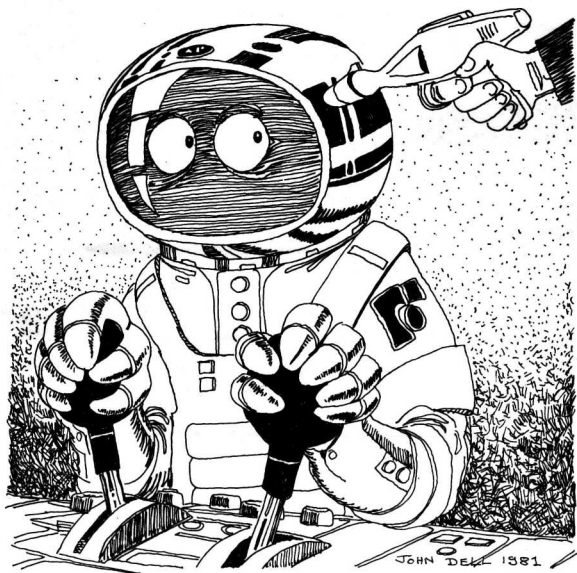


VECTOR

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

75p



bfa

Featuring: Barrington J Bayley, Andy Sawyer
David Langford, Jim England, Garry Kilworth
and others.

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VECTOR

The Critical Journal of the BSFA

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THIS ISSUE

... is the first under the new bi-monthly regime, appearing at a time when, for the last two years, *Focus* was made manifest. Accordingly, and in line with what I said last time, some of the articles in this issue of *Vector* are such as might have been published in that magazine. Barrington J Bayley's 'The SF Novel And Basic Form' was in fact sent to *Focus*, and Chris Evans passed it on to me; it is about a way of plotting a certain type of SF novel, though the method suggested can also be used to analyse that type of novel. Jim England's 'SF And Reality' was addressed to *Vector/Focus* and looks at the subject from the writer's standpoint. In the other Standpoint, Dave Langford expounds upon a new SF publication with which he is concerned. So we have three items for the writers. Otherwise, Andy Sawyer writes about the SF of Doris Lessing; in particular, the *Canopus In Argos* sequence, the first volume of which, *Shikasta*, has recently appeared in paperback from Granada. Then there are the usual book reviews, letters, and editorial -- not forgetting the maddening page fillers, this time from Tully Zetford's *Hook* books of fond memory: *Whirlpool Of Stars* and *The Virility Gene*.

"I've said you're a chanocroid, Hook, and a burst ulcer, and a candidate for advanced pustular syphiloderma, and I'll go on telling you you're a *Pasturalla pestis* -"

This is my fifth issue since I became editor just a year ago. Last August I had a fairly clear idea about what I wanted to do with *Vector*. I wanted to make it a forum for discussion of science fiction -- informed but not arrogantly opinionated, intelligent but not dryly academic, thoughtful but not pretentious, and interesting. Above all, interesting -- else why should people want to read it?

To this end I restored "The Critical Journal of the BSFA" to the logo as a declaration of intent and launched into my editorial series 'Towards a Critical Standard' without another word of explanation. The letter column reappeared, and I introduced the Standpoint column as a means of making the 'forum for discussion' more accessible to BSFA members, of making it easier for them (i.e. you) to contribute.

So now that I've finished patting myself on the back, I'd better answer a question: why am recapping on all this now? There are a number of reasons. First, so that I can look back at the last four issues and see whether I've achieved my objective. The answer, I think, is "fairly well". The letter column is lively, and there have been a number of provocative Standpoints. The book reviews have been of a high standard, and a number of new names have appeared as regular reviewers. The articles have generally hit at least three out of four of the requirements I stated above, and I haven't had to bully my friends into writing them; they all arrived unsolicited, which is a good sign.

There is a counter-point to this. The new contributors to review, letter and Standpoint columns have tended to be the same people, so that it might seem that *Vector* is now run by a small group, a *Vector* mafia consisting of Joseph, Paul and myself (the editors) and Dave Langford, Mary Gentle, John Hobson, Andrew Sutherland, Arnold Klien and a few others. I can't deny that these people have had a lot of their words printed in *Vector*, but that's only because they've written a lot that's been worth printing, not because they are "in".

So a second reason for this editorial retrospective is to pave the way for the future. There have been a lot of new members in the last year and for them it is worth repeating all this. Letters are always welcome, whether commenting on subjects previously raised or introducing new ones. If a letter on a new subject is the right length (600 - 1500 words), and takes a strong enough view of the subject, it might well be turned magically into a Standpoint. Or you could write one deliberately. I'm cronically short of them at the moment, having precisely none... As a general rule, Standpoints on any SF-related subject are acceptable. If they are well written and well argued I will publish them, whether I agree with the sentiments expressed or not, and leave the readers to comment. Similar remarks apply to the main articles, now handled by features editor Paul Kincaid. People sometimes ask if I would be interested in an article about such and such. To some I haven't replied (mea culpa), but the answer would generally be "yes", if the article is about SF. Whether it is published or not depends on how well it is written, not on what it is about. Joseph Nicholas is still going strong on reviews, and it's about time I inundated him with letters again, by asking anyone who would like to review for *Paperback Inferno* or *Vector*, and doesn't already, to write to him. And while I'm asking for things, I'd better ask for some cover art. Ain't got none of that neither people, and I can't do it myself. (See issue 102, p.5, for specifications.)

The third reason is to define the proper subject matter of *Vector* in relation to *Matrix*, to avoid overlap and confusion. This is point that Graham James also addresses in the current *Matrix*. My view is stated in my opening paragraph. To which I would add: the overwhelming thrust of *Vector* is "SF -- the literature". There is room for the occasional considered article on, say,

(continued on p.47)

An Interim Report From The Archives

The SF Of Doris Lessing



ANDY SAWYER

It is strange and interesting how popular elements find their way into so-called 'literature', bringing a fresh torrent of invigoration. That is, of course, if you accept the notion that there is a body of work called 'literature' on the one hand, and the vast morass of popular culture on the other. Barriers are not quite so rigid, nor is the influence constantly from one side to the other, but the notion of 'streams' and 'traditions' is a useful one so long as we resist the temptation to be consistently linear about the image.

Five years ago, Doris Lessing was known as a writer of largely 'mainstream' novels who occasionally used images and structures generally found in SF. Now, with volume 3 of her *Canopus In Argos* series published in hardback as the first volume appears in paperback, she appears to have whole-heartedly entered the science fiction continuum. "Space fiction, with science fiction," she writes, "makes up the most original branch of literature now... what a phenomenon it has been -- science fiction, space fiction -- exploding out of nowhere, unexpected of course, as always happens when the human mind is being forced to expand." (1) Robert Scholes describes her as "a classic example of the autobiographical realist who must wait between each book in order to live through enough material to fuel the next one" (2) and cites her as one of those writers who have realised that "the most appropriate kind of fiction that can be written in the present and immediate future is fiction that takes place in future time." (3) Or, in other words, as a writer in the tradition of those established 'literary' writers such as Wells, Orwell, Stapledon, Huxley and so on, turning away from a realistic, present-oriented fiction to a fantastic, future-oriented one as the best way of pointing out certain truths about the present.

That sounds plausible enough, and I'm tempted to begin discussing Doris Lessing's science fiction right here. But already we've become too linear, because to toss about expressions like 'mainstream' and 'established' in connexion with Doris Lessing is to ignore the perspectives offered the masculine Anglo-American literary tradition, which is given us as our heritage, by a writer whose work is coloured by the consciousness of her upbringing in Africa, and her sex. Doris Lessing has always been to some extent outside the cultural mainstream, and with the benefit of hindsight we can see that the use of such so-called 'unconventional' tropes as galactic empires and super-civilisations intersecting on Earth is by no means startling when you look at her previous themes of colonialism and conflict set against the fuzzy background between fantasy and reality, sanity and insanity. There is a strong mystical streak in Doris Lessing; the peculiarly strong-minded mysticism of Sufism (her early SF novel, *Memoirs Of A Survivor*, shares publishers with many Sufi texts) and her own use of science fiction is very much as a tool to expand and explore concepts and imaginative frameworks implicit in her non-SF works but which are constrained by the mimetic and narrative conventions within which they are set.

I have just called *Memoire Of A Survivor* an SF novel. I now need to qualify that statement, for although both *Memoire* and *Briefing For A Descent Into Hell* caused a fair degree of interest in Doris Lessing in the SF world (see Cy Chauvin's "Doris Lessing: Briefing" in *Vector* 78) they are not as self-confidently science fiction novels as at least the first and third volumes of the series *Canopus In Argos: Archives*, which roundly and unambiguously start from the premise that Earth is the focus of extraterrestrial attention from the highly civilised Canopean Empire, grappling with metaphysical problems of evolution in line with cosmic harmonies, the bureaucratic Sirian Empire, aping Canopus in existential confusion, and the debased and evil pirate-planet Shammatt. This is, of course, not new to habitual readers of SF, and here we probably have an advantage over those to whom such imagery is confusing or alienating; only, however, if we do not fall into that old SF trap of mistaking the image for the idea. It is with Doris Lessing's science fiction that I'm largely concerned for the purpose of this article, so I can't avoid talking about the images; what I do want to point to is the nature of the image as moving towards pure SF and also as a crystallisation of the ideas which it is meant to signify.

Shikasta, volume 1 of *Canopus In Argos*, sets the broad outline for the rest of the series. *Shikasta* (the hurt, the damaged) is our Earth, formerly Rohanda (fruitful, thriving) after the failure of the Lock with Canopus which links the planet to the rest of the cosmic network. The book purports to be a collection of documents relating to *Shikasta*'s 'Fall' and its history until the final nuclear Armageddon, with special reference to the Incarnation by the Canopean Johor as George Sherban, a Messianic youth leader of the Last Days. The novel's sweep is magnificently Biblical -- I've used those words in that last sentence deliberately -- using the supposition that our stories of Gods and Giants are memories of a Higher race, a supposition so prevalent in certain types of SF, as a lens through which to view the human propensity to know things are wrong with our cockeyed world but to be unable to do very much about it. Humanity is seen as a corrupt and tragic remnant of a noble experiment in forced evolution. The Canopeans are part-transcendent beings, aware of "the various levels of being which lie in concentric shells around the planet, six of them in all" (4) the lowest of which, Zone Six, is the realm of the newly-departed dead. They can 'incarnate' as humans such as George Sherban, one of a long line of Canopean emissaries whose influence provides some humans with the conceptual breakthrough necessary for avoiding total racial degradation: even at the worst, some people are aware that there is something else, some force or power or concept outside the shoddy world-view forced upon them by their environment, even though they may be able to do little with that awareness: "sometimes it was only in madhouses or as outcasts in the desert that these valuable individuals could survive at all." (5)

Canopus intervenes at various points in history, first introducing a race of Giants to Rohanda as 'elder brothers' to boost human evolution, then, as the 'Substance-of-We-Feeling' which links Canopus and her colonies dwindles to a trickle, struggling against the greed and degradation of Shammatt to preserve ideas of Canopus through songs, stories, legends of 'gods' and judicious admixtures of favourable genes.

The novel's 'documentary' structure shifts the viewpoint through which events are seen. Much of the book is narrative from the point of view of Johor, involved from the beginning with the tragedy which is playing itself out, feeling its pain. Other documents are more 'objective' reports on *Shikasta*, from textbooks, etc; others show obliquely Johor's final attempt to save at least a proportion of humanity. Most of what we see of Johor as Sherban comes from the journal of Rachel Sherban, his sister, and similar documents which show not only the events of the Last Days (the decline of the civilisations of the 'North-West Fringes', the rise of the 'Youth Armies', the takeover

of Europe by the Chinese and the eventual war) but the feelings which underly these events. The sweep of *Shikasta* is immense, recalling Stapledon's *Last And First Men* in implication if not detail, but despite its initial impression of coldness, of seeing humanity as a failed laboratory experiment, it is much more passionate than it appears. Doris Lessing writes: "It is our habit to dismiss the Old Testament altogether because Jehovah, or Jahve, does not think or behave like a social worker." (6) *Shikasta* is bleak in its view of Man, but anger and tragedy leap from the pages. The overall tragedy of the planet itself, the racial tragedies and ironies epitomised by the symbolic 'Trial' of the White Races (persecuted by George Sherban), the individual tragedies exposed in the dossiers of unnamed persons -- "Although she was born in a country of ample skies and capacious landscapes, she was afflicted, and from her earliest years, with feelings of being confined. It seemed to her that she ought to be able to find within herself memories of some larger experience, deeper skies. But she did not possess these memories." (7) -- fuse to condemn the waste of so much human potential. And it is this anger and tragedy, rather than the SF imagery as such, which heightens the book.

Underlying the vast sweep of the macrocosmic vision, which SF has always been rather good at, there must be a 'microcosmic' vision: a vision which sees people as more than extras in the cosmic drama, as -- at the very least -- actors with their own lines to say. SF has traditionally had difficulty here. I'm not so much talking about delineation of character, but rather of evoking a sense of feeling, of caring, of hurting, even if you cannot be optimistic. Blake, for instance, created vast spaces of mythic cosmology within the human mind; he also cared passionately, painfully, about his society's attacks on personal, economic and artistic liberty, and proved that an art which plunders tradition for a personal interpretation can still use that interpretation to illuminate an accessible caring art. Doris Lessing approaches that particular nexus.

She does so, however, from a different direction in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, And Five*, the second volume of the *Canopus* series. Zone Three is relaxed and pastoral: feminine. Zone Four is harsh and militaristic: masculine. Both Zones are suffering from an unknown malaise, and their rulers, Queen Al*Ith and King Ben Ata, are instructed by the Providers to marry. Both are unwilling, but they have no choice: it is a change in the Need (cf. references in *Shikasta* to the 'Necessity'). *Marriages* is told as a fable -- "As narrated by the Chroniclers of Zone Three" -- with frequent references to pictures and ballads which illustrate key scenes from the story and its frequent reversals (Al*Ith is ordered back to her own Zone at times, to become more and more alienated from its ways; Ben Ata is ordered to marry Queen Vashi of Zone Five) reflect the sudden shift of events often found in folk-tales.

Al*Ith and Ben Ata, representing their autonomous Zones, each affect the other:

"He had not experienced anything like this in his life. But then he had never spent such a long time alone with any woman, let alone one who talked to him, and behaved 'like a man' as he kept telling himself. These waves of emotion were so strong that as they lessened he felt ashamed at himself and wondered if he were not ill... As for her, she was sorrowful, grief-struck, she wanted to weep. These emotions were foreign to her. She could not remember ever feeling a low, luxurious need to weep, to succumb, to put her head on a shoulder -- not anyone's let alone Ben Ata's." (8)

That passage could come from any previous 'realistic' novel, but its tensions are heightened by the conventions of fable. By setting her conflict within an imaginary land with its own conflicts (Zone Three with Zone Four, Zone Four with Zone Five) Doris Lessing sets up a network of resonances which the atmosphere of deliberate artificiality enables us to look at with a clarity which

would not be present if we were reading a typical novel of sexual/social conflict set in our own time. The structure of the fiction -- arranged marriages, separation between the Zones -- reflect what the novel is about: is what the novel is about. The Zones are states of mind.

