VECTOR

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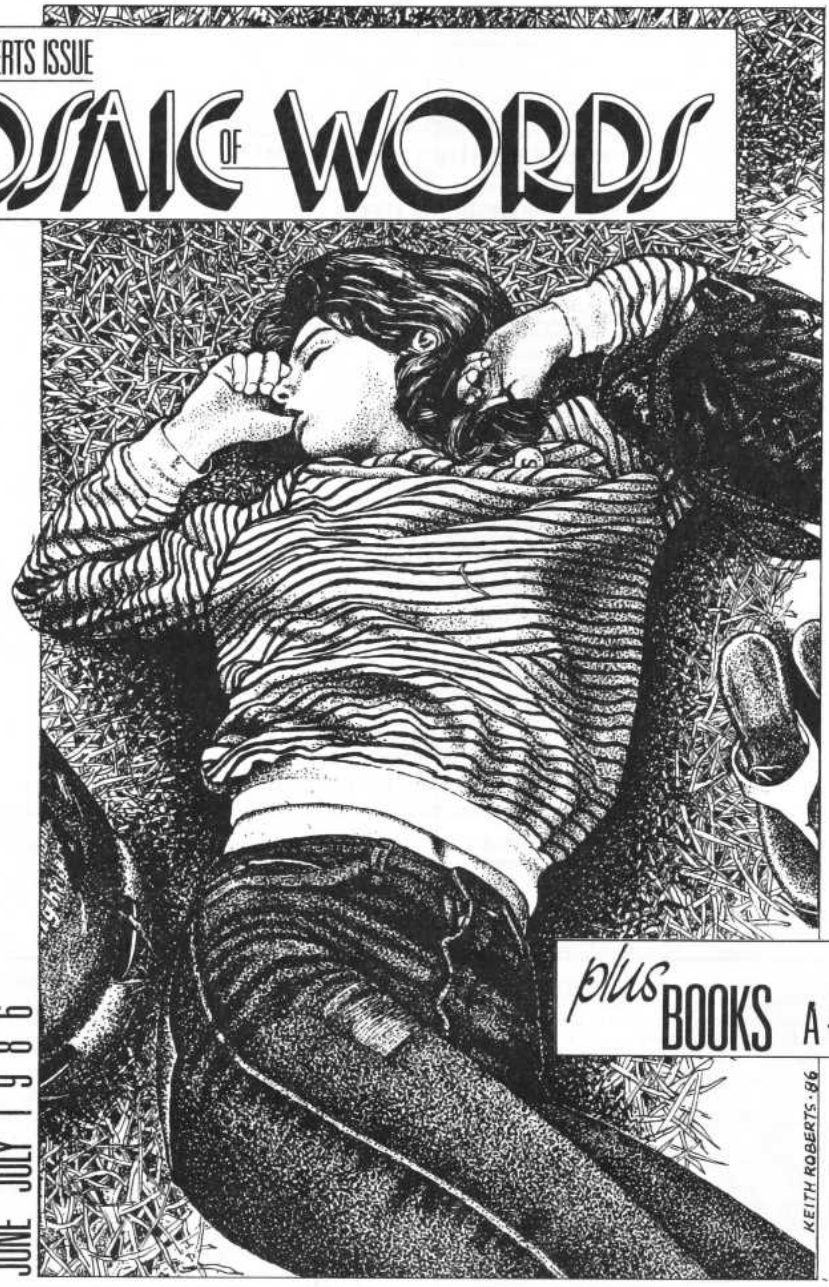
SPECIAL KEITH ROBERTS ISSUE

MOSAIC OF WORDS



plus BOOKS A·N·D LETTERS

JUNE JULY 1986

VECTOR

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JUNE/JULY 1986

C O N T E N T S

WE HAVE PACKED THIS ISSUE SO FULL THERE IS no room left for any extended words of wisdom from me. Briefly then: i) Response to the BSFA survey has been far better than anyone predicted and they're still trickling in. We've extended the deadline to June 30th, so if you have not yet completed yours there is still time to get it in. ii) You may have noticed that this is a **KEITH ROBERTS** special issue. If you know his work there should be plenty here to please you. If you don't, I hope this will act as an introduction to one of Britains most enjoyable writers. ——————— DAVID V.BARRETT

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L E T T E R S

SUE THOMASON'S REPORT ON MILFORD '85 WAS HONEST AND BRAVE; THE outsider view. Other pieces I've read about Milford have been written by one of the 'team members'. Personal experiences allow me to sympathise with Sue so I hope that the other people at Milford are not annoyed/upset. The view that British SF (or writing in general) is a middle-class pursuit is one worth further consideration. Certainly it's much more common to read that an author is/was a lecturer in English Lit than someone who has had a wider experience of the world. The day of the writer-adventurer seems to be gone.

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[Tom hopes in vain. All the other letters received on Sue Thomason's article in **Vector 131** disagree strongly with her perception of Milford - and with Tom's comments. - Ed.]

IT SEEMS A LITTLE UNFAIR OF ME TO ARGUE WITH SUE THOMASON'S report on Milford '85 since of course it was her personal experience, but there are things I think she is wrong about. One of them is class. This is a tricky subject to talk about - and I find it particularly difficult, as an American, to be sure what is going on when one English person (to my eyes and ears middle-class) sneers at another for being middle-class. Sue doesn't actually say how she would identify herself in terms of class, but her assumption that she was the odd person out in an otherwise homogenous group is simply not true. Of the other eleven people at Milford, I think at least two would identify their upbringing as working-class, three are expatriate North Americans, two are Jewish, some make a living as writers (sometimes below Sue's projected £5,000 p.a.!) and some do not, and in general there is far greater political, financial, religious, educational, sexual and intellectual diversity than an outsider could imagine from reading Sue's piece.

Other things she got wrong: there were five first-timers last year, not three; and they weren't oysters, they were mussels.

But obviously Sue did feel an outsider, and sensed a dividing line which does exist. The great difference is not class, not money, not making a living from writing, vs. having a job, not preferring beer to wine, but is a matter of attitude. Milford is for professional writers - professional not in the sense of making a lot of money, but in the sense that you consider writing your profession, even if you are doing other things to earn a living. The assumption at Milford is that everyone has an equal stake in it, and an equal contribution to make, whether an author of one published story or of a whole shelf-full of books. There is no division into teachers and students, and if Sue felt a lack of serious discussion about writing she should have said so at the time and not waited for someone else to start one. It is not necessary to be an extrovert, or middle-class or rich to enjoy Milford, but what you get out of it does depend a lot on what you bring to it yourself.

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AS THE SON OF A BUS DRIVER WHO LIVES IN A COUNCIL FLAT, WITH A secondary education and eighteen years in the R.A.F. as a ranker before my first story was published, I'm a little surprised to find myself described as moneyed and middle class. Sue makes some terrible assumptions on very little evidence. Anyone who thinks writers make a lot of money must have stars in their eyes. Like Sue I had to borrow to go to Milford, as did one or two others that I know of.

There is no such thing as a 'Milfordian' in the way that is implied in this article. This is a writer's workshop, not a public schoolboys' reunion, and a third of the attendees this year were there for the first time. If Sue had wanted to talk about full time working and writing, she need only have asked. I have been a writer for 12 years and had a full-time job, commuting to London, for 3 of those.

The most presumptuous statement in this article, and one I resent, is that I write for 'the entertainment of a privileged group' and 'despise my readership'. To my knowledge that does not apply to anyone I met at Milford last year. I don't know who these 'privileged people are that Sue talks about, but I have to earn my living by my stories and I'm not going to do that writing for half a dozen people. And why should I despise my readers? They are putting bread and butter on my table.

This is a personal reply because I cannot speak for others, but I know that my circumstances are not very different from those of several of the attendees last year. We were all as apprehensive as Sue that first night - that much I do know - and oysters must have been a joke. Most of us were eating cottage pie. There were no oysters on the menu to my knowledge and a glass of wine costs the same as a pint of beer, I believe, but then I don't drink wine, ever.

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DESPITE HAVING READ TWO ARTICLES IN FOCUS, BOTH OF WHICH ARE FAR more accurate than her own piece (okay, I admit, I wrote one of them), Sue says Milford wasn't what she expected. Her report is a personal view, and she admits that a lot of what she didn't like might have been her own fault, but I'd like to pick her up on one point where she is totally wrong: it's where she talks of readers, and the way writers are supposed to despise them.

Speaking for myself, I suppose I only ever think about a certain class (sorry, I mean 'group') of readers - that's the professionals: the friends who read my manuscripts, at Milford or elsewhere, my agent, and the editor who has the good taste and discrimination to publish what I've written. They're the people I know, and it's because of what they say that my stuff appears in print. Readers? An author can't possibly write for thousands of people that he doesn't know, so you write for yourself and those who are close enough to you to comment on your work.

Although I never really consider them, I know readers exist - there are PLR printouts itemising how many thousands read this book or that, there are royalty statements which tell of sales (and, if you're lucky, even royalties), and there are paperbacks available in bookshops - ten copies, say in the local Smith's, and a few weeks later only five. They must go somewhere, people must buy them. But who...? I'm glad this mythical race of readers exists, and the last thing any writer does is hold his audience in contempt - because if so, his opinion of his own work and himself can't be very much higher.

At the last Milford there was a discussion on this topic, when one person was defending his story by claiming that it was like the usual 'rubbish' aimed at that market - and this comment was immediately pounced upon, even by the most cynical amongst us. We spend our lives in front of our word processors/typewriters/parchment, and writing is far too important for us to waste our time deliberately writing badly or turning out junk. A 'hack' is a writer who can turn out professional work to order - it might not be great literature, but must please the people who buy such stuff (editors and readers) or he wouldn't make a living. And whatever work a writer does, it has to be done as well as possible. The author owes that much to himself... and to the reader. Whoever he or she may be.

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A MOSAIC OF WORDS

AT MEXICON II, IN FEBRUARY 1986, ***PAUL KINCAID*** *TALKED TO* ***KEITH ROBERTS***

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS ARE BY KEITH ROBERTS

KINCAID: The place I want to begin is the letters you wrote to me saying you were giving up writing. Why?

ROBERTS: Well, I think the answer is, writing was giving me up, because I was getting increasingly difficult problems in selling. I still think it was Anthony Burgess in his **99 Best Novels** that got me back into print. Within a month or so of that I was getting competing offers, one from Penguin and Gollancz, the other from Macdonald/Futura. They were both saying:'No, no, it's nothing to do with that Burgess list, that's nonsense.' But I genuinely believe that was it.

There was that poor lady Jean Rhys who was ignored for twenty years, and then she went into two lists of the most neglected novelists of the century. She was the only one who got two mentions, one from Ted Hughes; and they put her back into print after twenty years of writing a book a year and putting them into a cupboard. I heard her interviewed on radio and they asked her what difference does it make, and she said: 'None, it's too late'. About two months later the poor old love died.

That was the publishing business in the '50s. From being a top selling novelist, they suddenly decided Jean Rhys was a no-no. I've got a feeling that the same thing had happened to me. I haven't written to Anthony Burgess yet.

KINCAID: Did you abandon work in the middle of writing it and just say that's it?

ROBERTS: Basically, yes. I didn't have much on the stocks at the time, and I just decided I wouldn't add any more to it. I've always worked as a graphics man and an advertising man anyway, so I just turned to that full time.

KINCAID: So when you started up again it was with the Kaeti stories?

ROBERTS: Sorry, par for the course, I can't honestly remember. Probably them. But I've stopped and started many times over the years, and each time is the last time.

KINCAID: The character of Kaeti seems to be very different in each of the stories I've seen. Is she a manifestation of what you call the multi-girl?

ROBERTS: Sort of, yes. Well you should get Michael Coney over from British Columbia or wherever he lives because he invented the phrase. It was the girl in **The Chalk Giants** who kept having awful deaths and being recreated. I think Kaeti probably does much the same sort of thing. I think they're fantasies that could each have a psychological explanation - so what is new?

KINCAID: Again, in **Richenda** you have a malleable female character, a character who appears in different ways to the narrator at different points. Why do women appear that way to you?

ROBERTS: I don't know. I think all characters appear that way. We've all got a variety of characters inside us and we just tend to present a face to whichever is convenient.

KINCAID: In **Richenda** you actually wrote a story about someone who writes Keith Roberts stories.

ROBERTS: Well, I was very annoyed with the BBC World Service at the time because one of the PR people at Gollancz rang me up and asked if I'd do an interview for the BBC World Service. It turned out her name was Richenda, and I'd never heard of the name before. Anyway, I went along for this interview and I was in and out of Bush House inside 20 minutes. I didn't have a relaxer. I was dry as dust because I'd spent two and a half hours in the coach because of a shunt on the Chiswick flyover. And the recording they did of me was obviously something designed for the cutting room floor. It was something the series editor was going to look over and say: 'No, I don't want that'. I was treated so cavalier that I thought I have to get some sort of mileage out of this to pay for my coach fare. It sounds awfully corny, but that's how I worked it.

It seems I spend most of my time being cross. It's not really true, but if I get wound up it can be useful. I got very cross with **The Women's Press** because they were putting advertisements into **Interzone** among other places saying only work by women considered. I thought this is driving a coach and horses through the Sex Discrimination Act, but that's by the way. I did hear that they can tell the work of a male within two sentences. Well this got me very cross indeed because it's putting petty politics above writing, which I happen to think is important.

Apparently the phrase in those circles that's used is 'biffery' and they said that every male writer in the business had tried to 'biffer' them by sending in a story as an alleged female. So I doctored up a story - one of the Kaeti stories actually. I had to retype it - it's the first time I've felt the need for a word processor, because I could have instructed it to search and saved myself two day's work. I presented it as a first time writer would. It wasn't in a folder, it was folded in half and stapled. I put in a rather gushing cover letter, just the sort of letter that a first time writer would write, saying that she much admired their operation and she was very nervous about sending a story but would they look at it. This was for **Dispatches**, which I knew they'd closed up the list on anyway. As I said, it was a tremendous piece of deception, the covering letter was the best piece of fiction I'd written. I used a friend's P.O. Box number. The resultant letter reads:

'Dear Richenda Steuart, thank you very much for letting us have a look at

your story. We enjoyed it, but unfortunately having reached our final selection for our forthcoming short story anthology there's nothing much we can do with a single short story at the moment. Thank you for your interest in our series. We would be very happy to look at a full length manuscript if you have any.'

It has been alleged since that they wrote this letter because they were worried about the Sex Discrimination bit, but I said considering their advertising why should they worry about private correspondence. It's also been alleged that since this was only a short story not a novel, they'd have obviously told the difference between a male and female writer if it was a novel. So novels use different language...!

KINCAID: Talking about novels, how did Kiteworld become a novel?

ROBERTS: By a process of addition. I had a letter from Gildman Verlag in Munich, and they were doing one of those big paperback things with illustrations. It's a very interesting letter. They said they were interested in material from Britain and America for direct translation into German. I'd been shooting my mouth off for years about why can't foreign publishers accept material. But they won't, of course. They say if you cannot print it in England then there's something wrong with it. So I had to put my money where my mouth was and do a story very quickly. It was an idea I'd been messing around with. The Cody system of strings are real, of course, and are still flown. So I hacked out this thing fairly quickly, which became **Kitemaster**, which won the BSFA award.

Malcolm Edwards then said: Right, turn it into a novel. I said: My God, you can't write a noel about people flying kites. I mean, fly one kite you've flown the bloody lot. I had to try and concentrate on the people who were doing it, rather than the things themselves, just repeating the technical detail of flying a Cody string which I thought would be awful. But if I'd done it the other way I might have won a Nebula.

KINCAID: I've not compared the two versions. Is there a difference between the first stories that appeared in **Interzone** and their appearance in the novel?

ROBERTS: No. Someone criticised me badly for that, saying that the first story, **Kitemaster** is in question and answer vein - refresh my mind on this, and tell me how that works - which of course it is. But since it was only conceived as a short story one had to do it in this fashion, one had to get the information about the kites over very quickly. It was quite a short story, the Germans said: We will give you 12 pages only. I didn't know whether they meant A4 or 10x8 or what, so I gave them 12 pages of A4 double spaced and they said that was all right. But it was a bit of a problem when I came to novelise it. It has been said, quite rightly, this information could be spread right through the book and it'd probably have made it more satisfactory. I thought, well, the BSFA were kind enough to make it the pot winner and it didn't seem to me right - maybe I didn't make the right decision - to then tear it up and re-write it and spread the material. It was also easier, of course,

KINCAID: Is **Kiteworld** Britain?

ROBERTS: It can be Britain, if you want it to be, but it could be any planet really. It wasn't tied to a particular locale in Britain as possibly **Pavane** and **Chalk Giants** were. In fact geographically it looks more like Brittany than Britain, because it's a large appendage to what is obviously a mainland stretching to the east which is the deadlands. So it's not really geographically located at all, but I don't mind people saying it's Britain if they want it to be Britain, honestly. It's just a country after a nuclear war.

