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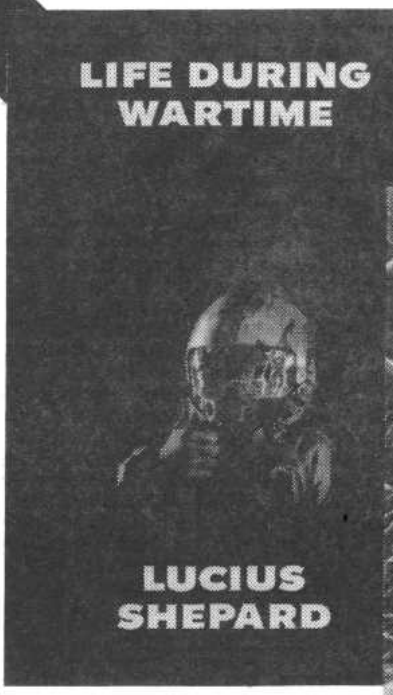
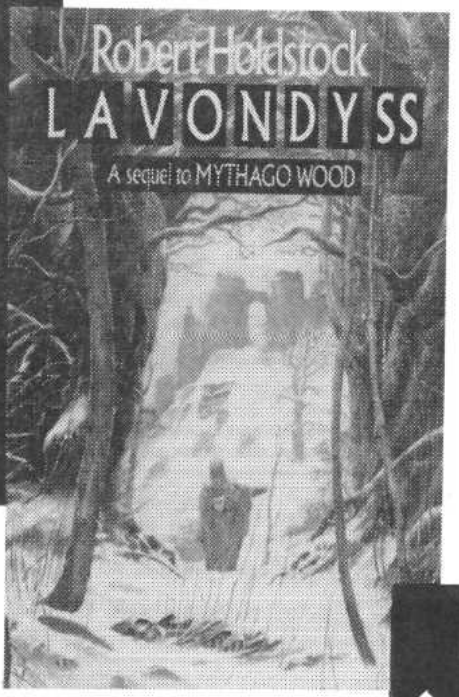
# VECTOR

95p

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

FEBRUARY/ MARCH 1989




Best of 1988:
The Shortlists

The Publisher's Editor's Story

Shades of Big Brother

PLUS

Book Reviews and Letters

# VECTOR
## 1·4·8

## FEBRUARY/MARCH 1989


# C O N T E N T S

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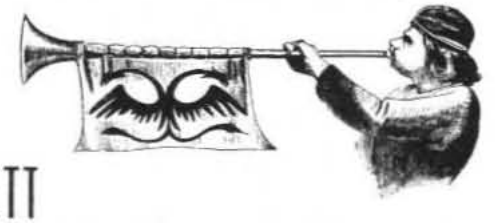
# EDITORIAL



## DAVID V BARRETT

I never really got to grips with 1988. I blame it on the Russians, or the Americans, or whoever else it is buggering up the weather (probably a combination of French nuclear tests, Chernobyl, and MacDonalds' hamburger cartons) so that last winter, for the first time in my life, I didn't see any snow on the ground. I was still waiting for winter to come when I set off for my summer holiday. I'm convinced that set me wrong for the whole year. I don't know what I'll do if I don't get my couple of weeks trying desperately not to break my neck on icy pavements this year.

Summary of my life last year: several things went badly wrong; a few others went splendidly right; and I finally took the decision to step down as *Vector* editor. (No-one has yet applied formally for the job, so think on: if you really want *Vector* to continue after this summer, maybe *you* are the right person for the job...)

I was impressed by the amount of good SF & Fantasy that came out last year — see the "Best of 88" feature in this issue — and much of it by British authors: Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, two great books by Garry Kilworth, at last the sequel to Rob Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, Storm Constantine's second Wraeththu book (and I'm eagerly awaiting, despite usually despising trilogies, the final one), and more.

It's Awards time, folks; the Arthur C Clarke Award shortlist has been published (see Maureen Porter's piece), and nomination forms for the BSFA Award should be in this mailing.

As always, some excellent books failed to make the Clarke Award shortlist. Now I'm not going to question the taste of the six judges; there were, as I've said, some extremely good books this year, seven or eight of which just failed to get on the shortlist. It's been a difficult decision for each of the judges, and I suspect the final discussion and choice of the winner in the Groucho Club on March 15th will be anything but easy: raised voices and blood on the floor can be expected. Neither am I going to weigh my judgement and taste and preferences against theirs, or question the meaning of the word "best" in this context; Edward James, the editor of *Foundation*, gave a clear exposition of this in *V145*.

What I do want to question here is: just what is this genre that the Clarke Award and the BSFA Award are presented for? (Attentive readers may note some overlap between this and my last editorial: so be it; I'm beginning to think the question is important, and could do with being thrashed out again.)

Let's look at two of the books (out of several I could have chosen) that didn't make it to the Clarke shortlist, and see if we can learn anything. Rob Holdstock's *Lavondyss* and Jonathan Carroll's *Sleeping in Flame* are both fantastical, in that the situations and events they describe haven't happened, aren't happening, and are most unlikely to happen in the real, physical world we live in, yet the magical atmosphere of the books lingers long after you finish them.

The premise of *Lavondyss*, like its prequel *Mythago Wood*, is that deep in the heart of a wood in the southwest of England are physical embodiments of mythic archetypes. If the people of this country have believed in something, it's there in the wood. *Imagination made real*: a fair description of SF, one would think. Most people would probably call the books Fantasy rather than SF, yet their rationale is every bit as logical as novels with time travel, teleportation, FTL drives, and so on, which are good, solid, traditional SF (or sci-fi). Time travel *et al* are not at present known to be possible; in fact, in the sense in which they appear in SF most scientists would say that they are impossible. So is it simply because such impossibilities are presented in a scientific rather than an irrational framework? You push buttons and read dials, and BLIP... there you are — instead of You sit in the Lotus position facing the rising sun and recite a mantra, and BLIP... there you are. One is SF and one is Fantasy. The rationale behind the *mythago* books is carefully and logically worked out, but there ain't no dials and knobs. I suspect that if Tallis had had to turn knobs and examine dials to enter Lavondyss, the book might have stood a good chance of winning the Clarke Award — but then, of course, it wouldn't have been the same book.

*Sleeping in Flame* is about the intrusion of magic, fantasy and horror into a very real and ordinary world. *The known and the unknown; the familiar and the strange; mimesis and fantasy*: another fair description of SF. No skiffy elements (well, there is a spot of time travel, but definitely no knobs and dials); definitely not the sort of thing Niven and Pournelle would (or could) write. Not science fiction, then, you say. Fantasy? But Carroll's world is as real as the street outside my window. Fantastical is the word I used above. It's a novel which most SF readers will love, even if they don't like Fantasy or Horror. So will Fantasy readers. So will Horror readers.

And so will readers who never go near any of our sub-genres.

To quote Ed James, "There is even the idea of trying to push a book as one which *should* be read as widely as possible." The Clarke winner "ought to be a book which any non-SF reader could pick up, recognise as SF, and also perceive as worthwhile literature... the sort of [book] that can attract new readers to science fiction and increase general awareness of the importance of SF, not just within 20th century literature but as an indispensable tool for understanding our world and where it's heading."

Now, these two books don't extrapolate sexual politics or environmental ruination as do the first two Clarke Award winners. But anyone reading them will be, to use an unfashionable phrase, enriched by the experience. They will look for other books by the same authors, and some of them will look for other books published by Gollancz or Legend, to find more of the same. (This is a good reason for publishers advertising some of their other titles on the back flap of a novel.) Carroll's book doesn't have any genre labels on its jacket, though the blurb quotes include Ramsey Campbell and Stephen King. There are many arguments for and against strong genre identification (see the interview with Kathy Gale in this issue); Century's decision in this case may well be right, as it should bring the book to the attention of non-genre readers.

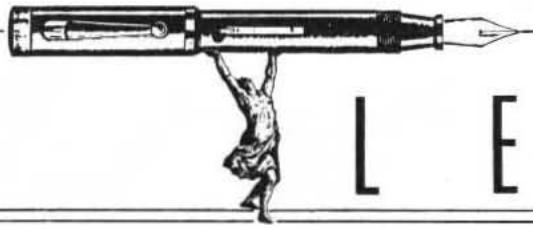
But if neither of these books is, strictly speaking (whatever that means) science fiction, maybe they *shouldn't* be considered for SF Awards. Maybe such Awards *should* be only for honest-to-goodness, traditional, science-based SF.

I don't happen to think so.

"SF", so far as these awards is concerned, should include science fiction of all varieties and flavours, Fantasy, Horror, the mythic, the supernatural, the strange — and this includes any "mainstream" novel which exhibits these qualities. If the Clarke Award or the BSFA Award can point to a supposedly mainstream novel and say "Actually, we thought we ought to let you know that this is SF", they would be doing something valuable in improving the profile of the genre in the eyes of both critics (the self-styled guardians of what is literature) and general readers.

These Awards *are* important. I would like *every* BSFA member to put in nominations for the best works of 1988, then vote on the shortlist. Don't, by the way, assume I'm pushing the two books I've discussed here; I used them as examples, simply to make the point that our definition of SF should be inclusive, not exclusive. An award-winning book should be readable by non-genre specialists; we must beware of digging ourselves further into our ghetto.

Choosing the "best" won't be easy; I'm going to find it as difficult drawing up my list of nominees as did the Clarke Award judges — there were just so many high quality novels last year. Let's hope that 1989 is as good.



# LETTERS

*«Some held-over letters first, continuing the great cyberpunk controversy, and sparked off by the Turner/Gribbin debate in* V146.*»*

**BEN STAVELEY-TAYLOR**
39 Entry Hill, Bath BA2 5LY

PRACTITIONERS OF LITERARY CRITICISM LIKE NOTHING BETTER than to invent themes and movements out of entirely innocent events. I strongly suspect that cyberpunk is a victim of such a reviewer's conspiracy to categorise and pigeonhole everything. If it's new, invent a label for it. And being categorised has set it up, unfortunately, as a target for members of other categories who feel slighted at no longer being "the new thing".

RA Lafferty's comment (*V145*) that cyberpunk must be crap because no-one can define it properly seems singularly stupid. Of course they can't define it — it's an arbitrary category thrust upon an unwilling body of writers. Anyway, how many SF writers can define SF? (No, that's a rhetorical question, please don't try!)

Cyberpunk, if we must use the label, to me means two things: an attempt to evaluate how the present day trends of progress-at-all-costs will affect the values of society as a whole, not just individuals, and also an attempt to rediscover the skills of writing a taut thriller-style plot. The heavy use of brand names, as Cecil Nurse points out (*V145*), is a device to make the reader accept these techno-marvels as everyday objects. Would you rather have lengthy Clarkian explanations of what everything does and how it works?

Good cyberpunk books — *Schismatrix* and *Count Zero* are my favourites — tend to be weak on characterisation of individuals, but extraordinarily strong on characterising the infrastructure of society. I would like to believe that the emphasis on society rather than individual is intentional, rather than "bad writing" as "conventional" writers would say.

For God's sake, no-one's saying that *all* books have got to be cyberpunk. I enjoy many so-called cyberpunk books, but I have enough taste to recognise when inept writers are jumping on the bandwagon and churning out inchoate pulp — no names, no pack drill. Just as pure punk rock has died but left an indelible impression on later music, so I believe the pure cyberpunk novel has fatal inherent weaknesses as a long term art form, but I sincerely hope the good parts of it will influence SF for a long time to come.

**JON MORAN**
6 Eccleston Close, Bury, Gtr Manchester BL8 2JF

WE SHOULD ALWAYS TREAT WITH CAUTION THOSE WHO SEEK TO impose their definition of what SF is and what it should be about upon us, and George Turner is no exception. The views expressed in his speech (*V146*) seem flawed and restricted to say the least.

John Gribbin is right to attack those like Turner who dismiss SF as useless if it isn't factually based from the present. This narrow kind of view is only detrimental to SF. If those advocating it now had been around 100 or so years ago the genre would no doubt have been strangled at birth. For example, just where the heck was the scientific extrapolation in HG Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* or *The Time Machine*? Needless to say a trip to the moon wasn't remotely possible in Wells's time, nor was/is time travel, yet these two stories are cornerstones of SF. When we limit ourselves to merely basing novels or short stories on a hard scientific base we throw out one of the basic ingredients of SF: imagination. If stories of time travel, interstellar travel, telepathy and the like become of no use to SF there will be no SF left to speak of.

But if Turner rejects this "old" view of SF what does he propose to put in its place? It's quite obvious from looking at his own priorities that Turner wants SF to perform a different and narrower rôle. He proposes that SF writers deal genuinely with today's problems, such as the greenhouse effect, pollution, overpopulation, over-use of resources, economic failure, etc. From this it seems clear that Turner wants SF to become a kind of study in political economy. Forget fanciful notions of imagination and creation and instead address yourselves to the task of finding solutions to the world's political and economic troubles. If SF were to go down this path — and heaven help us if it did — the result would be a flood of polemical novels much like Turner's own (to judge from Gribbin's comments).

Furthermore, Turner places the world's problems on a flawed assumption. He argues that the reason the world is in such a state (over-use of resources, pollution, etc) is because governments are too worried about staying in power *now* to concern themselves with the longterm consequences of their actions. But the implication here is that all governments are democracies and thus concerned about votes. I don't know the exact figure but I think at the very most there are about 12 democracies in the world, though these do exercise considerable power. So most governments don't have to worry too much about losing votes through unpopular policies. The totalitarian systems of Russia and China have had 70 and 40 years respectively to find a "durable economic theory" and manage resources effectively; the military dictatorships of Brazil and Chile have had 21 and 15 years respectively to do the same. All have resulted in stagnation or crisis. And in the light of all this what makes Mrs Thatcher's government so special as to warrant Turner's praise? What has her government done about the over-use of resources, pollution or the provision of a durable economic theory (monetarism was tacitly abandoned in 1985 if not earlier)?

Finally, before certain persons write in about the "tendentious politicking" in this letter it should be noted that it was Turner's speech which sought to introduce politics into SF under the guise of "respectable science fiction". The kind of SF Turner stresses everyone should be producing only embodies values — restrictiveness, politicisation — which have no place in the genre.

*«Yes, I too found it interesting that the people who complain vociferously about politics in* Vector *when I include left wing or Green-type views, raised not a murmur about Turner's right wing polemic. Whatever my own beliefs (which you all know by now!), don't let it be said that* Vector *only publishes one political stance...*

*Now some more ideas about what SF shouldn't — and should — be about:»*

**LYLE HOPWOOD**
119 Wilmott Street, London E2 0BX

THERE'S A LOT OF STUFF IN *V146* ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION'S ability to predict the future, and the linked concept of whether SF can give us any clues on how to deal with the future when it happens.

This is a good point and definitely worth asking. Trouble is, I don't believe that most SF set in the future is actually about the future in any meaningful way.

Why? Because most SF writers don't give a cent a word for politics, and don't give a rat's arse for sociology either. In many post-nuclear scenarios — eg David Brin's *The Postman* — the war is a Golgafrincham Ark Ship B-style plot device for getting rid of all the complexity and stubbornness of human organisation — removing, say, used car salesmen, marxists, religious bigots and marketing executives — and peopling the world with a simpler bunch of easily manipulated chessmen selected for the ability to play off each other's dogmatic statements (pace Philip K

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Dick, who being brilliant and non-straightforward peopled his post-nuke scenarios with seemingly *only* used car salesmen, marxists, religious bigots and marketing execs).

