

# Vector

October-November 1989 95p  
Issue 152

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association

**Interzone:  
How it all began**

**Highballs!**

**From Hell  
to Paradise**

**Plus:  
Book Reviews  
& Letters**



# Vector

Issue 152 • Oct/Nov 1989 ISSN 0505-1448

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Cover art by SMS for "Chaos Surfari" by Rudy Rucker  
and Mark Laidlaw, *Interzone* 28

Typeset by PCG, 61 School Street, Barrow-in-Furness,  
Cumbria LA14 1EW. Tel: 0229 36957

Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage,  
Guildford, Surrey. GU1 4AP

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contributors and must not be taken to represent those of the  
Editors or the BSFA except where explicitly stated.

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enquiries on rates, sizes, etc. to the Publicity Manager:

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amateur organisation, founded in 1958, which aims to promote  
and encourage the reading, writing and publishing of SF and  
Fantasy in all their forms. We publish six times a year:

- *Vector*, the BSFA journal
- *Matrix*, the news magazine
- *Paperback Inferno*, the latest paperbacks reviewed
- *Focus*, a magazine for SF writers (thrice yearly)

Other BSFA services include *Orbiter*, a postal SF writers' workshop; an SF information service; a postal magazine chain; and an SF lending library.

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(Overseas: \$20 surface, \$35 air-mail)  
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**V**151 was very much a transitional issue. Most of the features were passed onto us from David Barrett, which allowed us a little breathing space to make a radical design change. Our first issue looked a lot different from our predecessor's, which made us feel much more comfortable with it. As David points out in his letter this issue, we would have felt too tied to the old way, made to fit into his template.

I typed the entirety of that first issue, and found myself with very little time for proof-reading; hence the abundance of spelling mistakes, etc. Apologies must be made. To Paul Brazier, the reviewer of *The Hormone Jungle* by Robert Reed (V151, p20), for missing his name out. To Judith Hanna, for turning her name into a palindrome (V151, p14) - and see the letters column this issue. And to all those who noticed the spelling mistakes, the lack of spaces between words, and all those other inconsistencies.

This issue should be a lot better. We have production assistants now, and would gladly welcome more. I've proofed it, and spent a little more time on its general appearance; in all, I think that this is a much more attractive issue, more consistent, less white space, more good artwork.

V152 has been a Parkinson-McVeigh production: it has our stamp on both the production and features content (Paul Kincaid still looks after the Reviews, thankfully). And I feel safe to say that both of us have begun to settle into this job of editing. We have plans for the future, which are starting to take shape; the first of such plans beginning here, within the pages of this issue of *Vector*.

The 1980s, whether you consider that decade good or bad, have at least been "interesting times". It has certainly been far from a stagnant period - there always seems to be something happening somewhere, somewhere, whether a war or disaster, or a simple change in fashion and trends.

It's been a time of greed ("I'm all right Jack"-ism) and intense generosity on a massive scale (Live Aid, Comic Relief, ITV's *Telethon*...). It's been a time of war and strife, conflict between nations and the Superpowers; and it's seen the emergence of *glasnost* and peace summits, the freedom for hundreds of East Germans, the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.... There have been fears over the spread of AIDS, the worsening of the Greenhouse Effect, the irradiation of food on our supermarket shelves; a general growth of awareness of the world around us, a concern for those things which matter. And it has been at once superficial, a surface gloss, where fashion dictates and the press make a meal of it, and the TV moguls reap the profits for being more real than reality - and there's also been a growth of self-respect, of humiliation, and of a caring for others less fortunate than ourselves....

Dull? The 80s were never dull.

Thinking about it, other images come to mind, mostly catastrophic: Chernobyl, Zeebrugge and Hillsborough and Heysel,

# EDITORIAL

By Boyd Parkinson



Artwork by Kevin A Cullen

IRA bombings, Thatcherite yuppies and Reaganomics, Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* (his other catchphrase that no one seems to know what it means), the infamous shoe-collector Imelda Marcos, war-torn Beirut, the famine of Ethiopia and the Sudan, the Falklands War/Conflict/Crisis (delete as appropriate, or choose your own euphemism), the filofax and designer fanaticism.... The list is far from exhaustive.

So it is with our own little corner of the world: since the late 70s, with the vast commercial successes of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*, etc, the SF genre has reaped the benefits of riding in their wake. It brought a wider audience to SF, lining the pockets of Hollywood and publishers alike - a few authors can now even make money from it! The boom came, exploding like a supernova in the minds of millions of people worldwide who had very little previous knowledge of SF, and it stayed.

SF has become part of the popular culture, almost gaining respectability. These last ten years have seen a growth in awareness and use of SF and its imagery. And a greater acceptance of its creators, though fans still seem to be thought of as weird.

But it's on such a reflective note that we hope to start our first series: SF in the 1980s.

This issue, David Pringle takes us back to the birth of *Interzone*, for a long time the only SF magazine in this country. For the

most part of the 80s, the magazine was certainly an important feature of the British SF scene, playing its part in creating the healthy climate that today we can so much enjoy - because for all the crap that is brought out, there's still a lot of good stuff to be found, making the publishers wealthier and more able to print a quality product. But that's another story....

We hope that we can continue this series in a similar vein, publishing features or interviews of important authors of the 80s, on major events and trends.

Of course, we have other plans in the pipeline - ideas for theme issues, etc, but these we'll deal with as we come to them. There's no point in spoiling the surprise now, is there? And always we're bearing in mind David Barrett's policy that: "Vector should be the most stimulating journal of SF and Fantasy criticism available anywhere."

Kevin McVeigh is also presently working on a project, with the help of Sue Thomason, to set-up an Orbiter devoted to non-fiction and critical work. The intention is to develop reviewing and critical skills and the exchanging of information for paying markets for non-fiction. Anyone who is interested should contact either Kev or Sue (their addresses are printed in *Matrix*), who will provide further information. ■

# LETTERS

Write to:

Vector

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## Art in the Cynical 80s

I read an article about the sculpture [V149] in *New Statesman and Society*: the footcuses were real, obtained from a medical supplier. The NSS speculated that it might be an attack on abortion rights.

The violent reaction to Rushdie's book is not by 100% of the Muslim community but the fundamentalist, male-dominated parts. Among those individuals and groups who do not want Rushdie murdered, Women Against Fundamentalism is the most visible. At the bottom line, however hurt or insulted believers may be, the religion itself isn't damaged by the "attack" on it - the criticism or doubts - but by the behaviour of its supporters. That goes for the excesses of Christian fundamentalists too. It would have been more constructive to voice their reaction without death threats though I suppose the sensation-alist appetite of our media probably meant book burning was the only way to get their views publicised. Also if, as has been suggested, the real reason for the outrage is anger about racism, it seems pretty ironic to scapegoat someone who has fought against it and no doubt has suffered from it himself. I don't agree that he is "protected" by the dominant culture: the craven responses, Pontius Pilate impressions etc of both left and right have been sometimes transparently due to a fear of alienating Muslim votes. What about the blind eye turned to the incitements to violence and/or affirmations of an intent to murder Rushdie by various Muslim "leaders" - some on prime time TV?

To add more impressions to the 60s v 80s debate: as a child of the 60s I was excluded from both the political and sexual experimentation going on but, with the benefit of hindsight, see it as a period of extreme idealism and naivety which spawned more thoughtful questioning and striving for civil rights in the 70s (eg the women's movement originated in the dissatisfaction of women in the male-dominated civil rights movement who were denied a voice, relegated to the menial jobs and pressured into sex thanks to so-called sexual liberation). Its good aspects included a willingness, stemming from idealism, to try to band together and work for the common good, to try to improve society.

The 80s by contrast is a time of extreme cynicism and indifference to altruistic concerns: "I'm all right, Jack" at its most selfish. Far from more "sane", I can only wonder how Gavin [Dixon in V150] has managed to avoid noticing the constant wars,

terrorism and soaring crime rates, all the 60s vices shorn of their glamourising and justification perhaps but there certainly seems to be a lot more violence and glorification of violence. Also a lot more 1984 type Double-speak and Doublethink with the Government constantly telling us we've never had it so good as things continue to get worse and worse. The only good things politically are a wider public awareness of green issues after 20-odd years of environmentalists crying in the wilderness. But liberating... no, our freedoms are being continually clipped away daily while we're being told how much freer we are.

**Pam Baddeley**

55 Union St, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7PX

*It seems to me that your own view of the 80s is very cynical in itself; it made me think of Vietnam, Biafra, the Bay of Pigs saga, the OAS and the growth of the IRA, the Cold War, Charles Manson, Hindley and Brady, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and the Kennedys, Spaghetti Westerns.... War, terrorism and crime, the glorification of violence. Maybe it's no better in the 80s, but is it any worse? - BP*

## Announcing the SSP!

I would like to speak for all those BSFA members that don't write about anything: we pay our membership and for that we expect the BSFA to form our opinions. Nowadays, with everyone having a different opinion, your own opinion is likely to be opposed by almost everyone so it's better not to have one. Instead we wait for others to tell what they think and then conform. We have too little time to form opinions and it's hard work. Remember, we pay you to give us an opinion and we listen to it, we don't oppose. Signed: the Silent Sleepers Party.

Get the picture? Lately two things in Vector caught my attention: totalitarianism and what comes with it (censorship, political extremism, etc) is an increasing trend in our world (read the editorial in V149 for example) and people hardly express their opinions anymore. Either they agree with it or they don't care (which is worse than agreeing), they are scared or lazy. In any case they are responsible for all forms of totalitarianism throughout the world. And they are guilty of justifying their opinions to themselves: the sentence is seizure of freedom to decide anything for yourself.

If we don't oppose to totalitarianism, we'll get it. Extremists, fanatics and totalitarians have one enemy: opposition. If no one opposes, they move in and won't move for at least 70 years (USSR) unless we start a war (Nazi Germany). Be against it and express what you think.

**Erwin F Blonk**

Werkhovenstraat 115, 2546 VD Den Haag, Netherlands.

*I agree. Let us know your opinions, whether in this letter column or on the questionnaire that should be in this mailing. The BSFA is yours too! - BP*

## Definitions, definitions....

Surely the question "what exactly is SF?" to which David Barrett, John Gribbin and now Cecil Nurse are addressing themselves, is susceptible to a fairly simple answer. It is made of two words of which one is *fiction*.

Fiction is the literate telling of a structured story about believable people undergoing believable and entertaining events in a believable environment in our world, past or present.

SF (speculative, science or whatever word you choose to show how widely you want to stretch the concept of the form) is just the same as other fiction - except that the environment is *not* our world past or present, but a believable alternative to it.

If the story be not literate or structured, it will fail to hold the interest of the reader. If the characters and events that befall them be not believable, again the reader's ability to suspend disbelief will be broken and the story will fail.

If the imagined alternative be insufficiently different from our own to give the reader that delicious *frisson* of pleasure that comes from all successful SF, then it ain't SF at all - it's just fiction.

Why do we need more than that for a fair and full definition?

**Ken Lake**

115 Markhouse Avenue, London E17 8AY

*A fair enough point, but all too often the simple answer isn't always the right one. I'm sure many will agree with you, though there's a great deal of room there for serious debate. - BP*



## Vanity Fayre

Congratulations. **V151** was impressive. The professional typesetting and the layout were really fantastic (although the photos didn't come out too well). The contents were good too, although presumably David Barrett should share the credit for that. I enjoyed the Ramsey Campbell interview (what a horror writer?) and also Brian Aldiss's little plug for *Chung Kuo*; in fact, it was a consistently thought-provoking issue.

One minor quibble. Before Barbara Davies accuses someone of vanity publishing, couldn't she check her facts? Okay, she only said she suspected it, but her vague statement could leave a lot of people with a half-remembered link between "Merlin Books" and "Vanity Publishing". I don't know anything about Merlin Books, apart from a few mentions in "Books Received" columns. Maybe Brabara is right; but there are also a number of small presses earnestly trying to break the publishing stranglehold of the conglomerates. Vague accusations of vanity publishing could literally be the death of a small publisher.

Keith Brooke

12 Western Hill Road, Beckford,  
Nr Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, GL20 7AJ

*I know nothing about Merlin Books, and at first glance I come to the same conclusion as Barbara. If they're a small press, and not involved in vanity publishing, then they are keeping a fairly low profile as far as I'm concerned. Does anyone out there know anything about them? Would Merlin care to comment? And thanks for the favourable comment on Vector's new look, you were one of many, and all comments are greatly welcome. - BP*

## It's that Cecil Nurse again....

Just to wish you good luck and good fortune (not quite the same, are they?) with Vector. I found Kev McVeigh's editorial particularly inspiring. And I'm sure plausibility is spelt with an f; why does everyone spell it with an a? That Cecil Nurse is some irritable character - are you sure he even likes SF?

It's amazing how professional typesetting changes the whole feel of the publication. So does a short non-discursive letter column (which I'm afraid I didn't like).

Cecil Nurse

49 Station Road, Haxby, York, YO3 8LU

*Apologies, Cecil. Our typist has been taken out and shot. I don't think I'll ever spell plausibility plausibility wrong again. - BP*

## Strange Men!?!?

Letting go of *Vector* after so long was a bit like a parent letting go of a teenage child; accepting that it has a life of its own, it's no

longer my responsibility, no longer my baby (especially remembering all those sleepless nights, and we won't talk about the bed-wetting) - I hope it's going to be all right, going off with strange men....

And, of course, it is. The content of **V151** was largely familiar - much of it was material I'd bequeathed to you - and I'm looking forward to seeing how you impose your own stamp on the content; from your editorials I don't think I need to worry. The appearance is great; the old layout, while it served me well for four years, would have imposed a restriction on your editorial creativity, by tying you too closely (even subconsciously) to what had been before, making you fit into my template. Your redesign is fresh and open, implying a new, youthful, bright, invigorating approach. Obviously it will evolve, as a good design should, but it's simple and clean, and should display the content well. I'm delighted you've been able to get *Vector* typeset at long last; that's something I wanted to do for four years and never managed to achieve.

There are bound to be some complaints from the petty-minded. I've read a one-page missive which attacks **V151** for - to tell you the truth, I'm not exactly sure for what - for being different from how the missive-writer would have done it if he'd got the job, I suppose. Ignore them. You've made a great start. I can sit back and relax.

A comment on Brian Aldiss's piece on David Wingrove's epic *Chung Kuo*: I wonder whether he's actually read the thing (hollow laughter). What is most upsetting is that while the concept is great - the synopsis of the whole seven-volume series sounds as if it would make a good novel, possibly even two... - it's let down so badly by the execution. I'm told in a glossy booklet that it is "totally unlike anything previously produced in the science fiction genre"; and the press release (largely self-penned by Wingrove) that it is "unmatched in modern literature"; and that "it's not cold and abstract and clever, like so much SF, but a hot-blooded blitzkrieg of a read". I'm afraid I found it dull and predictable in plotting, Mills & Boonish in characterisation and relationships, flat and clichéd in writing quality, and almost totally lacking in the essence of Chinese culture. So much for hype. So come clean, Brian: we're agreed on the concept, but what did you actually think of the book?

