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The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

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It is not often that I read an article which affects the way I view the publishing industry and science fiction publishers in particular. But, such an article arrived through the post earlier this month. As I believe it deserves special coverage I have taken the unusual step of publishing it as a 'Guest Editorial'.

Hype Anxiety

Steve Gallagher

Yesterday, I bought a book.

For some time now - years, even - I've been intending to read Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, but I never got around to it. The reasons are part laziness, and part fear; ever since I came across the classic story Second Variety in the Hamlyn Best Science Fiction Stories collection, I've been aware of Dick as a quality writer. And Quality Writers have always scared me a little, perhaps because I don't have enough confidence in my own credentials as a Quality Reader; I seem to hang back from the George Orwells and the John Steinbecks like a kid shying away from the deep-end diving board, too nervous to take the plunge even though I know from limited experience that I'll enjoy it.

This time, however, it was different. Ridley Scott gave me a push.

I know that if I see the movie version first, I'll have lost forever my chances of getting an untainted and subjective experience out of the novel. Hence the scramble... and a pretty fruitless one it turned out to be, as it seemed that new copies of Androids had instantly acquired the scarcity of rocking-horse shit. It was listed, all right - Panther SF, 75p - but in every bookshop and on every convention stand that I checked I had the same kind of

luck, i.e. none.

But yesterday, the search was over. Except that I didn't get exactly what I wanted; instead, I got a book called Blade Runner (TM).

It's a garish-looking piece of work with a picture of Harrison Ford on the cover and a set of cast and production credits on the back. We're spared the ultimate indignity of a sheaf of picture-pages stuck in the middle of the text - they're probably saving those for the fotonovel - but there's a copy line that goes, "Through the mean streets of a grim 21st Century megalopolis, bounty hunter Rick Deckard stalked, searching out the renegade replicants who were his prey..." The tacky feel extends to the actual production of the book; the paper seems to be even cheaper than is usual, and at a guess I'd say that the typesetting has been copied complete from an earlier edition with a slightly different page-format. Pick up a copy and see if you don't agree - there seems to be something subtly wrong in the way that it sits on the page, and the typeface of the text doesn't match that of the publishers' material at the beginning and end of the book.

Picky, I can hear you saying. Anybody who underestimates the ability of
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Once more into the editorial breach, issue number 3 on the GDR scale. I must admit that I often feel a spent force after each issue but the feeling does not last long the steady trickle of letters normally cajoles some enthusiasm back into my system. No rest this time though, from Vector I'm going to start pasting up the next BSFA bibliography. This one is on Keith Roberts and should be ready by the next mailing. I'll be sending out a flyer then. In progress are bibliographies on Mike Moorcock and James White. Both of these will be out early next year. If anyone is interested in doing one of the 15,000 (approx) articles on a British sf author send me a letter. Not that money is the be all and end all, but we do make a token payment.

Steve Gallagher with his various articles in BSFA publications hardly needs an introduction. His first novel, rather than novelisation, is due out soon.

ARTWORK

This issue's cover is by the Netherlands artist Eric Jong. Some of you might be more familiar with his proper name, Thys Fibbenlaist as he writes children's science fiction. The other artwork on pages 12 and 25 is by the old redoubtable, Alan Hunter.

Once again I'm afraid to say that the artwork file is empty. I would urge anyone who has hesitated about submitting artwork, to stop hesitating and do so. Any size or shape is acceptable as long as it is a black and white drawing.

Being a fairly enthusiastic photographer, more enthusiasm than talent unfortunately, it occured to me that Vector should consider publishing photographs. No not page 3 or your family snapshot but work that has an abstract feel to it. A simple test, to see if it is suitable, is to try and describe the photo. If you use the same words to describe the photo as you would science fiction (unusual, unfamiliar,



outlandish, odd fantastic) then it might fit. The photographs will have to be black and white prints, no larger than 8"x10". All of you who do your own developing and printing, or have access to the necessary facilities have a look through your files and see if you think anything would be suitable - don't be cautious, if in doubt send it! Photography is an artform afterall.

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If I was asked to name my favourite 19 science fiction authors I would unashamedly put Richard Cowper in the top 5. Thus, for me to comment on this article could get a bit syncopantic. So bear with me.

Richard Cowper has taken the brave and unusual step of writing an article on his own work. I find it brave because to analyse and rationalize what you have done is a tough form of self-analysis. From the fool of the article Richard is trying to exorcize Kinship, he will try hard and fight long, but The Spirit of Kinship is part and parcel of him, it will never totally disappear. And I, for one, am glad.

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This is rather an apt article to publish at this time as Clarke's sequel 2010: Odyssey Two will be published by Granada in November (288 pages, £7.95). Even after the 10 or so years that have elapsed since the film it still creates controversy. (At the last Vector pasting-up session Paul and I spent most of the weekend talking about it!) Peter Stockill, an ex-student of that renowned hotbed of sf, Keele University, has been foolish enough to allow us to publish his first article, the first of many I hope.

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Josephine Saxton's article was not originally intended for Into The Arena but when I read it, it fitted the bill so exactly it could go nowhere else. Read it and you will see what I mean.

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I had a letter from Chris Bailey asking how I chose the Vector's Choice. The choice is made by me from reading the reviews, it is not possible for me to read all the books mentioned. It's meant as a bit of fun, possibly it might encourage someone to read a book they might not normally. As Chris says, "it's an enjoyable game" and it should keep you amused now and then while you try and work out why I've gone for a certain book.

Apropos

'The White Bird of Kinship'

Richard Cowper

Setting out to write about something I have written myself is, for me, an entirely new experience. For the better part of a week I have been buzzing back and forth around the project and by now I am almost certain that I would be finding it a great deal easier simply to write another story in the series. For those unwritten stories are still there, lying like bright pebbles at the bottom of a lake. All that is required is for me to dive down and fish one up. Except that I have decided for better or worse that the series has ended. After all I might never rise to the surface again - a strange and rather disquieting thought which is by no means as fanciful as it may seem.

When, back in March 1974, I wrote the nouvelle called Piper at the Gates of Dawn I certainly did not see it as forming the opening chapter of a story sequence which would eventually clock in at close upon a quarter of a million words. Had I done so I would in all likelihood never have embarked upon it. Better than anyone I believed I was aware of my own limitations. To use an athletic analogy I saw myself as being by nature and temperament a sprinter - or, at most, a middle-distance man. The mere thought of entering myself for a marathon would have been tantamount to fastening a ball and chain about my pen. So far as I knew I was writing a short (or perhaps middle length) tale around the germinal notion which in my "Ideas" notebook featured as: 'The Story-Teller's Tale. Post-disaster story of an old man and a boy (apprentice?) who wander the countryside as latter-day equivalents of Mediaeval story-tellers. Tom, Tom the Piper's Son'. That note (inspired by who knows what?) had been jotted down in the summer of 1972. There it lay, all but forgotten, until some two years later a second idea floated into my mind and sent me back to the original one. This second stimulus was a very clear mental image of a boy lying wounded in the snow. The picture was in such sharp focus, so compelling, that somewhere in my subconscious the two notions fused together and I was off.

To say of a story that it "writes itself" is something only another writer will understand. To the uninitiated it may well conjure up an image of page following swiftly upon flowing page with scarcely a blot or correction to be seen anywhere. Possibly this does happen to some writers, but it has never happened to me. The original manuscript of Piper at the Gates of Dawn (I've just hunted it out to check) is a real mess, a true palimpsest if ever I saw one, with at least four differently coloured inks testifying to the innumerable re-draftings. Yet I still stand by my original assertion. The story did "write itself". I followed where it led and gradually the shape, the theme, the under-

6.

lying pattern of the narrative became clear to me. By the time I was a third of the way through I had realized that the child - the boy of my vision - was not wounded but dead, and from that moment on all the bits and pieces began to lock neatly into place.

Having finished the tale I was convinced that it would prove unpublishable except perhaps as forming part of a story collection. For one thing, by no stretch of my imagination could it be classed as science fiction. Maybe if the White Bird had turned out to be an alien space ship....? Thus I was both delighted and surprised when Piper at the Gates eventually found a home for itself in Ed Ferman's 'Fantasy and Science Fiction' (presumably as 'fantasy') and, a few weeks after it had appeared, letters began to arrive. One of the first of these asked me where 'The Book of Morfedd' and 'Orgen's Dream' had been published and whether they were still in print. This was a direct - if somewhat bewildering - reference to the prefatory note which, in an effort to distance the whole tale still further into the future, I had added to Piper. Those other 'stories' had been mentioned there as works in a so-called "Avian Apocrypha". They existed only as titles in my imagination. But the question set me wondering whether I might not find myself in a Borges-type situation in which those tales would have to exist in order for their ghosts to be exorcized. It was, I suppose, my first intimation of what I might be letting myself in for.

In 1976 Piper duly appeared in the collection entitled The Custodians and was singled out for notice by the critics. Not always with approval. An American reviewer writing in "Foundation" compared my collection unfavourably with one by Norman Spinrad and dismissed Piper succinctly as 'bored and sorcery'. This, fortunately, was exceptional. More letters arrived and several of them expressed the hope that I had written, or soon would write, another story like Piper. What my correspondents could not have known was that about a year earlier I had written two or three thousand words of just such a story and had then come to an abrupt full stop. The reason for my breaking off was not that I'd dried up or that my imagination had failed me but that I'd suddenly realized where it could all be leading to. Resolutely I had closed up that particular note-book and spent the next eight months working on the second volume of an autobiography.

It was the better part of two years before I got round to re-reading the description I had written of two fishermen dragging the water-logged corpse of a Kinsman aboard their boat. The action took place in the middle of the sea-channel which now occupied most of what had once been The County of Somerset and I had chosen to call the 'Somerset'. I remember being vaguely surprised to discover how vivid the incident still was in my mind's eye. I dug out the Ordnance Survey map on which I had diligently traced out the limits of the new coastline (c. AD 3000) and began calculating exactly where the cross-currents and tide-rips would form. It was all so damned real to me that it wasn't so much a question of imagining it as simply entering it. And that is precisely what I did. I set myself adrift once more on the Somerset in the year AD 3018 and discovered that Jane and her father and mother and Thomas of Norwich and Brother Francis and the Magpie and all the rest of them had been there waiting for me to tell their story. In its early draft the tale was called Castaway, but finally I settled on The Road to Corlay, half suspecting as I did so that one day I too would travel with Jane along that road to the Island of Brittany and learn what happened to her when she got there.

If all this sounds insufferably fey I'm sorry, because it's as close to the truth as I can get. Some writers really do have this sort of emotional relationship with their characters. It's the way we are made and the only way we can function properly as writers. It is also the reason why we are by nature constitutionally incapable of writing detective stories. What on earth we are doing swanning about in the hard-headed world of sf is something I shall never really understand.

During the writing of The Road to Corlay I learnt a lot about the creed of Kinship, but I was careful never to spell out exactly what it was. I allowed

myself allusions, hints, scraps of prophecy and, above all, the luxury of describing my characters' own attitudes towards it, because these were what most concerned me. Drafting a set of 'Commandments of Kinship' on the lines of Asimov's 'Laws of Robotics' would have been fatal. Not that I could have done it.

Nevertheless there was one moment in the book when I felt I had brushed against the essence of the mystery and - typically - it came through the experience of one of the characters - Brother Francis, (later to play a dominant role in *A Dream of Kinship*). Sent out by Archbishop Constant to track down the truth about the Boy Thomas, Francis encounters a woman who, as the twelve years old girl Katie, had once met the Boy on his way to York (and to martyrdom) some eighteen years previously. In answer to the priest's questions about Tom she tells him: "It was as though all the promise of life was twinkling in him like sunshine in a waterdrop... so bright and so clear was it that I knew it could not last... Even though I live for a thousand years I shall never meet another like him, for he took my heart from me and breathed his music into it and gave it back to me... Oh you, holy men, how can you ever, ever hope to understand? You come sniffing after him, poking and prying, and all the time Tom is everywhere about you, just as he always has been and always will be. He came to show us what we have it in ourselves to be, and you blind priests killed him because you could not see what we saw!"

Those words continue to haunt Francis right up to the moment when he experiences his own revelation and becomes a convert to Kinship. And they continue to haunt me too. 'What we have it in ourselves to be...' Time and time again I come homing back to that phrase, sensing that there, if anywhere, was the clue I sought. Elsewhere in the story I chose to call it "all the infinite possibilities lying within the grasp of the unshackled human spirit".

 Pan Science Fiction

**Richard
Cowper**

**The Twilight Of
Briareus**



 Pan Science Fiction

**Richard
Cowper**

**The Road To
Corlay**



If, as I was beginning to suspect, this was what the White Bird symbolized then it was surely a large enough theme to sustain any number of stories.

By the time I had written the last sentence of The Road to Corlay I knew that, sooner or later, there would have to be a sequel to it. By now the mists were starting to clear and in my mind's eye I had already begun to glimpse some of the shadowy outlines of the landscape which lay ahead. But instead of sitting down to write the sequel there and then I chose to break clean away and indulge myself with a satirical 'black comedy' on the lines of Clone which I called Profundis. This was by way of being pure relaxation. The intensity of involvement with my own characters that the 'Kinship' stories were demanding was altogether too exhausting. Having suffered drowning, near-rape, pursuit and finally a most painful death, I had surfaced from The Road to Corlay feeling like a wrung-out dishcloth. The knowledge that all these experiences were imaginary was no sort of consolation at all. Besides, by then I was pretty certain that there was worse to come.

In the autumn of 1979 I started work on the third story in the series and at once became aware of certain problems which hitherto I had either chosen to ignore completely or had simply discounted. The first was: How much background information is it necessary to incorporate into each successive story? Obviously the ideal to aim at was some sort of effective balance struck at the precise point where new readers would be sufficiently well-informed about what had happened in the previous stories to be able to read on with ease and pleasure, while those who had read the other tales would not be bored out of their minds by repetition of things they already knew. I began to see great virtue in the underrated talents of those Victorian magazine editors who had somehow contrived to compress a dozen previous instalments of, say, The Moonstone into a couple of meaty paragraphs, and for the first time in my life I found myself sighing for the lost liberty of the "Dear Reader..." aside. Those early passages in A Dream of Kinship in which I had to convey retrospective background information proved far and away the most difficult parts of the book to write. The only time I breathed at all freely was when I was able to get away with eavesdropping on a 'do-you-remember?' type of conversation between the characters.

The second problem was different and, unlike the first, it remained to torment me throughout the whole of the nine months it took me to complete the book. This particular difficulty can be condensed into one word - 'Time'. I knew before I started that the story was going to have to span a period of some eighteen or twenty years, from the birth of Jane's son Tom until he reached manhood, and I knew this was going to take place against a background in which I must somehow contrive to demonstrate what was happening to Kinship both as a religion and as a political force. Not only would Tom's childhood be shaped by these twin dramas but eventually he himself would come to play a leading part in them. Never before had I tackled a project of such daunting scope and I seriously doubted whether I could pull it off. But I knew I had to attempt it if only to discover what I could not do.

