the pressure of the sun of the solar system one enters. Niven and Pournelle's ship takes over 200 years to travel 35 light years, an average speed of approximately 17-5% of the speed of light. I can't say whether these would be realistic figures, but their largeness rings true to me.

The lesson of both this and 'Rama' is that interstellar exploration will probably be an immense task involving vast amounts of man-power and thinking in terms of planetary sizes and aeons of time. But there is no reason to classify such ideas with Doc Smith type mile-long-spaceships; which would have totally exhausted the Earth's resources. Light sails would have to be extremely unmassive for various reasons, particularly for deceleration and acceleration, and since, after all, it is preferable over interstellar distances for velocity to be the major component of your ship's momentum,

There are plenty more scientific Einstein-beaters, though these are nearly as wishful as the 'Inertialess drive' or the space-warp, and often only used for plot purposes. Principle amongst these is the black-hole transit system. Carl Sagan, the Cornell astronomer, describes such a system in 'The Cosmic Connection', as does, fictionally, Joe Haldeman in 'The Forever War'. The theory is that, given the right circumstances, matter entering a rotating black hole reappears somewhere else (note the uncertainty), either through a white hole or another black one, or into a different universe, or...

Another idea, based on contemporary physics is the use of Wheeler's 'wormhole' theory, mentioned before.

However, the likelihood of all these seems to me a little stretched. I will not pass them off, but Clarke's and Niven/Pournelle's are the more realistic and, from an SF fan's point of view, just as fascinating. Such methods demand a vast overall view, showing us that any starward spread would be incremental over thousands of millenia, perhaps with ships taking, like the Pioneer probes, thousands of years to reach the nearer stars. The Galactic Empire is really an impossibility, and any colonised galaxy would be of inhuman creatures beyond comprehension.



Which, however disappointing to some, is a fascinating vision.

On a less technical slant, a whole sub-genre (or sub-sub-genre?) has emerged around the closed environment theme, which often takes the form of the multi-generational starship, the crew of which has often degenerated and the ship come to be taken for the universe. It was Heinlein who probably invented it in one of his best novellas, 'Universe'. But he did not begin to work out the implications. His hero makes it his mission to educate the inhabitants because "it has to be done you know". But for Brian Aldiss and Alexei Panshin the idea has a different potential. To Aldiss it is a prison to be escaped from, in NON-STOP: Panshin has a whole fleet of starships with crews and passengers in complete possession of their technology, and by virtue of it living off the fat of the colonies. However, despite this superiority, social progress is inhibited. They both have layed a new facet of symbology onto the spaceship. To them it represents the closed-sided prison of technology and the non-stop march of 'Progress'.

The plot of NON-STOP concerns a multi-generational starship sent on a mission taking colonists to Procyon. Having deposited its passengers it sets off on the return to Earth, but is almost immediately overwhelmed by an epidemic which kills off most of the remaining population, leaving only a handful of survivors.

We learn all of this around the three-quarters mark, through the diary of the captain who presided over it all. At one point he is ordered to turn the ship back. He explains how this is impossible due to the mechanics of the flight. Here Aldiss is stating the irrevocability of the situation of an industrial society - there is no turning back. The symbolism of the novel is indicated in the closing entry of the diary:

" Only now...do I begin to question the sanity...of interstellar travel. How many hapless men and women must have questioned it on the way out to Procyon, imprisoned in these eternal walls!...I pray that...men's hearts have changed, grown less like the hard metals they have loved and served so long. Nothing but the full flowering of a technological age, such as the Twenty Fourth Century knew, could have launched this miraculous ship; yet the miracle is sterile, cruel.

" At the beginning of the technological age - a fitting token to my mind - stands the memory of Belsen; what can we do but hope that this more protracted agony stands at the end of it. " (Pages 148/9)

The survivors of the plague repopulate the ship, but all knowledge has been lost. A new religion has sprung up, advocating the ritual release of violent emotion, based around the holy trinity of Froyd, Yung and Bassit; the last being the crewman who preached the religion, plundered from psychology books, during the plague. The people, due the effects of the disease, have become half normal size and live four times our normal rate. Relics of the old times are being constantly rediscovered in old cabins. And, to summarise the whole predicament, the hydroponic plants have spread out beyond the vats and infested the whole ship. NON-STOP is landscaped with forested corridors.

What does it all mean to us? It seems to me that it represents the pointlessness and purposelessness of twentieth century life. We have forgotten what it is all about. The whole novel seems to be saying that

we should search to try to find out, not let our lives be "guttered uselessly". As Aldiss' heroine puts it, "We've got to get out of the ship somehow."

And do we? In the sixties (as far as I can tell) it seems people were beginning to on a large scale. Now the problems of industrial society are more immediate - unemployment, slump and pollution. But at least The Sex Pistols have managed to note that we are a 'Pretty Vacant' generation.

However, I digress (Okay, I said I did!). The spaceship theme is by no means exhausted. I have already mentioned the use of the spaceship as symbol, and I tread on dangerous ground in indicating the rocket's phallic connotations, as I stand to descend into the absurd. Still, I have done. This aspect has been deliberately used by a number of writers. For instance, Norman Spinrad used phallic imagery in obvious contexts, and even pointed it out plainly, to emphasise the sexual frustrations of his alternate Hitler in 'The Iron Dream', and closes with the launch of a spaceship intended to 'fecundate the stars'. Vonnegut did a similar thing in 'The Big Space Fuck' ("Again, Dangerous Visions")

And whilst we are in the modern vein, on to the work of Barry Malzberg. In the best form of SF he examines the effect of science and technology on human beings, and most notable are (at least in the terms of this essay) novels like 'Beyond Apollo', which describes reactions to "the starkness of the capsule" (a phrase from 'The Awakening' by Hawkwind). His protagonists are psychotic astronauts unable to cope with the dehumanization of the space programme. Like Aldiss he uses the spaceship as a symbol of technology, but unlike Captain Complain of NON-STOP he does not "question the sanity...of interstellar travel". He is in no doubt of its absence.

Some very unusual semi-spaceships have appeared over the years, too. James Blish in his 'Cities In Flight' series chronicles the Okies, entire cities which, by virtue of the 'spindizzies', antigrav drives, take off to become vagrant workers among the stars. Then there is Fritz Leiber's 'Wanderer', a huge, planet-sized world/ship manned by rebels and criminals fleeing the galactic-powers-that-be. A true 'spaceship earth'. Another very common idea is the Cyborg-ship. Anne McCaffrey describes one in her novel/collection 'The Ship Who Sang', in which a human brain is rescued from a deformed body and put in nervous control of a spaceship, which becomes its alternate body. I wonder what Captain Complain would have to say about that.. Walter M. Miller seems to have qualms about the idea in his excellent story, 'I dreamer'. In Brian Stableford's 'Halycon Drift' his pilot, Grainger, flies his ship by almost becoming part of it. And on the next stage down, the ships in Samuel Delany's NDVA are flown by cyborg studs, who plug into sockets on their arms or backs.

So there we do not have it. The spaceship is probably the archetypal SF motif. To illustrate, pick out a random sample of SF rock music, and the spaceship crops up. Take Pink Floyd's powerful and atmospheric "Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun", Hawkwind's "Silver Machine" (of course), Elton John's "Rocket Man", the name of the group Jefferson Starship... The title of this essay is from a Pink Floyd song, "Let There Be More Light", to be found with "Set The Controls" on 'A Saucerful Of Secrets'. Or look for contemporary pseudo-religions and what do we find

but flying saucer cults?! And take the new TV series, 'Blake's Seven' - (how many bets that the spaceship 'Liberator', which had already made its presence felt before the series began, becomes star of the show?). A recent TV reviewer writing about the series spoke of the Ultimate SF dream - a spaceship to do what you want with and go anywhere in. Have we yet another layer of symbolism here? The spaceship representing escape? Or perhaps echoes of the power-fantasy. Doc Smith rides again!

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FUTUREWORLDS: Short Story Competition.

FUTUREWORLDS is the name given to the forthcoming Newcastle Film Festival which will be held from June 16 to July 2. A number of associated events are to be held concurrently and one of the ideas generated by the organisers was a short story competition, which, "gives you the chance to think about the future and express your ideas in fictional form". The rules are as follows:

- (1) The competition is open to anyone who wishes to enter it. There will be no prejudice on grounds of age, previous success, or any other criterion excepting the quality of the story in the opinion of the judges.
- (2) Stories should be no longer than 5,000 words and preferably typewritten, though this is not essential if the alternative is legible.
- (3) The closing date is APRIL 25th 1978. All entries must have arrived by that date for consideration.
- (4) Entries should be sent to Rob Carter at:
78, Bewick Court,
Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- (5) Stories will be judged solely on the grounds of quality of writing; that is, prose, structure, style, adherence to the spirit of the theme.
- (6) The theme is simply: A Future. Any interpretation is acceptable though we would stress that gadget stories or pseudo-medieval fantasies are hardly appropriate.
- (7) The winner will receive a cash prize of £15 and be guaranteed publication of the winning story in TANGENT, the BSFA fiction magazine, a Newcastle publication; and possibly a local evening newspaper, or the festival booklet.
- (8) Entrants may use pseudonyms, but their real names must be on the script along with a contact address. The competition will not return scripts unless accompanied by return postage.

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A quick appeal also from Colin Lester who is currently working on the International Science Fiction Yearbook (Pierrot Publishing). "Pierre Moumon of Villa Magali, Chemin Calabro, F-83160 La Valette, France, is looking for a French speaking sf collector to exchange copies of English Language books for his french language duplicates." Can anyone help?

Ahah, a space to fill! And no illos thin enough to fill it! Will have to mumble to the bottom of the page. Everyone should see BIG BANANA FEET for some marvellous light relief and iconoclasm of the first order. Connolly reads science fiction too. So I guess you could say that this aside has some relevance. McCartney reads that 'SF stuff' too. Hmm. Interesting that.

All Yin and no Yang: ILLUMINATUS!

by Robert Gibson

(ILLUMINATUS! by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. In Three Volumes:
 (1) The Eye In The Pyramid: Sphere; 1976; 311pp; 75p; ISBN 0 7221 9208 8.
 (2) THE GOLDEN APPLE: Sphere; 1977; 250pp; 75p; ISBN 0 7221 9209 6.
 (3) LEVIATHAN: Sphere; 1977; 253pp; 75p; ISBN 0 7221 9211 8.)

Man, these books are the most! They fill me with awe and with an SF thrill, not because of the fact that they are here: with such stuff being published I know I must already be living in the future. It seems clear to me now that the present ended sometime in the 1960's, when the winds of change blew history clear off its moorings. Way back in the present, in 1965, Poul Anderson's THE CORRIDORS OF TIME was published; the novel shares with ILLUMINATUS! a central philosophical theme, but there is a world of difference in the treatment. Both novels see history in terms of a conflict between two great themes, which are impossible to define but to which one can hint by pairing and opposing various terms, such as: yin and yang, subjectivity and objectivity, receptivity and dominance, spontaneity and reflection, the White Goddess and the Sun God, the insights of the East and the insights of the West. A ridiculous oversimplification, of course; but one cannot hope to do more than ring the right bells with words like this, and hope that you sort of get what I mean. In Poul Anderson's novel the conflict was ultimately resolved through balance and fusion, in a result which I found profoundly satisfying. Then along comes the future, typified by the insights which are reflected in T. Roszak's THE WAKING OF A COUNTER-CULTURE: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE TECHNOCRATIC SOCIETY AND ITS YOUTHFUL OPPOSITION (1968) and Colin Wilson's THE OCCULT (1970); the balance, though not emphasized, is still within reach. Then comes ILLUMINATUS!, which has a lot in common with the Roszak and Wilson books, and the balance is gone. And, after all, what else can one expect under Reformation conditions?

ILLUMINATUS! tempts me to introduce it in its own style, but I guess I'm just not stoned enough out of my freaked-out mind to do it that way; still, why worry, the trilogy contains a review of itself (Book 1; Page 243) which gives me something to start from:

"It's a dreadfully long monster of a book," Wildeblood says pettishly, "and I certainly won't have time to read it, but I'm giving it a thorough skimming. The authors are utterly incompetent - no sense of style or structure at all. It starts out as a detective story, switches to science fiction, then goes off into the supernatural, and is full of the most detailed information on dozens of ghastly boring subjects. And the time sequence is all out of order in a very pretentious imitation of Faulkner and Joyce. Worse yet, it has the most raunchy sex scenes, thrown in just to make it sell, I'm sure, and the authors - whom I've never heard of - have the supreme bad taste to introduce real political figures into this mishmash and pretend to be exposing a real conspiracy. You can be sure I won't waste time reading such rubbish, but I'll have a perfectly devastating review ready for you by tomorrow noon. "

Epicene Wildeblood failed to mention one important thing (besides being wrong about a lot of other things): yin. Yin is the inspiration for the trilogy. Down with Yang, government and religion, long live yin and anarchism, all hail Discordia, and down with the Illuminati who've masterminded all the repression and oppression which body and soul have had to suffer since

the fall of Atlantis.

Except for the Atlantis bit, the fiendish-plot thesis is made to sound very convincing. Perhaps Shea and Wilson really are historians (I found one error: the crusade against Fra Dolcino was in 1307, not 1507), but the main thing is that they seem to know a lot, and so they can give the plot what it needs, an aura of authenticity.