David V Barrett

23 Oakfield Road, Croydon,  
Surrey CR0 2UD

*V151 was largely a transitional issue. This issue, we hope, should be certainly more firmly our own in matter of content (and even fewer typographical mistakes). - BP*

## Corrections....

It was nice to see in print the extended Zoline review which I wrote a year or so ago. I forgive you for turning my name into

a palindrome, even. But for the benefit of any serious students out there and for anyone who wondered what the hell I was getting at with what appeared as gibberish, could you print a note of two important corrections. Both occur in the last column of my article as printed.

The final two sentences of the first paragraph of that column should read:

Condemn... weaponry... as hopelessly naive. Praise Zoline for being *hopefully* naive.

Not "hopelessly" again. That is, not simple (pointless) repetition, but a contrast.

And also, in the middle of the following paragraph:

But the existence asserted is as much of the sensual world as of the *self*.

Not "sense", as you had it, which doesn't make sense. Again, not repetition but a contrast between the solipsistic "ego" cogitating abstracting, as against raw, often irrational sensation.

(Italics not for emphasis, but indicate the corrected word in each case)

Judith Hanna

22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico,  
London, SW1V 2ER

*Again, I apologise. Despite all the mistakes, Judith also said that she liked the new look. Apart from those already mentioned, we received other favourable comments - from Brian Aldiss, Colin Greenland, David Pringle. Thanks - BP*

And finally....

## An Appeal

I am researching on the subject of time capsules and similar examples of deliberate attempts to communicate with the future. Besides the informal messages often buried or hidden in walls etc by individuals, and the more elaborate, ambitious capsules organised by committees (about which there is considerable information), I would also like to know of any fictional examples which may have been used in literature, especially in science fiction. Apart from machines for time-travelling (which don't really count) the only vaguely relevant example I have come across is the time-locked hologram of Hari Seldon from Asimov's *Foundation* books.

Since I cannot scan this field myself, I would be most grateful for information about any examples of this sort of behaviour which you or your readers may recall.

Dr Brian Durrans

Deputy Keeper

Ethnography Dept. of the British Museum

Burlington Gardens

London, W1X 2EX

(Ref: BD/sv)



# interzone

*How it all began...*

*David Pringle, co-editor of Britain's leading science fiction magazine and one of the original founder-members of the Interzone collective, takes us back almost ten years to the beginning of the Eighties and of (what was then) the only British SF magazine...*

**T**he decision was taken in the summer of 1981. Having grown tired of waiting for someone else to do it (Rupert Murdoch or Richard Branson, perhaps) we aimed to create a new British science fiction magazine virtually out of thin air. At the time, there were two groups of people thinking along the same lines - a bunch of us in Leeds, and another lot in London.

"Yorcon II" had been held in Leeds over Easter weekend, 1981. I was co-chairman of that SF convention, and Alan Dorey, Graham James and Simon Unsley were all committee members. After all the bills had been paid we discovered that the convention had made a "profit" of about £1,300. This was not intentional. Our inexperience in handling large sums of money and our nervousness about the possibility of getting into debt had caused us to budget cautiously and to overestimate our likely expenditure. We saved a good deal of money by borrowing art-show screens free of charge, and by employing other cost-cutting measures. In the event, the convention was a great success, if rather overcrowded: there were many walk-ins (people who paid their registration fee on the door and hence could not have been accounted for beforehand). After it was all over Alan, Graham, Simon and I were left with the problem of what to do with the surplus funds.

We could have refunded the money to the convention's attendees, who would have received about £1 a head. We could have passed it on to the following year's Easter Convention, were it not for the fact that the practice of passing on funds had lapsed - we had received nothing at all from the previous Eastercon. We could have donated the money to the Leeds SF Group, where it would have been used to fund a local fanzine or whatever. Instead, we decided to use the £1,300 to help launch a new professional SF magazine.

I believe it was Graham James who first suggested using the funds in this way. We gladly followed his suggestion - in the belief that SF conventions are meaningless events

unless they do something to promote science fiction, the art form which is the reason for us all coming together in the first place. There was no British SF magazine in existence in 1981, nowhere for a new writer of SF and Fantasy to publish his or her short stories and receive fair payment for them. So we believed the best way to use Yorcon's money to help British SF was to put it towards a new magazine. After all, *New Worlds* was created at ground level by a group of eager SF fans way back in 1946; and that magazine survived for 24 years and helped launch the careers of Aldiss, Brunner, Ballard, Moorcock, Roberts and so many other writers.

Personally, I was encouraged at the time (and still am) by remarks JG Ballard made when I interviewed him in 1979 for an American fanzine, and again in 1981 for *Foundation* (see issue 24 of the latter journal). He said there was an urgent need for a new British SF magazine; the time was ripe; there was so much going on in the world that needed "interpreting" imaginatively; moreover, there was a whole new young audience out there, people who read papers such as *New Musical Express* and *City Limits*. I became enthusiastic about putting Ballard's suggestions into practice. However, there is no truth to the rumour that I was eager at first for the new publication to be called "JG Ballard's Science Fiction Magazine"....

Actually, the magazine had no name at this stage. We played around with various ideas - "Quasar", "New Horizons", "New Terrain", etc. - but we were unable to settle on anything which seemed original. We began to plan the shape of the magazine: it would be digest size, perfect-bound, with large print on thick paper; about 112 pages, comprising stories, reviews and articles; we would pay £20 per thousand words for fiction, and use all our personal contact with authors such as Aldiss and Ballard, Bob Shaw and Brian Stableford, in order to get a good line-up of names for our first issue.

I was to be Editor, with Graham, Simon

and Alan in various other capacities - Business Manager, Associate Editor, Circulation Manager, whatever. At one time, I think, the great Don West was mooted for some sort of editorial position. We had no illusions about paying ourselves for the work involved. We were all in jobs (apart from D West, whose involvement with the project was slight) and this would be a voluntary spare-time activity. Most likely, the Yorcon money would not even cover costs of the first issue.

Meanwhile, down in London....

Malcolm Edwards was then a freelance writer, although working part-time as SF adviser to Victor Gollancz Ltd. I knew him quite well from the days when we had worked together at the SF Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, in 1978-79 (and in 1980 I had inherited Malcolm's post as the unpaid Editor of the SFF's critical journal *Foundation*). In 1981 Malcolm prepared some costings for a prospective science fiction magazine, possibly to be published by the BSFA. He drew up some professional-looking cashflow sheets. I am uncertain exactly what happened next; presumably, the Committee of the BSFA threw up its hands in horror at the likely expense involved in launching a serious SF magazine. (Just to complicate matters, Alan Dorey was at this time chairman of the BSFA; he had a foot in both camps.) So Malcolm's approach to the BSFA came to nothing, but the exercise had sown a seed in his mind. He too wanted to become the editor of a brand-new British magazine, and he began laying alternate plans for an A4-size, 32-page publication which would contain nothing but fiction. It would pay £40 per thousand words, which Malcolm considered to be a truly professional rate - equal to or greater than the amounts paid by most American SF magazines at the time.

The publication would be funded in the main by advance subscriptions. Malcolm was prepared to do the bulk of the work on such a magazine, to be Editor and Business

Manager, but he was daunted by the prospect of reading hundreds of manuscripts, as much of his time was already spent in reading for Gollancz. So he invited various people to become his assistant editors. That is how John Clute, Colin Greenland and Roz Kaveney came into the project; they were to form Malcolm's team. All of them were talented people, well known to Malcolm - and well known to me, as it happened (John Clute was the Reviews editor of *Foundation*, and Colin and Roz were frequent contributors to the journal). Meanwhile, news of our intentions in Leeds had reached Malcolm, possibly via Alan Dorey. Malcolm thought it would be foolish to have two new SF magazines appearing at the same time, competing for the same writers in the same market, so he wrote to me and proposed that we pool our resources and expertise. In Leeds, we pondered - and decided to accept the offer, despite a few provincial misgivings about a "London takeover". Some of us travelled to London for a meeting in the summer of 1981.

The proposed magazine still did not have a name. And there were obvious problems over the choice of an Editor. One suggestion was that Malcolm and I should be Co-Editors, with the other six as a supporting team. That failed to win universal approval, though, and Malcolm proposed instead that we form a "collective" of eight equal co-editors. This was carried with general enthusiasm. We did not realize at the time that we would be criticized severely for this somewhat eccentric decision - by writers, by readers, even the *Times Literary Supplement*. In the world of letters, the mystique of the all-powerful Editor remains strong (although in reality every magazine is, inevitably, a team effort).

The format we decided on was, in effect, the one which Malcolm had planned. We agreed that the magazine should be a quarterly, priced at £1.25. It would depend entirely on its high-quality fiction, and there would be little or no illustration and non-fiction. In addition to the SF writers of our acquaintance, we would approach such leading authors as Martin Amis, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie and D M Thomas in an effort to solicit wide-ranging material. We were now thinking in terms of a literary magazine, devoted to "imaginative fiction" in general rather than science fiction in particular. I had misgivings about this (as, perhaps, did some of the others from Leeds) but I was swayed by the argument that we might succeed in finding a large new audience: the sort of people who bought Picador and King Penguin paperbacks and who might be deterred by the "SF" label.

The eight of us now racked our brains to think of a name for the magazine. We wanted something that sounded science fictional but not too blatantly so, something that would jog the imagination but not lead it into any narrow channel. In desperation, I decided to ransack the novels of William Burroughs in search of a word or phrase. We thought about his title *The Ticket That Exploded* (another of his titles, *The Soft Machine*, had been pre-empted by a 1960s

rock band); should we simply call the magazine "The Ticket"...? We believed that had possibilities: "just The Ticket; buy your Ticket here!; this is your Ticket to tomorrow." But laughing acquaintances soon made it clear to us that we had to come up with something better. So back I went to the Burroughs novels. In *The Naked Lunch* he describes an imaginary city called Interzone:

*The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market... Expeditions leave for unknown places with unknown purposes... Followers of obsolete, unthinkable trades doodling in Etruscan, addicts of drugs not yet synthesized... Tithonian longevity serums, black marketers of World War III, excisors of telepathic sensitivity... bureaucrats of spectral departments... brokers of exquisite dreams... A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum...*

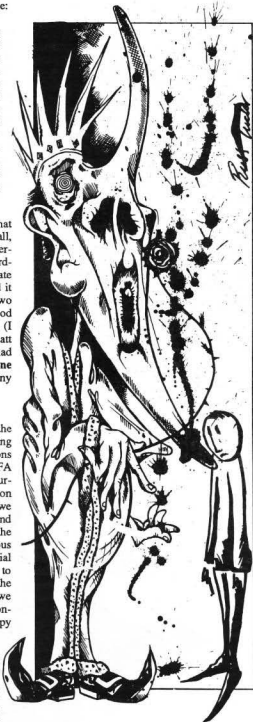
Wonderful! I suggested to the others that we call the magazine *Interzone*. After all, we didn't want a title with pastoral overtones: this was to be a city magazine, hard-edged. The idea did not meet with immediate acclaim, but people went away and rolled it over in their minds. After a week or two everyone seemed to agree it was a good name. The magazine was duly christened. (I was particularly pleased when Charles Platt wrote to me from New York, after he had agreed to become our US agent: "*Interzone* is a great title - I didn't think there were any good titles left.")

Now came the task of launching the magazine. Malcolm's original fund-raising idea had been to solicit advance subscriptions (at £5 each) from the members of the BSFA and various SF conventions. This we pursued. The Leeds-based artist Pete Lynch designed a provisional logo for us, and we used it on several publicity fliers (in the end we were not to use Pete's heading on the magazine itself). We contacted numerous authors and extracted promises of material from them. We then used their names to entice subscribers. Every member of the BSFA received a leaflet from us; and we scattered fliers around a couple of conventions. I also inserted some boosting copy in *Foundation*:

*What is Interzone? It is the provisional title of an exciting new British SF magazine to be launched next spring... The magazine is being undertaken for the good of British SF, and for the good of SF in general. The real 1980s start here!*

We sought a typesetter and printer. Malcolm obtained quotations from various people in London; I tried the printers in Leeds. Eventually through the good offices of the Yorkshire Arts Association, I contacted Arc & Throstle Press at Todmorden. They were printers of poetry books and other

Artwork by Russ Tudor for "Once Upon a Time in the Park" by Ian Lee, *Interzone* 30



literary products, and they seemed to be able and sympathetic - and cheap. We settled on them (and although we have been subsequently changed printers a couple of times Arc & Throstle's typesetter, Bryan Williamson, has been with us ever since).

Malcolm Edwards did the lion's share of the preparatory work, becoming managing editor in all but name. His was the magazine's

main address, with my Leeds address as an alternative. And the advance subscriptions were beginning to flow in. By early November 1981 we had received 200; by early December there were 300; we ended up with over 600 by February 1982. The first issue would cost us slightly more than £1,000 to typeset and print; payments to authors (at £40 per thousand words) would amount to another £1,200. With our charter subscriptions, plus the remains of the Yorcon money (minus some advance publicity costs), we would be well in hand.

Of our more than 600 charter subscribers well over half were BSFA members who subscribed at the special introductory rate of £4 for four issues. This success was partly due to a clever marketing ploy of Malcolm's: we offered a "free" limited-edition booklet to all who subscribed before the end of January 1982. In the summer of 1981 I had approached JG Ballard for an original story to appear in our premier issue. He didn't have one, but as it happened he had just completed a 13,000-word novelette, "News from the Sun", which was due to appear in the literary magazine *Ambit*. With the consent of *Ambit's* editor, Martin Bax, and on the payment of a nominal fee to Ballard, we were allowed to use this story as our special offer to charter subscribers. When the relevant issue of *Ambit* appeared in November 1981, Malcolm bought two copies, cut them up, and re-pasted Ballard's story in a format suitable for reproduction as a chapbook. We

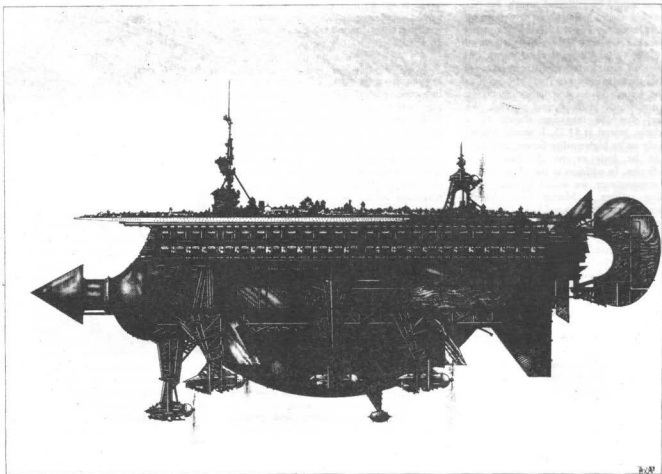
had to pay for paper and printing, but it was an inexpensive exercise. The *Interzone* edition of *News from the Sun*, signed by the author, is now a collector's item and certainly worth much more than the cost of a charter subscription. We were very grateful to JG Ballard for making this possible.