In the end I solved it (to my own satisfaction at least) by a sort of compromise I wrote that amounted to three inter-linked novellas. The first dealt with the Church's attempt to extirpate the heresy of Kinship and culminated in the sack of Corlay and Tom's birth: the second explored the economic/political/religious conflict as exemplified by what was happening in the First Kingdom (old Devon and Cornwall): the third focused upon Tom's struggle to come to terms with his own genius and with the dictates of his destiny. The threads by which I contrived to weave these three stories together were those characters who moved back and forth between one story and the next. The actual time span covered by direct narrative (i.e. the historical time occupied by each separate story) was approximately as follows - Tale I, one week: Tale II, less than three months: Tale III, about four months. But by the end of the book those of my original characters who were still alive were now eighteen years older than when the reader first met them. For my own part I felt about a hundred years older!

There is a word that might have been coined expressly to describe the type

Pan Science Fiction

Richard Cowper The Custodians



of enterprise I was engaged upon. I first came across it thirty five years ago when I was studying English Literature at university. The word is "heuristic" and it means roughly 'designed to enable one to find out for oneself'. Put another way I suppose it might be interpreted as 'going there in order to discover where you've been'. By the time I had reached the end of A Dream of Kinship I knew beyond all shadow of a doubt that it was through the character of Jane's son Tom - and only there - that I would discover for myself the ultimate truth about Kinship and the meaning of the White Bird. And yet... and yet...

Up to the moment when I laid in a fresh supply of exercise books preparatory to making a start on the final story in the series I was quite sure in my own mind that it would begin at the point where A Dream of Kinship had left off. And it might have done just that had not something rather odd happened. The night before I was due to start work on the new book I had a vivid dream. In this dream I was walking along a gas-lit street. It was winter. Snow was falling. Hearing footsteps behind me I glanced back over my shoulder and saw a small child with a 'bird' mask on its head running through the snow towards me. As it drew alongside it spread its paper wings and simply vanished. I woke up wondering what on earth the vision meant and jotted down its essential elements lest I should have forgotten them by morning.

I need not have bothered. The dream was still just as vivid in my memory when I next woke up. Unfortunately I simply couldn't get it out of my mind. I wasted a whole day struggling to get the first paragraph of the new story down on paper and never even got beyond the first sentence. By about five o'clock in the evening I was forced to acknowledge what the trouble was. Some essential part of me needed to explore that dream. It had infested my imagination.

Just Published

RICHARD COWPER'S

NEW NOVEL

A TAPESTRY OF TIME

The final volume in
**THE WHITE BIRD
OF KINSHIP**
saga

£7.95 net

SF SF SF SF SF SF SF **Gollancz** SF SF SF SF SF SF SF

Next day I set out to exorcise it in the only way I know - by writing it out of my sub-conscious. In a matter of moments I had discovered who the 'me' of the dream was. He had been there waiting patiently off-stage for seven years. His name was Robert Cartwright, a Fellow of St Malcolm's College, Oxford, and in the year AD 3798 he had published his new version of that book of the Avian Apocrypha "which has been called by certain scholars 'Old Peter's Tale' and by others 'The Book of Gyre'." He called his version Piper at the Gates of Dawn and in the prefatory note to that first story in the series he features under the anonymouse initials 'R.J.C.' Thus was the wheel come full circle.

Ideally Robert Cartwright's story should form the frame in which the tale of Tom and Witchet is set, and if ever the chance arises for me to issue the whole of The White Bird of Kinship as a single volume I shall do my level best to see that it does. As it is the exigency of having to carry new readers along with me would not permit it. But anyone who is familiar with the earlier stories and would be interested in reading A Tapestry of Time as it was originally conceived could start half way through the book at the section called The Cartwright Papers, read as far as where Cartwright discovers the 'New Exeter m/s', then go back and read The Singer and The Song, and finally pick up The Cartwright Papers again and follow it on to the end. It sounds unbearably complicated but it isn't really.

So far I have purposely avoided saying what actually happens in A Tapestry of Time, though by the time this essay appears anyone who is sufficiently interested in finding out will probably have done so. In my experience reviewers who can't think of anything either relevant or illuminating to say about a book are frequently reduced to retailing some sort of travesty of the plot which they have culled from the publisher's blurb. Be warned. They will be even wider of the mark than usual with this one since the only blurb I have seen deals with but half the story. So what really happens? All I am prepared to say is that my instinct proved right; I learnt the truth through Tom.

I suppose it should now be possible for me to look back over the span of the seven stories which go to make up The White Bird of Kinship and to pass some overall verdict upon them. Indeed I am trying very hard to do just that - to make a definitive assessment of what, if anything, I have achieved. I can't do it. I have no doubt at all that the stories have been important for me, and from the letters I continue to receive about them I gather they have succeeded in saying something of value to other people too. But even here there is no consensus of opinion. Some of my correspondents appear to relish most the physical environment I have created (one even assured me she could hardly wait for 'The Drowning' to happen!); others prefer the characters - Jane and the Magpie are the two most often singled out; some appear to appreciate especially the general ethos of Kinship. Their interest warms me and I do my level best to answer their questions, though quite often I have to confess that I can't give an honest answer because, not having written that particular story, I don't know the answer. I suppose the ultimate test will be if the tales are still being read in twenty or fifty years' time. It doesn't seem very likely, but then, unless something entirely untoward happens, I can't see myself being in a position to care much about it anyway.

So there it is - one author's somewhat chaotic observations upon his own work. Having read back through the article I am aware chiefly of a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction. This, I am half convinced, springs from an uneasy feeling that I have let down my own characters - that they deserved better of me. Strange this sense of responsibility towards the creatures of one's own imagination - this anguish of involvement. But is it really so strange? After all we have shared so many adventures together: they have taught me so much. Now that the time has come finally to bid them all farewell I do so with real regret, recalling Gibbon's words when, having at last completed The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, he declared: 'a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion. I know just how he felt!'

Dangerous Divisions

ANDY SAWYER,
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Merseyside,
L42 7JT

I seem to remember from that Bookseller article that the 'Wizard of Oz' books have also been banned in parts of the USA - it's a strange world! Your editorial raised some interesting points in too short a space - I'm not sure whether, at the end, you are arguing for or against censorship. (((Before I wrote the article I was against it, but, by the time I had finished it I could not decide which way to turn.))) Certainly attitudes are instilled by what is presented for people to read (and view), but there are many levels on which this is done, and one's reaction to the process needs some thinking out. I suspect that if those 'members of the Rhine army' hadn't read any of John Norman they'd still have had the necessary attitudes in them to beat up their wives - but I for one do not spend public money on the purchase of John Norman books because I find them politically (in the widest sense) offensive. Is that censorship? Probably. Yet I managed to get a relatively favourable compromise when our children's library service was very cagey about buying a book which was ostensibly "an insult to our soldiers in Northern Ireland". Censorship is hardly ever a moral question, but a political or financial one. A book is rejected by a publisher because it won't sell, or maybe, the cost of a possible legal action isn't worth it. A bookshop will do a similar thing for similar reasons. Both publishers and bookshops (and distribution chains) will have political 'lines' on which items are acceptable. In the vast majority of cases this isn't called censorship, and those who carry it out would be indignant to have themselves classed as 'bookburners'.

This debate erupts periodically in librarianship, especially when you're talking about children's books, and I remember an adage a few years back which went something like: He practices censorship;

You have inadequate book selection;

I have a well-balanced stock within necessary financial limits.

And that (flippantly, I agree) sums up the nature of the beast. Except that it's a bit more serious than saying "We all, however unconsciously, have limits beyond which we do not want our books to go", because there are people around who have clearly-defined limits which would decimate the average library, and reduce culture to the texture of a three-day old blancmange. I don't want my kids to end up with picture-books of hard porn but an almost equal revulsion comes from reading another article from the Bookseller in which a publisher describes how the romance writer Doris Leslie entered into a diatribe about Doris Lessing, insisting that he pressurize her to change her name as she (Leslie) did not want to be confused with such a purveyor of 'filth'. Fortunately the publisher resisted... But when people with reactions like that get into power then we start worrying. And worry like hell.

I agree with much of what Chris Priest says, except that when he writes about those "dull-eyed and witless" people watching Star Trek I get a vivid flash of all those adults who, when I was a kid, tried to get me to stop "sitting around with my nose in a book" and, to quote one of my school reports, "assert myself in useful ways". Despite Chris's 'sub-texts', you do not get an infinite number of relevant meanings from a passage of literature and also, visual stimulation is not necessarily secondary to verbal. I hardly think Chris is arguing that,

say, a Perry Rhodan novel is intrinsically superior to, say, Solaris - indeed he implies as much in the bottom paragraph on p. 24 - but you sometimes get that impression when these ideas are argued out. I think that it is possible to get more out of a visual sequence than Chris says, but these meanings can only be communicated by means of language, which leads us right away into problems which arise when you attempt to translate one form into another. As we exchange ideas through language clearly language is central and however developed our other aesthetic senses are, we are handicapped if we cannot share them, or at least attempt to do so. I see the greatest danger in the 'visual culture' of video-recorders, TV, and comic-strip not in the visual aspect itself but in the assumption that it is a valid replacement for language. You've seen Polanski's Macbeth? Fine, then you needn't read Shakespeare. But we must retain our own capacity for visualizing: I once offered a book of fairly accessible horror stories, in textual form, to a lad who wanted to look at pictures of Dracula. I commented "How about making your own pictures - in your head?" - It wasn't so much that he rejected the book; but he had no idea what I meant, no conception of the fact that you do not need physical images to have a 'picture' of something. That's what worries me. Yet I see that Frank Herbert is quoted elsewhere in Vector as saying "The cheapest set-building in the world is in your imagination." Exactly...

Sorry, but I can't agree with Dorothy Davies: I insist, as a reader, on personal evaluation in reviews. (I think resumes of all recently-published SF is something which should be tackled, but that's a different question!) A good review should, if concluding that a book is good or bad, give some idea why the reviewer thinks so: that done, the reader can make up his/her own mind whether they agree with the logic. I found the reviews in Vector 109 an interesting case in point. Having read three of the books considered, and being familiar with the works of two others, I wondered whether the reviews would influence me to buy (or not) the books (had I the money!) I enjoyed reading the Disch and the Aldiss, both of which received broadly favourable reviews. I tended to agree with the reviewers' general conclusions. I was influenced to read Helliconia Spring, not by a review per se, but by seeing Brian Aldiss talk about it on T.V. If I was in the market, I may well have bought it (and may still do if and when it reaches paperback) although it was not as impressive as it seemed to be (partly due to the way the T.V. programme emphasised the "deeply researched imaginary world" aspect of the book as opposed to other sides of it, which led to raised (or at least different) expectations, on my part. Stephen Donaldson's The One Tree had an inbuilt magnet of its own to attract the reader. I found the first trilogy irritating but immensely readable. Despite the review, I would have bought The One Tree if I'd bought the others in the series on the same basis that I am about to buy another 'follow-up' novel to another series. Yet again, I broadly agree with the review: less readable and more irritating, the second trilogy is a disappointment, but initial success is a good crowd-puller. Despite Joseph's forebodings, I would still buy the concluding volume - which is probably a sad tribute to the power of reputation as against individual taste and 'free choice'.

As far as the others - while I'm not one of those who damn Poul Anderson and all his works (he has written at least one minor classic in The Broken Sword and several other very readable tales) I think I'm familiar enough with his work to know what to expect and Three Worlds to Conquer is something that I'd read if there was nothing else to look at but otherwise..... I'd need to look at the book very carefully. It gets a bad review but I'd be chary about it anyway. Brian Smith hedges his bets on Damon Knight's The World and Thorinn: I'd approach this similarly to the previous book, but because of phrases like "exquisitely crafted artifact..." I'd probably be more favourable. Certainly I want to read it, whereas I don't want to read the Anderson; partly this is Brian Smith's summary of the plot, partly it is his judgement of it (I would want to know if I agreed with his final conclusions)

As for the two 'unknowns', I admit to being influenced here. But as these are books which I would not think about buying, I'm not sure how much it matters that I finish Vector with a prejudice against The Golden Space and for Strata. Certainly

I would not have heard of them without Vector, and I may well, in scanning The Golden Space decide that it is interesting or look at Strata and find it not worth buying. What is significant for Dorothy's argument is that my prejudices are very much based on summary rather than judgement. One seems an interesting idea: one doesn't. And that's it.

So of this issues crop of reviews, I'm influenced negatively by one, I ignore a negative review in another case, two more I'd consider in any case (simply because Disch and Aldiss are "big names who I like") and I'm influenced positively by two. This seems a reasonable case for reviews, although rendered largely specious by the fact that I can't afford to buy many books so I have to 'play safe'. There's no substitute for looking at the book yourself (I'm about to read Timescape said he virtuously) but at times other people's opinions may make you seek out something you otherwise wouldn't have found. No-one but you can make you read a book, and the best way to discover something is to wander into a library or bookshop when you're feeling bored and pick up something at random until you find a book which strikes a chord. Criticism is a debate rather than a set of instructions from on high. As a final point: I have on occasion sought out books which have had stinking reviews to see if they were as bad as suggested (often they were!) (((Serves you right for doubting us!)))

I've been left thoroughly confused after having read the letters in Vector 109.

Dorothy Davies intimated that if she read a bad review for a book she would be disinclined to buy it or, as with Timescape two bad reviews would put her right off! (me too unless by an author I particularly liked). Yet you say that it is one of the best books of the decade. Therefore we cannot trust the reviews.

So, the next best thing to do is give a synopsis of the book and let the discerning member decide that way if it would be to his/her taste? But no..Paul Brazier prefers not to have the plot spoiled by any advance knowledge.

There is another alternative. List the new books with the name of author on specially serrated paper so that members can tear it into strips, fold them up, stick em in a hat and pick out the best two or three reads (no need to worry, God's on your side - if you believe in that sort of thing!).

I would just like to add that if Frank Herbert is a childhood image of Santa Claus, I for one, am looking forward to Christmas even less than I usually do. ((("There are as many opinions as there are men; each a law to himself" Terence c. 195-159B.C.)))

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As an habitual reader of reviews in magazines such as Foundation and those from the BSFA, I have found the recent discussions about this topic to be quite interesting. Dorothy Davies seems to be making a solo but determined effort to reduce reviews to manipulations by the reviewer of the reader's feelings about the book.

On the other hand people such as Andrew Sutherland in Vector 109 argues the case for an 'intensive analysis'; an 'open mind', and a 'perceptive and responsible critic'. I must say I am of divided mind here. I would tend to agree with what Dorothy says about a bad review damaging a book. (I recently read in Focus how a publisher decides a print run partly on the reaction to advance copies.) Yet, reviews have been written and read from ages past, and will continue to be so. And her suggestion of resumes 'with no opinions' has been well rejected, what with its disguised subjectivity. Is not the writing of reviews though part of the larger process of the writing of articles, of critical essays and so on? Also, when a reviewer expresses his personal opinion, what influences made him end up with that opinion? Probably, in the case of the BSFA, where things get around

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fast, the standing of a particular author in the community at large. Is there a set reaction to the names John Norman, Larry Niven, Jacqueline Lichtenburg, Chris Priest?

