

VECTOR REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT

VECTOR REVIEW SUPPLEMENT Number 1, dated February/March 1980, and featuring many of the reviews that space consideration precluded from our printing in Vector 96. Contents copyright BSFA 1980 on behalf of the contributors, to whom all rights are hereby returned.

John Maddox Roberts -- THE STRAYED SHEEP OF CHARUN (Dobson, 183pp, £4.95)

Reviewed by Simon Ounsley

In the far future, in a distant part of the galaxy, two men set out for the unholy cities of the long-lost planet Charun. Their mission in this godless underworld of gambling casinos and bloody gladiatorial combat is to convert the planet to Christianity. Will the peace-loving Franciscan friar with his mild-mannered charm score the most conversions, or will the swashbuckling Jesuit priest with his magic staff and a sermon-you-can't-refuse do rather better? Most important of all, will our heroes succeed in indoctrinating the entire planet before the Moslems show up to provide competition?

It is against this admittedly unusual background that John Maddox Roberts has chosen to set his rather poorly-written potboiler. He seems mainly interested in the fights in the arena, about which he goes into considerable tedious detail, while everything else in the novel is scarcely afforded an adjective. Had he devoted as much enthusiasm to the more general aspects of his world and the people who inhabit it as he has to swords and loincloths then this might have been a better first novel.

The style is barely competent and often blatantly clumsy:

'Parma had only his Thrax knife and a four-foot chain with a weighted end to defend himself with.'

The dialogue is always dull and simplistic; it is sometimes appalling:

'"Call me Ludmilla. Since we're probably to be butchered together, we might as well be on a first-name basis."'

Even setting aside these technical shortcomings, there's not much good to be said for it all. The characters are only developed far enough to reveal the simple motives which carry the plot along, and the latter only just hangs together -- or does it? What happened, for instance, to the conspiracy to kill the heroine near the end of the book?

Roberts doesn't seem to have any great religious (or even anti-religious) message to preach. The Franciscan, Jeremiah, is allowed the occasional outburst at the awfulness of things:

"Don't go! It's meaningless! It isn't necessary! You're fools to let yourselves to (sic) be killed in this way!"

Yet he's also made into a figure of fun for his beliefs:

"I was going to preach among the poor, according to the Franciscan tradition but I've had little success so far," said Jeremiah, with a woebegone look.'

Miles the Jesuit, however, has more success with his scheming, violent methods, which I suppose is realistic enough. After all, he's not such a bad chap, and even has a word of patronising praise for the Franciscan:

"It seems I underestimated the boy. A hundred (converts)? This is splendid."

The Jesuit then goes on to convert the rest of the planet....which is of course all to the good. His methods are a bit underhand but he really does have a heart of gold and at least it keeps those dastardly Moslems out. Perhaps he should have been sent to Iran. In fact, if Miles had been a Moslem instead of a Jesuit, The Strayed Sheep Of Charum might have been hailed as the visionary novel of the decade.

As it is....well, it's fast-moving and mercifully short but for those of you with no more than a cursory interest in gladiators I suggest you seek your escapism elsewhere. It should not be difficult to find.

Ned Crawford -- NAMING THE ANIMALS: A HAUNTING (Faber, 191pp, £5.50)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Even for a first novel this is not very good, although Ned Crawford is obviously a thoughtful and able writer who will go on to produce better work. Naming The Animals is the all too familiar story of one man's struggle against a repressive state organisation. His anti-establishment activities bring a warning and harassment. He is forced out of his house and, following a car accident, is held by the authorities in some kind of hospital for dissidents. Escaping, he heads for one of the old city slum areas, where misfits and criminals remain, relatively unpestered by the government. There (surprise!) he meets up with an underground resistance organisation.

Yet the state against which Thomas Bolt is rebelling is not a harshly oppressive one like Big Brother's Oceania, not even an analogy of present-day Russia. From the evidence available it has a benevolent government widely supported by its inhabitants. (The author's choice of Westworld as a name for this state, which includes Britain, is an unfortunate one, to say the least; at the turn of every page I expected to be confronted by a gun-toting robot Yul Brynner.) The customs and procedures of Westworld are different from ours (and it is difficult to see how society moved from here to there), but they do not seem unfair, corrupt or inhumane; hence the protagonist's rebellion seems unwarranted and fails to arouse any feelings of sympathy or identification in the reader.

