VECTOR 135

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

75p

M. JOHN HARRISON

AN INTERVIEW BY Paul Kincaid

PLUS
THE TV SF OF
HARLAN ELLISON

AND
LETTERS & BOOK REVIEWS

DECEMBER 1986/JANUARY 1987

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OUR THANKS TO MICHAEL FEARN AND MARY GENTLE FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE WITH VECTOR 134 AND THIS ISSUE

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EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

CENSORSHIP IS AN EMOTIVE WORD. LIKE SIN, EVERYbody is against it. Like sin, it is widespread. Accuse someone of practicing censorship, and you will be met with a string of justifications -- many of them very fine-sounding. But in the end, all of them are simply euphemisms.

Who practices censorship? Government, publishers, schools, parents, you, me -- anyone with a chunk of information that for some reason they want to keep from other people. The usual justification is that "it is for their own good." The usual reason is that it is for the good of the censor -- very often to make life easier, to stop awkward and embarrassing questions, to maintain the status quo.

One of the more glorious functions of science fiction is the introduction of new ideas. One of the more insidious functions of censorship is the suppression of new ideas. For "new" substitute unorthodox, controversial or revolutionary, and the motivation of the censors becomes more clear.

Recent months have seen two blatant instances of censorship in the SF-related world, hitting Michael de Larrabeiti's third Borribles book and Richard Adams's new illustrated book of verse-legend.[1] I'll return to these later.

First, let's look at a book on Star Wars, written by Richard Ennals, son of former minister Lord Ennals, and (until he resigned in protest against the Strategic Defence Initiative) a senior research scientist at Imperial College and a leading light in the Alvey Artificial Intelligence programme.

Ennals's book, *Star Wars: a Question of Initiative*, should have been published in September. Publisher John Wiley suddenly withdrew it from publication, without any explanation, a few days before its scheduled launch.

Along with other journalists, and numerous MPs, I tried without success to find out who had stepped on the book and why. I did, however, manage to get my hands on a copy of the book for a few days -- much to the annoyance of journalists covering the same story for other papers.

Ennals indicated in the book that many UK scientists and civil servants are opposed to Star Wars research, mainly on the grounds that it is a totally unworkable scheme, and have told the UK government so. Michael Heseltine and Leon Britton resigned over SDI, he says; Westland was merely a smoke-screen. And Ennals claims the Americans, trying to gain support from UK military research, sent an industrial spy to find out what we're working on. But whatever the protests, Ennals shows the British government committed to putting UK research under US military control.

Ennals's book will now be published in December.[2] According to Wiley, it will be "improved". I understand from Ennals that all the factual information in the original version will still be there, but that he has had to tone down some of his more outspoken assertions. It's still going to be worth reading for the truth behind British involvement in Star Wars, but it's a shame that it was muzzled as it was.

Why did the publishers withdraw the original? Was there any external pressure? (They say not.) If so, from where? The libel laws make it dangerous for me to speculate; make your own guesses and draw your own conclusions.

That was a case of a publisher nobbling a book. Government departments are often reluctant to speak to the Press; when they do, they want to control what is written and published -- and broadcast, in the light of the Tebbit's tirades against the BBC.

I've recently been working on a series of articles on the use of computers in sensitive installations. Two of the most secretive and security-touchy (I won't name them, but Dave Langford used to work at one, and I used to work at the other) allowed me to interview senior staff on condition I let them vet my copy for possible security breaches. Because of the rarity of these interviews, my paper, equally rarely, agreed to these conditions.

Fine. Having agreed the terms, the interviews went well, and I wrote interesting but, as agreed, non-sensationalist, articles, and sent them off to be checked. Then the problems began.

"You can't say that. This shows us up in a bad light. That is your own interpretation. We don't like the way you phrased that."

They'd moved the goalposts. Suddenly they wanted to rewrite my articles to be more favourable to them. They wanted me to act as their PR man. They wanted to stop me, as a journalist, putting my own comment and interpretations on what I'd heard into the articles.

There's a word for this: censorship.

Let's return to the SF world -- because censorship does affect us directly. It would be interesting to know how many BSFA members who enjoy Samuel R Delany's books don't have a copy of *The Tides of Lust*. For several years the only available edition was a French translation. No English language publisher would touch it, until Savoy Books came along. Then Savoy were busted by the police, and much of their stock was confiscated as pornography.

If you define porn as blatantly sexual writing (I'd disagree, but that's a reasonable Moral Majority definition), then *The Tides of Lust* is porn. It's literary porn, in that it's an extremely well-written book about non-orthodox sex. Why Savoy were busted, when similar subject matter is available in any newsagent, or behind blank "Private Shop" windows, I don't know. Maybe because *The Tides of Lust* is literary, instead of badly-written hack pap, it was seen as more morally dangerous, more subversive: "nice people don't do this sort of thing."

But this censorship means that most Delany fans have been denied access to a beautifully-written book.

The Borribles: Across the Dark Metropolis was published by Piccolo (Pan) this autumn, as a paperback original. Collins were to have published the book in hardback, but changed their minds and cancelled the publication. Apparently they objected to these anti-authoritarian, pointed-eared children fighting the police in the streets and railway tunnels of London. The novel is violent and brutal. Property is damaged, people are hurt. People -- Borribles and police -- are killed. The Special Borrible Group (SBG) of the police are depicted as vicious

and cruel. Collins, it seems, did not wish to be associated with this sort of thing. But it's such a damn good book because it's real, it's hard, it hurts.[3]

It is true that publishers have the right to accept or reject books as they see fit. But having contracted for this book, their rejection of it becomes a deliberate act.

Okay, so it's been published in paperback, so what harm has been done? It won't get the same review coverage, the same publicity, as it would have done in hardback. It will be available in fewer libraries and school libraries. A paperback is nowhere near as durable as a hardback. In a few months, *The Borribles: Across the Dark Metropolis* could vanish without trace.

EDITORIAL

Richard Adams has left talkative rabbits far behind. His latest work, *The Legend of Te Tuna*, recently published in hardback by Sidgwick and Jackson, is a beautifully illustrated narrative poem, based on a South Sea legend about Polynesian gods and heroes and the giant eel Te Tuna. It's the illustrations, by Ul de Rico, which have caused the problem. Some of them portray the sexual act colourfully and erotically -- too erotically for *The Bookseller*, which refused to carry a promotional leaflet for the book.[4]

Again, any journal has the right to accept or reject ads -- but by banning advertising for *The Legend of Te Tuna*, *The Bookseller* made a decision which is likely to affect sales of the book. You advertise to sell. If your ads are blocked, banned, censored, your sales will fall.

These are some of the examples of censorship I know of. I'm sure there are many others, both outside and within the SF world. Publishers don't have to give reasons to authors why they reject their books. The vast majority of rejections are simply because the book isn't good enough, or because the publisher reckons it won't sell -- and publishers are businessmen, not altruists.

But how many books never see print because the publisher doesn't like their sexual, or moral, or political stance? We know that this goes on in South Africa and the Soviet Union -- but how common is it in Britain?

More subtly, how many borderline SF novels are bounced because they don't fit within the publisher's neat genre limits? Even more subtly, how often do publishers put pressure on authors to make changes in their work that they don't want to, that make it a different book from the one the author intended? (This isn't new: the published version of *Great Expectations* ends happily; Dickens's original didn't. The publishers won.)

There are two fairly new organisations which may help combat censorship in this country. One, chaired by Des Wilson, president of the Liberal Party, aims to increase freedom of information, and, presumably, freedom of speech, which is supposed to be one of our basic human rights.[5] The other takes its name from Article 19 of the internationally agreed charter on human rights, which guarantees freedom of speech; I believe it is headed by a former Amnesty International leader.

As SF readers and writers, we generally see ourselves as independent, liberated thinkers. People with ideas, sometimes controversial ideas. Unorthodox, even revolutionary ideas. If we see ideas and information and speech and thought being squashed, it's up to us to make a fuss about it. Tell people -- they might listen. Write to the Press -- they may suppress it, but there's a chance they'll pick it up. Write to your MP -- or if you think yours is no good, write to another one; some of them are very helpful. And if you come across suppression of information by government, the civil service, local government or industry, contact these two new organisations -- they may be able to take up your cause, and publicise the case that you've brought up, as an example of the growing cancer of censorship in this country.

Christmas is traditionally a time for appealing to totalitarian countries for the release of political prisoners, locked up because they dared to express their beliefs. This year, let's look at the mote in Britain's eye as well.

[1] Source: *Locus*, October 1986
[2] *Star Wars: A Question of Initiative* by Richard Ennals, to be published by John Wiley on December 10th
[3] *The Barribles: Across the Dark Metropolis* by Michael de Larrabeiti. Piccolo, 1986. 332pp. £1.95
[4] *The Legend of Te Tuna* by Richard Adams. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986. 31pp. £8.95 (h/b)
[5] Campaign for Freedom of Information, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD

URGENT! URGENT! URGENT! URGENT! URGENT!

STOP

SITS VAC

We urgently need *two* new members of the VECTOR Editorial team, one to help prepare final typed copy and the other to help design and paste-up the artwork. The typist *must* be fast and accurate with constant access to a word processor (preferably an Amstrad PCW 8256/8512 to maintain consistency with the rest of the team.) You can be anywhere in the country as long as you are reliable! *AND*, the same goes for the designer, with the addition of access to a copy camera if possible and graphic arts materials (like a drawing board, etc.) Previous applicants are welcome to re-apply. *YOUR VECTOR NEEDS YOU*! Call the Editor on 01.688 6081, *NOW*!

PRESS

LETTERS

IT FELT RATHER ODD TO SEE MYSELF DESCRIBED AS BEING derogatory about John Wyndham. I've always thought I stick up for him a bit too much for street credibility's sake. But I suppose that this is another example of one of the great unfortunate truths in the science fiction world: it ain't what you say, it's what other people say you say. I demurred mildly when I read LJ Hurst's article in *V133*, felt my lines were inoffensive and removed from their context... but LJ was busy making his point, and it didn't matter too much. But now in *V134* Robert Steele is quoting LJ quoting me, and taking LJ at his face value: nasty old Priest, getting at John Wyndham, etc.

Just for the record, my apparent heinous attack on Wyndham's bourgeois tendency was lifted by LJ from a long essay in which I tried to point out the virtues of British science fiction. The work of several authors was summoned as evidence for this case, John Wyndham's being fairly prominent. I've also praised Wyndham elsewhere: I loved his books when I was young, and when I re-read them a few years ago I thought they were a lot better than I had secretly dreaded I might find them, taste notoriously changing with age, and all that. They were a bit chatty, like an Afternoon Play on Radio 4, but still exerted a great power. They're deservedly popular... unlike the meretricious garbage put out by hacks like Anne McCaffrey, Piers Anthony, Alan Dean Foster and all the others that nasty old people like me aren't supposed to mention by name.

Speaking of Wyndham, it seems to me that these days Bob Shaw is every bit as good. I always read his new novels. To tell the truth, he's more or less the only trad science fiction writer whose work I still unashamedly enjoy. I liked his article in *V134*, and admired his honesty. I too read James Salter's *The Hunters* years ago, but Bob makes me want to go and read it again.

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
78 High Street
Pewsey
Wiltshire SN9 5AQ

I'M SORRY TOM JONES HAS NO IDEA WHO THE EDITORS ARE AT Gollancz, Grafton, Ace, etc. -- but surely they aren't that anonymous or secretive. Most of the British editors heavily involved with SF are to be found at conventions -- at least from time to time -- though few have as high a profile as Tony Roxburgh or (dare I say?) me.

Thanks for another good issue.

MALCOLM EDWARDS
Victor Gollancz Ltd
14 Henrietta Street
London WC2E 8QJ

I WAS DISMAYED TO SEE HOW LITTLE THE EXAMINATION BOARD booklist for SF had changed (Michael Fearn's letter, *V134*). Your reply, though correct, had that lonely sound of truth.

I agree that the BSFA should at least try to change the situation -- but *how?* I assume that a member would write to the Exam Boards on behalf of the BSFA, but I have no idea who is responsible for such a task. Am I the only person to find Those In Charge too distant or even anonymous? All I can do is write to *Vector*, hope my letter is printed, and hope my words are read *and noted*...

SIMON NICHOLSON
290 London Road
Langley
Slough
Berks SL3 7HT

«By "Those In Charge" do you mean the Exam Boards or the BSFA committee? If the latter, yes, there's been a gulf between committee and members for too long, and we're trying to do something about it; your letters, articles and other help (typing, mailing sessions etc.) are very definitely welcome. As for the Exam Boards, we will be contacting them with suggestions; for example, here's Andy Sawyer's list. -- Ed.»

I DON'T KNOW IF ANYONE EVER MADE ANYTHING OF YOUR SUGGestion to put forward alternative SF novels to examining boards. I had a think about it, but found it a difficult exercise partly because I'm very ambivalent about the idea of compulsory reading. I'm sure a lot of people are put off books by reading them at the "wrong" time, and certainly I have a mental list of books which I want people to read, because I think they're good, but I'd be unhappy about people having to read them to pass exams. Still, I had a go, for interest's sake, and came up with:

Olaf Stapledon	*Last and First Men*
"	*Odd John*
Ursula LeGuin	*The Dispossessed*
Walter E Miller	*A Canticle for Leibowitz*
Arthur C Clarke	*The Sentinel*
"	*Childhood's End*
John Brunner	*Shockwave Rider*
Keith Roberts	*Pavane*
Pohl/Kornbluth	*The Space Merchants*
Naomi Mitchison	*Memoirs of a Spacewoman*
Cordwainer Smith	*The Planet Buyer/Norstrilia*
William Gibson	*Neuromancer*
Alfred Bester	*The Demolished Man*
Harry Harrison	*Make Room, Make Room*

If there's a common element there it's because they're all other than just good SF stories, at least in my view.