I thought I would offer up these comments by C.S. Lewis in his essay 'On Science Fiction' (1966) where he is talking about writing criticism of sf;

'It is very dangerous to write about a kind (of novel) you hate. Hatred obscures all distinctions..it is, I think, the most subjective and least reliable type of criticism. Above all, it should not masquerade as criticism of individual works. Many reviews are useless because, while purporting to condemn the book, they only reveal the reviewer's dislike of the kind to which it belongs. Let bad tragedies be censured by those who love tragedy and bad detective stories by those who love the detective story. Then we shall learn their real faults.'

I don't know; does this answer our problem or create more? What are 'real' faults? I am still of divided mind, I think that reviews are useful in some ways and yet on the other hand can be damaging. (((I certainly would be interested in the readers views on C.S. Lewis's comments. I feel that there is a danger in what he recommends, it would also be nearly impossible to put into action..)))

Well, I suppose that I have to respond to what Dorothy Davies is saying about criticism, if only because she's dealing with something with which I, as Vector's Reviews Editor, am intimately involved. But, although she raises some seemingly valid points, their validity collapses when subjected to close examination, and are (I'm afraid) revealed as little more than ill-informed opinion and prejudice. Such as this nonsense about a bad review killing the sales potential of a book - yes, a bad review of a West End play, in, say, The New Standard may result in the play being taken off after only a few days, but to compare it with a bad review of, say, Julian May's The Many Coloured Land in Vector is simply absurd. The New Standard is read by literally thousands of people, and reviews plays when they are premiered, Vector is read by merely hundreds, and reviews books weeks (or even months) after their publication dates, when they have already sold out their first print-runs and been reissued or have entered the best-seller charts (as had The Many-Coloured Land and - re Andrew Sutherland's observations on my review of same - God-Emperor of Dune). In other words: the two publications are not even remotely in the same league, and comparisons between them are ludicrous in the extreme.

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In her defence, Dorothy claims that a review is directed only at the reader, as a guide to what is worth reading and what isn't. The first part of this statement is a truism (what other purpose is there to criticism, after all?), but the second part is a gross oversimplification, not least because the critic is charged with explaining why the book is or is not worth reading. This he does by providing a context in which the book may be viewed as part of a larger whole, by assessing whether or not the insights into human life and its relationship to the universe are of value and have taught us anything new about ourselves, determining whether or not it succeeds or fails in its stated intentions, and explaining whether, after all this has been taken into account, it is good or bad fiction. And, contrary to Dorothy's contention, a critic's conclusion that a book has failed all the tests and is hence worthless does not put people off reading it - the instances of people reading a review to see which books were most roundly condemned and then going out and buying these same books are legion (even if they only buy it to see what so annoyed the critic or, more usually, are operating on the principle that if the critic hated it then they'll enjoy it). Which, if nothing else, demonstrates the sheer subjectivity of individual taste - to which, as Andrew Sutherland points out, the critic is as prone as any other mortal. That we may

not rise above it is of course to be regretted, but (as Ned Kelly said in quite another context) such is life - our upbringings, the mores and norms of our society, our expectations of life, all have irrevocably moulded and shaped our personalities, and for this reason alone true objectivity is impossible - for to achieve true objectivity would mean rising above our world, pretending that we were not products of it, which is clearly absurd.

But this is perhaps getting too theoretical. In conclusion, I would like to take issue with Mike Lewis's and Roger Waddington's apparent contention that entertainment and art are mutually exclusive, a position which, I'm sorry to say, strikes me as somewhat immature. For one thing, they are ignoring the fact that all fiction is a form of entertainment (it has to be, otherwise no one would ever bother to read any of it); for another, they are ignoring the fact that entertainment may be derived from more than one aspect of a book (the skill with which the author uses language, for example, or the interplay between his characters, or the novelty of his ideas), and that the ultimate measure of a book's 'entertainment value' is the degree to which the reader becomes imaginatively involved in the author's creation. What I rather suspect they really mean by 'entertainment', however, is 'escapism', which is not at all the same thing - never mind that there is not, and never can be, any such thing as the 'pure escapism' for which they seem to crave, since (as David Penn pointed out in his letter in Vector 103) any book is informed by its author's attitudes and experiences, and so cannot help but suggest or confirm certain opinions, a certain view of the world; and even if he does not overtly challenge his readers to agree or disagree with his statements, his biases will be present nevertheless, and to pretend that they aren't is simply irresponsible. (((As a side note I would like to thank Dorothy Davies for having the courage of her convictions in writing the article/letter in the first place. It certainly has kept the letters flowing.. I've greatly enjoyed watching the letters branch off in different directions from Dorothy's original piece.)))



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Congratulations on your appointment as editor of Vector. In just two issues I've noticed an improvement - not least in the artwork and layout. (((My thanks..but don't forget that Vector is very much a team effort and without Paul, Joseph and John & Eve Harvey it would be

a very different story. I think Paul wishes that I'd never got the magazine as all his spare time is taken up with Vector. Joseph's and John's contributions to the magazine are self-evident as you read and see them every issue but I wonder how many people realise the amount of work that Eve puts in. Without her help in

typing and transcribing most issues of Vector would not make it! As you can see Vector is a collective effort.)))

About your editorial: I think you knew the answer to your closing questions before you penned them. Of course we should take the attitude 'publish and be damned!' I'm sure that the cases of people being adversely influenced by what they read (to the extent where they commit actively anti-social behaviour) are few and far between - and even so should be accepted as preferable to the society we would live in if censorship was rigorously practised. I work in a factory where the stuff people read (if at all) is Mills & Boon, Westerns, the Star etc. In the world of the factory the majority of the workers are bigoted, racist, and ignorant - and although I don't blame their reading matter for this, I think that if they read 'good' literature they might emerge from the experience extremely enlightened. Which is to say that if censorship was rigorously practised our literature would be gutted - SF would sink to the level of the pap a la Mills & Boon, readers would be lulled into a safe, unquestioning fantasy world totally divorced from reality. There would no longer be any 'good' literature if authors were not allowed to ask taboo questions that make the reader think about the real world. Can you imagine a society which was the macrocosm of a West Yorkshire factory? The thought gives me the shits. Moral Responsibility? Of course we have a moral responsibility, to publish and be damned. (((Mark Adlard's trilogy Interface, Volteface and Multiface should interest you as it is based upon an industrial background. It is one of the few books in sf which looks at industrial problems with a sympathetic eye.)))

FACT - SF is supposed to be forward looking. FACT - To ban books gives them a worse reputation. I recently read The Gas and found it tame compared to what I was expecting. But this censorship, whether at the cinema or in literature, is simply a hangover from the hypocritical Victorian bourgeois sexual hangups. We should shake off these out-moded modes of thought. An adult should be able to choose what he reads and sees, with the exception of Child Porn (as the child involved can't choose). But this is just one aspect of a much wider problem. We have laws which prevent us drinking when we like (but not the MPs note - their bars are always open). We have laws preventing people eating or smoking what they like. But note, these laws always have a sugar coating of good justification to help them go down the right way. The government (all governments) prefer a grey protoplasmic mass of robots to control rather than individuals. As readers of sf we have all seen what happens if men can be moulded - 1984, Logans Run etc. We must avoid this at all costs as Hawkwind once said; "The weeds are writing their scriptures in the sand already natures calling, take heed of her warning".

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I'm not really sure what my views are on censorship, on one hand I would say that all censorship was wrong - people have a right to read what they want, watch what they want, etc. However, then you are faced with such cases as the John Norman one. What do you do? In

this case, I would say that it would be an idea to censor the works - they aren't worth the paper they are printed on anyway. But, how do you know whether to censor work before it has had any harmful effects? And who has the right to censor things - who decides? I don't believe in such self-proclaimed protectors of public morality as Mary Whitehouse and the 'Moral Majority' in the USA (Who are apparently censoring fantasy games such as D&D, because they promote devil-worship!). A difficult conundrum.

I possibly agree with you that one way to spread SF is to get people to join the BSFA. However, the advertising of it, as Kenneth Lake said, seems to be poor - while many people are aware of the existence of the BSFA, very few seem to know 18.

enough about it to join it, or to prompt them to find out more information. What about in associated magazines, like fantasy games magazines? White Dwarf for instance, you could place a fairly cheap ad there - even a classified one for only a few pounds and I'm sure you would get response to it. Leaflets could be printed, and left for people to pick up in specialist SF bookshops and Comic shops. It should even be possible for them to be sent out to BSFA members, who could then get some into their local bookshops - or even libraries (a great place to advertise). I think that all of these ideas are worth considering. (((Thank you for those ideas although to be fair, the BSFA has tried some of them - the posters being a case in point. I'm surprised that you think libraries would be much help. Speaking from my own experience I once advertised my previous magazine in all the local libraries, I'm afraid to say that the response was nil! What I would suggest that we really need is national coverage - how we get that without paying an awful lot of money I've no idea.)))

Reading Angela Carter's views about SF in Vector, I was struck by the contrast between what she was saying and what William Golding another author I admire very much, writes in his latest collection of essays, "A Moving Target". Whereas Carter says "the formulas of fiction can no longer contain the content that they (the writers) want to put in them", and advocates a move away from the conventional restrictions of prose fiction, Golding's argument takes the other viewpoint.

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He begins with a forthright statement: "Let me throw in some fighting talk straight away and declare that far from liberating art from its conventions we ought to guard them as precious things and even add to them where we can. Let us claim that the more restrictions a man finds on his art - other things such as talent being equal - and the more he has to fight these conventions, use them, outwit them, defeat them as in Judo by allowing them to defeat themselves, the better his art is likely to be. The finest Egyptian statue was carved from basalt, the hardest stone available to them and one they must have found almost impossible to work."

Later in the book he reiterates this same belief in a direct attack on those aspects of SF which Miss Carter believes are so important when she writes "... it's no longer possible to write directly from reality."

Golding maintains that "The trouble with the writing of SF is its complete freedom of manoeuvre. Once you accept the premise of knowledge and power increasing world without end you are carving in butter rather than stone."

These then are two seemingly contrasting opinions expounded by two writers I admire. However, it is not adequate to make a simple contrast between the two writers, labelling Angela Carter a 'progressive' writer and William Golding a 'reactionary' or 'conservative' one. Even the most cursory examination of their fiction shows this to be a ridiculous generalisation. Rather, Golding is content to be innovative by using original themes and ideas whereas Carter is more interested in exploring the limits of the fictional form. Personally, I find Golding the more entertaining and absorbing of these two fine novelists and perhaps this is significant. Maybe the purveyors of modern fantasy are too concerned with format and not sufficiently concerned with theme or maybe, as Golding claims, the very nature of their fiction means that they are merely "carving in butter".

In the same collection of essays, speeches and reviews, William Golding speculates on the reasons for SF's development, paralleling the current relationship that mainstream fiction has to SF with the relationship it used to have with ghost fiction. "Possibly," he writes, "tales of the supernatural were a by-product of a waning religious faith and possibly SF is a by-product of our increasing loss of faith in science." This theory may hold true for some writers (J.G. Ballard, C.S. Lewis and even Ray Bradbury are good examples). Surely, however, the fiction of writers such as Arthur C. Clarke, described by Golding

as a "child of his century," derives its inspiration from a fundamental belief in the goodness of science and the progress of mankind.

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As to whether we should censor books such as the Norman 'Gor' books, well, whilst we may all be slightly influenced by what we see, hear and read, surely it is not to the extent of committing acts of violence. People who are so susceptible that they commit acts of violence after reading a book

must surely be very sick indeed, and should not be out walking the streets. The reaction of most people to the 'Gor' type of book ranges from total boredom to, at most, a mild stimulation. To lay the blame for wife or 'queer' bashing on John Norman or the book publishers is utter rot.

Christopher Priest raises some interesting points about T.V. and T.V. S.F. in particular. I personally think that the enjoyment one gets out of something is directly proportional to the effort one puts in. I always enjoy seeing films at the cinema far more than seeing them on the T.V., simply because I've had to make an effort to get up and go out rather than reaching over and pressing a button. Similarly with reading one had to put effort into visualising a book, and this is what makes it so enjoyable.

I'm rather puzzled by your reaction to David Barretts' letter (Vector 108). Surely he was not advocating that the BSFA would be the "sole judge and jury on books published"? He was merely suggesting that the BSFA should become more actively critical - a kind of 'pressure group' for the improvement of the 'state of S.F.' (((Perfectly correct, he didn't and I did not wish to imply that he did. I was just making a personal point of the possible dangers of the BSFA setting itself up as a censor of people's reading. Not that we would be able to get a consensus on what is a good or bad book. The debate on the reviews has shown how our views on sf differ!)))

I find his idea of an 'anti-award' particularly appealing. Furthermore, I can see no sinister moral implications in the provision of such an award. Each year, the membership of the BSFA (well, a few of them anyway) decide which publication they consider to be the 'best'. Is there really any 'moral' difference between this, and the same membership deciding which is the worst publication? (((None, I must admit, that I can think of now.))) In doing this the BSFA would not be setting itself up as the arbiter of what should or should not be read, it would merely be expressing the views of a section of the reading public who care sufficiently about the standard of the literature that they are presented with to voice an opinion.

For such an 'anti-award' to be effective it would obviously require a considerable amount of publicity in order to embarrass the publishers or authors concerned. This presents quite a problem. One can hardly imagine publishers printing 'WINNER OF THE BSFA LITERARY ATROCITY OF THE YEAR AWARD' across the covers of their latest offering. However, if this problem can be surmounted I believe that such an 'anti-award' could provide a useful kind of negative feedback to publishers, T.V. companies and so on. Perhaps I'm being rather naive in assuming that such an award presented by the BSFA would have any real effect on the publishers and media organisations. However, I find the idea of 'hitting back' in this way very attractive (albeit possibly ineffectively). What do other members think?

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I appear to have unleashed something of a storm in V109 with my letter in V108. Fine, especially as some of the comments (those whose writers paused for thought before committing them to paper) take my arguments

further, instead of merely taking the easy alternative of hurling chunks of invective at me. Simon Gosden, for instance, falls into the latter category, condemning my "conceit" and the "pseudo-intellectual elitism" apparently evident in my "simple piece of egoistic diatribe." Thank you, Simon, for those kind words. The thing is, he destroys their point and their effectiveness by suggesting that my letter might have been "deliberately written to encourage controversy" - in which case, he doesn't know whether I really meant all those nasty things I said, or whether I was simply stirring.

It might have come out more clearly if my letter had appeared as a Standpoint article, as I had intended. The title would have been 'On Making the Vocal Audible,' and this was the reason for the piece. (((To be fair David I did mention that your letter/article was written originally for Standpoint in V108. I'm not sure that missing off the title made that much difference to the readers' interpretation of the piece.))) In fact, this point was picked up by a number of correspondents in V109; instead of so much in-house bickering, we should be working for the greater exposure of what is good in SF. And we should not be afraid to say what we consider to be good and bad, and why; that isn't elitism (though why elitism is a crime, Simon Gosden fails to tell me) - it's simply putting our specialist knowledge to good use.

The US and THEM categorisation, by the way, was not intended to be offensive to THEM. The tone in which I wrote made it quite clear that I was actually describing a phenomenon which exists, rather than advocating such a division, or even giving it my approval. I said right at the beginning that I was going to "make the implicit explicit," I called US "the ivory-towered experts on SF," and I pointed out the very real danger of the BSFA becoming a "snug little, smug little clique." Perhaps Simon Gosden and Mike Lewis should reread what I actually wrote before they become so accusing; Andy Hobbs gets the point: I was telling US to get our house in order, not denigrating THEM. But yes, the division does exist.

