

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1988/89

VECTOR

147

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The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association



The Fantasy Connection

Allegorical Adventures

PLUS

Book Reviews and Letters

VECTOR

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DECEMBER/JANUARY 1988/89

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Ian Watson - THE FIRE WORM

Ian Watson - WHORES OF BABYLON

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EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

THE IMPRESSION GIVEN TO MILLIONS OF LISTENERS TO Radio 4's *Today* programme early one morning in late October, is that Fantasy is actually another name for Horror. A brief piece on the World Fantasy Convention, which had begun the night before in London, featured Stephen Gallagher reading an extract from one of his books, Clive Barker ditto, the Con organiser saying that such writers have a great sense of moral responsibility, and an un-named reader effectively saying he liked brown underpants.

Fourteen hours earlier I'd registered at the Con (many thanks to Deborah Beale of *Arrow/Legend* for making that possible), and within minutes had bumped into M John Harrison, David Garnett, Mary Gentle, Alex Stewart and Colin Greenland — friends whom I think of as primarily SF writers.

So where's the Fantasy?, I wondered. Well, Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones were there, along with some others who are immediately thought of as major Fantasy writers. But it set me thinking.

Just where are the dividing lines between SF, Fantasy and Horror? What makes one book definitely Fantasy, another definitely SF? Is Horror really a separate genre, or not?

I've heard the arguments that SF (and Horror) are subsets of Fantasy. And that Fantasy (and Horror) are subsets of SF. And the relatively new one that all fiction, especially mainstream, is a subset of SF — or was it Fantasy? Countering all this, there are many SF fans who won't touch Fantasy, who sneer at Horror. And vice versa. And vice versa.

Bookshops over the last few years seem to have shown a move towards Fantasy — certainly judging from the covers. Is this actually the case, or is it simply a marketing ploy by the publishers? (Fifteen years ago you couldn't move for Chris Foss covers; was all SF at that time space opera?) It might well be so, at least in part. A lot of SF is being sold in covers deliberately aimed at Fantasy readers. It's not just SF; Kathleen Herbert's historical novels *Queen of the Lightning* and *Ghost in the Sunlight* are usually found on the Fantasy shelves, simply because of their covers.

This raises again the serious question of how far "current tastes" in SF, Fantasy and Horror are publisher-led, author-led or reader-led. My belief (kept naive for the sake of argument) is that authors should write what they want to write, readers should read what they want to read, and publishers should find the course which satisfies both as much as possible (and makes them money).

But too often publishers appear to dictate taste. A few years ago it was difficult to find anthologies of short stories by UK writers in the shops. Why? According to the publishers, they didn't sell. I reckon they didn't sell largely because they weren't in the shops, because they weren't being published. Self-fulfilling prophecy. I was amazed to hear this admitted by a major American publisher on a panel on anthologies at the Con. But attitudes change. The UK original anthology market is particularly strong at the moment; witness *Other Edens*, about to go into Book 3, the *Interzone* collections, *Tales from the Forbidden Planet*, and the anthologies edited by Alex Stewart, David Garnett and Chris Morgan.

Has the Great British Book-Buying Public suddenly changed its tastes? Or have the publishers changed their minds? Because those anthologies already published seem to be selling quite well. Maybe they're selling because they're in the shops. And they're in the shops because they've been published.

TO RETURN TO SUB-GENRE CATEGORISATIONS. MOST OF THE authors I know write both SF and Fantasy. Some also write Horror. Several write Comic scripts. In fact there aren't many I can think of who restrict themselves to one

sub-genre; perhaps Arthur C Clarke hasn't written any Fantasy; perhaps Clive Barker hasn't written any SF. But they don't seem to be typical.

So if the authors don't distinguish — if they're equally happy to write SF or Fantasy or whatever — why do publishers? and why do we? A letter in *V146* suggested that a lot of Fantasy readers don't realise that *Vector* (and the rest of the BSFA) covers Fantasy as well as SF, and so miss out on us. In response I suggested — and only half in jest — that we rename ourselves the BSFA&F.

A sad but classic example of this Great Divide happened at the World Fantasy Con. I was talking to one of the organisers, and mentioned *Vector* and the BSFA.

"Ah, and how is the BSFA these days?" he asked in the tone one would use when enquiring after an ailing and senile aunt. When I said we had about a thousand members he looked stunned.

"What sort of magazine is *Vector*?" he asked. I told him. "Oh, it's not a news magazine then," he said, I think relieved that we missed out on this vital function. So I told him about *Matrix*. "But you don't have a fiction magazine," he said desperately. I agreed, but told him *Focus* is specifically for writers, and workshops a story in each issue. For good measure I described *PI*. "A total of 21 magazines a year for £10," I said.



James Herbert at the World Fantasy Convention

By this time he was looking distinctly dispirited. Not wanting to upset him any further, I left, to chat to a load of authors who were guests at the Con, who write novels and stories which might or might not be Fantasy or SF or Horror or whatever, and who are old friends of the BSFA and regular readers of and contributors to *Vector*.

I'm not putting the blame solely on this guy for his ignorance of the BSFA. The Fantasy Con is linked with the British Fantasy Society, and I know next to nothing about the BPS. He could no doubt have stumped me in a similar way.

So no blame; but it's sad that there's so much mutual ignorance between members of the BSFA and BPS, and such a gulf between the two organisations. It goes back a long way, probably right back to 1971 when, I believe, the BPS was formed by people cheesed off at the BSFA's anti-Horror stance.

There's still some antipathy in SF fandom; I'm told that some fans (who may or may not be BSFA members) have for some time been criticising the World Fantasy Con and the members of the BPS who worked their rocks off to make it work. I've got news for them: the World Fantasy Con was both successful and enjoyable. What might have upset the fans is that it wasn't a fanfests event; it was a professional event. Practically every person there was a professional author or editor or publisher or agent or critic. Yes, they were having fun, like at any other con;

yes, the wine was flowing like wine and a lot of people stayed up very late and woke up with hangovers; yes, there was a book room and an art room. But calling it a convention maybe gives the wrong idea. For just about everybody there, this was a working weekend; in a way it was a business conference, or a trade fair, with professionals dealing with other professionals in a convivial atmosphere.

During the weekend I talked with several of the BFS people who organised the Con; we agreed that the gulf between the BSFA and the BFS is not only pointless, it's actually divisive and harmful. We're going to get together again for the odd pint, and maybe see if there's a way we can work together on some things. Perhaps a couple of them could come to a BSFA London meeting to tell us what the BFS is all about. Maybe organise some joint events.

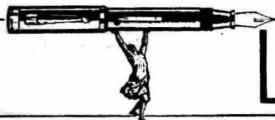
For example: I set up a Science Fiction Day at Marylebone Junior Library recently. The panels included Chris Evans, Neil Gaiman, Mary Gentle, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Porter and myself. It would have been good to have had an expert on RPGs, or adventure game books, or child-

suitable Horror; but in the time available I wasn't able to arrange this. A friendly contact in the BFS might have helped on that occasion.

At least we'd be talking. No (before anyone jumps to conclusions), I'm not suggesting any sort of merger; we're different organisations with different aims and different emphases — but we have so much in common.

The only thing that surprised me at the Fantasy Con, to return to where I began, was the emphasis on Horror; some call it Dark Fantasy. I'd expected more S&S, more magic in feudal societies, more of what gets called Fantasy in *Vector* reviews. But the centres of attraction were James Herbert, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Steve Gallacher, and their American equivalents, not, sad to say, Diana Wynne Jones and Terry Pratchett and their ilk.

If we were to become the BSFA/BFS, maybe the BFS should rename itself the BHS. Maybe not. But the point is, our genres overlap so much that you really have to split hairs to tell the difference. We write about, and read, largely the same books. And the authors? Well, there are no divisions there. They are the same people.



LETTERS

"I suspect that some of my mail has gone astray over the last few weeks; it happens from time to time. If you've written to Vector and your letter isn't here, could you write again?"

KRY McVIGHE

37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7QF

YOUR EDITORIAL (V145) WAS INTERESTING, BUT I WOULD LIKE to offer a better view of *SF Eye*, if I may. Issue 1 was a very heavy look at cyberpunk, but no 2 did not focus on Philip K Dick, having 15 pages on him but 30 on Lucius Shepard as well as a lively lettercol and several other in-depth pieces. It does have a bias towards the c-word, but not excessively so.

I wish I'd seen the Delany interview in *SF Eye* before I finished my article on cyberpunk. He suggests that the quintessential cyberpunk story is "All my Darling Daughters" by Connie Willis, a story I had read but failed to consider. Delany also equates Gibson's Molly to Joanna Russ's Jael in *The Female Man* and questions why male critics, like myself, have ignored the women who have led to cyberpunk:

"You notice... this endless, anxious search for fathers — that finally just indicates the general male discomfort with the notion of paternity. What it's got are mothers. A whole set of them — who were so promiscuous that cyberpunk will never be sure of a certain daddy."

So when I said that cyberpunk had no real roots I was only half right.

Keith Brooke however missed a point I was making: that cyberpunk writers are labelled by others. I did not call Stan Robinson a cyberpunk, but others have. Sterling, Shepard *et al* have written stuff which may be cyberpunk but also some which isn't, and I used this to say that the whole thing is as Delany says a vague concept of bastard inheritance. I also said that Sterling was laying down rules which he ignored himself. Part of my purpose in quoting so many names was to show how cyberpunk has such a vague basis that it cannot be considered a movement in itself. Which is not to say that *The Movement* that Sterling and Shirley are so vociferous about doesn't exist, rather that it is a different thing to this so-called cyberpunk, incorporating some cyberpunk but not all.

Keith also suggests I was trying to compartmentalise cyberpunk, something I normally try to avoid. However with such an article it is sometimes necessary as in reviewing to use other people's labels and definitions if only to show how they break down under even the simplest of studies, which mine was. I really only skimmed through the mass of recent fiction and reviews.

Mark Gorton offered an interesting introduction to Thomas Pynchon, but I was surprised that neither Maureen Porter nor Dave Hodson mentioned the Pynchonesque ending of Shepard's *Life During Wartime* in their reviews. Once Shepard's scene becomes a closed unit then entropic decay becomes a major part of the book, along with the magical realism that Maureen referred to. Hopefully this book will receive all the praise and attention it deserves as the first truly great male, American SF novel of the 80s, if not longer.

Another quote on reviewing: "Criticism is prejudice made plausible" — HL Mencksen. How do other reviewers and critics feel about that?

"Read my editorial in V142 for my thoughts on this. Meanwhile, more on Pynchon:"

IAN MURDELL

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MARK GORTON SPENDS A LONG TIME IN HIS ARTICLE "LIFE, Literature and Entropy" (V145) doing exactly what many of the characters in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* do, particularly Tyrone Slothrop, and that is looking over his shoulder. "Are we, in a real sense, threatened by a universal conspiracy?" he asks about half way through. Here he is embodying what I feel is Pynchon's main point, even if he does not think so himself: paranoia. In *Gravity's Rainbow* entropy is a character, much like the V2 rocket, present throughout and integral to the dénouement.

What could be more terrifying than entropy? It is the ultimate fate of the universe, it is death to us all individually; both commoner and scientist have only a limited understanding of it. This, however, is too obvious, and as we all know the paranoid is a devious being, clever too, how else would he spot all the conspiracies the rest of us are missing? Entropy is a measure of a system's disorder, its disorganisation. High entropy, confusion, chaos — what better haven for a paranoid? How can there be plots and conspiracy in confusion?

In *Gravity's Rainbow* Slothrop is sent into the Zone, an area of utter confusion left after the end of the war and before the Allies can take control. This Zone is the clearest embodiment of entropy in the book, not, as Mark Gorton suggests, the Nazis. Far from being the enemies of diversity they were perhaps the strongest exponents of differentiation history has seen: the Reich versus the Allies, the Aryan versus the Jew, the Roman, etc., etc. In terms of entropy surely the level of one militaristic society (the Nazis) must be approximately equivalent to that of another (the Allies).

