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

Science fiction has always been a popular literature — not in the sense that it sells in huge numbers to all and sundry, since it has always been and will always remain an essentially minority interest, but in the sense that it is not an accepted part of established, "highbrow" culture. Admittedly, this may now be changing, with such as Aldiss, Ballard and Priest winning critical acclaim as writers rather than being regarded first and foremost as science fiction writers, and with such mainstream authors as Doris Lessing appropriating the props of the genre for her own particular use, but how far this process is likely to go is anyone's guess. Even so, it's worth remembering that this diffusion of SF's ideas and images into other branches of literature, or even into other areas of artistic endeavour, is not a completely new thing; just as science fiction borrows from the world around it, so the world around it has received SF's ideas back again, and the exchange has been going on for quite some time (anyone who remembers, say, The Man From UNCLE television series will recognise as much). It may be that the commercial success of such movies as Star Wars, Alien and E.T. has acted to acceler-

ate the process, or perhaps render it more visible; certainly, there seems to be a lot more non-SF science fiction around now than there was a few years ago.

Anyway, the diffusion of SF ideas continues apace, its most recent conquest appearing to be the newest literary genre: the paperback best-seller. The term "bestseller", in this context, means not a book that has sold or is selling millions of copies around the world but a certain type of book, one written to a particular formula, usually involving a large and variegated cast of characters, a complex and intrigue-ridden plot, a number of exotic foreign locales, and taking around 500 pages to tell its story. The novels of Susan Howatch and Harold Robbins spring to mind as obvious examples of the genre (their SF equivalents being Robert Silverberg's Lord Valentine's Castle and Joan Vinge's The Snow Queen); examples which reveal some SF influences are Craig Thomas's Firefox, with its thought-controlled air-to-air missiles, and Frederick Forsyth's The Devil's Alternative, a near future thriller praised, I recall, for its demonstration of the only convincing reason why the Soviet Union would want to take over the

West. In front of me now I have another two such books: Luke Rinehart's Long Voyage Back (Granada, 496pp, £1.95), a holocaust-and-after novel which fits squarely within the SF tradition of same and which is billed as "The ultimate epic of nightmare survival", and Donald James's The Fall Of The Russian Empire (Granada, 509pp, £1.95), a near future thriller about the last days of the internally dissolving USSR billed as "The shattering epic novel of Soviet collapse". You can tell they're bestsellers from such code-words alone; the back cover of the latter is particularly revealing: — "...towering saga of the Soviet Union's explosive appointment with destiny...enthralling human drama of a whole society in turmoil...top-level Politburo struggles...the storming of Moscow itself by prisoners escaped from the Gulag hell-camps...a giant novel of stunning excitement and frightening relevance to today's world...a sweeping, panoramic novel in the grand tradition, full of passion, horror, glory..." After a blurb like that, you begin to wonder whether reading the novel itself might not prove something of an anticlimax.

It does. In the first place, James can't write — his prose is devoid of grace or style, unable to communicate tension and excitement, and gives us no sense whatever of being present at the events he describes. Instead of colour, atmosphere and telling detail, we get seemingly endless lists of place names, job functions, hardware specifications, and the like, presumably in the hope that sheer weight of information will eventually serve to make everything seem real; but despite the preponderance of dialogue we're left with the impression that we're reading a collection of impersonal memoranda. In some ways, this is the sort of impression we're supposed to gain, since the novel is composed of a series of eye-witness reports by the main characters (the whole supposedly being compiled many years later by someone else), but the impersonality remains because the characters simply cannot be told apart; they are little more than cardboard cutouts shuffled around from one bit of the plot to another (and I refuse to believe some of the coincidences necessary to bring them together) and very often used for no other purpose than the mouthing of the author's knowledge of Soviet affairs.

Which brings me to the second reason why The Fall Of The Russian Empire is no good — its implausibility. The revolution begins, apparently, with a public protest against wages and conditions by a group of Leningrad workers, who are of course arrested and beaten up but whose release is secured by another public protest by an even larger group of workers. This is complete nonsense, for the simple reason that there is absolutely no tradition whatever of democratic public debate in the Soviet Union — individual workers may grumble to themselves and their friends about the shortage of consumer goods and the lack of adequate living space and whatnot, but as for drawing up a petition or airing their grievances en masse at the local Party headquarters...bullshit; such Western customs are utterly alien to them, and nor do they even miss (never having had them in the first place) the freedoms that we take for granted. Nor do they care much for the USSR's dissident movement, seeing it as a collection of intellectuals who are out of touch with the realities of life and viewing it with grave suspicion as a threat to

their way of life (which may be pretty grim by our standards but is heaven by theirs); so to suggest that they might side with it, much less act on its behalf, is quite absurd.

The next step in James's revolution is the defection of an officer in KGB headquarters, who becomes a mole for the workers' free trade union...then there's a Politburo struggle between a Stalinist hardliner and a woman who believes in Holy Mother Russia and wants to cut her free of her East European and USSR dependencies, and guess who wins...implausibility piled upon implausibility, in other words; the novel is a work of make-believe and wish-fulfillment from beginning to end. (It's also out of date, replacing a Leonid Brezhnev who is still alive at the beginning with a Mikhail Romanovsky who dies a little later; Yuri Andropov is mentioned only once, as the ex-head of the KGB. Well, perhaps it's an alternate universe novel as well as a near future one eh?) And this, in truth, is its only conceivable purpose; far from being a novel of (to quote the blurb again) "frightening relevance to today's world", it is intended as a reassuring fantasy for the people of the West, designed to persuade them that despite the almost daily pronouncements of New Right politicians about the obscure, unexplained and largely imaginary "Soviet threat" they really have very little to fear. In itself, this might be no bad thing — on the grounds that anything which contributes to the lessening of present international tensions is worthwhile — but in truth the preceding sentence is incomplete and should be extended to read "...very little to fear because the USSR is on its last legs and will fall apart sooner or later anyway". A professed aim of the Reagan administration, after all, is to force the Soviet Union to compete with the USA to the point where its economy is under so much stress that it can no longer sustain itself, thus bringing its political system down too; but this, as an assumption, begs so many hows, whys and wherefores as to be seriously untenable. Yet The Fall Of The Russian Empire implicitly contributes to the idea that it will collapse, thus negating its apparently reassuring message, and encourages its readers to believe that if the New Right politicians continue on their present course then the Soviet Union will be forced into collapsing sooner rather than later. It paints the Soviet Union as an ogre to be confronted rather than a nation to be negotiated with, and thus acts to increase the level of international tension rather than reduce it. It is irresponsible and hypocritical garbage.

Luke Rinehart's Long Voyage Back at least has the virtue of being better written — you get the feeling that you might actually be present at some of the events he describes, although his characters are no more rounded than James's. The story begins on an ocean-going trimaran in Chesapeake Bay, heading north to pick up some friends for the weekend; but then (for the usual undisclosed reasons) nuclear war breaks out and they have the head south again to escape from the fallout over Washington; but for various reasons (they're short of supplies, some people try to steal the boat, they rescue some other people) they have to head north again, finally turning back south...and then, a full day after the destruction of Washington, the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia is hit. I don't believe a word of it: a prime military target like that

would be destroyed first, not as an after-thought. Anyway, they eventually make it out into the North Atlantic and start sailing south, but run short of supplies again and have to call in at Morehead, North Carolina, where they're conscripted into the armed forces...I still don't believe a word of it. Rinehart is supposed to be describing the aftermath of a nuclear war: what makes him think the war itself would last as long as a week, or even more than a day, and that after an all-out nuclear exchange any social or political organisation would still be remotely functional? Much less, given that San Juan, in Puerto Rico, is not destroyed until later, that there would be anyone left on either side to operate the missiles?

His protagonists sail on, into the southern hemisphere; and, after many more adventures (that's how I feel like describing them, so unreal is this novel), round Cape Horn to finish up in a small community of survivors in southern Chile; and, while not exactly living happily ever after, feel suitably grateful that they have survived, that they will be able to carry the banner of human civilisation on into the future, that they will have children who will not make the same mistakes...bleah. In his author's postscript on the last page, Rinehart states: "This is a work of fiction. The actual effects of a large-scale nuclear war are so much worse than I have dramatised that no bearable work of fiction can be written about them." And that's precisely what's wrong with Long Voyage Back: it is bearable, and it is bearable because it grossly understates the effects of nuclear war. He states, for instance, that the sun shines day after day, the sky marred only by the clouds of dust and smoke above the destroyed cities (clouds which themselves eventually disperse), yet numerous studies have pointed out many times before — see, as the most recent example to have come to my notice, "Dark and cold: the aftermath of nuclear war" in New Scientist for 15 September 1983 — that the amount of rock and soil thrown into the air as dust as a result of ground-level bursts, added to the smoke generated by crop and forest fires caused by the heat from the explosions (fires estimated to cover at least one million square kilometres in the northern hemisphere), would be sufficient to plunge the Earth into a week-long twilight, with — as a result of the increased reflectivity of the cloud cover — a catastrophic reduction in global temperatures, even in the tropics (triggering, in the worst-case scenarios, the onset of a new Ice Age). Agriculture would fail, rainwater become poisonous with radiation (yet Rinehart's characters drink it regardless), disease (cholera, typhoid, dysentery, tuberculosis, very probably bubonic plague, and let's not forget skin cancers due to the destruction of the ozone layer allowing through the harmful radiation it now keeps out) strike down the survivors...and never mind the psychological effects on them of the war. Has Rinehart never noticed the apathy and listlessness to which earthquake victims are prone, even with outside help pouring in to reconstruct their lives? So what lassitude does he think is likely to overtake the survivors of a nuclear war, who will have seen not merely their homes but their homelands obliterated?