KINCAID: What are you doing with **Kiteworld**? There is a sequel in the works.

ROBERTS: No. I'm working on another book set in the **Kiteworld** realm, but it isn't a sequel because to a large extent so far it has infilled on the stories of many characters in **Kiteworld**. It does go forward from the end of **Kiteworld**, but it also goes back. The only one I've completed is **Tremarest**, which is a biggie - 30,000 words - which is coming up in **Amazing**. End of plug.

I don't want to think of it as a sequel because if you do that the first thing everyone will say is: Oh it wasn't as good as the first. Because people are always assumed to go downhill as they go on writing sequel after sequel. The truth is, most of them do.

KINCAID: Why are you going on to write something else in the same world when usually you don't?

ROBERTS: I just thought there was more to be said about the characters than I'd said in **Kiteworld** itself. Now that's a long book, it's about 108,000. Thank God I was so tight to my deadline, because Malcolm didn't have time to cut it.

KINCAID: You suffer that a lot?

ROBERTS: Yes, There's a standard thing among publishers, and I've heard it said for years and years: Get 20,000 words out and we'll think about it. The fascinating thing is, it doesn't matter how long the script is, it can be 140,000 words, it might be 90,000 - but the magic figure is 20,000. Get 20,000 words out and we might consider it.

I've got a theory of why that's done. It might be thought a little bit arrogant, but it's honestly not. My work is very condensed and tight, and you know how scripts are read by publishers, they have people called readers - the rate when I was editing was about 50 bob a manuscript. They're usually retired schoolmarms - nothing against those - but they usually are. I used to know one, and every Saturday afternoon she'd be lying on her tummy in the front room with a very large bottle of gin beside her and an overflowing ashtray, and she'd be speed-reading a great pile of manuscripts at £2.50 a throw. Her speed reading was magic. But I think my stuff honestly won't speed read because it's been condensed already - what it needs, if anything, is expansion. They say: Oh I can't understand that, therefore it needs tightening, therefore get 2,000 words out. What it needs is 20,000 in, but the speed reading can't pick this up. That's the theory anyway.

KINCAID: How much re-writing do you do? I've heard it suggested that you don't do many drafts, is this true?

ROBERTS: No, I used to do a tremendous number of drafts. Over the years I've cut down the number. It used to be at least four. **Kiteworld** I did in three, that includes the finished draft; but it really did need another. Malcolm Edwards worked with me on the editing side, but there was a tremendous amount of roughness in it that would have been smoothed out by another draft.

KINCAID: Your novels are never novels, they're collections of stories. Why?

ROBERTS: I seem to be better at writing short length than long length. It's not absolutely true, of course, you've got **The Furies**, and the historical, and **Molly Zero** which I think just about rates as a novel.

It's a very interesting point, actually, that the novella has never been an acceptable form in England, and yet many of the great writers of this century - the first one that springs to mind is Thomas Mann - seem to have written to novella length. **Death in Venice** certainly is a novella, it can't be more than 25-30,000 words. So on the continent it's always been accepted as a form. But in England, no way. Except in science fiction and fantasy. It seems that a tremendous number of fantasy and SF writers are happiest around this 20-25,00 word length.

KAETI'S HERE!

KINCAID: Is there any reason why you work at that length? Is there anything you can isolate, identify in your work that makes you happiest at that length?

ROBERTS: I don't honestly think there is. I always let a story make the length it wants to make, and most of the things I've done seem to have wanted to make that length. I'm afraid I can't explain it at all, I don't know. Maybe I lack concentration.

I know one other thing - I can't pump things up. I'm thinking of a certain very famous writer who's a great friend of mine who, faced with a contract that had run over time, took a novelette that I'd published during my publishing days, and he said: Every page of this script has got to become three. And that's exactly what he did, he multiplied every page by three. And that did win a Nebula, which probably tells you who it is.

His theory was that if you repeat yourself often enough, and stretch material thin enough, then the critics are not going to understand it, so they call it genius. It's a cynical attitude, but it does honestly seem to work. And that really won a Nebula, and it was inflated by a factor of three over the original novelette simply because he was over his deadline.

KINCAID: I've said you write a sort of mosaic. Your novels are a mosaic of individual pieces that together add up to a full picture of the world. Is that how you set out to produce them, or is it a by-product?

ROBERTS: I think it's a by-product, honestly. I set out with a general idea of the kind of world I want to create, it just seems that I'm happiest in creating that world in small sections like a mosaic.

KINCAID: **The Chalk Giants**, for instance was originally published over quite a long period of time. How far did you conceive the whole thing when you started?

ROBERTS: Well, in very general terms, the whole thing. Obviously a lot developed during the writing of it, and one story tended to spark off and suggest others. The broad outline I had, but the thing really had to make its own shape and pace as it was going on.

KINCAID: And was that true of the other books that have arisen out of stories?

ROBERTS: Yes,I think it is. And **Pavane** was written back to front, which amused me at the time. The first story that was written was 'Corfe Gate', which came about because of a remark made by a landlord's daughter in a Dorset pub one time. I wanted to write a story about Corfe Castle, but I didn't want to write an historical. The actual siege of Corfe castle in the Civil War is interesting and rather horrid, but I didn't want to write an historical, I wanted to try and get across the tension and contrast between the old castle and the fact that Corfe is a modern tourist centre, and get them both together.

She made a stray remark that she was the reincarnation of Lady Mary, who was the castellan; and I thought: my word, you are. So I wrote this thing called 'Corfe Gate', and in the writing of that found myself talking about **The Signallers** and I thought: Who the hell are they? - and the road trains, and I thought: What the devil can they be? And I had to go back and attach the front of the book to it. So it was actually written from back to front. And everyone said as it was going on, because it was published from front to back: Oh no, he's losing his inspiration. So maybe it got better as it went forward.

KINCAID: Something that has always puzzled me about **The Chalk Giants** is the story 'Monkey And Pru And Sal', which, individually, I think is the best piece in there, but seems detached from what has gone before and what comes afterwards.

ROBERTS: I just saw it as a sort of entr'acte between the modern section and the really, basically, sort of historical flashback. A sort of resting point. Which is why the multi-girl and none of the other characters appear.

KINCAID: Was it conceived as part of it when you originally worked out what the novel would be?

ROBERTS: No. I had a vague idea for it for some years though I couldn't quite see how to use it, and it seemed to me it would fit quite nicely in that. I might have been wrong. But it was thought of as a deliberate interval.

KINCAID: Is the final version of **Chalk Giants** as you wrote it?

ROBERTS: Almost, except for the links. My original series of links was changed at the suggestion of Tony Whitam at Hutchinson, and my agent at the time, Giles Gordon. They said: You've made it painfully obvious that you hate the guts of the lead character, you don't need to rub it in any further. So I wrote new links. There is one copy of the original novel with the original links, but I can't for the life of me remember where it's gone.

KINCAID: But there's a big difference between the British and American editions.

ROBERTS: Oh yes. That was that character, David Hartwell; I've been promising to stick one on him ever since. He offered me something for it, and I said no it wasn't enough. Then he upped his offer and said he'd give me $500 more if he could cut the links out. I said no, I didn't want the links cutting. Then he said he'd give me another $1,000 if he could cut off the first story. At that point - does everyone know the legend of the Sibylline books? I thought: let's see how far he'll go. If he'll give me another $1,000 per cut we'll finish up with a single fold booklet.

It had a nasty aspect to it, because he later got on to my agent and was very huffy indeed. He said I'd mounted some sort of campaign of vilification against him in the States and this had resulted in no sale of the book. This was completely untrue. I was glad he'd given me that much power and authority, but I can't pull strings like that.

He destroyed the book, and he also destroyed my American reputation. Hopefully, it might be restored with **Kiteworld**. Several critics actually said there is something wrong with this book, it is not complete - because of Hartwell's vivisection of it.

KINCAID: Something that comes out of a lot of your work is your fascination with machinery. Is this just something in your writing?

ROBERTS: I'm fascinated with machinery up to the level I can understand it. People start talking computers to me and I'm completely lost. I can't understand new technology, I've reached my ceiling, which is with machinery I knew when I was a teenager.

I suppose there's a degree of nostalgia in it really, all the machinery's very simple. I remember when I was editing the magazine and I was paying a monthly visit to the Globe in Hatton Garden out of a sense of duty, I think the first time I met John Brunner, he asked me one of those obviously prepared questions. He was at the bar, and **Pavane** had just come out, and he said: Tell me, when an author posulates an alternative time stream, why is the technology always inferior to ours? I'd had a hell of a day at the office - that was the day they took the telephone away - and I said: You know, John, I'm buggered if I know. And I carried on drinking. But I don't know, except there is a certain nostalgia to do with old machinery.

KINCAID: One of the other things that crops up a lot in your writing is religion. Are you pro or anti?

ROBERTS: Neither, really, but it's a hell of a convenient fall guy for a lot of things. I was rather sorry when I did **Pavane**, I felt I'd dragged the Catholic Church in by the scruff of its neck, screaming. Not that the church minded. I tried to put that right in **Boat of Fate** and give a more accurate picture, certainly, of early Catholicism.

I suppose in that sense **Kiteworld** is a deliberate looking back to **Pavane**. I was trying to think of something that had a repressive influence, and religion put itself up as a front runner.

KINCAID: Another thing that comes up in several works is the place of the artist in society. Are you writing about your own plight?

ROBERTS: No, I don't think so. When I was writing 'Our Lady of desperation', which I still think works very well as a vicious black comedy, everyone said: Roberts is supposed to be an artist, so he's sympathetic. Well I wasn't, I thought the artist in that was a prime rat fink. So was the Civil Servant, so it was just thieves falling out, I didn't take any overview of it. The interesting idea of two people who are totally unable to understand each other: at one point, his watchdog says: 'I can't understand you; any of you. I've tried, but I can't'

KINCAID: I was thinking more of Rowley and Brother John in **Pavane**.

ROBERTS: Obviously I had a fairly extensive art training, so I tend to think possibly back toward that kind of theme. It's material that I do have as personal experience, so it's natural that I do occasionally tend to go back to it. I don't attach any social significance to it. It's more that the material is to hand, and I find it a lot easier with characters like that because to a certain extent can understand how they tick.

KINCAID: **Keith Roberts, thank you very much.**

THE CHALK G·I·A·N·T

Reflections by Keith Roberts

THIS ARTICLE IS LARGELY BASED ON LETTERS FROM KEITH ROBERTS TO VECTOR IN RESPONSE TO THE BSFA BIBLIOGRAPHY AND TO ARTICLES WHICH APPEARED IN VECTOR 124/5 AND 126. THE SECTION ON KITEWORLD IS ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE IN ABBEY HABIT 1

I'D LIKE TO START OUT BY CONGRATULATING EVERYBODY CONCERNED with the booklet on an excellent production. That's Paul Kincaid, of course, for his careful and perceptive biography and analysis; Geoff Rippington for the masterminding; Mike Ashley for his extraordinarily detailed bibliography, which will in fact be very useful to me; and last but not least, Eve Harvey for her mammoth typing job. I would also like to pass on my compliments to LJ Hurst, Stephen Tew and Judith Hanna for their very interesting, incisive and understanding comments on Pavane.

THE FURIES

THE FURIES WAS A FIRST NOVEL, WITH THE FAULTS OF A FIRST NOVEL ON its head. Although I'd been writing for seven or eight years (without trying to sell any of it), it was a first novel, I was insecure, and I did try to disarm where possible. The characters are relatively crude, which is perhaps why Penguin books finally decided to reissue it. (I've always said I didn't like what they printed, but they make damn good chocolate biscuits.)

John Clute got it dead right in his **Encyclopedia of Science Fiction** article. I hate and fear violence, which is why I sometimes show it, though I try to keep it to a minimum. I think the last time I belted anybody I was about eight. He fell over and had a nosebleed; I finished up in the loo being sick. And I was the winner! I don't hate cities, by the way, though I can easily see how a reading of my early stuff would create that impression. I love London, Birmingham, Newcastle; and Glasgow, that vast, brooding, frightening, magnificent town. What I really hate (and fear) is the endless, featureless, suburban sprawl in which, unfortunately, most of us are forced to live.

The character Pete was real, though I never knew her well. Interestingly, the idea of Jane came about after I'd watched the rather disastrous movie of **The Day of the Triffids** what was produced by, of all people, Howard Keel. Wyndham's original Susan was played by a disturbingly nubile young lady who was obviously several years older than the school girl she was portraying. 'My God', I thought, watching the only bits of the film in which I found the slightest interest, 'the English disaster novel with sex!' And so, bingo, we had a book..

Paul Kincaid mentions a subject that of course had to come up: my use of female characters:

'Though not unique in writing about women, Roberts has used women as protagonists far more often than is usual among male SF writers; and the women have always been characters not cyphers'.

OK, so I use a lot of them; it's because I like to. And I also realise that SF and fantasy writers do the same (note I don't classify myself as an SF writer at all). It's just that I think I do it rather well. I like beauty; and so I like women. It sounds crazy, but wen I was still a student I was haunted by a fear: that I'd wind up an old man in a long' dirty mac, staggering hopelessly from one dirty bookshop to the next. It sounds crazy now, but it used to keep me awake at nights. What has happened of course is the reverse. Since I've become middle-aged-aged I've cased to be a threat to them.

I think certain SF writers need to take a short course in growing-up, because they don't seem to be able to handle the topic at all; women, when they appear, are either pointless odalisques, nude for preference, but be 'jerked into savagely' whenever they can't think of their next para, or ogres to be fled from in fear. Complete with vaginae dentate, the lot. I think only Bradbury got the mixture right, in **Silver Locusts**; but he of course knew exactly what he was doing.

The trouble is that the bulk of SF fans (all present company honourably excepted) are very young folk themselves;they just haven't lived long enough to understand. But when I wrote my sex scene in 'Our Lady of Desperation' (itself a rare event for me), a very old friend of mine said thoughtfully it was 'the best bang-up I've ever read. Which I took in turn as the best praise I'd ever received!

I'm very interested in porn, by the way. Always have been. The trouble is, I'd like to do good-class porn; and that wouldn't sell. Start to make your characters real, and it interrupts the masturbations!

PAVANE

PAVANE SEEMS TO BE HUNG AROND MY NECK LIKE THE TRADITIONAL albatross. So much so that at one time I said I would have my middle name changed by deed poll, to make it Keith author of Pavane Roberts! Not that I'm complaining;I can think of less glamorous impediments. But it is an early book and very far from faultless (so what is?) I'm occasionally sad though that it seems to have overshadowed so much of my other work, which seems to me also have a certain merit.

No story or novel is ever written, in my experience at least, as a result of cold, cerebral plotting; it seems the things grow organically, usually from small beginnings. Stephen Tew's comment (**Vector** 126) about the symbolism of the White Boat is clearly correct.

'The very colour white represents the enlightenment of freedom and progress in contrast to the black and suppressed world of Becky's home.'

I was obviously aware of the notion in a vague way while telling the original story;but the perception in this case comes more from the reader than the original author.

What actually happened was that some six or eight months after the original cycle was completed I was commissioned by Mike Moorcock to produce another story in the same vein. By that time I was working in London, editing **SF Impulse**, and was puzzled for a time as to subject. I was saved by having a weekend's cruising on a magnificent ninety foot racing yacht. The skipper, an active

RN commander, turned out to be a martinet of the type that makes Captain Bligh's junketing look like something at a Sunday School fete, and in fact I had hell;but somewhere along the line the idea of 'White Boat' was born. (The boat I was on was white, as of course most of them are.) Critics are quite correct in saying tat the story doesn't really fit the rest of the cycle; though I still hope it's acceptable in its own right. A perceptive friend said at the time that it was the first piece in which I'd done an in-depth psychological examination of a character, and I think he was probably right. But Paul Kincaid looks at it from a different viewpoint:

'The great success of 'The White Boat' is that it represents the first really successful fusion of is twin obsessions, character and landscape.'

This, which I' been trying for for sometime, is probably more significant.

Becky, by the way, did exist. She was a barmaid at a Dorset pub I frequented. She later became what another friend called the 'multi-girl' of **Chalk Giants**, a book I've always thought of as a sort of 'black **Pavane**'. And no, I didn't screw her; I had my hands too full in other directions at the time.

There is a structural flaw in **Pavane**. I was guilty, slightly, of changing boats in midstream; I started with the idea of a parallel world, and then decided some cyclical view of history would become useful plot-wise to make the point that the Church was actually aware that it had all happened before; but it's not brought out strongly enough. Anne McCaffrey, an author I respect very much, picked it up on first publication; but I know it has since puzzled other readers and critics.

