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GUEST EDITORIAL

WHITHER SF -- WITHERED SF

Paul Kincaid

Poul Anderson's Orion Shall Rise, Gregory Benford's Against Infinity, Roger Eldridge's The Fishers Of Darksea -- these three books represent the middle ground of SF. We are away from the borderlands here, the region where terms like SF and magical realism and literature shade into each other and risks are taken. This is the solid heartland where no one is in any doubt about labels, and where everyone knows precisely what to expect of any book. Since all three novels come larded with the sort of praise that suggests they are the cream of the current crop, they should provide some clue as to the state of science fiction, some suggestion of where it is going.

Well, if these books are typical of contemporary SF then science fiction is going nowhere except up its own fundament. There isn't one that couldn't have been written at any time in the last thirty years. To judge from this evidence, the "literature of ideas" doesn't have two new ideas to rub together. As for the writing, the epithets "uninspired", "unconvincing" and "unexciting" are the ones that spring readily to mind.

Roger Eldridge is the newest of the three writers on display, The Fishers Of Darksea (Unwin, 214pp, £2·95) being his first adult novel. He strikes me as being a prime candidate to become one of SF's young fogeys. So readily does he follow the pattern laid down by countless fantasy writers before him that within about twenty pages I had not only guessed how the story ended but had also worked out most of the incidents along the way.

The setting is a rocky arctic isle beset by ice and sea on which a tiny, isolated community ekes out its existence. Their society is bound by an impenetrable density of rules, formalities and traditions, so that at every possible moment there seem to be twee little rhymes to be recited or strict patterns of behaviour to be observed. Other than two wizard-type characters, the highest stratum in this rigid society is the Fishers. No-Mirth (I kid thee not), the hero, is a Fisher who finds himself at odds with his society.

That the novel should consist of a series of set-pieces to illustrate first the weird and wonderful strangeness of this society, and second No-Mirth's increasing alienation from it, is routine and to be expected. That the climax should be No-Mirth's transformation into the chief of the wizards is so predictable as to make you wonder why Eldridge bothered writing it (and even more why I bothered reading it). That the novel should consist of nothing but these routine set-pieces and the predictable climax just leaves you sad for the current state of fantasy.

It seems to me that The Fishers Of Darksea belongs in a genre as rigid and hidebound as the society it protrays. A handful of writers (chief among them, I suppose, being Tolkien) have achieved such towering stature within the genre that no one else now seems capable of doing anything but follow in their footsteps. Originality seems to have been drilled out of fantasy by this apparent demand for regimentation, for more of the same. All that is fresh and new about this novel is on the surface; beneath its specific trappings of arctic fishermen it is not one jot different from countless others.

Yet this familiarity seems to be what the audience is demanding these days. Either the readership is unable to cope with originality, or the writers are unable to provide it. Gregory Benford's Against Infinity (New English Library, 251pp, £1·75) has so little that is distinctive or original that while reading it one finds oneself asking whether it might not have been written by Asimov or Clarke or Orson Scott Card, or any of science fiction's other persistently predictable practitioners?

The setting is Ganymede, still a frontier world, but very slowly being terraformed by the use of mutated creatures (the most original thing in the novel, but never more than a part of the background). Here, in this bleak, wild place, men encounter the Aleph: possibly living creature, possibly alien artifact, certainly so alien as to be unknowable, incomprehensible. Manuel, a boy of 13 as the story opens, sets out to hunt down and kill the Aleph, which he does; but it continues to haunt him through what is essentially the story of his growing up.

Back around the time of Clarke's Rendezvous With Rama, I found the idea that the alien might actually be so strange as to be beyond our understanding both novel and exciting. Now, it is such a commonplace that I long for a writer to make the mental effort to actually try to understand these things. But in Against Infinity the Aleph hardly matters, because the novel is really a crude and ill-disguised paean of praise for American frontier virtues. I don't normally object to writers bringing political sensitivities and perspectives into their work, but when it is done as blatantly and as badly as it is here then the novel suffers.

Manuel, a preternaturally mature 13-year-old, either espouses or personifies just about every right-wing virtue or attitude in the novel. Around the middle, there is a ludicrously misplaced section in which he is brought face-to-face with what purports to be a socialist society in action. Yet the whole thing is so silly, so over-the-top and so grossly distorted that one wonders how Benford had the nerve to include it.

Politics also lies at the heart of Poul Anderson's Orion Shall Rise (Sphere, 468pp, £2·50). Right-wing libertarianism has always played a large role in science fiction, and this is just the latest example of what seems to be something of a revival in its fortunes of late. Yet it is nowhere near as obtrusive as the politics in Benford's novel, is handled more subtly, and fits in with the story rather than being shovelled in on top of it. The result is certainly the best novel of the three, though that isn't necessarily saying a great deal.

It is after the bomb, but so long after that an elaborate and sophisticated civilisation has arisen. (Why is it that one of the libertarians' most typical views is that nuclear war will not destroy civilisation but just tidy it up a bit and allow a new and generally better one to emerge?) The three most significant of the new nations are based in Europe — a feudal society under the sway of a sort-of left-over space station — New Zealand — moderate and ecologically minded — and along the north-west coast of America — still technologically oriented.

The story spans the continents, and is basically a fast-moving tale of adventure and intrigue. As an SF version of the big fat romantic novels that seem to be all you can find in W. H. Smiths these days, it works well enough. Anderson is always able to pile on some new bit of action, or to shift the scene, if things ever start to slow down. It is an undemanding, but reasonably entertaining read. The fundamental plot concerns the efforts of the American society to recreate nuclear technology, opposed by the ecological Maurai. For the majority of the novel, Anderson makes it seem that the Americans want a nuclear bomb. and that his sympathies are with the Maurai. Then, at the end, it is revealed that the American plan is to build nuclear-powered spaceships, and that of course they are misguided but basically right. What else could you expect — how could the builder of a spaceship possibly be wrong in any science fiction novel?

It is a novel of cliches; but Anderson knows this, and at least has the ability to use his cliches well. What a comment on SF it is, though, that a novel should receive the praise that this one has without even attempting to do anything that hasn't been done a thousand times before.

Yet if they lack originality -- which in my

naivete I had thought was a prime science fictional requirement — do these three novels have anything else to offer the reader? How about readability, for example?

I have already compared the Anderson to the sort of mass-produced romantic tosh that seems to make millions these days. In other words, it is slick and bland and keeps going purely by inserting plot devices whenever required. At its best it is undemanding and adequate; at its worst... Well, let me quote the first couple of sentences: "There was a man called Mael the Red who dwelt in Ar-Mor. That was the far western end of Brezh, which was itself the far western end of the Domain". Fortunately he doesn't keep that sort of rubbish up for more than a few pages.

Eldridge adopts the sort of artificial, formal-sounding prose that is so beloved of writers of mediocre fantasy. It consists mostly of a preference for the fanciest, least common word over one that is simpler and often more accurate. It consists of a liking for words like "drear" and "crone", and for phrases like: "The tribe sorrowed in the spring darkness". It is more irritating than anything else. It tends to indicate a deafness to the natural rhythms and poetry of our language. And it is as lifeless and as unconvincing as the story it is used to tell.

But it is Benford whose writing seems to embody what I like least about these three books. A writer with little poetry in his voice yet who tries to be rich and fulsome in his language only ends up being florid and overblown. Thus passages such as this:

> "They called it Aleph. Some Jew had given it that, a blank name that was the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet: a neutral vowel that bespoke the opaque nature of the blocky, gravid thing, the bulk that humans had tried to write upon with their cutters and tractors and on which they had left no mark."

Benford also seems to be blind to what he is describing. Take this typical passage: "A slow drizzle of methane-cloaked and ammonia-steeped droplets, all swirling in the still-thin mongrel chemlab gas that was the new air". This seems like a rich descriptive passage, but it isn't. It does nothing to tell us how things look and feel, to give us the vicarious experience that is the usual aim of authors. It might describe how things are, but that is not enough. A sterile scientific account of the rain with a few literary flounces does not paint a picture, does not make us see and feel and hear and taste and smell what is going on. And too often I feel that this is the common failure of science fiction — a reliance on the leaden and technical, and an avoidance of the poetical needed to bring the image vividly off the page.

(To be fair to Benford, the passage quoted is only the beginning of a descriptive passage that does manage some rather more sensual images later. Nevertheless, even these are somewhat pedestrian: "Above, stars were hazy jewels lingering above thin cirrus".)

When I first discovered science fiction, simple phrases like "the depths of space" were enough to excite my imagination. No longer. It may be old age and growing cynicism, it may just be over-familiarity with the genre, but it is no longer enough. Good God, the depths of space is a tremendous concept, and science fiction is supposed to open our minds to the vast, unbounded wonder of the thing. The author who writes of the depths of space is limited only by his imagination, and I find it not just sad but an unmitigated disaster that SF writers with so much to play with are incapable of devising any but the most dull, the most pedestrian imagery to describe it all.

Look, what are the limits of science fiction? None! We have all of infinity, every last second of eternity, with which to weave our tapestries. The only restraints on any writer who chooses science fiction or fantasy as their medium are their imagination, and their ability to put that imagination into words.

If these three novels, these three authors, are truly representative of the middle ground of contemporary SF, the solid everyday bulk of the genre, then we are being ill served. In his way, each has allowed his imagination to be trammelled by the cliches and habits of the writers who have gone before. Each has made what seems to be a deliberate decision to turn away from what is new. They may have written what the audience wants, but they have made no attempt to enliven those audience desires with a little daring of their own.

And, on top of that, they have failed to express their limited visions with anything but limited language. They have fettered not only their imaginations, but also their tongues. If they have nothing to say, they could at least try to find an interesting way to say it. But they don't. Their ideas are dull, their tongues are duller.

And it is sad that this seems to be only too true of the rest of science fiction as well.

