

# VECTOR 69



*Summer 1975*

# VECTOR 69

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VECTOR 69 - Summer 1975 - Journal of the British SF Association

Cover by AMES

## Contents

Lead-In.....	3
The Science in Science Fiction/ <u>James Blish</u> .....	5
Early one Oxford morning... / <u>Brian W. Aldiss</u> .....	11
The Value of Bad SF/ <u>Bob Shaw</u> .....	18
Square or Fiction/ <u>Tony Sudbery</u> .....	22
The Infinity Box: Reviews/ <u>Mark Adlard</u> <u>Brian W. Aldiss</u> <u>John Brunner</u> <u>Cy Chouvin</u> <u>Christopher Fowler</u> <u>Berry Gilliam</u> <u>Bob Holdstock</u> <u>Chris Morgan</u> <u>David Pringle</u> .....	26
Letter to the Editor/ <u>John Clute</u> .....	40

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Copy date for VECTOR 70: Friday 24th  
October

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## Thanks to:

Marcus Edwards, who did much of the  
editorial work on this issue before  
passing it on....  
Keith Freeman, for editorial advice  
and production hints....  
Florence Russell, for the use of her  
IBM Selectric (not to mention 'burg-  
ers, orange juice and tea')....  
...and Dave, Yvette, Howard, Sally,  
Steve, Sandra and Margaret, for  
being there

VECTOR is the official  
journal of the British Science  
Fiction Association Ltd

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This issue of VECTOR is avail-  
able at the non-profit-making  
price of 50p. It is regularly  
available in the U.K. only to  
members of the B.S.F.A. (enquiries  
to David Syme)

VECTOR subscriptions outside  
the U.K. are five issues for  
£5.00 (or \$1.50 per copy air-  
mail) in the USA or Australia.  
Equivalent rates elsewhere.  
Cash or money order, or cheque  
payable to the B.S.F.A. Ltd,  
sent to the editor.

Back issues available at 50p  
each: 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 68,  
67/68; from the editor

Print run this issue: 600

Printed by: Sanderson Design  
and Print, 18 Portman Rd Reading

# LEAD-IN

Dora, who dislikes hyperbole, would disapprove strongly if I were to begin this first editorial with some triumphal statement such as:

## VECTOR LIVES!

Nonetheless, it is with a certain sense of triumph, and not a little joy, that I can report what should be obvious to you from the magazine you now hold in your hands. VECTOR is back. The gap in publication has been far too long - about 17 months by the time you read this - but has been no fault of the previous editor, Malcolm Edwards (or myself). It has been entirely due to the collapse of the BSFA which occurred shortly after Easter 1974, when the new Committee took over. The reasons for this, and the explanations of the long delay in sorting things out, are to be found in the Newsletter which should accompany this VECTOR. I don't really wish to comment on this, further than to say that in my personal view, and that of many of the BSFA members to whom I have spoken, the performance of last year's Committee demonstrated a staggering incompetence and a cynical lack of responsibility to the BSFA and its members which is unparalleled in my experience. I think the most irksome aspect of the affair is what Malcolm Edwards characterised as the "self-satisfied apathy" of certain leading Committee members.

As some of you may know, I have been standing ready to take over the editorship of VECTOR from Malcolm Edwards since he made it apparent that he wanted to resign, at the Tynacron at Easter 1974. It's been a long wait, but I feel that it has been worth it; I hope that as the months progress, and you see what I am doing with VECTOR, you will feel that it has been worthwhile too. It is not going to be an easy task following such a fine editor as Malcolm. He built the magazine up to the point where it commanded serious critical acclaim from many quarters. He worked tirelessly and conscientiously for the good of the magazine and for the benefit of BSFA members for two years, and we all owe him a deep debt of gratitude. Perhaps my personal part of the repaying of that debt will be maintaining the standards of excellence which he set.

My plans for the magazine are still forming at the moment, but I hope that we shall be on a quarterly basis: - mid- March, -June, -September and -December; with possibly an additional "mid-summer" fifth issue. In addition to these issues of VECTOR, we hope to be able to produce the Yearbook suggested by Neo Sister, containing information on publishers, clubs, book-sellers, etc. in the of field; this would appear in January. With each of these publications, and additionally at the end of May and October, there should be a Newsletter, to keep you up to date on general BSFA and other of news. Thus, we hope that some communication from the BSFA should be dropping through your letter box every six weeks. Ambitious? Certainly - but then, if one does not aim high he can achieve nothing.

Such things as the Newsletter and the Yearbook are totally dependent on information/news being forthcoming - and that is up to every one of the BSFA's members. We need your support. Particularly, I need your support for VECTOR. There are those who would like to see the magazine cease publication - and who used proxy votes at the AGM to pass just such a motion. It was mainly due to the stirring efforts of Malcolm Edwards that a counter-motion was passed, continuing a BSFA magazine. But there are still people around who seem to be opposed to the magazine. For example, Ken Slater writes in his July Fantast (Wednesday) Limited catalogue: "... voting managed to kill 'VECTOR' - which is a good thing, VECTOR always having been the BSFA's private millstone..." He goes on to say many things about the magazine and about the BSFA which I disagree with strongly, but the crux of his argument is in this comment:

Do you agree with Ken Slater that VECTOR is a "millstone"? Or do you agree with Mike Husky, Chairman of the Reading SF Club, and BSFA member, who wrote to me, on hearing of the revival of the magazine: "I consider VECTOR the 'cement between the bricks' of the members." He also thinks that his may have been one of the proxy votes used in the original motion to vote VECTOR out of existence - directly contrary to his wishes. Finally he says that he is "delighted" with the fact that VECTOR is re-appearing.

Mike's opinions concur with those of the overwhelming majority of BSFA members to whom I have talked about the magazine. I hope that your views are the same. But your silent consent is not enough. We desperately need your support. Send us your letters - there will be a letter column for those beginning in the next issue - and we shall publish as many of them as we can. Send us your opinions of and suggestions for VECTOR. We are very open to your ideas. I, as VECTOR editor, recognise my responsibility to you the members, and I am always willing to listen to ideas. Write, talk to me if you meet me - I'm really quite approachable, despite my "image" - or even ring. Whatever you do though - communicate with me as VECTOR editor, and with the other members of your new Committee. Together we can make the BSFA work.

--- Christopher Fowler

#### SAMUEL DAYENFORD RUSSELL

March 1st 1939 - July 14th 1975

Although I knew Sam for only a year or so, I came to like and respect him, both as a kind and generous person, and as an intelligent and painstaking scholar. His death, after a terrible illness, borne with great bravery and no complaint, is a tragic loss. He will be missed by many but most of all by Florence, to whom we can only offer our sincere and deep-felt sympathy.

# THE SCIENCE IN SCIENCE FICTION

## JAMES BLISH

It was suggested that I might talk about the science content of science fiction, and I suspect that there are at least a few people here who think that such a title could properly only be followed by an hour of dead silence. And I'm prepared to agree that most of what we call science fiction - even hard science fiction - is technology fiction at best. The scientific content, as a scientist would understand the term, is quite invisible.

However, we do play around quite a bit with what we think of as scientific facts - or what we hope are scientific facts - and this gives us our cachet for using the label which Mr. Gernsback hung on us in 1928. Now a lot of the science content (such as it is) in present day science fiction is deplorable, as we all know, but I would like you for a moment to look back to the pre-glacial era when I began to read the stuff. I'll give you a few examples of the things I learned about science from science fiction.

For one thing, there was a convention among the authors of those days that, since the solar system lies approximately in a flat plane - the plane of the ecliptic - the only way you could get from one planet to another was by travelling along that plane. This meant that if you were attempting to go any distance beyond the orbit of Mars, you were involved in an awful lot of banging and clashing about among the asteroids. My favourite example of this comes from a somewhat later period - a story by Sam Moskowitz in which the hero, in order to reach Saturn, finds himself banging and clashing his way through the rings. Now, if there is a more avoidable astronomical object in the solar system than the rings of Saturn, I don't know what it is! But there was this flat plane convention; and there it was, we were stuck with it. It took me a long time to learn from science fiction that space happens to be three-dimensional and that, in order to avoid the asteroid belt, at a very slight expenditure of extra fuel you could go over it!

Another thing I had to unlearn was that at least the major asteroids were inhabitable. There was a marvellous moment in a story by Harl Vincent called "Copper Clad World", which appeared in ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION in September 1931, in which the hero's ship passes close by Vesta - or another one of those large rocks - that he can see its steaming volcanic jungles and a gigantic waterfall! I don't know whether he actually saw any aborigines or not. .

We also learned from primitive science fiction that atoms were solar systems and electrons were planets. One novel of this kind was THE GREEN MEN OF KILSONA by Festus Pragnell. The hero found himself dwindled down to an electron and found it very much like a sort of Cretaceous Earth. This novel won the praise of H.G. Wells. I couldn't understand why then, and I still can't. But my first encounter with this notion was a story in ASTOUNDING of January 1932 by one Francis Flagg, called "The Seed of the Tock-Tock Birds".

Another convention of that time which is, as a matter of fact, still with us, goes under the name of The Crushing Gravity of Jupiter. I encountered this first in a story by Paul Ernst - "The Red Hell of Jupiter" in ASTOUNDING, October 1931. Now, it is probably no news to you that the "crushing gravity" of Jupiter is approximately 4G, which is a good many of you have probably experienced in airplane takeoffs, in high speed lifts, and in a reverse sense, in sudden stops of automobiles. If you stop and think this out for a moment - think of your actual weight and then say, "Suppose I weighed four times what I weigh now, would I be crushed to the ground, never to rise again?" - well, of course you wouldn't. It's still around however: Howard Fast is still peddling this one in his latest book.

Nowadays the situation is somewhat better. We have with us a number of writers who have either had scientific training or have made it their business to pick up some accurate information. When you read a story by Poul Anderson, Raymond F. Jones, Hal Clement, Arthur C. Clarke, Larry Niven, you can be reasonably sure that when they say such-and-such is a scientific fact to the best of our knowledge, they are not leading you up the garden path. It isn't something you are going to have to unlearn later, with great pain.

We have also two other groups in modern science fiction whom I shall have to mention, simply because I'm forced to, although they don't really form part of the subject of my talk. One is the group of people who are largely scientifically illiterate, but write very well indeed. They like to say what they do is speculative fiction rather than science fiction. Their originator - grandfather, I guess - was Bradbury; today we have Jimmy Hallard, Harlan Ellison, the whole KPM WORKS school. The stuff is often very well worth reading, but not for its scientific content.

Secondly, we still have the fossilized remains of the old school of science fiction writers who knowingly peddled scientific garbage, didn't care that it was garbage, and whose work has, furthermore, no redeeming literary qualities - or any other qualities that I can see. Here I shall only mention two Englishmen, in deference to the fact that I'm a guest here: Charles Eric Maine, who hasn't been with us much recently, and John Lyndington, who unfortunately has.

But even among the group of writers whom I consider scientifically responsible, even if not scientifically formally educated, we have a group of acceptances in modern science fiction which are impossible by current scientific standards. I'll give you a very short list (I'm sure you could multiply these examples endlessly): telepathy, faster-than-light travel, time travel, anti-gravity, force-fields or force-screens. You will find writers like Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Larry Niven, Ray Jones - all these people I have named are responsible - taking these things for granted and using them. And the readers are still for it. This seems odd; but it also seems to me that it is philosophically rather easy to defend - and here I'm going to drop into a few generalities.

Thomas S. Kuhn wrote a famous and highly recommendable book called THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS, in which he points out that, whatever we might like to think, and whatever the mythology of the history of science tells us, new ideas were accepted as soon as they came along, as soon as the evidence makes it clear that new ideas are needed. Actually, science progresses in a series of convulsive hiccups, during each one of which the attempt to suppress the coming convulsion is the strongest feature of the landscape. There is always a body of conservatism which is defended to the death before the actual overthrow takes place. He calls this - the characteristic features of this body of conservatism - paradigms, and he defines them as follows: "universally recognised scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners".

Now these paradigms can be very various. They can go all the way from the turtle that supports the elephant that supports the sky in Indian mythology down to what we have to sit still for in classrooms today. The one thing they do have in common is that the scientists of their time hate to see them overturned. I quote again from Kuhn:

'Copernicians made few converts for almost a century after Copernicus' death. Newton's work was not generally accepted, particularly on the continent, for more than half a century after the PRINCIPIA appeared. Priestley never accepted the oxygen theory, Lord Kelvin the electromagnetic theory, and so on.'

To this I will add a few examples.

The motion of the moons of Jupiter, which - as you will remember - was an early Renaissance discovery, was doubted as late as the middle of the seventeenth century in very august quarters. The last recorded denial of the motion of the Earth itself can be dated 1823. This occurred in an edition of Newton's PRINCIPIA edited by two learned Jesuit astronomers who said, in a footnote "Of course, to make sense of all this, one must accept Mr. Newton's assumption that the Earth moves in space, although our faith teaches us that this is not so." Well now, in a sense they may have been right: what moves in space is, of course, a relative proposition. But I do think it would be awfully inconvenient if we had to go back to Ptolemaic epicycles at this late date!

It took twenty years to establish special relativity. This is now apparently nailed to the ground on all four sides, and I shudder to think of what would happen to the whole body of our present-day assumptions in theoretical physics if we had to do without special relativity now. But there were people who doubted it very, very much, and for a very funny account of the "back to Newton" movement I recommend you a book by the highly gifted Martin Gardner called FAHS AND FALLACIES IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE. He devotes a whole chapter to the movement, and it makes very funny, and at the same time very sad, reading. We still have, in general relativity, a theory that is widely doubted (by me among others). Part of the reason for this is that the evidence for it is so slight and so hard to come by. But it is gradually gaining acceptance, and it is something that we might describe as a coming paradigm.

I return to Kuhn for a moment. Before I do, the question naturally arises: what actually is the reason for this convulsive movement? Why does science have to proceed in a series of revolutions rather than smoothly, as the mythology says it should? Well, Kuhn says: "scientists

do not treat anomalies as counter-instances, though, in the vocabulary of philosophy of science, that is what they are. Once it has attained the status of a paradigm, a scientific theory is only declared invalid if an alternative candidate is available to take its place. Initially, only the anticipated and usual are experienced, even under circumstances where anomaly is later to be observed. I'd now like to point out the apparent size that an anomaly has to be before we can overturn a paradigm.

We now have before us a phenomenon called the quasar - a name which expresses absolutely nothing except that we do not know what it is. It has been violating the laws of special relativity hand-over-fist, backwards, forwards, and sideways. We do not know whether they are distant objects or far objects: whether they are exploding galaxies or some condition of matter about which we know nothing as yet. The whole thing is up for grabs. One thing is for sure, that as relativistic objects they put us in a great deal of trouble.

Now, thirty years ago or more, the great British astronomer E.A. Milne (not to be confused with the author of the Pook books) proposed something which he called dynamical relativity. I am neither physicist nor astronomer enough to go into this at any distance whatsoever, but I do know something about its reputation. It was quite elegant mathematically, and the general reaction of astronomers and theoretical physicists was: well, yes, it is quite convincing, and there seems no way to attack it; but it is so far-reaching that nobody can think of any way to test it either. As a matter of fact, Milnean dynamical relativity makes Einsteinian general relativity look like a blackboard exercise.

