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Editor: Christopher Fowler
72 Kentleorib Avenue,
Southcote,
Reading RG3 3DN
United Kingdom
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in)

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the Fantasy Workshop...
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Barbara... Steve&Andrea... Florence, Judy
and Keith... Martin Hatfield and Ian
Thomson...

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Chairman: Lennox Bulmer

Vice-Chairman: Dave Eyle:
Two Rivers, Bann Court, Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 8VU

Administrator: Alan Stewart:
7, Surrey Lane, London SW11 3PA

Treasurer: Keith Freeman:
369 Wykeham Road, Reading Berks

Membership Secretary: Elke Stewart:
7 Surrey Lane, London SW11 3PA

Publication and Distribution Officer:
Christopher Fowler:
(address above)

Council Members: Sam Bulmer, Bob Shaw,
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Back issue availability on page 89

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V76/77 has been produced by Chris
Fowler, who is feeling a Bit Tired,
and an IBM Selectric 82C, which is a
Bit Hot. Time for feeding, IBM.

11.30 am, Thursday August 3th, 1978 - Southcote

Now come of you, upon recovering from the shock of finding that you have received in this mailing, not only a Vector, but also Jason Travers may be wondering whether there are in fact three: why, in short is the 50-page Vector 76/77 a double issue when the 80-page Vector 75 is not? Now, if I were feeling snotty - which I will might do upon being asked silly questions after spending five days typing these issues out - I should say: "Because I'm the editor (and the BSFA Publications and Distribution Officer to boot) and I say so"; but that would be an inadequate response to such a vital question, touching as it does upon the whole future of human, nay galactic, civilisation. The fact is that the standard size of Vector throughout its history has always been 40 pages. Thus any issue of more than that is an "outsized" one. You will see from a cursory examination of the issues produced under my benevolent guidance that they have all been more than 40 pages. This particular package, of 120 pages, constitutes, under the "Vector-standard-40-page" rule, three issues. So one is labelled as a single one as a double. See?

Having disposed of that one, I can make some comments on the contents of this (double-) issue. We have the Robert Silverberg interview, conducted by my good self at the ManCon, the first of three articles by Brian Stableford, illustrated by award-winning artist Paul Dillon; the film review column, The Celluloid Dream, where regular Andrew Tiddmarsh is joined by an honoured visitor, Steve Davey, and a lengthy book review section, where John Clute makes a welcome first appearance as a Vector reviewer, and Brian Stableford also steps in as reviewer.

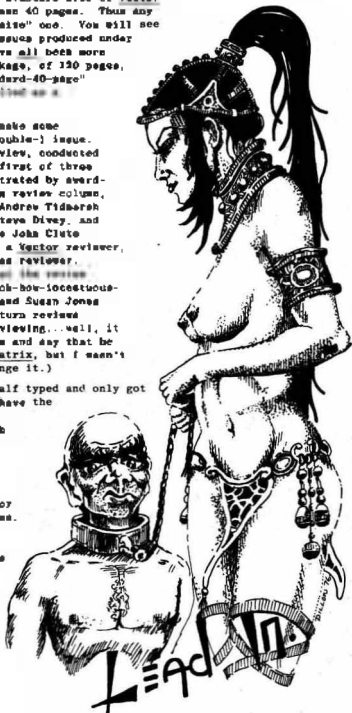
(The manuscript will have noticed that the review section this issue is a special "look-how-locustuous-the-of-field-is" one - as have Tom and Susan Jones reviewing Brian Stableford, who in turn reviews James Corley, who in his turn is reviewing... well, it would be nice to complete the circle and say that he was reviewing the latest issue of Matrix, but I wasn't able to contact him in time to arrange it.)

Next issue will definitely - it's half typed and only got squeezed out by demands of space - have the interview with Roger Elwood; plus an article by Ian Watson and the Bob Shaw talk from the ManCon; and will also have some letters in, space permitting.

A final couple of notes: the Vector editor is supporting Terry Jaevon for TAFF - if anyone deserves it, he does. And Evelyn Harvey informs me that arrangements for her convention bid for 1978 are going well, with hotels booked. More news of this in later issues.

Since I'm getting claustrophobia typing in the gap left by Paul Dillon's artwork, I'll stop, with the hope that you find this issue worthwhile.

--- Christopher Fowler





Robert Silverberg

talks to
Chris Fowler

Firstly, may I welcome you behalf of Vector readers, and of the BSFA, to the Nancam convention. I hope you'll enjoy your stay in England, although it's a very brief one.

A brief one this time, but it's a pleasure to be back here after five years.

Thank you. I'd like to start around about 1968, when, it seems to me - reading your books and looking at the criticism - that there was quite a considerable change in the kind of work you were producing. You'd forsaken the production of a very large output of, shall we say, relatively trivial science fictional material for works of much greater critical stature. I'd like to ask you: how did you manage to achieve this, both in practical terms and artistically - and why did this change come about? What was the motivation; and was it a conscious change?

It was only partly a conscious change. It was partly a fact simply of being older in 1968 (than I was in 1958, that much more experienced a man, that much more capable a writer. Partly a feeling that it was now time for me to reach beyond my grasp, if ever. Partly a matter of going through certain personal changes in 1963 which simply worked for me a transition from adolescence to adulthood, in a way. And, it was simply time for me to write differently, and I felt this. It was not a conscious, calculated decision of: "Oh boy! Now I'm going to write some good stuff!", but that I knew this was the moment when I could not continue doing what I had been doing, therefore I had to do something else.

How was it accomplished practically? I had been away from science fiction for several years, so that when I returned I was virtually a new man. No-one knew what to expect of me. I had been present at conventions, I was visible but not writing. And, several editors were aware that there must be more to me than what I had put on paper, and when I finally came to them and said: "Look! I want to write again. Will you allow me to write as I wish?", they were willing to take the chance. Those editors were Fred Pohl, who bought my short stories of the period, and Betty Ballantine, who signed a contract for Thomas on the basis of my description of the book... nothing but the description of the book, I did not write any sample chapters. And once those books were written, the only practical problem that remained for me was to get people to read them who were aware of my previous output, to overcome the prejudice that had, quite rightly, been built up during the years when I was turning out simply machine-made pot-boilers. That took several years.

I see. And was that metamorphosis, if you like, aided by the fact that you'd diversified your writing out of just science fiction into non-fiction, and got quite a good reputation there for your non-fiction work?

I think so. I think it gave me much more confidence, the fact that I had had a writing career which was not merely a hack writing career, allowed me to return

to science fiction with much more steadfastness of purpose. Also, it gave me an economic base from which to work during the years when science fiction was extremely ill-paying.

It seems that in the works that you've produced since Thoma you've explored a number of major themes, particularly, it seems to me anyway, the theme of alienation. Did you, in any conscious way, set out to explore certain themes and then write books around them, or was it again something that grew out of the state that you were in at that time?

Well, I certainly never set out consciously to explore alienation. I realize now that has been my theme, but that's the theme of any writer who is on this planet attempting to encounter other human beings and relate to them. The only thing I set out consciously to do in the late sixties was to return to the classic themes of science fiction which I felt had largely been mishandled... in execution, not in thought; but in literary execution. And try to set them right, try to do them with a literacy, a grace that nobody seemed interested in doing. And so I worked my way through, time travel and androids and... well, you know what the themes are... and methodically re-examined them, attempted to wring from them the emotional and literary implications that I felt had been neglected. I don't mean any arrogance by this particularly, just that I feel the interests of other writers before me, particularly the generation before me, lay in other places. And, it was now time to re-examine those themes in a new light.

This new light that you speak of: it seems to me - perhaps it is a function of the way in which I, particularly, approach your work - that one of the central concerns of many of your books, particularly a book like Downward to the Earth, is essentially spiritual: concerned with finding the answers to the problems that you're exploring by means of a transcendental transfiguration - a re-birth, if you like. Again, are you conscious of this spiritual or religious dimension? Are you explicitly exploring spiritual or other ideas of your own in your work?

Well, I'm an isolated human being, struggling against the pain of the human condition. To be very preoccupied about it, and searching in my own life for that which provides meaning. I'm not primarily a religious man. Well, I am in a way, but I don't belong to any religion. I have a Jewish ethnic heritage, that's all, but I have never been a practicing Jew. I'm doing my best, getting through. Those are the two phrases that I would attach to myself. And one of the modes of getting through, one of the modes of breaking through to perception of what it's all about, is reflected in books - particularly books like Downward to the Earth, Son of Man - where it becomes more cryptic, perhaps - Time of Changes, where it's extremely explicit. The fault that I would lay at Time of Changes is that it's almost a scream, and that's not good. Moving to California five years ago was, to me, a great spiritual revelation; to get closer to nature in an environment which is relatively unraped. I'm talking about Northern California where I live. I'm 400 miles from Los Angeles..

That's up around San Francisco, is it?

I live near San Francisco, yes. The physical beauty of the place leads very easily to a kind of quasi-mystical experience. These days I've virtually given up writing - in fact I've totally given up writing - simply to be closer to nature. I find it much more rewarding to encounter growing, living things than to wrestle with publishers.

To what extent did this move to California come about as a direct result of the five which you wrote about...?

No, not connected. In fact, the five, if anything, retarded my leaving New York because.. The firm was in 1968, we rebuilt the house completely and it

became an extraordinary house as a result of the rebuilding job. 1971 was when I first began, very suddenly, to feel that it's now time to get out of New York and to go to a cleaner, purer place. And what delayed us was the sentimental bond with that house that we had suffered through the fire of and then rebuilt. Had that house not been there I think we'd have left six or eight months earlier, but we both had to wrestle with the tie to the house. No, what got me out of New York, on the simplest level, was the emigration of all our closest friends, so that we felt marooned in this island of eight million stranger. But also a sense that this is a collapsing civilization, that this is an increasingly ugly place and that life is just not good here any more, and do we not want to be the last ones left in the calamity?

Yes, if I may come back to the fire, because it seems that this...reading what you wrote in Hell's Cartographers, reprinted in Foundation, one particular quote struck me very strongly, when you were talking about your feelings after that fire. You said, if I may quote: "I had felt the hand of some supernatural being pressed against me that night, punishing me for real and imagined sins, levelling me for over-weening pride, as though I had tried to be Agamemnon". It strikes me, in reading that, that you are writing very much from the heart. Do you really feel that that particular incident was - well, not to use a phrase like "divine retribution", but...

Oh, I do. I did quite. It was the only time in my life I've had that feeling. There was a chain of events through 1965, 66 and 67, which I do not propose to talk to anyone about - I hinted at that when you asked me the reason for the change in my writing...

Please excuse me if I'm...

No, no not at all. This is because people will read this and say: "Well, you can tell us". I really don't want to talk about it. But there was a chain of events which, as a writer, I organized into a great tragedy, if you will. It seemed to me a very logical progression, building up to the fire as the appropriate culmination. Now this, I think, is my own sense of fore playing machiaveltic tricks on me. But I did perceive this very clearly in that terrifying morning after the fire that: yes, it all fits together and what better thing could there have been, what worse thing could there have been to do that to give me this fire? I didn't actually feel the sense of a Jehovah sitting up there saying: "Well, it's really time to knock Silverberg down a peg". But what I felt, and I still feel it, is a sense of compensating balances in the universe, which to me is the governing force. And that is some inexplicable way, even down on the molecular level where I live, the forces had balanced. There was the rubble to prove this to me. I don't literally believe that there is that degree of neatness and symmetry in human life. I do believe that things do even out in the universe, and that this is a factor one must treat with great care.

Do you think that after that event and after your feelings about it that there's a slightly darker tone to your work? It seems that there's always been a certain underlying darkness to your works, but that it got stronger, particularly, again, in The World Inside and A Time of Changes, where you're exploring similar kinds of problems - alienation again - and the kind of societies which engender these things: but no actual solution is offered in these works. Unlike Thorns where, for example, the solution of love is offered, although it's a kind of fierce love...

Time of Changes offers a solution of sorts

One felt at the end of that novel, with the man alone there, in that shack with everyone around him coming to...

Ah, but he's still offering a message of hope. He has lost, but...I would think Time of Changes offers neither more nor less of a solution than the other books.

But, no doubt a darker tone came into my work after the fire, although... I should say that I was never particularly a jolly man. My humor takes the form of wit. I'm not boisterous, I'm not Harry Harrison-like in any way. I rarely tell jokes with punchlines or anything like that. There's a certain melancholy about me which dates from well before the fire, in fact to the beginning. And I think that was reflected in any story of mine that I took seriously, straight from "Road to Nightfall" when I was 19, before I was anything really.

Can I ask, then: have you lost faith in traditional solutions, like Love?

Oh God. I never had any faith in traditional solutions!... When I say I'm trying to get through, I think there are enormous obstacles to getting through, that we can be struck down at any moment. And eventually we will be struck down, without question of doubt. And there is no solution to that. There's no solution to the fact that a billion years from now the molecules of our society will be equally distributed through the atmosphere. We accept these things, and we do our best under the sentence that is meted out. But there are no solutions. There are only adjustments.

Does any darker tone in your work parallel your waning ability to write very fast and very easily? You've spoke, again in the Hell's Cartographers article, about how you find it. You say: "I have only rarely felt that dynamic sense of clear vision that enabled me to write in wild, joyous spurts"... that's a slightly abridged version of what you said. Is there any - I'm sure you must have been asked this many times before - auto-biographical element in Dying Inside, the waning of David Selig's psi abilities? Is there any parallel there with your feeling that perhaps it's your ability to write quickly and easily that has slipped away from you?

I don't think so. In the context of my life, particularly in retrospect, it certainly looks that way. What I saw when I conceived Dying Inside was a general metaphor for loss and decay and ageing. However, I conceived Dying Inside in late 1980, I believe, around the time I wrote Son of Man - at any rate, at a time when I was not contending with these problems particularly. So this is a bit of gratuitous, sort of, biography that appears only in retrospect.

I see. The Book of Skulls? I think, was the last of your novels which I read. You've had The Stochastic Man which has just been released in this country since then...

Well, Book of Skulls was actually written before Dying Inside. It's the book just before that.

Perhaps it's merely the order in which I managed to get hold of them... Anyway, I was waiting to come onto The Stochastic Man and Shadrach in the Furnace. Now, these are two books which I haven't read, and I think will be unfamiliar to the readers of Vektor; because I think The Stochastic Man has only fairly recently appeared over here. Could you tell us something about those two books, and is there any development of your ideas through them, or...

It's very hard for me to tell that. You see, I don't see my books as neatly as, say, Brian Stableford in that marvellous essay he has in Science Fiction Monthly. He's outside and he can perceive an unfolding pattern. I'm within and I perceive an organic pattern that's not easily expressed, except by the books themselves. I can't say much about them, except to say that The Stochastic Man does not, to me, fit the curve of my growth. It somehow is a book that was outside it and which I don't fully understand or appreciate, and that Shadrach, which was obviously to me going to be my final book for a long time, is, in a way, a summation in which I say goodbye to many of my technical tricks and many of my themes, and manage to hit such one as I go along. It's a much longer book than any of my other books, and I think a successful one, but I can't analyse it in the way that you're asking me to do.

I'm sorry, that was an unfair question to ask you. What is the publishing position on Shadrach in the Furnace? Is it out in the States yet?

No, it's not out. It will be serialised in Analog in a month or two, that is to say, in the summer of 1978. It'll be published by Robert-Merrill in hardcover in the fall of '78. It'll be published here by Gollancz, I would guess during the winter, and in paperback by Coronet... I think they've already bought the rights, unless it's The Stochastic Man. There have been no many deals lately that I've begun to get confused. But at any rate, the book will be along in the next six months.

And most of your other work, which has been in American paperback or hardback - we're likely to see that over here? I know quite a lot of it has appeared lately...

I think by the end of 1977 you will have the complete Silverberg in print in Great Britain. When I say the complete Silverberg, I mean that the early books that I don't see any virtue in reviving will not be revived, but everything that I want to preserve will have a publisher here. It certainly looks that way. John Rush of Gollancz has been a great pillar of support during the last year or two when I've had no much trouble in the States. I think he's given me a sense of renewed confidence in what I've been doing that has allowed me to be more aggressive in placing these other books. Some of that has flowed back into the States now where my books are returning to print this year very rapidly. I can't say that the complete Silverberg will be back in print in the States, but in Britain it seems assured.

You spoke just there of troubles in the States. Is that trouble with publishers in getting your more recent work published, or just keeping your main corpus of work in print?

Oh, no. A great deal of trouble of both sorts with the paperback, only paperback publishers. I'm not having trouble with my hardcover people. But, without a paperback publisher, I feel quite alienated from the readership. Several of my best short story collections have not been purchased for paperback at all in the States, including Unfamiliar Territory which has been a considerable commercial success in Great Britain, and which was bought for quite a robust sum by Coronet. That contrasts strongly with the fact that, as of now, I haven't been able to find anyone to publish the book in paperback in the States. That's the chief problem. Then, also, because of changes in policy at such houses as Ballantine my older books disappeared from sale, and for about a year I was unable to persuade any of the publishing people to re-issue them. That has begun to change within the last few months. We've had Dying Inside and Nightwingback. A Book of Skulls is now coming back. Downward to the Earth... oh, a whole string of them suddenly. Not I expect 18 months basking on docks before there was much movement. Oh, Son of Man, even, will be re-issued, perhaps my most difficult book. I've finally been allowed to have that back.

That's been issued over here by a publishing house in Wales, hasn't it?

No, they were going to do it. It's a small press. I have never offered it commercially here. I assumed there was not hope for it. A friend of mine, an American who lives here, had agreed to do it, a poet. But his printer refused to set it on the grounds that it was blasphemous, and because he worked so closely with that printer he was stymied by this, and as of now has been unable to find another printer who will give him the quality of work that he demands in this small press operation. So, I say take the book back from him and place it with one of the commercial publishers, which I think would now be feasible.

You've spoken elsewhere - I think in the interview which we had in Vector 72, the postal interview with Malcolm Edwards - about the great frustration that you feel that your older books, which you described as machine-written pot-

boilers, and your more recent works, which are very seriously and carefully written works, seem to sell equally well on the stands. Is this part of the element of frustration which is driving you from writing?

Well, that's part of it, but only a small part. That's an interesting abstract phenomenon. I really don't care which books sell more in any fundamental way, so long as they're all out there, and the right audience for each can find each book. But, what eventually wore me down was the necessity constantly to remind my publishers that I existed, that my books existed and were no longer in print. The difficulty in getting the books published in a way that was not embarrassing to me. As these factors accumulated, and they are the factors that most any writer has to deal with, I just began feeling that I didn't need this any more, that there were other things for me to be doing with my life that were less irritating and more rewarding. And although I must say that many of the factors that so embittered me and exhausted me have dissipated by now, I still feel no impulse to go back to writing, because the ultimate life that I've devised in the last year and half is quite fulfilling. And it's not a life of idleness by any means. It's simply a life without writing in it.

So...there was this dual force in action on you? One, the frustrations of continuing writing against the problems of publishers and the problems of finding the right readership; and at the same time your wanting to get back to a more natural life style, closer to the earth as you said before?

Yes. It was very easy for me to succumb to the temptation to go somewhere else because I had somewhere else to go. And, it was a matter of calculus of pleasure: this thing hurts, this thing fulfills. And now that I'm out of writing I feel amazingly little urge to return, even though I imagine I could return on my own terms. Though I've only been out a year, this way change, and I'm making no contracts with myself about it.

Can I ask you something about the kind of life style that you're leading now, if I'm not again treading on too personal an area?

Aah, aah. What would you like to know?

Well, you say that your present life style is one that's closer to nature and is a fulfilling one. Could you tell me what that means in practical terms? Do you do a lot of reading?

Well, I do some reading. Actually, much less reading than I should. But I spend a great deal of time out on the land, in California, in the deserts, in the mountains, hiking examining. My particular interest is botanical, and I'm getting very close to an understanding, at least of the California landscape. At home, I have an acre of land that I play with, re-landscaping it, transforming it, experimenting with, testing, plants that are, perhaps, not hardy enough for the northern California climate, discovering what can be done. There are interesting rewards to this, both aesthetically, simply in the arrangement of the landscape, and technically, and...a curious event last year. I've planted a cactus garden behind my office, and a friend from San Diego - that's extreme southern California - a psychologist friend was visiting, and he knew nothing about what was going on in my writing, but he went down and looked at the cactus garden for a while, and he came up, frowned strangely, and said: "Are you having trouble with your writing," and I said: "As a matter of fact, I've given it up altogether", and he said: "Yes, I could tell, There's at least two novels worth of work down there".

