VECTOR

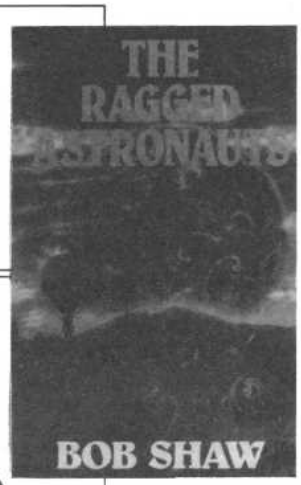
134

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

75p

BOB SHAW

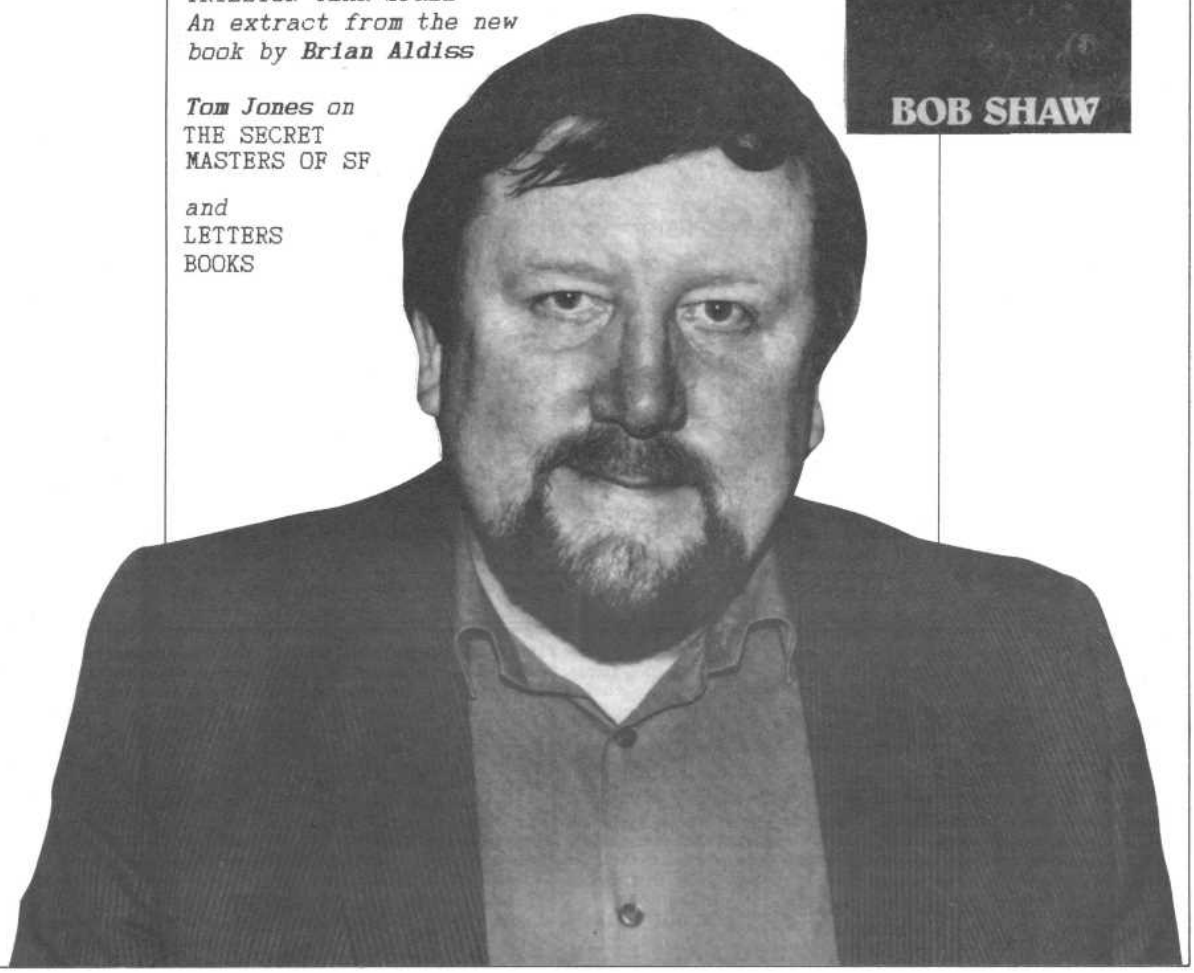
The genesis of an epic



plus
TRILLION YEAR SPREE
An extract from the new book by ***Brian Aldiss***

Tom Jones on
THE SECRET MASTERS OF SF

and
LETTERS
BOOKS



OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1986

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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

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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Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editor

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THE BSFA: The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organization, formed in 1958, which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing, and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish Vector, a bimonthly critical journal; Matrix, a bimonthly newsletter/magazine; Focus, a biannual forum for writers, and Paperback Inferno, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks. Other services include Orbiter, a postal SF writers' workshop, an SF Information Service, a postal Magazine Chain and an SF Lending Library. Membership costs £7.00 per year. For details, write to: Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire, G72 9NA or if you live in the USA: Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan 48213, USA.

— THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION LTD —

EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

SOMEBODY MENTIONED *VECTOR* IN THE OFFICE RECENTLY, AND one of our reporters said, "Oh, that's your sci-fi thing, isn't it." Bristling, I told her it was SF; we never called it sci-fi; sci-fi was commercial crap. "So what's the difference?" she asked. Ten minutes later, when even I realised how pompous, patronising and arrogant I was sounding, I shut up and returned to the article I was writing on the social implications of office automation (now *there* was a piece of SF! Or was it sci-fi?)

A few days later I mentioned to another BSFA member the name of Anne McCaffrey. "I'm sorry," he said, "I thought we were talking about SF writers."

What is it that makes it fashionable for us to sneer at McCaffrey? After all, she's a competent writer, with some good books to her name. *The Ship Who Sang*, for example, is a thoughtful examination of the woman-machine interface. And the original Dragon book, *Dragonflight*, was a well-realised creation of an unusual world, in a skilful mix of old SF tropes: dragons, telepathy, threat from space, time travel, etc. In a way it drew dragons, which like unicorns, are creatures worthy of some respect, back out of the world of low-quality fantasy into a pretty decent SF novel.

So why is McCaffrey now one of the despised and reviled in the pages of SF criticism magazines? Apart from the fact that her dragon books have now become somewhat twee and more than a little repetitious, I think there are two deeper reasons, which say more about us, the critics, than about her, the writer.

The unpardonable sins that she has committed are:

1. She has written not just a trilogy -- in itself that would call down the wrath of the critics, it seems -- but a whole series of follow-on books.
2. She's made a packet from her Dragon books. She's commercially successful. This is dreadful; how can she possibly live with herself?

(She's also, in passing, brought a great deal of pleasure to a great many readers. But then, that's irrelevant, isn't it?)

95% OF EVERYTHING

It was Theodore Sturgeon who said "95% of everything is crap," and he surely meant his Law to be applied to science fiction as much as to anything else. But crap, without getting too scatological, is a part of our everyday lives. It's something we don't actually need to spend much time talking about, but (if you'll pardon the pun) at bottom it *is* a universal constant, and a great leveller of mankind. The poet Irvine Hunt once wrote "Behind the Palace railings / do they also have a loo?" But there's not a lot of point condemning it because it's not a rose.

Need we be so bitterly dismissive of so much of our genre? Isn't it more productive to praise the "good" than to condemn the "bad"? (The inverted commas are deliberate.) Should we expect every science fiction novel to be a great work of literature? Is this the case in other genres?

Looking through my record collection recently I noticed a couple of dozen albums I hadn't played for years. They used to be my favourites; should I play one now? No, I decided, I don't actually want to listen to them now. Have they then become inferior quality music? No, but there are other things I prefer to listen to these days. My tastes have changed.

The SF that we read when we were 13 was good stuff -- then. I remember being profoundly impressed by Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, and I used to love Clifford D Simak. Now I'm not; now I don't. But just because I specifically don't want to read them, that doesn't make them crap. They've not changed. I have.

US AND THEM

Way back in *Vector 108* I wrote about Us and Them, and was roundly condemned in the letter column for the next few issues for being elitist. I'd compared readers of SF and readers of sci-fi, and had pointed out that the former (Us) were in the minority. I'll quote just three sentences:

"It is easy for Us to dismiss Them as fairly mindless (any Them, by definition almost, is mindless) and non-discriminating because they read more Perry Rhodan than Chris Priest. We readily condemn as commercial rubbish a novel which thousands of Them enjoy. We are the self-styled arbiters of taste, style and quality -- but since when have the Paris fashion houses had much impact on what you see walking the streets of Rochdale?"

But my critics had missed my point: I was not advocating this stance; I was being descriptive, not prescriptive. I was saying that this is how we are, or at least how we often come over to other people. Negative. Condemnatory. Arrogant. Too clever by half.

I'm as guilty of this as any of us. I'll tear a book or an author to shreds, when actually it's not such a bad book after all. Maybe it's not as good as I think it should be; maybe there's something in it which irritates the hell out of me -- but that's as likely to be my fault as the book's.

But one of the main things that causes us to carve up a book or an author is commercial success. If it sells, it means it's being bought by Them; if it's being bought by Them, then it can't be good, now can it? It can't be worthwhile SF, it's commercial! And if an author consistently has high sales, then he or she has capitulated to the forces of the mass market, has gone over to the other side, is churning out commercial crap, is writing sci-fi.

When *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was known only to a few dedicated Radio 4 listeners -- the first broadcast of the first series -- we were delighted that good, well-written, humorous, intellectually satisfying SF was on the radio. Then there was the second series, the TV version, the books, the records and tapes, the stage play. Yes, it became over-hyped. Yes, the quality deteriorated. But the reason so many of us turned against it was that it had become *popular*. We were no longer an exclusive clique. We had been joined by Them. And we weren't having that.

SNOBS UP THEIR NOSES

I'd be willing to bet that the reason a lot of people leave the BSFA after a year is that they see us as a bunch of stuck-up arrogant intellectual snobs. We get up their noses. They joined to find out more about science fiction; all we do is leap up and down on Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Herbert, McCaffrey, Simak *et al* -- quite possibly the very authors who drew them into the genre in the first place, and maybe recently. If those are the authors you appreciate, you won't be too pleased to see them being dismissed as rubbish every time you pick up a BSFA magazine.

I'm not saying there shouldn't be critical standards. I'm not saying John Norman is in the same league as Samuel R Delany. I'm not saying that there aren't appallingly bad books. I'm not saying that 95% isn't crap.

What I am saying is that the vast majority of SF readers in this country aren't in the BSFA.

And maybe it's the attitude shown by Us which is turning Them away.

L E T T E R S

READING MY LETTER IN *VECTOR 132* I REALISE IT COULD BE misconstrued. My comments did not relate to any experience I have had of Milford; not being either a writer or aspiring writer my only experience of Milford was when I was invited there for a party (one of the perks of being BSFA chairman, I think). I enjoyed the party and was grateful to the organisers who had invited me. My comments referred to other situations where I had not found it possible to fit in.

I enjoyed *V132*; I'm getting bored of saying that of late. Concentrating on one author is a good idea providing it doesn't become a habit and I was pleased with the choice of Keith Roberts who I enjoy. Whilst Keith no doubt "suffers" from people bringing up *Pavane* at every opportunity that's the price you have to pay for writing a classic.

My only criticism is that some passages from the interview appeared verbatim in the article which followed it; they stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb.

TOM A. JONES
14 Haywood
Bracknell
Berks.

AS A BSFA MEMBER WHO WILL BEGIN TO TEACH GCSE IN A WEEK or so, I feel that I ought to bring to the attention of the Association the dreadfully stolid and unimaginative SF content of the London and East Anglia Board's book list:

John Christopher -- *The Death of Grass*
Aldous Huxley -- *Brave New World*
R. O'Brien -- *Z for Zachariah*
George Orwell -- *1984*
John Wyndham -- *The Day of the Triffids*
-- *The Chrysalids*

If we expand the definition slightly, we may also include:

Alan Garner -- *The Owl Service*
George Orwell -- *Animal Farm*

It should be pointed out that this is an *advisory* book list. Other books may be used but: "Where it is desired to use a text not in the advisory list care should be taken to see that it is of a comparable quality and demand" (quote from the final, approved version of the syllabus for 1988).

Fair enough. None of the above books are bad books, but isn't it about time that SF in schools meant something other than these old chestnuts? As for the necessity for one to prove the inherent worth of a work of literature before it may be said to be of comparable worth to one of the above, it would be quite difficult to find another SF author whose characterisation of women in normal situations is *worse* than Wyndham's. The other suggested books also have technical faults.

I suggest that the only reason these books continually appear on such a book list is because the majority of people still regard SF as low-level recreational literature only, and are unaware of the Roberts/Kilworths/Gentles/Cowpers etc. Could the BSFA not inform the examining boards of what does exist?

MICHAEL FEARN
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«It's this sort of rôle which I feel we should be taking on; maybe we could exert a positive influence. I got fed up with the same thing in my teaching days in the late 70s: either old "classics" or (for class readers) very poor modern juveniles, with trite ideas and Victorian attitudes on sexual, racial and class consciousness. Nothing, it seems, ever changes in the world of education, unless it's for the worse -- and it's the negative Victorian attitudes which seem to be gaining strength under the iron reign of Mad Meg. Garner's Owl Service *stands out as a glorious exception in the GCSE list. -- Ed.»*

I'M A TRIFLE DISTURBED TO SEE *TO THE STARS* LISTED AS A viable market on p8 (*V133*)! Terry Carr commissioned a space opera from me over a year ago, asking for up to 25,000 words. So I brought it in at 24,500, as long as a third of a novel, and he said he loved it. But I'm still waiting to be paid...

JOHN BRUNNER

"CHARLTON IS A TINY OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE" SAYS THE evocative opening paragraph of Paul Kincaid's piece on Geoffrey Household (*V133*). Oh no it isn't. It's a tiny Northamptonshire village. It might have an Oxon postal address and it might be close to the Oxon border but it is firmly inside the ancient and honourable boundaries of my native shire. And whilst I'm on the nit-picking trail, "It's so small it doesn't even have its own station" isn't much of a definition in Northants., where there is only one other village which *does* have its own station...

To avoid confusion, I ought to add that there *is* a Charlton in Oxfordshire, but it's not the one Paul was talking about because it's not near King's Sutton (Northants.) as Paul's was.

MARK VALENTINE
35 Grafton Way
New Duston
Northampton NN5 6NG

«Thanks for the factual corrections, Mark... but did you enjoy it? -- Ed.»

I'M FORWARDING THE ENCLOSED LETTER TO YOU BECAUSE I thought you might be pleased to know that running the article on Orbiter in *V133* has had a fairly immediate result. Over the last ten days I've had three requests to join a new group, and this "feedback" letter -- this is about equal to response over the previous six months.

It is very encouraging to know that Orbiter obviously is valued by some BSFA members, and that running an article in *Vector* has an effect!

SUE THOMASON
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Dolgellau
Gwynedd LL40 1LT

Dear Sue,

I am a member of Terry Broome's Orbiter group, and have been since January. I am writing this letter because I thought you might appreciate some feedback.

