

Vector

April-May 1990 95p
Issue 155

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association



- Michael Moorcock Interviewed ●
- Arthur C Clarke Award ●

Vector

The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association
Issue 155 • Apr/May 1990 ISSN 0505-1448

Contents

3 Editorial

4 Letters

6 Books of the Year: 1989

Vector's book reviewers choose their favourite books of last year

11 Michael Moorcock

Colin Greenland interviews the author at January's BSFA London Meeting...

17 The Arthur C Clarke Award

Run-down on how the winner of the Award was finally chosen

18 Book Reviews

18 Azazel – Isaac Asimov

Canal Dreams – Iain Banks

War of the Sky Lords – John Brosnan

19 Prentice Alvin – Orson Scott Card

Tales from Planet Earth – Arthur C Clarke

Rama II – Arthur C Clarke & Gentry Lee

Thief of Dreams – Adrian Cole

20 Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Annual 1988

– Robert A Collins & Robert Latham (Eds)

Through the Nightsea Wall – Otto Coontz

Truckers – Terry Pratchett

Zaragoz – Brian Craig

Wolf Riders – David Pringle (Ed)

The Father-Thing – Philip K Dick

22 Prince of Blood – Raymond E Feist

The Last Guardian – David Gemmel

Reach – Edward Gibson

Bill the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Robot Slaves

– Harry Harrison

24 Glitterspike Hall – Mike Jefferies

The Dark Half – Stephen King

The Language of the Night – Ursula K LeGuin

26 The Wolf's Hour – Robert R McCammon

Casablanca – Michael Moorcock

Ivory – Mike Resnick

The Fugitive Worlds – Bob Shaw

27 Piper at the Gates of Dawn – Mary Stanton

Arrows of Eros – Alex Stewart (Ed)

Wolf-Dreams – Michael D Weaver

Co-Editors

Boyd Parkinson 11 Marsh Street, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA14 2AE Telephone 0229-832807

Kev McVeigh 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF

Telephone 05395-62883

Reviews Editor Paul Kincaid Production Assistants Chris Amies, Paul Macaulay, Catie Cary, Alison Sinclair, Camilla Pomeroy,

Brian Magorian, John Foster Production Consultant Barry Parkinson

Typeset by PCG, 61 School Street, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 1EW. Tel: 0229-836957

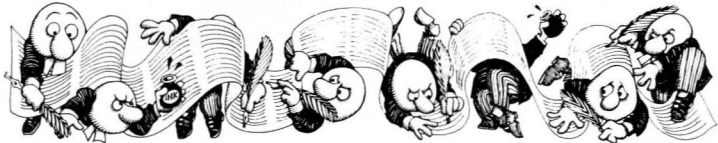
Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, Surrey. GU1 4AP

Vector is published bimonthly by the BSFA, copyright 1989. All opinions expressed in **Vector** are those of the individual contributors and must not be taken to represent those of the Editors or the BSFA except where explicitly stated. **Contributors** Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double-spaced on one side of the paper. Maximum preferred length is 3500 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editors. **Art** Cover art, illustrations and fillers are always welcome. **Volunteers** Typists particularly (Atari ST or IBM PC) wanted. Contact Boyd Parkinson....

Advertising All advertising copy must be submitted as b/w camera-ready artwork with all necessary halftones. All enquiries on rates, sizes, etc. to the Publicity Manager: Dave Wood, 1 Friary Close, Marine Hill, Clevedon, Avon BS21 7QA

EDITORIAL

By Boyd Parkinson



This issue contains an interview with Michael Moorcock, pioneer (amongst many other things) of the now long-dead *New Worlds*, harbinger of the so-called "New Wave" movement of the 60s. *New Worlds*, though surely needing no introduction, could be summed up as a magazine of experimentation, of the stretching of genre boundaries, of emphasis on speculative rather than science fiction. In this piece, Colin Greenland comes to the conclusion that *New Worlds* had little effect on the SF world and that SF has come back to where it was prior to the "New Wave". Though more "sophisticated" it is "thoroughly generic", and both writers agree that there is very little experimentation in SF these days.

At face value, I go along with that. But...

When discussing science fiction, one has to be sure that you're talking about the same thing. For the critics, SF (whether science fiction or speculative fiction) is a vast amorphous, pulsating mass of idea and imagination, endless in its scope and impossible to perceive in its entirety. Trying to define it, that extra *something* that makes it different, they call it a *genre* and most seem to agree that this *genre* is clearly undefinable, and that one shouldn't strait-jacket SF by setting limitations upon its definition.

I agree with this assumption wholeheartedly, because to my mind at least, SF is BIG. It may mean different things to different people, depending on their view-point, but SF can be set in the past, the present, or the future. It can be subtly strange and outrageously weird. It can have full space ships, Viking longboats, nuclear-powered submarines; it can have mind-sucking aliens, Navajo Indians, swash-buckling buccaneers, and anything else you want, from any era, ad infinitum... It can be written in any form of the author's choosing. It can be down-beat. It can be optimistic, gung-ho, neo-nazi political... whatever. Whether or not the book you're reading writes at this moment is actually "the real stuff" is up for debate; and debate it they will.

Some people, however, don't seem to have this problem with definitions. These

people are, of course, the publishers (boo, hiss).

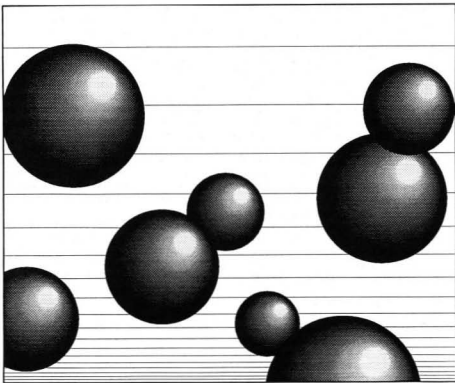
For them, SF isn't a *genre*, but a category – a label and signpost for readers to come along and spend their well-earned money on some nice escapism. This ranks it alongside soap operas, S&F (Shopping & Fucking) Hollywood Wives Sagas, Mills & Boon romances, Rambo movies...

Fiction of this sort has to fit into the neat little boxes that the publishers make for them. Preferences seem to be for the gung-ho, swaggering, all-competent hero-type out to save the Universe/the Earth/the planet Zed from imminent destruction/invasion by some nasty force/alien... Or, in these days of post-cyberpunk, loner hero-type, living on the edges of society becomes embroiled in Corporate take-over of the world/L-5 col-

onies, inadvertently saves the day, and invariably ends up back at square one, living on the edges of society... Dull and uninspiring SF the category has turned out to be; certainly there is often very little of interest here to a hardened SF-junkie like myself.

SF the category may well be clanking out variations on some set themes, have the same set of stock characters again and again, use the same plot devices over and over... but, there are books which escape the categorisation because they simply don't fit it well enough – which is not to say that there aren't quality SF books which are marketed as such, just that there are those books which are quite possibly SF (depending how wide you wish to stretch your definitions) but don't have

Continued on page 16



LETTERS

Write to:
Vector
11 Marsh Street
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA14 2AE

Artwork by Kevin A Cullen



On Reviews...

I'm here in the unlikely role of springing to David Wingrove's defence. Your letter column in *Vector* 154 began with Paul Kincaid's "Right of Reply", immediately followed by Ken Lake's ditto. Wondering what they were going on about, I dug out the last issue and found a good-tempered letter written by Wingrove in response to a review by Ken Lake. This was noticeably shorter than either "Right of Reply" from Kincaid or Lake.

Let's start with what you call the "Right of Reply". I don't believe that either Kincaid or Lake has a right of reply in this case. One is the editor of the reviews section, the other is a reviewer. They had their say when they published the original piece.

The only "right" of reply rests with the author of the book.

In general, if a writer feels his book has been given short shrift by a reviewer, he has every right to send in a letter saying so. Most authors don't bother, knowing that such letters almost invariably look pompous, vain or irrelevant to disinterested readers. One of the few times an author should write in to complain is when he believes, and can show, that the reviewer has not read the book.

Wingrove's letter complained of just this, and it's a valid complaint. Lake made no reference to the novel at all, and occupied his space with a crude summary of publicity material, interjecting his own wisecracks.

Wingrove should be supported in this. Lake chose a cheap and cowardly way of attacking a writer, and Kincaid most certainly should not have published it as a book review.

I also disagree with Paul Kincaid on two other matters. Firstly, he asserts that the publicity material seems to have been written by David Wingrove. This is unsupported by evidence, and is therefore *not*, as he claims, "a legitimate subject for comment". (Anyway, so what if Wingrove was a party to some of it? The book is the text made available to the public, and is more important.) Secondly, he generalizes about Wingrove's lack of confidence in his writing, because Wingrove "responded angrily". This is not true, so the generalization is unreliable.

Wingrove has made a few enemies with his utterances about this book. For instance, a few issues back in *Matrix* he was busily crowing about the huge sums of money he was making, comparing himself to Tolstoy,

etc etc. All of this irritated me as much as it seems to have irritated other people. But what you have been publishing is unfair. The book's out now, and that's what counts. The only person connected with *Vector* who appears to have read the book properly is KV Bailey, and he said it was pretty good. (I myself have no opinion of it.)

Christopher Priest
78 High Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire
SN95 5AQ

From Chris Beebe

I see that the quality of your reviews has been lately debated in your columns, and that in a summing up (*V154*), Paul Kincaid blames the publicity material of publishers for unnecessarily tiring the reviewer and the authors' "insecurity" if he or she is displeased with the result. Presumably the mere punters are totally delighted with everything you print.

As an author and punter, I too am disturbed by the quality if the book reviews published in *Vector* and *Paperback Inferno*. They seem chiefly characterized by a tone of dismissive disappointment suggesting the sensations of a bored child prolonged into adulthood. I simply cannot believe that so many bad books are published. The chief concerns of your reviewers seem to be not the content or ideas of any book, but whether it can be fitted into a sub genre: ie space opera, cyberpunk, SF adventure, or Fantasy. Secondly there seems to be a fixation with "the story". Your reviewers seem unable to bear a subtle or layered plot.

I dread to think what your reviewing team would make of William S Burroughs' *Nova Express* or even the earlier works of Alfred Bester if they hadn't already been told that these were an acceptable part of the SF canon.

Finally having vented my spleen, I would like to point out that book publishing is in a very bad state. Hypes are there to try and sell the books in a difficult market. Authors struggle to get published. Obviously no one expects a favourable review every time - too many subjective factors are in play - but this doesn't excuse the poor standards currently evident in your magazines, with reviews which are of little use to author or book buyer.

Chris Beebe
110 Framfield Road, Hanwell
Middx W7 1NJ

From Craig Marnock

In *V152*, Boyd Parkinson expresses his thanks that the reviews are not under his editorial control, though some similar kind of shake-up would surely be welcome here. The reviewers have perhaps been reviewing for too long, writing so much under their own byline that they have forgotten that it is the books that the reader is interested in hearing about, and not the inside of their own heads, which many of them seem to find a far more interesting subject.

Thirteen of the 20 reviews in *V152* start this way: "The only Piers Anthony books I've read..."; "I found the opening chapter..."; "Enough scary stuff to keep me awake..."; "After the first part of this trilogy, *Dawn*, left me unimpressed..."; "I know this is SF, because it says so..."; "You know that..."; "Stop me if..."; "... but I'm not sure that..."; "When I was very young..."; "Need I say more?"; "What we have here..."; "My initial feelings..."; and "It is my contention..." All these are excerpted from the first or second sentence of the review (with one exception, from the third).

This is not to say all the reviews following these opening remarks were bad. A couple of them were actually very good and useful. And one of the reviews not featured above actually went for a whole paragraph without a personal pronoun.

And this is not to say that the personal dimension can't be important and useful in a review. It can. However, most of the reviewers appear to be under the impression that the review section is a mirror in which to view themselves. They perhaps need to be reminded that the review section has little or nothing to do with the reviewers, and everything to do with the books. Alternatively, I would suggest that *Vector* find itself a new subtitle.

Craig Marnock
78 Queen Street, Castle Douglas,
Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 1EG

I agree that there's room for improvement, as there is in every stage of Vector's production, and it's something we'll have to work on.

Paul Kincaid's reply was much longer than Wingrove's original letter, but there was too much to edit down without making it a complete nonsense. It does make it seem rather one-sided.

- BP

Myths Issue

There is a danger in deploring the hackneyed looting of Celtic/Arthurian myths and legends, then noting approvingly that writers could make use of other exotic myth cycles. We English-speaking whites may be vulgarising and trampling flat into worn-out stereotype the myths of our own ancestors; to go on to do the same to the myths of other cultures smacks of cultural imperialism.

Two anecdotes to illustrate some of the issues I think are at the root of approaches to Fantasy:

1: When I first came to this country from Australia where I grew up, I visited (as many tourists do) all sorts of historic monuments, reassuring myself that real places stood behind all the familiar postcard images. Standing on the Ridgway Path above the White Horse at Uffington, looking down at the flat stage of Dragon Hill, was something more. This, it struck me, is the landscape all our old stories are about – this is what Aborigines' sacred places feel like to them, who know the stories that belong to their land.

Perhaps us colonialists are particularly vulnerable to this nostalgia: note how Kipling, born and lived in India, when he settled in England wrote in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and other stories much about the spirit of the "Land". In his poem, "The Land", he wrote of his archetypal countryman "Old Mus" Hobden, "For his dead are in the churchyard, thirty generations laid / Their names were old in history when Domesday Book was made..." We Anglo/Celts may have no tradition of ancestor spirits, a belief central to many other cultures including Aboriginal, but the feeling of a special attachment to the land our great-great-grandparents and beyond lived and died in is the main reason so many Australians and Americans head first and primarily to Britain as tourists. We grow up with English fairy-tales, tales of King Arthur and Robin Hood, all rooted in the faraway imaginary landscape of Britain. We know those stories better than those of the country around us: we killed off the people who knew its stories, and it takes more than a generation or two to grow new stories to bring that landscape to life. But then, there's the problem of modern lifestyles: who any longer lives where they, let alone their parents or grandparents, grew up or died? How many Britons feel the rootlessness in an alien, unstoried landscape I've described?

I'm struck by the extent to which the current fervour for rewriting legendary history as fantasy is an American enthusiasm, and suspect that this urge to reclaim some sort of "roots" from the ancestral body of oral tradition has much to do with it. In many cases, this is augmented by the desire to rewrite legend to give women a better role – Fantasy as proto-feminism.

2: When I was living in Australia and belonged to an Australian apa, an American joined – and had the cheek to call their 'zine

"Alturinga". They kindly explained to us ignorant Aussies that this was an Aboriginal word meaning the sacred Dreaming, the eternal time where the ancestral spirit beings exist to be invoked by ritual song and dance to renew the land. It was a word we had no particular right to claim, since as white Australians none of us had more than a casual vulgar book-knowledge of Aboriginal culture. But at least we lived in the land the word, and the myths it stood for, belong to. For some rank outsider to come along and wave it about as a jolly gimmick was really a bit off.

I feel much the same about the notion of us Anglos mugging up on other mythologies and looting them for exotic Names of Power and plot devices to bedeck our same old culturally conditioned habits of how a story ought to run. Good writing needs honesty and thought drawn from the writer's own experience, not tarring up with new cultural loot.

Judith Hanna

5a Frinton Road, Stamford Hill
London N15 6NH

I agree that good writing needs honesty and thought, but I'm not so sure I agree with the notion that cultural myths are above exploitation for use in Art – which includes SF and Fantasy, naturally. Using such things as a "jolly gimmick" does seem rather insensitive on the part of the user; however, much the same thing has been said of Salman Rushdie and his Satanic Verses.

- BP

From Jim England

Seeing that Garry Kilworth lays himself "on the line" about being "a religious man" etc, in V154, I think it fair to be allowed to comment on this "line". "I believe in a supernatural being" which (he adds later) is "either within us or without us". Is this being God, I wonder? (He does not use the word.) If it is the Creator, what are we to make of the "either... or"? Perhaps he has not thought things through, because he says that it is "the mystery of religion" he loves, and "you have to... dispense with logic"? He refers to Christianity having "smothered" some "pagan religions".

Perhaps I should not read between the lines, but I get the impression that he would have had no great objection to any of these pagan religions, and views all present-day ones with an open mind. Is this being "religious"?

But a couple of things he says strike me as really flat. First of all:

"Recently the race has come to depend more on (equally unreliable) science and technology than on mysticism and magic, but still these beliefs persist... Surely we would have evolved out of such a state by now, if it were not necessary to us?" (*My underlining*) Need I do more than underline the words?

Yes, I think maybe you should! The

statement seems okay to me. As does the rest of the quoted statements from Mr Kilworth's article:

Secondly, Kilworth finds it impossible to believe in "an alien lifeform which has no religion" unless it is "a dull rock-like being with no imagination, no vision and no sense of purpose". How can he have failed to notice that all the living creatures on earth, with the exception of human beings, are alien in this sense? They have no religion. They also have no wars!

Jim England

Roselea, The Compa, Kinner
W Midlands DY7 6HT

And, in similar vein, among other things, from Peter Tennant

Garry Kilworth is always a joy to read. His essay makes a powerful appeal on behalf of Christianity with which, as an atheist, I cannot agree. Garry's belief in God seems to depend on emotion, and so I cannot effectively refute him. It seems to me that the emotional need behind the belief in God is a need for comfort and reassurance that all will turn out well with the world, despite appearances to the contrary. Perhaps the ancient Greeks derived similar comfort from their knowledge that lightning was only Zeus having a good time. I can't disprove the existence of God, and by the same token Garry can't disprove the existence of Zeus or any other of the myriad tinpot deities mankind has believed in over the centuries. They all have equal validity. Only the arguments and beliefs attendant upon these deities have grown more sophisticated (immortal, invisible, rather than sitting atop Mt Olympus).

