VECTOR

133

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

75p

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1986

WE ARE THE DEAD

L.J.HURST ON *1984* AND *THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS*

plus Readers Letters and Book Reviews

VECTOR

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1986

C O N T E N T S

OUR PRODUCTION ASSISTANT FOR THE LAST SIX ISSUES, **ANN MORRIS**, HAS now moved to the States. Ann has done a superb job, her typing accuracy greatly contributing to the production quality of **Vector**. We'd like to thank her for her efforts, and wish her all the best across the Pond. This means that there may be more typoes than usual this issue, as Paul and I have done most of the typing, but we hope to have a new production assistant for **V134**.

We're also hoping to be able to stay at 24pp, or even increase to 28pp, but to make this possible, there are a number of things that we need:

- More articles from members, of a high enough quality to publish.
- More artwork -- ditto.
- More letters: we want your response to the articles and reviews in **Vector**.
- More contributions from professional authors: if I haven't contacted you yet, and you have something you want to say in **Vector**, please don't wait to be asked!
- More advertisements from publishers. The BSFA does a lot to promote your books, and revenue from your ads can help us to continue doing this -- and your ads should do you some good as well! Please contact me for details. -- Ed.

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EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

I RECENTLY MADE A NEW ADDITION TO MY growing library of books about SF, an early SFBC edition of Patrick Moore's **Science and Fiction** (1957). Boiled down to the droppings, Moore's argument is that there are two types of SF: that which has a good, solid, scientific base, and the rest. The former are worthwhile, the latter...

> *It is a great pity that so much of the fiction produced is scientifically inaccurate and of dubious literary value. If only the magazines and fan productions could be persuaded to keep to technical possibilities, science itself would benefit.*

I find his basic assumption that hard science, technological SF is of an inherently higher order than any other kind somewhat difficult to accept. From over 20 years of dedicated SF reading I can probably count the number of good, well-written scientific SF novels I've read on the fingers of one hand.

Clarke, Pournelle and their ilk suffer from cardboard characterisation, over-mechanistic plotting and a generally "cold" atmosphere. There is little human warmth in their books. Other scientists who one might look to for good, scientifically-based SF -- Asimov, Hoyle, *et al* -- suffer from adolescent melodrama and generally hack writing. There have been very few scientific SF novels with any literary value at all.

SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY, GIMMICKS -- AND PEOPLE

I'm not, of course, dismissing a scientific element in SF. A good scientific background can be a major plus. If you set your novel on a planet half the size of Earth, with three or four moons each larger than our own, you'd look more than a little foolish if you forgot to have strong tides -- unless you have a very good explanation. It is essential to work out your background logically so that it does make sound scientific sense. The story should always be more important than the scientific accuracy, but sloppy writing or careless research can never be acceptable.

Unlike Alice's White Queen, who sometimes "believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast," the usual rule of thumb in SF writing is to allow just one scientific implausibility per story, and have everything else follow from it. ESP, time travel, FTL drives, antigrav devices, parallel worlds -- take the concept, give it a different slant, and add an element of scientific plausibility. Actually, it doesn't even matter if the story is scientifically impossible, so long as it is internally consistent. But mixing your gimmicks, like mixing your drinks, can have messy consequences, and it's all too easy for even an experienced writer to fall into that trap.

Because I've read so many badly written hard science SF novels, and also because I reckon men and women are both more important and more interesting than machines and widgets, my own preference is for "soft science" stories -- sociological, psychological, philosophical, political -- where people are up front rather than physics.

BUT SOME GET IT RIGHT

Having said that, I believe that there is a need for good, well written, hard science SF. If mechanical engineers, nuclear physicists and computer programmers were to write good stories founded in their own specialisms, perhaps it might help, in the public mind, to remove the silliness from "sci-fi". To quote Moore, science fiction might then "regain its rightful place as a wholesome and respected branch of the literary tree." Again he is equating scientific SF with literary value, a dubious concept indeed -- but why shouldn't a novel be both science-based and literary? Indeed some, a few, a very few, are.

Paul Preuss got it right in **Broken Symmetries** (1983), which taught me more about quantum theory than any textbook -- and also a good deal about human behaviour: pride, arrogance, love, revenge. Gregory Benford's **Timescape** (1980) is one of the rare scientific approaches to time travel, and is also a very readable study of the academic research world. Greg Bear goes into tremendous depth on gene manipulation and cellular engineering in **Blood Music** (1985), and gets a rattling good disaster novel and future-evolution-of-mankind novel out of it.

There are exceptions to all rules. It is possible for an author to "mix his drinks" successfully if the right combination of ideas are blended, and if the characters are put firmly before the technology. One example is Christopher Hodder-Williams' **The Prayer Machine** (1976) in which travel to the near future occurs through psychotic catatonia, in order to discover the long term effects of present day genetic engineering research: three concepts here. But the story is about people more than it is about science; the love affair between the psychologically disturbed hero and a young nun adds both personal and religious moral dilemmas to the scientific moral questions which the book raises. This is a multi-layered novel, whose complex plot twists work because it is well written.

GOLDEN TURKEY

But usually science-based SF novels are poorly written. My Golden Turkey of the Year Award goes to William S. Davis, who is professor of systems analysis at an American university. His book, **The NECES Voyage** (1985), from one of the most respected publishers of computer books in the Western world, attempts to teach computer science through SF. A direct rip-off of **Fantastic Voyage** (novelised by Isaac Asimov, 1966), **The NECES Voyage** has a team of experts shrunk to bit size to enter a computer which has been taken over by a hacker. At each crisis one of the computer experts breaks off to explain elements of computer architecture to the others, with instant diagrams. Full of gosh-wow, melodramatic chapter-endings and amazingly clichéd concepts and language, this one makes EE Doc Smith look like great literature. It's the best example I've ever read of how not to do it.

THE RIGHT TO WRITE

Being a professor of systems analysis does not automatically qualify you to write novels. Indeed, I think the traditional division between the Arts and the Sciences has some validity: the mind-training and acquired skills of a scientist are not those of a creative writer. A good professional writer can write well, accurately and convincingly on any subject, including science and technology. But there's nothing to say that a highly intelligent, qualified and experienced scientist can write anything readable.

Being able to speak, read and write English, or any other language, does not make one a writer. It's not the doddle many people assume it is. In fact, writing well is one of the most difficult skills there is, and I applaud those who can do it, who can entertain, stimulate and educate their readers. And if they can write a hard science, technology-based SF novel which does all of this, and which has true literary value, then they are rare beasts indeed.

L E T T E R S

BECAUSE OF THE VAST AMOUNT OF MATERIAL WE PACKED INTO V132, THE letters had to be restricted to one topic; all other letters were held over till this issue. It's taken a while, but it looks as if Vector is going to have a vibrant letter column again — if you keep them rolling in.

VECTOR 130 IS ANOTHER FINE ISSUE WITH THE HIGHLIGHT BEING Michael Coney's "A Forest of Ears". Michael's name is obviously a basic reason for his love of rodents in general and rabbits in particular. Interestingly "coney" is not only a word for a rabbit but also a rock hyrax (archaic usage). Rock hyrax are the nearest relative to elephants but are about rabbit size; the ones I've seen in Kenya live on vertical cliffs. We were told they make lovable and loving pets so perhaps Michael should consider getting one.

Back to the plot: "A Forest of Ears" was not only informative about the biological aspects of Michael Coney's work but was also entertaining. Unfortunately entertainment seems to be looked down on by some members of our community and I find that both sad and narrow-minded. **Albion Writ** is an excellent feature and has produced some good articles; this is the best to date.

«Anyone who can make rabbits sound interesting has achieved something quite remarkable! -- Ed.»

I've not read **Footfall** but Mike Dickinson's review certainly indicates poor research and slapdash science which is surprising as Niven and Pournelle usually try very hard to get that right. I disagree with Mike that lying is inseparable from imaginative construction: the latter implies an ability to extrapolate, the former to fabricate; there is a difference. Mike quotes from the Algis Budrys review in **F&SF** and I think this was a better review managing to combine criticism of the book and the apparent reason for writing it deliberately as a bestseller whilst picking out those parts which would be enjoyed by Niven and Pournelle fans. I have to admit to bias here as I consider Algis Budrys the best reviewer/critic writing today. I'm not sure why I picked Mike's review to comment on; probably I was triggered by the mention of Budrys. In no way am I getting at Mike, indeed he's one of the better reviewers.

The interview with Alasdair Gray (V131) was interesting but too short. I would be interested in hearing more about the "Glasgow Mafia". I think that we tend to believe that the South East in general and London in particular is not only the centre but the only point on the literary scene -- how sad.

«As an expatriate Northerner, I couldn't agree more. -- Ed.»

Good to see Dave Wingrove back in **Vector**; I have a lot of time for Dave. I enjoyed Yes, but wasn't a great fan of Jon Anderson's voice, which is probably a statement of heresy with dedicated Yes fans. Being ignorant of the background I'd not been able to interpret the lyrics as Dave has. I believed the song names were hooks for the rest of the song, rather than the equivalent of a story title. What I mean is that if you thought "Starship Trooper" was going to be about Starship Troopers *à la* Heinlein you were going to be disappointed. The title set a mood, a generic theme. Dave's piece certainly provided interesting background information which enhanced my view of Yes.

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HAVING JUST READ GEOFF RYMAN'S **THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE** along with various reviews and appraisals of it I would like to put forward my own views which are rather different from the general mood expressed.

In my view, despite passages of stunning horror and descriptive brilliance, **The Warrior Who Carried Life** is a deeply flawed novel, resting upon a basic misbegotten premise: that men are responsible for the world's sufferings. This bias is clear from the beginning in Ryman's choice of sex for his heroic figures: the main protagonist, Cara, has to don the disguise of a male body while being "inside" a woman; and Stefile, her companion and lover, is cast stereotypically -- very young, downtrodden and abused, but yet still retaining a basic sensitivity and maternal appreciation of life. Now this is a rather confusing situation sexually and one which I doubt either men or women reading the novel will find gratifying or totally believable.

In this novel Ryman has sought to rewrite the Genesis myth. But whereas that piece of propaganda got it wrong and foisted the blame for mankind's iniquities onto womenkind (Eve), Ryman goes to the extreme in the opposite direction and heaps the blame on men. But this premise is patently false when one considers that history has seen many notable murderesses (Myra Hindley) and that viewed psychoanalytically men's violence towards women is often an expression of their own mothers' murderous, destructive feelings towards them in childhood.

The need to maintain this piece of mythology at all costs shows itself in the establishment and development of a quasi-religious scheme: the Galu, the Serpent, the Secret Rose, the Garden of Eden. But by resorting to mythology Ryman regresses us to primitive culture in the worst sense, the time of the early Greeks and before, when humanity was still prey to the forces of "divine power" (the unconscious) and could not grant themselves the freedom to question and change the structure of the world by their own understanding and will.

It is only the detail and vividness of Ryman's imagination that stops the novel losing all credibility, for the women as much as the men are stereotyped and two-dimensional. Thus Ryman's own primitive prejudices blind him to a precise and objective depiction of human character and action. He has substituted a false generality for particular reality.

That this is so shows itself in the central biblical chapter, "The Other Country." This is the most directly mythological and least convincing of all parts of the novel, for here didactic and intellectual purpose dominate in an attempt to promote Ryman's false personal mythology. Lines like "The secret of the Secret Rose rose to the Secret Rose" perhaps indicate in their empty playfulness Ryman's own lack of conviction towards his basic premise when viewed consciously.

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«I imagine this letter will spark off a healthy response from feminists, Christians, students of psychology, mythology, anthropology and religion, admirers of the novel, and perhaps Geoff Ryman himself. -- Ed.»

I WANT TO DISAGREE WITH YOUR REVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER EVANS' **In Limbo**. I read it about a month after reading Christopher Priest's **The Glamour**, and while I would agree that they share a similar concern, I could not argue that Evans is imitating Priest. They are both dealing with subjects that are now very much everyday matter for all kinds of writers. But Evans, it seems to me, deals with the subjectivity of experience far better than Priest because he does not explain it.

In the last pages of **The Glamour** (the p/b edition at least -- I understand that the Cape h/b is different) it is almost as if one had stopped reading a novel and started to read a book about the literary theories of John Fowles or Italo Calvino: the idea that all books are fictions, and the characters in them can be modified by the author. **The Glamour** stops being about something we could experience and starts being about how to write. Now I am not a product of someone else's writing -- the way I live may be the product of someone else's machinations, in my relationships at work, for instance, but that has nothing to do with the authorial theory that Priest uses to round up his story. There is very little point to a story that concludes by saying that the story has got to the point that it has because it is a story, and that its resolution lies in this admission. If a story has been developed completely then it ought to be concluded either catastrophically or by tying all the knots. **The Glamour** escapes its complexity by denying its reality.

The strength of **In Limbo** is that it refuses to bow to contemporary literary theory. Carpenter's final escape, or failed escape, are signs of a far greater literary theory which worksd because it is not expanded. It is only in the last, apparently irrationally placed, chapter that one realises "Of course! Carpenter has been In Limbo all his life, metephorically speaking, and now he has had a breakdown represented by the imprisonment." But it is not until the last pages that one realises that **In Limbo** is not a work of historical, kitchen sink realism but of a powerful symbolism. By avoiding direct allusion to any of this, Evans has avoided the flaws of the last part of **The Glamour**.

I regard both **The Glamour** and **In Limbo** as signs of the power of present SF writers, though I would hate to see them setting a trend. But I regard them as equals, at least, not one imitative of the other.

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«With hindsight I would agree that my review of In Limbo misses the point in several areas, and that the novel is deeper and more successful than I indicated. I would disagree with your interpretation of the ending of The Glamour, which is unexpected and not easy to get a hold on, but which is tremendously thought-provoking in its implications; the ending cannot be separated from the dislocations which occur throughout the book, causing the reader to question the relative validity of subjective and objective reality. Both Evans and Priest are currently tackling similar themes in similar ways, and I'm looking forward to seeing what they both produce next. -- Ed.»