The first thing I received was your very welcoming letter, which told me to write to Terry Broome, group organiser. As I was joining an existing group, Terry related a little of its history -- strange tales of disappearing folders and vanishing people. We were only four in number, which prompted Nick Mahoney to find a fifth member. Unfortunately, Dave Hughes had already asked a friend to be the fifth member -- and that was when you sent us PT Ross, the *official* fifth member...

I suppose the moral is "Keep in contact"; all of our problems have stemmed from lack of communication, and most are made worse by it. It does mean that we have to rely rather heavily on the Post Office, however, as we live miles apart (one member in the Navy, serving in Hong Kong!). Phone calls are a last resort, for reasons of cost.

I actually *enjoy* writing crits -- more than writing stories, sometimes -- because I feel I may be achieving something through others. My biggest problem is that, being extroverted, I occasionally write criticism which could be interpreted as destructive (in bio-jargon, "I have a big mouth"). I'm no great writer, but receiving a good crit is probably the greatest pleasure my writing will ever bring.

SIMON NICHOLSON
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«I agree with Sue; it's gratifying to see a response like this. Any enquiries about Orbiter, Sue will be happy to hear from you. -- Ed.»

FIRST I WISH TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION TO those few members of the BSFA who do such a great job with *Vector*, *Paperback Inferno* and *Matrix*. Admittedly these publications are by no means perfect -- when I received my first mailing some six months ago I had expected something a little more polished -- but where it counts (the reviews, articles and latest information on publications and

L E T T E R S

conventions) the quality is of a very high standard.

Having said that ("Build 'em up, then knock 'em down") I am writing with a few suggestions which I hope may prove worthwhile.

To start with the reviews, I feel that a little more emphasis could be placed on the "scientific" content of the more "hard" SF books. The authors of these books very often have received scientific training and they put a lot of thought into their fictional technology. Reviews of such works could be greatly improved if the originality, feasibility, uses and implications of the ideas concerned were discussed more fully. Some ideas, I know, are too incredible to even consider the technology involved (as in time travel). But less far-fetched inventions certainly aren't.

An extension of this would be a look back at the "future science" outlined in old SF novels -- an article on the scientific and/or social relevance of such works today to see if any of the speculations have become fact or nonsense or remain as fiction.

Still in an historic vein, it would be nice to see some articles on the development of science fiction and its pioneering authors. And how about an article or two on some of the major themes often used in SF, such as time travel or first contact with aliens, and how well the ideas have been developed by authors. I know it's easy enough for me to say these things, but I can't write said articles since I know very little about the topics involved.

DAVID J. GARDNER
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«Some useful ideas for articles there, David. If anyone would like to write one or more of these, please drop me a line. -- Ed.»

THANKS FOR THE LAST TWO EDITIONS OF *VECTOR* WHICH HAVE maintained the high standards set by previous issues.

I was interested by the points made by Andy Sawyer in his letter. Andy says that "if the book is worth it, then knowing the 'plot' doesn't matter." I wonder. I think the plot (if there is one -- some novels are a little thin in this department, I admit) is an important aspect of any book. Although a "retelling" of the plot may not deter me from reading the book, it certainly detracts from my overall enjoyment. I remember reading a revue of *2010* a couple of years ago in *Vector*, I think, which revealed the climax of the novel. Now, *2010* may not make my list of great SF novels but, as a result of this rather heavy-handed review, I was not as dazzled by Arthur C Clarke's imagination as I should have been. By not reading David Pringle's book I am trying to avoid similar incidents.

This raises the question of when it is reasonable for a critic to discuss the whole plot. After reflecting on Pringle's intentions I think he is probably justified in doing this in his book. At least in the case of older SF readers. After all, most of the novels have been around for several years and older readers will have read a sizeable proportion of them. Will it appeal to newer SF readers? I think not. They will be pleased at obtaining a valuable reading list but not too happy about knowing the climax of so many good books.

STEPHEN R. EALEY
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RE YOUR EDITORIAL IN *VECTOR 133*: I THINK THE BEST SCIENCE-based SF novel I have read must be *Fade Out* by Patrick Tilley, a well-researched book in science facts and geographic locations.

The problem about the best authors: arts- or science-trained will be always with us. The scientist sees the world in a more factual way, whereas a story to be totally appealing has to relate to human experience, which is why a person trained in social education (i.e. Arts) is maybe a better writer.

"How did the world deteriorate to 1984?" is an unanswered question in LJ Hurt's article "We are the Dead". A possible clue: about three weeks ago BBC Radio 4 broadcast a Saturday night play (I've forgotten the title or author) set in Britain about ten years into the future. Crime has practically vanished, no football violence, there is a strong sense of Law & Order around. But those who try to find out why the changes, "disappear" into the clutches of a private army and are invariably found dead. There is a new recruit to this army, his name is only mentioned twice, he takes no action in the story, but he is told he will do well in the army; his name is... O'Brien.

On the question of football hooligans, Dick Morland's *Albion! Albion!* depicts England as a society ruled by gangs of football thugs (à la Jubilee type of society); it sometimes seems slightly true, judging by my experiences on BR last weekend!

JOHN C. FAIRWEATHER
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«LJ Hurst's article has prompted a lot of response, both pro and anti -- with some excellent points raised on all sides. -- Ed.»

I WAS VERY PLEASED TO READ LJ HURST'S ARTICLE, "WE ARE THE dead" in *V133*. An account of the work of John Wyndham, by someone who appreciates its true worth, was long overdue. I could not help thinking, however, that his arguments, against the derogatory criticisms of Brian Aldiss, John Clute and Christopher Priest, could have been further substantiated by using examples from some of Wyndham's other works, in addition to *The Day of the Triffids*. Nevertheless, the quoted criticisms were tackled well and comprehensively refuted.

Considering, however, that the Aldiss quote specifically referred, not only to *Triffids*, but also to *The Kraken Wakes*, I feel that examples from the latter should also have been used in this article.

The Priest and Clute quotations, however, referred to Wyndham's work more generally and examples from some of his other works could have been used, to good effect, in disproving these.

For example, some of Wyndham's more inventive and imaginative ideas and concepts (from works such as *The Chrysalids*, *Web*, or some of his short stories), as well as "controversial" social themes that run through some of his work (for instance, the overt feminist message of *Trouble with Lichen*), could have been used.

Also, in reply to Priest's criticism, it could have been pointed out that, in *Triffids*, Bill Mason was certainly not portrayed as being part of the "bourgeoisie", and, in the earlier part of the novel, Josella Playton's upper class pretentiousness was portrayed very negatively and seemed very pathetic under the circumstances of the story.

In Wyndham's other works many of his major characters did have upper or middle class backgrounds, most obviously in *Kraken*, *Web*, and *Trouble with Lichen*. This was mainly due to the fact that most of these characters were scientists of one type or another. How many scientists during the 1950s had a working class background?

All of this having been said, the article certainly achieved its aims, not the least of which was, as Hurst put it, to show that "*The Day of the Triffids* is much more complex and richer in texture than the critics have admitted." Anyone who has read and understood the works of John Wyndham at anything more than a very superficial level must realise that this is true for most, if not all, of his post-war novels and short stories.

In my opinion, Wyndham at his best (especially with *The Chrysalids*) ranks alongside the likes of JG Ballard and Brian Aldiss, as one of the most important British writers of imaginative fiction in the past 40 years, and I hope that more articles on his work are published in *Vector* in the future.

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more!

L E T T E R S

"WE ARE THE DEAD" (*V133*): I FIND I DISAGREE WITH THE BASIC premise of the article and thus little or no common ground for the rest of the arguments. *Day of the Triffids* is basically an optimistic book -- the hero/heroines find refuge on the Isle of Wight and there is hope that the triffids can be beaten back; they are not in "an eternity of irrecoverable pain". *1984* on the other hand is a political warning of a totalitarian state where there is no hope because the populace would not know what to hope for. Whilst we may consider *1984* to depict a hell it is clear the inhabitants do not and even Winston Smith accepts.

I think too much is read into *Triffids*, which is not to belittle it as I think it is an excellent book and classic disaster novel. Similarly LJ Hurst treats *1984* as SF when Orwell was writing a book about politics (it is a matter of emphasis).

The death of Jorge Luis Borges is a major loss for literature, and humanity. Paul Kincaid's obituary is fitting but I would like to mention that Borges also took political stands unpopular with his government to the extent someone less famous probably would not have gotten away with it. He also remained a staunch Anglophile during the Falklands affair which did not make him popular with the junta. I do not want to make him out as some left wing revolutionary, far from it, but he was a man of principle. (Being introduced to the stories of Borges is another thing I have to thank Dave Wingrove for.)

I see Ken Lake has spread his views from *Matrix* to *Vector*; they are more appropriate in *Matrix*. Your response is good. Lake fails to think things through logically. Perhaps £6 of the £7 membership fee goes on magazines, postage, stationery etc. and would still do so if we had 4000 rather than 1000 members. With 4000 members professional collation and stapling would be needed (otherwise it would take four weekends rather than one to produce a mailing, or more helpers and more collation machines); this would probably mean £7 wasn't enough. Going from 1000 to 4000 copies isn't a sufficient increase to produce real economies of scale in the cost of the journals. Thus at best we get an extra £3000 and at worst we have to put the membership fee up to break even. I would like to know where we advertise to get 3000 new members, which implies 4000-5000 enquiries, and where the money comes from. A mass-circulation magazine like the old *SF Monthly* does not exist in the UK anymore. Ads in the US magazines bring in few members (ads have been run in *F&SF* for little return). Ads in books do not produce this sort of response (4000+) and are expensive (and thus not cost-effective) unless some deal can be negotiated.

Ads in general interest magazines have failed to produce results. Ads on TV associated with an appropriate programme could be good but are very, very expensive. A free plug is best (The mention of the Prisoner Appreciation Society after one episode of *The Prisoner* produced a large response for them) but free plugs are very difficult to get. (I know how hard people tried when I was Chairman.)

I know Ken Lake will say these are problems we should be able to overcome and I agree, but it would take more organisation and discipline than we've had and less fun for the volunteers who run this organisation. Further I'm not convinced such an increase would provide any benefit, the economy of scale still isn't there with 4000 members nor does it seem large enough to attract more adverts (if anyone has facts to show I'm wrong I'd be interested to know the truth).

I think it's time for Ken Lake to put up or shut up, tell the committee how to get this advertising campaign which will produce the increase in numbers, cost it, and then tell us how to get the money.

TOM A. JONES
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IN CONTRAST TO PATRICK MOORE (*V133* EDITORIAL) JAMES BLISH concluded that "the most important scientific content in modern science fiction were the impossibilities" since these suggest (or can suggest) new paradigms in science.

I've enjoyed Ian Watson's novels because they seem to do this, and explore perhaps less well-known branches of science. I also think that some writers given the label "hard science writer" (such as David Brin) don't really deserve it; Brin may be a physicist, but his novels use science to create colourful backdrops rather than being about science in any important way. I think in your editorial you also missed the real problem in writing good "hard science" SF -- the conflict between the novel of character and the scientific problem. A good book of hard SF should focus on both, and I think the difficulty of writing a novel that does not let either become dominant has not been stressed.

I am appalled by LJ Hurst's description of *Earth Abides* as "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*." Isherwood Williams (the main character in *Earth Abides*) is often driven to despair and lives in fear, until he realises that "Nothing more than my own death can happen. That has come to most already. Why should I be afraid of that?" Is that a cosy thought, or a realistic one? In the middle third of the novel, much of Williams' hope for the rebirth of his civilisation rests on one boy, Joey, who shows an interest and an intelligence that the other offspring lack. This son dies in the plague. Is that cosy? At the end of the novel, as he is near dying, Williams is on the crumbling Golden Gate Bridge, and feels a personal defeat in the way nature has destroyed or is destroying all the artifacts of mankind. He remembers *Ecclesiastes*: "Men come and go, but earth abides." Even here the hint is given that Williams realises that not even the earth will last forever, but it is the only thought he can turn to for comfort. *Earth Abides* is a visionary novel rather than a cosy one, and certainly deserving of Brian Aldiss's praise as "the best of the disaster novel subgenre." I've not read *The Day of the Triffids* (although I've enjoyed Wyndham's other books), but I'm afraid I now find LJ Hurst's comments on it suspect, since he is so wrong about a novel I do know.

Perhaps Chris Bailey is right that all reviewing should be said to be subjective; but I would then have to insist that some people's opinions are better than others. Some reviewers present better arguments. Some poor reviewers present no arguments for their opinions at all, but just a plot summary. It really is more useful to know *why* a reviewer arrives at his conclusion ("this book is good") than not, and more enjoyable to read, too. And I don't think criticism has to appear in enduring hardcover -- some of what appears in *Vector* is criticism. Critics are articulate readers.

On the review section: short reviews of well-known classics seem pointless. No-one has the space to say anything new about the books -- these are the kind where a feature article might be interesting, if you must cover them at all. I would rather see the space devoted to books by new authors, or else longer reviews. For instance, KV Bailey seems almost too brief in his review of Turner's *In the Heart or In the Head* -- this is a hard to obtain and expensive book, yet it was nominated for a Hugo Award. No-one else in the UK or the USA has published a review of it. Surely it deserves more space?

If you could list the US subscription price ($14) in your colophon, I'd appreciate it. This has been the standard US/Canadian rate for a long time, and often *Vector* is reviewed or mentioned by itself in *Locus* or elsewhere -- but without a price in dollars. New readers, baffled by exchange rates, etc., never bother to go to the trouble to subscribe, never get to read *Vector*, and thus never know the pleasure of writing you a loc! (Surely a sublime delight.)

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«Cy also mentions that the Spaced Out Library (40 St George Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2E4, Canada) needs a copy of Vector *117 to complete its collection. I'll send a copy direct to them as Cy suggests, for trade. There must be very few complete collections of* Vector *around; glad to know one of them is in Canada. Thanks for the point about quoting a $ price; we'll see to it immediately!»*

The Secret Masters of SCIENCE FICTION

Tom Jones

WHO SHAPES SF, WHO SETS THE TRENDS? WHO DECIDES WE'RE going to love piles of original anthologies, or future-tech thriller blockbusters, or fantasy trilogies, or cyberpunk?

First let me tell you who it isn't. It isn't you and me, members of the BSFA and thus discerning readers of SF. There's not enough of us to matter. It's not the critics and reviewers, they (and I suppose that includes me), are followers on rather than leaders (and who gives a damn what they think anyway). Now the mass of readers do have influence but usually as an indicator when a trend has run its course (pity the poor publisher with half a dozen fantasy trilogies to push out when the readers decide they've had enough), but I don't believe they actually set trends.

Hang on, it's obvious isn't it, it has to be the writers, after all these are the people who put the words on paper, they shape the words for us. Sure, but they no more set the trends than do the readers, although some of them are very quick to jump on the bandwagon. Think, we see a very small percentage of the stories writers produce, there's a filter in the way (thank goodness).

The answer is obvious, editors shape the field. Why do they keep this secret? If I was a cynic then I'd say it was much better to let the writer take the stick from the critics for producing the 43rd book in the Dumbquest series.

I think my statement would be accepted by most of you for the SF magazines. Let me give two examples. John W. Campbell shaped "Astounding/Analog" and with that the SF shorter story (or at least our perception of it). He also shaped the ideas and to some extent the style of many SF writers. I'm not suggesting this shape was static; there were certainly periods, for instance when JWC was interested in psi (ESP), by God we got a lot of stories about it.