Christianity is a more charitable and compassionate religion than most (though those who suffered persecution in past eras might disagree). This doesn't make it true, though. Garry cites the persistence of religious belief throughout mankind's existence as proof of its veracity and rightness. One could make a similar case for aggression or greed. Maybe we do still need these feelings, but that doesn't make them right per se. We can hope that they are only part of a phase out of which mankind is destined to evolve at some future time.

The strongest impression Garry made on me though is that religion appeals to him on aesthetic grounds. He seems enamoured with the mystery of God. But doesn't life itself have enough mystery without tacking God on the end to add just a little bit more? Wasn't God originally a concept invented to short-circuit that mystery and explain it away? Garry isn't thinking straight, I'm afraid.

Peter Tennant

9 Henry Cross Close, Shipham
Thetford Norfolk IP25 7LQ

*Apologies to Robert J Newman and
Lesley Hall. Perhaps next time...*

-BP

It has become habitual, around this time of year, to canvass the **Vector** reviewers for their selection of the best books of the previous year. This year, however, the result is unusual for two reasons. The first of these is that no clear favourite emerged. Okay, Iain M Banks came top of the list with 4 votes for **Player of Games**, closely followed by Christopher Fowler's **Roofworld** and William Gibson's **Mona Lisa Overdrive** both with 3, and a further 15 books got two votes apiece. But a total of 92 books were nominated in total, which spreads the net pretty wide. And if we're talking popularity, then how about Orson Scott Card who garnered 6 votes for 3 novels, while both Banks and Terry Pratchett gained 5 votes, spread over two and four books respectively. What we're really seeing, I think, is the result of a year with a lot of good books, but perhaps no outstanding title.

Which brings us to the second point: the three books that rose to the top of the pile were all first published in 1988. In fact, fully one-third of all the nominations were for titles that first saw the light of day before 1989. In part, I suppose, it's a sign that reviewers are just like the rest of us, buying most of their reading matter in paperback, and forever trying to catch up with last year's favourites. But they have a better chance than most of us to discover this year's favourites, so are we to assume that there were no such favourites?

Anyway, this selection does give us a good opportunity to compare the tastes of **Vector** reviewers with the selections for our two major awards. Of the seven books shortlisted for the Clarke Award, six get picked here. In fact **Desolation Road** by Ian McDonald, **Soldiers of Paradise** by Paul Park, **The Child Garden** by Geoff Ryman and **Neverness** by David Zindell all picked up two votes, with one vote apiece for **A Child Across the Sky** by Jonathan Carroll and **A Mask for the General** by Lisa Goldstein. Only **Ivory** by Mike Resnick missed out. As for the BSFA Award nominations, there were votes for Ryman, Carroll, and Kim Stanley Robinson's **The Gold Coast**, but nobody chose the Hugo Award winning **Cyteen** by CJ Cherryh, or, curiously, **Pyramids** by Terry Pratchett. And we mustn't forget two votes for Mary Gentle's **Scholars and Soldiers** which contains a short story nomination, though none for **Zenith** which contains three short story nominees. Curiouser and curiuser, as they say.

One last point: one of the selections became detached at some point from its covering letter and carried no other means of identification. I believe it came from John Newsinger, and I have included it as such below, but if not apologies to both people concerned.

And now: on with the motley...

Books of the Year: 1989

Compiled by Paul Kincaid

Christopher Amies

Roofworld Christopher Fowler (Arrow). A very strange little tale, kind of Titus Groan meets the *Borribles*. Not exactly horror nor detective novel *only*, and not quite SF either. It isn't like anything else and it is certainly worth a look.

Mona Lisa Overdrive, William Gibson (Grafton). The third volume of the *Sprawl* Trilogy is the clearest sign of a mature talent and a new direction. Just as well, as burnt-out cyberspace hacks are beginning to pall. Whatever comes next, it's going to be good.

Tiger! Tiger!, Alfred Bester (Penguin). This is one of the very few *must-reads* I can think of in SF, and I hadn't read it until this year. Does what the cyberpunks did, earlier, and often better. If you haven't read it, do so.

The Player of Games, Iain M Banks (Orbit). The Culture – Banks' "Functioning Communist Utopia" – rolls onward into the world of chess played for real. He gets funnier and more imaginative all the time. I especially like the machines!

The Western Lands, William Burroughs (Picador). Farewell to a long, bawdy life by a veteran fantasist and iconoclast. It's about gruesome deaths and a hard-won immortality. And there's quite a lot about centipedes, hashish, and the Old Man of the Mountains.

David V Barrett

I'm going to cheat and include all three of Orson Scott Card's "Alvin Maker" novels. **Seventh Son**, **Red Prophet** and **Prentice Alvin** (Legend) are possibly the finest alternate history SF I've ever read. They manage to recreate the feel of the settlers moving west in America, and make it more real than real by skilful use of the sort of magic powers you instinctively believe in. I want to read the rest of them, and *now*.

I won't lightly forget the effect of three novellas in particular in Mary Gentle's collection **Scholars and Soldiers** (MacDonald): an amazing working mix of hermetic philosophy, architecture, magic and *strange*, in a world which isn't ours but ought to be (bugger the 18th and 19th century rationalists!); a whole new form of Fantasy.

I'm not normally too fond of hard SF, but David Zindell's **Neverness** (Grafton) is outstanding: mathematically plausible and poetically written space opera. Garry Kilworth's **Hunter's Moon** (Unwin) is the most believable animal story I've read: painful and warming. **A Child Across the Sky** (Legend)

is Jonathan Carroll; need I say more? Geoff Ryman's **The Child Garden** (Unwin) and Lisa Goldstein's **A Mask for the General** (Legend) both impressed me a lot. And I also loved **The Fulfillments of Fate and Desire** (Orbit), Storm Constantine's third "Wraeththu" book; she's *got to* do a fourth.

Paul Brazier

Novelty by John Crowley (USA only) contains three wonderful stories and in "Great Work of Time", a new benchmark for the time paradox story: best of the year! **The Child Garden** by Geoff Ryman (Unwin) is Ryman's first mature novel, fulfilling all the promise of his two earlier books. Watch this man: he is destined for great things. This book would have been first above almost anything except the Crowley.

The Motion of Light in Water by Samuel R Delany (USA only) is not fiction, but is still one of the most mind-stretching reads of the year. Delany's reality is much stranger than any fiction I've ever read.

The Hidden Side of the Moon by Joanna Russ (Women's Press) is a superb collection of her short fiction. Reading this makes me think that perhaps she makes me feel what it's like to be a woman. If that's possible.

Kalros by Gwyneth Jones (Unwin): not since DH Lawrence have I had to stop reading a book – because I wasn't paying enough attention – and start again. This I did here. Not to be scanned, to be read and treasured.

Martin Brice

Heaven Cent by Piers Anthony (NEL) is a romp of a book. Read it if you're feeling fed up; read it on holiday; but don't read it on the train – you'll laugh out loud and get arrested.

The Fourth Book of After Midnight Stories (William Kimber) should not be read at one sitting. Each story should be read separately; each one makes you think.

Even more thought-provoking is **The Cinema of Mystery and Fantasy** (Lorimer), a small lipcover, it is fully pictorial, while David Annan's text is entertaining and profound.

A Master of cinematic fantasy is covered in **The Disney Studio Story** by Richard Holliss and Brian Sibley (Octopus), a very solid reference work, it is also enjoyable reading and looking.

Roofworld (Arrow) is not one of my best-favoured books, but it is one of the most memorable. I could not get on with the second half, but in the first half Christopher Fowler's portrait of London in the 1980s and his creation of menacing malevolence, must rank with the social and sinister depictions of Orwell and Dickens.

Terry Broome

Apart from the novels of Dick and his proteges last year, high on my list are Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* (Grafton) and Michael Blumlein's *The Movement of Mountains* (Simon & Schuster). The parts do not quite add up, but both manage to bridge intelligent literature with thrilling adventure, breathing new life and depth into themes of war and suppression in a sympathetic manner missing from much right-wing hard SF.

Another novel making that bridge is *The Bridge* by Iain Banks (Futura), which, like Priest's *The Affirmation* (Arenas), concerns a protagonist's withdrawal into a parallel world (or himself, depending on your perspective) on a quest for self-identity, the two novels ending on beautifully opposing notes. The former's strength derives from its brilliant bridge-like construction, whilst the latter's power comes from its thoroughly unsettling portrayal of a would-be writer's slide into psychosis.

My final recommendation is Catherine Czerkawska's novel for teenagers, *Shadow of the Stone*, which is either the story of a girl's redemption from madness or her release from the bane of the Granny Kempeck stone near her home. It has everything a story should have – fully realised characters and setting, with a plot and themes which intertwine in a fashion rarely matched in "adult" speculative fiction.

Barbara Davies

Pat Murphy's *The Falling Woman* (Headline), a potent mix of modern archaeology and ancient Mayan magic, made a great impression. It was a refreshing departure from more usual subject matter and extremely well written.

Women as Demons by Tania Lee (Women's Press) was an impressive collection of short stories. Her delicate prose and pastel imagery have remained with me, as has her compassion for her female subjects, both good and misguided.

Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* (Simon & Schuster) was a compelling, though for my money overlong, alternative look at vampirism. Nonetheless, it held my interest to the end.

Roofworld by Christopher Fowler (Arrow) was a rattling good yarn set on London's rooftops with a memorably evil villain. My imagination boggled at the thought of all those characters whizzing up and down on their wires – I couldn't put it down.

Penterra by Judith Moffett (NEL) was an interesting exploration of Quaker beliefs. The details of the planet and its flora and

fauna were fascinating and convincing. I could have done without all that messy sex though!

Gareth Davies

My first book isn't fiction – quite. *Infinite in all Directions* (Pelican) by Freeman Dyson is a collection of wildly speculative ideas founded in solid engineering experience. Space probes, genetic engineering, colonising the Solar System, the future of East-West relations, the value of small-scale technology – all these SF themes orbit Dyson's central discussion of diversity in the universe. If you don't get at least five story ideas out of this book, you aren't trying. Fascinating, exhilarating stuff.



Jonathan Carroll
[photo – Century Hutchinson]

Greg Bear's *Eternity* (Gollancz) didn't quite manage to follow *Eon*, but the sheer cosmic sweep of his ideas and the humanity of his characters distinguishes him from the ruck. He has to go in. Besides, how could you follow *Eon*?

I came across Jonathan Carroll for the first time this year. *Bones of the Moon* (Legend) was one of the most interesting books I've read for a long time, an unpredictable, surprising, surrealistic examination of the crossover between dream and reality. Most importantly, it glows with the light of pure originality; Carroll's willingness to take risks shows up stuff like *Chaos Blackbane of the Hell Hamster* for the formulaic rubbish it is.

More recently, I've read Paul J. McAuley's *Secret Harmonies* (Gollancz). I enjoyed his first book, *Four Hundred Billion Stars*; this is even better, a picture of life on an offworld settlement that's biologically, technologically and politically credible. More importantly,

it gives a feel for the human values and problems of such a colony, those areas that writers like Niven tend to skip over with a quick gloss of technophilic capitalism. I expect McAuley's next book will be even better.

Desolation Road by Ian McDonald (Bantam), a strange mix of scientific possibility, unlikely prediction and out-and-out fantasy. His style is sometimes a little rambling, but at least he's original, rising out of the ghastly mess of reheated fantasy, limp horror and dull science that has clogged the lists recently. I notice these days that I'm positively surprised when I get to the end of a fantasy novel and find that it stops neatly, with all the loose ends resolved and no need for a sequel or three.

As a final piece of rant, may I suggest a list of the most over-hyped and disappointing books we've read recently? I'd vote for *Neverness*, *Moon of Ice*, *Islands in the Net* and *Double Planet* for starters.

Alan Dorey

It was good to see a relative newcomer doing well in 1989: Christopher Fowler followed up *Roofworld* with a strong and imaginative anthology, *The Bureau of Lost Souls* (Legend). This is my book of 1989 – solid writing, economy of style and genuine wit and fascination permeating through each of the stories. Michael Moorcock also weighed in with *Mother London* (Penguin), a fabulous journey through our capital city, its characters and pubs, its changing and yet not-changing landscape. With a wonderful eye for detail, this is a book to be re-read, and often. Michael Bishop's *Phillip K Dick is Dead*, *Alas* (Grafton) was a clever and touching tribute to the genius of that awesome talent; a novel in the style of Dick, set in familiar territories, dripping with in-jokes and a fine work in its own right. A novella from JG Ballard, *Running Wild* (Hutchinson) gave us a vivid picture of Thatcher's Britain, its High Security Housing Development providing a microcosm of the nation at large, the violence and class warfare ringing horribly true. And finally, Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam), the first "science" book I've understood in too long; big concepts, wide ideas all analysed and discussed in a simple but cogent manner. He's not afraid to dig into the unknown, admit his shortcomings, and still come out the other side with intellect and ideas intact.

Michael Fearn

Neverness by David Zindell (Grafton). Such books as this are rare, but when they come along, they act as a reminder of why one reads SF in the first place: for the ideas. Original, profuse and unforgettable.

Seventh Son/Red Prophet (Prentice Alvin) by Orson Scott Card (Legend). It is very rare to be able to recommend an entire series of books without reservation: one wishes, for example, that the rest of the *Amtrak* books were of the stature of their first volume. Here the imagination of Keith

Roberts meets the historical authenticity of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.

To the Land of the Living by Robert Silverberg (Gollancz). Give a man of Silverberg's stature the entire afterlife to play with: the result is a reality inhabited simultaneously by HP Lovecraft, Elizabeth I and Gilgamesh. The really clever trick is to weld these strands together into a pacy narrative with a rational outcome.

Stark by Ben Elton (Sphere). Having read this very funny book, I really cannot imagine any other way to make a joke about the ecological death of earth and make serious political points at the same time, without seeming the slightest bit precious.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (Virago). Not published in 1989, but certainly the most impressive piece of speculative fiction I read during the year. The book is set during a near-future, post-feminist backlash. Frighteningly believable and beautifully written.

John Gribbin

Asking for five books of the year seems a little optimistic. Any year in which five really good books appeared would be one to record in letters of fire, or justify the building of pyramids. But I'll do the best I can.

On the subject of *Pyramids* (Gollancz) Terry Pratchett continues to delight, even though some of the discworld jokes are now becoming too familiar. So it was especially good to see *Truckers* (Doubleday), and I don't care if it is intended for young readers. Great – that's two out of the way relatively painlessly. I won't cheat by including all the Philip K. Dick reprints, but I'll pick out *Beyond Lies the Wub* (Gollancz) as representative. Good old-fashioned SF, the like of which (well, to be honest, the very stuff) I cut my teeth on, which should never have gone out of print in the first place. As for the modern guys, there's Bill Gibson and everybody else. For my money, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Grafton) is his best. It lacks the surprise impact of our first view into the world of *Neuromancer*, but the writing gets better with each book.

So – one more to make up the five. Paul Kincaid stressed that this should be a personal choice, and who out there in the world of the BSFA wouldn't include their own first solo novel appearing in print as a personal highlight of the year? *Father to the Man* (Gollancz) which is not great SF, but it's all my own work, and it's better than the latest offerings from Clarke and Asimov. Who would have thought, when I was cutting my teeth on Dick, that I'd ever be able to say that?

Leslie J Hurst

This was not the best year for science fiction. A large part of what I liked was old even if it was only being printed here for the first time.

Fiasco, Eden and The Hospital of the Transfiguration (Deutsch) by Stanislaw

Lem were all interesting, but *Eden* was published in Polish over 25 years ago and *Hospital* is even older. Lem is a strange character – he writes in many different styles, but he always has; the plots of *Fiasco* and the 25-year-old *Eden* and *Solaris* are not very different.

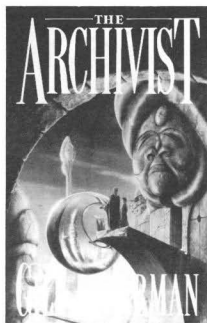
The Broken Bubble by Philip K. Dick (Gollancz) was another of his 50s straight novels and well up to standard. If we are lucky there are three novels from this period still to be published. I'm sure that some stories from the posthumous *Collected Stories* (Gollancz) by Dick have become confused in my mind with some from the *Zenith* and *Interzone* collections, which is perhaps a good sign.

And, lastly, Gill Alderman's *The*

rentice, a real joy.

David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo: The Middle Kingdom* (NEL) is about a future earth ruled by the Chinese who have produced a society which restricts change. This book covers the first days of the last days of that society. There's lots of action, multiple plot lines and many characters. A good SF adventure but with other layers dealing with the nature of power, the life-cycle of empires and the conflict between stability and change.

Finally, Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games*, not SF but about Irish terrorists trying to capture the Prince and Princess of Wales and kill the hero Jack Ryan who foiled their first attempt. This isn't "high art" but things don't have to be "difficult" to be a good read.



The Archivist
by Gill Alderman
[Unwin Hyman]

Archivist (Unwin) was reasonably original Fantasy.

Tom A Jones

First a short story collection, *Strange Things in Close Up* by Howard Waldrop (Legend) who commits strange ideas to paper. Here are stories of the last dodo, the Slough of Despond and rock'n'roll, amongst others which certainly stuck in my mind.