Mixed in with Thomas Bolt's feelings of dissent are mystical elements. He has experienced dreams of that old and now forbidden institution, the Prison. There is mention at one point of his possession of racial memories. The chapters of the novel are entitled First Dream, Second Dream, and so on. Indeed, many of the incidents have a dreamlike quality about them, which serves to throw more doubt than ever on Bolt's state of mind. Does all this add up to some great revelation? No, unfortunately it peters out in what even Faber's blurb writer has to admit is an enigmatic ending. Quite a number of the novel's ingredients seem to have been tossed in just for the sake of being able to mention them

rather than because they fitted or because their implications were being fully explored. Even elements which are important in terms of the plot are incongruous or undeveloped -- such as group sex (a system under which Bolt has grown up and which commands wide, even total, popular support, but against which he finally revolts), the Pilpak kit full of tranquilisers which all members of society carry (its implications are not fully developed), and the hips, roving bands of hippies, whose sudden appearance seems to be nothing more nor less than a plot convenience, and have been equally conveniently forgotten by the next chapter.

This is all rather a shame, because Ned Crawford shows evidence of writing talent. I hope (and expect) that his next novel will be much better.

Brian Aldiss -- NEW ARRIVALS, OLD ENCOUNTERS (Jonathan Cape, 224pp, £4.50)

Reviewed by Roz Kaveney

Brian Aldiss is an author whose capacity for self-criticism has never been the equal of his considerable talents, occasional attacks of genius and intermittent craftsmanship. Once in a while, and lately with growing frequency, he publishes a story that simply isn't good enough, and this collection is one in which such stories predominate. It's almost as though this were a collection of those of his stories of the seventies which weren't good enough for Last Orders, salted with enough work of some stature to make it impossible to dismiss it altogether.

Two moderately worthwhile stories date back to the sixties: "Amen And Out" is an amiable if cheaply cynical piece in which at the suggestion of distinctly peculiar immortals people have opted to run their lives in accordance with the oracles of computerised household gods; while "The Soft Predicament" is a slightly confused piece about racism, the relative uses of the hard and soft sciences, the effect on human behaviour of plugging into the collective unconscious and serious stuff like that. These two stories work because at that stage in his career Aldiss could still be cynical about a character in a way that made the character more human where now his cynicism turns them into pos-turing puppets. At that time also, he could discuss serious issues in a charmingly irresponsible and agnostic way where now he tends to adopt a tediously editorial pose.

Aldiss's adoption of a gravitas appropriate to his maturer years does produce three good recent stories. "The Small Stones Of Tu Fu" combines a slightly twee chinoiserie with a moderately successful portrait of a totally alien omnipotent intelligence which finds aesthetic pleasure in infinite sterility; that it should have first appeared in Isaac Astral's SF Magazine is quite bizarre -- unless, of course, Astral identifies himself with the principal character. "One Blink Of The Moon" is an odd blend of Hardy and Stapledon; the narrator is vouchsafed a vision of the future development of mankind and machine. The title story itself is a strangely successful experiment in incantatory prose, an elegy for innocent aliens destroyed by mental pollution from human explorers. These three stories are heavily worked upon and rather solemn, but they have a seriousness and an integrity which combines the graven terseness of the best of the "Enigma" stories with the humanity of "The Circulation Of The Blood".

Of the remaining stories, some escape the atysmal without quite struggling across to mediocrity. "Space For Reflection" is an attempted return to Aldiss's early style in which a sub-Candide ingenu wanders the galaxy trying to find the secret of life and eventually decides that it's the opposite of what he'd thought. "Song Of The Silencer" is a very old-fashioned and pat comic catastrophe story -- humanity is rendered capable of hearing the music of the spheres and intelligence is promptly destroyed. "Non-Isotropic" creates a singularly implausible astronomical phenomenon in order to present an aged son with the corpse of his young father; the story exists for that punch-line alone and is of little interest even when it's not given away. "Three Ways" confronts returned startravellers with the choice of a fascist feminism, Asian

mysticism, and a brutal frontier in a new Pacific continent -- but none of the societies are presented in any more than the most arbitrary of ways, which makes their intended use as correlatives for three states of mind difficult at more than an unsatisfactory and sketchy level. "Spot Of Konfrontation" is an unfunny satire which fearlessly tackles major issues like bureaucracy, tourism and Frenglish: an EEC decree that everyone should speak in macaronics, which results in endless linguistic fun for all the family. "Indifference" is an extended piece in which three clones set up a mission station on behalf of a technocratic religion of the future; but since writing about clones means that you needn't devote much time to differentiating your characters, and thus the story evokes in the reader the emotion of which it so originally accuses the Universe. "The Impossible Puppet Show" is the poorest story in the book: for some reason Aldiss decided to try his hand at writing his own Monty Python scripts and the result is, to coin a phrase, very silly.