From some of the tales which are told you get the impression that many of the stories should have been bylined "John W. Campbell and A. N. Other". It doesn't matter that there were other magazines producing other styles of SF or even that the majority of SF may not have reflected "Astounding", the perspective at the time and from this historical viewpoint is that the shape of "Astounding" was the shape of SF.

Moving to the UK our most notable/notorious magazine editor was Michael Moorcock (apologies to John Carnell whose three titles - 'SF Adventures", "Science Fantasy" and "New Worlds" were a mainstay for many of us and a haven for British writers, but they didn't have the sort of influence I'm talking about). Moorcock and friends took the troubled "New Worlds" and metamorphosed it (whether they produced a butterfly or a nasty, creepy, crawly thing is a matter of personal opinion). "New Worlds" was the New Wave, it changed British SF to perhaps the most unlikely shape ever, I would even suggest it was the seed for the American New Wave which should not be confused with the British one; whilst superficially similar they're different animals.

Whilst other magazine editors may not have been as influential within the field as a whole they certainly shape their own magazines. I don't think any but the most perverse would argue with that. This doesn't mean that other people don't have a say, such as the publisher or the editor's spouse.

If you accept that premise for the magazines it's a short step to accepting it for novels. My knowledge of the inner workings of a publishing company is slim but I believe the first filter is a professional reader who, as the name suggests, reads the manuscripts and produces a report. Once over that hurdle we have the editor. The editor decides what will be published, within guidelines set by the owners. But the power to shape lies with the editors.

Now, let's not kid ourselves, publishing is a business, books are merchandise, but they're luxury items, not essentials such as cornflakes and deodorants. Publishers have to sell books otherwise they go out of business and then writers would end up on the dole lost in the unemployment statistics. So that means most of what an editor buys has to sell and that itself means one of three things; a known author with a following, something which fits within the trend or trends prevalent at the time, or something which might be able to start a new trend (I've ignored the completely unique, never-to-be-done-in-this-way-again masterpiece as being so rare that it isn't statistically significant).

So if we examine what is currently popular, we shouldn't be surprised if an editor has an orgasm when Niven and Pournelle produce their next "big job" or Jack L. Chalker delivers his 14 volume opus combining all the basic ingredients of SF and fantasy (just like Tolkien used to write, as it will no doubt say on the cover), and if Asimov/Clarke/Heinlein produce their massive collaborative work, the universe will really move.

These editors are the masters of SF. Why secret? Well, do you know the name of the editors at Gollancz, or Granada, or Ace, or .....? I don't.

I think we should be told. //.....

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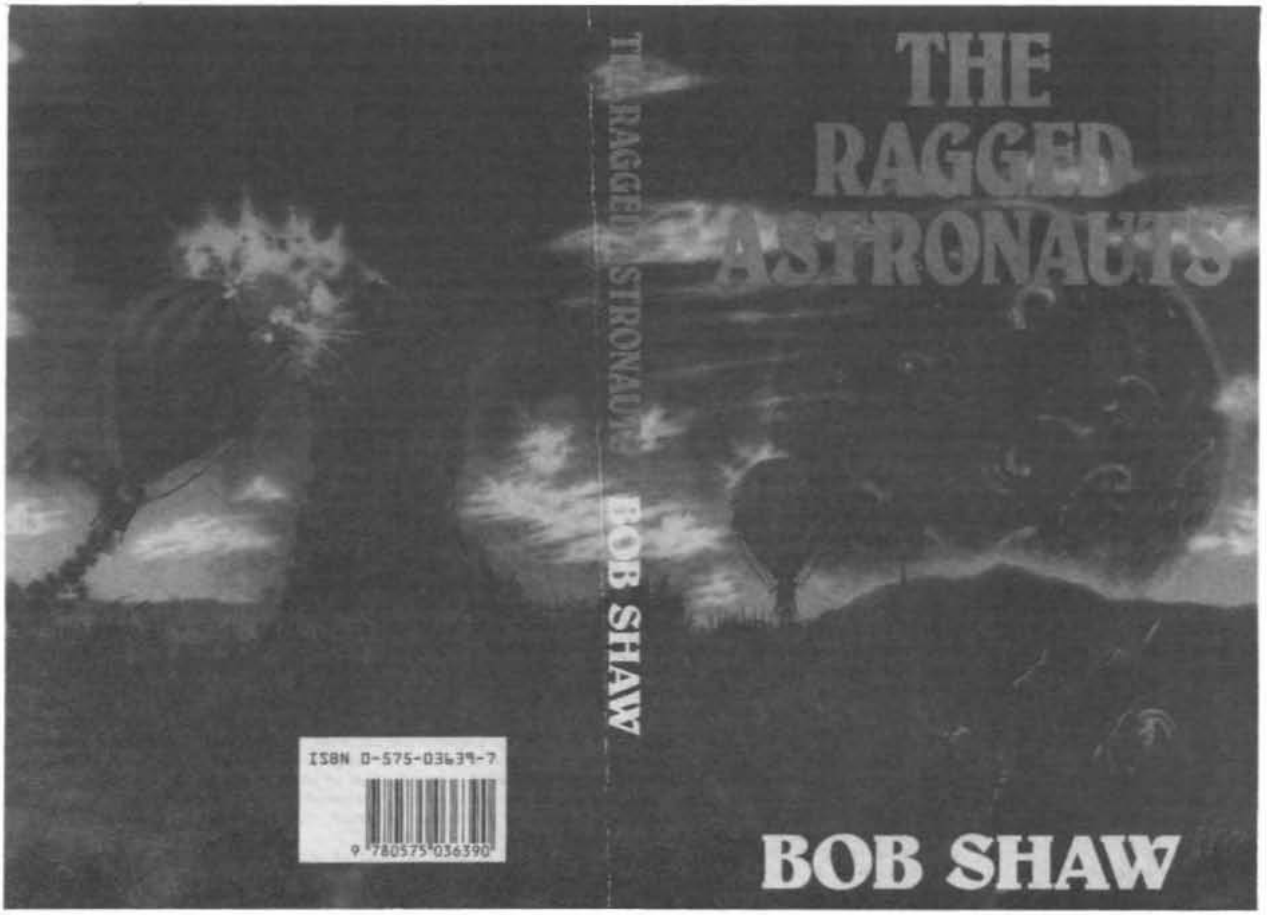
ALBION WRIT



THE EXTRA DIMENS

Some notes on the genesis of a science fantasy novel

LIKE QUITE A FEW OTHER WRITERS, I TEND NOT TO READ very much. (When I drift down out of the office in the late afternoon, having spent the day putting words on paper, I don't really feel like staring at pieces of paper on which people have been putting words. As a conscientious would-be intellectual I openly despise television, but secretly I think it's great, and spend far too much time watching it. That's about all I'm fit for in the evenings, because writing doesn't just give me a headache — I get a sore *brain*.

Nevertheless, I continue to feel guilty about not reading as much as I should — because practically every book I read yields up something which is valuable in my own work. By reading ten times as much, the reasoning goes, one might become ten times as good an author.

All this soul searching has come about because I was asked about the genesis of *The Ragged Astronauts*, and on thinking about it realised that a non-SF novel — discovered by chance some twenty years ago — had influenced both my earliest SF novel and the most recent. The book was *The Hunters* by James Salter. He was a jet fighter pilot during the Korean conflict, and he was acutely aware that his was in a way, the first "science fiction" war in history. He wrote about it in a terse, economical style which made me sick with envy, and the story he told had a poignancy I feel to this day. (The Mitchum film version bore hardly any resemblance to the book and was totally unworthy of Salter's vision.)

My first novel was *Night Walk*, published in 1967, and on sitting down to write it I found myself petrified with

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fear. I had published quite a few short stories and was beginning to feel quite at home with the form -- but how did one pen the opening paragraphs of a novel? A *novel*, for God's sake! I dithered around for days, scrapping opening after opening, overawed by the grandeur of the undertaking and shocked by my own presumption in tackling it.

Finally -- in desperation -- I decided to cheat. I'm giving away trade secrets here, but one essential in any art or craft is learning the most effective ways of being dishonest. I decided to take the opening of *The Hunters,* the book I admired so much, and use it as the opening of *Night Walk*. A comparison of the actual wording will show that I am not kidding.

The Hunters: A winter night, black and frozen, was moving over Japan, over the choppy waters to the east, over the rugged floating islands, all the cities and towns, the small houses, the bitter streets.

Cleve stood at the window, looking out. Dusk had arrived, and he felt a numb lethargy. Full animation had not yet returned to him. It seemed that everybody had gone somewhere while he had been asleep. The room was empty.

Night Walk: A winter night, sharp and frozen, had moved in over new Wittenburg, pressing down hard on the bitter streets, laying uneven swaths of frost on the concrete desert of the space terminal.

Tallon leaned against the window of his room, looking out..... He had dozed on top of rumpled bedclothes for several hours, and during that time the world seemed to have died. The hotel felt empty.

That piece of blatant thievery did the trick. It got me into the first novel and my own voice took over from there -- but further on in *The Hunters* was a sleeper, a group of a few sentences which knifed straight into my consciousness and which was to have a much greater influence on my work. One might even say that the passage led directly to the creation of *The Ragged Astronauts*. It described Cleve Saville, the book's hero, leading a patrol over Korea in a cold blue sky...

Suddenly Pell called out something at three o'clock. Cleve looked. He could not tell what it was at first. Far out, a strange, dreamy rain was falling, silver and wavering. It was a group of drop tanks, tumbling down from above, the fuel and vapour streaming out of them. Cleve counted them at a glance. There were a dozen or more of them, going down like thin cries fading in the silence. That many tanks meant MIGs. He searched the sky above but saw nothing.

All at once it hit me that Salter, pilot as author, perceived the situation in three dimensions.

The height factor has always been important in aerial combat, right since the first fluttery skirmishes over WWI France, but Salter wasn't talking about separations measured in hundreds of feet. He was talking in terms of *miles*. Riding on the back of a jet engine, an instrument provided him by a new technology, he had moved into a rarified blue environment in which the vertical dimension was more important than the others. He had become a Fairy Chessman. The hero of his novel *knew* there were two groups of planes going into action directly above him, but they were too far above him to be visible. He also knew, though I haven't quoted this bit, that there was action below him, but he couldn't see the planes involved -- they were too far away as well. For the moment he was lost, but not in any way previously understood by mankind. He was *vertically* lost.

I don't know if I'm getting my feelings of wonder across to you. Science fiction is like that, bless it. The range of ideas is so wide that not all of them will connect with everybody. For example, the notion of cloning human beings stirs some authors, whereas my reaction is: All right, you have a bunch of people all the same -- so what?

The concept of personal freedom of movement in three dimensions has always entranced me, always produced that delicate and delicious tremor within the thorax which is endemic among science fiction fans. I got it strongly reading Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse*. The cobwebs to the moon had *verticality*. (The emphasis on the word is to show that I'm not giving it its accepted meaning in this article.)

For many years I had a yearning to write a story featuring verticality. My 1979 novel *Vertigo*, was a step in that direction, but in it the vertical dimensions were too limited to be fully satisfactory.

They could be expressed in metres, and my compulsion was to deal in thousands of miles. There was a period when I considered giving Orbitsville a huge interior atmosphere and setting a story there, but that would have produced an uneasy blending of disparate themes.

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I was beginning to wonder if it would ever be possible to put a handle on the idea, then one day while idly glancing through an atlas of the solar system I noted the peculiar relationship between Pluto and its single moon, Charon. The two are quite similar in size, and Charon revolves around Pluto at a surface-to-surface distance of only 15,000 kilometres -- *less than the distance British fans travelled when going to the worldcon in Melbourne!* Furthermore, Charon hangs above the same spot on Pluto -- an awe-inspiring spectacle for the notional inhabitants of either body.

That was it!

I had seen those facts on paper a few times previously, but not until this occasion did I experience that turmoil at the centre of the being which is often referred to as inspiration. That's the way it works. When you're in the market for an idea, the conscious mind seems to put a requisition slip in to the subconscious, a search begins and -- sooner or later -- *bingo!*

In that single moment I saw the universe of *The Ragged Astronauts* in its entirety, though without details as yet -- the sister worlds of Land and Overland, each hanging at a fixed point in the other's sky, looming, beckoning, occupying a large portion of the heavens, occulting the sun every day, producing a diurnal cycle of foreday, littlenight, aftday, forenight, deepnight, aftnight....

And that was where the real work of planning the book began.

Built into the original inspiration was the idea of a journey from Land to Overland, but it had to be an *epic* journey. In other words, it had to be accomplished by people whose science was not quite up to it. That premise fixed the inhabitants of Land at a level of technology roughly equal to 16th Century Europe. And brought with it the first major problem.

Even when assisted by low gravity, the voyagers would be unequal to the task of crossing an interplanetary vacuum, so -- not without qualms -- I took the steps of enveloping both worlds in a common atmosphere. Arthur C Clarke had some complimentary things to say about *Orbitsville*, but he also gave me a few words of gentle reproof about the validity of the science. I tried to placate him in the sequel by naming the originator of my FTL drive Arthur Arthur, but I doubt if that was enough. I could visualise him and everybody else with astronomical knowledge shaking their heads at the thought of small worlds having atmospheres thousands of miles deep.

But when you're a professional SF writer, you don't abandon a cherished idea without a fight -- so I moved my sister planets into a different universe where some of the laws of physics differ from ours. When writing *The Ragged Astronauts* I didn't go into detail about the differences -- it isn't that kind of novel but suffice it to say that the differences are exactly those required to make possible all the things I wanted to be possible in the story. When you create a fictional universe you become a microcosmic god -- and half the fun of it is in taking advantage of the system by laying down your own laws and issuing your own set of commandments. In the case of *The Ragged Astronauts*, no matter what technical or scientific objections readers may come up with, they will be overcome by the rules of my alternate physics.

So far, so good. I had given myself an environment with thousands of miles of vertical air space to work with or within. I had the prospect of being able to write chapter after chapter of pure verticality -- but verticality is meaningless without horizontality, which in this context means a world and its people and their history. This brings us to what I believe to one of the main basic difference between science fiction and mainstream fiction.

The classic seal-of-approval technique for creating a mainstream story is to take a handful of characters, throw them together, let them interact and report what happens. If you try this technique with a science fiction story, *nothing* will happen. That is to say, nothing of much interest to the science fiction buff. Like it or not, when writing SF you have to start with an idea/situation/environment in a way that explores all the attractive intellectual avenues.

That may sound like heresy to members of the literary establishment, but in real life environment and circumstances play major rôles in the formation of character and personality. Who is to say that the science fiction writer's technique is not the best, the most fruitful, the most relevant to life itself?

I can aver (choosing that verb because it recently occurred to me that I hadn't read about anybody averring anything for decades) that on setting out to devise a cast of characters appropriate to the Land-Overland environment I found the task strangely compelling. It was far from easy, but those characters came alive inside my head, and in the six months I lived with them I had many nightmares, many sweet dreams and much intense satisfaction. It wouldn't be fair to anybody, least of all to me, to disclose too much about that side of the story before the book has fully reached its market, but I can talk about some of the practical difficulties that had to be faced.