Tim Powers' *On Stranger Tides* (Grafton) is set in the Caribbean and mixes Hollywood pirates and historical facts with voodoo. He also successfully mixes a rite of passage plot with a love story in this "historical fantasy".

There have been few truly funny SF or Fantasy stories but Terry Pratchett hits a consistently high level with the "Light Fantastic" series. This year I'll mention *Mort* (Corgi), the story of Death's app-

Paul Kincaid

This has been an unusual year for me. For various reasons I've not been able to keep up with as many of the new books as I'd like, and there's a long list of books waiting to be read, some of which look excellent indeed. Nevertheless, there are several which stand out.

First has to be *Desolation Road* by Ian McDonald (Bantam), a spectacular kaleidoscope of a novel which may have been wayward and varied, but which was also exhilarating and fresh.

Next, two new books by an American writer who turns the surreal into something vivid and clear and startling. *Rubicon Beach* (Futura) by Steve Erickson was his second novel, stringing together three bizarre tales which are imaginatively linked though you'd hardly think they were in the same universe. But his third novel, *Tales of the Black Clock* (Simon & Schuster) is even better, perhaps because his talent is under greater control and the invention more sustained.

It is probably partly egoism which makes me nominate *Arrows of Eros* edited by Alex Stewart (NEL), but it does contain other good stories besides my own (especially by Ian Banks, Geraldine Harris and Diana Wynne Jones), and I think it just tips the scales against *Zenith*.

Finally? Well, I did consider nominating *Secret Harmonies* by Paul J McAuley and *The Night Mayor* by Kim Newman, but in the end I had to settle for *The Broken Bubble* by Philip K. Dick (Gollancz) just because it is one of the best of his non-SF novels to appear to date.

Ken Lake

With 60 paperbacks awaiting reading, I'm probably the least likely person to ask for five top books for 1989. As I grow older I find I read more for pleasure, less as an act of rebellion, and my tastes are modified by that predilection. With no new DeCamp, Disch, Edmonson, Forward, Foster or Llewellyn for a start, my choices are limited, and with the determined onslaught of women on the field, my final selection surprised even me.

I finally caught up with Katherine Burde-

kin's alternate world novel *Swastika Night* (Lawrence & Wishart), and was amazed at her clairvoyance; Amanda Prantera brought me immense intellectual pleasure with her *Conversations with Lord Byron on Perversion, 163 Years after His Lordship's Death* (Cape), and MJ Engh added to the list of women who emphasise male homosexuality with her superb near-future *A Wind from Bukhara* (Grafton).

Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* (Gollancz) trilogy came to a close, leaving me at first thrilled and only later aware that I'd been conned into approving of a viciously racist diatribe, while Pamela Sargent & Ian Watson's editing of the anthology *Afterlives* presented me with after-death imaginings in vast and intriguing variety.

Finally, of course, absolutely anything by Terry Pratchett and Lois McMaster Bujold provides us with thrills and laughs galore. Yes, a good year in all, thanks!

Kev McVeigh

Gill Alderman's debut novel *The Archivist* (Unwin) shows us a city, and a society, with its own identity. Her characters occupy all the social strata that real cities have, and undergo the confusing mixes of emotions that real people have. Although it is occasionally dry, the whole work is worthy of comparison with Delany and Wolfe. I don't know if there is room for major improvements, but if there is then Gill Alderman will be great.

For most of 1988 I was telling all who would listen about Ian McDonald's amazing debut novel, *Desolation Road*, now he's surpassed that. *Out on Blue Six* (USA only) is equally strange, but the ideas are worked out further. Not only that but there are more of them. It is full of allusive images, fantastic ideas, and I found it delightfully witty. There is no room for me to even hint at what it's all about, but I am reading it again right now.

Another writer who made a great start with his debut was Dan Simmons, who won the World Fantasy Award for *Song of Kali*. *Phases of Gravity* (USA only) deserves every award going. It is superficially the story of an ex-astronaut seeking something to fill the emptiness in his life. Beyond that it is a moving tale of complex relationships, with some scathing put-downs of certain aspects of The American Way.

I generally enjoy reading the annual best of the year anthologies, and one name that has been cropping up regularly for the past few years is Pat Cadigan. Now she has a collection, *Patterns* (USA only), out, which shows not only an amazing range from cyberpunk to horror to you-name-it, but a control that leaves me numb. She merges style and content, making political points seductively, and wrapping it all up in a very dark wit.

Leigh Kennedy has been among my favourite writers since I first got about 10 pages into one of her books. Although it is a couple of years old now, I re-read *Saint Hiroshima* (Bloomsbury) twice this year,

and it still leaves me feeling sad. It is very sparse in places, allowing the reader to fill the gaps, and by doing so it draws you right into the hearts of the characters. The only suitable adjectives are words like "beautiful".

Nik Morton

Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist* (Hodder) is tragic and moving, inspiring to read of her 13 years' dedication to obsession with the apes of the African rain forest; first contact with aliens may be something like this - we can only hope so... the individual characters come across well. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's *Demons and Dreams* (Legend) is a massive anthology of some 36



Geoff Ryman
[photo - Unwin Hyman]

stories/poems, mining many gems, running the complete gamut between Fantasy and Horror. Terry Pratchett's *Sourcery* (Corgi) for simply introducing me to his zany, hilarious Discworld characters and style of humour; I became a late convert! *Moonshadow* (Epic) a graphic novel by JM DeMatteis, Muth and Nowlan, reveals a young boy's rite of passage in lyrical, bawdy, literate, passionate, erotic, crude, wonderful words and remarkable painted panels; SF, Fantasy, Horror, romance, and cry for compassion. Loup Durand's *Daddy* (Muller) gets into the mind and under the skin of a 9-year-old genius with a phenomenal memory hunted by a Nazi psychopath, a battle of wills, unrelenting, page-turning, stomach-churning action.

John Newsinger

A good year. I could easily nominate as

many as ten novels that have really impressed me in 1989, some new, some recent. To choose five is a problem - however, here goes. Paul Park's *Soldiers of Paradise* (Grafton), the story of a civilisation in a state of dissolution and of the strange odyssey of Thanakar Starbridge was the most remarkable book I read last year. It is one of those books that one hopes, rather than dreads, is the start of a trilogy. Next must come William Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Grafton). This is SF in the 1980s for me. What will the great man produce in the next decade? Also impressive was Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (Legend). His Laura Webster is a thoroughly convincing character and her grim education in the realities of power politics in a post-Cold War world made compelling reading. Another novel that really impressed me was Iain Banks' *The Player of Games* (Orbit). Jernau Gurgeh's painful and unwitting part in the overthrow of the Empire of Azad is marvellously well-written. As for children's books, well without any doubt the best I read during 1989 was *Transformations* (Orchard) by Ann Halam, another episode in the chronicles of Zanne the Covenantor. For my money, Halam has LeGuin beaten as a writer of novels for young readers. A triumph! Although not one of my five, I would also like to give a mention to Tad Williams' *The Dragonbone Chair* (Legend), one of the best Fantasy novels that I have read for a long time, which makes six! And I could go on.

Andy Sawyer

Professionally and for pleasure I've read hundreds of books this year. These are five I'm glad to have read. Gregory Benford's *Tides of Light* (Gollancz) starts with a dreadful transposition of Horatio Hornblower's "Loneliness of command" angst into a spaceship near the galactic core. However, the quest started in *The Great Sky River* deepens into a weird but compulsive epic. Mankind is relegated to the sidelines but the novel's depiction of humanity's aspirations for "zeal and verve... in the shadows of vastness" redeems its severe flaws. Similar bleak romanticism underlies John Constantine in DC's *Hellblazer*, and Titan's first Graphic Novel collection of the strips offers superb satirical commentary on the "me first" 80s. Check the yuppies in "Going for it!"

A very welcome reprint was *Bone to his Bone* (Equation) bringing EG Swain's carefully crafted "Stoneground" ghost tales back to an audience which should welcome their wit and character, together with six "new" stories by David Rowlands which soar beyond the term "pastiche". Mary Gentle's collection *Scholars and Soldiers* (MacDonald) is notable for two long stories set in a truly original "alternative Renaissance" world. Sword and sorcery, hermeticism and HP Lovecraft seem to be elements, but the whole is something else. (What? - well Neil Gaiman captures it perfectly in his introduction....)

KV Bailey's criticism may be better

known in these pages than his verse. Whereas most SF poets concentrate on the cosmic image and let rhythm and structure go (hang or at best end up doggerel) Bailey knows about complex verse-forms and rhyme schemes as well as SF. *The Sky Glants* (Triffid Books) fuses Grail-quest and space fiction in a way which captures the mythopoetic essence of both and the lightness of touch he brings to both form and content of his work is something joyous.

Martyn Taylor

1989, maybe not a very good year, but...

David Wingrove's *Chung Kuo* (NEL) was burdened with hype rivaling the likes of Tom Clancy, but it survived – just. The story moves s-l-o-w-l-y. The plot is calculated – targets are hit just a bit too precisely. The Chinese are horrid. Still, it kept me reading and I will buy No. 2. Would that it had the vitality of Iain Banks' *The Player of Games* (Orbit). I dislike but admire Banks' mainstream novels whereas I like his SF but don't admire it. Oh well, maybe you really cannot expect an artistic rattling good yarn. Then there is – yawn – Terry Pratchett. Every year he comes up with another hilarious Discworld romp, and every year we laugh. Hardly worth mentioning *Sourcery* (Corgi). If you didn't laugh you are braindead.

If you laughed at Jonathan Carroll's *Sleeping in Flame* (Legend) you are as strange as his characters. This novel is an exercise in deception. Almost every word, even, is a Russian doll. The levels of story-

telling and erudition seem limitless. The best book of the year. Last year I recommended Steve Erickson's *Days Between Stations*, this year it is his *Rubicon Beach* (Futura). This guy boldly goes places most genre writers don't even dream exist. Great stuff.

Jon Wallace

1989 has been a strange year. Looking back, I found it difficult to pick five books which stood out, then I thought about it and remembered William Horwood. *Skallagridd* must be one of the most complex and emotive novels that I have ever read. Its blend of myth and startling reality must confirm Horwood's position as one of the best creative writers of our time (as do the final two books in the *Duncton* trilogy, by the way). Equally mythic but far lighter (on the surface anyway) is *Galapagos* (Grafton), Kurt Vonnegut's first SF novel for ages. This novel blends white and the blackest comedy in a way that only Vonnegut can. To get away from fiction for a bit, you have to read Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam), a lucid and fascinating exploration of modern physics. The only snag with modern physics is that it kind of puts you off SF, so I escaped into the horror world of Robert R. McCammon, whose collection *Blue World* (Grafton) pops him firmly into the top ranks of modern dark Fantasy writers; and talking of these brings to mind a collection called *Dark Visions* (Gollancz), probably my favourite three-author collection in a year which has seen

several. This one has Stephen King, Dan Simmons and George RR Martin, whose story "The Skin Trade" is the cream of the book.

Martin Waller

Not an easy choice, this time: a dearth of first-rate novels coincided with a glut of also-rans, so I've had to fill up with a couple of up-market space operas. But pride of place goes to Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast* (Orbit), neither a hideous warning nor a technophile's dream but a real near future inhabited by real characters. (Bruce Sterling just missed the same trick with *Islands in the Net*, also marred by a flabby plot.) *The Sea and Summer* (Faber) by George Turner was more in the hideous warning mode, and the first book to address itself seriously to the implications of the greenhouse effect, again peopled by believable characters. (A side-bet for the 90s – look out for a rash of Survivalist yarns set, post-glasnost, after the ecological collapse.) Christopher Hinz's *Liege-Killer* had a believable future society and a nicely-judged sense of evil – a convincing debut, a shame his second was so awful. Iain (M) Banks continued to please with *The Player of Games* (Orbit). I've saved the wierdest until last – Paul Park's *Soldiers of Paradise* (Grafton), a hideously cruel, powerfully-conceived near-fantasy, the nearest stopping-points: Gene Wolfe's *New Sun* and Aldiss's *Hellconia*, and a first novel that leaves you aghast at what he might do next. ■

A FRESH LOOK AT SCIENCE FICTION

The British Science Fiction Association provides a unique perspective on science fiction and fantasy today.

Vector

One of the leading critical journals in

Britain - 'a required title' says *Anatomy of Wonder!* Recent issues have included interviews with Bruce Sterling, Frederik Pohl, Neil Gaiman, Ramsey Campbell, Brian Aldiss, Greg Bear & Lewis Shiner; articles on feminism and SF, Children's SF, the TV SF of Harlan Ellison; articles by Dave Langford, Bob Shaw, Mary Gentle, Gwyneth Jones, Brian Aldiss, Garry Kilworth. Plus the very best in critical writing.

Matrix

Britain's leading SF news magazine. It keeps you up to date with what's happening in the world of SF, conventions, fanzines, media reviews and a lively letter column.

Paperback Inferno

A paperback review magazine that tells you all you need to know about the books on your local bookshop shelves.

Focus

is for anyone with an interest in writing, with market up-dates, tips and ideas from the professionals, and workshops for your own stories.

And that's only part of the story. The BSFA is the organisation for everyone with an interest in science fiction, from the readers to the writers. And all for just £10 a year. (Overseas: \$20 surface, \$35 air)

For full details contact

Joanne Raine, BSFA Membership Secretary, 33 Thornville Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW
(US Agent) Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred, Detroit, MI 48213, USA)

FOUNDATION

THE REVIEW OF SCIENCE FICTION

In its fifteen years of publication, FOUNDATION has established a reputation as probably the best critical journal of science fiction in the world.

"Continues to be far and away the best in the field"

—Ursula K. Le Guin

FOUNDATION publishes articles on all aspects of sf, letters and debates, and some of the liveliest if reviews published anywhere. Authors and regular reviewers have included:

Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, David Brin, John Clute, Richard Cowper, Colin Greenland, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, Roz Kaveney, David Langford, Christopher Priest, Kim Stanley Robinson, Pamela Sargent, Robert Silverberg, Brian Stableford, Bruce Sterling, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson and many others.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FOUNDATION is published three times a year, and each issue contains over a hundred well-filled pages. Subscribe now!

The annual subscription rates are: £8.50 (UK and Ireland), £9.00 surface mail to other countries (£13.50 air mail); US \$17.00 surface mail (US \$21.00 air mail) to USA and Canada. Individual issues are £2.95 (US \$6.95) post free. Transatlantic subscribers please add \$1 if paying by dollar cheque, to cover handling charges. Please make cheques payable to "The SF Foundation" and send to: The Science Fiction Foundation, N.E. London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, RM8 2AS, England.

Michael Moorcock

On January 18th of this year, Michael Moorcock was interviewed by Colin Greenland at the Plough in London, the location of the BSFA London Meetings.

The following is an edited transcript of that interview.

Colin Greenland speaks first...

Right at the moment you're working on *Jerusalem Commands*, the next Colonel Pyat memoir. How do you approach a great big book like that? I remember reading *Byzantium Endures* and being overwhelmed by the colour, the flow, the period detail. How do you go about preparing for that?

Well, I think you have to be overwhelmed yourself by that; you just absorb the whole thing to do it. It takes a while.

What do you absorb? What do you go for?

Well, everything you need for the book. Travel to some extent. Whatever really is involved. Mostly the reading has to be first source – depending on the language, obviously. Reading, that is, naive accounts, letters, newspaper accounts – ephemeral stuff. I don't read histories or stuff that's been processed that has an academic, sort of, "processing" that's gone on. I want to read how people actually were thinking and what they thought and so on. So naive accounts are better for that. Letters to the press written in 1920 and stuff like that are always better.

You go for popular magazines?

Yeah, anything that reflects what people were really actually thinking and doing at the time, rather than what the Academics have decided they were particularly doing at the time. For a book like that... not every book obviously requires it.

And you just surround yourself with the stuff and absorb it all in?

You just live it.

"Live it"?!?

Yeah, I mean, what happens to me is that at a certain point the visual stuff starts to impose itself on the real world. I remember very clearly when I was doing *Laughter of Carthage*, I was going along up by Ribble Head – which was where I lived at the time in the Yorkshire Dales and there's nothing but the bridge, the viaduct and the valley – and I had a fairly complete image of 1920s Istanbul super-imposed over it and I could actually pick out buildings and streets. So

it's a funny process. It's nothing I'm particularly conscious of, it's what happens, but to get to that state you also need to sort of divorce yourself in some ways from a lot of the normal routine.

It must be hard to talk to other people...

Well it is because you're actually living it. After I'd written *Byzantium Endures* – I think it was about June I came out of that – and I was astonished. I just couldn't understand why people were so under-dressed and there was no snow on the streets! I just really couldn't! Conrad did that with *Nostromo*: for two years or so he just vanished and didn't know anything that was going on. His children grew up around him and everything went on, and every so often they'd put a tray outside his door, and sometimes it would get eaten and sometimes it wouldn't, and sometimes they'd hear him because he always walked in French. [laughter] He wrote in English, spoke Polish as a native, and walked in French! [laughter]

I've managed to sort of "short-circuit" some of the self-pitying aspects of that. I find this appalling mass of self-pity before I really begin, but a lot of that is kind of reforming yourself. Your ego, your "personality" vanishes, starts to disintegrate as the work takes over, and you've obviously got a superego that's controlling it.

You told me once that when you wrote *Byzantium Endures* in the first draft it was one paragraph – it was one long rant.

Yeah, it was just one chapter. I then divided it into two chapters. [laughter] I then thought better of it and made it into actual chapters. But yes, it was just one long rant.

So how do you go about it? Do you just make them up as they go along? Or do you plan them beforehand?