Zones Three and Four are separated not so much by armed conflict but mental rivalry. Zone Four is not as militaristic as it seems to be. Its famous 'deathray fortresses' and 'invulnerable singlets' are fakes to impress enemies, ideas borrowed from "a place where they had weapons we hadn't even imagined... a planet. It is an evil race. They kill and torture each other all the time, for the sake of it." (9) (For a moment we are back on the plane of *Shikasta*.) Zone Four's main trait is possessiveness and a rigid self-boundedness: the people of Zone Four are forbidden to look towards the mountains of Zone Three. Zone Three, in contrast, tends to despise Zone Four, yet the prevailing attitude of this Zone tends towards complacency. While not actually forbidden to look towards the higher mountains of Zone Two, "it never occurs to us. We are too prosperous, too happy, everything is so comfortable and pleasant with us." (10)

Al*Ith becomes drawn towards Zone Two as she becomes more dissatisfied with Zone Three.

"There is something we should have been doing. But we have not done it... it is to do with the blue realm beyond the peaks in the north west. But what, Murti? What? That is the point. And that is what we must find out. We must find out what we are for." (11)

After weathering Ben Ata's jealousy of their son, Al*Ith finds a new equilibrium only for Ben Ata to be instructed to marry Vashi, who has united the feuding border tribes of Zone Five and subjugated the cities of the interior. The chaotic, anarchic way of life of Zone Five is destined to come to an end under the influence of Ben Ata, just as he, under Al*Ith's influence, begins to disband part of his army to free his men for more productive arts.

Returning to Zone Three, Al*Ith is a stranger in her own land. Exiled to the borders between Zones Three and Two, she frequently crosses into the higher plane, and eventually fails to return. Others who find Zone Three hollow settle near her. The borders between the Zones open. People cross. "There was a lightness, a freshness and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration where there had been only stagnation. And closed frontiers." (12)

Al*Ith's cry, "We must find out what we are for", is echoed in *The Sirian Experiments*. Here we are back operating on a galactic scale, looking at the events of *Shikasta* not from Canopus but from the rival Sirian Empire. Technologically far advanced, but spiritually way behind Canopus, Sirius is racked by existential doubts, and is clearly a model of our society: technology has removed the need for work but not for personal fulfillment. As a result, despite occasional attempts to create work by deliberately renouncing various aspects of technology, millions of people are haunted by a sense of their essential uselessness. These problems lead to the use of Sirian colonies on Rohanda (Earth) as a kind of agricultural colony cum work camp and as a biological research station to breed a permanent servant race which will do the drudgery without aspiring to something more.

We see the fall of *Shikasta* through Sirian eyes, specifically through the eyes of Ambien II of the Five, one of the secret rulers of Sirius. Certain elements of the story previously hinted at -- the development of the Hopi/Navaho Indians as descendants of Sirian experimental stock, the destruction of Adatantland, for long a repository of Sirian values -- are made clearer. Others, the chief of which is the nature of Canopus itself, are obscured. Much of the book is

closer to traditional space opera than anything in the previous volumes. We experience scenes where Ambien, in out-facing Elyle, a beautiful but corrupt courtesan who is an agent of Shammatt, saves Nasar, a Canopean emissary whose nature has been warped by too long exposure to Shikasta. In another mission, the debt is repaid and Nasar saves Ambien's life. These episodes of melodrama, still portrayed in Doris Lessing's discursive, highly cadenced style of writing, highlight the debased nature of the events which make up most of the concern of the book. Still, constant Canopean influence results in Ambien's increased concern about both the ethics and the practical results of Sirian action on Shikasta. Ambien is sent on a mission to a theocratic slave-state which has captured some of the Sirian 'experimental animals':

"I thought of our encampment in the heights where our colony of animals was being acclimatised, and the regular patterns of wooden huts in which they were kept, and could not help a pang, wondering if they perhaps felt not very different from the poor wretches I could see staring below me. But after all, our supervision was only for their benefit, to keep them in health and of course to prevent them from running away, which would do them no good. And our punishments were hardly of the kind I knew were used here.

"All the same, I must record that I did not enjoy the comparisons I was being forced to make, and I suffered more than a few moments of attack from the existential problem." (13)

Further Canopean influence leads to the conclusion that Sirius ought to be more responsible for Shikasta and further, that it is also the development of Sirius which is at stake. The Sirian Empire is not as civilised as it thinks itself. Ambien eventually faces the ideas which have been breaking in throughout the novel, ideas which are present in different guises in the previous two, that her idea of reality is cramped and incomplete. She circulates her report (the main text of the novel) but ends up in exile, in opposition to the ruling elite of her society. Yet, as in *Marriages*, barriers are down. The Sirian Empire is being forced to confront its own ideas of social reality, and totally reconsider its position with respect to Canopus, which, far from being a rival empire, is working for completely different ends.

The *Canopus In Argos* sequence can be seen as that kind of science fiction which encapsulates contemporary social questions within an exotic setting; like, for instance, Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. What is striking about Doris Lessing's SF is the tentative nature of much of her so-called 'conventional' science fiction imagery; the way she appears to have groped towards a realisation that the SF genre-imagery is the most powerful tool for what she has to say, and the way she has kept the dynamic of that imagery. In earlier novels she simply extended her 'contemporary' stories into the near future, depicting nuclear holocaust at the end of the *Children Of Violence* series and social breakdown as part of the structure of *Memoirs Of A Survivor*. Both the latter novel and the earlier *Briefing For A Descent Into Hell* can now be seen as 'trial runs' for *Canopus*.

In *Memoirs* the narrator watches society disintegrate into semi-barbaric tribes. A stranger leaves with her a young girl, Emily, with a dog/cat hybrid named Hugo and a case containing "a bible, a book of photographs of animals, some science fiction paperbacks." (14) Much of the novel has the inexplicable episodic vividness of dream. The slow breakdown of services, the rise of a youth culture completely autonomous from the State (with its horrific elements in the warring tribes of abandoned children which Emily's boyfriend, Gerald, tries unsuccessfully to socialise) are described with the same concreteness as the narrator's ability to flash to other planes of existence "behind the wall", to experience Emily's past life as a small child. The novel ends with the main

characters moving physically into this plane, taking us directly into realms of the mythic and fantastic... which is metaphor, which is reality?

Or, which is SF, which fantasy? *Memoirs* possesses clear SF tropes. The departure into 'another order of world altogether' is fantasy of the 'Narnian' variety -- although it can be explained as SF. In *Memoirs* we are not yet at the stage of 'science fictional explanations' but are still exploring illusion versus reality, the nature of conceptual breakthrough, metaphors for totally new forms of existence. The power of *Memoirs* is in the way it charts this borderland. Is it SF? Or are even the SF tropes of social breakdown and reintegration, interspecies hybrids, etc, metaphors for the personal breakdown and reintegration of the characters, along the more 'conventional' literary lines of the recurring dream of the protagonist of *The Summer Before The Dark* in which she, in working life a middle-aged mother and provider on the brink of old age and the end of her 'career', drags a wounded seal across the ice-pack to the sea. Or, do we have to have 'either... or'?

Briefing possesses even more of the trappings of *Canopus*. Is Professor Charles Watkins suffering from a breakdown, or has he become aware that he is an alien emissary? Like *Shikasta*, *Briefing* is a mixture of narrative stances: reports, dream sequences, conversation, letters, poems. The imagery is powerful, exotic; the subject's mental trip through ocean currents to a Rimbaudesque jungle with a deserted city leads him through bloody moon rituals as he waits for a crystal spaceship to reclaim him. When the Crystal absorbs him, the subject has a Stapledonian vision of a macrocosmic overview:

"My mind made another outward-going, outswelling, towards comprehension, and now I saw how lines and currents of force and sympathy and antagonism danced in the web that was the system of planets around the Sun, so much a part of the Sun that its glow of substance, lying all about it in space, held the planets as intimately as if these planets were merely crystallisations or hardenings of its vaporous stuff, moments of density in the solar wind. And the web was an iron, a frightful necessity, imposing its design." (15)

The subject's experience of the physical solar system and the symbolic mythic modes fuse: the fantasy modulates to a brief section where the planets as gods discuss Earth and mankind. The tone is very similar to that of the more mythological Marvel Comics, as Doris Lessing realises: "Ah yes, all very whimsical. Yes indeed, the contemporary mode is much to be preferred, thus: that Earth is due to receive a pattern of impulses from the planet nearest the sun." (16) Then the discussion is repeated in SF terms, as a report of a 'Conference' discussing a forthcoming 'Descent' to keep alive the knowledge that mankind is part of a cosmic unity and harmony.

"You will lose nearly all memory of your past existence." (17) Watkins is identified by the doctors of the Asylum he is placed in after being found wandering, insane, in London, but awakes from his drug-induced sleep with no memory, just a feeling that there is something he must remember. Gradually, from the facts we are given about Watkins's past, we discover that he has never quite fit in, has never had quite the right emotional attitude to life. His doctors try to get him to remember his past:

"But supposing I remember what I want to remember? They take it for granted that I'll remember what they want me to remember. And it's desperately urgent that I should remember. I do know that. It's all timing, you see. I know that too. It's the stars in their courses." (18)

So he co-operates and undergoes shock treatment. He remembers. But the set of memories he regains is the conventional set: he leaves the hospital, as we would say, cured.

Briefing is full of structural and verbal parallels with *Canopus*. The cosmic web, the underlying 'Necessity' (reference (15) above) refer forward to fuller exposition in *Shikasta*: the incarnation of alien intelligences into the hellish conditions of *Shikasta*'s spiritual wasteland (remember "sometimes it was only in madhouses... that these valuable individuals could survive at all") refers back to *Briefing*. Compare the description of the 'Crystal' in *Briefing* (here part of an hallucinatory experience carefully left ambiguous) with the Canopean spaceship in *The Sirian Experiments*:

"As I looked it was as if the light there lay more heavily -- no, not that, it was not a heaviness, a weight, but more of an intensity... And I remembered how as I stood on the deck of the ship and watched the shining crystal shape, the disc, that was at the same time in an unimaginably fast movement and stationary, a visible flat spiralling... From so very close, and by not looking direct... I could see it pulsing there, a shape of light and (almost seen, more sensed, known, recognised) the creatures that belonged to that state in nature. Like the shadows of flames running liquid on a wall of fire." (19)

"The Canopean Crystal floated down and lay in the air in front of me. It was in its most usual shape, a cone, and as it hung point down... it was most attractive... The Crystal became a tetrahedron -- the three facets of it I could see reflecting the landscape of these blue and white skies -- then a globe. A glistening ball rolled and danced among the clouds. I was laughing with the pleasure of it, and even clapping my hands and applauding... it elongated and became like a drop of liquid at the moment when it falls from a point." (20)

or even with Al*Ith's experiences in Zone Two:

"Almost she could see them. Almost in the thin blue of the high air it was as if flames trembled into being... Al*Ith pulled herself up and staggered back off the crystal airs of that plain with its swirling pink skies, and into the thick blue mists that surrounded -- or guarded it." (21)

With *Briefing* we are led to the question of how far this transcendent imagery is, within the terms of the story, 'true'. The verdict is open. How far is this an unwillingness to come to terms with straightforward SF imagery? To bow to the constraints of the 'literary' tradition which insists on a certain lip-service to realism by using the stock explanations of 'dream' or 'insanity'? I think there was a certain amount of that, and *Canopus In Argos* keeps the power of the initial imagery without its ambiguity, because a concern with the future, with the necessity for a change in consciousness -- long-time preoccupations of Doris Lessing -- demand unambiguous fictional representations of that future, of that change. So we can approach *Briefing* as a fable, hovering between 'symbolic' and 'realistic' methods of interpreting a story: the same goes, to some extent, for *Marriages*. *Shikasta* and *The Sirian Experiments* are closer to that strange form, the pseudo-realistic novel -- or, in other words, it is not 'realistic' only because as far as we can tell the events depicted in it do not conform to our conventional theories of 'reality'. If that seems unclear, remember what they used to call 'Speculative Fiction'?

But what is the nature of this imagery? Here I'm going to turn everything I've written on its head and question whether it is SF imagery as such! It is rather the sort of quasi-science fiction found in the books of pseudo-science which most SF readers hotly deny ever being seen dead near. The Zones, planes of being, and probably the Giants and 'Adalantaland' come from theosophy. The concept that humanity is the result of biological experiments by aliens is commonplace among the von Daniken school, as is the explanation of the Navaho/Hopi Indians as descendants of these experiments. *Shikasta* tells of the old

Rohandan cities built according to the alignment of geomantic and stellar forces; Alfred Watkins and his modern-day followers called them ley lines.

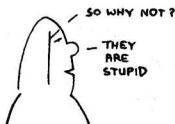
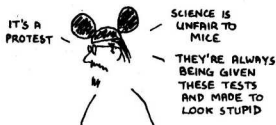
At root, Doris Lessing is more concerned with the influence of science (and science fiction) on religion, and the speculations that result in the interface between these areas, than in merely lifting various bits of pulp SF. But it's in using these elements as tools of speculation that the real matter lies. The *Canopus* series is as yet unfinished: there are two more volumes to appear, and who knows if after this Doris Lessing will stick to writing science fiction? But her present writing in the field has quite definitely marked her as a recognised SF writer, to be talked of in the same breath as your Asimovs and Zelazneys. But it would be very small beer if it were just another example of *How The Earth Was Seeded By The Galactic Empire*. By fusing a definite and powerful SF tradition with another, the chronicle novel, at which she has proved her adeptness, and by using these traditions not only as playthings in themselves but also as tools to investigate the novelist's traditional hunting ground of contemporary existential speculation, Doris Lessing has rehabilitated SF as well as the mainstream. Or rather, she has widened the breaches in the boundaries.

* * * * *

References

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- 2) STRUCTURAL FABULATIONS (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975) p.23
- 3) Ibid. p.17
- 4) SHIKASTA p.5
- 5) Ibid. p.110
- 6) Ibid. preface
- 7) Ibid. p.114
- 8) THE MARRIAGES BETWEEN ZONES THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE (Cape, 1980) p.49
- 9) Ibid. p.97
- 10) Ibid. p.74
- 11) Ibid. p.119
- 12) Ibid. p.245
- 13) THE SIRIAN EXPERIMENTS (Cape, 1981) p.165
- 14) MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR (Octagon Press, 1974) p.23
- 15) BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO HELL (Cape, 1971) p.99
- 16) Ibid. pp.115/6
- 17) Ibid. p.124
- 18) Ibid. p.245
- 19) Ibid. pp.67/8
- 20) THE SIRIAN EXPERIMENTS p.276
- 21) THE MARRIAGES BETWEEN ZONES THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE p.194

The Customs Man recovered his balance and, with the speed of a striking sex-crazed strooka, drew his weapon. The Tonota Eighty could vapourise a man's head at six hundred metres.



STANDPOINT

SF AND REALITY

Jim England

There are times in life when the writing of fiction seems quite inappropriate: like fiddling while Rome burns. At such times, the pleasure of reading fiction may also disappear. You try it and find yourself re-reading the same sentences, over and over. You switch on TV and find yourself sickened by it: the nightly accounts of man's inhumanity to man, the banal situation comedies, the action-packed films full of plastic people, unreal violence and interminable car chases. They have all, suddenly, acquired negative entertainment value. It is called 'depression' and, at its worst, you almost wish the nuclear bombs would drop and clean up the world.

Shortly after the publication of my first SF novel in 1978, I passed through such a period as a result of a series of misfortunes whose details I shall not give; the important thing (for the purposes of this article) is that I spent about a year being more interested in thinking about the activities of writing and reading fiction -- especially SF -- than in engaging in these activities. Why did anyone bother to engage in them? (Most people will know at least one pragmatic and intelligent person who has asked them this question, and will know that it is easier to ask than to answer. Are such pragmatists superior to us, in some way?) What was the source of the compulsion to write? (Yes, it could be a compulsion, like smoking, but harder to give up.) If we must write, what sorts of things should we write? These are not simply ingenuous questions. The deeper we delve into them the harder they become. And I approached them with a certain humility, knowing that whatever conclusions I reached, someone else had probably reached them, refuted them, or extended them. I don't claim to have all the answers. On the major questions I am still confused. But I had some thoughts about the relationship between fiction -- especially SF -- and actuality that may be worthy of communication.