To be fair, he does make some references to the apathy and listlessness of the survivors; but the survivors in question are not his pro-

tagonists, who suffer only from the odd pang of emotion from time to time but otherwise grit their teeth and keep going regardless. (One of them, incidentally, is an ex-naval officer who institutes lifeboat ethics to keep them going, and at one point behaves as though he's stepped straight from the pages of a Robert Heinlein novel.) Frankly, I doubt that even the toughest and most stable survivors would maintain their toughness and stability for very long, much less be capable of planning their escape route with the shrewdness Rinehart's lot do, and even if they did make it to safety — but even here Rinehart has some weird ideas as to what constitutes safety. He assumes that only the northern hemisphere would be affected by a nuclear exchange, the southern escaping unscathed — but this ignores the fact that even total destruction of the northern would leave unused approximately half the weapons in the inventories of both sides. The temptation to use these weapons — in accordance, perhaps, with some mad idea of denying facilities to the nation which might "recover" first, or eliminating future competition from other nations — would be almost overwhelming. Australia, South Africa, mineral resources in central Africa, the industrialised countries of South America: they too would be targets. Even if they weren't, they wouldn't be safe from fallout — remember Nevil Shute's On The Beach? And even if the fallout didn't kill in the way Shute depicted, the radiation would still be incorporated into and passed up the food chain, rendering plant and animal life unfit for human consumption for years to come. (Rinehart, apparently oblivious of this, has his characters go fishing as they sail through the fallout zones.)

In other words — and not to put too fine a point on it — Rinehart is lying to us; and, worse, knows that he is lying to us. Never mind that all fiction is at heart a lie, in that it makes things up, because the purpose of fiction's lies (paradoxical though it may seem) is to reveal various truths about ourselves and our world, deliver a message that the writer hopes will to some extent affect the way we live. And Rinehart's message, of course, is that there will be survivors after a nuclear war, and that although they may have a pretty bad time of it at first they'll pull through eventually. The effect of this is to make nuclear war itself seem less threatening (you or I may die; but there will be someone left to carry on), and by making it seem less threatening help foster the attitude that it can be fought; and thus, by defusing popular protest, increasing the likelihood of its one day breaking out. Long Voyage Back is thus, like The Fall Of The Russian Empire, irresponsible and hypocritical garbage.

If such books were only a minority interest, we would have little to worry about. But they are not; they are lowest-common-denominator material, designed to appeal to the widest possible audience. They have no genuine depth or insight, only a shallow illusion of same; they do not, as science fiction should, challenge or subvert their audience's view of the world but instead reinforce all their easy assumptions and unquestioned prejudices. As works of literature they are shoddy and complacent, and as propaganda for prevailing points of view they are infinitely dangerous. We should be ashamed of both their inept handling of SF clichés and their contribution to the dogma of the new Cold War.

BOOK REVIEWS

- Robin W. Bailey — FROST (Timescape, 208pp, \$2.75)
 Elizabeth Boyer — THE THRALL AND THE DRAGON'S HEART (Futura/Del Rey, 294pp, £1.50)
 Marion Zimmer Bradley — WEB OF LIGHT (Timescape, 208pp, \$2.95)
 Mildred Downey Broxon — TOO LONG A SACRIFICE (Orbit, 251pp, £1.75)
 Carole Nelson Douglas — SIX OF SWORDS (Futura/Del Rey, 276pp, £1.60)
 Nancy Springer — THE GOLDEN SWAN (Timescape, 176pp, \$2.50)
 L. T. Stuart — THE HOUSE OF THE LIONS (Bantam, 184pp, \$2.95)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

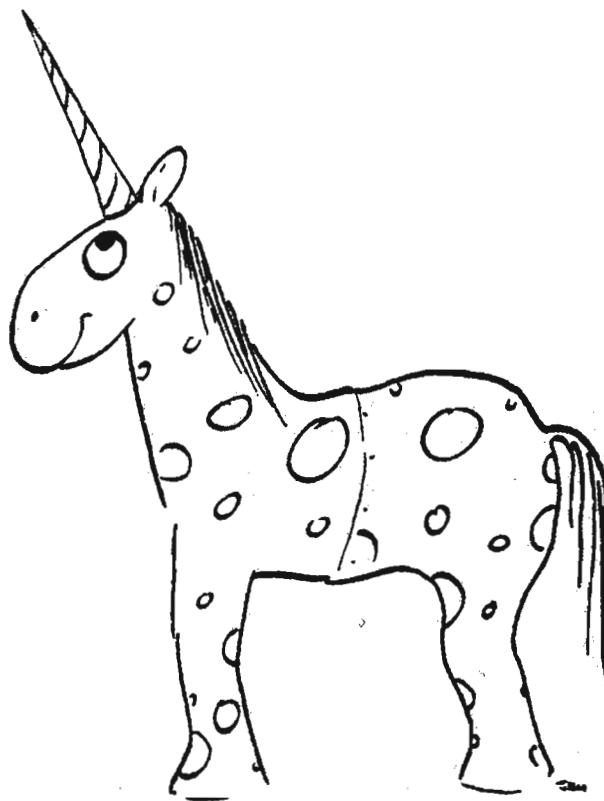
"Fantasy...is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent" said J. R. R. Tolkien in his radical essay On Fairy Stories. "Fantasy has also an essential drawback: it is difficult to achieve." Indeed, although a quick look at the shelves of the bookshop or library reveals dozens of new titles labelled "fantasy", the all-too-common reader's response is to glance at the cover art and blurbs, flick through the first few pages, and discover that once again this somehow isn't really what we were looking for.

We know we've read fantasies in the past that were deeply moving, deeply satisfying; perhaps we found, like C. S. Lewis, some trace in them of the transcendence he called "joy". But somehow all the fantasies we read these days seem to excite the desire without satisfying it; we finish a book knowing we have not found what we wanted, and in a frenzy of frustration rush out to acquire more, equally unsatisfying books. We know they are inferior imitations of the real thing, but we're desperate for stimulation so we buy them anyway.

What has gone wrong? We were looking for something genuine and worthwhile, and we have turned into the worst sort of escapist: junkies desperate for our fix. If we can't get the real thing, anything will do, just so long as it has heroes and dragons and unicorns and magic in it.

Why do we need them so badly? Why is a dragon not simply a dinosaur, a unicorn more than a horned horse? Because they are archetypes, and connote power beyond our individual imaginations. The familiar components of fantasy stories are nothing less than the dragon's hoard of symbols pilfered from the collective mythological consciousness of (primarily) Western European culture. A unicorn is not simply a pretty way of talking about innocence, or grace, or virginity, or uniqueness, or death, or the Incarnation, though it has been used to talk about all these things. A unicorn is itself, to our wonder and delight. Anyone who doesn't like having feelings of wonder and delight evoked in themselves — not just at unicorns, but at ordinary things like day, night, grass, trees, people — probably won't understand or enjoy real fantasy.

And real fantasy does more. It deals directly with psychological reality in its own language, it provides us with models for coping with the profound and inevitable changes in our



own lives. Because fantasy uses the images of "imaginary" (and therefore real to the psyche, the imagination) beings and forces to embody the archetypal power present as a deep structure in the common cultural background of its readers, it simultaneously provides us with the tools and methods of dealing with the delight, pain, terror and death they carry, as the story's characters deal with them. A good fantasy often shows one or more main characters undergoing profound and irrevocable change — often an actual "rite of passage" — and the transition is usually from youth/dependence/innocence to maturity/independence/experience.

Fantasy's description of profound change should give the reader a model for coping with similar (though not always so intense) psychological problems and changes in his or her own life. Reading one good fantasy should leave us with a feeling of satisfaction, or purgation, like the catharsis of Classical Greek drama, because by witnessing great psychological events we have participated in them. We should not want to read anything more for a while, because it takes time to assimilate change.

So we have a set of standards by which to judge any given fantasy. A book which does not allow any of its main characters to undergo profound psychological change is not real fantasy, but a plastic imitation (probably mass-produced). "Open-ended" books or series are highly suspect, because they do not permit real development or resolution of a theme. Any work which mixes mythologies, as opposed to using one as a background, or inventing one, is doing the psychological equivalent of putting a scoop of chocolate mint ice cream on a plate of chili con carne: an interesting effect, possibly, but a little indigestible, and not the most nourishing of balanced diets. And the "magic" in fantasy should be as necessary and as inevitable in the

context of the story as the "science" in SF: no pulling either dragons or blasters out of hats simply to move the plot along or get it out of a tight corner.

Any work of fantasy in which the author strives to make the reader aware of his or her individuality as a prose writer is trying to do two different and often conflicting things at once. The fantasy storyteller is merely the mouthpiece of a culture, and should therefore seek to focus the reader's attention through the lens of language towards the "soul" of the story; and should thus cultivate a "clear" style. Fantasy is derived from oral tradition, so it follows that a good "style" is probably one that reads well out loud. A really good author of fantasy should want to be anonymous, invisible...a traditional device which points to this attitude, used by Chaucer, Tolkien and Le Guin, is to claim a prior source or record of the story, enabling the writer to say, in effect, "I am only the translator, the copyist, not the originator of this story"; and it should be a true statement. Tolkien did not invent dragons or elves; he merely understood them well.

So how does the current crop of new fantasy writing measure up by these standards? Not well, I fear, not well. Take Frost, by Robin W. Bailey: a perfect example of a book where nothing actually happens on the level we want. It is cunningly designed to allow the production of an infinite number of clone sequels or prequels with the minimum of auctorial effort or insight. Frost, the untouchable mighty warrior and ex-witch, discovers on page 12 that she has, by mere chance, stumbled across The Book of The Last Battle which "is said to contain the strategies, the plans and the Words of Power that will be used in the final confrontation of Light against Darkness". Also, that "the time is not yet right for the final confrontation. If the Dark Ones are called through, the scales of destiny will be unbalanced, and the hour of the Last Battle will be delayed beyond all foreseeing". Needless to say, it is. The book is a Plot Device which drags Frost, her sorcerer companion Kregan of The Brotherhood of The Black Arrow, and their enemy Zarad-Krul across half a continent. A war starts, and several hundred thousand extras are brought on stage and killed. At the end of the novel, Frost may or may not have fallen in love with Kregan. She may or may not be going to regain her arcane powers, which she lost before the novel began. Nothing happens. Please do not buy this book, even to read on trains.

