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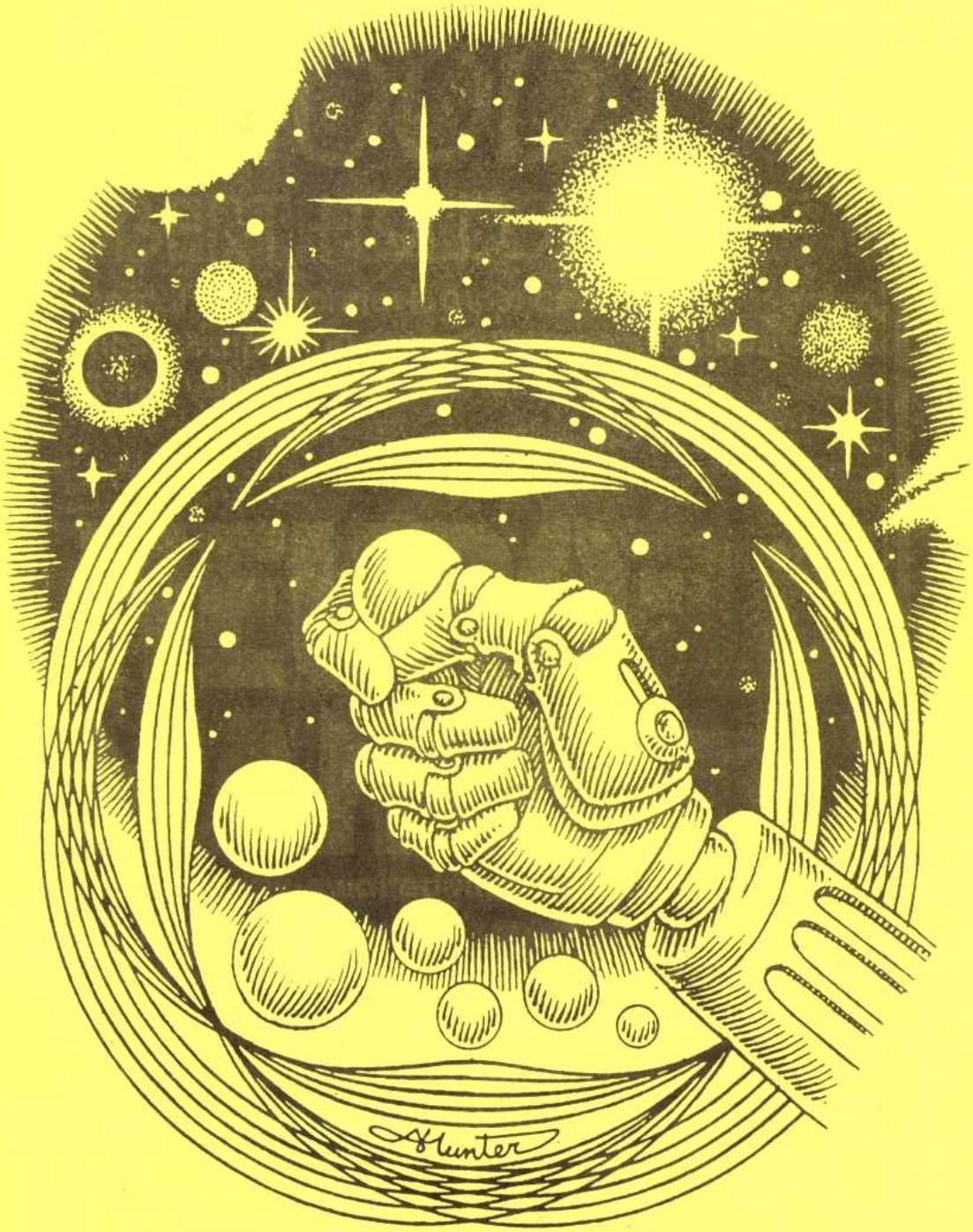

The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

VECTOR EDITOR

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EDITORIAL

G.D.Rippington

THE MOVING BLUES

Surrounding hills of scattered remnants brings back the music of distant pasts and futures too near.

Outside the bungalow the sound of locusts dance upon dried fields, the animals pant in the heat, dust clouds follow the occasional car. Natives peddle past nervously, momentarily not knowing where they head, as they look suspiciously behind at the close crop poodle, the size of an Alsatian, as it lopes up to their ankles. It's a twenty minute ride to the city centre, with it's two bookshops and one library. Not a daily trek or even a weekly one as the books cost at least 4 Kwacha each and the library will only last a couple of weeks. Brak the Barbarian was there though; "He rode alone through a world of savagery and sorcery, relying on his swordsmanship and his barbaric strength for protection". Mighty deeds we did together then behind our fences of wire, not cocooned from outside influences by reasons of money or colour, but by reasons of age and innocence. Delany was there too, The Fall of the Towers; "The Lord of the Flames... A force of evil devoid of physical substance. The berserk computer which guided the Empire's military complex", however this is a Delany I cannot remember. There was no identity for a thirteen year old to hold onto, to nurture and to grasp for more. Four books a day, five days a week, until the library and my pocket money gave out. I wonder what I actually read....

We did have hot and cold water in the showers, not that it mattered as the point of the exercise was humiliation of the "fat slob" naked in the wire locker flanked by the crowd, throwing cold water every couple of minutes. There is no fun when he crys, no joy in shared humiliation. David had the right idea in The Chrysalids, 'run far, run far' and keep on running. What has gone before must be worse than what is in front. A motto for science fiction perhaps. Wyndham, Orwell, Latin, Greek, History and English. Then Sex and later girls and Spinrad's The Men in the Jungle; "Sangre- the Killer Planet, dominated by the sadistic Brotherhood of Pain, a priesthood dedicated to torture, slavery and cannibalism," shook off the fetters of academic dullness and placed its own granite rigidity of booze and parties. Dune was O.K. it had the right feel, ignore the fascist overtones, the humans playing god, the role of Sex as master, ecology was the real thing. Pimples of ideas pricking the pock marked surface only produce acne faced hopes.

Does innocence end? An office, fairly small by todays standards, though large enough to lose oneself in; "There was so much terror jumping around inside my skin that I couldn't feel it anymore" although that is only half the truth Bob. Gateway is the unknown, you have a right to be frightened of the unknown - the fear of the unknown is afterall a tenet of science fiction - it's when the known becomes frightning that you feel terror. If someone was ever looking for an alien environment I suggest they try an accounts office because there you have people working with pointless (to them) abstract figures intermixed with their own terror and love, fear and adoration, cheerfulness and despair; a human interaction. "True Love", "Liar!", "The Bicentennial Man" is it no wonder that Asimov is so popular when we have more than enough of emotion's roller-coaster ride. Innocence does end, but it can be found again in science fiction. Thankfully.....

By The Pricking Of My Thumbs.....

Lisa Tuttle

As I sat in the audience, listening to Brian Aldiss giving his Guest of Honour speech at my first British convention, it never occurred to me that four years later I would be making a guest of honour speech, at a British convention, to an audience including Brian Aldiss.

This is not actually my first experience of being a guest of honour, although I wish it was. The first time was long ago and in another country. I won't name names, because it was one of the worst experiences of my life. It began with my arriving at the convention hotel and discovering that there were no vacancies -- they'd given my room to someone else. I should have taken the hint.

The worst thing about that convention was not that it was boring, or badly-run, or small, or that none of my friends had turned up and most of the scheduled events were cancelled -- no, the worst thing was that all of that was my fault. More and more often as the weekend dragged on, I overheard members of the committee muttering to each other: "If we'd had Anne McCaffrey like I wanted, this place would be packed out!" and "Why didn't we get Roger Zelazny? It wouldn't have cost any more to fly him in." and "Surely we could have found somebody with a Big Name?"

The full magnitude of my failure as the main draw of the convention was brought home to me on the Sunday, when I was informed that precisely one banquet ticket had been sold. The banquet was the main event, at which I was to give my speech. The banquet was cancelled, but not the speech, alas. I gave it in the room where the banquet should have been, cleared of tables and far from filled by the faithful - and ten fans, all of them munching hamburgers brought in from Macdonald's and waiting for me to drop my pearls of wisdom upon them. At this point, mercifully, my memory fails.

When, last year, I got a letter from the Novacon Committee inviting me to be guest of honour, a warning bell sounded in my brain. I comforted myself with the thought that they couldn't expect me to draw the crowds; after all, nobody goes to Novacon on account of the guest of honour. But then I realized that this was Novacon Thirteen, and I heard that the committee planned to publish a fanzine full of true disaster stories in honour of the convention, and I began to wonder what they'd heard about me, and what they expected to happen. Was I being set up for something? Was I being used? Was I supposed to being Doom to Birmingham and ensure that this was the last Novacon ever? Or could it be that I was meant to ward off evil, to be the Jonah who would be sacrificed to ensure success? Perhaps I was to be ritually disembowelled one midnight on an altar before a golden calf - this mysterious Royal Angus they all kept talking about...

So it has been a relief to find my fears were unnecessary, and that this has been a really enjoyable convention. But it leaves me with a problem. If I wasn't invited as a kind of unlucky charm, then I must have been invited as a science fiction writer....and that's something I don't feel very qualified as. I've been a fan for a long time, but as a writer..in the past eleven years I've had about forty stories published, and less than a dozen of them could be called science fiction. I've written a horror novel, and a children's fantasy, and the novel I'm writing now is straight-forward, contemporary, mainstream fiction. I'm also one-half the author of a science fiction novel called Windhaven.

I say "one-half author" rather than author of half the book because it is more accurate, and it reflects the problem I have in talking about it. If I was author of half a book I could talk about half. But because I'm half an author, whatever I say represents not exactly half the truth, but just one way of looking at it. George Martin -- my other half, I could say, if that wasn't likely to be misconstrued -- might agree with some of the things I'd say, but he would almost certainly contradict others. And we would both be right.

That's not surprising. What is surprising, I think, is that we managed to come together with our different views, and to find a way of reconciling them, to write a book together.

Collaborating on a piece of fiction is a very strange thing to do. It's perfectly understandable that people might want to work together on something where they could divide up the different tasks, as in film-making, or in song-writing where one person might write the lyrics and the other the music, or in non-fiction where two authors might divide up the chapters on grounds of expertise, or one might do the research and the other one the writing. But fiction-writing is extremely personal, and it can't be broken down into separate-but equal tasks.

Although some people imagine it can. There was one very silly review of Windhaven I remember in which the reviewer revealed that he'd figured out how we'd done it: George Martin had made up the plot and the background, while Lisa Tuttle had done the characters. As if novels were put together like that -- I had an image of George hammering together the structure in a firm, masculine way, while I waited until he was done, and then injected characterization, as I might squeeze cream filling into a bun.

That's not how we did it -- I can't believe that's how anyone does it. As for how, I'll get to that in a minute. As for why --

Anyone who has ever written knows what a lonely job it can be, especially when it isn't going well, or if you're not sure of what you're doing. The idea of having someone to share with is very appealing: someone to provide immediate feedback and reinforcement, someone to offer another point of view and keep your spirits up. I thing that's why writers' workshops and creative writing courses are so popular, and also why a lot of writers like to talk about what they're doing. I don't usually like to talk about what I'm writing because I'm afraid it will come out sounding boring or silly, and because I would have to explain too much to begin with.

One of the great pleasures of writing Windhaven was in being able to talk about it -- and not having to explain. George and I were in the same place, mentally, so we could share ideas and inspire them in each other by talking. It was the sort of working-out of a book that is usually done alone, internally, and it was different and very nice to have that solitary vision become a social experience. It was something like the pleasure I'd had as a child, when I discovered a friend who could enter my made-up worlds and play pretend-games I usually had to play by myself. It didn't stop me playing other games alone, but it was an additional pleasure, to have someone to share with.

George Martin and I first met at a science fiction convention in Dallas, at a time when we'd both been nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. (We both lost, to Jerry Pournelle.) We'd both had about three short stories published, and we had a lot of friends, most of them coming out of Texas fandom, who had started selling their stories in the past few years. Besides George and me there were Howard Waldrop, Jake Saunders, Steven Utley, Tom Reamy, George Proctor, Joe Pumilia and Bruce Sterling. We called ourselves the "neo-pros," and we were all utterly obsessed with writing. We loved it. We couldn't get enough of it. We met at conventions and at parties and we held workshops for the sheer joy of reading each others' stories and talking all night about them.

Collaborations sprang up naturally out of this shared obsession, whenever there were two or more of us together. This wasn't as often as we would have liked, since even for those who lived in Texas, hundreds of miles

might separate one writer from another. It's a big place. So when we did get together, we tried to get the most possible out of every meeting.

I think science fiction lends itself to collaboration in a way that other kinds of fiction do not. That's because of the importance of ideas in SF. Comedy writing seems to work in much the same way, with people talking, tossing ideas back and forth and elaborating, coming up with something much different then either individual could have written alone. I've seen stories develop like that at science fiction conventions and at workshops, where one person says, "Hey, just think what would have happened if General Custer'd had the airplane." And another writer, equally drunk, says, "Oh, yes, the subject of that famous movie, "They Died With Their Chutes On,'" and before you know it, Howard Waldrop and Steven Utley are hunting frantically for paper and pen to make their ideas immortal in the story "Custer's Last Jump."

There was a lot of that going around. My first collaboration was with Steven Utley. There were about ten of us sitting around drinking at his apartment in a small town north of Dallas, and there was his typewriter on the dining table. Suddenly, in the middle of a conversation about Mark Twain, Steve jumped up and ran to the typewriter, where he began pounding away. Ten minutes later he came back, saying, "Your turn" in the general direction of me and/or Howard Waldrop. Howard had his legs stuck under the coffee table and couldn't move, so I went to the typewriter and saw there the beginning of a story called "Tom Sawyer's Sub-Orbital Escapade." If that happened to me today I'd probably go back under the coffee table with Howard, but in those days I had no sense of my own limitations. A Mark Twain pastiche? Why, sure, I could do anything! We took turns at the typewriter until some sort of ending had been reached, and a year later, against all expectations, we managed to sell the story.

So, in this context of constant collaboration, it made perfect sense that within twenty-four hours of his arrival in Dallas, George Martin should be writing a new story with Howard Waldrop, and that as soon as he met me he should try to talk me into writing one with him.

The first recorded suggestion for what this collaboration should be was that, since we both liked Kris Kristofferson's records, and since George had already written a story inspired by "Me and Bobby McGee," that we should choose another Kristofferson song, and set it on Mars.

I didn't respond to that. So the next time we saw each other, at another convention, George dragged me off to the bar to discuss ideas.

At that point in our budding careers, everything I'd written was what could be called "dark fantasy", disturbing supernatural stories, set in the real world. Whereas all of George's stories were definitely science fiction, set either on alien planets or in the far future. George though he'd like to try his hand at something more contemporary, maybe a horror story, but he wasn't too confident about beginning. A collaboration, therefore, seemed to him to be ideal. He already had the setting for a story -- an amusement park, since he'd spent one summer in New Jersey operating a ride called the Tubs of Fun.

But I wasn't interested. I'd written horror stories on my own, so this didn't seem enough of a challenge. Besides, what impressed me the most about George's stories was that they were what I considered <u>real</u> science fiction: the sort of thing I loved to read but felt incompetent to write. I loved the idea of creating another world, but I didn't know how to begin. It was hard enough trying to describe the things I could see around me!

