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WASN'T BORN TO FOLLOW — an editorial by Joseph Nicholas

It seems fairly widely believed these days that science fiction is in a state of decline — I even said as much myself in an article in Vector 101, seeking to identify where and how I thought it was going wrong. I also made a stab at saying why: in general, that the gloom of the real world was responsible for the retreat into escapism, that the apparently inexorable decline of the West — tentatively dated as beginning with Watergate and the Yom Kippur War — had led to a switch of interest away from the truly innovatory and imaginative towards the safe, the repetitive and the undemanding. Certainly, the science fiction of the late seventies was nowhere near as mould-breaking as that of the late sixties, and as for the science fiction of the present...

Kingsley Amis appears to feel much the same, and the introduction to his anthology The Golden Age Of Science Fiction (Penguin, 365pp, £2·95) is devoted to expounding his reasons for where and how he thinks it's gone wrong — all very different from mine and all, I think, insupportable.

Amis dates the beginning of the decline from the early sixties rather than the early seventies, and ascribes it to factors arising from within SF itself than from the world at large. His argument rests on two main points: firstly, that SF began to lose its innocence and its youthful vitality, in particular the intimate rapport between writers and readers that had engendered same, as a result of the interest that academia and the mainstream critical establishment then began to show towards it; and, secondly, that all the basic themes and ideas of SF were used up — and, indeed, best expressed — by the writers who appeared in the magazines of the fifties, so that when the sixties dawned there was nothing left to say. The first is dubious, the second mere assertion.

The first is dubious because it inflates out of all proportion the effect that academics and mainstream critics either did or could have on the literature. It's true to say, as Amis does, that their attention confers a certain degree of respectability on SF, and leads to some of its writers adopting a more self-conscious approach to their work, but quite apart from the fact that large numbers of fans and not a few writers actively resent such "outside" attention the claim that such attention alone was responsible for the changes that occurred in the sixties is not very plausible at all. As though recognising this, Amis buttresses it with a few other reasons, remarking on science fiction's "incorporation" into the general cultural scene and claiming that it had been bewitched by the spectre of modernism. The first is indisputable — there was a Moon-landing programme going on

at the time, after all, and it would have been strange indeed had that not sparked some popular interest in the literature and had there not been some attempt by some writers to "justify" SF's existence through the successes of Gemini and Apollo. Nor was such cross-cultural feedback particularly new; there had been a similar (though smaller) surge of popular interest in SF in the early to mid-fifties. This latter is a phenomenon to which Amis explicitly refers in his introduction, apparently without realising that by doing so he is drawing an implied parallel between the two decades, and that if he is to condemn the supposed perniciousness of popular influence in one then he must apply the same reasoning to the other. The only reason he doesn't, it seems to me, is because it would undermine his thesis that the SF of the fifties was SF at its finest. And as for the SF of the sixties having become bewitched by modernism... well, doesn't everything go through a period of experimentation at some time or another? Usually during adolescence, too — which is where Amis's claim that science fiction "lost its innocence" in the early sixties takes on a new meaning, because when looked at from another perspective it means, simply, that SF began to grow up: that it set aside the naiveties of childhood and took its first steps towards adulthood. To find something wrong with that is to have a very odd view of the world indeed... although, to be sure, the experimentation he condemns — the so-called "New Wave" ushered in by Moorcock's New Worlds — was not wholly successful, and many of the writers who appeared in its pages have since remained unpublished, but it was neverthless a valuable contribution to the liberalisation of the UK publishing climate, making possible (until the reactions of the seventies) the publication of material that might otherwise have been rejected and, most importantly, establishing for once and for all the "right" of British SF writers to produce a distinctively "British" SF free from the trappings of the American genre product. Amis, who grew up reading the American magazines (from which most of the stories in this anthology are taken — those that aren't come from such transplanted "clones" as Carnell's New Worlds) has no truck with this at all: he disliked the changes then and he continues to dislike them now, and his argument here strongly resembles a post facto rationalisation of that dislike. So neither of these subsidiary reasons can really be adduced as explanations of decline — even leaving aside my own objections to them, as above, it's obvious that, in the first place, no matter what the overall cultural trends of the sixties (or of any period at all, for that matter), individual writers continued to write books about the subjects that mattered most to them, and while they may have made use of the freedoms conferred by the New Wave such is hardly evidence of their pandering to their audience's whims; and, in the second place, while certain writers may have fallen under the sway of the New Wave "ideology" there were vast swathes of the SF authorship which remained untouched by it, continuing to write "traditional" SF in the "traditional" way. Amis simply ignores these two fundamental facts, and his argument perforce collapses.

The second main point on which Amis's introduction is founded, that the basic themes and ideas of SF were used up and best expressed in the fifties, is mere assertion because it isn't even his own; he's simply lifted it wholesale from Barry Malzberg who, in a number of essays written over the past few years, has been banging away at the same subject (in his usual tones of bitterness, remorse, recrimination and guilt, which work in his fiction but are wholly unsuited to the tasks and goals of non-fiction). Nobody ever appreciated or understood writers like Mark Clifton and Kris Neville, says Malzberg, yet they did more than anyone else to extend the boundaries of science fiction; writers like Algis Budrys and Damon Knight were masters of the short story form, and the short story form is the quintessence of science fiction; Alfred Bester and Robert Sheckley pioneered all the really worthwhile stylistic and technical innovations; and yet it was all for nothing because the editors were too cheap to care and the readers too young to know. Malzberg's evidence for these claims is conspicuous by its absence, and his claims are in consequence mere assertions — they look, in fact, suspiciously like a lament for the "lost innocence" of his youth, for the time he began reading SF; that first, fine, careless rapture that has since eluded him. (I wonder, also, whether his claim that the writers of the fifties "deluded" themselves over the importance and durability of their work might not apply to himself as well.) Amis simply takes Malzberg's argument as given and proceeds on the assumption that it's correct without once stopping to examine it — no doubt because it accords well with his own thoughts on the matter. He freely admits that his own ability to assimilate new material evaporated around the early sixties, and could this be a reference to his "sense of wonder" having become jaded, so that SF no longer seemed so new and invigorating? I think so: everyone's capacity for surprise becomes exhausted at some time or another, after all, and because we are most "surprised" by what we first encounter in our youth, measuring all subsequent experiences against then, there is a tendency for us to look nostalgically back to the past as the best of all possible times. This is just what I think Amis has done in selecting the stories for this anthology, and his introduction is but a lengthy justification of it.

(I daresay that I too could be accused of falling prey to this in taking a fairer view of the sixties than Amis, so it's perhaps worth pointing out that I didn't even begin reading SF until 1967, went off it in 1970-71, and didn't return to it until 1974-75 — and it was then that I discovered there had once been something called "the New Wave", too late for me to read it from anything other than an historical perspective, as a curiosity rather than something vital and alive. So any claim that the sixties were my "Golden Age of SF" would have to take the above dates into account to ring halfway true.)

So where does this leave Kingsley Amis? Wallowing in nostalgia and trying to pretend that things haven't really passed him by, I'd say. And not quite managing it, either, since at certain points in his introduction a degree of resentment seems to reveal itself — as in, for instance, his statement that his New Maps Of Hell (1960) was the first full-scale work of serious SF criticism. Reason enough for pride, you'd think, but instead he complains about all the people who came after him; the people who, it seems, intruded on his turf, who took science fiction away from him. If the stories published in this anthology are any guide, the cynics amongst us could perhaps be excused for thinking that it's just as well they did.

Barry B. Longyear -- CIRCUS WORLD (Orbit, 219pp, £1·60), MANIFEST DESTINY (Orbit, 284pp, £1·75), ELEPHANT SONG (Berkley, 234pp, $2·50)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

On the face of it, Circus World, Manifest Destiny and Elephant Song do not come with a pedigree apt to endear them to the reader, containing short stories (and a novel) by a writer who in 1979 won the Hugo, the Nebula and the Campbell Awards. It's taken as a truism (their validity or otherwise left unconsidered) that what wins awards for popularity will of necessity be fiction of the lowest common denominator. The surprising thing, from this point of view, is that Barry B. Longyear is not as bad a writer as one expects him to be.

Running away to the circus doesn't have the attraction it once did, maybe because there are fewer of them, or because they prove less popular for any number of reasons. Nevertheless, there's a nostalgic spangled child's dream in there somewhere, and what better admixture to update it than a circus in science fiction? Circus World collects together the "Momus" short stories, which first appeared in Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine. At least two of them -- "The Tryouts" and "The Second Law" — have the true ring of inventive light comedy: a civilisation based on circus tradition (in which, when one owes an apology, one pays cash) can make militarism and armed diplomacy the butt of ridicule. It's an anarchist stance, clever "aliens" against dumb humans; a reversal of Eric Frank Russell, or Keith Laumer's "Retief" stories. The "Momus" stories have the humour of incongruity, of absurdity.

To call it a branch of children's literature is not new; but then it need not necessarily be insulting either. Many kinds of Fantastic Literature are condemned to the children's shelves, one suspects because the critics don't know what else to do with them. On the other hand, to call it children's literature can imply limitations; and towards the end of Circus World these limitations begin to show.

An attraction of the circus is to some degree that of the elite group: it has its own customs, language and in-jokes. One is not altogether surprised, therefore, that it should find itself in genre SF. Nor is Longyear averse to commenting within the stories. "The old storyteller... brought a new kind of tale to the fires along the road from Kuumic to Tarzak. He spoke his tales of space, strange beings and high adventure, and all listened in wonder. Few appreciated his tales at the beginning, but soon a following began to grow — small, but enough to keep the old fellow in coppers." Intendedly humourous, it has an undertone of self-congratulatory smugness; it is addressed to a genre audience.

A further limitation is that of light comedy: Momus's absurdity is set against a darker reality. "Great powers usually find someone else's backyard in which to wage their wars... The troops move in, those paper credits start flying around, the economy gets a sharp increase in wages and sales, and the next thing you know the bases are ringed with whorehouses, drug-parlors, and clip-joints... Then the military steps in and sets up a government." Momus escapes on a legal or diplomatic technicality. In the later stories, militarism is more pronounced. Deaths happen: either off-stage, awkwardly, or else on-stage with a good deal of uncomfortable senti-

mentalism. (The two alternatives to opt for are realism or black comedy, and Circus World achieves neither.) The army and the circus have aspects in common; once again, they are elite groups, struggling against great odds in a hostile world. Like many of the themes of genre SF, it's tailor-made for the wish-fulfillment of power-fantasies.