You might be interested in the actual germination of the book. I said that most ideas spring from small events and **Pavane** was no exception. I'd known Purbeck for some years, and wanted very badly to do a novel about the area; but fascinating though the story of Corfe Castle is, I didn't want to do straight historical.(Also, publishers being what they are, it had to be SF; after **The Furies**, I'd already been put firmly in to my pigeonhole.) Also I genuinely wanted to capture, if possible, the sheer contrast between that great growing ruin and the modern tourists, the beer, ice-cream and all the rest. I was puzzled for a long time; and then one evening I happened to overhear a barmaid (not the multi-girl)giving a spirited description of Lady Mary's defence of the place during the Civil War. When she'd finished the visitor complimented her on her detailed knowledge; at which she stuck her chest out, and said she was the reincarnation of Mary Bankes herself. 'My God', I thought, 'you are..' So next weekend, 'Corfe Gate was born. The rest, the Signallers and the roadtrains came along later, the book being essentially written back to front. Hence, perhaps, the greater assurance at what seems to be the beginning of the cycle: by then, I already knew my world! The original 'Corfe Gate' of course differed considerably from the printed version; quite a lot of details, including the assassination of Lady Eleanor right at the end, were suggested by Kyril Bonfiglioli.

There was a curious sequel, some years later. I was talking to an extramural study group at London university when the inevitable nit-picker (there's always one at these events) chose to take me up on the subject of the Lady Eleanor wearing 'patterned nylons'. He said this argued the existence of an advanced petro-chemical industry, but there was no evidence for it elsewhere in the book. I merely said that it puzzled me as well, but since nylons are mentioned they must have had one, mustn't they? Which to my surprise got a round of applause, after which the talk went with a swing! I don't think the real answer would have appealed to him: the lass who sparked off the whole idea wore patterned nylons, they being the in-thing that year; the sentence stands as a little tribute to her. Grab that, and you've grabbed the very heart of the book, because everything sprang from that. North and south, forward and back, up and down. It's a fantasy, with all its anomalies on its head. A girl can wear nylons, and defend a castle; because girls, and women, never change.

A few months after I completed the **Pavane** cycle I met 'Old Bess'while driving back to Henley from a caravan I used to own. It was dusk; I was travelling through high woods, and this vast black steamer appeared suddenly around a bend, 'hell in its belly, and its running lamps for eyes'. I was terrified and went hell for leather for the lights of town. Later I met both the loco and its owners at a steam rally. They were pleasant, unassuming folk; and the engine herself, seen in bright sunlight, seemed far less frightening. It rather brought home what my American girl said later in 'The Shack at Great Cross Halt' (**Ladies from Hell**); you end up scaring your own pants off!

Stephen Tew also made the point that most writers of alternative history fiction 'see it as necessary that some link be made with our world for their story to have any relevance'. It's interesting, in view of this, that my editor at Gollancz, Malcolm Edwards, rather firmly scored out any references in**Kiteworld** to 'our'parallel universe such things as swastikas, hinting at a Nazi tie-up, etc. So much so that it's uncertain whether the action takes place on Earth at all. I wonder whether that, in turn, will pose problems for analysts?

The Fairies in **Pavane** might pose a problem for some, but I think it's one of semantics. I remember having a fairly extended argument with Kyril Bonfiglioli (who incidentally taught me more about writing than almost anybody else I can think of) about whether the word could be used at all. Right at the moment, I'm having similar trouble with that dear, sweet,harmless little word 'gay'. I refuse to have my vocabulary restricted because some smartmouth somewhere has decided on a new euphemism for homosexuality.

As Judith Hanna remarks (**Vector 126**), my Fairies are not whimsical, but a real and living force. Fairies aren't tiny,inch-high, shimmering creatures; they look like us, they move among us, they're indistinguishable from us. Shakespeare is usually blamed for the confusion, but that's wholly wrong: his fairies in **Dream** have no scale. OK, so they fight bumblebees; they wrap themselves in adder skins (a change of scale already); but also Tytania (I use the old spelling, because no Queen's name can possibly start with a syllable like 'Tit') sleeps in the arms of the enchanted Bottom. And presumably gets her regal arse screwed off for her pains. So how big are the Fairies? I submit we don't know. They are viewless.

I still feel a bit guilty about the role of the Church in **Pavane**. My Church is modelled on the setup at about the time of Innocent VIII; if anybody doubts it, get hold of a copy of their handbook, the **Malleus Maleficarum**. You'll see that if anything, I played it down. I was looking for an instant fall guy, and Catholicism was a natural. I tried to put it right to an extent in my one and only historical, **The Boat of Fate**, but since it had lousy circulation, and it's out of print anyway, I doubt if any of you have read it. But not to worry; maybe some of you will read something new from me, and I'll try to redress the balance yet again.

One thing, and one thing only, upset me in the reviews of the original **Pavane**. Somebody or other (I clean forget who) said it would delight the soul of Ian Paisley. Well, the day I rejoice in the thought of men, women and children lying in gutters in shaking, bloody fragments - I can only hope it's long distant. My great Church lunges and plunges, baffled; but it isn't evil. I tried to make that plain; but maybe in that, I failed.

Judith Hanna also said:

'The important difference between this reality and that, is that here grand tragedy and true heroism have become impossible, undermined by the cynicism and scepticism our rational and scientific world view entails.'

This echoes something Michael John Harrison said to me years ago: that the real effect of totalitarianism is a slumping of the shoulders, and a sort of grey acceptance. He was right, of course; but I still can't resist the verbal flourishing of the cloak. My characters may not win, in fact they seldom do; but by the Lord Harry, they fight!

THE GRAIN KINGS

ALL I'LL SAY ABOUT 'WEIHNACHTSABEND' IS THAT IT'S COMPETENT. I'D originally planned it as the lead to a new story cycle, and in fact had several more pieces worked out in considerable detail. (Note that I never said Mainwaring was killed at the end; I had a deus ex machina all prepared to take care of that.) What horrified me was its success. One mention of Nazi atrocities and the eyes of the most liberal, humanistic people begin to gleam. So I dropped the notion, and probably cost myself a great deal of money as a result. By the way, England wasn't conquered, she joined in with Nazi Germany before there was any possibility of a war. This, I'm convinced, was the reason for the weird mission of Rudolph Hess; and it's a concept that as far as I'm aware no other writer has so far used. Not even the magnificent Len Deighton.

The Grain Kings was a piece I was quite pleased with at the time. It also caused me a load of trouble, including my one and only libel threat. (There is no libel involved, of course, but that should go without saying.) I thought it pannned out well; Mike Moorcock, when buying it for its First British Serial, merely remarked 'You're there, aren't you?' and slung it over his shoulder onto the acceptance stack. I'd been toying with the idea for years, until it suddenly dawned on me that the way through was via the psychology of the characters. I can't help wondering what Heinlein would have made of the theme. CIA agents shooting it out with .45 semi-automatics, among the tracks? Very likely.

THE INNER WHEEL

JUST ONE THOUGHT ON THIS. SOME YEARS AGO, WHILE SPEAKING AT Cambridge, I was asked by a very knowledgeable postgrad just how I managed to make the Libby section read like the writing of a woman. I said that all male writers, when pretending to be female, became horribly conscious of their character's body. Even John Wyndham fell into the trap in **Consider Her Ways**. So instead of saying, 'I walked down the High Street, my long skirt swishing', Libby just says things like 'I went to the supermarket.' As any intelligent girl or woman would. I just wrote it as if she was a bloke; and amazingly, it seemed to work!

G I A N T

THE CHALK GIANTS

I'VE ALWAYS SEEN THIS AS A SORT OF 'BLACK PAVANE'. THE 'MONKEY and Pru and Sal' sequence was intended as a sort of entr'acte separating the present-day and future parts of the book. Maybe this doesn't work; I've never been too sure.Though I am sure that 'Fragments' does indeed fulfill a purpose. If you doubt that, read the truncated American version, which omits both that and the lead story ("The Sun over a Low Hill") as well as all the links. It may be of interest here to note that Hartwell is the only editor in the English-speaking world who has been forbidden ever to read a manuscript of mine again. He may buy from me if he chooses; but only on a contractual clause that he will print from English plates. So far he hasn't taken me up on the offer.

At the time of the book's publication Michael Coney, a very engaging and skilful writer, dropped me a note to the effect that it was obvious I had once had an unsuccessful love affair with a Dorset barmaid. I wrote back to say that although there was an original for 'Martine' (and by God she was nice!), I'd never had an affair with her, successful or otherwise. If I had, I'd hardly have made it public. I had other problems at the time, and there is no autobiographic material in the book. But it's not where it seems to be. I offer a ten cent cigar to anybody who spots it; but so far nobody as!

Re the 'Viking saga' of Rand: I would recommend the extraordinary book by Tim Dinsdale, **The Great Orm**, which provides the only explanation I've so far read for the Loch Ness Monster. Tim, one of the most prominent 'monster watchers', posits the unique theory that the thing is in fact an invertebrate; which instantly explains the lack of skeletal remains, and a whole lot besides. So leaving aside the rather sweaty aspect of all this sexual adventuring, there is quite a lot of hardcore research behind the narrative!

LADIES FROM HELL

THE STORIES IN **LADIES FROM HELL** ARE OF COURSE THEMATIC: THE concern is for the individual opposed to society. But the menace is not in every case from the left wing; in the lead story, 'Our Lady of Desperation', the government has been replaced by a civil service administration; I can't imagine anything more right-wing that that! Yet this view seems widespread. When the book was first published, some fool or other called me a 'middle-class Prospero', which has to rank as the silliest 'critical' remark made about me so far.

Since politics seem to be called into issue here, I'll make my first (and last) political statement. It seems to be obvious that in terms of both logic and morality, the only acceptable social order is communism. The trouble comes between the theory and the practice; as I say in**Molly Zero**, it founders on the rock of human nature. The painter Vincent van Gogh once said of political systems, 'Those that cost human life I think cruel; so I do not respect them.' Bend any extremist doctrines round (**Kiteworld**) and they meet at the back. Between Scargill and Reagan, I find no difference. This is what I was protesting about.

It might be interesting to note in passing that while I was writing 'The Ministry of Children' (the title is a pun by the way, though nobody seems to have spotted it yet) a couple of little dears in Corby caught a classmate, poured petrol on him and set him on fire; an atrocity that leaves my so-called 'alarmist' story standing.

MOLLY ZERO

PAUL KINCAID HAS MADE A POINT THAT I DON'T THINK I REALISED fully, even during the writing: that as well as being a personal odyssey, the thing does move through the fifties, sixties and seventies. Which of course is the purpose of good criticism: one learns from it. He also says, quite accurately, that 'the politics are undefined.' I have no politics, any more than I have a fixed religious faith; I simply feel that people should be treated as human beings, and become angry with any regime, regardless of its colour, that flouts this. Molly is under personal as well as political pressures, so I don't think that this is essentially a political book.

My greatest pleasure in it is the handling of the central character. Paul kindly says that she's probably the best 'dolly-bird' I've written, and I cautiously go along with him. I never become self-congratulatory (that way lies madness) but I can't help wondering sometimes at the jammy-fingered mess certain other writers would have made of it. Dirty-minded little sods! As it turned out, I handled her for a hundred thousand words without the slightest yuck, dirt,muck, etc. She isn't perfect (who of us are?) and at times I felt I'd like to take a slipper to her; but I do think she's maybe a bitreal. And it may be of interest that a very pretty young lady at Gollancz who handled the editorial preparation for the hardback, rang me with one or two minor queries and took the opportunity to thank me for giving her such an enjoyable job. Which praise meant more to me than all the national critics standing in a row and howling in unison. For an old stager, I couldn't have done too bad a job!

KITEWORLD

THE FACTS IN **KITEWORLD** ARE AS CORRECT AS I CAN GET THEM. THE William Cody who invented the Cody system also helped found, at Farnborough, what was to become the Royal Aircraft Establishment; The Cody Tree still stands there to his memory. He sold the patent to the British War Office for use by observers over enemy lines; and although I've not been able to find any evidence that the Codys were ever used in hostilities (the rapid development of hydrogen balloons made them instantly obsolete) the notion remains a very interesting one. Though personally, with the enemy aircraft buzzing around with their machine guns loaded with tracers, I'd rather take my chance under a Cody string than just below several thousand cubic feet of hydrogen, It's also interesting that at the time, about the turn of the century many patterns of airlifters were being experimented with, it just happened that the Cody model was the one selected.

I had intended the Mistress Kerosina to be villainess; but during writing her I fell progressively in love. She's proud, defiant, lovely, frightened, frustrated; in fact (hopefully) a real human being. I'd like to do some more work with her sometime, because the tale of the white world is far from completely told.

I must say something about the origins of Velvet, the street urchin, and of Tan.

A great pioneer photographer, Frank Meadows Sutcliffe, once took a picture; he called her "The Mermaid' and posed her against a great rotting anchor. Bare, grubby feet, the froth of equally suspect petticoat, the lot. She couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen at the most;but the street-wise look in her eyes haunted me for years. In writing Velvet, I had the feeling that I had called up that unknown, wretched child back to life. I found it a strange experience, and I must admit a rather moving one.

To me, though, the most interesting character in the book is the lovely, voiceless Tan, who I think is my most powerful heroine to date. The biggest story in **Kaeti and co.** features a young schizophrenic female. I won't go into how I got the raw material for that, save to say I didn't go looking for the experience, and that the result nearly scuppered me for good. But while planning 'Kitecaptain' I realised I could take the disassociation process to its final stage and go for full autism. Having completed the piece I showed it to a friend who had had considerable experience of nursing the mentally handicapped. She went quite pale, and asked me how I knew so much. I said, of course, that I didn't; I'd proceeded from the original notion by what I held were logical steps. She told me the story of Gabriela, a beautiful young girl who died prematurely at a local nursing home. Which is why her name features in the dedication. It was all I could do for that unknown and pathetic child

I think the story itself has a certain intrinsic interest, if only for the rather crafty plotting. It had become obvious that I couldn't go on for 112,000 words rabbiting about 'Demons' without making at least one appearance; but since they didn't exist, I was faced with a problem. I solved it, successfully I hope, by the Captain's distraught final vision; and I thought the ghosts of the ICBM's really worked quite well. It also allowed me to bring in the quiet power of the 'Middlers', so I thought it answered quite admirably.

Kiteworld ends with a miracle. (And yes, I know there were various Gods popping out of Machines, but what else could I do? The script was already overlength...). The greater miracle was that the thing was reduced at all; because the final writing time was two and a half months. I've never written a book at that speed before, and never expect (or hope) to do so again. But needs must, as they say, when the devil drives. I was lucky; that magic thing happened, that comes so seldom, and as they say 'it caught fire'. Also which is interesting, it still seems to be alive and kicking. Watch out for the sequel, **Tremarest**, which George Scithers has accepted for **Amazing.**

The miracle had to happen. Tan's hideous self-inflicted wounds came to me in a nightmare; it distressed me so much I spent half an hour walking round and round the centre block of Henley. Since it was 3 a.m., I was finally checked by a patrolling copper. Fortunately, he proved to be sympathetic. Ten minutes chat, and I was back in the land of the living. But I knew the way the story had to go and of course it gave me my tailpiece as well. I distrust the word 'inspiration', and habitually ignore people like spiritualistic maiden aunts; but occasionally I can't help wondering if things are sent from somewhere.

THE FUTURE

KITEWORLD HAS BEEN OUT FOR SOME TIME; **KAETI AND COMPANY** HAS JUST been published. What does the future hold?

I've never yet finished a book without wondering whether I was written out, burning up, soaked dry aad all the rest. But the good Lord (metaphorical usage only) always seems to have provided. Maybe somebody will get me mad; and when the pieces have finished sailing down, there'll be another book. Oscar Wilde used to say that he chose his friends for their beauty, his acquaintances for their integrity and his enemies for their intelligence. Otherwise they couldn't appreciate him properly. God send me some more enemies; and that quickly!

KAETI and Kerosina

KEITH ROBERTS was the author chosen to launch a new line of hardback science fiction, Kerosina Books. He talks about the experience.

KAETI WAS A FASCINATING PROJECT, PRIMARILY OF COURSE BECAUSE of the manner in which the book was produced and funded. As far as I was aware the operation was without real precedent, in English SF at least. As I was fortunate enough to be involved from its inception, it follows that any comments I make will bear as much upon the production as on the text itself.

I first met the Romsey group in the summer of '85. I was impressed from the start by their high collective intelligence and by their obvious keenness and sincerity. When I realized that Jim Goddard and Les Escott already ran a successful marketing operation of their own, and that Jim, as well as being a walking encyclopaedia of SF facts, had wide experience of selling and marketing, the project began to look more and more viable. Mike Moir's knowledge of fans and fandom was equally wide, while Debby, his wife, added to her many other qualities a quietly incisive mind and a feeling for graphics that isn't, frankly, the commonest trait of women. As things turned out, it was Jim, Mike and Debby with whom I had most dealings during the various stages of production.

I'm sure the group won't mind my saying that at the start their practical experience of book production, graphics, typography and the rest was sketchy to say the least. Certainly they had no clear idea of the sheer complexity of the project they had undertaken, or the many potential pitfalls along the way. As Mike observed to me later, 'We realized it wouldn't just be a case of writing a cheque and sitting back to wait for the parcel of goodies; but honestly...'