Elizabeth Boyer's The Thrall And The Dragon's Heart is considerably less pretentious, and a considerably better book. Rather than using the sloppily-painted "desert" stage flats employed as "landscape" in Frost, the author takes the trouble to depict a credible, consistent world picture in some detail. The mythological and magical elements are Scandinavian, as is the nomenclature and the lifestyle of the human characters; but there is not quite enough sense of a normal, everyday life going on in the background to really convince me to suspend my disbelief.

Brak the thrall and Pehr his chieftain take refuge from a snowstorm in an isolated cottage. There they discover Ingvold, an alfar (elf) girl who is under a hag-curse laid by the witch-queen Hjordis. All is not well in the realm of the

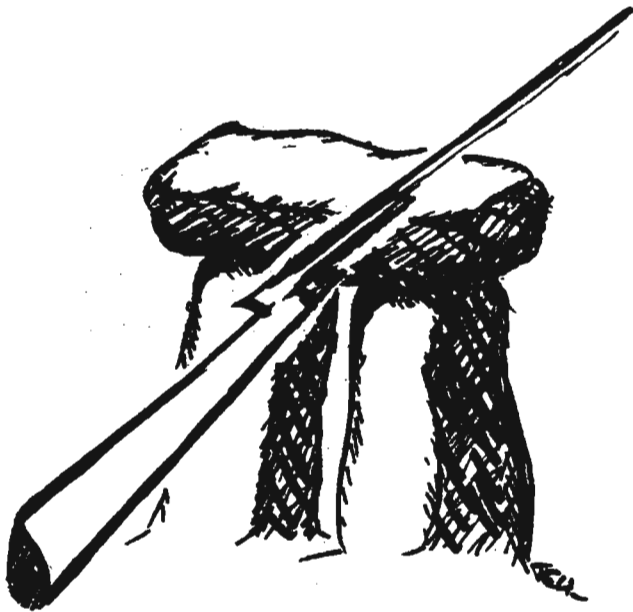
alfar, since Dyrstygg their champion was defeated and his magical weaponry dispersed among his enemies. At first Brak simply wishes to help Ingvold, and keep Pehr out of trouble, but the three become involved in a search for Dyrstygg and a series of attempts to rescue his battle-gear and restore it to his rightful owner.

The story is fast-paced, inventive and entertaining, but...once again the basic character of the protagonists remains unaltered. At the beginning of the novel Brak is a thrall, true, and by its end he is a freedman with a homestead of his own. But at the beginning of the novel he is the sensible, responsible man who does the organising, and at the end he is the sensible, responsible man who does the organising. At the beginning he is brave, at the end he is brave, and you bet he has plenty of opportunities to be brave in between! The novel's baddies can be accurately described as "baddies" rather than "Evil Ones", and the book in general has the toned-down quality of something written for "younger readers". The author has aimed low, and so well achieved her aim that next time I would like to see her tackle a real, serious theme; it would certainly be entertaining, and it might be nourishing too.

I think that Web Of Light would probably not have been published were it the work of an unknown author, but because it's by Marion Zimmer Bradley its future is assured. It is not a fantasy, but a costume-historical novel set near Atlantis. Although mythical countries require a little more imagination and a lot less research to depict than real ones, their presence or absence is not a good test of fantasy. What is necessary is archetypal power. By this criterion, Web Of Light is not a fantasy, in the same way that Le Guin's Malafrena is not a fantasy. Conversely, Tolkien's Akallabeth, which deals with the archetypal downfall of the Island in the West, is a fantasy, and a myth of great power.

Web Of Light, though it does use magic (if apparently magical operations within the framework of a defined religion, i.e. miracles, can be said to be true magic), is a kind of soap opera, an everyday story of Atlantean folk. Domaris is a trainee priestess of the Temple of Light. She has a sister, Deoris, who is seduced by the dark side of the force (haven't I heard this somewhere before?). Micon, the Atlantean prince, can control wind and wave. Domaris falls in love with him and bears him a son. "Soon, out of a tender, earthly passion, would rise forces that might decide the final victory" says the blurb. But they don't decide it, of course. See next year's thrilling installment. Personally, I find this sort of thing vastly superior to Coronation Street, and of course soap operas are designed to carry on for ever. But don't mistake them for fantasies. They're not: they're not the kind of thing you remember a fortnight after reading.

Mildred Downey Broxon's Too Long A Sacrifice is an interesting failure. Tadgh the bard and his wife Maire the Healer enter The Land Beneath The Waves from 6th century Ireland, to re-emerge in modern Ireland and become enmeshed in the Troubles, which are seen as symbolising and being symbolised by the eternal fight between the Dark God of Winter, the Violent Hunter, and the White Goddess of Summer, the Gentle Healer. "Ireland is sword-and," says one figure in



novel, "and we are doomed to fight; if not someone else, then each other." This is nearly very good book: it has consistent mythology and setting, it has Real Evil to grapple with. Ireland is a country that has suffered the very real consequences of indiscriminate mythologising; even its recent history is awash with powerful and dangerous archetypes that can kill as surely as bullets: the author is playing with fire. And, on the whole, playing well; though magical fiats are used to get the protagonists out of trouble, the trouble is realistic enough — Maire, for example, is picked up off the streets and dumped in a mental hospital.

Although fantasy needs ordinary human beings to witness the fantastic element of the story setting, to bring fantasy and real life as close as this novel tries to is extremely difficult. Broxon has aimed high, and not quite reached her goal. The characters are nearly compellingly, convincingly real, but not quite. The pain of the Troubles nearly really hurts...

Carole Nelson Douglas's Six Of Swords has the Torloc (like a Warlock, only different) Irissa (she has magic eyes) teaming up with the Swordsman Kendric and touring the world of Rule to find out what's going wrong with its magic, its kingship, its wizards and its floating island. To keep them in order, the talking cat Felabba comes along for the ride, with knowitall advice straight out of Puss In Boots. Their string of adventures is entertaining, well-written, and occasionally genuinely moving. The naming runs from the cringe-making (Rindell as a sort of de-based Rivendell where the magic folk hang out, "Eldress" as a title of respect — which is about as twee as calling a woman engineer an engineeress) to the inspired (I liked the poisonous borgia-monster). A major failing is the tacked-on ending: in this case it's obvious that the author is so fond of her characters that she doesn't want them to stop adventuring just yet. Despite its very patchy quality, the novel does have the virtue of displaying a series of situations, characters and events that the author seems to like and care about. If you can cope with the names and the cat, you'll probably enjoy it, but it offers little in the way of catharsis.

Nancy Springer's The Golden Swan was another big let-down. I should have known better, since

it was billed on the back cover as "a sequel to The Books Of Isle and The Black Beast, but it did start with an interesting idea. Dair was born a wolf while his shape-changing mother was in wolf form. He now lives with the king, his father, naturally remaining a wolf for his brief childhood. An overwhelming love turns him back into a human youth, incapable of speech, uncomfortable indoors or wearing clothes. The transforming love comes on Dair when he finds Frain, the Swan Lord, washed up on a local beach. Both the cover art and the sensuous physical descriptions made me suspect that a nice juicy homoerotic heroic pairbond would follow, but the implications of powerful, transforming love are ignored, almost: "His wolf form came on him all in a rush, like loveheat...Dair ran to (Frain) and laid his long head in his lap with a whine, a wordless appeal. Frain held tightly to the taut, quivering body." But instead of getting their act together, they go off on a rather arbitrary quest for the World Tree (sublimation, you know) and everything ends happily ever after in a blaze of mystical enlightenment. I can't help feeling that Springer chickened out of writing the story she really wanted to: the archetype she evoked turned out to be too hot to handle. Again, the novel lacks convincing background detail, and also contains bad poetry.

L. T. Stuart's The House Of The Lions is another non-fantasy offering. Set in a post-holocaust America, it is a trie morality tale in which the only potential archetype turns out not to exist. Youngman Snag, an innocent and uncorrupted priest, searches the ruins of New York for the legendary White Warrior, billed as the people's rescuer, the deliverer from tyranny, and all that. Finally, in the bombed-out Metropolitan Museum of Art, he finds a suit of silver armour...it fits him...and the White Warrior is born. The novel is crammed with sticky sentimentality and manages to patronise Jews, the handicapped, reformed bad guys and women without really trying. "A stunning testament of faith and hope", it's called. God Save America.

We know, then, what good fantasy should be. These books aren't it. The fact that they exist in such numbers provides support to the theory that a combination of economic pressure on authors (to produce books which keep on selling) and on publishers (to market books that will sell well and lead to more clone books and more sales) is encouraging the production of a large number of mediocre to downright dreadful "fantasies". The most alarming implication is not the hydra-like proliferation of instant series, but the effect their existence may have on any really good fantasy novel in preparation. Remember that publishers' readers are not trained or expected to seek out literary masterpieces, but to recommend books that will sell lots of copies, in a pretty much guaranteed way. The easiest way to do this is to encourage the demand for "real" fantasy but fail to produce a satisfying single-volume answer. A standardised formula for superstimulus fantasy is required, which will encourage the desire without satisfying it, thus provoking more and yet more book-buying. These books prove that formula has been found.

As already discussed, a good fantasy novel is a complete and fulfilling psychological experience. The aims of a good fantasy run counter to the apparent aims of the publishers. Would a good fantasy novel ever be published at all und-

er these conditions? Certainly, if anyone out there is currently engaged in writing the great fantasy novel of the 1980s, I would strongly advise them to submit it as mainstream literature, or as a children's book (for which the publishers' criteria seem less rigidly enforced, perhaps because of a lingering sense that children's books should be educational, which may result in slightly more attention being paid to "literary value"), or to disguise their masterpiece to resemble as closely as possible Tea Ladies Of Gcr.