This is seen more clearly in Manifest Destiny. This, however, is truly remarkable in its ability to run with the hare as well as the hounds. The militarist and the pacifist could both read this collection of stories, and finish without concluding that their principles had been subverted. That in itself is a remarkable achievement. If it can have multiple readings, that is not a condemnation; complexity of meaning is a mark of good art. What can be condemned is fiction masquerading as subversion purely for the sake of popularity. The conclusions of Longyear's stories, no matter that they travel by a liberal path, arrive at the same old safe conservative values.

Manifest Destiny, attempting action narratives on a serious level, brings out the weaknesses implicit in Circus World: sentimentality, cartoon characterisation, shallow insight, and glorification of war. There are a number of green jungles here, and a number of gooks — I use the term advisedly, since whatever planet and whatever alien race is portrayed it has that echo of Vietnam. The narratives are often first person, the "ordinary young man" (of whatever species) passing from naivety to supposed maturity. Without any apparent sense of contradiction, "The Jaren" presents the preparations for combat as the apotheosis of glorious male comradeship, fighting as glorious, and its glorious result as genocide and racial suicide. "USE Force" is a Heinlein-cum-Haldeman celebration of army training — what one might call "strength through sadism". Regarding sexism, one notes without surprise that it is present ("Males in this race are determined by conquest. Females are determined by being dominated" — "Savage

Planet"), since sexism and militarism go hand-in-hand — or would do, if they didn't suspect such a posture as effeminate.

Which brings us to the award-winning short story, "Enemy Mine", in which (to briefly summarise) a human and an alien soldier are stranded on an inhospitable planet during their fight-to-the-finish, gradually become allies and friends, and when the alien dies in parthogenetic childbirth the Earthman brings up and eventually returns to its homeworld the alien's child. If that is read substituting "woman" for "alien", one might have a feminist story. Or, if the alien is regarded as male — and Longyear refers to the alien as "he" — then "Enemy Mine" is a story of homosexual marriage, complete with child-rearing and a happy ending. Or, to read it as one suspects the majority do (although in this case the alien should be an "it"), it's a happy story of tolerance and love extended by professional soldiers to alien species. It supports conservative tradition by its portrayal of the alien warrior family. It supports liberal tradition, having a soldier-turned-peacenik persecuted because he has learned to hate war. It reassures principles and prejudices, whatever they happen to be. But at base it has the same old platitudes. Good wins. All soldiers are killers with hearts of gold. Genocide is an acceptable subject for fiction. Women can be safely ignored. The cavalry will always come over the hill in time...

To go from the morally dubious to the technically appalling brings us to Elephant Song. As other critics have already pointed out, its premise is nothing short of ludicrous. About the last thing a crashlanded circus crew would do on a virgin planet is build roads across the damn thing. Plant, sow, reap, and mow, possibly — but to begin by building roads? (This leaves aside such considerations as half the crew, to judge by the birth-rate after the crash, being in the last stages of pregnancy.) By no standard is this novel credible. It may be that it is a poetic symbol. in which case one would like to see the expiry date on the author's poetic licence. But what it is, in fact, is nothing more than a long "practical justification" for the existence of Momus. Applying such plodding realism to so insubstantial a conceit has the result one might expect — Elephant Song nose-dives into non-existent characterisation, a heavy dose of technological incredibility, and a complete absence of emotional involvement. There is little that qualifies it as a novel: it's more a succession of semi-connected episodes that finally cease, one feels, only because it had to stop somewhere. It may be that it was written purely for Momus fans. However, Momus is best (like the foundations of much comedy) when it is left unexplained. As they say: the cobbler should stick to his last. And if Elephant Song is the last load of old cobblers about Momus, I for one will be profoundly grateful.

None of this is incompatible with the tradition of the circus, taking it to be that Roman circus which featured bloodshed, entertainment, and (one imagines, life being what it is) boredom in about equal parts. To take the analogy a stage further: bread and circuses are generally provided for just one reason — keeping the people contented, off the streets, and quiet. Which leads us to fiction for reassurance. One of the best ways of keeping people out of politics (in the widest sense) is to give them a false idea of how politics works.

In Manifest Destiny the pax Americana is alive and well, even if there's a change from "the Manifest Destiny of Man, that He shall reign supreme in this and in any and all other galaxies of the Universe" to the "Manifest Destiny of Intelligent Life, that it shall be self-determined and free from either the coercion of its own kind, or from any other kind of life". From the stories, one can only conclude that the latter is a liberal ideal and the former a political reality. Longyear's technique is to present independence sheltering under the strong arm of military superiority. His "Ninth and Tenth Quadrants" fight over the division of non-technological jungle planets, a political allusion not entirely restricted to the USA and USSR and the Third World. Ashly Allenby's diplomatic service has (as had Retief before him) a strong satirical flavour of the late British Empire.

At the risk of taking humour too seriously, it's possible to see Longyear's limitations in his technique for creating sympathy. It happens by one of two devices. Firstly, sympathy for the underdog: the people of Momus are small, and ridiculous, but nevertheless successfully defy the massed ranks of Authority. Secondly, sympathy for the misguided: Longyear's military men are a conscience-stricken lot, always willing to be reformed from their morally indefensible profession. (Or else they're mindless sadists, and one can, equally mindlessly, approve of their destruction.) As techniques for comedy, they work; but as techniques for "realism", for fiction that purports to deal with "real problems", they have the defect of all fiction written for reassurance: they promise easy answers.

Easy answers: power can be best achieved through power-fantasy rather than by action. (This is not to say that all power-fantasy is at all times useless or actively harmful, only that unexamined power-fantasy is liable to be just that. Wish-fulfillment is only dangerous when someone else's wishes are in control.) Easy answers: human suffering can be cured by technological civilisations. Easy answers: politics is the business of politicians. Or diplomats. Or the military. (No mention of big business?) In fact, it is the responsibility of anyone except the reader...

But there are answers, even if they are not easy..

Nor is it (which would also be too easy an answer) that there is some great paranoid conspiracy. Reassurance-fiction is not a deliberate provision; like bread and circuses, it flourishes when the time is congenial to it. Circus World, Manifest Destiny and Elephant Song flourish. But, to take a last look at the historical parallel, circuses never flourish so well as in a time when there is distinct difficulty in providing bread.

Ray Bradbury — THE MACHINERIES OF JOY (Bantam, 245pp, $2·75)

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

Certain writers have to be read by a certain age or else the magic goes. John Fowles's The Magus is ecstasy at 17, Albert Camus is God at 19... I was hooked on Bradbury at 12; he was the first writer I read because of his name rather than because I liked the jacket cover. I wallowed in the fated autumnal half-light of his stories; he described a world that managed to feel both more real yet more mysterious than this one. Every sunset was potentially the end of the world,

every night-time creak was a Martian in the house...

Even then I thought The Machineries Of Joy was pretty wretched. I didn't know, then, that the stories were written in the early sixties, when people were acclaiming Bradbury as a poet and he was beginning to believe them; I just thought that they were overwritten and pointless. They disappointed me then, they annoy me now. They're not as bad as some of his more recent work or, heaven forbid, his "poems", but they're neither fish nor fowl: in this volume, Bradbury can't decide whether his master is Joyce or Hemingway. In places his writing verges on self-parody, one minute writing nothing but five-word sentences but then coming up with such monstrosities as: "It was a day compounded from silences of bee and flower and ocean and land, which were not silences at all, but motions, stirs, flutters, risings, fallings, each in its own time and matchless rhythm".

Early Bradbury stories, such as "The Playground" and "The Million-Year Picnic", remain firmly lodged in my memory after a dozen years. The stories in this collection have slipped away already despite the re-reading. Enough said? I think so.

Gene Wolfe — THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS (Arrow, 192pp, £1·50)

Reviewed by Chris Bailey

The Wolfe character inhabits a solipsistic universe. Given the slightest opportunity, he (always he) retreats into self-absorption, and while life carries on and may provide him with the stimuli for change, the grave narration continues, unruffled, unless it is to suggest a placid wonderment that change should be required. Always on the inside, and looking both inwards and outwards with equanimity, man is an island (as in the "Doctor/Island/Death" stories, an outlook which is explained by and goes towards explaining Wolfe's frequent use of children in his narratives.

Wolfe's children, like Hardy's Father Time or Dickens's Paul Dombey, are born adults, with adult reactions to the world and to themselves, except in two vital respects; they have the child's fascination with the commonplace coupled with its unblinking acceptance of the bizarre, and they have the child's self-centredness, and these are qualities that they retain in later life. To Severian, the chamber of horrors he inhabits is unexceptional, an everyday world of "clients"; in the title story of the present volume, the unnamed adolescent narrator is bored with being taken to the child-slave market, uncurious at the operations of his father's bordello (not the House Azure, but neither is it far away), and curious rather than outraged at the way he father keeps putting him to sleep for months on end to experiment with him. As the cruelty and the sickness around it grow, the voice maintains its matter-of-fact tone. Eventually the narrator kills his father, not in anger and not with remorse, but as the result of a logical necessity. In the context of what has gone before, this is made to seem very reasonable; the intensity of Wolfe's involuted world requires that the reader must make a major effort to sit back and regard it objectively. The narrator has already killed once before, a six-limbed slave ("on his back and grinning, with his legs and all four arms raised like a dead spider's"), and it is a moment of acute self-discovery; not so much of psychological awareness but of physical identity: "While I was stabbing the slave, my face was very near his and I saw my own face reflected and doubled in the corneas of his eyes, and it seemed to me that it was a face very like his". "The Fifth Head Of Cerberus" is the ultimate cloning story, not in any superficial "Gosh, they're all the same!" sense, but in the way that it probes the ultimate horror of identical identities.