Nevertheless, it seems to me, intuitively, that these things are behaving in a very Milnean way indeed; and we may eventually find ourselves referring to somebody who we would then be calling "poor old Einstein". Or quasars may eventually prove explicable in Einsteinian terms (my instinct is to say that they aren't). But there is a huge anomaly that cannot be ignored, and it has got us into serious trouble, and we may need a new paradigm for it.

Now let's get back with a sigh of relief to science fiction, and to my list of scientific impossibilities which sf writers and readers nevertheless accept. I think that in this light we can understand them a little better.

Telepathy, for instance, is in trouble with the scientific community for one main reason: it is in complete conflict with that paradigm we call the electromagnetic theory. We do know, of course, that across the skulls of every one of us minute electrical currents race constantly - and the movement of electrical currents produces radio waves. However, these have been measured by Rolf Ashby, Adrian and Grey Walter, and one can say that if the nearest person to me has a radio receiver in his skull, his chances of picking up the radio broadcasts from my skull are about as good as his chance of making an audio recording of a smoke signal. So that kind of transmission is out. Telepathy is therefore impossible.

When we look, however, at the evidence which has been gathered, and we make the temporary assumption - as we must - that some of this evidence has been honestly gathered, and honestly reported, and may represent real instances, we find also that it is characteristic of telepathy that its strength of reception does not vary over distance - even over long



distances. Now we are in trouble with something much greater than the electromagnetic theory: we're in trouble with the inverse square law itself. To me this means one of two things. It means either that telepathy is impossible, by two different paradigms, or else it tells us that the electromagnetic theory was the wrong paradigm to apply here. Now I have no idea what the right one might be - and one of the problems of telepathy is that nobody who has ever worked seriously in the field and is respected as honest and responsible, has himself ever managed to come up with a decent model for how it works. There is no point altering this paradigm to the ones we know don't work in order to account for this evidence.

This field also offers a lovely example of the kind of resistance that Kuhn was talking about in his book. One scientist approached on this subject said:

"In any other field, I would grant the reality of a phenomenon on one-tenth this much evidence. In this one I would not be convinced if there were ten times as much."

My favourite example of the scientific open mind:

Now, I could go back to my little list of our other impossibilities - and I will, just briefly. Faster-than-light travel is forbidden us by special relativity, anti-gravity is forbidden us by general relativity. I uttered the heresy that, so far as special relativity is concerned, if it was wrong it would not be the first time Einstein was wrong. You'll recall that he crowned his career by publishing a unified field theory, which he discovered he could not defend, and had to withdraw. So far as anti-gravity is concerned: this depends on a whole series of highly meta-physical assumptions in general relativity, and general relativity does not have the status of papal dogma in science yet. There may be a way round this one too.

Time travel? Well, all right, let's play both sides of the street on this one. Supposing general relativity is in fact right, and we all live on the surface of a hypersphere. If you make the slight additional assumption that the hypersphere is rotating in four dimensions, round its imaginable centre from which it is expanding, time travel into the past becomes instantly possible - all you have to do is drag your feet a little. How much energy it would take to drag your feet I am unable to tell you, but this has been seriously proposed. It could be done. Again, nobody knows in the first place whether or not the universe is a hypersphere, let alone whether it's rotating, so we are in no position actually to say with great positiveness that time travel is permanently impossible.

Force fields or screens? Well, again they climb in the face of the electromagnetic theory. You can't make the expanding wavefronts of a wavefront stop expanding. No. Well, telepathy suggests to us that perhaps there is something wrong with the electromagnetic theory - or at least that it may be the wrong paradigm to apply to that particular problem. So, again, let's not hear so many doors slammed around here, please.

Now, here's where I am about to get myself into trouble. I mentioned three classes of science fiction writers. I'm now about to take my first class, and sub-divide it further. I'm talking, remember, about science fiction writers whom I consider to be responsible to what they consider to be scientific fact.

Most of such people, however, only extend the consequence of our present-day paradigms into the future. There are some who present futures in which new paradigms obviously prevail. Most of them do this unconsciously; but whenever a writer tosses out a reference to working telepathy, or working faster-than-light drive, he is talking about such a future - and of one thing we may be very sure: the future will offer us new paradigms. We may kick and scream and have to be dragged into them, but they will be there.

There are also a very few modern science fiction writers who do this consciously. I'll give you two examples only. My favourite one is Lester del Rey, who quite often writes about faster-than-light drives, and who has made a game out of the fact that every time he introduces a faster-than-light drive in a story he has a new and different explanation for it:

Raymond F Jones - who hasn't been around lately, I'm sorry to say - did this in a story called "Noise Level", in which he proposed what was essentially a new method of scientific investigation. You lock up a group of scientists in a room, with a whole mass of dubious and not-so-dubious evidence that something impossible can in fact be done, and you don't let them out until they do it! To do this, you must expose them to as much garbage as possible. You don't give them all the standard accepted references on what gravity is, and why anti-gravity can never work, and so on. Instead, you pile in all the occult books you can find on levitation. You introduce, if possible, a fake film showing a man actually going up with an anti-gravity pack on his back, and tell them that it's real. You do everything possible to increase the noise level at which the scientist is surrounded, tell him that it has, in fact, been accomplished, and that for the protection of his country, or whatever, he's got to duplicate it. And see what they come out with.

I think this is a lovely notion. It is obviously a new paradigm of sorts. Jones recognised it as such; in fact, he thought of it as a law of nature, and his later stories in the series degenerated into an argument as to whether or not it could be patentable under US law, which is a distinct side-issue. But that's a fault in the writer, not in the idea. The idea is obviously a paradigm which might be of considerable force. Who knows?

So my final expression is this: in my opinion - in my profoundly religious opinion, I might add - it is the duty of the conscientious science fiction writer not to falsify what he believes to be known fact. It is an even more important function for him to suggest new paradigms, by suggesting to the reader, over and over again, that X, Y, and Z are not impossible. Every time a story appears with a faster-than-light drive, it expresses somebody's faith - maybe not the writer's, but certainly many of the readers' - that such a thing is accomplishable, and some day will be accomplished. Well, we have a lot of hardware - including, I'm sorry to say, a couple of old beer cans - on the moon right now, so show us what can be done with such repeated suggestion. It can be done I think philosophically on a far broader scale than we have ever managed to do it before.

So I come down now, having prepared my retreat as best as possible, to my conclusion, which surprised me as much as it may surprise you. It seems to me that the most important scientific content in modern science fiction is the impossibilities.

— James Blish

# EARLY ONE OXFORD MORNING...

Brian W Aldiss

A bookseller was not what I wanted to be. I wanted to be William Shakespeare. Indeed, I suppose I might have become William Shakespeare, had not somebody else already done so.

During the trying period before the metamorphosis took place, I had to work. When I rolled up at Frank Sanders' bookshop in the High, Oxford, one fine September day, I was aware of life beginning in grim earnest, of respectability closing in like a rat-trap, of being ignorant of - well, of everything Oxford stood for. But I made a fairish showing, surely, on that walk from the station, papier-mache suitcase in one hand, recalcitrant little Bar-Lok typewriter in the other. Whatever else I did, I was going to write, and Oxford was an okay place for that.

This was in 1948, I was 22. How green I was! Nine years of boarding schools, followed smartly by five years of soldiering, do singularly little to belit one for the niceties of society. It could be said that I never have managed to adjust to them, or tried very hard either.

In those days, Sanders' was the best possible shop in which to learn the book trade. The old man had built up a grand collection of antiquarian books and rare bindings, besides the ordinary commerce of a secondhand bookseller. He stocked fine prints and old maps. There was a ramshackle place called Heaven upstairs, where two ladies coloured eng-ravings from volumes like PLEASURES OF THE PROSPEROS. With one of these ladies I immediately fell in love.

My job it was to sell books, to keep the shilling shelves stocked, to take down the shutters in the morning and put them up in the evening, to sweep the floor when needed, to pack parcels, and be the universal dogsbody.

Hours were nine till seven, pay three quid a week. I put up with the long hours (because I had no option), but I did enjoy everything about the shop. Speed maps, Piranesi prints, Hogarth Illios, sets of Fielding, runs of learned magazines (how beautiful they all were! I read avidly - poetry, novels, essays, biographies, psycho-analysis, diaries, everything. I remember sitting on the base of the Martyr's Memorial one lunch-hour to read TRISTRAM SHANDY, doing without lunch because the one-and-three which would have bought me lunch at a British Restaurant (history, my friends!) had gone on the World Classics' Sterne. I recall the occasion vividly because I was partly role-playing. I enjoyed the novelty of being poor. Novelty makes many things tolerable; youth makes things novel.

Sanders soon put me in charge of new books. I was good at buying books. The trouble was selling them afterwards. Many of the reps were friends; many of them were revered.

My feelings were more mixed about the representatives of the august institution which Sanders' in the main served. My reverence for learning has always been strong, but one could not help perceiving that dons had human failings. Some were caught thieving books. Several, charming in the shop, when they wanted something, cut one dead outside on the pavement. It consoles me to reflect that my annual income is now at least the equal of that of the Chancellor of the University. Jude strikes back...The university is a small, self-involved world.

Whilst at Sanders' I got married. Finally, I could take no more of this stuffy shop and the bad pay. I left, and went to Parker's in Broad Street - Parker's old shop, not the present flavourless building. I had the pleasure of working in the antiquarian department for an honest and knowledgeable bookman, William Thomas. The staff was larger and younger and we had fun. The hours were not so long, either.

My poetry-writing withered when confronted by the real thing, that great heritage of English poetry, many specimens of which we threw out every week as unfit even for the shilling shelves. That reminder of changing taste, of merciless posterity, did not stop me writing. In the early fifties, I slowly constructed my first novel, *SHOOTING DOWN A CLIFF*. I knew it was terrible, but I still knew that what I could do once I could do again, better.

I am making this period sound humble - and it was - but I had within me a saving streak of toughness without which a writer cannot survive. Just to make things difficult, I believed in the possibilities of science fiction as an art medium, as a form in which one could do new and startling and beautiful things. I was aware that most of its practitioners were slobs; that awareness gave me hope of excelling, although it meant also that the form was held in disrepute. It is still not entirely respectable, but neither am I.

I wrote an sf story with a bookshop background and sent it to *THE BOOKSELLER*. No reply. I imagined that their contempt for it was so great that they had destroyed it. But, early in 1954, it turned up in the august pages - just before I posted Mr. Segrave, the editor, a snotty note. Instead, he sent me a cheque and a nice letter. Then I was moved to write an article on being a bookseller's assistant, which was published in two parts. That did not embody all I wanted to say, so I advanced the idea of a diary. Mr. Segrave was properly sceptical, but he let me have a go. And so I began *THE BRIGHTFOOT DIARIES*, under the pen-name of Peter Pica, a very small type. They soon found me out at Oxford - mainly because I could not resist leaking the news!

Brightfount's was Sanders' as it should have been, with the lighter atmosphere of Parker's, and everyone dedicated to books. My one attempt at a Utopia!

Everybody was civil about that modest series. Indeed, almost twenty years after, I still meet chaps at publishers' parties who come up and say how they enjoyed it, before asking if I've written any other books.

The first Brightfount's piece appeared in February 1954. I was invited to present myself at *THE BOOKSELLER*'s offices in Bedford Square, close by Jonathan Cape, who are now my publishers. What a glow of romance Bedford Square held then! How alluring its lights.

Mr. Segrave and Miss Thompson were encouraging, talking about Thomas Hardy and putting the paper to bed on a Wednesday evening, somewhere south of the Thames. At last I was in contact with the real literary world! I was told that the Diaries were popular and exhorted to keep up the good work.

1954 and 55 were great years. I began another novel, wrote several short stories, and dashed off a play called *ARIADNE* which was very nearly performed. I also started to review science fiction for the *OXFORD MAIL*. 1954 was the first year I earned any money from writing: £105, compared with £408 in wages from Parker's. And Edmond Segrave sent me a bonus of £5 for Christmas. For mentioning the sordid subject of money, my apologies to those who have forgotten what being poor is like. It is a matter of ever-anxious attention to pennies. Edmond's fiver made my Christmas.

By the end of that year, my luck had changed. Charles Monteith of Faber had written to ask if I would turn the Brightfount Diaries into a book. *THE OBSERVER* had written to say I had tied equal first in their competition for a story set in the year 2500.

My partnership with Faber lasted through 18 books. Charles never flinched from publishing science fiction and did well with it. But I've generally - not always - had luck with publishers.

It is easier to talk in these social terms than to speak about the sullen art and craft of writing itself. I gave up bookselling in 1956, when I was earning more from my part-time writing than the job: not only did I wish to write successfully, I could not stand the wages or the prospect of a secondhand set of *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA* at the age of 65.

I survived the ordeal of going freelance, the combined onslaught of coming face to face with oneself, finding no cash trickling in, enduring long hours of work, and stumbling slowly towards what one really wants to say in one's own manner. I managed it in the end, although it broke up my marriage - and very nearly broke my heart, because I was short of my children. One of the reasons why second marriages are much jollier than first ones is the one does, after all, learn by experience if one tries.

In 1957 I was made literary editor of the *OXFORD MAIL*, a part-time job I greatly enjoyed, until mental indigestion caused by too much reading made me hand over to Jon Hartridge.

Although I am not a particularly prolific writer, I have been consistent, and titles add up over the years. All the science fiction I have ever written is in print and constantly being reprinted, although my books are often reckoned difficult when they first appear.

*BILLION YEAR SPREE* marks one high-tide in my career. It is the synthesis of years of reading and practical experience. It seeks to convey enjoyment and explain the fascination of sf. The novel has lost ground in recent years; the novelty that gave it its name is evaporating, whereas science fiction retains novelty and ideas. That is possibly the secret of its wide and enduring success. True, much sf is drivel: that only accords Sturgeon's Law, which states that 90% of anything is crud.

The rise of science fiction in England has been rapid. The crude native product of the fifties, which aped the worst American writing and generally consisted of adventure on other planets, has virtually disappeared. We have instead a much more supple literature, capable of reflecting and analysing the fears and pleasures of our times. New writers and publishers are appearing on the scene.

One promising sign has been the Gollancz SF Competition, which should encourage new writers, just as the OBSERVEH competition encouraged us. Universities and polytechnics are starting courses in sf. There is no doubt that sf will come to be taken as seriously as we take the 19th century novel. Meanwhile, those of us writing now enjoy two very good things: a freemasonry of writers, a vociferously enthusiastic readership. Even Shakespeare couldn't have asked for more!