One of them concerned internal time. I had decided that Land's equator would not be tilted with respect to the plane of its orbit so that daily eclipses could be featured. Fair enough, but when it came to the actual writing I suddenly realised how useful longish periods of time -- such as months and seasons -- are to an author. It was fiendishly difficult, while trying to live in a world without months or seasons, to stop using phrases like, "In the spring of the following year..." It is very convenient and natural to refer to an event as being "three months away," but it looks odd and stilted if one changes that to "ninety days away." For all I know, in spite of my best efforts, one or two incongruities may have slipped through.

Another difficulty sprang from the simple fact that it was necessary for the purposes of the plot that Land should have no metals. (No metal-type metals, that is -- I first studied chemistry 40 years ago and *still* can't get used to the idea that calcium is a metal.) Time after time I would notice that I had used a phrase like "silver tongued" or "golden haired" -- though not as banal as those -- and would have to find a substitute. That was a self-imposed discipline. It probably would not have mattered to anyone else, but I felt that having created a world without metals it would be unethical of me to employ metallic adjectives while describing it. The problem had two sides. On Land a wood known as brakka is used in place of iron, but to describe a person as having "a will of brakka" would have been clumsy and would have sabotaged the suspension of disbelief.

Then there was the question of names for animals, foods, units of measurement, etc., which do not exist on Earth. This is a matter of continuing concern to SF writers. Way back in the 1940s there was a story in *Astounding* in which an alien being introduced itself to a human as "iGlann". I was deeply impressed. Oh boy, I thought, that's great. That's really *alien*. Only later did I begin to fret over technical queries like: How did the human listener *know* the alien's pronunciation of its name called for a lower case initial letter? How was it that an alien alphabet, with no relationship to our own, could do such funny things to printed English?

In *The Ragged Astronauts* I decided to give exotic names only to things for which there are no equivalents on Earth, and to explain them immediately in context. For everything else I used familiar terms. My contention is that if every word uttered is in an alien language, and the author is translating to avoid the kind of difficulty which led to my giving up on *Shogun*, he is being a bit arbitrary, not to say niggardly, if he doesn't translate every possible word. It's to do with the suspension of disbelief business again. The illusion tends to tremble and dissolve when you read, "I have ridden ten gorkles to meet you," and then have to look at a footnote or glossary which tells you the gorkle is a unit of distance equivalent to two miles. Why not simply put down "20 miles" in the first place and get on with the story?

Problems like that help to make science fiction so much fun to write -- which reminds me of something. I should be producing SF at this very minute. See you around!

THE LONGEST SHAW

Mike Moir looks at
The Ragged Astronauts
in the light of Bob Shaw's earlier work

A NEW BOB SHAW BOOK, NOVEL OR COLLECTION, IS ALWAYS AN event. His latest, however, has been heralded as a very special event. *The Ragged Astronauts* is Shaw's longest and most ambitious novel to date. So important do Gollancz consider it, they have wrapped his work, for the first time, in full colour. I expect there will be more disagreement over the cover than the book. The cover may not be that special, but the content definitely is.

Bob Shaw's books have been appearing for many years now. His début with *Night Walk* was one of the most impressive first novels of its time. His work quickly became recognisable for its high quality, particularly for me for three key features. First and foremost is his strong characterisation. His novels are full of real people in real situations; there is no cardboard in sight. Second, there is his amazing inventiveness. Surely everyone has heard of "slow glass"; if you haven't, read *Other Days, Other Eyes*. Finally, and least easy to explain, is his injection of his own marvellous sense of humour. Only one Shaw novel, *Who Goes Here?*, is meant totally as a humorous work, but all the rest have just the right level of humour in them to make them a joy to read.

Bob Shaw's finest books, until now, have been those with the fewest SF elements. They follow the old rule of "Make one smart technological change and then extrapolate" -- to show the effects on both the little man in the street and on society as a whole. The most powerful of these are: *Night Walk*, with glasses for the blind that let them share others' eyes; *Ground Zero Man* (revised to *The Peace Machine*) with a machine that reduces the critical mass of nuclear materials; *A Wreath of Stars* with its anti-neutrino world; and *Vertigo*, with its anti-gravity packs. It is no coincidence that although their key elements are the single change, they are most memorable for their central characters and the way they react to the change.

As the last three of these are all essentially Earth-based, very near future tales, I was perhaps a little apprehensive of *The Ragged Astronauts* with its totally alien theme. It follows the new trend for SF novels with specially designed worlds, often featuring astronomical oddities. These novels are becoming a major force in SF even if the "oddities" do seem to be running thin. There have been a number of successful binary star novels -- the *Helliconia* trilogy, *The Snow Queen*, etc., but this is the first time I have read a binary planet novel.

In simple terms there are twin planets, with overlapping atmospheres, in fixed circular orbits. This means no seasons and the planets fixed permanently in position in each other's skies. The novel, not surprisingly, concentrates on the attempt to travel from one planet to the other. The inhabited planet has essentially no metals, nor have its inhabitants discovered the use of petro-chemicals, so the emigrations are performed by balloon.

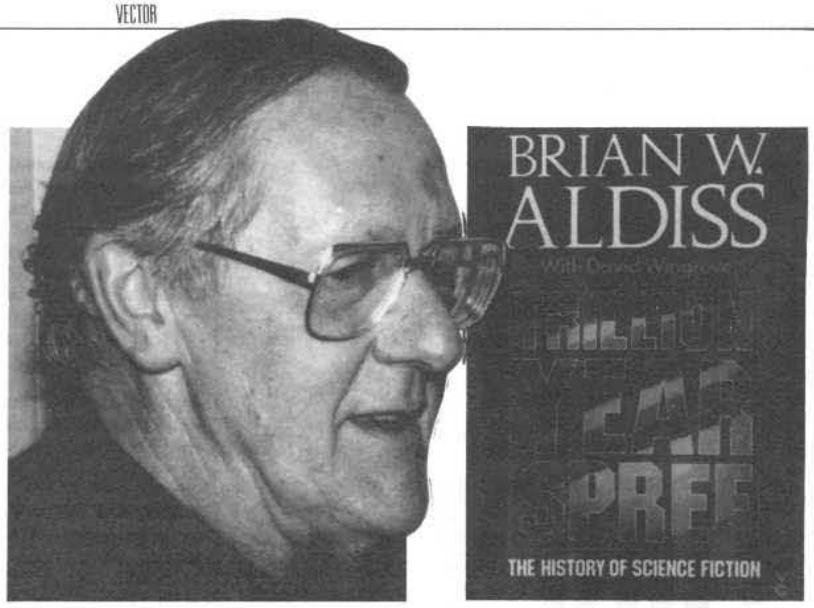
Only once before has Bob Shaw attempted a novel on such a grand SF scale, in the very successful *Orbitsville*. This time, I believe, he has achieved a much better book and it deserves to be considerably more successful.

The central character, Toller, is a member of the Philosopher's Guild who would much rather be a soldier. Initially he is a particularly dislikable person; later he becomes a hero. The character development of Toller is the major sub-plot, matching the developments in interplanetary travel. The whole book is filled with strong characters, and this is where Shaw shows his greatest skills, recognisable from his previous books. What makes this one very special is the way he marries this with the complex alien society and ecology. Shaw has set out with the initial axioms of binary planets and a metal-free guild society, and then has carefully bent a few mathematical and physical laws (the true implications of π being exactly 3 are potentially mind-boggling). He has built them into a carefully constructed and consistent ecosystem. Perhaps most important of all he has not flaunted the differences; where they are necessary to the plot they appear and somewhere they are explained. Unlike similar books there are no irrelevant chapters explaining miscellaneous hyper-exotic flora and fauna. There are just enough exotics to allow a comparatively high-tech society, given no petro-chemicals or metals.

Bob Shaw has always been renowned for quite short novels, completely free from padding. The increased length of this one has not been achieved by padding; the book is very tight and lean, leaving you hungry for more. And there will be more; *The Ragged Astronauts* is the first novel in a trilogy. Don't be put off by that: it stands perfectly well on its own, with just a hint of what might come later; you are not left hanging at the end.

If this book is well-publicised it could be a bestseller, bringing Shaw many new and returned fans. In an ordinary year I would now write: "If Bob Shaw and Gollancz were American then this would be a strong contender for a Hugo, which he has long awaited and deserved." But this year is different. The 1986 Hugo Award winners will be decided at the 1987 Worldcon in Britain. For once, it's up to us. Maybe *The Ragged Astronauts* will win Shaw his Hugo.

BOOK EXTRACT



TRILLION YEAR SPREE

IN 1973 BRIAN ALDISS PUBLISHED BILLION YEAR SPREE: THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE Fiction. Now, assisted by David Wingrove, he has revised and greatly expanded the original, bringing it bang up to date and making it an even more significant work.

We are delighted that the authors and publisher have given us permisssion to print extracts from Trillion Year Spree, which was published by *Victor Gollancz Ltd* on October 20th. (*512pp. £9.95 paperback, £15.00 hardback*).

These extracts are taken from the introduction and the very end, and give, we hope, an indication of both the flavour and the scope of the book. *[Ed]*

"*Trillion Year Spree* is a very much revised, altered, and enlarged version of the 1970s book. It includes and attempts to digest all that has been happening in the science fiction field over the last two decades.

What has not altered in that time are my convictions. True, I have changed my opinions of this or that; how could it be otherwise? But my basic convictions have merely strengthened over the intervening years. I refer to certain ideas which, tentatively proposed before, roused anger, shock, vituperation, threats of violence, and occasional acceptance, in my readers.

Of course I understand that bosoms can scarcely be expected to remain tranquil in companies where SF is supported, is idolized, is a way of life. Any deviation from an established order of ritual must be challenged. Equally, one must stand by one's beliefs.

Foremost among these beliefs is a certainty about the origins of SF. Of course, it is in a way a Stone Age truth to say that SF began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The more we know, the less certain we can be about origins; the date of the Renaissance becomes less clear decade by decade as research goes on.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind that no genre is pure, *Frankenstein* is more than a merely convenient place at which to begin the story. Behind it lie other traditions like broken skeletons, classical myth, a continent full of *Märchen* tales. But Mary Shelley's novel betokens an inescapably new perception of mankind's capabilities, as is argued in Chapter One. Moreover, *Frankenstein* is marvellously good and inexhaustible in its interest. Not a negligible point.

Were there women writers before Mary Shelley? Research into this subject is carried out in all the world's universities. One name at least emerges, that of the

lively Margaret Cavendish, impoverished Duchess of Newcastle, whose *The Description of a New World, called The Blazing World* was published in 1666. The absence of Margaret Cavendish and Mary Shelley from standard literary histories reminds us that science fiction is not the only thing against which learned men have harboured baseless prejudices.

Before I wrote, almost no one paid any attention to that old pre-Victorian novel of Mary Shelley's. Having seen travesties of the theme on film and television, they believed they knew what they did not. The situation has remarkably improved since then. (After writing the history, I wrote a novel, *Frankenstein Unbound*, designed to draw attention to its great original.)

Like all discoveries, this one was prompted by more than circumstantial evidence. It was born of a wish to refute certain nonsensical claims previously put forward, which did a mode of writing I much enjoyed no honour.

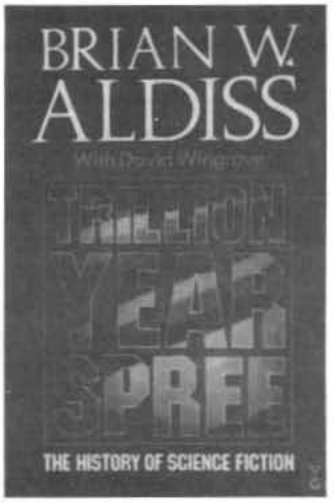
My belief in SF has not diminished over the intervening years, and remains strong at a time when true science fiction appears under threat, swamped by an avalanche of imitations and wish-fantasies in the United States and, in England, the virtual disappearance of young science fiction writers, thanks to the chill climate of discouragement which there prevails.

For all its tragic flaws, its absurd pretensions, its monstrous freights of nonsense, the platonic ideal of science fiction remains alive, as the literature most suited to our progressing and doom-threatened century, the literature most free to take aboard new perspectives, new manifestations of the *zeitgeist*.

Critics expected the Gothic to go away. It never has. Born pseudonymously from the mind of Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford, it proved to have all the adaptability of a living species. Critics expected SF to go away. It never has. It is the urban literature and will, we hope, exist as long as there are cities, in whatever form.

Both the thesis that *Frankenstein* marked a beginning and that SF was a Gothic offshoot were so unacceptable that *Billion Year Spree* scarcely received any reviews in those journals in which its appearance should have been instantly greeted; indeed, had it not been for the vigilant intervention of my old friend and ally, Harry Harrison, those reviews would have been even sparser.

It is hard to recognize now the confusion that existed then. Before my book appeared, there was no accepted idea of when SF began. Some critics claimed it all started in a semi-juvenile pulp magazine in the twenties, others that Homer wrote science fiction. Ludicrously enough, these were often the same critics. Yet to have no understanding of this matter is to have no understanding of the function and nature of SF. ▰ ▰ ▰



XVI. The Future Now

Whither, then, the trillion year spree? Whither that long journey on the wings of progress into darkness and ice?

One thing is certain, Science fiction is now an industry, not a genre. Nor will it ever return to what it was—a family affair with its hideout in a gaudy 25-cent pulp.

SF has grown huge and, in some respects, bloated. It has grown self-conscious as well as self-indulgent. But it has survived as a form, and diversified. Despite the vast amount of derivative work being done in the field, there remains a healthy proportion of interesting and sometimes exciting new work, as we have demonstrated.

Even so, there is no sign at all that science fiction can ever become more than a department of literature. Little sign of it growing into the natural form of expression for young writers, as some hoped in the sixties.

A stratification of the field into high-brow and low-brow, spoken of in *Billion Year Spree*, has, to a great extent, come about. It may be expected to grow into a schism by the end of the century—not so far away now that we cannot talk of it familiarly. ▰ ▰ ▰

Such a schism will be accompained by a process of self-labelling, acrimony and hectic internecine fighting. All camps will claim they represent *the real thing*, the genuine form of SF. Each will have its champions, its critics, its individual magazines. The day of the SF *salon* will arrive.[15] There will be bridge-builders, of course, but they will have a hard time of it. The academic critics must in consequence choose to be less cautious.

A new generation of giants will rise up—the Silverbergs and Wolfes of tomorrow—and earn ever more phenomenal advances. At the same time a new generation of feminists will bring an increasing complexity and maturity to their themes[16]: the most vociferous of a number of splinter groups we expect to see using SF as a mode of expression.

Human nature being what it is, we confidently expect that a few individualists will always stand against the popular tide. That the notion of science as quest rather than conquest may still animate a few Benfords. That iconoclastic Harrisons and Sheckleys will still maintain guerilla warfare on behalf of the readers. That Vonneguts and Lessings will continue to slip across frontiers. That there will be critics as well cheerleaders for the idea of progress—in the name of which forests go down for every rocket going up. That the mass market will occasionally—if by accident—turn up something not designed merely for mass taste. That storytelling will go on.

Of course, all of this depends on the continued economic stability of the West and its ability to walk the nuclear tightrope. The old SF stories have come true to an extent. The doomsday weapon is here, scattered about our globe in silos, rocket launchers and submarines. This is the Future Now. The few years before century's end will prove a long time in world history; we live, as they say, in interesting times.

In the coming years we expect to see continued growth and proliferation of mass media technology. Will books themselves remain unaffected by this radical shift in our entertainment habits? Of one thing you can be certain—there's an SF story about it somewhere in the magazines.