Fortunately, this is enough to counter the streak of preposterousness that runs through the trilogy. Also, it is extremely interesting. Why indeed were the Allies so slow to accept evidence of the final solution? Who are the bosses behind the bosses? The best disguise, the story indicates, is internal self-contradiction. The Illuminati backed Hitler and broke him, and then backed the USSR and the USA. The conspiracy is ranged over thousands of years and is disguised in a myriad of ways. In tune with this the plot of ILLUMINATUS! jumps and zigzags all over the place, and in a way this is fitting. The reader is at once confronted with an omnipresent 'I', which often appears and disappears, seeing through the eyes of other beings. During the reader's progress hints appear: perhaps this 'I' is Leviathan; perhaps Leviathan, some kind of super-being, is in control of the Illuminati; or perhaps not. Perhaps behind the Illuminati stand the Ilogor, those Things which H. P. Lovecraft unwisely mentioned in his so-called fiction (his reward for blowing the gaff was an untimely death). Congratulations to Shea and Wilson, to their exuberant eclecticism: they actually get away with incorporating the Lovecraftian Mythos into their trendy trilogy. Puzzles and hints are scattered and juggled with finesse, while the reader's progress continues through the first two books, sustained by the implicit promise of enlightenment (or even Illumination) in the third.

There are many inter-

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-ruptions and lots of gimmicks and conceptual fireworks which remind me of Vonnegut, Bester and Sheckley. It is desperately necessary for these books to keep rollicking along fast, mesmerising the reader into suspended disbelief. This is one of the functions of the continual shifts of scene in space and time, which, however, are also an integral part of the plot, in two major ways:

- (1) as manifestations of the omnipresent 'I'
- and (2) as manifestations of the 'tomorrow-today-yesterday world' which, if I understand rightly, is experienced on the way to illumination.

But there are other reasons for the flashy style. It blends in well with the authors' sense of humour (and ILLUMINATUS! is the funniest book I have read for quite a while). Also, since Shea and Wilson seem to lack the flair for evoking atmosphere, it is natural for them to concentrate on what they can do well: literary acrobatics. At its worst the effect is confusing, though never boring; at its best it is astonishing. In one exceptional passage (Book 2; Pages 52-65) Robert Putney Drake, the richest and most cold-blooded man in the world, has decided to break with the Illuminati and face the hideous fate which awaits him in consequence:

....Lovecraft's words came back to him: "I beg you to remember their attitude toward their servants." That was it, basically. He was an old man, and he was tired of being their servant, or satrap, or satellite. When he was thirty-three, he was ready to take them over, as Cecil Rhodes had once done. Somehow, he had been manoeuvred into taking over just

one section of their empire. If he could think, truthfully, that he owned the United States more thoroughly than any President in four decades, the fact remained that he did not own himself. Not until he signed his Declaration Of Independence tonight by joining the Discordians. (Book 2 Page 52).

And so Drake tosses sleeplessly, and waits alone, and remembers, and dreams, and waits, and remembers. Another life's end edges into the narrative: the deathbed scene in 1935 of 'Dutch' Flegenheimer, whose last words had revealed to Drake the nature of the powers that be, thus launching him in his career. Needless to say, this is not prefaced by "Meanwhile, back in 1935" or anything of that sort. There is a remarkable lack of prefaces throughout.

The pain wasn't just the bullet; they were working on his mind, trying to stop him from saying too much. He saw the goat's head. "Let him harness himself to you and then bother you," he cried. "They are Englishmen and they are a type and I don't know who is best, they or us." So much to say, and so little time. He thought of Francie, his wife. "Oh, sir, get the doll a rofting." The Illuminati formula to summon the Iligor: he could at least reveal that. "A boy has never wept nor dashed a thousand kim. Did you hear me?" They had to understand how high it went, all over the world. "I would hear it, the Circuit Court would hear it, and the Supreme Court would hear it, if that ain't the payoff. Please crack down on the Chinaman's friends and Hitler's Commander." Eris, the Great Mother, was the only alternative to the Illuminati's power; he had to tell them that much. "Mother is the best bet and don't let Satan draw you too fast."

What can not be shown, short of quoting thirteen whole pages in this review, is the masterly fusion and flow of a host of thoughts and memories, and the way in which the fates of Drake and Flegenheimer, widely separated in time, sweep to a simultaneous climax. The episode I've just discussed is better than average, but even so, throughout ILLUMINATUS! the reader is kept very much on the move. He may suffer a twinge of scepticism now and then but it is likely to be anticipated and undercut by expressions of scepticism on the part of the characters themselves. For instance, when new arrivals on board the yellow submarine 'Leif Ericson' are told that what they are seeing are the remains of Atlantis, they tend not to believe it either, so the reader gives the book the benefit of the doubt and carries on.

But there is a price to be paid for the literary psychedelics; they are hard to reconcile with the demands of an unfolding mystery-thriller; for how can there be anything to unfold, since all lies within range of the omnipresent 'I'? Again, this is another of the doubts which the pace and zest of ILLUMINATUS beguiles one into postponing; it was only after I'd finished it that I realised the full extent of my disappointment - wishing that the trilogy could have developed in the classical suspense style. Which was the way in which Van Vogt's short story, 'The Rulers' and Eric Frank Russel's novel DREADFUL SANCTUARY used the "secret society ruling the world" theme well. Shea and Wilson could have surpassed them at their own game, considering the command of detail ILLUMINATUS shows: the in-weaving of speculations on Jesuits, the Mafia, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Rosicrucians, Nelson Rockefeller, Mao Tse Tung, the Assassins, the Allumbrados, the Ancient Illuminated Seers of Bavaria

Richard Nixon, the Shia, the Rothschilds, George Washington and Ambrose Pierce, to name but a fraction. What an opportunity was lost!

However, the trilogy is not primarily a mystery-thriller; it is an anarchist tract. The hero is an anarcho-capitalist named Hagbard Celine; he owns the 'Lief Ericson', leads the Legion of Dynamic Discord and allies with an anarcho-communist group known as the JAMs. He is aided by his greatest invention, First Universal Cybernetic Kinetic Uni-Programmer, usually referred to by its initials. It "throws" 'I Ching' hexagrams internally, reading random open circuits as yin lines and closed circuits as yang; "these are then correlated with three thousand years of 'I Ching' scholarship, current astronomical and astrological data, CBS news, and reports from Hagbard's agents in world capitals...." I mentioned that Hagbard 'leads' the Legion Of Dynamic Discord; and although he does, he doesn't. "The hardest thing for a man with dominant genes and piratical heredity like me is to avoid becoming a goddam authority figure. I need all the feedback and information I can get.... but nobody contradicts an Authority, you know. Communication is possible only between equals." If you are an authority you are told only what people think you want to hear, and knowledge of this principle enables Hagbard and friends to succeed where the FBI and the CIA fail, thus saving the world from the killer bug Anthrax Leprosy Pi.

"Get the Special Agent in charge," the President snapped. He was the calmest man at the table - ever since Fernando Poo, he had been supplementing his Librium, Tofranil and Elovil with Demerol, the amazing little pills that had kept Hermann Goering so chipper and cheerful during the Nuremburg Trials while all the other Nazis crumbled into catatonic, paranoid or other dysfunctional conditions.

The supreme unimportance of such people is revealed. ILLUMINATUS! is a jaunty frolic, yet passionately concerned with the evils of government. The authors are surely anarchists themselves. They grind their axe good-naturedly, and the effect is more emotive than it would have been if they had been gloomy about it. Before reading the trilogy I had thought of the USA as a quasi-democracy; now I am yet more inclined to emphasize the 'quasi'.

But although ILLUMINATUS! is revolutionary, it is not revolutionary. By which I mean that it is activist, but it's not activist. What I'm really trying to get at (fortified by the trilogy's "all statements are true/false/meaningless in some senses and not others" philosophy) is that ultimately it seems to be saying, "be yourself, exercise your freedom by saying 'no' when you want to; but don't try to change things by force or you'll just make them worse". Below the sewers of Dealy Plaza in Dallas, Texas, sits the Dealy Lama. He explains to the British agent, Fission Chips, that the age old struggle between Good and Evil is coming to a climax:

"I see," OOOOS nodded. "And you want to enlist me on the side of Good?"

"Not at all," the old man cried, bouncing up and down in his seat with laughter. "I want to invite you to stay here with us while the damned fools fight it out aboveground. "

But the reader, as yet, is given no clue to the Lama's real status (he is the most important character in the trilogy) or to the fact that the passage in which this incident occurs (Book 2 Pages 172-184) is vital for

an understanding of it. The spotlight is on Hagbard's attempt to alter the world for good, or rather to use force in staving off disaster. He calls his attempt the Demonstration; but then he comes to a point where he must kill, and there he admits that the Demonstration has failed.

All very well, one might say, but passive resistance cannot stop H-Bombs or germ warfare. Power must be countered with power of some kind. Here is where all the magic comes in. ILLUMINATUS! is full of numerological and symbolic hocus-pocus. It is, nevertheless, SF. The occult formulae are "methods of self-programming" which give us a kind of edge over Reality. This is partly to do with our own nature: the thesis of Colin Wilson's THE OCCULT, that (broadly speaking) magic is psi power linked to auto-suggestion, is applicable here. Also relevant is the 'thermoplastic' nature of external reality, and this is the foundation of power which underlies the confidence of the Dealy Lama, head of the Erisian Liberation Front. Eris is the ancient Greek Goddess of confusion; confusion and variety are basic to the universe.

ILLUMINATUS! typifies this confusion and variety. Too much so. Earlier I mentioned that the reader is strung along through the first two books by the promise of elucidation in the third. Just barely. And then....it seems to me that many of these promises are not kept. The tail of the tale is twisted once too often, and everything makes less sense than it did before. I would not like to give the plot away by being too specific; I'll confine myself to saying that answers to the following questions would be welcome. Who is and who is not illuminated, and why? Why was malaclypse invoked as a lloigor? What was the lloigor's real position? What was Dillinger doing talking to Hassan i Sabbah X? Above all, how do these matters and the attitude of the Dealy Lama square with Hagbard's admission (Book 3, Pages 136-145) about what is really going on?

This final outbreak of muddiness is a big let-down. More's the pity, for it need not have happened; the fault doesn't lie at a basic level. The trilogy's fundamental ideas, those which fuel it and justify the dazzling surface effects, cohere - for better or worse. The sex scenes, pace Wildblood, are not "thrown in just to make it sell". They are part of a particular kind of anarchism, a certain view of human nature not shared, or only partially shared, by the Anarresti in THE DISPOSSESSED: "The insights of spontaneity are all right; the insights of reflection are all wrong." Of course, Shea and Wilson do not put it this way. But clearly they are so frightened, in these embattled Reformation conditions, of pomposity and prudery, that their only view is the great truth "we're jolly beggars all; we're clowns at heart." They ignore the other great truth, that we're all monarchs and gods. The result is a bout of pornography that makes the writings of the 'bergs (Silver and Malz) seem praved by comparison. If I had to criticise ILLUMINATUS! with just one slogan, I'd say that it's all yin and no yang.

If I were allowed another, I'd say it needs an index.

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Editor's Note: SFR 17 (Dick Geiss again!) ran an interview with Robert Anton Wilson which is of great interest to anyone wanting a glimmer of the truth behind the creation of the ILLUMINATUS! trilogy. Wilson was once assistant editor on PLAYBOY magazine and a total iconoclast. The interview is one of the funniest I've ever read, and the tone is set from the start: "Well, to begin with, I never balled Sophia Loren on a bearskin rug. I think that's what gives my writing its unforgettable poignancy and haunting sense of cosmic search."

THE INFINITY BOX

ANYWHEN: James Blish; Arrow; 1978;
ISBN 0 09 916000 5; 185pp; 65p

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas.

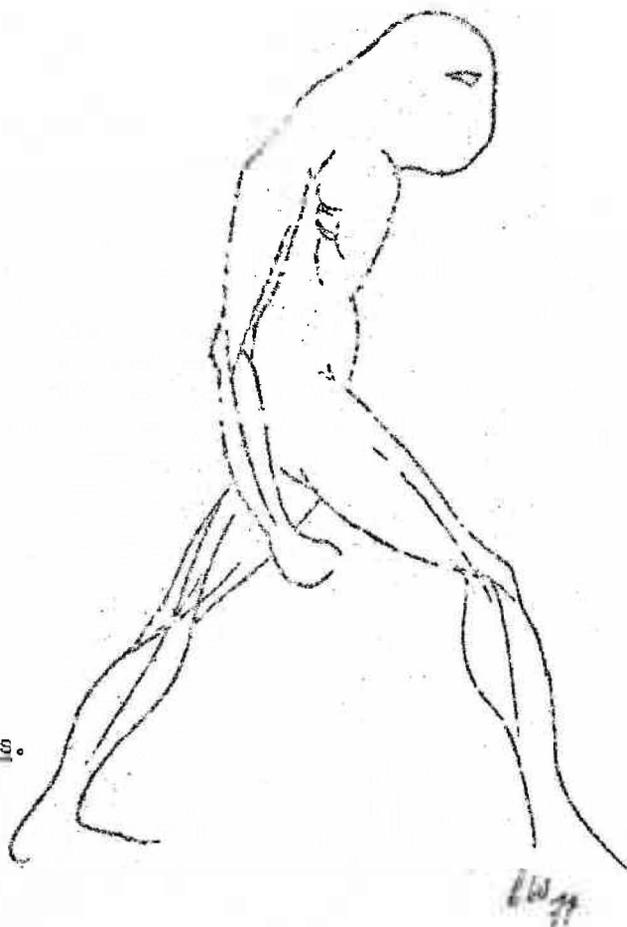
It's difficult to criticise story collections; the fact that the stories have all appeared in print before is often inhibitory in that they must, by the very nature of their prior publication, have some redeeming features to their credit. But then I suppose that is really only a theory...