LIKE CY CHAUVIN (LETTERS, V131) I ENJOYED COLIN GREENLAND'S article on the theory and questionable practice of book reviewing (V129), but a couple of Cy's assumptions puzzled me. He seems to be protesting that Colin neglected to suggest that there could be objective standards to reviewing, yet feels that one might work to

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an "ideal, internalised SF model" (my emphasis). Internal to what? The SF field as a whole, or the particular reviewer/reader? What I think Colin was saying was that all reviewing is of necessity subjective and that it is the responsibility of the reviewer to strive to make his piece as dispassionate, and hence useful to others, as possible. The professional reviewer, that is -- the fun part of **Vector** or PI can be the larger allowance they make for the subjective element, so let the reader of those magazines beware. Until the day all book reviews are composed by computers they will contain some subjective slant, however slight.

(Except, who will program the machine? Anyone who thinks that computers can't write book reviews has never seen that which passes for a literary page in the **Daily Mail**.)

Then Cy wrote of "the difference between reviewing and criticism." This is not a distinction that Colin drew, although I think it is one that I have vaguely noted before and always it has been to the detriment of the "review". Reviews are journalism and ephemeral; criticism comes in enduring hardback. I find that much of what passes as "criticism" does in fact belie the word. It achieves little assessment and too much turgid explication. The review has its faults, as illustrated by Colin, but because of that journalistic streak it has to it, its brevity and its attention-grabbing approach means that it is much more up-front with the ideas and the opinions. A long work of criticism may boil down to precious few of those.

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CY CHAUVIN (V131) SAYS THAT JOANNA RUSS WRITES BETTER THAN ANNE McCaffrey, which may well be true from a critical literary point of view, but is it really relevant from a review where I, for one, will want to know whether I will enjoy the book? I like both Russ and McCaffrey, as well as Harlan Ellison and Bob Shaw, for instance, and I would not dream of comparing Russ with any of the other three in a review. Perhaps comparison with Alasdair Gray or Chris Priest might be appropriate in Russ's case, whilst McCaffrey compares with Bob Shaw, and possibly some of Piers Anthony, or more relevant perhaps, with Edna O'Brien (not just because of "Stich in Snow" but the **Crystal Singer** pair as well.

One advantage McCaffrey has over Russ is in readability, and that is a thing that is often neglected, unfortunately. Russ is in some places quite a struggle to wade through and we don't really learn that much from these passages. This may not be a literary flaw but it certainly is from a reviewer's angle.

You refer in your editorial to "borderline SF... where it sometimes approaches literature." Surely SF does not need to be borderline to be literature. Admittedly, such "mainstream" or "hard" SF as Shaw or Asimov is hardly literature at its best, but some of Dick or Priest's work must count without really being borderline stuff.

As for Ken Lake's suggested book on "99 best SF novels", I would like to see something somewhere between David Pringle's book and Steven King's **Danse Macabre**, i.e. a detailed, readable analysis of the science fiction (and fantasy? or is it too broad?) phenomenon based roughly around 99 best novels where King discussed films and only went into depth on about ten books (one of which -- Ellison's **Strange Wine** -- is a collection).

Finally, David Wingrove's Yes piece was an interesting run through, and is he considering any other pieces, on Rush or Led Zeppelin perhaps? After all, SF and rock music have a lot of interlinking themes, especially Mike Moorcock!

P.S. Has anyone a copy of Ellison's **Strange Wine** for sale?

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I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER MY CONGRATULATIONS TO DAVID WINGROVE FOR A most interesting and informative article on the group Yes (**V131**). It gave me a great insight into the inspirations, musical and lyrical, behind a group I have admired tremendously for a number of years, and I look forward with great anticipation to the time when I listen to the album **Tales from Topographic Oceans**, given his description of it. I wonder if there is a chance that Wingrove, or anyone, would be willing to write any articles on any other overtly SF influenced rock groups, in particular the Canadian group Rush whose album **2112** is virtually a musical novel based on the works of Ayn Rand.

«I believe that Dave is working with Colin Greenland on a book about SF and Rock... Watch this space... -- Ed.»

I agree with what you said about the main aim of **Vector** being the criticism of written SF, but I also agree with Martin Hewitson (Letters, **V131**) in that I think it should contain more articles. Maybe a number of smaller ones -- such as the interview with Alasdair Gray, which I enjoyed as an example of a non-SF writer enjoying popularity in the genre -- would be better, to give a variety with a long article every two or three issues to break the monotony.

Although I do not know enough to offer any comments on Ken Lake's letter, I agree with his idea to a much greater extent than I did David Pringle's, and I would like to see such a project bear fruit, if only for the chance to widen my own horizons, being too young to have been around when many of the "best" SF books were first published.

SIMON JEWELL
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I WAS SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED TO SEE DAVID WINGROVE'S ARTICLE ON Yes in **V131**, simply because I never expected to see a piece on a rock group in **Vector**. Perhaps the magazine has become a little staid and conservative; where is Joseph Nicholas these days?

Yes has always been one of my favourite rock groups, so I was able to follow Wingrove's argument fairly closely. But I'm not sure how seriously to take the lyrical content in Yes, since Jon Anderson said in an interview that the words were chosen for their sound rather than their meaning -- no demerit in my opinion, since music is the expression of emotion without information, and anyway Anderson has the most unique and wonderful voice that I don't care what he sings.

I wonder if there might be some other connection between SF and Yes, rather than the rather banal and trivial one suggested by their lyrics, particularly since so many SF readers I know are fond of their music -- indeed, two or three fanzine titles have been inspired by their music. I think the significant connection is in the type of emotion often expressed or provoked in both: the transcendental experience, the "expansion of consciousness". Yes, as Wingrove notes, is so affirmative that I experience a sort of artificially induced state of enlightenment while listening to their music. Isn't this what Ian Watson and others attempt to achieve (albeit it through more logical sounding informational noise) in their stories? Is this the gasp the scientist-characters feel at the moment of conceptual breakthrough (e.g. James Blish)? Isn't this what the Panshins are always raving about in their books?

I don't know: this may be a slim connection. But I think it is a more significant one than that which Wingrove finds.

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I REALLY MUST PROTEST STRONGLY ABOUT **V131**. OF A MERE 20 PAGES, a quarter (pp 5-9 inclusive) are devoted to a rock group. How can anyone justify this utter waste of space, especially when it makes a mockery of the editorial statement (p 2) that "**Vector** is mainly about written SF."

Much more waste like this, and my subscription will certainly cease. I see we are threatened with an increase anyway, despite the fact that just one well-funded professionally performed publicity campaign would quadruple membership and give the BSFA an additional £20,000-plus a year to use for good magazines and better functions. Really, this "small is beautiful" mania must be killed off, or we'll dwindle away and disappear into Dave Langford's grammatically erroneous **Twll-Ddu**.

KEN LAKE
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THE PRESENCE OF DAVID WINGROVE'S PRETENTIOUS AND PROLIX ARTICLE "The Other Side of the Sky" in **V131** wiped away the last thoughts I had about renewing my subscription to the BSFA. If **Vector** is going to become a showcase for retrogressive rock music fans than it can do so without my participation and without my seven quid a year. With **Matrix** in the dismal state it is and **Vector** reduced to printing any old tosh that comes along, I'd say it was high time to abandon the BSFA. As it is, the only worthwhile thing coming out of the BSFA is **Paperback Inferno**, and I can get that, according to the cover, for 15p an issue... So, goodbye.

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«You'll see from this mailing that Matrix has a new editor and a new look, as part of the "quality relaunch" of the BSFA's magazines and services; I'm willing to bet that its content will also be greatly improved. Ken and Nigel would appear to be in the minority over Dave's article on Yes, but I can't hope to please everybody with every article -- or even with every issue. I asked Dave for this piece; most of the articles published in Vector are commissioned; I would love to receive more unsolicited articles, but I assure you that I won't be "printing any old tosh that comes along": if it's not up to standard I bounce it.

Incidentally, Vector has been 24pp since issue 132 -- but look, Ken, if you want quality and if you want size, you're going to have to pay for it. We would like bigger and better magazines; we

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WE ARE THE DEAD

DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS *and* NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

by

L.J.Hurst

Although it was his commercially most successful novel (or perhaps because of it), John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids has often been treated as a horror story devoid of ideas rather than an S.F. novel full of ideas. This has meant that some major themes in it have been ignored, despite the fact that they are shared with George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. The main theme that is never discussed by critics of either book is, quite simply, permanent horror. Perhaps it is because people hate contemplating that possibility that they do not discuss it, but both Nineteen Eighty-Four and Day of the Triffids are about an eternity of irrecoverable pain. The only way of escaping it is not to have it start. Furthermore, the two authors are not religious. Their eternity of pain is on this physical earth.

The purpose of both novels is to account for the perpetual hurt and both titles are ironic references to their double treatment of time. The novels are about immediate suffering but they premise this going on forever. Winston Smith cannot know that the year is 1984; the day of the Triffids will last till the end of the Earth.

If the world arrived at the state of Nineteen Eighty-Four it would never change back; any part of it could be represented by a boot stamping on a face forever. Nineteen Eighty-Four and Day of the Triffids place the cause of the catastrophe in their own time, and give it totally different forms, but after their catastrophes everyone ever born must experience the same misery: its causes will never fade away, and the nature of the catastrophe means things could never improve. Anyone in the year 1984 or after it, like Winston Smith, his lover Julia, his friend Ampleforth, or any of the nameless victims, would know they were in a world of inescapable, unending misery. Similarly, anyone living, even on the triffid-free Isle of Wight to which the hero's party escapes at the end of Day of the Triffids, after the blindness, would be in the same state as their descendants. There can be no recovery, the disaster stops it. It is this dead stop, and the anguish with which it is presented, that distinguishes the two novels from others with which they are sometimes compared.

In Brave New World, for instance, the inhabitants do not question the social stratification that sends the epsilon semi-morons to die of radiation sickness, because they are all bred to accept the status quo. Genetics means the people could not not like it. Or compare Wyndham with George Stewart's reversion to nature, post disaster, Earth Abides. Stewart observes his reversion to barbarism benignly. In the author's eyes the catastrophe does not negate the values of civilisation, he simply records its passing. There are regular references to cyclic events in nature and human life - only "earth abides". James Blish, at least, when he adopted Spenglerism gave the race millenia in which to cycle. Earth Abides is a cosy novel, everyone in it feels all right, and it is that cosiness which distinguishes it from works such as Day of the Triffids.

The word "cosy" appears here because either it or synonyms of it have been used by Wyndham's critics to derogate his work. Here are three examples of that criticism, and others, which are not really true:

Brian Aldiss - "(Day of the Triffids and The Kraken Wakes) were totally devoid of ideas but read smoothly, and thus reached a maximum audience, who enjoyed cosy disasters."

Christopher Priest - "Wyndham is the master of the middle-class catastrophe; his characters are of the bourgeoisie, and the books lament the collapse of law and order, the failure of communications, the looting of snopping precincts and the absence of the daily newspaper."

John Clute - "His protagonists and their women tend to behave with old fashioned decency and courage, rather as though they were involved in the Battle of Britain, a time imaginatively close to him, and to his market..."

"...(he) effectively wrote for a specific English market at a specific point in time - the decade following the Second World War.... He will be remembered mainly for the brief moment in which he expressed English hopes, fears and complacency to a readership that recognised a kindred spirit. Yet during that period, in England and Australia at least, he was probably more read than any other S.F. author. To this day his books regularly appear on school syllabuses in the U.K., in part, perhaps because they are so 'safe'."

The critics feel that the books is devoid of ideas, complacent and ideologically safe and undemanding. The text in question suggests at least three reasons for thinking otherwise.

Firstly, ideas. At one point a professor of sociology lectures the survivors on the pragmatic morality needed for the new, broken world. The body of his speech is given in chapter seven; Bill Masen and Josella Playton, the hero and heroine, discuss their changing standards and offer political interpretations of events, regularly from the first chapter onwards. At least three social theories lie behind the founding of different colonies - the Christians wiped out by the plague, the feudal seigneuries established by the dictator Torrence, and the final Isle of Wight fortress on which Masen and Playton live out their lives and write their account of events. Ideas clearly are discussed, and their consequences are worked out in the different camps. Wyndham also goes into an analysis of the triffid economy (see below). This is all explicitly done, but there are implicit levels as well, as will be seen later.

Secondly, the concept of law and order, and the need for its maintenance: this just does not appear. The "decent" narrator actually goes around killing people and helping people to kill themselves. Now, suicide, attempted suicide, and aiding a suicide were all offences when Day of the Triffids was published (only aiding now is an offence), but Masen records it without comment.

Of the deaths seen by the narrator (i.e. of whose cause we can be sure), Masen helps three people kill themselves (Doctor Soames, the landlord of the Alamein Arms, and the blind girl from his London party), he does not stop a young man from hurling himself and his (the young man's) wife from their flatblock, and he is also present at a mercy killing in the street. Although he sees the bodies of others presumably killed by them, he sees only three people killed by triffids (two blind men in a shop front on his London patrol, and a flagwaver in the country). So, ignoring the deaths from uncertain causes, the count is:

by Triffids, 3
by humans, 6

The devastation wrought by the triffids is not so immediate as the hero's failure to display what is normally thought of as bourgeois regard for lw. A new law is instigated by the new circumstances, and Day of the Triffids provides a reasonable, if popular and simplified, discussion of pragmatic ethics.

Thirdly, the historic references in the text: there are none that could refer to the Battle of Britain (June - September 1940). The war references in the narrative (apart from the sociologist's reference to Hiroshima) are to the Allies' victory under Montgomery at Alamein in October 1942. Montgomer's likeness is on the Alamein Area' signboard, and the title of chapter one, "The End Begins", follows Churchill's speech of November 10th, 1942: "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning", the irony being that Bill Masen's beginning is of a world stricken by disaster, whereas Alamein was the turning point to Allied victory. Wyndham could have found an equally ironic chapterheading in Churchill's Battle of Britain speech, about so many owing so much to so few, ironic because after the blindness the few sighted do little for the blind apart from help them kill themselves - but Wyndham did not.