Furthermore, popularisation diminishes the archetypes as it debases the literature that deals with them. The powerful and "super-human" elves and Fair Folk of European mythology become the petty, spiteful and physically diminished fairies; the magical (and highly dangerous) witch-hare becomes the Easter Bunny. Until a Tolkien or a Kit Williams can rescue them, they become unavailable to our imaginations, making it increasingly difficult even to write good fantasy, let alone get it published.

So, at present, fantasy as a serious and worthwhile literary genre seems to be undermined and degraded by the economic necessities of the publishing industry. There is a strong pressure to produce bad books, and to suppress good ones. Perhaps the answer -- the only answer -- is simply to refuse to be satisfied with second-best. Ignore the hype: don't buy them, even to read on trains. It's the only way we will persuade them to publish what we really want.

Frederik Pohl -- THE COOL WAR (Corgi, 251pp, £1.75)

Reviewed by Brian Smith

With a single bound, Pohl has stepped thirty years into the past, back to the days when Horace Gold ruled Galaxy and satire was in. Coming across something not too far removed from a follow-up to The Space Merchants, thirty years on, invokes a variety of curious feelings. Not only has Pohl been influenced in the interim by writers who were probably influenced by him in the first place, but Pohl's brand of satire is so firmly associated with the 50s as to make it seem that part of the past has stepped forward to comment on the present; I recalled Bluebottle making jokes about Margaret Thatcher in The Last Goon Show Of All.

As is traditional, the setting is a world not too many years away, a slightly exaggerated version of our own. Oil has been in rather short supply since the last Arab-Israeli war went nuclear, and America at least has become very energy-conscious indeed. But at least the world is peaceful now, since no one can afford shooting wars any more. The cool war is different. The Reverend H. Hornswell Hake discovers the cool war when he is snatched from obscurity by a government agency operating under the name of The Lo-Wate Bottling Co. They put him in charge of a party of schoolchildren giving away marmosets as a PR exercise, which seems harmless enough until a debilitating epidemic springs up in his wake and several European GNPs take it on the chin. The cool war is an economic guerilla war; working in total secrecy, its warriors noble inventions, destroy crops, defraud corporations...

At the outset, this seemed to be a satire on

the likes of the CIA. Several characters will be immediately recognisable to Sladek fans, and occasional lines such as "When the toilet spoke again it was crisp and clear" are pure Goullart. But somewhere around halfway Pohl seems to start taking it all more seriously, and Bond movie-style takes over, even though Hake himself observes how ridiculous such histrionics are. The whole book becomes tied up in knots. Like me, Hake spends some time wondering exactly how a Unitarian minister can be turned into a secret agent with barely a murmur, a train of thought which builds into a bleak view of most of humanity being role-playing robots, susceptible to any kind of suggestion. Only occasionally does the old Pohl reappear, as Hake regularly gets trodden on in traditionally heroic attempts to rescue feminists in distress who have no real need to be rescued. An ancestor of this routine appeared in Search The Sky in 1954.

The Cool War is a fairly readable novel for the most part, but it won't bring back the Golden Age of satire. Whether Pohl misses Kornbluth too much or whether he's simply out of practice at this sort of thing I cannot say, but the novel lacks the strength of whatever convictions it believes itself to have. Sad, really. Even nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

Zoe Fairbairns -- BENEFITS (Bard/Avon, 214pp, \$2.95)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

Let's hope that the Family Policy Group who whisper hymns to "Victorian values" in Margaret Thatcher's shall-pink iron ears never read this book. It might give them ideas.

Zoe Fairbairns's feminist family saga novel Stand We At Last was recently published by Virago Press. Benefits is a feminist near-future social satire, which the back cover blurb compares with H. G. Wells. Orwell would be a better comparison -- chillingly big-brotherish, characters lively, setting detailed and naturalistic, all shrewdly and humorously observed. Or one could compare it with Dickens -- message didactic, characters idiosyncratically vivid to the point of caricature. And good caricatures are among the best portraits.

The pointedness of satire depends on restricting its scope to a narrow focus, in this case women's issues; specifically, it's about the rise of a family-oriented backlash against "women's lib". Legislation for a "benefit" payment to women devoting themselves to domestic motherhood, a step welcomed by many women, leads through growing hostility to any woman who wants to work or who ventures out alone to an eugenics programme of forced sterilisation for all women except those of impeccable genetic background (free of inheritable disease, and from the correct racial and economic group), who are issued with an antidote which -- by some biochemical freak of combination with the contraceptive in the water supplies, causes foetal deformities.

Implausible? That sort of thing couldn't happen in a sensible and civilised country like this? While reading the book I was carried along by the telling little details which made each step seem convincingly just the way things really could escalate. Then, after I'd finished, I sat back and thought "No, too far-fetched, a paranoid fantasy". But since then I've been

reading the newspapers and such paranoid journals as New Scientist, New Internationalist and Sanity, and I've read such books as the Cambridge Seminar for Strategic Studies's Defended To Death and Susan George's How The Other Half Dies, all about the world as it is now. After all, we live in a world where (for instance), the USA -- who, being on our side, must be a goody -- is openly trying to bring down the Nicaraguan government (which within four years has virtually wiped out malaria and reduced illiteracy from 83 percent to around 12 percent) simply because it proposes to reduce the export of multinationals' profits; a world where the USA and the Soviet Union between them have enough "peace-keeping deterrent" to kill every human alive today 47 times over; a world where the amount spent every two weeks on the arms trade just about equals the total sum which, the UN has estimated, would provide adequate food, water, education, health and housing for everyone in the world.

Far-fetched? Faced with such extremist lunacies, accepted as reasonable policies by our democratically elected governments, I begin to wonder. Perhaps the scenario Fairbairns isn't likely, but her depiction of the way in which one step, after protests, is accepted then leads to another, more extreme step, and another, and so to atrocity, is well worth reading.

Robert A. Heinlein -- FRIDAY (New English Library, 428pp, £2.50)

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

"As I left the Kenya Beanstalk he was right on my heels. He followed me through the door leading to Customs, Health and Immigration. As the door contracted behind him I killed him."

How's that for a snappy first paragraph? And there's more in the same vein -- much, much more. Many people, myself included, contended that The Number Of The Beast would be -- indeed, should have been -- Heinlein's science fictional tombstone, but there seems to be life in the old dog yet. It isn't often that I agree with Jerry Pournelle, but I've got to concede the essential rightness of his blurb: "...his best since The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress...the old master is back". This brief statement is a model of common-sense, not to mention an object lesson in critical circumspection -- Pournelle's fellow blurbers (Poul Anderson, Harlan Ellison, Frederik Pohl, and Publishers Weekly) self-destruct with sycophantic slobberings.

The "I" in the above quote is Marjorie Bladwin, alias "Friday", the Amazonian heroine of this novel. She is a secret agent for a nebulous industrial espionage outfit headed by a Heinleinian Competent Man whom she affectionately calls "Boss". She is, we are told, an "Artificial Person" (or AP for short) and very sexy.

The novel continues with a bang; a gang bang, to be precise. Our supposedly super-intelligent heroine is effortlessly duped by a dear old double agent named "Uncle Jim" Prufit, and duly suffers a fate worse than death (or words to that effect). She later treats the incident with commendable sang-froid:

"But why waste time by raping me? This whole operation had amateurish touches. No professional group uses either beating or rape be-

fore interrogation today; there is no profit in it; any professional is trained to cope with either or both. For rape she (or he -- I hear it's worse for males) can either detach the mind or wait for it to be over, or (advanced training) emulate the ancient Chinese adage."

"The ancient Chinese adage" being, presumably, "Lie back and enjoy it". Heinlein either believes this ardent nonsense or else he's thrown it in for shock value. Alternatively, he may be arguing that because Friday is an Artificial Person she is therefore outside the psychological parameters that define, and limit, "ordinary people". Not that Friday is devoid of traumas: "My mother was a test tube; my father was a knife" she laments to everyone and his granny. No doubt we are expected to feel sympathy for the (artificial) plight of this (artificial) female.

Much of Heinlein's unique quality stems from the fact that views the speculative elements of SF from an engineering as opposed to a purely scientific one. He is just as much concerned with how things work as why they work, whether it be a time machine or an entire future society. This "nuts and bolts" approach can produce a minor masterpiece like The Door Into Summer (1956) or a major disaster like I Will Fear No Evil (1971). Friday lies somewhere between these two extremes.

Heinlein has a lot to say about such sundry subjects as Skyhooks, I5 colonies, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, corporate nations, brush-fire wars, "contract" families, and so on. These "factional" parts tend to be greater than the fictional whole, so that Friday becomes a kind of polemical patchwork. Too much of this background material is random noise, with only tenuous relevance to the issue(s) at hand. Skyhooks and I5 colonies are all very interesting, in their way, but Heinlein misuses them as fashionable buzz-words; they have no real dramatic significance. He is on much better terms with the "contract" families notion, and Friday's (foredoomed) attempts to find social stability in such an arrangement make for a certain amount of emotional tension. Then he allows the situation to degenerate into a pallid parody of Dynasty and/or Soap.

But it does move; the novel has all the makings of a good old-fashioned space opera. Reduced to more manageable proportions, it would have made a fine lead novella for Startling Stories. The action, when it comes, is fast, furious and well worth the wait. The climax, however, is anticlimactic; the novel ends not with a bang but a simper.

There would be little or no point in my describing the plot of the novel, because it doesn't really have one. Incidents there are, action there is, but dramatic unity is sacrificed to the whims of the moment, and the whole melange lacks any consistent purpose. Friday is a picaresque potpourri in the manner of, if not in the style of, Moll Flanders; but Heinlein is no Daniel Defoe, more a pretentious Harold Robbins.