Rarely is there an attempt to portray people learning to live after the disaster (many of the exceptions are John Wyndham stories). On the contrary, the writer tends to use the sheer violence and power of the nuclear weapon as a convenient way to suspend the laws of physics or biology, producing time travel, alternate worlds, and as George Turner rightly points out, genetically impossible monsters, telepaths and sword-swinging Amazons, all tending to group together under the heading "plot devices" not "reasonable speculation".

Then again, not every writer is solely after three impossible things before page 2, or even a chance to "prove" that xxxism is against nature by having the Bomb produce tribes of happy and fulfilled yyyers. Some people are turning out literature in an SF guise. In *PI74*, in his review of *IZ25*, Andy Mills reviews Chris Burns' "Babel" by saying that it "tells us that after-the-holocaust-man-will-be-reduced-to-scrabbling-in-the-ashes-of-civilisation". It told me nothing of the sort. It told me that in the Fantasy setting of the Tower of Babel, after the people's tongues had been confounded, there were men salvaging the wreckage. One speculates with his friends on the nature of the tower and then suffers an existential crisis when his beliefs on the value of his life's work are questioned by a supernatural being. The story is fantastic, in all senses of the word. One of the best I've read all year, it stayed in my mind and when I read the review I had to go back and check if it could really be so mundane. It wasn't — it's a must read.

Another writer in that mailing wonders which will "come true", Ballard's *The Drowned World* or his *The Drought*. If *The Drowned World* is really *about* people coming to terms with a lot of water, and *The Drought about* the sea failing to evaporate and people trying to find water in the sand, then... well... splutter... they're pretty boring books! A dose of one of David Pringle's excellent essays on metaphors in Ballard's work will cure both these impressions. Or reading *The Day of Creation* with your eyes open. No cheating there at the back, open!

I don't want to give the impression that SF is divided into bigoted trilogy-artists with an eye on the main chance vs. people you need a degree in John Clutology to understand. Much fine work has been turned out carefully studying the impact of a plausible new thing on a reasonable facsimile of human society. Can't think of any at the moment, though. I don't doubt that it would be beneficial to humanity to play out more of the probable scenarios.

Imagine a *The Drowned World* in which Bush, Gorbachev, the CIA, the little man on the Clapham omnibus, the Mafia, the penniless Third World and vested interests are sent to do battle with, exploit, or explain away as God's will/capitalism's fault the rising floodwaters of post-greenhouse-effect America. Who would write this book? Brin? Ballard? LeGuin?

No, a thriller writer would do it. It's their job. One of those thick books they sell in airports. Titled something like *The Greenhouse Heresy*. Huge hardback print run. Packed with facts and figures gleaned from years of reading declassified government material. Pacy, readable and undemanding. Leaving you thinking: what if that really happens? Thrillers are for things like that. Invite a writer to our next worldcon for a briefing and wind him up. Leave vague speculation where it belongs: in SF books.

*«I think there's a bit more to SF than "vague speculation". But I wasn't talking about SF's job being predicting the future; though George Turner seems to have been. Wyndhamesque "learning to live after the disaster" is the old British standard disaster novel, largely done to death 20 or 30 years ago. The point of SF authors writing "about" the future is to enable us to examine the present that we live in and have to cope with, but are too close to to see clearly, from a different perspective.»*

## ARCTURAN ALLEGORIES

KV BAILEY
1 Val de Mer, Alderney, CI

TIM WESTMACOTT'S DISSECTION OF *A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS* (V147) is quite the most thorough I have come across. He left few Tormancian stones not prised-up. His interpretive comments and questions are stimulating and could be argued for ever; but I will restrict myself to two points.

"Muspel": the definition of this as "mush" and "dispel" might plausibly apply to the "Muspel-stream", which is Crystalman's food (described by David Lindsay as "a ghastly mush of soft pleasure") but not, I would think, to Muspel itself. How about "music" and "spell", or "compel"? For by rhythms of waltz and march the corpuscles of Muspel-light are ever-constrained to struggle back towards their source in Muspel.

Secondly, I cannot agree with the assessment of *Arcturus* "as a fantastic adventure peppered with an assorted collection of symbols rather than as a comprehensive metaphor for life, the universe and everything." I would rather say that it is exactly the latter. Tim Westmacott quotes fragmentarily Loren Eiseley's Ballantine introduction, and by coincidence I also quoted from this in my Blish essay of the same issue. Eiseley says, and I would agree, "do not mistake [it] 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." Nothing could be more comprehensive than what is implied in that last phrase.

*Arcturus* is, admittedly, full of unresolved anomalies — but so is life and the universe; and so is that genre complex, much concerned with both, which your *V147* editorial tries so valiantly to disentangle and put together again. In fact, Lindsay's novel demonstrates classically

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how a work listed in every SF encyclopædia and source book runs the gamut of those sub-genres and categories that you editorially correlate. I quote, almost at random, three prototypal sentences (Ballantine p/b):

p44:

"Maskull beheld with awe the torpedo of crystal that was to convey them through the whole breadth of visible space,"

(Somewhat archaic-sounding, but recognisably SF.)

p218, where the stone Colossi assume life:

"Out of the blackness of space a gigantic head and chest emerged, illuminated by a mystic rosy glow, like a mountain peak bathed by the rising sun."

(Undoubtedly the imagery and language of Fantasy.)

p285, descriptive of the nebulous form of Crystalman:

"The sweet smell emanating from it was strong, loathsome, and terrible; it seemed to spring from a sort of loose, mocking slime, inexpressibly vulgar and ignorant."

(Mild by present standards, but Horror none the less.)

Science fiction, Fantasy, Horror: if one asks when shall these three meet again, the answer may be "increasingly frequently"; that is if, as your editorial seems to suggest, more genre convergence than divergence is at work among writers. But it's not a new occurence, of course. It is all there in early Wells — in "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" and "The Lord of the Dynamos" for example; or if we want to go back to the founding mothers and fathers, in *Frankenstein* and in "The Ancient Mariner", that masterpiece of fantasy and horror which, as poetic narrative, is shot through with pregnant imagery derived from Coleridge's reading of the Transactions of the Royal Society and from his constant fascination with the documentation of such fields of enquiry as animal magnetism, phosphorescence, and the phenomena of meteorology and astronomy. The poem is not science fiction, but it contains supremely those elements of imaginative insight out of which science fiction/fantasy grew and which continued to inspire it as decade by decade the maturing empirical sciences enlarged the literature's arenas of extrapolation and speculation. Thus in *V147* "Arcturan Allegories" and editorial complement each other nicely.

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**PAM BADDELEY**
55 Union Street, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7PX

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FIRST, I THINK "MUSPEL" MUST BE DERIVED FROM MUSPELHEIM (or Muspellsheim, depending on the translation you look at) which is the land of fire in Norse mythology.

Second, there are some similarities between the basic premise and some Gnostic beliefs. Some Gnostics viewed the Old Testament God as a false one and were called "dualists" by orthodox Christians. EG (from "On the Origin of the World"):

"I am God and no other one exists except me," But when he said these things he sinned against all of the immortal ones,..

Sources like this characterise the Garden of Eden story as one of enlightened rebellion against tyranny. Another Gnostic sect, the Valentinians, believed that the one most orthodox Christians naïvely worshipped as creator and God is really the *image* of the true God. The "God" of Israel was therefore the instrument of the real God: this instrument is ignorant of the truth. (Either way, these beliefs were a great threat to the power of the Church which derived its authority from the supposed delegation of "God's" power.)

This instrument was commonly supposed to have been created to administer the universe by Wisdom, the eternal Mother/female principle who ruled alone or co-existed with a Father/male principle. A few in the orthodox Church spoke of the female side of God but broadly speaking it was the Gnostics who accepted the full equality of the sexes and allowed women a full rôle as prophets, priests, teachers, even bishops, and the orthodox Church which denied women a place other than "seen but not heard". Possibly, this ties in with the instructive rôle of the various women encountered by Maskull/Nightspore.

Another Gnostic work, "The Authoritative Teaching", tells the allegorical story of the soul which originally came from heaven but was "cast into the body" to experience sensual desire, passions, hatred and envy. The Gnostic perception of Christ's teachings is not as a ticket to salvation but encouragement to actively engage in a process of searching for truth and fulfilment. Doctrines, including the Gnostics' own, were only approaches to truth, not truth itself.

Material existence involved a threefold suffering: terror, pain and confusion — *aporia*, literally "roadlessness", not knowing where to go; perhaps tying in with the diversity of species on Tormance which results from the efforts of the spirit fragments to return to Muspel: they don't know where to go consciously, but on the deep level, the fragments do. The Gnostics therefore distrusted the body through which these sufferings were experienced and were convinced that the only way out was via an internal journey to discover the truth about humanity's place and destiny in the universe, a journey which led to identification of the self with the divine. Christ was seen as an aspect of the divine which led souls out of the world into enlightenment. All this could tie in with Surtur, the true God, trying to lead his people out of their slavery via a (spiritual) journey through Tormance so that they might return to their former spiritual existence.

I also note the usurpation of Surtur's position as the true God by the false Crystalman. The only missing element is the wearing away of the original spirit fragments but the Gnostic sects do characterise most humans, those who have not received *gnosis* (secret knowledge) as being asleep due to their ignorance (as the Tormancers are asleep to the truth?)

*«For anyone wanting to follow this up further, some useful books are:*
The Gnostic Gospels, *Elaine Pagels*
Adam, Eve & the Serpent, *Elaine Pagels*
Gnosticism: its history and influence, *Benjamin Walker*
The Gnostics, *Tobias Churton*
The Other Bible, *ed. Willis Barnstone*
*— but be prepared to have some of your preconceptions radically altered...»*

## GENRE CATEGORIES

A few words on your editorial: I tried a Fantasy novel around some publishers about five years ago and received some encouraging noises but "there's no market for Fantasy in the UK". As I'm at last slowly recovering from a very long writer's block I might have another go — after all, there seems to be enough of it here now...

I think a lot of these trends *are* publisher-defined. Categories help marketing and retailing; that's why they exist, however misleading — historical romances lumped in with Fantasy or whatever. They're for publishers' and booksellers' convenience mostly.

Incidentally, as a member of the British Fantasy Society also, the main differences I can see are that they're a lot less regular at producing the newsletter than you are! — and their newsletter concentrates on just that — news, and although they publish one-off booklets of fiction, a regular fiction magazine and "specials" on particular writers, they don't really publish articles or many letters. The convention, as you say, was really for the pros; I took one look at the registration fee, realised that, and gave up! By all means, let's co-operate, but I'd prefer not to see any merger. Incidentally, the Horror bias you mention is reflected in BFS publications; I like some Horror but get a bit fed up with so much of it.

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*«We also heard from Kev McVeigh and Rosemary Pardoe. Please send your letters as soon as possible to ensure inclusion in* V149.*»*

# BEST OF 1988: REVIEWERS' CHOICE

**WE ASKED SOME OF OUR REGULAR REVIEWERS TO NAME their top five books of 1988 — and, as always, we have an amazingly varied response. Only a few titles are mentioned more than once — which says something not only about the diversity of taste, but also about the excellence of last year's offerings (though even this is disputed by two of the writers!). If you want a guide to what's new(ish) and good, read on.**

**KV Bailey**

Five *best*? Too presumptuous, and of course no one's read them all; but the five (and I shall include UK originals) giving most personal pleasure or reward – that's attemptable. I will name two wide-screen pieces – the kind that you can immerse yourself in to enjoy the alien, the exotic, the baroque, while finding sufficient of a science fictional and maybe philosophical core for proper nourishment. In their different ways AA Attanasio's *Arc of the Dream* and Iain M Banks's *The Player of Games* both measure up: the former for, or in spite of, its sheer imaginative and metaphysical audacity; the latter because the SF/play relationship has long intrigued me, and this is, apart perhaps from Ian Watson's *Queenmagic/Kingmagic*, the most inventive recent romp around that field. Quite different in style, but prompting similar responses, Michael Bishop's *Philip K Dick is Dead, Alas* must be the year's most remarkable tour de force.

Two non-fictions: David Pringle's *Modern Fantasy: the Hundred Best Novels* for its encyclopædic value and for access to a sharp and sensitive critical intelligence; Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine* for its integral treatment of feminism and science fiction.


**David V Barrett**

A good year: impossible to keep to only five books. Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss* and Jonathan Carroll's *Sleeping in Flame* are brilliant examples of fantastical literature. In *Lavondyss*, the beautifully-portrayed 13-year-old Tallis enters the Wood, frighteningly amongst the mythagos. Carroll has the enviable talent of bringing magic into a very real world; the problem is suspending your belief, not your disbelief, in his creation. While Robertson Davies's marvellous *The Lyre of Orpheus* shows the use a master of modern literature can make of the fantastical in a mainstream novel.

Two excellent anthropological studies from Garry Kilworth: *Cloudrock*, a closed society in which incest and eating the dead are accepted behaviour; and *Abandonati*, about how the unwanted have-nots of society survive when they have been abandoned by the haves. And the strangeness of Wraeththu society in Storm Constantine's compelling *The Bewitchments of Love and Hate* is utterly believable.

New in paperback, Amanda Prantera's *Conversations with Lord Byron on Perversion, 163 years after his Lordship's Death*, is the best (and best researched) novel on artificial intelligence I've ever read. Byron also comes into Esther M Friesner's *Druid's Blood*, along with a pipe-smoking detective, his faithful doctor chronicler, and a wonderfully randy Queen Vicky in a magic-ruled Britain: great fun. So is Michael Coney's hilarious *Fang the Gnome*, set in his Greataway cosmos, with the most unusual retelling of Arthur I've come across.

**Terry Broome**

The most thought-provoking of the books I've reviewed this year has been *Interzone: The Second Anthology*. It contains some fine writing, but it's not one for the casual reader. None of the other review books came up to its standard, but if you're just after a fun read you could do worse than to pick up James Blaylock's very convoluted *Homunculus* – that other pseudo-Victorian scientific romance, K.W. Jeter's *Infernal Devices*, suffering in comparison only by its predictability.

For fans of hard SF, Ben Bova's *Millenium*, by contrast, offers a realistic future setting, a compassionate look at some of today's political concerns and an abundance of melodrama.

There are two reprints: *Norstrilia* by Cordwainer Smith and *The Malacia Tapestry* by Brian Aldiss. Choosing between them, the Aldiss clinches it despite its flat ending because its impressive style shows none of the labours which Smith's book sometimes displays.

Finally, Philip K Dick's *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland*, though general fiction, exhibits all the bitter-sweet ironies which make his SF so extraordinary. It's a textbook example to many a would-be SF writer of how to handle characterisation – a lesson they're not likely to learn from most works of science fiction.

**Barbara Davies**

*Unquenchable Fire* by Rachel Pollack springs immediately to mind. The story of Jennifer Mazdan, set in an America where the miraculous is an everyday occurrence, its surrealistic imagery remains vivid to me even now.

Next must come Jack Vance's *Araminta Station*, the first book in the Cadwal Chronicles. The sheer breathless scope of Vance's imagination when it comes to creating his own flora and fauna overwhelms any minor inadequacies in the plot. A master craftsman – read him and weep.