---Brian W. Aldiss

(This article first appeared in THE BOOKSELLER, April 7th, 1973; and is re-printed with the permission of the author)

#### THINGS TO COME:

VECTOR 70, scheduled for publication in mid-November, should be bigger (64 pages) and even more packed with good things than this number. On file, we have: an analysis of Ivan Yefremov by Patrick McGuire and the text of a talk by Edmund Cooper on Violence in SF. In addition, we hope to run Boh Shaw's Beacon talk, "Time-Travellers Among Us", an article on "Science Fiction's Urban Vision"; new review columns on fanzines (yes, Keith?) and films, as well as the usual book reviews (up-to-date this time!); a convention report on Novacon; and last, but not least, a Letter Column - if you send us the letters.

So - stick with us: VECTOR is on the move again.

#### COMPETITION:

Yes, folks, never let it be said that Fowler will miss any chance to boost the circulation of his organ. Here it is, for the first time in living memory - well, the first time in my memory - a competition. What you have to do is work out the dumba mistake that the editor made when typing up VECTOR 69 (no, we don't mean particular typos, we mean one BIG error running through page after page) and only realised about half-way through. There's a catch - you only get the prize if you can guess closer than anybody else the exact point at which the editor realised his dumba error and corrected it.

NB (and this is by way of a clue): no IBM Selectric owners may enter.

# THE VALUE OF BAD SF

Bob Shaw

I think most of us have a clear idea of what we mean when we say a piece of sf is "good", or when we say a piece of sf is "bad". Our ideas remain clear even when we hear misguided people classifying a story that we know to be "bad" as "good", or one that we know to be "good" as "bad". And our ideas go on remaining clear even when we discover that a story we used to think of as being "good" was actually rotten all the time, although we hadn't realized it. I daresay our belief in our powers of judgment would remain unshaken even if the reverse happened, and we found that a story or book that we had once thought rather useless turned out to have been "good" all along - although this seems to happen very rarely.

For some reason, about the only people it happens to are influential critics who have published reviews of my books. A few years ago I wrote a book called THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, which some people liked, and which others hated. Greg Benford, the reviewer for AMAZING STORIES, was in the latter category and - being a friend - he sent me an advance copy of the unfavourable review he had written.

This is another curious phenomenon which sometimes afflicts a writer. Every now and then my friends take turns at deciding to prove that our relationship is strong enough to embrace honesty and straight talking. For months on end they come along, my friends, one after the other, and explain to me, at great length, how rotten everything I write actually is. Sometimes I get the impression that I have the most honest and candid set of friends in the entire universe!

Anyway, I happened to be in Boston a couple of months later for that year's World Convention, and Greg Benford came up to me and said: "Bob, you'll be pleased to hear that I've re-read THE PALACE OF ETERNITY and I've completely changed my mind about it. I now think it's a really good book."

I said: "Thanks a lot, Greg. I was a bit worried about the review you sent to me going into print."

And he said: "Oh, it already has - it's on the stands this month. I just thought you'd like to know that it's all wrong."

I gave him a sort of inward smile - one that was very difficult to catch - and thanked him to the best of my ability. Strangely enough, exactly the same happened with another

reviewer about the same book. Perhaps it was a delayed-action book, like van Vogt's *WORLD OF NULL-A* was supposed to be when John W. Campbell first serialised it in *ASTOUNDING*. I don't know how many people would remember that far back, but in his blurb for the final installment Campbell said that the full impact of the story wouldn't hit you until 48 hours after you had finished reading it.

This statement ruined an entire weekend for me.

I finished *NULL-A* about 8 o'clock on a Thursday evening, analysed my inner being, and realised I hadn't benefitted from the experience to the predicted extent. This was a disappointment, but then I remembered Campbell's words about the story being constructed like a 48-hour Coldrex capsule, and realised it would all hit me like a bomb at 8 o'clock the next Saturday night. The next two days were an agony of anticipation; I even refused to go out with my friends on Saturday night, because I didn't want my translation to a higher level of understanding spoiled by my being full of Guinness and meat pies.

Come 8 o'clock on Saturday night I was sitting alone in the house - and nothing happened! As the minutes ticked by I tried to console myself by saying that it was something to do with the US being five hours behind the UK, and that I'd have been all right if I had read the British Reprint Edition of *ASTOUNDING*. Then, after about two hours, came this blinding flash of revelation. I realised that I would have been better off out getting full of Guinness and meat pies.

Now, I was talking about the definition of "good" and "bad" science fiction, and the difficulties and ambiguities of such definitions. I'm fairly clear in my own mind about what constitutes sf in either category, but the situation is complicated by the fact that there is sf which I know to be "good", but which gives me no pleasure when I read it; and there is sf which I know to be bad, but which I enjoy reading.

In the little piece I wrote for the Tynescon programme booklet, I mentioned at some length the financial importance to the continuance of sf publication of the beginner or casual reader. When you've been closely involved with sf fandom for a long time, it is easy to start thinking that it is congruent with the readership a publisher aims at or gets when he publishes a book. And because members of sf fandom are usually highly vociferous, there is even a danger they can convince the publisher that they do indeed represent the general sf audience. I use the word "danger" because the first step in any commercial selling operation is to identify the customer, and anybody who fails to make this identification correctly is in trouble. A good example of what I'm talking about was the Scottish sf magazine *NEBULA*, which was published from Glasgow during the Fifties. Its editor, Peter Hamilton, was a very nice person who became deeply involved with fandom. As a result the magazine gradually became more and more like a fanzine. It employed fan artists, had chat columns written by well-known fan writers, and had a fan-



letter section. All this was great from the point of view of somebody like me, who knew all the people concerned; but to the casual reader it presented an irritating in-group image, and as NEBULA became more fannish its circulation dropped, until in the end it had to close up shop.

The disappearance of NEBULA was a bit of a blow to me, because it was there that my first half-dozen sf stories were published. It is a peculiar thing that very often when I sell to certain magazines and publishers, I hear soon afterwards that that magazine or publisher has got into financial difficulties. I keep telling myself that there is no connection between the two events, but during periods of depression (such as are brought on by reading some of Isaac Asimov's jokes) I wonder: did they buy my stuff and then get into trouble because of its effects on their sales; or were they in trouble in the first place and only bought my stuff because no other author would submit anything to them.

Anyway, as I was saying, Peter Hamilton was an extremely nice person, and keen on sf fandom. He even started attending conventions, his first one being at Manchester in the mid-Fifties. Well, I say it was his first convention; it was also his last. This was due to an unfortunate experience which led to a series of rows with the hotel manager, and the starting of a petition to have the Manchester Ship Canal cleaned up on the grounds that it was a danger to public health.

Conventions those days weren't the sober and respectable affairs we have now. The hotels tended to have wall-to-wall managers...and hot and cold running women in every room. A regular feature was the Humming and Swaying session, an experiment in mild mass hypnosis conducted in utter darkness in the Con hall. (I never had much to do with them, mainly because I had usually been humming and swaying all by myself since shortly after the bar opened.)

On this particular occasion, a well-known fan (who shall be nameless, because he is bigger than I am) arrived carrying a heavy cardboard box. He explained to Peter Hamilton that it was equipment which would be needed later during a ceremony, and asked him if he could store it in Peter's room. Peter said it was all right, not realising that the ceremony referred to was the annual sacrifice of virgins which always took place during the Humming and Swaying session. (The virgins shall also be nameless - because they were bigger than I was as well.) Nor did he realise that this well-known fan had become so carried away in his quest for realism during the ceremony that he had gone round to his local butcher and obtained about half a hundredweight of animal intestines, which he planned to produce and brandish in the air as evidence that the virgin had been well and truly sacrificed.

Well, I remember that it was very hot in Manchester that year. The Humming and Swaying was on the second or third day of the convention - and the intestines had been none too fresh to start off with. They were off! All that Peter

Hamilton knew was that his room was filled with a ghastly stench, which became more unendurable as the long hot days dragged by; and he never thought of looking in the cardboard box, because he thought it was full of robes and regalia and so forth. That was what started all the complaints to the management, and when the source of the smell was finally located, old Peter was so embarrassed that he quietly packed up and left soon afterwards.

Talking about NEBULA reminds me that once I had ambitions to be a science fiction artist, and I came close to doing the cover for its first issue. NEBULA's art editor was another well-known fan, and the trouble was that he wanted to do the cover as well. Peter Hamilton resolved the issue by having a competition in which we submitted a cover painting. This sounded eminently fair to me - until I discovered, too late, that the competition was to be judged by the one other competitor, the art editor who wanted to do the cover himself. In due course he considered the entries - and decided his was the best. He told me afterwards that the reason he had picked his own painting was that he had been so pleased with the way he had achieved a two-dimensional effect. As paper is pretty two-dimensional to start off with, I regarded his achievement as a rather minor one, certainly not worth blighting my artistic career for.

All this is straying a bit far from the definition of "bad" science fiction. As I was saying, it is very difficult to give a hard and clear definition of "bad" science fiction because everybody has his own ideas and even these can vary over the years. But one very interesting thing which can be said about "bad" sf is this - it is very often, even usually, the sf which is classified as "bad" which brings new readers into the field.

Sf readers tend to be born rather than made, so I'm mostly talking about young people, rather than those who come to the field in their maturity. And, as well as being economically essential to sf, those youngsters are vital in another respect - because it is from their ranks that the writers, artists and editors of the future are drawn. One of the things which usually makes an sf story "bad" in my eyes is if it contains a blatant scientific impossibility or logical flaw which the author happily serves up in the belief that his readers will not notice it, or - perhaps worse - in the belief that if they do notice it they won't care, because it doesn't matter.

An example of the sort of thing which I mean occurred in the film PLANET OF THE APES. Charlton Heston's spaceship is thrown forward several hundred years into the future (I forget the exact number) and lands back on Earth - but the crew don't recognise it as Earth, for no other reason than that it is handy for the plot that they shouldn't. Now, one handy way to recognise the Earth would be by looking up at the sky and recognising the Moon, but this opportunity is denied them by

"a strange mist which covers the sky every night". That's a hard one to swallow, but you might just get it down your imaginative gullet except for one thing: the Moon appears in the sky just as much by day as it does by night. And there was no mist in the daytime sky. A few vapour trails, perhaps (probably the same ones I noticed in ALEXANDER THE GREAT and HOW THE WEST WAS WON), but no mist.

Another good clue as to where they came from was the apes themselves. Surely an alert mind, surely even Charlton Heston's mind, could have drawn some kind of inference from the fact that these apes spoke perfect English! With US accents! (The apes, incidentally, seemed to have progressed from inarticulate banana-gobblers to intelligent articulate machine-tool makers in a few hundred years. At that rate they must have been evolving nearly as fast as the constitution of the British Science Fiction Association. They were able to make rifles and seemed able to turn their willing hands to anything - at least, their fingers were willing, but I noticed that their thumbs were opposed.)

In contrast to the idiosyncrasies of PLANET OF THE APES, Pierre Boulle has written a rather nice novel called GARDEN ON THE MOON, in which Japan is able to win the race to the Moon by the simple expedient of not hampering their space rocket with the means of getting the crew back to Earth. The final chapter, in which the cosmic kamikaze lays out for himself a little garden composed of moon rock and personal trinkets and then commits suicide, seemed to me to be first class sf.

On this subject of stupid, careless flaws, the TV series STAR TREK is another winner. And I'm not talking about the grammatical idiosyncrasies of the opening voice-over: "... to boldly split infinitives that no man has split before". I've talked at length at various conventions about the strange command structure of the Starship Enterprise, so I won't go into it again. Not much anyway. As you know, there are hundreds of people on that ship, but the chain of command seems to be such that when the Captain and First Officer are otherwise engaged, which they frequently are, the Chief Engineer takes over; and when he is crawling under the floor, personally adjusting the main drive system - by re-arranging plastic Lego blocks - the Medical Officer takes over!

That is weird enough, but it has lately occurred to me that as all the adventures take place when Kirk, Spock, Scotty and McCoy are all on duty, assuming they work an eight hour shift the Enterprise must have two other complete crews that we never see, to whom nothing ever happens!

If Jim Blish ever feels like including a satirical piece among his Star Trek books, I offer him the idea of writing about a chap called, say, Arnold Dinkelschmaltz, who has been night-shift commander of the Enterprise for years, and who became paranoid through boredom, and the fact that the day shift man - Captain Kirk - gets all the fun, all the women, and all the glory.

I was talking about new young sf readers, and what they like about the game. My own children enjoyed PLANET OF THE APES and STAR TREK, and when I tried pointing out some of the flaws I have just mentioned they said, quite reasonably, that the apes had to speak English otherwise the people watching the film wouldn't have understood them. They could see the flaws, when they were pointed out, but were willing to accept them in order to get the other things they like: the other-worldliness, the colour, the glamour, the new concepts, the adventure, the strangeness, the sense of other places and other times.

And I found I was rather sad in way. A good religion would be one in which belief was strengthened by enquiry; to my mind, a piece of sf should be constructed in the same way. The fact that so much of it isn't constructed in this way might account for another phenomenon I have noticed. This is that all children are sf fans by instinct and then at a later stage, usually about puberty, most of them cease to be sf fans. Because of the timing of this change of heart, I once wrote a carefully worked-out fanzine piece in which I attributed the swing away from sf to the dawning of sexuality; but it could also be that it is caused by nothing more than the dawning of reason and the critical faculty.

The sad thing is that there is no need for faulty workmanship in the building of a story. By working harder, taking more time, thinking harder, the author could, in almost every case, find a way to solve all the logical problems in the construction of a story - and at the same time retain, or even enhance, those qualities I mentioned: the other-worldliness, the colour, the glamour, the new concepts, the adventure, the strangeness, the sense of other places and other times. And if he can't find a way to solve all those problems, this means that the story should never be written.

I am, of course, assuming that it isn't the flawed nature of many stories which is the magnet for new readers. It is only when you have been reading the stuff for a long time that you can appreciate the real sf kitsch for its own ghastliness. An old favourite of mine is the line of dialogue which was discovered many years ago, I think by Ken Bulmer, and which went: "Rat!" he hissed". Now how do you hiss "rat"?

Perhaps paradoxically, after talking about the flaws which cut down the number of recruits for sf, it is worth mentioning some characteristics of the consciously "good" sf which I believe to have a similar effect. During the last decade or so there has been a move away from the old hard sciences and towards the social and biological sciences. This isn't a bad thing in itself, but it has somehow led to sf adopting a negative approach to the future. Authors tend to look at the future through morose-coloured spectacles; but I feel that doom stories can only be appreciated when mixed in - like Ali-Ban - to provide roughage in a diet of optimism. (To go right off the subject for a moment, I wonder how many

people have been put off taking up astronomy for a hobby by the fact that they couldn't discuss it with other people, because they didn't know how to pronounce the names of the stars. There is one star in particular that I avoided mentioning because I didn't know if I should call it Aldebaran or Aldee-baran. In order to be able even to think about it, I christened it All-Bran. Perhaps I had decided that it was a regular variable.)

Doom stories are part of the sf trend towards contemporary social realism, and they proliferate largely because the surest way to arrive at a doom prognosis is to try solving tomorrow's problems with today's resources. This is an attempt at realism, of course, but a more real realism could predict escalation of our problem-solving ability as well as an escalation of our problems. That's harder to do because, by and large, we can see tomorrow's problems quite well, whereas tomorrow's solutions are hidden from us. The point I'm trying to make is that the vital new recruits to the sf field are likely to be turned away if they come to think of it as a literature of disaster.