Socio-politically, Heinlein's future society is akin to that of Pohl and Kornbluth's fifties novel, Gladiator-At-Law. Multinational "corporate states" vie with each other for commercial supremacy, and if they have to nuke a few cities in the sacred cause of free enterprise then so be it. Nations as we know them today have more

or less disappeared. The USA has fragmented into a crazy-paving of autonomous mini-states, such as the California Confederacy and the Chicago Imperium. We are told little of the situation prevailing elsewhere. Friday's life is thrown into elegant disarray by an outbreak of worldwide terrorism known as "Red Thursday", and things look promising for a while. But we are actually shown as much of Red Thursday as Jane Austen shows us of the Battle of Waterloo in *Pride And Prejudice* — nothing. The whole thing is eventually explained away as a minor kerfuffle in the "frigid fracas" of inter-corporation politics.

If Friday is about anything at all, then it's that old Heinlein standby — competence. People doing things to other people (competently), and people doing things to things (competently). Interestingly enough, Friday herself is not much of a problem-solver; she is, in fact, downright thick. Sex, evasion, and non-intellectual trouble-shooting are her main stocks-in-trade. She finally "proves" her competence by managing to escape to the interstellar equivalent of a rabbit hutch. But she is at least a refreshingly positive, if schizophrenic, character. She is, by turns, likeable and loathsome — a mature woman and a giggling adolescent. Imagine, if you can, a cross between Podkayne (of Mars) and Modesty Blaise; that's Friday.

The remaining dramatis personae are considerably less striking. "Boss", alias Kettle Baldwin from "Gulf", is the same archetypal Heinlein know-it-all, except that he's much more decrepit than usual; poor senescent Superman... His true relationship to Friday can be deduced by anyone who has read The Puppet Masters — it should come as no surprise, in any case. However, Georges Perreault is good for a few laughs — he's a Quebecois "several sorts of an artist" whose speech is carbuncled with schoolboy French: "Mai oui, mon vieux! Certainement!"

Friday is the ideal novel for both Heinlein boosters and detractors; if nothing else, it should stimulate some lively debate, not least in feminist circles. Welcome back, Robert A. Heinlein — all is forgiven! Well, almost...

Christopher Priest — THE AFFIRMATION (Arena, 213pp, £2.50)

Reviewed by Bill Carlin

It's long been a claim of Jesuit scholars that given their brand of education a boy will always remain Catholic in his views. Many liberal, open-minded SF fans seem to treasure a parallel article of faith: once an author has established himself in the genre then he will always be, at heart, a purveyor of escapism. While escapism is indeed a central theme of The Affirmation, Priest's exploration of it is far from orthodox, and may be regarded as heretical by those who adhere to such a rigid creed. Like Alasdair Gray's Lanark, this is a novel far removed from the ciphers of traditional SF, yet it manages to deal with more than a few of the genre's long-standing themes in a wholly new way.

Peter Sinclair, the narrator of the novel, is a man plagued by mundane problems — the death of his father, the attempted suicide of the woman he loves — that he has come to regard himself as a complete failure by worldly standards. In an attempt to divine a purpose to his

life, he starts to write an autobiography, but as his work progresses he becomes convinced that life is too lacking in the elements of story to be presented as such. Eventually, he discovers his own solution to this problem:

"I knew at last exactly how my story must be told. If the deeper truth could only be told by falsehood — in other words through metaphor — then to achieve total truth I must create total falsehood. My manuscript had to become a metaphor for myself.

"I created an imaginary place and an imaginary life."

As the narrative progresses it becomes clear that Sinclair's obsession with his manuscript has changed its purpose from an affirmation of true reality into a negation of the tragedies that have gone before. A pathway is thus provided for his ultimate decline into the insightless "escapism" of schizophrenia.

Priest maps the decline brilliantly with marvellously intense yet flowing prose. Not for him the more bizarre, almost sensationalist approach of D. H. Thomas; no grotesque sexual fantasies or brutalities come seething and frothing to the surface here, but the gradual revelation of how personality can be eroded by the tiny, constant horrors encountered in everyday life is rendered all the more shocking because of the author's admirable restraint. No overt reference is ever made to the psychological significance of dreams, yet scenes set in the Dream Archipelago (Sinclair's imaginary paradise) abound with haunting, dream-like imagery. The very act of transforming a blank sheet of paper into an obsessive, enthralling narrative is itself presented as a process akin to dreaming at the point where other characters point out to the narrator that he has created nothing of substance.

Throughout the novel, the reader finds that myths are not there simply to be accepted, but also to be questioned and pondered over. When Sinclair accepts the gift of immortality in his imaginary world he is not transformed into a superbeing (one of the favourite myths of SF) but is instead using a metaphor to underline his isolation from the rest of humanity? It's unsettling, perhaps, to think that such a sense of isolation can lie at the heart of so many of our innocent adolescent fantasies, but this is a novel that stimulates thought equally as much as it grips and entertains the reader. Much of its magic lies in Priest's giving the reader some degree of insight into the mind of an insightless individual, carefully pointing out the thin border between the rational and the insane. Peter Sinclair is basically a very cold fish with crippling problems of intense introspection and egocentricity, yet through sheer artistry Priest enables us to empathise with this character who has so little empathy. The slightest slip might alienate the reader entirely, yet the portrait is very neatly and carefully drawn.

Though it poses questions which are well worth pondering, The Affirmation never becomes ponderous in style. Its pace is comparable to that of any "psychological thriller" concocted by Patricia Highsmith or Ruth Rendell, yet its content and style are far more deserving of consideration. With this novel, Christopher Priest may finally have moved out of the SF ghetto to reach the wider audience he deserves.

Italo Calvino -- COSMICOMICS (Abacus, 153pp,
£1.95)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

Calvino was given the 1982 World Fantasy Award for his contributions, over 25 years, to fantasy literature. He is not an easy writer to get on with, and quite rightly makes no apologies for his work, simply stating that he is always intent on writing new books in new styles (an approach which many an SF writer should perhaps emulate). "I always feel the need to alternate one type of writing with another, completely different, to begin writing again as if I had never written anything before," he says in his note to *The Castle Of Crossed Destinies* (1969).

Cosmicomics was first published in Italy in 1965, the first English translation appearing in 1968; this Abacus edition is thus a reissue. Excluding the blank and title pages, there are only 125 pages of text for your £1.95, comprising twelve somewhat rambling stories or, rather, fables. Random tales, with little form and no plot; yet something indefinable and elusive unfolds as you read them; a composite image, the whole being decidedly greater than its parts.

The blurb (why do we read them, they're rarely valid!) states that the book is a "phenomenally funny account of the Universe as a cosmic joke, surreal random fiction without beginning or end". (Actually, there are countless beginnings, as will be seen by the peppering of that word in what follows!) It is a book of surreal imagery, and zany and weird, but it is not very funny. (I don't think this is the fault of the translator; indeed, it is not a fault -- except, perhaps, of the blurb-writer -- for I do not believe Calvino intended

Cosmicomics to be "phenomenally funny". Beneath the often whimsical humour, this a moral book.) Random tales, yes, without any apparent chronology; this reflects the seeming randomness of the Universe: it doesn't matter where you encounter the story about the beginning of the Universe, for the Universe is imploding and exploding continually and, besides, all time is now; present, past and future are as one...

To start with, the narrator, one Qfwfq, is possibly God, or all matter, or nothing, or everything; he can take any form and does so, donning both the physical and psychological mantles with apparent ease. The names, Qfwfq (henceforth I'll refer to "him" as "Q"), Xlthlx, Vhd Vhd, Bb'b, Rwfzfs, and so on, are not in the least amusing; if an unpublished writer had used such epithets, he would still be unpublished... Granted, the implicit purpose may be that these names are merely symbols, because names hadn't been invented; but then again, neither had symbols... Having read *The Castle Of Crossed Destinies*, I did suspect that there may be some convoluted reason for the awful names, but if so it's too deep to fathom. Nonsense should be digestible; like pulp SF of the Golden Age, these names produce indigestion. To quote from "Without Colors": "In other words, it was all beyond understanding".

Fables are intended to offer a moral to the listener or reader; happily, this is the case with *Cosmicomics*, though it is not always readily apparent. Nevertheless, Calvino can write effectively; I especially like "Without Colors" and "The Dinosaurs". But equally, on occasions, he does lapse into a rather pretentious style:

"...On the suspended globe we no longer saw our familiar shore, but the passage of oceans as deep as abysses and deserts of glowing lapilli, and continents of ice, and forests writhing with reptiles, and the rocky walls of mountain chains gashed by swift rivers, and swampy cities, and stone graveyards, and empires of clay and mud. The distance spread a uniform colour over everything: the alien perspectives made every image alien; herds of elephants and swarms of locusts ran over the plains, so evenly vast and dense and thickly grown that there was no difference among them."

A few fables suffer from repetition of idea or theme. In "Games Without End", Q "started making fake atoms" to trick his antagonist; in "A Sign In Space", Q "unable to make true signs, but wanting somehow to annoy Kgwqk, started making false signs". As already mentioned, Calvino often attempts to describe the indescribable, before things were named; and he succeeds, surprisingly, raising a smile as he does so:

"Once, as I went past, I drew a sign at a point in space, just so I could find it again two million years later, when we went by the next time around. What sort of sign? It's hard to explain because if I say sign to you, you immediately think of a something that can be distinguished from a something else, but nothing could be distinguished from anything there; you immediately think of a sign made with some implement or with your hands, and then when you take the implement or your hands away, the sign remains, but in those days there were no implements or even hands, or teeth, or noses, all things like that came along afterwards..."

This is echoed, in "The Spiral", by:

"I wanted to make, and considering the fact that I had never made anything, this in itself was a big event. So I began to make the first thing that occurred to me, and it was a shell."

In "The Form Of Space", we encounter a new phenomenon: "universes" -- which is slightly odd, considering universe means the whole system of existing things and therefore by its very nature cannot be plural. Also odd: "he still couldn't stop larding his talk with all the slanders and intolerances he had grown up in the midst of". It may be the narrator's style, but it isn't repeated to confirm this opinion; unless in character (which I doubt, here), ending sentences with "of" makes me cringe.

Despite the foregoing, I can still admit to enjoying chunks of the book. Morals there are -- empiternal truths.