Naturally, there were hiccups and setbacks; because no operation in the field loosely and unsatisfyingly designated 'the arts' has ever, in my experience, run smoothly. Nor do I think it ever will; it's not the nature of the game. What matters is that each problem was tackled as it arose and overcome to the best of our collective ability. The fact that the group were learning their trade as they went along reflects the greater credit on them. The results, I think, have amply justified our faith, and the hard work that was put in by all.

One of the group's earliest and I feel soundest decisions was that though they wouldn't try for the moon production-wise (cost was obviously a a vital factor, since the enterprise was being funded from scratch); they would settle for nothing less than good commercial quality at all stages. Their reputation as a new publishing house would stand or fall on their first title; whle it was only natural that the project would be watched with great interest by fandom and the trade alike. Most important of all though were the folk who would be buying the title; the customers, at whom the whole exercise was aimed. The sales potential was there, we were confident of that; but these days book buying is an expensive hobby, getting more expensive as each month passes. Nobody would settle for second best; we didn't expect them to.

I suppose I should make clear at this point that I have no actual connection with the group, now Kerosina Publications Ltd., but after my long association with them (the nine months classic gestation in fact) I look on them all as personal friends. So I suppose it's only natural that from time to time I identify with their interests.

From the start it was obvious I would have more say in the book and its promotion than would be the case with a normal 'commercial' house. I was correspondingly the more determined not to seem to pull rank, but to function where possible as part of a team. The editing of the manuscript provided an early illustration. Editing, as I explained, is vital to any writer; the value of a fresh eye can't be over-estimated. It had saved my bacon time and again; and I was anxious to make use of the range of collective skills the group could bring to bear. On the other hand, dealing with individual queries and objections would be vastly time consuming and would probably lead to total confusion. So Mike undertook the listing and rationalizing of the many points of view expressed, a task he performed admirably. So much so that the final checklist, which was mainly concerned with small but vital points of technology,was rapidly dealt with. At one point only was I required to give a casting vote; so all decisions genuinely reflected the majority opinion of the group. To the faint surprise, perhaps, of all concerned, 'editing by comittee' had actually worked!

My own first self-imposed task was to re-read the book from beginning to end, keeping a sharp eye open for possible cuts. I was particularly keen to avoid the charge of self-indulgence, easy to make under the circumstances. My major concern was with the little 'linking sections' of the cycle, where Kaeti appears to talk to her own author. The trick was dubious, to say the least; would it be seen as a device to shore up stories that wouldn't in fact stand on their own? I decided, after long and serious thought, that the links were vital to the structure of the book. Without them, coherence would be lost; the notion of a 'repertory company of the printed page' would be wholly obscure. Also, they gave more insight into Kaeti's real character than the stories themselves,where she's invariably playing a part. It was a view the group later confirmed; in fact they seemed surprised that I had raised the objection, even to myself.

A brief comment about the 'links' that may perhaps spoil the fun of any amateur psychologists inclined to do a shrink job on me. At odd times I've heard the view expressed that when I write in the first person I'm really writing autobiographically, a notion that has always seemed to me remarkably simplistic. I've always felt happy with the first person, happier at times than with the more normal third; hence my frequent use of it, where it seemed suitable. What you have in **Kaeti and Company** isn't ten stories with little bits of 'owning up' in between; it's twenty pieces of fiction, and in the 'links' I'm afraid the fiction is at its height. After all, if I'd really known a girl like Kaeti on a day-to-day basis, the book probably wouldn't have been written at all. I'd have been far too preoccupied!

Which isn't to say that Kaeti,in an odd way, doesn't have a life of her own. I've done my best to give her one, anyway. It seemed to work, to an extent at least. Certainly when I finally produced the point-of-sale cutout I'd suggested, Debby asked with apparent seriousness whether Kaeti trimmed her own fringe, because if she did she had the same trouble that she had herself; it was all right till you moved your head, then the ends went ragged again. I said the answer was probably yes, but that I honestly wasn't sure. After all,there are things even I don't know about Kaeti; everybody has to have their little secrets!

I was unsure at the start how far I should involve myself in the production and promotion. The group, after all, were now my publishers; they had every right to order their own affairs. On the other hand I had contacts who I was sure would help out with bromides, repro settings, all the bits and pieces that would be required. Also the group would have problems of its own; there were funds to be raised, a company to be set up. And we'd be working on the tightest possible deadline. In the event, the problem tended to solve itself; as Mike later remarked, it would have been crazy not to make use of what skills I had, or could call on. It was, literally, a case of all hands on deck.

I was in fact amazed at the amount of help I received. My own friends in the advertising business weighed in with amazing generosity,giving both their time and skill. But the goodwill didn't stop there. Other writers responded in the most practical way, with advance orders. **Locus** and **Interzone** showed the keenest interest, while those of the publishing establishment I spoke to equally expressed their unqualified support, notably Malcolm Edwards, my own editor at Gollancz. It seemed a niche had been filled that in the opinion of everyone had needed filling for years; I can only join with the rest in wishing Kerosina every possible success in their future operations.

And the book itself? It's strange, and will probably seem crazy, but it's hard to remember, now, that I wrote the bloody thing to start with. Certainly there were times when I completely forgot; it had become a commodity, to be produced and marketed like any other. It's the sort of schizophrenia that can perhaps only be successfully induced by a quarter of a century in the advertising game.

Nor do I propose to say much about it. It's time,now, for Kaeti to speak for herself. I suppose, looking at it clinically, you could see a progression from other work I'd done. Certainly any of the old preoccupations are there,foremost perhaps the concern for the individual versus society. There's a dollybird heroine, pragmatic, laid-back, very much a reflection of the times; or at least the times as I perceive them. If there is a personal achievement,and I of course can lay no claim to it, it's in taking fantasy firmly away from the region of swords and flapping cloaks and planting it in the here and now; in Smithfield and Covent Garden, in East End boozers and bedsits in Southwark.

That's what I set out to do anyway. Whether I succeeded or not will naturally for for others to say. On a purely individual level, I do have one hope; that **Kaeti** will knock on the head an idea that seems to have been expressed in certain quarters, that I'm some sort of right-wing screaming reactionary. Read **Kaeti and the Hangman**, then come back and tell me I'm a middle class Prospero, or some such garbage. Once, I would probably have belted the accuser up the trunk;now I'd be more inclined to fall about laughing. I think tangling with Kaeti, and of course the delicately-controlled lunacy of Kerosina Books, have been very good for me, in more ways than one!

KAETI'S HERE!

KEROSINA & KAETI

Kerosina books chose KAETI & COMAPNY by Keith Roberts as their lead title. MIKE MOIR writes about the publisher's experience in setting up a new science fiction hardback publishing company.

'BUT THIS BOOK IS **REALLY** GOOD... HEY IF WE GOT TEN PEOPLE AND they all chipped in a couple of hundred quid, we could publish it... We could become... **PUBLISHERS!**'

~

In retrospect one's own naivety is always embarrassing. For a start the financial estimate was way off and getting ten or rather, in the end, nine people to agree on anything other than 'Let's play publishers' is, of course, impossible.

The publishing business for SF and SF-related books seems to be in a boom period in America. In Britain, it looks healthy, but look again closely. Tolkien look-alike fantasy is in a boom. What about SF? Try counting the new British SF authors with novel debuts in the last ten years; now count the ones still writing SF. Or for that matter, go to the last year's BSFA awards reminder lists and count the new British SF novels, or even vaguely SF/Fantasy related ones. British SF is nearly dead.

Let's guess at some publishing statistics. Take 'A.N. Other Ltd', a hardback SF publisher and imagine they are publishing a new novel by a British author. Their print run is about 2000, maybe more, probably less; at a rough guess 1800 go to libraries and 100 to the open market (that's us). Perhaps 100 get remaindered and sell two years later as rare collectors items. Much of their money is probably made by selling the paperback rights. Now consider 'Someone Else & Anne Other Ltd.' (no relation). They publish trade paperbacks, with small edition hardback runs to get national newspaper reviews and sell to the libraries (no-one has told them libraries are now full of paperbacks). They publish US books mostly and the hardback edition is often the World First. Imagine their amazement when their 750 hardback run disappears across the Atlantic in two weeks flat. Three months later they are on sale at twice the original price. Somewhere, we thought, in between there's a hole in the market for our kind of book.

To set up a publishing company you need a market strategy. Our strategy was as follows: buy the world English language hardback rights and take no option on the paperback, print about a thousand copies, make a couple of hundred a special limited signed edition. We have a product that should not make a loss, no major distribution problems, but no big profits. The author gets a pretty good deal and potentially a very good one, and you, you get books you might not otherwise see, and they are GOOD. As for any profit we do get, that means we can publish more books.

How do we decide what to publish? To sell, the author has to already be a big name; sorry all you budding scribblers, but that's life. After that we have a policy that says the selection criteria has to be by (our perception of) literary merit and not saleability (they are not the same). Then we will try and sell it any way we can! We do have an ambition to one day really stick our necks out and publish a first novel. One day, but not for quite a few years yet, the risks are too high.

The criterion of literary merit should be stressed: it is not a criterion of good SF, just good fiction. We have no intention of confining ourselves to SF; in fact there will not be a lot of straight SF. They mostly will have SF and fantastic elements, some may be totally, but beyond the criterion of established author, we are going to try to sell anything that we consider merits publication.

Probably the hardest part of becoming a publisher is establishing some kind of credibility, first to persuade authors and their agents, then typesetters, printers, binders and booksellers. 'You're going to do what? Publish a book! Pull the other one.' The printers looked quite shocked when we turned up with a set of bromides and a 4 figure down payment cheque and said 'Go on then, get on with it'. If you can pull off the credibility bit then it works the other way. The same printers were later most hurt when they found out we did not have any fork lift truck facilities to take deliveries.

I apologise to all of you now thinking: 'Bromides? What are bromides?' Well they have a lot in common with ems, ens, casting off, prelims, Baskerville and PMTs, plus a whole load of other printers' and publishers' jargon which has to be understood. No, I am not going to explain; it is things like that that keep the professions separate. Seriously, there is an amazing amount to learn in the publishing business, and we may even have learnt some of it.

Kerosina Publications was born on a crazy day in July (suitably 9 months before the birth of our first book). Kerosina is the name of Keith Roberts' Kitemistress, one very bizarre lady. Why did we choose that name? I don't think anyone is really sure, someone suggested it, Keith came up with the 'K' in the

circle logo and, like mud, it kinda stuck.

The manuscript of **Kaeti & Company** turned up a few weeks later, in a Jiffy bag, and after a lot of optimistic pestering of Keith. Five of us read it in a week and we all went 'Wow'. We then wasted a number of weeks asking for, and failing to get, quotes for typesetting and printing, etc. Then it dawned on us that we had to take our fingers out - the obvious time for a launch would be for the next Eastercon.

The first stage of publishing a book is the typesetting. Gone now are the days of hot metal and composing rooms, everything is done with computers. It's not funny really: people who think you are publishing novices tend to forget you're probably quite expert in something else, like computers. During the all phases of **Kaeti** we were given some tall explanations, but nothing to beat: 'Oh no sir, all those repeated characters aren't our fault, that's completely due to fluctuations in the power supply'. As someone else said, 'Don't tell me, one of the other composers was standing on the power cable and the electricity was coming through in lumps.'

There is one story I have to tell. We have the books now, so early disasters can now be told. Our first selection for typesetter was also going to do the printing and binding. They were one of the top printers in the land, quite rightly they demanded a one third payment up front, and two days after we sent the cheque, and only a week before Christmas, they phoned me up -

'Hello, did you receive the manuscript corrections OK?'
'Um, yes.'
'The cheque?'
'Um yes.'
'Then everything's OK?'
'Um no.'
'Why?'
'We, er, go into liquidation tomorrow!'

I nearly fell over. Fortunately they had not cashed our cheque, in fact they provided us with a first class alternative for the typesetting, but it didn't do my blood pressure any good.

The replacement typesetter was good and didn't go bust, and that gave us a small breathing space to find a printer and binder. For once we managed to find someone on our doorstep, thank goodness. The next trap we almost completely missed. Union matters; the printer would never have touched the typeset book unless it had been set by NGA staff. We were surprised and bemused when the setting turned up with the approval stamp on the first page. Good thing we didn't throw it away.

The actual printing and binding took only two months, that's two months of the most nail-biting terrifying waiting ever. We had already had one company go bust on us, we were waiting for the next disaster, which, touch wood, never happened. On March 13th we took home 1000 books (we could not afford delivery); we really were publishers.

One of the sillier parts of the publishing was sticking in the bookplates for the special edition. We decided to use '3M Photomount Glue' which is a deadly spray gunk. I found after sticking 100 bookplates it had given me a very sticky high,the result was I had a weird hangover for 24 hours, everything tasted of glue for days and every time I sneezed I could kill small rodents at 25 paces. We decided an essential part of a publishing set-up would be to use conventions and fandom as a method of promotion and of course getting sales. So apart from the necessary adverts in **Locus** , **Interzone** and the BSFA, we decided to plug the convention programme books.

The advertising campaign for **Kaeti**, with the teaser ('Kaeti's Coming') and follow-up adverts ('Kaeti's Here', etc), was a group decision based on a dislike of the apathetic advertising campaigns of most publishers. The main idea of the teaser was if you get people's curiosity going early, that might get them buying later. The teaser also partly came about because we were almost scared to let out the news that we were publishing a Keith Roberts book: we almost believed if we told anyone, something disastrous would go wrong - tell someone your wish and it won't happen.

The reaction to our teaser adverts seemed to go very well. The response to the Mexicon one was interesting: we seemed to have generated the world's worst secret, which is exactly what we wanted.

Setting up your own company does bring you into a whole new world, the world of enterprise and small firm advisors bureaux. What I failed to realise was they all have shares in British Telecom. To find out there is absolutely no useful way they could help us took me an hour and a half, about 12 phone calls and left me totally bemused as to what they were there for. My favourite one was 'Yes, we can guarantee loans, the only problem is the banks don't accept our guarantees!'

When you set up a company you also get a marvelous piece of legalese; the company objectives. Ours are 240 words long and only one sentence. They include bits like - 'to carry on all or any of the businesses of printers, typesetters, engravers, diesinkers, electrotypers, stereotypers, photosetters, photolithographers, chromo-lithographers, graphic, commercial and other artists, stationers, typefounders, designers and draftsmen; manufacturers and distributors of and dealers in art colour, copperplate, lithographic, offset, photogravure, and general printers, etc., etc....' I don't think it included what we actually did but adding that in would have been extra.

With all the best laid plans of publishers and men you always end up needing a bank loan, if for nothing else to fill in the gap between promised contributions and urgent bills. No doubt most of you are familiar with getting personal bank loans; company ones are quite different. Rule one is you can only get a loan if you can prove beyond all doubt you don't need one. There are no other rules. Seriously, there seems to be no way to get a loan first time you apply, but the second time was simple. I don't quite understand why.

Finally, of course, you have to sell the book, and this produces its own paradoxes:

'Hell, my name is Mike Moir and I represent Kerosina Publications...'
'I can't help you, all our buying is done by the shop managers.'
'Ah I see, how do I contact them?'
'They won't talk to you.'
'Why not?'
'You're not an approved publisher.'
'How do we become an approved publisher?'
'You have to write to me, saying the following...'

This was followed by an impossible set of conditions, so don't look for any of our books in Claude Gill's.

We did it. I guess if we knew all the problems in advance we would still have done it, but it was quite a risk. We are negotiating for a considerable number of further books; watch this space for news. We could never have done it without you lot, nearly all the dealers and authors and fans were incredibly supportive. I write this one week before formal publication, the special edition is sold out and the ordinary is beginning to move, much better than we expected.

Final thanks has to go to Keith; he wrote a beautiful book, did the excellent artwork, but most of all, he trusted us.

LETTERS

continued from page 1

AS ONE OF THE FIVE NEWCOMERS TO MILFORD WHOM SHE SIGNIFICANTLY miscounted, I read Sue Thomason's report on the 1985 session with interest, confusion, and some distress. It was interesting to see in print another's version of events one had oneself lived through; confusing to recognise how marginally her version and mine actually tallied; and distressing to detect, in the way she shaped her narrative of the week, a strain of quite remarkably ill-concealed aggression.

A single example will have to do, what one might call the strange incident of the oyster that barked in the night. But there was no oyster that barked in the night. That, Watson, was the strange incident. Neither, one might add, was it an oyster. It is Sunday evening. Everyone but Sue Thomason and Alex Stewart have arrived and have gone to the place that sells food on Sunday. It's not a cheap pub, but the moderately expensive meals it serves are absolutely huge. Some of us are eating mussels. Sue and Alex arrive. Someone recommends the mussels, which are not only tasty but could almost be called working-class salt-of-the-earth fare. Sue, however, thinks they are oysters - posh, pricey SDP food which she has of course never herself eaten. Not only that, these people are drinking wine. As she makes amply clear in her report, Sue feels both ill-at-ease and resentful at this point. Not being British, I feel, even after 17 years here, that I'm ill-equipped to parse the class system and the shibboleths (like wine and oysters) that signify it, so I may have misunderstood Sue's language, and may be wrong in my identification of what seems to be an illegitimate use of the animus-laden vocabulary of class to describe her treatment by the 'Milfordians', from whom she significantly excludes herself throughout her report. But that's what it looks like to me. Unlike Sue, and unlike the other salt-of-the-earth folk whom her report may well dissuade from attending the workshop, 'Milfordians', I felt we were meant to learn, are a coterie of insensitive, affluent, middle-class, gourmandizing wine-bibbers. We are not decent folk. We are not salt of the earth.

