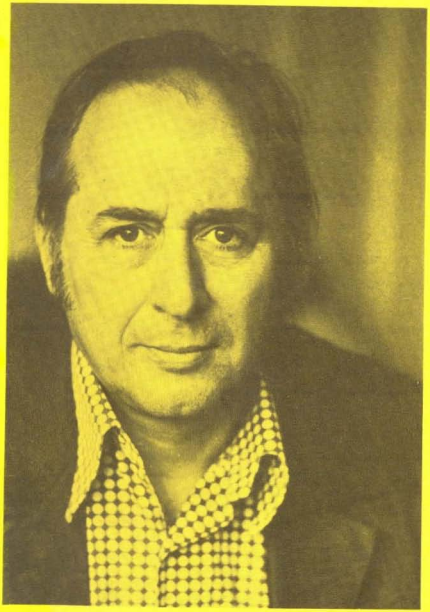
VECTOR 96

Dec/Jan 79/80



BALLARD: Unlimited Dreams

COWPER: Closed Minds

75p

The British Science Fiction Association Ltd.

(Company no. 921500)

VECTOR 96

Mike Dickinson
EDITOR

Joseph Nicholas
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Alan Dorey
PRODUCTION EDITOR

Advertising Rates 1979-80

Back Cover		£40
Interior	1 page	£30
	½ page	£20
	¼ page	£10

All copy A4 or division. Black on white, camera ready.

TREVOR BRIGGS
BUSINESS MANAGER
6 The Plains
Crescent Road
Chingford
London E4 6AU (tel. 01-529-3361 evenings only)

Published 4 times a year by the British SF Association Limited.

ISSN 0505- 0448

Contents Copyright © BSFA 1980

Cover Photograph of J.G.Ballard by Fay Godwin.

CONTENTS

ART CREDITS:

Paul Ryan Pp. 2, 4, 10, 37 38
D.West Pp. 26, 27, 31, 32, 36

Cover Designed by: Alan Dorey
BSFA Logo: Jim Barker

Mike Dickinson
Flat 7
301 Chapeltown Road
Leeds LS7 3JT (tel. 0532-620256)

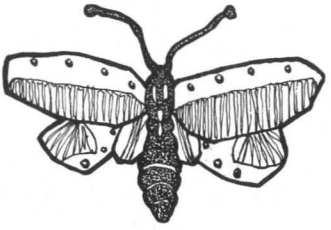
Joseph Nicholas
2 Wilmot Way
Camberley
Surrey GU15 1JA

Alan Dorey (BSFA Chairman)
20 Hermitage Woods Crescent
St. John's
Woking
Surrey GU21 1UE (tel. 04867-3886)

VECTOR 96

A Little More Off The Top AN EDITORIAL

Mike Dickinson.



In the first issue of the returned Times Literary Supplement, Anthony Burgess quotes some recent words from Doris Lessing:

> "Space fiction, with science fiction, makes up the most original branch of literature now; it is inventive and witty; it has already enlivened all kinds of writing"

only to reply in disagreement:

> "If space or science fiction is good, then it must be good as Jane Austen or Henry James is good -- through the artful delineation of human character in credible situations, through the generation of a pattern out of the chaos of actuality.... The separation of SF from literature in general has helped to condone a loosening of artistic standards in the SF field. Writers of regular fiction would not get away with some of the psychological implausibilities, unreal dialogue and ill-managed recit that are positively welcomed by addicts of the SF genre as signals of a new kind of literature. But Wells, Stapledon, Aldiss and Ballard can be evaluated...(as writers of regular fiction)...and not found wanting." (TLS, 23 November 1979, p.11)

Whilst I entirely agree with Doris Lessing and with some of Anthony Burgess's criticism, I think that much of it defines the portentous wrongheadedness which has informed his stint as SF book reviewer for The Observer. The models he has chosen for SF to emulate are silly to the point of facetious. It would surely be satisfactory to believe that SF contained a stylist fit to compare with Jane Austen (but perhaps not Henry James, as the orotund wordiness of his prose would make its imitator as tedious as the original), but to compare that most contained and social of all novelists with the vaulting perspectives of an SF writer is ludicrous. In fact, he generally misses the point: that without the "enlivening" of speculation the novel has been increasingly moribund. Such writers as Snow and Greene, mentioned with approval by Burgess, and the generally acclaimed Iris Murdoch and Beryl Bainbridge are thrashing about trying to find an enclosed society which they can study to produce that "pattern" Burgess demands.

It just will not do, however; the focus of artistic attention is shifting from its previously convergent to a divergent mode. Seamless novels mean so much falsification, or the construction of irrelevant social modes -- there is only so much interest that can be generated out of the bourgeois agonising of the university wife-swapping circuit, versions of which seem to occupy many esteemed novelists. SF will not rearrange peoples' lives into meaningful patterns; even if that were possible in the nineteen-eighties, it has more important things to do. Given the improbability of a reasoned study of man through his society, the old, rejected tool of speculation had to resurface somewhere: in SF. The fatc that Burgess used that tool for his own inept, reactionary and derivative 1985 should not be allowed to obscure its value and increasing necessity.

However ignorant Burgess may be with regard to the positive virtues of SF, we should not be blinded to the strength of some of his criticisms. There is no doubt that many writers who have achieved great acclaim within the genre are lacking in human values, not merely failing to create fully-rounded characters but tending instead to populate their work with automata. While it must be accepted that the modern novel has become over-introspective in its reliance on the minutely explored psyche of one central character, and that attempts to recreate this obsessive microcosm within SF (as in Robert Silverberg's Dying Inside) are rarely successful, some allowance for individual characteristics and consistent psychology is necessary. Attempt to pair blatant immaturity with omnicompetence, as in Roger Zelazny's Doorways In The Sand, or with painfully inappropriate dialogue, as in Robert Heinlein's The Puppet Masters, or with dubious humans in a crumbling plot, as in Arthur C. Clarke's Imperial Earth (to name but three novels from the output of SF's most highly respected "masters") are inexcusable. There is every reason why SF should not stultify itself as has much of the mainstream but in painting the broader canvas it must not lose sight of the humans behind the control panels. Faced by the twentieth century question "Is man a machine?" too many writers have lazily answered "Yes" and passed on to seemingly more important problems. Emphasising a negative response to that may be the most important thing that any of us can do.

The Best of Elmer T. Hack

80p

Jim Barker & Chris Evans

STILL AVAILABLE! ONLY 80p from: Alan Dorey, 20 Hermitage Woods Crescent, St.John's, WOKING, Surrey, GU21 1UE. Cheques and POs made out to BSFA Ltd. Price includes P&P.

A bsfa HACK PRESS publication

SCIENCE FICTION at good prices!

HUNDREDS OF HARDBACKS! HUNDREDS OF PAPERBACKS!

A wide selection of SF, dating from the nineteenth century onwards, for the reader and the collector. Many mint bargains. Second-hand hardbacks from only 75p, paperbacks from 40p. Many rare first editions, ranging from Karel Capek, Dunsany, Stapledon and Wells to Aldiss, Ballard, Dick & Harness.

Send for list: (Please enclose 10p stamp towards postage)
C.WILLIAMSON, 17, POPE ROAD, BROMLEY. KENT.

UNLIMITED DREAMS ~ J.G.BALLARD

INTERVIEWED BY
ALAN DOREY
& JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Shepperton, a small town on the southwestern outskirts of London, is encircled by reservoirs, gravel pits, a motorway and Heathrow Airport: all the elements one usually expects to find in a J. G. Ballard novel. But despite their strange, almost threatening aspect, the town itself, with its quiet, tree-lined streets and neat parades of shops, seems the very epitome of complacent commuter suburbia. Ballard's own house in particular is but an unprepossessing semidetached in a street of unprepossessing semidetacheds, its garden as slightly overgrown as its neighbours; and has within it a cluttered, homely, lived-in feel, with a large dog rambling unconcernedly from room to room and Ballard himself -- seeming faintly amused at the idea of our interviewing him -- relaxing in an overstuffed swivel armchair, speaking in a commanding (but never domineering) voice about his latest novel, his attitude to SF and the state of the modern SF scene as a whole.

In the UK, 1979 saw a tremendous upsurge of public interest in SF, not least because of the staging of the World Convention here in August -- an event which merited an entire programme to itself in the BBC2 TV series Time Out Of Mind and which Ballard, not himself an attendee of the convention, watched with a great deal of interest. "You had people like John Bush of Gollancz and Hilary Rubinstein talking of it as a respectable function; as the centrepiece of science fiction and not just an excuse for a lot of fans to dress up in space armour and hit each other with wooden swords. That's a change, I think" but he felt, on the other hand, that "all the good words put in by Fred Pohl and Brian Aldiss were undone by all those pictures of half-naked women in fancy-dress costumes" and went on to say that "the dominant image people still have of science fiction is that provided by visual sources. This is the sad thing: it's still Star Trek, Star Wars, Alien and so on.... But I can now look back over 25 years and see that the climate has changed. Everyone doesn't automatically think of SF as being nothing but Star Wars; there's a small percentage who have realised that it's capable of producing a genuine speculative fiction about the present day. This is as you'd expect: so many mainstream writers have gone into SF -- Anthony Burgess, Kingsley Amis, William Burroughs, Doris Lessing -- that I think people are gradually beginning to realise that the sort of freedoms available to, let's say, Huxley and Orwell and Wells are available to writers now, and that one doesn't have to write within the narrow format of fifties American SF; that SF isn't just Heinlein and Asimov and Poul Anderson."

He ascribes such new-found "freedoms" to the revolutionary impact of the so-called New Wave. "For about three years I reviewed SF regularly for the New Statesman and it seemed to me that people like Pohl and Silverberg, for example, were benefitting in every conceivable way from the liberating influence of the New Wave. They'd broken out of the commercial formulas that had tended to restrict them in the past, and were able to explore imaginative and literary ideas for their own sake; resonances which, back in the fifties, they would have clamped down on very rapidly because they would not have appealed to the editors of the commercial American SF magazines of the time. And think of a writer like Ian Watson, whom I admire enormously: it would have been very difficult for him to have published his novels anywhere back in the late fifties; I cannot see that they would have been serialised by any of the American magazines, or touched by any of the American publishers of the day. There's been a tremendous change in the climate, and that's all to the good."

Even so, it's likely that a large number of people read SF without admitting it -- either as some form of "closet" reaction to those who consider it as beneath contempt or because they tacitly acknowledge that the SF they enjoy is not the most intellectually demanding. The operative word here is "enjoyment", which Ballard openly accepts: "A lot of the SF I seem to criticise -- the Heinlein, Asimov, Poul Anderson stuff -- is certainly entertaining, and people certainly get a great deal of pleasure out of it; why not?" but then went on to say that his whole career "has been dedicated to giving the rest of us a chance, to enlarging the rules of the game a little." In this respect his name will probably be forever linked with the magazine New Worlds under its second editor, Michael Moorcock, in that gloriously heady period of the mid to late sixties when it was printing such novels and stories as Disch's Camp Concentration, Spinrad's Bug Jack Barron, Ellison's "A Boy And His Dog", Delany's "Time Considered As A Helix Of Semi-Precious Stones" and Ballard's own Atrocity Exhibition pieces. He had of course been established in his own right for several years, publishing work in both New Worlds and its sister magazine Science Fantasy (both then edited by E. J. "Ted" Carnell), but both Moorcock and he "had a great number of ideas in common, and shared a great number of ambitions for the future....we were totally in agreement about what we felt were the failures of conventional SF at that time, and what was needed to move SF forward inot the next stage of its development" and, despite Moorcock's later championing of him, felt himself to be under no particular pressure to "experiment" (a word he detests): "He picked me simply because I was the nearest writer to hand -- he was familiar with my stuff and could see that, right from the beginning, I'd been trying to write a new kind of SF that broke with the SF of the past. It was a wonderful thing for me because it allowed me to publish all those stories that I would have found difficult to publish anywhere else." To some people, of course, it seemed as though he was abandoning the traditional ideals of science fiction, and their reaction was predictably hostile; but "that's part of the price one pays for change. There may exist the ideal reader who admires everything one's written, but that's most uncommon, actually. I regret that the people who admired my earlier stuff didn't respond in the same way the the Atrocity Exhibition stories, but on the other hand there appeared a new readership who did like them.... I write what I feel I have to write, and it's always struck me as something of a miracle that people like anything I've ever written at all."

About the "SF of the past" referred to earlier he is somewhat scathing. "What the so-called "Old Guard" -- the more conservative readers, writers and critics of SF -- think of as the "immutable laws" of science fiction are in fact of comparatively recent origin. It was only in the forties and fifties that the two major conventions of SF, outer space and the far future, established themselves as the characteristic hallmarks of the genre, and were eventually consolidated into holy writ. But they're very much an obsession of the commercial American SF magazines of the time. If you look at, say, the SF of H. G. Wells, very little of that is set in the far future or on alien planets -- The Island Of Dr Moreau, The Invisible Man, The War Of The Worlds, large numbers of his short stories: all are set in the present, or the near-present, and on Earth." Citing the work of Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and George Orwell's 1984 as further examples, he continues: "I regard American SF of the forties and fifties as an aberration; as a fossilising of a very long-standing imaginative impulse going back hundreds of years, if not longer; and to break out of that little ghetto and rejoin the mainstream of imaginative scientific fiction was part of my inspiration and I think of the New Wave as a whole."

Given all this, it seemed valid to ask whether, when he started writing in the late fifties, he saw himself as a science fiction writer, or whether he though of himself as a writer who wrote for the SF magazines simply because they happened to be there. "I still call myself a science fiction writer although, being realistic, of my total output I imagine that, even by my elastic definition of the term, at least a third of it isn't SF but is fantasy. Is The Unlimited Dream Company SF? I'd say no. I think I could make a claim for something like Crash, or even High-Rise, being SF because their subject-matter and their points of view are inspired by changes in our world brought about by science and technology, and their perspective on these changes -- my approach -- is rather analytical. And I use the scientific vocabulary, on the whole. But I think of my total output as being largely homogeneous, even though some of it is clearly SF and some clearly not, and for that reason I feel that my imagination belongs within what is loosely called "the realm of science fiction" rather than to so-called mainstream fiction. I've always felt that. That's why I began writing within the SF field, and why I've always thought of myself as an SF writer."

Mention of the SF magazines brings one to the realisation of that fact that their heyday is now long past and that, in Britain at least, there are effectively no real markets for the aspiring short story writer -- a lack he considers "tragic. I was talking to Brian Aldiss recently about just this, and I said to him "God knows where the young Ballard or the yound Aldiss could find somewhere to publish their short stories" because he an I, I think it's fair to say, learnt our trade writing short stories for the SF magazines, which meant that neither of us had to begin writing novels straight off." Feeling that some current writers are having to write novels the way he and Aldiss wrote short stories, he went on to say that, in his opinion "SF as a whole owes a greater debt to the short story than the novel -- leaving aside obvious masterpieces like 1984 and Brave New World, most of the great SF of the past thirty years has been in the short story form. There's something about the short story's very formal structure that makes it an ideal vehicle for the SF imagination -- more so than the novel, which you could say has no structure and is a completely open entity."

He was, however, uncertain as to whether Britain could actually support a new magazine. "It's partly a marketing thing. To be distributed by Smith's these days, a magazine has to have a guaranteed minimum circulation well above anything New Worlds, Science Fantasy, Galaxy and Astounding had in the fifties. Carnell's New Worlds couldn't survive now; and anyone who comes into the SF filed and decides to start a magazine goes for a sort of Omni visual-oriented sensationalist large-format glossy artwork approach, whereas what sells a good short story magazine is the short stories. The artwork doesn't make a damn bit of difference -- you may pick up a few passing customers that way but on the whole you can't establish a serious and devoted readership unless you publish good and original fiction. But you try telling that to the big magazine companies who think there's a killing to be made out of SF." He does, on the other hand, feel that "the time is now absolutely right for a small-format, digest-sized magazine consisting entirely of straightforward, good, strong short stories with perhaps a serial and one or two book reviews" because "I think the period we're in now is rather similar to that of the late fifties: we've just had a rather entropic decade and an extremely uncertain world lies ahead. The time is right for carefully and closely-written speculative fiction looking hard at the world in which we live -- stories written in a traditional form, avoiding experiment, simply trying to make sense of the world we're moving into."

The surviving SF magazines are of course American, the most successful (in terms of its sales) being the ghetto-minded, past-oriented Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine, publishing nakedly commercial action-adventure space fiction, our description of which prompted Ballard to remark that it sounded "like a glorified comicbook"; then, as though relenting, he pointed out that "the real yardstick of its merit will be the number of original and well-written stories that it publishes, and this you can only judge in, say, five or ten years' time. One can say that, in their heyday, magazines like Galaxy, F & SF, Amazing, Fantastic, Analog and, over here, New Worlds did generate a substantial body of fiction by a school of writers which has passed the test of time, and one can award these half-dozen magazines high marks for doing so. But my guess is that Isaac Asimov's will eventually vanish without trace once it's served its function, which is to extract as many dollar bills from the American public as possible, and probably produce no decent fiction."

Despite the terrifying influence of this terrible magazine, others -- most notably F & SF -- maintain a more open-minded attitude; has Ballard ever thought of writing for them again? "No, I haven't, actually. When I did write for them, they were distributed over here -- even the little newsagent in Shepperton would stock F & SF, perhaps only two or three copies, but it was there -- and this meant that all the people I met, like Michael Moorcock and Charles Platt and all the others involved in New Worlds, or in British SF generally, had read them. And the American writers who came over here were either writing for them or were familiar with them; they formed part of the climate of ordinary everday life. But this isn't true any more; no one I know has read any American SF magazines for ten years, and I haven't even seen a copy of most of them for years....the incentive to write for them just isn't there. Most of the stories I've written in the past five years have been in response to requests from editors like Martin Bax of Ambit and Emma Tennant of Bananas, so that I've never been in a position where I've written a story and then thought "Ah -- who shall I send this to?" But then the role played by the magazines finished at the end of the sixties; the seventies became the decade of the original paperback anthology and they're actually very conservative. Their editors tend to attract and publish only established writers, and have all the time in the world to say "Mm, that's a bit of an odd story, we won't use it, let's ask so-and-so for one of his"; whereas the magazine editors were under pressure to fill their pages once every month and so were far more tolerant of the experimental and the unfamiliar." As an example of the conservatism of anthology editors, he quoted a request once made of him by Damon Knight, who "ten years ago, when I was in Rio de Janeiro, invited me to contribute to one of his Orbit anthologies but asked for "nothing too original". I knew what he meant -- he didn't want anything like my Atrocity Exhibition stories, but the fatc that he'd mentally lowered the shutters was terrible. What an attitude to take!" Despite which he has contributed a story to an original anthology: "One Afternoon At Utah Beach" in Chris Priest's Anticipations, but that was as a result of an apparently carte-blanche invitation. "It was rather different from sitting down and thinking "I will write a story for Orbit 9, but I'd better be careful because Knight doesn't like anything too original" -- what a climate to work in! That's ridiculous, just death to the imagination."

