VECTOR

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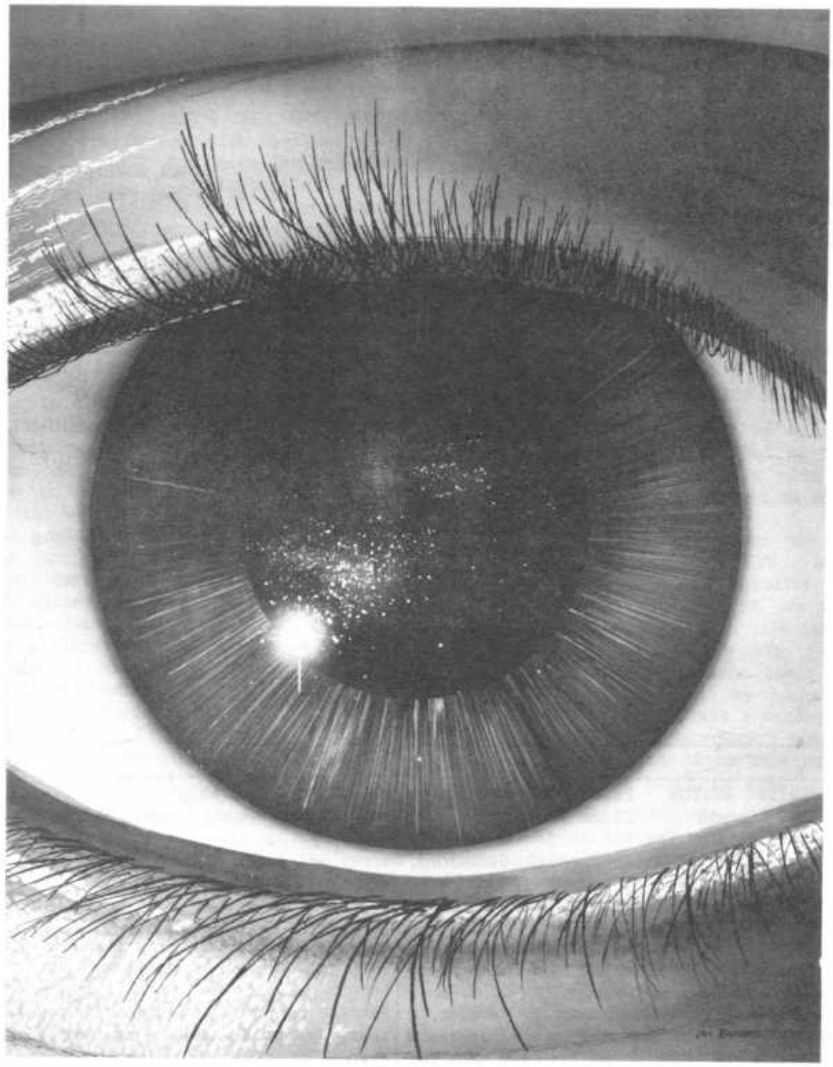

CHINESE MURDERS INVESTIGATED
L. J. Hurst on Robert Van Gulik's *Judge Dee*

PLUS
Letters
Book Reviews

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1987/88

VECTOR
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DECEMBER/JANUARY 1987/88

C O N T E N T S

NEXT ISSUE
We begin a series exploring Literary Criticism and the Art of Reviewing applied to science fiction and fantasy.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!
A happy winter festival to you all

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THE BSFA: The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organisation, formed in 1958, which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish bimonthly: *Vector*, a critical journal, *Matrix*, a news magazine, and *Paperback Inferno*, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks; and triannually, *Focus*, a forum for writers. Other BSFA services include *Orbiter*, a postal *SF* writers' workshop; an *SF Information Service*; a postal *Magazine Chain*; and an *SF Lending Library*.

MEMBERSHIP costs £10 per annum (Overseas: $20 surface, $35 air). For details, write to: Joanne Raine, BSFA Membership Secretary, 33 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (USA: Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred, Detroit, MI 48213.)

All opinions expressed in Vector *are those of the individual contributors and must not be taken to represent those of the Editor or the BSFA except where explicitly stated.*

CONTRIBUTORS: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double-spaced on one side of the paper. Length should be in the range 1500-4000 words, though shorter or longer submissions may be considered. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned unless accompanied by an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editor.

ART: Cover art, illustrations and fillers welcome.

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EDITORIAL

An article has been sent to *Vector* which has angered me considerably. Nevertheless, its assertions should be responded to, so I reproduce it here, in its entirety, with its accompanying note, and with my reply.

Dear David

In view of the basic and incontrovertible contradictions pointed out in the enclosed brief article submitted for publication in *Vector*, I shall take its rejection as proof positive of the censorship and propaganda which I see in your selection of subjects and articles for publication.

Yours
Ken Lake

RIGHT OF REPLY
by Ken Lake

I MIGHT WELL HAVE WRITTEN THIS AS A LOC, BUT THEN I would have been tempted to preface it with that hackneyed old *Private Eye* ploy "You will not dare publish this letter". Instead, I am framing it as a short article in the hope that the concept of fair play will overcome the editor's blatantly obvious prejudices and permit the piece to be seen in print.

I shall, therefore, preface my comments with a direct quotation from the editor in *V139* (p6): "What is the BSFA? Nearly 1000 people who enjoy SF. That's the common thread among members, rather than a particular political stance." Yet not only is this issue devoted to feminism, it is prefaced by several tendentious left wing assertions (following the title "Tomorrow belongs to..." on pages 3-4) which I find offensive and which in any case completely belie the editor's claimed stance.

Not to mention the demand from a persecuted Catholic minority member who wants us to ban membership to another minority (the white S Africans who will assuredly, if the Republic goes the way Zimbabwe has done, be persecuted far worse than he has been, and indeed worse than they have in their turn persecuted the blacks).

The point I'm making is pretty easy to grasp, actually: it is that there are two sides to every question, but that the minority usually gets to be more vociferous about things. I don't want to examine all the feminist articles in the issue, though I will stop a moment to make two points about Mike Christie's expanded piece on Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue*. When this first appeared *«I assume Ken means the earlier and much shorter version in Caroline Mullen's fanzine* The Mirror Crack'd*»*, I wrote simply saying that by his complex arguments he had almost succeeded in ruining for me a book which I had thoroughly enjoyed and which I felt contained a very cogent argument.

Since then I have come across the following nice comment about the theories he puts forward.

> "The artist Magritte once painted a briar pipe and wrote underneath it 'This is not a pipe.' His point was that it was not a pipe, it was a picture of a pipe. If that strikes you as absurd rather than clever, I have bad news for you: a whole linguistic philosophy -- structuralism -- has been based on this idea.
>
> "Structuralism, and its close relative deconstructism are... something to talk about which useful members of society can be guaranteed not to understand. Expressed simply, all three are staggeringly unhelpful theories. Existentialism tells you that if you feel rather queasy you should fix yourself a stiff Pernod; structuralism tells you that a stiff Pernod is society's way of stopping you feeling queasy -- and deconstructism tells you to chuck the Pernod away and pull yourself together."

I do feel that throws more light on the question than all Mike's hyperserious waffle.

Coming now to feminism itself, I want to set aside the arguments put forward here and look at *-isms* as a group (Mike will have a posh word for that). Here are a few basic points to consider:

All -isms have a certain validity (I include Nazism with Communism here, both being called forth by actualities in certain countries at certain times).

No -ism can have full validity, by definition, because it is based on a partial and biased view of the real world, usually coloured by the attributes or perceived shortcomings of the proponents (remember, for every -ism there is an equal and opposite -ism).

What functions, then, do -isms perform? They are a nexus of feeling, argument and action for those who share the same beliefs in their exploitation by an equal and opposite -ism. They do help the rest of us to grasp the feelings, and understand the frustrations, of those whom we are accused of exploiting.

And in time, they can be (and usually are) absorbed into life-as-it-is-lived, enhancing our understanding and encouraging us to be tolerant. And ultimately, they make us aware of those essential differences which (like it or not) *force* us to be male or female, black or pink, employer or employee...

But it is a fallacy to claim that any -ism is true (and this is proved simply by examining every -ism the world has known, each balanced by its equal and opposite -ism), or to believe that any -ism can remake the world in its image. Life just is not as one-eyed as an -ism is, by definition.

We all contain within us the genetic, cultural and conditioned results of past -isms; some of them, obviously, have lost their validity, while others have yet to be fully resolved. But not one of them deserves to be considered in isolation from life itself.

Please understand that this is not an attack on -isms, but merely a plea for their being properly understood. But to return to my opening quotation from our editor, and his own blatant breaking of that credo, I must close by entering the strongest possible complaint at the constant proclamation of certain political theories as if they were revealed truth, or even probable futures.

I did not join the BSFA to support tendentious politicking in the pages of publications supported by my subscription, and since it becomes ever more obvious that there is to be no even-handedness, no equality of treatment, in non-SF fields (in other words, that there is to be no real freedom of speech here), put forward in all seriousness the following proposition: that since, as stated, the sole common thread between readers is that they enjoy SF, any articles that do not deal with SF subjects should be carefully analysed by the readership.

Then at the end of the year, we should withhold that proportion of our membership fee which corresponds to the proportion of reading matter that we feel is being misused in this way, leaving those who wish to continue to subvert a supposedly SF organisation for political or other tendentious reasons to increase their own subscriptions to sponsor such activities.

Now you can't say fairer than that, guv, can yer?

The editor's reply is overleaf.

EDITOR'S REPLY

ON CENSORSHIP

FIRST, I AM ASTOUNDED THAT KEN, WHILE SAYING IN HIS article that he won't, uses a ploy equivalent to "You will not dare publish..." in his letter. This "I win if you do, I win if you don't" trick is not worthy of any writer, let alone a professional freelance journalist as Ken is. So far as I remember it is the first time any *Vector* letter or article writer has tried this on since I became editor. A fair warning to Ken and anyone else tempted to be so puerile: next time it goes straight in the bin.

Ken makes a number of serious allegations about my editorship of *Vector*. These include my censorship, propaganda and prejudices. Of course I have prejudices; anyone who hasn't doesn't exist on this planet. For example, I'm prejudiced against bad SF and in favour of good SF; both are value judgements, and my opinion is as valid as anyone else's. I have other prejudices, bred into me as a child, some of which I believe are wrong; these I attempt to overcome by self-education. Other prejudices, particularly in the fields of books and music, are simply my own likes and dislikes; I don't let these influence my use in *Vector* of articles or letters displaying different views.

I dislike propaganda intensely, whether religious, political, advertising or any other.

Censorship is a very dicey issue. Ken, while accusing me of it, is insisting I practise it, by not publishing anything he disagrees with. Like any editor, I am guided by my gut feelings, by my perception of what is likely to offend a majority of the readership, and by the law. I would not run an article using SF examples to advocate child-molestation, or sexual or racial or religious intolerance; I would not print unedited a letter whose every other word was "fucking". So I do practise censorship; if I didn't, Ken would have cause to complain. But I publish ideas and opinions I personally disagree with, in both articles and letters, including criticism of my own writing; I do not practise censorship in this respect.

Ken is confusing censorship with selection. I select what goes into *Vector*; this is part of an editor's job. I publish every letter sent for publication, though usually with cuts (see below). Articles are either specifically commissioned or sent in on spec. Though I may choose the overall subject of commissioned articles, I have no control over the opinions expressed in them, nor would I wish to have. Commissioned articles are greatly outweighed by submitted articles, over which I have no control regarding subject matter. I do, of course, have the option of rejecting them, and perhaps this is what Ken has in mind. In nearly three years I have rejected only two articles; one because it had little connection with SF and was too overtly political, and the other because it was atrociously written and said nothing worth saying. (Neither was written by Ken Lake.) I have asked for rewrites of many others, because they were either badly written, or clumsily argued, or not properly thought through, or unbalanced. Again, this is a normal part of an editor's job.

I edit letters if:

- they are libellous: this is a legal obligation of an editor; I do not wish to saddle myself or the BSFA with a libel settlement
- they are too long: I select the pertinent sections and sometimes summarise the remainder
- they are inaccurate: I cut or correct
- they are unclear: I clarify
- they are repetitious, of themselves, or of points other letters make more succinctly: I cut and select
- they are badly written (you'd be amazed!): I correct or improve the grammar, spelling or punctuation
- they are personal, gratuitously abusive or offensive, irrelevant, or boring: I select what is usable
- intro and extro sentences are friendly (or unfriendly) chat: I cut
- they are marked DNQ (Do Not Quote): I don't. Please make it clear which sections of a letter this applies to.

ON POLITICAL STANCES

On the specific charge of my "tendentious left wing assertions" and my supposed inconsistency on politics and the BSFA, Ken is deliberately ignoring my clearly stated distinction between the BSFA having a political stance (which it should not, and cannot have, if only for the self-evident fact that different members have, and should have, differing political beliefs), and my own views and beliefs. The section in the *V139* editorial headed "Tomorrow belongs to..." made it abundantly clear several times that these were my *personal* thoughts, and not an attempt to present either the beliefs of all BSFA members, or the stance of the BSFA as an organisation, or even a prescriptive statement of what we all *ought* to believe. I have no right to tell you what you should believe; I have every right to tell you what I believe.

Note that these "tendentious left wing assertions" about my vision of a Thatcherite future are in each case followed by factual examples of how they are already occurring; all I did was to put in one list news stories that can be read every day in *The Guardian* or heard on the BBC.

Note also that I stated my political stance (Alliance), that of two other BSFA members who have said publicly that they support Labour, and said I was sure the BSFA has some Conservative supporters. I then made the point that we are all people, whatever our political colour, and that government policies affect us all.

To pass on to other points in Ken's article. He makes the assumption that Mark McConn is "a persecuted Catholic minority member"; the only evidence for this, and it is by no means conclusive, is that Mark gives his address as "Derry" rather than "Londonderry". I've no idea whether Mark is Catholic, Protestant or Zoroastrian, and it's utterly irrelevant to the point he was making -- a point which I happen to disagree with, but which I gave space to in *Vector* as I feel it is very much a valid subject for debate. Also, Ken speaks of Mark's "demand"; Mark made no demand -- he put forward an argument. I find it disturbing that Ken should treat any argument he disagrees with as a demand.

Next, Ken attacks Mike Christie's "hyperserious waffle" in his analysis of the linguistic rationale behind Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue*. (I found Mike's arguments complex as well, but unlike Ken I was grateful for the opportunity to increase my knowledge and understanding of linguistic theory.) He quotes two paragraphs (without any attribution) of someone poking fun at philosophical systems and assumes that this answers the question. It's an amusing (though somewhat fallacious) quotation, and I'd like to know where it comes from; but you can't simply dismiss the collected thinking of the world's philosophers as easily as that -- that's an anti-intellectual argument if ever I saw one.

Ken discusses -isms in general; some of his points are worthwhile, though his assertion that every -ism has an equal and opposite -ism is factually incorrect; it's not that simple. But he misses the points that I stressed in the Feminism editorial: that "feminism is a *movement* towards a different society... in which there is no discrimination...", and that there are many quite different varieties of feminism, based on different philosophical and political foundations. Not all people who call themselves feminists (whether women or men) are left wing. He also argues that no -ism, presumably including feminism, "deserves to be considered in isolation from life itself". I couldn't agree more; that's exactly why I wrote the editorial I did, grounded firmly in real life, rather than an abstruse pure theoretical piece.

Politics is to do with life, not with political parties. If Ken is arguing that this has no place in *Vector*, then I am afraid he is advocating censorship of the worst kind. I have demonstrated above that I strive strongly for "even-handedness and equality of treatment"

in *Vector*; I publish many views I disagree with, and will continue to do so. Ken claims that "there is to be no real freedom of speech here". Rubbish! If he feels that too many articles and letters express left wing views, or other views that he disagrees with, he has the same right as any other BSFA member to put forward his own views, to write articles and letters related to SF from his own political and philosophical stance. (Incidentally, Ken has had articles in five of the 16 issues of *Vector* I have edited -- more than any other BSFA member. Thus is my censorship of him demonstrated!)

With his final point I'm afraid Ken really shoots himself in the foot. The *V139* editorial that he finds so offensive is firmly linked to SF, and sets the scene for all the articles in that issue -- each one itself SF-related. Hardly a single word of Ken's diatribe has any connection at all with SF. To quote him once more, "any articles that do not deal with SF subjects should be carefully analysed by the readership." This is what I have done here. I leave the verdict to you.

