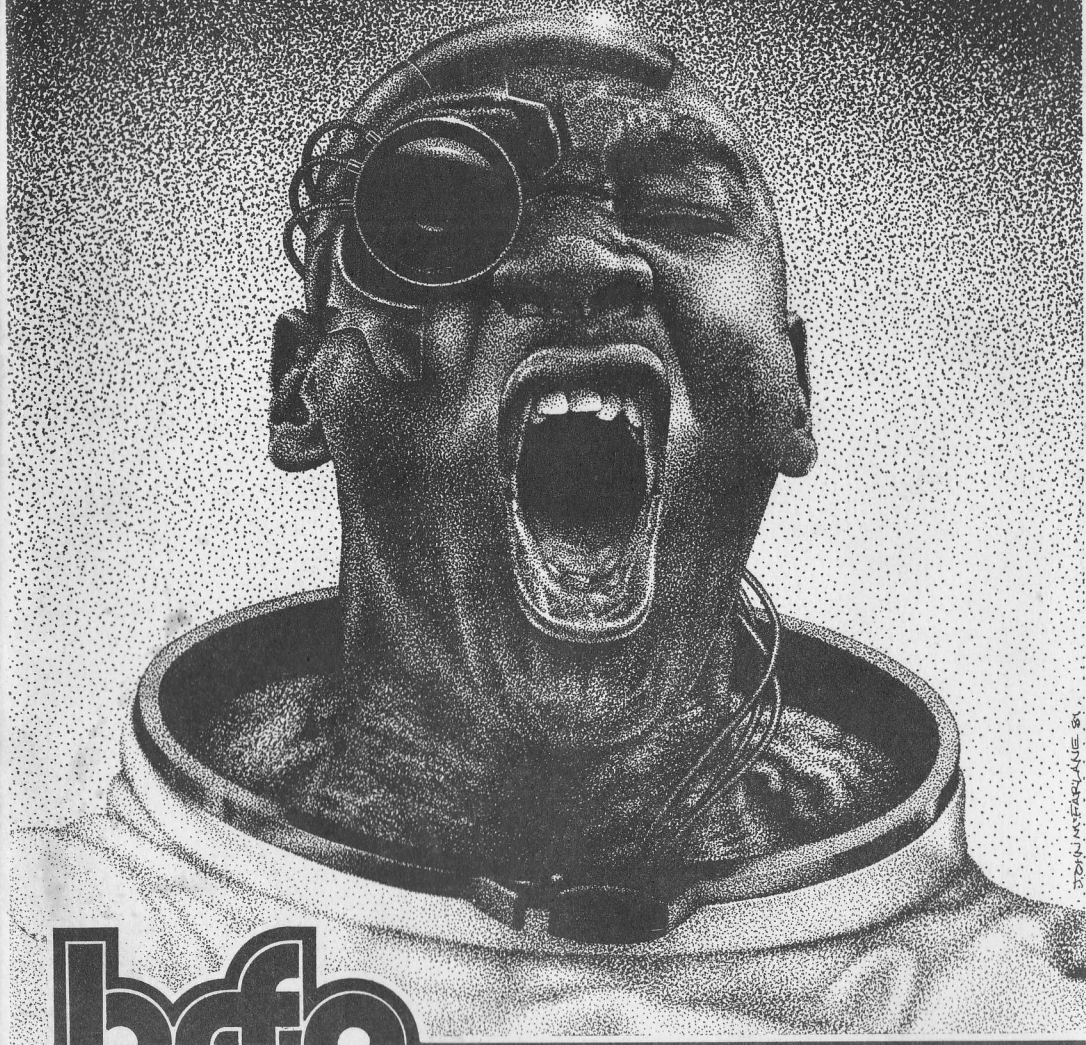


VECTOR

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

75p



bsfa

Issue No.101. APRIL 1981

VECTOR

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

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Printed by the BSFA.

Thanks are due to John and Eve Harvey, who actually did the printing work.

The BSFA printing service is available to BSFA members. Please contact John and Eve for details.

John & Eve Harvey, 55 Blanchland Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5NE.

ADVERTISING RATES

Back cover £40
Interior - full page £30
half page £20
qtr. page £10

All advertising correspondence to
the editor.

All copy A4 or division for
reduction to A5. Copy to be
black on white, camera ready.
Please leave a half inch mar-
gin all round. Quotes will be
given for special requirements.

VECTOR is published four times a year -- in April, June, October and December -- by
The British Science Fiction Association Limited.

ISSN 0505-0448

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bsfa The British Science Fiction Association

VECTOR 101

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COVER ART

John MacFarlane
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THIS ISSUE

... is almost as big as the big, bumper, celebration issue 100. This is due
in part to Joseph Nicholas; his article "The Shape Of Things To Come" is a
substantial one which has nothing to do with H G Wells, being rather concerned
with the future of SF. Joe outlines four trends that are now noticeable in
SF and expresses considerable concern about three of them. David Wingrove
has also written a major article. "Saving The Tale" asks the question, 'Can
there be a critical standard of science fiction?' and cites some critics not
normally found in an SF magazine. Arnold Akien's piece, "You Can Get There
From Here", was written as a letter, with "Standpoint" overtones, but when I
typed it out it was too long for that, and so became a short article all by
itself. It considers 'ghetto literature'. The issue is filled out with
three rather good "Standpoint" articles (I need some more for next issue),
the book reviews (I had more of these than room for them, but they will
appear) and an encouraging number of letters. Not to mention an editorial.

The squibs that fill the pages are taken, this issue, from Robert Heinlein's
The Number Of The Beast.

"I think you're cute too," Zebbie answered, grabbed me by both shoulders,
dragged me over the table, and kissed me hard. Our teeth grated and my
nipples went spung!

Editorial Towards a Critical Standard

Part III

In *Focus* 2 (Spring 1980) Randal Flynn said this about plot:

I'd realised there were two fundamental types of plot in the universe. There was the plot boldly and artificially imposed from above, the way Poul Anderson does it. He invents a few names, John, Tom and Jane, and then makes them do things, like chase after treasures etc. Or there was the plot that grew of itself, starting from the imaginative creation or arrival of a life-given character and the results of his subsequent interactions with the physical and social environment, and with his own emotional nature. This was organic plot.

and made it quite clear that he thought 'organic' plot was the only one worth bothering with. Certainly a lot of people would agree with him, including a number of *Vector* reviewers. It's an opinion I have a great deal of sympathy with, but one which I can't wholeheartedly agree with, because of the number of great novels which don't have 'organic' plot -- Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, for example, the plot of which is the antithesis of 'organic'. With such a novel occupying stage centre, and dozens more waiting in the wings I cannot help but feel that to insist on 'organic' plot is to limit what can be done in a novel.

Thus, when the requirement for 'organic' plot is raised again by Simon Ounsley in *Vector* 98 (in his article 'The Deadly Tiger') I find myself regarding it critically, and nodding in agreement with Alex Eisenstein when he says that there are two types of plot, "those that work, and those that don't" ('Letters', *Vector* 100). Although Alex, of course, gives no indication that a plot can 'work' in several different ways; his distinction is a critical blunt instrument, useful for separating sheep from goats, but unable to tell a merino from a big-horn. We need something more subtle.

In his book *The Structure Of The Novel* (Chatto & Windus, 1928; paperback edition 1979) Edwin Muir distinguished a number of types of novel. First there is the 'novel of action', in which a series of arbitrary and exciting events thrust the hero into and out of danger. The plot is strictly developed -- manipulated, if you like -- by the author, in the manner deplored by Randal Flynn, and here I would agree with him. So would Mr Muir. Such a novel, he says, "is a fantasy of desire rather than a picture of life. It is never of much literary consequence except when ... it is also in some measure a novel of character."

The 'novel of character' is Muir's second type of novel. In it the plot hardly matters at all; it is merely a device for bringing together numbers of characters so that they can interact. The characters are finely drawn and complete. This means that they do not change or develop in the novel, and are thus totally independent of the plot. It also means that the characters are predictable and flat, and in that sense unreal. However, if you look around you can see real people with the characteristics portrayed by such characters, though real people generally play several parts at once. The purpose of a novel of character is to tell us about characters, about themselves and their reaction to each other. In no sense does it have, or need, a plot that is 'organic', but neither is it to be deplored as Randal Flynn would have us do. Deplore Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, would you?

The third type of novel meets with Randal's full approval, I am sure. This is the 'dramatic novel', in which, as in the novel of action, the plot must be strictly developed. But unlike the novel of action, the plot and characters are closely interwoven, each affected by the other, each movement in the plot arising from the characters, and each change or development of the characters

arising because of the plot. Examples of dramatic novels are Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and anything by Jane Austen.

The fourth type of novel is the 'chronicle' -- a novel such as *War And Peace* in which the action is dramatic (in the sense above) but the arbitrariness of nature itself is taken into account -- the "cycle of birth and growth, death and birth again". As well as the characters' changing, the background also changes. Places are not just lived in, as in novels of character or dramatic novels; they have been lived in, and undoubtedly will be lived in as well.

The fifth type is the 'period novel', which is similar in appearance to the chronicle, but differs in a fundamental respect: the chronicle is universal in its application; the period novel is concerned only with its own time and society. In a chronicle, the background changes, but it is the change not the background that is significant; in a period novel the significant aspect is the background. Examples are Bennett's Clayhanger trilogy, Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and Wells's *The New Machiavelli*.

When we look at SF in terms of these five types it is evident that most SF (as, indeed, most fiction) is of the first type, the novel of action. Some novels of action can be enjoyable; all of them are intended to be; and none of them are intended to be anything else. A large portion of the remainder of SF fits into the period novel category. The period novel's emphasis on historical accuracy is mirrored by the SF period novel's emphasis on the detail of future or alien societies. Jack Vance is the SF period novelist *par excellence*: his best, most lyrical writing always occurs in his descriptions of strange and unlikely societies; when he turns to action his writing deteriorates. Two quotations from Muir are appropriate here.

The bondage of the novel to period has naturally degraded it. Mr Bennett's and Mr Wells's many descriptions of the devices which have changed modern life are of course interesting, and these inventions are important in their sphere; but no one could imagine their being given any consequence in a novel moving at the imaginative tension of *War And Peace*...

The bondage of the novel to period has degraded it. But it also insensibly falsified for a time the standards of criticism... Exactitude of contemporary detail became more important than exactitude of imagination.

It is easy to see the parallels with both SF and SF criticism.

Almost all SF novels fall into one of Muir's lesser categories, the novel of action and the period novel. This doesn't leave much for the three more important types. However, the matter is simplified by the realisation that there are no SF novels of character. Nor is there any need for there to be. If all that matters is the interplay of characters, then any SF ideas or backgrounds are totally irrelevant and can be dispensed with. A novelist would be wasting his time with such a creation.

It is also true to say that the SF chronicle is a rarity in SF. Most 'big scope' novels -- *Dune*, for example -- are period novels merely. J.G. Ballard's *The Wind From Nowhere* and *The Drowned World* are examples, Ballard working out his action against the remorseless progression of time and change.

This leaves us with the dramatic novel, into which category one can place all the novels of Le Guin, and some Silverberg, Aldiss, Budrys, Priest, Shaw and Holdstock. In the dramatic novel, as we have seen, plot and character are intimately intertwined. In the SF dramatic novel this must remain true, with the added condition that the plot must also be dependent on an SF element. In other words, the science fiction must be an integral part of the drama of the novel. The SF dramatic novelist is, in fact, making life difficult for himself, giving himself something extra to do. Why should he do this? Why, to portray dramas that could not otherwise exist!

(continued on p29)

The Shape Of Things To Come

Joseph Nicholas

Once upon a time, as we all know, SF was a despised minority literature -- but then came the bomb, television, rock music, Moon landings, future shock, academic respectability, *Star Wars* and mass popularity, with the result that the very label has entered everyday speech as a jargon term for anything futuristic, high-powered and (often) unlikely. Not that the public mind has much more than a hazy idea of what it means anyway: conditioned by endless re-runs of *Star Trek* and the recent flood of big-budget cinema spectacles, they conceive of it as but a saintly wonderland of spaceships, aliens and ray guns, ignoring the imaginative core of which these are the external trappings, and hence dismiss it as no more than juvenile escapism.

And the trouble is that altogether too damn much current SF seems not to warrant any other treatment.

It has been claimed that SF is the only true literature of our age, and it does indeed have the ability to dramatise and examine the problems that now confront us with a scope not possessed by any other 'form' of fiction. The energy crisis, sexual politics, the microchip revolution, genetic engineering, the threat of nuclear war... these are the things that the so-called 'mainstream' can only deal with (should it ever choose to deal with them at all) as the background to its usual parade of character interplay and personal catastrophe -- and when it comes to more abstract concepts, like the nature of consciousness, the evolution of intelligence, and the entropic disorder which ultimately overtakes all civilisations, it is clear that SF is the *only* medium for their expression. Not to put too fine a point on it, it has a potential and a novelty that all other 'forms' of fiction seem to have long ago exhausted.

Except that in certain quarters this potential has been thrown away unused and its novelty deep-sixed in favour of audience-pleasing repetition. What we get from the majority of the stuff that now crowds the bookshops is not challenge and innovation, but 'romantic escapism': undemanding and easily digestible stories designed not to stimulate their readers' intellects, but to bypass their cerebrums and mainline their simple, transient thrills straight into their thalamuses, absolving them from the need to think and lulling them into a false sense of acceptance and security. Idiot action adventure space opera from the likes of Jack Chalker and Alan Dean Foster, oversentimentalised wish-fulfilment cuteness from such as Anne McCaffrey and Spider Robinson, long-winded pseudo-philosophical moralising from wolfish hard-liners like Robert Heinlein and Jerry Pournelle, naive celebrations of the 'inevitable' triumph of technology from such 'Golden Age' leftovers as Arthur C Clarke and Larry Niven, derivative sub-sub-Tolkien or (worse) sub-sub-Howard fantasy by almost anyone you care to name... Never mind all the barely literate novelisations of third-rate film scripts, large format paperbacks with an illustration on every other page, novellas expanded to the length of novels by the use of big typefaces, *comic book* adaptations of well-known stories and films (as though everyone were suddenly unable to cope with anything more complicated than a speech balloon) -- dear God, you think to yourself, what in Heaven's name is going on here?

It would be easy to blame *Star Wars* and others of its cinematic ilk for this malaise but, while it is true that they did foster the now dead commercial boom that has given us much of these "decadent symbols of a declining literary form" (Christopher Priest, *Vector* 97), they didn't exactly initiate the trend, only enhanced it -- because the malaise is in essence one from which the entire Western world is currently suffering. The Watergate affair of 1972-74 exposed so completely that even the most naive must have difficulty denying it the corruption which lies at the heart of modern politics; the Arab oil embargo which followed the Yom Kippur war of 1973 brought home to everyone the appalling fragility of the economic system on which our society is based; and from there on in it's been downhill all the way. As Brian Aldiss put it in "Magic And Bare Boards", his autobiographical essay in *Hell's Cartographers*: "... we are at the end of the Renaissance period. New and darker ages are coming. We have used up most of our resources and most of our time. Now nemesis must overtake hubris, for this is the last act of our particular play." Faced with the incipient terrors of this in their ordinary everyday lives, who can blame the public at large for turning to SF as a means of escape from them? Unlike the rash of spy adventures which provided the escape route during the sixties, SF novels need not be set in the real world, nor even an idealised version of it, at all. When they are set in the real world, or a near-future facsimile of it, their authors usually cop out of confronting the problems that would be involved, either by ignoring them entirely (presumably in the ostrich-like hope that they'll thus be persuaded to go away) or by pretending that they've been completely solved (without ever saying how). And for total escape, there is naturally nothing better than outright fantasy, where evil can be externalised and defeated and the plot can be as *deus ex machina* as possible because the readers are only looking for an intensively detailed imaginary worldscape which can be revisited at any time by simply rescanning the maps and re-reading the appendices.

But then, as I said earlier, the reading public at large has never seen SF as more than escapism anyway. We, its dedicated readers and critics, have always viewed it as something more -- or, at least, we did; because if the sales figures are anything to go by, more and more of us are coming to view it in the same light. Quality material is still being published, of course, but it has always constituted a small percentage of the total -- and, given that publishers have to sell books and must bear the needs of their markets in mind, that percentage now seems to be steadily shrinking, with those writers who reject such pandering to popular taste in favour of pursuing their own individual visions in their own ways finding it increasingly difficult to locate publishers willing to back them and their work (although there are of course, at least as far as the UK is concerned, exceptions -- two hardback firms spring instantly to mind as purveyors of quality first and sales potential second). The problem seems much more acute in the US than it does here, and writing about it elsewhere two years ago, before the recession began to bite, I identified this as a belated reaction to the revolutions of the sixties by what I termed the 'Old Guard': a coterie of editors for whom 'modern' SF was something being published, at the very latest, back in the mid-fifties, and who regard everything that has happened to SF since as either of no consequence or even as a definite retrograde step.

There is, obviously, something rotten in the state of SF -- and for all that proclaiming the existence of a malaise is easier than locating its source, I think we can nevertheless identify a number of trends which underly it. In this, I intend to engage not in a discussion of what's been happening during the sixties (for that I commend you to Roz Kaveney's forthcoming article in *Foundation* 22) but in discussion of the trends which are now emerging and which I feel will determine much of what is published in the eighties. Three of these trends strike me as definite contributors to the rot and the fourth as the only hope for SF's survival. They are, in the order I will deal with them, the retreat to the ghetto, the repetition of familiar themes, the 'big books sell' best-sellerism, and the fight to reintegrate with the mainstream.

The first of these, the retreat to the ghetto, is closely bound up with, and in

fact seems a direct result of, the Old Guard backlash referred to above. It can hardly be coincidence that what they conceive of as 'modern' SF stems from a period when the genre's only home, its only outlet, was the genre magazines, which came to an end when America's national distribution system, run by the monopolistic American News Company, collapsed, putting almost all of them out of business and ending the bright hopes of the early fifties for an SF which would break through to a wider audience. (Morace Gold, the first editor of *Galaxy*, for instance, looked forward to the day when his magazine would achieve the same readership as *The Saturday Evening Post*.) Suddenly, the genre seemed to 'lose its way', by default repudiating its pulpier excesses but seeming to have no idea of what to do next, thus allowing a certain amount of stagnation and dissatisfaction to set in: a feeling which in some way initiated the search for other routes out into the wider world, and eventually led to the revolutions of the sixties. (It was in this period, after all, that the two writers now considered the giants of British SF, Brian Aldiss and J G Ballard, prime movers in the British wing of the 'New Wave', began their careers.) Yet in all their published pronouncements, the most prominent members of the Old Guard have consistently decried this repudiation, the search which followed it, and the eventual fragmentation -- claiming over and over again that the SF of the late forties to mid-fifties is the only 'true' SF, constantly stressing that it should, and can only be no more than escapist entertainment (this despite also upholding the more serious SF-as-future-realism line pushed by John W Campbell, which doesn't say much for their capacity for logical thought), that its writers should eschew complexity of theme, plot, idea, characterisation, style and message, that they should make no undue demands on their readers... The rejection slips issued by George Scithers for *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, for example, explicitly instruct those who wish to sell to the magazine to avoid such nasty and corrupting subjects as sex, swearing and violence and, citing inflation, the cost of car repairs and the tedium of its readers' jobs as justification, urge them to produce their next story with the editorial requirement for gung-ho plotting and an upbeat ending well in mind -- a policy which, far from nurturing a school of exciting, risk-taking writers of the type who contributed to Moorcock's *New Worlds*, creates instead a group of production line hacks whose stories are indistinguishable from each other, and patronisingly juvenile to boot.