Identity is also the theme of the other two pieces in this volume of three linked novellas (first published in 1973). The links are in common themes, the three stories weaving a strange and richly suggestive pattern; in a very few common characters and cross-references to people already known; and in the common setting of the three on the colonised twin planet system of Sainte Croix and Sainte Anne. Regarding this last point, a more untypical space-colonial ethos could scarcely be imagined, for Wolfe has taken the flavour not of the usual British or American imperialism but of French colonial Africa, a steamy world of corruption and indifference. "'A Story', by John V. Marsch" and "V.R.T." are not as intensely weird and horrifying as "The Fifth Head Of Cerberus"; rather, they amplify and commentate on that first piece. "'A Story'" is anthropological myth-making, with a rattling narrative and a physical immediacy that help carry one over the deliberately outrageous deus ex machina at the end. The theme of identity comes in with the arrival of the first human colonists — are they subsumed by the shape-shifting natives of the planet? If so, then another layer of meaning is added to "The Fifth Head Of Cerberus", for all the characters therein would be in essence despised "abos". (This is the "Hypothesis" of the grotesque Dr. Veil. I was trying to remember where I had seen that name before, and eventually it came — Titus Alone. The tone is not dissimilar.) "V.R.T." is perhaps not entirely successful, concerning the researches of John Marsch — the one character common to all three novellas — into the grounds of his "Story" and leading us through to the events of "Cerberus". It is a complex piece, though, weaving several narratives at once, and may require more than one reading for its concerns to become evident. Certain recurrent interests of Wolfe's are apparent; the musings of the imprisoned man, the investigation of identity, the voyage of discovery through strange lands.

Publishers are prone to dragging skeletons from dusty cupboards when an author hits the big time, but in the present instance there is certainly nothing for Arrow or Gene Wolfe to be ashamed of. If, like me, you have not been quite as unreserved in your reactions to The Book Of The New Sun as you have been told you should be, then I strongly recommend that you try The Fifth Head Of Cerberus; you will then return to the tetralogy with an enhanced appreciation of Wolfe's writing.

John Sladek — RODERICK AT RANDOM (Granada, 317pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Dave Langford

By now you really should have read this, and the review is mere formality. The conclusion of Sladek's superb satire suffers slightly from the delay since Roderick; his writing is as fine and as witty as ever, but that first surge of fresh-

ness which carried us through Book One seems to have slackened a little. Roderick the robot Candide has grown up, passes for human, and still wanders bemused through an all too familiar world whose humans seem far more "programmed" than himself (in clever Sladekian shorthand, one character's sex fantasies can only be triggered by upside-down words on a calculator display); the ending is as blackly witty as anything Sladek's done, with our hero becoming the acknowledged symbol of "Man Confronting The Universe", having earnt the position by rejecting the world. (Echoes here of Swift's final disgust with humanity in the uneasy conclusion of Gulliver's Travels.) En route there are high spots like the outrageous frame for a Chapter One summary of Roderick, the secrets of robotic orgasm via naughty truth tables and subsequent triste, the clever musings on artificial intelligence and its consequences, further eccentric characters such as the cyborg assassin whose hire-purchased body modifications are unfortunately repossessed; and much more. But the nifty prose and constant wit can't entirely hide some rather routine targets of satire: murderously rapacious businessmen, yet more nut cults, monstrous governmental think-tanks, the appalling world of publishing hype: "a simple boy and girl story...boy meets girl, girl goes blind and boy leaves her, he goes back but it's too late, she's already committed suicide. (That was the uptown version, we also mapped out a downtown version where the girl gets eaten by her seeing-eye dog.) ...six-figure plus percentage movie deal...seven-figure paperback deal...we finally hire an author to hammer out the screenplay and book, the fictionalisation. We paid him I think two grand and no comebacks." Yes, yes, yes, but in a world where publishers feel it necessary and desireable to commission prose fictionalisations of The Old Curiosity Shop or Campbell's "Who Goes There?", all this is hardly more than a truism. Probably, for all its excellences, Roderick At Random is overlong for its content; I'm only glad I don't have the job of trimming it. Recommended nonetheless, especially to poor benighted Americans who bought Volume Two of the idiotically redivided Timescape edition and discovered themselves only two-thirds of the way through the story.

Jack Dann & Gardner Dozois (ed.) — UNICORNS! (Ace, 306pp, $2.75)

Reviewed by Nick Lowe

Unicorns get right up my nose. I've read too much crud fantasy, and wandered disconsolate through too many convention artshows, not to feel that anyone who can wax gooey over some wimpy padnag with a stupid great barber's pole sticking out its prefrontal wants their head urgently rewiring. This collection is obviously aimed at those who feel differently, and no doubt they will lap it up. It has all the best-loved unicorn stories, a couple of new pieces, and a handy bibliography of yet more stories for the true obsessive. And look at all those famous names! Sturgeon, de Camp, Niven, Ellison, Le Guin, Zelazny, Wolfe. Who could doubt that these awesome artists of the imagination have felt their noble souls touched by the unicorn's timeless magic? Why else is the unicorn such a pervasive fixation of folklore, art, fantasy writers and fantasy readers?

But really, there's no great mystery. Folklore, because the bestiary form encouraged the accumulation of an elaborate corpus of beast-lore in a widespread literary tradition, often ascribed to impeccable authority, and the unicorn "myth" is anything but unique, as T. H. White's piece in this anthology wittily demonstrates in an erudite throwaway paragraph. Art, because heraldic designers were desperate for impressive-looking animals and had recourse to all kinds of invented composites; unicorns were eagerly adopted because they were little harder to draw than horses, unlike more exotic (and short-lived) heraldic coinages like the alphyn, opinicus, or calygreyhound. The pervasiveness of animal symbolism in renaissance art ensured the unicorn a modest subsequent career in cameo appearances.

Fantasy writers are another matter. Unicorns, quite simply, are a prefab image, a venerable cliche that saves having to think — like desert island cartoons, flat-sharing sitcoms, or Garden of Eden short-shorts. A unicorn story is already three-quarters written before you shove the paper in the typewriter. Little imagination is demanded: a bit of purple writing when the wretched beast makes its entrance, a snappy new twist on the innocence theme. Mercifully, Dann and Dozois have kept to a minimum the slick 500-worders existing solely to tag a notionally unexpected ending on to the basic virgin's-lap scenario; mercilessly, they haven't kept them out altogether. (Dozois's own "The Sacrifice" is predictable from the second paragraph, and even so he muffs it with an anatomically unintelligible last line.) Fantasy writing today is amazingly bad at dreaming up really new, bold, original images, and as a genre has practically ceased to exist — unless one's prepared to admit feeble minor variations on tired old motifs as somehow worthy of the label "imaginative literature".

As for the readers, I don't know why they put up with it. I certainly can't. I can only note that unicorn fetishism seems an exclusively female disorder, and may well correlate with the pubescent infatuation of many of that gender with all things equine, a marvellous mystery to their brothers. If you study the epithets most frequently attached to unicorns (and I've attempted a simple statistical test using the stories in this volme), you find they're transcendental reifications of the familiar Pullein-Thompson qualities of high-grade horsiness: beauty, nobility, swiftness, majesty, intelligence, but felt in often mystical degree. Sublimated sexuality projected onto the ideal of virginity? The big white lover, silent yet sentient, tamed to your hand alone, whose mighty body bears you a wild, dizzy journey that outraces the wind and leaves you gaspingly, gloriously satisfied? I'd rather not think.

Many of the stories in Unicorns! are familiar — Sturgeon's "The Silken-Swift" (here curiously editorialised out of its hyphen), Niven's "Flight Of The Horse", Ellison's "On The Downhill Side", Swann's "Night Of The Unicorn", the unicorn episode from White. Nearly all are recent — half date from the last five years, reflecting the boom in cliche fantasy. Of the three pre-seventies pieces, only the White ages well. The Sturgeon still gets away with a lot, but some of its less happy lushnesses are now a bit painful, while Frank Owen's "The Unicorn" (an old Weird Tales exhumation) is one fumbling embarrassment.

The remainder range from the indifferent to the infuriating. Avram Davidson's essay "The

Spoor Of The Unicorn" affects a rambling, contrary discursiveness, in which the article's slender content gets utterly lost in the author's booming laughter at his own hilarious whimsy. Apparently it's part of a series, as is de Camp's "Eudoric's Unicorn", an equally leaden and protracted non-joke. Much the funniest item is Stephen Donaldson's "Mythological Beast", in which the author demonstrates the subtlety of thought, artful plotting, and almost symphonic ear for language that have won him the love and respect of readers the world over. This astonishing tour de farce about a man turning into a unicorn in a very boring, controlled society is the sort of inadvertant comedy slush-pile readers heartlessly call everyone else into the office to hear. Grown men will weep at the scene where the hero takes the Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology out of the library. I've read better stories than this in Indogermanische Forschungen.

Wolfe and Zelazny are, as usual, not at their best, though the latter's lightweight Hugo-nabber "Unicorn Variations" is amusing enough at a first encounter. (Wolfe offers "The Woman The Unicorn Loved", a routine plodder about a genetically engineered mythical beast.) Le Guin, rather to my surprise, is "The White Donkey", a tiny, touching vignette of Hindu village life, by E.T. out of Victor Zorza, and it's only a shame she had to use a unicorn at all to thump home the point. McIntyre's "Elfleda" has an intriguing group copulation with centaurs, but otherwise offers little; Eric Norden's "The Final Quarry" is a dreadful thing about travesties of Englishmen hunting the last unicorn in a travestied Greece (all moussaka and ouzo); and Bev Evans "The Forsaken", the only story previously unpublished, is a disappointing mock-Celtic exercise that breaks no new ground and gets a bit strained towards the end.

Dann and Dozois have clearly tried to assemble the best unicorn stories about, and I suppose in that much they've succeeded. The editorial matter (introductions to each author and story) is excessive and rather irritating in degree as well as quantity. I counted 49 superlatives in the introductions to the stories; de Camp, Sturgeon and Wolfe are all "seminal", Le Guin is "one of the major figures of our times", and Ellison is "one of the most acclaimed and controversial figures in modern letters". This is a small annoyance only; what matters is the quality of the stories. But with only one good piece that isn't already widely known, one can't but feel that excellence is not a quality to which the purchasers of this volume are intended to pay much regard. Who, after all, would snap up an anthology called Rhinos! or Narwhals!?