Clare Bell gets my next two slots with *Ratha's Creature* and its sequel *Clan Ground*. Yes, I know it's yet another intelligent animal story, but the intelligent felines of 25 million years ago fascinate and interest me. The first book is the better of the pair but the second also has some good moments to offer.

Finally, *Writing Science Fiction* by Christopher Evans makes up my quota. Although possibly too detailed for those who are already aficionados of the genre it is welcome nevertheless. Full of good advice and long overdue it makes fascinating reading.

**Michael Fearn**

*The Judas Rose* by Suzette Haden Elgin. As a linguist I find the idea of language alone being a tool for subversion quite irresistible. I also find it alarming that in one more generation, many of the reading public will have too little acquaintance with the mechanics of language to understand most of the references.

*Whores of Babylon* by Ian Watson. This is one which seeps into the consciousness over time and repays a second reading. A discourse on the nature of reality set in an ancient Babylon which is reconstructed, for experimental purposes, in the American desert.

*Starfire* by Paul Preuss. Although the characterisation is as fragrant as a month-old kipper, it is difficult to write a highly readable hard science novel these days, and Preuss has certainly succeeded.

*Lavondyss* by Robert Holdstock. The quality of the

writing and the imagination in this book, the sequel to *Mythago Wood*, are both excellent. Does he know something about the workings of the human subconscious that the rest of us do not?

*Sleeping in Flame* by Jonathan Carroll. This highly complex and fascinating book is the antidote to prescribe to those people who say that the psychology of the characters in Science Fiction is never sufficiently highly developed. They should be strapped into a Vogon poetry-appreciation chair and not released until they have finished.

**LJ Hurst**

All the criticisms that have been made about the pop music of the last year seem to be just as applicable to the SF and other literature of 1988. Two of the authors I'm going to praise were on my list for '87, but when you consider that one is dead and his books were written 20 years ago, and the other work is a novella, you get an idea of how bad I feel things are.

*Running Wild* by JG Ballard is the novella, one of Ballard's treatments of modern problems, a prescient identification of some of the more bizarre threats posed by the justified consumer society. Read what happens when the world of *High Rise* relocates to a new estate in the green belt.

*Humpty-Dumpty in Oakland* and *Mary and the Giant* are more posthumous publications of Philip K Dick's straight novels. I can't help feeling that Dick's great skill was in his naturalism, which was a result of his sympathy for his characters. I read Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* and found it was not as good as *Hawksmoor*. Ackroyd tends to write about people with the same problems as Dick, but his literary trickery ultimately means you like neither the novel nor the novelist.

Robert Silverberg's *At Winter's End* was good, entertaining fantasy.

The biggest disappointment was Neil Ferguson's *Putting Out* which I bought because his original Interzone story was so good.

And that's it, really. A lot didn't appeal to me. Too often looking for a good read I got the impression that not only had the author given up but so had the editor who accepted it. Surely things must improve?

**Edward James**

I don't *think* it is just bad memory that prompts me to assemble my "Top Five" largely out of the books I've read in the last three months. Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* must be one of the very best books of the year. An effective historical novel; an intriguing scientific rationalism of vampirism; a rich musing upon the 17th century Scientific Revolution, and lots of other things too.

Secondly, I'd place Judith Moffett's *Pennterra* (my review of which should appear shortly so enough said). Thirdly, perhaps, Richard Grant's *Rumours of Spring*: since no John Crowley appeared this year, here's the next best thing, full of mystery, lyricism and wit.

And lastly, since senility not only leads to forgetfulness but also to nostalgia, the splendid Hawkey facsimile reprint of two marvellous Dan Dare adventures in one volume, *The Red Moon Mystery* and *Marooned on Mercury*; and Jack Vance's *Araminta Station*, not because it's vintage Vance SF, but because it still has delicate hints of the fine bouquets of the past. If only I'd been allowed more space, I would have mentioned Donald Moffitt's *Genesis* duet, and John Clute's *Strokes*...

**Paul Kincaid**

How to judge a good year? Well, I'm going into 1989 with a pile of books still unread all of which look superb, and which have been highly praised by people whose judgement I respect. Yet I'm still leaving off the list a number of books which would have made the top five easily in any other year. I think 1988 must have been a good year.

First, two discoveries. Ian McDonald is a British writer who only seems to be published in America, but his short stories in *Empire Dreams* are fresh, extraordinarily varied, and full of great ideas. Steve Erickson's *Days Between Stations* is a wonderfully surreal look at the century that has probably made a greater impression on me than any other book I've read this year.

A dilemma: should I choose Garry Kilworth's spare and affecting *Abandonati* or Gwyneth Jones' dense and complex *Kairos*? If it has to be just the one, then it must be the Jones, it demands far more of the reader, but the rewards could be that much greater.

Best British book of the year, though, is undoubtedly *Lavondyss* by Robert Holdstock. It is rich, beautiful, and incredibly manages to be even better than *Mythago Wood*.

But the absolute best book of the year has no rival, it just has to be *Life During Wartime* by Lucius Shepard. Read it and you'll know why.

**Ken Lake**

Probably I should list *The Collected Stories of Philip K Dick* in five volumes and have done with it, but I haven't read them and it does seem a copout.

Three "continuation" novels really have to be mentioned: Bob Shaw's *The Wooden Spaceships*, Terry Pratchett's *Wyrd Sisters*, and Harry Harrison's *Return to Eden*. If you haven't read them you will assuredly know their predecessors and hence will have them on your reading list already.

An amazing alternate-history novel from a writer new to me will remain on my "classic 100" list, I'm sure: Ken Grimwood's *Replay* is a damn good read, intelligent and gripping and well plotted with believable characters.

But the greatest thing to happen in the year is undoubtedly *Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder* from Gollancz. Taking 13 classic shorts and looking at them with two eyes - one eye today's skilled author, the other his juvenile "first contact" impression - Silverberg shows us how a superb writer, and a superb story, are made. Pity about the egoboosting autobiographical section, but this is a must for every fan, no exceptions allowed. 1989 should be so good to us!


**Nik Morton**

*Whale Nation* by Heathcote Williams crystallised much of the feelings I have had for the plight of whales since reading Farley Mowat's *A Whale for the Killing*. Some beautiful prose poetry, backed up with many photographs and masses of extracts from many books and periodicals ranging from Greece BC to the present day.

*Precious Bane* by Mary Webb (admittedly a best-seller love-story in 1924 through to the 1940s) is a classic example of dialect writing that works, long before Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Hoban's *Riddley Walker*; Webb displays a feeling for nature and mood that blends with the far from simple characters.

With a nod to nostalgia, *Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future* (Vol 1) by Frank Hampson was most enjoyable - particularly as I didn't start collecting the Eagle until 1956... Wallow in the anachronisms and the quite astonishing future predictions; marvel at the artwork.

*Koko* by Peter Straub was a *tour de force* in the suspense/horror category: here were characters of all shades, all of whom you cared about; even the villain of the piece evinced sympathy when I learned of his emotionally disabled childhood.

*The Bewitchments of Love and Hate* by Storm Constantine is my exception to the rule: steer clear of trilogies

etc! She has created a fresh set of characters, an interesting environment and writes with perception and flair.

As a concession to the inclusion of two non-SF/Fantasy books, I would also jointly nominate two anthologies. *The Third Interzone Anthology* and *The Best Horror Stories from Fantasy Tales*, both of which offer great variety yet consistently well written fare.


**John Newsinger**

Five best books of 1988! Well, first on my list is without any doubt Mary Gentle's *Ancient Light*, the chronicle of Lynne de Lisle Christie's return visit to Orthe. My only wish is that it was longer. I only got around to reading Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* last year. Again a remarkable book that throws a searching light on aspects of gender relationships and ideology in contemporary society in the guise of a future dystopia. An important novel superbly written.

Another novel that was both a good read and an important statement was Jack Williamson's genetic fairy tale, *Firechild*. An exciting thriller that makes you want to weep for the human condition in the age of the Superpowers. The best novel for young people was Robert Westall's *Urn Burial*. Always an interesting writer, the quality of Westall's prose in this novel is often breathtaking. A young shepherd stumbles across the hidden burial site of a long lost galactic battle fleet... and its dead guardian.

And lastly mention has to be made of one of the most interesting non-fiction works that I have read for a long while: Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*. Will she please produce the necessary sequel, *Masculinity and Science Fiction*, as soon as possible?

**Maureen Porter**

Five SF novels which made a big impression on me in 1988? I was tremendously impressed with Philip Mann's *Pioneers*, a poignant, thought-provoking novel about genetic engineering, among other things. Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss* was a worthy sequel to *Mythago Wood*, a strange and powerful book, impossible to encompass. On a lighter note, Diana Wynne Jones produced *The Lives of Christopher Chant*, a must for any devotee of the Chrestomanci stories, and a delight to read. Perhaps though, the person whose work has most impressed me this year is Lucius Shepard, and I heartily commend *The Jaguar Hunter*, *Life During Wartime* and *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter*. This man can write like no other person I can think of. I wonder if he has ever written a dud story. I envy his talent.

But why, when there is so much good writing about, do publishers continue to spew out an endless stream of unimaginative, derivative pap and label it science fiction or fantasy? Well, I guess we know it has something to do with profits, but I cherish the hope that in 1989 the reading public will be more discerning and demand higher standards. Well, everyone needs a pipe dream, surely?

**Martyn Taylor**

What? Me nominate a Hugo winner? I enjoyed *The Uplift War* by David Brin thoroughly, although *Startide Rising* is a better, more compact novel. Sensawunda, optimism, adventure, that sort of old fashioned junk. Anything less like the Brin than Steve Erikson's *Days Between Stations* is hard to imagine, an entropic fantasy with a hint of Marquesian otherness. This may well be the shape of fiction to come.

Now a couple of nonfiction books which ought to be compulsory reading. All creationist and social darwinist pygmies who want to contain God and the universe within their own sloping foreheads ought to read Richard Dawkins's *The Blind Watchmaker* - a blindingly lucid exposition of the real theory of evolution. The rest of us can make do with Stephen Hawking's spectacular *A Brief History of Time*. A pity neither man pretends to any sort of notion of God other than the crude imagery of an antagonist. Faith, boys, faith.

And to finish, one from an old favourite and another from someone destined to become an old favourite. Kurt Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* is a welcome return to form after the disappointing *Galápagos*; while Paul McAuley's *Four Hundred Billion Stars* is a statement of intent, a promise of goodies to come.

**Jon Wallace**

1988 was a sparse year as far as I was concerned and it was difficult to pick out five books which stood above the rest. But Iain Banks's *Consider Phlebas* fairly shone. A return to space opera in grand style, mixing in a touch of eighties realism to bring the whole thing up to date. *Espedair Street* isn't SF, but still a good read, very Scottish in places and filled with rock-scene detail.

*Misery* by Stephen King is not a supernatural tale like most of his books, but it is horror. A writer has killed off his heroine, and unfortunately has crashed his car in the driveway of a psychopathic nurse who was her biggest fan ...

By comparison, Terry Pratchett's *Sourcery* is in a lighter vein. Another Discworld novel, well up to his usual standard. But in the misuse of sourcery, the root of all magic, this one has a tougher, more serious core.

*Archon* is the first of a series by Stuart Gordon. Gordon's books are all out of the ordinary, and this one is no exception. Unusual and complex, the rest of the series is to be anticipated.


**Martin Waller**

I'm not too interested in whether 1988 was a vintage year - such a judgement seems to need about five years' distance to be objective - but I notice that none of the ten or so writers I considered for inclusion managed an entry in Peter Nicholls' 1979 Encyclopedia. A vintage decade then, surely?

Two of my selections effortlessly included themselves — Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* and William Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. Little more one can say about the latter, which built successfully on the strengths of the first two, but Shepard has hit some criticism of late

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# BEST OF 1988: ARTHUR C CLARKE AWARD

## MAUREEN PORTER

IT WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR SCIENCE FICTION, WAS 1988. The judges of the Arthur C Clarke Award — Maxim Jakubowski and Mary Gentle for the Science Fiction Foundation, George Hay and Maurice Goldsmith for the International Science Policy Foundation, and Andy Sawyer and myself for the BSFA — can vouch for that with probably greater authority than anyone else. We saw almost all of it pass through our hands in the course of the year, and between us we read most of it. It was an interesting experience, enjoyable at times, frustrating at others, and there were moments when I was left wondering why I was assisting in this curious business. How could we hope to find the best SF novel of 1988?

Definitions. I've been beset with them all year. What is science fiction? What is best? How far does personal taste come into it, and can you in fact exclude personal taste entirely, at all? I've always thought that defining science fiction was very much a matter for each individual, but when you have six individuals working as a group, it becomes an even more interesting process. To judge from the shortlist, and from the list of those that so nearly made it, this panel of judges encompasses very varied tastes and the final choice of winner will surely be reached only after much earnest discussion. One trusts there will be no bloodshed.

I wouldn't be so crass as to tell you what I favour at present, but I think that this shortlist represents a very interesting selection and provides challenges for judges and general reader alike. Certainly, I anticipate there being some criticism that none of the titles can truly be described as SF. I shall of course disagree. It's time this wretched misconception that science fiction is about, or should be about, rocket ships and space travel was put out to grass. There is so much more to it than that. Science fiction is perhaps outmoded as a term. I favour "speculative fiction", but I realise this is mostly regarded with disdain. As I see it, SF is about exploring possibilities and limitations, and these shouldn't simply be geographical and/or physical, as in "Can we get a man to Mars, what can we do there and how long would it take?" Which is not to say that we should necessarily abandon traditional themes and ideas, but it is surely the duty of the author to tackle them in new and challenging ways.

Traditional themes are apparent in Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* and Richard Grant's *Rumours of Spring*, for example. On the one hand, you have alternative history, but with an unexpected and highly original twist to it; and on the other, a search for the reason behind the world's one remaining forest suddenly engulfing everything in sight, conducted in a style which reminded me vaguely of late 19th century travel books, yet with the most modern of preoccupations. And what about Gwyneth Jones's *Kairos*, and Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime*? Both are set in a future so close to now that it's only the occasional reference which convinces the inattentive reader that these aren't just mainstream novels with a small dash of something unexpected. War, a stolen drug or device, a world falling apart, all very common themes but so frequently distanced from the reader's own experience. Yet *Kairos* might almost be set in my own seaside town, and *Life During Wartime* can be directly related to the current political situation in Central America, not to mention Vietnam, and yet it is full of strange occurrences which we can't relate immediately to our own experience of the world. Michael Bishop's *Philip K Dick is Dead, Alas*, Rachel Pollack's *Unquenchable Fire* and Ian Watson's *Whores of Babylon* each hold up our world to a strange mirror, and then consider it in the light of what they see there.

Not a rocket ship in sight, and yet each of these novels has something to say which can not be expressed in any other way. People write science fiction because they can tap into a grammar of fiction which is generally unavailable to mainstream writers. They are not tied in the same way to the familiar and recognisable as many mainstream writers would appear. Of course, this might raise the problem of how one should regard a mainstream writer who decides to employ the armoury of science fiction imagery to make a particular point. Does this mean that he is an SF writer? Obviously, if he has written an SF novel. And what about SF writers who write something which lies closer to the mainstream of fiction? Does it honestly matter, in the end? The publishing industry has a mania for labeling and categorising — do we really need to fall into the same trap? Inevitably we end up doing so, if only for convenience sake, hence Science Fiction and Fantasy, but I think that the shortlist for the Arthur C Clarke Award might well encourage the less adventurous to think more carefully about the definition of science fiction.