As he remarked earlier, Ballard has continued to write short stories, and this has in fact been one of the main reasons for the four year gap between his last novel, High-Rise, in 1975, and his new one, The Unlimited Dream Company. "I hadn't written any short stories since something like 1970, largely because there was no way of publishing them, but I started again in 1975 -- a friend of mine, Emma Tennant, started her magazine Bananas, and she was very keen to have a story from me for every issue of it. I wrote something like a dozen stories for Bananas over the next three years, plus one or two for other magazines like Ambit. I think my total output was equivalent to about two volumes of short stories....then The Unlimited Dream Company took me a couple of years to write. So the seventies as a whole have been a very busy time."

The Unlimited Dream Company is, as earlier intimated, not an SF novel; it is instead a fantasy, although not the sort of avowedly genre work that one normally expects to find sheltering behind the term. "There's a difference between the fantasy produced by SF writers and that produced by those who've never written SF; it's much closer to SF than to fantasy as a whole. You get much less whimsy, much less sentiment; it's much more rigourous and has much more realistic goals." And, indeed, The Unlimited Dream Company does have a remorseless internal logic that such overtly escapist "classics" as Tolkien's The Lord Of The Rings utterly lack; a logic that all his novels may be said to have in common. Despite which, it is still very different from the immediately preceding three (Crash, Concrete Island and High-Rise), although Ballard himself admitted to "no particular inspiration" and continued: "I felt that after all that steel and concrete there was a tremendous pressure of sheer imagination building up. Anyone who has a powerful imagination will tell you that as you walk down the most familiar, the most ordinary street in a quiet suburn like Shepperton -- even a quiet suburb like Shepperton -- that powerful imagination is continually transforming the humdrum into the marvellous. So the idea occurred to me that it would be possible to transform, in a fantastic way, the most infinitely humdrum place in the world -- and Shepperton must fall into that category, at first glance, anyway -- into something rich and strange." Not, however, that the Shepperton of the novel is identical to the Shepperton of the real world, the former having been compounded of various elements taken from such neighbouring towns as Sunbury and Walton-on-Thames and in consequence existing more as

an abstract for suburbia everywhere, because "the point of the novel is that everywhere is infinitely exciting, given the transforming power of the imagination. When I first had the idea of an escaping pilot who crashes his plane, perhaps does, and by a massive effort of will forces himself to survive in our continuum -- the continuum of time and space that bounds the everyday physical universe -- I didn't think of Shepperton; I thought of picking just any quiet spot near a river. But it suddenly occurred to me that if I wanted a humdrum place, then I was already living in one that I at least knew well." This point should not be underestimated because "I also knew that, without doing so deliberately, I could, despite myself, feed into the novel various unconscious autobiographical elements which would be bound to give it a little more imaginative pressure." This is in fact the main reason for its being narrated in the first person -- a device he has rarely used before (and only in Crash (1973) was there a character actually named after himself). "Although I don't want to make too much of it, I think the book is my autobiography. If for flying you substitute writing fiction, or using the imagination, the book has all the elements of an autobiography. I fell into this place, as it were, and into the predicament of ordinary life, some twenty years ago, and have used my imagination for those twenty years to try to give that ordinary life some sort of meaning. But all this just occurs to me with the benefit of hindsight; it didn't occur to me at the time because there are no correspondences between me and the character -- or just very minor ones that aren't important."

Reinforcing the novel's autobiographical nature is the appearance in it, as minor protagonists, of three children and a woman doctor. When interviewed for J. G. Ballard: The First Twenty Years, the important critical study by David Pringle and James Goddard, Ballard stated:

> "The protagonists of most of my fiction feel tremendously isolated, and that seems to exclude the possibility of a warm, fruitful relationship with anybody, let alone anyone as potentially close as a woman.... I've got three children, with whom I'm extremely close, and yet I've never introduced a child into any of my stories.... It's just that children are not relevant to my work."

With respect to The Unlimited Dream Company, however: "Maybe those three children were really standing in for my own children. Maybe the woman doctor is standing in for my late wife -- or, rather, an amalgam of my late wife and one or two other women who have been very close to me over the years" and he then, apropos the above quote, went on to say that "it's not strictly true to say that there have been no children in my fiction; many of the protagonists of my short stories - particularly the ones I was writing in the late fifties and early sixties, like "Chronopolis" and "Billenium", and also "The Ultimate City" --" (included in his most recent collection, Low Flying Aireraft) "have been adolescents, with the fresh eyes and untested ambitions of adolescence....so children have appeared in my fiction, although I think the particular role they play in The Unlimited Dream Company probably ties in with my own three."

One of the more obvious aspects of The Unlimited Dream Company is its incorporation of various themes and elements from his previous works: the harsh starkness of reality -- concrete motorways, tower blocks, washing machines and TV sets reminiscent of the Crash "trilogy" -- and the exotic images of fantasy -- tropical flora and fauna reminiscent of The Drowned World and The Crystal World (symbols explored in depth by David Pringle in his essay "The Four-Fold Symbolism Of J. G. Ballard", reprinted in the critical study mentioned above). But this was not conscious intent on Ballard's part: "When I sit down to write a piece of fiction I write that piece of fiction as if I'd written nothing before. I try not to repeat myself in an obvious way, nor to assemble set building-blocks in a new configuration. After all, if you're going to transform something like a small suburban town in a dramatically immediate manner then there aren't many ways you can do it -- particularly if, as I had, you have a central character as some sort of pagan god from life is pouring in enormous abundance....exotic flora and fauna are just waiting there." Hindsight suggests, however, that "it does amalgamate certain elements from novels like The Drowned World and The Crystal World, and from my more hard-edged stuff like Crash -- but it certainly wasn't calculated."

Critical and public reception of Ballard's work, both here and around the world, has been mixed. Kingsley Amis has referred to him as "one of the brightest stars of post-war fiction" but others (particularly Martin Amis) have expressed opinions ranging from the indifferent to the hostile; and while a novel like Crash, with its frequent use of American automobile terminology ("windshield", "hood", "fender", and so on, all

being more a residue of hischildhood in Shanghai -- "a totally American zone of influence" -- than an overt calculation on his part), might have been expected to enjoy great success in the States, the opposite was in fact the case: the book flopped there but was a hit in France, and he has since acquired something of a cult status there. Curious? Not really: "The influence of the French symbolist poets of the nineteenth century, of twentieth century French literature, and of French painting from the 1870s onwards has always been enormous upon me. I don't know whether French readers hear an echo of Genet and Rambeau and Pollinaire in my fiction, but if those echoes are there then I'm glad." Stating that he was "delighted" by the response of his French readers, he went on to say that he thinks "the symbolist method, which I use in my writing, strikes a sympathetic chord south of, as it were, the "olive line", and that in northern Protestant countries like Britain and the USA the symbolist movement, evident in painting, poetry and the novel over the last hundred years, has tended to produce a great deal of unease. And surrealism, the major twentieth expression of symbolism, has only recently come to be regarded as respectable, accepted in the US and Britain as an important movement in the arts only in the last ten years, whereas on the Continent it's been established since the turn of the century." The imaginative approach adopted by the surrealists, he said, makes people in Britain and America feel uneasy because "the dominant form of the novel here is the bourgeois novel, the so-called realistic novel, which offers in its pages all the reassuring conventions and a polite avoidance of certain unmentionable topics in exactly the same way that bourgeios life protects itself from unpleasant truths by a whole series of polite conventions. And as I don't subscribe to any of those bourgeios conventions in my fiction I naturally meet a certain amount of hostility and resistance which I haven't met in France." Nor, it seems, in Japan, which might appear an American-dominated country but is in fact very different. "The paradox of life there is that there's a hundred million people packed onto those tiny islands and yet each of them feels absolutely alone. The Japanese psyche is very isolated, very self-immersed, obsessively committed to the fulfillment of its own "private mythology", and quite unlike the northern European or American consciousness." The sense of isolation felt by his fictional protagonists is obviously a reflection of this; and of an imagination, he feels, that is very close to his own -- moulded, as was only to be expected, by his childhood in Shanghai. "Even though I was born and brought up in China, I don't think that the Chinese landscape and character touched me very much. The Japanese and the Americans were the "occupying powers" in all senses of the term; the two imaginations presiding over my life there, and in a way my fiction represents a movement between those two poles."

And what of the future? Does he, for example, have any plans to extend his work into other areas of the arts? "Well, I've always wanted to be a painter. That was my real ambition for many years, although it's waned a bit now because I long ago realised that I just didn't have the talent, the technical facility, to make it a credible one. I sometimes think that my entire output as a writer has been the substitute work of a frustrated painter, and that if I could be given the gift of technical facility I'd stop writing. That probably isn't true, but I do still feel that my imagination would express itself much more directly, more easily, through visual imagery than prose narrative." Would the cinema therefore constitute a viable alternative? "Not really, because on the whole the cinema is a realistic medium. There have been a lot of powerful, imaginative films made, but I don't think that my particular imagination would express itself too easily on film. I can't visualise myself making a film of The Unlimited Dream Company -- it could probably be done, but it would be a damn sight easier to write than to film." Otherwise: "I've nearly finished another novel, which is SF rather than fantasy, and should be published in about a year's time. It's rather in the vein of the novella "The Ultimate City -- originally I wrote it with a view to it being published as an illustrated novel" (Hello, America, in the Pierrot series that includes Brain Aldiss's Brothers Of The Head and Harry Harrison's Planet Story) "but it seems to have grown in length. I certainly plan to write a novel for that series, though, because I've always been very keen on the idea of illustrated fiction." There are no collections of short stories due in the immediate future; "I think that when I've finished this novel I'll get back to writing short stories again and think about another collection in a couple of years' time. Other than that I've no real projects; I just live for the moment."

THREE ASPECTS OF FANTASY

BY

MIKE DICKINSON

The gap between SF and fantasy has always been narrower than many SF fans have allowed. Even in the hard-line SF days of John W. Campbell, many of the mainstays of his Astounding, such as Heinlein, Kuttner, De Camp and Williamson, produced fantasy especially for its companion magazine Unknown. Many of the new writers ushered in on the boom of the early fifties tended to be "as ignorant of science as a pollywog" (as Damon Knight once remarked of Robert Sheckley), and the critics of the time suggested that they were not SF but fantasy writers. What happened of course was that the term "SF" just became more elastic in its meaning. During the sixties, however, the success of Howard and Tolkien tended to drive the non-imitators out of the market, so SF fell back upon itself only to be met by the New Wave writers and an explosion from within its community. Thus relatively old-fashioned SF, avowedly speculative fiction and fantasy could again coexist and occasionally mingle. As the label "Speculative Fiction" unfortunately did not catch on (one can see why -- too many syllables), the New Wave writers remained in the SF field, which had the benefit of stimulating older writers, such as Frederik Pohl, to new insights, but unfortunately also tended to leave fantasy as a ghetto of, generally, hack writing.

During the late seventies, however, things began to change once again. A look at three new novels -- one by a writer of the "Golden Age" of SF, one by a master of the New Wave, and the other by a relatively new writer -- shows just how varied and interesting the fantasy world is now becoming.

First, by order of age, is Clifford D. Simak, who won a Hugo in 1964 for his SF novel Way Station and is now, perhaps, taking the old Astounding route of writing fantasy for light relief. Certainly, the title of his new novel, Fellowship Of The Talisman, reveals his awareness of the sales figures for Tolkien and Terry Brooks's The Sword Of Shannara. He has also seemingly decided not to work hard on the plot since it is one of the silliest I have encountered for some time. Britain is still stuck somewhere in the Dark Ages, progress having been arrested by the (literally) diabolical machinations of some evil aliens. In this world, a young scion of noble stock is dispatched to convey a scroll, containing what purport to be eye-witness accounts of Christ, on a hazardous journey to Oxford, where it can be authenticated. Of course, he picks up various companions along the way: having started out with only a giant, a fighting horse and a dog, he encounters a cowardly hermit, a ghost, a goblin, a de-cauldroned witch, a demon from Hell (yes, there is a real terrestrial Hell that hates all those evil aliens for stealing its thunder) and a banshee. At the final battle with aliens (you knew it had to come, didn't you?), he is joined by a sorcerer's daughter, her griffin and a whole army of little people. Yet the only thing that proves triumphant in the parchment, which terrifies the whole bunch of aliens into disintegration.

Why the aliens should be so scared of a symbol of what is clearly a terrestrial god -- since the terrestrial Hell and Devil (who renders no direct assistance at what is at least a minor Armageddon) has left them completely unmoved -- is not explained. Nor

is it explained why the prevention of the Crusades, which did at first help spread civilised Eastern knowledge to barbaric Christians, should keep the whole world stuck in the eleventh century; it's conceivable that without Christian pressure on those Eastern civilisations, they might have produced a better world than ours.

That said, however, I must confess that I did enjoy reading it. The pace is hardly frenetic but an old craftsman like Simak can be trusted not to let it slack below readability. There is also a pleasant tongue-in-cheek tone to the whole novel which, while lacking the bite of satire, does produce some pleasingly humourous byplay from the companions, including a lecture on goblin civil right (p. 86) and a hermit who recalls (via parallel universes) Ben Gunn in his overwhelming desire for cheese (p.38). There is no depth to the characterisation, and in the end the gauche young hero turns out to fairly omnicompetent despite his lack of experience, but it is quite a jolly romp and even the odd lapses from mediaeval pastiche into colloquial American -- for example, "The hell you don't" (p. 300), "Goddamn it" (p. 307), and "Poor son-of-a-bitch" (p. 209) -- do not jar too much. In general, Simak has produced a relaxing, forgettable couple of hours entertainment for tired minds -- and whilst I recognise that for some people any literature which provides more than this is anathema, I suggest that it is not really enough. Any book needs to entertain some audience in order to succeed, but such a jerry-built model as this leaves a sour aftertaste. The alien race is here depicted as unimaginable powerful yet is defeated by a theological fly-spray. It is also shown as mindlessly evil, but since no explanation of its behaviour is ever given or even hinted at it can only be regarded as a useful bogeyman. All the conflict between good and evil is over almost before it began because of this cheap conjuror's trick. A little more thought amongst the slickness of plot manipulation would have resulted in a much more satsifying book.

Someone who uses the traditional trappings of fantasy in a much more honest way is the young American writer Phyllis Eisenstein. Sorcerer's Son tells a story which begins with a conflict between two sorcerers, one male, one female. Rezhyk, having had his proposal of marriage to the lady Delivev rejected, fears that she hates him and decides to protect himself with a cloth-of-gold shirt. Unfortunately for him, it has to be woven, without help, from virgin ring metal. In order to keep Delivev occupied during this vulnerable period he co-opts his chief demon, Gildrum, as a succubus to impregnate Delivev. The plan succeeds and Delivev becomes preoccupied with her child, Cray, and with the memory of the knight she believes was his father. Having provided the seed, however, Rezhyk feels nothing for his son and tends to discount the entire episode except as another element in his increasing paranoia. In fact the impossible happens and the cold demon, Gildrum, falls in love with Delivev: that, and the child of their union, is the mainstay of the book.

One thing which impresses immediately is the economy and logic of the story. Rezhyk would not be called evil in the Old Testament sense of the term, one that so much fantasy implies is perfectly valid. His power is such that his sanity is never called into question, although he does become slightly but increasingly deranged. Indeed, the power of such a sorcerer as he, who controls demons as though they were the most subservient of beings, is such as to imperil human sanity. His nature is, moreover, dictated by the sort of magic he uses -- controlling by metal. He is cold and hard, unable to understand anything his own burnished ego considers immaterial. Delivev is the opposite, except in respect of pride (a believable trait in sorcerers). Her magic is concerned with the manipulation of living things and their derivatives, such as cloth and wool. She is warm, intensely emotional, and simple in life-style. Cray reflects the union of both of these two characters.

Another delight of this novel is that the wealth of supporting detail, never intrusive but subtly crafted into the story, is such as to suspend the disbelief of even the most sceptical. I found Gildrum to be a particularly fascinating character; Ms Eisenstein has created a splendidly alien but convincing demon. We first meet him in the body of fourteen-year-old girl; in order to create the appearance of the knight with whom Delivev is to fall in love Rezhyk has fashioned a life-size terracotta statue into which the demon must enter:

> 'The demon-as-girl smiled once at her lord's handiwork, and then she burst into flame, her body consumed in an instant, leaving only the flames themselves to

dance in a wild torrent of light. Billowing, the fire rose toward the high ceiling, poised above the kiln and, like molten lead poured into a mould, sank into the terracotta figure and disappeared. The clay glowed redder and redder, then yellow, then white-hot.

'Rezhyk turned away from the heat; by the light of the figure itself he entered its existence, the hour and the date in a notebook marked with Gildrum's name. By the time he looked back, the clay was cooling rapidly. When it reached the colour of ruddy human flesh, a dim glow compared to the colour of the brazier, it began to crumble. First from the head, and then from every part sifted, falling through the grate at its feet to form a mound in the bottom of the kiln. Yet the figure remained, though after some minutes every ounce of terracotta had been shed -- the figure that was the demon, moulded within the clay, remained, translucent now, still glowing from the heat of its birth. The ring that had been set upon the clay now clasped the arm of the demon, its entire circle visible through the ghostly flesh. Then the last vestige of internal radiance faded, the form solidified, and the man that was Gildrum stepped from the kiln.'