The same thing might be said of the tendency some authors have towards writing sf novels which become more and more like ordinary novels, and less and less like sf. I was going this way in my own work, until it dawned on me that the only reason a person picks up an sf novel in preference to a mainstream novel is that he expects it to be different from a mainstream novel.

Authors who go in for this literary unisex - books that are neither sf nor mainstream, or which are both - feel a compulsion studiously to omit all the traditional props of the sf story. Spaceships become taboo. Time machines become taboo. Extra-terrestrials become taboo - except, perhaps, as philosophical sounding boards, who are supposed to have been born in another galaxy, but can handle the English subjunctive like Oxford dons.

Properly done, this kind of story has its place - after all, sf is a very flexible and accommodating field - but it rarely seems to achieve its objectives. Perhaps a writer who has had his grounding in the pulp magazines never quite manages to shake off that thick, dusty, choking, evocative smell that an old ASTOUNDING exudes.

Well, that's about it. I think that what I've been trying to say is that the old traditional sf had its good elements, and its bad elements. And that one of the tasks of every sf author today should be to examine these elements very carefully: that he should retain and develop the truly good; that he should discard the truly bad; and that he should be very clear in his mind about which is which.

---Bob Shaw

(This is the text of Bob Shaw's Tyaecon Guest of Honour Speech; it first appeared in GOBLIN'S GROTTO 1, and is re-printed by permission of the editor, Ian Williams.)

# SCIENCE OR FICTION

Tony Sudbery

Science fiction writers, and writers about science fiction, often seem to feel a tension between the two words that are yoked together in the name of the genre. Science, the feeling goes, is science: a mechanical, inhuman thing, full of facts. Fiction, on the other hand, is literature, a part of Art and therefore totally opposed to science. So if sf is fiction, as it surely is, how can it have any relation with science?

One of the writers who displays this feeling of tension is Brian Aldiss, who thought it necessary to assure readers of his anthology PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION that "science fiction - the fact needs emphasising - is no more written for scientists and technologists than ghost stories were written for ghosts". Now there's a nice knock-down argument for you! Well, almost; I feel obliged to play the pedant and point out a false analogy. Ghost stories are presumably written for people who are interested in ghosts, and it seems reasonable on the face of it to suppose that science fiction is written for people who are interested in science. Brian Aldiss, however, makes it quite clear that he is not at all interested in science. In this essay he goes on to remark that:

"...two main streams flow through sf, the scientific and the whimsical. Or the empiric and the runcible, if you prefer. These two streams often mingle inseparably in one story...but to distinguish them they are best named after their two most notable exponents and called the Wellsian and the Carrollian. My contention is that sf owes a greater debt to Lewis Carroll than to H.G. Wells; which is why I believe that its appeal is more to the layman than the buffin." (2)

My contention is that these two streams mingle inseparably in science itself, and that one of the functions of sf is to draw attention to - even, perhaps, to keep alive - the runcible elements in science. This is an old cliché among sf readers: science tells us wonderful things about the world - that's what it's for - and sf helps to stimulate the sense of wonder. But that's not how Brian Aldiss sees it:

"A wonderland, that's sf, a realm of the curious, through which a twentieth century reader wanders like a terylene-clad Alice. Myself, I like this

facet of sf greatly, preferring it to the sort of "Popular Science" side. I'd as lief hear how crazy the world is as how fast it progresses technologically." (3)

It's sad that all that the scientific side of sf can do for Brian Aldiss is to tell him how fast the world is progressing technologically. This is not the only place where he equates science with technology, regarding it as something whose function is to produce gadgets. I'm not sure whether he knows that science, as pure inquiry motivated simply by wonder about the world, exists.

Similar comments apply to Mark Adlard's strictures on "Ideas" in sf:

"Pohl said, in essence, that a writer had to have what he...called 'ideas'...What he means is an imaginary invention...Invent a better mousetrap and Pohl will beat a path to your door." (4)

Like Adlard and Aldiss, I am bored stiff by gadgetry. But gadget stories and engineering fiction do not, for me at least, amount to science fiction. Real science fiction gives us not an idea for a new gadget, but a genuinely interesting and intellectually stimulating scientific speculation, or else an imaginative realisation of a scientific truth. Aldiss does in fact recognise this latter function:

"A writer's business is to digest new things and make imaginative experience of them. My own story, "Poor Little Warrior", began as an attempt to bring to imaginative life a dinosaur bone I found in a museum." (5)

but this is a rare lapse from his normally consistent ideological objection to science.

I suspect that this hostility arises from the standard romantic objection to any form of scientific inquiry, which seems to have become an orthodoxy demanding assent from all sf writers, even those whose natural temperament makes them sympathetic to science. James Blish, for example, a man with a wide knowledge of and deep interest in the sciences, a critic who pounces fiercely on any scientific inaccuracy in an sf story, and one of sf's foremost theorists, obviously feels that the presence of science in fiction is incongruous and needs some explanation. Here is his subtle and ingenious account:

"Short stories of any kind are like tattoos: though they are on public display, they come into being to identify the self to the self... The science fiction writer chooses, to symbolize his real world, the trappings of science and technology, and in so far as the reader is unfamiliar with these, so will the

story seem ouire to him. It is commonplace for outsiders to ask science fiction writers: "Where do you get those crazy ideas?" and to regard the habitual readers of science fiction also as rather far off the common ground. Yet it is not really the ideas that are "crazy", but the trappings, not the assumptions, but the scenery. Instead of Main Street - in itself only a symbol - we are given Wars, or the future.

It is not even essential that the symbols be used correctly, although most conscientious science fiction writers try to get them right in order to lure the reader into the necessary suspension of disbelief...

The absolutely essential honesty, however, must lie where it has to lie in all fiction: honesty to the assumptions, not to the trappings. This brings us back, inevitably, to the often quoted definition by Theodore Sturgeon:

' A good science fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content.'

This is a laudable and workable rule of thumb. It seems to me, as long as the writer is aware that the "science content" is only another form of tattoo design, differing in detail but not in nature from those adopted by the writers of all other kinds of fiction.

Viewed in this light, the writing of science fiction is an activity which cannot usefully be divorced by the critic from the mainstream of fiction writing, or from artistic creation as a whole." (6)

Subtle and ingenious - and unconvincing, I think. Blisb seems to feel a need to apologise for the "science content": he is embarrassed by the possibility that an SF writer might be interested in topics which do not interest other fiction writers. By making the science content merely "trappings" in which more conventional concerns are tricked out, and denying any interest in it for its own sake, he relieves his embarrassment and arrives at the comforting conclusion that he is really no different from all the other boys, and that he is not doing anything special at all. But in doing so I think he falsifies the actual concerns of a number of centrally important sf writers, including himself. Much of his own writing is impregnated with an obvious interest in the scientific "trappings" for their own sake, to such an extent that it becomes quite misleading to call them



trappings. It is hard to accept the description of Wars, or of the future, as mere alternative sceneries for which Main Street could easily be substituted, when the whole point of so many sf stories is that Wars, or the future, will be different from Main Street.

It is strange that Blish should be rebuffed of having a wider range of interest than a mainstream author. For I wouldn't want to deny that the interests of sf include those of other types of fiction - or, as John Brunner has put it, that: "science fiction, like all fiction, is about people" (though such a denial could, perhaps, be made: one could point to Olaf Stapledon and Jorge Luis Borges as authors of far from negligible fiction that is not about people at all). The point is that it doesn't follow that sf must be only about people. I am gratified to find support for this view coming from a poet whose connection with the sf field is slight. Here is Peter Redgrove on the appeal of sf.

"Sf at its best is a place where the modern realising imagination is very much at work. It is as interested in things and the ways they work as science is, but unlike science it involves the spectator too, the person, the feelings - so that facts are not just things, but meanings also. Sf shows that matter and spirit are the two sides of the one coin - this is what "literature" is about too. It is a bridge between science and poetry; it is as interested in the sheer presence and working of things as both science and poetry. At its best, it becomes poetry, at its best modern poetry becomes like sf. Both are interested, intensely involved in the sheer "thingness" of things, both try and unite feeling and fact." (7)

This is the most convincing and satisfying statement of what sf is all about that I've ever seen. It is refreshing to be reminded that there is no disgrace in wanting to focus hard on things, rather than people, sometimes. And Redgrove's formulation brings to mind other sayings by the writers I have been disagreeing with: I think of James Blish calling the General Theory of Relativity "a glorious piece of poetry", and of the enthusiasm for Olaf Stapledon that is shared by Mark Adlard and Brian Aldiss, even though he deals with undeniably scientific concepts and interests. In STAR MAKER, for example, Stapledon is pursuing an interest in the stars which he shares with the poet and the scientist, and he explores this interest by telling stories about them. Poets and scientists tell stories, too - scientists more often than poets - but their main concern is to give exact, true descriptions of things. The sf writer's speculations

(Concluded on p 48)

# THE INFINITY BOX

UNIVERSE 3 edited by Terry Carr (Random House, 1973; 180pp; \$5.95)

Reviewed by Barry Gillam

UNIVERSE 3 is the best number yet of Terry Carr's original fiction anthology. The first two, which appeared as paperback originals from Ace, were distinguished only by their blandness. The few exceptions were the two Lafferty stories, an ingenious Wolfe jape and nice if simple drawings by Alicia Austin. Even the Joanna Russ stories were disappointing.

What UNIVERSE 3 has over the earlier issue is, really, just a single story; but that story is so good that it outweighs the usual mediocrity of the bulk of the anthology.

The delightful anomaly is Gene Wolfe's "The Death of Dr. Island", which, as you have doubtless read, is an inversion of his excellent "The Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories" (in ORBIT 7). What is amazing is not only the quality of the story (even if it is no way a sequel) but the extent to which a comparison of them illuminates both pieces.

Tackie, the young boy who was the protagonist of "Island" took refuge in a Dr. Moreau-like pulp adventure when his mother neglected him for her own drug-induced refuge. The boy's fantasies of the eternal struggle between the heroic Captain Ransom and evil Dr. Death formed a twisted mirror image of his mother's world, in which her young, handsome beau brought amphetamines and her old, kindly doctor tried to restore her to health.

Nicholas, the young boy who is the protagonist of "Death", is living on a small, wondrous island with two other young psychiatric patients. By means of a miraculous future technology, the weather responds to the moods of the inhabitants, who are watched over by an almost omnipresent spirit, 'Dr. Island'. The patients are learning how to re-enter a community by interacting with each other.

Basically, then, "Island" dealt with the imagination as a self-destructive force, while "Death" deals with the imagination as a socially therapeutic force. In "Island", the attempt to make fantasies real was seen as a breakdown of the body as well as the mind: a drug whose slow poison had not yet harmed Tackie although it had, over the years, weakened and finally consumed his mother. But in "Death", as in Disney and Shakespeare, the heavens literally reflect the emotions of the men beneath them.

The island in the earlier story created a multiple isolation, physical, social and intellectual, from which the boy and his mother

could escape only into the imagination. The island in the second story is there only for its inhabitants. It is a machine designed for their well-being, mental as well as physical. The bare, wintry New England island of the first story is quite a contrast to the warm, sunny, tropical island of the second.

The island of the first story isolated its inhabitants not only from the outside, but also from each other. There was much less dialogue between Tackie and his mother, her sisters or her lover than between Tackie and his imaginary characters. In the costume party which Tackie's aunts hoped would mark his mother's return to society, everyone became anonymous: a girl on acid talked aimlessly to the men standing in the shadowy corners of the room. The island of the second story brings its dwellers together because they are restricted to such a small space. All the displacement and alienation has taken place before the story begins. Nicholas has had the halves of his brain separated to stop his seizures. Diana has already been rejected by her family and Ignacio has left some unspecified important niche in society. The work of their stay on the island is towards reconciliation. Nicholas must learn to live with both his identities, and Ignacio and Diana must learn to live with each other.

Their success is only partial, but then the dissolution of Tackie was only partial. Both stories end ambiguously. Their quality, though, is unquestionable. The characters may not be exceptional, but the psychologically therapeutic environment that is a hospital machine is depicted effectively and movingly in the very human drama of its patients.

The protagonist of Edgar Pangborn's "The World is a Sphere" is a legislator in a future empire which is yielding inexorably to the darkness of tyranny. Pangborn's post-catastrophe world is an America in which the shapes of the land masses, like their names, have been melted into strange, but still vaguely familiar forms. It is a world of men who, unlike their medieval counterparts, are aware that they live in an inter-regnum. The details of this land halfway between stagnation and rejuvenation are not new; emperors having themselves deified, trying to pack the assembly with their relatives, toying with the restless slave population. But Pangborn in this story is particularly successful at suggesting the mind of his protagonist, who sees clearly that social, political, scientific and religious ideas are of a piece; that the mass psychology of acting on one's beliefs and believing to justify one's acts is a cycle that must be broken if progress is ever to be initiated. Pangborn's flair for the dramatic gesture and the precise, evocative symbol have seldom been better displayed.

Robert Silverberg's "Many Mansions" is a time travel comedy that bears distant kinship to *UP THE LINE*. It might more accurately be called a temporal bedroom farce. Silverberg quickly sets the stage with the characters' backgrounds, like rubber bumpers in a pinball machine. Then he paints their desires: murderous, lustful, primary colours that will light up when hit. And in he shoots the characters, bouncing off each other and their self-contradictory status in time. The control of emotion in the story is admirable. Silverberg uses a series of short, cinematic scenes, beginning in efficient procession and rising to click-clack comic speed. He employs a smooth, flat narration which switches from scene to scene like a television from channel to channel, all covering the same news event, but each with a different narration and point of view. Such technical facility is a delight to watch.

The same cannot be said for the other four stories here. Geo. Alec Effinger explores the problems of the artist of the future in "The Ghost Writer". Ross Rocklyne posits an elaborate programme to relieve mankind of its anxieties and hates in "Randy-Tandy Man". Edward Bryant offers a little lesson on the individual's fight against the restraints of society in "The Legend of Cougar Lou Landis". And Gordon Eklund invokes Charles Dickens - to little avail - in "Free City Blues".

UNIVERSE 3 contains two fine stories and one superb one. The latter, one of the best stories of 1973, is Gene Wolfe's "The Death of Dr. Island". Enough said.

FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND by Brian W. Aldiss (Jonathan Cape, 1973; 184pp: £2.25; ISBN 0 224 00803 6)

Reviewed by Mark Adlard

This is a marvellous novel. Criticism is dumb. I feel as if, unconsciously, I have been waiting for Brian Aldiss to write this book.

The epigraphs, like everything else in the book and unlike some 'literary' science fiction, are apposite to the theme. Some agonising lines from Byron are complemented by some well-chosen advice from Leonardo on the painting of stricken faces. This confirms our expectation that the fiction, despite its futuristic setting, will draw its inspiration from that blend of melancholy and torment which was invented by the Romantic Movement.