The most worrying thing to come out of these letters is the spectre of Editorial Misdirection, which was noticeable on two points, and which caused people to react not to what I had written, but to what you, the Editor had implied I had written.

1. At no point in my V108 letter did I suggest that there is anything wrong in reading anything for enjoyment, for the sheer, pure and simple pleasure of reading it. In fact, in earlier issues of Vector I have argued strongly that enjoyment should be the primary reason for reading and the primary function of a novel. The totally incorrect impression given to Vector readers came from your editorial interpolation, "It's a real sin to give people enjoyment," which was quite unrelated to what I had been saying.

2. I also at no point in my letter imply that the BSFA should be "the sole judge and jury on books published." These are your words, not mine, and I refute the suggestion entirely.

It is one thing for a reader to misinterpret what a correspondent has said; it is quite another thing when an Editor does this. It is totally beyond your brief as editor, and it is morally indefensible (and you say you're concerned about the moral implications of my comments!). You have a duty to present the views of BSFA members in the letter column. You have the right, as have we all, to make comments on those views, and to disagree with them as much as you wish. But you do NOT have the right to misrepresent and misinterpret those views. That is bad editorship, as you should be well aware. (((I was beginning to wonder when the editorial 'honeymoon' would end, I thought things were going a bit too quietly! I believe, David, that you are getting slightly confused. While you say I have a "right to make comments on the letters" at the same time I must not "misrepresent and misinterpret" other people's views.

You are, of course, correct in saying that there is a danger in misrepresenting a person's views, I could, for example, edit a letter in such a manner that the views expressed in it come out totally different to the author's original intention. This, of course, is something I never would intentionally do. Not only because it would kill the letter column but also because it is "morally indefensible". The key word is intentionally. What I did in your letter/article was give my inter-

pretation of what I believed you said and drew conclusions from them. You might not agree with my interpretation or conclusions but surely, is this not the cut and thrust of the letter column?

I will not intentionally misinterpret letters but I'm afraid that I could, and most probably will, mistakenly do so. I'm not omniscient - I might not "have the right" to mistakenly misinterpret or misrepresent but, unfortunately, I expect I will. But don't forget there is a leveller. My views and the writer's are expressed side by side, people can make their own judgement on whether I'm right or wrong, as people did last issue and as yourself and Mark Hewlett have done this issue.

Can I stress that I will never intentionally "misinterpret or misrepresent" anyone's views, but I am allowed to make interpretations and conclusions.)))

General Priest certainly marshals a Wellingtonian assault on the trenches of media sf in 'Into the Arena; The Barrel'. Look! There goes a brave, lone Harrier to nonchalantly dispose of half a dozen trekkie Pukharas. And listen! Here come the paras, the tune of 'Colonel Bogey' on their lips and the ultimate weapon of subtexts in their hands, marching over the hills to liberate Port Literature. Not even Exocet Avon can save the cringing whoies now. It's a famous victory. Vector backs our boys!

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Loathe as I am to play the fifth column, and timorous as I am of the white feathers waiting for me at the King of Diamonds, I must point out a certain weakness in Chris' intellectual tactics.

Look at that 'reasonable' statement; "You can examine the sequence as minutely as you like, frame by frame...but you can never see more than what you saw the first time... you can perhaps even see something... that the eye's definition was tricked out of seeing." True, on the face of it. Mind you, if you reread a passage of writing you will never read more than you read in the first place. The words will be the same, in the same order. What will probably happen is that you will appreciate more, understand more. Similarly, if you examine an image you first saw for a fraction of a second you will probably appreciate more than you did the first time - the exact set of his face, that bar of shadow across her hand.

What was that? "... an image you first saw for a fraction of a second...", which is how you see any image on a movie for video. Here we come clear up to Chris' misrepresentation of the facts. He attempts to compare, favourably, the written word in its context of 69,999 other well chosen words, with a single image snatched from its context of 7,775,999 other images. A novel is a whole, a combination of all the words contained within its bounds. A motion picture is also a whole, a combination of all its individual images, not to mention the dramatic action those images portray, the dialogue and the musical soundtrack. The good film maker chooses every facet of his movie, every image and each component of every image, with just as much care as any good writer chooses his words. To loftily dismiss all media sf because episode 1325 of Star Trek is lousy is akin to dismissing all sf (including all of Chris' books) because Ice Rigger is lousy - which is precisely the treatment of sf that is lamented so long and often in the BSFA, not least by Chris. The serious critic does not compare the loving work of an artist with the 9 to 5 cheap whiskied sweat of a hack, except to give thanks that there are still some artists left in these days of rampant hackery.

"What about those subtexts?" I hear someone whispering at the back. There are, of course, no more subtexts in an individual image than there are in an individual word. Subtexts arise, by Chris' own admission, in the active combination of the chosen words, the richness and density of reference and allusion they encompass, creating a significance additional to the action portrayed. Anyone who suggests that there are no subtexts in a movie hasn't been watching the right movies. No subtexts in Metropolis? No subtexts in The Seven Samurai? No subtexts in Citizen

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Kane? No subtexts in On The Town?

Chris doesn't really expect his deliberately disingenuous suggestion to be taken seriously, does he? By all means pour scorn where scorn is deserved - and much media sf deserves little other than scorn, it is hackwork of such mediocrity - but have a care with the baby.

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There's a point in the middle of Chris Priest's article where I suffered unexpected mind-blink. Mind-blink is what

happens when you turn a page in Vector and continue half-a-dozen lines before you realise that what you're reading now has no connection with what went before. Normally, what's happened is that a page has been repeated or transposed, which is why it was a surprise to meet the same experience of mental doubletake halfway down a page.

The point in question was the jump from the "TV sf is pretty crummy" argument to the rather more radical "the visual media are pretty crummy". This strikes me as dangerously similar to the equally suspect logical saltus from "there is much bad sf" to "sf is intrinsically bad". Chris's remarks about science fiction on television are hard to quarrel with, but in extending the polemic into a general contention that visual forms are a priori secondary to literature and inferior, I rather feel he's trying to objectify an ill-founded personal prejudice into a critical truth - in much the same way as people who feel instinctively that they don't like sf try and rationalise their distaste by generalising from the worst to the whole.

To judge the visual media by television sf is of course like judging science fiction by The Number of the Beast, and it's a shame to see this kind of reasoning adopted by one who must surely have suffered endless frustrating encounters with it in the defence of his own profession. Perhaps the difference between Chris and his despised "media fans" (is Martyn Taylor a media fan, then?) is that Chris thinks of "sf in the visual media" in terms of Star Trek and Blake's 7, while I (for example) think of Impact Theatre and the films of Peter Greenaway - just as I like to think of written sf in terms of C. Priest rather than L.Niven.

It strikes me that, to judge at least from his article, Chris has a rather primitive conception of the visual narrative arts, and this may be the real reason why he seems unable to respond to them in principle. Certainly the statement that "the visual image has no sub-text" seems perfectly extraordinary in this semiotic age. The cinema is, historically speaking, a young medium, but it's an immensely creative and rapidly-evolving one, and its technical vocabulary today is every bit as rich, complex and expressive a language as that of prose fiction, if it's meaningful to make the comparison in the first place. The argument that "with the visual image, you get only what is there" is hopelessly simplistic, and the freeze-frame proof of this contention might equally well be applied to the written word. Every time you open the same book, it's full of exactly the same places; but this no more describes the reader's experience of the work than does a frame-by-frame description in the case of Citizen Kane. Chris's misconception here seems allied to his insistence that watching television (and, by extension, a film or a play) is "a passive, stuporous thing to do", requiring no "attention and participation". I'd challenge anyone to watch, say, Last Year in Marienbad, A Walk through H, or Celine and Julie Go Boating without attention and participation and not fall asleep in the first sixty seconds, just as I daresay a reader

accustomed to a diet of Dick Francis would nod off before the bottom of the first page of The Affirmation.

There seems, in any case, a bit of a logical lacuna between all this and Chris's subsequent point about only derivative visual productions being inferior to the written word. After an attempt to demonstrate from the very nature of visual narrative that "the visual media are of equal rank to literature" is "a very dubious proposition", we now learn that "this is not to say that the visual media are an inferior form". I may be missing something here, but this seems a drastic change of tack. It's a pretty specious contention anyway, since of course derivative, compromise-ridden TV drama is not better and no worse than derivative, compromise-written prose fiction. The fact that all TV science fiction is derivative and compromise-ridden is surely nothing to do with the intrinsic artistic potential of the form, but simply an accident of politics. Television is a conservative, heavily censored, thoroughly bourgeois and desperately commercial medium because that's the way it happens to have got institutionalised. Fiction publishing, for a variety of complex reasons, is marginally less so. Good TV dramas (and good films, and good plays) occasionally slip through the net, just like good books do; but because the taste of the television-owning public inevitably lags a generation or two behind us elitist BoSFA types with our literary pretensions and our upturned noses it doesn't often happen that the good ones are sf.

I love books and I love the cinema. Unlike Chris, I wouldn't dare try to exalt the one over the other, though I'll dig in heels and reach for my baseball bat any time some philistine bastard tries to tell me I'm wasting my time on either. I do think, though, that the kind of boneheaded snobbery sf literati display towards the visual media does them no credit at all. For my money the finest writer on this planet today is also the finest sf author and the finest television auteur, and I'd be interested to hear Chris explain why Alan Garner's TV versions of The Owl Service and Red Shift are artistically inferior to the novels from which they unforgivably derive. But we're so embarrassed by the notion of serious media criticism that he'd have to go skulking in the back pages of Matrix to do so.

Bob Shaw's letter in Vector 109 hinting that "SF stories with a contemporary urban setting" need not be bad, supposedly (but not actually) in opposition to Brian Smith's stated views, prompts me to write agreeing with both on a 50/50 basis. The dispute relates to that well-known fruitless pastime of trying to define SF.

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If a supposed SF story contains nothing but an urban setting, it is not SF. If a microscopically small dose of SF content is injected into it, it becomes arguably SF, although many would say that it is not. Deciding whether it is or not is rather like deciding what we mean when we say that a man is 'bald'. With very few hairs on his head, many would say he was bald, but others would demand that he have even fewer hairs, or none at all, in order to qualify for 'baldness'. To define 'baldness' exactly, someone would have to do the very silly thing of assigning some precise and arbitrary figure to the minimum number of head hairs below which 'baldness' results. And, even then, it would probably remain only a private definition.

I once read an SF story about a doctor on a spaceship. His girl-friend developed some rare, incurable and painful disease, so he killed her, out of kindness. The spaceship and rare disease were almost irrelevant to this drama. The spaceship could have been Earth, and the disease could have been cancer. It was spurious SF of a kind that many are now writing. It was bad SF because the SF content was neither necessary to the plot nor interesting. Good SF can involve both large and small doses of SF content. Large doses (alone) can not make it good, and small doses (alone) can not make it bad.

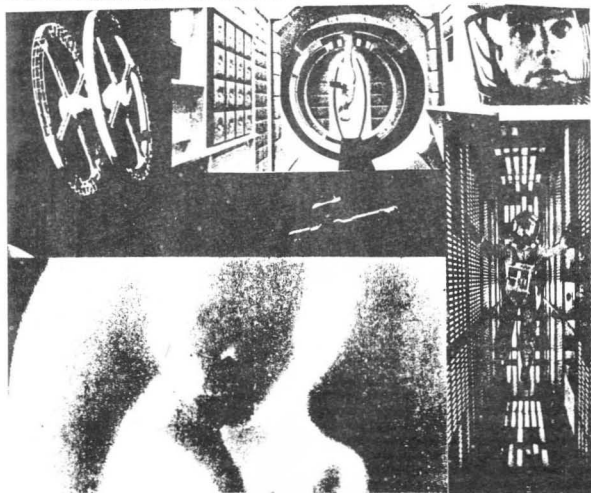
(((That's all folks..Letters were also received from Dorothy Davies (well, a postcard actually), Roger Milne, Patrick Riggs and Cy Chauvin.))

□□□□□□



2001
The Creation of
a Modern
Mythology

Peter Stockill

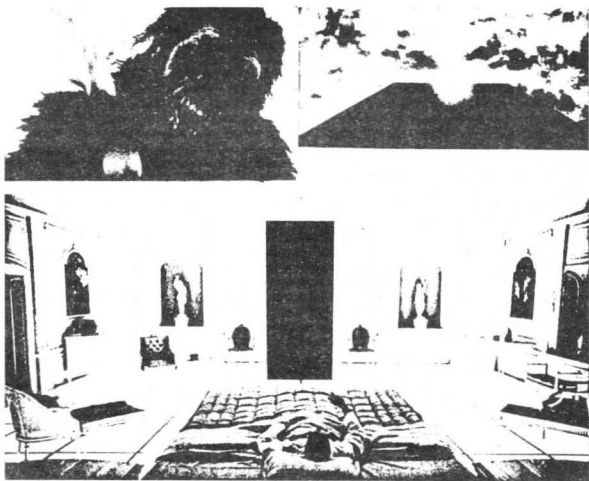


"Its origin and purpose still a total mystery." Thus ends *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* edited by Jerome Agel. The film's origin, of course, is well known - 'The Sentinel', a short story written by Arthur C Clarke in 1950. Its purpose, though, remains a mystery. I hope, in this article, to shed some light on that purpose.

Perhaps the most obvious point to make is that the film seems to have no point at all. Those who search for plot and narrative do so in vain. The cut from the 'Dawn of Man' millions of years ago to the year 2001 sets the tone - one of utter discontinuity, a series of tableaux, each purporting to say something profound, but never quite making it explicit. Whereas most film makers try to ensure continuity of plot and narrative, Stanley Kubrick slashed all scenes which offered an explanation of what it was all about. Originally, the film was preceded by a short prologue in which scientists discuss the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe. However, this too was cut when the film went on general release. If it had been retained, at least it would have suggested that the film had something to do with extra-terrestrial beings.

In the absence of plot as we understand it, what are we left with? My view is: a sort of religious mysticism. After all, Clarke said that *2001* was the first ten million dollar religious film. It may sound clichéd to suggest that the 'Dawn of Man' sequence represents the Garden of Eden, the genesis of mankind, but if we accept the religious symbolism then I think this conclusion is inescapable.

What are we to make of the monolith that appears near the beginning? Here we must have recourse to the book, in which we discover that the monolith is a device sent by benevolent aliens, who use it to accelerate the evolution of the apes. Before the monolith came the apes were animals at the mercy of



other animals. After it came they were on the road that leads to Man. Here is perhaps the central theme of the film - the evolution of man under the benevolent control of the aliens. We never see them in the film, they are only alluded to in the book; they are the most important characters in 2001.

Having initiated human evolution, the aliens contrive to take one man from Earth to a special room prepared for him. There they create in him a likeness of themselves, and then return him to Earth to initiate the next stage of evolution. So we have a religious theme reminiscent of the New Testament story - Jesus Christ, the son of man, but also the son of God.