For me, George's success and my own failure in my own mind could be measured by the fact that he sold most of his stories to ANALOG, a market I was afraid I'd never be able to sell to. I didn't even like ANALOG all that much -- compared to F&SF or AMAZING I found it boring -- but it was symbolic, to me, of real, hard-core science fiction.

So I told George that I would collaborate with him, on the condition that we wrote a real science fiction story -- more than that, an ANALOG story.

George sighed and promised that when we got home he'd look through his "ideas" file and see if he had any possibilities.

Sure enough, about a month later I got a letter outlining two possibilities for stories. Both were what he called "idea germs" -- not full-fledged story ideas, not yet, but they might spark more ideas in me. He sent two, but I'll just read you one -- the one I responded to:

"An ocean planet; the only land is small, scattered, rocky islands, a few big enough to farm on. A ship crashes. It's a Cordwainer Smith-Arthur Clarke kind of sail ship, with immense metal wings, never meant to land. There are survivors, but they become primitive in a few generations, as there is no metal for technology. However, the immensely strong, immensely light cloth-metal of the sailship sail has survived. Since the ocean is wracked by storms, volcanic activity, and is very dangerous to sail (dinosaurs?!), the early survivors, who still had some tools, cut up the metal into glider-type one-man wings. They fly on strong storm-wind currents from island to island. The wings are handed down. Family Heirlooms. The flyers, naturally, are glamorous figures. It's dangerous, they're the only ones who travel, etc.; much more exciting than the drudgery of growing food, etc. Conflict. Maybe twins in one family. A primogeniture tradition, but now, who gets the wings? 'On the Wings of Storm' sounds like a nice title."

It was the idea of flying that intrigued me. Like most people, I've always dreamed of flying under my own power, so I could really identify with a character who wanted to fly. And I especially liked the fact that it wouldn't just be a fantasy (I had already written a fantasy in which people had wings) because there would be a science fiction rationale behind it. Also, this other world George proposed didn't sound too dauntingly alien. I could cope with the idea of ordinary people living on scattered, rocky islands, in a stormy sea.

So this "idea germ" of George's infected me. I was susceptible to it, and, after the way of germs, the ideas began multiplying in my mind, out of control, until it was mine as much as his, and a story began to grow.

First of all, twins didn't interest me. I thought of a young woman who wanted to fly but wasn't allowed...why? Was this to be another male-dominated society? No, I didn't like that idea -- we had a whole new world to play with, so what was the point of messing it up with sexual prejudice? No, the clue was in the idea of the flyers as glamorous figures, a race apart, who kept the wings jealously guarded. A lot of people would be content with the status quo, but what about someone who wasn't? What about an outsider trying to fight her way into a closed society? Maybe she was befriended by a flyer, or adopted, and given a taste of the sky, all the time knowing that her wings were only borrowed and she would eventually have to turn them over to the flyer's natural-born child.

I wrote George a long letter about my thoughts, and he responded with more suggestions, details of the culture and the planet, and questioning how we might resolve the conflict we'd set up -- he listed a number of possible endings, none of which were completely satisfactory, as follows:

"One, she could give up the wings, try to reconcile herself to it. The moral would be 'sometimes you have to give up dreams.' Pfagh. I just wrote that in 'Fast-Friend' and I'm not sure I believe it. Too damned grown-up and realistic. Alternatively, she could fly away. Just take the wings and go to some other island where her origins aren't known and her wings would be appreciated. That's better, but I still don't like it much. Three: she just flies off over the sea to die. Death is better than life without wings. Four: wings get damaged and broken so nobody can have them (cheat! cheat!). Five: it turns out the son didn't want to be a flyer, he has some other dream and is just being pushed into flying by his father's expectations. Six: she kills the kid. Seven: she finds some way to build another pair. Eight: she kills a second

flyer to get a second pair. Nine: she becomes a nun and flies with the aid of a giant hat."

He closed the letter with some suggestions for titles ("Stormwings," "My Brother's Wings," "Stormfever," "Flying Fever," "God is My Flockmate," or "Death Duel in a Stormy Sky.") and said "I'm very enthusiastic about this all. Write back with more ideas and other good stuff."

What I wrote back with was the beginning of the story later called "The Storms of Windhaven." Within minutes of reading George's letter I was pacing around my room, a story building in my head. The name of the main character came to me, and the opening lines, with Maris flying through a storm, and I sat down at my typewriter and was off. I finally had to force myself to stop -- after all, this was supposed to be a collaboration -- and I mailed it off to George.

His response was what every writer hopes for from the ideal reader, and demonstrates the joy of collaborating: he loved what I'd written; he was totally, heart-warmingly enthusiastic. Even his criticism was not the sort anyone could take offense at: he wanted more. He felt I under-described things, that in my hurry to get on with the story I'd skimped on scene-setting. My opening two paragraphs, for example, he felt could be expanded to at least two pages to convey the sensations of flying without losing the reader's interest. And I didn't even have the worry of rewriting, because he did that himself, expanding what I had done before continuing the story.

As I said earlier, everyone has a different view of reality and a different way of writing about it, and the difficulty in a collaboration is to somehow combine those two views so that they don't obviously conflict. I know that some collaborative teams talk out their story first, then one writes the first draft and the other writes the second. But George and I handled it differently, so that we both contributed equally to all stages of the story. We both wrote parts of the first draft, and we both also rewrote each other as well as ourselves. Doing it this way there was the danger that our two different voices would be audible, jarring the reader and making the story spiky and lumpy instead of one, smooth, natural-seeming piece. But what I think we managed to do was to find a voice which was neither mine nor his, but which felt comfortable for both of us. I can't explain it very well because it wasn't really a conscious process -- it was something that happened, and it was very fortunate.

We seemed to be very much in accord, writing about the same thing, but it's hard to be sure about something like that. People can mean very different things when they use the same words.

For example: at some point early on George and I had agreed, or decided, or mutually discovered, that Maris had short hair. Later, George was puzzled by some passing reference I made to Maris' hair hanging down, or something like that, and he questioned me about it. Only then did we discover that we each meant something different by the word "short". At that time my hair was very long, so to my mind hair above the shoulders was short. George, however, with hair to his shoulders, thought his hair was long, and "short" meant the way men wore their hair in pre-hippie days, that is, clipped very close to the head, and certainly hanging no longer than the ear-lobes. This led us into a discussion of what Maris actually looked like. Oddly enough, since we'd described all the lesser characters quite thoroughly, we'd written about Maris's physical appearance in only the vaguest terms. Which was just as well, since it turned out we disagreed violently. George had her all wrong -- much too little and cute.

Another example of different perceptions: After "The Storms of Windhaven" had been published, George and I happened to be at a convention where we saw Gardner Dozois. He complimented us on the story, and went on to say, "I especially liked the sex scene! Pretty hot stuff for ANALOG!"

Now, Gardner is the sort of person who could find something sexual in

the offer of a cheese sandwich, but I grinned and said, "I'm glad you liked it" while George's eyes got very round and he gasped, "What? Sex scene? What sex scene? What are you talking about? There isn't any sex in that story!"

"Oh, George, of course there is," I said. "What about Maris and Dorrel? When she goes to his house and spends the night, what do you think they did?"

George puffed up slightly and sputtered: "But -- but -- they didn't -- we didn't -- it doesn't say --"

"No, it isn't written down," I agreed. "It didn't have to be spelled out -- it's so obvious! There they are, gazing into each other's eyes --"

"And then," said Gardner, "There's a two-line space. Two blank lines! And the next thing you know, they're having breakfast together! I'm amazed at you two, putting all those naughty things in that blank space!"

Anyone who has ever written fiction knows that the whole story doesn't appear on the page. You know things about your characters that you may never put into words or use at all. But the knowledge is there, behind the words you do put down on paper. All that additional awareness makes the characters more real.

Although George and I had discussed Maris and her world quite a lot, and had come up with many things which we didn't directly use in the story, we were still two different people, and we wrote different parts of the story, and it was only natural that we should each discover, or assume, different things about Maris and her life. Some of those assumptions might be totally contradictory...it really was a case of the left hand not always knowing what the right had was doing. And yet, on the surface, we were in agreement, we were working together, and the story somehow works as if one person had written it.

The way we actually, physically, wrote that first story and the novel that eventually grew out of it, was that one of us would write a chunk and send it to the other who would go through it, expanding or deleting or changing, putting it through the typewriter again for a polish and then continuing the story before sending it back for the other person to do exactly the same thing. It went along fairly smoothly and surprisingly swiftly considering that most of the work was done through the mail, but then we came to a problem that stopped us.

We couldn't end it. We both knew that we didn't want Maris to die, and we didn't want her to give up her dreams. We wanted her to have her wings, but given everything we'd said about the society so far, we couldn't come up with a convincing happy ending in the 8,000 word short story we thought we were writing. Finally it dawned on us that it was going to have to be more than twice as long as that -- we realized we were writing not a short story but a novella.

At about the same time, we realized that we had a lot of ideas that wouldn't fit even in the expanded version, We were interested in what would happen to Maris later in her life, and what effect her experiences would have on her society. We realized that we wanted to write a whole series of stories set on Windhaven -- maybe even a novel.

We did finally finish that first story, and it was published in ANALOG under the title "The Storms of Windhaven." That title was put on it by the then-editor of ANALOG, Ben Bova, by the way, since a title was one of the things George and I never could come to an agreement on.

So I got my wish: a story published in ANALOG. I could finally call myself a science fiction writer.

We meant to start on the sequel to "Storms" immediately, but life got in the way. George was writing his first novel, and both of us got full-time jobs which took up a lot of time and energy. So a couple of years passed before we got on with the novel.

When we were writing the last section of the novel, George came down to Texas for a three-week visit, figuring that we could work better and faster if we didn't have to spend so much time mailing the manuscript back and forth.

But while I was taking my turn, George tended to get a little bored with nothing to do. One day he sat down to read a stack of my most recent short stories. Almost all of them were contemporary horror stories -- despite being a science fiction writer by collaboration, you see I hadn't really changed my ways in six years.

After reading about grisly horrors all afternoon and evening, George found it rather hard to sleep that night. He kept thinking about what he'd been reading. One of the stories was an early draft of what became the novel Familiar Spirit, and included a horrific encounter with a demonic rat in the very room in which poor George was trying unsuccessfully to fall asleep.

Finally, to distract himself from my horrors, George told himself a story. It wasn't a particularly nice story, but he managed to put himself to sleep with it. And in the morning, instead of sleeping late as usual, he got up and got out his own typewriter and sat down to work even before I did.

"Your scary stories gave me an idea", he said. And he wrote all day, only taking breaks for lunch and dinner. In the evening, some of the local writers were coming over, but George went on writing as they gathered. Finally, at about 10 o'clock, he stopped, and read us what he had written.

It was "Remembering Melody", his first story with a contemporary setting, his first horror story. So George got his wish, too.

'And Torture One Poor Word Ten Thousand Ways'

Lisa Tuttle

Interviewed By

Paul Kincaid

Lisa Tuttle comes from Houston, Texas, though she currently lives in this country with her husband Christopher Priest. She is a graduate of the Clarion workshops in America, and since 1972 has been producing a steady stream of impressive stories. In 1974 she won the John W.Campbell Award for the best writer. More recently one of her stories was nominated for the Nebula Award. She asked for the story to be taken from the Ballot, but too late to prevent the story being announced as the winner.

I conducted this interview at Seacon 84, and found Lisa to be an interviewer's dream. She talked readily and in such detail that I was able to put aside most of the questions I had planned and just let the conversation take us where it would.

KINCAID: I want to start with Clarion. Your first story was in the second Clarion anthology.

TUTTLE: The first one I sold, yes.

KINCAID: Had you been writing much before Clarion?

TUTTLE: Oh, yes. I can't remember a time when I didn't write. What Clarion changed was that before Clarion I very rarely sent out stories. I had collected maybe four or five rejection slips while I was still in my teens, but usually I just wrote the stories and did nothing more with them. At Clarion everyone assumed that what you were going to do was finish the stories and then send them out. Even if you didn't feel they were the greatest literature in the world, you did the best you could and then tried to sell them.

Robin Scott Wilson who founded Clarion was there as one of the teachers in the year I was. At the end of his week he signed a book he had edited - it was the first Clarion collection. I remember he wrote in it: For Lisa, I'm quite sure she has it. He told me that he felt certain I would sell. Not necessarily anything I'd written up to that point, but that by the end of the

year I would certainly be writing stories that would be saleable. Having someone say that to you, it really does build up your confidence.

KINCAID: Were you working full time at the time of Clarion?

TUTTLE: No, I was a student. I was 18. I'd just finished my first year at Syracuse University. I had heard about Clarion - I think I saw an advert in a science fiction magazine - and I just thought it sounded really great.

KINCAID: A six-week workshop is something we don't have in this country. How did it actually affect your writing?

TUTTLE: Well, I suppose there were several ways it affected me. One was realising that I wasn't ever going to come to a point where I was going to write stories and say: Ah, I am now publishable! But the idea was that you just started trying to sell your stories. You just started taking yourself seriously as a writer, because everyone else did, because everyone else there intended to sell their stories.

I'd already had a certain amount of feedback because I was writing for fanzines, so I had had the experience of people reading my stories. But I'd never had this kind of in-depth criticism. That was very valuable. That made me look at my stories very closely, notice a lot of things, really on a word to word basis. It didn't change my style or affect me in that way. I think it just helped strengthen my commitment to writing and take myself more seriously. Think: this is not just a hobby, I can be writing things other people will want to read.

KINCAID: The impression I got of Clarion was that some of the tutors could be very demanding and very difficult to work for. Harlan Ellison seems to have been particularly scathing to some people.

TUTTLE: Yes, that is true. As far as being demanding: I was at two Clarions and there was, at each of them, someone who basically did almost no work. At one Clarion there was a guy that we called 'The Vegetable'. It was partly a joke, but it was partly because he tended to spend most of his time in his room with his door shut. No-body could hear the sound of a typewriter. If he wrote anything he didn't show it to anyone. And he tended to sleep a lot. I don't know what he was getting out of it.

Then there would also be people who knew what they were doing. Like Russell Bates. He had already been at a Clarion before and he was working on a novel. When Harlan would say: "Alright now, I want you all to write a story on primal fear", everyone would rush off to write it, and Russell just went on doing what he was doing. Some people turned in stories almost every day, and some people turned in a story every week. I was aiming to do a story every week. I think I did do about five or six stories in six weeks. I'm not sure, I remember I started at least two stories that I never finished. But some people, they'd be working but you wouldn't see anything; then in the last week suddenly here would come the story, and they'd get just as much out of it from that as from writing a story every week.

Everyone was there because they wanted to be there. I remember Harlan never pressured Russell, he knew Russell was working. But if someone was seen to be goofing off then Harlan in particular would come down really hard, because he felt you're wasting your time and you're wasting the group's time. And yes, he could be very harsh as a critic. I happened to be one of the people he was very favourably inclined towards. He praised me to the skies, he'd go over the top in that way. You were either a genius or you were hopeless.

I remember an incident in which someone got extremely upset at what someone said at Clarion. But it wasn't from Harlan, it was something Chip Delany had said. Now Chip was very careful, very gentle. But this person really idolised Delany and basically took a very gently comment

which didn't offer a lot of hope, I suppose, about a particular story, took it and just thought I may as well give up writing.