There are eight stories in this book, ranging in age from "The Writing Of The Rat" (1956) to "Skysign" (1968); one of them, "How Beautiful With Banners" has also been published in a previous Arrow collection of James Blish stories, The Testament Of Andros. I cannot possibly review each and every story, of course, and so I shall just have to single out for extended comment those that made some sort of definite impression upon me.

The worst story in the book is easily, "A Style In Treason", an expanded re-write of the earlier "A Hero's Life" that can be found in the now out-of-print Harry Harrison-edited Four For The Future. The style and setting of this re-write are quite horrible; the sort of ghastly melange more common to Don Wollheim's OAW books than James Blish (Jo Clayton's Diadem From The Stars is a perfect example of the former, although I hope you understand that this is not a recommendation) - swords and cloaks amidst spaceships and stellar federations. The idea of the Traitors' Guild is ludicrous, and the invented quotation that Blish attributes to the imaginary authority, Lord Gro, is an open admission that he recognises it as such. Charles Harness did it all so much better in The Paradox Men, and I only wish people would stop trying to imitate him with such blind determination.

"How Beautiful With Banners" vies with "A Dusk Of Idols" as the best story in the collection, although both strike me as being the wrong length for their respective contents. The former is too long and the latter too short. The latter also suffers from the wrong choice of narrative viewpoint - first person as repeating third, which tends to distance the subject matter from the reader and renders impossible the reactions and introspections it demands.

"Skysign is a meglomaniac's dream come true. What would happen if one clever Earthman could take over a quiescent alien spaceship and use it to set the world to rights? After first taking his vengeance on those who did him down while he was still the underdog, of course... But his dreams fail him; his victory is snatched out from under his nose by the "do-gooders" he despised. The one thing that is wrong with this story is that it is too short; the personality of the character in question is not as fully realised as it should have been.



The remaining four stories - "And Some Were Savages", "None So Blind", "No Jokes On Mars" and the aforementioned "The Writing Of The Rat" - are merely average, and not even Blish-average at that; just plain average. "No Jokes On Mars" is a joke; a squib that should never have been published in the first place. "The Writing Of The Rat" is really too dated to have been worth re-printing, since the recent finds at Olduvai and elsewhere (see Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin's recently-published Origins for an excellent exposition and summary) are finally laying to rest that hoary old Daniken-like idea about man being a child of the ancient astronauts (or whatever), mainly because there does not appear to have ever been a 'missing link' in the first place.

It is not a great collection, to be sure - the long-out-of-print Galactic Cluster is probably better, and certainly more classic - but it is worth your while, if only because of the (until recently at any rate) dearth of material by James Blish available in paperback. Which brings up a question that I have been wanting to ask someone for some time now: why have we had to wait for someone as popular as James Blish to actually die before his books have started appearing in mass-edition paperbacks?

ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE: R. A. Lafferty; Dobson; 1977; London; £3.95; 216pp; ISBN 0 234 72013 1.

Reviewed by James Corley.

Subtitled 'The Autobiography of a Ktistec Machine'. Ktistec? A baffling word; according to Lafferty it is a machine made out of wheels, vats, gyroscopes and assimilated personalities. Among other things it has meadows and snakes, forests and factories inside it, but sometimes it takes on the semblance of a travelling salesman. It has three related functions: to look for leadership, love and communication in the world. It was conceived in what is either the Institute for Impure Science or a derelict pig barn. Like the larger-than-life characters who surround it (among whom is Aloysius, the writer) it is multi-determined and multi-valued.

Raphael Aloysius Lafferty is obviously writing a very unique brand of fantasy. He is not, as is usual in fantasy, extrapolating from any conscious reality, enhancing it with the metaphysics of magic or imagined 'otherness'; instead he seems to have delved for his phenomenology into the world of dreams where experience is sometimes sharp and sometimes fuzzy, where people and events are mutable but inevitable, and where, as Freud so famously pointed out, nothing has only a single meaning. So is Ktistec a metaphor for the unconscious mind? What else could it be?

Lafferty, an engineer by profession, has scored a psychological triumph here. The dream often makes an appearance in fiction, but authors seldom manage to capture the authentic ambience, far less sustain it throughout a novel. It does not, of course, result in an easy book to read. We are used to sharing a common external reality but in Easterwine we are required to journey through someone else's multiply-determined scenario. It demands not only the assimilation of an idiosyncratic set of postulates but a constant amendment and enriching of them. It requires that the mind be simultaneously passive to allow it to be fed in twists and quantum jumps, while remaining active to analyse and interpret what is going on. It's a difficult but very worthwhile exercise, enlivened by Lafferty's roller-coaster humour and intellectual games-playing: he constructs edifices of poetic grandeur then demolishes them like a kid playing with building blocks.

Easterwine is extraordinary, strange and brilliant. There is something of Bradbury in the midsummer landscapes and the hint of wickedness beneath the surface, but the comparison doesn't go far in defining Lafferty. He is an original, and undoubtedly one of the most literate writers in the genre.

BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO: Harry Harrison; Penguin; 1977; 174pp; 60p; ISBN 0 14 00. 2970 2.

Reviewed by Paul Wilson.

Another Penguin reprint; this time by the masterly Harry Harrison. For those of you who have read Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS, the parody found in BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO will be all the juicier. For those who have not, worry not for Mr Harrison has ensured your enjoyment too.

"War is hell" says Bill. How right he is. But his war is hell because of his friends, fellow troopers and the Imperial wonder-planet of Helior. To begin with, his friend, Eager Beager (voluntary latrine orderly and late-night boot polisher) turns out to be a man-sized robot piloted by a 7"-high green lizard, a dreaded Chinger. Petty Chief Officer, Deathwisher Drang, an enormous, scarred training officer who boasts a pair of teeth capable of making Dracula jealous, creates misery and mayhem at training camp, on board ship and in prison, until our hero gets his own back in the penultimate chapter.

When as an almost accidental hero, Bill is sent to the Imperial World of Helior to receive his medal, he loses his floor plan (a cubic foot of paper which is a guide to both the city and the world of Helior since the two are interchangeable) and takes eight days to find his way back to Transit Camp. He is accused of being an imposter and only just escapes, turning up some timelater as a Garbage or G-man, helping to get rid of the rubbish produced by 150 billion people. He does so by parcelling it up into small packets and posting it to random people on other planets selected from old telephone directories.

Eventually our hero, becoming more resigned as he does so, winds up as a prisoner on a planet revolving round a star called (you guessed it!) - Hernia. There, a facsimily of Heinlein's powered suit appears and then rapidly disappears into a pool of quicksand. Bill is last seen as a hardened veteran tightening up his ankle with a spanner and conscripting his brother.

My advice is to read Harry Harrison's splendid piece of military lunacy which should be thoroughly enjoyable. It pokes fun in a beautiful way at everything the military mind considers holy. For those as irreverent as I it is a must.

THE BLUE HAWK: Peter Dickinson; Puffin; 1977; 236pp; 60p.

Reviewed by Mike Dickinson.

Like the writings of Leon Garfield and Susan Cooper, those of Peter Dickinson constitute one of those special pleasures which seem to be known only to children's librarians, teachers and the children themselves. This is particularly unfortunate since, in some cases, it is undoubtedly the former pair who derive most pleasure from them. Peter Dickinson's primary adult metier has been the detective story in which he produces a subtle intellectual brew which, in the case of such books as 'Sleep and His Brother' or 'Skin Deep' also contains an element of bizarre fantasy. His children's books have tended towards Science Fiction or

Historical and are again quite subtle and complex, especially his 1975 telepathy novel, 'The Gift'. 'The Blue Hawk' is the most demanding yet.

The story is told totally from the point of view of Tron, an apprentice priest in the great Temple. (Part of the fascination of the novel is that Dickinson never stoops to presenting an explanatory package of information which Tron could not know). The heavily ritualistic opening gives the impression that this is a historical novel, probably set in Ancient Egypt; an impression reinforced by the excellent interior illustrations by David Smee. Certainly there are some correspondences such as the Dawn Hymn, the Sun God, the treatment of the dead, the great stress placed on ritual and the consequent importance of the priestly hierarchy. However, as one continues to read, odd disquieting differences arise. The land is described as being bounded by swamp and mountain, hardly Egypt. It is ruled by a King. Even the Gods differ perceptibly in their attributes and this theology contains a great opposing duality between O and Aa, Sun and Moon, Dark and Light, which does not seem to be present in that of Egypt.

Parallel to these discoveries of the reader, Tron is also engaged in finding that all was not what he had been brought up to expect in the Temple. He finds that the outwardly pious priests are, while quarrelling amongst themselves, also engaged on a murderous conspiracy to rule the Kingdom. At times the reader's quest intersects with Tron's as, for example, when evidence is discovered that the Kingdom is in fact in a process of decay from the time of some mysterious all-powerful predecessors. From that point it becomes apparent that this is not strictly, or, perhaps, not even a historical novel. The layers of reading peel back like the skins of an onion. Of course, these are twists of plot, surely a technique well known to the detective story writer; but they do not seem to be at all trivial. The final nature of the Kingdom is left as a mere suggestion, as is the nature of the Gods.

This is a book with action enough to please most, but the long ritual opening and the extreme ambiguity characteristic of almost all the book, especially the ending - where the reader must make his own interpretation - limits its appeal to the juvenile market. However the result for an adult is a fine book, especially for those who prefer their rationales to be implied rather than stated.

MIDDLE EARTH: A WORLD IN CONFLICT: Stephen O. Miller; £2.25 (Published by T-K Graphics and illustrated by James Shull).

Reviewed by Andrew Muir.

That there is, and will be, a stream of writings on THE LORD OF THE RINGS is as much a fact of life as the trilogy itself. Unfortunately such a stream inevitably produces variations in quality. A statement of faith or a re-telling of the story is no justification for a book or an article: there must be some degree of critical insight which deepens or extends the reader's appreciation. This book, though obviously stemming from a genuine admiration of the trilogy, does not come near meeting this condition and I do not think it will satisfy any Tolkein admirer as something worth buying or reading; a re-reading of the trilogy itself would be eminently more profitable.

The main problem with this book is that it is little more than a straight summary of Tolkein's plot. It is very rare for Mr Miller to go any deeper than the surface narrative, and his rigid adherence to chronological

sequence stultifies the possibility of any thematic investigation. In addition to a scarcity of original thought there is a pervading sense of non-professionalism; which is intensified by the occasional intrusion of colloquialisms. This might sound hyper-critical, but to describe Gandalf's return as 'a shocker to the reader' is indelicate to a degree which destroys the impression he is attempting to convey. Furthermore, the use of words such as 'awful' and 'dreadful' does nothing to help the author's position.

There are some good points, though, and despite their scarcity, it is only fair to mention them. Mr Miller - quite correctly in my opinion - points out that the scene where Aragon pettishly quibbles about leaving his sword at Theoden's door, is out of character ((THE TWO TOWERS; Bk. 3: Ch. 6)) But this passing comment is one of only a few moments of perception.

However, Mr Miller does raise the thorny problem of the extent of Valar's influence in the history of the Ring (One feels he would have been more advantageously employed in writing his article on this theme). He makes the interesting claim that when Frodo tells Gollum to "Begone and trouble me no more!..." (THE RETURN OF THE KING; Bk. 6: Ch.3)) he has, in fact, been 'taken over' by the Valar who are speaking through him. I am not entirely convinced of the validity of this, but a careful reading of the surrounding paragraphs undoubtedly renders such a reading highly plausible.

I would, however, emphatically deny any suggestion that Sam's hand is stayed from slaying Gollum on Mount Doom by the intervention of the Valar. It is true that free will and determinism pose as difficult a problem in Tolkien's mythology as they did in Milton's christian mythology; but if the Valar's influence is pushed as far as this the whole war becomes pointless. If Sam's mercy is not the decision formed by his own free will, the morality behind THE LORD OF THE RINGS must collapse.

On the whole, then, this publication is shallow and disappointing. This is the result of a distinct lack of critical insight or perspicuity. As proof of the work's superficiality I would contend that there are no points of any real interest in the book which I have not mentioned in this review.

SEED OF LIGHT: Edmund Cooper; Coronet; 1977; 160pp; 75p; ISBN 0 340 21990 4
 ALL FOOL'S DAY: Edmund Cooper; Coronet; 1977; 192pp; 75p; ISBN 0 340 02860 2
 WHO NEEDS MEN: Edmund Cooper; Coronet; 1977; 192pp; 75p; ISBN 0 340 18614 3

Reviewed by Brian Stableford.

Edmund Cooper, says the publicity handout, is one of Coronet's top-selling science fiction names. Cooper is quoted as saying that "In a typical Edmund Cooper novel there will be a theme that I care about and take seriously. In a sense, the novel will be a propaganda vehicle... These are serious novels, not intended for science fiction addicts only. I have a big readership among people who wouldn't read science fiction but like the blend I write because it's fairly credible and doesn't offend their intelligence." The handout adds: the fact that Coronet has sold half a million Edmund Cooper's (sic), must surely prove this.

On which point I can only say: Garbage.

I do not dispute the first part of what Cooper says. The second part is a lie, and the comment added by Coronet can in no way be reckoned evidence, let alone proof. There is nothing credible about these three novels, and they are an offense to the intelligence. The large sales testify only to the fact that Cooper is fortuitously adept at pushing the buttons that correspond to the everyday prejudices of the unintelligent. Seed Of Light (which, contrary to the publicity handout, has appeared previously in the UK) is a standard generation ship story in which exiles from a doomed Earth seek a new home in the stars. It is crude and mawkish, its characters continually posturing as they mouth their way through set pieces consisting largely of silly platitudes. All Fool's Day is a catastrophe story based on the hypothesis that an increase in the number of sunspots drives the masses of mankind to suicide (all except for the lunatics). How credible, I wonder, is "fairly credible"? The survivors of the catastrophe go through the usual motions.