These grounds alone mean that Day of the Triffids is much more complex and richer in texture than the critics have admitted. But there is even more to it than this, and it shares some of those additional attributes, and a common background of some ideas, with Orwell's portrayal of the threat.

This is the common background: Orwell said that he got the idea of the globe split into three power blocks after the Allies' Teheran conference in 1944. (This was intelligent guesswork on Orwell's part, about the expansion of the Eastern bloc, particularly, as the Teheran conference passed only Poland into Soviet interest). In the Day of the Triffids, the background is the same: the Cold War and the isolation of the Soviet Union.

According to Bill Masen (and Goldstein's analysis is similar in Orwell), the unspoken hostilities that then developed locked nations into a drive for agricultural, industrial and economic self-sufficiency, even while they all kept a War Economy. Wyndham extrapolates from this.

Eastern biologists, possibly affected by the corruptions of Lysenkoism, made the experiments that lead to the teratogenesis of the Triffids. The need, as Masen's narrative makes clear, was for expansion of food production: it was being done by increased yields, reclamation of cold zones, and new plant types. Yet the outcome of this research was the Triffid, not a better fed world.

Masen, in his longest chapter - "The Coming of the Triffids" - narrates how the nutritional, political and military needs of the world's states meant that all nations stole and used the triffids despite the side effects of being stung, blinded, killed and digested by amok plants. Economies and corporations became dependent on the flow of triffid oil. At the same time nationalist fears and hatreds and the strategical and tactical planning of the military meant that governments were putting up space weapons that could not be controlled in the final crisis. The triggering of the satellite by a chance meteor described in the first pages of Wyndham wrecked the world. There could be no Marshall Aid as there was after 1945. It is never suggested that the Soviets were responsible for the blinding, or that the triffids were developed to be nasty.

Both Orwell and Wyndham saw that it was not the Atomic Bomb that threatened the world necessarily. As the book within the book, "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" reveals to Winston Smith, the power blocs threaten everything simply to maintain their integrity, and the means they use to maintain themselves make life hell. In Nineteen Eighty-Four it is deliberate; in Day of the Triffids it is a consequence. Whoever it was wrote in Brian Ash's Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, that "unusual radiations have blinded the great majority of humanity, reducing it to the prey of poisonous mobile plants which, paradoxically, had originally been farmed for human benefit" was wrong. There is no paradox; people become prey to the triffids as a necessary consequence of the world that originallyl farmed them. Bill Masen gives a clear description of how events came about and of the world economic order that lead to it. It is no good saying that the background is paradoxical. The politics and economics that govern the world are not rational. The two novels are about the logical consequences of irrationality.

Against the analytic background of Day of the Triffids one has to consider the lack of plot and rambling storyline. The notion of "idea as hero" does not really make up for the lack of plot. In some ways the opposite is true of Nineteen Eighty-Four - how the world deteriorated to 1984 is unclear, and Smith's memory unbelievably sievelike - but the novel is tightly plotted, and the turns of plot reasonably based on Orwell's scientific extrapolations. In Nineteen Eighty-Four these are two: developments in electronics (the telescreen) and in psychology: the Thought Police know Winston's thoughts, change his ability to perceive the world physically, and they may also have supplied some of his dreams with the messages and images that lead him to rebel. (Of Wyndham's two extrapolations - in genetic engineering and space technology - we now seem to have them both).

The background of both novels requires about the same period of political development - from the 50s to 1984 in Orwell's case, while the Wyndham book is set no later (Masen's father walked a single man through pre-war London and Masen is less than thirty years old when the meteros strike). Events have not falsified the warning they offer; not as to year, but as to developments and consequences. The power blocs exist in their bastard forms now, and the close relationship between destruction and national economyu is obvious. The triffius are aware of the helplessness of the human blind and exploit it but the triffids are a product of the world in an arms race. The condition that leads to uncon trolled blindness also leads to the adoption of the triffid economy. Such a system is prompted equally by opposing political forces, so that the governments of the world could be said to be finally identical, just as no one could distinguish between Ingsoc, Neo-Bolshevism or Obliteration of the Self, the practices of the three states, Oceania, Eurasia and Easasia in 1984.

The failure of an opposition to appear is a feature of both novels. Bill Masen, who leads his group to sanctuary, was employed as a triffid botanist by the Arctic and European Oil Company, while Coker, the former radical agitator, has failed in all his agitation. Orwell thought of calling his novel "The Last Man in Europe",. but Winston Smith is not the last man - he is something less, weak and untrue to himself, actually enjoying working in the Ministry of Truth on the rewriting of history. Just as Orwell was correct to reject that title, so Wyndham's original U.S. title, "Revolt of the Triffids", has been rightly replaced. The triffids do not revolt, they revert to their normal condition. Bill Masen sees more people die by human hand than by triffid sting; people are more deadly and less able to co-operate than triffids and the triffids were themselves grown for human use.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a complicated work that can be read in many ways. It can be read, as William Empson has shown, as an attack on religion, or as others have said, as similar to Gulliver's Travels in its unreal satire. Day of the Triffids can be read as a realistic account of one way of the holocaust but it could be read as an allegory of other weapons and material sources: it, too, is not simple in its conception. Both authors have seen that as horrors arrive they have arrived in completeness; the Nazis were first encouraged by Big Business to limit the Left; they then started to control industry; war when it came allowed a cover for the exterminations; the exterminations and the slave camps provided labour for industry, and for wealth to be stolen and recycled. Ultimately the war economy was going to be destroyed, weakened from the inside by the need for soldiers to guard the camps, etc., making them unavailable to fight but the destruction was an integral part of the process of:- Big Business encouraging Nazism, encouraging war, devaluing life, the destruction of Europe, the destruction of Nazism. One part reinforces the other. It has happened elsewhere but this was the example that both authors had seen at first hand.

From their experience, Orwell and Wyndham wrote thought experiments in other possible worlds, the possibility of an evil that broke the circle and ensured its continuity. Orwell said that he had written a parody of a centralized economy made worse by the political intentions of its intellectuals. Looking at "Prophecies of Fascism" in any essay, Orwell found many of them in the previous forty years: even in Gulliver's Travels some of its trends were obvious. As the world develops materially the possibility of its negation through that development increases. There will be no escape: the systems that come about do not allow it: no one would be triffid-free long enough to re-establish any level of technology; the party apparatus of 1984 would actually prevent research, so that everything would be wasted on munitions. Only the extent of the destruction, though, would have altered: national economies reliant on space weapons and triffids, or nuclear research and exploitation, and political hatreds and nationalism, or whatever poison, can only go on so long before they negate themselves. The developed thing flips the world that developed it, allowed it to develop, and relied on it. The researcher is consumed, and so too are they consumed who formerly were consumers.

Nineteen Eighty-Four includes many more of such traits than Day of the Triffids, and as a traditional novel it is more successful than Wyndham, but if one wanted a reasonable allegory of the destruction on which the world implicitly relies, Day of the Triffids would provide it. The technology in use has changed but not the underlying motives and uses. These books cannot be written off as obsolete: the warning they offer is still relevant; the misery potentially eternal.

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IN ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND

On Geoffrey Household and *Arrows of Desire*

by

PAUL KINCAID

CHARLTON IS A TINY OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE WHICH RUNS TO ONE pub and a few dozen stone built cottages. It's so small it doesn't even have its own station; the nearest is two miles away at King's Sutton. Here is England as never-never-land. Green fields roll away towards the horizon, divided by a jagged pattern of hedges. A copse bristles against the skyline. The slender Gothic spire of King's Sutton church rises behind a screen of winter-bare trees. It's an England most of us don't believe exists any more.

Here, in a thatched cottage that is crying out for a Constable to record it, lives Geoffrey Household. The Geoffrey Household who wrote such archetypal English adventure stories as Rogue Male and A Rough Shoot, all Buchanesque heroes and stiff-upper-lipped resources. And the Geoffrey Household whose most recent novel, Arrows of Desire, is a futuristic fantasy set in the year 3,000, 1,000 years after the Age of Destruction, when the Britons of the diaspora resettle here in just such a rural idyll.

It would be tempting to see this setting as the inspiration for the novel. It would be even more tempting to equate the parvenu Brits with the people I encountered in the Rose and Crown, in their sensible tweeds and designer wellingtons. One character talked loudly of the rabbits he "bagged" that morning. The landlord brought from the kitchen a tray of smoked pigeons, which his customers sniffed tentatively, unsure of such a native delicacy. Everyone knew everyone else, and the accents were pure Chelsea. But when I visited Household to talk about his novel it was November, within a few days of his 85th birthday, and he had only been living there fore two months. Nevertheless, these types are evident in the novel.

Household is exactly as one might imagine him, still with the bearing and clipped accents of a British army officer, still sprightly and upright from a life as devoted to action as to the pen, a life clearly reflected in his more than twenty novels. Yet if one were to imagine a rude jingoism to go with the appearance, one would be disappointed. Arrows of Desire is actually a vigorous satire on the insularity of the British. "A great many years ago I wrote a form of it as a radio play because I was extremely angry, feeling myself a European, at the fact that we'd turned down, or were about to turn down, membership of the EEC. That was at the bottom of it".

The novel concerns three groups of people. After the Age of Destruction an international Federation has grown up to ensure world peace. The people of Britain alone reacted against this, unwilling to give up their national identity. The result of their disturbances was that they were forcibly removed from the island, which was hence abandoned for several centuries. As the novel opens, the Federation has decided to end the British diaspora, to see if they can live peacefully again in their own land. A small colony is set up in a clearing in the great forest that has now established itself across the South Downs. Hidden in this forest is a community of native Britons who escaped the diaspora and have established their own peaceful way of life, and they serve as ironic observers as the replaced Britons inflate their nationalism once more to the point of violence against the Federation.

Sandorski, a character in one of Household's earlier novels, A Rough Shoot, says; "I am opposed to all idealism". It seems to me that he is speaking directly for the author in this. Certainly, when I began to read this book I thought that the Federation would prove to be the villains, but they weren't. The nationalists are the instigators of violence, and are decried for that. When I observed that he didn't like nationalism, Household was emphatic: "I don't. It can't be avoided."

So what is the way ahead?

"The only hope is for some form of internationalism."

Though the Age of Destruction is never explained during the course of the novel, it clearly represents a nuclear war. "I'd have thought every reading, intelligent person knows what's going to happen if we carry on. Oh, people must accept the danger. Look at Greenpeace, look at all these women sitting around barbed wire. All of us. And I think they're just as much afraid in Russia, too."

Geoffrey Household could hardly be described as a left-winger, but this novel is an effective little satire on some of the most cherished tenets of the British right-wing. Something well in keeping with his earlier novels where the villains are almost always fascists, or in some way of the right. Indeed, despite the far future setting, and the clearly didactic purposes, Arrows of Desire sits easily with Household's other novels - a slight and readable suspense tale.

His effects are created with broad strokes, rarely crude, but without any great delicacy of effect. Only once does he achieve such delicacy, in one haunting and effective scene in which a woman in white holding a child by the hand emerges between two armies to ask for peace. It is an image redolant with Blakean undertones that echo the quotation from "Jerusalem" which serves as his title.

Other than that, as in all his books, he writes with a vigour and pace that don't allow for much subtlety, but which do keep the reader turning the pages. Characterisation is minimal; he is much more concerned with the roles people play than with the people themselves, but they do serve to make his point. Arrows of Desire is no great work of literature; as satire it is no match for 1984, as a suspense tale it falls a long way short of Household's own Rogue Male, A Rough Shoot or Watcher in the Shadows. Yet it does have the energy of its author's own commitments, and that's not to be sniffed at.

ARROWS OF DESIRE - Geoffrey Household

(Michael Joseph, 1985, 136 pp., £8.95)

The BFSA is expecting to relaunch Focus real soon now. In the meantime, Sue Thomason has contributed two members' impressions of Orbiter, and a list of current markets for SF short stories.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by Sharon Hall

I am a coward. That's not good for a writer. It took, if not courage, then a self pep talk before I dared to write to Dorothy. Not only am I new to the BSFA (actually, I've been a member for six months -- but I still don't understand half of what's going on), but I'm new to writing. Was I doing the 'right thing', I wondered, and what is a postal writers' workshop anyway?

The answer came, without too much delay, on a piece of A4. "The point of the exercise", so the blurb goes "is to present your piece for constructive (not destructive) criticism. It is this which helps to expand a writer." Good.

"Your piece", it turns out, is to be a completed story. Oh, hell. Okay, so I'm a very slow writer, but in one year of scribbling I'd yet to finish a story I would want to inflict on anyone else. PANIC STATIONS.

A writers' workshop doesn't teach you how to write. It tells you what's wrong with what you've written.

Luckily for me, though not for more anxious souls, Dorothy was unable to place me immediately -- I was on hold. And scriboling at a new frantic rate with one eye on the letter box. To give you an idea of actual time scales, the first reply was dated 9/1/85, the second 16/3/85, the letter from 'my' Orbiter organiser arrived 10/4/85. The folder was on my doorstep on the 16th of April. I opened it with eager trepidation.

Was it what I'd expected?

To a great extent -- yes. There were four stories, quite good ones too, a covering letter on each, and at the back -- the comments -- more on some than on others. (A note here, that in the end I joined an established group that had lost a member. This had obvious advantages -- the others know what they're doing, and disadvantages -- I'm still the new girl.)

So what were those first impressions? The folder made me think. For the first time I read a story, other than my own, as a critic, rather than just as a reader. An experience which will help aid self criticism. It was hard work; destructive criticism would be much easier to write. In short, Orbiter has helped me already, and I haven't had any feedback from my first story yet! Perhaps I'll feel differently when I've read that first set of comments.