Finally, we predict a growing predilection in the non-literary artistic media for using SF metaphor as an art form; something that will, in time, feed back into the literary form. We see the beginnings of this in the pop video, with its abrupt, telescoped imagery. Art often revitalizes itself by refashioning the popular.

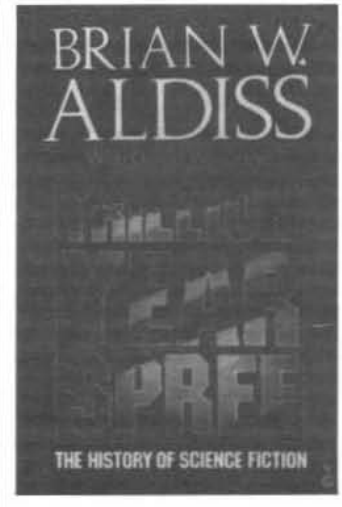
This volume has told an amazing story, of a virtually secret movement that has, by appealing to the imagination, become a vivid popular success. Such success makes modern-day SF a challenging place in which to work. A beginner writer's voice must contest against a thousand clamouring tongues—many of them equipped with loud-hailers. But writing is something always done against the odds.

We have also told another story. The story of how science fiction began largely outside the United States, and of how it is becoming mainly an American activity. Contributions from other countries—England in particular—have grown increasingly marginal as the nineteen-eighties progress. In emphasis or in fact, it concerns itself with the renaissance power-centred world which the United States inherits from Europe. From the time of *Frankenstein* onwards, SF's main preoccupation has been with power in one form or another. It is no coincidence that the widest span of its popularity comes at a period of rapid technological evolution, which is linked with the rise of the USA to solo super-power status. Themes of empire and conquest naturally predominate.

SF often exhibits a brazen whorish face to the world at large. It is more important than ever that it should continue its old role of evaluating the pluses and minuses of progress, and that hubris should continue to be clobbered by nemesis. For SF is in crisis.

Where it belongs.

This is our prayer for the future: "Oh Lord, make SF perfect—but not quite yet. . . ."



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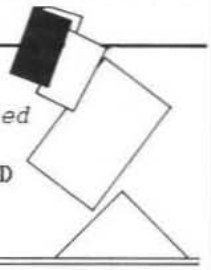

Reviews compiled and edited by **PAUL KINCAID**

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS - Edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh
[Robinson, 1986, 574pp, £4.95]
Reviewed by L.J.Hurst

IN HIS THREE PAGE INTRODUCTION, Asimov writes that the sf novella is something of a rarity due to the Darwinian struggle for space in the sf magazines, and consequently "editors chose only those novellas that were sure-fire, so that by and large only well-established and experienced authors dared write them". Unfortunately, this means a quarter of this book's stories are very well known - Campbell's 'Who Goes There?', Longyear's 'Enemy Mine', and Silverberg's Majipoor Chronicle 'The Desert of Stolen Dreams'. Another two or three repeat themes so familiar one seems to be reading something already read (David Drake's 'Time Safari', Gordon R. Dickson's 'The Mortal and the Monster', and Lester Del Rey's 'For I am a Jealous People'), and one more story is not really sf - Philip Jose Farmer's 'The Alley Man'. So that leaves six novellas to lift this volume above the average.

It is perhaps more indicative of something in the editors than the authors that not one of the stories is concerned with answers, and while several of them are based on problems, none describes clearly the nature of the problem at its heart. The heart is mush. Three stories demonstrate this: Asimov's 'Profession', Niven's 'Flash Crowd' and Pohl's 'In the Problem Pit'.

'Profession' describes a future of intense education and specialisation. The hero, after being treated as ESN, comes out of his ugly ducklinghood, realising that he can become clever outside of educational specialisation. However, he never comes to criticise the system that caused the pain he experienced and others will experience. Asimov's lack of intellectual pehetration leads him to treat his protagonist as a hero when he is little more than a maintainer of misery.

'Flash Crowd', about population pressures and social problems caused by a matter transporter mass transit system and its hero's solution (let all mass transit systems lead to police cells), and 'In the Problem Pit', where a brainstorming group try to escape and the story ends with a rescue across the bowl of the Arecibo radio telescope, are further examples of the lack of solutions. Pohl may have intended something in not producing the answers that his group come up with, but it is lost. Farmer's 'Alley Man' may also have been intended to have greater depth but it comes out as Tennessee Williams moved slightly west.

Phyllis Eisenstein's 'In the Western Tradition' is a good reworking of personal obsession with images of the past and the damage it does, and Donald Kingsbury's 'The Moon Goddess and the Son' hides its soap roots well. That is the variety of this collection. In its content it is average. In its pence/page ratio it is a lot better. A present for a friend on the edge, perhaps.

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT FANTASY NOVELS - Edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh
[Robinson, 1986, 612pp, £4.95]
Reviewed by Tom Jones

FIRST I'D LIKE TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE cover - a naked woman clasping a dagger before an altar with a huge, red, cratered planet as backdrop. Not only is this sexist, it conjures up as accurate an image of fantasy as spaceships with BEMs clutching scantily spacesuited maidens does for sf.

If I was Greenberg or Waugh I'd be annoyed that Asimov's name is the only one on the cover. But his name is now used to sell products, a science fictional 'By Royal Appointment').

I'm not sure if there's a strict definition of 'novel' or 'short novel' but these stories stretch from around 13,000 to about 30,000 words, certainly not novels and probably not short novels either. Perhaps the publisher thinks 'novelette' and 'novella' are too difficult for the reader to understand.

Enough moans, onto the stories. There are 13, from Rider Haggard's 'Black Heart and White Heart', to 'Tower of Ice' by Roger Zelazny and 'A Man and his God' by Janet E. Morris, certainly a wide span of time. The two classics are Fritz Leiber's 'Ill Met in Lankhmar', a Fafhrd and Gray Mouser story which won the Nebula in 1970 and Thomas Burnett Swann's 'Where is the Bird of Fire?'. If you haven't read them then you should, if you have you will remember them.

I used to be a keen reader of John Carnell's *Science Fantasy* magazine and always looked forward to Michael Moorcock's Elric stories. This troubled, possessed hero/anti-hero, certainly different from the traditional swordsman hero, appears here in 'The Lands Beyond Night'. Speaking of traditional swordsman heroes we have the granddaddy of them all, Conan, in Robert E. Howard's 'Red Nails'. I am not a fan of the barbarian swordsman story considering it the S&M of S&S but a lot of people obviously are and if you like Conan that's okay.

Suzy McKee Charnas's 'Unicorn Tapestry' is certainly the best modern vampire story I've read, assuming it is about a vampire and not just a psychosis. It's an excellent story, read it.

I'm not a fan of Avram Davidson but found much to enjoy in 'Sleep Well of Nights'. You could say it was too much like a set from a 1940's film and you kept waiting for Humphrey Bogart to appear and you could say there's not much story (a ghost and buried treasure). Perhaps you'd be right but feel that atmosphere.

As for the rest of the book, there's two stories from the Thieves' World series by Poul Anderson and Janet Morris. These stories seem popular but I find them just average.

This is certainly a varied book and big. I would guess it contains something for everyone (although you might already have read it) and these days £4.95 isn't a bad price for 612 pages. A good book to pack for your holidays, perhaps.

THE BRIDGE - Iain Banks
[Macmillan, 1986, 259pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid & Mike Dickinson

IAIN BANKS' TWO PREVIOUS NOVELS, *THE Wasp Factory* (1984) and *Walking On Glass* (1985) have, if nothing else, demonstrated the workings of a bizarre and prolific imagination. But, good as they are, neither can have prepared us for anything as rich and as vivid as *The Bridge*. It is an extravagantly inventive novel, delighting in wordplay and oblique literary allusion, and tossing by the way side ideas and images that would have provided many another author with a dozen novels.

A brief summary could only make the book sound trite and unoriginal. A car crash, the victim, forgetting even his own name, lies in a coma while his consciousness wanders through weird adventures on the Bridge. But then, the plot is by far the least important part of the book. Banks produces layer upon layer of involvement that takes us from the crash victim to his alter ego on a Bridge so vast that a complex society exists there without ever glimpsing land. The alter ego is himself an amnesiac washed up on the Bridge and known as Orr, a significant name since the whole novel is made up of choices and possibilities.

Orr's psychiatrist requires him to write down his dreams, and the book is dotted with these dreams within dreams, some real some invented by Orr. Interspersed in all this is a straightforward account of the victim's early life up to the point of the crash, an account which shows Banks must have a considerable future as a novelist even if he dispenses with the pyrotechnics.

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If I have suggested that this is a complex novel, then so it is. The unravelling of its intricate structure is one of its chief pleasures. But I cannot so far have indicated the sheer fun of the book. Anyone familiar with the earlier works would expect a very healthy helping of wild, black humour, and it is there in full. The moronic Scots barbarian with the impenetrable Glaswegian accent who crops up on several occasions is one of the most hilarious comic creations I've encountered for some time. And there's barely a page goes by without some pun or joke to enliven an already slick and vivid narrative.

I have been racking my brain to find some suitable comparison for this highly original novel. The only one I could come up with is *Lanark* by Alasdair Gray. If that seems like extravagant praise, well this is an extravagantly good book. [P.K.]

THE BRIDGE IS IAIN BANKS' THIRD NOVEL. *The Wasp Factory* was both scandalous and successful. Though it was a little obviously designed to shock, it certainly established his presence. *Walking on Glass* aroused no such storm and seemed rather diffuse in execution, despite excellence in parts. He might have settled now for a conventional, easily controlled novel, instead he has confirmed himself as the best British writer of his generation.

A geologist, turned civil engineer (both are significant) lies critically ill in a hospital bed. Meanwhile his mind is active elsewhere - chiefly on the Bridge. This is a giant structure, which seems initially endless, on which a whole society sustains itself in all ways. The narrator is a mysterious amnesiac who suddenly appeared there, and his explorations illuminate the strange but convincing details of this world. The only intrusions are the menacing dreams and visions, which gradually filter out to two - a man in a hospital bed, and a Scottish Conan with a highly intellectual familiar.

The whole thing is beautifully written, showing great variety of style. Banks moves deftly from the horror of the earlier dreams to the social comedy and, later, Kafkaesque alienation of the Bridge, to the farce of the Barbarian sections (which are extremely funny) and finally introduces a fictional autobiographical element which shows real strength of characterisation. The pattern fits superbly with the state of the patient, demonstrating that though his tactics are marvellous, his strategy is masterly.

Symbolism adds a depth and richness to the narrative, though the central symbol of the Bridge is integral to the history and character of the protagonist. Images abound that reflect the sexual destruction that the central character suffers and practices.

It is possible to detect some influence of Alasdair Gray in Banks' work, but Gray has never approached the control and focus of this work. There are also clear hints that this is *Alexander Lomax's Wake*, including a doctor named Joyce. However the real message of this book is that we have a new voice of great power and maturity who is moving into the speculative fiction area. This will also provide an interesting test of the major literary awards - nothing better has been or will be written this year, if they do not respond to it, dismiss them. [M.D.]

THE WITCH IN THE CAVE - Martin H. Brice
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 196pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

THIS FIRST NOVEL IS BASED ON THE legend of the Witch of Wookey Hole. Camden's *Britannia* referred to "Ochie Hole" and Brice's heroine is called Ochy. A human skull and multicoloured pebbles were found there, and the legend included a dog. These elements and more have been woven into the story.

The People of the Bear, formerly cave-dwellers, tend cattle and grow corn to trade with the Marsh People. Their witch, Vhi-vhang, is old with fading magic powers and her position is coveted by chief's daughter, Khirr-cuin. The tribe's partial destruction is engineered by Khirr-cuin using diabolic powers and Vhi-vhang is put to death. The old witch's daughter, Ochy, flees to the caves. The rest of the story concerns Ochy's transition from fearful girl to powerful woman protected by the powers of Air, Earth, Fire and Water. Subsequently she wreaks her revenge upon the usurper witch and herself becomes Witch of the People of the Bear. There are some loose ends and the author is working on a sequel.

Martin H. Brice has clearly done his research. The details of the life of the tribe and the ritual of witchcraft are plentiful, as are the descriptions of the caves. Ochy is no milk-and-water heroine but a full-blooded woman with destructive obsessions. Her relationship with her familiar, the wolf called Dhogh, can only be called overfamiliar! The gory sacrifices and battles were not to my taste - I preferred the early parts dealing with Ochy's transition to full witch. It did hold my interest though and I read it in one go. An unusual, well-researched fantasy. I shall visit Wookey Hole with new interest.

XORANDOR - Christine Brooke-Rose
[Carcanet, 1986, 211pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

THE GENRE CRITIC WHO HAS 'DONE IT ALL, must sometimes look beyond the ordinary bounds of the genre for that hit of surprise, especially when the genre makes about itself the tawdry claim to novelty and surprise. The surprises are not always pleasant, but sometimes . .

Christine Brooke-Rose is not a genre SF writer, as the first page shows. The topic may be computers and the protagonists the staple bright young kids of the juvenile but the style is deceptive, and fine. These hyperintelligent computer freaks narrate their tale as though they had spent their short lives reading Austen and Tolstoy rather than Prolog and C manuals. Equally surprising, the author conveys their breathless excitement without it ever becoming tedious to an adult reader. If you want sense of wonder this novel is all about it, both in the story and the telling.

The storyline belies its regulation genre beginnings. Twins James Ivor Peter (Jip) and Isabel (Zab) discover what seems to be a living stone computer, and a Martian to boot. Xorandor isn't just fun for the kids. Their father manages an old Cornish mine where 'They' are storing nuclear waste, unbeknown to the locals. No prizes for guessing what Xorandor uses for food, which makes him (?) a Godsend for the authorities, to whom nuclear waste has become a mild embarrassment. Except here things begin to seem somewhat out of tune. Some of Xorandor's offspring are stolen by the Soviets in a distinctly unconvincing fashion while another demonstrates even stones can go bananas by pointedly pointing out that if waste plutonium is good, weapons grade stuff is even better.

What began as a 'simple' little science fiction story becomes an exercise in the nature of substance and reality, politics and realpolitik, truth and falsity, semantics and logic. And all the while the story line bowls along as merrily as any adventure thirsty reader could wish. Which isn't to say everything rings true - the assumption that a Martian thinking 'machine' would operate on machine code is made a little too glibly for my liking, and the ending is just too pat and predictable, a disappointment after what has gone before. Nevertheless, this is SF of the old school - not space opera but extrapolation which ought to make the reader think while they enjoy themselves.

There is much about this book which is highly enjoyable. There is sense of wonder in abundance. The subject matter and storyline appear to excite the author, who is obviously a writer of no little skill in the classical sense, and that excitement communicates itself. If you want a book to remind you why you gave up space opera and began to read 'real' SF then this is for you.

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

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF BOOKS ABOUT animals written for children. The animals include cats, dogs, horses, rabbits, mice and moles, and the adventures vary widely, some are extremely anthropomorphic some are fairly realistic. So far as I know no

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one's devised a genre title for them other than animal stories, but this book fits into that genre without difficulty. Although Ratha is given speech and intelligence she remains very feline, a cat in a herding clan, never a human with four paws and a fur coat. Ratha's clan have developed into a structured group which herds other animals for their food. Her species must be nearer in size to lions than the domestic moggy, they are possibly prehistoric, possibly from another planet, the details are unclear but it doesn't matter.