ANDY SAWYER
1 The Flaxyard
Woodfall Lane
Little Neston
South Wirral L64 4BT

«Andy enclosed an ad from a recent Times Educational Supplement *for the* Starpol *series by John Tully:*
"Highly motivating science fiction stories for reluctant and remedial readers: reading age 8½, interest age 8-14+, with Action Files which offer a wide range of imaginative comprehension, language and reading development activities."
It would be interesting if a teacher who's used this material could write an article for Vector, *saying how it comes across in the classroom. If any reader has, or knows a teacher who has, please contact me. -- Ed.»*

YOUR EDITORIAL TO *V134* HIT A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE NAIL (to myself at least -- although I'm probably not alone) firmly and squarely on the head.

If I were to give a definition of my own interests in the field of science fiction I'd probably find myself on the side of the "Them" you refer to. Like these people I do find a good deal of the reviews published in *Vector* (and to a lesser extent *Paperback Inferno*) negative and condemnatory.

Having been a member of the BSFA for just under three years I am now used to this approach, and temper my reading of reviews by largely ignoring most of the criticism, and trying to elicit what the story is about before deciding whether or not I'd actually want to read the book.

Where the editorial really struck home, however, was in the reference to the time-old "SF" versus "sci-fi" quandary. I find it incredible that readers of science fiction get so uptight when a non-reader refers to the field as "sci-fi". Admittedly, to us there is a discernible difference between the two, and it is undoubtedly the fear that we are being identified with these people who actually (shock horror!) enjoy the likes of *Dr Who*, *Star Trek* or the *Star Wars* films that annoys us so much.

But wait just a minute, now. Surely there are those of us who do enjoy the aforementioned programmes and films? Admittedly, the science in them is more often than not a little wonky, but that does not bely the fact that a majority of these "sci-fi" programmes (and, indeed, books) are great entertainment. And while we're at it, let's not forget that it was with the likes of Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke that most of us were introduced to the field in the first place (at the tender age of 12 I'm sure a lot of us were more likely to be reading these authors than the likes of JG Ballard or Philip K Dick).

The point I'm trying to make here is that the definition "sci-fi" is exactly that: a definition. For us to wail and moan about it and chastise those who employ it to describe the sort of thing we enjoy reading or writing is

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futile. It will never simply go away, and even if it did all that would happen is that people outside of the field would begin using SF as a new blanket term for anything remotely futuristic or with scientific undertones.

If the BSFA want to appeal to a greater membership we are going to have to accept the lovers of what it is convenient for us to refer to as sci-fi into the organisation, and I feel strongly that it is time that some allowance was made for these people. If it is felt that the hallowed pages of *Vector* are sacrosanct, and could never stoop so low as to print reviews and articles that do not resemble doctorate theses, then perhaps a new publication is in order. I would suggest a combined *Matrix/Paperback Inferno* magazine that sought to appeal to a wider audience, and not just the "stuck-up, arrogant intellectual snobs".

MARK OGIER
Celeborn
Chridesa Clos
Pitronnerie Road
St Peter Port
Guernsey CI

«I agree with much of that, Mark, but not with your last point. I think the different magazines already cater for different people; in the BSFA survey (results out Real Soon Now!), every magazine was somebody's favourite. I don't want Vector *to be seen as hyper-intellectual; I've had to ask several contributors to make their articles read less like doctoral theses.* Foundation *is the academic British SF journal. I hope* Vector *is of interest to most (if not all) members, and try very hard to make the contents an interesting mix. -- Ed.»*

I HAVE JUST BEEN READING YOUR COMMENTS ON THE CRITICS' anemia *«sic»* to Anne McCaffrey (*V134*). There is but one thing I have to say to these people, this being, I've enjoyed them all (all 96 or so of them) so up yours pal. Why is it that when someone writes a trilogy he suddenly becomes a grabber and a one-track writer? As long as the writer (whoever it may be) continues to produce a good quality readable book, why worry? The publishers don't. I think the critics' time would be better spent slagging off those writers who, having had one or two major successes, proceed to live off their good name, producing books which one could term as being nothing less than utter drivel. That does not mean I agree with the practice of surrendering to the market trend, but so long as the writer himself enjoys producing a book and throws himself and his feelings into that book, I myself am satisfied -- even though I might not like his style and composition, which in itself is totally a different kettle of fish altogether.

Now, after all that I am after a favour. Could you name me 12 sci-fi (or SF -- whichever turns you on) writers who dealt in the sword and sorcery theme and who have now passed on -- you know, snuffed it in order to get away from the so-called critics. No, seriously, I need the names as a basis for a book I hope to start on shortly.

TONY MORRIS
23 Woodward Road
Prestwich
Manchester M25 8TX

«Please send suggestions directly to Tony, not to Vector *-- though if you're serious about writing a book, Tony, you should be able to track them down through your own research. -- Ed.»*

YOUR EDITORIAL IN *VECTOR 134*, AND BRIAN ALDISS'S COMMENT at the top of page 12 of the same issue, reinforce each other nicely.

You are really entering the dangerous territory of trying to tie a definition to the field that will please everyone and, quite frankly, you're wasting your time. If we reach a point where we can all agree on what we mean by SF, sci-fi or skiffy, we will be endangering the diversity of the field (notice I don't say *genre*, for *the field* does have more than one plant growing in it -- it's a whole area of inter-related genres); and it's the diversity of the field that attracts so many different types of writers and readers. As long as we all get what we are looking for from the types of books we choose to read, that's all that matters. If we all agreed on a definition, I wonder how much of the field's richness would disappear because publishers and writers no longer needed to try and please so many different tastes.

This brings me to what I imagine is a rhetorical question on your part: "Isn't it more productive to praise the 'good' than to condemn the 'bad'?" I would answer this question with a sound NO. There are several reasons for my negative attitude to your proposition. Firstly, if you don't condemn the outright bad that publishers attempt to foist upon us you ultimately put at risk the good as well, because it is far, far easier to lower standards than to improve them. The question then arises as to how we should react to the vast amount of passing good work that is published? There's no easy answer to this except, hopefully, to be guided by those reviewers and critics whose opinions we have learned to trust. If writer X allows a book to be published which is below his *personal* average for quality, then critics and readers should let him know, vociferously. If writer Y, whose personal average is mediocre to poor, publishes a book which shows a marked improvement over previous efforts, regardless of where it stands in relation to the rest of his genre, then he obviously deserves praise for trying harder. It's the old carrot on a stick, really. Secondly, if you don't condemn the bad, but keep on buying it because it's more productive to encourage than to condemn, you put at risk the whole integrity of the field; because, without any doubt at all, it is the bad by which the field will be judged by those who know nothing of it.

As Brian rightly says on page 12, there *will* always be schisms and internecine warfare within the field. And what a good thing that is! How else will new concepts, new techniques of writing, new authors develop if everything is set out and agreed for all time? What a bereft field this would be if everyone agreed that dragons, time travel, space adventures, alternate worlds, cute fantasies, post-holocaust stories, whatever, were all of equal merit. There would be nothing to encourage one faction or another to dominate for a while, there would be no development, no change. The field would be stuck in its own cosy little niche, just like romances, westerns and whodunnits.

I'm all in favour of Us and Them; long may all factions go from strength to strength, long may we disagree, because, after all, we are not inferior to each other, just different. And those difference are vital.

JIM GODDARD
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«I couldn't agree more, Jim. Uniformity leads inexorably to mediocrity. The more types of SF the better, the more new ideas the better, and I also get very angry when people try to straitjacket SF. What I was objecting to in that Editorial was the knee-jerk dismissal of the types of science fiction we disparagingly call sci-fi, the intellectual arrogance of so many reviewers who divide science fiction neatly into worthwhile and worthless, SF and sci-fi. By all means call crap crap, if that's what it is -- but don't dismiss something as crap because it's written by a certain author, or because it's part of a trilogy, or even because it's a cute fantasy, or whatever. All that shows is the prejudice of the reviewer. It's exactly the same as a man snarling "Women drivers!", or saying that all red-headed people have fiery tempers, or any form of racial, religious, sexual or political prejudice. -- Ed.»

OF COURSE I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE SPREAD YOU GAVE TO *Trillion Year Spree* in *V134*.

However, through no fault of yours, the cover of the book, which is reproduced three times, is a little murky. A crucial line of text is thereby obscured. That line reads "With David Wingrove".

You do mention David Wingrove in your preamble, but perhaps you would allow me to insist in your columns that he and I in this book achieved what I regard as an exemplary partnership. Of course it is based on my solo *Billion Year Spree* of 1973, but nevertheless the new book

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-- so startling, so comprehensive -- could not have made its appearance without David's assistance at every stage.

BRIAN ALDISS

«For those who haven't yet seen it, I strongly recommend Trillion Year Spree *as a good comprehensive history of SF; we'll be reviewing it in full in the near future. Finally, a couple of late comments on book reviews in* V133. *A general point: we start putting an issue of* Vector *together as soon as the previous one is published -- though obviously the planning goes back months before that. To try to keep letters relevant to the previous issue, please write as soon as you can. -- Ed.»*

THE SIRENS OF TITAN: THE WORST BOOK IN THE GOLLANCZ collection. I thought it was terrible. Looking at *PI* it seems I'm in the minority; well, you pays your money...

Nova: As soon as I had finished this book one thought occurred to me -- it is no more than a retelling of the *Romeo and Juliet* theme set in the future. The attraction of Lorq Von Ray to Ruby Red, while at the same time Lorq and Prince Red try to destroy each others' families -- to me none of the other elements in the story could detract from this point. If you want a classic read Shakespeare. My hope is that the next four releases in this collection are up to the standard of *More than Human* which I thought excellent.

Time-Slip: a book I have not read. You mention the novel has imperfections: that would be putting it mildly, if the scenario is that the USSR is the enemy. Scotland would be one of the worst affected countries because of such targets as the US nuclear sub fleet in Holy Loch and the RN nuclear subs which would be based at Rosyth and the Clyde.

IAIN U ANDERSON
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I READ PAUL BRAZIER'S REVIEW OF *FORCIBLE ENTRY* BY STUART Parrer in *V133*. Paul describes it as a thoroughly bad book. Fine, I believe him. It sounds it. A number of points strike me:

Paul has not thought through one of his criticisms logically. On the grounds that most amputees can still feel their missing parts until their removal is proved he objects to his "missing" genitalia being the first thing noticed by the male protagonist as he explores a "taken-over" woman's body. The point is there has been no amputation; there is nothing missing so the comparison is false.

Nevertheless, I would question whether the "psychic rapist", as Paul characterises him, would notice any missing genitalia since he would be taking over a perfectly normal body and receive its normal sense impressions. Since a woman has no penis her body would not recognise that it's not there!

The sexually noisome aspect of this is that the male would have to actively seek out the differences in his "new" body -- this is true rape, not just voyeurism at its worst.

And yet, the thought nags -- would it not be a natural reaction on taking over a "new" body to explore it? This would, I think, be as true for a woman taking over a man's body as *vice versa*. (Wouldn't a woman in a man's body be extremely interested in the penis and how it works? She might find it extremely awkward -- jiggling about and getting in the way when you run, misbehaving when you don't want it to and sometimes not when you do.) The author would be remiss if, in setting the situation up, he ignored this.

The situation is not quite as simple as Paul believes. I agree the trans-sexual overtones give added distaste but surely the real objection is to the taking over (raping) of any body at all, without consent, whether that body be a woman's, a man's, a child's or even an animal's?

On another point: I disagree with parts of your Editorial (*V133*). I would say that without the mind-training and acquired skills of a scientist a good professional writer is likely to cock it up, if the subject is science and technology. God knows, enough scientists do, even with their training. And I'm not talking here about scientists writing SF; I'm talking about their grasp of and communication of scientific concepts to each other.

I don't agree that being a scientist is a disqualification to being a good writer as you imply. The fact that there are very few examples probably just means that the appropriate people are too busy being scientists to write novels. The essence of science is communication (of results). That scientists can do that badly is no more surprising than the same failure in anyone else.

The implication of part of your argument is that good professional writers ought to be able to teach any subject if they can write about it. (I know that takes your argument to extremes but I hope you get my point.)

Your Golden Turkey of the Year Award is justified, however. Trying to teach computer science by writing SF is using the wrong tool for the job. Novels should be about people in various situations and their reactions to those situations. The hardware, in literature as in life, should not get in the way.

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ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER

THE TELEVISION SF OF HARLAN ELLISON

BY PHIL NICHOLS

A REBEL FACES THE IMMENSITY OF SPACE FOR THE FIRST time; an android faces eternity with the fate of humanity in his hands; a starship captain must allow the woman he loves to die in order that history might resume its proper course. The television scripts of Harlan Ellison have placed protagonists in such quandaries; in his science fictional tales the lone hero can and does change the world. His heroes are victims, different, alienated from their own kind. His heroes are ultimately - on the brink of immensity, on the edge of forever - responsible.