A long time ago, when the Moon almost touched the Earth, Q and his companions used a ladder to climb up and milk the Moon. This fantasy, more than all the others, has Freudian connotations; the Moon, mistress and unattainable, and milk, symbolising man's semen, generative fluid of life; the milk could also signify our dependence on our mothers (the Moon) until departure at the point of adulthood... Love, lust and madness are all reflected in the moonlight; the tale also points to the pleasure of anticipation often being more satisfying than the realisation of one's aims. Although implied elsewhere, here it is said most strongly: life is full of choices, and at each moment of selection something is

irrevocably lost. Thus, life exacts a price in this random universe.

Beneath its flippant surface, "A Sign In Space" possesses hidden meanings. This fable is about identity, and about The Embarrassing Past that lurks forever to ridicule you. It offers an insight into a creative person's deep fears: for the writer, those old stories are — now, at the time of maturity — shameful. Here I was reminded most forcefully of the frustrations emphasised by Herman Hesse in his short story "Dream Journeys":

"And yet the writer was disillusioned by what he read; sobered, he sat in front of what he had begun the previous evening with a certain joy and enthusiasm, what for the space of an evening hour had looked like poetry and had now overnight simply turned into literature, into miserable scribbled pages that were really a waste of paper."

"Without Colors" pictures the Earth's beginning, a colourless grey time; the coming of primary colours is depicted with exciting brushstrokes and a little wonder — yet the gaining of colour is at the expense of something else. Loss emerges, ubiquitous.

On another occasion, Q plays marbles with the atoms of the universe. An explanation of atomic creation is featured in "Games Without End":

"Space is curved everywhere, but in some places it's more curved than in others: like pockets or bottlenecks or niches, where the void is crumpled up. These niches are where, every two hundred and fifty million years, there is a slight tinkling sound and a shiny hydrogen atom is formed like a pearl between the valves of an oyster."

We know (don't we?) that it isn't like that, but it is nevertheless appealing, an enchanting vision.

A variation on Descartes's "Cogito, ergo sum" can be located in the extended metaphor of "Games Without End", too. "The only proof I existed was that I bet with him, and the only proof he existed was that he bet with me." Imagine betting without alphabets, or signs, or numbers, or anything to serve as a stake...well, Calvino manages to show how gambling began. (Protostars are to blame, you see...)

"The Dinosaurs" highlights bigotry and general attitudes to "different" people. Xenophobia writ large, perhaps... In his saurian semblance, Q becomes his most endearing. The moral tone is light but evident, and subtly blended is the beginning of an international awe: "there seemed to be emerging a kind of posthumous admiration for these Dinosaurs about whom no one knew anything precise". As if this wasn't enough for a fable of 16 pages, Calvino propounds two interesting theories to explain their disappearance: decadence and pride. In the latter resides something noble and tragic, but the poignancy does not persist; as Q remarks:

"If ever a species had had a rich, full evolution, a long and happy reign, that species was ours. Our extinction had been a grandiose epilogue, worthy of our past."

Like Jonathan Livingstone Seagull, "The Dinosaurs" is open to allegorical interpretation. Possible parallels are religion and culture; whatever, the prose is redolent with a haunting quality:



"The more the Dinosaurs disappear, the more they extend their dominion, and over forests far more vast than those that cover the continents: in the labyrinth of the survivors' thoughts."

Q's great-uncle was a fish. "But I don't want to go into all those questions of kinship, nobody can ever follow them anyhow" possibly alludes to The Book Of Genesis and all those begats. The fable contains a perceptive view of attitudes to alienness and the generation gap. Set in his ways, his uncle couldn't accept a reality different from his own; very much a cry of the young (of any era) about the aged... The decision made, the uncle would not leave the sea, but would continue to evolve there; the land was far too treacherous. Shame and prejudice are touched upon with purpose, too; and an ironic loss, of course. Eventually, "in the midst of the world's transformations, being transformed myself", Q becomes part of Evolution, watching branches of fauna become extinct while others moved on, while still others remained unchanged, surviving through the centuries...

"The Light Years" has the funniest lines, and dabbles with the mind-boggling time-perception problem encapsulated by the lines of an anonymous poet, "the moment of which I speak is already far away". The implications are that you can never recapture or undo the past; that you must look forward, not back. An irresistible moral dig raises its head, too: "I recalled a day when I had really been myself, I mean myself in the way I wanted others to see me". That, neatly, sums up one's view of self, the civilised self.

Finally, "The Spiral" reveals how Q made the first mollusc; thus art and artistic expression began. All art was born with the first coelate shell, and the dropping of scales from the eyes in order to perceive art. Perception was, and is, all. Eyes (in our distant past, and in

but one of Q's pasts) became the windows of the scul, and though these fables appear random in their placement between the colourful covers, this tale is a fitting conclusion; it is both elegant and moving.

Cosmicomics may seem expensive, even for a large format text, but when you consider that a thriller costs the same and is far less memorable then, yes, it is worth the expense, particularly as Q's pyrotechnic display redounds after more than one reading — and how many thrillers can say the same?

Robert Silverberg — THE WORLD INSIDE (Bantam, 167pp, \$2.50), MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES (Bantam, 281pp, \$3.50)

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

These two books throw each other into interesting relief. Neither of them is really a novel: there is no main protagonist whom we follow throughout nor a particular crisis which is examined in detail. Both are very fragmentary.

The World Inside is a reprint of a 1971 book, a series of interconnecting stories set in and concerning Urban Monad 116. An Urban Monad (Urbmon for short) is a very overgrown tower block, one thousand stories tall and containing everything: homes, hospitals, schools, factories. It is a self-contained unit which goes outside itself only to trade for certain food-stuffs from the farming communes. The main purpose of its inhabitants is to breed and to expand into more Urbmons, for the answer to the overpopulation of the twentieth century has been to exchange population control for unlimited population expansion, made possible by living vertically in the Urbmons instead of horizontally on the ground. With this has come the obligation to accept complete sexual freedom with few reasons allowed for refusing any partner who asks, although — curiously — marriage is still the norm.

The book follows various members of Urban Monad 116 through parts of their lives, the stories interconnecting through the reappearance of the same people in several of them. They explore the happiness of the characters, the contented and the distressed, the girl who wants to stay and the man who wants to go. Compliance with the status quo, however, is essential. If people do not comply they are either adjusted until they do or they are disposed of. The status quo is ruthless.

Majipoor Chronicles is a collection of short stories set on the planet of the same name. Many of them have already appeared in the magazines, and they are linked in this volume by a crude device giving them the illusion of a novel. Hissune, the linking device, is a clerk who surreptitiously investigates the Register of Souls, reliving parts of people's lives which have been recorded for posterity; these extracts from the Register form the short stories. Anyone who like Lord Valentine's Castle will like Majipoor Chronicles. It fills in a lot of the background detail left vague in the earlier book — we're told how Barjazid became the King of Dreams and how he punishes wrongdoers, what the Labyrinth is like seen from the inside, what Ghayrog and Metamorphs are really like.

The two books have many similarities and many differences. The most striking difference is the changing auctorial voice. In The World

Inside he's rebellious. The status quo may be powerful, perhaps omnipotent, but that doesn't make it right. There is a strong undercurrent of satire, an uneasiness that this world, for all its superficial happiness and efficiency, is wrong. Questions are raised as to whether human nature can be completely moulded to fit such an environment, and the answer seems to be no. But whether the Urbmon or mankind will eventually win is left open; there are no glib answers. Majipoor Chronicles, however, could have been — and perhaps in some ways it was — written by a different man. The civilisation on Majipoor is static and likely to remain so; no one really questions the rightness of it. People like Therea may go off into the woods and cohabit with a Ghayrog for a while, but she returns and she conforms. There are no real rebels, no one protests against Majipoor's status quo. They may dislike their own position, but that can be changed without any need to alter anything else. There is no satire, no unease, no undercurrents in this book. The rebel has become conformist.

The similarities are where both books are disappointing. Clearly, a lot of thought has gone into both their societies; there is history, geography, legend and fact about Majipoor and the Urbmon. Both societies are coherent and complex; I feel that both of them would work. But neither they, nor their inhabitants, seem to have any life. The characters exist only on the page, although there's a greater attempt at characterisation in The World Inside — people ponder and agonise more, and their motives are clearer. But in neither book did I find any of them memorable. Silverberg's writing in both is clear, readable, but not exciting, and so are his books — both are moderately interesting, but neither are exciting.

I'm not sure whether I'm damning with faint praise or praising with faint damns. Both are appropriate. Both books reflect the styles and preoccupations of their respective periods, both pass the time fairly agreeably. Neither is more than that, which is a pity.

Lisa Tuttle — FAMILIAR SPIRIT (New English Library, 220pp, £1.50)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

Ten years ago, or perhaps fifteen, and this book could not have been published. For one thing, that would place it before the recent boom in occult horror; and, more specifically, it would pre-date a considerable amount of feminist groundwork on the novel that the reader now takes for granted. I say this because, in the early 1980s, Familiar Spirit could easily be lost in the crowded shelves of paperback horror, and that would be a pity. Certain kinds of originality are more a matter of timing than content.

I'm not certain whether Familiar Spirit really amounts to anything more than demon-meets-girl, demon-loses-girl, demon — but let's not anticipate. There are two parallel narratives in the book: that of Sarah's fight against the evil she finds in a "haunted" house, and that of her equally difficult struggle against subtle and not entirely external attacks on her independence. Both stories, in a kind of narrative pun, ultimately deal with possession.

The setting is an American town, the ambience

of college and shared apartments, very convincingly depicted. It would require only a very slight emphasis to present Familiar Spirit as a mainstream novel, with Sarah's "demonic" experiences a hallucination, the result of her break-up with her lover Brian. The characters and their emotional relationships are well-drawn. Auctorial authority, however, gives us the occult experiences as being objective rather than subjective, and the horror-narrative suffers by comparison — but only because it too is familiar. There have been too many books and films on this subject over the past few years for it not to be.

