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

Writing about the BMC's (ineptly conceived and lamely executed, in my opinion) "Venture Into Science Fiction" promotion in The Guardian for 12 October 1983, arts reporter Martin Walker said: "Surveys suggest that 400,000 British adults are regular SF readers, but SF remains a cult, and where there are cults there are sectarians. The little local difficulty between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader is as nothing compared with the feud between the SF purist and the fans of science fantasy, or that between the partisans of the good old days of Astounding magazine and the fans of the experimental writings in New Worlds." Such a statement revealed only that he was as ignorant of SF as he went on to accuse the BMC of being, since the "war" between the Old and the New Waves has been over for at least the past decade: New Worlds is no longer published (in any form), Michael Moorcock now claims not to write science fiction, and — with the New Wave's greater emphasis on character, style and ambiguity having been more or less incorporated into the corpus of traditional SF — no one now really cares what it was all about.

Coincidentally, however, we have an opportunity to look back at it with New Worlds: An Anthology (Flamingo, 512pp, £3·50), a collection of stories, verse and articles culled from the period 1964-1975 with the intention of providing a representative cross-section of what it was like, and prefaced with a lengthy autobiographical introduction (slightly revised from its earlier appearance in Foundation 15) by Michael Moorcock detailing the somewhat turbulent history of the magazine under his editorship. Being autobiographical, it is naturally not impartial, and mixed in with the basic facts about the magazine — its different incarnations, its financial ups and downs, and its varying critical and commercial reception — the introduction has a good deal to say about Moorcock's hopes for and frustrations with the rebellion he ushered in and the impulses and inspirations that lay behind it. Reading his words, one catches something of the novelty and excitement of the time, and of his anger and contempt for the complacency that he felt lay all around him:

> "Those first editorials and articles, almost entirely written by Ballard and myself, were therefore often fiercely opinionated and probably overstated, largely in reaction to these new conservatives who had appeared (with New Maps Of Hell, the Spectrum anthologies, reviewing spots in the Observer and Sunday Times, and so on) to advise SF writers

(and anyone else) against anything but the most gentle of ambitions. Amis, with his lazy paradoxes, reviewed the first issue of New Worlds we produced by referring to Burroughs as not the far more interesting and imaginative Edgar Rice but the boring William. The fruity ghost of Chesterton, never far away, was wagging the finger it had once waved at Wells. We celebrated the work of William Burroughs and invoked the names of surrealists, romantics, imagists, allegorists. Borges, Hesse, Peake, Calvino, Kafka, Wyndham Lewis, Vian (then hardly any of them available to an English public) were called upon as examples not necessarily because they were admired but because their techniques, their angles of attack, were different. New Worlds evolved into an avant garde magazine through necessity, not through any abstract ambition to be different, and it retained a popular audience (emphasis as original). A disgruntled audience, sometimes, or a confused one, but a fascinated one which continued to buy the issues. The writers had few enthusiasms in common. I had no interest in Dali, whom Ballard frequently mentioned, nor in Nabokov, who was much admired by Langdon Jones; they did not share my liking for, say, Brecht. My view of writers like Pynchon or Barth was that they were clumsily, by means of long-winded parody, trying to achieve results already achieved in New Worlds. We published Pynchon's Entropy for the first time in England, however. Being easily bored ourselves, I think we stimulated readers who were equally bored with most of what was offered to them." (pp 14-15)

A fine old mixture of attitudes and emotions — but how much of it is true and how much the product of nostalgia? Moorcock himself says, at the end of his introduction, that he occasionally feels nostalgic for the New Worlds ambience, but knows it can't be resurrected — adding that "All an anthology like this one can successfully do is to select some of the most interesting examples from what was, in its own small way, a revolutionary and stimulating period and to remind the reader that it is anger, impatience, optimism and idealism, not nostalgia of any sort, which creates the most worthwhile and lasting changes" — yet his introduction reeks of it, and of the mythologising that goes along with it. To be sure, the magazine was ambitious and innovative, and did generate a great deal of controversy, but Moorcock is surely overstating his case, reworking what was in truth a comparatively short-lived rebellion in a generally overlooked literary field into a major ideological drama, complete with good guys, bad guys and political manifestos. What he seems to be ignoring is that, while the magazine may have achieved much at the time, what matters now is how lasting its achievements have been and how much of its contributors' commitment and fervour have been transmitted to subsequent generations of writers.

The answer to both is "not much". It goes almost without saying that the bulk of the SF being published today represents, in comparison with the SF of the sixties, a distinctly retrograde step — where once flourished innovation and risk-taking, in both themes and styles, there is now an undemanding conservatism. Instead of Stand On Zanzibar or Bug Jack Barron or Camp Concentration we have Julian May's "Saga Of Pleistocene Exile" and made-over war stories from Jerry Pournelle. The truly individual works, like Brian Aldiss's "Helliconia" trilogy or Chris Priest's The Affirmation or Gene Wolfe's "The Book Of The New Sun" either exist on the fringes of the genre, where they have virtually ceased to be science fiction at all (and more power to them because of that), or stand so far above the general run of everything else that they are unique in all possible senses of the word. In this respect, my earlier statement that the New Wave's greater emphasis on character, style and ambiguity has been more or less incorporated into the corpus of traditional SF is as much a piece of mythologising as Moorcock's introduction — true, there was once a period when it was the case, but not any more. Even Frederick Pohl, who once opposed the New Wave and then executed a complete about-face to say that without it he wouldn't have been able to write such a novel as Man Plus, is now — with The Cool War and Midas World — back to producing feeble "satires" along the lines of (and with a tenth of the imagination and wit of) those he produced in the fifties. The newer writers have paid no attention to the New Wave at all: bar a few new equations to play with, Jack Chalker, James Hogan and Barry Longyear produce identikit versions of stuff that was all the rage in the forties. Compounding the problem is the fact that many of those writers most closely associated with New Worlds, such as Michael Butterworth and James Sallis, have fallen silent since the demise of the magazine, and their work for it, languishing in obscurity, has had no impact or influence on anyone. In other words: New Worlds failed in its stated objectives, and the science fiction of the eighties is little different from the science fiction of the forties and fifties.

This is of course to beg the question of why it failed. The answer, I think involves consideration of, firstly, the wider world of which it was part; secondly, the nature of science fiction (and of its readership); and, thirdly, the changing nature of New Worlds itself. To take each point in that order:

The sixties, as those of us who lived through any part of them will remember, were tremendously optimistic times — the future was assured, there was nothing we couldn't do if we only put our minds to it, prosperity and equality for all lay just around the corner. Then came the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the energy crisis, the beginnings of the current world recession, and the slow but steady decline of hope that has led us to the bleakness of today. The seventies were a decade of apathy, the eighties show distinct signs of being a decade of authoritarianism, and God only knows what lies beyond. (Opinion polls suggest that more people than ever before now think there will be a nuclear war of some sort by the end of the century — a prospect that can only lead to total paralysis of the will.) In such circumstances, it's not surprising that people turn more to escapism in their leisure activities — via video games, adventure films of the Star Wars kind, paperback spy thrillers, TV series about an allegedly simpler and less threatening past — rather than grittily realistic dramatisations of current social concerns or agonised wrestlings with the philosophical questions of human existence. New Worlds, of course, was not escapist at all: its dominant theme was entropy, the ineluctable decline and

dissolution of absolutely everything (including the social order) in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics (the key stories in this regard being Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death Of The Universe" and M. John Harrison's "Running Down", both reprinted in this collection), coupled with a solipsist belief that there was no such thing as objective reality and that, because of this ambiguity as to what might or might not be "true", no one point of view was any more valid than any other. It celebrated, in other words, the virtues of angst and despair — something that (sticking my neck very far out indeed) I think can only flourish in a climate of optimism. When we think the world is secure, when we do not feel threatened by what happens in our day-to-day lives, we're prepared to spend our leisure considering the possibilities of failure and catastrophe; but when gloom surrounds us on all sides the last thing we want to intrude on our leisure is more of it. As the social climate changed around it, therefore, New Worlds became increasingly isolated from the rest of the world, left high and dry by the onward march of events. It failed in what it was trying to do because it did not adapt to the changing attitudes of its audience; it ceased to speak to them in a voice they wished to hear.

Secondly, then, the nature of science fiction and the science fiction readership. I think it's fair to say that the bulk of genre SF is still governed by what might be termed "the Gernsback-Campbell prognosis", to the effect that science fiction is a literature of "future realism", concerned to dramatise the effects of technologically-induced change — a prognosis that obviously didn't interest Moorcock in the least. He has, elsewhere, freely admitted to not having read much SF prior to taking over the editorship of the magazine, or to knowing much about it, and thought that it was all in the same vein as the stories of Bester, Harness and Sheckley he'd admired up until then (and professed to be astonished when he later found out that it wasn't). He says here that "SF was attractive because it was overlooked by the critics and it could be written unselfconsciously, just as, in the early days, it was possible to do interesting work in popular music as a rock and roll performer. There was no sense of having someone looking over your shoulder" — a remark that reveals how ignorant he was of the unspoken conventions that governed what was printed in the magazines. That his New Worlds received so many complaints from so many readers is thus not at all surprising, because he was going directly against the grain of the SF they were used to. "We were surprised by the lack of response from old-guard SF fans, who, we had assumed, were as hungry for real imagination as we had been. Naively, we had honestly expected that these readers would be more open to new kinds of writing. It took me some years to learn that a certain kind of SF fan is about the most conservative reader of all!" Thus the magazine gradually lost its SF readership, and built up instead a more "literary" and in some respects more "underground" audience, one more tolerant of what it was trying to do — but such an audience, contrary to Moorcock's claim (in the lengthy quote that appeared earlier in this editorial), is not by any means a "popular" one. This represents another failure on its part: a failure to reach the audience to which it was ostensibly addressing itself, which it was trying to convert to its cause. It failed because it misread its context, and in misreading its context ran itself agground on the intransigence of the SF readership.