Part One begins with a huge and easy confidence, in the form of a letter from Joseph Bodenland to his wife, from which we learn most of the things we need to know about the year 2020. There are casual references to futuristic thingumajigs - CompC, a dolphin helping the kids to swim, increasing industrialisation, and what not. But the main point, which is repeated, is that "the fabric of space/time has been ruptured". Then Joe Bodenland disappears in a Time-slip.

With the premises thus economically dealt with, Aldiss gets down to the real business. Part Two (The Tape Journal of Joseph Bodenland) comprises the rest of the book, and is the body of the novel.

Joe finds himself on the shores of Lake Geneva (Lac Lemán) in 1816. He has a drink with a "lean-visaged but elegant man in dark clothes", who seems troubled by the trial of one Justine Moritz for murder. It transpires that the name of this gloomy individual is Victor Frankenstein, and Joe soon has an opportunity of seeing the monster. Joe begins to feel that he is in the presence of a myth, and that he himself might be mythical. He sells his uranium watch, and recognises this as a symbolic action. He decides that he must destroy Frankenstein's work, and travels east along the lake to the Villa Deodati.

Aldiss' recreation of the Byronic ménage at the Villa Deodati is breathtaking in its brilliance. Every touch, every faint nuance, is exactly right. Here they are, as they lived: the breathing likenesses of the hypersensitive Shelley, the pensive Mary Godwin, the giggling Claire Clairmont, and the absurd Polidori (who in our time has undergone apotheosis as the father of vampire stories).

But the recreation of Byron is an incredible achievement. He limps straight off the page and sloshes the claret into your glass. This is the nearest anyone will ever get to knowing what it was like to be inside the Villa Deodati as the guest of Byron.

Aldiss has induced some of the sparkle into Byron's conversation by taking the odd phrase from his poetry and the letters ("There is a tide in the affairs of women which, taken at the flood, leads God knows where..."). This is quite legitimate, particularly as Byron (like Hemingway) used his good things over and over again. But Aldiss has caught the very manner of Byron in dozens of imaginary utterances ("We can always shoot each other later, if needs be"; "the rain holds up, but seldom off"). This resurrected Byron is a tour de force which must make Peter Quennell, Iris Origo, and all the other Byronic body-snatchers, sweat with envy.

The historical characters were so real that I was distressed when Mary is unfaithful to Shelley, and allows Joe to make love to her.

These episodes present Aldiss with a superb opportunity of recapitulating, in human terms, some parts of that literary history which he has dealt with in *BILLION YEAR SPREE*. Thus Shelley tells Byron of his conversation with "old Erasmus Darwin"; Mary tells Joe about the late-night conversations at the Villa Deodati, about Polidori's ghost-stories, and of how she dreamed of Frankenstein just as Horace Walpole had dreamed of Otranto. By one of those master-strokes which the science-fiction framework makes possible, Aldiss is able to "prove" that the central thesis of *BILLION YEAR SPREE* has been confirmed: Joe tells Mary Godwin that in the twenty-first century her novel about Frankenstein is regarded as the first novel of science fiction. (There are many tiny echoes of *BILLION YEAR SPREE* in the novel: the misty northern landscape reminds Joe of the paintings of Friedrich; the city to which the monsters make their way is almost certainly taken from Piranesi's engravings of the Carceri Suite.)

Joe seeks out Frankenstein. Frankenstein tells him of correspondence with Michael Faraday, a visit from Humphrey Davy, and he quotes Shelley. Joe goes up to the laboratory, and sees the female monster (a mate for the first monster) waiting to be brought to life. The unnatural horror of Frankenstein's work is implied, and no more than implied, by the conjunction with a natural phenomenon "On the stool by the side of the female stood a jar with flowers in it, crimson and yellow."

Joe falls on his knees, weeps, and calls aloud to God. In this unnatural monster he sees the first fruits of that "Frankenstein mentality" which will bring so much tragedy to the world in the next two centuries.

Later, Joe sees the female and male monsters performing a ghastly dance around Frankenstein's tower. The disintegration of space/time continues, and two moons sail in the sky. One moon is a crescent, the other almost full, and they gaze down on the copulating monsters like two eyes, one half-closed. This is a modern *Walpurgisnacht*. The imaginative grip on this entire episode has the certainty of genius.

Joe pursues the monsters into that icy landscape which Mary Godwin had described. (I remember Anna Kavan's obsession with a similar landscape, and that she also appears in Aldiss' recent fiction as a loved figure; and that I can't help remembering Norman Mailer's fictional courtship of a dead but desired woman.) He finally manages to destroy

both the monster and its mate. The dying monster speaks: "...though you seek to bury me, yet will you continually resurrect me! Once I am inboud, I am unbouded."

The novel has numerous layers of irony and sophistication.

There is a nice irony in the title. For the ancient Greeks, PROMETHEUS BOUND showed a man punished for defying the gods. Mary Godwin called her novel FRANKENSTEIN, OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS. Shortly afterwards, Shelley finished PROMETHEUS UNBOUND, in which the hero is a champion of mankind. Aldiss gives us FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND as the scourge of mankind.

But the novel is much more subtle than that. This is not a simplistic moral tract.

For example: Frankenstein is explicitly differentiated from Faust, and is described as a man seeking knowledge, not power through knowledge. Similarly, in creating life through means other than sexual congress he wanted to produce abeing without an animal nature and without guilt. The main theme seems to be that "When knowledge becomes formulated into science, then it does take on a life of its own, often alien to the human spirit that conceived it."

But this general standpoint is modified by other views: Mary strokes the back of the plastic seat of Joe's car, and wonder what beautiful animal the material came from; (- "one of the many tempting gifts of Frankenstein's heirs"); Joe, who has luxuriated in the timeless and trafficless streets of Geneva, discovers the other side of the pre-industrial century when he is thrown into one of its prisons.

BILLION YEAR SPREE and FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND have burst into the sky like a double star. The appearance of either alone would have been a cause for wonder. The appearance of both together is almost unbelievable. These two books have delivered two perfectly aimed kicks, muscular and elegant, to indicate the direction in which science fiction is going to proceed.

But that raises other issues.

I continue to open FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND at random. I take my hat off again...and again...and again...and again...

MALEVIL by Robert Merle; translated from the French by Derek Coltman (Michael Joseph, £4.50)

Reviewed by Brian W. Aldiss

How about a new definition of science fiction? It's about things going wrong.

You can't deny that the definition covers a lot of ground. It covers MALEVIL, for instance, although this is one of those novels which is not issued as science fiction\*; but, as Confucius says, it is generally a publisher's label in any case.

Robert Merle is the author of DAY OF THE DOLPHIN, which was made into a movie. MALEVIL may well be intended as movie material; at least it is designed as a big and plushy best-seller, and built as such, but the foundations are good and solid, embedded in the rock of catastrophe.

Emmanuel Conte, the rugged central character, inherits the castle of Malevil. He proceeds to restore it from its ruined state, using it as headquarters for his farming activities. The cellars and dungeons serve as granaries, as well as an animal hospital. Conte is moved by powerful ancestral feelings for his land. This spirit, which pervades the book, gives it its excellence, lending strength to much that might otherwise seem over-familiar.

Then the bomb is dropped. The civilised world is wiped out. More particularly, France is wiped out. The action, the author's thought, never moves beyond France, or, for that matter, beyond the small region of France which centres upon the castle of Malevil itself. The local scene is carefully drawn, though never too precisely placed.

Almost all life, human, animal, vegetable, is wiped out. Only Malevil, sheltered by its cliffs, survives, although the inhabitants are almost cooked. Here the veteran of reader will find reason for complaint, because little care is taken to establish the authenticity of the science involved. It appears - Merle is none too specific - that one lithium bomb is detonated twenty-five miles above Paris, and that this is enough to obliterate all France. As if this were not hard enough to credit, there is no resultant radioactivity, and the ruin that eventually falls is pure, because the lithium bomb was clean. Merle seems not to realise that "clean" is a relative term.

However doubtful Merle's facts may be, his feeling for what would happen at Malevil after the catastrophe is sure. The initial shock, and then the recovery, as a kind of monastic life establishes itself, is the central part of the book. At least he never bothers us with any speculations as to whether the bomb was a judgement; he gets on with his grand and leisurely tale.

Conte is at first almost unable to deal with the situation, but his old peasant cook, La Meson, remains firmly in control. She, and the other members of the household, are drawn with affection, although too many of them tend towards stereotypes, the shortcoming of almost all survivor-type novels; we have the Communist, the anti-Communist, the young man who must prove himself, and so on.

There is also a good deal about religion and about leadership. It is a matter for personal taste whether one cares for these two mystiques. I found, somewhat to my surprise, that I enjoyed the religious debates, no doubt because they clearly matter to Merle. The most formidable enemy of Malevil to arise is a fake priest, Fulbert, who seizes power in the nearby town (the survival of which is none too convincing). Fulbert and Conte are opposed, yet their two characters are not unlike. Although Fulbert is an impostor, he nevertheless has a strong religious drive. Conte has no time for religion; nevertheless, he is forced by circumstance to promote himself to holy orders, and derives strength from functioning in that capacity. Such concerns are unusual in such books, but here they lend seriousness to what is generally merely sensational.

The rest of the long book is occupied with the destruction of enemies and the cultivation of the land. Perhaps towards the end a reader needs extra patience, but the best scenes embody Merle's strong respect for leadership and affinities of earth. Here he evinces a deep vein of the romantic feeling which is present in every catastrophe novel ever written.

This runs most freely in some of the early passages, where impulses for command and territory run together, when Conte, with young Thomas,

goes to challenge gipsy troglodytes who have stolen his mare; this sets the key for the struggle that follows, in which the gypsies are defeated, and Comte takes over their fortress, their goods, and their women. Chief female capture is Miette, a buxom young woman whom Merle describes roughly in the terms he would use for the mare - "squarely cut shoulders, breasts high and rounded like bossed shields, high buttocks, well-muscled legs" - and, to increase her animality, her creator inflicts dumbness on her. Comte takes Miette back to his castle, where she is shared around liberally.

So the catastrophe is not the centre of the book. It merely forms a stage on which Merle's large and somewhat cumbersome figures perform. Colman's translation into American English is good, though it too does not escape cumbersome at times.

The novel's dominant image, the castle built by the Black Prince, dominating its surroundings, is a strangely medieval one. It is effective at the cost of making the novel seem rather old-fashioned. The care that has gone into building the novel is also old-fashioned. You may feel, as I did when I closed the book, that these are virtues rather than defects.

\*(Although it should be pointed out to those who don't already know, that MALEVIL is the novel which, by sharing first place in the John W. Campbell Awards, prevented 1973 being entirely Arthur C. Clarke Benefit Year. (Ed.)

TEN THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS FROM HOME by James Tiptree Jr. (Acc 00180; 1973; 95¢; 319pp)

Reviewed by John Brunner

Two things combine with that deceptive appellation "Jr." to make one construct an imaginary presence for this man James Tiptree...and at once there I am face to face with a qualification I can't eliminate yet: does one here deal with a pseudonym, and has he or even possibly she invented that biography of which in his introduction to this volume Harry Harrison gives tantalising snippets?

Who knows? Who cares? Back to the aforementioned elements of imaginary presence. For myself, I am painfully revising an impression of him as a youthful novice, due to his comparatively recent arrival in the sf field (the earliest story here, out of 15, was copyrighted in 1968) and the quite astonishing freshness of his best work.

Perhaps it's only by setting 'prentice tales of the type represented here by "Mama Come Home" and "Help" alongside (I won't apologise, I can't think of a better term) masterpieces like "And I Awoke And Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side", that one can appreciate how rapidly and with what sure sense of direction Tiptree has advanced from the learning in the trail-blazing stage of his craft. With the wisdom of hindsight I imagine people may say that they knew all along this could be no callow boy fresh from college. I didn't know it "all along" - it's only in reading this collection that I've been able to discern how personal maturity lights the more recent stories in a way nothing else can surrogate - but the fact of that deception delights me, as a con-jurer's performance would.



It's an out-and-out shame that Ace Books cut so many corners off production of this volume that there isn't even a contents page, just a table of acknowledgements. But make no mistake: though the quality of the collection is indisputably uneven, if you don't acquire it pronto you will be guilty of overlooking the most extraordinary and varied talent to arrive among us in lo! these many moons.

**CRASH** by J.G. Ballard (Jonathan Cape; 1973; £2.25; 224pp; ISBN 0 224 00782 3)

**VERMILION SANDS** by J.G. Ballard (Jonathan Cape; 1973; £2.25; 208pp; ISBN 0 224 00894 3)

Reviewed by David Pringle

1973 was Ballard year in Britain, with two new books appearing from Cape - a collection of stories, **VERMILION SANDS** (which had appeared in America two years before) and a new novel, **CRASH**. The British edition of **VERMILION SANDS** gives us the bonus of an extra story, "The Singing Statues", plus a short preface by the author. Often accused of "pessimism" in the past, Ballard seems to be forging a new attitude towards the future in these books. Rather than a killing ground or disaster area, Ballard increasingly sees the future as a playground, however serious and indeed terrifying the games may be. Although he has never been a pastoral or utopian writer at the best of times, Ballard seems more than ever to be moving towards acceptance of man's perversity, his technological fall from grace. In **VERMILION SANDS** and **CRASH** he gives us two versions of the "glaucoous paradise" of the near future - utopias he can already glimpse from his own suburban home in Shepperton. Whether they are equally convincing in their "optimism" is another matter.

In his stimulating preface to **VERMILION SANDS** Ballard says that the book portrays "a place where I would be happy to live". Vermilion Sands is suburbia writ large: "As the countryside vanishes under a top-dressing of chemicals, and as the cities provide little more than an urban context for traffic intersections, the suburbs are at last coming into their own. The skies are larger, the air more generous, the clock less urgent." This description certainly fits the languorous atmosphere of Vermilion Sands, with its sculptured clouds, musical statues, verse-transcribers and psycho-sensitive houses - a place where it is always evening, where the party is just over, the season just ended. Interestingly enough, **CRASH** is also set in suburbia, although in a more precisely located zone than **VERMILION SANDS**. Its landscape is that of modern West London, dominated by airport and motorway: "Our own apartment house at Drayton Park stood a mile to the north of the airport in a pleasant island of modern housing units, landscaped filling stations and supermarkets, shielded from the distant bulk of London by an access spur of the northern circular motorway which flowed past us on its elegant concrete pillars." For all its modernity and its blue skies, the world of **CRASH** is enclosed. The characters are trapped between concrete walls, however spacious, and this gives **CRASH** a very different feel to **VERMILION SANDS**, with its receding vistas of sand-sea and mesa. The latter is a "suburb of the mind" which might be "somewhere between Arizona and Ipanema Beach" or located in that "3000-mile-long linear city that stretches from Gibraltar to Glyfada Beach along the northern shores of the Mediterranean." In short, **CRASH** - for all its

attempt to present a perverse utopia - has something of the harshness of contemporary reality about it, whereas VERMILION SANDS gives us a science-fictional world moulded by desire. Who wouldn't rather live in Vermilion Sands than in Greater London?