I plan them very meticulously beforehand. The form is very important; let's say you've got a moral element to it (which the Fantasies don't have, more what you might call an element of strong sentimentality, a "moralistic element", perhaps) and obviously the structure can't get in the way of the story you want to tell, so you have to get a structure, you have to work that out first. You have to work out the story you're going to tell, then you've got to work out the

structure that will be best. Sometimes that's a conventional structure – a Sword & Sorcery book would be a conventional basic structure.

What are the elements of a conventional Sword & Sorcery structure?

I use a conventional Introduction/Development/Conclusion form. Basically just a Classical form.

It fits very well with writing trilogies.

It does, and that's how I started writing trilogies. Each of the books is divided into three – consciously divided into three – and each three forms a trilogy.

I plan mathematically, in an odd sort of way. I impose a mathematical logic on something that isn't really completely controlled or dealt with through that. But by doing that you can also work out structures. So a basic, three-part structure you use in a trilogy, you'll still do Introduction/Development/Conclusion for the first book, but you'll also extend that to the trilogy so that the first book also stands as an Introduction, the Development you then have to make sure that it all comes in the second one, and you can't start introducing new material after that. You then work with the material that you've got and the plot has to develop out of the characters that you've got, and so on – you can't then bring in *deus ex machina* stuff, you can't bring in sudden characters from nowhere. It's very much a formula that people either like or don't like – if they like it then that's the formula they want.

This is the sort of thing that when you read those books you won't necessarily pick this up.

No, you're not meant to. With a book that requires a different kind of form... because you're trying to deal with people's expectations (and people will always impose their own expectations onto the material) it has to be very different before they stop doing that, and if you want that not to happen so much, then experimentation comes into play and you start working out forms which are designed to shake those expectations.

So now you're thinking of things like *A Cure for Cancer*, *Breakfast in the Ruins...*

and *Mother London* too?

Yeah, and all of those are tightly structured too, but they're obviously unconventional structures.

Not just beginning, middle and end...

No, they're personal structures which you invent to fit the material. For some material you just need to find some new way of dealing with it. With *Mother London* you could do it as a sort of family saga because you're covering 40 years of London, in which case it becomes exactly what it is: the medium is the message. Whatever you would be trying to say would be constantly at odds with people imposing their expectations because they know what that kind of form is supposed to be. You'd also get reviews in which they'd tell you off for not doing what they expect you to do, because you haven't done it. Angus Wilson's *No Laughing Matter* got reviewed like that. I thought it was extremely interesting, lots of experiment in it, but because it's still close enough to the sort of Galsworthy thing, it meant that all the reviewers were reviewing it as a failed Galsworthy novel when in fact it had a lot of interesting experiments in it that *worked*, at least as far as I was concerned. So you're always dealing with that too, but that doesn't really matter. It's really what the readers think that matters.

But I think that as long as you keep the structure very very clear, even though it's not clear to the reader, it basically means that you're giving somebody a rollercoaster and you're saying it's safe, you're going to go all the way around and you're going to come up at the ending, and in the meantime something will have happened – but not necessarily what you might expect to happen.

And you won't fall off!

Yeah, that's right. I think you owe that to a reader.

You feel a responsibility to your readers?

Yes. I don't think a reader has any responsibilities to you – you're the only person who has. They're buying the books, and as far as you're concerned that's good – if they do that, that's fine. But that doesn't mean they have to like or understand the books. Once it's become theirs, it is theirs, and I'm not trying to mess about with readers' expectations in that way.

We're surrounded by books and series of books at the moment that are written by people who've read Tolkien, and read Michael Moorcock, and are now reproducing what they got out of him and yourself, and doing it apparently very successfully in commercial terms. [But] when you were writing this, this was new, a new proposition; and now there is a genre, and it's an industry.

How do you feel about the way that the [Fantasy] genre has developed?

I don't know. It's kind of weird for me, because I've seen virtually everything that was novel in my books become part of the general conventions of the thing, and so my books to me actually just disappear in with the others – they don't look any different! But it's a peculiar feeling... Every problem has to be solved technically and you solve it by what people see as innovation. But frequently you don't even see it as innovation yourself, because you're borrowing from a different genre, that's all you're doing, so you're not really innovating in any sense that you see yourself as doing, although it *might* be sort of novel...

Did you feel that when you were writing the first *Etric* stories?

I didn't think I was doing anything new. I was just writing in a tradition, but it was a Gothic tradition, it was a sort of Victorian tradition which went back to the stuff that inspired the Lovecrafts and the Howards and all that sort of stuff. So I was sort of borrowing from traditional areas and coming straight into popular Fantasy, commercial magazine Fantasy. In those days I don't think Fritz Leiber thought he was doing anything particularly new. Again, he knew he was working in a certain tradition, it just happened to be very fresh to the readers of Science Fantasy, or the readers of *Weird Tales*, or whoever was publishing him.

So I don't think it was very novel. All I thought I was doing was that I was taking the implications of the form and running with them so that the *tragic* elements, the dream hero, the ironic elements of the thing were all essentially derived from Byron, the whole romantic period.

You could get away with murder in SF magazines in those days, because nobody had read anything but the stories in the SF magazines. There are all kinds of things that you couldn't get away with now because the readership's more sophisticated, I think... So it's hard to say what I think about the *modern* stuff.

It seems to me that there hasn't been much of that – what you talked about may not have been innovation, but it was *reintroducing*, like breeding back from the stock...

It was written by people who read stuff other than Howard and Lovecraft as it were, or whoever else it was. I think that's one of the things people like Leiber in some ways were always having to deal with: they were always ahead of their market. Leiber in particular. I mean, he was always producing stories which were very very good and ten years later people would say: "Wow, what a great story." But at the time nobody was quite as bothered. And yet, Fritz didn't think of himself as an innovator. I didn't think of Fritz as an innovator, just a very good writer.

Thesedays, I don't know. Things have changed: we've got commercial genres, we've got editors who know what sells and what doesn't sell. In those days they had *no idea*. I mean, when the first *Etric* book was bought the editor said that we were going to make a lot on this, and he payed me £100 (a big investment then, the most money I'd ever had) and the book failed. I said it would, I told him it would and he said, "I'll be the judge of that." He was wrong, I was right. There was no market at all for books like that and it wasn't really until the late 60s with Mayflower starting my stuff and other stuff that I'd sort of recommended that any kind of Fantasy as a specific genre was published.

Why do you think it's so popular? Why do you think we consume so much of it?

Why do people consume so much Catherine Cookson? I don't know.

Yeah, but – I mean, I've just got this idea that each age, each political epoch we go through has its own subtle myths, and we're much more inclined to heroic Fantasy now than we are to... Westerns, say.

Yeah, at this moment in time we're inclined to Green politics, a lot of slightly abstract politics of various kinds – liberal politics of one sort or another, which don't actually involve you in any action, which don't actually involve you in doing anything but tut-tutting what's going on in Brazil. And you can feel good about yourself by saying it's disgusting that these trees are being cut down, which doesn't actually deal with the person who's being raped around the corner, or who's having a baby, or whatever's happening in real life under your actual nose – which I find disgusting.

I think that that kind of fiction actually

appeals to people who don't want to *know* about that or (to be fair to them) to know too much about it and want a release from it. I don't want to sort of moralise about people who read it, but I think that a lot of the appeal though is towards the abstract. The thing about Tolkien is that he abstracts everything: you've got a bunch of baddies, and a bunch of goodies, and you've only got one decent character – who's that little one who speaks with a whisper? Gollum, yeah. He's the only decent character in the whole fucking book. [laughter]

You never set out to write heroic fantasy though did you?

No, not that kind. I thought it was wet. I still think it's wet. I mean, it's like Winnie the Pooh... I had too much of that when I was a kid, Children's Hour. It all sounds like Children's Hour to me: "Hello children. Once upon a time there was a little furry animal..." [laughs]

Another thing I think about the Fantasy genre: that by being so derivative it's actually got away from the menace that is actually there in the romantic originals, the feeling that this was a dangerous world.

One of the things that Leiber did that I liked, and to quite a large extent Howard did, was that the characters were never all good or all bad, they were *moved* by ordinary human needs, which may not have been particularly high, but at least you knew that the reason that Conan was going there was to steal something and not to fight for Good and all of that.

The other thing that I thought was that you had was to replace Good and Evil with Law and Chaos...

Yeah, but it wasn't my idea. It was Poul Anderson's idea, I stole it from him whole.

That's why the acknowledgement to Poul Anderson.

Yeah, it was from *The Broken Sword*.

But I always thought that it touched a nerve in the 60s, because at the time there was a lot of moral confusion, and we didn't know what was necessarily Good or Evil. It wasn't clear-cut. But to be told that the cosmos was a vast battle between, or a balance between, Law and Chaos – that we could comprehend...

The only reason for making that replacement is that you don't want Good or Evil. Law and Chaos are different *things*. Law and Chaos are both attractive, both dangerous, and both become worthless if you push them too far. In one way or another they're not what you'd want, so the idea of the Balance is the main thing there.

I still don't actually believe in Good and Evil as literary devices... they're too simple to put into stories like that. I *do* believe that

some people are righteous evil bastards and that some people are generous, good people, and the way I'd look at it is you'd get some of those righteous bastards in the Chaos camp, and some of those righteous bastards in the Law camp, and so on – which is basically, I suppose, what was different. Also, it wasn't anti-intellectual, which Howard was, so there was that element of intellectualism... simplistic intellectualism, if you like.

Asking, "What are we doing here? What're we supposed to be doing?" That sort of thing?

Yeah, and wondering about the moral aspects of killing five million people before breakfast.

You may distinguish between your Fantasy books and the rest of your work in terms of form, or the way you approach them, but you don't write "throw-away" books, do you? Everything is imbued with whatever it is you want to say.

No, I don't think I write "hack" books in that if I'm writing a *simple* book it will still be exploring the same ideas that's in a more complicated book. I'm not sure if it makes any difference, but I think you're giving short measure to people if you write cynically, even if it's popular, and I try not to do that. The only way to make sure you don't do that is to write about things that engage you, that are actually *meaningful* to you, that you care about and then you can actually write, going on giving the reader something that –

That feeling that they've paid their money, you've got them on the roller-coaster, you've got their attention. You want to tell them something that is worth their while.

Yeah. I was talking to somebody the other day, that series books always sell five times more than individual books by *any* author. The book in the series is going to sell more than the individual book by an *enormous* number, which means that people are after a prolonged *escape*. I'm not saying that's the only thing they're after in a book, but frequently that's all they're after essentially.

Is that one reason why all your books join together, that all the characters are anagrams of each other?

Well, one thing is that as an author you've only got a certain stock of characters that interest you (major characters anyway) and those characters will turn up in different forms all the time. Essentially, you're always exploring relationships of a certain kind, certain ideas are always there – you may be adding to them and you may be emphasising them or developing them. What I realised early on was that instead of reinventing, or rather, calling the character by a different name every time, you might as well just call the character by the name of the first name,

and take the reader to some extent along with that general development.

You're letting them into what's going on in your own mind? So you have Karl Glogauer and you want to write another book about that kind of moral area, so you have Karl Glogauer again even though he died in the first book.

Yeah, that's right. It's weird because much as I loathe the notion of metafiction and so on, I sort of do it in a funny sort of way in that I admit it's fiction, even though I spend a lot of time elaborately pretending these stories are written by somebody else!

Like in *The Dancers at the End of Time*, the Auditor that has heard this story and is retelling it to us...

Yeah. It's all from Edgar Rice Burroughs, really.

"Edgar Rice Burroughs"?

It's almost all Edgar Rice Burroughs – he's the main source of my experiments. Burroughs used that as a suspension of disbelief device, which is basically "I've had this from an old man who said..." Burroughs used to have a lot of that, or somebody visiting, or getting news from the centre of the Earth sent by "Griddleywave", which would be received by Griddley (the inventor of the Griddleywave) who would then pass it onto Burroughs, who would then put it down saying that this was the latest story that he'd had from the centre of the Earth.

Burroughs used that same device in the same way that I do: several times in different books, about different characters, about different worlds. Towards the end, he had linked the Venus world, the John Carter world, and Pellucidar, and all those different worlds he invented eventually all knew about one another.

It's also a device which comes natural to you as writer, because these characters are living people to you.

You were the master of the three-day book and the ten book year – ten books in one year...

Yeah, I noticed that. [laughter]

You only realised it looking back?

I did. I've just read an old interview with me and – this was years ago – and I noticed that I'd written ten books in one year, and I say that two of them are amongst my best. I think *English Assassin* was one of them and *Breakfast in the Ruins* was the other... but I did write ten books that year.

How do you get that skill? How can we do that?

You can't. It's unfortunate because I've been trying to teach it to people for years and I've got a lot of friends that I'd be happy to pass that on to, but you either can do it, or

you can't. What happened to me was that I grew up in a different world than most people. As a journalist I was used to delivering copy on time, I was used to taking on whatever the job was and having it done by whatever the deadline was. When it came to novels and they wanted one next week, it's the same thing. I didn't know you were supposed to take a long time writing novels. I thought: three days, 15,000 words a day. All the Hawkmoon books were exactly 45,000 words, the length of a basic genre novel of the time.

That's another thing about your three-part structure: Introduction/Development/Conclusion, that's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday! [laughter]

Yeah, that's true.

*What did you do on Thursday and Friday?

You're just a *blank*. It costs you dear to write like that; it's not an easy way of writing in the end. You're up and down the whole time. It's awful. It's terrible for your ordinary family life, because half the time you're an insane working monster, and the other half you're just clapped out. So I stopped doing it. [laughs] I now just take ten days. You learn moderation as you go along.

There's an article in *Casablanca* which says that *Time* magazine called you a "British Writing Machine". And you say, "if I'm any sort of machine, then I'm more on the lines of the engine which took the *African Queen* up-river than the astonishing device which gave lift-off to Jupiter I; I'm far better at sighing, wheezing, thanking, covering myself with warm grease, mysteriously loosing pressure in mid-stream, than I am at purring unostentatiously into sophisticated drive mode carrying a mighty crate of tonnage to safe harbour on the other side of some imaginative universe." *The African Queen*?

Yes, the *African Queen*. Actually I'm getting more and more like an old donkey-engine. I'm not even computer-friendly any more.

The world has speeded up around you...

I know, it's totally mechanical my world.

... looking in my notes here, I've got this reference to Peter Ackroyd's recent article/review, and he says that your great strength is your historical vision.

It's very flattering – it seems to fit actually. The flattering content of the thing is very nice of him, but also slightly embarrassing to talk about that... but I think it is probably true that I do have a strong sense of history. You can ask my children about that whose eyes glaze over and sometimes forget that they ought not to have asked the question three hours before. [laughter] That happened the

other night – I can't remember exactly what it was, something to do with women in prison – but it eventually went onto the American Civil War, and then cotton-growing in Egypt... and that's when I stop myself and realise that I've gone a long way from the original question. I tend to make those historical links all the time.

I don't know whatever it is. I tend to have a sense of – a sense of people being the same down the ages and trying to understand how they express themselves, why they express themselves, what context they express themselves in, because that way you can enjoy what people write better too. There are all sorts of reasons for it, but I think a lot of it is... Gorbachev said something about history having no rehearsals, which I think is



a very good phrase. There are no rehearsals, and I think that the more you know about the world's history, on a social basis preferably, means that you can respond very quickly to changing social conditions, because you've got some sense of how it's all been working.

I was talking once to Greg Benford who complained that "... when he [Moorcock] writes about the past, he researches it and researches it. When he writes about the future, he doesn't research it at all!" [laughter]

That's true. You can't say fairer than that.

It's partly that sense of history and of the whole conditions producing cycles with people being the same when the conditions repeat, but it's also that sense of where we are now, that we're living in the ruins of empire...

We're not *living* in the ruins – we're *always* in the ruins of empire (that is, if we're living in a society that's had an empire); we're always living in a society that's in a process of disintegration. Entropy is the rule. We're always living in a society that's in a period of transition, where the past was always better and the future's going to be better – that's how people live, how they perceive things. It's our subjective way of looking at the world, but in fact society is always disintegrating and it's always reforming.

I'm interested in the kind of myths that people create for themselves – the myths of grandeur. People create family myths: "We were once a very rich family, but Uncle John gambled all the money away and now we're very poor." – to explain why you're very poor. And they're sort of status things going on like that all the time – they're going on in terms of empires, and they go in terms of family relationships, they go in the terms of the lies we tell ourselves, and so on. So it's all part of the same thing. My view is that everything is disintegrating and reforming, but fundamentally entropy is the name of the game. The only thing I believe that stands *against* entropy, against the awful truth of entropy, the awful fact of death and disintegration and *nothingness*, is human relationships. Human relationships actually counter that: they're something that can be permanent, they can improve, they can intensify... Human relationships, human love – whatever you call it – human *good*, are an effective antidote to entropy, so that while people may think that I'm pessimistic in a lot of things, like the Cornelius books, human relationships are what save people. They're the *only* thing they've got in a world that's *completely* blown apart, where nothing is certain at *any* given moment, because really that's what life is like, even if we sort of gloss it over. Certainly in cities life is like that, but people caring for one another makes a sort of zone of stability in the unstable. I'm not saying there's anything *wrong* with instability either, I'm not saying I'm depressed by entropy, but at the same time I don't think it's all there is and I think there is something just as good, just as powerful, and I think human relationships are just as powerful as anything in the Universe as we perceive it.

You said "In cities"...

I think cities are the great expression of human endeavour and human beings. I love cities. Cities are an environment that we've created and which we don't understand – which is marvellous to create something you don't understand, pretty much like everything else we've created! [laughs]

*Would you say that Cornelius is the epitome of being the city person?

