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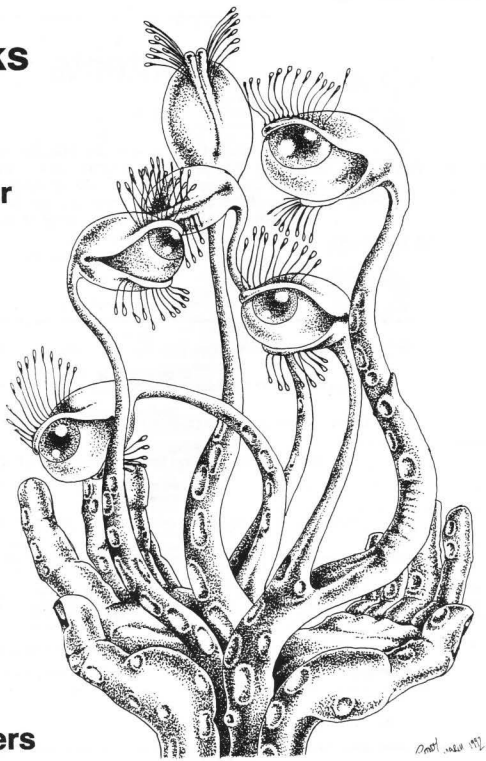
Best Books of 1991

Angela Carter



Stephen King

Czech SF Writers

Vector

April/May 1992 ⇒ Issue 166

Contents

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Editorial

By
Catie Cary

Previously, I've talked about religion and I've talked about pornography, I thought this time maybe sex, maybe death, but then I realised I couldn't put it off any longer; It's time to talk about something *really* important. Let's talk about **Vector**.

The sharper-eyed of you will have noticed a slight change in the credits this issue, and will be wondering what changes this *putsch* will issue in. The answer to that is none that you will notice, except hopefully an increased efficiency. This is not a palace revolution , but an attempt to shift labels in accordance with perceived reality. Kev will continue to contribute editorials and interviews to **Vector**, to edit material in which he takes a special interest, and to share decisions about **Vector**'s long term plans and ambitions. I will continue to control the way **Vector** looks, to decide on the contents of individual issues, and to be responsible for the final edit of all material included. It would be helpful if all submissions were addressed to me in the first instance.

This issue marks the end of my first year of editing **Vector**. I was initially terrified at the prospect, but I've learnt a lot and enjoyed myself enormously in the process. As one of Nature's little opportunists I dislike fixed goals, but I did have a couple of strong intentions in mind when I took this on and it is interesting to see how they have panned out:

I wanted to widen the base of contributors. I still do. I mean no offence to the people who have been the mainstay of this magazine over the last few years when I say that I think that **Vector** could benefit from more fresh voices. I think this is always true; variety is life. Please notice that when I ask for freshness, I do not also ask for youth; I feel that ageism is one of the more tiresome afflictions of the SF critical community. It is true that some writers become stale with age; we can all think of examples. Others take on fresh life, finding an originality they did not possess in their heydays. So I would like to see more contributions from the old as well as the young. I do not want to accuse anyone of *apathy*; we all live busy lives. I think some of you may be either a little shy, or scared of committing more time than you can afford. Please do not think this way, I am always ready to discuss contributions and to offer practical help where required.

I wanted to liven up the letter column. I had heard long-term members sighing over the days when **Vector**'s letter columns were full of argument and a lively spirit of discussion. Although I wrote *that* review and Editorial in all innocence and with no previous personal bias against David Wingrove or his books (I think Chris Lewis, in this issue's letter column, comes the closest I've seen to discerning my original intent), I think I've had a little more success there, don't you? I think I've got a lot to thank him for. Despite the contents of some of the letters, receiving and reading them has been one of the joys of the last year; always something new to chew over. Please do not stop writing when the Wingrove affair has blown itself out!

So, two intentions; mixed results; where next? People have commented in the past that **Vector** can be a little grim, a little down. It is difficult to see how to combat this one; you cannot expect a reviewer to be cheerful about the process of wadeing *n* hundred pages through a bad book. However I do have a couple of ideas and regular contributors can expect to hear from me in the not-too-distant future. Others, who do not recognise themselves in that description, may drop me a line if they're curious. My address is inside the front cover. Shamelessly begging for mail again.

So much for good intentions; how much of this is seen through into this issue of Vector? Sally-Ann Melia who has written about Angela Carter, is a new contributor, and I think one to watch. We received far too many letters to include them all, even after radical surgery. By the way, if some of the letters seem a little curt, it's because the first victim of my knife is always the polite bit at the beginning; on the other hand some of our correspondents *are* abrupt. As for cheerfulness, well maybe I listened too much to The Sisters of Mercy while putting this one together....

By the way, if anyone spots me at Blackpool, please introduce yourself. I don't usually bite on *first* acquaintance.

Artwork by Claire Willoughby

Letters

Please address all letters of comment to:

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From Hussain Rafi Mohamed

What an extraordinary business! I can only thank the Nameless Ones that despite being a member of the Association my standing was not sufficient to warrant a letter from David Wingrove. I pity those who did because clearly the issue has become hopelessly clouded by the combination of what seems to me two quite separate and distinct matters. On the one hand the "Wingrove affair" (for want of a better title) which is about authors, criticism, reviews and egos; and on the other, pornography. But what really baffles me is why such mild efforts (**Vector 164**) should have provoked such a thunderous response! (**Vector 165**)

Whatever authors may think there really are only two situations in which it seems reasonable for one to respond to a review of his/her book. Firstly, to correct clear errors of fact (although even there it can sometimes seem like overkill) and secondly to say *"You will be hearing from my solicitor..."* Responding to errors of judgement, opinions etc seems to be utterly pointless, a view shared by most authors, it would seem judging by the general lack of printed sparring (although I did notice a letter from Gore Vidal in the Guardian the other day.) I'm sure that Mr Wingrove did feel sleighted by Ms Cary's review and her editorial, but what purpose does he think venting his spleen in public will serve? I don't detect contrition in the brief comments from Ms Cary in **V165**, and clearly Mr McVeigh is not about to tug his forelock. So apart from the support of some of the mailed Association members it is back to square one. Or perhaps Mr wingrove is even now preparing another searing statement. Taking the advice of Chris Priest might be a wiser move.

Pornography is something else and well worth a bit of discussion in the pages of **Vector**. SF doesn't have a particularly good record when it comes to sex and its derivatives, despite the obviously golden opportunities presented by all of known space and time. The endless possibilities seem still to be just that.

The essence of the argument, it seems to me , is what degree of risk is acceptable, and on that there is no consensus. Democratic political systems rely to an enormous extent on citizens accepting the risk of non-democratic bids for power. When pressed on the point people often seem ambivalent, asserting that "It's a free country" but roused to righteous wrath over, for example, the proximity of homosexual teachers to their children. There's no solution to that so I see no reason why there should be one where pornography is concerned.

Many years ago at a party I attended, given by people I hardly knew, I saw a sequence in a grainy and badly produced 8mm film. I was led to believe that it was what the Americans call a "snuff movie". Despite the fact that no-one seemed to know anything else about it I am pretty certain it wasn't genuine, but while the sex scenes were acted with a complete lack of interest by the participants (as is usual), the apparent murder looked real. It certainly provoked a stunned silence from those watching. I still doubt it was genuine, but clearly it is for something like this that "most" people would decide legislation was necessary, despite the considerable amount of ground covered before we got to that point. But would that ever stop people writing about it - as Peter Straub did in **Koko** - with ever more contrived and explicit detail.?

Mr Wingrove defended his apparent excess with the words, *"I do not present this material gratuitously ... But to instruct"* It's not the first time I've heard words to that effect and it can seem like a convenient way of acquiring respectability for what would otherwise be grim stuff. I'd like to believe it, but I do wonder who is being instructed and why? Am I so naive and ignorant that I need to be told how to respond to and understand these things? If I can understand the politics, can I not also understand the sex? Is it really then merely a getout; cover for someone who wanted to write a racy book, or not be thought simple-minded and innocent? And is it that hypocrisy that constitutes pornography? I wouldn't want to accuse Mr wingrove of such a motive in case I receive a very long and angry letter, but in abstract I think the point worth making

I personally would resist all measures to censor the written word, in the same spirit that I would resist proscription of political parties whose views I thought dangerous. I don't doubt that a great many people are distressed and angered by the appearance of sex in fiction, particularly when it involves the violent humiliation of children and women. But It's worth considering the fact that the Romans - and they were not alone - not only abused women and children in private , but also in public, slaughtering them into the bargain. Legally sanctioned public murder of that sort has gone. If that is an example of social evolution then one might suppose that eventually those who produce pornography - however defined- will also evolve out of existence. In some dim future. In the meantime I am damned if I can think of any way a civilised person can respond to the existence of pornography other than choosing not to read it/ see it/ experience it. That's small comfort to the unwilling participants in some areas of pornography, but handing the state - in whatever form - the ability to legally suppress it - no matter how desirable it may seem at the time - will always be a regressive step.

Incidentally, I haven't read any of the **Chung Kuo** series but I daresay when my son one day brings home a copy of **Chung Kuo XXIV** and I take it away because I think it unsuitable he will accuse me of censorship. He'll be right, but that is probably part of another argument altogether.

Hussain Rafi Mohamed
Kingston-upon-Thames

From Humphrey Price

There are many things about the last issue of **Vector** that interested me , as I'm sure you can imagine.

None more so, perhaps than the wildly inaccurate view taken by Marcus Rowland, who appears to think that **Chung Kuo** is some massive plot undertaken by NEL to avoid publishing British science fiction. I will not comment on this other than to draw attention to the report in April 1991's **Locus** on the British SF publishing scene of 1990, the year after we published the first volume of **Chung Kuo**. Hodder & Stoughton, of which NEL is an imprint, published more SF and fantasy books in the Uk than any publisher other than HarperCollins, Macdonald or Century. Of these, we were third on the list for titles published for the first time *anywhere*, after century and Macdonald, and second on the list for titles published for the first time in the UK, after Macdonald. *Locus* comments:"The UK publishing situation seems healthy enough overall, with a strong forward surge by Hodder & Stoughton / NEL - the only publisher to make overall statistical gains without a new line or imprint to account for the change."

Humphrey Price
Senior Editor, Hodder & Stoughton

From K V Bailey

I see from a note in **Vector 165** that mail sent from Milnthorpe has not been arriving. It may be the case in respect of the enclosed letter, which I sent in good time for publication in **V165**.

At first glance through **V165** it seemed that the sheer weight and repetitiveness of opinion, particularly following David Wingrove's massive ***demarche***, might prove sufficiently boring to kill the whole issue dead; but as well as repetition there was diversity, and so many sub-topics of wider relevance to SF and to reviewing were aired along the way (censorship, politics, subjectivity, library policies, feminism, liberalism, fundamentalism, personalities) as to create a mini-symposium and to make that number of **Vector** one of the most interesting of recent issues. I wouldn't propose, that such another ***casus belli*** might crop up in the near future, or welcome too many artificial stimuli such as David Wingrove's circularisation, but it could be a beneficial ploy (directed to interest-arousing and exchange of ideas) if from time to time attention were drawn editorially to some review which naturally awakened speculation or controversy. I would think this perfectly acceptable editorial practice - though preferable for the review itself not to have been written by an editor.

"I note that David Wingrove has given wide circulation to his rebuttal of Catie Cary's criticism and to his detailed defence of **The White Mountain**. Not having yet read the novel, I hesitate to comment; but having read (and reviewed for **Vector** Books One and Two of **Chung Kuo** I'm bound to say that I found in them more of ideological substance than Catie could discover in Book Three, where she sees only "history bodged together" and considers that as "a book of ideas" it "has nothing to say". In the first two Books the overlying weight of megalopolis (literal and metaphorical) continually crushed "innocence of vision" - which (personal and political) still strove to survive. A yin/yang dialectic explored themes of conformity, corruption and revolt, while the ***wei chi*** game yielded an appropriate symbolism. If these significant structures have not been carried through into Book Three, it will be both surprising and disappointing.

Is it possible that Catie's natural distaste for passages of what she views as pornography has clouded other considerations? Certainly such happenings as she describes are offensive to the senses and the mind, as I found particularly to be the case in at least one incident in **The Middle Kingdom** (the torture of Si Wu Ya by the sexually depraved De Vore and her subsequent brutal murder). I think, however, that depicting this depth of vileness was integral to the narrative's purpose. Such actions could have been dealt with obliquely, hinted at or inferred. The author has to make a judgement; and because, to cite his circularised letter, he is concerned to impress on the reader what can happen in a sick "Yang" society far out of moral control, he takes the harsher, more disturbing option. An OED definition of obscene is "offensive to the senses and the mind"; and of pornographic, "dealing in the obscene". In those terms, certain limited sequences in **Chung Kuo** might be said to be pornographic, though not lubricious; and, indeed, in context and intent, not even pornographic, given the word's frequent contemporary usage which implies the crudely cynical and commercial exploitation of sexual images. David

Wingrove's novelistic aims are clearly different. They are surely pointed to in one of his most apt epigraphic quotations - the "Heavenly Question" of Ch' Yuan: "***What is it whose closing causes the dark and whose opening causes the light? Where does the Bright God hide before the Horn proclaims the dawning of the day?***"

KV Bailey
Alderney

From Norman W Beswick

As a retired recluse (though a member of the **BSFA** since 1979) I didn't get David Wingrove's blockbuster letter, and was appalled when I read it in your excellent **Vector**.

Wingrove purports to be a professional writer: but the content of this sprawling diatribe could and should have been expressed in three short paragraphs, which I have no doubt you would have given due prominence.

Like some other members, I read the first **Chung Kuo** book up to, but no further than, the revolting episode of the king-sized steel-tipped leather condom, and set it aside until reviews of later volumes assured me that this pointless monstrosity had some serious purpose. So far no comment from anyone, the author included, has succeeded in doing this.

The extravagant violence of Wingrove's response to criticism, and the spoiled-baby tantrum that caused him to send copies of it to so many people, suggest to me that he is in need of professional help and counselling. It is hard not to associate it with the gratuitous violence that obtrudes so nastily in these books.

He has at best made a colossal, embarrassing fool of himself, and whether or not we agree with every one of Catie's comments and arguments, she has behaved perfectly properly, both as reviewer and as joint editor. More power to her!

N W Beswick
Church Stretton, Shropshire

From Andy Sawyer

Since I wrote the letter published in **Vector 165** I have actually seen a copy of the **Lord Horror** comic: specifically **Hard Core Horror #5**. I found it fascinating if unpleasant reading. Has it changed my opinion? Probably not. I think, though, that the comic is almost entirely an artistic failure. True, if one picks up a part of ***any*** series, especially in comics, without knowing what has gone before, it can be very hard to place what you're reading in context, but in this case I have no idea what much of it is about. It seemed to me that the reader requires a detailed knowledge both of the biography of William Joyce and the history and psychology of Nazi fascism, particularly anti-semitism. Without that knowledge, It's a progression of detailed but context-less images, and I can't see anyone picking it up and coming to an active ***anti***-anti-semitism by reading it. I'm not clear about what is being satirised: the icons of fascism? The ordinary society which allowed these icons to flourish? The kind of reader who gets off on the literature of cruelty? A long, textual prose passage beginning "'Don't talk to me about fucking Jews.' Horror was dressed as a rat." Is a mixture of coprophilia and cruelty; powerful, even poignant in places but which speaks to me of torturers fascinated by their own inventiveness and again, has no context. Is it an extract from the novel? Who is the narrator? What relationship does it have with the preceding and following visual sequences? What exactly is the point apart from being a ***tour de force*** of grotesque imagery?

I am not necessarily appalled by the passage's imagery, which I'm sure many readers will find disgusting, but one thing about being adult is being able to deal with one's disgust at a piece of imaginative writing. Hell, I like a good dose of ranting prose. I admire William Burroughs, who surveys similar territory, and books like **Last Exit to Brooklyn** hold no terrors for me. But there is a personality behind Burroughs's writing which you can clearly discern; there's a moral standpoint behind his nihilism (even if It's an amoral standpoint!) And I can tell where I dissent from it. Similarly, Selby, in **Last Exit**, evokes compassion in the reader (I'm less certain about **The Room** which I found obsessive in a similar way to this comic, although the subject-matters are entirely different). Here, I think the imagery is the central "attraction" of the work: yes, It's over the top; yes, It's gross. But what else? Well, it has photographs of corpses: there is one of two dead babies which is overprinted with a few staves of music and a quote from "The Trial of William Joyce" by JW Hall. The music I can't recognise - like most people I can't read orchestral scores - but it is clearly German and I wouldn't be surprised if it was Wagner. The quote - "I have always been desirous of devoting what little capability and energy I may possess to the country which I love so dearly, England" - adds a nauseatingly hypocritical gloss to the pictures and I suppose that I do find the picture apposite in that the reality of the dead babies underlies what this foul man is really saying about love for his country. Yes, It's a horrible image and yes, it works. But generally in image and text there's a sense of striving for effect, of playing the take-racism-to-extremes game both ways (the one group I can't see being grossly offended by the text is overt racists) and of wanting to shock rather than confront.

I've nothing against shocking the bourgeoisie - It's a fine and noble thing and we all need reminding that while we are discussing the finer points of literature countless millions are living lives of unspeakable terror and agony. But is this what the comic is about or are we in the same cult-territory as the slasher movie or the death-metal bands or even the morality-preaching tabloids and bible-punchers, fascinated by what they purport to condemn? I'm not convinced that this is not the case here.

Were I reviewing the comic, then I'd go on at greater length but basically to me it neither entertains enough (I enjoy a good dose of splatter like the next person but the further away from real life the better: and in this case the next person really doesn't like splatter ***all that much***, if truth were told) nor does it create really effective satire. What does it say about our own society, where there are still plenty of potential Joyces about? Really, precious little. Apart from the fact that I'm sure there are people about who would pick it up and say "HEYYY... This is really terrific! Didja see that picture of the guy with his brains blown out?"

So It's shocking?

So what. There'll be something more shocking next month.

Given that the people behind the comic are apparently still the subjects of court action, I'm not sure that this is particularly helpful. I'd really love to read something which could persuade me that I may be wrong in all this, and certainly I have not changed my mind about the wisdom of allowing the Manchester Police Force to decide about whether I should read the comic or not. At least I'm clearer about the fact that what you defend on principle is not necessarily anything you approve of in practice.

Andy Sawyer
South Wirral

From Gillian Rooke

Ken Lake goes from bad to worse. I did answer the rather ignorant questions he raised in his article on the Burgess Shale(**In an article to be published in Vector 167... CC**), but this latest escapade of his is straight out of **Boys' Own**! He further insults our intelligence by suggesting that we might wish to use this spurious science, in our writing! Is he serious, or is it a joke and I've missed the punch line? I think from what he says in the current **Vector**, it must have been a joke but unfortunately the favoured style of writing in **Vector *et al*]** is so prissily quasi-erudite, that there is no more room in the format for humour than there is for common sense.