Under the veneer of "optimism" these books follow the pattern of all Ballard's work. The characters are driven by obsession, they enact psychodramas, and end up making their peace with the world - however bizarre the terms of that peace may be. The search for grace is as compulsive in CRASH as it was in THE CRYSTAL WORLD or "The Voices of Time". In this case, the protagonist finds grace (of a sort) by following the logic of the equation "sex X technology = the future. The machine, symbolised here by the motor-car, becomes eroticised, automobile interiors become "broders", chrome fittings become "altar-pieces". The dead limbs of technology take on new life, and man's creations are suffused once more with human meaning. In paradoxical merging true to the surrealist metal becomes flesh - and more than flesh. Under the influence of LSD, the narrator sees motor-cars as angels "waiting for some invisible slip-road into the sky". The crystal symbol returns, and these transformed machines become chips of eternity, pouring out preternatural light: "I saw her aircraft above the motorway, a glass dragonfly carried by the sun. It seemed to hang motionlessly over my head, the propeller rotating slowly like a toy aircraft's. The light poured from its wings in a ceaseless fountain." One no longer has to visit the jungle behind Fort Matarre for a vision of eternity - it is right there in West London; concrete and steel can be enlivened too. If man will accept his own perversity, start viewing his self-made prison as a playground, then he will attain grace.

This would seem to be Ballard's message, but almost inevitably the novel works against any such direction on the author's part. The narrator glimpses eternity through the influence of a drug, and the prison-walls soon show through again. The long catalogue of car-crash mutilations and sexual perversions, which sometimes make the novel read like a science-fictional version of Genet, may be intended as an exorcism, but they have a numbing effect on the reader. The emphasis on machines makes for a scant treatment of human beings - the women in CRASH might as well be androids - and the result is that this is the least humanly interesting of Ballard's novels. Even the hero-villain Vaughan (intended as a dying-god figure whose dismemberment will fertilise the motorways) is less convincing than he could be. And although the narrator bears the author's name, he is little more than a cipher.

CRASH is an infuriating, irritating novel in many ways, but I feel that Ballard has not lost his talent as a writer. Not enough has been said about his curious style, which throws together disparate images, sometimes to the point of contradiction and absurdity. I like to call Ballard's prose-style "impressionist", because it works by presenting several discrete images in swift succession, each modifying the whole. This can sometimes cause a jangling of impressions in the mind, but at its best it works very powerfully indeed. A small example. Ballard, in describing motorway architecture, talks of "the cathedral-like vaults of the overpass, like a succession of empty submarine pens." The image of submarine pens following so hard upon that of the cathedral jars. But if we allow the images to drift into each other, we find that two aspects of the motorway overpass have entered our awareness at the same time - the beautiful and the ugly, the sublime and the sordid. This portmanteau image fits the situation of the novel, where the

protagonist has suffered both beatific and hellish visions under the influence of the hallucinogen. Often accused of verbal clumsiness and poor syntax, Ballard is in fact a master of dense descriptive prose, sown with well-turned throwaway phrases and haunting parantheses.

With another new novel, called *CONCRETE ISLAND*, published in 1974, we still have many delights to look forward to in Ballard's writing. Meanwhile I recommend these books, especially *VERMILION SANDS*, to those who wish to explore the ever-fascinating ports of call in Ballard's continuing psychological odyssey.

*YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN* by David Gerrold (Faber and Faber; 1974; 211pp)

Reviewed by Rob Holdstock

At the 1971 Science Fiction Convention at Worcester, David Gerrold (on a panel of professional writers) had this to say about sf:

"I'm a chauvinist to the extent that sf is, to me a literature of ideas, of human beings in conflict with ideas - I don't like to see that literature cheapened by imitation science fiction and that's why I react negatively to things that are adventures masquerading as sf."<sup>a</sup>

This was, and remains, a noble sentiment, but an assessment of his latest book - *YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN* - raises the question of whether or not Gerrold is prepared to practice what he preaches.

For example, a "literature of ideas". 7 The United Systems Space-ship *ROGER BURLINGAME* is on routine patrol of the Galaxy - her sensors pick up a "bogie", an enemy vessel for sure, and immediately the ship gives chase in hyperspace (at approximately warp factor 135) with intent to destroy. The bogie vanishes and is rediscovered near the end of the book when - in a crashing climax - we realise that the "bogie" isn't as inappropriate a name for it as we had at first thought. That's it: well, no, not all of it. There is a weak, tired Captain called Brandt, who gradually concedes control to the strong vital aggressive First Officer, Korie. Korie has his own ideas about things - like increasing the efficiency of the ship, hunting down "bogies" with great dedication, getting promoted, getting his own ship. So the First Officer and Captain are at loggerheads and the Captain loses his pride and the First Officer loses his cool (often) and his mind.

It is very tempting to try to remember how many similar stories have been written and filmed, set not in space but in the more domestic environment of the cruel sea. The laughable twist to the story is the only flimsy justification for the book being sf at all. As for ideas, *YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN* is not worth a damn.

Literature? The book reads like a fleshed-out stage play. For some unfathomable reason it is written in the present tense. We are treated to long tracts of pseudo-technological bullshit:

"Prepare to collapse warp.. neutralise the secondaries  
...remove the interlocks...stand by to neutralise...  
cycle set at zero. Begin phasing..."

It isn't long before the astute reader recognises the good ship

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<sup>a</sup>A transcript of this panel appears in *MARCH 1972* 2

ENTHUSIASM. Gerrold has written the ultimate STAR TREK adventure (it makes setting the scene less demanding, of course) and lays his book wide open - as was the TV series just mentioned - to the criticism made by someone of sf once, that too much of it is imitation sf, adventure masquerading as sf - hey, that was Gerrold himself, of course! Well, there we go. By his own bootstraps hangs he.

The "characters as 3-dimensional and real as those in mainstream fiction" mentioned in Faber's jacket blurb is not only an insult to the increasing school of sf writers who are concerned about literacy in all its manifestations, but it just isn't true about this book. Certainly the characters shout and bawl at each other, seethe mightily, and explode angrily.

"'Oh Christ!'" He buries his face angrily in his hands.  
 "Goddamnit all anyway! Son of a bitch! Shit, shit, shit-hell, hell, hell! Aw, shit!"

For a moment there is silence..."

Brandt's weakness hangs on him like a senile dingus, and Korie's terrible burning passion to BOSS everyone about could hardly be more clearly illustrated. Thinking about it, perhaps the characters are three-dimensional, but then nobody ever complained that characters in sf books weren't. The complaint in the past, and the criticism which must be levelled at YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN, is that the characters aren't four-dimensional. They exist, do personal things - but they have no sense of a past, and no direction to the future. Three dimensions they don't lack - their craggy jaws, raw bones and wide shoulders jut out so far that the book is very difficult to close. And the chief engineer is just as tetchy about his engines as any good stereotyped chief engineer should be.

"It has to be my machine, doesn't it? It just has to be my machines. It couldn't be anything but my machines... Listen wobblehead, if it were the goddamned machines, don't you think we'd tell you?"

David Gerrold said something else at Worcester that, in view of this appalling addition to his list of books, should be held against him:

"Ira Levin wrote a book called THIS PERFECT DAY, and it's about a computer society and everybody has numbers and you know, we've all see it before and better done(sic).

A reviewer at LIFE magazine said, "If you're going to write sf, learn the genre first. Sf is a hard field to write - you can't just sit down and write an sf book, you have to know what you're writing and be conversant with the field so that you can avoid obvious mistakes" - and I think this is the major criticism of outsiders who come into sf, they have not really got beyond the obvious stories."

All of which, of course, is very sound philosophy, but a philosophy hardly evidenced in either THE MAN WHO FOULDED HIMSELF or YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN.

It's very easy to treat a book like this with derision, but quite honestly, YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN begs for it and it is impossible - and pointless - to take it seriously. The book contributes nothing to the

genre, whilst contributing fuel to the genuinely vindictive attitudes of the less observant reviewers and critics in the cold world outside. As fast as Le Guin and Silverberg bring credit to the genre to demonstrate what rich pastures stretch ahead of the sf writer, we are plagued with a cheap sort of exploitation of the increasingly good name that sf is getting, exploitation by books that are not only slight - as is YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN - but downright destructive, and here I would recommend you draw your own conclusions from the state of the paperback shelves today.

Gerrold's career in this country can hardly be said to aspire to great heights, although in the USA he has notched up several award nominations and would appear to be doing well there. Perhaps when we see a book from him that is more than just a single idea worked furiously to a fate worse than death we will have cause to re-assess our opinion, but with books like YESTERDAY'S CHILDREN and THE MAN WHO FOLDED HIMSELF Gerrold is digging a professional grave.

ORBIT 11 edited by Damon Knight (Putnam; 1972; \$4.95, 216pp)

Reviewed by Cy Chauvin

ORBIT is generally a mixed collection of fair-to-good stories that has become something of a standard in the field, so much so that it often seems nothing new can be said about it. Rudolf B. Scherl, in his essay "Fantasy as Technique" (reprinted in SF: THE OTHER SIDE OF REALISM, edited by Thomas Clareson), has suggested, however, a new approach to sf that I thought might be interesting to apply to this anthology. Scherl says in his essay that "the novelist's task is not the same as the historian's, and we use different criteria when assessing their work," and since "the possibilities open to the fantasist are not identical with those the writer of realistic fiction can exploit", we should also use different criteria in assessing their work.

Perhaps I really shouldn't call this approach new - many people have used it in the past to justify sf hackwork, claiming sf "can't be judged by normal literary standards". However, as Scherl's essay was originally published in THE VIRGINIA QUARTERLY REVIEW, I doubt if this is what he meant. I think Scherl was implying that instead we should add some other criteria to those we judge all fiction by, to take into account those unique imaginative qualities which sf possesses.

Unfortunately, Scherl never really says what these new criteria should be, or how they should be applied; but I think a clue lies in the phrase I quoted above, "the possibilities open to the fantasist are not identical with those the writer of realistic fiction can exploit". To what extent does a story exploit the unique imaginative possibilities offered by sf? And to what extent are these possibilities properly exploited - i.e. developed logically and consistently; made into an integral part of the story, and not just a superficial garnish, and the use of these possibilities in a clichéd or trivial manner avoided?

These are the sort of criteria I believe Scherl was hinting at in his article, and these are the sort of criteria I intend to imply while reviewing this volume of ORBIT. Scherl never said what these special possibilities open to the sf writer are, and I won't attempt to say what they are either, since I suspect that in doing so you would really

have to define the nature of sf itself. And these criteria I've outlined probably aren't anything that we wouldn't apply to a purely realistic novel (use of clichés is as much a flaw there as it is in an sf novel, for instance); all I've done is apply them to the imaginative side of sf. But surely that element of an sf story deserves as much attention and evaluation as the more mundane elements of plotting, characterisation, style, etc..

Unless a story meets normal literary standards as well as the ones I've mentioned above, it can't, of course, be called good sf, but the extent to which it meets both normal literary criteria, and the ones I've proposed above, is the extent to which I believe it fulfills the true potential of sf. There sometimes seems to be a division drawn in sf, between those stories which are highly imaginative but have little real literary worth (such as *TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO*) and those stories which have much literary value but little imaginative worth (such as *THE BOOK OF SKILLS*). This is a completely artificial division, and there is no reason why a story can't be good in both respects: there is no reason, in fact, why we shouldn't insist that it be good in both respects. Certainly this is the ideal.

One more thought before I discuss the actual stories in *ORBIT*: "good" is a relative term. I think we all realise this, even if we may not realise what it implies. Story A may be "good" in comparison to Story B, but rotten in comparison with Story C; "good" is a matter of degree, rather than an absolute fixed quality, like colour or shape. That is why I emphasise the "extent to which a story fulfills the potential of sf" - no story can completely fulfill it, but some fulfill it to a greater extent than do others, and these are the superior stories.

To what extent does a story exploit the unique possibilities offered by sf? This was the first criterion I suggested, and it is a mere matter of utilisation, not proper or improper use of sf material. At one extreme, we have mainstream-realistic stories and borderline efforts - stories which make no use of sf possibilities, and stories which make such slight use of such possibilities that it is not clearly discernible whether they are sf or not. *ORBIT 11* has examples of both. Frederik Pohl's "I Remember Winter" is a series of adolescent reminiscences; pure mainstream. George Alec Effinger's "Things Go Better" is about a young wandering minstrel's entry into a town, and were it not for the surreal manner in which the story is told, it would probably be pure mainstream as well. "Counterpoint" by Joe Haldeman is about two men, one rich and the other poor, whose lives are connected in some way that Haldeman never explains. There is little material of science-fictional nature in this story as well. Most of the other stories in *ORBIT 11* exploit the imaginative possibilities offered by sf to a much greater extent than do these three, but generally still make much less use of these possibilities than do most other sf stories published elsewhere - and thus in this respect *ORBIT 11* is inferior.

Nor do many of the stories develop properly the sf possibilities that they do exploit. Kate Wilhelm, for instance, fails to develop logically the imaginative element in her story, "On The Road to Honeyville". There is a sudden transformation at the story's end in which Elizabeth, the protagonist, transfers mentally to the body of her mother, when she was the same age as Elizabeth is at the time of the story. "I felt... a fear that I couldn't explain...as if somehow the world had shifted and

nothing was what I thought it was." (p.215). However, Elizabeth doesn't have any memories of her previous life, so for all intents and purposes she is her mother. (If you transferred bodies with another person, but didn't retain any memories of your former self, and instead adopted those of your new body, what would be the difference between you and the other person?) Thus Wilhelm's mention of Elizabeth's mother feeling a fear she "couldn't explain" is illogical, as is Wilhelm's whole premise.

This might strike some readers as nit-picking, and to be quite honest it is nit-picking. The fact that it is reveals another, more important, flaw in the story: the sf possibility exploited is a mere superficial garnish. It is insignificant and unimportant when related with the story's main concerns, and is only included on the last page as a "surprise" ending. Like the space operas that exchanged horses and six-shooters for spaceships and laser guns, there was little point in writing this - and many of the other stories in ORBIT 11 - as sf. I think this is the most damning indictment one can make of an sf book.

A number of stories in this anthology also fail to avoid using the sf possibilities they exploit in a clichéd or trivial fashion. Vonda McIntyre's "Spectra", for instance, is an anti-utopian story about a girl whose eyes have been replaced by metal sockets. She works in a factory, along with everyone else, and plugs her "eyes" into a machine. She puts together lines in some electronic fashion, but doesn't do her job well, since she often daydreams of times when she had her eyes. So she is punished, again and again. The horror evoked in the story is the same horror evoked in nearly every other anti-utopian story I've read; it has its purposes, but has become somewhat clichéd. McIntyre's story is also only six pages long, which means that she hasn't the space to develop the details of her anti-utopia, or tell us how our society degenerated into the nightmare described - and thus "Spectra" loses much of the originality and interest it might otherwise have had.