With Harlan, he's known for jumping up and down and screaming at people. Also, Harlan's quite perceptive about how people are going to react. He didn't jump up and down on this other girl who wasn't very good. Harlan didn't offer her any false hope, but he also didn't tear her apart because there wouldn't be much point, also it would have just destroyed her ego. At the end of the course he said: Do you want me to tell you the truth about yourself? And he would tell you his own personal assessment of what you would do; and if you didn't want to know he wouldn't tell you.

But it's not for everyone. Some people don't like having criticism of their work in that public light, and there are people from whom it would be no help at all. I found that sort of criticism helpful, and I still go to Milford now because I do actually find it useful to have a group of people go over a story.

One of the things you learn - I learned it at Clarion within the first week - is that you'll never please everybody. A perfectly brilliant piece of work will often completely divide people. I can remember a particular story (not one of mine) which Damon Knight bought for Orbit when he was teacher. It went around the room and almost everyone there hated the story. Then it got to Damon, because the teachers go last, and he said: I think you've all completely misunderstood the story. There are a few flaws, and he pointed them out, but I think it's an excellent piece of work and very subtle. And then he said: I'd like to talk to you afterwards, and he ended up buying the story after it was re-written.

So from all these experiences you realise that even if everyone hates it, that doesn't mean that it's bad. Other people's opinions are important and can help to point out problems; but basically, if what they say rings a bell with you, you probably knew all along that there was something wrong with the story. But if it doesn't have that sort of ring of truth in it you can just say it didn't reach them, and you can still have faith in the story.

KINCAID: By the end of your two visits to Clarion, then, you'd already sold several stories?

TUTTLE: I sold my first story to the Clarion anthology at the end of the summer. And then I went back to university and I sold two stories. One to F & SF and one to The Last Dangerous Visions.

KINCAID: So in a way Clarion was the launching pad. Suddenly things happened fairly quickly. Selling three stories in a year is pretty good going, particularly when it's your first year.

TUTTLE: It's hard to know how much of it was I'd changed as a writer, or how much of it was that I just needed someone to say: Yes, send your stories out. I mean, there were incidents. For example, if I'd not gone to Clarion and I'd not met Harlan he presumably would not have said to me: Send me a story for The Last Dangerous Visions. So I wouldn't have sold that one.

The story I sold to F & SF I didn't think was good enough. I wrote it, I wasn't sure it was any good, so I didn't send it anywhere. And then Harlan was in New York. I was visiting a friend in New York City and Harlan said: Come along to the Nebula banquet, be my guest. He introduced me to Ed Ferman and said: She's a very good writer. Harlan had asked me to bring along whatever I'd written recently, and he'd read it and he said: Lisa's just written this brilliant story which you're going to want to buy. I was going: Oh Harlan! And Ed, very cool, said: Yes, well, fine, send me the story. So I did send it to him, and I might not have had the courage to do so if Harlan hadn't bullied me into it. A couple of weeks later I got a letter from Ed saying: Well, Harlan was right, it's a good story, I like it, so I'll buy it.

KINCAID: Your stories always have, to me anyway, a sort of frisson. They're not exactly horror stories, but they're on the edge. A little dangerous, I suppose, in their approach. Is this something you're conscious of, that your writing has an unease about it?

TUTTLE: I suppose this is an area that most interests me. I've written some fairly straightforward horror stories, but a lot of my stories do tend to be, as you say, on the edge.

The novel I've just finished, I haven't sold yet, called Gabriel, is not quite a horror story, but it has a very uneasy and difficult situation at the core, and there are uneasy things that happen. But this isn't to everyone's taste. The editor who first read it and didn't offer for it - as my agent said: It's not rejected, they just didn't offer - felt that it really takes off towards the end when things start actually happening. For much of the book it's the build up, it's about how people are feeling, and it's just little daily things, emotions and memories and not much happens. That was what I wanted - a kind of interior, psychological and emotional story. Towards the end there's quite a violent climax. But this particular editor felt that I was too controlled, that I was holding back and it was too slow and gentle.

KINCAID: I like that particular atmosphere in your stories. I remember in your Guest of Honour speech at Novacon you mentioned wanting to write real SF. Do you still feel that, or did Windhaven write it out for you?

TUTTLE: I do get the urge every once in a while. I suppose not as often now. I don't read a lot of science fiction now, but every once in a while I will read something and it rekindles the old flame - this is what I like about science fiction, I'll think. One of my impulses after reading a really good book is to write something like that, and I often get that feeling with good science fiction. I'll think: Yes, I want to write a real science fiction story.

Part of the problem for me is that I don't very often get good science fiction ideas. Every once in a while I'll get one and then I've got the problem of, well, how do I deal with it, because just having the idea isn't enough. So I often write stories years after I get the idea. I keep notebooks.

I've got some friends back in Texas who write science fiction - Howard Waldrop and Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner and various people - and I get letters from them and they talk about the stories they're writing and it makes me sort of itchy. I feel, yes I want to do this too.

KINCAID: There seemed - I don't know whether it was real or just illusory - in the 70's about the same time that you were emerging as a writer, a whole lot of others - Joe Pumilia, Steve Utley, Howard Waldrop and so on - all emerging at the same time, all from Texes. Why?

TUTTLE: I don't know. It's not an illusion - it happened! But I think actually it's happened in other places at other times. George Martin was quite envious. We're all from Texas and we were all good friends, and he felt - well, for a while he was living in Iowa so he was out of it I'm afraid - but he really felt quite jealous and wanting that sense of community, and he really loved coming down to Texas. In fact when I first met George I thought he was a Texan because I knew him through Howard, who corresponded with him.

Then there's Leigh Kennedy. She's only had a few stories published so far, she's working on a novel now, and she's very good. And she's someone who's on the edge of science fiction because most of the stories she writes are just barely science fiction, or she says she writes a lot of mainstream stories which she cannot sell. Anyway, the point is she moved down to Austen from Denver, Colorado, and there are also a lot of writers who started appearing in the

Denver area I think in the mid-70's. Ed Bryant of course lives up there, and then there were a lot of others like Connie Willis and Cynthia Felice and, well right now my mind's gone blank. But at a convention in Denver about five years ago I met several promising new writers.

KINCAID: Is it something to do with the fact that you were a community, that you got together occasionally?

TUTTLE: I think it does help, because you kind of reinforce each other. Sometimes there's rivalry, which is sometimes for the good. I do think it probably helps if you're just starting out and you see other people around you who have sold their stories.

KINCAID: Again harking back to your Guest of Honour speech, you talk about people suddenly coming up with ideas for collaborations. It seems that you spark ideas off one another.

TUTTLE: Yes, I think that's particularly true in science fiction. I don't know what it is about science fiction, but it's whatever it is that makes people want to go to conventions. It obviously makes them want to have writing workshops or write stories together, or talk about books or publish fanzines. It just seems to be there's something about science fiction.

KINCAID: Do you like the experience of writing with another writer?

TUTTLE: Yes. I suppose the best thing about it was being able to keep up the enthusiasm. When I was working on Gabriel I was working on it for the better part of two years. Originally, when I sat down, I actually, for the first time, wrote an outline because I wanted to get it really clear in my mind how I was going to write it. Except it turned out to be a lot more difficult than that and I kept changing my mind about thing. But I thought I was going to sit down and write it in four months maybe, something like that. And it came to about two years. I did other things as well. But I would get very depressed about it at times. I would think it was no good, and I'm never going to be able to fix it. With a collaboration one of the good things is, if you get that feeling - and I remember at least a couple of times in Windhaven where I felt I don't know what to do next, or I don't know how to get through this next scene - where it was possible to just say: Maris meets Dorrel and they have a discussion about something. Then I'd say: I can't cope with this right now, and send it to George and say: How do you think this scene should be handled?

KINCAID: Do you ever do that with Chris?

TUTTLE: No. You mean collaborate?

KINCAID: No. If you find yourself stuck with a story do you ask his advice?

TUTTLE: With a collaboration this doesn't seem to apply; but when I'm writing on my own I don't like to show people drafts of stories. I want it to be as finished as I can possibly make it when I show it to him. I just get too embarrassed and uncomfortable. So the most I've been able to do with Chris - and he did help with Gabriel - was I would talk to him about what it was about and what the problem was, and he would just make suggestions. Some of which, of course, as he hadn't read it, would be completely useless. But it helped to have him just make suggestions because I could then look at it from different viewpoints. It would probably have helped more if I could have gotten over my scruples and given him things.

KINCAID: What's it like being a writer married to another writer? Does it have any effect upon your writing at all? Do you affect Chris's?

TUTTLE: People always ask that question - I suppose they ask Chris as well - and I don't have a good answer. Ever since my first Clarion, when I was eighteen, I've spent a lot of time around other writers - maybe too much! It's probably warped my perspective on what 'real people' are like. I can't answer you question because I don't know what it would be like to be married to someone who wasn't a writer. It's not that we work together, but we're in the same business, which means that we share a lot of the same interests, obsessions, friends and contacts, and, probably most important, neither of us has to explain and justify the need to stay at the typewriter late into the night instead of going out to a movie as originally planned.

Does he affect my writing? I'm sure he does, on some level, but I couldn't say how. It's not conscious, and I don't think there's any change between my pre-Chris and my post-Chris writing that couldn't also be put down to the effects of getting older, reading different books, moving to another country, new friends, the world situation, etc. In other words, everything affects my writing.

KINCAID: One thing I find fascinating is how writers write. Every author seems to work differently. How do you set about it?

TUTTLE: I've written on a typewriter since I was twelve, although I didn't actually learn to type properly until I was 16. But I always have a pad of paper next to the typewriter, because often, particularly when I'm trying to get going, I have to try out words and sentences. So I might write: "She put the coffee cup gently on the table." Then below that I'll write: "She put the coffee cup firmly on the table." And then: "Gently, she put the coffee cup on the table." Or: "She put the coffee cup on the table with a gentle motion." I'll keep testing it out. I mean, it's stupid because I could type it all and then cross it out. But somehow, particularly getting started, I have to feel that a sentence works, so I'll fiddle around with it. Or if I'm not certain of a word I'll write down several possibilities.

Starting a story I'll get an idea. It might be an image or sometimes it's a title or a first line or a situation. I'll write it down in a notebook. Later I'll think of a little bit more so I'll add to it. Then maybe I'll get another idea and write that down. And then two weeks later I might realise that these ideas actually fit together into the same story. Then I may think: Oh yes, and I know exactly what this person looks like, and it should be told in the first person, I can hear the voice. So I'll write a few sentences in the notebook to remind myself later. At some point it starts coming together in my head. Then, sometimes too early, I sit down at the typewriter, put the typewriter paper in, toll it up, type either a title or (I'm kinda bad at titles) sometimes just a code word, then begin.

Often the beginning is all I've got. And sometimes I'll start and I'll realise after three pages that I'm not ready yet. Some things wait for a long time.

I'm writing a story right now which I suppose you could say is a romantic ghost story. It's not a scary story at all but it's a ghost story, kind of a love story in an odd sort of way. I've had this idea for a long time and I've had notes on it, and I'd actually written a draft of it. Then I'd decided about half way through - though I ended up finishing the draft anyway - that it wasn't quite right. For a while I felt maybe it should be told in the first person, or maybe there must be another character. I was setting it just after the First World War, and at one point I thought well maybe it should be set in the present, but that didn't work either. So I finished the draft and put it aside, and a few days ago I felt really moved to re-write it, so I got it out and re-read it. For one thing it was better than I had thought, but a lot

of the stuff I thought was quite good is going to have to go because it doesn't fit in with my new vision of what the story has to be. There is one character who has completely gone.

KINCAID: You say you are still working on the story. Have you just put it aside to come to the convention for this weekend?

TUTTLE: Yes. I was in a very bad mood on Thursday because I'd been hoping to finish it before I came down to the convention. I was irritated because it's not finished and there's only two more scenes to go. There's a quite long confrontation scene that I've got to get right, and I couldn't finish it Wednesday night because I was getting tired and I couldn't write it, and then I didn't have time on Thursday morning. And then there's the ending. So when I go back I'll be able to finish it in a day, then I'll have to re-type it.

KINCAID: You don't need to keep the continuity going, the feeling?

TUTTLE: To a certain extent. The way I will probably recapture it, I'll read through all that I've done, then I'll start re-writing it from some point. I'll re-write the last three or four pages, and that should get me back into it.

KINCAID: Writing for you seems to be quite a long, drawn out, rather difficult process. How does that square with Clarion where you were having to turn out a story a week?

TUTTLE: Yes, that's sort of depressing. I used to be a much faster writer. Sometimes I think it's good. I mean, I do a lot more drafts now, and very often when I write first draft it's completely different, whereas when I was at Clarion what would happen was that I would have an idea for a story and I would go away and I would sit down and write it. Then the final draft would be like a polish of the first, it wouldn't be completely different.

KINCAID: Even in that regime of writing a story a week you had time to do a polish?

TUTTLE: No, well I didn't always. Usually a first draft was workshopped and afterwards I would polish it. I used to write much shorter stories, so there would be time to do another draft. The story that everyone probably thought was the best thing I did at the first Clarion was only about five pages long - not much happened, it was just two people looking at each other.

So I wrote much shorter stories, and part of it may have been that I was less self-critical. I'd have an idea and then I would write it, and basically I'd just fiddle with sentences a bit. Now I'm much more critical, almost everything I do I look at it and say I could do this better. I do sometimes worry that I'll get to the point where I'll just knot myself up and not be able to go on, because I'll not be able to say when I've done enough. But I am able to write in a short space of time because I've done things when I've had deadlines.

KINCAID: You were, of course, a journalist for a while.

TUTTLE: Yes, I used to have to write a column every day, on television. But that was only about 500 words.

KINCAID: Did you find that having any effect upon your fiction?

TUTTLE: The main connection I think with my writing is that I had a tendency, I still have it, to underwrite, to try and write things in as brief a space as possible. For a long time I thought I would never write a novel because any idea I had I could deal with in 20 pages at the most. But I've gotten over that, I can write novels now. But I do sometimes get criticised for writing

a scene that's too short, for underwriting, or for stopping it too soon and leaving it to the imagination of the reader rather than doing what might be a very powerful scene. I'll just say it's obvious what comes next and jump to the next scene.

KINCAID: Yes. You've talked of Gardner Dozois seeing a sex scene in Windhaven that George didn't think was there. You realised it was there because you were leaving things to the reader's imagination, and you anticipated that the reader was going to take things that way.

TUTTLE: But every writer does that - to a certain extent there always is more going on behind a story than is spelled out on the page. I'm talking about leaving out things which should be put in.

I wrote a story called "The Family Monkey" which I sold to George Martin. When I first wrote it, I mailed it off to George and he liked it, but he said that it was not long enough, particularly the middle section. I had a young woman in Victorian times, straight-laced mores and everything. She was telling her own story. She encounters the alien and there's a sexual attraction and they go to bed together. In the story as I was writing it I thought she couldn't write this down, she wouldn't be able to say it. So I left it out. In the scene I had, she came to him and takes off her clothes, or something like that, and then I just cut and the next scene was something else, you know the father finding out or whatever.

George wrote back to me: I can't believe you left out the most powerful scene in this story. He said: You must put it in. You can't build the reader's expectations up and then just stop. There's a difference between leaving something to the reader's imagination and leaving out a very dramatic, potentially powerful scene. He said: We need to know. This is not an ordinary thing, a man and woman going to bed together. This is an alien encounter. How does she feel about it? What's it like?