Okay, okay. Rhetorical question. Forget I asked.

Robie Macauley — A SECRET HISTORY OF TIME TO COME (Corgi, 219pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Roelof Goudriaan

Robie Macauley, we are told, is no neophyte. Author of both criticism and fiction, published in such works as The Best American Short Stories, winner of literary awards, and for no less than 12 years fiction editor of Playboy. The packaging of this novel led me to expect a witty, perceptive send-up — and, indeed, it begins promisingly:

> "Day of portents, day when the skin crawls suddenly, day of soundless thunder enough to deafen you, the day when Caesar's statue in the forum begins to bleed mysteriously. This is a personal record, note-in-a-bottle, one fingerprint of my own left on Earth -- and so I go back to that day when it all began to happen."

If this isn't satire, or my beloved sarcasm, then what is?

But Macauley is serious, and as straightforward as crows fly; the result is a run-of-the-mill post-holocaust story. The adventurers, hunters and free spirits roam the woods of the USA on horseback, eyed suspiciously from behind the fences of isolated villages. Behind the next tree, they can expect to find the whole Sioux nation...well, at least bands of outlaws and slave-drivers.

To be honest, the entire book is not written in as ghastly a style as the opening paragraph, and some of the action scenes are quite gripping. But Macauley's insistent attempts to write "science fiction" elements into his narrative is the most annoying: the continuous gasps of amazement at the miracles of our civilisation, like freeways, car wrecks and automatic rifles.

A Secret History Of Time To Come is a perfectly readable book. It's just that others have so much more to offer.

George Turner — VANEGLORY (Sphere, 320pp, £2·25)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

The problem with sequels to successful novels is that they are often unplanned and unfocussed; having said everything they thought they had to say the first time around, the authors then find themselves at something of a loose end when they are called upon to develop their ideas further. Not that I suspect George Turner of having written Vaneglory simply as a result of commercial pressure — Beloved Son was hardly a runaway best-seller, after all, and he is in any case too conscientous a craftsman merely to write a book for the money — but there's nevertheless something naggingly contrived about it. Its rationale, plot and settings never quite ring true, and at the last it simply repeats its predecessor's theme almost word-for-word: the power inherent in control of genetic engineering is such as to completely corrupt whoever possesses it.

The plot, like that of Beloved Son, is too complex to summarise in detail. The book opens in Glasgow in 1992, on the verge of the world-wide disaster referred to in the former novel, with much cryptic dialogue and apparently aimless toing-and-froing after an amnesiac individual named Will Santley. As the bombs begin to drop, the Australian government steps in to rescue him and his ill-matched companions, then shoots half of them and sticks them in suspended animation in an underground laboratory until 2037, when the story resumes with their revival. There is yet more toing-and-froing as everyone tries to find out who they are and what was so important about them, as rival bureaucratic power-blocs contend for their secrets, and as one of the principal officials of Melbourne's 2037 "Ethical Culture" is unmasked as one of Santley's companions-who-got-away (by which time Santley himself has ceased to be of any real interest to anyone, including the author — he spends a good half of the novel drugged and off-

stage, and is only brought on again at the end so that he can be disposed of). Then it's hell-for-leather for Glasgow again, this time to make contact with the self-styled "Children of Time", a group of naturally-occurring freaks, perpetually youthful and apparently immortal, who (individually and collectively) have been present at most of the major events of world history and have attempted to influence same to their own ends (at which point my credulity broke down completely, since what Turner is offering here is, in effect, another tired rehash of the Conspiracy Theory of History — which anyone who knows anything about history knows is absolute rubbish). After several shootings and betrayals, the World Security Council steps in to resolve the situation by removing twelve of the Children for intensive study and neutron-bombing the rest. End of book.

The basic problem with all this, as hinted at earlier, is that it has no depth to it, none of the weight and texture its scenes and settings need to make them real. Part of the problem seems to be that, too often, Turner resorts to telling us rather than showing us, with the result that we can never really empathise with what is going on, much less why; and this is compounded by the fact that certain key events happen offstage, so that as the plot proceeds we're left wondering why it's taken the turn it has. Another factor is the apparent imbalance between dialogue and narrative description: there's too little of the latter and too much of the former, with everyone talking nineteen to the dozen in a manner so similar that (save for Donald and his atrocious Glasgow accent) they can hardly be told apart, with the result that we can neither readily comprehend their motives nor derive an adequate mental picture of the world through which they move. Turner skimps on the essentials, in other words, and Vaneglory is the poorer for it.

Michael Bishop — BLOODED ON ARACHNE (Timescape, 305pp, $3·50)

Reviewed by Pascal Thomas

The giant spiders of the title story are probably the tamest of the aliens presented here — so far as the imagination is concerned. Most of the stories in this collection feature aliens of some kind, even some which, in "The White Otters Of Childhood", have evolved from the human race. Communication with them is usually hard to establish, if not impossible, and the best the human protagonist can hope for is to find some peace with himself as a result of his attempts, frustrating though they may be. In "The House Of Compassionate Sharers", such people have become therapists.

Even when he uses fairly cliched or camp situations — the flying spiders of "Blooded On Arachne" or the garden planted with humanoids in "Effigies" — Bishop remains a subtle writer, whose characters are wont to engage in moody reminiscences. Their fate is generally not that rosy, fight though they may; often, as in the excellent "The White Otters Of Childhood", their only hope is for a bitter revenge. Bishop says of the story in his introduction that it is "the nearest thing to a headlong melodrama I have ever written" — and I would still call that a pretty long shot.

There are some weak stories in here. One cheap joke, "Rogue Tomato" (Bishop is capable of much more devastating humour), and one overblown fairy tale, "In Chinistrex Fortranza The People Are Machines", but neither is really boring. And, to my mind, such earlier pieces as "Pinon Fall" and "Spacemen And Gypsies" hold up quite well.

"On The Street Of Serpents" may be the only story in the book without an alien (although with some mighty strange human specimens in it), but this does not prevent it from packing in a good deal of suspense and local colour — it's pleasant to walk the streets of Seville with Bishop, and maybe it is because he has spent so long outside the USA that he can and will portray all those aliens. In this he can be compared with Benford and Watson; the experience of other cultures, beyond giving verisimilitude to the scenes set in foreign countries (a detail to which I can be quite sensitive!), gives their paper universes more depth and variety.

One may get tired of inscrutable aliens; if so, take this collection in small bites (and perhaps it will relieve the indigestions caused by the overlong novels to which Bishop has, unfortunately, lately succumbed).

James Blish — AND ALL THE STARS A STAGE (Avon, 189pp, $2·25)

Reviewed by John Hobson

No doubt originally written to pay the rent, why this rather inept work has been reprinted since is only understandable when one remembers that Blish is a Big Name Writer and, even better, a HUGO WINNER. Only an industry so steeped in regurgitating a golden past which was tarnished and threadbare even at its inception would still print and promote orphans like All The Stars A Stage.

Those interested in it may care to know that the Earth is about to die and the chosen few in their connestoga wagons are heading out to them thar stars to seed the Universe. Will our heroes find another planet before the Grim Reaper finds them, will the local fauna provide a red carpet or a bloodbath, will we all go gaga before page 189? Despite all his sterling work in reviewing SF, Blish seemed as unable as his peers to escape from the usual morass of cliches, apart from one flash of inspiration: thanks to birth control and a shortage of females, Earth has become a matriarchal society, so one could expect a certain frisson when the dominant sex has to treat the males as equals aboard the spaceships. Blish sidesteps this problem nicely: "Aboard the Javelin the males were rising ineluctably into the ascendancy".

Nothing dates as badly as sexism, and Blish's reactionary views of women will ensure that he never makes the Virago lists. Unfortunately, his failings don't stop at sex roles; his grasp of economics is non-existent, he drops the all-too-common racial clanger by having the baddie inhabitants of one planet black, and in a sad attempt to impress he peppers the novel with direct cribs from astronomy texts about the formation of the planets.

Written in haste with one eye on the cent-per-word rate, its style is redolent of those children's essays in which time passes somewhat abruptly. Halfway down one page, we come across the line: "Staring into the plotting tank five years later...", and the descriptive qualities of this prose are matched by transparent characters, stunted themes and unexplored ideas as Blish subordinates everything to genre demands for action and wonderment.

Ian Watson — DEATHHUNTER (Corgi, 173pp, £1·50)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

Ian Watson's voyages into cerebrum-hurting metaphysics tend to scare off SF readers; as a result, some of his Granada paperback editions were recently sold as remainders. Until a short time ago I too fell into the "intimidated" category; but there is decidedly more thought, innovation and wit in his books than a bookshelf full of top-selling SF.

Deathhunter, whilst impressive enough, is more so when read twice, for the second time around you're privy to the neat twist ending that endows the early chapters with a deeper import.

The scene is set at a leisurely but never glagging pace. Possessing a rather contrived name, Jim Todhunter has been reassigned from his death researches in the city to the House of Death at Egremont, a community which was happily adjusted. (Adjusted to what? you may well ask; but this is merely the first of many hooks, compulsive enough to keep you going.) At first sight this community appears to be a kind of utopia. The buildings are pyramids; there is a great deal of symbolism, which is never heavy-handed — for example, in dream analysis pyramids may have sexual connotations; to say more would be to give too much away. Very soon, we begin to suspect that the society depicted is a fragile one...

Under the tutelage of an atrocious poet named Norman Harper, people have come to accomodate death in their lives. Fantasies of the soul, of afterlife and reincarnation are virtually taboo; metempsychosis does not exist even as a theory; death is acknowledged to be The End. Once this philosophy is grasped, death can be welcomed rather than feared or held in awe. Euthanasia is enforced at age 60 — or earlier, depending on the volunteer. Valid criticism is raised against armaments: nations thrived on war and the survivors were heroes, having magically cheated or defeated death with a capital "D". Now, the age of the Good Death has dawned; violent deaths are almost non-existent and the newsscreens never cover the rare occasions that violence occurs; the populace is cushioned. To believe that one individual could restructure a whole society, let alone along the shake-hands-with-Death lines, is not easy to credit. But suspend that disbelief and read on.