For Slothrop, the ultimate paranoid, there is as much to fear in the Allies as the Nazis. It is only in the con-

LETTERS

fusion of the Zone that he finds individuals he may trust, if only temporarily, and he can escape his paranoia.

However the Zone is thick with people, the purveyors of negative entropy, and eventually the powers of order start to catch up with Slothrop; the Zone begins to shrink, too, as the Allies clear up. The individuals who best survived in the Zone take on the appearance of being its controllers. As the disparate elements of the novel's plot start to come together, to resolve themselves out of confusion and a dénouement starts to appear, Slothrop's character dissolves: further seeking sanctuary (in entropy) from his paranoia, Slothrop fragments:

...Tyronne Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly... The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, and scattered.

(Bodine is) one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature anymore. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together even as a concept - 'It's just too reate' - what they usually say.

The Firm, the controllers, have tried to use the Zone, entropy, for their own purposes, but have failed. In the words of William S Burroughs (various sources), "Here lived a stupid vulgar son of a bitch who thought he could hire death as a company cop."



That there is any one message in *Gravity's Rainbow* is unlikely, but the above, the nature of paranoia, is what the novel conveyed to me, and where I differ from Mark Gorton's analysis of it. However, I must further take issue with his reaction to entropy. He says "We must keep our systems open and covet diversity if we wish to be truly alive."

Diversity, I most heartily agree, is the most essential thing for a meaningful life, but if we open our systems we will become like Slothrop, infinitely diverse but at the expense of our individualities. To retain life, be it mundane or diverse, we must continue our ways of negative entropy. Heat death is perhaps the only certainty in this universe, but it is a long way off. Any fluctuations in entropic levels, the rise and fall of civilisations, must be seen in the context of how much energy is available to living beings to counteract them; it is a vast, almost inconceivable amount.

Mark's mistake is in seeing life as inherently unstable, something which despite its negative entropy it certainly is not. A watch running down is not unstable, merely losing energy in a controlled way, performing work with the loss of that energy. Of the energy stored in the spring some is lost, granted, in the ticking and in heat from friction but the efficiency is quite high.

Similarly the human being channels energy in a highly ordered way, performing work. Life is not a closed system, but it owes its negative entropy to the complex chemical systems that channel the energy, nothing less than a vast number of closed loops and cycles; life approximates to a closed system.

This illustrates why scientists as individuals are good at appearing less than intelligent on broad subjects (like real life). Specialisation narrows the outlook and if you wish to consider entropy and life, you cannot just consider entropy as a physicist, that is only one side of the question; no biologist or biochemist would say that eating flouts the second law of thermodynamics — his colleagues would tear his limb from limb.

Living things exhibit negative entropy, but they do not control it, no more than a fish controls the river or the Firm in *Gravity's Rainbow* controlled the Zone. What living things control, what has caused their presence to remain on this planet for so long is equilibrium, balance. It is this that we must strive for, a balance between diversity and dissolution, or we will go the way of Tyronne Slothrop.

"And now some more thoughts on the nature of reality and how to cope with it; and on the writing of short stories:"

NICHOLAS BERNETT

Bygdoy Alle 49C, Oslo 2, 0265, Norway

THE VECTOR EDITORIAL — 146 — WAS VERY GOOD. I WOULD like to say again that I have never read a more interesting magazine.

When the unreality of being is perceived, you say it frightens with its potentialities. *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad arrived there, and Jorge Luis Borges' fictions are always dealing with that dangerous place.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men Couldn't put Humpty together again. That was the danger Conrad and Borges took on.

Anton Wilson described a terrifying experience called ego loss. If one has experienced this, then life can seem over-strange.

Nicholas next discusses how he approaches his own fiction, with reference to one particular story. The following extracts from his letter make points which I think are valid for all writers, and for many stories. Without straying too much into Focus's territory, perhaps other writers might like to follow up these thoughts.

Some time ago Vector dealt with approaches to writing fiction.

I try to make the words do a lot of work, try to approach the poet's aim of having language operate on many levels at the same time.

If a short story has little time for character description, be brief on physical description; maybe have the main character seen at a remove, by others; or have his character (and the plot) illustrated through dialogue.

When the short story is approached as an art form, there is always only one way of telling each story. A lot of the craft of writing can be taught, but the final narrative method, told, seen, described, by whom, is a conjunction of every other element in the story. These include time span, characters, theme, tone, plot-story.

A short story is most easily handled when part of it is past, and part to come.

Ideally the short story should move to a definite point which defines the psychological, or whatever, core of the tale, and much should be suggested, very little told.

KRITH BROOKE

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THANKS FOR ANOTHER GOOD VECTOR. I PARTICULARLY LIKED the pieces by the two Davids — Langford and Garnett.

Perhaps ironically, my main reason for writing this time is a throwaway remark of yours in the letters column: "Maybe we should rename the BSFA 'The British Science Fiction and Fantasy Association'". Hmm. True, it would be a more accurate reflection of the contents of the magazines, but if I were a Fantasy fan joining the "BSFA" I would feel a bit cheated at the bias towards SF: in V146 there were two articles specifically about SF (Garnett and Turner/Gribbin) and none specifically about Fantasy, although the reviews were evenly split; in P1 the score was 19 to SF and 11 to Fantasy (with a certain number I wouldn't attempt to categorise). To rename our society would involve more than just the letterheads; we would have to reassess the balance of the entire output.

"See this issue's editorial for further thoughts on the subject. I think you're probably right, but how do you suggest we let Fantasy fans know they're not totally ignored? Incidentally, there was a lot of interesting material in the last issue (I still don't know how we crammed it all in); letters of comment would be very welcome."

ENDLESS PATHWAYS

KV BAILEY

MIDSUMMER CENTURY, DEVELOPED FROM A 1972 STORY IN *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and published by Faber and Faber as a hardback novella in 1973, is a late and comparatively neglected work: not Blish at his peak, but Blish still adept at creating a fast-moving surface narrative which is studied with symbols and subliminal clues leading the reader towards what lies deeper. In its 106 pages Blish recapitulates, packs in, and puts into bizarre, and by virtue of its very strangeness, thought-prompting context many of the ideas which made his science fiction of the 50s and 60s so innovative and influential: ideas about psi faculties, genetic engineering, entropy, inner space, immortality and the rhythms of history. That is a tall order for some 40,000 words: so tall, in fact, as to constitute a weakness in the book, while at the same time making its impact a challenging one.

The plot is complex and condensed. Covering a century and retrospectively 23,000 years, it could have served trilogies. Though the following outline must appear crude, I set it out to provide a frame of reference for later examining some of the book's subtleties. It is in three Parts, entitled *Rebirths III, IV, and V*; and each rebirth is that of human civilisation. At the same time there are rebirths of a kind in the successive returns from unconsciousness or pseudo-death of the story's protagonist, John Martels.

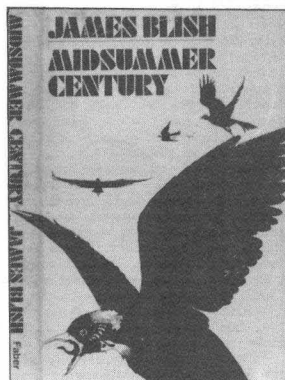
He is a radio astronomer of our own time (preceding *Rebirth I*) who, while trying to remedy the malfunction of a giant telescope, falls down the inside of its tubular wave-guide. He is not conscious of hitting the bottom, but wakes 23,000 years later on the site of the Argentinian town of Rawson in the hall of a Museum of Technology of the defunct civilisation of *Rebirth III*. He finds he is sharing the brain case and perceptions of a "bridging" being surviving into *Rebirth IV*, one bred for hypnotic and projective skills. He, the Quant, ex-Autarch of *Rebirth III*, is physically immobilised in the Museum, a sort of cyborg with a brain as big as a dolphin's. To him come tribesmen of a world entirely tropical (save for the Poles) to consult him as a god-oracle, particularly on how to combat the Birds, a class which has evolved deployment of its telepathic instincts to the extent of allowing it to dominate most of the globe, and now determined to eradicate mankind.

Martels learns that at Terminus, in Antarctica, there survives a community preserving *Rebirth III* technology and possessing a computer from which Quant has been cut off, but to which he longs to be reunited. Believing that if he reached Terminus he might find a way of time-travelling home, Martels takes over the body of a supplicant tribesman, Tlam, temporarily neutralising the reach of Quant's control by causing Tlam to attack him physically. Tlam/Martels then escapes into the jungle, where exhaustion gives way to sleep.

Part Two starts with Martels, still sharing Tlam's body, waking from a dream of falling down a tube lined with thornlike fangs. He/they embark on a journey southwards through rain forest to Tlam's village near Lake Colue Hupac — one step nearer Antarctica. The confused Tlam confesses to his (involuntary) blasphemous attack on

Quant, and suffers exile. He is compelled, Martels controlling him, to continue southwards through Bird territory. There Martels/Tlam/Quant (Quant by now has projected his consciousness to make a threesome) is captured by the Birds and taken to a great Tower, a Bird capital, from which, after interrogation by the Bird King, he escapes, strangling the vulturine guard and jury-rigging a skin and feather contraption which enables him/they to glide southwards at 7,000 feet, until crashing on the edge of Antarctica. The unconscious body is found by Antarcticans and flown to Terminus.

Despite Blish's precise geography, that journey of 1,000 miles by foot and purloined wing is fantastic; and Blish's crossing of SF with Fantasy is accentuated at the opening of Part III in his play with the concept of "juganetic transfer". The force of the same "juganetic" that had propelled Martels into the future now lodges him in the computer, leaving Quant in command of Tlam's body. Martels resumes consciousness as occupant of a "spherical nonmaterial machine floating in the middle of a nearly transparent dodecahedron", which bestows on him sixteen-fold vision and instant comprehension. Quant he learns had been excluded from the computer because he had yielded to the temptation of passively exploring the Pathways of contemplation it made available, to the neglect of the problem of the Birds. Quant tries in a psychic battle to regain the computer, but Martels persuades the Antarcticans to put Tlam's body, and consequently Quant, into suspended animation. In return for organising the tribes to assist against the Birds, the Antarctic technologists promise Martels a passage home.



After a hundred years the Birds attack: neo-albatrosses with bombs; neo-penguins with torpedoes; but by such strategies as Martels entering and confounding the mind of the King of the Birds, and by breeding back ancestral avian forms to diffuse a genocidal virus, the humans defeat them. Martels, however, after considering the implications of time paradox, decides to stay inside the Rawson Museum brain case, linked to the computer; and to admit to coexistence Quant (at last reconciled) and Tlam ("beginning to understand the nature of freedom"). Now constituting the Quinx, Autarch of *Rebirth V*, their mission is to "learn to love their immortality", to explore the Pathways, and to free other men to travel them; their destiny is eventually to "be called the Sixt... and so on, reality without end."

SO STRANGE A STORY, MIXING THE IMAGERY OF TECHNOLOGY with concepts of mysticism, counterpointing the patterns of a future history with the rhythms of innately perceived space and time, inevitably leans more to Fantasy than to Science Fiction. It is in fact a hybrid. This merging of genres is nowhere more apparent than in the functioning of the Birds. Starting with the statement (Quant's) that their original "ritualistic" behaviour had been subject to

evolutionary pressures, and after discussion (through Martels' rationally based reflections) of theories relating to their direction-finding and homing abilities, Blish makes the leap of supposing these faculties to have been selected out in favour of intelligence, and self-consciousness, making the Birds capable of speech, of constructing a huge, King-ruled, dove-cote-city and, though their general mode of attack is pecking, of manufacturing explosive weapons — all this within a minuscule span of evolutionary time.