Ellison's television output has been of a consistently high standard, and for this he has been rewarded several times by his peers. Little attempt seems to have been made, however, to integrate those stories he has written for the visual medium into his larger body of prose fiction. My aim here is to make a small start on this task by considering Ellison's most important science fiction scripts in relation to his short stories. I shall consider in detail five TV episodes. The scripts of three of these are available in books, either Ellison's own or anthologies edited by others; and three of the completed episodes have been televised here within the last five years.

Ellison's first SF TV script to be filmed was "Soldier" (1964), written for The Outer Limits, and based on his 1957 short story. It concerns one Qarlo Clobreggny, warrior from the future, who finds himself catapulted through time to 1960s America. The plot centres on attempts to understand and communicate with the barely intelligible Qarlo, and focuses on the question of "nature verses nurture" - can this killing machine be reconditioned to function in a peaceful society?

The original short story ends in certainty, with the soldier put to constructive use as a warning against the very future that produced him. The script version, however, abandons such certainty, and leaves the viewer to ponder whether or not Qarlo has been reformed by the typical American family that has given him shelter.

Qarlo is clearly alienated, a stranger in a strange land. He is recognisably human, and occasionally sympathetic. Somewhat atypically, though, he is not the hero of the story. In fact the story has no real hero; the drama is shared between Qarlo and a scientist named Kagan. In later scripts Ellison would focus events on a single character, combining the strength of heroism with the pain of victimisation in a single individual. In "Soldier", though, we can identify a number of key elements that recur in Ellison's work: an alien who is also human; a character thrust into a sitiuation by forces beyond his control; and the ever-present question of responsibility. Qarlo gives his life to save the family from an enemy who has followed him back through time.

Ellison's second SF script, "Demon With A Glass Hand" (1964), was also written for The Outer Limits, and can in many ways be seen as a thematic extension of "Soldier": again we have a mysterious time-traveller beset by a mysterious enemy. "Demon" is also significant in that it was Ellison's first original SF script, although it forms part of his loose cycle of Kyben war stories.

Trent "was born ten days ago, a full grown man." He has no knowledge of who he is or why he is here, but he soon finds himself pursued by Kyben, who have conquered the future Earth. The Kyben are in disarray, not least because every last human being has vanished from the face of the Earth, leaving only a worldwide plague which has decimated the alien invaders. They follow Trent back through time where, finger by finger, he assembles his own glass hand. Having thwarted his pursuers, and completed the hand, Trent at last learns the truth: he is an android, and the whole of mankind has been encoded for safe-keeping into a wire within his chest. He must wait out the centuries on Earth,- "waiting for the day he will be called to free the humans who gave him mobility - movement, but not life."

Once again, we have a mysterious alien in human form, moved initially by forces beyond his comprehension and control, a notion common to several of the Kyben short stories.

The fisrt Kyben story, "The Crackpots", appeared in 1956, and presented the alien race on their home planet; the story is unusual in that the Kyben are the only race featured - there are no humans involved - and in that the Kyben seem neutral, quite unlike the unpleasant villains they were to become. In subsequent stories, the Kyben become a galactic menace, heading out toward Earth. However, they are mostly kept in the background, while more de-humanizing elements are hard at work in the foreground. In "Life Hutch" (1956), an astronaut is trapped alone in a cabin by a beserk robot; his ingenuity defeats the machine. "Night Vigil" (1957) has a young man stripped of his identity and wired into an early-warning system, his sole purpose being to set off the alarm when the enemy approach Earth; he grows old, alone, and when the enemy finally appear - it comes as a relief. "Run For The Stars" (1957) sees the inhabitants of an Earth outpost fleeing from an imminent Kyben invasion, leaving behind Benno Tallant, a cowardly junkie, into whose stomach has been implanted a "sun bomb": in order to proceed to Earth, the Kyben must first capture Benno and defuse the bomb. But Benno finds courage, and eventually leads the Kyben toward revenge on his human tormentors.

In each of these stories, we find a lone protagonist trapped in a situation devised by others - usually a group of his own kind - often led to bitterness and feelings of revenge towards his own manipulators. The hero's

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degradation is a result of human inventiveness in advance of the actual outbreak of war. By then end of each story, mankind has become the enemy.

The Earth-Kyba conflict depicted in "Demon", then, is a rarity, not only showing the Kyben, but showing them as the enemy. However, the hero is again, like Benno Tallant, calculated to act as a decoy, and to this end has his identity over written by those he is to serve. "Demon" is also an altogether more "upbeat" tale than most of the Kyben stories: Trent is turned not to revenge, but to saving his creators.

While Qarlo's self-sacrifice was once-only, Trent's is eternal. He is immortal; Gilgamesh. He recalls Ted, the sole survivor of "I have No Mouth And I Must Scream" (1967), and in his solitude provides a curious counterpoint to his almost-namesake Trente, the "Paingod" (1964) - appointed by the Ethos to inflict eternal pain on man in order that he may know pleasure. But these characters, while enduring comparable solitude, undergo considerable suffering - Ted is reduced to a gelatinous blob. Then there is Jack the Ripper who, in "The Prowler In The City At The Edge Of The World" (1967), has his personal, righteous (if misguided) crusade reduced to a spectator sport by the thirtieth-century telepaths who enter his mind. Trent, however, is to a large extent self-motivated, and in this way presages a shift in Ellison's work away from suffering caused by an external agent, and toward the internal conflict, a shift which is further evidenced by his next major SF script, written for Star Trek.

"City On The Edge Of Forever" (1967) became one of Star Trek's most popular episodes, picking up a clutch of TV and SF awards. Dr McCoy, temporarily deranged, passes through a time portal to Earth's past, and unwittingly disrupts the normal course of history. To set things straight - and escape from the timeless limbo into which they have been plunged - Kirk and Spock must follow McCoy into the past. However, once in the past, Kirk falls in love with Edith Keeler, a woman of unusual vision, who also turns out to be the focal point in time to which they have been drawn. In order to restore the course of history, Kirk must allow the woman he loves to die.

Originally, Ellison had Edith run over by a truck as Kirk stood anchored to the spot, racked by indecision, while the ever-logical Spock prevented McCoy from saving Edith. Spock is thus used in his early symbolic sense - wholly rational, but with a suggestion of evel - while Kirk is figuratively tied to the mast in an effort to resist the siren that Edith represents. Naturally, the series' creator Gene Roddenberry was not too pleased to see the series' vital hero being incapacitated in this way, as it could destroy the future credibility of Kirk the decision-maker. Hence, in the final version (credited solely to Ellison, but re-written by Roddenberry) the climax is re-structured. Now, Kirk makes the decision that only he can make: he prevents McCoy from saving Edith.

"Do you know what you just did?" asks McCoy; "I could have saved her!"

"He knows, doctor," replies Spock, "he knows."

"City" makes much use of the concept of time as a river, possessing flow, eddies, and backwash. But at the centre of the disturbance in time encountered by the Enterprise crew is the Guardian of Forever, a machine with the ability to replay the past, and permit passage to and from it. The Guardian exists to serve man, apparently disinterestedly, but the images it offers act as a lure, the first sign of the misleading siren Kirk is soon to meet.

A number of Ellison's short stories use this temptation of a return to the past, or to simpler times. In "One Life, Furnished In Early Poverty" (1970), a man returns to his own past to help his younger self; but in his efforts to spare "himself" the pains of growing up, his adult form begins to decay. He must escape, leave the past as it should be. Ultimately, the younger and older selves become intertwined in a kaleidoscopic climax of shifting viewpoint.

Then, too, there is the retreat to a comfortable womb-like world, the orderliness of which always conceals a darker side. In "A Boy And His Dog" (1969), we see a perfectly preserved middle-class suburbia fully functioning under what remains of a war-scarred city. The hero, Vic, descends to this society, but sees it for what it is - Vic is to be used as a stud as the inhabitants of the underground town are increasingly sterile - and ultimately escapes. In "The Prowler In The City At The Edge Of The World", the sterility of a future world serves as a womb-like contrast to the Spitalfield slums from which Jack the Ripper has found himself inexplicably plucked, but the autoclave environment opens up to reveal the minds of its inhabitants; the Ripper's dream of a slum-free world, clean and pure, is dispelled when he discovers the evil which still lurks in the mind of future man.

To escape from his womb-like world, Kirk must face up to reality. Like Vic, and Jack, he must see the deception behind the facade the womb-world presents to him. In the final version of "City", Kirk is put firmly at the centre of this realisation - he is not only trapped, but executes his own escape. He must choose between his love for Edith and the future of the Earth. The pressures on him are purely internal: if Kirk is in any way victimised, it is by his own personal dilemma, not by any external agent. The suffering is, in William Faulkener's phrase, of "the human heart in conflict with itself."

In 1973, Ellison conceived The Starlost: a weekly series set aboard a generation starship. Following the traditional pattern established by Heinlein's "Universe" (1941) and Aldiss' "Non-Stop" (1958), among others, it was to feature a hero who has discovered that "the world" he knows is nothing more nor less than a colossal spaceship, and who must convince others of the fact before the ship is destroyed by collision with a star.

Ellison's pilot script, "Phoenix Without Ashes", introduces the hero, Devon; an outcast and rebel. In one of many playful literary references, he is likened to Huckleberry Finn. The society in which he lives is ruled by strict religious elders, who dress in Amish-like garb. Devon discovers the opening to the heart of the spaceship - a circular hatch in a hillside into which he tumbles, like Alice down the rabbit-hole. Curiously, this hero is not so much escaping into a womb as escaping from it; the society he leaves is cocooned, middle-class small town faimiliar in its generalities from "A Boy And His Dog".

Once outside his home biosphere, he explores the ship, eventually - like the hero of Plato's parable of the cave - discovering that his knowledge of the world is nothing but a shadow of the truth. At the heart of the script is a bravura sequence in which Devon realises for the first time the true scale of the universe: a sequence which would begin on Devon's face, proceed out into space, revealing the ultimate insignificance of the grape-cluster spaceship, and then return through the intricate tubes of the ship to another close-up, ending on a tear on Devon's cheek.

(Needless to say, the desired effects were never realised. Ellison's script was re-written by others, and he, executive producer Douglas Trumbull, and technical adviser Ben Bova all left the series. Ellison also withdrew his name, substituting his derisory pseudonym Cordwainer Bird.)

For once, Ellison's expansive canvas is space, not time, and it might thus be argued that he hoped for too much from the spatially-limited medium of television. In this script, there is no other worldy being, no alien force. But there are conspirators. As in "A Boy And His Dog", Devon is manipulated by his elders; the hero's enemies are once more of his own kind. Thus, "Phoenix" has much in common with the earlier Kyben short stories. Still, though, the hero carries the fate of the world on his shoulders, for if the spaceship is to be saved it will be by Devon's efforts.

Through these scripts can be seen developing the theme of responsibility, of characters taking on the full load of the universe. In the short stories, however, there remains a negative side to this kind of heroism, a failure on the part of mankind to "play the game". In "Silent In Gehenna" (1971), Joe Bob Hickey must spend eternity as the seldom heard conscience of mankind. In "Asleep: With Still Hands" (1968), man has had enough of his troublesome conscience, and short-circuits the Sleeper, the "man who had spent lifetimes beyond his own lifetime that man could live in peace".

In Ellson's early short stories responsibility was shunned, or rebelled against. During the 1960's the stories became increasingly focused on a single character. The

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previously mentioned "One Life, Furnished In Early Poverty" has only one character, seen at two stages of life. "Try A Dull Knife" (1969) features one man on the run from those who have taken advantage of his natural empathy - as they use his figurative shoulder to cry on, they each take a piece of his individuality, literally cutting away at his physical form; his only escape is by 'phoning the one person he knows can help him, but the number is engaged, for the number he must ring is his own.

A later story, "Alive And Well And On A Friendless Voyage" (1977), returns to the idea of the empath, showing a character, Moth, who takes on the guise of any person needed by his fellow travellers on a voyage across the stars. Moth is the only one for whom the voyage never ends; purgatory. But this story is in contrast to the hysteria of "Try A Dull Knife", and reflects the ideas found in the TV scripts namely, the character who heroically accepts the challenge of taking on the burden of the world. Another Demon, another mirror-image Paingod.

In recent years, Ellison's short stories have returned again and again to the question of responsibility, perhaps reaching a peak of expression in "Shatterday" (1975). Here we again see a character meet himself, but this time split into two by a crucial dilemma in the character's life. One version of Peter Novins has taken on the responsibility for his ageing mother's well-being, while the other version has shirked the responsibility: we see both outcomes of the dilemma coexisting, until one version of the hero begins to fade away.

The most recent example of Ellison's original TV SF brings these themes together, and provides a unique melding of his prose and script work. "Paladin Of The Lost Hour" (1985) was begun as a short story, developed as a TV script for the new series of The Twilight Zone, and then finished in short story form. It concerns an old man, Gaspar, whose pocket watch, stopped at 11 o'clock, carries one last hour for mankind; if ever it should reach 12:00, the universe will end.