Also, there is a circularity. At the end of the 'Dawn of Man' sequence in the book, Moon-Watcher, one of the few 'man-apes' to be given a name, kills a leopard with a bone. As Clarke says: "He was not quite sure what to do next, but he would think of something." Again, at the end of the book, the Star Child hovers above Earth, flexing his new found powers, and Clarke writes: "He was not quite sure what to do next, but he would think of something." So we are brought back to the same position as Moon-Watcher - a new stage of human evolution. Incidentally, the name 'Moon-Watcher' is not without significance, for it is Moon-Watcher's remote descendants who will discover the hidden monolith on the Moon.

In the 'Dawn of Man' sequence, the first tool is also the first weapon. The bone that kills the animals also kills the other man-apes. This is confirmed by paleo-anthropology. Louis and Richard Leakey and other scientists piecing together the remains of our remote ancestors have the difficulty of deciding whether a skull is that of an ape or a precursor of man. Sadly, in its implications for human nature, one of the criteria used is whether there is evidence that the skull was smashed deliberately in an act of violence. If it shows

signs of murder (if such a legalistic term can be used at a distance in time of a million or more years), then the chances are that it is human, for only man kills its own kind. In an article in *New Scientist* (9 March, 1961) it was revealed that scientists believe that since many Australopithecine skulls are smashed on the left side this shows that these ancient primates were right handed. Many anthropologists believe that man did not make tools, but rather that tools made man. This is because the increased dexterity and powers needed to manipulate tools increased the mental agility of 'ape men'. As Clarke says: "The toolmakers had been re-made by their own tools".

The transition from animal to man brings with it ominous powers for good and evil. So, in the film, the sudden acceleration of evolution brings about a duality which persists throughout the film - man the intellectual toolmaker, and man the savage killer.

The wonders of man's achievements in space technology as represented by the orbiting space station masks, but does not eliminate, this duality of man the intellectual and man the savage. On the surface there is co-operation and friendliness between the American and Soviet scientists, but the laboured and artificial chit-chat shows an underlying distrust. This is made clear when Dr Heywood Floyd refuses to confirm rumours of trouble on the Moon, possibly an epidemic. The confrontation between the American and Soviet scientists in orbit is a pale reflection of the savage fighting at the waterhole millions of years ago at the Dawn of Man, but conflict is still there.

This conflict between man and man is carried further in the film when the astronaut Bowman battles for survival against the computer Hal, after it has killed the rest of the crew. Many scientists, including Clarke, believe that computers will be the next stage of evolution and will replace man. In terms of the film, the computer is the modern tool/weapon, made by man but turned against him, just as the bone was used aeons ago. Thus this theme of the duality of man the intellectual and man the savage is linked to the major theme of evolution. Just as the man-apes were at the transition stage between ape and man; Hal, the super-intelligent computer, stands at the brink of a new stage of evolution. An incipient new form of 'life' created by man, just as man was created by the infinitely superior beings from the stars. Kubrick and Clarke's vision is profoundly pessimistic - with increasing evolution comes increased conflict, and with scientific progress comes responsibility for its use for good or evil.

Clarke tells us in his book that the aliens, like us, passed through a stage of flesh and blood, but then evolved into a non-material, incorporeal existence - pure intelligence, or as Clarke puts it: "lattices of light... free from the tyranny of matter". The aliens evolved into god-like entities that roamed the universe at will. It is Clarke's belief that this is our destiny too.

So 2001, in my opinion, is very much concerned with the evolution of man into god-like beings or supermen. Kubrick and Clarke allude to this in their choice of Thus Spake Zarathustra by Richard Strauss for the opening and closing music. Thus Spake Zarathustra comes from a book written by the 19th century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In this book, Nietzsche suggests that mankind is only halfway between ape and 'Superman'. In fact, in his almost biblical style, Nietzsche says: "Man is a thing to be surmounted...what is the ape to man? A jest or a thing of shame. You have trod the way from worm to man, and much in you is yet worm...Behold, I teach you the Superman...Man is a rope betwixt beast and Superman - a rope over an abyss...We journey to find the Higher Man."

Clarke openly acknowledges his debt to Nietzsche and refers to him in his book *Profiles of the Future*. In a chapter called 'The Obsolescence of Man', Clarke says: "No individual lasts forever; why should we expect our species to be immortal?" Clearly, Clarke is very pre-occupied with the evolution of man and our successors over millions and billions of years, such is the scope of his vast imagination.

In the closing chapter of Profiles of the Future, Clarke writes of our descendants in the incredibly remote future: "They will have time enough in those endless aeons to attempt all things and to gather all knowledge. They will not be like gods, because no gods imagined by our minds have ever possessed the powers they will command. But for all that, they may envy us, basking in the bright afterglow of creation, for we knew the universe when it was young."

In Clarke's novels the evolution he is so fond of is often either initiated or helped along by aliens from elsewhere in the universe. In his book Childhood's End, Clarke tells of the arrival on Earth of powerful aliens described as 'Overlords', who are themselves controlled by a yet superior entity called the 'Overmind'. The aliens initiate in humanity a process which leads mankind to this divine-like status. The title of the book indicates that Clarke believes that our present civilisation is only a childhood, a preparation for the adult mature civilisation which will come with time.

We also know that Clarke was heavily influenced by Olaf Stapledon, whose book Star Maker (1937) portrays one man who is subjected to an acceleration of evolution. By the end of the book the hero has evolved into a god-like being who, after searching the universe, is able to catch a glimpse of the supreme being of the universe - the Star Maker.

This theme of evolution may help us to try to understand perhaps the most baffling and enigmatic part of the film - the ending, when astronaut Bowman rapidly ages and then turns into a foetus. The human foetus in the womb recapitulates all the stages of evolution. Soon after conception the embryo looks like the embryo of a fish, then like a reptilian embryo, and then a mammalian one. At this stage the human embryo looks indistinguishable from that of a rabbit. Only then does the foetus take on human characteristics. So the foetus is a symbol of the dominant theme of the film - evolution. It represents the birth of a new era of human evolution, the fruition of the seeds of humanity sown in the Dawn of Man.

One of 'Clarke's Laws' states that an advanced technology or science is indistinguishable from magic. To us, therefore, the aliens in 2001, with their millions of years of civilisation behind them, appear to be god-like. In 'The Sentinel' Clarke says that the aliens suffered the "loneliness of the gods", and wanted to know when intelligent life had evolved on Earth. So they left a pyramid on the Moon, the discovery of which by man would signal to the aliens that mankind had reached a high level of technology and civilisation. The mountain top pyramid of 'The Sentinel' gives way in 2001 to a buried monolith but they have the same function - to let the god-like aliens know that we have reached a maturity of civilisation. The aliens will no longer suffer the "loneliness of the gods"; for, having initiated human evolution, they propel mankind inexorably towards that same god-like destiny.

In 'The Sentinel' the narrator-hero says: "So they (the aliens) left a sentinel, one of millions they scattered throughout the universe, watching over all worlds with the promise of life. It was a beacon that down the ages patiently signalled the fact that no one had discovered it...I can never look now at the Milky Way without wondering from which of those banked clouds of stars the emissaries are coming...I do not think we will have to wait for long."

But where have we got with our explanation of what 2001 is all about? I don't believe that the film can be explained objectively, it needs to be interpreted subjectively like a painting or a poem. In fact, I would go so far as to call 2001 a visual poem, that each one of us needs to interpret in a different way. What was in the minds of Kubrick and Clarke when they made the film need not be transmitted to the mind of the person who views it, and it does not matter. Just as one can appreciate a painting without understanding what the artist had in mind, we can still enjoy 2001 for what it is - a visually stunning film. And if we leave the cinema feeling mystified, then to some extent the film has succeeded, for Kubrick and Clarke said that they aimed to produce a modern mythology. In this they certainly succeeded. ■

Acknowledging Debts

Josephine Saxton

I fervently hope that the attitude displayed by my previous article for Vector was not that of an embittered, 'alf-arsed, unsuccessful, menopausal, hard-drinking, drug-taking, chaotic-rather-than-anarchistic, sexually frustrated, mixed-up-never-had-a-decent-teenage, half-and-self-educated, ivory-tower, fascist-middle-class-Bolshy-uptight-aggressive, dilettante, feminist, lesbian, Outsider, misfit, sour-grapes, never-even-had-a-slice-of-the-cake-never-mind-the-whole-bloody-cake, insufficient-self-sufficiency-freak, would-have-been-a-hippy-except-she-was-stuck-with-kids-on-a-housing-estate, been-through-the-mill-and-came-out-milled, doesn't give-a-fuck-about-the-proles, Hitler-must-have-been-okay-kids-and-animals-adored-him, talks-to-plants-they-are-the-only-people-who-understand-me, hide-her-head-in-the-sand-its-awful-out-there-and-my-bum-is-worth-viewing, apathetic, sit-on-the-fence, apolitical, mystical, nothin-better-to-do-than, why-doesn't-she-get-a-decent-job, when-I'm-dead-'they'-will-make-a-fortune, mere-self-indulgent-self-seeking-sensualist, pie-in-the-sky-dreamer, if-she'd-really-suffered-she-wouldn't-have-time-for-all-that-psycho-surreal-crap, champion-of-lost-causes-better-lost, lives-in-her-own-world, put-on-dressed-as-sham, atavistic, anti-technology, unrealistic, pretentious, portentous, superior, writes-hairy-things-which-would-benefit-from-Occam's-razor, obscurantist, Madame-Ovary-hides-again, can't communicate-with-the-masses, thinks-the-world-owes-her-a-living, intellectual-blue-stocking, dumb-woman-Chip-Delany -on-shoulder, penis-envying, message-carrying-nothing-relevant-to-say-really-writer sort of person, because, although all of the above descriptions have been made of me at one time or another, and many of them were, are or will be in some measure true, depending upon the point of view, none of them is all of the picture, but they also describe not only myself but all science fiction writers and readers. That above sentence incidentally is not my longest to date; I think the longest counted was 497 words counted by some angry reviewer with a short-attention span but time to count words who was delightfully misprinted as stating that one of my sentences contained '497 worlds' -- pretty good going for any science fiction writer. And the reason also for the fervent hopes at the beginning of this article is because, even if most of Science Fiction fandom either disclaims me or has never heard of me, I wish to be recognised as and am, one of the boys - er - sorry, club.

I owe a large personal debt to what is loosely or very tightly termed Science Fiction. This goes for a lot of other good writers too, and countless lousy ones (note which class I put myself in there -- I have to try to see it that way in spite of lack of world acclaim). Self-annihilation is anathema in any of the arts as is self advertising, but I regret to say I have spent far more time on the former to date and only recently made some feeble attempts at the latter.

If it was not for Science Fiction per se -- yes, I mean as such (excuse me while I have a fit of hysterics) I would not only in all probability not have got

into print, it is even possible that I would never have persevered in writing at all seriously -- or, as I would prefer, hilariously, my intention often being comic. Not that my funniest things aren't written when I am suicidal or course -- they are; shortly after putting the pills down the loo instead of down my gullet is often a good time for writing something hilarious. Some of my readers, bless them, laugh with me instead of scoff at me in peevish incomprehension.

I write signposts, mostly from the interior of the psyche but some of them from the future, therefore it does make sense that the only editors who consider my work are in Science Fiction. SF being what it is (what is it?), the editors who reject me most fiercely are also from that field, upon which are played some weird games. Editors now seem to me to be people with specialised tastes in a genre, who choose their stories for known market in specialised taste, not unlike Rubberwear Monthly but with a little more imagination, but a sufficient number of variants to justify an entire genre. To produce stories which somehow do not fit into any of these specialised markets I count as a distinguished if futile and unremunerative achievement. And yet, do I not fit within SF brackets?

One (I refer to myself but feel free to identify) has only to take a look around a Science Fiction convention to find it closely comparable to the boat-trip scene in the film of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. A crowd of utterly disparate highly-individualised people, all with something in common, on parole from Life, which really should be one long convention, 365 days per month, Flat Earth time. Do I see Science Fiction people through a warped vision, or can readers agree that SF is not only a literary ghetto, but a home for what 'normal' people would term loonies, freaks, oddities, eccentrics, weirdos etc? No, I am not meaning to be insulting (polemical maybe, after looking it up in the dictionary believe it or not, to make absolutely certain I was correct as to its meaning -- it means my usual conversational manner except that to me nothing is worth an ulcer) -- I'm asking a rhetorical question. Is there, or is there not, a feeling of homecoming at Conventions? By which I mean delight admixed with a sickening horror upon returning to a loved and detested bunch of awful people to whom you are unfortunate enough to be related by blood, but with whom you are very much at home, feel free to be and say things which elsewhere would be misunderstood, and which relationship you can not deny because you are one of them. Pretty much like being a member of the human race but again, specialised.

We, you, the Science Fiction readers, writers and critics, are a minority to which I am grateful to belong.

I am not ashamed of being brought up amongst lower working class people any more than I am proud of it -- many of their values are false -- and I have never tried to cultivate my voice, but I did get caught out wasting time explaining that I was not a science fiction writer; I did not want to be identified with hack writers of genre rubbish. None of that matters to me now; if I discuss the matter at all it will be to point out that some of the best work written at all is published under a Science Fiction label, and by many definitions I am from that family.

Arthur C. Clarke is actually my father. He may not wish to know this any more than other relatives to whom I now claim kinship such as Uncle Ray Bradbury, Great-Uncle Eric Frank Russell and numerous other cousins and half-cousins such as Algys Budrys, James Blish, J.G. Ballard, Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight and all the others whose names you know and many of which I have forgotten, having completely lost touch as one does with family. These writers may, if they know of my bastard existence at all, think I am not really of their clan, not connected to the tree, try to cut me off without a shilling, but they have scattered their images in places they'd rather not know about and given life to a lot of oddities, paupers, freaks, and here is one returning to say thank you.

I must of course while claiming origins, for which may be read 'influences', point out that I also owe a great deal to mainstream literature of every kind and to other genre fiction; I have always been an avid reader but had only one temporary literary obsession: Science Fiction.

Where except under the label of Science Fiction would my first work have

got into print? Not since the nineteen-thirties have there been patrons for such literary oddities. Not that I knew I was writing literary oddities, I have never self-consciously tried to write any particular kind of work. It was once because of wealthy patronage or family connections that literary oddities, some of which turned out to be Lion's work first found publication; today, a work which will not fit anywhere else just might get a chance in Science Fiction. Science Fiction publishers and readers do sometimes give a chance to work which nowhere else would be understood at all and conversations at conventions confirm this. One feature of science fiction people is the enquiring mind, a phenomenon not found everywhere. My first convention impressions took a while to mature into the realisation that while I was not only gawping at eccentricities, I was enjoying myself very much, and that this was because I was not an onlooker, I was part of the scenery.

Science Fiction sometimes nurtures winners who then try to forget their origins, quite as sad a process as black people straightening their hair and bleaching their skin as some did and perhaps still do. It is becoming fashionable also to write Science Fiction but to have it published with a mainstream label, for example recent work by Doris Lessing and D.M. Thomas's wretched hotchpotch, The White Hotel, which apparently was first published in New Worlds. But it was not fashionable or even possible when I first started writing SF seventeen years ago, SF fandom reaches out and claims William Golding, Russell Hoban but I wonder how they feel about that? They should be glad that they are exceptions and did not first see print with a genre label.