Other authors were now coming through with material. We obtained good stories from Angela Carter, M John Harrison, John Sladek and Keith Roberts. Michael Moorcock had no short stories available, but he did offer us a novel, *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, from which Malcolm hacked out an extract for use in our first issue. We decided that *Interzone* premier issue had to be filled with "name" writers. Our advance subscribers were already committed, but we thought that no one would buy an unknown magazine in a bookshop or a newsagent's unless the cover could boast an array of well-known names. What else should go on the cover we had no idea. We regretted the fact that none of the eight editors was an artist or had much in the way of design experience. Charles Platt, who had been the designer of *New Worlds* in the late 1960s, drew some abstract cover roughs for us. We liked them, and decided we would do something along those lines. The covers would not be pictorial - we all had a horror of Chris Foss spaceships and the like. In retrospect, I think we were sadly mistaken in this decision.

Malcolm sought out a professional designer who would also do the paste-up of the

magazine for us. To this day I have not met Philippa Bramson, though she was responsible for the design of our first four issues. But in the early days of *Interzone* Malcolm Edwards was very much the supervising editor: he copy-edited the stories and sent them to the typesetter, Bryan Williamson; he then received the setting back from Bryan and proof-read it; after a few corrections were made, he passed it down. With Malcolm leaning over her shoulder, Philippa designed the layout of issue one; she created the headings and had then specially typeset; she devised the cover with its airbrush logo and its motif of a black sun with a blazing yellow corona (which Angela Carter was to describe, rather unkindly, as looking like a fried egg). Malcolm showed a cover rough to the rest of us, and we were impressed. It had a decidedly professional look, although personally I didn't like the lettering which Philippa had chosen for the *Interzone* heading. I thought it old-fashioned, overly decorative and insufficiently legible. However, Malcolm and Philippa had put together a good package, and we told them to go ahead.

Philippa Bramson, and her successors as designer after issue four, were to be *Interzone's* only paid employees (apart from the typesetter). The design and paste-up of an issue is approximately a full week's work, and we have always paid the person who has done it. For the first six years of the magazine's existence none of the other members



Artwork by Ian Miller for "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd, *Interzone* 4

of the editorial team received any pay. At first we didn't even reimburse ourselves for out-of-pocket expenses: I only started to keep a record of my postage expenses after a year had gone by. Malcolm Edwards paid for the bulk mailings of two issues to subscribers. Thus, although none of us (apart from Malcolm) sank any large sums of our own money into the magazine, we all invested in it to a small degree. And we kept the finances on a sound footing: after seven years, we have still never been overdrawn at the bank. Back in 1981, Simon Ounsley was elected to be the magazine's treasurer: he opened a bank account in Yorkshire, and kept a wary eye on the cash-flow right up until 1988, when he eventually handed over responsibility for that side of things to me.

In the beginning we decided to publicize the fact that *Interzone* was edited by an "unpaid collective", hoping that this would bring us general goodwill from both writers and readers. Our early adverts, in *Foundation*, *Locus*, the BSFA publications and elsewhere, stressed the fact that "all proceeds go to the contributors". After two or three years we ceased making that boast. It can backfire. One obstreperous reader refused to renew his subscription because, he said, he had just found out we were "a bunch of amateurs". He seemed to believe that only paid editors can be relied upon to do a proper job.

By the time the first issue had gone to press, JG Ballard did come up with a brand-new story for us. This was "Memories of the Space Age", a sequel-of-sorts to "News of the Sun". We were to run it as the lead story in our second issue. By the early months of 1982 we were already receiving a considerable influx of unsolicited manuscripts. Most of these came from unknown writers, although a few came from people who had published work previously - for example, Rachel Pollack and Andrew Weiner, who both provided good stories for issue two. We also took our first story from a complete unknown - "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart.

Scores of beginning writers were eager to submit material to a magazine they had not even seen. Many of the manuscripts came from the United States, stimulated no doubt by that great American institution, the Creative Writing class. But there were quite a few British hopefuls too. We soon learned to distinguish an American submission from a British one at a glance: US scripts are beautifully typed and laid out, with writing and spelling almost invariably competent however bad the story itself may be. British scripts, on the other hand, tend to be shakily typed (or sometimes handwritten in pencil) on coloured paper, single-spaced without margins, and in many of them the spelling and grammar are atrocious. I exaggerate, perhaps, but there can be little doubt that most American manuscripts are lovely to behold simply because kids over there are taught how to do these things in school.

We were building up quite a slush-pile, or, two slush-piles. Most of the submissions

went to Malcolm's address in London, but a not inconsiderable number came to me in Leeds. The stuff which arrived at my end was shared out between Simon Ounsley, Graham James, Alan Dorey and me. Anything which we thought was really promising we passed on to London. At Malcolm's end, Roz Kaveney acted as the principal sieve (she is a phenomenally fast reader). Reading story submissions proved very time-consuming, and simultaneously we were discovering how many other chores are involved in the editing and publishing a magazine. Apart from making editorial judgements and physically producing the magazine, there are such matters as publicity, promotion, distribution and sales to worry about.

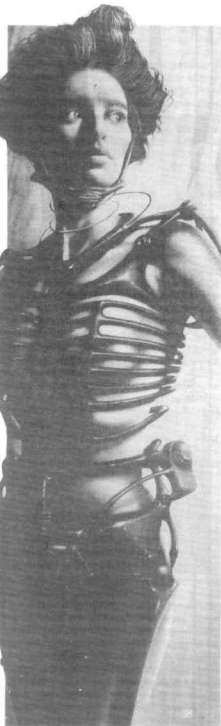
Graham James took on the task of soliciting advertising from book publishers, and I believe he was rather disheartened when his initial circular letter produced almost no response. (Graham was to become our first drop-out, leaving the editorial collective around the time issue two was published.) But advertisers require a great deal of coddling and encouragement - they begin to warm to you after a few years have gone by - and the last thing they want to hear about is some bright spark's brand-new, unproven magazine. Luckily, Malcolm procured some full-page adverts from Gollancz. Those aside, the only advertisement we ran in our first two issues came from a dubious outfit called Flickknife Records, who never paid their bill.

Distribution was, is, and perhaps always will be a headache. Malcolm and Colin contacted several London-based distributors (including WH Smith's) but none showed any real interest in the magazine. Only Titan distributors, the company which owns Forbidden Planet Bookshop, said that they would definitely take a quantity from us. Bless them. To tell the truth, we had counted on Titan taking some as a matter of course, and we had hoped to find a general distributor besides. We failed to find one, so our modest dreams of selling 1,000 copies direct to subscribers, plus 1,000 to SF bookshops via Titan, and perhaps 3,000 through general outlets, proved over- sanguine. The print run for our first issue was 3,500 copies (which subsequently fell to a low point of 2,500 with issue five), and it was only in 1988, after long years of effort, that we were able to advance substantially beyond that initial print order.

Some copies of our first issue were distributed by hand to bookshops in Leeds and London. The subscribers' copies were mailed out (all labels hand-written, a big chore in itself); and the remainder languished in Malcolm's house and mine, to be sold gradually as back-issues. We were able to declare issue one finally sold out of print in 1988, after six years on sale - and once we did so I daresay the SF rare-book dealers began trading in second-hand copies at £10 apiece.

That premier issue brought a mixed response. We got one or two favourable mentions in the press. There was praise for most of the stories, but people criticized the magazine's thinness, its lack of illustrations and its dearth of non-fiction content. Sales

were sluggish, and Titan cut their order for subsequent issues - and yet for all that we were not disheartened. We knew that we could do better, and we knew that it would take time to establish public confidence. We felt we had created something from nothing: at last there was a new British science fiction magazine. A long period of growth and consolidation was just beginning. ■



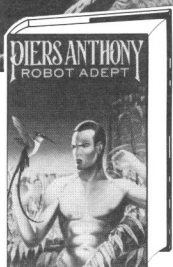
Artwork by Jim Burns for "The Winter Market" by William Gibson, *Interzone* 15

# PIERS ANTHONY

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# Highballs!

*David Langford, award-winning fan writer and master of scintillating sarcasm, scans a critical eye over the works of erstwhile space-operatist Philip E High*

**R**espectable SF criticism has this habit of focussing on good writers, well-known writers, historically important writers - no two of which categories wholly overlap. Ask Mummy to draw the pretty Venn diagram for you. I sometimes take a perverse interest in what's left in the vast and shoddy obscurity beyond the diagram... for three reasons.

First: unlimited quantities of rotten SF exist out there in the sludge reservoirs, influencing the image of the genre; and most of us have read all too much of it. What questing spirit raised on hard SF can resist a journey into extraliterary space?

Second: it's horribly true that the compulsiveness of SF can (for most readers when they're young, for too many throughout their whole lives) exist independent of your actual literary virtues.

Third: just as physicists begin by examining "simple" systems, so perhaps (I rationalized to myself, having decided to write this piece anyway) critics can make useful generalizations from books whose crude fantasies and formulae are nakedly visible.

My choice of obscure writer for an experimental once-over was the erstwhile bus driver Philip E High. He was British (chauvinism), I had most of his stuff either from my indiscriminate SF-buying days or as review copies (opportunism), one or two fans had made enthusiastic, completist noises and deplored High's lack of fame (optimism), and I vaguely remembered having once been tempted to sweeping generalizations about him (lack of controlled laboratory procedure).

From 1964 to 1979, High's fourteen novels were published in the grottier literary circles: Ace Doubles, Robert Hale, Dobson\*. This is at once a bit of a handicap for any author. My dim recollection that our man's *Prodigal Sun* (1965) was better than most turned out to be, in part, what scientists call an artifactual datum - i.e. that book, the only one to be published in the almost respectable "compact SF" paperback line, was also virtually the only one to be copy-edited.

In the rest, High's preference for commas where colons, semicolons, dashes, new sentences or no punctuation at all, are required,

often results in text like this, it is peculiarly irritating to read, the only SF author nearly as bad as Harry Harrison and he at least usually confines it to speech in quotation marks, possibly on the theory that people don't make true sentences in conversation. Also, far too many "significant" lines are delivered portentously, in... *italics*!

Let us be scientific. Pausing to refresh my memories of 13 out of High's 14 novels (the omission is *Butterfly Planet*, 1971, which I've never come across), I made a chart to see whether good, strong formulae and instructive trends would emerge. You bet they did. Many of them, I predict, will remind you of other books before and since.

High's peculiar charm lies in his patent spring-loaded plotline, which invariably starts from a position of rock-bottom despair and then keeps on getting more cheerful. Thus in 87% of my sample, the opening scenario is shittily dystopian and/or post-holocaust; in 100%, we get a happy ending of global and often galactic proportions. One side effect of the exponential rate of improvement is that flashbacks are always to not-so-good times and are thus invariably downers. Another is that High's plots tend to suffer from premature ejaculation. We've barely taken in the fact that the ravaging Vegan mind-hordes are giving the hero a stiff time before, rather too soon, he's gone off and overcome them.

As a result, the shorter novels like *Invader On My Back* (1968, possibly the best of the lot) read better. When carried too far on High's roller-coaster of new technologies and victories multiplying at compound interest, the book tends to peter out in cosmic flatulence, like the dull schematic interstellar-war finale of *The Tully Mercenaries* (also, oddly enough, 1968).

Whence the initial unpleasantness? Although humanity always contains nasty specimens, chiefly power-mad demagogues, the basic threat of a High book tends to be external: aliens in 54% of our sample, rising to 92% in the light of later revelations about how perceived human baddies are in fact being manipulated by the aforesaid Vegan mind-hordes.

By way of non-rigorous confirmation: three of the novels were indeed reprinted in Arrow's "Venture SF" space-opera series, which loudly claimed to hark back to those golden days when "the only good alien was a dead one". In justice to High and the Vegan embassy I should mention that in 77% of cases (including all the Venture trio) the

\* Apart from *Ace*, all publishing imprints are British. Most are defunct; Arrow survives as a division of Century Hutchinson Ltd.

balance is redressed by wise old alien mentors who Help Out when the happy ending starts looking difficult to achieve. Some sort of record is set in *Fugitive from Time* (1978), where the extraterrestrial foe is so superior, despicable and innumerable that no fewer than three - or, depending how you count them, five - independent alien mentors are required to push the wheezing plot to its triumphant finale.

Ah, but you'll identify with the human hero (100%) or heroine (0%), who is ever ready with such sophisticated gallantries as, "I'm sorry, it was reflex. In my culture it is incumbent upon the male to protect the female" (*No Truce with Terra*, 1964). If not an officer of the British Navy (8%) he is invariably some other species of physical or mental superman (92%), though his mind-boggling abilities will characteristically be clouded at first by amnesia or deceptive stupidity (62%). "Intelligence Quota, conscious mind, 110; Intelligence Quota, potential, 612..." (*Double Illusion aka The Mad Metropolis*, 1966).

Frequently he will have self-doubts or weaknesses, and accuse himself of being too easy-going, or over-fond of the ladies (46%), a form of randiness whose chief discernible symptoms are holding oneself rigidly in check and taking many cold baths. In only one book, *Twin Planets* (1967), does this uncontrollably guilt-making erethism actually result in pregnancies. This is also the only book where such an astonishing if demurely offstage consequence is actually required by the plot.

However, the High Hero is cultured and will often quote a bit of inappropriate Literature to demonstrate this (62% - the sample here is a mite inadequate, but one gleams that the all-time top bard is Swinburne). At the end of his long toil he naturally gets the girl (100%), often under the terms of that social contract which is High's favourite utopian vision: predestined telepathic sex with the One Right Person (69%), a boon frequently extended to all or most of the race (54%).

Speaking of races, ethnic minorities quite often receive a determined mention (38%). As in early Doc Smith before the Rigellians got integrated, equal opportunities consist of a cameo part showing how splendid and staunch your minority is, after which chore the WASP heroes return to the actual business of the plot. There is a sort of ghastly, bumbling well-meaning about the mould-breaking way in which High's whites demonstrate their total lack of prejudice by

"jokingly" addressing black walk-ons as "Black Boy" (*Sold - for a Spaceship*, 1973) or "Old blubber lips" (*Blindfold from the Stars*, 1979). Actual, systematic racism is however practised only against artificial or cyborgized races (23%), who when they've shaken off their insidious Vegan mind control are later allowed to use the same toilets as everyone else.