When Aldiss is good, which is most of the time, it is usually because his verbal inventiveness and structural playfulness are linked to a cheeky, humane compassion and insight; when he is bad it's either because the verbal invention (these days rarely interesting in itself) is being indulged in total isolation from other values, or as a tool to assist the neo-conservative polemical tone of a piece like "Enemies Of The System". Some critics have disliked Last Orders for the experimentalism of the "Enigma" triptychs, but from the vantage-point of this collection it can be seen that Aldiss does have a very real need to move on, however frenetically, to new ground. It is when he stands still that he becomes lazy and pompous. All too often in New Arrivals, Old Encounters he ruminates, then pontificates, upon the nature and destiny of the Universe -- a question he settled quite elegantly several years ago and really shouldn't go picking over now. Several of the stories should never have escaped from Aldiss's study, much less been collected. When a writer is Guest-of-Honour at a World Convention, he or she should have behind them a slave to whisper: "Remember, thou art mortal"; perhaps Cape, in publishing this book, intended a similar moral lesson.

Suzy McKee Charnas -- WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD (Gollancz, 214pp, £5.25)

Reviewed by Alan Dorey

For a first novel to be endorsed by no less than William Burroughs is an achievement indeed, even allowing for the fact that he may have mellowed over the years. This is not to say that the book is perfect -- there are flaws -- but it is a refreshing treatment of a hackneyed theme.

On a post-holocaust Earth, scattered groups of humanity have survived by hiding away during the years of devastation. The catastrophe was blamed on the increasing awareness of women and so in The Holdfast, one of humanity's enclaves, they are reduced to the level of mere slaves, blindly obedient -- but inwardly resentful -- of their masters. Known as the fems (such an original term), they are kept firmly in their place by the Seniors, the adult males, who also have absolute authority over the Juniors (why are post-holocaust societies always so boringly feudalistic?). Fragments of ideas from the past break through every now and again, and one man, Eykar Bek, deserts his Guard Post in search of the knowledge thought to exist at the end of the world. He is later joined by two closet renegades sent out to recapture him, and by Aldera, a fem seeking the whereabouts of the legendary Free Fems.

The journey in search of The Answer is of course just a framework upon which Ms Charnas can hang her study of the relationships between these travellers. In an effort to contrast the great difference in social attitudes, she does overplay the subservient role of the women and, by the end of the novel, one's teeth tend to grate at the very mention of the term "fem".

Walk To The End Of The World is, however, engrossing, mixing in elements of Ursula LeGuin and evoking a similar atmosphere to that of Chris Priest's

Inverted World. Its delicately-handled resolution does come as something of a surprise, and more than compensates for some of the novel's earlier flaws. It makes satisfying reading, and one hopes that Ms Charnas can follow this promising debut.

Cherry Wilder -- THE LUCK OF BRIN'S FIVE (Angus & Robertson, 230pp, £4.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

One of SF's most cliched plots concerns the solitary Earthman whose spacecraft malfunctions and lands him in the middle of an alien society on the brink of civil insurrection, with its rigidly traditionalist leaders struggling to silence the calls for social change and scientific progress from the revolutionary underground; and who, adopted as the underground's "messiah", acts as the catalyst for the eventual transformation of that society. If nothing else, such plots probably have great cathartic value for all those readers frustrated by the petty repressions of everyday life and who, projecting themselves into the novel as that "solitary Earthman", are eventually "proved right" about everything in a climax that kills off the existing power-group and installs "them" as the new ruler.

This is more or less the basic situation in Cherry Wilder's The Luck Of Brin's Five, except that the novel effectively ends with the society still teetering on the verge of insurrection (thus rather depressingly promising a sequel, or even a series of sequels), having up to that point chronicled the adoption of the solitary Earthman -- one Scott Gale -- as the underground's "catalyst-messiah". This tale is related by Dorn, the male teenage member of a family Five (so called because of the number of adults required for its formation) of mountain weavers which adopts Gale as its "Luck" or sage; and with such a viewpoint-character it's inevitable that we learn more about the family's view of their world than we do about the world itself, and virtually nothing about the different factions engaged in the covert struggle for change. This is, paradoxically, both its greatest weakness and its greatest strength -- in the former case because it means that the world exists more as an abstract than as a surrogate reality, known implicitly to Dorn but never fully revealed to us; and in the latter because it focusses the reader's attention solidly on Dorn's family, whose essential "ordinariness" -- far removed from the centres of power, caring little or nothing for the things over which their rulers are squabbling, and likely to suffer most in any upheaval that may ensue -- gives us a somewhat different perspective of events ("from the bottom", as it were) and points up the (unstated) moral that not all change is necessarily for the better. As such, it stands in nice contrast to the rather arrogant "born to rule" assumptions made by other authors who have used the plot in the past, probably with its value as a cathartic power-fantasy deliberately in mind (Edmund Cooper's A Far Sunset springs to mind as a good example of this type, but that's not to be interpreted as a recommendation).