So, about the obsession which shaped my malformed career. I caught the obsession from Colin Saxton who is long since cured but who at that time, about twenty-five years ago was a powerful influence in my life. By way of conversation he would, with his memory for detail, relate to me the entire plots of science fiction novels and movies and short stories, often using the words 'fantastic', 'amazing', 'weird', 'otherly', 'incredible' and so on; what young woman in love could fail to be affected? I began to read for myself, remembering childhood H.G. Wells thrills, and then it was too late. An 'O' level in English Language and Literature does not equip a person to discriminate and criticise so I read eclectically, goggling and boggling, damaging my mind forever. And yet later, very much after this stage I found myself in the peculiar position of being a published writer of three novels and many short stories, doing a necessary term of English literature while trying to study biology, in the tutorials of a pal of Kingsley Amis. I inadvertently called George Orwell a writer of Science Fiction and the reaction was as if I had uttered obscenities; only the New Maps of Hell attitude was given grudging ground for intelligent discussion. I hardly knew on what ground I stood, but I was certain that I could not give lip service to D.H. Lawrence's ignorant maunderings about women, nor sincerely agree that Scott Fitzgerald's characters struck me as at all convincing. Thank heavens I did not get near a department of English Literature when I was young and impressionable, or I would probably have turned from all SF as trash, as so many brainwashed graduates have done.

As it was, the obsession took a hold, until, married and a mother, I would take every opportunity to read, a good one being while suckling a baby. My children all have a taste for anything even vaguely SF; I did not instruct or influence them, they drank it in. My daughter for example saw King Kong on television when two days old and now as a young woman she still collects anything to do with the movie. And it was therefore that I first began writing stories with neither preconceived notions about form, style, taste, nor with any formulas for pulp stories -- I had simply not noticed any of these things. I believe I instinctively knew the difference between a story which merely diverts with a tale and a story which means something but I didn't even think about that. Gradually I learned to be critical about writing in general and this perhaps contributed to the eventual cure of my obsessive science fiction reading.

Now I will try to get to a crux in this: my earlier attempts at writing had not been science fiction in any sense, it was only when I began to write things

32.

which seemed to me to have affinity with science fiction that I began to get into my own real seam. The truth began to dawn that I was interested in science fiction because it was littered with visionary ideas, connected with my religious or mystical foragings and experiences, which naturally led me into every branch of psychology, and easily embraced Atlantis, Velikovsky, topology and witchcraft. No problem then as to where to submit my stories; I chose at random a copy of 'Science Fantasy' for the address and a (malformed) career was begun. But only by a hairsbreadth constructed of coincidences such as the fact that the editorial office had moved, and my manuscript lay for six months at the back of a warehouse door until James Parkhill-Rathbone, then co-editor returned there seeking something else and found it. He liked it but Kyril Bonfiglioli hated it; they discussed, and grudgingly, my story was published.

So my fate was sealed; I became some kind of an SF writer, not then realising that I was cutting myself off from the mainstream but that worse, I would be rejected so often within the genre as some awful cross-breed. I had read everything without carping and categorising within SF, swallowing the lot; I was not even, apparently, a typical reader.

I then fell victim of a violent reaction to my obsession; the disease will be familiar to some readers. The symptoms are glazed eyes, an inability to concentrate, a rictus of the lips as yet again the same old male hero does the same old male things, weariness at plots like neglected knitting-baskets and a terrible thirst for something Really Good to read in which the only reference to Outer Space is a starry sky, and, please God, no robots or jelly.

All children must undergo a rebellious phase against their parents and background. It is a wet sort of child who does not have some criticisms of its family at some stage. But there must be a further stage; not so much that volte face (where is Mark Adlard by the way?) but an acknowledgement at the very least of all that the parents and family have done; some gratitude for shelter and acceptance and understanding, however inadequate.

Child might say: 'I know we'll never agree on some matters but...' and child might think: (having learned when to keep its trap shut) 'you're a silly old fart in some respects, and a bigot, but I've got to admire your determination and the way you did at least give me a chance to prove my ability.'

So thank you my few Science Fiction publishers, my editors (even those megalomaniacs who wish they could write my stories and even try to) and all eight staunch fans; without you I would be even more obscure than I am. Where else except in SF anthologies would I have had the amazing distinction of being between the same bookcovers as Jorge Luis Borges, Alfred Jarry, Ronald Dahl, and luminaries such as J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss and many others, and to have had a rave review by Theodore Sturgeon, that writer who as a young woman I adored. I am aware that it is said Ted Sturgeon gives everyone good reviews, but let's ignore that.

If readers have the idea that I write only very soft science fiction of the mystical-fantast-dream-inner-space-depth-psychology-surrealist-picaresque kind, I would draw attention to my few but properly researched extrapolations on scientific fact, my few invented planets, my few space vehicles, my forays into physics. I have a passion for biochemistry dating back to 'O' level nutrition -- utterly fascinating that the difference between a cretin and a normal baby was merely iodine -- and once invented a large number of anti-gravity devices, all of which were demolished by a Professor of Physics and which dammit I have now lost. But I think they must be in my brain somewhere, and I hope so, because your strange spawn has matured into a writer who feels she might, if she can bring herself to write anything at all, might well return to Science Fiction, although I expect it might have strong overtones of what Mike Moorcock once called my work, defining it as Psycho-fic. Spoken in mocking jest, but accurate. Even though many mainstream writers use science fiction ideas, with more or less success, it is still only within SF as such (oh dear) that really wild and stimulating ideas and visions can be employed.

That SF label, all embracing: I'm ashamed that I ever attempted to disclaim it, whatever it might mean.

a publisher to clamber onto a bandwagon has got to be more than a little bit naive. But wait a minute; to get to the heart of what's annoying me, let's take a closer look at that publisher's material. There's a note on the copyright information page that I think is interesting enough to reproduce in full.

Publisher's note: In 1968, Philip K. Dick wrote Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, a brilliant science fiction novel that became the source of the motion picture Blade Runner. Though the novel's characters and background differ in some respects from those of the film, readers who enjoy the movie will discover an added dimension on encountering the original work. Granada Publishing is pleased to return this classic novel to print.

I can take the packaging; it's a tough commercial world, and you've got to move the goods. What I can't take is an apology from the publishers because the text falls short of being a novelisation.

I'm sure I don't have to point out all of the implications in the publisher's note. The total message is clear enough; the movie is the definitive statement, and the 'original work' is no more than a curiosity, an addendum, a souvenir of the flicker-show. It's the worst piece of in-print toadying I've seen since Lord Carrington made a public apology for the embarrassment caused by Death of a Princess.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that every paperback house should start modelling itself along the lines of the Oxford University Press and present each of its titles with considered and tasteful reverence. Nor am I suggesting that novelisations simply shouldn't be (I make an exception for fotonovels, though. You make the heap, and I'll bring the matches). I've even pulled the old film-into-book trick myself when times have been particularly hard, and fen with a taste for trivia may remember the awful Saturn 3 ("No taction contact," James barked). The film vanished abruptly, the novelisation began to

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fade with it, and some time soon I'm hoping that the damn thing will disappear completely and stop following me around. My opinion is that the best novelisation in the world is only a piece of ephemera, a souvenir, something on a par with Nostromo baseball caps and Yoda ears and Darth Vader T-shirts, any literary pretensions that it may have being completely undercut by its illiterary origins.

And this, it would seem, is the kind of respect that Panther has for Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

I don't want to see novelisations done away with, any more than I want to go around the streets snatching the deelyboppers off the heads of kids who are obviously having fun with them. I do think that the line between the novel and its ersatz counterpart is becoming blurred, and that any conscious move by a publisher to worsen this situation is reprehensible.

There's a solution that wouldn't harm anyone; publish books as books, and novelisations as A4 format magazines in the style of the Complete Bestsellers series. They could carry stills from the movies and backup pieces on the making of the films - merchandising without shame or pretensions, in other words. And nobody, meanwhile, should have to make apologies for a novel on the grounds that it's self-contained and reflects the inner vision of its author, any more than we should apologise for a nightingale because it doesn't croak like a frog.

That's what I'd like to see, but in reality the division is tending to break down even more. On the bookstand alongside Blade Runner (TM) I found The Thing, "by" Alan Dean Foster, with a sideways nod to John W. Campbell. If ever we need an example of the worm that swallows its own tail, here it is. Start with John W. Campbell's novella Who Goes There?, published in 1938, filmed in 1952 as The Thing from Another World, remade in 1982 as The Thing by John Carpenter, novelised the same year by the aforesaid typist. The Campbell novella was tight, well-written and it all happened in the head. A fast flick through the Foster novelisation, reading a few passages at random, was like eating suds. Not much to it, but you still want to heave.



Philip K. Dick

Alan Dean Foster is worth looking at, while we're in this piece of country. His name has been associated with a string of mass-market adaptations, from the Star Trek Saturday morning cartoons to Alien. In interviews he appears to make little distinction between this kind of work and his original fiction, and here I have to agree with him. I've tried a couple of his books, and they read like hack novelisations, too. Starlog treats Foster as an up-and-coming Big Name in sf, and Starlog is read by a lot of the kids who make up the sf market. Certainly in terms of purchasing power, they can outvote the Vector readership any time.

Phil Dick wrote for people who are prepared to interact with a prose work to create their own mental images. Alan Dean Foster writes for people whose lips move as they read. And who's the Man of Tomorrow?

So Blade Runner (TM) now sits on the corner of my desk, a piece of tinsel tat wrapped around a high-quality core that's regarded as more of an embarrassment than an asset. And somewhere during the packaging, they hiked the price by one hundred per cent.

Sleep on, Philip. This is something you wouldn't want to see.

(c) Steve Gallagher August 82.

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INSPIRATION

DAVID PENN

(SERPENT'S REACH by C.J. CHERRYH. Orbit 1982, 334pp., £2.25.)

When I began to read science fiction, at the age of twelve or thirteen, there was no question of being critical about it. It was simply a case of opening a book and plunging straight into a completely new world, full of weird and vivid characters, momentous events, and awesome ships traversing the galaxy in the name of the Empire. I didn't think of it as unlikely or far-fetched or unconvincing - I wasn't that sophisticated. But after three or four years that innocence wore off. When I read even the most celebrated books, I found myself - if they involved galactic empires, or aliens, or spaceships - forcing myself out of a sort of loyalty to suspend my disbelief, which I couldn't really manage. Half my mind was following the universe-shattering events on Arrakis, and the other half was wondering whether I should have done the washing-up, how close I was to getting the sack at work, how many people would remember what I did at the party last weekend. When I tried with longing to re-read the Foundation books, the characters seemed to be nothing but vague essences extracted from every television, Hollywood or hack historical work you could imagine - not at all the mind-boggling panoply of future lives as I remembered it. I had to content myself with the drier, more intellectually bracing novels of J.G. Ballard or the tongue-in-cheek logic-twisting extravaganzas of Philip K. Dick, which were less romances or imaginative tales than elaborate games with imagery, rather like abstract art. I lost faith in the old virtues of science fiction as I had seen them. More accurately, I thought that entertainment had to be on an intellectual as well as an imaginative level - any book that tried to get me going with long spaceflights or intrigue amongst galactic leaders I rejected as childish.

But now I stumble across a book with no overt 'meanings', full of all the stuff of space opera, populated in a very similar way to Asimov's books, with colourful and somewhat theatrical characters, with space battles, space voyages, weird aliens, the lot, and I'm thoroughly convinced. Why should that be - am I getting old, or am I less cynical than I was, or have I retreated into a second adolescent dream-world?

I think the most important factor is that space opera is capable of maturity, just as all other forms of literature are capable of maturity in the hands of a serious practitioner. Whereas Asimov's characters are ciphers to conjure up the image of a detective or a great scientist in the minds of an unsophisticated audience, C.J. Cherryh's have a life and breath of their own. Whereas his prose is merely a vehicle for carrying the plot, hers is a performance in itself, giving the impression that she's actually worked at it and tried to get it right. Whereas his plots are clever and craftsmanlike, hers is strong and logical. Yet Cherryh's book is like nothing in science fiction so much as Asimov's epics. There is, for her, the same fascination in the alienness of civilisations, in the exotic, simply for itself - unlike Bishop or Le Guin, for whom alien planets are arenas for the exposition of some social or philosophical point. The difference is that she has managed to escalate that fascination onto a higher plane, and the single most important factor in her achievement is her intense interest in character.

Character is at the heart of *Serpent's Reach*, not only in the human dimension but in the whole foundation of human character in the society which breeds it. The alien society Cherryh creates is not just a backdrop for her characters, and her characters are not simply TV characters or anyone in the street transposed to another part of the universe - they have grown out of that society and are a necessary product of it.

Raen a Sul Meth-maren is the full title of the book's central character, and

each part of her name has its origin in the nature of the society into which she was born. The Meth-marens are a branch of the Family that came to an area of the galaxy known as Hydri reach ("reach" is Cherryh's word) and settled it with the agreement of the indigenous life-forms, fantastic ant-like creatures called majat. The Meth-marens were given the exclusive right to communicate with these creatures, but one section of their family broke faith with the alliance and tried to exploit the majat. As a result, two "septs" of the family, Sul and Ruil, were formed, Sul retaining the family's homelands. Raen grows up in an atmosphere of tension at a time when the Family, having been given extreme longevity by the majat, is enjoying the maturity of the civilisation it has been creating for itself from clones and specially-bred "Betas": power has gone to the heads of its younger members and Raen has to be an expert at self-defence, survival and Machiavellian diplomacy to cope with the feuds and assassinations that accompany the Family's factions' struggles to gain supremacy. The formative experience of Raen's life is the destruction of all her family and her home by jealous rivals, leaving her to escape and grow up even tougher and craftier than her peers.

As a member of the reach's ruling family, semi-immortal, commanding unlimited funds and having all clones and Betas at her disposal, Raen has all the pride and bearing one might expect. She is generous to the weak and poor, harsh and merciless with upstarts and enemies, cultured and highly educated, intelligent, willful, self-indulgent, amoral (but self-disciplined and honourable) and daring. Because she must keep out of the way of her enemies, she is also lonely, and her search for human companionship is an important thread of the plot. Because she is opposed to the ruling regime, she sees beyond it; she is inquisitive about the Outside, the majat, the servile clones and Betas. The story follows her through several decades of her life, from fiery adolescence to self-indulgent youth to proud and lofty maturity, and each barely discernible change in her character is a logical product of her experiences. The plot is simply the story of the consequences of her alienation from the Family, causing her first to want revenge and then to discover what is really happening inside it, and what is going on deeper in the society it has created. As the story progresses, we discover more about the society into which Raen was born: Cherryh describes the whole economy of Hydri reach, the structure of its society, the nature of the bizarre majat on whom the economy depends, the character of the programmed human clones who are the reach's slave class. Cherryh's fascination with the whole complex is endless, and so is ours.