Suppose we start by thinking about the pragmatic and intelligent person mentioned earlier, who never reads fiction on the grounds (he claims) that it 'has nothing to do with real life', is 'escapist', and so on. Is he superior to us? No, he isn't. He is lacking in imagination -- which can be either a good thing or a bad thing, depending upon your vocation. He is the sort of person who will perform all the brutal, inconsiderate and unimaginative acts that imaginative people have dreamed up. His excuse for not reading fiction, that it is 'escapist', is mere rationalisation. No further proof of this is needed than that he watches the most unreal, escapist stuff on TV. He needs to escape as much as the rest of us. But escape (from the self or from the harshness of real life) can take many forms. Some become alcoholics; some become 'workaholics'.

Now, suppose we turn from the above example of philistinism to consider the arguments of an entirely different kind of animal: the literary intellectual who claims that every great and 'serious' novel must contain 'realism' of a sort. It must have 'real', believable, three-dimensional characters (above all, it must teach us things that are relevant to the conduct of life, provide insights into 'the human condition', etc. The language of criticism he uses may change slightly from year to year; the word 'escapism' may no longer be in vogue; but his basic argument remains the same -- 'realism' is good, 'escapism'

is bad. It is a viewpoint with which it is difficult to disagree. Because of this (and quite apart from considerations of literary quality) it is easy to conclude that most SF is inferior to most 'mainstream' fiction. SF, after all, usually concerns itself with worlds separated by time and space from the present-day 'real' world, so how can it be realistic?

What do we mean by 'realism'? There are ways in which the most realistic of realistic novels are not realistic. A writer cannot transcribe large, amorphous chunks of life onto paper. He cannot hold a plane mirror up to life; even with the best will in the world he has to use a distorting mirror. "All Art is selection", and it is interesting to consider what aspects of life usually escape selection.

First of all, there is the matter of boring details. Even the writers of 'realistic' novels (except some, who will state the exact heights and weights of people in the belief that this is part of 'characterisation') tend to omit boring details. It would be exceptional, for example, to list all purchases a character makes throughout the time-span of a novel, give details of his ablutions, cite hourly temperatures, provide street maps, etc. Science and art differ in this respect, science being the more comprehensive. Of course, 'boring' is a relative term. Nothing is absolutely boring, and it might well be that details and digressions that bore some readers would delight others but, on the whole, novels are written to interest large numbers of people; there would be no market for ultra-specialist genres of fiction, such as fiction for economists, meteorologists, and specialists in anorexia nervosa.

Then, there is the matter of boredom itself. Most of life is boring, but fiction does not 'reflect' this fact. Writers seek to heighten the interest of life when they write about it.

Thirdly, there is the matter of what we might vaguely term 'unpleasantness'. There have always been taboo subjects, of which sex is the most important, and, in the past, writers were never explicit when writing about them. When writing about relationships between the sexes, for example, writers would never dare to reveal their real thoughts and feelings; they wrote instead about 'acceptable', phoney feelings. When writing about children, they described idealised, middle-class creatures. Nowadays the taboo subjects are changing.

Finally, there is the matter of pain and misery. It is the worst thing in life and arguably the most important. Yet nobody really wants to write about it; nobody wants to read about it. Even the writers of the most serious novels have to soft-pedal it. There is too much of it in the world and most people, leading "lives of quiet desperation", don't want more. They know that black marks on paper can never convey the worst kinds, anyhow. It is ineffable.

So where does this leave us? Suppose we admit that writers, writing about real life, can never describe it exactly 'as it is', and that their pictures of it will always be more glamorous, neat and tidy than life will ever be. We are left with a large number of writers in SF and other genres, an indeterminate but large percentage of whose work is trash. Each selects different aspects of reality to emphasise: its humour and absurdity, its cosy aspects (storms in teacups), its excitement and opportunities for adventure, its romance, its undertones of the supernatural, its violence and conflict, its wonder. SF's tradition of encouraging the 'sense of wonder' is well-known. It is interesting that certain of these aspects of reality are never combined in fiction. Writers like to think that they are 'doing their own things' when writing but, in a sense, they are not: they are copying examples that tradition has laid down as being worthy of imitation, and for which there is a 'market'. When they fail to do this, their work is never published. This happens when it is too didactic or tries too hard to be a 'literature of ideas'.

If SF can't hope to represent reality, and if the paid futurologists employed by governments and large corporations are taking over its prophetic function, what can it hope to do? Must it continue to purvey fantasy, subject itself to the whims of publishers and the scorn of literary critics who don't find it 'literary' enough? What about the ideas in it? What is the 'science' in its name, which is supposed to be an 'organised body of knowledge', if no one is organising it? Why don't SF writers band together to organise this science, if they take it seriously? I am not talking about the depressing forecasts of futurologists. We can all guess that, as a race, we are programmed for self-destruction; we are such stuff as nightmares are made of. "Hell," as Satre said, "is other people." But writing about dystopias is too easy; we can go to hell in so many ways. Nor am I talking about the implausible technological marvels that fill the pages of SF: technological 'fixes' for everything, like the armoured tanks against which the people of the future will beat their naked fists. I am talking about real, human science put to the service of man, and the planning by SF writers, working in unison to some degree, of realisable utopias we would all like to inhabit, but probably never will. Why not?

I rest my case.

SF FOR THE PEOPLE?

Dave Langford

A new SF magazine, anyone?

The last two *Vectors* saw a brief debate on 'punk SF', the original suggestion being that a daring new SF magazine might operate on the cheap with a very low circulation, primarily through outlets already dedicated to the genre. (Like that shop 'Dark They Were & Golden Eyed'... but oops, they just closed down.) In fact the resuscitated *New Worlds* started doing precisely this a couple of years ago, and despite the allegiance of some impressive Names has made no impact whatever—I'm not even sure that it still exists. The low-circulation approach has two major problems quite apart from distribution: firstly, authors in their natural vanity would prefer their fiction to be read by lots of people; secondly, authors in their natural poverty will submit to such an inevitably (?) low-paying market only as a last resort—meaning you get the professionals' dregs. *New Worlds* (reincarnated version) may have been an exception owing to its old reputation and connexions, but ultimately these don't seem to have helped; a new magazine of low circulation wouldn't have even these advantages. I'd love to be proved wrong about this—but meanwhile, I've become involved in plans to do something altogether different in SF publishing.

That a new British SF magazine is an idea whose time has come seems to be a thought buzzing under several bonnets: word has come to my ears of no less than three variously hush-hush projects to rival or surpass *Ad Astra* (which for all its faults is currently the only British prozine with any semblance of distribution). I'm now talking about another project so different from these that it won't even be competing in the same market.

This planned 'magazine' will be aiming for a very high circulation indeed, on the order of 100,000 in Britain alone—which BSFA members will instantly realize is huger by far than that of any home-grown or imported SF magazine, past or present. (With the possible exception of *Omni*.) Indeed it dwarfs the print-run of the average SF paperback. Obviously the intended readers are not just the current buyers of SF: there aren't enough of us to support such a leviathan. The audience which is being covetously eyed is the vast horde which buys *The Unexplained*, a not all that good weekly partwork which is supposed to build up into a wondrous reference book on mystic phenomena, and which I've restrained myself from buying for such reasons as the ludicrously outdated information in its article about black holes.

Now, after talks at the highest level between Eaglemoss Ltd (publishers of such action-packed partworks as *The Living Countryside*) and *Omni* (reputed to publish an SF magazine), planning is well under way for *The Omni Book of the Future...* a weekly partwork looking something like a thin *Omni* without the adverts, and published specifically for a British audience. Though this will largely consist of articles on What The Future Might Well Be Like—see any issue of *Omni*—I'm happy to say that every week there will also be a few pages of fiction. This portion of the magazine is mainly the responsibility of my old pal Michael Scott Rohan (pause for rebellious mutterings about old boy networks... yes, he and I were at Oxford together), whilst I occupy the enigmatic position of SF Consultant. When I find out what an SF Consultant does, I'll tell you.

Goodness knows how much overall influence Mike and I will be able to exert if the project does get going: but from our position as fans in high places we'll obviously be doing our damndest to prevent *TOBotF*'s fiction reaching the embarrassing depths found in (er, let's name a safely dead example) *SF Monthly*.

Although *TOBotF* will contain some reprinted SF from *Omni* and elsewhere—feasible because the expected audience is not, for the most part, the existing SF audience—new fiction will be bought, and paid for at rates comparable to those of current US magazines. And since the primary audience will be British, there will be no discrimination against work that's 'too British': stuff which is 'too American' is far more likely to incur editorial disfavour. That was the good news... with the caveat that market testing of *TOBotF* is by no means complete, and the enterprise won't take off until the fiendish accountants give the go-ahead. Thus, although submissions are welcomed right now, the final decision to accept any story can't be made before, say, late 1981.

The less good news comes in several packages. Firstly, because a partwork is by its nature finite, so too is the amount of fiction we can buy—probably not more than 30 stories. This is still more than Peter Weston published in three whole volumes of *Andromeda*—so there. Secondly, there are technical limitations owing to the rather tiny space allotted to fiction in each issue; and thirdly, there is the necessity for material to be comprehensible to readers unfamiliar with SF. My blood curdled when I first had these constraints explained to me, and as Mike outlined his draft list of 'rules' I felt the mantle of Isaac Asimov's *SF Magazine* hovering over us both. A consultant's lot is not always a happy one.

'Technical limitations', for example, means that the weekly fiction slot can't hold more than two or three thousand words. This isn't a lot: Procrustes is alive and well and living in London SW7. I imagine we'll be buying several pieces short enough to fit the slot; others will have to be split into two or three (never more than three) parts. This means that a story which doesn't manage to involve the reader in the course of its first segment is not likely to be acceptable—but then, such a piece isn't likely to be acceptable anywhere. Luckily, since the partwork is both frequent and intended to be read and reread in collected form, it's unnecessary for there to be massive moments of drama at each breakpoint—no need for Zelazny's approach to his first novel, which he deliberately constructed with subclimaxes so positioned that it could be conveniently serialized in either two or three parts.

The problem of arranging breaks begins to sound more sinister when the Procrustes effect demands that small cuts be made to fit a story into the space available. At once the image is conjured up of demon editors hacking out every third word... and Mike's draft infosheet certainly sounded alarming enough: "We must ask for the unconditional right to do this, and stories can only be accepted for consideration with this understood." Authors sent into palpitations by such demands should note that work will not be savaged without permission. In the

unlikely event of a significant change being deemed necessary by the purblind editors, matters will be sorted out before any contract is issued—the author can refuse to sign until satisfied. If, as is very unlikely, a need for significant change arises after the contract is signed (eg. if the story relies on General Relativity and this theory is refuted the day after signature), the author is protected by a clause requiring consultation before such a change can be made. I'm dwelling tediously on this to emphasize that, despite our cursed space constraints, Mike and I do want to preserve the integrity of each story and the temper of each author. Are we not writers ourselves? (Yes.)

The limitations imposed by our theoretical audience are less drastic-seeming: the main problem is accessibility, which does not mean that stories should be sited handily close to the M4. Ideally we'd like to convert millions of unenlightened folk to the joys of SF—and a good thing, too. This means, for example, that familiarity with SF/technological jargon can't be assumed—buzzwords like Dyson spheres, L5, Bussard ramjets, FTL or Alan Dorey must be somehow explained if invoked, and even old stalwarts like hyperspace should be used with caution. As this line of jargon may imply, the general approach of *TOBotF* as a whole implies some bias towards 'hard' SF, towards stories which take off from feasible science, technology or other trends of the present day. Not favoured are pure fantasy, space opera, crude Gernsbackian technological uplift, and stories neither editor nor consultant can understand. As for other matters... controversially political stuff may be OK by us yet liable to be zapped by managerial lightning bolts in the interests of foreign sales; incestuously 'literary' material probably won't be bought either; steamy sex and blood-and-guns violence, however appealing to the editors themselves, should be deployed (if at all) with great care and relevance to the tale—not the way Chris Carlsen does it.

You will see what I mean about the mantle of *Asimov's*. But no specifications about technophilia or happy endings are laid down, and the planned line is less that of *IASFN* than of *Analog* (as it claims to be rather than as it is): Mike's own ideal is a fictional level which is to the 80s what the *Amis/Conquest Spectrum* anthologies were to the early 60s. Meanwhile, however compromised by the grim business of having to choose Big Names for the early issues while *TOBotF* gets under way, he and I will be glad to break practically any of these poxy 'rules' to buy topnotch SF. This, for the writers out there, has been a Hint of the non-subtle variety. Send your best, and only your very best, to:

Michael Scott Rohan, c/o Eaglemoss Ltd, 7 Cromwell Road, London, SW7 2HR.

[Only the newest of BSFA members will need to read *this*... but yes, the usual boring provisos do apply. Stories should indeed be typed double-spaced on one side only of white bond paper; an attached title page should clearly set out the title, approximate wordlength, author's name and address; and MSS cannot be returned unless appropriate postage—preferably on a stamped self-addressed envelope—is provided. You may find it cheaper to send a photocopy which can be destroyed if rejected—if you do this, please make a clear note to this effect on the title page. A slightly more detailed account of *TOBotF's* fiction requirements may be had by sending an SAE to Mike at the above address. Don't write to me: I'm only a consultant. So far, my best guess as to what 'consultant' means is 'accessory before the fact'.]

It would be rather interesting to hear what you people think of this latest and most eccentric attempt at a British-based 'SF magazine'...

The two voices out there whispered fiercely as their owners squabbled.

"Ozymoron, Line! He's only an ecsema-sniffing spirochaete sap! You should be able to rubberise him before your first tutorial!"

"It's all right for you, Taynor Sinker! You don't have the trouble I have with the rubberisation process."

The SF Novel And ● Basic Form ●

BARRINGTON J. BAYLEY

Any time I try to put together even the simplest storyline there is the sound of a head banging against a wall. A certain hopeful fascination rises in me, therefore, at mention of the word 'formula'. Who wouldn't rather do this kind of thing painlessly? I even saw a formula once: Lester Dent's Master Plot Formula for 6,000 word pulp adventure stories. (Dent's unremarkable boast was that he made his living writing the same 6,000 worder over and over.)

The validity of formulae is that every story has structure, and all that the formula does is express aspects of that structure. The more standardised the genre, the more formulaistic the rules become. I recall, when working in a field that perhaps parallels Dent's -- juvenile adventure fiction -- feeling prostrate with admiration for editors who could glance through a synopsis and pull it into shape in a matter of seconds; or, if they didn't like it at all, work up a new one from scratch and send you toddling away to write it. They weren't the supermen they seemed: they simply knew the mechanics of their business.