Who Needs Men? is a satire - by which I mean that it contains a lot of crude sarcasm - on the theme of an all-female society which is gradually hounding men to extinction. Unfortunately, Cooper becomes so involved in the plot he forgets that it's a joke and starts taking it seriously. Exactly the same mistake was made by Walter Besant, who wrote a book on the same theme in 1887. It is surprising, considering the attitudes of the two writers, how much they have in common, save that Cooper is perhaps a little more the typical Victorian, while Besant is certainly the better writer. I wish I could say that all Cooper's propaganda is out of date, but alas, it is not. There is still a big audience for it.., an audience big enough, in fact, to contain half-a-million book-buyers who don't mind being preached at by a man whose writing ability is negligible. I find this terribly depressing.

THE BEST OF ARTHUR C. CLARKE 1932-55/1956-72: Sidgwick And Jackson; £3.95 each; 1977; ISBNs 0 283 98402 3/0 283 98403 1.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

This appeared in one volume in 1973. It comprises the development of, rather than the best of, A.C.C., from his early efforts as an amateur in 1937 (I guess that 1932 date on the first volume must be a publisher's error) to his Nebula-winning "A Meeting With Medusa" in 1972. A cynic might ask, "what development?". Well, since "Retreat From Earth", which first surfaced in 1938 and is appallingly bad, there has been a dramatic improvement in most aspects of Clarke's writing, particularly in the presentation of future science and technology. But in the field of characters and relationships Clarke is still a beginner. True, he often manages to avoid these by writing about a single character with a technical problem to solve, or by using first person narrative; but it seems to me that he has never produced - in any of his fiction, not just these eighteen stories - a convincing human relationship of any kind. In fact, he is the perfect writer for those readers (and I've met some) who hate having people mixed up with the science in SF.

For the record, there are some good stories here; "The Star" and "Death and the Senator" in particular. "The Sentinel" (the seed of 2001) is included, but the equally famous "The Nine Billion Names Of God" is not. Nor are there any Tales From The White Hart here, which is a pity. The Clarke bibliography is a poor effort which avoids listing the contents of collections, doesn't touch any non-fiction and is incomplete even on its own narrow terms through failing to mention the first US edition of The Sands Of Mars. I don't know whether Gerald Bishop or the publisher is to blame.

REVIEW OF :-

HERMANN HESSE : "THE JOURNEY TO THE EAST"

"THE JOURNEY TO THE EAST" (Panther/Granada 1977, ISBN 0 586 03826 4; 60p; 108pp; Copyright Hesse 1956; UK Translation 1956 by Peter Owen. This translation by Hilda Rosner.)

by Andrew Darlington.

ON PROSELYTIZING DISCIPLES ...

The year before I was born (1946) Hermann Hesse received the Nobel Prize for Literature, and was dubbed 'the Dostoevsky of puberty' when "Siddhartha" topped the U.S. best-seller lists. A decade later, Colin Wilson was loudly voicing his praises in his epochal thesis, "The Outsider", in which Hesse appeared as a major symptom of Wilson's 'outsider-syndrome', the estranged visionary existing beyond the boundaries of normal straight society. A select elite of cerebral misfits like Kafka and Dostoevsky, who were charting courses to the brittle edges of human experience - and further. A decade after that Timothy Leary took over the Hesse-propaganda machine. Through his eccentric magazine "The Psychedelic Review" and the inconsistent book, "The Politics of Ecstasy" he wrote of Hesse's work as being blue-prints for neural voyages down the helical DNA polymers via LSD-induced satori. A 24-page essay by Leary was salvaged from this period (to pad this edition out to novel length); it asserts that certain passages from Steppenwolf are 'fairly unequivocal in stating that some chemical was involved and that it had a rather direct relationship to the subsequent experience'. Acid, Leary claimed, could take everyone through the same social and intellectual barriers traversed by Wilson's 'Outsiders', everyone who took the sacred Lysergic Diethylamide sacrament could become Hesse, and understand all of his subtleties and convolutions.

Although equally intriguing both writers probably missed the point - and as no-one seriously gives a damn about either theory any more, perhaps this re-issue of 'Journey to the East' is timely. Unencumbered by the ponderous pseudo-intellectual fabrications of misguided disciples it is possible at last to consider Hesse as Hesse, not as a symptom, a panacea, or an oracle. After all, what is left beyond this Occam's razor process remains well worth consideration. Hesse's novels are largely symbolist exercises, and hence remain open to interpretation, and indeed, invite misinterpretation. They show little of the quiet disturbing nightmare of the Kafka novels from the same circumstances and period. For, instead of being obsessed by the paranoia of the post-war German hunger-years like Kafka (whose work Hesse admired, and whose books he reviewed enthusiastically), Hesse took his Journey to the East; a journey metaphorically encountered in the novel, a journey which took him into mysticism, oriental religion and the pervasive gentleness that was to survive even Harry ("Steppenwolf") Haller's trip through the hallucinogenic Magic Theatre. The oriental motif recurs throughout the body of Hesse's work; from "Siddhartha", a personal reinterpretation of the life of Gautama Buddha set 24 centuries ago in India; to the Chinese Poet Han Fook, the 'Master of the Perfect Word' in the short story "The Poet"; to "Narziss and Goldmund", in which the latter quests through sensuality for the 'Mother of all things' (and gest a mention in "Journey to the East"), while Narziss takes the path of meditation and philosophy in Maulbronn, Medieval Germany. The dichotomy between the protagonists probably represents elements within Hesse's character. A personal quest for an achievable transcendence, a Satori, a unity with what Carl Jung (from whom Hesse took psycho-analysis) called the Pammeter, the unconscious, the race mind. The Journey to the East is perhaps also the life-journey, an escape from the 'delusions of reality',

a wheel of Karmic rebirth through into the Samsara beyond. Into the Nirvanic plain. In the novel he reinforces the point when he writes that 'I will be mindful of the first principle of our great period, never to rely on and let myself be disconcerted by reason, always to know that faith is stronger than so-called reality'.

ON THE JOURNEY TO THE EAST ...

"The Journey to the East" itself is slight, little more than a 74-page essay, and of this the first 28 pages directly recount the actual journey. It is a journey in which 'we not only wandered through space, but also through time. We moved towards the East, but we also travelled into the Middle Ages and the Golden Age; we roamed through Italy and Switzerland, but at times we also spent the night in the tenth century and dwelt with the patriarchs or the fairies ... for our goal was not only the East, or rather the East was not only a country and something geographical, but it was the home and youth of the soul, it was everywhere and nowhere, it was the union of all times'. The journey was astrology-guided - 'we stopped for a few days because an opposition of Saturn and the Moon checked our progress', carried out in diverse company - 'we met other parties of the League's hosts on our way; sometimes we then formed a camp of hundreds, even thousands ... each one of whom had his own dream, his wish, his secret heart's desire, and yet they all flowed together in the great stream and all belonged to each other, shared the same reverence and the same faith, and had made the same vow. I met Jup, the Magician, who hoped to find the greatest happiness of his life in Kashmir; I met Collofine the sorcerer, quoting his favourite passage from the Adventures of Simplicissimus; I met Louis the Terrible who dreamt of planting an olive-grove in the Holy Land and keeping slaves. He went arm-in-arm with Anselm, who was in search of the purple iris of his childhood. I met and loved Ninon, known as 'the foreigner'. Dark eyes gleamed beneath her black hair. She was jealous of Fatima, the princess of my dreams, and yet she was probably Fatima herself without my knowing it.'

Having recounted the early stages of the journey in this way, the writer, H.H., 'a violinist and story-teller', experiences difficulty in evaluating the significance of incidentals that had taken place in the Morbio Gorge, and of the mysterious Leo. He abandons the manuscript and later re-contacts the League, which he believed to be scattered and fragmented.

Hesse made his own oriental trip, to India, in 1911 - but the novel, written in 1932, takes place in 'the troubled, confused, yet so fruitful period following the Great War'. A time of 'so many eccentric political, religious or artistic movements', a time when 'prophets and many secret societies with Messianic hopes appeared and then disappeared again leaving no trace'. Hesse, a German (born in Calw on 2nd July 1877) had sat out the First World War in Switzerland as a protest against German militarism. During the War, Switzerland had played host to many other emigres of various hues - like the 'revolutionary bacillae' Lenin; and the Dada theatre, 'Cabaret Voltaire' from which artist and 'League member' Paul Klee was to emerge. From this Swiss 'detached involvement' Hesse had watched Europe tear itself to pieces, had written emotive pacifist texts and pamphlets (later collected into "If the war goes on ..."), and had observed the emergence of the 'eccentric political movement' of Fascism.

ON RELATED LITERARY THEMES AND JOURNEYS ...

Against this background he had begun to write "The Glass Bead Game". Begun in 1931 it had originally been intended as a hymn to the aesthetic kingdom of the spirit (the name of the protagonist - (Joseph) Knecht, is

the German word for spirit). The novel took eleven years to write - during which time the rise of fascism indicated to him the futility of purely aesthetic ideals in the world of reality, and the novel ended as a repudiation of isolationism in favour of personal involvement.

"The Journey to the East" was produced during this time of a fundamental shift in Hesse's perception, and inevitably it shows many of Hesse's pre-occupations of the period which are also to be found in "The Glass Bead Game". The latter novel, set in a kind of Medieval Germany in AD 2400, was dedicated 'to the Journeyers to the East'. The inventor of the Game, Bastian Perret, was 'in all probability a member of the Journeyers to the East'. While in his article on Hesse Timothy Leary (who took the name of his psychedelic Castalian Foundation from the novel) records that 'in the history of the bead game the practice of meditation was introduced by the League of Eastern Wayfarers'. So, what the novel calls this 'eternal idea' was obviously of some importance to Hesse; and one of the most intriguing questions left by his work - and one most relevant to "The Journey to the East" - concerns the exact nature of this 'League'. Was it, as Colin Wilson suggested, an elitist group of artists and intellectuals, a dominant 5% of the population forming a kind of MENSA-club of evolutionary natural selection; or was Leary right when he hazarded the idea that the League was made up of small visionary cells of drug-users to whom 'the doors of perception' to cosmic eternity had been narcotically opened?

Leary goes on to establish the fact that the League was not entirely the product of Hesse's imagination, but that there were strong anchors tying its complex mythology to the earth. Quoting heavily from a 1960 biography by Bernhard Zellers, Leary established that Hans C., who appears in the novel, and to whom the book was dedicated, was Hans C. Bodmer, a friend who later bought Hesse a house in Montagnola. Again the 'Castle Bremgarten and its hosts Max and Tilli' from the novel is established to be the home of Max Wassmer near Bern, where Hesse was a regular guest. Leary continues 'The Black King in Winterthur refers to another friend, George Reinhart, to whose house filled with secrets, Hesse was often invited. The names of artists and writers which occur in "The Journey to the East" are all either directly the names of actual historical persons or immediately derived from them; Lauscher, Klingsor, Paul Klee, Ninon (Hesse's wife), Hugo Wolf, Brentano, Lindhorst etc. In other words it appears likely that the scenes described are based on the actual experiences of a very close group of friends who met in each others' homes in Southern Germany and Switzerland'.

ON OTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF THE THEME ...

Certainly the 'poet of the Interior Journey' displays a certain element of elitism in the novel that would not be inconsistent with the circumstances of Leary's contention. Leary clarifies Hesse's delineation of the 'brotherhood of the illuminati' from the 'sleepwalking majority'; and within the novel there are pointed references to the 'select little group' as distinct from the 'officials and shop-assistants who, after a party or a Sunday outing, adapt themselves again to everyday business life'. There are also numerous mentions of those 'born to be masters'.

But there are also indications that the League went beyond the elitist 'close group of friends' suggested by Leary. Mozart, for example, is mentioned as being a League member. He also has a cameo role in "Steppenwolf" as an inmate of the Magic Theatre. Perhaps it is worth bearing in mind that in reality Mozart himself was a member of the equally antique League of Masons, and insinuated references to Masonic rite into

his opera, 'The Magic Flute'. Perhaps that is mere coincidence, but in the novel Hesse goes on to enlist Zoroaster, Lao Tse, Plato, Xenophon, Pythagoras, Albertus Magnus, Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy, Novalis and Baudelaire as 'co-founders and brothers of our League'. A mix of real and fictitious characters, of which the 'imaginary characters were more animated, more beautiful, happier and certainly finer and more real than the poets and creators themselves'. This suggests to me that, although there undoubtedly were cross-over points into reality, at least an element of the League's construction was the kind of pantheon of literary and historical heroes that might have been assembled by a lonely and bookish child. This idea would be consistent with the bias towards the greater force of fiction; and the kind of child would also be consistent with the one described by Hesse in his semi-autobiographical works, "Peter Camenzind" and "Unterm Rad" (translated in the UK as 'The Prodigy', in the US as 'Beneath The Wheel'). There is further support for this idea in other examples of Hesse's writing. In particular a 1948 short story, "The Interrupted Class", which specifically refers to Hesse's literary attempts written roughly from "Demian" to "The Journey to the East".

ON INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSIONS ...

In the story Hesse writes that 'storytelling presupposes listeners, and demands of the storyteller a courage which he can summon up only when he and his listeners have a setting, a society, an ethic, a language, and a manner of thinking in common. The models I revered in my youth ... long supported me in the pious belief that I too had been born into a community of this kind.' The analogies with the League need little elaboration. He continued 'I have no serious doubt either in the understanding of my readers or in the narrative quality of my stories', until a period of subsequent disillusionment in which he saw 'all my art seep away and the substance of my experience become almost uncannily polyphonic, ambivalent, complex and opaque'. The experience seems to be remarkably similar to the narrator's disorientation following the Morbio Gorge incident in "Journey to the East". 'When something precious and ir retrievable is lost, we feel we have awakened from a dream' he wrote, remembering when he had been free to 'move Time and Space about like scenes in a theatre', when the League had 'conquered' the war-shattered world by its faith and transformed it into Paradise, creatively bringing the past, the future and the fictitious into the present moment'.