Other writers have of course succeeded in much the same sub-creative vein, but it is her enthusiasm for the new in itself which sets this book apart. It is almost a naive enthusiasm, a simple desire to create and explore, and in that sense it is fully in the spirit of the early universe-trotting genre writers, carrying on where they left off. From the studied, philosophical realms of Bishop, Le Guin and all the others, we come back to that original sparkle of freshness which made early science fiction - at least, our early science fiction - what it was. But the difference is that we come back to it with a writer of such power that she can convey that excitement, that dream-adventurism even to adults who live on a wage-pocket in a semi-detached with a mortgage, children, the parents' association and career anxiety.

But she is far from a perfect technician, and is probably a long way from her own maturity. Her style in this novel has a sort of grandiose mythic booming rhythm which carries the grand events of Family history superbly but has to give way for those more ordinary moments in which Cherryh takes an equal interest, such as Raen's choice of clothes for her servants and lover, jumping down from a truck, or setting up house on an alien planet. Sometimes the writing flags in other ways - she works very hard at building up our respect for the ancient majat but then puts these giant armoured creatures through the most unbecoming manoeuvres when they try to get into the front seats of cars or come in through the back door for a saucer of sugar-water. But these lapses hardly matter - they don't even grate as one would expect, since the pressure of the book and its overall magnificence simply pulls you inexorably on to the next page. It's the sort of

book you'd be captivated by even if half the pages were missing.

Cherryh's inspiration is her hallmark at the moment. Although she obviously strives hard to polish her work, she writes less by technique than by sheer vitality, and that after all is the single most important element in any writer's work. I recommend *Serpent's Reach* to anyone who thinks that only philosophy and social comment can save science fiction from being the literature of adolescence.



COOKIE LANGUAGE

JIM ENGLAND



(*STARBURST* by FREDERIK POHL. Gollancz 1982, 220pp., £6.95.)

This novel is based on Pohl's earlier novella "The Gold at the Starbow's End" and stems from his feeling that he "did not do full justice to (its) theme". What he has done, in fact, is shamelessly pad out the original novella and thereby transform it into something very silly.

A group of young Americans is launched towards Alpha Centauri on the first interstellar voyage, at a cost of 40 billion dollars. The inevitable fanfare surrounding the launch, involving the US President and the First Lady, lots of ambassadors and over 4000 press people, is fairly well portrayed. The idea of the voyage seems to be largely that of the President's Science Advisor, Knef-



FREDERIK POHL

hausen, a one-time member of the Hitler Youth and a Germanic stereotype about whom the author seems to have mixed feelings. But we soon learn that the project is a fake - there is no planet orbiting Alpha Centauri, and Knefhausen's sole aim in sending the crew on such a long journey is to give them the time to make scientific discoveries. They are all geniuses, and Knefhausen has devised an educational programme for them "to keep them from boredom or insanity". The plot, at this early stage, has already become rather silly, since it is not clear why the same discoveries could not be made on Earth. That the discoveries are said to be urgently required "to keep the Free World Free" is equally as silly. The theme of all this, it appears, is that necessity is the mother of invention.

The novel becomes briefly interesting as Pohl appeals to his readers' sense of wonder with talk of the concept of "Godelized eidetic statement" which made the original novella famous, and discoveries in Number Theory and a "calculus of statement" used by his geniuses "so that they can learn to think clearly by communicating fully and without fuzzy ambiguities". But it soon becomes clear that some of Pohl's ideas are very specious and simplistic, and that his characters are as unlike geniuses as any that have appeared in fiction. This, for instance, is how the ship's commander begins an important message to Earth: "This is Shef again and it's oh, let me see, maybe about day two hundred and fifty? Three hundred? No, I don't think it can be that much. Look..." And so on for five pages, full of such expressions as "crappy", "piss off", "rotten", "shucks", "dumb" and the observations that sex is "great", resembling nothing so much as the outpourings of some petulant New York teenager. All the geniuses seem to think and talk in the same addled way ("It makes no difference at all. No. That is not true. It makes a

difference..."), rapidly becoming (as one of them might put it) a "pain in the ass" as far as the reader is concerned. Near the end of the above-mentioned message, the commander casually remarks that he is enclosing certain information "so you'll know how to build those fusion power reactors you've been bullshitting about all these years", and it is impossible for the reader to believe anything of the kind.

It is clear that Pohl has a very cynical view of his potential audience. They will, he thinks, be adolescent or young adults, probably American, with a fondness for raiding ice-boxes and cookie jars, a liking for crude language and demeaning references to sex, blind to the appreciation of literary quality, capable of only the sloppiest reasoning, and inexperienced enough to admire such characters as his Eve, of whom he writes: "When (she) was younger she had served her term in the counter-culture - nothing bad, none of the hardest stuff. Just a time to rebel and fool around. She had observed or experienced almost every known form of interpersonal relationship, from quickies to communes" - or so she and the readers might think, because Pohl can be referring only to sexual relationships. The same cynicism is evident in the mechanical fashion in which he tries to maintain suspense by interposing pages of banal, pointless conversation and accounts of meal-times between his climaxes, switches without good reason from one viewpoint to another, injects into his prose phoney sentiment and infantile humour ("It was a worrying position for a four-year-old to be in, especially if he wanted to live to reach five"), and is inconsistent enough to describe one character, Darien, as "dark" on page 168 and "fair" on page 173. The plot is imposed on the book with no regard for plausibility or organic growth, and the prose is only minimally serviceable.

The original novella was worth reading for the sake of the ideas it contained, but in this novel they are submerged beneath power-fantasy and pure hokum. The characters, having reached Alpha Centauri, build a spaceship out of almost nothing and return to an Earth that will live happily ever after because all its radioactive heavy metals have been destroyed. I cannot believe a word of it. Once again, it seems, we have an established writer coasting along on the basis of his earlier reputation.

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## DAUGHTER OF TEMPEST

JOHN HOBSON

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(PZYCHE by AMANDA HEMINGWAY. Faber & Faber 1982, 235pp., £7.95)

Amidst the bulbous blockbusters and never-ending sagas of mediaeval anti-heroes, it's good to find an honest example of the SF thriller. With her first novel, Amanda Hemingway has produced a highly literate and entertaining tale which suggests that a new talent may be emerging.

Hemingway's only previously published work is "The Alchemist", a short story in Introduction 7, which was a sustained atmospheric nightmare concerning murder and paranoia. Surprisingly, Pzyche has not - as the Faber blurb would suggest - been written for the serious prose market; instead, she has dusted down the plot of Forbidden Planet (itself lifted, of course, from Shakespeare's The Tempest) and turned it into a frequently gripping yarn that will find wide appeal.

Krake is a remote planet in a system at the edge of the galaxy, barren and uninhabited save for a few miners and Dr Corazin and his eldest daughter, Pzyche. Corazin had deserted his wife before the birth of her second child to live a monastic existence devoted to science, and has brought up Pzyche with only a computer for company. When Corazin's wife dies, his second daughter, Tnoe, decides to visit Krake and finds, coincidentally, that interest in Krake is increasing. A lost civilisation, or at least its remains, has been found underground and a price-

less seam of gems which could upset the galactic economy if mined has also been discovered. On the flight with Tnoe is Varagrín, representative of a godfather who wishes to buy a few planets with the aid of the gems.

Formerly isolated, Psyche is now faced with the task of making conversation with strangers, with making allowances for them, and with growing up in weeks rather than years. She falls in love with Varagrín, who liquidates the miners and paves the way for the mafiosi to begin their excavation of the gemstones. Varagrín prides himself on having complete self-control and no principles to compromise his sense of survival, but with the arrival of Tnoe's friends and an archaeological team to investigate the lost civilisation and the mafiosi's subsequent attempts to kill these intruders, he is forced to take sides and admit to his humanity - especially when he discovers that the planet has a hidden and menacing secret.

Psyche is a fast-paced and entertaining thriller, Hemingway concentrating on the building up of a web of relationships between a host of characters. She has a gritty and often uncomfortable sense of reality, and despite the predictability of much of the plot it is given fresh impetus by the askew angle of her vision. But the problem with thrillers is that they need to be told from more than one perspective (to help the plot along) and it is extremely difficult to juggle with the personalities and views of six or more characters. By not taking the easy way out, with clichés, Hemingway is faced with the problem of quickly defining and imposing strong identities on her characters, and in this she falters. She makes a mistake in giving them odd names, like Tnoe, Tnar and Tirrill, which are hard to distinguish, and she fails to sketch them adequately, relying too frequently on their physical attributes and not on the mental impression that appearance and personality convey. This handicap counterbalances the otherwise impressive writing in the rest of the book; a cast of fewer characters would have been more effective.

Psyche is a welcome first novel, and even if it doesn't break new boundaries it is nevertheless the sort of enjoyable, well-crafted story that is too often in short supply.

GOOLIES GRABBER

DAVE LANGFORD

(FRIDAY by ROBERT A HEINLEIN. New English Library 1982, 380pp., £7.95)

It isn't often that I find myself agreeing with publishers' hype, but just this once I do. Not of course with Harlan Ellison's extremely silly comments ("Get it, enjoy it, and trumpet the news: Heinlein's back -- and better than ever. A seething performance drenched in professionalism. If Le Carre had made it with Le Guin, their mutant offspring would have written this dandy novel...") One can only hope this is supposed to be tongue-in-cheek, but with the more cautious and canny dictum of Jerry Pournelle: "His best since *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*."

Yes indeed. It's something to be thankful for. In between we've had three long bad books: the sopiness of *I Will Fear No Evil*, the bitterness of *Time Enough for Love* and the out-and-out grotteness of *The Number of the Beast*. By comparison *Friday* is not bad at all; on the other hand it isn't startlingly good, and comes nowhere near Heinlein's one-time peaks. Its virtues are background inventiveness, wisecracking energy and continual movement, which is not the same as plot; its major flaw is that there is no plot, the author faking it as best he can with exposition and travelogue to an extent which gets downright annoying - as when, near the end, the heroine addresses a seven-page lecture on astronautics to the reader for no apparent reason than to flaunt Heinlein's research and computer-generated (presumably) star maps.

At the beginning there's a promise of plot. Boy, does that old Heinlein opening style grab you by the goolies! There is our 'combat courier' heroine, Friday, killing a man just for following her when for all she knew he might only want to ask her to join the BSFA. She rushes about at great speed as hundreds of people are blown up in vain attempts to get her; she makes her rendezvous; she is betrayed, interrogated, gang-raped, tortured, hospitalized and told about the wonderful heroism of Friday and those who rescued her, all in 25 pages. The plot stops around here.

An incidental note. Several reviewers have declared that Heinlein's views on rape here are pretty despicable, a man having no right to suggest that a woman really could 'lie back and enjoy it' nor that her main objection would be to the guy with bad breath rather than to the experience as a whole. Frankly, this got up my nose too: but it's defused partly by the reflection, "Oh yes, this is a standard Heinlein Controversial Bit, meant to get up critics' noses," and partly by the patent fact that Friday is no real woman but a mingling of the standard Heinlein Competent Person (usually male) with, say, Podkayne of Mars (a trifle older and less icky). Also she is an 'artificial person', genetically souped-up, and has terrible problems in a society where such test-tube folk are mere scum. "My mother was a test tube; my father was a knife," she repeats in accents of self-pity on every possible occasion: the real delayed-action irritation of that rape scene is the contrast between her supreme cool then and all this weepiness later on. (By the way, you can't spot her artificial status by looking at her, not from records, nor apparently by any scientific test, but she's rather gabby and increasingly inclined to spill the beans to anyone she's known more than about five minutes.)



ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

In the background we have an interestingly fragmented world comprising endless mini-states which at first glance are autonomous, from Wales or the Channel Isles to Quebec, British Canada and the Chicago Imperium. Such states' sovereignty is as piffle before the wind by comparison with multinational 'corporate states' a la IBM, which are quite happy to nuke the odd city in the interest of driving a hard bargain. Somewhere in this background is a great ruckus called 'Red Thursday', a mysterious orgy of sabotage and assassination which breaks out on page 91 and holds out the promise of some more plot at last: but it stays firmly in the background, merely causing Friday's travels in vague search of friends, lovers, jobs etc. to be more protracted thanks to blocked borders. (About 250 pages later Red Thursday is explained in an offhand fashion as the equivalent of an IBM board reshuffle: by this time one has practically forgotten about it.)

Slightly more visible are Friday's employers, an organisation run by aging Kettle Baldwin (you may remember him from 'Gulf', though there's no other connexion beyond a fanfare to those who Died For Civilization in that story and a vague parallelism between the openings of 'Gulf' and Friday). On page 233, after sleeping around a bit, travelling a lot, dodging the fuzz and similar travelogue material, Friday learns she is about to 'enter on her true profession' of being a supergenius and wizard extrapolator -- this from Baldwin, who takes the usual role of wise old Jubal Harshaw but snuffs it shortly after the above and allows the plot -- for want of a better word -- to flop anew. And so on.

Politically, Heinlein sounds a few familiar notes while washing his hands of our (extrapolated) civilization. The fragmented nations stand for his favourite sure-fire sign of cultural sickness: identifying oneself with one's own race, religion, language, sex or SF association rather than all pulling together for America and Robert Heinlein. Other symptoms include being rude to Robert Heinlein, making Robert Heinlein pay excessive tax and writing poor reviews of Heinlein books...perhaps I exaggerate. Luckily Friday need not go down the plughole with the rest of us since there is a New Frontier out there on raw untamed planets...

So, after a final attempt to instil some urgency into the book by a bit of intrigue without relevance to anything that has gone before, Friday ends up on a distant homestead with a few of the more personable characters (assembled on the same remote planet by boggling coincidence) and realises that the true outlet for her supergenius mentality, hyperacute senses, ultrafast reflexes and souped-up strength is: you guessed. She becomes a nice housewife and raises babies. And, of course, cats.

There's some good stuff here, as indicated; perhaps we could all write to Heinlein suggesting that the material lying about in Friday might be well worth making into a novel.

XX

SPACE FILLER

SUE THOMASON

XX

(THE SPACE EATER by DAVID LANGFORD. Arrow 1982, 301pp., £1.75)

Despite the rather pulpy cover and title, I found this book interesting and entertaining reading. Langford combines elements of an exciting gadget-based adventure story with some thoughtful, and thought-provoking characterisation.

The adventure involves sending two people via matter-transmitter to a colony set up on an alien planet during a previous experiment in this field. The colony is now experimenting for itself with the various effects of Anomalous Physics, which provides the key to matter-transmission and other technological goodies, but is unaware of the dire consequences that such meddling has on the Structure-of-the-Universe-as-we-know-it. Our Hero and his girlfriend are sent to try and preserve the status quo.

On another level, it's a book about manipulation: scientists trying to manipulate forces they can neither understand nor control, bureaucrats manipulating other people into doing their dirty work for them. Both of the two main characters, Jacklin and Rossa, have been psychologically manipulated, distorted to fit the specialist roles they play in the future-Earth society. And the final horror of physical manipulation: the maximum aperture of the matter-transmitter's gate is 1.9 centimetres. To pass through it, Jacklin and Rossa must be killed and cut up into little pieces.

An attempt to realise what this must mean to the man and woman facing it dictates the pace of the novel. It opens with a piece of action writing straight from the pages of Starship Troopers: one-and-a-half pages into it, the hero dies for the forty-sixth time. Jacklin is a professional soldier; dying is part of his 42.



job. He's not afraid of it: there are always the regeneration tanks afterwards. He is desensitised to pain and death; other stimuli pale into insignificance.