Gaspar is another Trent, living slowly through the years with the responsibility for the race itself held within him. Unlike Trent, Gaspar is mortal. With his death approaching, he must pass on his watch to a worthy successor. Before he dies, he feels a strong temptation to steal the hour for himself, in order to be once more with his long-dead wife. As in "City On The Edge Of Forever", the future itself rests on a choice between personal gain and universal survival. "This weary old man, who only wanted to stay one brief hour more with Minna. Who was afraid that his love would cost the universe."

Billy Kinetta is the young black man who at first shies away from responsibility, but later learns his work as successor to Gaspar. He must struggle with his memories of an unknown soldier who died to save Billy's life. Billy recalls Pogue in "With Virgil Oddum At The East Pole" (1985), who also overcomes his reluctance to handle responsibility by taking over the lifework of an old man. Billy and Pogue, unlike the earlier hero of "Try A Dull Knife", are able to throw off their personal needs in favour of protecting the larger world.

In this latest work, then, we see a further exorcism of the self-centred individualism found in Ellison's earlier stories, another ordinary man who finds that he, too, can be responsible. The fight is no longer against an external force - no longer the fight of Benno Tallant against those who would use him - but an internal struggle merely triggered, not propelled, by external pressures.

From the early persecution-and-revenge stories, through to the more mature recent short stories, Ellison's work shows a developing human concern away from the self, from isolated individualism, toward more genuinely heroic characters. It is notable that the themes which weave through his short stories are not only present in his TV scripts, but in many cases make their first appearance there. The hero of "Demon With A Glass Hand", taking the weight of mankind on his shoulders, preceeds by many years that of "Alive And Well And On A Friendless Voyage"; his more recent stories, from "Shatterday" to "Jeffty Is Five" (1977) to "With Virgil Oddum At The East Pole" have come explicitly to recognise the theme of responsibility. It is fitting, then, that his latest foray into the visual medium should have united the prose and script form with a story which brings together the idea and ideal of over twenty years work: a lone hero, responsible, on the edge of forever.

HARLAN ELLISON SCREEN CREDITS

I make no claims as to the completeness of the following list; I would welcome any corrections or additions.

1961-62	RIPCORD	- episode title unknown
1962	THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK HOUR	- Memo From Purgatory
1963-64	BURKE'S LAW	- Who killed Alex Debbs?
		- Who killed Purity Mather?
		- Who killed Andy Zygmunt?
		- Who killed One Half of Glory Lee?
1964	THE OUTER LIMITS	- Soldier
1964	VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA	- The Price of Doom*
1966	THE OSCAR [Feature Film] Screenplay by Ellison, Russell Rouse & Clarence Greene; from a novel by Richard Sale.	
1966-67	THE MAN FROM UNCLE	- episode titles (2) unknown
1967	STAR TREK	- City On The Edge of Forever
1967-68	CIMARRON STRIP	- Knife In The Darkness
1968	THE FLYING NUN	- You Can't Get There From Here*
1971	THE YOUNG LAWYERS	- The Whimper Of Whipped Dogs
1971-72	THE SIXTH SENSE Ellison served, with D.C.Fontana, as story editor.	
1973	THE STARLOST Series created by Ellison*	- Phoenix Without Ashes* (aka Voyage Of Discovery)
1975	A BOY AND HIS DOG [Feature film] Screenplay by L.Q.Jones, from story by Ellison.	
(1976	FUTURE COP [TV film] Screenplay by Anthony Wilson & Allen Epstein; subject of (proven) infringement charges relating to story "Brillo" (1970) by Ellison & Ben Bova.)	
1977-78	LOGAN'S RUN	- episode title unknown (story only)
(1984	THE TERMINATOR [Feature film] Screenplay by James Cameron & Gale Ann Hurd; alleged to infringe upon Ellison's "Soldier" story and script.)	
1985	THE TWILIGHT ZONE Ellison also served as series' Creative Consultant until the end of 1985.	- Shatterday Script by Alan Brennert - Gramma Script by Ellison; story by Stephen King - Paladin Of The Lost Hour - Eagles** Script by Ellison; story by Donald Westlake - One Life, Furnished In Early Poverty Script by Alan Brennert - Killing Bernstein Script by Alan Brennert

*Under pseudonym "Cordwainer Bird".

**Ellison was due to direct this episode; CBS-TV disapproved of the script, and Ellison left the series; the episode was not made.

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- Partners In Wonder (1971; Ace 1983)
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ALBION WRIT

A YOUNG MAN'S JOURNEY FROM VIRICONIUM

AN INTERVIEW WITH M. JOHN HARRISON

BY Paul Kincaid

PAUL KINCAID Can we start by talking about Viriconium? It appeared in your first novel, and it's still going strong. Did you imagine that when you started out on *The Pastel City*?

M. JOHN HARRISON No, I didn't think it would take 20 years to work out. In fact it appeared before the first novel; the original version of 'Luck in the Head', one of the Viriconium stories published about 1983, was re-written from an original story published about 1965/66. So it's an obsession that's lasted 20 years.

PAUL KINCAID How come it has obsessed you so much?

M. JOHN HARRISON I think the kinds of images and themes that are handled and the way in which Viriconium the concept allows you to handle them have really been fascinating enough to take that length of time for me to become bored with. But I am now. I wouldn't say bored, but it's worked itself out. I probably won't do any more. I might give the odd snapshop here and there as it were, because it is an addictive method of writing. They're addictive images.

PAUL KINCAID I've described Viriconium as a strange mixture of fin de siecle Paris, Weimar Berlin and Medieval England all mixed up together. Do you have a clear image of the city?

M. JOHN HARRISON No, mine is about as clear as the reader's. Intentionally so. It is a collage in the sense that it's put together from odds and sods quite deliberately. I never wanted there to be a recogniseable period of Viriconium's history as it were. These things should suggest to the reader that it is a temporal collision really.

PAUL KINCAID I like the way that history is always changing, you can have a character killed in one story and in another which appears to be later in the sequence he's alive again.

M. JOHN HARRISON Yes, exactly. The rationale allows this. It's stated two or three times in the novels and through the stories that time, the universe has become so exhausted that it's beginning to forget itself, it's beginning to forget how to do, as it were, temporal narrative. As you say, there are hitches and ellipses, prolapses and so on. The whole idea was to make it as mixed up as possible, for the simple reason that it aids you in preventing closure for the reader. It forces the reader to look for the closure of the story somewhere other than in the narrative.

PAUL KINCAID Was 'A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium' intended as a closing off of the sequence?

M. JOHN HARRISON Yes, very much so. The story is in itself a use of the Viriconium replication methods on 'Egnaro'. It makes the equation between Viriconium and Egnaro, and between what Viriconium and Egnaro represent, which is the act of fantasy itself. And it says the same thing as 'Egnaro' which is that we should think very very very carefully when we make an act of fantasy, especially an act of escapist fantasy. Obviously, too, it's rather perjorative.

PAUL KINCAID I was surprised that in Young Man's Journey, Viriconium doesn't become as attractive as it might otherwise have seemed.

M. JOHN HARRISON Well exactly. I had regarded it for some time as my ideal escape, and I looked at it and thought: My God, this isn't actually a very attractive place. Most of what goes on there is not what you'd want to escape to from our world simply because it is so heavily based on how our world seems to me to operate anyway. I mean it's about contingency, it's about the fact that in real life you cannot depend on anything, you cannot operate by ideological systems, moral systems and so on. Because of that it's not the ideal escape world, so it is quite reasonable that the guys who go there from Huddersfield should discover this. At the same time there is a polarity involved in that discovery because one of the guys does think the world is beautiful and escapable to. He does see it as a fantasy and the other sees it as a terribly cold, realistic, dangerous place from which you have to escape in another way, by practical methods. There are more paradoxes of that nature involved in the subject matter of my work than I could ever possibly have guessed, and my next novel will get into some of those.

PAUL KINCAID Is it meant to be a counter-Viriconium?

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M. JOHN HARRISON It will very much be a counter-Viriconium. The idea this time is to present an actually accepted fantasy world. It's very similar to 'Egnaro' again, and Viriconium as seen in 'Young Man's Journey', but it is definitely presented - though you don't get very many glimpses of it in the novel - as an acceptable alternative. There is also a heavy meta-language in the novel that tells you constantly it is more acceptable. In the end some of the characters do manage to achieve it.

PAUL KINCAID Is it as entropic as so much of your fiction seems to be?

M. JOHN HARRISON No. The real world is shown as entropic in the sense you associate with M. John Harrison, in 'Running Down' or 'Egnaro' or 'The Ice Monkey' or any of those things. But it is definitely seen towards the end that characters have escaped that, and they have escaped it by operating in one of the paradoxes the book is about, which is to do with that constant antithesis since the Middle Ages or before in cultural or political history between what I term 'love' and what I term 'order', between as it were anarchy and call it fascism, statism, whatever. This fabulous new fantasy land, which is called the Coeur d'Alene, actually is a resolution of this paradox, or rather is a level of existence which can contain them as non-paradoxical, as parts of its structure. Unfortunately I can't tell the reader how to attain this, otherwise we might solve the world's problems tomorrow.

PAUL KINCAID This seems to be not so much a counter-Viriconium as a counter to a large proportion of your writing.

M. JOHN HARRISON Yes. It's a deliberate attempt to look at the other side of the question.

PAUL KINCAID Is it very difficult to write because of that?

M. JOHN HARRISON Easier than I would have thought. I sat down thinking: alright, this is where I state the antithesis of 20 years of work. And I found that it flows, it comes out very fluently indeed. Of course at the moment I'm only doing the miserable bits, we may find a little difficulty with the ending which is supposed to be happy. There's no point in me saying a lot about it now because I've only done three chapters, but it does indicate there's going to be a different point to my work from now on.

PAUL KINCAID You're writing a mainstream novel at the same time. Do you find any conflict there?

M. JOHN HARRISON Well, I do one or the other, and at the moment I'm working on the fantasy. The mainstream novel works by a methodology which is crazily documentary, almost everything in it has occurred. It's material that has been collected by observations in situ. It's about climbing and most of these observations have been collected on the crag. Because of that I had to wait for certain things to occur so I could write about them, and I'm still waiting for a couple of incidents to crop up. I mean I could ham them up but I don't see the point since they will inevitably happen. Also of course if you work by this method you often have to see one incident or a particular type of incident several times before you can really get the feel of it, take several notes, many observations, and layer them on top of one another to give the reader a feel of the complete experience.

PAUL KINCAID Did you find it an imaginative gear change to move from fantasy to something realistic?

M. JOHN HARRISON No, because I did it slowly. All the stories in *The Ice Monkey* collection move, from about 1974, towards a fiction totally empty of science fiction. I've only ever used the science fiction and the fantasy elements in my work as metaphors anyway. Metaphors for stuff that a mainstream novelist would deal with directly, because he's allowed to, whereas I was never allowed to in the sense of having to write for a genre audience.

PAUL KINCAID But some people would claim that the freedom of fantasy allows you to say even more than the mainstream writer is allowed to say.

M. JOHN HARRISON Well it does and it doesn't. It's an argument you could have all the way. I think that's probably why I'm still continuing to do some fantasy, because you feel this need to put things metaphorically rather than directly. Complex metaphysical ideas can be handled directly because you can act them out in front of the reader, you can't do that in realistic fiction. You can do it in 'real' fiction, 'real' writers have written fantasy if they needed to. This is where distinctions break down. A real writer takes what he needs to do the job that he wants to do. The fantasy element is used as a metaphor.

For instance in 'Running Down' I'm not writing about entropy. Somebody said in *Foundation* a while back that M. John Harrison had misunderstood entropy when he was writing about it. I had no intention of writing about entropy. Entropy doesn't interest me as a thing, it interests me as a metaphor for the human condition. As far as I'm concerned - and this is very important about all my work and it's very rarely stressed - I write about people. Fiction is about people, it isn't about anything else. The fiction of ideas can go stuff itself as far as I'm concerned. Ideas mean nothing, what counts is people. Entropy in my work is a metaphor for the condition that people find themselves in. A reader who can't see that and who thinks I'm trying to write about some aspect of astro-physics is crazy. I mean it's quite obvious from reading 'Running Down'.

Anyway, they're metaphors. Because of that they can be taken out and they steadily have been, and finally if you look for instance at 'The Ice Monkey' there are only three sentences in there which make it a fantasy. They could very easily be lifted out and one day I will just lift them out and leave a story about climbers. This is how *Climbers* was developed, very slowly and across a long period, to remove all those fantasy metaphors and only leave the realism which I was already doing in 'Running Down' and stories like that.

So no, it wasn't a difficult transition, it was wonderful. It's so relaxing to be able to write about the world, what you see, you don't have to make it up all the time. You're not constructing it to the extent that you're constructing a fantasy. You watch somebody walk past in the street, you listen to what they say, you put it down in a notebook, the next day it's in the fiction, or a year later it's in the fiction, whenever it's necessary. It means that you have a direct contact again with the world. You're writing for people, about people. My biggest quarrel with science fiction as a genre and as a philosophy of life - which a lot of people use it as - is that it's so damned inhuman. There is so little to do with people in it. And I just think that's a tragedy. It's not just a tragedy but it seems to me to be a deliberate avoidance of human affect. It's an attempt to escape from the difficulty of being human, the pressures of being human.