It's a simple transfer of energy. I'm still serving the shaping spirit, but I'm shaping different things. There was a while when people would not believe that I was simply walking away from writing, they thought it was too bound up with who I was. In a sense, that's true, that my identity has much to do with the fact that I am Robert Silverberg, science fiction writer, author of the following books. But though the identity problem remains, the energy shift has been complete, and it's now convincing people that I'm not idle

I've just moved the energy to another place.

You've become, in a sense, a shaper of landscape rather than a shaper of words...

Yes.

Obviously an equally valid form of human creative effort.

I think I said in that Vecator interview that some of the plants may be thorny, and some may be...

I remember the quote, yes.

It's easier to wrestle with the land than to wrestle with people in New York who don't understand what I'm doing.

You spoke a little earlier about the mystical or semi-mystical nature of the way you're living at the moment, or certain aspects of the way you're living at the moment. Does this involve any particular spiritual or mystic disciplines, or is it just a question of communing with nature in the way you spoke of?

You - I wouldn't want to be too ostentatious about what I'm doing. I'm not a regular meditator, or a member of any Californian cults, though I've touched on these things in my life out there. It's simply a sense of connection which occasionally reveals itself to me in a moment of understanding. These moments are unsolicited and gratuitous, and quite wonderful when they happen. When the next one comes I will be very pleased, but I don't live for them. No, it's a matter of a daily rhythm of life which leads to these feelings of connection. That's the extent of it. It's not structured to produce quasi-mystic or ritual, mystic results.

I see. So it's something that flows naturally from what you're doing rather than being imposed on it by anything that you're doing. You say that you're not doing quite as much reading as you were before. Are you still carrying on reading science fiction, and are you still intending to carry on editing your New Dimensions series?

Oh yes, by no means have I given up editing both New Dimensions and several other reprint books. I enjoy that, and it's a kind of maintaining connection with the science fiction field. I read as much science fiction as I can. I think science fiction is wonderful stuff which has been occasionally badly served by its practitioners. But when I'm outdoors so much, and in California we have 12 months outdoors, it's only on a rainy day that I can really get any sustained reading done, and... well, this winter we've had a drought.

So to a large extent you're maintaining, shall we say, your connections with the science fiction field, and with the writing field in general through your editing activities. How often are you producing the New Dimensions now? Is it yearly, or...?

Annually. I have no intention of bringing it out more often.

It seems to me, and to most of the critics, that it's one of the best of the original anthology series that's appearing at the moment.

I'm very pleased with the writers who have come to me. I think it's a very exciting group. There is now, apparently, a New Dimensions group developing which seems unavoidable in this business. Yes, I'm very happy with New Dimensions. It's taken a while for its presence to establish itself, for people to notice what's going on there, but now we're... well, the sixth one is just out in the States, and so it's a fairly extensive shelf of books by this time.

Are we likely to see any of that series in paperback in this country?

Well, I hope so. I don't know what Gollancz has done yet. I think they're just

out with the first one here, number five. The series begins unavoidably with number five here because John Husb did not want to get too far behind what was being done in the States. I assume that he'll find a paperback house for it in short order. I hope so.

This brings us really to the - I suppose it's the \$4,000 dollar question, and probably the question which you can't answer anyway. You've been out of science fiction writing for about a year, although you're still maintaining your connections. Do you see a possibility of returning to writing at some time in the future? Do you think that your creative energies may be diverted from what you're doing now back into writing, or do you see yourself developing into something else? Do you have any ideas?

Well, I always believe, and this is not the mark of a pessimist, I believe that anything's possible. I might very well return to writing. I would like to write a film script, and in fact have had serious negotiations with several producers in Hollywood, but I would like to write a film script of an intelligent movie, and that is an immediate problem. So I certainly haven't closed writing out, if I've said I'm willing to write a film script. I don't have any immediate plans for writing science fiction again. I doubt that I'll write any in the next two or three years. That's as far as I can see. I might start a novel July first, but I really doubt it. The impulse is not there. I have a feeling that I've done my work. I got a great sense of conclusion when I finished *Shadrach*, and this may seem almost grotesque for a man who's only 41, but we should consider, I think, the quantity of work that was packed into the last 20 years.

So there's an sense of unfinished business between me and science fiction, and until I feel that inner itch that tells me that there's something left undone, I see no reason to return.

Well, no doubt that's something that we'll just have to keep our fingers crossed for, and look forward to - that you may return to writing sometime again.

It's been gratifying to hear things like that. When I said I was quitting a certain number of people said: "Bloody well time!", you know. But there weren't many of those. I think, perhaps, if I had had the stamina to hold out another year or two, and if the whole quality of my life had not changed in a way that took me away from really being interested in writing, I think the whole pattern might have looked quite different. Perhaps what I was doing in 1959 and 70, and the years since, simply was not ready to be noticed before 1977 and 78, and my patience ran out too soon.

But the irritations, the frustrations, are really incidental, I think. They were pretexts. The main fact is that my life has just turned away from being a writer into being something else.

So in the same way that around 65, 66, you matured, shall we say, in a certain way which brought you to writing a more serious kind of book, now you've matured in another way, and you're...

I can't call this maturing, except in the sense that change is maturing. I think it's merely a change of aim, of centre. My centre is in a different place. Writing, literally, seems irrelevant to me. I can't imagine now sitting down and bothering to write a whole novel, and when a writer says: "I can't bother to write a novel", you know something fundamental has happened to him.

Yes, precisely. Well, as I say, I'm sure it would be a tremendous experience for an enormous number of people who love your work, all around the world, if you were to return to writing. But equally, I am sure that all of those of us who love your work accept the fact that you've changed in this way, that your creative fulfillment is in other areas now.

I appreciate that understanding; that finally people are comprehending what has happened to me, and are no longer saying: "Well, it's your obligation to write for us", which is hard for to handle, because it's a terribly moving thing to hear, but it's also a terribly irritating thing to hear.

I personally would have felt that your obligation is obviously to yourself, and to fulfill your creative energies in a way which is most fulfilling to you.

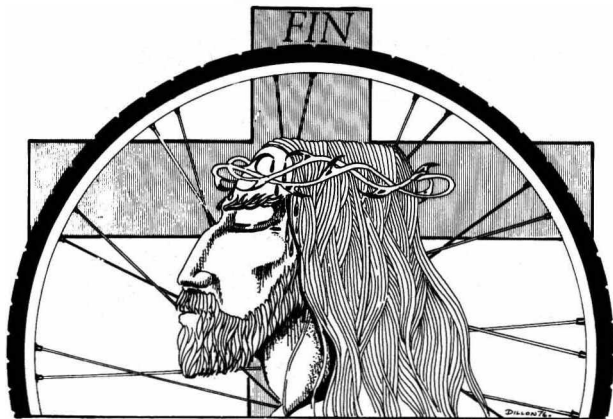
also, there are a lot of books there. There are fifteen or sixteen novels within the really fertile period. I think Asimov only wrote eleven novels. So they can go back and read those fifteen. I'm sure hardly anyone, except Brian Stableford, has read the whole business...

I think I've managed all apart from the last two or three...

I'm sure you'll catch up with them.

Yes, right. Robert Silverberg, thank you very much for your time - thank you very much for giving us so much information.

Thank you, Chris, for asking.



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DILLON 76.

by Brian M. Stableford

The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast two different approaches to the art of science fiction (and by "the art of science fiction" I mean not simply the art of science fiction writing, but the whole art of science fiction thinking, which is the prerogative of readers as well as writers). The best way to compare these approaches, I think, is to look at the methods and the work of two men who used and developed them in the same historical period: H.G. Wells and Alfred Jerry.

Wells was born in 1866, Jerry in 1873, the former in England and the latter in France. Their early writings appeared in the mid-1890s. There is a certain similarity in their educational and vocational background: each hesitated at one time between a career in science and a career in literature, and each opted for the latter. Their work converged at one point, when Jerry was inspired by Wells' novel *The Time Machine* to write a speculative article on "How to Construct a Time Machine", presenting a different concept of the nature of time.

Wells studied under Thomas Henry Huxley, the English evolutionist who was the most prominent champion of Darwinism. Jerry studied under the French evolutionist, Bergson, who became one of the principal opponents of Huxley's interpretation of Darwin's theory. In this curious biographical parallel we may find the source of the intellectual diversion which resulted in the works of Wells and Jerry (though both wrote what might loosely be termed "science fiction") being poles apart.

Huxley was a "hard" Darwinist, determined that the harshness and cruelty of "the struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest" must be accepted as the rule of life, from which men could not be immune. He believed these principles to have been blessed by scientific proof, and thus constituted as scientific truth. Bergson, on the other hand, was more concerned with fitting the ideas of Darwinism into a natural philosophy much more general in kind - he saw Darwinism as no more than a model, truthful only insofar as it was useful which, to his mind was not very.

Wells, pupil of Huxley, became a proponent of what is now termed "hard" science fiction. His works were scientific not only in their content but in the method of their composition. He adopted simple hypotheses and attempted to trace by rigorous logic their implications for man, society, and the world. Usually, he permitted no more than one such hypothesis per story, and he did his best to make it seem reasonable, fitting it into the scheme of the story as plausibly as possible.

In the introduction to the definitive collection of his longer scientific romances (assembled by Gollancz in 1933) he wrote that "the writer of fantastic stories... must help (the reader) in every possible way to domesticate the impossible hypothesis. He must trick his into an unwary concession to some plausible assumption and get on with his story while the illusion holds". This is the method behind *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Invisible Man*, and it is very successful - these works are quasi-realistic, and the reader will accept their initial premises easily. In later works, like *The First Men in the Moon*, more ambitious hypotheses prove a little harder to swallow, but the method remains the same, and the attempt is there.

Wells thus held the highest priorities in his speculative work to be the rational development of hypotheses and their plausible presentation to the reader. He took his inspiration from the idea of the scientist as a steadfast seeker of truth, dedicated to the classical scientific method of hypothesis and experiment, and the rigorous testing of notions.

Jerry, however, drew his inspiration from a different kind of scientist - from men who produced new ideas in quantity: expurators of ideinagination. Bergson was one such, and so was Clerk Maxwell, who revolutionized physics with

his synthesis of electrodynamics and a new theory of light. Maxwell was not so much an experimenter in the laboratory or in the field as an experimenter in the mind. In order to make his kinetic theory of gases comprehensible he imagined a "demon" which, by selecting appropriate molecules, could engineer the transfer of energy from a cool gas to a hot one. No such demon could exist, and perhaps it was irreverent to imagine him, but the idea helped the mind to grasp the logic of Maxwell's theory.

There were nineteenth century scientists who were both adventurers in the imagination and rigorous experimenters (Poincaré, Lord Kelvin, and even Edison) but for the most part the dichotomy reflected by Wells and Jarry was a real one. Maxwell predicted the existence of electromagnetic waves in the ether, but could not demonstrate it. Hertz, after years in the laboratory, found the waves, but lacked the imagination to see their potential in wireless telegraphy (radio).

Jarry wrote two "pseudo-scientific novels", which bear very little resemblance indeed - on a superficial level - to Wells' scientific romances. In *The Supramale*, investigating the possibilities of man becoming more than man, Jarry featured a race between a five-man bicycle team led on "Superfood" and an express train, while another character gives evidence of the benefits to be gained by an ascetic training in performing erotic feats of an amazing nature. The second novel, *The Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll, Pataphysician*, is completely disordered - a chaotic mass of ideative inspirations drawn from scientific texts and symbolist poetry, a surreal celebration of bizarre philosophical concepts. Wells' hypotheses are there in profusion - dramatized (often melodramatized) but never organized or rationally developed. The very last thing Jarry would have considered doing to a new idea was "domesticating" it.

Jarry is remembered today not for his avant-la-lettre science fiction but for a short story called "The Crucifixion of Christ Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race" (whose title is, amazingly enough, self-explanatory) and for his dramatic work. He was the pioneer of the "theatre of the absurd", which he developed through his character Papa Ubu. Ubu appeared for the first time on the Paris stage in *Ubu Roi*, which begins with his shouting obscenities at the audience. Jarry's explanation of the philosophy of his compositions was that if theatre audiences were to be presented with the spectacle of characters like themselves acting out absurd and eminently sensible scripts then all the commonplace illusions to which they were already committed would be made even firmer. He wanted to make people open their minds, to shock them out of their mental straight-jackets and offer them new opportunities to think. He wrote of allowing audiences the "relief" of ending on the stage that which they did not understand, and the "active pleasure" of participating in the ideative explorations of the playwright. His science fiction, too, is intended to jolt dull minds into new paths of thought.

In the service of these ideals, Jarry invented a whole new science: pataphysics, the "science of imaginary solutions". "Pataphysics," he wrote, "will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be - and perhaps should be - envisaged in the place of the traditional universe, since the laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe are also correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones." (here again, incidentally, we can draw a parallel between Jarry and Wells for Wells' first important piece of scientific journalism, "The Radiocopy of the Intique", pointed out that technology made available the means of measuring minute differences among apparently similar phenomena, thus affirming the uniqueness of all entities and events.)

One foundation stone of Jarry's philosophy of science was the notion of "cylindres" - a concept initially used by Lucretius, one of the Greek exponent

of the atomic theory of matter. Clineham is supposedly a tiny weevil in the motion of an atom, entirely at the discretion of chance, which is the hypothetical "ultimate cause" of all events and phenomena. Kelvin had resurrected the idea of clineham for his own theory of matter, and it has since been accepted into modern scientific doctrine in the guise of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. This chance "weevil" - the irrational origin of all orderly behaviour of matter - is reflected in Jerry's work by the absence overruling of the mind from idea to idea, making imaginative leaps and settling nowhere.

Jerry died in 1907, aged 34. Wells lived to be eighty. Such fame as Jerry achieved was local and short-lived (although he has recently been "rediscovered") whereas Wells became universally respected in his own lifetime as a philosopher and writer.

Modern science fiction, through its critics and its writers, still pays homage to Wells. Few of them have even heard of Jerry. And yet even the most cursory glance at contemporary science fiction reveals that Jerry's methods survive, alongside that of Wells.

The modern writers of "hard" science fiction - almost all graduates of the Campbell school - take their brief from Wells. Writers like Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Poul Anderson and Hal Clement pose their hypotheses, and pursue the implications thereof with ruthless discipline. Those who have written critical manifestos championing this kind of science fiction (Heinlein, Blum and others) stress the realistic qualities of it, its determination to stay within the bounds of scientific possibility. All imaginative exercises which fall this rigorous standard are relegated to the status of "fantasies".

There are, however, writers like N.A. Lafferty, Harlan Ellison, A.E. van Vogt, Philip Dick and Michael Moorcock, who still consider that what they are involved with is science fiction, and yet make nonsense of the Wellsian standard. The discipline of the classical scientific method is in no way represented in their work. They are adventurers among ideas, and - whether they are aware of it or not - they are the intellectual descendants of Alfred Jerry. Clineham plays an important role in their thinking and their art, and their effect on the reader is to jolt his mind into new and unforeseen paths. These writers, too, have their champions among critics who have written manifestos for science fiction (Alexander Panahin belongs to this group, as did the prophets of the so-called "new wave"), declaring that science fiction is a form of fantasy whose business is to disturb settled routines of thought, and whose claim to scientific fidelity is both spurious and unnecessary.

In a sense, it is a pity that this polarity should still exist today. Many science fiction writers - particularly those of real ability - can work in the one mode as well as the other (and this includes some of the writers whose work I instance as exemplary of the one mode or the other).

The polarity between Wells and Jerry was an opposition within a basic similarity. Wells and Jerry were both involved in the business of opening minds, and were opposites only in that they had very different ideas as to how minds might best be opened.

Wells' idea was that minds should be opened by the merest crack, so that a new idea might be slipped in without the mind fully realising that its boundaries had been breached. Once inside, the idea might then interact with the contents of the mind to expand its imaginative horizons. Wells, and Wellsian science fiction, attempts to invade the mind a little at a time, introducing new ideas one by one and in such a way that they may not seem too alien. It is a cunning method (but by no means dishonest).

Jerry scorned such cunning and he had no patience with careful procedures. His intention was to dynamite the boundaries of the mind, sweeping them away with a great flood of ideas. His policy was one of confrontation and challenge - overt

and dramatic (and in no way dishonest)

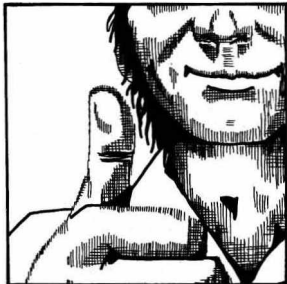
There can be no doubt that Wells' methods worked better at the turn of the century, and probably works better today. The cunning, diplomatic way, is more successful - minds often react to the Jarryanque confrontation by closing up completely. The fact that one method is relatively more successful does not, however, mean that Wells was "right" and Jarry "wrong". It should be noted that in twentieth century science it is the experimenters in thought (Maxwell, Einstein, Dirac) who are remembered as men of genius - for they it was who assaulted old dogmas with daring new concepts. These are the scientists Jarry would have admired. It should also be noted that the reason that these men can be hailed as geniuses is that other men (Barkin, Raddington and Carl Anderson) did the experimental work which proved them right. These are the scientists Wells admired. There is no progress without thinkers of both kinds. Someone has to create new ideas, and someone has to test them - and it is a simple fact that only a very few men have the temperament to do both. One might suggest that science fiction writers are especially favoured, in that there seems to be a considerable number of them who are capable of bleeding Wellsian methods and Jarryanque.

It is, I think, inevitable that science fiction writers should have discovered and used Jarryanque methods, without even knowing of his example, for it is through the methods of Jarry that the Wellsian imagination is provided with fuel. It is perhaps also inevitable that it should be the Wellsian methods which are the most revered within the field, while the Jarryanque are less respectable. Wellsian philosophy is, after all, tried and tested, guaranteed by classical scientific methodology, while Jarryanque exploration is irrational, irreverent and mercurial.

When the critics of science fiction go in search of works outside the label which might be co-opted into the establishment, it is the Wellsian works which they embrace: *Drava New World*, *1984*, *We*, and - of course - the works of Wells himself. They have not been so ready to acknowledge *The Circus of Dr Lao*, *A Voyage of Amelius*, *The Phantom Tollbooth* and are generally unaware of Jarry's own work and novels like *The Emperor of If* (by Guy Dent) and *Murphy* (by Eric Thacker and Anthony Herndon) in any case, they would probably exclude these works as "pure fantasy". But fantasy has always lived alongside science fiction - and publishers have recognised this despite the reluctance of critics. All of the major science fiction magazines (*Amazing*, *Antarcting* and *Galaxy*) have had fantasy companions (*Fantastic*, *Unknown* and *Beyond*) for a part of their lives, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* openly proclaims the alliance. The fantasy thus associated with science fiction (and written for the most part by the same authors) has generally been fantasy using ideas which come from the same intellectual springboard as were conventional science fiction, even though its vocabulary of symbols has been traditional and mythological.

We should, I think, be prepared to recognise the kinship between Wells and Jarry, and we should not be so determined to define boundaries between their methods. Though poles apart in their procedure, their aim was the same: to open minds. The Wellsian methods may work better, but someone has to evolve the ideas that are elipped through the crack in the imaginative boundaries, and these are more likely to spring from clinicians than from the dogged pursuit of the mislaine of truth. It is often painful for minds to be biased open, but - as gold-miners always used to find - it is often the only way to get at the treasure.

Note: Jarry's work is available in English in two books published by Jonathan Cape: *Selected Works* edited by Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor (which includes *Faustreid*), and *The Supernatural*. Both are in paperback.