Yes, he is – he was designed to be. I wanted to have a character, if you like, a *myth* character who embodied *relish* for a city. One of the things that characterises Cornelius, as opposed to most of the other stuff that came out around the same time, is that Cornelius

* Question from a member of the audience

was actually enjoying it all. I mean, the technology was great. He wasn't saying "Oh, these computers are going to give us trouble." – which was the fashionable idea at the time, and all that kind of thing. He actually saw it all as... *usable*, actually maniable stuff that you could use for your own benefit, which of course you can. And I was bored, because at the time... it's very much like the Green movement – you get the few pieties repeated over and over again, and the pieties in those days were basically anti-technological pieties about how we were all going to be taken over by computers. I mean the idea of being taken over by computers as opposed to the present government is actually far preferable! Still, that's what people were afraid of, and so the Cornelius books are about living in the city, about myths you invent in order to live in the city. *Mother London* is the same; it's not a lot of difference in terms of subject, just different in expression.

Another thing that Peter Ackroyd said in that article (which I wasn't quite so sure you'd be flattered by) was that you were working in "an English tradition based upon exaggeration and vulgarity." How do you feel about that?

Well, when I first read it... well, I thought, *the bugger!* [laughter]

That's a vulgar thing to think.

I suppose it was, but then... I happened to flick through the book at that point and I came upon "The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle" (or "Gold-Diggers of 1977") and some of it was *extremely* vulgar actually. [laughs] I thought, *this wasn't very nice at all!*

Yes, I think I am vulgar. I realise that from time to time.

Is this why the Literary Establishment don't want you?

Well, some of the LE want me *because* I'm vulgar...

I think you have to decide to be vulgar... the reason I was attracted to science fiction in the first place (and rock'n'roll) was because it was vulgar – and I don't mean that I consciously thought "this is vulgar", but because I was vulgar too. I was an ordinary lad in a lower-middle-class family. I left school at 15, so I didn't have any formal education to speak of... and whatever attracted me to science fiction and rock'n'roll was the fact that I thought it was *mine*, something that didn't belong to the establishment world, the literary world. There was no criticism of it, (well, maybe one or two things by Blish or somebody) no magazines about it, there were no academics writing about it.

Similarly with rock'n'roll: Melody Maker was the only musicpaper and that thought that rock'n'roll was terrible and that jazz was the only thing worth having around. And occasionally they'd mention Elvis Presley in the back somewhere, rather awk-

wardly because it was fairly obvious that he was doing considerably better than Jelly Roll Morton or whoever it was that they were pushing at the time.

Rock'n'roll and science fiction... comics too?

No, comics were just comics when I was a lad, they were things you grew out of. I still tend to think of comics like that. I'm astonished at the success of comics. [laughs] I made my living writing them, but I never thought anybody would take them seriously.

*Have you ever thought about writing a Horror novel?

A Lord Horror novel, now there's a book to write... No, I don't read Horror books, I don't write them.

*Have you ever thought about it, because the market seems to be coming up on Horror. Like Fantasy's a bigger market than SF.

Maybe, but when I was writing Fantasy, there was *no* Fantasy market. It hasn't exactly swayed my decisions... anyway, I don't like Horror novels.

I suppose it's that sense that people aren't looking over your shoulder, telling you what to do...

You do feel self-conscious. So you read the *Sunday Times* and you're beginning to read other things than SF. You start to read what to you represents some sort of literary arbiter of quality, and gradually you realise that they're not talking about you at all and, like all revolutionary processes, there's a point where you want to be accepted by that society, but you want to be accepted on your own terms. When you're not, you either modify as some people have, or you just say: "Fuck you! I'm going to write what I want to write, I'm going to publish what I want to publish, and I'm going to see to it that people get to read it!"

That's what we did with *New Worlds*. That's how all that came about because there was no one willing to publish what we wrote, so we essentially published it ourselves. Then publishers, being very cowardly people, once they saw it in actual print, said: "Oh well, this is printed, then we can print it again then." And it's amazing how a story in print will sell better than a story in manuscript, even if the story in manuscript is better, it frequently helps if it's in print first.

What you were doing with *New Worlds* in the 60s was against the grain, encouraging people to stretch, to move, to try and do new things with SF. It seems to me that since then, SF has come pretty much back round to where it was before. It might be more sophisticated, but it's still *thoroughly* generic and experimentation is out of the window.

Very little of it about at the moment, that's

for sure.

Do you feel you've achieved things with *New Worlds*, all that effort and money? Or do you feel you were wasting your time?

Well, again it's something that's subjective, and you're dependent on other people's views of that really, to some extent, whether it was successful or not. People seem to think it was worthwhile – certainly a lot of people who wouldn't have otherwise had a certain work published.

I'm quite surprised at how many first stories I ran, which I didn't really think about, and stuff like that... People that started in *New Worlds*, frequently almost by accident – Gene Wolfe is a good example, even though he wasn't a "New Worlds writer", had his first stories published in *New Worlds*. So there was a sort of willingness to recognise individuality, which I think is difficult these days, is much harder these days.

Again, we didn't have a movement... I'm sometimes suspicious of things like "cyberpunk" as a label, because we got labelled "New Wave". We weren't calling ourselves "New Wave." What do you do? Say things like, "Hello, I'm a New Wave writer!" I mean, everybody was writing what they wanted to write, and there was often very little similarity between a lot of those writers.

Ballard and you and Aldiss and Disch...

Yeah.

I was amused at what Bill Gibson said that people talk about it as a movement, but he said it's like a "Chinese festival dragon" – everybody from the outside sees this great big colourful thing coming up the street, but inside all you see are these pieces of paper and wood that you've got to carry along at top speed. That was his experience of being in the Movement, being under the dragon. And I wonder if it's always like that.

Well, certainly, again in terms of disintegration and reformation goes on all the time: *New Worlds* was never a sort of unified movement, or anything close. Nobody was in agreement. It was characterised largely by the hideous quarrels, personal arguments and fights that used to go on amongst all the people, and people used to say "this is an old boy network" – or something – and that was the farthest remove; *every one* was a contentious little bastard.

I remember one evening when somebody wandered in – I can't remember who it was; it was visiting American – and there was Jimmy Ballard and quite a lot of other SF writers and poets, and gradually (this was just an ordinary night in those days) a fierce quarrel, a fist-fighting quarrel developed largely between Ballard and Peter Rodgrave, who were both totally out of their skulls – [laughter] – and totally opposed on every issue. And this poor American had come

over thinking he was going to meet these "Golden People" who were all sort of advancing themes. Instead he met this appalling bunch of drunks full of hideous, personal and completely un-called-for insults. I mean, people were about ready to die over a comma – people took what they were doing seriously.

But what I'm against is when people from time to time say they'd like to see *New Worlds* reform, and it can't be. There's no way that that period can be reclaimed, any more than The Beatles can reform and sort of "make it right" again. It just happened to be a particular period.

The only possible this is that something else would arise out of the woodwork.

Oh quite, yeah. And something will, but I don't think it has yet.

I wonder if it will. I think, even in the 60s, things were that much more unanimous and consensual. I think that things are so scattered now you can have things like cyberpunk and it's already over, it's already gone. I think it's very hard to imagine anywhere in the whole area of writing and publishing that could make an impact on everything. Now you can only make an impact in your particular area. The "New Wave" (as exemplified by *New Worlds* and what happened in America with writers that thought they'd picked it up in America) was seen to be a threat – people like Isaac Asimov were really vicious about it.

Oh, yeah it was seen to be a threat. Fred Pohl

– and I know he's not like that now – he thought it was all terrible and hideous, and should be stopped. He was actually against any encouragement.

***You mentioned earlier SF and rock music... how does that tie in with something like Hawkwind?**

Same thing: Hawkwind appealed to me because they didn't know what the hell they were doing. John Peel had given them a synthesiser (and this was one of those old synthesisers that you're plugging in jacks all over the place) and that was it really. They became an electronic band because they had the electronics; they didn't know what the hell to do with them, but they thought *let's give it a shot*. And so the great early days of Hawkwind were amazing. It was like watching a space ship completely crewed by *crazies* – they didn't know where they were going to take it, but by *God* they were going to take it somewhere! [laughter]

That sort of spirit was very much the New Worlds spirit: we basically run it up the flagpole to see what comes down. We didn't actually give a toss; we didn't have to. We were young enough not to have to, for one thing, and in a relatively privileged period of history. It's not easy for people to take those risks now, it means much more. It's just the political and social atmosphere, whatever it is, and I don't blame people for not doing it, but we were able to do it and did.

Hawkwind had that same... people were always trying to push them up like Pink Floyd and make references to electronic composers and things like that. Hawkwind never went for that kind of bullshit, they

never got sold on their own publicity in the way that lots of people did at that time. So they remained a fairly crappy band, all in all, but at least they remained what they were and were interested in what they were doing.

In fact, a lot of the songs at the time later became thought of as sort of "urban punk" songs; a lot of them were urban songs and much heavier than the standard "hippie" stuff that was around at the time. I mean, "Sonic Attack" is not exactly about roses and flowers and all that sort of stuff. So I liked it; I fell into doing it.

***Why did you go back to writing Elric stories after such a long break?**

I had two ideas which were best suited to Elric books – that's why I went back to doing them. What I tend to do, having a lot of different forms that I write in, if I have a certain kind of idea, I'll write it in whatever series it may fit in, if that's the way it is. Something like *Mother London* isn't any kind of series, so I'll just do it separately... But that's the reason, and also because people will pay me a lot of money for it. I'd be a hypocrite if I said that wasn't a factor – that there's more people that'll ask you for an Elric book than for a Jerry Cornelius book, for instance. There's no one running after me offering £10 million for a Cornelius book, but they'll publish it if I give them an Elric book. Those books still don't sell as well as the generic Fantasies. But basically, I write what I feel like writing. ■

Casablanca, Michael Moorcock's latest collection of short stories is reviewed in this issue of Vector.

continued from page 3

the marketing push that the categorised books have.

If you want quality and imaginative category books, take a look in the "Best of the Year: 1989" article in this issue, or Maureen Porter's run-down on the Arthur C Clarke Award. Many of these are damned good, and worth every penny. Geoff Ryan's *The Child Garden*, for instance, or Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* for another: two books which, perhaps not extending genre boundaries, but certainly distort them.

As for experimentation... that's still alive and kicking long after the demise of *New Worlds*. You've just got to know where to look for it.

In SF EYE 5, Bruce Sterling called it the "Slipstream" – not quite mainstream, not quite SF, which:

... is a contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensual reality. It is fantastic, surreal sometimes, speculates on occasion, but not rigorously so... Instead, this is a kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the late twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility.

And he then goes on to list authors of such fiction: Aldiss, Ballard, Banks, Jonathan

Carroll, Crowley, Erickson, Gunter Grass, Lessing, Marquez, Moorcock, Priest, Pynchon, Updike, Vonnegut, Don Webb... among many others. It may not be recognisably SF, but it's there in full view – it's just that the above authors are ignoring such notions as "genre boundaries", and are able to push right past them.

Don Webb is a good case. His *Uncle Ovid's Exercise Book* is a collection of 97 short-stories and vignettes, each one a "Metamorphosis" from one state to another, in one form or another. It's easy to get lost in this book, in the sheer power of his imagery, in the magic of his words. He blends Horror and Fantasy and SF into something totally unique, totally bewildering, totally breathtaking. One of the most valued books in my collection, and an example of experimentation with the SF form at its best.

Also in SF EYE 5, John Shirley shows us what he calls the "Science Fiction Underground" – another enclave for experimentation and genre-breaking fiction. Here he mentions the English magazine *Back Brain* *Recluse* and the American magazines *Ice River*, *Blue Light Red Light*, and (reckoned by some to be perhaps the best of the lot) *New Pathways*.

This latter has published fiction by Paul di Filippo, John Shirley himself, Don Webb,

Misha, and Brian Aldiss among many others. The Aldiss stories in issue 14 are some of the best I've read by him, and the Don Webb stories are... well, written by Don Webb! A magazine that makes *Interzone* look positively conservative.

Shirley also mentions Misha's collection of short stories, *Prayers of Steel*: a small press publication with crazed and somewhat maniacal illustrations from Ferret which perfectly complement the prose pieces. The stories themselves are mean, tightly written, true post-cyberpunk stuff, hard-edged and cold and metallic and dangerous... Her first novel, *Red Spider White Web* (see the advertisement on page 25 of this issue), is published by Morrigan Publications – which is yet another host for fiction which ain't scared to bite and kick and scream and fuck and howl against the boundaries put up in front of it.

And that's just skimming the surface. There are many more besides the above...

But enough of this "Slipstream" and "Science Fiction Underground". They aren't necessary, and can only restrict authors' movements. What matters is that there are writers who are daring to ignore genre conventions imposed by publishers and fans and critics alike, and are producing fiction which is rare and dangerous and different. ■

The Arthur C Clarke Award

Maureen Porter, one of the judges for the Arthur C Clarke Award, gives us here a run-down on how they came to the decision of picking the winner for 1989:

*Geoff Ryman's **The Child Garden***

The judges for the 1989 Arthur C Clarke Award – Mary Gentle and Maxim Jakubowski on behalf of the Science Fiction Foundation and David V Barrett and myself on behalf of the British Science Fiction Association – arrived at a shortlist of seven books with a surprising degree of ease. However, it soon became clear that choosing a winner would be much more of a problem. 1989, whilst maintaining a consistent high standard of fiction, did not produce many books which immediately stood out from the crowd, and this consistency was reflected in the shortlist and in the difficulties experienced by the judges in finally reaching a firm decision.

Three books fell away in the first round of discussion, three good books but somehow lacking that extra sparkle an award-winning novel requires. Let's take a look at them, in alphabetical order of author to avoid any misleading judgements. Paul Park's *Soldier's of Paradise* was, I know, considered by many to be an unexpected inclusion. It is a strange book, very uneven in places, but at its best I found it powerful reading. A cursory glance suggests that it is just another generic Fantasy, but whilst the cover and the series subtitle, and indeed some of the plotting, might confirm this, there is much to commend in this story of a theocracy, riddled with corruption, battling the Antinomials, the so-called barbarians. Just who is the more barbaric is difficult to decide and I was forcibly reminded of the more excessive of the Egyptian pharaonic exploits. Where this novel falls down is in the writing which is extraordinarily flaccid at times, a fault made more obvious by the tightness of other sections. There are moments when we are wandering in familiar Fantasy-quest territory, and then other moments, such as the awakening of Thanakar Starbridge's mother and her attack on her servants, when one knows one is seeing a writer who will go far. I'm looking forward to the second volume.

Mike Resnick's *Ivory* is altogether more cheerful. Again, I have heard criticism that this had no place on a shortlist, particularly as it has been suggested that *Ivory* is a really a series of short stories linked together with an inept framing device. This is an unfair conclusion and I disagree with it strongly. *Ivory* may not be high literary art, but it is a model of good SF adventure. The framing device is the commission offered to Duncan Rojas, a researcher, to locate the tusks of the Kilimanjaro Elephant. The person offering the commission is Bukoba Mandaka, the last

of the Maasai. As Rojas tracks the tusks through the centuries, we are given a series of vignettes which tell the history of the tusks. I suppose they might exist as short stories but only in the most shaky fashion. The weakest strands of the story are undoubtedly where one is privy to the innermost thoughts of the Kilimanjaro Elephant himself, a pointless inclusion, and Rojas' meetings with Mandaka, the last of the Maasai. For some reason, I find it impossible to believe in Mandaka and the survival of the Maasai over so many generations; the most laughable scene is surely that in which Rojas visits Mandaka's apartment, only to discover a mock-up of a Maasai compound. Still, as a science fiction detective story, it is well-handled, and it is a fine adventure story.

I liked David Zindell's *Neverness* when I first read it, and indeed wrote an ecstatic review to that effect. In this case however, distance does not lend enchantment and my second reading has obliged me to alter my opinion quite radically. I still think that parts of it are a good book, particularly the first sequence, dealing with Mallory Ringess' journey to discover the nature of the Solid State Entity, and I now feel that it would have been better if Zindell had concentrated on this. In this section of the novel, he showed an extraordinary ability to communicate the beauty of mathematics. As I read it, I felt that some vital piece of information had been vouchsafed which finally broke through the barrier that O-level maths had failed to breach. Alas, this feeling tends to obscure the fact that the second and third parts of the novel are extremely incoherent whilst studded with attractive vignettes. *Neverness* itself is a splendid creation but it's sacrificed to anthropological meanderings which, whilst highly decorative, add nothing to the meat of the novel.

Which brings us to the final four novels. The judges could not, despite much discussion, separate Lisa Goldstein's *A Mask for the General* and Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road*. Two such different novels, and both of them very fine, one a model of restraint, the other a fantastic baroque flourish. I very much admired Lisa Goldstein's *The Dream Years*; there was an elusive quality to the prose which set it apart, a delicacy, a limpidity. This is also apparent in *A Mask for the General*, a novel exploring the events leading to the setting in motion of a revolution in a totalitarian state which owes a certain amount to Orwell's 1984. The eponymous General, however,

does not appear until the closing stages of the novel and instead, the action centres around Layla the mask-maker and her acolyte Mary, and the tribes, an alternative culture which exists on the fringes of society. In many respects, though, I think Goldstein threw her net a little too wide, drawing in so many disparate elements. The final effect is too vague, too unfocused to be entirely satisfying, a literary example of Nouvelle Cuisine.