PAUL KINCAID Do you feel that writing fantasy has given you a sideways entrance into that, a slightly different angle than other people might have got?

M. JOHN HARRISON Oh yes, I wouldn't change anything. I don't approve of a lot of the early stuff that I wrote, but I wouldn't change any of that because it allowed me to come to realistic fiction, or mainstream fiction whatever you like to call it, with a tool box that is quite different to what a normal mainstream writer would have. If I can then add his toolbox to mine it would be a strange workshop and it would enable me to do what every writer ought to do, which is to write himself, to write with his own voice out of himself, not just out of his own opinions but out of his own temperament and the rhythms of his own brain. So fantasy at its best provides an oblique look at the real world. I'd be really happy if it was said that I was doing that.

PAUL KINCAID M. John Harrison, thank you very much.

BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

For the fence-sitters ... buy it.

THE PENGUIN WORLD OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION - Edited by Brian Aldiss & Sam J. Lundwall
[Penguin, 1986, 320pp, £3.50]
DEALING IN FUTURES - Joe Haldeman
[Orbit, 1986, 277pp, £2.50]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

SF "FROM ALL FOUR CORNERS OF THE globe, and beyond" it says. And it is ... well, maybe not from beyond.

This collection of 26 stories, selected by national panels and published under the auspices of World SF, like all collections, is a mixed bag of dross and gold. Fiction must be one of the hardest things to translate successfully, with the added worry of style and atmosphere which must be properly transposed from the original to the translation. Allowing for this makes it difficult to be objective about these stories. Some of them, like Ion Hobana's 'Night Broadcast', seem to have been translated from one language to another then to English using an out of date dictionary; others, like Tetsu Yano's 'The Legend of the Paper Spaceship' are so intelligently translated that there is a double joy in the story and the translation.

It is difficult to review these stories stylistically, but easier to look at the ideas in them. And it is in the ideas that they have the sense of "other" mentioned in the blurb. They encapsulate a cultural difference and diversity absent in SF written in English for the transatlantic market, from the all-enveloping desire in Uruguayan Carlos Maria Frederici's "'Oh Lenore!" Came the Echo' to the somehow quintessentially Chinese "Is this not true?" which ends 'The Mirror Image of Earth' by Zheng Wenguang.

On the other hand, there are almost no translation problems with the Joe Haldeman collection (except the back cover says "13 mind-expanding excursions", I've counted twice and get 12 stories and two poems). Bridging the years 1975-1985 (the time since his first collection, *Infinite Dreams*), the stories are separated by snippets pertaining to the one just finished and the one to come, sort of fore'n'afterwords, either informative and entertaining or deadly dull, depending on whether you like this sort of thing.

The stories are a mixed bunch, some mind-expanding, some not, but all written with Haldeman's typical style that makes it all look so easy. The most interesting is 'You Can Never Go Back', a central section from the original version of *The Forever War* bounced by the publisher for being too downbeat. The dullest is 'Lindsay and the Red City Blues', a horror story which never quite comes off.

But here I face the problem with single-author collections. I'm speaking to the converted. Either you like Haldeman and will buy this (and thoroughly enjoy it), or you don't and won't (and won't miss it).

PEBBLE IN THE SKY - Isaac Asimov
THE STARS LIKE DUST - Isaac Asimov
THE CURRENTS OF SPACE - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1986, 226pp, 220pp 220pp., £9.95 ea.]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

THESE EARLY GALACTIC EMPIRE NOVELS are internally and comparatively inconsistent, sexist, racially conceited and overflowing with coincidences. However, *The Currents of Space* and *Pebble in the Sky* are enjoyable, racey pulp. The former concerns political intrigue over a scientist with news of an impending disaster who becomes an amnesiac; the latter, an archaeologist's quest to prove Earth the birthplace of Mankind, and a group fighting to halt a rebellion against the Empire that would result in the extinction of almost all animal life in the universe by bacteriological warfare. Both books are complicated and the gradual unravelling of the stories is well handled, though *Pebble in the Sky* is severely dated in its treatment of the effects of radiation (for which the author apologises) - a central element of the novel.

The Stars Like Dust, on the other hand, is a poorly written juvenile centring around the search for a rebel organisation and a 'holy relic' - an important historical document that will bring an end to a tyrannical galactic super-power. Unfortunately the relic isn't even being upheld in the USA today, so how it could banish a *galaxy* of baddies is beyond me. Since the whole book relies on this assumption, I felt cheated when the exact nature of it was revealed.

Not much to recommend some very dated sf, so why were these published in hardback again after so many years? I can only assume they're to ride upon the sales of Asimov's recent books. I doubt if they'd be considered for hardback re-release in their own right, and certainly no thought has gone towards giving any of them new covers.

OLYMPIAN NIGHTS - John Kendrick Bangs
[Greenhill, 1986, 224pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

OLYMPIAN NIGHTS WAS ORIGINALLY PUBlished in 1902. This edition is complete, unabridged and a facsimile of the original. But what is it, and does it merit republication?

I've always liked the kind of humorous SF which takes a poke at modern life by anthropomophising aliens to act as stereotypes which then exaggerate the characteristics to be lampooned. Keith Laumer's 'Retief' stories and Robert Sheckley's *Mindswap* come to mind. *Olympian Nights* shows that this style did not spring suddenly into being when the time was right, but was always there.

The story starts in Greece, where a journalist in search of a war to report is led astray by his guide, Hippopopolis. Eventually they stop for the night (on Mount Olympus, Hippopopolis assures him) and when the journalist awakes he finds himself alone, robbed and lost on a Greek hillside. A search for shelter reveals a cave which proves to have a elevator in it, leading to the fabled Home of the Gods on Olympus.

From the character of his simple, but financially knowledgeable Greek guide to the manic driving of Phaeton in his chariot, Bangs has created a collection of personalities which parody what he saw as the worst in Society. But they have little relevance for us today, beyond pointing out those things that were seen as *bad things* in 1902. Where a contemporary reader would recognise the targets of Bangs' humour, the modern reader is forced to extrapolate backwards, from Bangs' treatment of a problem to the problem itself, losing something of the ingenuity of the book in the process.

So, a book which was probably well-received in its time, becomes a curiosity, good only to while away a couple of hours.

TERRA! - Stefano Benni (Translated by Annapaola Cancogni)
[Pluto Press, 1986, 360pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

I DON'T LIKE INTELLECTUAL PUZZLES WITH no emotional depth. Thus I didn't like *The Book of the New Sun*. I thought I would enjoy *Terra!* because it was a comic novel and thus would have some emotional depth. Instead, I was reminded irresistably of Gene Wolfe.

The story is (needlessly?) complicated. It concerns the search for a new source of energy - on a post World War III, IV and V (optimist!), glaciated, nuclear wintered Earth - or a new Earth to colonise. On this storyline are hung irrelevant episodes during which a rabble of characters choose absurd moments to tell anecdotes or fairy tales (although, unlike Wolfe's, they *are* often entertaining).

There are offensive racial stereotypes - Fang, the inscrutable Chinese; Yamamoto, the homicidal Japanese soldier; Akrab, the degenerate Arab king; and N'Gombo, king of the videogames. At least Wolfe either invents or disguises racial stereotypes.

Benni also refers to obscure

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mythologies (of Aztecs, Celts, even the I Ching and Moby Dick). But, most heinous of all, to tie off (or just loop back) the myriad loose ends such importations cause, he resorts to the same deus ex machina plot device as *The Book of the New Sun* - time travel!

Thankfully, this book is not irredeemably similar to *The Book of the New Sun*. Where Wolfe only makes me laugh at Wolfwe, Benni sometimes manages genuine humour, albeit his comic style is rather slapstick.

I said that because the book was comic I expected emotional depth. The pivot of any comedy is the fundamental absurdity of human motivation. Where Wolfe lacks this insight, Benni uses it to great effect. Fang's solution (emotional not intellectual) of the book's central puzzle has real pathos. It is only hard to see this because the plethora of ideas overwhelms the underlying compassion so completely.

Here is part of 'What Galina's Crystal Ball Said' -

> Just as the donkey carries a cord of rosewood, and feels only its weight, but not its scent or value, so he who reads many books without understanding them will feel only their weight on his shoulders.

This is apropos of nothing - but the book is full of such aphorisms. However, although I didn't understand a lot of it, it will not weigh heavily on my shoulders. This is because I understand enough to say that if you like intellectual puzzles and obscure references, you'll like this book. If you like emotional depth, it too is there, but you have to unearth it. In short, it's a very good book if you like that sort of thing: I don't.

MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE/SOLD - Terry Brooks
[Macdonald, 1986, 324pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

THIS NEW FANTASY FROM THE AUTHOR OF *The Sword of Shannara* and its sequels is his first non-Shannara novel.

Moderately wealthy Chicago corporate trial lawyer Ben Holiday receives a copy of the latest "Rosen's Christmas Wishbook"- a mailorder catalogue from a New York store. An advert for the magic kingdom of Landover - a snip at $1,000,000 - catches his eye and, because he is desperately bored and unhappy, Ben buys it on ten days' approval. To get there he must travel to the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia where there is a path between the worlds. He must wear a medallion to prove he is the new King, its removal will return him to Virginia.

The advert contravenes the Trades Description Act. Landover is failing because it lacks a committed ruler - the previous such died twenty years ago. "The Tarnish" is spreading. The castle of Sterling Silver could do with a polish, the magic trees called Bonnie Blues are wilting and the land is becoming polluted and dead. Not only that but the King's followers have deserted him except for the faithful few. The unusual retainers are Questar Thews the inept substitute Court Magician, Abernathy (once a man now a Terrier due to one of Questar's spells) the Court Scribe, and two Kobolds called Bunion and Parsnip.

Ben has two major tasks - bring Landover back to its former glory and defeat the evil Demon Lord in armed combat. Previous mailorder buyers have failed but Ben is helped by the mysterious Paladin, champion of Landover Kings. Why he should reappear after twenty years and whether or not Ben will succeed in his quest against dragons, witches and demons I will leave you to find out for yourselves.

Magic Kingdom for Sale/Sold is a light-hearted but eminently readable book. It contrasts the world of today with fairy tales, including modern problems like pollution in an archaic setting. I didn't get all the American references but don't feel unduly deprived. If you liked the Shannara trilogy you'll like this book. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

A NOOSE OF LIGHT - Seamus Cullen
[Orbit, 1986, 216pp, £2.50]
BAGDAD - Ian Dennis
[Allen & Unwin, 1985, 210pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Mark Greener

THESE NOVELS ARE SET IN 'THE MYSTERIous east' which has long exerted a fascination for the occidental reader. However, neither add anything to the corpus of myth surrounding the tales of the Arabian nights and in many ways merely undermine the legends.

Bagdad is the better book as in places it almost attains the level of competence. To attempt a plot summary is pointless as the flimsy storyline merely acts as a framework for various characters to recite stories in the most improbable circumstances. Most of these add nothing to the narrative and give the novel an episodic feel. The book is poorly written, in particular the dialogue is stilted and false, and the cosmetic references to Caliphs and Djinn totally fail to evoke the atmosphere of the east. *Bagdad* is the first novel of a projected series and has a cliff-hanging ending. I will not be buying the sequel.

However, compared to *A Noose of Light*, *Bagdad* is a masterpiece. This is the biggest load of unmitigated drivel I have had the misfortune to read in a very long time. Not content with being poorly written with an ill-timed plot populated with characters that barely have two dimensions, it further offends the sensibilities with a brutally perverse attitude to women that is infantile and anachronistic. Indeed, *A Noose of Light* might almost be pornographic, but all the sexuality has been distilled out leaving a sick brutality. The blurb claims *A Noose of Light* is "Sensual, exotic, humorous and magical", it is none of these. It is offensive, sick and sexually patronizing.

Neither of these books warrant your time or your money. The sooner they are exiled to the remainder shelves the better.

THE CELESTIAL STEAM LOCOMOTIVE - Michael Coney
THE SULTAN'S TURRET - Seamus Cullen
JERUSALEM FIRE - R.M.Meluch
[Orbit, 1986, 302pp 252pp 331pp, £2.95 £2.50 £2.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

THE SULTAN'S TURRET IS DESCRIBED ON the cover as "a magical fantasy of a world that should have been". "Might" have been was probably intended, since it is not set in utopia, but Spain when Christians, Moors and Africans are at war. 12-year-old Dinah meddles with "something as old as time and monumentally evil" and is catapulted into "a kaleidoscopic universe of Djinni, demons, holy men and Golem". It is well-written at times, incoherent and hard to follow at others. The age of the heroine should not lead anyone to suppose it is suitable for children.

Jerusalem Fire superficially resembles this with Christians, Jews and Moslems at loggerheads, but is set in a future world of "warrior-priests, of witches and warlocks attended by familiars in wondrous shapes". It starts in Star Wars fashion with a battle in space and continues with tedious fighting on the ground that hardly ever lets up. The author has packed her book with gratuitous blood and gore, severed heads, sword fights between men with rippling muscles, painful attempts at firewalking and the like. It seems unsuitable for either children or intelligent adults not filled with permanent blood lust. Any self-respecting SF or fantasy fan should demand much more than this.