But out of the disillusionments of War, the lost ideals of intellectual aestheticism, and the tarnished innocence of childhood (all of which could be said to be allegorically recounted in "The Journey to the East") came a new set of ideas. A new phase of post-war questing, one that was spiritually non-sectarian. A phoenix-generation which 'no longer considered the records of past religions primarily from a historical, sociological, or philosophical point of view ... they not only revered, but actually envied the manifestations of religious life. They thirsted to know the inner meanings of the cults and formulas that history had transmitted to us, and were animated by a secret desire - half weariness with life, half readiness to believe - to get to the heart of religion, to achieve a faith and a state of mind which would enable them to live with the freshness and intensity that emanate from religious cults' (from 'Edmund', a 1934 short story). It is an image consistent with the tantalising final few pages of "The Journey to the East" in which the writer discovers the symbol through which he is defined within the League archives; the sculpture which apparently symbolises the relationship between Master and Pupil, birth and regeneration, death and rebirth.

To read Hesse is vastly enjoyable; to classify and subdivide his symbolism into areas of meaning, into overblown theories, is like grasping at fistfuls of air. 'I hold in my hands a bundle of a thousand knotted threads which would occupy hundreds of hands for years to disentangle and straightn out, even if every thread did not become terribly brittle and break between the fingers as soon as it is handled and gently teased out.' These narrator's comments from "The Journey To The East" should act, perhaps, to discourage future disciples from erecting edifices of elaborate and often misleading 'significance' around elements of Hesse's work, and merely enjoy its totality.

END.

((Editor's note: I am in total agreement with Andy's conclusion but would like to add a few thoughts of my own on this topic. Leary's opinions seem to me to be in the mould of the worst excesses of American materialist thought. If transcendence and spirituality are mentioned, he infers, there must be drugs involved. Those with stunted imaginations are never willing to give credit to those who need no such crutches and can attain spiritual lucidity naturally. I feel Leary not only misunderstood Hesse but used him as 'intellectual capital' for his own misguided philosophy. Hesse was never a great socialiser and the ludicrous image Leary spwans of an intellectual 'glee club' does not tie in with the situation in Southern Germany and Switzerland between Wars. It seems a simple case of Leary superimposing his contemporary California intact upon Hesse's Swabia. Leary also ignores entirely the fact that all of Hesse's fiction was extrapolated autobiography (when it wasn't straight autobiography). For those of you interested in a more exhaustive and quite stimulating book on Hesse you could try to track down Edwin F. Casebeer's HERMANN HESSE, in the Writers For The 70's series. Though it is another American study of Hesse, it does manage to capture some of the essence of Hesse's mid-European romanticism whilst linking it with modern culture. The book is in Warner Paperback library. ISBN: 0 446 68965 3.))

OPERATION ARES: Gene Wolfe; Dobson; 1977; £3.95.

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid.

Any book review, in essence, is no more than the personal opinion of one reader, the reviewer: at least, I'm not about to pretend to any objective view. It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, that a new reviewer give readers a yardstick by which to judge his opinion; and, by coincidence, I have been given a perfect vehicle upon which to voice my prejudices.

Who is the finest contemporary sf writer? A hellishly difficult question to answer, but for me it would come down to one or other of the following: James Tiptree Jr., Samuel R. Delany, Gardner Dozois, Kate Wilhelm, Harlan Ellison or Gene Wolfe. In his latest Best Of The Year collection, Terry Carr makes it clear that Wolfe would get his vote, but I'm more hesitant about actually reaching a decision. However, when it comes down to favourite pieces of fiction, and despite a close race from such as Zelazny's A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES, Dozois' CHAINS OF THE SEA, Richard Cowper's THE CUSTODIANS and Kate Wilhelm's THE INFINITY BOX, it is Wolfe's THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS that emerges with a clear lead.

Thus as neat a summation of my tastes as you're likely to get, as well as an explanation of my high expectations when OPERATION ARES arrived for review. But it does date from 1970, his first novel, and in AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS Ellison did sum it up succinctly as 'A so-so novel', so I can't say I wasn't warned. Still, I was disappointed. Not so much that

it's a bad book, you understand; but it could have been so much better. If it had not borne his name I certainly would not have recognised it as being by Gene Wolfe. Oh when you look for them there are occasional flashes of his style and his genius as shown in stories he was to produce only a year or two later. But you do have to search for them, and more frequently there are overlong, overcomplex passages that one has to read two or three times before the convoluted meaning becomes clear. Places where he has tried and it has not come off. Elsewhere there are simple - too simple - sentences, the opposite extreme, so that at times I could almost imagine myself reading a collaboration.

What it comes down to is the fact that it is a feeling-the-way book, a testing-the-water before diving in, an experiment, or rather, a mishmash of experiments. In other words almost a text-book of typical first novel faults. If the critic has any purpose in the scheme of things it is to point out to the writer these faults, and hopefully guide him towards achieving his potential. But in this case we already know with hindsight that Wolfe chose the right road, so my comments on these failings are going to seem like nit-picking. Okay, perhaps they are; but if there is anything to say about this book other than that it is a reasonable but totally undistinguished adventure story, then it lies here.

It is hardly reasonable to expect the sort of fully-realised world rich in atmosphere that Wolfe achieved in more mature works, THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS, THE DEATH OF DOCTOR ISLAND. Given that cavil, the scene-setting and background-building with which he opens OPERATION ARES are effective. In a few swift scenes he paints enough of the picture to allow us all to identify the political set-up. In a way it is an extolling of the traditional virtues. A nasty fascist dictatorship has taken over the US on the strength of being anti-science, and although most of the population (at least, so we are given to assume early in the book; later he backs down from this considerably) hates them. They rule with a rod of iron (or rather, something resembling a cattle-prod in the hands of the 'peaceguard') and no-one can do anything.

But never fear, help is at hand, for the brave scientists of Mars will return to rescue Earth from this dreadful tyranny, and science will once more win the day. Science, of course, is represented by the space programme and the Mars Colony, and the whole thing is rather naive, because although he lets the baddies spout one or two transparently false ideals (the space programme wasted money that could have gone on food, education etc), Wolfe too obviously loads the dice against them: a dictatorship; censorship of what can and what cannot be taught and even said; a policeforce of armed thugs (peaceguards), widespread decay, curfew, wild animals in the country attacking careless passers-by. It is quite clear who our sympathies must lie with in this black and white world.

To be fair, the political set-up is far more complexly drawn than I have implied, complete with strengths and weaknesses on both sides, and a marvellously drawn 'air of decay' being urgently shored up. But there is one very bad weakness; the tendency to see America as the World. Okay, lip service is paid to Russia and China (both, by implication, exactly as they are now; except for links between Russia and the USA being stronger: a nice realpolitik contradiction considering the fascist nature of the US government). But it is still very much an American Mars returning to Earth for the sole purpose of returning democracy (ie; Science) to America.

The hero, John Castle, is a teacher of physics; which serves as well as a white hat to place him firmly on the side of right and good and science. He is helped by a brother and sister called Japhet and Anna Trees (I'll refrain from comment on the significance of that name). The story, in brief, is that Castle is a malcontent. He is falsely arrested on a charge of sabotage, imprisoned, escapes, joins the invading Martians, becomes leader of the underground organisation ARES and, despite being captured by an old enemy is still able to arrange a happy ending by bringing about a return to democracy (which seems to rely heavily upon everyone's right to carry a gun). As nice a set of cliches as you're likely to encounter in any casual browse among bookshop shelves.

The story proceeds in fits and starts. Each chapter details either an incident or a closely related series of them; but in a way they seem hermetically sealed and there is little continuity. Between each chapter time passes, and things happen that change the set up and character relationships, yet which are only alluded to after the event and neither explained nor described. Thus in Chapter 1, Castle can only warn the Trees of a peaceguard raid by denouncing them on a lesser charge. The next thing we know, he is visiting them as if nothing has happened, and the incident is not referred to again. Yet I would imagine the average reader would like to know what happened. I know I would. Then, in Chapter 2, the underground organisation, ARES, suddenly crops up in mid-paragraph without explanation or prior warning, though everyone in the story has apparently known about it for some time. One more example: we suddenly discover that - apparently overnight - a militia has been set up and Japhet and Anna, two determined opponents of the regime, have both joined it. But this is too much of a change even for the author and briefly, in passing (almost as an after-thought) this is explained away as giving them access to arms.

It is a jerky, ill-considered style; a strain on the reader who has to start from scratch at the beginning of each new chapter. In fact I could not avoid the impression that the novel was not written as a single entity, but as separate chapters. Even more fatally, the disjointedness gives the impression that the various incidents, characters and organisations introduced throughout the book did not arise naturally from the story but were simply created for the convenience of the plot every time he found himself in difficulties. Certainly none of the characters take on a life of their own.

Thus, although Castle and the Trees are malcontents, there is no hint of ARES until it is convenient to have Castle suspected of leadership of such an organisation. But it would seem that the existence of such a subversive group is only logical given the political situation Wolfe has created. The biggest surprise is rather that it is not bigger and better organised than it in fact is, assuming the implied extent of malcontentment. However, even to suspect Castle of leadership of ARES, given that he is a schoolteacher in a small backwoods town with no external connections seems absurd. Then, later, we learn that (after all!) ARES was no more than a fiction created by the Martians. But once invented ARES has quickly built up a substantial body of real members. Which leaves the strange picture of an unpopular dictatorial government in decline with no organised opposition.

But then OPERATION ARES is rich hunting ground for the seeker of inconsistencies and unlikelihoods. It doesn't even eschew proceeding by coincidence; always the hardest thing over which to suspend disbelief. One prime example: Japhet and Anna become separated. Japhet makes his way to New York where, coincidentally, Castle is a prisoner. Inevitably (in such a small place) the two meet; and when, badly injured, Castle escapes,

Japhet arranges for him to be given shelter in the house of a cult, the Hunters, that Japhet has joined. The Hunters have a guest, the constitutional president, among whose bodyguard is - Anna!!

Constitutional president? That's an idiocy to beat them all. Would the President Pro Tem (Dictator) really allow a constitutionally-elected president to continue in office in the White House, even if it were an empty, powerless sinecure for an over-the-hill, time-serving politician? No matter how personally and politically weak, how under-the-wing of the dictator he was, such an office would readily provide a figurehead (willing or no) for those elements seeking a return to democracy. No one clever enough to ride a wave of public feeling that he has created and fanned (and that is by no means universal) into a dictatorship of the USA, would be so short-sighted and politically naive as to so feed the flames of opposition.

But this is just one more of the many disparate elements that have been crammed together in this book. A typical first novel fault - get as much in as possible, you never know if you'll ever get to do another. And besides, who is to say which little bit it'll be that will tickle the publisher's fancy? One can almost picture the writing of it: his Solzhenitsyn phase - the march of the prisoners and their night in the barn, a little bit of IVAN DENISOVICH there; and the special privileges prison for the teacher; THE FIRST CIRCLE perhaps? The strange cult, the Hunters; an homage a Robert Silverberg, who seems to crowd his books with so many strange apocalyptic cults? And in the curious political set up with its President Pro Tem who has the power, and the Constitutional President who has none, do I detect overtones of Philip K. Dick?

There are simply too many bits crowded in together without really fitting into a smooth, coherent, unified story. Obviously he should have been far more ruthless in deciding which elements were vital to the story, and which were slotted in merely because he had a nice scene worked out.

But if he is overgenerous in some areas, he is terribly remiss in others. In particular he tantalises with brief mentions of things that, as a reader, I at least would like to know much more about. For instance, the Martians have a device for projecting the mind of one man into the mind of another. It is used at several, often crucial, points during the course of the story, and though I can understand the lack of any technical account of the process, I do wish he had told us what it is like to experience this mind-sharing from one side or the other. There were two occasions in particular where this information would have been fascinating: where Castle shares the mind of a man who dies, and where he shares the mind of Anna. But both are mentioned just in passing. WHAT WAS IT LIKE!?

Another example: the abortive attack on the capital, Arlington (Washington) is a crucial piece of action that cries out for some subjective account of the experience of battle. Instead, all we get is a page of impersonal statistics and troop movements. He might just as well have said "They attacked Arlington and were repulsed" for all the interest he generates.

Even the locations are shadowy things. New York, Washington, White City, Peking: it takes a signpost to distinguish them. What do they look like? What sort of climate do they have; what do they smell like, feel like, sound like? He never says. Buildings remain anonymous, streets and regions just names. Even the transition from country to city is indistinct. Considering his later work this is perhaps the strangest failure in the book.

I have always assumed that one of the purposes of a novel was to give the reader vicarious experiences, whether or not it was pure imagination on the part of the author he should be filling his reader's heads with strange experiences. Well, the poor reader would hardly be said to get his money's worth from OPERATION ARES in that respect.

But that is the pattern of the book. He leads you up to a piece of action and then skips ahead to what happens when it's all over. It is very difficult to involve the reader, to engage his sympathies for the characters when he does not actually see what happens to them. It is a measure of Wolfe's ability then, that he succeeds to the extent that he does; especially when you realise that the characters are just good quality cardboard. It is amazing how unemotionally they take everything that is thrown at them, as if it were their normal daily routine. Castle, for instance, barely escapes with his life from a building that is destroyed by peculiar burrowing animals brought in by the Martians that he has never heard of before; yet he is affected less than I would be by a cartoon film seen on television.