In which case McDonald's *Desolation Road* is a five course feast, rich and almost indigestible. In many respects it is classic SF, set on Mars, that most hoary of clichés and not a little reminiscent of Bradbury's *The Silver Locusts* in construction. And yet McDonald brings a freshness to the idea as well as introducing some highly interesting characters as he chronicles the rise and fall of a small town, accidentally founded in the middle of nowhere by the extraordinary Dr Alimantando, traveller in his own homemade time machine, a little breathless in places, and maybe embracing too grand a vision, this is a boldly-drawn and ambitious book which almost succeeds, but not quite, and that is what made the difference in this instance.

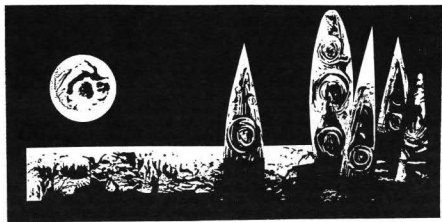
So, we are left with Jonathan Carroll's *A Child Across the Sky* and Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*, again two very different novels. There was a great deal of debate as to whether Carroll's novel is even science fiction at all. I can't answer that question except to say that I'm certain of its right to be on the shortlist. As I said last year, I'm an advocate of the notion of speculative fiction, and I suspect that Jonathan Carroll's work being regarded as SF says something about the way in which the definition of the genre is shifting and broadening. It's not science but it is most definitely speculative, and how. There is nothing mainstream about a novel in which one of the major characters is an eight year old girl who is actually an angel and also pregnant by one of the other major characters, who happens to be an adult woman. The novel is in its most basic form a quest, but to leave it at that would be far too simplistic. It's an exploration of the forces, for good or bad, which drive human beings and the way in which we, as humans, relate to ourselves, each other and the world around us. I fear that readers with more traditional tastes will reject this out of hand, but I would urge you not to.

It was difficult to make a choice between the two novels, but in the end, we chose

continued on page 24

Book Reviews

Edited by Paul Kincaid



Artwork by Kevin A Cullen

Azazel

Isaac Asimov
Doubleday, 1989, 221pp, £10.95

Asimov's style is designed to persuade the reader how cuddly he and his circle really are. The editor of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, to whom this collection is dedicated is, of course, "sweet". Later on, "all the editors I have ever met are nice people". But the Good Doctor is too wily a bird to allow critics to stand and scoff. The narrator of these 18 stories is too close to Dr A. himself, and when we read of the protagonist's explanation of his assumption that the narrator's book has had a rotten review – "I just asked myself what kind of review a book of yours could possibly get" – we're entitled a smile of admiration at this mixture of self-deprecation and self-justification.

The stories are all variants on deals with the devil and how they go wrong, a light and frothy mixture of modern urban Jewish PG Wodehouse folk-tale given a science fantasy gloss. The narrator's friend George, an urbane freeloader, knows how to conjure up a 2cm tall demon (or extra-terrestrial: the slightly complex publishing history of these tales explains this ambiguity) who can transform reality. Each story has George doing a "favour" for a friend: for example, an advertising copywriter wants to be a novelist. Scenting huge royalties, George persuades Azazel to re-route several mental circuits so that Gottleib can write better – but what happens is that he writes better ads, makes much more money, and fame (and George's share of his earnings from fiction) can go whistle.

Many of these stories involve sex and romance presented in that particularly arch, masculine-Barbara-Cartland tone Asimov

sometimes employs in his newer Foundation novels. Here, however, it doesn't matter. It merely underlines the artificiality of the stories, which have been effectively camped up anyway by George's ingenious remarks about his selflessness and generosity (as others pay the bill) and his half-malicious jibes about the narrator's mutton-chop whiskers and awful books. Azazel too makes acerbic comments about mankind as he is called by George at increasingly inopportune moments to perform pointless tasks.

"Overblown and 'un-Asimovian'" (the author's words) these stories may be, but they are much more enjoyable than Asimov's recent longer fiction. In fact, are they "un-Asimovian"? The formal conventionality, in-jokiness and pose of humble conceit which irritate many readers are all present, but here they're in their right places, giving colour and individuality to a collection of ingenious tales. Don't apologise, sir! We love you really.

Andy Sawyer

Canal Dreams

Iain Banks
Macmillan, 1989, 198pp, £12.95

Banks' first novel, *The Wasp Factory* used shocking imagery to look at one aspect of war and the military establishment; in this latest novel his tone is much softer, but it is still a hard hitting piece of fiction.

This is yet another new area for Banks: almost a straight mainstream novel. In one sense it completes a triptych with Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime*, and Lewis Shiner's *Deserted Cities Of The Heart*; considering the near-future of Central America with reference to US military

involvement there. Banks has been the most successful of the three, though, it must be said, that is due to the higher ambitions of the other two.

Hisako Onoda, perhaps the most famous cellist of her time, is trapped in the Panama Canal by fighting over the proposed return of the Zone to its original owners in 2000. Banks has always been praised for his depth of characterisation, and Hisako is no exception. By skillful use of past, recent and present timelines he draws a picture of a complete woman, yet, we continue to be surprised as incidents from her youth are sketched in. Amid the events on board the ships we learn of the violence in Hisakos past, through which we learn about the violence within all of us. If this woman, whose hands produce beautiful music, can fight and kill, then what of the rest of us? And if she, with all her insecurity can love and be loved, then so may the rest of us.

In this book Banks is never gratuitous, always controlled. It is precisely the right length (his shortest since *The Wasp Factory*) and his locations are characters in themselves, playing their part as required. It is this which makes *Canal Dreams* so strong, his most effective writing yet.

Such a pity then, that so strong, passionate and sensitive a book has been printed on thin paper with such a bland jacket. One wonders if MacMillan deserve Iain Banks.

Kev McVeigh

War of the Sky Lords

John Brosnan
Gollancz, 1989, 252pp, £12.95

The second book of a series, *War of the Sky Lords* does not suffer by having the core of the first book re-iterated. The essential information is, actually, summed up succinctly on the inside of the dust jacket. Thus this book can be treated as a separate entity with no fore-knowledge (and though the series will be continued it is not left so open-ended as to leave the reader feeling cheated).

The story is set on an Earth that has been ravaged by wars fought by means of gene-altered plants and animals. This has left large areas that are inimical to humans, monsters roaming both land and sea and a division of humanity between those eking out a living on the land and the "Sky People" – who voyage in gigantic airships. Within the airships society has degenerated to a feudal level, the inhabitants ranging from Lords to slaves, all dependent on the ancient (and also degenerating) equipment. Oddly this equipment seems technical rather than bio-engineered.

Two factions continue from the first book – the Sky Lords who have gathered to fight Jan Dorvin and Jan, who has obtained a pristine airship. A third element is introduced, Ryn (or Robin), a "throwback" human brought up in a fortress under the sea off Antarctica – the fortress being controlled by a computer subservient to the "Eloi" – originally human but now an immortal race

of sexless, emotionless inwardly looking beings.

After being introduced to Ryn and the Elois, Ryn escapes from the Elois and joins the Sky Lords (who have been looking for the fabled fortress). With Ryn and his "toy" (a sketchily described "super-science" submarine/flying machine) the Sky Lords feel they can vanquish Jan Dorvin – so they return to South America to find her. It is little surprise that Ryn dupes the Sky Lords and throws in with Jan. Unfortunately Jan is losing control of her ship, partly to an insane biocomputer and partly to a resurrected enemy, Milo, who takes over her (and his) son. A one-sided battle later sees virtually all of the protagonists, their airships destroyed, gathering in one "safe" area in a sea of blight – fighting each other and the blight. We leave the book with Ryn and Jan heading south, the Sky Lords marooned in the blight and Milo a helpless prisoner of the insane computer.

An entertaining book that doesn't push the imagination too far with its scenario or its characterisation.

Keith Freeman

Prentice Alvin

Orson Scott Card

Legend, 1989, 342pp, £12.95, £6.95pb

It's a moot point: to what extent do you have to sympathise with a writer's world view to appreciate his or her fiction? More particularly, can Fantasy written from an explicitly Christian viewpoint be appreciated by us pagans?

It is also about the only interesting point raised by this, the third in the Alvin Maker cycle. I suspect that when I embarked on reviewing the first book I was tempted into over-praise by the fact that it was a) well written b) different and c) Fantasy, three qualities that seldom seem to co-exist.

I don't believe Gene Wolfe's Catholicism gets in the way of *The Book of the New Sun*. However, I have known at least one child put off CS Lewis' *Narnia* chronicles by the explicitly Christian allegory. Card is a Mormon; his Christianity certainly of an old-fashioned nature.

The plot of *Prentice Alvin* is negligible and makeshift – Card has taken to using Alvin's magical talents as a *deus ex machina* to help it along, but broadly concerns the escape and subsequent childhood of Arthur Stuart, born into slavery in the south of the author's alternative United States. Alvin is now in his teens, and an insufferable little prig he has become too. Most adolescent boys have unspeakable personal habits and minds like sewers, Alvin is clean in word and deed. The whole frontier world depicted is a little too good to be true. Upchuck time comes with passages like:

Perhaps all that some men need from a woman is for her to be loving and wise and careful, like a field of flowers where he can play the butterfly, drawing sweetness from her blossoms.

Not only does all this sweetness and light

weaken an already strained plot, but on a strict theological level, where there is no temptation there can be no sin, and where no sin, no good. Alvin, despite his occasional temptations to misuse his talents, is a robot.

Parts of the book remain well-written, and the series continues to be different from anything else on the market, if the books themselves begin to seem indistinguishable. Following the line charting the decline from the first to the third, suggests that the sixth will be quite unreadable.

Martin Waller

Tales from Planet Earth

Arthur C Clarke

Legend, 1989, 313pp, £12.95

The 16 stories in this collection, from 1949 to 1987, were nearly all new to me and even the oldest have not "dated" as much as one would expect. The majority have an introduction by the author which I found best to read *after* the story – facets are then revealed which add to ones enjoyment.

Clarke has often been criticised as a "hard SF ideas man" whose characters lacked even the substance of paper. I don't entirely agree with this judgement, but I can see how the short story format is therefore considered his strongest idiom. It was surprising and pleasing to find a few of the stories – "Hate", "The Other Tiger" and "The Parasite" for example – to be in much darker vein than one normally associates with Clarke. This adds considerably to the books appeal, as do the illustrations, unusual today, which are used in the longer stories and act as breaks between stories.

I can do no more than strongly recommend this book not only to Clarke's many fans but also to everyone who wants a collection of entertaining and thought-provoking tales.

Keith Freeman

Rama II

Arthur C Clarke & Gentry Lee

Gollancz, 1989, 377pp, £12.95

Times have changed. 16 years ago Clarke told the tale of a mysterious galaxy-crossing craft that passed through our solar system, briefly explored by an accidental group of ordinary professional space-going types.

Rendezvous with Rama is lean, clean, a whiff and glimpse of interstellar vastness, a classic vision. *Rama II* is the story of a second crafts visit 70 years on, met by a high-prestige group of highly trained astronauts and media-representatives. And instead of continuing on its mysterious alien business, it changes course and heads for Earth! I was shocked!

Comparison with its distinguished forebear reveals this work for what it is: pure wish-fulfillment, the purging of a disturbing emotion, the reduction of the vastness of space and time to a problem with bad guys. One cannot see the artifact for the personalities hustling, posturing, scheming, in front of it. Granted, that might be exactly how it

would be. When new and wonderful things develop they seem to have no substance beyond their relevance to the characters' pursuit of self-fulfillment and happiness. Rama II, the artifact, ends up feeling like a high-tech suburban house whose gadgets may be hard to figure out but, ultimately, were designed especially for us. Maybe that's how the Big Technologists at NASA (Gentry Lee is one) view the universe. As a counter-myth to the "probable hostility of anything not American/human" which informs the major decisions made about Rama by the powers-that-be, I personally don't find it convincing.

Strangely the first half of the book, concerned with political and personal complications, which had me hoping they would all come to sticky ends, is the most satisfying. The artifact, its behaviour and implications, and the way the characters respond to it is not handled with any conviction. Mr Lee would, I think, do better to stick to near-future thrillers.

Cecil Nurse

Thief of Dreams

Adrian Cole

Unwin, 1989, 366pp, £6.99

It's me. It must be me.

Perhaps it's been an off-week for me.

I mean, there is so much in this book. For example there are the gliderboats; mechanical pterodactyls big enough to carry passengers, their guidance systems implanted with the remains of living intellects – themselves directed by thought-transference from the humanoid pilots. And quite right too; everyone knows that machines have personality – that's why it jars when a named ship is referred to as "it". Then there is the whole planet of Innasmorn, herself, where every rock, wave and windy blast has his or her own living deity within – all subject to their own elemental rulers whose violent hatreds and loves are manifested in storm and calm according to their prejudices and favouritism... which is how many historical religions saw the universe.

There are the Openers, spiritualist mediums whose powers enable them to transfer whole armies from one aetheral realm to another, and from one physical world to another. There is Jubia, a thief so expert that he can steal your sleeping dreams.

That is one of the names I can remember. I think that he and his companions are members of humankind, whose discredited culture is split into various rival factions. A previous book (which I have not read) describes humankind's defeat at the hands of the alien Csendok, themselves now trying to hunt down the last human survivors.

But that is as much as I can tell you about the story. For most of the time I was lost, unable to tell who was alien and who was human, who were the good guys and who were the baddies, what was living and what was inanimate. Perhaps that itself is a parallel picture of our own world today.

But most of the time I wished I had illustrations of the characters or had the book

read aloud to me with different actors of each character. Or perhaps the whole *Star Requiem* saga would best be understood if played as a role-playing game.

But one phrase coined by Adrian Cole will always stay with me: "The Supreme Sanguinary" – what a marvellous way of describing... The Bloody Boss.

Martin Brice

Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review Annual 1988

Robert A Collins & Robert Latham (Eds)
Meckler 1989, 486pp, £37.00

The main body of this book, over 370 pages, consists of reviews of SF, Fantasy and Horror books, largely novels, published in 1987, mainly in the States. With about 600 reviews, by over 100 reviewers, there is a great deal of inconsistency in style, approach, depth of criticism, and assessment of quality.

Some of the reviews are excellent; others seem to miss the point completely. The reviewer says of Norman Spinrad's *Little Heroes*: "the narrative is often turgid and repetitive, while the language and sexual content are exceedingly raunchy (some will say obscene)." And of Tom Holt's *Expecting Someone Taller*: "This very British fantasy is a light, slightly cynical, mild satire – almost too mild too notice." The reviewers of both books, and of many others, seem unable to tell when a book is, *inter alia*, quite simply great fun. Too many reviewers, too little editorial direction.

The overview articles are, in the main, somewhat more informative and cohesive. There is a very interesting interview/article on "the writer of the year" Orson Scott Card, which explores the effects of his Mormon beliefs on his work. This is followed by articles on the years Fantasy, Horror, Science Fiction, and Research and Criticism. But again, the quality is inconsistent. Charles de Lint's *Fantasy survey* is little more than a list of titles strung together: quantity rather than quality, with very superficial analysis. Michael A Morrison and Michael M Levy are far more selective and consequently far more informative on, respectively, Horror and SF. Neil Barron's "critical survey of fantastic literature and film scholarship in 1987" doesn't restrict itself strictly to that year, but usefully puts new books in a wider context. I was disappointed to find only one brief reference, in a list, to *Foundation*, and none to *Vector*, *Australian SF Review* or several other critical journals. Roger Robinson's *Who's Hugh?* is stupidly dismissed as "of little interest to anyone save a few devoted bibliographers".

As well as the inconsistencies and dodgy judgement, there are errors. The book has been very badly proofread; we come across Gary Killworth, Hauford Pierce and Robert Schekley, and characters' names have variant spellings within a review. The Arthur C Clarke Award is "chosen by an international panel"; the "British SF Association Awards" are "chosen by the members of Becon,

the British National SF Convention". Wrong in both cases. A reference book cannot afford to be sloppy in either proofreading or fact; if it is seen to be unreliable in the areas one knows, it becomes worthless in the areas one does not know. Interesting to browse through, even a fair overview of the years (largely US) output, but of no value as a reference work.

David V Barrett

Through the Nightsea Wall

Otto Coontz
Methuen, 1989, 225p, £8.95

Truckers

Terry Pratchett
Doubleday, 1989, 190pp, £7.95

Otto Coontz is fast developing a reputation as a writer of teenage fantasy novels. *Through the Nightsea Wall* reveals the connection between worlds in the remote Ozark mountains of Arkansas. The story is centred around Sarah, who is dying of leukemia and trying to cope with her own fear and the pain her fate will bring to her family: the "nightsea wall" can easily be seen as a metaphor for death. The story, in fact, possesses the kind of mystical imagery reminiscent of the SF novels of Madeleine L'Engle. A slightly clumsy pattern to the shifts of viewpoint don't help clarify a richness in the description of Ausable Centre and the Sireniens and coelenterate-like briliade whose larvae cause strange and not altogether inimical developments in their hosts. This is a book which, although readable, baffles a reader looking for a straightforward moral signpost. Fleeting glimpses of a "blight" from "The Shadowlands", a "black and oozing slime" suggest more fundamental conflicts to come in the next two volumes of the "Ausable Odyssey".

Truckers is aimed at the same age-group, but will appeal more to those who prefer moral conflict clothed in humour. In the beginning, Arnold Bros (est. 1905) created the Store... "And into the Store came the Nomes, that it would be their Place, for Ever and Ever." But what is the meaning of "Closing Down sale"? It looks as though the nomes will have to find a new universe pretty sharpish. How can creatures four inches high and as co-operative as – as beings which are not very co-operative* commander a truck and escape? It's down to Maskin, one of the last nomes to come in from the Outside (which most of the Store-dwellers don't believe exists anyway) to find a way.