He quotes an article from **Nature**, which states, he says, that a planet can be terraformed by such simple methods as pouring soot over the ice caps and planting genetically engineered "hardy" plants. I can only assume that the article was in an edition published on April the first.

Let me put you right, Ken, assuming that people may not get the joke and think the article "for real". On the subject of the plants, the quickest to deal with; perhaps it is a long time since you studied biology at school, but I have a good memory of my first lesson, and it was that all the higher phyla, plants included, breathe in oxygen, and breathe out carbon dioxide. However "hardy" your plant, if it is planted out on a "virgin planet" the oxygen it photosynthesizes will blow away and it will promptly suffocate. Th eproblem of engineering a plant that can live in a reducing atmosphere is still a little beyond the resources of science.

Perhaps Ken thinks that the atmosphere may have contained oxygen. So I refer him to another article in **Nature**, "RNA evolution and the origins of life" by Gerald F Joyce (16th March 1989 (and note I name the article)) wherein it says: in "scientific models of planetary formation... It seems certain that there was no free oxygen until the advent of oxygen producing photosynthetic bacteria...."

Of course it would be possible to oxygenate the atmosphere by extending eco-domes until they almost covered the planet, constantly releasing the surplus oxygen from them. But there are many other problems. The chosen planet would have to have seas as extensive as our own. It is the sea that regulates the amount of oxygen present in the atmosphere, and if we didn't have them we would be running amok for half the year suffering from oxygen narcosis, which problem would soon be solved when we suffocated along with everything else.

In fact there are a myriad other critical factors. The chosen planet would have to be orbiting a yellow dwarf in about the same position; it would have to have a moon of about the same size; it would have to have the same most eccentric axial tilt, same composition of rocks, etc., Etc., Etc. The chances are, that if we ever found such a planet, we would find it already inhabited by a fair old approximation to ***Homo..., Er, sapiens***?

And:

I wonder if you will let me throw a little informed opinion into the pornography debate?

I think we all know within certain parameters, what we mean by pornography, and I am not going to argue here the differences between soft and hard porn. I am more interested in answering the question ***is pornography bad***? With a resounding ***yes***.

I'm sorry that this has to be a sort of male v. Female debate. Women can also "get hooked" on pornography but it is rarer simply because of the biological difference. Women do not normally require a visual erotic stimulant (or if this language is too technical for some, they don't need a dirty picture to help them jerk off, although I suppose a candle might come in handy.

I think the word "offensive" is rather stupid in the context of pornography because it completely misses the point. Women are not against pornography because it sends them running for the smelling salts. ***Women are against it because of its detrimental effects on the behaviour of men towards them.*** Women connect pornography with rape, and there is overwhelming evidence that the connection is real.

I would suggest to anyone with any real interest that they look at the increasing amount of experimentation on the subject, some of which was summarized in Mike Baxter's article in **New Scientist** (May 1990). His conclusion was that "The weight of evidence is accumulating that intensive exposure to soft core pornography desensitizes men's attitude to rape, increases sexual callousness, and shifts their preferences towards hard core pornography. Similarly the evidence is now strong that exposure to violent pornography increases men's acceptance of rape myths and of violence against women. It also increases men's tendencies to be aggressive towards women and is correlated with the reported incidence of rape. Many sex offenders claim they used pornography to stimulate themselves before committing their crimes."

(An 18th-century definition of a pornographic book = A book that is read with one hand.)

This latter fact, the strong correlation between the use of pornography and sexual offences, puts paid I think to the frequent claim that pornography is a "safety valve". It is about as much of a safety valve for prevention of sexual offences as an inflammatory Nazi speech (or book) is for the prevention of racial offences.

It is obvious, isn't it, that the more you read about it, the more you think about it, and the more you think about it, the more you want to do it? Two studies reported "a short-lived increase in sexual activity between married couples" following the usual format of such studies, getting experimental subjects to read or watch a lot of it. But these were married men reporting. I wonder what the unmarried ones did? They are hardly likely to have told the experimenter that they knocked their girlfriends about because they said no, are they?

Baxter also makes the important point that, whereas the many studies that show positive proof of changed attitudes must be taken seriously, those that give no results are probably badly conceived. For instance, a college campus study where personality tests are taken before and after exposure to soft porn. No change. Surprised? Hardly. They would have had just as much exposure to soft porn before the first testing!

Of course all studies using humans as experimental subjects must be slightly suspect. I would have thought though that if they were able to suss the reasons for the experiments, most subjects would try to come over all sweetness and light in order to prove the innocence of their popular pastime. The fact that subjects don't seem to guess the purpose of the ruses used by experimenters might also say something about the effects of pornography on the reasoning powers of the mind.

However the most telling evidence must be that which comes from large scale surveys and the statistics they produce. Almost perfect correlations have been found between increases and decreases in the amount of pornography circulating in a society, and increases and decreases in violent sexual crimes and abuses. Moreover even changes in the type of pornography produce corresponding changes in the type of crime.

You might take issue with the word "produce" and argue that I could be putting the cart before the horse. But we are writers. Do we really get all our plots from the tabloid newspapers? What a terrible thing to have to admit to!

Whichever way round it is, the fact remains that if there was less porn, fewer people would get hurt. Remember this, chaps, next time you settle down to write a book with one hand. If It's a best seller it could score ten rapes!

Gillian Rooke
Canterbury

From Martin H Brice

Am I some sort of second-class citizen or something? Am I the only member of the BSFA not to have received a letter from David Wingrove? Not that I should have done anything about it, as I had not - and still have not yet - read the book. However, I did feel that most correspondents seem to have misunderstood Catie's tongue-in-cheek triagic definition of pornography. As in all critical discussions, the precise form of words depends upon whether the speaker is talking about himself or about his co-conversationalist or about some third party not present

Reviewers' Choice

The Best Books of 1991 edited by Chris Amies

Chris Amies

Blue World - Robert R McCammon; in which he reveals his adeptness in various modes but most suited to keeping it short, something he admits to in the introduction. This lot kept me awake during a fifteen-hour night flight.

The Flies of Memory - Ian Watson: Watson has now taken on a new linguistic fire and fizz and buzz, as well as his customary intellectual depth and sly humour. This book represents the 'new' Watson as much as does 'The Coming of Vertumnus' in **Interzone 56**, which I could also have nominated except that it came out in 1992.

By Bizarre Hands - Joe R Lansdale: a collection of strange, violent tales infested by the redneck Texas milieu inhabited by Joe Bob Briggs, six-packs of Bud and Louisville Sluggers.

The Devil's Mode - Anthony Burgess: a rare foray into short fiction with variations on Burgess's favoured themes of music, language, religion, Rome, Malay(sia)a, and interracial sex.

'Floating Dogs' by Ian McDonald in **New Worlds 1**, a story of technobaroque overkill and artificial sentience, was briliantly conceived and executed, just what we need.

KV Bailey

Here are five (and a bit) items of enjoyed 1991 reading - not arranged in any league order.

First, Storm Constantine's **Hermetech** for its futurological and environmental inventiveness, and for the verve with which she powers along the plot through a labyrinth of sexual ambiguities.

Also, Kim Stanley Robinson's **Pacific Edge**, where, after his distressed and distressing Californias, we find an Orange County utopia which is believable, even possibly attainable, and that just because of its imperfections. It's a utopia actually inhabited by interesting people.

Then there is Ian Watson's novella **Nanoware Time**, exhibiting his extraordinary ability to leaven metaspace and metaphysics with a sophisticated playfulness.

Aside from fiction, Stanislaw Lem's **Microworlds** became available in paperback, a collection of reviews and essays so stimulating and controversial as to galvanise thought and leave you wanting to argue back - he's especially sharp on time travel, Philip K Dick, and the Strugatskys.

Lastly, the best SF verse of the year was in the Stateside publication (doubled with Bruce Boston's **Short Circuits**) of Steve Sneyd's collection **Bad News From the Stars** - poems sardonic, scintillating, beautiful. To that I will add (and this is the bit) **We Are Not Men**, Sneyd's lilliputian booklet of SF haiku, in which each seventeen-syllable poem quintessentially conveys what many an ambitious epic has less adroitly striven for through three large volumes. The art of the minimal!

David V Barrett

Ian McDonald's mythic Irish fantasy **King of Morning, Queen of Day** confirms him as one of Britain's finest young writers, with a brilliantly observant eye and ear. If you ever thought the world of faery was twee, read this and have nightmares. At the same time, in places it's utterly wondrous.

Ellen Kushner's **Thomas the Rhymer** is a beautiful, haunting novel, the *definitive* new version of the song, told by Thomas himself, the lady he leaves and returns to, and two elderly people who care for him. The Queen of Elfland is spellbindingly attractive and dangerous: perfectly portrayed.

Gael Baudino's **Strands of Starlight** and **Gossamer Axe** are magical fantasies, written by someone who understands magic, and whose Old Religion is believable. So are her elves; there are three more Strands books to come, and I want to get my hands on them.

For a humorous, touching and environmentally-sound cross between **The Hobbit**, **Little Fuzzy** and Blish's **Black Easter**, Alan Aldridge's **The Gnole** is one of the most unusual books of the year. The illustrations are fun too.

I don't know when it'll be available in this country, but look out for Michael Swanwick's **Gravity's Angels**, one of the finest short story collections I've ever read. Excellence throughout.

Martin Brice

Chase is another masterpiece of suspense from Dean R Koontz, but in this case a whodunnit, first published under the name of KR Dwyer in 1972.

Creed by James Herbert is more than an erotic horror story; it also presents a biting and perceptive picture of life and attitudes in the late 1980s. It should be set reading for future historians of the Thatcher years.

The author of **Diary of a Space Person** is Chris Foss, painter of fantastically complex technologies. In this pictorial book, gargantuan machines, weird aliens and beautiful women are juxtaposed with a handwritten text, which includes a number of thought-provoking religious concepts.

There is plenty of disturbing symbolism in **Beyond the Looking Glass**, by Jonathan Cott and Lesley Fiedler, subtitled 'Extraordinary Works of Fairy Tale and Fantasy - Novels and Stories from the Victorian Era'. Well worth reading.

Marvels by RE Harrington describes the rise of the information technology industry in the Twentieth Century. Purists may argue that it is not strictly science-fiction, but it is certainly the best scientific fiction I have read in 1991.

Molly Brown

My favourite book of 1991 was **Dreamside** by Graham Joyce. Joyce writes with such richness and maturity, it's difficult to believe this is a first novel.

Second favourite was **Nudists May Be Encountered**, a collection of short stories by Mary Scott. Not strictly speaking a genre book, but several of the stories stray into fantasy, and one is definitely SF. **Nudists**, like **Dreamside**, is a first book, and it's especially nice to see a publisher (Serpent's Tail) taking a chance on an original collection of short stories by a first-time author.

Next comes **Jago**, a big fat book by Kim Newman, who's anything but a first-time author. He's been around a while and he knows all the tricks of the trade. A great read.

My last two came out in hardback in 1990, but I'm one who always waits for the cheap 'n' cheerful paperback. **Queen of Angels** by Greg Bear was brilliant; I want to be a transform like Mary Choy, and I loved **Good Omens** by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, even though I'm foreign and had never even heard of the **William** books.

Catie Cary

The Werewolves of London and **Angel of Pain** by Brian Stableford head the pack. By turns exciting, glamorous, mind-expanding and just plain weird, these are the work of a writer at the peak of his powers. I can't wait for the third part of the trilogy to appear, so that having read it I can then read them all again.

Thomas the Rhymer by Ellen Kushner is near perfect of its kind; contrasting the shimmering glamour of the fey with the simple life of scottish rustics in jewel sharp prose. This is a novel of great power and beauty.

I had problems with **The Stress of her Regard** by Tim Powers; it descends all too often into 20th century dialogue and I dislike some of the basic ideas behind the book (eg that human poets should require the assistance of another race). For all that it *is* a fascinating secret history stuffed with ideas, and the long-suffering Josephine has to be one of the best characters I read in 1991.

Dreamside by Graham Joyce was an outs-

tanding first novel, distinguished by a gripping plotline, sympathetic characters and a real fear for a world gone out of control.
The Daedelus Book of Fantasy: 19th Century edited by Brian Stableford is a must. It combines old favourites with obscure delights and is enhanced by scholarly introductions. Before you read the Tim Powers novel you should definitely read this.

Barbara Davies

The Silence of the Lambs by Thomas Harris was so gripping and well written that I didn't dare see the film for fear of the inevitable disappointment. The tension was such that I needed frequent breaks to calm down.
In Pat Murphy's **The City, Not Long After** - a different kind of post-plague novel - artists and sculptors continue to defend San Francisco from military thugs. The city itself lent a helping hand. A deceptively gentle book, it crept up on me, and before I knew it I was hooked.
Raising the Stones by Sheri S Tepper took the idea of God as fungi and added religious fanaticism and the male fascination with heroes. A lengthy but heady concoction.
In **Black Trillium** Julian May, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Andre Norton gave us 3 fantasy quests for the price of one. Triplets Haramis, Kadiya and Anigel had 3 fascinatingly different journeys to make and objects to recover.
Rune by Christopher Fowler combined the idea behind MR James' 'Casting the Runes' with video and computer technology to produce a gripping supernatural thriller. Policemen Bryant and May, and a librarian with occult interests helped Harry Buckingham avoid coming to a nasty end.

Lynne Fox

It should be impossible for all the **Vector** reviewers to each select five favourite new books from 1991. There aren't that many good books published each year. But there are five good books to be read each year.
Pat Cadigan's collection **Patterns** is packed with excellent, thought-provoking stories in the best tradition of speculative fiction. Well worth £3.99.
Colin Greenland's **The Entropy Exhibition** is a wonderfully readable and detailed study of the British New Wave in Science Fiction.
Read, re-read **The Unlimited Dream Company** by JG Ballard. It's this power of convinced vision, this relevance to here and now which so much contemporary fiction lacks.

John Gribbin

Best nonfiction: **The Man Who Knew Infinity**, by Robert Kanigel. The story of how an Indian clerk with no mathematical training, Srinivasa Ramanujan, produced a breathtaking stream of original work, became a Fellow of King's College Cambridge, and died tragically young just after the end of the First World War. Science is included, giving a flavour of the excitement and importance of Ramanujan's work even to non-mathematicians.
Runner-up: Dennis Overbye's **Lonely Hearts of the Cosmos**. This time the story is that of the Universe, and Overbye describes the lives and work of many cosmologists. He gets carried away sometimes, and presents a highly personal and US-centred view of some of the cosmologists and their work. But it makes for great entertainment.
Fiction: I have an ongoing love-hate relationship with John Cramer's **Twistor**. Love the science, hate the wooden characters; But it makes a refreshing change from all those stories with great characters and plots but no science. I think I'll start a campaign for real science in SF (CAMREASCIF).
Another hopeful sign for members of CAMREASCIF was the appearance of John Stith's **Redshift Rendezvous** on the Nebula shortlist. Excellent "what if?" speculation about the implications of a minor (?) change in the laws of physics. But there is more to SF than hard science, and I got as much pleasure out of a book where the emphasis is definitely on characters and feelings, not hard science. It isn't new; I picked up a secondhand copy of a 1968 Ace, **Synthajoy** by DG Compton, and as far as I know it is out of print, like most of Compton's work. And you thought all that stuff in **Interzone** was new! If Compton was American, Gatlanza would probably be reprinting his collected works by now. But as things are, I can only recommend you check out the book dealers at your next con.

LJ Hurst

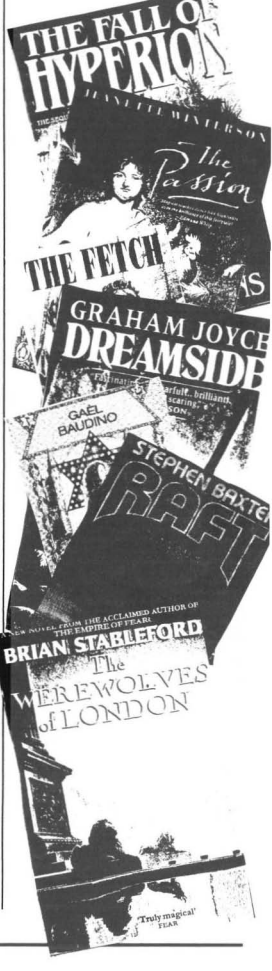
1991 seems to have been the year I used even the specialist debts to buy non-SF material. My first choice is tangential and most others even further away. That first choice is JG Ballard's **The Kindness of Women**, which gives a very alternative reading of the life of a man who helped to reinvent science fiction. Although it is said to be autobiographical it seems to be just as much a reinvention of Ballard. The other book that reached us was the illustrated edition of **The Atrocity Exhibition**, that came with Ballard's annotations to his Sixties creation.
The next two are straight biographies of tangential figures: Ted Morgan's **Literary Outlaw: the Life and Times of William S Burroughs**, an account of a man who dedicated his life to its own extinction and provided an alternative philosophy on the way, and the other is Bernard Shelden's **Orwell: The Authorised Biography**, which makes Orwell more human but lacks Bernard Crick's depth on the postwar writing of **Nineteen Eighty Four**.
I only bought Harold L. Klawan's **Trials of an Expert Witness** because the book club said I had to buy something, but it's a good read about the application of scientific expertise, and I've now read his **Newton's Madness** too.

Tom A Jones

Sadly I can only find four books I really enjoyed in 1991. I read fewer books than previous years, as the attention demanded by a two-year-old doesn't leave much time for reading and most of what I did read wasn't above average.
First, Barry Hughart's **Story of the Stone**: I really enjoy his detective stories set in a magical ancient China which sadly never existed. The plot is too complicated to describe, but it has lots of dead people in it.
Another 'China' book, **The White Mountain**, the third in David Wingrove's **Chung Kuo** series. The second book was a little slow, but this one certainly picks up the pace again. At the basic level it's a pseudo-thriller but the layered plotting takes it well above that.
Simon Green's **Blue Moon Rising** is a fantasy with a dragon, princes, magic swords, and all the sub-Tolkien paraphernalia which I normally dislike. This book overcomes that with humour and some interesting plot devices, and a great character in the Unicorn.
Finally, Ray Bradbury's **A Graveyard for Lunatics**. This is a detective/thriller (not a trace of SF) set in and around a Hollywood film studio. I liked the fast-cut style, the depth of knowledge and the affection that Bradbury obviously has for the movies.