-- David V Barrett

L E T T E R S

«MORE RESPONSE TO V139, AND SOME THOUGHTS ON THEME issues in general, before we get to V140:»

WELL, IT WAS A GOOD ISSUE, THE FEMINIST ISSUE. I HOPE IT encourages more women to write for *Vector*. I hope it *doesn't* cause the membership to say "Well, we've done feminism now, don't have to bother about that for another couple of years." The danger of splitting off "women's issues" into a separate compartment is that it encourages people to do just that, and then to devalue the compartment -- as in: there's SF (real SF), and then there's Feminist SF, which is out on the lunatic fringe, not a part of everyday life. As in: let's have a Ministry of Women. Then we have somewhere to put all these women in politics (apart from Real Parliament), and we can let them sort out the women's issues like maternity leave and child benefit (and abortion? and community health care, and the diabolical plight of the nursing profession, and education, and town planning and conservation and disarmament (Greenham isn't a women's issue, right?)). I've got a better idea. Let's have a Ministry of Men, to look after this violent and destructive minority group. They obviously can't do it for themselves. We really do have their best interests at heart.

Gor books -- I agree they are as Mary Gentle describes them (I've read a couple of the early books, which I'm told have slightly more plot and less rape than their interminable continuation series. The images exist, and they are powerful. What I don't understand is *why* they are powerful, *why* boys are unthinkingly aroused by these blow-up plastic dolls. Is it a case of atavistic response to super-stimulus?

The questions which intrigued me when reading *Gor* books were these: All the women look like *Playboy* centrefolds, and there are no old women. What do they do with their old? Liquidate them?

I assume there are no sexually transmitted diseases on Gor, and that there is a 100% effective form of contraception freely available (are the sex-toy women sterilised?)

I have seen no references at all to children on Gor.

Would any rational man *really* trust a great military and political leader whose first official act on taking office was to pass a law shortening women's skirts?

There are references in the early books to "panther women", pseudo-Amazons (who of course are eventually enslaved by the protagonist, except for their leader). Great play is made of the fact that the panther women claim to enslave and sexually subdue men in rôle-reversal of the usual Gorean pattern. Although men are several times captured by the panther women, Norman evidently cannot bring himself to imagine or describe the rape of a man -- the panther women stake out their victim on the ground, do a war-dance around him, then fling off all their clothes and roll around on the ground in uncontrollable passion. At this point the male "victim" escapes or is rescued. Conclusion: Norman can't face his own fears. So much for being a "real man".

The other thing about the *Gor* books (those that I've read) is that to me it's obvious from both style and content that they are boys' books, juveniles. Continual fevered obsession with a particular sexual fantasy scenario, inability to imagine or describe "real sex", a plot that moves plastic dolls around an ill-defined landscape; these are all hallmarks of the average inexperienced adolescent grappling with puberty.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL CONCERNED WITH THE PRODUCTION OF *V139* with its "Feminism & SF" theme -- intelligent and stimulating articles -- many of the books discussed by Jean Weber should be required reading for MCPs everywhere and for anyone who still thinks that SF is about spaceships and little green men.

I suppose we all read SF for different reasons, but for me the greatest attraction has been the SF author's ability to challenge our assumptions about the way things *are* and show us the way things *could* be. Of course, subtlety is the key word here -- some writers do seem so anxious to put their social/moral message across that they forget about such basics as plot and characterisation.

Given that SF is the ideal genre for writers with a feminist "message", the number of SF novels that continue to perpetuate archaic male/female stereotypes is surprising. Fantasy does appear to be more guilty than SF in this respect, possibly because of its tendency to rely on traditional and archetypal characters. I agree with most of what Sue Thomason said in her article "Women Wizards? Yes -- Now!" about the lack of powerful female mages in fantasy writing, but I must put in a word for Barbara Hambly's Jenny Waynest (in *Dragonsbane*) who, admittedly at the end of the book, rejects ultimate power, realising "The key to magic was not magic, but the use of magic; it lay not in having, but in giving and doing", a rejection of the (usually male) quest for occult power at the expense of humanity. Perhaps as more women are encouraged to write SF and fantasy, we will see more well-adjusted female wizards.

Meanwhile, can we look forward to more *Vectors* with a particular theme? "Pacificism in SF" and "Ecology in SF" are two of the more obvious themes that spring to mind, and I'm sure there are many more.

LYNNE BISPHAM
Bushey
Herts

NICE TO SEE EVERYONE NOT HAVING READ THE *GOR* BOOKS -- come on: *someone* admit to having read them! All right -- I have. I read the earlier *Gor* books along with others in the genre (Conan/John Carter/Brak the Barbarian) and to be honest, they didn't seem a lot different. What that says for Conan/Carter etc I don't know. I read one or two later ones and my reaction was the same as Mary Gentle's. The books have become a lot more open in what they're preaching and it's impossible, now, to say (which arguably you still can about Conan/Carter & co. although I won't press the point) that they're only entertainments, because the plot seemed to be minimal and the main point of everything seemed to be to be as cruel as possible to as many women as possible and that, folks, is what life's

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all about. They're also profoundly unerotic (in the sense that I define "erotic" as something giving sexual pleasure): you don't really get the impression that all these macho dominating men are actually *enjoying* what they're doing -- poor souls: a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do and they only do it, I'm sure, because it's their natural rôle. I wonder if Tarl Cabot *really* wants to take up embroidery or badminton or something that would allow John Norman to write as if he were actually enjoying what he was writing. There are, of course, as far as I'm aware, no dirty words or lavish sexual descriptions in the *Gor* books (I remember one unfortunate being hit "below the small of the back" which is one of the drabbest euphemisms I've ever come across) so I suppose that makes them all right in some quarters...

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THE LAST TWO ISSUES OF *VECTOR* MIGHT HAVE BEEN CALCULATED to raise me from my inarticulate torpor. As a child of 12 I read Ursula LeGuin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, followed by the other two books in the trilogy in short succession, and I admit that the philosophy in them has had an important effect on my outlook on life.

It was, thus, that Sue Thomason's article on women's rôles in the trilogy disturbed me. I would like to try to qualify, clarify or otherwise invalidate some of her points.

First, "the male is the norm". I do *not* agree with this, directly, but would rather qualify it with "the values of the male are the norm". Our society has traditionally confused masculinity/femininity with gender. Of all people feminists should be the first to see that this is not so. It is quite possible to imagine a society where women subscribe to masculine values, and men to feminine. Indeed it would be the fulfilment of a function of Fantasy to posit such a society. However, there has not been such a society for nearly 3,000 years; the Romans and Greeks have been a male/masculine/dominant society that, until recently has been faithfully copied from generation to generation -- the "Caesar syndrome".

«I would say a far greater blame lies with the Judaeo-Christian-Moslem religious idea, whose roots stretch much further back, and whose influence has been far more pervasive.»

I would question that Sparrowhawk's rôle is presented as a desirable one. He makes it plain that he has been trapped into his life of doing, while he was young, thoughtless, and acting proudly, as many are in this society.

I would agree that *The Farthest Shore* and *A Wizard of Earthsea* are heavily biased towards masculinity. However, *The Tombs of Atuan* is another proposition. Only two of the protagonists are male. It is true that Tenar is, in a sense, "rescued" «but» it is not a straightforward "saving the innocent heroine". It as much her effort -- indeed mostly her effort -- as Ged's that the Nameless Ones have the ring taken from them. She takes the death of Kanan upon herself, and it she who goes to Gont, with Ogion, something that Ged ultimately desires, but has prevented himself, by foolishness, from so doing. In this sense, she transcends Ged.

If women go with sex, and the dark, sterility, death, how the hell are sex and sterility connected? *«It is quite common for a goddess or god to contain opposed attributes: the giver of life is also the taker of life, for example.»* Why is not Sopli a woman, then or Hare? Why is the shadow, Ged, himself? Why is Cob not a woman? Akaren is, to me, a wizard: "Aye, like knows like, sister." Furthermore, Ged plainly considers her to have wizardry. She is also more than a simple craft-witch.

The Earthsea Trilogy is not a static thing. It is the work of an evolving writer. Akaren represents the maturation of an attitude to women. Neither Hare nor Sopli regrets the loss of wizardry. She does, and the effort to retain it has cost her her sanity. In this she transcends -- again -- the men.

Ultimately, I would disagree with Thomason's analysis of the opposition and identifications of Logos and Eros. Women are mostly feeble in Earthsea, rather than particularly twisted.

I feel the message of Earthsea could either be a lot more enlightened or sinister -- all depending on your prejudices -- that Eros is a power beyond Logos, but capable of being invoked -- *not* controlled by Logos, to become something greater than both. *This* is the way of the Tao.

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SUE'S ARTICLE HASN'T PUT ME OFF LEGUIN -- I'VE HAD THE same reservations myself -- luckily it doesn't interfere too much with my enjoyment of the *Earthsea* books. I too would like to see, or rather read about women protagonists especially in books written by women, but I find that when I read it is quite easy to assimilate the "male" side of my personality into the part of me reading that identifies with the characters. A lot depends on the quality of the writing and the *human* sympathy that is engaged.

It is, however, prominent in my own writing, that my heroines aren't the ones falling over and breaking their ankles at inconvenient moments (though is there a convenient moment to break your ankle?).

It's high time the bitch/goddess stereotypes were abandoned and a little -- *no*, a great deal of character shading took over, and if we women don't allow ourselves the chance to breathe life into our characters when we are the creators, not only will heaven not help us, we become the creators of our own hells!

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I FEEL THAT I SHOULD BEGIN BY SAYING "CONGRATULATIONS" on producing a showpiece *Vector* for Worldcon. Theme issues, as *V139* proves, can work very well, attaining a pleasing sense of consistency without sacrificing the diversity or quality of individual contributions. So far, so good (and *V139* was *good*). My delight is only tempered by the looming shadow of a theme treadmill... once you start on it, it's hard to get off. (I speak from

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parallel experience.) However, I have sufficient confidence in you to presume that you'll stop long before the point is reached where you find yourself trapped...

I would second Sue Thomason's call for women wizards -- and now; except that I can't help feeling that they would still be male in all but name. She appears to be advocating an "if you can't beat them, join them" stance. Who says a witch's magic has to be less powerful than a wizard's. Whose rules are we playing by? And isn't it time we started making up our own?

I found Mary Gentle's article on *Gor* something of a surprise... «because of» the revelation that rape is a constant feature of the books. You see, I "know" some of the bastards who read them, and most unlikely bastards they are.

When my children were younger I often used a mobile library -- four or five of us and it was cramped -- you can't help seeing what other people are choosing when you're falling over each other, and you can't help hearing when someone is shouting in your ear, "Hey, what about this one?", proferring a copy of *Gor* to a friend at the other end of the library, all of four yards away. (They're pretty distinctive covers, and I can still remember thinking what a stupid title it was for a book.) Nudge, wink, titter. "Is there any sex in it?" "Oh, yes..." "That'll do for me then!" General laughter. "'Ere, you'll have to hide it from your Tom, it might give him ideas." "Hmmph, no such luck." More laughter.

These bastards are in late middle age, plump, wrinkled (not the kind of woman who looks "good" in skimpy leather and chains, you understand), their husbands probably "read" the *Sun*, and they have precious few illusions about what the rest of their lives are going to be like. They read *Gor*. But to conclude that that means they have a desire to be raped, or even an (unconscious?) wish to be dominated, would be fallacious. They, unlike J Norman and his ilk, do not confuse fantasy with reality; nor woolly thinking with logic.

That some women fantasise about being "raped" is indubitable -- and I am not the sort of person who denies facts because I don't like their implications. But to transform that into "therefore women want to be raped", or are even, because of some quirk of clandestine biology, genetically programmed to want to be owned and abused (whilst men, presumably, are blessed with a correlating need to own and abuse) requires a leap from the specific to the general which, as a philosopher (and teacher!?) Lange Jr should know is unsupportable. As is his concomitant side-stepping of any moral dilemma by invoking the clay footed genie of predeterminacy via biological evolution. Aren't men supposed to be logical thinkers? Damn, another myth down the plughole.

The fantasy of "rape" -- the subject and form of which is totally within the woman's control -- bears no relation, save in name, to the invasive violence and physical violation of an actual rape (part of the trauma of which is being denied any semblance of control over the situation). Women who fantasise about being "raped", or read *Gor*, have no more desire to be *raped* than a man who enjoys reading war novels or spy thrillers genuinely desires to kill or be killed, however bloody (or genetically predetermined toward conflict) his ancestry.

But fallacies aside, what I, like Mary, find so disturbing about *Gor* is not that these rape fantasies are being published, or read, or even that they're seemingly enjoyed by both men and women -- it's the very real possibility that the crap masquerading as "truth" within them will be *believed*. And further, that that "belief" will be harmful to women -- personally, physically, possibly; generally, insidiously -- in its pervasive reenforcement of dangerous misconceptions -- probably. Whether these books encourage sexual offences, offer an alternative release, or even, given the diversity of human nature, do both, we can only speculate. That they provide a crutch for the consciences of those deficient males who need to degrade women in order to function sexually we can merely presume. But we can be sure that however reassuring to anti-feminists Lange's casuistic philosophy might be, at heart it is destructive to both men and women. If woman is predetermined (a product of evolution, natural selections, what you will) then man is too, and rage as we might about freedom or love or liberty, about will or intelligence or choice, in Lange's view be and we are nothing but puppets tugging uselessly against the strings of our own true (biological) selves. Thanks for the theory, Lange Jr, but no thanks. Personally, I will be invoking the optional free-will clause and leaving *Gor* on the shelf.

«From a later letter:»

I WAS QUITE SURPRISED TO FIND MYSELF BEING DESCRIBED IN *V140* as a writer "experimenting in the cyberpunk mode" (Mike Cobley's letter), particularly as I have always been a little bemused by what "cyberpunk" is, or was, or might have been. As a descriptive term it is at best vague and undefined; and as a "movement" it is somewhat limited to say the least. I can only presume that Mike is working on a definition all of his own which goes something like "human's interfacing with AI = cyberpunk", in which case I must plead guilty to experimenting with the defunct cyberpunk corpse. But please Mike, I would prefer it if you didn't burden me with any more labels than I need. Being a Woman, an SF Writer, a Mother is restrictive enough without having "necromancer" stamped on my figurative forehead, too.

(And please, David, don't indulge in generalistic comparisons based on shady definitions. Or accuse inanimate objects of having opinions, inflated or otherwise. The stuff going under the label of "cyberpunk" is not aware of anything, let alone its own significance or lack thereof -- only the writers of the stuff are capable of that.)

«I would justify the anthropomorphism on two grounds: I was speaking figuratively, in the context of the discussion of cyberpunk being dead or dying -- already attributing an animate nature to a concept; also, I think that cyberpunk only really exists in its proponents' minds -- which minds are the literal holders of the opinion I ascribe to the concept. Also, my comparison was based more on the nature of the content and style of the books concerned than on any definitions, my own or anyone else's.»

As to Mike's claim that "the habitual discussion of the meaning of words is not only tedious but harmful" -- to be provocative about it (and inaccurate, but that shouldn't worry Mike) -- what gobbledegook! It's like saying that the value of an archæological dig is in inverse proportion to the amount of mud cleared away from it. You could argue that left clogged with the muck of centuries it is in a "truer" state, you could fumble around its edges trying to assess its shape, meaning, purpose; you could make assumptions from its position and outline based on previous "knowledge", but until you have washed the mud from the small "finds" within, until you have examined, dated and tried to understand their place and purpose, then however educated your guess about the whole it is no more than that.

Which leads me, somewhat sideways, to *Native Tongue*. I found Mike Christie's article both interesting and informative. I thoroughly enjoyed the book even though, although *right* in its own terms, the ending was something of a disappointment. (I also find the viewpoint that *all* men are inherent male chauvinists difficult to accept, but that's another story.) On further thought however, I am given to wondering just what was so special about Láadan that it alone could so alter the women's perceptions of reality and/or relationships as to bring about a (however subtle) revolution: particularly bearing in mind that these women were, in any event, multi-lingual -- and more importantly, that they had spent long periods of their formative years in an interface learning alien languages, and therefore, surely, alien modes of thought and perception. We encounter at least once, quite specifically, a species to whom the idea of sexual inequality is nonexistent, if not abhorrent; a species who deliberately use their knowledge of the Lines' social structure to sabotage some proposed discussions or other by sending "female"

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representatives, much to the annoyance of the men and quiet amusement of our heroine -- who is there because she is one of the few who can speak their language!