And what of those which didn't make the shortlist? The judges felt that it would be appropriate to mention some of those which came close. It's a long list so I'm going to mention just a couple which particularly impressed me. I'm sorry that Robert Holdstock's *Lavondyss* didn't quite make it. It was one of the books of my year, with its rich mixture of thoughts and ideas, not to mention introducing Ralph Vaughan Williams as a character. Fantasy, perhaps, according to some lights, but I see it more as an exploration of the inner self, and the possibilities contained beyond the boundaries of this world. Connie Willis's *Lincoln Dreams* was an altogether more delicate and fragile creation, deceptively straightforward in construction, and yet, the theme of communication through dreams is surely relevant to any self-respecting reader of the fiction of ideas.


But in many respects, compiling the shortlist was actually the easiest part of the task. We now have to read the seven books again, weigh them one against another, and even if comparisons are supposed to be odious, one book has to be chosen above the other six, and described as being "best". And I already know that many people will disagree with the choice of the judges, and it's possible that the judges themselves may not reach agreement without the greatest struggle. It's a sobering thought.

*«Editor's note: Strange as it may seem, Maureen's article and my editorial were written without any collusion whatsoever.»*

# PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL, POLITICAL

## KATHY GALE in conversation with STAN NICHOLLS

**IN HIS EDITORIAL FOR *VECTOR 135* (Dec 86/Jan 87) DAVID Barrett looked at the issue of censorship. Citing publishers as one group who practised it, he asked, "How many books never see print because the publisher doesn't like their sexual, or moral, or political stance? We know this goes on in South Africa and the Soviet Union — but how common is it in Britain?" He went on, "More subtly, how many borderline SF novels are bounced because they don't fit neat genre limits?"**

**One of the people who responded to the subsequent debate was Kathy Gale, then SF/Fantasy editor for NEL paperbacks. In this interview with Stan Nicholls Kathy restates her feelings on the subject, as well as discussing the current publishing scene in general.**

*Would you like to summarize your response to the editorial in V135?*

I originally responded to a letter I saw following David's editorial. The letter talked about the difficulties authors have getting their books into print. On top of everything else, it argued, the work has to get by an editor's *personal* value system, and this is a form of censorship. That's partly true, and although I understand it's unfair, it is to an extent unavoidable — editors have to buy books they have a personal as well as professional enthusiasm for, because so much depends on their muscle in getting them noticed in a very tough market place.

However, the way the industry is organised, plus the general social climate, has a greater effect on editors' decision making. When I find myself taking my own moral and political code into consideration, as well as purely commercial factors, I am proud. When I do that I'm closer to what I believe writing and literature is, or *should be*, about. It's true to say that if I see a manuscript which is particularly left wing, I feel more responsive to it. But I also know it's going to be a very, very hard book to sell. It's going to be difficult to get the reps, the art department, the publicity people behind.

*Because they make value judgements too?*

Yes. There is an extent to which I censor because of my politics. I think I am right because I believe my politics are right. But in this industry my politics are different from those of most other decision-makers, so I counter-balance, in a limited fashion, the general pattern of censorship. Thus my "censorship" becomes a form of positive discrimination, I suppose.

People are shocked when I say I'm in favour of censorship. I don't see how it's possible not to have it — people are censoring things all the time without realising it. What you have to be clear about is why you are doing it. I feel very strongly about this. If I could I would censor freedom of speech in terms of saying, for example, that Enoch Powell should not be allowed to speak on certain occasions. I would censor pornographic films and advertisements.

*There is an argument that left wing SF is an aberration. The tradition is mostly reactionary.*

I don't think I have ever bought a fiercely right wing book, and I would be ashamed of myself if I did. If I read a manuscript, and decide it's right wing, I find myself looking for an excuse to turn it down. That sounds harsh, but it's human nature. It's also something that right wing — including those who think they are "apolitical" — editors do from the opposite angle, without even realising they are doing it.

As I said, being an editor is very much a case of having personal enthusiasm for a book. So my political decision is often a good professional decision. I can't do my job without feeling strongly positive about the books I buy. In my experience the vast majority of publishing employees tend to be, if not positively right wing, at least not very left! I often, and regretfully, turn down books I know my sales team won't give me support for.

If I didn't believe the effects of my politics are largely drowned by the politics of the industry as a whole, then perhaps I would find this more of a morally problematic area. In fact I'm sure some of the books I've bought, if I think about them in the way I do about books I read purely for pleasure, have been quite right wing. I certainly can't afford to adopt the position of not taking on any book that adds to the general right wing atmosphere. But what you can do is say, "Look, this is really appalling, and I don't want anything to do with it". I am very careful about saying this in the right way, and about prioritising the battles I choose to fight; I don't by any means fight all those my conscience tells me I should. I

# REVIEWERS' CHOICE FROM PAGE 9

for attempting to cross over into the mainstream. Both *Wartime* and the indispensable *The Jaguar Hunter* collection were marketed without a genre label. So what?

My view of Tim Powers's *On Stranger Tides* should be somewhere within this issue. Normally I approach "Fantasy" as I would a rabid dog. God bless you and keep you, Mr Powers.

I make no excuses for including Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers*, a convincing and homogeneous slice of the future and still about as weird as it gets. Flying nuns, and still only the first chapter? Well, jack up my ecstasy level.

Finally, as I pull on the turkey's wishbone, I shall be hoping for another traditional SF romp as good as Iain Banks's *Consider Phlebas*, the kind of *big* book of which they said they didn't write that kind of book any more, and raising a glass to any further outpourings from Mr Banks's reject drawer.

THREE CONTRIBUTIONS UNFORTUNATELY ARRIVED TOO LATE FOR inclusion, but as some of the choices augment the favourites above, we thought we would list them.

**Valerie Housden**

*The Rediscovery of Man* — Cordwainer Smith
*The Empire of Fear* — Brian Stableford
*Abandonati* — Garry Kilworth
*Tool of the Trade* — Joe Haldeman
*Sourcery* — Terry Pratchett

**Tom A Jones**

*A Brief History of Time* — Stephen Hawkins
*Lincoln Dreams* — Connie Williams
*The Empire of Fear* — Brian Stableford
*Fang the Gnome* — Michael Coney
*The Mammoth Book of Classic SF — Short Novels of the Thirties* - ed. Asimov, Waugh & Greenberg

**Helen McNabb**

*The Jaguar Hunter* — Lucius Shepard
*The Ragged Astronauts* — Bob Shaw
The assorted republishings of Cordwainer Smith
*Equal Rites* — Terry Pratchett
*How Much for Just the Planet?* — John M Ford

suspect I may have been guilty of publishing sexist, or even racist, books and haven't realised it. They may sometimes get terrible reviews in, for example, *City Limits* or *Time Out*, by people who have looked at them with an eye to the political message. But they haven't seemed particularly objectionable when I accepted them.

I look at books with the commercial aspect at the forefront of my mind — considerations about market forces, jacketing approaches, blurbs, publicity; the response of sales, marketing, art departments, etc. These crowd out that very sharp and uncompromising political approach which characterises my reading for personal pleasure. What I can do is refuse to be the editor of a book which, say, depends upon some awful scene where a woman is tortured or raped.

*Let me put to you another question David posed — "How often do publishers put pressure on authors to make changes in their work that they don't want to, that make it a different book from the one the author intended?"*

I think one of the points David was trying to make is that editors have a market in mind, and sometimes they try to edit out things writers feel keen on getting across. You have to create a distinction between sensitive editing, which is about making a book better, and insensitive editing, which can be about making it commercial at the expense of other things.

Frankly, we take on so few books anyway that, unless dealing with a well-established writer, we are unlikely to buy anything needing substantial editing. There are so many brilliant books around you don't have scheduling space for anyway.

*Have you detected any trend away from SF and into Fantasy or Horror?*

SF has a strong core market, and is still attracting people, although I worry about its future. Science fiction readers have traditionally been male, and quite young. It seems to me a lot now are middle aged. This is a bit shaky, because I'm going on the evidence of things like conventions, and perhaps middle aged people are better able to afford attending them.

Women's Fantasy and Romantic Fantasy is selling. I guess you could almost put Jean Auel in that category. When she suddenly took off, you realised you'd got a market among women, who will now look at Fantasy instead of Jackie Collins or somebody.

Horror is much wider in terms of general appeal. Jim Herbert is read by a larger range of people than Jack Vance. I guess Horror has always been a *broader* market, and Fantasy is getting that way.

*There's an increasing tendency to create special imprints for SF. Is this a good idea?*

One author told me the trouble with publishers is they try to hide the fact they are putting out science fiction, in order to capture a general market, and they shouldn't go about it like that. Other writers say, you're burying my books under a genre label; I don't want to labelled just because I set my stories in a futuristic context or a different world.

In terms of selling titles, publishing and bookselling is to do with having strong list identity. The trade has to be able to say, this is an NEL book, with this kind of content, this kind of jacket, this kind of reader. That works in terms of selling books. Whether it's right or not...

I speak to authors who tell me the best thing that could happen to books would be to rip the jackets off, and not have a title page, so readers would open to page one and have to bloody well read it! And you think, well, that would be nice. On the other hand you know most people would go home and watch the telly instead. I don't know if I would pick up a book in those circumstances myself — God knows what trash it might turn out to be!

*Genre identification can determine whether you buy a book?*

Yes, absolutely. If a book doesn't fall into a well-defined category it's difficult to market effectively. Unless people are going into book shops and hovering around the SF section it's hard to attract them. They want to wander in, pick up a book, and have an idea of what they're getting. There are editors who think this practice of categorising literature is morally wrong, and invalid. Some believe you can make books work without pigeonholing them. I would like to think they are right, but have yet to be convinced. An ideal world is one where people would say to themselves, "Hey, this might be something new and interesting to read", without reference to a genre. I really can't see this happening without radical changes taking place throughout the industry, and this isn't on the horizon. The industry is geared to a clearly-defined product, and it's very hard to get around that.

*Some say British SF lacks vitality at the moment. Where are the new stars?*

British publishers are looking for British SF. One of my theories is that because it's been hard for SF a lot of writers were sat on. There is a measure of depression in the British science fiction scene, a feeling among writers that they are never going to get into print. The talented ones, with the energy and enthusiasm to succeed, need to get canny. They should approach agents, market themselves aggressively, and make sure they put every ounce of talent they have into their product before sending it in. It's no good waiting to be commissioned because that's never going to happen unless you approach the industry in a thoroughly professional manner.

I've become wary of telling people to go away and write a book, because there's no guarantee of publication for anybody, and it takes years of people's lives. Who am I to make that decision for them? Perhaps they'd be better off doing a 9 to 5 job and going to the pub in the evening. But you try to encourage people and tell them what you think their potential is.

*You said that younger people don't seem to be going for SF books.*

It's books in general they're not seeking out. Reading is a skill you build. If you start young, read a lot and continue to read, it becomes easier and you get more interested. If you're enjoying it, it takes all your concentration. Those little words on the page can grab your interest and involve you. When someone writes a book they are sending quite complicated messages to people. The

visual, electronic forms of entertainment often don't convey such a wide range of emotional, political and personal values. When reading a book it's very difficult not to sense the personality behind it, because of the nature of words themselves. You're often not dealing with this consciously as a reader, any more than the author is conscious of sending these messages.

There is a deliberate understaffing in our industry, because arrangements can't allow editors to get too involved with their books. Whatever an individual editor's feelings about their job, they are part of a business, and business is about creating maximum profit for minimum outlay. What's different about publishing is there also has to be room for individual flair, and this incorporates character, and with character comes individual politics. Thus, my politics don't necessarily detract from my ability to do my job within a business organisation.

On the other hand, if I was able to spend as much time as I liked on every book I took on, then I wouldn't make as much profit for the company. At the moment we are all too pushed to do much more than the most immediate part of our job, and this means buying and publishing commercial propositions, with as much individual love and care as we can muster.

One of the things publishers don't do is broaden the market for books. Not enough effort is put toward getting books discussed on television for example. What TV tends to do is turn out academic programmes about boring books discussed by boring people. It appals me that the media thinks the business is about Anthony Burgess' latest book and discussing it at 8 o'clock on BBC2 when everybody with any sense is turning over and watching something lively and interesting. *Books* should be presented as lively and interesting.

*Big advances seem very popular at the moment.*

That's publishers competing, not necessarily a reflection of the quality of the books. Take science fiction. The days when many publishers would say, "This is an area which we are not very good at therefore we'll stay out of it", have gone. Now the line is, "This is a part of the market we have to get into; we'll have someone who can handle science fiction on the payroll". It should be pointed out that large advances are the rage for "big" authors, and occasionally new authors with huge talent. Most writers still get very low advances. I'm amazed at unknowns who send editors a proposal and declare they won't write it without an advance of £5,000 or more. Forget it!

*Are all the recent takeovers and mergers influencing editorial decisions?*

It's early days at the moment and difficult to tell. It's also hard for me to comment because NEL is part of one of the few independent publishers of any size around. I think for the time being editorial decision-making is going to be left alone. Editors have to develop commercial judgement rather than have money men interfering too much with editorial policy. Books are different from sausage rolls, and editors' "feel" for them cannot be overruled by purely financial considerations. It's very much down to an editor's instinct and experience.

*We hear a lot about the slush pile. What percentage of it gets published?*

Hardly anything. In a big company, nothing. One of the things that's so criminal about it is that there's a large amount of interesting material coming in that's never given a serious look. I'm snowed under with stuff; I just can't read all the unsolicited material too — and the number of science fiction manuscripts coming in is enormous. I'm sure most unsolicited material goes back with only a paragraph having been read. Which is awful.

There's a debate about whether it would pay publishers to employ readers purely for the unsoliciteds. Who knows, we may well be missing potential bestsellers by the score! Looking at the sheer volume of material NEL gets, our packed publishing schedules, and the fact that the departmental budget is barely sufficient to cover readers to help us with the "official" submissions, I don't see this being viable.

*There must be a number of people around with one book in them. Maybe a great book. Is that enough?*

No. I wouldn't take on anyone without more potential than one book. Another thing is the list cannot be too bitty. You have to build a list, to have an eye to the future. Often a first book won't sell particularly well and you have to decide whether to take the next by that author. I think it's vital to work on steadily increasing a writer's place in the market. You have to push a first book so we can all reap the rewards on subsequent work, or to keep publishing someone whose first book hasn't made a vast amount of money. We can't be doing with authors who turn in one competent novel and never produce anything else. At editorial meetings a frequent question is, "What's he going to do next?" It's something I always ask agents.

*How do you assess a writer's future potential?*

Partly from the work itself, partly from talking to the agent and/or the author; sometimes from the submission letter. You get a feel for it after a while.

*So to some extent you judge a submission on the basis of the covering letter?*

Yes. But you should really ask my secretary about that. She's the person who takes first look at unsolicited submissions. If she brings something to me and says it's good, I look at it. But if I get through the first ten pages and it's not suitable then, if I'm being professional, I should stop reading. Often I read a bit more so I can say something sensible which will help in writing the rejection letter. As a matter of fact I'm in the process of rejecting a submission partly on the basis of the covering letter which is too long, too jokey, and gives the definite impression the author is going to be a bit of a pain. He sounds the kind of bloke who's going to ring up every half hour to find out what's happening with his book. This, along with certain minus points in his actual work, is a factor. Especially when you've got a full schedule and a pile of other manuscripts to read. Given those circumstances you tend to think, "Oh good, here's a reason to turn this down". It's a great shame, and largely a result of the understaffing I mentioned. And there's a physical limit to what the market can bear anyway, which is another consideration. I'm scheduling eighteen months ahead at the moment and agents are not happy if you take that long to publish their clients' books.