Worse than Scithers, however, by virtue of the greater control he wields -- in theory only over Ballantine Books's fantasy imprint, but with his wife in control of the SF side any suggestion that there is no overlap between their respective spheres of interest is simply laughable -- is Lester Del Rey. This is a man who, in five years of 'reviewing' for *Analog* dumped (heavily and often splenetically) again and again on anyone who dared write something more ambitious and demanding than simple escapist fare. Writers, he said, shouldn't take themselves or their work seriously; heroes should be strong, unambiguous and forthright; style should be simple, straightforward and easy to understand; plots should be plain, linear and fast-paced... If this sounds as though I'm pushing it a bit, I'd refer you to an interview with him published in *Science Fiction Review* 18 (1976) in which, with perfect seriousness, he claimed that: "pulp fiction is actually truer to human nature than most other fiction" because it "tends to use what might be called the universal values. You don't go into the hero now in any detail. You don't establish your characters with small, tiny strokes of the brush. You use broad sweeps. But in the long run that type of characterisation usually can be read by more people for a longer period of time with understanding and identification, than the literary types" (*sic*, bad grammar and all), and in support of this ludicrous contention named Fielding's *Tom Jones* as a great pulp novel. With such views as this being expressed by the man at the top, it comes as no surprise to note that the majority of the SF published by Ballantine Books -- under, of course, their Del Rey brand name -- over the past three or four years has shown a marked shift to the juvenile, the pulp, the hollow, the artistically derelict and the instantly forgettable.

And both are powerful men in their fields. *Asimov's* is the most commercially successful SF magazine in history and Ballantine Books is one of the longest

established and most respected US paperback SF publishers, and it thus seems fair to suggest that they do in some way set the tone and lead the way for everyone else. Indeed, with the recent sale of *Analog* to *Asimov's* publishers -- because, their many protestations to the contrary, it is most unlikely that they will remain completely independent of each other -- and *F & SF* apparently adopting a more conservative tone in order to retain its share of the market, with such writers as Chalker, Logan and McCaffrey being published by Del Rey Books in a manner that makes them seem 'the saviours of SF' and equally 'newer' -- but in terms of their approaches and concerns, not new at all -- writers like Cherryh, Haldeman and Varley being similarly pushed by other publishers, the suggestion seems even more fair, even more accurate.

None of it has the slightest pretence to literary quality, or can appeal to other than the die-hard addicts: it is the sort of incestuous, derivative, self-plagiaristic, third rate stuff we thought had been condemned and abandoned long ago, now brought back to shambling semi-sentience with no other apparent object in mind than the shoring-up of the crumbling ghetto walls and the quickening of the dusty pulses of those still gathered around its flickering campfires in resolute ignorance of the world outside. Worse: it is actually pulling in a horde of new readers, selling in its thousands of copies, winning plaudits and Hugo awards and, on top of its further entrenching of SF's prevailing escapist image in the public mind at large, is in the rigid across-the-board application of its very limited principles by this selfsame Old Guard next to stifling the life out of the literature, denying it any impulse to creativity and innovation, making of it nothing more than a fiction of safe, cosy, mind-deadening pabulum.

But then, a cynic might suggest, perhaps challenge and stimulation are essentially alien to SF anyway. After all, one of the particularly besetting sins of a genre literature is the way it encourages its authors to repeat themselves, both by circumscribing their compass of discussion and by accustoming its readers to expect only a limited set of themes and approaches -- as the truism has it, the readers want no more than another dose of what they're already getting (which probably explains in large part the revulsion and sometimes downright hostility felt by most fans of the time towards the *New Worlds*-led 'New Wave'). In the days when the magazines constituted the only outlet for genre SF, this 'more of the same', played up to by the authors, often expressed itself as a series of stories about the same characters and/or situations; but with the magazines having faded from prominence we now get instead series of *novels*: sequel upon trilogy upon quartet upon future history upon... It goes almost without saying that no single novel of such a sequence can ever stand alone, can ever be (in Chris Priest's appropriate term) 'autonomous', but must be read in conjunction with all the others -- sound commercial logic, to be sure, but is it art?

It's a moot point. Those story cycles which have been conceived and executed as such do have a certain unity and integrity about them, but those where the author manufactures a sequel simply to capitalise on reader demand are usually too slipshod or lightweight to possess such characteristics. And the former variety are often just as bad, their ideas being effectively sufficient for only one volume but which are extended, padded, and supplemented to make up the required three (or whatever) less for the sake of enriching the story or the reader's experience than for the sake of enriching the writer by forcing the reader to buy them all in order to find out what finally happens. The current near-perfect example is Jack Chalker's 'Well World' series, each volume of which is so bloated and rambling as to give one the impression that he's not even writing to entertain himself, only to fill the pages. Further, some series may not actually end with their final volumes: a growing practice is the leaving of minor loopholes or unresolved plot threads to which their writers can later return. Glen Cook's 'Dread Empire' trilogy is an example, culminating in a war that kills millions but allows the top magician of the bad guys to escape unscathed. Never mind the series which just go on and on without apparent end, like E C Tubb's 'Dumarest' novels.

It isn't a completely new trend, of course -- the reader demand for series is, as a proportion of the total audience, probably much the same as it ever was, but the number of writers now clambering aboard seems to be increasing. Ultimately, they are likely to do themselves more harm than good, for the more they repeat themselves in this fashion the more likely they are to restrict themselves in what they can or cannot do. The easier it becomes to write (or rewrite) one particular type of story the less incentive there is to try to write something else, until they reach the point at which they have become so adept at writing (or rewriting) the same type of story that they simply haven't the skill to do anything else. Perhaps they just don't want to write anything else, because they know they have a market for their stuff and don't want to upset it. This, if so, might be halfway defensible if they evidenced some care for their readers: the cynicism of Roger Zelazny, for example, churning out his "Amher" potboilers until demand was sated and even he grew bored with them, or the contempt of Larry Niven who, when interviewed in *Science Fiction Review* 26 (1978) said that he conceived of his ideal reader as someone a lot like himself, 'except that he needs things explained to him', is simply inexcusable.

In fact, that the authors who write such series have loyal bands of readers who like their stuff is inexcusable anyway. The best, the most original, the most memorable novels are and always have been those written at the frontiers of the audience's expectations; those which, dispensing with the baggage of the past and striving for some new insight from a new perspective, breathe new life into the body of the whole by forging new paths for others to follow and explore in their turn. Farmer's *The Lovers*, Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!*, Aldiss's *Report On Probability A*, Delany's *Babel-17*, Moorcock's *An Alien Heat*, Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, even the early work of Asimov and Heinlein, have contributed more, have in the long run proved more influential than any number of sequels and series and trilogies. Such cannot point the way to progress, they can only rehash what has gone before, each succeeding repetition being but an increasingly pallid imitation of its predecessor -- and where's the health and vigour in that?

For the reader, of course, the escape value of a series is high: the more of it there is then (in theory) the more detailed its background, the more complex its plot, the greater and more rounded its cast of characters, and thus the more the reader can lose himself in it. The same is naturally true of single large novels, and it was this sort of book -- most notably Heinlein's *Stranger In A Strange Land* and Herbert's *Dune*, not forgetting Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* -- which crossed the genre boundary and made a wider audience more aware of SF's existence. And now that, post-*Star Wars*, the potential audience is even wider, we seem to be getting even more single large novels, marketed as an escape route for both SF and non-SF readers. Bova's *Colony*, Silverberg's *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Vinge's *The Snow Queen* -- all good blockbusting stuff, you might think. No, actually, because as novels intended to expand the frontiers of SF they are anything but, enlarging it only in terms of its readership and not in terms of its compass of approaches and concepts. They are, to give them their aptest possible label, bestsellers.

The term as used these days doesn't mean that the book in question has sold or is selling many thousands of copies around the world but that it is a certain distinct type of book: one that appeals to the largest and most variegated possible audience. The novels of Arthur Hailey and Harold Robbins spring readily to mind as excellent examples: books with huge, rambling plots in which twist is piled upon twist, with large casts of rather stereotyped and two dimensional characters who undergo many shifts of personal allegiance and undertake many grabs for power over everyone else, with a wide and colourful range of expensive and exclusive scenic locations, with a hint or two of high level political intrigue and a whiff or three of vaguely coy and old-fashioned sex -- the whole designed not to challenge or subvert the reader's world-view but to reinforce it by allowing him to live a vicarious fantasy life of glamorous langour and transient thrills. (The title of a recent Susan Howatch novel, *The Rich Are*

Different, just about says it all.) They have no genuine depth or insight, only a shallow illusion of them, and in consequence, although presumably intended for the long, long empathic read, can in practice be picked up and put down again at any time (or perhaps even read in reverse -- with some of them you'd probably never notice the difference).

But what in Heaven's name has this sort of mass-market fodder got to do with SF? If we really believe that SF has the ability to dramatise and examine the problems of our age in a manner not possessed by any other 'form' of fiction, then it can't afford the cop out of simply reinforcing its readers world-views: it can and indeed must confront them with the object of *changing them*, setting out to tear them down with all the power and passion it can muster. Yet what can such novels as *Lord Valentine's Castle* and *The Snow Queen* do but cop out? Stories of dispossessed kings and despotic queens struggling to regain or retain their thrones are, bar their being set on other planets, no different from the jet set fantasies of Robbins and Howatch, and hence have nothing to do with challenge, confrontation and subversion.

This bestsellerism is the most recently emergent trend (the reason why I can't cite any other examples of the type, although certain of the series novels lambasted above possess much the same characteristics) but on present evidence it's a growing one. Its motivation seems to derive from a desire to reach the wider audience that is now known to exist, presumably in the hope that the audience for SF as a whole will thus be enlarged by the tempting in of a whole new generation of readers. If so, it's a most misplaced hope, for the readers of such books will be interested in their SF trappings only as a fillip to their otherwise jaded imaginations; give them anything more than the 'saintly wonderland' they're expecting and they'll recoil in horror -- as, indeed, the majority of the readers tempted in by *Star Wars* have done, failing to make the transition from the ephemeral froth to the pure quill because they couldn't take what the latter had to offer. One way or the other, *they* were the boom. Provided, however, the authors of such books avoid offering such challenges, they're likely to enjoy (as do most bestseller authors) considerable short term success -- quantity has, after all, always been a depressingly more marketable commodity than quality -- but in the long term their books are likely, as with virtually all bestsellers, to fade completely from view, contributing nothing of any lasting value.

The desire to reach a wider audience probably motivates part of the 'fight' to reintegrate with the mainstream, but certainly not all of it; literary, artistic and critical factors have more part to play than the mere commercial desire for increased sales. It's a trend that has been forging slowly forwards for some time now, and often seems to have been supported more by those on the 'other' side of the 'fence' than by those within -- Brian Aldiss's 1968 appeal for an Arts Council grant to *New Worlds*, for instance, was backed by such respected establishment figures as Edmund Crispin, Marghanita Laski, J B Priestly and Angus Wilson; and over the past few years we've had a number of SF novels from such mainstream writers as Kingsley Amis, Anthony Burgess, Len Deighton, Doris Lessing and Sheila MacLeod (with many others, such as Margaret Drabble and John Fowles, also declaring their respect and admiration for the literature); and all of this has probably done more to 'rehabilitate' SF than the efforts of those, like Aldiss, Ballard, Moorcock and Priest, working from within -- probably because those working from without are operating from a position of established critical acceptance, 'subversive' elements in their own ranks that the literary community can't ignore. (Not, mind you, that the efforts of Amis *et al* have always been welcomed by die-hard fans: a charge commonly levelled at them is that they are too ignorant of SF to do more than rehash old themes and concepts in a not particularly original manner -- a charge which reeks of exactly the same paranoid inverted snobbery I condemned in "Guns Of The Timberland" in *Vector* 99 and which, unless it can be materially substantiated, has to be dismissed out of hand.)

In retrospect, of course, it's odd that this selfsame literary community should have so shunned SF, particularly considering the long and, at least to judge by the work of Wells, Huxley and Orwell, honourable tradition of imaginative speculation that runs through English literature. It was only the cynical commercialism of an immigrant American radio engineer that resulted in SF's abstraction from the whole and its making over into a publishing category of its own that killed off the tradition, after all, and those authors who have been fighting free from the dead hand of the essentially alien American pulp heritage are thus seeking only to revive it. Categorisation of literature into its supposedly different 'forms' (because in the last analysis there is no other category but fiction itself) is in any case a ridiculous expedient. It may help to isolate and identify the wellsprings of creativity, but it also results in each succeeding generation of category writers producing only increasingly pallid and derivative imitations of their predecessors work, and this, for an artform, is next to the kiss of death.

The mainstream, too, suffers from the same sort of categorisation, with stories of character interplay and personal catastrophes having long ago assumed the ascendancy over everything else. Much though I enjoy their work, I sometimes wonder what Beryl Bainbridge and Margaret Drabble can find to say about their 'types' of protagonists that hasn't been said a thousand times already by everyone else before them. It should thus be clear that the reintegrating of it with SF will result in the revitalisation of both, each drawing something from the other: SF receiving a necessary shot of social realism, a concern for character and a care for literary quality, and the mainstream receiving an infusion of the surreal and the symbolic, the mythopoeic drive it has in the main (I have to exclude such as John Fowles and William Golding from these generalisations) been lacking for some time.

Or will it?

One might reasonably argue that, in attempting to reintegrate with the mainstream, SF is likely to run up against much the same objections as would be voiced by an audience accustomed to bestsellers: don't give me anything challenging, just give me something I don't have to think too hard about. A mainstream audience seeming more receptive than a bestseller one, the objections are likely to be milder in tone, but the problem will still remain. The SF writer who aims for a mainstream audience can't adopt the sort of completely subversive stance we expect from the best SF for fear of alienating that audience altogether-- for example, what would the readers of Graham Greene and Iris Murdoch novels make of the schizophrenic reality shifts of Philip K Dick and the piled on metaphysical speculations of Ian Watson?

One might also argue, perhaps in line with certain SF authors themselves, that any reintegration with the mainstream would result in SF's suffering a certain 'loss of identity': a diffusion of the drive which its categorisation, for all the isolation thus imposed, has at least concentrated and intensified, allowing it to sustain and extend itself while all other genre categories -- westerns, horror novels, gothics and the like -- have more or less withered on the vine, declining into ever more uninventive pastiches of themselves (although, as described above, this is what SF itself is showing distinct signs of doing already). And if this impulse is diffused or blunted then it is possible that SF will lose its ability to dramatise and examine, with the intensity and depth of vision we expect, the 'problems' to which I earlier referred, never mind its ability to deal with the abstract concepts to which I also earlier referred. To cite again the novels of Philip K Dick and Ian Watson, one is forced to wonder how their respective particular concerns could be conveyed via plots devoted primarily to character interplay and personal catastrophes.

Which raises the obvious questions, do we really want such reintegration, and if so then how far do we want it to go?

The answer to the first question is 'yes', of course. Genres, as genres, are inevitably doomed to stagnation if they don't attempt to break free of their self-imposed limitations. It is evident that this is just what is happening to the works which fall into the first two of the trends detailed above. They have reached their pre-set boundaries, cannot or will not cross them, have turned in upon themselves, and are in consequence already well down the road to self-extinction. Quite apart from which, if we are to hold that SF is the only true literature of our age, then should we not at least try to bring its messages home to a wider audience, subverting the tropes and metaphors of the mainstream to its ends so as to increase its range of response and enhance its compass of responsibility? Which more or less answers the second question: we want it to go all the way, all the time, and not duck out of meeting any of the challenges and problems this poses.

Which statement automatically raises the question of how such reintegration can best be achieved. Well, certainly not by the writing of tediously unimaginative stories about the building of L5 colonies or the distant interplanetary quests of dispossessed kings to regain their thrones, for this is merely to rework familiar genre material, and hence advances the 'fight' not one whit. The most fruitful route would appear to be by the writing of novels that in some way make use of the basic symbols and archetypes of the genre, reworking them into a pattern or configuration that will hold some meaning or appeal for everyone. The obvious example to cite in this instance is the great J G Ballard, who -- alone amongst those working from within the genre to tear down the 'fence' that separates it from the mainstream -- has won through to critical acclaim, public acceptance and an audience all his own. One could also name as similar (though lesser) examples, Michael Moorcock and his "Jerry Cornelius" quartet, Chris Priest's *A Dream Of Wessex* (and perhaps also his forthcoming *The Affirmation*), Brian Aldiss's *The Malacia Tapestry*, most if not all of Kurt Vonnegut's work, Tom Disch's *On Wings Of Song*, and perhaps Greg Benford's *Timescape* and Robert Silverberg's *Dying Inside* as well. In fact, this 'making use' of SF's basic symbols and archetypes is the only way in which the literature will ever become more meaningful or attractive to everyone. Consider, in support of this assertion, what we now think of as the classics of world literature, novels which are read by all and acclaimed as great because of their universal appeal; they have meaning for everyone regardless of the period in which they were written and first published. And if we want SF to last, to accrue meaning for everyone and become great, then... It will not *always* be great, of course, but it should at least aim for such: better to try and fail than never to try at all.

The last ten words of that sentence do of course constitute a personal statement; which is why I support the trend to reintegrate, and sneer at the others. It should be pointed out, however, that the trend is primarily a British one, just as the previous three are primarily American, which is one more piece of evidence to add to the case that British SF is substantially different from the American variety, a concept to which a quite extraordinary number of fans seem most vehemently resistant -- and this in itself demonstrates just how slender the trend's hold on life actually is. I've called it a 'fight', and I really do mean it. Not so much a fight against the entrenched attitudes of the wider literary community, which no longer seem as entrenched as they once were, as against the growing force of the other three trends, which at the very least -- the bestsellerism of Bova and Vinge -- represent a nervous refusal to fully engage in the conflict and at the most extreme -- the retreat to the ghetto of Del Rey and Scithers -- an outright hatred of anyone who dares to even think of disturbing, let alone exposing as the ill-thought-out anti-intellectual nonsense it is, the enforced conformist peace of the literature they clutch so frantically to their breasts. They are growing in force because in the final analysis they have a better sales record than the fourth. The works which can be subsumed into them are safe, secure, soothing, undemanding, unchallenging... escapist in every way -- and, to refer back to what I said earlier, with the real world in the state it is what better palliative can there be? Shallow bestsellers,

repetitive series, idiotic space operas, hack fantasy -- drivel of the lowest order, yet drivel that is daily threatening to submerge the trend to reintegrate altogether: the only trend that is worth our attention and support.