If, then, language shapes thought -- truly and completely -- how could the women break the bonds of their given tongue to create Láadan... because the channels have already been opened by contact with species such as the one above, perhaps?

With reference to the (non?) revolution: if my recall is correct, there is no evidence in the book that the effect of Láadan was to make its speakers "react more vigorously and emotionally against another person exerting... dominance over them", but rather the opposite. Having freed themselves from inappropriate (male-world-view-dominated) modes of thought, the women ceased to appear muddle-headed, illogical, *emotional*; they were no longer to be found in twittering groups groping to express themselves in a language shaped by men, but appeared and disappeared as required, quietly, calmly. They became their true selves: capable, assured, composed, and thus ceased to be (in the men's eyes) "amusing", but they did not become rebellious. If anything, they were more compliant. Faced with this, discomforted and nonplussed, but without specific cause for complaint, the men gradually lost their masterly hold over them. We *were* shown the beginnings of the revolution, but not of the kind that Mike Christie, blinded by thoughts of political rebellion and vigorous emotional reaction, could see.

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COMMENTS IN THE LAST FEW ISSUES ON CYBERPUNK CANNOT GO unchallenged. The argument that cyberpunk is dead or that it never really existed anyway, except in the minds of one or two over-hyped writers, seems nonsensical to me. Dozens of writers have written cyberpunk, thousands have enjoyed reading it. Cyberpunk exists by the very fact that people *do* it. But numbers shouldn't matter; judging by the amount of discussion and argument, over the last few years the influence of cyberpunk has been huge. Of course it has its roots in Bester, Dick, even Doc Smith (!) -- all movements must have roots. In your editorial in *V138* you argue that cyberpunk is "little more than 60s New Wave updated to the 80s" -- it doesn't take *me* much cerebral strain to refute that: I have great difficulty scraping anything out of the first New Wave that I enjoy (maybe some Sladek, Priest and Disch; Ballard and Delany send me to sleep), yet cyberpunk has given me some of my favourite stories and novels. Surely that indicates that there must be quite a significant difference?

No, for me cyberpunk has been the most exciting development SF has seen.

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INTERESTING TO SEE THE *DRAGONFALL 5* BOOKS MENTIONED *(V140)* -- is this another first for *Vector*? -- and I think a closer look at such books could be interesting for another time. There are some SF books for the younger age-group which are particularly good -- others less so: the problem is in keeping the science authentic without being too complicated. It might be argued that this isn't a real issue, but I've read too many junior SF books which are not so much speculative (hell, we all know that FTL travel breaks umpteen laws of physics) as plain wrong or at least seriously misleading. It could be argued that SF for kids on the "Transformers" level is the modern equivalent of fairy-tale and not "real" SF at all: that's maybe another issue that could be explored.

I'm glad to see Patrick Lee mentioning HM Hoover -- a most under-rated writer who deals with some complex themes.

The articles by Diana Wynne Jones and Gwyneth Jones were both good. I would, though, like to say something about Gwyneth's labeling of *Swallows and Amazons* with Blytons and the *Chalet School* series. I do agree with the point she is making, but the Arthur Ransome books are a bit more complicated than her sentence suggests, particularly in the context of fantasy. (What follows is a quick synopsis of something I've been niggling at for a couple of years now...!) In the Ransome books we have quite complex examples of the distancing effect of fantasy. They are books about the imagination at work -- the Walker children, and the Blacketts, are quite serious about their "play": the world is seen through their imaginations. The lake is an inland sea; their families are "natives", the Blackett's Uncle Jim *is* Captain Flint, a retired pirate. But although the books can probably quite justifiably be criticised on the grounds that these are middle-class children mucking about with boats (I particularly never was happy about the way "nurse" was never given a name) one thing Ransome never is, is condescending about the children's "games". They are in some way experiencing real experiences, in the same way as we experience real experiences when we are rapt inside a good book which captures our imaginations.

But there's another level at which the books exist. The "D"s -- Dick and Dorothea -- who appear in *Winter Holiday*, *The Picts and the Martyrs* etc., are examples of other imaginative engagements. They become part of the *Swallows and Amazons* world, but offer their own slants to it. Dick as the "scientist", the observer, looking at the natural world, the ideas man, and Dorothea as the "artist" -- her distinguishing trait is to imagine the adventures

she is engaged in as part of a story in a book. For example, in *Coot Club* when Tom Dudgeon is being hunted by the boatload of what we would now call yuppies whose boat he cast off when they were moored next to a nesting bird, she is constantly retelling to herself what has just happened as part of her book *The Outlaw of the Broads*, and although part of the joke is that she is using horribly clichéd language culled from junior melodrama, it's quite obvious to the child reading the book that here we have a character in a book seeing events and using the fictional instances in her own fiction -- metafictional texts in children's literature...?

And a third level of fantasy is given on consideration of the fact that two of the books in the *S&A* series -- *Peter Duck* and *Missee Lee*; some would also add *Great Northern?* on the grounds that, although the events *could* have happened, the time they were supposed to have happened makes it unlikely that they *did* -- are not actually "real" adventures set in the *S&A* world but romances invented by the children, one involving hidden treasure on a desert island and the other Chinese pirates. They're presented as straightforward adventures and written in Ransome's usual realistic style; the only clue we have that they "didn't happen" (I've had to use quotes there to show that the baseline is a primary level of fiction rather than real life -- *of course* they didn't happen!) is our own sense that the realistic characters we know from the other books wouldn't have those kind of adventures.

...It all sounds very complicated, but my point is, briefly, that the books do allow a child to experience the notion that there are different levels of fantasy.

...As a parallel example, there's the works of ER Eddison, whom Gwyneth also mentions. Eddison was a boyhood friend of Arthur Ransome, and Ransome had at least some of his books in his personal collection. They shared the Lake District together -- and the opening "Zimiamvia" scenes of *Mistress of Mistresses* are very "Lake District" in their geography. I think that there are very close similarities between the structures of Ransome's work and those of Eddison. *The Worm Ouroboros* seems to be a dream-vision of Lessingham, although Lessingham conveniently vanishes from the text after not too long. The Zimiamvia of the later trilogy seems partly to be a kind of Valhalla of the Mercury of the *Worm*, but it also has a relationship with our Earth, in that Lessingham is a character there, presumably after his death on Earth (*Mistress of Mistresses*). But there is also a sense (in *A Fish Dinner in Memison*) in which our Earth is itself a creation emanating from a few idle moments spent in Zimiamvia. And there's all the theological/philosophical speculation which I needn't go into here; suffice to say that it's a similar kind of steps of imaginative world-building, which I find particularly interesting because in terms of what they're actually writing, Ransome and Eddison are very, very different. Ransome and his characters, whatever they do imaginatively with the real world, are very much part of it, and live in it and experience it and know when they're fantasising. I'm not so sure about Eddison and his world. But I'm sure that when you read Ransome as a child you're looking at different ways of using your imagination with respect to a book which is very different from high-jinks at the Chalet School.

ANDY SAWYER

ANOTHER FINE ISSUE OF *VECTOR* HAS JUST LANDED, WITH THAT marvellous snippet from Diana Wynne Jones about Children not being Real People. As far as I'm concerned children deserve the very best we can give them, which is what Diana and others give (while others certainly do not). Children, like women (like men), like any aliens are just different -- not inferior, just different, and you know what is said about the difference -- or maybe you don't. It's the Manx Tourist Authority's slogan -- "It's our differences which make the difference."

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«We're always glad to get letters from authors, giving comment, or praise, or criticism, or setting the facts straight when we get something wrong. First, a word from the President of the BSFA:»

I'VE JUST RECEIVED THE JUNE/JULY *VECTOR* TODAY (AFTER THE August/September issue!).

David Knott makes an interesting error in his comments on *2010* ("Forgotten Fruit", *V138*). It was *not* conceived by me as "an exciting interstellar adventure that could actually happen and doesn't defy the laws of physics". That was my description of *The Songs of Distant Earth*.

But he makes a good point in his *critique* of the ending. I hope that, come January, he'll agree that I've tied up most of these loose ends -- and introduced a lot more...

ARTHUR C CLARKE
Sri Lanka

IN RESPONSE TO JOHN OWEN'S LETTER (*V140*): YES, THERE IS a certain amount of pressure from publishers to produce novels rather than short story collections, since the latter do not sell as well. However, collections and anthologies are being published -- more frequently of late -- with publishers willing to chance their arms and occasionally being surprised at the result.

In response to the review of *Spiral Winds* (if I may), I should like to set the record straight. I was not a soldier, but an airman in the Royal Air Force. The difference means a lot to me, if no one else. Nor is *Spiral Winds* a *ghost* story, which has been read into the novel by the reviewer and not written into it by the author. The reviewer assumes too much on negligible evidence, putting one and one together to make three. The cliché is in his own mind.

GARRY KILWORTH
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ROBERT SEDGWICK OBVIOUSLY HASN'T READ A SINGLE WOMEN'S Press book (Letters, *V140*). I'd like to see him give examples of works he has read which support his statement that "every other female SF writer is seemingly giving every novel a feminist slant", naming all the established female SF writers currently being published in the USA and Britain. As for his implication that the stories in *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* (for example) are *not* bona fide SF/fantasy, I wonder what Sue Thomason makes of this, having appeared in the anthology -- because she also co-ordinates the BSFA *Orbiter* groups. I also suggest he reread LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*.

John Newsinger's review of *Dracula's Children* was interesting. I thought R Chetwynd Hayes a children's fiction writer, and William Kimber a children's fiction publisher. Yet John's approach to the collection seems to

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be one with the presumption that *Dracula's Children* is an adult collection. I have kept the same author's *Tales from a Haunted House* because the stories were so well written. Adults wouldn't find most of those stories frightening, but I'm sure children would. Nor does the fact that they don't frighten adults invalidate them as entertaining stories.

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«As you say, using similar scenarios, plots, even characters, is a common occurrence in SF; the "Golden Age" of the pulps would not have existed otherwise. I'm told that Feist openly acknowledges rôle-playing games as one of the influences on his writing -- but don't forget that the major influence on the settings, plots etc of such games was -- yes, SF and fantasy. I found Feist's Magician *tremendously hackneyed, and I'm not familiar with rôle-playing games; it's just that such fantasy scenarios are a dozen a dime. Rather than be angry at supposed plagiarism (a dangerous charge), I'd say sadly that it's just over-use of common stock that's in the public domain.*

Another letter about the same review:»

BARBARA DAVIES'S REVIEW (*V140*) OF *DAUGHTER OF THE Empire* by Raymond E Feist and Janny Wurts is a model of its kind -- a plot summary, comment on technique and the benefits of two authors, and an intelligent appraisal of the cultural background of an imagined world.

However... A dozen or more years ago the followers of the then new pastime of fantasy rôle-playing were startled by the appearance of a beautifully crafted setting -- Professor MAR Barker's *Empire of the Petal Throne*. Barker's world setting is the Tsolyani empire of the world of Tekumel. Tekumel is the home of several alien species, including the insectoid Pei Choi. The description of the Tsolyani empire seems to owe much to the ancient Aztec, Chinese and Japanese societies of our own world.

So when I read the first of Feist's *Riftwar* books and was struck by these and further parallels -- the Tsolyani and Tsurani are both short of metal and use a "leather" substitute, both empires use blue as their imperial colour, and so on -- I became angry.

Now I'm angry again because the ideas which Barbara Davies has seemingly been particularly taken with are not Feist's own.

I wonder that I'm so cross about what is such a common event in SF (I've read a half dozen thinly disguised copies of *Starship Troopers* with no more than wry amusement). I think it must be because the original vision of Barker is such an extraordinarily striking one. If Barbara Davies, or any other reader, would like to sample this (if they're not afraid of rôle-playing games!), to adventure in the world of Tekumel is a fulfilling experience. For lesser mortals, Barker's novels *The Man of Gold* and *Flame Song* have both appeared as Ace paperbacks. The professor isn't a great writer, and these are his first two books. But his characterisation is much better than Feist's. And his world is a very beautiful and very strange place.

I've just returned from California, where I was fortunate enough to catch the premier of the new *Star Trek*. The two hour introductory episode captured and surpassed the magic of the original -- the impression of a society much evolved in the 78 years that have passed since the days of the first series is most striking. But -- judging from the one "regular" episode I saw -- the plots of the episodes are going to be the same formula as 20 years ago. What was fresh then is now overly familiar; I hope the new magic extends to the plot in future episodes.

ED GRIFFITHS

I SHOULD LIKE TO TAKE ISSUE WITH THE COMMENT IN BARBARA Davies's review of *Daughter of the Empire* that "the two authors have an advantage over other writers in that they can make both the male and the female protagonists more than cyphers". Does she mean to imply by this what I immediately supposed her to mean: that only a person of a particular gender can create convincing characters of that gender? In my experience writers who can create convincing characters, create convincing characters, whether female, male, hermaphrodite, neuter or alien, and writers who can't, create cardboard cutouts with sexual characteristics pasted on.

The paucity of the depictions of females in much traditional "hard" male-orientated SF has been extensively pointed out; but do the male characters in works of this particular sub-genre resonate in the memory as triumphs of three-dimensional characterisation? The conventions militate against such subtleties.

I have not, yet, read *Daughter of the Empire*; I see it on bookshop shelves and dither, since while Wurts is a writer I look out for ever since reading *Sorceror's Legacy*, as for Feist -- I abandoned *Magician* about page 30 in utter uninterest. I am however, in spite of the above quibble, enough intrigued by Barbara Davies's review of it to (perhaps!) stop waiting around for it to come out in a cheaper paperback edition (I deprecate this current trend of "trade" paperbacks, partly on grounds of price and partly because they will not fit in my handbag so I can read them on the Tube).

If I have misinterpreted Barbara's meaning I do apologise; however the issue of the creation of character and whether a member of one sex can convincingly write a member of the other is a subject on which I feel strongly, and on which I should be interested to find out what other people think.

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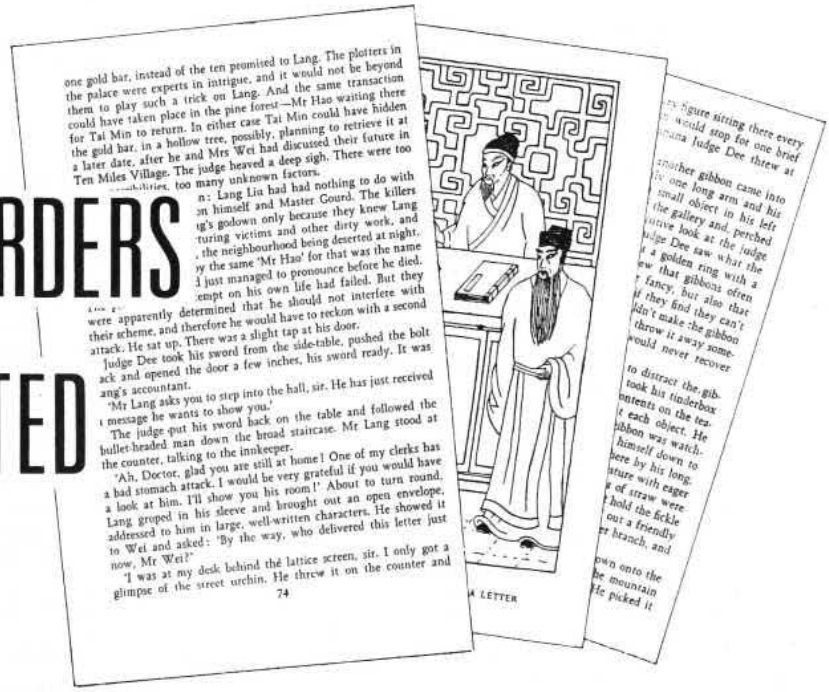
«A mammoth mailbag. Could I make an appeal for shorter letters? -- if it takes three pages to make a point, why not make it an article? But thankyou all, and thanks particularly to John Peters and David A Hicks for sending me copies (one studio, one live) of Harry Chapin's song "Flowers are Red", which I misquoted in my V140 *editorial. I may have got the sex of the child, and other details, wrong; but the message of both the song and the editorial stands: Imagination is precious; cherish it.»*

CHINESE MURDERS INVESTIGATED

by L J HURST


one gold bar, instead of the ten promised to Lang. The plotters in the palace were experts in intrigue, and it would not be beyond them to play such a trick on Lang. And the same transaction could have taken place in the pine forest—Mr Hao waiting there for Tai Min to return. In either case Tai Min could have hidden the gold bar, in a hollow tree, possibly, planning to retrieve it at a later date, after he and Mrs Wei had discussed their future in Ten Miles Village. The judge heaved a deep sigh. There were too many unknown factors.