The novel is, as the age of the protagonist suggests, intended for a young teenage audience (I'd estimate 12 to 15 years), but I can't help feeling that such a readership is likely to miss much of the foregoing; it's all so understated that the novel can be read as a straight (if somewhat leisurely) adventure story, with only the fully attentive (and adult?) reader deriving much intellectual stimulation from it. Which brings up a question that I've been wanting to ask for some time now: why is it that children's SF novels always seem to be so much more rewarding than adult ones?

Robert Silverberg -- THE SONGS OF SUMMER (Collanz, 173pp, £5.25)

Reviewed by Dave Langford

"Eleven stories never previously published in Britain", it says here, though the title story appears in Dobson's Next Stop The Stars and the much-antholo-

gised "Double Dare" may be found in a ten-year-old Sphere collection, To Worlds Beyond. The other mildly irritating aspect of the book is Silverberg himself, in an introduction like several he's written recently. Speaking as a hack who's recanted and now produces great art, he gently deprecates the young (but oh! so promising) lad who once churned the stuff out at such a rate....and adds that the stories are in fact pretty good. Handy phrases for hard-up reviewers are supplied: "Technically the most advanced, the most experimental....still making its way in print nearly a quarter of a century later, and not merely as an historical curiosity, either." (The title story.) "Smoothly done, oddly unsettling little stories, without the harsh and jagged aspects of my later output...."

But yes: this is a good collection of the transitional Silverberg. In the eleven stories, the simple problem-solving approach is increasingly replaced by a realisation that simple goals are not enough. In "A Man Of Talent" the hero wants artistic fame, in "Dark Companion" oblivion, and Silverberg takes a step away from pulp by having both win through by rearranging their own desires. Even this is a one-dimensional view of life; bleaker and less shallow (i.e., "oddly unsettling") stories follow. "By The Seawall" hints at the irrationality of supposing that there must always be an answer; "The King Of The Golden River" and "The Pleasure Of Their Company" insist that real people don't follow the game-theory/minimax approach to life and that self-respect may be a more important motivation than survival; "We Know Who We Are" offers the thought that even access to the Right Answer may do the problem-solver no good. By comparison with these later pieces, the title story -- dealing with the impact of a nasty, grasping present-day man on a gentle future society, and his defeat by a deus ex machina -- is overstated and pretentious.

This doesn't mean that I would pick out anything in this book as a towering piece of literature worthy of engraving on tablets of imperishable crystal for the benefit of all future generations. Slickness and competence are the key-notes, plus a growing dissatisfaction with the pulp traditions. The "new" Silverberg is firmly in control by the time of the final stories; this was also the period in which he wrote Downward To The Earth, Tower Of Glass and Son Of Man. Which should be recommendation enough.

Bernard Fischman -- THE MAN WHO RODE HIS 10-SPEED BICYCLE TO THE MOON (Hodder & Stoughton, 97pp, £4.25)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

In his Fables And Fabulists (1895), Thomas Newbigging distinguished two different ways in which the word "fable" is used, deriving respectively from the Latin fabulae and fabellae. The former relates to myth-histories and stories of an imaginary past; the second is "a special branch of literature, in which the imagination has full play, altogether unassisted by superstition in any shape or form....there is no attempt (....) at any serious make-believe. On the contrary, there is a tacit understanding between (the fabulist) and his hearers and readers, that what he narrates is only true in the sense of its application to corresponding circumstances in human life and conduct." The Man Who Rode His 10-Speed Bicycle To The Moon is a fable in this strict sense. It is a manifest fantasy which makes no claim to plausibility, but which nevertheless purports to represent metaphorically a particular crisis in human affairs with a prescription for its resolution. Classical fables are invariably sharp and frequently witty (after the fashion of La Fontaine), but modern American ones tend to be self-consciously sickly, well aware of their own cuteness and mock-naivete.

The Man Who...., like that other much-lauded contemporary fable, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, is about the need to assert oneself -- at least in one's dreams -- in order to rise above the awful ordinariness that constantly threatens to engulf and dissolve the modern city-dweller. Stephen Aaron, estranged from his wife and unable to connect with his young mistress, rides his bicycle

to the Moon (accompanied by the spirit or his dead dog) in order to get his problems into perspective and prepare himself for reinvestment in the business of zestful living. All you need, apparently, to withstand the ravages of anomie and alienation is a sprinkle of stardust (I think the 10-speed bicycle is optional, or perhaps symbolic).

It is essentially a nice book, and a determined cynic like myself really ought to have found it pretty painful. In these dark times, however, I can forgive a book a lot if it doesn't feature seagulls, rabbits or hobbits, and I have not yet become imaginatively allergic to bicycles. I quite liked it -- and it does have some nice artwork by Barbara Lanza.