Paul Kincaid

This year there's no contest for the best book of the year: **Sarah Canary** by Karen Joy Fowler (forthcoming) is a fantastical story about the Pacific Northwest in the latter years of the last century with a vivid historical awareness, a keen eye for peculiar historical fact, some wonderful writing, and an ending which just tips it over from straight historical writing into fantasy.
Any other year, **Only Begotten Daughter** by James Morrow would have won hands down.



This tale of the daughter of God coming to a near-future Atlantic City is sharp, corrosively witty, and an excellent example of science fiction at its most thought-provoking.

By comparison, **Time and Chance** by Alan Brennert is lightweight and sentimental, but I still found it one of the most entertaining novels I read this year.

It has been nearly ten years since Ted Mooney produced **Easy Travel to Other Planets** but at last he has come up with a second novel, **Traffic and Laughter**. It isn't quite as good as the first but it still puts him up there with Paul Auster and Don DeLillo with an excellent piece of literature which just happens to be set in a world where history took a slightly different path.

Finally, **Night of the Cooters** by Howard Waldrop, about which it is only necessary to burble incoherently and wonder how anybody could come up with such perfect stories.

Andy Lane

It hasn't been a classic year for SF, so I'm going to have to twist the rules to find five books that stand out.

First twist - Mike Resnick's **Soothsayer** was announced for UK publication during 1991 but only appeared in the USA. Resnick writes the sort of Western-in-Space SF that will outlast all other styles. **Soothsayer** isn't his best, but since he doesn't have a worst it doesn't matter.

Second twist - Tim Powers's **The Stress of Her Regard** appeared in the UK during 1991, but was originally published in the States in 1989. It's a beautiful, literate and complex book, and sees Powers return to his previous form.

Third twist - I can't remember whether Dan Simmons' **The Fall of Hyperion** was published during 1991 or not. What the hell, the **Hyperion** books are classics to rank alongside **Dune**. I'll say no more.

Fourth twist - Jonathan Carroll's **Outside the Dog Museum** isn't SF, but then I'm not sure what it is. All I know is that I started reading it at Glasgow station, finished it as I was pulling into Euston, and didn't notice the journey inbetween.

Fifth twist - er... nobody will believe that Stephen King's **The Dark Tower III - The Waste Land** is SF. Well, it's about parallel universes, artificial intelligences, post-catastrophe dystopias and time loops. What's more, it's very good.

Then again, maybe it wasn't such a bad year after all.

Ken Lake

The mandatory nod of approval at Terry Pratchett and Robert Rankin goes without saying, as does the genuflection before the complete five volumes of **The Collected Stories of Philip K Dick** now in Grafton paperback; Lois McMaster Bujold's eighth Vor novel **Barrayar** ought to win her a second Hugo, and the Robert Silverberg-franchised universe series **Time Gate** (vols. 1 & 2) are worth a try, as is Frank McSherry Jr's anthology **The Fantastic Civil War**, while Pulphouse Publishing's **Author's Choice Monthly** series continues to please.

But I have to single out a much belated discovery, Vladimir Nabokov's **Ada, or Ardor**, as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's readable annotated collection **Maps In A Mirror**, while reserving for special recommendation the mind-boggling Michael Talbot "this takes over from Hawking" all-encompassing theory of life, the universe and everything in **The Holographic Universe**, which is bound to annoy almost everyone.

Sally-Ann Melia

Books are a solitary pleasure, the brain translating the black ink into 3D Technicolour images and projecting them on that all-encompassing screen behind the forehead. 'Good' books necessarily compete against personal dreams and nighttime memories. So I must beg your indulgence, what follows is not my top five books for 1991, but *me* in 1991.

My first is **Canal Dreams** by Iain Banks. 1991 was the year I decided to read every story Mr Banks has ever written and this is by far his best. My first copy was lent to a friend, never to be returned; my second copy is dogeared from reappraisal and rereading.

My second is **Mindsail** by Anne Gay, a sophisticated debut weaving a heart-rending tale of dreams unfulfilled. A youthful lover disappears forever, the longed-for child is never born, Eden refound is a disappointment; in the end, death seems a gentle release.

My third is Colin Greenland's **Take Back Plenty**. I loved the Perks, the Cherub and the Parrot. And yes, it confirms what I always thought of men... well, another time...

My fourth is Robert Rankin's **The Antipope**, the first of his Brentford comic fantasies. The Devil comes to Brentford and upsets one too many of the Flying Swan's regulars...

My fifth is the Centenary edition, fully illustrated hardback of JRR Tolkien's **Lord of the Rings**, a beautiful book I will probably treasure and reverently peruse for many years to come.

Kev McVeigh

Five best books? **Antigone, Heart of Darkness, The Great Gatsby, Hamlet, Revelations.** It was a good year.

From recent times? The Clarke Award shortlist goes without saying, and then?

Jeannette Winterson - **The Passion**. A very personal, human view of love and history, and fantasy. A rich and warm novel i could read many times over.

A S Byatt - **Possession**. Lit crit, satire, history, a mystery, at least two love stories and poetry too.

Terry Bisson - **Voyage to the Red Planet**. Sound (as in well thought through) politics. SF rigour and sensawunda and more.

Mary Gentle - **The Architecture of Desire**. A love story, despite appearances, with as appropriate an ending as anywhere.

Ian McDonald - **King of Morning, Queen of Day.** Any novel which quotes David Langford can't be all bad. Three women, fantasy worlds, and Ireland interact within some marvellous writing. He gets better.

Nik Morton

The Empire of Fear by Brian Stableford, breathing something new into a vampire story and crossing more than two genres in the process;

A Fatal Inversion by Ruth Rendell, because she is so good at evoking a place, a time and a strange variety of psyches;

Good Omens by Gaiman and Pratchett, because it was such fun yet leavened with pathos and good thoughts - besides, they save the world, don't they?

Other 'best' books were not SF or Fantasy; but **Twilight**, a DC Comics graphic novel by Chavkin, Garcia-Lopez and Oliff was outstanding in its execution, encompassing cosmic themes, terrifying, brutal and moving; Penguin's adult comic **Give Me Liberty** by Miller and Gibbons, tearing apart turn-of-century American politics with irony and savagery.

John Newsinger

Best books of 1991: three really memorable novels and a number of also-rans.

First, Iain Banks' **Use of Weapons**. This author never fails to impress and this particular volume, the story of Culture mercenary Cheradenine Zakalwe, was outstanding.

Second, Bruce Sterling and William Gibson's **The Difference Engine**. An alternative history of Victorian Britain, exploring developments consequent upon the information revolution unleashed by Babbage's nineteenth century computer.

Third, Paul J McAuley's **Of The Fall** (the imported American edition was cheaper than the British edition!). Once again a fine novel of conspiracy and revolution on Elysium.

After these three it becomes difficult to single out two more that were outstanding. In the end it has to be Pat Cadigan's **Synners** and Phillip Mann's **Wulfsyarn**. The first chosen not because it was brilliantly successful, but because of my sympathy with what she attempted; the second a powerful space tragedy by a consistently good writer.

Cecil Nurse

First I would like to endorse the Arthur C Clarke award shortlist, some of which I would mention here otherwise. Personal favourites:

Raising the Stones - Sheri S Tepper. A full-blooded book, engaging fearlessly with the question of the creation, role and consequences of mythology in human history. On the one hand an unsentimental portrait of an intelligent fungus that incorporates humans in its commune; on the other an almost parodic fundamentalist community that nevertheless closely resembles real world attitudes. Eminently re-readable.

Dream Science - Thomas Palmer. Contemplations and variations on the nature of reality. Starting from a room apparently in the middle of nowhere, one follows the rational protagonist through deeply puzzling changes until an explanation and resolution is reached. I loved it.

Xenocide - Orson Scott Card. I haven't read the earlier works in this sequence but I found this full of ideas, melodrama, humour, compassion, folksy/ordinary people, and an unabashed happy ending. With the world so full of stupid, nasty and ridiculous things, I can't bear to be cynical about this.

White Mountain: Chung Kuo III - David Wingrove. This portrait of a vast decadent society where there are no easy answers, nor even happy outcomes for the protagonists, is winning me over. Paradoxically, I think it is because the unpleasant bits really do make me feel queasy.

Confessions of a Crap Artist - Philip K Dick. A tale of three ordinary scale total weirdos, drawn with bewildering compassion. Amazing.

Michael J Pont

My "top 5 for 1991"? Difficult. I buy most of my books from my local "Age Concern" shop at about 25p each: the choice of 1991 hardback SF/Fantasy from this source was limited! I also devoted much of last year to trying to get my own first novel into print, which left fewer opportunities for reading. These problems aside, I did catch up (just a little late) with Greg Bear's **Queen of Angels**, which I much enjoyed. I also read and was sadly disappointed by Stephen Donaldson's **The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story**.

Moving to "real" 1991 books, Terry Pratchett's **Reaper Man** is added to the list. One definition of a good story is that it should fill the reader with a compulsion to read, and then a sense of loss as the last page is finished; very much in this category for me was Ray Bradbury's new novel, **A Graveyard for Lunatics**. Note that this is not, despite the author's previous record, a work of SF/Fantasy.

Finally, from the 1991 reviews, Chris Claremont's **Grounded** .

Andy Sawyer

Whereas in 1990 I could easily have nominated a top ten of SF novels read during the year, I found it hard to do the same for '91; all my fault, I'm sure. However, no fictional character I encountered in any form in '91 matched Lucy Snowe from Charlotte Bronte's haunting **Villette**, which I finally got round to reading following a visit to Haworth where I fell desperately in love with the author.

For that matter, few fictional characters matched the reality of Oscar Wilde as revealed in the **Selected Letters** edited by Rupert Hart-Davis, which chart Wilde's compulsive self-destruction and brilliant charm.
Non-fiction book of the year, though, has to be Lawrence Sutin's biography of Philip K Dick, **Divine Invasions**: another flawed genius, sympathetically portrayed. We miss him. This was closely matched by Stephen Jay Gould's **Wonderful Life**, an "ideas book" if I ever read one. Since reading it I've been able to understand and enjoy the exchange between Ken Lake and Andy Robertson (**Vector 163/4**), even though I disagree with them both.
Finally, just to show that I have read some good SF novels this year, I'll nominate as best of the bunch Arthur C Clarke's **The Ghost from the Grand Banks**; not, perhaps, technically the best SF novel of 1991, but one which, for me, proved that Clarke original is better than Clarke sharecropped, and in which Clarke's mastery of extrapolative future-drama and poetic, almost childlike marvelling at what can result from mathematical theory showed him as near top form as makes no difference.

Maureen Speller

This year I've read more short fiction than novels. Indeed, I feel completely unqualified at present to comment on the state of novel publishing and I'm constantly behind on my short fiction reading as well so my choice will seem a little biased.
I was very impressed by Nancy Kress's **Beggars In Spain**, an extraordinary story about genetically engineered people who do not need to sleep. Set apart from society, the urge to regard it as a metaphor for the marginalised in any society is irresistible.
Connie Willis's **Cibola**, about a mysterious lost city, embedded within a familiar environment, delighted me as a person convinced that even concrete blockhouses have an inherent magic.
Terry Bisson's **Bears Discover Fire** is what Gary Larson would write if he didn't draw instead, and Bisson indeed acknowledged the influence of Larson. This story is weird.
Richard Kadrey's **Notes for Luchenko's Third Symphony** [**Back Brain Recluse 18**] impressed me as an honest attempt to sidestep the conventional narrative form.
Mary Rosenblum's **Waterbringer**, one of a series of stories set in a drought-ridden future America, each a beautifully-crafted gem.
For 1992, I want to pose two questions: when will short fiction be given the serious and thoughtful critical attention it deserves in this country? And when will short story writing in Britain not be almost exclusively tied to the production of theme anthologies?

Alex Stewart

By far the best book of the year for me was Mary Gentle's **The Architecture of Desire**; a deft and disturbing swashbuckling fantasy which, unusually for the genre, wasn't afraid to confront some of the darker aspects of human nature.
Neil Gaiman's graphic album **Season of Mists** tackled similar themes on a more cosmic scale, raising some interesting theosophical points with his usual wry humour along the way.
Less intellectually demanding, but fun nevertheless, Tom DeHaven's **Walker of Worlds** rung a few interesting changes on the traditional fantasy quest, spilling it over into the gutters of contemporary New York.
Back in the mainstream, Paul Auster's **Moon Palace** offered a more allegorical, knowingly postmodern treatment of the urban dispossessed.
Finally, Garrison Keillor's **We Are Still Married** dissects the American psyche with quiet, surreal wit; probably best enjoyed on the BBC audio tape, read by Keillor himself.

Charles Stross

First off, **Vineland** by Thomas Pynchon. Published in 1990, the novel that took him twenty years to write - a merciless and funny portrayal of corporate postmodern America in the 'eighties, Japanese multinationals engaging in corporate warfare over the latest microchips, deranged DA's descending on drug farms in black helicopter gunships, teenage hackers jacking into the net (and each other), and an order of ninja feminist nuns in the hills above Hollywood. Sounds familiar? It should be; this is the ***ne plus ultra*** of cyberpunk... and it's set in 1983! Mondo-2000, eat your heart out; this is the real thing.
Second: **Rats and Gargoyles** by Mary Gentle. I know I'm late on this one, but let me just say: this is the most challenging, cerebral, downright intelligent fantasy to hit the bookshelves for ages. Pimply Trilogy junkies will be found squatting dead on the toilet, pants around their ankles, smoke trickling from all their orifices and an overdose-pure fix of this lethally-sharp fantasy clamped between their hands. Weeble. I ain't no fantasy fan, but this is Righteous Stuff. Mainline on it...
Third: **The Brains of Rats** by Michael Blumlein. The LA soul-surgeon strikes again with the precision of a cruise missile and the mercy of a serial killer. About as pleasant as a tracheotomy, and about as avoidable as death: totally compelling.
Fourth: **Night of the Cooters** by Howard Waldrop. Waldrop writes exactly the opposite of Blumlein - expansive, broad, rambling, friendly, woolly - in every way except one: quality. These stories are, frankly, amusing. And, um, moving. And, uh, just plain fun. Go figure.
Fifth: **Out on Blue Six** by Ian McDonald. "Quirky" is the simplest way to describe it. Or maybe outrageous... an exercise in the sustained suspension of disbelief that, amazingly, pulls itself off and leaves behind a quite strange emotional kick for an encore. I don't understand this book, but I want to. I'm going to have to re-read it again soon, to get back the feeling of immanence that came from it.

Martyn Taylor

The Fall of Hyperion by Dan Simmons is, to my mind, the superior third of the story - massively ambitious and at least he dropped that awful Canterbury Tales gimmick!
Earth by David Brin is another ambitious work, although flawed - it could have gone through the WP one more time - but I like ambition and I like Brin.
The City, Not Long After by Pat Murphy is a unique piece of imagination and writing, a story and a telling which moved me - pointillist to the spraygun artists mentioned above, but what's wrong with being an individualist?
Outside the Dog Museum by Jonathan Carroll has ambitions as large as those of Simmons and Brin, but Carroll treats them as being the canvas on which his characters paint their smaller scale contributions to the drama. By some way the best of the Venasquez sequence; I even bought it in hardback! At the same time I bought Robert Holdstock's **The Fetch**, also in hardback, on the strength of a first page which would not allow me to wait for the paperback. More of Holdstock's uniquely British muscular, earthy fantasy; he just keeps getting better.

Jon Wallace

A mixed bag this year. Mike Resnick's **Ivory** was well worth reading; first as wideranging SF - almost but not quite Space Opera -, second as thoughtful fantasy; both elements blended together to grip the imagination to the end.
Still with thoughtful fantasy, Robert Holdstock weaves a fine web in the beautifully constructed **Lavondyss** which ties up some ends and unravels others from the mysterious **Mythago Wood**.

And talking of woods, **Duncton Tales** by William Horwood sees his excellent moles facing a new threat, this time from fundamentalist elements. Horwood's mix of myth and down-to-earthiness works as well here as in his other books, and sets you on the edge of your seat waiting for the last book in the series.
Religion also features prominently in Gaiman and Pratchett's **Good Omens**, a well-rounded apocalyptical tale featuring (among others) a prophet with a strangely narrow view of the future and what has to be the funniest line of the year - "Do Notte Buye Betamacks."
I know that this is supposed to be five books, but I'd just like to sneak in an honourable mention for the Graham Masterson-edited **Scare Care** collection. The proceeds of this anthology go to child protection charities. And it's worth reading.

Martin Waller

Pride of place to Kim Stanley Robinson's **Pacific Edge**, completing his Orange County triptych and a warm, beautifully written story that achieves the impossible by making an ecotopia interesting.
Mary Gentle's **Rats and Gargoyles** was another must, an extraordinary, original vision.
I enjoyed Colin Greenland's **Take Back Plenty** despite a lingering feeling that my leg was being pulled.
Gibson and Sterling's **The Difference Engine** was a light *jeu d'esprit* with some distinctly dark undertones.
I have an affection for alternate world yarns, so I include Robert Charles Wilson's **Gypsies**, particularly for his Novus Ordo, a vivid depiction of a United States gone horribly wrong.
Among the blockbusters, David Brin's **Earth** never really convinced despite a welter of detail but gave encouragement for next time.

Martin R Webb

This past year seems to have produced few outstanding books, and sadly even fewer from British writers. The one I found least worthy of praise was **Reprisal** by F Paul Wilson, a writer I had admired until this book. Whitley Streiber's kidnapping tale, **Billy**, did not fulfill the promise. While not technically new books, James Herbert's re-issued **The Dark** and **The Spear** deserve a mention because, not only are they eleven years old and are now published in NEL's mother imprint Hodder & Stoughton, their backgrounds still ring true today.
David Gemmell's **Lion of Macedon**, a fantasy based in mythological Greece, and the first part of a saga, was well-written and deserves attention from anyone interested in the genre.
My top five for 1991 were:
1. **Twilight** by Peter James, the best and most original book of the year.
2. **Malltime** by Chas Brenchley: a believable storyline.
3. **Renegades** by Shaun Hutson: politics and the occult join forces.
4. **The Boat House** by Stephen Gallagher.
5. **Stranger in a Strange Land** - the uncut version - Robert A Heinlein: still a classic.

Artwork by Martin Brice

Wise Child Wayward Woman

Angela Carter,

an obituary by Sally-Ann Melia

Angela Carter, cult writer of Gothic fantasy, described by David Pringle as a writer of "great verve, great good humour, great daring and great generosity of spirit," died on February 17th, 1992 of lung cancer.

Her dark fantastical novels **The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman** 1972, **The Passion of New Eve** 1977 and **Nights at the Circus** 1985 were amongst the most praised books of this genre; dying only weeks before her last book **Expletives Deleted** was published, Angela Carter leaves us with books still to be written and is a great loss.