One suggestion, which was new to the group, was to leave the comments on each story to circulate a second time around, so that everyone can see what everyone else thought of a particular story. An idea which has won the group's approval, and mine. If we can resist the temptation to comment on comments, on comments ....

Where might Orbiter fail? I quote: "An Orbiter group consists of five people. This ensures a good cross section of opinions on your submitted pieces". By its nature, Orbiter -- and you -- are at the mercy of those four or five people. It is as good as its constituent parts. If you're lucky, it can be very rewarding, if not -- I wonder, if one group doesn't work for you, can you go back onto hold and try another? If not, is this a workable idea?

No doubt each group has its own problems -- not least the post office -- and its own rewards. What do I want from Orbiter? A sounding board for some of my stories; honest, friendly criticism; a guaranteed response of SOME kind.

Success or not, I don't know yet -- but I'm hoping.

SECOND THOUGHTS

by Stephen O'Kane

Two and a half years of membership of an Orbiter group have not yielded me any returns in the sense of publication success. Indeed one rogue member of our southern group appears to have lost one of the packages, or at any rate, forgotten to send it on. Still, I have on the whole enjoyed being in an Orbiter group. I learnt fairly soon to overcome my fear of being asked to write criticisms of other people's work, for I normally found that I could think of something to say, even, in one or two cases, something useful.

I joined originally because I hoped that some friendly, but honest, criticism of my writing, rather than just the useless rejection slip "I regret that we are unable..." might help me to develop some publishable stories. Last time was a bit of a disappointment, but previously I did find the Orbiter comments helpful, even though none of the stories has achieved the amazing feat of getting into print (three have acquired the status of rejects from Interzone. I certainly wouldn't ascribe the failure to lack of guidance from Orbiter.

On the whole, I've found Orbiter worth continuing, and I suppose that over three years one disaster is only to be expected. Save for the stories -- or novel extracts -- being something to do with SF or fantasy, there is no other attempt to organise common themes. Maybe just as well, in view of what can happen at writing workshops.

More information on Orbiter is available from:

Sue Thomason,
1 Meyrick Square,
Dolgellau,
Gwynedd LL40 1LT.

Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your letter for a rapid reply. Please don't send me your manuscripts. I'll try to answer all letters as quickly as possible, but please remember that I co-ordinate Orbiter in my spare time, and that it usually takes a few weeks to assemble a new Orbiter group.

ORBITER

Introduced by
SUE THOMASON

SINCE I TOOK OVER FROM DOROTHY DAVIES, THERE HAS BEEN little publicity about the BSFA's Orbiter postal writers' workshops. Anyone who wants more information about Orbiter after reading the accounts below, or who wants to join a group, should contact me at the address at the end of this article. I am also happy to hear from members of existing Orbiter groups who want to change groups and get some fresh opinions of their work, or from anyone who has any other problem or query connected with Orbiter. I'm particularly interested in hearing from any operational Orbiter groups who think that I may not be in contact with them -- I'm trying to assemble a complete list of working groups (I currently know of 9) for BSFA records.

MARKETS

for SF and related literature
For reasons of space the market listings are necessarily incomplete. We hope to provide further information in later issues

THIS INFORMATION CONCENTRATES ON BRITISH MARKETS AS FAR AS possible, and doesn't include either gaming outlets (unless they publish fiction as such) or little press poetry and literary magazines which occasionally publish SF. It does include amateur SF zines, paying and nonpaying. For more information on little magazines, contact Oriel Bookshop, 53 Charles Street, Cardiff CF1 4ED (they produce an address list of small presses and

little magazines). Also useful: PALPI (Poetry & Little Press Information), the magazine of the Association of Little Presses - - subscription £6.00 p.a. from ALP, 89a Petherton Road, London N5 2QT.

This information is collated and updated by Sue Thomason, 1 Meyrick Square, Dolgellau, Gwynedd LL40 1LT from information supplied by BSFA members. If you can add to this list, or update it in any way, I'd be very pleased to hear from you.

Competitions

L. Ron Hubbard's WRITERS OF THE FUTURE contest is still running. Science fiction short stories (under 10,000 words) or novelettes (under 17,000 words) should be submitted typed, double spaced, have a cover sheet with author's name and address and title of work. The MS itself should be titled but should not be headed with the author's name. SAE for return of MS. Cash prizes $1,000, $750, $500 every three months. Contest is open only to authors who have not had professionally published a novel or novella or more than 3 short stories or one novelette. Entries to: Writers of the Future Contest, 2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 343, Santa Monia, CA 90403, USA, or write to: Dowgate, Douglas Road, Tonbridge, Kent. TN9 2TS.

Magazines

AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES -- takes SF and F to 15,000 words, pays 4c - 6c. per word on acceptance. Editor: George Scithers, Box 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A.

ANALOG -- (hard) SF, 2,000 - 70,000 words, pays 3.5c - 7c. per word on acceptance. Editor: Stanley Schmidt, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA.

BACK BRAIN RECLUSE -- original fiction and art. Probably nonpaying. More information from Chris Reed, Dyers Field, Smallfield, Surrey RH6 9NJ.

CASSANDRA ANTHOLOGY takes fiction (from Cassandra SF Workshop members only). Details from: Bernard Smith, 8 Wansford Walk, Thorplands Brook, Northants.

DREAM MAGAZINE -- Amateur SF fiction magazine published bi-monthly. Pays £2.00 per thousand words. MSS to Trevor Jones (Editor), 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18

FAR FRONTIERS -- Needs stories of the kind J. W. Campbell would have bought; hard SF, realistic fiction, good SF adventure stories , science articles, poetry. Pays 5c. per word for 1st publication rights, on a one year non-exclusive royalty basis. Editor: John F. Carr (Managing Editor), C/o J. E. Pournelle and Associates, 3960 Laurel Canyon Boulevard, 372 Studio City, CA 91604, USA.

FANTASY & MACABRE MAGAZINE: CoA to PO Box 20610, Seattle, WA 98102, USA. Looking for supernatural, ghost , horror stories. 2,000 - 4,000 words. Pays 1 cent per word.

FISHEYE -- quarterly magazine of original fiction, financially supported by Kings College, London. Seeks stories up to 10,000 words. Publishes a broad range of material including SF/fantasy/dark fantasy. Editor: Simon Ings, 93 Narbonne Avenue, Clapham, London SW4 9BS.

HAUNTS magazine -- Takes fantasy, supernatural, SF/horror. 1,500 - 10,000 words. Pays 0.25 c. per word. 1st rights bought. Editorial address: P.O. Box 3342, Providence, RI 02096, USA. Reports in 4 - 6 weeks.

INTERZONE -- Takes SF and F, "utopias and dystopias, possible, impossible or improbable visions of how things might become, and awful warnings." Seeks "material that counters the traditional macho blasters and space pricks bias of science fiction." Up to 8,000 words, occasionally longer. Pays well. Editorial address: Judith Hanna, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF Magazine -- Short SF and F to 15,000 words. Pays 5c - 7c. per word on acceptance. Send sae for requirements. Editor: Shawna McCarthy, c/o Gardner Dozois, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA.

MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION -- F and SF to 10,000 words. Pays 3c to 5c. per word on acceptance. Editor: Edward Ferman, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, CT 0675, USA.

MOONSCAPE -- takes F and SF to 10,000 words, also poetry. No sword and sorcery, Star Trek, or Star Wars stuff. Pays 2c. per word for North American serial rights on publication. Editor: Mogens Brondrum, P.O. Box 1858, Swan River, Manitoba, ROLIZO, Canada.

OMNI -- strong, realistic SF to 9,000 words, some contemporary hard-edge fantasy. Pays to $2,000 on acceptance. Editor: Ellen Datlow, 1965 Broadway, New York, NY 10023 - 5695, USA

ORACLE -- SF, F, sword & sorcery to 500 words maximum. No horror, poetry, or reviews. Pays 1c to 3c. per word for 'one time' rights. Editor: David Lillard, P.O. Box 19222, Detroit, MI 48219, USA.

OUI -- Modern upbeat stories with unusual settings; sexual situations or overtones helpful but not mandatory. Editorial address: 300 W. 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036, USA.

PLAYBOY -- Quality SF to 10,000 words, active plots with strong characterisation. Pays well on acceptance. Editor: Alice K. Turner, 919 Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611, USA.

SPECTRUM -- F and SF, 3,000 - 8,000 words. Pays 1c - 5c. per word. Editor: Marshall Bonfire, P.O. Box 113945, Arlington, TX 76013, USA.

STAR LINE -- Newsletter of the SF Poetry Association. Publishes 10 - 12 poems per issue, pays $1 for the first 10 lines, thereafter 5c. per line. Editor: Bob Frazier, P.O. Box 491, Nantucket, MA 02554, USA.

STARDATE is a multi-media SF magazine. Takes STAR TREK, DR. WHO, and straight SF material, no fantasy or horror, up to 10,000 words, though under 5,000 words preferred. Pays 10c. per word. British agent (to whom stories from Brits should be submitted): Lisa Tuttle, 1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middx. HA2 0DA. Editorial address: Dave Bischoff, 1010, Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 910, Washington, DC 20005.

SWORDS & SORCERESSES -- takes fantasy 1,200 - 12,000 words with the emphasis on women as sword swingers, wizardesses and hell-raisers. Pays 3c - 5c. per word against pro rata share of royalties. DOES NOT want to receive dot matrix submissions. Editor: Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 352, Berkley, CA 94701, USA.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE -- Stories to 5,000 words, dark fantasy, suspense, supernatural (like the TV show). Pays $150 to $800 per story, half on acceptance, half on publication. Editor: Ted Klein, 800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA. Reporting time said to be very slow.

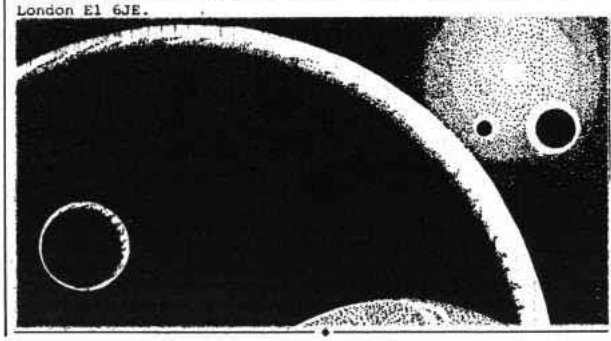
TO THE STARS -- SF (no fantasy) stories. Pays 6.5 cents per word. Editor: Terry Carr, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611, USA.

WORDS Magazine -- publishes some short fiction, and runs an annual short story competition. For more information on style, length, payment, contact: 7 Pale House Common, Fromfield, Elkfield, East Sussex.

Novel length works

TOR BOOKS seek SF novels (no fantasy). "I can buy SF novels, either completed or on the basis of portion-and-outline, provided you've never sold a book to Tor before" says Terry Carr, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611, USA.

THE WOMEN'S PRESS seeks good feminist SF. Send novel-length MSS to Sara Lefanu, The Women's Press, 124 Shoreditch High Street, London E1 6JE.



BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

WELCOME, CHAOS - Kate Wilhelm
[Gollancz, 1986, 297pp, #9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

KATE WILHELM IS SURELY AN AUTHOR TO BE reckoned with, one whose works merit serious consideration and against which you will seldom hear a bad word spoken. Yet, in those dark haunts where SF fans gather to discuss the all-time greats, her name is not mentioned that often. I know that is hardly the acme of critical standard-setting - nevertheless, it might say something. I recall **Where Late The Sweet Birds Sang**, one of SF's seminal notions treated fetchingly, but hardly tellingly. With **Welcome, Chaos**, theme and approach are again at variance.

The classic theme this time is immortality, and Wilhelm views the subject in an oblique and intelligent manner. Art and history are our two tools for regulating our mortality, she says, the one for recording our permanence of spirit, the other to make collective memory tangible', the two establishing a sense of reality about our existence. Bestow immortality and these two cornerstones of the mind are removed and you have the human spirit, not unchained, but blundering without direction - welcome, chaos.

This struck me as being a thoughtful approach to the theme - a definite advance on the accruing-aeons-of-wisdom nonsense, and Wilhelm leaves many of her ideas hanging tantalisingly, leaving the reader the enjoyable job of speculation. She directs most of her attention towards the threat - note, not the boon- that the promise of immortality holds for the world. This brand of immortality comes in the form of a complete immunological system, offering, for example, immunity, or at any rate speedy recovery, from the effects of radiation. And so what is likely to happen if the Russians 'have it' and the Americans think that they are far advanced in the innoculation of their population; or if the Russians have it and believe that the Americans are a long way down the same path? The book is politically intelligent and its author not afraid of plain talking:'Our military and theirs are equally crazy. To talk about a pre-emptive defensive strike is insane and yet both sides do it'.

So, while the political reasoning is convincing, it also helps account for the main weakness of **Welcome, Chaos**, as Wilhelm gets tangled in the behind-the-scenes manoeuvering. A freelance operator, Lasater, is on the trail of the secret, and there is page after page of tedious stuff as he plays bluff and counter-bluff with his CIA ex-boss. And I am not sure that it is that well done. One scene, the lifting of a Russian scientist from an Amsterdam hotel, strained the credulity of even this unsophisticated reader. The whole story starting, of course, with a Nazi research project lost in the confusion of wartime Europe... This all serves to demean and to detract from the elegance of Wilhelm's approach to the immortality theme, which in turn sits uneasily in such a context. Lasater, for example, is potentially a fascinating character within the world of subterfuge, yet must be hastily shunted aside once the secret is out in the open. The heroine, Lyle Taney, is selected to join the covert group of immortals on account of her spiritual qualities and therefore belief in her is strained when she is called upon to perform feats of daring and cunning out in le Carre country.