On the day of Harper's "retirement", when he was due to be guided to Death, he was assassinated. The murder is graphic and believable; worse, it is televised, a riveting tableau, and numbness pervades the shocked onlookers. The murderer, Nathan Weinberger, must adjust before appearing on television to sooth the upset viewers; then he must be guided to a Good Death, for public consumption. Todhunter is to be his guide, guides being needed to provide "Death therapy tailored to suit the clients", to bring them to right frame of mind to face oblivion.

Todhunter begins to detect something amiss underlying the atmosphere within the House of Death. Resnick, the Master of the House, and his secretary, Alice, are apparently conspiring against for unknown motives. Weinberger is a retired death guide who believes that Death feeds off the souls of easy deaths, the guided ones, whilst only the accidental, quick dead escape Death's clutches; in his view, then, he had saved Harper. He is of course disbelieved, for if he could provide any proof of an afterlife it would throw the adjusted society into chaos.

According to Weinberger, Death is called to the dying soul by means of "corpse-sweat", a psychochemical, a pheromone of death. Here, auctorial imposition rings false: as these guides would be trained in psychology, they would be aware of attractants from behavioural studies, so it would not be necessary for Weinberger to deliver an exposition on pheromones to Todhunter (for, of course, the benefit of the unenlightened readers). Still, the idea is intriguing. Corpse-sweat is released by the dying body and the dying mind; Death is thus "the soul-vulture", conjuring up many Bosch-like images. And Weinberger is intent on building a cage for Death, with the pheromone as bait. Todhunter does not wish to resist Weinberger's illusions lest he alienate him; best to play along, to build the damned cage for Death. An ugly fascination with the project grips him: "It was the direct opposite of everything the Houses stood for" — a portentous observation, indeed.

Word-play, jokes and wit figure in just the right measure. I enjoyed the computer search for a death pheromone resulting in equivocal computer graffiti, and the quip about working on the astral plane: "That was grounded years ago". Other ingredients include death symbolism with psychological ramifications and a plea against vivisection.

So Weinberger lapses into a death-trance, followed by the materialisation of the "red thing", a bat-moth. For Todhunter, seeing is believing; he is convinced he did not hallucinate. Against all advice, he joins Weinberger and both lapse into a death-trance with the aid of a hypnotape. Experiencing the "oceanic unity state", there are out of body, incorporeal, and chase after the Death-creature.

Watson has done his homework, consciously or unconsciously employing symbolism from dream-analysis, which can be interpreted here as symptoms of the unwell unconscious or even of non-consensual perception of the real universe. Creatures flying may point to Death, or the realm of angels and ghosts. Creatures that crawl being transformed into creatures that fly

may indicate the moment of death, when the body is transformed into a free-flying spirit. As Weinberger and Todhunter fly after the red thing, they pass through griseous mist: disappearing into the fog could point to Death. And so it does. It is interesting, also, that the red thing should half-resemble a moth: the butterfly of the night, the dark, sinister aspect of the psyche.

Within the fog, they encounter floating crystals, imagination-worlds, with other bat-moths carrying wriggling, worm-like things to deposit each in "some crystal to ferment it into an intoxicating, toxic world which they would sip on like wine, growing drunk on the soul's dreams". If you've read "My Soul Swims In A Goldfish Bowl" (in The Very Slow Time Machine), you'll recognise the worm-like souls before they are identified; but the nightmare imagery is very effective. Weinberger and Todhunter become entrapped, but are abruptly pulled out of their trance by Resnick.

Ironically, Todhunter now feels caged by the House. Suspicions deepen about a conspiracy to deny the truth about Death, about death-sweat; death was not oblivion at all... He and Weinberger break out of the House, using the latter's gun, and run to the forest, seeking succour from reality, a return to the womb. There, they travel out of body again; and there is a sense of deja vu about the occasion, a faint impression reminiscent of the end-sequence of 2001. But the other imagery is stronger; I shall not forget in a hurry the Death-creatures' aviary.

The Truth about death is now presented to the two men, both of whom are convinced by it; I had misgivings about their too-easy acceptance. Within Death's demesne, would you believe everything the imbibing Death Angel tells you? But don't stop to quibble for, shortly afterwards, two dramatic and startling — yet fitting — twists bring this remarkable excursion to a close. I didn't like the sudden switch from Todhunter's viewpoint to Weinberger's, but it would be difficult to conceive how else certain information could have been imparted.

Deathhunter is a fast-paced, fascinating book; Watson has more depth than many of his contemporaries. If you've never tackled him before, then this is a good beginning. The characters may not have great depth — and Watson has cleverly anticipated comments of this sort — but they are nevertheless convincing within the framework of the novel. Its ideas and imagery remain with me long after reading, which must be a good indication.

John Banville — KEPLER (Granada, 187pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

A mischievous thought occurred to me as I was re-reading Kepler: is it science fiction? It is, after all, fiction about science. Indeed, so central is the science that without it there would be no fiction. Yet I cannot see SF fans welcoming it to the hallowed ground of the ghetto. However, no one should miss this book simply because it doesn't fit into some favoured pigeonhole.

Kepler is a book that defies categorisation. It is not, of course, science fiction. In SF, the "science" element provides the setting for the fiction; in Kepler the science forms part of the plot, and even the characterisation. But nor does it conform to the usual pattern of an historical novel. It is, I suppose, a form of fictionalised biography, but though it gives a remarkably vivid portrait of Kepler no one should turn to it expecting to find the facts of his life on neat and unambiguous display.

In fact, the overall success of the book is made up of a host of successes in many different areas. To attempt to pigeonhole it in any way would be impossible. One of the reasons I take such delight in it is that it crosses all borders with such insouciant ease and to such devastating effect. Banville, in other words, has written a fine novel about science, an atmospheric novel about a particularly dramatic period in history, a sharply perceptive novel of character — and they are all together in this one book.

At its heart, of course, is Johannes Kepler. It may seem an easy thing to take a real person and put him in a novel, but many good writers have come a cropper doing just that. The known facts about a person's life and career, the imposed chronology of recorded events, can rob the author of the creative impetus necessary to bring the character to life. It is a measure of Banville's achievement, therefore, that he has not only managed to breathe life into his Kepler but also made him one of the most vivid characters I have encountered in any novel.

Truth to tell, I don't think I would have liked to have known Banville's Kepler: he is sickly, obsessive, self-centred, tactless, weak, obstinate, proud, brilliant; yet he commands our attention and sympathy throughout the book. He feels that anyone who does not support him has betrayed him, yet we are made to feel, too, that he deserved much more support than he got. He has an inflated sense of his own worth, boasting that he will solve the problem of the orbit of Mars in just seven days; yet when, seven years later, he does solve this tricky problem he not only reveals his true genius but also revolutionises our world-view. He is a mass of contradictions, but we are shown how the many facets of his character relate to each other and add up to one all too human man.

Banville has a special ability to create character, and is unstinting with it. Many of the secondary characters are nearly as vivid as Kepler himself: Barbara, his wife, who nags him and has no real comprehension of his work; his infuriating mother, who dabbles in witchcraft; and above all the gross, Falstaffian figure of Tycho Brahe. Nevertheless, it is Kepler himself who holds the book together, and it is through him that Banville manages what I consider to be the most remarkable achievement of the book: he makes clear the nature of Kepler's discoveries and the scale of his achievement, he fits the discoveries into the pattern of contemporary belief, and he conveys the excitement of the discoveries.

Science rarely fares well in the hands of novelists. Theory, and the patient sifting of minutiae that form such an important part of scientific method, do not make for great drama, and on the few occasions when they do appear in fiction they tend to be passed over quickly or else are just plain dull. That is not the case here. My knowledge of and interest in science is virtually non-existent, yet throughout the book I had no difficulty in understanding the development of Kepler's ideas, and found myself as excited as he at each new discovery.

Banville is able to do this because by showing each step in the process in the context of contemporary belief he is able to set up a conflict. Right from the start, we are shown that the impulse driving Kepler to study the stars is

a search for order and harmony in a world and a life that are far from orderly and harmonious. In this Banville recreates with masterly brevity a very convincing picture of daily life in Europe at the time of the Thirty Years War. Kepler's quest for harmony leads him to posit the idea that the intervals between the planets correspond to the sequence of regular shapes — triangle, square, pentagon, and so on. The neatness and elègance of this theory so entrances Kepler that his later and major discovery that the planets follow elliptical rather than circular paths conflicts dramatically with his earlier and favoured belief.

The whole is presented in a rich and pleasing prose that is absolutely littered with fresh and delightful metaphors. There is a studied disregard for chronology, sending the story off on flashback after flashback, and flashbacks within flashbacks, which enable the sense of the character to be conveyed far better than any mere record of events. There are even audacious little stylistic tricks that work surprisingly well, far better than they have any right to. Around the middle of the novel, Banville suddenly presents us with a series of letters from Kepler to a variety of correspondents covering some seven years. Then he balances this with a second series of letters, in reverse chronological order, from Kepler to these same correspondents. In each case it is obvious that Kepler has received a letter in the interim, and the pairs of letters neatly present different sides of his character, byt turns braggadocio and injured pride, confidence and uncertainty, anger and hurt. It is a remarkably effective device.

One other aspect of this diverse and hugely enjoyable novel should not be overlooked: its humour. There is a constant thread of comedy running through the book, in the situations, the characters, the dialogue, and in the occasional joke that Banville slips in. I particularly enjoyed the way, towards the end, he suddenly and very briefly introduces two Scandinavian relatives of Tycho Brahe, "Holger Rosenkrands the statesman's son and the Norwegian Axel Gyldenstjern", who invite Kepler to join them on their mission to England. Perhaps wisely, he declines.

Kepler is a novel that cannot be accurately or conveniently summed up in one slick phrase. But it is a novel that sets out to be many things and succeeds in just about all of them. I hold little hope for anyone who cannot find something to enjoy in it.

Frederik Pohl — THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS (Granada, 318pp, £2·50)
Annette Peltz McComas (ed.) — THE EUREKA YEARS (Bantam, 348pp, $3·50)

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Books about science fiction are all the rage these days; not just encyclopaedias a la Peter Nicholls but chatty memoirs (Asimov) and didactic anthologies (Greenberg et al). These two volumes are fairly typical specimens of this burgeoning sub-genre. The Way The Future Was is a trip down Memory Lane by a distinguished writer and editor, Frederik Pohl, while The Eureka Years is a "celebration" of the early years of F & SF and a belated eulogy for its original editors, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas.