Lang Liu had had nothing to do with himself and Master Gourd. The killers were apparently determined that he should not interfere with their scheme, and therefore he would have to reckon with a second attack. He sat up. There was a slight tap at his door.

Judge Dee took his sword from the side-table, pushed the bolt back and opened the door a few inches, his sword ready. It was Lang's accountant.

"Mr Lang asks you to step into the hall, sir. He has just received a message he wants to show you."

The judge put his sword back on the table and followed the bullet-headed man down the broad staircase. Mr Lang stood at the counter, talking to the innkeeper.

'Ah, Doctor, glad you are still at home! One of my clerks has a bad stomach attack. I would be very grateful if you would have a look at him. I'll show you his room!' About to turn round, Lang groped in his sleeve and brought out an open envelope, addressed to him in large, well-written characters. He showed it to Wei and asked: 'By the way, who delivered this letter just now, Mr Wei?'

"I was at my desk behind the lattice screen, sir. I only got a glimpse of the street urchin. He threw it on the counter and

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figure sitting there every would stop for one brief Judge Dee threw at

another gibbon came into one long arm and his small object in his left the gallery and, perched look at the judge Dee saw what the a golden ring with a that gibbons often fancy, but also that they find they can't didn't make the gibbon throw it away some- would never recover

to distract the gib- took his tinderbox contents on the ta- each object. He gibbon was watch- himself down to here by his long- ture with eager of straw were hold the fickle out a friendly er branch, and

own onto the e mountain He picked it

11

LJ Hurst applies Professor Darko Suvin's famous definition of SF to Robert van Gulik's *Judge Dee* stories

SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORKS IN A GENRE CHALLENGE the definitions of the genre. For instance, Samuel Delany's Nevèryon tales challenge many of the themes of sword and sorcery. Judith Hanna wrote a very interesting article about these and Delany's writing about them in *Paperback Inferno 47*. However, while Delany knew what he was doing, some works may challenge the bounds of their genre without acknowledging that that is what they are doing. This essay is an attempt to demonstrate how this challenge can be identified, and why it is worth looking for it.

Sometimes critics try to distinguish SF from genres they say are related but distinct, such as satire, utopiae, fantasy etc. Darko Suvin makes this distinction in his essay "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre", and then defines SF as "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.*" However, I now want to use his argument in reverse, because I want to examine Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee detective stories and show that many science fictional features can be found in them, even while the facts that they are set in seventh century China and are detective stories would seem to exclude them. ("Transient estrangement is specific to murder mysteries, not a mature SF," Suvin says.)

By "cognition" Suvin means that stories make the readers think, and by "estrangement" Suvin means both creating worlds different from this one and making this one feel strange when we read about it.

The historical detective stories of Umberto Eco and Ellis Peters have sold well to SF readers, so this argument may be better accepted now than ten years ago. However, van Gulik is a better example to illustrate this argument, and reveals, I think, that what Suvin calls "estrangement and cognition" can be dealt with in different types of literature. In his history of the crime novel, *Bloody Murder*, Julian Symons calls the Dee books "well informed pastiche," while other critics seem to omit van Gulik from their studies. However, Symons's rejection of the series concludes thus: "The best of them are clever, but they proceed from such fantastication of style and motive that they remain simply curiosities," and it is here that our examination can begin.

The stories are not fantastic -- the most common motive for the crimes investigated by Judge Dee is sexual jealousy (sometimes extending to a mania), while economic motives (e.g. theft and tax evasion) are quite common. However, a society in which failure to father sons causes mental derangement, or in which a salt smuggler is a master criminal, is one a long way from ours. We know about secret struggles over gold-bearing lodes or meteorites, but secret visits to groves of mandrake plants? That is a long way from our ken.

The stories can be examined in three lights: that of their estrangement (a different world from ours), their science/technology, and their methodology.

By setting them in a society which had been settled into feudalism for a thousand years, had an established infrastructure and a high degree of civilisation, as well as a long established technology, van Gulik paradoxically was able to create a world very different from our own.

At the same time the level of technology affects the geography and social order in very clear ways. They are obviously part of their time, but we would look at them very oddly today. For instance, people accept that earthquakes occur. In *The Emperor's Pearl* an earthquake years before has left a murder scene a marsh. This is not a development we would expect at all in Britain, nor would we expect the modern Chinese not to drain and reclaim the land, but seventh century society moves more slowly. Similarly, whole areas can be affected, as in *The Chinese Maze Murders*: "Until a few years ago the main route to Khotan and the other tributary kingdoms of the west ran through Lan-fang and this town was quite an important emporium. Then three oases along the desert route dried up and it shifted a hundred miles to the north." The stories are set in a period before technology controls or replaces nature.

We are estranged in these stories because the characters in some ways either seem modern (Judge Dee as the rational detective) or because the stories can be read in modern ways (they could be read as a sort of Sword and Sorcery). Delany said, "Sword-and-sorcery tends to take place in a world that seems to be changing from a barter to a money economy." But Dee's world is a feudal world, in which antique dealers make a good living, poets publish, and specialist tea merchants sell to cogniscenti. Readers are puzzled, but how do the characters of this civilisation react?

JUDGE DEE SAW THAT THE GIBBON WAS WATCHING HIM

Consider what further distinctions have to be made between a magistrate who has just solved three cases and announces his ratification in these words:

> "This is the official verdict on Yoo Kee's treason, the killing of General Ding, and Mrs Lee's murder. It will interest you that the conspiracy of the Uigur tribes has been settled on high government level, in negotiations between our Board for Barbarian Affairs and the khan of the Uigurs." *The Chinese Maze Murders*

with the same man announcing:

> "The criminal Yoo Kee is guilty of high treason. He should properly be submitted to the lingering death, being cut to pieces alive... [but] this sentence is mitigated in so far as that the said criminal shall first be killed and thereafter dismembered."

(one page later). Dee feels that there is no discontinuity between his first and second announcements, but we, his readers, do. The missing words from his statement were:

> "In view of the fact that the criminal's father, His Excellency Yoo Shouchien, has merited greatly of the State and the people, and in view of the fact that he has entered a posthumous plea for mercy for his son..."

and they again suggest a world of other values -- inherited leniency or virtue is something that disappeared long ago.

Other elements all go to present a world different from our own -- we recognise the established Guilds that control the trades (Goldsmiths, Merchants, ironmongers) but did London, Paris or Florence know a Guild of Beggars? It is a stange society that not only has beggary but has so accepted it into its structure of urban organisation. Similarly, the brothels, the selling of daughters to meet the rent, and the hire of courtesans may be familiar as individual ideas but to see the rôle they play in an unchanging society is again to complete the picture of that society and to emphasise its alienness compared to the reader's world.

So this estrangement or distancing is achieved by a number of things: the historical setting, the distant location, the foreign culture and the different social standards. The level of technology and what it can and cannot do also affect the reading of the story.

The science in the books is chiefly forensic: medicine, herbally based, is well advanced both in the knowledge of pharmacy and in pathology. Several of the books include detailed accounts of post-mortems carried out on suspected victims. Admittedly, one coroner misses the signs of imminent leprosy in a man with a severed jugular and another misses the *modus operandi* of an obscure domestic murder but overall the scientists are well equipped with devices and information. Van Gulik reinforces this knowledge by forensic detail of other types (identifying weapons which made blows, identifying the murder scene from the presence of disguised blood stains, etc.).

One effect of this, given other restrictions on technical advance (travel, for instance, is very slow) is to make the Judge something of a superhero. Equally, though, it can be seen as reinforcing the feudal structure since it is only because the Judge represents the central power (the Emperor) that he has access to the technical advisors, and so is perhaps only a superhero in locum.

If there is a distinction between technical and scientific developments, then no new scientific developments are being made. The canal system is being expanded which helps trade but on the edges of the Empire this is still subject to other forces (like oases drying). The only new technical development ever mentioned is the adoption by the army of iron tipped crossbow bolts to replace simple wood.

So what we have instead is a Detective Science (or method). If this existed in ancient China no record of it survives. As Dr van Gulik wrote in his postscript to *The Chinese Nail Murders*, while the forms of the crimes he describes come from ancient sources the method of their solution comes from modern, Western literature. Some of the ancient tales are available in a collection, *The Strange Cases of Magistrate Pao*, and while they are interesting, a comparison of the original tales with van Gulik's use of them shows the difference between the literature of the period and the literature of another, later civilisation -- "The (ancient Chinese) author apparently did not care a fig about probability or credulity in the modern sense. The plots are supported by coincidence and the intervention of supernatural agencies."

CHINESE MURDERS

Dee, on the other hand, is a post-Holmesian detective whose magisterial position allows him to explain his solutions thoroughly. Although supernatural elements sometimes appear (people think they see ghosts, or feel a sense of evil), these ultimately play no part in the solution. This rejection of the spirit world also reinforces the rejection of these books as Sword and Sorcery, for although they contain fighting, armies marching, hidden gold in temples, this is always explained by the exigencies of the situation.

The official religion of the Empire was Confucianism, but many of the people worshipped an animistic pantheon; Taoism was allowed but frowned upon as leading to sexual excess, while Buddhism was spreading. Buddhism is represented as a rapacious cult and not as the force for peace it is now held to be. Suppression of vice leaves Taoist temples empty to be misused by others, political struggles as the Buddhists try to influence the throne lead to corruption and injustice, while all kinds of reprehensible and dubious crooks hide behind the shield of the cloth.

This kind of struggle is clearer than other cultural problems, since schisms in Christianity have led to similar developments in the west. However, religion has not had the same kind of effect on society in the west -- Confucianism with its obligations to preserve the old order inherently stopped social change and improvement. This is so much at odds with western developments that again in presenting something like a modern man in Dee in this environment is to shock readers. Dee, who is a reasoning man, thinks it is reasonable to preserve society on its inequitable basis, though this attitude seems at odds with the progressiveness of the logic he uses in solving cases. Once more the reader is faced with the strange position that Dee finds society tenable when the reader cannot.

Dee's society is one in which women are oppressed -- polygamous wives are kept in seclusion, brothels are normal, the selling of daughters to meet debts is common. On the other hand the Confucian emphasis on family order and continuation provides some reassurance (a mistreated girl may be married posthumously to her fiancé, her soul tablet taking her place at the wedding service) while pressures on men to father sons is cited as the basis of several men's madness. All of this is comprehensible as the basis of society and helps to maintain it, but it gnaws at the reader's certainty that his or her own world is constant and fixed.

In many ways the world of Judge Dee was totalitarian because everything reinforced the social order. There was no escape from it. All who lived within it were free but there was no freedom without it, and again it makes this world strange by showing that it could continue even while forces which have undermined other cultures thrived within it.

This becomes very evident in Dee's attitude to aliens -- both internal and external. Round about China Dee met Koreans (who had been invaded by the Chinese), Uigur tribesmen from the sub-Gobi whose grazing land was being swallowed by Chinese expansionism, and Arab and Persian traders, and his attitude to all was essentially one of nationalist contempt. The Han Chinese, though, had also colonised internally, driving the early aboriginal Tanka peoples into ghettoes of floating villages. Dee's response to Tanka resistance is not to accept that they have cause for complaint and put it right but to increase oppression and vigilance. The solution he offers to the "blackhaired people" (the Han Chinese) he does not make available to other sufferers. They are not of his people and so are outside the pale of society.

This sort of chauvinism apparently still continues (and is still mentioned in the Japanese treatment of Korean guestworkers and the aboriginal Ainu) but its significance is its continuing so long -- we recognise it in the Third Reich but reassure ourselves that the Reich showed it could not be maintained; but Dee's society demonstrates that an unfairness can be maintained for a

INVESTIGATED

chiliad or longer. Certainty in progress, or the rate of progress at any rate, is called into question.

It is in these sort of areas that Suvin's cognition is called for: SF has examples of chauvinism being extended into the future (the further suppression of women, for instance; or the suppression of races), even without considering the suppression of species (aliens by humans, animals by humans, etc.), but generally the impression is of an optimism that implies we can write about this problem because passing time will see it corrected. Van Gulik challenges this gratuitous optimism -- an Empire maintained itself with no internal challenge (Emperors changed and were overthrown but imperial rule continued), accepted by its people and by its administrators and literati.

Van Gulik's historical detective stories show the same sort of challenge that Darko Suvin said were the qualities of generic SF, but show them in ways other than those identified by Suvin. Thus they help to redefine what is SF and also to show the critical uses of the theory of estrangement and cognition -- making what seems obvious, strange, and thus challenging the reader to think about all the implications of that estrangement.

Appendix

Dee was a real person who lived in the seventh century. He served first as a magistrate and then transferred to a political rôle in the Imperial capital. Van Gulik's stories are not biographical, although many of the crimes he describes appeared in various Chinese texts.

Van Gulik was a Dutch diplomat who worked in the Far East. Apparently he wrote his first stories in English (rather than Dutch) only as working texts, intending to translate them into Chinese and Japanese because he did not like the westernised trash that was swamping the orient. However, he was encouraged to publish in English and the success of the five novels he published in the 1950s (one novel for each scene of Dee's magisterial career) encouraged him to write more in the 60s. The novels of the second decade are shorter than those of the earlier. A short-lived television series was made by ATV in the 70s, receiving poor reviews, but a US television film of *The Haunted Monastery* worked well.

The following list gives, I hope, a list of all the Dee novels and two short stories, according to their location and internal chronology.

THE INNKEEPER TELLS MR LANG ABOUT A LETTER

The five towns were all fictional (each one set in a different part of the empire), but their geographical locations were real and were:

Peng-lai	North-east coast of Shantung Province
Han-yuan	sixty miles north-west of the Imperial Capital
Poo-yang	Kiangsu Province on the Grand Canal in central China
Lan-feng	on the western frontier (on the edge of the Gobi desert)
Pei-chow	in the far north of the country

Internal date	Title	Setting	Date	(Sequence)
630 born				
663	*Chinese Gold Murders*	Peng-Lai	1958	(5)
	The Lacquer Screen	Wei-Ping	1964	
	The Haunted Monastery		1963	
666	*Chinese Lake Murders*	Han-Yuan	1952	(3)
	"The Monkey"		1965	
668	*Chinese Bell Murders*	Poo-Yang	1950	(1)
	The Red Pavilion	(Paradise Island)	1964	
	The Emperor's Pearl		1963	
	The Fox-Magic Murders (aka *Poets and Murder*)	Chun-Hwa	1968	
670	*Chinese Maze Murders*	Lan-Fang	1950	(2)
	Phantom of the Temple		1966	
676	*Chinese Nail Murders*	Pei-Chow	1956	(4)
	"The Tiger"		1965	
	The Willow Pattern	(Imperial Capital)	1965	
680	*Murder in Canton*	Canton	1966	
700 died				

VICTIM OF GOR

CECIL NURSE

There has been a tremendous response in the letter column of the last two issues to Mary Gentle's article on John Norman's *Gor* novels in *Vector 139*. In addition, Ellen Pedersen, a Danish writer, has written an article attacking Mary Gentle's article. Before that, we have an piece which Cecil Nurse sent as a letter, but which is such an honest examination of why people read the *Gor* books that I feel it deserves to stand as an article.

I MUST ADMIT TO HAVING READ SOME NINE OF THE *GOR* novels. I read the first, *Tarnsman of Gor*, about ten years ago, when I was 17. It was the first SF book I had read for several years, and I thought it was great (the later books were not so interesting). Adventures, great big birds, a reasonable "identify-with" hero. I thought the relationship between this competent man from Earth and a spoilt Princess was good fun, and it tickled various adolescent nerves in my groin. As I recall, the basis of their relationship was that she was a prisoner, or rescued by him, rather than a slave, and I certainly do not remember that the pattern of the relationship was "meant to be" as opposed to simply fortuitous. It all reminded me of various John Wayne type stories, with a fiery lady being tolerated by a more or less gruff sort until they more or less simultaneously get through to each other and discover that they enjoy each other's company.