The daughter of a Highlander and a Selfridges cashier, Carter lived through the Second World War in a mining community in South Yorkshire. She claimed her earliest childhood memory was of standing atop a slag heap with a crowd of other youngsters, shouting abuse at the German bombers passing overhead to rain destruction on Manchester or Leeds.

The family lived in the house of Carter's maternal grandmother, whom she greatly admired. She once remembered: "Every word and gesture of hers displayed a certain dominance, a native savagery and I am very grateful for all that, now, though the core of steel was a bit inconvenient when I was looking for a boyfriend in the south."

The war over, Carter's parents returned to London and here she was increasingly drawn under the influence of her journalist father, Hugh Stalker. Together they would attend matinee performances of glittering post-war films; the more glamorous the better. Some of these films were not thought altogether suitable for a young girl; it seems she saw Jean Simmons in the original **The Blue Lagoon**. Carter's love affair with the glitz showbiz of old Hollywood would pursue her through to adulthood and people her novels with larger than life heroines: Tristessa, Fevvers and the twins Nora and Dora Chance.

From her mother, Carter gained an insight into "niceness" and learnt the importance of qualifications. She would have gone to Oxford, had it not been for her mother's off-the-cuff remark that she would also move to Oxford to be nearer to her daughter. Such suffocating possessiveness, paired with an insistence on academic excellence sent Carter spiralling down into a vector of depression, self-hate and finally a serious case of Anorexia Nervosa. So Oxford was postponed.

Instead Carter's father found her a post on the Croydon Advertiser. In retrospect a journalistic career may seem to have been a good fit, in fact it quickly revealed Carter's scant regard for facts and total disrespect for actual events. From the newsdesk she moved to a comfortable niche in record reviews and features.

Angela Stalker married Paul Carter in 1960 and moved with him to Bristol. Leaving her job, Carter discovered herself "only a wife" and experienced acute frustration. Her husband tried to make her life more interesting by taking her on peace marches and introducing her to folk and jazz, but wandering through the city, she discovered for herself the student and cafe life of the university. Within a year she was studying English Literature with a particular interest in the medieval and the fantastic.

Carter wrote her first novel **Shadow Dance** during the summer break of her second year at Bristol; it was published in 1986. Three other novels followed in quick succession: **The Magic Toyshop** 1967, **Several Perceptions** 1968 and **Heroes and Villains** 1969, as well as a story for children; **Miss Z, The Dark Young Lady** 1970.

The Magic Toyshop won the John Llewellyn Rhys prize and has subsequently become a television film and a set text at British schools. The story tells how fifteen-year-old Melanie steps into a bad dream when she tries on her mother's wedding dress. Using magic and myth this beautiful tale spins out the wonder of sexual awakening.

Heroes and Villains was her first novel to fall squarely into the category of science fantasy. It depicts a post-holocaust scenario where some lucky survivors have emerged from bunkers to live in university citadels and towers of stone, with armies to protect them from the barbarians and mutant Out People living in the ruined cities, radio-active marshlands and forbidden forests. The when, why, and how are never addressed or answered; only the present counts. The heroine, Marianne dreams of freedom from the restrictions of the life of a professor's daughter and escapes to live with a powerful young barbarian; her brother's murderer. The novel carries a powerful message of discontent and longing for another reality, another life.

Several Perceptions won the Somerset Maugham Award with an associated requirement to travel; Carter left her husband to live in Japan from 1971.

It is difficult to imagine Carter, with he multicoloured clothes and "devil may care" frizzy blond mane, living among the prim and proper Japanese of the early 1970's. Yet she stayed for two years, meeting up with refugees from 1969 France who reinforced her socialist ideals and encouraged her to pursue her exploration of relationships between men and women.

Love, published in 1971, draws heavily on this theme. Its strength is Carter's exposition of erotic violence, of female as well as male sexuality. Her men and women clash frequently and bloodily; there are no easy victories. Her prose is rich, vivid and sensual.

Life in Japan brought an opportunity to look on ordinary European life from a fresh perspective and reveal the fantastic. Carter wrote two spectacular fantastic novels: **The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman** 1972 and **The Passion of New Eve** 1977. Many people thought the first to be the best of Carter's earlier novels, herself she was not so sure. It was outlandish in a fashionable way but alienated many who had previously seen her as an emerging new talent. In her own words: "It was the novel which marked the beginning of my obscurity, I went from being a promising young writer to being ignored."

It is a novel of adventurous travel, following in the footsteps of such gargantuan predecessors as Voltaire's **Candide** and Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**. The young hero Desiderato pursues the beautiful Albertina across cultures, continents, through vampire-infested nights and even through time itself, repeatedly befriended then abused by a magnificent cast of African cannibals, lusty Moroccan acrobats and extraordinary tattooed centaurs. At the end of the novel the hero overthrows the evil Doctor Hoffman, but having saved the city, he finds himself in the unenviable position of having nothing left to live for, except for the memory of his past misadventures.

The Passion of New Eve followed fast in Doctor Hoffman's wake and is in a similar vein. Carter allows her young hero to seduce and impregnate a teenager. Becoming bored he forces the girl to have an abortion; when this back-street coat-hanger job goes wrong he abandons her to a life of sterility in an uptown clinic. The remainder of the novel vindictively showers misadventures on the hero, from surgical sex change through imprisonment in a harem with weekly scheduled rapes, the discovery that his life-long heroine is in fact a man, a brief night of passion before watching his lover's murder and more. The cruelty of this piece, in a world of dog-sized rats and gang street fights grown into pan-American civil conflicts, took my breath away. Still it is compelling reading.

Neither of these books was well received in the UK, but they did enhance Carter's international reputation. Her name became known from Denmark to Australia and teaching invitations came to her from all parts of the English speaking world. She was guest lecturer at Sheffield University in the 1970's and at Brown University, Providence and the University of Adelaide during the 1980's.

In 1973 Carter began to write on a regular basis for **New Society** magazine. A close friendship with Carmen Callil blossomed into a publishing relationship and her first piece of non-fiction **The Sadeian Woman** was the first book published by Virago. In writing to Callil in 1973, Carter said: "Herewith is the Sade book for Virago, who I hope is a healthy child and screaming already."

This was an important work. Carter gave voice to the feminist idea that women are partly responsible for their subjection within society. This was a thorny path for her to tread, but was a vital part of the growing feminist attack on British values frozen in a Victorian timewarp.

The end of the 1970's saw the appearance of two further collections of short stories: **Fireworks** 1974 and **The Bloody Chamber** 1979. In describing these two books, W L Webb, Literary Editor of the **Guardian**, said: "The wry and rude comedy that sauces the erotic poetry of those fables and fairy tales for grown ups will be rediscovered delightedly long after the heavy prizewinners of the seventies and eighties have sunk without trace." The Bloody Chamber won the Cheltenham prize.

In the 1980's Carter started to reap the rewards of her industrious youth. This decade would see her produce two further novels, another non-fiction work, two screen-plays, two collections of short stories and a son.

Nights at the Circus 1985 is the tale of six foot trapeze artiste with wings who is interviewed by an American journalist who hopes to expose her as a Humbug. The lady gymnast invites him into her dressing room, and into her life. The journalist, Walser, learns of Fevver's past and joins her circus to become part of her present. Together they embark on a voyage of adventure across turn-of-the-century Russia from St Petersburg to Siberia and into the new century. To quote David Pringle: "Fevvers is a new woman for a new age, the all-embracing, all-conquering, high-soaring symbol of a liberated femininity." **Nights at the Circus** won the James Tait Memorial Prize.

Wise Children 1990 is a multi-layered tale reflecting Thatcherite Britain which Carter invariably described as "Going to hell in a handbasket." The novel tells the life story of twin sisters Nora and Dora Chance and is told by Dora at the age of 75. Four-fifths of the book is reminiscences; the story only swings into the present in the last fifty pages for a family reunion. The front page bears the old saying: "It's a wise child that knows its own father." And the plot hinges precisely on that question: Who is the twin's father? And will he ever recognise them?

The only link I perceived with the swinging eighties under Thatcher was that the twins never sold their souls. A Thatcherite heroine may well have married the first and best millionaire who came along and lived the remainder of her life in clover. Both girls were tempted by such offers and passed them up, espousing their life together and family values.

The non-fiction, full-length work **Nothing Sacred** 1982, was Carmen Callil's idea, a collection of Carter's pieces written for **New Society**, it touched on a spectrum of subjects: "South London, Venice, Padstow, D H Lawrence as a closet Queen, Red Indians, Health foods, Underwear, Teddy Bears, Male Nudes." **Black Venus** 1985, and **Wayward Girls and Wicked Women** 1986, came next. Two anthologies of fairy tales for grown ups and stories "designed to promote the female virtues of discontent, sexual disruptiveness and bad manners."

A wider audience was reached by the television film of **The Company of Wolves** 1984, based on one of Carter's short stories and **The Magic Toyshop** 1987. Carter was involved with the writing of the scripts for both pieces and Neil Jordan spoke of fond memories of meeting her for tea in Clapham and devilling pieces she had written late into the night. He was impressed by her fearless

imagination and her awareness of sexual issues, but most particularly her sense of irony.

Carter started the 1990's with a new and unique anthology of fairy tales: **The Virago Book of Fairy Tales** 1991. This is a gem fallen on rough ground, just waiting to be dusted off to sparkle, with over forty short stories; some *very* short. These tales echo of "mother's knee" with their cast of princesses, trolls, evil fairy godmothers and adventures, yet these are the ones that got away. They have never been tamed for a PG rating or picture book painted by a hundred and one publishers, plain and simply the stories are thought-provoking originals. Carter's favourite was the Russian tale **The Wise Little Girl** about a spunky, dumpy, plucky seven-year-old peasant girl who outwits the Tsar and grows up "happy-ever-after" to become his bride.

Carter was an early contributor to **Interzone**. 'The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe' appeared in **Interzone 1** and 'An Overture for "A Midsummer Night's Dream"' in **Interzone 3**. The stories are similar in that the first creates a fictional childhood for the famous black fantasy writer (or someone with the same name), while the second describes what happens before the curtain rises on a performance of Shakespeare's **Midsummer Night's Dream**. The two stories bear witness to the two main themes of Carter's writing: the wonderful world of make-believe in the theatre; and the conflict between male and female sexuality.

Carter had been a lifelong smoker and it seems she continued even after being diagnosed with lung cancer. It all came to an end on February 17th and yet is not over. On April 6th Virago will publish her last novel **Expletives Deleted**, later this year will come a **Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales**. Her influence can also be felt in a decade of new writers from Rushdie to Jeanette Winterson to the American Fabulistes like Robert Coover.

Carter's second marriage to Mark Pearce was a success and there are many testimonials to her deep love for her son Alexander. She lived her last years in and around Clapham Common. You were quite likely to have spotted her window-shopping and holding her son's hand. On one such outing a friend reported, they passed before a Latin American craft shop; after a few moments appraisal, Carter concluded: "Their devils are dull."

And so is the twentieth century now Angela Carter is gone....

Chronology

Angela Carter, writer, mother and first rank feminist thinker. Born May 7th 1940, died February 17th 1992 from lung cancer.

Novels:

1965 Shadow Dance
1968 The Magic Toyshop
1968 Several perceptions
1969 Heroes and Villains
1970 Miss Z - The Dark Young Woman
1971 Love
1972 The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman
1977 The Passion of New Eve
1985 Nights at the Circus
1990 Wise Children
1992 Expletives Deleted

Collections of short stories:

1974 Fireworks
1979 The Bloody Chamber
1985 Black Venus
1986 Wayward Girls and Wicked Women
1991 The Virago Book of Fairy Tales
1992 The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales

Non Fiction:

1979 The Sadeian Woman
1982 Nothing Sacred

Film Scripts:

1984 The Company of Wolves
1987 the Magic Toyshop

George Mann Macbeth 1932 - 1992

An obituary by Cardinal Cox

George Macbeth was an important figure in the development of British SFnal poetry. He was editor of the **Fantasy Poets** series for the Fantasy Press of Oxford from 1952 till 1954. His contributions to **Penguin Modern Poets 6** 1964 include the evocative pieces 'Mother Superior' and 'Early Warning'.

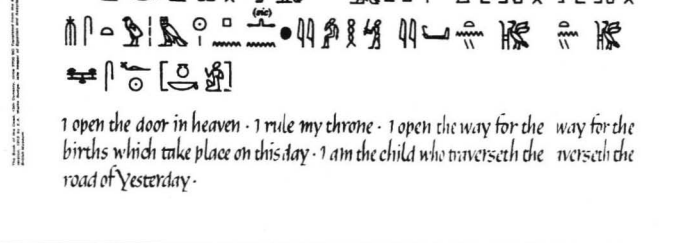
His first contribution (of several) to **New Worlds** was 'Crab Apple Crisis' in issue 167 of October 1966. This was followed in January 1967 by the oft-anthologised 'The Silver Needle' in which a psycho-active hero journeys epicaly through innerspace. He contributed four further poems over the next few years.

In Langdon Jones' 1969 anthology **The New SF** the poem 'Fast Car Wash' was included with an interview conducted with J G Ballard for BBC Radio's Third Program. (He Had been involved with the BBC's **Poetry Now** from 1965 till 1976).For the 1973 anthology **Beyond This Horizon** he contributed the etherial 'Lamps'.

He did not just write poetry though, there is his short fiction like 'Mirth' in the anthology **A Book of Contemporary Nightmares** 1977, his novels including the soft-porn **Cadbury** series (1975-1981) and autobiography, **A Child of War**1987.

At last year's Poetry Festival in Kings Lynn I was lucky enough to have a few words with him. He reminisced about the period when he wrote for **New Worlds** and expressed regret that so little contact was maintained between the various writers. He had just started reading SF again, starting with Greg Bear. His motor-neurone affliction was evident, but he declined to use a wheel chair in public. His spirit, and his wife and young child, clearly powered him, dressed as he was like an Edwardian gentleman. His knowledge of Poetry was encyclopedic and the world is a little greyer without him in it.

"The candle has been extinguished, but come the dawn, we'll have its image in the Stained-Glass window still"



The Book? The Film?

Liz Counihan discusses two stories by Stephen King

A year or so ago I thought it was time I read something by Stephen King. I'm not a horror fan, but people seemed to think he was the best and there was that delightful film **Stand By Me** based on one of his stories. So I bought **Misery**, which had recently appeared at WH Smith's - SK had an entire shelfload to himself. The book was, of course, a jolly good read with all the excitement and tension you would expect from a bestselling author; but there was more.

Misery tells the story of a cynical, middle-aged writer, Paul Sheldon, who has made his fortune with a series of corny historical romances about a girl called Misery Chastain. Paul aspires to write the Great American Novel, but feels that as a popular writer he is not taken seriously by the cognoscenti. What's more, he is thoroughly fed up with his creation and decides, as Conan Doyle did with Sherlock Holmes, to kill her off. On the day when his final "Misery" novel is published he has double cause for celebration as he has finished his Great Work (a streetwise modern novel) and is all ready to take it to his agent. Gleefully toasting Misery's demise, he sets off alone to deliver his new manuscript: an unwise decision as he has just drunk a bottle of bubbly and there is a howling blizzard outside. Then the horrid bit starts. Paul's car crashes and he wakes to find himself helpless with two broken legs and in the clutches of a psychopathic ex-nurse who also happens to be his "number one fan". When she finds out what he has done to her beloved Misery she is not at all pleased and shows her feelings by chopping bits off Paul.

This is all good fun, but once you've been a medical student and not only attended postmortem examinations but spent several months in the dissecting room, you aren't going to bother much about the odd flying limb (just remember that next time you visit your GP). Having established total control over Paul, Mad Annie forces him to write a sequel bringing Misery back to life; but not any old "with one bound our heroine was alive again" version. Paul tries that at first, but Annie won't allow any cheating, and so the writer is forced to write and in doing so half enjoys the challenge. The whole thing almost becomes a discussion about popular fiction and I suppose a defence, in a sly kind of way, of Stephen King's own work, as Paul comes to realise that writing Misery novels is what he is good at and something to be proud of. A large part of the narrative is taken up with passages from the new book as Paul desperately uses his talent to save his life. I found most of this fascinating and saved from any possibility of tedium by the well-placed episodes of manic violence from Annie.

Kathy Bates won an Oscar for her performance as Annie Wilkes in the recent film version of **Misery**. Yes, she does a good job with a blunt instrument and looks fairly unpleasant. James Kaan is adequate as the unfortunate Sheldon. All the horror scenes are juicily performed. But I found the film a disappointment. Paul's fevered visions of African goddesses and trapped birds, the fear of the tide of pain washing over him if Annie refuses to give him his addictive analgesics, the fear of not being able to imagine any more stories - all this is missing.

In 1983, David Cronenburg filmed an earlier Stephen King novel **The Dead Zone**. This story also concerns a car crash victim, this time the young, almost-too-innocent school teacher John Smith. John wakes up to find he has been in a coma for five years during which time he has lost his fiancee, his job and his health but gained an overwhelming clairvoyant ability which constantly thrusts him into the public eye. Seeking anonymity and trying to escape the terrifying effects of using his Gift he becomes a recluse, hiding behind shuttered windows. But his conscience forces him to violent action when the Gift shows him a way to prevent a future nuclear war although at a terrible cost to himself. John Smith is a tragic hero and it would have been very easy to cast an All American College Boy as Johnny and play for the Kleenex sales. But David Cronenburg uses Christopher Walken whose strange features and sinister smile emphasise the character's enforced alienation from "normal" people. (Christian Walken is a dab hand at playing sad and bad weirdos if you think of his Oscar-winning performance in **The Deerhunter** and his contribution to world villainy as the camp blond half of the devilish duo out to exterminate James Bond and flood Silicon Valley in **A View to a Kill**.) But all the acting in **The Dead Zone** is of the highest quality. The constantly gloomy snow scenes, the compressed time scale and Michael Kamen's sombre music, give a claustrophobic doomladen atmosphere to the film. Yes, there is some horror and some brilliantly economical special effects, but this isn't really a horror film: it's more than that, surely a minor classic, and much better than **Misery**.

I had to order the book - it seemed to be the only Stephen King not glaring at me from the horror line at Smith's. Was it worth it? Well yes, but I was a little disappointed. After the spare economy of the film, the novel seems too long and discursive. It fills in all the spaces: what happened to Johnny's family and friends during the years he was unconscious, but we learn all this in one minute of the film; the rise of the politician Greg Stillson so that we know just why we should find him repulsive, but in the film Martin Sheen shows us with just a wink and a phony smile. I prefer the spaces left unfilled. Nevertheless it is an exciting SF-based psychological thriller, and a clever working of the talent-as-curse theme, perhaps not quite bloody enough for the genuine horror fan.