The Infinity Box

A STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME by H.G. Wells
(Corgi; Landon; 1978; 112 pp; 45p)

Reviewed by Brian Stablesford

"A Story of the Days to Come" first appeared in *Pall Mall*, in 1897, in the same year that *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man* made their appearances as magazine serials. It was subsequently included in *Tales of Space and Time*, and has been in print for the last forty years or so in *The Collected Short Stories*. I don't know what the current price of the *Short Stories* is, but such omnibus purchases are usually cheap by hardback standards, and it is probably better value than a 50p paperback which

separates out one of its longest but by no means most impressive offerings.

Wells was stimulated to write his imaginative fiction by two main interests - his dogmatic belief in Thomas Henry Huxley's interpretation of Darwinian theory and his passionate commitment to Fabian socialism. The best of his work is the product of the conflict awakened in his imagination by the struggle to reconcile these doctrines and harmonise their precepts. Most of the early (pre-1901) scientific romances are, however, built primarily upon the flood of ideas which swarmed from his exercises in popular scientific journalism and in them his sociopolitical ideas are really only embryonic. "A Story of the Stone Age" is the only one which is supported by sociological thinking alone, and in 1897 he was just not ready for it.

The story is set in a future of extreme urbanisation and class division, but as a vision it remains flaccid, and unfuelled by any real imaginative insight. Its plot is lifted from common Victorian melodrama without modification, even to the extent of resolution by fortunate "coming into a legacy". It may be remembered that this antedates *Anticipations* - Wells' first significant collection of essays - by four years. It is the reflection of an immature social and political consciousness, and does not compare with the biological fantasies, based on no area of imaginative extrapolation where he was at that time far more competent.

If Corgi really want to present this as part of an "SF Collector's Library" they owe it to the reader to provide an introduction which will set the work in context. Unless the reader understands something of the background of the place - when it was written, why it was written, what is in it that is interesting and for what historical reasons - he is likely to be very disappointed by what he finds here, unable to put it into perspective. Even the copyright notice, referring to an edition of 1927, is misleading. As it stands, this looks like an off-hand attempt to cobble some easy money out of unwary readers.



EDGE OF INFAMY by Lester del Rey (Dennis Dobson; London; 1976; £2.75)

Reviewed by John Clute

As provenance-testing counts with crud too, it's relevant to note that it was as long ago as 1967 that Lester del Rey first published a version of *Edge of Infamy* (a lousy little book) in an American sf magazine, which expired thereafter, and that it was 1983 that he expanded it into the otiose novella Dennis Dobson have had the effrontery to photograph and release - like a final straw - into the English hardcover market of markville. In 1967 there may have been some commercial excuse for Lester del Rey's publishing the thing, because he had to eat, and who was Lester del Rey in 1967 to polish crap; even in 1983 the timestacing of old crud into the shape of a (mighty short) book might have passed muster as the sort of activity you had to expect out of an old back and its droppings, on the (mighty safe) assumption that professional hackery and toilet-training were mutually incompatible: but in 1976, on the last legs of the sinking ship, it does seem a piece of impertinence to be dealt this sort of stuff by Dennis Dobson, who have become the kind of publisher whose editorial activities and mispings seem to consist of the copying out of old blurb material from American editions of the titles they photograph for us suckers, and mis-spelling what they copy, too, incredibly enough (viz. "imposter" in the back-flap blurb for Silverberg's egregious *The Silent Invaders*; in 1983, when they published it, Ace - even Ace - managed to spell it right).

Like most timepieces of thin pulp, *Edge of Infamy* runs very fast to stand still, just the way Chinese food is supposed to, so that all the extraneous foings and froings and Potarian philosophising about the iniquities of universal suffrage drift through the mind like white noise, though something of a synopsis does survive, barely. Universal suffrage having been granted all the ne'er-do-wells, great lobbies have sprung up to cater to the, and to control them. The Medical Lobby is one, and retains its power (now get this for an example of a sharp tongue and mind at work, Lester's) by refusing to allow doctors to respond to field emergencies, which is pretty dystopic you can betcha, with the result that any doctor who does give first aid immediately suffers debagging, unfrocking, ostracism, and poverty. Our hero, Dr Dan Feldman, is out in the country with his fiancée and finds himself forced into giving first aid to save a life; both the patient and his ambitious aggressive girl afterwards denounce poor Dan, who sinks immediately into the gutter, and only begins to reconstruct his shattered life after finding himself able to sneak aboard a Mars-bound freighter; on Mars maybe a man can do what a man gotta do, without ambitious females betraying him to the authorities and trying to gain agnethood for themselves, like his ex-fiancée for instance, who aspires to succeed her father as chairman of the Medical Lobby, now can ya beat that for unwomanly behaviour? Not only that, she's on board the freighter, and starts hounding poor Dan all over again, smothering and denouncing and debagging him all over again, until the message must have been transparently clear to the doffiest dimplest teenager in 1987: Girls are vicious and untrustworthy and no wonder they won't give you a date because they know you're else to them from reading sf, and who needs girls anyway!

Dan doesn't. He escapes to the backwoods of Mars with some men pals, where he saves lives in the field, makes devoted friends, acts real nice, researches illegally into the deadly plague putting the solar system at risk, finds a cure when the entire Medical Lobby (including the female) conspire, and helps all his new pals on Mars rebel against the illegitimate authority of the lobbies (and the female). Not even when his fiancée finally surrenders to him does Dan hallelude into the nambypamby creature he was before finding out what women are really like: With an expression of well-earned distaste on his male face, he turns his back on the denuded,

trencherous female to face the Martian future together with the guys.

What is peculiarly unpleasant about this creepy little story - perhaps it is something peculiarly unpleasant about genre pulp as a form, though analysis is beyond our scope here - is the fact that the actual story says nothing out loud at all about women or their role: the animus is covert, coded, dingy. Its decipherment is sadly elementary, however. Not only does the female sin irremediably simply through taking it upon herself to act, though nothing of this is actually stated; ultimately there is no way to interpret any of her plot activities - whose lunacy and viciousness are otherwise inexplicable - without reference to an underlying hubris on her part. That ongoing act of reference - the reader is forced to make, if he wishes to understand Mr del Rey's story at any level whatsoever. The reader is forced (by Mr del Rey) to incriminate himself - through these enforced decoding of the text - in gestures of misogyny the author (Mr del Rey) escapes, for all I know in dumb good faith, having to pay for.

Which was typical enough of sf in 1957, and maybe even in 1983, when boys were boys. What seems pretty clear, however, is that what might have gone down in 1957 as fun misogyny does not wash as fun misogyny any longer, Dennis Ogbson, Lester, so that one can only wish a sales-wise anathema upon this drab, costly, below-the-belt reminder of the fantasies we've put behind us and of the dreck they used to munch, alone each Friday evening with Jack Paar.

NO DIRECTION HOME by Norman Spinrad (Hillington; 1976; £3.50)

Reviewed by John Clute

It's rather a shame to live Norman Spinrad's recent collection of short stories, *No Direction Home*, in a paragraph, but there's a kind of disjointedness to the compilation that flummoxes any attempt to respond to the book itself, rather than to the various aspects of Spinrad's career the individual stories represent, and who has time for that, who has space. Some of the stories are in his least engaging *New Worlds* vein, their doctored "pulp enthusiasm" (Algis Budrys) biding under a sub-Hallardian carapace, uneasy, poverty-stricken, punchdrunk. Others more attractively lay down apocalyptic responses to the loss of the dream of America in the late sixties - though by now we're beginning to get nostalgic about the loss itself... "All the Sounds of the Rainbow" is too long but nicely renders a post-historical Los Angeles and could serve as a preliminary sketch for Edward Bryant's *Cinestar*. The brilliant "A Thing of Beauty" has appeared elsewhere more than once, but improves on rereading; a wealthy Japanese comes to a decayed tourist-ridden America and buys the Brooklyn Bridge for aesthetic reasons - reasons the vendors can no longer properly comprehend. "The Last Continent", very long, an earlier story, presents much the same deep structure of message, but not a line is blotted. Most of the tales, in fact, are too long, jaw at the reader just that fraction beyond the demands of shape, so that you find yourself fighting the book, fighting Mr Spinrad despite your fundamental agreement with his opinions, the (failed) claims of his aesthetics, your sympathy with his sense of role. Add to these frustrations the fact that these stories are deeply implicated in a previous era of the American rhetoric of self-discovery in the cold polluted world, and you have a collection whose raison d'être is somehow - damagingly - documentary.

STEPPE by Piers Anthony (Millington; London; 1978; £3.00)

Reviewed by John Clute

Steppe is a week to chuckle, and probably took about as much time to write. Piers Anthony's new novel is very speedy indeed, and a pleasure to ride.

Alp, an Uigur of the western steppes of Asia, several centuries after the birth of Christ, is a clever quasi-literate semi-nomad, fast-thinking, innovative, tough as nails, lynx-eyed, ruthless, and he whitts in little holes for local colour. As it's the only local colour we're going to get, revel in it. Mr Anthony is not about to sit still. The book opens in medias res with Alp's traditional enemies the Kirghis chasing him across the steppes after raiding his home. On his great bove Surfoot, Alp attempts to leap a chasm, but the noble-hearted beast is too winded to make the jump, and Alp falls hundreds of feet to what seems certain death.

And shakes some horse on an operating table way into the future, in a world he has no way of understanding except through the assumption that he has died and gone to Hell. He figures he might as well adapt. Hell seems to be dominated by the Game, a complex simulation of various epochs from Earth history in which, mediated by a giant identikit computer, eager citizens - like those who have whisked Alp futurwards to interrogate him about cheating in little holes and other tips about survival in the game of Steppe - participate in the recreated historical epochs as figures of note and compete for points, points being won mainly through the committing of mayhem in accordance with tradition. Quick-witted traditional Alp soon works it out that his best chance for survival in Hell is to enter the game of Steppe so, wrapping his would-be interrogators, he makes his way to the great computer and applies successfully for entry into the Game.

At which point Mr Anthony begins to camp, but jauntily, the eyes blue. It turns out that the Game is actually interstellar in scope - despite its semantic restriction to Earth history - and consequently the analogues it offers to life on the great steppes are a tough fren. In the game encampments are planets, horses, spaceships, and so forth, and with events conducted on a time-scale that compresses Earth history by a factor of ten. Alp soon zips past his own era, dies and is reborn a few times, according to the rules, all the while amassing Game-points as he glenat-bops in his spaceship committing mayhem and cheating where he can, though sometimes it's a little hard, finding a hole. Finally he's hornswoggled by the computer - which had been planning this difficult role for him all the while - into taking on the part of an obscure teenager named Temujin who soon grows up to be Jeongble Qan.

As Jeongble, Alp is able to amass an enormous number of points, become all-time winner of Steppe, and exit from the Game. Back in Hell, he's able to retire on his proceeds, and lives happily ever after. What he thinks of all this we never find out, Mr Anthony being no subjectivist reader, not having the time, the novel ends, a stiffly unemotional rollercoaster of a read. If you ask for more you are asking the wrong bank. Apart from some pleasant voyeurism about sex, and some hilarious dramatizations of history, there simply isn't any more.

Not a thing

A MULTITUDE OF VISIONS edited by Cy Chauvin (T-E Graphics; 1975; 67 pp)

Reviewed by Brian Dickelford

This is an anthology of critical essays rescued from various fannishes in order to give them the opportunity of wider circulation. Such projects are to be applauded, and although I have one or two reservations about the contents of this particular anthology I think that Cy Chauvin and TE Graphics deserve every encouragement.

Chauvin's editorial policy is claimed to be to present "as many different and conflicting (yet always stimulating) views on science fiction as possible". It isn't possible - not in 67 pages - and one can detect certain other factors at work in the thinking that lies behind the selection process here. For one thing, there is the need to co-opt big names, and so we have transcripts of talks given by Ursula Le Guin and James Blish, plus a postscript lifted from an article by Stanislaw Lem and stranded alone. Though Ursula Le Guin and James Blish had interesting things to say in their talks, talks are not critical essays and do not claim to be, and it is unfair to represent them as such. Similarly, an isolated postscript is bound to feel uncomfortable if asked to masquerade as an item in its own right.

Of the other five pieces, two are generalised broadsides aimed at the supposed shortcomings of contemporary SF, two are rhapsodies on individual works, and one - the best by far - is a comment on a body of work.

The two broadsides, by Tom Blach and Bruce Gillespie, both suffer from the standard perils of swashbuckling pliancy aiming to show that everything stupid of readers love and admire is really poverty-stricken rubbish. They play with loaded dice, castigating contemporary SF for what it is not, dismissing as irrelevant any attempt to decide just what it is, or why it is not what they reckon it ought to be. These articles are provocative, but are exercises in showing-off rather than constructive criticism.

Also guilty of blatant showing off is Sharyl Smith, whose self-congratulatory piece dealing with (obliquely) R.A. Lafferty's *Arrive at Easterwine* is excruciating in its ineptitude. Self-indulgent fan writers often feed gluttonously on self-indulgent novels, but it can be done with style and competence, as evidenced by the other extended book review - Jeff Clark's essay on Aldous's *Frankenstein Unbound*. Although limited, this is a good piece of work and worthy of inclusion.

The one remaining piece, which really serves to reveal the merit of the idea behind the anthology, is Bob Rickard's essay on James Blish's *After Such Knowledge* novels. Here is the genuine value of criticism, providing not simply a commentary upon, but also a context for, an important group of books. Without agreeing with what Rickard has to say I can appreciate what he is doing here. He is making a real contribution to the understanding of these works, drawing a pattern of relationships between them and making an attempt to explain the pattern in terms of Blish's ambitions and limitations.

I have no idea how many other essays of the quality of Bob Rickard's there are lying about in the vast assembly of published fanzines. There are some, at least. There are, also, a multitude of items like Sharyl Smith's and a great many transcribed talks by famous names which belong where they are unless or until their authors actually make articles out of them.

Let us see more collections like this, but let us see a little more editorial discretion in their compilation.

ANDROMEDA GUN by John Boyd (Barkley; New York; 1975; 172 pp; 95c)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

The introduction of an alien innocent into an ordinary human situation is just about as classic a strategy as of possession. It served H.G. Wells, Eden Phillpotts, Olaf Stapledon and others as a useful tool in social criticism, and furnished many modern writers with a satirical instrument. What we have in *Andromeda Gun* is not, however, straightforward satire, but something one step removed from that. The alien here finds not a human situation but a literary cliché - the landscape and the mythology of the western. The result is a curious but fascinating literary joke.

Due aspects of westerns to be disastrous (as they have been in the past, when attempted by John Lister or W. Saus Piper and John J. McGuire). But John Boyd is extremely adept at deadpan humour and he brings this off as perhaps few others could, with a keen eye for sheer stupidity.

As a writer Boyd seems very limited in his use of tools. A coy prurience haunts all his works, at times irritating and often bewildering in the manner of its intrusion. His plotting shows great intricacy in some respects and wholesale sloppiness in others, suggesting strongly that he is a make-it-up-as-you-go writer. Nevertheless, he is always readable.

The hero of *Andromeda Gun* is a gunslinger infested by an angelic alien whose mission is to bring Earth into Galactic Brotherhood. His character is ill-formed and unstable - he can't add 3 and 4 but cleans up the town with considerable ingenuity. He doesn't understand women but has a mastery of my tomundo. The alien, too, is a pretty weird angel. And yet it moves...

There are three kinds of lie - lies intended to deceive, lies intended to confirm beliefs already held, and lies intended for sheer amusement which work through their idiosyncrasy. *Andromeda Gun* is a thoroughly silly book, but it is silly with some style, and style can make a tall story stand up. Definitely a book for those with an eccentric sense of humour.

ONE-EYE by Stuart Gordon (Panther, 1976; St Albans; 288 pp; 75p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Here be dragons - not to mention wizards, demons, armies of women, a totalitarian state, a magic-infested tower, assorted monsters and a plot that never knows where it's headed from one chapter to the next. Though it is jargonised into the mythology of sf as a post-holocaust world in which most men are mutants and the powers of the mind run wild amid the relics of an ancient supercivilisation, *One Eye* is a fantasy, pure but not quite simple. The occult and the supervillainistic lie side by side here, and mingle.

The renaissance which this variety of fantasy is enjoying is an interesting phenomenon, particularly in that the demand for "scientificfictionalisation" seems strong. It seems that we can no longer take the supernatural imagination straight, but must spice it with ritual phrases which shift the symbols into the borderlands of the supposedly scientific imagination. Why this strange compulsion?

Such works as this one do not set their own literary standards. They do not (and perhaps cannot) contain anything special or unique. They are unstructured, without plot simply because anything can happen at any time - there are no problems or solutions but simply a constant flow of dangers to be exercised in formulaistic fashion. The standards to which the work must be compared are those of the fare, of the product - the bizarreness of the monsters.

the dexterity of the author in concealing the facility with which the hero (and assorted extras) are wheeled through their sequences of encounters. By those standards, this is a fair to middling piece of work. Its author is a man of not inconsiderable ability, and one can only hope that his inventiveness is up to the grueling course of promised sequels.

This is perhaps the most stereotyped mode of contemporary fantasy, and for that reason it is the most difficult to write with sincerity. Writers who use it almost invariably make their impact - if they make any impact at all - with their earlier work. Familiarity makes them stale, if not contemptuous. *One-Eye* has verve and vigour. Its monsters are on puppet strings by the strings don't show. Its magic works in such mysterious ways that the author has to droop its logic in torrents of verbal embroidery, but the embroidery is not without artistry. In three books time, or four, it will all become mechanical, dried-up, and lacy. Stuart Gordon won't be writing 200 pages a book then. But by then he will probably be moving on to other pastures, which give him more opportunities in virtuosic performance. In the meantime, *One-Eye* will please its audience.

THE SPACEJACKS by Robert Wells (Dorkley; New York; 1975; 140 pp; 95c)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

"Ryder's Recovery Systems United was just trying to stay in business, getting to space wreckage faster than the competition. When a mammoth, mysterious star-craft began showing up near Earth giving evidence of possessing that impossibility, faster-than-light speed, Trix Ryder thought that her father's business was in deep trouble..."

It was, too. It found itself in the embarrassing situation of being beleaguered of a *Planet Stories* novelette which had somehow suffered the indignity of being passed to four times its natural length.

Planet Stories was never the kingpin of the of pulp magazine field (and what's more, it was one of the few magazines modest enough not to claim that it was), but it had its virtues. One of them was an awareness of the fact that if you are going to give the reader unpretentious adventure stories set within a rather stereotyped mythology of interplanetary derring-do, then you should keep the action going at a good, steady pace. The most unfortunate thing about *The Spacejacks* is that the pace is anything but steady. Things happen in fits and bursts, and in between there are hopelessly pieces of blatant dalliance - like the six pages of torn-up newspaper (pp 30-35), the two-page spaceship manoeuvre (pp 57-9) and the frustrated phone call (pp 79-82). It is also worth pointing out, I think, that a *Planet Stories* novelette would never, under any circumstances, allow its mysterious starcraft to fart around for 150 pages and then simply go away, leaving the ending open for a sequel but letting down the present offering with a sad and soggy thud.

DOCTOR MIRABILIS by James Blish (Panther; St Albans; 1976; 310 pp; 75p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Doctor Mirabilis was first published by Faber & Faber in 1964. It has taken a long time to get into paperback. This is understandable, for *Doctor Mirabilis* is an esoteric book. It is by no means relaxed reading and the manner in which the author approaches his subject is far from familiar.

Most historical novels are interested in events and motivations. Writers who are sufficiently conscientious to avoid mutilating history are often meticulous and laboriously skilful in the reconstruction of happenings and their physical background - incidents and appearances. Though this is admirable it is not uncommon. Slightly rarer, however, are writers who can supply persons known to modernity by their actions and writings alone with character and feeling. This is, inevitably, a distorting process, but there are still numerous craftsmen who can do it. These are criteria by which we might assess the competence of historical fictions, and James Blish meets both of them well. Roger Bacon's world is constructed with the utmost care, a character grafted on to what is known of his career with craft and delicacy. The amount of work and effort which has gone into this is undoubtedly tremendous. But in this particular case the historical reconstruction is not an end but a means, and the further ambitions of *Doctor Mirabilis* take it beyond the usual realms of historical fantasy into imaginative territory which is very much its own.