Ratha accidentally discovers how to keep a fire alight, move it, control it and use it, but for daring to do so she is banished from the clan and the fire - the creature of the title - is extinguished. Until nearly the end of the book there is no more mention of fire which does make the title rather misleading. Instead we follow her adventures with the unnamed - all the cats outside the clan. She initially supposes them unintelligent and without speech, but learns that some have enough intelligence to nearly destroy the clan. Her part in that and the part fire, her creature, plays in the resolution of the plot make a good read.

Ratha makes a believeable heroine, she develops through her experiences to become a different personality from the young cat at the beginning, which is a lot more than many books can claim. Bell tells the story without either superfluous padding or leaving out so many details that the reader is perplexed or irritated. Some passages are very vivid, such as those describing Ratha's first heat and her first encounter with fire, and although others are less so the standard is always competent. It isn't a startlingly original book, it doesn't set the pulse racing, but it is eminently readable, well thought out and well executed, which leads me to recommend it to you if you have a fondness for animal, particularly cat, stories.

THE INNER HOUSE - Walter Besant
[Greenhill, 1986, 198pp, £7.95]
THREE GO BACK - J. Leslie Mitchell
[Greenhill, 1986, 254pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

THESE BOOKS BEGIN 'GREENHILL SCIENCE Fiction and Fantasy', which is intended to reprint neglected classics. These two are very well produced, in uniform dark brown dust-jackets. The texts are photographic reproductions from the first editions, with a one-page 'Afterword' by the consulting editor, Brian Stableford. If the series can be judged by these two, it is a thoroughly worthwhile project. And if you don't want it all to depend on Brian Stableford's taste, the publisher invites suggestions: write to 2-6 Hampstead High Street, London NW3 1QQ.

Sir Walter Besant published *The Inner House* in 1888. The 'Inner House' is the former chancel of the House of Life, once Canterbury Cathedral, on the alter of which is kept the secret of immortality. The discovery of immortality led to the establishment of an apparant utopia of equality and freedom from want. The People have forgotten religion, because that arose out of fear of death. Hence the imagery of the Inner House; the Great Secret of real physical Immortality has replaced the Christian promise of future immortality. The inevitable happens: a child is born (a very rare event) who is obsessed with the past and inspires a revolt. A pulp sf writer would have ended with the overthrow of the House of Life. Besant is much more subtle. If one can ignore the Victorian passion and melodrama, this is an astonishingly fresh extrapolation, dealing with ideas that are actually important.

J.Leslie Mitchell's *Three Go Back* (1932) is more conventional, or seems so now we've read others of its kind. A militant pacifist, an armaments manufacturer and a 'pornographic' novelist, enter a Bermuda Triangle-type time-warp, and go back into the Palmolithic. It takes them an implausibly long time time to realise it, but then none of them seem to have read any sf. They fall in with a group of Cromagnon men, who very implausibly speak a proto-Basque which is intelligible to the pacifist who, of course, has a Basque mother. The novel is not just a tale of how modern men and women cope with life among the primitives; it is a counter-blast against those who imagine man's capacity for inflicting pain and death to be an integral part of his nature. These Cromagnons are Rousseauesquely noble; it is the Neanderthals who are the evil progenitors of the worst side of twentieth-century man. Mitchell was born in 1901; his novel is obviously a reaction to the horrors of the Great War, but also witnesses his ultimate hope in the potential nobility of human nature. There are echoes of the 1920s society novel, which make it almost as alien to us as Besant. But it is another grand survivor of the days when sf really *was* about ideas. Greenhill, and Stableford, need every encouragement to reprint some more gems like these.

DEATH IS A LONELY BUSINESS - Ray Bradbury
[Grafton, 1986, 239pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

"RAY BRADBURY IS ONE OF THE FEW TRULY great science fiction writers of today, and indeed of all time." So it says on the back his first novel for 23 years.

This book would disappoint any science fiction fan.

The dedication includes: "And to the memory of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Ross MacDonald." A mystery novel then?

This book would disappoint any mystery fan.

So what is it? The flyleaf tells us. "The book is a carnival of extraordinary characters - a classic mystery, a love story, and a nostalgic evocation of a time and place."

With this novel, Bradbury has written about people, about a time and place, and he has done it well. The time is 1949, the place Venice, California, a community where things are running down. They are demolishing the pier and late one night a young writer finds a body stuffed into a discarded lion cage in a canal. Bradbury interacts all these elements into a story line which is not a mystery story in the classic sense, Ruth Rendall or Ed McBain fans would get nothing from this, in terms of a puzzle.

In fact it is a Ray Bradbury novel. With most of what that implies. Bradbury is a master at handling the English language. The man is a poet, and it shows.

> The wall of a little room . . . where the shudders of the big red trains go by like nightmares turning you on your cold steel bed in the trembling basement of the Not So Royal Lost Canary Apartments, where the numbers have fallen off the front portico, and the street sign at the corner had been twisted north to east so that people, if they ever came to find you, would turn away forever on the wrong boulevard.

But my memory is of a writer who couldn't handle realistic dialogue. It reads well, but said aloud sounds contrived. Bradbury has solved that to some extent by creating these "extraordinary characters" who *do* speak like that, and also by moving some way towards a more realistic style.

> 'What have you done about the haircut?' I said.
> 'What haircut?'
> 'Mr Smith had a really lousy haircut the afternoon before he died. His friend moaned about it at the morgue, remember? I knew only one really lousy barber could have done it.'

This is a literate work, peopled with strange, sympathetic characters, fleshed out in the inimitable Bradbury style. They live and breathe in its pages. The style is intricate without being florid. It is worth a read by anyone who enjoys good writing.

KHALINDAINE - Richard Burns
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 268pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

THIS NO-NONSENSE QUEST NOVEL IS A CUT above many partly because the land and characters are well drawn, the land seems as vibrant or as menacing as the people, and the fantastic elements are limited, with no magical swords, jewels or talismen in sight. There is no biography of Richard Burns so I must assume that this is his first novel - and it is an accomplished one, too.

The obligatory map shows the route of the companions, from mountainous Northreach to Cythroné, home of the empress. The plot is almost as simple: the empress is dying and talk of the lost bastard heir is becoming loud again. Will he be found to save the land from the impending conquest of the inhuman Agaskan? Two brothers related to the empress plot to murder

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the bastard and take the throne for themselves. That, quite baldly, is the plot. But Burns manages to imbue even the bit-part characters with their own identities and quirks. Also interwoven are observations on court etiquette, touched upon with colour and humour, and architecture: the towns and cities can be pictured most vividly.

Description, as already hinted at, is original. For example, "Elsban felt her heart swell as she thought of her lost child, and knew that the doctors were wrong: the heart is full of emotion, and the emotion was bursting to get out." Or the humorous: "Like its designer, the litter was sophisticated, expensive, awkward and well-padded." There is an all-pervading medieval gloom, even morbidity, about some of the passages, creating good atmosphere.

There are possibly too many coincidences, but they aren't clumsily apparent. This is a well-written, imaginatively realised tale whose ending satisfactorily does not betoken a sequel. I look forward to Richard Burns's next book, in the hope he will maintain the promise of *Khalindaine*.

THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH - Arthur C. Clarke
[Grafton, 1986, 182pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S 1957 STORY, 'THE Songs of Distant Earth', is effective enough. On the long-neglected colony planet of Thalassa the placid routine is rudely interrupted by the arrival of a starship from mythical Earth for emergency repairs. Love briefly blossoms between a ship's officer and a native woman and a child is conceived before duty calls the officer and kinship the woman. The tone is the familiar Clarke elegaic. The prevailing emotion is of loss and regret, hope is offered as a palliative, yet these feelings are paltry beside the immensity and impersonality of space.

Now the story has been expanded into a novel. Unlike many such projects, this exercise is potentially worthwhile. There is plenty of meat remaining on the bones of the story - the courageous voyage to a new frontier, the jealousies and heartbreaks of a doomed love, an emotional content beefed up with the revelation that the starship riders are the last refugees from a destroyed Earth. The Thalassans, meanwhile, are on the threshold of something just as momentous.

The scale of the vision is sabotaged by the fragmentary nature of the narrative. 57 chapters in a very few pages - what should be an awe-inspiring saga of man's far destiny comes out like a succession of newspaper reports. The relationship between the Thalassan woman and the ship's officer must be central but the reader is told about it rather than experiencing it. They have the occasional stilted conversation then slip into the background as Clarke moves on to other things, forgetting how they were the rock on which the original bittersweet story was built. So the spaceship is afflicted by the "*Bounty* syndrome"; the ship's spokesman struggles with grief over his lost wife (rather sentimental this); a young Thalassan blade meets a curious demise (positively drips with sentimentality); the Thalassans own story, very different in mood, begins.

Obviously Clarke had to flesh out the original, rich in potential though that is. But he hasn't integrated all the new elements. I had the impression of pieces of mood music - whenever the emotional intensity slackened, Clarke introduced another weepy theme.

He can irritate and impress in equal measure. The space elevator and sea diving are becoming monotonous. His attempts at jocularity are leaden. At other times he generates ideas with the expected facility. He discusses the relationship between population density and scientific progress; suggests circumstances in which censorship may be justifiable; provides a splendid three-page history of religion; redefines 'democracy' and intelligently suggests the first nation to subscribe to this. Sometimes he is quite radical.

These asides, though, do not distract Clarke from the major vision. He still feels for the classic themes of SF as vital issues and strives to express this in his fiction. It is probably pointless to suggest there might be more pressing concerns, although it would be interesting to see him try sailing a different tack. He has told the story of *The Songs of Distant Earth* more than once before.

A PLACE AMONG THE FALLEN - Adrian Cole
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 352pp, £10.95]
THE ISLE OF GLASS - Judith Tarr
[Bantam, 1986, 286pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

TWO FANTASY NOVELS BY NEW AUTHORS (though Cole has previously written children's books). They have common themes but the treatments are very different. Both have a central character who wields 'supernatural' powers, and an underlying debate about the use of such powers. Therefore the effect these forces have on the characters is key to both books.

The Isle of Glass, set at the time of Richard the Lionheart, involves Brother Alfred, a monk with unusual powers and apparant perpetual youth. It combines historical fiction, fantasy and some SF 'devices' (telepathy). The theme is the conflict (internal and external) as the monk tries to reconcile his 'witch-like' powers and 'Elf-kind' background with his religious calling. The writing is clear and unpretentious, but the theology is in no way trivialised, which makes the book more than just a good story. This is helped by a convincing central character and Tarr's ability to produce a well-constructed story. I found it a refreshing and enjoyable read and look forward to the next volume in what appears to be a trilogy.

A Place Among the Fallen, by contrast, treads much more traditional ground. Originality has been bleached from this kind of fantasy, which makes it very difficult for a new author to break new ground and find his own voice. There is, therefore: a map of Omara; a central character, Korbillian, who reluctantly wields great power and comes into conflict with Simon Wargallow of the Deliverers, set to purge such evils; a mission to destroy evil which unites the warring factions; and the final struggle of good and evil in a climactic conclusion. To be fair this is actually a good rendering of these overused elements, and if you like such fantasies it will not disappoint you. I found it difficult to put down.

STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND - Samuel R. Delany
[Grafton, 1986, 464pp, £2.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I HAVE TO CONFESS to skipping large portions of a book sent for review, much as I would feel obliged to skip boring accounts of who begat whom in the Old Testament.

It has to be admitted (or does it?) that Delany is (as Michael Bishop says): "a variety of genius". He is a Nebula Award winner, a noted critic of science fiction. He is also a sort of stylist. But my unease about the book began with the ill-conceived simile of the title.

Apropos of style there is a saying: "Easy reading is hard writing". What, I wonder, about hard reading? Is it easy to write? I have a feeling that for Delany it is, because he derives a perverse pleasure from it. When he tells a tale he does not make it plain and simple. He likes to confuse, complicate, elaborate and exaggerate. He likes to invent neologisms, exotic names, exaggerated metaphors. He is fond of subordinate clauses, asides, parentheses, even parentheses within parentheses. He prefers to describe baroque hard-to-visualise surroundings. He is obsessed with numbers and bright colours.

Apropos of content, there is hardly any. Not much happens and Delany makes few concessions to plausibility when it does. Characterisation is negligible and consists of making brief reference to sexual proclivities and lengthy reference to ways of speaking - accompanying body language and so on. The characters engage interminably in vapid and unlikely dialogue. As I read on, I began to see the novel more and more as a marathon exercise in puerile imagination, the self-indulgent, private joke of a solipsistic writer, or one so assured of publication that he spares no thought for his readers. Far from conveying an impression of the alienness of other worlds, Delany only

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conveys his alienation from this world and encourages alienation in his readers. The impression of alienness is also militated against by Delany's intrusive and frequent use of twentieth century American colloquialisms. To sum up, I thought this one of the most pointless, self-indulgent, dehumanising and crazy books I have ever read. It beats me how Delany found anyone to publish it and how anyone can be expected to read it. The second novel in the so-called diptych is *The Splendour and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*, and it will make me miserable if I get it to review.

To quote from the *New York Times Book Review*, however:

"What makes *Stars in my Pocket Like Grains of Sand* especially challenging - and satisfying - is that the complex society in which the characters move is one of the author's own imagining . . . a major step forward. A work of adult science fiction, an extraordinarily satisfying experience."

THE HOOD'S ARMY TRILOGY - Nathan Elliott
EARTH INVADED (160pp)
SLAVEWORLD (143pp)
THE LIBERATORS (144pp)
[Grafton, 1986, £5.95 each]
Reviewed by Darroll Pardoe

THIS TRILOGY HAS EVERYTHING. ALIENS who come in three colours depending on their rôle in life, and who are bent on invasion and colonisation of the Earth. The brave band of human guerilla fighters, led by the hero Hood, based in the tube tunnels under the ruins of London. A mobile robot with a character like a teddy bear but lacking the redeeming feature of being soft and cuddly. An evil alien leader who behaves as though he were Ming the Merciless but lacks the charisma to do it properly. A brilliant professor who manages to come up with a suitable invention for every tight corner of the plot, at a moment's notice. In short, every time-worn cliché in the science fiction catalogue. Aliens die in droves at every encounter, helped along by having become so reliant on energy weapons they no longer take precautions against old-fashioned projectiles. Of course, humanity triumphs in the end, largely through the efforts of the apparantly indestructable Hood. The defeated aliens are given the professor's latest hormone treatment to purge them of their aggressiveness, and packed off to a strangely temperate Venus. I can really find nothing positive whatever to say about this trilogy. It's merely the Yellow Peril tale beloved of *Chums* and *The Boys Own Paper*, transferred to an interstellar arena. I wonder if the pseudonymous author is pulling our legs?