So if I had to choose I would vote for the written version of **Misery** and above all David Cronenburg's film of **The Dead Zone**. And I'd give it an Oscar. But if it's blood you're after, then watch **Casualty** on TV - yes it really is like that.

The View From Olympus

Three Czech Women Writers Talk about SF

Translated by Cyril Simsa

Why do you write?

Vilma Kadlečková: Because I must; when I stop for a while, my fingers start to get terribly itchy.

Eva Hauser: As a safety valve. Clinical necessity. Provocation. Vanity. Narcissism. A craving for royalites.

Carola Biedermann: If a Sinclair Lewis or a Božena Němcová [1] could express themselves to the world in which they lived, and address it, why shouldn't I do the same? How's that for conceitedness? But then again, not completely, because writing for me is a form of communication with the outside world. And communication is a process which allows a person to prove to herself her own existence and the existence of the world outside. In the ideal case, writing mediates communication directly between these inner "I"s. So that it is probably a way of coming to terms with my own psychopathology.

Why do you write SF, or where appropriate fantasy?

VK: I love everything special, contrary, peculiar, unreal...plain reality without cosmic argosies or wizards bores me.

EH: I don't have a sense for realistic detail or atmosphere. I have almost no memories. I need to extrapolate. To exagerate. To invent. To propose theses. To play.

CB: Because a number of very nice people initiated me into the craft of writing in this field, and for a number of other reasons, which are contained in my replies to other questions.

With what obstacles have you met as a woman writing in this genre?

VK: Occasionally I am regarded as a lunatic, but then again I don't have to do the dishes and I have a lot of intelligent friends.

EH: With nothing but advantages. Because there are fewer of us and consequently we are more conscpicuous. What's more - as a man I would probably write in a more "literary" way, with less personal absorption and drive, and a greater interest in scientific and constructive detail instead.

CB: At first, with sticks between the legs and ridicule on the part of my family, especially with regard to my chosen genre, later with a certain grudging respect, and in the end with out-and-out respect and a little amazement, chiefly that with all my work I manage to write at all - even with tolerance for my most various excesses which are accounted to my "artistic" temperament. That is of course complete nonsense, but why should't we take advantage of it, eh?

For whom do you write? Do you have an "ideal audience"?

VK: Naturally, I write only for myself and my parrot. It's an ideal audience.

EH: Sometimes when I am writing I imagine somebody concrete, how they are reading it. Sometimes not, and I write only with regard to myself. It depends whether I am writing the thing for a particular occasion - for someone.

CB: In this province, my elder son excells. He snatches everything I write and reads it wholly raw and unfinished, in the course of which he actively contributes his own notably crazy ideas. Some things of a more delicate nature I try to hide from him, but he knows where to look for them. Apart from that, I have developed a corps of consultants, composed of Egon Cierny, Jan Pavlík and Lad'a Kejval [2]. Jan, for instance, has already stung me a couple of times with an idea for a surprise ending, the others tend to indicate when the text is too long, when there isn't enough action, and so on.

What role does feminism play in your writing?

VK: I prefer not to think about feminism.

EH: A spontaneously large one - ever since I got married. My writing is in a small way a counter-pressure called out by the fact that once in while someone drives me to the stove and tries to make me feel guilty for my neglected children and household, and my long-suffering husband. However, feminism is not something I force myself into, manecouvre myself towards. I don't say to myself - well, then, now I'm going to write in a feminist way.

CB: About the same role as it plays in my life. Every woman who doesn't have just the soul of a slave (and God knows there's a lot of them), must in our world be continuously angry and combative, so long as she doesn't take pleasure in people doing it on her head. A woman, if she wants in some way to hold her own, must be better than the majority of men, which admittedly is no great art, but it is damnably strenuous, and spiritually it is a life on the race track. It is simply impossible that this would not be projected into my writing. I very much like to project it by way of the contrast, by describing the stupidity and laziness of men. That is a theme which is so fabulously productive...

What future do you see for SF and fantasy?

VK: It will be a natural part of life and art - one of many variants. Nothing more, nothing less.

EH: Here in Czechoslovakia, at first a glowing one, then a respectably stable one; the biggest sellers will probably be comics.

CB: A good one and getting better. At a time when our sorely-tried country is being flooded with the literature of the desk drawer, which despite all its qualities is in the end much of a muchness, SF and fantasy form a direct spring of live water.

What influences and motivates you in writing?

VK: By and large I write things which I already yearned to write at the age of ten - but even without any kind of particular intention on my part, everything I meet with gets subconsciously projected into it. Motivation - see question one; weapon against laziness - closing dates for competitions.

EH: Influences: fairly unmediatedly, my life and surroundings. Motivates: my friends, competitions, requests for contributions to a magazine or an anthology. I like writing columns and working as a publicist, writing to meet the opportunity.

CB: That varies. Quite often it's the crazy ideas of my sons. The anecdote about how they forced me to win the Antigé Award [3] because they liked the prize as an artefact, is I think abundantly well known. Then again, not long ago they forced me to write a western, except it wasn't a true western, rather a western from their world, so they protested about the killing of a traitor. We had a lot of fun with it, and my sons occasionally washed the dishes. At other times, I need to come to terms with something in myself by this method, and at other times it is perhaps the army anecdotes of my husband. That was the case with the story which won the Antigé Award in 1989, when I tried to describe the world of the military, which is for me something like ET psychology.

What position do you occupy in the SF and fantasy writing community?

VK: I am woven into fandom like a liana twining through the primeval forest: just like all the others, creeping after the sun, sometimes on view to everyone and sometimes concealed.

EH: I see myself as an eternally beginning cracked woman of letters, who has only now started to have a serious go at it, and is clawing her way up onto that wall, where there are already - well - at the moment they have a fairly large turnover.

CB: I'm supposed to say this about myself? Well, okay. It's already a lot of Fridays since I was a novice to fandom, sitting somewhere in a hidden corner and putting together something which had nothing in common with literature apart from the fact that it also used letters. In those days, I used to peer timidly at those whom I called the *cognoscenti* [4]. For me they soared at Olympian heights. There followed an entrance to those heights so fast and sheer that it took my breath away. It's like a dream, and I'm afraid that I will wake up with a fever and a sock in my hand, and a chorus of family Fates will be explaining to me that I'm using the wrong needle for darning socks, an unsuitable kind of thread, and that the threads must be lined up one next to the other, for precisely on that rest the fortune and contentedness of the whole family. Into that, some dumpling on the television screen will be gabbling something I don't understand, even if it ostensibly seems like Czech, my temperature will keep rising, and I will feel inferior because that darning, well listen, even the neighbours refer to it...But back to Olympus. I don't feel like one of the gods, rather like one of the demigods or heroes whom form the gods' underbrush. Like that formed by Heracles, perhaps.

Are there things you can say in an SF or fantasy story which you can't say in the mainstream?

VK: It's not a question of which or what. SF and fantasy cannot say anything more than the mainstream and vice versa. It's a question of how. I love SF and fantasy backdrops.

EH: Precisely everything. Mad scientific ideas, mad social, cultural and linguistic ideas. Here, freedom has dominion. In the mainstream, it hasn't.

CB: Any kind of fantastic story has one immediate advantage: it makes it possible to avoid circling the point of contention, which I hate in life just as in literature.

Do you think there is a "male" and a "female" style of writing?

VK: Of course! We have different ways of thinking - and so inevitably we must also have a different way of writing. This gives us a great opportunity in "unfemale" fields of writing - in SF, but perhaps also in detective stories, horror stories, westerns. We have the opportunity to introduce something new there with considerably less effort than do men. And similarly women writing women's or girls' novels struggle much harder than women SF writers.

EH: Yes. Men are obsessed with constructions, a one-sided viewpoint, theses, and so they write in a more black-and-white fashion, more forcefully, but in SF they form a mass of graphomaniacs fascinated by technological visions. Women write in a more complex manner, about their circumstances, but sometimes this can be boring: trifles, minute observations, etc. A surplus of feeling and sentimentality is perhaps no longer a danger for women here.

VILMA KADLEČKOVÁ B 1971

PHENOMENALLY YOUNG, TALENTED AUTHOR OF SF AND FANTASY. HER STORIES HAVE BEEN APPEARING IN FANZINES AND SAMIZDAT SINCE HER MID TEENS, AND MORE RECENTLY IN PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS. IN 1990, SHE WON THE ANNUAL KAREL ČAPEK AWARD FOR HER FIRST NOVEL, NA POMEZÍ ETERNAALU, (ON THE BORDERS OF THE ETERNAAL). MOST OF HER FICTION BELONGS TO A FAR FUTURE STORY CYCLE ABOUT A MYSTERIOUS CRYSTALLINE SUBSTANCE CALLED ARGENITE, AND THE POWERS IT BESTOWS.

EVA HAUSER B 1954

ORIGINALLY A MICROBIOLOGIST BY TRAINING, SHE NOW WORKS AS A PROFESSIONAL EDITOR ON IKARIE MAGAZINE, THE SF MONTHLY FOUNDED BY ONDŘEJ NEFF AFTER THE REVOLUTION. THROUGHOUT THE SECOND HALF OF THE 80S SHE WAS A REGULAR RUNNER UP IN THE KAREL ČAPEK SHORT STORY COMPETITION, IN 1988 SHE WON OVERALL FIRST PRIZE THE FIRST WOMAN TO HAVE ACHIEVED THIS DISTINCTION. HER ARTICLES HAVE APPEARED IN A NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS, SHE IS THE WINNER OF THIS YEARS GUFF BALLOT, AND BBR WILL BE PUBLISHING A TRANSLATION OF HER STORY 'A TOOTHSOME SMILE, AN ARTIFICIAL DEATH' ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN IKARIE IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR.

CAROLA BIEDERMANN B 1947

A LAWYER BY PROFESSION, HER STORIES AND ARTICLES HAVE APPEARED IN A WIDE RANGE OF PUBLICATIONS, IN 1989, SHE WON BOTH FIRST AND SECOND PRIZE IN THE ANNUAL ANTIGĚ AWARD SHORT STORY CONTEST. HER STORY 'ONI' (THEY), A FINE FEMINIST HORROR TALE PUBLISHED IN IKARIE MARCH 1991, IS ONE OF THE TWO MOST CONTROVERSIAL STOIES THAT MAGAZINE HAS EVER PUBLISHED, AND STRONGLY DESERVES TRANSLATION. THE OTHER CONTROVERSIAL STORY WAS GEOFF RYMAN' S 'O HAPPY DAY' IN DECEMBER 1991.

Artwork by Claire Willoughby

CB: Yes, but on the whole it is independant of the gender of the author, it depends rather on their point of view. The male and the female world differ in a lot of things: perhaps in a system of totems, taboos and priorities. A man is capable of making a totem for himself out of his sexual organ, out of the act of voiding himself, or out of its end product. For women these things belong to the domain of the taboo. And so it is with lots of other subjects of examination. An author can study these affairs, and from a bird's-eye view write in either a male or a female way, according to need. I know plenty of things written by men in a downright female way. Something like The World According to Garp I'd gladly sign my name to.

How do you regard the process of writing? Are you an experimenter, a stylist, a messenger or an entertainer?

VK: I'm the one who spins and weaves fates and stories for the pleasure of the stories themselves.

EH: A crafty ironist, an autoptician, and sometimes just someone who hysterically cries the truth!

CB: That's a bit of a weighty question! How does one tell? You must understand, I don't have time to search myself. I have too much work, including my writing. Let others search me.

Do you feel any pressure (from fans or a particular culture) to write in a particular fashion?

VK: Very strongly. In fandom I have distinguished two conspicuous and antithetical tendencies -- in the direction of experimentation (Eva's biopunk, Martin Klíma's desert drama, Pšv's stories [5]), and in the direction of experiencing long, balladic tales interwoven with themselves (František Novotný's story cycle about the space junkyard [6], the great love of Tolkien, Dune, etc.). The adherents of one direction or the other try very hard, often subconsciously, to bring the others over to their side. Personally, I belong to the second stream -- and in the final analysis it is so close to me that, for all that I am aware of some pressure from outside, I am almost unable to distinguish it from my own intentions.

EH: Yes, often, a lot. They want space opera, kitschy fantasy, the little doves. They want consumer reading. No way! They're not going to get anything of the kind.

CB: Of course. It's enough for me to get information about some new direction, and I already have a taste to try it. For example, steampunk fascinates me. And I think it's necessary to listen to one's readers. But nobody will force me not to write "thank God" if I feel it that way. Just at the moment the poor little Lord God is in full bloom, but the Christians are prancing around again, so pretty soon it will be undesirable to say - I don't know - perhaps "bum". And I can't just not write it, if I feel it belongs in the text. (A pox on religious zealots!).

English translation by Cyril Simsa. First published in the Czech literary magazine, **Qvark**, Jan. 1991.

NOTES

1. Božena Němcová [1820-1861]. Important 19th-century Czech woman writer. Many consider her to be the first significant novelist in the Czech language, and she was also responsible for several popular collections of Czech fairy tales.

2. Egon Čierny, Jan Pavlík, Ládˇa Kejval. Active members of the Jules Verne SF Club in Prague, of which CB is also a member. Čierny was for many years the editor of the club fanzine, **Poutník** (also occasionally published in English), and is now trying to turn it into a professional publication. Pavlík doubles as president of Czechoslovakia's first Star Trek club, but is also a skilled translator of stories from French and English.

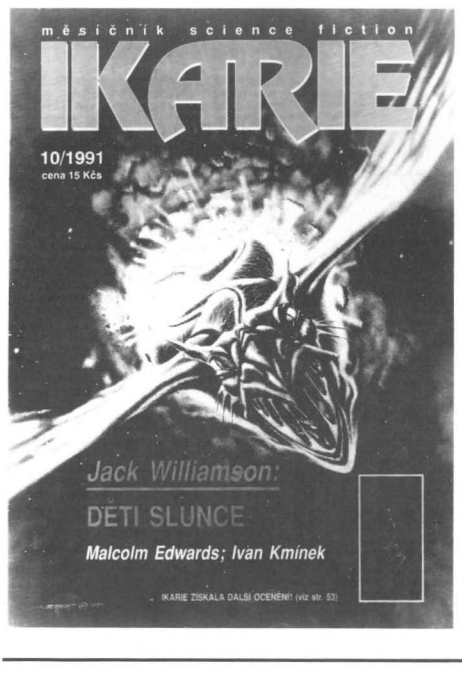
3. Antigo Award. Annual short story contest run by **AF167** magazine in Brno. AF167, which started life as a fanzine in 1985 (the name means "Anno Frankenstini 167"), has since the revolution transformed itself into a very fine professional SF quarterly, and looks set to become **Ikarie**'s main competitor. They are also planning a line of SF paperbacks, beginning with Harry Harrison's **Deathworld** novels.

4. Coryphaei. In Greek drama, the leaders of the chorus.

5. Biopunk: literary movement founded by Eva Hauser in 1987, in response to cyberpunk; other figures associated with the movement include the short-story writer Zdeněk Pšv [b.1959], and the Jihlava-based editor/translator Miroslav Fišer. Martin Klíma, a prominent Prague fan and gaming enthusiast (responsible in part for the Czech edition of **Dungeons & Dragons**), has also reputedly been working on an experimental stage play about a group of tavellers in the desert, first night yet to be arranged.

6. František Novotný [b.1944]: one of the leading lights of the Brno SF group, and a popular writer and critic, whose celebrated story-cycle about the vrakoviště (space junkyard) is set in a future where humanity has decided to abandon technology, and has put all its derelict space craft, robots, etc. into a huge storage facility. The cycle began with 'Legenda o Madoně z Vrakoviště' ('The Legend of the Madonna of the Junkyard', 1985), which won first prize in the Karel Čapek Award short story contest that year, and was published soon after in samizdat, but did not appear legally until Dec. 1990. The most recent installment in the cycle, **Ramax**, won the Karel Čapek Award as best novel of 1991.

With thanks to Denise Du Pont, on whose book, **Women of Vision** (St Martin's Press, New York, 1988), the questions have been based.



The Invisible Hand

Although full of admiration for the high quality of Bruce Sterling's work, and of his speech at WINCON II in particular, I feel that he may have word-painted pictures that show only one side of a whole currency of fictional and "Market" coinage. I would admit that the stuffing was largely kicked out of SF by television. And that the sufferer was kicked again by computer games. But, if it is now as moribund as Sterling suggests, may it not be the fault of editors who fail to encourage a kind of writing people will pay to read, and of writers who fail to turn out for the editors the sort of material that cannot be put down?

I am not as well read now, I feel, as well educated as either Sterling or the producers of and contributors to the BSFA magazines, so that my examples and points of view are limited and may be no more than a personal moaning.

For instance, although I feel that **New Moon Science Fiction** (It used to be **Dream SF**) has a consistently varied content, some issues of **Interzone** have been so depressing that they could have tripped an unhappy reader into suicide... because they were so good! While fans may enjoy such misery, no general reader is likely to pay a regular £2 for it.

SF needs iconoclasts, but surely a mixed diet is likely to be more palatable? And saleable?

SF, I think, should be exciting, thrilling, interesting, inspiring as well as shocking. It is not necessary for SF to preach towards a better world, but if it does so, the sermons should be wrapped in a mixture of colour, action and varied characters - some of whom should even have good morals - sorry to have to introduce this last pair of unpopular words!

SF in trying to be an art form, can so easily become anti-science. It should never be overlooked that science is crammed full of wonders. SF should not concentrate only on the dreadful possibilities of science. SF should, I think, actively try to spread at least a veneer of scientific awareness. SF is up against the fact that most people simply do not wish to know. They want to "drive the car but not understand how it all works." People generally simply do not wish for more scientific knowledge, do not want to suffer the disciplines of science. Many others have been trapped by circumstances and have forgotten how they once felt. SF should attract all kinds of people by offering the thrill of knowledge in small or large doses with a fictional narrative of sugar to help the medicine go down.

If there is to be a lot more spine and brain as Sterling suggests, ought it not to be written up into books such as the marvellous **Brief History of Time** and not as fiction which, by definition, is a lie.

And I very much hope that Sterling is not entirely committed to destroying "The Market" that he writes about so well. He may not mean that the Invisible Hand of the Market is necessarily bad, but he does not speak well of it either.

The Market, that is the World Market, at a basic level, is nothing more and nothing less than "Organisation." Civilisation itself requires Organisation. Capitalist Organisation, for all its faults, appears to work. The Invisible Hand, for instance, feeds people in this country even though they may never have grown a single vegetable in their lives. Invisible Hand Organisation created and operates the jet in which Sterling came over from America. In fact without organisation there could be no possibility of the application of science in human existence and certainly no general enjoyment of art whether in a popular book or a symphony orchestra. Those who would wish to court anarchy might do well to think again and consider keeping the Invisible Hand. It is not all bad.