So this brings us into the realm of Fantasy, if not of fairy-tale. Blish strengthens our sense of this being so by his glosses and allusions. When the enormous crow-messenger intercepts Martels/Tiam on the southward journey, Martels is haunted by memories of Edgar Allan Poe. The crow's speech might be straight out of the Brothers Grimm: "Go home: I lust for your eyes. The King has promised them to me: if you do not go." The Birds' "city" to which they are brought, fashioned out of three trees interwoven and clad with leather to resemble a medieval fortress, is called the "Tower on Human Legs". Blish's description of its dark interior — the ranked talons and eyes, the tricks of light that make it an illusory universe of nebulae and stars — is a splendid piece of high-fantasy prose.

For Martels the Tower proves to be a staging-post on his southward journey, the real/unreal nature of which is hinted at when, from the Tower's thousand foot top, he looks towards Antarctica over the now forest-covered Drake's Passage:

There lay the Promised Land; but as far as Martels was concerned, the curtain of rising mist which marked the beginning of the icecap sight as well as the layer of ice-crystals which delatated the atmosphere of Mars.

Had great gull-like birds flown toward his out of the mist crying *Tekelli-II*, he could not have been more sure of more helpless.

Oblique or direct allusions to Poe are scattered through *Midsummer Century*, and this is one of the most specific and significant. On the last page of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, just before Pym, encountering a superhuman white figure, disappears into the Antarctic curtain of whiteness, we read:

The range of vapour to the southward had arisen prodigiously in the horizon... Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew now continuously from beyond the veil and their scream was the eternal *Tekelli-II* as they retreated from our vision.

What should we make of these forays into the realms and literatures of fantasy? To what exercises of the imagination is Blish leading us? It seems clear that the Birds are made to represent archetypally a "negative" force. In evolving (Man, and the Qvant, neglecting to inhibit this), they had, in realising to the full their essence, become "proud, territorially jealous and implacably cruel — to which had been added, simply by bringing it forward, the serpent wisdom of their remotest ancestors." When the Tiam component of Tiam/Martels seems incapable of further terror, as the eye-lusting crow threatens him, Martels recalls a line from Canto IV of James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*: "No hope can have no fear." It is another of Blish's associational

clues. Thomson's immediately preceding lines are: "then some enormous things/Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings." The poem's dominant image is the "sunless city," the "City of Tremendous Night," and there are many details (too many to cite here) which match those of that dim abode of torture and hatred, the Birds' "Tower on Human Legs." It is within the Tower's symbolic gloom that a psychic struggle takes place between Martels and Qvant: "The ripples of demanding hatred surged through a featureless, locationless chaos."

This fight lasts "over kalpas of eternity, eternities of seconds." At the end of it Martels emerges from unconsciousness thinking that he has again fallen down the telescope's tube. Soon afterwards he realises that the Birds are possessed of one deeply-buried error: "Man cannot fly". Out of this comes his escape, symbolically by flight, from this hell to Antarctica. Blish gives resonance to his symbolism by likening Martels to Icarus, who escaped from the Labyrinth (as dark, as hopeless and as spatially disorienting as the Bird Tower) by soaring on similarly devised wings, only to fall into the Aegean Sea. Blish uses landscape again to remind us also of the fateful Antarctic descent of Poe's *Narrative*. As Martels dives towards earth (which once had been sea) his vision is of: "a cruel series of volcanic lowlands, like a red-and-black version of the Mare Imbrium... or that territory which Poe had described toward the unfinished end of *Pym*."

There have been many interpretations of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Gaston Bachelard, viewing the surface narrative as an overlying dream-like apprehensions, sees in it the imaginative traversing of a labyrinth of the elements, the lonely journey and struggle leading to experience beyond the labyrinth. Roger Asselineau, citing this in introducing an edition of Baudelaire's translation, points out that Pym's voyage lasts nine months exactly, and that his supposed death in "the embraces of the cataract" is at the same time a transcendental rebirth and entry into a universal consciousness, identity being lost in becoming, in effect, God. He relates this to Poe's later work *Burke*.

In the light of such interpretations, and of Blish's close interweaving of his narrative and landscapes with Poe's, it is significant that, while the last sentence of Part II of *Midsummer Century* is: "Once more, he had hit the bottom of the telescope of time, and was flung alone into darkness", the opening sentence of Part III (Rebirth VI), is: "Being dead, Martels decided after an infinitely long time, had had a bad press." He comes to consciousness experiencing something like "what the mystics had called *cleansing the doors of perception*." He is enjoying thought of great clarity "amidst which he sported like a surfacing dolphin." It seems clear that in these sequences of the book we are involved in a progress from a restrictive to a liberating mode of experience. As medium for his symbols and metaphors Blish changes from depicting menacing or bewildering landscapes and organisms to using the images of mysticism and the figures of esoteric geometry. Martels opens his computer Eye to find himself existing as a sphere within a dodecahedron, the Eye having components located at the corners of the upper six of its twelve pentagonal faces. Blish's use of this

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GOLLANCZ

Pythagorean form may well stem from an awareness of its iconic indications of completeness, unity and transcendence, and its "magical" association with gold, the colour symbolic of harmonising forces, and, in alchemy, of "the body of resurrection".

Blish then, still using geometric symbols, shifts attention from dodecahedron to sphere, into the nature of which Martels achieves insight during his struggle for possession with Qvant. Like the dodecahedron this sphere has upper and lower surfaces encompassing between them 360°, one surface receiving input from the inner world, the other from the outer world; and at the respective interfaces occur such phenomena as REM dreams and the Zen experience. "It was a model of the sentient universe, at the heart of which lay the primary pulse of life — and a core of absolute passivity."

It is this mode of being, with its endless Pathways, which the reunited Qvant/Martels/Tiam trinity will explore actively and, while resisting temptation to become passively lost in contemplative depths, will bring to the service of the human race. The organising of the tribes, the war with the Birds, these events of a century, though they have relevance to the pilgrimage of Martels and to the nature of Rebirth V, are unsatisfactorily crammed into the last six pages of the book, creating a sense of hurrying anticlimax before the Qvant, now a component of the Quinx, in conclusion restates definitively the major motif: "We shall fall often, but will also rise, within the wheels."

IN MY OWN CONCLUSION I WOULD LIKE ONLY TO POINT OUT ONE or two further strands which in Blish's novella have correspondence with, and in at least one case a discernable relation to, analogous works of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Few stories involving time travel fail to evoke in the reader some thought of the masterwork of that sub-genre, *The Time Machine*. Blish, I believe, gets deliberate associative mileage out of it. The Museum of Rebirth III, with its collection of rusting artifacts, has distinctly the feel of Wells's Palace of Green Porcelain, and the imagined dichotomies and specialisations of evolutionary development may also owe something to it, as may the destruction of the Birds owe something to *The War of the Worlds*.

The initial fall down the telescope tube, recollected in several subsequent falls, is a version of that symbolic birth, or rebirth, common in the literature of Fantasy.

It may, as here, indicate transition to a different mode of experience: different environmentally or psychically. In the literature of pure fantasy, Alice's fall down the rabbit hole and arrival in the hall of the Pool of Tears is a classic instance. Ian Watson uses the fall down the gullet of the Worm in *The Book of the River* to take Valen into the Ka-store, this preceding the first of her many "rebirths". The repeated "fall" may also represent the fall of successive civilisations, as when the word is used by Gibbon of Rome or by Oswald Spengler in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Blish was familiar with Spengler's historical schema; its shape and influence are very apparent in *Cities in Flight*, which, in this respect, *Midsummer Century* echoes in miniature. Blish was also deeply versed in the works of James Joyce, for whom the cyclic/rhythmic historical philosophy of Giambattista Vico provided a model for his circular patterning of history in the *Vake*, and for the corresponding rises and falls of EC Barwick, his Everyman. Put into a Science Fiction setting, Martels and future history are similarly co-involved by Blish.

Like that of Dante, who from Inferno climbed the southern Purgatorial Mount to cross over Lethe and ascend to Paradise, or like Kerans' journey in Ballard's *The Drowned World*, a trek southwards through "the phantasmagoric forest" and "drenching mists" while "searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun", what Blish terms Martels' *Drang nach Sweden*, from the infernal Tower on Human Legs to his dodecahedron "immortality", has in it elements of the cosmic/personal pilgrimage of Everyman. In this aspect of interior pilgrimage, and in some of its symbolic landscapes — forests, coloured mountains, vast tree structures — it is comparable also to David Lindsay's allegorical fantasy *A Voyage to Arcturus*, of which Loren Biseley wrote, introducing the Ballantine edition: "... do not mistake *Arcturus* in this day of easy science fiction for a superficial tale... it is a story of the most dangerous journey in the world, the journey into the self and beyond the self."

Blish was writing in this vein, and in much the same vein as Roger Asselineau says Poe wrote when in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* he created a fiction responsive to the popular taste of his time, while making a gradual transposition from the key of adventure novel to that of philosophically tintured fantasy. Make no doubt, however, that, as always (and as Poe did), Blish told a good story.

ARCTURAN — ALLEGORIES

TIM WESTMACOTT

AFTER TWO COMPLETE READINGS, COUNTLESS RE-EXAMINATIONS of certain passages and the making of many pages of notes I am still not satisfied that I have grasped the full meaning of this book. Fortunately I am not alone in this respect. The opening sentence to Loren Biseley's introduction, in the 1972 Ballantine edition, claims that, "*A Voyage to Arcturus* is, in reality, a long earth journey", whereas the extract from a review in *The Times*, printed on the back cover states, "The book is not allegory..." Perhaps Maskull's journey is symbolic and Nightengale's is not.

My interpretation begins with a crystallisation of the cosmological events leading up to the voyage and then moves into the area of speculation.

Many thousands of years ago there was a world called Muspel where, we are told, grandeur ruled. Life there was in the form of fiery spirit which was "not below individuality but above it. It was not the One, or the Many, but something else far beyond either". The "God" of this world was Surtur, but another "God", Crystallman, drained off the entire life force of Muspel in order to populate his newly created world, Torrance.

Crystallman's intention had been to convert all the life force of Muspel into pleasure-seeking individuals as

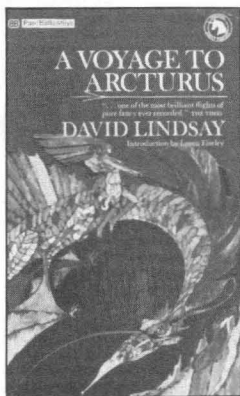
it passed through his body, but some of the spirit emerged unaltered except that it was now fragmented into millions of parts. Every life-form on Torrance, while being outwardly, i.e. physically and mentally, a product of Crystallman, contains some of these unaltered fragments of spirit in every atom. The fragments are blindly trying to get back to Muspel, but not only are they imprisoned and suffering shame due to the life-styles of their hosts, they are slowly being eroded away. They are passed into each life-form's offspring until they (the fragments) are entirely worn away, that is, experience spiritual death. The enormous variety of animal and plant life on Torrance caused its people to give Crystallman the name Shaping, but in fact the diversity of species is a direct result of the spirit fragments' efforts to return to Muspel.

Surtur has to rescue his "people" somehow but Crystallman is passing himself off as Surtur, presumably in case any memory of the name of their "God" had travelled to Torrance with its new inhabitants. So the real Surtur takes on the alias of Krag whom Crystallman and the people of Torrance believe to be a devilish spirit "compounded of those vestiges of Muspel which Shaping did not know how to transform". That Crystallman doesn't know the real identity of Krag is shown by the fact that the

latter steadfastly refuses to tell Maskull who and what Surtur is. This, I assume, is because Maskull's mind can be easily read by Crystalman's people.