More of the stories in ORBIT 11 use the imaginative possibilities they exploit in trivial rather than clichéd ways. Robert Thurston's "Gondyr Shelley, Shirley, Charlotte, Charlene", for instance, is mostly a bad joke about duplicate girls. James Sallis's "Doucement S'il Vous Plait" is about a man who has become a letter, and while it is a very charming, clever and surreal fantasy, it is not significant science fiction. Philip Jose Farmer's "Father's in the Basement" is about a man who literally wears his fingers to the bone writing his last novel. He dies immediately after finishing it, apparently only held together by his daughter's psychic power. (All this is revealed in the story's "shock" ending). If sf is to have any significance, then the imaginative possibilities it deals with must be significant, and be dealt with in a non-trivial fashion.

I have emphasised the poorer stories in ORBIT 11, in order to bring home the point I am making and also to provide examples of stories that fail to meet the different criteria I propose for determining the imaginative excellence of an sf story. But there are two stories in this volume of ORBIT which do come close to meeting my four suggested criteria. The first is Hank Davis's "To Plant a Seed" - unfortunately, this is still a poor story, for basically literary reasons, and as I stressed, we need both imaginative and literary excellence for a truly first-rate sf story. "To Plant a Seed" is about the launching of a ship through time from this universe to the next (the scientists in this story believe in the "pulsating universe theory", in which the dying universe contracts and

then explodes, giving birth to a new universe). The story is told in the form of the chopped up fragments of letter, interviews, notes and standard narrative, which is put together skillfully, but adds nothing of consequence to the story. The characters are flat, and the story basically uninvolved. I found that I cared little whether the project the characters were working on succeeded or failed. The fragmented structure of the story also makes the reader view the events in the story from a distance, second-hand as it were, rather than involving him in the plot and characters. There is also some blatant moralising at the end: "...without the knowledge, the project was right. Everything I did was right. And if the human race ever stops acting on the basis of what it thinks it knows, paralysed by the fear it may be wrong, then homo sapiens will be...in the dinosaur club" (p. 206).

The second story that meets my four criteria is also literarily well-constructed; it is Gene Wolfe's "Alien Stones", and after all the other stories in the book, it is a positive delight. Wolfe's story is about the discovery of a strange deserted spaceship wandering in space. The spaceship is composed of various pod-like structures linked together. Crewmen from an earth vessel explore the ship, and attempt to discover if there are any inhabitants aboard: one man is lost; and his wife and the captain of the earth vessel attempt to find him. From this synopsis, "Alien Stones" may sound like a puzzle story, and in part, I suppose, it is, but it is not only that. There is an underlying current of strong emotion in the story, as well as an aura of mystery, as is Wolfe's award-nominated novella, "The Fifth Head of Cerberus". In the April 1973 FANTASTIC, Alexei and Cory Panshin discuss the importance of mystery in sf, and "Alien Stones" is a perfect example of a story that benefits from such a quality. Mystery is the element that makes up that elusive "sense of wonder" - for only when things remain mysterious to us do they seem as fresh and new as the day we discovered them. It may be that by leaving certain things unclear and mysterious in a story, an author forces the reader to fill these gaps with his own imaginings - and often these seem more wonderful than anything a writer can put down on paper.

The four criteria I've outlined for judging the imaginative value of an sf story are probably imperfect, as is this attempt to apply them. But in order for sf to realise its full potential and become accepted as a branch of literature with something worthwhile and unique to offer, both the imaginative and literary sides of sf must be developed. We need one as much as we need the other. Most of the stories in ORBIT 11 do not meet both these requirements, but then neither do most of the other sf stories and books published.

(Note ORBIT was recently cancelled by its publishers, and I suspect that Knight threw together all the stories he had already bought into this last volume. At least that is the only reason I can think why this volume of ORBIT consists almost entirely of extremely short stories, each averaging only ten pages in length)



NEW WRITINGS IN SF 23 edited by Kenneth Bulmer (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973; £1.95, 191pp; ISBN 0 283 97987 9)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This is Ken Bulmer's second volume in the series. It does not contain such a host of well-known names as no. 22, but the overall standard of the stories is slightly higher. Perhaps it is too early yet for Ken Bulmer's own editorial ideas to have broken through the Carnell traditions, or perhaps the change in editorship will make no real difference; certainly the only alteration so far has been a move towards more stories per issue.

Number 23 contains nine stories. Only three of the authors are anything like well known: Brian Aldiss, E.C. Tubb and Keith Roberts, and some of the others are very new indeed. The tone of the book is morose, downbeat. It could have done with a humorous story or maybe a really good novelette, to add variety. As it is, only two of the stories are particularly original or memorable.

One of these is by Brian Aldiss, who has recently been turning out triplets of "enigmas" with extreme regularity. The three enigmas printed here are the ones he presented to an appreciative audience at Novacon II. They are really good, beautifully written and containing just sufficient detail to make sense. (The difficulty in writing this sort of thing is that the writer himself can never be sure whether his audience is capable of plugging the intentional gaps, or whether it is all nonsense to them.)

The only other thing which I shall have no difficulty in remembering from number 23 is "The Five Doors", an alien puzzle story by Michael Stall, and the reason is its presentation in a series of short, jerky chapters which aim for maximum shock value. His theme, when it is finally revealed, is not new, and his ever-changing viewpoint does not make it easy reading, yet the story is extremely memorable. It is tightly written with hardly a superfluous word. Michael Stall is a new name to me, but one I shall look for in the future.

I do not want to suggest that the remainder of the book is bad, for there are one or two other good stories, but they all lack a spark of originality. Take Keith Roberts' "The Lake of Tuonela". It is very nicely written and makes a good point, but its description of an alien planet snacks too much of Earth: these descriptions are so good - when applied to our own planet - that they become unconvincing when we are told that they are of an alien world. Also, the point and the main characters are too similar to his cleverer, sharper "The Passing of the Dragons" in NEW WRITINGS 21. Another example is E.C. Tubb's "Made to be Broken". The idea of Earth re-establishing contact with colonies which have regressed to barbarism is old. The idea that theories and regulations can never cover all eventualities and must sometimes be broken in order to get the job done is just as old. E.C. Tubb puts these two elements together (plus an incongruously happy ending) and produces an old-fashioned story.

It is always nice to see fans breaking into the professional sf market. "Sporting on Apteryx" is Manchester fan Charles Partington's first published sf story (rather than horror). It is short, being more of an incident and allowing little room for character development, but the writing is smooth and the point nicely put.

The remainder of the stories include an unconvincing novelette by Barrington J. Bayley, who can write better than this, another strange story by Grahame Leman and an undeveloped idea with a good final twist from David S. Garnett.

It would be nice in future volumes to see a return to good chunky novelettes by NEB WRITINGS regulars like James White, Colin Kapp, Michael G. Coney and H.A. Hargreaves.

THE GUNS OF AVALON by Roger Zelazny (Faber, 1974; £2.10, 180pp; ISBN 0 571 10490 8)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

At the close of NINE PRINCES IN AMBER it's hero, Corwin of Amber, had just made a miraculous escape (of the "with one mighty bound Jack was free" variety) from the dungeons of Amber and was moving off in search of a place to recuperate and from which to plan the overthrow of his brother Eric, the ruler of Amber. THE GUNS OF AVALON continues the story, showing how, after many adventures, Corwin manages to gather an army and return to Amber. It too is an open-ended book, which leaves plenty of scope for sequels.

This is Roger Zelazny's heroic fantasy series, his answer to Conan, Elric and Puffard and the Gray Mouser. For my money Zelazny's series comes out on top, by reason of its extreme complexity and very high standard of writing. The complexity is due partly to the great number of ongoing characters (the nine princes, their four sisters, their father, and a mad artist-cum-magician) and partly the setting; all other places are Shadow, an infinity of not-quite-parallel worlds through which the princes and princesses of Amber can move at will. As for Zelazny's writing skills, try this (p. 51).

"Riding, riding. Through the wild, weird ways that led to Avalon, we went, Genelon and I, down alleys of dream and of nightmare, beneath the brass bark of the sun and the hot, white isles of night, till these were gold and diamond chips and the moon swam like a swan. Day belled forth the green of spring, we crossed a mighty river and the mountains before us were frosted by night. I unleashed an arrow of my desire into the midnight and it took fire overhead, burned its way like a meteor into the north. The only dragon we encountered was lame and limped away quickly to hide, singeing daisies as it panted and wheezed."

I must say that I found NINE PRINCES to be a patchy book, with many stylistic and grammatical lapses, but greater care has been taken with THE GUNS OF AVALON and it reads more smoothly. I do have a couple of reservations, though. First, the complexity of the series is a two-edged sword, necessitating about thirty pages of explanation. This has been split carefully into small, digestible pieces and hidden amongst the action, but I would like to recommend a time-lapse of several months between the reading of these two volumes. Secondly, there is so much incident in THE GUNS OF AVALON that the plot of the series is advanced only a small distance.

Such faults are only slight, though, and do not mar an exciting and worthwhile book. I look forward with eagerness to volume three.

TRAITOR TO THE LIVING by Philip Jose Farmer (Ballantine, 1973, \$1.25, 220 pp; ISBN 345 27613 0 125)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

This is Philip Farmer's latest novel - a turgid tale of alleged communication with the dead by means of a new and wonderfully complex machine (called MEDIUM). The book is over-long, having been padded throughout, and it rambles linearly through a fairly loosely constructed plot. It seems to me that Farmer was determined to have another go at this subject (despite - or perhaps because of - the hash he made of it in TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES CO) but that he was unable to decide on his method of approach. As a result, TRAITOR TO THE LIVING is, by turns, seriously scientific, seriously occult, heavily satirical, a cops-and-robbers thriller and a send-up. But it remains, essentially, a dull book.

The setting is a heavily polluted USA in the fairly near future. Taymond Western (a smooth-talking, black-haired archetypal villain) extracts vast sums from clients whom he claims to put in touch with the spirits of their dead relatives, via MEDIUM. Naturally there is much controversy over the validity of Western's invention. One person who makes a stand against Western is Gordon Carfax, a college lecturer who just happens to be Western's cousin. Carfax's theory is that these spirits are the "non-human inhabitants of a universe occupying the same space as ours but at right angles to ours". Fascinating, eh? And Gordon Carfax is the novel's protagonist: its anti-hero, even. He is supposed to be a one-time private eye, but every time something frightens him he wets himself. The third main character is Patricia Carfax, a cousin to both the others, who claims that her father, Rufus Carfax, was the real inventor of MEDIUM but has been killed by Western.

The action consists mainly of Gordon rushing around by car, train and aircraft, investigating Western, attending seances, bedding Patricia, making social comment which falls flat and being shot at. (Here Farmer not only displays a great deal of ignorance concerning ballistics, but he also makes some idiot guesses as to what calibre of pistol will be in use in the future.) The questions posed by the book as to whether Western is a fake or whether he is communicating with the dead or with a bunch of aliens, are left unanswered for so long that by the time I came to the explanations I was no longer very interested. And the wider, more serious, implications of life after death are only lightly touched upon.

I feel there is scope for more sf on this general topic, though not from Philip Farmer who will, I hope, revert to the type of writing he does best: heroic fantasy as in the WORLD OF THE TIGERS series.

As an example of how this topic should be tackled I would like to recommend the excellent novella 'Born with the Dead' by Robert Silverberg, in THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, April 1974.

ZARDOZ directed by John Boorman (20th Century Fox, 1974; GB)

Reviewed by Christopher Fowler

In his last film, *DELIVERANCE*, John Boorman explored the theme of the civilized man reduced to savagery by a hostile environment. In *ZARDOZ* the idea is reversed: it is that of the savage who is brought into a civilized environment and becomes far more than human. *DELIVERANCE* received poor distribution but critical praise - some described it as the best horror film of the year. Critical opinion has been very divided over *ZARDOZ*, but paradoxically it is likely to achieve better distribution, due to good publicity. It is to be hoped that it will get the audience it deserves, for while it is a more uneven film than *DELIVERANCE*, it contains ideas and techniques which warrant attention.

The major theme which runs through *ZARDOZ* is that of immortality. This has always been an important theme in sf, and has most recently been impressively tackled by Robert Silverberg (*DOWNWARDS TO THE EARTH*, *THE BOOK OF SKULLS*), Norman Spinrad (*BUG JACK BARRON*) and Bob Shaw (*ONE MILLION TONDERBOLTS*). Yet it is Moorcock's community at the end of time in *AN ALIEN HEAT* which comes closest to the overwhelming and helpless boredom experienced by many of the Eternals of the Vortex of *ZARDOZ*. Our first view of the Vortex is of a country house beside a placid lake. But the apparent tranquillity is false, and it is the lowering grey sky which gives the clue to the mood of the Vortex, for the seeds of tension are sprouting within. The force which brings the seeds to fruition is the presence of Zed (Sean Connery). We first see Zed with his band of Extremators, bowing down to worship their god, Zardoz, a huge stone head. The god's message is simple: the gun is good, the penis is evil. So the mouth of the god vomits forth guns for the Extremators to control the population level of the Brutals, those savages who scratch out an existence from the wasted Earth. When the god starts to command Zed not to kill the Brutals but to make them grow food for Zardoz, Zed begins to lose his faith. He stows away, hidden in a load of grain, and enters the Vortex after slaying Arthur Frayn, the controller of Zardoz. Thus Zed destroys his god.

Once in the Vortex, Zed comes to be the catalyst of conflict. This conflict is seen in the antipathy between the two previous lovers, May (Sara Kestelman) and Consuela (Charlotte Rampling). The former wants to study Zed, the latter wants him dead, recognising his disruptive influence. Thus the scientific/rational is opposed by the instinctive/emotional. The conflict continues throughout the film, until Consuela realises that although Zed will ultimately destroy the Vortex, this destruction is desirable. It is to be desired because the promise of immortality has failed man - or man has failed immortality. Although the Eternals have developed mental powers - they can overpower Zed with a glance, telepathically communicate with each other, and no longer need sleep, having united conscious and subconscious minds - their lives are ultimately empty. They have even lost their sexual feelings - a fact dramatised by their asexual costumes. This emptiness is shown through the person of Friend (John Alderton). He desires death - indeed, has committed suicide many times - but cannot die. Each time, he is regrown by the Tabernacle, the super-computer which controls the Vortex, and returned to life. As punishment for anti-social actions, the Eternals are aged, but not allowed to die. Thus the rebels - the

Newsgades - are a group of pathetic and hideously senile old people, living out a miserable existence in the 1920s atmosphere of the "Starlight Hotel". To them Zed is a wonder, the one who can achieve the thing they most desire but cannot do - die. Similarly Zed is a miracle for the other group which has opted out of the Vortex, the Apathetics. Totally without emotions or desires, this group is unable even to move most of the time.