*This interview was conducted about a year ago. Kathy Gale is now SF & Fantasy editor for Pan Books.*

# ANYWHERE BUT STOKE POGES

## L J HURST wonders whether George Orwell knew the novel IF HITLER COMES

I RECENTLY BOUGHT A SECONDHAND COPY OF A PAPERBACK first published in March 1941: *If Hitler Comes* by Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell. It had been published in hardback a year before under the title *Loss of Eden*. None of the reference books I've checked mentions the book or its authors, yet it obviously influenced other writers — and apparently was widely reviewed at the time: the cover flap quotes three reviews from the *Daily Mail*, *Education* and *The New Statesman*.

*If Hitler Comes* describes the early years of the war. After a phoney war period there is peace. A government weaker than Chamberlain's takes power, while fascist agitators provide the breakdown of society that gives the Germans an excuse to send a peace-keeping force. Opposition is demoralised and quickly collapses. The fascist leader, an Irishman, realises that he has been used and turns to resistance but socialist opposition ends with a single shooting accident; the Labour party does nothing. The narrator of the story, a New Zealand journalist, escapes home before the ultimate bloodbath to write his true account, for his journalism was false, censored and manipulated by English and Nazi alike. The manuscript is supposed to have been discovered and published by Maori archæologists of the far future.

Even though the book only appeared after the outbreak of war it is very much a warning of the dangers of pessimism, collaboration and the hope of cohabitation with the Nazis. The abuse of parliamentary democracy — the failure of the Opposition to oppose — is a strong element. Some real people appear in the book, but fortunately they acted in reality in a better way than Brown and Serpell thought they might.

In his essay "Worlds Without End Foisted Upon the Future — Some Antecedents of Nineteen Eighty-Four", Andy Croft describes many of the anti-fascist, anti-totalitarian novels of the 1930s (without mentioning *If Hitler Comes*) but he concludes "There is no evidence that Orwell ever read... any of the anti-fascist novels mentioned above." I wonder, though, did Orwell have a hand in writing *If Hitler Comes*.

Compare a passage from the book with another published eight years later:

> *I shall never forget the frantic plea of a Reader in Classics at London University, on being told that he would be held in "protective custody" there. "Stoke Poges!" he screamed. "No, no, not Stoke Poges! Anywhere but Stoke Poges! Please don't send me to Stoke Poges."*
>
> *If Hitler Comes* Ch 7 "Terror"

> *"I've got a wife and three children. The biggest of them isn't six years old. You can take the whole lot of them and cut their throats in front of my eyes, and I'll stand by and watch it. But not room 101."*
>
> *"Room 101," said the officer.*
>
> *Nineteen Eighty Four* Part 3 Ch 1

Ideas from Orwell's other writings also appear — that a British fascist leader would not be English, media manipulation, the loss of language, the use of economic autarchy. A fascist meeting in Leeds in the novel is similar to a meeting in Barnsley recorded in Orwell's diary; Bernard Goldsmith — for a short time parliamentary opposition to the collaborators — has a "sheeplike profile and gold pince-nez", while Goldstein in the Two Minute Hate has a "long thin nose, near the end of which a pair of spectacles was perched. It resembled the face of a sheep". Goldstein, of course, was supposed to be based on Trotsky, but why should a British Home Secretary be described in a similar way?

As late as 1943 when Orwell reviewed some pamphlets he wrote of one, *I, James Blunt* that it was a "good flesh creeper, founded on the justified assumption that the mass of the English people haven't yet heard of Fascism". *If Hitler Comes* is in parts a flesh creeper but manages to be serious as well. Did Orwell know Serpell or Brown, or are the similarities only coincidence? More information would be gratefully received.

*«There is a brief mention of* If Hitler Comes *in* The Shape of Futures Past *by Chris Morgan (Webb & Bower, 1980), ch 2 "The End of Civilisation as We Know It: Dire Warnings". DVB»*

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Edited by Paul Kincaid

**THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF SHORT HORROR NOVELS** - Mike Ashley (Ed)
[Robinson, 1988, 518pp, £4.95]
Reviewed by Michael Fearn

IN BULK IT RESEMBLES A PAGINATED housebrick. A perplexing picture of a beetle with its backside in flames adorns the cover. Not an auspicious beginning.

During the two weeks of my reading dominated by this enormous tome, I did come to agree with the editor's contention that he had assembled a collection of work in which at least some of the offerings convey eeriness and horror without exploring the capricious, dietary habits of the undead or detailing the more improbably uses of a sewage system. To "create a subtle atmosphere of unease" (his words) within the constraints of a novella is a skilful writing achievement. But why, oh why, always the decaying castle, country house or chateau? Are the shades of the dead choosy about the social *cachet* of the company they keep? Sloane ghosts with green, spectral wellies? Yuppies from beyond with ectoplasm organisers?

Four of the novellas rate mention. "The Parasite" (Conan Doyle) is a tale of the loss of academic reputation through mesmerism: well-written, as one might expect. Lucius Shepard's "How the Wind Spoke at Madaket" is quirky, original and blackly humorous. A.C. Benson (brother of E.C. Benson of *Mapp and Lucia*) contributes "The Uttermost Farthing", a moral tale in which the ability to reject almost unlimited power and wealth permits our heroes to say "Au reservoir" to their supernatural inconvenience.

The best of the bunch, "Nadelman's God" (T.E.D. Klein) chronicles the unwholesome deeds of Arlen Huntoon, a delivery-driver who takes the lyrics of a horror-rock song too literally. Anyone who has seen the audience's cardboard sabres deployed during Judas Priest's *Ripper* cannot fail to be chilled. Unfortunately, Klein's knowledge of this subdivision of rock seems superficial; he names bands which sit ill side by side. Nevertheless, an original and plausible plotline, in what is generally a predictable fiction style.

Certainly, this is a collection for the aficionado and general reader alike, but I remain unconvinced about horror and have difficulty in taking it seriously. Much more that is genuinely horrifying can be found nightly, at stop-tap, in my local, London streets. One plea: the corridors of castles with ancient curses are all very well, but when is someone going to write a decent horror story about a back-to-back-with-outside-toilet in Droylsden?

**PRELUDE TO FOUNDATION** - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1988, 461pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

SINCE THE LATE 1930s ISAAC ASIMOV HAS written over 350 books. His most familiar, as even any new SF fan should know, are those concerning positronic robots and *The Foundation Trilogy*. Recently, Asimov has decided to resume these topics, tying up loose ends and even merging the two themes.

*Prelude to Foundation* is, as its title suggests, a "prequel" to *Foundation*. It charts the adventures of the 32-year-old Hari Seldon - discoverer/inventor of Psychohistory, the science of prediction. We meet again the First Galactic Empire and its capital planet Trantor, but there is a twist. Instead of the allknowing, allseeing Seldon of the trilogy we meet a young man who is swept along and controlled, albeit unwittingly, by others. The plot concerns itself with the moment that leads Seldon to begin his gargantuan task which will have such an impact on the future.

Asimov's current style is very different from his original trilogy, written in the 40s. It is verbose and needs pruning. The hoops that the *deus ex machina* puts Seldon through seem unnecessarily contrived once you are aware of the outcome and the plot, as a result, seems rather thin. Characterisation is also not what it could be, in particular the cardboard Sgt Emmer Thelus and the irritating urchin Raych.

That aside, there are some good points. It was pleasant to be back in Trantor, and some of its precincts were intriguing, for example the depilated inhabitants of Mycogen caught my interest.

To sum up, perhaps my expectations had been unreasonably high, given my fondness for the original books, but I found *Prelude to Foundation* disappointing. Asimov's compulsion to mix robots with the Galactic Empire puts too much of a strain on the plot and I could only ask "Why bother? Leave well alone." Finally, I would request his editor to tighten up Asimov's prose or I for one will give his modern books a miss and revert to those from his earlier years.

**KINSMAN** - Ben Bova
[Methuen, 1988, 269pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Terry Broome

IN 1949/50 BOVA WROTE AN EARLY VERSION of *Millenium* which was rejected by publishers everywhere. It featured a character, Chet Kinsman, with whom Bova became obsessed, returning to him in 1965 with the short story "Test in Orbit", followed by "Fifteen Miles" (1967), "Zero Gee" (1972) and "Build me a Mountain" (1974). In 1976 a version of *Millenium* finally saw print.

*Kinsman*, first published soon after *Millenium* according to Bova's foreword, incorporates - and with this new addition, updates - the early stories. It is the first volume in a trilogy which will apparently also include an updated version of *Millenium*. Plot and character development are reminiscent of *Top Gun* - cosy and predictable, in an easily digestible style, with simple, shallow characterisation that gives the impression of three-dimensionality without actually revealing much. Nevertheless, it gripped, leaving me interested to read more, which Bova's *The Starcrossed* and *Voyagers* had failed to do.

Kinsman, a pilot in the American Air Force Academy, persuades congressman McGrath to help the singing career of Diane Lawrence, with whom he is having a casual relationship. Kinsman soon becomes top astronaut, priding himself on not having had to kill anyone to get there. Relations between the Americans and Soviets become so fragile that on one mission he ends up murdering a cosmonaut, and is taken off active duty while a psychiatrist tries to get to the heart of his trauma. These scenes are pat, with plot requirements making it necessary for the psychiatrist to act irresponsibly, almost criminally, so that he can be put back on active duty as part of a civilian programme where it is soon discovered that he is still in need of professional help. The only way he can get back into space is to blackmail McGrath (who is having an extra-marital affair with Diane Lawrence) into not opposing a planned permanent installation on the Moon.

There are few surprises. In fact, Bova seems so conscious of its predictability that he gives most of the

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plot away in his foreword. The entertainment ultimately comes from reading the story fleshed-out, and not from the plot itself – possibly a weakness in what is essentially a shallow and undemanding hard-SF novel.

**THE SECRET LIFE OF HOUSES** – Scott Bradfield
[Unwin, 1988, 166pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

NINE STORIES RING THE CHANGES ON A variety of psychoses from lycanthropy to schizophrenia, from nympho to homicidal mania, counterpointing the characters' inner experiences with the externals of a West Coast culture dedicated to insatiable consumption of food, drink, cosmetics, clothing, entertainment etc. Inventories threading their way through the text are symptomatic. Sandra in "Unmistakably the Finest" broods over magazine adverts:

> Fashions by Christian Dior, natural wood-grain furniture ... an automobile with a leopard crouched and snarling on the hood.

The waking consciousness of the characters is often as dream-like as their actual dreams. The merging of veridical and dream/fantasy experiences are particularly well portrayed in the title story, where a young girl under stress senses the organic roots of the family house and its contents as being in correspondence with those of her own body; in "Greetings from Earth", in which the partitioning of reality from fantasy thins to almost nothing; and in "The Dream of the Wolf", as the environing Los Angeles commuterdom intermittently gives way to the cold tundra of the Pleistocene.

Dogs (and wolves) get a better press than humans. The eponymous Dazzle is unquenchable. His small saga is the funniest and for my money, allegorically and satirically, the most imaginative of the stories. In places it reads almost like a rewriting of Kipling by Thurber. Dazzle is a philosophically minded dog and in his tutoring of the pup Flaubert he produces a few gems:

> There's a hidden continuity between signs and things, thoughts and the world. Our fears of discontinuity are a fiction, actually, but one which we must be maintaining for some reason.

Dazzle's philosophy is the nearest to an up-beat formulation that Scott Bradfield gets. Yet his story-endings are often more open-endedly positive than the narratives' disintegrative progressions have led one to expect. It sometimes seems that the action runs like water into the sand; but, in fact, there are often intimations of fulfilment and renewal. As the title story ends Margaret "fell asleep on her couch and dreamed the vast dreams of her house". In "The Other Man" Edward's release from his haunting begins with "acceptance of that part of the world you can't explain" and continues through a revelatory thunderstorm. At the conclusion of "Dazzle" the dog, having made his life-restoring foray into town, "with a flourish ... ascended again into the high mountains."

**THE DAYS OF MARCH** – John Brunner
[Kerosina, 1988, 309pp, £14.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback, £30 collector's edition]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

FOR THE FIRST 20 OR SO PAGES I FOUND the style Brunner has chosen irritating as if he had overdosed on Dylan Thomas, with strings of alliterative linked adjectives; also the shortage of punctuation and swift changes of perspective from author to principal character were annoying and distracting. However, having made a statement of intent, he became less strident and more skilful and the style and the story blended together.

Micky Dawes is young, single, just unemployed; his two concerns in life are finding a woman to have a proper relationship with and saving the world from annihilation by the bomb. Not that CND is mentioned by name through the whole book, nor are there tracts of explanation, special pleading or any hint of a need to justify the truth. The truths of the Peace Movement are self evident to most of the characters, and they will grab any opportunity to educate the uninitiated into these truths, by reason and the power of their own belief. It is not what I half expected from the dust jacket blurb; it is better, more original and more effective than the affectionate retrospective in factional terms I had prepared for.

Micky is pleasant, thoughtful, neither saint nor sinner; his preoccupations colour the narrative and show us a credible slice of the life of a believable person. Where Brunner succeeds best is in charting the work involved in organising a major march; work which overtakes the lives of the volunteers so they miss sleep, meals and are forced to make choices between the cause and their personal lives. But their regrets are brief, because they are involved in something greater than themselves which lifts them to a higher level. The work is the routine, essential organisation which supports any large event, not in itself exciting but because of what it is heading for the book is gripping.

In one way, it doesn't matter what the final event is because Brunner has presented an archetype, a picture of dedicated people working with little thanks or reward because they believe in a cause, and the low key approach emphasises this. Nevertheless Micky is working for the Peace Movement in its early days, before it became widespread and respectable, when to even wear the badge could and did attract violence. They believe, and because they believe the depth and unshakeable nature of their faith can alter the perceptions of the reader. For existing CND members there is no need to change or consider, they already share the faith; but for others who are uncertain or even against it their sincerity is not dismissible, and by expounding it Brunner has made it all the deeper. It does not matter that their fears were wrong, that the world and the bomb are still here together, the changes they wrought, like this book, are more subtle than that.

It is not science fiction, it is fiction rooted in fact so recent that readers can compare it to their memories, a comparison that will probably bring as many voices to protest it was not like that as voices of support. In the end neither matter, in the end the book matters and the cause matters. The cause is something all will decide for themselves, as for the book – it is the best by Brunner I have read in a long time, it is captivating and fascinating and shows an author in control of his subject and his skill. It is well worth reading.

**SEVENTH SON** – Orson Scott Card
[Legend, 1988, 241pp, £10.95, £5.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Martin Waller

MUCH OF THIS SLIM VOLUME WILL ALREADY be familiar. The first five chapters appeared as "Hatrack River", Card's award-winning story first published in IASFM in 1986.

