VECTOR

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PLUS
Readers' Letters
& Book Reviews

VECTOR
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APRIL/MAY 1988

C O N T E N T S

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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 8EV. (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.*

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EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

COMICS?

Me, read comics? You must be out of your skull. When I was eight or nine, a new magazine came out: *Boy's World*. Until then, I'd been getting the *Eagle* every week. *Boy's World* contained articles, on astronomy, science, current affairs, modelling, as well as stories.

After a couple of weeks of getting both, my mother gave me a choice: I could have one or the other, but not both (we were poor at the time: three growing children, and one very low stipend). "But I want both." "No, we can only afford one." (This was in addition to my pocket money: 6d a week.) "But I can't choose. I want the *Eagle* because it's fun and it's got Dan Dare, and I want *Boy's World* because it's really interesting and I can learn things from it. I want both." "You must choose one."

I agonised for days. My mother told me I would face much harder decisions between two things I wanted equally when I was older. I didn't believe her.

Eventually I chose: *Boy's World*. Maybe it was a decision that affected the course of my life, that nourished my thirst for knowledge. Certainly it stopped me reading comics. Apart from the occasional stolen glance at a child's *Dandy* or *Beano* for old time's sake, I don't think I read a comic again.

Until last year, when Titan Books started publishing comics in a big way: comics of some artistic and, yes, literary merit. What, me? Serious old me, read comics?

I remember in the early 60s when SF paperbacks suddenly hit those wire racks outside sea-side gift shops. Cult pulp magazine SF had suddenly transmogrified into semi-respectable books. A similar transformation is now occurring with comics — the pulps are becoming smartly produced books — though I suspect it will take as long for them to gain social respectability as it has for SF (we're still waiting...). I felt dreadfully self-conscious one lunchtime last December, sitting in a pub at Charing Cross reading *Watchmen*, especially when I noticed the looks from the clutch of yuppies next to me. I was wearing (for once!) a suit, collar and tie; how could someone, presumably intelligent, presumably taking a lunch break from (professional) work, be reading a *comic*? (Snobbery, thy name is Yuppie...)

I must confess, I'm not a great fan of *Judge Dredd, Judge Anderson* & co., or of the war comic *Bad Company*. They seem little of an advance on the blood and guts stuff that's been around for years. For real guts, sublime horror, you want the *Swamp Thing* books: man injured in explosion, flung into swamp, metamorphoses into a THING. To employ a cliché, *Swamp Thing* is an excellent example of its kind: not quite my thing, but there again, I'm not a great horror reader.

There's no doubt of the comic book (or graphic novel, which makes it sound more respectable) of 1987: *Watchmen*. This is a full-fledged novel; it takes longer to read and requires considerably more brainwork than most novels. Just because it's a comic doesn't mean it's lightweight — a lesson it took me a while to learn. *Watchmen* is set in an alternate present, where superheroes, masked avengers, are real; only, as in our own world, their heyday was 20 years ago. But a series of mysterious deaths persuade the superheroes to come out of retirement... *Watchmen* is a deep indictment of our own society; it should be compulsory reading for politicians.

The Adventures of Luther Arkwright is also set in an alternate world: present-day Britain under harsh Puritan rule. This is a powerful and disturbing political allegory, with stunningly detailed artwork. Read and beware.

Neil Gaiman's *Violent Cases*, reviewed by Maureen Porter in this issue, had a similar effect on her as *Watchmen* (one of the first comic books I read) had on me. A graphic version of a short story I read and admired at the Milford Writers' Conference 18 months ago, it is simply the adult recollections of a child who may have met Al Capone's osteopath. Whether it is SF or not is irrelevant; it is a deeply thoughtful psychological drama, beautifully illustrated by Dave McKean.

Most comic books are black-&-white; of those that are full colour the French *The Magician's Wife* makes the best use of it. This is a harrowing and haunting dream-like (often nightmare-like) tale of a young girl who marries an unprincipled stage magician — but much of the magic in the book is real. This one requires several readings for full appreciation of its subtleties.

Other continental comics include *Gods in Chaos*, a fascinating blend of SF and Egyptian mythology set in 21st century Paris; *The Gardens of Aedena*, on the awakening from innocence of two young space travellers; and the sad, cruel but rather dull *Joe's Bar*, set in New York.

Of all the comics I've read recently, nothing measures up to the work of the Hernandez Bros. Gilbert Hernandez in *Heartbreak Soup* convincingly portrays the life of a small US/Mexican border town: its midwife, its unmarried mother of four children by four different fathers, its village idiot, its loves and fights and hopes and tragedies. The characters and their problems are utterly real, totally believable; you can *smell* the hot dust on the streets.

But brother Jaime's *Love & Rockets* characters have stolen my heart. Maggie and Hopey, two teenage punks, live together, sometimes with the strange, disturbed Izzy, who is a writer; Maggie is a prosolar mechanic, largely gay, but smitten by the occasional male; Hopey plays bass in a band, is devoted to, and often arguing with, Maggie, between fighting off the attentions of another girl. Other characters include Penny Century, who goes out with a billionaire with horns on his forehead; and Rena Titafion, a retired female wrestler. The *Love & Rockets* stories, possibly the strongest male-written feminist work I have seen, have strong SF and Fantasy elements, but the important feature is the characters themselves, their relationships, worries and problems — paying the rent, putting on weight, living in a poor, mixed-culture society.

One word of warning if you fall for Los Bros' comic books: the Titan editions and the American Fantagraphics editions are different but overlapping selections of stories; if you mix the two you'll duplicate some stories.

For London members, all these books are available in *Forbidden Planet*; but many of them can also be found in good SF/Fantasy sections in "ordinary" book-shops. That's if you don't think comics are beneath you. Me? I'm going back for more of Maggie and Hopey.

• Many thanks to Titan Books for supplying:

Love & Rockets 1 & 2 Jaime Hernandez
Heartbreak Soup 1 & 2 Gilbert Hernandez
Watchmen Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons
The Adventures of Luther Arkwright 2 Bryan Talbot
Violent Cases Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean
The Magician's Wife Jerome Charyn & François Boucq
Gods in Chaos Enki Bilal
The Gardens of Aedena Jean Giraud
Joe's Bar J Muñoz & C Sampayo
Swamp Thing 1 & 2 Moore, Bissette & Totleben
Judge Dredd 18 Wagner, Grant & Robinson
Judge Anderson 1 Wagner & Grant
Bad Company 2 Milligan, Ewins & McCarthy

LETTERS

POLITICS ETC.

STAN NICHOLLS
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YES, THERE IS TOO MUCH POLITICAL BIAS IN BSFA PUBLICATIONS. Every issue of *Vector* seems to be full of the ravings of a self-opinionated, humourless right wing prodnose. I feel like -- to paraphrase Dorothy Parker -- "I just spent two hours with Ken Lake for ten minutes".

PETER TENNANT
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KEN LAKE STATES THAT -*isms* DO NOT DESERVE TO BE CONSIDERED in isolation from life itself, yet a paragraph or so later he seems to claim this very prerogative for science fiction, with apparently no awareness of the self-contradiction involved.

No literary genre can exist in isolation from society as a whole, and perhaps this is more true of science fiction than of any other. It is not something we can go off and do in a corner by ourselves. Writers are affected by social change and, whether we like it or not, this is reflected in their work, for good or evil. We need to consider such things.

It is not good enough to hail *1984* as a genre classic while blithely ignoring similar trends in the real world, or to moan because you can't get your hands on a book while pretending censorship doesn't concern us.

Of course Ken knows this just as well as I do. Beneath all the carefully phrased rhetoric what he's really bleating about is that you've printed political opinions he doesn't want to hear. Yet often, listening to viewpoints we don't like is the only way forward. If your facts or the inferences drawn from them are in any way incorrect, Ken should write a letter explaining how and why, instead of demanding you refrain from expressing such opinions. We can draw our own conclusions as to why he doesn't do this (I showed your recent editorial on Thatcherite repression to several Conservative friends, all of whom dismissed it as crap and none of whom could say why).

As for Ken's suggestion that we withhold subs, frankly this is contemptible. Like the majority of people I voted against Mrs Thatcher at the last election. She won and therefore my taxes pay for policies I do not support. That's how our democracy works. The BSFA is a democracy too, and if he doesn't like how it's run Ken Lake is welcome to stand for office.

KV BAILEY
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IT IS SIMPLY FOOLISH TO DENY ANY EDITOR THE RIGHT TO state personal views and convictions in the context of an editorial, so long as he makes it quite clear that this is what he is doing. The last sentence of your *VI39* editorial takes right issue with that: it could be construed as advocating the commitment of your very varied body of readers and writers of SF, almost as a community, to a particular kind of political activism. If, however, what is implied by working towards a feminist society is also what is conveyed by a passage in Gwyneth Jones's excellent article in the same issue, then no place could be better for the advice that an SF editorial: "...men (may) secretly feel as much need as women -- in the late 20th century -- to imagine new roles for themselves. And SF is probably the place to do it. But the doubt and questioning must come from within."

I also regret Ken Lake's strictures on Mike Christie's *VI39* article -- an article which not only expertly analysed an important novel but defined and illustrated the uses of a critical/philosophical tool in such a way as to make clear its relevance to SF and for its readers. To sneer at this as "pseudo-intellectual" is simply to reveal some misapprehension of intellectuality and to demonstrate a rather philistine intolerance. *Vector* should be, and is, a journal of balanced fare, reflecting the content of that wide literary spectrum which constitutes SF, with all its varied fannish, technological, socio-political, mythopoeic, metaphysical and what-not constituents.

TERRY BULL
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AFTER SOME 20 YEARS OF INERTIA THE "EDITORIAL" OF KEN Lake in *VI41* has finally driven me to comment. The language of his article is of course so coated with value judgements -- "blatantly obvious prejudices", "contentious left wing assertions", vociferous minorities" -- as to tell us (a) Ken Lake has strong views and (b) he is right wing and not a lot else. Talking about minorities being vociferous it seems to me begs quite a few questions (which may have even more than two sides): like: women are a majority in the UK and if the opposite of a "vociferous minority" is the silent majority how do their views to be determined? By self-appointed persons who feel they are in the right (or on the right more likely)?

Basically I suppose they support the *status quo* (the way things are) and any *-ism* (system of ideas which offers an alternative) is wrong or worse "political". God knows this desire for change is called "subversion", that those who don't like the prevailing *-ism* (yes folks, capitalism!) deserve all the pejorative adjectives, spurious facts and anti-intellectual prejudices they get. That'll learn them! God help the people who suggest these things actually believe in them (except the prevailing *-ism* which of course is *the way* because we have it).

Now forgive me but science fiction is either entertainment or speculation or hopefully both. It has its fair share of reactionaries -- more if the truth be told -- and a lot of decent liberals who used to say maybe the aliens have got a point. William Tenn's "The Liberation of Earth" popped up in my mind. So guessing about the shortage of material available I reckon that if there are literate, intelligent proponents of the New Right, Old Right and Righter than Right then they could just about be guaranteed to turn *Vector* into a Poul Anderson/Keith Laumer-ism magazine. The editor needs the articles. Of course it might provoke a frontlash from others but it would be lively and most people would still read the book reviews. I promise I wouldn't seek to get back a proportion of my subscription on the basis I didn't like what someone wrote. Or at least if I sent the BSFA an invoice on that basis I hope they would know what to do with it. We all have the choice of participating, sitting back and enjoying the fruits of the labour of others or just not renewing our subscription. It's amusing to see just how closely SF reflects the moods, prejudices and themes of its times whilst appealing to the longing for a timeless universalist approach. Has anyone bucked the trend? -- perhaps Olaf Stapledon, but that's debatable.

JOHN OWEN
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I FOUND KEN LAKE'S "RIGHT OF REPLY" TO BE AN EXTRAORDinary piece of jumbled thinking, much of it well-answered by your own reply. Ken seems to be of the opinion that SF is a non-contentious, non-political genre, promulgating ideas that are sweetness and light, and that the BSFA should quite naturally follow that lead. Of course, it isn't true: SF is made up of authors of all political persuasions, many of whom push their own particular creed through their books (good ol' Elron being the prime candidate, naturally). Does Ken object to the American militaristic authors (like Pournelle) as well as the feminist

authors? Does he feel that the BSFA should now do a right-wing special to redress the balance?

Ken tries to dismiss *-isms* as being only relevant when taken in the context of overall life as we know it. Of course that's not true. Initially, all *-isms* have their basis in a truth. Indeed, the very existence of an *-ism* indicates that there are problems within society that have to be addressed. The "truth" within an *-ism* is what makes it go: behind Nazism was an injustice of a vengeful settlement at the end of WWI which bled Germany dry; behind Marxism was an Industrial Revolution which enslaved workers to a horrific lifestyle; behind feminism is a society which fails to give equal standing to women, even now. And you can go on and on denying that these *-isms* exist as separate entities, and fail to realise the power that they have. They are *ideas*, and as any SF reader should know, ideas are the most powerful things in creation: they *are* creation itself at work. Often, they have to be highlighted to ensure that they are properly considered, and not brushed off as "irrelevant" or "left-wing claptrap" or whatever.

Ken's closing suggestion, that we should deduct part of our subscription in proportion to the amount of "tendentious politicking" that we find in the Association's reading matter rather misses the point: if the BSFA's organs are failing to raise issues, failing to strike sparks, failing to pursue ideas (and ideals), in other words, failing to be *alive*, then it's up to the membership not to reduce our subscriptions, but to provide the necessary material that is missing. If Ken believes that the BSFA editors are putting in material that is one-sided, then he should supply the balancing material.

IMELDA HIGTON
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I'VE BEEN A MEMBER FOR AROUND A YEAR NOW, AND LATELY I've enjoyed reading the magazines from the BSFA. I would like to express an opinion about the letter you printed in *V141* by Ken Lake; the letter smacked of the dreary debate I became all too familiar with when I used to get 'zines, and read locs, with it seemed paragraph-long sentences, which were simply incorrigibly dull even when the subject matter was fascinating, because of the hectoring style.

I honestly hope this isn't going to become the norm in *Vector*.

«So do I. Let's leave the subject there, and go on to other matters. John Norman's Gor *books are still raising a lot of comment»*

GOR

MARGARET HALL
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I MUST ADMIT I FOUND IT RATHER AMUSING, THE WAY EVERYone was condemning John Norman with extraordinary zeal whilst at the same time strenuously denying ever having read any of his books. I — like Sue Thomason and Andy Sawyer — am prepared to admit to having read several. And I agree with Andy that the first two or three are no better and no worse than many other books of the hack-and-slay fantasy genre. They are Ripping Yarns, with not very original, but decently paced plots. Tarl Cabot is a typical, durable hero who survives every hazard. You just know — when he is sentenced to be torn to pieces between two tarns — that one of the huge birds will turn out to be his own and when he finally plummets to earth, he conveniently lands in the web of a giant spider which turns out to be intelligent.

The slavery of the women did not unduly trouble me at this stage. It was how the world was. Tarl Cabot in fact (if my memory serves me correctly) is most unhappy about this aspect of Gor. However, when I purchased a later book, to while away a train journey, I was appalled. Not only by the book, but by the emotions it generated in me. Suddenly, John Norman was wallowing the horrible details of how women were broken to slavery.

Ellen Pedersen seems to be trying to defend Norman's books as acceptable sexual fantasies, but they are certainly not women's fantasies. The descriptions are of physical pain, imprisonment in tiny cages and humiliations, all designed to break a person's spirit. I wonder what her reaction would have been if the slaves had been black, instead of female? Would she have defended Norman in that case? Would she be writing articles saying it's okay for whites to have fantasies about dominating blacks and okay for middle-aged, white, middle-class American college professors to write books that indulge these fantasies?

What emotions these books arouse in male readers, I don't know, but in me that final book (*Assassin of Gor*) was doing to my fantasy life or my blood pressure and I have never opened a *Gor* book since. Admittedly I didn't *actually* go out and start attacking men and tying them up so I could brand them, but if the books can do that to a respectable mother-of-two, what do they do to impressionable adolescents?

Sharon Hall says a lot of very sensible things about "rape" fantasies and it may be that Gor has many female fans, but I am very unhappy about books that portray women in such a degraded rôle and regard that rôle as a woman's "true" place. Besides, as far as I can remember, there are no rapes described — and certainly none perpetrated by the hero. The most common scenario is that of the available, willing woman, trained to please a man and begging for sex. The rescued princess in *Tarnsman of Gor* is offended when Tarl Cabot at first refuses her offer of sex (his reward for rescuing her). This is a male fantasy, not a female one. The traditional female "rape" fantasy involves the brooding, dominating hero who won't take *no* for an answer and presses his suit relentlessly.

Actually, Ellen has a very refined notion of English society. Maleness has never been defined as good manners: that is being a gentleman. Maleness (for many) has more to do with drinking far too many pints of lager, driving too fast, using bad language and fighting at football matches. Femaleness is page 3 of the *Sun*. The similarity to the Gor "ideal" is close enough to be worrying. You can't stop people fantasising, but you can refuse them fuel for their fire.

So far in this debate, everyone has assumed that fantasies are harmless. But are they? The use of fantasy as an aid to altering behaviour is an established technique used in, for instance, the treatment of phobias. Patients are asked to imagine the object or situation that brings on the fear and gradually they learn to handle their emotions. When they can handle their fears in the fantasy, the make-believe is replaced by the reality. Fantasising about performing well and winning has been recognised as an important tool in training for various sports. Therefore, if a man is constantly fantasising about women as Gorean sex objects, it is going to make it very difficult for him to simultaneously have proper relationships with women and treat them as equals. The main reason I confine my fantasies (both the sexual ones and the more general daydreams) to imaginary people is because to use real people would interfere with my dealings with them in real life. Of course they wouldn't know that I'd been fantasising about them, but I would, and that would alter my perception of them.

JENNIFER COBBING
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THERE'S BEEN SO MUCH TALK ABOUT THE *GOR* BOOKS I JUST had to find out for myself! Of course I've seen them on the bookshelves but hadn't even considered buying them since I read the blurb (a long time ago) and decided they weren't for me. I didn't actually *buy* a book — I took advantage of *Forbidden Planet*'s indulgence of browsers and had a look through a couple.