(p. 55-56)

The power and precision of this writing (which, I suggest, very few contemporary writers could equal) is such that the demon and Rezhyk (that most bureaucratic of sorcerers) are shown with vivid realisation. This and many other passages show how strongly Ms Eisenstein has visualised the story and her ability to convey it.

The story proper which begins (p. 21) with Cray's search for his lost father, the knight Mellor, is a quest which occupies most of the first part of the book. It carries more conviction than the usual fantasy quest because its motivating factor, the search for a lost father, both seems more worthy than the usual business with grail, ring, or talisman and parallels similar searches about which one may read in daily newspapers. Compared with the pace of quests initiated by such old craftsmen as Simak it lacks impetus and the reader's inescapable knowledge of its initial futility removes any real tension. It is nevertheless carefully organised both to mature Cray as an individual and to build in factors needed for the final confrontation and resolution. Ms Eisenstein's subtle manipulation of viewpoints -- Cray and he newly-acquired servant; his mother's observation of Cray's activities via a sort of spider's web TV screen and a monitoring tapestry; and Gildrum, feelings in turmoil, watching in the form of a squirrel -- keeps the narrative from stagnation. Once the journey produces its inevitable result, Cray has only to become apprenticed to Rezhyk to set forward the steadily accelerating march to the final scene. And that final scene is on a broad enough scale to satisfy lovers of space opera everywhere.

Throughout this Ms Eisenstein shows what a writer who is skilled, inventive and concerned with human values can do with fantasy. It is, particularly in the second half, entertaining in action and in quality of writing and characterisation. One feels involved in the lives of these people, who take on a credibility rarely achieved in this medium. The result is totally satisfying, and following her previous work in The Magazine Of Fantasy & Science Fiction, marks one more step on the road to eminence. At a time when relatively incompetent fantasy writers like Tanith Lee and C. J. Cherryh are receiving extravagant praise, perhaps solely because they are female, it is pleasant to be able to report a writer who, along with Tom Disch, deserves at least a Hugo nomination for best novel.

Another writer to whom that accolade would be new, if richly deserved, is J. G. Ballard. Ballard, despite an attitude of surgical precision and a fascination with at least some aspects of technology, has often trembled upon the brink of fantasy. In his first four "disaster" novels -- The Wind From Nowhere, The Drowned World, The Drought, and The Crystal World -- he had used an ecological catastrophe to precipitate that breakdown of civilisation which particularly fascinated him. In The Unlimited Dream Company he has no such premise. A deranged criminal obsessed with flight has stolen an aircraft to escape pursuit. From the moment his ineptness causes the plane to crash in the Thames near Shepperton, he begins to impose his imagination upon that paradigm of suburban metroland. (There is a strong possibility that all of the ensuing events are but the last fantasies of a drowning man, but there is no support for that view in the narrative and it must remain as a tantalising pathway to a realistic interpretation.)

Ballard's writing in this novel is an intense, visionary and sexual as it was in Crash; thus his first view of Sheppertan:

> 'Young mothers steered small children in and out of the launderette and supermarket, refuelled their cars at the filling station. They gazed at their reflections in the appliance-store windows, exposing their handsome bodies to these washing machines and the television sets as if setting up clandestine liaisons with them.' (pp. 35-36)

Here again, as in Crash, Ballard perceives our present life as mechano-sexual but under the influence of the pilot, Blake, nature begins to break through:

> 'By coupling with them, with the fallow deer in the park, with the magpies and starlings, I could release the light waiting behind the shutter of reality each of them bore before him like a shield. By annealing my body to theirs, by fusing myself to the trunks of the silver birches and dead elms, I would raise their tissues to the fever point of their true radiance.' (p. 82)

Strange birds arrive, some of them having escaped from a zoo owned by a mysterious local, Stark (a typically Ballardian name). Blake, at first in dreams and later in seeming reality, transforms himself into a bird, a whale, a deer; takes on the power of healing; and acts as a cornucopia of life, spreading luxuriant growth throughout the town:

> 'Hundreds of coconut palms were rising from the gardens.... At every street corner groves of bamboos spread through the cracked paving stones.' (p. 128)

Gradually, people begin to defer to his new status:

> '"Blake, tell me, what are you going to dream for us today?"' (p. 134)

The reader is propelled onward by a series of successful visions, the incongruous location of which Ballard relishes to the full. There has been a growing streak of dry, understated humour in his work since The Atrocity Exhibition days, and here it is at its most evident, not just in the idea of a pagan fertility god at large in commuter suburbia but in more specific details -- such as the postman puzzled by the transformed nature of his deliveries:

> '....postcards wreathed in vine leaves....tax demands decorated with tiger lilies and....parcels transformed into flowery bouquets....' (p. 129)

And the general traffic jam caused by a huge banyan tree growing in the middle of the high street.

As usual Ballard seems to draw heavily upon works of art for mood and atmosphere; here Henri (Le Douanier) Rousseau and his "primitive" paintings of lush, highly coloured tropical forests -- and in particular his painting of football players surrounded by hedges of menacing luxuriance -- seems most powerfully evoked. The surrealistic vision which Ballard captures as strongly as any writer is particularly well conveyed in this novel. The writing is succulent but in no way obscure, and there is no doubt that he is using the freedom of fantasy in a vigorous and searching way. But once one has acknowledged his stylistic and pictorial brilliance there comes the question of aim? What is the point of this novel? How does it enrich literature? Whatever question is asked of a whole book: after entertainment (and there is no doubt that it is superbly entertaining), what?

Ballard has sometimes been accused of nihilism, and although that is overstating the case (misanthropy is nearer the mark), in general there is a worrying philosophy behind this novel. In the accompanying interview Ballard states that it is in some ways autobiographical, concerned with the artist's ability to transform his environment by his own internal visions. Here, however, we are invited to watch an amoral superman, already a criminal, play with people's lives. Since the documented effects of identifying with Michael Valentine Smith, protagonist of Heinlein's Stranger In A Strange Land, upon the mind of Charles Manson, I have always been wary of this fundamentally fascist strain in SF, and it concerns me to see Ballard moving in this same direction.

Also disturbing, but in an artistic manner, is the way in which his fundamental influences not only intrude into the novel but predict its action. At times it resembles a

more definitive work of collative fantasy, Silverlock, in that one feels a constant (and justified) sense of deja vu. The name of the protagonist, Blake, is an overt clue to Ballard's major influence on this novel -- the Victorian painter, William Blake. The obsession with flying mirrors his own, the deconsecration and naturalisation of the church reflects one of his major concerns; specific attitudes towards pantheism and a recreation of the natural, even the final act of the novel with all (especially the children) flying to the sun and the dead reclaimed, are very Blakeian. Other obvious ingredients are the Christ/Green King motif which has Blake dying and then being reborn. Even though it happens thrice, his revival after the assault by the book's Iscariot (Stark) is almost anticlimactic. Similarly, the transformations are so specifically elemental that one knows to expect a scene analogous of, for example, fire. The result of all this is a slight feeling of dissatisfaction, enhanced by the passiveness of the ending, as though going to see a new play but being trapped by a change of programme into seeing a bright new version of something overfamiliar.

Perhaps I am being rather harsh on the novel as a whole when the sum of its parts is so magnificently high. Perhaps Ballard's having grown accustomed to a particular type of SF -- concerned with the burgeoning effects of one phenomenon -- left him a little agoraphobic when confronted by the freedom of fantasy, so that he felt he had to stay close to his familiar guidelines. I am not sure. I am, however, certain that parts of this book will stay with me for a very long time to come.

One of the interesting points about The Unlimited Dream Company is that it is the third excellent book to feature flying as a central motif that I have read in just over a year, the others being Tom Disch's On Wings Of Song and Tom Reamy's Blind Voices. It is a theme so permanently associated with the hippy era of the late sixties that I can only wonder whether our fantasists are just beginning to get to grips with that time. There are certainly indications of that in the above three books, and in Sorcerer's Son and Samuel Delany's Neveryon. If so, then we have a lively run of fantasy ahead of us, although whether any of these authors will figure significantly in the future remains to be seen. Ballard's next novel will be an SF one, and I should think that the vast majority of his future output will be SF as well. At his age, I cannot be sure of Simak, nor the trend that I associate with him; after all, Gordon R. Dickson never reappeared as an fantasy author after his excellent debut with The Dragon And The George. Phyllis Eisenstein's latest novel, Shadow Of Earth, is much closer to SF in its spirit and it could be that market considerations will force her to abandon fantasy altogether since -- apart from odious brawn and sadistic matsurbation stories -- it does not sell very well. Perhaps, given continued efforts by such excellent writers as those mentioned above (and not forgetting, of course, Angela Carter), it could begin to do so. I would certainly be more than pleased to pay my money over the counter.

1. Clifford D. Simak -- The Fellowship Of The Talisman (Sidgwick & Jackson, 346pp, £6·95)
2. Phyllis Eisenstein -- Sorcerer's Son (Del Rey/Ballantine Fantasy, 387pp, $1·95)
3. J. G. Ballard -- The Unlimited Dream Company (Jonathan Cape, 223pp, £4·95)

BSFA

If writers such as Aldiss, Brunner, Clarke, Coney, Cowper, Harrison, Holdstock, LeGuin, Priest, Shaw, Watson, and White (to drop a few names) think it's worth being members, perhaps you will too.

Further details from

The Membership Secretary, Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre G72 9NA, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

ALVERIC AND THE TIME WARP

SIMON OUNSLEY

Whereas the last few decades have seen a rise in the literary status of science fiction, the mother genre of fantasy has continued its decline and now seems to languish in the scorned and neglected doldrums previously reserved for the western, the crime novel and the popular romance. This is indeed unfortunate for a genre which has in its time encompassed such influential works as Swift's Gulliver's Travels and Milton's Paradise Lost. So how did this drop in status come about, is it justified and, if not, then how might it be remedied?

Whilst I'm against the categorisation of fiction, with all the confusion and snobbery it entails, fantasy embraces a wider spectrum of material than any other genre, and some sort of preliminary definition is therefore necessary. I'm talking about fantasy set in an imaginary milieu, so that Tolkien's The Lord Of The Rings (imaginary world) and Gulliver's Travels (imaginary lands) are included whereas, say, Stoker's Dracula and Kafka's Metamorphosis are not. And the difference between fantasy and science fiction? For the purpose of this article, a science fiction story is considered to take place in a world where events can be explained by science and logic to the satisfaction of the reader. The reader, of course, has to be fairly easily satisfied; the arguments used will not necessarily derive from known facts but merely have to sound reasonable. In fantasy, on the other hand, literally anything can happen.

In the era of the pulp magazines, both science fiction and fantasy were mainly escapist in their appeal, SF flourishing in magazines like Amazing and Astounding and fantasy in such as Weird Tales and Unknown. At that time, science was generally regarded as the saviour of mankind and the readers' minds turned more readily to the glittering spaceships of the near future than to the wizards and barbarians of the distant past or the never-at-all, so the SF pulps were the biggest sellers. Nowadays, we've caught up on the future a bit, or, rather, we're caught up in it. We've all been to the Moon, not in actuality of course, but through the TV screen, which is very much the same thing, and public interest is such endeavours has long since declined. Science's reputation as a saviour has been tarnished by pollution and the bomb, and with silicon chips threatening the livelihood of half the population, or at any rate a complete reorganisation of our outlook and way of life, escape into science fiction is often no escape at all. It still has potential for escapism of course, as Star Ware has demonstrated, but so far the written word has not, thankfully, followed the example of the cinema. E. E. "Doc" Smith is perenially popular, but Star Wars rip-off are not yet forcing Philip K. Dick off the shelves.

With fantasy fiction, things are different. Conan is as good for escapism now as he was in the 1930s and his creator, Robert E. Howard, is back in print and high in popularity. This may be due to the success of the Conan comic, or because he has been gradually rediscovered by the Tolkien-hungry hordes in search of more fantasy. (I was one of the latter.) Howard's Conan stories, though racist and sexist, were original and entertaining, and it seems perfectly reasonable that they should be back in print for the benefit of today's aficionados. What seems less reasonable and in fact downright deplorable is that all the other stuff Howard wrote (much of it mediocre), plus endless tired additions to the Conan saga by other writers, plus endless books about other barbarians who bear a remarkable similarity to Conan should now comprise such a large proportion of fantasy writing. It is not the mere existence of these Conan imitations that is so alarming as the fact that there is very little other fantasy to provide a balance.

This state of affairs isn't too surprising. SF's potential as an important branch of serious literature having been recognised in some quarters whilst its potential for escapism has to some extent declined, a gap has been left at the bottom end of the market. Fantasy has been brought in to fill this gap, with the result that it is now

regarded as almost entirely escapist literature, capable of taking the reader out of the real world and keeping him entertained for a while, but aspiring to nothing more than that. I don't say that there's anything wrong with this kind of writing, as long as it's well-executed. Fantasy, by its very nature, has a greater potential for pure escapism than any other genre, so it's only right that it should be utilised as such.

Good escapism means original ideas and credible characters. After all, you have to believe in a world to escape into it, which means that the characters must also seem real. Poul Anderson's Three Hearts And Three Lions, E. R. Eddison's The Worm Ouroboros and Tolkien's The Lord Of The Rings are all examples of excellent fantasy novels whose intent is pure escapism. The problem is that all these books were written over twenty years ago. What we're getting today is bad escapism. With a few exceptions, like Gordon R. Dickson in his The Dragon And The George and Charles G. Finney in his The Magician Out Of Manchuria, today's writers seem to be so dazzled by the twin spectres of Tolkien and Howard that they can imagine nothing other than to copy them. In book after book, grey-cloaked magicians undertake journeys of inordinate length in search of magic artifacts or a place to put them, while mighty-thewed barbarians (of both sexes) battle pale grey slugs from stygian pits. The irony is that I like the standard trappings of fantasy; I like magicians, dragons, magic rings, great lumbering castles with dark, dusty corridors, and thick forests with ancient trees and Nameless Things which hide behind them. When I'm looking for escapism, I personally prefer such things to spaceships and laser-guns; I think they've still got potential.

With his Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories, Fritz Leiber has shown that even that most maligned branch of fantasy, sword-and-sorcery, can be original and witty and even have the occasional serious idea behind it. In his article "Mysterious Islands" in Foundation 11/12, Leiber described how he had used this saga to express his emotions of the time: his early sexual inhibitions, for instance, in "Adept's Gambit", the frustrations of his career in the particularly excellent "Lean Times In Lankhmar", and his grief at the death of his wife in "The Price Of Pain-Ease" and "The Circle Curse".

Fafhrd and the Mouser are engagingly human characters who live in an intriguing world of dark, misty alleys, inscrutable sorcerers and bustling, bawdy taverns like "The Silver Eel". Their adventures are punctuated by philosophical banter:

> '"So tell me, giant philosopher, why we're not dukes," the Gray Mouser demanded, unrolling a forefinger from the fist on his knee so that it pointed across the brazier at Fafhrd. "Or emperors, for that matter, or demi-gods."
>
> '"We are not dukes because we're no man's man," Fafhrd replied smugly, setting his shoulders against the stone horse-trough. "Even a duke must butter up a king, and demi-gods the gods. We butter no one. We go our own way, choosing our own adventures -- and our own follies! Better freedom and a chilly road than a warm hearth and servitude."
>
> '"There speaks a hound turned out by his last master and not yet found new boots to slaver on," the Mouser retorted with comradely sardonic impudence.'

It is often settings like "The Silver Eel" tavern which linger most vividly in the mind after reading a good fantasy. They are ports in a storm, or "islands" as Leiber described them in his article. The inn at Bree in The Lord Of The Rings and, I think, the entire castle of Gormenghast in Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan are other examples. They are places of refuge with a storm raging all around them, a storm which may break its way in at any moment. As Leiber writes:

> 'Fafhrd and the Mouser drinking in "The Silver Eel" tavern....the torches.... the fog....they're reminiscing....and who's this coming toward their table? Anything may happen!'

You can get the same feeling sitting around a hearth fire exchanging ghost stories on a winter's night. Such situations might be dismissed as merely "cosy", yet the storm may at any moment break into the port, and you can't sit around the fire all night; eventually, you have to climb the dark stairs to bed. In other words, the cosiness of such places is really just an illusion; they're like the worlds we build around ourselves all the time.

There's also something familiar about the character of Cugel the Clever in Jack Vance's The Eyes Of The Overworld. Cugel represents the worst in all of us: he's a lazy, greedy man in search of a fast buck, caring nothing for anyone he meets except for the extent to which he can use them for his own ends. Yet Cugel isn't as clever as he believes and he usually falls foul of his own intrigues. The communities he encounters, the schemes he devises and the manner in which they are thwarted are refreshingly unexpected and ingenious. Writing in an understaed and ironic tone of voice, Vance makes good use of the potential for humour in his "dying earth" milieu. At the start of the novel, for instance, Cugel is attempting to sell tablets of lead from a melted-down coffin as lucky talismans, yet he finds that one Pianosther at a neighbouring stall is faring rather better:

> 'Cugel closed down his booth and approached Pianosther's place of trade, in order to inspect the mode of construction and the fastenings of the door.
> 'Pianosther, observing, beckoned him to approach. "Enter, my friend, enter. How goes your trade?"
> '"In all candor, not too well," said Cugel. "I am both perplexed and disappointed, for my talismans are not obviously useless."
> '"I can resolve your perplexity," said Pianosther. "Your booth occupies the site of an old gibbet, and has absorbed unlucky essences. But I thought to notice you examining the manner in which the timbers of my booth are joined. You will obtain a better view from within, but first I must shorten the chain of the captive erb which roams the premises during the night."
> '"No need," said Cugel, "my interest was cursory."'

Why are writers like Leiber and Vance such exceptions? Why do so few others manage, or even attempt, to work the same enchantment? Why do they turn out tired facsimiles of what has gone before, books in which magic is present only as a standard plot device?

Part of the problem is that bad fantasy is so easy to write. There's no need for research or detailed rationalisation and the most common milieu, the pseudo-mediaeval world, is so well established by now that a writer can mix together a few standard dribs abd drabs and contrive some kind of story with hardly any thought at all. This is why the genre attracts both lazy writers and worthy writers in search of somewhere to do their hackwork. On the other side of the coin, having now been lumbered with label of "escapism", it's difficult for fantasy to break away from it. The stage is approaching where people expect fantasy to be bad, and are liable to condemn it just because it's fantasy. This in turn discourages people rrom trying to write well within the genre, and so a vicious circle has developed in which a genre that has potential as both escapist and as serious literature is being largely wasted.