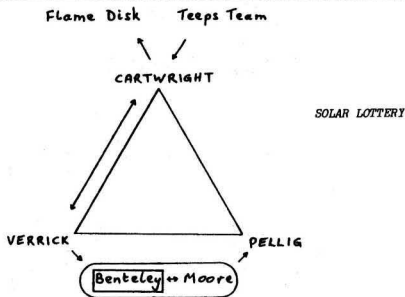
It was while mulling all this over that I chanced to read again my favourite Philip Dick novel: *Solar Lottery*, also published as *World of Chance*. I soon realised why I prize it even above Dick's more 'mature' work, extraordinary and subtle though that is. It's because *Solar Lottery* is a structurally perfect example of a type of genre SF novel whose development, I would guess, took place during the golden age of the pulps. A feature of this type of novel is that the author must simultaneously (i) give the reader a story dealing with the struggles and conflicts of the main characters, and (ii) depict a future society in which the events take place. The drama concerns this society as much as, or more than, it does the characters -- e.g. in the form of some crisis taking place in it -- though the balance between the two is optional.

What follows presumes a knowledge of the works cited.

The framework of *Solar Lottery* is a triad of elements upon which the other elements are hung. (See diagram on following page.)

The name of the central character is boxed. A double-headed arrow denotes conflict or an antagonistic relationship. A single-headed arrow simply denotes a connexion. A capsule denotes that a relationship is bound or compulsory: a drama within the main drama.

At first sight the idea of a basic triad might seem to point out no more than the obvious: that the story deals in conflict, that for conflict there must be two parties or elements, and that there must be a third element for the conflict to be about. But two important points emerge.



The 'conflict dyad' is represented by Verrick, ousted ruler of a society based on a philosophy of chance whose leader is chosen by lottery, and Cartwright, the new 'quizmaster' who is also leader of the crank Preston Society which seeks escape from the contemporary world by searching for the legendary tenth planet, Flame Disk.

The third factor Pellig, however, is not what the conflict is 'about'. This, identifiable as the assassination convention which gives the ousted ruler a formal chance to get back into power, is subsumed under the conflict dyad itself. Instead Pellig is a new feature, though one typical of the world that spawned him: he is Verrick's secret weapon, a means of getting through the team of telepaths whose duty it is to protect Cartwright.

For the third factor to be an innovation over and above the initial premises of the story is important in a novel that works through action. It is what makes the novel 'go'. Imagine *Solar Lottery* without Pellig. If the assassination project had included nothing radically new, the book would still have worked, but not nearly as well. When a novel seems to lose steam halfway through and to get to the end mainly by inertia, it may be because the third factor is weak or missing.

The innovative third factor is not important in a more introspective novel. Take *1984*, not a commercial genre novel: the conflict dyad is personified by O'Brien and the semi-mythical Goldstein, but there is no counterpart of Pellig and what is more, introducing one would have violated the integrity of the novel. I mention this to make it clear it is a species of action novel we are discussing.

What gives *Solar Lottery* extra texture is that Pellig is introduced first as a person, so that the whole basic triad appears to be composed of living people. Only later is he revealed to be an artifact, an android body into which minds can be switched at random. The third factor is more apt to be a device pure and simple -- though it can be anything.

The second practical point to note is that the central character is not a member of the basic triad. We can almost state this as a rule of construction, necessary in order to gain the proper perspective on the future world being

depicted. The basic triad is, so to speak, the central character's environment, for Verrick and Cartwright are not only characters in their own right but also personifications of the society Benteley has to deal with -- as, to a lesser extent, is Pellig. Where this rule is broken the novel is apt to be unconvincing, however colourful or inventive it may be. This is particularly so where the protagonist usurps the role of the triad by becoming too much a mover of events.

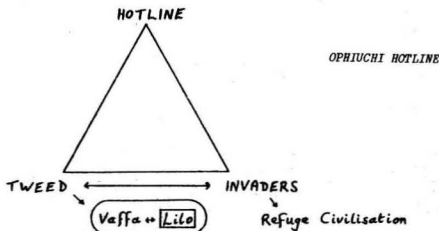
A partial exception, frequently employed, is where the central character is himself the third factor, as when he eventually discovers that he is a secret weapon to be used against one member of the conflict dyad. The gimmickiness of this resort remains hard to disguise, however.

The diagram shows how the well-crafted genre novel makes the central character able to play a positive part in the major drama taking place in his environment, while remaining realistically subject to that environment. The method adopted is to connect him to a member of the basic triad in a subordinate role.

Benteley's place in *Solar Lottery* is handled with typical Dickian indirectness. As a member of the assassination project, his proximate enemy is the brilliant but unstable Moore, Verrick's serf technician who built the Pellig body. Only at the end is he in direct confrontation with Verrick. For most of the book his relationship with the looming quizmaster is ambivalent.

The elements of the basic triad do not have to be equally prominent. It can happen that one of them is so little prominent that its place turns out to be filled by what seems at first to be a minor character, or it can be merely alluded to. The third factor, particularly, can dominate the book or it can seem to be lost amid a welter of other detail. But, in the retrospective perspective of the novel, the triad becomes discernable. Usually, but not invariably, there is a character that serves as focus or representative for each side of the conflict dyad -- though his importance in the overall scheme is variable. The most generalised assertion one can make of the third factor is that more often than not it is the factor to carry the surprises that keep the reader interested -- though, contrariwise, it can be something so fateful that its role unfolds with an inexorable logic.

Let's try out the diagram on one or two other cases. First, a novel that, though produced recently, is a splendid example of the tradition, John Varley's *Ophiuchi Hotline*:



Actually one can go on adding to the diagram until all the minor elements are incorporated, but we'll keep it as simple as possible.

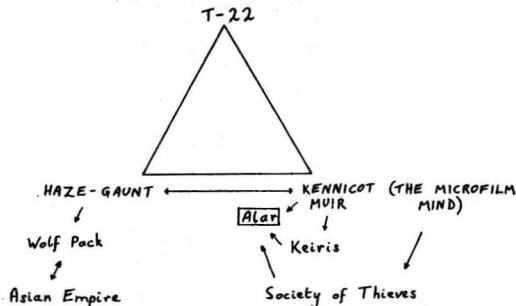
Ophiuchi Hotline is rather more elaborate than *Solar Lottery*. The position of the central character, however, is practically identical. Boss Tweed, leader of the Free Earth Party, is a character very much like Verrick, except that, with his illegal organisation, he stands in relation to the ambient society more similarly to Cartwright. The minor Lilo-Vaffa-Tweed triad is a fair replica, even in its development (notwithstanding that Lilo and Vaffa are both many-cloned) of the Benteley-Moore-Verrick triad.

At the other end of the conflict dyad I have written the Invaders, but one could as easily write the whole refuge civilisation which is so fascinatingly described throughout the book -- a superb example of sustained imagination. The reason I have done it this way is that the Invaders' presence is the raison d'être of the refuge civilisation; the laws which Tweed breaks in his plans to fight the Invaders are designed precisely not to provoke them.

In neither case is there a representative individual. Lilo spends nearly all her time as a prisoner inside Tweed's organisation, along with other cloned 'non-persons'. The ambient society itself is unusually anonymous. Varley provides a substitute: pre-chapter excerpts from the literature of the time which give us an insight into the laws, mores and practices of Lilo's society.

The flexibility of the diagram is demonstrated in that the third factor, the Hotline, is definitely not a counterpart of Dick's Pellig. Instead of a weapon to be used in the struggle, it is a wholly external factor the gradual discovery of whose nature eventually alters the nature of the drama itself.

Now for the best genre SF novel ever, Charles L Harness's *The Paradox Men* -- or may I stick to the *Startling Stories* title *Flight Into Yesterday*, the version I have actually read? (*Flight To...* being a regular title format among the pulps.)



Harness, to quote John Brunner, did everything that van Vogt tried to do. The novel is so complicated that it took me several tries to get it diagrammatised. (See diagram on preceding page.)

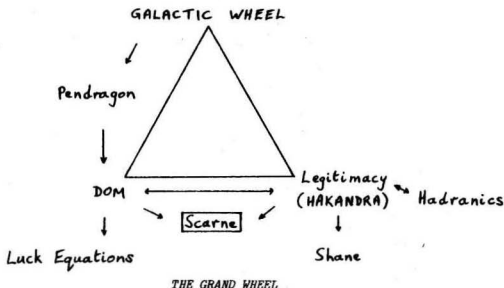
The other members of the Wolf Pack, America Imperial's Nazi-style leadership, are sufficiently prominent so that it might be correct to place them collectively in the conflict dyad. Chancellor Haze-Gaunt, however, is the hero's final adversary, and is much 'deeper into' the story than the others.

Alar, the central character, has a special relationship with Muir, also the Microfilm Mind. He is Muir, transmuted by being sent back in time. The separation of the hero into two roles highlights another reason why the central character should not be a member of the basic triad: he would lack the necessary mobility. Contrast the adventures of Alar with the Microfilm Mind's static position as a slave.

Of course, this and other considerations are not hard-and-fast rules. Means can always be devised of overcoming them. But such means will be special, and inflexible in that they could not be used very often.

The basic triad is fundamental enough to be the secret of imparting satisfying form also to novels not strictly of the above type, but there isn't space to go into that here.

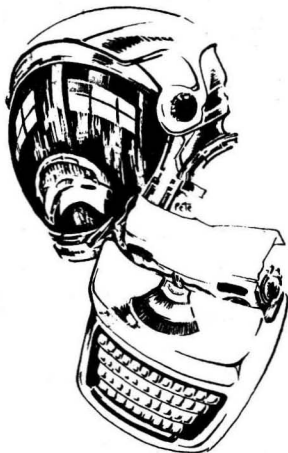
I have never yet used this diagrammatic form to plan a novel of my own, but I did make a limited use of it when planning one called *The Grand Wheel*. For this novel I abandoned my usual doomed attempts to find a 'different' format and aimed for a traditional type of storyline -- the sort that has been used a million times. I even took the unprecedented step of preparing a chapter-by-chapter breakdown. After some of the normal head-banging I decided to apply the triad diagram to what I had so far. The exercise, after a bit of messing about, showed me where my conception was fuzzy and how it might be clarified. The diagram finished up:



Pull it in a bit here, let it out a bit there... my God, the thing works! Could this really have been a lead novel in *Startling Stories* or *Super Science Stories*? (Under the title *Flight To Chaos*, perhaps?) Ah, dreams, dreams. Why couldn't I have been born forty years sooner?

Book Reviews

Reviews Editor:
Joseph Nicholas



Frank Herbert - GOD EMPEROR OF DUNE (Gollancz, 349pp, £6.95)
THE PRIESTS OF PSI (Orbit, 204pp, £1.35)

Reviewed by Brian Smith

A few years ago, when I first heard that there was to be a fourth Dune novel, my reaction was one of trepidation - was Herbert stretching the series until it collapsed under its own weight? (This is a rhetorical question, you understand - the answers come later.) But first things first.

God Emperor of Dune is set some three-and-a-half thousand years after Children of Dune. Little seems to have changed in the Imperium: the Bene Gesserit, the Spacing Guild and the Ixians are still there, plotting away as furiously as ever, and the Tleilaxu are on their nth ghola of Duncan Idaho. Arrakis itself, though, is almost completely transformed, with only a token desert left amidst the greenery. And there is of course the God Emperor himself, Leto Atreides II, slowly turning into a sandworm (being by now the size of a Tube carriage) and still pursuing his Golden Path, the guaranteed survival of mankind. Though he is worshipped by most of his subjects, an underground movement who consider him an amoral tyrant is seeking to overthrow him.

Many of Herbert's perennial themes are on display once more, in particular the boredom inherent in vast longevity, the evolution of man and his intelligence, and - most prominent of all - the moral implications and consequences of God-with-us, which have dominated Herbert's recent work: what would be the ambitions

and motivations of a man who became a god, having absolute power and answerable only to himself? This, of course, was the question to which The Jesus Incident addressed itself, albeit far less accessibly (because, I suspect, the background established by the earlier Dune novels placed far more constraints upon Herbert than did Destination: Void). It is also the direction in which the Dune saga has been turning over the years, and which is now virtually the only thing sustaining the series. The three and a half millenia which have turned Arrakis into a garden world and degraded the Fremens into a sorry handful aping their ancestors for the gratification of the tourists have robbed it of all the richness, colour and vitality which made Dune and its two sequels such a tour-de-force in what Tolkien called "sub-creation". God Emperor of Dune is a pale shadow of its epic predecessors. It is for much of the time disjointed, endlessly indulging in flashback conversations of questionable illumination. At times, the philosophy seems almost superficial, serving only to mask the knots on the loose ends for as long as possible. Herbert is no longer challenging the reader, posing questions; he is presenting his own answers, and they are not convincing. Though it grieves me to say it, this is not vintage Herbert - and there is a distinct possibility of a fifth novel to come. Certainly, there are enough loose ends produced after the old ones have been tied up to establish (if not to justify) a further sequel; but if it is not considerably better than this then I foresee the series nose-diving to an ignoble death - which would be a tragedy of the first order.

The Priests of Psi is a collection, only Herbert's fourth ever, and as fine an example of barrel-scraping as I have ever seen. Though it first appeared only last year, the most recent story it contains dates from 1970, with the rest coming from 1962, 1959 (twice) and 1958. "Old Rambling House" appeared in The Worlds of Frank Herbert and the title story (the longest in the book) was re-written into the second half of The Godmakers. As for the others... "Try To Remember" leans rather heavily on Hoyle's The Black Cloud, featuring an internationally diverse group of scientists trying to communicate with an alien race; "Mindfield" is set in a Buddhist-dominated post-holocaust America; and "Murder Will In", probably the best story in the book, is about an immortal psychic parasite being hunted down after ages on Earth. One good story, two average, one reprint, and the first draft of half a novel. This is most definitely for completists only.

I was puzzled as to why this book was ever cobbled together until I read the title story, when it became obvious: the Golden Path again. Herbert's idea that mankind is ultimately doomed without omnipotent shepherds is building into an obsession. I hope he takes a long holiday before his next book, because if I see one more on this subject too soon I may scream.

Gene Wolfe - THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR (Timescape, 301pp, \$12.95)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

This is the second volume of "The Book of the New Sun". If the two remaining volumes sustain this level of artistry and invention then the completed work will undoubtedly be one of the masterpieces of science fiction. Rarely have I encountered a book that works so well on so many levels, and I would even go so far as to say that there is nothing in science fiction to match it.

I was lavish in my praise of the preceding volume, The Shadow of the Torturer, and I was ready for a let-down. Indeed, as I began to read this book, I thought that Wolfe had not quite been able to sustain the quality of the writing: the prose was still good, but somehow it seemed to lack the sparkle

of the earlier book. But I was wrong; insidiously, the writing began to work its magic, and before I had gone very far I realised that Wolfe had done it again, that every scene was so startlingly vivid and every word so precisely chosen that it was almost an effort to draw back far enough to look at the writing rather than the story being written.

But, as I said, the book works so well on so many levels. The writing is good, the scenery beautifully described, the characters (even the minor ones) are living, breathing human beings, with human frailties and complexities that make them particularly appealing. More than that, it is a good story, so well paced and so effortless in the telling that the reader just isn't aware of turning the pages. It is, basically, an odyssey, Severian's journey through the society of his world; but there are so many twists and sub-plots that one is kept constantly on the edge of one's seat, waiting breathlessly for whatever happens next. It is, in other words, a damn good adventure story, and one of the highest possible calibre.

I should add, however, that I do not think that anyone who has not read The Shadow of the Torturer could follow The Claw of the Conciliator. The book is littered with casual references to minor incidents in its predecessor, and Wolfe, never one to make things too easy for his readers, will not explain again anything that has already been explained in the first book. It is, thus, quite clear that "The Book of the New Sun" has been conceived and written as a unified whole, and the constituent parts are not meant to be read as other than parts of that whole. But I must make mention of the very unusual and irritating opening to the book - because, while The Shadow of the Torturer ended with Severian and several companions leaving the city of Nessus and suddenly experiencing something happening to them, The Claw of the Conciliator begins some days later, when Severian has only one companion and with no explanation as to what has happened to the others. The reader is later able to piece together something of what took place, but is liable to be distracted from the opening incidents by wondering what happened in between.