REVIEWS

Fred Saberhagen — EMPIRE OF THE EAST (Futura, 558pp, £2.95)

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

Most of what you might expect to find in a sword-and-sorcery tale you will find in this assembled trilogy, with a few pleasant extras. The story itself is pretty standard — the brave but few forces of Good girding their loins for the Final Battle against the overwhelming hordes of Evil with Civilisation As We Knew It at stake. The genus is The Lord Of The Rings, the sub-genus Michael Moorcock. All the old gang is here. There is the jeune premiere, Rolf, a bit naif maybe, but a willing lad for all that and a dab hand with antique machinery. Then we have Mewick, a peripatetic ascetic who only comes out of his dolour when he is hacking people to bits with his battle-hatchet. There is Chup, dark-eyed, handsome, one-time aristocrat on the other side, but he's done his time and learned the error of his ways. Well, he would, wouldn't he, being the husband of the devastatingly beautiful but utterly corrupt Charmian. She is the daughter of Ekuman, the first of the Lords of Evil we meet. You can tell he's a nasty piece of work — his pet wizard has a toad for a familiar — but he's a real cutie beside his boss, Som the Dead, so called because he is dead but won't lie down, unless it is beside Charmian. Even he is a mere ratfink beside the capo di

tutti capi, Emperor John Ominor, who, in an earlier life, was clearly educated at Winchester and Oriel and served as Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office — you can tell this from his habit of relaxing from the burdens of world domination by watching the slow impalement of a man who stepped on his shadow. Out of the magic box steps the fattening but jovial wizard, Loford, and his big brother, the imaginatively-name Grey. Matched against them is a dull old stick who calls himself Wood and rides a griffin. There are good guys and bad guys, demons and djinns, talking birds and creatures which have changed somewhat since the days of that staple of such stories, The Big Change. The whole thing is wrapped in a truly awesomely bad cover depicting our bloody but unbowed hero, his far-away-eyed Amazon girlfriend, knights in armour, flying nasties, a ludicrously phallic battle tank, and the huge blue face of Mick Jagger practising his contemptuous sneer. Finally, just to complete the overall impression of deja vu , the blurb has Larry Niven proclaiming: "I think Empire Of The East is better than The Lord Of The Rings".

With all that going against it, why did I enjoy this book so much?

The root of the matter is the unpretentiousness of Saberhagen's storytelling (on this evidence, at least). This novel has a vigour and dynamism all too often lacking in other examples of the genre, whatever their virtues. The plotting is tight, building to a steady crescendo through all three parts, although any one part could have read with enjoyment on its own. The action runs as a piece from the first small slaughter to the cataclysm in which Good finally vanquishes Evil (it has to, hasn't it — although Saberhagen does put in a nice twist) and never relies on some deus ex machina intervention, but rather a close intertwining of character with action. When Chup has to turn the final battle by shaving the head of Charmian's sister — not the most obvious course of action in a pitched battle — then Saberhagen has provided both characters with plausible reasons (within the confines of the story) for being where they are and doing what do. Either Saberhagen has a remarkable gift for keeping characters and storylines under close control, or he has plotted the whole thing in minute detail. Whichever, the action stems naturally from the characters and the interactions of the players, which as far as I am concerned is a prime virtue of storytelling. Having devised his plot, Saberhagen drives it straight down the middle of the road to its conclusion, not stopping for anything along the way.

As I remarked earlier, Saberhagen's characters are all old friends; stereotypes, in fact. This Saberhagen seems quite happy to acknowledge, and exploit. At least, he never stops the action to dispense those reams of overwritten imagery masquerading as "characterisation" and "scene-setting", which seem de rigeur for the genre. He doesn't pretend he is Leo Tolstoy telling the tragedy of "real" people, but seems content to be Fred Saberhagen spinning a fantastic yarn. He knows that stopping to give the punters time to look closely at the scenery will destroy the spell of his fabulous lie, so he hurries on pell-mell from one plot climax to the next. Rolf, Mewick and company are cardboard cut-outs, but does that really matter in a novel like this?

Let it be said that there is nothing pretty, felicitous, or mellifluous about Saberhagen's writing. His vocabulary is limited and his structure very basic, but he deploys his armoury with gusto. The energy of the prose matches the robustness of the storyline. It may not be great art, but Saberhagen doesn't pretend to be creating great art. I find it attractive that he doesn't make believe he is some fey, troubled poet retelling the lost tales of antiquity, sprinkling his story with quotations from excruciatingly bad and/or obscure heroic poetry of the days of innocence, and that his characters don't sit around and sing campfire ballads of the "good old days". He makes it quite clear that however bad life under Ominor may be, the dim and distant past of our times scares them witless. There is a signal lack of elves. A brutalist he may be, a "just gimme the facts, ma'am" storyteller he certainly is, but coy? Never. In this subgenre this sets him apart...

So does his rationale of magic. It is not original — I recall Oppenheimer musing along these lines, as did Arthur C. Clarke — but he does add a plausible and even amusing gloss to this fairly basic idea. Of course, it is all impossible bosh and balderdash, but at least it is something more than misrepresented ideas of Central Asian creation myths as rehashed by the miserable disciples of Lovecraft, which is a blessed relief.

Since its first publication in three parts in 1968 — which date could explain the sneaking feeling that the denizens of the evil empire of the east may not be the bad guys with red stars on their fur hats but the lounge-suited lizards of Wall Street and the Eastern establishment — this novel has not gained a cult following. Excitable young people do not dress up and make believe they live within its confines. After all, they would be too liable to end up dead, which must be a bummer for role-players. I doubt whether this causes Saberhagen much grief. Empire Of The East is a coarse, vulgar swashbuckler of a story, told con brio, to be read for simple escapist entertainment rather than an explanation of the mysteries of nature. Larry Niven is of course wrong — Empire Of The East is not better than The Lord Of The Rings. Comparisons are not so much odious as idiotic. Empire Of The East is nothing like The Lord Of The Rings, which is the greater part of its attraction.

Marion Bradley — THE MISTS OF AVALON (Sphere, 1009pp, £2·95)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

The Matter of Britain is a deep well. Writers have been drawing from it for centuries, and still the water flows, slaking our imaginative thirst. Working within such a detailed framework of received tradition has its own challenge for the conscientious writer: to enrich the tradition, to add some new ingredient, some part of one's own individual vision to the broth of legend, something that will both blend with and enhance what is already there, something that will give us an unexpected, clear vision of a familiar subject while preserving the appearances we already know. This process of enrichment is one of the great joys at the heart of an enormous subset of "fanwriting"; giving the amateur (here strongly connoting "lover") the op-

portunity to widen, deepen, elaborate her beloved scenario. Essentially, there is no difference between the writer who uses Greek myth, or Arthurian legend, as a basis for further work, and the writer who uses Star Trek or Bladerunner (though it is currently fashionable to scorn the latter class).

Marion Bradley (who has dropped the "Zimmer" for her venture into the Big Fantasy-Historical Romance genre) is a good fanwriter. She loves her subject-matter, she has taken a lot of trouble to get the details right; she wants this novel to be taken seriously. It is, she states in her Acknowledgements, "time to stop playing it safe by writing potboilers". As a result, The Mists Of Avalon is, not a great novel, but a competently written and interesting one, reassuringly familiar and intriguingly different by turns. The story sticks fairly closely to the gospel according to Malory and its subsequent but synoptic expansion by T. H. White, with occasional excursions into the Celtic tradition. (In order not to infuriate the archaeologists and theologians amongst the readership, I'd better not speculate on whether the proto-Celtic Arthurian source was "Q".) It is told from the viewpoint of Arthur's half-sister, Morgaine of the Fairies, who is a witch — that is, a priestess of the Old Religion.

The novel is both a family saga of the juicy "epic blockbuster" kind and an imagined history of the conflict between the newly-introduced patriarchal world-view of Christianity and the Goddess-centred Pagan wisdom religion that probably preceded it in Britain. Although many of the principal characters have been copied from T. H. White, Bradley does produce some original insight into personality, most notably and successfully with Gwenhwyfar, who is presented as a convent-raised devout Christian and agoraphobic. In feminist terms, she is a forerunner of the generations of guilty, miserable women who internalise their oppression under an unfair system. She is believable; as is Morgaine, the bitter, clever woman who fights to save a dying tradition, who sees everything she holds dear used, corrupted, rejected...who fears towards the end of the novel that she has lived her life in vain.

I found the uses of magic in the novel a little jarring. The Sword, the Grail, the Sacred Marriage, the Sight, the everyday magic of the Goddess religion, are all convincingly depicted. But the removal of Avalon from the world, superimposing it on the Christian site of Glastonbury, takes magic of another order. Of course, symbolically it is right, philosophically it is right...but I felt uneasy every time Morgaine summoned the black barge to pass into the otherworld. Perhaps the magic seemed too much like technology here, and not enough like religion.

But The Mists Of Avalon is still a good read. I'll stick my neck out and say that on the whole it will appeal more to women than men (as does the Old Religion itself, in its modern reincarnation). If you like magical-historical-pastoral escapism, at £2·95 for 1009 pages, how can you lose?

Gordon R. Dickson — THE SPIRIT OF DORSAI (Sphere, 180pp, £1·50)

Reviewed by Graham Andrews

Soldiers — and especially mercenary soldiers — have always exerted a strange, not to say uncanny, fascination on the minds of SF writers and readers. E. E. Smith's space-warring "Lensman" series is a good case in point. A strong tradition of militaristic SF developed during the fifties and sixties, notable early examples being Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers (1959), Mack Reynolds's The Earth War (1963), and — especially — Gordon Dickson's "Dorsai" series, which began with Dorsai! in Astounding in 1959 (an abridged version of which was published as The Genetic General in 1960; the original finally saw book publication in 1976). More recently, we have been subjected to such fascistic abominations as Niven's and Pournelle's The Mote In God's Eye (1974), the aptly-titled Hammer's Slammers (1979) by David Drake, and Manifest Destiny (1980) by Barry Longyear.