Can Wilhelm write thrillers? I think not, although **Welcome, Chaos** is a commendable try and nobody after all wants to see →

APOLOGY

Some particularly nasty gremlins seemed to creep into the works of Vector 132. In particular some very strange additions were made to Helen McNabb's review of *Ratha's Creature* (Gollancz). The result of these was to make a nonsense of her review, and we apologise sincerely to Helen and to Gollancz. The correct text of the review will be reprinted in Vector 134 and we hope we won't suffer any more of these unwelcome interpolations.

OBITUARY

JORGE LUIS BORGES 1899 - 1986

JORGE LUIS BORGES

BOOKS OF SAND

by Paul Kincaid

JORGE LUIS BORGES, THE BLIND POET OF BUENOS AIRES, DIED IN Geneva in June. He was one of the most acclaimed and brilliant writers of this century, though constantly denied the highest literary honours such as the Nobel Prize. Though not a science fiction writer as such, he chose puzzlement and mystery as his subject matter, and used the fantastic as the richest and most widely employed of all the many tools at his disposal. His work has had a tremendous influence on everyone from Stanislav Lem (whose collection of reviews of unwritten books only takes to greater length one of Borges' most distinctive devices) to the magical realists, while both Alasdair Gray (in *Lanark*) and Iain Banks (in *Walking on Glass*) pay specific homage to his influence.

Borges was born in 1899, in Buenos Aires, the city that was to be at the heart of so much of his writing. He was brought up speaking English as fluently as his native Spanish, and throughout his life had a passionate devotion to English literature. He was widely read and expert in everyone from the Anglo-Saxon poets to Stevenson and Conan Doyle. He travelled widely, amassing a vast knowledge of European literature and culture, all of which was to come out in his own work.

He was a poet and essayist, and a leader of the radical *Ultraismo* poetry movement in the early 1920s. His stories did not begin to appear until the publication of *A Universal History of Infamy* in 1935. These early stories captured the romance and futility of the lives of renegades, at their best when dealing with the knife-fighters of the Buenos Aires slums in 'Streetcorner Man', or 'The South' from his later collection *Ficciones*. But already he was inventing works of reference and fictionalising authorities, a technique that was to become peculiarly his own.

Quite quickly he abandoned the straightforward narrative of 'Streetcorner Man' for the puzzles and word games best summed up in the title of his most famous collection, *Labyrinths*. Thus in 'Death and the Compass' the arcana of the Jewish cabbala provides clues to a murder that hasn't happened yet; 'The Library of Babel' presents us with an infinite library of every book that might possibly have been written; and in 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' extra pages in an old encyclopedia introduce a whole new universe.

Time and again, Borges' delight in puzzles and games led him into the realms of fantasy and science fiction. He invented a wealth of learned volumes to substantiate worlds that could not possibly exist. He tricks his reader with immortality, with infinity, with creation and doppelgangers and a whole arsenal of fantastical devices. In 'The Circular Ruins' his character dreams a person into existence, only to realise in the end that he himself is a dream. In 'Borges and I' the author encounters himself, and cannot tell which is real.

The stories all seem to have their origin in some literary trickery, as if Borges is saying look how our imaginations will let us run unchecked into all sorts of weird and unlikely places. There is a sense of the librarian relishing the unbounded reach of the written word. Yet there is more to it than that, he is not simply poking fun at learning but revealing a deeper unease beneath. There is a futility in the way everything runs in a circle, the further you seem to have reached in a Borges story, the closer you are to the beginning. He excavates the unconscious like an archaeologist, discovering grave goods one moment, a dead body the next.

For all of that, his stories are remarkably light. They are rarely more than a handful of pages long, and some of the best are just a side or two of text. Yet within that tiny compass he manages to insert so many startling images that his stories linger in the memory long after many a novel has faded. In 'Funes, the Memorious', crippled Funes sets out to memorise in precise detail everything he has experienced, while at the same time applying a name to every individual object. "Funes not only remembered every leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times he had perceived or imagined it. He determined to reduce all of his past experience to some seventy thousand recollections, which he would later define numerically." It is the sort of project that would intrigue and absorb Borges, blind yet with a tremendous memory for all he has seen and read, yet at the same time he pokes fun at it: Funes' individual name for five hundred is 'nine'.

The literature of ideas has never had a better or more thorough exponent. A myriad of wild and wonderful concepts are raised, examined, and turned into elegant, sharp jokes. We don't have to be a Funes to remember the genius of *A Universal History of Infamy*, *Ficciones*, *The Aleph and other stories*, *A Personal Anthology*, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, *Doctor Brodie's Report*, *The Book of Sand*, and above all *Labyrinths*.

B O O K S

a writer afraid to attempt something new. And eventually the book does deliver, after a fashion - it is just that it could have been so much better.

I, ROBOT - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1986, 206pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

A DOZEN YEARS AGO A KINDLY LIBRARIAN, noticing my diet of E.E. 'Doc' Smith, decided to remove me from the primeval SF soup, and pointed me in the direction of Isaac Asimov, and the first book of his I read was: *I, Robot*. The rest, as they say, is evolution! (and history).

Indeed, this book is an historical survey of robotics from the inception of the positronic brain until the robots' eventual world domination in a future Utopia; but, since the stories were first published in the 1940's, they themselves mark an historical event in science fiction. Not only that, they are a source of nostalgia for the seasoned SF reader. (Presumably this new hardback edition will appeal to the next generation of robot fans, enticed by Asimov's new robot novels.) The question is: how have they stood the test of time?

I wasn't as disappointed as I expected to be. The stories exemplify Asimov's strengths and weaknesses as a writer. With the exception of 'Robbie', the first story, all the pieces centre round the Three Laws of Robotics and are essentially puzzles or games. Perhaps this is why, when Asimov combines detection with robots, he is at his best. The science in the stories has definitely dated and the characters, with the exception of the notable robots, are fairly weak. The Utopia depicted in the last story, 'The Evitable Conflict', grates a little in 1986 when there is more radioactivity falling on East Germany than there is in the 'hot' room of my lab. Still, we need to dream and Asimov's dreams have (like it or not) had a real impact on SF, and even the wider scientific community.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE - Margaret Atwood
[Cape, 1986, 324pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THE RIGHT-WING, FUNDAMENTALIST BACKlash that hovers so threateningly in the background of the modern American psyche has won. Exactly how is unclear, but the results are incontrovertable. A strict masculine rule has been instituted in a land now called by the biblical name Gilead; and the rôle of women is carefully ordered. The pampered wives of the ruling elite wear blue, the 'Marthas' (domestic servants) dull green, and the handmaids red. A long, shapeless habit that covers them from head to toe, with the white wings of a headdress like nuns; but the handmaids are no nuns. Women of proven childbearing ability, their rôle is the true rôle of women, the propogation of the species. Assigned to the household of a Commander, their duty is, at regular intervals, to open their legs for their lords and masters for a joyless coupling that it is hoped will produce children to be taken from their true mothers and raised as loyal servants of the state. It is Genesis and fascism run riot: no aspect of a handmaid's life is outwith the control of the state, and the state has made every effort to expunge pleasure and love, even sex is reduced to the linking of automata.

The horror of this dictatorship is recorded by one of its victims, the handmaid Offred (she is the property of the Commander Fred, even her name has been taken from her). Once, before things changed, she had a husband and a child, now she has nothing. As she goes through the institutionalised humiliations imposed by the new regime, as she is reminded in countless little ways that the state has absolute mastery over her, she remembers. She remembers things we take for granted, freedom, happiness, rights, and above all love so that the novel becomes a moving paean for all those qualities that are so vital yet so insecure.

Margaret Atwood has written a weighty and distinguished fable that is never less than readable and in places achieves a real power. Gilead is frighteningly convincing, its institutions and beliefs always plausible. It is a feminist book, yes, the brutalising of women is its subject; yet it is not strident, neither does it attack men indiscriminately. The men are delineated carefully with often surprising sympathy; they are victims too. Even Offred's Commander elicits a certain compassion. Atwood is at pains to show that women are among the most enthusiastic supporters, and indeed instigators, of the Gilead regime, and many of the most restrictive practices are in the hands of women.

The result is a truely shocking dystopia. It is written with a doleful rhythm, precise of detail, often repetitious, listing minutiae until the reader too knows the emptiness, the sterility of Offred's life. Yet, bleak though it is, *The Handmaid's Tale* is not an entirely black vision - it ends with a note of hope, even humour that seems appropriate in this distinguished and effective novel.

THE DAY OF FOREVER - J. G. Ballard
[Gollancz, 1986, 126pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN PAPERBACK IN 1967, this is the first hardback edition of *The Day of Forever*. One might question the validity of reissuing these stories but I think they have as much to recommend them in 1986 as they did nineteen years ago. Each story, each world is complete in itself, but all are characterised by a certain remoteness as though reality is perceived through a window rather than directly. This invests even the most straightforward storyline with a unearthly quality. 'The Man on the 99th Floor' is an example. A conventional story of murder through hypnosis, in Ballard's hands it takes on a dream-like quality as Forbis struggles to comprehend his fascination for tall buildings in a world in which, apparently, only he and his two protagonists exist. Ballard also shows an interest in paradox in 'The Last World of Mr Goddard' and 'The Gentle Assassin', and several stories border on the fantastic, notably 'Prisoner of the Coral Deep'. This is a slim volume, just ten stories, but the depth and richness of the writing, with no word wasted, is ample compensation.

BLOOD MUSIC - Greg Bear
[Gollancz, 1986, 262pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

THE BLURB WRITERS HAVE DONE IT AGAIN! They correctly quote that this is the "*Childhood's End* of the 1980s" - and so detract considerably from the book's build-up and revelations. Hopefully, before the paperback comes out the publisher will take note and not rubbish the writer's efforts to build suspense in a modern biotechnological disaster novel convincingly told.

Bear has expanded considerably his award winning short story from *Analog* and succeeded in developing his theory of the seeds of Future Mankind being sown in a Californian genetic engineering lab.

It begins with a not particularly likeable Genetron employee experimenting on the firm's time and being found out. He is fired but before going manages to inject himself with the results of his experiments so far - intelligent lymphocytes. Perhaps the only unconvincing aspect of the whole book is where this character is unable to connect the injection with the changes that occur in his physique, notably in improved eyesight! But that is a minor quibble in a tautly written, fast-paced exposition on the spread of, this "disease" - even faster than AIDS and far more devastating. To say more would detract from the book.

Annoyingly, the word 'convincing' keeps coming to mind in trying to describe the book. It will linger for some considerable time, as did Clarke's. Bear's imagination, delving into metaphysics and microcosmic scales, does not bewilder; the characters are as complete as they can be within the limits the disaster allows them, and they are more substantial than many a cardboard reactor to disasters.

Space-time, reality, and our future are all interlocked, brought to a new insight by infinitesimally small lymphocytes. There is a rightness about the explanations of racial memory and "oneness of the human beings" - after all, we all evolved from the same space-dust. Inevitably,

because of the blurbs, the apparant threat is diminished for this striving for "oneness with the universe" espoused by *Childhood's End* and now *Blood Music* is benign; perhaps horrifying to material souls, but ineffable to true romantics. Greg Bear manages to convey both the horror and the wonder of the end of the world of so many people . . . Do they die, are they reborn, does the whole world end, really? That is not for me to say; what I will say is, read the book, try to ignore this review and the blurbs, just enjoy it as it sucks you into a fascinating experience.

HEART OF THE COMET - Gregory Benford & David Brin
[Bantam, 1986, 469pp, $17.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

THE APPEARANCE OF A NEW NOVEL BY these authors should be a big occasion. They belong to that rare breed who can be expected to get their scientific facts right and write the hardest of hard SF. After all, they work in scientific academia and can (apparantly) enlist whole teams of experts to help with their enquiries. Benford is a professor of physics, Brin an astrophysicist and consultant to NASA. When they write an SF novel, every sincere devotee of hard SF must want to see them prove that they can also write.

Unfortunately, in their chosen theme, they have taken on a difficult task. How do you weave an interesting tale around the colonisation of a potato-shaped and rock-infested chunk of ice no more than a few cubic miles in volume? I refer, of course, to Halley's Comet. The answer seems to be: don't worry too much about plausibility. Have a large cast of characters (most, admittedly, in "sleep slots" most of the time) in the caves and tunnels honeycombing the ice of Halley's Comet. Let them dispute how its orbit should be changed and kill one another in tribal battles reminiscent of the worst kinds of hack-written space opera. Let them have fatal accidents and mysterious diseases, discover BEMs (the "Halley-forms"), do research on telepathy and artificial intelligence; in short, you name it, and we'll try to fit it in.

According to the blurb, Benford and Brin have been "praised for their skill in blending visionary science with compelling human characters", but I did not find their characters at all compelling and their supposed vision of the future is almost absurdly silly. The characters, of many nationalities, converse at great length in surroundings impossible to imagine, and when they engage in introspection it is usually of a banal or clichéd kind, not giving them any semblance of flesh-and-blood reality. Under stress they utter unfinished sentences and bite their lips a great deal. Worst of all, the prose is very often so ugly as to suggest that the authors are either word-blind or have a rooted objection to plain English.

The authors may have set out to write a real blockbuster, the definitive novel about a famous comet to end all novels about comets. The result is good in parts, and it can probably be assumed that the calculations were done correctly; but it is padded out to far too great a length, the characters do not ring true, much of it is a pain in the neck to read, and (despite the grandeur of the theme) it is almost completely devoid of any poetry.

UNIVERSE 13 - Edited by Terry Carr
[Hale, 1986, 192pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

SEVEN AUTHORS - ONE BRITISH (IAN Watson), one Australian and female (Leanne Frahm), the rest American male - provide a range of stories from hard SF to the sort of comedy of manners one thinks of as Ray Bradbury country. That's the 13th of Terry Carr's anthologies of all-new stories, and everyone should find something in it to appeal.

But it's a bit disheartening to discover 40% of the text devoted to Michael Bishop's 'Her Habiline Husband'. This is the Bradburyite piece: odd happenings and some very nasty people hung on an almost infinitely-improbable event: the survival of a single Homo Habilis with little ability to learn sapient ways but - quite out of character on both sides - an irresistable sexual appeal to the hero's ex-wife whom he impregnates.