So far as science fiction is concerned, Frederik Polh has done it all. As a writer, he has published over thirty novels and short story collections (both singly and in collaboration); as an editor, he's published a number of anthologies as well as having helmed such prestigious magazines as Galaxy, If and Worlds Of Tomorrow; he's also been a successful agent... The Way The Future Was is his life story to date, plus a potted history of American SF publishing. (He must know where most of the bodies are buried, but he's too much of a gentleman to tell.)

Pohl is no stranger to the "art" or autobiography; he chronicled his younger writing days in The Early Pohl (1976), and he's dropped a few hints elsewhere. But The Way The Future Was (an apposite title, by the way) sets it all down in a linear fashion. It's a delightfully laid-back book, full of witty asides and believe-it-or-not type revelations. We learn, for instance, that Pohl was still a high school student when his first sale (a poem!) was made to Amazing Stories in 1937, and that he was the editor of two SF magazines (Super Science Stories and Astonishing Stories) before he was twenty years old.

Kingsley Amis once hailed Pohl as being "the most consistently able writer science fiction, in the modern sense, has yet produced", an unsolicited testimonial that must have bedevilled its recipient ever since. Nevertheless, Pohl is a writer to be reckoned with, for Man Plus and Gateway rather than Syzygy and Starburst. It's also nice to see him reaffirm his literary debt to Cyril M. Kornbluth (co-author of The Space Merchants and others), without whom he might well have remained a cleverish short story writer of maverick status.

Pohl's private life has been and probably still is no different from that of most people; i.e., electrifyingly ordinary. However, this book is primarily concerned with Pohl the writer rather than with Pohl the pleb; as such, I heartily recommend it.

The Eureka Years (another apposite title, by the way) is subtitled "Boucher and MCcomas's The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction 1949-1954", which just about says it all. Since its inaugural issue (Fall 1949, as The Magazine Of Fantasy), F & SF has been the most reliably literate of all SF magazines. Anthony Boucher (1911-68) and J. (for Jesse) Francis McComas (1910-78) laid down strict editorial guidelines that are still followed today, though perhaps not with the same fanatical fidelity.

Annette Peltz McComas, the widow of J. Francis, has put together a miscellany of short stories, articles, letters, book reviews, etc., from the formative years of the magazine. The Eureka Years is, perforce, a bitsy book; lovers of literary marginalia should have a field day with it, but "normal" readers might be scared away by the plethora of prefaces, introductions, reading lists and other paraphernalia. For sheer diversity, it rivals the lining of a magpie's nest.

The fiction is by most of the Big Names which one usually associates with F & SF, or used to; Bester, Bradbury, Matheson, Sturgeon, et al. However, the editor has an honest attempt to pick relatively unfamiliar stories and, in the main, has succeeded admirably. My favourites are Sturgeon's "The Hurkle Is A Happy Beast", Matheson's "Dress Of White Silk", and Philip K. Dick's "The Little Movement". Also-rans would include "Come On, Wagon!", by Zenna Henderson, and Randall Garrett's wicked verse parody "'I've Got A Little List!'" The only real stinker is

Reginald Bretnor's "Cat", which represents F & SF at its most unbearably twee.

Everything else in the book is non-fiction of one kind or another; letters between the editors and their various contributors (famous and otherwise), original story-blurbs (mostly short and to the point), rejection slips (nice and not-so-nice), and "Recommended Reading" (circa 1953). It all serves to vividly recreate the very special flavour that these two editors generated, which is what Annette Peltz McComas set out to do. A word of warning, though; the so-called "Table of Contents" is cramped, incomplete, and doesn't even indicate page numbers.

The Way The Future Was and The Eureka Years will provide source material aplenty for SF historians — amateur and professional, present-day and yet to come -- as well as excellent reading.

Avram Davidson — COLLECTED FANTASIES (Berkley, 224pp, $2·50)

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

What strikes me most after reading this book is not how good it is but how low the standard of recent short fiction has become in comparison. Taken mostly from the early sixties but including "The Golem" from 1955 and "Manatee Gal Won't You Come Out Tonight?" from 1977, this collection contains Davidson's "wildest, most mischevious stories". And for once the back cover blurb is right: this has to be the best collection of short fiction since Gene Wolfe's The Island Of Doctor Death And Other Stories And Other Stories. Davidson is witty, literate, erudite and original; his stories take place in advertising agencies, cellars, bicycle shops and cobbled streets, in British Hidalgo or the New England of 1816, truly alien ground to most SF writers.

Within the SF field, the only writers that come anywhere near him are Bob Leman and Michael Shea, but they still have quite a way to go; to find a true compatriot one has to move outside the genre, to Thomas Pynchon. Both writers share the magical ability to make an art form out of overwriting, to distort and twist a narrative thread until it is all but obscured by wonderfully improbable background material and then, when subplot and sub-subplot seem to be taking over, bring everything together to leave the reader grinning stupidly like a conjuror's stooge wondering "How did he do that?". Naturally, this might prove too much for some readers and, with the short fiction field these days dominated by the likes of Barry Longyear and Orson Scott Card, I can see that Davidson's work will be a bit too rich and heady for some; but you have to read him slowly and carefully, not race ahead for the almost obligatory twist ending.

But he is fun to read! He is sly and clever and knows that a carefully observed absurdity can bring a scene alive far more successfully than the grimmest realism. Here's a perfect and almost random example:

> "The right side of Bob Rosen's face was going numb. The left side started tingling. He interrupted a little tune he was humming and said, 'Oh, the equation is invariable: on the odd-numbered pages the hero either clonks some bastard bloodily on the noggin with a roscoe, or kicks him in the collions and then clonks him, or else he's engaged — with his shirt off, you're not allowed to say what gives with the pants, which are so much more important: presumably they melt or something — he's engaged, shirtless, in arching his lean and muscular flanks over some bimbo, not the heroine, because these aren't her pages, some other female in whose pelvis he reads strange mysteries...'"

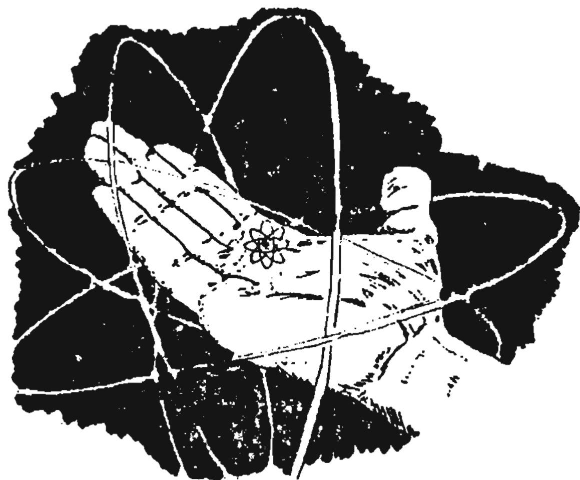
That passage is from "The Sources Of The Nile", first published in 1961, which could be described as a Pynchonesque Paranoid Quest for The Heart Of America if Pynchon himself hadn't written it five years later as The Crying Of Lot 49 (but is it too much to suggest that Pynchon might have read Davidson's story, because how many other American writers have mentioned philatelic forgeries in their works?). Protagonist Bob Rosen, a struggling novelist, tries to sell a radio script to Aunt Carrie's Country Cheese (who believe that the South won the Civil War) but fails, bumps into an old man who knows where all fashions and trends spring from, gets drunk with him, meets T. Pettys Shadwell ("the most despicable of all living men"), argues with his girlfriend Noreen...no, I can't summarise it; I can't even say what it's primarily about. Davidson just doesn't believe in one-note songs.

Elsewhere, in other stories, you can find out where coat-hangers come from, what happens when old films are shown on TV, what happened when the Quaker met the elephant and how two elderly Jews save the world; and much, much more. I could go on, telling you of his verve, his sense of period, his ability to capture the most exotic of atmospheres and his control of language, but a rave is a rave and if I haven't convinced you by now that this book is a must then you're welcome to whatever hack trilogy you're ploughing through at the moment. Just buy a copy of Collected Fantasies, that's all. Give yourself a treat. You probably deserve it.

Isaac Asimov — THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT (Avon, 242pp, $2·95)

Reviewed by Dave Langford

This is Asimov's 15th collection of essays from his F & SF column, comprising 17 pieces from March 1979 to July 1980, volume copyright 1981 by "Nightfall Inc"; this first paperback printing, all 242 pages divided into 8 fairly arbitrary sections of it, has ISBN 0-380-61390-5, measures approximately 174 x 107 x 16 millimetres, costs $2·95 and is dated January 1983. Almost every essay tells you something new or offers an interesting angle on familiar data; but as in the foregoing sentence, there's a dismal tendency to pad out a bright little "Believe It Or Not" insight with variously relevant numbers and facts. Asimov at his worst here bores through a book of international statistics to cull things like tables of the largest cities in the world and the USA to begin with each letter of the alphabet (gee, one feels the frontiers of knowledge expanding). At his best he offers clear and sensible views on nuclear power or the real (likely) reason for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Most pieces fall somewhere in between, covering sunspots, solar neutrinos, "noble" metals, Sirius and companion, astronomical quibbles, the future of the Earth/Moon system, the path from pitchblende to Fat Boy, clones, scientific fraud, longbows, population statistics, co-operation as a Darwinian survival trait... The welter of facts and figures could make this a handy place to check something like solar neutrino flux density when in a hurry, but I can't imagine myself sitting down to re-read the whole stodgy collection.



Peter Pringle & James Spigelman — THE NUCLEAR BARONS
(Sphere, 578pp, £3·50)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

On the eve of the world's first controlled nuclear chain reaction, the Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard believed that "there was very little doubt in my mind that the world was headed for grief". And, in retrospect, as this formidable book testifies most forcefully, grief is in great abundance as a consequence of the nuclear age. Even if lives were to be measured against the propagandised benefits of the atom — such as material gains, clean air, national prosperity, increased per capita wealth, the eradication of disease, continual peace...all resulting from the peaceful atom and the aegis of "deterrence" — the cost seems inordinately high, and the risks seem to be increasing...