To put it bluntly, therefore: if this goes on then, clearly, there isn't much hope for SF as a viable, let alone interesting, literary 'form'. What we have to hope for is that the fourth trend manages to entrench its hold and position on the fringes of the genre, that it isn't swept away by the other three, and that it makes it through the eighties more or less intact: alive and kicking, and full of the creative purpose that the other three will spend the decade abnegating. And, of course, push to make sure it does survive... for these trends are the ones which will determine much of what is published in the coming years: broad underlying currents denoting different 'zones' of interest and influence, the first three perhaps shading over into each other at their edges and the fourth right out on its own -- very likely increasingly isolated from the body of the genre which gave birth to it, but the only one with any hope of restoring to it the potential and novelty that it so often claims to possess.

Even if only in the sense of the old Chinese curse, we have some interesting times ahead of us.

YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE

Arnold Akien

Last week, being fed up with the silence of my sitting room, but not in the mood for music, I turned on my radio and sought a programme which had human conversation -- or a reasonable facsimile of conversation. What I got was one of those arty chat shows, in which the intelligentsia display themselves to an admiring Great British Public. I had intended to use this demonstration of rampant pretentiousness as a kind of sonic wallpaper -- the spoken voice as muzak. Instead I listened enthralled; for the man who was speaking was on of the breed of entertainers I find most interesting -- he was an author, though not a very happy one.

His complaints were very familiar. Not his precise argument, of course, but the heartfelt grievances he spoke of are familiar to us all. He spoke with a touching sincerity of his relegation, by mainstream literary critics, to a kind of literary ghetto: a ghetto in which, apparently, many of his fellow fantasy writers were content to dwell. As his conversation with the 'beautiful people' unfolded he spoke of writing as an art and a business. He, unlike many of his peers, is successful. His fantasies may have little literary value to some people, but they sell very well. He has sold a total of 108 novels to his contented publishers, and his readers have bought nearly nine million copies of those novels. Currently he has several popular series on the market; he likes to have characters from each series do guest appearances with with each other sometimes -- it helps sales and links his work into a, if not coherent, at least saleable whole. And the way his work is received by the critics gets on his tits -- to use a literary expression. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The author's fellow pundits didn't seem terribly impressed by the literary merits of the genre he works in. In cultured superiority they made gentle fun of him -- and his readers. Much play was made of the eccentric -- but oh so charming -- habit fans of the genre had of assuming fancy dress and holding mock battles -- why, they even held conventions for this purpose! Hardly a literature you could respect, was it? No doubt you've guessed the author's name by

now. No? Well, the information I've given is a bit sparse. His name is J T Edson. No, it's not a pen name; at least, I don't think it is, though I can't be sure since I'd never heard of him before the radio programme. You see, J T Edson writes Westerns. He doesn't live in our ghetto, but in the one next door.

Anyone who doubts the relationship of the two fields of literature has only to recall the number of times SF has been called, with some justification, Cowboys and Indians in space. Indeed I've just finished reading Brian Stableford's *Optiman*, a good example for that label.

Optiman is a novel which is set on an alien planet. Its plot basically concerns human/alien relationships on that planet. Though the aliens -- the Vetch -- and the humans are opponents in an interplanetary war, on the planet Heidra they live together in relative peace -- save for large numbers of native tribesmen who are stirring up trouble, having been aroused by a 'prophet'. The central character, Remy -- a human mercenary -- and his companions are commissioned to go into the hills where the tribesmen are revolting (very primitive hygiene) and kill the 'prophet'. Complications are introduced, in the form of a team of archaeologists which is looking for the lost base of a long-defunct alien empire -- in the hills, of course. Remy and Co join them and head for them thar hills. In due course there is lots of fighting, Remy and two of the party are captured, and rescued, though not till he has been tortured at the stake for the benefit of the tribe. Eventually the 'prophet' is killed, the alien base found, and -- surprise, surprise -- the archaeologists turn out to be 'not all they seem'. I could go on, but I think you have had the gist of the story by now. Does it sound familiar? Damn it, it should!

Change a few names, aliens into Indians. Remy and Co are still mercenaries, or guns for hire, but the guns become sixguns, their mission to kill the medicine man. Stableford even throws in a daughter of the clan chief (or Indian princess) for good measure. The parallels between his book and a Western are unmistakable. It would make a quite passable film -- Clint Eastwood could play Remy.

Similarities between the SF ghetto and its near neighbours are never ending. Look at the affinity between Doc Smith's 'Lensman' series and the popular costume drama piracy films, or the equally popular gangster movies, which were contemporary with *Triplanetary*. Smith even has battle-axe wielding boarding parties attacking space-going gangsters -- with that Arisian Lens to give an added touch of magic. In mentioning gangsters we touch upon crime fiction, yet another neighbouring, but slightly more respectable, ghetto.

There is much talk, in SF criticism, of how handicapped the genre is by its 'pulp tradition'. We are not alone. *The Maltese Falcon* was serialised in 1929 in *The Black Mask* -- a pulp crime magazine -- during its editorship by Joseph T Shaw, a man who had almost as much influence on crime fiction as John W Campbell had on SF. Shaw bought and published Raymond Chandler's first story. He also published three stories by Lester Dent who, under a pen name, ground out over two hundred pulp novels about Doc Savage. Thus do the literary ghettos merge at their edges.

I could go on drawing comparisons between SF and other branches of literature endlessly. Critics in SF are tediously fond of talking of its crippling ghetto mentality -- Joseph Nicholas mentioned it in 'Guns Of The Timberland' in *Vector* 99 -- but if SF is indeed a literary ghetto it has lots of company. (Editor's note: It seems appropriate to point out here that *Guns Of The Timberland* is a classic Western novel by Zane Grey, felt by Joseph to have transcended its genre. Thus do *Vector* articles merge in unlikely places.)

SF is not even unique in having a long history of staunch defenders of the pulp tradition. This was written by Joseph T Shaw in 1933:

Recently *Vanity Fair*, one of the white paper magazines ... told all about

how wood pulps cater to people who don't know or care about real literature. We venture to assert that *Vanity Fair* itself would not find too favourable comparison between its regular fiction and article writers and those of *Black Mark*.

Shaw also told his readers of the movie sales his writers were making. In the 1930s they were making quite a few. *The Maltese Falcon*, for instance, was filmed twice before the 1941 Humphrey Bogart version. The whole argument has strange echoes in the 'adventure SF' v. 'literary SF' argument of today. I wonder whether Shaw gave his writers little lectures on 'futility' as *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* is wont to do nearly fifty years later. The argument in the 1930s, and before, is accurately mirrored today in the way the proponents and detractors of the 'literary view' quite often ignore the fact that the two aspects of fiction can be successfully combined -- to the benefit of both. Everyone who comments on SF seems to be a member of one of two mutually opposed factions.

Even those commentators who would like to knock down the boundary walls of our so-called ghetto cling to old familiar terms -- like 'ghetto mentality' -- and in so doing help maintain SF's image as a uniquely put-upon genre. These critics claim, correctly, that if SF hopes to gain general recognition, as being more than just the literature of BEMs and blasters, it must face the literary world as an adult, not as an adolescent with the typically adolescent fear of criticism. And yet these commentators hang on to the strange twin concepts that SF is a ghetto and that SF must raise its literary standards towards those of 'mainstream' literature with unshakable tenacity. We cling to these ideas as a man learning to swim clings to a float, afraid to let go lest he should drown. But if we genuinely wish to develop a theory of literary criticism that includes SF as an equal with all other literary forms we must let go of all the preconceived notions we have -- and start to swim.

All right, so we are going to bravely go where no critic has gone before, are we? Then let's question everything, every existing convention of literary criticism. Let's form our own images of how the literary world is formed, not as hard and fast standards, but as points for debate. I see literature as being a city much like Los Angeles -- having many suburbs, villages and small towns within its boundaries, but without any real 'city centre'. The suburbs often touch and it is hard to tell them apart at their edges, but each maintains its own identity. And 'mainstream'? It resembles Main Street, a road which winds through the city picking up the best representatives of the inhabitants of the suburbs and taking them... where? The future, perhaps, or call it posterity. It does sound pompous, but probably the best test of a story's worth is how well it ages. And the stories that have, so far, stood up to the test of time are a motley assortment. Action adventure rubs shoulders with period comedy, political satire with romance. The only thing they have in common is their excellence.

Our critical standard should give us an inkling of which of the works in our field of special interest will stand that ultimate acid test of time. And it should help us gauge all SF against that ultimate level of achievement. In deciding how a story stands up to such a rigorous trial we must, as Kevin Smith has said, be as fair as possible. A standard of criticism which embraces all of literature would be fairer than one which merely compares SF with SF. A critic would, ideally, recognise the similarities between a book in the SF genre and books from other fields of literature and point them out where they are relevant. And in being fair to the book he is judging, the critic must be equally fair to his audience and tailor his comparisons to their likely experience. It probably is impossible to do all this, but the effort should be interesting.

It could be said, though, that if such an effort were worth making it would have been made long ago. And if its merits were so great the effort would have

succeeded. But the trouble is we SF fans are afraid to disturb the foundations of our little world. We are afraid we may lose our comfortable sense of uniqueness, we are afraid that if we surrender just one part of that sense of difference we will lose it all. What we have failed to realise is that in recognising, even proclaiming, SF's connections with the whole of literature we have the opportunity of gaining a new and far more important unique position for the genre. That uniqueness lies in the manifold connections SF has with every aspect of literature. Alone among literary forms it has much in common with every type of literature. This is a uniqueness worth proclaiming. It may even be that in SF literature has been evolving a form capable of doing just this, a form capable of taking on aspects of every established literary form and breathing new life into them. It's a big claim. Maybe it isn't true, but until we put aside the old certainties and accept this infinitely more valuable uniqueness we won't find out.

STANDPOINT

PUNK SF John A Hobson

At the November BSFA meeting (in Hounslow) Chris Priest, who was guest speaker, brought up the old chestnut about the lack of an SF magazine in the UK. He believed that any serious attempt to launch a magazine needed an editor steeped in SF, a publisher with plenty of money to gamble on the idea, and distribution through the courtesy of W H Smith. It's a familiar argument and one which, I suggest, totally misses the point; by looking at the problems facing a new magazine from a *conventional* and very *conservative* viewpoint one adopts a frame of reference that is totally outmoded for SF. What we need is a radical approach to the problem of publishing a viable SF magazine.

Abandoning the past approach of trying to interest the big publisher is justified when one reconsiders the past decade of SF magazine publication in the UK. If a publisher is interested in a magazine he will play safe; we will end up with another *SF Monthly*, 'name' authors and damn all else. A publisher has to be conservative otherwise jolly old W H Smith, self-appointed keepers of the nation's morals, will not allow the magazine to appear on their stands, and we will have *New Worlds* all over again. (Not that I am proposing that we should revive *NW*, which is about as relevant to 1981 as flower power and that other SF in California.) Having a knowledgeable editor means very little either, as no two SF fans will agree on what an author's 'knowledge' should contain. Is a man steeped in US SF less qualified to edit than a man who derides US SF as puerile? Witness George Hay's efforts with *Pulsar*, a sort of Brit *Destinies* and about as interesting. Mr Hay has a working knowledge of SF, but was still not a good editor. Is it therefore surprising that *Ad Astra* has taken the easy way out and become acceptable to publishers, W H Smith *et al* simply because, by conventional methods, there is no alternative: compromise or be spurned.

We will now deviate slightly and look at the phenomenal decline of the record industry in the past three years. Record companies refused to touch many of the punk bands so the latter started to make their own records, which sold through specialist shops, which in turn inspired a number of independent distributors who concentrated on these records. The record industry is currently in its death throes, yet independent labels and groups are thriving, and despite the BPI chart which, as we all know, is biased in favour of half a dozen firms, independent records are increasingly 'making it'. Just look at the label names today and compare that to even five years ago. Thus we have an example of people collectively by-passing one of the most solid edifices of the media and winning.

What has this to do with SF? you ask. Well, everything, because the publishing industry is in the position that the record industry was in 1975. Each publisher survives on a handful of best sellers, authors like Robbins, Hailey and Higgins, which support everything else. These and other such authors naturally demand million dollar advances before a word has been typed, so the publishers' return is minimal. That's OK in a market that keeps growing, but paperbacks have now suffered the slump that hit records. You can sell only so many glossy film tie-in prepackaged stories before a glut starts and people stop buying; it will be interesting to watch the publishers make the same mistakes as the record companies and (hopefully) join them. A publishing industry based on the 'big is successful' policy will collapse, just as the film industry has bombed with blockbuster flops like *Raise The Titanic* and *Heaven's Gates*. Therefore a prospective SF magazine should avoid the system and create its own market, own methods, own product, by itself.

How? Simple. Find out how many bookshops specialise in SF or have owners with an interest in their SF shelves, as well as other places that an SF magazine would be acceptable, such as specialist record shops, boutiques, anywhere but *W H Smith*. Why limit yourself to one outlet? *Private Eye* has proved you don't need a big distributor, so why should we saddle ourselves with a dead weight? Money, of course, is a problem, but here one needs to look at the format of the magazine. Another *Omni* is out for this reason, but would a properly thought out paperback magazine, with the long shelf life that this entails, be the correct approach? Or would an A4 magazine with, say, a glossy cover, similar to *Zig Zag*, be the answer? There is no need to go to a big printer either; this is the age of the computerised printer, so why not use one? Anyone can now typeset a book, and layout only takes imagination.

Which of course brings us to content. If you want a mass audience then you need bland crap that will offend no-one, hygienic SF of the type served up in the US which is valueless, over-written, and incomplete without being labelled a 'Classic'. What is the size of the SF audience? If publishers find difficulty shifting fifteen thousand paperbacks then we are talking of a potential readership of, say, ten thousand -- so why print more? A small circulation in a tightly controlled number of outlets would allow one the freedom to take chances with SF, chances that are now avoided by writers because only four hundred page pseudo-theological abortions set in space will be accepted by publishers. Given an outlet, how many authors would start thinking afresh? Even more relevant, how many J G Ballards are fruitlessly headbanging away against what is 'acceptable' in SF? Publicity is where the real revolution starts. Punk exploded after a one minute interview. If SF is going to be the vanguard for fiction, if SF is going to be its saviour, is it not time someone said bollocks to the twee Bloomsbury idea of publishing that we have inherited? Why can't SF escape from the cosy catastrophe of the publishing world and stick two fingers at the pompous bores, the academics who are gradually strangling SF? Why can't SF scare the knickers off politicians, priests and parents? Well?

SCIENTIFACTION

William Bains

Science fiction, we are told with repetition worthy of Minitrue, is the literature of ideas. We are not told it so much now, possibly because it is not true, but the converse held by the less talented of the 'New Wave', that science fiction should contain no ideas at all, is not therefore automatically correct. In the fight for a literary SF I would like to cast a nostalgic glance at the rosy glow of Gernsback and Campbell burning at the stake, and ponder whether *Sensawunda* and similar diseases have any place in the fiction we would like to read.

Certain critics will recoil, demanding careful plotting, in-depth characterisation, realistic backgrounds, and their requests are valid. They can go read *War And Peace*. Me, I like *Mote In God's Eye*, even if its characters are

paradoxically wooden and cardboard, and if the resolution is based solely on Earth's (USA's) ability to bomb hell out of Mote Prime (everyone else). The Earthmen and the tin Doc Smithian spaceships they travel in are insignificant beside the Moties themselves, not individually where they display all the characteristics of Niven Character Two, but as a species, a concept. As a vision of Man Future, if you will. To anyone scientifically aware the problem of applying evolution theory to intelligent species, to Man, is at least of passing interest and here Niven and Pournelle suggest an answer not based on *Childhood's End* or *Lensman*. That in itself is fascinating, but they try to construct the culture such a species might have, and answer the Fermi paradox of how come they are not here if they exist at all. Does Man evolve from or to Motie? Did the reviewer of *MIGE* in *Vector* even think about it? The characters could be glass sheet for all I care, invisible to the naked eye: the book has intrinsic interest in the ideas it implicitly and explicitly conveys.

Similarly *Tau Zero*, recipient of unkind comments in a recent BSFA rag. Anderson doesn't just leave the physics as 'E=MC²' and go on to Dickensian character analysis. He writes the whole book around the Lorentz transformation. Not quite as original as *Mote* (a German pre-empted him in 1905), but how much more original than, say, *World Out Of Time* where, Simak-like, Niven takes an unimaginative look a hundred years into the future and calls what he sees 'three million AD'. *WOOT* nearly bored me to narcolepsy. *Tau Zero* and *Mote* still steam from the eyetracks. Yet to the 'literary' critic all three are of a type: "Characters cardboard... plot unbelievable... writing styleless and banal... rubbish... rubbish..."

Is he wrong? On traditional grounds, no. But SF employs another area of judgement (dimension, to stick to the hard SF terminology), the sense of wonder scientists (that is, 'believers in science', as Christians are 'believers in Christ') and Isaac Asimov feel at seeing how the universe is. Fredric Brown, always one to say in ten words what I would say in a thousand, wrote a vignette called 'Wonder' on the theme that the universe is quite incredible, all by itself. "Hey, look at Black Holes!" is as valid an artistic statement as "Hey, look at this guy!" and its light entertainment value is far greater. You can be mugged by one of Ellison's brilliantly portrayed degenerates any day of the week. Black holes I have yet to meet on a dark night.

But such values need a different approach from those adopted for 'traditional' writing values, valuable (ugh) although the latter are.

The stuff we are talking about is Science Fiction. Its name, however poorly defined, derives from the role Science, the seeking of the objective world, plays in its basic construction. There is the reason that Gernsback, for all his unlovable ability to promulgate the very worst in writing standards, should be at least mentioned for the name he gave the ghetto he formed. When demolishing the ghetto walls, please do not demolish the scientific standard in SF as well and leave us all reading mainstream.

SCIENCE FICTION ART

RGA Wilkinson

As an amateur SF artist I have noticed, with some interest, that this particular branch of SF is held to be in a sorry state of affairs. We often hear it referred to as 'a ghetto artform', 'flashy consumer packaging', and the like. I am not about to argue with those points of view as I fear SF art does indeed fall far short of its potential. But I see no reason why this should remain the case. In fact I believe it is high time that this art form experienced its own 'New Wave', where artists should be prepared to experiment with their chosen field of endeavour. As you can see, I was inspired to write by Pete Lyon's letter in *Vector* 99.

Of course, it is easy to talk of experiments in SF art, but this raises three immediate questions.

- (i) Who will carry out these experiments?
- (ii) What will be the nature of these experiments?
- (iii) How will the results be distributed?

The answer to the first question should ideally be 'all artists', but, as Pete Lyon pointed out, it is not quite as easy as that. Professional artists, although in a more prominent position than the rest of us, are also more restricted. They have a living to make with their work and it is the publishers who pay the wages. Experimental artwork is all very well, but what publisher will risk using it on a book cover when he already has a perfectly functional system to hand?