After struggling since the creation of Tormance, but without any success at all, Krag came up with an idea which might lead to the saving of one of his "people". For it to work he would require from another planet a human with "a bold daring heart and no encumbrances" (i.e. no ties such as a family) who would be prepared to give his life for the privilege of spending a short time on an alien world. Krag picked a suitable inhabitant of Tormance, Nightspore, brought him to Earth, blocked off part of his memory and programmed him to find a suitable subject for his plan. Maskull fitted the required specification perfectly. On the night of departure, a voice, which I take to be that of Crystalman, in the tower at Starkness, reveals the outline of Krag's plan in an attempt to warn him off; "Maskull, you are only an instrument to be used and then broken. Nightspore is asleep now, but when he wakes you must die. You will go, but he will return." I'd have got the next train back to London, but Maskull is not deterred.

This is where things start to get difficult. His erstwhile companion Nightspore is mysteriously absent for the whole of Maskull's journey across Tormance but just as he is dying, Krag tells him, "You are Nightspore." Loren Eiseley states that Nightspore is Maskull's spiritual self, but this is shown not to be the case by the fact that Nightspore endures such great physical distress when he climbs the Muspel tower. This means that Nightspore was, in some unknown way, entirely incorporated in Maskull's body. Facts: We know that Maskull was a large man and Nightspore of middle height; Maskull felt extraordinarily heavy when he awoke on Tormance even though he'd had the preparatory treatment; when Krag rejoined Maskull on the outskirts of Barey he responded to his questions concerning Nightspore, saying that he was "not far away" and that they wouldn't wait for him because he would arrive at their destination "as soon as we shall". These are the sort of subtle ambiguities which are only appreciated on a second reading, but they support the notion that from his arrival on Tormance, Maskull, as his name implies, was a mask for Nightspore.



"We know that Crystalman is aware of the situation so what is its purpose? Whether Crystalman made Tormance so that via his created life-forms he could absorb the spirit fragments that originally passed through him without being corrupted, or whether he created the planet just to be a "God", he would want to detain Nightspore on it, i.e. he would try to prevent him from getting to Muspel. If Nightspore had been set down on Tormance unshielded he would have fallen to the pleasure-seeking ways of all its other inhabitants. Protected by Maskull's "bold daring heart", which led the latter from place to place, in search of adventure, but presumably sharing his experiences, Nightspore could see the world as it really was. It

also gives the reader the benefit of having an Earthman's point of view on the various incidents.

Just before Gangnet joins Maskull and Krag, the latter says, "Perhaps Crystalman will make one more attempt on you." If we cast this idea back through Maskull's various encounters we find attempts to sidetrack him nearly all the way. This is not just by the natives but also due to the fact that as he travels from province to province he develops specialised sensory organs which amplify or distort his perception of the world.

In the area of Poolingdred, Maskull's new organs reveal the true splendour of the landscape such that he can even hear the rays of sunlight. The inhabitants of this area revere nature and their philosophy is summed up by Joiwind who asks, "What pleasure is greater than loving-kindness?"

When Maskull sleeps on the outskirts of Ildawn his organs mutate and these subsequently give him a different perspective. Whereas earlier everything had existed purely in its own right, now things are seen in terms of their usefulness to him. He can now also absorb the minds of other people. Here, as Oceaxe tells Maskull, they believe that "animals were made to be eaten, and simple natures were made to be absorbed."

Despite their contrasting attitudes both of these women enjoy their lives and wish Maskull to remain in their countries. They also both believe that Crystalman and Surtur are one and the same. On the other hand the men of Sant know this to be "the greatest of lies", to quote Catice. They also know that Tormance is a false world and that its pleasures are, as Spadevil states, "a fierce mocking enemy" which kills "the naked grandeur of the soul". To protect themselves they have resorted to self-inflicted pain. However, according to Spadevil who has been away brooding, "this hatred of pleasure is the greatest pleasure to them."

When Maskull is given a double membrane on his forehead like that of Spadevil, pain and pleasure have no meaning and objects are perceived in terms of his importance to them. Spadevil's new law is duty and he wants Maskull to be his first disciple, but when Catice strikes out one of the Earthman's membranes, Maskull realises that duty is "but a cloak under which we share the pleasure of other people."

Dreamsinter shows Maskull a vision in which Krag stabs him in the back; Polecra (quoting Broodvial) tells him that the way to get to Muspel is by renouncing the self-life but at the same time reuniting with the whole of Crystalman's world; Leehallifae, after Maskull tells him that Muspel is another world of some sort, replies, "That cannot be. There is only one world — Faceny's." (Faceny, he informs Maskull, is the original and true name of Crystalman). Corpang, on the other hand, states that there are three worlds, Faceny's, Amfuse's and Thire's which turn out to be three states of perception — existence, Love and Religion; Haunte creates in Maskull's mind the desire to meet the woman Sullenbode, a desire which is enhanced by alcohol and the female atmosphere of Lichstora; Sullenbode captures Maskull's heart and when his greater attraction to Muspel-light than to her competitive embraces causes her to die he loses all impetus to travel on. At this point Krag suddenly shows up in order to push Maskull onwards to his destination.

Gangnet is Crystalman's final attempt on Maskull. He extols the virtue of Tormance's second sun, Alppain, of which Maskull has only so far seen the after-glow, telling him that it "is a wonderful, life-giving sun". However, Krag warns Maskull that this is Crystalman's trump card; "you'll renounce the world so eagerly that you'll want to stay in the world merely to enjoy your sensations." As always Krag is correct and when Maskull finally sees the blue sun he says, "I feel as if some foul tumour had been scraped away, leaving me clean and free... I have no self anymore... this is life." Disillusionment is, according to Krag, the last and strongest illusion of all.

The journey across Tormance has enormously weakened Maskull and it takes only a little prompting on the part of Krag to bring about his death. Presumably only Maskull's death could release Nightspore from within. Krag tells Nightspore, "You have got through, and the latter realises that he has escaped from "that ghastly world". After climbing the tower and learning the facts he discovers that he is only the first to be rescued and that

he and Krag (whom Nightspore soon learns is Surtur) have to somehow return the remaining trapped spirit fragments to Muspel before they are totally absorbed by Crystalman.



THIS SEEMS A GOOD POINT TO LIST THE QUESTIONS FOR WHICH I still don't have any answers. If, as he claims at the end, Krag (Surtur) is mightier than Crystalman, how did the latter ever drain off all the life force of Muspel, and why for thousands of years was Krag unable to reclaim any of his "people"? How will Nightspore be able to help him? Why are we told near the end that "the corruptations of his life on Earth were scorched out of Nightspore's soul, perhaps not for the first time"? Is there a connection between this, Nightspore's remark, "I can't face rebirth", and Krag's comment when they were still on Earth, "the journey is getting notorious"? Since Nightspore needed to have his arm cut as Maskull did before he could ascend the Observatory tower with its Tormantic gravity, had he been born (reborn?) on Earth? How did he know so much about the Gap of Sorgie? Why did the voice in the tower say that Nightspore would return? Who had slept in the beds and where did they go?

What is the significance of Maskull's vision in Tydomin's cave where he sees the scene from the apparition's point of view?

If Tormance is a composite of the words Tormant and Romance, which words combine to make Muspel? (My guess is Mush and Dispel.) Why is the remnant of Muspel in the form of a tower, why is it situated on Tormance, why is it so similar to the one at Starkness and why does the latter have Tormantic gravity? What is the connection between the banshee-like wail heard before the departure and the similarly described voice of Crystalman heard from the top of the Muspel tower?

This brings me neatly to the question of whether the story is an allegory. When Krag meets Maskull on the latter's fifth morning on Tormance he says, concerning the Earthman's impending death, "You are ripe for it. You have run through the gamut. What else is there to live for?" Does he mean that Maskull has seen all there is to see of Tormance and that it's now time to give up his life in accordance with the original bargain? Or, does he mean that in his previous four days Maskull has experienced the equivalent of a normal lifetime on Earth and, as such, he is not depriving him of anything?

For the first two days of Maskull's journey, there is a close parallel with life on Earth. He arrives naked on a new world and, after a woman has given him a vital infusion of her milk-like blood, he familiarises himself with his environment via his new sensory organs. Later the woman's husband tells Maskull a story which gives him an insight into the ways of that world. His next encounter takes him into the realm of sex and violence, domination and jealousy and as such represents the loss of innocence. After this Maskull falls in with some people who spend all their time thinking about the meaning of life.

When Maskull leaves Sant his progress ceases to have a direct parallel with the course of life on Earth which makes me wonder if perhaps the previous similarity was not intentional, at least not as a sequence anyway. Perhaps we are just meant to perceive that the behaviour patterns of most of the people of Tormance are exaggerated versions of human characteristics.

The only thing that is certain is that Maskull's running through "the gamut" was primarily for Nightspore's benefit as already described. "Gamut", as well as meaning a whole course or extent of something, also refers to a whole series of musical notes. The book is full of musical references so perhaps when Krag tells Maskull, "the music was not playing for you, my friend," he is talking about the latter's journey as much as the mysterious drumming.

What about the wider aspect; are Tormance and Muspel metaphors for Earth and our notion of an afterlife? There are certainly similarities between events in the story and various theological beliefs. Crystalman, whom Krag refers to as "the real devil", constantly diverts the

people of Tormance with various pleasures, and only those who deny them recall their origins in Muspel. Similarly it has been said that what we call the devil is in reality the input of wrong thoughts into our minds, such as greed, lust, etc., the intention being that we should overcome them in order to get to heaven.

The life force of Muspel was originally in a spirit form which transcended individuality. Likewise humanity, although split into many races, has a belief common to its various creeds that we have a spiritual origin and that our earthly minds are like rock pools temporarily separated from the ocean.

However, as with Maskull's journey, the parallel is only partial. The life force of Muspel was 100% pure and was stolen by a completely external entity in order to populate his world, whereas some of our religions tell us that man in his original state sinned in some way necessitating the creation of the Earth — by the same God. A further difference is that on Tormance the spirit fragments are being eroded away with spiritual death as the end result, due to the lives of their host bodies, while we are told that our world is meant to be enjoyed and that we can't come to any permanent spiritual harm on it.

So *A Voyage to Arcturus* is allegorical in some of its parts but not in whole. I think it is best to approach this book as a fantastic adventure peppered with an assorted collection of symbols rather than as a comprehensive metaphor for life, the universe and everything.

Perhaps David Lindsay's intention is summed up by Maskull when he says of Broodvial's philosophy, "He must have meant that, as it is, we are each of us living in a false, private world of our own, a world of dreams and appetites and distorted perceptions."

At one point the author has Leehallfae say "Everything hangs together." If he is also talking about the book I am encouraged but not enlightened.

Anyone who can offer further enlightenment on this difficult book, please write to Vector or direct to Tim Vestmacott at Flat 1, 13 Rosemeath Avenue, Winchmore Hill, London W21 3NE.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Paul Kincaid



BEST SF STORIES - Brian W. Aldiss
(Gollancz, 1988, 328pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Edward James

SEVERAL REVIEWERS NOTED THAT ONE OF the problems of Aldiss and Wingrove's *Trillion Year Spree* was its failure to deal with the important rôle Brian Aldiss himself has played in the history of science fiction. Those same reviewers, of course, would have been just as condemning had Aldiss and Wingrove gone to the other extreme, as Lester Del Rey did in his history of sf. Anyone wishing to get some idea of Aldiss's contribution to the field in the space of four or five books could do worse than read, say, *Non-Stop, Hothouse, Barefoot in the Head, Hellion's Spring* and this volume. Any "Best of" collection (particularly one selected anonymously, as this one is: was it Aldiss's idea of "The Best"? Malcolm Edwards's? Whose?) does lend itself to quibbles. Some of his collections (*Space, Time and Nathaniel, Intangibles Inc., New Arrivals, Old Encounters*) have provided no stories at all; some periods of his career have perhaps been overemphasised. But on the whole it is a selection which has captured much of the astonishing variety of his work. The stories range chronologically from "Outside" (1955) to "The Difficulties Involved in Photographing Nix Olympia" (1986). Here is Aldiss the master of the old-style twist-in-the-tail story, with "Outside", "Poor Little Warrior" or "Who Can Replace Man?". Aldiss revels in his own updates of the immense imaginings of pulp space opera, in "Heracles of the Huge God" or "An Appearance of Life". Here's the ultra-English Aldiss recreating the world of Wells in "The Saliva Tree" or flailing bitterly at all sorts of contemporary targets in "My Country 'Tis Not Only of Thee". And the equally typical cosmopolitan Aldiss contemplating the collapse of the West in "Door Slams in Fourth World" or "The Gods in Flight". There are 22 stories in all. Few will like them all: their styles and tones are too varied for any but the most broad minded readers. But altogether they give an excellent idea of Aldiss's range, talents and humanity. Those who voted him, in 1959, the most promising sf author could assure themselves by

this collection that their judgement was not far off the mark.