And so, thirdly, the changing nature of New Worlds itself. Moorcock acknowledges (again in the lengthy quote that appeared earlier) that the magazine became concerned less and less with science fiction (even in the most elastic possible sense of the term) and became instead an avant garde one — and although he sounds a bit coy about admitting as much (saying instead how "different" various authors were), there were times when it appeared (even in its early seventies' paperback format) to be pursuing the new and obscure for no other reason than the fact that it was new and obscure. Experiment for the sake of experiment, in other words, and thus a steady drifting away from its initial purpose, the transformation of science fiction, becoming instead concerned with the transformation of all fiction — an obviously hopeless endeavour. It failed because it lost sight of its original objectives, and diffused its energies over too wide a field for them to have any real effect.

"To this day I don't know if New Worlds achieved anything which would not have happened anyway," Moorcock remarks towards the end of his introduction. It's a moot point. The magazine certainly sparked off a good deal of controversy and, in doing so, did force a degree of re-examination and rejection of the limitations that had bound science fiction until then, and to that extent can be said to have accelerated the progress of trends that were just becoming visible — in particular, the emergence from beneath the dead hand of the American magazine tradition of a more idiosyncratic, more identifiably "British" science fiction, to which New Worlds gave enormous encouragement. But, as I said earlier, many of the writers most closely associated with the magazine have since fallen silent; the exceptions, such as Ballard and Aldiss, Disch and Sladek (whose work for the magazine was often seen as the epitome of its endeavour), for all that they were able to publish in it material that could not have found a home elsewhere, were pursuing their own paths prior to the real onset of the New Wave (around the mid-sixties), and have continued to do so. (The only specifically "New Worlds writers" to have survived the magazine's demise are M. John Harrison and Michael Moorcock himself — but while the former may still cleave to its twin themes of entropy and ambiguity, the latter's fiction is of a somewhat different order.) As stated earlier, New Worlds has left little to mark its passing.

By and large, the material collected in this volume is not a good advertisement for the magazine. Moorcock has excluded all of the better-known material, such as Harlan Ellison's "A Boy And His Dog" and Roger Zelazny's "The Keys To December", either because it's readily available elsewhere or because it's too long, and those "name" authors who are present are represented, in the main, by minor work (Ballard with "The Assassination Weapon", for example, and Aldiss with "Multi-Value Motorway"). The best stories — Sladek's "Masterson And The Clerks", Masson's "Traveller's Rest", Jones's "The Eye Of The Lens", Bayley's "The Four-Colour Problem", the stories by Pamela Zoline and M. John Harrison mentioned earlier — stand out clearly from the relative dullness and inconsequentiality of the

rest. Some of the rest, too, are now frankly unreadable — Giles Gordon's "Scream", Michael Butterworth's "Concentrate 3", Joel Zoss's "The Valve Transcript", to name but three. Moorcock states that the collection represents his choice of his personal favourites, which is perhaps as it should be; but, reading some of these stories those who know nothing of the New Wave could be forgiven for wondering what all the fuss was about — not because they now seem so ordinary but because they're so boring; so pretentious and self-indulgent. It's difficult to believe, reading through New Worlds: An Anthology and trying to imaginatively recreate the period in which its contents were first published, that they were once the cause of so much argument and strife, constituted the cutting edge of so angry and uncompromising a rebellion.

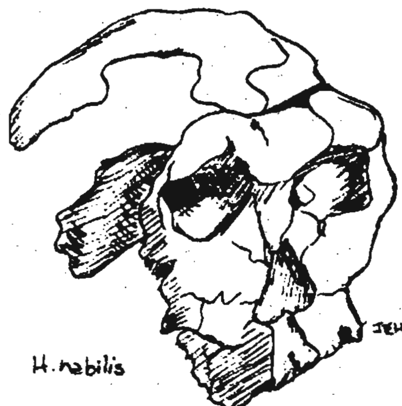
BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Bishop -- NO ENEMY BUT TIME (Sphere, 397pp, £2.25)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

The serenity of its narration remains my dominant impression of No Enemy But Time, which I first read when it came out in hardback. Since then, of course, it's won a well-deserved Nebula, and now here it is in affordable paperback. The serenity suits a book that's about dreaming.

No Enemy But Time is also solidly based on science -- along with Benford's Timescape it's the most scientific fiction I can recall having read. Only its technical gadgetry, the machine that supplements or substitutes for Joshua Kampa's dream "spirit-travelling" back to Pleistocene East Africa, is gimcrack. But Bishop's imaginative recreation of the protohumans, the Homo habilis his protagonist, Kampa, finds there, is soundly founded on and reflects the current state of expert opinion on this very live field. Recreation of what those early humans or not-quite-humans -- where to draw the line is the burning question -- were like must always be guesswork, reconstructive fiction based on the available evidence. The primary source of evidence, of course, is from palaeontology, in particular from the excavations led by the Leakeys (Mary, the late Louis B., and now Richard), first at Olduvai Gorge in Kenya, lately at the Koobi Fora deposits at Lake Turkana, Tanzania; and from Don Johansen's more recent dig at Hadar in the Afar depression, Ethiopia -- the evidence they uncover consists of very fragile fossil shards, remnants of what might have been our ancestors, or perhaps were bipedal offshoots from our direct ancestral line, doomed to extinction without issue. Although the information such experts can read from a fragment (or collection of fragments) of bone is almost magical, what old bones simply cannot reveal amounts to far more. Our humanity, after all, is in the way that we behave, in the fact that we can think and communicate, tell and write stories. Fossils can't tell us when, or how much, Australopithecus became like us more than like a chimpanzee or gorilla.



To flesh out the bones of the palaeontological evidence with personality and action, Bishop could call on two lines of enquiry, both falling roughly into the science of 'ethology' : the study of animal behaviour with more emphasis on responses to the complex stimuli found in the wild than in artifically structured laboratory experiments. The animals whose behaviour is most likely to illuminate the ways of humanity's ancestors are of course the great apes, our nearest living relatives. After all, our genetic structure differs from that of chimpanzees and gorillas only in about 3% of its make-up, while the rest is identical: this is considered a pretty close relationship. Our best information on the behaviour of the great apes comes from those like Jane Goodall and Jane Carpenter who have gone out, like anthropologists undertaking fieldwork on 'primitive' tribes, and lived with their subjects, studying and recording how they act in their natural environment, particularly their social behaviour, how they communicate with each other and with the visiting primatologist. Bishop's account of Kampa's visit to the habilines consistently conveys the same sympathetically observing, not quite dispassionate, tone.

The line of speculation which does not flavour Bishop's narration is the popularized 'sociobiology' of Desmond Morris's The Naked Ape and Robert Ardrey's Imperial Adam and The Territorial Imperative in which, from such evidence, along with other anthropological writings and their own ideas, they attempt to synthesize biologically based apologia for the parlous state man's progress has landed us all in. (As Elaine Morgan points out in The Descent Of Woman, their view of human evolution is entirely male-centred, so in writing of their views I, as a female, can feel loftily exculpated from any responsibility for what men have made of humanity. Or could if I accepted their views.) Their views of man, early and modern, clearly owe much to Tarzan of the Apes, R M Ballantyne's The Gorilla Hunters, and other such ripping yarns of high adventure and bloodletting -- remember the killer apes of 2001, or the hysterics of the film (but not the book) Quest For Fire -- on which Desmond Morris was a consultant -- which impelled the primitives to squeal with fright just when it would be wisest to keep silent. Howling choruses at dawn to mark one's territory, as gibbons and Bishop's habilines do, or frolicking and chattering when feeling safe enough, as chimps and baboons and Bishop's habilines do, is one thing; but attracting predators' attention by panicking seems a surefire recipe for extinction in any environment more

challenging than a modern movietorium. It seems more likely that, as Bishop shows them, the habilines could call on the same phlegmatic indifference conferred by familiarity with the known dangers of the world they lived in as we do when crossing a busy road or contemplating the likelihood of nuclear holocaust. Had our ancestors less than that common sense, it's unlikely we'd be here today to speculate about them.

Bishop's hominids are believable animals -- prelinguistic, not much material culture beyond occasional chipped-stone tools and shelters a touch more sophisticated than gorillas make, shown as responding to their surroundings rather than to the completely extraneous demands of a plot they don't know they're in. Joshua Kampa perceives them as human. Of course, given humans' often demonstrated capacity for relating to dogs and other pets as if they were mute humans (not to mention treating other people as animals, aliens, cannon fodder or cogs in the economic machine), that Kampa is able to live with, roughly communicate with, and think of the habilines as people proves nothing. Not even falling in love with a creature proves it human.

The burning question: are they true humans? admits only one proof: biologically, two varieties belong to the same species if they can interbreed to produce fertile offspring; if the genetic difference is such that mating is sterile, or the offspring (like a mule) infertile, then they are different species. Bishop tackles half this question -- Kampa falls in love with "Helen habiline" and she bears their child. Its large head -- increased brain capacity dictated by Kampa's two million plus years extra evolution -- causes her death in childbirth. We do not find out whether the daughter Kampa brings back from his dreamworld is herself fertile.

Besides being a half-proof of habiline humanity, the daughter he brings back serves as proof that Kampa's Pleistocene dreamworld, to which he travelled back in time, is real. Or so it would seem, except that his escape from that world back to modern Africa involves a blatantly dreamlike spacemen-ex-machina.