After that, Ian Watson's almost cosy, certainly more normal characters participate in a superbly presented and gripping (but decently quiet) disaster. Brevity and wit make this memorable, so watch out for 'The Width of the World'. Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Stone Egg' (a pointless title) returns us to strange Americans in an odd little piece that's basically about alienation, I suppose.

Bill Bickel's 'The Widow and the Body Sitter' again redeems Carr's selection - it's taut, amusing, complex enough to make you think, and hinges on a simple idea: floating out of a sick body until it's cured and hiring a body sitter to suffer the pain. Another one to watch. Lucius Shepard's 'The Taylorsville Reconstruction' is something else - more unpleasant Americans messing with telepathy to change the political colour of the country. A few nice turns of phrase, but I found it hard to believe in the characters' posturings or beliefs.

To an even greater extent I found it impossible to empathise with Bruce Sterling's creation in 'Cicada Queen' - "hard socio-SF" at its most uncompromising. I *like* Sterling, but this time he has gone over the top for many readers, including me.

Leanne Frahm I've left till last because I think she offers something new and enjoyable. Her female protagonist is astonishingly spineless and weepy, her men well characterised, her landlady a gem; the ambiance - the Queensland rain forests as the dinosaurs take over again - is accurately depicted, strange enough to appeal, normal enough to be accepted. The dénouement is carefully understated, as indeed is all the action; no American could have written this. I hope this first hardcover appearance will lead to better exposure for a writer it would be patronising to call "promising".

TALES FROM THE SHADOWS - R. Chetwynd-Hayes (188pp)
SUPERNATURAL SLEUTHS - Edited by Peter Haining (224pp)
THE HAUNTED GARDEN - Mary Williams (174pp)
[William Kimber, 1986, £8.50 each]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

THE SHORT STORY IS, GENERALLY speaking, alive and well. Most modern

B O O K S

writers are aware of the stigma of clichéd plots and shoddy characters attaching to the short form and are therefore finding ways to expand. Characterisation and narrative technique have progressed beyond the crude sketches and obvious linearity of the past, and short stories are no longer bogged down in the mire of ideas-above-all . . . at least, so I thought until I settled down to read these three collections.

Supernatural Sleuths is a reprint collection, with stories dating from 1866 to 1963, tied tenuously to *Ghostbusters* (the movie) by an editorial introduction in which Peter Haining says: ". . . the American Paranormal Society in New York('s) . . . investigators are anything but like those of the film's trio of madcap heroes!" It is interesting mainly due to the strength of its line-up (Conan Doyle, Algernon Blackwood, Sax Rohmer, etc) and as a measure against the other two books.

These two modern collections show clearly that the stylistic progress evident in other genres has passed the supernatural market by. They share a remarkable uniformity of style and technique with *Supernatural Sleuths* despite the intervening years. Oh some things have changed. The new stories have the occasional outbreak of (reviewer pauses to look furtively about him) *sex*, and a note of obscurity, masquerading as enigma, has attacked some of the endings, but the overall feel of all three collections is the same.

I read these books with a sense of anticipation, they combine, after all, two of my favourite areas - short stories and supernatural suspense. I was doubly disappointed. Read these after dark . . . if you're an insomniac.

NOVA - Samuel R. Delany
THE SIRENS OF TITAN - Kurt Vonnegut
[Gollancz, 1986, 224pp ea, £2.95 ea]
Reviewed by K.V.Bailey

THE GOLLANCZ COLLECTION OF SF classics will make currently available a number of past works which are lastingly enjoyable and of continuing significance. Opening the list is *The Sirens of Titan*, a classic of the absurd, of comedy, of pastiche, of a variety of existential *angst*. It uses (while parodying) space opera as framework in establishing Vonnegut's emerging metaphors of ironic perspective.

This is an imaginatively bold and wildly entertaining fantasia. Its claim to classic status lies partly in its atemporal schema which has influenced the "philosophic" sector of later genre writing (including Vonnegut's own); but also in its innovatory stylistic mannerisms, its inventiveness of incident, and its unleashed spring of imagery - which, even when parodying space opera, rises aesthetically far above most of those models.

The function of good fiction is to tell a story well; classic fiction does this, but as in *The Sirens* there may be, perhaps must be, levels of meaning and tensions in action which have an extended psychological or mythopoeic import. Such extension is certainly there in *Nova*. At its straightforward story level it is the picaresque adventure of a somewhat piratically-led crew to win energy-providing resources from an imploding sun. The resources will serve to destabilise a stable galaxy. Captain Lorq Von Ray plunges through the torus at the nova's heart, emerges in agony, but survives as a Promethean figure combining the attributes of both destroyer and renewer.

In his cosmic crime Von Ray says: "I feel no sin in me. Then it must be that I am free and evil." The stance is not only Promethean but Nietzschean. *Nova* sets up such "classical" reverberations and, both by virtue of that dimension and for its bravura descriptive writing and narrative zest, is itself a classic of science fiction.

FORCIBLE ENTRY - Stewart Farrar
[Hale, 1986, 240pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN IS DYING OF A LONG-suffered leukemia. During scientific ESP experiments in astral projection, he finds he can occupy the body of a fellow experimenter while she is projecting. So when he dies, he takes over her body. So far so good, but at this point the book ceases to resemble SF in any way, as he is eventually expelled by a coven of Wiccan witches and a dead priest.

Stewart Farrar is apparantly a white witch and has written many occult plays and novels. So the intent here appears to be to popularise and demysticise white magic by setting up a problem then solving it by white magic. If this were SF the scientists would invent a gadget, or the girl would spend her time in limbo scientifically deducing a way to repossess her body. So this book is definitely *not* SF.

However, SF or occult, neither would be an excuse for the excruciating badness of this book. The depiction of the man exploring the woman's body from the inside is offensively male-oriented - the first thing he notices is his missing genitalia (despite the fact that most amputees can still feel their missing parts until their removal is proved).

The trouble with reviewing bad books is that if plot factors are not mutually relevant or interlinked in some way, there is very little one can do apart from catalogue endless loose ends. If this were a bad book politically, scientifically, or even science fictionally, I could have a stab at arguing for or against it. But a book which is badly plotted is beyond redemption. As a final example, it concerns a man forcibly entering a woman's body, however nowhere is there any real account of the horror or anguish *she* suffers. I can only suggest it be republished under the far more apt title *Psychic Rape*, and then let more qualified feminists than I am tear Mr Farrar into well deserved little pieces.

NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE
- Timothy Findley
[Macmillan, 1985, 352pp, £9.95
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE IS ABOUT the Flood, Noah and his family surviving the Deluge with an Ark full of animals. We all know the story - don't we? However, I don't remember the Bible portraying Noah as a tyrannical hypocrite, bending beliefs to suit his purpose, a man with an unholy interest in his daughter-in-law, a vivisectionist. Nor do I remember Mrs Noah as a gentle, frightened woman, trying hard to please the bullying Noah, seeking solace in the gin bottle and with her half-blind cat, victim of Noah's experiments. And the children - Shem, the ox, unsuitably married to clever, beautiful, enigmatic Hannah; Ham with the unearthly (in all senses) Lucy; and Japeth, unable to consummate his own marriage to the child Emma, expressing adolescent confusion in violence. It's not exactly the sort of family that deserves to survive the Flood and repeople the world. But Yaweh cannot see through the dissembling of his old friend. Deeply distressed at the corruption in the world he has created, he conceives the idea of the cleansing flood (inspired by one of Noah's conjuring tricks) deciding that Noah and his family shall be the sole survivors, along with a representative selection of the world's fauna.

The old world disintegrates in dust and fire storms before the rain comes, the animals flee in panic or are trampled underfoot. There is little sense of human suffering; people appear only as dead bodies in the carnage. There's no orderly embarkation, but hysterical confusion as frightened animals are herded aboard or consigned to Noah's sacrificial fire of thanksgiving. Only Mrs Noah shows compassion as she struggles to save her beloved cat, now pregnant, amid the world's death throes. Once on board, Noah's tyranny continues as he lives in luxury with Hannah whilst the others are forced into the hold to care for the animals and defend them against his demands for fresh meat. The fairies are lost in the flood, the unicorns die and the sheep no longer sing. The magical things are all gone, but only Mrs Noah mourns their passing because only she understands that they are as important as Noah's 'science' and, once lost, cannot be replaced.

The message of this novel is grim and uncompromising. The only way to escape the perpetual cycle of death and ruin is total destruction. Even the

survival of a small group of apparently perfect people ensures its continuation. Mrs Noah recognises this - at the end of the novel she is seen praying for rain. Even so, there are lighter moments, delightful anachronisms, and a hint that so long as someone remembers how it ought be, how it used to be, the world has a chance.

COUNT ZERO - William Gibson
[Gollancz, 1986, 269pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

GIBSON'S FIRST NOVEL, ***NEUROMANCER***, WON last year's Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick awards. More importantly, it changed many perceptions of SF, brushing away a certain jaded feeling and re-interesting many who had drifted off to fantasy and Latin surrealism.

So how do you follow a book like that? The answer is a sequel. The smart money though - and Gibson is smart - is on a quasi-sequel. In other words, Gibson seems to have followed his own interests while exploring further the dimensions of his world.

One major difference is that he has chosen a tripartite viewpoint. Inevitably this lessens the pace, and it was probably the driving paranoiac pace of *Neuromancer* that made it a hit, but there are compensations. Case and Molly in the earlier book were archetypal drifters - genre figures. In *Count Zero* only Turner, a mercenary, is of that type. Bobby, whose grandiloquent title 'Count Zero' names the book, most closely resembles Case, but he has a streets background which is still with him. Marly, however, is a start on characterisation proper, though not much, this is not Gibson's strongest point. As yet he has kept to the sort of narrative where characterisation, rather than clever charicature, is unimportant. Marly is some evidence that this need not always be true.

Nevertheless he continues to develop his art, producing a book that is in many ways superior to its predecessor. The art boxes, a central plot device, are solidly described and intriguing as objects. Bobby's life on the streets is more believeable than the rather stroboscopic views of Chiba in the first book. There are also enduring qualities: the sense of large cartels jousting and pulling the rest of the world puppet-like along with them; the introduction of a dimension of art and culture; and a real development in his world of cyberspace.

Gibson's other strengths are still apparent. His ability to produce dynamic and colourful minor characters is sufficiently unusual, however there is at times a wisdom about his writing which gives the authenticity of a true chronicler. Gibson is not just a genuine science fiction writer but also a humanist in that tradition which has done much to prevent the genre from becoming engineers' bedtime stories. He is on course to being the most indispensible writer in his field: his achievements are already tremendous; his potential, stunning. Even if you never buy hardbacks, buy this one and treasure it.

THE DREAM YEARS - Lisa Goldstein
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 181pp, £3.50 paperback, £8.95 hardback]
Reviewed by L.J.Hurst

THIS BOOK IS ONE OF THREE LAUNCHING A new SF series from Unwin. Clearly the publisher's intentions were good. Why they allowed themselves, then, to publish this rubbish is beyond me. I can find nothing to praise in it. And this failure is already known - Martyn Taylor was able to criticise the book on the basis of the original Bantam edition. Why Unwin bothered I cannot say - unless they were so keen to launch an SF imprint that they took anything they could get. In which case I applaud their largesse but deplore their lack of judgement. On the other hand, the other books in the launch - Gwyneth Jones' *Escape Plans* and Graham Dunstan Martin's *Time Slip* (he wrote the rather good *Soul Master*, also published by Unwin but as fantasy) - promise more.

The Dream Years describes the life of Robert St Onge, a young poseur on the edge of the surrealist school before they became fashionable in the 1920s. By an unexplained time slip he travels forward to fall in love with a student revolutionary in 1968 Paris (and she sometimes travels back to him). She convinces him that surrealism has revolutionary importance, even while the students on the barricades fail to change anything. A masked time policeman starts chasing them, and other people get involved. At rare intervals one gets bursts of some sort of philosophy underlying this but those bursts tend to be less than a sentence long, and generally Ms Goldstein shows less ear for French and the French than Van Gogh.

This series can only get better.

MAN OF TWO WORLDS
- Frank & Brian Herbert
[Gollancz, 1986, 317pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

WE ALL OWE A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO Gollancz for their SF list - the back flap details here include Dick, Gibson, Niven, Roberts and Watson among others, and this excellently printed, colourfully jacketed volume brings the late Frank Herbert and his son Brian together in what turns out, unfortunately, to be a load of codswallop.

The dust-wrapper - a striking design by Fred Gambino, bears absolutely no relevance to anything in the book! The title is redolent of all that was worst about Golden Age pulp fiction, and unfortunately the text bears out that judgement from start to bloodletting finish.

The plot's summed up in the very first sentence, which, like far too much of the book is in the form of a fictitious "quotation" from an imagined book: "If every Dreen dies, the universe collapses, for all life and all matter are sustained by Dreen idmaging". No, not a misprint - "idmaging" is what we call imagining but it actually creates too. And (shock, horror!) Our Earth and all its people are mere products of Dreen idmaging. (Dreens, incidentally, are incredibly stupid, equally stupidly formed, and prone to drunkenness brought about by "bazeel" which, we discover without a shred of surprise, is our old herb Basil).

The anti-hero is "the wily . . . scion of an industrial empire, and reckless adventurer" to quote the blurb. How does an author enter into the mind of such a person? Answer: make him and all around him almost as stupid as the Dreens but nasty with it, with a paranoid father, an unutterably vicious mother, a plan to become President of the United States of America, and of course a horde of unprincipled, murdering hangers-on. Mix with this characters called "Sam R. Kand" and Dreens called Mugly and Wemply, devote pages to attempted troilism between a virgin, the President of the US and a Dreen which is sharing his body and doesn't want to know about sex anyway, and all I can say is that if you have a particular type of mind, no doubt this all adds up to "entertainment".