FAR AS HUMAN EYE COULD SEE - Isaac Asimov
(Grafton, 1988, 214pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Darroll Pardoe

TO ISAAC ASIMOV ANTHOLOGIES THERE IS no end, but as this one is concerned mainly with chemistry I was especially pleased to be asked to review it. To my mind, these popular science essays are what Asimov does best. I'd prefer to read one any day in preference to his science fiction, which appears to have neither grown nor changed in 40 years. This current batch of essays, which appeared in *FASE* over 1984/6, ranges widely in its subject matter, from batteries and photoelectric cells, through vitamins and coenzymes to the centre of the earth, the chemical composition of interstellar space and oddball stars. Asimov's writing is always entertaining, always instructive and always comprehensible. I always look for the little asides, the snippets of odd information that find their way in, such as why Americans (and cornflake packets) call nicotinic acid "niacin", why noon is at midday, and why jam is so sweet. As always, my recommendation on this excellent book of essays is "read and enjoy".

CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION SHORT NOVELS OF THE 1930s - Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh (Eds)
(Robinson, 1988, 572pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

NOVELLAS ARE NOT LONG ENOUGH TO BE published as a novel (without padding) and too long to be reprinted in a traditional anthology. Thus I applaud this enterprise which allows some of them a new lease of life, and hope we see similar books for later decades.

Of these 10 novellas, three are perhaps classics: Lovecraft's "The Shadow out of Time", Campbell's "Who Goes There?" and de Camp's "Divide and Rule", and I'd heard of Leinster's "Sidewise in Time", but I'd read none of these stories before.

I didn't like the Lovecraft because I don't care for his style of writing, far too over emphatic. He pounds into us how terrible the situation is, how horrific this alien race,

but the actual descriptions do not substantiate this. If you've not read Lovecraft it may be a good introduction, but for me it contains no fear or horror and there are better Lovecraft stories which convey this aspect of his writing.

"Who Goes There", the story of an alien gradually taking over members of an antarctic expedition, is well written, taut and a good thriller. It holds up even though there have been many similar stories since.

"Divide and Rule" is fun. You may think it's a fantasy or parallel world, with knights in armour in modern day New York, but it's an alien conquest story where the aliens have restricted mankind's technological base and reverted to feudal government. The story is simple - mankind fights back - but de Camp's obvious knowledge of armour and other knightly things and the amusing way in which it's told meant I could still enjoy this story.

Leinster's story is about parallel worlds, now a standard theme. We follow a small band through some of these worlds and things happen to them, but it's not really a story, just events surrounding the idea.

Of the rest I only really rated Stanley G. Weinbaum's "Dawn of Flame". To put it into a box it's a post-holocaust rite of passage story. I'm somewhat surprised that he got away with the sexual overtones in the 30s; he's an under-rated author and much of his fiction still holds up today.

Jack Williamson gives us a story about lycanthropy, Eric Frank Russell and Leslie T. Johnson provide a time travelogue, and Harry Bates's story is similar but includes the end of the human race. Cornell Woolrich deals with re-animating the dead and Horace L. Gold with the transference of personalities. All much used themes now but not then. While these stories did not hold up as well as the others none were unreadable.

I found two common threads: xenophobia and the lack of rocket ships. Without exception the aliens are bad, at least the humans consider them bad. In Bates's "Alas, All Thinking" the "aliens" are the future human race who have followed a cerebral rather than physical path and this is considered sufficient justification for the "hero" to kill them! Williamson's aliens are more evil than Lovecraft's, and like Lovecraft's somewhat over written. At least de Camp's are sort of high tech buffoons, but as they conquered mankind that doesn't say a lot for us. USA in the 30s was isolationist, and

perhaps that's reflected in the treatment of the aliens.

As for the lack of rockets, only Russell and Johnson's story takes place off Earth, but while the narrator is on Venus his story takes place on Earth. Either these 10 are atypical, or my belief that most early stories relied on rocket ships is sadly wrong.

These stories from the 30s have some historical significance, and three hold up very well. My greatest dislike is the large number of typos, surely we could have had better proof reading. I look forward to future volumes.

IN THE COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS - Paul Auster
(Faber, 1988, 188pp, £9.95)
DAYS BETWEEN STATIONS - Steve Erickson
(Futura, 1988, 249pp, £3.99)
THE WAR AGAINST CHAO - Anita Mason
(Hamish Hamilton, 1988, 252pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Paul Kincald

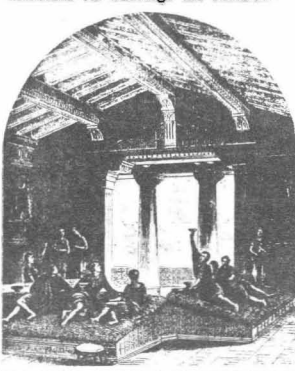
THINGS FALL APART, AS THE POET PUT IT, the centre cannot hold. These three books demonstrate that a common theme among today's writers is the end of things; and that, as so often happens, the mainstream is turning to science fiction in order to express its fears and feelings. Terrorism, vandalism, urban blight, the civilisation of the city is under attack, and reeling from the blows. Government indifference, or even active support for the processes of decay, do not help. The result is a grim, grey vision of rot and ruin.

Each book, in its own way, is excellent, but each author chooses to look askance at the city of tomorrow in very different ways. Auster and Mason are closest in some of the details they envisage: institutionalised scavenging, for example. Yet it would be hard to imagine two more different books in style and tone. Auster's rapid follow-up to the minimalist detective story of *The New York Trilogy*, is equally bare, equally concerned with literary reference, equally an intellectual enquiry into the nature of identity and the death of language. It is more bleak in its manner than in any state it portrays. Fresh, vigorous and challenging, it builds upon the success of that first book without really advancing much beyond it, nevertheless it is not the book for fans of plot and incident.

Anita Mason's previous book, on the other hand, was an excellent historical novel, *The Illusionist*, and though this retains the same rich and eminently readable style, it could not be more different in subject or manner. Like Auster she sets her action in a nameless city in decay, but here the façades of civilisation are more rigorously maintained by the Council and the Company. But when John Hare is unfairly dismissed from his job he becomes a marginal, and begins an odyssey through the underworld of this

rotting world that reveals much about the nature of the state, and the inexplicably lethal Zone at the heart of the city. Along the way Mason propounds a powerful yet equivocal argument about the nature of political control, and the instruments for maintaining civilisation.

The best of the three, however, is Steve Erickson's extraordinarily surreal vision of a future in which Los Angeles drowns in sand, Paris freezes, the canals of Venice run dry, and two blue eyes glow in a bottle. In and around this is a cock-eyed story of the century built around the career of an obsessive but brilliant film maker. Strange connections are made, coincidences abound, and the world we know slips into one we don't without us noticing the change. It is a peculiar, magnificent novel, full of flaws yet so original and daring that its bold successes far outweigh the failures.



THE PLAYER OF GAMES - Iain M. Banks
(Macmillan, 1988, 309pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

I WAS GOING TO SAY THAT *THE PLAYER OF GAMES* is a more mature work than its predecessor, *Consider Phlebas*, but in view of my recent discovery that *The Player of Games* was written first, I'm not so certain this is a good idea. However, I also know it was extensively rewritten, so maybe that observation still holds true. I hope so, because *The Player of Games* rises head and shoulders above *Consider Phlebas*. The latter was an action-packed but unconventional space opera, enjoyable to read, but I wasn't the only person to feel that it sprawled uncontrollably. As for the last hundred pages, they really should have been edited down to something much more succinct. For all that, it was definitely one of the more readable novels of last year.

The Player of Games, despite its earlier genesis, shows signs of greater maturity, presumably acquired in the rewrite. It's a thoughtful, sombre sort of story, less reliant on action, but redolent with a careful attention

to plotting which reflects the central image of the novel: the game. In this case Azad - a game which has so much importance in the society in which it is played that it actually determines the whole structure of life within the Azadian Empire - is effectively "as comprehensive a model of life as it is possible to construct". Economic theory, establishment promotion, political factions: the fates of all are controlled by the outcome of the game. The ultimate winner becomes Emperor.

The Culture, having established contact with this civilisation, approaches Jernau Morat Gurgeh, expert in all games but seeking a new challenge, in the hope of persuading him to play the game for them. The Culture's interest in Azad is perhaps ambiguous, but no more so than the nature of the Culture itself, probably Banks' finest creation in these two SF novels. It's a communist society (that's with a small 'c' for the politically aware) with a penchant for meddling discreetly in the affairs of others, particularly the authoritarian regimes they despise. The Culture is a rationally organised society, and as such requires no laws to govern its people. Neat in principle, but practice sometimes falls rather short. In *Consider Phlebas*, Morza disagrees violently with the Culture's stance, to the extent of fighting on behalf of its enemies, despite not supporting them either. Yet *The Player of Games* offers the other side of the coin. Banks' portrayal of the Azadian Empire as a corrupt and decadent monarchy is particularly chilling, and his presentation of the Culture as an attractive alternative is very skilful, pointing up the undesirable nature of each in its turn. Gurgeh stands in the middle, the observer and commentator.

It is too simplistic, not to mention inaccurate, to regard this as a sequel to *Consider Phlebas*, but the novels might be regarded as companion pieces, presenting two sides of a coin. *Consider Phlebas*, even with its left-wing approach to space opera, is very much the fast-moving, action-packed story, exhilarating in the way it ranges across the universe. *The Player of Games* is much more compact, a microcosm encapsulated in the image of the gaming board. Neither novel offers any real answers, but they amply illustrate that there is more than one side to a story.

THE SKY LORDS - John Broman
(Gollancz, 1988, 318pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Chris Barker

THIS IS A PASSABLE POST-HOLOCAUST story of the ecological variety, and the first venture of its author into science fiction though he has other fiction to his credit as well as numerous books, essays and reviews relating to SF and fantasy in the cinema. One's immediate impression is that the

book might have made a much better film. Its general tenor invites comparison with the work of Philip José Farmer or early Moorcock. Omitting the lesbian sex and the extrapolation of some relatively recent progress in molecular biology it could have been written 30 years ago. The most original element is the use of giant airships; these overshadow their human occupants and are the main reason for suggesting the material would be better suited to the visual media.

The plot concerns Jan from a feminist influenced city-state which is on the one hand besieged by the "blight" - a devastating man-made plague - and on the other by the Sky Lords of the title. These overlords control mile-long blimps, though the society within them - as well as the struggling remnant on the ground - has regressed to a kind of feudalism.

The Sky Lords operate a protection racket whereby the earth-bound groups supply food and their other meagre resources in return for not being bombed. Needless to say this isn't a particularly happy state of affairs for those on the ground, and as the delicate balance between being bombed or starved to death changes Jan's mother rallies her city to attack the Lord Pangloth, the local blimp, on its next visit. The rebellion is a failure, Jan survives, and the rest of the book is concerned with her life on board after capture. This involves an uneasy partnership with a rather dubious character, Milo, who saves her from certain rape, but whose own motives are far from pure.