What interested James Blish about Roger Bacon was neither his actions nor his world, but his world-view. The events which overtook Bacon and the historical pattern of which he was a tiny part are - to Blish and Blish's Bacon - only scenes set upon a greater stage. That stage is the philosophical range of man's place in the universe and his role within the universal scheme which dominated the intellectual climate of thirteenth century Europe and which Bacon attempted to affect.

This is the proper context for a novel about Bacon because this is the context in which what Bacon was and what he tried to do is significant and important. His actions did not divert the flow of eventful history, nor did his efforts accomplish a great deal in altering the scientific thinking of his day, but what he attempted was something of profound importance with respect to the scheme to which all these things had meaning. *Doctor Mirabilis* is, first and foremost, a story about an individual intellect developing and working within an intellectual cosmos. It is not, by virtue of that fact, divorced from all the customary criteria by which a novel might be assessed, but it thus renders itself to other criteria of criticism as well - criticism on the basis of its concern with the life of ideas and the nature of scientific knowledge. It is, I think, sufficient to say that it measures up well to all these criteria. This is not faint praise but recognition of a triumph which is considerable indeed. There are very few writers who could have fulfilled such a prospectus, a few besides James Blish would have had the courage or the determination to try.

James Blish was a science fiction writer. He was, when he first came to prominence in the early fifties, the most intellectually adventurous of all science fiction writers, using the vocabulary of ideas offered by all to approach and consider (in literary thought-experiments) philosophical problems of all kinds. His writing was not without its faults - his prose was often lame, moving with determination but without grace. He was careful in construction but contrivance was sometimes blatant in his work. These were principally faults of method. He was a writer who had to work very hard indeed to make his characters live and feel because they were all-too-often celled upon to be far more than simply themselves - they had to be actors in a precise scheme, pieces on a board where the move to an existential game were to be worked out. Only when he worked very hard, and things worked for him, could he actually bring it off. *Doctor Mirabilis* is the book in which he succeeded best. He had the advantage of not needing to invent an alien environment to provide a setting for his play - he had, instead, to reconstruct one. It is not easier work, but it is more secure. The alien environment he rebuilt was the world-view of the Aristotelian cosmology as adapted to

dogmatic Christianity by Averroes and Aquinas, which opened up in the course of that uncomfortable hybridisation a great expanding galaxy of enigmas and possibilities. In this intellectual corner, with the horizons of the imagination ready to be pushed back, and the hierarchy of the Church ready to punish with the utmost severity anyone who tried to push them back, the mind of Roger Bacon found its challenge, its quest and its essential dilemma. In that challenge, that quest and that dilemma James Blisk found the means to pose fundamental questions about the nature of scientific knowledge.

Blisk had already posed related questions in *A Case of Conscience*, and he was later to pose more in *Black Easter* and *The Day After Judgment*. Doctor *Mirabilis* fits in, with these books, to a particular field of investigation. But it is also, in a sense, a cornerstone in the whole edifice of the literature of the scientific imagination: a unique work; a very special book.

LENNUS 1: WAITERS ON THE DANCE by Julian Jay Savarin (Corgi; London; 1974; 253 pp; 75p)

LENNUS 2: BEYOND THE OUTER MIRR by Julian Jay Savarin (Corgi; London; 1976; 253 pp; 85 p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Lennus features (among other things):

The Galactic Organisation and Domions, based on Haven, the original world whence all human populations in the galaxy initially came. Its illegal galactic is la'tis...

An expedition to the virgin world Terra, headed by one Jael Adams, which settles on the island continent of Atlantis...

A character named Yael Christl, sole survivor of the Atlantis catastrophe, who is transferred back to Earth at a later date for 30-odd years to carry out a mission connected with the saving of mankind...

Etc...

You may wonder why people whose native tongue is la'tis should have names like Jael Adams and Yael Christl - not to mention Yael Plaid, Glai Ch'aro, Wil Plu'nd, Evokedyen Eyoox et al - but if you intend to read *Lennus* that's the kind of thing you'll just have to be content to wonder. You will, also, have to wonder what happened to the geological record - and come to that science itself.

Basically, *Lennus* is a mess. It is a trilogy, but part two (*Children of Lennus*) is included in the second volume along with part three, whose title the volume bears. The first part (or the first phase, as Savarin has it) is basically a long and involved prologue to events scheduled for phases two and three. It is 243 pages long. The second part is mostly space opera highly reminiscent of early Edmond Hamilton or John Campbell, and runs 157 pages. The third part, about the final stages of the Terra experiment, is 84 pages long. The steady decrease in the magnitude of the phases is evidence, I think, of the increasing boredom and frustration of an author who found that he had saddled himself with a grotesquely naive and pointless project. *Waiters on the Dance* was first published by Arlington Books, who then abandoned the series. It was a wise decision. The author, it seems, also realised that the axe had to fall, for the concluding part ends abruptly, without any ceremony, in the manner of a mercy killing.

As science fiction opine go, *Lennus* is most remarkable for an appalling poverty of ideas. Most of the ones it gets by with putrefied long ago, and

even Edmund Hamilton left them behind in the thirties. *Lemmus* is empty of logic, of organization, and of any form of intellectual or aesthetic discipline. As a reader-experience it is very tiresome. I would not, however, be inclined to write off Savarin as a hopeless case if only because he seems to have reached a similar conclusion. He seems to have been betrayed, in planning *Lemmus* by the inspiration of a guileless and unfurnished imagination, but there are signs in volume two of an attempt at rescue. One or two intrusions suggest that Savarin at least knew that he was going wrong and perpetrating a horrible travesty. In time, he may produce work that will leave this far behind, and everyone is entitled to a few beginning-of-career indiscretions. I only hope that *Lemmus* won't stay around to haunt him - or, if it does, that it makes him enough cash to enable him to cry all the way to the bank.

Corgi plan to publish another Savarin book called *Archives of Haven*. I shall read it, looking for an injection of ideas and significant progress away from the credulities of the present offering, and I will try to avoid blundering at the title. I honestly don't think that I can say fairer than that.

SPACE CHANTREY by R.A. Lafferty (Dobson; London; 1976; 133 pp; £2.75)

Reviewed by Brian Stablsford

I have heard it argued that the *Odyssey* is a science fiction novel. I remain unconvinced. Of the statement's obviousness, however, there can be no doubt - there are indubitably several of novels which are the *Odyssey*. I do not refer to books which use a similar method, or to those which simply borrow odd incidents from the Homeric epic, or to works like Ernst Schmalohl's magnificent *The Voyage Home*, which are modern novels about Odysseus. I refer, instead, to the group of novels which are, manifestly and specifically, the *Odyssey* itself, symbolically transfigured by the identitive vocabulary of science fiction. The first of these, I believe, was Fletcher Pratt's *The Wanderer's Return*. *Space Chantry*, originally published by Ace in 1968, is the second. There is at least one other. *Space Chantry* is the best of them.

R.A. Lafferty is chief dramatist in the science fiction theatre of the absurd. His works grow wild and unpredictable, witty and wonderful. His characters are, for the most part, at once worldly-wise and inordinately innocent. They are guaranteed to overlook the obvious while serendipitously discovering hidden meanings. It is a combination which makes for good comic writing.

The *Odyssey* is ideal material for the kind of bizarre adventures which usually take place in Lafferty's version of the comic stage. At novel length Lafferty has a tendency to lose all semblance of shape and direction, and it helps to have a model for reference. (This, incidentally, is not to write down his novels in general - *Fast Winter* and *Fourth Mansions* are masterpieces, albeit amorphous ones.) Lafferty, like Marshall McLuhan, explores rather than explains. He is relaxed and extravagant, always ready to disconnect and digress, to stretch his material all the ways it can be stretched in order to accommodate a truly prolific imagination. Thus, in the epic of Captain Roadstrum, we find invaders like Velibula and the Club of High Liars, while Nausicla and her haven of rest is abandoned without a quail.

Will there be a mythology of the future? asks the novel, and answers itself in the affirmative. There must and will be - a mythology by which the nonsensicality of the known and unknown universe may be made known and thus become familiar. Like *Space Chantry*, a mythology of the future can at best be no more than half-rational, and at worst ingloriously comic - a tale told by an idiot-savant.

WING OF RINGS by Robert Hoodrie Wilson (Robert Hale; London; 1978; 165 pp; £3.10)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Science fiction as a publishing category was American in origin, and as publishers in other countries have adopted it they have usually begun by importing standards and assumptions about the nature and quality of sf which are also American in origin. British sf writers, too, have often tended to inherit the American attitudes and methods which characterise the genre. There has, however, always been a vein of British sf which retains a taste and texture rather unlike the American product - calmer, slower in execution, lacking in extravagance and literary shorthand. The difference is not in the content but simply in some of the methods - methods intrinsic to the philosophy of mass-produced pulp fiction - which appear central to American sf writing largely thanks to a historical accident.

At its worst this separate, stiff-upper-lip brand of British sf writing (as, for instance, in the works of Edmund Cooper and "John Hamlyn") seems rather dull and sometimes patronising - not only unoriginal but unrespectfully so. At its best (as, for instance, in the work of D.G. Compton) it can be much more clinical and analytical than American sf - more objective, leading to a better display of corollaries and consequences.

Ring of Rings belongs to this school of British sf, and unfortunately it is closer to Cooper than to Compton in terms of its efficacy. Nevertheless, it is not without its merits. One of the characteristics of the vein is that its less ambitious works rarely even attempt or merely mechanical operations of pulp formulae. *Ring of Rings* is readable and comfortable. It is difficult to avoid spotting the ending very early, but there is enough interest outside the gimmick to sustain reader interest. The invocation here and there of Nietzsche (to make those pseudo-intellectual comments many sf writers seem to feel is necessary to their posturing) is more showing off, and is quite unnecessary, but not offensive. A novel with a principal character called Rupert Willbenet can't be all good, but it's not bad either.

ARENA: SPORTS SF edited by Ed Ferman and Barry Malaberg (Hobson Books; London; 1978; 223 pp; £3.25)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

I am a sucker for science fiction sports stories. Why this should be, I am unsure. Perhaps, as Barry Malaberg suggests in his afterword, it is because I recognise subconsciously the basic structural similarities between reading sf and watching sport. ("Crystallization, metaphor, extension, the medium of exchange", he quotes, meaning these are common factors, or even identities, between the fictional experience of the story and the game.) Perhaps, alternatively, it is because my childhood was devoted to the perpetual modelling of games using dice and complex sets of number/event translation devices, after the fashion of J. Heavy Weight in the brilliant novel *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc.* by Robert Coover... a passion which, I suppose, was gradually supplanted by the habit of sf reading. Perhaps the two activities, each involving private universes of well-defined structure and co-ordination, were serving the same need. I still retain a profound fascination for the mechanics of betting - odds and races and weighing of incomplete data in the service of speculative forecasting. Probability theory - mathematical or intuitive and almost always both - is central to all these universes of discourse. There is an affinity between sport and sf.

Anyway, I came to *Arena* ready and willing to love it. I found within it no cause for disillusion. I *did* love it. Only three of the stories were unfamiliar, but I reread the rest without getting bored.

The longest story in the book is Irwin Shaw's "Whispers in Bedlam", and it is perhaps the archetype of the speculative sport story - or the speculative sports daydream - with a moral at least as old as Perrault's fairy tales. It is the story of the sportsman whose acquisition of a supernatural talent allows him to become a super-success, but which, in the end, proves to be an existential curse. This is an excellent version of it.

Will Stanton's "Dodger Fan" is about sports fandom - and next time someone tells you that of fandom has unique characteristics, take off your blinkers and think beyond the literary world. It makes its point simply and gracefully.

Gary Wright's "Mirror of Ice" (which, contrary to the story intro, is not Wright's only contribution to sf, or even to the sf sports story - cf "The Ultimate Racer" in IF Nov 1984) forms, together with Barry Malzberg's "Closed Sicilian" and Vance Amsdahl's "Beyond the Game", a kind of triptych on various aspects of the psychology of competition.

These five, together with Fredric Brown's classic "Arena" - representing, of course, the game situation stripped of its symbolic and metaphorical sublimations - are the book's real heart and strength. Of the rest, James Gunn's "Open Warfare" and Bruce Jay Friedman's "The Night Boxing Died" lack subtlety, while Rudr's "Nobody bothers Gus" and John Anthony West's "Gladys's Gregory" are surely marginal to the prospectus. The only original story in the book, Bill Pronzini's "The Hungarian Cinch", deals with trick hustling made far too easy by the recruitment of alien powers.

There are what there is. Not there are Simak's antique "Rule 18" or any of the good sf boxing stories of the fifties - William Campbell Gault's "Title Fight", Richard Matheson's "Steel" and Robert Fresselle's "The Champ" are surely better than "The Night Boxing Ended"...but such quibbles as these are really not relevant

It is perhaps worth noting the obvious point that this is distinctly an anthology of American sf sport stories. American sport, as we all know, has a flavour very different from English sport. It is more mechanical in philosophy. Its aims and means are better defined. Its laws are more like scientific ones. It is far more commercial in all its relationships and transactions. I make these comments not simply as a footnote but in order to try to reach something which may lie at the very heart of the anthology - a fascination, perhaps natural to sf, with figures and measurements. It seems significant that in "Open Warfare", for example, it is scores that are important, not strokes, or that "Gladys's Gregory" is permitted its surprise pinch hit only because the reader has been entranced throughout by the magic of statistics. Is my long-nursed secret ambition to write the great cricket sf story really possible? Could "Whispers in Bedlam" have been written about soccer? I'm not sure. Is it, I wonder, purely coincidental that *Rollerball*, *Death Race 2000* and other recent bandwagoning performances celebrate the total breakup of both the ethics and the aesthetics of sport and a return to the gladiatorial circus? Are the stories in *Arena* really about sport at all...or do they represent the decline and fall of sportsmanship, isolating - like all good sf - trends within the present and exposing them by strategic exaggeration? There is, I suggest, food for thought here. But read and digest the book first.

THE INFINITE CAGE by Keith Laumer (Dobson; London; 1978; 221 pp; £3 50)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

"The type of person whom psychiatrists designate 'schizoid' is characterized by detachment and emotional isolation. There is a lack of ordinary human contact; a feeling that such a man is unconcerned with, if not superior to, the ordinary, mundane preoccupations of ordinary people; that he is 'out of touch' with, or 'on a different wave length' from, the people with whom he mingles but does not

mix...schizoid individuals habitually play roles which, intellectually, they believe to be appropriate, but which do not reflect what they are actually feeling...A second characteristic of schizoid people is paradoxical. It consists of a sense of extreme weakness and vulnerability vis-a-vis others, combined with its exact opposite, a sense of superiority and potential, if not actual, omnipotence."

That description comes from Anthony Storr's book *The Dynamics of Creation*, and forms part of the preamble to a discussion of the characteristics of schizoid creativity. In literature, Storr's archetype of schizoid creation is Kafka's *The Trial* - the model of the schizoid world-view which is all-but perfect.

Science fiction, by virtue of its vocabulary of symbols, is the literary medium per excellence for such modelling. It is also, perhaps, the perfect medium for neurotic readers, who may find in the pages of many of novels their fantasies not merely displayed, but also justified and resolved.

The man who has done most to incarnate the schizoid world-view in science fiction is A.E. van Vogt, whose novels *Slan* and *The World of Null-A* are schizoid fantasies of great delicacy and detail. Keith Laumer is one of the foremost among van Vogt's literary heirs, and *The Infinite Cage* is probably the most definite schizoid novel he has produced to date.

We begin with a character who knows not who or what or why he is. Picked up naked in the street and beaten up by the police he is in terrible state. His identity shifts constantly as he tunes in other men's minds and allows their personalities to invest his body. Ultimately, he is recruited by a fake medium who intends to exploit his superhuman talent, but slowly - as the situation develops - he begins to realize the extent of his powers and begins to discover an identity of his own. However, though potentially all-powerful he remains totally vulnerable thanks to his servile, and is taken to death's very door before his latent powers prevail and allow him to undergo a transcendental metamorphosis taking him away from the poor human condition altogether.

This is a plot and a conclusion which must, by now, be familiar to all of readers. This motif of transcendence has been the key to so many post-war sf novels: *Childhood's End*, *More than Human*, *Camp Concentration*, *The Moon, Ymm-Enough for Love* etc, etc. It has become a standard, and the only thing which stops it becoming a cliché is that it still seems to be acknowledged as appropriate and pertinent.

To comment that *The Infinite Cage* is another in a long list of schizoid sf novels is merely informative, and perhaps obvious. What is really interesting is that it is another in a long list of schizoid sf novels which reach this particular resolution, for this is not simply a logical extension of the first observation. There is nothing startling about the observation that many of writers are schizoid, but what we find in novels like *The Infinite Cage* is not by any means case-history of neurosis but a myth to counteract neurosis. *The Infinite Cage* (and all its brethren) stands in stark contrast to *The Trial*, in which the schizoid situation becomes schizophrenic - utterly crushing and hopeless. (It is worth noting that even in the most despairing of sf writing in this vein - the work of Harry Mulberg - there is to be found the superb novel *Galaxian*, which self consciously evokes the transformation myth.) Now, then, are we to evaluate *The Infinite Cage*. Assessed by the standards and requirements of literary art, it is not much of a reader-experience. It is not very logical and not very well-written. But it is nevertheless attractive reading, perhaps even compelling reading. It is enjoyable...and perhaps it serves a purpose.

In today's world it is easier to be schizoid than it ever was before. We are each, within the universe of our own imagination, godlike - and we are each, in the real world, exterminable and utterly vulnerable, no matter who or what we may be. In an age when the power exists, in human hands, for the destruction

of the world, the paradoxical element in the schizoid world-view is not longer an illusion. And when social relationships are in the process of undergoing slow depersonalisation and disintegration, the isolation of the individual is no delusion either. In such a world, to be schizoid is to be normal, and in such a world we should not be surprised to find myths of escape, myths of transcendence. They may help us to live with our existential situation by providing temporary escape into a world where that situation is redeemable.

On these grounds, I am prepared to declare that *The Infinite Cage* is an excellent book.

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND by Jules Verne; translated and abridged by Lowell Blair (Corgi; London; 1976; 184 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Brian Stablesford

Jules Verne once wrote a book called *The Mysterious Island*. It was published in 1876. It was his favourite book, and it is in many ways the archetypal Verne novel, most typical of the man and most representative of his particular literary endeavour.

Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* is a Robinsonade, dealing with the experiences of a group of castaways. The Robinsonade is one of the most interesting classes of fantasy because it reflects in a rather neat and concise manner a certain aspect of world-view associated with the capitalist/protestant ethic.

Alexander Bulkin, a castaway in real life, dined with his goats and went mad. Returned physically to civilisation after some years he was never able to return socially and psychologically, but dug a hole at the bottom of his garden and was a castaway for evermore. So much for reality. In fantasy, Robinson Crusoe built a little England on his desert island - a capitalist, imperialist England complete with a native population of oom to be colonised, civilised and exploited. In the work of Defoe the island became an allegory of bourgeois Utopia, or perhaps a kind of bourgeois heaven.

The Mysterious Island (the one by Jules Verne) was a product of the heyday of bourgeois France, written by its most popular armchair voyager. Verne was the all-time champion middle-class daydreamer... his work is filled with ships and islands - private worlds furnished with all the comforts of idealised bourgeois ritual middle-classness. These microcosms are transported by the characters they surround (sensible, capable, civilised characters all) all around the known world (once in 90 days by usually at a very leisurely pace) and also round the moon, twenty thousand leagues under the sea and off on a comet. The scope of the journey confirms and epitomises the narrow all-inclusiveness of bourgeois ambition in all its claustrophobic single-mindedness. *The Mysterious Island* (1876) was Verne's longest, most self-indulgent, silliest book. The essence of it - the whole purpose and joy of it - was its languorously, its luxuriously dwelling on the comfortable isolation of the protagonists, their house-keeping, their assembling of possessions, their establishment of sensible social relationships, their glorious islands, their careful furnishing of their fantasy world. It is a significant book, a book which offers great insight into the character of its author and the times which made him.

And now for something completely different

Corgi have published a book which claims to be *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne. It isn't.