Elizabeth Lynn -- A DIFFERENT LIGHT (Gollancz, 175pp, £4.95)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Suppose you're an artist living in the future, when mankind roams the stars in hyperdrive starships, but you have a susceptibility to cancer (now almost an extinct disease) which will be exacerbated by hyperspace. The choice is clear-cut: stay on the planet of your birth and live to be a hundred (perhaps even 150), or see the glories of other worlds, other stars, and die within a year. What would you do?

The artist, Jimson Alleca, asks:

"What colour is the sun on China III?"

"The sun?" She thought. "It's yellow, I suppose."

"Like New Terrain?"

"Not exactly. It's brighter, I think. Maybe a whiter yellow. I remember we wore sunshades a lot. It must have been a different light."

"I want to see a different light."

Of course, he goes into space, visiting different planets and finding new, demanding subjects to draw, and he does die; yet this novel is not just that. It's a brilliant and beautiful piece of writing, a first novel of awe-inspiring maturity. There is much writing in the minor key: much sadness. The image of death lurks on every page. Jimson as by turns morose, despairing, thoughtful, demanding, spellbound by beauty, casually creative, but never happy; perhaps it such would be too simplistic a response. Indeed, the only happiness in the novel is right at its end.

For the most part A Different Light is a sentimental romance, economical with words, as Jimson finds and loses lovers of both sexes. Elizabeth Lynn drags in many of SF's cliches (hyperspace, telepathy, taverns, a rich man who could buy up the world, a long-isolated human colony which has regressed), but she uses them with great delicacy and sweeps the reader on by keeping the plot moving. This itself is of the quest variety, although it takes fifty pages for this to become apparent. Jimson Alleca finds his "different light", achieving something new in his drawings; then he meets an old friend -- Russell, his boyhood lover -- and rather fortuitously joins an expedition searching for specific art-treasures on a planet which official records deny exist.

Throughout the book it's the people who are important. In particular, the aloofness of the spacer sub-culture is put across very strongly, although Jimson manages to break into it through his friendships with Leiko, a beautiful female space pilot; Ysao, a giant male telepath; and Russell, now a Starcaptain. They all have their own motives and foibles; and if most of them seem to lack backgrounds this can be put down to their natural taciturnity and the unwritten rule that one must never ask a spacer a direct personal question.

Ms Lynn commits occasional indiscretions of detail and plot credibility; that which sticks most in my mind concerns food bars, the staple diet in space, which are tasteless, "about as satisfying as chewing paper". This is ridiculous, since any manufacturer with an ounce of common-sense would introduce flavours

and scoop the market. But this sort of thing is relatively uncommon and relatively unimportant. Stylistically, Elizabeth Lynn is very sure of herself, and A Different Light is an intelligent, enjoyable, satisfying book. It's a good deal better than a first novel has any right to be, and I'll most certainly be looking out for her next.

Terry Carr (ed.) -- BEST SCIENCE FICTION OF THE YEAR 8 (Gollancz, 363pp, £6.50)

Reviewed by Kevin Smith

As a friend of mine said when he saw the book I was reading: "What's so special about the year 8?" Judging by the science fiction that was considered its best, by Mr Carr at any rate, the answer is: "Not a lot."

John Varley's "The Barbie Murders" is basically a detective story. The twist of detection this time is to find the murderer when the murder has been committed in a society where everyone looks exactly alike. Varley spends some time setting up his conditions. The barbie colony consists of people who have given up their individual identities to become identical units. They look and sound the same, to minute engineering tolerances. They have no visible identifying marks -- even their fingerprints have been obliterated. Everyone is responsible for everyone else, because all decisions are taken collectively, and each uses the collective pronoun "we" in conversation. Then we come to the murder investigation. The female detective drives herself nuts trying to pin down an individual, and isn't helped by any of the barbies, who keep trying to give themselves up; one of them did it, they say, and it doesn't matter which one. The detective can't see it that way, of course; she wants the real culprit. By the end of the story, although she doesn't have "her", she does know how to find "her", and intends to sneak into the colony and commit a summary execution.

It's an ingenious tale, but totally artificial. The barbie idea is just too artificial to be taken seriously. For all that Varley tells us about them, the barbies' sole raison d'être is to make the plot work. It isn't such a good plot, either, and its conclusion takes us right back to those six-gun toting heroes of Westerns. There's no serious consideration of the moral issues involved. I hesitate to say that the barbies need to be explored in greater depth; Varley might just write a novel about them with -- oh horrors! -- this story as its first chapter.

"Devil You Don't Know" by Dean Ing is that curious creation, an SF story that doesn't need to be. The theme is a powerful one, concerning the care and treatment of mentally handicapped people in institutions, and in a strong opening Ing nicely points out some of the inhumanities man perpetrates on handicapped men. The hero, Chris, investigates private homes by placing his assistant, Val, who looks like a moron but isn't, inside to experience them at first hand. They have several times been successful at forcing changes for the better. Then they start on Gulfview Home, and Val quickly learns that the doctors who run it are not at all qualified to do so, and that something else is going on. At this point, roughly halfway through the story, Val has replaced Chris as the protagonist, and from here, too, the story degenerates into a weak detective story.