We have been given a picture of a society in which trucks and buses are broken down and disused; where the only form of transport is in the hands of the peace guards. Hence I would have thought, for the ordinary people like Castle and the Trees, their horizons would be pretty close and any major journey would be an event. Yet they flit from place to place across the country, and even visit China, without evincing the slightest wonderment.

Now I am myself a great believer in the importance of individuals in the great sweep of history, so I am not about to complain about the fact that it is the actions of the main characters that are vital. It is, after all, an acceptable concomitant of them being the focus of the novel; and isn't the whole basis of the adventure story the story of people who find their role pivotal in a far wider scheme of things? But is it really credible that immediately upon recruitment into ARES, Castle should be made its leader? Even more unbelievable; almost immediately after that he is leading a raid upon a prison where Anna and the Constitutional President are being held. Castle, remember, is a small town physics teacher with no military experience. So suddenly he is a tactical genius? It is pure pulp, where you simply create an all-purpose hero who is really Superman, whatever profession the author has originally placed him in.

But OPERATION ARES is more than that. Or should be.

I have had a lot to complain about in OPERATION ARES, but to be honest it is an acceptable enough little adventure, not too mindless a way of killing a few hours if you have nothing better to do. There are many worse books about. No, my main complaint is that it bears the name GENE WOLFE; it is an anonymous confection that could have been churned out by any hack.

A NEW MAP OF HELL; "Inferno" by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle

Reviewed by Philip Stephensen-Payne.

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita. (1)

So Dante begins his "Inferno". From the 'dark wood' he is rescued by Virgil, who says his only hope of redemption is to travel through Hell.

Dante, reluctantly, is persuaded and Virgil transfers him, mystically, to the Vestibule of Hell.

For Allen Carpenter, the narrator of the Niven/Pournelle version, the story begins at an SF convention:

" Remember the drinking party in War and Peace? Where one of the characters bets he can sit on a window and rick a whole bottle of rum without touching the sides? I made the same bet... The bottle was half-empty when my gag reflex cut in and...I pitched right over. " (pp 9/10)

To his surprise, Allen 'wakes up', though in a state where he can see, feel or do nothing. Thoughts of frozen corpsicles flash through his mind, and he swears at the race that has been so careless as to leave him half-conscious. Finally, in desperation, he cries in his mind 'For the love of God, get me out of here', and is out, seemingly alive and well, in a place that looks surprisingly like Dante's 'Vestibule of Hell'. Beside him a man is standing; not Virgil, but another Italian who calls himself Benito and offers himself as Allen's guide.

Allen is not gullible enough to accept Benito's ludicrous explanation that they are in the real Hell, and concludes they must be in an unusual future.

" But what kind of civilisation would build an exact copy of Dante's Inferno? An Infernoland? " (p 20)

However, as the ground-rules seem to follow those laid down by Dante, he is quite happy, at least until he can think of a better idea, to humour Benito's idea that the only way out is, as Dante described, down through each circle of Hell and out through the centre.

They set off at once, crossing the river Acheron in Charon's ferryboat (upgraded from a rowing boat to accomodate the greater influx of damned souls). Entering the Palace of Minos (Judge of the Dead), Allen gets the first blow to his self-confidence, and theory, when Minos proves to have a tail that can suddenly extend to be several miles long. Nonplussed, but still believing there is an easy way out, Allen follows Benito further and further into Hell, a Hell that seems to become more and more real with every level they pass.

Per me si va nella citta dolente. (2)

"Inferno" (the Niven & Pournelle version) is divided into three (untitled) sections. The first takes Allen and Benito from the opening to the walls of Dis, which form the boundary between Upper Hell and Nether Hell. Upper Hell is for those who have committed 'Sins of Weakness', and the corresponding punishments do not seem very horrifying to the observer. In Circle One the Virtuous Pagans live in ignorant seclusion. Circle Two is for the lustful, who are constantly whirled around in a storm. In Circle Three we find the Gluttonous sitting in eternal cold and rain. Here, for good value, Niven and Pournelle have added the Health Faddists (as Benito says 'Gluttony is too much attention to things on Earth, especially in the matter of diet. It is the obsession that matters, not the quantity.')

The Fourth Circle contains the Hoarders and the Wasters forever, according to Dante, rolling huge rocks together in conflict. Niven and Pournelle amplify the scene somewhat by making the rocks enormous diamonds that the groups are fighting over. Nearby, in the same Circle, they have also put the Builders and the Conservationists, forever trying to construct/dismantle a gigantic bridge.

Finally Allen and Benito cross the Fifth Circle, a freezing marsh in which the 'wrathful and sullen' fight, to reach the red-hot iron walls of Dis itself. However, here they are faced with a problem, as they have not the

right papers, and the clerk will not let them through without them.

" Of course there are exceptions, sir. One was made over two thousand years ago. Before my time, but they still talk about it. " He shuddered. " But you are obviously not Him. Is either of you a living man? /like Dante/ Can either of you summon angels? /like Virgil/ Those are in the book too...it says very plainly, anyone who can summon angels may pass. But if you're applying under that ruling you'll have to go to the main gate, and they'll take care of you." (p 58)

Benito, by pretending to be the Secret Police, gets them through, and they go in search of some clothe for Allen to build a glider - his new idea for escape. After a very light passage through the first five circles, Niven and Pournelle allow a brief humorous interlude as Benito and Allen wander through Dis - there will be little time for that later.

Io non averei creduto
che morte tanta n 'avesse disfatta. (3)

As the second section opens, Allen is just finishing his glider with which he hopes to fly out of 'Infernoland'. Hauling it back up to the Second Circle they launch the glider and for a while all goes well. Then Benito begins to lose control of the craft, and they acquire a passenger - one of the Lustful who happens to fly by - called Corbett, a 21st century shuttle pilot. Even he cannot handle the craft and, sailing over the walls of Dis, they crash-land in the Sixth Circle, a region of red-hot tombstones. Allen and Benito are thrown clear, but the glider bursts into flame with Corbett still inside. Allen is laid out with a shattered leg, and looks on in amazement as Benito rushes to the blaze and pulls out the charred Corbett. He is even more startled when his leg begins to heal, and Corbett's skin begins to regrow rapidly.

I'd watched a miracle. A compound fracture had healed before my eyes. And I was no robot!
But this place had to be artificial. It was a construct, a design. I knew that. All right, Carpentier. An artifact implies an artificer. There has to be a designer. Pick a chief engineer for the Builders, and call him...what? Good fannish names, like Ghod, Ghu, Roscoe, the Ceiling? No. Call him Big Juju.
Question, Carpentier. In what way do Big Juju's abilities differ from God Almighty's (p 87)

The red-hot tombs belong to heretics, according to Benito. Surely an obsolete sin, thinks Allen, but sins are not outdated that easily. In the distance a sign flashes,

SD IT GOES
SD IT GOES
SD IT GOES

- What was the blinking neon sign doing in this place?

...At the end of the corridor was a tremendous squarecut edifice on black marble. The epitath beneath the neon sign was long and wordy, couched in words of one syllable and short, simple sentences. A man's life history, a list of books and awards -

...At first I couldn't speak, I was that angry. "Him? Why him? A science-fiction writer who lied about being a science-fiction writer because he got more money that way. He wrote whole novels in baby-talk with sixth-grade drawings in them, and third-grade science, and he knew better. How does he rate a monument that size?"...

Benito shook his head wonderingly. "I question your sanity. He is in there. You are out here, free to escape." (pp 91/2)

After the tombs the group reach their first obstacle after the walls of Dis, the river Phlegethon ('incorrectly' identified with the Acheron by Niven and Pournelle), a river of boiling blood in which the 'Violent Against Their Neighbours' are placed. Unlike their predecessors, Virgil and Dante who, being sent by divine authority, were allowed to cross the ford, Allen, Benito and Corbett are subject to the pains and strictures of the dead, and must wade through the boiling blood, an agony the like of which Allen has never encountered. In the river they meet Billy The Kid, who decides to join the trek downward rather than stay where he is.

From then on it becomes more difficult. The small group are forced to experience much of the punishment meted out to those in the circles they are passing through. As they descend further, the punishments become more and more severe, and at the beginning of the Eighth Circle (where the flatterers live waist-deep in shit), Corbett gives up and retreats.

Credo in un Dio crudel. (4)

It is the Eighth Circle that really has an effect on Allen. Divided into ten bolgias or canyons, it seems to cover as many sins as the rest of Hell put together, several of them unreasonably punished, seemingly. In the bolgia reserved for witches and alchemists he finds one of his son's teachers. Horrified he asks her why, and she explains that whenever she had a pupil who had difficulty learning to read, she said he had dyslexia. "Are you here because of bad diagnosis?" exclaims Allen.

"Dyslexia is not a diagnosis, Mr Carpentier. It is a prediction. It is a prediction that says this child can never learn to read. And with that prediction on his record - why, strangely enough, none of them ever do. Unless they happen on a teacher who doesn't believe in educationalese witchcraft." (pp 140/1)

Allen cannot accept this and insists her punishment is unjust. When Benito asks him calmly why he has a better right to judge than God, Allen replies,

"It's God I'm judging. If He can judge me, I claim the right to judge Him.'
 ...Benito laughed, and said, 'How will you impliment your judgement against God himself?'
 The only answer to that was a feeble one, maybe, but I used it. 'By withholding my worship. Benito, do you realise the God you worship keeps a private torture chamber?'
 'Hardly private.'
 'Private or public, the God Allen Carpentier worships will have to meet higher standards than that!' " (p. 141)

Very fine sentiments, perhaps, but it makes it no easier for them to get past the demons who guard this sector of Hell. At the 5th bolgia, Billy stops to fight a demon and is captured and returned to the river of boiling blood.

Allen and Benito trudge on wearily, as at each bolgia Allen recognises more people he knows, and realises how many of the categories he could fit into - grafter, flatterer, seducer. Then, at the 8th bolgia, that of the False Counsellors, comes a surprise for Allen,

"Come down!' one of the flames called to Benito... 'Throw him down, you, if you're an american! That's Mussolini! Benito Mussolini!' " (p. 151)

In disgust Allen throws Benito into the valley, where he instantly bursts into flames. Allen presses on alone, past the two remaining bolgias of the Eighth Circle, to the empty plain before the Ninth. There he stops to think:

If what I remembered of Dante was true I would then be in the last Circle of Hell, the Circle of Traitors...

But there had to be a joker in the deck somewhere. Benito had been a power in Hell. He'd given orders to others of Hell's minions. He'd demonstrated demonic strength against a tank of a man in the great swamp.

Carpentier, why didn't he do that to you?

Maybe it was guilt that stopped him. He'd writhed and torn at the ground, but he hadn't actually hit me, not once... And for all his presumed safe-conduct, he was back where Minos had sentenced him, with the Evil Counsellors.

...Why hadn't Benito fought?

From every direction it looked the same. It was going to be unreasonably easy for Allen Carpentier to enter the Circle of Traitors - the place of punishment for those who had betrayed their benefactors. I thought it over for a long time. Then I turned and started back.

(pp 163/4)

He forces his way, at great cost, back up the path he has come and rescues Benito from the pit. Allen is at last prepared to admit he is wrong, and to go through a lot to right that wrong.

O delli altri poetri onore e lume. (5)

Dante's 'Divine Comedy' is commonly regarded as one of the most important pieces of literature. As T. S. Eliot says in his essay 'Dante' - "Take the 'Comedy' as a whole, you can compare it to nothing but the entire dramatic work of Shakespeare... Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them, there is no third." (6) By parallelling the original so closely, Niven and Purnelle court an unflattering comparison with it.

For the main strength of Dante's 'Inferno' is twofold. Firstly, it is an outstanding piece of poetry that stands at a peak of literary achievement. With this, naturally, Niven and Pournelle cannot compete - their style is competent, light and enjoyable, but not the stuff of which great literature is made.

Secondly, Dante's poem was crammed with a very clever combination of allegory and political commentary on 14th Century Italy. This skill, while undoubtedly remarkable, is sadly lost on the modern reader. Niven and Pournelle have not attempted to include the same level of topical references - they have more of a reputation to safeguard than Dante had at the time - but they do, very skillfully, update Dante's ideas to make them more immediate to the 20th-Century reader. They follow Dante's geography rigidly (for the assumption is that Dante had visited Inferno, in which case his description must be accurate) but they reinterpret the meaning of some of the sins to suit modern references (such as the writer who invented a religion being classed as a heretic, or the teacher who diagnosed dyslexia as a witch) and add some others that were not prevalent before (like the polluters and environmentalists). In addition, they avoid Dante's tendency to discuss at length the histories of all he met, thus keeping the reader firmly entrenched in the horrors of Hell.

Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate. (7)

Can the Niven and Pournelle book be dismissed then as merely an updated imitation of Dante's work? Not at all. For in one crucial area, the theme, they differ, and that difference is enough to make Niven and Pournelle's book much more relevant to the average 20th-Century reader.

Dante preached a theme of religious intolerance, in line with the thinking of his age. Those who did not follow the strict Christian ethos in their lives were doomed to an eternal punishment of one kind or another, from which there is no reprieve. Dante and Virgil are purely spectators in Hell, untouched by the suffering around them, which they regard as basically just, however unfortunate. Dante meets a man he admired immensely in life, Brunetto Latini, condemned to eternity on the burning sand for being a sodomite - yet Dante feels no revulsion at this sentence passed on so 'worthy' a man.

Niven and Pournelle disagree with Dante's idea of the purpose of Hell, and reject the notion of there being no reprieve. Allen sums up their views when he says

"It has to be the final training ground. If nothing can get a soul into Heaven in its life, there's still Hell, God's last attempt to get his attention. Like a catatonic in a hotbox, like me in that bottle, if Hell won't make a man yell for help, then it was still worth a try.'