Where the two narrative strands become inextricably linked is in the matter of sexuality. Possession here refers to demonic possession and the loss of self, sexual possession and the loss of independence, and (most insidious) the lover's possession and the loss of self. What Familiar Spirit does is to emphasise, if not over-emphasise, the very close link between demonology and sex; between, if you like, two kinds of pornography, that based on lust and that based on fear. That's a narrow line to tread, and it's no wonder that from time to time Familiar Spirit goes over the top into the ludicrous. (One might say that, witness Stephen King, the form demands it.) It's difficult to take a book containing the image of a girl threatened by a disembodied penis as seriously as one ought...but, fortunately, there's more to the book than that. The difficulty can be illustrated by reference to the cover blurb: "her mind, then her body were being invaded, perverted, destroyed". It's occult, but might as easily be erotic-pornographic; it could fit equally well onto a John Norman Gor book.

Readings naturally differ according to preconceptions of the reader, but I've a feeling this book will be more subject to alternative readings than many others of its ilk. The feminist groundwork I mentioned earlier allows the book a frank portrayal of female sexuality — but is the heroine's fate a punishment for that, or a reward? Sarah fights against evil, and suffers, but is she just another masochistic heroine? The first victim of possession, Valerie, slashes her wrists as the only way of ridding herself of the disembodied spirit. The earlier history of Jade (a rather Crowley-ish occult figure of the 1920s) involves the rape of the viewpoint character, and Sarah herself suffers a kind of self-induced violation. I began to wonder if the book wasn't a kind of feminist justification of clichés, rather than their reversal. Sarah originally takes the house for good reasons — the break-up of her life when Brian rejects her for another girl and the desire to leave her friend's flat where three is undoubtedly a crowd — and yet what it amounts to is the hoary old cliché of dumb heroine entering weirdo house despite enough warnings to send any normal person running. And to explain her staying, the undead Jade has to be credited with powers that change her mental state, so that once outside the house she forgets why she shouldn't return to it.

The occult is difficult to depict convincingly, and Familiar Spirit has a very dodgy rationale. If magic has rules, then it should abide by the restrictions; if it has no restrictions whatsoever then that makes it not just a game but a pointless game. The view here is non-religious, in the sense that Jade can't be re-

strained by rituals of exorcism, and tends at first to the anthropological. But earlier restrictions on evil are later overcome for no apparent reason. One doesn't necessarily expect a horror story to follow the logic of reason, since fear is not one of the more rational attributes of the human being; but it should follow the logic of emotion, or it loses credibility. The reader ceases to care what happens to the puppets.

Despite flaws, it's a well-written story, with some neat links between the "familiar spirit" of the disembodied Jade and the familiar body of the lover Brian. There are, too, witches' familiars: toads, rats, cats that suckle blood as children suckle milk, and lead one to suspect a link between that and Sarah's childless state. Fears are duly roused — fear of darkness, rats, claustrophobia, blood; the loss of identity and sanity, the incapacity of illness, and emotional dependency. It's interesting that, in keeping with the somewhat ambiguous American attitude, those characters who are old are either helpless and disgusting or evil and powerful, while the characters who have all the life are young, good-looking, and sexually active. Ideally the occult novel should both touch the deep-rooted archetypes and stereotypes and also transform them; Familiar Spirit manages the first rather better than the second. And if the impulse is (as it so often is with occult horror) to reach for the psychoanalyst's handbook or treat it as a landmark of how far the novel has progressed over the last ten or fifteen years, that doesn't make it any less of a good read.

ALSO RECEIVED

Poul Anderson — THE TROUBLE TWISTERS (Grenada, 192pp, £1.25): "Three 23-year-old puzzle tales — "The Three-Cornered Wheel", "A Sun Invisible" and "The Trouble Twisters" (aka "Trade Team") from the golden age of Analog," says Martyn Taylor, who continues: "Easy enough to read, demonstrating most of the virtues of the genre and the weaknesses in that the puzzles wouldn't puzzle most 13-year-olds for very long. While these stories don't patronise the reader in the way that so many of this type do, I'd have thought there must be sufficient new stories as good, if not better, to make it unnecessary to exhume these. Or are there really that many Anderson completists?"

Scott Baker — DHAMPIRE (Timescape, 260pp, \$2.95): "The best argument for censorship I've ever read, a book that degrades its readers to the same putrid level as it author," says John Hobson, stating that he felt "mentally violated...when the hero of this travesty anally raped his sister with the aid of a broken bottle." Good God. He adds: "It needs no further comment save that it is a sad reflection on a society that has produced people so devoid of morality that they can see nothing wrong with it."

James Blish — WELCOME TO MARS (Avon, 156pp, \$2.50): "Bright teenagers fly to Mars in a packing crate in this very poor, very dated Disney Time novel," is John Duffy's verdict. "I suppose it may introduce very young readers to SF, but I hope not."

Marion Zimmer Bradley -- SHARRA'S EXILE (Arrow, 365pp, £1.95); "This isn't science fiction, but Mills & Boon," says Chris Bailey, who has the quotes to prove it: "When he smiled, she thought, he was very handsome; even the scar that pulled his lip into distortion only gave his smile a little more irony and warmth", and 'I caught her for the first time in my arms and pressed her lips hungrily to mine.' You'll note," he continues, "a couple of ripe old cliches in these extracts, which are very typical of the whole look. The writing is like suet pudding, but the narrative is passed around from character to character to

provide variety, and it becomes positively interesting in the first person sections concerning Lew Alton and the physical and spiritual course he bears. Somewhere in here is a strong and capable story about Lew and his development, but it is lost among the stultifying mass of words and a plot which largely concerns itself with the feuds and intrigues of the Darkovan clans and noblemen, achieving a quite Balkan complexity. It's strictly for the addicts."

Stephen R. Donaldson -- WHITE GOLD WIELDER (Fontana, 509pp, £2.50): See my review of the earlier hardback edition in Vector 116. It's all true, I swear.

LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOOM — the letter column

A few more letters than last time, all considerably meatier and all eminently quotable. The two main topics of discussion were my editorial comments on Kingsley Amis's The Golden Age Of Science Fiction and my closing review of the Brandt Commission's Common Crisis; but first let's hear from ANDREW WEINER (in Canada) with a late comment on Chris Bailey's "Blood On The Racks" column in Vol 6 No 6:

"As an occasional contributor to F & SF, I read the column with interest, and I have to agree with some of the points he made. In particular, the magazine is weak in the hard-science stuff (no doubt because hard-science writers don't read F & SF, and because Analog pays better anyway) and should probably stay away from it. But I think Bailey gives Ed Ferman too little credit in general. What other US editor consistently publishes Cowper, Priest, Watson, Holdstock, et al? What other US editor would buy oddball stuff like Greg Frost's "A Day In The Life Of Justin Argento Morrel" (in the July 1983 issue) or John Kessel's "Another Orphan" (which won the Nebula)?

"I think Bailey should also look at some recent issues of Isaac Asimov's, which is now less 'pulp adventure' (Scithers has taken his crew to Amazing) and more of an F & SF clone -- and in fact has recently out-F & SF-d F & SF with writers like Connie Willis."

On, then, to the latest issue. MALCOLM EDWARDS had the most detailed comments to make:

"Of course, Kingsley Amis has been widely derided, and not without reason, for his contentious and unconvincing introduction to The Golden Age Of SF. Nevertheless, the argument that the heyday of the science fiction short story was in the 1950s is not quite as easily dismissed as you appear to suggest (even if Amis's and Malzberg's arguments do lack conviction). I'd refer you to a couple of other critical pieces -- Joanna Russ's important (I've always thought) essay "The Wearing Out Of Genre Materials", which I reprinted many moons ago in Vector 62, and, more recently, Brian Stableford's essay on the short fiction of William Tenn in the multi-volume Survey Of Science Fiction Literature. Brian's argument (and I simplify, from memory) is that in the 1940s SF writers worked out most of the technical variations on the various SF notions. Then, in the 1950s, a new set of writers appeared (in F & SF and Galaxy), more sophisticated than their predecessors, who found all this subject matter lying around waiting for

the whole range of ironic variations to be worked on it. And in an explosion of short stories -- which remain some of the most entertaining SF stories ever written -- Bester and Sheckley and Tenn and Pohl and Knight and Kornbluth and Dick and Leiber and Aldiss and others ran through them. After that, it has been much harder to write original SF short stories. The greater concern with the range of literary technique, which is characteristic of the best 1960s' writers, yielded some; but most of those writers have done their best work in novels, whereas the majority of those 1950s' authors are, rightly, valued primarily for their short stories. There are very few later writers of whom that can be said and, interestingly, they seem mostly to be British (Ballard, Roberts, Cowper to some extent)."

Unfortunately, I haven't read either Russ's or Stableford's essays (I was not a member of the BFA when Vector 62 was published, and no spare copies of that issue now remain; and my pocket won't stretch to the Survey Of SF Literature), but I've no doubt their arguments make much better sense than Amis's and Malzberg's. Brian's in particular -- although it might be possible for an Amis to argue, at least from your summary of it, that if the writers of the fifties really did just run variations on the themes of the forties then the "decline" in SF began earlier than his watershed year of 1959. Or perhaps not ...but I half-concede the point anyway -- only half-concede it because, after all, ideas aren't the sole province of SF, but the basis of all fiction, and I think it's only the notion that "in SF, the idea is hero" which leads us to view those stories lacking in original ideas as somehow derivative or third-rate. I think that no matter how unoriginal the idea the manner and quality of its dramatisation is as important as anything else.

Another reason why I only half-concede your point is much more heretical -- simply put, I do rather reject the notion that the story, as opposed to the novel, format is the "best", or the "natural", or whatever format for the expression of an SF idea, as the likes of Malzberg and Gunn would have us believe. Or, to put it another way, are the magazines really as important or as central to the history of SF as they're usually made out to be? I happen to believe that novels are far more important than short stories, will last rather longer, and that when the true history of SF comes to be written the magazines (of which only a handful, and for a fairly short

period, can be said to have been influential) will be relegated to a considerably more marginal role. Not, of course, that you held out for short stories and/or the magazines over novels, but you did point to the fact that the writers of the sixties, compared to the writers of the fifties, have done their best work in the novel rather than the short story format; which, for me, makes their stuff much more worthwhile.