Nevertheless, Dickson has proved that there need be nothing wrong with "wargaming" SF per se; it all depends on the author's attitude to violence and the way in which they treat their material. Dickson is, by and large, a sensitive writer with more important things on his mind than meaningless blood-letting. (Unlike some people I've already mentioned, or could mention if I had a mind to...)

Dorsai is one of several human-colonised worlds in a period of gradual interstellar expansion, and the Dorsai — the men who live on it — are specially bred and trained as crack mercenary soldiers, hiring themselves out to fight in off-planet wars. They embody all the old Spartan virtues, such as taciturnity, efficiency, determination, and a fierce loyalty to their state and to each other. Donal Graeme, the hero of Dorsai!, is the ultimate Dorsai — indeed, he is an entirely new kind of human being, even a superman — who, by the end of the novel, has become mankind's arbiter and guiding light.

Other books in this same series are Soldier, Ask Not (1967), Tactics Of Mistake (1971), Lost Dorsai (1981), and The Spirit Of Dorsai. First published by Ace in 1979, the latter does not share the unity and dynamism which characterised its predecessors; mainly because it is, in effect, a "fix-up", consisting of two novellas supplemented by linking material. The first novella, "Amanda Morgan", is original with this volume, while the second, "Brothers" first appeared in Astounding: The John W. Campbell Memorial Anthology (1973), edited by Harry Harrison. But it is a book that carries quite a hefty emotional punch. The artwork, by Fernando Fernandel, which has been deleted from this edition, was evocative and actually complemented the text rather than, as is usually the case with "illustrated" novels, detracted from it. Furthermore, the linking material is an organic part of the book rather than a piece of simple bridgework.

Hal Mayne (a typical example of idiosyncratic Dicksonian name-coining) is an outworlder guerilla fighter who, while recovering from his wounds on Dorsai, is given a series of history lessons concerning the early days of the planet by Amanda Morgan, whose ancestor (also called Amanda Morgan) features prominently in the story of that title. A task force from Earth, led by

the redoutable Dow de Castries, attempts to seize the planet Dorsai, but is eventually defeated by what amounts to a deus ex machina even though all the relevant clues are seeded throughout the story. "Brothers" is much more effective. It is a poignant tale of Dorsai twin brothers named Ian and Kensie Graeme. After Kensie is murdered on the planet St Marie, Ian extracts retribution in the usual thorough-going Dorsai manner.

Dickson's male characters are usually quite finely drawn, as Hal Mayne, Dow de Castries, Tomas Velt (a superintendent of police on St Marie), and the Graeme brothers demonstrate. However, he invariably has problems depicting members of the distaff side, especially with females aged from (say) seventeen to thirty-six, although his younger girls and older women are often surprisingly forceful, if ephemeral, figures. Amanda Morgan is something of an exceptional case, here, probably because she is one of the few women in the Dickson canon who takes centre stage for any significant length of time.

The unique "philosophy" of Gordon R. Dickson is most fully expressed in his so-called "Childe Cycle". According to the American SF critic Sandra Miesel, "The Cycle treats the human race like a single organism in which the condition of each individual cell affects the health of the whole. The progressive and conservative tendencies of this human organism, symbolised as estranged Twin Brothers, must be reconciled if the organism is to continue growing. Specialised, sometimes tightly organised groups work to ease the problem but it can only be solved by the combined efforts of the Three Prime Characters — the men of Faith, Philosophy and War. When fully mature, humanity will exercise creative and responsible control over its own evolution". (Taken from "About Gordon R. Dickson" in Alien Art, Ace, 1978.)

The warrior race known as the Dorsai lies at the very heart of the Childe Cycle, and The Spirit Of Dorsai is — to quote the author's own words — an "illumination" of the heart and soul of that people. Ian and Kensie Graeme, of course, represent the aforementioned "estranged Twin Brothers". But Dickson would appear to have run out of steam so far as the Childe Cycle is concerned; the long awaited concluding volume, The Final Encyclopaedia, is still long awaited. Lost Dorsai, the most recent entry in the series, represented a step sideways rather than forwards. Apropos of nothing, I can't help wondering what would happen to the Dorsai if the galaxy ever became completely peaceful. Turn their blasters into ploughshares, I suppose...

Frederik Pohl — STARBURST (New English Library, 220pp, £1·75)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

"The Gold At The Starbow's End", the novelette of which Starburst is an expansion, was quite highly thought of at the time, although I can't imagine why; blown up into a novel, its confusions and absurdities become so blindingly apparent that at times I began to wonder whether Pohl might have lost some of his marbles.

Hand-picked for their mission by a devious German-American scientist who bears a strong resemblance to the late Werner Von Braun (who would probably sue for libel were he still alive), a group of young American geniuses is packed into a spaceship and shot off towards Alpha Centauri, supposedly to establish humanity's first interstellar colony. Fairly early on, it is revealed (to the reader) that there is no planet for them to colonise and that the whole voyage is a fake, the scientist's purpose in mounting it being to give his troupe of geniuses the opportunity to make volumes of intellectual and practical discoveries that can be transmitted back to Earth and used for its betterment. Precisely why it should be necessary to indulge in something as extravagant and as wasteful as a fake interstellar journey in order to make such discoveries is something Pohl never stops to explain...presumably in the hope that if he doesn't raise the question we won't either.

Eventually, the spaceship reaches Alpha Centauri and the geniuses discover that they've been had — but by this time they're so supercapable that by golly they just buckle down and build themselves a planet out of all the asteroidal junk floating around. And then, God help us, come zipping back to Earth to set about solving its problems too...

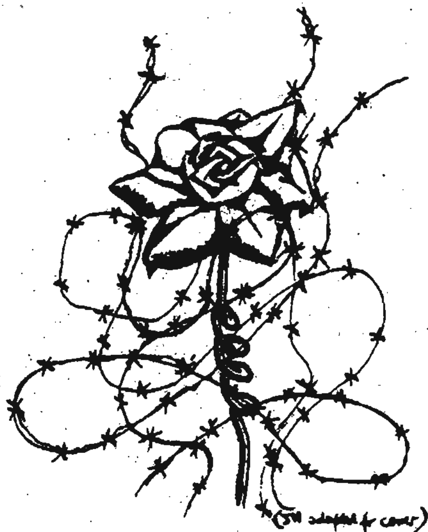
To label it all as juvenile power-fantasy, designed to appeal only to retarded, socially inept adolescents who harbour secret paranoid dreams of one day becoming planetary dictators, is to understate the case by several orders of magnitude. If Starburst had been written as a satire of the plonking, sub-Gernsbackian universe-busting stories of the thirties it might have been marginally interesting; instead, it's evident that Pohl was taking it deadly seriously, as though he thought he was writing a deeply meaningful novel of urgent social relevance — and the result is simply dire beyond belief: vapid, puerile drivel from beginning to end.

Hilbert Schenck — A ROSE FOR ARMAGEDDON (Sphere, 190pp, £1·75)

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

One of the most noticeable trends in American fiction, of late, has been a rather over-earnest rejection of the conventional hero and heroine. No square-jawed spaceship pilots or raven-haired xenobiologists with legs up to their necks allowed around these parts, friend! Hilbert Schenck takes things even further; her protagonists are both well into their sixties and consider themselves as "two wrinkled, conceited, poopy old professors". Hardly the sort to save the world, you might think (although whether or not they do save the world I won't say, since the novel doesn't).

A Rose For Armageddon is a pretty dodgy title, resembling a fair number of others: Roger Zelazny's "A Rose For Ecclesiastes", for instance. It also gives the game away far too early; symbolically, the rose has been worked to death in SF, as it previously has been in poetry. The moment a rose shows up, you are assured of a tale of quasi-mystical conciliation, of endings that are also beginnings, of timeless moments and redemption... As I read the novel I kept feeling that it was all rather familiar; halfway through, I realised that it is damned close to being a novelisation of Eliot's "Little Gidding", the poem which contains lines that more than one SF author has chosen as an epigram:



"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

Being SF, the "end of all our exploring" and the place "where we started" happens to be a time-warp. It's hard to criticise Schenck when Eliot himself was the biggest literary magpie of all, but by the end, when the fire (of Armageddon) and the rose are one, I was wondering if the novel should have carried the same sort of credit as Tarzan films do: "Based on the similes and metaphors of J. Arthur Prufrock..."

The story, as I mentioned, concerns two elderly scientists, running a long-term morphological project on an island off New England, hoping to create a computer analogue that will be able to extract all manner of things from all manner of input. By feeding in information on lobster catches and wool prices over the past five centuries, the computer is able to work out where one of the island's previous owners hid his fortune. The science behind all this is a bit dubious, particularly when the final output from the computer reveals a time-warp in the middle of the island, but by then the momentum of the story is enough to carry you through this sticky patch. Eventually, the two make it to the time-warp and find themselves swept back from their decrepit bodies — just as civilisation is finally crumbling — to their 17-year-old selves back in happier days. They make love, finally understanding everything, and believe that they can change things this time around. But after leaving the time-warp they find themselves reverting to their 17-year-old minds. Will they grow up to love each other and save the world? Or will they make the same mistakes again? Will Jake forget about her and go after the empty-headed cuties instead? And will Elsa grow up frustrated and unhappy again? Now read on...

Judging by various laudatory reviews of it that I've read, I feel that I ought to like this novel, and say that it is sensitive and humane and (like all good literature) cares about the people rather than the mechanics; but a voice within me shouts "no no no!" To put people above plot doesn't automatically make a book into something special -- after all, Mills & Boon have been putting people above plot for years. And is it really any more palatable to have two people save the world by being sensitive rather than dynamic, and shooting everything that doesn't speak their language? As for the writing itself, Schenck's clumsy, graceless prose style is hard to like: sentences containing four "and"s are not uncommon, and the dash seems to have replaced all forms of punctuation more complex than the comma. This is science fiction straining to be literature, and the result lacks the potential of either. And I'll take my Four Quartets in undiluted form from now on, thank you.