Perhaps, in a technical sense, Corgi have not violated the Trade Descriptions Act, in that it clearly says on the cover "newly abridged and translated by Lowell Blair". Morally, however, and by any meaningful literary standards, the publishers are guilty of gross deception.

Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* was nearly a quarter of a million words long. Lowell Blair has abandoned nearly two hundred thousand of them. He has thrown out everything which made Verne's book significant and interesting. All that he has saved in the plot - which was, in Verne's book, a simple and rather preposterous convenience completely extraneous to the real concerns of the work.

Cargi offer this in their "SF Collectors Library". It is not science fiction (neither was Verne's novel of the same title). In any case, there is no reason why any kind of collector of any kind of fiction might be interested in a hideous case of literary butchery like this. Even Dr Bowdler was not so careless of the works he practiced his depredations upon.

This is, on the part of the publishers, an insult to Jules Verne, an insult to science fiction and an insult to the reading public. Do not, on any account, touch it with the proverbial barge-pole.

THE CHALK GIANTS by Keith Roberts (Berkeley; New York; 1976; 217 pp; \$1.25)

Reviewed by Brian Stablesford

Though Keith Roberts first appeared in the pages of *Science-Fantasy* while Kyril Bonfiglioli was editor he had, I think, first been "discovered" by John Cramail, who had earlier "discovered" Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard in the same magazine. Roberts' first sf novel, *The Furina*, was competent but formulaistic, working ground already familiar to British sf. His second book, however - the episodic novel *Pavane* - was one of the classics of its period end of the genre. About eight years have passed while we have waited for Roberts to put on display again the considerable powers which showed in that work. And here, in *The Chalk Giants*, they are.

The Chalk Giants is structurally similar to *Pavane* - it is episodic, the parts listed in a cursory manner by one particular character but in a much more dramatic and meaningful sense by a developing theme and concern with a historical integrity which transcends individual characters. And, with an element of parallelism which signifies a real thematic link between the two novels, *The Chalk Giants* concludes at the same geographical location as *Pavane*, Corfu Gata.

The world of *Pavane* was an alternate present - a world of if built meticulously and beautifully with the aid of the Victorian thesis concerning the intimate relationship between the rise of Protestantism and the rise of Capitalism. In *Pavane*'s world the industrial revolution is styled as Catholicism has built on to the cultural and political development in modern Europe. *The Chalk Giants* notionally, is set in a post-holocaust future, but identically the future fuses here with the past, and we find an examination of historical process and human interaction in the generalized circumstance of barbarism. The novel is concerned very much with the politics of superstition and the value and quality of human life in circumstances very different from what we identify today as "the human condition".

Very few writers can free themselves to any significant extent from the subconsciously-notreached attitudes and values attached to contemporary world-views. Indeed, few writers even in the sf field have consciously tried. American sf has not taken this as its brief at all, but has developed the vocabulary of ideas characteristic of sf as a kind of metaphorical commentary on contemporary situations. It is primarily in British sf - principally in the work of Ballard and those he has influenced - that the attempt at a genuine disassociation from the present day's conception of the present day is sometimes made. Similar attempts have been made elsewhere in modern English literature, too - and it is perhaps Henry James's *The Golden Strangers* which is, in content and ambition, most nearly comparable to *The Chalk Giants*. But Roberts has

drawn some benefit from his knowledge of and association with science-fictional thinking, and his book has a depth that France's has not.

This is not a comfortable book. It is not an enjoyable one in the trivial sense of the word. It sets out, in fact, to be a disturbing book, and some of its methods are slightly gruesome. It will alienate its readers, and there may well not be many who accept this alienation as an essential part of the book's aim and a process both strategic and constructive. This is not a book to be taken lightly, for relaxation.

It is unlikely that the talent which Keith Roberts has will ever make him popular. It is not in the nature of his creations that they can have wide appeal. In the science-fiction community, where a writer is so much closer to his audience, and that audience so much more reactive, it is easy for an unappreciated writer to despair under attack. This process has driven several writers away from the genre into a curious kind of limbo. This may be the fate of Keith Roberts - to follow Ballard into introspection or Heinberg into retirement. I hope not, for Keith Roberts is one of the few men, who can genuinely use science-fictional ideas to accomplish real artistic ends.

THE AMONG THE BLIND by Robert Holdstock (Faber and Faber; London, 1976; 319 pp £3.96)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a first novel, and, I fear, must be assessed as such - in terms of the potential it shows rather than its actual achievement. It is somewhat more ambitious than many first flirtations with novelistic length and complexity, but not so ambitious as to break entirely new ground. In fact, it deals with material which has become almost staple in the diet of the SF reader of late, but tries to use a little more insight than is common.

We find herein an alien race in the process of cultural pollution by "advanced" humans but who are, in fact, better integrated with their environment than we are. We also find the memory of an ancient race of advanced capabilities which may not after all be legendary. In the background there hovers the shadow of an interstellar plague threatening humanity. The immediate narrative - which haphazardly switches viewpoint far too often to retain its coherence - examines the attempts of various humans to come to terms with the alien world, with the understanding that what is happening there may help to elucidate the perils looking ominously in the wings.

There are, however, the seeds of a good book - similar seeds deployed elsewhere have grown well. But Holdstock cannot protect them from a certain amount of nutritional starvation, in that he cannot find the words to make clear the products of his imagination, and also a little mild pulsing by courtesy of an excess of melodramatic leitmotifs.

Everyone in the book except the ultradignified blind superman is in a constant state of incipient anguish. Their relationships are tortured, their existential situations trembling on the brink of intolerability. Their dialogue is fraught with false-ringing emotion. I realize that the characters are under great stress, but I wish the author were not apparently in a similar state. The events in the book gather into a pattern which begins vaguely and ends in tatters.

Most of these faults are the faults of inexperience. The author seems, in fact, noticeably lacking in authority. But Holdstock is putting effort into his work, and it will not be wasted. He deserves encouragement for his willingness not to settle for something simpler. There are virtues in his kind of thinking and writing, although they are fugitive in a jungle of words and ideas that have not sorted themselves out in his mind.

The blurb describes *Eye Among the Blind* as "a deeply imagined and accomplished piece of work". It is, alas, only half-accomplished, but it is deeply-imagined. This is not the superficial work of a shallow imagination. Given time to learn a little more about clarity of expression and the analytical treatment of the deep contents of the imagination Boldstock may prove to be a fine writer, with a genuine contribution to make to the genre.

THE ANARCHY PRELARS by John October (Robert Hale; London; 1978; 169 pp; £3.10)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a book about the re-emergence in the year 2001 of the old oriental cult of the assassins, who have been hiding in an underground city and who now plan to achieve world domination by murdering world leaders in alphabetical order. It is not made clear how they expect this plan to lead to world domination, and, indeed, the assassin who sees the light and betrays his plan concludes that it is a stupid idea. I heartily concur.

The last man to attempt the plot was Rex Rohmer, who nearly made it work. He made it work for him by pitting villains of personality (Fu Manchu, The Golden Scorpion, etc) against English gentlemen in plots which moved vigorously from one ingeniously dexterously threat to another, never leaving a pause for the absurdity of it all to become apparent. While these are no great shakes as literary virtues go, they are virtues nevertheless, and if Rex Rohmer had decided to do without them he would probably have stayed Arthur Ward all his life and died unknown. I don't know what John October's real name is, but he is not going to make his pseudonym famous while he maintains his present habits.

The bulk of the novel is pure background, related in a clipped, potted-fact-for-simplicity style reminiscent of Reader's Digest articles. (And as his history of the cult coyly manages to avoid the word "hanshin" from which "assassins" is derived, I would not be surprised to learn that, despite quotes from Fliny the elder and Marco Polo, the Reader's Digest was where he did his research.) No characters are introduced as to the story as actors until page 108. Everyone quoted in the book, whether fanatic oriental cultists or Scandinavian beauties unreasonably fascinated by Atsusa, speaks in colloquial English, which gives some of the stirring fanatical speeches delivered by the head of the cult a quite remarkable quality of bathos. The lead character is ridiculous and I was quite glad when he exited on page 145 to head back to Reader's Digestarian. The plot ends according to that famous old dictum of rived plotsters, "how 'am all up".

As an attempt at novel-writing this is pitiful. The writer probably knows no better, but Robert Hale's editor seems to be suffering from alshpils fever.

LOGAN'S RUN by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson (Forgi; London; 1972; 144 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Logan's Run first appeared in 1967 to the sound of failure - movie rights had been sold in advance for a large (pre-inflation) sum. Now, the movie itself is about to put in a belated appearance. According to Nolan it has, during the long interim, drifted so far away from the book as to render any resemblance negligible, but the re-release of the novel was nevertheless inevitable. It's a very readable book - a cavalier, slightly gaudy, escapade to a future where euthanasia is compulsory at twenty-one. It is, as befits a novel about a youthful world, essentially a playful book. Curiously, it one seems a little dated, perhaps because it reflects too accurately the temper of the sixties, perhaps

because I'm nine years older than I was when I first read it, and even less playful now than I was then. Anyhow, it's worth reading as entertainment - a pleasant literary confection.

HOSPITAL STATION by James White (Corgi: London; 1974; 181 pp; 65p)

STAR SURGEON by James White (Corgi: London; 1976; 156 pp; 60p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

James White's Sector General stories began in *New Worlds* in the late fifties and spanned several years of that magazine's early incarnation, when it was under the guidance of John Carnell. The magazine had a distinct flavour in those days, although not as distinct as it was later to acquire. Carnell's product was directly related to John Campbell's idea of what sf ought to be, but it seemed more self-sufficing that the actual product which Campbell published in *Astounding*/*Analog*. It was not so broad, not so aggressive. It dealt with problems of the same artificial type, and provided the same species of artificial answers, but more gently. These stories by White - *Hospital Station* is a series of novelettes not really improved by the addition of connective tissue to allow them to pretend that they are a novel; *Star Surgeon* is a novel that grows from a preliminary novelette - are typical of the Carnell product, and are among the few examples of it likely to survive.

It is easy to confuse modesty of style and treatment with a lack of ambition. These stories do not dazzle their readers. But they are by no means unadventurous - nor has James White ever been an unadventurous writer. They are a fusion of space opera with medical drama, and that is no easy fusion to make. Space opera characteristically relies for its appeal on splendid violence on a cosmic scale, while hospital stories usually employ the "commitment mystique" of the medical profession as a counterweight to an apparatus of frustrated emotion and muted passion. When hospital drama is transplanted into the science fiction universe, and the patients (plus most of the doctors) are aliens, both the romantic angle and the orchestration of galactic terrorisms become inappropriate. A substitute has to be found, and it comes from the standard of methodology of inventing imaginary problems with difficult imaginary solutions. Anti-violence takes priority over violence and the spectacle of giant forces in conflict is replaced by the essentially private battles taking place in the intellect and the imagination.

There is a certain clumsiness in the way these stories are put together. Human relationships and human/alien relationships are equally strange, and the former become unconvincing by comparison with the latter. The main protagonist, Conway, has a tendency to secrecy (in the service of maintaining euphoria for the reader) that often seems close to lunacy. The background assumption that all conceivable problems have neat solutions that miraculously integrate any number of loose ends is annoying. Some of these difficulties arise from the nature of the exercise, some from the fact that James White was not so accomplished an author in 1960 as he is today. But none of the faults stem from mere carelessness, or from a willingness on the part of the author to fudge things into a merely passable condition. White is perhaps not blessed with much natural grace in the way he writes, but he has always worked hard at producing good work, and he has worked hard on the reader's behalf, trying to write stories which are interesting and entertaining to read. It is for this reason that these books will merit further reprinting as new generations of readers emerge to be introduced to them.

BENEDICT'S PLANET by James Corley (The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1978; 189 pp; £4.65)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Yesterday I watched Flash Gordon on TV. I saw him tortured in the static room, threatened with the Tunnel of Terror, and watched him stoking the atom furnaces, which flared every time he throw in a shovelful of radium nuggets. I enjoyed it. It was fun. But it was a period piece - an antique. If they made it tomorrow and called it *Space 1998* (for instance) it would make me wince.

Benedict's Planet isn't Flash Gordon, but it still makes me wince a little, for similar reasons. It has a plot which has surely, by now, become very haggard indeed. This old prospector has found an old abandoned alien mine with a payload worth more than you or he can imagine. An evil corporation tries to jump his claim but he is befriended by a weird private investigator who doubles as piano player in a Martian night-club. A senescent alien race once enslaved by the terrifying ex-mine owners gets into the act, and so does a lavish dollop of relativistic double-talk.

It's hard to believe that Corley can retail this in 1978 with a straight face, but he tries, and one can almost admire his nerve. He doesn't handle his clichés all that badly but he certainly does them all. They're all on parade and standing to attention, just as they were in Roy Palmer's *Amazing Stories*. No hint of irony or originality, I fear...unless you count the highly ambillious notion evoked in the last chapter to wrap up two loose ends. To start verping time, space and reality to account for a few trivia is using a sledgehammer to crack a monkey nut, and I am disposed to wonder whether Corley could have written ten times the book he has if only he had thought of it at the beginning. Only a coward uses his best ideas as excuses rather than premises - but this is perhaps a tragedy of mis-judgment born of inexperience. This is only Corley's first published novel, and might perhaps best be regarded as a trial run, a practice exercise. There is definitely hope for him, and next time out, if he manages his material better, he could produce a good book. I only pray, though, that he is not writing a sequel to *Benedict's Planet*.

BALCYON DRIFT by Brian Stableford (Pan; London; 154 pp; 50p; 1978)

MAPHOBY IN BLACK by Brian Stableford (Pan; London; 1978; 137 pp; 50p)

PROMISED LAND by Brian Stableford (J.M. Dent & Sons; London; 1978; £3.95; 160 pp)

Reviewed by Tom and Susan Jones

These books are the first three in the Star Pilot Granger series, of which there are six in total.

First let us say that these books aren't sf. Sure, they've got spacecraft and planets and aliens, but for all the science fictionalness made of them they might just as well be chips, islands and natives. What we have here are adventure stories, and as Brian likes af he has put them in an af format. Having said that...it is not 100% true. There is one element which is developed in a true sf manner, but whether this is continued throughout the series I don't know. I may be forced to buy the last books in the series to find out.

Now for the plot summary.

Balcyon Drift: Star Pilot Granger is marooned on a planet at the edge of the Balcyon Drift, a dark nebula where dust and space-time distortions mean that no ship can survive for any length of time. Something like a cross between a macelatron and the Margesso Man. Whilst on the planet Granger picks up a mind symbiote - or so it claims).

Eventually Granger is rescued, charged an exorbitant fee for the rescue (no spirit of good will between space companies here) and dumped on the backwater planet of Earth. Granger is offered the job of piloting a new spacecraft, the

Hooded Swan, a mix of human and alien technologies. Eventually, after much mulling and prototyping, he takes the job as the salary will pay his debt in a few years, where normally it would have taken a few centuries.

Lo (and behold) somewhere in the Eucypor Drift is a legendary lost ship (bailo El Dorado) and Granger's first job is to locate the impenetrable Drift and find it. With a cardboard crew and a couple of plot twists our hero sets out.

As an adventure story it's not bad, but every of element is quickly suppressed. To pilot the ship requires a nan-machine welding between Granger and the Hooded Swan, which could be interesting but is not investigated in any depth. In fact, its sole use is to generate some excitement, an attempt to lighten the drama.

Potentially the most interesting part of the book could be Granger's reaction to his mind partner and how he comes to terms with the situation. This isn't done, the symbiote is ignored for the most part of the book and only appears as a deus ex machina at the end.

The writing is very workmanlike and I found the book easy to read, unlike some other novels of this genre. The only distraction is the scientific and pseudo-scientific jargon often used to fill of explanations, but once one realizes it is irrelevant and can be skipped it ceases to distract.

Rhapsody in Black: Here we have Granger planet bound as Rhapsody. This planet is uninhabitable on the surface so its occupants live underground in caves and tunnels. These occupants all subscribe to a particular religion which is lots misery and hardship in a big way.

Something of Galaxy-shattering importance is discovered on the planet and Granger is sent to find it. There are various adventures and chases in caves and with rebels, before Granger finds what he's after. For a simple space pilot, Granger reveals his massive biological knowledge and deduces the significance of the discovery.

Suddenly you're at the end of the book and the interesting dealings between all the parties, to reach a suitable outcome, is summarized in a couple of pages!

This time the book employs a flashback technique to tell the story. This is a standard technique to heighten tension but it didn't come off and I found it positively distracting. Once again much scientific jargon, but this time mostly biological (Wilm has a B.Sc. in biology). Thus words such as "alveoline" and "stiolated" appear frequently, so it is necessary to have a dictionary handy (unfortunately I'm fascinated by dictionaries and find myself reading them instead of the novel).

This book perhaps signposts the way the series is going. The Hooded Swan, much played up in the first book, is virtually ignored, becoming just a means of transportation. The crew are locked in a prison for most of the book, and play little part in the story. Granger's personality is expanded and explored though his big-headedness does get a non-nervous.

The most interesting part is the expanded role of the wild partner. Along with Granger we wonder exactly what powers the symbiote really has. After many discussions with the symbiote we see Granger realize he cannot continue to ignore it. He accepts he must come to some compromise. Both we and Granger realize it is just his pig-headedness which makes him delay.

Premised Land: Once again we have a planet-bound Granger, this time sent to find a supposedly kidnapped girl. Granger ventures into the rain forests of the planet, Chao Phrya, accompanied by a couple of human inhabitants of the planet, descendants of the people from a generation ship and three natives (who turn out not to be so native).

After several incidents, such as giant "spiders", Granger finds the girl and discovers the truth about the natives. Granger once again displays his knowledge of biology and ecology and we are treated to a lecture on the biology of the rain-forest and its eco-system. For a space pilot, Granger certainly spends as little time as possible in space.

Three books with the somewhat limited character of Granger is becoming a bore. In fact, the book is a bore, it's not even a good adventure story. One gets the feeling it's here to pad the series out. Whatever the reason for the book, it doesn't fill me with enthusiasm and make me want to rush out and read the rest of the series, and I think this will be the general feeling of the readership.

Overview: I'm sure there's a story here, and I'll probably read the last book in the series to find out how the mind symbiote/Granger relationship works out. Whilst books one and two are barely of any readable adventure stories; unfortunately book three is boring, and it puts one off the rest of the series. The preponderance of biology should not go without note. If I'd wanted to learn some biology I'd read a text-book. It also does nothing for the believability of Granger that he, a simple space bum, should have sufficient biological and ecological knowledge to get a degree in the subject!

This isn't Brian at his best, but at least the writing's workmanlike, and the first two books will help you get through a train journey or a wet afternoon.

DOUBLE TIME by Michael Elder (Robert Hale; 1976; London; 164 pp; £3.10; ISBN 0-7091-5490-8)

Reviewed by James Corley

Did you realise that eating is fatal? All the cholesterol in eggs, milk and cheese, that instant killer processed white bread, fruit saturated with DDT, the shellfish that carry typhoid, the tooth-rotting heart-attacking refined white sugar, and peanuts, bacon and kippers are only a few of the many things which give you cancer. I try not to think about kippers - the worry makes me smoke too much.

It was like a reprieve from the noose when the 4p off voucher for Cadbury's Boys Chunks came through the letter box. Here at least was something safe, the long-awaited nutritional panacea Soya Beans. But there was another delivery that day, Michael Elder's new book, *Double Time*. It looked good - maybe if I got into it it might make me forget about lunch.

It's about this man Grant Lomax, a minor bureaucrat in the 21st century, and even though almost the entire country has been built over with apartment blocks the population explosion means that there's still a pressing need for more building land. That's why, when someone spots a patch of green on the map, Lomax is sent off to stop a compulsory purchase order on it.

He finds Farmer Henchew and his daughter bucolically unwilling to exchange their homestead for a high rise flat, and rather than be flushed out by tear gas Henchew put a shotgun to his head. His injured daughter is taken off to hospital where, after eliciting Lomax's sympathy, she dies by the classic method of ageing the odd hundred years overnight.