I was not impressed but obviously someone is or the books wouldn't sell. On the whole I found them juvenile and badly written.

I get very angry at any abuse to women by so-called "men". But not all men fulfil their fantasies by actually committing rape. Research shows that women have fantasies about being raped. These fantasies have nothing to do with reality and don't mean that women go out searching for rapists. Mary Gentle should take a look at the books on the "Romance" book shelves. These books are all about male domination (and often rape) — they are written by women and bought by women. Some of them are more explicit than the *Gor* books.

In my job I have contact with women who have been raped. These women range from shy young girls to old age pensioners and are usually vulnerable, ordinary-looking people. They bear no resemblance to the unreal, luscious, half-naked sex objects in Norman's books.

I know many feminists disagree but I do not believe a bit of macho domination in badly written books urges all men to brutal sexual attacks. The men who *are* raping women don't need a fantasy world in a science fiction book. Their needs are very different.

Men will continue to ogle women in the street, talk dirty about the girls at work and boast about their sexual prowess even if all books, films and page 3 girls were banned. (Hard core pornography is another more serious matter.)

Although I am a feminist (in that I believe I should have equal rights and my independence) I do not believe, as many do, that all men are base, sexually animals. I stubbornly believe the good men outnumber the bad. And I do not believe that this kind of literature does a lot of harm. These fantasies are in men's heads — they won't disappear just because they're not in print.

MARTIN H BRICE
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WHAT IS IT ABOUT CONAN WHICH PROVOKES SO MUCH CORRESpondence? After all, he's a bit of a woodentop. His supporting characters show even less gumption; supposedly worldclass swordsmen are always disarmed at the first thrust and parry. And his women! Okay, things may happen to them, but they themselves never actually *do* anything. They're just living wallpaper. Compared with them the life of the archetypal housebound housewife is a continual round of fun, adventure and crucial decision.

So let's accept Conan as nothing to do with real life. He's just fantasy and if science fiction readers and authors start putting the mockers on any particular form of fantastical writing where will it all end? All literature, no matter whether written, pictorial, audio or visual, is fantasy and nothing to do with real life and real life behaviour. In how many love stories does somebody say, "I can't kiss you because I've got a coldsore on my lip and it'll start bleeding again"? In detective stories, how many times does the robbers' getaway car drive round and round the block trying to find somewhere to park outside the bank?...

So let's accept Conan as just another type of literature. And if his fantasy is too exaggerated for your taste, then let he or she who doth never ever fantasise cast the first bookmark. I can't say that I'm a fan of his books, but I do like the covers, when reproduced in large format without lettering. Look carefully at the backgrounds, the portayal of trees, waves, animals, and a whole realm of natural phenomena: they really are outstanding fantasy art...

Looking at those pictures I know I'd be the one who'd fall over and have to be picked up and put in a safe place while Conan prepared to do battle with yet another monster. Although I suspect that even the fictional Conan must occasionally feel like saying, "'Ere, mate, I'm 'avin' me tea-break. Let someone else go for a change."

«Let's leave the world of somewhat dubious fantasy characters, and take a look at some of the issues sparked off by V141 and V142. First, some comments on an article I enjoyed, but expected to be criticised for not being specifically about SF. But no:»

JUDGE DEE

JOHN OWEN

LJ HURST'S ARTICLE ON THE JUDGE DEE BOOKS IS QUITE EXcellent. I've commented before, in my own zine, that I often read historical novels as extensions of the fantasy novel, rather than as a genre in their own right. Hurst's piece on van Gulik's creation can be extended and applied to other such series, such as Ellis Peters's *Cadfael* series, or the works of such strong historical novelists as Cecelia Holland. To me, the same sense of "estrangement" is present in many of these stories, indeed, it's almost inevitable if the author truly manages to reconstruct the historical context in which the characters move. If that is far enough back (over 500 years, say), then the forces acting upon the characters are going to be different enough to become "fantastic" in concept.

CYRIL SIMSA
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AS SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN A FAN OF ROBERT VAN GULIK'S Judge Dee stories for many years, I was fascinated to read LJ Hurst's article about them in *V141*. It has long been a complete mystery to me why van Gulik's novels have been out of print in Britain since the early 70s. They are, as Hurst points out, not only fascinating for their historical background, but also very readable. In view of the tremendous success of Ellis Peters and Umberto Eco in recent years, to say nothing of their imitators, and the emergence of what might almost be considered a sub-genre of historical detective fiction, one would have thought that some publisher somewhere might have been bright enough to reissue van Gulik onto what is obviously a very undersupplied market.

All his novels have been reissued in paperback in America in recent years. *The Haunted Monastery* and *The Chinese Maze Murders* are available in an omnibus edition from Dover Books *«sometimes available in the UK»*, the other four "Chinese" titles from the University of Chicago Press, and the remainder in the Scribner Crime Classics series.

There is one further Judge Dee novel, *Necklace and Calabash*, not listed by Hurst. This takes place during the period that Dee was magistrate of Poo-Yang (c.668 AD) but is actually set in Rivertown, a settlement adjacent to the Water Palace of the Emperor's favourite daughter. It is one of the last books that van Gulik wrote (copyright 1967). There is also a collection of short stories, *Judge Dee at Work* (also 1967), which has a very useful chronology of all van Gulik's Judge Dee stories to the date of compilation.

I must correct Hurst's statement that the ATV series based on van Gulik's work dates from the early 70s. Though I do not know the exact date of the series, I have two novels reissued by Heinemann in 1969 to tie in with the series.

Van Gulik himself translated an authentic 18th century Chinese detective novel featuring Judge Dee, under the title *Dee Goong An* (Tokyo, 1949), reissued by Dover Books in 1976 as *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee* and currently still in print. It is clear from the introduction and notes (see p 231) that it is this work which first gave van Gulik the idea of writing his own series of Chinese detective novels. His introduction also gives a very useful potted summary of the differences between the Chinese detective novel and its Western counterpart, background information on the Chinese system of justice, and several suggestions for background reading...

Van Gulik's novels are enormous fun to read, and to those of us not familiar with the Chinese tradition they do, as LJ Hurst points out, produce a tremendously invigorating sense of estrangement. They are long overdue for rediscovery in this country, and I am grateful to *Vector* for affording them the sort of publicity they deserve.

CYBERPUNK

DAVID MILLS
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I THOUGHT THAT EVERYBODY KNEW THE DEFINITION OF CYBER-

punk, but if Terry Broome (*V142* p15) wants to know, then here it is:

Cyberpunk is a type of science fiction that contains at least one and a half of the following conditions:
1. Computer software that plugs directly into the brain, preferably via a socket behind the left ear.
2. Japanese-based multi-national corporations with more power than the legitimate governments, probably run by an Artificial Intelligence, and whose heavy mob is a bunch of android Yakuza derivatives.
3. Ageing hippies squatting on derelict satellites in an L5 Earth-Moon orbit.

I am still working on my definition of science fiction, but it certainly does not contain anything about cognitive estrangement.

Finally, isn't Scientology a wonderful religion? It proves there is a life after death. You can tell that good old Elron's brain was decomposing when he wrote the *Mission: Earth* series, but it's not bad for someone who is pushing up the daisies.

CECIL NURSE
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MOST OF TERRY BROOME'S COMPLAINTS ABOUT "CYBERPUNK" seem to apply to the term "science fiction": a somewhat ambiguous definition, a marketing ploy, something a good number of people don't want to be seen doing, a search for "roots" in writing that pre-dated the term, all contributing to the creation of a literary ghetto.

Despite the critical bewilderment that seems to surround the term, I note that Frederick Pohl has no difficulty in replying to a question about "the cyberpunk view" (*V142*). He doesn't like any of the characters. As I recall, punks went out of their way to shock and disgust people, so it couldn't really be called a criticism; more like a recognition of their success. Punk was about recognising and resisting the squelching influence of a commercial music-business machine, among other things, and rediscovering the raw populist energy of pop music. It was extremely cynical about what happened to people who accepted what they were fed, and in general avowed and found virtue in the poverty that so many young people find themselves heir to upon leaving school. What's wrong with recognising a similar attitude in one's own writing and coining a term that might be appropriate?

Cybernation: control by machines. Well, exactly. The intermingling of man and machine in a way that, unlike being bionic or otherwise enhanced, feeds back to change the nature of the being that is created. That, surely, is only one of the aspects of "control by machines" that is addressed, though admittedly symbolic of all the others. What about the continuing mechanisation of human beings, the scientific management of employees, that is occurring right now?

Imagine an Edwardian gentleman presented with a device that is able to do some menial chore quickly, with invarying precision, and without any complaint about wages, boredom or fatigue. He is completely astounded, and inspired. He had thought that dealing with surly workmen was an inevitable fact of life; suddenly he spies freedom. It isn't very long before the virtues of the machine seem to him (and us) to be virtues that human beings should emulate. Aren't the cardboard competent heroes of early SF just that: human beings that have been conditioned by centuries of admiration for machinery into being as useful as machines, our vision of the shining future?

So, I like the term cyberpunk. I haven't read any of the central works nor any of the alleged manifestos, but then I don't particularly care what people say it is or think it is, or isn't. Like the archetypal punk, half of the point is that it is I, not someone else, who decides what it is (and thus who I am), and anyone who goes around accusing other people of being or not being cyberpunk has obviously missed the point entirely and deserves little more than a headbutt. Certainly I won't agree with what you think it is, nor bother to justify myself to you.

JOHN OWEN

KEITH BROOKE TRIES TO CONTEND THAT CYBERPUNK IS SOMEthing wonderfully new under the sun, presumably sprung forth whole and perfectly formed, like Athene from the forehead of Zeus. 'Tain't so, as anyone who has read widely in SF over the past 40 years can (and should) tell him. He berates New Wave and thus places me in the somewhat invidious position of defending something I was never that fond of anyway. But to write such drivel without understanding bodes ill for the future of cyberpunk: after all, with supporters like this, who needs enemies! If he finds Delany a cure for insomnia, maybe he's never tried reading *Babel-17*, *The Einstein Intersection*, because those two books (along with *Triton*) have much in common with cyberpunk. And what about "New Wave" writers, like Zelazny, Silverberg, and (especially) Spinrad. I think you could make a good argument that Norman Spinrad was the first "cyberpunk" writer, yet he is solidly based in the New Wave, contributing to *New Worlds*, etc. Stuff like *Bug Jack Barron* and *A World Between* treat civilisation as an interactive process, much as cyberpunk does, based solidly around information technology, and predating the Gibsons and the Sterlings by a decade or more.

Keith, there ain't nothing under the sun that is *entirely* new: nearly all of it evolves out of something else. This is most definitely the case with cyberpunk, and trying to deny it just does everyone involved in the genre a disservice.

KEITH BROOKE
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IT WAS AN INTERESTING LETTER COLUMN IN *V142*. A LETTER from Mike Cobley in which he comments on the extreme reactions to any mention of cy!##!nk followed by just such a reaction. My point in *V141* was simply that if a number of writers and readers wish to label the sort of fiction they like — whether it be science fiction, cyberpunk or New Wave — what's the harm in why not? Cyberpunk can be described by a number of common factors, such as the generally high-tech nearish future described in fast-moving streetwise terms, the transcendence of the current human form, and so on. Sure, Terry Broome could criticise any definition of cyberpunk, but the point remains that it is possible to loosely group some mid-80s SF together in such a way.

Compartmentalising? Ghettoising? Yes. Here in Norwich I ignore the one bookshop that doesn't have a distinct SF&F section — I don't generally have the time to wade through dozens of non-SF books just to find a few Gibsons or Silverbergs. Just as the SF label constantly highlights new authors, the cyberpunk debate has drawn my attention to several excellent authors associated with Gibson and I, for one, have found the label useful. Being a constant sitter on fences, I am aware of the problems of the *SF* ghetto and I have to rely on luck and fandom to draw my attention to authors that might not be labelled *SF* (Ian McEwan is an excellent example). Also, I was intrigued to see Terry take my comments about Dick and Smith so seriously when I was only trying to say that of *course* cyberpunk has its roots in the traditions of *SF* — another case of the over-heated response to the mention of that word?

REVIEWING

COLIN GREENLAND
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YOUR DIAGRAM OF THE CONSIDERATIONS OF THE FICTION REVIewer is intriguing, if only because it would never have occurred to me to represent them diagrammatically. Everything that's here is relevant, yes; some of it crucial, much of it all too often absent. Of course "not every point in the diagram will appear in every review": it is a chart of questions to be asked, not information to be found.

Still, I don't recognise myself as the reviewer on the left-hand side. When I sit down to work, I never ask myself "How valid is my judgement?" I know how valid my judgement is: as valid as anyone else's. It might sometimes be better informed; it might sometimes be better expressed (of which more in a minute). Nor do I ask "Am I a reliable critic?" any more than an ambulance driver asks "Am I a reliable ambulance driver?" It's work:

something you do as well as you can under the circumstances, while, if you enjoy it as much as I do, trying to do better all the time. Similarly, "Do I know what I'm talking about?" is what my Latin teacher would have called "a question expecting the answer no". I mean, either there's no question; or the question is actually: "If I don't know anything about Jack Vance, should I review *Araminta Station* or turn it down? If I want to review it, how much research am I prepared to do?"

What you're missing most prominently, as far as I can see, is the fact that reviewing is writing. It's *making something*. My consideration is: "What can I make that's 500 words long and will present this book properly to my readers?" — and not only properly but persuasively. The answer will be governed by who they are, who my editor is, how interested I am, how long I've got, as well as all the things on the right hand side of your diagram; but above all it's a question of style. Shall I be amusing? angry? enthusiastic? neutral and factual? Reviewers are wasting space when they say "Rush out and buy this book" or even "Don't bother". It's like the singer in a band saying, "Come on, everybody, dance!" If they have to tell you, forget it.

Incidentally, I always reckon a useful distinction between reviewing and criticism is that reviewing is before the fact, and assumes you haven't read the book (which is why a reviewer should avoid giving away the end of the story), while criticism is after the fact, assuming you have (and if there's a chance you haven't, giving you a good account of what's in it), while putting it into a theory or argument. But there's an overlap, of course.

KV BAILEY
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FROM CONTROVERSY TO CARTOGRAPHY: *VECTOR* EDITORIALS LACK neither vigour nor variety. "Cartography" because that double-spread diagram is no less than a mind-map, a charting of, not simply a reviewer's mind, but of the complex of stimuli, conditionings, skills, insights, expectations and satisfactions which constitute the making/reading/appraisal of a book. It is about as good as a two-dimensional representation can be, but inevitably suffers limitations, because that kind of mapping, with its lines of descent and its inter-relationships, finds its closest analogy in the genealogical tree; and in a genealogical tree the end "twigs" are both disparate lives and "growing points", whereas in the case of the mind-map the entire concept is in its nature holistic. There are no true "lines of descent"; any factor or combination of factors, with all their cross-correspondences, may at any time be operative at the "working face" of the process. This is, of course, implicit in your accompanying editorial text, and in any case doesn't really detract from the great value of the diagram as an analytical (and practical) guide.

A most important feature of the editorial text is the emphasis put on the creative nature of reading. To some extent an author's text is launching an invasion of the reader's mind: maybe a merely petty and distracting one, maybe a grand take-over. This especially relates to that element you place at the heart of your right-hand sector — "the author's world-view". The reader, and critic, may receive it, perhaps suspiciously, or perhaps, on the basis of known credentials, gladly; but always as an experience to be coped with and be in culturation in anything ranging from antagonism to empathy. While all this is so in general, it has particular force in the reading of science fiction.

Sydney Smith, the 19th century critic, litterateur and wit, said: "You should never read a book before you review it. It will only prejudice you." Over and above this being a jibe at reviewers, there may be some sense behind the nonsense. He may possibly be saying that you have to take stock of your own world-view and of all those attitudes, relevant for reader and reviewer alike, listed in your left-hand sector, before completely raising the barrier for the author's entry. There are writers such as (odd pairing) Thomas Carlyle and Robert Heinlein whose world-views I personally am somewhat prejudiced against, but I know that in reading or rereading them that, such are, in their own spheres, their imaginative powers and expressive skills, I shall need all my prejudices to resist the lure of theirs. With the unknown I must, even more, be alert as to how the battle of prejudices may go, without letting this mar what I always hope will be enjoyment of a creation in which an author has invested some of him or her self.

MARTYN TAYLOR
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I WAS INTRIGUED BY YOUR DIAGRAM OF THE REVIEWING "PROCESS", although I'd suggest a more linear sequence (although the other questions are all inherent in the process):

- Question 1 — What sort of work has the author set out to create?

Manifestly you do not criticise a piece of potboiling entertainment for *not* being *War and Peace* (although I fancy the "right thinkers" would criticise *War and Peace* for not being pot-boiling enterainment).

- Question 2 — How successful has the author been, and why?

This is the tricky question, to my mind, especially when working within the word limits of *Vector*. Almost no book will be so good or so bad that the reviewer can tick "Yes" or "No" for this question, and the more problematic the work the more difficult it is for the conscientious reviewer to evaluate.

- Question 3 — Will the intended audience like the book?

Now here is where the "right thinkers" have a point. Members of the BSFA are committed SF enthusiasts. We are *not* the audience towards which books are aimed (unless *Interzone* has begun publishing books...) The intended audience will be both less enthusiastic and less knowledgeable about the genre than we are — and less demanding. They haven't read (and remembered reading) Plot 1A one hundred times already. As an example, my father — who hasn't read any SF since Wells — recently read *Contact* and enjoyed it immensely. Who is right — we who condemn it as being derivative or the reader who innocently enjoys it? There is undoubtedly a tendency to criticise books for not being swans when the author intended to create a chicken — which is poor reviewing, not ideologicaly motivated malice. I know that I as a reviewer have a duty of honest care to the author. I also have a duty of care to my audience, the members of the BSFA, enthusiasts all, experts all.