Having criticised the current state of the art, however, I think it's necessary to explain why I still have so much faith in fantasy.

That the genre has value as escapist literature is probably the easiest premise for most people to accept. As I've already mentioned, the most common setting for a fantasy story has a mediaeval flavour, although other settings are frequently used: Conan, for example, buckles his swash in ancient times, while Ernest Bramah and Charles G. Finney have used oriental milieux. Since all works of imagination must in some way derive from real life, the particular influence of one historical period or another is usually detectable, although occasionally an imaginary world will seem to shake off all ties with reality and become purely a creation of the mind. I would cite William Hope Hodgson's The Night Land as an example. If the status of fantasy does improve, perhaps writers will begin to explore such possibilities rather more fully. Theoretically, at least, the genre has no boundaries and the reader can escape from the restrictions of reality into a world of infinite size and infinite possibilities.

To assess the potential of fantasy as serious literature is rather more complex; it is convenient to compare it with science fiction, which has recently achieved some measure of acceptance as such.

An area in which SF has superiority is its ability to predict or warn of a possible future. The dangers of overpopulation, for instance, can be more effectively illustrated in the setting of a concrete jungle, with poisoned air, congested streets and overcrowded high-rise blocks: a milieu extrapolated from our present reality, than by use of a fantasy world in which, say, two dozen elves have to live in the trunk of a single enchanted tree. However, the extrapolation of likely futures is not, in my opinion, the most significant function of science fiction; more importantly, like all literature, it provides "distance" between the reader and reality.

Both SF and fantasy can achieve this more effectively than "mainstream" fiction. They can provide "distance" not only between the reader and the characters but, by the use of an imaginary milieu, between the reader and the world itself, so that the problems of society as a whole as well as those of the individuals within it can be studied from a new perspective. Here fantasy has the advantage over science fiction, for the writer of fantasy can concentrate on communicating the atmosphere of the world, the characters, the plot, and such ideas as he may wish to convey, whereas the SF writer must continually take pains to rationalise the milieu, a process which may be tedious, time-consuming and irrelevant to the impact of the story on the reader.

An example of such shortcomings can be found in the works of A. Merritt. Such novels as The Face In The Abyss are fantasies in spirit, yet in his attempts to render them acceptable to the SF readership the author provides tedious and frequently ludicrous explanations of all the fantastic happenings, a process which actually helps to scuttle rather than suspend disbelief and disperses whatever atmosphere of enchantment the stories might otherwise aspire to create.

Characterisation has been another victim of the need to rationalise. Hard-science SF writers, for instance, have so much technology to explain away that there isn't any time for them to develop their characters, which is why they all seem particularly wooden and the stories so dull. The more recent "humanised" science fiction has relied on science and hence been inhibited by rationalisation to a far lesser extent.

Fantasy is free from any such restrictions, although many of the techniques used in SF can still be applied. Time, for instance, has been a favourite plaything of science fiction writers from H. G. Wells onwards, yet in his fantasy novel The King Of Elfland's Daughter, Lord Dunsany also distorted it to great effect. The novel concerns the kingdom of Elfland, in which time passes more slowly than in mortal lands, so that a day there would span, say, ten years of earthly time. Dunsany, a writer in the romantic tradition, uses this discrepancy to illustrate his favourite themes: the approach of death and the passing of youth and beauty. The human hero Alveric goes to Elfland to steal away the king's daughter; on his return he finds that his friends have aged and his father has died. In Elfland, meanwhile, the king bemoans that passing of his daughter into mortal lands, where he knows that she is subject to the ravages of time:

> 'For he, whose wisdom surpassed the confines of Elfland and touched our own rugged fields, knew well the harshness of material things and all the turmoil of Time. Even as he stood there he knew that the years that assail beauty, and the myriad harshnesses that vex the spirit, were already about his daughter. And the days that remained to her now seemed scarce more to him, dwelling beyond the fret and ruin of Time, than to us might seem a briar rose's hours when plucked and foolishly hawked in the streets of a city.'

Writing as he does in the fantasy idiom, Dunsany has no need to invent some fantastic machine or split in the fabric of the universe in order to justify the time discrepancy; it is part of the magic of Elfland. He merely states the fact, then uses it.

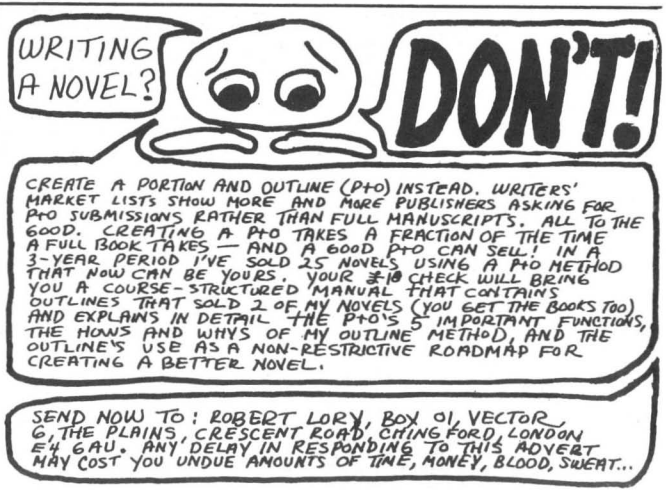
Some would argue that despite such technicalities, the fantasy genre has no value as serious literature because events which take place in a world which is not logically derived from our own can never bear any relation to reality. This seems to me to be based upon two false premises. Firstly, it suggests that people are one hundred per cent products of the world in which they live, which I think is an exaggeration. I would agree that we are strongly influenced by our environment, yet that environment is in turn strongly influenced by the other people in it, and it is with people that

fiction is primarily concerned. Even when considering innovatory and possibly global concepts in the way that science fiction does, it is their effect upon people that really counts, as the science fiction has, to its credit, grown to realise in the last few decades. So if a fantasy world contains real people, as indeed it should, then it must automatically bear a strong relation to the real world.

The fantastic elements of a story can in fact contrast with the more realistic elements, making them seem more real. Humour can work in the same way. A good example is The Eyes Of The Overworld, in which the fantastic beasts and strange customs of the land, and the hilarious nature of many of Cugel's antics provide contrast with the cruel side of his nature, showing it up for the callousness that it is.

The argument also presupposes that an imaginary world really can bear no relation to reality. In actual fact, a fantasy milieu, though perhaps having no logical relation to our world, is still a product of the human mind and hence (once again) of the human environment. I have cited The Night Land as an example of the fantasy milieu which bears less relation than most to present or past realities, yet even that nightmarish landscape seems to have uncannily preaugured its creator's death in the trenches of the First World War, an environment that must have seemed to him like the Night Land's worldly incarnation. The imaginings of humanity, it seems, like its equally tenuous hopes and fears, have their roots in reality.

So what of the future? Is fantasy likely to re-establish itself as a respectable genre, or will the hackwork take over completely? Certainly, science fiction is unlikely to relinquish its position as the most important of the two genres in the near future, and in the present period of technological breakthrough and sociological uncertainty that is probably as it should be. It is not my intention, after all, to suggest that fantasy is a genre superior to science fiction, merely that it should be considered on its potential merits rather than on its present reputation, and that the two genres should be complementary areas of serious writing. Imaginary world fantasy has its advantages as well as its disadvantages, and it is time that these were recognised again.



RICHARD COWPER:

YORCON SPEECH 1979

This is the text of the Guest of Honour speech that Richard Cowper gave at Yorcon, the 30th British Easter Convention at Leeds on April 14th 1979.

I don't think I have ever come closer to a writer's block than I did when I read the programme details in that final Progress Report and discovered that what I am about to say to you now was billed as the major event of this the 30th British Easter Science Fiction Convention. I found myself locked rigid in a sort of mental paralysis. I felt like that terrified figure in the picture by Edward Munch -- the one called "The Scream" -- mouth agape, eyes starting, hands clasped over its ears, yelling silently for help which never comes.

When the moment passed (they always do) I was left as I had been for the past year or so wondering what on earth I was going to talk to you about. What could I possibly say to several hundred people at least three-quarters of whom know more about science fiction than I do? Well, twenty minutes from now we will all know the answer to that one.

As a matter of hard, cold fact I have spoken in public before about science fiction on one or two occasions. I was once invited to address an audience of seven members of the Llantwit Major Women's Institute on that very subject. The memory still lingers in the burrows of my nightmares. There they sat, ranged about me in a stony, sombre semi-circle. Three of them never stopped knitting; one had a slight but most disconcerting muscular twitch which, every now and again, caused he to jerk her head sideways and upwards as if she were giving me a covert invitation to step outside with her (possibly with a view to discussing Existentialism in the works of J. G. Ballard); two were (I suspect) members of the CIA; and the seventh kept jumping up to see if the kettle was boiling over. So you see I am not wholly unprepared for the situation in which I now find myself. I have done battle for the Cause on the far-distant outposts of our Empire, and I still have the mental scars to prove it.

Nor have I been short of advice from kind, well-meaning friends who have told me which subjects and approaches have been pre-empted. Better not try to be funny, they warned me, because that'll mean you're in the ring with Bob Shaw and Bob Sheckley. And you can't really talk about professionalism because you aren't really a professional, are you? Not a real professional. I mean you haven't ghosted any volumes for one of those series which Brian has epitomised for ever as "Cor Of The Planet Shagbag". Besides, you can't even type, for God's sake! Still, they'll probably be curious to look at you even if they don't listen to you. Yes, that might well be your biggest advantage. The charm of novelty. It'll be like looking at a mammoth that's just been thawed out of a glacier. Not so much a left-over from the Golden Age as from the Stone Age. Well, they didn't actually say all those things, but I'm an adept at reading people's minds.

And undoubtedly there is a substantial grain of truth in that "one of the last survivors of an earlier age" label which has been attached to my collar. Were it not for H. G. Wells certainly I would not be standing here today. (Iam tempted to add that I think it quite likely that none of you would be here either.) Wells, Karel Capek, Huxley's Brave New World and one novel by Jules Verne -- A Journey To The Centre Of The Earth (incidentally, the only story of his I have ver been able to finish) -- these first made me aware of the almost infinite possibilities in scientific romance,

and it is, I think, significant that I read these books before I had any idea that one day I might become a writer myself. If there is one inestimable advantage that the non-writer has over the writer it is that he or she is largely unaware of the process that has gone into putting the words on to the paper, whereas the writer, whatever other compensations he may have acquired, has lost his primal innocence and can, I suspect, never wholly suspend his disbelief in any literary work unless, perhaps, it is one of his own.

When I started writing seriously -- no, let me rephrase that -- when I started writing (for I have never been less than deadly serious about it) way back there in the late forties, it did not occur to me to try my hand at science fiction. I read a fair amount of SF but -- and in retrospect I find this mildly interesting -- I read it simply as part of all the other fiction I was reading at the time. I did not think of SF as being different in kind from the rest. Had anyone thought to ask me whether I ever intended to write an SF story of my own -- and I'm quite sure that no one ever did -- I should have denied it, if for no better reason than that I could not imagine that I would ever have anything to say that needed to be said in that particular way.

So, in a sense, I was able to retain a good deal of that lost innocence I mentioned, right up the point in 1964 when I found that I needed to write a novel about Extra Sensory Perception.

Having written my story and sent it off to my publishers I was somewhat taken aback when my erstwhile editor returned the script to me and told me that, though she had greatly enjoyed the book, the firm did not publish science fiction. As soon as I had recovered from my astonishment I protested loudly. I told her that I didn't mind in the least if they didn't call it science fiction, just so long as they went ahead and published it. But it was all to no avail. I was up against the Closed Mind. And that -- what I have learnt to recognise as "The Closed Mind Syndrome" -- is one of the things I would like to talk about this afternoon.

To me one of the most fascinating aspects of this common affliction is that practically no one who suffers from it will ever admit that he does. He will happily agree that lots of other people have closed minds -- he will probably even be prepared to name names -- but himself? No. The most he will admit to is an occasional grey area over which he retains an uneasy, shuffling ambivalence.

After several years of somewhat lethargic research I am in a position to report that I have detected the Close Mind Syndrome operating in many different areas. Let me instance a few. Birth control (a favourite Closed Mind topic amongst Catholics); Catholics (a favourite Closed Mind topic amongst Protestants); Arabs (amongst Jews -- and vice versa); homosexuality (amongst heterosexuals); acupuncture and hypnotism (amongst doctors); ESP, water-divining and astrology (amongst scientists); and, of course, science fiction amongst all kinds of people who really ought to know better. I could go on but I'm sure you will have taken my point.

As an autonomic reflex the Closing of the Mind is predominantly emotional and wholly protective, yet those who are afflicted will often go to quite extraordinary lengths in their efforts to convince you that they are completely rational and totally without prejudice in the way they face up to the facts. The classic example so far as I was concerned was, of course, ESP. Now I am firmly of the opinion that ESP exists. I have experienced the phenomenon myself and refuse to deny the (admittedly subjective) validity of my own experience. Furthermore, if it were possible to put the question to the whole of the world's population I hazard that a good nine-tenths of them would agree with me. They might not know what it was, but they would sure as hell know what I was talking about. Yet, when I was researching the background for that early novel of mine I came up against a number of so-called "scientific" minds who simply refused to admit that ESP even might exist.

One of these was a self-styled "behaviourist" -- and if you want a short and depressing trot through an arid mental landscape let me recommend that you try talking to an orthodox behaviourist about telepathy. That man had built up an absolutely impenetrable defensive wall around his mind. As far as he was concerned there was no god but J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner was his prohpet. And he knew he was right! He is the man I

call to mind whenever I remember Andre Gide's wise observation: "Be prepared to follow the man who says he is seeking the truth, but don't believe him if he tells you he's found it". That behaviourist was genuinely convinced that any scientist who was prepared to allow that ESP just might exist was involved in some vast and sinister conspiracy designed expressly to pervert the course of "true" science. He was a classic example of The Closed Mind and, what's more, he was proud of it.

I came up against the same sort of thing -- though in a much milder form -- when I was living down in South Wales and first heard about a Cardiff doctor who, over the course of some fifty-odd years, had been conducting a series of experiments in hypnotically-induced temporal regression which appeared to offer remarkable evidence for human re-incarnation. (His work has since achieved a modicum of recognition through a television programme and the publication of a book called The Bloxham Tapes.)

Now at least three eminently level-headed people told me quite categorically that Bloxham must be a fraud because what he appeared to have produced evidence for was utterly impossible. Their reasons for asserting this varied, but common to them all was the firm -- almost religious -- conviction that science had somehow "proved" that the human soul or spirit did not -- indeed, could not -- exist, though as far as I can recall they were not prepared to state precisely how this had been done.

I shudder to think what my behaviourist friend would have said about Dr Arnall Bloxham. "Charlatan" would certainly have been the mildest of his epithets. But I do not believe that Dr Bloxham is a charlatan. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that I suspect that what he has uncovered may ultimately prove to be at least as important to humanity as the space programme. I will go even further that that and state that if I were in a position to do so I would quite cheerfully divert a large chunk of the money that is going to fund the next rocket launch and use it to set up a research programme on the lines of the Bloxham project.

This does not mean that I am some sort of pin-headed Luddite where modern technology is concerned. Far from it. Dyson Spheres, tachyons, black holes and ovionic systems are all dear to me in their own delightful way. But only as the means to an end. For me that end is man himself. If I send one of my characters out into deep space -- and I have never made a regular habit of doing so -- it is simply in order that he may ultimately learn something about himself and, by extension, about us.

Now without wishing to sound either presumptuous or iconoclastic I cannot let this opportunity pass without remarking that this conviction of mine that The Proper Study Of Mankind Is Man is something I seek for in vain in a lot of science fiction. It would be churlish of me to name names but there some very well known writers within the field whose fictional characters convince me far less than does the ingenious gadgetry which surrounds them. So often these steely-eyed, craggy-jawed troopers seem to act like a behaviourist's chickens and pigeons -- i.e., wholly predictably. But you know, and I know, that human beings are not wholly predictable. Neither are they rational. And if we ever do get around to pooping off a spaceship full of homo sapiens in the general direction of Alpha Centauri or wherever, the one thing I am quite certain of is that the vessel will be loaded down to the Plimsoll Line with Human Error.

Over the years, when I have been provoked into mildly voicing this perennial complaint of mine about the relative poverty of the human characterisation in SF I have sometimes been told that I shouldn't be looking for that sort of thing in the genre. Science fiction, I am informed, is The Literature Of Ideas. I know what is meant, but I remain unconvinced. After all, 1984 is a novel of Ideas but, I maintain, the real impact of that book springs not from the ideas themselves, fascinating though they are, but from the reader's imaginative identification with the plight of Winston Smith. To put it in its crudest possible form, Orwell involves our emotions. And he does it because he cares passionately about the fate of the creatures of his own imagination.

It has been said that we, as writers of science fiction, are simply competing for our readers' beer money. I reject that utterly. What I am competing for is my readers' imaginations -- for their emotions. For the last six years or so my potential reward

has been symbolised for me by a moment when I was travelling on the London Underground and noticed that a girl who was sitting opposite me was reading one of my books (perhaps the only person in London who was). I watched her covertly and suddenly I saw her begin to smile. The smile broadened into a grin and fianlly she laughed aloud -- glanced up -- caught my eye -- and blushed. It was a rich moment. If I had been using it in a story I might well have felt tempted to pretend that I subsequently discovered that she had slipped the dust-jacket of my book round her favourite copy of Emmanuel Kant's Critique Of Pure Reason!

This problem of persuading people to suspend their disbelief in our characters, and in the situations in which we place those characters, is fundamental to all fiction. To succeed as novelists we have to involve our readers emotionally. But emotions are tricky things -- especially in SF. After all, science is supposed to be an unemotional subject. Could this be one of the reasons why so many people feel uncomfortable about science fiction. I mean, there is science on the one hand and there is fiction on the other -- matter and antimatter. Bring them together and the likelihood is that they will annihilate each other. And very often they seem to do just that. An awful lot of SF lies dead upon the page. But it is a victim not so much of the overwhelming force of its ideas as of the feebleness of the writing in which those ideas are embodied. Put at its bluntest, there is just too much plain bad writing around.