The High trademark most favoured by his fans is an inventive gift for devising boys' toys in the form of exotic weaponry (100%)... over a wide range from solar bombs via flesh-rotting handguns, pencil-sized personalized cruise missiles and automatic repeating crossbows to tiny hunter-killer submarines which cruise the bloodstream, electrocuting bacteria. High-tech small arms will often have deeply silly names, usually made sillier by italics. From a single book's extensive armoury one may at leisure select an italicized Prengos, Vildustuck, Zu, Zine, Narth, Zac, Bute, Spond, or even Garrett (all from *Come, Hunt an Earthman*, 1973). An interesting sub-obsession involves subjective, hypnotic weapons (31%): the psychosomatic whip, the hysteria bomb. This comes to a head in *Reality Forbidden* (1967), whose culminating arms race is entirely in the mind: "Our illusion of an H-bomb won't penetrate their illusion of a force screen...."

Horrid infections and tumours are also rife (54%), many of them preying exclusively on bad guys who are not in tune with the Force. Oddly enough, the nasties aren't related with particularly gory relish, and the genocide count is remarkably low for such heavily armed SF (only 8%).

Much more familiar is the gung-ho enthusiasm with which the hero and/or human race tends to have whole new technologies developed to production-line point within about a week of getting a new idea or taking apart an advanced alien gadget. Pretty remarkable, when phenomena as simple as animal pelts move them to gems of scientific insight like "This fur, I concluded, had evolved as some sort of protection against the ever-present radiation" (*Fugitive*, and yes, he does mean hard radiation) or, "There was a wide band of silver fur on the animal's back which absorbed sunlight. This energy was converted into food" - to sustain a doggoid the size of a pony (*Blindfold*).

On the high-tech front I also admired the miniature race which developed miniature nukes: "In all probability the 'mushrooms' of these devices seldom rose higher than a normal mushroom" (*These Savage Futur-*

*ians*, 1967). Only the brave should dare High's version of genetics (*Speaking of Dinosaurs*, 1974), involving such concepts as "blank genes" ripe for recording your favourite programmes, and the notion of a genetic racial memory which will one day make us sit up and realize with much smiting of brows that we call ourselves what we do owing to dim recollections of being descended from the Yewmen Race of planet Terth.

Enough of cheap jokes. Despite obvious enthusiasm and a surprising measure of "good bad book" readability, High is a dire and unimportant writer, displaying in his works a classic sloppiness and stereotyping which detract from the books' legitimate escapism fun and cheerily nasty invention. In that sense he's a bad example, rotten with fantasies of power and wish-fulfilment. Yet it's rather touching that his heroes are never particularly interested in conquering the universe, merely in achieving a little peace to sit down and, when the opportunity presents itself (38%), to enter into total symbiosis with the ecosphere. Meanwhile, any remaining baddies are merely chastened/reformed (38%) or rot quietly away on exposure to the light of sweet reason (31%).

Contrasting this with, say, the equally ill-written but wildly successful Skylark and Lensman books, wherein a series of multiple genocides purges the cosmos of every single member of every non-cuddly race... and you can't help wondering whether High's obscurity is largely because his weapon-toting, universe-shaking supermen, far from embodying fascist ideals, are merely too Britishly unpretentious, and wishy-washy, and nice.

This intensely litric analysis is dedicated to all those other writers like High who thought SF was jolly wonderful, who scraped together an idea or two and tried without any huge talent to make their names immortal - and who (99.8%) didn't succeed even to the extent that he did. Remember them. They perished that our remainder shelves might live. ■

#### Author's Note:

When *The New York Review of SF* printed a version of this piece, the title was thought too raunchy and outspoken; cautious hands changed it to "On High".

Artwork by Kevin A Cullen







*Gli occhi miei ghiotti andavan pure al cielo*  
(With longing my eyes were turned towards  
heaven again)

Dante: *Purgatorio*, VIII, 85

In *Alien Encounters* subtitled by its author Mark Rose "An Anatomy of Science Fiction", HG Wells's story "The Star" (the disturbance of the solar system and the devastation of Earth by an incoming planetoid) figures as paradigmatic representation of a cosmos indifferent to the human world, offering no sympathetic correspondence between the human and the natural spheres. This divorce Ross regards as characteristic of science fiction. He writes:

*The societies of Dante, Ariosto or even of Kepler might have their stories of passages through the weightless centre of the earth or of journeys to an inhabited moon, but those stories could not be science fiction in the same sense as Wells's fable.*

The post-renaissance and contemporary alienation which Professor Rose discerns is a real one and is reflected not only in such seminal works as Wells's "The Star" and *The Time Machine* (though a different aspect of the latter I will return to shortly) but in such later novels of meteorological or gravitational hazard as Greg Bear's *The Anvil of God* and Brian Aldiss's *Helliconia* trilogy. But let me modify Mark Rose's Dante/Wells dichotomy by citing another quotation (this from CS Lewis's *A Preface to Milton*). It is a most useful springboard.

*The Commedia combines two literary undertakings which have long since been separated. On the one hand it is a high, imaginative interpretation of spiritual life; on the other it is a realistic travel-book about wanderings in places which no one had reached, but which everyone believed to have a literal and local existence. If Dante in one capacity is the companion of Homer, Virgil and Wordsworth, in the other he is the father of Jules Verne and HG Wells.*

To return to *The Time Machine*: in one respect it conforms well to Lewis's "travel-

# From Hell to Paradise

KV Bailey examines Dantean motifs in SF and Fantasy....

book" categorisation. The duration of the Earth through seasonal, epochal and evolutionary changes, on to its ultimate existence in a run-down planetary system, was a condition acceptable to the reason of Wells's readers; and though such futures were not physically accessible to them, Wells made them fictionally as accessible as might a travel-book. In doing so he also exemplified that sense of alienation defined by Mark Rose - as when the Time Traveller is represented as having seen: "in the growing pile of civilisation only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back and destroy its makers in the end." But this conclusion, occurring in the Epilogue, is complemented by Wells's other voice, speaking through the mouth of the Narrator, who says that he: "cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time." He alleviates his distress of mind by contemplation of the two white flowers, given joyfully to the Time Traveller by Weena and brought back to the nineteenth century, appearing now to him as witnesses of the survival "even when mind and strength had gone" of "gratitude and a mutual tenderness... in the heart of man."

Flowers have in literature strongly paradisaical or "other world" associations. The Time Traveller indicates the flowers as proof that he had not dreamt his journey, but had actually been in the world of the Eloi. There is a remarkable passage in the *Notebooks of Coleridge*:

*If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke - Aye! and what then?*

Dante's climactic vision in the *Paradiso* is of the Celestial White Rose; and his first sight when, in the *Purgatorio*, he has attained the Terrestrial Paradise (Garden of Eden) was of the maiden, Matilda, gathering flowers - which reminds him of Hades carrying off to the Underworld the flower-gathering maiden Proserpina ("she was lost to her mother, and to her the spring flowers were lost").

The Time Traveller's first impressions of the Eloi, before he becomes dismayed by their effeteism, is entirely Edenesque. Their delight is "to adorn themselves with flowers, to dance, to sing in the sunlight" in a garden

apparently untainted by pestilence or decay. The Underworld, populated by the predatory Morlocks, a sub-terrain throbbing with machinery, is an extrapolation of the grosser, more hellish aspects of the materialistic nineteenth century world from which he had travelled to this flawed earthly paradise - he cites the basement factories and underground railways. He reflects: "Even now, does not an East-End worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth?"

After the Traveller has saved Weena from drowning she decorates him with a garland of flowers, and later, devotedly accompanying him on his explorations, darts around gathering flowers to put in his pockets. In the course of his fiery battle with the Morlocks she disappears, snatched away by them, and the Traveller supposes, perishing with them.

The Traveller from then on experiences no celestial vision, but an apocalypse, drawn, as Wells indicates, from the contemporary planetary science of Sir George Darwin, though with imagery reminiscent (as it so often is in Wells's SF) of *The Revelation of St John the Divine* - the sea like blood, the death of all the sea's creatures, the sun "black as sackcloth of hair". No Paradise there. I am not, of course, paralleling *The Time Machine* with the *Commedia* in any precise way, still less suggesting Dantean influences as necessarily at work in Wells. What I am suggesting is that in each case there is a journey of the kind Lewis defined; but that Wells, alienating though many implications of his story are, uses a comparable archetypal symbolism - "infernal" under-world, garden world, flower-maiden, redemptive paradisaical flowers - to weave what might loosely be called a spiritual counter-strand into a predominantly dead-end-depicting, indifferent-cosmos kind of tapestry.

Dante's journey through the earth to emerge at Mount Purgatory, and thence through the spheres of Ptolemaic astronomy to the Empyrean, was consonant with what we would now term the geophysics and astrophysics of the Middle Ages. Wells's exploration of four-dimensional space-time was consonant with what were advanced physical concepts in the decade leading up to Einstein's and Minkowski's relativistic formulations. My next example is taken from a recent novel by

Ian Watson. The way-out cosmology (the so-called "new inflation" theory), emerging a century after Wells's early SF, offers the possibility of a multiplicity of universes - budding, expanding, multiplying. SF has been quick to discern them, even to anticipate, fresh routes for the questing consciousness; and where certain Dantean motifs persist, there may again be a counter-balancing of alienation by renaissance, of entropic endings by an infinity of beginnings.

Ian Watson's *Queen Magic, King Magic* is conceived on the borderlines of SF and Fantasy. Its protagonists and their worlds are incessantly destroyed, only to reappear as strange alternatives of themselves. These universes are, in the story's chimerical denouement, bubbles, both made by the bubble-blower and/or enclosing him and his world. The rules governing creation and metamorphosis sometimes appear as logical as those of Chess, sometimes as predatory as those of Monopoly, sometimes as chancy as those of Snakes and Ladders.

It is in the novel's transitions from infernal to purgatorial to bizarrely paradisaical worlds that Dantean echoes may be heard. From "space-beyond-space" Pedino and Sara are serpent-swallowed to find themselves "falling, sliding downhill through darkness absolute... towards a spark of light which suddenly swelled, dilated." The world they enter is one where: "Fish-heads and maize husks rotted in a trickling stream that stank of urine... flies swarmed.... Grey scavenger birds spiralled overhead on wide, serrated wings." Their guide to this world of degradation and brutal beatings is the stunted street-wise urchin, Albertini. Eventually with him they escape its "foetid air" and a life of "shit-shifting and goat-herding". They have climbed a chalk hill (perhaps a "Mount Purgatorio"?). Suddenly they are bathed in bright light and: "Glowing slopes and side-rails of a ladder sprang up from the top of [the] hill." Though they are told by Mendrix that: "The closer you are to paradise, the slimmer your chance", this ascent has at least led them to "the demesne". With its well-spaced oak trees, horse-drawn carriages, entourage of maids and pages, music and dancing, this is depicted in a sensual and materialistic key, through images of the same class as those employed to be spiritually symbolic in the Earthly Paradise cantos of the *Purgatorio*.

Dante's Empyrean is described as a sea of light, but near the opening of the *Paradiso* (Canto II) he warns uncommitted readers to hold to the shore, lest they "never more make port", losing themselves in the ocean waters heaving and closing in his wake. Like Dante, Pedino and Sara ascend to a desired paradise; but what their ladder brings them to is the shore of a tropical island stereotype. Before long this uncertain paradise is invaded and destabilised by a kind of apocalyptic tsunami from which they escape into "the crackling blue emptiness", only to be precipitated into a dungeon-hell in a different universe where "Monopoly" conventions obtain. So this "Dantesque" adventure is apparently only one cycle in an existence of contingency and hazard - the "indifferent

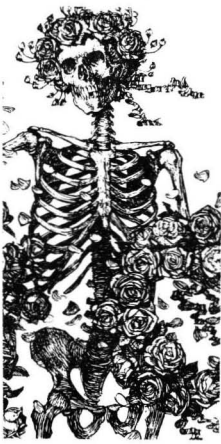
cosmos" paradigm in fact. Yet in the novel's conclusion Watson hints that there is an existential freedom available in the very activity of game-playing, where the rules, arbitrary as they may seem, are learnt and can be worked with. Your (the reader's) world, says Pedino, may not be the original of his (Pedino's) world; indeed, the reverse may be the case. Be relieved from the tedium of automatism: meet Pedino and join with him in play. It is not exactly a "spiritual" solution, but it is not a "dead-end" closure; and it is perhaps, at a low level, somewhat in the mode of Virgil's challenge to Dante in Canto II of the *Inferno* not to delay but to take courage and go with him; to which Dante responds, from amidst the fears, compulsions and confusions of his "Dark Wood", by finding daring flooding his heart and experiencing the feeling of being a free man.

In the preceding examples from Wells and Watson, the imagery has affinities chiefly with that of the *Inferno* and of the *paradiso terrestre* of the *Purgatorio*. The next two examples, from Doris Lessing and again from Wells, have in their cosmological frameworks, and to a limited extent in their metaphysical implications, something in common with the *Paradiso*; but before considering them, there is more I should say about light and space in Dante's universe. In the *Paradiso*, Dante ascends through the seven planetary "heavens" to the "heaven" of the fixed stars and thence to that of the crystalline *primum mobile*, from which he looks down on the entire created universe. Beyond is the Empyrean, first experienced by Dante as a dazzling sea of light, in which space and time have no meaning, and through which comes his vision of the angelic circles forming the Mystic Rose, with that eternal light of God's glory forming its circular centre. In his ascent through the planetary spheres, from that of the Moon to that of Saturn, Dante dwells for a time in the fourth "heaven", that of the Sun. This, with its circles of light and harmonies of music, is, in creation, counterpart of the invisible Angelic Sun of the Empyrean - even though it is in the sixth "heaven" of Jupiter that the angelic "Powers" and "kingly spirits" (Trajan, Constantine) exist to represent divine justice and authority. Dante admits no crude astrology, but supposes (*Purgatorio*, Canto XVII) that the human imagination may be moved by supersensual light formed in and sent down from heaven. Dante's spiritual/physical universe is essentially hierarchical and harmonious - its harmonies only fleetingly and reflectively glimpsed through created beauties.

Charles Watkins, the amnesiac psychiatric patient of Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell* is so far drowned in the fantasies induced by drug-medication that from "the ocean floor where it is as dark as a fish's gut... there's nowhere to go but up." He has drifted around and has been submerged in a waste of sea. Reaching land, he wanders through nightmares of city and trackless forest, abodes of foul and murder-

ous animals and humans, his "thoughts and movements... set... not by the Sun, man's father and creator... [but] by the moon." In the dark of the moon he falls into "a misery and a dimming of purpose." From this condition he escapes by being absorbed into the visiting and transforming Celestial Crystal. To his new senses, the nightmare forest is, as he puts it, "paradisical". His body becomes "a shape in light" and he has intimations of "the locking together of the inner pattern of light with the outer world of stone, leaf, flesh and ordinary light." He explores "a paradise of leaf and pattern of branch." The animals are now "poor beasts trapped in their frightful necessity"; though some "sometimes sniffed the finer air." The tone now seems "purgatorial" and there is in that ambience a distinct breath of the *paradiso terrestre*.