But the oyster did not bark. The 'Milfordians' I met came from a variety of classes, including the working classes had jobs or did not have jobs, had money or did not, drank or did not drink wine: and did not lay class trips on poor young things from the North. Though Sue Thomason herself is in fact scarcely that. Not being British, I find it impossible to think it's to her discredit that (as far as I know) she comes from a middle-of-the-road family background, that she is a graduate in English of Girton College, Cambridge, and that she is a (probably ill-paid) director of a firm involved in computer software. It may be less to her credit that she is at least a decade older than the ingenue teenager from the Five Towns a reader might think her from reading her report.

It is distressing to suffer misprision; to stand guilty without trial of elitism, brutal extroversion, insensitivity to the poor and helpless, and refusal to perform samaritan therapy on a person one had no reason to think of as anything but a perfectly competent grown woman. More important than this sense of personal misprision, though, is the sense that the nature of Milford itself was tendentiously distorted. Milford '85 was not a conclave of professional writers gathered to trade contract gossip with their cronies; and nor was it a course in creative group therapy. The professionalism expected of those who attended the workshop was a professionalism of attitude toward the work at hand, nothing more, and certainly nothing less. It may have been a cruel thing to discover, though I do not think most of us found it so, but the fact was that 'Milfordians' spent much more time and energy on the stories presented than on each other. This was the strength of Milford '85 and I am writing to advertise it.

This could go on. As Chairperson of the 1985 Milford, Lisa Tuttle is the unmentioned target of some of the accusations-by-inference that characterize the report, and I'm strongly tempted to correct Sue's version of what happened on that first night regarding who was going to bunk with whom. But defences against ad hominem arguments always end up seeming to protest too much. Since the accuser always therefore wins, and since extricating oneself from misprision is like having to explain when you stopped beating your oyster, this ya-boo must have a stop.

JOHN CLUTE
221 Camden High Street
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EXERCISES
– in Landscape

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WORKS OF KEITH ROBERTS

As KAETI & COMPANY bursts onto the scene, BERNIE PEEK looks back over the career of one of Britains best science fiction authors

TWENTY YEARS AGO, IN MARCH 1966, KYRIL BONFIGLIOLI WROTE IN AN introduction to volume one number one of the British SF magazine **Impulse**:

'I take leave modestly to doubt whether any first issue of a magazine has been able to boast so distinguished a contents-page. The only name not yet a household world in the science-fiction field is that of Keith Roberts, who made his debut in **Science Fantasy** over a year ago and whose stories and cover-designs have been steadily winning greater applause ever since. His present story is the first in a series which will, I am convinced, establish him firmly in the front rank of imaginative story-tellers.'

The contents page listed stories by Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, J.G. Ballard, Jim Blish and Harry Harrison. Bon may have been biased as later on he introduced the new associate editor of **Impulse**, Keith Roberts. Later, Roberts went on to edit the magazine and continued writing for it using his own name and pseudonyms, such as Alastair Bevan.

Twenty years later seems a good time to examine the prediction. The story referred to in that introduction was 'The Signaller', the first story in the **Pavane** series. Until recently the name Keith Roberts automatically brought **Pavane** to mind. But what about the rest of his work?

In the last twenty years he has published twelve books, with varying degrees of success. He has never been a prolific author and more than once he has threatened to give up writing completely. Once the rumour went round that he had died! (The writer that had died was a different Keith Roberts, an art critic.)

Although **The Furies** was published in book form first the **Anita** stories came first in the magazines, stating with the September 1984 **Science Fantasy**. Most of the **Anita** stories were published in **Science Fantasy** or **Impulse**; the last ones were in **F&SF**. For those readers who don't go back as far as 1970 and want to meet Anita there is a newer story in **F&SF** February '81. Anita is a witch growing up in a rural area in the sixties. She is being brought up and trained in witchcraft by her Gran. Anita is a child of the swinging sixties; Gran is the child of a Giles cartoon. **Anita** shows Roberts' humour at its best, with a touch of slapstick.

Most of Roberts' books have been compiled from linked shorter pieces. **The Furies** is a conventional novel. Like many of his earlier stories, including some written as Alastair Bevan, it is set in the west country around the Isle of Purbeck after the apocalypse. In this case the apocalypse is brought about by two underground H-bomb tests. The explosions cause massive earthquakes and loose the furies, extra-terrestrial invaders appearing as yard-long wasps with a foot-long sting. An excellent book and still worth reading. It is slightly let down by a deus ex machina ending, but if H.G. Wells can get away with it...

Only one of his novels is not SF. **The Boat Of Fate** tells the story of Caius Sergius Paullus from childhood as the son of a fourth-century Spanish architect to de-facto military ruler of Roman Britain and to retirement in North Africa. The turbulent times at the end of the Roman Empire are a perfect setting, as

Paullus is constantly buffetted by circumstances beyond his control and by unforeseen consequences of his own actions. Recommended reading for those who associate historical novels with Mills & Boon.

In 1973 the first collection of short stories **Machines and Men** was published. The Observer review said that there wasn't a dud in the book, and few would disagree. It is full of stories that remain in the memory: 'Manipulation', 'Breakdown', 'Therapy 2000', 'The Deeps', 'Synth', 'The Pace that Kills' and others.

The Chalk Giants, is, according to many, his best book. It starts in Dorset just before the start of a nuclear war and moves forward from there. First the chalk giant (Cerne Abbas?) of the title is built. King Atha unites the land under God. King Marck, in a land pocked with radioactive obsidian scars, wages total war which leaves his enemy's land unable to support any form of life. Finally King Atha leaves Marck to dream of building a great castle at Corfe Gate, above which will fly the pennants bearing Marck's crab emblem and Atha's - the wheel of God. Through it all the present-day observer Stan Potts watches his eternal woman: a theme continued in much of Roberts' work since.

The Grain Kings is his second collection. It contains 'Weihnachtsabend', a parallel world story reminiscent of Sarban's **The Sound of His Horn**; 'The White Boat', a Pavane story missing from British editions until recently; 'The Passing of Dragons' (title story of an American collection), which shows Roberts' ironic wit in the interchange between the two humans in a scientific research station. 'He shook his head. He said "I just don't understand you". "No" I said "And we're the same species. Awe inspiring, isn't it?" 'The Trustie Tree' and 'The Lake of Tuonela' are set on a watery world where there are a lot of canals, and are reminiscent of Stanley G. Weinbaum's 'A Martian Odyssey'. SF stories about narrow boats are rare. The title story reveals Roberts' love of mechanisms, complicated bits of machinery with levers and wheels and cogs and things. The last story 'I lose Medea' is pure fantasy. This collection contains some stories that are definitely 'hard' SF.

The three stories in **The Inner Wheel** share characters, the third story bringing together those from the first two. For me the stories do not quite make a coherent whole but the second, 'The Death of Libby Maynard', stands out above the others. The book deals with the rise of Homo Superior, 'The Death....' being the first person account of the childhood and adolescence of a telepath: how would an isolated telepath, a freak, come to terms with her ability?

Another collection followed in 1979, **Ladies From Hell**. In the first story 'Our Lady of Desperation', artists, writers and other creative people are taxed to the hilt, and more.

> 'We pay at the C rate, seventy per cent, but we get a ten percent surcharge for being butterflies and pariahs. (I've heard both phrases used often enough, so you must take your choice.) But being a bachelor I was worse off than most as I attracted another ten for the privilege. The unmarried, as is well known, are child-rapists at best and anti-Establishment at worse, though |I could never understand how keeping them short of cash automatically rendered them harmless...But then some bright bastard slapped on five per cent across the board for a Mickey Mouse new insurance scheme, and my goose was sizzling nicely when another Department - God bless the lack of liaison - decided class D's still weren't contributing enough to the common weal and upped their loading to twenty per cent'.

For those not mathematically minded that makes 105% tax. One artist manages to increase this by twenty five per cent in a most unlikely manner. Artists also get their own, their very own, personal overseer, a sort of Little Brother. The story revolves around a painting of a nymph. Amaryllis models for the painting but the artist never quite captures the nymph. In a much later short story 'Ariadne Potts, **F&SF** April 1978, Roberts writes about someone who captures the nymph, Ariadne, but loses her again. 'Our Lady of Desperation' left me wondering whether Roberts was the type of small boy that pulled the legs off of spiders, and is itching to get his hands on a tax inspector. Other stories in the book deal with education, politics and art. Definitely a book worth looking out for, but not at all common.

Molly Zero, first published in 1980 but now available in paperback, follows a by now familiar theme. After the collapse of civilisation, in which Birmingham gets nuked, a new system of education is started in Britain. The country, led by Dorset, has become divided into Enclaves such as Cumbria, Lothia and Wessex. Molly is a product of the new system, carried by circumstances she does not understand and cannot control; she attempts to gain control of her life and understand the world she lives in.

Kiteworld broke a five year hiatus as far as book publishing was concerned. The book has much in common with **Pavane** and **The Chalk Giant**: it is set in a post apocalypse Britain, in which society is ruled by a religious elite. Although that links it to **Pavane** and **The Chalk Giants** there is also a strong connection with **Molly Zero**. Religion has been cited as a major theme in Roberts' work but this may well be because of the disproportionate attention given to **Pavane**. Faith and blind obedience are more important, religion being the context in which most people recognise faith.

A caveat before looking at his latest book, **Kaaeti and Company**, which was published in March this year. One reading is not really enough to fully absorb a book, but this one seems to link up with earlier stories.

The **Kaeti** stories link Roberts' touring cast. (In the case of the synth stories perhaps that should be Turing cast!) Bill Fredericks appears in a number of stories, while his wife Pete starred in **The Furies**. Kaeti, representing ultimate woman (named as such in 'Richendon', **F&SF** September 1985, appears in stories as far back as **Anita** but takes centre stage as Martine/Mata in **The Chalk Giants** and again as Ariadne Potts. Keith Roberts instead of Stan Potts provides the continuity.

In all of his books imagery is important. In the April '78 **F&SF** Brian Aldiss, discussing differences between British and American SF, said 'Disaster novels - an English speciality since Wyndham's day - are often exercises in landscape. Characteristically, the alien is absent from British SF.' Disasters and landscape feature prominently in Roberts' work and only one book, **The Furies**, features true aliens. The landscape is usually the chalk downs and rolling English countryside. He paints a picture behind the stories.

> 'Night came quickly; night, and the burning frost. Jesse swung west, well before Wareham, cutting straight across the heath. The Burrell thundered steadily, gripping the road with her seven-foot drive wheels, leaving thin wraiths of steam behind her in the dark. He stopped once, to fill his tanks and light the lamps, then pushed on again into the heathland. A light mist of frost smoke was forming now; it clung to the follows of the rough ground, glowing oddly in the light from the side-lamps. The wind soughed and threatened. North of the Purbecks, off the narrow coastal strip, the winter could strike quick and hard; come morning the heath could be impassable, the trackways lost under two feet or more of snow'.

Roberts is an artist; he painted a number of covers for **Science Fantasy** and **Impulse** magazines and did all the artwork for **Kaeti and Company**, and artists figure prominently as characters in his work. Perhaps his training as an artist helps in visualising a scene, extracting the essence. It certainly must have improved his powers of observation; for instance, he notices lighting conditions others might miss. 'He stared up. The lifter strings glowed against the clouds massing overhead.' and 'Di perched on a window seat in the old old room; the light from the orchard outside was still intense, it suffused her outline with an emerald dazzle. Baskets of Russetts stood about, filling the air with a scent like heavy spice. It was a night for marvels.'

This clear and accurate visualisation keeps his writing on the right side of the line between purple prose and descriptive writing. Many authors, particularly in science fiction, have played safe and avoided the line completely. After all, we know what an ansible looks like - don't we? Many fantasy authors, living dangerously, have tried to follow Tolkien, a British amateur artist, and William Morris. Perhaps that is why we have so much appalling fantasy around. There are strong links between fantasy - rather than science fiction - and art, and Roberts' work definitely has a large fantasy component. It is also, in more ways than one, the work of a true artist.

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KAETI & COMPANY

TWO REVIEWS OF THE FIRST TITLE FROM KEROSINA BOOKS

KAETI & COMPANY - Keith Roberts
[Kerosina Publications, 1986, 224p, #12.50, #25.00 presentation edition]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

IN 1968 I BOUGHT MY FIRST SF PAPERBACK, from a rack outside a giftshop in Criccieth. Ray Bradbury's **The Illustrated Man** looked good, until I realised that the title image was just a device to link a lot of unconnected stories. I've been highly dubious about italicised linking passages ever since: they rarely add anything useful, and certainly don't turn a collection into a novel.

Keith Roberts uses such links in **Kaeti & Company** and for the first time in over 20 years I find they work. In fact, without those ten pages of italics, the book would simply be a collection of stories linked only by the main character having the same name and appearance in each; the appearance of other repeated names and descriptions in otherwise unconnected stories would only seem confusing. The links are the framework for the whole book.

Kaeti is essentially an actress of the page rather than the stage; the other characters are her supporting cast, a repertory company, each one appearing in some, but not all of the productions. In the links Roberts discusses her previous and following roles with Kaeti:

> 'Who's the other girl?' she said.
> 'New actress', I said. 'One-off. Guest performance.'
> She bit her lip. 'I shall need some backup,' she said.
> 'You'll get it. The entire Company.'
> She bit at her lip again; then suddenly the old Kaeti was back. She said, 'Do I get top billin'?'
> 'That'll be up to you,' I said. 'I warn you, she's a right little scene stealer.'

In two of the stories Kaeti actually is an actress in films. In the last one, Roberts' home and local in Henley-on-Thames are used for location shots in a film, and he is able, as a character himself (in the story to watch Kaeti, as herself, play another role in the film.

By this means - I hesitate to call it a device, because it is central to the structure and content of the book - Roberts is able to explore different aspects of Kaeti and the other characters in different circumstances, and also to examine different aspects of a multi-layered reality.

I was at first uncertain about Roberts' use of characters from his earlier book,s remembering the self-serving way in which Heinlein does the same in **The Number of the Beast**. But Heinlein's characters are all one character anyway. Roberts handles characterisation far better; in other parts of this issue he describes the origins of some of his creations, and a diverse lot they are.

The reader knows that a good character has a life off the page - this is what essentially distinguishes it from a cardboard character. The writer knows this even better. Once you have created a character, you have given a person life and breath; unless you commit murder - or worse, neglect - that person will continue to live, and on occasion will bump into you and chat with you.

And so Pete is still around twenty years after Roberts wrote **The Furies**; Bill Fredericks is still a garage mechanic - but maybe he always wanted to run a pub; and Amaryllis, the nymph in 'Our Lady of Desperation' perhaps shows her true identity in **Kaeti & Company** as a schizophrenic sex-kitten whore.

But Kaeti herself is new, and so, I believe, is the Irish-Jamaican Kerria ('Her hair was...plaited all round into sort of little pigtails, each one finished with a brilliant yellow bead') who Kaeti is in love with. Roberts is clearly in love with both girls, but not with the blind love of youth: both girls have weaknesses as well as strengths, allowing Roberts to explore dominant/subservient relationships and role-reversals in different stories.

And the sex scenes - particularly the implied ones - are beautifully erotic.

Is **Kaeti & Company** SF? Only by the very broadest of definitions. It is set firmly in the real work, in the streets and pubs of the Smoke, and in real times, both in the present day and the first world war. But it is fantasy, and thank the gods there isn't a single sword-wielding cloaked hero-barbarian in sight. What Roberts had done is to show that there is magic enough in real life, for those who can see it.

KAETI & COMPANY - Keith Roberts
[Kerosina Books, 1986, 224pp, #12.50]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

WE SEEM TO HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR A LONG time for Kaeti - like Godot she was coming, although whether (like Godot) she would eventually arrive seemed less of a problem. The publishing hype did a good job of arousing curiosity and drawing attention, and at last Kaeti has stepped out onto centre stage into the full focus of the spots. Was it worth the wait? Does she merit the attention devoted to her? Or is the whole thing just clever PR work? In order the answers to these questions must be 'yes, 'yes' and 'no'.

I am not very widely read in Roberts' work, I read **Pavane** when I think I was too young to appreciate it and have only read those stories which came my way thereafter, so my preconceptions of the book were minimal; however **Kaeti** has prompted me into reading more by him and I think probably many of those who read **Kaeti** to see what all the fuss is about will do likewise. The book, like Kaeti herself, is beguiling and a charmer, insinuating itself into your thoughts and remaining there long after the book itself is back on the shelf.