But where there should be pressure from all sides on the writer to write as well as he he possibly can there is nothing of the kind. If I were of a despairing disposition I would certainly have felt tempted to give up writing SF some years ago when a novel of mine was rejected by one of the largest publishers in the United States on the grounds that it was (and I quote) "rather too well-written for our specialised market". Even assuming that they didn't wish to hurt my feelings by telling me that they thought my book was a load of crap, it seemed an oddly depressing choice of words. Yet I think I know what they meant. And I suspect that every other writer here today will know it too. After all, the subliminal message is plain enough. I read it as -- "If you want to make a name for yourself as a writer, steer clear of SF".

It has taken me many years of toiling in the field to appreciate that my one small, positive advantage as a writer of science fiction lies in the fact that I did not start out by writing it. By the time I got round to writing my first SF novel I had at least proved to my own satisfaction that I was a writer. But had I started out in the field and then gone on to produce my quota of acclaimed SF novels I would still have that nagging suspicion at the back of my mind that I hadn't yet proved muself as a real writer, only as a writer of science fiction. Certainly I would know in my bones that my work was superior to that of X, Y and Z -- but outside the walls of the citadel who the hell has ever heard of X, Y and Z?

Any author who finds himself in this situation has my profoundest sympathy. I think it monstrously unfair that science fiction should be treated differently from ordinary fiction, categorised, hived-off, patronised or condemned out of hand as being beneath contempt. I care passionately about the art by which I live. When a newspaper critic can go into print and inform me that, as a writer of SF, I practise the genre because I have fancy but no imagination and that bizarre things matter more to me than such fictional staples as character, psychological probability and credible dialogue, I scream in my soul because I know I am confronting yet another manifestation of the Closed Mind -- one which has been wound up like a clockwork Dalek and can only repeat: "No Science Fiction Novel Can Ever Be A Good Novel" while all the other closed minds quack back: "Quite Right; Quite Right; Quite Right".

But what is more -- and what is far, far worse -- is that I know, and you know, that for every single SF novel I could bring forward to refute his daming generalisations he could produce a dozen to support them. Yet the fact that he is able to do so still does not invalidate my one book any more than the existence in print of a thousand Mills & Boon romances invalidates one Catch-22 or a Doctor Zhivago.

I wish I knew what the answer was. I don't think it is quite as simple as just removing the letters "SF" from the jackets of the books themselves, though I would be delighted to be proved wrong. It would certainly be interesting to see what would happen

if that were done. Nor do I think it lies simply in the Closed Minds of harrassed Literary Editors who can find room for only about a quarter of the ordinary novels they receive for review anyway. No, if I were to plump for anything, I should have to say that I believe that the real answer probably lies with us, the writers. If every one of us took a binding vow never to be satisfied with so much as a single sentence that was less than the very best we could produce I suspect the problem would vanish almost overnight. But probably we would too!

I have come almost to the end of what I have to say. But not quite. There is still one head left on the phantom hydra: one charge which is levelled against that form of fiction which I love, warts and all, and which I continue to practise because I love it. And the name of the beast is "escapism".

I am sure we are only too familiar with this term, which my dictionary defines as "the tendency to escape from unpleasant or intractable realities into fantasy". Now the interesting thing to me is that here in Britain today this so-called tendency has, by and large, come to be regarded as something reprehensible though, so far as I know, the word was not even coined until about 1950. The implication is, of course, that Life is Real and Life is Earnest and it is to be met with a stiff upper lip, a copy of some political manifesto and an expression of gloomy suffering.

Now the truth is that all imaginative literature is a form of escape. I have a nasty suspicion that the current fashion of using "escapism" and "escapist" as terms of censure can be traced back along the critical web to where the figure of Dr F. R. Leavis still glowers out balefully upon a hostile world. Leavis and his followers spread abroad the poisonous rumour that an enthusiasm for imaginative fantasy was a sure indication of a Bad Upbringing, Lack of Moral Fibre, and Hopeless Immaturity. Literature, they have insisted, is Serious and Symbolic and has absolutely nothing to do with Enjoyment or Day-Dreaming or indeed any of those delightful and harmless pastimes that distinguish homo spaiens from the other animals.

In my experience the only effective way to meet such a charge is boldly, head-on, conscious that at your shoulder stand all those ghostly legions from Chauver onwards who have gloried in the freedom of the imagination and have bodied forth the forms of things unknown.

As I have said before, and will I am sure say again, to "escape" is but to exercise the Divine Faculty of the Human Imagination. A great writer lends us the whole of his sensibility. The intensity and validity of the imaginative experience which he communicates and which we are privileged to share is what counts. I simply do not comprehend the kind of mind which effects to despise this faculty or elects to subordinate it to something they call "realism".

Imagination is our only reliable escape hatch from the suffocating prison of the ego -- from our own identity -- and if we deny its claim upon us then we are denying the most precious element of our own humanity.

Don't forget that there won't be a Vector going out with the next BSFA mailing. Instead, there'll be issue 2 of FOCUS, edited by Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans. Copies will be available to non-members for a price of 75p from: 32 Balfern Grove, Chiswick, LONDON, W4.

There will be a special Reviews Supplement edited by Mike Dickinson and Joseph Nicholas with the next mailing, due to be sent out in the first week of March. The next proper issue of Vector is due at the end of April, and already is shaping up to be a strong and solid issue.

JUDGEMENT DAY

Artwork: D.WEST JOHN CONSTANTINE

John Constantine is a publisher's Reader whose fiction and criticism have appeared under other names. D.West is a largely unpublished writer whose novella The Pit was recently reprinted in Let's Go To Golgotha, the Panther paperback edition of the Gollancz/Sunday Times Best SF.

Writing a novel is a lengthy business - so lengthy, in fact, that the aspiring author may well lose sight of the end to which he is working. Absorbed in the complications (and sheer toil) of getting the words down on paper it is possible to forget the aim of this act of creation is not simply self-expression but publication.

Some years ago there appeared a book called Reader's Report, in which Christopher Derrick gave a lucid and comprehensive account of the business of novel writing as seen from the viewpoint of a publisher's reader. The Reader (given the dignity of capitalisation to distinguish his stern professionalism from the frivolity of the mere consumer) is the man who looks over the newly submitted manuscripts, who sees not only the books that make it into print but those fated to remain unpublished. Reader's Report is valuable not only for being entertaining, witty, and one of the very few sensible books on how to set about writing a novel, but also as virtually the only detailed account of the critical process to which a newly submitted novel is subjected. And this, after all, is the most important judgement of all: acceptance or rejection. An author's amour propre may be caressed or buffeted by what the critics and reviewers have to say later, but in real terms their verdict carries comparatively little weight. It is probably true to say that in the Book Trade any publicity is good publicity. Much though it hurts their own self-esteem, even reviewers will admit that what they say about a book matters less than the amount of space they give it; exposure is more important than critical acclaim. In the end, the Only True Critic is the Publisher's Reader: detached, objective, untroubled by any temptation to show off or impress - and with a firm grasp of the commercial realities of publishing.

Christopher Derrick's book dealt with publishing in general. This article repeats and amplifies a number of his points and also considers some of the special factors that affect the field of SF. Practice varies cosiderably from one firm to another, and what is given here must therefore be taken as no more than a general outline, with many possible exceptions. However, although after reading these words of wisdom and secret love you will not necessarily be any more fitted to become the Arthur C Clarke or Frederik Pohl of your generation, you should be aware of some of the traps, pitfalls and obstacles which line the way to success. And if you have no intention of beating your brains out in the attempt to write SF, you can simply sit back, free from all anxiety, and savour the horrors that lie in wait for the more ambitious.

Let us assume that you have written your SF novel and are typing up the final draft. You have already started to feel edgy, to anticipate the period of waiting before the publisher's awful final verdict. What are your chances of success?

Well, assuming that you are of a reasonable intelligence, can write coherent prose, and have not sent in a manuscript written with a blunt blue crayon on the backs of a collection of old envelopes, the likelihood of your novel being accepted is probably somewhere between one and twenty.

As Christopher Derrick points out, those who speak of "The Novel" or "Fiction" are invariably referring to that small fraction which has actually reached publication. The whole body of the Novel is like an iceberg: a few glittering peaks above the surface which catch the eye - and another nine-tenths lying invisible under the waves, coli, forgotten and forever unknown. Most novels sent to publishers are rejected. Most novels are destined to go on being rejected, to remain forever unpublished: unread save by those of the author's family and friends loyal or unwary enough to express an interest.

This may sound daunting. In fact, an aspiring author should realise that the situation is quite hopeful. It is hard to convey exactly how mind-numbingly awful much of this rejected material is. You are invited to consider your own candidate for Worst Published Novel (perhaps something dictated by a hungover hack in his lunch hour) and then to reflect that - however bad the thing may be - it is certainly superior to much of what regularly faces the Publisher's Reader.

This is where the new writer has his chance. If his work shows any signs of talent at all, the Reader will fall upon it with cries of joy and sobs of gratitude. In the cold and dismal wasteland of Mss. reading, even the smallest and most distant spark will be checked out in case it is an embryo bonfire. The Publisher's Reader is paid to read bad books. Some are mediocre, some are simply incompetant, and some are so terrible they should be taken out and buried, preferably with their creators. In other circumstances, eight out of ten would either be laid aside or hurled across the room. But the iron has entered the Reader's soul. He plods on to the end. He has to be sure. That, after all, is what he is being paid for. Being hired to read books may seem an easy and agreeable profession. The Reader knows it is mostly hard work, and being human he would really prefer to get paid and enjoy himself.

It can be quite flatly stated that no novel of any merit whatsoever is denied a fair judgement. The main problem faced by the Reader is not that of recognising a good book, but of preserving his brain and critical faculties in the face of so many bad ones. After a while even something quite mediocre looks like genius. Second thoughts usually take acre of such errors of judgement, but not before the work in question has been subjected to particularly close scrutiny.

There is little chance that any book will be rejected on a mistaken estimate of its literary merit. There is a surprisingly widespread belief that large numbers of brilliant SF novels are lying unloved in bottom drawers, due to a wicked plot on the part of certain publishers and established authors to keep new writers out. For reasons best known to themselves (but doubtless suitably shocking) these evil men are strapping down SF in its minor-genre category, although it is well known that the public would dearly love to buy six new paperbacks a day and support a dozen monthly magazines.

The conspiracy theory of SF publishing is fantasy, but it does contain one or two small grains of truth. It is slightly more difficult to get published if you're an unknown writer. Some publishers are over-cautious or over-conservative in their assessment of what the readers want and what the markets can absorb. And the conspiracy can be seen in action at any SF convention, where the villains stand around in exclusive groups drinking toasts to mutual success and laughing heartilly as they exchange merry jests about new, young, writers starving in attics.

The basic defect of this argument is that it puts the cart before the horse. SF doubtless has the potential to expand and publish more books - but only if more publishable books get written. And the books that are written are mostly written very badly. Competant novelists are much rarer than is generally supposed. Even good short story writers are not common. A new British SF magazine would have trouble not so much finding an audience as finding enough good writers. When Peter Weston rather incautiously let it be known that he was looking for material for the Andromeda anthology series he received several Mss. from unknowns. Virtually all this material was hopelessly unsuitable and in the end the stories

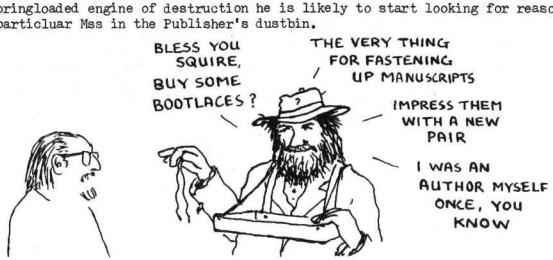
in Andromeda 1 all came from established authors. The way the same familiar names turn up again and again is not the result of a sinister plot: comparatively few of the people who think they can write are actually good enough to be published.

Having accepted that the Publisher's Reader is conscientious to the point of insanity (if inclined to be a little morose about it) and that the Publisher is pathetically eager to discover new talent - should an author persist in his efforts to gain acceptance or should he take rejection as cruel but final dismissal? Well, since a certain amount of egotism is necessary to embark on the lonely and arduous task of writing a novel, it would be a poor-spirited author who gave up immediately. After all, there are many well-known examples of books rejected several times before finally making it and becoming bestsellers. But after two or three rejections it might be as well to pause for reflection, to attempt - if possible - to subject the work to the same sort of scrutiny it has already received from the Reader.

The position of the Reader varies from firm to firm. Sometimes he is a full-time minion with other duties, but more often (since Reading is a time-consuming job) he is an outsider either on some sort of retainer (as "SF Advisor") or paid by the Mss. In general, the Reader sees only those submissions which are in the middle ranges. Material by known and established Big Names goes straight upstairs to the Boss Man, while the unmistakable duds (written metaphorically - if not literally - with a blunt pencil in an old exercise book) go straight into the OUT tray. The prerogative of instant dismissal is usually exercised with some caution. The Publishers know all those stories about bestsellers that got away, and anything remotely likely gets a closer look. The Reader is aware of how cautious his employers are since he has to read the awful things.

So - the Reader sits at home, and your bundle of Mss descends upon him, compliments of the Publisher. Maybe the Reader has a hangover, or maybe he's just quarelled with his wife. Maybe he simply feels in a bad temper generally. The sight of the new work rouses no tremendous enthusiasm - merely a groan at the prospect of another dose of what will very likely turn out to be stupefying incompetance. Maybe (a shocking admission) the Reader mouths a curse or two, snarls, and hurls the offending package across the room into some obscure corner where it can lie forgotten for a week or so. The Reader has better, more rewarding pursuits to follow. Like watching television. Or picking his nose. Eventually, however, the Mss. is removed from its wrappings. Mindful of the fact that this vile object represents MONEY the Reader is resigned to giving it a look. And at this point a preliminary examination may well change the Reader's attitude from grim resiggnation to profound loathing.

Submitting Mss. is the most presentable possible form seems an elementary point. Mss. should be clearly typed, double spaced, on one side only of reasonable quality quarto or A4 white paper, with margins of not less than one inch and preferably with the same number of lines on each of the (numbeted) pages. Any alterations and corrections should be clear and unambiguous and should not in any case consist of a complete re-writing job. Obvious stuff - to which must be added: do NOT use punched holes, ring binders, bits of spiky metal or old bootlaces to fasten up the bloody thing. The average Ms is a bulky object, and with any form of binding it is far too heavy to handle comfortably. If you must fasten pages, do it by stapling them (in the top left hand corner) in batches of twenty or thirty pages. Better still, leave the whole thing loose, confined only by a couple of rubber bands. (But adequately packed in some form of box) Any form of fastening has to be undone sooner or later, so the simpler it is, the better. If the Reader nips his finger in some springloaded engine of destruction he is likely to start looking for reasons to put that particluar Mss in the Publisher's dustbin.



You can, of course, just take your chances. One of the worst-prepared Mss I've seen came from an experienced professional. Eight pages were missing entirely and about a dozen more were wholly or partly illegible due to faulty photo-copying. Almost every page was littered with typing errors, scrawled corrections and alterations, and the page numbering was further complicated by the fact that whole sections had been excised or added. This book was subsequently accepted and a quite substantial advance paid.

Still, that was a good book. The poor presentation of the Mss was irritating, but never a serious factor in the final judgement. Nor should such factors ever affect the verdict - but the Reader is only human, and the less he is provoked and annoyed, the better the chances for work which is marginal. Similarly, not a few well known authors are less than perfect in the areas of spelling and punctuation. The prose may be perfectly good in essence, but words like "jepodise" and"manover" (for "jeopardise" and "manoeuvre") will tend to halt the smooth flow with something like a jolt. Likewise, a wild superfluity (or complete absence) of commas and other punctuation marks may well mean that a sentence needs to be read twice over before the sense emerges. Few people are perfect here(the Reader may not be so hot himself) and Publishers edit copy as a matter of course, correcting spelling and regularising punctuation, but text should be readable, even if not absolutely correct.

It's fairly easy to decide when a book is "Bad" (in the sense of being absolutely unpublishable) but "Good" can mean a number of things. Different publishers have different requirements and also different standards. It is not the Reader's job to say Yes or No; the final choice is not his. His task is simply to outline what the book is about, to list its areas of strength and weakness and to estimate its possible or probable overall appeal, giving a clear indication of the sort of audience it might suit. (Quite often the audience is a small one -like schizophrenic fourteen year old amateur rapists). At the end he may include a definite recommendation - nine times out of ten, for rejection - but the Publisher may choose to disregard this. This does not necessarily mean the Reader has made a mistake; he is doing his job properly if he provides the Publisher with a sufficiently detailed and accurate picture of the book.

Having read the Mss (a thing sometimes easier said than done) the Reader starts by writing a precis: a summary of the background and main lines of the plot. This often demands a considerable effort. Having laboured through Toad Princess of Altair Five the Reader may feel inclined to summarise his findings as "Toads fighting the Space Patrol - the Toads Lose". Other than that, he is conscious of very little except a vague indignation at being forced to read such drivel. However, being conscientious, he looks over his notes (too obscene for verbatim transcription) and finally stirs up a few bald facts about exactly which Toads were being nasty to what Princess and where the Space Patrol finally caught up with them. This probably takes a couple of hundred words, the Toadly transactions proving more complex and confused than memory first suggested.

The more interesting business of comment can now begin. In a perfect world one would simply take care of Toad Princess of Altair Five with: "This stinks. Burn it." However, such brevity smacks too much of mere subjective opinion, so the usual practise is to list all the good points - plot, characterisation, scientific plausibility, prose style, imagination, readability - then state that the book has none of these and is best rejected. This takes about half a page, and is worth doing if only to show that you are awake and keenly on the job. Really bad books are easilly handled once the awful effort of actually reading them is safely past. Something slightly better, like Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid (a sociological and philosophical study of the traumatic ecological effects of the arrival in a closed spacer society of cheap sexual aids) will take a little longer.