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there". One thing the lacunae of fossil, archaeological and historical records bring home to us is that, in imagining or reconstructing the past, we can only draw on incomplete and partial evidence, which is biased by the very accidents that preserve one item or collection while others are destroyed -- for the rest, we complete our picture of how-it-must-have-been by drawing on assumptions formed by how-things-are-here-and-now: even in imagination, we can never visit the past as natives, only as foreigners. Kampa remains conscious of this alien tourist status, and duly humble: he's not there to invent fire and the wheel, or teach the primitives language or religion. As a visitor, he's very well-mannered, an example other sf heroes dropping in on foreign worlds would do well to imitate.

But what about the alternating chapters, which follow the child of a mute Spanish whore and black US airforceman, adopted into a white airforce family, growing up in modern America, running away from his family when he finds his mother writing a book Eden In His Dreams about his lucid and accurate dreams, to become a tank repair monkey, then fortuitously meeting up with a palaeontologist who gets him into this dream-travelling project? Joshua Kampa, or John-John Monegal, or Juan Ocampo, is an oddity in his own time - black in a white society, short (though taller than the habilines), with these weird dreaming fits. Does something in his American childhood explain Freud-like why he has such dreams? Does he find it easy to communicate with the hominids who have no language because his first year was spent without hearing speech? The two time-streams are juxtaposed without integration. In fiction, the magnetism of plot demands that all incidents point themselves towards the axis of events like a pattern of iron filings. But this second, modern track of No Enemy But Time resists incorporation into the dominant theme of Pleistocene time-travel fantasy. It refuses to resolve into one consistent explanation of how Kampa's "dreaming" could be real, and by this refusal, it is the modern elements which seem less real. The story is the "dreaming" - that is the most vivid, exciting, interesting, and therefore, most real part of the story. Without secure anchorage in that, fantastic, level it is, paradoxically, the "realistic" elements of Bishop's novel one questions, even rejects as irrelevant. This distancing of the familiar, modern world in favour of the "dreaming" is clearly an effect Bishop intends.

No Enemy But Time is a soundly-crafted, approachable and thought-provoking book.

Mike Scott Rohan -- RUN TO THE STARS (Arrow, 295pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

It has been said that real SF can be written only by Americans, much as it has been said that white men cannot sing the blues. As generalisations, both propositions are spurious, but at their core are sufficiently accurate not to be dismissed out of hand; and the flourishing of certain genres in certain cultures can reveal something of the national psyche. While Mike Scott Rohan is a cosmopolitan -- born in Edinburgh of French-Mauritian and Scottish parents, and married to an American -- his Run To The Stars lies firmly within a genre that has dominated British masculine popular fiction for the past thrity-odd years and it can be reasonably claimed British writers do better than any others. Characterised as "spy fiction", these tautly-plotted action stories pit lone, often reluctant "heroes" against ruthless, corporate "thems", and the genre is probably best exemplified in the work of Fleming, MacLean, Bagley, and Hall/Trevor. The modern story type has its roots in the romantic adventures of Stevenson, and has evolved through cross-pollination with the closely observed exoticism of Kipling and the mannered whodunnits of Christie and Sayers (with an unhealthy genuflection towards the "snobbery with violence" of Buchan and his unpleasant chums). While the genre as a whole may be lacking in the finer points of the literary art the stories often make for exciting, diverting reading. I might even describe them as impure escapist fun... The hallmarks of the genre are the paramountcy of plot over character -- plots which lead the reader through a series of increasingly climactic set pieces at a carefully contrived pace to land him, breathless, at a final denouement -- ostensibly cathartic violence, and drumhead justice. In recent years,

cheap travel has created a demand for verisimilitude of locale, while the thrust towards realism of action by the more "respectable" of the practitioners (Deighton, Le Carre) has brought the genre as a whole to the brink of becoming the pornography of violence. The internal justification for this mayhem — hardly ever spelled out — is that nihilist philosophy best summed up when John Wayne drawled "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do", with the authors careful to ensure that what their man gotta do is kill. The dominant atmosphere of these tales is paranoia in all its many disguises, but most especially mysogyny.

The links between this genre and contemporary SF out to be fairly clear by now, but where SF diverges and remains an American fiction while spy stories are the most British of genres is that SF is generally optimistic while spy stories are pessimistic. The triumph of the lone hero is nothing more than a momentary irritation to the inexorable success of "them".

Mike Scott Rohan postulates a world in which "They" dominate in actuality rather than from the backroom shadows. Just a few years from now, the Soviet Union has crumbled, and been followed not long afterwards by the balkanisation of the USA. The world is dominated by a united Europe under strict bureaucratic control (Brussels isn't the capital, but you get the message), and an even more strangely unified Africa ruled by a junta whose members are never described but I guess bear more resemblance to Idi Amin Dada and Jean Bedel Bokassa than they do to Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah. But before the USA fell apart into warring states mankind established an interstellar colony, the economic burden of which was such that interstellar travel has become a thing of the past save for the second — and last — "Infall" ship playing at being an albatross just outside the atmosphere. Of course, there are still those humans who would go to the stars, but the bureaucrats — styled by Rohan as "BCs", and everything The Daily Mail would have us believe our friendly local VAT inspector is like — deem interstellar travel simply too expensive. (It bankrupted the USA, so they may have a point...) Nevertheless, a second trip is being planned as the result of a spectacular "advertising" campaign by the original colonists.

We join the story at this point. The setting is Galloway; while taking a vacation incognito, the Security Chief of the Sea Station from which Europe launches all its orbital hardware is engaged in a spot of enthusiastic if fogbound alfresco fornication with the barely of age daughter of his host. At precisely the right moment in their engagement the earth moves, in the form of a mysterious spacecraft crashing about ten yeards further down the beach. By glorious chance, he is the one man in Europe capable of getting to the bottom of the very complex plot represented by the spectacular climax.

If you think this rather absurd as a plot device you'd be damn right, but it has to be said that Rohan gets the worst of his plot devices and the worst of his writing — the aforementioned "love" scene is utterly, utterly execrable — out of the way in the first fourteen pages. From this inauspicious beginning, which led me to expect the worst in terms of a "quick buck, smart arse" hack job, the plot and Rohan's writing take a smart turn for the better as Bellamy, the hero, takes 150 pages to dig out the reason why he got caught with his trousers down. During these pages, the story moves through the statutory twists and turns in convincing style, doing so with the equally statutory side dishes of sex, violence, and interdepartmental rivalry. At the halfway point in the book he discovers what has really been happening — well, almost — burns his employers — literally! — and finds that he has no alternative but to "run to the stars". Since he was thinking of going on the colony ship anyway, this is no great hardship for him, but during the second half of the novel he discovers that the plot is even thicker than he had imagined. It would not be fair to reveal more of it — in the style of good detective stories, everything is predictable from information given in the story, but prediction is no easy matter and the cinclusion is surprising despite being entirely logical. By the standards of the genre — and of the SF genre — Mike Scott Rohan has produced a satisfying, entertaining story written in a pleasingly (at least) middle brow manner.

Had I been reading Run To The Stars only for fun, I would have smacked my lips on finishing it and made a note to keep an eye open for Rohan's next novel. But since I was reading it for review I had to read it again and think about it, and it was then that I began to notice the odd loose thread here or there. At the end of the novel there is a reference to socioeconomic computer modelling, by which I assume Rohan has asked a computer a series of questions along the lines of "All other factors remaining stable, what would happen if...". While such a process may well provide useful background to any decision it must always be borne in mind that all other factors do not remain stable, and that we are only a very short way down the road to understanding how societies respond to changing circumstances. As anyone who has spent as much time as myself wading through the pontifications of the various computer-equipped economic modellers will know, the watchword in this area is most definitely GIGO. On reflection, I do not buy Rohan's future, not for one minute; but that he had me convinced while I read the novel is a testimony to his skill.

Equally skillful is his account of the reasons why his lone hero can overcome his bigger, faster, more ruthless opponents. On the face of it, his little rebellion ought to have been squashed out of hand. Bellamy is not cleverer than his BC bosses; he says himself, when advised that he could have a career in fraud, "You should see the men who trained me" (i.e., the BCs). Neither does luck, the other classic trump card of the genre, come into the reckoning. The reason given (which I shall not reveal) is neat, satisfying, and consistent both with the plot and with the characters. The BCs don't swat our hero because they have bigger fish to fry, and the rationale is as tight as most of the plot.

As I say, this is a skillfully crafted and well written story which often transcends the stylistic limits of the genre. In two areas, though, the story is bog standard, and both irritated me considerably. The first concerns the women in the story. There are none. Characters with female names are either two-dimensional sex objects or chaps with tits. Beside the often subtle characterisation of the males, the poverty of the female characterisat-

ion stands out like that proverbial sore thumb. So, too. do some verbal eccentricities — for in stance, on page 151 Bellamy refers to an act of the BCs as a "baboon reaction", which is an apt and strking term, one which sticks in the mind; but on page 163 another character describes the same act in the same way, despite previous descriptions of her being such as to convince that she wouldn't reognise a baboon if one stood up on its hind legs and bit her. This is by no means an isolated example of clumsiness destroying in an instant the patiently created ambience of a well-crafted. thoughtful story. Perhaps the man on the Clapham omnibus wouldn't care too much about these infelicities, but Rohan does have literary pretensions. There is often a degree of subtlety and unexpected finesse in the way he characterises Bellamy, for instance; he invites us to contrast his expressed distaste for killing and politicking with his practical facility for both, pointing out that we ought not to judge even storybook heroes exclusively by their own testimony. Again, Bellamy claims to be a folk song devotee, and does occasionally display the aggressive defensiveness so characteristic of the "folkie"; yet he describes something he regards as sacriligeous as "like rearranging a folksong". Surely a folkie would know that there are as many arrangements as there are singers, myriad versions of most sets of words, and almost as many settings. But Bellamy lives in a world of fixed truths; his folk songs come from definitive collections rather than the living oral tradition. His one little visible gesture of dissent is as bureaucratised as the rest of his life, and he doesn't know it.