In his subsequent ascent, absorbed into the voyaging Crystal in such a way as to attain a visionary perspective, he sees the Earth as subject to casual cosmic catastrophe and as tied to its other self, the cold Moon, "its half-starved twin... the Necessity." At the same time he sees the planets in their dance and realises that: "The ground and soul and heart of this little solar system was the light and pulse and song of the Sun, the Sun was king"; but realises later that in ordering and regulating the harmony of the dance ("for this is nothing if not a hierarchical universe") the king's deputy may be Jupiter, "who is like a modest little mirror to the Sun, being, like the Sun, a swirl of coloured gas, and having, like the Sun, its parcel of little planets."



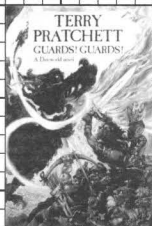
## GUARDS! GUARDS!

A Discworld novel

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November, £12.95



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## THE FUGITIVE WORLDS

**Bob Shaw**

At last, the conclusion of the trilogy begun with the award-winning *The Ragged Astronauts* and continued with *The Wooden Spaceships*.

October, £12.95



After a fantastic conference of the planetary gods, their "avatar" - this now supposedly paranoid protagonist - is born with the imprinted brief to awaken men to consciousness of the hierarchical harmony, to counter the dead-weight of Necessity. As he is cured, by shock treatment, the "sleep" of waking life and everyday "sanity" ultimately frustrate that purpose. Dante, at the end of the *Commedia*, prays that his memory may retain sufficient of the great vision to enable generations of men through his words to experience something of its glory. Wells, writing of the waking-dream visions which gave content to many of his stories, said that they were "remote and mysterious worlds ruled by an order logical indeed but other than our common sanity."

My second example of a "paradisaal" journey is Wells's "Under the Knife". Doris Lessing's vision takes us "out to Riga, even to that other mirror, far Andromeda and beyond that to...." Wells's goes beyond the elipses. His Narrator, on the eve of surgery, sits in Regent's Park and has a premonitory dream, *Inferno*-like in its images, of the Park broken up by "withering graves", corpses stifling and bleeding in their struggles, flesh peeling from the bone, and he himself: "dead, withered, tattered, dried, one eye.... pecked out by birds." On his way home he has a near-death escape from a road accident and dazes through the night, thinking of things past and of "the question of immortality". Under the anaesthetic, accessing the surgeon's brain, he sees in clear, bright focus the near-fatal slip of the knife. His consciousness is then released to soar above the earth and through the planes of the planets to what he calls the "Outer Universe". There the stellar universe seems to recede, all matter shrinking to a point of light. He is overcome by an intolerable terror; and his final vision before returning to life is of the materialisation of a shadowy clenched Hand, the forerunner of which is circled by a ring on the curvature of which shines that spot of light. He asks:

*Was the whole universe but a refracting speck upon some greater Being? Were our worlds but the atoms of another universe, and those again of another, and so on through an endless progression? And what was I? Was I indeed immaterial?*

The Narrator's resumption of bodily existence is marked by symbols of eternity giving place to the corresponding artefacts of space-time, but by no consciousness of persisting vision or mission - only a perception of the sudden lifting of a dull melancholy from his mind. That this is a paradisaical journey of sorts the splendours of the (pre-astronautic) description of planetary and trans-planetary vistas testify; but of a harmony and a cosmic dance such as is found in the *Commedia*, in Lessing's *Briefing*, or in the Dante-influenced experiences which CS Lewis created for Ransom in his *Perelandra* trilogy, not a trace. Perhaps Wells should be one of those advised by Dante to hug the shore; but, as I

shall later specify, his ventures away from it were frequently both insightful and rewarding.

**Archetypal motifs** - the voyager's quest; the lost, or guiding, *anima*; the Virgilian *katabasis* - these are so intricately interwoven in the *Commedia* that it is small wonder that Dantean correspondences often appear when similar motifs are embodied in the more mythopoetically orientated works of SF and Fantasy - as, for example, in Ursula Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan*. There, Tenar's guidance of Ged enables them to escape from the evilly stygian Underbroom, where "one man alone has no hope". By way of the sunlit Western Mountains and a sea-crossing they reach the city of Havnar, where Ged will say to the Princes of Earthsea: "In the place of darkness I found the light, her spirit.... By her I was brought out of the grave. By her the broken was made whole...."; which may fairly be compared with the role of Beatrice as defined in Cato's question to Dante and in Virgil's reply at the opening of the *Purgatorio*. Who are you, Cato asks, who have fled from the eternal prison: who guided you and who acted as a lamp to bring you out of that infernal veil? To which Virgil replies that he acted at the behest of and as surrogate for Beatrice.

The intrusion of Fantasy into SF - or should one say their not infrequent fusion - may sometimes indicate what Lewis (in his introductory quote of him) called the "imaginative interpretation of spiritual life", of insights, numinous intuitions, inspirations, speculations, being projected onto the world of "the realistic travel book". In John Crowley's *Aegypt*, there are many passages that exemplify this process: as when Pierce Moffett, after years of teaching Dante as simply not true ("There isn't any hell in the middle of the earth with the devil stuck in it.... There is not a seven-storey mountain in the empty southern sea...."), all in the course of one summer's day becomes orientated towards a different adventure of the mind in which truth itself is seen as a metaphor - and it is his "shiver of wonder" at the perceived existential nature of one human life in an infinitely extended universe that reveals to him: "where heaven is, and where hell, and where the seven-storey mountain...." Similarly, in the renaissance novel that is contained Chinese box-wise within *Aegypt*, Doctor John Dee, on the height of Glastonbury Tor brooding over the Somerset geography (or, rather, chorography) of what had been the Arthurian land of Logres, reaches the conviction that "one kingdom is all kingdoms: a hill, a road, a dark wood; a castle to come to; a perilous bridge to cross".

The convergence of "travel book" envisioning and imaginative insights bordering on fantasy can leave a Dantean impress on that science fiction which is by most standards judged to be "hard". In the concluding chapters of the Gregory Benford and David Brin novel *Heart of the Comet*, its two "immortals", Saul the cloned and Virginia the neuronic hologram, are described as the Wandering Jew and the Lady in the Machine". Saul, Dante-like, commits himself to

transmitting the knowledge he has gained back to the terrestrial planets with the vow: "Forbidden, oh Lord, that we should ever forget the rocky worlds - or what we once were." Dead but immortal Virginia, his mistress guide and inspiration is in one aspect his Beatrice. In the "earthly paradise" of the Comet's sylvan park cavern "planted with oak and dwarf maple trees.... like a strip of old Earth, bent into a circle and set inside a vast, surreal vault", he encounters her: "It always did it to him, meeting her like this. Her body had long gone into the ecosystem. And yet she walks in beauty." At a truly infernal perihelion, the sun, designated "the Hot", is so disruptive of the Comet's terrain that bodies of the plague-buried dead are torn out of the ice and burn like torches in the heat-initiated ionized oxygen. Then, as beyond Jupiter the Comet climbs out of the sun's gravitational well and heads for the region of ice worlds at the edge of their interface with other stellar systems, Saul reflects that perhaps the people of Halley were not even "human" any longer. Humans, even achieving star-hopping, would essentially dwell "down where gravity curls space tightly and suns cook heavy, rocky worlds": the new phylum "will have the real universe.... the spaces in between". In the Oort Cloud, where "there circled beneath a sheen of unblinking stars a trillion cometary nuclei", Virginia, now a newly evolved entity, "no longer a vertebrate but biocybernetic", knows that there "would never be a return to the knigdom of the Hot", and that in "that truly rich realm" and within the framework of a different time-scale she will seek "endless byzantine pathways of contemplation".

**The Heart of the Comet** is a novel in which psycho-physical possibilities and potentials are stretched to make imaginable, if only remotely credible, future evolutionary directions. It is a work of science fiction with no overt pretensions to Fantasy or allegory. Yet, I would suggest, the boldly imaginative plunges it takes awaken many of the archetypal resonances that are to be found in the *Commedia*. As the progress of Dante and Beatrice rises through the planetary spheres to the Empyrean, in the course of which Dante finds himself transformed, so is the rise of the Comet (which Saul and Virginia come to occupy to the point of identification with it) through a neo-Copernican system basically a vehicle (in both senses of the word) of their transformation. The entropic fury of the sun i the gravitational sink which it centrally occupies is at the "bottom", the icy brilliance of the Oort Cloud and of the interstellar spaces at the celestial "top" of their ascending journey.

In Dante's geometric cosmos, of course, the earth is central and the sun, the fourth planet, is "universal lamp" and symbol and type of God. In so far as Dantean archetypes inform certain other works of "hardish" SF, the sun may function somewhat as does that prime fount of supernal light, the *lumen glorie* of the Empyrean, in the *Commedia*. One such instance is Brian Aldiss's classic *Non-Stop*. There Complain's "ascent" from

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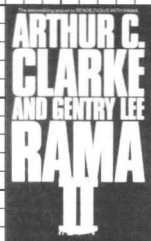
October, £11.95

## THE QUEEN OF SPRINGTIME

Robert Silverberg

The second volume in Robert Silverberg's brilliantly imaginative trilogy of Earth in the far future, following *At Winter's End*.

October, £12.95



the deadening spaceship squalor and super-station of the Quarters, on through the dizzy corridors of the Deadways, climaxes in his sharing with Laur Vynn a dazzling revelation and sense of "rebirth" as the windows of the Forwards open onto space. There is the strongest echo of Dante and Beatrice when the sun "wreathed in its terrible corona" bursts from behind the eclipsing planet. They are "struck dumb, deaf and dizzy by its sublimity"; and Complain realises his attainment of "the big something" that he had unconsciously wanted all his life: "to see Laur's face - by sunlight." It is such a way that Dante sees the revelatory sun, or the Celestial Sun, at several points in the *Paradiso* (Cantos I, XXIII, and XXX), and turns to see its light again transfiguring Beatrice's face.

The sun also is the symbol of the goal of quest at the conclusion of JG Ballard's *The Drowned World*. Kerans, freed from confinement and torture, flees the depraved voodism of "The Feast of Skulls" and, with the aid of (the perhaps symbolically named) Beatrice, escapes (though without her) from the crazed gangsterism of submerged London. He heads ever southwards through the confusing mazes of swamp, dune and lagoon, and, "holding her memory clearly before his mind as long as he could, [he thinks] of Beatrice and her quickening smile" until he at last disappears from the narrative: "a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradise of the reborn sun." It is the sustaining smile of Dante's Beatrice that haunts the ending of the *Purgatorio* and almost every Canto of the *Paradiso*, and which when, in Canto XXX, Dante is separated from Beatrice supports him still as "she, so distanced from me, now seemed to look on me again and smile."

I return to HG Wells for one of the most intriguing Dantean analogues - *The First Men in the Moon*. Wells's protagonist is dual, a twinned opposition: the idealistic-scientist Cavor and the materialistic-entrepreneur Bedford. Just as Dante at the outset of the *Inferno* found himself lost in a dark wood not knowing the way to go, so in the chapter "Lost Men in the Moon" they cannot, after landing and leaving their sphere, find it again amidst "the confusing sameness" of a wilderness of shrubs and fungi. Dante used the body of the earth as it was then believed to be; Wells used a contemporarily not unacceptable concept of the moon's body and sculpts its interior into forms reminiscent of the *Inferno* - the sheer precipices, cascades of water, the "inky ocean", the narrow walkways. Even the "Giddy Bridge" has its counterpart in the bridge crossing the Third Bolgia over which Dante had to be carried. The sufferings of hell are variously projected (in the chainings, the goadings, the flayings, the arrow-piercings and dismemberments) onto the bodies of the prisoners, the mooncalves and the selenities. The return to the surface, to their "own province again, beneath the stars" is by way of "a steeply ascendent tunnel" with a circular rim: that of Dante

and Virgil by a hidden passage leading them to "a round opening from which we issued forth, again to behold the stars". Each moon-traveller then suffers both purgatorial and semi-paradisaic experiences: Bedford homeward-bound in the sphere; Cavor still on the moon. Bedford, floating among the stars, achieves a realisation of the smallness of terrestrial life as he passes his own futile life in vivid pictorial review. Sensing the relativity of time, he "sat through immeasurable eternities like some god upon a lotus leaf". (Dante, rising through the spheres, likens his transformation to that of Glaucus who became a god.) Eventually, before returning to the commercial "realities" of earth, Bedford comes half to believe: "that really I was something quite outside not only the world, but all worlds, and out of space and time, and that this poor Bedford was just a peephole through which I looked at life."

Cavor stays within the moon which, though not without its terrors, is no longer a hell for him. The bestial chaos of the earlier journeys is replaced by a stricter order; the frightening vistas by an austere grandeur and even beauty. As Mount Purgatory is ringed by terraces, so is that great cylindrical gulf he describes as a lunar highway. His guide and mentor, Phi-oo, escorts him through the various conditioning and processing sectors of Wells's ambivalently "utopia". Wells's overt purpose here is ironic social satire; but, as a leading interpreter of Wells (John Huntington) has said, there was always for Wells: "the attraction of the utopian solution which lurks behind the horror." This is surely apparent in the confrontation between Cavor and the Grand Lunar, where the peace, unity and harmony consequential on the selenities' systems of reasoned and reasonable adaptation (however sinisterly disturbing their methods of conditioning and their solving of redundancy) are contrasted with the war, chaos and waste of earth. These contrasts and their implications are brought to a climax during the audience with the Grand Lunar, the imagery of which, and that of the preceding journey, conveys ever more of the Dantesque.

Cavor is brought to the "palace" by "channels of the Central Sea". (Dante follows the "darkly flowing" stream of Lethe through Purgatory, and eventually crosses it.) Wells then describes, rather wonderfully, a "paradisaic" upward journey. Cavor's message recounts how:

*We ascended the spiral of a vertical way for some time, and then passed through a series of huge halls, dome-roofed and elaborately decorated.... Each cavern one entered seemed greater and more boldly arched than its predecessor.... I seemed to advance to something larger, dimmer, and less material.*

If these halls are analogous to Dante's succession of "heavens", that of the Grand Lunar must be Wells's "Empyrean". Cavor enters the largest imaginable hall, blue-illuminated, with endless vistas of yet larger halls, culminating in a flight of steps

ascending out of sight with at the summit "the Grand Lunar exalted on his throne". A halo encircles him, beams of blue light flood the scene, and swaying around him is the multitudinous assemblage of the court of the moon. Seeking an image for the setting of the throne, Cavor summons a memory of the Ara Coeli in Rome - which was the altar of the apotheosis of the Emperors. The climax in which Cavor is "left naked, as it were in that vastness, beneath the still scrutiny of the Grand Lunar's eyes" and encircled by his tiered-by-rank courtiers, guards and servants may be but a poor relation of the vision of the angelic multitude comprising the Celestial Rose and of the supernal light of God which Dante "standing motionless in wonder" received and endured, but archetypically it is like-founded. Dante, however, returns from his vision to write of "the love that moves the sun and the other stars". Cavor, appearing as a threatening representative and secret-holder of warning, divided, invasive man, is "forced backward... for evermore into the Unknown". But in a Wellsian pastiche by Bernard Villaret, "Un Message de la Lune" (1980), Cavor is not so treated but simply to be taken to be sterilised of all earthly viruses and infections, and thus ensured an inhuman longevity. In his message he says that so changed he can never return; nor would he wish to, having come to know the "splendours inegalables" of his new planet "qui est maintenant devenue ma vraie patrie".