To begin with, Sex Pirates looks good. There's a nice piece of scene-setting action as the Pirate ships, heavilly laden with contraband Atomic Vibrators and Venusian Ticklers, make a swashbuckling approach to the puritan asteroid settlement of Quim's World. The Pirate Leader Moggadeath immediately clashes with Rocata, stern-eyed Master of Quim's Select Bretheren, and the stage seems to be set for some colourful conflict. A little pretentious, perhaps, but quite good entertainment and fairly well written.

Then everything goes sour. Instead of blasting each other - or(at the very least) rasping curses through gritted jaws - Rocata and Moggadeath settle down to a series of oblique, opaque and generally incomprehensible dialogues about the Infinite and Cosmic Forces. Cryptic phrases and subtle references fly back and forth, and every pause is pregnant with symbolic meaning. In fact, pretty nearly everything turns out to be symbolic: the conflict is really between the Aesthetic Impulse and the Vital Primitive Unconscious. Or something like that. The author (like the Reader) loses control half way through, and the whole thing eventually disappears up its own arse in a welter of super-significance.

In a perfect world this too would be dismissed with two or three expletives. But Publishers - and Readers - cannot afford such self-indulgence. After all, books only a little better (or a little less bad) have been published and acclaimed as Art. Pretentious nonsense sometimes sells as well as brainless nonsense. SF is always more or less crackbrained stuff... it's just a question of how much the readers will stand. Yes...thinks the Reader...remember Van Vogt's books: incomprehensible nut stuff if ever there was...Not to mention Samuel R. Delaney and all his imitators...

In the end, judgement comes back to a measurement of all those sterling old qualities which were so conspicuously lacking in Toad Princess of Altair Five: plot, characterisation, scientific plausibility, prose style, imagination and readability. The Reader notes that Sex Pirates has a good prose style (when the author has anything clear or definite to say or describe), is excellent on the SF trappings, shows a lot of imagination (albeit confused) and is very readable in patches. But the plot is a mess: apparently pointless (or with a point so obscure as to be invisible) and littered with unexplained and unresolved loose ends. The characterisation suffers from the determined striving after Cosmic Meaning: the characters are never allowed to develop beyond the level of mouthpieces for one side or the other in the Great Universal Debate. Interesting in parts - says the Reader - but too muddled for the intellectuals and too slow for the space opera fans, the imagination dissipated in undisciplined ramblings and the action held down by over-indulgence in philosophising. The wrong sort of philosophy, too: transcendental stuff, not good solid Heinlein-style crackerbarrel cliches.

Both these hypothetical examples illustrate the would-be novellist's commonest failing: the inability to distinguish between intention and execution. The author of Toad Princess wanted to write an epic space adventure full of colour, romance, daring, excitement, and the good old sensawunda of exploding suns and mindblowing alien monsters. Instead he produced something flat, trite, and rather silly, like the slambang plot outline of a rather poor comic strip. But as he re-reads his work this is not at all what he sees; his imagination supplies all those details - all the colour and vitality - which somehow never made it onto paper. Similarly, the author of Sex Pirates looking over his own turgid and obscure opus, picks out all those pointers (too deeply buried for mere readers) which link the whole amorphous mess into something with a real message. He takes no account of the fact that at least half the meaning he draws from the narrative never actually found its way onto the page but remains locked in his own head.

The Reader spends much time gazing into the gulf between ambition and achievement. Very often he feels a sympathetic pang even when turning down the most hopeless piece of garbage - somewhere inside this pathetically inept farrago is the faint bright spark of a good idea. Still, the Reader may sigh, but he knows it is his duty to be ruthless. As far as publishers are concerned, manymay feel called but few are going to be chosen, and good intentions alone count for nothing at all.

An insistence on the necessity for a solid plot and clearly defined action and characters may seem philistine: the sort of approach which critics (particularly British critics) tend to inveigh against as producing formula-ridden hackwork. In fact, such writers of advice to SF authors as Ben Bova and L.Sprague de Camp have much that is useful to offer. The real criticism to be levelled against their teaching is that it doesn't go far wnough: Bova and de Camp's concentration on basic technique carries too heavy an implication that is all that is necessary. They seem to encourage a deliberate underachievement: develop yourself to the point of saleability and then no further.

Still, this is the way up in the stratospheric realms of the Higher Criticism as far as the Reader is concerned. Much of what he handles doesn't even rise to the level of hack-work. Formula SF may exist on a rather low-level but at least on that level it does achieve its own aims. (some of the time. But the objection to such atrocities as the type of fiction promulgated by Isaac Asmiov's SF Magazine is not that this is Bad Art, but that it is bad entertainment, inadequate for all save fact-orientated morons).

The average Mss these days doesn't concern anything so colourful as space opera. Apparently space ships banging around the galaxy are now passé. Instead, we have a mysterious Space Research Establishment (devoted to mysterious Secret Research - this is not a joke; half the time the authors themselves don't know what's going on) and a hero who contends with dark doings of some semi-scientific sort. Maybe it's a common old World Domination plot; maybe something subtler, such as a plan to instal a miniature radio reciever in everyone's head, thus broadening the powerbase of the BBC. The story can then go one of two ways: either the hero has it figured out by page 25 and spends the next 200 pages wrestling with his conscience (and the evil BBC men) before pulling the stroke that Saves Everything, or the Frightful Revelation is held back for the last page, the reader meanwhile being left to get through the intervening fog of incomprehesibility as best he can. More often than not, the hero comes to a bad end, or the situation is revealed as being entirely hopeless. This is not so much due to the author's iherent pessimism as to the fact that it's easier to stage-manage a disaster than a triumph. When in doubt, kill everybody off. Ruthless villains are always a sounnd bet: any time it become necessary to account for some character who has dropped out of the main scene it can be revealed that the poor geek was really liquidated several chapters back. The author is then able to enjoy a satisfying sensation of having tied up all the loose ends.

This kind of nonsense (the rule rather than the exception) has almost too many faults to list, the commonest being that a weak short story idea has been inflated far beyond its natural length, with all the consequent evils of poor construction and attenuated plot. Writing short stories is not a good preparation for writing novels. The two forms are radically different. A short story can focus a narrow beam on one idea, one incident or one facet of character and virtually ignore everything else. A novel, unless it is to make quite unacceptable demands upon its readers, calls for a much wider and deeper approach. A short story can be read for its ending, but a novel needs something to maintain its readers's interest (to put it crudely) along the way. Apart from twists and turns of plot, much of this come down to a matter of details.

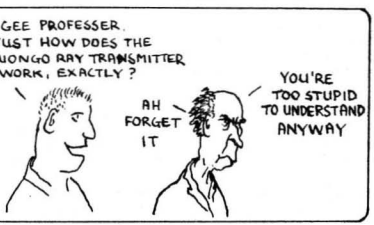
Imparting information to the reader calls for some skill, the guiding principle being "Show, not tell". In other words, slip in the fact about the Quongo Ray Transmitter indirectly, rather than having the Professor deliver a ten page lecture to some stooge who keeps feeding him dumb questions. Even this primitive device, however, seems to be beyond the capacity of many. All too often a computer is just a box with a few knobs and dials, a space ship is a space ship, aliens have green skins or blue skins and a limb more or less - and figure out the rest of the details for yourself. The result, of course, is s landscape made entirely of cardboard, the separate parts identified, if at all, by crudely lettered labels. Quite often this paucity of information on important matters coexists with an appalling prolixity concerning totally unimportant trivia. One writer was distinctly vague on the vastly important Research conducted at his Secret Establishment, but spent four pages describing how one of his characters got into a taxi. Professional writers, temporarilly trapped in a corner, may also indulge in this type of maundering simply to stay on their feet - but afterwards they make sure the redundant wordage is thrown out.

SF is of its nature in informational content. A mainstream novelist can often take a great deal of his background for granted, and concentrate on character. The SF writer has to put across a picture of some future society which may be wholly alien to his readers - even down to the smallest details and most basic assumptions (assuming the author has thouroughly worked out the implications of his ideas). Sometime there is over-loading - an excess of facts presented too quickly and in too crowded a form. It is not always necessary to cover everything. A novel set in South Ealing does not need to include the entire history of Timbuctoo - unless events in Ealing and Timbuctoo are connected.

Continued on Page 33

Great Moments from Unpublished SF

Eagerly he questioned the Professor on the details of this amazing new invention...



The race of Ixperq'll had blue skins, which was different to the green skinned F'lugberti...

He would show these vile aliens the true courage of an Earthman...

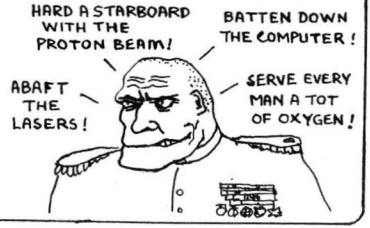
Leaping to the control panel, his eyes ran swiftly over the knobs and dials...

Work on the vital project pressed ahead at the Secret Research Establishment...

The awesome psionic powers of his mind reached out to her...

Suddenly he saw new meaning in the matrix of the cosmos...

The iron jawed Space Admiral prepared to fight to the last...



Continued from Page 30

Similarly with purely technical matters (the size of the starship, its drive, the essential principle of the matter transmitter) there is a need for enough information to establish the basic credibility and create an appropriate mental design, but not for so much that the reader feels he has fallen into a textbook. In this connection it should be noted that the Publisher's Reader is not necessarily very strong on scientific knowledge himself; it is not his job to detect any save the grossest errors. All he really cares about is whether or not the Quongo Ray Transmitter looks like it might work, and whether or nots its place in the story is justified, consistent and (given the usual suspension of disbelief) reasonable. The research an author does (or should do) is really nothing more than the gathering of materials for a confidence trick: a matter of impressing the reader with the author's knowedgability and thereby increasing the credibility and interest of the story as a whole. The late Ian Fleming used this approach with his James Bond books, sprinkling the text with pieces of "inside" information. Quite often (as critics susequently pointed out) his "facts" were incorrect, but this never bothered the majority of his readers and the display of expertise served its purpose. The device can be pushed too far, becoming a blatantly mechanical journalistic contrivance, but those SF novels which lack any display of expertise at all (fake or otherwise) will need to be very strong in other areas if they are to succeed.

Any fool can do a little research and hurl a few facts (or factoids) around, but rather more imagination is needed to develop a story or plot. Or so you might think. In fact, the real requirementis not so much inventiveness as discipline.Presented with a random collection of characters and properties most people can make up some sort of story. The problem is, having devised a plot of sorts, to make sure that the narrative does not diverge into irrelevancies and that no loose ends are left. The classic form of the detective story (the locked room country house murder) offers the best illustration of plotting at its most rigidly controlled. Everything is explained, everything connects and nothing is included without purpose. (Material which, is in fact, of no importance is included - but for the definite purpose of diverting or delaying the suspicion of the reader, a convention well-known and generally accepted). This type of detective novel is a completely closed and self-sufficient world. One knows that the murderer must be one of the characters - not some previously unmentioned total stranger. In this respect all novels are more or less unrealistic: they limit, organise and straighten the chaotic formlessness of real life; they provide begininnings and endings which are only true in artistic terms. A writer disregards these facts at his peril. The justification of some rambling mess of disjointed prose by the claim that it is "like life" in including a great many loose ends and little apparent meaning is no more than a hollow debating point. Fiction is fiction precisley because it is an edited version of reality: life stripped down to those essentoals which can be seen to have connection and meaning. This is not necessarily escapism; life also has its significant moments and it is quite legitimate to concentrate on these, rather than the repeated muddle and trivia of much everyday existence.

Many writers seem to perceive the truth (that Art is not at all the thing as an edited transcription of life) very dimly or not at all. Their books include great formless wodges of material which has neither interest nor relevance. Taken sentence by sentence the writing may not be bad, but the Reader feels a strong desire to ask: Why are you telling me all this? The first skill a writer needs is the ability to evaluate his own prose: to rewrite or throw out whatever is badly written. The second skill is the ability to decide what is irrelevant and unnecessary - and throw it out, well-written or not. Many writers make the mistake of assuming that their job ends when they have produced a couple of hundred pages of reasonably literate prose - regardless of content. They fall too much in love with what they have written and are reluctant to "waste" paragraphs which have no obvious faults. This false economy, of course. results in greater waste in the long run, since the Reader (an intolerant and hasty Person, impatient to get to the point of all this maundering) will simply snarl snarl "padding" and mark the Mss for rejection.

(One rather crude method of detecting redundant prose is to retype the whole Mss. This is a wearisome business - so wearisome that the writer soon feels inclined to cut the job as

possible. Thus, when he comes to the four pages describing how the hero got into the taxi he may well say, "To hell with this," and merely type "He got into a taxi", thus doing everybody a great favour).

In his early days Damon Knight worked for the Scott Meredith Literary Agency, which at that time offered a criticism and advice service to aspiring authors. The criticism was standardised: how well did the work satisfy certain basic requirements?

1. A sympathetic and believable lead character.
2. An urgent and vital problem.
3. Complications caused by the lead character's unsuccessful attempts to solve the problem.
4. The crisis.
5. The resolution, in which the lead character solves the problem by means of his own courage and resourcefulness.

This plot skeleton is recognisable as the basic pattern on which a great many SF novels have been based. In fact, in its most mechanical forms it has often been seen as a joke and burlesqued as such. Its inclusion here may once again seem rather like a philistine insistence on the importance of following a formula. Not so: the belief that good books can be written according to some universal recipe is both the delusion and consolation of second-rate writers. However, it is not enough simply to sneer; one must also ask: If not, why not? In other words, if the formula is to be scrapped, what is to be used in its place? Too many authors seem to have little idea, and would be well advised to return to this starting point.

The importance of "ideas" and "originality" in SF has been much exaggerated. This is not to imply that if you get an original idea you should suppress it, but simply to observe that this is really rather unlikely. Most of the basic SF ideas were dreamed up years ago. However, when it comes to examining the implications of these ideas, the surface has barely been scratched. SF tends to deal on a large scale: suns are smashed, planets destroyed and the fate of the universe hangs in the balance. This prodigality has done no more than sketch in the outlines: enormous areas still remain blank and void of detail. Similarly, all the basic plots have been discovered years ago, but this does not invalidate the giving of new flech to old skeletons.

Meanwhile....TOAD PRINCESS OF ALTAIR 5 and SEX PIRATES OF THE BLOOD ASTEROID have both been completely re-written and re-submitted. (Actually, this doesn't seem to happen very often; rejected authors either go away and sulk or produce something completely new). The first has had its prose style improved and the second has acquired some vestiges of plot and coherence. Both are now publishavle, though not outstanding. Snarling and baffled, the Reader is backed into a corner. He doesn't actually like the bloody things (come to think of it, he hasn't read a really enjoyable SF novel since he was fourteen) but there seems no alternative but to give them a guarded recommendation. He writes a carefully worded criticism full of "On the one hand...but...however...though it may be felt..." and concludes with the sort of hedged approval that kicks the decision firmly upstairs. And that may be the last he hears of it. But a month or two later it comes over the grapevine that Gonzo & Faded (the Reader's firm) have rejected both books, though one has since been accepted by arch-rivals Dipwick & Jockstrap.

Books are turned down for a variety of reasons, the fact that they are badly written being only one of them. TOAD PRINCESS was just unlucky; it so happened that Gonzo & Faded had just bought REPTILE ROVERS OF THE GALAXY, a very similar piece of space opera. Also, other epics of batrachian badness were known to be due from rival firms: SPAWN OF SATURN and THE TELEPATHIC TADPOLE. The word comes down from above: no more frog books for the moment; the market is saturated.

This kind of thing happens quite frequently. The time lag in publishing should always be remembered: it may take a year to write a book - and then a further year before it is finally published. Frog books may have looked a strong prospect a couple of years ago, but

by the time TOAD PRINCESS is completed the boom may be past its peak. It's never very wise to follow fashion too slavishly. Rigid formula writing of any description carries the seeds of its own destruction: if a formula can be followed by one, it can be followed by twenty more. To give a specific example: you are not advised to start work on some magnum opus in which a giant meteor strikes the Earth. This particular theme has been handled by several authors recently - and done about as well as it can be done. Only a limited number of variations are possible: hit, miss, near miss and so on. A subject with more latitude (and less likelihood of being assigned to a specific sub-genre) faces less competition and runs less risk of ruling itself out by accidental duplication.

On the other hand, greater originality can also run up against a certain amount of prejudice. Some publishers have rather rigid ideas about what SF is or should be. Confronted with something slightly unusual they begin to fear for the purity of the label. Books are tagged SF because the genre identification guarantees the attention of a certain definite market; if this market is offered goods which fail to meet expectations then the label in general (and the publishers name in particular) loses some of its sales appeal. This is not so much a matter of the individual book's quality as of the degree to which it reflects the general image of SF. E.E.Smith's LENSMAN books are bad writing but as science-fictional as could be imagined; J.G.Ballard's later novels are good writing but much more doubtfully SF in this commercial sense. Such questions of orthodoxy aside, there are also publishers who believe that it is impossible to underestimate the taste of the public (bless their pointed little heads) but that care must be taken not to frighten them off by offering anything too clever or too literary. These same people (who also publish several best-selling soft-porn saga series) may also believe that SF should be entirely free of the shocking taint of SEX. (Fry as many planets as you like, boys, but watch those dirty thoughts). Publishing is a peculiar business, with all sorts of incompatible (and often self-defeating) beliefs and prohibitions existing side by side in separate sealed compartments.

Maybe it was the taint of sex or originality which cooled off the chances of SEX PIRATES OF THE BLOOD ASTEROIDS. Maybe not. In the end, there is always a certain amount of sheer luck involved. Marginal Mss. can be doomed by casual prejudice, whim or caprice. If one takes a dislike to a book, there's always a good reason why it should be turned down. Of course, anyone responsible for too many arbitrary judgements is unlikely to do well as a publisher, but an occasional purely personal mistake of this sort probably has to be taken for granted. More likely, however, Gonzo & Faded (a hardback house) were doubtful about disposing of the paperback rights.