Any hard-core SF fan who is unable to appreciate anything that isn't loaded down with ideas will find this book more than satisfactory, since it is an incredible treasure house of science fiction ideas, most of them thrown in as asides incidental to the main story. A strangely mutated visitor from the future, a not-quite-human survivor from the past, a host of creatures imported from other planets, a black hole that may be eating up the sun - every page seems to throw up something new. But all this has its purpose, for it first of all demonstrates to the reader just how different this far future Urth is, and, secondly, gives the society a history, traditions and folklore; a depth and a solidity that lift it above the status of an artificial construct that allows an author to spin his tale.

And there is yet more to savour. The words, for instance, are a sheer delight - whether made up or dredged from the lesser-known reaches of our own language, the odd terms sprinkled throughout the book all have an authentic ring, as if they are familiar, something only half-remembered. And they are used with such assurance that one feels as if one knows exactly what the word means, even if it is one never seen before.

The Claw of the Conciliator is a book that constantly discloses new delights, new pleasures. Yet it is so intimately linked to The Shadow of the Torturer that the two together are something greater than either alone. One can only wonder how The Sword of the Lictor will build upon these two... but I must close with a complaint. The cover illustration, by Don Maitz, is one of the worst it has ever been my misfortune to encounter; and although it does depict one incident in the book, it still manages to be so completely at odds with the work that one can only hope that the British publisher will show better taste.

Garry Kilworth - GEMINI GOD (Faber & Faber, 240pp, £6.50)

Reviewed by Ann Collier

Gemini God is an extremely impressive portfolio of passages demonstrating Kilworth's stylistic virtuosity, but is much less impressive as a novel, its weak structure and uneven pace poorly serving the high quality of much of the writing. Although rarely less than competent, it fails to really involve the reader in its denouement.

The plot concerns the use of empathic communication between identical twins to warn of danger on New Carthage, a distant planet with an alien life form known as "gins". The central character, Alex Craven, accompanies one twin to New Carthage in the hope that her carefully conditioned fear of the gin will in an emergency transmit itself to her sister on Earth, thus enabling help to be sent without delay. The story unfolds, however, in no less than six locations. On Earth, following a population implosion, men having withdrawn to the security of the physically enclosed and geographically isolated city-states. Outside these protective shells live those remnants of rural society who have rejected this way of life, preferring a less artificial environment. Thus, counterpointing the hoped-for instant communication between the twins, a central concern of the book is the lack of communication between other individuals and groups - but Kilworth does not succeed in conveying the isolation of the groups without making the book seem very bitty. Although Craven visits all the locations and acts to some degree as a unifying thread, the novel still seems too episodic, a succession of scenes, landscapes and set-pieces, many of which are superbly written but are not adequately drawn together.

The interest of the first half of the book is derived from Kilworth's descriptions of the "Outer Angles", the Essex countryside in which is set the institution where the twins are studied. To the city-born Craven, this exposed and bleak landscape is as alien to him as New Carthage will later be. It is perhaps an indication of the author's lack of confidence in the mood he creates - one of almost sinister disorientation, so powerfully evoked - that he feels the need to spell this out in too explicit a statement; but he manages to abandon completely any uncertainty a few pages later, when he obviously has great fun describing a character experiencing the sense distortions caused by a magical spell, and the semi-feudal community living in a castle built to honour a legendary local hero.

It is, however, only in the second half of the book, set on New Carthage, that the writing really moves into top gear; here, there is a wealth of striking images. A New Carthage day lasts for two hundred and fifty Earth years, and the intensity of the sun's heat prevents habitation on the exposed side of the planet; the gin and the human explorers, therefore, lead a nomadic life, cultivating crops in the dawn area and gradually retreating before the slow advance of the sunlight. There are no cities on the planet: the gin stay in shallow depressions when the need arises and the explorers live aboard their ship, the "Stingray", a sleek silver craft gliding over the ground on rollers of air with its tail reaching back into the sunlight to gather solar energy. The flora of the planet and the landscape permanently bathed in the light of dawn are splendidly described. Whilst I fail to gain a definite visual impression of the gin, Kilworth absolutely persuades me of how it feels to be one of and of the kind of thoughts that pass through their heads. The dialogue is fluent and natural, and Kilworth renders with equal ease the idiom of the peasants, the scientists, the military men and the gins' thought processes. He studs the book with climactic scenes which promise to engage the reader's interest, but the events of magnitude they concern are sometimes only tentatively treated. And yet, again in stark contrast to this uncertainty, Kilworth uses throughout

the novel poetry supposedly written by a mystic and prophet - and, while I wonder whether it adds a great deal, it is confidently and competently written.

The action of the novel is much fuller than the bare bones I have outlined, but some of the remainder seems superfluous, and a lengthy sub-plot concerning Craven's wife seems to have been introduced solely to provide a convoluted justification for his taking the job at the institute where the twins are studied. Although this sequence is also intended to tie in with the theme of non-communication, the plot device used is remarkably clumsy, and Kilworth seems very unsure of himself when dealing with human relationships. Not having read any of his other work, I can only wonder whether his apparent pessimism about them is in evidence there; but in this book we get very little impression of people meeting, relating, and gaining something positive from the contact. (The only apparently happy relationship in the book is that between two of the peasants, and we can only assume this is happy in the absence of any information to the contrary.) In particular, I find a noticeable awkwardness in his treatment of women -- whilst accusations of sexism would be unjustified (despite the number of times women are referred to by the size of their breasts), it seems very self-conscious, and the imagery jars as Craven's wife is described in terms of the clichéd dichotomy of a spitting wildcat and purring kitten.

Finally, Craven settles for a woman he meets aboard the "Stingray", this relationship his acceptance of something real and sound rather than dreaming of an unattainable relationship with his former girlfriend. That ending I could just about have accepted; but Kilworth overdoes things by having the woman announce on the fourth-to-last page that she is having their baby. If New Carthage had a sunset they would undoubtedly have walked hand in hand into it! Although this brings the novel full circle, since it begins with Craven's birth, the attempt at structural coherence does not compensate for the sickly feeling left with the reader, and I wondered whether this ending was intended to be a tranquillising reparation for the scenes a few pages earlier where an artist, who has been portrayed sympathetically, and a large number of the gin are clubbed to death in a ceremony to ensure that only the fittest survive. Kilworth handles the mood of this scene well, creating an atmosphere of tense expectation and a sense of horror without resorting to gory detail; and the ceremony, as proof of the fundamental differences between the human and gin cultures, would have provided an ending in tune with the pessimism of the book. Instead, he opts for a more optimistic one -- the twins' field of energy had on Earth proved to have benign powers, and when this energy reaches a peak on New Carthage, they are "simultaneously drawn into their own creation to become part of it: a wholeness, a single entity"; and, attracted by this, other alien races come to visit the planet with suggested good intent. I found much of the quasi-spiritual, psychedelic experience so floridly described in the pages preceding this effective as imagery but intellectually unconvincing. The final two pages are nevertheless a return to the successfully underwritten style that suggests more than it actually describes and leaves the reader feeling calmly satisfied, anticipating the arrival of the aliens.

Gemini God is packed with incidental thought, speculation and tangential comment which illustrate Kilworth's wide interests and research -- but their being thrown in higgledy-piggledy just adds to my general feeling of confusion about what this book is really saying. Why are there so many subsidiary characters who appear to have no clear function in the structure of the novel or its plot and are only occasionally of interest as characters in their own right? Why is there a parallel suggested but not developed between the gin and the peasants, both primitive people but with a strong culture and value system? I don't know whether there is a point to all this; I do know that I grew tired of looking for one and sought relief in re-reading those simple

and elegant passages describing the "Stingray" cruising above the New Carthage landscape. Although much of Gemini God may not be particularly memorable, those images deserve to survive.

Jack Vance - THE FACE (Dobson, 224pp, E5.25; Coronet, 224pp, E1.10)

Reviewed by Simon Ounsley

Jack Vance at his best is a comic anthropologist. He postulates cultures with customs and beliefs more resolutely peculiar even than our own, and goes on to exploit their comic potential to delightful - sometimes belly-aching - effect. At the same time he maintains their inner logic, as indeed SF writers are expected to do, so that they keep their credibility and everything seems logical and sensible, albeit on a different plane from our own - somewhere up in comic limbo, between Noel Coward and pantomime.

The Face is the fourth volume in the chronicles of Kirth Gersen - the DEMON PRINCES series - and is itself peculiar in that its publication is separated by the space of a decade from that of the previous volume, *The Palace Of Love*. It's a credit to Vance, I suppose, that even though he succumbs to the vile "series" bug which so infests SF and fantasy, at least he's got the decency to wait until he really wants to write the next volume in the interminable saga, instead of wearily churning it out on schedule for the sake of appeasing his publisher. Certainly, his appetite for chronicling Gersen's adventures seems to have been well whetted before embarking on *The Face*. There's a lot of enthusiasm and energy gone into the book. It concerns Gersen's attempts to wreak vengeance on Lens Larque, the fourth of the Demon Princes who murdered Gersen's parents, and to whose destruction he has dedicated his life. The opening is unspectacular - like a run-of-the-mill thriller, but set on a different planet. We're given a few advance glimpses of Dar Sai, the world from which Lens Larque comes, but they're not appealing - mainly concerning entertainments in which small boys are lashed with whips. It's a great shame, you begin to think, that Vance seems to be putting his considerable talents to the service of the bondage/sado-masochism bug which, to coin a phrase, so infests sf and - more particularly - fantasy. Still, there are enough twinges of Vance's wry humour to keep you reading, and this part of the plot resolves itself quite cleverly, a twist leaving Lens Larque victorious and Gersen licking his wounds, having lost the battle but not the war.

Still bent on revenge, our hero sets out for Dar Sai itself, and here, in the second part, the book really takes off. This is Vance at his best - as I have said, in the guise of the comic anthropologist. Gersen arrives alone on the planet, scarcely knowing what to expect, and through his stranger's eyes, its mysteries start to unfold. The sexual tastes of the male Darsh are seen in the wider context of life on their home planet, where men and women marry for convenience only, and go out chasing more attractive partners on moonlit nights, under "mirassou-shine". These midnight romps are larger than life - the men go out chasing the young girls - Kitchets - in places with names like Differy Downs, but they have to watch out for the older women, called khoontzes (geddit?) who have moustaches and lurk in the shadows trying to trap them. Fans of sixties radio comedy will notice fairly strong echoes of Ramblin' Sid Rumpo in all this, particularly in the Darsh folk songs...

She seized my draps and dingles, she toyed with my emotion;
She rubbed my private enterprises with scrofulatic lotion.

Perhaps I should have said 'rugby songs'.

The setting for all these antics is an arid planet, whose centres of population are known as "shades", umbrella-like structures of varying size which irrigate the land by sprinkling water round their periphery. To enter one, you have to pass through a curtain of this sprinkled water. The Darsh live in houses called "dumbles" and play a fascinating game called "hadaul", the rules for which, and Gersen's endeavours at playing it, are described in great detail.

The third part of the book, unfortunately, leaves this fascinating planet behind again, but the resolution of the plot is itself delightful enough to make up for this. The last paragraph sticks in the mind, as do the moonlight antics of the Darsh, and I defy anyone to anticipate it.

I've heard Vance described as an ultra-right-wing writer, and certainly if you read between the lines of this book, you can find quite a lot to support this. Gersen, after all, is motivated solely by a desire to see the Demon Princes die horrible deaths; the old women, with their moustaches and horrid cooking, are like a grotesque extension of the mother-in-law joke; and rape is treated as a big laugh. But - if you want to carry this a bit further - the conclusion of the book, which I won't reveal, could be seen as a kick in the face for racial and social intolerance, while the sexual habits of the Darsh, taken as a whole, are a parody of the worst in male-female relations in general, certainly taking the men to task as well as the women.

But personally I, for once!, don't want to carry it this far.

It's always difficult to interpret a writer's intentions, though this is something a critic often has to attempt. But I don't see Vance, whatever his political stance may be, as a writer who wants to preach. Unlike certain right-wing writers working in the genre, he is trying primarily to entertain rather than to get a message across. Naturally, the beliefs of any author will tend to emerge in his writing, but Vance does attempt to put across a balanced viewpoint, while his humour and imagination make him about the best writer of good escapist entertainment that we've got.

It's strange. I'm pretty fussy these days about the things I read, and I usually look for something more than the pure escapism which I appreciate so much in Vance. So what, I've been wondering, makes Vance so special? Why do I like his work so much?

I think it is something about his major characters, whether Cugel the Clever in *The Eyes Of The Overworld* (one of my very favourite books) or Kirth Gersen in the present novel. They're both anti-heroes, motivated by greed in the first case, and revenge in the other, but their inadequacies are presented in such a way as to make us sympathetic. And when we're sharing their first experiences of a strange new culture, it's hard not to identify very closely with them. Despite their inadequacies, and despite the peculiar societies and situations which they have to confront, they seem to get by quite well, all of which is very encouraging, perhaps even illuminating. Things might turn out horribly for them from time to time, but they proceed with a certain smug self-assurance. Taking a passage from *The Face*, in which Gersen has just arrived on Dar Sai, and is about to take a meal at a restaurant:

"What is this?"

"That is our 'Sunday Punch'. It is enlivened with three tots of Black Gadroon rum and a half-gill of Secret Elixir."

"The day is still somewhat young. What is this?"

"That is simple swizzle, prepared from fruits and pale elixirs."

"That sounds more practical. What is this?"

"That is 'Tourist Ahagæe', especially modified to suit the off-world

taste."

"And this?"

"Those are parboiled night-fish, fresh from the bogs."

"I will have simple swizzle, ahagaree and salad."

"At your order."

Gersen sat back in his chair and contemplated the surroundings...

Now, to be offered parboiled night-fish fresh from the bogs, yet maintain your cool and your appetite -- that, I think, is the secret of survival. On Dar Sai or any other strange planet.

Tim White - THE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY WORLD OF TIM WHITE (New English Library, 144pp, £9.95)

Vincent Di Fate & Ian Summers - DI FATE'S CATALOG OF SCIENCE FICTION HARDWARE (Sldgwick & Jackson, 160pp, £8.95 hb, £4.50 pb)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Tim White is a young British cover artist whose trademarks are an almost photographic clarity of subject and the painstaking provision of extremely fine detail. His work has been appearing on SF and fantasy paperbacks - particularly from NEL, and more recently from Futura also - since 1974.

The high quality of his painting is without question (apart from a few niggles to which I'll return later). My chief grumble about the book is not the execution of the artwork but the lack of choice: it contains all of his published work, in date order, which means that among just 116 pieces of artwork there are about 40 pictures of spaceships with planetary backgrounds. This is about twenty too many. Don't misunderstand my point: most of these spaceship pictures are very good, although they were obviously produced in quick succession at the insistence of art editors because (as we all know) spaceship covers sell SF books. (In the mid- and late-1970s NEL were in fact employing White to imitate and improve on the spaceship covers Chris Foss was then doing for Panther.) I'm not suggesting that White shouldn't have done these pictures, but that he should have waited a year or two before putting this book together, replacing half the spaceships with other subjects.