What is it about? That's a less easy one to answer. It is neither a novel nor a series of short stories. The individual stories could be read and enjoyed separately whereas chapters of a novel taken alone are meaningless, but it is more than a collection of short stories: the atmosphere is built up through successive episodes to make the whole much more than the sum of its parts. Kaeti and the cast of characters she collects around her become a living Repertory company independent of Roberts even though they sprang from his imagination. The conversations he has with Kaeti and his descriptions of her between stories are as captivating as the actual stories because of her independence. By no stretch of the imagination could Kaeti be called anyone's puppet. She is real, more real than half the people you meet in the street. It would be no surprise to be introduced to someone and be left feeling you had perhaps met Kaeti playing one of her parts.

As for the stories, the plots are all quite different, the characters individual except that they are played by the Rep company of Kaeti and her friends; they concern London, the nature of history and the layers of it below modern life, layers with a life of their own at times; there are also personal relationships, and a variety of subjects few of which are overtly SF. Nevertheless they are not just simple and straightforward stories, they all possess too many layers of meaning, resonances from the other stories echo through building into something much more complex and much less comfortable than a superficial plot synopsis could convey.

Kaeti & Company is beautifully written, the author in harmony with the language, blending plot, character, meaning, description, atmosphere into a balanced, enjoyable and memorable book. It won't appeal to high tech space opera fans perhaps, but to people who like to think and enjoy a work of art I recommend it, it is a delight.

BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

A DREAM OF HUNGER MOSS - Mabel Esther Allan
[Severn House, 1985, 188pp, #6.95]
Reviewed by Mary Gentle

A DREAM OF HUNGER MOSS DOES NOT ANYWHERE live up to the strange fey quality implicit in its title. It is not the fantasy novel it purports to be, either. Although the heroine, fourteen year old Allie, says towards the end that the book 'is about me and the Moss', the narrative focus keeps slipping away from the 'influence' that the Moss or moor might have. It gets distracted into details: the Liverpool backstreets, and the Oxfordshire countryside, in that long hot summer before the beginning of the Second World War; Allie's brother Adam, who is afraid of nothing except cows; her father who is at home in their small shop, and her mother who isn't... quite. Allie's mother, who came to stay at Guelder Rose Farm in 1919, as Allie and Adam do in 1939; who used to meet, on Hunger Moss, in an old ruined tower, a boy called Reuben - and Allie, in the same place, twenty years on, meets a boy called Reuben: nephew of the first one.

Dream is a children's historical novel, strong on details of country people (insular) and country life - describing it, with a touch of acerbic realism, as 'a rather charming slum'. This is not a romantic pastoral. Allie and Adam, city children, commit cardinal sins, leave gates open so that the herd strays, learn to love nature... a bit perilously close, there, to cliche. Reality intrudes. There are to be evacuees billeted on Guelder Rose Farm, and on Reuben's 'landed gentry'' Great-Grandmother. There will be war. Allie feels that on Hunger Moss she comes full circle, is herself and her mother, and why did the first Reuben leave without ever saying goodbye? And will Allie's Reuben do the same thing? And as the book ends, with a 1941 postscript, hard reality is about to encroach on Hunger Moss itself...

A Dream of Hunger Moss is about the importance of place, the influence of place, but Hunger Moss isn't enough **there** (as, say, Alan Garner's landscapes are there: active rather than passive). The moor is smothered under a flurry of character-studies, and the small lives of people caught up in history. As that kind of life has been smothered, in the years between then and now.

ROBOTS AND EMPIRE - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1985, 423pp, #8.95]
Reviewed by Pal Brazier

I INTENDED TO WRITE A FAVOURABLE REVIEW OF this book because, although I had not read any Asimov for more than ten years, I remembered **Caves of Steel** and **Naked Sun** with some affection and this is a sequel to them. However, I realised this would be difficult as this book is merely silly.

Plot: insofar as a set of givens leads to a logical conclusion, it has one.

Narrative tension: none. It begins at the beginning, plods in a straight line through conversation after conversation to the middle, and then without variation in pace or direction continues to an utterly predictable close (I can't call it an end for reasons which will become apparent).

Characterisation: none. Robots speak together in high-speed telegraphese and humans have almost mutually incomprehensible accents. Nevertheless all conversations are depicted in the same stilted but grammatically correct English of the narration. While I don't expect constant rendering of the accents into prose, it seems to me swashbucklers, evil scientists, heroines and robots may have some different phraseology and vocabulary.

The basic SF idea here - the need for Man to spread into the galaxy and build a galactic empire - is old hat even from Asimov, quite apart from being extremely suspect. There is a new weapon, the nuclear intensifier, which, although it allows the non-lethal destruction of Earth, explodes spaceships. Hmmm..There is, however, one new idea here. The robots creatively derive an implicit law of robotics higher than the sacrosanct First, Second and Third Laws - which they therefore name the 'Zeroth Law' (I said it was silly):

> A robot may not injure humanity, or through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

This leads the First Law to be recast:

> A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm, unless this would violate the Zeroth Law.

Besides the suspect punctuation, it also leaves aside the fact that earlier in the book Solarian roboticists have successfully redefined human beings for their own robots as 'human beings with Solarian accents', thus proving that the Three Laws are now effectively useless anyway. We have to leave this aside because the absurd reformulation of the Four Laws of Robotics by Daneel under the remembered influence of Lije Baley is leading somewhere important. Honest!

Giskard the telepathic robot whose talent no-one knows about has meantime dreamed up a sociological manipulative mathematics he calls 'Psychohistory' (sound familiar?) which in the light of Daneel's Four Laws he tries to bring into existence. In the process his own self-doubt causes him to self-destruct - but not before he manages to pass on his telepathic powers to R. Daneel. Implicitly, Elijah Baley survives through his partner R. Daneel to generate the **Foundation** trilogy and perhaps even become Hari Seldon...?

Now there is no integral reason for any of this: all it does is create a link between two entirely different segments of Asimov's work. But it does seem to be the point of the book, which is why I class it as silly. Thus my recommendation: to be avoided with extreme prejudice. For completists only.

THE SUBATOMIC MONSTER - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1986, 213pp, #9.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

IT IS DIFFICULT TO DECIDE THE READERSHIP AT which this book is aimed. Dealing in an idiosyncratic way with aspects of science past and present (it is subtitled on the dustwrapper, but not elsewhere, as 'essays on science'), its content is immensely varied and its style unsuitable to most readers who are likely to need this information.

The three-page introduction is devoted almost entirely to Asimov himself, the word 'I' being far more used than even 'the'. Each chapter opens with more of what I can only describe as 'me me me' except where it becomes 'My dear wife, Janet... mememe,sheshesheshe, wewewe...'

The content is to a very great extent the equivalent of explaining the multiplication table, and then logarithms, in a great many words with a fair amount of repetition, but this is lightened (if that's the word I'm looking for) by such fannish turns of phrase as 'all together, now' and by the introduction of such meaningless similes as likening the mass of a magnetic monopole (if such a thing exists) to 'the mass of 20 human spermatazoa'.

However, the major fault in this book is that Asimov sets out to present in full colour the erroneous views of past experimenters and scientists, to the point of making them sound perfectly good sense; he then supports current doctrine with immense vigour even though even he must realise that a fair proportion of it is bound to be disproved as time goes by, and he does the usual thing by (for example) burying the Michelson-Morley experiment in a mass of platitudes instead of admitting that it could well undermine much of what he and we hold dear today.

If you really want the views of a dedicated propagandist for his own beliefs, expressed in the language of an educated 11-year-old, spiced with twee references to his own sexual proclivities and supposed appeal, and overlaid with trowelfuls of sheer egomania, this is the book for you.

RATHA'S CREATURES - Clare Bell
[Gollancz, 1986, 259pp, #7.95]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF BOOKS ABOUT ANIMALS written for children. The choice of animals includes cats, dogs, horses, rabbits, mice, moles, wildebeest, terrapins, coatimundis and the ever-popular dugong, and the adventures vary widely; some include humans, some don't, some are extremely anthropomorphic, some are fairly realistic, although so far as I know no-one's devised a genre title other than 'animal stories' for them. This book fits into that genre without difficulty. It is a must for ailurophiles because although Ratha is given speech and intelligence she remains very feline, she is a cat in a herding clan, never a human with four paws and a fur coat. Ratha's clan have developed from individual hunters into a structured group which herds other animals for their food. Her species is never fully described but they must be nearer in size to lions than to the domestic moggy; they are possibly prehistoric, possibly from another planet: the details are unclear but as they remain irrelevant to the story it doesn't matter.

The story is Ratha's. She accidentally discovers how to keep a fire alight, how to move it, control it and use it, but for losing the box of matches she is banished from the clan and the fire she brought to them - the creature of the title - is extinguished. Until nearly the end of the book there is no more mention of fire, which does make the title rather misleading; instead we follow her adventures with the unnamed - all the cats outside the clan - whom she initially supposes to be unintelligent and without speech, but learns that some of them have enough intelligence to nearly destroy the clan she came from, and other less intelligent ones study quantum physics and the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. Her part in that and the part the fire, her creature plays in the resolution of the plot make a good read.

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The story is involving. Ratha makes a believable heroine, she is changed by her experiences, she develops through the book to become a different personality from the rabid punk-haired tiger of the beginning, which is a lot more than many books can claim. It is complete in itself, it tells the story without either superfluous padding or leaving out so many details that the reader is perplexed or irritated. It is well written, some passages of description are very vivid, such as those describing Ratha's first heat and her first encounter with fire, and particularly the one where she eats an SF reviewer marinaded in a delicious sauce, the recipe for which is given on page 900, though I haven't tried it myself, and although others are less so the standard is fairly high and always competent. It isn't a startlingly original book, it fits into the animal story genre easily, it doesn't set the pulse racing with excitement, nor does it resurrect the dead, but it is eminently readable, well thought out and well executed, which leads me to recommend it to those who have a fondness for animal, particularly cat stories.

WAR WITH THE NEWTS - Karel Capek
(Translated by Ewald Osers)
[George Allen & Unwin, 1985, 241pp, £2.95]
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

KAREL CAPEK, 1890-1938, WAS A CZECH WRITER and journalist, best known for his play R.U.R. (Czech premiere 1921) from which our word 'robot' was taken. **War With the Newts**, from 1936, is Capek's masterwork, an outrageous and highly original satire that eschews the accepted form of the novel, and tells its story in a most beautifully controlled series of dramatised episodes, character sketches, letters, scientific articles and newspaper reports, making use of a great variety of typographical styles. This literary form is known as the roman feuilleton, literally a story in newspaper columns. It is more than that, though; it is a parody of newspaper reporting. So, although **War With the Newts** was serialised (1935-6) in the Prague newspaper of which Capek was editor, it was not just a serialised novel in the Dickens tradition but a story greatly resembling newspaper reports and, in its satirical thrusts, responding to the contemporary events which surrounded it on the page.

The newts are a marine species, under five feet in height, discovered in a remote part of the East Indies by a Captain van Toch. Because he is Czech he approaches the Czech businessman G.H. Bondy (who also appears in Capek's novel **The Absolute at Large**. At first the newts are exploited in a small way, as collectors of pearl oysters. Soon they are being employed on many underwater construction jobs, in various parts of the world. They are believed to be unintelligent, though this is disproved by a multitude of instances. They are treated abominably, killed, enslaved and experimented upon. Parallels are drawn with the treatment of negro slaves.

In the crucial chapter 'Up the Ladder of Civilisation' the position alters; the newts become amazingly numerous in a few years due to rapid breeding, and their true intelligence becomes manifest. Soon they are the exploiters, and in this role Capek's model is Nazi Germany.

In his determination to ignore the conventions of the novel, Capek has no continuing characters except for Mr. Bondy's doorman, who blames himself for the war with the newts, because it was he who let Captain van Toch in to see Mr. Bondy in the first place! And in the last chapter, unable to decide how to end his story, Capek has a dialogue with himself - far more obvious than John Fowles' similar device at the end of **The French Lieutenant's Woman**.

Most astonishing of all is that **War with the Newts** is an entertaining book, even today, when the cultural context of Capek's satire is long-forgotten. The novel was taken as an insult by the Nazis, and early in 1939, after the German takeover of Czechoslovakia, the Gestapo went to arrest him. He had died a few months earlier.

THE MESSENGER - Monica Dickens
[Collins, 1985, 155p, £5.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

QUESTION: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT OF A NEW children's novel from the prolific great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens?

Answer: Quality of writing, decent characterisation, a rattling good tale, and enough suspense to make me worried for the safety of 13 year old heroine Rose, even though I know from the blurb that **The Messenger** is the first in a series, and that Rose will live to fight another day.

Rose's parents buy the house next door for an annexe to their small private hotel.There's a stain on the floor 'that looked like spilled blood' that won't come off, and there's a large cupboard in the front room that makes Rose uneasy. Then, walking and riding on the moor, she finds a mist-enshrouded valley where she knows there should be a lake, and she encounters a magnificent grey horse.

> ...she drew back in fear from his dapple coat which seemed both white hot and coal black, and from his large, deep grey eyes, in which her dizzied senses seemed to see reflections of mountains, water, strange shapes of people moving...
>
> She sank to her knees on the rock beside him. How dared she think of catching him, possessing him? She was possessed by him, humbled, afraid.

The horse has called her to be its Messenger, to restore peace to an area tormented by past wrong. Each time Rose meets the horse, she is carried a little further back in time - 30 years, 50, 100 - and becomes involved in past events in the hotel annexe. Monica Dickens' twist on the 'traveller in time' theme is that Rose becomes characters from the past; each time she is an observer in another girl's body - but can she influence her hosts' actions?

Each step into the past takes Rose closer to the mysteries of the forbidding cupboard and the stain on the floor, which are rooted in human fallibility and distrust; and by a life-giving action of her own, she counters the stain of the past.

All this might sound ultra-moralistic, but it's no more so than any other story where good triumphs over evil. **The Messenger** is a well-written, gripping tale. As such, if nothing else, it's a welcome relief from a lot of the poorly-written, ideas-orientated books marketed as adult SF. Even some of our top genre writers, British as well as American, might do well to learn that a novelist, first and foremost, should be a storyteller. It's a lesson they could learn from Monica Dickens.

KEEPERS OF THE SECRETS - Philip Jose Farmer
[Severn House, 1985, 152pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

I WAS HALF-WAY THROUGH RUSSELL HOBAN'S **Turtle Diary** when I received **Keepers of the Secrets**. I mention this not as an irrelevant aside, but because i) it gives a clue to my reading tastes, and therefore my approach to the book under review and ii) these two books are on the opposite ends of my reading range, and I must confess my tastes are moving towards the subtle, low-key character study of the former, rather than the action-packed, fairly superficial narrative of the latter.

Keepers of the Secrets is one of a series of books concerning the exploits of Doc Caliban, a long-lived scientific genius with formidable physical prowess (ie, a 'superman') and his ruthless 'holy' campaign to eliminate his former masters, the Nine. The Nine have the elixir of eternal life and for thousands of years have secretly ruled the world. This particular book concerns Caliban's pursuit of the 'Mad Goblin', Iwaldi - the nastiest of the Nine. He is ably assisted by his two loyal 'batmen', who provide an entertaining double-act of the Laurel and Hardy kind. The narrative is relentless, the few pauses in the action serving as flash-backs to inform the reader of the history of Caliban's crusade, or even moments of introspection from Doc himself. The intrepid trio are armed to the teeth, and laden with gadgets for every conceivable circumstance, such as breathing under water and seeing in the dark. There is, however, one scene when the heroes, disrobed of their technical props, tackle a grizzly-bear in a bloody battle - and there is plenty of the 'red stuff' in this book.

By now you will be aware of the abundance of cliche; however this appears to be intentional, rather than the embarrassing effort of a poor writer, and the narrative is effectively written. It must be remembered that the use of archetypal characters characters (eg, Tarzan and Doc Savage - a model for Caliban) is a hallmark of Farmer's work, and the Author's note, where Farmer attributes the book to Doc Caliban himself, best sums up the approach one should take towards it - tongue in cheek. The archetypes in the narrative in themselves are interesting: strange castles, secret passages, gadgets, invincible heroes, fiends, goblins and dwarfs were very much part of my childhood fantasies. Farmer is obviously drawing on memories which stretch many decades further back than mine, and which remain, for him, as vivid as ever. For myself I'm not so sure. The difficulty I had with this book was largely in its intention. Is it purely escapism, or partly pastiche? Are we meant to laugh at the sometimes outrageous violence as satire and a spoof on awful sado-masochistic fantasies, only to find ourselves condoning gratuitous violence? I don't know.