James P. Hogan — VOYAGE FROM YESTERYEAR
(Penguin, 378pp, £2·50)

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

James P. Hogan is a new writer to me, a former British electronics and digital systems engineer who worked for many years in the computer industry, moving to the USA in 1977. He has been writing full time since the end of 1979 and this novel was first published in the USA in 1982.

Hogan's main premise in Voyage From Yesteryear is that we are all prisoners of history, too constrained by old prejudices to ever make a worthwhile society here on Earth. So, in order to preserve human life in the face of impending nuclear catastrophe, three nations — the USA, China and Japan — who obviously share that belief co-operate in 2015 in an ambitious project. They build a starship, to be crewed entirely by robots, that will journey to the Alpha Centauri system to seek for a planet suitable for human habitation. When such a planet is discovered the robots will, using the latest techniques in embryology, create and nurture up to ten thousand human children. The first generation of colonists will be raised and educated in orbit while machines establish metals and materials processing facilities, manufacturing plants, farms and homes on the planet. Within a few generations, a thriving colony will have been established and the human race will survive despite whatever happens on Earth.

However, the war which flares in 2021, though devastating, does not destroy Earth's civilisation. The voyage of the title is the voyage of the "Mayflower II", sent out from New America decades later after news is received on Earth in 2040 of the successful colonisation of a planet to be named after the centaur Chiron. Each of the main power groups on Earth — New America, Greater Europe, and the Eastern Asiatic Federation — determines to build a generation ship to make the twenty-year voyage to Chiron, take over the planet, and settle larger numbers of Earth people there. The "Mayflower II" is the first to leave for Alpha Centauri. It is an immense structure eighteen miles in circumference, with thirty thousand colonists and a separable Battle Module manned by the troops of the Chironian Expeditionary Force. The Force's task will be firstly to back the setting-up of a New American controlled planetary administration on Chiron and supervise the colonisation programme, and secondly to defend the planet against the EAF and European colony ships due to arrive two years after them.

The main story starts in 2081 as the "Mayflower II" approaches Chiron, and recounts the confrontation between the Americans and the Chironians for control of the planet. This is rendered more purposeful by the worsening four-year-old news from Earth and the eventual cess-

ation of transmissions, indicating that the war of total destruction has finally occurred. The novel culminates in a battle fought with devastating weapons between the two sides to determine whether Chiron's way of life will continue unchanged or be subjugated. The Chironians have developed a liberal, classless and vigourous society with no apparent government or authority, no legal system, no money or even barter-based means of exchange, and no political or religious creeds. They initially welcome the new colonists as Chironians, but see no merits in the leaders and administrative structures that the Earthmen wish to impose upon them, and resist recolonisation.

Hogan is acclaimed on the back cover by Asimov and Clarke as a new star of "hard" SF. He makes no concessions whatever to those SF readers who came up by the arts route. The spaceships and their propulsion systems are described in great and convincing detail (so that the "Mayflower II" can be illustrated on the otherwise insipid cover by George Underwood), and he devotes equal space to describing the magnetic fusion power stations which provide the Chironians with all their energy needs. His scientific tour-de-force is a nine-page contrast between Earth and Chironian theoretical physics, the essential difference being our acceptance of entropy and the eventual death of the universe, and the Chironian belief that the universe is only one atom of a possibly infinite Universe of sibling universes, any one of which can couple to and replenish the power of any other. Our universe is therefore not a closed but an open system whose life is also infinite. This positive and unlimited view of creation contrasts with the current pessimistic theory and accounts in part for the totally different Chironian view of life and society.

What Hogan has actually done is rewrite Eric Frank Russell's "And Then There Were None", which was incorporated into his 1963 novel The Great Explosion. With the exception that Russell's Gands were pacifists and the Chironians are not, the structure of both societies is very similar — the status of each member is measured by achievement and skill, and his or her contribution to society is determined and controlled by a seemingly informal mutual obligation system. Annares in Le Guin's The Dispossessed is not comparable because the Odonians live with a continual shortage of resources and each person's freedom of action is therefore much more constrained and directed. The Chironians have a culture which is "appropriate to high technology, limitless resources, and universal abundance", which allows each individual considerable personal freedom and which can tolerate a degree of aberrant behaviour by persons who do not wish to contribute to society. Virtually all Chironians accept their obligations readily, however, taking everything they need to satisfy their material needs, but working hard and with great conscientiousness to repay their "debts". Hogan believes that this new society could only have evolved in this way because it was "isolated by light-years of space and by its unique beginnings from mechanisms that had perpetuated the creeds of hatred, prejudice, greed, intimidation, domination and unreason from generation to generation".

A weakness of the novel is that this result is not the fulfilment of the original plan, because the Chironains have disregarded their instructions to set up the institutions specified for the colony and evolved their own society along completely different lines. This development was not foreseen by the project planners and therefore can only be regarded as serendipitous, in that the original plan envisaged a direct continuation of Earth's society rather than a new beginning. Also, since the first generation of Chironians are only in their forties, it is a little difficult to believe that Chiron could have made the enormous strides in sociology, science and technology that it has in such a short space of time, even though Earth has hardly provided a suitable environment for the same sort of progress in the same time period.

Your enjoyment of this novel will depend on two factors: whether you have enough of a scientific background to appreciate the lengthy scientific and technical descriptions; and whether you believe that Chironian society could have developed in the way it did and that such a society would be superior enough to our own to absorb its survivors without being changed itself.

The concept of the novel is straight from the so-called "Golden Age of SF", technologically updated for the eighties but still rooted in SF's past rather than its present. Characterisation is subservient to the demands of the plot, mainly because there are far too many principal characters for any to be treated in depth (although one of those normally pretentious lists of dramatis personae might have been a good idea). It doesn't dish up any nouvelle cuisine, but it does provide "hard" SF readers with significantly better meat than Asimov, Clarke and Niven have been serving up lately.

Phillip Mann — THE EYE OF THE QUEEN (Granada, 264pp, £1·95)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

This ambitious and, I believe, successful first novel emulates a number of other memorable works by beginning at the end, with the narrator-cum-hero, Marius Thorndyke, already dead. Effectively, The Eye Of The Queen comprises The Thorndyke Diaries, with added commentary.

Thorndyke, and his protege Tomas Mnaba, are members of CLI, the Contact Linguistic Institute. In 2076, an alien sphere arrives on Earth from Pe-Ellia with the intention of taking Thorndyke back there. There is a sense of foreboding about this, dimly perceived but tangible nevertheless; a feeling that Thorndyke and Mnaba are being "shaped", manipulated as though in a laboratory experiment but most subtly so. There is a sense of brooding menace created by appearance of the Pe-Ellians: humanoid in shape yet of greater size and intelligence, of neuter gender yet the equal of either male or female...

Mann said in an article in Focus 8 that "the question of translation and understanding is of great importance to me, and it is the backbone of the book. I believe that when we do finally meet alien intelligence, first communication will be through pattern, form and rhythm and that our ambassadors will be potters, weavers, painters and sculptors... For a while the aliens I wrote about...were like guests in the house. Writing the book was sometimes like taking dictation".

"Eternity is definitely perceivable in a grain of sand, and one step carries me into worlds unknown," Thorndyke writes of his entry into the Pe-Ellian sphere. This allusion to Blake's "Auguries Of Innocence" typifies the novel: it is literate, but not in a contrived way. "But literature is not life," Thorndyke later muses. "It may satisfy the mind in any number of ways, but it is not life and any attempt to make it such is perversion." The Pe-Ellians views on poetry are of interest here: they feel that it must be allowed to continually grow, and not be stultified by being written down. The emotions — repressed and expressed — seem right. Their language appears to be a composite of gesture and voice, gesture being an emotional modifier. The central event in the Pe-Ellian lifestyle is the sloughing of skin; each successive phase in a Pe-Ellian life is determined by the skin that is revealed after such a change; their goal is a kind of symmetry, an outward sign of inner fulfillment. Their skin patterns reflect their physical and spiritual health, while colour changes indicate when they are becoming emotional or ill.

There are some excellent in-character phrases used by Thorndyke in his diaries. "My head is a trunk of old clothes and someone is rummaging through it. Picking up quaint customs. Holding them up to the light. Looking at the holes and threadbare patches." Thus he voices his suspicion that his and Mnaba's minds are being bugged. In fact, telepathy is employed by the Pe-Ellians, but not obtrusively — indeed, they need it to block off the rush of thoughts from Earthmen, which clutter space with emotional charges. To them, thought is a living, tangible force: "in a world such as ours, the very flowers reflect the passing of a sensitive mind".

But this is not simply a dull socio-anthropological survey; there is humour, too. One section relates Thorndyke's introduction to his bed, which is sentient and wishes to soothe him when all he wants is motionlessness and sleep; and in another a Pe-Ellian renamed "Cook" voraciously reads Westerns in order to study humans, as a result often using cliche phrases from the genre in his own speech.

Thorndyke's tone seems just right; when reminiscing about assignments on other planets, he says that "just to have known these people remains a source of strength". This was the view of other travellers, like Wilfred Thesiger. Thorndyke is human, and in conflict with the linguist's code he helped devise, which prevents him from going rogue and attempting to manipulate the local population, with obvious dangers to the local culture (as, it turns out, other operatives have done). Only too clearly, Thorndyke realises that he is a product of his own culture and history and thus doomed never to be able to get under the Pe-Ellian skin; yet the terrible yearning for oneness with them does not leave him. "Every animal, all life, has its own individual melody. Play this melody to the creature and it will flourish, the building blocks of its body will all dance to the same tune, and perfection is reached when melody and life are one."