Rossa, on the other hand, is addicted to pain. She is a projective telepath; she screams in Morse code as machines torture her by nerve induction to transmit important messages. Telepaths are not permitted to permanently suicide - those useful regeneration tanks again.

Much of the first third of the book is a long meditation on facing the inevitable, premeditated, coldly calculated death which, for different reasons, both Jacklin and Rossa have volunteered for. It has the impotent slowness of a nightmare. Events speed up again afterwards: lies are disclosed, makeshifts are constructed, a final flurry of action ends the novel.

My main criticism of *The Space Eater* concerns its ending. Only at this point does Langford's handling of his material show unsureness of what to do. The story slams to a halt like a car driving into a brick wall, and a cliché is thrown hurriedly over the mangled remains. I cannot believe that

Jacklin and Rossa could break their conditioning just by wanting to, and I fear that even in the new world/new start to which they are abandoned, neither of them will live long enough to explore the unique opportunity for reciprocal sado-masochism their relationship presents.

However, even with its faults, this is not simply a promising first novel, but a good novel, first or otherwise, even if a rather harrowing one. Just goes to show what nasty things lurk in the nicest people's minds....



VECTOR'S CHOICE



LEGERDEMAIN

PAUL KINCAID



(NO ENEMY BUT TIME by MICHAEL BISHOP. Gollancz/Timescape 1982, 397pp., £8.95/\$17.50. }

To write is to perform magic. It is to conjure places, people and happenings from marks upon paper. Too often, writers are content to perform some poor sleight of hand; we recognise the trick, and the illusion does not work. But sometimes a writer works hard at his craft, constantly refining and honing his skills, never content if anyone can see through the trick. Michael Bishop is a magician of this second type, and *No Enemy But Time* is far more than just another illusion.

As the title suggests, this is another time travel story. It's an old theme and one that is becoming tired. Anyone, therefore, who can conjure new life out of it is to be congratulated. And that is precisely what Bishop has managed. From infancy Joshua Kampa has vivid dreams of early Pleistocene Africa. He soon recognises that these are far more than just dreams, keeping a detailed record of his 'spirit travelling', so that he is eventually able to challenge the views of a renowned archaeologist. It is this archaeologist who introduces him to the time travel project, a means of visiting the past by actualising these dreams.

There is, throughout, a hint of ambiguity between dream and reality, an occasional suggestion that things happen because Kampa, the dreamer, wills it. But, to my mind, this could have played a far larger part in the novel, particularly as it leads to a deliberate and unresolved contradiction at the end of Kampa's adventures in the past. Nevertheless, the underlying awareness of this ambiguity adds a nice flavour to the story.

I cannot remember meeting the idea of time travel through actualised dreams before, and there are hacks enough who, having come up with this new variation on an old theme, would think it more than enough to carry a book. Bishop, thankfully, has not fallen for such foolishness. Instead he gives us an episodic, third-person account of the life of Joshua Kampa from his birth in 1963 to the beginning of the next century, alternating this with Kampa's own account of his dream/time travelling experiences in early Pleistocene Africa.

There are several novelties here. Perhaps most to be approved is the escape from science fiction's traditionally limited world view. To set a story in a convincingly described Africa is quite refreshing. Also refreshing is the fact that Kampa does not time travel to some action-packed period of history but to that dimly understood period when homo habilis inherited the earth from the australopithecine. We have all come across stone age characters, or rather caricatures, in more than one science fiction story, but this is the first time I have come across such distant ancestors so convincingly drawn in an sf novel. Bishop has clearly done his research into the work of the Leakeys and their fellows, and has used it to good effect.

The comparison for these time travel passages that springs most obviously to mind is with William Golding's *The Inheritors*. Golding gets under the skin of his Neanderthals, and presents the world through simple eyes. One feels that these are, indeed, pre-human people. Bishop is not quite so successful. Kampa's role as narrator, of course, means that everything is viewed from a 20th century viewpoint, and we only see the hominids from the outside. What is more, there is a tendency for these homo habilis to appear as no more than primitive tribesmen. They come to terms with, and indeed understand the rudiments of, Kampa's gun far too quickly for my liking. And once Kampa starts to live with the tribe it is often difficult to remember that these are supposed to be pre-humans. What really spoils it, however, is the character of Helen, the hominid Kampa falls in love with. Physically and intellectually she is clearly far more homo sapiens than homo habilis, and it never does quite work. Nevertheless it is a praiseworthy effort, and head and shoulders about anything similar I have ever read in science fiction.

However, if the passages set in the Pleistocene have their weaknesses, the contemporary passages have considerable strengths. Right at the beginning of the book Kampa uses the analogy of a slide show:

"Until the moment of my departure, you see, my life had been a slide show of dreams divided one from another by many small darknesses of wakeful dread and anticipation. Sometimes the dreams and darknesses alternated so rapidly that I was unable to tell them apart. An inability to distinguish between waking and dreaming may be an index of madness, or it may be a gift." (Page 9)

Kampa then relates an incident in which he changes the order of slides in an oft-repeated slide show. That is how Kampa's life during the 60s, 70s and 80s of this century is presented, a non-sequential series of images from different periods. The many little domestic elements that contribute to this picture of modern life are very convincingly handled indeed, and in the main I found these parts of the story far more interesting than those set in the Pleistocene.

Kampa is a well-realised character, and setting him against a contemporary world, going through the agonies of growing up that we all know, Bishop clearly had a lot to say about him. However, the rather too rigid pattern of the book, alternating chapters set in the modern world with chapters set in the Pleistocene, left me wanting more about the modern world, while the Pleistocene elements

seemed rather too drawn out. Certainly, around the middle of the book, the pace of the story in the Pleistocene sections slows considerably, leaving me impatient to be back in the modern world.

The intent, clearly, is that each modern chapter should throw light on the succeeding Pleistocene chapter. That, on a rather simple level, it does, but I can see no real justification for such a rigid pattern. There is a lot to be done in the modern chapters. They show how Kampa's life is affected and shaped by his spirit travelling, and particularly how it affects his relationship with his adoptive family. There is the basic exposition, telling how Kampa comes to be involved with the time travel project, and his training with a tribesman in the African bush. Then there is the detailing of the ramifications; the project is supposedly intended to establish the theories of the archaeologist Blair, yet Blair is also a minister in the government of the African state in which the project takes place, and the political standing of the state in the world is also a consideration. And above all this, Bishop has to tell us about Kampa, crafting a real human being out of words on paper.

In comparison, his job in the Pleistocene chapters is essentially descriptive. Things happen, sometimes dramatic things: earthquakes, death, the hominids' first encounter with fire and with Kampa's pistol. Yet these are essentially illustrative, there simply to tell us about the life of *homo habilis* rather than to carry forward the plot of the novel. And every now and then the artificiality of these incidents shows through: something happens not because the plot warrants it or even because it adds much to our appreciation of *homo habilis*, but to provide a Pleistocene break between two modern chapters.

What is important in these chapters, and what is done remarkably well, is the impact Kampa makes upon the hominids, and the impact they make upon him. In effect they rapidly accept him as some strange new creature in their dawn world; but in the modern chapters we have seen that Kampa is outside the mainstream of his society, and he fits in better with *homo habilis* than he ever did with contemporary USA. Significant of this is the fact that he finds love with the hominid he calls Helen, and their relationship is quite sharply, wittily and affectingly drawn. Yet these elements are somewhat overwhelmed by the other details with which Bishop loads these chapters. It would have been clearer and more effective if the balance of the novel had been adjusted: perhaps a ration of two modern chapters to one Pleistocene might have been better.

But don't let this mislead you. I am quibbling here about how a good novel might have been improved, but never let it be forgotten that this is, in the first place, a very good book as it is. Both parts, in the main, work well. There is a believability about them that convinces you not only that this is how it is, but that this is how it was.

To return to my analogy between writing and magic; the quality of his writing is an author's most potent tool in creating his illusion. Writing awkwardly is like a magician fumbling his tricks, whereas good writing makes the whole thing smooth and hides any sleight of hand. The passage I have already quoted shows the quality of Bishop's writing, and though such heights are rare, his writing is never less than craftsmanlike and generally shows a wit and perception that help to make this such a delightful book to read.

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TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

NIK MORTON

~~~~~

(MISSION by PATRICK TILLEY. Michael Joseph 1982, 398pp., £4.95)

Mission, labelled as "a novel" and not as SF, is as difficult to classify as Russell H. Greenan's "It Happened in Boston?" The story begins with Jesus Christ

(The Man) arriving DOA at Manhattan General Hospital on the 1948th anniversary of the Resurrection; he subsequently awakens to confront the narrator Leo.

Was God an astronaut? As John Hobson said in *Vector 105*, this theme can be puerile and redundant. Mission could so easily fall into this dread Van Daniken slot, yet Tilley's handling of the central characters, especially The Man's, adds depth and freshness and redeems the book; indeed, this might be the definitive God-as-an-astronaut tale. Not that such matters: his major theme and his treatment of it transcend such considerations. He apparently spent twelve years of research to produce this riveting, consistent, learned, often humorous, iconoclastic novel, in which all the sham and ceremony, the hypocrisy and time-serving attitudes are ripped away from the world's religions. As The Man says, "Religion is not what it's about. That's something you people dreamed up." Man-constructs, not divine ones.

Leo is a cynical, wisecracking, questioning lapsed Jew and attorney. The Man has chosen him to pass on the True Message - how is left until the quite devastating end. The book is shot through with sardonic wit, forthright appraisal and great candour, employing pyrotechnic images and calling upon various ingredients - the Turin Shroud, parallel universes, Carlos Castaneda, Michael Moorcock and sex commercialism to name but five. In addition, the style, language and characterisation make it very much a book of the eighties, weaving a convoluted and believable story using the symbols and questioning stance of our age. It is also a brave book, carrying as its banner the pursuit of selfless love, unfolding the history of The Man's "missing years" through many humorous conversations.

Time, it appears, is simultaneous - not a new idea but, as St Thomas Aquinas said, "To God, all Time is eternally present" - and The Man and his fellow "Celestials" can time-travel almost at will. There are, he says, nine universes, seven of them belonging to the World Above and being non-temporal and non-dimensional, while the physical cosmos which we inhabit is known as the World Below and the Netherworld is a mirror universe of antimatter, created as a prison. Twelve Celestial colonists, powers rather than physical beings, the Ainfolk (from which the ancient name for Earth, Eardh-Ain, is derived), originally implanted the genetic matrices from which all life throughout the cosmos springs, but millions of terrestrial years ago the Celestial Empire of the Presence was split by a rebellion which had its roots in the creation of the World Below; the rebels were banished to the Netherworld, but soon broke out into our physical universe. The Ainfolk became trapped on Earth, surviving by incubating themselves inside a host-body and thus concealing themselves from the powerful forces of Brax, a "relation" of The Man. As the world's population increased, they became splintered into smaller and smaller pieces, only dimly remembering that they were once part of a greater whole: these scattered fragments are the human spirit, the soul, to which folk-gods and the concept of "the soul of a nation" are attributable. The Man's original mission was to prepare the Way for the re-coalescence of the Ainfolk splinters into the original twelve to return to the World Above, but both he and one of the two envoys that had accompanied him became stranded. Referring to being trapped inside a human body, The Man says it was "A thirty year nightmare. And it still isn't over. They promised me. Go through with the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and that's it. Next stop home. Instead of which, I end up in the twentieth fucking century."

'Brax is the Gnostic "Abraxis, Lord of Chaos, Supreme Unknown", non-dimensional and not encountered directly, but Leo nevertheless experiences his power, shifting reality, feeding doubts and threatening physical violence. He can corrupt or destroy life, not create it, and can increase his strength only by winning the allegiance of the Ainfolk. He will do anything to prevent the ungarbled truth from getting out - "It takes a brave man to stand up against them," says The Man. "They can sap your will, corrupt you, ridicule you and, if all else fails, they can destroy you" - and Leo becomes embroiled in his and his forces' age-old man-hunt through time after The Man, who has appeared in visions in many different time-frames.

Leo's response reflects that of the reader - though he continually tries to bury under layers of doubt the feeling of certainty that The Man's revelations of

the Truth engender, he resigns himself to eventual conviction. His gradual transformation from cynic to believer may be inevitable, but is accomplished without cloying sentiment, resulting in his reappraisal of the world around him - particularly profligate America, squandering money and resources on the gratification of 'Braxian desires while millions in the Third World starve - in a manner that is uncompromisingly honest: "Like Conrad's hero, he had journeyed to the heart of darkness only to recoil before it engulfed him". He and we are made more aware of the "Gadarene-swinishness of the Me-Generation" and of the way in which "Knowledge has become a packaged product, marketed like soap. Just as detergents are choking your rivers, so the garbage that is being pumped into your heads through your eyes and ears is polluting your mind" - which is just what certain critics have been saying all along!

Ironically, a cult religion could conceivably develop around Mission's central theme, which is in essence that only the man-constructed trappings have alienated the people from The Word. Christian teachings, when stripped of all the pretentiousness foisted upon it in the early Christian centuries, are obviously appealing; this is also the case with the cores of many other religions. People seem to need a spiritual goal, a storm-anchor in these agitated times, but let it be honest and stripped of all its cant. The idea of Good versus Evil does seem naively black and white but, really, all the world's ills (barring natural disasters) could be pared down to these two extremes - not necessarily 'Good' as we've been 'educated' to understand it, but the 'Good' that is instinctive, a gut-feeling that makes sense, devoid of passion or self, like the concept of universal brotherhood. The plea that emerges from Mission could so easily be the clarion call to begin the spiritual fight. As The Man says, "All of us are involved, whether we like it or not." Clearly, I like it, and I believe many other readers will too.



VANITY FAIR

GEORGE HAY



(MEMORY OF TOMORROW by MARC FINGAL. Published by the author 1982, 112pp., £1.60) (postage paid from J.Cairns; 15 Brinburn Street, Sunderland, SR4 7RG.)

In view of the anguished cries from unpublished writers, I think you ought to know about this novel. Marc Fingal got tired of waiting, and published his own work. Duplicated, it is bound 'unprofessionally', but perfectly adequately. The printface and chapter headings are, if anything, easier on the eye than with most pbs. There are twenty-one chapters for 112 pages, and they give the flavour of the book: 'Up and Away', 'Success at last', or 'Littorally Lovely'.

The content is indeed as unusual as the format: the setting varies from a seaside watering-place, ice-cream stalls, long sandy beaches and those endless streetfuls of decaying boarding-houses, space-ship interiors and a planet called Senuria. There is a convincingly charming heroine, an alien conjuror and a mad professor. Well, on reflection, not so mad - The hero draws unemployment benefit and studies at the local College of Further Education. He's a real person; I have met him often at Cons, and sometimes in the North of England - he has a certain wry quality not too often met with in the south.

The author cheats quite magnificently at the end. You'll probably feel annoyed but not, I think disappointed - the thing is very ingenious.

I hope I'm getting across to you that this is an unusual novel, and well deserves to be read in its own right, and not just because it is gallantly self-published.

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