Written within the bounds of its two genres and a fairly superior example of both, Run To The Stars is a pretty good read. It's not without its flaws — I still don't entirely understand the relativistic finale — but it combines a gripping storyline with occasionaly stimulating ideas and a generally higher than (genre) standard of expression. Not a great book, maybe, but still a great deal better than many.

William Hjorstberg — FALLING ANGEL (Arrow, 243pp, £1·60)

Reviewed by John Duffty

Starting on Friday 13th in the 666 building, this story, a combination of the detective and occult thriller genres, proves to be quite a shocker and a consistent page-turner. Yet at the same time it is anything but cliche-ridden. Hjorstberg has created a likeable, believable character in Harry Angel: a 1950s'-style detective almost straight from any vintage "B" movie, but thankfully given a surprisingly updated and well-paced plot.

Angel's latest assignment is to locate Johnny Favorite, a sensational singer from the 1940s who has been missing since the conclusion of World War Two. But after the first of the murders he encounters, Angel realises that his simple assignment has many hidden aspects, and a tumult of well-executed twists follow. The suspense is built up slowly as each utterly believable situation leads logically to the next. Hjorstberg has taken infinite care with the creation of his characters and scenes; the result is a spellbinding piece of nostalgia. The Spider Simpson Band; the piano player Toots Sweet; Margaret Krusemark, the astrologer; all fall one after the other, with their characters as believable as their names are nostalgic.

If there was one fault, for me, it was the climax. It was shocking, just as the blurb, claims, and it does follow quite logically from everything that has preceded it; indeed, with hindsight, it's the only possible end. Perhaps that is what so floored me: its necessity. Harry Angel is perhaps too likeable and believable a character to have such a thing happen to him, but I think I was shocked the way Hjorstberg intended me to be. It's masterfully done.

For true occult fans, the mysticism may prove a little tame, and for detective fans it may prove annoying. Perhaps this kind of fusion is unwise — it certainly works well, but will people read it?

I hope so.

Robert Silverberg — THE BOOK OF SKULLS (Bantam, 196pp, $2·95)

Reviewed by Kevin Busby

To say that a certain novel is more concerned with characterisation than with plot can usually be interpreted as being at best a barbed compliment, so I should make it clear that although the main preoccupation of The Book Of Skulls is the portrayal of its main characters, it is done with such a degree of observation and realism that all but the most action-obsessed readers should find it enjoyable. This isn't to say, either, that the plot lacks interest.

The story concerns the discovery by a student, Eli, of an ancient manuscript in the university archives; this "Book of Skulls" offers the gift of eternal life, but under certain conditions. The candidate must present himself and three other candidates to the Ancient Order of the Brotherhood of Skulls as a "receptacle", two members of which shall receive eternal life but one of which shall commit suicide and one of which shall be murdered. His imagination further provoked by a newspaper report of a strange monastery near Phoenix, Eli determines to find the Brotherhood, persuading three other students — Oliver, Timothy, and Ned — to join him.

Of the four characters, Ned is by far the best-drawn. An aspiring modern-day Oscar Wilde, his musings on such things as his lust for Oliver provide the novel with a great deal of earthy humour. But Ned is far from being a camp figure of fun or a token member of this week's favourite minority group for socially-aware authors; his homosexuality is genuinely necessary to the course of events, and is secondary to his character as a whole. There are occasional minor flaws in Silverberg's presentation of him, however, such as his repeated description of himself as a "little fairy", which comes over as forced humour. Likewise, the Jewish element of Eli's personality seems somewhat overplayed, in particular his reference to himself as a "Yidling". A bitterly self-critical person who finds solace solely in believing that only the underdog has a worthwhile soul, "Eli the Jew" seems too obvious a victim. Nevertheless, he too transcends stereotyping; his weaknesses and strengths are slowly revealed as the novel progresses.

From the start the introspective and essentially introverted personalities of Ned and Eli

are balanced by the apparently well-adjusted ones of Oliver and Timothy, so that the latter become progressively more vulnerable as the other half of the "receptacle" becomes stronger. It does not come as a shock, therefore, when the apparently purely materialistic Oliver begins to experience fear for not only the death of his body but also the death of his soul as the reason for his constant need to prove his masculinity becomes clear. The unimaginative but perceptive Timothy to a large extent retains his composure almost to the end, yet he too is revealed to have areas of his personality and his past which he would rather have kept hidden.

With these four main characters so expertly brought to life by means of almost diary-like chapters, it is not surprising that the other inhabitants of their world are by contrast rather monochromatic. The fraters of the monastery, although deliberately portrayed as unemotional and mysterious, seem just a little too faceless. This is, however, nitpicking at what is an engrossing and entertaining book.

Despite what the publishers and James Blish maintain on the cover, The Book Of Skulls is not, for the most part, either science fiction or fantasy, but it is nevertheless recommended to the readers of Inferno — not because of its slight fantasy element, but because of its fine writing.

Robert Wilfred Franson — THE SHADOW OF THE SHIP (Del Rey, 273pp, $2·75)

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

This is not your usual Del Rey potboiler. To be honest, I'm not sure what it is, other than being rather strange, clumsily written, and about as scientifically plausible as a whole series of Space 1999. This isn't to say that the novel can be dismissed out of hand, however; it's so damn weird that it defies my attempts to decide whether it's good, bad, or whatever.

Most of the story takes place beneath the universe, on the airless, rocky surface of sub-space. Rheinallt, an exiled Earthman, is leading a caravanserai along the glowing blue trail that points towards an abandoned starship in which he hopes to return to Earth. The train of caravans is hauled along by vaguely intelligent mammoth-like beasts known as squeakers, and it is only by remaining in close proximity to these creatures that people are able to cross from normal-space into sub-space and remain there without fading into oblivion. These squeakers plod along the various coloured trails that link countless primitive worlds, although no one knows how or why.

All this is weird enough, but Franson piles on more and more crackpot stuff to the extent that one can't tell if he's an imaginative writer with a way-out sense of the absurd or a hack with no control over what he's doing. When his protagonist does find the ship, it turns out to be in neither normal-space nor sub-space, but exists only as a three-dimensional shadow. Only Susannilar, Rheinallt's companion, is able to board the ship; but she has problems of her own, rarely being in less than two places at any one time, and when she is she's being pursued by a mad fascist from her own world. (Other passengers on the caravanserai include a lighter-than-air cat who writes operas and has bad dreams about its sister's singing voice, a ruffian or two, and something called a Detenebrator, which appears to be a hand-woven brain.)

If the novel had been written in a less affected and tortuous manner, it would be a great deal easier to come to some critical conclusion about it. I think it's a stinker, but there are times when the wonky, opaque style clears and things become interestingly intriguing for a paragraph or two. At these moments, it reads like A Voyage To Arcturus rewritten by Murray Leinster at his pulpiest...

Some things are explained, but only in terms that make matters even more confused. Rheinallt turns out to be some kind of superman, able to control his bio-electrical functions as well as being much cleverer than everyone else. He can spit and urinate blood, too — at first I thought that this meant he had TB and ruptured kidneys, but it transpires that these are either the causes or the effects of his being immortal. By the end of the novel, he has acquired a few more superhuman abilities, but he doesn't get back to Earth. This probably means that we're in for a series, but then would Del Rey have published it otherwise?

Paul Hazel — YEARWOOD (Sphere, 276pp, £1·95), UNDERSEA (Sphere, 224pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

I suppose there comes a time in every critic's life when she has to throw up her hands and admit bafflement, defeat, and a kind of vague despair. I've been fighting these books, trying to get a hold on them, for nearly three months. The books have won.

Yearwood and Undersea, first and second volumes of the inevitable trilogy (of "The Finnbranch"; the third is to be Winterking), are either very good books or very bad books, I couldn't tell you which. That is, because of their apparent idiosyncracy and eccentricity I'm sure they will inspire the fervour of cult devotion in a small band of followers while leaving the majority of their audience in a state of puzzled blankness; I would bet that it is impossible to merely like them. The publishers themselves seem unsure how to market their changeling children; they are certainly not what the average genre fantasy reader will be expecting. One the one hand, Yearwood has absolutely the best bad blurb I've read for ages — "Finn the Fatherless, strange fruit of his wandering mother's wild womb, was born to break the oldest laws" — but on the other hand Publisher's Weekly, a reputable periodical, is quoted as saying that the books have "all the weight and mythological resonance missing from most adult fantasy these days...an atmosphere of 'mystery and portent'", and I am forced to concede that these statements are true.

Both books do have tremendous atmosphere, but that is all they have. Particularly noticeable by its absence is anything resembling a storyline or plot. The detailed description of image and incident is definitely high-quality, but scenes, but individual scenes have only the most tenuous connections with others. The books have no direction; and not only are they not going anywhere, I'm not even sure that they're trying to. What both books actually consist of is a kind of stream-of-consciousness first-person narration, by the semi-divine hero Finn, of his

life and deeds. The "view" of his world hovers between dream and madness, but perhaps semi-divine heroes should be expected to have mental processes unlike those of ordinary mortals.