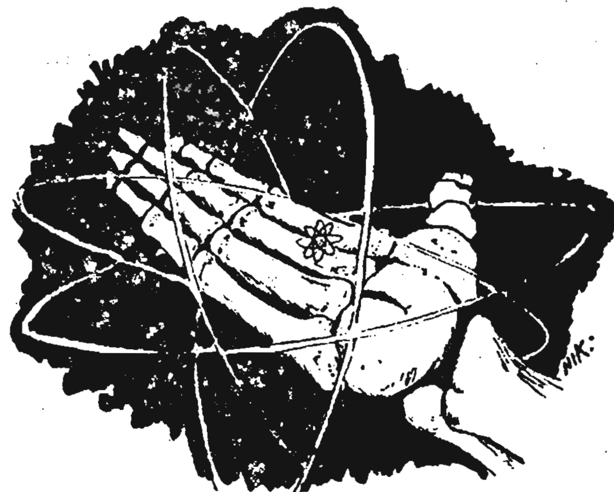
Yet, historically, the atomic bomb was simply an idea whose time had come. German and Russian physicists were aware of the theoretical background and began atomic research; Britain and France felt compelled to emulate them. As early as 1936 Szilard patented ways of making an atomic bomb whilst Lord Rutherford thought the idea of using the power of the atom "the merest moonshine". Influenced by Wells's The World Set Free, Szilard wanted the Allies to create the "impossible" weapon before the Nazis. Hindsight reveals that whilst the danger was potentially there it was not as great as feared: Germany was short of materials.

Distrust engendered by the spectre of fear, an exaggerated fear. The following decade tended to compound the feelings of distrust, and the motivation behind the making of the atomic bomb subtley altered; as Germany lay defeated the programme continued, now more a race to make the bomb before the war ended, to justify the collossal expense rather than to meet a real need. The reasons given were convincing in patriotic times: "to shorten the war with Japan, to save American lives". The decision to drop the bomb was made; to their eternal shame, the scientists neglected to apprise the politicians (whose decision it was) of the long-term radiation dangers, even though they were known. Knowledge of the horrible aftermath, spreading over decades, might have altered the decision, but it was not to be. Though Japan was heading for defeat anyway, Hiroshima and Nagasaki entered the history books. Besides the thousands of Japanese, honesty and trust became casualties of the bomb...

Throughout the book — and thus since the beginning of the short nuclear history it chronicles — several themes keep resurfacing, and they sound all too familiar today. Fears of an arms race, for instance (1944 onwards); fears of proliferation (from the early 1950s); concern over safety standards (from 1951); anger at monumental cover-ups (from 1957); concern over genetic damage; and so on up to the present and the growing international voices of protest.

It would seem that lack of trust — between nations, and between nuclear authorities and the public — is the stumbling block. The US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, said in the 1950s that "The chief lesson I have learned in a long life is that the only way you can make a man trustworthy is to trust him and the surest way to make him untrustworthy is to distrust him and show your distrust". There are numerous examples of this trust being eroded. Truman believed that "the bomb is too dangerous to be let loose in a lawless world" and deceived himself by thinking that Russia would never get the bomb: disillusionment was rapid, for she exploded her first atomic bomb only four years after Hiroshima. (The Fuchs spy scandal is cast in a new light, too. There are many revelations in this book, too numerous to mention.) And in 1945, against advice and though Britain was all but moribund, the newly elected Labour government began to build an independent nuclear deterrent (it seems somehow appropriate that the Labour party now want to abandon it forty years later); the British people were not made aware of the decision for a decade, and subsequent governments kept quite about it. "The British bomb was insulated from the vagaries of party politics." Pleading "national security", the various nuclear agencies (both here and abroad) deflected legitimate public enquiry and avoided "the normal checks and balances of democratic control" — a phrase occurring more than once, which says something about much-vaunted "democracy".

Caution about joining the nuclear bandwagon seemed synonymous with lack of patriotism. In 1951, following test fallout, Kodak was given fallout maps to avoid a repetition of damage to their processing; the local populace, also in the fallout path, was left in ignorance... The President said "Keep them (the public) confused about fission and fusion". In 1957/58 the world's worst nuclear accident occurred in Siberia; the land became a moonscape, with no cultivation, "the most radioactive place on the face of the earth". Details are obviously sketchy, but it was probably an explosion in a waste dump; for reasons of his own the UKAEA chairman said the story was "pure science fiction". Safety standards in uranium mines were low, but so what, it kept the costs down; not until 1967 were health standards enforced, opposed by the mining industry worried about its profit and



nothing else... One comment on an accident scenario chilled me to the bone: "What makes you think that 32,000 (extra deaths from cancer per year from radiation) would be too many?" The book features a forbidding catalogue of reactor and reprocessing incidents and also examines the cover-up of the loss of the US nuclear submarine Thresher. An antiradiation pill was offered as a sop, but disappeared smartly... Reactor manufacturers began offering reactors as "loss leaders", undercutting and offering bribes; all very reminiscent of the international oil companies' artificially lowered fuel oil costs to oust coal from industrial boilers and electricity production. The electricity utilities fell for manufacturers' propaganda, fascination with the new technology, and questions of corporate prestige".

Prestige and pride became linked with the nuclear bandwagon. Pakistan had a voice, too: "If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own" — and, via dummy corporations, they almost did. Like China, India shared a knowledge of a civilisation of great antiquity, but now suffered from economic backwardness and an inferiority complex that could only be assuaged by embarking upon nuclear energy projects. So Nehru abandoned Gandhi's philosophy of "appropriate technology", and atomic research received as much money as industry or agriculture. The cost of the nuclear programme heavily undermined efforts to overcome the electricity shortages obstructing India's economic development. In Russia, Stalin had declared that "The equilibrium has been destroyed. Provide the bomb — it will remove a great danger from us". So, in the middle of nowhere, a town later called "The Factory For Measuring Instruments" was constructed by slave labour, and whilst the German scientists there had a good life they were virtually prisoners of Beria's NKVD. Russia's anxiety about building a bomb superseded her priorities for postwar reconstruction, regardless of total war's devastation.

Often reiterated is the impression that in the early days of nuclear research concern for human life came a long way behind interest in the scientific studies. The US Army actually marched troops into test fallout areas to obtain "information on the possibility of close tactical support by infantry after a nuclear explosion"; years later, clinical information revealed high mortality... There were also plans for US nuclear-powered aircraft — using older pilots so that genetic damage to their offspring would be less than that for younger pilots' offspring! Fake intelligence was leaked by the nuclear lobby, saying that the Russians already had such planes; Kennedy finally killed the project in 1961, it having cost $1 billion. (Suspect reports of Russian particle-beam weapons, published in New Scientist and elsewhere a couple of years ago, have probably fuelled the Pentagon's demand for space weaponry...times don't change.)

But concerned voices were raised. Once aware that the Nazi danger had been crushed, Szilard was against the bomb's eventual use on moral grounds; with others, he believed it would lead to a terrible postwar arms race. Neils Bohr suggested that secrecy would only reinforce suspicions, and that it would be far better to give the Russians the secret; but Churchill disagreed. Sir Henry Tizzard, the British government's chief scientific adviser, said: "We are not a Great Power and never will be again. We are a great nation, but if we continue to behave like a Great Power we shall soon cease to be a great nation". And not all military men were warmongers: an American Rear Admiral said that "levelling large cities has a tendency to alienate the affections of the inhabitants and does not create an atmosphere of goodwill after the war". False hopes rose often: the decision to go ahead with the H-bomb was offered as a real opportunity to open talks with the Russians about nuclear arms control; now it's the turn of the cruise missile... Discussions went on to outlaw the bomb, of ways to denature fissile material; there was always talk of inspections: the dilemma presented here is ironically illustrated by Szilard in his The Voice Of The Dolphins. Eisenhower used the propaganda slogan "Atoms for Peace" as a first step towards disarmament, but all that achieved was nuclear proliferation...

Just as intriguing (and just as frightening) are the machinations of France, Japan, Canada, Germany, China, and Russia. The authors provide a remarkably comprehensive picture, despite the fact that there is only a limited insight into the build-up of nuclear research in these countries; thanks to the US Freedom of Information Act, however, there is a vast fund of detail on the US — including some documents released in error!

The Nuclear Barons is not SF, but it ought to be essential reading for all SF readers. Herein is the dark, stark history of our wonderful nuclear age. (I can still remember the authorities' calming noises about there being "no danger" from radiation after the Windscale accident of 1957. Now, over twenty years later, the truth is beginning to emerge.) How many human and animal lives have been cut out, shortened, damaged because of the atom? Look at Bikini atoll, at the Marshall Islands, at French Polynesia, at India, at Siberia, all places whose populations, often numbering in their thousands, had to be relocated so that nuclear tests could be performed.

Alternative forms of energy? The energy gap? The coal shortage? The oil shortage? In 1953, oil shortages were forecast by 1975. The same report stated that nuclear fuels would only carry one-fifth of the load, so aggressive research was needed in the field of solar energy. Thirty years on, the message is the same — solar energy, if given the same immense funding as nuclear technology, would pay dividends with no equivalent risks.

So the mistakes, confusions, floundering good intentions, and downright duplicity goes on. Pringle and Spigelman have written a fascinating, often exciting, always illuminating, sometimes frustrating book. The frustration is born of hindsight, not their prose style, which is lucid, the narrative crammed with character-sketches from historical sources. Whilst the excellently laid-out text is 446 large format pages, the bibliography and notes add another 107, of which the majority is additional text. Here, my one criticism: the text lacks superscripts, so the notes, which are tabulated in page order, have to be read almost concurrently lest something is missed; but they are worth reading. The researched sources cover a remarkably wide range (even Asimov's Biographical Encyclopaedia Of Science And Technology) and appear to have been selected without bias. It is no wonder that the book took them four years to write!