But not for me it doesn't. But as a Dreen captive of Earth, one Deni-Ra says, "Someone's gotta tell yew nesters yore fences are a'comin' down". You have been warned.

SANDWRITER - Monica Hughes
[Julia MacRae, 1985, 159pp, £6.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT BETRAYAL AND trust; prejudice and pride; knowledge and wisdom; about growing up.

Princess Antia - a very young and spoilt 16 - is sent from her home on the twin continents of Komilant and Kamalant to the barren island desert of Roshan, to meet the boy her aunt, the ruling princess, plans for her to marry. Roshan is hot and dusty; life is simple and basic. Antia is treated just like everyone else, and it rankles. Do these primitive people not realise who she is?

They realise - but as they treat their own leaders as ordinary human beings why should she be treated differently? The people of the desert are more puzzled than angered by her behaviour, and continue to treat her with rough friendliness.

This is one of the faults of the book: Antia is too blind, too unwilling to accept the differences of a different culture, and far too childish.

B O O K S

In contrast the desert people are too nice, friendly, rough and ready, sensible, likeable people. There has to be a contrast between the corrupt and the honest, the authoritarian and the egalitarian, and between Antia as she was and as she becomes, but it would have been all the better for not being so heavy-handed. Children, contrary to much adult belief, *can* appreciate and understand the subtle approach.

There is, however, a great depth to this book. The Roshanites live close to the desert, in more ways than one; and like Frank Herbert's *fremen* they must understand its ways if they are to survive. The Sandwriter, an old woman living out in the desert, acts as sage, guardian, and the embodiment of Roshanite myth. And because the mythology deals with sand and water and survival, it is an essential part of everyday Roshanite life - as is the distinction between knowledge and wisdom: "Knowledge helps men . . . Wisdom helps mankind". The twin continents may have much knowledge, but Roshan has wisdom.

Antia may be a pain in the neck for most of the book, and the story may be over-moralistic, yet this is an enjoyable SF novel, telling an exciting tale, and making the young reader consider matters adults often shy away from. Antia suffers the emotional and mental agony of betrayal of her love and trust, but her worst pain is the iknowledge that she herself betrayed the love and trust of others.

FACES - Leigh Kennedy
[Cape, 1986, 152pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

FACES IS A COLLECTION OF 10 SHORT stories. Six have been previously published over the last four years; three of them in *Asimov's*. On the strength of that information, I'm thinking of renewing my subscription to *Asimov's*.

Faces is everything a single-author collection of short, imaginative fictions should be. The stories are frighteningly acute; oddities observed and recorded with a semi-detatched compassion. They are stories about the insides of people's heads; inner landscapes. The familiar country is transformed into a strange place, the wildly unfamiliar and debateable land is shown to lie very close to home. The stories are about a phantom child, a conventional miracle, what it feels like to have *petit mal*, an ethical cannibal. Some of them are science fiction, some of them are fantasy, some of them are speculative, some of them are realistic (these categories are not exclusive).

Faces is a first-time collection. Next time I see Leigh Kennedy's name on a book I will buy the book. They're that good.

AMY'S EYES - Richard Kennedy
[Julia McRae, 1986, 379pp, 1986]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

AMY'S FATHER LEAVES HER AT AN orphanage with a sailor doll of his own making, the Captain, when he goes to seek his fortune. Amy accidentally brings the doll to life, and he goes off to seek his fortune in order to take her away from the orphanage. But Amy doesn't hear from him, and turns into a doll herself. After that life gets a little frantic. The Captain does return and they embark on a complicated adventure in a ship crewed by vivified toys. Amy is re-united with her father though the Captain dies in a battle with pirates.

This is an odd book, eccentric and a little anarchic at times. Richard Kennedy lacks a firm hand on the narrative which, consequently, wanders all over the place, and there is too much sub-plot, a lot of it totally unnecessary. He is also very fond of philosophising on the state of human existence but his wisdom and insights mix uncomfortably with a swashbuckling piratical adventure which would stand quite nicely on its own. It has no more need of the cloying sentimentality than it requires the theological discussion on Revelations and numerology which is interpolated at one point.

Yet despite its many minor faults, stripped of the life enriching commentary, it is a first rate adventure story. It also contains many delightful moments, such as the Captain training his crew on the sayings of Mother Goose, as well as incidents of stark brutality - the battle with the pirates is uncomfortably realistic in its violence. The author has enhanced the common theme of a search for treasure with many original ideas, it's a pity he couldn't resist embellishing to the point where the book narrowly misses becoming cute rather than meaningful.

VARGR-MOON - Bernard King
[New English Library, 1986, 244pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

IN THIS SEQUEL TO *STARKADDER*, A VARGR, the Norse-myth idea of a werewolf, is let loose in Sweden. Hather Lambisson sets out with an anarchistic band of men to hunt it down. Meanwhile the Swedish king declares war on the Danelands and the dwarf-king, Alvis , seeks Tyrfing, a sword that holds his destiny. At the same time (or "meanwhile", a device the book is overly fond of) Odin and Mother Skuld vie for control over the destinies of men.

At the beginning of the story, Hather's first wife disappears. Fifty pages on, his second wife is murdered and his son taken by the vargr. Within weeks of the murder, he again falls in love, based largely on the fact that "Her skin was white and her breasts were firm". Of course she falls into his arms at the first opportunity. The mother of his new love has a starring rôle in the obligatory rape and gruesome death scene. Norse myth should be more than this disappointing tripe.

Various characters are hacked to pieces by the author in passages like "the two friends grinned at each other, genuine pleasure shining in both their eyes". Purple prose prevails with, "Her voice . . . crept into the ears like the insidious, demented whisperings of some lurking, perverted dwarf inciting acts of lust and murder". But King really shows his mastery of vocabulary with one of the few passages in the book which isn't a cliché, describing the sorcerer's eyes, "The yellows weren't yellow. They were red, a deep blood-crimson crimson-blood bloody red. The red of horror and dementia". The red of dementia?

Hather does a lot of thinking back over circumstances, and there are flashbacks, plot summaries and updates. Who the vargr is first becomes important about half-way through the book, and though the creature isn't unmasked until the end, we know who it is as there is only one candidate (you can guess reading this review). So the aimed for suspense falls terribly flat.

The scenes, as well as the lines, are clichés. Even the jacket cover is atrocious. This book, which has a map, is an all-time low for NEL. It makes *Killashandra* appear like the work of a literary genius.

TIME-SLIP - Graham Dunstan Martin
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 164pp, £2.95 paperback, £8.95 hardback]
Reviewed by Mark Greener

SCIENCE IS ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS THE Western World's new religion, encased in an ideology requiring priests, saints, dogma, and even a mystical language. SF has provided a consummate vehicle for examining the relationship between the ecclesiastical tradition and science. *Time-slip* is firmly within this sub-genre and although it does not challenge the parameters of SF it is a readable and intelligent novel.

Scotland has been spared the worst effects of the nuclear holocaust. The war has resulted in science being considered blasphemous and evil and man attempts to find reassurance in the plethora of cults ensuing from the fragmentation of established religion.

Peter Gilchrist loses his job when he is discovered with prohibited books on quantum mechanics. Knocked unconscious in an accident he finds the world changed in subtle and inexplicable ways. Contemplating these, Gilchrist is suddenly enlightened and develops the one true religion. Preaching in communities around Edinburgh, he quickly amasses a large following; the government perceives him as a threat to their power and begin to take action against him . . .

Time-slip follows the tradition of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, examining the rôle of the church in rebuilding society after nuclear war. But far from kindling the flame of scientific know-

ledge, the cults in *Time-slip* are united in their desire to extinguish it.

However the true strength of *Time-slip* lies in the excellent characterisation. Most SF is populated by archetypal 'cardboard', but Martin's characters are described in a depth equivalent to many mainstream novels.

I do have a few reservations. I always find 'post-nuclear' novels hard to believe - the assumption that anything of the world would be left is at best contentious. It is to Martin's credit that he overcomes this obstacle and achieves conditions conducive to the suspension of disbelief.

The major flaw lies in the scenario which Martin expects us to believe leads to nuclear war early in the 21st century. This is not the place to produce a detailed repudiation of his politically naïve arguments, but the upheavals are described in terms so vague and rest on such shaky propositions as to be totally at odds with the rest of the book.

But these imperfections are not enough to spoil the novel. *Time-slip* is impressive. It is Martin's second fantasy novel, I would be interested to know if he has produced anything outside SF as *Time-slip* is too polished to be the work of a newcomer. Martin is certainly a name to watch. In the meantime I recommend *Time-slip*.

THE CITY IN THE AUTUMN STARS
- Michael Moorcock
(Grafton, 1986, 344pp, £9.95)
Reviewed by Edward James

A MOORCOCK SCHOLAR MIGHT BE ABLE TO untangle all the internal references in his works; I can't. It is enough, I think, to say that chronologically *The City in the Autumn Stars* comes between *The Warhound and the World's Pain*, where Ulrich von Bek in the 17th century makes a pact with Lucifer, and *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, in which Rickhardt von Bek enjoys a joint obsession with his lady-love and his city, late 19th century Mirenburg. Here Manfred von Bek, lover of adventure and liberty, French Revolution style, is unwillingly brought face to face with the pact his ancestor Ulrich made; here, in the last few lines, Manfred decides to go to Rosenstrasse. But as the jacket-note rightly (if somewhat defensively) says, this is "a self-contained novel in its own right".

The events take place in 1794, and quite a realistic one at that, rendered in colloquial English of c. 1800 (with German low-life slang nicely if almost incomprehensibly 'translated' into London thieves' cant). Manfred leaves Paris on the day his friend Tom Paine is imprisoned on Robespierre's orders. "Aha!" I thought, "Moorcock is telling us this is an alternative world, Paine was never imprisoned by Robespierre." Luckily I looked it up: he was. The strength of the book indeed is the way Moorcock slides from Von Bek's picaresque but plausible adventures in an historically real 1794, into a world inhabited by sinister but fairly recogniseably loony alchemists and Illuminati, and finally into a world in which the fantasies of those alchemists are suddenly revealed to be true, indeed only a pale reflection of the truth. The magical twin of Mirenburg, The City of the Autumn Stars, is a stunning creation, and the apocalyptic climax is horrifyingly perfect.

One of Moorcock's aims, I take it, is to recreate a mythical framework for a world in which God is dead or, as here, has at least retired from the scene. He pours Christian tradition, alchemical flummery, and modern nonsense (such as the demonstrably false and foolish ideas from the best-selling *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*) into a glorious mixture; while allowing the book to be read as a fantastical allegory of a period, around 1800, when utopia was indeed being sought by both mystical and severely rational means. Von Bek's two companions, the mysterious Libussa and the Scots adventurer and engineer St Odhran, in whose balloon the magical city is reached, symbolise these two approaches; the two mingle and harmonise in a very odd way in Manfred von Bek himself.

I approached this book convinced I would not enjoy it; I have never been much of a Moorcock fan. But by the end I had been captivated by its characters, its colour, and its sensitive and often witty writing. I'm already looking forward to re-reading it.

DOWN TOWN - Viido Polikarpus & Tappan King
(Macdonald, 1986, 293pp, £4.95 paperback, £8.95 hardback)
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

IF YOU KNOW NEW YORK AS WELL AS London taxi drivers know London, and love it with a sentimental and nostalgic passion, then this is the book for you. You can wallow in historical memories, exclaim in recognition, and marvel at the cleverness of the authors. If, like me, you know New York's vague geographical location and have seen bits of it on TV and films then a large portion of this book will be meaningless.

It is a fantasy with a 10-year-old boy, Cary Newman, as protagonist and hero. In the middle of a tantrum he accidentally finds himself in Downtown, "a place for all the people and things, real and imaginary, that the Uptown world no longer has a use for". It mirrors and echoes the real world, mingling time and history, magic and legend in a way that seems almost random. Cary and Allie, a street kid he meets, go through various adventures trying to find a way home for Cary, during which he is told that he is the long awaited saviour of Downtown.

It is unsatisfactory in many ways. The baddies, the Gnomes of Wall St. and their henchmen, the Badmashers, are thoroughly evil but they are not balanced by the goodies who are self absorbed, motivated by a need to defend themselves rather than by any altruism. The main force for good is a tree called Taara which is about to be destroyed both in the real world and Downtown by the machinations of the Gnomes and their supercomputer. Cary's task is to feed a microdisc into the computer telling it the whole truth so that tree and computer can combine in a force that will save both worlds.

Cary is essentially passive. People or Taara tell him to do things and he does them. There is no particular virtue in him to make him a hero, he is merely the one carrying the relevant microdisc. It is a very *contrived* book, the plot and its resolution predictable, with no allowances for individuality from the characters.

Nor does the writing compensate. It is very colloquially American throughout, not just in the dialogue, which aggravated me. There are a number of illustrations which I can't judge as I read a proof copy and they were only photocopied. The vagueness of the myths and history behind *Downtown* may be because they are not ones I recognise or sympathise with. Even so the book never moved me or aroused more than tepid interest. For the price you can get two or three much better books.

THE ANVIL OF ICE - Michael Scott Rohan
(Macdonald, 1986, 348pp, £9.95)
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

I LAST CAME ACROSS MICHAEL SCOTT Rohan under the pseudonym, together with Allan Scott, of 'Michael Scot'. Their book, *The Ice King*, was full of old Norse legends. This preoccupation plus a love of Wagner's operas now gives us the first volume of a fantasy series called *The Winter of the World*.

The Anvil of Ice contains the chronicle 'The Book of the Sword' plus an appendix about its background, and purports to be based in the 'Visconsinian Ice Age' of 18,000 years ago. The endpapers contain a map.

The scope of the book is vast. It is set among many lands and peoples: the Ekwesh, fierce sea raiders; the Duergar, underground cavern dwellers; and the red-haired Southlands and dark-haired Northlands races. There are Powers for good, evil or indifference - Raven the wanderer, Niarad of the seas and Tapiau of the forests. Ice is being driven by malevolent forces to sterilise everywhere of life.