The mysterious Mantissae seem to be a higher level Pe-Ellian, a link between the thought of Pe-Ellia and the thoughtwaves of space: both receivers and transmitters. A Mantissa Singer is composing an epic on the theme that one day all Pe-Ellians will meld and that day will be the end of time; then they will vacate time and the present and spread through the universe as pure thought. The title of the novel is significant: the Eastern religious belief in reincarnation looms: as in all life, elements at the atomic level are not lost but reused; why not self, why not soul too?

In his review in Vector 112, Martyn Taylor said that he thought the plot was "pretty silly", neglecting to appreciate the ultimate design of the novel, which is geared to fulfill the Pe-Ellian higher purpose summed up on the last page. As Mann said in Focus 8, "...the ending came in one sustained burst and I realised that the final paragraph was what I had been heading towards all the time." Martyn was seeking a novel, but The Eye Of The Queen is much more than that. It is a kind of extraterrestrial exposition by a future David Attenborough on an alien race, and one just as foreign to Earthly eyes as Marsh Arabs and !Kung societies were to Western eyes. Martyn also felt that the novel's structure disrupted its narrative; but because it is so successful as a study of alienness it's necessary for it to be structured as it is. D. M. Thomas's The White Hotel has what appears to be a disruptive structure, yet it succeeds admirably in getting the reader not only under Lisa's skin but also inside her mind, so that her senseless death is that much more horrific. Similarly, I found that the characters came alive just as much as the Marsh Arabs did in Thesiger's classic work: through observation, not involvement. The Eye Of The Queen is the drama of life being observed, not the melodrama of fiction.

If you want details of the Queen and "the central notion of the planet Pe-Ellia" and Thorndyke's final commitment, then read Martyn's review — but, better still, read Mann's novel. Actually, Martyn gave The Eye Of The Queen his guarded approval; I'd simply like to thank Gollancz (the original publishers) for finding a new writer worth reading, and one who will be worth watching. Buy it, and read what SF can be like.

Brian Aldiss — GREYBEARD (Granada, 272pp, £1·95)

Whitley Strieber & James Kunetka — WARDAY (Coronet, 380pp, £4·95)

Reviewed by Mary Gentle

Not so long ago now, I saw nuclear missiles explode over the town where I live. Very graphic: it was one of those brilliantly sunny days when the sea is a picture-postcard blue, and the hotels and guest-houses have a Mediterranean whiteness. And there they were — four airbursts, sunfire-brilliant, and I remember thinking, with total certainty, I knew this would happen. In the best literary tradition, I must now tell you that I was dreaming (you will have guessed this), but add that it was a real dream and not a literary device. I don't, I think, believe in precognitive dreams. I do believe that nuclear war has found its way under the conscious mind, and that fear surfaces in dreams.

We'll get to the books in a minute.

These are my credentials for thinking that I can review novels about the aftermath of nuclear

war. I fall about midway between the "they'll never dare start a nuclear exchange" and the "CND is the only hope" positions. I've been on one protest march. I admire the Greenham Common women, and will give them every assistance short of actual physical help. Because all organisations seem to share the same methods, structure and inefficiencies, I doubt that setting one against another (say, the Green movement in the European Parliament) will prove useful: at the same time, I fail to see what an individual can do alone. In short, I'm as confused and morally dubious as everyone else.

Before you complain that this is the "itchy bum" school of reviewing, let me pre-empt you. (Er...) Sure it is: I come more and more to doubt that any novel can be judged by some aesthetic, objective, single standard, especially in a case like this. Reviewers are people. It may help you to know, as you read this review of Warday and Greybeard, that some time ago it came to me that I had Had Enough of the nuclear problem. So it's from a somewhat jaundiced position that my criticism comes...

Having said that, Warday isn't a bad book. It isn't as bad as people would like to think — those who would say it's pernicious because it encourages people to think there can be life after nuclear war. Unfortunately, it isn't a very good book either. If it weren't that nuclear armageddon is a potent image, without fictive addition, then Warday would be an insignificant curate's egg of a novel.

By the way, I don't say that there can't be good novels about life after the bomb. I do say that they're thin on the ground. Christopher Hodder-Williams's The Chromosome Game presents the only plausible scenario I've seen for surviving nuclear war (and far be it from me to spoil the novel for you by telling you what it is); Russell Hoban's Riddley Walker is one hell of a good novel, but I maintain that it isn't really about the nuclear holocaust and that its fall is a metaphor for a more fundamental and theological Fall. Warday doesn't come anywhere near these two.

Part of the reason for Warday's bittiness is its structure. Supposedly, it is the eye-witness report of two survivors travelling across the USA five years after a Russian nuclear strike. In a way, it wasn't a good idea to have real people as the main characters. We know, or think we do, that Strieber and Kunetka are young, not old; alive, not dying; that when they sit down to write a survivor's diary, every word is automatically false — one can't give it the suspension of disbelief that even the worst novel invokes. To believe it as an Awful Warning, one must accept the story as both true and not true; which in this case is an uncomfortable paradox.

Interspersed with the narrators' split narrative are word-of-mouth rumours, interviews with other survivors (economists, farmers, priests, witches, funeral directors, and Deconstructionists), and memos from various balkanised governments, plus tables of statistics (see under: damned lies and). Persuasive it may be. A novel? Well...

But then I suspect this isn't at all to be judged by how well it works as fiction, but by how well it functions as propaganda. Yes, anti-nuclear propaganda is still propaganda. To be judged, I think, by what it makes one do.

Warday has two narrators, rather than the one

that would give it fictional unity, because Strieber is a novelist and Kunetka is a journalist, and one needs to know what the other can research while the other can't write and the first can fictionalise. The result of this is that it's difficult to get emotionally involved with the characters. In normal fictional terms, they don't ring true. I'll give you an example: if I were the (fictional) Strieber, and had received a high dose of radiation in the destruction of New York; if I had been triaged on the fittest-first principle, so that it was illegal for me to go to hospital even for a minor ailment; if I were awaiting the inevitable development of cancer within the next five years — wouldn't that be the biggest thing in my life? In yours, if it was you? But in Warday it plays a poor second to sight-seeing.

Sight-seeing, because it's a novel that tries to make us feel how devastating the death of the whole country would be. It isn't really concerned with its narrators. I suspect that "Strieber" is sick because one of the two had to illustrate the long-term effects of radiation, and he drew the short straw. The destruction of the USA (and the USSR, let us not forget) is just too big to see. One falls back on quibbles — is Warday as well-researched as it claims, is this how it would be?

There's no mention of the "nuclear winter", that latest Strangelovian surprise in which "survivors would face extreme cold, water shortages, lack of food and fuel, heavy burdens of radiation and pollutants, diseases and severe psychological stress — all in twilight or darkness". A 5000 megaton exchange is postulated to produce this amount of smoke and dust; Warday is more of an incident, something around 300 megatons expended on New York, Washington, San Antonio and the Mid-West. (The figures for the USSR aren't given.) But even then there are toxins from urban fires, depletion of the ozone layer and consequent increased exposure to ultra-violet radiation, sub-freezing temperatures... Or at least there are if the pamphlet put out by SANA (Scientists Against Nuclear Arms), quoted above, is correct. And is it? You tell me; I'm not a physicist.

Warday's war is abortive chiefly because of the electro-magnetic pulse generated by massive Russian airbursts, which wipe out guidance systems, firing mechanisms, communications networks, computer memory banks, telephones...this

is a new one on me, I'll admit, but since I know just enough about electricity to change a plug I'll have to take on trust that the EMP effect does what they say it does to micro-electronics.

What we're talking about here, you'll notice, isn't nuclear war but secrecy. It shouldn't be that difficult to establish what effect a nuclear strike of a given number of megatons would have — God knows there have been tests enough, and there was Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But no one appears to know. Those that say they know are as promptly contradicted; factors are included or excluded at will (and isn't it interesting how little one hears of biological and chemical warfare?); in short, we don't know. Who's keeping secrets, and from whom? Governments are best at concealing things from their own electorates. not from foreign powers; hence technological advances in either the USA or the USSR escalate the arms race across the world, while the person in the street couldn't tell you, offhand, just how big a bang a one-megaton explosion is.

Added to that, those that could tell us don't — writing this in the early part of August, I have seen (apart from the anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) the Bernard Levin interview with Edward Teller. Oppenheimer at least said that physicists had known sin. Teller — if ever a man spoke like a moral cripple, if ever a man contradicted himself within the same sentence, every sentence...but what's the use? The people who ought to know how we got where we are stay silent. Experts disagree. Reagan plans star wars. Possibly we're <u>all</u> psychotic.

But back to <u>Warday</u>, wherein the USA is reduced to approximately mid-nineteenth century levels of technology. Plus, of course, fallout, poisoned crops, new dustbowls — "wheat and corn need tending. Left to themselves these highly bred species do not go wild, they die. When the stalks rot or blow away, the raw dirt is exposed". Hence famine, new strains of flu, any number of other diseases, infections and parasites. And a great deal of health aid and imperialism from the untouched nations of the world.

Europe is untouched. Maybe the wind wasn't blowing that way when the two super-powers got nuked. (When Krakatoa went up, the dust coloured sunsets all around the world for two years. Picture that dust radio-active.) The British Relief is presented as paying off the debt incurred in two world wars by aiding America. The British, it seems, are practising a covert imperialism: government under the guise of charity. Japan is busy making the hardly-touched California into a client state of theirs...