Benito was nodding. 'You may be right. You may have found the purpose of Hell.'

'Yeah. Yeah, but do you see where it leaves me? Everyone in Hell has to be able to leave once he's learned enough about himself... And I can't leave Hell until I'm sure they can do it.'" (p. 191)

Anyone can be redeemed; all they must do is admit their guilt and be prepared to do anything to correct it. Benito, condemned as an evil dictator, has saved himself by his preparedness to go through Hell to try and rescue other souls. Allen set his foot on the right path when he decided to go back to rescue Benito and, at the end, he takes Benito's place as guide to help save more people and to further atone for his guilt. We are deliberately told nothing of Allen's life, and yet by the end of the book we know him well, for it is his deeds in death that are important here.

Dante, at the gates of Hell, said all should abandon hope; Niven and Pournelle modify that to a comment Dante makes slightly later - "Here must all distrust be left behind, here must all cowardice be ended." (8)

Niven and Pournelle's "Inferno" is no mere adventure story set in Hell - it is a spiritual journey as much as Dante's was. Allen has transcended the lecherous hack at an SF convention to become a man with a purpose at last. As he sits at the end, watching Benito escape, he sums up what he has learnt:

The damned had all the time there was, and so did I. Hell was the violent ward of a hospital for the theologically insane. Some could be cured. I would have to return to Hell. I was afraid of that; not afraid of the pains, or that the demons would catch me, because the pains would heal, and pain in the right cause is a badge of honour. As to the demons, there'd be no chance they could hold me. Not now. I knew. No. My fear was of the doubts that would return. They would come, and I'd just have to live with them, and fight them with my memory of these few moments of peace. There were no doubts here. None at all. (pp 191/2)

References:

All quotations from Dante's "Inferno" come from the 1971 Oxford University Press editions, translated by John D. Sinclair.

- (1) Dante's INFERNO Canto I 1-3. "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost." (p. 23)
- (2) Dante's INFERNO Canto III 1. "Through me the way into the Woeful City." (p. 47)
- (3) Dante's INFERNO Canto III 56-7. "I should never have believed death had undone so many." (p. 49)
- (4) Iago in Verdi's opera "Otello". "I believe in a cruel God."
- (5) Dante's INFERNO Canto I 82. "O glory and light of other poets." (p. 27)
- (6) Reprinted in "Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot" ed Frank Kermode: Faber & Faber: 1975: p. 227.
- (7) Dante's INFERNO Canto III 9. "Abandon every hope, ye that enter." (p. 47)
- (8) Dante's INFERNO Canto III 14-15. "Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto; ogni vilita convien che qui sia morta." (p. 46)

All other quotations from "Inferno" by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle: Star: 1977: 192pp: 75p: ISBN 0 352 39729 2.

INFERNO by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle

Reviewed by James Corley.

INFERNO begins mundanely enough with an sf writer defenestrating himself at a convention. He returns to consciousness in Dante's Hell and naturally assumes the place is an 'Inferno land', the playground of advanced, sadistic aliens versed in medieval Italian literature and Walt Disney's real estate activities. He resolves to escape.

In Paperback Parlour 6, Phil Stephensen-Payne described this as 'the best book of 1976' (US Publication date) and at the time of writing it's a front runner for the 1977 BSFA Paperback Award. The cover boasts raves from Poul Anderson ('dazzling tour de force') Roger Zelazny ('intelligence and imagination') and Norman Spinrad ('the ultimate Sam Peckinpah movie'). Is that a compliment?

Well there's certainly a lot to be said in favour of it. It's slick, fast and unpretentious. It leaps in at the top of chapter 1 and heads for the last full stop on page 192 with the single-mindedness of an elephant in heat. En route it passes over a great many tormented archetypes with the empathy of a steamroller.

No, I wouldn't call it subtle, or even the best book of the year. It's probably one of the most entertaining though. Hell itself turns out to be too exotically varied and interesting to be really objectionable. Niven and Pournelle's next book, Lucifer's Hammer, is to be filmed, but not, I imagine, by Sam Peckinpah, George Lucas would be more appropriate: Satan Wars.

If you're into this sort of thing, someone called E.E.Y. Hayes has also published a novel about a character precipitated into Dante's Inferno, but

only the Second Circle. It is called CHARIOT OF FIRE, comes from Hodder and Stoughton, and is described by the Sunday Times as a subtle, sophisticated romp through the afterlife. Will the Inferno take over from the skateboard?

GOD STRIKES AGAIN : ANOTHER BIBLE!

a review of

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IGNORANCE

Edited by Ronald Duncan and Miranda Weston-Smith

Volume 1. Physical Sciences.

Volume 2. Life Sciences and Earth Sciences.

£3.50 each in flexi paperback

£12.50 in one combined hardcover volume.

Pergamon Press Ltd.

by Maxim Jakubowski.

If, like me, you spent the final hour of an inglorious career in mathematics locked up in a narrow metal cupboard during a riotous class at the French Lycee in London, then the relationship between you and the higher realms of science is tenuous indeed. Mind you, I'm a fluent as well as dazzling manipulator with a pocket calculator, providing the silly batteries haven't run out of course! The point I'm attempting to make is that Science Fiction is a tough world for pornographers or specialists in aspects of despair in contemporary literature (a comparative study of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cesare Pavese and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle); what can a poor boy do with all these high-flung, super-engineer types like Heinlein or Larry Niven around, or radio-astronomers, physicists and other assorted wizards of the grey cells like Gregory Benford, Fred Hoyle or Frank Herbert/Herbert Franke. Then you have unfairly brilliant Oxford literature graduates like Ian Watson who somehow comprehend every little nook and cranny of abstract science and manage to conjure up with delightful ease impossibly realistic unknown mental/physical universes every breakfast or so (you should have stuck to Walter Pater, Watson, one more prize-winning novel from your pen and I'm sending the First Fandom hitmen after you - end of personal message). Doesn't all this make you want to puke (or join a rock'n'roll band); here we are, would-be Science Fiction writers who just can't understand the wonderful subtleties of science. It just ain't fair: why can't proton-drive subspace rockets work on double strength tomato juice and black holes open gently when you stroke a pliant female breast or an old magic brass lamp? And to make things worse, on a more personal note, my own wife is an electronics engineer, who, since our wedding night, adamantly refuses to explain to me the holy mysteries of the inner electron.

Well, for all of us lower minions of the Science Fiction hierarchy, a book has arrived which could go a very long way towards solving our nagging problems of scientific inspiration. And, I beg you, do not allow for one instant the jesting thought that an encyclopedia of ignorance is

devised for ignorants to flitter across your worthy mind!

An encyclopedia is generally about known facts, it provides answers to all the many "whys"; this Pergamon Press project, on the contrary, is all about unknown facts. Edited by Ronald Duncan, a major contemporary poet and playwright who recently completed the epic poem MAN, in which he tried to bridge the gulf between Science and Art, and Miranda Weston-Smith, granddaughter of the cosmologist E.A. Milne, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IGNORANCE is a massive compendium, a fascinating collection of usually short and cogent contributions by the world's most eminent scientists on what still lies beyond the edge of our knowledge. The practicality of the approach wins head over hands the frustrating search for facts of interest which many of us do on an occasional basis in scientific publications like NEW SCIENTIST, NATURE or SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN. Each contributor surveys the unsolved problems in his own field and provides a personal view in often simple language (although some pieces liberally sprinkled with mathematical formulae soon had me lost) on those questions which seem to him most important for the future of mankind. This can range from astonishingly far-reaching mysteries on the function of leaves to the more prosaic pieces on the birth and nature of the solar system, biochemistry or fashionable ecology.

The whole idea for such a project is utterly fascinating and it's, in a way, almost surprising no one had come up with it before in a publishing industry where good as well as bad concepts are more often than not mercilessly battered to death (viz. the coming onslaught of SF encyclopedias!). As to who, in fact, is going to actually read these ambitious volumes, well, that's another problem altogether. I just can't quite picture the average Mr. Jones roaming down Alpha Ralpa Boulevard or Desolation Alley pondering over the speculative prolegomens of whether physics is legislated by cosmogony (article by J.A. Wheeler & C.M. Patton). Or does Joe Fan really care deeply about unsolved problems in higher arithmetics (H. Halberstam)?

University and research libraries throughout the world will no doubt purchase copies galore, as will your kindly next-door Nobel prize-winner, but if you've ever thought of making a fast buck out of SF (and, admit it, that's the name of the game, ain't it? To hell with all the saintly aspirations towards literature with a capital L, an unsold SF yarn is no more useful than a polka-dot Durex with gaping holes), then THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IGNORANCE could be a major investment: truly, a bible for the Science Fiction writer.

Be the first on your block, ahead of Ian Watson and that other know-all Ben Bova, to dazzle the readers with a thorough knowledge of the curvature of space (P.C.W. Davies & I.W. Roxburgh), exploit the riddles of gravitation (B. Bernotti), the "Arrow Of Time" (A.J. Leggett), the Hinterland between large and small (C.J.S. Clarke). If you are willing to put a genuine imaginative effort into the reading, understanding and extrapolating of the unknown facts conveniently listed in these two handsome volumes, the rewards could seriously be great in a day and age when it too often appears that the advances of science have caught up with Science Fiction and its speculations, causing the genre to look more and more destructively inwards. Here, we see all the loopholes of science exposed and ready for workmanlike exploitation by the imaginative writer.

As the editors put it, "Compared to the pond of knowledge, our ignorance remains atlantic". By systematically pinpointing these gaps still unanswered by science, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IGNORANCE opens up to SF many a fertile road for exploration and I, for one, unscientific as I am, welcome the existence of such a manual of possibilities.

Sorry if I leave you now, but I have a half-dozen ground-breaking concept novels to write on the themes of the understanding of pain, control of form in the living body and the Veils of Gaia amongst others (respective articles by P.D. Wall, Sir Vincent Wigglesworth & P. Cloud). But why am I altruistically revealing all this treasure find to you thieving lot of writers out at large? There are a total of 50 articles in THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IGNORANCE, and I'm confident every single one contains in seed a potential of a dozen stories or novels. That's a lot of material, folks, so I suppose there's no point my being selfish.

(C) Maxim Jakubowski, 1978.

FOUND IN A BATHTUB: A Lettercol.
(Editor's comments are marked thus: **)

** A large response and a shortage of space have meant this abbreviated lettercol. I'll begin with one that's already dated, but still very interesting**

Greg Benford: Univ. California.

Just recieved and read VECTORS 81 & 82 and found them very stimulating indeed. I read Ian Watson's while I was on sabbatical at Cambridge (& got over to Oxford now and then) and found them as now the quality of discussion much superior to American journals.

David Pringle's point in contradiction to Cy Chauvin I found intriguing. There clearly is a tradition of the 'scientific romance' in British sf, and reading David's lineage from Wells to Orwell, I was struck by a particular British flavor in sf: the tradition best exemplified by Wells, then Stapledon, then Clarke. The seeking after the largest canvas, the huge perspectives of time and space.

I've always felt drawn to that tradition. It seems to me to exemplify a basic, well, theme (for want of a better word) in sf, one sorely neglected in the US. It strikes me as odd that so many American sf writers follow in the footsteps of Heinlein - there's a subgroup of young writers who've made their impact as Heinlein descendents including Panshin, Haldeman etc - and virtually none in those of Stapledon and Clarke. Yet to me Heinlein is deeply flawed by ethnocentric biases, easy answers and oolipsism. Clarke, who so clearly learned much from Stapledon, is limited only by his choice of literary techniques. I think he'll last much longer. And the line will have more advocates. The more I write, the more themes involving the fundamentally strange, immense and alien interest me. Science continually rubs our noses in a fact many would like to avoid - that the world is genuinely alien, though not necessarily hostile, and this fact is the only way we really recognise how strange and wonderful the world is. I have come to feel that Heinlein's certainties



often may have been intended to paper over this disturbing and relentless fact. There's a reason for those breezy assurances running through his work; they distract us from the clutching and sometimes horrible realities of the universe we find ourselves in.

Looking forward to the next Vector, Gregory Benford.

** I think Greg is referring to Mark Adlard's piece in V82, but I agree that there seems to be a tone of false (or naive?) optimism in American SF, in almost total opposition to the ultra pessimistic tone of the British disaster genre.**

Chris Evans: Chiswick, London, W4.

I enjoyed your first effort with VECTOR (terrible cover, tho), especially the editorial which was stimulating and provocative. I'm pretty sure you're going to arouse some controversy as editor of V (see, for example, the third paragraph of Dave Lewis' letter on page 27 of the latest MATRIX - the knives are already out!). While I agree with most of the sentiments in your editorial, I think you should beware of too great a concentration on writers who are not generally considered as belonging to the sf genre - not because they aren't worthy of critical appraisal (I, too, enjoy Borges immensely) but because I suspect that they will be only of marginal interest to the majority of readers of V. Let's face it, VECTOR is basically a popular journal and its readership mostly comprises people who are primarily interested in genre sf and who will not, I suspect, take kindly to a plethora of lengthy articles on writers who operate outside the genre tradition. VECTOR is a showcase for the BSFA and as such it should aim to attract new readers as well as stimulating long-time fans: thus the mag must contain its quota of familiar names otherwise prospective new readers are likely to be scared off.