The practice of hardback firms taking a large percentage of the royalties from paperback sales strikes many people as gross exploitation. After all, what does the hardback publishers do, that he should receive a 50% of this hard-earned income? Why should he be subsidised in this fashion? In fact, the author published in hardback and paperback and the author published in paperback alone may not receive substantially different returns. The hardback might sell two or three thousand copies, the paperback ten times as many - but both the hardback retail price and royalty are much higher, and income from this source may well cover what the author loses to the publisher's share of paperback income. (This is very much a generalisation, but certainly likely to apply in the case of first novels). In addition, there are certain advantages to publication in hardback. Ninety per cent or more of hardback fiction sells to public libraries. These volumes may sit on the shelves, displaying the author's name, for several years. Most paperbacks ahve a display life (except for the specialist shops) of only a week or two at most. A hardback library book may be issued to anything between twenty and fifty readers, giving it a total audience which may be twice that of a paperback. Assuming that the author intends to write more than one book this is very valuable publicity - advertising is very largely a matter of making a name familiar and then keeping it familiar. Paperback publication, on the other hand, is rather like Andy Warhol's vision of the future: everyone will be famous - but for exactly fifteen minutes and no more.

(A digression for the benefit of SF collectors: it is worth bearing in mind that the hardback first edition of any SF novel is likely to be a collector's item inside five years. This particularly applies to the first novels of new authors; since their names are unknown and

and they have no following, very nearly all the sales will be to libraries. Only a couple of years later there may be less than a hundred copies of the book still existing in a collectable condition. Limited edition publishing is something of a racket in that it attempts to give books an artificial scarcity value. But nobody throws away a limited edition book - whereas the libraries will certainly throw out their SF hardbacks sooner or later. A hardback edition of any writer's first novel is probably a very rare item indeed. Michael Moorcock's first two Elric novels were published at 12/6 and 15/- respectively - and now sell for ten or twelve pounds each. Even some of his later hardbacks have appreciated in value quite considerably.)

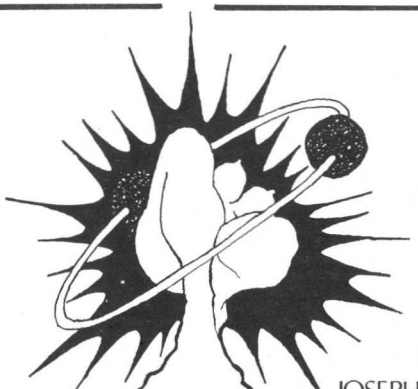
A hardback publisher will not expect too much money solely out of his own edition of a first novel. He may even make a loss. The edition will probably sell out eventually, but profit margins are quite narrow and a couple of years of inflation can mean that in real terms the return is less than the outlay. Hence the inclination to take a good look at paperback prosepcts and other subsidiary rights. However, hardback publishers do seem to be more inclined to take a risk, to back their own judgement and invest in future prospects. For various reasons the paperback firm will tend to go for a quick return, but the hardback publisher always has the cushion of his library sales - which, as often as not, are made more on the basis of a firm's reputation than the merit of any specific title. A good SF novel may never make much impression on the world of letters, but on the other hand it may go on earning money for many years, bringing in a much greater sum than more prestigious (and apparently successful) mainstream books. SF is not a spectacular selling line, but it is very steady, and a small initial loss on a promising author chancing to secure later profits.

Still, after a breathless interval of waiting, the author of SEX PIRATES OF THE BLOOD ASTEROID learns that his masterpiece has been turned down by Gonzon & Faded yet again. There is no real indication whether his precious effort is still judged an inferior piece of work, or whether it has been given the finger for more complicated reasons of high policy. As always, Gonzon & Faded send a polite letter, but offer little in the way of explanation. They have enough to do with getting involved in (inevitably) acrimonious correspondence with spurned authors. This, too, happens: you may seem to have done everything more or less right, and still be rejected. Base injustice - but the only recourse is to curse the publisher and send the mss somewhere else.

So, after the fashion of authors (who, fortunately for themselves, usually possess a massive self-conceit and belief in their own greatness), the rejected one snarls, mouths a choice malediction or two, kicks his Mss. (or his wife) across the room and begins to wonder how to raise the money for the postage to Dipwick & Jockstrap, next in line for the inestimable privilege of accepting his masterpiece.

Meanwhile, watching his TV (or picking his nose) the Reader awaits the arrival of his next task, The TV programme (which features an old film about a sentient carrot which has escaped from a Secret Research Establishment) is pretty awful, but considerably better than the last Mss. Besides, he's not going to read a bloody book. Not unless he gets paid for it.

REVIEWS



EDITED BY
JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Douglas Orgill & John Gribbin -- THE SIXTH WINTER (Bodley Head, 313pp, £5·95)
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Unlike American authors concerned to overwhelm mankind with alien invaders from Somewhere Out There, British ones have preferred to do it by rather more "natural" means: floods, droughts, winds, earthquakes, snow, nuclear radiation, pollution, crashing moons, clouds of poison gas, nearby supernovas and the like, all supposedly demonstrating the insecurity of our position as this planet's dominant species but all being often branded as "cosy catastrophes" -- novels from which the reader, safely ensconced in his fireside armchair, can derive a vicarious thrill from someone else's desperate struggle to survive in an irreversibly hostile world; watching over them from above, smirking cruelly the while and contenting himself with the thought that it could never actually happen. The theme fell from vogue in the early sixties, probably because real-world upheavals in the social status quo were overtaking the fictional ones, and those few disaster novels to have appeared since have concentrated more on the personal effects of the catastrophe than on the physical nature of the catastrophe itself (Ballard's first four novels are the obvious examples, but even comparison of John Christopher's A Wrinkle In The Skin (1965) with Charles Eric Maine's The Tide Went Out (1958) reveals this difference in emphasis).

But now the wheel might almost have turned full circle; in The Sixth Winter we're back to where the catastrophe is the thing and the characters mere players in the drama it creates -- not that there are any real characters in the novel at all, more a series of cardboard cut-outs shuffled around from chapter to chapter with the main object of providing convenient pegs on which to hang the action. There are in fact so many of these "characters" that the novel verges on becoming yet another of those overpopulated "bestsellers" currently cluttering up railway station bookstalls, and from the order in which the authors' names are credited I'd attribute this more to Orgill than to Gribbin, since his particular forte is thrillers (whose authors, truism though it may be, are more noted for their attention to plot than to character), with Gribbin primarily responsible for all the climatological and meteorological details (he has written several books on the subject, after all). Such details, far from merely decorating the narra-

tive, provide essential reinforcement for its message: that the warmth of the previous 15,000 years has been but a minor aberration in the Earth's long-term climate, that we're already heading back down the temperature slope into a new Ice Age, and that we and our technology are pitifully ill-equipped to cope with it when it finally arrives. Whether the freeze will occur as quickly as the novel claims I, climatologically ignorant, can't say; but the army of facts marshalled in support of the contention is, if not convincing, at least persuasive enough to give pause to even the most complacent of readers. Which is of course the novel's whole point; one that is unfortunately (if perversely) blunted by its ending's optimistic and rather glib suggestions as to how man might survive in such a world (by imitating the Eskimos, mostly). And also by the closing chapters' in-depth description of the main protagonists' trek across the newly-reappeared Bering land bridge from northeastern Siberia to Alaska: it stands in marked contrast to the somewhat hectic pace of all the previous chapters, adds nothing to what little we already know about the people concerned and is just too long to wholly sustain the reader's interest.

On the whole, however, The Sixth Winter is a readable and effective piece of SF (although the jacket blurb attempts to claim that "it is not science fiction because all the science in this book is fact", which is almost to embrace the much-discredited Gernsback Delusion of SF as fiction about science, and was surely written by someone who's never read an SF novel in his life) which, while making no specific prophecy, does -- in the tradition of The Battle Of Dorking, Brave New World and 1984 -- prophesy a warning; one that, if real-life prophets of the new Ice Age like Gribbin himself are correct, we would do well to heed. At the very least, I think I might take up skiing once again....

Robert Silverberg -- THE SECOND TRIP (Gollancz, 185pp, £4·95)
SON OF MAN (Panther, 192pp, 95p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Both these novels belong to the second phase of Silverberg's career -- the first has a copyright date of 1972, the second 1971. The fate that they have not so far seen British publication is no slur on their quality, but rather a testament to the fact that during the period when they were written Silverberg was so prolific that his British publishers could not keep up with him. In fact, both these novels are impressive examples of the author's work.

The Second Trip is set in a society where dangerous criminals are "executed" by the erasure of their personalities from their brains; new personalities to replace them are then built up from scratch. Thus Paul Macy finds himself inhabiting a body previously used by artist and rapist Nat Hamlin, feeling rather insecure in the existential sense for the very good reason that he knows all his memories to be false. His problems of adjustment are compounded when he discovers that Hamlin has not, after all, been extinguished, and is ready to compete with him for possession of the body. Furthere complications ensue when he meets a yound female telepath whose abilities are on the point of driving her mad. The subject-matter of the novel, as with several other Silverberg novels of the period, is a lonely struggle for self-realisation in an unhelpful, if not downright hostile, world. Its bizarre central premise makes it less convincing than some of his other exercises of this kind, and the predicament of the minor character is in some ways more intriguing than that of Macy himself -- in which sense the novel may perhaps be said to have helped pave the way for the writing of Dying Inside.

Son Of Man takes the same quest into very different imaginative territory. It is a surreal allegory which recalls in some ways David Lindsay's A Voyage To Arcturus, but there is a special sense in which it remains science fiction because the order of things reflected in its symbology is an evolutionary schema rather than a theological one, albeit recalling Bergson rather than Darwin. Many readers will find the novel alien to their expectations, especially if they try to read it as a straightforward time-travel adventure, but those interested in what the author is trying to do will find it a rewarding experience. It has not proved to be the most popular of his works, having never had a hardcover edition and having been virtually ignored by critics and commentators, but it remains my personal favourite and I recommend it wholeheartedly.

Philip K. Dick -- CONFESSIONS OF A CRAP ARTIST (Magnum, 220pp, £1·25)

Reviewed by Alan Dorey

To those familiar with Philip K. Dick's science fiction, ranging from such truly influential works as The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch and The Man In The High Castle to insignificant little pot-boilers like Vulcan's Hammer, this novel may come as a surprise. It's not SF, it was written in 1959 and remained in manuscript form, unpublished, until 1975. Knowing this, the committed Dick reader may feel justified in ignoring it, but if he does he will be denying himself the pleasure of enjoying an immensely satisfying work.

Twenty years is a long time in a writing career; for an early novel to hold its own in the light of recent successes like A Scanner Darkly is indeed a sign of the literary greatness to which Dick has aspired. Confessions Of A Crap Artist is, like the film American Graffiti, essentially a book of its era, the 1950s, but more praiseworthy by virtue of its being a genuine work. The California of the 1950s is pictured as a breeding ground for eccentrics and deviants, and Dick delights in highlighting the absurdity of various strange situations without the benefit of hindsight. His powers of observation and detchment are to be admired. In his introduction to the novel, Paul Williams says that "Dick's characters are cursed with awareness....the horror is that human beings torture each other, and fail repeatedly to do what is best....for the people around them." Indeed, Jack Isidore -- the most important of the four protagonists -- says "In fact, the whole world is full of nuts. It's enough to get you down".

Isidore is in many ways the only link with any form of SF; he complains of his sister having thrown out all his SF magazines and was obviously inspired by them. Dick describes Isidore as one of "God's favoured fools": he can evaluate without prejudice, but his ultimate downfall is caused by his failure to recognise the influence on him of a neurotic but powerful woman who, through supposed hypnotic contact with an alien race, predicts the end of the world.

Into this Dick skillfully weaves the conflicting relationships of the four main protagonists. Jack's sister Fay Hulme seeks popularity, but worries constantly over the scorn that could be caused by his infatuation with the end of the world (Fay, it transpires, was based on a woman Dick later married and survived five years with); her husband Charles, browbeaten and under exacting marital pressure, turning violence into symbolic revenge, feels himself to be forever drifting in the wings; Nathan Anteil, drawn by Fay to adultery, hates everything she stands for but is unable to resist her -- and so the whole set of complex interactions continues.

Dick's sympathies clearly lie with Jack, who beneath his shambling and uneasy exterior has probably got it all worked out to a more satisfactory level than any intellectual. He accepts things at their face value, and when told that the world isn't going to end after all just calmly carries on as though a recent phone call had turned out to be a wrong number. Only Dick could have written this novel, but the sad, appalling thing about it is that it took so long before a publisher felt brave enough to touch it. One can but wonder whether Isidore of Seville (from whom Dick culled the name) faced such problems in producing his 35-page comprehensive encyclopaedia of the world's knowledge back in the Dark Ages.

Colin Kapp -- THE UNORTHODOX ENGINEERS (Dobson, 216pp, £4·50)

Reviewed by Dave Langford

Here are five previously published stories: "The Railways Up On Cannis", "The Subways Of Tazoo", "The Pen And The Dark", "Getaway From Getawehi" and "The Black Hole Of Negrav", all featuring lovable Fritz Van Noon of the Unorthodox Engineering squad; all but the first appeared in New Writings In SF (volumes 3, 8, 16 and 25), although the fact is not recorded here.

The formula of the UE stories is a simple one: a problem involving a ludicrously unlikely alien planet or technology is thrown at Van Noon's head, and after much struggle and adventure he devises a solution so lunatic as to make the original situation seem relatively mundane. All good clean fun. The stories rely heavily on auctorial ingenuity, and Kapp scores well for clever notions (despite such expedients as having Van Noon survive ground zero of an antimatter explosion in the third story). A little humour also helps, and here Kapp is happiest when facing some revolting piece of alien technology: "It's like the epitaph to an insane, overgrown spider with a compulsive spite against inverted single-head broaching presses." ("The Subways Of Tazoo") But he can't always keep it up, and on the next page we have limp stuff like: "If this is their idea of electrical control gear I should hate to see their version of a collection of crazy, twisted maypoles" (etc. etc.).

The stories contain no complexities besides those of the laboratory, no emotions likely to be found outside a junior-school classroom, and no women. The idea and the zest are all as Van Noon tackles pandemic volcanoes, demented alien artifacts, black holes orbiting at zero altitude and a dotty Placet-like world where gravity loops the loop and 1 + 1 = 1·5708. Obviously one isn't meant to take all this too seriously (Kapp doesn't, to the extent of not bothering to revise internal inconsistencies for this collection); one should simply lie back and enjoy the ride. If you don't mind being taken for a ride, it's a pleasantly undemanding collection.

Piers Anthony -- THE CLUSTER TRILOGY (VICINITY CLUSTER, CHAINING THE LADY and KIRLIAN QUEST) (Millington, 254pp, 342pp, 313pp respectively, £4·95 each)

Reviewed by Roz Kaveney

There was a time in the later sixties when Piers Anthony, a vegetarian, looked like a coming man who might dominate the field with his energy and originality, in spite of his books reading like translations from the Ish. Macroscope and Chthon still stand up well in their intense psychotic way, the first for its audacity and scope, the second for its unique blending of the Orpheus and Oedipus legends. Omnivore had some clever ideas, Sos The Rope some entertaining martial arts stuff....and then the bean sprouts got his brain cells.

Vicinity Cluster is the tale of how Flint, a stone age savage from the most primitive of Earth's colonies, saves the Milky Way from destruction at the hands of the Energy Thieves of Andromeda. He does this by a combination of his Kirlian Aura (I'll come back to that), Kissingeresque openmindedness to the strange practices (such as slavery) of alien allies, preparedness to adopt the sexual procedures of any alien whose body he happens to be occupying, and the usual old-fashioned brawn. Kirlian Auras, for those of us not up to dat in contemporary pseudoscience, are a sort of gobbledygook materialist equivalent of a soul; Flint, being the hero of a space opera, has an especially good one. Females all over this galaxy and the next afll over themselves (or fail to fall over themselves if falling over themselves is how they normally get around) to snuggle up to a male with such a good aura. "It must be wonderful to have an aura like that" say ten thousand adolescent male readers as they slump sated after a feast of Flint's exploits. (Flint has green skin; one of Anthony's characters refers to him as the Jolly Green Giant; I kid you not.)

Chaining The Lady deals with another attack by the Andromedans, a millenium later; they are now operating by the good old-fashioned method of taking over people's minds whether they like it or not. Flint's daughter Melody -- well, the daughter of an alien whose body he was using at the time -- is an old maid (Anthony's description), a tarot reader, and looks like a set of bedsprings having sex with a one-man band-kit. She also has a Hidden Grief. Pausing only to adopt the body of a dumb blonde with whom she holds endless inane conversations inside their head, she goes off to investigate the local bit of the Milky Way fleet. Almost everyone in the officers' mess -- even her friend Llume, even the good-looking captain, Boyd Dash -- is an Andromedan spy; the only exception is a stooge who hasn't much an aura but is quite good at standing around saying "Gosh, you don't mean...." and getting killed. After a gruellingly long space

battle, the Andromedans send Melody's mind off to Andromeda; she diverts it to a body other than the intended receptacle and discovers the secret of the Ancient Race who dominated the galaxy before there was intelligent life as we know it around. In a flurry of ensuring that Anthony has material for a sequel, Melody locks the secret deep in her brain without even telling us what it is. She saves this galaxy, changes sex, and dies; the Andromedans give up.

The hero of Kirlian Quest is himself an Andromedan -- gosh, this is the era of tolerance and mass solidarity! There hasn't been anything like it since Blackie DuQuesne, the Great Minds and the Fenachrone joined Dick Seaton in a popular front against the dreaded Llurdi -- who is called in to investigate when a squidge-like astronomer from Weew starts collapsing, going grey and blurting @The Space Amoeba@ (Anthony's punctuation) in strangled and incoherent tones which indicate some concern. Herald the Healer, our hero, has an even bigger aura than Flint or Melody and is at the same time involved in the case of a beautiful maiden whose aura grows to several times its normal size and is in danger of being burned for it. There is the usual happy ending.

For those of us with warped senses of humour there hasn't been anything like it since Clarissa McDougall last opened her Lens for two-way communication. Piers Anthony isn't into auras alone -- he's into tarot and heraldry as well -- which with his usual astrology, eugenics, martial arts and vegetrianism makes for quite a heady stew. There are in these books aliens with names like Tsopi (try pronouncing that), Pnotl and Heew (presumably pronounced in the same manner as Grecer Heath addressing the shade of Gaitskell). In an interesting and, I hope, doomed technical innovation, Anthony surrounds the dialogue of his aliens with different punctuation marks according to their species. By the end of the trilogy he is reduced to using Greek letters; only if someone buys him a typewriter with Chinese characters will he become a serious threat to sanity.