The novella dealt with the singular events surrounding the birth of Alvin Maker, seventh son of a seventh son, in Card's version of the American frontier on the Pennsylvania/Ohio borders at the start of the 19th century. This inconclusive "First volume of the Tales of Alvin Maker" takes the story to his 16th year and his first plans to move away from the townstead founded by his father.

Card's early 19th century America is not our own. Clues are sketchy, but the Glorious Revolution has apparently not taken place in England, which is still ruled by the Lord Protector, opposed by the Cavaliers who control America's southern colonies. The American Revolution has failed, save in the one state of Appalachia, and George Washington has been beheaded as a rebel. Napoleon Bonaparte is a high-ranking officer in the army of the French king. But Benjamin Franklin has seeded the idea of one country from shore to shore in the American mind.

This last theme foreshadows Card's subsequent, unconnected short story "America" which deals with the emergence of a national identity drawn from the country's Amerindian as well as European roots in the wake of ecological disaster. British readers could

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therefore reasonably feel left out of these explorations of the American myth and character. It is to Card's credit that they do not.

His early baroque space opera, *Hot Sleep*, sticks in my mind for the author's Mormon upbringing and his unhealthy obsession with pain. This latter has not disappeared, as descriptions of Alvin's injury and subsequent operation bear witness, but Card has switched from space opera to what is close to full-blown American Gothic.

In his cosmology God and the Devil are on the same side, battling for possession of this world. Darkness are represented by the Unmaker, the force of entropy which attempts to grind everything down to its component pieces. Alvin is a Maker, who can oppose this force by acts of creation, and from his birth the two sides fight over his future. Ranged against him is a fanatical preacher of the Christian Church and the Unmaker itself; on his side are the peripatetic Taleswapper, the girl Peggy who assisted in his birth in "Hatrack River", and a vision, the Golden Man, who attempts to teach him the true use of his powers. For the main difference between Card's world and our own is that practitioners of magic and witchcraft have been banished to the colonies, where they coexist in uneasy rivalry with the Church; and hexes, charms and the like all work.

I normally find this kind of pastoral fantasy fairly resistible. But Card in the main avoids both whimsy and irritating, home-spun folk wisdom. He writes well and imparts a true sense of civilisation emerging from the surrounding wilderness. Whether succeeding volumes will see Alvin, like Brigham Young, leading his people to their Promised Land to the west remains to be seen. If Card can resist spinning the tale out to too great a length, I shall stay reading.

**SLEEPING IN FLAME** - Jonathan Carroll
[Legend, 1988, 244pp, £10.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

*SLEEPING IN FLAME* IS PUBLISHED BY CENtury's Legend imprint. The implication is that the book is being marketed as fantasy, and to some extent this is justified. On one level this novel is fantasy. But on the surface, it looks different.

The first seventy-odd pages are a reasonably straight love story. Walker Easterling meets the girl of his dreams sort of stuff ...

> Over the next months we would grow so close and empathic that once she could joke she wasn't breathing air any more, she was breathing me.

The rest of the novel reads more like a mystery with fantasy overtones as Easterling tries to make sense of his past and struggles to understand what is happening to him now.

> Who was Rednaxela? Or if *I* was him, as two nutty old women and a bearded UFO on a bicycle contended, who was he/I? How come I didn't know anything about who "we" were? Or did I?

Along the way the story encompasses precognitive dreams, reincarnation and past life experiences as Easterling's reality gradually becomes invaded by the mysterious magician (and father figure) who seems to be the key to the whole thing.

I said that this seems like a mystery with fantasy overtones, but this isn't really the case. The elements to solve the puzzle aren't present for the reader to find, therefore mystery fans would feel cheated. The fantasy elements are too obscure and mixed too far back into the plot for them to excite any sense of the other, and so the whole mixture left me feeling frustrated.

Jonathan Carroll's style makes the novel readable enough, and there are plenty of ideas here, but none of this can compensate for its shortcomings. Or the schmalz of the closing scene.

**INTERZONE: THE 3RD ANTHOLOGY** - John Clute, David Pringle & Simon Ounsley (Eds)
[Simon & Schuster, 1988, 184pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

STRANGE ANIMALS, THESE *INTERZONE* ANthologies: they are not aimed at the likes of the BSFA membership, surely, because the majority must be subscribers. Are they aimed at seducing non-subscribing SF readers into buying *IZ*, or appealing to non-genre readers? Or are they simply celebrating good story-telling in Britain's only large-circulation SF magazine? As a subscriber I would not normally go out and buy an *IZ* anthology, and I doubt if many others will fork out £11 for stories they've already got/read. (A small saving grace, the atrocious artwork(?) of Tina Horner is not in evidence - sadly, neither are any other artists featured. Perhaps new artwork for each story would make the book more attractive.)

Apart from John Clute's introduction, which strains metaphors to breaking point, there are 14 stories. The selection is a good one; certainly any non-genre reader coming to this anthology would be surprised at the versatility of subject matter, presentation and styles employed: all facets that Clute rightly distinguishes.

It was a pleasure to encounter again David S. Garnett's "The Only One", a marvellous time-paradox tale, together with the possibly definitive version in the same theme, "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick; "His Vegetable Wife" by Pat Murphy was still moving, and in its SF-fantasy setting said a great deal about the subjugation of woman, a variation on the theme of the worm turning, perhaps ... Brian Stableford's "Sexual Chemistry" was one of the few humorous pieces, tongue in cheek but with underlying comments on the state of society. Peter Lamborn Wilson's "Fountain of Time" was adventurous in its style and marvellous in characterising the old Ponce de Leon and his past time and acquaintances. Other stories are by David Brin, Kim Newman, Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Tuttle, Richard Kadrey, Eric Brown, David Langford and Paul J. McAuley, all of which make satisfying, imaginative reading. The least satisfying, for me, was Cherry Wilder's "The Decline of Sunshine" which, as it happens, was bottom in the latest *IZ* poll.

This is a worthy book, with imaginative plots, realistic characters and interesting blends of style. It seems that *IZ* has played safe by including authors-who-have-a-book-published rather than the newer writers. It is still questionable whether there is a market for the anthology - presumably there is or we wouldn't be seeing a third. But if *IZ* is suffering a surfeit of good stories, and in fact is rejecting some on those grounds alone, might it not be of more service to the SF readers to feature new original short stories in the anthology, perhaps alongside the poll's top five?

**BEST NEW SF 2** - Gardner Dozois (Ed)
[Robinson, 1988, 678pp, £11.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback]
**THE ORBIT SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK** - David S. Garnett (Ed)
[Orbit, 1988, 336pp, £4.99]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

ONE OF MY LESS PLEASANT TASKS EACH year is reviewing 'best of year' short story collections. Please don't misunderstand me: I'm in favour of short story collections, thematic and otherwise, and they have, over the years, formed a staple of my reading diet. No, the reason I approach the annual task with trepidation is simply this: how does one compare two 'best of year' anthologies? As David S. Garnett observes, in the introduction to *The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook*, "there can be no absolute standard of what is the 'best' - any judgement must necessarily be subjective...", and this applies as much to reviewing his production as his criteria in making choices. Gardner Dozois, on the other hand, makes no comment on the subject. His criterion is implicit in the title, and for me, at least, his reputation as an anthologist and compiler of similar annual roundups is sufficient that I mostly trust his judgement.

To my shame, I have, before now, tackled the job from the standpoint of value for money. Inevitably, the Dozois collection would win hands down. It has the dimensions of a house brick, contains 28 stories and a detailed summary of the year in SF, inevitably

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American-biased, but still valuable for all that. But that approach, this year, would do a serious injustice to Garnett's slimmer, but equally invaluable volume. Two stories only are included in both volumes, "Rachel in Love", by Pat Murphy, and Kate Wilhelm's "Forever Yours, Anna", whilst Howard Waldrop and Lucius Shepard are represented in both volumes, by different stories. The proportion of material from British, or British-based authors is about the same, perhaps slightly disturbing from the point of view of the Yearbook, a British publication after all. However, the Yearbook also contains an acutely observed commentary on the year's SF from critic John Clute, and Garnett's own acerbic review of the year, distinctly less neutral than Dozois. I'm sure fans of Brian Aldiss will be delighted with his article, but I frankly found it entirely irrelevant to anything else in the volume.

I refuse to say that one collection is better than the other. If you must buy only the one, inevitably it has to be the Dozois collection, simply for size, but I have to say that your perception of the developments in SF during 1987, assuming you rely exclusively on this volume, would be a little biased and rather two-dimensional. The Garnett volume provides the complementary critical bite to the blander presentation of *Best New SF 2*, not to mention another ten excellent stories. For just under £11 all told, I think that's pretty good going.

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**FAERIE TALE** - Raymond E. Feist
(Grafton, 1988, 393pp, £11.95 hardback, £6.95 paperback)
Reviewed by John Newsinger

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RAYMOND FEIST'S LATEST NOVEL IS THE story of an encounter between Reagan's America and the world of faerie, of a modern all-American family fighting to overcome a supernatural evil that threatens to destroy its children and plunge the world into a mystic war.

Briefly, the Hastings family move into a house on the edge of haunted woodland and become unwittingly involved in a plot to break the centuries-old Compact that has kept the peace between the human and faerie worlds.

The Hastings are a prosperous middle-class American family: husband and wife are divorcees, he a successful Hollywood scriptwriter and less successful novelist and she an actress turned housewife. There are three children: Gabrielle is "basically a resilient, well-adjusted and healthy kid" who just by chance happens to be heiress to an $80 million fortune, and the eight year old twins, Sean and Patrick. These children become the prospective victims of the Fool, the Shining One.

There are two narrative threads running through the novel, one successful, the other not so. What can usefully be described as the "grown-up" narrative is by and large unconvincing, increasingly so as it becomes clear that Feist has opted for a world-in-danger conspiracy motif complete with ancient secret brotherhood. This hasn't got much to recommend it: the characterisation is poor, the dialogue wooden and the storyline hackneyed and unoriginal.

All this is compensated for, however, by the thread that concerns the magical threat to Gabbie and the boys. Here the book lifts itself out of the ordinary and Feist achieves a degree of conviction that carries the reader along with him. The danger confronting the children is decidedly authentic whereas the conspiracy that envelops the adults is obviously contrived and half-hearted.

Feist conveys quite effectively the predicament of the two boys: they have no way of getting their uncomprehending parents to recognise the nature of the danger that threatens them, and so have to face it alone. The world as they experience it is very different from that of their elders, and Feist produces a delicious irony when they are battling against a supernatural evil while their father is immersed in swords and sorcery video games.

Sean's lone expedition to rescue his brother from the Fool is nicely done. The manner of his final victory, however, while a tour de force for a children's novel is not entirely convincing in an adult work. This seems to be the problem: Feist has fallen between two toadstools, combining elements of children's and adult literature in a way that is in the end unsatisfactory. Nevertheless this is an interesting novel and made an enjoyable read. It must surely be made into a film.

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**GOTHIC FICTION** - Frederick S. Frank
(Meckler, 1988, 193pp, £25)
**PKD: A PHILIP K. DICK BIBLIOGRAPHY, REVISED EDITION** - Daniel J.H. Levack
(Meckler, 1988, 156pp, £27.50)
**DUNE MASTER: A FRANK HERBERT BIBLIOGRAPHY** - Daniel J.H. Levack and Mark Willard
(Meckler, 1988, 176pp, £27.50)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

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THE BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF DICK AND HERBERT are both annotated, providing very useful critical tools. We get the word length of stories, a brief (if not always that enlightening) synopsis, the odd comment by the author or revealing aside (did you know that Herbert's *The Heaven Makers* is closely linked to his poem "Carthage: Reflections of a Martian"?), plus, of course, complete bibliographical detail which covers every appearance of every story and every edition of every book around the world. With full checklists, lists of collaborations and pseudonyms and non-fiction work, they provide a comprehensive factual account of the work of the two authors. It is always a shock to realise just how prolific Dick really was. Herbert, who was far less prolific, consequently allows space for far longer synopses of his work, though it is dubious how valuable these are in such a book. Any serious researcher, surely, would use the bibliography as a stepping stone to the work itself.

But any such book, particularly of authors whose careers are now, alas, over, must be comprehensive. Neither of these is. *Dune Master* misses Herbert's third collaboration with Bill Ransom, which must surely have been known about at the time of preparation. *PKD* is in an even sorrier state, missing *Nick and the Glimmung*, the Kerosina edition of *Valis* and *Cosmology and Cosmogony*, at least one of the non-SF novels unearthed from his archives, and, unforgiveably, *The Complete Stories of Philip K. Dick*. A little patience in preparing this revised edition might have produced a more complete and hence more useful bibliography.

Much more useful is *Gothic Fiction*, which provides a superb list of critical books and articles on the subject, divided by individual authors (William Beckford to Horace Walpole, Edgar Allen Poe to Stephen King), and by subject. Anyone with more than a cursory interest in Gothic Fiction will find this book absolutely invaluable.

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**LAVONDYSS** - Robert Holdstock
(Gollancz, 1988, 367pp, £6.99 paperback, £11.95 hardback)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

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LIKE *MYTHAGO WOOD*, ITS SEQUEL ENDS with an open-ended Coda, this epigraphed by Whitman's "I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers, / And I become the other dreamers." A strength and a weakness of the novel is that, like Looking-glass Alice, its readers are kept wondering who it is that has been dreaming (or mythago-making). Extreme malleabilities of landscape and identity can disorientate. Positively, however, the mythagos (mythic images that materialise, as individual minds draw them out of the collective unconscious) when once established offer experiences of great poetic power. Such are the neolithic Tuthanach-clan settlement, with its shaman, totems, and mortuary houses; Tallis's tree-metamorphoses; and the undead stag, Broken Boy.

The Tuthanach mythago was introduced near the end of *Mythago Wood* as

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the base from which Harry Keeton sought a haven (or heaven) where his wound might be reversed. In *Lavondyss* the neolithic ambience is identified as Keeton's own mythago in which he is trapped; but by an interpenetration of mental images this same past also exists for his half-sister Tallis, whose quest for him takes her through Ryhope Wood to Lavondyss, the aeonic wintery shroud ever concealing, half-promising, Avalon, Lyonesse, the underworld source of legends, and access to the homeward return.

All that in Part II. Part I has a realistic setting: a Herefordshire village where Tallis (paronym of Taliesin!) grows up and is lured (or admitted) into Ryhope Wood by seemingly hallucinatory embodiments of her own imaginings. A significant happening is the traditional folk festival that mimetically prefigures the magic, the challenges and traumas of Part II – as do also Tallis's childhood inventions and fairytales. We are early introduced to her self-fabricated masks of wood, bark and paint – Alan Lee's beautiful chapter-head icons. Using and gazing through these masks, Tallis later assumes varying personae to interact with the mythagos she successfully encounters.

Coloured strands of myth, folklore, anthropology, history, are too intricately textured to be disentangled here; but the narrative does embrace several major structures: the trans-culturally changing personifications of the archetypal hero; decay, rebirth and the spiralling cycle of seasons. The story's metaphysical foundation, however, is best expressed in words spoken to Tallis by the dream-exiled scientist/shaman, Wynrajathuk: "The world in which you and I exist is not nature, it consists of mind."