Discworld fans will lap up *Truckers*, which contains similar verbal slapstick and pratfalls honed even sharper for a younger readership (I don't think I've ever come across critical path analysis in a childrens book before...) We may recognise some of the characters under other names (particularly cantankerous old Granny Morkie) but the targeted readers may rather remember Mary Norton's "Borrowers" books, also about tiny humanoids living in the nooks and crannies of human households. Pratchett's

nomes, however, have a neat science-fictional history (even though they don't actually *know* it yet) and the ending promises a pretty audacious sequel. Pratchett's humour, relying on the reader seeing the larger pattern the characters miss in favour of misunderstandings and perfectly constructed illogic, is ideally suited for children. Adults too, for that matter.

[That is the kind of joke Terry Pratchett inserts in *Truckers*. His however, are much better.]

Andy Sawyer

Zaragoz

Brian Craig
GW, 1989, 245pp, £4.99

Wolf Riders

David Pringle (Ed)
GW, 1989, 236pp, £4.99

These two volumes are part of a new publishing initiative by *Games Workshop*, the fantasy games people. They are primarily aimed at the games playing public, but the involvement of David Pringle as series editor indicates that they hope to attract readers from outside this particular fraternity. So, are they of interest to BSFA members? *Wolfriders* is a collection of stories set in a traditional fantasy world of swords and sorcery, dwarves and dragons. They are, as is usually the case with such collections, uneven in quality, but enough are of interest to make the volume worth a look. I particularly like Sandy Mitchell's "The Tilted Rat", a clever reworking of the *The Maltese Falcon* that was entertaining and should have been longer. Brian Craig's "The Phantom of Yrenny" and Jack Yeovil's "No Gold in the Grey Mountains" are also well-written, and entertaining. This volume, at least in time, was worth reading.

Brian Craig's novel, *Zaragoz*, is set in a society very similar to the Jacobean notion of Spain and Italy in the 17th century, with magic replacing gunpowder. The itinerant musician and storyteller, Orfeo, finds himself enmeshed in the murderous intrigues and conspiracies that beset the degenerate ruling class of *Zaragoz*. A melodrama of swordplay, treachery, wizards and demons, it is competently written and has its moments, but overall I found it uninspiring and pedestrian.

Neither volume has made me inclined to go out of my way to read any of the others.

John Newinger

The Father-Thing

Philip K Dick
Gollancz, 1989, 376pp, £13.95

This is volume three of the collected stories of Philip K. Dick and includes the 23 stories he wrote between spring 1953 and spring 1954. It is this book which shows how the Dick universe first appeared. In his introduction, John Brunner writes that Dick's early stories had many echoes of Henry Kuttner, but they must, I think, have

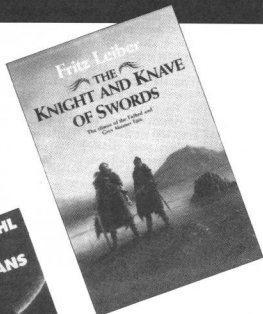
DISCOVER

the new worlds

Fritz Leiber
The Knight and Knave of Swords

The final volume of one of the most acclaimed contemporary heroic fantasy series, featuring the climax of the Fafhrd and Grey Mouser Epic. It also includes a novella, a novelette and a short story.

£12.95 trade paperback £7.95

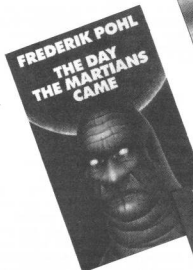


Frederik Pohl
The Day the Martians Came

The day the Martians came to earth, a world ruled by hype was forced to make some searching – and hilarious – self-discoveries.

'One of SF's all-time masters of satirical extrapolation.'

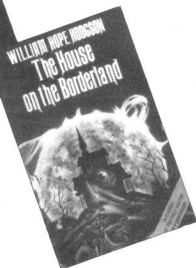
Publishers Weekly
paperback £3.50



William Hope Hodgson
The House on the Borderland

A true classic of dark fantasy that blends haunting visions of far-future cataclysm with the story of one man's battle against monsters from the Pit. *'Something almost unique ... a classic.'* H. P. Lovecraft

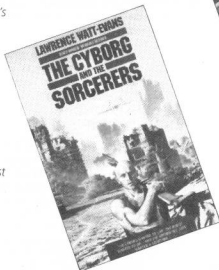
paperback £3.50



Lawrence Watt-Evans
The Cyborg and the Sorcerers

The cyborg wants to live, the robot wants to die – and the apprentice just wants a sorcerer – in a world where hope is no longer allowed to exist.

paperback £2.99



Grafton Books
Widening Your Horizons

Out in
April

GRAFTON BOOKS

disappeared in the last volume.

Second *Variety*, the previous volume, had stories about robots emulating humans, but it did not have a metaphysical of the struggle between human and android. It had stories about illusion but it did not have stories which dealt with the questions of reality. *The Father-Thing* has stories that do have those implications. At times it seems he has found the underlying philosophy but not realised how to use it: the title story, for instance, is a horror story, even though a synopsis wouldn't make it clear how it differed from one of his later treatments of illusion and reality.

Dick was a radical writer, and these stories cover the threat of American life in the age of McCarthy - "Foster, You're Dead" is a horrible satire on the American way of paying for war, and "Tony and the Beetles" is a critique of colonialism years before Vietnam. "The Chromium Fence" is about party sectarianism used to sell the green revolution in washing powders. As long ago as 1954, Dick could see the ecological struggle was not just about the planet but about party politics. He was remarkably prescient - he knew what the implications of the American way and policy would be, and he showed individuals what the consequences would be for them. Like all good science fiction writers he was there first.

Written for the magazines (and all published) in the early fifties, these stories are also remarkably easy reading: I read this collection in just one sitting. They also deal with more than we commonly associate with Dick.

LJ Hurst

Prince of the Blood

Raymond E Feist

Grafton, 1989, 315pp, £12.95, £7.95 pb

In this sequel to the Riftwar saga, royal factions in Kesh commit treason and murder as steps towards the throne. They also plan to murder two princes, Borric and Erland of neighbouring Krondor, for reasons never made clear, though there are enough loose ends to herald sequels. Borric is kidnapped by slavers and after a telepathic companion fails to locate him with her mind, Feist never satisfactorily explains why she doesn't then ascertain his whereabouts through the minds of his assailants, whose "thought patterns" she picks up.

Borric escapes, fighting his way back to his brother's side, picking up several stock characters along the way to the farcical climax. In this the principal traitor learns of his fate, which he is to spend the night being reminded of at every quarter hour. The following morning he is to be stripped naked, whipped by the masses, burned on the buttocks with hot coals, hung in a cage to suffer from exposure, tormented by passers-by with bamboo sticks, revived with vinegar water and salted bread, lashed and burned again, have his genitals cut off, and be thrown into a marsh where the resident crocodiles will eat him alive. It is significant the protagonists do not react in any way to

this sadly ridiculous news, which totally destroyed what ever suspension of disbelief I'd had.

Belief in the world of this novel is almost impossible when there is only a perfunctory attempt at description and characterisation, leading to comments like, "he pierced [sic] together hints and tantalising bits of this and that" (p. 163) and the cynical inventions of a disabled child and Indian-type beggar-boy which stereotypes reflect the author's antipathy for honest depictions.

Feist lacks a sympathetic ear for names, clichés are used as stepping stones from the first chapter to the last and the style is leaden and stodgy. The novel is almost devoid of imagery; sex is portrayed in terms of juvenile, masturbatory fantasies; and intrigue, politics and political relations have as much relevance to reality as Danglemouse has to the cause of the bubonic plague.

Meant as nothing more than a juvenile adventure, this piece of omniumbonum fiction could have been written by any number of Fantasy writers. If you can swallow the idea of an Empress personally guarded by 10,000 soldiers who still can't do their jobs, the sound of vacuum should impress as much.

Terry Broome

The Last Guardian

David Gemmell

Legend, 1989, 279pp, 11.95, £5.95 pb

It is the 24th century. Jon Shannow, the Jerusalem Man, rides into Pilgrim Valley and encounters the widow Beth McAdam, who is seeking to settle there with her children; a strangely-driven individual, the Parson; and a young gunfighter, Clem Steiner, who wants to beat the Jerusalem Man to the draw. 3,000 years earlier in Atlantis, the shipbuilder Nu Khasisatra has visions of an impending catastrophe and tries to warn the king. Condemned as a traitor, he escapes to the 24th century using a Sipsrassi stone, arriving guess where? Back in Atlantis, the king and his beautiful mistress Sharazad have opened up portals to the future and to another world. Thus the story is set for an apocalyptic climax that ties up various biblical and other ancient traditions.

Being the fourth (and probably last) book in the Sipsrassi series, the earlier chapters recapitulate the important threads of the story; necessary for readers like myself who have not read the previous volumes, but possible tedious for those who have. And I could not ignore the nagging suspicion that some of the retelling merely served as padding. But the story moves fairly briskly, the stock characters do what has to be done.

If not for the magical Sipsrassi stones, this would be an ordinary post-holocaust SF novel. Had it not been set in the future it would have been an ordinary Western. The combination of the different genres does, however, work surprisingly well. And the story is strong enough for the book to stand alone.

The characters are stock, but not purely functional, and there is a strong sense of

place. The climax, which pulls together many disparate myths, proved to be rather disappointing, but I quite enjoyed this well-crafted Fantasy. However, I did not feel the urge to go back and read the earlier ones.

Valerie Housden

Reach

Edward Gibson

Macdonald, 1989, 328pp, £12.95

Astronauts really are the boring fighter jocks portrayed in *The Right Stuff*. Edward Gibson was a crew member on Apollo 12 and on the longest US space mission yet, Skylab 3. His novel about a deep space mission of the 2030s oozes authenticity, and that makes it downright dull.

This is a pity, because buried inside all the mind-numbing detail about training for the mission, coping with the press (evil Luddites all), and saying goodbye to the little woman back home (no sign of any illicit unions here, mind; strictly monogamous unions blessed by the Church, just the public image NASA is happy to see portrayed) there is a halfway decent novella, maybe even a novelle, struggling to get out.

The buried story concerns a mini black hole passing the Solar System just beyond the outermost planets, which is somehow (I never did find out how) used by an alien intelligence to gain a mental toehold in our neck of the woods. It hoovers the minds (such as they are) of astronauts sent to investigate the hole, absorbing their personalities (?) and leaving the husks behind. So far so good - except that this is, in essence, it. A second team of mixed sex but chaste heroes, representing the "World Space Federation" (we know it isn't NASA because one of the six astronauts is a Russian called Boris) goes to find out what happened. Three of them get their brains hoovered too, but three are saved because the heroic commander of the mission just happens to have a more resistant personality than your average guy - no doubt a result of his mind-numbing obsession with being a chasty hero fighter jock, enough to give any sophisticated intelligence mental indigestion.

The author misses the opportunity to develop the alien intelligence into something interesting. He bores us with a primary school description of black holes. He steals the idea of inter (or intra) universe communication from *The Gods Themselves*. And he doesn't understand gravity as well as Larry Niven did when he wrote "Neutron Star". One to avoid, unless you are twelve years old and obsessed with the idea of becoming a chasty, fighter jock astronaut. If so, read it to find out what you are letting yourself in for, then get a proper job when you grow up.

John Gribbin

Bill the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Robot Slaves

Harry Harrison

Gollancz, 1989, 236pp, £11.95

With his tongue planted firmly in his cheek,

**COMING IN
APRIL 1990**



**THE NEW FORCE
IN SCIENCE FICTION,
FANTASY AND HORROR**

**WATCH OUT FOR
DARK VOICES : THE BEST FROM
THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES**

featuring
THE WORLD'S MASTERS OF HORROR

ROBERT AICKMAN · BRIAN ALDISS · CLIVE BARKER
ROBERT BLOCH · RAY BRADBURY · RAMSEY CAMPBELL
DAVID CASE · BASIL COPPER · DAVID CRONENBERG
STANLEY ELLIN · DENNIS ETCHISON · STEPHEN GALLAGHER
CHARLES L. GRANT · HARRY HARRISON · JAMES HERBERT
ROBERT HOLDSTOCK · SHAUN HUTSON · STEPHEN KING
GEORGE LANGELAAN · JOHN LENNON
GRAHAM MASTERTON · ROBERT R. McCAMMON
IAN McEWAN · ALAN RYAN · PETER STRAUB · F. PAUL WILSON

and the *Oxford Book of Weak Jokes* at his side, Harry Harrison has revived Bill, the Galactic Hero, to boldly go where SF has so often been before. *Planet of Robot Slaves* is deliberate parody which manages to remain consistently light-hearted throughout but only rarely rises to be genuinely funny.

There's little point in summarising the plot since it's totally irrelevant anyway. Basically, the eponymous trooper Bill is stranded on an alien planet together with an unlikely rabble of associates and sundry hangers-on. They fight their way more or less randomly across the planet through a series of equally unlikely adventures.

Along the way Harrison takes the opportunity to take sideswipes at a number of SF writers and styles. There are set pieces in the style of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Anne McCaffrey and (I think) Robert Heinlein. A spoof cyberpunk passage is particularly funny. The short, sharp sentences of cyberpunk lend themselves to the sort of quick-fire humour that shows Harrison at his best. It even made me laugh out loud on the train, which is no mean feat considering the mood BR normally leaves me in.

Mostly, though, the book is cunningly written in the style of Harry Harrison. This is fine as long as you enjoy his gently rollicking humour. It's a kind of verbal slapstick.

I was hoping for something more wicked, more daring. After all, SF is a pretty easy target for parody. It's a genre that sets itself up as larger, more extreme, than everyday life. There's plenty of raw material for Harrison to get his teeth into. As it is, he takes very few risks. It really is just clean, good old fashioned fun.

If you like your humour safe and about as subtle as a brick through a plate glass window then you'll enjoy *Planet of Robot Slaves*. If, like me, you prefer more subtlety you'll have to search harder for the occasional good nugget.

Neale Vickery

Glitterspike Hall

Mike Jefferies
Fontana, 1989, 413pp, £6.99

This is in many ways an awkward book to review. It's not very well written, yet it has a simple honesty trying to burst out – almost as if, with some judicious (and heavy) editing, it could be boiled down to a half-way decent novella.

Glitterspike Hall is intended to be the first of a Fantasy series, and at first glance

appears to be some sort of sub-Mervyn Peake Gormenghast gothic tale. The cover artwork and interior decorations (all expertly drafted by the author) lend credence to this view – even the opening chapter set in the City of Gor (I kid you not!) appears determined to plunge us into this clone of Titus Groan. Miresnare, Lord of the Glitterspike, has no son and heir – merely countless daughters. The Lords of the surrounding marshes are given the chance once a year to joust for the hand of the eldest daughter, and her valuable dowry of all the lands and, most importantly, The Glitterspike, a protected monument "ice-cold to the touch, its precious gemstones and veins of molten silver ghosting secret patterns of liquid moving fire".

The eldest daughter, wary of her chances with the Marshlords, escapes the City and makes for the marshes and whatever may lie beyond. And it is here that the whole enterprise cranks down into a routinely dull and monotonous Quest for that certain something which will enable the daughter to triumph over evil. In fact all she triumphs over is the reader's good will and stamina.

Occasional sequences are amusing, some of the odd characters encountered are mildly diverting, but you keep expecting Max Wall in leg-hugging tights to leap out and shout "boo!". The whole thing is almost sanitised, antiseptic in its execution, rather than being genuinely evil, sordid, polluted and distasteful.

Alan Dorey

The Dark Half

Stephen King
Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, 412pp, £12.95

This is a powerful, compelling novel, arguably the best that Stephen King has written for some while. It uses the supernatural to explore the dark side of human nature, something we all have, but which in the case of Thad Beaumont comes alive and wants to replace him. A Jekyll and Hyde story, but served up fresh and as American as apple pie by the phenomenal Mr King.

Thad Beaumont is a "serious" writer who has produced a number of best-selling tough guy novels under the pseudonym of George Stark. He decides to kill off this alter ego and concentrate on his serious writing, only to find that Stark obstinately refuses to die. Indeed, Stark manifests himself in physical form, as a murderous doppelganger, who sets about brutally killing all those involved in

Beaumont's decision before coming after Beaumont himself. George Stark is not a very nice guy. Beaumont's predicament is not made any easier by the fact that Stark's fingerprints are identical to his own, making him the perfect suspect for numerous killings.

The story is handled with consummate ease, becoming more believable with each chapter. King is, as usual, very good at portraying his America, its ordinariness providing a perfect setting for the horror that is abroad.

In his struggle to save both himself and his family, Beaumont slowly becomes aware of, is forced to acknowledge, the extent to which Stark is an aspect of his own personality. To destroy the monster he has to realise his own capacity for ruthless, decisive action, for murder. He will never be the same again. The book has a marvellous climax, a veritable Gotterdammerung. An enjoyable read.

John Newsinger

The Language of the Night

Ursula K LeGuin
Women's Press, 1989, 210pp, £5.95

The first British publication of a series of essays on fantasy and science fiction by Le Guin, this was first published ten years ago. The essays were all published separately in the 1970s and, as their author says in her Preface to this revised version: "The principal revision involves the so-called 'generic pronoun' *he*." In other words, there are footnotes or explanations throughout the book whenever the word *he* is used. Le Guin admits that this is "a political change", but the reasons for it are fairly clear from such statements as, on page 120:

Feminist ideology has been immensely valuable to me... (because?) All too often we (women) have found that we had no opinion or belief of our own, but had simply incorporated the dogmas of our society.