Unfortunately sex could always be bought but, although having human organs for sale does seem immoral, yet it might be argued that large numbers of people may depend upon a millionaire purchaser for their work and prosperity.

And is the Invisible Hand really like a coral reef? A coral reef is crammed with life, all busily trying to keep alive, even to the extent of eating each other. Compassion, on the other hand is a uniquely human quality, not at all evident in nature. It should be kept in mind that out of the fat generated (inhumanly?) by the Market, enormous sums are being given to the less fortunate people in the so-called third world where the Market would appear to be unable to operate because of graft, civil war and an overall lack of organisation.

Of course the Market is far from perfect. For instance, its existence encourages rural populations (who might otherwise feed themselves, and be productive and even happy in some ways) to migrate to slums and become dependant on Invisible Hand cities. Yet on the other hand, many people in developing countries find themselves eager to work for the Market and thus buy automobiles and video-recorders because they do so more cheaply and so undercut the old producers of such things... so that a start is made to level standards within the Market.

Most people, although there is no physical compulsion to work for the Market, would admit that there are visible advantages in doing so.

Indeed, if there were no Invisible Hand, I fear there might be no SF. Sterling and all other writers would have no media in which to work. We would return from our World Organisation to a rural economy. There are quite simply *too* many people for it to be otherwise. Vast numbers would die or be reduced to subsistence levels. World civilisation *needs* the Invisible Hand of organisation.

In fact the Invisible Hand seems, on the whole very much a good thing, if not a necessity for humanity. SF should not, in my opinion, be knocking it, unless SF is anxious to knock away the very basis on which the future can be built. If SF has a duty to point out the dangers of organisation, it should also point out the benefits... In fact organisation is a knife-edge and if we fall off it there can only be anarchy on a scale that will bring death and destruction on a scale never before possible.

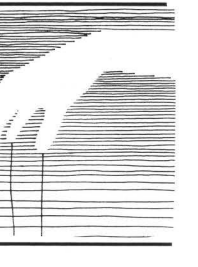
The Market is organisation; is civilisation; is surely more desirable than mud huts and no electricity and no sewage and... no hope?

Please, let SF show hope as well as gloom! To some extent, life really is what you make it, regardless of circumstances. It may not be a perfect system to have this Invisible Hand, but for a steadily increasing number of people it feeds, clothes and entertains them and leaves them to run their own lives. Surely the business of SF is not to bash such a system, but only to comment.

As for the continuance of SF... well, the written word is unique and may never be replaced entirely. Anyone who has read **Dune** will almost certainly know what I mean. **Dune** in **Analog** and then in book form awoke my imagination and hopefully awakes every reader's imagination in the reader's own, individual way. A writer can never know exactly how he affects his readers. Each reader may experience a different response. This cannot be the same as being spoonfed images as in the cinematic **Dune** which, though excellent, reminded this writer/reader of **Flash Gordon** rather than of Frank Herbert.

Long live SF, I say. Editors, writers and fans ought, in general, to like the world and try to bring a balanced way of looking at life and... dare I say it... thrills and excitement can capture more readers.

E R James appreciates the Market



Reviews

Edited by Chris Amies

In the Blood
Nancy A. Collins
NEL, 1991, 301pp, £4.99 pb

Black for Remembrance
Carlene Thompson
NEL, 1991, 248pp, £4.99 pb

1992 has only just begun, but **Black for Remembrance** is definitely a candidate for inclusion in my list of 'Five Best Books of 1992'.It is *terrifying*.So much so, that I should hesitate to recommend it to nervous aquaintances. Not "terrifying"-not "horrific" or "sickening", or even "gloomy". No, thesetting is cheerful, the atmosphere often bright, the home-life friendly ... and then WHAM-ice-cold fear hammers you and you grunt aloud with alarm; well, I did! Nineteen years ago, Caroline Webb's little girl, Hayley, was kidnapped and brutally murdered. Now the child's ghost suddenly appears, wreaking vengance upon all those who may have mistreated her when alive. Who is conjuring up this spectre? Is it the Voodoo-believing maid? Could it be the last person to see Hayley alive? Is it Caroline's childless friend? Or Caroline's first husband, Hayley's father? Or Caroline's present husband and children, jealous of the unforgotten dead. Could it be the detective; or even Caroline herself, always appearing at the crucial moment, deliberately spreading occult alarm to cover a campaign of corpreeal murder?An excellent book-I wish I'd written it.

In the Blood is another good read, although it could easily be subtitled "Marlowe meets Dracula". Palmer, a down-on-his-luck private investigator, is hired to find a beautiful dame, Sonja Blue; he falls for her and wants to know why she's wanted by a Mafia-type organisation. But **In the Blood** is more than a simple amalgam of the deteictive and horror genres. I enjoyed the earlier part more-Palmer tracking down his elusive quarry, gradually realizing the weird world into which he is blundering. The latter part becomes a brain-teasing maze, where every word has to be studied to ensure you don't miss some clue to the next occult manoever. In between there are some really grim passages: a gruesome birth, encounters with a pyrotic, and very nasty ogres. Yet most frightening is the attitutde of the master-manipulator Pangloss, who names all his personal assistants Renfield:

"'My dear Mr. Palmer, the world is full of Renfields! Just like it's full of letter openers and paper clips. You don't christen each and every paper clip you use with its own name, do you?"

Shades of those Nineteen Century stately homes where every footman was called John and every maid, Mary!

Martin Brice

Clay's Ark
Octavia Butler
Gollancz, 1991, 201pp, £3.99 pb

There are bleak echoes of the AIDS epidemic in this re-issue of a futuristic, nicely wrought, controversial story. A strange plague is creating an interdependent nomadic super race. Blake, a doctor, and a carrier of the virus, is the main male protagonist. He is concerned to prevent the disease from spreading. Yet, like a gnawing hunger, his survival is dependent upon physical connection. Thus, he wars within himself, his moral code inevitably superceded by his tainted human condition.

Feuding factions of desperado survivors wrestle with the knowledge that they are on the verge of extinction, unless they spread the infection.- With Blake, and his two daughters, we travel at a dizzy pace, gleaning previews of a future containing a new super race of athletic quadrupeds. The reader is moved forwards through the pain barrier, into a new dimension, where death, perhaps ultimately, has no dominion, and where reality is absorbed into an ubrella ghetto wherein eugenics becomes a plethora of new rabid offspring .... the summer of a new doomed race? Or perhaps a brave new world, breeding-orientated, where we recognize a humanistic fear for the future of the mutant children.

Conversely, the story does contain a lot of perhaps gratuitous violence; and the depiction of a naked doctor's daughter, dying a long drawn out death, riddled with bullets, perhaps smacks of misogynism.

As Meda says, "With no outlet it gets ... painful and crazy, sort of frenzied when there are a lot of unconverted people around. I have dreams ... where I have no choice but to keep touching people ... I'm on automatic. It's just happening." Finally, this book heralds the cosmic orgasm, not as a sinister virus, but a new breed of person, a message of hope.

Suzanne Rasmussen.

Halo
Tom Maddox
Legend, 1991, 216pp, £13.99

The eponymous Halo is an L5 habitat, owned and supposedly administered by the megacorporation SenTrax, but actually administered by a self-aware Artificial intelligence called Aleph in conjunction with an Interface collective of humans. In that difference between form and reality lies this small story.

One of the original movers and shakers of Halo, Jerry Chapman, is at death's door. His body doesn't work much but his friends think they can 'preserve' him by computer aided surgery while his personality is having a vacation in machine space. Sentrax, of course, want to keep tabs on this, and send along their investigator, Gonzalez, and a former staffer, Diana Heywood, who also happens to be a former lover of Gerry (coincidence, eh what?). Once everyone is in this idyllic machine space Jerry's body gives up the ghost and SenTrax executives pull Gonzalez and Diana out of the interface. This sends Aleph off in a jiff, and it effectively shuts down the station while devoting all its attention to keeping 'Jerry' alive.

Perhaps I don't know enough about computers, but I cannot buy this scenario; the machine space and the 'life' therein, that's okay, as is the aware AI, but not the maintenance of one "illusion" requiring all the "attention" of the AI.

I think that a large part of my problem is due to the duality of this novel. It begins as a hard edged, fast paced typically C-punk action story-Gonzalez hunting 3rd world corruption and all but getting iced by those 'lasers in the jungle'. So far, so good. Then he gets of Halo and everything gets soft and squishy, an AI mediated love story, not that I mind a love story, but the two parts don't fit together. Put simply, the future technology Maddox could extrapolate from his library works just find, the stuff he has to imagine-machine space-simply does not convince, convince me, at least.

All of which is a pity, because Tom Maddox can write-his characters come alive, his storylines can can accommodate sharp action when he wishes and his prose has that spare, evocative crispness which is the characteristic of so many good American writers. He can handle adult emotions in a way that gives them a genuine three dimensions.

So, what is the problem? I think it is Artificial Intelligence, that future concept which has been a staple of SF since we first imagined machines 'thinking' for themselves. While computers are fabricated by human beings I have greath difficulty in believing that the mechanical brains (mostly) so far postulated will 'think' like our organic electro-chemical melanges. **Halo** ends with the inevitable oriental guru saying to the sentient, if not yet angst-ridden, Aleph, "Welcome, brother human".

No, I don't think so. They are more likely to be the insecure demi-urges of Dan Simmons' imagining. Not that this is a 'failing' peculiar to Tom Maddox. To my mind, all the c-punk crew fall into the trap of anthorophomorphising their machines (and most other SF writers with them). Perhaps it is a generic failing, I don't know.

Martyn Taylor.

A Rage in Heaven
Kenichi Kato
Questar/Warner, 1991, $19.95hb

Question: After Davind Wingrove's **Chung Kuo** series, who needs another SF oriental? Answer: we all do. Especially when it's as cheerfully subversive as **A Rage in Heaven.** At first sight this book appears to be just an updated version of E.E. 'Doc' Smith. The cover shows a Royo space-warship in orbit around a planet, and, for once, that's exactly what you get to read about inside. However, on

closer examination there are some very subtle and amusing tricks going on here. Kato, a Japanese-American Vietnam veteran who according to American reviews emerged from the world of comics and film some three or four years ago, gets away with being very rude about present-day America and Japan, and he does it in a wonderfully intelligent way.

Kato takes delight in marking the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor with a tale of East versus West in the interstellar empire of four hundred years hence, but there is also a clever echo of the history of four hundred years ago, with the old social castes of samurai and peasant re-emerging on newly terraformed Japanese-controlled worlds. He cheekily dedicates the book to James Clavell, whose masterwork **Shogun** he mercilessly parodies throughout. He makes equally interesting criticisms of religion (both Eastern and Western) and effortlessly takes apart all the assumptions of the American world-view as the book proceeds. American cultural core-beliefs like the racial integration of humanity, the idea that Progress is a worthwhile goal, or even an inevitable concomitant of civilisation are gently toe-poked into the gutter. Democracy, human rights, social and sexual equality, all come under the jack-hammer. His American characters seem somehow always to be either gung-ho good-ol'-boy Texans or nasty, reptilian Washington-style politicians. He even mentions a planet called Disney World TM, and another called Wyoming, covered in forests, where the economy depends upon "corporate fatsos" flying in to play survival games and shoot vast amounts of game. It seems he understands America pretty well ...

It is refreshing to see a book as original as this, but it was probably a bad idea to disguise it so heavily as something as worn-out, trite and unfashionable to a western audience as Space Opera. Even though this setting is only the vehicle for the story, Kato's attention to detail is close, and he goes to the trouble of using plenty of accurate physics and astronomy in constructing his star empire. The action takes place in a plausible colonised universe six hundred light years across, where Old Earth has been destroyed by some unspecified disaster which is constantly and tantalisingly referred to. Another running mystery is the question of extraterrestrial life. Unlike just about every other SF interstellar empire Kato's has never encountered so much as an amoeba, and the mystery as to why this should be builds up interestingly.

The central theme of Kato's book is an examination of the historial process itself, and a drawing of the distinction between belief in Free Will or Determinism. This crystalises out in his handling of the idea of psi talent. Many of the interlocking facets are very subtle indeed (I hesitate to say like a Chinese puzzle) and will probably go straight over the heads of most American readers, if Mr. Kato is right about their crassness. This is borne out by the fact that about half the reviews in the States compared Kato to Hubbard or Herbert (some to both) or even to the Niven-Pournelle partnership. This was undoubtedly missing much.

A trivial example of one of the many games Kato plays is the frequent references to SF that pepper the novel in the form of SF book titles embedded in the text. I counted at least twenty. In many ways Mr. Kato seems to be grinning affectionately at the Golden Age. He is also taking sword-swipes at many phenomena of the post-war world, such as Japanese big business, the raping of Pacific islands to get at mineral deposits, the arms race, and the corrupt trught underlying superficially democratic government. Perhaps it is this, (or is it Kato's reported paranoiac bouts?) which explains why he complains that his work is being suppressed.

According to Kato's publishers **A Rage in Heaven** is the first volume of a series of six, called collectively the Yamoto Cyle. They say it is doing about as well as could be expected in the Recession. It will be interesting to see how the rest of this highly entertaining cycle stacks up financially and critically against the only other oriental SF series around at present, David Wingrove's **Chung Kuo**.

Lionel Freedman

Another Round at the Spaceport Bar
George H. Scithers and Darrell Schweitzer
NEL, 1991, 248pp, £4.99pb

The "bar story" is well known in SF-usually a short, slightly whacky tall tale type pf story; in a way a development of the "ghost story told in front of a roaring fire". This book contains 19, only one of which ('The Ultimate Crime') doesn't strictly speaking fit into the defined format. These are the stories:

'The Far King'-Richard Wilson (1978) takes place in a "hidden" bar in Chicago frequented by a few Earthlings and many different extra-terrestrials. Humour with a serious point made.

'The Altar at Midnight'-C.M.Kornbluth (1952). Short with all the punch in the tail-almost a prerequisite for the "ideal" bar story.

'Princes'-Morgan Llywelyn (1988). Overlong to get to the point, again relying heavily on the sting in the tail.

'The Subject is Closed'-Larry Niven (197'). Gives the reader a paradox to solve, or think about, in an entertaining way.

'The Persecutor's Tale'-John M. Ford (1982). Fantasy, with the characters being not all one suspects (or perhaps more than one suspects) to start with.

'Longshot'-Jack C. Haldeman II (1978). Perhaps the nearest, in this book, to the formula "bar story"-a lovely comically told tall tail (read it and find out that *isn't* a spelling mistake!)

'Finnegan's'-W.T. Quick (1988). Really a story *about* a bar rather than a bar-story. Humanity versus technology. Human cunning prevails.

'The Oldest Soldier'-Fritz Leiber (1960). Time travel and drink *do* mix.

'The Ultimate Crime'-Isaac Asimov (1976). One of the good doctor's Black Widower's tales. Fair, but not, to my mind, a proper bar tale.

'All You Zombies'-Robert A. Heinlein (1959). A typical Heinlein time-paradox that starts in a bar (thus enabling it to be in the book) but quickly leaves the bar behind.

'The Immortal Bard'-Isaac Asimov (1953) relies on the last line of its three pages for its effect.

'Anyone here from Utah?'-Michael Swanwick (1985). Reveals why and how the aliens have already taken over.

'Cold Victory'-Poul Anderson (1957). How a victory was won-and a defeat engineered-in a future battle.

'C.O.D.'-Jonathan Milos (1979). Intergalactic bureaucracy is the same as any we know, but on a much grander scale ...

'Pennies from Heaven'-Darrell Schweitzer (1986). Something nasty that happens to another person is bad-but what if you are the next victim?

'Not Polluted Enough'-George H. Scithers (1973). Back to the tall tales and story of how an alien invasion was prevented.

'Well Bottled at Slab's'-John G. Betancourt (1988). More *about* a bar than a bar-story, pure fun fantasy with logic shining through the magic.

'The Three Sailors' Gambit'-Lord Dunsany (1916). The style might be a little dated and the plot a little thin but a good story teller is *still* worth reading.

Keith Freeman

Albion
John Grant
Headline, 1991, 310pp, £14.95

Suppose that you had no memory, that only moments after an event happened - from a drink of water to a violent rape - you had no recollection of it, that it was almost as if it had never happened. Suppose that the land where you lived had no continuity of which field was where, which field contained which crops, that these things changed from day to day. Suppose also that into this world came a man with a memory who, by his presence, enabled others to remember, made the fields remain stable, gave names and a meaningful existence to those around him.

These are the ideas upon which *Albion* is based, ideas which in themselves are intriguing enough to make you try to imagine what it would be like to exist in such a way. The theory 'I think, therefore I am' needs a memory before even thought is possible.

Albion begins with Terman, a sailor, wrecked on the shore of Albion, rescued by Minna who, because of his presence, is able to remember. It seems a shame to me that with such a thought-provoking idea, all Grant has done with it is to go to war. Twice. The first half of the book describes the rebellion led by Liam, Terman's son, against the rulers, and the second half describes the rebellion led by Anya, Liam's daughter. But a war is a war, blood and fighting are much the same wherever they take place, and I did find the amount of time spent describing events similar to those in hundreds of other books disappointing. As were the number of rapes and the lack of effect they had on the victim. My impression is that Grant had an excellent idea, and being uncertain what to do with it, decided to send his protagonists on crusades.

The book is well written in so far as the writing flows well and the descriptions are good; but the characterisation is patchy and frequently shallow, people alter their behaviour radically without sufficient cause, except perhaps the author's needs.

Overall, a rather disappointing use of a really good idea.

Helen McNabb

Illusion
Paula Volsky
Gollancz, 1991, 700pp, £8.99 pb

Want to find out about the French Revolution? Yes? The really bloody, messy bit, 1789 through 1794? But you are someone who would not be seen dead reading anything other than SF or Fantasy? Paula Volsky's **Illusion** is the Fantasy novel for you!

700 pages of plot boils down to: boy and girl, garden playmates and classroom competitors, grow up to discover the girl is Exalted Miss Eliste vo Derrivalle; the boy, Dref, is a mere serf. Come the Revolution, the patriot Dref saves the outcast Eliste, and they all live happily ever after.

Illusion opens with a lengthy depiction of a pampered and privileged lifestyle. Necessary, yes; the reader needs to appreciate the scope of the subsequent social upheaval, but me, I was almost hysterical with boredom. Take for instance, this fascinating conversation between Exalted Miss Eliste, and her cousin Aur'elie on p261. Aur'elie is speaking:

''Do not my eyes reveal all? Are they not the windows of my soul? They shout my secret to the world, and I am surely undone, la! Come, Cousin, only look into my eyes, and you will know all. Just try, do!''