This leaves us with the amateur as the likeliest candidate. He or she is not so restricted in choice of subject or medium. In fact the only limitations that immediately spring to mind are imagination and ability. It is likely that anyone who paints or draws SF has a pretty functional imagination to start with. As for ability -- well, as long as the artist puts his message across does it really matter if, for instance, the perspective is slightly out, the pallet too dull, or the humans tend to look like matchsticks? After all, practice does make perfect, as the saying goes. Besides, the professional of tomorrow is probably among the amateurs of today.

If today's amateurs are to lead a 'New Wave' in SF art then in what direction should they aim? This, our second question, does not have a simple answer, if it has one at all. However, an art teacher once told me that a good work of art should carry a message, whether it be a feeling or an idea. This does sound slightly reminiscent of that famous cliché, "SF is a literature of ideas", doesn't it? So why not apply it to the field of SF art? In fact, much that is said about SF as literature can also be applied to SF as a visual art form. For example, an author can set a novel around a subject on which he has strong feelings -- and so can an artist. A story can be a strong warning of future dangers -- so can a picture. If an artist wants to paint pictures of spaceships and space wars then he should do so, but why not add a little something to point out the needless horror of warfare, or the depersonalisation of war to the machine versus machine level.

There is no reason why SF art cannot become a truly respected artform in its own right, but to achieve recognition it must be on general view somewhere. This brings me, rather conveniently, to my third question, how will the results be distributed?

I don't doubt that many SF artists are producing excellent work at the moment, but with lack of suitable outlets how can fandom and the general public be made aware of it. *Vector*, *Matrix* and the various fanzines do offer some hope, but there is a limitation on the size of the artwork and, of course, the artwork must be in black and white and easily reproducible. This does cause a problem for amateurs like myself who are more at home with brush and paint than pen and ink, but any artist worth his salt should attempt to master new media.

However, there is an outlet that may prove useful -- the local art gallery or centre. These establishments sometimes run exhibitions of local arts which are specifically aimed at the enthusiastic amateur. These exhibitions are normally intended to cover as wide a field as possible and SF comes easily within the limits. More important is the chance this offers for the SF artist to display his work and compare it with other fields of art.

Alternatively the artist could always join an SF group, if he is not already a member of one, and show his work to fellow members. At least this would to prove to fandom that SF art has a great deal of potential.

As you can see, this article is not intended to defend my chosen field, but is an attempt to give would-be artists a sense of direction and thereby to improve a situation which many find intolerable.

Saving The Tale



David Wingrove

...the sense of wonder. That is our sixth sense. And it is the *natural* religious sense.

Somebody says that mystery is nothing, because mystery is something you don't know, and what you don't know is nothing to you. But there is more than one way of knowing.

Even the real scientist works in the sense of wonder. The pity is, when he comes out of his laboratory he puts aside his wonder along with his apparatus, and tries to make it all perfectly didactic. Science in its true condition of wonder is as religious as any religion. But didactic science is as dead and boring as dogmatic religion. Both are wonderless and productive of boredom, endless boredom. (1)

What is the element that distinguishes science fiction from other literary forms? Does a single, clear distinguishing trait exist, or is the distinction a matter of several vague, unfocused and irrational elements glimpsed tangentially and recognised as *generic*? Such questions of definition, familiar to anyone who has read SF thoroughly, thoughtfully and *critically*, are pertinent here only in so far as they allow us to establish a good reason (or otherwise) for treating science fiction as a *special case* when we come to analyse it critically, separate from the greater, encompassing 'world' of literature. But, as any modern philosopher would willingly and exhaustively tell you, definitions are not labels, but flexible, multivalent concepts. We are always, it seems, working in the realm of the *several* and not the *single*. Nonetheless, a definition of sorts is useful at this stage, if only as a starting point, and Aldiss's tentative offering at the beginning of *Billion Year Spree* is as good as any and better than most.

Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic, or post-Gothic mould. (2)

We can see, immediately, the strengths and weaknesses of such a definition (as, indeed, can Aldiss), and recognise that the second half of the definition is of more *specific* weight than the first. Is it, then, a question of form rather than content? The first half of this definition, after all, seems to cast too wide a net, and draws in every piece of great literary art existent. But isn't the second part too *narrow*? Doesn't the gothic form itself *limit* what we can clearly recognise (even if we cannot with any certainty say how we recognise it) as SF? It would seem so. And therefore the truth would seem to lie somewhere between the two. Between the idea and the form.

All sudden, gorgons hiss, and dragons glare,
And ten-horned fiends and giants rush to war.
Hell rises, Heaven descends, and dance to earth:
Gods, imps, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,
A fire, a jig, a battle, and a ball,
Till one wide conflagration swallows all.

Thence a new world to Nature's laws unknown,
Breaks out refulgent, with a heaven its own:
Another Cynthia her new journey runs,
And other planets circle other suns.
The forests dance, the rivers upward rise,
Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies,
And last, to give the whole creation grace,
Lo! one vast egg produces human race. (3)

This succinct review of Jack Vance's *oeuvre*, written in anticipation by Pope in 1743, clearly undermines any view that science fiction deserves to be treated as a special case simply because it is a literature of outrageous idea. We have a long and healthy literary heritage of Myth and exaggerated fantasy. What remains then if we cannot consider this element -- as we surely cannot -- as something peculiar to the SF genre? The sense of wonder, perhaps? Ah, yes. *The sense of wonder*. Yes of course. And at this stage we recognise the pertinence of the quotation that began this article. A critique of modern, hard-core science fiction? It might seem so at first glance. But no, this isn't Algis Budrys, or Mike Harrison, or even Peter Nicholls, writing in a modern SF magazine. It was D.H. Lawrence, writing in 1928 about the factor he saw as aniliving all creative activity. The sixth sense. The *natural* religious sense, without which all is 'boredom, endless boredom'. We cannot fail to recognise something in Lawrence's words that is immediately relevant to all good science fiction: imagination, extended knowledge, entertainment. But even as we recognise this pertinence, we note that Lawrence knew little about scientifiction (nor cared greatly for Wells in his SF guise) and was talking of the principle behind *all* truly creative activity. The nature of the problem begins to be apparent. What *is* the element that distinguishes science fiction from other literary forms? Without establishing that, how can we establish a case for an independent critical theory for the genre? It is not, it seems, in an extensive use of metaphor.

At this stage we must focus in upon specifics of the criticism produced both 'within' the genre and 'without', and to this end I shall concentrate upon six readily available pieces of criticism, three from each 'camp'. Perhaps by looking at these, perhaps by coming in close and focusing upon those distinctions of *emphasis* and *perspective* the answer to our question might be revealed. Perhaps this is our only means of deriving "a method of SF criticism that treats SF as part of the wider world of literature" (4). One of the discoveries of the literary critic is, after all, that it is all *opinion*, that it is *subjective*. There is no external, *objective* set of 'rights' and 'wrongs'; but there do seem to be certain approaches which have more to commend themselves than others. As even Mr Leavis will readily admit:

I don't think that for any critic who understands his job there are any 'unique literary values' or any 'realm of the exclusively aesthetic'. But there is, for a critic, a problem of relevance: it is, in fact, his ability to be relevant in his judgements and commentaries that makes him a critic, if he deserves the name. And the ability to be relevant, where works of literary art are concerned, is not a mere matter of good sense; it implies an understanding of the resources of language, the nature of conventions and the possibilities of organisation such as can come only from much intensive literary experience accompanied by the habit of analysis. In this sense it certainly implies a specifically developed sensibility. (5)

This element of 'relevance' might be given the name 'perspective', and as such it provokes another question. Just how much criticism of science fiction is entered upon without a proper perspective? How much of it is, in Leavis's terms, *irrelevant*? It can be so, it seems, for two reasons: either because the critic has little knowledge of the undeniably wider field of general literature; or because the critic has a sound academic grounding *without* knowing much of the extensive work undertaken within the genre. The former set of critics manifest

themselves in society journals, and specifically science fiction-orientated magazines and fanzines, the latter in Sunday papers and academic treatises from Professors of Creative Writing (usually from the States, as we in Britain are generally spared the blight of 'creative writing' courses). *Perspective* is what we apparently need:

You then whose judgement the right course would steer,
Know well each Ancient's proper character:
His fable, subject, scope in every page;
Religion, country, genius of his age:
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticise. (6)

Pope's *An Essay On Criticism*, written two hundred and seventy years ago, is the first of the six pieces I want to deal with here. It is pertinent because we have yet to establish any reason for treating science fiction as a special case, and therefore ought, until we do, to deal with it in general terms. Pope's is one of the first succinct statements on literary criticism in modern times. The quotation above indicates something of Pope's view that each work must not only be dealt with as an artistic whole, but also within the context of the author's life and contemporary situation. Something of this emerges in the frequent attempt by some modern critics of science fiction to deal with the genre as a sociological phenomenon, but such an approach also tends to lose much of the 'Ancient's proper character' (which we might define as the particular author's idiosyncracies) in the game of puppets and manipulating forces. Pope, despite his seemingly erroneous belief in a 'natural' and objective standard of criticism, was nonetheless acutely conscious that a partial reading of Man and his literature -- and he saw literature as 'Nature's finest achievement' -- was far worse than no reading. Elsewhere in his poetic essay he says,

A perfect judge will read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its author writ:
Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find
Where Nature moves, and rapture warms the mind,
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
The generous pleasure to be charm'd with wit. (7)

What has this to do with SF? What have the Eighteenth-century ideas of 'wit' and 'Nature' to do with the peculiarly Twentieth-century genre of science fiction? At this stage I want to make an unsupported assertion and then examine its consequences: that science fiction up to the mid-sixties was similar in its mature to the mannered literature of the Eighteenth Century. Which is to say that the science fiction genre was a highly restricted field, the science fiction writer having to work within rigidly ordered limitations. It is to say that its *creative perspective* was limited and partial, that science fiction was, by its nature, myopic and, worse than that, cyclopic. And I want to deal with science fiction as it was fifteen years ago because in many respects the genre has divided in two since that time, such that a simple argument about the nature of the genre is no longer possible -- and that we now have two distinct and differing forms masquerading under the same label. And what brought about this inner schism? To my mind it was occasioned by the entry of self-consciousness -- of critical values themselves -- into a previously unconscious genre. Before the early sixties science fiction was a literature of escapist entertainment with a vague didactic and socially-prophetic role (or so, at least, it visualised itself). The social conditions of the sixties changed this drastically: outer space was replaced by inner space in the imaginations of a whole new generation of writers and readers. But this was not a metamorphosis; it was merely the birth of a new form of SF alongside the old. The old form persevered, and perseveres even now. It was easy for Kingsley Amis to write a critical book about science fiction in 1961 and *know* what he was talking about. Then, he was the unaffected eye *looking in*. *New Maps Of Hell*, surely one of the major precursors of our modern heritage of SF criticism (and also a cause of so many of

our problems of definition, if you accept my argument re consciousness in the genre), began with science fiction as an 'addiction' contracted, rather like acne, in one's adolescence, but then proceeded to argue why it nonetheless had value -- much as Lawrence in his *Studies In Classic American Literature* sought to liberate Hawthorne, Melville and Twain from their status as children's literature and reinstate them as a *different form* of adult literature,

It is hard to hear a new voice, as hard as it is to listen to an unknown language. We just don't listen. There is a new voice in the old American classics. The world has declined to hear it, and has babbled about children's stories. (8)

If we substitute 'science fiction' for 'the old American classics' we have Amis's critical stance in 1961. But such a stance, whilst the correct one to adopt, is no longer so easy to take. Can we any longer recognise SF as a distinct and *new* voice? Hasn't it now merged into the soft murmur of older, more familiar voices? What was distinct, if limited, has become more vague, far more difficult to evaluate, in extending itself. We could still blinker ourselves and deal with a small section of science fiction -- that which now attracts the labels 'traditional' or 'classic' science fiction -- and pretend that that is *all* of science fiction. But if we choose to do this, we are in danger of omitting the majority of writers who would readily admit to the science fiction label, but who would not wish to be confined by the old limitations -- Le Guin, Compton, Aldiss, Crowley, Bishop, Disch, Roberts, Lem and Delany. Indeed, turning to the last of these writers, Delany, we might look at his essay "Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction" as the second of our examples.

As any other area of art is judged by its finest examples, and not by the oceans of mediocrity that these high points rise above, this is the way SF must be judged. (9)

Again this is an approach that has much to commend itself, and we are inclined to agree. But can we readily judge *science fiction* by its finest examples? Surely the most immediate, the most evident factor about SF's finest examples is that they *transcend* those old limitations and become *sui generis*. They become something *more than*, something *other than* science fiction. The close-minded literalism and the failure to use the imagination of so much traditional science fiction -- the failure to create Lawrence's 'sense of wonder' -- is really the *true* science fiction. It is the 'sci-fi' we see in the cinema and on television. It is the science fiction rack in WH Smith's (with a rare few exceptions, placed there in error because of the covers on the books). It is the popular image foisted upon the millions, of rockets, robots, clones, monster-aliens and fantastic futures. And this, I insist, is the *true* science fiction, from which all that is of value in the genre escapes in transcending that close-minded literalism. Let us call upon Delany again,

It is just this basic concern with *thingyness* that makes me insist that the initial impulse behind SF, despite the primitive and vulgar verbal trappings, was closer to the impulse behind poetry than it was to the impulse behind ordinary narrative fiction. (10)

This is a frequently heard argument from advocates of the *value* of science fiction. Delany pursues it in his article and insists that any *singular* reading of the SF genre undervalues its worth. This seems fine. But what of his *thingyness* -- how does that manifest itself in the genre other than as literalism? I'll readily admit a rich use of metaphor in the better writers, but the 'wonder' of Ringworld and Rama -- *things* if ever there were *things*! -- is not a genuine 'sense of wonder'; it is only a simple, *materialistic* response to *bigness*. It is the respect we show to a millionaire for amassing so much wealth so quickly. It is the respect we show Hitler for taking France in five weeks. It is an inhuman thing, and the traditional science fiction genre thrives upon it. This isn't poetry at all, unless you relate it to the worst excesses of jingoism.

Delany is wrong, in as much as he is referring to the finest examples of science fiction and poetry, for in the former this traditional aspect of *thingyness* is transcended. Were he talking of Melville and Hawthorne he would be much nearer the mark, but when he draws this similarity and rests his case upon *thingyness*, then he is simply lazing in the deep mud at the bottom of his oceans of mediocrity. The finest examples of the genre surely don't rely upon *thingyness*. They are (and it is no surprise that one of the very finest of these rare works is Le Guin's novel) *dispossessed*, and their connection to poetry -- if it exists -- resides in a rich and imaginative use of metaphor (read Cowper or Le Guin and this becomes immediately apparent). Indeed, it would be valuable, at this stage of the argument, to proceed to Le Guin and her article "Science Fiction And Mrs Brown" for a different perspective from within the modern genre -- something to counterbalance Delany's insistence upon *thingyness*:

What good are all the objects in the universe, if there is no subject? It isn't that mankind is all that important. I don't think that Man is the measure of all things, or even of very many things. I don't think Man is the end or culmination of anything, and certainly not the centre of anything. What we are, who we are, and where we are going, I do not know, nor do I believe anybody who says he knows, except, possibly, Beethoven, in the last movement of the last symphony. All I know is that we are here, and that we are aware of the fact, and that it behoves us to be aware -- to pay heed. For we are not objects. That is essential. We are subjects, and whoever amongst us treats us as objects is acting inhumanly, wrongly, against nature. (11)

In her essay Le Guin asks not only whether a science fiction writer can produce a novel -- having at its core a genuine 'secondary creation', a character -- but also whether it is desirable. Her answer is a resounding 'yes' on both counts, and yet again I wonder whether in describing the kind of science fiction she would like to see she is not once again transcending a genre and talking of what any literary art form strives for: stressing once again that first part of Aldiss's definition of science fiction:

The writers' interest is no longer really in the gadget, or the size of the universe, or the laws of robotics, or the destiny of social classes, or anything describable in quantitative, or mechanical, or objective terms. They are not interested in what things do, but in how things are. Their subject is the subject, that which cannot be other than subject: ourselves. Human beings. (12)

But this subject becomes something that lies outside of the traditional concerns of science fiction. Le Guin in her essay -- as much as Delany -- dismisses the Utopian/Dystopian role of SF, undermines SF's value as a text book for sociologists and condemns its literalism. But in doing all of this -- in stressing the Human Being at the centre of all -- she is pointing not to an element confined to science fiction and produced *solely* by it, but to that 'mystery' which Lawrence saw as concomitant to all genuine creative activity. Yet there is another aspect of science fiction which Le Guin mentions only cursorily and disparagingly, as if she had forgotten that it were not simple *fiction*: it is that important part of Aldiss's definition which reads 'in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science)'. One thing Delany is careful to do in his essay is to note the vascillating nature of Man's 'truths' -- that social custom and behaviour is a thing of time and place. Le Guin's is a belief in constant human nature and thus eternal truths at the bottom of all. Somewhere in between trips Lawrence, our fourth example, with his essay, "Spirit Of Place" with a different kind of 'truth':

Art-speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Awat with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day, and the marvellous Plato of yesterday is chiefly bosh today. (13)

And if there is a truth of the day, then that suggests also a form of art that will best express that truth; one that would reflect the nature of that day's society best. Thus the polite and mannered Augustan literature of the age of Queen Ann and Alexander Pope, thus the wild flux and assertion of the individual and the nation of the Romantics in the age of the Industrial Revolution, thus the whole Modernist movement in the early years of this century in the face of relativity and the existential abyss. What then would suit an age of high Technology that both praised and queried the results of that Technological drive? What would suit an age facing the Apocalypse? What suit an age that paradoxically looked nostalgically at the future? It need not be said. The art-speech of our day would seem, naturally, to seek its most perfect form in science fiction. Hence Doris Lessing's recent excursions; hence the interest of Golding, Fowles, Burgess in SF. It would seem that the very nature of the metaphors science fiction utilises are the things which make it a special case, but also that they are unimportant in themselves: their importance lies in that they allow us to focus upon the truth of the age; upon the specific nature of the human condition as it exists here and now. Thus Le Guin is partially correct when she says,

...when science fiction uses its limitless range of symbol and metaphor novelistically, with the subject at the centre, it can show us who we are, and where we are, and what choices face us, with unsurpassed clarity, and with a great and troubling beauty. (14)

Where I feel she is wrong is that it is *not* a 'limitless' range, but a quite specific one, and where it ceases to become 'relevant', there it drifts into power-fantasy, wish-fulfilment and other forms of simple escapism. It seems that the critic's job, then, as Leavis noted, is to recognise the 'relevance', and thus to recognise and identify for us the 'art-speech' of our time, wherein lies the truth of our age.