- Question 4 — Do I like the book?

The fact that the reviewer likes/dislikes/cannot remember the book in question will of course colour everything, but so far as I am concerned personal like or dislike is of limited significance in a review except when it is exceptional. A rave review or a straight one is automatically suspect. For myself I am reluctant to review my favourite authors because I will possibly be harder on them than they deserve. Equally, if I loathe something I must wonder whether I am the right reviewer — although I'd say those books I've trashed in seven years of BSFA reviewing have all deserved it, objectively speaking.

Many BSFA reviewers are writers themselves — of all sorts. We love SF and we review books for the love of it. We have varying degrees of technical knowledge about the way fiction works, knowledge acquired in academic classrooms and in the light of midnight oil poured over hot typewriters. Of course, this may be a spurious expertise but it may just mean we know whereof we speak when we criticise a book for being badly written.

And before the "right thinkers" trot out the special pleading that "SF is a literature of ideas" let me say that a good idea deserves the best of expression, and if the authors the "right thinkers" would have us praise regardless are so good why aren't they more widely read? A quick survey of my local bookshops (and this being Cambridge we have more than Smiths) reveals that the "popular" writers (outside the genres) are all better writers as writers — whatever the subject matter — than the "right thinkers'"heroes. I see no reason why I should pretend a semi-literate is a great writer because he is ideologically sound in the view of the "right thinkers". If I am required to do so then I'll stop giving my time and effort to the BSFA, thankyou very much.

• Continued on p 19

OPUS

Quarterly

Opus Quarterly, now in its second year of publication, was set up to provide an alternative to the larger circulation science-fiction and fantasy publications and paperbacks, and to encourage talented British writers and artists who might not otherwise get the chance to see their work in print.

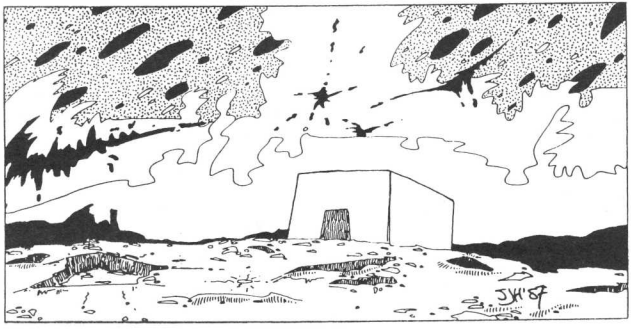
The magazine has quickly built up a reputation for "strange and strong" fiction (*Adventurer*), and in accepting work we look for well written stories with good characterisation and innovation in theme or ideas.

One of our main aims is to publish a wide variety of sf/f, and in doing so broaden the field's horizons. In our first year we have published stories ranging from straight sf to explicit horror to humour to fantasy to the surreal. Our future issues will continue this policy as well as continuing to reflect the state of sf/f short story publishing in the 80s through reviews and articles.

Why don't *you* take a look at the contemporary British sf/f short story scene beyond the pages of *Interzone* and the all too rare anthologies, and join the ever-growing body of readers already enjoying *Opus*?

Individual issues cost £1. 50 in the UK (£1.80 elsewhere), and a four-issue subscription £5.50 (£7). All prices are inclusive of postage & packing (surface mail to outside the UK). Please make payment, in sterling only, to Michael Hearn, Staff House 2, Broxbournebury, Broxbourne, Herts. EN10 7PY.

IN RECENT AND FUTURE ISSUES: Graham Andrews, S.M. Baxter, Eric Brown, Dorothy Davies, John Francis Haines, Kenneth Harker, Garry Kilworth, Kim Newman, Steve Sneyd, Johnny Yen.



BOOKS OF THE YEAR

19 87

IT'S ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO DECIDE WHAT ARE THE best books of the year. For a start, no two people use the same criteria. But at this time of year, with awards in the air, everyone is making precisely that decision. So we thought we'd find out what our reviewers enjoyed during 1987.

KV Bailey

IN GREG BEAR'S *THE FORGE OF GOD* THE GREEN-EYED CHROMIUM spiders and the exploding gourd-shaped robots could have emerged straight from *Amazing*, loved in my youth; but the sophisticated science-fictional self-referentiality, the global paranoia, the masochistic eschatology and millenial horizon-seeking, are perched right on the nerve of our late-century decades. So, two enjoyments for the price of one.

JG Ballard's *The Day of Creation* compels lastingly. That river, like a Yeatsian gyre, springs from fountain to flood, dwindles to source, and flows again through flood to drought, imaging the beginnings and endings of worlds, of memories, of desire. Only John Crowley's *Aegypt*, where systems nest within systems, histories within histories, books within books, for me stretched the boundaries of perception further.

Cheers for the Evans and Holdstock *Other Edens* which anthologised original stories, recognisably British but varied, admitting many such fine snakes as Kilworth's "Hogfoot Right and Bird-Hands", Watson's "The Emir's Clock" and an intricate Lisa Tuttle bio-sexual quadrille. Tuttle's *A Spaceship Built of Stone* I rate high among individual collections of '87, in particular for the dream fantasia of its title, and for the delicacy of both prose and treatment of an archetypal theme in "The Bone Flute" — a mini-classic I suspect.

Chris Barker

THE HOUNDS OF GOD BY JUDITH TARR. THE CONCLUDING VOLUME of Tarr's *Hound and Falcon Trilogy*, and as the first work by a new fantasy author a surprisingly mature work. Because of the simplicity of style, it would be easy to underrate this pleasing blend of history, theology and fantasy, original enough in its treatment of these themes to refresh the bored reviewer.

The Wave and the Flame by Marjorie Bradley Kellogg with William B Russow. Another new pair of writers in a novel reminiscent of LeGuin and Gentle. Again good for its balance of hard and soft sciences with good characterisation and an intriguing anthropological/theological mystery intertwined for good measure.

Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett. I remember reading a book sent to me by the now defunct Reader's Union book club; the book, *Strata*, had me laughing out loud — a rare occurrence. This is funnier than Adams, I thought ... the rest is history. The latest offering from Pratchett was wonderful light relief, not quite as funny as its predecessors though.

Eon by Greg Bear. I bought this afflicted by British Rail boredom. Despite the superlatives on the front, it is good! Hard SF with a sense of wonder and unlike the good old days, an author using real people in his artefact. Follows in the wake of Benford's more literate near future SF.

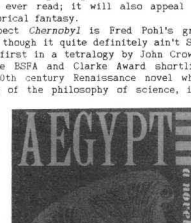
The Memory of Whiteness by Kim Stanley Robinson. The best SF novel I've read for a long time. It's a flawed masterpiece and transcends all my previous choices. The imagery literally sings, it fails only in the fact it reaches its emotional climax on Mars, sometime before the conclusion of the story. Yet I have a feeling this author's best work is still to come.

David V Barrett

THE BOOK OF THE YEAR, FOR NEWS IMPACT, HAS TO BE PETER Wright's *Spycatcher*: fascinating, far better than Chapman Pincher's recycled stories or "Nigel West"'s turgid stuff. *But I'm not allowed to say why!*

Kathleen Herbert's *Ghost in the Sunlight*, sequel to her *Queen of the Lightning*, is one of the best historical novels I've ever read; it will also appeal to lovers of Celtic historical fantasy.

I suspect *Chernobyl* is Fred Pohl's greatest novel (see *V142*), though it quite definitely ain't SF. Neither is *Aegypt*, the first in a tetralogy by John Crowley; but it's on both the BSFA and Clarke Award shortlists. It's an excellent 20th century Renaissance novel which explores the history of the philosophy of science, in its widest sense.



But it always seems to me that the best SF doesn't win awards. Mary Gentle's *Ancient Light* continues the story of Orthe ten years after *Golden Witchbreed*, which it far surpasses — but it didn't even get shortlisted. Neither did Lisa Tuttle's *A Spaceship Built of Stone*, a fine, painful, pain-filled collection; short story collections are ineligible for the BSFA Award.

Finally, it's had a lot of hype, but Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen* really is worth reading. Any book which can overturn my prejudices and preconceptions (comic-books? yeugh!) has to be good.

Barbara Davies

I'VE CHOSEN TWO PAPERBACKS AND THREE HARDBACKS; THE former, although first published in 1986, were only available in paperback last year.

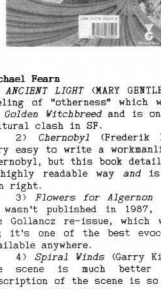
The Ragged Astronauts by Bob Shaw is the first of his books that I've found wholly successful. It brilliantly realises his concept of the binary planets Land and Overland and the technological restrictions imposed by the lack of metal.

Pat O'Shea's *The Hounds of the Morrigan* richly deserves its seemingly permanent place in the children's top ten bestseller lists. Pidge and Brigit's quest for Cuchulain's pebble, fraught with danger yet full of humour, brings back that rare "sense of wonder".

Phillip Mann's conclusion to "The Story of the Gardener", *The Fall of the Families*, charting the decline of Pawl Paxwax, makes gloomy but gripping reading.

Daughter of the Empire by Raymond E Feist and Janny Wurts provides an Oriental slant on SF. The obstacles that Mara of the Acoma must overcome in her attempts to reinstate her family make a compelling story.

Finally, Mary Gentle's *Ancient Light*, while not as impressive as *Golden Witchbreed*, brings the welcome return of Lynne de Lisle Christie to the planet Orthe. A flawed but remarkable book.



Michael Fearn

1) *ANCIENT LIGHT* (MARY GENTLE). THE BOOK CONTINUES THE feeling of "otherness" which was very cleverly portrayed in *Golden Witchbreed* and is one of the best depictions of cultural clash in SF.

2) *Chernobyl* (Frederik Pohl). It would have been very easy to write a workmanlike piece of "faction" about Chernobyl, but this book details the sequence of events in a highly readable way *and* is a memorable novel in its own right.

3) *Flowers for Algernon* (Daniel Keyes). Yes, I know it wasn't published in 1987, but I hadn't read it until the Gollancz re-issue, which was. It just happens to be SF; it's one of the best evocations of personal tragedy available anywhere.

4) *Spiral Winds* (Garry Kilworth). The description of the scene is much better than the plot, but the description of the scene is so good as to almost make you feel you've been there.

5) *Nature's End* (Strieber & Kunetka). As in *Warday*, these two have managed to deal with a terrifying problem (pollution) in a way which is quite scholarly without being depressing. This is not an easy trick to do.

Valerie Housden

BOB SHAW'S *THE RAGGED ASTRONAUTS* ENTERTAINED ME THROUGH Worldcon 'flu. The complex, pre-industrial society, an indigenous life evolving into an even deadlier form and a sympathetic central character make this a great swashbuckler.

Superficially, Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* has little to recommend it, being book two in a trilogy and written by a too-clever author obsessed with genocide. None of the characters are nice, and they do some unpleasant things. Yet I was hooked by his easy style.

Douglas Adams' *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* is a short, very well crafted, time travel spoof, with beautifully funny ideas — I particularly liked the electric monk. It helps to know a little of the life and work of Coleridge, too.

The impact of *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood was as great the second time I read it last summer. This bleak dystopian fantasy is written in beautiful, simple language and contains a rich vein of gentle, underplayed humour, although some disagree.

For her book *The Business Amazons*, Leah Hertz interviewed fifty American and fifty British successful business women, and not a bitch among them. Written in a positive, conversational style, this book is an informative and amusing counterpoint to daft fantasies such as *Dynasty*.

LJ Hurst

THE DAY OF CREATION BY JG BALLARD. THIS APPEARED TO BE received with indifference by reviewers. Many of Ballard's themes re-appear from earlier novels, several incidents are repeated from *The Drought*, yet all this reflects the simple truth that Ballard's world was awaiting famine to arrive as it did.

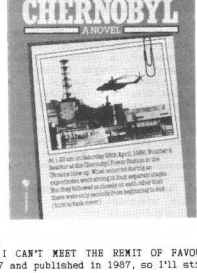
Puttering About in a Small Land by Philip K Dick. I was able to praise this in *Paperback Inferno* but it has then taken me six months to get hold of the two other mainstream Dick novels published since his death. Discussions of whether Dick was a better SF or mainstream novelist are only just starting. There are at least five more novels unpublished. I can't wait to see them.

Star Healer by James White. It was years after hearing of the Sector General novels that I first saw one. I'm glad to see Futura's publication of the whole series and that they're getting good reviews. At the least they're good entertainment.

Perfume by Patrick Susskind. Historical novels like *Perfume*, *Hawksmoor*, *Stone Virgin* and *A Maggot* seem to indicate a new strain of power in literature. They're almost impossible to criticise although it is possible to detect differences between the continental Susskind and the British. In passing, having paid for them, after reading I resented Ellis Peters getting her royalties. Her books are pretty bad.

The 50 Minute Hour by Robert Lindner. This classic study from the 1950s is cited in the SF encyclopædias for its chapter on a man obsessed by his visits to distant planets. The analysand may have been Cordwainer Smith. The other four case histories, though, explaining Robert Lindner's practical use of psychoanalysis are even more gripping. What a pity that he never got a chance to study a scientologist.

My complaint about Ellis Peters also applies to Michael Moorcock's *Wizardry and Wild Romance*. He did himself a disservice in that book.



Tom A Jones

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T MEET THE REMIT OF FAVOURITE BOOKS read in 1987 and published in 1987, so I'll stick with the former.

The Drawing of the Dark was Tim Powers' first novel and has been resurrected by Del Rey because of Powers' popularity. It mixes Suleman besieging Vienna, an Irish mercenary, the Arthurian legends, Vikings and beer — what more could the SF and fantasy fan want?

Speaking of Tim Powers, remember the scenes under London in *The Anubis Gate*? Well you can read the truth in *London Under London, a Subterranean Guide* by Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman. A fascinating history which puts the various engineering achievements in context with society at that time.

B O O K S

I'm a sucker for the orient, it's an alien world to most Westerners and Barry Hughart's *Bridge of Birds* captures this "difference". Using some basic facts from Chinese history he creates a fine fantasy and manages to inject some humour.

I seem to be locked into fantasies because my next choice is Geoff Ryman's *The Warrior Who Carried Life*. This takes the standard sword and sorcery trappings, including the macho attitudes, and turns them inside out. Ryman is a hell of a good writer.

Finally, a collection, Eric Frank Russell's *Like Nothing on Earth*. ERF is a grossly under-rated author who wrote some truly funny stories and that's not easy to do. This contains an interesting cross section of the funny and serious.

Ken Lake

MY ONLY HARDCOVER SF READING IS REVIEW COPIES, AND NOT one I received in 1987 merits recollection so I am driven to consider paperbacks instead.

David Brin hit the spot with *The Postman*, *The Uplift War* and his collection *The River of Time* (which contained "The Crystal Sphere", a story I regard as almost perfect). Bob Shaw's *The Ragged Astronauts* reached me at last and both pleased and amused me, as did David Langford and John Grant with *Earthdoom!* I wish I'd been able to read Terry Pratchett's *Equal Rites* and *Mort*, and hope their paperback editions will appear soon.

But my Number One met with little fannish recognition as its superbly presented political predictions do not jibe with your prejudices — yes, it was Graham Dunstan Martin's *The Dream Wall*, which both spoofed and terrified convincingly.

However, 1987 was really the year of the reprint, and from that viewpoint I have no hesitation in nominating Malcolm Edwards for his sterling work on the ongoing Gollancz Classic SF series — almost every one a winner, and most of them better than any new writing of 1987.

Nik Morton

YET AGAIN I'VE NOT READ MANY NEWLY PUBLISHED BOOKS LAST year. But of those I did read, the following I considered the five best:

The Second Trip by Robert Silverberg. Admittedly a reprint, but still a powerfully written view of an unpleasant future where mind-manipulation is the norm. The language is strong, most of the characters are unpleasant, but the dichotomy between the original criminal and the ersatz mind grafted on is enthralling.

Watchmen by Alan Moore. A comic book and one of the best to have materialised in a long time. Apart from the incredibly detailed multi-viewpoint artwork of Dave Gibbons, the complex script, flashing back and forward between three decades, and interspersed with a fantasy comic to lend graphic horrific parallels with the "live action", hangs together brilliantly. If you don't read comics, then make an exception: there is now available a book of all 12 issues.

The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit by Storm Constantine. She created a mutation creature in our near future, but not some ghoul, oh no, but beautiful hermaphroditic characters whose culture usurped that of mankind, and it worked. The excellent style, the sensual, descriptive passages brought this alive. Although unique, there are echoes of Mary Stewart.

A Perfect Spy by John LeCarré. Well, it's his fattest to date, and probably his best. He breaks every writing rule in the book and gets away with it superbly. Chronology — reintroduced for the TV series — is discarded. The reminiscences of Magnus, a traitor, written down as they are brought to mind, dredged up from a troublesome subconscious. And the haunting presence of Magnus's father is ever present. From the fascinating childhood, lived in the clover provided by the Black Market racketeering machinations of his father, to the shadowy post-war spy networks, Magnus tells it all, with humour, pathos, and tragedy.

Phantom of the Opera by Gaston Leroux. The original, which for many years was overshadowed by the cinematic versions, has been reprinted and is worth a look. The prolific Leroux tells his bravura, mythic story with panache and feeling. The character of Erik, the Phantom of the Opera, is finely drawn and of course is now legendary.

John Newsinger

FIVE FAVOURITE BOOKS: WELL FIRST MUST COME KW JETER'S *Dr Adder*. For me this book was a revelation, an expedition into the realm of male sexuality that only a science fiction writer could have accomplished. It is a crime that we had to wait so many years for its publication. Another book that made an impression was Richard Grant's *Saraband of Lost Time*, a beautifully written novel with a well-realised exotic landscape, memorable characters and a nice balance between the mundane and the profound. Very enjoyable. Also memorable, Robin McKinley's fine short story collection, *Imaginary Lands*. While not every story had the same impact, those by Robert Westall, Peter Dickinson, Jane Yolen and PC Hodgell in particular are model examples of the form at its most expressive.