Something odd is going on here. Elder has done the immortality story in *The Everlasting Man*; this time he shows us the reverse of the coin. His hero Lomax, following clues left by his eccentric great grandad and helped by mysterious higher-ups in the bureaucracy, does what so many apparently ordinary heroes do in this sort of situation, he risks a safe job and comfortable home

life by sticking his nose where it shouldn't be, burglarizing (ah Watergate, at least you enriched the dictionary) official records, and generally going on between us any civil servant might reasonably be expected to. Maybe the fact that he's only 15 years old excuses this lack of maturity, though he looks twice that age. He discovers that for the past couple of centuries, unnoticed by the public and suppressed by the government, the pace of life has been steadily accelerating until it's now double what it used to be with people marrying at ten, retiring in late middle age at thirty and dying of senility at forty.

What caused it? No clues - but I've thrown out the 4p off voucher for Sonya Cumska.

Double Time isn't what you'd call a deep investigation of the social problems of overcrowding. Though the epiph-off idea that computers will have to be programmed to make mistakes to make work for all the people the computers have made redundant strikes me as being brilliantly credible. The book couldn't rightly be described as unputdownable in the sense that it generates continuous high-pitched excitement: it does though, somehow, slide down as easily as an oyster (damn, I wish I hadn't thought of that). In fact, it's the only book I've ever known two people to read in a single day, and one of them not even a regular of reader. Of course, it is short, no more than 300 unless the computer's fooled again, but being read twice in the same day can't be a bad recommendation.

ENGLISH FLANDRY by Paul Anderson (Coronet; London; 1976; 65p, 217 pp, ISBN 0-340-19864-8, paperback - no UK hardcover edition)

Reviewed by James Corley

Dominic Flandry, the hero of a new paperback series by Paul Anderson, appears at first glance to be just another long distance superhero from the same mould as Perry Rhodan, the Interpid Book and countless others it will be kinder not to name publicly. But though the story is, as the cover claims, a "fast moving adventure of a new intergalactic hero", Flandry is no Nietzschean loner or even an old fashioned champion of good against evil. Far from it, the cosm is the first of an entirely new breed, an innovative sub-genre that might in time come to be described by the phrase "the hero as cretin". For Flandry, as Mr Anderson lets us know by certain subtle innuendoes, is demonstrably on the wrong side. And right to the end, though by this time the point should be obvious to him, our retarded dare-devil remains perfectly oblivious to the fact.

To give him his due, Dominic Flandry, 19 year old star of the Imperial Space Navy, was the Academy's most promising cadet. This lack of intellectual calibre is therefore undoubtedly explains why the Empire of Earth is fast crumbling under the weight of its own corruption. Long after the passing of Anderson's Paleotechnic League the Navy is serving, by name often more foul than fair, a foppish aristocracy whose decadence dims old Louis the Sun King to a damp Roman Candle. The Empire and Flandry become embroiled in a minor war on a backward planet called Starhad, supporting the side which is not supported by the other super-power of the universe, the vigorous and expanding Marxian Empire - which supports the rather charming Australia against the Lantian Tigry (whom our side supports for lack of anyone else to support).

Only cunning Lord Hawksharg realises that the Marxians, having learnt a few tricks from contact with Earth in its better days, are actually using the conflict as a smokescreen for a full-scale inter-Empire war. Perhaps because of some tainted grudge against adventure story writers he determines that a negotiated peace is speedily required.

Meanwhile our clean-cut ideal Flandry, though quick to blush when praised or propositioned, is no successful in his honest slaughter of Australia and no unsuccessful in resisting the Rudolf attacks of Hawksharg's noble courtiers.

that hawkish Commander Abrams recognizes him as an ideal candidate for intelligence work (a good fall guy). He is sent to accompany the worthy diplomat to the capital of Nevada where, by standing idly by, he is instrumental in fouling up the entire peace negotiations.

This being that sort of book we may safely reveal, since you're already guessed the outcome, that thrown out in the cold by his own side, hunted as an outlaw by two interstellar empires, and faced with the problem of creating an unbreakable code which contains the crucial secret about StarKad, he eventually saves humanity. What still remains a mystery is why he bothers, the Moruelans being so much more deserving of the universe than the humans. I maintain that either Flandry has failed to think the situation through as logically as Mr Spock would require or else he is merely being selfish and inconsiderate by banging onto the entire spiral arm the way he does.

Hughes may be premature. Remember in this first book Dominic is still a raw assign. In the rest of the series *The Rebel Worlds* I am led to understand that he is promoted to StarShip Commander and goes so far as to adorn the Empire he serves, even though he does save it again. Is there no hope for the man?

Thankfully whatever Flandry lacks is compensated for by the talents of Paul Anderson. His writing is well above the average for this sort of space opera and he makes a sterling job of keeping a literary straight face while heaping heroism onto his puerile adventures. It's also good to see for a change a series in which the hero gets older as time goes by. I rather suspect that Mr Anderson knows what he is doing with this naive character, he is, I hope laying the ground for the future development of the saga, even though the ambiguity which results in the isolated first episode might be disconcerting to someone to the simple black and white tones of John Carter, Adam Smith and Lucky Starr.

No whatever level it's approached, *Ensign Flandry* is entertaining. I doubt however if *The Rebel Worlds* where Flandry saves the universe again will tempt me. What I look forward to, when it comes, is the last volume of the series. What happens I wonder? Does decrepit Grand Admiral of the Fleet Flandry finally see through the whole shamconce, turn traitor and join the deadly green aliens in overthrowing Earth? Or does he simply realize to go home to raise ducks like some futuristic Candide, oblivious to the end of what it's all about?

WHERE LATE THE SWEET BIRDS SANG by Kate Wilhelm (Harper and Row, New York; 1978; Pp. 320)

Reviewed by Cy Chavira

Part One of this novel appeared in *Orbit 14*. It is about the founding of a clone society as disaster strikes the world - social services break down, epidemic diseases run rampant, most people and animals become sterile. A large wealthy family (the Summers) build an experimental hospital in a valley, and begin cloning both animals and people. The clones think differently from the Elders (as they start to call themselves), and a wide gulf develops between the two.

Wilhelm uses a postulate similar to the one Le Guin used in "Nine Lives" the clones are exceptionally close to one another, and there is such a close empathic link between the members of a clone group that it seems they are almost telepathic. There is none of the essential "loneliness" that humans so often experience; the clones have one another, they are promiscuous, and have group sex.

The three sections of the novel chronicle the conflict between individual human beings and the clones. In the first section (when the clone society is just being established), the conflict is between the survivors and the new clones. In the second, between a clone (Molly) who is sent out as one of the first expeditions into the post-disaster wilderness, and returns with strange

visions filling her head. She has need to be alone, to paint and draw and give her visions artistic form. She is exiled for her oddity to an old farmhouse, and bears a baby boy there in secret. Mark, as he is called, inherits his mother's artistic bent, and since he is not cloned develops unique characteristics that set him apart from (and in conflict with) the close community. His mother is put in the breeder's compound, along with the other fertile females, but she escapes into the wilderness.

The novel does seem rather didactic: the clones are never presented in a sympathetic light, and yet certain of the qualities Wilhelm describes as being characteristic of the society (close, intimate contact, strong empathy for one another), are good qualities, ones that could be to the benefit of most individuals in Western society. The very stark, black and white conflict Wilhelm paints seems simplistic; it is too much a case of "good guys" vs. the "bad guys", rather than an inevitable conflict between radically different approaches and philosophies of life. The story would be more moving if we could identify with both (though, truthfully, Wilhelm does describe a couple of clone administrators in a favourable light - but those clones are given individualistic human characteristics, and are presented favourably because they sympathise and identify with Mark and Molly, and not because they are happy examples on their own culture/"species").

The novel may also suffer in comparison with others because its background does not seem as original (I keep thinking of Wolfe's *Fifth Head of Cerberus*, which has a three-part structure similar to *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, and the first portion of which also appeared in *Orbit*). It is drawn competently, but is plain, lacks the cultural and anthropological details that give good sf an much of its flavour.

But Wilhelm writes well, and captures the forests and fields where most of the story is set in her prose. It is a good novel, but not an exceptional one; more craft than art, perhaps. But if all of was at least as finely crafted as *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, we'd have great cause to rejoice.

TRITON by Samuel R. Delany (Bantam Books; New York; Feb 1978; 369 pp; \$1.65; ISBN 0-553-02587-195)

Reviewed by David Hingray

This is once again a long book, a complex book, ambiguous in parts but basically less vague than *Dhalgren*. It is an attempt at sf of the *Nova* variety; far less inaccessible and far more ingenious thematically than his last novel. In *Dhalgren* Delany explored the brief aphorism "You have confused the true and the real", and did so in some detail. Likewise in *Triton*; which is an attempt to illustrate the Mary Douglas quotation (used at the very beginning of the book): "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived..." And, once again, this is an exhaustive elucidation.

The blurb on the back reads: "Interplanetary war. Capture and escape. Diplomatic intrigue that topples worlds..." which is not what *Triton* is about. No, not one bit! "The social body constrains..." *Triton* depicts a future society where the economic division of people no longer exists (or exists at a low key) and where the demarcation is exerted on a sexual basis. Which is not to say that this is a sexist novel, for it is not. But most of the many pages in the book are preoccupied with sex; sex being in Delany's envisioned heterotopia the motivating social force, such as money is within our present system. It is an artificial sexual utopia contained within an artificial city; the city Tethys, pinned to Neptune's moon, Triton, by Man's technological wonders. Each environment spawns its own society, and in this respect Delany's creation of a sexuality-motivated society is perfect.

Upon Tellico both marriage and prostitution are illegal. However, it is free house to any other form of relationship. The city is divided into co-operatives which can be straight, gay male, gay female, communalist (of the family sort) or even of a sexually-maintained nature. Each co-operative is contained within one building, and movement between them by individuals in search of a more or less extreme lifestyle is quite common. I say the book is not sexist, and it is not, but the central character of the novel, Bron Sulstrom, is a misogynist of the old order; a chauvinist in an age where it is no longer possible (socially) to be such, and in a society where it is totally unacceptable. His love affair with "the Spike" (a street-theatre director/player) is a very astute portrayal of misunderstanding between people, particularly on the part of Bron whose "deviation" prevents him from ever realising what he is. His self-delusion becomes more and more apparent throughout the book until it surfaces as lies. At one stage he states: "They don't understand about men... I mean ordinary, heterosexual men," (which bears comparison with what D.H. Lawrence said in *Lawrence*). In *Low* through his character Birkin about a separate understanding between men). And eventually his solution is to become female (totally female, physically and in mental inclination). This in itself is nothing unusual in the age have described, but it is his reason for doing so that is. He changes sex to avoid women; so that he need only be concerned with men. He is described as a "logical sadist" and certainly his actions bear this out. He is charming, handsome, sexually gifted (after to adolescence spent as a male-prostitute on Mars) but none of these attributes can compensate for his lack of understanding of other people. He is selfish, destructive and possesses the empathy of an 18th century slave-trader. Even his inherent intelligence does not remove the cloud that surrounds his introspective thoughts; he cannot accept self-blame and unconsciously twists events and reinterprets them so that they are sympathetic to him. In Bron, Delany has created his first genuine unsympathetic character, and in many ways - because he is antagonistic rather than protagonistic - his most real one.

Because of the sexual element involved, Delany also wanders into frequent discussions about "types", and concludes that "everyone is a type". The wide variety of sexual tastes results in an equally bizarre number of "types". But despite this regular discourse amongst his characters, they do not fall foul of becoming caricatures. Unlike most of novelists, Delany's lesser "players" have an inner-ambiguity that gives them individual life. The, and the things they do, are not easily predicted or predictable. That, perhaps, was a fault of *Thalgrin*; that his types were "types".

Another reviewer said of *Thalgrin*: "And its content does not justify its length". He could, perhaps, say the same of this book and miss the point entirely. Delany is writing about people and their interaction in certain social climates and perhaps because of this the element comes off second-best. But perhaps that isn't in itself a bad thing! So why write it at all? Delany gives the reasons for better than I could in Appendix A of this new novel (where he follows the idea laid down in *The Hinge* of printing excerpts from his writers notes).

"I feel the science-fictional-enterprise is richer than the enterprise of mundane fiction. It is richer through its extended repertoires of sentence, its consequent greater range of possible incident, and through its more varied field of rhetorical and syntactic organisation."

Richer? How much richer? From *Thalgrin* I remember the images of the double moon, the receding/approaching river, the scorpions ablaze in the darkness, the gaping lift-shafts. From *Tellico* (close as it is now) I recall in that same clarity the miniature war-game, Vlet, the Suen's Craw, the sensory shield (equivocal with Neptune's bulk). Delany handles images as well as any writer of SF. And more important than that is his usage of the "extended repertoire of metaphor". Delany avoids the clichés of the genre and is unafraid to

experient with words (which to me was an important aspect of *Dhalgren*). If anything can be criticized it is his creation of a hermetic universe in which all the characters are either poets or mathematicians; where the central character wears sandals and sleeps with either sex... a world of wall-dragons and curious acts, obscure mathematical systems and four-armed boys.

Progressing through the book systematically it must be said that the opening section is clumsy. Our introduction to the society of Triloo is through the eyes of the misadjusted Bron. We are offered facts as if from a text book and the contrived nature of these early pages is paralleled in the prose:

"...seized her blue-nailed hand in his blue-nailed hand, grinned (bluey) at her..."

which would not be tolerated from a beginner. But this is a small flaw. What it lacks the smooth literary style of *Moby* and the early poetical flow of *The Jewels of Apor*, the gritty, ultra-perceptive mode of language used here (as in *Dhalgren*) is attractive, and the detail achieved through the use of this style more than compensates for the occasional banality:

"...entered a wooden door (in a white plaster wall) with painted green flowers on it, and real blue flowers growing beside it in a wooden box."

Which could have been said in twenty less words. But the additional wordage gives visual perceptiveness to the scene and adds another brick to Delany's house of sub-reality. Delany writes what is basically fantasy; the science in his stories is so much fairy-dust. (For example, his seven-page explanation of "metalogica" in *Triloo*.) But unlike the admitted fantasy writer, Delany uses a harshly realistic style and imbues his characters with introspective and observant traits that most writers of "mundane fiction" would not give their creations. It is a strange amalgamation that only works because Delany can use words properly to convey both image and thought.

As in *Dhalgren*, Delany splits his book into seven sections (excluding, in this case, the two appendices, of which I shall say more later), and each section encompasses a separate stage in the development of Bron. In the first two sections our sympathies are with Bron; we accept his view of people and places. From the middle of the third section it is apparent that Bron's interpretation is confined, mainly from the observations of the minor characters, and in the next two sections Bron becomes an unsympathetic creature as the self-centered nature of his observations is made clear. This process necessitates a complete re-evaluation by the reader of every other character, and it is this gradual operation that makes this Delany's finest work yet. As in life, Delany's "layers" change quite radically; not from what they do, but in the sense that the information we possess regarding them is, to use, them, and as this information becomes more complete our view can metamorphose drastically.

The last two sections of the book continue the logical progression, and when he says of the Spiks: "Really, a logically consistent position is just beyond her", his comment is double-edged and applies more to himself than it does to the woman he loves. Here, the war (between the planets and the moons) impinges directly upon his life, and for a brief while it seems that the apocalyptic events of that war could jolt him into self-awareness, (i.e. the deaths of 88% of Earth's population and the loss of his "friend", Alfred). But the opposite occurs and he obdurate his sex because he believes it to be the only way out of the dilemma of constant misunderstanding. And finds himself in danger! The last section shows Bron, the woman, unable to formulate any kind of relationship, mental or sexual, the climax of which comes in a dream where she wants Bron, the man:

"I shall destroy you!" She clawed at his gold brow, hissing: "I shall destroy you, destroy you, destroy you, do you hear!"

And the realization, when it comes, is of the nature of the society in which he/she lives; that the "subjective was held politically inviolable; and hadn't they just killed three out of four, five out of six, to keep it so - ?" It is a chilling finale which leaves the pathetic Iron gone alone, more confused and much more aware of his true nature than ever before.

Many readers will shun this novel, disillusioned by the excesses of *Chalgren*. *Triton* contains the best elements of that book whilst concerning itself with a far greater scope of human experience. It is well written and well developed (and even the first section improves on re-reading). Now important is that it marks a new stage for Delany, possessing a maturity not evident in any of his earlier works. Superficially, the book seems a derivative of all his previous novels, and though it is true that he uses recurrent imagery and symbolism in all his work, that is no fault. The same could be said of Ballard, Dick, Le Guin and Herbert. *Triton* is no important because Delany at least has harnessed his quite considerable talent in a novel that is controlled without being contrived. It isn't perfect and probably will not appeal to the reader whose ideal of a novel is one in which adventure and scientific ideas sweep the monstrous characters (like Larry Niven, Isaac Asimov school of SF). What is - and in this respect it is akin to Silverberg's *Dying Inside*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Ballard's *Crash* - is a serious literary exploration of a basic human dilemma. What, serious literature calling itself SF? I can hear the objections now. I have already quoted Delany on the subject and can only reiterate his comments. The two appendices to *Triton*, one a discourse upon SF writing and the other upon our perception of literary "models" should be read by anyone who is uncertain as to where SF is heading. Delany compares SF to abstract painting and atonal music, spheres of activity where the idea and the image coincide; if only for his comments on this aspect of the genre this book should be looked at by anyone who sees SF as more than an escapist amusement.

I do not wish to join the current disputation between academe and fandom as to whether SF can or should seek to become accepted for its literary merit. To me that problem was solved long ago, and *Triton* is but one more reaffirmation of my feelings on the matter. SF is a richer field than that of sundry literature. And *Triton* is another example of the genre's consistent openness. But what *Triton* also evidences is that SF has the inherent capability of becoming a far deeper realm of fiction at the same time. It is my opinion that standards are higher within the field than without. *Triton* proves it.

TOWER OF GLASS by Robert Silverberg (Panther, London; 1975; 206 pp; 60p; ISBN 0-596-04301-2)

Reviewed by David Mingrove

Any book by Robert Silverberg is guaranteed to attract attention, for as much as anyone within the genre he is the writer of the moment. *Tower of Glass*, finally released over her in paperback format after a six-year delay, does much to back the claim by many that Silverberg's work is not generic, and yet at the same time such a book could not have been written outside the genre.

The dominant theme of the book is what Brian Aldiss termed "the submerged belated theme". Simon Krug has created a race of androids, the best of which are superior to Man in every respect but for the fact that they cannot procreate. They are manufactured in chemical vats, trained as machines and then sold to commercial concerns as slaves, possessing no human rights. This is the foundation upon which Silverberg builds a tale of the androids' struggle for equality with Man.

The majority of the androids have formed a religious sect in which Krug is their deity, seeing their slavery as a "time of testing" before Krug deems them worthy and allows them equality. A smaller but more vehement section of the android community believe in political agitation and the slow legal progression towards equality. The questions of "property or brother" and "thing or being" are examined at several levels and through many eyes; sympathetic and hostile.

Subsidiary to this (although a grand enough idea in itself to be the subject of a separate novel) is Krug's obsession with the construction of a "tower of glass", a 1500 metre tall communications spire with which to answer the pulse that originates 300 light-years from Earth. The construction of the tower and its symbolic and actual fall (coincidental with the essence of humanity as the androids claim their denied birth-right) runs through the novel like a spinal column, linking together the various strands.

As in all his recent works, Silverberg refuses to "cop-out" with the ending: there are no easy solutions or happy endings and the stunning climax is powerful because of this realism. The characters are not prone to changing their habits over night but remain utterly faithful to their beliefs and codes of behaviour to the end (even if disillusioned). This is often the weakness of a literary writer but it is a fault no one could direct against Silverberg here.

Even apart from the above, though, there are many other factors which recommend themselves. At first I was slightly dismayed by the technicality of the early chapters but soon the strong characterisation more than counterbalanced this aspect of the work. The whole work is more akin to traditional "bard" of than any of Silverberg's recent books and contains a great deal of interesting technical explanations: tower-construction; android-creating; tachyon-beam transmission; interstellar star-flight; transgates; shunting. The book is over-brimming with ideas and the last-mentioned, shunting, deserves special mention because it is a "machine" forerunner to the mind-expanding drug used as a "catalyst" in his *A Time of Changes*, a device that opens one's "ego" or "soul" to the other participants in the shunt.