MIRROR IN THE MIRROR - Michael Ende
(trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn)
[Viking, 1986, 224pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by K.V.Bailey

MICHAEL ENDE, SON OF GERMAN SURREALIST painter Edgar Ende, has written a fantasy to complement 18 of his father's lithographs. The relationship of drawings to narrative is oblique and subliminal rather than naively direct. Edgar Ende's surrealism is austerely classical, its sophistication lying in its very simplicity. The narrative transmutes the drawings into more eclectic contexts; vibrant with bottomless chasms, soaring arches, asteroidal edifices, faceless men, seductive or hideous women, icy or desert wildernesses. Counterpointed with such vigorous theatricality is the classical motif of the Cretan labyrinth, and here, in imagery of enclosing walls, corridors and organic/inorganic forms, the text-illustration relationships are most acute. Thus the first two drawings, 'Bull and Bunch of Grapes' and 'Winged Figure', suggest the Minotaur and Icarus archetypes of the first two episodes. Hor, imprisoned in a vast empty house, endlessly roams its passages. Dreams - or strangely intrusive 'recollections' - bring him experiences from beyond its walls suffered by others: others who are in fact himself. He asks: "Can you feel me, limbs of my scattered body? ... Are you searching for me, my alter ego? ... Are we drawing closer like stars converging in infinite space, little by little, image by mental image?"

The 30 episodes are variations on that 'convergence', and they should be read in sequence, ideally at a sitting. Then the effect mounts powerfully, of inner and outer phenomena, of dream within dream, of equivalence and antithesis, of recurring symbols mutating and merging.

There are many macabre ironies but little humour - and that fairly harsh. Yet this mirroring book has something in common with Lewis Carroll's gentler fantasies, in substructure and even in incident: one narrator dropping on all-fours in midshout bleating like a sheep; trial scenes of logical/illogical jurisprudence; the final bombardment of the clown by activated beer mugs, evocative of the playing cards attack in *Wonderland*; above all the clown (in the culminating episode embodying all the protagonists) who echoes Alice and the Red King when he says: "I don't want to go on dreaming that I exist, nor do I want to be in someone else's dream, no matter whose. Unless of course we're dreaming of each other". Ende and Carroll are in their own ways both writing about crises of identity.

Descriptive virtuosity (and translator's skill) fill this book with meticulously conceived vistas, and their most grotesque populating figures are marvellously realised: delights warranting more than one reading. With each re-reading, I assure you, the interwoven subtleties of related drawings and narrative become ever more pleasureably apparant.

ORGASMUS - John Gartland
[Bachman & Turner, 1986, 205pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

MOST PEOPLE WITH DEGREES IN ENGLISH seem convinced of their ability to write a successful novel. A few are correct, the vast majority - including John Gartland - are not. He is an inept and obviously untrained writer who has produced a patchy novel that is often excrutiatingly bad. He seems not to grasp the elementary fact that the reader needs to be shown what is happening rather than just be told: dramatised flashback is usually interesting, exposition essentially boring. After a reasonably bright (though silly) first chapter there is a chapter 2 lecture, then a chapter 3 lecture. This novel is full of boring lectures, most in the form of narration though a few are presented as unwieldy dialogue. There are too many shallow characters (none worth caring about or identifying with) and a plot that consistently avoids any hint of credibility.

Okay, but what's it all about? Not a lot. There's Brian Carver, a civil servant who never does a stroke of work but spends much of his time screwing various women, sometimes at work. In other parts of London people who were at college with Carver are recruited by Orgasmus (Organisation for Salvation of Mankind, Universal, Secret) to test a new aphrodisiac. At the same time terrorists are blowing up diverse parts of London.

In places I think the novel is intended to be satirical, it doesn't succeed due to being too farcical. It is, I suppose, an autobiographical wish fulfilment fantasy. It has very little connection with SF.

THE MAGIC COTTAGE - James Herbert
[Hodder & Stoughton, 1986, 309pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mark Greener

JAMES HERBERT IS A HORROR WRITER WHO has made a career out of the literary version of the ultraviolent genre now prevalent in the cinema. However, *The Magic Cottage* marks a major departure for Herbert, and though flawed is his best book to date.

When Mike Stringer and his girlfriend Midge move into Gramarye, the cottage of their dreams, strange events occur. Cracks in the wall spontaneously repair themselves, the woodland fauna treat it as a refuge in which injured animals heal rapidly, and the owners find their artistic capabilities vastly improved. Gramarye acts as a focus for psychic energy, a fact recognised by the previous owner, a white witch, and the Synergists, a strange cult lead by charismatic and mysterious Mycroft. Stringer is disturbed by the manner of the witch's death and Midge's increasing involvement with the Synergists, and is eventually forced to confront Mycroft's evil.

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Even a reader with only a passing acquaintance with horror will recognise the plot. Herbert infuses it with a degree of originality impossible to convey in such a synopsis, though the originality arises more from skillful use of technique than original ideas.

Unlike most of Herbert's novels, tension arises from anticipating the outcome rather than carefully orchestrated violence. He develops the book well, evolving the 'strange events' which in the beginning are just about rationalizable, to the point where they fall outside human understanding. The cross-over point is nicely blurred. However the change in style exposes his major weakness as a writer. The characterisation is so minimal as to be virtually non-existent. This is a flaw common to all his novels, but usually the reader is carried along by the breathless pace of the plot. *The Magic Cottage* is his most subtle novel and as such requires the most careful characterisation. His failure here seriously flaws the novel. Even so, I was unable to put it down during the last 100 or so pages. Even if you are not a Herbert fan, *The Magic Cottage* has a lot to recommend it.

THE LIMITS OF VISION - Robert Irwin
[Viking, 1986, 120pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

IN SETTING UP THIS COMPLEX intellectual conundrum I wonder quite what Robert Irwin hopes to achieve. The odds have been stacked in such a way that whatever the reader may deduce the author will be able to say 'wrong'. The novel is so densely structured that it becomes impossible to discern his intent, always assuming that he has one. If he hasn't, then the game has become distinctly unfair.

The novel examines one day, possibly the last day, in Marcia's lone battle against dirt, chronicling her obsession with its inexplicable accumulation and removal. Yet one is uncomfortably aware that she is a very intelligent woman, holding mental discussions with Blake, Darwin and Da Vinci in between minutely describing the world of the thick pile carpet in positively surreal terms. Her insight is remarkable in its imagination.

We have a choice. Marcia might be mad, driven over the edge by the boredom of domestic isolation forced on her by an unattentive husband and friends whose very sophistication limits their world view. Or her withdrawal into a rich, satisfying inner life may be an intellectual game to make housework palatable. Equally, it may be that Marcia simply has a unique and colourful attitude to her daily chores and genuinely enjoys them. On a secondary level *The Limits of Vision* can be interpreted equally successfully as a feminist tract pointing up the dangers in being a housewife, or a hymn of praise to an absorbing life of domesticity. Or is it?

To be honest I am not sure that this book is anything more than a very clever piece of fantasy, a vehicle for the author's brand of clever and perverse humour. The various literary conceits scattered throughout were amusing but lent nothing to the plot, in fact they slowed the pace quite badly. The other major weakness is that Irwin eventually becomes bored with his own creation, and gives the game away in an unexpectedly clumsy fashion which sits most uncomfortably in an otherwise beautifully structured book. As a result, the last chapter is rendered entirely nonsensical as it attempts to return to the ambiguous tone of earlier chapters. Yet despite all this, *The Limits of Vision* is an intelligent piece of fantasy, handling an unusual subject in an unusual way, and for that reason I recommend it.

CRY WOLF - Aileen La Tourette
[Virago, 1986, 192pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

CRITICS LOVE CATEGORIES. THEY FORM A shorthand that may be poor critical method but it is all most books aspire to, and most readers want. Nevertheless most critics long to be presented with work which transcends categories and demands genuine analysis. Such books are rare but reward the effort by being mouthwateringly good. Unfortunately there are exceptions to all rules and some category busters are so confused and confusing, badly written, and downright perplexing they defy all critical templates.

Cry Wolf is such a book. The Virago imprint indicates a feminist attitude, and Ms La Tourette is certainly feminist. Her post-Armageddon world seems to be populated entirely by women, though I can't be sure. Whatever charges may be laid against her, clarity is not one. Curie (hear the crash of symbols!) is a teacher in this future world whose morality and religion has been created by Curie and the other three M'others who fortuitously came to this isolated community just before the button was pushed. The M'others are of that over-educated, under-occupied breed of feminist who do so much to undo the hard work of their sisters who do rather than talk - just the audience Ms La Tourette and Virago have in mind, I expect. If so perhaps they will know whether she is poking a little fun when she tells the tale of the girl who cried 'Wolf', but it would be a very isolated example of humour in this awfully solemn work.

There is so much amiss with this book I hardly know where to begin. Several discrete stories are told, each in a different style, from the turgid and convoluted main tale to brief but meaningless descriptions of how the four 'heroines' penetrate top secret nuclear bases to try to talk the men out of pressing the button. Not for a moment can I suspend my disbelief, or give a damn about their fate.

In her introduction the author thanks her sons for being her science fiction consultants. From that I presume she hasn't read the stuff. If she had she might know that even the most banal SF writer works hard at setting their alien scenes. Certainly this book would benefit from a little traditional scene setting. She might also know that when the concepts get tough the writing becomes clearer (in good SF) because the ideas demand clarity. There are some good ideas here, but they are buried under a slurry of mistakes and plain bad writing.

Doubtless the audience for this book, not to mention the author and publishers, will dismiss my comments as those of a mere man. Maybe so, but as a work of fiction *Cry Wolf* doesn't get past first base (go read some Angela Carter, Ms La Tourette - see how it is really done) and as polemic it only succeeds in reducing my admiration for those magnificent human beings at Greenham and elsewhere.

THE TRICKSTERS - Margaret Mahy
[Dent, 1986, 266pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

'HARRY' IS VERY MUCH AN OUTSIDER IN her own family, overshadowed by a vivacious older sister, and a much-adored but insecure father, and isolated from her mother, absorbed in the needs of the younger siblings. Seeking solace in writing, her novel is a mixture of childish dreams and hesitant acknowledgement of her incipient adulthood. Christmas at the family holiday home only highlights the underlying conflicts within the family, even more so with the presence of visitors. One is an English academic, the other three are less easily identified.

They claim to be descendants of the house's original owner, whose drowned son is the 'possible ghost'. But Harry is disturbed that they seem to have taken on the forms and attributes of her literary creations, and by the way they expose family weaknesses and stretch internal tensions to breaking point. Only she recognises that they are collectively the ghost, feeding off the family's distress, a realisation complicated when she falls in love with one of the aspects. Only her love allows him to overcome their power and reunite the whole.

So, is this a ghost story, a powerful study of family relationships, or both? As a ghost story I find it overstated. The ghosts are too matter-of-fact to be acceptable as supernatural beings, though their behaviour is certainly bizarre. The author tries to hint that the incident is initiated by Harry's confused mind but there is no controlled development of suspense and the insinuations evaporate rapidly. The only section with atmosphere comes right at the end when Harry sees the ghost as one person, across the fire in which she is burning her book. It's a long time to wait for such a powerful scene to be wasted

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As a novel about family relationships and adolescent angst, it does not fare much better. The dialogue moves briskly enough but in a studied and knowing fashion. The moralising about extra-marital affairs, love and marriage, and parent-child relationships smacks of the author's 'awareness' of the need to handle difficult topics with care, and she tries *too* hard. The characters are all much larger-than-life, stereotypical rather than individual, and nothing more than the author's mouthpieces throughout.

Which is not to say that it isn't a good story, but it would be so much better if Ms Mahy settled for one thing or the other. Her two previous books in the same vein - *The Haunting* (1982) and *The Changeover* (1984) - each won the Carnegie Medal. This novel will probably do the same although it doesn't really deserve to. This particular formula has become rather worn and Margaret Mahy ought to turn her talents elsewhere. Not a bad book, but not great.

MASTER OF PAXWAX - Phillip Mann
[Gollancz, 1986, 280pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

"PART ONE OF THE STORY OF THE GARDENer", this book is the first of two, the sequel being due early next year. Phillip Mann's *The Eye of the Queen* was apparantly well received for its portrayal of convincing aliens. *Master of Paxwax* continues this development and is, as the blurb says, "a sweeping far future epic".

The Human Race, dominated by the Eleven Great Families, has long since claimed the galaxy for its own - in the process wiping out numerous aliens and their worlds. Surviving aliens have taken refuge from The Great Push inside the seemingly barren planet Sanctum awaiting an opportunity to strike back. Meanwhile, in the guise of the mysterious Inner Circle, they are keeping an eye on the Humans. Particularly the Fifth Family of Paxwax whose second son, Pawl, has been obscurely indicated as a saviour of the Sanctum inhabitants.

Pawl Paxwax is about to break the Family Code that prohibits marriage outside the Eleven Families. Bad enough if he was just the second son, but the death of his father and elder brother promotes him suddenly to Master of Paxwax. Pawl finds himself catapulted into violence and intrigue as he tries to come to grips with his new position, marry the woman he loves, and save himself and his empire. In this he is aided by Odin the Gerbes, an alien snail-like telepath of the Inner Circle, and Wynn the bio-crystaline brain created from Pawl's brainwaves.

Master of Paxwax is on a scale reminiscent of Asimov's *Foundation* books. There are a bewildering number of planets accessed by Way Gates. A nice touch here - someone using a Way Gate may find himself reconstituted slightly differently at journey's end, with curly hair instead of straight, or new freckles. Apart from the aliens, the Humans have begun to mutate. Clarissa of the Xerxes Fourth has feathers on her head and shoulders, Laurel Beltane is piebald with webbed feet and hands. The customs of each family are different too. The Xerxes ritually castrate their men when they reach ten, the Wong have all the characteristics of the inscrutable Oriental. This book is full of characters and details. In fact there is rather too much of a good thing, but the main thread concerning Pawl and Laurel is gripping. I also like the relationship between Pawl and Odin. As usual plenty of loose ends have been left for the sequel to tie up.

Master of Paxwax is entertaining though rather disjointed and overdone in parts. It will be interesting to see if the sequel is any improvement.

THE SWORDS OF CORUM - Michael Moorcock
[Grafton, 1986, 509pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

THIS OMNIBUS VOLUME CONTAINS THREE OF the six books of Corum, *The Knight of Swords*, *The Queen of Swords* and *The King of Swords*.

Prince Corum Jhaelen is one aspect of Moorcock's Eternal Champion, the sole survivor of the elf-like Vadhagh on his plane (there are 15 world-planes in his universe), and determined to revenge himself upon Glandyth, leader of the Mabden (the race of Man), who cost him a hand and an eye during torture. A sorcerer gives him the Eye of Rhynn and the Hand of Kwll, and he learns that to defeat Glandyth he must take the Knight of Sword's heart. He succeeds, only to realise he now must face the Queen, and after her the King of Swords. Here Rhynn and Kwll themselves provide what appears to be a final solution to the balance between Law and Chaos. Unfortunately, the ending didn't possess any surprises.

In the second book the Companion to Champions, Jhary-a-Conel, arrives on the scene, and in book three there's an unusual but perhaps self-consciously commercial meeting between a sorcerer and three of the Eternal Champions - Corum, Elric of Melnibone and Erekosë. Elric, Erekosë and Hawkmoon are also referred to earlier.

Good is ravaged by Evil. Evil needs one more death to become invincible. A hero, guided by Gods, saves the day. There's nothing new about *The Swords of Corum*, but it's one of the better examples of its type I've read. It isn't brilliant, but it *is* competent. If you want to read lightweight fantasy, something to pass the time during long journeys, then you could do far worse than read *Swords*.