Resignedly Eliste complied. ''Really, I can't guess. Your eyes are scarcely the traitors you imagine!''

''Oh, pooh, cousin...''

And so it goes on. 100 words later we discover Cousin Aur'elie is in love. At first, I thought **Illusion** was translated from Polish or perhaps Russian; but no, Victor Gollancz confirmed Paula Volsky is American.

Come the Revolution, the story picks up. Paula Volsky's gift for minute detail comes into its own, as she describes the stage-by-stage demolition of Exalted Eliste's lifestyle to abject poverty and starvation. The last 200 pages are truly exciting: when will Dref come

to Eliste's rescue? Will Eliste and Dref get together?
I might even I have liked **Illusion**, if I didn't have one area of specialised knowledge. Educated in France, I was immersed, at a tender age, in the sordid detail of the Terror, 1793-94. During those two years of Revolution, Robespierre guillotined the King, Marie-Antoinette, and about 19998 others, and was finally guillotined himself as a result of a counter-coup. Paula Volsky neglects the fact that the Terror was a product of a decade of famine, a reaction to the 12000 inhabitants of the Royal Court conspicuously consuming 25% of France's National Product, and a defence in the face of the young Austrian Emperor storming down on the Frontiers.
Instead she describes sentient machines controlled by magicians, not even particularly interesting Fantasy. **Illusion** is one page ripped unceremoniously from history, and embroidered into a Fantasy novel.
Sally-Ann Melia

Darker Than the Storm
Freda Warrington
NEL, 1992, 304pp, £4.99 pb

Prince Ashurek and his lover Silvren have been living happily on Ikonus where Silvren teaches in the School of Sorcery. In a fit of restlessness Ashurek opens a Way to another world, Jhensit, and as punishment for this unauthorised use of power, he is sent through to that world to observe and ascertain whether it poses a threat. In fact he discovers that Jhensit is slowly being consumed by the Maelstrom, and a small group of gifted people have been sending promising youngsters through to Ikonus to study at the School in the hope that one would come back to save their world. However as Ashurek passes through the Way, a force sweeps through and catches both Silvren and the High Master Gregardreos, depositing them in the Maelstrom. Meanwhile among the ruling elite a sinister murderer is loose, and the Hyalon quite unreasonably suspects his sister, who therefore has to take refuge with the Court of Pels. And what is the secret of the White Dome? And why the references to Ikonus' Sphere?
As I am not a fantasy fan, I have not read any of Freda Warrington's other books. However this tale of a corrupt and blinkered upper class oppressing a slave class, while their world dies, is a taut, competently crafted novel. The two societies of Jhensit are credibly drawn with their physical locations reflecting their social status, and I particularly like the concept that enjoying goodies and growing things is "dirty". The effect of the Maelstrom upon those caught in it for long is quite believable. Most of the characters are rounded and the various subplots, though predictable, are carefully interwoven to build up to a spectacular climax.
I am less happy with the magic in the story. Given the conventions of High Fantasy I can accept the Hyalana's Faustian bargain with the Face, I can accept its transference to Ashurek, which neatly adds a deadly complication to the plot. I can just accept that its transfer brings the Hyalana back to life, as its original purpose was to cheat death. But I found its ultimate resolution weak and completely unconvincing. Furthermore, although one should not complain of a lack of killing, the only characters who are killed off, are either evil or mad, or they are unimportant, expendable victims, usually nearing the end of their lives. Characters whose deaths would have been tragic are miraculously restored to life.
There is no suggestion on the cover that this might be part of a longer series of stories. However the references to Ashurek's violent past and the recent history of Ikonus are so frequent as to suggest that this could be a rich source of material for prequels, while the ending does not rule out sequels. We can but hope.
Although this did not exactly stimulate my jaded palate, it is better than a lot of books currently on the market and should appeal to those who do enjoy fantasy.
Valerie Housden

Alien Sex
Ellen Datlow (Ed.)
Grafton, 1991, 333pp, £3.99 pb

The title of this collection may provoke worries about the contents: I know I received many "knowing" glances while reading it in public. To say it does not contain some material which could be considered puerile (for example, Harlan Ellison's 'How's the Night Life on Cissalda') would not only be lying, but also, strangely, doing the book a disservice. Where it is puerile, it is also hilarious. Where it is explicit (the closest it gets is in Richard Christian Matheson's 'Arousal' and Scott Baker's 'The Jamesburg Incubus'), it is more usually disturbing than pornographic; it would be hard to imagine anyone getting their sexual "jollies" from this collection.
What you will get is literary "jollies", in a very well put together collection. The selection ranges from classics (such as Farmer's 'Jungle Rot Kid on the Nod'), through good reprints (Leigh Kennedy's 'Her Furry Face', for example), through to entries such as Edward Bryant's 'Dancing Chickens', culled from Datlow's (probably impressive) "too wild for [Omni]" file. All in all, a mixture of ten new stories and nine reprints, each giving the other class a good run for their money.
The range of "experience" (always a tough word to use in relation to SF) encompassed is also impressive, from Lisa Tuttle's intensely personal 'Replacement Husbands', through to Geoff Ryman's story which can only be described by its title, 'Omnisexual' (and, please, no jokes about the magazine...).
For your four pounds, you get a high quality, but varied in style, review of how SF can approach a delicate subject now that it's all growed up. Some is to be read once and inwardly digested, such as Connie Willis's 'All My Darling Daughters'; some, Larry Niven's 'Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex' especially, begs to be read aloud and laughed at. But out of all nineteen stories, only perhaps one or two don't demand to be read. This could adequately become for the nineties what **Dangerous Visions** partly wanted to be for the late sixties/early seventies: proof positive of a mature literary mode called science fiction.
Pete Darby

Hooray for Hellywood
Esther Friesner
Orbit, 1992, 217pp, £3.99 pb

Plainsong
Deborah Grabien
Pan, 1991, 281pp, £4.50 pb

Both these books can be described as light fantasy, but the first is the lightest. Despite the spelling "Hellywood" in the first title, it is largely about crazy goings-on in Hollywood and a sequel to **Here Be Demons** and **Demon Blues**, both described on the back cover as "A hell of a lot of fun". Besides demons, it is about a TV evangelist, reincarnation and a bunch of Californians as flaky as can be. Frankly, I found it as cheap and silly as the worst of imported American sitcoms. Much of the humour may be lost on British readers. To quote two examples: (p43) "Lara's mouth hung open like the legendary and extinct two-dollar valise", and (p76) "There is a planet full of my descendants there to this day, all of whom drink warm beer, eat boiled beef, and blame the Tories for everything". I'll risk censorship of this sentence and say it's writing in the style of **The Shit-Writer's Guide to the Galaxy**.
Plainsong deserves to be taken much more seriously. It may help to say that its author is said to have "exchanged the fogs of London for those of San Francisco... She divides as much time as possible between her California home and Europe". It is "a fable for the millennium" and the chief protagonist is a pregnant poet, Julia, who "lives out lazy, empty days in a green and pleasant countryside" after a mysterious plague has left her almost the only survivor. Typical of the fantastic elements is the fact that there appear to be no inconvenient human bodies lying around. Julia is quite clearly glad that all "noisy, destructive, rapacious" people have disappeared from the scene. She finds herself able to communicate telepathically with a cat called Dad (not God) and various other animals, perceived anthropomorphically. It would be wrong to give away what happens next. Suffice to say that what starts off as a pastoral, wish-fulfilment fantasy in the tradition of William Morris rapidly becomes as narcissistic as Virginia Woolf and full of Christian allegory. The style is rather windy at times, beautifully poetic at others, always tremendously confident and competent.
Jim England

Darkness, Tell Us
Richard Laymon
Headline, 1991, 312pp, £14.95

Captives
Shaun Hutson
Macdonald, 1991, 432pp, £14.95

A couple of workmanlike chillers: one American midlist and one British blockbuster, both of which deploy stock elements to very different effect. Laymon opts for the up-front supernatural, sending the obligatory crosssection of obnoxious American teens off into the wilderness in search of buried treasure at the behest of a passing ouija board, just in time for the opening of serial killer season. From here on an astute reader will have little trouble joining the dots, but the prose is well-crafted, the kids convincingly bratty, and the overall effect entertaining enough within its limited scope.
Shaun Hutson, on the other hand, needs only a passing nod to Science to kick-start a plot which floors the accelerator and keeps it there. His prose style is spare, his depiction of violence, both physical and emotional, all the more resonant for its apparent dispassion, and his evocation of place and mood deftly conveyed. Like a great deal of material currently being published as horror, **Captives** owes more to the *policier noir* and the conspiracy thriller than traditional tropes; and if it helps Hutson find a wider readership, good luck to him.
Alex Stewart

Once Upon A Time
Lester del Rey and Risa Kessler (Eds.)
Legend, 1991, 336pp, £9.99 pb

Once Upon A Time is described as "A treasury of fantasy and fairy tales". It includes new works by ten authors: Isaac Asimov, Terry Brooks, CJ Cherryh, del Rey himself, Susan Dexter, Wayland Drew, Barbara Hambly, Katherine Kurtz, Anne McCaffrey and Lawrence Watt-Evans. The book has illustrations, one per story, by Michael Pangrazio.
There is no space here to review the stories in depth, but I enjoyed the collection as a whole. True, despite del Rey's insistence in the foreword that this is a book of "mature, modern fairy tales meant for mature, adult readers", some of the stories on occasions cross the border between what is childlike and childish: but this can be forgiven. In general, the stories are well constructed and well written. The

plots usually involve dragons, in some shape or form.
Asimov's faintly tongue-in-cheek 'Prince Delightful and the Flameless Dragon' opens the book, and Watt-Evans closes it equally well with his 'Portrait of a Hero'. In between, 'Imaginary Friends' by Brooks, and del Rey's 'Fairy Godmother' fit squarely into the childish category, as to a lesser extent does Dexter's 'Thistledown'. 'The Tinkling of Fairy Bells' by Kurtz has some good ideas concerning the interaction of "magic" and religion but is, to my mind, rather too short to explore them properly. Cherryh's 'Gwydion and the Dragon' is my personal favourite, both the best written and the most powerful story in the collection. I also much enjoyed 'The Old Soul' by Drew, and 'Changeling' by Hambly. I'm not normally a great fan of McCaffrey's work, but her 'The Quest of a Sensible Man' wasn't by any means the worst story here.
Pangrazio's illustrations are undoubtedly of high quality and seem to fit the stories well, but I can't really see the need for them in an "adult" book. The colour plates must add considerably to the cost of production, and I personally would rather del Rey and Kessler had dropped them and brought in a couple more authors instead.
Overall I hope that this book is a success, and that it inspires duction of others in this vein of the same high standard.
Michael Pont

The Drowners
Garry Kilworth
Methuen, 1991, 153pp, £8.99

The Drowners is set in the wetlands of the river Itchen in Hampshire around the middle of the 19th century. Tom Timbrell's father is a Master Drowner, whose extensive knowledge of the ways of the river and the channels and locks on it are vital to the tenant farmers' spring floodings that make their land fertile. When local landowner, Sir Francis Alderton, brings in professional troublemaker Wesley Wickerman to sabotage the farmers' efforts, the scene is set for a gripping tale that gradually mixes in the supernatural with deceptive ease.
Kilworth has obviously taken pains with this book as the setting looks and feels authentic (apart from the measures being metric - metres etc - but Duncan (12) accepted this quite happily, seeing as how that's what he was taught at school) and, more importantly, is interesting and different, something which is needed to catch and hold the young imagination.
The characters too, are strong enough to identify with, the two main youngsters (Tom and Jem) at first have a strong antipathy towards each other which develops into liking and respect with time. the adults are more sketchy, with only the more eccentric characters standing out, which of course, is how the world looks to young people.
''Whoffer had several parts of his body missing. One arm, a leg and part of his remaining hand had all been left in Belgium, when a cannon he was loading exploded. if anyone suggested that Whoffer was only half a man, he would call them a liar.
'Oi be just spread about more. that's all. Oi be a man o' two countries. half on me in Belgie, half on me in Hampshire.' ''
The story develops nicely, and each incident interacts with the others to move both the plot and the characters along to the final satisfying conclusion with a pace well suited to the material.
Garry Kilworth is becoming as respected a children's author as he is an adult author, and this book will do nothing to detract from his reputation.
Jon Wallace

N-Space
Larry Niven
Macdonald, 1992, 617pp, £14.99

Another major retrospective on one of the USA's leading SF writers, Niven's collection of over-familiar and not so familiar short stories, novel excerpts and articles, works much better than 1991's **Asimov's Chronicles**. the collection also includes an introduction by **Hunt For Red October** author Tom Clancy, story notes *and* laudatory ''blurb'' comments by other writers, whom Niven introduces in a tongue-in-cheek *dramatis personae*.
the quotes serve well as plugs, but needlessly duplicate other material and taken out of context are meaningless. One quote is actually taken from the story which immediately follows it.
The articles can sometimes be dull. the title piece is also outdated, referring to an extant Pan Am and USSR. However 'Building **The Mote in God's eye**' on his collaboration with Jerry Pournelle is fascinating. Missing are pieces on his other collaborations, particularly with steven Barnes, and the franchising of **Known Space** in the four **the Man-Kzin Wars** volumes to date (although there is a story inspired by them, 'Madness Has It's Place').
His collaborations often lack the whimsy and tightness of his solo work. Constrained by others he becomes wordy, as in 'the Locusts' with Steven Barnes, 'Brenda' and the excerpt from **Mote** (both from Pournelle's **Co-Dominium** universe) and from Harlan Ellison's **Medea** world, 'Flare Time'. In this latter story, plot concers constantly give way to travelogue-style descriptions. The one shared-world story where he keeps everything under control, 'The Tale of the Jinni and the Sisters', is a slight addition to Susan Schwartz's Arabian Nights franchise.
'The Kiteman' is an interesting, if workman-like, tale from **The Smoke Ring** universe, 'the Return of William Proxmire' is a dreadful tribute to Robert Heinlein, 'Night on Mispec Moor' is a failed horror story.
The collection ends with a curious bibliography in which this very volume is described as a work in progress. It lists **The Barsoom Project** as forthcoming, but fails to mention the other **Dream Park** sequel, **California Voodoo Game** and **Fallen Angels**, a collaboration with Pournelle and Michael Flynn. Another two works listed as ''in progress'', **Achilles Choice** with Steven Barnes, and **N-Space 2** have also now been published, the latter as **Playgrounds of the Mind** in the US. perhaps **Playgrounds** will fill in the areas missing from this volume.
The classic stories are still fun, but there is not enough new stuff of value for anyone but Niven fans. Save yourself a fortune and book it out from your local library.
Terry Broome

Prayers to Broken Stones
Dan Simmons
Headline, 1992, 311pp, £15.99

Then the time comes and the reviewer knows he has no choice. he has deftly avoided this necessity for some time, but one annot always escape these hostages to posterity. he must review a harlan Ellison introduction.
These strange and unpleasant beasts are becoming all too familiar in science fiction and its related genres. Familiar not just because Ellison has become ubiquitous as the introductory voice to new or little known writers, but familiar because all these things are the same. it was there at the beginning of Bruce Sterling's **Involution Ocean**, of Tom Reamy's **Lightfoot Sue**, it was inescapable throughout everything to do with **Dangerous Visions**, and it was doubtless there in uncounted hordes of other books. now it is weighing down an otherwise fine collection of stories by our latest cross-genre ***wunderkind*** Dan Simmons. I don't really want to burden my praise of Simmons with criticism of Ellison, but at some point this would have to be said, it might as well be now.
the identikit Ellison introduction goes something like this: There is a portentous opening full of the great sweep of time in which Ellison unsubtly places himself as one of the movers and shapers: ''I was a man who first published Lenny Bruce''. there is an anecdote by way of introduction to his theme in which he revels in the casual, brutal destruction of a would-be but no-hope writer. then comes the discovery of the new talent, a talent no-one else has ever appreciated before, a talent upon which, hurrying to the opposite extreme, he lavishes such outrageous, ludicrous praise that even a Shakespeare would bow beneath the weight of it. Ellison kills himself with his cruelty, he kills his pets with his ridiculous praise. The thing is an exercise in ego, it is distasteful, it does no service whatsoever to the stories which follow.
dan Simmons could not live up to Ellison's grandiloquent praise, he deserves better than that.
Simmons is a good writer. Having been unable to get through what seemed to me to be the stodge of **Hyperion** it was a pleasant surprise to discover just how good he could be. there is a richness in the prose, a vividness in the description and a verisimilitude in his characterisation which makes these stories a real delight. Unfortunately they are sometimes marred by a pacing which would be more appropriate in a novel. Stories like 'Eyes I Dare not Meet in Dreams', 'Remembering Siri' and 'The Death of a Centaur' contain long passages which seem to have been included for no other reason other than the joy of the writing. Excise them, and nothing would have been lost; so that by the end of the tale one has an impression that here was a frail plot stretcged beyond its natural length, and weakened because of it.
Though it may be that Simmons has to write at such a stately pace to accomodate his particular brand of horror. the pairing of 'Metastasis' and 'The Offering' is a case in point. 'Metastasis' is a story of cancer vampires which achieves a menacing atmosphere though it seems to have gone on a little too long by the time it reaches its rather perfunctory climax. 'the Offering' is an adaptation of that same story for a half-hour television slot which of necessity pares the plot right down to its basics. the script ha s the pace so many of his other stories lack, but it has sacrificed atmosphere and menace, and comes across as an unspeakably bad example of hack genre writing.
At their best, these stories demonstrate Simmons's ability to incredible effect. 'Iverson's Pits', far and away the best story here, is an evocation of the 50th anniversary of Gettysburg, recalled in old age by a man who was ten at the time so that the whole is shot through with ripples of memory and nostalgia which make the rather tawdry horror of the ending seem right and remarkable. A Faster pace would have shredded this story.
Unfortunately they are not all of this standard. there is an air about the collection as if these are all the stories Simmons had published at the time it was put together. he has shoehorned in the TV script, two stories, 'Carrion Comfort' and 'Remembering Siri', which have alreadt metamorphosed into novels (the latter as **Hyperion**), and some decidedly second-rate work, 'Vexed to Nightmare by a Rocking Cradle' and 'Shave and a Haircut, Two Bites' spring most readily to mind. It is a shame. I have to repeat, Dan Simmons is a good writer, at their best these stories are excellent. But I could have wished he'd waited a while longer so he could have been a bit more selctive in putting his first collection together. And he could certainly have done without the Harlan Ellison introduction.
Dan Simmons

Particles

Short Reviews by Chris Amies

Use of Weapons - Iain M Banks [Orbit, 1991, 371pp, £5.99 pb]. Reviewed by Paul Kincaid in **V158**. Paperback of Banks's third "Culture" novel, "Heart of Darkness" in space, two mirroring stories told in opposing directions, in turns funny and horrific and OTT techno-baroque.