Val discovers that the Home is being used as a front for drug refining and marketing. The "doctors" discover that she knows. We all discover that the extraordinary eyeless girl in the Home, Laura, possesses psi powers. (Aha! The SF at last.) With these powers Laura defeats the villains and saves Val, who decides that she and Laura can use the powers to help the mentally handicapped more than she and Chris are doing at the moment.

You can see what I mean about the SF content being unnecessary. Some other way could have been found to extricate Val; even something as clichéd as a last minute cavalry dash by Chris would have been preferable to this deus ex machina ending. I would go further, and say that the SF ending is positively damaging to the theme. It holds out a false hope to the mentally handicapped, because in the real world Laura's psi power is a complete fraud. Ing has used SF as a

crutch to avoid the need for him to face squarely the problems of mental handicap. In doing so he has both squandered a powerful theme and devalued SF.

I suspect that "Count The Clock That Tells The Time" is included in the anthology because the name under the title is Harlan Ellison's. His premise is that people who waste their time fade away from the real world into a timeless limbo. The moral is that you can only properly use time in relationships with other people, and everything in the story is subordinated to it. Ellison's observation can be deadly, as here in his itemising of ways of "keeping busy" which are in fact wasting time (he had me checking my daily routine), but too often he goes over the top in his relentless, single-minded pursuit of his idea. Perhaps I wouldn't have minded so much if the idea had been more original.

The title of the story is taken from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, part of which is quoted at the beginning. The sonnet starts: "When I do count the clock that tells the time", and the quote ends on line ten, with: "That thou among the wastes of time must go". Shakespeare's main meaning for "wastes of time" is obviously old age and death, and Ellison's interpretation of a wasteland of time certainly adds something new to it. But the moral that personal relationships are what matters is also present in the last four lines of the sonnet, which Ellison doesn't quote:

"Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence."

Ellison has merely given us a new twist on a theme set out with great clarity and economy -- fourteen lines -- some four hundred years ago.

"The Morphology Of The Kirkham Wreck" by Hilbert Schenck is an interesting story. The style is dry and factual, suiting the "report" format Schenck has used. The story concerns the ultimately successful attempt of a lifeboat crew to rescue the sailors from a schooner wrecked in a violent storm off Nantucket Island in 1892. Success is achieved only by the exercise of para-normal power by the lifeboat captain, Walter Chase. This power consists of the ability to use and modify timelines -- something that is explained in the "report". In our future, "time-using" societies are quite common, and it is for them that the "report" is written.

The atmosphere of a small boat in violent seas is accurately captured and the lifeboatmen are realistic in their setting, with just enough characterisation to make them individuals. However, I couldn't visualise what was really happening. The time-usage is described in technical terms analogous to thermo-dynamics -- information matrix, information gradient, temporal gradient, time-information entropy balances, and energy-time-information barriers, for example -- but I didn't understand a word of it.

James Patrick Kelly's "Death Therapy" is about an alternative to actual death as a punishment for criminals. You take the criminal through the trauma of death without irrevocably killing him, and the deterrent effect lasts the rest of his life. (This happens with actual execution as well, of course.) This, at least, is the theory that our intrepid scientists, Challant and Walsh, are testing. Challant is the boss, and definitely a nasty piece of work. Carla Walsh has to be persuaded to join the experiment, since she has qualms about the ethics of it. However, she decides that these qualms are based on her feelings, her personal prejudices, and not on professional standards (whatever they might be) and goes ahead. The implications of this decision are really rather horrific. Ethical value judgements have no place in science, according to Kelly. It's all right to kill people in the name of science -- oh well, we've got these Jews who are going to die anyway so let's cut a few of them first as an experiment.

Challant is obviously a loony as well as a nasty. He refuses to listen to Carla when she finds out that the subject of their experiment is unsuitable -- for him to do otherwise would ruin the plot. The subject, it transpires, can

transmit his mental state, and does so (powerfully) in his death trauma. The nasty Challant is killed and the nice Carla survives. The ethical balance is restored!

Well, no; actually, it isn't. Carla may have had doubts about the ethics of her work, but she did it anyway. Does Kelly really believe that it is all right to kill people as long as you think it is probably wrong and don't enjoy it? Good grief!