There'll be a difference, I think in <u>Warday</u>'s reception inside and outside the USA. One can translate: images of a devastated London in place of New York, etc.. But the political side? Things being the way they are, at least one non-American reaction is going to be "Ho-ho, serve the bloody Yanks right". I must admit that I have a sneaking fondness for <u>Warday</u>'s political scenario in Europe:

> "Now it turns out that the whole European peace movement, the Greens and such, were secretly supported by the very governments they were opposing, to give the Soviet Union the impression that Europe was too divided to be dangerous... The English and the Germans and the French and probably the Italians and the Japanese all had secret treaties to the effect that in the event of a sudden and unexpected nuclear war between the two superpowers, they would seize American nuclear components on their soil... There's a school of thought that the Europeans tempted the Soviets into getting trigger-happy by revealing those treaties to them and making the Western Alliance seem disastrously split. Their real purpose was to trick the superpowers into crushing one another."

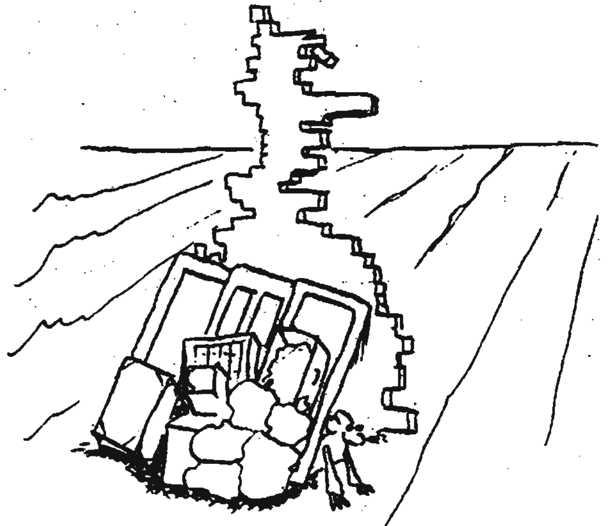
Did I hear someone say "American paranoia"? If I thought for one minute that it would work (which it wouldn't), I'd say that it was the best idea I'd heard for years!

That, then, illustrates <u>Warday</u>'s kind of politics. Strictly speaking, the cause of its war is technological: the USA drawing so far ahead of the USSR that the Kremlin panics. Faced with a satellite spy-system that will make their missiles useless, they consider they have no option but to shoot the satellites down. Once the missiles are launched...

Would it be so abortive a war? Even in <u>Warday</u>'s terms, I don't credit it: there are stray Trident and Typhoon nuclear submarines still at sea (one prevented only by moments from laying waste to California). One could ask why no other nuclear power was provoked or panicked into a strike (and what about China, which seems to be the "invisible" country?). National feeling is an unpredictable thing; wouldn't the get-them-before-they-get-us mentality take over?

But <u>Warday</u> regards national feeling with a great deal of approval, is very insistent on the virtues of the American character. I don't put much confidence in national stereotypes, though there is of course a shared cultural experience. I do know that in wartime national character assumes a life of its own (and, yes, I do mean the South Atlantic). <u>Warday</u> might stand a better chance with its self-appointed task of persuading people not to blow each other up if it included some scenes in an equally devastated and equally patriotic Russia. Patriotism is not only the last refuge of a scoundrel and the first refuge of a politician, it's how we got into this damn mess in the first place.

What's good about <u>Warday</u>? Touches, here and there. The realisation that, for the first time in human history, a megalopolis can be reduced to black dust, and that "the heart does not understand this sort of death, neither the suddenness nor the scale... (People) disappeared so suddenly and completely that they don't seem



dead so much as lost". Observations: that "if there is a truism about life in our times, it is that the poor die first. And in America that means, for the most part, the black" — which explains the initially irritating preponderance of white faces. The co-operatives of the independent state of Atzlan. The realisation that the "nuclear mentality" hasn't gone, and that new fortress-nations are arising. Salvagers dismantling Manhattan. A quote that is applied to the USSR but points to all of us: "Those brutal acts seemed the work of pride, but time and experience has revealed that they were the fearful doings of the trapped".

And what's bad about Warday? The failure to recognise the sheer scale of the catastrophe. Corny reactions, like quoting "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair". Hospitals that can cope with a nuclear strike over their city. Failure to realise personal tragedy — a radiation victim dies "after a very hard five hours". There's no reality in that.

For comparison, an eye-witness description of refugees from John Hersey's Hiroshima:

> "The eyebrows of some were burned off and skin hung from their faces and hands. Others, because of pain, held their arms up as if carrying something in both hands. Some were vomiting as they walked. Many were naked or in shreds of clothing. On some undressed bodies, the burns had made patterns — of undershirt straps and suspenders and, on the skin of some women (since white repelled the heat from the bomb and dark clothes absorbed it and conducted it to the skin), the shapes of flowers they had on their kimonos. Many, although injured themselves, supported relatives who were worse off."

And Hiroshima's, they say, was only a small bomb. Warday has none of this.

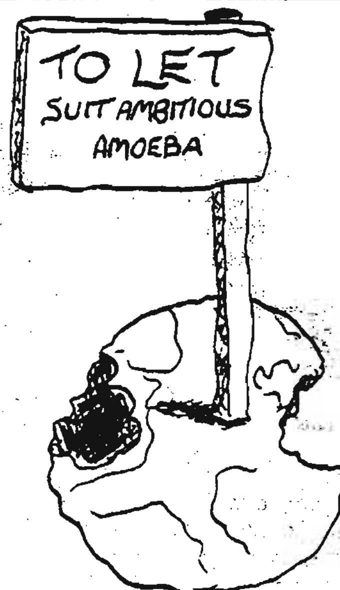
And nowhere does it suggest what might prevent "warday", except a "massive change of heart". That, considering Warday's treatment of human nature (there is no black market in drugs or other essentials), isn't helpful. Something a little more practical seems called for. (Or, as one of Richard Nixon's men is supposed to have remarked: "When you've got them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow".) Mankind doesn't do anything it doesn't have to, and it doesn't "have" to stop the arms race. We can always blow ourselves straight to hell...

Having read one novel in that frame of mind, of course, it begins to carry over to the next. When we're told in Brian Aldiss's Greybeard that some kind of nuclear "accident" makes the human race sterile the questions come: could this actually happen? Is it feasible?

Nuclear testing in space causes fluctuations in the Van Allen belts, dosing the entire Earth (if briefly) with hard radiation — could it do that? What exactly are the Van Allen belts, and what is their normal behaviour? If hard radiation sterilised the Earth, would the sterilisation be confined to (some) mammals? Would fertility return? What effect does knocking out half the food chain have on the other half?

Which are not, perhaps, the questions one should be asking of Greybeard. I think its primary demand is for fictional belief, not (as with Warday) that we should get out on the streets and protest. The accident exists for the sake of the story, and not vice versa.

Greybeard is the story of Algy Timberlane,



his journey through a world composed mainly of octogenarians, in the twenty-first century; and flashbacks to how he and some of his companions survived the the civil unrest attendant on a world discovering itself to be sterile. Driven by wild stoat packs from the river settlement Sparcot, he and his wife and friends travel down the Thames; lodge for a time in decaying Oxford, meet Bunny Jingadangelow and the church of the Second Generation; and reflect on the likelihood of their being the last generation of mankind.

It's a variant of that terrible and fascinating image, the deserted world. Grass growing in city streets, Warday's New York vines where the house-plants become a flourishing jungle, the mediaeval markets in Greybeard's Oxford colleges, women who hunt using tame otters, an empty England... It combines apocalypse with the Noble Savage, the return to a pastoral Eden. And Greybeard is more pessimistic about human nature than Warday; it is always fallible, sometimes malicious, invariably complex. The advent of an anti-bomb government only produces from the young Algy the remark that "(it) only demonstrated people's fatuous belief in a political cure for the human condition". But then later, older, he says: "It's a national failing to think of politics as something that goes on in Parliament. It isn't; it's something that goes on inside us".

It's curious, however, that there can be a novel about the loss of fertility that all but ignores the womb. The talk is always of fathers and sons and sperm, rarely of mothers and daughters, and never of the ovum. Only Algy's wife Martha carries with her the realisation of her loss:

> "'We can see now that the values of the twentieth century were invalid; otherwise they wouldn't have wrecked the world' (said Algy). 'Don't you think that the Accident has made us more appreciative of the vital things, like life itself, and like each other?'
>
> "'No,' Martha said steadily. 'No, I don't. We would have had children and grandchildren by now, but for the Accident, and nothing can ever make up for that.'"

Mind you, only in a novel whose focus is procreative sex could you gett away with a sentence like: "The moon hung like an undescended testicle low in the belly of the sky". (And maybe not, at that...)

The nit-picking frame of mind remains. The "accident" is supposed to have taken place in the early 1980s. And no one had a shelter? No one had advance warning? (Consider the links between scientists, the military and the government.) And the West went to war to recover from the Third World their mutant children that might breed true? Did no one consider the easy option — forced parthenogenesis, cloning techniques? If not enough to continue the race, then enough to keep a research community in existence. I think it's possible to ask these questions, since the novel has both a 1964 and a 1984 copyright date and so could have been revised to take account of developments since the 1960s.

And, while I think of it, I'm not sure it's justifiable to use nuclear destruction as a plot device, because if Warday relies on a change of heart and Greybeard on the ability of life to survive appalling self-mutilation (and I think it underestimates how fragile the biosphere really is), then where do we go from here? Perhaps, as is quoted in Greybeard, "All men think all men mortal but themselves". Believe it: we're all fragile.

But, as I say, having had enough of such matters, I turn to more practical alternative scenarios. Let's consider them. My favourite, as regards probability, is the "businessman's peace", which relies on the theory that loyalties to companies are becoming stronger than loyalties to nations, that multinational corporations will increase in power, and that finally it won't be in anyone's interest to have a war that would wipe out half their staff, half their markets, half their profits... Not that it would be all roses, of course; there's such a thing as commercial competition, and while corporations that transcend national boundaries won't want to devastate the world they wouldn't be adverse to conventional warfare. And whether they kill you with a bullet or a missile, you're just as dead.