Most fantasy writers strive to invest their created worlds with a kind of crystal-clear, diamond-hard certainty, the kind of absolute reality that makes us believe in the breeze in King Arthur's hair, the ground under his horse's hooves. Paul Hazel does not. To enter his world is to see with a perception distorted and clouded as if by drink or drugs; I never felt as though I could touch anything he describes, and the sensation of unreality was so disturbing and disorienting as to become distinctly unpleasant — unpleasant enough to prevent me from finishing Undersea. Even more damning, after reading a book and a half without ever having the faintest idea of what was really going on, I became more and more suspicious of the author's control of his material, and more and more convinced that he didn't know what was going on, either. Hazel is obviously a prose stylist of considerable skill, but I wish that his form could have had a little more substance.

Another problem that leads me to believe these books may be not very good rather than misunderstood and maligned masterworks is the rather peculiar mixture of mythologies used as background. Although Hazel provides a credible rationale for the indiscriminate appropriation of names at the end of Undersea, the main elements used, Scandinavian and Celtic, do not blend well or form a consistent and credible world picture. Finn (not the Irish hero Finn MacCumhal, but a Scottish-derived finn or seal-man) has a son called Njal (who I know is a Scot in "our world", but one living in Iceland and recorded in the Scandinavian saga tradition). Finn's first deed as a youth, when he is known as Herawd (the Anglo-Saxon Hereward?) and/or Agravaine (the son of King Lot of Orkney, but from the Continental (French) tradition of Arthurian romance) is to climb the World Tree (Scandinavian) sung of by the filidh (Irish) and steal two crows (not ravens) whose names mean Thought and Memory (Scandinavian) but whose mother is Badb (Irish), in the process losing an eye (in inexact parallel to the Scandinavian Odin). I was left wondering whether Hazel expects me to keep being jarred by the inconsistencies or to note the associations of his borrowed names and somehow use them to enrish the "portent" of the story.

If you're the sort of person who likes to at least end up knowing what has been going on in your reading, you'll probably hate these books. If you like vague intimations of hidden mystery and undisclosed significance, you may well like them. The closest comparable work I've read is that of Robert Nye (whose books I find considerably more intelligible because he bases each one around a well-known mythological figure: Merlin, Grendel, Taliesin), so if you really like him you might like these. But for Heaven's sake try them before you buy them.

Stephen Leigh — DANCE OF THE HAG (Bantam, 183pp, $2·50)

Reviewed by John Duffty

Dance Of The Hag is the sequel to Stephen Leigh's previous, and first, novel, Slow Fall To Dawn. Dance Of The Hag is 18 pages longer, is not quite as tall, and its pages are an unfamiliar cast of white. There end the similarities.

To be kinder: Leigh has rekindled the characters from Slow Fall To Dawn, but failed to capture the same thrust of that earlier work. The Hoorka, the guild of assassins operating on the world of Neweden, are now attempting to take their skills further afield. But the code that maintained the Hoorka is bound to the culture of their own world, and collapses when they take their work off-planet.

The problem with the plot is that it is rather self-centred, and tends to be so inward-looking that nothing new or startling is presented to the reader to help him through its turgid twists. The den of the Hoorka resounds to its own emptiness, and Leigh fails to transmit any of the guild's kin-feeling — a thing which is of great importance to the code. He concentrates on only a few varied characters, and we never see the world clearly. The characters, too lost and unsure of themselves, made me feel at a loss also; I could not read in comfort when I doubted that the author had full control over his creation. Leigh has, I think, become too bound up in the world he has created — I'm sure he enjoys the adventures that occur there, but he is too close to it to transmit a clear or comprehensible picture to us. The works lacks authority.

As I said, Dance Of The Hag follows on — albeit meekly — from Slow Fall To Dawn; but it presents nothing new.

Alan Dean Foster — THE TAR-AIYM KRANG, ORPHAN STAR, NOR CRYSTAL TEARS (New English Library; 210pp, 206pp and 231pp respectively; £1·50 each)

Reviewed by Andy Hobbs

"It's hard to be a larva," begins Nor Crystal Tears. Well, I have news for Alan Dean Foster — the man who brought us Alien and The Black Hole in novel form — concerning these books. It's hard to be a reader.

These three books form some sort of series. You know the sort of thing — goodies and baddies, galactic empires, zap guns, quests for Truth and Answers, aliens, funny words, funny names (Conda Challis, Sylzenzuzex, Mordecai Povalo, Ulru Ujurr; the whole gang is here), and silly characters.

As entertainment, these books are tremendously inconsequential. They offer nothing of any use to the reader other than a waste of valuable time that could well be spent elsewhere. From the SF point of view they perhaps offer a step along the exploratory voyage into the genre; the step above Dr Who. But to those who are already long-standing readers of SF these books are an insult to the intellect.

During the "Golden Age" that we are constantly reminded of, there was such an expansion in the areas that a science fiction writer could explore that poor writing, lack of character and downright shoddiness could be allowed and even accepted while the boundaries of this style of SF were still being pushed back. But now the very ideas are hackneyed, and it takes skill and imagination to produce a worthwhile novel when using them. Alan Dean Foster, on the evidence of these books, has neither skill nor imagination. He does not enhance the genre, and his poor style and seeming lack of insight do not bode well for the future.

Harry Harrison — TWO TALES AND EIGHT TOMORROWS, PRIME NUMBER, PLANET OF NO RETURN (Sphere, 157pp, 191pp and 155pp respectively, £1·50 each)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

If you already possess a copy of The Best Of Harry Harrison, then five of the ten stories in Two Tales And Eight Tomorrows and three of the nineteen in Prime Number can also be found therein. Chronologically, Two Tales And Eight Tomorrows has the earliest Harry Harrison stories represented here and, surprisingly, some of the best. (Though typical of the early sixties, its title is atrocious; far better had it been renamed The Streets Of Ashkelon And Other Stories...) There are no dates of publication, though the collection first appeared in 1965, and there have been three reprints since. While I would think enough is enough with regard to reprinting, such does serve to introduce newcomers to SF to one of the most celebrated short stories, "The Streets Of Ashkelon" (1961, according to The Best Of...). It had difficulty finding a market then because the magazines of those tame days were taboo-ridden and it features a taboo-breaking protagonist, an atheist. Of interest to budding writers, Harrison has written (in The Best Of..., from where these snippets are gleaned) that Brian Aldiss had "cogent remarks about the characterisation of the priest, which I agreed with, and did some rewrite to repair this". (Sadly, Planet Of No Return could have done with rewriting, too, but more of that anon.) The story concerns the literal-minded, ponderously logical Weskerian amphibian indigenous population; a naive people, completely free of superstition, and happy. "They believe in truth — and have never heard of such a thing as a lie." They only seek knowledge. Even after all these years, this story still gives pleasure; poignant and illuminating, it is a sad comment on and a criticism of man's capacity to force beliefs onto non-believers.

"Portrait Of The Artist" (1963) reflects the time Harrison spent in "the cesspits of the comic book industry", where he sank into "the slough of commercial hackdom". This story was intended to exorcise his feelings about comics, and the feelings and characters do seem real; but little did he realise that twenty years later computers would be used for sophisticated graphics or that a film such as Tron would be so artistically successful.

Apparently, "Rescue Operation" (1963) is a real story happening in a real place, for "Yugoslavia is a microcosm that reflects our entire world". I'll have to take his word for it, but he seems to be saying that although aliens have already landed human frailty, ignorance and religion have destroyed them... It's nevertheless a worthwhile story of what could happen, though there are some infelicities — typically of journalism and magazine tales, there is a lack of punctuation, which imparts some confusion: "When he lifted up the eyes still did not open". He wasn't lifting up the eyes, I realised after a mental double-take.

"Captain Bedlam" possesses an intriguing idea, that a dual personality is necessary to pilot spaceships to protect the alter ego from going insane. Discounting the fact that it is probably easier for automatic spaceships to ferry sleep-frozen passengers instead of creating a dual personality, the deus ex machina

"Two Tales & Eight Tomorrows: 'Rescue Operation'"

ending is well-handled.

"Final Encounter" is a genuine treatment of the genetic engineering of humans inhabiting space, including their differences and jealousies.

Being an ardent admirer of C. S Forester's books, and imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, Harrison wrote an SF parody of Hornblower, "Captain Horatio Harpplayer, RN" (1962). He sent a copy to Forester, but received no reply. "In fact he died soon afterwards and I have always felt a bit of guilt that I might have had a hand in the matter." Forester's grasp of style and characterisation is markedly superior to Harrison's, but if you have read Hornblower some of the humourous touches will bring a smile — Mr Bush becomes Mr Shrub, for example... Hornblower's nature is transformed, becoming "morbid and paranoic", while his concern for his men is also skewed: "he pulled victory from the jaws of defeat, and always at an immense cost in lives". Instead of Hornblower's tone-deafness we have Harpplayer's colour-blindness, and Hornblower's brown moods, his introspective periods, are reflected: "The men must never know that he had these thoughts, that he was the weakest of them". (Yet it was because he had such doubts and fears for his men that Hornblower was anything but weak.) But even where humour is concerned — unless it is utter fantasy — there should be continuity; but at one point Harpplayer is talking with a hammer in his mouth ("Mither Thrub") and the next it has disappeared, without explanation. Again, the HMS Redundant is sinking, all hands to the pumps; the next moment the ship sets out to chase an alien craft... Such inconsistencies might be intentional but do not read well.