The Celestial Steam Locomotive comes like a breath of pure, sweet air after the above. I was not previously a Michael Coney fan, and this may not be his best work - being pressured, like so many established writers, into writing a series in some haste - but it is undoubtedly the product of a powerful and healthy imagination. Volume 1 in an epic fantasy series *The Song of Earth*, it is set in the year 143,624 Cyclic on an Earth that is one of many possible Earths in which humanity has evolved into five distinct species. True humans inhabit the Domes, where they use a mysterious Rainbow to dream their lives away. The dreams can be reified to produce such things as the celestial steam locomotive of the title. There are some rather silly bits but on the whole it comes off wonderfully. You'll like it.

THE MIRROR OF HER DREAMS - Stephen Donaldson
[Collins, 1986, 658pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

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READING *THE MIRROR OF HER DREAMS*, THE first volume of Stephen Donaldson's new fantasy saga, *Mordant's Need*, I have two pieces of advice to offer the prospective reader. First: do not read the blurb, the book is better than it would lead you to believe. The second follows later.

There is an immediate similarity between this book and *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*: both concern the removal of an uninterested person from an unhappy or unfulfilled existence to a fantasy world where they assume an importance far beyond anything they are used to, an importance they themselves refuse to believe in. The heroine in this new saga, Terisa, a 'poor' rich girl abandoned by her father in a luxury Madison skyscraper, assures herself she exists by surrounding herself with mirrors. Geraden, clumsy protege of a group of Imagers, bursts through one of her mirrors in search of a champion who will save Mordant from approaching doom. In Mordant, mirrors contain images - created by Imagers - which can be transported into Mordant from their own world and used to destructive purpose.

Many of the ideas in this book are old hat and ironically Donaldson, who spearheaded the new popularity of this type of fantasy in the late 70's, is in danger of being lost in the slipstream of the countless Covenanter look-alikes which have saturated the market. Only Donaldson's unquestioned ability as a story teller enables him to rise above the quagmire of cliché.

Given that, I found the ending very poor. In fact it isn't really an ending at all, the action is left almost in mid-sentence with no resolution of any of the convoluted plot, as if the publishers, faced with a 1300 page epic, chopped it in half without looking at the text. My second piece of advice is not to read this volume until the next one comes out, to avoid extreme frustration!

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW - Arthur Conan Doyle
[Greenhill, 1986, 256pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW IS AN EARLY (1891) work of Doyle's, written before the bulk of the Holmes material and some two decades before he returned to science fantasy with the Professor Challenger stories. Even having made all due allowance for the clichés of Victorian literature and the inexperience of the writer, *Raffles Haw* is a disappointing book. The science fantasy element is minimal and uninspiring. The narrative does maintain some interest by means of simple character development until it unfortunately slides into melodrama and a laboured, moralistic conclusion. One good feature is the fluent prose.

Greenhill Science Fiction and Fantasy is a new imprint dedicated to republishing early fantastic fiction which would otherwise be unavailable - whet your appetite on a list of forthcoming titles which includes *Planetoid 127* by Edgar Wallace and *Tourmalin's Time Changes* by F. Anstey. The enterprise must be applauded, even if, as in the present instance, the results may sometimes be of interest rather than interesting. In all, the series should encourage exploration of sf's genre roots.

FAITH IN FAKES - Umberto Eco (translated by William Weaver)
[Secker & Warburg, 1986, 307pp, no price quoted]
LETTERS FROM HOLLYWOOD - Michael Moorcock (with illustrations by Michael Foreman)
[Harrap, 1986, 232pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

ONLY THE ACCLAIM THEIR AUTHORS HAVE received elsewhere can have allowed these two unlikely books into print - Moorcock as travel writer? Eco as journalist? - but they are no less welcome for that.

For most of the century Hollywood has manufactured dreams, turning itself into a city with at least one foot in the fantastic. Not just the way LA has become familiar to us all through its own products, but the unreality that has produced hot-dog shaped hot-dog stands, and the weird mixture of people who inhabit the place. Perhaps that is why the ace fantasist, Moorcock, produces far and away the most realistic portrait of that fantastic city I have ever encountered. In the form or letters home to J.G.Ballard, recounting visits to Harlan Ellison, doomed film projects and other adventures, this is a superb travel book.

Eco's first and longest essay covers some of the same ground as he writes about America's love of the artificial. But the interface between beliefs and reality, the way we see the world and the way the world is, forms a thread that runs throughout this collection. He calls upon a bewildering array of cultural referents - pseudo-Medieval fantasy and science fiction frequently among them - in an intellectual exploration that is not easy but is never less than fascinating, and which raises some tantalising questions about the world we inhabit.

A DARKNESS AT SETHANON - Raymond E. Feist
[Grafton, 1986, 368pp, £10.95]
THE ROAD AND THE HILLS - Spedding
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 431pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

BOTH THESE BOOKS ARE PARTS OF SERIES. *The Road and the Hills* is volume one of *A Walk in the Dark*, while *A Darkness at Sethanon* is the third and final volume in the Riftwar Saga, and neither of them are anything to get excited about. *A Darkness at Sethanon* is a fantasy with many of the traditional elements; there was a quest in the first two volumes and in this one we have the warfare leading to the final confrontation with the powers of evil. The author designs rôle-playing games and something of that shows in the types and behaviour of his characters; there is a great deal of action but little depth of characterisation. There's a certain archness which made me wince: the hero's name is Arutha which is changed to Arthur when he's incognito; and the sword left wedged in the stone of life at the end. But mostly the book is acceptable within its limits. It makes no attempt to move beyond the narrow expectations of a fantasy novel, there is no particular originality, but it is a fairly agreeable mixture of the usual ingredients. Its strongest points are in the background, which is nicely detailed with a spread across society, giving indications of the existence of some political and social depths; and the writing, though not brilliant, is thankfully plain and leavened by humour. I wouldn't particularly recommend buying this but I didn't really mind reading it, which is more than can be said for *The Road and the Hills*.

I *think* the author is trying to do a Mary Renault but decided to duck out of the historical research necessary to write a novel about Alexander the Great (to whom it is dedicated) by writing a fantasy. The heroine is Ailizon *Ailix Ayndra* (!) and her lover - the king - is called Ailixond, which I found so pretentious it put me off before I started. The book didn't improve. The author hasn't the writing ability to copy Renault and has only succeeded in writing a book which is profoundly dull with cardboard cut outs pushed through a series of sieges and battles which aroused no emotion in me other than boredom. Avoid it. Read a biography of Alexander the Great instead. Or some Mary Renault. They're much better than this.

BURNING CHROME - William Gibson
[Gollancz, 1986, 200pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

INEVITABLY ATTENTION WILL BE CONCENtrated on the three stories set in the 'Sprawl' milieu of Gibson's successful novels. Two of these are superb. The eponymous story in particular is an episode of computer dragonslaying as good as any such he has written. Also very effective is 'Johnny Mnemonic', an early piece, stylish and wierd, which shows all the signs of the work to come, including a first appearance of Molly, *Neuromancer*'s Chiba-trained bodyguard/assassin.

Also forming a recogniseable group within the book are three collaborations with other writers usually slated as fellow members of the cyberpunk school. This spirit of co-operation represents one more link with Harlan Ellison, who published a volume of such stories. Probably the

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most influenced was John Shirley (a brilliant columnist for *Thrust* magazine and author of *City Come A-Walkin'*, an ingenious though deeply flawed novel), and the story they produced, 'The Belonging Kind', is neat, nasty and very satisfying. Another success is 'Dogfight', written with Michael Swanwick (whose first novel, *In The Drift*, appeared last year in the States), a tale of a computer-simulated duel between WW1 aircraft, it forms a sort of prelude to the 'Sprawl' stories - 'Burning Chrome' cross-refers to it - and has a peculiarly apt moral ending. In contrast 'Red Star-Winter Orbit' with Bruce Sterling seems, though well-written, to be a rather conventional piece of new cold-war writing, though perhaps Americans feel that a couple of sympathetic Russians is enough of a contribution to global culture.

Of the remaining stories, 'Hinterlands' is related to 'Red Star-Winter Orbit', but is moving and original, while 'The Gernsback Continuum' and 'The Winter Market' are both tremendous. The former is told in hallucinating detail, containing a devastating attack on the values of SF pioneers which cunningly admits their power. It is also more wittily playful than is Gibson's wont. The latter is a desolate little piece combining high-tech and damaged love, which is at the heart of much of Gibson's best work. Both show that there is enough breadth to his vision to avoid his being trapped in his own ghetto.

The problems may, however, just be starting. This publication seems to mean that all of Gibson's work is now in print, yet there must be a large number of people constantly demanding their next fix.

Good luck! In the meantime, buy this collection and try to stop yourself devouring it.

WINTER IN EDEN - Harry Harrison
[Grafton, 1986, 486pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Mark Greener

THE QUESTION 'WHAT IF?' IS THE CENTRAL theme of SF. Contemplation of the consequences of this question can release the intellect and imagination of the writer and result in novels of rare distinction. Harrison, in his Eden trilogy, asks 'What if the dinosaurs had not become extinct?'

Winter in Eden has the feel of the middle movements of a symphony. The themes and concepts established in *West of Eden*, are developed in order to lay the foundations and set the parameters for the climax. As such *Winter in Eden* is a subtle, restrained book and to reveal much of the plot would be unfair to reader and writer alike. Suffice it to say that the plot is a direct, consistent and logical development from the events described in *West of Eden*.

Harrison's forte is describing the sociology of both mammalian and reptilian culture. The atmosphere he creates is evocative and on a par with Aldiss's *Helliconia* books. It is a pity the characterisation of the protagonists is not to the same standard. They show a degree of evolution over the course of the novel but it seems purely cosmetic as the protagonists lack any real depth to begin with. As a writer Harrison is a competent technician. Though he lacks Aldiss's light touch and intellect, he is able to mould and direct the readers' emotions without the manipulation being obtrusive. Only the weak characterisation prevents the Eden books occupying the same niche in the literary hierarchy as the Helliconia novels.

The Eden trilogy has been conceived as a unified whole and, therefore, familiarity with *West of Eden* is a prerequisite of understanding *Winter in Eden*. *Winter in Eden* might be considered a literary hors d'oeuvre to the final novel in the sequence. It whets the appetite without providing much in the way of sustenance. I hope the final novel delivers.

EYE - Frank Herbert
[Gollancz, 1986, 328pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Tom Jones

THIS BOOK CONTAINS 14 PIECES, I USE that word deliberately, covering the years 1955-1985. There are also a number of illustrations by Jim Burns which I liked but would rate as good rather than excellent. Why 'pieces'? Because not everything in this book is a story. The 'Introduction' is Herbert's views and feelings about the making of the film *Dune*. It's very interesting and seems to accord with Ellison's excellent review in *F&SF*, which Herbert mentions. Staying with *Dune* we have 'The Road to Dune', a walking tour of Arrakis, lavishly illustrated. Only for the *Dune* fan, I think.

These two are from 1985, as is 'Frogs and Scientists', a one-page joke which is a waste of good paper.

The other 'piece' is 'Dragon in the Sea'. Yes, I know this is a novel but what we get here is the first part, (perhaps the first installment of the serial in *Astounding*?) and I felt cheated. This is the first story by Herbert I remember reading and I would have been interested to see how well it held up and compared with my own experiences of submarines, but there wasn't enough here to let me do that. Herbert certainly seems to have spotted the oil crisis though.

I didn't dislike any story in this collection but nor do I think any of them is above average. My favourites include the oldest, 'Rat Race', I think because it's a detective story as well as SF and I have a weakness for that combination. I also liked 'Try to Remember' which is about aliens who give humans the task of understanding their language or being destroyed. The linguistics is interesting but more important is that there is a female lead, a savage portrayal of governments, including the US government, and a deep vein of bitterness in the story - all most unusual for 1961.

I thought I was going to enjoy 'The Tactful Saboteur', about the Bureau of Sabotage. The premise that governments need to be inefficient and only politicians who can survive the dirty tricks are worthy to govern is interesting. But the story became, seemingly deliberately, convoluted towards the end, I lost the thread and couldn't be bothered to go back and find it.

From this book I would have to judge Herbert as a solid craftsman who produced readable stories but nothing above the norm.

WITCH-WATER COUNTRY - Garry Kilworth
[Bodley Head, 1986, 202pp, £9.95]
TREE MESSIAH - Garry Kilworth
[Envoi Poets, 1985, 28pp, £1.80]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

IT IS THE SUMMER OF 1952. TITCH IS 11 years old, living with his grandparents in a village on the Essex marshes. The twentieth century is only slowly coming to the village, but adulthood is coming to Titch much more rapidly. Thus Garry Kilworth's first mainstream novel records a rite of passage, that most familiar of literary mainstays. But the book is raised far above any suggestion of cliché by the power of the writing (certainly the best thing Kilworth has done), the richly detailed evocation of place and time, and above all by the skill with which he enters the mind and the emotions of an 11-year-old.

It is that magical time when fantasy and reality mingle intriguingly, when a mismatched gang of youths can instantly become Normans and Saxons in their minds, and water witches haunting the pools and streams are a very real threat. Around this idyll of youth, the adult world is by turns fascinating and disturbing. A strange man searches the mud banks for the body of Amy Johnson; an old woman, clearly a witch, occupies a magnetically attractive house; Grandad tells ever different and oddly unheroic tales of how he lost his leg in the Great War.