To say that White's work is "photographic" is not just to stress the amount of detail included and his avoidance of impressionism. He makes conscious use of the tricks of photography to create his effects: wide-angle distortion, high and low viewpoints, and out-of-focus backgrounds have been employed sparingly and well. Occasionally the wide-angle treatment is inappropriate and fails to provide the necessary impact (as in the case of picture 22, illustrating Glory Road), but elsewhere it is used to great effect.

The snag about showing fine detail is, of course, that it has to be right - carefully researched where possible and carefully planned in any case. White's research and planning are always impeccable. (Apparently he tries to read each book before beginning work on a cover design, which is to be applauded.) His spaceships and other machines are highly convincing; his landscapes - whether terran or alien - are worth examining closely; his animals - especially the dragons - are superb. His only difficulty seems to be people, particularly faces, so that pictures 25 and 81 are not as good as they should be. But the pictures for which I have the greatest dislike are number 24 (the Christmas cracker in space which appeared on the cover of Science Fiction Monthly) and number 51 (the AZ space station which appeared on the cover of The Visual Encyclopaedia Of Science Fiction), both of which display such outrageous bad taste that I feel confident in ascribing their conception to art editors and their execution to periods of temporary aberration.

Another of my grumbles concerns the printing of the book; too many pictures have small scratches or blobs on them, which are evidence of mucky colour slides. This is shoddy production work and should not be found in such an expensive book. Otherwise, the book has been well planned and finished, with a brief biographical introduction, some nice black and white sketches and a detailed list of where, when and on what each picture appeared. It's pricey but good.

In contrast, we have Di Fate's Catalog Of Science Fiction Hardware. Sidgwick & Jackson, usually one of the more reliable publishers of SF, have made a terrible mistake in importing and distributing this large format art book. Di Fate's work varies from very good, particularly a few of the paintings which have already appeared on the covers of US paperbacks, to poor in the case of some of the pictures done especially for this book - sketches in just one or two colours which must have taken him all of half an hour each to produce.

Di Fate's style is usually fairly impressionistic. When his paintings are reduced to, say, a quarter of their original size to fit onto paperback covers, this impressionism is very effective in suggesting detail without actually showing it, but when printed full size or slightly enlarged they look rough. This is particularly noticeable when the subject is hardware - a spaceship, a city, a weapon - which deserves to be shown very clearly, with an emphasis on detail. Thus, as space scenes, his pictures are often good (despite the unfortunate fact that all his spaceships look like white plastic models), but as depictions of space hardware they are disappointing. The only possible conclusion is that Di Fate was the wrong artist to choose for a book of this sort.

Approximately sixty pages of the Catalog (sic, by the way) are devoted to diagrams and blueprints of the same hardware items as the colour pictures show. Their dimensions are given in a random mixture of feet and "meters", but are otherwise so lacking in detail as to be a total waste of space. Then there's the text... there isn't much of it, just a hundred words or so on each item, but it is unbelievably banal; sometimes relevant SF works are mentioned, though usually not. Responsibility for it rests with someone called Beth Meacham, whom Di Fate, in his introduction, describes as "an acknowledged expert in the SF field". It's "experts" like that who give SF a bad name. Nor must Ian Summers, who was presumably the instigator of this whole sorry project, be allowed to escape blame.

The basic idea of showing off SF's hardware in a book of colour pictures, diagrams and brief descriptions was not a bad one. The result, in this case, is a book which might just be acceptable to a juvenile audience but is fated (as you might say) to become an almost instant cut-price remainder.

(Note: there seems to be some doubt as to the spelling of Di Fate. I've followed that used on the book's title page; the competing alternative, also used in the book, is DiFate. The Nicholls Encyclopaedia favours Di Fate.)

David J Skal -- SCAVENGERS (Pocket Books, 204pp, \$1.95)
WHEN WE WERE GOOD (Pocket Books, 188pp, \$2.25)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

In one way, *Scavengers* is a book about a drug cult; in another, its central theme is identity.

Tracy is a brainstormer -- a junkie for a new drug, a preparation of the human brain, one brain yielding a thousand shots. A shot bought from a pusher (who will have murdered to get the supply) for a time transforms her into a different personality. *Scavengers* details Brian's obsessive attempt to convert the derelict Tracy into Kelly, his dead lover, murdered by the brainstormers.

Brian is an art curator, dedicated to preservation and protection; Kelly an artist who believes all art to be ephemeral and protection of any kind an intrusion. Their intense, compact drama -- related by three first-person narrators: Brian, Tracy and what may be Kelly, or only her memory reflexes -- is played out in the ruined apartment where he keeps her prisoner, surrounded by a decaying world.

It's a good book, harsh and disturbing, very convincingly written, raising awkward questions about art as a form of escape. Brian uses Tracy as raw material, sculpting Kelly (who was herself a sculptor); his love is all-consuming -- but is it love, and what does Kelly feel? Tracy's ambiguous desire for extinction turns into a strong urge for survival; if a personality is dead, is it capable of change? Kelly, half in and half out of reality, plots her own survival and escape; events that lead up to the final apotheosis of she and Brian. The ending finds Tracy, now pregnant, living with a man very like Brian, both desiring to be "someone a little different". Skal is asking us to define identity -- is it RNA memory or something else; does a brainstormer really become another person; is Kelly a person or a construct? His implicit warning is that we're conditioned to want to be other kinds of people; if brainstorming were practicable today, a pusher would have no difficulty finding customers.

If Tracy's pregnancy is a "symbolic statement, a new beginning", then the end may be the children in *When We Were Good*. There are bizarre flashes of black humour in this story of child-substitutes, used after an all-out genetic war has left most of humanity unfit to reproduce. Adults -- desiring and hating the children of the Steel Bitch, the artificial womb -- stand at the bars of the children's enclosure, in a parody halfway between visitors to a zoo and parents outside a playground. Tranquilliser drugs are dispensed, by a child, from a bell-ringing van that tours the decaying city streets. The adult 'uniform' is a clown's costume.

The story is narrated in the third person by Kevin, illustrator of government comic books for would-be suicides, and by his partner Linda; and in the first person by one of the androgynous children, Angel/Tyke, kept pre-pubertal by hormone regulation. Linda, ex-musician and borderline psychotic, runs the Daycare Centre for Imaginary Children, and is haunted by dreams of pregnancy. Kevin, suffering mental dissolution at the end of the world, is obsessed with the hermaphrodite children. Their lives impact with Angel's in violence, leading the child to discover precisely what it and the Steel Bitch is, and what kind of life they maintain. It ends, as it began, in the Steel Bitch, with sterile birth, and is obsessively concerned with dirt, mental decay, urban life, violence, grotesquerie, and the inner workings of human relationships.

Both *Scavengers* and *When We Were Good* are harsh novels, sharing themes and treatments: a triad of characters dealing with catastrophe in a decaying world. From the reader's point of view, both may suffer by not having one 'nice' or 'good' person to identify with, but this isn't necessarily an artistic defect. They mix the hardware of SF with a concern for human relationships, sometimes almost in metaphor, *Scavengers* being about emotional dependency, how people (literally) feed off each other, and *When We Were Good* exploring the relationship between parent and child, one generation and the next. Of the two, I personally prefer *Scavengers*, as being the more accessible.

Norman Spinrad -- *SONGS FROM THE STARS* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 286pp, £6.95; Pocket Books, 277pp, \$2.50)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Most of the best novelists have an axe to grind or a theory to propound, and I have no objection to a little propaganda creeping into a piece of fiction.

I do ask, though, that such propagandists be at least true to themselves, and that they make it clear where they stand. But *Songs From The Stars* has a thread of rather muddled thinking running through it which consequently makes it much weaker than it might have been.

We are in a post-holocaust world where, familiarly, the survivors have banned the 'black' sciences that precipitated the holocaust. The inhabitants of Aquaria, a state apparently occupying the West Coast of America, seem to be latter-day hippies, taking drugs and talking about their 'karma'. Adherents of the "law of muscle, sun, wind and water", they obviously represent the ecologists, but here Spinrad is not quite playing fair. Nuclear power and polluting petroleum-based fuels are understandably on the black list, but anything electrical seems to be similarly blacked only when it suits the author, and there is no mention of hydro-electric power, wave power, or any other 'clean' sources of electricity. This makes it appear that Aquaria is totally dependent for its technology -- and hence, by implication, for its existence -- upon items imported by devious routes from a colony of 'black' scientists. An official blind eye seems to be turned upon this trade.

But where do Spinrad's sympathies lie? His protagonists, Clear Blue Lou and Sunshine Sue (more echoes of hippiedom), are very good, very nice people constantly voicing their approval of peace, love and the Aquarian way of life, and expressing righteous horror at the 'black' scientists' use of nuclear power and petroleum (though this latter would in fact have been exhausted long before, and there is no sign of the extensive and expensive refining plants that each would require). On the other hand, the 'black' scientist they encounter, one Arnold Harker, is unpleasant, leads a joyless, mechanistic existence, and proves to lack the cosmic vision that will save mankind.

Yet however much our sympathies are directed towards the Aquarians, the novel's plot actually leads us inexorably towards the 'black' scientists. They win all the arguments, and their aim in life is shown to be good -- they want to reach a space station that, just before the holocaust, had picked up messages from other beings. Sunshine Sue and Clear Blue Lou recognise the good karma in these songs from the stars, that this way lies our salvation, and so we are back with the rather tired old SF dream: our future lies in space. Since Spinrad apparently doesn't see Aquaria as viable without the 'black' sciences, the thrust of the novel is revealed. The distant aliens actually spell it out: any race must develop its technology to the point of self-destruction, but if it survives then all is roses because a welcome into the community of stars will follow. Curiously, Spinrad himself doesn't seem too happy with all this -- the 'Galactic Way' he comes up with is as near as damnit the love and peace of Aquaria, and Arnold Harker is the loser; but he has no way out and in the end can only scrabble around to rescue a rather wishy-washy compromise.

A couple of other, brief, points about the book. First, the writing is competent, though Spinrad is one of those people who seem to believe that 'good writing' is flowery writing, and has a tendency to pile on the adjectives in an attempt to be arty. Secondly, throughout the book the point of view alternates between Clear Blue Lou and Sunshine Sue, but the similarity between the two is so great that this stylistic exercise is wasted, since there are none of the different perspectives that could be its only excuse. It would have been far better had Spinrad alternated between one of the Aquarians and Arnold Harker, since that at least would have given him the chance to strengthen Harker's character and better highlight their incompatibility -- but as it is the similarity between the two protagonists is so great that if not for Spinrad's love of sexual gymnastics there would have been no clue other than her name to show that Sue was female.

To sum up: *Songs From The Stars* is readable enough, and even exciting in parts, but the propagandising attempt to tie up the pro-space lobby vociferous in SF with the ecology lobby vociferous outside it doesn't come off.

Pamela Sargent -- *CLONED LIVES* (Fontana, 319pp, £1.50)

Reviewed by Brian Smith

The clone novel is today as fraught with pitfalls as the lunar frontier novel was thirty years ago -- it is only a matter of time before it is overtaken by history and reduced to a literary fossil. But I suspect that when fiction is finally measured against fact, Pamela Sargent's first novel will prove to be closer than most.

The cloned lives of the title, the first of their kind, begin in the year 2000, after the end of a moratorium on genetic research. The story traces their lives from adolescence to the late thirties, when mankind stands on the edge of a potential Golden Age. It is an episodic novel, focussing on each clone in turn. The first section, though, centres on the donor/father (naturally enough), and is woodenly plotted -- scene setting at its most blatant. Stock characters abound: the scientists who create the clones are of course noble and idealistic, up pops an old friend who became a priest to act as *advocatus diaboli* so that the moralistic pros and cons of cloning can be debated, and even a reporter who discovers the project and promises to treat them fairly in return for an exclusive (if this last sounds only vaguely familiar, go and read *Nightfall* again). Not to mention the hordes of rioting Millenialists without which no book touching on 1999 seems complete. Sargent works hard, far too hard to make her milieu convincing. Technological details are hammered in relentlessly; not only the mechanics of cloning, but descriptions of airport-subway interfacing, automated highways and computerised cars, right down to throwaway mentions of hydrogen-powered lawnmowers. Pre-packaged verisimilitude from a futurology textbook.

The following sections are much more assured. These clones are not supermen, they are not a telepathic gestalt. They are confused, frightened human beings, all emotionally crippled to some extent by the fear and mistrust which they have unwittingly provoked from the world from the day they were born. They are almost pitiful, as their fragile relationships crumble, capable neither of giving nor accepting trust. Sargent's writing here is as sensitive as earlier it was heavy-handed. Each clone develops into a real and distinctive character, all struggling towards maturity against massive odds. Yet for me, they are all upstaged by a comparatively minor character who is elevated, close to the end, from an empty-headed dilettante into a compassionate person very aware of her limited abilities, yet able to maintain a pride and dignity of her own. It is a wonderful, moving piece of characterisation, achieved in little more than a page. For this alone, I can forgive the novel many of its earlier faults.

Cloned Lives, then, is a flawed, uneven novel, uncertain of its direction. At the outset, seemingly an exercise in dramatised speculation, ultimately ending on an ambiguous suggestion of racial destiny replete with Christian symbolism. And in between, some excellent work bearing on alienation in society, more than enough to convince me that with more discipline, with a clearer idea of what she wants to say, the pen of Pamela Sargent will yet bring forth masterpieces.

Chris Morgan & David Langford -- *FACTS AND FALLACIES: A BOOK OF DEFINITIVE MISTAKES AND MISGUIDED PREDICTIONS*
(Webb & Bower, 176pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Compendiums are always fun to poke around in, and this one is no exception. It concentrates not on the customary list of obscure and esoteric facts with

which to baffle the incredulous but on the gaffes committed by those who should have known better, with its entries grouped under various thematic headings -- from The Arts to Inventions, Biology to Warfare, The Future to Politics... there are twenty-five such chapters in all. These entries range from the familiar, such as Simon Newcomb's 1902 prediction that heavier-than-air flight was impossible and Bishop Usher's seventeenth century calculation that the world was created (as confirmed by the Bible) on 21 October 4004 BC; through the less well-known or forgotten, such as Aristotle's remark that birds never urinate because they convert all their superfluous water into feathers and John Middleton Murray's gloomy 1933 observation "that the Socialist movement in Western Europe has failed" (well, he could still be right, at least as far as modern Britain is concerned); to the downright ridiculous or lunatic, such as Trofim Lysenko's report that his biological theories must be sound because they had Stalin's support and a Tory woman councillor's comment that but for the grace of God all the whites would be black as well (to which the authors add: "Readers responding to the above with a healthy surge of nausea should know that they are not alone"). The text which links the quotes together is in general witty and sharp, cast in a style which I'd swear is unmistakably Langfordian; although I'm told that it is in fact a genuine collaboration between them both, with Morgan having apparently done the majority of the research. But no matter: *Facts And Fallacies* is an erudite and entertaining work, and one to be recommended.