My last two choices are from the shamefully neglected field of fiction for the young: first Michael de Larrabeiti's *Across the Dark Metropolis*, the kid's book of the eighties as far as I am concerned. The triumphant conclusion of his magnificent Borribles trilogy. Lastly a difficult choice between Diana Wynne Jones's *A Tale of Time City* and Robert Leeson's *Slambash Wangs of a Compo Gormer*. Leeson wins. His novel is the story of what happens when gormless Arnold Radleigh of Denfield Comprehensive and heroic Himsir Dornal of Klaptonia unwillingly swop places. An exciting, often hilarious, send-up that effectively demolishes the values underlying much of the world of dungeons and dragons in a thoroughly enjoyable fashion.

Maureen Porter

I WASN'T CERTAIN I COULD FIND FIVE BOOKS WHICH MADE MY year — I've read so many novels in the last twelve months, and so many were books I would be glad never to see again. However, I offer a selection of books which convinced me that intelligent speculative fiction is alive and well, if fighting a losing battle with bulk pulp.

Grainne by Keith Roberts — an astonishing story, which I devoured at a sitting. It's impossible to convey the attraction of this without becoming incoherent — just read it.

A Tale of Time City by Diana Wynne Jones — proving that children's novels aren't just for children, and that Diana Wynne Jones is getting better and better.

1 9 8 7

Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett — it made me laugh, which is a feat in itself. A wicked, wicked look at feminism and fantasy.

Best Science Fiction edited by Gardner Dozois — as a connoisseur of anthologies, the only way I ever find out about new authors, I can confidently say that for size, quality, and sheer value for money, this far outstripped any other "best of year" compilation I have read.

Always Coming Home by Ursula LeGuin — an anthropological fantasy of the future which was not everyone's cup of tea, I admit, but I like a book which makes me work, and doesn't assume I need to have every last detail spelt out to me. This novel provided the information and let me draw my own conclusions.

For 1988, I would like to see fewer trilogies, tetralogies, sequences, series and other publishers' devices, and a greater number of thoughtful, well-written, and well-edited novels. It's surely not too much to ask.

Martyn Taylor

TOP OF MY LIST IS *FIASCO* BY STANISLAW LEM, WHICH purports to be about a far distant planet in the future but is about this minute, right now, and has Lem writing at his accessible, serious best — full of quirks and knots, but definitely the real thing. Philip K Dick seems to be better regarded now he isn't bothering us with his disturbing presence, but as far as I am concerned, even at his worst he is magnetic. *Radio Free Albemuth* isn't perfect, and presages *VALIS*, but corruscates proof that SF is the literature of ideas. Robertson Davies is not an SF writer, or a magic realist writer, or anything like that, but his books *The Fallen Angels* and *What's Bred in the Bone* show that "real" life is not necessarily mundane, and he writes like an angel (for a professional academic...). Wickedly funny. And speaking of wicked humour, Terry Pratchett's *Equal Rites* only seems less funny than *The Colour of Magic* because I am getting used to reading with tears in my eyes — and there ought to be a law against his puns.

Sue Thomason

MOST ENCOURAGING BOOK OF THE YEAR WAS CERTAINLY THE *Friends of the Earth Handbook* ed. Jonathon Porritt, which encouraged me to get up off my backside and start nurturing the growth of the sort of society I'd like to live in, rather than just sitting and dreaming about it.

Funniest Book of the Year, in the absence of a new Langford opus, was a tie between *Equal Rites* by Terry Pratchett and *How Much for just the Planet?* by John M Ford. The former scores heavily on Ideological Soundness (being about the sex discrimination faced by a young female wizard), while the latter, a Star Trek novel, had me giggling at the patter songs and chortling at the inflatable rubber spaceship, but the thing that *really* finished me off was the Vulcan epic poetry ...

The Silent Tower ties with Barbara Hambly's other new title, *The Witches of Wenshar*, as Best Genre Fantasy; a well-told, convincing tale by a writer who knows and enjoys the genre conventions, using them not as unthinking assumptions, but with thought and care. I like the ethical principles behind the books, as well; Good-and-Evil being of course one of fantasy's most important themes.

Also much enjoyed were *Count Zero* by William Gibson and *Wizard of the Pigeons* by Megan Lindholm; two very different books, both looking at the idea of "reality" as an individual point of view rather than an absolute and universal standard.

But although there's been a substantial quantity of good new fiction published in 1987, nothing absolutely outstanding springs to mind, and a good deal of my reading and book-buying over the past year has been back-filling; Dorothy L Sayers, GK Chesterton, Fritz Leiber's "Swords" series, Naomi Mitchison, Patricia Wrightson. I look forward to sampling the fiction of 1988; may the year produce not simply a bumper crop, but an excellent vintage!

Jon Wallace

FOR ME 1987 HAS BEEN SPENT RE-READING — MAINLY LE Carré's eight Smiley books — a hefty dose of Cold War cynicism. Terry Pratchett's two new Discworld novels offset this. *Mort* shows that Death has feelings too and *Equal Rites* charts the rise of Discworld's first female wizard. Both tremendously funny, with *Mort* having the edge, I think. Death gets all the good lines.

Stephen King's *Eyes of the Dragon* is a fine example of American Fairytale (you know, where the king is a cigar-smoking redneck) written with King's usual superlative skill. It is good to see him tackle something different and make it work well.

This is the Way the World Ends by James Morrow is a long way from fantasy. It is a black comedy about nuclear war and its aftermath, with Morrow's deftness of touch making it horribly easy to read but hard to forget.

But reading *The Hounds of the Morrigan* helps a lot. Pat O'Shea's first novel is a children's fantasy; every character, every incident, every line has the feel of Ireland and a solid, suspenseful story is built round the Irish mythology.

Iain Banks' *The Bridge* mixes surrealism, fantasy and a twist of black comedy to achieve a book which explores the inner mind and motivations of its protagonist in a novel and surprising way.

NOTICE

We humbly apologise for last issue's slip-up; an error at the printers caused pages 2 & 27 to be transposed. Apologies also to Kev McVeigh, whose article on cyberpunk had to be cut at the last minute owing to an editorial oversight. To reduce the risk of further slip-ups, *Vector*'s Production Editor was taken outside and executed immediately.

Although the slip-ups were, in fact, nothing at all to do with the Production Editor, we hope that the membership will be satisfied by this gesture of appeasement.

Posthumously, the Production Editor would like to thank Suzanne Nicholson for her help with this issue. That is, he would like to; but unfortunately he ended up having to do everything by himself. Again.

Many more thanks must go to Sharon Critchfield, whose love, kindness and attention actually had very little to do with the production of this issue — but who cares?

WANTED

***Vector* desperately needs a new Production Editor, effective immediately. The job entails: paste-up of already prepared copy, and design and layout of the pages on A3 sheets, for photo-reduction by the printers. Simon Nicholson, who is having to give it up to concentrate on his freelance work, will pass on to the new Production Editor all his tools and materials, and will be happy to give advice and guidance if needed. Professional skills aren't required; just willingness, patience, time and reliability.**

My personal thanks to Simon for all his hard work in producing some excellent-looking issues, and for not missing a single deadline despite late-arriving copy.

If you think you could do the job, please phone me on 01-688 6081 *now!*

David V Barrett

THE WOMEN'S PRESS— 10 YEARS

SUE THOMASON

HE WOMEN'S PRESS IS TEN YEARS OLD THIS MONTH (April). During those ten years, the Press has grown from a small, specialist "fringe" publisher which produced just five titles in 1978, to its present size and status; a major influence in the much-expanded field of feminist publishing, producing 60 new titles a year and with a strong interest in fantasy and science fiction. The Women's Press is marking its birthday with a series of author events, festive celebrations and film showings all over the country. I thought it might be interesting to look at its impact on science fiction over the last few years.

The first five titles produced by The Women's Press were all re-issues of classic novels by women (four British and one American), which were unobtainable elsewhere. However, the Press soon decided that rather than staying in direct competition with Virago, which also specialised in re-issuing "forgotten" or neglected work by women, it would concentrate on publishing work by living writers, with a balance of about half fiction and half non-fiction.

The science fiction list was launched in April 1985 with four titles, and at first it too was dominated by re-issues of work by well-known authors like Naomi Mitchison, Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ. However, the Press policy of encouraging original work by new writers soon made its mark on the SF line as well, with the publication of a number of challenging new novels and an anthology of original short stories by women.

It's very interesting and encouraging to note that in The Women's Press SF line, there is a much stronger presence by British writers than is usual in a genre which is dominated by a great volume of American work. Another unique feature of TWP's support of women's speculative fiction is the inclusion of a number of humorous/satirical titles. *The Planet Dweller*, the first to be included in the SF range, received a very mixed reception. Since then the Press has published a number of other titles with a humorous element, including one of the funniest fantasies I've read for years, *The Fires of Bride*. There's also a science fiction element creeping into The Women's Press's new Livewire young adults' line, with recent titles being reviewed in BSFA publications.

A significant new development in the feminist SF line this year is the publication of *In the Chinks of the World Machine* by Sarah Lefanu: a critical study of the work of a number of women writers of science fiction, some overtly feminist, others not. The advance publicity for the book suggests that science fiction is seen as a "traditional male preserve", and that a feminist approach to the genre is to reject "the weight of misogynist ideas that burdens science fiction and, instead, use its radical and progressive potentialities".

There was a good deal of ridicule and resistance to The Women's Press when it first began, and there was, and still is, much unreasoning resistance in the science fiction community to the idea of feminist SF. It would be foolish to claim that *all* feminist SF (or even all SF published by The Women's Press) was wonderful simply because it's accredited Ideologically Sound. If one of the unique virtues of feminist SF is a capacity for speculation in hitherto unexplored dimensions of human experience, one of its characteristic faults is the tendency to degenerate into an Ideologically Sound tract in which the story-for-its-own-sake is firmly subordinated to, if not totally squashed by, didactic illustrations of Good Feminist Politics and exhortations to Collective Virtue. In fact, like many young and vital concerns, it takes itself seriously, sometimes too seriously.

However, I remain baffled by the actions of writers like Keith Roberts, who in a letter to a past issue of *Vector* wrote with considerable gusto of his attempt to submit a story to the original anthology of SF stories by women produced by The Women's Press. If his point was that "feminist" is not a synonym for "written by a woman", then I agree with him. It is surely one of the touchstones of a good novelist that she (or he) can empathise with, and convincingly portray, characters who have quite different backgrounds, experiences and opinions from those of their author. But this is no licence for deception.

Another area in which The Women's Press SF line has broken completely with (male-dominated?) convention is in its graphic design. The distinctive stripy spines of The Women's Press fiction titles are recognisable across a crowded bookshop. The covers all use original colour illustrations, often by new artists virtually unknown elsewhere. And there are no rocketships, no traditional clichéd images of men conquering new worlds, rescuing scantily-clad women, and subduing evil aliens; which is a good thing, because you won't find those images in the books either.

To sum up, science fiction in the hands of The Women's Press is alive and well. The SF line is full of fiction that challenges established conventions, both of the genre and in the real world. And this is as it should be in a field which prides itself on its openness to new ideas. Why should men have a monopoly of the future?

In the Chinks of the World Machine

FEMINISM & SCIENCE FICTION

Sarah Lefanu

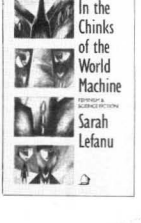
The Women's Press science fiction

Introduction

In the following pages I shall describe the fruits of this marriage between feminist politics and science fiction. The freedom that SF offers from the constraints of realism has an obvious appeal and has been exploited by mainstream writers such as Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy. Its glorious eclecticism, with its mingling of the rational discourse of science with the pre-rational language of the unconscious – for SF borrows from horror, mythology and fairy tale – offers a means of exploring the myriad ways in which we are constructed as women.

Further, science fiction offers women new ways of writing. Despite the growing popularity of the trilogy – an unnerving prospect for the writer as she starts out – there is still a privileged place for the short story within the body of SF. What is perhaps most remarkable is the fluidity of form that SF allows: the set length of the novel does not dominate. Writers can let themselves experiment, writing and rewriting in short story, novella or novel form. More than in any other form of fiction there is an easy flow between writers and readers. Professional writers often start out as fans, writing in fanzines or producing their own. One does not have to be a professional in order to be read. Ideas, themes and characters are borrowed, elaborated, reworked by different people in different forms. One example of this is the elaboration of the Kirk/Spock relationship in *Star Trek* produced and written in a series of fanzines entirely by women. Another is Suzette Haden Elgin's Ozark Centre for Language Studies, where, amongst other things, she is developing the study of Láadan, the women's language of her novels *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose*. Writers, C.J. Cherryh being one example, may invent a universe and then invite other writers to share it. There are many collaborations in SF, such as in the rather unappealingly named Sime/Gen novels of Jacqueline Lichtenberg and Jean Lorrah, and between Cynthia Felice and Connie Willis. And the numerous SF conventions bring together writers, fans and artists from all over the world.

All this leads to a breakdown of the conventional hierarchies between writers and readers, and challenges the conventional authority of the single author. Such an anti-authoritarian style has, potentially, a particular interest for women, for whom writing requires not just self-confidence, but the confidence necessary to break through what can be seen as a male-dominated world of ordered discourse, into a male-dominated world of professionalism.



The book is divided into two parts: an overview, in which I will mention a variety of work by women and look in detail at some of it, and four chapters on the work of individual writers: James Tiptree Jr (the pen-name for Alice Sheldon); Ursula K. Le Guin; Suzy McKee Charnas; and Joanna Russ.

In the first section of the book, the overview, I shall start by looking at the representation of women, or the lack of it, in science fiction, and ask whether this can, or should, reflect the experiences of women in the 'mundane' (to use a science fictional term) world. I will then raise some questions about the function of narrative, drawing on Rosemary Jackson's analysis of the 'fantastic' to explore the subversive potentialities of science fiction. I will describe some of the ways in which science fiction narratives allow the inscription of woman as subject, first by borrowing from Ellen Moers the concept of 'travelling heroinism', then moving on to look at different writers' use of the amazon-figure and the contradictions thrown up by role reversal as a literary strategy.

From narrative as analysis I will move to narrative as the telling of dreams: the traditional 'what if . . .?' of science fiction transformed into 'if only . . .'; then from dream to nightmare, from utopias to dystopias. I will return to woman as subject of her story, looking at the constitution of self and other and the expression of desire; this will lead to a description of the practitioners of what might be called 'women's science fiction' and I will contrast their aims and aspirations with those of the practitioners of 'feminist science fiction'.

Who is Tiptree, What is She?: James Tiptree Jr

Tiptree's assumption of a male persona is at times utterly convincing, although she says that '*trying* to write like a man' was 'the last thing I was trying to do.'[45] As she explains, 'men have so preempted the area of human experience that when you write about universal motives, you are assumed to be writing like a man.'[46] This political insight into ways of writing, into what is *allowed* to women writers, does however mask a certain disingenuousness. As we saw earlier, Tiptree writing in the first person in the *Khatru* symposium was doing rather more than just 'letting people think' she was a man because of the male name. Her work cannot easily be divided into 'universal' – written by James Tiptree Jr – and 'feminist' – written by Raccoona Sheldon, despite her claim in her introduction to 'Morality Meat' in *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* that she used the latter when she 'felt the need to say some things impossible to a male persona', producing 'a few overtly feminist tales'.

Tiptree's feminist vision in fact appears at its most powerful and complex in some of the stories that have a male narrator, or where the authorial voice is mediated through a macho world view, even though, or perhaps because, those stories, at least to this woman reader, are the most disturbing.

I shall look first at 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973), not least for the questions it raises about the nature of feminine and feminist writing, and also for its treatment of the concept of 'the alien', what Judith Hanna describes as 'a, if not *the*, dominant theme in SF'.[47] In his introduction to the short story collection *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* (1975), Robert Silverberg states: 'It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing.'[48] He describes her stories as 'lean, muscular, supple', and goes on to compare her with Hemingway: 'And there is, too, that prevailing masculinity about both of them – that preoccupation with questions of courage, with absolute values, with the mysteries and passions of life and death as revealed by extreme physical tests, by pain and suffering and loss.'[49]

In a postscript to the introduction to *Warm Worlds*, added in 1978, Robert Silverberg says: 'She fooled me beautifully, along with everyone else, and called into question the entire notion of what is "masculine" or "feminine" in fiction.'[50] This is an important point, particularly in relation to what Silverberg said earlier about this story: 'It is a profoundly feminist story told in an entirely masculine manner . . .'[51] Both statements are correct. The notion of what is 'masculine' or 'feminine' fiction must indeed be questioned; it is too simplistic to say that male writers of science fiction concern themselves only with technology or 'hard' science at the expense of development of character and the consequences in social terms of technological development. Such a distinction not only posits a crude sexual dualism – masculine is hard, feminine is soft – which anyway is anathema to Tiptree, but it also denies the connections between the different 'hard' and 'soft' sciences, connections that in good science fiction should be made. The fact that male writers all too often don't concern themselves with the personal or the private, but concentrate instead on so-called 'extreme physical tests', is nothing to do with an essential masculinity. It is to do with privilege, power and the division of labour between the sexes in the writer's own world, that is, now.

To say that this story has a masculine manner is to place it within a tradition in which machismo itself becomes the protagonist. Tiptree appears to allow this, and then subverts it: this is what makes it a feminist story, as much as what 'happens' in it.

SF & FANTASY IN 1987 — A READER'S VIEW

IT'S INTERESTING TO SEE HOW AMERICAN CHOICES of the best books of 1987 differ from *Vector* reviewers' selections. Caroline Mullan looks at the *Locus* recommendations, and says which of them she will and won't be reading, and why.

HAVE BEEN READING SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FOR over twenty years. There was a period of years in the mid-70s when I think I could fairly say that I read most of what was published in English each year. One year I averaged over a hundred books a month for twelve months — I spent most of my non-school time reading — and most of those were recently published SF and Fantasy. Ten years later, with a job, a house, a boyfriend and a social life to compete with books as claims on my attention, I find to my amazement that I am still considered to be well-read in current SF and Fantasy.