We begin, at last, to glimpse an area in which science fiction is distinct from the general run of literature, yet there is the irony that if we recognise this distinction it is only fair that we should also assert that science fiction *is* the literature of the age, and that what we term the 'mainstream' is in fact a tributary, a cul-de-sac which fails to recognise the social movements of contemporary society. In doing so we would not necessarily be setting up a distinct form of literary criticism for science fiction, but simply creating the circumstances in which the 'new voice' of the genre could be recognised as *the* voice of modern literature. To any literary critic outside of the genre this would seem perverse, and indeed, I would agree with them. Yet there is an element of truth in the idea of SF as the art-speech of today. Science fiction *does* seem to be the most pertinent and relevant form in which to express modern truths, and yet -- as I have tried to demonstrate -- the *true* science fiction is a banal, literal, lifeless thing. The thing of value -- the thing produced from within the genre -- has as yet no proper, satisfactory name. It is *in*, but not *of* the world of science fiction, and until it creates for itself a clearer, more solid form, *recognisably different from SF*, we must begin with the stumbling, questioning process that most articles like this begin with, and end in a similar failure to properly identify. Faced with such a vague area of achievement, and having no alternative as honest critics than to reject *present* reasons for dealing with SF as a special case, we must handle it as a hybrid of the old forms -- treating it by the wider rules of general criticism -- and try to ignore the disturbing idiosyncracies. It is my contention, however, that this is only a temporary measure, and that within the next few decades this new form, growing from the side of the older, *truer* form, will become a lucid, separate form, with a separate name. It will no longer be science fiction. Nor will it be that form known to some as 'artfiction'. What it will be I am not certain, but I am sure it will become the recognised 'art-speech' not merely of an eccentric minority, but of the greater majority. But for now, we must deal with it -- unsatisfactorily perhaps -- within the wider context, and my last two examples will perhaps show how this can most comfortably be achieved.

In Brian Aldiss's essay "Science Fiction As Science Fiction", he proposes that SF is:

...the ideal negotiator between the two hemispheres of the brain, the rational cognitive -- i.e. scientific -- left, and the intuitive -- i.e. literary artistic -- right; so its proper function is to cleave closely neither to science nor literature. (15)

As Aldiss points out, the very term 'science fiction' illustrates the straddling of these two hemispheres, the unification of two different parts of the personality. Science fiction is therefore, by this definition, centrally concerned with Man and his inner division, and not with simple *thingyness*. Aldiss is perhaps closest to Pope in his demand for a balance between head and heart (intellect and emotion) which avoids excess but yet recognises the two extremes of Man's nature; he, like Le Guin, also echoes Pope's words that the proper subject of Man's study is Man. This *must*, I feel, be borne in mind when criticising work produced within the genre. It is not enough to focus upon the ideative content, for this is to emphasise the dominance of the head, of the left hemisphere. Neither is it right to demand that character be *all* in science fiction, because once again we are creating an imbalance, this time for the heart, for the right hemisphere. Aldiss's article is valuable in that it once again illuminates that area which the critic of science fiction ought to focus upon, and lay emphasis upon, in his critical writings -- that bridge of imagination straddling head and heart and uniting the intellectual and intuitive faculties. That bridge is nothing more than the 'sense of wonder' we began with: *the vital, creative principle itself*. And as we have seen, such a principle is not confined to science fiction alone, but relates to *all* truly creative activities. We *must* use general standards of criticism. When Aldiss says, "SF is a Sense of Wonder" (16) and claims this to be the most durable definition for the fans of science fiction, he is adding nothing that is genuinely useful, but when he states later on in the essay,

So one returns to SF as a principle, as imagination, rather than as subject. (17)

and talks of it transcending itself, he is recognising that there is this other 'thing of value', this new, as-yet-unnamed genre emerging from within science fiction -- a genre of balance, of imagination, of true creative vitality: 'sixth sense fiction' we might call it. And he also recognises that most *true* SF is unimaginative in saying of its writers,

In rebelling against the mundane, they too frequently use the weapons of the mundane. (18)

So what have we? From Aldiss we glimpse that what the SF critic must be emphasising in any work is how successfully it achieves this 'balance' between idea and emotion by use of the imaginative faculty. And we shall be condemning books for a failure to achieve such a balance. Does this seem too definite an aim? *Should criticism even profess an aim?*

Criticism...must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. (19)

We might well query the second part of this -- bearing in mind the fluctuating nature of taste and truth -- yet if we substitute 'imbalance' for 'taste' in Eliot's assertion we come close to a genuine critical standard: one that is fitting to the 'art-speech' of our time. Yet even in setting up a standard of 'interpretation', Eliot in 1923 was conscious of the problem of subjectivity in the critic:

It is difficult to confirm the 'interpretation' by external evidence. To anyone who is skilled in fact on this level there will be evidence enough. But who is to prove his own skill? And for every success in this type of writing there are thousands of impostures. Instead of insight, you get a fiction. Your test is to apply it again and again to the original, with your view of the original to guarantee your competence, and once again we find ourselves in a dilemma. (20)

Which echoes succinctly what I said earlier in this article about *opinion* and emphasises the necessity of checking sources. Unsupported assertion -- and I have been far from free of such in this article -- is perhaps the most eloquent but ultimately least convincing part of criticism. Yet there is a need for an intuitive, unsupported element in 'interpretation' to prevent it from becoming simple dissection. Eliot puts it well:

Comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place. (21)

The critic, as well as the writer of fiction, must ultimately be a creative writer (and here I run contrary to Eliot) if he is to accurately capture the 'sense of wonder' inherent in the fiction. An uncreative, functional critic will never see it: he will see only the factual 'lies' (See Lawrence, quote (13)) and complain that the structure is unrealistic. Such a person has no business being a critic, and I make no distinctions here between science fiction and the wider field of literature.

In this article I have given vague glimpses -- vague because the things glimpsed *are* vague -- of the potential differences embodied in a small proportion of the work emanating from the general mass of *true* science fiction. It is with this small minority of accomplished, imaginative works that the genre's critics -- by necessity versed in both the nature of the *true*, unimaginative and literal science fiction, and the nature of the true creative vitality behind all great works of literary art -- must deal. It seems to me that they must deal with the vital *results* of the genre and not its dead processes. And in doing so they must bear in mind the widest perspectives of art, the aforementioned need for balance, and the particular element of 'art-speech'. And there is one further thing the critic has to do. Again it is a general rule, and again there is a far better writer than I who has expressed it succinctly. I leave it therefore to Lawrence to have the last word, as he had the first:

Truly art is a sort of subterfuge. But thank God for it, we can see through the subterfuge if we choose. Art has two great functions. First, it provides an emotional experience. And then, if we have the courage of our own feelings, it becomes a mine of practical truth. We have had the feelings *ad nauseam*. But we've never dared to dig the actual truth out of them, the truth that concerns us, whether it concerns our grandchildren or not.

The artist usually sets out -- or used to -- to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it. (22)

NOTES

- (1) "Hymns In A Man's Life" by D H Lawrence, (October 1928) reprinted in *A Selection From Phoenix*, Penguin Books, 1971 (p20).
- (2) "The Origins Of The Species" by Brian W Aldiss, in *Billion Year Spree*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson/Corgi Books, 1973 (p8).
- (3) "The Dunciad" (Book III, lines 235-248) by Alexander Pope, 1743 version.

- (4) "Editorial: Towards A Critical Standard" by Kevin Smith, *VECTOR* 99, 1980 (p3).
- (5) "Johnson And Augustinianism" by F R Leavis, from *The Common Pursuit*, Peregrine Books, 1952 (p114),
- (6) "An Essay On Criticism" by Alexander Pope, 1711 (lines 118-123).
- (7) *Ibid.* (lines 233-238).
- (8) "The Spirit Of Place" by D H Lawrence, in *Studies In Classic American Literature* (1923), Penguin edition (p7).
- (9) "Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction" by Samuel R Delany, in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, 1977, Berkley Windhover, New York. Article written 1969. (p129).
- (10) *Ibid.* (pp125-126).
- (11) "Science Fiction And Mrs Brown" by Ursula Le Guin (1976) in *Explorations Of The Marvellous* (Ed. Peter Nicholls), Fontana, 1978 (p30).
- (12) *Ibid.* (p23).
- (13) "The Spirit Of Place" *Op. Cit.* (p8).
- (14) "Science Fiction And Mrs Brown" *Op. Cit.* (p33).
- (15) "Change: The Break With Tradition" by Brian W Aldiss, in *Science Fiction As Science Fiction*, Brans Head, 1978 (pp1-2).
- (16) *Ibid.* (p6).
- (17) *Ibid.* (p35).
- (18) *Ibid.* (p37).
- (19) "The Function Of Criticism" by T S Eliot (1923) in *Selected Prose Of T S Eliot*, Faber & Faber, 1975 (p69).
- (20) *Ibid.* (p75).
- (21) *Ibid.* (p75).
- (22) "The Spirit Of Place" *Op. Cit.* (p8).

EDITORIAL (continued from p5)

And now I am in a position to answer Chris Priest's question about 'types' of books (see 'Letters' this issue): "Is *The Left Hand Of Darkness* the same 'type' of book as *Star Smashers Of The Galaxy Rangers*?" The answer is "no". The former is a dramatic novel, the latter a (comic) novel of action. Overall, we now have a basis for comparison of books -- of fiction books -- which is not dependent on their genre, but rather on their structure. And I am keeping David Penn happy, so far, by staying with traditional literary virtues.

I still haven't shown how to make the comparisons, but because of the letters I received after *Vector* 100 I felt it more important to discuss types of novel this time. Without an appreciation of types of novels it is obviously impossible to make proper comparisons of them. The structure of a novel is formed by the relationship between plot and character. The quality of a novel is based on the quality of its plot and characters, and also on its use of language, style and -- dare I say it? -- ideas. More next time.

NEXT ISSUE

ARTICLES -- by people who write articles.
 REVIEWS -- by lots of reviewers, including a number that were ready for this issue, but for which there just wasn't room.
 STANDPOINTS -- if anyone writes any and sends them to me.
 LETTERS -- from hordes of you, surely.
 EDITORIALS -- dozens of them, a whole issue full of editorials, all mine!
 COVERS -- two, one at each end.

I'd be an idiot to risk competing with Deety's teats.

BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEWS

Reviews Editor: Joseph Nicholas

Ian Watson and Michael Bishop - UNDER HEAVEN'S BRIDGE (Gollancz, 159pp, £6.95)

Reviewed by Dave Langford

"It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive." It was fascinating to imagine what Ian Watson and Michael Bishop might produce between them: could Bishop's warmly living characters have prevented *Miracle Visitors* from vanishing up its own metaphysical orifice? Could Watson's ingenuity have made the sealed city of *Catacomb Years* a logical necessity rather than the unconvincingly arbitrary notion it is? Might Watson's intellectual strengths combine with Bishop's emotional drive and imagery to produce a true "landmark of the science fiction field" (to quote the blurb)? Well... it might yet happen, but for the present we have *Under Heaven's Bridge*. It's a slim book, and a relatively slight one; once or twice it had me expecting an impressive, climactic bang, but somehow it never quite reached critical mass.

What defuses the book? For a reader familiar with both authors' other work, the very sense of familiarity doesn't help: here, after all, are Bishop's aliens from *A Little Knowledge* and parts of *Catacomb Years*, familiar down to the last hour glass eyeball and tatter of loose flesh. Here too is a dollop of recognizably Watsonesque metaphysics (he said, sticking his neck out), the expounding of which occupies the climactic scenes, and which as is customary gives the ultimate answer to life, the universe and everything as, approximately, a lemon. I exaggerate: this part is really rather interesting, with a cybernetic religion which deduces an external Programmer for the universe, and which the heroine arbitrarily refuses to accept because her Oriental nature rebels against a god external to humanity (though not, and here's the novelty, necessarily external to the alien Kybers)... Yes, this is the sort of stuff which would make a damned good short story in the Borges or for that matter the Watson manner.

Which brings us to the key phrase: a short story. This book, thin as it is, feels as if it would be happier as a long short or a novelette. One can hear the creaky machinery of delay, of authors playing for time... for example, the sun Dextro is going to go nova, and -

'The big man hunched his shoulders and nodded at the vibrant, falling sun. "Provided Dextro doesn't..."
'Doesn't what?' Sixkiller prodded him.
'"Captain Hsi wants to talk to me," Craig said...'

- and the revelation gets pushed back fifteen pages (think of it as 10% of the book). Similarly, the aliens enigmatically decline to reveal their secrets until Chapter 16, and the Earth expedition spends the interim arguing, making love and lecturing each other on what they intuit about the aliens: 'The Kybers may have incorporated extrasomatic data - facts, if you like - into their cellular physiology... Kybertrance is probably the biological agency of the transfer,' etc. Most of the book's pacing problem seems attributable to the authors' efforts to insert quantities of such background material in digestible form. There's a whole lot of intuiting in this area: one character intuits that the cyborgish Kybers are mere machines, and anti-life, and generally despicable; another intuits that they have great secrets to tell, and hands down such pronoun-

cements as, 'Their sleep is literally death, and their dreams are profound but inaccessible kyberthoughts,' (a jolly good intuition about what on the face of it is but an extreme case of hibernation) or, 'Their lateral pupils are their death-eyes. Thanatoscopes, call them. Instruments for perceiving life-in-death and death-in-life.' Personally I cannot intuit why one should have external, physical organs to perceive the metaphysical world; but practically all the intuitions in the book prove to be correct... well, it's a convenient way of introducing far-out concepts, though not wholly worthy of these particular authors. Nor, from Bishop and Watson, would I have expected the goshwownery whereby the expedition arrives just before its target planet's once-every-few-millennia orbital transfer between the suns of Dextro and Laevo, which itself happens just before Dextro goes nova: gosh! wow!

In due course the book winds down. One character travels spiritually towards the Kyber 'god', never to return; the expedition leaves with ample safety margin, taking just six of the Kybers; the others stay home and may or may not have escaped the holocaust thanks to their pull with the Cosmic Programmer; apparently they're also moving into a new evolutionary phase; it is intuited that the six on Earth will not emerge from their current 'death'; they do not, at least not before the end of the book a few pages and decades later; the closing scene artfully (a little too artfully) comes full circle to an early and recurring image of a Japanese temple of gilded statues; the now-aged heroine confronts a possibly dead Kyber currently on display there (in a temple? really?) and finds in its immobility the promise that it'll wake up some day. This sort of summary can't really do justice to a book; you'll have to take my word for it that there's a sort of emotional rightness about most of this, but at the same time a disappointing number of intellectual loose ends.

The writing is pretty good, with some evocative descriptions of the icy planet Onogoro and of the Kybers in their windy, roofless labyrinths. There are telling moments, as when the heroine makes love to the man who's obsessed with (and later succumbs to) the Kybers, and for an instant she feels him as a machine, his flesh warm metal... Alas, a few hoary phrases do creep in ('Humanity was heading out to the stars from Luna Base'), and likewise some nasty neologisms - surfaceside, inflatadorm, dormicles. (And if the word 'gyzym' is what I think it is, one of the authors must use a funny dictionary.) That such routine coinages stand out as blemishes is itself something of a tribute to the writing. Also there are signs of Trying Too Hard To Be Poetic: 'She felt her heart stagger in her breast like a great scarlet butterfly in a high wind.' Ugh.

In summary... an intellectually provocative book, even if it only provokes you to query the peculiar definition of death implied by certain quotations above; an interesting and readable book, but one which never quite seems to jell. In particular, the emotional conflicts and the intellectual exposition don't mirror and support one another as we'd hope. The characters could be arguing about any old situation; the expositions could be made to any old characters. Even the heroine's key rejection of the machine deity comes over as a suddenly-adopted pose rather than an inevitable result of her beliefs. Deeper resonances and echoes seem to be lacking; such contrived neatness as the reiterated gilded-statue image doesn't really satisfy. This is the sort of criticism which would be worthless if directed at, say, another Larry Niven space opera; Watson and Bishop have set their sights a bit higher and demand to be judged by higher standards, and I'm afraid they ultimately fail. It may be that their very different approaches to writing will ensure that any ambitious joint project must fail... though perhaps, just perhaps, this will be proved false when we see another book by this "promising new author".

My darling keeps her feelings out of her face, mostly, but those pretty pink spigots are barometers of her morale.

Her face remained calm but the light went out — and her nipples went down.

Reviewed by Ian Watson

Roderick is a young robot, initially no more than an erasable computer program at the third-rate University of Minnetonka. The U of M has been given a grant to secretly develop artificial intelligence by a crooked employee of NASA, who is in fact creaming off most of the cash to buy and support his private fleet of vintage aircraft; and he chose the U of M because he knew for sure they couldn't possibly come up with anything. But despite his skillful laundering of NASA's auditing computer, the dire truth comes out and the project at Minnetonka is zapped on the head. Thus young Roderick (for genius has indeed invented him in the unlikelyst of places, midway between courses on Contempt Humanities and projects on telepathy in pigeons) is thrust out into the uncomprehending and incomprehensible world, encased in something like a trundling toy tank to preserve him. And just as well, since a real Think Tank out in the desert is hiring hoodlums to bump off anyone who looks like coming up with machine intelligence. Pursued by hoodlums, kidnapped by gypsies, sold into slavery as a fortune-telling machine, and adopted by Ma and Pa (into whose true roles I dare not even start to go here) Roderick grows from robot babyhood, attends school (mistaken for a severely handicapped child) and then a Catholic institution, and eventually graduates into a more passably humanoid body -- though since he paints his blank metal face black in mourning for Pa he gets lynched as a negro...

This book is a most wonderful bundle of zany absurdities developed with snappy, witty, slangy panache; it's a novel to burst out laughing over, time and again. It does, too, manage to shoot out tendrils into almost everything connected with artificial intelligence, from the logic of thought and paradoxes, through Great Automata of History, to what the Sages have speculated about machine minds -- picking up along the way on all our neuroses and misconceptions about our relationship with machines.

The real irony of *Roderick*, of course, is that amidst this contemporary American Dickens-gallery of caricatures (perfectly believable as people -- God help us -- yet like many of Dickens's best characters, in the final analysis magnificent caricatures) it is the robot who is the adaptable person while the people, with all their fleshly fulminations, quirks, obsessions, tics and traits, are mostly robots acting out self-written jargon programs of delicious spontaneity yet inflexibility.

'In the final analysis' is, of course, another programmed jargon phrase which 'springs to the lips'.

When one has stopped laughing, one can start worrying.

Ursula K LeGuin & Virginia Kidd (eds.) - INTERFACES (Ace Books, 310pp, \$5.59 1ge format, \$2.50 mass-market)

Reviewed by Cy Chauvin

This is the first anthology edited by Ursula K LeGuin. She says it began by her reading other anthologies and thinking, "Why did they put this marvel and this trash together? ...now if I ever did it..." Maybe she found the answer to that question, but I can't say that any anthology which includes a story like "Hunger And The Computer" by Gary Weimburg (4½ pages of a man starving in outer space with only his computer to keep him company and of course he is having delusions) has eliminated the trash and kept only the marvels, but it does contain some exceptional stories.

The most outstanding is James Tiptree Jnr's "Slow Music"; it is the longest, and develops its situation the most fully. The Earth is deserted, its inhabitants drawn away to the mysterious Rivers that course across its surface, making

them immortal and taking their transformed intellects on a journey across the stars. One woman, Peachthief, remains; she wants to raise a family, to be self-sufficient, and not give up her Earth life for the immortality of the River. She meets Jakko on his journey to the River and tries to change his mind - or at least have him impregnate her.