I kept reading the series, and slowly the realisation seeped into my mind that nothing much was happening, and I got as far as *The Captive of Gor*, the first of the books written from the perspective of a woman, before I tumbled to the truth of the matter, that that particular pattern of relationship was the consuming interest of the writer, and that I, as a reader, was being asked to agree that it was enjoyable if not inevitable. I think my childish mind twigged a little earlier, when it began disliking the hero for being an active promoter of enslavement rather than a wanderer making do in a barbaric land.

With hindsight, I am forced to question my enjoyment of the first book. It seems to me that the nature of the "romance" in it was not far removed from large numbers of other stories I had seen or read, unlike the more hard-core later works. The "ritual humiliation" of the woman whereby the man forces her to "see" that she has sexual desires herself, is not an unfamiliar story: I'm sure Clark Gable did it all the time. On a more personal note, and what prevents me from claiming the somewhat complacent virtuousness of some *Vector* correspondents, the keynote of my adolescence was an intense sexual frustration and bewilderment. All around me people were "doing it", or so I thought. Partly it was true, partly it was heated fantasy provoked by advertising and "adult fiction". The tenor of my sexual desires exactly matched the Gorean fantasy: a resentment sometimes rising to blinding hatred of the women/girls with whom for one reason or another I could not get together; a feeling that my own desires were unilateral, bestial, in a sense, something to be perpetrated upon a female body; a feeling that if I wasn't so bashful about it, if I were to be more forceful in pursuit, I would not be so frustrated; no real idea of how sex could be integrated into a real relationship.

I suspect that what lost me to the series was that the women had no existence beyond being sexual ciphers, and that their characters (if I can speak of such a thing) were of the "fallen adult" rather than the "precocious child" (and therefore did not appeal to the adolescent in me). If this had not been true, and if the plots had had some substence, I fear that the series would not have appeared to be so obviously obsessive, would not have stood out as being very much different from other fantasies, and I might still have been reading them. I say this as a condemnation of what some section of my emotional being has been led to expect of such things, not as a pseudo-enlightenened *mea culpa*.

The thought of female *Gor* fans disturbs me, not the least because it tweaks a happily-buried suspicion that maybe there is some truth to John Norman's assertions. I would rather think that I could never meet a woman who would beg me to bring her to slave-orgasm, that it is an entirely adolescent male fantasy, and something that I and everyone else eventually grows out of. There does seem to be a substantial "slavery and bondage" section among historical pot-boilers, which is on the "hard" end of the racy romance/sex-and-intrigue genre, and as such seem to be marketed especially for women. What is it about? Who reads them? And what do these women expect of the men in their lives? Sometimes I wonder whether John Norman, after happily writing a few *Gor* novels in an adolescent sweat, suddenly ran into a woman who fulfilled his fantasy (for whatever reasons of her own), and he has yet to get over it. I don't mean that as a macho joke; I mean sex can "do your head" whether you are a man or a woman, and maybe it does everyone's head in one way or another.

I hope it is clear that I agree with Mary Gentle's analysis of the *Gor* books. Nevertheless, I did read a fair number of the books before baulking, and I can understand the appeal of "rape and revenge" fantasy, much as I hate to say it. I see it as a pathological symptom of our society, one that I deplore whole-heartedly if ever put as a "rightness", and yet the seeds of it are in myself. Matching Ms Gentle's anger and protest, I discover a half-articulated (male) rage that I wish was just my problem but seems to extend to John Norman and *Gor* readers, at least. What is not clear to me is whether I am a fellow victim, as it were, or whether I'm one of the enemy, despite my protestations.

JOHN NORMAN'S SEVEN SINS

ELLEN M. PEDERSEN

-1-

HE PROVOKES PEOPLE INTO EMPLOYING ARGUMENTS BEGINning with "As a woman I..." Statements beginning like that contained some truth when used by Greer and Millett back in 1969 and 1970 because their approach was original. Even earlier, back in the days when there were real feminists rather than producers of synthetic fears, *chic* simplifications, and plain predictability, people spoke from different historical positions in authentic voices, on genuine issues. Mary Wollstonecraft, who first suggested a connection between intellect and physical activity, would be ashamed of what has made itself the main trend in this generation. Sojourner Truth, who bore thirteen children and saw most of them sold off into real slavery, would have wondered what we've been doing these past 130 years. When Mary Gentle, in *Vector 139*, pp 9-11, feels attacked "as a woman", there is no argument, except to those of our brothers who for some reason have to think of a way to please.

Any linguist with a little muscle might easily tear the rest of Gentle's article "Heads I Win, Tails You Lose: The Science Fantasy Novels Of John Norman" to pieces, but having declared Ms Gentle's central statements invalid I see no reason to do so. And since she has emphatically, "as a woman" made herself a plurality I am sure she will forgive me for not addressing her directly. I shall treat her article as part of an ideological trend, and am not going to further nourish the narcissism involved, except as far as it impinges on John Norman's "sins". A warning: what I am saying here is based upon a reading of *one* Gor book, *Beast of Gor* (1978). If more were included, I would evoke Ms Gentle's ungentle wrath making myself one of the "bastards out there" who are "keeping John Norman in business", actually having to buy one.

-2-

No. 2 is a sin that he shares with his feminist attackers regardless of whether they "have done a valid bit of reading" (Don Wollheim on Gentle's article in a recent letter to me) or produce "simply bits of personalised venom" (from the same letter), namely **basing cultural arguments on biology**. This is not directly inferable from the Gor books, which are fiction, but from his non-fictional *Imaginary Sex: An Explanation, Defense and Manual, Complete with Fifty-three Scenarios for Sexual Fantasy, with Discussions of Several Thereof* (1974).

On the shaping of specific cultures, literary or otherwise, there are few valid arguments from biology. Take the Gor universe, evolving around only the twin concepts of physical survival and apparently one-sided sexual domination; and England, where maleness seems to be defined as good manners and femaleness as judgement. Would both be determined by the same biological factors? Hardly bloody likely. I am not being metaphorical, honest. Most human activity, certainly most shared activity, is a function of what comes *with* human biology, rather than of the biology itself.

One of the oddities of this generation's feminists is how they try to get rid of cultural diversity. One should not exaggerate the causative influence of biological factors at the expense of more or less organised choice. It is more generally true that the cultural organisation of sexuality is a response to the absence of sexual periodicity that we all share.[1]

Of course, the Gor universe is unfit for permanent human habitation. That is one of the reasons it is a Counter-Earth rather than an imagined holiday spot near Betelgeuse. If the hunting society of Gor were to be real, they would be in more need of improved conditions for reproduction than of imaginative sex. Under known, Terran conditions, not even the most geographically marginal ones make do with survival and domination. Culture *means* more, in England as well. But of course any writer has the right to create a minimal fictional universe.

-3-

Triggering unsound attempts to police people's minds. Mary Gentle, for example, lashes out at readers who may have what she calls rape fantasies as opposed to other types of sexual fantasies (I won't repeat the argument; it is predictable, as I implied above). Aside from the question of whether there isn't an element of intrusion in all fantasising, no valid reason has yet been given why no man should have and read, or read and have, "rape fantasies". Do the feminist attackers of aggressive male sexuality do all they are capable of imagining? Like stealing? Propositioning every male or female they fantasise about? Provoking scenes that match their imaginary hero play? Killing guys who take their jobs? Maiming the children of unfair critics? I think we would know if they did.

The unsoundness of the attempts comes with an almost unbelievable naiveté. One little secret that can perhaps now be revealed: there is no way to keep oneself out of the minds of others, be it their memory or their imagination. It is simply not possible to prevent someone else from fantasising, whether rape-wise or not, about you. It is similarly impossible to infer what manner of fantasies people have. Some people's minds are schematised in such a way that imagination does not happen, or happens only as a sort of revenge. If anyone tries to impose such schematisation on others, their children for example, then they are likely to get a number of surprises.

If you study, or at least take an interest in, the minds of people, then you realise it is possible for some to imagine themselves being someone else. Even someone else being in the same room taking part in the same action. What surprises me is that practitioners of the verbal arts, who presumably are in possession of this faculty, seem unaware of its sexual implications. My heart sank when I heard Chelsea Quinn Yarbro defend having written a rape scene earlier this year. Why does she think she has to?

-4-

Being almost alone in his universe, which is not really his fault. Rather than arguing with one head as John Frederick Lange, and with another as John Norman he might, even in a science fiction and fantasy context, have argued against the shameful indifference of other 20th century philosophers towards sexuality and aggression. Aggression seems to have been not nice since Nietzsche, and sexuality a non-subject since Freud colonised it.[2] Only a handful of philosphers seem to have bothered with sexuality in our time, several of them of the existential-

ist school,[3] and the most consistent reasoning, significantly perhaps, being on gay grounds.[4] These having such an inadequate press makes them an insufficient antidote to the provincialism of the lesbian/feminist writings on sex and eroticism.

John Norman, in a science fantasy context the master of John Lange, too infrequently allows Lange to appear through his own fabric, and so is not much help either. Norman's books might benefit from the inclusion of Langean warnings that he is not addressing people with a slow metabolism (one of the infrequent touches of humour in *Imaginary Sex: An Explanation, Defense etc.* It is also, naturally, somewhat arrogant, like the remark early in the book that if you don't understand an argument it probably doesn't apply to you).

Lange-as-Norman might make it more clear that his concern is with those aspects of aggression that "may at one time have had survival value". The caution here is his, not mine. Aggression does have survival value for each individual. The trick of co-existing with it and with one another is not having it washed over by the "tragedy of lost pleasure" that Norman says is characteristic of the type of marriage that is statistically most frequent. Thus Norman bears some affinity, much as his detractors may hate the thought, to the Lange who, although perhaps not America's most original thinker, has written about colleagues who titles typically read, *Values and Imperatives, Freedom and Reason,* or *The Language of Morals.*

A more prominent Langean profile might make more people notice that in discussing sado-masochistic games in marriage he speaks of "morally acceptable, gratifying, honest concessions to elements that are as much part of us as our rationalities and our loves", "expressing them in modalities that would [not] increase the misery of the world" (p 24). It is doubtful, unfortunately, whether rationality and love are a very stable part of people who judge books without developing the concepts wherewith to do this fairly. There *is* an argument from silence (echoing the title of John Lange's first published article) but one obviously cannot count on it to be working in one's favour.

-5-

He preaches. He prescribes, thereby establishing a fairly prominent law within his tale. Not a law in the sense of "supposedly-justifiable-rape fantasies" but one which upholds his fictional universe. There is tale in the sense of "His name was Gaal Dornick and he was just a country boy who had never seen Trantor before", although one consisting of largely forgettable plots and interchangeable characters. Too much tale, in fact, if one opens a Gor book at random looking for scenes fitted with pornographic value ("the *p* test" in Danish idiom). A well-known example of law is that favoured formula of English mothers, "Do as you're told!" As two textual registers law and tale are interrelated in Gully Foyle's presentation in which he tells us who he is in four lines ending with "The stars my destination!", a mighty law within a very short tale. In Asimov's robot stories the relation between law and tale is made implicit in a unique way in fiction. In Norman's Gor universe the relation is put forward in such a way as to produce irritation in some people, confusion or anger in others. Even people who respond to the *p*-value do not avoid boredom reading through the rest of the text -- unless there exists a type of reader with an extra high tolerance of boredom (?!). Perhaps the pornographic parts are intended as a reward for having yawned through several pages of undistinctive science fantasy. Then the poor reader, on top of the *p*-value, gets a load of the law of sexual dominance on which the universe is built. We do see this elsewhere in the genre -- one stream of its history is didactic, remember? -- but we don't, admittedly, often see it combined with chunks of text intended to arouse.

Whereas regular pornography provides a relief, in the form of exemplary or even nonverbal thinking, from the explanatory or theoretical types[5], Norman is obviously reluctant to leave his pornography as pure as he does here and there in *Imaginative Sex.* As a result, readers are hardly able to name their own response, and the books have been described as "vile" by friends of mine who have varieties of what Mary Gentle would call rape fantasies. Why it is that pornography does not work for some people at all is a different question.

-6-

Knowing little about male psychology, and about human psychology only enough to project a number of general emotional traits into women. Verbal inventiveness and moral independence seem, in Western culture, often to be balanced with a certain masochism, with more or less sadism attached. If the argument begins where I let it, gender becomes a side effect. Remembering this at the same time as reading sermons about "learning one's womanhood" by being stripped and branded, etc., is obviously a too complex process for many people. Perhaps if he could keep his hands off his somewhat insufficient notion of evolution (which I suspect is just another version of the American unilinear concept of history) and stick to sex then more people would be able to realise the truth of one aspect of that "learning" business, the give-and-take that is necessary if a woman's sexuality is not individualised because her orientation is essentially towards reproduction rather than towards the communicative side of sex. To this type of woman a major source of pleasure is easily lost if she is not "trained" into it. In one sense, sex always loses in any culture. (Which is also what Freud said, whereupon he bravely set off producing a method and a theory of repair.) Keeping sex in a position of gain is mostly a male job, I am afraid.

Norman knows this too but puts it in an awkward way, leaving the argument inside women rather than inside men. Perhaps Lange knows one or two reasons why Norman doesn't put stuff inside men. The compulsive triangle of aliens-men-women has a truth in it by Terran, heterosexual definitions, although not on the level envisaged by Ms Gentle.

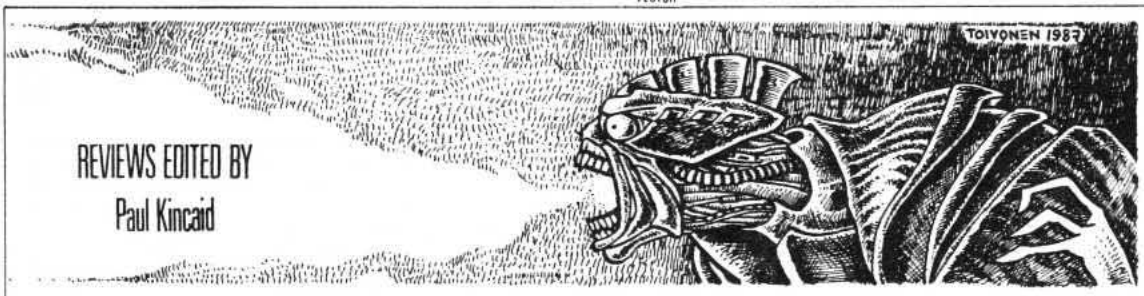
The rest of the "truth" can be easily dismissed. How many 20th century, urban males would survive even for a couple of weeks under Gorean conditions? Whatever else the books are, they seem to be lamentations of the futility of physical definitions of maleness in Western culture. On the other side of the gender line where maleness for some time has been safely defined as more machine than human, Norman's warriors come to represent a disturbing regression towards the older model, that of male-as-animal. Yes, yes, I know women traditionally don't make such models explicit, but they do exist. And occasionally appear as concepts in science fiction and fantasy.

-7-

He is relying, in vain, on the silence between Mr Norman and Dr Lange reminding people that Gor is a Counter-Earth, thereby exposing himself to the assumption that he is a rapist. Some people have the ability to transfer material generated in one realm of conciousness into another. Some would say this is endemic to the fantastic genres. John Norman does not seem overly endowed with this gift. But he has the compensatory merit of being easy to read, and therefore sellable on a mass market where at least a number of people are at least as literal minded as his Goreans. So he becomes The Enemy to people who fail to realise that the real enemy doesn't often write, and usually doesn't read too well, either.

Footnotes

1. Christopher Lasch makes a similar point in a recent, somewhat muddled, reappraisal of heterosexual family bonding, *Tikkun* vol 1 no 2.
2. Morse Peckham in *Art and Pornography: An Experiment in Explanation*, New York (1969), discusses the combination, pp 216-222.
3. Which is clear from Mike Brake, ed, *Human Sexual Relations: A Reader: Towards a Redefinition of Sexual Politics*, Penguin (1982).
4. Foucault. (See, though, Alan Soble's *Pornography: Marxism, Feminism, and the Future of Sexuality*, Yale UP (1986), especially the bibliography, for several contemporary readings on the philosophy of sex, particularly Soble's own anthology of 1980).
5. Terms borrowed from Morse Peckham's *Art and Pornography*).



BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

REVIEWS

GOLLANCZ/SUNDAY TIMES SF COMPETITION STORIES
[Gollancz, 1987, 200pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley

THIS ANTHOLOGY CONTAINS 25 STORIES, including the two winners, from over 1000 entries in the 1986 Gollancz/Sunday Times SF story competition. Overall winner was Paul Heapy's 'Moral Technology', which frames extracts from a report on doctrinal problems posed by technological advance with conversations between two priests whose antics show how much society has really changed. An elegantly concise tale. Paul Gooding's 'The Machine Age', about the consequences of being able to 'phone people from the past, a clever twist on the time travel theme, was the best entry by an author under twenty-one. Both deserving winners. I also enjoyed Simon Ounsley's 'Adam Found', in which perceptions warped by radical brain surgery are seen from the *inside*; 'Prisoners' by Anna Lieff Saxby and 'Wartours' by Mark Wilkins, two stories about wars in the third world as entertainment; 'The African Quota' by Elizabeth Sourbut, which quietly and economically tells of the effects of mass emigration to L5 colonies; and Mark Gorton's 'The Fall', a witty tale about the Marxist awakening of animated advertisements.

Most of the other stories failed to engage my interest. Either they failed to get off the ground within the length; or they were not genuine extrapolations but simply a selection of today's headlines pasted together; or they used themes which were hoary in the Golden Age of *Astounding*. In fact I was surprised at the old-fashioned feel of many of the stories. Cyberpunk, it seems, has yet to make much of an impact here.

It's tempting but difficult to draw any sensible conclusions about the next generation of British SF writers from this book - for one thing, no biographical details are included. Certainly, that 1000+ people entered shows that there are a lot of people out there writing, and writing for publication. That more than half of the stories are set in the near future, most of them dystopias, may mean something too; though we've always been more suspicious of the future on this side of the Atlantic. Was this a worthwhile exercise? Well, anything that provides another forum for relatively unknown SF writers is welcome; *Interzone* performs a necessary miracle each issue, but space is limited. Perhaps it is too early to draw conclusions. A competition set up to attract those with little or no previous publication is a little like a hothouse; a warm shelter in a cold climate. Writers must prove their worth by surviving in the real world. That test takes time. But if this anthology turns out to be the forcing ground for just one new writer, then surely that is no bad thing.

DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY - Douglas Adams
[Heinemann, 1987, 247pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

TWO THINGS IRRITATE ME ABOUT DOUGLAS Adams' latest book. First: all the superstar hype, mega-publicity and rumoured six-figure advances that accompanied its launch. It couldn't possibly be any good. Second: it is.

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency is a genuinely funny SF detective story. Adams (or Heinemann) calls it "the first ever fully realised Ghost-Horror-Detective-Whodunnit-Time-Travel-Romantic-Musical-Comedy Epic". Now we know what it is, what's in it?

There's the confused ghost of Gordon Way, MD of WayForward Technologies, who get's shot because the Electric Monk - designed elsewhere in the universe to believe things for people - takes things too literally; the Monk is on Earth because the Regius Professor of Chronology at St Cedd's, Cambridge, has been messing around with time again; and now a former student, Richard MacDuff - who has had a sofa stuck on his stairs for the last three weeks - is suspected of the murder of his employer, Way, whose sister Susan he's failing to have a meaningful relationship with.

(Who said the plot couldn't be summarised in a sentence?!)

Dirk Gently? He's an old undergrad friend of Richard's, now running a seedy and unsuccessful detective agency. Holistic? "We solve the *whole* crime. We find the *whole* person."

There's time travel, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (of course; it now seems obligatory in time travel novels, especially if there's a nutty professor *who is not all he seems*), and a horse in the bathroom. And a frustrated ghost who wants to make a phone call but finds incorporeality has its disadvantages.

It's funny, it's good, and there's a sequel on the way; I just hope there's less hype next time around. I'm also more than a little troubled about the commercial sponsorship. At the launch party there were more Apple Macintoshes on display than authors. Adams wrote the book on a Mac and says so in his Author's Note; but he also gives a nice plug to the Mac in the novel. One worries about auctorial integrity.

CRACKEN AT CRITICAL - Brian W. Aldiss
[Kerosina, 1987, 192pp, £12.50 (Collectors edition £35)]
THE MAGIC OF THE PAST - Brian W. Aldiss
[Kerosina, 1987, 48pp]
RUINS - Brian W. Aldiss
[Hutchinson, 1987, 85pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

RUINS IS A NOVELLA, THE STORY OF A musician who had one big hit in the Sixties and has been living off the proceeds ever since. A return to London to his mother's funeral marks the end of his latest relationship, finished in the casual, almost accidental manner that characterises his life. The story, though short, spans the early 60s to the mid-80s, charting Billings' journey from drifter to settled member of a community. Aldiss handles his theme well, giving us an insight into the character of Billings which, in turn, gives us an insight into the times in which he lives.

The Magic of the Past is also short, a nicely produced 48 page booklet which contains two stories, 'North Scarning' and 'The Magic of the Past'. 'North Scarning' is close in theme to *Ruins*, a man forced by the funeral of his father to face up to, and come to terms with, his past. But the setting is the Norfolk Broads, and the piece has the framework of a ghost story. 'The Magic of the Past' is longer. Professor Edward Robinson tells of his search, as a young man, for the truth behind obscure 19th century author Jean-Loup St. Sous-Sol's sojourn in G, that "great glamorous southern city". It soon becomes obvious that the story is as much about young Robinson as St. Sous-Sol.

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Cracken at Critical, subtitled "a novel in three acts", is the only one of the three which could be called SF. It is set in an alternative world where Churchill was assassinated before the Second World War, leaving Britain vulnerable to the Nazi menace. On the surface it is the story of a composer who finds a murdered girl lying in a ditch. In her possession are two books, *maybe-myths*, this world's equivalent of SF. The *maybe-myths*, 'The Impossible Smile' and 'Equator', are embedded in the book as the composer reads them. (The copyright page states that the two stories had been previously published by Aldiss, one as by Jael Cracken, the fictional author in the book.) The narrator is ashamed to be found with this escapism, but reads them anyway in the hope that they will give some clue as to who the girl was and why she was murdered. Aldiss, through the narrator, gets in some digs at his earlier self:

> By now I was certain that this adventure was yet another potboiler from the hand of Jael Cracken. The vein of sadism gave the game away ... Should I go on with it? Would Sinnikka hate me if she knew I was reading something so far below her ideals? Would she not rather that I was undergoing torture?

But the plot and the stories are the surface. Below are two levels. First is the obvious homage to the sort of Golden Age SF exemplified by the two stories - 'Equator' (and indeed *Cracken at Critical*) is dedicated to the spirit of Hugo Gernsback:

> Perhaps that provided a clue, if only I knew who Hugo Gernsback was.

The second level is more subtle, more like the Aldiss of today than the Aldiss who was Jael Cracken. It is, like the other two books, the examination of human motivations, and their complex natures. And like their subject, all three books seem unsure just what these motivations are.

For SF fans, though, *Cracken at Critical* is the most important book of the three, containing the space-opera roots of the genre, in a more complex framework, and examining them with a modern, more critical eye.

THE DAY OF CREATION - J.G.Ballard
[Gollancz, 1987, 254pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by K.V.Bailey

DR MALLORY (N'DOC MAL TO THE AFRICans) upturns the roots of a dead forest tree: tectonically (but incredibly) a vast river is formed. Identifying himself with it, he paradoxically wants to destroy an entity that makes his sub-Saharan well-drilling project redundant. Having escaped from guerillas, he sets out in a hijacked car-ferry for the source of the river, a war-harassed journey, at first embanked by seemingly instantaneously grown jungles, later by progressively more primitively evolved flora and its inhabiting fauna. It takes us not only through the dark valleys and battle-stained swamps of the savannah but through even darker convoluted passages, dammed-up lagoons and sudden torrents of the mind; for the half-mad Mallory not only travels the river but *is* the river - the River Mallory - and his "ark" is the ferry-boat 'Salammbo'.

Why 'Salammbo'? Sainte-Beuve, in his critique of Flaubert's *Salammbô*, was dismayed by "this lost war, buried away in the gorges and sands of Africa ... these wicked little local hatreds between one barbarian and another." That could also be a perfect description of the landscapes and events through which Ballard's 'Salammbo' sails. Additionally, in Flaubert's masterpiece the aqueduct (a river surrogate) bringing water to the desert city is of prime significance. It is the physical route to attaining the virgin, Salammbô; and later, when "a cataract, an entire river, fell from the skies into the plain", it is the instrument of both "victory" and "death".

Flaubert is joined by T.S.Eliot in contributing to such water and wilderness symbolic imagery. Ballard's opening sentence is: "Dreams of rivers, like scenes from a forgotten film, drift through the night between memory and desire." That phrase, "memory and desire" is constantly repeated, and it is the actual title of the concluding chapter. Allusively it interweaves *The Waste Land*, a poem which opens with spring rains falling on the dead land "... mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots ..." I can only briefly indicate the extent of matching imagery: the "dead roots"; the "arid plain"; the creating but also fouled and drowning waters; the patient fishing (by a girl with a wounded foot!); the signs of renewal in desert and mountain springs; the impress of an uncertain but potentially creative eroticism, centred in the novel upon the fishing girl, Noon, Mallory's black guerilla nymphet. In psychic landscape and 'action' poem and novel converge, the keying-in refrain being "memory and desire".

Twelve-year-old Noon, a hill-tribe girl, in the course of months maturing and transforming for Mallory into a water-borne "princess", a "high-temperature Venus", is his longed-for virgin, his Salammbô and his Lolita. She moves between the 'Salammbo', which she pilots intuitively, and the 'Diana', Mrs Warrender's brothel ship. In her skiff she eventually leads Mallory to the River Mallory's source (and grave), but then, though he continually seeks their traces, she and the river are lost to him. The narrative's last sentence is:

> Sooner or later she will reappear, and I am certain that when she comes the Mallory will also return, and once again run the waters of its dream across the dust of a waiting heart.

While these various allusive strands work into the narrative, like eddying currents within a stream, the dominant theme remains the river itself, carrying the jungle into the desert, drowning the ex-colonial structures and artefacts, finding its origin and end among plutonic rocks beyond a sulphurous and primal lake. Here Mallory's wading foot, breaching a mud-bank, creates a counter-flow, and the river returns to lose itself in sand and dust,

> the whole process of creation winding down to its starting point like a reversed playback of ... my quest for the Mallory's source.

All this, one might say, stems from familiar Ballardian archetypes: true, but in its extraordinary psychophysical symbolism, and in its subtle allusiveness, *The Day of Creation* breaks new and original ground, as indeed successive works of Ballard have always done; and it is as strangely compelling as any of them.

THE FOLK OF THE AIR - Peter S. Beagle
[Headline, 1987, 330pp, £4.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

SOME 20 YEARS AGO PETER BEAGLE PRODuced a series of elegant, witty fantasies, imbued with a delicate humour and irony, touching on such unlikely subjects as a love affair between cemetery ghosts, and the consequence of inviting Death to a ball. The stories have been much admired over the years, and his fans looked forward eagerly to the next novel, promised as long ago as 1978, when it was mentioned in the introduction to *The Fantasy Worlds of Peter Beagle*. But now it's published, well I for one confess intense disappointment.

Farrell is visiting Ben - both characters already familiar from 'Lila the Werewolf' - and Ben's lover, the strange and secretive older woman, Sia. He is gradually drawn into the activities of a local medieval recreation society which has virtually the entire town in its membership, and is particularly intrigued by Aiffe, self styled witch and spoilt darling of the society, having inadvertently witnessed her summoning a spirit.

And it's here that I find I can no longer willingly suspend my disbelief and accept this scenario. There is something so ineffably ridiculous and improbable about an entire town absorbed in medieval recreation, and it totally obscures the much more interesting confrontation between Sia, old as time, and Aiffe, a magically naive upstart. And as if he wasn't content with this farrago, Beagle carelessly throws in the fact of Ben being intermittently possessed by the spirit of a ninth century Viking.

And yet, there are moments when it is clear that Beagle still has the power to create a masterpiece, and that his touch is still sure, if wildly erratic. At times I can recognise the freshness and clarity of his earlier work, but now they are in danger of being swept away in a welter of characters and unnecessary action, as a result, I suspect, of too much rewriting as he works ever harder to recapture that lost simplicity and richness. And it is because of those fleeting moments of satisfact-

ion that I cannot dismiss the novel entirely. The quintessential Beagle lurks within, but the process of sifting it out is sometimes a pain.

THE ENCHANTMENTS OF FLESH AND SPIRIT - Storm Constantine
[Macdonald, 1987, 318pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

BEFORE YOU GROAN WHEN HEARING THIS is another first book of a trilogy, let me state that this *is* different: it doesn't really contain a quest, as yet, and there are no magical swords, jewels or other arcane paraphenalia usually associated with them.

We've had cyberpunk, now this is "punk" fantasy. This is a first novel, and the first person narrator, Pellaz, manages to bring alive the strange futuristic landscape he has inherited, where walk humankind on the decline and a sport species, the Wraeththu, hermaphroditic "beautiful people" who resemble punk in some of their dress styles. The first paragraph is faintly reminiscent of John Carter's prologue: "My name is Pellaz. I have no age. I have died and lived again. This is my testament." A good hook.

Ms Constantine's language is descriptive, emotional and worth reading:

> His face was lean and very mobile, emotions flowing across his features like the movement of moths.

Young Pellaz has heard of the Wraeththu, but until one of them turns up at his farm doesn't give the stories much credence. But Cal is beautiful, bewitching:

> his wistful and haunting beauty, his mysterious and perhaps violent past appealed to me ... as make-believe super-heroes had appealed to young boys throughout the ages.

Pellaz runs off with Cal and begins his historic transformation, both in body and mind, becoming true Wraeththu. The mystical origin of the first mutant Wraeththu takes about two pages, but is convincing; the children mature very quickly, the mutant possesses superhuman abilities - including a form of telepathy and mystical travelling over great distances via *other realms* - and whilst the combined feminine and masculine constituents are present in Wraeththu, so they can give birth, and the ugliness and deceipt inherent in mankind is absent. The first law of Wraeththu is selflessness; the second, physical perfection.

So this is not a story of a young boy's emergence into manhood, but of his transformation into a hermaphrodite with super-human powers, and of his love for his first Wraeththu friend, Cal, and of his baptism. It has something to say about the sexuality within us all, bits of female and male in each, and possesses humour and enough contrasts to satisfy most readers. It is about the emergence of a new species, beyond tired old mankind: "Men, horrible things, seemed to have got away with lifetimes of mistreating women only to

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cheerfully phase us out with a timely mutation!" one woman says, but she is wrong for the Wraeththu are a melding of all that is good in both sexes. Well, that is the idealised view - events and the next two books may revise that view considerably. I for one will be very interested to see where the future lies for young Pellaz as he and his new race mature.

GHOSTS AND SCHOLARS - Selected and Introduced by Richard Dalby & Rosemary Pardoe
[Crucible, 1987, 270pp, £12.95]
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

THE "ETON AND KING'S" TRADITION OF the Jamesian ghost story can lead to whimsey or sterility as we turn to yet another tale of a clergyman with antiquarian interests. It is a tribute to the quality of these stories, and the taste of the editors in providing a varied selection, that this is not the case here.

Richard Dalby and Rosemary Pardoe have selected 25 stories "in the tradition of M.R.James", and two pieces by James himself, much of the material little known and hard to come by. Some, such as Baring-Gould's 'On The Leads' pre-date James' work; others were almost certainly written under his personal influence (R.H. Malden was a friend for over 30 years). Yet others were probably written under a more conscious sense of tradition: Ramsey Campbell's 'This Time' adapts the Jamesian ambiance to corners far removed from Cloistered Academe. The "malign intrusion" is subtly handled with a growing sense of displacement and a final revelation of more disturbing vistas beyond what we're given in the story. Just, in fact, what the editors suggest such a story *should* be.