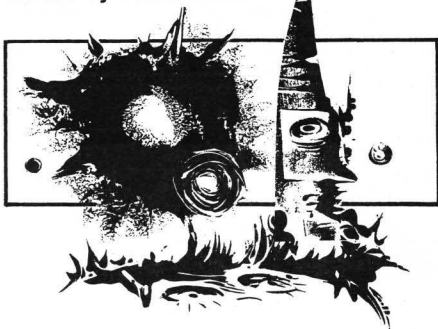
In his two final works Wells created in one a kind of paradise of the mind: *The Happy Turning*; but in the other, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, he envisaged for humanity a disappearance for evermore. This dichotomy, this ambivalence, haunts his writings from first to last. Such hauntings are, in varying intensities, traceable through large tracts of the genres of SF and Fantasy. This does, I suggest, indicate that even though, as my initial quotation of Mark Rose states, Dante may not be science fiction in the same sense as are the alienated and alienating fables of Wells (and others), many of those fables do themselves (and sometimes in a way almost counter to their main import) demonstrate and nurture a sensitivity to human/cosmic correspondences and unities. It indicates also that literary and imaginative lines thought by CS Lewis have become, in their descent from Dante, irreconcilably divergent and continue to find in SF and Fantasy many imaginative mergings and meeting places. ■



ARTWORK BY MIKE ROLLINS

# Book Reviews

Edited by Paul Kincaid



Artwork by Kevin A Cullen

## Heaven Cent

Piers Anthony  
New English Library, 1989, 324pp, £6.95

The only Piers Anthony books I've read were the *Battle Circle* Series. I found them hard work. I expected *Heaven Cent* to be the same.

But when, in the first paragraph, I read "big sisters were a pain in the tail", I go along with that. Then "centaurs playing people-shoes" and "The Gorgon making gorgonzola by staring at it" - and I'm hooked.

The story is a Quest. Shape-changer Dorph (nine-year-old Prince of Xanth) wants to find out why Good Magician Humfrey has gone up in smoke. First, Dorph must get parental permission. Good point! I could never believe that grownups would let Enid Blyton's Famous Five go off in a caravan on their own. So Dorph has to take a responsible adult with him. There are dragons, goblins, piranhas, a flying centaur wedding, shipwrecks on islands of illusion; even our mundane world where they talk mjlfi ubu - like that. (Yes, you can work it out too.) It was also a Quest for me, once I'd met Marrow Bones, Dorph's skeleton minder. I'm sure he's a fleshless Jeeves. There's the time Dorph changes into a roc:

"But perhaps -," Marrow began.  
Dorph pumped his wings and sailed into the trees at the edge of the glade.  
"... we should look for a longer runway," Marrow concluded.

After that, I found myself looking for allusions, literary and otherwise. There's the shocking Electra who gets along better with

her father than her mother. There's Rapunzel: "who was a sickeningly nice little woman until she got a snarl in her hair. Then she could speak almost as interestingly as Grundy Golem." And Dorph is just William Brown with magic.

And there's all the puns.

It's a fun(ny) book; it has fun in it.

In the same way, it is a sex(y) book; it has sex in it. Dorph doesn't like "mushy stuff", but the grownups won't tell him what that has to do with the "stork-summoning". He almost finds out when he meets voluptuous she-creatures, who almost persuade him that "mushy stuff" is interesting after all, but... "Well, maybe in a few more years".

I enjoyed *Heaven Cent*. I shall start reading more Piers Anthony. But first I must tell you about bedtime when Dorph is a roc and Marrow calls out: "Dragon at three o'clock" - shades of *The Memphis Belle* and Gregory Peck!

Martin Brice

## Devils

Isaac Asimov, Martin H Greenberg & Charles G Waugh (Eds)  
Robinson, 1989, 351pp, £3.99

## Monsters

Isaac Asimov, Martin H Greenberg & Charles G Waugh (Eds)  
Robinson, 1989, 349pp, £2.99

At face value these volumes seem to be just another exercise in packaging bundles of short stories from the SF magazines of the 1950s and 1960s. The first apparent giveaway is the generic title *Monsters* or *Devils*,

permitting the editors to plumb the back catalogue and pulling anything out that mentions those words. Secondly, they are merely part of a whole series of such volumes... but, despite this and despite unattractive, scruffy covers, there is good material to be read.

*Monsters*, particularly, has a few gems - William Tenn's "The Men in the Walls", a "rites of passage" exercise that shows his mastery over the short story form. Then there's Roger Zelazny's "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" - over-anthologised, but still good value, and "Passengers" by Robert Silverberg. This latter is short and economical, describing alien possession of individual humans - but only at certain times of the year, the twist being that when possessed, the individual gets up to all sorts of debauched fun, but can't remember any of it once the "passenger" moves onto someone else.

The rest is of a more doubtful nature, stories which don't really stand up, and one or two (Philip Jose Farmer's "Mother", I'm afraid) not being desperately well-written.

*Devils* is a different proposition, most stories being Horror- or Fantasy-based and, well, not very special. Frederic Brown's "Rustle of Wings", a slight little thing loosely based on the "selling-your-soul-to-the-devil" principle, sits uneasily with truly awful items such as Theodore Cogswell's "Deal With The D.E.V.I.L.", also a soul-selling scam. Whereas *Monsters* has ideas and some sparks of quality, much of *Devils* is bottom-end-of-the-market stuff. A little unfair on poor Leo Tolstoy, who gets in with "The Tale of Ivan the Fool" - a whimsical piece which puts the rest to shame, but having to pay a pound more for this volume is as ludicrous as much of the content.

If you have to read them, try *Monsters* - but don't try too hard.

Alan Dorey

## The Great and Secret Show

Clive Barker  
Collins, 1989, 698pp, £12.95

I found the opening chapter of this novel unputdownable.

Randolph Jaffe is working in the dead letter office of Omaha Central Post Office - at the crossroads of America - "a balding nobody with ambitions never spoken and rage not expressed". Reading the countless letters which have never reached their destination - "the stories of love and death" - he comes across a minority hinting at:

... something close to the unstateable.  
What it came down to was this: the world was not as it seemed. Not remotely as it seemed.

This, of course, is the old cliché about the world being "queerer than we can imagine". But Jaffe seems to be getting close to the mystery that lies behind it - the Veil. There is something called "the Art", but no Artist, and he hopes to learn about it. Who with any spark of the sense of wonder left in them would not read on?

The next chapter keeps up the suspense fairly well. But we soon realise that the mystery is nothing a scientist would interest himself in. It is our old friend "the occult", familiar from innumerable other novels, complete with Rosemary's baby theme, lots of sex and violent action. "All hell breaks loose", as the blurb puts it, and we aren't bored, but....

Above the back cover blurb is a photograph of a knowing young man ("born in Liverpool in 1952") much more handsome than Stephen King and (from what I remember) Ramsey Campbell, but whose writing has much in common with their's and is sometimes better, although in a novel puffed out to nearly 700 pages you can hardly expect uniformly deathless prose. This is the first Barker I have read. Besides writing fiction, he "writes, directs and produces for the stage and screen". His films include *Hellraiser*. There is very little in his writing (apart from a distinct sense of humour) to suggest his Liverpoolian origin and all settings and idioms are as American as King's. Most of the action takes place in the sultry landscape of California and Hollywood.

The chief protagonists of the story are Jaffe, whose spirit is "obsessed with darkness and depravity", and Fletcher, "a force for light". Like God and the Devil, they fight for the spirits of (mainly) young people. Jaffe surrounds himself with a retinue of what might be termed creepy-crawlies:

*Antennae weaving, limbs reading themselves for new instructions, eyes bristling on stalks. There was nothing among them that resembled anything he knew; and yet he knew them.*

Sure, we know them (BEMs?), and their charm wears off after a while, along with that of the four-letter words. Perhaps Barker will come up with something new in the second volume. Yes, I forgot to mention, this is *The First Book of the Art*. It is an easy read, if not always pleasant, and I would call it a triumph of prolixity over true inventiveness.

Jim England

## The Magic Mirror

Algernon Blackwood  
*Equation*, 1989, 235pp, £3.50

Blackwood's importance as a writer of supernatural fiction is widely acknowledged. His speciality was the "outdoor" tale, in which he imbued the world of nature with a uniquely awesome and sinister atmosphere. His best stories, such as "The Willows" and "The Wendigo", are well-known, but few people realise that he actually wrote over 200 short stories and more than a dozen novels, as well as numerous talks for radio.

The *Magic Mirror* collects together a miscellany of Blackwood's lesser known works. No one is more suited to the task of selecting them than Mike Ashley, the foremost expert and researcher on Blackwood. Yet Mike does not get carried away by

enthusiasm for his subject. In his introduction he warns: "I cannot promise that the stories published here will be on a par with Blackwood's very best, but neither are they his worst." It's true that nothing in *The Magic Mirror* comes close to "The Willows", but some of the contents are nevertheless very good indeed.

The book is split into four sections: "The Early Years", "The Novels", "Radio Talks" and "Later Stories". Ashley believes that the best of the writing is within "The Novels", but I find it difficult to enjoy segments of novels I know I will probably never be able to read in full, even though the four excerpts here are all reasonably self-contained. The "Radio Talks" are minor, but often quite entertaining. However it is in the first and last sections that the chief highlights of the book appear.

"The Early Years" contains nine tales dating from 1889 to 1921. "The Kit-bag", set in Bloomsbury and written while "Blackwood was still shaking off the shackles of the traditional ghost story", is such a powerful example of the classic type that one almost wishes he could have remained enchained for just a little longer. Possibly even better is "Onanonanon", which reads like the worst kind of fever dream. None of the seven pieces in the "Later Stories" (1935-1947) quite equal those two, but "Roman Remains" is a good "second-rank" nature tale.

As well as the general introduction, Ashley provides informative paragraphs at the head of each item and a detailed bibliography, all of which contribute to *The Magic Mirror*'s position as one of the best books to be published under Equation's short-lived Chillers imprint.

Rosemary Pardo

## Night Fears

Edward Bryant, Dean R Koontz & Robert R McCammon  
*Headline*, 1989, 308pp, £5.99

## Midnight

Dean R Koontz  
*Headline*, 1989, 438pp, £12.95

## Blue World

Robert R McCammon  
*Grafton*, 1989, 306pp, £12.95

Three Dark Fantasy books - two short story collections and one novel. Enough scary stuff to keep me awake and looking carefully into dark corners for a week. And between them, they illustrate two different areas of the Dark Fantasy and Horror genre.

*Blue World* is McCammon's first collection. All but four of the stories are rooted in the supernatural or the psychic world. "Pin" is an exploration into schizophrenia; "Yellachille's Cage" is a psychological piece; "Night Calls the Green Falcon" is a homage to the Saturday morning serial; and the title story, "Blue World", is set in the sleazy world of porn movies. The rest are more traditional Horror stories, but written with a modern touch

which adds flesh to the bones of the characters.

McCammon's three stories in *Night Fears*, on the other hand, are more modernly traditional. "Best Friends" is a possession story pints bloodier than *The Exorcist* and "A Life in the Day of " is a definite Twilight Zone-style piece. "The Deep End" falls in with the other stories in the book by being a bug-eyed monster yarn. Both Koontz's and Bryant's stories tend towards the "real" world (if there can be said to be a real world in Dark Fantasy). The monsters are from another planet, or are decidedly human.

And *there* are the two areas: on the one hand the "traditional" supernatural side, on the other the BEM who really does want to eat your face and the products of our own invention. This new horror, based on reality, seems to come from a need to rationalise, not one believes in vampires anymore, but radiation or motiveless murders are real and supposedly scarier.

Take Koontz's *Midnight*, a werewolf novel where the monsters are a side effect of a mad industrialist's attempt to create a new human race that he can control utterly. In spite of slight stereotyping of the characters this is a well-structured novel and the pieces fit together to create real suspense.

But are these stories scarier than the old style vampire tale? I think not. As a long time SF reader, I find it difficult to believe that an alien would come to Earth just to eat me, (as a biologist, I doubt if they could handle the differences in body chemistry). And I'm sure that mad industrialists would do a lot more harm if they could, but I don't think that our technology is going to be capable of such things for a good few years yet. So the disbelief is stretched just a bit too far; rational or not, I think it is easier - and more in tune with our baser side - to believe in things in the dark that have always been there.

Jon Wallace

## Imago: Xenogenesis III

Octavia Butler  
*Gollancz*, 1989, 264pp, £12.95

After the first part of this trilogy, *Dawn*, left me unimpressed I did not bother to seek the second volume, *Adulthood Rites*. Has *Imago* made me regret that lapse, possibly for the pragmatic reason that I need to have read it to understand what is happening, perhaps because this one is so good on its own that it forces me to find out what I missed? No, not on any count.

Quickly, I found myself back in the world of *Dawn*: the devastated Earth, the gene-trading Oankali and their experiments on the survivors. *Imago* advances a few years and deals with the growing pains of Jodahs, the first human-Oankali hybrid, who metamorphoses into their third gender.

Jodahs, in search of love (and it requires two lovers to be satisfied) goes journeying, semi-pupates, gets into fights with suspicious chauvinist humans but ends back with its family. For all the adventures, *Imago* does not read like an adventure story -



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despite the outline you could never mistake this for HG Wells rewriting **Tom Jones**.

Many of the characters are mundane (though Wells could use ordinary people); there is "incident-a-plenty" but it is not dealt with dramatically; and there are large areas of xeno-biology and -psychology but they do not yield a sense of wonder. *Jodahs* is a thumataure among Latin Catholic peons but there is little spark of contact between the alien and fearful conservatives.

The real theme of *Imago* (and the whole trilogy) is colonialism/vampirism. Unfortunately the viewpoint is that of a self-justified colonialist. *Jodahs* takes a resistor: "This is our world. You people can go to Mars." And, humans are told that without genetic manipulation they are doomed to repeat their catastrophic warfare.

Wells was thinking of the extermination of the Tasmanian aborigines when he wrote *The War Of The Worlds*. There is no better justification for removing someone's possessions from them than telling them that they are undeserving. *Xenogenesis* is a work of extreme misanthropy, justifying a race which might be technically more advanced but is morally no better. After all, not every U-boat captain felt obliged to shoot the survivors who clung to the torpedoed wreckage.