Against this backdrop we follow the adventures of Elof the Smith, who as a boy was called Alv the Changeling. *The Anvil of Ice* is about the forging and tempering not only of steel but also of a boy into a man. Alv, apprentice to Mastersmith Mylio, unwittingly provides him with a magic sword and helm which he uses for evil. Alv runs away with Roc, another apprentice, suffers hardship and disease, discovers himself and his real

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name, and begins the long haul to set right the wrongs he has caused.

The style of *The Anvil of Ice* is rather grand in places but meshes well with the plot. A mass of research has gone into the book, and it shows in the detail given of, for example, the forging of metal. Alv's love for his work, the effort and grime, are conveyed strongly.

There are many plot strands, some of which are left for development in later books. It will be interesting to watch Elof's relationship with the elusive Kara. The characterisation is good - I genuinelycared for the protagonists. References to old legends are legion, particularly those used in Wagner's Ring operas. The atmosphere is convincing and compelling.

I couldn't put this book down and can't wait for the sequel. Whether Michael Scott Rohan can finish what he's started remains to be seen.

QUEEN OF THE STATES
- Josephine Saxton
[The Women's Press, 1986, 175pp. £1.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

It's hard to know where to begin with this extraordinary novel. On the one hand, Magdalen may have been abducted by aliens who want to research the human species. If so, they do not conform to the standard behaviour patterns of alien researchers, providing Magdalen with every creature comfort, not to mention a very high standard of cuisine. At the same time, one of them seems to have been the strange insect which she spied on a flower in a cafe years previously. Alternatively, Magdalen is Queen of the States, the United States, that is. Or possibly she is mad, a patient in a psychiatric hospital, a refugee from White House and her husband. So which is true?

The only conclusion that can be →

LETTERS *continued from page 3*

would like more members, and we're working on a number of advertising ideas right now. But the BSFA has kept its subscription unrealistically low for too many years, which is why we can't afford "a well-funded professionally performed publicity campaign." The best advertising is word of mouth: if every member persuaded a friend or colleague to join, that would double the membership and bring in the badly needed revenue. Dammit, it costs money to produce and distribute these magazines every two months. All our own work is free, but printing and postage are real expenses which have to be met. If you want decent magazines, if you want the BSFA to be worthwhile, you're going to have to do your bit as well. -- Ed.»

PERHAPS I HAVE A CYNICAL NATURE, BUT KEN LAKE'S CRITICISMS OF David Pringle's **Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels** (Letters, V131) sounded very much like sour grapes. Some of his comments were valid but one cannot help but feel that in his attempts to unfavourably compare Pringle's work with his own projected one, Lake has lost sight of a certain objectivity.

First, Lake vilifies Pringle's title and then proceeds to say that he'd call his own book **99 Best SF Novels**. Come now, is there really such a difference between the two? Surely any selection has to be a personal one, unless you plump for the "popular" choices (award-winners, best-sellers, etc.); I thought that Pringle gave a more than adequate defence of his choice of title in the introduction to his book.

Secondly, if the aim of Lake's book was to be "somewhat different" from Pringle's, why does he adopt the same criteria to judge it by? Pringle's work was obviously designed to appeal to fans old and new, whilst Lake is aiming for the newcomer. Nothing wrong with either tack but it is clear that the contents of each book will be dissimilar. Lake's idea to place each of his selections in context seems both worthwhile and ambitious, but I would also welcome both controversy and erudition, which Lake wishes to eschew -- dangerous, as blandness may all too easily be the result.

I enjoyed Pringle's book on two counts: it was entertaining and it provided me with a new reading list. If Lake were to provide the same service, I would be equally delighted -- but he ought to remove the chip from his shoulder first!

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I WONDER WHAT KEN LAKE'S "99 BEST SF NOVELS" WERE? I CAN'T, IN all honesty, see much in his précis of "his" book that isn't covered by David Pringle's other than, perhaps, a desire to propagandise for SF, while Pringle takes it as a "given fact", and a deliberate restriction to within the ghetto walls. I don't think that Pringle's "retelling" of the plots deters anyone from reading the books: if the book is worth it, then knowing the "plot" doesn't matter. Except for particular deliberately convoluted stories, it's not what the plot is but how it's told that matters.

Fundamentally, though, Lake's restriction to non-controversial, safe judgements wouldn't, I think, make a very interesting book. As I see it, while a "reader's guide to SF" would be an interesting project, the whole point of such an undertaking would be the pointing out of such "fringe" works as **Riddley Walker**, which is, as Pringle points out, "SF of a traditional sort" and only "difficult" because of Hoban's use of "the broken debased English of a neo-barbarian future": an embellishment which I'm sure most people could accept. I can think of far more difficult books to read including a lot of "mainstream SF". Perhaps a more fruitful approach would be, not 99 recommended books by one person, but 20 "best" by five. Allowing for overlaps, there wouldn't be as many books actually recommended, but the difference in taste and approach would be far more useful to an "ordinary reader" in search of guidance.

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WHICHEVER WAY I LOOK AT IT I FAIL TO SEE KEN LAKE'S DISTINCTION between **SF: The 100 Best Novels** and **99 Best SF Novels**. It seems to me that he also makes the "wild claim" that his 99 are the most excellent, desirable, attractive, advantageous or whatever. In any case, **SF: The 100 Best Novels** is a much more eye-catching title than, say, **David Pringle's 100 Favourite SF Books**, although not as accurate. I agree with Ken, however, when he says that too much of the plots are revealed, at least on the evidence of the extracts in **Vector 130**. As I have only read about 30 of the novels listed I will not be reading the book yet. Thanks to a recent flyer from Andromeda bookshop I do have a useful list of Pringle's selections.

Ken's suggested book sounds much like **The Encyclopedia of SF** only not as comprehensive.

I enjoyed reading the article on Yes. It even persuaded me to consider one of their albums when I next go to buy a record. I felt that the inclusion of tenuous links betwen the lyrics of Yes and works of SF was unnecessary. It seemed as though David Wingrove was trying to justify the inclusion of the article in **Vector**. The subject matter of the albums appears to make them a legitimate target for discussion in an SF journal.

I would be interested in seeing a compilation of some of the final results of the questionnaire. What, for example, are the favourite novels of the BSFA membership, and how does it compare with David Pringle's list?

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«Well over 200 of you completed and returned the questionnaire, far more than even the most optimistic prediction. Our thanks to all of you. I'll try to reply to those who offered ideas or help over the summer; if you think I've forgotten you, drop me another line to remind me. Mike Moir, the BSFA Information Officer, has the mammoth task of extracting some sort of statistical information from this survey; his report should be ready in a couple of months. I expect a detailed list of "BSFA Members' 100 Best SF Novels" will be included. -- Ed.»

I AM WRITING TO THANK YOU FOR PUBLISHING A SPECIAL KEITH ROBERTS issue of **Vector** (132). Roberts has been one of my favourite writers since I picked up a copy of **Machines and Men** in my local library more years ago than I care to remember. In fact I have only one complaint. The copy of **Vector** I received had a blank page 8 and (unsurprisingly) a blank page 13. I really enjoyed the rest of the issue but I wouldn't mind knowing what was on those pages.

GRAHAM SMITH
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«Sorry about that; I know the collating team are very careful not to use any dud pages, but occasionally (like tpyoes) they slip through. Because we've had to put this issue together early, for various holiday reasons, this is the only letter *re* V132 I've received so far. Any further letters will be held over till V134. -- Ed.»

reached, given the pun contained in the title, is that Magdalen is undergoing these various experiences simultaneously, depending on which part of her consciousness is most active at any given moment. To Magdalen this is a perfectly reasonable state of affairs, it's the people around her who can't cope, who seek to condemn or deify her, who can't manage without her and who would rather she couldn't manage without them. That she can reject all this and walk away to find her own destiny is a powerful statement of the capabilities of this protagonist.

Is *Queen of the States* to be classed as science fiction? To be honest, I'm not sure. It defies categorisation. On the one hand it is most certainly an examination of states of being, exploring the possibilities of several consecutive existences, resonances from one spilling over into others. And, of course, there are those aliens discussing the matter of the human experience with Magdalen. At the same time it is a witty, observant comment on woman's place in society, both actual and perceived, carrying a strong, defiant message in favour of women taking control of their destinies. And it questions our awareness of the world, whether things really are what they seem to be, whether an acceptable standard of normality ought to be imposed on society. Magdalen most certainly does not conform to outside standards but she is completely at ease, at the centre of her world as she perceives it. Ultimately, why should it concern anyone else, any more than it really matters what label this book wears.

What *does* matter is that *Queen of the States* is by far the most stimulating and thought-provoking book I've read in a long while. It has so much to say on so many subjects, and all in a direct and forceful prose style which I find very refreshing. It is also very heartening that The Women's Press has finally found an original science fiction novel which is actually worth publishing and which deserves as wide a public as possible. All I can say is, read this book and enjoy it - it's wonderful.

TOM O'BEDLAM - Robert Silverberg
[Gollancz, 1986, 320pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

POOR, MAD TOM.

Once there was Silverberg who won the Best New Writer Hugo, 1956. Then Silverberg who turned the handle and produced SF adventure stories I have no memory of now. Then the promise of 1956 was fulfilled as Silverberg the craftsman became Silverberg the artist (*Nightwing, A Time of Changes, The Stochastic Man*). Then *Lord Valentine's Castle* and the other Majipoor books was a return of Silverberg the adventure writer and I was disappointed.

This is the first Silverberg I've read since *Castle*, and while it doesn't have the atmosphere of the 'serious' Silverberg nor is it just an adventure story. Let me set the scene. A fragmented Earth not too far in the future, with tracts of land made deadly by radioactive dust (used in a war that avoided the bomb). A world with hover vehicles, personal laser weapons and force fields but no airplanes. We only see California.

One plot line follows the march of the tumbonde people. Tumbonde is a religion owing more than a little to voodoo, but its pantheon of gods come from space. The followers have visions of marvellous alien worlds populated by these gods.

Then we have the patients and staff of the Nepenthe centre, a psychiatric establishment treating suffers from Gelbard's syndrome, a consequence of this post-dust world. First the patients then the staff start having space dreams.

Finally we have Tom who falls in with a bunch of drifters living by what they can find in the deserted areas. Tom has had visions for as long as he can remember. Not only does he see the alien worlds, he talks with the inhabitants, he knows their history and their future. And he knows that one day there will be the Crossing and he will leave this world and join the space people.

All revolves around Tom, but are his visions real or hallucination? Will he be the instrument that opens the way for the Crossing or is he some kind of super-telepath broadcasting his hallucinations?

I had assumed there would be an ambiguous ending, but one answer is clearly indicated. Having said that, there is still room for doubt and I think this ambiguity is necessary and isn't done as well as it could be.

The writing is well done, the story is fast paced and keeps you turning the pages. On the minus side I was unhappy with some of the detail. The tumbonde religion, its followers and leaders, don't seem to have complete internal consistency. The technology isn't in step - I don't insist that it must be feasible based on present day knowledge but I do expect some attempt at internal consistency.

So, not vintage Silverberg, but interesting.

IN THE HEART OR IN THE HEAD: AN ESSAY IN TIME TRAVEL - George Turner
[Norstrilia Press, 1984, 239pp, no price quoted]
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

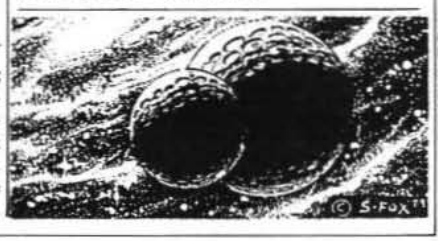
AS ITS SUBTITLE WOULD INDICATE, THIS is part autobiographical, part literary-historical, part futurologically-political. Of three sections the first divides its chapters into 'a' and 'b'. The 'a' sequence follows what the author describes as "an egocentric, selfish lifetime", the 'b', in parallel, the development of science fiction, objectively outlined, subjectively appraised, between the '20s and '60s.

His compelling life story introduces a Dickensianly tragi-comic cast from a variety of antipodean environments. It is a kind of rake's progress - interrupted by brilliantly described episodes of war - from the youthful pilfering of cash to buy *Amazing Stories* (and being beaten for reading them) to the time he "crossed the vague line between 'one of the boys' and 'one of the town drunks'". He adds: "In this ambience of decay my literary career began" - a career producing first the 'Treelake' Australian backblock books and later his SF novels, that second phase entered via fanzine and professional reviewing.

In Part II autobiography is directly interwoven with accounts of (mainly) Australian '70s conventions, workshops and publishing enterprises. They are documentarily interesting, acid or generous in their remarks on authors encountered; likewise on experiences during two visits to Britain.

Turner in Part III, after providing a sequence of (mostly dystopian) scenarios, defines a small but "socially meaningful rôle for the genre". Denigrating fantasy, he seeks writers "in the tradition of More, Bacon, Wells and Huxley" who will responsibly use SF to create a "political fiction". He specifies Gene Wolfe, Moorcock and Aldiss as virtuous only as "decorators of mental scenes we already know" and brackets them dismissively as "no longer science fiction writers but fantasists". Paradoxically he connects Lewis Carroll strongly with SF. This he elaborates by saying: "He did not fantasize; he extrapolated received knowledge and theory to points beyond the edge of reason". Yet, surely, many of what Turner calls "the oddities and quiddities of the thought of Brian Aldiss" do just that; and Moorcock's *The Dancers at the End of Time* follows multiverse contours far outside the "easy dreams" category in which Turner places it.

What is undoubted is the relevance of a twice-quoted aphorism culled from T.S. Eliot: "It is not enough to understand what we ought to be, unless we know what we are". Eliot also wrote in *Four Quartets* that only "at the still centre of the turning world" in timeless consciousness can past and future be enchained - a concept which brings into the fold some of the metaphysical and even fantastical sheep that George Turner would prefer to exclude.



STEVEN FOX