The American monthly magazine *Locus*, which calls itself "the newspaper of the science fiction field", each year records "books received", which lists include almost everything that is published in America as or relating to SF and Fantasy, along with a good deal of what is published in other countries. Each February it publishes a statistical breakdown of the American books, by publisher, category (e.g. SF, Fantasy, anthology, non-fiction), hardback/paperback publication, etc., and in the same issue a group of "*Locus* staff, reviewers and outsiders" collaborate in compiling a list of "recommended reading" from the books and stories published in the previous year.

The February 1988 issue is now available, with the statistics and recommended reading relating to 1987. As a long-term and current reader of SF and Fantasy, I found the articles fascinating in relation to my own reading. Hence this article.

In 1987 there appeared "an amazing 1675" books which Locus counted. Briefly (and with some simplification), it counted everything it saw that year that was published in America, that was SF or Fantasy or non-fiction relating to SF and/or Fantasy. The count includes some late-appearing 1986 books, and some early dated 1988. The "recommended reading" list is selected on substantially the same criteria (as far as I can tell from the article), plus of course that of perceived worth by the group making the selection. This group included Michael Swanwick and Orson Scott Card, both of whom review for American magazines, as well as others a British member of the BSFA (who does not also read *Locus*) may not recognise. From this list I have reproduced the three categories of recommended novels: science fiction, Fantasy and first novels.

According to the statistical analysis, there were 298 SF novels published, and the group recommended 32. Of the 256 Fantasy novels 23 titles are recommended. (Incidentally, the statistical analysis splits Fantasy (256 titles) from Horror (96), and the recommended titles do not appear to include any Horror. This is fine by me: I am not now nor have I ever been a Horror reader.) There were 36 first novels among the SF, and 23 among the Fantasy (and one among the Horror); nearly 50% of the first novels are recommended, as opposed to less than 10% for either of the two main categories.

There are obvious problems with taking such a list from an American magazine and discussing it in the Critical Journal of the BSFA. The most obvious, perhaps, is that the list is necessarily a subjective selection by Americans from books available in America. This specifically excludes all foreign books unless they're worldwide editions with an American distributor. On the one hand this means that such British books as *Grainne* by Keith Roberts (Kerosina 1987) and *Ancient Light* by Mary Gentle (Gollancz 1987), to name but two, which BSFA members have been able to read are not considered, and on the other hand that the majority of the titles listed are not yet available to British readers without access to American imports. Even those of us who can buy or borrow American imports have not yet seen most of these.

For these reasons I have divided the *Locus* lists into categories according to the probability that I will read the books in the next year or so assuming they become available in the UK, while preserving the *Locus* categorization into SF, Fantasy and first novels. My categories are:

- **Will Read** — these are books I have already read, and/or own, or will obtain at the first opportunity (books already read are marked "*");
- **May Read** — these I may read if I can borrow them or buy second-hand, or if someone recommends a title to me, but I won't go looking for them;
- **Won't Read** — I'm not likely to read these even if someone makes me a gift of them.

The SF and Fantasy lists contain several books by once-great authors who are still alive and ruining their reputations. *To Sail Beyond The Sunset* was read almost from a sense of obligation towards the Heinlein-that-was. It has become a cliché that Heinlein is past it (most of my friends seem to have given up his books as unreadable

at around about *Time Enough For Love*), but I read on in the hope that some glimmer of the former glory still remains. *To Sail Beyond The Sunset* was *boring*: can I say anything more damning than that? Heinlein is the last of this group to survive this far: Clarke, Zelazny and Niven all have books in this list that I will not be reading; if Asimov was represented I wouldn't be reading that either.

There are some books by authors still great and still alive, authors who have demonstrated their worth and are not diminishing themselves with their recent work. Pohl and Wolfe are two long-established and prolific representatives of this category, while John Crowley has never written a book that was less than superb. My most fervent wish is that these authors live long and write many more good books, but failing that I hope they'll drop dead before they join the company of Heinlein *et al*.

There is also a clutch of lesser authors represented — like Clement, Spinrad, Dickson, and Vance — who have written good books in the past, but whose recent work has not impressed me. Thus their books have temporarily or permanently dropped out of favour, and I won't be reading them until and unless the titles are recommended by a reviewer or friend that I trust.

Five books are "hopeful". The Butler, McKillip, Tepper (twice) and Greenland titles — are "will read", either because the author wrote a really good book once and I hope they'll do it again, or because I think they have the potential to write something really good and I haven't given up hope yet. If these fulfil my hopes they'll end up with the greats; if they don't they'll eventually be demoted to the "worth reading".

Seven books are "worth reading". These — by White, Brin, Card, Hambly, MacAvoy, Pratchett, and Donaldson — are "will read" because, by and large, I expect books by these people to be interesting, competently written (I mean showing evidence of ability to use the English language as opposed to consistently abusing it; I exempt Donaldson from this particular criterion: I like his ideas, not his writing), and to contain evidence of ideas and thought even if these ideas and thoughts are then not fully explored in the novels in which they are set. In a sense I have given up on these authors: I take them for what they are, but once I hoped they were capable of better things. They have disappointed me. Having read almost all their books, I've given up expecting them to write any one significantly better or worse than their average to date. The only thing that distinguishes these from their peers is my taste: I like what they are, but if I were a slightly different person then the Bear, Benford, Blaylock and Powers titles, and a dozen others listed as "may read", would join or replace them in the favoured category; as it is, they don't.

Of the books in the "will read" category this leaves only four not mentioned so far — Swanwick, Willis, Geary and Carroll. These are "awaiting judgement". I've read nothing by Swanwick until now, only short stories by Willis, and only one novel each by Geary and Carroll. I haven't yet decided whether I like these authors, or how much; I only know that they are very well worth carrying on with until I know them better.

I've already mentioned why I won't be reading the Zelazny, Clarke and Niven titles. The remaining "won't read" fall into two groups: one — the Anthony, May and Eddings — comprises books by authors whose work I know well is not worth reading these days (even though in Anthony's case it once was); in the other group, books by Hubbard and Feist and Wurts have caused me acute pain on trying to read a few sentences; there is no way I'm going to subject myself to whole books.

Looking back over these lists one comes to the not-very-surprising conclusion that my judgements are based almost entirely on past experience of the author, with a little help from reviewers and my friends when a particular title is in doubt. The first of these is useless in the case of first novels; accordingly the second assumes more importance.

Locus recommends 29 first novels. Of these I have read the princely total of one: *Swordspoint*, which was, of course, recommended to me by a friend. On the same basis I shall seek out *War For The Oaks* and *Mindplayers* as soon as I can. There are also two books that I have already come across and decided against buying until and unless recommended to me personally. The remaining 24 fall, naturally enough, into the "may read" category for the moment, though I'll almost certainly end up buying/borrowing some of them as I find them.

No-one, not even the adolescent I used to be, can read 1675 books in a year: some selection amongst those offered must be made. Over the next three or four years I may read half of the 84 books listed here, some by design and some more-or-less by chance, as well as quite a few not recommended by *Locus*.

Do I qualify as well-read? And, how about you?

SF

Will read

* *The Uplift War* David Brin
* *Dawn* Octavia Butler
* *To Sail Beyond The Sunset* Robert Heinlein
* *Fool's Run* Patricia McKillip

The Annals Of The Heechee Frederik Pohl

* *Vacuum Flowers* Michael Swanwick
* *The Awakeners* Sheri S Tepper

After Long Silence Sheri S Tepper

* *Code Blue - Emergency* James White

The Urth Of The New Sun Gene Wolfe

May read

The Forge of God Greg Bear
Great Sky River Gregory Benford
The Secret Ascension Michael Bishop
Dover Beach Richard Bowker
Still River Hal Clement
Way of the Pilgrim Gordon R Dickson
When Gravity Fails George Alec Effinger
A Mask for the General Lisa Goldstein
Rumors of Spring Richard Grant
Dark Seeker KW Jeter
The Tommyknockers Stephen King
Memories Mike McQuay
Life during Wartime Lucius Shepard
Little Heroes Norman Spinrad
The Sea and the Summer George Turner
Araminta Station Jack Vance
Voice of the Whirlwind Walter Jon Williams

Won't read

2061: Odyssey Three Arthur C Clarke
The Doomed Planet L Ron Hubbard
Intervention Julian May
The Smoke Ring Larry Niven
The Legacy Of Heorot Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes

FANTASY

Will read

* *Egypt* John Crowley

Seventh Son Orson Scott Card
Bones Of The Moon Jonathan Carroll
A Man Rides Through Stephen R Donaldson
Strange Toys Patricia Geary

* *The Hour Of The Thin Ox* Colin Greenland
* *The Witches Of Wenshar* Barbara Hambly
* *The Grey Horse* RA MacAvoy
* *Equal Rites* Terry Pratchett

Lincoln's Dreams Connie Willis

May read

Weaveworld Clive Barker
Land of Dreams James P Blaylock
The Firebrand Marion Zimmer Bradley
Infernal Devices KW Jeter
Darkspell Katherine Kerr
The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three Stephen King
Swan Song Robert R McCammon
Never the Twain Kirk Mitchell
On Stranger Tides Tim Powers

Won't read

Being A Green Mother Piers Anthony
Guardians Of The West David Eddings
Daughter Of The Empire Raymond E Feist and Jenny Wurts
Sign Of Chaos Roger Zelazny

These lists are taken from *Locus*. All the information is theirs. All the mistakes in this and in the accompanying article are my own.

FIRST NOVELS

Will read

War For The Oaks Emma Bull
Mindplayers Pat Cadogan

* *Swordspoint* Ellen Kushner

May read

After the Zap Michael Armstrong
The Man who pulled down the sky John Barnes
The American Book of the Dead Stephen Billias
The Movement of Mountains Michael Blumlein
A Rose-Red City Dave Duncan
A Death of Honor Joe Clifford Faust
The Shadow of His Wings Bruce Fergusson
In Conquest Born CS Friedman
Teot's War Heather Gladney
Liege-Killer Christopher Hinz
The Brentwood Witches Brenda Jordan
The Net Loren J MacGregor
The Architects of Hyperspace Thomas R McDonough
Pennterra Judith Moffett
Frame of Reference Jerry Oltion
Becoming Alien Rebecca Ore
Soldiers of Paradise Paul Park
Napoleon Disentimed Hayford Peirce
The Leeshore Robert Reed
Memoirs of an Invisible Man HM Saint
Soulstring Midori Snyder
Wild Card Run Sara Stamey
Station Gehenna Andrew Weiner
Ambient Jack Womack

Won't read

Arrows Of The Queen Mercedes Lackey
Reindeer Moon Elizabeth Marshall Thomas

THE FINE ART OF REVIEWING

PAUL KINCAID

OT SO LONG AGO A *VECTOR* READER SENT ME A SAMPLE review. The book had three people credited on the cover, let us say author A, artist B and designer C. It should also be pointed out that A is better known from his television appearances. Within the first sentence of the review this putative critic had managed to suggest that because A was better known as a performer he could not have written this book; because the reviewer had not heard of B (actually a well known figure with many books to his credit) B was not very good; and because the reviewer could not work out C's role in producing the book he had clearly done nothing. That the reviewer later went on to say that the book was quite good only added to the confusion.

An extreme example, but apt. Like probably 90% of you, my would-be reviewer clearly thought that reviewing is easy, anybody can do it. The other 10% are the ones who actually write reviews.

My critic didn't intend to insult the authors, and after I pointed it out in my letter rejecting the review, still failed to see that it was an insult. The critic had simply committed the cardinal errors of:

- putting thoughts on paper without sorting them out first;
- imagining that criticism must be destructive;
- having no context within which to judge the book;
- and a complete blindness to nuance.

LET US BEGIN WITH THE OBVIOUS: A BOOK REVIEW IS A PIECE of writing. Too obvious to need stating? You'd be amazed at the number of reviewers who happily denounce an author's literary shortcomings while repeating those same faults in their own review.

The first and last of the cardinal errors are errors in the writing. As in any other activity which involves committing words to the page, a review is an exercise in communication. Which means knowing the ideas you want to get across, and expressing them clearly, effectively and, in view of the space limitations, succinctly.

It also entails a basic understanding of the meaning and use of words. Until I received the review I mentioned earlier I wouldn't have thought I'd need to spell that out. Without some elementary grasp of those essential building blocks you shouldn't even be writing notes to the milkman, let alone book reviews.

So, let's assume you can write, and you're prepared to devote as much care to a book review as you would to a short story, what are the ideas you should be communicating?

THIS IS WHERE WE COME TO THE MEAT OF THE MATTER, THE whole fraught question of what reviewing is all about. I think the place to start here is with the word itself. What is "reviewing" as opposed to "criticism"?

Some people seem to believe that there is some great and fundamental split between the two, though the nature of that split varies depending on who is telling the tale. There are those who hold that criticism is a high, arcane, academic pursuit beyond the understanding or even interest of mere readers; while reviewing is akin to writing an advertising blurb, a brief note to tell potential readers whether they should buy this book or not. Others see criticism as a slavering-jawed brute, a great, evil, green-eyed monster intent on tearing luckless authors limb from limb, with no desire in life other than to uncover every fault, real or imagined, in a book and destroy for all time the works that simple readers enjoy; while reviewing is a gentlemanly sport that says nice things about books and makes readers and authors feel good at the end of it all.

Neither view comes within spitting distance of the truth.

The two are aspects of the same thing. "Criticism" is a detailed examination of a book which sometimes highlights its faults, but more often looks at its strengths. A good example of literary criticism should reveal something fresh about the book in question, open it up in new ways, explore subtleties, and chase up hints and allusions buried in the text. In other words it should prompt the reader to go back to the book, even a very familiar book, with renewed appreciation and pleasure. Naturally to do this thoroughly requires space — Samuel R Delany devoted an entire book to a critical appreciation of a short story by Thomas M Disch — and time; which is why it tends to be done by academics and at book length. Inevitably a jargon is acquired, and the worst examples of academic criticism are impenetrable, even to other critics. But we shouldn't tar an entire field with the example of its worst exponents.

However, a book-length work of intense critical analysis a year or more in the writing, no matter how perceptive, is no use to the editor of a magazine with a dozen or more books to cover and only half a dozen pages to do it in. Hence the "review". In approach and in purpose it is exactly the same as criticism, but it is written with the limitations of time and space in mind.

Which means that the reviewer cannot be as thorough as, or match the insights of, the critic, but still strives to find the strengths and weaknesses of the book, analyse why they are there, examine what, if anything, lies below the surface, and deliver a critical evaluation which should allow the reader to approach the book with fresh appreciation.

AND HOW IS THIS JUDGEMENT ARRIVED AT?

In *Vector 142* David Barrett produced an elaborate chart to illustrate his idea of the way a reviewer works. In the main I agree with his view of things; it seemed to touch all the bases involved in a critic's evaluation of a work. Perhaps too many bases; I think the chart was too complex and lent too much weight to some things and not enough to others. However, my major disagreement is with his starting point.

The main dilemma facing any reviewer, any critic, is the balance between objective and subjective. Reading a book, however deeply or thoroughly, is a subjective thing. One immediately makes value judgements — that book is good or bad, dull or entertaining — but the job of the critic is to find some objective basis for these subjective judgements — that book is good because the reader is completely absorbed in the action from page one, this book is dull because the author is constantly making jokes that don't come off.

David Barrett leads us into the maze of reviewing through the question: "What type of book is it?" But that immediately raises an objective point to which he expects subjective responses. I would prefer to start with the subjective: "How do I respond to this book? Why?", and find objective responses.

For me, reviewing a book is a series of questions which provoke answers which raise further questions which

... Oh, you get the idea. The extremes are always easy: it can be book is outstandingly good or outrageously bad the review virtually writes itself. But the vast review ty of books are not like that, they belong to the grey region in between, and judgements are much more delicate. One of the worst feelings is when you are reading a review book and thinking: there's something not quite right about this book, but I don't know what. I'm sure every reviewer has experienced this same feeling time and again, the vague sense of a book not working but with no specific fault you can pinpoint. From then on it's hard labour as every possibility is raised and examined: is it the plot, the characters, the writing, the sub-plot? As often as not it's none of these but, for example, an inconsistency between the way the characters are presented and the way the plot requires them to act. The antennae need to be finely tuned for things like that.

Not that the book in question is the only thing to think about. No book is an island; even a first novel stands within a context. Is it the 576th story about the survivors of a nuclear war being called Adam and Eve? Or a clever pastiche of Jane Austen? Or a political satire which sees Don Quixote at large in Thatcher's Britain? What has gone before, what is going on around it, all have their part to play in any full consideration of a book.

But even more than that, no reviewer is an island. Every single thing the reviewer has ever read has its part to play in moulding tastes and knowledge and perceptions, and it is these which go into making the judgement.

So, from that initial question: "How do I respond to this book?", we have moved on to question the elements that make up the book, and the inter-relationship of those elements, and the context within which the book stands, and the context from which the reviewer views the book. It is possible to go on and on, there are always more questions to be asked, new depths to be plumbed, but these are the key questions, the broad strokes that go into the making of just about every review.

Of course, each book is different, throwing up new alleyways to be explored, new diversions to be followed. And not only each book, but often each reading of a book. For instance, I have recently reviewed a re-issue of *Tiger! Tiger!* by Alfred Bester. When first published a good review of the book might have detailed the convoluted plot and commented upon the pyrotechnic writing style. But any review today which did just that would have been a bad review, because it would isolate the book from a new context which has grown around it. Yes, plot and style are as important now as they were in 1952, perhaps more so; but in the years since then the book has acquired an extra significance which any successful review from the perspective of 1988 must acknowledge.

Put simply, *Tiger! Tiger!* is one of the most influential works of science fiction, a precurser, for instance, of both the New Wave and cyberpunk. A review which simply mentions the literary pyrotechnics, for example, might make it sound like just another imitator of the worst excesses of the New Wave; but if the review points out that it predates the New Wave by a decade or more, that it set the scene for the SF of the 60s, and that it still stands out as a thrilling and innovative read when most of its later imitators have slipped into a well-deserved oblivion, then the book has been set within a context which does it justice.