It is an aching story because it pulls the reader between two basic desires: that of the family (motherhood, creation, all that our culture on Earth means) and that of immortality - a concrete escape from death. Its two protagonists are stumbling innocents, not fully aware of sex or death ("He had never seen a dead body before, nobody had..."), and this gives them an amusing perspective - one that Tiptree has always been very skillful at portraying - which makes the ending, when it arrives, that much more poignant.

LeGuin's anthropological interests are represented by two of the stories - Robert Holdstock's "Earth And Stone" and Phillipa C Maddern's "The Pastseer". Holdstock's is the most original: a time traveller to the Boyne Valley in the Ireland of the New Stone Age finds a graveyard of sorts where the tribespeople bury themselves alive on the command of the gods. They have intercourse with the Earth, and arise filled with a vision; the result is most portentous. Maddern's story is simpler: a tribe depends on a woman who has second sight to lead them to new hunting grounds by finding and following the trail of past adventurers. But then she has a sight of the future and is shocked into immobility. The story is simple in itself, but Maddern seems the sort of writer whose power would accumulate in say, a novel or a novella, each incident bringing us deeper into her characters and society.

"The Reason For The Visit", by John Crowley, is a delightful conceit about a visit to the author's apartment by Virginia Woolf. Crowley knows how to preserve the magic (he never mentions her by name) and some of the story's touches are marvellous ("I squeezed lemon juice into the tea from a plastic lemon. The plastic lemon she found enormously witty.") but the point of the ending is elusive. Nevertheless, I liked it.

The introduction to Vonda McIntyre's "Shadows, Moving" says that "There is perhaps no other young artist so committed to SF as a career and lifework, so purely, so triumphantly..." Nor any other so overrated so early or so deadly dull. This pretentious story contains paragraph after paragraph on the order of "I feel lonely. It's a different kind of loneliness than in my dark rooms. It's the loneliness of solitude, instead of the loneliness of desertion, and the pain is not so great. It is as if I were not really alone." This is what passes for insight and emotional revelation in McIntyre's work, and I think SF can do without it.

"A Criminal Proceedings", by Gene Wolfe, is a droll but dull parody of the American judicial system. Wolfe is usually a much more ambitious writer; this story fulfills the goals he set for it, but he just didn't set them very high. Michael Bishop's "A Short History Of The Bicycle: 401 BC To 2677 AD" I read first, expecting another clever morsel similar to his earlier "Rogue Tomato", but it just doesn't hold up. It is two sorts of stories chopped up and put together like a layered sandwich: an exaggerated, pseudo-academic history of the bicycle, which is unfunny, and a story told by the historian of an encounter on an alien planet with herds of wild bicycles, which is also unfunny.

Hilary Bailey's "Everything Blowing Up: An Adventure Of Una Persson, Heroine Of Time And Space" is a chaotic, swinging sixties style of story, similar to the others she wrote about Una Persson for *New Worlds*. Like Crowley's, its point is elusive; but unlike his, its atmosphere is uninteresting. "The New Zombies" by Avram Davidson and Grania Davis, comes as a relief after Bailey's - it is a model of clarity - but it has nothing more marvellous to convey than the idea that all those burnt-out bums on the street corner are the result of a sinister organisation's having tapped them for an immortality serum. (In their defence,

I must admit that the authors do play it for laughs; but it is very hard to write true humour.) "Household Gods", by Daphne Castell, is actually more amusing, because its atmosphere is more unusual: the aliens have invaded and have taken nearly everything (including household furnishings), ignoring the native population. But one very proper old lady who has managed to retain her house goes on having parties.

D G Compton's "Bender, Fenugreek, Slattermann & Mupp" is a rather routine shocker set in one of those drugged and rigidly controlled utopias: the old boy wants to chop off both his hands, but "No one could. He need doubt no longer. It really was true - they really did know what was good for him." Of course, he couldn't get it up for years. "Precessions", by Edward Bryant, is a story of love and shifting realities: "'The lake,' I said, 'It looks like a goddamned brain.'", only Bryant isn't playing it for laughs. Michael G Coney's "The Summer Sweet, The Winter Mild" is a much better story about an encounter between a herd of caribou and a man and his wife in Canada, only the world has changed: all the animals and human beings can no feel what happens when they kill another and this has, quite naturally, resulted in the downfall of civilisation. A couple of the scenes in this story, those where Coney attempts to describe this feeling, are quite excellent.

Finally, Jean Fémeling's "For Whom Are Those Serpents Whistling Overhead?" is an energetic story about a winged bird-beast that invades the life of a married woman named Miranda; after it crashes through her office window, she develops an attachment for it. Fémeling's prose and observation make the story absorbing even though the situation seems somewhat familiar; it's the sort of story once common in F & SF.

Indeed, the overall quality of the anthology is rather like that of an average issue or two of F & SF; there are only one or two bona fide "marvels", the Tiptree and, perhaps, the Holdstock. Not all the rest is trash, of course (although Ferman would never have published "Hunger And The Computer"), but is merely competent. It is not that the writing is so mediocre, but that the points, the emotions and the characters are so slight; only Crowley's and Tiptree's stories could do without expansion. Kidd and LeGuin seem no better as anthologists than Terry Carr and Don Wollheim (but could be following in their footsteps: Pocket Books has just released The Edge, another jointly-edited anthology which could well be composed of leftovers from this one). But it would be better for LeGuin, at least, to go back to creating her own stories; others can edit anthologies as well as she, but none can create her marvels.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson (Ed) - AMAZONS! (Daw, 206pp, \$2.25)

Josephine Saxton - THE TRAVAILS OF JANE SAINT (Virgin Books, 128pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

We've come a long way from Jirel of Joiry.

Being what it is, Amazons! demands to be considered from two viewpoints, the fantastic and the feminist, but no one should be scared off by that. Here are some good and bad stories - don't be afraid to read it and find out which is which.

Besides thirteen stories, there is an introduction which is in itself worth the cover price. Salmonson chooses to deal with historical examples of women who overcame cultural conditions to become fighters and adventurers, rather than the fictional ancestors of Amazons! - Eowyn, or Jirel - which you might imagine more becoming for a collection of amazon-fantasy stories. The reason for this, I think, is that it brings to our attention how unreliable history is. (Perhaps because history is his-story and not her-story.) If conditions in the past were different from the present, then they may be different again in the future: possibilities are opened up. As Salmonson says, it's as dangerous to interpret myth as history

as it is to interpret history as fact. Nevertheless, this introduction should be required reading for anyone under the impression that amazons are either feminist myths or Greek ladies with one tit missing.

Inevitably, these are stories about outsiders. Most of the societies portrayed are patriarchal - there is a Sharone amazon empire, but it's off-stage. The woman-warrior or witch is a loner by nature, sometimes coming to terms with society, most often not. T J Morgan's 'Woman of the White Waste' has her gang-raped heroine wreaking bloody vengeance on an army of occupation, with the aid of a she-bear Goddess and magic sword, and then riding off alone. 'Agbewe's Sword' also has Goddess and sword and woman alone, leaving her society; though here Charles R Saunders gives us a historically-based African culture, and a seed of hope at the end. (You might almost say he writes as good as a woman.) Joanna Russ edits a fragment of Emily Bronte's Gondal saga, Bronte herself an outsider; and in Janet Fox's 'Morrien's Bitch' the heroine is thieving and manoeuvring on society's edge, retiring into obscurity after having engineered the hero's coup d'etat for him.

Surprisingly, there are a number of passive female characters in the book. Andre Norton's 'Falcon Blood' evokes the spectre of wicked matriarchy, which is destroyed not by an act of her heroine but by her refusal to act. Margaret St Clair's 'The Sorrows of Witches' has an omnipotent witch-queen who is nevertheless afraid of the 'stiff-necked and narrow-minded society' that she rules. Even C J Cherryh can't come up with anything more convincing than 'The Dreamstone', a familiar arrangement of Ealdwood and harpers and cold iron that possibly got front position in the book so as not to frighten off nervous readers.

It's possible for fantasy and feminism to enhance each other. 'Bones for Dulath' uses the monster and quest theme to explore the relationship between Ki and Vandien, both fighters, lovers and friends. Megan Lindholm's story may not be fantasy as such, the monster is not supernatural. This is in the class of history-that-never-happened, which is also represented by Tanith Lee's 'Northern Chess', set in medieval France. Her self-possessed heroine has barbed wit and a quiet but inflexible will, and is ready to take responsibility for the effect this has on other people. The ending bodes ill for many prophecies. Janrae Frank also deals with the problems of a woman-warrior in a patriarchal world. Chimquar of the Sharone amazon empire, disguised and travelling through male-dominated country, is condemned both by her enemies and her own people; not even able to teach her ward to be a warrior for fear of making the girl an outcast.

Not only did the Amazons! anthology win the 1980 World Fantasy Award, one of the stories tied for first place as best fantasy short story: Elizabeth Lynn's 'The Woman Who Loved The Moon'. Based on Oriental myth and history, it is the story of three women-warriors, and the one who loved a sister-slaying moon elemental. There are old themes well handled: women called more beautiful than goddesses, divine wrath, timeless love in a dimension beyond time, and a return to find that the world has moved on. It's a lyrical story, but it lacks the abrasive quality of others in the book.

'The Rape Patrol' is abrasive, controversial, and fantastic only by inclusion of a small element of voodoo. Michele Belling's vigilante group have an answer to the problem of rape, but it's an answer that many will disagree with. Is there an alternative? 'Love him' says one of the women here; and perhaps it is possible to love the criminal and hate the crime.

Also included in Amazons! is a section from Josephine Saxton's The Travails of Jane Saint, a story that is pure allegory. The book is a trip through various regions of the collective unconscious, and is perhaps less a novel than a map - a map that will be clear or unclear depending on that area of the collective unconscious housed in your own skull.

All of which sounds uncommonly serious, and doesn't take into account Saxton's lean and lively style, strong story-line, and flashes of baroque humour. Here for

example is Jane Saint in that part of the unconscious that manifests itself as a golf course:

'Suddenly and with great force she was projected into another state of consciousness. The golfball had hit her head and knocked out out stone cold.

'A little dog came snuffling over the grass and found Jane Saint, victim of a hit and run driver.'

Her astral body set free while her physical body undergoes brainwashing and sensory deprivation, Jane Saint quests through strange regions - though memory of the nature of her quest is lost at the very beginning. Most people will recognize the attitudes and opinions encountered here. It's a feminist book but not a feminist tract: herein are mothers, goddesses, chauvinist men and chauvinist women, friends, lovers and husbands, gold-feathered demons and philosophical dogs. The end of it - with the quest accomplished, and Jane Saint back in her physical body - may, according to your mood and inclination, make you cheer or cut you to pieces.

There are remarks throughout the book, both funny and serious, that cry out to be quoted. One will serve to demonstrate the depth of Saxton's reasoning:

"Womankind is freer than mankind already, little one. We have the power of creation, the hand that rocks the cradle and so on..."

"Oh no, not that," moaned Jane desperately, having heard it all too often. Use your charm, manipulate men, get power by stealth - it was a way to survive and exert influence but it was also enforced dishonesty, and it ruled out friendship with men.'

Many feminist utopias have the unspoken attitude that if only all the men could be done away with, the world would be roses. (A similar attitude spawned Belsen.) Aside from being impractical, it's also untrue. Jane Saint's realisation is that to free women you must, as well as humanising women themselves, humanise men: there is only one race here - human.

But inevitably the book suffers the same fate as Amazons!, that of ghetto publishing. Genre covers, genre marketing - as femme fantasy, perhaps, or women's lib literature? - ensures that those who might benefit most from reading the books never do. In the final accounting it may be that novels with a strong pro-feminist attitude safely concealed inside the covers - Delany's Tales of Neveryon, for example - have a greater effect than anything overtly labelled feminist; and that both Amazons! and The Travails of Jane Saint suffer from the inevitable Catch-22: preaching to the converted.

Philip Jose Farmer - DARK IS THE SUN (Granada, 400pp, £6.95)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Do you remember Brian Aldiss's novel Hothouse, in which humanity's far descendants engage in a struggle for survival - and a search for knowledge - on a dying Earth? Philip Jose Farmer obviously remembers it, because he has taken the idea as the basis for his latest novel, Dark is the Sun. Not that I'm accusing Farmer of plagiarism; he has developed it in his own fashion and, lacking Aldiss's depth, finesse and originality, has made it into an adventure story which is broad and long but shallow. I would hesitate in calling it a novel because it is more a series of adventures and discoveries, following a group of humans and non-humans for several years as they travel around Earth upon more than one quest.

In both books mankind has lost all technological expertise and reverted to a primitive barbarism, and it is a more recently evolved sentient race which is acting as a repository and disseminator of all knowledge (in Hothouse this is

a morel fungus- in Dark is the Sun it is a half-plant half-animal creature; both are good characters). In both books there are warring tribes of mankind and numerous animal and vegetable dangers to be contended with. Farmer shows his future Earth not simply dying peacefully but going through convulsions, with ever-worsening earthquakes recurring whenever the action seems a bit slow. I must give Farmer his due: he is never at a loss for another event, be it a calamity, a discovery or an attack by a noxious beastie.

It is Farmer's inability to find a credible plot which is the book's weakest aspect. He plays god, pushing his characters from pillar to post without adequate explanation, employing extreme coincidences and hair's-breadth escapes as a matter of course. He allows his group of travellers to become larger by adding various spear-carriers, with the sole intention of killing them off a few chapters later. This is to demonstrate the great dangers encountered without killing off any of the major participants.

I won't detail the plot. There's a lot of incident, a lot of artificially generated excitement, and a lot of toing and froing in search of people, places or things. The human characters learn a lot, particularly how to be Better People. As in several other Farmer books, the Mighty Being Who Controls The Universe makes a brief, uninspiring appearance. The ending is less final than one might expect, giving scope (I warn you now) for a sequel. If you enjoyed Farmer's The Green Odyssey and his "World of the Tiers" series, you'll enjoy this, though it lacks the originality of, say, John Varley's novels Titan and Wizard (which are also about humans and aliens indulging in heroic adventure).

I must mention the poor packaging of Dark is the Sun: a black dustjacket covered by large lettering is not the ideal inducement to the reader. It's a pity Granada didn't make use of the accurate pictorial cover by Darrel Sweet which adorned the US hardcover edition.

Alexander Beliaev - PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD (Macmillan, 158pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Beliaev, born 1884, is described here as "the most popular of all Russian SF writers." Apart from the fact that he flourished in the '20s and '30s, and the titles of some of his other novels, that is all the information we are given... but more of that later.

This story is an extremely competent scientific shocker. Marie Laurent applies for a job with Kern, a scientist, and is sworn to secrecy with some non-too-subtle hints about what might happen if she reveals what she might see. It turns out that Kern has been working with the late Professor Dowell to keep the heads of animals alive after bodily death, and has murdered the Professor, keeping alive his head in order to use his knowledge and pass it off as his own. Marie's duty is to attend to Professor Dowell's head, and those of two other people who are later 'reanimated', Thomas, a labourer, and Brigitte, a cafe singer. The second stage of the experiment comes when Brigitte is given a new body, that of Angellica Gai, perfect in every way except for a minor injury to the foot caused in the accident which killed her. Ms Gai was, by some strange coincidence, the lover of Armand, a friend of Arthur Dowell, son of the Professor. Overwhelmed by being given a second chance to live a full physical life, Brigitte escapes, to be spotted in a casino by Armand, who is struck by her similarity to Angellica.

Got that? Things get better...

Marie, more and more shocked at what is going on, is imprisoned in a lunatic asylum to keep her quiet. Kern goes on with plans to announce 'his' discoveries publicly. Brigitte, having spilled the beans to Armand and Arthur, develops gangrene in her foot from the injury suffered by Angellica's body. She returns

to Kern, but too late: he can do nothing and her body (or her head, depending on which way you look at it) has to be amputated.

Marie is rescued by Arthur and promptly falls for him. Kern publicly announces the result of his experiments, using Brigitte's severed head as example. At his lecture, Marie denounces Kern, who manages to pass her accusations off as the ravings of someone unhinged by observing the macabre (but perfectly ethical!) processes involved in his scientific work. He is set up to take all the credit himself when Arthur Dowell persuades the police to act and the head of Professor Dowell is discovered. Unmasked for the rogue he is, Kern shoots himself.

PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD is a book to puzzle over. The main puzzle is why Macmillan's have chosen to reprint this particular title. It is a melodrama of the highest degree, highly enjoyable if you're in that sort of mood: it races along entirely at the surface and if you look below you start floundering. Inconsistencies abound. Do we really believe that Kern would wait for the police to come and discover Professor Dowell's head sitting clumsily disguised in his laboratory? Beliaev is too much indebted to coincidence and the conventions of melodrama to write a novel which can stand up to anything in the way of serious literary analysis. Characterisation? very much stock figures - the mad scientist, the beautiful heroine, dashing hero, etc. Yet there is a power to be detected in the book; ironically, it's saved from being total hokum by the fact that similar experiments have been carried out on animals (since reading the book I cannot get out of my mind a terrible picture the Daily Mirror published some years ago of a severed monkey's head kept alive by 'scientists') and by the recent TV preoccupation with the question of transplants and when the donor's death actually occurs. There are no characters, merely types, nor is there a genuine feel of place - very little even of a 'Russian' flavour (whatever that is) to it, with its studding of Anglo-saxon and French names and Parisian setting, and even that is perfunctory - but image carries it through. Just.

Theodore Sturgeon makes the most of these points in his introduction: largely a useful comparison between the Weird Tales magazine and Beliaev which ruminates about how SF writers in both the US and USSR seemed to be using the Verne/Wells tradition in similar ways. PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD could have come straight from the pages of Weird Tales, yet we are told there was no connection; presumably we are faced with the stereotype of the Russian SF scene being more faithful to the hard-science aspect of SF because of the difficulty of sociological dissent, or even literary experiment, in a totalitarian society.

Yet how far can we rely on this? I would have liked more information on, if not Soviet SF (which is obviously a big subject and is touched on in further books in this series), Beliaev himself. Why was he so popular? Was he aware of what was being done in the US? Is this a typical book by him? Are his books still popular in the USSR? What was the reaction to certain aspects of this book, such as the Catholicism of the female characters? Books, of course, must stand on their own, but the rationalisation behind this series must be that these books have an interesting background. It's no good presenting a book which assumes that everyone knows all about Alexander Beliaev.

Soviet SF is unknown territory to most people in this country. The translated works of one or two authors are changing this, and Macmillan are to be congratulated in their brave attempt to add to this change by devoting a series of novels, twelve so far, including five by the Strugatskys, to the works of Soviet authors. This series should be a valuable addition to published SF - but it would be interesting to note just why Macmillan think it will be valuable. For literary purposes? Then PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD kept me amused for a couple of hours, harrowed for longer, and if you feel the same way I do about Gothic-type melodramas and vivisection I can recommend it - but that's about all. For historical purposes? Then the lack of serious information is, I'm afraid, pretty inexcusable.