As a former admirer of Le Guin's writing, it grieves me to say that I didn't like the book and learned very little from it. Her love of paradox and of gnomic utterances partly explains why. Consider this on page 132:

I talk about gods, I am atheist. But I am an artist too, and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth. The only truth I can understand or express is, logically defined, a lie.

from page 17

Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*, by a whisker, or, given the nature of Rolfa, by a hair. I think the only disappointment in this book is that Rolfa, the genetically engineered Polar woman who sings opera, disappears so soon in the action, and that we never meet her mother, Hortensia, who writes such wonderful letters to Milena, the main character. That's one thing I particularly like about this novel – the characters are so vivid, so real and believable. The story

focusses on Milena and her life's work, staging Rolfa's opera of the *Divine Comedy* but I also see it as a future history. Oddly, it reminds me of a certain kind of drama popular around the time of the Second World War, detailing the life of two London families, usually Cockney and aristocratic, through several generations. There is the same sense of panoramic sweep through history. But London in the future, is a very different place. Ryman has taken current preoccupations – the greenhouse effect,

genetic engineering – and extrapolated to their logical conclusion. London is surrounded by paddyfields, and society has become a biological function with viruses to determine law and cultural behaviour, other viruses to educate, Milena, resistant to the viruses, represents the non-conformist element, even as she struggles to fit in with the society in which she lives. It's a very rich book, the sort of novel that requires many readings to derive the full flavour. And yes, I think it was a worthy winner. ■

RED SPIDER WHITE WEB by Misha

Fifteen minute viruses, savage police 'wire dogs', roving street gangs, the punishments of the Bell factory and a vicious murderer.

A Dazzling first novel by one of America's finest new writers.

"Misha is going to take off like an eagle."

Ursula Le Guin.

"The prose flashes knife-like or glows coolly depending on what kind of fire Misha wants to emit." Michael Bishop.

Illustrated by Don Coyote

Foreword by Brian Aldiss

Postscript by James P. Blaylock

of this edition 100 copies are specially bound, slipcased, and signed by all the contributors.

SPECIAL EDITION £40.00 TRADE EDITION £13.95

Morrigan Publications

MORRIGAN PUBLICATION: 26 ST. PAUL'S DRIVE, SCOTFORTH,
LANCASTER, LANCs. LA1 4SR, ENGLAND.
TELEPHONE: LANCASTER (0524) 35563.

And so it goes on. What can you do with a person like that? When you discern what she means and make allowances for the fact that she would like to (but does not) define her own terms, it would seem churlish to disagree with her. But this is because she says so little. Essentially, she seems in this book less keen to be understood than to sound wise and clever. She is pretentious, pontificates and takes herself too seriously. (Spoiled by fame?) On page 170 she says in "Talking About Writing" that to ask her about writing is like asking the sea about itself!

She has a great deal to say about art, illustrated by references to a select band of writers, and about Fantasy, but very little to say about science or "hard" science fiction. On one page she refers to "the reductive, scientific mentality", on another to "the schizoid arrogance of modern scientism". On page 91: "We are in an age of Science, where nothing is. None of the scientists, none of the philosophers, can say what anything or anyone is..." and adds later, with absurd pretension, "except, possibly, Beethoven, in the last movement of the last symphony." Even of art, we are told: "Art never fed anyone."

On the credit side, Le Guin has some interesting things to say about Jung, Tolstoy, the Brontës, Zamyatin, Virginia Woolf, Tolkien, Tiptree DG Compton and a few others. But remember that admonition: "Distrust everything I say." (Did she really think we needed to be told?)

Jim England

The Wolf's Hour

Robert R McCammon
Grafton, 1989, 475pp, £12.95

Michael Gallatin is a spy. He is tough, quick-witted, and lamentably given to sub-007 wisecracks. He is also a werewolf.

The Wolf's Hour tells of Gallatin's youth among a werewolf pack in a Russian forest, and his mission twenty years later to find and destroy a Nazi secret weapon.

McCammon elaborates the werewolf myth skilfully, and changes parts of it to his advantage. Even so, the story of Gallatin's childhood ends abruptly and no link is made between this and the main story. Which is a pity, because the scenes of wolfdom show a lot more imagination, inventiveness, and good writing than the rather thin spy-thriller plot.

Gallatin's many and varied skills make him a one-dimensional character. His personal motive of revenge for the betrayal and killing of his lover by a German double-agent is not convincingly stated. He is hardly more than an idealised killing machine, with no ambivalence to gain the reader's sympathy. James Bond with the ability to turn into a wolf when things get hairy is just too much. Once the perilous quest is over, Gallatin returns to London and thinks about another mission. So we'll have a sequel.

The Wolf's Hour is fast-paced, detailed and atmospheric. But it is too long and often

inconsistent. We are never sure whether Gallatin's cover has been blown, so we don't know what danger he is in at any time. The villains are picked from the parts catalogue: *Fiendish Herr Doktor* and *Brutal Nazi Sadist*. They are caricatures. So is everybody else. The novel is an unholy mix of genres, and keeps changing shape between them, uncertain of what it really wants or is destined to be. No amount of lovingly described sex and violence is going to make up for that.

Christopher Amies

Ivory

Mike Resnick
Legend, 1989, 374pp, £12.95, £6.95 pb

I confess a rooted dislike of yuppiesback, but admit to being perfectly happy to pay £6.95 for this most untypical Mike Resnick novel. Always having enjoyed Resnick's offbeat New York humour, his crisp plotting and baroque ambiances, I have to tell you that this book is nothing like that at all.

True, Mike begins in sparkling style, but soon the plot takes over and he shows his skills as a storyteller in what might perhaps be described as a detective story – with a computer as the detective, guided by a senior researcher for a futuristic *Book of Records*. The tasks of Earth's biggest ever elephant are the missing objects that precipitate a search through 7,000 years of recorded history, touching on lives and deaths of many an unusual character.

We stop here and there to pick up the trail, learn a great deal of life on Earth in 1885 and 2067, as well as in various strange parts of the galaxy over succeeding millennia. We meet crooks and cranks, and seek to discover why Bukoba Mandaka, the last Maasai and a man with no identity, will pay virtually any sum – including murder – to track down the tusks, and what he aims to do with them if they are located.

This may sound a strange and perhaps dull topic for an SF author best known for his scintillating repartee; in fact, I found myself gripped by the leisurely unfolding of the tale, half-guessing the denouement but happy to take the story at Resnick's pace. The blurb quotes Analog: "A marvellously satisfying SF novel... don't miss" but I confess that when I see Alan Dean Foster's opinion that it "delivers pure entertainment and a rollicking good time" I fear he is thinking of some other Resnick book, for this is neither "entertainment" nor "rollicking" but is instead a deeply felt, gently unfolded and surprisingly *literate* novel.

If I call it a "Quest" I risk frightening off most of the people who will appreciate its pleasures. If I describe it as "a tale of myth and magic" I tell no more than the truth – and again do nothing to reveal its true appeal. This is indeed a serendipitous joy for the Resnick fan: I only hope it will be bought and enjoyed by those who would not previously have patronised this writer's works at all.

Ken Lake

Casablanca

Michael Moorcock
Gollancz, 1989, 267pp, £13.95

"What you're asking them to do is take you seriously, to believe you're real. But you're not real. You're a performer." So says Mitzi Beesley to a dejected Mo in the context of the rise and fall of the Sex Pistols. Later Sid Vicious, Nestor Makhno, Brian Jones, Byron, James Dean, Gene Vincent and others of the romantic brotherhood are commiserated in the Cafe Hendrix. "It's all my damn fault," Jesus sighs (he's there too), but gets scant sympathy. Elsewhere another anarchist-cum-hero Lemmy explains why he isn't working: "Bullshit-saturation does it to you in the end." Perhaps Moorcock is struggling to tread the fine line between (fascistic) elevation to hero-status and the marginalisation that is the destiny of every self-effacing anarchist. To be heard you must perform, but as a performer you are not real (just an artist).

The first third of *Casablanca* consists of fictions that have appeared in SF anthologies in the last few years, plus the title story, which appears for the first time. The second consists of essays, those discussing feminism and pornography being the weightiest. Many are reviews of works that are not explicitly identified, an omission that sometimes makes it difficult to tell what he is on about. The last is a revised version of "The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle", now entitled "Gold Diggers of 1977", which partakes of the hyperreality that attended the Sex Pistols and is surely a different species of fiction from that in the first part. Brought together, these disparate productions invite one to contemplate the articulation of art and politics that drives Moorcock. It is a fearless mixture, more challenging when taken as a whole than the sum of its parts might suggest.

I found this collection impressive and inspiring, reaching parts that other concoctions do not reach. Grace and grumpiness; what does that remind me of?

Cecil Nurse

The Fugitive Worlds

Bob Shaw
Gollancz, 1989, 254pp, £12.95

The adverts say this is the third part of the trilogy which started with *The Ragged Astronauts* and continued in *The Wooden Spaceships*. Now whilst I like Bob Shaw's stories I'd not read either of the previous books. This book takes place two generations after the first two and there are sufficient hooks to understand most things, fortunately the others are not pertinent to the main theme of the story.

The background is two planets, Land and Overland, which are so close that their atmospheres merge so that travel, by balloon, is possible between them. Life starts on Land but due to a fatal plague everyone was killed except those who migrated to Overland. Metal was not available on Land and wood was used in its place, some metal

is available on Overland and is gradually taking over from wood.

The book starts with a mission from Overland to Land preparatory to resettling it. Our hero is Toller Marquise II, grandson of the hero of the first two books, he's an airship pilot and trying to live up to the example set by his grandfather. Toller meets and clashes with another pilot, the Countess Vantara, but becomes besotted by her, but she is not besotted with him, in fact she treats him with some contempt.

Okay so far, but then the whole plot changes. Vantara and Toller return to Land, Vantara's balloon disappears and Toller's encounters a vast crystal disc growing between the two worlds. Meanwhile a new planet has suddenly appeared in the planetary system. Toller is sent to investigate Vantara's disappearance and as the blurb says the future of planets and civilizations become dependent on his actions.

I didn't enjoy the book as much as I'd hoped. It seems to be two stories, first the resettling of Land and then the story of Toller against a super technology civilization. The end left so many untied knots that whilst this might be the end of a trilogy I doubt it's the end of the series, indeed it read more like a linking novel than one which completes the story.

Whilst the style was clear and straightforward I found the characters were just characters, rather than people. Toller does change but seems only to develop into the macho hero, and with a touch of xenophobia.

In summary, I was disappointed by this book, it did not live up to the expectations I have of a Bob Shaw novel.

Tom A Jones

Piper at the Gates of Dawn

Mary Stanton

NEL, 1989, 307pp, £12.95, £6.95 pb

This book is not related to the short story of the same name in Richard Cowper's *The Custodians*, the title comes from Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* where the piper in question was the god, Pan. It is, in fact, the sequel to *The Heavenly Horse From The Outermost West* and contains several unattributed illustrations; am I alone in being embarrassed to be seen reading an illustrated book on the train?

Piper at the Gates of Dawn continues the story of the struggle for survival of the Appaloosa breed of horses begun in the previous book. Once again the Balance of good and evil is upset and the Lead Stallion, Sweetwater's Dancing Piper, has to help his gods, Equus and Jehanna, restore it. He is personally involved – his parents Duchess and Dancer have been maliciously betrayed by El Arat, the Soul Taker.

Piper sets out on a quest, accompanied by his most trusted geldings, Blackjack, Alvin, and Hank, and guided by the foxes Basil and Dill. This takes them down into the Black Barns to a confrontation with the Dark Horse himself.

The social aspects of horse life are nicely

portrayed – the horses have ranks like Dreamspeaker and Storyteller, Lead Brood Mare and Working Herd Chief. The duties of a stallion to his herd and the relationship between stallion and gelding, horse and man, are authoritatively described.

The characters of the horses are rather exaggerated, as you'd expect in a book about talking animals, – I could imagine the Disney version as I read – but the details of horse anatomy and existence sound convincing to one ignorant of anything equine.

Stanton's style is extremely readable. I picked up and put down this book a lot and each time was quickly engrossed in its contents. The descent into the Black Barns is particularly vivid.

The presence of different talking animal species did raise one query, perhaps brought on by previously reading Garry Kilworth's *Hunter's Moon*: how can the animals understand each other so easily and even share many of their mystical beliefs? Perhaps this is taking it too far when one considers that the book claimed as inspiration, *Wind In The Willows*, made no such concession to internal consistency.

To conclude – this is a readable book that actually did while away that clichéd train journey!

Barbara Davies

Arrows of Eros

Alex Stewart (Ed)

NEL, 1989, 262pp, £3.50

Arrows, metaphorically, barbed and poisoned; some driven home with the brutality of a cross-bow bolt; very few shot by a kindly cupid. Given eroticism as the theme, it is not remarkable that both alien sexual variations and dream imagery feature prominently and sometimes in tandem, as in Freda Warrington's "The Palomino Roy" where a xenologist's nightmares are intimately related to the strange reproductive cycle of her subjects. A thematically not dissimilar story, "The Growing Place" by Simon Ounsley, describes an unlocated pilgrimage. This progresses (and culminates) as might an exotic dream, framing interior dreams en route. The Vienna of Anne Gay's "Howie Dreams" is as sensuously tangible as its traded hallucinations are chimerical; while in "The Cat and the Sleep Machine" by Christina Lake dream-manufactures horrifying mediaeval fantasies.

The step from dream to the surreal is short. Much of the imagery of "The Song of Women" by Paul Kincaid, approaches it. His protagonist paradisiacally "lived a dream" soon to be shattered. The story itself exhibits all the arbitrariness and vivid eeriness of dream. The surreal is wholly realised when Garry Kilworth's Hogfoot Right, adventuring amorously, finds an Eden beyond *Other Edens*. Psycho-erotic presences inform Chris Morgan's "A Little Magic", a clever me-and-my anima kind of story, and Stephen Gallagher's "The Horn", a literally chilling haunt contemporising the MR James tradition.

In the genre of revised folk tale, Geraldine Harris' "Iron Shoes" grimly out-Grimms the Brothers Grimm; and Iain M Banks' "Odd Attachment" is a pastoral of alien vegetable loves, a Daphnis sighing for a Chloe, innocent despite its Stewelpetrian grue. Semi-pastoral in mood, also ambivalently traumatic in dénouement, is the brilliant "Wildland" by Brian Stableford – *Hothouse* and *Solaris* interfused.

Familiar SF themes are revived in Alex Stewart's "Cruel as the Grave" (a twist to the time-travel/murder paradox); in Kim Newman's "Pamela's Pursuit" (the gladiatorial duel – here sexually oriented and fought through arenas of dynastic decay); and in Tanith Lee's "The Beautiful Biting Machine" (vampirish goings-on in a Disneyish fun-fair, detailed by her wonderfully decorative prose). For realistic if subliminally realised horror try David Langford's "The Motivation". For alien sex manoeuvres in a space-mercantile setting, and for the only bit of laughter in the book (Hogfoot Right apart), read Diana Wynne Jones' "The Mela Worms".

The imposed topic of sexuality, an idea (informally) of Milford provocation, may constrain the native genius (by which I mean distinctive authorial talent) of some, while encouraging that of others to flourish extravagantly. Whatever its effect, the results here are never less than entertaining and often are sophisticatedly sharp.

KV Bailey

Wolf-Dreams

Michael D Weaver

NEL, 1989, 686pp, £5.99

Wolf-Dreams is in the wrong medium. This "trilogy in one volume" would come across better as a movie or a comic.

Every full moon Thyri Eiriksdattir, a Viking warrior, turns into a huge white wolf. Her quest (naturally enough) is to avert the coming of *finbulwinter* brought about by the Morrigan. She is accompanied by a band of warriors and a witch, who is also her lover.

Unfortunately there is so much else crammed in that the story begins to resemble an overstuffed Victorian sofa. The result is a farrago of Norse and Celtic myths, well enough written but hard to get through. It feels as if Weaver has ploughed through the *Larousse World Mythology* and the *Golden Bough* looking for as many myths he could squeeze in as possible. Someone tell him all the good legends have been used. Most of them too often.

In *Wolf-Dreams* there are characters who remember the *Tuatha de Danann* – the pre-Celtic inhabitants of Britain. The *Tuatha* lived in about 1000BC and had long since become the Celtic pantheon, but the story needs this change to "allow" magic to exist alongside the historical world of Dark Age Europe. But if you modify myths and legends, they still have to adhere to an internal pattern. *Wolf-Dreams* doesn't seem to.

Christopher Amies

**Shortlisted For
The Arthur C.
Clarke Award**

THE CHILD GARDEN

**GEOFF
RYMAN**

*'easily the best written,
most distinctive novel to
emerge in recent
months. Excellent.'*

Time Out

**A vision of the
future...**

In a semi-tropical
London, the people
photosynthesise.
Children are raised
in Child Gardens
and educated by
virus. Milena is
immune to the
viruses and
dreams of a
forbidden love...
a love that will
transform the
universe.

*'This book
should take
Ryman away
from the SF
awards, and
make him a
front-runner for
the major literary
prizes.'*
The Guardian

*'if you read one SF
novel this year, it
should be this one.'*
**London Evening
Standard**

THE CHILD GARDEN

UNWIN



HYMAN

**£12.95 Hardback
400 pages
Jacket illustration by
Dave McKean
Paperback publication
23 August 1990, £4.50**