Does this give us any hard and fast rules for what should be in a review? Well, there are certain constants that are in most works of fiction: plot, characters, setting, underlying ideas, writing. Inevitably, any review is going to consider how well these are done, both individually and as part of the whole. But each book holds these elements in a different balance, and the reviewer has to be able to cope with and reflect that. In some instances a review that consists entirely of plot summary may be appropriate (though as a general rule of thumb these are bad reviews), but anyone who spent a review of Anna Kavan's *Ice* looking solely at the plot would find something thin and insubstantial because the strength and beauty of that book lies elsewhere, in the ideas, the writing, the characterisation. At the same time a book like Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* may be overloaded with ideas, and it might be worth devoting a review purely to the discussion of those ideas, but you cannot assess it as a novel without some appreciation of the other factors like character and plot.

You see the problem. To treat a book well one must be able to look to the strengths and appreciate the author's intent; but that must be balanced with an awareness of the book as a whole. It may be possible to write a great novel without plot, or without characters; it is certainly possible to try doing this and fall just a little way short of total success. The reviewer has to find the balance.

It's as difficult to say what makes a good or bad review as it is to say what makes a good or bad book. And there are at least as many exceptions as there are possible rules that one might propose. In general, however, I will stick my neck out far enough to say that a review should provide some sort of key to the work reviewed. I have tried, here, to consider some of the main ways of providing that key. But I can do no more than suggest questions, point towards possible routes. The rest is up to the individual reviewer. A review, after all, is a piece of creative writing.

LETTERS continued

JOHN BRUNNER

I WAS STRUCK BY YOUR REFERENCE ON P19 OF *V142* TO "THE 20th century renaissance novel". (Your review satisfies me that I must read *Egypt*, by the way.) I can think of two such that greatly impressed me: *The Sotweed Factor* by John Barth and *The Recognitions* by William Gaddis. Recommended.

JOHN OWEN

I FIND I MUST AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY WITH ANDY SAWYER IN his defence of Arthur Ransome, whose books in no way deserve to be lumped in with the likes of Enid Blyton: his works are far superior, and as Andy points out, damned good examples of the "fantasising" aspects of children's play. In common with many in my age group, I'm sure, I devoured the Ransome books at about the age of 10 or 11. To them I would attribute my own feelings for scenery and setting, which I find most satisfied by some of the very areas he wrote about: the Lake District, for example. Ransome is now looked down upon: in another fifty years he'll probably be hailed as a classic.

«Re Ed Griffith's letter on Raymond Feist's Riftwar *books:»*

Of course such activity *is* rife in the fantasy field, with far too many authors using clichés as building blocks in the construction of their fantasy world. This endows it with a safe familiarity for the reader, certainly, but also constrains the author, since it precludes the unusual, the unique. Plausible stories must arise out of the environment in which characters are placed, and if the context is hackneyed, then so is the story. If only would-be fantasy authors would just go back after their first drafts, read them dispassionately, then eliminate *anything* that they can identify as a lift from Tolkien, or any of the other fantasists already published. Some hope, it's far too easy to use pre-fabricated materials.

ROB HOGAN
30A Grange Avenue, Street, Somerset BA6 9PF

WHILE AGREEING WITH MIKE COBLEY'S MAIN POINT ABOUT THE use of language being of far greater importance than linguistic analysis, I would like to take issue with his statements in the next paragraph.

In my experience, physicists do spend a great deal of time debating the precise meaning of the basic terms. And a study of the history of science over the past century, or even the past two decades, will show that any claim to accurate and extensive knowledge is purely transitional. In the sciences, today's certainty is tomorrow's quaint old belief.

I would claim the dislodged title for my own discipline, mathematics, and it's slide rules at dawn for any physicist who tries to reclaim it.

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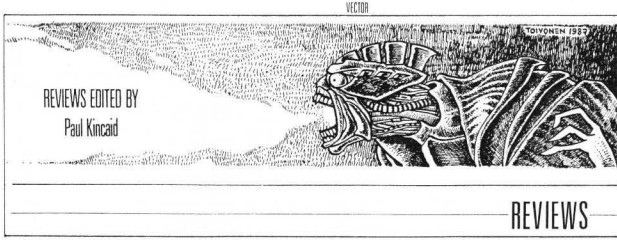

WEAVEWORLD - Clive Barker
(Collins, 1987, 722pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

I'VE HEARD PEOPLE SAY "NICE CARPET, shame about the book" it's not so. If *Weaveworld* wins any awards, it will only be on the grounds of "Never mind the quality, get the scales out"; but it's a good book nevertheless.

Mimi Laschenski, the last Custodian of the carpet, dies. Her granddaughter Suzanna and a fairly ordinary young man, Calhoun Mooney, are caught up in a chase for its retrieval. Within the intricate weaving of the carpet lies the Fugue, the home and people of the Seerkind, humantypes with supernatural abilities, who have magically woven themselves into the carpet for safety against both mankind and the Scourge, an ancient and evil power.

Also after the carpet, but for its destruction, are the Immacolata, a twisted member of the Seerkind, with her sisters the Magdalene and the Hag, and her human accomplice, the salesman Shadwell, the multi-coloured lining of whose coat offers (deceptively) what the viewer most desires.

There is little point in detailing the adventures of Suzanna and Cal in England, in the carpet, and in the Fugue when it is released from the carpet; suffice to say there is excitement and horror aplenty. Some of the scenes of the Magdalene raping human males to give almost immediate birth to her "by-blows" are humerous.

On the whole, the book works well on the mythological level. The epigram in a book of faery tales given to Suzanna by Mimi, "that which is imagined need never be lost" is a recurrent theme. The links with "leftfield" Christianity are also, on the whole, well-handled:

> She didn't need to be a believer ... to be touched by the image of the Madonna and Christ-child. Whether the story was history or myth was academic ... all that mattered was how loudly the image spoke.

and a little later:

> "I find all this difficult to believe, not being a Christian ... But you still think the story's true?"
> "We believe there's truth *inside* it, yes."

Worthwhile points, but Barker gets confused over the triune female principle, Virgin, Whore and Hag, all showing their dark face; and over his identification of the Immacolata with "a dozen different names -- the Black Madonna, the Lady of Sorrows, Mater Mallicorium"; the Black Madonna is identified with Mary Magdalene, the Mother Whore, not the Virgin.

Weaveworld is a better than average horror story, - it holds the attention throughout; I felt for the heroes, and I feared their opponents — but no more than that. The packaging makes it appear much more: the beautiful cover, the woodcut initial letters of each chapter; even the massive size is a cheat: a large typeface, widely spaced lines, each of the 103 chapters starting a fresh page, blank pages and full title pages for each of the 13 parts and three books. Normally presented, *Weaveworld* would be two-thirds the size, and less than half as impressive.

ANATOMY OF WONDER - Ed. Neil Barron
(Bowker, 1988, 674pp, no price given)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

WHEN ANATOMY OF WONDER APPEARED IN 1976 it was the first comprehensive critical guide to science fiction. Now in its third edition it is still an indispensible part of any reference collection. Nowhere else in one volume do you find such a wealth of information about science fiction. There are brief but worthwhile essays on the history of the genre, divided into four periods: up to 1920, 1918-1938, 1938-1965 and 1964-1986, each accompanied by a brief critical account of the most significant titles of the period. The modern period, for instance, details over 670 titles, and though a synopsis or two or three sentences can do no more than suggest the content of a book, the listing of comparable and contrasting titles makes it more than a reading list. In fact it is remarkably effective at providing a context for the books that are familiar, while leading on into unfamiliar and refreshing territory. Similar treatment is provided for children's SF, as well as SF in German, French, Russian, Japanese, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian, Romanian, Yugoslav and Hebrew. Even such standard reference works as the Nicholls *Encyclopedia* and *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers* hold me little or nothing about work that did not appear in English.

All of this, plus the splendidly balanced "Core Collection Checklist", should make this a must for any SF collector or completist. But on top of that there is a "Research Aids" section which makes it invaluable for every critic or writer on science fiction. Where else can one find, readily available and easily accessible, a guide to SF criticism and reference works, listings of particular author studies, a look at teaching materials, and details of SF libraries and collections. In fact everything that one requires to begin research is here at the fingertips.

As for accuracy, well he does estimate that *Foundation* reviews 100 books a year, while *Vector* reviews 80. In fact, in 1987 *Vector* reviewed 193 books and *Foundation* reviewed 37. But I think we can forgive that, since the book is, as a whole, far more accurate than that. And he does say some very nice things about *Vector*, and the BSFA as a whole.

GREAT SKY RIVER - Gregory Benford
(Gollancz, 1988, 326pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Ken Lake

LOADING THE DICE AGAINST YOUR PROTAGONISTS is one thing: making them unnecessarily stupid just to make the plot work is cheating. Introducing the memories of dead protagonists, injecting them into "chips" that nestle in the characters' skulls, then having them ignore the vast background of knowledge and technology that those "aspects" can impart, merely annoys the reader.

The "aspects", however, are used by Benford as his way of imparting to us the how and why of his imagined world. He does this by having them spout on interminably and boringly for no wonder that we can't be bothered to listen: why should we? To bulk out the book, each "aspect" has his own typeface; all spaced out widely and unnecessarily, because each is so idiosyncratic it's instantly recognisable without the typescript labelling.

Our part-mechanised humans are fighting "mechanicals" which aim to remake the planet to suit themselves, destroying the remnant as part of this plan. The humans are totally reliant upon mechanical aids for life, communicating by radio and radar — yet the author has given them a bastardised speech which, relying upon instant recognition of terminology

B O O K S

for the safety of the Family, relies heavily on four words: *heysay, yeasay, naysay,* and *aysay*, when the immediate confusion of sound would have ensured such silly expressions were never adopted.

The book is basically a reiteration of bickering and killing, themes which seem to turn up with such frequency in modern American SF that I begin to wonder what fandom must be like over there. All this would be bad enough, but the dustwrapper tells us that this is "the first of three novels ... exploring the one of the strangest regions of space: the centre of the galaxy where (as recent scientific investigation has revealed — *it says here*) an immense black hole is gradually drawing tens of thousands of suns into itself."

However, before I had even gotten deeply enough into the book to pick out its obvious and fatal flaws, I was brought up sharply by the stunned verbal infelicity of this "internationally respected scientist" when, describing superbly the ruined city, its desolation, the terror of the hero searching for his father and finding his wife, her dead eyes staring ... goes on to tell us that its "delicate towers had glistened like rock candy." Bathos rules!

ANCIENT OF DAYS - Michael Bishop
(Paladin, 1987, 366pp, £4.95)
WHO MADE STEVIE CRYE? - Michael Bishop
(Headline, 1987, 309pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

THESE TWO BOOKS COULD NOT BE MORE different. *Ancient of Days* might be described as a mainstream novel with SF elements, whereas *Who Made Stevie Crye?* is a horror story with "photographic illustrations" by J.K. Potter.

Ancient of Days supposes that a previous human species, Homo Habilis, is alive and well and living on an island near Haiti. One of these black, ghoul-like men reaches the southern USA, there to meet up with the ex-wife of the narrator, Paul Loyd. The story covers Paul's reaction as he realises that Ruth Claire prefers an apeman to himself, the marriage of Ruth Claire to "Adam" and their subsequent child, Eve, the rise of TV evangelists and the Ku Klux Klan to these events, and finally the Habiline colony itself. Along the way we are also shown the spiritual development of a primitive man when he comes into contact with modern civilisation..

Bishop covers many topics — religion, metaphysics, anthropology, art, racism and voodoo to name a few! This slows the book down after its promising beginning. The style is very erudite with occasional lighter contributions by the narrator. Unfortunately Paul is a rather unsympathetic character which results in some alienation of my interest. Since he is the catalyst or witness of all the events this is a major drawback.

Who Made Stevie Crye? is about a young widowed writer, her two children and her typewriter. When Amy Stevenson Crye's Excelerite typewriter breaks down, lack of funds sends her to a strange repair shop where her machine is "fixed" by an even stranger repairman and his monkey. The typewriter now types by itself, but is it chronicling Stevie's progressively more weird dreams or actually causing them? The dreams become indistinguishable from reality as Stevie's dead husband, the repairman, and especially the monkey become key figures in her nightmare existence.

The heroine's contrived name, the flimsy basis of the plot and the padding out with "photographic illustrations" hint that this may have started out as a short story. The characters are unconvincing and their speech rather wooden. Stevie calls her daughter "daughter mine" for example. The style is very colloquial American, making constant reference to things and customs which are unfamiliar to me. At one point we are told that Stevie has written a short story, and it is presented to us in full as "the Monkey's Bride". Somewhat immodestly, Bishop then has Stevie say "For a first-timer it's pretty bloody marvellous." Tongue in cheek, maybe, but one more thing that grates.

A comparison of these two books reveals that Michael Bishop changes his vocabulary and style to suit the particular genre and audience he is addressing. *Who Made Stevie Crye?* passed me by completely, but I would recommend *Ancient of Days* as an interesting if imperfect book.

MINDPLAYERS - Pat Cadigan
(Gollancz, 1988, 276pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

AS TECHNOLOGY CHANGES SO DOES CRIME, but there are similarities between horse stealing and Grand Theft Auto that cannot be seen between forging a signature and stealing a personality. Once you have the technology that can strip a mind, and you have a world in which people are prepared to do it — who swap characters as fashion changes, who become addicted to or steal the creativity of other people which they can never achieve themselves — you are in a new world, perhaps a horror story. *Mindplayers* has this background, and though Deadpan Allie, the protagonist, is relatively a good person it is difficult to sympathise with her or indeed anyone else we meet. There is little zest in the play implied by the title.

In the spirit of many melodramas Allie is rescued from a life of psychocrime. Her special talents are recognised, she is trained and becomes a pathosfinder — going into someone else's head to help them clear up. The last half of the novel deals with several of her cases — Rand Gladney, whose personality has been stolen; a pair of composers whose partnership has broken up and caused major psychic damage.

The psychological theories underpinning the book aren't clear — punning terms like "pathosfinder", "alerted snakes of consequence", a page full of dots, indicate something like Freudian theories put to use. In her mind search, though, Allie discovers people living within her who are part of her, and this is much more Jungian than Freudian. Within himself Jung found a Dwarf and his feminine Anima, a sort of Carla Jung, when he introspected; Allie finds people she knew nothing of within her, and events just as astonishing as her discovery occur within her clients. Her treatment consists of bringing the personalities together, in echoes of *Three Faces of Eve*. At the same time as the treatment implies everyone consists of multiple personalities reconciled in varying degrees, Rand Gladney regains his craft from an organic source not from something abstract.

Mindplayers, then, is a novel of possibility not certainty or probability; it is about that view of SF that says Allow this hypothesis and work on from that, rather than a more hard SF attitude which would define a more certain psychological science as its premise. As it is, the book tends to ignore the hard side (apart from how nerves make contact between pathofinder and client — you thought putting in sockets lessens the bad enough!) and concentrates on the communication following, which means long passages printed in italic as of course this is unspoken. The book equally avoids many of its opportunities for action — Allie never fully escapes the criminal who introduces her to mindplay but neither he nor his milieu ever invade her world in a gripping way. The lack of action combined with the weak scientific basis ultimately makes the book slow and boring. Nothing comes from nothing.

THE DOLL WHO ATE HIS MOTHER - Ramsey Campbell
(Century, 1987, 284pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Nik Morton

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1976, *THIS IS* one of a number of reprints heralding the new Century Fantasy & SF publishing line. Ramsey Campbell needs little introduction, he is one of the foremost horror writers in Britain, and respected internationally too.

Apart from the atrocious title, doubtless selected for its eye-catching phrasing more than any attempt to reflect the content of the book, this is a good, deceptively easy, gripping read. Campbell has an eye for detail, and uses it to good effect portraying his home town of Liverpool where the action takes place; and he is not afraid to acknowledge the many people and institutions who provided him with time and assistance to get the details right.

B O O K S

Clare is involved in a traffic accident, her brother Rob is killed: a freak occurrence, but his severed arm vanished, stolen by the pedestrian who caused the crash. A crime writer herriends her and together they try to track down the ghoul, suspecting that the thief was someone from the writer's past. During their investigations they interview a number of people, all drawn from life, all distinct personalities. As the events from the past unfold, threatening to overtake them and destroy them, the tension mounts. We care for these people, even the unfortunate "monster" they are stalking — a product of an evil mind, or somebody sadly warped by his grandmother's unremitting reminders of his birth. Why do we care? Simply put, there is gritty realism, the characters seem to speak in the real world, they have mixed-up and sometimes dark thoughts, they are *real*. Though it could be termed fantasy — as could most fiction! — the horror is not overstated, the events are consistent. Of course, the paperback has been available for years so there is no real incentive to buy the hardback, but it is a good read.

THE INFLUENCE - Ramsey Campbell
(Century, 1988, 234pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Jim England

RAMSEY CAMPBELL HAS BEEN QUOTED AS saying "If I'm lead to believe that my field can't achieve something, I'll give it a try." He is talking, of course, about the horror genre. In this and other novels, what he is trying to achieve is a transposition of something like Lovecraft's doom-laden New England to contemporary Liverpool, complete with foxteth, high rises, pollution, videos and vandalism. It is an unenviable task and a moot point whether or not he has succeeded. He is brave to make the attempt, but I have serious doubts as to whether it is worth the effort.

Derek and Alison have an eight-year-old daughter, Rowan, and live with matriarchal old Queenie in the latter's decaying mansion. The strong-willed Queenie believes that she need never die. When she dies, she is buried with a locket containing young Rowan's hair. Shortly after, Rowan's behaviour changes (her schoolwork and spelling improve, to give a trite detail) and Alison begins to suspect the horrifying truth that Queenie has somehow returned to life in Rowan's body: she is the evil "influence" of the title. In due course, Queenie is persuaded to leave the body, the child re-enters it and everyone (except Queenie who has gone wherever dead people go) lives happily ever after. Anyone who seeks to know how Queenie entered the body in the first place is doomed to disappointment.