It is in one sense a rite-of-passage piece in which a nice feminist girl with a sheltered upbringing enters the real world where men are "real men" rather than the genetically tampered weak, ineffectual version she's used to. Some may take umbrage at Brosnan's treatment of his protagonist, though I think the effect may be intended to be ironic rather than chauvinistic. It is worth bearing in mind that the book's intent clearly lies in adventure rather than serious literature. It's very much in the middle of genre SF, but Brosnan is outclassed by other writers within mainstream SF, for example Bob Shaw who has a much greater sympathy with the characters he creates. Finally the conclusion leaves a large thread hanging loose, doubtless this will be woven into at least one sequel.

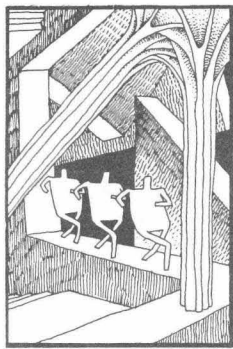
SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & HORROR:
1986 - Charles N. Brown & William G. Contento
[Locus Press/Meckler, 1988, 347pp, £32]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THIS TOME IS SUBTITLED: "A COMPREHENSIVE Bibliography of Books and Short Fiction Published in the English Language", yet right at the start we learn it's been put together from the mon-

thly "Books Received" column in *Locus*, and though the information has been checked and expanded, some titles inevitably will have slipped through the net. Nevertheless, not many can have been missed, the list of books by author fills 70 double-columned pages and covers not only straight SF and fantasy, but also juveniles, non-fiction, and novels only tangentially related to the genre. And for each book we get publisher, ISBN, date of publication, price, page count, cover, and a brief summation. In other words this is an excellent reference tool.

It also lists books by title, books originally published in 1986, books by subject (SF, fantasy, horror, juvenile, collection, anthology, magazines, reference, associational, miscellaneous), stories by author and title, the contents of the year's anthologies and magazines, plus an appendix which includes recommended reading lists from the *Locus* reviewers. In other words it's good to browse in, as one entry leads to another. And because British books are covered as well as American, it's as useful on this side of the Atlantic as the other.

But it is the British side that lets it down. British listings in *Locus* are never as comprehensive as the American, and there are gaps. Thus, although *Interzone: The First Anthology* received American publication that year, its contents are not listed, and one scours the book in vain for mention of Geoff Ryman's "O Happy Day!". So, not quite as comprehensive as it claims, but still very good.



TOVONEN BT

TALES FROM THE HIDDEN WORLD - R.
Ghetwynd-Hayes
[William Kimber, 1988, 206pp, £9.50]
Reviewed by Martin H. Brice

I HAVE ALREADY READ SOME OF THE WORK of Ghetwynd-Hayes, but I do not think I have visited Clavering Grange before. Located in Kent - I imagine somewhere, not far off the M2 or M20 - its foundations were laid in ground forever tainted by some ancient horror. The Grange has gone, but its macabre spell

still binds the new housing estate and embraces the present - and future - generations of the Sinclair family: future, because the site of Clavering Grange is also a multi-dimensional interface, a doorway into other times, other places, and other realms.

Tales from the Hidden World comprises four novellas covering incidents in the 20th Century. My favourite is "Those That Serve", a well-written portrayal of a 1900 life and attitudes as well as a horror story. The characters are believable eccentrics; only gradually do their more sinister machinations ensnare the young servant until it is too late for her to escape her inevitable yet unexpected fate.

The idea that Immortals condemned (?) to "Life Everlasting" should play pranks on living people seems a more amusing way of passing eternity than wandering around wailing as ghosts usually do. The extravagant behaviour of the psychic detectives in "The Gringing Couple of Clavering" disguises two very professional ghost-hunters, experts in scientific and occult techniques for investigating and countering the paranormal. And for most of "Home and Beauty" we are not sure who will prove the greater peril: Sinclair and his plant-like Munkins; or the eerie couple and their photographs in the house where the heroine is lodging - a climactic horror-story made more powerful by the use of first person.

No, I haven't visited Clavering Grange before, but I know I shall go there again.

CRADLE - Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee
[Gollancz, 1988, 309pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by John Newsinger

ACCORDING TO THE COVER BLURB, *CRADLE* is a "masterwork of soaring visionary imagination" with top American space scientist Gentry Lee adding another dimension to Arthur Clarke's masterly skill. Unfortunately this is totally misleading. In fact the novel is a rather clumsy comedy thriller with a strange encounter element worked into the plot.

Of course, misleading cover blurbs are hardly something new even if they continue to annoy. More to the point, does the book actually succeed at what it sets out to accomplish, is it any good? Not for me I'm afraid.

The plot is embarrassing rather than funny and the characters are strictly cardboard. It must be admitted that some attempt has been made at giving them psychological depth, but the end result reads like a selection from an American psychiatrist's casebook. We are dealing here with the immature rather than the mentally ill. The plot develops remarkably slowly with only the last third of the book actually concerning the strange encounter that takes place beneath the ocean. What occurs is very much sub-Spielberg with a Commie-obsessed naval

officer being confronted by an alien carrot, and sentient carpet creatures making an appearance, etc. And at the end, when our heroes' pleadings persuade the aliens to leave our world alone ... Well it just doesn't work.

Clarke's reputation can survive this sort of thing without difficulty, but Gentry Lee would be well advised not to give up his day job.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY - Annie Dalton
(Methuen, 1988, 173pp, £6.95)
ADAM'S PARADISE - Alison Rush
(Macmillan, 1988, 187pp, £6.95)
Reviewed by Jessica Yates

ADAM'S PARADISE IS ANOTHER IN THE LONG line of Celtic fantasy for younger readers. In a dreary landscape of mudflats, dunes and a river estuary in north-west England Ruth revisits her childhood home, her Gran and her younger brother, Adam. Soon she is drawn into a supernatural conflict in Otherworld where her mother, the witch Fincara, and a host of women warriors seek a battered cup, all that is left of the Cauldron of the Dagda. Meanwhile a group of half-mortal men seek to regain the cup as they hold the other three treasures of the Four Cities. Ruth is told that her mother will put the Cauldron to evil purpose, but the men fight for the light.

Alison Rush dares to write intense, poetic prose though it may not always succeed; but preaching about the light and dark inevitably sounds pretentious if the reader has already read much of the genre. And I was puzzled by an inconsistency: Fincara says the cauldron can only be restored to its place in Caer Wydyr by a child born for that task, which is why she sought a mortal man to be that child's father. Yet when Adam brings the cup to her, Fincara tries to hang it on the chains herself.

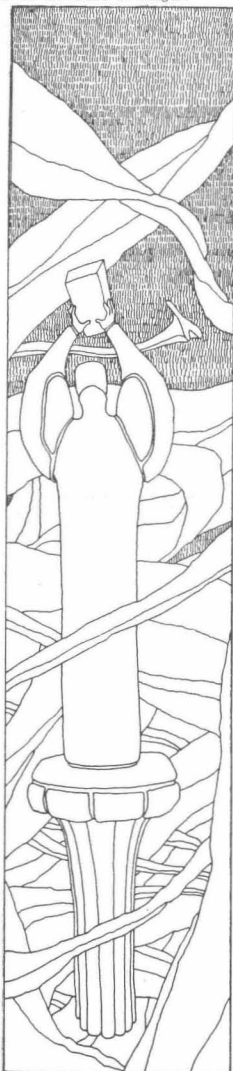
Apart from plotting problems, it's a pity Rush cannot free herself from debts to recent children's fiction. This is obviously indebted to Alan Garner's *Eldor*, even to the Spear of Llandan from Gorias (traditionally the spear came from Finias, the sword from Gorias). Four treasures, four cities, the light to be restored by the aid of children ... while Caer Wydyr, the castle of glass, also turns up in Susan Cooper's *Silver on the Tree*.

Annie Dalton, on the other hand, is the real thing! A new fantasy author for young adults with the right blend of originality and traditional elements, streets ahead of Rush.

Molly, a 15-year-old in a small Northern town, has fantasies about other worlds, and on a whim writes a holiday job ad which includes the phrases: "Quests undertaken ... enchantments broken ...". By one, three mysterious visitors announce she has been chosen to care for a strange child sought by an evil wizard. As the child adapts to late '80s culture - trainers, Dangermouse pyjamas and ice

cream - Molly finds a friend whose psychic aunt has the knowledge they need to defeat the wizard.

Full of allusions to, and jokes about, fairy tales and their modern versions - *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Dark Crystal*, *Labyrinth* - this very successful updating of the family fantasy recalls the work of Diana Wynne Jones, especially *Fire and Hemlock*, with a joke in the heart of danger.



THE JUDAS ROSE - Suzette Haden Elgin
(Women's Press, 1988, 363pp, £4.50)
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THE JUDAS ROSE CONTINUES THE STORY begun in Elgin's *Native Tongue*, set in America a century or so on in which there are two major changes. Mankind is in contact with extraterrestrials, some of whom we can communicate with through the special skills of the Linguists. And women are subordinated to men: the excesses of the 20th Century have been put to rights, and men have taken away from women the unfair burden of having to vote - indeed, of having to make any decisions.

The story is a continuation; unfortunately the ideas set out in *Native Tongue* for the development of a women's language, Láadan, are not really taken any further. The language is, yes, and is spread from the Linguist women who developed it out into the rest of society by, of all things, the Roman Catholic Church, through a clever series of deceptions.

So Láadan will be spoken by women everywhere; women will change, will become more capable of coping with men; men will be changed by their contact with such women; and eventually Láadan will be learnt, with other languages, by both girl and boy babies.

But we knew all this from *Native Tongue*, or could surmise it.

"No more powerful instrument for change exists than language," we are told on p352. But that is much of what is wrong with both books: we are told, not shown. Elgin's theory may well be valid; she is a Doctor of Linguistics, and see Mike Christie's article on the theories behind *Native Tongue* in *V139*. But she's not a particularly compelling or inspiring novelist, and unless she can pull a few literary rabbits out of the hat in a third volume (this one feels like the middle book of a trilogy, with the usual fault-hallmarks), I would regretfully consign her, as a novelist, to the category of worthy, but dull.

THE SUPERNATURAL TALES OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE - Peter Haining (Ed)
(Foulsham, 1987, 272pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Darroll Pardo

IN THE COLLECTIVE MIND OF THE PUBLIC Conan Doyle is inextricably linked with Sherlock Holmes. There are several reasons for the enduring popularity of the great detective, notably the perfect image of late-Victorian England they conjure up, and the interplay of the characters of Holmes and Watson. Doyle was also sufficiently slapdash in his plot construction to leave a store of contradictions and discontinuities for his fans to argue over. So it is interesting to read this collection of supernatural stories to see how he fared as an author in a non-Holmesian milieu. Conan Doyle is revealed as a journeyman writer, competent but

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rarely able to rise above the pedestrian. The problem, in his supernatural stories specifically, is that he is never able to make his horrors believably scary, either in the traditional way which raises the hairs at the nape of the neck, or in the currently fashionable creation of grue. Only five of the 18 stories here were published after 1900, so there is little trace of the obsession with spiritualism which dominated his later life. This is a book to read once, then give away. I wonder if William Hope Hodgson read "Playing with Fire", a tale of the raising of an astral unicorn, before he wrote "The Horse Invisible"?

HAUNTED - James Herbert

(Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 224pp, £10.95)

KOKO - Peter Straub

(Viking, 1988, 576pp, £12.95)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

THE PROLIFIC AND COMMERCIALY POPULAR Herbert has now tackled the Haunted House mystery, while Straub, after his own previous *Ghost Story*, has embroiled himself in a horrific thriller.

Haunted involves David Ash, a man with an undisclosed secret in his past who now devotes his time to exposing charlatan mediums and fake spiritualists, who is called upon to supply a rational explanation for the hauntings of Edbrook, a remote country house.

Koko concerns four survivors of the same campaign whose service in Vietnam culminated in an atrocity in a small village, Ia Thoc. 15 years later they reunite to investigate a series of murders in the Far East: the killer stuffs one of the regiment's playing cards into his victim's mouth, mutilates him, and identifies himself with a name they all once shared - Koko.