FIRE FROM THE ASHES - Kenzaburō Ōe
[Readers International, 8 Strathray Gardens, London, NW3 4NY, 1986, 204pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

THESE ARE JAPANESE STORIES ABOUT Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and more than one of the authors wrote from personal experience. Their 'fictional' stories are the more harrowing for that.

Tamiki Hara, determined to give literary expression, as an eyewitness, to the wretchedness of A-Bomb suffering and damage, resisted Allied censorship and published many works. Five years later, when it was rumoured atomic bombs might be used in Korea, he committed suicide. His 'The Land of Heart's Desire' is a depressing remembrance of things past as the character lies dying. But for all the depression there is the hopeful cry: "I myself have long cherished a vision of an age when harmony would come to the earth, when deep in men's hearts would sound the quiet murmur of a spring, and there would be nothing to snuff out individual existences any more."

Yōko Ōta, another survivor, whose death at 57 was probably attributable to her Hiroshima experience, viewed the survivors' pains and problems in terms of relations between self and others. Life and fiction overlap: a character visits the monument to Tamiki Hara, a character whose eyes even after seven years still see only fire and blood everywhere. Her ending to 'Fireflies' is inevitably moving: not only were fireflies the ghosts of dead soldiers, but also the slugs that slithered around the dilapidated shacks, as though they can't rest in peace until the threat of nuclear warfare is eradicated forever.

Ibuse's 'The Crazy Iris' begins with an iris that flowered out of season following the Hiroshima bomb, a metaphor for so much else that was knocked out of sync. Kyōko Hayashi's 'The Empty Can' concerns a girl who places her parents' ashes in a tin can which she then carries to school; she grows to adulthood with glass fragments, sprayed widely by the atomic blast, still embedded in her back.

In Mitsuharu Inoue's 'The House of Hands', fears of radiation after-effects reveal social discrimination against survivors, and in Hiroko Takenishi's 'The Rite' a woman who experienced the Hiroshima bombing as a girl begins to be anxious about abnormal genetic effects, leading to misgivings about marriage and childbirth.

These stories give powerful voice to a real fear for our future, but also express a hope too. There is a strong faith evident, that people will overcome the fear, they will survive. Let us hope that survival will be without another Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

THE LIGHT FANTASTIC - Terry Pratchett
[Colin Smythe, 1986, 217pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

B O O K S

THIS LIGHT-HEARTED SEQUEL TO *THE Colour of Magic* continues the story of Discworld, and in particular Rincewind, the inept and cowardly wizard, and Twoflower, the tourist.

Discworld is a flat, disc-shaped world carried by four giant elephants who are in turn on the shell of the giant turtle A'Tuin. When last encountered, Rincewind and Twoflower had fallen off the edge of the world, but as in all cliff-hangers this book begins with their unlikely deliverance from suffocation in space.

A massive red star is on collision course with Discworld. The only way to avert it is by the recitation of all eight great spells written in The Octavo. Unfortunately, one spell transferred itself into Rincewind's head in the previous adventure. The search is on for Rincewind, but the wizards of Unseen University are not too particular whether he is alive or dead - if the latter the spell would transfer to someone else.

The book is full of nice touches. Twoflower's belief that "nothing bad could really happen to him because he was not involved" is held in the face of all adverse situations. I particularly liked Twoflower's camera, a box containing a Picture Imp with paints and an easel. There are characters reminiscent of other books, but with a twist. Cohen the Barbarian, for instance, an aging muscle-man of 87 with no teeth and a bad back, whose three greatest things are "Hot water, good dentishtry and shoft lavatory paper".

Throughout *The Light Fantastic* are the most outrageous puns and sideswipes at anything that takes the author's fancy. Accurate descriptive writing, for instance, when we are told of a law to introduce honesty into reporting. "Thus, if a legend said of a notable hero that 'all men spoke of his prowess' any bard who valued his life would add hastily 'except for a couple of people in his home village who thought he was a liar, and quite a lot of other people who had never really heard of him'."

The Light Fantastic is not for the serious SF buff, but if you like a wry smile rather than a belly laugh and you want an easy read to pass the time this may well be worth a look.

CONTACT - Carl Sagan
[Century, 1986, 432pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Keith Freeman
and Hussain R. Mohamed

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE IMPORTANT, AND the first impression of *Contact* is that behind the fairly unimpressive cover there's a large book. It is an impressive package for the price and if you enjoy the book it will take you a reasonable time to read it.

And that's the crux of the matter - will you enjoy it? The plot is relatively simple (and hardly original), a message received from Vega is decoded to reveal a plan for a machine, the machine is built and the selected few sit in it and turn it on. The flesh on these bones is supplied by the characters we follow via the heroine (and I'm still not sure why Sagan chose a heroine, making the whole thing more difficult for himself). One advantage of a long novel is that characters can be built up slowly - so you'll not be surprised that we start with the birth of Eleanor Arroway and follow her through her education, both public and private. The story leaps ten years to find her the director of an institute seeking messages from the stars via a radio telescope.

The story now becomes involved in the conflicts engendered by the reception of an intelligent (though at first not fully understood) message. Despite opposition, three machines are built, by America, Russia and (at first unofficially) an industrial conglomerate in Japan. The American machine is damaged by sabotage, the Russian one has faults in components (despite the touted international co-operation) and so Eleanor plus four begin their journey of discovery and enlightenment in the Japanese machine.

Their return coincided, for me, with a feeling of anti-climax - having done what the book's title promises we have another 60 pages wherein frustration is the main ingredient. No-one, officially, will believe the reports from the travellers. One or two loose ends are tidied up (loose ends which hardly had any bearing on the story in the first place) and a new concept is briefly mentioned.

The blurb says "Not since H.G. Wells has there been a novel that so stunningly combines storytelling power and scientific vision". I *did* enjoy *Contact* but my feeling was that the style was reminiscent of Clarke rather than Wells - except that Clarke starts with more original ideas and has fewer unnecessary complications. (K.F.)

FEW REGULAR WATCHERS OF DOCUMENTARY television in this country will be unfamiliar with Carl Sagan. His science series *Cosmos* made him a household name. Perhaps fewer people are aware that in 1978 he won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Dragons of Eden* and currently is professor of astronomy at Cornell University. For a scientist his popular profile is high, and so apparantly was his advance, in excess of a million dollars for his first novel *Contact*.

Sagan is a well known advocate of SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), so it is not surprising that he chose the subject for his first foray into fiction. *Contact* concerns the efforts of a radio astronomer to find extraterrestrial life by listening to an enormous number of frequencies with a radio telescope complex called Argus. Her mission is successful and contact is made. That, in essence, is the plot. What makes this a novel not a thesis is the cast of characters, up to and including a female US president. If science for Sagan is a world of joy, the world itself is far from happy. He has a tale to tell of the way governments, especially large powerful ones like those of the US and USSR, are ill equipped to handle the scale of events that science takes in its stride. Much of the debate between scientists and government displays a controlled anger, as if the author were remembering true incidents. It came as no surprise to read a clear condemnation of SDI and his portrayal of the USSR is sober, even sympathetic - not a common attitude in America these days.

Does Sagan write a good book? Some criticism can be made of the way he handles words and the skill of his characterisation, but I suspect these will be of little importance to most people deciding whether to read *Contact*. It is far more likely that those who see merit in wondering how they might react to knowledge of an extraterrestrial presence will want to read the book, and those who see such efforts as pointless will not.

If *Contact* has one problem that overrides all others it has to do with using fiction to discourse on a serious though abstruse subject. If *Contact* is a case being made, then being fiction and likely to be seen as simply 'sci-fi' its message is severely diluted. No matter how accurately or factually based fiction may be, in the end it *is* fiction, and a line is drawn.

Contact deals with issues readers of a more clearly defined literature might find of little relevance to the problems of the human race. Yet *Contact*, which has faults, held my attention from first to last and made me wonder if some day those ones and zeros might really appear in Pi. Maybe for that reason alone I should recommend this latest addition to that tiny sub-genre; science fiction written by scientists. (H.R.M.)

GREEN EYES - Lucius Shepard
[Chatto, 1986, 275pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

IN *PAPERBACK INFERNO* SOME WHILE BACK, 'Vincent Omniaveritas' predicted: "True innovation in SF will not come from some exotic elite but from a process of internal subversion ... Look for an eminently commercial, popular, accessible SF that reinterprets genre roots from an '80s or '90s perspective". This is very appropriate to the work of Lucius Shepard. When I first read *Green Eyes* I wasn't happy with it, the genre elements disturbed me. Now I see what he is up to. In genre terms *Green Eyes* is so gloriously OTT it becomes positively *outré*.

The SF is quickly disposed of. An unholy brew of DNA extract, chromosomes and bacteria from slave graveyards is pumped into a new corpse, and, hey presto, a Bacteriologically Induced Artificial Personality. Except by page 3 everyone calls them "zombies" and shortly after the scene shifts to: "This great manor house glooming on the edge of the swamp amid sentinel

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oaks and penitential moss, inhabited by dead men come to life again ... here were both magical setting and characters, the stuff from which great drama arises." That's as clear a statement as you could wish of Shepard's attitude to fiction. Great dramas are the ones told most frequently and therefore codified into genre early on. If these dramas are to be retold effectively, the thing to do is accept genre unreservedly and attempt to take it one step further.

If *Green Eyes* were mere pastiche it wouldn't be worth reading. An insistent cajun rhythm; a crumbling mansion decorated with *voudou* emblems and a storm lashing the windows at theatrical moments. Should a stray dog wander on stage you *know* something appalling will happen to it; the point when reading Shepard is the extra insight. So with the stamp of his writing on well-worn material. The prose is as luxuriant as the vegetation that chokes the grounds of the chateau at Maravillosa. Shepard is saying, I am writing about dead men rising and walking the earth again. If I can't make you believe this intellectually, you're going to have to feel it in the gut. The struggle between genre situation and the actuality evoked by Shepard's language results in a tension that is absolutely addictive for the reader.

Green Eyes is so good in places that you forget it is a first novel and has the occasional shortcoming. There is little insight into the fears and feelings of the principle "zombie" protagonist, a lack that none of Shepard's bravura passages can compensate for; the eventual revelation of just where the bacteria are being dug up from means that the story's rationale comes to lean too heavily on voodoo cultism. Niggles though. Do not read *Green Eyes* when in a niggling frame of mind - be prepared to simply surrender yourself to it.

THE MARATHON PHOTOGRAPH - Clifford D. Simak (Edited by Francis Lyall)
[Severn House, 1986, 171pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

I DIDN'T ENJOY THIS BOOK THE FIRST time I read it - that wasn't the book's fault, it was mine. I was living a particularly frenetic life unsuited to the leisurely pace of Simak's writing. Having calmed down a bit and re-read it, I can report that while it holds few surprises, it is a workmanlike and typically Simakian book.

To anyone familiar with his work the wide open Wisconsin countryside, the woods, the whippoorwill and the squirrel are old friends. So is the fascination with time travel. Each of these four stories concerns some form of time travel (I've never read a Simak story that didn't). In 'The Marathon Photograph' future humans travel back to the present and our past; in 'The Whistling Well' the central character is transported in his mind to the precambrian; in 'The Grotto of the Laughing Deer' a man going "the long way round" is an apparantly immortal neanderthal working on a present day archaeological dig; and in 'The Birch Clump Cylinder' people travel from the present to the past and future and finally use time as a star drive. Any of these might appear at best to be cliches, were it not for the wonderfully matter of fact way they are embedded in Simak's rural backdrops. The fact that the paradoxes inherent in any time travel story are so successfully ignored is a tribute to the power of the writer.

His characterisation, while not as strong, is interesting. His characters are stereotypes, but they are *Simak's* stereotypes, somehow more rounded, more knowable. And that is the mark of a fine storyteller; he can't characterise in depth, so he *uses* stereotypes with quirks to do the job, where a lesser writer would be used by them.

The only thing I could honestly say I missed to begin with was Simak's humour. There are no garrulous robots or pedantic dogs. But looking deeper I found gentle ironies in the plots, so perhaps the humour has matured too.

This book is supposedly edited by Francis Lyall, 'Introduced by' would be better. The introduction is pleasantly unobtrusive and perfectly in keeping with Simak's style, but I have a nagging suspicion it isn't necessary, the publisher wanted to fill a few blank pages and had no more of Simak's work to hand. As it is, the book is rather short for the cover price, and I suspect it will not appear on its own as a paperback but will be used as a basis for a fat collection of shorts.

But let us put these publishing quibbles aside. Books like this, however short, can send you back to re-read novels long forgotten. I recommend this book not only because it's a joy to read, but also because it will make you want to read Simak's other work again, and that's no bad thing.

A NEST OF NIGHTMARES - Lisa Tuttle
[Sphere, 1986, £2.50]
Reviewed by Neil Gaiman

THE HORROR GENRE SEEMS ALWAYS TO have been split into two camps: those who show you the monster, and those who work on the often correct theory that what you see is often disappointing, while what you don't see can always hurt you.

Clive Barker, with his artist's sensibilities and his peculiar enthusiasm for the repellent, is the best example of the former camp. He can show you a monster which, to borrow a metaphor from the movies, is neither a man in a monster suit nor a spider filmed through a telephoto lens, but something genuinely wonderful and new.

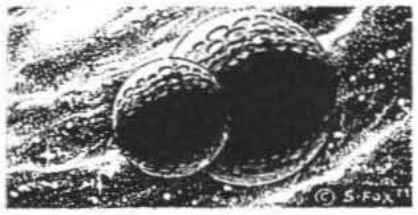
Lisa Tuttle's first horror novel, *Familiar Spirit*, was not notable for showing one monsters: the demon king was around but invisible through the book. It was a routine occult horror novel, interesting for its female viewpoint and bizarre sexual subtext.

Her first collection of short stories, *A Nest of Nightmares*, is anything but routine. "Enter the Worlds of Loneliness, Anxiety and Fear . . ." proclaims the blurb. The blurb, for once, is quite accurate. The title is also both revealing and correct. Nests are homes, places of retreat and shelter, where young are raised. And although the thirteen stories in this collection were written over the last fifteen years, they have a remarkable unity of content: the fears addressed are those of interfamily relationships, of parents and children, of friendship. The nest, in Ms Tuttle's hand, is no longer a place of safety and retreat, but one of nightmare, discomfort, embarrassment and death.

The supernatural horrors, whether horse gods, white goddesses, ghosts, or gigantic, sister-stealing birds, wait offstage or at the limits of vision.

The real monster however *is* always shown: it's the horror of personal relationships, of families and lovers, of fear and embarrassment, perhaps best shown by the (presumably partially autobiographical) 'Flying to Byzantium', the story of a young fantasy writer's abominable experiences at a small town SF convention, climaxing with her retreat into the world of adolescent awkwardness and pain from which her escapist fantasies spring.

In the final analysis I found the collection far more harrowing than most modern horror; not only because of the almost unbroken succession of downbeat endings, but also because the accurate evocation of the horror of being placed in an untenable position, of a relationship going wrong, of a home no longer being a place of safety and comfort, of "loneliness, anxiety and fear" hits closer to us than fear of Lovecraftian beasties, brain-eating zombies or giant rats (mice, crabs, dogs, newts, voles, and silverfish *ad nauseam*) can ever do. Tuttle's horror is not cathartic. It isn't reassuring. It *might* even be respectable. But she surely does show you her view of the monster.



STEVEN FOX