If I knew more about economics, I could give you a better idea of the second scenario, but let's postulate some kind of total collapse of the banking system (stand up and take a bow, South America), or just a failure of resources (oil and the like). So the Third World begins to flourish, having a solid agrarian base, while in East and West the missiles rust in their silos (do missiles rust? Well, it's more poetic to think they do) and we see a total breakdown of services in the cities, plague, civil unrest, and finally a grinding poverty-level existence on the land for what small percentage of the population survives. Then a brain drain to the Third World? Ah, but they might not want to learn what we could teach, and who could blame them? But some kind of civilisation thus survives — even if it's back to agricultural societies and military dictatorships, it's better than having the planet blown up. One shouldn't be parochial in these matters.

Thirdly, and least likely, there is a change not of heart but of mind: we quite simply say, This is insane. And stop.

But that's no help either. It's this kind of frustrating unanswerable question that makes me say I don't want to know...and I'd feel happier about that if I didn't think that They counted on it. That They know people can't be afraid, in a vacuum, indefinitely, and must instead get on with living. Every paranoid knows who They are — military-industrial complex, politicians, communists, conservatives; you take your pick, and tell me why we're so intent on doing this to ourselves: so obdurately determined to commit suicide, and take the whole world with us.

Two sentences stick in my mind, when the rest has gone wherever read books go. From Greybeard: "This one really is a war to end war. There won't be anyone left to fight another". And from Warday: "Night has just touched us in the middle of the afternoon".

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT — an uncopyrighted poem taken from an anonymously edited US fanzine, a copy of which reached me via sources I'd better not name lest I implicate them too...

SF: A Rhapsody. After Swift

All Human Beings would be Rich,
So many scratch where all must itch;
Though few will ever find a Cure
Except through Crime or Luck; and your
Best chance for Wealth is to inherit.
For those who have no skill or merit
A Writer's Life holds most attraction —
Requiring neither Mind nor Action.
The hack chews shreds of Literacy
To nourish those less read than he
(Thus we define Democracy).
If even this prove uninviting,
There's always Science Fiction writing;
Or baser still, if this he scorns,
He'll churn out stuff on Unicorns,
Assured there is no Magazine
Can spot the difference between
A future possibility
And rankest ancient Phantasy.

The SF Field! O, sore disgrace!
Where Dunces fight for bottom Place,
All forced to exercise their Spleen,
They're in such odious Comp'ny seen,
Where every mental Deviation
Is praised as true Imagination.
If on Parnassus' top you sit,
You rarely bite, are often bit;
Conversely, in Parnassus' ditch,
There's nothing but to boast and bitch
As brother turns on savage brother
(E'en while they plagiarise each other)
As, writhing in low eminence,
They cannot make their Tales make sense.

These failures clog the lists of DAW,
Del Rey, Ace Books, Avon, and Tor,
Where copywriters gild their sins
With "Greater Tolkiens", "New LeGuins",
"Beats Arthur Clarke", "Equal to Niven"
— As if that awful thought were Heaven! —
Or "Starrier Wars"... And Sturgeon there,
Here Budrys, "Masterpiece" declare,
"Not to be missed..." Such feeble lies
Support a feebler enterprise
Of Royalties at 4%
Which scarcely serve to pay the rent
— Or keep a Mistress in a Tent! —
Yet still these hacks are overpaid!

Such fools will never make the grade.
They have no Style, no Spark, no Topic,
Their very Pains are Microscopic.
Although they holler for Attention
In Fanzine, LOCUS, and Convention,
With Asinine Insistence —
The World knows not of their Existence,
The World hears not their Lamentation,
And holds SF in...Detestation...

ALSO RECEIVED

Crawford Kilian — TSUNAMI (Bantam, 219pp, $2·95): from the front cover blurb and illustration, you'd think that this would be a fairly straightforward disaster novel; but the back cover blurb has "devastating solar flares (wiping) out the Earth's protective ozone layer". Struggling to connect the two events, Kilian transforms what might have been — had he concentrated on one or the other event — a readable if cliched story into an irritating and ultimately incomprehensible mish-mosh.

Stephen Goldin — THE OMICRON INVASION (Granada, 205pp, £1·75): ninth in the apparently interminable "Family D'Alembert" series, starring a troupe of circus clowns masquerading as secret agents (or vice versa), derived from a short story by E. E. Smith...and written just as badly.

LETTERS

Another good selection of letters, mostly continuing the main controversy in last issue's letter column. GENE WOLFE gets first shot:

"To recap for anyone who may still be interested, Sue Thomason wrote in her review of John Crowley's Little, Big: 'But too much obscure literary referencing leads to (justifiable) charges of academic elitism, plagiarism and clique-incest'. I then wrote: 'I don't know what the British situation with regard to plagiarism is, but here in the US plagiarism is an accusation that can easily become the basis for a lawsuit'. I meant to caution you (and Sue Thomason) about the careless use of that word in print.

"Since both you and she are in Britain, let's use the definition she quoted from the OED: 'the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of ideas, of another'. Both wrongful appropriation and purloining are euphemisms for theft. I think it is dangerous to call living persons thieves in print unless one can prove the charge. If you disagree, you may use plagiarism (the literal meaning of the word is man-stealing, by the way) freely. But if you are required to prove your charge in response to a libel suit someday, don't say you weren't warned.

"I would accept Sue's apology for offending me if in fact I had been offended. I wasn't. I was concerned about the practice of casually calling writers thieves. I still am."

I take your point — indeed, on reflection (and this is something I've since remarked to Sue), her original response to you did seem to sidestep these implications. (As I sidestepped them by not responding myself.) But let me now yield the floor to SUE THOMASON:

"I'll agree that plagiarism is a nice polite word for theft. What we seem to disagree on is what 'theft' means, and whether it is always wrong. Or, to what extent is an idea the property of an individual? To return to Little, Big: does Crowley 'borrow' Sylvie and Bruno from Lewis Carroll, or does he borrow them from the common stock of Carroll-derived images, phrases, etc. that have become part of the general culture (whose general culture? as I was trying to say in the original review) — when is an idea an original idea, and when is it an archetype running loose in the collective unconscious? Listen to this; Dave Langford's review of Nancy Springer's The White Hart in Cloud Chamber 29: 'The book seems to have been stuck together out of lots of little bits prised out of lots of other fantasy books: a Faceless Arch-Fiend (Tolkien, Brooks, Donaldson) whose magic Cauldron (the Mabinogion, probably via Walton) generates undead legions which the High King, an Elf Who Has Accepted The Doom Of Men (guess who), must battle with an Invincible Magic Sword (passim) which must be Wrested (plot coupon) from a Dragon-Guarded Horde (passim) by Someone Tempted To Use Its Power Wrongly (Tolkien: Samwise), and later of course someone (having formerly played Denethor in being unkeen on the new High King) does indeed do a Boromir/Saruman and start Using It Wrongly, while...but enough'.

"Now is that stealing, or is it not? Is it stealing if I write a fantasy novel about a quest for kingship, or is it only stealing if I call my hero Aragorn? Alan Garner has said that he makes nothing up, and he's right; Alasdair Gray calls his own borrowing plagiarism and openly names many earlier writings containing the ideas he's used. To make matters worse, there are some books which I think are very, very good which are stuck together out of little bits of other books — and some which are very, very bad. It's not what you've got (or stolen); it's what you do with it that matters."

(Those fascinated by the sound of The White Hart may care to note that it's recently been published by Corgi (202pp, £1·75) and is the first in "The Book Of The Isle" trilogy.)

I tend to the opinion that an idea, once set down in print, ceases to be the exclusive property of its originator and becomes instead the common property of all who read the book — the very act of publication, intended to communicate that idea to as many other people as possible, ensures as much. (Where would, say, Marxism and Marxist ideas be without Das Kapital, after all?) But this is to leave aside the question of whether one should attribute the source of one's ideas before making use of them oneself... CHRIS BAILEY has a few thoughts:

"As you said, Sue Thomason and Gene Wolfe were talking at cross-purposes. But there is an article in The Guardian for 20 August 1984, which you and Sue have probably read (and possibly even Gene Wolfe, as it is extracted from a longer investigation by a US newspaper), which makes it abundantly clear that plagiarism is a sacking offence in American journalism and has expensive legal consequences in American publishing (Arthur Haley's $500,000 settlement in respect of Roots). I suppose that in Britain we can say 'cribbing', in spite of its naughty schoolboy overtones, but 'plagiarism', while not approved, simply does not carry the same force. It is quite in order to refer to T. S. Eliot as a plagiarist ('Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song') without obloquy attaching — perhaps that's why he left Boston for London?"

And here's some longer thoughts from K. V. BAILEY — no relation, as far as I know, and no they did not collude in the writing of these letters!

"It seems to me that the misunderstandings, and

Gene Wolfe's consequent indignation, arise because Sue Thomason bracketed plagiarism, a morally and professionally indefensible practice, with academic elitism and clique-incest, which describe only practices understandably obnoxious to academic oppositions and those outside a clique (in any case, one person's clique is another person's universe). There is a vast difference between an original creation which draws on a common fund of literature, legend, anecdote or plot (as, say, John Cowper Powys drew on The Iliad in writing Homer And The Aether, or Tom Stoppard on Hamlet in Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead), and works which intentionally deceive publishers and readers by claiming to be the work of the author when they are actually the work of another. In his book Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel, Norman Fruman gives examples of how Coleridge presented Schlegel's thoughts and very phrases as his own in his lectures and, with Wordsworth's connivance, submitted for publication poems actually written by Wordsworth. That is plagiarism, or very near to it.