It is the arrival of a girl their own age that first splits the four lads in the gang, eventually resulting in their leader being killed attempting a dare. His body is lost amid the currents of the marshland, only reappearing in a bizarre and frightening moment some time later. But this is only the beginning of a time of upset and revelation for Titch as he begins to discover things about himself and his family, all of it coming to a head with the great flood that swept across Essex that winter.

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As often happens when a writer turns from science fiction to the mainstream or vice versa (Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* for instance), his themes and obsessions come into sharp focus. That is certainly true of this excellent novel, where death and regret as expected occupy centre stage. But for another perspective on Garry Kilworth's writing, we can turn to his poetry, a selection of which has recently been published in a slim booklet from Envoi Poets. His viewpoints are off-beat (the title poem, *Tree Messiah*, tells of a tree "crucified against the body of a man"), and his vision is frequently dark and sad ("Sadness/is not/where something is:/nor is it/where something is/not, but/where something/was-"). One thing is sure, though; Kilworth's talents as a writer have never been better demonstrated than in these two volumes.

ALWAYS COMING HOME - Ursula LeGuin
[Gollancz, 1986, 525pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey & Maureen Porter

IN THE 30'S, *TALES OF SHEM AND SHAUN* and *Anna Livia Plurabelle* presaged the appearance of a major *oeuvre*, which eventually entered the world as *Finnegan's Wake*. It's 'trailers' created an atmosphere of expectancy; and LeGuin fans over the past two years have similarly anticipated *Always Coming Home* as they have encountered stories, poems and 'histories' in contexts as diverse as *Omni* and *Whole Earth Review*. Here is the awaited work, semi-encyclopedic in size and content, multifaceted as to form and media, a high point in the genre of ecology-based, mythopoeically-oriented fantasy.

How in detail to describe it? It is not a novel, though it samples one, and another threads through it. It contains drama, legends, stories, conversations, charts, mini-treatises. It is among other things a collection of verse, an atlas, and an anthropologically, geophysically and (to a limited extent) technologically thought-through account of a presently potential future. In it are two scores by Todd Barton (the luxury edition adds a full-length cassette); and interspersed art work of great delicacy and beauty by Margaret Chodos. What in the case of some other created worlds has gone into supplementary manuals (eg. *A Guide to Middle Earth* and *A Pliocene Companion*) is here presented in over 100 pages of fictional-factual appendices together with a substantial glossary. A Preliminary Note says that the glossary may be "useful or amusing". It assists the author's difficult task of "translation from a language that does not yet exist" spoken by "the people (who) might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California".

Extravagant as such concepts and expressions may appear, they are, in context, more ludic than whimsical. The work is not soft-centred, but often strenuous in thought, word and deed. Yet its images of earthiness are mingled with the iconography of a romanticism rather in the vein of Blake and Yeats. What could be more essentially Yeatsian than the metaphor: "Clothes wearing the body,/there's a good clown"; or more Blakean/Yeatsian that the lines: "As I grow old/my soul gets younger./I go seaward:/it travels upstream"? The multi-referent title says much the same thing; and so does the cyclic dream-world river-run, river-return beginning-ending of *Finnegan's Wake*.

LeGuin's opening archaeological reverie is archetypally in resonance with the opening of the *Wake*. Numerous voices then take over: first person narrator in the novella 'Stone Telling'; poets and dancers of the Valley; author/editor - collecting, foot-noting, and, in her Pandora persona, enquiring, expounding, soliloquising, by turns guilt-ridden and euphoric.

It would be misleading, however, to categorise the Valley as Utopia. The Valley is, rather, the cosmically active Yin to which the City is the complementary Yang. The City, or "City of Mind", interfaces with the Valley at the Exchange, and is a cybernetically functioning entity, strictly rational "as well as being several light years larger than the solar system, and immortal". Frameworks of the *I Ching* are everywhere apparant - in Amerindian key; the illustrations offer variations on Tao symbolism and on helical and other manifestations of organic form. Overcome (or embrace) the Valley's west-coast specificness, and you may have a universal alternative-culture breviary and beadroll. In any case what you have, I suspect, is a new-born 'classic'. [KVB]

MORE THAN ONCE I HAVE CRITICISED A fantasy novel for relying on maps and glossaries to create a world where the author's own writing skill has failed. So what am I to make of a book which is almost exclusively given over to creating a world and discussing elements of its culture? Were it anyone but Ursula LeGuin I would be very unhappy with the idea. As it is, I believe she has made a genuine attempt to approach the fantasy genre from a new and extremely unusual angle.

Always Coming Home is set a long way into the future, in a part of the world which might possibly be a post-holocaust California. People have returned to the land, reverted to the lifestyle of the Indians, whilst accepting the conveniences of technology but refusing to be dominated by them. They live close to nature and in harmony with it. Their life, whilst not idyllic, is near to what we might regard as perfection.

The unifying thread is Stone Telling's autobiography, though the book has much more in common with an anthropological study, hardly surprising considering that LeGuin's father was an eminent anthropologist. I was puzzled, at first, by the viewpoint from which the study was being made but once one accepts that we are travelling between 'now' and the future, this element of the story becomes much clearer, although I was never entirely happy with the author's intrusions in her guise as Pandora. Frankly, I couldn't really see the point of them, and whilst there was no particular thread of narrative to be disturbed, somehow these interpolations upset the balance of the study.

What does the study contain, apart from Stone Telling's tale, which is probably the most conventional part of the whole book and would stand on its own as an admittedly predictable fantasy story? There are detailed explanations of the beliefs of the Kesh, descriptions of their daily life and their customs, samples of their poetry, everything one would require in order to construct a detailed picture of this people, and with several readings one would become very familiar with their way of life.

This is an unusual and intellectually satisfying study - I hesitate to describe it as a novel, but perhaps the best definition would be an anthropological fantasy. Carefully constructed and sharply observed it could easily be read as a scientific report rather than as a work of fiction. On both levels it succeeds admirably and is proof of the fact that one requires skill and talent in creating a society far more than one needs a map and a list of characters.
[MSP]

ONE HUMAN MINUTE - Stanislaw Lem
[Andre Deutsch, 1986, 102pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

ONE HUMAN MINUTE IS A SLIM VOLUME containing three essays. The first (on internal evidence, written in the late '70s? - the publishers provide no such detail) is a review of the book *One Human Minute* by Johnson and Johnson, published in 1988 by Moon Publishers (London - Mare Imbrium - New York)

> Only an advertising ploy ... the editor sent to the Moon, in a container on one of the Columbia shuttle flights, a copy of the manuscript and a small computer reader ... the computer read the manuscript over and over. Perhaps it read without thinking, but that didn't matter: people in publishing houses on Earth generally read manuscripts the same way.

The book describes, with an immense barrage of statistics, what the human race is doing during one single minute. How many people are killed by poison, torture, falling meteors (0.0000001) or how much sperm is ejaculated (43 tons). The reviewer muses on the way in which all these statistics dehumanise mankind, emphasising misery, shame and wickedness rather than creativity and goodness, and concludes "it is the nature of things, not a consequence of the statistical method". The essay includes a review of the second edit-

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ion, and of the third, a computerised and endlessly updateable edition, enabling the reader to call up figures for the past, and to extrapolate a hundred years into the future.

The second essay, 'The Upside-Down Evolution', is a commentary on some volumes of 21st century military history which have somehow arrived in the 20th century: a despairing view of the future of nuclear warfare, and the consequences of increasing computerisation and miniaturisation. (21st century armies are made up of highly specialised computer insects - artificial nonintelligences, with instinct rather than intelligence, which is all a front-line soldier needs). The reviewer promises another essay, showing how Earth emerged from this technological trap, only to step into another. The third essay, 'The World as Cataclysm', is not a pseudo-review, but a fairly straight commentary on the way science is increasingly emphasising the rôle of chance and catastrophe in the process of evolution, both of man and the universe (and, a sly reminder, of capitalism).

There are ideas enough for a dozen SF novels here, compressed into three short essays, and a wealth of imaginative, concerned (and wryly cynical) comment upon our own world. It deserves to be widely read, above all by those outside our ghetto.

THE STOVE HAUNTING - Bel Mooney
[Methuen, 1986, 125pp, £6.95]
Reviewed by Rosemary Pardoe

DANIEL RICHARDS, AGED 11, MOVES WITH his family to an old rectory in Somerset. He feels strangely attracted to a large stove which is discovered behind the wall in the kitchen and, while examining it, finds himself drawn back in time. He becomes another Daniel Richard, a kitchen boy who was responsible for keeping the stove clean in the 1830s.

Why should an author choose to write a novel with such a painfully hackneyed plot? Bel Mooney has done it in order to bring some immediacy to a story about the formation of the first farm workers' unions. She is a decent enough writer and evokes well the horror and injustices of the farm worker's life before the unions. However, it is not enough to frame what is essentially a good historical novel with two chapters at the beginning and one at the end linking the events with modern times and the modern Daniel. This does not make it a ghost story. Any child reading *The Stove Haunting* hoping for one in view of the title will be sadly disappointed and probably bored as well.

The ghost story as history lesson can only work if the information forms a natural part of the plot as it progresses (as in Penelope Lively's *The Driftway* and Robert Westall's 'The Haunting of Chas McGill'). The plot of *The Stove Haunting* is merely a vehicle for a didactic exercise (though admittedly a reasonably painless one). This seems to me to be rather unfair to the ghost story genre and to children too.

The book includes a series of charming and restrained drawings by Jeremy Ford, who was also responsible for the illustrations in John Gordon's brilliant *Catch Your Death*. *Catch Your Death*, unlike *The Stove Haunting*, was everything a children's ghost story book ought to be.

BLACK STAR RISING - Frederik Pohl
[Gollancz, 1986, 282pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

CONSIDER THIS RETROGRESSION: *THE Black Star Passes* (John W. Campbell, 1930), *The Black Star* (Lin Carter, 1973), *Black Star Rising* (Frederik Pohl, 1985) - check the first two in any reliable SF encyclopedia or your own horror-stricken memory, then ask how I am to review the third.

Described by the publisher (who ought to have a smattering of the English language) as "sharply satiric", this is a determined attempt to jam every pseudo-sociological and even-more-pseudo-technological platitude into 282 pages, well spattered with what I am tempted to call pseudo-Pohlian japery and self-conscious punning - surely no-one would actually wish to acknowledge that this was done on purpose?

Examples? Post-holocaust (Ala) Bama as a Chinese-controlled, totally brainwashed autonomous republic, where Our Hero begins a torrid sexual relationship with a Chinese police inspector while his wife divorces him because she has deliberately become pregnant and, unless she rids herself of this paragon of bedworthiness and moves into the grain belt, will be compulsorily aborted.

The sex is male-chauvinist, the sort any red-blooded sex-starved product of 30s America could be expected to write to project his fantasies - the "Real Yanks" who have set up home on the planet of World, all live in nests with one man to thousands of women, and use the verb 'copulate' transitively, presumably to indicate that Americans cannot speak English without fucking it up.

Next comes the threat to destroy all Earth under the guise of saving America from Chinese domination. The emigré Yanks are going to do this with the help of the indigenous inhabitants of World, who are of course called "erks". These loveable war-crazy aliens live simple lives of tolerance and joy except when they have destroyed every other race they ever met, all in the cause of "helping" them conquer their enemies; the motivation for this selfless devotion to peace is their elevation from dumb erkery to smartdom by "The Living Gods", a now-self-destroyed race worshipped by the erks, who inculcated into them the need to be ever at war.

Our Hero, "elected" in about the poorest parody of totalitarian pseudo-electioneering ever written to be President of the United States of America (which has not existed for two centuries), whizzes through the space-time continuum to World. He is, of course, welcomed by the Yankees' ruler, a lesbian named Nancy-R.

Surely I don't have to go on after that? I mean, do you really care? If this is satire, long live *Krokodil*!

Value judgement: crap.

THE LORDLY ONES - Keith Roberts
[Gollancz, 1986, 160pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Mike Moir

ALTHOUGH KEITH ROBERTS HAS RIGHTLY gained acclaim as one of Britain's greatest SF writers, some readers and even some reviewers still find his 'mosaic' novel style uncomfortable. *The Lordly Ones* is a collection, so no-one should have any difficulty with the style or the contents.

This collection consists of seven tales, five originating from *F&SF*, one appearing for the first time in English and one totally new. They cover a period of writing from the late 70s to the early 80s. I include these details simply because Gollancz have not bothered.

The most interesting stories in the collection are 'The Lordly Ones' and 'The Comfort Station'. They are variations on a single theme. Roberts has always had a soft spot for the underdog and here he explores the effects of the breakdown of civilisation (caused by an unspecified holocaust) on similar 'slow' central characters. Both stories feature a retarded lavatory attendant and his inability to adjust to the changes. The stories concentrate on their determination to continue the responsible tasks of keeping "the comfort station" in readyness for the return of "the lordly ones". Roberts expertly captures his characters' incomprehension of change in the natural order and then he cold heartedly predicts the terms of their possible viability. Together they form a small pattern in the otherwise random mosaic of the collection. Both are excellent stories in their own right, but when put together a new dimension is added.