A few specifics: the two pieces on WE were both interesting but not entirely satisfying. Phil Stephensen-Payne's was too short (the preamble was good, providing some useful background information on the origin of the book, but the critical analysis was rather cursory), whereas your half was far too long (5½ pages on one book is a bit much for a mag of V's nature, and length doesn't always mean clarity, you know). Brian Aldiss' ONE MAN'S WEAK was thoroughly entertaining and absolutely sui generis - there's no-one like the man. The reviews section was up to its usual high standard - I particularly liked Andrew Darlington's piece on W58; I thought he captured the flavour of Burroughs' writing extremely well and provided a pretty comprehensive overview of his work. Be careful of spreading yourself too thin, though: your review of Borges' LABYRINTHS was only half-done; there's really no excuse for "putting down your pen" in the middle of the critique; either do the whole job or leave it alone.

Considering that V84 was probably assembled with undue haste, I think you did a good job overall. Thanks too for the Vector Reviews Index: much appreciated and long overdue. I hope my comments and criticisms will at least give you some food for thought: the one thing an editor needs (especially when he's new to the job) is lots of feedback.

** Especially intelligent and constructive feedback. Yes, V84 was assembled without a great deal to work from, which resulted in a rather over-austere zine dominated by my own tastes (as I had to do a great deal of the writing to fill out the review column!). I still want to run borderline examinations and at least let the readers of VECTOR know that there are things that are not hard-core sf but which would still stimulate them in a similar manner. Borges, for example, is easily accesible and thoroughly readable and entertaining. As to the knives being out, I'll print the next letter without comment. Holding my tongue, I feel, is the only course open to me.

**

(Letter addressed to Andy Sawyer of MATRIX)
Richard McMahon: New Malden, Surrey.

First, let me congratulate you on MATRIX, you're make a jolly good job of it. Unfortunately I feel that the same cannot be said of your counterpart on VECTOR, Dave Windytrees. I'm writing to you because VECTOR does not actually publish letters at present.

In the past I have criticised Dave very severely - originally for trying to run before he could walk, and later for totally contradicting himself. This criticism arose after Dave's disaster of a first fanzine, KIPPLE. Dave was attacked from many quarters, phrases like "pseudo-intellectual" and "inexperienced, gibbering snob" being bandied about.

Dave's second fanzine, VECTOR 84, is an improvement on his first. The reproduction and layout are markedly improved, the contributions are better. But as the principle critical organ of the BSFA it's a disgrace.

Now, I'm willing to put this down to inexperience, over-enthusiasm and lack of time. Clearly Dave works like a trojan and does his best. Therefore I feel that Dave is not at fault, but the BSFA for letting him take VECTOR over in the first place. It's like letting someone who has had one driving lesson out on the roads on his own. I don't know who was responsible for choosing the new editor, or maybe there wasn't any choice, but a definite mistake has been made.

Anyway, tempus fugit and all that; maybe I'm just bitter that I can only identify one of the quotes in the Quotation Competition.

** It's nice to see, however, that VECTOR is stimulating author response. Such as the following from Mark.**

Mark Adlard: Hartlepool, Cleveland.

Congratulations on your very sane and balanced first editorial: I say this not merely as an inducement to publish the following.

The oddest thing about Robert Carter's very odd attempt to review my 3 novels (INTERFACE, VOLTEFACE, MULTIFACE) is his request that we all 'forgive' him for feeling 'obliged' to invent 'a short collective name for the trilogy'. He then tells us that he has decided to call it THE TCITY TRILOGY. But if he had lingered only a moment longer over the jackets (which he discusses in some detail) he would have discovered that his ingenuity was wasted: the novels are already explicitly specified in capital letters as VOLUME ONE (TWO and THREE) IN THE TCITY TRILOGY.

So he's right, after all, but that isn't the point. When a reviewer is able to imagine that he has invented a suitable title for an author's novels, which the author himself has already decided upon and arranged to have displayed on the jackets, the author would be lacking in a sense of proportion if he quarrelled with what the reviewer then goes on to imagine he has found inside the jackets. Even so, I must ask you to cast an editorial eye at the transcription in which your reviewer recommends my novels to the "BEM/rocketship/raygun fan" as well as to those who are interested in 'wider reading'. There must be an error in transcription somewhere.

I should hate to think of weeny star-hoppers reading my novels and coming inevitably to the conclusion of Phillippa Grove-Stephensen (in Paperback Parlour) that my concerns don't provide adequate 'excuse for a story'. But fan reviewing is now so given over to what Brian Stableford (same issue) calls "reader experience" instead of what poor old Leavis called "the words on the page" that I suppose anything is possible.

This opens a whole question of critical approach. Does the reviewer say what he feels or concentrate on the intent of the author. I must admit that I much prefer the latter approach: the words on the page are what matter.

Malcolm Edwards: Harrow, Middlesex.

Random thoughts. Don't think much of new BSFA Award eligibility. Most of the contenders are books which have failed to win it in the past. Why should they get a second chance with the winners eliminated from contention? And what is THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION - first Sphere edition 1978: I just checked our file copy - doing there? Not being a BSFA member I can't vote, but on the basis of the shortlist (I don't have the Paperback Parlour with the full list) I'd be inclined to twist the rules any way possible to fix it for THE DEEP - a book which deserves an award, not least to bring it to people's attention.

Quick word of advice. Use bigger staples. This copy has just sprang apart in my hands.

Chris Evans' Dean Koontz review very strange. Bears no relation to publishers' thought processes, esp. Dobson's - planning just doesn't come into their publishing. Who does he think buys hardback sf anyway? People?? Ho ho. Gibe at price unrealistic, too. Hard to do any hardback book under £4 these days.

Why am I writing this odd shorthand? Can it be BWA's subliminal influence. Enjoyed his piece. Just read a bit of it to Melvyn Bragg over phone; had a goos laugh.

Oh well. Useless letter this. Should read magazine first. Am leaving Gollancz in two weeks, prior to taking up new appointment as Administrator of Sci-Fi Foundation (I'm renaming it). Already growing beard and practising Strine, to ease transition. Beergut to follow.

Saw lady reporter from Sun last week. They think sf is Big Thing of 1978. Planning feature. Need to work up angle that will enable them to feature STAR WARS and tits in roughly equal measure. Await results with interest.

Xeroxing whole books illegal without written permission from publisher. See Copyright Act. You're an accessory. Send £10 cheque, we'll say no more.

**Hmmm. Malcolm has taken up the Administrator's role at the FOUNDATION by now. Can I reiterate his request that anyone who has written to the FOUNDATION in the last few months and not yet received a reply should write again (anew!) if they are still interested in their query. It would be nice to see closer cooperation between the two organisations and I'd like to see a greater interchange of ideas and assistance in the future. **

Graeme Young: Bran's Head Books.

I would hate to think that should I ever publish a science-fiction novel it would be precluded from consideration for the BSFA Award because it was first published as a hardback - but that is the only interpretation I can put on the method of title selection outlined in VECTOR 84. Quite apart from which, as the initial listing shows, you'll be doling out awards for books people have forgotten they wrote.

** This is something I want RESPONSE on. If we are to get a satisfactory method of choosing a book every year for a BSFA AWARD then we need the comments and cooperation of the total membership. To this end I'm doing a separate voting form with space for comments on the method of nominating books. Unless you make comment we have nothing to work on: only the ideas of eight or twelve committee members. Oh, and thanks too to Graeme who has kindly provided VECTOR with an article on Starledon, which should see the light of day next issue. **

Mike Dickinson: Leeds.

I was very impressed by the quick turnaround of VECTOR and, behold, you review with much my own emotions two of my favourite books, WE and LABYRINTHS. As an anarchist of the Proudhon/Kropotkin school I found much of interest in the former when I first stumbled across it a dozen or so years ago. Since then perhaps my belief in the perfectability of mankind has declined somewhat, but WE has retained its power in setting out the alternatives. I agree with your conclusion but fight shy of the word classic, not because of its occasional clumsiness, but because I feel it is still very much alive. Thank you for reviewing it. Similarly with Borges. Whatever my quarells with Moorcock's later performance as an editor, his mid-sixties New Worlds certainly gave me some vital reference points, specifically its championing of Dick and Celine and its recommendation of Borges FICCIONES. Later, when Penguin issued LABYRINTHS with even more of his fictional essays I was still stunned by the man's ability. Alright, so he has since condemned them as mere stylistic tricks, but by such a stylist, with such imagination, I can relish tricks.

Tom Jones: Bracknell, Berks.

I agree with your editorial 100% taken from your standpoint, but most books (sf included) are written purely to entertain. They are escapist, they follow the oldest literary tradition of Ugh the storyteller through Homer and onwards. Yes, literature can stimulate thought in the reader but most people don't want this (though I think a greater percentage of our membership does than the general readership of SF). Now I am perhaps fortunate and can enjoy both types (using the mass generalisation of 'escapism' versus 'questing'); both types can be written well or badly. Writers of each type can experiment with style (note the escapist Damon Runyon) and 10% of each sort is excellent, whilst the rest trails off very rapidly through good to unreadable.

Phil S-P told me all I wanted to know about Zamyatin; you then said virtually the same in 3 times the length. What was the point? One piece should have been kicked out and it should have been yours. Okay, so WE was the seed that produced 1984 and BRAVE NEW WORLD, but they were the basis for the rest of that part of the genre. Yes, we need to note that WE is there, but apart from historical significance that's it. To quote. "In a sense there is a dead weight of history which stifles the constant attempts by genre writers to revitalise and regenerate...". You have fallen into your own trap, Dave.

**I'll refer back to Mike's letter and say that I agree with his denial of my use of the word 'classic' in this case. WE is very much alive. It is one of those books that should be constantly referred to to enable the genre to maintain a perspective. In my naivety I still affirm that SF is a radical venture and should play devil's advocate to everything secure and comfy. It is a rebellious literary genre. Returning to specifics, my article dealt with style and themes, things only briefly touched upon by Phil's. **

David Strahan: Colchester, Essex.

I really enjoyed VECTOR 84, more than any other VECTOR I've read.

I'd never heard of WE before and I found the pieces by Dave Wingrove and Phil Stephensen-Payne very interesting. I would just correct Phil in talking about 'Stalinist Russia' in 1920. In 1920 Stalin was only an Inspector of Government Departments and it wasn't until 1924, when Lenin died, that he had any power in the actual government of Russia.

I found the Aldiss article quite amusing; did I detect a bit of a jab at KIPPLE? Of course, Brian may have been going to get his eyes tested anyway.

I thought there was some fine arguing by P. M. Westran in "But Is She SF" and it covered a lot of ground very concisely.

What more can I say except that I enjoyed everything in this issue of VECTOR. Chris Fowler reckons that Dave Wingrove needs 4 issues to get into producing VECTOR. If this is what he can do at his first attempt..

** We-ell, I've got to print at least one ego-boosting missive. One point that Phil did miss was that Orwell never read the book until 1946, when he reviewed it for Tribune: it consolidated his own ideas and led immediately to 1984.**

Phil Stephensen-Payne: Oxford.

I was greatly entertained by your article on WE which seemed to me to be a complement to, rather than refutation of, my piece. Roughly speaking I was trying to evaluate the book as a book to be read by a VECTOR reader, and came to the conclusion that while it had great historic interest, and was undoubtedly much better before its time, the narrative was fairly weak and the theme had been much better handled elsewhere, and that hence the book was really only of value to those after the historic value. Your piece in the main seems to be saying, in far more words, the same thing. The only point on which we seem to differ is on the value of D-503 as character, but I suspect that may be because I view him as narrative protagonist while you view him as exponent of the political philosophy. Perhaps we're both right, or wrong - certainly I would say we don't contradict each other.

I loved Brian's ONE MAN'S WEAK, it could almost be true. Can you persuade him to make it a regular feature?

Mike Coney's letter was amusing - it makes it almost worthwhile having given the award to BRONTOMEK! As for the SMOLOSKYP letter, I'm not sure what reaction we can make. It is hardly surprised to hear that foreign writers are being suppressed...I'm not sure it is a sign of 'the World's fearful social regression' though as much as a sign of the continuing "Human Condition". So what should we do about it? Well, the Russians had one answer in 1917 - Revolution. Living under a cruel, repressive regime they took up arms and overthrew the cruel government so that 60 years later their children could ... live under a cruel, repressive regime. Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose.

Which again only goes to reiterate the fact that WE is a very alive book. Phil's is a beautiful critique of V84, but constraint of space again defeats me. A quick We Also Heard From section coming up...

J. D. Baldwin (Scarborough, N. Yorks): "Simak witless and decayed! How can you be so cruel Mr Gibson. Simak has been imitated but seldom surpassed. Put yourself on the firing line, Mr Gibson. I'd love to review one of your books!" David Langford (Reading): "gosh, a cheerful V editor, saluting his readers from the back cover! Chris Fowler had (and no doubt still has) many sterling qualities, but cheerfulness was not the most prominent." Robert Gibson (Hemel Hempstead, Herts): "Let me heartily concur with the letter in V83 which said my reviews 'lack polish'. For me the ideal style is one which sounds like the relaxed, natural, spoken word. Too bad I can't do it - yet. Still, while there's life there's hope." Chris Morgan (Weymouth): "My own nomination is for THE DEEP - one of the finest pieces of writing I've ever read, and a book I've read several times over the last three years." Paul Kincaid (Manchester): "I liked this edition of VECTOR, and it's serious consideration of the genre. This is only a partial thing, but it is good to have a little seriousness in the fannish spectrum to keep a balance." Rob Jackson (Newcastle): "Atmosphere of VECTOR more cheerful & wide-ranging already. Keep it up!" WAHF: James Corley, Richard Bancroft, Brian Griffin, T.W. Francis, David Lewis, Alex Pillai, Maxim Jakubowski, Tim Pickard, Steve Higgins, Martin Ricketts, John Clute, Judy Watson and numerous One-Tunners. ** I seem to have run out of space...**