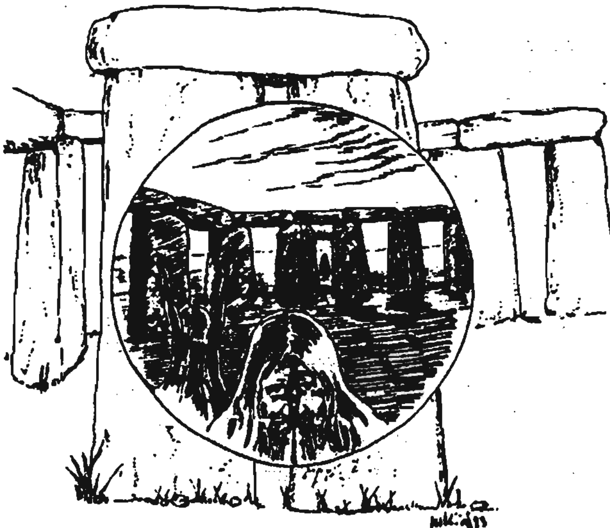
"To pay the rent", Harrison sold "I Always Do What Teddy Says" to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and thereafter regretted acceding to their request to change the ending. (The original end in restored here, but I'm intrigued to know what form the altered ending took!) It is an extrapolation on the behaviourist Skinner's claims that sociological events can be explained by individual behavioural events; the alienation of youth in advanced industrial societies by the

lack of an adequate reinforcing stimulus during their upbringing. Of course, the teddy bear provides the reinforcing stimulus, and the story offers a fascinating, albeit highly improbable, glimpse at mass mind control.

And so to Prime Number (a collection copyrighted 1970, with its contents all dated), which contains some good stories; but they are few, and the style has lapsed rather than improved. A healthy antipathy towards violence is exhibited in "Contact Man", "You Men Of Violence", and "Commando Raid". The latter also features an awareness of Spaceship Earth sensibilities, having been published when the term was new; it is also distinguished by its anti-Vietnam stance. Harrison is bold and brave in his conceptualisation, here, and even more so in his simple but penetrating anti-racist tale, "Mute Milton", in which we have all the bigotry against and dehumanisation of the American Negro in the Southern States. It was written while Harrison was living in Denmark, where "they are colour blind regarding race", shortly after Martin Luther King had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and a Southern sheriff had dismissed him as "just one more nigger". The story was written in "a white heat, at one sitting. I do not apologise if it is an angry story". It is nevertheless one of the best in the book, which seems surprising when you realise how quickly it must have been written. Other stories, by comparison, show the speed of their production, and many of their sentences grate — "While they were fighting the deceleration he had to do what must be done" (from "You Men Of Violence") reminded me of John Wayne's ubiquitous line; and the sequence of tenses is all wrong anyway.

"Down To Earth" was written before the first Moon-landing, so the few extravagant descriptions concerning the rough treatment of the spacesuits can be dismissed; but other technical details appear impressive. The astronauts return to a changed Earth where they meet a still living Einstein who tells them there is only one objective world but many subjective ones, and they're on one of those...and he happens to have the knowledge to rescue our stranded heroes... Really? Magazine fodder, this.

In many of these stories, Harrison is prone to use the device of explaining the obvious to listeners in order to inform the reader — most notably in "The Ghoul Squad", featuring an unlikely inversion of donor cards in the event of death, and "A Criminal Act", in which the population quota is maintained by a death for each new life. Like "Mute Milton", this latter story was written when Harrison was "possessed by rage" — he says that the laws in the story are not a real extrapolation but do represent the extreme possibility. However, the protagonists, shooting to kill, spend something like four pages talking to each other simply to give the reader information on the background and the attitudes. Such sloppy construction demolishes the anger.



Prime Number: "The Secret of Stonehenge."

Nine of the stories are predictable or not very good; one is virtually a secret agent chase tale, inferior to Adam Hall but clearly in vogue when written. There are few moments of really inspired writing. One story that has potential is "The Greatest Car In The World":

> "...I have only a few laps left of the race of life and my magneto is failing and my oil pressure is low. Allow me a few moments of pleasure before I pull into the pit for the last time."

Though contrived and cliche-ridden, it's possible that a famous old Le Mans racing driver and car designer would talk like that; overdramatic, maybe, but some people are. The story symbolises the love affair many men have with cars, its saddest aspect being that the dream car could be manufactured but compromises would be necessary to accomodate financial constraints imposed by the existing manufacturing system...ergo, the dream car becomes a compromise dream. But perhaps this is true of all dream-fulfillment.

There is little feeling in much else, even though the anti-violence, anti-ignorance, anti-prejudice stand is often taken. Feeling is somehow lacking, as is involvement.

And that can be said of Planet Of No Return as well — short story material stretched to book length and displaying an effortless rent-earning ability. Its theme is not dissimilar to the anti-violence stories mentioned above: the analogy with the wasteful expenditure on weaponry by the superpowers is particularly transparent, and the moralising is shallow. The writing style is Professional Unpolished; a lot of it is top-of-the-head stuff and hackwork as a result.

The novel begins with a spaceman landing on a hostile world. Weapons hardware is scattered all over. He jabbers away at great length (for the benefit of the reader) on his radio, yet is concerned about hostile sensors! When, inevitably, he is attacked, he stares, frozen, then begins "talking again in a toneless voice: 'That was my ship going up!'" — adding that the enemy weapons must be tracking his radio signal or something. If I were in his position, I'd shut up pretty damn quick...

We are now introduced to the main characters: Brion Brandd (sic) and Lea. (Normally, I'd steer clear of books with characters with names like that — and the blurb writers, perhaps realising that many others would too, left off the final "d".) This pair are fresh from another mission on Dis (qv Planet Of The Damned).

The book abounds with careless editing:

> "'Culrel?' Brion asked. Carver nodded.
> "'The Cultural Relationships Foundation. I understand you have worked with us before?'"

So why does Brion need the meaning of Culrel explained? He doesn't, of course; the reader

does.

"Looking down Brion saw that his arms were drenched with green blood — that was surely not his own!"

Well, he should know...

"Beside him on the ground the unmoving beast lay stretched out, motionless and dead."

A long tautological sentence meaning "Beside him the beast lay stretched out, dead". And so on...

Brion, according to the blurb, is the "mightiest weight-lifter in the galaxy", someone who can ripple his muscles to snap rawhide bonds. With one bound, etc....

Believe it or not, this novel was actually written in 1981. It suffers from sporadic "ing-itis", too: "'Here we go,' he whispered, scooping her up in his arms and rising, walking carefully among the silent bodies. Quickly and silently, waiting for the alarm to be raised, but still hearing nothing".

The brilliant sensuous Lea is shocked to learn that "robot controlled" machines can kill. If SF has envisaged such crude machine in the fifties, and the real world of the eighties will introduce them, how can she be so naive?

When the inevitable confrontation with the enemy occurs, the bellicose Colonel remarks "How very observant of you", straight out of a fifties' B-movie. But this is played straight, folks. Throughout, thoughts are spoken and actions explained and recapitulated — all padding. I had intended to give a brief one hundred word description of the story, but that would comprise the book's actual content. If you've bought Planet Of No Return for your collection because Harrison wrote it, then I won't destroy the little content you've paid for; but if you haven't bought it, my advice is don't bother. The book is an example of someone basking in reflected glory: his own, reflected from better works. Many writers write to pay the rent but it is a long time since I have encountered such cavalier treatment of readers by an established name. He has done both SF and himself a disservice by writing this rubbish. I feel sure that if he was an unpublished author rather than a Big Name no one would have touched the manuscript.

Doubtless, whatever I say, Planet Of No Return will sell well. There are a teeming number of injustices in the world; when the carefully crafted works of Watson and Priest fail to sell as well as Harrison's and are remaindered, we should weep.

Michael Bishop — EYES OF FIRE (Timescape, 262pp, $2·95)

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

My main feeling about Eyes Of Fire is irritation, which is rather unfair because on the whole it deserves better recognition than that as it's generally a well-written, imaginative and original novel.

The cover blurb is wonderfully misleading; it says "the ruling race of Tropiards were powered by the telepathy of their crystalline eyes — but the Sh'gaidu refused to join them in their rebirths to higher powers". Wrong, all wrong! In fact, almost the opposite is true, for the Tropiards deny their telepathy and have only limited powers which enable them to cerebrate (i.e., talk mentally) to each other, whereas the Sh'gaidu are a fully telepathic community.

The central character, however, is a young Earth human called Seth Latimer who, with his older clone brother Abel, is stranded on the world of Gla Taus when their clone father is murdered by reactionary priests. As a price for their return to Earth Seth has to undertake negotiations which will result in a dissident community, the Sh'gaidu, from the nearby world of Trope coming to farm on Gla Taus. Seth is confused and innocent, which the Liege Mistress, the Ruler of Gla Taus says is her reason for choosing him. That those words don't make him suspicious must be proof positive of his innocence, though how anyone with a trader brother and father could be so naive puzzles me. He tends to adopt a passive role throughout most of the novel, until the tail end, when he undertakes quite extraordinary action, including an attempted rape, and makes a final decision to sacrifice his return to Earth to fulfill a trust placed on him to care for the Sh'gaidu.

All this sounds quite promising, and indeed I was never bored with the book, but I did feel cheated by the ending, which struck me as a cop-out. The book should have been very much longer so that we're not left hanging in limbo with the story half-finished, and this final impression distracted me from it's very good qualities. For instance, the two societies on Gla Taus and Trope give a good impression of the alien, that of Gla Taus sketched in more lightly than the more important and complex one of Trope. The people of Trope are androgynous and can choose to be male or female, but the strong cultural and moral bias of Tropiard society is that the j'gosfi form, the male, is the norm and the sh'gosfi, the female, is a form of madness or sickness; the dissident group which the Tropiards wish to have taken off the planet are those who chose to be sh'gosfi and thus be definition mad. In the hands of a rampant feminist you'd be reading a very different review because it's possible to read into the book innumerable implications concerning our own society, but I don't think that's a particularly helpful attitude and in any case I didn't find myself drawing conclusions about twentieth century Earth but about the planet of Trope, which is a tribute to Michael Bishop's skills as a writer: he's made the fiction strong enough to drown out the reality.