The two sanitary tales are separated in the collection by the light relief of 'Ariadne Potts'. This is possibly Roberts at his funniest and saddest. It is a simple tale of boring Stan Potts' rise to fame after he accidentally wishes to life the statue of a grotto nymph.

The other four stories are all of high calibre: possibly the world's only SF tennis story; a new Anita story; a time travel (or ghost) tale and a 'grand' operatic comedy. There are familiar Roberts themes and new ones, making a fine mixture. Oh yes, and one story is the most misleading I have ever read, but I shan't tell which.

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THE WILD SHORE - Kim Stanley Robinson
[Macdonald, 1986, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mike Moir

THIS IS THE THIRD OF THE NEW ACE specials to receive its first hardback publication in the UK. Fortunately a new edition of *The Wild Shore* gives me a chance to right a wrong. *Paperback Inferno* reviewed this two years ago and slammed it. Whether or not this book is ideologically sound (whatever that means) is irrelevant, it is one beautifully written novel.

The Wild Shore is superficially a traditional post-holocaust tale about the struggle for life in a small coastal village in southern California. The twist is that only the 'good old US of A' has been wiped out, destroyed by 2000 neutron bombs left in the backs of vans parked in all the major city centres. As the remaining US government decided not to retaliate the rest of the world has only suffered from the resulting 'moderate' climate changes. The UN have attempted to quarantine the crippled USA, with the inevitable mis-management of the borders Everyone knows you can't keep out Japanese tourists. Ironically the result puts the surviving Americans in a situation not unlike the way they had treated the red indians.

PI pointed out that the USA, not the USSR, has neutron bombs, and no major nuclear winter is unrealistic. Even I think the American government not retaliating is optimistic. But, however likely you consider the scenario is not really important. The vital point is, is it a good book? The answer is a resounding yes.

The novel is about growing up - a classic rite of passage tale. It is about coming to terms with the problems of being a man in a society that was wrecked 60 years before. The strength of the book is that instead of being a tale of far flung adventure, or striving and succeeding, it is a tale of foolhardy adventure, of learning to accept defeat and loss.

In this novel Robinson reads a little like Mark Helprin or Hilbert Schenck with their strong characters and marvellous abilities to paint the broadest land and seascapes. Also here is a distinct touch of Gene Wolfe with his love for telling stories within stories. Robinson's next two novels, *A Memory of Whiteness* and *Icebenge*, have already appeared. They show even more promise and considerable versatility.

Perhaps this book may not be very good *science* fiction, but it is great science *fiction*.

THE TWO OF THEM - Joanna Russ
[Women's Press, 1986, 181pp, £2.25]
Reviewed by L.J.Hurst

ALTHOUGH NOT AS FRAGMENTED AS *THE Female Man*, *The Two of Them* falls into two parts. The main section is set on a distant planet where the social standards are of a strict Islamic type, men are totally dominant and women totally dominated. The heroine, Irene Waskiewicz, and her male companion and lover, are sent to investigate conditions. She is disturbed by what she finds, and determines to save a young girl from growing up in the stifling, cruel, mind-shaping, subterranean world. Her escape with the child ends her relationship with her lover.

This part of the novel is set far in the future. With no explanation it is intercut with Irene growing up in 1950's America. Her future lover turns up on her parents' doorstep unannounced but he does not seem to take her into the future.

It is not clear whether this book is meant to be entertainment with a message or a more direct piece of feminist propagandizing. Really it fails as both, partly because of the lack of adventure, partly because the arguments do not seem sound, partly because the book does not seem to have had enough attention paid to detail.

The master of the house in which Irene stays does not, at first, recognise her as female - partly because of her lithe, slim, facially-uncovered body, partly because he is so accustomed only to meet men socially that he assumes all he meets socially are men. There are problems in the logic here: if women are robed even in the seraglio when do men form the opinion that women should be rounded? Why do they bother to form these opinions, and if they do, do they do so only because they want to use their power to shape or mis-shape women's bodies and minds?

The attitudes of these alien males and of native US males have the same consequence. Wherever they are, men wreck women's lives. They seem to do nothing else - the only way Irene can escape from the influence of her lover is to kill him. *The Female Man* argued that a wholly female society would be utopian but *The Two of Them* has no room for the development of Utopias, consequently it argues itself into this corner: all women should kill all men, but they are prevented from killing or any other act by their upbringing. (Incidentally, this book is also unusual in that it does not suppose that there are 'feminine virtues' that could benefit men or society).

All in all, *The Two of Them* is a hopeless book, depressing to read, not well constructed, and pointing to no possible improvements. Why Joanna Russ had to set it off planet and far away when everything she attacks is clearly here on Earth and close at hand remains a mystery.

THE UNCONQUERED COUNTRY - Geoff Ryman
(with illustrations by Sacha Ackerman)
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 134pp, £8.95 hardback, £2.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT TO BE SAID about Geoff Ryman's *The Unconquered Country*? Originally published as a short story in *Interzone* in 1984, and later winner of the 1985 World Fantasy Award and BSFA Award, it has attracted much praise in the last two years. Nevertheless, I think Allen and Unwin are to be congratulated for bringing the uncut version of the story to public attention, particularly in an edition with such wonderful illustrations as those provided by Sacha Ackerman.

Is it worth buying this book if you already have *Interzone*? Certainly. Whilst the edited version retained much of the delicacy of the full story, a lot of the fine detail was inevitably sacrificed. Reinstating reinforces the simplicity and rightness before the invasion by the Neighbours, and stresses the horror of life under occupation. The tragedy of Third's life is firmly underlined but her capacity for survival still transcends all this. The story, its conclusion in particular, is still very moving, retaining all its original impact yet acquiring a greater depth of meaning.

Considering how so much of the Unicorn imprint demonstrates the paucity of good fantasy writing, I am delighted to see Allen and Unwin redress the balance by making this fine example of the genre available.

I, VAMPIRE - Jody Scott
[Women's Press, 1986, 206pp, £2.50]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

I, VAMPIRE CONTINUES THEMES BEGUN IN Jody Scott's previous book, *Passing for Human*. Sterling O'Blivion, 13th century Transylvanian vampire, is immortal as long as she drinks at least 6 ounces of blood each month; her victims rarely die except occasionally from shock. We join her in 20th century Chicago where she heads the Max Arkoff Studio of Dance. For 700 years O'Blivion has been waiting for "a woman from the stars" in the belief that they will fall deeply in love (this is a feminist novel after all), have adventures together and live happily ever after. The woman turns out to be Benaroya, the body-swapping dolphin-like anthropologist from the planet Rysemus first encountered in *Passing for Human*. In her guise as Virginia Woolf, Benaroya is seeking the most advanced human to help her defeat the slave-trading Sajorians and their weapon called the Agony Organ. The oldest and therefore wisest human is the vampire. Their efforts to "restore order to the chaos" involve the Famous Men Sperm Kit, body swapping and a little time travel before the eventual conclusion.

The narrative is rather confusing. The title leads one to expect a first person narrative from the vampire - and indeed some of the book confirms this expectation. The rest, however, is third-person in which the vampire seems almost incidental. The plot is also rather disjointed and contrived. The device of the Famous Men Sperm Kit is introduced and worked for all it is worth - then suddenly dropped as if of no further interest. I had the feeling

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that there were two distinct stories trying to get out.

There are compensations for the confusion. The image of the rip-roaring hell-raising Virginia Woolf is not one I will forget easily, and the cynical philosophy expounded by the vampire about the dance studio is also interesting. For me, however, the most successful parts of the book were those that took an unorthodox view of vampires - I would have liked more of this and less of Benaroya. The feminist viewpoint is slightly over the top but has its heart in the right place.

A curate's egg of a book - good in parts.

THE SHAPING OF MIDDLE EARTH - J.R.R. Tolkien (Ed. Christopher Tolkien)
[Allen & Unwin, 1986, 380pp, no price quoted]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

THIS IS VOLUME 4 IN *THE HISTORY OF Middle Earth*, and the latest collection of J.R.R.Tolkien's scribblings-on-the-backs-of-old-exam-papers as edited by his son Christopher. Most of the book is taken up with a number of discarded or uncompleted drafts of material later published in *The Silmarillion*, together with Christopher Tolkien's exhaustive commentary on them.

The book's stated aim is to illustrate the development, depth and richness of J.R.R.Tolkien's personal mythology, and this it does. But persons looking for a 'good read' in the style of *The Lord of the Rings* should steer clear of it. The five-volume *History of Middle Earth* series will undoubtedly encourage both those who see J.R.R.Tolkien's work as an uncultivated garden of theses, and those who wish to use it as a hotbed of escapist obsession. Also, I believe that J.R.R.Tolkien himself would not have wanted to publish this discarded or set-aside material in this form (he was, after all, working on a revision of *The Silmarillion* up until his death). This lays the reader open to charges of literary voyeurism.

I found trying to read straight through the book rather like trying to read Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*; page after page of technical detail interspersed with an occasional gleam of pure archetypal numen. For me, finding the gold is its own justification. However, I strongly recommend assessing a library copy before buying this book, for everyone but those who automatically buy anything by Tolkien.

QUEENMAGIC, KINGMAGIC - Ian Watson
[Gollancz, 1986, 205pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

ANY GENRE IS HIDEBOUND BY CONVENTION, a consequence of being pop (pap?) entertainment which measures success as the public getting what the public wants and paying handsomely for the privilege. Some toilers in the pablum mines regard themselves as artists, kicking down doors, smashing icons - only to find the doors were open and the icons exist only in the collective imagination. When they depart for greener pastures they always leave the genre as they found it. Yet genres change as the public grows sated with yesterday's soma. Change also comes from within, from subversives who are masters of convention, using limits to their advantage. Ian Watson is one such subversive. Lately he has run the gamut of genre types, remaking, remodelling and adding an individual touch which is his own. *Queenmagic, Kingmagic* sees him take the hoariest chestnut - life as a chessgame - and transform it into something bright, new, entertaining, radical even.

In Bellogard and Chorny only the magical protagonists are touched by the endless war. When the final checkmate comes they die before the world ceases to be. Pedino, a 'white' pawn, falls in love with Sara, a 'black' pawn, short circuiting the structural magic. They survive the demise of chess world and find themselves engaged in snakes and ladders. Their rogue magic also affects this world and they escape its end, with a streetwise urchin who is in his element in Monopoly world. Here they become the 'Antibanker', only to be whisked off to witness the conclusion of a game of Diplomacy. No prizes for guessing where survival of that game leaves them.

At first I thought this book unbalanced, with the chessworld minutely described and the other universes sketched in the passage of a whirlwind Cooks Tour. On reflection that lack of balance is as illusory as the worlds themselves. We know what Watson means, and we add our own colour - an archetypal genre technique. The story is the thing, and if it is fundamentally absurd ... well, what is magic if not absurd, what are our games, what is the genre obsession with storyline?

To those of us who know (and love) Ian Watson's work I simply say "Read, and enjoy". This is a bloodily funny book containing all the qualities we have long admired together with the breathless storytelling he has adopted since coming into full spate these past few years. To those of us who do not know him, this is as good a place as any to start. Go on, allow yourself to be subverted. It's good for you.

A VOCATION - David Wheldon
[The Bodley Head, 1986, 238pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO A BLIND SPOT. According to Larry Niven, this is what happens when you look through a window onto hyperspace and your mind balks at the thing so radically unfamiliar that it has no referents. The edges of the window appear to border each other, you cannot 'see out'.

I cannot 'see out' into the world of this book. I can't read more than a few pages without getting annoyed, frustrated, distracted by the style and feeling that I must be stupid not to see what's good about it. I am reminded of Burton Raffel's essay 'The Lord of the Rings as Literature' in which he defines 'literature' in terms of literary style and proceeds to demonstrate that *The Lord of the Rings* is not 'literature'. When I read the essay I got a very strong feeling of a man of considerable intellectual integrity and ability reading this book that everyone was raving about, and being left absolutely cold, not seeing any of the joy and glory the fans get from it.

In *A Vocation*, Thomas Colver, traveller, falls sick of typhus (or typhoid) somewhere foreign (a village in a karst landscape). The landscape is dominated by the mysterious and inaccessible building referred to as 'the monastery' but which probably isn't, as its bells ring out at unpredictable and uncanonical hours.

Raffel focussed on the style of *The Lord of the Rings* as he was not able to come to grips with the content; reading *A Vocation* I found myself doing the same. This passage will show why my Orbiter group would unhesitatingly haul this man up for repetition, hesitation, deviation, and a host of other malpractices:

"The room below, which he had not seen before, and which he was now seeing from the most unusual perspective possible, was disposed to the viewing of his eye. The room below him was an exceptionally high-ceilinged room for the front room of a village inn. At his first glance he was forced to ask himself whether this building once had a different purpose. He looked down. He saw the bottles and the glasses which stood on the wooden surfaces of the tables."

This reads to me like a translation from the Serbo-Croat. Then I found a page-long sentence containing six colons and 22 commas. And then I found the following: "'You must have been tempted to make surmises about the monastery when you first arrived here,' said Colver, speaking as though out loud." This totally stymied me; I must have spent hours wondering how one speaks *as though* out loud. (Does it sound like one hand clapping?)

Enough, I am running out of room, and have surely told you enough to indicate whether you might love or loathe the book.

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