Imperial Earth - Arthur C Clarke [Gollancz, 1975/1992, 287pp, £3.99]. A classic detective story set on Earth and in the frontiers of the Solar System and crammed with the joy of inventive hi-tech.

Greenmantle - Charles de Lint [Pan, 1991, 328pp, £4.99 pb]. At the point where the known world gives way into something much older, much more unknown; ancient folklore weaves into the present day, just at the edges of vision. And when it steps out of the shadows?

Vengeance for a Lonely Man - Simon R Green [Headline, 1992, 186pp, £4.50 pb]. In which Hawk and Fisher of the Haven City Guard go on the trail of a spy, but find themselves menaced not only by a shapechanging energy vampire, but also by a noble and ancient family not pleased at finding undercover cops in the ancestral manse.

Bill, The Galactic Hero on the Planet of Tasteless Pleasure - Harry Harrison & David Bischoff [Gollancz, 1991, 213pp, £3.99 pb] Reviewed by Jon Wallace in V163.
Bill, The Galactic Hero on the Planet of Zombie Vampires - Harry Harrison & Jack C Haldeman II [Gollancz, 1992, 217pp, £14.99]. -"Been a trooper long, Bill?" -"Too long." Quite. Dismiss the poor bowb.

Thomas the Rhymer - Ellen Kushner [Gollancz, 1991, 247pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Dave Mitchell in **V162**. The Queen of Elfland took Thomas from human sight for seven years, and then returned him to his people with the gift of prophecy. This novel won the World Fantasy Award; its style is poetic, and its portrait of the medieval Border country and its people is remarkable in itself.

Pegasus in Flight - Anne McCaffrey [Corgi, 1991, 318pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Ken Lake in **V162**. Sequel to **To Ride Pegasus** (1973): an overpopulated Earth is beginning to send its populations into space, assisted by parapsychic Talents.

The Ultimate Dracula - Byron Preiss [Headline, 1992, 372pp, £4.99 pb]. Compiled to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the first "Dracula" movie, this is an anthology of new vampire stories. Some bring in Count Dracula himself, others his historical inspiration Vlad Tepes. WR Philbrick's excellent 'The Dark Rising' tells the tale of a vampiric incarnation of the AIDS virus ravaging Haiti, whose attention must soon focus on the American mainland (remember that Stoker's Dracula represented the dual opposing forces of eroticism and the fear of syphilis); Karen Robards' 'Sugar and Spice and...' is a nicely cynical tale of a very little vampire; 'All Dracula's Children' by Dan Simmons goes into the terror of just-post-Ceaucescu Romania to suggest why so many Romanian orphans had AIDS. I wouldn't say all the stories are as good as those three, but I should guess that if you like vampire stories you'll like this book, and if you don't you won't.

Farslayer's Story - Fred Saberhagen [Orbit, 1992, 252pp, £4.50 pb]. Of mermaids, swords and magic, this is the fourth Book of Lost Swords. Seems like good ol' down-the-line S&S to me.

Lord Valentine's Castle - Robert Silverberg [Pan, 1980, 506pp, £5.99 pb]
Majipoor Chronicles - Robert Silverberg [Pan, 1983, 317pp, £4.99 pb]. The first two volumes in the "Majipoor" trilogy, the first the story of Valentine's wanderings as a juggler and his reaccession to the throne usurped from him, the second a series of tales ranging across Majipoor's vast distances and long history and among its many races. The third volume, **Valentine Pontifex**, should be reissued shortly.

The Fall of Hyperion - Dan Simmons [Headline, 1991, 632pp, £5.99 pb]. Reviewed by Charles Stross in V162. The second volume of **Hyperion** twists the original around and pours in the original inspiration (John Keats), and AIs turning against humankind and trying to replace it.

Downriver - Iain Sinclair [Paladin, 1991, 407pp, £5.99 pb]. Into the darkness of a London whose river sweats oil and tar; haunted by vast Gothic dosshouses and their Gormenghastly inhabitants, and perhaps the ghosts of those who disappeared (vanished, murdered, the death of water and fire...) and whose trail must be picked up before it, and the Isle of Dogs and by extension London herself, vanish under concrete, scrambling the signature of time. The style is intense and referential, but persist, persist.

Stalin's Teardrops - Ian Watson [Gollancz, 1991, 270pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Catie Cary in **V162**. A varied collection of stories, time-travel, near future thrillers, political fables; like the experimental 'The Pharaoh and the Mademoiselle', and like very much 'Gaud'i's Dragon' - ten years ago they were talking about finishing the Sagrada Fam'ilia and maybe holograms are the only way to do it. **Interzone** weren't sure about publishing 'The Eye of the Ayatollah' in case they got firebombed by rampaging fundamentalists, but they did publish it, and here it is too.

Reviews continued

The Key to Midnight
Dean R Koontz
Headline, 1992, 311pp, £15.99

In this re-issue from his pseudonymous past, Koontz proves, as if proof were needed, that he can tell a good tale with or without horror.
This tale involves a woman with ahidden past, and a private detective with a nose for the truth. the fact that the detective, Alex Hunter, had been hired by the woman's father to find her, ten years before, seems a little too coincidental, but Koontz's style saves it from being just another romantic thriller. Alex is too good at self-defence and remaining unhurt while those around him are being murdered. He is too perfect to be believable and belongs in a Mills & Boon novelette.
The story's one redeeming feature is the style in which it was put on paper. Once you pass the first chapter you will not be bale to put it down.
Martin Webb

The Weerde: Book 1
Roz Kaveny and Mary Gentle (Eds)
Roc, 1992, 365pp, £4.99 pb

The Weerde are a race, close to human, capable of changing their shape, usually wary of humankind. They call themselves the Kin. As the human population increases thaey are being pushed out, but for now they sometimes mingle.
The eleven stories told in this book come from the archives of the Library of the Conspiracy, where Harry Lamb, a journalist, has been driven to investigate by the need to know what it was he once loved, for his love was a shapechanger.
The stories cover everything from prehistory - where Liz Holliday suggests that the Greek gods were Weerde, through the Renaissance - where Mary Gentle shows the investigations of Rene Descartes; the Victorian Age of Industry - where the effects of building the Settle to Carlisle railway on a previously isolated Weerde community are described by Michael Fearn; the Wars of Intervention in Russia - described by Roz Kaveney; through to the present day where in Paul Cornell's 'Sunflower Pump' the shape changing includes the ability to imitate a pair of training shoes with unfortunate results.
The research comes from a Library of Conspiracy, and other conspiracies and secret strains of thought run through the stories. These include the *Opus Dei* in Christopher Amies' 'Rain' (along with the mainstream Roman Catholic Church), the Rosicrucians, Aleister Crowley in Josephine Saxton's 'A Strange Sort of Friend', alchemy, and various branches of the KGB and other secret services in Charles Stross's 'Ancient of Days', along with various ancient beliefs and mythologies.
The Weerde are found around the world. the stories describe them in Siberia, Spain, England, Greece, and North America, but they are not united in purpose and are divided by old animosities. Though they are not werewolves some of their activities seem unpleasant, and like most minorities they are driven into economic uncertainty and to the edges of society. In English towns and cities they live a sort of Cathy-Come-Home life, although Brian Stableford does describe one becoming a minor popstar (who could only come second in the Eurovision Song Contest). Abroad, Christopher Amies' Letamendi tries to bring rain to a drought-stricken Spanish town, but Colin Greenland's Tom in 'Going to the Black Bear' seems to hand his hitchhiker over to his family for abuse before changing his shape and rescuing her. Only Storm Constantine meets two Weerde living happily like faery children.
The result of all this is to find that the Weerde are not particularly weird, and somehow lack the interestingness of, say, evil werewolves or vampires. And on the other hand, the conspiracies do not create any strong plot. The social background in which the Weerde live reminded me of Michael De Larrabetti's Borrible trilogy, strangeness and plot coalesced in his novels. Here, the whole is not as good as some of its parts.
L J Hurst

Letters continued from p 5

As always, I'm most impressed by the number and quality of the letters from readers, authors and critics. I cannot help thinking that Anglo-Saxon society does seem to get more agitated about sex than about anything else. A devious person can achieve high office; someone who ruins their country's economy can still be entrusted with vast sums of money; someone who launches a war which costs thousands of lives will have statues erected in their memory. But let one leader, one expert, commit a sexual misdemeanour, then all past service can be negated and all future promise forfeit.

It always surprises me that if literary and visual art can be so socially damaging in sexual matters - or so campaigners claim - then why isn't similar consideration given to the harm done by art in other spheres of human activity? All those cookery books, for example: they are obviously the pornography of gluttony, encouraging people to overeat when most of the world's population is starving.

Conversely, there is the pornography of pride - or rather its reverse, humiliation: all those magazines devoted to diets and slimming and how to avoid being ashamed of what you really are. Equally pervasive are the twin pornographies of avarice and envy: there are all those advertisements and brochures which tell you how to make more money if you take it from here and put it there or vice versa... The glossy magazines and coffee-table tomes which portray the house and garden beautiful... All very unsettling, disrupting family relationships, in some cases as totally as unfaithfulness.

Then there is the pornography of anger - not outright violence (that's linked with lust) - but the insidious encouragement of aggression. Most automobile advertising is aggressive and selfish, but equally disturbing are all those investigative TV programmes which make you feel guilty and angry, but unable to do anything about the matter under investigation... Except get more and more angry. In fact, most campaigners - even for pacific causes - seem to be permanently belligerent, incapable of relaxing even when their crusade is won.

Quite seriously, I maintain that all these trends can have results as devastating as any sexual misbehaviour. If sexual pornography can stimulate social misfortune, then so can the literary or visual encouragement of any other sinful desire.

But what of sloth, you ask? What is the pornography of apathy? Well, I don't know. I can't think about everything. Someone else can write about that.

Martin H Brice
Alton, Hants

From Andy Mills

DM Thomas's **The White Hotel** (to take a well-known example) contains a passage of sexual violence which, for the effect it has on the reader, in likelihood outweighs anything in the Wingrove book (although I haven't read the latter). It is truly shocking and upsetting. Millions of people have read it - have they been corrupted and depraved by it? If so, how do we know? I can't recall any "copycat" crimes being reported. Of course, if pornography does corrupt and deprave, then every time a crime of sexual violence (for, as we all know, sex and violence are inextricably linked, aren't they?) Has been committed the first port of call for the police should logically be to the film censors' office. After all, by virtue of their work they must be among the most depraved persons in the country... Personally, I'd much rather the police be involved in other activities other than seizing "pornographic" material. These activities could involve coming down on things which do have a measurable and detrimental effect on people, such as heroin and handguns...

I'm frankly bewildered why some/many people find depiction of the sexual act, and even the sight of the unadorned human body, so offensive. It strikes me that such disquiet at an enjoyable activity is the problem society has here, not the depiction itself...

Andy Mills
Hull

From Steven Tew

A critical value that seems to be eschewed by one or two of your correspondents is that style is not important, and that judgement of whether writing is good or bad is purely subjective. I think it does matter whether a book is well-written, and it is a part of the reviewer's job to state an opinion of this as to this. I think it perfectly legitimate for Catie to condemn wasteful, repetitive writing, and there clearly is some objective line to be drawn as to whether text is wasteful in this sense, even if it is arguable as to where the line should be drawn. There is such a thing as bad writing even if opinions as to what constitutes bad writing differ.

A small points to Ken Lake - obviously, when Wingrove describes people as "bastards", he isn't referring to their parentage. English usage, as you well know, has a habit of overtaking dictionary definitions. I, for one, find Wingrove's use of the word appropriate and comprehensive.

Stephen Tew
Wakefield

From Erwin Blonk

I was one of the probably few not being sent the Wingrove letter and so I was a bit surprised by the attention it got. Hell, I won't have to go out and read it at all which saves me a penny or two. The only other thing I got out of it was when the letters touched the issue of censorship.

Which brings me to the letter of Robert Gibson, from which I understood I'm an immature, liberal, auto-anti-censorship robot. I gladly go along with the immaturity, for maturity has an air of non-existence about itself or at least artificialness. Yet the rest of it doesn't describe me, and I shall try to prove my anti-censorship opinion is not generated automatically.

Any form of good, clean, honest and objective censorship (how about that for a contradiction?) Needs a firm, unshakeable reality. That is necessary to decide what is wrong and what is right in human behaviour. Yet there are as many equally good realities as there are people (or almost as many). Also, It's a fact (which is not the same as reality) that any reality is formed by the fantasies that came before it. It's a bit like fire being made from ice. The basis for censorship is shaky to say the very least.

Besides a philosophical side, there's also the material side: a lot of time and effort is being put into fighting books, records and movies. Isn't it better to redirect that time and effort to fight what happens to living beings? As a psychiatrist once said: "If you forbid people to write about certain things, they'll go out and do it for real".

Finally there's the point of what people do with censorship. Ask the people of Amnesty International. Ask the recordstore owner from California who is in jail for two years for selling "Me so horny" by 2 Live Crew to a 14-year-old boy. Ask the author of **Lord Horror**. Ask homosexuals, coloured people, the religious and atheists as well.

Erwin Blonk
The Hague

From Ken Lake

I feel I ***must*** correct Peter Tennant and Tom A Jones when they so blatantly misrepresent the facts.

Books for review are sent to editors, who send them to selected reviewers. Wingrove's **Chung Kuo** I was sent, along with an unconscionable amount of factitious, often misleading, propaganda, direct to me.

Knowing that Paul Kincaid would have allocated the review to someone else, I asked him if I could - unusually - write about the pack of press releases sent direct to me, since I found them so unacceptable in their contents. Subject to his approval of my review, Paul kindly agreed that I could do so.

If Wingrove does not wish to be judged by his own words, and those of his appointed publicity agents, then he should keep silent. I did not "dismiss unread" the book - I was not asked to comment on it.

Ken Lake
London

From Chris Lewis

When I read a review, what I want to know is might I enjoy the book? Should I buy it immediately or leave it on the shelves? Since a review is always going to be somewhat subjective I try to consider what little I know of the reviewer and how our tastes have compared in the past. When I first read Catie cary's review of **The White Mountain**, which was ***before*** I had read the editorial, her name did not mean anything to me. I acknowledged the review as particularly negative with reasons given, personal at the start and stylistic later. My conclusion was that it was a book to avoid, unless some other reviews were strongly positive.

It may be that this is what Dave Wingrove doesn't like - another reader put off his books. But having read his own more detailed account of the book's contents I still do not want to read it. I would now say that Catie ***did*** catch the book's essence - she says "Wingrove describes a society rotten to the core and peoples it with monsters"; Wingrove -"The world of Chung Kuo is sick... Out of balance... There are undoubtedly a number of evil men." This seems to be nothing more than a difference in degree.

The matter of the editorial is somewhat different. An editorial article should be there to draw attention to issues larger than one book, maybe to reflect on some trend in the "outside" world or to give some theme to a particular issue, to inspire thought and intelligent debate. Again, it seems to me that thsi is what Catie tried to do - to tie together her revulsion to **The White Mountain** and the issues raised by Kim Cowie's article, and to ask questions on warning labels, certification and censorship. Having read the editorial I went back to reread the review and then the article on the Savoy books affair. This gave me a little more background with which to assess the review, but more importantly it made me think about some of the books that have been praised in BSFA (and other) reviews but that I personally have found distasteful in places. Would I have wanted a warning?? Would I have avoided those books if there ***had*** been a warning? Would my life have been less complete if I ***had*** avoided those books? Surely that was the point of the editorial, not a debate on whether or not **The White Mountain** itself is pornographic, but what should be done about literature (and films? and plays? and records?) that could be considered corrupting? Perhaps we could get on to that.

Chris Lewis
Oxford

FromMichael Cobley

I read **Vector 165**'s letters concerning the **Chung Kuo** books, and had to laugh. According to David Barrett, Maureen Speller and Paul Kincaid, Catie Cary is entitled to her opinion of **The White Mountain** while David Wingrove is a scoundrel for objecting to it.

What tosh. Reviewers and critics are entitled to an ***informed*** opinion, not any old mishmash of fancy and prejudice, and certainly not unsupported allegations and interpretations. David Barrett previously criticised **Chung Kuo: The Middle Kingdom** on the grounds of plotting, background, characterisation and prose style, and Catie Cary took up where he left off, focussing on sex and violence. Yet neither of these eminent commentators provided a single corroborating excerpt from the texts that had so offended them: no, we were obviously expected tto take them at their word that what they say is the truth...

Whereas the truth is that great lakefuls of mud are being unjustly slung at the **Chung Kuo** books. Inevitably some of it will stick and there are readers out there who will never find out how entertaining the books really are or what they are about, simply on the say-so of a few people whose critical attitudes in this matter have more to do with personalities than withinformed opinion.

Oh, and it so happens that I'm a friend of David Wingrove - maybe readers should take that into account. Maybe readers should think - and read - for themselves.

Michael Cobley
Glasgow

From Howard Reynolds

It's fine for Wingrove to describe the world of **Chung Kuo** as deliberately designed to be horrifyingly totalitarian, but I don't see there's anything to be gained from having lurid unpleasantness thrust down our throats. The reason he concentrates on horrific characters, and his plots revolve around such matters as vice and rape, is because it's a lot more difficult to imagine constructively. Most people have no objections to nude bodies or the portrayal in fiction of the sex act, so long as they're handled genuinely

Howard Reynolds
London

From Judith Johnstone

I must be the only member of the BSFA who didn't get ***the*** letter from David Wingrove, judging from the seemingly endless amount of space given over to responses to it.

I ploughed through it all, charges and counter charges, mystified, and increasingly bored, wondering if I mightn't be better advised spending my hard-earned pennies on a subscription to the Financial Times instead of the BSFA. It could well prove more entertaining.

And what do I think - if anyone really wants to know - which I doubt? I think It's a pity so many trees had to be made into paper pulp for the sake of so much hot air. No wonder we're supposed to have problems with global warming - and now I'm adding to it.

PS: No more **Vectors** like this one please.

Judith Johnstone
Bowness-on-Windermere, Cambria

Despite mammoth attempts with shoehorn and scalpel, I could not get all your letters in this issue. We also heard from Brian Aldiss, Helen Bland, Pam Wells, Peter Tennant, Joseph Nicholas and M Cowan. Maybe next issue...

I have a certain sympathy for Judith Johnstone's point of view. Pleas, no more letters directly related to Chung Kuo. That horse is flogged, but we're as eager as ever to hear your views on the general issues raised. CC

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