But I have a number of niggles. I didn't understand the process of auxiliary births since I couldn't figure out whether this replaced pregnancy or whether people were reborn into adult bodies; too much is left unstated and it made other important issues unclear. Seth is a clone but calls himself an isohet, a word my dictionary hasn't heard of — the "iso" part is fine linguistically but I'm not so sure about the "het". Much of his background is left vague, but we get a clear enough picture of an honest, kind young man, although where he acquired his strict moral sense is unaccounted for; his isohet Abel certainly doesn't have it. But he is not an altogether satisfactory character — his innocence may be endearing but his motivations remain obscure and unconvincing. The lighter sketches of Magistrate Vrai and Douin are far more effective, and their characters became more real to me than Seth ever did.

There are almost too many elements for the

length of the book, so that few of them are fully realised or explored. We have an androgynous society, telepathy, clones, a future human merchanter society, yet another alien society, sexuality of various types, power struggles, and philosophy all crowded into 262 pages. Either some elements should have been left out or the novel expanded to do them justice; as the book is, they are frustrating. Also, Bishop's writing style jars occasionally, as, for instance, when he describes a sunset as a "haemorrhage", but for the most part the alien settings are evocative and imaginative and the story flows well and easily. There are maps of Gla Taus and Trope which I never actually used but which are quite well done.

On the whole, I enjoyed the book; there's a lot to absorb, it's wide-ranging and original, but it's imperfect. It's a rewritten version of an earlier novel, A Funeral For The Eyes Of Fire (Bishop's first, in fact, from 1975), and I think it needs more rewriting to improve the frustrating end and clarify the obscurities, to raise it from the acceptable to the thoroughly enjoyable.

Pamela Sargent — THE GOLDEN SPACE (Timescape, 246pp, $2·95)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

Four novellas and a coda make up The Golden Space. All of them circle the main theme rather than come to grips with it; in fact, the whole atmosphere is of something peripheral, as if the real story were going on elsewhere. "The Renewal" begins with Josepha, a woman who is more than two hundred years old and has survived the Transition of society from mortal to genetically engineered immortal; yet she seems in all respects identical to a woman of perhaps thirty, and of the twentieth century. Her only unusual quality is the degree of her detachment from life; but then everyone in The Golden Space is emotionally detached.

The narrative covers certain episodes in the life of Josepha, the geneticist Merripen Allen, and the genetically engineered children of "The Renewal"'s project. It's a longish book, but there seems little to say about it. This is possibly because the reader who is familiar with SF will have read it all before — immortality, social change, superkids, space exploration... Now how could that be boring? But I have to concur with the previous review of the hardback in Vector 109: it isn't long before tedium sets in.

A clue to what The Golden Space doesn't deal with comes early on, with Josepha's consideration of genetic engineering: "...the biologists, afraid of too much tampering with human versatility, simply ensured that flawed genes were not passed on rather than actively creating a certain kind of child." There's no discussion of just what might constitute a "flawed" gene. One can "simply" erase them. The last phrase reveals sloppy thinking: obviously, to omit certain genes, whether classified as flawed or not, is to create a certain kind of child. There are disagreements over what science fiction is, but no disagreement over what it's for; what it is not for is taking things for granted.

Of the other sections — "Unguided Days", "The Summer's Dust", and "The Loop Of Creation" — it is "The Summer's Dust" which perhaps works best. Therese is a child only because her owner happens to prefer little girls to women; use of the rejuvenation drug gives her a child's body with a woman's experience. The story is peripheral to the main narrative of the book, telling of Therese's escape and meeting with genuine children, and covers the inevitable twin theme of immortality: death.

The old joke says that if you give up drinking, debauchery and all other vices you don't actually live longer; it just seems longer. If you read The Golden Space it won't make you live for two hundred years; but you'll feel as though you had.

Fred Halliday — THE MAKING OF THE SECOND COLD WAR (Verso, 280pp, £4·95)

Reviewed by Jeremy Crampton

How many of us, I wonder, realise how much the world situation has changed since the end of the 1970s? To be sure, we may have noted a touch of belligerency here, an invasion or two there, and empty promises everywhere. But have we ever put them together and considered the thing as a whole? Fred Halliday has, and he makes no bones about his conclusion: this is the Second Cold War and things are pretty dodgy. The Making Of The Second Cold War is history and current affairs as theory, and his theory is bold and comprehensive; his analysis covers and brings together events that are widely separated in time and space but which all play their part in today's world.

Halliday dates the Second Cold War from 1979, and gives it two underlying reasons: the globalised conflict between the USA and the USSR, and the massive arms race in which they are engaged. He then devotes a chapter to each of the five main constituents of the USA/USSR conflict and arms race, these being the decline of US military superiority (although he shows that the USA still leads the USSR); a new wave of third world revolutions; a move to the right in the USA; the stagnation of the post-revolutionary states; and the contradictions between the capitalist states. Although all these have contributed to the new cold war, Halliday places the blame firmly with the USA, which instigated the cold war, while the USSR receives the lesser blame for responding to the American moves. The UK and the other capitalist countries are shown as passively supporting the USA.

This all sounds pretty controversial, but Halliday can and does support his thesis, destroying in the process a few dearly held but erroneous myths of the right, such as the concept of Soviet superiority. He shows how the West has long had a military superiority over the Soviet Union, which the latter has recently gradually eroded, resulting in a swing to the right in the USA and — coupled with a resurrection of the "Soviet threat" and a "know-nothing" rhetoric — calls for an increase in military expenditure in order to lengthen the US lead once again. This increase, and the consequent acceleration of the arms race, duly occurred, beginning with Jimmy Carter's last two years in office and then taking off significantly with the election of Ronald Reagan. This is then linked with events in the Third World, where increasing US involvement has been passed off as combatting Soviet "world domination" and the spread of communism. Halliday's analysis here

may be uncomfortable for some, but his presentation is unambiguous — for example, Soviet and Cuban aid to Angola in 1974 came only after the CIA were sent in and South Africa had started supporting the pro-Western UNITA guerillas. In Afghanistan, the situation was not as bad the West's furore would have had us believe, since the country had been governed by a pro-Soviet regime since April 1978 (and one readily recognised by the USA and other NATO countries); Soviet intervention came only when Kabul precipitately tried to impose reforms from above, necessitating its shoring up by Moscow and having catastrophic (for the USSR) consequences on world opinion. The USA's track record of military assistance is markedly longer and bloodier: Pakistan, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, North' Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, where there is no Soviet intervention; pressure on Cuba, Nicaragua, Libya, and now invasion of Grenada; and that was just a selection.

However, the USSR does get its fair share of criticism for following the "logic" of the arms race and for their contribution to the cold war initiated by Washington. But despite the relatively minor role of Soviet global involvement, Halliday is not as critical of them as he could be. Intervention by either side is to be deplored, and although Halliday is by no means pro-Soviet he does allow them a freer hand.

Still, his book is a refreshing change from the rhetoric and sloganeering that passes for informed analysis these days. His arguments are clear and convincing. If we agree with his statement that "by studying how the cold war has been made, it may be easier to unmake it", then The Making Of The Second Cold War offers a start in the right direction.

David Ireland — WOMAN OF THE FUTURE (Bantam, 351pp, $3·95)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

This is a brilliant book to read, but how to review it? If only Ireland had been dully conventional, then summing up what it's about and what it's like would be much easier. But dull, or conventional, it's not. Nor can it be boiled down to a facile "message", with all the author's own words discarded as though they were no more than elbaorate packaging.

Clearly, it's about Alethea Hunt, the "woman of the future", who narrates her own story:

> "I can't very well tell anyone this is a diary, it's mostly papers I've kept, but if I manage to finish enough of it before my hand can no longer hold a pen, perhaps father will try to get it published.
>
> "If people somewhere down the slope of the future read it, it may help them if I start with a note about the sort of society in which people like me are possible.
>
> "Here goes..." (p.13)

This montage of jottings of hers, covering the period from her birth to her leaving school, tell us something about herself — questioning, self-confident, sometimes arrogant, the top of her class, a star athlete; about her family — father an actor and a practical man about the house, mother distant and eccentric; and about the world she grows up in, which to her is both as ordinary and as puzzling as our world is to us. That is Ireland's great achievement, capturing not only the ruthless clinical curiosity of childish innocence but also rendering in proper perspective a combination of the familiar and the strange.

This future Australia (for Ireland is one of Australia's leading novelists, up there with Thomas Keneally, Randolph Stow and Patrick White), is an "affluent society", a standard enough "soft-option" near future society, a sort of comfortable suburban utopia with a well-meaning socialist set up:

> "The social classes have been reduced to two: Serving Class and Free; the battle between the two was decided when one class took Dostoyevsky's advice and, tongu in cheek, became servants in order to be leaders... At the end of school years the grading system diverts a small stream of young people toward the class of professionals, those named the Servants of Society. The rest are Free Citizens, proletariat. The trivial occupations of freedom are their whole life. They see the divisions of society, they see the success of others, they see their own failure; the seeing begins to interact with the seen, the eye with the object: aberrations blossom." (p.13)

That wider society which she knows only through what her father and teachers say, and through odd scraps of her own observation — since it's very much a low-key background, appearing only in casual, often ironic comments — isn't really what Ireland's writing about. His focus is on Alethea's immediate experiences:

> "Like cats we were, straying near the source of food. Asleep, scratching, playing, washing, playing at sex, returning to the source of food, never leaving, but for short prowls near other animals.
>
> "The little rules and laws we lived by were our prejudices, crystallised for a time to give the impression of permanence. Then a new batch of kids came on the scene and lived by a slightly altered set of prejudices.
>
> "Our responses to the questions put to us by our surroundings were a selection from the feelings we had at the time. We dramatised each truth, each feeling for our own benefit, as if we were trying on new clothes; tasting each new truth, each hypothesis, each new outfit." (p.287)

"The lions were limp and lazy, the tiger neurotic, walking round his yard in endless ellipses, the panther seemed like a theatrical animal with its light green eyes, but the leopard looked at me. She looked at me with a sarcastic pair of eyes, and even turning she looked at me from the corner of one eye. I

thought she was saying we had secrets, she and I. She was the nearest one, in appearance and mood (on a far larger scale, of course), to the cats I knew from Heisenberg Close. It was noticeable that the keepers had taken more precautions with her than with the other cats; they knew she could jump high and climb practically anywhere. I loved climbing too.