And I realised he was right. In a sense it was a false excuse that she wouldn't write it down. Okay, so maybe it shouldn't be told from her point of view in that case. It has to be there for the story. So I added it, and I think I went through and expanded a bit more. Then in the last bit of that story I did have to compress because it was getting too long for the book. He wanted a novella, and I began to realise I could almost write a novel. The last part of the story is a little abrupt and I obviously could have gone into a lot more. There was a time when I thought I would go back to write it as a novel, but the impulse to write it had been satisfied, and I never did.

KINCAID: Do you find the move from America to England has changed your outlook?

TUTTLE: It's hard to know. Almost certainly. I'd have changed in different ways if I hadn't come to England.

KINCAID: There seems to be a distinct difference between British and American writing. Coming to Britain, do you find yourself becoming more of a British writer?

TUTTLE: I don't know. Sometimes I think my attitudes are very English, sometimes, by contract, I feel very American. On a practical level I worry about things like after I've been here for say 10 years am I going to be writing stories about British characters or Americans living in Britain, or Americans living in an America that no longer is the way I remember it, or what? I do worry about not getting things right. My last novel, Gabriel, is set in America, and it's all American characters, and I think I got it right. But I don't know, there may be little bits of British slang or something in there which shouldn't be there. The way it creeps into my voice in this interview. For my next book I have three ideas, but two of those ideas may end up coming

together into one novel. It's a sort of marginal fantasy, set in the contemporary world but with a strong fantastic element. But it's an American character in England and part of the thrust of the story is her responding to England, English landscape and myths and things like that. What I'll do after I don't know.

KINCAID: I take it you haven't actually started on the new one?

TUTTLE: No, I'm not ready to.

KINCAID: How do you know when you're ready?

TUTTLE: Well, sometimes I'll make false starts on things. I mean I will actually sit down and start writing and then I just get stuck, I can't go on.

Part of it's the feeling of getting really impatient to do it. I'm thinking about it so much and so often that I know I have to sit down and write it. That's what happens with short stories. I've got ideas for a lot of different short stories, but which one I write next will be the one that really starts haunting me the most, that won't be denied.

KINCAID: When you start a novel do you write the whole novel first draft and then go back and start polishing, or do you write a bit then go back and re-write it before you go on to the rest?

TUTTLE: Mostly I write it all in one draft and then go back. That would be my answer, except that in my last one I did write one draft right the way through, and then half way through the second draft I realised it was completely wrong. I was telling it in the third person, and I realised it should be in the first person. Or at least, I finally decided that this might be the only way I could write this novel because I was getting really stuck. So I decided I can't go through another draft in the third person. I either had to abandon it or I had to start over again. And so, even though I have this reluctance to break off when I've written 100 pages, I did. I just threw away those 100 pages and started over. And suddenly it really began to move for me. I had really been labouring, forcing myself to keep going and just re-write what I had. But when I set myself free I said: OK it's no good, throw it away and start over, it took off.

KINCAID: I'm looking forward to reading it.

TUTTLE: I hope you're able to do.

KINCAID: Any chance of a collection of short stories, because there must be quite a few of them now.

TUTTLE: I've had about 40 stories published, yes. There doesn't seem to be. I haven't mentioned it to my agent recently. The last time I mentioned it to him he went out to lunch with an editor and before he could even say my name, like he said something about short story collections, she said: Don't mention it to me. Even if it's a Hugo winner or anything like that they just don't sell.

I was talking to Dave Hartwell just yesterday and I said: Is it true short story collections are still not selling, and if so, why not? And he said basically he believe that people really aren't buying short story collections any more. He says he's asked them at conventions. He says: How many of you have bought a novel in the last week or month or whatever? And you know it's like 100% at a convention, hands go up. Then he says: How many of you have bought a short story collection. And like five hands go up. I said: Well isn't it the case that there are fewer short story collections to buy? And he said: Well that's true but even so he believe that unless it's somebody like Robert Heinlein or Stephen King that people would much rather have a novel. Also most people will say that if they've got like £2 to spend on something, they want a novel they can lose themselves

in, rather than little short stories. But I'd love to have a short story collection published.

KINCAID: I'd love it too. Lisa Tuttle, thank you very much.

A Reply To Gregory Benford By Damon Knight

[[[The following is a letter originally published in Science Fiction Review 51 by Damon Knight on Gregory Benford's article "Is there a Technological Fix for the Human Condition?" (Vector 119). Gregory Benford has kindly sent us a copy of Damon Knight letter plus a specially written reply.]]]

Gregory Benford, in 'Is there a Technological Fix for the Human Condition?' (Vector 119) remarks that "hard" science fiction "somehow seems to be the core" of SF. This is a modest claim; Benford is too intelligent to assert, as others have, that hard SF is the only true science fiction, all other varieties being counterfeit. But history does not support even this. "Hard" science fiction in the sense in which Benford uses it, that is, fiction in which speculative (preferably physics) is an essential element and is rigorously worked out, is a game which very few writers are qualified or inclined to play. Wells did not writer hard SF -- he got his characters to the Moon by the use of Cavorite, a gravity-opaque substance. Verne did not write it -- he got his characters there by shooting them out of a cannon.

Science fiction is a literature of novelty and a medium for day-dreaming: Thus the popularity of "hard" SF, often involving unusual astronomical bodies. A typical example is Larry Niven's Ringworld, a habitat of mind-boggling size and shape, on which however, nothing happens that could not happen on Barsoom or in Oz. The attraction of such backgrounds is not their scientific respectability (Ringworld, as others have pointed out, is not a stable configuration) but simply their scale and novelty: They give the science fiction reader a large new place to go to. This value is not to be despised; the primary attraction of SF, for many people, is the opportunity it offers to escape to other and more fascinating worlds. But novelty is short-lived by definition; if science fiction has any lasting value it must lie elsewhere. "The game" of hard science fiction cannot be at its core; that is as absurd as to imagine that the point of reading Dostoevsky is to try and catch him out on details of the architecture of St. Petersburg.

Let us return to Wells. He called his stories "scientific romances"; he used devices he knew to be impossible - Cavorite, the elixir of invisibility - in order to turn the world over and see what it looked like from the other side. The core of science fiction, I suggest, is philosophical speculation.

The cluster of "hard" science and right-wing politics which Benford notes has never been satisfactorily explained. It was evident in the pro- and anti-Vietnam manifestoes published in GALAXY in the sixties: All the Campbellite writers lined up on the hawk side with one exception, Isaac Asimov. It may be that some scientists, and many engineers, have an ingrained

pragmatic approach to problem-solving which makes them seek simple and pragmatic solutions to human problems (social Darwinism, racism, laissez-faire capitalism, imperialism). Whatever the cause, this right-wing bias is a grave defect in the works of many hard SF writers, because they are philosophically shallow. The only thing we learn from these works is that Man has a glorious destiny to conquer the universe and that if other races get in the way it is too bad.

As a science fiction writer, I believe in getting the science right if I possible can, just as I believe in getting the facts right in any other kind of fiction; but I also believe that if the only way of making an original philosophic point is to introduce some impossibility, it does not matter a rap that the science is wrong. The novelty appeal of the "hard" science fiction writers is essentially that of POPULAR MECHANICS. We must aim higher that that if we expect to be read twenty years from now.

Journey To The Genre's Core

Gregory Benford

We've tried for decades to isolate what true, irreducible inner quality SF has that makes it a separable genre. Damon Knight's notion that philosophical speculation is the True Core raises interesting questions, but I feel does not answer most of them.

When I suggested that hard SF "somehow seems to be the core" I was actually reporting a widespread belief, largely uninspected, of the bulk of the reading (and viewing) public. You can't help noticing that the bestseller lists carry the names of hard SF stalwarts - Asmiov, Heinlein, Clarke - and not the Sturgeons, Pohls and Bradburys of the same vintage. Question is, why?

Partly, I suspect it comes from the fact that the public likes fiction deeply grounded in the real world. It's long been known that nonfiction top bestsellers (leaving out diet books etc.) outsell fiction top bestsellers by a typical ratio of 2:1. Similarly, the didactic fiction of Mitchener et.al. sells better than the best thrillers. Even in as fanciful an area as SF, these biases probably hold sway. Hard SF benefits from this basically American taste; as Charles Platt remarks in Science Fiction Review 51, "I open a nonfiction book, or a rigorously realistic novel, with the definite expectation of discovering new and interesting information," and to his surprise, most of his friends do, too.

But Damon's case against hard SF as the centre of the field rests also on his odd notion that our Founding Fathers, Verne and Wells, weren't hard SF types. Verne conspicuously allied himself with his contemporary technology, stating on one famous retort to a critic, "I never invent!" When he needed to get characters to the moon, he used what seemed possible at the time - huge cannon - and tried to take account of celestial facts. He got lots of it wrong, but that only means he didn't do it well, not that he was opposed to the standard of fidelity to fact.

Similarly, Wells' famous injunction - assume one improbable thing, and then deal rigorously with it - announces a central tenet of hard SF. There must be a fantastic element, but then the methods should be orderly and convincing. His Cavorite wasn't obviously impossible when he wrote of it, neither was the time machine, or invaders from Mars.

In fact, Heinlein (clearly a hard SF type) descends obviously from Wells; his "The Door into Summer" specifically refers to "When the Sleeper Wakes."

True enough, the aim of some hard SF is the large landscape - but not of all hard SF. To dismiss rigor as "novelty" is to miss that invention is central to SF. If our standard of abiding worth is to be that a book should stand up to (and reward) re-reading, then novelty clearly would fade. But hard SF can and does contain drama, emotion and philosophy tightly grouped around the central images of science. Novelty is not the only purpose of hard SF.

Which brings us to Damon's assertion that philosophical inquiry is the true centre of the field. The problem with this is that, first, the statement is too vague. Most of "serious" literature has philosophical aims; so do most of the arts. So what? We would like the core of SF to distinguish it from, say, the fictions of Sartre.

We've seen claims through the history of literature that it is essentially allegorical (18th century) or reportorial (19th century) or metaphorical (20th century) or philosophical (as Damon claims for SF). Of course it's not merely any of these aspects. All general aspects can be applied; the interesting question is what's distinctive about a given class of works?

Second, too much SF doesn't have significant philosophical inquiry. This is even true of hard SF. For example, Niven's short work and many of his novels are devoid of it. Indeed, when he collaborates with Pournelle we can clearly see an outside hand inserted into it, lending a different flavour. Also, lots of SF adventure fiction isn't philosophical (Leigh Brackett, Chalker, McCaffrey). Leinster's "First Contact" isn't philosophical unless you force a metaphysical interpretation. Neither is "Arena," etc.

You could maintain, of course, that "high" SF is more philosophical - but it's got other virtues, too, which make it "high."

Fantasy is mostly pastoral, animistic, and politically conservative. SF is more often urban, technophilic, and politically radical - in the sense of striking at fundamental issues. Using a distinct disjunction from contemporary reality demands thinking about basic issues. Sometimes this has a libertarian flavour, as befits the independent-mindedness of writers everywhere. I wouldn't call right-wing political theory "simplistic," as Damon does, since pragmatism (which he cites) isn't necessarily an inferior philosophy.

Damon would cast aside scientific fidelity in favour of reaching a philosophical point, saying "it does not matter a rap if the science if wrong." But this hazards losing a goodly fraction of the audience. Worse, it also casts the philosophy into contrast with known facts.

How seriously this is depends on the details of how it's done, the particular story, etc. How seriously will a reader take an authors's ruminations or explorations on metaphyics, when he's clearly shown that he doesn't feel bound by what we've already learned about the world? You run the risk of merely demonstrating to the reader that your "original philosophical point" applies only to a dream world.

I feel that we are in the business of enlisting the devices of realism in the cause of the fantastic. One of the masters of the exact, gritty detail in short stories is certainly Damon Knight. And he's at his best while doing this. His "I See You" uses an invention which isn't theoretically impossible (as I remember it). Similarly, "Masks" is perfectly plausible.

That's what gives these stories quite a bit of their power. The working though of consequences, ever mindful of what he know of the world, doesn't merely introduce "novelty," as Damon has it. Doing so plays tennis with the net up - always a more interesting spectacle. I'm sure that's the way it will be played twenty years hence.

THERE ARE NO NIGHTMARES AT THE RITZ:

An Exploration of The Drowned World

BY K.V. BAILEY

The essential content of J.G. Ballard's novel The Drowned World is what he himself calls a "neuronic odyssey". In it his correspondences between outer and inner space, between cosmic and personal time, proliferate and overlap to a degree which is complex, exhausting and exhilirating, both emotionally and intellectually. While this short article will examine several of these correspondences, it could not within its compass achieve any comprehensive correlation of them. What it will mainly attempt is some analysis of locations in the planetary and solar frameworks within which they are deployed, and some estimate of the relationships of these frameworks to similarly archetypally conceived frameworks in the literature of quest, pilgrimage and odyssey.

Ray Bradbury and J.G. Ballard are writers of very different temper, but because both at times deal in archetypal themes, there is a good deal of imagery common to the works of both of them. At the end of the title story of The Golden Apples of the Sun, as the ship, mission accomplished, races with its Cup of stolen substance from the grasp of the flaming disc, its captain says: "There is only one direction in space from here on out." That direction is "North". In reverse locational symbolism, Kerans, the Odysseus or pilgrim of The Drowned World, the pointer of his "talismanic" compass tokening the journey, is drawn by the inner and outer pulsing of the archaic sun mesmerically South. The same is true of Kerans's alter ego, Hardman. When preceding Kerans, he vanishes, Kerans says: "There's only one direction in which Hardman is heading-south." Riggs asks "Why." Looking out across the water again, Kerans replied in a flat voice: 'Colonel, there isn't any other direction.' This southward compulsion is also true of Poe's protagonist in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: "To attempt, therefore, getting back would be folly-especially at so late a period of the season. Only one course seemed to be left open for hope. We resolved to steer boldly to the southward..."; and of Coleridge's in The Ancient Mariner, whose entry upon his purgatorial journey begins with the ship's being irresistibly propelled: "The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast, and southward aye we fled."

The orientating axes of Kerans's eventual pilgrimage, or quest, are the great planetary ones about which the sun is positioned. The east-west axis is delineated by the sun's rising and setting which mark off the temporal progress of the narrative, and the days during which the massive heat and its accompanying pullulation of predatory life grow and shrink again. The north-south axis is made symbolic of orientations primarily in space. North is Greenland, site of the surviving remnant of western civilisation and technology, represented by Camp Byrd. Submerged London is the pivotal mid-point of the story, site of the symbolic protective sanctuary of the Ritz penthouse, starting point for potential journeys north or south - south being the direction of the meridional sun, the heat-storms of the Equator, and the ultimate longed-for, though all-consuming, solar paradise.

These spatial directions, however, have also their temporal correspondences, which are explicitly set out at the point when Kerans, finding his

womb-like penthouse wrecked, accepts the need to abandon the London lagoon and move southwards: "Now he would have to go forward. Both the past represented by Riggs, and the present contained within the demolished penthouse, no longer offered a viable existence. His commitment to the future .. was now absolute."