One unfortunate aspect that struck me and which will quite probably occur to anyone who has read Huxley's *Brave New World* is the similarity between Silverberg's androids and Huxley's "bokononvskified" men, and my objections were only calmed by Silverberg's careful manipulation of the inner psychological turmoil of his androids which made them fuller, deeper creations than Huxley's satirised hedonists.

The major strength of this book is, however, that of any memorable work of literature (and is comparable to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in this respect) in that it can be read on several levels: as a straight-forward adventure tale of revolution and thwarted ambition; as a "bard" of story packed with captivating ideas; or lastly, as a psychological study of the concepts of "humanity", "religion" and "property". Read it on all three and the full richness of the work is immediately apparent. I have read recent works of Silverberg's which have moved me more but none so entertaining, tense, masterful or well-written and constructed.

"AAA AAG AAC AAD"

Praise be to Silverberg ..

BORN WITH THE DEAD by Robert Silverberg (Vintage Books; New York; 1975; 257 pp; \$1.25 (available on import, £1.00); ISBN 0-384-31447-4)

Reviewed by Chris Evans

Subtitled "Three Novellas about the Spirit of Man", the stories within span the period 1971 to 1974 - vintage Silverberg indeed.

What can I say? I found this book so vivid, so haunting that I'm sorely tempted to blubber incoherently in admiration for the remainder of the review. Reading these stories you become aware that if Silverberg stops writing, then at will lose one of its finest stylists, one of the few authors who is capable of tackling themes with intelligence and realism. Silverberg's major gift is that he can take ideas which we had assumed were exhausted or clichéd and breathe fresh life into them, giving us, as readers, new insights and perspectives. The phrase "breathe fresh life" is oddly appropriate in this context, for two of the three novellas in this book are about death.

"Born with the Dead", the first, describes a society in which a method of reanimating the dead has been developed. The "deads" live in their own communities, having little contact with the ordinary world of the "norms" and winning a complete disinterest in its affairs. Jorge Klein pursues his resurrected wife Sybille obsessively, unable to accept that in her rekindled existence she has no interest in him. He follows her to the Cold Towns where the deads congregates, to Africa where she and her companions are on safari, slaying dinosaurs, moas and quaggas - the dead hunting the dead. Sybille repeatedly spurns him, as a norm he cannot share her world. Klein is finally released from his quest by death - he is killed and rekindled.

Klein's fate serves not only as the logical outcome of the plot thrust but also as a clever ironic twist. The deads are perfectly adapted to the real world, whereas Jorge, lacking Sybille's love, is hardly alive at all - his unrequited love is his sole preoccupation. The irony is manifest in the final scene when the rekindled Jorge, accepted at last by Sybille, finds that he has lost all desire for her.

"Thomas the Proclaimer" tackles a particular religious question which could only be examined through the medium of science fiction: what would happen if we received a sign from God? Thomas, a long-haired, wine-sipping Apostle of Peace, who for, and is granted, a miracle: the sun stops in the sky for twenty-four hours. However, his success in eliciting a response from the heavens does not unite the people under a common faith. Various sects quickly coalesce: the Discerners, an intellectual, secular group founded by scientists, the Avengers, who anticipate a second sign which will reveal whether the first was celestial or satanic in origin, the Propititors, who believe that the miracle was the work of the Devil. The sign that Thomas had hoped would bring spiritual unity to mankind has the opposite effect, and his crusade degenerates into interdenominational strife.

Some of the parallels in this story are too apparent to labour - for example the ultimate betrayal of Thomas by his patron, Saul. Thomas is in many ways detached from the gospel which he so eloquently espouses. Like Christ he employs his oratory gifts to attempt to impose some order on the arbitrariness of life, but unlike Christ he lacks any real philosophy, simply exhorting the people to "have faith and all will be well". I found this story the least interesting of the three (the rogado prophet being rather too familiar a figure in fiction), but it is probably the most ambitious. Told from several viewpoints, Silverberg makes us aware of the unresolving nature of religious mania and its connections with violence. That so many different sects could evolve from such a broad base is not surprising given the history of Christianity. The author's point seems to be the religious conviction is ultimately a matter of personal psychology.

With "Going", the last of the three novellas, we return to the question of death. Assuming that the human lifespan could be considerably extended, at what point would we decide that we had achieved all our ambitions and it was now time we voluntarily passed on? The gut reaction is to say: never, I'd live on whatever the cost. But Silverberg takes you into the mind of Henry Staut, a sensitive composer, and shows you exactly what it would be like to be a hundred and thirty-six years old. Staut has a backlog of memories, a moderately successful

career as a composer; a happy marriage; several generations of descendants, and a house full of fine ornaments collected over the years from every part of the world. However, his wife has been dead for fifty years and is accessible to him only via a portrait cube; his sons and grandsons have their own families and are independent of him; the ornaments he has come to see merely as abstract pieces, their symbolic and emotional value long gone. He is, in short, lonely and bored, and he applies to the House of Leavetaking to prepare for his death.

Despite its sombre theme, "Going" succeeds because Silverberg is really writing about life rather than death. Stout is not a sad figure, merely a man eroded by time. Following his decision to "go" he experiences pangs of doubt, hesitates, regains his resolve and finally exits with memorable dignity.

The main difference between Silverberg's output during the fifties and sixties and his more recent work lies not so much in a profound change in style (though it's obvious that he now lavishes more time over his work) but rather in a shift of emphasis. Ideas in SF, as Jerome Kuzar has astutely pointed out (see "The Bearing out of Genre Materials" in Vector 52), often evolve through three distinct stages. In the primitive stage the novelty of an idea is often sufficient in itself to create interest. In stage two the idea is developed, expanded upon, and various conventions may arise governing its treatment. In stage three the concept may be relegated to the background of a story, serving as a metaphorical device or a traditional prop without being the central point of interest. It is clear that most of the fiction that Silverberg is now producing lies in the third category. He is no longer interested in the technical details of the SF elements in his stories. Thus the method of resuscitating the dead in the title story and the precise nature of the electric io "Thomas the Proclaimer" are never explained - Silverberg's attention is focused firmly on his characters. The density and clarity of his prose are a joy to read, and his deep knowledge of history brings his often exotic locations fully alive. This book confirms his position as a major writer of the seventies - in any field. Go out and buy it. Read and enjoy.

PERIOD CHARM: -

THE SPACE MACHINE by Christopher Priest (Faber & Faber; London; 1976; £3.50; 363 pp; ISBN 0-371-10931-4)

Reviewed by David Fringle

It has been remarked often enough that the 1970s is a decade of nostalgia in the popular arts. There have been "rediscoveries" of the music of Scott Joplin, Glenn Miller, the Beatles; minor cults devoted to the 30s and 40s movies of such directors as Raoul Walsh and Howard Hawks; the box-office success of the musical compilation *That's Entertainment!*; periodic rock'n'roll revivals; the re-creation of the songs of Jimmie Rodgers by the contemporary country-and-western singer Merle Haggard; a growing minority devotion to the blues roots of all modern popular music; intellectual pastiches of 1930s detective novels, such as Kingsley Amis' *The Riverside Villa Murder* or John Sladek's *Black Arm*; a multitude of films set in the earlier decades of this century (and full of conscious references to the work of older film-makers) such as Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* or Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, other examples too numerous to mention. There is definitely something going on here, some retrograde motion of the zeitgeist, but is nostalgia an adequate word to deal with the phenomenon? For one thing, many of the people who appreciate these trends were not even born when the various styles first enjoyed a vogue (I spent a most pleasurable week in the summer of 1971 watching the films of Mary Pickford during the Brighton Film Theatre's short season of her work: most of them were films made a good thirty years before my birth). Can one be nostalgic for a world one has never known? Perhaps it is

got so much a matter of true nostalgia as of traditional escapism: the happy flight into a simpler world where the values are certain and where contemporary reality (at worst painful, at best confusing) cannot intrude.

There is more to it than that, I'm convinced. After all, we have just come through some 70 or 80 years of the most extraordinary fecundity in the popular arts. The richness and variety of what has been created in this relatively narrow of high population, near-universal literacy and rapid communications seems quite remarkable if one pauses to look back on it. And pausing to look back is, in effect, what many of us have been doing in the last few years. It is not so much a wallowing in nostalgia (although it can be that at times) as a rediscovery of roots. More than that: it is an appreciation of what has always been there, but which we have not had the eyes to see, a realisation of the value and interest of much that our parents and teachers (with our uncomfortable acquiescence) condemned as trashy, ephemeral and in bad taste. However, this is not to say that the heritage of our century's popular arts should be uncritically accepted: there are definite distinctions to be drawn. (In brief, there are tensions running throughout the popular arts - the tension between authentic "folk" expression and commercial exploitation, for instance, or the tension between the individual imagination and collective fantasies - and it is from the interplay of these tensions that much of the best work has been generated.) It is, in fact, the uncritical acceptance of much popular art simply because it is old that has given the current backwards-looking mood a bad name, and which provokes the use of words like "nostalgia" and "escapism".

The rediscovery of roots has been going on apace in the field of science fiction, too. Admittedly, this has always been a tradition-conscious genre, but in recent years the tendency of its authors to re-examine the genre's origins and its various phases of development has increased markedly. There have been about a dozen histories of sf, and scores of anthologies of early stories, published within the last decade (and as I type this I have just heard the news that a set of *Asiomatic Stories* dating from the 1930s has been auctioned at Sotheby's for upwards of \$300). Old novels have been reissued and have enjoyed a surprising new popularity: the space extravaganzas of E. E. "Doc" Smith are no obvious example. Against this background, writers like Michael Moorcock (with his Captain Rastable novels, *The Warlord of the Air* and *The Lord Leviathan* and his Jhaerek Carnellian books, *An Alien Heat* and *The Hollow Lands*) and Brian Aldiss (with his *Frankenstein Unbound* and an announced, but as yet unpublished, sequel to Wells' called *Morau's Other Island*) have been turning to the past, and particularly to science fiction's past, for their inspiration. Philip Jose Farmer (the American Moorcock - or should we call Moorcock the English Farmer?) has given us a sequel to Jules Verne in *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg*, and he has repeatedly done versions of the Tarzan and Doc Savage stories. Harry Harrison has written a spoof scientific romance (*A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*) and a space opera (*Star-Smashers of the Galaxy-Rangers*) and the other Harrison, M. John, has performed a similar exercise (more successfully, I feel) with his *The Centauri Device*. What all these works have in common is that they rely heavily on literary references for their major effects: earlier writers (Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells) even crop up as characters. They are, if you like, all examples of ingrown science fiction.

Which brings me at length to Christopher Priest's new novel, *The Space Machine* (subtitled, predictably enough, "A Scientific Romance"), a work of ingenuity as it ever there was one. The plot involves one Edward Turnbull, a conventional lower-middle class young man of the year 1863, and his meeting with Miss Amelia Fitzgibbon, an independent-minded young lady who works as "amanuensis" to a crackpot inventor. Sir William Reynold is not as much of a crackpot as he at first appears to be, since he has built a workable time machine (indeed, in the end he turns out to be M.G. Wells's anonymous time-traveller). Sir William's machine moves through space as well as time, and when Edward and Amelia (in the inventor's absence) decide to go for a joy-ride they find themselves stranded some ten years in the future and on the planet Mars. Approximately two-thirds of

the novel is taken up with their adventures on Mars, where they discover a society that is deeply divided. The common Martian folk are close enough to human beings in appearance, but their overlords, the artificially-"evolved" Martians, are tentacled monsters. The latter are planning to invade earth by travelling across space in projectiles fired from an enormous cannon... In short, the War of the Worlds is about to begin, and Edward and Amelia are faced with the double problem of finding a means of returning to earth and of foiling the Martian invaders.

That the plot of *The Space Machine* is basically an elaboration on the plots of two of H.G. Wells's major works is surely obvious, and it must be added that the whole thing is ingeniously done. Dates, events and characters are all carefully slotted into place, so as to do no violence to the "truth" of the Wellsian canon; on one, if one wishes, conceive of the story as taking place in an alternate universe, where the events that Wells imagined in these two books actually did occur (and where Mars is an anachronistic shade of intelligent life, complete with breathable atmosphere, canals and red sand). Christopher Priest's new work is an entertainment, then a *jeu d'esprit* - scarcely a 'serious' novel to the vein of *Fugue for a Darkening Island* or *Inverted World*, but an ingenious exercise in recreating the flavour of late-Victorian scientific romance. Much of the book is comic in tone (there are some amusing, if rather predictable, digs at the characters' sexual inhibitions) and the whole story is handled with a pleasing lightness of touch. For once, Priest's somewhat stiff and remote prose style seems apt (although I wouldn't say that it amounts to a good pastiche of Wells's prose style - if, indeed, that is what the Author is trying to do).

But is it all to some purpose? Is Priest telling us anything about Wells, or about life, or about science fiction, that we didn't know before? Or is he just using the Wellsian trappings to produce a comparatively easy effect - namely, the effect - newly, the effect of "period charm"? I find this thought disturbing, for it suggests that many people nowadays read Wells for his period charm rather than for his real qualities as a writer. (Conan Doyle is certainly read in this way: the period atmosphere of the Sherlock Holmes stories is their major source of appeal, as is testified by the recent spate of Holmes pastiches, where the emphasis is placed heavily on basement cabs and London fogs). But it seems to me that the main point of *The War of the Worlds* is that it is a frightening and admonitory tale - recall, for example, Wells's brilliant description of the panicking London mobs, full of authentic feeling of 20th century nightmare which he also caught very well ten years later in *The War in the Air*. There is nothing frightening or admonitory about *The Space Machine*, however, even though it ostensibly deals with the same events. Karl Marx once said that when historical events appear to repeat themselves they are always replayed as comedy. Something similar seems to be true for literary "events": Wells's tragedy becomes Priest's comedy, and although I don't believe that comedy is inherently a lower thing than tragedy, I can't help suspecting that Priest is cheapening Wells.

But it may be that Christopher Priest is not really to blame, and that the time machine and the war of the worlds, like Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan, have become so familiar and accessible a part of the literary mythology of our times that they are fair game for anyone wishing to concoct a whimsical entertainment. Literature feeds on itself - this is true for all languages at all times, even though some schools, such as Naturalism, have tried to pretend that it is not so (if you want to find out more about this, read Northrop Frye's excellent new book: *The Secular Scripture: a Study of the Structure of Romance*, Harvard UP, 1976). Science fiction, however much it has drawn its inspiration from extra-literary sources - science, technology, the future - is no exception to this rule. Books like Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* and Priest's *The Space Machine* are tributes to this fact, and seem almost to be the products of a desire to turn the sf tradition into a closed circle, like a snake swallowing its own tail. Is this unhealthy? Insofar as it's a natural, if unrecognised, attribute of all literature, no, but insofar as it leads to the abandonment of all new ideas, yes. It cannot afford to become

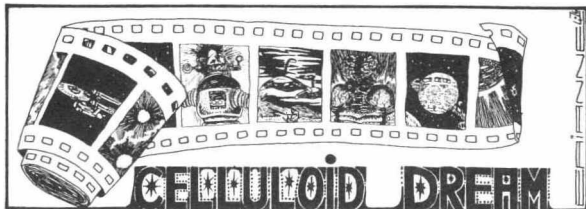
too literary, or it will cease to be what it has been, at its best, in the past. I.e. a form of literature which takes cognizance of those massive "facts" of modern life, the aforementioned science, technology and the future. In short, I have enjoyed looking backward with Messrs Aldiss, Priest, Farmer, Moorcock et al, but I think it may be time to reassume the journey once more.

THE THIRD INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION by G. Harry Stine (Putnam; New York; 1975; 192 pp \$7.95)

Reviewed by David Pringle

This is not a work of fiction, but it is a remarkable book which should be of great interest to all readers (and writers) of SF. G. Harry Stine, a long time member of Campbell's *Analog* stable of "science fact" writers, gives us here the first reasoned and sustained argument for the economic necessity of man's going into space. Due to lack of gravity, the presence of vacuum and extreme temperature ranges, among other factors, space is an ideal industrial environment, Stine tells us. Not only that, but energy (from the sun) and raw materials (from the moon, the asteroids and elsewhere) are available in abundance. At the same time, we know that industrial resources are dwindling on this planet and that modern processes pose an ever greater pollution problem, while the continuing population growth makes it necessary that we expand production. Therefore, why not move all heavy industry into space, and eventually return the earth to an Edenic state? It can be done, Stine argues, and it will be done, beginning with the first flights of the Space Shuttle in 1980 or thereabouts. It will be possible to manufacture materials in space which simply cannot be made under terrestrial conditions, and the costs of transporting them to the surface will be low, since they simply have to fall down the gravity well and arrive by parachute "from the sky like Biblical manna". Fantastic? Yes, but Stine's reasoning is very convincing.

If writers have shown a gross failure of imagination when it comes to the possibilities of space manufacture and its likely repercussions on the life-style of all of us, history has an economic motor, as Marx told us long ago, and while Harry Stine is no Marx (the introduction to the book is written by Barry Goldwater, no less - but don't let that put you off) he appreciates the importance of this three-quarters truth. Pace Arthur C. Clarke and his spiritual brethren, man will not go into space unless he has a sound economic incentive to do so, and such an incentive is fast becoming apparent. Far from being a part of the problem, as some misguided environmentalists seem to think, space travel could well turn out to be the major solution to mankind's present "megacrisis". Despite Stine's advocacy of a rapacious free enterprise, and the occasional criticism of his style, I strongly recommend this book to everybody who has the slightest interest in the future and the question of mankind's survival. Stine does not have all the answers, but at least he re-opens a debate which has been in danger of going motionless due to the refusal of the heat minds to even think about it. We need philosophers for the space age, and we need them fast!



TOMMY (directed by Ken Russell) (Colour, Quadraphonic Sound; 111 mins)

Reviewed by Steve Diver

The rock opera *Tommy* was written by Pete Townshend in 1966. It achieved critical acclaim in music circles, made a lot of money for the Who (it is now available in three different versions) and it became a staple feature of their stage act to perform parts of it. The fact that it had to wait until 1975 to be filmed has not diminished its moral impact because the music has become a modern classic and the new arrangements for the voices used in the film are totally successful. The tremendous visual impact of the film, which makes it considerably more than a mere celluloid version of the record, is of course due to its director and writer Ken Russell. He was the Who's first choice and they had to wait until he was available; hence the delay. No one else could have done justice to it.

The plot of *Tommy*, to which Russell's treatment in essence adheres, should be familiar to most people by now. It is a simple science-fiction story about a child who is struck deaf, dumb and blind by the trauma of witnessing the murder of his father, missing and presumed dead in the war, by his mother and step-father. His childhood and adolescence consist variously of being fiddled about with by Drig Doke Keste, bullied and trembled by Cousin Kevin and subjected to non-radical ballistocardiographic therapy by the Acid Queen. To all of this he is virtually a passive spectator until he begins to relate to the world by means of a pin-ball table. He becomes so adept at this hugely popular spectator-sport that he defeats the champions and becomes an anonymous youth-cult figurehead. His nadirings, which are diagnosed as psychosomatic, are miraculously cured when his mother sneezes a mirror into which he has endlessly gazed. From this point the story picks up one of the themes of Peter Watkins' *Primitives* (GB 1966). His messianic appeal to the legions of fanatic devotees is disappalled and exploited for commercial ends by his relatives until the messianic realises their plight and destroy their oppressors. Tommy himself survives, and rid of the grasping influences over him is finally able to experience liberation and enlightenment.