And for a third reason (closely allied to my second) for why I only half-concede your point: you're referring specifically to short stories, whereas Amis was attempting to discuss SF in toto...but I've run on more than I should have. More from Malcolm's letter:

"I think Chris Bailey would find "V.R.T.", in particular, transformed by further readings; it now seems to me the best part of what I still regard as the best single SF book of recent years. You start by identifying for yourself the exact moment in the story when the narrator is killed and supplanted by one of the shape-changing 'abos'. From there, all its other complexities begin to open themselves to you."

Mention of Gene Wolfe, however, brings me to PHILIP COLLINS:

"What is it about Gene Wolfe that at present he can be indulged mightily where other authors are hacked to pieces? Q.What do you think of trilogies, tetralogies, etc.? A.Terrible. An individual book should stand on its own. But along comes 'The Book Of The New Sun' and suddenly all the critics are falling over each other in their attempts to kiss the feet of the demi-god. Q.What do you think of stories which have a deus ex machina ending? A.Terrible. The author obviously hasn't planned his story properly. But lo and behold, here's Chris Bailey positively acclaiming Gene Wolfe's use of such a device in his review of The Fifth Head Of Cerberus. Q.Tell me, doctor, how long-lasting are the effects of the mind-drug 'Gene Wolfe' which warps critics' judgements and feelings?"

I think the distinction which ought to be made between sequels to successful novels — such as, say, Frederik Pohl's Beyond The Blue Event Horizon, which followed Gateway; or, worse, Piers Anthony's interminable "Xanth" series — and a cycle of novels like "The Book Of The New Sun" tetralogy is that the latter kind is deliberately planned that way while the former is not. The latter is conceived and executed as an artistically integrated unit, and when completed no more can be added to it (in theory; I understand Wolfe has since been cajoled into writing a fifth volume, although God only knows what he thinks he has left to say), but the former come into being at the behest of purely commercial considerations, and can be extended for as long as demand continues. Thus the latter is, I think, acceptable and defensible while the former is not. As for the deus ex machina in The Fifth Head Of Cerberus: Chris didn't actually praise it, but said that the "pace" and "immediacy" of the narrative helped carry one over it. Quite a difference, really.

Back to my editorial, then, with NIK MORTON:

"John Hobson's review of Blish's reprinted And All The Stars A Stage seems to echo your comments on Amis's anthology. If there wasn't such a descriptive phrase as "The Golden Age"

an ad-man would have to invent it — but there is no such thing. Looking back, most people remember with fondness the good moments, the uplifting moments, many of which are associated with the process of growing up. But to dwell on the past moments to this inordinate degree, as SF tends to, is to succumb to the Peter Pan syndrome; or, perhaps worse, to exist with your head in the sand. The growing-up process doesn't stop because you've passed puberty or your bones have set; it's a mental process, and pray God I hope I never stop growing up!"

On the same subject, here's ANDY SAWYER:

"Someone ought to do a close comparison of Amis's introductions to the anthology and his earlier New Maps Of Hell; skimming through the latter, it's obvious that the person who wrote it isn't the Amis of today. Despite its faults, there's a kind of freshness about New Maps Of Hell; a feeling of kinship between the jazz/SF fan of the 1950s and the rock/SF fan of the 1960s in the way they react. Perhaps that doesn't say too much about the 1960s, but there are odd little emphases of tone — in the way, for instance, that Amis looks at radical/conservative strands in SF — which I'm sure would come over quite differently now. (Incidentally, wasn't Amis's The Alteration a reflection of Keith Roberts's Pavane, which is actually referred to in the text of the novel? Yet Roberts is part of the New Wave Amis professes to despise.) His final section, on 'the needed invasion from above' — i.e., writers from the 'mainstream' — is fascinating.

"I'm pleased to see the two non-fiction reviews in Inferno, which remind me of Amis's comment that in SF 'we have a form of writing which is interested in the future'. Not now we haven't, I think; but I've been saying that for years. How many SF readers are really concerned with what the world will be like in ten or twenty years' time? Not a lot, I think, despite the growing number of individuals who become, say, GND activists, because the fashion in SF writing now seems to lie elsewhere. Which is a shame, but you can't chain people to desks and force them to write what you want. Still, perhaps I shouldn't shout too loud; the kind of SF which devotes itself entirely to social satire and attempted 'prophecy' is usually too boring for words! Perhaps the best balance is what you are doing — discussing relevant non-fiction."

MARTYN TAYLOR, however, doesn't agree:

"I do wonder at your devoting four pages to two books which have nothing whatsoever to do with fiction in the journals of the British Science Fiction Association. (Except in that anything published by the UK Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels are works of more extreme fantasy than almost anything that gets published outside of the Conservative Party Manifesto.) By all means engage in a little consciousness-raising, but at 25 per cent of one issue I'd suggest that you're certain to raise the ire of the Ken Lakes of this world. Or is that what you're about?"

Well, I'd certainly like to provoke and promote informed and intelligent debate on real-world issues that seem in some way relevant to the

concerns of SF -- naive and idealistic though this may sound, I believe that the more aware we are then the better equipped we are to control our own destinies (never mind the destiny of the world). But in controversy for the sake of controversy I have not the slightest interest.

More from Martyn:

"I'd point out something awry with your piece about the Brandt Commission's Common Crisis. 'Radical critiques by the Third World...' I don't know how to tell you this, but the Third World is a fictitious entity. It does not exist. What you have is a very loosely defined number of countries and their citizens. Maybe citizens of Third World countries write radical critiques -- I'd point you in the direction of the magazine South, if you don't already read it -- but that is all. Since most of those radical citizens were educated at the universities of the rich North I'd suggest that their viewpoints are as muddled as the politicians you chastise for not seeing through the 'unlimited growth' misconception."

But isn't South subtitled "The Third World Magazine"? Apart from which, I disagree with you anyway; we may not be in a position to identify the Third World as a specific political grouping in the same way as, say, the OECD or OPEC countries, but it is beginning to find its collective voice through the so-called "Group of 77" institutions (so called because of the 77 Third World nations who found themselves lining up alongside each other against the rich West in the UN Law of the Sea negotiations, although there are a number of others that now fit beneath that umbrella), institutions which in years to come are likely to play an increasing role in world affairs.

To finish with, though, here's IAN MCKEER, like Andy beginning with Amis and ending with Brandt:

"Your editorial made eminently good sense to me, and there are two small points I'd like to add. Firstly, I wonder what Amis would think of his 'hero' Pohl if he were aware of Pohl's opinion of the effect of the New Wave on his own writing. I can't recall where I read Pohl's comment but he said that the techniques and the opening up of wider horizons that the New Wave engendered had helped him improve his own writing. And had it not been for New Wave type fiction I personally would have stopped reading SF long ago, because the 1950s' style Amis likes has always seemed to me restricted in both style and content.

"Secondly, the question of academic influence. Undoubtedly, commercial pressures must far outweigh academic influence on the genre. I am one of those cynics who believe that the main reason academia became interested in SF was to provide grist for the PhD mill. After all, it's much easier to write a thesis on a relatively new area of investigation, knowledge of which amongst one's peers is pretty minimal, than to try to find yet another novel angle on, say, D. H. Lawrence. (But that doesn't mean I think there's nothing to be said for SF.) Where the academic influence may be more widespread, and really only in the American market, is with these classes in creative writing and the like. It's quite possible that these can influence the style

and perhaps the content of the stories. Certainly, it's struck me that the stories produced at the Clarion workshops have a particular feel to them: not so much that they were all the same but that they looked like they'd rolled off a production line. Mind you, this may simply be my inability to perceive the various subtle gradations in American SF, being an outsider and an ignorant Brit to boot.

"Judging from your review of Common Crisis, you're well read on the world economy and Third World issues. It seems to me that Brandt has had to find a way to persuade those with power to yield some of it to others, and that is extremely difficult for if there is one thing to be learned from history it is surely that those who have power will not willingly give it up, especially to those whom they regard as adversaries and competitors. Nor, as you so rightly point out, are the governments we in the West have today likely to take risks. To have vision at a time of economic depression requires the sort of courage we're unlikely to see in acolytes of Friedman's economics. Even though a restructuring of the world economic order would benefit everyone it appears it's impossible to convince those who now have power that this is so.

"Then, too, there is an entrenched elite in most Third World countries who are doing very nicely out of things as they are, something that was probably too politically hot for Brandt to have a go at and which his commission may (rightly) have regarded as small beer compared to the IMF, GATT, etc.'s hold on the world economy. Perhaps you've read it, but if not I recommend Barbara Ward's Progress For A Small Planet for a lucid and coherent exposition of Third World problems which she saw as not only the fault of the West but also of those Third Worlders with vested interests. A rather more specific case was made (or, rather, implied, as nothing was said outright) in a Horizon programme on Kenya broadcast about 3 years ago. It dealt with peasant farmers displaced from the land by coffee-growing combines, which exacerbated the problems of food supply, urban unemployment and damage to the land but which was very nice thank you for those in the cash economy who were growing and exporting coffee. When you remember that more than a few African nations could feed themselves at independence but that as they concentrated more and more on cash crops their problems have grown steadily worse...and all because the people in power want an international airline, a satellite ground station and all the other symbols of progress they've heard about from the West. Then on top of that they're hit by the price of oil going through the roof, which puts another twist in the deforestation and desertification cycle. Of course, I'd lay odds that the West, and the IMF in particular, would ascribe these problems to the governments concerned."

Thank you for that small word of praise back there; I do my best to keep up with what's going on, but there are no doubt lots of things I've missed. A couple of economist fans said as much to me about that review, but the conversations never developed any further and they didn't write in either. (So no cigars for them.) But you'll all write in next time, won't you?