Past, present, future: dimensions of time, direction, and life. The past was, in effect, the pre-catastrophe history of the planet and mankind, and Keran's own role in it. Riggs, whose ineffectual hope and mission was literally to turn back the tide, restore the harbours, make possible again the old conventions, must eventually depart into the deadpast, taking Beatrice with him. There is even a compact between this "restoring" emissary of Camp Byrd and the "non-dead" albino Strangman, with his savage horde, his retinue of alligators, his looted Greek statues and Byzantine furniture - mere props which can only emphasis the deadness of the past. Kerans comes to realise that even the paintings, the Beethoven recordings that he had shared with Beatrice, were in like case. In that present he becomes a soul isolated, and about to be precipitated into the future: "His time there (at the Ritz; in the present) had outlived itself, and the air-sealed suite with its constant temperature and humidity, its supplies of fuel and food, was nothing more than an encapsulated form of his previous environment, to which he had clung like a reluctant embryo to its yoke sac..."

Throughout the crises of "the present" paradigmatic occurrences are repeated in such a way as to reinforce the concept of Kerans undergoing birth and death - or death and rebirth. When he dives to enter the submerged planetarium, described as a "huge vacant womb" and "a giant amnion", his senses are so hallucinated by interfusions of light and water that they regress by "a billion sidereal days" to an experience of "the nebulae and island universes in their original perspectives." In his rescue and recovery these death/rebirth images are sustained. The "deep cradle of silt carried him gently like an immense placenta." As his consciousness fades, "he could see the ancient nebulae and galaxies shining through the uterine night." Eventually, as their light grew dim, "he was only aware of the faint glimmer of identity within the deepest recesses of his mind." He emerges from the "limbos of eternity" to see a ring of faces looking down on him.

In the following chapters Kerans suffers the vicissitudes of life, the pains of death, the sufferings of hell. In the chapter "The Ballad of Mistah Bones" he is represented almost as an automaton - the image of "behaviouristic" man as conditioned organism. As the bizarre carnival goes on around him, he is described as stumbling through it "like a blind man"; Strangman sees him as being in a trance. When Bodkin urges him to escape with Beatrice, he says that there is something inhibiting his will to do so: "There's a strange incubus on my mind. I must lift it first." Then, when Bodkin precipitates the crisis and is killed, Kerans is made to suffer the role of scapegoat and sacrificial "king". In the chapter "The Feast of Skulls", mounted in a tumbril, wrists and feet clamped, half-crucified, half enthroned, he is paraded through the drained lagoon "almost as if he were an abducted Neptune" compelled to give sanctification to the reclaimed streets of London. He is crowned first with sea-weed and then with the head of a dead alligator - virtually the totem of Strangman's savage army. Regarded ambivalently as victim and as idol, put to the tortures of stoning (with conch shells and starfish), thirst and exposure (his pain dulled by the rum forced down his throat), he is eventually thrown into a mud-bank, where Strangman poses over his fallen body "long enough to convince his followers that Kerans's power was truly spent." In details this chapter reflects the Saturnalia, and even more primitive rites involving the mock-honouring of king or animal surrogate in processions, and the culminating sacrifice, partly as scapegoat and partly that, in the words of Frazer's The Golden Bough, "he might come to life again with all the vigour of youth." (of particularly Frazer's chapters on "Killing the Divine Animal" and on "Public Scapegoats".)

Kerans is shut in by the inverted cart and "half buried in the bank of caking silt." Strangman and Big Caesar, coming to give the coup de grace, find this "tomb" empty. Kerans has escaped, and it is after this last ordeal that he organizes his journey southward, away from what he describes to the returned Riggs as "a nightmare world that is dead and finished". His penthouse sanctuary is demolished. Beatrice, the significantly named, erotic, yet strangely virginal figure cannot go with him. As they part she asks where he is going. "South", said Kerans softly. Towards the sun. You'll be with me Bea..."

From here on the final two chapters of the book assume epic dimensions and their action and symbolic cosmography are often evocative of other psycho-physical journeys in myth, allegory and poetry. First, to outline the progress of Kerans's journey. After his action in re-flooding London, Kerans flees the swamp. Initially he uses the engine of his catamaran; then, setting a sail, he made a steady two or three miles an hour tacking across the light southerly breeze. "To ease the pain of his wound, he takes morphine and falls into "a loud, booming sleep, in which the great sun expanded until it filled the entire universe, the stars themselves jolted by each of its beats." He wakes to find himself among islands, eventually reaching the southern edge of the sea, where he leaves the boat to traverse a lonely beach where silt banks "glittered along the horizon like fields of gold, and to climb under an impassive blue sky, through miles of dunes, and subsequently through jungle country to a steep rise, at the crest of which he finds what he describes as a ruined "temple", (orientated less like a Christian church than a Mycenaean tomb). The sun sinks westward beyond the altar. Propped against the altar, his eyes ruined by the sun's radiation, staring into the sun, he finds Hardman, who had preceded him in leaving the lagoon to walk "across dunes of white-hot ash into the very mouth of the sun." Hardman is emaciated "no more than a resurrected corpse..like someone jerked from the grave and abandoned to await the day of judgement." Three days are measured off by the circling of the sun about the east-west axis of the temple. Kerans selflessly nurses Hardman, pulls up cracked rough stones from the nave floor and builds a slab-like shelter round the marble altar. Within this shelter Hardman rests mostly in a shallow sleep, breathing stertorously, his "real personality..now submerged deeply within his mind."

However, Hardman appears rapidly to gain strength, and on the third night of their reunion he disappears. He has continued southward, and Kerans knows that "as long as his eyes were strong enough to sense the distant signals transmitted by the sun...Hardman would move forward, feeling his way through the forest hand over hand, head raised to the sunlight breaking through the branches."

When Kerans follows Hardman, he too presses on southwards. We find him after a while resting to heal his wounds on a beach of white sand bordering a lagoon and encircled by forest. It is so calm that he is reluctant to leave its peace and silence. The lagoon is like a glass sheet, the colours of which "recapitulate all the changes he had witnessed in his dreams." Kerans lies by these waters, half asleep, "thinking of the events of the past years that had culminated in their (his own and Hardman's) arrival at the cental lagoons and launched him upon his neuronic odyssey." After that, and finally, he thinks "with a deep pang of regret and affection, holding her memory clearly before his mind as long as he could, of Beatrice and her quickening smile." It is with this enduring and sustaining mental image that Kerans, as the book ends, moves again southward, "a second Adam searching for the paradises of the reborn sun."

I have summarised the chapters "Grand Slam" and "The Paradises of the Sun" in fair detail, because it in some of the detail as much as in the terrestrial and cosmic contours of the journey that the parallels of this odyssey to other great symbolic journeys of the imagination is most apparent. The parallels on which I propose to touch are with Homer's Odyssey, Blake's The Gates of Paradise, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and Dante's The Divine

Comedy. Parallels of course are in no way complete; image and frameworks touch here and there; but common threads can everywhere be traced, and a common ground-pattern discerned. I am not suggesting that Ballard draws on or necessarily directly reflects any of these works; but rather that the creative subconscious, in exploring the paths of that entity called by Blake "the lost Traveller", tends to produce similar, if not identical, symbols.

Ballard's frequent use of the word "odyssey" may, however, indicate some reference to Homer's epic, or at least to that part of it, Book 11, in which Odysseus sailing "deep flowing Oceanus" approaches the world's limits and stays in "the dwelling of Hades and Pesephone" to mingle and talk with the dead, and to witness the tortures of Tantalus and Sisyphus, until, fearful of encounter with the Gorgon monster, they depart "rowing first (as Kerans had first used his out-board motor), "and afterward the fair wind was our convoy." Crossing open sea they reach Aeaea "the dwelling place of early Dawn and her dancing grounds". They beached their ship in the sand. "There we fell on sound sleep and awaited the bright Dawn." In Andrew Lang's translation, this Odyssey patterns almost step by step Kerans's escape from "hell".

I have mentioned William Blake's "lost Traveller". He appears in the epilogue of The Gates of Paradise. This life and soul's journey poem is accompanied by seventeen emblematic engravings. Some of them might well illustrate episodes from The Drowned World: a child hatching from the shell; the Traveller struggling amidst the four elements; overwhelmed by floods and drowning; imprisoned; hastening through a forest scene, "The Immortal Man that cannot Die", to the dolmen-like tomb, or "Death's Door" (which features in various other Blake engravings as, variously a Gothic or Classical portico, or a cave, and which Kathleen Raine has suggested may owe something to a panel of the Portland Vase that Blake may have believed to represent the Eleusinian Mysteries of ordeal and renewal.) Certainly there are points of correspondence between this image and that of the "altar/dolmen/tomb" above which Hardman's skeletal claw "rose like a hand from the grave and pointed at the sun", and where he slept through three circlings of the sun, gathering strength to follow his pilgrimage towards it. In his much later and greater "prophetic book" Jerusalem, Blake states and elaborates the same theme on a grander cosmic scale. The first chapter opens amidst Ulro - Blake's material world of "the Grave", of dark delusive dreams, and "unreal forms":

> 'Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through
> Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life.
> This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev'ry morn
> Awakes me at sun-rise... '

In The Drowned World there are two travellers, Kerans and Hardman, twin pilgrims each in some measure surrogate of the other. In The Pilgrim's Progress Christan and Hopeful meet and travel together. They approach, after many trials, the Celestial City, which stands on a high hill. The description of that city is that "it shone like the sun". When they first glimpse it "by reason of the natural glory of the city, and the reflection of the sunbeams on it, Christian with desire fell sick. Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease. Whereby they lay by it a while...But being a little strengthened and better able to bear their sickness, they walked on their way". As they journey (just as at this stage Kerans and Hardman are sustained by wild berries) they gather and eat grapes from "the goodly vineyards". Then as "they addressed themselves to go up to the city...the reflection of the sun upon the city (for the city was pure gold) was so extremely glorious that they could not, as yet, with open face behold it..." The motif is that of The Drowned World, but in a different key.

If Keran's experience among the stinking mud-pits of nightmare London have resemblances to scenes in the Inferno of Dante, his later odyssey parallels Dante's ascent of the Mount Purgatory to St. Peter's Gate, and his

eventually approach to Paradise. The Purgatorio opens with Dante describbing how the little ship of his insiration hoisted its sail and gained the islands and beaches flanking the mountain. He and Vigil ascend to St. Peter's Gate entrance to a a rocky cleft though which they must pass penitentially on their way to Paradise. The steps to this portal are described as being, one of white marble, one of stone "rough and cracked", one of flaming red porphyry. The altar/sanctuary reached by Kerans, is first seen in the setting' sun's red light; is made of marble; and is added to by the cracked flagstones dragged by Kerans. Dante's passage from Purgatory to Paradise is marked by his stay in the Earthly Paradise - the Garden of Eden regained. Visually based on the pinewoods fringing the Adriatic south of Ravenna, this equates with the calm and recuperative sands and forest-fringed lagoon where Kerans exorcises his memories of Strangman's "hell", and summons up the sustaining vision of Beatrice, just as Dante, separated from Virgil, in the Earthly Paradise wipes out evil memories by drinking of Lethe, and, in sleep, of Eunoe, the "good-remembrance spring", here reunited with Beatrice, who unveils her eyes and smile to him. The smile of Beatrice is the prelude to the Paradise to which she leads him, and it it at the beginning of the Paradiso that, together with Beatrice, he momentarily fixes his eyes upon the intolerably radiant sun, when (in Carey's translation) "..suddenly upon the day appear'd/A day new risen; as he who hath the power/Had with another sun bedeck'd the sky." This is surely Ballard's "second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun", holding lastingly in his mind Beatrice's "quickening smile".

C.S. Lewis in Of Other Worlds defined the variety of the genre he most favoured as "a science fiction (which) repeats simply an imaginative impulse as old as the human race working under the special conditions of our own time." A constant image of the imagination, recurring through culture after culture, is that of a quest for, a striving towards, whatever it is of which radiant and dazzling light is the prime symbol. The routes of such quests or pilgrimages are determined by parameters constructed according to particular knowledge and experience of our planet's nature and cosmic setting. No novel better exemplifies these processes than The Drowned World.

In his magnificent book The Blue Nile, Alan Moorehead, writing of ancient peoples whose invasions and incursions successively moved southwards towards Ethiopia, remarks that "it is strange that so many of them worshipped the sun, which was their enemy, and not the river which was their only hope of life." Can it be that this was because of an intuition that water, forests, crops, life on earth itself, are moved and renewed only by the sun; that all the planet's physical being exists within the ecosphere of a star; and that this star is also what the alchemists called the "signature" of a sphere within which our inner lives exist, and towards the heart of which we, as entities of consciousness, are irresistibly drawn?

BOOK REVIEWS

PLOT - TO BE POLITE... NIK MORTON

[THE FORLORN HOPE By DAVID DRAKE. Tor Books 1984, 318pp., $2.95]

In between starting and finishing this book I read Paul Scott's conclusion to the Raj Quartet, A Division of the Spoils (brilliant, satisfying), R.C. Hutchinsons's A Child Possessed (moving and memorable), William Trevor's The Day we got Drunk on Cake (short stories, excellent, full of character and atmosphere), and Andre Brink's Looking on Darkness (remarkable, chilling spotlight on Apartheid). Why? To remind myself that books can contain plot and sub-plot, varied characters about whom one experiences some emotion, and sentences which convey atmosphere, feelings, and sense.

If you hadn't guessed already, then let me admit that I would be hard-pressed to find one redeeming feature about The Forlorn Hope - an ill-advised title if ever there was one! For information, Drake offers a definition of the title, ostensibly from the Oxford English Dictionary: "In early use, a picked body of men, detached to the front to begin the attack... pl. The men comprising such a body; hence, reckless bravos." My concise version offers "from Dutch, verloren hoop, lost troop (hoop company) orig of storming-party etc." Bravos are "hired ruffians or deperadoes."

The cover put me off - by Gutierrez - it depicts an enormous starship emerging out of a deep gulley, being fired upon by tanks. "First paperback publication of a novel by the author of Hammer's Slammers" said the blurb, boding ill... Tor books are apparently presentations by Jim Baen for Pinnacle Books (Hence the synonyms, tor, pinnacle perhaps): though this book is rather the nadir. The dedication was to Susan Allison "considered as a person and an editor." As an editor, she must be a better person...

Plot - to be polite - involves some mercenaries with typical immigrant American names and also Czechoslovak monickers betrayed by employers and hounded to death on the planet, Cecach; but these desperadoes attempt to escape - I think... It isn't all that clear, so I suspect some details may be found in Drake's earlier novel. Praha is one of Cecach's cities - Praha is Czech for Prague, though Drake never says so: it's just a name, without any future Middle European ambience. The characters are sketched poorly: "Del Hoybrin was dumb as a post, but he was experienced and his reflexes had kept him alive before." Emphasis is more on the weaponry: "The weapons were specialized; but it benefitted mercenary soldiers, like whores, to be able to provide specialised services for their customers. The gun was meant to bust armor and brick walls. It opened the fuel tank like one of Jack the Ripper's girlfriends." And so on... There are countless explosions, many troopers find their "world exploded" - i.e. died or lost consciousness... Women troopers fight alongside men and seem as tough. Everybody's tough. To lend a dash of "realism" perhaps the starship was called "Katyn Forest", presumably to commemorate the many slaughtered there. Surprisingly, not only are humans still killing each other in this unrealistic future, but they're still using Wafarin to kill rats!