Russell's use of images in this film, rather more than in his other work, constitutes a visual experience matching in intensity the strength of the music. It produces total involvement with the action which is no mean feat for a film with no spoken dialogue whatsoever. (Have any other All-musical science-fiction films been attempted?) After the music and imagery the main strength of the film lies in the inspired casting. Obviously only Roger Daltrey could play Tommy as he's been rehearsing for it on stage ever since the record came out. Ann-Margret as his mother is brilliant. Nominated for an Oscar (which she must have won had not one of the all too rare great films turned up in the same year and justifiably swept the board), she covered the whole acting range from devotion through desperation to hysteria; and the "avalanche of naked breasts" sequence, which apparently took three days to shoot, must have been one of the most unpleasant selling experiences of anyone's career. Tommy's step-father was well played by

Oliver Reed. Whilst not usually famous for his ringing voice, he manages very convincingly as the extrovert sinister/comical "heavy" of very average intelligence that he has done so well before. All the other appearances are consistently superb cameo by well-known faces. Keith Moon as the totally believable Uncle Ernie is a joy to behold. Tina Turner injects far more than acid into her role as the Acid Queen, giving a new dimension to the familiar who number. Elton John as the pin-ball wizard, Paul Nicholas as Cousin Kevin, and Jack Nicholson as the suave seducer in the role of the Specialist all added substantially to the film's structure.

The theory that rock music can save the world, which was found to be worthless by the beginning of the seventies, has been used to level at Russell the accusation of anachronism. This is despite the superb sequence where child Tommy is taken to a faith healing establishment founded on the Power of Rock Music, the high priest of which is played by Eric Clapton - one of the cleverest pieces of casting in the film. The mother-fetish focus of this cult is an enormous plastic-looking statue of Marilyn Monroe in the famous pose of having her shirt blown by a gust of wind. Whilst Tommy not surprisingly is failing to be cured, he knocks over the statue which shatters along with the spurious faith which created it. Russell's image of a plastic Marilyn Monroe is an especially nice touch in that it comes from one who, almost alone in this country's cinema, has opposed the infamous fabrication, by the American film industry, of a product that is carefully market-researched, manufactured and packaged for the sole end of maximizing world-wide profits, but which has essentially less content than the legally required minimum of vitamins in a packet of corn-flakes. Russell's views on this subject have provoked hostile reaction from many quarters, not least from a reviewer on a London evening paper who is well known for his hooks on the American industry. Their actual animosity over earlier films has led to two staged TV confrontations coming near to blows and ending with Russell using language described as "offensive to many viewers". Although Russell's innate ability to provoke hostile responses from those reviewers unsympathetic to his work has given him a bad press for many of his films and despite the fact that for the initial press showing of this film the volume of sound in the cinema was inadvertently set too high, this film has deservedly received consistently good reviews from most of the respected critics. Amongst these was the award of best British film of 1978 from the highly authoritative *Film and Filming*. I urge you, when seeing this film, to select, if possible, a cinema with a reputable sound system so as to provide yourself with a treat for both ear and eye.

THE PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh, 20/3/1978

A superb film: a mixing of the rock rip-off industry and fantasy. I'm not certain which comes off on top, but the collaboration can only be mutually beneficial. Who would have thought, for instance, that the Faust theme could be revitalised? But that is what, among many things, this film does.

An impresario, Swan, controls the rock (music) industry. He plans to open a new, sensational night-spot, the Paradise, but has no suitable music to use. While watching over a performance of his latest (literal) creation - The Juicy Fruits - a band formed to promote/generate a "nostalgia cult" - Swan hears an unknown pianist play an unknown song. There is an attraction; Swan must use the music of Winslow Leach. Swan's assistant - fat Freddie - talks to Leach and is told that the composer has completed a *sonata* - based upon the story of Faust - which he would like to perform. Freddie is unimpressed, but nevertheless lights Leach of a few written songs; lights so that Swan might know what Leach can do. The naive composer believes that he has impressed upon Freddie

the fact that Leech will only allow himself to sing the songs. Then there is silence.

Winslow waits for a week or two until deciding to present himself at Swan's "Dearb Records" HQ and asking what Swan thinks. But, from the stark offices, Winslow is evicted. He will not be deterred; he waits for Swan, who, bedecked with a black limousine, rolls serenely home at the end of the day (ah! how nice it must be for a man's day to end) and leads Leech to the country mansion, Swannage. The composer invades the mansion, only to find a row of beautiful girls struggling with a vast staircase to sing one of Leech's most personal songs. Leech aids an aspiring star - Phoenix - with her modulation and is locked upon by scornful faces that say: "If you are the composer of this song why has not Swan invited you in this audition?" Of course, Leech is once more evicted and once more returns - disguised.

Arrest follows a final eviction and a violent assault. Winslow Leech is convicted, for possessing a satchel of drugs planted by two crooked policemen, and is sent to Sing Sing (prison). Therein the singer's teeth are extracted - as an experiment conducted under the auspices of a Swan "charity" - and replaced by a set of metal dentures; his voice is thereby stolen.

But Winslow is still alive and he can hear how Swan is making use of his sonata. When it is announced that The Juicy Fruits will open The Paradise by performing his work, Leech is outraged and escapes from confinement by hiding inside a box emptied of its intended party games. Leech breaks into a warehouse where cartons of Juicy Fruits' discs are stacked and destroys them; by so doing he uncovers a record press and decides to destroy it. But, being apprehended: before he can escape he traps his head between the surfaces of a hot plate and makes an impression of the Fruits' hated rendering of "Faust" on one side of his face. His subsequent flight leaves a trail of blood. Winslow finally falls into a river, and is presumed to be drowned.

The scene is thereby set for a fabulous recreation of "The Phantom of the Opera". Actually, the situation is not so simple; the film does not merely recreate, it re-tells. Winslow Leech - mutilated and voiceless - enters the Paradise and seduces Swan by exploding a bomb among the Juicy Fruits. Swan does not fear the masked Phantom; he rightly remembers Leech sustained by its Fanatic sonata and offers this creature a further stretch of life. Leech insists that Phoenix - no other - sings the songs he no longer can; and Swan agrees. He offers an intricate contract which Leech signs to bind himself to Swan unto death. As a demonstration of his goodwill - and in a scene of poignancy and simultaneous grating horror - Swan returns Leech's voice: the composer is wired into a synthesiser and the impresario expertly recreated a voice which can earn him fortunes yet which he despises.

The Phantom undertakes to, within a week, rewrite his sonata so that Phoenix may perform it. But Swan will not allow the girl's perfect voice to compete with his perfect mastery of the rock business: so he introduces a new star, Beef, and relegates the girl to a subsidiary choral role.

Need one go on? I ought to mention the subtle way in which the imagery familiar to an admirer of sf and fantasy films is used to highlight the machinations of the music industry. (For example: from the seven-together remnants of dismembered teenagers a new sensation - Beef - is born.) I could recite a long list of verbal puns. (A Phoenix from the ashes - of an electrocuted guitarist - newly arisen.) Perhaps I could probe further the heavy use of the legend of Faust and the contemporary arrangements by which life is prolonged, youth is preserved (Swan retains his smooth features by recording his every action on a film, that shows reality, his age.) Or maybe I ought to dwell upon the first deliberate staging of an assassination (will this event not go down well? will audiences, from the myriad comforts of their suburban parlours, not be enthralled?)

(An aside: I have long believed that I saw the sexualisation of JFH live on the Tonight programme of 25th November 1983. Why do I remember this death so vividly?) No. 10. 00.

Oh, I felt that the ending was chaotic. But several themes were being simultaneously resolved: tragically, yet the Paradise's hysterical audience were not concerned, had been so absorbed by the performance of the myth-maker, that fantasy and reality were indistinguishable. Ah! does not a spectacular death give substance to a phantom?

I will remember this film, though I've not mentioned the music, or the photography, or the acting (all superb), or...the strange and frightening mask of Winslow Leach, the Phantom of the Paradise.

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH directed by Nicolas Roeg (1976, USA)

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh, 27/3/1978

The first film is a description of how the American business community reacts to the visit to their great, open, free-enterprise country of a British national who is the possessor of nine basic patents (WOW!). The Briton, a veritable alien by name of Thomas Jerome Newton, rather hastily establishes a giant corporation, World Enterprises, which, though making a great deal of money, has no purpose. The collapse of Capitalism, the envy of Capitalist? No, no. With a perception no doubt heightened by a psychological and physiological dependence on "the greenback", various self-interested economists realize the debilitating effect of an independent concern on the viability and profitability of the tightly-knit incestuously inclined American economy. World Enterprises must, and inevitably does, collapse. The destitute Newton - by now a somewhat resigned alcoholic - is forced to live out the rest of his life in a shabby hotel room. One problem, however: Newton is not a human being; if he does age and move towards death, no human can tell. So David Bowie (but he's not in this film, is he?), thrusting aside leiborg and a glass of neat gin...The Visitor makes a record.

The second film describes the unfruitful journeying to Earth of an alien being. This Creature has left behind a wife and two children on a desolate (apparently uninhabited) parched desert world (sky mysteriously overwhelmed by clouds) to come to the "Planet of Water", but intends to return. The creature's space vehicle descends downward through Earth's atmosphere, landing (with a flash from Planet of the Apes) in a water hole beside an abandoned quarry. The creature - red hair centrally parted, blue/gray eyes mismatched, gait unsteady beneath the Earth's mighty influence - assumes a British nationality and the name of Thomas Jerome Newton. He - the sex-role into which the creature is increasingly forced - is the possessor of nine basic patents (seemingly sprung full-grown from the riven head of Zeus, a figure absent from the film) and quickly has established a giant corporation, World Enterprises. The nature of Newton's products is to him irrelevant; all he desires is the money, a way to finance the construction of a space vehicle which will take him home. But... Newton does not understand Earth and its strange inhabitants; radio and TV uselessness, after all, are not, and are not intended to be, representations of reality, penetrating analyses of human motivation. The chaos, isolated upon, isolation of World Enterprises works against it, exposes it to the ravages of hate. Various balances are toppled, various relationships fall apart. The beleaguered, impoverished, isolated alien is forced to abandon its ambitions, to abandon its loved ones, to abandon its memories of home, to abandon, indeed, its insistence that it is an alien disguised to seem human. At the end of the film, Newton, once an identifiable - and at times frightening - monster, is (has become) a human being. (It is the image, the unfathomable and undimensionable image, of D. Bowie that makes and breaks this

The third film describes how a young man is unable to fuck a young girl. The man is handicapped by not being a human being (and therefore not suitably constructed) and by being married and used to a joyous, peculiar process of intercourse - all liquid, all bouncing dance. The girl is handicapped by inexperience, by fear, by revulsion. The tenuous partnership, haphazardly put together in a small New Mexico hotel, falls apart through lack of the requisite nuts and bolts.

The fourth film is an unshapely, unsatisfying mishmash of ideas and emotions, put together in such a way that their sum seems no more than a promotional short for David Bowie, rock superstar (I'm sure I've read that somewhere). The film opens with the fall to Earth of the alien protagonist, Thomas Jerome Newton, and his initial hesitancy, "his" initial discomfort. Newton could well have come from another world (and this is Bowie acting, not being himself). Throughout the film's first half - during which World Enterprises is established and prospers, and the reclusive Newton befriends the eloc-utted Mary Lou - we are reminded that we are watching an extra-terrestrial being struggling with the strangeness of Earth. We learn why Newton has come to Earth (so that "he" can drink many glasses of water); we also learn that "he" desires to return to "his" wife and children and has formed World Enterprises for this purpose. The most important thing we learn is that Newton's body has been skillfully disguised to look human, to look, moreover, masculine. All is revealed (literally, and startlingly) when Mary Lou begs to be fucked. From then on the film disintegrates.

World Enterprises is skillfully taken apart, offscreen. Newton's pet project - his space vehicle - is dismantled and he is imprisoned. Time passes and the characters age, though Newton's senility is not facially marked, can only be glimpsed in the way that his memory of his home disappears. The film's slow crescendo - to a disappointing climax - demonstrates the irrelevance to the story of the character Nathan Bryce, reveals the continuing youthfulness of Candy Clarke beneath the coarse make-up of an aged Mary Lou and suggests that someone, far less obvious, can do more than obscure the ends of a promising narrative, cannot even grasp the tantalizing threads.

And, in the final frames, from behind the mask of Mr Newton, slides the lurking, ever-present D. Bowie. He bows the film out.

THE BLOB directed by Irvin S. Yeaworth, Jr. (1958, USA)

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh, 15/4/1978

Could you be horribly mutilated by the Blob?

Well, an immediate re-assurance: in the film the carnivorous strawberry jelly (or is it the sharper raspberry?) monster is overcome. Yet it lurks as often do these disgusting facets of human nature (or do I mean nurture?) - waiting for a weak mind and a hateful heart to radiate it and roll it again upon the children of the species. It may momentarily rest solidly amidst the arctic snow, it may in its absence allow amicable community between young and old. But on its inevitable return - banishment, after all, is not extermination - the Blob, unreasonable, shapeless, animosity between "generations", will take many lives and destroy many things.

The film neatly explains the Blob's mysterious origin as extraterrestrial. At first, few of a small town's folk believe the claims of a youthful Slave McQueen that a monster is among them. But McQueen's persistence, and the loyalty of his young friends, finally convinces the town's Lieutenant of Police that a threat does exist and that action against it must be taken. Meanwhile, the monster has grown by devouring several "oldsters" (including a doctor who has described the monster's capacity for total absorption of human tissue) and can no longer hide

beneath bushes. During the finale folk of all ages are threatened; but the Blob is defeated by the observation of a youthful Steve McQueen (why not plug this young actor, tackling his first "sterling" role?). One ought to be apprehensive though (and one might be if the film were more effectively horrific), for the Blob has not been totally destroyed; should circumstances dictate it will again roll among, among the unconvincing "special effects".

The story of the film (a supposition, I will admit) was written by Geo Alec Effinger (and appears as "The Westfield Heights Mall Monster" in the first "Clarion" anthology). The author's purposes - and no doubt his mind was sharpened (and twisted? nay!) by the ingestion, from a crisp cellophane sachet, of a small quantity of cocaine - that the Blob appears one evening in the midst of a sparsely populated shopping precinct. Of course, Effinger allows his monster to surge upon young and old alike and sweep them all greatly away. There can be no resistance to a thing as obnoxious as to cause conflict between parties whose co-operation can only be mutually beneficial.

Perhaps the fiction lacks conviction. "The Westfield Heights Mall Monster" is, after all, a film ground which the story is built: the soft centre, not (be hard shell). The fictional narrator is looking upon a world of horror - which is not his world, is not the "real" world. But this conjecture is disfigured by the ingestion of the cocaine: surely it must be true that the narrator's brain is helplessly addled, his perception consequently impaired? No. The narrator's perception is sharpened: he grasps the connection between his presence in the cinema and the message of the film he sees. The message is relevant to his life; the film is not escapism, is a reflection of the environment in which it was made (and, of course, a reflection of the environment in which it is seen, of the people who see it). When he wrote the story (in 1968?) Effinger was, consciously or unconsciously, writing about the American circumstances of that time. "The Westfield Heights Mall Monster" was shown to be all-consuming because all American citizens were in 1968 touched by some kind of emotional fervour (anti-war, anti-racial, anti-political) and there were sharp divisions between cliques, between parents and their children.

The story would be different if it were to be re-written in 1976. The literary use of cocaine as a means of viewing one world from another (two facets of the same) would be unacceptable. The message, also, of the story would be inappropriate. No one, nowadays, has much time, money or energy to protest greatly about matters other than how much time AND money AND energy one ought to have (deserve). Aren't we all going to give to others so that we, in the short term, may benefit. Enough! This is not an appropriate forum for a discussion of politics. Though, if a formidable case could be made for science fiction as a medium of change.

Perhaps it is a medium for social criticism? *The Blob* would support such an assertion if (and I have no first hand knowledge of this period or place) America in 1958 really would not have treated the presence, and (importantly) the behaviour, of Steve McQueen tolerantly. The film relies for what dramatic tension it has on the disbelief with which an adolescent's report of a murder is greeted. A young person is not a reliable witness, is more likely the prime suspect. Fortunately (and can anyone deny this?) young people in 1958 did not view a parental rebuff as a personal dismissal (cynicism, after all, was not yet fashionable), and their reward for perseverance was, ultimately, worthwhile. (Though in a friendship - with one's parents - worthwhile if one is the sole warrior and the trophy gained is that in future years the monster you fought will return and plague you?) yet it is McQueen who defeats the Blob; his parents - the "old folk" - merely cart the inert jelly away. So, in light of an optimistic (not however conclusive) final scene, *The Blob* is a film about the value of youth to the world. (Strike out world, insert America?) No matter the treatment they receive, clean, soft-drinking (coke-aine? what is that?) American adolescents are reliable, do not think of revenge. *The Blob* is a social

criticism; of is social criticism Q.E.D.

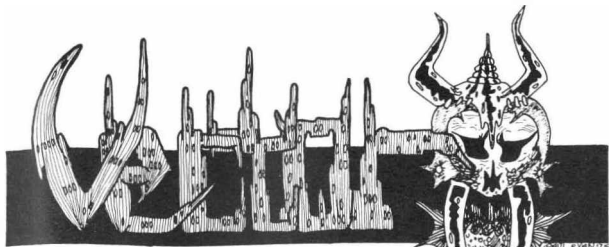
Can things be that simple?

Why, in what way, is *The Blob* social criticism? The film was probably made on a low budget to exploit the popularity of the sf/horror genre. Its subject matter would, consequently, have been the carnivorous Blob, and human reactions to its presence on Earth. The selection of McQuinn as the protagonist (the hero) could have been a deliberate market policy to attract a "young" audience. The film's plot was without thought lifted from any number of other contemporary films. In short, *The Blob* was a casual 1958 product of the commercial film industry. Now, then, can I claim that the film metaphorically examines the "generation gap"?

Where can I look but to the recent upsurge of interest in, and analysis of, sf. Having learnt what a metaphor is, and that several of sf's most persistent images are (actually?) metaphors, one is inclined to boast. One is inclined to be vain, and to exaggerate, and finally to distort truth. To claim that *The Blob* was more than a science fictionally laced horror film would be to overstate its worth. All I can plead is a belief that I would not have understood Effinger's delightful story had I not seen the film. Which, however, is the key to which? (My answer, it would seem from the text of this review, is that Effinger knew what he was writing, that he was employing the metaphor consciously. The film gained "overtones" from the deliberate post-1958 - though when? - merging of sf with non-genre fiction.)



BARRY N'76



WHISPERS FROM THE PAST...BACK NOS. OF VECTOR

75: July, 1976 -- Harlan Ellison interviewed by Chris Fowler; book reviews, including an in-depth look at Again, Dangerous Visions by David Wingrove; cover by Paul Ryan

73/74 March 1976 - J. E. Ballard interviewed by James Goddard and David Pringle; book reviews; cover by Paul Dillon

72 February 1976 - Dan Morgan's Gorb Speech from the Novena; Robert Silverberg interviewed by Malcolm Edwards; book reviews; cover by Brian Lewis

71- December 1976 - The Stone Age and the Mush Ooze by Ursula Le Guin; Towards an Asian Linguistics by Ian Watson; book and film reviews

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69 Summer 1975 - The Science in SF by James Blish; Early One Oxford Morning by Brian Aldiss; The Value of Bad SF by Bob Shaw; Science or Fiction by Tony Rudkavy; film and book reviews

67/68 (the last Malcolm Edwards issue) Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin; Gene Wolfe and Peter Michell; Letter from America by Philip K. Dick; Period of Transition by Michael G. Coney; After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss; Machines and Inventions by Brian Stableford; Down-at-Heel Galaxy by Brian Aldiss; book and film reviews- Spring 1974

64: March/April 1973 - The Android and the Gummy by Philip K. Dick; The Extraordinary Behaviour of Ordinary Materials by Bob Shaw; Author's Choice by Paul Anderson; book and fanzine reviews

63: Sept/Oct 1972 - The Axle in SF by James Blish; An Interview with Peter Tate by Mark Adlard; book and fanzine reviews

60: June 1972 - Through a Glass Darkly by John Brunner; SF and the Cinema by Philip Strick; The Transcended Living Thing by Bruce Gillespie; Edward John Carnell 1918-1972 by Kerry Harrison; Dan Morgan; Ted Tubb and Brian Aldiss; Convention Report by Peter Roberts; book and fanzine reviews

59: Spring 1972 - An introduction to Stanislaw Lem by Franz Hottenstein; A Good Ending by Stanislaw Lem; A Cruel Miracle by Malcolm Edwards; Why I Took a Writing Course... and Didn't Become a Writer by Dick Rossitt; SF Criticism in Theory and Practice by Pamela Hulme; book reviews

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