According to John Farris on the cover, Campbell has in this book

> set a difficult challenge for himself and succeeded brilliantly, mining the dark recesses of the human psyche where only the most talented of novelists say go;

according to James Herbert "it's Ramsey Campbell's finest"; and to Clive Barker "Campbell writes prose as incisive and elegant as anything the mainstream can offer". But all these judgements are so absurd as to leave me almost speechless. Campbell has written better stuff. He does no mining of the human psyche here but presents poorly drawn characters having banal thoughts. The prose is the opposite of "incisive and elegant"; it is often rambling, incoherent, padded and written (like the dialogue) in a sloppy, contemporary idiom.

Some minutiae (faults?): he describes a school teacher reading *The Sun* whilst a class works, a nurse in a hospital reading a story to a child patient (on the NHS?) and "the green neon glare" of a fish and chip shop. He is a writer of undoubted talent, at his best in conveying atmosphere through modes of description that often take chances with strained metaphors — "a dark smell" "a gaping hush" — and one has to admire him for this. But finally it saddens me that this sort of morbid potboiler is being published under the "Fantasy and SF" label. It appeals to gullible readers whose minds are back in the pre-scientific Dark Ages. How much better it would be if Campbell would employ his talents in bringing them up to date by writing about the real contemporary Merseyside in the honourable tradition of proletarian mainstream writers.

2061: ODYSSEY THREE - Arthur C. Clarke
(Grafton, 1988, 254pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by John Gribbin

I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. I'M THE person who thought *2010* was a better film than *2001*. Of course, the first space odyssey never was a book, until after the film; and the second was also very much the book of the film. So *Odyssey Three* is quite different from either of its predecessors — a genuine Arthur Clarke *book*, which has no connection with any film, past, present or future.

Clarke is at pains to point this out, telling us that his stories are "variations on the same theme," but "not necessarily happening in the same universe." So it is no use quibbling over inconsistencies of detail and characterisation from one odyssey to the next.

"Characterisation," of course, is a word that must be used sparingly in connection with Clarke's work. This, indeed, is good old fashioned SF, in which the science is more important than the fiction, and the people are only there to provide a backdrop for the scientific exposition. Clarke had planned to use data from the space probe Galileo as the basis for his novel; Galileo's trip to Jupiter, originally planned for the late 1980s, is still the subject of indefinite postponement because of the *Challenger* disaster. So, instead, he has used data from the probes that visited Comet Halley on its recent pass through the inner Solar System — which is why the action, such as it is, is set in 2061.

This could have made an excellent basis for a story in its own right. The connection with the Odysseys exists, it seems, largely because Clarke was already working this up in his mind when Galileo was postponed, and had a nifty idea he didn't want to waste, and partly because there might be a more ready audience for *Odyssey Three* than for *Halley One*. But *Halley One* would have been a better book.

What you get here is less than the sum of its parts — by no means vintage Clarke, but a good light read with echoes of the old master. Parts of the book feel like *Imperial Earth*; in places, I am almost reminded of *A Fall of Moondust*. Characters are placed in what ought to be life-threatening and suspenseful situations, but where you know rescue is at hand. It is cosy, comfortable, and you learn a little bit about the Solar System along the way. I like it, just as I like Dick Francis thrillers, but I wouldn't recommend it for any awards.

Of the three grand old men of SF still writing, though, Clarke is the one worth reading. (I don't include Pohl as a grand old man; such a versatile and prolific author of the eighties is clearly young in every way that counts.) With Heinlein and Asimov both obsessed with tying up every loose end in every story they ever wrote into one messy knot, he is still recognisably the author we knew in the fifties. If you find that thought comforting, you'll like the book; if not, you have been warned.

INTERZONE: THE SECOND ANTHOLOGY - John Clute, David Pringle & Simon Ounsley (Eds) (206pp)
A TOUCH OF STURGEON - Theodore Sturgeon (Selected and introduced by David Pringle) (234pp)
(Simon & Schuster, 1987, £10.95 each)
Reviewed by Mike Moir

THESE ARE THE FIRST TWO BOOKS FROM the UK incarnation of Simon and Schuster. It seems rather brave to launch a new publishing venture with two short story collections, but perhaps that's the influence of the other common element — David Pringle, of *Interzone* fame.

Before passing any comment on the books I must admit a bias, I am no great lover of short story collections. In fact I think this *Interzone* anthology is probably the first time I have ever finished an anthology.

B O O K S

As I am also not a regular reader of *Interzone*, I had read only about one third of the stories before. So the book came as rather a surprise: I greatly enjoyed it. Nearly all the stories had merit and many of them were of a high calibre. Most interesting of all was the juxtaposition of the stories by seasoned professionals and newcomers. The newcomers compare very well, they gained in originality, but overall they lacked the polish of the "old pros". On the establishment side there is one of the best Ballard stories I have read in a number of years and very slick stories from Benford and Disch. Most memorable of the newer writers were Kim Newman, Peter Garrett and Paul McAuley.

Read this book and know that there is a future for SF, and quite a bright one it is too.

In complete contrast the Sturgeon is a one-man retrospective. I can remember reading him voraciously about 15 years ago, I read all that was then in print, and have not read him since. I really wanted to like this collection, but I could not.

It contains some classic Sturgeon stories and some rarer ones, at least unknown to me. There's a bias towards one of Sturgeon's favourite themes, that of fantastic pseudo-scientific explanations for well known phenomena such as spontaneous combustion.

Usefully the stories are in chronological order. The earlier ones, especially "Killdozer", are powerful but rather gung-ho "America the Brave". As time progressed the stories seemed to lose some of their power and gain compassion instead.

I cannot really put my finger on why I disliked the book so much, I have to put it down to my personal taste. I am confident many readers will enjoy this book, but some, like me, will not.

On the basis of these two books, Simon and Schuster, not forgetting David Pringle, have started quite well. In the present publishing climate it's most important that they continue, we need them badly.

THE BEWITCHMENTS OF LOVE AND HATE - Storm Constantine
(Macdonald, 1988, 411pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Nik Morton

THE SEQUEL TO *THE ENCHANTMENTS OF Flesh and Spirit* (*Vector* 141) — at the end of that book I longed to find out where young Pellaz's future would lead him, but this book hardly touches upon him. It's another first-person narrative, this time by a true-born Wraeththu. Swift was born from a black opal emitted by his bonding, Calveh, whom we met in the first book. We now see the Wraeththu culture through his eyes, and probably the only criticism I can level is that the voice of the narrator is virtually indistinguishable from Pellaz's.

In the rambling mansion called Forever, young Swift passes an idyllic childhood and a sheltered adolescence, unaware of the mysticism and depravity surrounding him. But he is sensitive, soon to become sensual, and perceives that the atmosphere is threatening, that *change* is hovering. Again, the author's excellent command of her character's feelings, her apposite and often haunting descriptions, help to make this a memorable novel. Her prose is never dull:

> Our house, throughout the ages, may always have been a place of secrets. Hmong the curtains, whispering, all the long corridors rustling with the confidences of unseen lips ... and at that time, Forever was our only world.

I made a point of not reading the blurb before reading the book so was able to learn much that is rashly divulged by the blurb writer, but at the author's more measured pace; and the revelation, of incipient destruction of the Varr tribes at the hands of the newly awakened Swift, though inevitable, was a powerful exposition.

Swift learns to love, and to hate, and to betray. But he also learns to subsume all emotion for the greater good of the Wraeththu. The seemingly alien culture from a mutation in our near future, of creatures with striking beauty and mystical powers, is gradually unfolding: this book disclosed more powers, called to use through the arcane sexual-magical acts of Swift, the weaving of more threads in the tapestry designed by the first Wraeththu. The remnants of humanity have not been ignored, they make moving appearances, often female, envying the beauty of the hermaphroditic Wraeththu. The upshot of this melding of the old defeated culture with the powerful new is that where it was believed that the Wraeththu would not have a use for the frail, debilitating passions of mankind, such emotions are percolating through. Whether this is making them impure or better is not yet clear.

Flesh and spirit, love and hate: what now for the Wraeththu? The questions still hover: what of this godlike race, would they survive? Even after over 700 pages in two books, I'm still intrigued by this Wraeththu saga. I feel you will be, too. Now that the paperback of the first book has come out, I recommend you obtain it, it is powerful writing, creating characters and scenes which are memorable and *different*, far removed from stereotypical fantasy genre fare.

SPHERE - Michael Crichton
(Macmillan, 1987, 368pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by John Newsinger

A SPACESHIP IS DISCOVERED A THOUSAND feet under the sea and the evidence suggests that it has been there for at least 300 years. This is the opportunity with which Michael Crichton confronts his handpicked team of academic misfits. They are sent into the depths to investigate, and find themselves involved in a plot that uneasily mixes *Forbidden Planet*, *Jaws* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

The story opens with a series of humorous digs at the petty jealousies of the academics assembled to unravel the mystery. Then, quite skillfully, Crichton introduces a growing sense of danger, of unknown menace.

The spaceship, they work out, is actually from a future Earth and has somehow been lost in time, crashing hundreds of years in the past. There are no crew aboard. What happened to them is not a subject that Crichton chooses to explore, although without such an explanation there seems no compelling reason for his making it an Earth spaceship to begin with. An opportunity missed perhaps?

Predictably bad weather forces the withdrawal of the surface support ships leaving the investigators alone in their underwater habitat, with the mysterious sphere that the spaceship contains. At this point the novel begins to loose its potency and fails to fulfil its early promise. This reader confidently expected some threat comparable to, say, *The Thing* or *Alien*, but instead all we get is a 19th century horror out of Jules Verne.

The manifestation that comes to attack and destroy our heroes is unfortunately too mundane to actually generate the tension, the alarm that Crichton is clearly aiming for. His borrowing from Verne will not, one suspects, impress readers reared on more exotic and outlandish horrors and the book looses considerably in this respect.

One other criticism. Crichton fixes the burden of guilt for the dangers that overwhelm the team on two characters: a black man and a feminist woman. They have chips on their shoulders and it is this that causes the deaths of their colleagues. Their problems are explicitly identified as problems of psychological adjustment. However, the terrible experiences they undergo bring them to their senses. This sort of writing is clearly political, but Crichton writes carefully enough not to have spoiled the enjoyment of at least this reader.

Having sounded a generally critical note, let me conclude by emphasising that this was quite an enjoyable read. It could have been so much better though.

FIREBALL - Paul Davies
(Heinemann, 1987, 178pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Michael Fearn

A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WILL ENJOY this book, even if they are not SF readers. There are few enough books in any genre which contain interesting ideas but are an easy read. The author of this first novel, Professor of Theoretical Physics at Newcastle, has written what (we are told) is to be termed a *scientific thriller* rather than a work of SF.

B O O K S

Fireballs have been causing death and mayhem throughout the Western world. Aeroplanes explode, trains are wrecked and an entire American town is vapourised. The superpowers begin to square up for Armageddon.

Meanwhile Andrew Benson — an embittered scientist whose career has been blighted — is called upon by the British government to find the cause of the phenomenon before the proverbial balloon goes up. Initially, he resists because of a healthy mistrust of government motives. Benson's researches start at ball lightning and end in a way which reminds us, if we needed it, of the black farce of military paranoia.

In *Fireball* the characters are typical, not only of the 50s/60s school of British disaster SF, but also of a light university novel. It quite definitely belongs to this second tradition too. Benson is gratuitously unsympathetic. He isn't even attractive enough to be an anti-hero, and his girlfriend and fellow-academic, Tamsin Bright, suffers from the problems all too common to the depiction of women in SF. She seems simply there to provide semi-intellectual "noises off" for the great man's deliberations. A rather dippy comment about the moon which Davies puts into her mouth whilst on a busman's holiday in Venice is the inspirational trigger towards the solution. Even making all possible allowances, some of the dialogue is nothing short of putrid: "Do you mean the Americans have Fireballs too!" One is tempted to add: "Gee whillikers!"

There is one character who lives, whose portrayal is genuine and touching: Leonid Burkov who is freed from internal exile in the USSR to work with Benson. The account of the cruelties he has faced places before the reader a reminder of the effect upon intellect of totalitarian cultures.

It would be very easy (but a little unworthy) for habitual readers of SF to be clever at the expense of this book and its author. To read *Fireball* is a similar experience to wearing old clothes. They are comfortable, even if they do smell musty and are a little threadbare in a few embarrassing places.

VALIS - Philip K. Dick (Afterword by Kim Stanley Robinson)
[Kerosina, 1987, 256pp, £13.95
Collector's edition £37.50]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

THIS BOOK HAS TAKEN ME A LONG TIME to read and I am quite unable to say exactly why that is. The usual reasons for a review book (i.e. one you have to read) to take a long time is either than it is a very long book, or that you dislike it. Neither of these is true in this case. The book is relatively short, and far from disliking it, I though it was remarkable. At least a part of the rea[illegible] must be that it is a book which [illegible] thought from the reader; it's [illegible] book you can read while watching [illegible] cooking the dinner, or even [illegible] melee of people, and as solitude is such a luxury the book stretched over weeks.

It is largely about **Dick** himself; in the afterword **Kim Stanley Robinson** names the original [illegible] the two other main characters and details some of **Dick**'s own personal history so that the real life context is apparent in the writing and emotion of the work — which I will not call a novel as it is altogether too autobiographical.

The narrator is Phil **Dick**, the sane SF writer, who describes the breakdown, suicide attempts and subsequent religious revelations of Horselover Fat — who is, of course, Dick's other self. I've been told that there's a religion in the USA founded on this book, which I find perhaps more than I can accept, but the coherency and conviction which permeates the whole narrative, the extracts from Fat's exegesis (or revelation) which may or may not be that of Dick himself, become meaningful in a way which is truer than fiction, and more significant than dreams or fantasy.

The narrative begins relatively quietly with Phil Dick tracing the origin and development of Horselover Fat's insanity, but as the book progresses the weirdness increases until in the second half, after the protagonists have seen the film "Valis", they discover who or what Valis is, and follow the path where it takes them, though whether that be to sanity or insanity is up to you to decide.

I cannot describe the book, but I can and do recommend it. It isn't easy, but it is funny, thoughtful, vivid, exciting and quite unlike anything else I've ever read.

COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY - Philip K. Dick
[Kerosina, 1987, 45pp]
Reviewed by Edward James

I SHALL REVIEW THIS AS IF I DID NOT know that it was the work of a well-known SF writer, which serves to explain his later novels, above all *Valis*. Let us take it on its own merits. It is a 35-page tract, probably a first draft typed in one day, perhaps in late January 1978. It forms part of an enormous quantity of otherwise handwritten material which he produced in the eight years between his mystical experience in 1974 and his death in 1982. It is sadly muddled, carelessly thought out, and full of the amazing gaps of logic and rationality which characterise so much second-rate mystical writing. It purports to explain three "facts" (!): that the empirical world is not quite real; that its creator can't be appealed to for redress of its evils and imperfections; that the world is progressing towards a good and purposeful end-state. The solution is a variant of Gnosticism, revealed to Dick in part while contemplating a ham sandwich: man and the true God (the Urgrund) are the same substance (bread); they are separated by the created world (the ham), which isn't created by the Urgrund but projected by an artefact. This is only understood by those few Christians who have kept alive old Hermetic traditions (that hoary and unhistorical myth beloved of neo-Gnostics: for sane commentary on it, see Crowley's *Aegypt*). The second coming of Christ has already happened; man and the Urgrund will soon come together, destroying the world and its artefact creator in the process. We know this because the Urgrund is gradually intervening more in this world (secretly, so as not to disturb the artefact). In 1974 the Urgrund replicated itself with Dick himself; and "in 1974 I saw it take aim at the center of tyranny in this country".

The essay is not, its editor Paul Williams says (quoting *Valis*) the "furtive act of a deranged person". "Furtive", no.

MARY AND THE GIANT - Philip K. Dick
[Gollancz, 1988, 230pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

PHILIP K. DICK DIED IN APRIL 1982. It is ironic that that event was to be the impetus for finally publishing the non-SF material left in his estate. The latest novel from that material is set in Pacific Park, a small California town, in the early fifties.

> Pacific park, Set in the heart of rich California, Only two days of rain a year, Owns its own ice plant,

Dick's novels contain an oblique view of reality which sets his work apart from the traditional mainstream of SF. Dick's characters are always at odds with their world, an alienation which reaches its peak in the character of Jason Taverner (*Flow my Tears, the Policeman Said*) who is wrenched into a world where he had never existed. This style adds a sense of "other" to SF and in his mainstream works like *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* the dislocation emphasises the widening rift between the characters and their lives. But *Mary and the Giant* is a "realistic" novel and the very obliqueness which enhances SF is a flaw here.

Mary Anne Reynolds is twenty and confused. She is engaged to a cleancut American smalltown boy, but she is different from her peers. She doesn't want to spend the rest of her life in Pacific Park but she doesn't really know how to get away.

The blurb says "its treatment of racial and sexual issues is startling for a book written more than thirty years ago." And thirty years ago this would indeed have been a remarkable book, but today the whole thing takes on an air of cliche, the characters become almost stereotypic. If this had

been published as a classic, with all the respect that a mould-breaking work accumulates in time, then it would have been more relevant. But the apartness of the characters never quite rings true, and in fact detracts from the book's message.

This book is a curiosity which is more interesting to the collector of Dick's work than it would be to the casual reader.