As I said at the start of this review, Piers Anthony was once quite good -- but he is now writing absolute garbage which can only be profitably read as a joke. Part of the trouble is that he writes so badly, part is that he thinks he has a sense of humour, and part is that he is simply very silly. I don't believe that this sort of abject mindlessness is a necessary concommitant of the attempt to write star-spanning epics, but I must confess that it sometimes looks as though it is.

Ian Watson -- GOD'S WORLD (Gollancz, 254pp, £5·95)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

At it most mundane level, Ian Watson's latest novel is space opera -- but those at all familiar with his work will realise that it possesses many levels, with analogy and symbolism heaped upon each other. In God's World a mixed nationality, mixed sex crew of humans leave Earth in 1997 to travel by FTL spaceship to the vicinity of the star 82 Eridani; they make contact with more than one alien race, learn much, are changed by the experience, and return home bearing gifts. That is a plot summary, yet it is not what the novel is about. The SF elements are employed as little more than metaphor, helping to confer palatability upon the author's continuation of his search for the limits of man's inner being; a search begun in earnest in The Martian Inca and followed up in Alien Embassy and Miracle Visitors. This time it is transcendentalism of mind which is examined -- religion and godhood from a carefully non-sectarian viewpoint. Religious manifestations and miracles are explained in scientific terms as the result of an "infection" by an alien life form in the shape of a body covering of fine golden hair; when humans become infected they are able to communicate with the dead, share dreams with each other and cross light years in the blink of an eye.

From the outset the novel promises to be metaphysical. The spaceship crew has been summoned by religious apparitions in many parts of the world; the spaceship itself is psychically powered (via an alien artifact found in the Gobi Desert) in High Space (hyperspace) by the psychically sensitive half of the crew, who spend the journey arguing interminably with the other half of the crew, the rationalists. The ship is "attacked" in High Space by what appear to be other ships but are just doppelgangers

of their own; it is a deliberate ploy to ensure that they use up their armaments. They reach the system of 82 Eridani, are approached by scorpion-like creatures and, in an action of pure plot convenience, start fighting them. Six members of the crew escape in small boats to land on the nearby planet (actually the large moon of a gas giant): God's World. It is the aliens of this world who have acquired godlike powers; they are a strange and convincing race, too alien for any brief description here to do them justice. It is through their philosophies and attributes, gradually passed on to the six crewmembers, that many religious and ESP phenomena are explored. Yet they remain enigmatic, a fact symbolised by the blank masks they often wear. They are a people who do not recognise history, speaking only in various present tenses -- and this, presumably, is why the symbolically-named Amy Dove narrates the entire book in the present tense.

There is plenty of excitement here amongst the metaphysics (although I don't find metaphysics intrinsically exciting), and those who have enjoyed the author's previous books will find much to reward them in this one; but those looking for an easy read should try elsewhere.

Keith Laumer -- BOLO: THE ANNALS OF THE DINOCHROME BRIGADE (Millington, £4·25)

Reviewed by John Collick

This book is an unfortunate example of a theme collection failing to work. Individually, most of the stories are readable and although suffering from shaky plot construction (and in some cases an irritatingly Chandleresque style), a couple of them are quite interesting. However, when they're crammed together and typecast as the "Annals of the Dinochrome Brigade" their faults, and the inconsistencies in theme and treatment between each story, become painfully obvious. One gets the impression that the "history" concept was slapped on as a commercial afterthought. What is more, hardly any of the stories exploit the idea of the cybertank to its full potential; instead, these awesome engines are reduced to mere obstacles, "robots on the rampage" or human characters transplanted into big metal boxes with caterpillar tracks. For all their sophisticated internal electronics, massive arsenal of weapons and hyper-intelligent on-board computers, the BOLOs seem eternally doomed to speed off in straight lines or run round in circles mindlessly destroying everything in their path while the rather cliched collection of red-necked generals, Philip Marlowe reporters/"agents" and hillbilly old-timers watch aghast until someone conveniently remembers the deactivation signal.

As an examination of the literary career of Keith Laumer from 1960 to 1969, Bolo is an interesting collection, as long as each story is considered on its own; but when read together as a "history" of the "Dinochrome Brigade" the book is an awful disappointment.

Anonymous (ed.) -- LET'S GO TO GOLGOTHA! (Panther, 220pp, 95p)
Garry Kilworth -- SPLIT SECOND (Faber & Faber, 191pp, £6·95)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

Once upon a time Gollancz and The Sunday Times held a competition for new writers of SF; a year later Gollancz published the seven stories that were considered the best. Now, four years after that, Panther has fianlly consented to push it out in paperback. No wonder such competitions are so rare, no wonder there are so few openings for new writers, no one cares.

Or, just to put it another way, perhaps there's no one worth caring about. With the hindsight that this publishing doziness affords us, we can see just what has become of these seven new writers -- and, with one notable exception, the answer is "nothing".

For a start, I've seen nothing further in print by five of the seven (although that could simply be because I don't read that much SF), but some I don't miss at all. In "The Hibbie", James Alexander, and even more so Vic Norris in "Blue Danube", descend

too readily to that common technique of the poor writer, the lecture. Indeed, the plot of "The Hibbie" develops solely through lectures. Leaden writing, cardboard characters, predicatble endings: neither story has anything of worth. They make one wonder just what criteria the judges used in choosing the stories; and if these really are the best, then heaven help the rest. Certainly, none of the seven would get by solely on their merits, although the other five could make it on that old intangible, promise.

There was once a time when new writers burst onto the scene with dramatic new ideas, and experimental ways of telling them; now they tend to creep quietly in with variations on old themes told in plain, straightforward prose. There is nothing really new in any of the stories, although D. West's "The Pit" reveals an original thinker producing a marvellously twisted view of the world. Unfortunately, it is told in a laboured style that does little to hold the reader's attention; only the imagination marks it out as the best story in the book. In this respect, it is unique.

Chris Morgan is the only contributor to attempt a refreshingly new approach, but this surface gloss is the only thing of interest in his short non-story. Still, he is someone it may well be worth looking out for; as is Norman L. Macht, whose "A Way Of Life" is one of the better stories in the collection. Daphne Castell is one of the two writers in this collection whose work I've seen elsewhere; in "Cold Storage" she employs the best example of writing in the book, a lucid, deceptively simple prose style more familiar from mainstream short stories. What a pity that she wasted it on so hackneyed and overused a story-line.

There are better stories in the book, there are more original ideas, there are finer pieces of writing; even so, I suppose it was quite clear even then which was the writer most likely to.... The title story, "Let's Go To Golgotha!" by Garry Kilworth, is that staple of modern SF, a slight variation on an old theme. How many times has a time traveller gone back to view the crucifixion? There's the little "sit up and take notice" twist at the end; nothing original, but the sort of thing that too many people seem to think SF is all about these days. And the writing: crisp, clean, functional, unexciting; competent, second-division stuff. Here is the work of someone bound to get on in our undemanding genre.

Which is more or less borne out by Split Second, Garry Kilworth's third novel. I didn't read In Solitary, his first, but this one is a definite improvement on his last work, the dire The Night Of Kadar. But, again, this is hardly the most original of works.

There is a new archaeological device, a ray which, when projected upon bones, shows the beings they once were. A youth accidentally break the beam, and finds himself sharing the mind of a Cro-Magnon youth. How many times have we encountered this? And Kilworth does little new with the theme. The contrast between the sophisticated modern youth and the superstition-ridden, barely human Cro-Magnon has all the makings of a great novel, but it is never fully exploited. The two accept each other too easily; there is never any sense of culture shock. Whilst in the prehistoric world we witness the dramatic confrontation between Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal, which raises unfortunate comparisons with William Golding's masterly The Inheritors.

I get the impression that Kilworth has researched his subject fairly thoroughly, yet he somehow fails to make it believable. I was left with no feeling for what it was to be a cave-dweller part way between apeman and true human, living close to nature in a society tightly bound by superstition and magic. But then, Split Second hardly pretends to be great literature; in fact, it reminds me most of the adventure stories I used to read as an adolescent, packed with incident, straightforward action straightforwardly told. Here, the odd "poetic" turn of phrase sticks out like a sore thumb. Kilworth is at his best when he doesn't try to be anything more than a reliable but unremarkable spinner of tales. He hasn't made any spectacular improvement since "Let's Go To Golgotha!" but then he probably doesn't need to; as long as he keeps turning out such undemanding, entertaining fare he'll keep on selling.

Ben Bova -- KINSMAN (Sidgwick & Jackson, 280pp, £6·95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

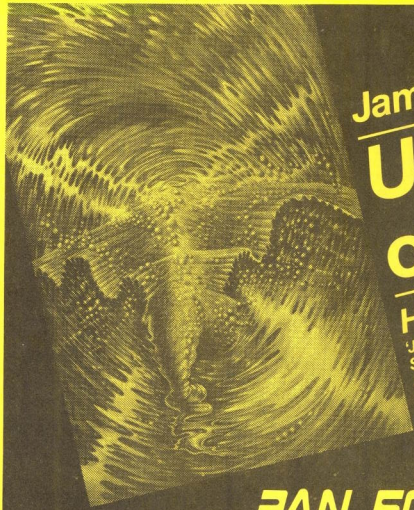
When a particular novel proves popular, its readers inevitably demand a sequel of its author -- but the problem with Bova's earlier Millenium, which told of political confrontation on the Moon in late 1999, was that it ended with the death of its main protagonist, Chester Kinsman, commander of the US Moonbase, having just managed to prevent the outbreak of World War III in time for Christmas. Hence this prequel, which chronicles Kinsman's earlier career from his entry to the US Air Force at age 21 up to the Congressional appropriations hearings authorising construction of the Moonbase at age 35, filling in the background that was merely hinted at in Millenium. As such, it is not a novel at all, but a series of previously published short stories (including an adaptation of "Zero Gee" from Again, Dangerous Visions, in which Bova still can't bring himself to use the word "fuck" and resorts to a coy fadeout when Kinsman finally gets around to fumbling with the zip of the female astronaut's jumpsuit) detailing the various highlights of his life during those 14-odd years. Many of these stories -- particularly the last, concerned with the shenanigans surrounding the Congressional hearings -- are little more than naked propaganda for the manned space programme, dwelling lovingly on the minutiae of How It Can Be Funded, etc., and simply move me to exasparation; why is it that space enthusiasts like Bova (and Clarke, and Pournelle, and Sheffield, amongst others) cannot see the Apollo Moon landings for the Cold War PR exercises they were, and prefer instead to regard them as the first tentative steps along the road to the stars? How can they possibly believe that the launching of the Space Shuttle will automatically reopen that road and give us space stations and orbital factories and solar power satellites and Moonbases and all that by the end of the century? Don't they realise that the Space Age, far from being just about to begin in earnest, is actually over for good?

The level of political awareness Bova displays is naive in the extreme. Anyone who can imagine that the murder of a Russian cosmonaut by a US astronaut will not jeopardise relations between the two superpowers, or that an astronaut can materially influence the financial decisions of US Senators and industrial magnates (because it's Kinsman himself who sells them a complex scheme for funding both a laser-satellite ABM system -- designed to shoot down ICBMs as they rise from the atmosphere at the tops of their trajectories -- and the Moonbase, with orbital factories and God knows what else besides) is clearly living in a fool's paradise, hopelessly prone to wishful thinking and utterly divorced from reality. In point of fact, the inclusion of the laser-satellite ABM system (it was mentioned in Millenium and so had to appear here) in Kinsman's scheme completely destroys its supposed plausibility because the special characteristics of cruise missiles (the first prototypes of which had admittedly still to fly when Bova wrote Millenium) render the system completely redundant -- indeed, the (deliberate?) omission of cruise missiles makes Kinsman seem even more divorced from reality, even more the product of naivete and wishful thinking.

Having said all that, however, it must be admitted that this is, as its title implies, an SF "novel" about people rather than ideas -- which, for a noted technophilic author like Bova (ex-editor of Analog, amongst other things), must surely constitute some sort of major breakthrough (one that many other SF authors would also do well to make, because who really gives a damn about paper spaceships when the people in them are also made of paper?). SF takes another bold step towards maturity, or something....but having said that, it must also be admitted that Kinsman is not a particularly credible or engaging character, in the first place because his aforementioned influence on US Senators and such is too great to be anything other than grossly unrealistic, and in the second place because he was already reasonably well fleshed-out in Millenium and this new book adds little to our previous picture of him (except, perhaps, to explain how he got that way). In all honesty, the most that can be said for this book is that it is entertaining, and will keep you pleasantly occupied for a few undemanding hours -- but for a book that asks to be taken seriously, as some sort of blueprint for How It Might Be, a few hours of undemanding entertainment is simply not enough.

ALSO RECEIVED:

Richard Lupoff -- THE TRIUNE MAN (Dobson, 219pp, £4·25): Van Vogtian power fantasy about double-brained comic-book illustrators in which, according to Brian Stableford, "the plot never actually begins to make sense". // Edmund Cooper -- JUPITER LAUGHS (Hodder & Stoughton, 220pp, £5·50): collection of undistinguished and decidedly unmemorable short stories. // Chelsea Quinn Yarbro -- FALSE DAWN (Sidgwick & Jackson, 208pp, £5·95): overlong feminist post-holocaust quest saga which uses up all its potential in its first hundred pages and eventually declines into terminal boredom. // Cherry Wilder -- THE LUCK OF BRIN'S FIVE (Angus & Robertson, 230pp, £4·95): rather good juvenile about a lone Earthman stranded in an alien society ripe for revolution. // Philip E. High -- BLINDFOLD FROM THE STARS (Dobson, 192pp, £4·95): invading aliens infect Earthmen with virus intended to kill them off but which gives them telepathy instead; pretty witless, in other words. // Brian Aldiss -- NEW ARRIVALS, OLD ENCOUNTERS (Jonathan Cape, 224pp, £4·50): collection of previously unreprinted short stories, mainly ones that "weren't good enough for Last Orders", according to Roz Kaveney, with a couple from the mid-sixties. // Suzy McKee Charnas -- WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD (Gollancz, 214pp, £5·25): another feminist post-holocaust quest saga but one which, unlike Yarbro's, does actually possess a plot and a resolution. // Bernard Fischmann -- THE MAN WHO RODE HIS 10-SPEED BICYCLE TO THE MOON (Hodder & Stoughton, 97pp, £4·25): fable about a modern-day resident of New York temporarily opting out of life in order to gain a new perspective on his personal crises and prepare himself for reinvestment in zestful living -- or so says Brian Stableford, who "quite liked it - and it does have some nice artwork by Barbara Lanza". // Robert Silverberg -- THE SONGS OF SUMMER (Gollancz, 173pp, £5·25): collection of stories from the late fifties and early sixties left over from his reshuffling of the contents of his early collections a few years back; competent rather than outstanding. // Elizabeth Lynn -- A DIFFERENT LIGHT (Gollancz, 175pp, £4·95): first novel from a new author about an artist who wants to travel but will die if he does so; a sensitive and evocative debut. // Keith Roberts -- LADIES FROM HELL (Gollancz, 198pp, £5·95): three previously published novelettes and two new ones; good stuff. // Terry Carr (ed.) -- BEST SF OF THE YEAR 8 (Gollancz, 363pp, £6·50): the 1978 selection, chosen from such wonderfully imaginative and original sources as Analog, Isaac Asimov's and Omni; if these are the best, God only knows what the worst were like. // Anne McCaffrey -- DRAGONDRUMS (Sidgwick & Jackson, 240pp, £5·95): third in the juvenile series that began with Dragonsinger and Dragonsong, and just as cloyingly sentimental. // Chris Lampton -- GATEWAY TO LIMBO (Sidgwick & Jackson, 184pp, £5·95): unbelievable nonsense about a dying race of aliens being fed through a trans-dimensional gate into another continuum in order to keep its whale-like inhabitants alive; the author is presumably unaware of the Law of the Conservation of Energy. // Keith Laumer -- THE ULTIMAX MAN (Sidgwick & Jackson, 217pp, £5·95): relentlessly dumb but strangely enjoyable story of a failed small-time crook transformed into a galactic superhero; typical Laumer fare, in other words. // John Maddox Roberts -- THE STRAYED SHEEP OF CHARUN (Dobson, 183pp, £4·95): another first novel by a new author; apart from which, no more is yet known about it. // Barrington J. Bayley -- THE SEED OF EVIL, ANNIHILATION FACTOR and EMPIRE OF TWO WORLDS (Allison & Busby, 175pp, 144pp and 144pp respectively, £5·95 each): a collection of short stories and two novels, currently under review. // Alan Frank -- GALACTIC ALIENS (Angus & Robertson, £4·95): supposedly factual survey of the galaxy's nastiest inhabitants, with pictures; obviously intended for kids, but even the least attentive of them are likely to notice the somewhat unimaginative nature of most of the nasties. // Ned Crawford -- NAMING THE ANIMALS: A HAUNTING (Faber & Faber, 191pp, £5·50): 1984-ish story of a rebel seeking escape from a totalitarian regime; or so the blurb would suggest, since no one has yet read it. // Colin Kapp -- THE ION WAR (Dobson, 252pp, £4·95): space opera about criminals having weaponry implanted in their bodies and being forced to fight on behalf of Earth; eventually (yawn) said criminals decide not to continue fighting and (yawn).... // Don Wollheim (ed.) -- THE WORLD'S BEST SF 4 (Dobson, 280pp, £5·25): a 1976 selection, in which Wollheim displays his expected First Fandom bias, harping on about the importance of "solid science fiction" but consistently refusing to define what he means by the term. // D. G. Compton -- ASCENDANCIES (Gollancz, 208pp, £5·95): Fortean-like falls of dust and disappearances of people, according to the blurb; under review for the next issue.



James Tiptree Junior

Up the Walls of the World

His long-awaited first novel

'James Tiptree Junior is one of SF's prodigies. Strong, passionate and redemptory – humorous too – his novel is a wild song'
Oxford Mail

'The most demanding of SF readers could scarcely ask for more – a brilliantly inventive book'
Irish Times

Pan Books

PAN SCIENCE FICTION