PUZZLES FROM OTHER WORLDS - Martin Gardner
[Oxford, 1986, 189pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

I STARTED READING **ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAG** with Issue number 1 and have read nearly every issue since (that statement would once have been enough to get me thrown out of the BSFA!). The puzzles in this book originally appeared in that magazine with (the foreword says) some additional comments, and so some of these puzzles are familiar to me (perhaps they all should be, but my memory is all too fallible). Although some of the puzzles are 'standard' ones written out in SF terminology the author has, obviously, an abiding interest in SF. If you like puzzles this book will interest you. If you get annoyed at not solving puzzles prepare to be annoyed... and, further, when you do manage to solve a real teaser you're likely to find the answer also sets a second puzzle... and lo this carries on in some cases to a third problem!

Some of the puzzles have a mathematical basis, others 'pure' logic,

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whilst yet others can only be solved with general knowledge - these latter ones are, perhaps, the only ones slightly slanted to American audiences.

The price appears steep - though it's becoming the standard for paperbacks and you only show your age when you talk nostalgically about paperbacks being 2/6 (12 1/2 pence)! Some of the puzzles are longer than others (though the length bears no correlation to their difficulty) and indeed some appear padded out - though with wit and wisdom which amplify the pleasure, for example:

> 'The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children's games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up. And one of the games to which it is most attached is called, 'Keep tomorrow dark', and which is also named (by the rustics in Shropshire, I have no doubt) 'Cheat the Prophet'. The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. That is all. For a race of simple tastes, however, it is great fun.'

Unreservedly recommended for anyone who fancies outwitting Martin Gardner - and who'll accept the answers in the back if they have to!

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY BOOK REVIEW INDEX, 1980-1984 - Ed. H.W. Hall
[Gale Research Company, 1985, 761pp, $160.00]
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

I AM IN A QUANDARY - FACED WITH THIS massive and well produced book I want to give it unstinted praise; but then a little doubt creeps in. It contains references to reviews appearing in over 70 periodicals ranging from the Times Literary Supplement to many titles I've never heard of. If you have these periodicals/fanzines to hand you can, with the aid of this book, pinpoint and look up reviews that have appeared in the five years covered. How many people, I wonder, are in this happy position?

Let's forget that though, for the moment, and look only at this book. After an interesting Introduction and the abbreviations used for the periodicals (a cumulative list from 1923-1984) there are addresses for the periodicals used - and here's the first fault; **Vector** has the wrong address (that of the business manager - and that changed in the middle of 1980!). As soon as you spot such simple errors a certain amount of confidence in the book is lost.

The book is divided into Book Review Index (subdivided by Author - 305 double columned 8" x 11" pages - and Titles), and Research Index (by Author and Subject). To give a feeling for the coverage (with names that everyone should recognise) I looked at the entries for John Brunner - 17 books (1 in French and 1 in German). Only two of these were reviewed in **Vector** (shame on us?) but one of these was the 22pp **While There's Hope** from the Keepsake Press. Chris Priest has only 5 titles of his own and here **Vector** only scores one.

The 37 page Title Index gives just titles and authors - so you can then go back to the Author Index to find just who reviewed **Small, Elderly Dragon**, where it was published, etc.

The Research Index must have been even more a labour of love - to Index all the articles in the periodicals (which include many titles, such as **Focus** and even **Matrix** which were not applicable in the earlier part of the book). In the Author Entries (177 pages) Brian Aldiss has some 58 items and Paul Kincaid has 5 items. More interesting is the Subject Index (229 pages) - 'Writing SF' goes on for nearly 9 columns (and that's not to mention 7 closely allied subjects). Some items under subjects are a slight puzzle, 'A Telegram for Vector' seems incestuous and why should 'Standpoint: A Reassessment of Reassessments' appear under Sociology of SF and not under Reviewing? Despite my petty quibbles anyone doing academic research in our field needs this book. As I started off by saying, however, having tracked down the titles for source material fairly easily (thanks to the book) the problem then arises of laying your hands on the original material - a much harder job!

ESCAPE PLANS - Gwyneth Jones
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 246pp, £8.95 hardback, £3.50 paperback]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid.

IN HER PREVIOUS NOVEL, **DIVINE ENDURANCE**, Gwyneth Jones created a future that was as alien as any science fiction has produced, its strangeness compounded by being set in Malaysia and imbued with the atmosphere of that land. It was a land in which women ruled and men were reduced to an insignificant role. And it was presented in a dense prose packed with a knowledge of this world that wasn't always explained, and though it wasn't exactly an easy read, it always repaid the effort.

Her new novel is also set in a very alien and distant future, and again has an eastern setting though this is far less important to the atmosphere of the book. It is set in a society in which women rule and men have only the most minor of parts to play. And once again the prose is dense and packed with information and implication, and requires considerable alertness on the part of the reader to keep up with what is going on.

There the similarities end, for **Escape Plans** has no element of fantasy, but is science fiction of the hardest kind, as befits one of the first titles in Allen and Unwin's long overdue science fiction imprint, Orion. Far, far in the future mankind's space-going adventurers have found it is impossible to reach the stars, so they have turned back to a near-destroyed Earth, which they now rule from their VENTUR space stations. ALIC is a privileged VENTURan who visits the underworld as a tourist, but gives up her VENTURan privileges in a bid to help the mysterious jockey Millie, and as a result finds herself trapped among the Subs as religious fanaticism and revolution change the settled order of her world.

In outline the plot isn't all that original - a descent into Hell, a succession of moral, political and cultural rites of passage - but in what she does with it Gwyneth Jones has produced a novel every bit as powerful and impressive as **Divine Endurance**.

For a start this is a world that is totally dependent upon computers; they are central to everything from their sewage handling to their beliefs. Gwyneth Jones reflects this by creating a language, acronymic, made up of acronyms, abbreviations and computer slang, and this language is used consistently and naturally throughout the novel in such a way that the reader finds himself right inside the culture from the world go. This may be disorienting at first - though there is a glossary if anyone has problems with the language, it really isn't necessary - it quickly becomes vital in one's understanding of the people and their actions, and in showing just how alien this world is. **Divine Endurance** proved Gwyneth

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Jones an expert at introducing us to worlds we seem at first to barely comprehend; this new novel will only confirm that reputation.

But more than that, the last novel was that rarety in science fiction, a book that dealt both interestingly and believably, with political processes, and this is true of this book also. ALIC's odyssey is one through growing political awareness as she comes to understand the structure of her world and the nature of its people. Sudden shifts in scene and time mean that this isn't always an easy book to follow, but the precise, warts-and-all portrait of an entire culture that emerges makes the effort well worth while.

THE CAT WHO WALKS THROUGH WALLS
- Robert A. Heinlein
[New English Library, 1986, 374pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

MIND-EXPANDING, PROFOUND PHILOSOPHICAL appraisal of mankind as an allegory by an almost-octogenarian Heinlein this is not. It is as disappointing a book as I hope to read this year - well, I can hope... The most literary aspect of the thing is probably the quotation from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

If you wish to persist in reading this review, then briefly the book concerns Colonel Colin Campbell, aka Richard Ames, an old soldier turned hack writer. The vast proportion of the text is long-winded conversation, though no real people talk like these characters - grudgingly, I must admit the real people of the future might, but if they will, I may be glad not to one of them! -

'... was killed while he was a guest at my table. That's intolerably rude. I won't put up with it. Gwen, my love, if one tolerates bad manners, they grow worse...' So the Colonel would kill a person for his bad manners.

There are many shallowly posed questions and yet interestingly Heinlein's character, being a hack, comments on the writing profession: 'Writing is a legal way of avoiding work without actually stealing and one that doesn't take any talent or training.' If he really means this - and I must admit that it doesn't take much talent or training to produce this tome - then he is for once perhaps laying himself bare... and it isn't a pretty sight at his age! Campbell has apparently trained with the Dorsai, so that should make him much more interesting...!

Gwen aka Hazel Long is too good to be true, too; being accomplished in fighting, shooting and driving moon vehicles, yet Campbell still expressed surprise: 'You can drive this behemoth?' I mean, soldiers of fortune with literary hack leanings always refer to vehicles as 'behemoths', don't they? This stuff is crass, really; it is insulting; the odd wisecrack is thrown in amidst the corny puns, and none work, they don't even raise a groan of amusement. The whole piece is strained, rambling, and so short on plot and characters you want to feel something for that despair definitely sets in by page 155, with over halfway still to go!

A note from Gwen: 'Dearest One, I have an attack of wakeupitis...' One page 187 Campbell mentions Kipling's apes who believed that anything was possible just by wishing it so. One page 308, by which time you have stopped wondering why the book has such a cumbersome title, the cat is mentioned because he walks through walls: 'It's impossible but he's so young he doesn't know it's impossible, so he does it anyhow'. To quote Campbell again, 'I don't know how to write literature; I write stories'. That's as debatable as cats walking through walls!

There are thankfully-brief appearances of characters with names but not much else to differentiate them: Manuel Davis from **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**; Star, from **Glory Road**; Jubal Harshaw from **Stranger in a Strange Land**. If you're a completist and have read the above-mentioned, then you might want to read this book. The one description that seems to come alive, if only a little, is at the end, when both Campbell and Long appear to be dying after successfully liberating a sentient computer...Edgar Rice Burroughs did it so much better - the irony, the imaginative leaps, the humour, the social comment - and that was virtually 70 years ago!

A STEP OFF THE PATH - Peter Hunt
[Julia MacRae, 1985, 166pp, £6.95]
Reviewed by Rosemary Pardoe

FOUR CHILDREN, CAMPING IN WALES, ENCOUNTER groups of strange,secret people; long-lived men and women who seem to be descended from the knights and other contemporaries of King Arthur. The children are given the task of leading them to England, ostensibly to escape the pursuing Welsh, though the treachery is actually in their midst. At the centre of it all is a very precious object indeed.

But is this really happening? Back at home, on the England/Wales border, Jo the twin-sister of one of the children involved in the adventure, is recounting an identical story. Identical, that is, up to a point, for when the mundane worries of everyday life intervene, she seems to lose control of the story and her version starts to diverge from the events going on contemporaneously in the Welsh countryside. At the end she signally fails to provide her listeners with the correct dramatic conclusion, and they are left dissatisfied without quite knowing why.

Thus does Peter Hunt examine the relationship between fiction and reality in a neat, if rather superficial, way. The secret people, who have remained undiscovered through the centuries simply by living in the hidden places and moving in the darkest hours, are an attractive creation. It is easy to believe that they could exist, even in a supposedly overpopulated land like Britain.

There are, however, two major problems with the book. The first is that it contains too many characters. There are seven children involved altogether, and it is impossible to get to know, let alone like them in a mere 166 pages. Even Jo, the story-teller and much the most interesting character, is not fleshed out as well as she should be. As for the Arthurian folk, they are all disappointingly two-dimensional, though one can't help but admire Peter Hunt for so cleverly tricking us over Merlin.

An even more serious fault is the style in which the entire book is written. It is clearly quite intentional, yet it is hard to see what the author was trying to achieve. Perhaps he was attempting to express himself in a form similar to that in which a child might tell a story. Whatever his reasons, the result is awkward, stilted and often difficult to read. The best writers in this field, like Alan Garner and John Gordon, would never let style interfere with content, as Hunt does. But **A Step Off The Path** remains a thought-provoking, if flawed, look at the art and responsibilities of the story-teller.

THE SOUND OF WONDER; Interviews from 'The Science Fiction Radio Show' -
Daryl Lane, William Vernon & David Carson
[Oryx Press (Clio Distribution Services, 55 St Thomas Street, Oxford), 1985, 2 Vols. (203pp, 201pp), £17.50 each]
Reviewed by Edward James

SFRS: WELL,DO YOU THINK IT WAS A GOOD idea?
JAMES: It's certainly handy to have some of your radio interviews in book form. After all, these interviews were syndicated from Texas and heard by a lot of people in the States between 1980 and 1983, but it's all new to us. Apart from the Rudy Rucker interview that is: that's been printed already in the UK, in **Foundation** 27. And all those conversations are fascinating to read.

SFRS: Did we get the balance right?
JAMES: Well, the interviewees are nearly all Americans, of course: all of them if you count Piers Anthony and James P. Hogan. But it's a pretty wide spectrum of American writers: Donaldson, Cherryh, Clement, Harness, Sturgeon, Waldrop, Williamson and Rucker in the first volume (with the artist Michael Whelan added for good measure), and Anthony, Bryant, Farmer, Wollheim, Hogan, Bradley, Wolfe, Dickson and Martin in the second (with the film critic Roger Ebert). And a wide range of personalities too, from the modest - Sturgeon - to the barely sufferable - Anthony.

SFRS: Yeah, Anthony was a real pain in the...
JAMES: Quite

SFRS: So you reckon we did a good job?
JAMES: The interviews were well conducted, I give you that, by people who knew their SF. And there's the minimum of editorial interference. Just an introduction for each author, the odd explanatory note in brackets - and the occasional sound effect...
SFRS: (Laughs) Yeah, it's a transcript of the tapes, of course: if you left out the chuckles you'd have problems. Right, so we didn't do much editing. After all these are geuwine historical documents. So we didn't intrude like Charles Platt did in his interviews. (Printed in **The Dream Makers.**)
JAMES: And as a result, perhaps these interviews aren't nearly as penetrating or as literary as Platt's are.
SFRS: Win some, lose some.
JAMES: There's much more detail than in the Platt books, of course. I learnt a lot about these authors, about their obsessions, the genesis of particular stories, their attitude to writing. Sturgeon on 'Microcosmic God' or 'Bianca's Hands', Dickson on the Childe cycle, Wolfe on Urth, Bradley on Darkover, Cherryh on her future history, Williamson on his collaborations with Pohl, etc, etc: almost any SF reader will find stuff here to interest him. Not that anyone's going to be able to afford these books. £35 is absurd for two thinnish paperbacks. Even libraries are going to think twice about that.

SFRS: Perhaps you should donate your review copies to the Science Fiction Foundation library?
JAMES: Hmm.

KILLASHANDRA - Anne McCaffrey
[Bantam, 2986, 292pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

I DON'T LIKE KILLASHANDRA. SHE DISMISSES lovers and friends too easily, is a selfish, arrogant materialist and is far too lucky, successful and fortunate to be believable. All the most interesting men fall for her and she has no qualms about two-timing them. None of her friends are true friends - they are distant and lack affection. Or perhaps McCaffrey's characters are simply incredibly two-dimensional? The cast of the Pern series is

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more interesting.

The Crystal Singer plotted Killashandra Ree's life from failed music student on Fuert, to crystal cutter, or 'singer', of the Heptite Guild on Ballybran (a planet with only one primary industry - open cast mining, crystals being an important source of power and a valuable commodity).

Compared with **The Crystal Singer**, **Killashandra** is an inferior work, having a hackneyed plot and lacking as interesting a premise as that in the first book. Unlike Ballybran, Optheria - the main setting for **Killashandra** is sketchily drawn. This and the sparse plot, along with the romantic element that slows this volume up even more than it did with the first, makes **Killashandra** a very sedate read.

Killashandra Ree is told she can take the white crystals she has cut to Optheria for fitting in an organ, a musical instrument which boosts emotional response, and while there, can investigate why Optherian citizens are prohibited from the use of interstellar travel. After some deliberation, her decision is resolved by the information that if she doesn't go, she would put her lover, guildmaster Lanzecki, into jeopardy.

Optherians are supposed to be content and happy, but one of them attempts to assassinate Killashandra (so she believes) shortly after her arrival and she doesn't question this apparent contradiction. Before Killashandra can fit the crystals she is kidnapped and stranded on a desert island from which she manages to escape. Meeting the would-be 'assassin' and kidnapper again, she begins a stormy love-affair with him, in the process discovering that the planetary government has been brainwashing its people by use of the organs. Killashandra sets about bringing justice and truth to the stagnant planet.

Anne McCaffrey must have written chapter ten of the book asleep, because she makes the unforgivable error of calling the crystal singer by the pseudonym she takes (Carrigana) IN THE TEXT (on page 103): 'Joyfully, Keelaw deposited her garlands on a lean, brown-black man and with a half-reproachful, half-apologetic glance at Carrigana, accompanied him towards a distant section of the beach in the gathering dusk'. This also illustrates the level on which most of this book is written. Turgid stuff, and predictable, but don't let the blurb put you off, for on page 289: 'Lars swept her up in his arms, and carried her to the chair where he cradled her, appalled at the wildness of her sobbing and comforting her with kisses, caresses and strong embracings'.

I cried.

A SECRET PROPERTY - Ralph Noyes
[Quartet, 1985, 186pp, #7.95]
Reviewed by L.J.Hurst

THIS NOVEL KEEPS ITS SECRET WELL, ALTHOUGH I think this was not the author's intention. It is a thriller set in 1990, dealing with the appearance of UFOs and the involvement of the world's governments. As various civilians around the world become involved in the vast conspiracy, the novel becomes less clear. At times it proposes that UFOs and other inexplicable phenomena are produced by telepaths and telekenesics, but it also suggests that these individuals (being used wittingly and unwittingly by their governments) are also mimicking natural, or real, phenomena - i.e. as well as the UFOs produced by the telekenesics there might be real Flying Saucers from somewhere off-earth. The author cannot decide whether the mental products alone are real - so that when someone sees a UFO they are not imagining it, they are seeing a product of someone else's mind - or whether some people can, by power of mind, add to the number of UFOs to be seen. This ambiguity is one of the flaws of the novel.