At its most characteristic, the Jamesian ghost story is a tightly controlled form, but it's capable of more varied effects than other such forms (Lovecraftian horror? Sword-and-Sorcery?) because it is based upon simple good writing: the subtle, almost musical understatements of classical English prose. These are for the most part stories of the Ivory Tower, of cultured sensitivity and neuroses and terrors beneath the genteel veneer: most obvious in the suggestion of homosexual rape in Patrick Carleton's 'Dr Horder's Room'. But the predominant tone is that of skillful narrators using a variety of stances to tell their tales. The supernatural elements are dealt with in a mixture of tones, from the almost pefunctory (Arthur Gray's amusing 'Brother John's Bequest' scarcely needs the ghost) to the virtually Lovecraftian in Eleanor Scott's 'Celui-La'.

As befits a book in which the characters are so often bibliophiles, *Ghosts and Scholars* is most attractively presented, with a mixture of photographs and atmospheric artwork and a select bibliography to guide readers to the wealth of classic ghost story material. The notes and editorial matter are informative but never intrusive. Lovers of the English ghost story will find this a fascinating and rewarding book.

WOLF IN SHADOW - David Gemmell
[Century, 1987, 326pp, £10.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

WOLF IN SHADOW IS ANOTHER IDENTI-KIT fantasy, delightfully not part of a series. A Clint Eastwood type, Jon Shannow, seeks the legendary Jerusalem in a post-Apocalypse world. Along the way he meets your common-or-garden figure of evil who desires to rule the universe by using the powers of a magic meteor. Add lots of quotes from the Bible, throw in Atlantis and the Titanic, pepper it with coincidence, and this is what you've got.

It's a typical juvenile fantasy, not very well written, heavily into blood blossoming from the back of exploding heads, salutes to psychosis (Shannow is a mad killer, but we are supposed to think these "qualities" becoming), the glory of murder and war, and cheap philosophy. The kids will love it, and judging from the literacy level of this country many adults will too. I dread to think of all those people who look up to heroes like Shannow, wishing they could go and do to others as he does.

The book starts as a spaghetti western, becomes the great waggon trail and the cannibal story, and finally settles on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (this is where the Titanic, the post-Apocalypse Ark comes into it, and I pun the word deliberately). The style feels very cinematographic. The special effects - people aging in seconds and turning to dust, appearance of a Devil and the final Ark scenes - are cleverly reminiscent of

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sequences from a dozen or so fantasy films, from Hammer onwards.

One of the characters is a certain Jubal Cade, a name which strongly reminds me of J.T.Edson's horse-opera novels. There is a hint of sex, too, but only a hint - as befits adolescent fantasies. Shame it's marketted as a book for adults.

TOOL OF THE TRADE - Joe Haldeman
[Gollancz, 1987, 261pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

ALTHOUGH APPEARING IN THE PRESTIGIous Gollancz SF series of hardcovers, this is by no means what most readers would regard as SF. And since Joe Haldeman's first books were concerned with warfare and spying - *War Year* (1972), *Attar's Revenge* and *War of Nerves* (both 1975) - this is not surprising.

Known best for *The Forever War* (fix-up 1974), Haldeman is the precise opposite of the Jerry Pournelle "survivalist" war writer; his experiences in Vietnam, his wide experience of life in both east and west, and his academic background all contributed to create the most enthusiastic but open-eyed anti-war author in SF.

Tool of the Trade might be set in today's world; it takes us behind the scenes in both the KGB and CIA, and with only one small SF-oriented plot gimmick it tells a tale of spying - aimed at the introduction of world peace - that kept me up till 2am to finish it. The gimmick is that our hero, a Russian "sleeper" in US academe, invents a miniaturised gadget that ensures virtually everyone (except those with hearing problems) does precisely as he instructs them.

But it's no walkover: characterisation is good, plotting is strong, suspense is gripping yet there is a feeling of inevitability as the story unfolds; we get Kant's Categorical Imperative thrown at us as the protagonist tries to rationalise his stance and his murdering activities, and there are even three separate cliffhangers at the climax.

I found some trouble with Americanisms at times but was pleased to work out that a burger "excreted through the Golden Arches" was a Macdonald's. There are a few strange Russian transliterations, one or two obvious boobs like *Pravada*, and a fair amount of sheer joyous wordplay like the invented word "claustrated", but Haldeman's sheer writing skill avoids overwriting, and the only real tinge of infinitely improbable detail comes with his choice of names: I found myself quite unable to believe in a US President Gideon Fitzgerald, or indeed in the protagonist's final *nom de guerre* "Anson Rafferty" - that would surely scream "fake!" to any CIA or KGB man with any taste for real-world nomenclature, not to mention its SF overtones.

You want world peace? You want a sensible plan to end the nuclear race? Haldeman has it - get it, read it and figure out how to make it happen!

EXPECTING SOMEONE TALLER - Tom Holt
[Macmillan, 1987, 218pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Judith Hanna

I DOUBT THIS IS QUITE WHAT JESUS HAD in mind when He said: "The meek shall inherit the earth". For one thing, there is little evidence of humour in surviving accounts of His teachings. For another, it is one-eyed, black-bearded Wotan who plays the part of God almighty.

It all begins when Malcolm Fisher, archetypal wimpish wally, runs over a badger. "'Damn,' he said aloud. 'So how do you think I feel?' said the badger". Turns out he's Ingolf, last of

the Frost Giants of the Elder Age, who (see Wagner, Götterdammerung, last act) got away with the Tarnhelm (owner can take whatever shape s/he fancies, wherefore Ingolf's badger shape, plus instantaneous travel feature) and with the Ring of the Nibelungen, whose owner is master of the world and inexhaustible wealth. (Yep, this is where Tolkien picked up the idea.) Ingolf has been in hiding ever since, because various others would rather like the Ring for themselves.

"'Finally,' said Ingolf, 'cut my arm and lick some of the blood.' 'I'd rather not,' said Malcolm, firmly ... 'You'll understand the language of the birds and like it, my lad.'" From time to time the birds even say something worth hearing. Meanwhile Ingolf's body has turned to stone, in the middle of the Taunton-Bridgewater trunk road.

Young Malcolm rather takes to the shape of the Handsomest Man in the World, though he finds living in the village's stately mansion almost as overpowering as the super-efficient secretary who takes on management of his concerns. The glamorous Rhine maidens take a break from centuries of sunbathing to pop up in the River Tone and exercise their dazzling smiles. Things generally seem to do what the Rhinemaidens want when they smile at them. Alberich the sulphur-dwarf, maker of the Ring, and a martyr to indigestion, turns up in Malcolm's bedroom. Wotan, still in Germany, having a hell of a home life nagged by eight neurotic Valkyrie daughters, is getting more and more peeved. The spirit of niceness that now controls the Ring won't even let him whip up a thunderstorm because it would damage the crops. Besides, Wotan's been after the Ring for over a thousand years, and his patience (which isn't much at the best of times) is wearing thin ...

Immense fun, which had me giggling in the aisles in the bookshop where I first picked this book up. The same reentless barrage of wise-crackery relieved by wit that has made Douglas Adams rich. It would be a wonderful way to save the world - if only the Ring could find the right wimp - so much easier than lobbying, letterwriting and organising demos.

THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE - Robert Irwin
[Viking, 1987, 282pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

WHAT IS THE HAPLESS REVIEWER TO MAKE of this novel? Words desert me and I cannot find a way to translate what I thought about it into this review. It is a remarkable book, a clever book, constructed with cunning and intelligence, and after repeated readings I still feel I am scratching through the most superficial layer with promise of much more to come. I don't actually regard this as a failure to communicate on the author's part. In a world where storylines are as skimpy as a paperback binding, Robert Irwin has produced a dense, multilayered novel which recreates the complexity of a dream, stimulated by a topographical book on Cairo, and based on the structure of the Arabian Nights tales. Nothing, literally, is ever as it seems. One finishes reading it affected by the same confusion one experiences in waking from, and trying to recall, a long dream, the memory of which is already fading.

This is a difficult book, but rewarding for those prepared to persevere. The descriptive writing is detailed and realistic, the characterisation is robust, and as a bonus, the book is illustrated from the paintings of David Roberts. If your taste is for quickly absorbed, throwaway fantasy, I doubt this will be to your taste, but for those who like a

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thought-provoking story which needs working at, this is almost certainly what you are seeking.

HER STORY - Dan Jacobson
[Andre Deutsch, 1987, 143pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

IF *HER STORY* WERE A PICTURE, IT would be a washed-out religious print in a modern chrome frame. The main body looks like a historico-religious parable, prefaced by a piece of explanatory scene-setting with minimal SF content - the story-within-a-story is presented as the work of Celia Dinan, born in 2007 AD. Celia joins a new religious movement whose charismatic leader is her lover. She has a son by him. The group disintegrates with considerable violence, Celia's baby is killed, her lover disappears. Later, Celia writes a novel whose events mirror in some fashion the central trauma of her own life.

This story-within-a-story - Celia's story - relates the life of a woman in first century AD Bible-land. She is not Mary, and her son is not Jesus, but parallels are constantly drawn between them. However, Celia's story is a deliberate opposition to the meaning of the Jesus story in its Christian context; whereas the Jesus story is supremely meaningful, Celia's story is about bitterness, disappointment, futility, failure, and above all about meaninglessness.

Jacobson appears to use both settings simply as a way of distancing his material, and treats his sub-created worlds very carelessly indeed. Within the first few pages we are introduced to Celia who "did not (so far as we know) donate any of her ovaries to an ovarian bank" (any?? How many has she got, for goodness sake, or does Jacobson mean ova?). This is rapidly followed by an Islamic Boarding School for Girls with a male director, and no explanation of the radical change in Islamic educational philosophy that this implies. While reading the novel I was plagued with the feeling that almost every scene was out of focus. The book has no landscape, no place in reality. Jacobson is not interested in realising the future society of the framing sequence; he concentrates solely on creating (but not directly detailing) a plausible rationale for Celia's character and motivation. This is mirrored in Celia's story, which is similarly vague. I think it's supposed to be clever, it probably is clever, this allusive elusive loose illusion, but for me it was wildly annoying.

Her Story is a parable within a frame; both stories of a disappointed woman, gulled by religion, living through and for the men in her life. For *Her Story* as a complete artefact, cross The Golden Notebook with a straight version of The Life of Brian. Read either in preference to it.

THE DARKEST ROAD - Guy Gavriel Kay
[Unwin, 1987, 420pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb and Mary Gentle

HERE IS IT IS. VOLUME 3. THE FIONAVAR Tapestry finally complete. Those who have read volumes 1 and 2 are likely to read this to find out what happens; those who haven't are advised to do so before attempting this book. It is a three volume novel, not a series of self contained related works, the volumes are meaningless apart from one another. So much so that I found it hard to pick up this book at such a distance from the last, they need to be read consecutively.

In my reviews of the first two volumes I reserved judgement because I needed to see the work complete. So, does it work? Is it a Tapestry or a poor patchwork?

Before I answer that I must admit that my perceptions were altered by reading the interview with Kay in a previous *Vector* where he explained the mythology which he developed but which I found insufficiently explained in the earlier volumes. It is clearer in volume 3, but could still do with being more so, so that his reasons for resurrecting Arthur and Lancelot, and making an amalgam of so many myths are valid in context rather than being a mess.

Does it work?

Yes, I think it does. I think Kay has succeeded in writing an excellent, evocative, moving and original work which, in the field of fantasy where cliché is king, is an achievement of no small merit.

I have niggles. One or two threads are left hanging and ought to have been sewn neatly into the back (what of Sharra?); perhaps in this volume (not in the others) the lines between dark and light are too rigid, there are no people who are a pain in the neck, no pettiness, no minor irritations, and even in moments of crisis people will still be capable of heroism and pettiness both; I missed Kevin, he kept the feet of the others on the ground, injected humour into tension, and without him the contact with our world was tenuous.

On the positive side it is beautifully written, well paced, well plotted, good characterisation, the author is always secure but never obtrusive in his direction, it is masterfully done. To anyone who enjoys fantasy I recommend the whole novel without hesitation. [H.M.]

IN 1974-75, IT SAYS IN THE BLURB, KAY spent a year assisting Christopher Tolkien in his editorial construction of *The Silmarillion*. I wish he hadn't. This is a purely selfish reader-wish, brought on again by reading *The Darkest Road*. I say 'again' because the same thought occured after reading *The Wandering Fire* (much the weakest volume of the trilogy) and *The Summer Tree*. Why do I wish he hadn't?

In the set-pieces Kay writes at a pitch of emotional intensity that in places moved me to tears. And made me feel cheated. Because The Fionavar Tapestry is, plainly, *Lord of the Rings*, plus King Arthur plus sex with the odds and sods of the mythological rag-bag thrown in, but primarily it is Tolkien.

Tolkien wasn't, and knew he wasn't, wholly original: *The Lord of the Rings* is in many ways a Cooks Tour of European literature up to about Chaucer. But Tolkien did something to distance himself from his sources, and transform them into his own vision.

Now it is 1987 and if I see one more dragon, one more blasted (in all sense of the term) heath, one more Dark Lord (he may be called Rakoth Maugrim the Unraveller, but he's still straight out of the thick-as-a-brick Sauron mould), one more high-elven race, winged unicorn, tribe of noble riders of the plain (straight out of Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain*, as is the death of Kevin in the previous volume), one more high king with a grip on pageantry and none on economics, dwarf, wizard, and one more fucking Last Battle -

I WILL SCREAM

I am angry because I feel let down. And the reason for that is that what is done well in *The Darkest Road* is done very well indeed. There are real people here. The five (now four) humans from our world have real problems, genuine quirks of character, they learn and hurt and feel real joy. On the mythic side, there is a genuine, courtly, chivalrous and grim Lancelot du Lac; a most unexpected find. And there is Galadan.

This volume is, mainly, about Darien, the magic child born of mortal woman and Rakoth Maugrim who can side with either Light or Dark, and, for me, the character failed to work. It's the villain Galadan who has that kind of moral dichotomy.

I won't trouble you with the plot, *The Darkest Road* had me crying and cheering in all the right places, and spitting teeth whenever I shopped to analyse rather than emote. The question remains: why is a book as good as this not a good book?

Read *The Fionavar Tapestry*, anyway, it's head and shoulders above what else is being published. But I still wish someone had beaten its author away from *The Silmarillion* with a stick. [M.G.]

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THE WAVE AND THE FLAME - Marjorie Bradley Kellogg with William B. Rossow
[Gollancz, 1987, 358pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

THE DUST-COVER INVITES COMPARISON with Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, and Aldiss's *Helliconia* and there is certainly a superficial resemblance to these works. Kellogg, a set designer, by collaborating with Rossow, a scientist specialising in planetary atmospheres, increased the scientific 'clout' of the novel as Aldiss did in the *Helliconia Trilogy*, though Rossow has obviously a much greater influence on the finished product. The strongest common element between all three books is that they involve the effect of an extreme climate on the population of a planet; in all three this relationship is carefully and credibly explored. However, *The Wave and the Flame*, isn't a greatly innovative work, none of the elements are particularly original. It falls into the sub-genre of SF of which the first major work was *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the most recent important example probably *Golden Witchbreed*: novels concerned with the exploration by emissaries from 'earth' of a new humanoid culture, which concentrate on the sociological/anthropological/political implications of the meeting, rather than the purely scientific ones.

The plot concerns an industrially sponsored scientific mission to a planet explored by robot probe and classed as hot desert. The team find, to the planetologist's dismay, a world overwhelmed by a severe winter. The book is concerned with the relationship between visitors and natives. The Sawls' culture is an expression of their environment; their religion accounts for the weather in terms of two perpetually warring Goddesses, symbolised by the wave and the flame; gambling forms an integral part of their daily lives, a reflection of their desperate gamble of existence. For all this they are pragmatic and the priests, whose job it is to predict the weather, consult records rather than religious myth to determine how each Goddess might behave. Stavros, the young linguist, attempts to understand the complex religion and the weather, and is increasingly drawn towards an irrational conclusion. There's a strong female cast, and all the characters are well-formed. Indeed the book works well on the many levels the authors attempt, and despite the fact that this is the first volume of a larger work, the ending of *The Wave and the Flame* was good. Well worth reading.