Edmund Cooper - A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE (Robert Hale, 191pp, £5.75)

Reviewed by Ian Williams

Aha, I said to myself on opening the book, a collection of fantasy stories. This ought to make a pleasant change from Cooper's SF novels of fascist *Übermenschen* and their devoted, dumb sex-objects - you know, women, all tits and no brain.

Well, I was half-right: it was a change.

The most interesting and revealing part of the book was the two page introduction from which I extract the following quotations. 'There is another literary genre which is almost the antithesis of science fiction: it is fantasy. Good SF attempts to deal with the affairs of imaginary people in a potentially real world. Fantasy draws upon symbols and dreams and psychological archetypes for its literary potency.' If he'd began that last sentence with the word 'some' his ignorance of fantasy might not have been so obvious. Cooper concludes: 'I do not think I shall write any more fantasy. You know what you are doing with science fiction, but not with fantasy. At least, I don't. And that makes me just a little afraid...' My response to the first sentence was a sigh of relief and to the third, one of total agreement. Cooper does not know what he is doing.

Four of the six stories can be said to deal with mysticism - the relationship between individual experience and higher realities. In the 2½ page 'Jahweh', God is a super robot designed to stimulate primitive intelligences and would have been rejected by a fiction fanzine - it's that crude and trite. Equally as bad and in a similar vein, only slightly longer, is 'The Snow Crystals': God and the Devil, two super intelligences, give fragments of comfort to selected individuals. Main story in the book is the ninety page novella 'The Firebird' '...first published in the USA where it was well-received' in a collection edited by Lin Carter. The story, Cooper says, was derived from a dram and virtually wrote itself. This is all too evident. It languidly details the adventures of the youth Dominic who follows the magical Firebird into a strange world. In this land it is the worst form of heresy to claim to have seen the Firebird and Dominic is alternately helped and hindered by a variety of characters who appear to have symbolic purpose. At the end Dominic is revealed to be a dying old man. On one level it seems that the story is an allegory of life. I say seems because Cooper cannot handle symbolism and indeed implies in his introduction that he didn't know what the story was about. It's flat, slow and boring.

As an example of how limited and cliched Cooper's vision is, I'll quote from the endings of four stories. 'And then there was nothing but the darkness of night, the remote compassion of the start.' 'Again there was a burst of laughter.// Laughter among the stars!' 'And then there was nothing but the remote constellations, the far dusty patterns of a thousand million suns.' 'Suddenly there was nothing... Not even the darkness of space or the fixed brilliance of the stars.// Nothing but the strange, inexorable light of Resurrection...'

There are also two feeble jokey stories, one about a dragon, the other a ghost. But why go on. Had these stories been published under a pseudonym I'd have suspected the author to be a fumbling teenager. As it stands, calling them abysmally mediocre is praise.

If Mr Cooper goes back on his word about not writing any more fantasy, then I suggest he try sword and sorcery; the limited imagination and sexist characters of his science fiction would go well there. At least it would be more entertaining than this dreck.

My nipples popped out; I grinned and stuck out my tongue at them. They stayed up; I was happy.

Reviewed by Roz Kaveney

Richard Cowper writes quietly and elegantly; his work has a certain atmosphere of hush and stillness no matter how violent the events portrayed. His vision of the universe and of his characters and scenes is clear-edgedly precise but a little pastel-coloured and, while it would be wrong to say that his work is two dimensional, there is a certain sense in which the third dimension doesn't actually go back all that far, a certain sense in which what has looked like reality is an artifice kept convincing by the sheer niceness of the auctorial personality. On the whole, I prefer his shorter fiction merely because in it he seems to make fewer misjudgements and those he does make do not have to be lived with for so many pages. In short, it is possible to love his work as a whole yet be deeply unhappy about many aspects of each individual example of it.

A Dream Of Kinship is a sequel to *The Road To Corlay*, which was itself a successor to the novelette "The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn". All three are, as most of you will know, set in a pseudo-mediaeval British Isles a millenium after our century ends in catastrophic melting of the polar ice-cap. The parts of England not under water are independent island kingdoms held together by loose trading and political ties and by the power of the Catholic Church, which has suppressed most of what was left of 20th century technology and preaches submission to God's Law and the whim of your bishop. In the original novelette, a split-tongued boy piper preached visions of cosmic harmony and brotherly love, made especially convincing by his mutant mindpowers, before the Church, which saw him as a threat that could be controlled, had him martyred and canonised. In the first of the two novels Cowper has written so far with this background -- at least one more is implied -- the Church decides to crack down on the Boy's followers and, in spite of killing a lot of people, fails to smash the movement for spiritual renewal which will, it is implied, bring a cultural and technological renaissance with it. This fairly standard plot was given more interest and immediacy by the presence in the subconscious mind of one of its characters of a psychic investigator, Carver, from our time and the attempts of his colleagues to retrieve him.

The new book is back with the original story's 100 per cent concentration on the imaginary world of the future, and suffers from the usual problems of middle volumes of trilogies. Cowper has a fair idea of what he wanted to get done in this middle stretch and goes about doing it economically and effectively -- the Church overplays its hand totally and the followers of the cult of Kinship win even more powerful converts. This creates an environment in which the son of the man who was briefly reanimated by the mindtravelling Carver, a boy who is possibly a reincarnation of the Boy Himself, can grow up, become a great composer and learn that he is able to compel men's minds with his piping. This boy, Tom, wins everyone's eternal gratitude by saving the Princess Alice from rape by a mummer dressed as a swan and then punishing her brother, the inconvenient Duke Arthur, who has set the situation up, with the madness on the brink of which he was already teetering. Tom is shown as a bright young man who will go far, and who as the book ends is about to travel around his world learning more about what's going on.

All of this is entertaining enough, of course, done in very good taste and with very good manners, and if I seem a little churlish it is merely because I keep hoping that Cowper will do something a little less conventional with it. As the series has progressed the Cardinal, who is determined to destroy the cult of Kinship for the sake of the Church's authority, has become less rather than more convincing because the more you repeat the descriptions of his tight-drawn ascetic mouth and agonised brow the less one actually sees them, and the more you go on about his agonising over the fact that by the appointment of one of his bright young proteges to track down the cult he gave it its most effective leader the less his emotions seem real. Given that the Cardinal has thus become more of a cardboard villain, one cannot react as Cowper would wish to the dilemma

of Richard, Marshal of the Church's private army, who is increasingly convinced that the Cardinal is risking political disaster and destroying the Kingdoms of Britain to save the Church; what we should see as a dilemma comes to seem like a choice he has to make and the answer to which is obvious. His duty is plain and we cannot feel for his moral dithering.

Cowper's restatement of the paranormal mental powers of his characters and of their new religion is similarly hindered by a tendency to cliché. He has not tried to find new ways of describing these things and so we cannot react to them with the wonder that we would like to feel. The sermons are being written for us as much as for the characters and they don't make us feel that we are being shown some great new truth, just more basic peace and love.

Briefly, then, this is an enjoyable enough way to pass the time but is not even as good a book as its predecessor. My own feelings are usually against series and sequels and I had some worries when Cowper wrote the first of these novels; I felt that he was marking time in his career instead of pushing through to a deeper, better kind of SF novel writing. Now it is clear that we are in for a trilogy and my worries are deepened, especially since this middle book is itself so much marking of time. The writing is as good as ever and the characters warm and plausible, but the longer this goes on the more we look at this pseudo-mediaeval world with its curiously high level of sanitation and the less I believe a word of it.

Clifford D Simak - THE VISITORS (Sidgwick & Jackson, 282pp, £7.95)

Reviewed by Ian Williams

In the not too distant past, a gentleman of this establishment said that the critic should identify his prejudices. Fair enough: I'm a Simak fan. There are very few Simak novels that I haven't enjoyed to some degree and have found the recent trend towards Simak-bashing by trendy critics to be rather regrettable. Out of twenty Simak novels on my bookshelf I could only find two I disliked. On the other hand I also noticed that I could remember virtually nothing at all about any of his books published since 1969, with the single exception of *Mastodonia* (aka *Catface*), whilst the titles of several of his sixties novels evoked many pleasant memories.

If you think that this review is going to be of the "more in sorrow than in anger" type, you are perfectly correct.

The plot is fairly straightforward. Large slab-like aliens appear in our skies, land and begin munching their way through North American forests. Observing the laws of digestion they casually shit cubes of cellulose, then, shortly afterwards, begin budding baby slabs which eat the cellulose excreted by their parent. They are observed by Jerry, our hero, who gets scooped up briefly by a slab, and Kathy, our hero's journalist girlfriend. In Washington, a press secretary tries to pacify the public and the President. Lots of people discuss at length what is going on and try to build hypotheses. Meanwhile the aliens begin to bud sooper-doooper flying cars in huge quantities as a means of paying for the chomped up forests. Lots of discussions over the implications of this take place. The conclusion is that it will wreck the American economy and that the rest of the world will need to help out. At the very end the aliens start budding houses - with, it is suggested, budded people inside them. But this, the most interesting development, isn't followed up. So really this novel is the old chesnut of the enigmatic alien.

It's also the worst novel Simak has written in his life. Despite his attempt to create enigmatic aliens he's unable to withhold his cutesy touches with the result that whilst the aliens may be puzzling they are neither impressive nor scary.

Neither is there any pace to the story, no impetus and not much happening. People either stand around watching the aliens going about their business, or talk endlessly about what the aliens are doing and the implications of the alien activity. If the characters were interesting in themselves then this might have some point or entertainment value. But there are no characters in that sense, merely clumps of dialogue with people's names attached. Now Simak was never much on characterisation, but in his better books the heroes always had an intensity about them, whether it was Blaine fleeing through a surreal landscape in Time Is The Simplest Thing, Sutton working out his predestined fate in Time And Again, or the isolated melancholy Enoch Wallace of Way Station; an intensity that made you care about them.

All right then, what about the pathos or the relaxed pastoral quality that set Simak's prose apart from any other writer? Sadly, it's almost gone, to be replaced by leaden exposition. There are a couple of short chapters where lone man confronts alien, which hint of the old Simak but these are all too brief. It's as if Simak, an old man, sat on his front porch in a rocking chair, and rested a hand on the electric typewriter at the table by his side and let his fingers do the walking while he dozed on a hazy mid-summer afternoon.

Twenty years ago he might have spent a couple of days on the idea contained in this novel and sent in the resulting short story to F & SF where it would have been printed and forgotten about. Now he pads it out to ten times its natural length and it is printed in hardback at the ludicrous price of £7.95.

This is a dull, dull book and if it is now the best he can do then he should retire from writing rather than tarnish his reputation even further with tedious trivia like this.

ALSO RECEIVED.... Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Charles Waugh, Martin Greenberg & Joseph Olander (eds.) - MYSTERIOUS VISIONS (Hale, 516pp, £6.95)

A definite oddity, this: 26 fantasy stories by authors, like Agatha Christie, John D MacDonald and Mickey Spillane, normally noted for their crime and mystery work. In his thoroughly dispensable introduction, Isaac Asimov babbles on about the "paradox" of his enjoying both the rational, problem-solving approach of the crime story (similar to SF, he claims) and the "irrational" fantasy story; not much of a paradox and not all interesting. The stories themselves vary widely in quality, from G K Chesterton's witty and bizarre "The Finger Of Stone", about the chemical properties of a stream which changes the living creatures who fall into it into stone replicas of themselves, to Melville Davisson Post's hick Bible-punching "The Angel Of The Lord", another of those tedious Devil-in-the-Old-West pieces which is incomprehensible to anyone who doesn't live there; the whole comes across as more of a grab-bag than a reasoned selection, although in his introduction Waugh attempts to impose order on it by dividing them up into categories ("Strange Phenomena", "Spectral Creatures", "Miracles And Magic", and the like): but his explanations are too short and superficial to be convincing, and by some quirk tend to hinder rather than help analytical thought.

Michael Moorcock - WARRIOR OF MARS (New English Library, 384pp, £7.95)

The first hardback, one-volume edition of Moorcock's "Martian" trilogy - The City Of The Beast, Lord Of The Spiders and Masters Of The Pit - written in homage to and as a pastiche of Edgar Rice Burroughs's "John Carter" novels; in terms of his total output, it's pretty early and hence pretty crude and simplistic stuff, but has a certain naive vigour and colour which carries the action along at a fast enough pace for the reader not to care overmuch about its gross implausibilities and essentially wholesale silliness. In an introduction written especially for this edition, Moorcock details the various aspects of his life that went into the trilogy's genesis; I wouldn't for a moment claim that this is worth the price in itself, but it does shed some tangential light on his other heroic fantasy fiction, and is hence of some intrinsic interest.

FLIGHT FROM THE HEART OF BEING?

Iain R Byers The S in SF stands for schizoid, or so John Welsh says he believes (Vector 100). But like a politician, what he says he believes and what he actually believes are two different things. 9 Shaftesbury Dundee DD2 1LB The actual schizoid nature, or otherwise, of science fiction is of little importance to him, his ruling passion being the 'heart of being' or, more precisely, 'the female element'. Both of these quotations from Mr Welsh's "Standpoint", itself titled "The Flight From The Heart Of Being", are themselves quotes from the book which has inspired him. Although he actually credits the theories of 'object-relations psychology' with assisting him in reaching his valuable insights, his exiguous knowledge of the subject would seem to be derived solely from this book, namely *Human Hope And The Death Instinct*. Certainly it is the source of all his quotes.

As I have said, his real interests lie not in the schizoid but in the 'female element' whose wondrous qualities consist of love, feeling, sensitivity and creativity; not to mention sugar and spice and all things nice. If I may be permitted to quote at length we will see just how much importance he places on this: "...the essential value of writers like Le Guin, Sturgeon, Ellison and Dick lies in their deeply intuitive insights into problems of illusion, reality, identity, etc, insights which spring from the profoundly important, creative 'female element' of 'being' in them. It can let us see that these are writers who often involve us in solutions to these problems of existence which are based on love and reparation rather than on hate." And on the other side of the coin: "...it can also let us see that writers such as Silverberg, Heinlein, etc, (whose work is so often deficient in creative symbolism) equally often attempt to involve us in 'hate-solutions' which deny the 'female element'... and encourage the 'taboo on weakness'." Mr Welsh appears to be slave to an idea which goes at least as far back as the ancient Greeks. The belief that there is some kind of connection between creativity and femininity no doubt has its roots in the concept of an Earth Mother, and has also been suggested by Jung in his idea of the anima. It is, however, a belief which is entirely fallacious, a belief which completely ignores the importance of the male in the act of procreation. If female qualities are so essential to creativity, then why is it that there have been so few creative geniuses among the opposite sex? It is the very aggressiveness of masculinity which provides the spur necessary to achieve anything in this world. While not wanting to suggest that women are in any way inferior to men, I would like to point out that it is nothing less than feminism that endeavours to prove their superiority. This applies as much to the 'female element' as it does to women themselves.

And what of the value judgements implicit in Mr Welsh's beliefs? All feminine qualities are associated with love, while all male qualities are associated with hate. This is highly untenable by anyone's standards. Solutions which are based on love are necessarily right, solutions based on hate wrong. Who is Mr Welsh to decide what is right and what is wrong? Surely the correctness or otherwise of a solution is something relative to the society in which it is to be applied. To be all sweetness and light in a society which is barbaric and violent will not get one very far, and many of the societies depicted in science fiction are barbaric. Our own society is one which is based on 'hate', that is, it would be as defined by Mr Welsh, and the weak within it are only barely tolerated, mainly because we consider ourselves to be civilised and feel bound to behave in a manner befitting that civilisation. It is, however, only a facade.

Robert Silverberg. Another interesting thing in the article is Mr Welsh's attitude to this particular writer, singling him out for appraisal, if appraisal it can be called: "Silverberg, who is a classic example of a schizoid writer within the science fiction field, is, I think, especially guilty... a writer

whose grasp of emotional reality is so thin and whose feeling for experience is so anti-human and full of hate..." and, "...the very elements in Silverberg's work... also show him to be wrestling with deep intra-psychic conflicts, and this deserves only our compassion, not our scorn." Mr Welsh then goes on to say this about someone who deserves only our compassion: "this is not to denigrate these writers as people; ...simply to point out that the solutions they offer to the problems of existence are false solutions based on hate and on a schizoid reversal of human values." For someone who is not denigrating Silverberg as a person, Mr Welsh is expressing a very low opinion of the man, an opinion which, on the face of it, would appear to be based on hate and a schizoid reversal of human values.

He concludes by saying that he believes that a critical approach using interpretations from object-relations psychology would add to our understanding of science fiction. Would it really? Psychologists are notorious for their infighting, there being as many different theories as there are psychologists. Behaviourists scorn the analysts, the Freudians mock the Jungians, and so on ad infinitum. No theory has yet fully explained the mechanics of human behaviour or the workings of the mind, and no theory ever will. True, many advances have been made, but none which would suggest that any one theory has any more credibility than any other, and when one holds one theory over another it is due more to personality than to objective assessment. Psychoanalysing authors on the strength of their works, whichever standpoint one takes, is an amusing, sometimes informative, game, and nothing more. What a person writes and what the person is are intimately related but they are not the same. It is highly unfair to judge someone on the basis of their productions, and it is patently foolish to generalise for an entire genre on account of any such judgements. Science fiction writers have only one thing in common: they all write science fiction.

If I have said very little concerning the schizoid or object-relations psychology it is because I do not think having read one book or one hundred books on these subjects would qualify me to utter anything other than opinion. Obviously John Welsh thinks differently.

WHITE LIGHT

Maxim Jakubowski
Managing Director
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May I first congratulate *Vector* for reaching such a ripe old age; at times I thought the dear thing would never make it... I'm also obviously very pleased by the coverage given to (*White Light* by Rudy Rucker) and naturally agree wholeheartedly with Ian Watson's review. I fear, however, that I must comment on some of Paul Kincaid's remarks, as I feel very close to BSFA members/readers having once been the Hon. Sec. god knows how many centuries ago, and wouldn't want BSFAites to see me as a rip-off artist!

I do not agree that £1.95 for a book of 128 pages in a larger than usual paperback format is extortionate. In fact I would point out that the American Ace edition, by padding out the typeface, reaches 284 pages, although I do concede that the print of our edition is somewhat small. Our paperbacks are higher priced than most mass-market productions because we try and provide original material, not reprints, better quality and more lasting paper, binding and covers. We also feel we give decent royalties to authors. Most new hardcovers these days seldom go under £6.95 and get no promotion whatsoever, while *White Light* was advertised in the *Bookseller*, *Paperback Buyer*, *NME*, *Time Out*, *Guardian*, *TLS*, *New Scientist*, *Cipher* and a special badge was designed. All this costs money. So while we might be guilty of being more expensive than the majority of shoddily-produced paperbacks, I feel this is well justified by the fact that we are offering the public quality stuff and the author a bloody good deal in terms of promotion. My case rests!