The book starts off with several strands - a British tramp eccentric whose cat having been disembowelled by a UFO challenges the local USAF airbase, a British civil servant who discovers what dirty dealings his superiors have been up to, and a Soviet dissident lead to dissent by his telepathic powers. A lot of other characters become involved, including the present Prime Minister and the future presidents of the USA and the USSR - all three of them either insane or senile. MI5, the CIA and the KGB also have agents everywhere. While the experiments with the mental projection of UFOs go on in secret two spacecraft are circling the earth, trying out star wars weapons until they are torn apart by another mental projection. The story returns to earth as the British discover that the USA and USSR are combining to destroy the British and French experimental stations holding the telepaths. Luckily, a last shoot-out saves Britain and a cruise missile attack is diverted into space.

This has been a somewhat crude synopsis, but the novel, I would say is more confused than involved. For instance, the civil servant becomes involved as he tries to discover the nature of Project Prospero. This is the control of the telepaths. Later on, another project, Disinform, is launched. The purpose of that appears to be to make the public think the UFOs are from other worlds, not from somewhere in East

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Anglia, but it is not clear. Similarly with Project Prospero - it only works at the end of the book when a demented viscount is kidnapped so that his powers could be used - what was the project doing before? And who did it?

In an Afterword to his novel, Ralph Noyes goes back to Kenneth Arnold's first sighting of a UFO in 1947. Now, if his thesis that UFOs are mental projections is correct, who produced the UFOs of 1947 or whenever? Noyes does not suggest that they were products of government research, so where did they come from?

The title and the last chapter presumably refer to Charles Fort's 'We are property'. Even in the resolution of the last chapters we are never told of whom we are property. This book lacks answers. I do not vouch for the quality of the questions, either.

TOP FANTASY - Edited by Josh Pachter
[Dent, 1985, 311pp, £9.50]
Reviewed by Jim England

THIS IS A COLLECTION OF TWO DOZEN FANTASY stories, selected and introduced by their authors. Their lengths vary from five to twenty pages, the shortest being 'The Wife's Story' by Ursula LeGuin. In her introduction she remarks on the tendency of some fantasy writers to use 'junkfood emotions' in their stories and, unfortunately, many of the stories in this collection do just that.

Of the four longest stories, for example, 'The Depths' by Ramsey Campbell is a very well written horror story and,according to the author, 'has something important to say', but this something is so slight that I felt I had wasted my time after reading it. The same with 'Collaborating' by Michael Bishop, although its writer claims that it is about 'the existential dilemma of two distinct intellects sharing the same body' (a two-headed man). H.L. Gold's lengthy 'Trouble with Water' is a very slight story about the revenge of a water gnome, dating back to 1939.Tanith Lee's 'Blue Vase of Ghosts' is beautifully written on the parallel world theme, and she tells us that its twenty pages were written 'with a sensation of continuous excitement' in a day. In contrast, Pamela Sargent tells us that 'The Broken Hoop', about an American Indian, 'took me ten years to write'. One of the best stories is 'Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory' by thomas Disch, well up to his usual standard, about an enormous cemetery. I used to like Ray Bradbury's 'The Fog Horn', copyright 1951, but it now seems to exemplify 'junkfood emotions'. 'The Day of the Butterflies' by Marion Zimmer Bradley is yucky, with its cartoon-strip dialogue;not improved by a pretentious and patronising foreword that starts off:'I have always been interested in the nature of reality'. Anne McCaffrey's 'The Smallest Dragonboy', if anything, is worse, and her claim to have read it aloud to audiences from Liverpool to Alaska inspires pity for those (presumably child and captive) audiences.

What else? Well, there is a story by Michael Avallone about a man who could walk on air, as light as a dandelion seed; one by J.G. Ballard about a very big space station; one by Barrington Bayley about elves and trolls (better than you might expect); a Robert Bloch story emulating the style of Edgar Allen Poe; one by Terry Carr about a bookshop, one by Joe Hensley about a harpist; a sword-and-sorcery tale by Brian Lumley; a sort of detective story by John Lutz (who also speculates about the definition of fantasy); 'Caves in Cliffs' by Josh Pachter, the editor of this collection (quite good); 'Dancers in the Time-Flux' by Robert Silverberg (written in the present tense); another story about elves by Nancy Springer; a short-short fairy tale by Connie Willis; and finally a rare example of a story which the author, Gene Wolfe, claims to have dreamed, and which starts off with a mysterious advertisement.

And there you have it. I seem to have made some reference to them all. The copyrights date from 1939, but most are recent. The field of fantasy should be infinite, but it is surprising how much of it revolves around old ideas and is written in accordance with certain unwritten rules. The cover blurb hints that the fantasy genre helps to make present-day reality more tolerable. I suppose it does, but I can think of more cheerful and worthwhile themes for stories than are explored in many of these.

DINNER AT DEVIANT'S PALACE - Tim Powers
[Chatto & Windus, 1986, 294pp, £9.95 hardback, £3.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

TIM POWERS, CHATTO'S BLURB ASSURES US, IS A master story teller. Aren't they all. Beside Dickens, Tolstoy and Austen of course he is no master, but he is pretty good and he has one quality which one day may elevate him towards those heights. When he employs his imagination he uses his imagination, not someone else's. Which is less common than might be thought in this supposedly imaginative genre. In **Dinner at Deviant's Palace** he gives us a crystalline life form with pronounced megalomaniac tendencies, hemogoblins, liquor as currency in a post-nuclear California and a hero who is almost a real human being as well as a rock and roll musician.

Now Rock, of course, is not noted for its originality and at times in this book I had the odd notion Powers was making like one of those American session bands - Toto f'rinstance. The execution is flawlessly competent for the most part and all the right chords are struck at precisely the right times, but at no time is there the passion of the real thing. And as we know there ain't nothing like the real thing. Similarly the book entirely lacks any thrill of imminent dangerous revelation which characterises the best of 'real' SF. In **The Anubis Gates** Powers created his world by adding layers of his own detail to the historical fact (and fantasy) of 19th Century London and in doing so he presented the reader with the wherewithal to imagine that world for himself - which is what the good writer does. In **Dinner at Deviant's Palace** what we get is the stock, schlock cliche futureworld with insufficient added detail to deny the distinctly jerry-built nature of the base. If you have seen 'Mad Max' you've seen Powers' future California, which is dreary except when he enlivens it by putting his road warriors on pushbikes! I find Powers a very funny writer, in a downbeat, shoulder-shrugging way. At times he even essays irony, something largely absent from the genre. When, on page 230, he writes 'The beer and food cost only three jiggers but it tasted wonderful, and as he climbed back down to the pavement Rivas wondered if he'd ever really paid enough attention to food' - he can make me forgive those moments when he doesn't seem to have paid quite the attention he might, as when on page 4 he writes, 'The carriage was an old but painstakingly polished Chevrolet body mounted on a flat wooden wagon drawn by two horses...' A century after Armageddon all Chevvies will be old!

That image is, of course, familiar in the genre, and Powers makes use of many tropes which are familiar. Gregorio Rivas is a 'famous pelican gunner', a pelican seeming to be a cross between a violin and a lute, and gunnery a percussive style of playing. Some things have not changed in Northern California, including the pace of fashion. Thirty year old Greg thinks he's hip, but 'Like most kids his age, Modesto considered gunning a slightly embarrassing historical curiosity, conjuring up implausible images of one's parents when they were young and foolish...' In his spare time Greg 'redeems' devotees of the Jaybird cult, which is organised by the aforementioned alien for suitably ghastly purposes. He is retained at fabulous fee to redeem his long lost love, which he does after a number of adventures, the while making a number of discoveries about himself. Except for the resolution, though, the tale is rather flat. It rattles along nicely - Powers is a very competent story teller, remember -but I found no real sense of tension and climax. There are many virtues in the book - and it is an enjoyable read - but high drama is not among them. You will be entertained but not enlightened. Whether that is sufficient I leave to you. For myself I like the way Powers' writing wears a smile on its face.

THE MEMORY OF WHITENESS
- Kim Stanley Robinson
[Macdonald, 1986, 351pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

THIS IS A GOOD BOOK, IT HAS MUCH THAT'S interesting, much that's entertaining. It combines scientific marvels, intrigue, violence, a mystical secret, and music. Ultimately it fails, perhaps because it reaches so high; we'll return to this.

It is 3229 AD: Holywelkin physics has changed the solar system,much as Einstein changed the world. Holywelkin physics with its ten dimensions, some of which are tightly curved, with its ultimate 'particle', the glint would seem to be based on the theory of superstrings, and that's as much as I'm able to tell you on that topic. Application of the theory gives control of singularities, this allows artificial gravity, spheres of singularity to keep atmospheres around even the smallest moon or meteorite, it allows the sun's energy to be transferred to the farthest reaches of the solar system, so that 'whitsuns' can keep the remotest moon warm, and much more. This is a rich setting, one many authors would have spun out into at least a trilogy and maybe a full-blown series.

Holywelkin had turned to music in his later years and created The Orchestra, a vast player piano with all of the orchestral instruments controlled by one man using pre-recorded tapes and multiple keyboards.

Johannes Wright is the ninth Master of the Orchestra. We first meet him as an apprentice undergoing drug withdrawal symptoms within the Orchestra. In an hallucination (?) he talks with Holywelkin, which changes his attitude to the Orchestra so that he comes to regard it as a musical instrument and not just a musical curiosity.

The book follows Johannes' first grand tour of the solar system with the orchestra. Johannes strives for that secret, musical/physical, for which Holywelkin had built the Orchestra, a secret perhaps already known by the mysterious Grey Brotherhood. At the same time another secret brotherhood seeks to control the tour such that it becomes a play, a meta-drama of their own design. The road crew and Dent Ios, a music critic whom Johannes befriends, seek to understand the events affecting the tour and to protect Johannes.

Whilst the book is about Johannes, the central character is Dent Ios. We watch Dent change from a passive, limited

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individual to one confident in taking decisions and in acting even where there is danger to himself.

Music is at the core of the book and if you know more than I do then maybe you'll get things I missed, but Robinson provides sufficient explanation so that the terminology is understandable, eventually.

Mr. Robinson is certainly a craftsman; fast, pacey action sequences, packed, dense passages of description. Both the first and third person are used and there's even a section written in the second person singular which I believe succeeds. There are also passages of explanation where the writer talks to us, 'You, dear Reader...'. These passages I'm not completely happy with, somehow the 'Dear Reader' jars. I'm sure they were deliberate but the suspicion remains that they are bits of explanation the writer couldn't fit in any other way and they've been hidden behind this folksy kind of style. So whilst it's certainly craft, is it art? Behind the glitter is there substance, is this more than just a space adventure in flashy clothes, or are we just impressed by the tricks? You'll have to answer these questions for yourself. For me there's more than just surface gloss (but even if it is just a trick it's a damn good one).

And the failure? The end; whilst dramatic events occur, whilst loose ends are tied, I question whether there is a logical progression to this point, whether there is a resolution, whether anything is revealed. I don't need all the 'i's dotted and 't's crossed but I do ask for consistency. I will extend the benefit of the doubt, I'll accept it's an enigma (variation).

Even if not completely successful there are a lot of writers out there who would have loved to have written this book, a lot who will never write anything as good as this book. I will watch out for Kim Stanley Robinson.

THE ICE KING - Michael Scot
[New English Library, 1986, 252pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

MICHAEL SCOT IS THE PEN NAME OF TWO WRITERS - Michael Scott Rohan and Allan Scott. They list among their combined educations, occupations and interests: archaeology, Old Norse, TV scriptwriting and home computers, and have geographical links with Denmark, America and Yorkshire. All these topics are used in **The Ice King**, their first joint novel.

Neither SF nor Fantasy but rather supernatural thriller, this book is based upon the legends of Scandinavia. Set in the Yorkshire fishing village of Saitheby, the novel opens with Professor Hal Hansen and his team of archaeologists having recently uncovered the remains of a thousand year old Viking ship in a local estuary. The team consists of both Britons and Americans from Rayner College, Texas. No sooner has the scene been set than we are off at break-neck speed. Strange events begin to occur, building in crescendo from weird noises and the wrecking of exhibits from the dig at the local museum to a brutal series of killings. Connected in some way with the killings is the young American Jay Colby, of more brawn than brain, who hangs out with the local chapter of Hell's Angels. The police are baffled. As CID Chief Inspector Giles Ridley investigates, a severe winter begins - but it is only September.

I won't spoil the book by revealing any more except to say that dark forces have been unleashed and it is only with supernatural aid from Odin himself that Hal Hansen has any chance of overcoming them.

The book moves along at a cracking pace although it does flag towards the end, having been hobbled by the need to educate the ignorant reader in Old Norse mythology. The use of a computer to achieve this was much better than being lectured by a leading character. The chapter where Hal comes face to face with the old legends as reality definitely dragged.

The characterisation varies from poor to middling. We can tell that Hal Hansen is Danish because he keeps making unintelligible remarks in the language and there is a bluff Yorkshireman called Harry who says things like 'Wake oop, y'dozy booger!'. The two women archaeologists, Pru, an English girl, and Jessica, an American, seem to be mere plot devices to give a motive for revenge, introduce the computer and sleep with our hero Hal. The explicit sex seemed unnecessary but will no doubt help the sales figures. Jay Colby and the Hell's Angels are caricatures; only the policeman Giles Ridley seems remotely realistic.

But forget the poor characterisation - never a thriller's strong point. Where it really counts **The Ice King** is gripping. The authors are on familiar territory when it comes to digs and mythology, and they have a nice line in suspense and action. This book would be ideal for a long train journey.

A TIME OF CHANGES - Robert Silverberg
MORE THAN HUMAN - Theodore Sturgeon
[Gollancz, 1985, 221pp & 233pp, £2.95 each]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

THESE, NOS. 3 AND 2 IN GOLLANCZ'S NEW paperback series, are superb value for money. Having said that, we should consider what they are.

'Classic SF' is a term open to as much argument as any other in the file of literature. To most fans, it probably implies 'space opera' or the hard-core technical science fiction of the Golden Age; to Gollancz it is revealed as having quite a different implication, much broader and more catholic.

Robert Silverberg's oeuvre from 1968 onward encompassed some of the most complex, appealing, endearing and challenging themes in SF, presented in a flowing style and with considerable conviction. This is far from being one of his best, but it cannot be denied that its theme is intriguing and its treatment, though rambling and lacking in tension, comprehensive, dealing as it does with a society in which the concept of the 'I' has been ruthlessly suppressed.

Theodore Sturgeon is noted for his somewhat harsh view of mankind and nature; in the softer times of the forties he was often regarded as using 'rather nasty themes', and this is no exception. The idea was first used by him in **Galaxy** magazine in 1952 as one of the most hard-hitting and shocking tales ever to appear in those revered pages, under the title 'Baby is Three'; the present work sandwiches this superb story between two more rambling and far less gripping sections, weakening the impact and diluting the message, which is that mankind is being gradually supplanted by Homo Gestalt - groups of people with differing natural or psionic abilities which correlate to make up a single functioning unit with (of course) far, far greater power than Homo Sapiens.

If one were to be asked to select a single Sturgeon novel for incorporation into this series, probably three in four readers would pick this one, echoing James Blish's comment that it is 'one of the very few authentic masterpieces science fiction can boast'. Yet a very good case can be made for arguing that regardless of its basic premises - which are obviously within the genre - the style and content of most of the book, particularly the later sections, falls into mainstream literature and not the formalised body of SF. I suppose it all boils down to what Blish meant by 'authentic' - and to establish that perhaps we should consider that the book won the International Fantasy Award, while Silverberg's book gained the coveted **Nebula** Award which places it firmly within the field.

But just what do you get for your £2.95? Having recognised that nowadays this is a very reasonable price for any paperback of note, I must tell you that the Gollancz Classic SF series is produced in a larger-than-normal paperback format, on superior stock, with large clear and attractive type and firmly bound into glossy and well-designed covers. I found the artwork misleading in both cases, in that I would not have gathered anything about the style or content of either story from the cover painting, but each in its way is striking without being in the least garish.

If you are seeking a unified series of books that will provide you with a breadth of style and theme that are unrivalled in any other collection, and if in acquiring such a series you are prepared to have your personal ideas of SF, and probably your personal likes and dislikes in literature generally, strongly attacked and perhaps changed for ever, then I advise you to sign on for every new title.

If, on the other hand, your choice is for space opera and hard-hitting adventure SF, you will be totally bemused by these books and would do better to stick to the Hamlyn Venture SF series which in a sense gives you everything that Gollancz does not. Either way, we are better catered for today in the area of compiling an enjoyable SF collection in paperback than probably at any other date; don't let these new ventures die from simple neglect or through a feeling that because, somewhere you have a tattered and battered edition you have loved for decades, you need not replace or supplement it with one of these thoroughly worthwile new editions.

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