The remaining stories are not particularly memorable. Gregory Benford and Marc Laidlaw ("A Hiss Of Dragon") offer a slight piece about dragons farting. Fritz Leiber forgot to edit out his thought processes on the way to his "Black Glass". Donald Kingsbury ("To Bring In The Steel" gives us a nicely told, immensely cliched story about a high-society-whore-with-a-heart-of-gold. Ian Watson ("The Very Slow Time Machine") weaves a web of metaphysical and religious speculation which is, as usual, intellectually fascinating but emotionally dead. Joan Vinge ("View From A Height") contributes a very self-indulgent story which probes whole nanometres into already well-explored areas of personal motivation and feeling. Gordon Eklund ("Vermeer's Window") proves he hasn't read Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author Of The Quixote". And Thomas M. Disch ("The Man Who Had No Idea") is at first delightfully ironical, but carries the joke on for too long.

The question arises, was the year 8 -- actually 1978 -- just a poor year, or has Carr lost his touch? His failure to select even one Hugo winner ahead of the final voting -- despite having picked no less than five of the nominees -- might well be used in evidence against him, but the generally low quality of those winners and nominees rather destroys the case. Probably Carr was doing his best, and 1978 must be written off as a year of cheap plonk -- nothing vintage about it at all.

Anne McCaffrey -- DRAGONDRUMS (Sidgwick & Jackson, 240pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Janice Maule

I assume that this novel is intended to be a juvenile, although there is nothing on the horrendous blue, mauve, pink and green jacket to indicate as much. However, the choice of a teenage boy as hero speaks for itself -- the appeal to young readers of a hero of their own age who outsmarts his elders and betters, successfully escapes home and parental authority, survives Threadfall in the open, and achieves his heart's desire in hatching a fire lizard of his own is obvious.

Although the absence of any difficult words or concepts makes Dragondrums a very easy book to read, I nevertheless feel that an averagely intelligent ten-year-old would find it difficult to really enjoy it for two reasons. Firstly, there is no real plot -- the story consists of a series of events, linked only by the accident of Piemur's involvement. This is made more irritating because early in the book one is given the impression that Piemur will have an exciting life as a kind of special agent for the Masterharper; but after a couple of adventures he ends up in the Southern Continent with a very tame ending. He seems to have more thrills and spills with the other apprentices in the drumheights than on his trips for the Masterharper.

The second fault is the manner in which the book is interspersed with mentions of other dragon stories. Unless one is familiar with the whole series many of these references must be meaningless since they are so fleeting that no explanation of them is possible. To refer back to other children's books in the series is perfectly acceptable since the characters do overlap, but to make cryptic remarks about other books serves only to annoy. Perhaps McCaffrey is trying to draw the attention of younger readers to her adult novels or, more likely, she expects her adult readers to devour all her books and is using this device to link Dragondrums with them by placing it in context in the series.

No doubt there are many McCaffrey fans who will want to read Dragondrums for the

sake of completeness, but I would advise them all to either borrow a copy or wait for the paperback edition. £5.95 is a lot of money to pay for this disappointing children's book.

William Robert Loosley -- AN ACCOUNT OF A MEETING WITH DENIZENS OF ANOTHER WORLD, 1874, edited and with a commentary by David Langford (David & Charles, 96pp, £4.50)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Previous reviews of this book, appearing in publications as diverse as The Bookseller and Surrey Villager, have all, to some extent, been impressed with its verisimilitude; yet there can't be a single BSFA member who, on recognising the name "Langford", doesn't immediately fall to the ground in paroxysms of laughter. It is of course a complete hoax from beginning to end, and its acceptance as fact by all those reviewers (apart from Chris Priest, reviewing it for The Grauniad; but he confined himself to tongue-in-cheek hints) -- and the public at large: Langford has received congratulatory letters from a number of readers who apparently have nothing better to do than babble about their own UFO experiences -- is indicative of their appalling gullibility; they were obviously so desperate to believe in benevolent aliens and flying saucers and suchlike that they managed to overlook completely the gentle hint at the end of Langford's own Introductory Note: "...in the most fascinating and convincing account there still lurks the possibility of error or fabrication. The reader is warned."

To be sure, it's all dressed up very convincingly: Loosley himself actually existed (he was Hazel Langford's great-great-grandfather), the desk in which his manuscript was supposedly found even now reposes in the Langford household in Reading, and the account of his meeting with what Langford, in his commentary, supposes to be semi-autonomous robot sampling devices is cast in the tediously hyperbolic prose typical of the late Victorian era. Here he is page 35, watching the aliens attempting to communicate with him:

"And now, I must confess, at this thought of magic I was seized anew with something like dread: for of a sudden I recalled the Good Book's histories of men who met strange visions in the wilderness. Laugh if you will, but it is clearly written that Satan, the Tempter, sets just such snares as this: wild visions to delude the sense and make one prey to folly and temptation. But even as these thoughts revolved within me, they seemed not wholly to meet the case; if there was temptation in this, it was obscure indeed: how removed from the rich treasures held up before St Anthony! Moreover, what part in diabolic intervention could be played by the strange machines I had encountered? I could scarcely credit that Satan requires such tools, nor that he should trouble himself with me. The first dread passed away, but I remained watchful."