Herbert's characterisation is unusually shallow, but the reasons are (possibly) wound up within the plot; to say more would give away the denouement (though it was sign-posted for me very early on). Sadly *Koko* suffered the same ailment: if a character who is murdered has his face badly disfigured so he can only be identified by his dog tags then the possibility of a switched identity is bound to suggest itself. The difference was that *Haunted* only relied upon that one fact to produce the scary end, whereas *Koko* was many-layered, rich in characterisation, suspense and horror.

Haunted seems to have been written with filming in mind; scene shifts to show the person on each end of a telephone are unnecessary and abruptly switch the reader's attention; transition from scene to scene is smooth, however: "She remembered the last time, more than a year ago ..." followed by the new chapter, "When was the last time you went to church?" Ironically, ex-Lieutenant Beavers is the instigator of the search for the

Koko killer because he can see the potential for a bestseller non-fiction book and even a mini-series ...

Both books feature the flash-back. With *Haunted* the 18 pages comprising Ash's investigation into the demonic possession of a church is "all so obvious" to use his own words; it reveals little about his character and hardly moves the story along at all. The other, with a charlatan medium who is actually telepathic, is handled well, and paves the way for the "shock" ending, when Ash's locked memories and guilt pour out to unhinge him. The *Koko* flash-backs are graphic and snatched from the memories of the characters: each in their way adding another piece to the puzzle of why they acted as they did.

In *Koko* Dr Poole observes that "improbability and violence overflowed from ordinary life, and Stephen King seemed to know that". So does Straub. Time and again someone would enter a room and I would wonder if the killer was there, ready to pounce; and even when he did, the suspense continued. Some of the characters were not particularly pleasant yet I still cared what happened to them - well, with the exception of Beavers. And as the search progressed and the identity of the killer changed, sympathy began to creep in. For *Koko* is a story about a haunting too: as "if Vietnam was their real life and everything else just afterglow." It is a pleasure to read, notwithstanding the coarse language and graphic brutality depicted.

"Terror has many layers" says one of the characters, and so does *Koko*. This is a psychological horror thriller, touching upon Vietnam, the ironies and terror of that conflict, but mainly it is about people sucked into the past. Both books are page-turners, but Straub's is the more memorable.



EDGEMAN ENIGMA - James P. Hogan

(Century, 1988, 408pp, £12.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback)

Reviewed by Ken Lake

HAD ANYONE TOLD ME A WHILE BACK THAT people would pay £5.95 for a paperback SF novel, I'd have laughed. Yet here we have another of those "trade paperbacks" that will soon appear in normal format by a simple trick of photoreduction, saving the publisher the cost and trouble of binding in the sort of cover that would preserve this book for longer than the few hours it takes

to wade painstakingly through its complexities and consign it to the box of unwanted books.

Paranoid American spies are so thoroughly unlikely, I find it hard to understand how they can be elevated to the level of admiration that US SF fans apparently offer them - for if they don't, this book is flawed from the start. Again, utterly twisted, murderous, convincing, politically indoctrinated Russians are surely a creation of American comicbook fantasy - how come Hogan believes we will accept such parodies in a real book?

Add to these "a community that knows no frontiers" meaning utterly sensible, pragmatic, clear-thinking scientists, and you realise that this is really just 1930s pulp thud 'n' blunder SF, an anti-Communist polemic disguised as realistic fiction (though not very convincingly).

Hands up all of you who realise that Ziganda is not a breakaway part of the Malagasy Republic. Hardly anyone? Then you may have read the prologue of this dangerous, bigoted book and believed it to be true. Hogan will cheer if that is the case, for his real aim is to sow distrust among us all, to "prove" that only dirty American politics can save the world from dirty Communist politics. Open this book and almost the first thing you will see is an acknowledgement for texts reprinted from an anti-Communist compilation published in the United States; facing this you will read a dedication that is so stupid it has to be a joke.

The book is riddled with deliberate red herrings, every thought and action is argued three ways or more, confusion is spread upon misdirection and you cannot trust a word anyone says. The "secret" is revealed on page 327 after an interminable iteration of plot, counterplot, betrayal and lie, well sprinkled with xenophobic expressions like "You Irish asshole" and leading to no end of neatly sketched engineering cut-away drawings, page after page of technical explanations, all boiling down to (a) a Russian space station is really a highly armoured centre for the destruction of the West, and (b) the entire Russian leadership is in a massive hole in the ground which everyone else believes to be the space station aforementioned. If you can swallow this, you can swallow anything. Come now, where's your common sense - and Hogan's?

METROPHAGE - Richard Kadrey

(Gollancz, 1988, 240pp, £11.95)

Reviewed by Martin Waller

METROPHAGE BEGAN AS A TERRY CARR ACE Special, his swansong - he died after editing it. It was the series that also saw the debut of William Gibson, and this is another of those novels about a hustler moving through the cloaca of a neurotic, computerised future city,

being double-crossed at every turn. Jonny Qabbala, drug dealer and part-time anarchist, is one of those persons we would all love to be at 20 and shudder to read about in our morning papers once we pass 30.

He is caught in a future Los Angeles which is gradually dying of an apparently imported new strain of leprosy. Those responsible could be the Alpha Rats, aliens who have taken up residence on the moon, or a neo-Palaestinian Middle East superstate at virtual war with the US, or even the city's own authorities cleaning out the bizarre gangs who have taken over. Kadrey manages a (fairly) new slant on what is, on the face of it, already hackneyed material. He writes in the familiar clipped, cool streetwise prose style but shows at least some awareness of what each word means.

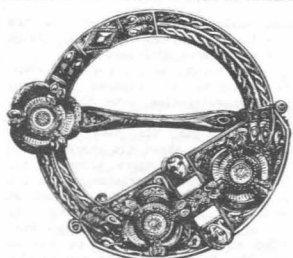
Surrealism and Dadaism provide an unusual theme - art is continually referred to, descriptions evoke well-known paintings and the leader of one of the odder street gangs is named Man Ray. The link is made explicit at one point: "to Jonny, the Ernests and Dalis could have been snap-shots from an only slightly depraved tour book of Los Angeles." To add to this Kadrey drags in Situationism and the concept of the Spectacle, the Big Lie used by Government to keep its subjects in line. In this case it is the aliens who are the necessary invented hate figures. The Good Guys are the Croakers; a web of anarchistic black market doctors forced underground in the 1990s by the AIDS crisis. Jonny ends up, his friends and lovers dead, his smuggler boss murdered, walking away from a city ravaged by civil war with the cure to the plague in his bloodstream.

The book has its weaknesses and infelicities. Jonny starts too many chapters coming round from yet another beating, and Kadrey has little concept of character in his peripheral cast list. But it has its strengths as well, not least its black humour. Characters with names like Pere Ubu, Groucho and Nialla Virtue throng the city, throwing bombs shaped like glass roses. One character claims surrealism to be the first art movement to genuinely comprehend the modern age. It is not a new contention within SF, but it has seldom been expressed with such panache and glee.

EAST OF LAUGHTER - R.A. Lafferty
(Morrigan, 1988, 176pp, £10.95, Special Edition £35)
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS BOOK. THERE IS no literal sense to the plot.

But I enjoyed it. Essentially it is an allegory, written in a symbolic code to which I don't have the key. It has a Christian basis: the central characters are a group of twelve; one is a traitor; and death is merely a



transition to the afterlife. But, in parallel, the inclusion of non-Christian mythopoetic loose ends allows the reinterpretation of both them and Christianity.

Now, I suffer from "protestant literalism" - I never learned when young to interpret texts symbolically. Thus the following exegesis of a character, intended to illustrate how bewilderingly multilayered this book is, may be a little wobbly.

Atrax Fabulinus is the chief Scribbling Giant who writes the future history of the world. In the Christian aspect he is a Jehovah figure who is omnipresent but usually invisible, who leads (and misleads) the group of twelve. In the non-Christian mythopoetic area Atrax is replaced by one of the group of twelve, like Jupiter usurping Saturn. He is also referred to as "the Roman Rabelais". But Atrax has to write Rabelais into the future of the world - he is, after all, a Roman - in order for the nickname to mean anything, and thus causality is questioned. Finally, he could represent Lafferty. The name means "atrocious fabulist", and he is writing the future we are reading, as is Lafferty.

For me, then, the delight of reading Lafferty is that, despite the basis in Christianity which I dislike, so much non-Christian material is included that multiple cross-referential christian reinterpretations of reality become possible. This can lead to re-examination of the entire edifice of one's rationality. It may seem a disconcerting prospect. It is not. A reassuringly informed and critical intelligence, Rabelaisian in its sheer exuberance, underpins what you read. No, I don't understand it, but it makes me think, re-evaluate and, hopefully, understand myself better. That's quite an achievement.

FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS - Paul J. McAuley
(Collins, 1988, 253pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

REVIEWING HOLDS A GREAT JOY, DISCOVERING a writer the prospect of whose next work is exciting. I knew McAuley from his short stories, and liked his taut, evocative prose style. *Four Hun-*

dred Billion Stars is his first novel and even if it isn't brilliant - flagging and becoming repetitious towards the end - it is exciting.

The theme is exobiology, "evolution" and discovery. Dorothy Yoshida, an astronomer, has been shanghaied to a remote planet where the human scheme of things is challenged and which may just hold the key to an interstellar war. Dorothy is psychic in a big way and knows there is a major league alien intelligence on the planet - only no-one believes her, especially her rigid-minded military superiors, because the local fauna is distinctly unintelligent. Dorothy really wants nothing but out of her situation, but the story has her journey, both literally and metaphorically, to the dark tower which is an entirely logical and satisfying resolution. And yet ...

The novel's weaknesses are structural. The plot developments seem pre-ordained rather than organic. There are physical perils galore for Dorothy, yet never any real doubt that she - and only she - will solve the puzzle. The effect of the characters upon the plot is very limited. They are well realised but seem divorced from the storyline which runs along the rails laid down when the story was planned. More than one act against character because the plot demands that is the way they must behave. Then there are the strong echoes of McAuley's influences - although there is no real harm in admiring the likes of Aldiss, Kilworth and Bear.

These, though, are quibbles, those factors which keep *Four Hundred Billion Stars* a good novel, rather than a great one. It is an entertaining, fascinating read which sets its stall out from the beginning as a traditional science fiction story and resolves the questions set. I enjoyed it and, as I say, I am looking forward to the next.

THE REVOLUTION OF SAINT JONE - Lorna Mitchell
(Women's Press, 1988, 204pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Mandy Gunning

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF MEN'S EGALITARIAN imagination? If history compelled men to make a world where women are their equals, what would their creation resemble? Mitchell replies that our world would still be the model. Women's oppression would persist and men would con everyone, including themselves, into thinking that black kettles are white doves. In the name of sexual equality, they'd carry on whoring and bettering and running the show. The best that men can achieve is the ideology of equality: only a world made by women could realise it.

Or at least that's the realisation that Saint Jone, the novel's heroine, comes to. In the opening chapters she ardently believes in her society. It is a place where science has become an

ascetic dogma, where passions may only be expressed in classroom games, where the worth of every human artefact is measured by its mathematical harmony. One by one, the scales are peeled from Jones's eyes until, aided by a super-sage that forces the articulation of intuited truths, she proclaims the failures of the male scientific theocracy. Chapter by chapter, she moves inexorably towards love and sex with a savvy rebel. This romance is essential for Jones's burgeoning political awareness; one of the sensibilities of our age is that love and revolution go together like a puzzle and solution.

And here lies the chief problem of the novel: it reads like a straight translation of feminist truisms into another dialect. Mitchell plods faithfully through every transcription. Lesbians are now Babylonians, Chaos is Kayos, the oppressed minorities are ethnics, what's Christian is Krishchan. And God is Gawd, but for some reason he is just Almighty instead of Orldmity. Mitchell is so dazzled by the interesting dictionary she has compiled, she has forgotten to surprise the reader. She chooses to simply mutate her feminist truisms rather than transform them.