Clearly, the Vortex must be destroyed. Aided by May and her fellow-women, Zed absorbs all the knowledge of the Vortex in a spectacularly photographed scene in which the transfer of knowledge is shown by the projection of words, formulae and pictures onto the face and body of the recipient. He enters the crystal heart of the Tabernacle, and in another spectacular scene shot in a hall of mirrors, destroys the Tabernacle by destroying himself-as-Exterminator - thus liberating himself from his past. The protective screen around the Vortex is destroyed, Zed's accomplices ride in and slaughter the Eternals, who run towards them begging for death, while May and her women ride off in one direction and Zed and Consuela in another, to start a new life. The end of the film shows Zed and Consuela produce a son, grow old and die, leaving behind only the print of Zed's hand beside his gun. Thus is symbolised the impact of Zed on man's history, his hand reaching down through time.

Different ideas about Zed crop up throughout ZARNOX. He is the noble savage, superior to the effete civilised people of the Vortex. He is the specially bred mutant, the new man. At one point he is arrayed as a bride - the Bride of Death. Most important of all, like Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius, he is the messiah of entropy, the bringer of chaos to the order of the Vortex. His name is no chance choice - he is Zed, the end. He ends the corrupt age of the Vortex, and brings in a new order. The ideas about Zed which Boorman presents are for the most part explicit, but other ideas are more enigmatic. For example, what is the purpose of Avalon? She seems to have the role of priestess, calling the Eternals to meditate, and at the end calling them together to die; but also the role of oracle, seeing most clearly the destructive influence of Zed, explaining it in veiled terms. Like 2001, ZARNOX is much less than explicit at times. Boorman leaves his audience to do a lot of work, to interpret his film.

The most striking feature of ZARNOX is the soundtrack. This is a collage of organ, orchestra and beautifully arranged voices. These voices sob out throughout the film, building to almost unbearable crescendos at times of drama. Together with the very theatrical acting of some of the scenes, the soundtrack lends to the film a strong liturgical air, the atmosphere of a religious service. This air is entirely appropriate to the material, which is strongly religious - rebirth, immortality, the nature of god, the coming of the messiah. Some may dislike this style of acting, but I believe they are failing to understand the effect which Boorman is trying to create. He is attempting to give each action significance, in the context of the scene and in the wider context of the destiny of man. At the same time, he wants his audience to think for itself. Thus the performances are carefully controlled, especially that of Sean Connery. His role is central, and he brings to it the right feeling of the man whose knowledge and understanding go far beyond those of the Eternals. Charlotte Rampling projects a nicely-calculated cool sexuality, and Sara Kestelman is suitably intense in her role as scientific inquirer. John Alderton excellently carries

off a difficult role as the bored, death-seeking Friend, especially after his ageing.

ZARNOZ is not an easy film to penetrate, and some may not like its style, but I firmly believe that John Boorman, who wrote, directed and produced, has created a worthy piece of sf cinema.

WESTWORLD directed by Michael Crichton (MGM, 1973; USA; Cert AA; 89 mins)

Reviewed by Christopher Fowler

On one level, Michael Crichton's WESTWORLD is an enjoyable piece of entertainment, developing smoothly from humour to drama; yet on another, it is an exploration of the nature of reality. Not quite up to the level of Philip K. Dick, perhaps, but thoughtful nonetheless.

One of the most disturbing and prominent features of American life, for the British onlooker, is the prevalence of violence. Whether it stems from a relatively recent frontier history, or from the excessive stress on the rights of the individual over those of society is unclear, but whatever the reason, Americans seem to employ violence more often than their European counterparts. Frequently, guns are employed - there are more guns than people in the USA - and the fantasy of the gun is strong in America. The gun is the symbol of power, for the male a symbol of virility: the sexual connotations of the gun, spurring bullets, is too obvious to labour. The fantasy of the gun is most prominent in the cinema, especially in the western film. Through these, the audience can move back to a simpler past, in which a man was a man, and he had a big six-shooter to prove it. And a woman? A woman was just there to satisfy the man's need for food and sex. No surprise then, to find few women who enjoy westerns.

As leisure increases, so holiday resorts become more and more sophisticated in their attempts to meet the needs of their guests. In the near future, the resort of Delos is the ultimate. Here a person may go - if he can afford the \$1000 a day that is - and live out his fantasies in one of three worlds: Westworld, Medieval World, and Roman World. These three owe less to history as it really was than to the romanticised visions of the cinema; the celluloid dream becomes reality. Each world is populated by robots, ready and eager to follow the desires of the guest. Does he require a romantic liaison with a beautiful queen? Then Medieval World will supply it. Does he want to outdraw a gunslinger? Then Westworld has just the robot for the job. The robots are accurate in every detail, except their hands, which have not yet been perfected. When you make love to one, it produces a simulated orgasm at just the right moment; when you shoot one, it dies very convincingly, trailing streamers of blood. The robots are controlled from an underground computer complex, complete with white-coated technicians who collect the "dead" ones every night and repair them. They are programmed never to harm a guest. The film is the story of what happens when the programming goes wrong. As the title implies, it concentrates on Westworld - no surprise, considering the strength of the fantasy of the gun for Americans - and on two guests, John Blane (James Brolin) and Peter Martin (Richard Benjamin). Blane has had previous experience of Westworld, but for Martin this is his first trip. We follow his progress through the world, and watch as he gradually comes to accept what surrounds

him as reality. At first he is dubious and reticent, but after gunning down the black-clad Gunslinger (Yul Brynner), making love to a voluptuous whore, and escaping from jail he can say. "I almost believe this". The point at which he moves from scepticism to belief, however, is also the point at which the fantasy danger which surrounds him begins to come frighteningly true. The tension builds gradually: a snake attacks Blane, in Medieval World the robot Black Knight slays a guest; and finally, in Westworld, the Gunslinger sets out to kill Blane and Martin. With the technicians helpless to stop the robot rampage, the Gunslinger shoots Blane and relentlessly pursues Martin, who has to use every ounce of his human ingenuity to escape.

WESTWORLD is not without its faults. Many of these concern the technical details of the robots. It is said, for example, that the guns in Westworld only fire at a cold object, like a robot. They cannot harm a warm human being. Yet if the robots are cold, then making love to them, indeed, even touching them, would hardly be a pleasant experience. Further, the Gunslinger is plainly shown using one of these guns to shoot at Martin. There are other problems of this type, but perhaps the most serious criticism is of the basic concept of Delos itself. One could see how the desires of one guest could be accommodated, but what happens if those of two or more conflict? For example, if more than one man wants to be sheriff. How would the computer-aided technicians cope with that? These questions are never really answered. Yet, for all these difficulties - and for the most part they are only minor irritations - WESTWORLD is worthy of attention, for it has something to say about the nature of reality. The film convinces us to the extent that it makes Delos seem credible, and possessing internal consistency. This it does well at most times. I felt that the TV commercial at the beginning of the film struck a regrettable false note, and was also a clumsy introductory device. But the position was soon rectified, and a strong air of the future created, by the scenes with the hovercraft, with the computer controls and the reflections in the pilot's mirror sunglasses. From this point the film generally convinces the viewer. WESTWORLD, however, is a fantasy within a fantasy, and what is most interesting is the way Martin accepts the fantasy of Westworld as reality. By the end he is no longer sure what is real and what is not. The final scene brings this home most strongly. Alone among the carnage of Medieval World, Martin encounters a girl chained up and pleading for aid. Thinking that she is a fellow guest, he releases her and offers her water to drink. Against her refusal, he makes her drink. Sparks fly, a short circuit occurs: the girl is no human, but a robot. In the case of the Gunslinger, we are faced with a similar question: what is the nature of humanity? Is the Gunslinger, operating under his own volition in his search for Martin, any less human than his victims? He may be man-made - and even man could not do it alone, but required the help of a computer to design the robot - but he manifests the basic features of a human being: sentience, intelligence, free will. Indeed, in some ways he is superior: his infra-red sight, for example, allows him to track Martin by the residual heat of his foot-prints. One feels, however, that Crichton intends us to answer the question in the negative: the robot is less than human. For in the end, it is the man who triumphs, by using his superior ingenuity.

Michael Crichton is generally well served by his cast. Richard Benjamin conveys well the shyness and reticence of the newcomer to Westworld, especially in the scene with the whore. He also gives us a good picture of a man gradually being taken over by his day-dreams, as they in turn are overtaken by nightmare. James Brolin is competent as the more experienced guest, and is at his best when shot by the Gunslinger, his face showing a fine mixture of disbelief and horror. Yul Brynner, recreating his character from *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*, is suitably menacing and implacable as the Gunslinger. *WESTWORLD* is a very promising directorial debut for Michael Crichton, and I look forward to his next film.

— Christopher Fowler

#### SCIENCE OR FICTION (Conclusion - from p. 25)

on what things might be like spring from an avid interest in what they are like, and they return us to it with renewed wonder at and concern for reality.

--- Tony Sudbery

#### References

1. Brian Aldiss, Introduction to *PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION* (Penguin, 1961) p.9
2. Ibid. p.10
3. Ibid. p.10
4. Mark Adlard, *SPECULATION* 31, p. 38 (1972)
5. Brian Aldiss, op. cit. p. 13
6. James Bligh, *MAINF ISSUES AT HAND* (Advent, Chicago, 1970) pp. 10-12
7. Peter Redgrove, *SF IMPULSE* 12, p. 158 (1967)

#### FURTHER EDITORIAL NOTES

This is absolutely the last bit of typing in the magazine. I hate leaving these nasty gaps, so am yielding to the temptation to go round filling them up.

Some of you may be wondering about that comment in the editorial about my "image" with reference to my approachability. Well, it's just that some people seem to think I'm a bit aloof - though how you can be aloof when you're only five foot four-and-a-half I don't know - or arrogant or something. I'm not...no, really...in fact I'm quite warm and cuddly, and very friendly, and almost as much so as Christine Edwards after eight pears and oranges, oops, sorry Malcolm, forget I said that, readers.

Farewell, farewell, parting is such sweet sorrow...(12.10 am/29/7/75)



# LETTER FROM JOHN CLUTE

Dear Mr. Edwards,

I read with interest your perfectly above-board slamming of the essay on James Blish I contributed to NEW WORLDS 6, and though obviously I'd contest some of your conclusions about the piece and its style, I would certainly not contest the legitimacy of fair comment, like yours, as a mode of critical address.

In other words, after it is published, I don't have any more "right" to evaluate my piece than you do.

However, you did make one speculation that struck me as being less addressed to the essay in question than to its author (me), ad hominem, and therefore legitimately open to some rejoinder.

As it seems to sell out immediately, I don't have a copy of VECTOR 67-68, and as the burden of what you said lay between the lines, in the form of damaging answers to a rhetorical question, I'd like to ask your indulgence for any interpretive elisions...

Here goes: You wondered why I inserted a commendatory reference to E.C. Tubb's Dumarest series into an essay on James Blish. If I were responding to a comment on the essay itself, I'd say that the reference was an aside - a diversion of the sort permissible to reviewers in an ongoing context - triggered by the distinction I'd referred to, between evolutionary and template sequences in science fiction. You could respond in turn that the reference was still irrelevant, and therefore bad writing, and that would be fair comment. In your actual piece, however, you went on to imply, pretty clearly, that I was touting E.C. Tubb to my own advantage, because I was (or had been) a reader for Arrow Books (a division of Hutchinsons), who are publishing the series.

Most readers of your piece would immediately make two assumptions:

- 1) the general assumption that a "publisher's reader" is a kind of recognised position, that the reader is in a definable sense his publisher's representative, with the added implication that he has a special retailer relationship to that publisher; and
- 2) the specific assumption that I personally was either on a retailer for Arrow Books, or had actually read the Dumarest series for Arrow, or both.

The first assumption would, of course, be generally inaccurate. It's certainly true that some publisher's readers - Richard Garnett for Jonathan Cape, or George Meredith for Chapman and Hall - are identified, ethically and financially (through retainer status), with the company they read for. Indeed, Arrow Books has recently acquired Philip Strick in precisely that sense, and it would obviously be ethically inappropriate for him to praise Arrow's (i.e. his) list without making the connection clear.

More frequently, however, as I think you probably know, the relation of the reader to the publisher is very much more casual than the virtually editorial status described above. In common with most readers, I read individual books on request for one or more publishers (Hutchinsons and The Granada Group for me at the moment), and make no commitment whatsoever, implied or explicit, to any sort of advertising capacity, either for the firm or for the book reported on. Reporting on a book to a firm involves an assessment as to marketability, a criterion which has relatively little to do with intrinsic literary merit - beyond the assumption that a book that is too bad or dishonest to be publishable is, obviously enough, not marketable. Reviewing a published book should reverse this evaluative process. A reviewer's assessment of intrinsic literary merit should have relatively little to do with marketability, else he is violating his trust.

Praising a book because I've read it for a publisher, as you've implied I must have, and not because I thought it was a good book, would not only be ethically and intellectually sleazy, but also terribly silly, too - because the imposture would depend on my dual role being kept secret, and the fact that I've read for publishers has of course never been privileged information.

Nor (I should have thought) of much general interest in an atmosphere of even minimal trust . .

In any case, regarding the second assumption, it happens that I did not actually read the Dumarest books for Arrow, nor, (if it need be said) have I ever been on a retainer basis with Arrow, or any other publisher. About four years ago, when Lionel Trippett took over Arrow's science fiction programme, he talked with me, and with several other people he knew, about what kind of books he hoped to publish. I remember speaking with him on the telephone, giving him, for free, two or three lists of 20 or 30 books each - science fiction novels I thought should get an airing in England. When I mentioned Dumarest - in a list including Silverberg, Dick, Blish, Edmondson and a lot of others - he indicated some pleasure, as someone else had apparently already mentioned Tubb to him. And that's that.

There is a sequel to all this. In copy submitted February this year ((1974 - Ed.)) to NEW WORLDS, after I had a chance

to actually see what Arrow had done with Dumarest, I referred - in another aside - to my earlier mention of the series, and criticized Arrow Books for their lousy presentation of the first four volumes. On two counts:

- 1) Arrow failed to use the revised and improved version of THE WINDS OF GATH (Bart-Davis, 1968), reprinting instead the Ace version; and
- 2) they published the first four volumes without indicating they were a linked series, much less including any references as to the order they should be read in.

These comments will appear in NEW WORLDS 7.\*

To be honest, part of the reason for writing you was to ensure your awareness that these comments on Dumarest and Arrow - written long before I saw your review - are in no sense a response to your piece. They should be read solely as distinguishing between the Dumarest books, which I have always admired, and still do; and their paperback publication (by a firm I've read for), which I thought bordered on the incompetent.

Best,  
John Clute

((This letter was sent by John Clute to the then editor of VECTOR, Malcolm Edwards, in response to his comments in no. 67/68 of the magazine. The letter is dated 25th July 1974. The comments Mr. Clute refers to of his appeared, as he said they would, in NEW WORLDS 7 - Ed. Hilary Bailey and Charles Platt; Sphere; 1974. In re-reading Malcolm Edwards' comments in VECTOR 67/68, I cannot escape the feeling that he allowed his usual judgment to err in publishing them. I therefore felt that the least that I could do, as editor of a magazine in which John Clute had had his integrity impugned, was to publish his reply. And there, I hope, the matter rests; except to note that Malcolm Edwards is described in the Season 75 Convention Booklet as "...chief reader for one of Britain's leading sf publishers". - Ed.))

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