LJ Hurst

## Astounding Days

Arthur C Clarke  
Gollancz, 1989, 224pp, £12.95

Clarke's *Ascent to Orbit* was sub-titled "A Scientific Autobiography"; here we have "A" (or "The", as the dust-jacket calls it) science-fictional equivalent. Neither books are autobiographies in any ordinary sense; they are collections of musings, interspersed with extracts of published texts. In the earlier volume we had technical and scientific texts; in this old *Astounding* stories which Clarke remembers with affection, the texts of all the letters which Clarke had published in *Astounding/Analog* between 1939 and 1971, etc.

*Astounding*, under the editorships of Bates, Tremaine and Campbell, between 1930 and 1945, is the thread which holds the volume together; it is as much a biography of *Astounding*, and the reflections of the immature and mature Clarke upon it, as it is autobiography. As such, of course, it is significant comment upon the sort of fiction which moulded Clarke himself, and upon the specific ways in which *Astounding* stories influenced his own. *Astounding*, above all under Campbell, had very much the same sort of ethos which Clarke has shown in his fiction; it is somewhat of a shock to see that in fact, between 1946 and 1961, he only had five stories in the same magazine, together with a short-short in 1984 and a spoof article in 1986.

There is a photo on the back of the dust-jacket of the young Clarke sitting writing in front of a set of shelves bearing *Astounding* and *Science Wonder Stories*: the same photo as was on the cover of *Foundation 41*. But the book was, appropriately, written as the 70-year-old Clarke browsed through the microfiche *Astounding*, not the yellowed

and crumbling (and, indeed, long-lost) originals. He works his way through chronologically, from issue to issue, picking out highlights of stories and illustrations. Interspersed with comments on the fiction and the science are accounts of his boyhood experiences, his time as a government auditor and an RAF "boffin", and his growing involvement with the professional SF world, as well as brief comments on his more recent career. It is an extremely chatty, digressive book - almost post-modernist in its willingness to change perspective, subject and chronology at the drop of a hat! Some might dislike the name-dropping, or find the justifiable sense of achievement felt by the mature Clarke too much like boasting. And as an autobiography it lacks both the historical detail of Asimov's *In Memory Yet Green* and *In Joy Still Feet* and the art and passion of Delany's *The Motion of Light in Water*. But it must be read by anyone interested in Clarke or in the history of SF. And it is a fascinating reminder of, a time when those who read SF shared a passionate belief in technological progress and the humanising potentialities of space travel. The essential seriousness of early SF is all too easily forgotten today when, to the publisher (and to the reader?), dragon and space ship are merely genre labels, equally empty of meaning.

Edward James

## Night Maze

Annie Dalton  
Methuen, 1989, 256pp, £8.50

Aimed at teenagers, *Night Maze* is more a ghost story than SF. Its 14-year-old hero, Gerard Noone, is an orphan who after a succession of unsuccessful foster homes has finally settled happily in a children's home. Suddenly his long lost uncle invites him to live in the ancestral Elizabethan house, Owl-cote, and Gerard's life changes dramatically.

Strange warnings about gold and a curse do not bode well, and sure enough there is something strange about Gerard's new relatives. It is as though the entire family is blighted by an ancient tragedy suffered by the house's first owner, the alchemist Thomas Noone. The blight varies, Uncle Avery is emotionally frozen whereas Gerard's young twin cousins, Laurie and Flora, are stricken by allergies to nearly everything.

The story concerns the attempts by Gerard and his cousin Harriet to lift the curse by rewriting the tragic history of the house, something which can only be done via the eponymous maze.

As teenage fiction goes, *Night Maze* is fairly typical. There is a wide range of emotion on display, a racial mix, a clash between patriarchy and feminism, rits of passage etc. This is interesting enough, but where the author really scores is in her understanding of what makes people tick. The psychology of both the children and the adults seems soundly based and convincing. Maybe the hero is rather too well balanced, some of the characters slightly clichéd and the happy ending too sugary; it is still enjoyable.

The style is pacy - rather too rattling at

times as it goes through the necessary phases of character and plot development - but always readable. One or two references are rather trendy and might make the book dated in a few years time.

*Night Maze* is an easy book to read, perhaps rather lightweight, but I enjoyed it, and I think a teenager would too.

Barbara Davies

## Demons & Dreams:

### The Best Fantasy and Horror 1

Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling (Eds)  
Legend, 1989, 482pp, £6.95pb, £12.95hb

The page count isn't strictly accurate as there are 23 pages tightly spaced with summations of the Horror and Fantasy fiction for 1987, including media presentations and obituaries. We have here 36 offerings, including a few one-page poems and accompanying one-page biographical notes and honourable mentions for 1987. Only 3 stories are featured in other Best Of anthologies.

Authors include Ursula Le Guin ("Buffalo Gals, won't you come out Tonight", magical North American realism), Joe Haldeman, M John Harrison, Joyce Carol Oates, and Alan Moore ("A Hypothetical Lizard", amazing prose, description, characters - pity the editors credited Marvel instead of DC Comics with his *Swamp Thing*).

It is invidious to select favourites, but I enjoyed Jonathan Carroll's "Friend's Best Man", a heart-warming tale of a dying girl and her friendship with a highly intelligent dog; William F Nolan's "My Name is Dolly" concerning the fine line between sanity and madness; and in a similar vein, Ramsey Campbell's "The Other Side", revealing Campbell's uncanny knack with descriptions of "real" people confronted by supernatural or unusual events; Harlan Ellison's "Soft Monkey", a strident comment on the homeless bag-people; Michael Shea's "Fat Face", a truly horrible story of possession; George RR Martin's "The Pear-shaped Man", a similar theme handled with masterful suspense; Lucius Shepard's "Delta Sly Honey" concerning the haunting of a GI in Vietnam (Shepard's scintillating prose - and poetry - is featured no less than 3 times in this collection). Not all is gloom and doom, however, for light relief there are a few tales; especially amusing was "The Improper Princess" by Patricia C Wrede, for the princess doesn't want to do the boring things princesses do - she wants adventure! The shortest story is "Simple Sentences" by Natalie Babbitt, a nice play on words and also very amusing.

Jane Yolen's "Words of Power" is about a young American Indian girl's right of passage, complete with myth and magical realism: beautifully written. Lisa Tuttle's "Jamie's Grave" is good, a mother's realism that her son's obsession with digging in the garden with a "friend" has more credence than she believes possible: skillfully accomplished. Perhaps the most chilling tale is Michael McDowell's "Halley's Passing", as we follow a mass murderer who seems to

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meticulously record all the details, incriminating, insane, until we realise the astonishing ending and his true beginnings.

Some of these stories are not for the squeamish - such as Skipper & Spector's "Gentlemen", an unpleasant lavatorial tale which also happened to be a convincing love story. But the collection is invaluable in these days when it is impossible to read everything in the Fantasy and Horror genres. Judging by the honourable mentions and the variety of magazines from which these stories are culled, the two editors have certainly read a large proportion of the available material, and this collection is a worthwhile addition to any reader's library: an excellent overview of the genre in 1987. I eagerly wait the 1988 edition.

Nik Morton

### Best New SF 3

Gardner Dozois (Ed)  
Robinson, 1989, 596pp, £6.99

Whatever happened to stories? You remember, those tales with a beginning, a middle and an end. I know this is SF, because it says so. I know it's the best (of 1988), because of the impressive author list and the award-winning credentials of the editor, Gardner Dozois. But in most cases the "S" stands for "speculative", not "science"; and what is treated speculatively is chiefly the art of writing itself. Style, we have plenty; but content? Not much, in many cases. Too many of the stories here read like exercises from a class in literary writing, full of imaginative scenes, emotions, and all the other things that make a simple story into a gripping tale. The only snag is, all this beautifully crafted secondary material is, in many cases, wrapped around - nothing at all. There simply isn't a decent story inside the packaging.

There are exceptions. Brian Stableford's "The Growth of the House of Usher" is a proper story, and also full of literary stuff. George Effinger's "Schrodinger's Kitten" is delicious - genuine science fiction, but also full of speculative literary style. How I wish I could write like that. And "The Girl Who Loved Animals", by Bruce McAllister. But contrast that with "The Last of the Winnebagoes" by Connie Willis. Yes, I know it won an award. But *nothing happens* in it, the one "surprise" is so telegraphed a ten year old could spot it coming, and a key piece of future tech simply will not work, in the way the author describes it.

But you can't please everybody, and I'm sure there are readers out there who love that story, but hate Effinger's. This is a big collection, one of the definitive "must buys" of the year, with something for everyone, and therefore, almost certainly, something for everyone to hate, as well. In addition, there's the bonus of the editor's sixteen-page "summation" of the state of the art in the past year. If you want to know what's been going on in SF in 1988, you've gotta read it. And if less than half of it really turns you on, there's a simpler answer. Go out and write something better.

John Gribbin

### The Diamond Throne

David Eddings  
Grafton, 1989, 396pp, £12.95

Be warned. This is book one of *The Elenium*. Our hero, the Pandion knight Sparhawk, has returned to his native Elenia after ten years of exile, to find the Primate Annias scheming to discredit the Pandion order, and Queen Ehlana poisoned and confined in a life-preserving crystal until an antidote is found. Unfortunately Sparhawk and his friends have only 13 months to find the antidote, an ancient jewel called the Bhellion, said to be filled with the powers of the Troll-gods, and which was lost 500 years ago. The good news is that their foes are all totally inept as they are under the control of a Damork. The bad news is that the Damork is under the control of Azash, who is not stupid...

Well, this jolly little fantasy buckled its swash at such a leisurely pace that this reader had difficulty staying awake. Many was the time I wished for an ingenious twist to liven the tedium of a totally predictable plot, and very occasionally Mr Eddings obliged with a teasing complication. Sadly, none was ever serious.

The characters are wooden puppets fulfilling their allotted function in this appalling farce. The good guys are a jolly crowd with lovable faults, who like to engage in good-natured banter but are aware of their shortcomings. While Sephrena the wise sorceress, who nevertheless does not notice when her title is used as a password, does wear white; the Patriarch Dolmant, a severe but just cleric with a redeeming sense of humour, wears black. The bad guys are crass, careless and always bickering. Either they are gaudy fops or they are dressed in red. Many scenes, such as the confrontation between Sparhawk and his former mistress, Lillias, are merely melodramatic set-pieces. However Eddings' prose is a discreetly fluent shade of purple.

Sadly, my days as a snob are through. No longer can I adopt a superior manner and declare that I have never read a book by Eddings. Even more sadly, this novel vindicated all my prejudices, as it is clearly aimed at the lowest common denominator readership. If you want a good, well-told story, full of interesting ideas, with characters who are real people, you will have to look elsewhere. But you knew that anyway, didn't you?

Valerie Housden

### The Fraxilly Fracas

Douglas Hill  
Gollancz, 1989, 220pp, £11.95, £4.95 pbk

You know that determinedly "jolly" sort of writing, whose basic message is "all this is great fun for you young people, so dig in and enjoy it"? Well, this is that sort of book, scattered with technical terms of minimal opacity, studded with "funny" extraterrestrial names and races (the Treffs, Ixyphallians and can you believe Ghargoyles feature heavily here), and loaded with explanatory asides.

Del Curb (that's supposed to be an Earth name), "interstellar courier and self-styled hero", gets himself into scrapes solely by refusing to listen to freely offered inform-

ation. In other words, we're back in the old routine: not one part of the plot of this book could work if the major protagonist, the man with whom we're supposed to empathise, were not a total idiot.

Furthermore, he gets out of trouble by allowing the author to write him out of it. For example, in the first four pages of the book: by failing to pay attention, Del wrecks a unique work of art, then mends it with shreds of fibre from his own blue socks, and nobody notices - because that's the way Hill wants the plot to go.

Nobody would dream of suggesting that Hill cannot write. His sentences flow, reported speech is believable even if the actions of the characters are not, his invented aliens can be very alien, he's given the cover artist plenty to garnish into fright-with-a-giggle... as the blurb tells us, he "has long been established as the leading writer of space adventure for children."

The trouble with this book, quite incorrectly described as "his first adult novel", is that it is unwaveringly, unstoppably, boringly aimed at the lowest common denominator of teenage space opera. Even the sex is comic book - "the bosomy Sergia, the lush and odorous c'Viva, and lovely Mara" are all cut neatly out of cardboard and draped for maximum pubescent appeal.

Let me not deter anyone in search of what I can best describe as an ongoing connected series of spiffing japes from enjoying them: they lie between these boards just waiting for you to taste, puke and pass on to something a little more challenging, like perhaps the Asimov juveniles. I just cannot grasp why Gollancz sought so to misdescribe them - "adult!" indeed!

Ken Lake

### Dreamer

Peter James  
Gollancz, 1989, 319pp, £11.95

Stop me if you've heard this one before. Successful career woman, wife and mother, Samantha, finds her yuppie lifestyle under threat from terrible dreams which seem to foreshadow real-life disaster (Nightmare in Docklands). The dreams seem to be connected with an unpleasant childhood experience in a barn (Nightmare on Cold Comfort Farm). Lurking at the back of the plot is a sinister figure with long-ago Nazi connections (Nightmare over a Bridge Too Far), but in the end Sam overcomes villainy in time for a reunion with her son and no-good husband, who finally comes good (Nightmare in Catherine Cookson Country).

All right, perhaps that's a little unfair, and certainly Mr James makes a much better job with his heroine than many others I can think of. In fact, I found Sam's inner struggles over her role as a working mother, and over her husband's past infidelity and present dodgy financial dealings, more interesting than her actual confrontation with the sinister masked figure haunting her dream life (Nightmare on Friday 13th). And while Mr James sketches his backdrop of mental persecution with a talented eye for the bizarre set-piece or

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jolting image, the book seems to come to a dead stop after the last such episode.

Part of the reason is that the plot is so remorselessly linear. We know she's going to visit the psychologist, the dream researcher and the clairvoyant; we know none of it will do any good, because there's still a hundred pages to go; we know the final confrontation will come on the skiing trip, out of sight of civilisation. We even know that her colleague at work is a mole for the baddies, because the author tells us, removing about the only possibility of a genuine surprise. Once reality and dream have been made to blend on one occasion, the reader is automatically prepared not to be taken aback by anything that happens after that, just in case it's another dream.

This book is a solid, workmanlike, reasonably well-written exploration of an idea which really needs a new twist to make it work. Unfortunately, *Dreamer* can't provide one, and like some undead corpse in a nightmare, the weary old idea is put through its paces once more. A promising talent working in an unpromising area of the genre.

Gareth Davies

## The Reindeer People

Megan Lindholm  
Unwin, 1989, 266pp, £6.99

The front cover blurb says this is "a stirring vivid tale of magic in the glorious tradition of *Clan of the Cave Bear*", which is not

true, but I'm not sure that it's quite the pigeonhole I'd use if I was to stick a label onto this book. The book begins and ends with magic and there are moments of magic throughout, but in general it is a book which deals with reality and practicalities. It is set in somewhere like Lapland in the early Bronze Age. The Reindeer People are just that - in the reindeer lie their livelihood, their wealth, the structure of their society as they follow the herds; hunting for daily use, for trade with the communities to the south to obtain the bronze tools prized above bone and flint.