A translator of technical manuals does not need to master the skills of story-telling. Mitchell writes redundant chapters which stall rather than propel the plot; zigzags between viewpoint characters as if she'd just heard the four minute warning, and gives little attention to how a writer can place new terms into a context that enriches their meaning.

Seasoned readers of SF will recognise the exuberance of a new writer who can't resist dressing her window into a new world with gaudy lace curtains. But this is a first novel, and as such it shows a writer with promise. Some passages, particularly those describing Jones's fears of drowning in the sewer of un-Krishchan sex, are splendidly visualised. I look forward to her fourth novel.

SOURCERY - Terry Pratchett
(Gollancz, 1988, 243pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

IF YOU KNOW THE WORLD IS FLAT, AND IF supported on four giant elephants, standing on the shell of the turtle Great A'Tuin who is swimming endlessly through the interstellar void, then you've probably read Pratchett's previous four Discworld novels. And you'll be glad that this is the fifth.

Rincewind looked up an elderly striped cat was extruded from an upper window and flopped down on to the flagstones below. Even the bedbugs were on the move.

All of Unseen University (except the wizards, of course) anticipates the arrival of the sourcerer the most powerful and dangerous source of magic since the young days of the Disc. But Rincewind and the Librarian realise

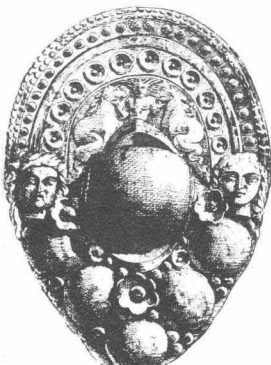
the danger, and once more, Rincewind sets out to save everything. Those who know Rincewind aren't reassured.

There are eight levels of wizardry on the Disc; after sixteen years Rincewind has failed to achieve even level one.... It has been suggested that when Rincewind dies the average occult ability of the human race will actually go up a fraction.

Although *Sourcery* is just as funny as the other discworld novels, it has a serious core, as though Pratchett is heading towards a less jokey atmosphere for his world.

Spelter shuddered. In his heart of hearts an inner Spelter had woken and was struggling to make himself heard. It was a Spelter who suddenly longed for those quiet days, only hours ago, when magic was gentle and shuffled around the place in old carpet slippers and always had time for a sherry and wasn't like a hot sword in the brain and, above all, didn't kill people.

And a touch of seriousness doesn't really go amiss. Rincewind and friends have to face a challenge bigger than anything they've ever had to face, a knee-slappingly funny style would have taken the tension away from that, but Terry Pratchett has achieved the right balance, mixing humour and suspense beautifully, right to the end.



THE GOLD COAST - Kim Stanley Robinson
(E! Martin's Press/Tor, 1988, 390pp, £18.95)
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

ROBINSON HAS CONTINUED A TRACK RECORD I have never seen in another writer. This, his fourth novel, is as different from the previous three as they are from each other. Where *The Wild Shore* was a post-holocaust novel, *Iceberg* an almost Delany-esque trip around the inner planets of our solar system, and *The Memory of Whiteness* an unclassifiable venture into the future of music making painted on a broad cloth of star travel, *The Gold Coast* is a savage near-future satire on the American defence industry, set on al-

most the identical stretch of California coast as *The Wild Shore*.

There are further parallels. Both are set in the middle of the 21st century and concern a young man coming to terms with trying to be a writer, both of whom are interested in history, even down to both books beginning with an illegal/unauthorised and unconventional version of an archaeological dig. I think this is significant.

Quite evidently, both are rite-of-passage stories, but equally evidently the different settings convey very different political messages about America now. In this country *The Wild Shore* has been called right wing, which disappointed Robinson: from his own point of view, and indeed from a normal American point of view, it is quite radical. Could it be that *The Gold Coast* is a conscious effort to re-write the earlier book in a more acceptable form?

Whatever the truth, Robinson has created a distinctly different novel from *The Wild Shore*, with new, believable and sympathetic characters. The sideswipes at the defence establishment and the sympathetic portrayal of drug culture add a zest of controversy, while the historical portraits of Orange County and poetic interludes interspersing the present tense narrative add interesting tensions.

There is an undoubted debt to Philip K. Dick too. The style of narrative follows exactly Robinson's description, in his doctoral thesis, of Dick's narrative style, and some of Dick's concerns are mirrored here. Unfortunately, Dick's weak portrayal of women is also repeated, and this must be considered a major flaw in what is otherwise a fine achievement.

In all, this isn't a difficult book to read, but there is an awful lot to chew over if you are of a thoughtful frame of mind. Definitely recommended.

HUNTER/VICTIM - Robert Shekley
(Methuen, 1988, 238pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Cecil Nurse

THE THIRD BOOK IN SHEKLEY'S HUNT SEQUENCE is backwork. It's the sort of book you write when you've watched so many movies you've forgotten there is a real world out there. It is set in a near future America instantly recognisable as the fantasy world where the A-Team, James Bond and Animal House also live. The protagonist is a man called Frank Blackwell, whose only distinguishing characteristic (beside the name) is that his wife is shot to pieces in the first chapter, leaving two fingers clutching her handbag. He describes his emotions on page 21:

Sometimes events conspire to produce in you a confusion of emotions that can only be satisfied by the taking of human life. I want to kill somebody. What sort of emotion is this? Greed? Rage? Fury? Envy? Hate? One never finds out. He makes his way through the plot in a bemused fashion,

aided and abetted by The Hunt, which sees his emotion as being good and right and really ought to be legalised. He is set the task of hunting a Wiccan, a contra terrorist (Guzman) around him the CIA, various criminal groups, and a secret organisation of scientists, seek to further their interests. A beautiful enforcer called Mercedes inexplicably falls for him but dies in the end. The surprise in the tale is so wildly unpredictable I almost broke my jaw yawning.

The book is professionally written, and if you don't mind your buttons being pressed firmly in a familiar order, you might enjoy it. The chapters run like scenes from the movie to come, including a self-referential time-slip (tracing the origin of The Hunt to the first books in the sequence) which did not so much boggle my mind as niggle at it. The light and even blithe tone might class this as a parody except that the portrayal of killing is just as light in the real thing. The underlying philosophy - that wars are caused by the frustration of each individual's desire to kill, or perhaps that the excitement of manhunting will alleviate the frustrations of modern living - is presented as propaganda rather than speculation. Basically, a nasty piece of work dressed up as a comedy.

MOSCOW 2042 - Vladimir Voinovich
(Cape, 1988, 424pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

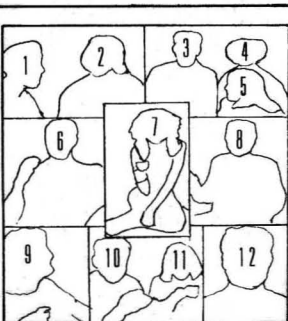
TO SAVOUR *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* TO THE full you need to know about Swift's society and times, though the inventiveness and action appeal universally. While there is plenty of inventiveness and action in Parts I and VII of Voinovich's novel, many of the intervening chapters, with such titles as "Family and Marriage", "Papli", "Inside the Kremlin", consist of discursive confrontations in the course of which communism is extrapolated into absurdity. The satire, while often Rebelesian comic, is inevitably attenuated for me and for most readers by lack of intimacy with the society being satirised (or societies, for dissident exilement is by no means exempted); and because translation (however excellent) from Russian into English (American Idiom) is a further barrier, since it is obvious that many in-jokes and savagings rest on linguistic tricks and subtleties and on the euphemisms and evasions of Moscow's street-talk and bureaucratic jargon.

Voinovich, exiled since 1980 and living in West Germany, sends his dissident hero, Kartsev, from the Munich of 1982 to the technologically regressed Moscow of 2042 by a photon-powered time shuttle. He has been manoeuvred into accepting a commission to publicise, in the twenty-first century, twentieth century plans to promote a Czarist counter-revolution. The novel

(this same Moscow 2042) that he wrote on his return to 1982 is, in 2042, official property, and some of the most telling ironies lie in accounts of official pressures to delete certain characters and trends so that history may be reshaped. Although Kartsev's time-return is then forbidden, the 1982 "proto-Czar", in the interim "on ice", turns up and, having wrested authoritarian power from the "Generalissimo", and having substituted Cossack-guarded baroque carriages for steam-driven armoured cars, permits his journey back to the Munich of 1982 to write the novel. This meta-fictional and temporal juggling and dystopian fantasising are highly enjoyable. Despite his protagonist's claim to dislike science fiction, the author is knowledgeable of its moods and foibles and doesn't hesitate to bring them within his satirical targeting, as a quote from the near light-speed time-trip will indicate:

I remember once in Paris, when a building was pointed out to me 'Look, there's the Louvre!' I looked, and thought, so it's the Louvre, so what? I thought the same thing again, watching the stars, planets, asteroids and nonoliths whiz past us. So what?

Ralph Steadman's jacket design is a work of great iconic wit. In its own right it makes the book worth possessing.



—FRONT COVER KEY—

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|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Deborah Beale | 7. Storm Constantine |
| 2. Rachel Pollack | 8. Stephen Donaldson |
| 3. Rob Holdstock | 9. Diana Wynne Jones |
| 4. Roz Kaveney | 10. Peter Morwood |
| 5. Mary Gentle | 11. Diane Duane |
| 6. Jonathan Carroll | 12. Ramsey Campbell |

THE FIRE WORM - Ian Watson
(Gollancz, 1988, 207pp, £10.95)
WHORES OF BABYLON - Ian Watson
(Paladin, 1988, 302pp, £3.95)
Reviewed by Michael Fearn

THERE ARE TWO COMMON FACTORS WITH these offerings. They both play games (not to say take liberties) with history, and both use the stylistic trick

of having the author-as-observer transcribing and presenting the text of another. In each case the second is handled differently and quite competently, but in a manner which provokes little surprise or dislocation.

The Fire Worm contains some of the same historical authority of such a book as Freble's *The High Olders*, and comes close to what *The Power* should have been but wasn't. The actual legend of the Lampion Worm (said to live under Tynemouth castle) is used. It is a local focus of evil, having been imprisoned there by a knight after coming out and making a snack of local maidens, not to mention indulging in other unworldly pursuits.

The evil has affected not only the present but the past lives of a local psychiatrist who is also a horror author on the quiet. He practices "past life therapy", allowing his patients to work out problems in their current lives by regressing them hypnotically to a past life which he believes to be fictional.

In a recent past life a patient underwent a homosexual rape beneath Tynemouth castle which led him to give birth anally to a segmented creature, under the influence of the worm. The horror-author side of the psychiatrist's personality takes over and stages a compensatory act of sex for his patient in this life in order to effect a cure.

Less of a novel than a thesis on the nature of reality, *Whores of Babylon* has the ancient city recreated in the Arizona desert in order to answer the question: "Is it true that all civilisations are only capable of progressing so far, and no further?" The quality of the writing is very high, as the historical research also appears to be, though I cannot confirm this from personal knowledge.

The plot, such as it is, concerns the arrival of Alex in Babylon, speaking Ancient Greek and programmed by computer interface. He becomes embroiled rapidly in the lives of several "Babylonians", experiencing every status from tourist to the slave of the highly manipulative and scheming Theanay - his mistress in at least two obvious senses. The arising lines of narrative are fragmentary. This is the point, possibly.

Intrigue and the use of religion to cover the computerised work of the initial project are main features, but all of the conclusions about the nature of life and reality could have been arrived at during an evening of intelligent conversation. Of other Watson I have read, it recalls to me most *Alien Embassy*.

This second is an encouraging book, in that it points the way to territory such as that inhabited by Priest in *The Affirmation*. Close, but no cigar.

Both books work very well within their own terms, and certainly the Watson of *Babylon* is once more proving to be a challenging and thought-provoking author.