Terry Carr & Martin Harry Greenberg (Eds.) -- A TREASURY OF MODERN FANTASY
(Avon, 588pp large format, \$8.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

"This anthology," say the editors in their introduction, "was created to fill an astonishing gap in fantasy book publishing. While there have been numerous anthologies of fantasy stories, many of them excellent, until now no one has made the effort to gather together in one volume a selection of the finest stories that have been published since the first all-fantasy magazine was born." Which more or less gives the game away, particularly as they then go on to state that, "There are no stories here from books, 'slick' magazines, literary reviews or any source other than the central genre publications"; in concentrating solely on the latter, the scope of the book has been so limited as to render the title rather a misnomer -- an anthology of 'modern' fantasy stories which includes nothing by Borges? -- and to make the editors' subsequent claims for the 'development' of fantasy fostered by the early pulp magazines highly dubious: for a genre literature, after all, tends to become isolated from the main literary currents of the world outside and hence assumes a rather backward-looking tone. Bearing such a cavil in mind, however, we do get a very wide and varied selection of such material, some of it -- by such as Lovecraft, Merritt, Bloch and Leiber -- overly familiar and available elsewhere, but some of it surprisingly neglected -- Shirley Jackson's 'One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts', for example, or Avram Davidson's 'The Montavarde Camera', John Collier's 'Man Overboard' and Michael Bishop's 'Within The Walls Of Tyre' -- and fully worthy of reprinting. Not to mention the surprising number of stories from writers more known for their SF -- Sturgeon, Kuttner, Russell, Heinlein, Blish, Farmer -- many of them taken from the pages of John W Campbell's *Unknown*; reading them, one wonders how their later careers might have turned out had wartime paper shortages not forced the magazine's demise. But yes, as an introduction to its subject, this volume strikes me, overall, as one that can be recommended.

Giffler melted.

His body deliquesced. It oozed. His head flowed and collapsed and sloughed. Still upright, he melted and shrank and collapsed, his body shimmered like a blood-drenched jelly. He shrank and oozed and formed a contracting pool of scum on the yard stones...

A robot vacuum cleaner and scrubber darted out on rubber wheels and began to suck and clean the spot where Giffler had died

SO WHAT
IS IT
THIS
TIME?



I AM NOW
A MEMBER
OF THE
CHISWICK AND
SOUTH EALING
MINUTEMEN



WHEN THE
FLYING SAUCERS
START LANDING
WE SHALL BE
READY



AT A
MINUTE'S
NOTICE
WE SHALL
TAKE TO
THE HILLS,
THE SEWERS,
AND THE
SUBURBS!



THERE TO
MOUNT A
CAMPAIGN OF
RESISTANCE
AND SUBVERSION
THAT WILL SWEEP
AWAY THE VILE
ALIEN INVADER!



WE SHALL
DRIVE THEM
BACK STEP
BY STEP
UNTIL
THE EARTH
IS CLEAN
AGAIN!



THE PRESERVATION
OF LIBERTY
DEMANDS
EXTREME
MEASURES!



THEY ARE
COMING
SOON!



BE PREPARED!

GET
READY!

I THINK
YOU'RE
NUTS



EVERYBODY
KNOWS THE
FLYING SAUCER
PEOPLE ARE
THE GOOD
GUYS

DAMNATION



I'VE BEEN
WATCHING
THE WRONG
FILM
AGAIN

LETTERS

SF'S INFERIORITY COMPLEX

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There is a disturbing note of apology, on behalf of science fiction as a literary form, running through the articles and reviews, culminating in Paul Kincaid's remark that he had always argued that science fiction need not necessarily be devoid of literary merit. Aldous Huxley and George Orwell would have been glad to hear such a pronouncement.

Why this inferiority complex? Writers like Le Guin, Cowper and Vonnegut do not need us to apologise on their behalf. It is acceptable to argue that a high per centage of what is published under the all-embracing heading of SF is not recognised as being serious literature -- but this can be said of all categories of writing. A recently published 'guide to the world of fiction' entitled *Novels And Novelists* stated that writers like Brian Aldiss have played 'leading roles in raising science fiction to the level of a serious literary form.' I prefer this judgement from an independent source; i.e. SF is already there.

The negative viewpoint seems to warrant print space these days. Personally, I would rather look at what is good in science fiction than continually point to what is bad.

"TOWARDS A CRITICAL STANDARD"

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So you've come the full circle back towards 'the elements of narrative fiction' as, in truth, it was inevitable that you should, since even a casually critical glance over the genre reveals how much it owes to other literary forms. (Pre-literary forms, too: heaven knows how many so-called 'modern' SF novels are based on ancient heroic epic poems and sagas.)

The great chance that the genre has for future development is going to be the manner in which the rest of literature absorbs what have been until now SF trappings, and since this process has been underway since the 'invention' of the SF genre and is likely to accelerate as the 'science' part of the title becomes commonplace, then we can only criticise the genre in terms of the whole of literature. Obvious really -- unless you read nothing but SF. Which is not to say that 'Towards A Critical Standard' wasn't a worthwhile effort. It was, and is, part of a continuing debate; the difficulty is going to be maintaining any kind of momentum since I feel that by its very nature such a debate is bound to run out of steam -- or whatever more modern means of propulsion you might choose -- and the massive, indifferent weight of pop culture publishing will prevail. We can but try. The nerd barrier can be broken, as is demonstrated by the success of *Shogun* and *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* -- both of which have had T.V. versions which were true to the original novels (though I reserve judgement on the American T.V. production of *Shogun*), but whether the subtleties of SF can survive the wholesale adoption (by T.V. and films) of the space opera remains to be seen

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So now 'Towards A Critical Standard' is complete, and forms a good bedrock basis for criticism. I must say that for me it had the effect of crystallising (and expanding) the method I try to employ in my own reviews. Any standard should be able to evaluate such diversities as, say, Dos-toievsky, Le Guin, Iris Murdoch, John Norman and Barbara Cartland; and I think Muir's categories might just cope.

Still, it is only a basis: I would like to see a standard that takes into account certain novels that break all the rules and still end up as good books. Criticism is to some degree a branch of pathology; the whole of a book is often greater than the sum of its autopsied parts.

And that, of course, while analysing the divisions of literature, leaves untouched the whole question of what books are 'for'; and why anyone in their right mind should want to read 200-odd pages of total falsehood. A fiction is a lie: there is the paradox that a writer is a person who can only tell the truth by telling lies.

As a subpoint: does this mean that in future *Vector* might be reviewing books other than those published with the labels of SF and fantasy?

Still on criticism, and David Shotton's point about slating any kind of serial or series: I think the main requirement is that (however many volumes it runs to) the sequence should have been conceived as a whole. There are obviously books that grow organically from the author's previous works, like Eddison's *Zimiamvian* fantasies and Donaldson's new *Covenant* trilogy, but this is still legitimate. The objection is to interminable commercial follow-ups cashing in on the success of a first work -- the *Dune* books, or the McCaffrey dragons, for example which were quite tolerable on their first appearance, but have since been diluted down to total bullshit. Commercialism isn't a bad touchstone for hackwork.

Speaking of hackwork, I note that a certain Mr T Wogan has got his fangs into Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* and the repeats of *Blake's 7*. Is nothing sacred?

Joseph Nicholas
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Good ish of *Vector*, boss, but the only comment I feel immediately moved to make about it concerns David Shotton's letter, in which he seems to fall into much the same trap as James Miller: trying to apply my comments to the readers rather than letting them stand solely for the novels and stories. I wasn't advocating

anything like a 'party line' which had to be followed by each and every reader if they wished to be accepted as an equal in some social grouping or other, merely (!) pointing out what seemed to me to be the most viable and most interesting of the trends apparent in current SF. And, for what it's worth, I happen to find a book that's a "nice easy read" and nothing else pretty tedious as well, because when I sit down to read a book I want to find the author making demands on me, actively inviting my attention and participation rather than simply boring me into a semi-comatose acceptance of his stuff, mainlining it straight into my thalamus without pause for thought. If I wanted that sort of passive, escapist entertainment, I'd watch television.

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The fourth part of your editorial in *Vector* 102 summed up your arguments in the other three parts nicely.

However, I would disagree with the contention of step five, that the work should be compared with all works.

Okay, I agree that the critic has to make his judgement

of the 'feel' of a book by comparison with something, but surely, however you look at it, that comparison must be made with a book or books of the same type (i.e. step four). You go on to say, in an aside, that you've had letters against this idea before, and that anyone who says that you can't compare x with y has already made a rudimentary comparison to know that you 'can't' compare them. This sounds very dodgy to me. I mean, any biologist will tell you that you can compare a man and a tree at molecular level, but this isn't much good to someone who's trying to spend all his resources to build a raft. Then you go on to say that such comparisons, when made by a critic, need never be revealed, as long as the critic knows that he's made them. If comparisons have to be made in the course of crafting a review, whether or not with a comparable book, then the critic is being dishonest, or at least unfair to his readers, to merely say something along the lines of "I've made my comparisons, I know my conclusions are correct" without revealing the comparisons so that

the reader can judge for himself. And if the critic finds another way to explain his unstated comparisons, surely this other way could have been found without going the long way round through secret standards!

But to return to the point of whether or not it is possible to compare 'non-comparable' books, you say that there is always a way to compare such books, even if the ability to do so is beyond some people. This may be true. But is it not also true that such comparisons would be forced and unrealistic in the extreme, and so worse than useless to the reader of the review? Unless, of course, the comparisons were left unstated, in which case my criticism above applies...

I'm afraid that I think Mary Gentle is being too pessimistic in her dread of the post-literate society. There is always a nucleus of people to whom reading is important. I, personally, have met people who are always reading, and people who claim never to read. In many cases this is a result of being brought up in an environment where reading (or not) is the norm. From this it is easy to see that the post-literate society is easily avoided by simply teaching your children (if you have any) to read: not just 'A B C', but really read. By example and by training, they will come to realise that they can get more from a book than they ever could from the one-eyed monster in the corner. But the onus is on us as parents (those of us who are) to show the next generation.

And surely, anything that uses the major themes of SF as a large part of its basic structure is SF, whether it be books, paperweights, or toilet-paper.

** Actually, Jon, I don't think we have much of a disagreement here. I agree absolutely that a comparison may be a waste of time -- for example, when a book quite obviously doesn't match up to the standards it sets itself, or is quite obviously worse than other, very similar books. Then step five (and even step four) might become irrelevant and unnecessary. This is explained in more depth in 'Part II' (*Vector* 100). I do think it essential to have step five available, because there is going to be the odd book for which it is required -- *The Dispossessed*, for example, or *Shikasta*; the few very good ones. Also, the comparison may be made very quickly by the critic, may, indeed, be made half-consciously. The point is that the 'standard' is based on comparatives, not on absolutes, and the critic should be aware of this. As for 'unstated comparisons', I mean only that there is no need to spell out the details at tedious length. Naturally sufficient should be said to demonstrate that the critic is not talking through the back of his head, that he has reasons for saying what he does.

WHITHER THE WRITTEN WORD?

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The written/spoken word has been the primary form of communication for a long time and for a simple reason. Within the schematic of a language the meaning/implication of a word is fixed. It ought to indicate an approximately equivalent object/emotion/reaction/concept to everyone using the word within that language. So far the word is the best shorthand we have discovered for the transfer of information from one mind to another, but it is not the only means and its limitations are implicit in the necessity for a fixed construct within which it functions.

Take an event depicted in three different artistic forms. The unsuccessful assault upon Moscow by Napoleon is shown in *War And Peace* (book), *The Retreat From Moscow* (painting), and *The 1812 Overture* (music). The most comprehensive portrayal is in the book, yet more humans on this planet cannot read than can. Tolstoy is a closed book (sorry!) to them. The painting has a much more immediate emotional impact with its men suffering in the snow. Yet a

deal of background cultural information is required to identify the specific event; how much would it mean to a Cambodian? The emotional impact of *The 1812 Overture* transcends most cultural boundaries, yet its picture of the event requires still more outside cultural background to complete. These three works are all of acknowledged genius, portraying the same event, and while they all have limitations I suggest that it is the written word that will collapse first under the pressure of cultural difference.

Your question as to where the line is drawn between *Vector* and *Matrix*: the *Vector* logo gives the answer, proclaiming itself 'The Critical Journal of the BSFA'. This implies a critical approach to any piece -- thoughtful, reasoned, distant, academic, unemotional. While I have tried to maintain such a stance while reviewing films it is not entirely possible, in that you cannot easily go back over sections of a film that you do not understand in the way that you can for a book. Not only that, but films are not designed to be seen too many times in a short period. So I would say that *Vector* is not the most appropriate forum for the discussion of specific contemporary films or T.V. simply because the requirements of a valid critique must, of necessity, be absent. The wider availability of video recorders may, of course, radically alter this situation.

** I don't think you're being quite rigorous in your argument about the collapse of the written word, Martyn, starting with the 'written/spoken' word in your first paragraph, and ending with only the written word in your second. To allow the spoken word into your argument would overcome the problem of the people who can't read; they would certainly be able to hear. However, cultural differences would still remain to cloud comprehension, and this does not refer solely to different languages. I would suggest, however, that the problem of conveying meaning in the picture and the piece of music is infinitely greater. Particularly, neither can be seen to refer to the same event as the novel without their titles -- which are, of course, in words. If words are more limited, it is only because they are capable of much greater precision, and only when considering words individually. In combination, words are wider ranging, yet still precise. (As long as you use them properly, of course...)

IN DEFENCE OF JOAN VINGE

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I'll grant you from the start that I rather like and enjoy without qualms escapist US SF... or at least, what I perceive as quality among that: Varley, and not Gordon Dickson. I am aware of some of the shortcomings of the trend in American SF, but I think that some of your contributors and letter writers are pushing it a bit too far concerning Joan Vinge. John

Hobson's review of *The Outcasts Of Heaven Belt* strikes me as particularly biased. To see it as an example of the absorption of feminism by 'shoddy commercialism of the Del Rey axis' is unfair, if not downright stupid: why shouldn't a woman write that sort of story if she so chooses, and why because she's a woman should one assume that feminism has to be mentioned? It does play a role in *Outcasts*, but it is a minor one. Vinge has addressed women's issues more directly in a story like 'Phoenix And The Ashes' (in *Millennial Women/The Eye Of The Heron*) but I think it has always been a side-issue in her work.

Neither is the plot of the book that important: of course there is a fair amount of space-chasing, but what matters here is the interaction that is brought about, in the course of the story, between various characters from four different cultures. And I happen to think that this aspect of the novel is quite successful -- and if he thinks that some of the characterisation, or some of the history of Heaven Belt, remains sketchy, Hobson should keep in mind

that the length of this novel is quite modest, by today's American standards.

Funniest of the affair is that Hobson falls flat on his face with his conclusion. How very British of him to make this comment about us being able to understand the abstract notion of time only by breaking it down into chunks -- 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day. Of course, of course; just as we have to get a grip on the abstract notion of 'length' by breaking it down into chunks -- 3 feet in a yard, 12 inches in a foot, and how many feet in a mile? The mind boggles! Having lived all my life with the metric system, I can assure him I never had any difficulty with decimal chunks -- centimetres, decimetres, and so on. So why shouldn't people who live in space, with no notion of 'day', measure time in arbitrary chunks, decimal chunks for convenience? You have to admit that metric measurements are a definite help when it comes to doing science, and the reason American 'hard science' writers so frequently make use of it is probably to convey a feeling of a technologised future. But metric time would perfectly fit a space colony environment.

Now, of course, the whole matter gets sort of ugly when you come to the comments on the persons of Frenkel and Vinge, the worst of them featured in Joseph Nicholas's letter. He retreats somewhat in *Matrix* (it was a bit ludicrous to accuse of furthering his career someone who has been sacked, wasn't it?), but the gist of it remains. Frenkel claims to have known Vinge as a person because of Vinge as a writer, not the other way round, and publication dates make him very credible. As for pushing *The Snow Queen* -- well, *Timescape* got exactly the same treatment, from what I've heard. So should Pocket Books be forgiven and granted a place in the Kingdom, because the book they were pushing was pure of heart, and not a work of the Evil One, for ever and ever, amen? I happen to think *Timescape* was the better novel, and I'm glad it won, but you can't knock Dell on that account.