Because of their nationalities, some characters call upon God or Saints (Ultruda, Christ, Virgin, and Nicolas), all unconvincingly. The vying Republicans are devout in that they punish sinners and especially those who curse, the Feds are quite the opposite: it's so black-and-white I expected to hear Minstrel music! Cliche abounds, one character spoke, "his face like wood and his voice like steel". Sentence construction is often atrocious: "He was enough shorter than Dwyer that he could not see the pit head at the moment." And; "The regrowth of the brush was taller though still less dense than some of what the Company had just marched through miserably." A spying drone was shot down by the mercenaries and their sergeant observed that as the drone wasn't in radio contact when it was shot down, then the enemy wouldn't know they were there: clearly, these specialised mercs had never heard of radar...

There are plenty of silly moments, too: "A cannon shell hit her squarely in the chest. That was bad luck - " Indeed it was! There are too many characters, barely distinguishable from each other, so that as they die (world exploded), I experienced no feelings whatsoever. More emphasis is placed on the hardware and the deaths, one trooper's blood actually quenching his burning fatigues...

"He and his fellows had bounced so many shots from the tank with no effect that his mind retained only duty in place of hope." My view, too, wading through this book: duty as a reviewer only, no hope of finding any good in it.

Laser beams lanced, from coruscant sections of the ship. "The beam's fusion-powered spike struck the fog of mercury droplets and scattered cataclysmically... the raging blue scintillance meant the guts of the starship had vaporized... the actinic glare..." I doubt if this is American, let alone English...

As a sop, the last chapter suggests that even slaughter was Good, if done in mutual respect of one's companions. The killing may sadly be part of war, but to pretend that it can ever be termed Good is sick. Audie Murphy's To Hell and Back showed the horror and viciousness, the numbing dehumanisation of war, and the men he wrote about were real in every sense. The men and women soldiers in Drake's book are less then cardboard, mere tissue. Don't buy The Forlorn Hope unless you require an undiluted diet of tedious action, no definable characters, and a scant plot. Rather, go and read some of the other books I've mentioned - at least they'll give you something for your money.

PRINCES AND PEASANTS — CHRIS BAILEY

[LANDS OF NEVER Edited by MAXIM JAKUBOWSKI. Unicorn/Unwin 1983. 167pp., £2.50]

Lands of Never is subtitled 'An Anthology of Modern Fantasy', and it is the adjective that immediately catches the eye. Modern as in 'recently written', obviously, but it also would be encouraging to think that the present generation had something to contribute to fantasy that could go beyond the achievements of Eddison or Dunsany.

That such a contribution is being made is well evidenced by the contents of this volume. Take a moment to compare the opening sentences to two of the stories, firstly that by Joy Chant:

> 'Many centuries ago in Khendiol, when the cities of Bariphen still stood and the Alnej were still new to the Wild Magic, a people lived beyond the eastern sea.'

Secondly, the opening to Angela Carter's piece:

> 'This girl, archaic, two-dimensional, with stiff outlines like a figure in a woodcut at the head of a ballad, stuck resentfully in her body like a cat locked in a lumber-room.'

A 'modern' attitude to fantasy is, I suggest, exemplified in the second extract, wherein we see the writer standing back and regarding her material with an ironic and critical eye. In Carter's story - "The Bridgegroom', one of her maverick fairy tales - the bride's dilemma is not solved by the fortuitous arrival of a handsome prince. Left to choose between two equally foul alternatives, either of which will crush her individuality, she is shown to be a victim of her sex and of the society she lives in. Again, Brian Aldiss's 'The Girl Who Sang' sets out with the promise of high romance and then disabuses the reader at every step. The mysterious girl of the title is the mentally unhinged victim of a multiple rape, the hero is no high-minded idealist but a mercenary creep who beats an undignified exit from the story, pursued down the stairs by the shotgun-wielding duke he has cuckolded.

This is not only a matter of the writers' attitude towards fantasy but of their perception of their readers' expectations of fantasy. When the word is said, I suspect that in the majority of people the concept that springs to mind is one which more accurately would be described as 'heroic fantasy', and the concern of writers nowadays is to point out to their readers that there should be recognisable humans in these stories, that behind every prince there is an army of peasants. Consequently, Lands of Never is low on magic and high on gritty realism. For every castle full of lords and ladies there is the wretched inn of Christopher Evans's 'The Rites of Winter', a body in the basement because the ground is frozen too hard for a burial. For every person who sees in a unicorn the archetypal expression of grace, virginity or whatever, there are hundreds more who want to grind down its horn into an aphrodisiac powder of awesome efficacy, as in John Grant's 'When All Else Fails'. Neither does this new realism seem to be a strictly European concern. Long Tom, the Cherokee prophet of Steve Rasnic Tem's 'When Coyote Takes Back the World', has his prognostications of Armageddon rudely interrupted: '"I don't serve no drunk Indians," the old white bartender said. " Get outta my place."'

It almost seems to go without saying that, of the stories indicated above, the only disappointment is the one that is firmly planted within the traditional grounds of heroic fantasy, Joy Chant's "The Coming of the Starborn'. The others are all fine stories, my pick being John Grant's piece, and I can only attempt to excuse my enjoyment of its coarser features and its brilliant dirty-joke ending by pointing to a positively Chaucerian wit and vigour in the telling.

Of course, there is more to fantasy than its heroic/romantic offshoot, however treated, and this varied collection is rounded out by a few examples of other styles. Robert Silverberg's 'Dancers in the Time-Flux' represents the whimsical or 'anything goes' side of fantasy. It is a pleasant enough read, but would a seventeenth century Hollander, a true native of the United Provinces, believe quite so devoutly in a medieval and very Catholic Hell? William Horwood's 'The Museum Bell' is psychological fantasy without any 'inner space' excesses, the relationship between three men being strangely governed by the object of the title. A weak conclusion does not do justice to some compelling characters and atmospheric details. The two remaining pieces come from the cosmological, Borges vein of Fantasy: 'In the Mirror of the Earth' is a typically readable and cheeky spell of inventiveness from Ian Watson; and 'Report on an Unidentified Space Station' by J.G. Ballard is the surprise let-down of the collection, an attempt to hang huge significance upon the frame of a predictable and tiresome conceit.

Finally, it remains only to note the pleasingly unobtrusive editorial

presence behind this book. No introduction is provided and we are offered nothing more than the briefest snippets of information about each author. This strikes me as being more honest than spending ten pages in trying to yoke a disparate assortment of stories to some editorial thesis, as is all the contributors had got together beforehand and arranged to work to a master plan. If Lands of Never does have a message, it is that the lessons of Tolkien have been learned and then discarded, and the book is, I think, the healthier for that.

ETHICALLY DUBIOUS

PAUL BRAZIER

[MINDKILLER By SPIDER ROBINSON. Berkley Nov 1983. 246pp., $2.95 paperback,]
[ISBN 0-425-06288-0]

First, I must declare an interest. I have admired Spider Robinson's work ever since I first encountered the Callahan's Saloon stories in Analog, and realised he was also the person who wrote those marvellous review pages (aggravating and opinionated they may have been, but they were fun!). The progression from his first novel, Telempath (1976), through Stardance (1979) (written with his wife, Jeanne), to this latest is marked, but not totally consistent.

In his introduction to Callahan's Crosstime Saloon (1977), Ben Bova says that Robinson is 'An empath. He's sensitive to human emotions: pain, fear, joy, love. He can get them down on paper as few writers can. I don't think I can fault this point, but it isn't the only thing a science fiction writer is trying to achieve. We should not only empathise with the characters, we should be able to learn about ourselves from the development of character portrayed. A book may be a good read, but if it is no more, it can hardly be recommended seriously.

Now this book is a very good read. There is a stylistic device which is so central to the development of the plot that I can't actually describe it without revealing the outcome of the story. But the plotting itself is superb.

The central SF theme is wire-heading, apparently the 'Mindkiller' of the title. This is where the pleasure centre of the brain is wired to a plug in the skull so it can be directly stimulated electrically. Simple tampering with the controls allows the wireheader to be permanently stimulated. He/she thus forgets about living - the only imperative is pleasure - and eventually dies of starvation or thirst.

The story itself concerns a professional burglar who has managed to erase himself totally from all computer records in a near-future New York. But he has no idea of how - he has lost his memory. He finds a woman who is committing suicide by wireheading and rescues her. Together they resolve to search out the source of wireheading and obliterate it. Parallel to this is the story of a Lecturer in English Literature who also attempts suicide (by jumping off a bridge), is rescued, and rediscovers himself through his sister who then disappears. He sets out to find her. The resolution of these parallels is one of the finer achievements of this book.

Now the emotional development of the characters is finely drawn, so that we feel the anguish of the suicides and their motivation for rebuilding themselves. Suicide stems mostly from self-contempt: these suicides find different reasons for their rehabilitation, but it's all summed up by the woman when she says:

"Someday ... random chance is going to strike me dead. I might

as well be doing something worthwhile at the time. It should be a shame that I died." (Pg 85).

The emotional understanding is carried through too in the latter stages of the story where we experience an almost impossible paranoia reminiscent of the paranoia in Heinlein's 'Number of the Beast'. Indeed, the comparison with Heinlein is not unfair: But while The New York Times sees fit to call Robinson 'the new Robert Heinlein', I would beg to differ on two major points.

First of all, as with Heinlein, all Robinson's characters are chronic over-achievers, although they are by no means perfect as people. However, unlike Heinlein, their abilities serve only to get them into trouble.

Secondly, Heinlein's moral message is always clear: you may not like what he says, but you know where he stands. The moral shift which constitutes the resolution of this novel is ethically dubious, but what is worse it isn't clear. I get the distinct impression that the end of the book is hurried and not fully thought through. As it involves wider political and social issues than are familiar from Robinson's other work, it may be the result of some rather immature or incomplete political thinking.

Regrettably, I can't discuss the details of this political/moral problem without divulging the outcome. So the best for all concerned would be for you to get hold of this book and read it. Stylistically it is a tour de force (and it starts with the most unusual mugging I've ever read); emotionally it is true, honest, and revealing; and on the whole it's a damn good read (I would say 'I couldn't put it down', but even though it's true it would sound insincere). Most of all, I hope it will spark a debate over its conclusion, for there are some knotty moral and philosophical problems for both author and reader which need to be unravelled here.

ARMCHAIR TRAVEL — NIK MORTON

[LORD OF DARKNESS By ROBERT SILVERBERG. Golllanz 1984. 559pp £9.95 ISBN 0-575-03347-9]

"In the destructive element immerse" - Lord Jim (J Conrad).

I have been in a time-machine and have savoured the richness of smells, tastes, sounds, prose and colours of 16th Century Africa. And what a journey: "There is a voyage outward and there is a voyage inward, and my twenty years inward to the heart of African deviltry took me farther indeed then Drake himself could have gone." This voyage inward gripped from beginning to end - even after the end. As a fictional travel autobiography, Lord of Darkness was most convincing, so true in fact that the author came across as one humourous, wise and compassionate Andrew Battell and not as Robert Silverberg, author of Lord Valentine's Castle.

Battell and many of the other characters existed. According to Silverberg, all we know of Battell is that he went to sea in 1589 when Spain and Portugal were at war against England, that he was captured on the Isle of Sao Sebastiao off Brazil, shipped to Angola, where he had twenty years of adventures before returning to England in 1610. He then dictated his memoirs which were subsequently printed in a much-edited form in 1625 and again in 1901. Upon these bones has Silverberg shaped flesh. The account of Andrew Battell of Leigh in Essex, born in 1558, is certain to be regarded as an outstanding work, comparable to Robinson Crusoe and King Solomon's Mines.

Although best known for his varied and numerous SF novels, Silverberg

has been prolific in producing non-fiction books, among them being The Golden Dream (1966) which was a study of the obsessive quest for the mythical land of Eldorado, The Longest Voyage, an account of the first six circumnavigations of the world, and The Realm of Prester John (1972). After a journey to Africa, he wrote Downward to the Earth, an SF novel in which were embedded some homages to Joseph Conrad. All this knowledge and research, the influence of Conrad and the Hakluyt Voyages and Discoveries, coupled with a masterful style that captures the feel of the 16th century, has inevitably been distilled into this quite remarkable Lord of Darkness, within which one can embark on a mind-broadening, often gruesome odyssey of young yellow-haired Andrew. He was new to the world beyond Leigh and began by looking at everything with the blinkered eyes of ignorance. In truth, he found that travel broadens the mind; aye, wondrously so. Perhaps armchair travel does too. For there is much cogent philosophy, wisdom and compassion within these pages, besides excellent description and humour.

Though a prisoner, Battell had been given a modicum of freedom to serve as a pilot; thereafter, he undertook two trading voyages, before falling in with man-eaters, the Jaqqa. He continually allied himself with the powerful to retain his modest freedom, as reflected in his simple philosophy:

> "No sailor ever reached home by sailing into the jaws of a storm.
> I try to keep my sheets aligned so that I will move ever forward,
> or at least not find myself capsized."

His intention was to bend to adversity, but never to give up hope that one day he might return to England. He was not given to despair, which is remarkable considering the privations, betrayals and disappointments he endured: "wholly English within me, that does not like to rush forward and claim defeat as a bride."

The foregoing quotations give a less than adequate indication of the style of Silverberg: it seems exactly right. He employs a marvellous choice of words, eg "catercorner" rather than "diagonally", and "rampscallery roguey army of cutpurses and rackrents and dandiprat costermongers, the dregs of Lisbon... to defend Angola against the forces of darkness." The insult of today is so pauperized, as is the description of explicit sex. In both these areas Silverberg restores some long-abandoned words so that, unlike many books on the shelves today, Battell's descriptions don't seem coarse or clumsy or purely sensational, but almost poetic. And then there is the language - "fetish" and "albino" come from Spanish/Portuguese sources, of course; and, "Your accent is broad, though you have the words and the sense quite aptly. You speak our words in the flat English way, without music. Speak you more in the throat and in the nose..." My wife teaches Spanish and can confirm that these observations are so right. "Put some thunder in your vowels. Put some savory spice in them. I think it is your English food, that is so empty of taste, that causes you to speak your words in such a flavourless way."

Battell was educated to be a clerk but followed his father and brothers to sea. He had read a lot, was familiar with Marlowe, the Book of Solomon, and Marcus Aurelius - all employed in their appropriate place - as well as two quotations familiar to SF enthusiasts - "folly it is to bid time return" (Matheson/Shakespeare) and "a stranger in a strange land" (Heinlein/Moses). He befriended Portuguese and natives, man-eaters and a slave-girl, Matamba.

The title of the book refers to Calandola, a Jaqqa whose influence on Battell is both hypnotic and demonic. He and his people are invested with a strange grandeur and a fascinating frightfulness. The Jaqqa creation myth, history and philosophy are held up against the religion and philosophy of the time: Battell found little to choose between them. At least the ferocious Jaqqa made no pretense at piety. Henceforth, Battell's soul was captive.

There are court-intrigues, trials by ordeal, strange beasts, bizarre illnesses, bravery, anthropological detail, and politics and power-hunger.

The sex scenes - and the gruesome horrors - are described with an ease and an openness which makes them far from unseemly.

Many characters deserve mention, not least the tragic, long-suffering slave, Matamba. But Battell's great passion was the beguiling Dona Teresa; she altered his life. She was shameless, their relationship vying between love and hate: "a superfluity of passion, that does turn to rage and foul sour juices when it is thwarted" was how she explained one betrayal. Yet towering over all is the overpowering Calandola, who was anointed daily with the fat of human victims to give his large physique a terrible burnished gloss. He is a memorable creation: an evil Umslopogaas. Whilst with the Jaqqa, Battell observed that his world was bounded by cauldrons and drums and ollicondi trees; so too was mine as I vicariously shared his sojourn. Ultimately, "Calandola was real to me and England only a phantasm, now, and much of the time my mind lay in a hazy borderland between the real and the unreal."