It ends on a faintly optimistic note. The seventies have ushered in the international protest movement. Plans for reactor sites can be abandoned. Already there is a dramatic rethink-

ing of public radiation protection standards (including X-rays). As the authors state, "man's genetic inheritance is his most irretrievable possession"; there has been enough physical insults to the biosphere; by its presence, the book endorses the views of Sakharov, who came to believe that universal suicide could only be avoided by the open exercise of intellectual freedom. But The Nuclear Barons, like Jonathan Schell's The Fate Of The Earth, is not stridently anti-establishment; it is not unaware of the various tortuous trains of circumstances which have led to the present fearful situation. But it recognises, as we all must, that the time for action is now, while there is still time.

The Brandt Commission — COMMON CRISIS — NORTH-SOUTH: CO-OPERATION FOR WORLD RECOVERY (Pan, 174pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

In 1980, the Independent Commission on International Development Issues — established in 1977 at the suggestion of then World Bank president Robert McNamara, chaired by former West German leader Willy Brandt, and composed of a number of prominent international politicians and economists (drawn from both the Third World and the developed West) — published its first report, North-South: A Programme For Survival. Restrained in tone but imaginative and thoroughgoing in its concept and approach, it argued convincingly that the world's economic problems cannot be solved by the actions of any one country or group of countries, that the gross economic imbalances between rich and poor nations cannot be allowed to continue, and that if the peoples of the world did not begin to pool their resources in a programme of global reconstruction the economic situation would simply continue to deteriorate — and then gave detailed proposals for initiating that reconstruction, moving towards an eventual fairer distribution of wealth and laying the foundations for sustained economic growth in the decades to come. The report became a world best-seller, inspired an international summit at Cancun in Mexico in 1981 — and was roundly ignored by the governments of the developed West, who were eventually forced into making vague promises to give the proposals "sympathetic consideration" sometime in the future but otherwise continued about their short-term business of trying to reduce the rate of inflation. And the world economy, as the Brandt Commission had foreseen, continued its decline.

Now, three years later, with time running out — we either embark on co-operative recovery soon, or we will find that the decline has become irreversible — comes Common Crisis, infused with an unmistakeable sense of urgency and eschewing the wider, longer-term perspective of the first report in favour of a concentration on the immediate, practical steps that all nations can take with the minimum of policy shifts and the maximum of effect. In keeping with the spirit of the times, and particularly with the economic objectives of most Western governments (who dominate world trade, have a commanding influence on the global economy, and would be the driving force behind any recovery), it devotes almost half its pages to the business of money — an increase in contributions to the IMF, a shift in aid payment emphases, modification of the Bretton Woods institutions — and the remainder to matters associated with it: trade, food and energy, and the negotiating process. It is detailed, precise, feasible, necessary — and contains at its heart a flaw that undermines every one of its proposals.

The Commission takes as its starting point, as it did in North-South, that economic growth is not only necessary but sustainable; that it is unquestionably a good thing and that its indefinite continuation is vital to the health of the world. There are two things wrong with this assumption. In the first place, it is to confuse means with ends: growth is worthwhile as a method of raising the general standard of living, redistributing wealth and ensuring equal opportunity for all, but these are the ends to which growth is directed; while it is actually in progress the existing inequalities are maintained and to a certain extent reinforced, as those who were better-off to begin with use the influence conferred by their position to improve same relative to the less well-off. In other words, continuous growth results in continuous inequality, and changes nothing. And, in the second place, it is to pretend, in the face of the obvious fact that the world is a finite quantity with a finite stores of material resources, that those resources are instead infinite, that they can never be exhausted and that all demands, however limitless and unforseeable, can be completely satisfied. This is prima facie nonsense. (I am of course aware of the argument that as one resource is exhausted technological innovation will enable us to locate and exploit others; but this is simply to sidestep the issue. Ultimately, everything will be used up, and unrestrained growth will only use it up faster.)

This misperception of the role of economic growth derives from our experience of the post-war boom years (from the Marshall Plan of 1947 to the Yom Kippur War of 1973), in which continuous economic growth was the engine of the world economy, when the West's standard of living rose exponentially, the Third World made vast forward strides, and an era of plenty for all appeared to be dawning. Recent developments should have made it plain that this bubble has now been punctured, but instead our leaders — people who commenced their careers during that era, and whose attitudes were moulded by it — continue to talk of growth as though it were still a necessity and a possibility and, worse, hark nostalgically back to the past in the belief that what has once been can be again. Brandt and his Commission, for all their breadth of vision and dedication of purpose, are very much of this ilk, and hence make the same mistakes.

I am also not convinced by their proposals for a reallocation of Special Drawing Rights, an increase in contributions to the World Bank, a shift away from project-oriented (and capital-intensive) aid loans, a restructuring of the IMF liquidity criteria, and other measures designed to enhance the effectiveness and viability of the Bretton Woods institutions, which strike me as far too cautious. Given the prevailing conservative tenor of most Western governments, more concerned to promote their own self-interests than to engage in any altruistic moves towards greater global equality, I can understand the reasons for the Commission's caution — in such a climate, anything more thorough-going would be thrown out unconsidered — but at the same time feel that unless something more far-reaching is undertaken no proposal will have any chance of success. Radical critiques by the Third World of the Bretton Woods institutions, while accepting that they were primarily estab-

lished to impose order on the world finance and trading systems and thereby prevent a recurrence of the Depression that preceded the Second World War, have pointed to the way in which, by subtler economic rather than overt political means, they have perpetuated the West's domination of the rest of the world and, in order to allow the Third World a greater say in its own development, have called not for their modification but their wholesale reform. I have a good deal of sympathy with this view, can appreciate the frustration Third World leaders must feel at the West's apparent indifference to their case, and think that unless some positive steps to meet same are taken soon they may lose all patience with the system and simply refuse to participate further. (The Third World would then fall into the abyss, of course, but such a catastrophic shock to the world banking system would mean that the West went down with them.) Merely tinkering with the system, as the Brandt Commission proposes, is insufficient except in the very short term, and then only as a prelude to wholesale restructuring; and the Commission, by shying away from this, thus reveals a certain failure of nerve and commitment.

But then one can't argue with their general case, with the principle that underlies their proposals and the evidence they bring forward in support of same: the world is an interlinked, mutually interdependent whole, in which the policies pursued by any one country will ultimately affect all other countries and from which no one can isolate themselves. We are all in this together, rich and poor alike, and we will either prosper together or perish together. "Our situation is unique," writes Brandt in his introduction. "Never before was the survival of mankind itself at stake; and never before was mankind capable of destroying itself, not only as the possible outcome of a world-wide arms race, but as a result of uncontrolled exploitation and destruction of global resources as well. We may be arming ourselves to death without actually going to war — by strangling our economies and refusing to invest in the future. Everybody knows — or should know — where the world economic crisis of the 1930s ended. Everybody should know what immense dangers the present international crisis holds, and that only a new relationship between industrialised countries and developing countries can help overcome this crisis. There is a clear common interest."

Absolutely. And we in the West must recognise this commonality, and recognise it now, before it is too late for us all.

LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOOM — the letter column

Two more letters than last time, the first from <u>MARTIN TUDOR</u> wondering whether my misnumbering of the previous issue was evidence of a latent reactionary tendency or merely a desperate ploy to attract more letters. It was of course neither, but I apologise for the mistake — it should have been Vol 6 No 6, <u>not</u> No 4.

<u>NIGEL RICHARDSON</u> also wrote to correct a mistake he'd made in his review of James Blish's <u>Fallen Star</u>: "It wasn't a play that Dr Johnson was talking about when he said 'worth seeing? yes; but not worth going to see' but the Giant's Causeway in Ireland". So now you know.

On a more serious note, the awaited letter from <u>DAVID SWINDEN</u> finally arrived (a couple of days after I'd completed the previous issue):

> "Your remarks in 'Blood On The Racks' in Vol 6 No 5 suggest to me that you harbour a fundamental antipathy towards <u>Interzone</u> which colours your approach to some of its fiction. To ask 'whether there is any real need for a magazine like <u>Interzone</u>' strikes me as pointless. What do you mean by 'any real need'? It is easy to forget that a magazine exists for the benefit of its readers as well as its contributors. I've enjoyed enough of the contents of <u>Interzone</u> to make me renew my subscription, so I suppose that as far as I'm concerned, yes, there is a need for it.
>
> "Your reviews of the fiction display an air of supercilious dismissiveness, as if you'd decided not to apply yourself fully to the job. For example, your approach to Josephine Saxton's 'No Coward Soul' seemed to me superficial in the extreme. I found the story to have considerable thematic complexity. Your review suggests that the events of the internal world have no significance at all, when in fact they contain whatever meaning the story possesses. To take one aspect, there's obviously a fairly hefty treatment of feminist issues. I won't go on about other thematic aspects, and the originality with which they're treated, because I'm not writing a review. But I don't believe you were either. If you found the story meaningless, or inept, you should have said so. Anyone reading your review who hadn't read the story would, I feel, get a very false impression.
>
> "Lest I be accused of being unfair, I did notice that you wrote nice things about two of the stories, which suggests that when something catches your imagination you can forget your attitude to the magazine as a whole. But that's rather hard luck on all the stories that don't immediately inspire you."

Another one who took my rhetorical question about the "need" for <u>Interzone</u> as a serious suggestion. Sigh... Main point taken, anyway, although I'd stress that I'm not so much antipathetic to the magazine as ambivalent. But I have renewed my subscription.

Also criticising me for saying the wrong things was <u>PHILIP COLLINS</u>, responding to my review of Chris Evans's <u>The Insider</u>:

> "Is it not the <u>idea</u> rather than the 'fact' of alien possession throughout which is unclear? In 'A Long Time Coming' in <u>Vector</u> 98 (written, I believe, about the same time as this novel), Evans said: 'The way in which the real world becomes a distraction to the person engrossed in his imagination is something which interests me greatly. To write about the world (which, indirectly, every author does) one has to withdraw from it, and there is in most writers a strong voyeuristic tendency...writers are parasites on experience'. Could <u>The Insider</u>, therefore, be an allegory for writing and an author's attempt to see things through other's eyes? After all, the first character we meet in the novel is a writer. Are you reading it too literally?"

Damn — no room in which to reply. Can defeat really be wrung so easily from me? Apparently. WAHF: Geogre Bondar, John Brunner, Andy Hobbs.