Let me finally add that if I allow 'escapist' SF to occupy my reading time (some of it), I also appreciate criticism and reviewing as practised in the BSFA publications, and that I do enjoy Joseph Nicholas's butcherings of Heinlein and his kind. I don't always agree with everything he says, but *Vector* and *Paperback Inferno* are some of the places where I look for the "full frontal intellectual attack" mentioned by one of your letter writers. And particularly I found your series "Towards A Critical Standard" engrossing and thought-provoking. I have a feeling I learned from it (which may show just how little I know).

** We can knock Dell on that account, and Pocket Books (or Timescape, as it now is) too. I don't think that the soliciting of votes has any place in the Nebula Award, although the way the award is run by SFWA lends itself admirably to such practices. I will be very interested in any evidence of such vote-begging that anyone can provide me with...

GOT DEM OLE PUNK SF BLUES

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>John A Hobson 328 Upland Road East Dulwich London, SE22 0DP</p> | <p>In his letter in <i>Vector</i> 102 concerning my Standpoint article "Punk SF", Steve Crouch accuses me of showing a "total lack of thought on the subject" of publishing a viable SF-oriented magazine in the U.K. In the course of a frequently self-contradictory letter he then reveals his own thought on the subject by proposing that someone revives the mixed-genre short story magazine such as <i>Argosy</i> and <i>The Passing Show</i> which had entered their death throes after World War One!</p> |
|--|---|

Obviously, Standpoint has a space limit which mitigates against greater elaboration; however, to put Mr Crouch's mind at rest, my suggestions were based on practical experience gained when I tried to turn a punk fanzine, with a 2,000

plus circulation, into a semi-pro affair. Lack of lolly killed the magazine but not the ideas gained in how to promote a magazine with minimal resources and outside the normal distribution channels. By the way, Rough Trade will now distribute magazines; the days of record shops selling just records has passed.

What any new SF magazine needs is an identifiable image that will make people hunt for a copy. Remember that the Sex Pistols and *New Worlds* created their market, and sitting on one's posterior saying that a market doesn't exist is self-defeatist.

That means that a new magazine goes out and creates its market by exploiting the electric media. Why can't a magazine achieve maximum coverage at minimal expense? 'It hasn't been done' doesn't mean it cannot! Just look at the *Face*, a clothes/pop/films oriented magazine that was launched one year back to cries of derision from the conventional music press and now has a circulation of 60,000 and is leader of the Blitz Kid movement.

Any new SF mag will not crawl beyond the bar room while complacent negativism rules -- or does the thought of being positive shake the cosy catastrophe lives that so many people lead?

** And in Standpoint, Dave Langford tells us about another SF outlet -- not quite a magazine, and not what John Hobson envisages, but an outlet nonetheless.

THE 'RELEVANCE' OF 'ART'

Paul Baxter
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I cannot agree completely with either Andrew Sutherland's letter or the comment following it in *Vector* 102. Clearly the statement that "literature becomes relevant at the expense of its art" is absurd, since this implies that it should be irrelevant, i.e. that it should exist in a void with no relation to society as a whole or its individuals.

In fact the necessity of relevance in literature is illustrated by the lasting success of the works of Shakespeare, Austen and Dickens which are relevant to the human condition. These authors certainly have something to say about the societies in which they lived, and while the context may have changed, their observations are still relevant today because of the basic immutability of human nature. A classic example of a novel that was most definitely aimed at the society of the author's time is Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The satire may have been intended to expose the evils of 18th Century society, but it is still, unfortunately, relevant today.

It is quite correct, therefore, that great literature lasts while lesser works are soon forgotten, but this is precisely because of their relevance to human society -- not because the authors ignored the world around them.

** What I wish is, I wish people would learn to read. Not just 'A B C', but really read -- to steal a phrase. Did Paul not read the first paragraph of the three forming my reply to Andrew Sutherland? Did he not read there certain words to the effect that Shakespeare, Austen and Dickens are relevant to the human condition? Probably he did, and still went on to confuse the human condition with human society, using the two terms interchangeably in his letter above. Good grief! The two are distinct and very different. Human society consists of people in the mass and the temporary, transient rules of behaviour they make up in order to live together. It changes from time to time and from place to place. The human condition is a somewhat abstract concept, but it applies to people individually and changes not. The 'relevance' of which I spoke last

issue (with quotes, note; then as now) applies to the society not the individual, and thus Paul's deduction that I meant that literature should have no relation to individuals is false. The greatness of literature lies precisely in its meaning to individuals, its meaning for individuals.

Andrew Sutherland
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You are being extraordinarily naive if you honestly believe that the works of Dickens, Austen and Shakespeare have no relevance in our society today. Superficially there is no connexion, but we can only appreciate these works if their themes are connected with the lives that we lead. The themes of the classics of literature ensure that they will be read as long as the nature of human society remains unchanged and the reader bears in mind the main point of my letter, the need to examine fiction from the viewpoint of the time in which it was written. When fiction does lose its relevance the reader's reaction to it changes. An excellent example of this is 18th and 19th Century satire, which loses much of its impact unless the society which it concerned is studied. To the modern reader, Hogg's *Confessions Of A Justified Sinner* or Burns's *Holy Willie's Prayer* are seen as humorous, lightweight works rather than as biting attacks on antinomianism, unless a study of Calvinism is made. Nevertheless, nobody would doubt that these works are milestones of Scottish literature. SF has always exhibited several of the characteristics of satire, including the tendency to become quickly obsolete in a rapidly changing field.

When I say that "all fiction is temporary, retaining its effect only until its style becomes archaic" I believe that I am justified. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare's plays do, on the surface, lose much of their effect when the reader has to carefully translate the text into English he can understand. The loathing of Shakespeare's work that most school children have before studying it in detail is an excellent example of the 'generation gap' I was writing about. Like all such judgements, it is based on prejudice, and the need to remove such prejudice formed the backbone of my letter. Only when the reader manages to lay preconceptions aside and gets down to work does the power of Shakespeare's drama become apparent, but to fully understand every nuance of the text, the reader would have to be a contemporary of Shakespeare or an extremely proficient historian. Social mores change, which is why much old drama now seems impenetrable and obscure.

In conclusion, I do not believe that 'literature' can be appreciated if it does not strike a chord within the reader, and that chord will not be struck if the themes, characters and ideas contained within the work are not relevant to the reader's life.

** Well how about that! Andrew and I actually are in agreement with each other after all; his conclusion is spot on. I suspect we disagree about the role played by 'society' and the 'human condition' in the reader's life -- or possibly only about the definitions of those terms. (I will say that what Andrew states was the backbone of his first letter (the need to remove the generation gap) was not at all apparent to me. I didn't read it that way originally, and can only read it that way now by paying close attention and not taking the obvious route. Got to be careful with words, boss; they are precise, but they are two-edged too.)

VARIOUS GNOATS

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Martyn Taylor's article on "SF On U.K. Television" suffers badly from a muddled first two pages. "Pop music... is the most significant cultural force of the century" -- dear me! What about nationalism? I don't think pop music has caused any wars yet. We read about the members of the

'elite' who run the TV companies. Does Martyn Taylor actually know who runs the BBC/ITV? If he doesn't he can't "just regard the situation as fact". What does the paragraph on Oxbridge mean? Later we read that "the name of the game is cultural and intellectual imperialism" and that "if he were alive today Karl Marx might well change his mind and describe television, not religion, as the opium of the people". Indeed. Come on -- the first two pages of the article are such poorly argued mumbo-jumbo that they should have been edited out. The rest of the piece was more enjoyable though still at times confusingly written and pretentious. I'm surprised that *The Prisoner* wasn't examined at all -- a more New Wave SF TV series has yet to be screened.

Mary Gentle brings up the question of 'SF as literature' yet again. The problem with any discussion of this is that it rapidly degenerates into promotion/defence of one's personal favourites. Thus while I would put forward Disch's *334* rather than Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* as a perfect example of an SF novel with 'literary qualities' that's only my personal preference. Who's to say (though I don't) that the new Heinlein doesn't qualify as 'SF as literature'? No doubt to some people it does.

Jon Wallace writes that "everybody he's talked to has noticed that books are getting worse. Even escapism ain't what it used to be". Perhaps it's not the books that are getting worse but Jon and his friends who are getting jaded through reading too much SF. How anyone can read the stuff book in, book out is beyond me. After two, or at best three, on the trot I find myself having to read something different. Sometimes it takes weeks to whip up the enthusiasm again. I read perhaps two or three SF books per month on average. Is this a low rate?

With the post-*Star Wars* deluge of SF publishing now drying up at an apparently alarming rate, we must hope that publishers will be far more selective in their output in terms of quality. However, there are signs already that this hope is in vain -- the big name authors continue to be published but the rest appears to consist of mindless action novels: the Gor books, Dumarest, the Rim series, and my favourite recent title *The Grotto Of The Formigans*. Wow! Even established authors seem to have had difficulties recently both in conception and conviction. Witness *Gateway II*, *Ringworld II*, *Titan II* etc. Upcoming are *Titan III*, *Lord Valentine II*, *Riverworld V & VI* and who knows what else -- Dune n?

I'm glad to see that *Focus* is defunct -- the actual writing side of SF holds little interest for me and 'fan fiction' is usually so awful it's embarrassing to read. Six *Vectors* a year makes membership even better value. So to close: I hope this loc has been of at least passing interest -- at least it puts the lie to Iain Byers.

** "Who's to say that the new Heinlein doesn't qualify as 'SF as literature'?"
 ** Anyone who writes in with a justification based on the renowned 'critical standard' -- that's who! (And not just Heinlein...) Glad to see *Focus* gone, eh? I hope you haven't chucked this issue of *Vector* into the bin, then, Adrian.

SF ON U.K. TV

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Liked the Martyn Taylor overview of British TV SF, although I'm sure it will provoke a lot of response along the lines of: "But he never even mentioned..." and then pencil in *Out Of The Unknown*, *The Adventures Of Don Quick*, *The Stone Tape*, or whatever; but then, Martyn was the first to point out that his list wasn't definitive. The problem is that if you start trying to dig out good examples of TV SF to put the dross into some

kind of context, you're going to have to go pretty deep. And then you have to keep your eyes open for the one-off or the short-run series; the long-running series which gets the peak time slot -- and therefore does more to shape the public's impression of what SF is all about -- is the work not so much of individual talents as of the gargantuan production machine which has to be set in motion in order to fill twenty-six hours or so of screen time with people walking about and talking. In short, it's hackwork, or at least the media equivalent of it. Most TV SF is junk because most TV is junk.

But much as I like the article, I can't help doubting the accuracy of Martyn's analysis of British TV as being shot through with the values of an Oxbridge mafia. The situation is a bit more complex; to begin with, there are real distinctions between the Independent companies and the BBC. Back in the days when I worked for an ITV station I found myself on more than one occasion at parties in London where most of the other guests were BBC staffers; I found myself being condescended to, patronised, and envied for my supposedly fabulous salary. To these people, ITV was no more than a vulgar and more extravagant extension of tin pan alley, whilst looking at it from the other side the BBC appeared as a monstrous bureaucracy groaning under the weight of all its administrators.

Both wild exaggerations, both with a grain of truth. My own suspicion is that the bureaucracy theory can be used to explain the BBC's irrational digging-in over *The War Game* -- it's a hot potato which gets handed on down the dynasties of the Directorates, and whilst any original and unofficial warning-off from above may now be old and stale, no-one wants to take responsibility for it.

Maybe the BBC's bureaucrats do run to the more traditionalist and conservative type, but it would be wrong to extend that assumption to the programme-makers. How often have we heard the accusation that programming -- for example in current affairs and in drama -- has a left-wing bias? The output that we get is the result of a continuing tension between these two groups. In the case of the independents the division of interests is even more pronounced, with the franchise-granting body of the IBA laying down restrictions and quotas to make sure the money-hungry wide boys don't overstep the mark. Because if they were allowed to, you could forget current affairs, you could forget children's programmes, you could forget the arts, you could forget local interest... and you could damn well forget any kind of SF that offered more than the kind of feeble plots and heavy reliance on large-breasted women to carry interest that you get in *Buck Rogers*. In fact, since there's nothing in the IBA's requirements to say that SF is any kind of priority for a commercial company, you might as well forget it anyway.

My money's on the BBC -- but not very much of it, and I'm not holding my breath. Just think what *Hitch-Hiker's Guide* might have been like if it didn't have the success of the radio series to carry it more or less intact past the programme committees.

And when did written SF ever get produced by a committee? (Well, Perry Rhodan springs to mind.)

EASY READER

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Like David Shotton, I too occasionally make a conscious decision to have a 'nice easy read' -- say, the latest *Dunarest* offering (surely the Cyclan base isn't Old Earth!) or some P J Farmer, among others too numerous.... Surprisingly it is still a conscious decision -- for there are many worthwhile tomes to spend time on in lieu -- whereas sitting in front of

a Cyclopean Cathode is the inverse: the conscious decision is not to watch. And even a 'nice easy read' is greatly preferable to 90% of the drivel on the box. I might add, for which I'm grateful. Imagine, if you will, a land where TV is absolutely rivetting, really superior stuff, moving, pertinent, colourful -- all things to all men: what a hell! No incentive whatsoever to read, to do much at all. Intellect not starved, granted, but... Oh, please, TV programmers, keep up the good work, keep the standard as it is so we don't become drawn into the fold!

CRITICS' PRIZES

Cy Chauvin There is too much emphasis on good and bad in *Vector* 101.
14248 Wilfred C S Lewis wrote: "The human mind is generally far more eager
Detroit to praise and dispraise than to describe and define. It wants
Mich. 48213 to make every distinction a distinction of value; hence those
U S A fatal critics who can never point out the differing quality of
 two poets without putting them in an order of preference as if
they were candidates for a prize." I think Lewis is right, and *Vector's*
critics should be cautious they don't fall into this trap.

** I don't think that the point is strictly applicable to *Vector* under my
** editorship. There haven't been any of the 'compare and contrast' type
of articles or reviews in which two works, or two writers, are - er -
compared and contrasted. The articles have generally been wider in
scope, and the reviews, even when two or more books are reviewed together,
have generally considered only one book at a time. Such direct comparisons
are in the minds of Joseph and I for the review column, and then I
think Cy has a good point.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM...

Michael Bond, who considers that commercial pressures from the marketers of
SF and from the entrenched writers of SF would prevent any
reintegration with the mainstream. "Still, it was a nice dream."
Paul Dembina, who really only wanted a couple of blank pages replacing in his
Vector 102, but said that he thought author interviews and in-
depth articles were a bit thin on the ground. Good news, Paul:
an interview with Frank Herbert is coming up.
J T Miller, who would appear not to like the tendency he can see of the BSFA
becoming a political debating society, with authors being assigned
to right (Heinlein, Asimov) and left (Brunner, Moorcock, Priest)
wings, with or without their consent.
A D Wallace, who thought that Joseph Nicholas (in *Vector* 101) neglected the
reader as critic.

EDITORIAL (continued from p.4)

media SF (see Martyn Taylor's article in issue 102) but I am mainly concerned
with written SF -- the novels, short stories and their creators, and, to a
lesser extent, the increasing number of books about (rather than of) SF in all
its forms. (An interesting side effect is that *Vector* is more likely to review
a book about SF book covers than the covers themselves!) For SF news and
reviews of SF other than the written word *Matrix* is the place. This is what
has, more or less, evolved naturally, but it's useful to see it written down.
It also provides the opportunity for you to comment.

So there it was -- the first year. What lies ahead? Oh, more of the same,
only different...

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