FIASCO - Stanislaw Lem
[Andre Deutsch, 1987, 322pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

IN LEM'S FUTURE MANKIND HAS DECIDED that to make contact successfully with any other intelligence out there, such contact must be made before that intelligence takes to the stars itself. To that end an improbable expedition is launched utilising sidereal engineering and quantum mechanics to effect "time travel" (you may guess I didn't grasp the full implications of all the technical advances Lem strews about with abandon - no matter; *Fiasco* is no more about the technicalities of space travel than *Moby Dick* is about whaling). Among the crew are a suppressed megalomaniac Norwegian fisherman, a Jesuit papal legate, a revenant pilot who died in Birnam Wood, and several fist-sized computers nonchalantly called "God".

From the above the experienced Lem reader may be unable to decide whether *Fiasco* is one of his belly-laugh throwaway fragments or one of his less accessible(!) serious works. Well, fragment *Fiasco* certainly is not. It is big. It is hard SF (hard in a way most other hard SF writers can only dream about). It is serious. Lord is it serious.

The civilization chosen for the flying visit is not exactly keen on talking to peaceable human beings; killing, yes, talking, no. Especially when we try to persuade them by cavitating their moon down on their permanently warring heads. The Quintans, you see, have got SDI in the way the Inquisition got investigation - Star Wars fever taken to a perfectly logical conclusion which is some way beyond terror.

For most of the book Lem prepares us for the hostility, the unknowableness of the Quintans, by describing a human endeavour as far advanced from us as we are from homo erectus. Only in the final analysis does he show that when it comes to Life not as we know it, we humans may too come in peace but shoot to kill.

Lem is an infuriatingly inconsistent author, but *Fiasco* shows him at his best. It does what we adherents often claim our favourite genre can do, which is show the consequences of today's foolishness in the guise of tomorrow's fable. It is a disturbing, eerily beautiful book, although I have my doubts about some of the translation (which remains a serious caveat about most editions of Lem I know). It is in earnest and deadly serious. It may not be a great work of fiction qua fiction, but it could be one of the most important books you can read today. Read it, then pass your copy on to someone who believes SDI will benefit humankind.

INSPECTING THE VAULTS - Eric McCormack
[Viking, 1987, 234pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

I CANNOT THINK OF ANY WAY OF DESCRIBING these stories other than weird. They owe a lot to Borges, especially in their love of symmetries, mysteries, and the unexplained. I can think of no more Borgesian a story than 'Eckhardt at a Window' in which a girl tells a police inspector of the gruesome death of an assassin she has met. A search is made, a body is found, but the details do not tally precisely with the girl's story. But in the meantime she herself has died in a way oddly parallel to the death she reported. McCormack also shares Borges' delight in creating obscure fictional references for his stories, as in 'The Fragment' in which his narrator unearths a document about a peculiar cult.

But where Borges is the starting point for Latin American 'magic realism', McCormack has a surrealistic streak that rather than heightening reality tends to distance his work from it. Some, such as the title story about strange people imprisoned in the basements of ordinary houses in a vaguely repressive state have an air of satire about them. Others, such as 'Festival' in which the eponymous celebrations include a massed parade of insects and a formalised version of Russian Roulette, seem to have no such link with our own world. While still others, such as the two pieces that make up 'A Train of Gardens', read like sustained exercises in imagination giving full rein to the author's fertile creativity.

In short, McCormack's is one of the freshest and most vigorous new voices to emerge in years. His writing is crisp and matter of fact, perfect for recording his imaginative flights - though the style does faulter a little in the less outre stories like 'Edward and Georgina', a rather unsurprising piece about a transvestite. His vision is strange, with a taste for the gruesome and the sexual, though the horrors are intellectual and the sexuality one more component of the oddity. He has an unusual talent to revolt and satisfy almost in the same phrase. But if you have a taste for stories that will challenge your concept of reality, stories that will delight, intrigue and amuse, then do not miss this wonderful collection.

B O O K S

EROTIC UNIVERSE: SEXUALITY AND FANTASTIC LITERATURE - Donald Palumbo (Ed)
[Greenwood, 1986, 305pp, £27.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

"WRITING ABOUT SEXUALITY IS HARD, dirty work. But someone has to do it". Thus begins Judith Spector's account of sexuality in LeGuin, Piercy and Russ, in this collection of 15 essays by American academics, mostly professors of English, who are almost all determined to show that it is indeed hard and dirty, and not fun at all. The book is arranged in four sections: "Theory", "Themes", "Feminist Views" and "Fanzines", the last being somewhat redundant, since it contains only one article which could have been accommodated elsewhere. But this article does happen to be one of the most interesting in the book, at least for me, since it dealt with a topic that I, in my innocence, had not even realised existed: the extensive literature, written by and for women, about the love affair between Kirk and Spock. The authors, Lamb and Veith (professors of English and psychology), argue that these stories are not really about sexuality, let alone homosexuality, or even romantic love:

> they provide a vision of a new way of loving and especially a vision of new possibilities for women. They are about the possibility of joining integrity to the self with fidelity to one's partner.

The essays in the first two sections are what one would expect in this kind of collection. They are discussions of (and occasionally mere plot summaries of) a fairly random selection of books and stories, ranging from the Odyssey and the Arabian Nights through to, predictably, Philip José Farmer, John Norman, LeGuin, Charnas, etc. Some range quite widely, like Valerie Broege's study of the future technology of sex, or Leonard S.Heldreth's on sex with aliens. These are useful catalogues, but they seldom come to anything more than the obvious conclusions. In the book as a whole there is little attempt to place the stories in their context, literary or historical, and no effort to make the study comprehensive; even the extensive bibliography is only a compilation of suggestions provided by each of the authors.

The 5 essays in "Feminist Views" contain some interesting observations, notably on LeGuin and Russ. The feminist theoretical approach, together with detailed concentration on a relatively small range of writers, gives this section a rigour that is lacking in the first 9 essays (even though one or two were not really about sexuality, but about gender rôles, which is not the same thing at all). But *why* are *all* the "feminist views" concerned with SF by women? It is a strange self-limitation, and makes the whole book rather anodyne: we could have done with something like the denunciations by Sue Thomason and Mary Gentle in *Vector* 139. Anyone interested in the question of sexuality in SF is going to have to start with this book, but they are not going to find it an exciting (if I can use that word) read.

WHO'S HUGH: AN SF READER'S GUIDE TO PSEUDONYMS - Roger Robinson
[Beccon, 1987, 173pp, £14.50 hardback, £9.50 paperback + £1.25 p&p from 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THIS IS A BOOK I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR for years. The Nicholls *Encyclopedia* gives many pseudonyms, but not all; Ash's *Who's Who in Science Fiction* only covers 400 authors; Ashley's *Illustrated Book of Science Fiction Lists* gives the 10 most pseudonymous SF writers. Trying to track down a suspected pseudonym when they have failed has meant ploughing through other critical works, none of them geared up to make such a search easy.

Who's Hugh covers over 3700 SF-related pseudonyms - a mammoth undertaking for the compiler. Its layout is particularly useful: the left hand pages are in alphabetical order of pseudonyms; the right in alphabetical order of the usual names of authors. Usual rather than real: Lester del Rey is listed under that as his usual name, but an asterisk directs us to Lester del Rey in the pseudonym listing on the facing page to find his real name is Ramon Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heathcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez y de los Uerdes.

Robinson also makes a simple distinction between the use of a pseudonym purely for individual short stories (listed in lower case), or as the author's name on a book (in capitals). Shared and collaborative pseudonyms and house names are also indicated clearly: Cameron Hall could be either del Rey or Harry Harrison, or the two working together.

The book is full of browser's delights: E.C.Tubb, Forrest Ackerman and John Russell Fearn vie for top place with 65, 56 and 52 pseudonyms respectively (though I suspect it leaves out Fearn's non-SF pseudonyms which, according to Ashley, would bring him up to 73, though Ashley gives the total SF pseudonyms for each as only 45, 16 and 40). The usual names of Xongo-Tee-Foh-Tchi and Baron Huffumbourchausen are unknown, no doubt to the relief of the perpetrators. L.Ron Hubbard wrote as Winchester Remington Colt and Legionnaire 14830. Forrest J.Ackerman as Ralph 124e41, 4e and 4sj ...

A wonderfully useful and entertaining work. My only complaint is that it doesn't give the true identity of Ainslie Skinner, pseudonymous author of the ESP novel *Mind's Eye*. Anybody know?

CAT MAGIC - Whitley Strieber
[Grafton, 1987, 414pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Mark Valentine

THE READER IS ASKED TO BELIEVE A LOT at the outset of this novel. There is a rejected, desperate scientist who has discovered a way to revive the dead; an abnormal elemental cat who comes to avenge this usurpation of natural laws; the modern witch who is the matriarch of a pagan commune threatened by an evangelist hell-bent on reviving Salemesque hysteria in the nearby small town. Into this cauldron steps Mandy Walker, an artist here ostensibly to illustrate the witch's new translation of Grimm's Fairy Tales, but who has a much more fantastic and fraught destiny ahead. It says something for the impetus and imaginative vitality of the novel that scepticism is quickly suspended. I read it all in one evening, it's a rattling good gothic thriller. It's only afterwards that a few doubts spring to mind.

Strieber contrasts the extremism of born-again zealots with the more tolerant attitude of older churches, but I cannot think that this would go so far as attending and implicity validating a pagan rite. Strieber is at pains to portray the pagans as environmentalists quickened with a spiritual response to the Earth and its mysteries, and he also sends out the message that the advocates of the Old Faith are the target of America's moral fanatics. But he tends to overstate his case; the commune is a bit too much sweetness and light. Another implausibility surrounds an experience undergone by Mandy which, without giving too much of the game away, I would have thought would result in considerable media interest, not just the localised consequences depicted.

All these faults can best be put down to excess of enthusiasm on the author's part. From a strictly literary angle this undermines his achievement, but Strieber's particular quality in past books has been the ability to give fresh perspectives on old dark fantasy themes. He did this with the werewolf and vampire traditions in *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*, and in *Catmagic* he is just as successful in reclaiming the ancient wisdom and natural wonder in witchcraft.

B O O K S

THE SEA AND SUMMER - George Turner
[Faber, 1987, 318pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

IT CAN BE A PLEASURE TO GET AWAY from the old, pseudo-scientific clichés of SF - time travel and the like - and read a novel in a more mainstream tradition which concerns itself with a credible near future. In *The Sea and Summer* George Turner, the Australian author of *Yesterday's Men*, has written such a novel, but it is not exactly pleasant to read because the world he describes is no entertaining utopia or dystopia but one just slightly worse than that we already inhabit. The setting is Melbourne around AD 2050. The problems are over-population, unemployment, the Greenhouse Effect which results in flooding of the city, great disparities in wealth between rich and poor described as Sweet and Swill respectively. The latter are accommodated unsatisfactorily (and rather implausibly) in vast high density, high rise apartment blocks. There has been no nuclear war, although there might as well have been. The dream of space travel has ended. Two of the chief protagonists are adolescents Teddy and Francis, required at a certain age to take the Test to determine whether or not they are worthy of employment. Francis proves to have a talent for mental arithmetic which leads him into crime. Teddy trains for Police Intelligence and discovers sinister goings-on which it would be wrong to give away.

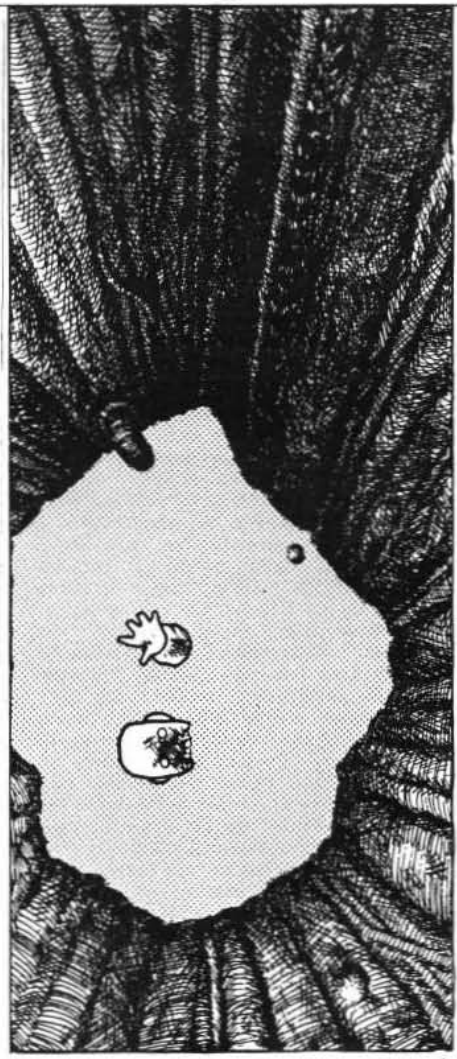
It has to be said that the novel is absorbing to read in some early sections but later becomes distinctly dull and padded. Its structure seems unnecessarily complex, with much switching of viewpoints. The characters are all (perhaps deliberately) unlikeable and exist in an anti-intellectual environment wherein pragmatism rules. Much of the dialogue is of the kind in which characters explain things to each other, and the writer has a tendency to pontificate with much use of abstract nouns and little sense.

Towards the end there is also some gruesome and gratuitous violence. (All fictional violence is arguably gratuitous in the sense that no-one forces a writer to write).

To summarise: a bleak vision of the near future, worth reading but grim.

THE POWER - Ian Watson
[Headline, 1987, 232pp, £2.50]
Reviewed by Michael Fearn

AGAINST A BLACK BACKGROUND, A YELLOW green claw-hand with dessicated skin and talons for nails reaches up, as from the grave. From the cover, which describes it as "horror", *The Power* seems to be the type of book I would emigrate to avoid.



TOIVONEN 1987

Adopting a gaian view, Watson postulates a creature-Earth which has boils packed with evil. The boil he calls a "diabolus", and one such lies next to the village of Melfort Parva in the shape of the US nuclear missile base of Kerthrop.

At the moment of a nuclear strike the power puts a force shield around Melfort, allowing the survival of five humans and a dog. The rest of the population and animals are condemned to semi-life as walking, rotting corpses. The premise, it seems, is: not even Satan can tolerate nuclear war as it negates everything, even evil.

Jenny, the main character, is the well-spring of the evil following juvenile, masturbatory domination fantasies, an undergraduate lesbian rape which she feels she failed to resist sufficiently, and a perceived previous life as a witch. The power, represented by the severed head of the local vicar, informs her that she must have sex with the gangrenous undead to stabilise and maintain the pattern of force which protects the village.

No-one doubts Watson's commitment to the Labour Party and CND. I am quite prepared to accept that the foul purpose behind such establishments as Kerthrop feeds a larger evil. But this point could have been made without necrophilia and explicit, lavatorial descriptions.

I enjoyed some of the stygian humour, such as the Parish Council meeting after Armageddon: a sideswipe, I suspect, at the inadequacy of civil defence provision.

Like Watson's SF, *The Power* is well written, but here good writing and ideas struggle to escape from a sickening shell. I am afraid it has confirmed my stance as a lifelong non-reader of horror.

CRITICAL TERMS FOR SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY: A GLOSSARY AND GUIDE TO SCHOLARSHIP - Gary K. Wolfe
[Greenwood, 1986, xxxvi + 162pp, £27.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF 'SCIENCE fiction'? If we can't agree the definition of such a basic term, then how fare all the other words used by authors, fans and critics alike about the genre? That is the starting point for this exceptionally useful book.

Wolfe has, quite simply, gathered together all the terms used in SF criticism, whether they come from academic, fannish or other sources, and has appended to each a short guide to their usage. The exercise is valuable if for nothing else than as a handy reference to what the critics are actually talking about. And some of his short definitions prove to be interesting mini-essays in their own right. The four pages on 'Science Fiction', for instance, include a fascinating chronological selection of attempted definitions of the genre, from Hugo Gernsback in 1926: "A charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" to Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins in 1985: "Fiction in which new and futuristic scientific developments propel the plot". We hardly seem to have advanced in our understanding of what we do.

But Wolfe is not always as useful as he ought to be. Too often he falls into the trap of defining jargon with more jargon. It is surely useless to define 'Cognitive Estrangement', the current buzz-term for the defining characteristic of SF, as: "estranged from the naturalistic world but cognitively connected to it." And though it is fair enough in a work of this nature to stick to descriptive rather than prescriptive definitions, we are on more than one occasion presented with contradictory usages of the same term, and no guide to which it is better to use ourselves. If, as Wolfe says, one of his aims was to end confusion, this is not the way to do it.