"I went home with aquarium fish swimming in my memory; the brilliant birds making short flights in my eyes; the proud, tenacious, clever leopard in my heart." (p.118)

...and on the odd characters she runs into, on puzzling inconsistencies between how things are and how she's been told they ought to be, on the adolescent discovery of sex:

"I have mixed feelings about one's partner sweating down on one. I mean on me.

"What a funny race men are.

"To think that opening your legs is in any way giving them access to you. As if this hole, dull, unfeeling, so expendable, was a health and wealth-giving prize to them, and an advantage given up and lost by us!

"They have had us, they say. Had be damned! They've been in contact with a few dozen square centimetres of mucous surface, coated with a lubricant which prevents actual contact with the internal flesh. They have never reached beyond the surface. Yet, when they open their arms to us, their vitals are exposed...

"...And in a personal crisis, what is their remedy for doubt, indecision, fear, and the nameless dread of loneliness? Why, they look for a tunnel into the problem and push a shaft in and make little explosions in it, hoping to blow up the world." (p.315)

Despite his lack of experience of that state, Ireland writes well about being female.

Grafted on to that predictable and familiar sort of future, there's a strange and inexplicable thing — people" change", their bodies rebel against the safe normality that cocoons them, so that they find a cannon or a young girl or their own internal organs growing out of them. People who have "changed" in this surrealistic way are among the oddities Alethea remarks upon — like Mister Cowan, for instance:

"The unpainted end of a coffin grew slowly outward from his side. Bevelled edges, beautifully made, ready for varnishing. He sat watching it, couldn't see it growing, but from morning to night there was a visible difference. He insisted death was not an obsession with him." (p.33)

"Old Mister Cowan still worked on his coffin. He lined it with lead, took the lining out. painted the timber many times, had pictures put in it, an oxygen bottle, food — in case he was buried alive, though that was unlikely since postmortems were general — relined it, clad the outside in stainless steel, stripped the whole thing down to the bare essential shape, scraped off the paint, and started again.

"It was a permanent hobby." (p.275)

What do these changes mean? Ireland no doubt knows, but not the characters through whom he speaks. It's mostly the idle, purposeless "Frees" who suffer these changes, which are therefore something to be ashamed of, a mark of failure. Except that, in the end, the arrogantly bright and fit Alethea herself starts to "change":

"Everything I thought I was is wrong. The tall girl who seemed to succeed at everything she touched — so healthy and intelligent — contained all the time the seeds of failure and shame. The person who seemed so certain to step through the grading gate to become one with the responsible, hard-working Servants of Society, was becoming something other than human." (p.347)

That change, that evolution into something new and not human, is what makes her truly "the woman of the future". But this review is a very basic sketch which does little justice to David Ireland's rich and complex whole. But then, as I said at the beginning, this isn't a book that can be easily summarised, wrapped up and dismissed in a few crisp paragraphs.

Go read it yourself, I exhort you.

ALSO RECEIVED

Philip K. Dick — MARTIAN TIME-SLIP (New English Library, 240pp, £1·75): "Vintage middle-period Dick," states Chris Bailey, and continues: "A disturbing novel and also a distasteful one in that Dick deploys mental illness and disability as pointers to an alternative reality — a moral can of worms often opened in SF — but the reader's rumble of discontent is drowned out by the sizzle and crackle of the author's mind at work. There is some fine nightmarish writing and more accomplished character development than is general with Dick. I recommend it. Brian Aldiss provides a wise introduction."

Malcolm Edwards (ed.) — CONSTELLATIONS (Puffin, 171pp, £1·25; or — and the differential seems to have baffled even its editor — Penguin, 171pp, £1·50): Bill Carlin states that "this reprint anthology — which in its Gollancz edition was aimed specifically at a 'young adult' audience — contains several gems which should delight readers new to SF and includes a 3-page introduction neatly sketching the history and general form of the genre." The

stories are by Dick, Sheckley, Ballard, Shaw, Lieber, McIntyre, Reed, Harrison, Clarke, and Kilworth; all standards, bar the Kilworth ("Let's Go To Golgotha!", his 1974 competition winner and the story which set him on his professional career), which I'm amazed hasn't been reprinted as often as it should have been.

Fred Hoyle — THE BLACK CLOUD (Penguin, 219pp, £1·75): Umpteenth reprint of Hoyle's first — and best — novel, now a terribly dated period piece.

R. A. MacAvoy — TEA WITH THE BLACK DRAGON (Bantam, 166pp, $2·75): "The rest of the world has known about it for years, but the Americans seem to think that Emotion is a neato gadget they've just invented," says Judith Hanna. She continues: "A promising-looking fantasy about computer wizardry, an Imperial Chinese dragon (male) with an identity crisis, and an Irish fiddler (female) is dragged down into soap opera zen by overstudied prose as its characters learn to 'handle' their emotions in a step-by-step stripping down to underlying vacuity. Pity about the story that gets lost in the process."

Robert Silverberg -- MAJIPOOR CHRONICLES (Pan, 317pp, £1·95): British paperback edition of a book reviewed by Helen McNabb in issue 44 (October 1983); she found it "conformist", and I tend to agree. There's also an overriding stylistic fault which renders it all somewhat duller than it could have been; the life-stories experienced by Hissune in the Register of Souls, which form the bulk of the book, would have been better told in the first person and/or the present tense rather than, as they are, the third person and the past tense, thus gaining greater immediacy and impact.

LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOOM — the letter column

Only a small letter column this time, with a couple of the writers responding to items in the October 1983 issue. First up is NIK MORTON, commenting on my editorial:

"The blurb on Rhinehart's Long Voyage Back was enough to put me off; as for James's The Fall Of The Russian Empire, I opened the book at random while in a shop and read flat, uncommunicative words so quickly put it back: nice to know this admittedly unstatistical sampling seems confirmed by your editorial. Seriously, though, it is worrying that authors continue to purvey the idea that individuals will survive and flourish after an all-out nuclear war (particularly when even a limited nuclear exchange would be catastrophic). To think that such carnage has become a stock scenario! Shute's On The Beach didn't duck the reality, then, so why do authors do so now? Perhaps because, in the real event, there'll be nothing left to write about."

Quite. You may be interested to learn, though, that -- according to the list in The Guardian for 9 January 1984 -- Donald James's The Fall Of The Russian Empire was the 38th best-selling paperback of 1983 (with, curiously enough, export sales accounting for the bulk of this). It was categorised as "faction", too... The best-selling SF paperback, incidentally, was (as you might suspect) Arthur C. Clarke's 2010: Odyssey Two, in 20th place; James Kahn's Return Of The Jedi, categorised as a fantasy (don't ask me why), took 8th place, with Stephen Donaldson's White Gold Wielder, another fantasy, in 16th place. Speaking of fantasy, however, reminds me that someone did notice Sue Thomason's essay on the subject; here's STEVE ROGME:

"It was the piece I enjoyed most in the October 1983 issue. The only criticism of it that I have is the failure to indicate some examples of 'true' fantasy writing — the work I can recall generating the catharsis that Sue (and I, for that matter) feel to be characteristic of 'true' fantasy is Stephen Donaldson's first trilogy. The feeling of purgative experienced by reading the three novels as one work (I was given them as a boxed set) was so intense that I readily forgave the verbose and occasionally turbid nature of his style."

Are you sure that's not why you felt purged by it? Jesting aside, though, the trouble with Donaldson's style is that — because ideas can't be separated from the words that contain them — it obscures what he's trying to say, and sometimes renders what he does say completely meaningless. (This, for example, from The Wounded Land: "They were featureless and telic, like lambent gangrene. They looked horribly like children." The sender of the first three best guesses...) Let me add, however, that — to a certain extent — I did enjoy the first trilogy, albeit for different reasons that you: the modelling of the plot structure of each novel on the shamanic monomyth, for one, and its centralising of some basic theological questions, for another.

Meanwhile, and concentrating on more recent matters, PHILIP COLLINS has this to say:

"I must congratulate you on your stroke of genius in spending nearly a quarter of the review pages on yet untranslated and largely unavailable French SF books. Marvellous idea, that. Now virtually no one can criticise the review or even understand most of the references. One slight word of warning, though; French is a language which a lot of people speak, so it is just possible that someone may follow the review up. Next time you should pick a really obscure language — what about the Swahili SF writers of the world?"

I assume this is a complaint — but one that I don't accept. I printed Pascal Thomas's essay (having asked him for it in the first place) because I think it's interesting (and even important) to find out what other writers, working in other languages, are doing. There are more cultures in the world than the English-speaking ones, after all; surely you're not suggesting we ignore them simply because their language differs from ours? (From which you may derive the implication that I intend to publish similar such essays in future; and you'd be right.) Besides, you can always make arrangements to get hold of these books one way or another...

The answer to your question as to who I'd married, indicidentally, is: who else but my assistant editor?

(WAHF: Dorothy Davies)