If you like history with flesh on it, unrestrained and vivid through eye-witness accounts, then this book is for you.

CONSCIOUS CLEVERNESS

JUDITH HANNA

[THE NEVERENDING STORY By MICHAEL ENDE. Allen Lane 1984. 396pp., £9.95]

When a book seizes you so that you simply can't put it down until you get to the end, you know it's doing something right. Once, when I was much younger than today, almost any book could enthrall me -- Biggles, Chalet School, Famous Five, all presented strange and marvellous worlds alien to my own limited experience. These days it happens more rarely. It happened about halfway through The Neverending Story: on page 181, to be exact, when Bastian Balthazar Buz becomes drawn into the world of Fantastica that he's been reading about in the book he's stolen while he hides away in the schoolhouse attic; that's when the story catches. Up to that point, it had been rather laborious going. Fat spotty nerdish little Bastian BB had been considerably more immersed in the marvellous book printed in red and green ink, bound in copper-coloured silk that shimmered when he moved about, with two snakes biting each other's tale in an oval on the cover, and the title The Neverending Story, than I was in reading about him reading about this book.

Ende's The Neverending Story is built around several neat metaphysical conceits -- which don't work. The story only comes to life when Ende the author abandons his clever adult, distancing tricks and, like Bastian, becomes drawn into Fantastica, the world he's creating. Up till then what he's writing is ponderous moralising, the sort of heavy-unclism that mars, for instance, C.S.Lewis's Narnia books or the beginning of Tolkien's The Hobbit.

Too much conscious cleverness, that's the trouble, too much of the author analysing the process of reading fantasy, too much telling about BBB becoming immersed in his imaginary world. When that barrier -- Ende writing about Bastian reading about Fantasica -- is removed, when BBB finds himself drawn in to Fantastica and set to the heroic task of re-creating it, just as he wishes, in order to save it from dissolving into nothingness, that's when I too found myself drawn in. Once Bastian becomes immersed in Fantastica and the author, contenting himself with the invisibility that befits a puppetmaster, lets his imagination go in rebuilding a new Fantastica, then the reader also can become absorbed in Fantastica, without constantly being reminded that she (sitting in her everyday office munching her lunchtime sandwich) is in the process of reading a fairytale about the process of

reading a fairytale.

The story comes to life when it stops trying to be "different" -- alternating red and green ink for this world and Fantastica, didactic pontification on functions of fantasy, imagination, storytelling and reading in order not to be mistaken for merely "escapist" fantasy - and settles down to being a fairytale rather than justifying fairytales.

The fairytale or "Marchen" is a very stylized form of story -- analysed by Vladimir Propp into 28 separate "narrative functions" which later structuralists have shown to be peritions of "testing" the hero for various qualities, traditionally, (1) courtesy (polite to little old woman/funny old man, (2) bravery (kill dragon/giant/etc), and (3) being the chap who really did kill the dragon. Further, the standard fairytale consists of a "frame", the ordinary, usually family, setting from which the hero sets out, and the nitty-gritty, the fantastic, unknown country into which the hero ventures or is dumped and in which his (or her) testing occurs.

Once we get past Ende's over-elaborated "frame" (red ink) to the nitty-gritty of Fantastica (green ink), a land BBB recreates with an imaginative extravagance that swept this reader off her feet (and well past her legitimate lunchhour) we don't notice that Ende, by manipulating the virtues tested, is slipping past us, embedded in the traditional pattern of exciting adventures, the very same stuff so wearisomely delivered as lectures in the frame. Bastian's an immediate hero in Fantastica because he has the imagination (not a traditional virtue, but a metafictional one) that shapes the Night Jungle and the searing daytime desert that supplants it and the deadly burning Lion of that desert. The Acharis, ugliest creatures in Fantastica, who built Amarganth, most beautiful city in the world to atone for looking so horrible, allegorically parallel fat spotty BBB/nerdish fantasy writer making up by making enthralling stories for their personal lack of charm. Wish-fulfilment? Indeed, "Do what you wish" says the amulet that gives Bastian in Fantastica the power to effect his imagination. But then Bastian, using his magic, makes the sad ugly creative Acharnis into jolly giggling bouncing Schlamoofs -- who gleefully set about destroying the matchless beauty they once created. Similarly Bastian, honoured hero, becomes overbearingly arrogant and most unpleasant. It is after being acclaimed as a hero, after through his arrogance almost destroying the world his imagination saved, that he finds that it is only by learning the courtesy and humility (which lead to love) which are the first test a traditional fairytale hero must pass, that he can save himself. The superficially 'escapist' (green ink) fantasy thus embodies, more subtly and more effectively, the morals so indigestible when baldly delivered as lectures in the (red ink) frame.

SUET PUDDING — PAUL KINCAID

[FANTASISTS ON FANTASY Edited by ROBERT H. BOYER and KENNETH J. ZAHORSKI.]
[Avon 1984, $3.95]

In any anthology, whether of stories or of essays, the reader should hardly be aware of the editor. After all, important as the editor is, as far as the reader is concerned his task is simply to select the material and direct the reader to it by way of the introduction. It says something for this book, therefore, that I was constantly aware of the influence of Boyer and Zahorski throughout my reading of it; and they irritated me.

Some of the irritations are minor. Each contributor is introduced in such gushing terms that it becomes meaningless; we learn little of the

author, less of his work, and nothing at all about the critical perspectives of the piece featured. There are so many superlatives flying around that if ever one of the contributors is described merely as 'good' one wonders what the poor fellow has done to offend the editors.

Some of the irritations are less minor. The editors make a big thing of describing the book as an academic work, aimed at least as much at the teacher and lecturer as it is at the general reader. Yet their scholarship is either questionable or very careless. As an example, Herbert Read's 'Fantasy (Fancy)' is described as "actually Chapter XI of Read's classic study, English Prose Style." (p43). A few lines above this they have already told us that English Prose Style is dated 1928, a fact that is repeated in the Acknowledgements. Fair enough, except that the essay contains references to James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake published in the late 30s, and George Orwell's 1984 published in 1949. If this is an academic book, then the editors should give some information on when and to what extent this essay was revised. Or are we to assume that Read was prescient?

My main complaints about the book, however, arise from the nine-page introduction - a work of stunning ineptitude. Much of it is a piece of extended special pleading. They seem to go out of their way to find two or three things about each piece to make it a unique and vital and important contribution to a unique and vital and important book. The overall effect of this, at least on me, was to leave me wondering what was wrong with the book even before I read it.

I didn't have to wonder for long. Fantasists on Fantasy is a collection of 21 essays in which 18 writers of fantasy take a critical look at their chosen art. Now fantasy is a vast realm, something of which is suggested by the fact that this collection includes contributors as varied as James Thurber and Ursula LeGuin. Any book that contains such diverse writers needs, somehow, to tie them together, to explain how there can be such diversity while still on the same subject. In other words, there needs to be some attempt at a definition of fantasy both as a starting point for the book and to give the whole thing direction. There is no such attempt.

We are left, therefore, to draw our own conclusions from the pieces the editors select, and from the things they say in the introduction. Both leave me dissatisfied. They say, for instance:

> 'Writers from both sides of the Atlantic are represented here, but it is interesting to note that while the authors representing the first half of the century are primarily British, the representation from about 1965 on is predominantly American. There is also a shift in terms of gender: before 1965, primarily male representation after 1965, primarily female. Thus our table of contents - partly by design, partly by happy coincidence, accurately reflects current trends in the fantasy field. Since 1965 the fantasy balance of trade has shifted from England to America, and the male-dominated genre of the first half of the century is now dominated by a number of excellent women fantasists.' (pp4/5)

Nothing is said to prove, or in any way support, these outrageous statements. No academic of any serious worth would ever produce such statements without also producing some evidence to back them up.

As far as I am concerned, this is far from being an accurate reflection of "current trends in the fantasy field". The editors include one article by Michael Moorcock from "a low-circulation British fan magazine, Foundation" (p2), otherwise Britain's considerable involvement in contemporary fantasy literature is ignored. And that means that writers as diverse and as important as Angela Carter, Russell Hoban and M.John Harrison play no part in their consideration of the genre. Similarly there is one contribution from

Felix Marti-Ibanaz, otherwise all the contributors are solidly, not to say stolidly, Anglo-American. Which means that writers of fantasy such as Kafka, Borges and Lainez are also forgotten.

Now I am not suggesting that the editors should have sought out articles by every writer of fantasy there has been. But there are important questions raised here. The selection, for instance, could have been much more representative than it is. Moreover, a good critical essay which put the various contributors into the context of fantasy writing over the past century or so, including reference to other important writers such as those I have mentioned, would have given us a standpoint from which we could appreciate the contributions. There is no such essay. So the various contributions are left isolated - unquestioned, and with no critical perspective provided. As an academic work, which this book claims to be, it is absolutely useless.

There is also, in the editors' remarks such as those quoted, and in the choice of contribution, an implied view of what fantasy is. I consider this view to be partial and inadequate. Thus the majority of the essays suggest that fantasy is, and can only be, the fairy tale, or fairy-tale-like works such as the wonderous adventures of Tolkien, or sub-medieval heroics a la Katherine Kurtz. There is the occasional nod sideways, for instance to Lovecraftian horror, but essentially this limited picture of fantasy is the only one considered.

From this volume, therefore, one would assume that the only precursor of contemporary fantasy is the fairy tale as collected by Anderson or the brothers Grimm. There is no reference to mythology, the fantastic tales of Homer and Virgil and Dante, the works of Dean Swift, Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream or any of the myriad other ancestors of modern fantasy. The use of fantasy for satire seems to be frowned upon as somehow not true fantasy, so that the only references to More's Utopia, Butler's Erewhon and Orwell's Animal Farm is Sir Herbert Read's dismissal of them. No fantasy which does not include the creation of its own weird and wonderful world gets a mention; thus fantastic happenings in an otherwise recognisable world, as in Hoban's Kleinzeit or Coover's The Public Burning, do not even seem to be considered fantasy. Kafka's Metamorphoses and much of the work of Borges is thus airily dismissed.

Likewise, any suggestion that fantasy might affect, be affected by, and otherwise play a part in the wider realms of contemporary literature is treated with dismay. I am sure that the editors are speaking for themselves when they say:

> 'Readers will be fascinated - and perhaps bewildered for a time - by the fact that Read includes as examples fitting his definition of fantasy both A Thousand and One Nights and Finnegan's Wake, or that Lovecraft does the same with Dickens and Henry James.' (p8)

Personally I find it very bewildering that both Dickens and Henry James fit any definition of fantasy. But putting aside this rather poor use of the English language, we can at least see what Boyer and Zahorski are trying to say. The obvious question is: why the fascination? Why the bewilderment? If the editors had made any serious study of what fantasy is, its history, and its role in literature, then these titles and authors would surely be among the first that sprang to mind.

Fantasists on Fantasy is a good idea. Unfortunately Boyer and Zahorski make a total hash of editing the book, and what they do do, they do very badly.

But after that long preamble, what about the real meat of the book, the essays? They are, in the main, interesting, and it is good to have them brought together in one place, One or two are already widely available, but others are rare and interesting oddities. Nevertheless, few of them are actually the 'critical reflections' they are claimed to be. Thurber, for

instance, is a writer who found it impossible to be either uninteresting or unamusing; but is a four-page consideration of 28 Oz books really worth including in anything but a collection of the Complete Works of James Thurber?

SEVEN YEAR HITCH — NIGEL RICHARDSON

[THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARDS, VOLUME 5 Edited by George R.R. Martin. Bluejay] [Books 1984. 238pp., $7.95. ISBN 0-312-94252-4]

This is a rather timewarped collection, which although copyrighted January 1984 collects together stories by the nominees for the 1977 John W. Campbell Award. George R.R. Martin goes some way to explaining the whys and hows of its delay in his preface before concentrating on the fact that things are no longer as rosy in the genre as they looked (to him, at least) back in the 70s. "Sales are down, advances are down, and publishers seem far more interested in buying other companies than in putting out good books... The genre has grown up, and part of the price of growing up has been learning what words like unemployment and breadlines mean... The eighties have not been a terribly good time to be a new writer." What he says may not come as much of a shock out here in the real world, but it is a bit unnerving to hear it said by a successful American writer like Martin.

The nominees for the 1977 John W. Campbell Award were Jack Chalker, C.J. Cherryh (winner), M.A. Foster and Carter Scholz. How well have they lived up to the award? Since 1977 Chalker has published 15 novels, Cherryh 16+, Foster 4 and Scholz... well, he's written a few short stores, and is presently working on an Ace Special. Subsequent winners of the award have been, in chrono- logical order, Orson Scott Card, Stephen Donaldson, Barry Longyear, Somtow Sucharitkul, Alexis Gilliland and Paul O. Williams. Most of the names nominated in the last three years are completely new to me; Warren G. Norwood, anybody? Kevin Christensen? Joseph H. Delaney?

The stories in this volume have been specially written for it, except for a brief and rather cheeky reworking of the myth of Sisyphus entitled "The Dark King" by Cherryh, which is a reprint - although the copyright page doesn't say from where. The runners-up are represented with "novelettes"; Cherryh gets pride of place - whether this is because she won or because she turned out the longest piece, isn't said - with a 95 page "novel" (one day someone will set down regulation for what constitutes a novel, page-wise...) The book also contains an anecdotal remembrance of John Campbell by Paul Anderson, which is no doubt sincere and well-meant, but is what we've all read a million times before by countless Astounding oldtimers. Onward to the fiction.

Jack Chalker's "In the Dowaii Chambers" is exactly what you would expect from Chalker, if you've already read or even heard of him. People die and are reborn in other bodies a few times in its course, which seems to be the pattern for all of his work. Four young people set out to discover the truth about a legendary Navajo underground chamber from which only a few explorers have ever emerged, but those that have come out are either godlike or insane. The four are the same four that have ventured into magical caves since the genre began - there's the arrogant, macho leader, his empty-headed girl, an ugly but goodnatured intellectual and a half Indian woman who's spunky but isn't pretty. They emerge from the chambers wiser, happier and all good buddies - or at least the three who survive do. It's silly, cartoonish stuff, too gormless even to offend, except for the passage when, after telling her companion that she has just died in another life

giving birth to her ninth child, the empty-headed girl is told by one of the men "You've changed, Jenny. You've - well, I'm not sure how to put it. Grown up." Nothing like dieing in childbirth to make a girl grow up, eh?

M.A. Foster's "Dreams" is about as far from Chalker's crass capering as is possible. In Chalker's story each protagonist lives through four other lifetimes - in Foster's all that happens is that a man drives through the city where his one-time lover lives. He offers her a lift. She declines. He goes on his way. End of story. The grim, detailed account of his journey paints a picture of a future that is strange, but in no way wonderful. It is a dull, repetitive future, more horrible than any dystopia not merely because it is so drab and oppressive, but because it looks so inevitable. What the main characters seems to be saying is that "life shouldn't be this dull and dreary - this is the future!" This is counterpointed by the two lovers' inability to give themselves wholely to their love because they are afraid that what seems so wonderful and timeless will eventually turn into something ordinary and banal, just like the world around them. It is a brave and sensitive work of fiction, that creeps up on you with deliberate slowness, although Foster's manner of expressing the dull routine of life in future could well bore the reader; had I not been reviewing the story I might have given up on it halfway through.