*Lavondyss* is ultimately a fantasia of the interfaces and interactions of discrete aspects of the universe – perhaps of what Karl Popper has categorised as the "Three Worlds": a cosmos of everything material; conscious experiences, imaginings, memories, dreams; and the world of objective knowledge. Tallis's childhood naming of landmarks exhibits such a trichotomy. There are her "common names"; and her other kinds: "Secret names are hard to find out. They're in a part of the mind that is closed off from the 'thinking' part." "Everything has three names?" asks her companion. This two-brained, threefold plurality is of the book's essence; but the substance is always multiform and marvellous in its proliferating imagery of fire and ice, tundra and forest, life, death and renewal.

**THE BEST HORROR FROM FANTASY TALES** – Stephen Jones & David Sutton (Eds)
[Robinson, 1988, 264pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

I'VE BEEN A REGULAR READER OF *FANTASY Tales* since No. 5. It was always an attractively produced small press magazine on high-quality paper which still hasn't discoloured, complete with excellent illustrations. Now, to celebrate publication of the magazine by Robinson Books, we are treated to this volume: 20 stories, each accompanied by an illustration from the original appearance in *FT*.

Inevitably, comparison with the 3rd *Interzone* anthology beckons. The quality of the writing in both is high, but thanks to the inclusion of good illustrations, the appearance of this volume is much more attractive. It is probable that *FT* subscribers won't want to buy a book of stories they already have in their collection; I can only hope this book will encourage a vast increase in new subscribers.

Clive Barker (with one of his *Books of Blood* stories, "The Forbidden") starts the collection and Ramsey Campbell (with a Cthulhu Mythos tale, "The Voice of the Beach") concludes it. Allen Ashley's "Dead to the World" lingered with me for a long time after reading it. Here is depicted one of the most bizarre horrible fates any writer has conjured up: the narrator's pores begin to seal up. An exposition on claustrophobia or literal, it does not matter, it's an original, memorable short piece. Psychological horror is handled with deceptive ease by Thomas Ligotti in "The Frolic", a nightmare that turns into horrifying reality for a prison psychologist. Mike Grace's "Tongue in Cheek" began as a straightforward suspense tale, a woman stranded as her car broke down; then the good samaritan who picks her up turns into something utterly evil, and the play on words of the title evokes horrible imagery for the dreadful ending. It's difficult to say much about these stories without giving away their suspense and horror; suffice to say, each is worth reading. Other authors featured are Robert Bloch, Dennis Etchison, Charles L. Grant, Fritz Leiber, Manly Wade Wellman, Richard C. Matheson, Karl Edward Wagner and Kim Newman.

If you've never tried *Fantasy Tales* no better introduction could be found than this volume. Recommended!

**THE ILLUSTRATED J.S. LE FANU** – J.S. LeFanu (Selected and Introduced by Michael Cox)
[Equation, 1988, 319pp, £14.95]
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

"LE FANU STANDS ABSOLUTELY IN THE first rank as a writer of ghost stories. That is my deliberate verdict." Thus wrote M.R. James, himself no mean hand when a ghost story needed writing. I've long been an admirer of James, but his enthusiasm for LeFanu has hitherto left me mystified, as I found little in the stories to recommend them. However, this collection in Thorson's new Equation imprint provides a chance to re-assess his stories. On the strength of the eleven titles included here, I was better able to appreciate LeFanu's skills as an invoker of malevolent presences and explorer of the psychological dimension in ghost stories, the first person seriously to do so. Some of the stories are well-known: "Squire Toby's Will", "Schalken the Painter" and "Green Tea", but other lesser known gems are also included, the most outstanding being perhaps "Madam Crowl's Ghost" and "Mr Justice Harbottle". The volume is handsomely illustrated and includes a detailed introduction to J.S. LeFanu's work from Michael Cox. Given the current interest in the British Ghost Story Tradition, as evinced in other recent publications from Equation, this volume provides a timely opportunity to appreciate LeFanu's contribution to the genre.

**PIONEERS** – Phillip Mann
[Gollancz, 1988, 320pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Neale Vickery

MANN'S PREVIOUS NOVELS HAVE SHOWN A preoccupation with aliens, together with an ability to portray the alien in a credible, interesting and readable way. In *Pioneers* he returns to the theme, but this story is more about alienation than the alien. It is told from the perspective of the non-humans, and charts their increasing alienation from the withered remnants of the mankind that created them.

The narrator, Angelo, is a genetically engineered artificial human with a huge claw in place of one hand, symbolic of his animal ancestry. Even his emotions are genetically pre-programmed. He is half of a Rescue Team sent to return to Earth the Pioneers of the title, despatched alone to the far corners of the galaxy during Earth's age of expansion to colonise new planets and make them habitable for man. Each Pioneer has been specially adapted to evolve rapidly to match their new environment, and endowed with the gift of near immortality.

Over 600 years have passed since the Pioneers left Earth. Meanwhile man has unleashed the "Catastrophe" (never fully explained) which has decimated

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the planet and left the few remaining humans infertile and doomed to extinction. The Pioneers, with their untainted gene pool, are humanity's last hope. In these troubled times, though, humanity reverts to a basic xenophobia and the returning Rescue Teams find themselves persecuted for their otherness. Ultimately, these "not quite humans" emerge as the saviours of humanity in an ending which is also a new beginning. But, as in all good stories, salvation does not take quite the form expected.

The Rescue Teams and the Pioneers are the aliens of this story, alienated from Earth, their home world, by the rejection of the remaining humans, the changes they themselves have undergone, and the changes they find on Earth after each long interstellar journey. Mann uses these outcasts to turn the spotlight back on humanity, asking what it is to be human (a classic use of the alien in SF). His answer is clear and unambiguous and is cleverly incorporated into a scene of high drama expertly weaved into the plot. Angelo affirms his humanity and returns to become the sterile stepfather to the world.

Mann's characterisation, always strong, is as good as ever and his plotting, though sometimes too linear, is effective. This is a complex and at times moving tale of love and sexual jealousy, camaraderie and xenophobia, the alien and the alienated, which confirms Mann's promise as one of the best new writers of SF in the 1980s.

**TERRY'S UNIVERSE** - Beth Meacham (Ed)
(Gollancz, 1988, 245pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

TERRY CARR WAS AN ACTIVE AND RESPECTed fan, the author of a handful of very good short stories and one good novel, but his greatest contribution to science fiction was as editor. His Ace Specials, recently revived, have been responsible for bringing out some of the most significant novels of the last 20 years; his *Best of the Year* anthologies were the best of their ilk; and his *Universe* original anthology series has been consistently publishing award-winning fiction throughout its life. In short, Carr made a phenomenal contribution to science fiction, and it is fitting that he should be recognised for it. And what a great idea that one of his proteges, Beth Meacham, should gather together some of the mainstays of the *Universe* series, and have them produce a fresh story for this commemorative volume.

After all that, it is practically an insult to the memory of the man that this volume is so bad. I cannot imagine that Carr would have had any hesitation in rejecting outright Fritz Leiber's bit of limp pornography, or Gregory Benford's very tired piece. Kim Stanley Robinson's manuscript would certainly have had more of Carr's blue pencil on it than black ink; and he would probably have wanted rewrites from Roger Zelazny and Ursula LeGuin. The stories by Silverberg, Swanwick, Lafferty and Wolfe just about get by, but they've all done far better work and one wonders that they considered these suitable contributions for such a book. Only Carter Scholz and Kate Wilhelm have produced work that does Carr's memory justice, and even they are outshone by Carr's own "The Dance of the Changer and the Three" which is reprinted here as if to show, by contrast, what Carr looked for in good SF. This is a very sad volume.

**ON STRANGER TIDES** - Tim Powers
(Grafton, 1988, 352pp, £11.95, paperback £6.95)
Reviewed by Martin Waller

IT COULD WELL BE SAID THAT WHAT THE world needs now is a Rattling Good Read. It could equally be said that Mr Tim Powers, resident of California although you would never guess, could just be the man to provide it. I first came across him, as did most readers I suppose, with his "breakthrough" novel, *The Anubis Gates*, a giddy fantasy which walked off with the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award with, I would guess, the firm approval of its recently deceased sponsor, with whose baroque imaginings Powers successfully crossed his own version of Boys Own G.A. Henty adventure.

His next effort, *Dinner at Deviant's Palace*, I found less convincing, but *Tides* sees him back on form, with his influences worn on his sleeve - *Anubis Gates* and *Tides* both feature introductory quotations from the decidedly fin-de-siecle poet William Ashbless, and *Tides* also refers back to Coleridge.

It tells the unsavoury tale of John Chandagnac, a harmless clerk who sails to the early 18th century Caribbean of the pirate Blackbeard on a quest to regain his fortune. By the end of the book he has taken up both piracy and witchcraft, under the name of Jack Shandy, in search of his love and ill-gotten treasure. He has also witnessed a short trip to Hell, any number of sorcerous battles, several captures by the Royal Navy, and the personal intervention of no less than Baron Samedi, central figure in the voodoo pantheon.

The whole book is riddled with voodoo - compare recent works by Lucius Shepard and William Gibson, both drawing apparently independently on the power of this form of all-American magic.

Powers has two important strengths. He eschews pastiche as if it were rabid - not an "odds bodikins" or "God's blood" to be seen. And he avoids putting his prose into an awkward, clunking American English, the hip, gosh-wow style of so many modern fantasy writers. Instead he has an ear for a telling image - zombies are described shuffling across the ship's deck making sounds "like someone rolling dead toads down a shingled roof." And his 18th century view of the New World as seen by a recent arrival is spot on:

> everything was still raw and unformed out here on the world's western edge, and bore only the most remote resemblances to the settled solidified eastern hemisphere.

Powers assumes that magic, as voodoo, still had a hold at that time in the New World, not yet swept away by the tide of rationalism - and the use of cold metal - prevalent in the more civilised east.

The first publication of *Tides* in this country is one of those up-market, £7 a throw "trade paperbacks" now common as a halfway house between an expensive hardback and a cheap-and-nasty paperback. Powers, unlike many others, shows himself to be worth it.

**WYRD SISTERS** - Terry Pratchett
(Gollancz, 1988, 251pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

*WYRD SISTERS* IS THE SIXTH DISCWORLD novel. It does for witches (and Shakespeare) what *Equal Rites* did for wizards (and feminism). Discworld connoisseurs can go out now and buy the book; those new to the genre should read on ...

Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg are witches. Traditional witches who believe in toads, cursing, riding around on broomsticks, you know the sort of thing. Magrat Garlick, however, is a *modern* witch. She believes in Bach Flower Remedies, wearing lots of significant silver jewellery, and *organising* witches to work together (in covens) against the oppressions of an intolerant and unenlightened society. You probably know that sort too.

One dark and stormy night, the witches are having a get-together on their favourite corner of the blasted heath when they inadvertently acquire a baby (the True Heir to the Throne of Lancre) and become embroiled in a sort of Cook's Tour of Shakespearean and Shakespearoid plots, with a subplot satirising the conventions of Elizabethan theatre. Not to mention politics. From here, the plot doesn't just thicken, it positively coagulates. The satire is rich, with a continued undertone of pure horror (the mad Duke Felmet has the blood of murder on his hand. He keeps trying to get it off ... with a scrubbing brush ... a file ... a grater ... but somehow, the blood won't go away. Euch!).

Despite the fact that the witches themselves are the most obvious targets for satire, Pratchett treats them with a more-than-grudging respect and

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admiration; these tough, adaptable survivor-types who use an eclectic blend of Ritual Magick and Headology, and who between them work out the practical details of in-flight refuelling for broomsticks. I'm tempted to quote phrases and incidents at some length, but that would only destroy the pleasure of find them for yourself. Go read the book. You'll love it.

**MODERN FANTASY: THE HUNDRED BEST NOVELS** - David Pringle
[Grafton, 1988, 278pp, £14.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

IN *VECTOR* 130 I REVIEWED PRINGLE'S *Science Fiction: The Hundred Best Novels* (Xanadu, 1985), and snottily remarked that I had only read 85 of his 100. Three years later there are only 6 I haven't read, and I am actively looking out for copies of those. The great value of a book such as that is to point you in the direction of books you might otherwise have missed - and, indeed, to impel you to reread books that (in my case) may have lain on the shelves for 25 years without being opened.

In this "sequel" Pringle follows the same useful formula: a two-page critique of each book, arranged in chronological order - this time from *Titus Groan* (1946) to *Aegypt* (1987) rather than *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) to *Neuromancer* (1984). The biggest difference (apart from the formatting and typography, where I think Xanadu has it over Grafton) is nothing to do with Pringle at all: it is the result of publishing history that the choice of books is not spread evenly over the 40 year period. Try as he might (by dint of including such frankly awful books as Van Vogt's *The Book of Ptath* from 1947), Pringle cannot find enough fantasy classics from the 40s and 50s. 30 of the hundred are from the period 1980 to 1987; seven from 1984 alone.

Most reviewers of Pringle's SF volume (including me) quibbled about his selection. Few of us could have actually read all of the hundred; even fewer can have read *this* hundred. "Fantasy" covers such a wide spectrum; it is also, until recently, far less of an established genre and far more prone than SF to being experimented with, successfully, by non-genre writers. Thus we do have the appearance of traditional genre authors, like Fritz Leiber (4 novels out of the hundred: more than anyone else, by my count), but we also have novels by John D. Macdonald, Brian Moore, Thomas Pynchon, Flann O'Brien, Salman Rushdie. And, from the mass of "typical" adult fantasy novels on Pringle's list, peek out a few representatives of *other* genres or sub-genres, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (children's fantasy) or *The Shining* (horror), which remind us of the riches that Pringle, inevitably, has to leave out. No lover of fantasy ought to ignore this book, however. Very few will not find themselves being put on the track of a book they had not heard of before; very few will not learn something fresh about old favourites from Pringle's informed and perceptive comments.

**OFF-PLANET** - Clifford D. Simak
[Methuen, 1988, 223pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

BASICALLY, SIMAK = SIMPLISTIC. HE PICKS a human shortcoming here, a universal ethical truth there, and weaves them into a folksy tale. But where much Simak is Earth-based, rural, whimsical, the present collection is of stories set on other planets - some in our system, others not.

Unfortunately, most of them share Simak's other failing - at least, a failing where the average British SF reader is concerned. His characters are mostly unpleasant, harsh, often the scum of the Earth; their speech is repetitive, slangy, coarse. When we do encounter a thinking man, he is usually incompetent and an apparent failure: Simak obviously does not rate humankind highly, and it shows.

Scotsman Francis Lyall has provided this collection with an "essay-style" introduction, seeking to set SF, Simak and these particular stories into some kind of context. I found his writing pretentious, his attitude to Simak gushing; the stories should stand by themselves and speak for themselves, and on the whole, with the reservations I've made, they do.

There are 6 stories, ranging from 1943 to 1972. The earliest, "Ogre", I'd love to rewrite myself: it has characters so corny and ill-distinguished they are just rough-talking clones; their bickering is boring and their speech grates so much on any British reader's sensitivity that the tale is virtually unreadable as it stands - yet it has an excellent plot.

"Junkyard" comes from 1953 and, like most of the stories here, its ending is so predictable it has little gripping power; an exception to this rule is "The Observer" (1972) which has no real point at all, a poor try by Simak at matching the "no plot" pieces of the New Wave. "Mirage" dates right back to 1956, yet has been placed last and is probably the best crafted and plotted tale here; again we have confrontation between the brutalized and murdering proles and the sensitive but harmless intellectual, and the fact that the brain comes out on top is no real reassurance.