And so on and so on, Loosley professing great wonder at the aliens but also great ignorance of what they're trying to tell him; things which Langford's commentary reveals as basic mathematical and physical theories of which Loosley was either unaware -- the Pascal Triangle, the Fibonacci sequence -- or which were at the time unknown in any case -- the Schrodinger wave equation, the particle theory of the atom, and more. Benevolent -- or at least non-hostile -- aliens indeed, whose motives and behaviour are, as with all other saucer-borne beings, obscure, irrational, or just plain daft.

The biggest problem posed by the book is that of the level on which to regard it -- either as a piece of cynical pandering to the UFO cultists' most cherished beliefs or as a wickedly clever send-up of the whole nonsense. I can't believe the former of someone as genial as Langford, so it has to be the latter -- in which respect it doesn't go nearly far enough. Surely he could have worked in a trip aboard the spaceship for Loosley? If nothing else, such would have increased the page-count to a more realistic level; as it is, £4.50 is a lot to pay for what is in effect no more than an extended joke.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro -- FAISE DAWN (Sidgwick & Jackson, 208pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Roz Kaveney

The considerable impact of feminism upon SF has resulted, particularly over the last five years, in two strains of feminist SF to which critics have tended to respond as if they were one and the same -- and, furthermore, their response is based on an ideological rather than a strictly literary basis. Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas have explicitly committed themselves to a hardline and hard-edged radical feminism which sees men as at best involuntarily oppressive and irrelevant, and at worst as sadistic slavemasters, and express themselves in a cold and clearly-etched prose. There is, however, a larger and probably more influential group whose work derives from and whose thought has been moulded by the politico-ethical strain in the work of Ursula LeGuin; this group is also keen on affirming positive female values (though not necessarily the same ones as would be affirmed by the Russ group), but in addition posit the existence of the Good Male, who is sensitive and caring and who comes charging over the hill -- to assist, not to rescue -- in the last reel. Unfortunately, such writers as Vonda McIntyre and Jean Vinge tend to express themselves in a water-colour prose whose soft edges and lack of tautness explains why they make so many sales to Analog. There are obviously exceptions to this model; an example is James Tiptree/Racrona Sheldon, whom many have seen as totally allied to radical feminism, thus ignoring the way the emotional thrust of "Houston, Houston, Do You Read" works to condemn the overt misandry of the story.

All of the foregoing has been an attempt to define what False Dawn is trying to do by placing it in context with the work of other feminist writers. Yarbro is a writer one tends to associate with the Russ group because of her clarity and slightly academic austerity, but here and elsewhere she is, broadly speaking, allying herself with the "other side". In the original short story which now forms the first chapter or so of this novel, the tough efficient mutant Thea and the one-armed bandit Montague form an alliance against the demented rapist who has them both at gunpoint. Thea is guiltless of the collapse of the old order, while Montague's attempts to shore it up have made things worse, but he is nonetheless cultured, witty, and not too pushy. In the expansion -- which bears out my views on expansions (see my review of Spider and Jeanne Robinson's Stardance in Vector 96) -- they wander through eco-doomed northern California narrowly escaping one damned thing after another and gradually getting together a very tentative sexual relationship. At the end, they disappear into a blizzard; they will die, but then so will the rest of humanity.

False Dawn is built around the conflict between these two paragons and an impossibly vile world full of sadistic flagellant monks, demented cannibals, sexist militia and poisoned water; it sacrifices the precision of realism without achieving the mad grandeur of an apocalypse. None of the people Thea and Montague encounter are ever more than rough sketches, and they are not particularly interesting in themselves. Though their relationship is seen as affirmative it is only by contrast with the surrounding gloom rather than because it is actually positive in itself. The novel is depressing without being cathartic -- a useful exercise. It is interesting to compare it with a more recent novel of hers not yet published in this country, Hotel Transylvania, in which a Cagliostro figure who is also a vampire saves a witty but otherworldly eighteenth century virgin from the clutches of a sadistic Satanist; she then joyfully joins him in the ranks of the undead. Here Yarbro portrays an equal heterosexual relationship convincingly and does so despite making it exist between two archetypes for whom anything other than exploitation and complicity should have been impossible. There too the relationship is made possible by the catalytic effect of the impossibly bad; but there it is an individual who is bad rather than an entire world. False Dawn is, especially by comparison, an interesting failure, not least on its ideological level, and it is unfortunate that for many British readers it will be serving as their introduction to Ms Yarbro's work.

There's just room to mention here what should have gone into the colophon: that this Supplement was edited by the Vector reviews supremo, Joseph Nicholas. Bye.