Carter Scholz's "A Catastrophe Machine" is the shortest and best of the works in the book. It reads rather like Silverberg circa Dying Inside in that it is painful, personal, paranoid and as pessimistic as hell (my kind of SF, in other words). The only other short story I've read involving catastrophe theory is Ian Watson's "Immune Dreams", which is surprising as catastrophe theory is slippery enough to suit all kinds of metaphoric use. Scholz is a very literate writer but tends to overdo things at times; "The sexual transactions of my being proceeded on a level deeper than I cared to go. Surfaces tyrannized my attention" reads like Malzberg parodying Malzberg, and elsewhere the influence of too many creative writing courses is evident. He tries too hard to put an entire life into one story - a life filled with death, despair, loss, divorce, paranoia and dread, too. It almost works, however (the whole point of the story is the dreadfulness of the protagonist's life, its curve of catastrophe towards the final cusp of terminal cancer),

thus making it one of those failures that is worth a whole pile of successes put together. Scholz could be an American M. John Harrison, although I'm not sure if that is to be wished for or prayed against...

Award winner C.J. Cherryh's story, "Companions", is quite a surprise (to someone like me, that is, who has been put off Cherryh by the titles and covers of her novels). Somehow she manages to take that hoariest of themes - the spaceship stranded on a deserted yet seemingly paradisaical world - and make something new out of it. It's an atmospheric, scary, thoughtful tale, and the robot in it, the companion of the only surviving astronaut, is possibly more like a real robot than anything I've encountered in SF to date. "Companions" is the sort of story that shows that good, traditional, hard SF can still be worth reading, and more importantly, writing. Like Foster and Scholz, Cherryh shows how writers can be heavily influenced by the SF that has gone before them without turning into regurgative hacks.

Although somewhat downbeat - the reprinted Cherryh story, although far from being a ribtickler, is the one moment of light relief - this is a better than average collection, as even the Chalker story has the merit of being a short (ie, less than four volume long) introduction to his work. The three other writers, together with Martin's meaty preface, show that American SF is not quite the artistic wilderness of dollar signs and gruel it seems from over here.

SOILED UNDERSHORTS — DAVID V. BARRETT

[THE STEPS OF THE SUN By WALTER TEVIS Gollancz 1984. 251pp., £7.95 ISBN 0-575] [-03367-3]

Take this really incredibly rich middle-aged man, right? He's bored with his business successes; he's tired of his relationship failures; he's become impotent. For a bit of excitement he decides to buy up a second hand space ship and go prospecting for uranium - no, not in the asteroid belt or on the moons of Jupiter, but way, way out in space, heading for stars that are spectroscopically likely to have planets. And waddyaknow - the two they drop in on have! And the planets they land on have breathable atmospheres. And by page 41 they've discovered a bloody great mountainful of uranium!

He's still bored. And he thinks he's still impotent, but he doesn't dare try to find out, even though:

> 'the pilot was a middle-aged woman with red hair; I had hired her with the possibility of sex in mind' (p8).
> 'It suddenly occurred to me that I had never told Ruth I was impotent, and I immediately realised she must be miffed at me for not even trying to get in her pants. Jesus, I can forget the simplest social obligations sometimes when I get wrapped up in myself.' (p36).

But why the grand quest for uranium? It's obvious, to any ecologically-minded late C20th reader: Earth has almost exhausted her fossil fuels. It's illegal to use coal for private heat, but for people with money and connections there are black market resources. You could burn wood, if you could afford it at $7 a stick; though as Tevis gives no comparative prices for the reader to work out the inflation rate between 1983 and 2063, that figure might not mean much. So nuclear power becomes necessary; but uranium, if not a fossil fuel, is still a non-renewable resource. The major powers go

out into space to try to find uranium on other planets (they don't even find any planets, which makes Belson's - our hero's - success even more unbelievable); they soon realise that the gamble isn't worth it:

> 'No government was willing to take the raks anymore. Just one space voyage would use about 6 percent of the Earth's entire supply of uranium. Enough to heat Shanghai for ten years. You couldn't go out into the Milky Way without putting the ship into a spacewarp, and you couldn't do that without a few trillion megawatts at your disposal.' (p24).

Whatever happened to alternative energy sources? Wind, tidal, geothermal, solar, hydroelectric... Suddenly, on p137, Tevis remembers them, and we're told that the USA has them all anyway. So why all the panic? Why the increasingly primitive lifestyle of the average American citizen? God knows. It's implied that the politicians are deliberately keeping a stranglehold on power, in both senses of the word. I find it unlikely that John Doe would put up with that for long.

We've left Ben Belson's sexual problems to one side for longer than they ever are in the book. The author treats us to Belson's first ever orgasm at the age of thirteen, when he is sitting on a Greyhound bus next to 'an amply built young woman with glasses and dark nylons' (p96). Brian Aldiss can describe masturbation and make it worth reading about; Tevis makes it sordid, unpleasant to read, and grubby: 'To hell with my undershorts. I would throw them away.' (p97).

The book is as distasteful as Belson's undershorts. Belson's attitude to women throughout gives a whole new dimension of meaning to the term 'male chauvinism'; if I were Tevis I would live in fear of a well-deserved lynching - or, at the very least, castration - by justifiably enraged feminists. Take Belson's girlfriend Isabel, after whom he named his spaceship (the first planet he discovered he called Belson; the second, Juno, after the horse he slept with as a child). She could have been an interesting, complex, carefully drawn character: a struggling actress living in her one room, devoting herself to a 52 year old man who can't satisfy himself sexually, let alone her. She should have been studied in depth: her loves and hates, her vocation, her art, her Theatre... Instead, the abiding image is of her painting the floor:

> 'She did this in black panties and socks, bare-breasted, with a coal fire blazing in the grate... I couldn't keep my eyes off that undulant ass and those lovely breasts that hung down and gently swung from side to side as she scrubbed with a Kiwi brush and then rubbed and then painted.' (p22)

Even his mother is pictured in her degradation:

> 'sitting there as though hypnotised, the flesh on her cheeks sagging, her breasts exposed, sagging, her arms sagging at her sides. Whenever I hear the phrase "spiritual bankruptcy" I think of Mother sitting there, an empty woman.' (p35)

There is a place for well-written pornography in literature; Samuel R. Delany's The Tides of Lust is but one example. But if that was the level at which the author wished the book to be appreciated, he failed; it doesn't come up to the standard even of the fiction in MAYFAIR or KNAVE.

But perhaps we are supposed to be disturbed by Belson; perhaps Tevis was writing a psychological case-study for us to examine and learn from. If so, it fails on that level as well; it cannot be compared with such recent classics as John Barth's The End of the Road, Luke Rhinehart's The Dice Man,

Chris Priest's The Affirmation, or D.M. Thomas's The White Hotel. To compare it with Frederick Pohl's Beyond the Blue Event Horizon is to do the latter a great disservice, but there is little doubt that this was the source of Tevis's 'inspiration'. The tremendously wealthy middle-aged businessman, going on a quest into deepest space, telling his life story in a series of flashbacks to show why he is the way he is, talking, at one point, to his therapist's computer... Pohl could probably sue for plagiarism, except that this book just isn't worth the effort.

Or maybe the book is meant to be deeply ironic, a parody of our times, a black comedy, a subtle dig at the genre? I think not; it lacks the necessary quality of writing, and although some passages are slightly amusing, it lacks any real humour.

Story, Sex, Psychology, Spoof - what have I forgotten? Oh yes, Science Fiction. The novel is set in 2063; that's in the Future. Some of the action takes place in Outer Space. Therefore it is SF. But he uses the prop of the spacewarp simply as an excuse for his hero to sleep between planets, while the rest of the crew have to stay awake. The whole energy issue, which is the foundation of the story, is clumsily and carelessly handled. A switch-on, switch-off contraceptive pill is dealt with in a couple of paragraphs (it had the effect of reducing the population. Surprise, surprise). There have been a few changes: the People's Republic of Scotland, the emergence of China as a world power (but Philip K. Dick had the USA taken over by the Japanese far more effectively in The Man in the High Castle), the Kissinger Air Force Base, the John Glenn Hotel, the (wait for it) Reagan Detention Centre. In fact, there are echoes of the Twentieth Century everywhere: playing Monopoly (p31), listening to "Down Town" and 'Let It Be' (p36), playing 'Stardust' and 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters' (sic) (p47)... And the spaceship!:-

> 'The best idea was to take the ISABEL up into orbit and bring her back back down again as close to the hill as possible... "Look, Ben. Maybe I can jockey the ship over without all that fuss."
> ... Ruth brought the ISABEL shuddering up to a few hundred feet of altitude, tilted her forward for a moment, and then brought her shuddering back down on her own white tail flame. It was a gorgeous maneuver...' (p42)

No comment.

Desperately trying to find something good to say about this book, I concede that there are a few excellent passages, such as when Belsen simply sat and 'waited all day for Formalhaut to set' (p83); his love of the grass on Belson (p114); his actually very moving friendship with an old Chinese woman in the closing pages of the book. But a few passages do not a novel make.

If you are prepared to switch off your intellect, emotions and morals for a couple of hours, this isn't a bad read, if you've nothing better to hand, and it's raining, and the TV's broken. Take this how you will: on the basis of this book, it seems that Walter Tevis is the natural successor to Robert Heinlein - but nowhere near his standard.

THE RABBIT SYNDROME — TOM A. JONES

[UNIVERSE 12 Edited By TERRY CARR. Robert Hale 1984, 181pp., £7.95 ISBN] [0-7090-1312-4]

This is one of those increasingly rare animals; an original anthology. It

contains nine stories, all bar one - R.A. Lafferty - by people whose name I didn't recognise. But the book tells me Howard Waldrop has won the Nebula for a story in Universe 10 which shows you just how little I know.

I've always felt original anthologies were unusual beasts. I can understand the reasoning behind those with a theme - sport, crime, sex - being aimed at a particular interest group within SF. Those purporting to publish the best new stories around somehow seem only to be magazines with hardcovers and no book reviews or other departments. Unfortunately Universe 12 falls into this category, claiming "... to publish the finest original stories of SF and fantasy" but only equating to a reasonable copy of THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Fortunately it does manage to avoid any fantasy of the Sword and Sorcery or Frog and Fairy type.

The book also claims to concentrate on the human elements of the stories but contains three whose form require character types rather than real people. For example George Turner's "A Pursuit of Miracles" is a modern fairy story and as required by this genre those characters who aren't killed live unhappily ever after. Howard Waldrop's "God's Hooks" uses real historical people, Izaak Walton and John Bunyon, but as archetypes rather than real people. R.A. Lafferty seldom has "normal" people in his stories, indeed they would not fit the form, "Thieving Bear Plant" is no exception.

The rest of the stories are told in a straightforward way with the exception of "When the Fathers Go" by Bruce McAllister which had a touch of Barry Malzberg's sad, mad, depressed characters.

So, did I actually like anything. Yes, I enjoyed the Lafferty, but I like Lafferty (in small doses) so am biased. Mary C. Pangborn's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" was a pleasant, light time travel story and Turner's fairy tale enjoyable.

I wish I could be more enthusiastic, particularly as our good editor, Geoff, tells me this was Hale's only Winter offering, and Hale used to be one of our most prolific publishers of SF. Even worse there are few enough outlets for short fiction and we have cause for worry if these were the finest Terry Carr could find to fill one of those outlets. None of them were terrible, in fact they were all readable, at least as a divertion on a train journey. They were also all safe, and that is not what SF is about.

VECTOR'S CHOICE

'THE TWELVE HOURS OF THE NIGHT' — MARY GENTLE

[THE ANUBIS GATES by TIM POWERS. Ace 1984, 387pp., $2.95]

Tim Powers, for those who don't already know the name, wrote The Drawing of the Dark, a truely individual fantasy novel - the kind of book that has you expecting great things of the next one. Too often that leads to disappointment. But The Anubis Gates? The Anubis Gates is good.

It's also screwy. (It even lives up to its backcover blurb.) Roughly speaking, you could describe it as a combination time-travel and historical novel. It begins with an Egyptian sorcerer just outside London in 1805, and what happens when he attempts to summon the god Anubis. It moves on to one Brendan Doyle, our hero, who is a present-day lecturer specialising in the late Romantic poets, and who agrees to give a lecture on Samuel Taylor Coleridge for a reclusive millionaire. He finds himself - via para-research and 'holes' in time - attending a lecture by Coleridge in person in 1810...

and, naturally enough, fails to make it back to the 20th century.

The Anubis Gates is a romance, in the old sense of the word; and it has qualities of those Romantic poets with which it becomes involved - vast landscapes of time, apotheoses, destinies, love, supernatural and sublime happenings, danger and adventure, heroism and humour. Well, I admit the late Romantic poets may be a little short on the last quality, but Powers has a notable and gritty sense of humour: witness Doyle, suffering from pneumonia, embarking on a career as a professional beggar - "All the running had started him coughing again, and he made a shilling and fourpence before he got it under control."

Marooned in the early 19th century, Doyle decides to seek our one William Ashbless (author of 'The Twelve Hours of the Night'), a minor Romantic poet upon whom he wrote - or will write - a thesis. While persuing the elusive Ashbless, Doyle finds himself persued by a number of parties... There's Horrabin and the beggar- and their-lords (homage paid here to Victor Hugo and the Court of Miracles). There is Jacky, a rather effeminate young man, who's searching for the 'werewolf' Dog-Face Joe, supposed to have killed Jacky's fiance. There is Byron, or at least someone remarkably like him; and a plot to kill George III. And then there are the Mamaluke Beys and the Cairene Master; not to mention the Antaeus Brotherhood, and Doctor Romanelli....

If that sounds confusing, all I can say is that it all slots into place. The plot is an intricate mechanism, and half the joy is in watching it mesh; but it's difficult to discuss in any detail without giving away the multiple surprises (some of which are telegraphed in advance, but not enough to spoil the reader's enjoyment). It makes The Anubis Gates very satisfying to read - as does the texture of the narrative. Without drowning us in research, Powers presents a very convincing 1810: dirty, dangerous, adventurous. (Was it really like that? Who knows? Who cares!) It has a Dickensian view-from-the-gutter feel to it. Historical characters interact well with the purely fictional. And Brendan Doyle truely suffers, to the degree that the reader - no matter how inured to fictional danger - may worry whether the hero really will survive intact. (And may be right to wonder.)

There are flaws, but they are minor - I found the secondary villains more convincing and sympathetic than the ultimate enemy (whose fate strains credibility to breaking point); and the conspiracy theory of history is not exactly original. But, as this is Tim Powers' version of 1810, and his version of Egyptian theology, so also it's his version of age-old conspiracies; and one should take the book on its own terms.

For all that, the central theme of The Anubis Gates is something closer to home than historicism. The book quotes from Heraclitus: "No man can step into the same river twice, for the second time it's not the same river, and he's not the same man." Heraclitus also said 'all is flux'.) The Anubis Gates is a flux, a masque, a minuet of identity-changes; and comes close to saying that identity itself is just a point of view in time. And, fittingly for a book so concerned with magicians, it's also a top-hat of a novel, out of which Powers pulls a succession of quite amazing rabbits. It's ready won the Philip K Dick Memorial Award in the USA. It deserves all the awards it can get.