A MAN RIDES THROUGH - Stephen Donaldson
(Collins, 1988, 661pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Chris Barker

AS I WRITE THIS REVIEW OF THE NEW Donaldson fantasy, two weeks after its first publication, it has already reached number five on the Sunday Times Best Sellers list — leaving the critic feeling a little powerless! The question at the back of my mind is: why? What are the elements in this, the final part of what must be regarded as one massive 1400 page novel, that send it soaring to such dizzy heights. The two blatantly obvious answers might be: a) Donaldson is already a Bestseller — which only displaces the question one step backwards; and b) an awful lot of people want to know what happened after Donaldson's mid sentence ending to *The Mirror of her Dreams*, — the first part of *Mordant's Need* - which, to some extent, displaces the question back to the first part. More cynical answers might be forthcoming: commercial hype; lack of critical faculties in the reading public; escapism and wish-fulfilment. Of these derisory comments, I think there is some merit in the latter, particularly when one examines the hero and heroine. Veraden is the clumsy failure who makes good; Terisa is the woman of little substance in her own world who becomes the key figure in a fantasy land. Shades of this central character type can be seen in the Thomas Covenant sagas. In fairness to Donaldson, it is his other main characters in *Mordants Need* who give the books real substance, for example the seemingly senile King Joyce and his insane friend Adept Havelock. These colourful characters - and others carry the story, and this is the crux of Donaldson's success - he tells a good story. *A Man Rides through* does not have the weight of great literature, but nonetheless I have to confess I found it difficult to put down and easy to suspend my critical faculties - a problem I haven't had with the previous Donaldson books, which I found over-long. The current novel, despite its length, is more concise. With greater maturity, the author has learned to control his sprawling epics better.

You will have noticed that I've said nothing of the plot: in fact, I have scrupulously avoided it. To describe it in any detail would ruin the sort of enjoyment this kind of book offers. However, I can say this: Boy meets girl; boy loses girl and regains her repeatedly; we find out who the goodies and baddies are; everybody else find out who the goodies and baddies are: the goodies and the baddies fight (guess who wins!) and finally, unresolved questions are resolved. The fact that Donaldson can turn this into a 700 page book shows his ability to tell a story well, even an essentially familiar one.

DON'T PANIC: THE OFFICIAL HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY COMPANION - Neil Gaiman
(Titan, 1988, 182pp, £3.95)
VIOLENT CASES - Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean
(Titan, 1987, £4.95)
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

ONE NIGHT IN 1979 I SPENT A FEW MINutes wondering whether to listen to the new sci-fi programme offered by Radio 4. Having decided that sci-fi was better than nothing, I tuned into the first episode of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The rest, as they say, is history, and I doubt whether I need to mention just how strongly the programmes caught the imagination of the British public. Being a purist, I remained faithful to the radio series and never bought the books, or the records. Neil Gaiman's official guide to the phenomenon has lately convinced me that I may have been wrong.

He charts the development of the idea for *Hitchhikers*, intermingling it with quotes from early drafts, excerpts from interviews with Adams and other people involved with the production of the radio, and later television series, and with biographical material on Adams himself. Most importantly, from the point of view, he points up the development of the basic idea as it moves from one medium to another, providing Adams with the chance to alter, adapt and introduce new thoughts. At the time of the book and television series, I found these changes irritating, but Gaiman provides an excellent insight into the creative process, and Adams' unparalleled opportunity to rethink his ideas at every turn, and I now understand why the changes were made.

Gaiman himself is no mean creative force. His splendid short story, *Violent Cases*, first produced for a Milford Science Fiction Writers Workshop, has been turned into a graphic novel with the aid of beautiful illustrations from Dave McKean, an artist of considerable talent. So far, the graphic novel boom has left me unmoved, but if more books were as beautiful to look at as *Violent Cases*, and if more of them had stories as delicate and as touching as this meeting between a small boy and the man who was Al Capone's osteopath, I could be persuaded to reconsider.

Both of these books are models of their kind, and I recommend them unreservedly.

ORVIS - H.H.Hoover
(Methuen, 1987, 186pp, £7.95)
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

H.H. HOOVER IS A WRITER OF CHILDREN'S SF whose themes and backgrounds are not necessarily a watering-down of those found in adult novels. True, Orvis - the six-legged robot whose name gives the title to the book - is quite cute when you get to know him, but there is more than cuteness in the way he is used to demonstrate the question of whether artificial intelligence is really "life", or to what extent the taking of animal life is justifiable.

Tabitha ("Toby") West and Thaddeus Hall find themselves lost and in trouble in "the empty" - the waste between settlements on a depopulated Earth - as their plans to find a new home for the now-obsolete Orvis and evade Toby's imminent transfer to a "better" school on Mars become disrupted after a hijacking. They stumble on a settlement of ex-Spacers who seem curiously reluctant to let the children go. And that's about it for the plot. What makes the book better than most juvenile SF is the way the plot is enriched by Hoover's fully-imagined yet economically-written background. The Spacers, for example, spending lifetimes on distant worlds and returning to a "home" changed by the passage of time: disoriented and alienated, they take refuge in mystical religion and long for children to replace those who grew up and left them while they were travelling. Thaddeus, whose own parents are Spacers, shares this loneliness. What is — in plot terms - a threat to the children is — thematically - a meditation on the spaces between the stars.

As with the examples cited in the first paragraph, the "messages" or "ideas" arise out of major or minor episodes in the story itself, rather than being imposed and done to death as apparent digressions from the plot. Some adult SF readers may find *Orvis* slight, but less experienced ones - and those willing to look beyond the basic tale - will find an entertaining story which carries out SF's charge to speculate about personal and social possibilities.

SERPENT'S EGG - R.A.Lafferty
(Morrigan, 1987, 166pp, £10.95 Special edition £27.50)
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

THIS IS AN UNCOMMONLY GOOD BOOK OF which it is almost impossible to give an immediate critical account. Evidently SF/symbolic imagining of the second coming, it does not allow us to rest on literalism. It has no real literal story, and thus would appear to be irrustrating to someone who is just looking for a good read.

What, in fact, Lafferty does is to plant pointers — "our universe is only a parable to illustrate a point"

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— which it would take an incredibly dense reader not to see as carrying more moment than the story they are embedded in. To make it even plainer, two pages before the end of the book we find — "As the only human left of the Royal Kids, I feel I ought to stand for something." — which is then repeated twice with nothing else in the paragraph. We are being encouraged to look deeper than the surface. Indeed, much of the book is taken up with investigating beneath the surface of a new artificial ocean.

I ought to stress that this is a very entertaining read too. Although the cast of thousands in such a short book, and the casual attitude to death, left me uneasy, I felt that this was because I hadn't fully understood what was being said. I was encouraged to go back and read it again — which will be no great chore in such a short novel. I look forward to the exercise.

As is probably apparent, I have never read any Lafferty before. Suffice it to say I will be seeking his books out in future.

THE ANNALS OF THE HEECHEE - Frederik Pohl
(Gollancz, 1987, 338pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

THE FINAL BOOK TELLING THE STORY OF humanity's discovery of Heechee artifacts, the Heechee and their secret. This is the fourth book so the question is: do you need to have read the first three? Undoubtedly it is better if you have — but not absolutely necessary. *The Annals of the Heechee* does refer to what has happened previously — but not excessively. The Heechee are, in fact, almost superfluous in this book which tells of Robinette Broadhead's quest to understand "the Foe" (aka Assassins) who are energy beings (much as Robinette has been since his death and transmogrification into software). There is little action and lots of exposition, lectures and explanations.

One hundred years after Robin's successful trip on a Heechee ship and the "taming" of those ships he is extremely successful (though dead). His "personality" lives on as a computer intelligence, one among many — wheeling, dealing and "making" the Heechee have come out of hiding to warn humanity about "the Foe" and a watch has been set up over what is either the Assassin's home or one of their dwellings. An alarm is raised and although nothing apparently has happened all Tycho-Heechee are evacuated. Three of these child refugees end up on Earth and cause yet another alarm. A subplot entails their danger and rescue and then Robin goes off to face the Foe. His journey is long and spent having the history of the Universe (from zero onwards) expounded to him (and us). A quote from page 313 "Even the longest river winds somewhere to the sea, and at last — at long last — at long, long last ..." *almost* summed up my feelings at this point — yet, due to Pohl's writing skills and the intrinsic interest one builds up while reading the book you *are* held to the end. The characters (live, computer simulations and computer held simulcra) *do* grow and one does have an interest in their eventual fates.

Talking of eventual fates — this book leaves no loose ends — but I found the ending an extreme anti-climax ... but read the books and see for yourself.

WHITE CHAPPELL SCARLET TRACINGS - Iain Sinclair
(Goldmark, 1987, 210pp, £12.50)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

IN 1975 BOOKDEALER IAIN SINCLAIR wrote a long poem, *Lud Heat*. Ten years later it provided the theme and inspiration for one of the most original novels of the decade, Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*. Another poem, *Suicide Bridge*, followed *Lud Heat* in 1979. Now Sinclair's first novel closes that "triad" and, so we are promised, opens a second.

Sinclair has a fascination with the darker side of human nature, the magnetic attraction of evil. He explored it in the two earlier poems, and it is centre stage again in this new work. *The White Chappell* or the title is that haunted part of London's East End, the *Scarlet Tracings* are the blood stains left by Jack the Ripper's victims. And as in *Hawksmoor* we find the evil reflected in a strange synchronicity as the surgeons William Gull and James Hinton plan their mad crimes in the 19th century, and second-hand bookdealers trace their shadows through the 20th.

It's a novel, but a poet's novel, full of ellipses and suggestion. It's not always easy to follow, and as often as not a few quick lines are sketched in and it is left to the reader to complete the picture. The links between the various sections of the book are never spelt out, yet the whole has a satisfying completeness. And there is a delightful humour that runs through the book: as the trio of bookdealers descend like locusts on a rural shop, the narrator finds a copy of *The Anubis Gates* marked at £15 for which he can get £40, and "an inscribed copy of Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* for a fiver". In fact there's a lot of insider knowledge about the book trade to be gleaned from the novel.

Strange haunting symbols run through the text. Mantras and magical concatenations of letters echo through history. The letters JK raise the ghosts of John Kennedy, Jack Kerouac, Doctor Jekyll, Joseph K and the K in Philip Dick. Sinclair's influences and inspirations range widely, and it isn't always easy to know how they belong to each other, how they resonate. But resonate they do. Sinclair believes that everything interconnects, is tied together by shadows. A thread of evil runs uninterrupted from the beginning of time, and all else is suspended from that thread.

Yet this obsessive interest in the darkness, a sense that there is something beautiful inherent in it, does not make for a dark or depressing book. You have to work at reading it, but the effort is well repaid.

ARAMINTA STATION - Jack Vance
(NEL, 1988, 468pp, £12.95 hardback, £6.95 paperback)
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

JACK VANCE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY writing SF since 1945. His range includes short stories, novels and series. *Araminta Station* is the first book in his latest series "The Cadwal Chronicles".

The planet Cadwal is protected by a decree of conservancy issued by the Naturalist Society of Earth. Over the centuries, the six bureaux administering the decree have become assimilated into the environment, as have their servants. The pressure of increasing populations, and the conflict with conservation principles, provides the background to the main plot concerning 16-year-old Glawen Clattuc.

Glawen's girlfriend disappears in mysterious circumstances. His job as a trainee with Bureau B, the bureau concerned with the patrols, surveys and policing of Cadwal, means that he is soon involved in the investigation of this and other strange occurences. Monstop action and adventure follow as Glawen travels the various islands and continents, and also the other planets of Mircea's Wisp.

At first sight, *Araminta Station* might be mistaken for a "juvenile" SF novel, and indeed there are elements of this. However, as you might expect from Vance, there is also much more. Cadwal is a marvellously complete creation; its flora and fauna are fascinating and convincingly alien. Only Vance could come up with an animal that stores its second helping of lunch on its back, and then developed the idea of using it for transport by conning it into believing that the rider is its lunch!

The characterisation of the humans is rather black and white, but you care what happens to the goodies. The tour-de-force is the servant race known as fips. Their settlement at Tipton, with its seedy canals and strange rituals, serves to emphasise the enigmatic nature of this seemingly peaceful and lethargic race.

The style is literate and fluid. The momentum is never lost and the interest is always held. Plenty of loose ends remain to be cleared up by subsequent books. These are not irritating but merely serve to whet the appetite. I suppose you could call this a "rave" review. An enjoyable and entertaining book — I recommend it.

B O O K S

THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN – Gene Wolfe (Gollancz, 1987, 372pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor & Paul Kincaid

THE EPIC OF THE NEW SUN IS DONE AND Severian has fulfilled his destiny by bringing salvation to dying Urth — or is it, and has he:

The Urth of the New Sun continues the series' picaresque structure, except our journeyman Autarch forsakes the stony paths of power for a literal spaceship and the mirrormaze of time. He has been taken to Yesod, in another universe, to be judged worthy of his charge of redemption by the bewildering Heirogrammate, Dzadkiel. The promised trial never takes place, to my disappointment as I'd have liked to see Severian up before the beak of beaks. I find him a nasty, egocentred fantasist, well suited to "Autarchy". In fact this entire volume sets up a series of showdowns for Severian — with Dzadkiel, Typhon, himself, the human species — and all are subverted. Faced with death Severian — the New Sun, the White Fountain, a star in his own right — simply steps into another universe where the butterfly form of Dzadkiel gives him more epigrammatic advice. This may move the book along, but another twenty pages or so but left this reader feeling distinctly cheated.

Fiction, of course, is just that. Rules exist to be broken, but even the asylum must have some formal notions. Wolfe pulls innumerable rabbits from his hat, raises the dead and slaughters them again, multiplies Severian almost out of hand and sends the story flickering in and out of time stroboscopically but when I look for the logic I find only arbitrariness. Endless *deus ex machinae* get Severian into and out of trouble and each is more outrageous than the last, setting the expectation that Wolfe will provide some revelation to render all this sleight of pen worth enduring. In the end, however, he left me gazing at a pile of coloured scarves and an empty pocket. That he is an artist of stature cannot be doubted, even if his prose is tiresomely ornate at times (as well criticise an ormolu clock for the same "offence"). His other works have shown him acute, insightful. *The Book of the New Sun* holds out the promise of an analysis of the human condition which will be as significant to the reader as Severian's burden is supposed to be to Urth. Yet what are we given? A messiah who would rather the cup were taken from him, a return to the womb, the amniotic ocean, the child as father to the man, mild time travel paradoxes and the proposition that those who would rule are really rather nasty with an ego problem. Hmm. Some of us might not be knocked out of our chairs by all that.

This book has been held up as the crowning glory of a major work of fiction. I find it a dramatic failure and a philosophical cypher. Why? Well, I dislike the structure — everything "remembered" by Severian with the odd arch interjection by the editorial/auctorial pen. More than a slight element of the suspense necessary to any tale, and especially one as ambitious as this, is removed; even when Severian dies, for no apparent reason, Wolfe simply resurrects him. Then there is Wolfe's habit of wrapping his puzzles in enigmas and referring it all back to some minor event in *The Claw of the Conciliator*. This last volume proves that *The Book of the New Sun* is one work, to be read and understood as such. *The Urth of the New Sun* no more stands as a discrete, independent novel than do any of the other four volumes. Their separate publication may not be a marketing ploy, placing Wolfe on a par with the likes of Donaldson et al, but I should not wish to argue the case. Finally, I am left with the conviction that Wolfe himself does not know whether he wants Severian to be a messiah or not. Of course the salvation offered by messiahs is not always what might have been expected, but in the end Wolfe is just too vague, too ambiguous. The reader has travelled too long, too far with Severian to be left holding so many loose ends in their hand. This is promised as the end of the tale. We've heard that one before, and with tales ended far less pregnant with possibilities than this. Oh well, I, for one, will not be holding my breath. [M.T.]

THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN WAS ONE OF the most impressive and important works of science fiction we have seen for a good long time. When something of that scale absorbs the creative energies of an author and arouses such a popular response, the pressures to repeat the formula must be immense. In stepping back to the Urth of his imagination, however, Wolfe has resisted the temptations and avoided the pitfalls normally associated with such revisitings. He is not retelling a tale he has already told, there is a fresh story here, a new advance in the saga, but the result is still not quite as impressive as its precursers.

After a long work rich in arcane names and centring upon a character with total recall, Wolfe refreshed himself with the opposite. Hence the memory loss and demotic place names of *Soldier in the Mist*. Perhaps the swing of the pendulum back from one extreme to the other failed to find quite the right spot, because one of the failings of *The Urth of the New Sun* is that it fails to recapture that earlier, assured balance between the omniscience of the narrator and the ignorance of the audience.

One thing overhung the original quartet while playing virtually no part in it, the New Sun itself, the threat and promise of the future. It is the New Sun that comes into sharp focus in this new volume. Ten years after becoming Autarch, Severian follows in the footsteps of his predecessor to stand trial before the Hierogrammates and discover whether he does indeed hold the promise of the New Sun. He travels by immense sailing ship between the stars, a ship that by its very nature journeys to the end of time and back — one of the set pieces that makes this book a pleasure even if it doesn't work quite as well as it should overall.

As ever, Severian is the hapless catalyst for a stream of events that are made more dizzying by the shifts in time. A confirmation that he is indeed the harbinger of the New Sun is but the prelude for further adventures back on Urth where he travels into the past to become the Conciliator, and into the future to witness the destruction inherent in the arrival of the New Sun.

It is an action packed book, but as in the quartet Wolfe presents incidents rigorously through the eyes of Severian; he's more concerned with the impressions and experiences of an event than he is with its explanation, so it often takes us after that we discover exactly what happened.

The Book of the New Sun had a clear, underlying Christian theme. It was subtly done, but evident in many small ways, such as the names "Hierogrammates" (sacred scribes) and "Hierodule" (sacred slave), both of whom turn out to have been the creations of an earlier breed of Man. But now the Christianity comes much more blatantly to the fore. It is impossible to miss the identification of Severian with Christ, and this is hammered home in many ways: the way he dies and rises again, his identification as the Conciliator, his judgement before Idzadkiel who's appearance is angelic and who seems to play the rôle of Gabriel. In many ways that is inevitable, having recorded the rise of everything to messiah, there was somewhere else to go but into the exploration of the godhead, but the heavyhandedness is unfortunate to say the least.

There's all we normally expect of Wolfe here in abundance: the large cast skilfully handled, the superb storytelling complete with the little tales that break the action, the inventiveness that extends from the plot devices to the language. This is no make-weight capping a successful series to cash in, but the question remains: did the series need any sort of cap at all? [P.K.]