Frankly, if you are a Simak completist you will want this; if you are new to straight planetary SF, you will find it very dated in style but still offering some interest. The bibliographical notes at the front are well researched and valuable, but it's not a book I'd recommend to anyone with more than a nodding acquaintance with either Simak's greater works like *City*, or interplanetary SF of a more challenging content.

**THE REDISCOVERY OF MAN** - Cordwainer Smith
[Gollancz, 1988, 377pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Valerie Housden

I KNEW THE STORY ALREADY: HOW CHINESE soldiers fighting in Korea were advised they could give themselves up, without loss of face, by saying "love", "duty", "humanity" and "virtue" in that order, which sounded very like the English words, "I surrender". I did not know, until I read J.J. Pierce's introduction, that Dr Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger, known to us as Cordwainer Smith, was responsible for this inspired compromise between self-dignity and the necessity of preserving life. It makes sense.

The stories in this collection, arranged in an order which follows the chronology compiled by Pierce, all reflect an obsession with the preservation of human life at all costs, but the more satisfying ones manage to reconcile this with preserving the individual's sense of his or her own dignity. Pros and cons of scientific and social developments are explored. In "The Dead Lady of Clown Town" brainwashing and controlling the individual are seen as beneficial, whereas in "Under Old Earth", a celebration of rebellion, they are shown as stifling initiative, while in "Alpha Ralpha Boulevard" restoring real choice brings out the best and worst in people.

My particular favourites were mostly from the earlier stories. The impact of "Scanners Live in Vain" for me was as strong as it must have been when it was first published in 1950. And the depiction of the "partners" in "The Game of Rat and Dragon" as intelligent, totally feline beings, was very effective. A society devoid of women, as that of the Klopts on Arachosia in "The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal" is portrayed as some sort of macho hell. (The cats come to the rescue again.)

How well do these stories written in the 50s and 60s read now? I found the strong sense of moral rectitude, particularly in the later stories, rather trying, and I decided that "The Lady Who Sailed *The Soul*" was not the only girl sailor - she was the only famous one! That said, Smith is an excellent stylist and produces some unusual ideas that should stimulate the jaded palate of the reader in the 80s. Highly recommended.

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**H.G. WELLS: DESPERATELY MORTAL** - David C. Smith
[Yale University Press, 1988, 634pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

WELLS, LIKE SHAKESPEARE, WILL BECOME A man recreated every generation. At the same time, in the 1930s, as a popular reference book called him "a man who made his home in Utopia", Wells presented himself in *Experiment in Autobiography* as "a very ordinary brain". Socialists of all persuasions, from the Fabians in the 1900s to Orwell during the Second World War criticized him - the Fabians for being too fiery, Lenin as being too middle class, Orwell as an anachronism. Yet Wells went on undeterred in his materialism.

In the 1960s Colin Wilson found quotations in Wells that seemed a precursor of his own metaphysics. In the 70s more biographical material started to appear, especially dealing with Wells and women. It is this liberal, proto-feminist Wells that David Smith is principally concerned with, but another new Wells has already appeared - in the latest issue of *New Scientist* there is an approving reconsideration of his early work as a science crammer. This Wells was a forerunner of Kenneth Baker on the curriculum.

The tendency of *H.G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* is to present Wells as a liberal, while calling him a socialist, a feminist, sociologist more concerned with the soft than the hard sciences (though it is no more than a tendency). However, it does lead to one or two contradictions - from *Anticipations* in 1901 Wells was saying that birth control was one of the necessary conditions of women's liberation, nevertheless he seems to have fathered two legitimate and five illegitimate children, which suggests that Wells himself did not bother to get involved in his companion's problems or that he engaged in illicit intercourse so frequently that the chances against were lost in the torrent. Also, since Wells attacked people by name as abusing womanisers (Hubert Bland, for instance) in his *Experiment*, it makes him out to be a hypocrite. And, as a minor criticism of professor Smith's detail he never tells us what contraception Wells used, though he discusses Wells and birth control several times. In contrast, Wells discusses his parents' birth control in his *Experiment*.

The book is not strictly chronological, but devotes some chapters to a period - early life, professional author, world statesman. Each period ends with a chapter summing up the themes of Wells' life in that period, and if you don't know that it's coming as I did not for some time it seems as if detail is missing. Also, Smith seems to regard some themes as continuing while others are dropped. So Wells and literature gets one early summary chapter, but Wells and women get two spaced chapters.

Wells is an author worth studying, but this biography is not written to emphasise his contribution to science fiction. On the other hand, if you are interested in Joanna Russ or Ursula LeGuin you will find Wells presented as their ally.

The book comes with 120 pages of notes but without a complete bibliography. It will not endure, I think, because of the constant recreation of Wells but it will challenge many readers to reconsider not only Wells and his achievement, but all his aspirations as well - how far they have been achieved and how far they should be worked for or resisted.

**ISLANDS IN THE NET** - Bruce Sterling
[Legend, 1988, 448pp, £11.95 hardback, £5.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Jim England

THE COVER SHOWS AN OIL-RIG STANDING on tripod legs in a rough sea with an unlikely-looking plane hurtling towards it. It is almost guaranteed to put off female readers with its conjured-up visions of exclusive maleness, I would have thought. You open the book and find yourself viewing life through the eyes of Laura Webster, who is reminiscent of Doris Day in some old Hollywood musical full of cardboard characters, apart from her frequent use of obscenities. Almost guaranteed to put off male readers.

The blurb says:

> The year is 2023, the place Galveston, and Laura Webster is happy. She and her adored David are bringing up their new baby in a world where nuclear weapons, environmental crises and national politics are all things of the past. Net - a global telecommunications system, using technology pioneered in the late twentieth century - provides activity, friendship, and support ...

It goes on to describe this scenario as "effortlessly believable" and the author as "the master of cyberpunk fiction". It also describes the book as "a fast-paced science thriller".

I found it slow, tedious and as hard to follow as the sequel to some previous, unread novel. (Perhaps it is.) For a start, large portions of the novel describe conducted tours of technology-infested places in the very worst tradition of 50-year-old SF, without even its attempt to be reader-friendly. There is a great deal of unintelligent dialogue in which technical concepts are interlaced with "Yeah", "Y'all", "Great", "No way", "Sort of", "Or what have you".

A random example of the prose:

> Tiny little Malay woman in her fifties, with oily hair in a chignon and frail, protuberant ears. Wearing a yellow sundress, tennis hat, and a Rizome neck scarf. Next to her a beefy Eurasian man chewed sunflower seeds and spat the hulls into a small plastic trash bag.

This is like stage directions, as if Sterling has thrown style out of the window in pursuit of content. But what content? Nothing ever really seems to happen except the endless flippant talk of people of whom we are given merely physical descriptions. No-one ever engages in introspection of a non-banal kind. The ambiance is as divorced from Nature as an airport lounge and gives rise to a sick, alienated or dehumanized feeling.

This would be all right in small doses but here we have a novel shamelessly padded out to no less than 448 pages. Having been initially sympathetic to "cyberpunk", I am greatly put off, preferring novels that have something to say about the human condition. It is worth adding (as the blurb does): "Bruce Sterling was born in 1954", and he is reported as having said (elsewhere): cyberpunk is dead.

**TRANSFORMATION** - Whitley Strieber
[Century, 1988, 256pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Mike Christie

WHEN I FIRST ENCOUNTERED ERICH VON Daniken and Uri Geller, in my early teens, I was stunned, and convinced they were for real. I grew up. I realised they were either nutters or conmen, and I forgot about them. And I guess I thought everyone else grew up too, otherwise I wouldn't have been surprised when I read *Transformation*.

It's a book only a child-like mind could believe in. Strieber claims to have met aliens, which he calls Visitors. Since he described them in his previous book, *Communion*, thousands of people have written to him to report similar experiences. My God, says Strieber, this must mean there are thousands of aliens contacting the Earth! And we never knew! My feeling that perhaps it was just thousands of nutters contacting him was strengthened by a couple of his attempts at scientific deduction. My favourite was his out-of-body experience. He knew nothing about them, but decided to read a book that explained them in great detail. Guess what - inside a day, there he was, floating around the house and bouncing off the ceiling.

The book is full of incidents like this which one would have thought would proclaim Strieber's suggestibility to the world. But of course people want to believe, and Strieber is just the latest in a long line of people to make a profit out of mankind's gullibility. The only interesting question is whether Strieber is a cynical conman or a True Believer in UFOs. The first seems more likely, if only because on occasion he almost seems to be taking the piss. For example, on that first out-of-body jaunt, he spotted a cat on his bed - which appar-

# B O O K S

ently was impossible. So cats are associated with out-of-body experiences. Gee whiz, Strieber, what about the Egyptians' habit of mummifying cats? Do you suppose it's because they knew cats were important if you wanted to go on an astral picnic? Strieber does suppose it, and a whole bunch of other idiocies as well. If I had room to relate them I would, but I can sum them up by saying that this is the most cretinously stupid book I have ever had the misfortune to review.

**THE RETURN OF THE SHADOW: THE HISTORY OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS PART ONE** - J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Tolkien
[Unwin, 1988, 497pp, £17.95]
Reviewed by Jessica Yates

THE SIXTH POSTHUMOUS VOLUME OF EARLY versions of Tolkien's Middle-Earth writings is different from the first five which dealt with the *Silmarillion* mythos. Now Christopher Tolkien gives us the first drafts of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, including transcriptions of manuscripts in his possession which were never sent to Marquette University, and thus have been seen by nobody else. The task of transcription was not easy; here is the sort of problem Christopher Tolkien was faced with:

> The manuscript of this chapter is an exceedingly complicated document: pencil overlaid with ink ... pencil not overlaid but struck through, pencil allowed to stand, and fresh composition in ink, together with riders on slips and complex directions for insertions ...

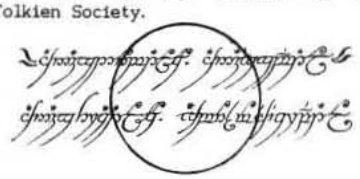
The MSS date from the late 1930s.

Volume 6 (unlike the other 5) is immediately readable, and anyone who knows and loves *The Fellowship of the Ring* will enjoy noting the deletions and corrections, from "They give me the creeps" changed to "They are terrible!" to whole chapters which eventually didn't work and were cut out. It is fascinating to see how early, or late, Tolkien took the major plot decisions about *The Lord of the Rings*.

Volume 6 is arranged in three sections. Phase I contains the early drafts up to the hobbits' arrival at Rivendell. The hero, first called Bingo, was accompanied by Odo, Frodo and Merry, and the mysterious Trotter, a hobbit who had joined their party at Bree. Already the plot turned on the destruction of the Ring, and the Black Riders were in pursuit. At Rivendell Tolkien began to rewrite from the beginning, and Phase II comprises extracts from this revised version.

Phase III begins with fair copies from the beginning, with Frodo substituted for Bingo. Now Tolkien has five hobbits, too many for each to have a definable personality, so he experiments with combining their rôles; eventually Odo is written out. By now he realised he was not writing a children's book the length of *The Hobbit*. He had included *Silmarillion* material - already Trotter retold the legend of Beren and Lúthien - but Trotter had not yet been recast as a man, and given a life-story, quest and love affair which recreated Beren's tale and that of Tolkien's own youth.

Though he had little idea of the intervening episodes, Tolkien had already decided that Gollum would try to take the Ring from Frodo and fall into the Crack of Doom - one of the most interesting insights provided by this fascinating book, which must have been far harder to edit than it is to read. Christopher Tolkien provides many percipient footnotes, and still leaves room for the DIY critics of the Tolkien Society.



**BLUEBEARD** - Kurt Vonnegut
[Cape, 1988, 300pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THE WORLD OF THE VISUAL ARTS, ART forgery, art criticism and all the pretentiousness that goes with it, makes an excellent metaphor for the beauty, murkiness, complexity, and cheating on oneself and each other that we call life. Russell H. Greenan's wonderfully idiosyncratic *It Happened in Boston?* and Robertson Davies's brilliant *What's Bred in the Bone* both tackle aspects of it; so does *Bluebeard*, typically Vonnegutian in style, but considerably better than some of what he's produced since he left SF behind.

"The Emperor has no clothes," an artist makes the young Rabo Karabekian repeat three times about modern art; "the fact that many people are now taking it seriously proves to me that the world has gone mad." *Bluebeard* is Karabekian's autobiography, a moving story of how a man can screw up his life and his career.

> "An Armenian boy with a cardboard suitcase and a portfolio ... is about to seek his fortune in a great city twenty-five hundred miles away. An old man wearing an eye patch, who has just arrived in a time machine from 1987, sidles up. What does the old man say to him?" ... I shook my head. "Nothing. Cancel the time machine ... I want him to believe for as long as possible that he is going to become a great painter and a good father."

Oh, let us keep all our dreams as long as we may. Hope that things will get better is all that keeps us going when life is grey. And in Karabekian's case, things are not just grey: he does a critically acclaimed series of paintings using a new type of paint; people pay thousands for them; and months later the paint crumbles off, leaving a blank canvas - a comment on the true depth of modern art, and a bitter comment on life. It makes Karabekian a fool, an old fool; and no-one is better at portraying an old fool and his meandering autobiographical thoughts than Vonnegut.

It's funny, it's sad, there are little triumphs and major pratfalls. It's not SF, but who cares? - it's Kurt Vonnegut, and I enjoyed it.

**THE OFFICIAL PRISONER COMPANION** - Matthew White & Jaffer Ali
[Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988, 244pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Alex Stewart

LIKE IT OR HATE IT, *THE PRISONER* REmains one of the landmarks of British television, and the only real surprise is that a book like this has taken so long to appear. The problem is, fascinating, enigmatic and stylish as it undoubtedly was, there were only 17 episodes ever produced; slightly over 14 hours of original material, which doesn't provide an awful lot of ground to base a critical study on.

Nevertheless, the authors have assembled a formidable amount of data, not only on the episodes themselves, but on the background to the show, the process of filming it, public reaction at the time and in the years since, and a tentative stab at analysing some of the themes and assumptions underlying the basic premise. I've seen a great deal of this material covered elsewhere, particularly the production information in the comprehensive episode guide, but this is the first time it's all been collected between the same set of covers.

This fact alone makes the book worth taking a look at, but where the authors really score is in assembling their data from primary sources wherever possible; inevitably, perhaps, with a show of this nature, rumour and anecdote have spun almost out of control as the years go by, and a few "well known facts" are duly nailed.

The book is weakest in the sections attempting to analyse the programme, doing little more than gesture towards a number of conflicting interpretations, before shrugging shoulders and moving on. I was also surprised by some of the omissions in the appendix; a small press fan novel is listed under related publications, but none of the contemporary spin-off novels (*The Prisoner*, by not exactly obscure author Thomas M. Disch, *Who is Number Two* and *A Day in the Life*, all of which were reprinted to tie-in with the last repeat showing on Channel 4), nor the recent DC comic based on the series, are mentioned at all. Similarly, although the company responsible for distributing the American videos of the programme are mentioned, the British Channel 5 cassettes are unaccountably ignored.

All in all, a commendable effort, and a useful source of raw data on the series. Telefantasy buffs will enjoy browsing through it, but I'm afraid the definitive critical study of *The Prisoner* has still to be written. If it ever is, though, it will certainly cite this book as a major reference.

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