"Coleridge is a difficult and borderline case because he had a highly retentive, assimilative and associative memory. There were occasions when he appears to have been deliberately less than frank; but he could, as Fruman puts it, at 'the very height of his transforming and synthesising power' in writing 'Frost At Midnight' interweave lines and images from Cowper's The Task, these filtering through from his reading in the same way that in writing The Rhyme Of The Ancient Mariner he dredged up 'caught on the hooks and eyes of memory' very precise images from sources as diverse as the voyages of Cook and Anson, Dante, Hudibras, Joseph Priestley's Opticks, and Shakespeare (as demonstrated by John Livingston Lowes in The Road To Xanadu).

"Such are the spreading, overlapping and interpenetrating worlds created in SF and fantasy that echoes of one work or sub-genre may sound through many others. Few writers of fantasy can have been untouched, if only at second-hand, by Tolkien — any more than Tolkien was untouched by Beowulf. In his 'Thulcandra' trilogy, C. S. Lewis avowedly based his planet-exploiting character Weston on Wells's Cavor. Frederik Pohl, remembering the 1930s in The Way The Future Was, says: 'I saw Things To Come thirty-three times before I stopped counting...I think a great deal of (it) rubbed off in the deep-down core of my brain'. None of these influences and orientations point in the direction of plagiarism.

"Nor do the practices of writers who use, and state their use of, a particular model within the orbit of which they shape their own variations. It is a fascinating experience to read Jules Verne's Around The World In Eighty Days and Philip Jose Farmer's The Other Log Of Phileas Fogg in parallel; and so it is to follow a re-reading of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein with Brian Aldiss's Frankenstein Unbound. The twentieth century novels are new creations which could not exist without the nineteenth century ones, but they add fresh dimensions of fantasy, inventiveness and fictional perspective. They enhance enjoyment of their predecessors. They are by no means plagiarisms, though they have strong elements of pastiche which (to quote the OED) means 'literary or other work composed in the style of a known author'. Even titles can be so treated — for example, Brigid Brophy's The Adventures Of God In His Search For The Black Girl, a work of great originality containing pastiches of, among others, Bernard Shaw and Edward Gibbon.

"But to attempt to answer Sue Thomason's question about how 'justified' an author is in being allusive, I would say he is in so far as he is drawing on resources common to him and to his envisaged readership (or at least peripherally and subliminally likely to be within the scope of that readership), and which function creatively in the context of his writing. Thus when T. S. Eliot in The Waste Land incorporates the nursery rhyme 'London Bridge Is Falling Down' and the line from Spenser's Prothalamion 'Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song', he doesn't bother to identify them in his substantial Notes, taking common recognition for granted and taking as then implied understanding of their relevance to his poem. When, however, he uses, in the voice of the thunder, Sanskrit words from The Upanishads, he doesn't assume these things and he translates and explains. I remember once at Berkeley making a joke about 'the feeding of the five thousand' to a friend majoring in psychology, which fell uncomprehendingly flat. More in surprise than embarrassment I explained; apologetically, she also explained that the New Testament wasn't on her reading schedule. So it's not easy to lay down rules about this kind of thing.

"As for Sylvie And Bruno, let me beg anyone who hasn't yet tackled it to do so. A great deal of it is pretty awful, some unreadable, but the rest, including the whole work's infrastructure, is genuine gold. Reading it opens up channels of fresh insight, direct or oblique, into not only Little, Big but also works by James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut, Ian Watson, Brian Aldiss, et al. It contains the shape-changing hallucinatory songs of the Musical Gardener and, among other goodies, such excellent aids to frustrating time-travel as the Outlandish Watch, the concept (vividly illustrated) of diminishing Chinese-boxed mini-worlds, a prime recipe for Black Light, and the most metaphysically extraordinary railway journey in the whole literature of fantasy. The Preface to Sylvie And Bruno Concluded is cited by Rosemary Jackson in her Fantasy: The Literature Of Subversion as a key document in the defining of the fantastic — what Carroll himself called the 'eerie' state. In fact, to read that section of Carroll's Preface and to substitute 'alien' for 'fairy', and Magonia or Tralfamadore or some such for Fairyland, is to be provided with one of the most intriguing symstematisations of potential SF/fantasy relationships ever devised."

SUE THOMASON responds:

"Fascinating! The nub for me are the comments on Eliot. I didn't know that 'Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song' came from Spenser, so I checked my copy of The Waste Land, and in fact Eliot does acknowledge the echo, but not in a very helpful way — the note to line 176 of 'The Fire Sermon' simply says 'V. Spenser, Prothalamion'. There is no indication that the quoted line is a refrain in the Spenser poem, there is no indication of how the Spenser connects with Eliot's own making. There is no direct referral from the line to the note. This is a beautiful example of note-making which is not genuinely intended to help the reader but to confirm the status as 'guardian of the culture'

of the poet and a small group of people who share both his assumptions about what culture is and his knowledge of it. Eliot may translate Sanskrit, but he assumes that his real audience will be able to cope with untranslated quotations from Latin, Greek, Italian, French and German. I certainly can't.

"Compare and contrast the approach of David Jones, another poet with a formidably difficult and intellectual approach to the raw and mixed material of language and culture. Talking of his decision to provide extensive footnotes in his long work Anathemata, he said: 'For many readers these notes may appear to be an elucidation of the obvious but, on the other hand, we are not all equally familiar with the deposits. It is sometimes objected that annotation is pedantic; all things considered in the present instance, the reverse would, I think, be the more true. There have been culture-phases when the maker and the society in which he lived shared an enclosed and common background, where the terms of reference were common to all. It would be an affectation to pretend that such was our situation today'. If this was true in 1951 (when he wrote it), it is twice as true today.

"Science fiction is by its very nature a note-making kind of writing. One can assume nothing about an alien culture, either as writer or reader. There are a number of classic ways of handling notes; the glossary of alien terminology, for example, or the excerpted quotes from the Encyclopaedia Galactica. There are the thousands of notes on Katin's recorder in Nova, and there are the hundreds of stories that start with a couple of paragraphs of small print prefaced 'Captain's Log: Stardate 1234.56'. There are the footnotes of Vance, the staged-question lectures ('Okay, captain, just what can we expect on Beta Anhydrous Five?'), the computer print-outs and advertisements of Gateway, the interminable works of the Princess Irulan. And still we persist in thinking of SF as an easy-reading genre. Why?

"Fantasy, on the other hand, does depend very heavily on shared cultural assumptions. The 'old sword' is the heroic weapon of both Beowulf and Aragorn, Arthur and Erreth-Akbe. Cultural borrowing is necessary and inevitable. Traditionally, the borrowing has been from a common, oral tradition, but more and more these days other works of creative merit are being sucked into the bog of 'source material'. The art of the fantasy writer is becoming more and more the art of the collage or mosaic maker. Every art has its rules — for example, trying to use motifs from different mythological backgrounds in the same work is like trying to use scraps of material of varying different weights and textures in a patchwork. It can be done effectively and successfully, but one is usually discouraged from making the attempt. In some writing, it's important to know the sources of the author's materials. In such cases, notes should be used, I guess, and open acknowledgement should be made. One cannot assume any common cultural background these days.

"I hadn't read Prothalamion before today. Why should I have done?"

I was hoping for further comment from Gene Wolfe, but at the time of writing any letter he might have sent has still to reach me. (Which means, if he has written, that it will probably turn up a day or so after we've gone to press. Such is life.) Slightly connected (perhaps) with this argument is the following response by **IAN WATSON** to Chris Bailey's letter in the previous issue:

"Blue guitars... Yes, I was thinking of the Wallace Stevens poem when I named my boat in The Book Of The River. I read the poem years ago, and it still sticks in my mind. But I wasn't thinking of it very strenuously, and readers needn't fear that they're missing out if they don't happen to know Wallace Stevens (except, that is, missing out on a lovely poem)."

On, now, to other matters, with **EDWARD JAMES**:

"Paperback Inferno 49 I enjoyed. Some sensible comments on Interzone; an excellent (and not overlong — I put that in to support you against the inevitable complaints) review of recent books on the arms race; and some sensible reviews (though I felt Graham Andrews was unnecessarily negative on Stuart Gordon's brave attempt at an interesting idea). I also enjoyed the 19-word review of 'Doc' Smith's Subspace Encounter. (Overlong?)

"But a comment on Chris Bailey's letter. Yes, surely you should review magazines. It is crazy to believe that the only SF worth thinking about is novel-length; and, like it or not, most published SF novelettes and short stories do still appear in the magazines — particularly now, after the demise of most of the regular original anthologies. And those magazines are, of course, mostly American. I realise that in current BSFA publications it seems fashionable to denigrate them (cf. Matrix 54, page 7), but BSFA members who pick up such prejudices are missing some fine SF — in this year's US magazines, for instance, there's been excellent work by such British writers (and BSFA members!) as Cowper, Watson and Gentle. Of course there is also a lot of low-grade fiction — though not as much, I think, as there was in Astounding/Analog in the fifties and seventies. Sturgeon's Law, and all that...but people might welcome hearing about the ten percent or more of good fiction (Budrys's Law)."

Yours is in fact the only response to Chris Bailey's letter that I've received — I'd hoped that there might be more, particularly as the BSFA still runs a magazine chain for those who subscribe to the US magazines. (Don't these people, whoever they may be, have any thoughts to offer on the subject?) Nor did I receive many comments on my lengthy review of several recent anti-nuclear books — in a postscript to one of her letters, Sue Thomason said that she thought it was "excellent"; Marjorie Brunner said that she agreed with every word I wrote; and T. Broome (which was how he or she signed him or herself) called it "very sobering: you wrote it in a very professional manner and it comes across as one of the strongest arguments against nuclear weapons I've ever had the (mis) fortune to read"; and that was all. The latter comment was also the closest to a complaint that I received, although I gather that several people did write directly to the BSFA Chairperson about the review — but not having seen copies of their letters I naturally don't know exactly what they said. (Perhaps they'd care to let me know sometime?)

Other letters, however, were received from John Brunner, Malcolm Hodkin and Jack Stephen. My thanks to all who wrote; write again soonest!