The focus, and the magic of the story are Tillu and her son, Kerlew. Tillu had been abducted in a raid on a southern village, and left with a child to bring up, which she does alone by virtue of her training and gifts as a healer, moving from tribe to tribe when she has need. At the beginning of the book she decides to leave Benu's people because of what she sees as a threat to Kerlew. Kerlew is vague, dreamy, timid, uncoordinated and, despite Tillu's efforts, largely helpless. However Carp, the shaman, sees talent and claims the boy for his apprentice which drives Tillu, rooted in the tangible and fearful of magic, to take the boy and leave. Setting up their tent alone many miles away, they meet Heckram, a member of Capiam's people, who becomes interested in them both, drawing into involvement with himself and his tribe.

The main narrative concerns those three

and their first months together. It is a story of personal and tribal relationships in a society very alien to our own. The magic comes from Carp, and Kerlew who has the gift; in context it is eminently believable, the magical beliefs of tribal groups were strong and the powers displayed by Carp and Kerlew are fitting for their society.

It is a well written book. It feels well researched although I admit I haven't checked it and may be misled, but even if I am the belief the author engenders is effective. The characterisation is good, particularly the relationship between Tillu and Kerlew. It is not the most exciting book I've read, but it is enjoyable and capably executed, worth reading if you like stories of primitive cultures.

Helen McNabb

## The Fortress of the Pearl

Michael Moorcock  
Gollancz, 1989, 248pp, £11.95

When I was very young, in the early 60s, I had only two sources of SF: the local library and the book stall on our local market. Among the magazines this stall provided were John Carnell's trio, *New Worlds*, *SF Adventures* and *Science Fantasy*. It was in *Science Fantasy* that I first read the stories of Elric.

Elric is the archetypal troubled hero. An albino requiring herbs and drugs to sustain his vitality, with a sword that makes him virtually invincible but which "drinks" the

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souls of those it kills. In those early stories there was a malign symbiosis between Elric and the sword, Stormbringer. The sword needed Elric to provide the souls and Elric gained vitality from these, more so than from the drugs. In this book there is still a dependency but Elric has greater independence and for a large part of the story he battles through without his sword.

This is a straight forward quest. It starts in the desert city of Quarrzhasaat, the last decadent city of an empire which destroyed itself in a war against Melniboné, the land Elric now rules. The story opens with Elric dying, having run out of his essential herbs and drugs. Lord Gho provides a potion which gives temporary relief but is addictive and destructive, and he offers Elric the antidote for the Pearl at the Heart of the World.

So, Elric sets off into the desert to find the camp of the nomads who he believes can provide directions. Here his quest changes to one of helping to wake the nomads' Holy Girl from a magic induced coma. He helps the dreamthief, Oone, as she takes them through the various lands of dream to find both the girl and the pearl.

Naturally there is lots of fighting, not all physical, Elric has to fight against his own emotions, fears and desires. In the dream lands he is not the all conquering hero, he has to rely on the assistance of others, particularly Oone. Naturally they win through in the end. The story is told in a straight forward style and the only thing which distinguishes it from many other Sword and Sorcery tales is Elric's character; his drive to redeem himself, to reduce his dependence on the sword and the Lords of Chaos. So whilst there is nothing wrong with this story there is nothing out of the ordinary and for me it was just an easy read.

Tom A Jones

## Pyramids

Terry Pratchett  
Gollancz, 1989, 272pp, £11.95

This is the latest Discworld novel. Need I say more?

I suppose I better. This being my first Pratchett, and being aware of a certain cult following, and his recent cracking of the American market, and that by the end of July this work had already been 5 weeks on the Sunday Times Hardcover bestseller list, I was quite looking forward to being churlish in this review. My gall-bladder quivered at the sight of ribald, rollicking, and knobbly grotesques on the cover, and "definitely the funniest Discworld book since the last one" had my retractable claws itching in their sockets. Oh well.

This is a winning, confidently crafted mixture of silliness, hard-edged scientific whimsy, and gentle satire, with a helping of allegory. The ancient kingdom of Djelibeybi, proud of itself primarily for having existed for seven thousand years (which for some reason sounds less absurd here than in the context of the book), is obsessed with building pyramids for its deceased god-kings. When the latest one is collected by DEATH,

it is decided to build the biggest one ever, twice the standard size. Pyramids being what they are, however, Space and Time can't cope with it and things go awry. There is much else, of course, but Pratchett has avoided that scourge of comic writing - the piling up of incident upon hilarious incident - by having a plot that does, as it were, make sense. Even the footnotes, highly susceptible to idiosyncrasy, have been restrained to sub-Vancian absurdity, sure signs of a matured talent.

Abundant allusions to classical and popular myth, camels, crocodiles, and mummies being not the least of these, lend *Pyramids* a familiar feel that is reminiscent of *Carry On* films, and put it on the edge of the genre that borders with the mainstream (ideopools?) of "English humorous writing". In fact I could see Pratchett being dragged from the loving embrace of SF fans to the great cocktail party of the laughter-loving general public in the near future. Well worth a read, though not in one sitting. Giggle-glands can only stand so much stimulation before drying up into malice, as anyone who watches TV comedy knows.

Cecil Nurse

## Voice of the Whirlwind

Walter Jon Williams  
Orbit, 1989, 278pp, £6.99

What we have here is the American asthmatic school of writing. The sentences come at you, short and snappy, with short, repetitive verbs or none at all. We get *soundbites*, not narrative. All conversations are clipped, abrupt, confrontational: there's no love lost between protagonists, believe me.

The plot, too, is fired at the reader in short, disconnected bursts - five to forty lines, a gap, a change of scene; chronology is sacrificed to shock, the innate poverty of the plot is disguised by turning its telling into a patchwork quilt.

Our hero's name is Steward, yet he stewards nobody but himself. "You've been programmed to divorce corporate morality from personal morality," he is told. "You're a zombie." In many ways this is true - his "finely honed" reactions are all set to murder and self-protection, his mindset pretends to Zen but only at the level of motorbike maintenance, and the sole "morality" that runs through every line of every page is one of violence.

Steward is a clone. There are aliens here; and there has been a hideously destructive interstellar war between rival factions of human armies, in which Steward "Alpha" learned his morality, gained his twisted loyalties and returned, only to be murdered years later and resuscitated - minus the memories of the intervening years - as Our Hero, Steward Beta. By the end of the book, Beta is dead and Gamma is pondering on the eternal verities as he sees them: "New life, he thought. New arrow. He wondered where he was aimed."

Presumably this means we are in for *The Life of Gamma, Delta* and as many more murdering, double- and treble-crossing, threatening and destroying clones as Williams

can project on to his appalling futureworld. What we have here, in essence, is a *Ladybird Book of Violence*, with its nice big print, its short paragraphs, its abrupt chapter diversions providing pabulum for adults with a two-minute attention span and an insane desire to kill that must find vicarious release. Really, the title, and the front cover artwork with its heavily armoured and armed, anonymous killer against a backdrop straight out of *Metropolis*, tell it all.

As long ago as 1949, Orwell gave us the jackboot, forever stomping in the face of mankind. He gave us love and self-sacrifice and humour and philosophy too; Williams can't be bothered with most of that - this is 1984 stripped to the basics. And you can keep it.

Ken Lake

## The Dragonbone Chair

Tad Williams  
Legend, 1989, 654pp, £14.95 hc, £7.50 pb

My initial feelings on being confronted by this massive heavyweight volume were of despair. A six hundred plus page Fantasy novel with the word dragon actually in the title, a cover blurb that claims it is the Fantasy equivalent of *War and Peace*, and more similar volumes to come. I put off starting it for as long as possible and in the end only duty drove me on. What a surprise! The book is really very good.

Essentially it tells the story of the downfall of the kingdoms of Osten Ard. The old king, Prestor King, dies and is succeeded by his son, Elias. At first all seems well, but the new monarch has entered into a secret alliance with evil, bringing darkness down upon the land. An increasingly brutal court treats the common people with contempt, like so many cattle to be milked dry to finance royal excesses. The new king is only reluctantly opposed by his younger brother, Josua.

What is refreshing in such an apparently conventional tale is that it is told from the point of view of young Simon, an often bemused castle scullion, who becomes apprenticed to the castle wizard, Doctor Morgenes. Through his eyes we see life in the Hayholt begin to go bad. We see the first signs of corruption, as Elias sells his soul for power and vengeance. Unwittingly, the King unleashes an evil that is completely beyond his control.

From being a peripheral observer of events, Simon begins to move centre stage, for reasons which will presumably become clear in the next volume. He is instrumental in thwarting Elias and has to flee for his life into the forest. Here his education begins.

Williams is marvellously successful at portraying his fantasy world of Osten Ard. The castle, the forest, the Sithi city, the frozen mountains, are all described with great conviction and brought to life, at least for this reader. It is an imaginary world with texture. Williams also handles a large cast of characters with admirable assurance. Simon, as one would expect, is admirably drawn, but the other characters are also successfully individualised. My only criticism is that

towards the end of the novel the complexities of the plot become a bit overwhelming. Williams is at his best when the story is firmly focused on Simon.

The *Dragonbone Chair* makes full use of the conventions of the Fantasy novel but does not really extend its boundaries. Nevertheless, it works superbly. *War and Peace* it ain't, but the book is beautifully written. It is without doubt one of the best Fantasy novels I have read and I eagerly await the next volume.

John Newsinger

## The Middle Kingdom

David Wingrove

New English Library, 1989, 501pp, £7.95

Spengler wrote in 1918 that he foresaw "long after AD 2000 cities... spread out over enormous areas of countryside, with buildings that will dwarf the biggest of today's...". An extrapolation of such megalopolitism might produce the cities of continental, even quasi-global extent, tiered kilometres-high, to be found in *Chung Kuo*: a dead-weight of uniformity manifesting a static conservatism. Wingrove, looking for a fictive vehicle for the unchangeable, happily settles on this Chinese world hegemony: a perceptive choice, for in contemporary China are still discernible the permanence of ancient forms, and the concept of the Middle Kingdom as equating the one and only significant world.

One reading of the novel is that it is about the dialectics of change in a culturally and politically "frozen" civilisation. This is a theme that has been treated by Asimov, Blish, and others, with western man, or his obvious technocratic analogues, structuring mightily dominating colossi. The placing of the Chinese in this role, with a North European "minority" in the counter-role, permits refreshingly exotic (and seemingly well-researched) varieties of culture-patterning. Wingrove is extremely adept at creating his consequential set-pieces - an execution, a brothel-night, a prize fight, an imperial wedding ceremony - as well as in exploiting all the intricacies of intrigue, espionage, assassination and sabotage offered by scenarios of subversion and infiltration. These at times move the style and imagery of his narrative towards what I might describe (though not with pejorative intent) as "sinopunk".

Central to its action and to the humanely philosophic dimension of the novel (and at a deeper reading this dimension distinctively emerges) are the perceptions and the "rites of passage" of the allusively-named boy Kim. That he is a pawn in the strife between the tradition-rooted establishment and the clandestine proponents of change does not lessen this centrality. He is a kind of Odd John prodigy who ascends from the Clay (Riddley-Walkerish territory, sealed beneath the city) through many levels of glass, plastic and experience. If the yin/yang of the novel's oppositions represents a whole seeking balance within itself, his course seems to define a line of juncture.

Reading needs patience, both in identifying the large cast, whose names may ring the changes on Chen, Chi'n and Cho; and because of the liberal (though justifiable) use of Mandarin, for which the glossary has to be prop until familiarity takes over. Patience is, however, rewardable: the narrative travels and compels; the ideas stimulate. I withhold the ingenious twist to the "alternative world" theme at the story's heart: it has to unfold for the reader. What is rather slightly sketched is the actual nature of the Martian colony and of earth-planetary commerce; but with, apparently, six volumes to come, and conspiratorial hopes set on the stars, there should be plenty of time for that.

KV Bailey

It is my contention that this book, the first of a seven-part sequence - can be both reviewed and condemned out of the contents of the five pages of adulatory blurb supplied by the New English Library and - from Wingrove's own mouth - by his publicity people.

Let me show you what I mean:

"No one has previously written about a world dominated by the Chinese" [not true].

"Wingrove is, for the first time ever in science fiction, able to show how history might actually 'feel' to those living in the future" [not true]. "Breath-taking in its scope and unmatched in modern literature (4 times the length of *War and Peace*)" [literature by the yard!]. "One of the most outstanding literary achievements of recent times" [now that's carrying things altogether too far for any book, especially as its justification is the fact that it took Wingrove 11 years to write it].

Now let's see what Wingrove himself has to say. In reply to the posed question "Have you ever been to China?" he tells us:

*No. Not yet. Apart from the fact that... it was not financially possible or viable timewise [what?] (having young daughters to bring up), I also wanted to delay the experience [because] to go there and see specific areas of China would, I believed, have pre-determined what I was going to write about... [Don't confuse me with facts!]... I deliberately set about structuring the novel... as a tightly-plotted Western political thriller [and then] permeating every part of it with the feel of China.*

Wingrove had "researched China thoroughly in my late teens and early twenties" and feels that the Tiananmen Square events mean "I'll not be able to get to see the land... my gut instinct tells me it will be." Well, with that nod to current events, let's see his answer to the unbelievable claim that the book "differs from all the other science fiction that precedes it." Says Wingrove, "It actually deals with the real matter of history... I'm able, for the first time ever in science fiction [not true] to show how history might actually feel to those living in the future. Social manners, fashion,

politics, art and science, forms of entertainment" [surely we saw all this in action in, for example, *The Man in the High Castle?*].

"The people in *Chung Kuo* have money worries, problems with their children, and they inconveniently fall in love with their friends' wives and husbands. So it is in life - thus, so it is in *Chung Kuo*." What does this remind you of? Well, Wingrove tells us: "Like Clavell's *Shogun*... like Herbert's *Dune*." It will:

*... have great appeal for the science fiction reader but, unlike most science fiction novels, it will also be lapped up both by those who like political thrillers and those who love to follow a group of characters through all the ups and downs of their life changes.*

Apart from the appalling level of English demonstrated in these snippets from the author's credo, I can only conclusively close this review with the publisher's ultimate accolade - that this is (and they underlined it for emphasis) "the first novel to marry the imaginative power of science fiction with the compulsive reading of a dynastic saga."

And there you have it: *Dallas* in the 22nd century, its "bloated population of 36 billion contained in vast hive-like cities and ruled absolutely by the Han - the Chinese - determined to end man's constant quest for change that has led to global breakdown and chaos." Sounds familiar? But it can't be - this one is "the first"!

Ken Lake



Artwork by Mike Rollins