WHAT VECTOR IS FOR

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BSFA publications are primarily for providing members with information on SF and its creation. Note I did not say writing, as I include filmic, musical, artistic and broadcast SF as well as the written kind. You and your colleagues are failing to do this since recent publications place more emphasis in providing SF fandom with information on SF fandom or riding a particular individual's hobbyhorse at our expense. This has simply got to stop; either get on with the job or get out.

An example to show what I mean. The recent BSFA mailing produced the following: *Vector* reviews - 16, *Paperback Inferno* reviews - 14. That equates to a mere 132 books reviewed per year. Not much for £6, is it? The recent *Erg Quarterly* (edited by Terry Jeeves) produced 47 books reviewed. That equates to 188 per year, 30% more than the BSFA and all done by one elderly retired school teacher on a shoestring budget. Surely with the resources we the members provide you ought to be managing at least 50 book reviews a mailing. I also contend that anyone you use who cannot get it over in two paragraphs is a waste of space. Times are hard, boss; us folks need value for money, not long meaningless ego-tripping screeds.

** I don't reckon much to your arithmetic, Dave. I make $16 \times 4 + 14 \times 6 = 148$. Not to mention the fact that *Vector* 99 had 24 reviews... I can't agree that two paragraphs is an absolute maximum for a review. There's little you can say in two paragraphs about a good and important new book, though it's quite enough for old rubbish. In any event, not everyone agrees with you about the purpose of *Vector*:

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Quite a lot of the issues of *Vector* haven't had a main, central article -- an interview the most likely candidate. In the past you had them, and *Vector* wasn't the publication it is now, so what's the problem? Reviews are OK, but surely *Paperback Inferno* caters for the fans who love them. More Jim Barker art in *Vector*! Lovely stuff.

Alan Dorey's article was fantastic and very informative, as I haven't been following the BSFA for long and it's good to know what I missed. Rob Hansen's art book articles were refreshing and reminded me that the BSFA isn't only interested in SF books.

** Why no interviews recently? No-one has sent me any, that's the problem.

COVERAGE OF TOLKIEN

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Amidst the self-congratulating padding and nostalgic reminiscences, some of *Vector* 100 was actually worthwhile reading. Several of the books reviewed in this issue could be classified as 'fantasy', and nearly all of these reviews contained unfavourable comparisons with *The Lord Of The Rings*, undoubtedly the greatest novel of this type ever written. Why, then, did you not review *Unfinished Tales*, a volume actually written by Tolkien, while wasting space on these inferior imitations? Obviously *Unfinished Tales* is to some extent a barrel-scraping, but it still exhibits Tolkien's tremendous lyrical power and the intricate details of his painstaking creation. I am certain that many BSFA members are interested in Tolkien's works, although maybe not enough so to join the Tolkien Society. Because of this, limited Tolkien coverage would be much appreciated.

** Again, the reason why we didn't have a review of *Unfinished Tales* is quite simple: the publishers didn't send us a review copy. And after all our efforts to build a critical standard, too...

CRITICAL STANDARDS

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What worried me (in Vector 100) were the comments on a 'basic standard' that could -- should? -- be used when reviewing a book. It just cannot be created. With a 'basic' standard' it would, theoretically, be possible to compare Ballard's *High Rise* to Edmond Hamilton's *Starwolf* series while using Shea & Wilson's *Illuminatus* as a side salad. It would, of course, be a fruitless exercise -- though it would be amusing to see someone try and perform this.

It is even impossible to 'standardise' two books using the same reference point. For example, I've recently read *The Long Walk* by Richard Bachman, and *The Feelies* by Mick Farren. Both books deal with the pathetic 'Game Show Civilisation' that America has/is, but Bachman's book deals with a marathon walk and Farren's with drug-aided preprogrammed fantasies. One is extrovert-based, the other completely introvert.

Surely the better (easier?) approach is to standardise the reviewer. Admittedly this is a more 'trial and error' way, but if you know the way a reviewer will jump when a certain 'type' of fiction is presented to him, you then have, basically, two choices: either buy the book because you enjoy the same tastes as the reviewer, or give it a wide berth because the reviewer can't tell chalk from cheese -- to put it mildly.

** The argument about 'standardising the reviewer' is one often put forward, and it sounds plausible enough. The method, on the other hand, is totally unreliable. You can't rely on the reviewer until you've found out the hard way -- by buying trash -- how his views differ from your own. You can't rely on him even then, because he may review a type of book that is completely new to you and him, and you're back to square one. For *Vector* the method is unworkable. The number of reviewers is large and constantly changing, and no-one appears often enough for anyone else to deduce his quirks and foibles. This is apart from the fundamental fact that a critical standard can be used other than in reviews.

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How far we are actually going to get along the road 'towards a critical standard' depends on whether we start in first gear or reverse. A phrase Kevin Smith used in answer to my letter in *Vector* 100 I think illustrates what is wrong with a lot of science fiction criticism. Kevin Smith and Joseph Nicholas agree that reviewers who are

also fans are often strongly biased in their criticism, yet Kevin displays a similarly provincial attitude when he writes: "There is something about SF (don't ask me what) that the traditional standard of 'literary excellence' can't cope with..." He has not escaped from the root problem of fan criticism. As long as 'critics' believe that there is an essence of science fiction separate from the essence of ordinary literature, they can't expect to be capable of assessing what really is good about science fiction. SF will continue to be an isolated area of fiction with recourse to its own critical standards and so no fundamental need to stand the test of broader literary criticism.

Behind the avowed desire of those who wish to tread on what Kevin calls the 'middle ground' to adopt wider literary values is a determination to have their cake and eat it: they want their own standards recognised as the equal of wider literary values while being separate from them. To actually institutionalise bias by honouring the 'something about it' of science fiction is to involve a contradiction in our criticism from the start. Kevin properly advises that the critic should try to be aware of his prejudices, but a critic who is operating on the assumption that science fiction is essentially different from other literature has sublimated his prejudices.

** This was a short extract from quite a long letter from David, the content of which I took note of in my editorial. Another long letter writer is Arnold Akien, whose letter on *Vector* 99 became a whole short article in this issue, and who sent me, less than a week ago, an equally long letter on issue 100. I hope you will forgive me, Arnold, if I only quote your brief summing up of your views on critical standards.

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My own view of a critical standard starts much as your own, with admission of subjective bias and a concept of fairness, but omitting entirely any attempt to type books in accordance with your fruit juice metaphor (fits in rather well with 'pulp' magazines, though, doesn't it?) and instead going directly to comparison with all other books -- bearing in mind the various elements of a story and the critic's subjective view of those elements.

Chris Priest
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For me there is a refreshing mood of iconoclasm in *Vector* these days, which must be healthy. The essence of criticism is a questioning of standards, and for too long there has been an unwillingness throughout the science fiction world to question accepted values. It's extremely welcome to see the rotten old statues in the town square being hauled down and pissed upon. But I think you should guard against it going too far. No names at this point, but one or two of your contributors are nakedly anti-American. Iconoclasm in SF is not an American trait as far as I can see, so perhaps it is just a bit too easy to turn against US writers. Even so, it was interesting to note the difference in approach in, say, the letter you published from Alex Eisenstein. His humble defence of a favourite novel was almost a period piece in its wholesale acceptance of established values. His liking of Alfred Bester is echoed, incidentally, by people like Mike Moorcock and Charles Platt, who both declare they never read SF (which is probably true of Mike Moorcock) and yet who maintain that Bester is comparable with authors of J G Ballard's ilk... thus revealing, inadvertently, that they probably haven't read Bester's journalistic novels since they were teenagers. Such abandonment of critical standards is presumably what you are getting at in your editorialising.

To which I have to say: I can only agree with you some of the way. I don't accept your first premise, for instance, that a critic should be aware of, and if possible declare, his prejudices. This leads to the hypocrisies of people like Spider Robinson, who abdicate all critical responsibility in the name of honest subjectivity. Robinson in particular adheres to the line that so long as he is truthful and subjective about the books he reviews, then in time the ordinary reader will learn his (Robinson's) likes and dislikes and so learn what books he (the reader) is likely to enjoy or not. The fraud in such an intent should be obvious: at best, such a line merely tells us the likes and dislikes of Spider Robinson, and at worst creates a philistine atmosphere for writers to work in. In any one person you will find oddities and anomalies of opinion; it is no baseline for criticism. Most people in the SF world have a genuine liking for the work for what we could call *good writers*... but at the same time they will also be able to enjoy what George Orwell once called *good bad writers*. So someone like Robinson can say in public, "I like Pangborn, Heinlein, Chalker and the Strugatski brothers," -- and expect us to make some kind of sense of such inherent critical contradictions.

Nor do I agree with your last two steps: comparisons (a) with other books of the same 'type' and (b) with all other books. Is *The Left Hand Of Darkness* the same 'type' of book as *Star Smashers Of The Galaxy Rangers*? Is either of them comparable, in any realistic way, with all other books? With a biography, say? Or a crossword book? Or an algebra textbook?

This brings me, advertently, to Martin Perry's letter, in which he takes me to

task for supposing that the same standards should be applied to all SF books. What I think I said, in any event what I meant, was that science fiction novels (particularly) should be able to survive the same standards of criticism that apply to other books. Both in and out of the field you see repeated examples of the sort of criticism that starts, "This is only science fiction, but" or "and" or "however"... So that any particular title is judged within the imagined context (which might or might not be an informed judgement) of SF as a whole. From this you get such false ideas as that Alfred Bester is a good novelist, say, or that Fritz Leiber is a stylist, or that Isaac Asimov is a storyteller.

** It had to be Chris Priest, of course, who caught me out in using sloppy terminology: I didn't mean 'algebra textbooks'. The next question, naturally, is, "why not?" The answer is left as an exercise for the reader.

REASONS FOR READING

Dorothy Davies First, a plea from the bottom of the exceptionally large Dorothy heart (this has nothing to do with physical size, I hasten to add): stop filling pages with silly bits from a book 99% of people won't ever bother to read — drives me completely insane!

I read a book for one reason and one reason alone. To be entertained. If a book does not entertain me by the end of the second chapter, I might, if there's not much else to read, continue a bit longer; but more likely than not it goes back to the library and I look for another author more likely to entertain me. If a book entertains me I do not seek its flaws and gaping errors, and then denigrate that book.

A THOUGHT

William Bains A thought occurred to me as I sat and re-read *Vector* the other day. Here am I, pontificating happily about Art and Literature and other subjects I can scarcely spell, insulated from the slings and arrows etc. by the good 100 miles between your editorial offices and myself. Maybe the reason

certain BSFA reviews editors also become a little more heated about certain topics than is called for by said topics is that they, too, are protected from their readers' wrath and scorn by a typewriter and the depersonalising delays of the GPO. Maybe if all reviews had to be read out in public by the reviewer at the BSFA monthly meeting before they saw print, there to have scorn and ridicule poured on the merest suggestion of hyperbole, we would get some balanced, informative reviewing published. It's only a thought.

P.S. Ra Ra Troglodytes! Can you cap it in V.101?

THE RELEVANCE OF SF

Andy Sawyer Well, that's 100 issues over; now for the next hundred... Very good, all, especially Alan's survey of past issues, much of which was unknown territory, I suspect, to the majority of current members, and Dave Langford's piece on G K Chesterton, who is unclassifiable in genre terms but what the hell — a science fiction journal has as much right to run articles about him as any other.

Rod Jones sounds like someone the BSFA needs and it's a shame that he felt he had to go. I think he's wrong; that there are ways 'science fiction' can be relevant to our problems with the society we live in (even if it's just giving us 30 minutes recreation: but God, I hope it's more than that!) but he's right in that these ways are becoming less and less intrinsic in the 'SF' we see in most bookshops. I don't think 'hippie revivals' will offer much hope (I'm sure there will be one and it will last about as long and be as effective as the mod revival — remember that?) but the humanist vision of the original movement

(stripped of its pseudo-religious trappings) would offer a great benefit if it could be sparked off. SF *claims* a concern for the future: if so it could (that is, writers, readers and critics could) show more awareness of possible future alternatives. We could have more discussion about possible futures, about social trends and the direction we're moving in. A few writers — Brunner, Moorcock, etc. — manage to produce popular fiction which poses these questions. The SF 'scene', however, manages to use a facade of dynamism and 'future orientation' to cloak a mass of decaying right-wing clichés and convention worship, and even if the next *Vector* is full of letters agreeing with this point of view, that's not going to change much.

But I could be wrong...

Ian Goffin
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I'm the same age as Rod Jones, but his letter in *Vector* 100 confused me. I was disillusioned with the world so I looked to SF to take me away from the same old everyday life that was going on outside of my front door; but he looks to SF for reality. The only way he's going to be able to face the day is if he puts all the crud that's going on in the world out of his mind and the only sure way of doing this is to escape from reality with a very good (or, for that matter, very bad) SF book.

SF AWARDS

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In *Vector* 100 Joe Nicholas said: "... but then, what do awards mean these days?" I hate to say this, Joe, but they mean one hell of a lot. I agree that the books or films which win the awards are usually a load of crap, but that is just our own subjective opinion. Bar the Nebula and the Prix Apollo they are in the main voted for by yer average fan in the street. Take this year's Hugos, for instance. Clarke's *Fountains Of Paradise* won best novel award. Joe himself called it 'dull, dull, dull' and I would tend to agree with him, yet the majority of people who bought it and who vote in the Hugos must have enjoyed it as it was so successful both in terms of awards and in terms of copies sold. (It was one of the few SF books to get into the *Sunday Times* top ten paperbacks.) Thus as a measure of the fans appreciation of a book or film, an award is a very good barometer.

Yet a book or film which is enjoyable may not be very good technically. For instance, I am a great fan of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* yet I am aware that as a film it is not very good. It cannot, for instance, stand up against the technical brilliance of the work of Bergman, Gance, Godard, Kurosawa or Truffaut, but it is fun. The solution to this is simple. Why not start a 'Prix Apollo' of our own? Perhaps the BSFA could administer it. The object of the award would be to present a prize for the best (not necessarily the fans' favourite) book of that year. The panel must also have enough guts to say that no book is good enough and not award the prize. The judging panel itself would consist of both fan and pro critics, editors and, as SF cannot be taken in isolation from 'mainstream', a couple of non-SF writers. How does that sound, Joe?

** More things for poor Joe to do? As if running the BSFA Award that we already have weren't enough! (I tend to think of our award as the 'BoSFA', despite the decision taken at an AGM to call it 'The Carnell'; it trips off the tongue more easily.) There is still time to vote in this year's Award, particularly if you are going to Yorcon II, so please make the effort to do so. Since the Hugo and the Nebula have become devalued in recent years, it is nice to have an award that consistently picks the best. The novel winners are obviously popular; they have also been critically acclaimed. You lot have good taste.

As for the reason why the Nebula, at least, has become devalued, witness the following letter from Dell, which has come into my possession.



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October 20, 1980

Dear SFWA Member:

Enclosed herewith is a copy of the Science Fiction Book Club edition of THE SNOW QUEEN by Joan D. Vinge. We are sending this to give you a chance to read it, and consider it for the Nebula Award. Unfortunately, our hardcover edition is out of stock, and the paperback won't be published until long after balloting has closed, hence the bookclub edition.

The last time we sent bookclub editions to SFWA members, it was copies of DREAMSNAKE by Vonda N. McIntyre. While THE SNOW QUEEN is quite a different book, we feel equally strongly about its quality, and hope that you will concur that it is worthy of the Nebula Award for Best Science Fiction novel of 1980.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours,

James R. Frenkel
SF Editor

** I make no comment. You are perfectly free to do so, and I'd be pleased to see the result.

TUFF BUSINESS, THESE FACTS

Malcolm Edwards Finally received my copy of the December BSFA mailing (they made me renew my subscription first), so now I have the opportunity to set Alan Dorey straight on a little matter of detail (though hundreds of others have doubtless already done so). It was not I who wrote the "Behind The Scenes" column in Vector 38 et seq: it was Peter Weston, who chose the pseudonym 'Malcolm Edwards' --so he later assured me -- because of its extreme improbability as a name. It was a great shock to him when I appeared in the flesh five years later, and the fact that I not only proceeded to follow a fannish career which closely paralleled Peter's in many respects, but even went on to edit the magazine in which he'd unleashed this pseudonym is just one of those curious coincidences which make Arthur Koestler happy. I think Peter still nurses a suspicion that he somehow created me.

Actually, to be perfectly honest, the part of this which leaves me really

miffed is Alan's evident belief that although I may not be old enough to have been a BSFA member in 1961, I am quite sufficiently advanced in years to have been an experienced fan in 1965! Sod it, I was only 15 in 1965.

Steve Higgins's reviews have generally struck me as intelligent and well-judged, but I'm bound to say that I felt he failed to do justice to *Timescape*. He agrees with the blurb's claim for the book as "perhaps the most convincing portrayal of working scientists to be found in modern fiction" -- no small achievement, surely? -- yet ends up wondering why Benford writes the kind of SF he does. The answer is surely that *Timescape* is the novel which Benford was almost uniquely qualified to write as, on the one hand, a practising scientist of some repute and, on the other, a writer whose interests (unusually for a 'hard SF' man) are in traditional literary virtues rather than technological gimmickry. I thought it made the practice of scientific research -- hitherto an area of zero interest to me -- intensely exciting.

Minor points: Joseph's casual slagging of the latest Terry Carr anthology, without actually having read it, strikes me as irresponsible. And Millington, not he, are right about the original date of *Into The Slave Nebula*: a revised version published in 1968 of Brunner's earlier (1960) novel *Slavers Of Space*. Tuff business, these facts. And, to be boringly pedantic, *Threshold*, whatever its merits or otherwise, was Ursula Le Guin's title for her book: the Americans changed it.

Are you sure the palindromic Mr Rafcam isn't a genius in disguise? If "inciting unnecessary pathos" isn't an offence at present it certainly should be, while the idea of an explosive which leaves people effete is novel and attractive. Now Lionel Fanthorpe has been rehabilitated Rafcam must be the next target. I look forward to his GoH speech at a future convention.

** Now, now, Malcolm; I can't let you get away with slagging Joseph in this fashion. He did read Terry Carr's *Best SF 9*, and I have proof of it. What he didn't read was Terry Carr's *Best SF 8*.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Sandy Brown (who caused this issue's cover to come into being), Paul Dembina (who seemed unduly impressed by the glossy blueness of the cover and the straightness of the margins), Pete Lyon (who sent some artwork, the final version of which I hope you'll be able to see soon), Keith Roberts (who only wanted me to forward a letter to Paul Kincaid, but whose name is a rather impressive thing to have in the WAHFs) and Ashley Walker (who also sent some artwork).

21 letters: a definite improvement, but don't let that make you complacent...

VECTOR BACK ISSUES

All the issues listed in Vector 100 with the exception of numbers 93,92, 91,90,89 and 79 are SOLD OUT. However, a past Vector editor has unearthed a few copies of issues 66,65,64,63,61,60 and 59. These historic issues are also available for 50p each including postage.

FOCUS BACK ISSUES

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