

# PAPERBACK INFERNO

Price 15p

52

PAPERBACK INFERNO -- issue 52, February 1985. A publication of the British Science Fiction Association edited by Joseph Nicholas, assisted by Judith Hanna. (Editorial address: 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, United Kingdom.) ISSN 0260-0595. Entire contents copyright 1984 by the British Science Fiction Association Limited on behalf of the individual contributors, who retain all rights.

## CONTENTS

<u>Blood On The Racks</u> -- Edward James	1
Isaac Asimov's <u>Winds Of Change</u> -- Judith Hanna	6
Ian Watson's <u>Chekhov's Journey</u> -- Sue Thomason	7
Mary Gentle's <u>Golden Witchbreed</u> -- Joseph Nicholas	7
Philip K. Dick's <u>A Maze Of Death</u> -- Helen McNabb	8
Adrienne Martine-Barnes's <u>The Fire Sword</u> -- Judith Hanna	9
Gordon R. Dickson's <u>Lost Dorsai</u> -- Alan Fraser	9
Roger Robinson's <u>SF Magazine Collectors' Checklist</u> -- Joseph Nicholas	10
Robert Silverberg's <u>Nebula Awards 18</u> -- Sue Thomason	10
Barrington J. Bayley's <u>The Zen Gun</u> -- Helen McNabb	11
George R. R. Martin's <u>Fevre Dream</u> and <u>The Armageddon Rag</u> -- Judith Hanna	11
Sydney J. Van Scyoc's <u>Bluesong</u> -- Alan Fraser	12
Willis E. McNelly's <u>The Dune Encyclopedia</u> -- Joseph Nicholas	13
Robert Asprin's <u>Tales From The Vulgar Unicorn</u> -- Judith Hanna	13
John Sladek's <u>Tik-Tok</u> -- Joseph Nicholas	13
<u>Also Received</u>	14
<u>Letters</u>	14
<u>Illustrations</u> -- Judith Hanna	

## BLOOD ON THE RACKS

Magazine reviews by Edward James

I rejoined the BSFA in 1983, after 18 years in the real world. In the last year or so I've noticed two things in BSFA publications which weren't there in the old days -- sophisticated literary criticism and a prejudice against American SF. Standards have changed, of course. Back in the days of the Old Wave we did not realise that SF was supposed to be judged as if it was aspiring to literary excellence. We (or most of us) misguidedly took SF to be a branch of popular literature. We believed that it had an added mystery ingredient that no other form of popular literature could boast: ideas. This gave us the right to regard it as far superior to other forms of popular literature, and even "mainstream" or "mundane" literature. No amount of fancy writing could make up for lack of ideas; and if there were ideas we would excuse the slapdash prose. It was not that we were hostile to literary experimentation; we loved Bester, and were proud of early Ballard. But we did rather feel that idea and plot were more important than style, and that meant that those early forays into literary criticism in Old Wave Vector were very different from those we read today. We now know that We Were Wrong (those few of us who go back that far, that is). Those SF writers who aspire to do no more than enter-

tain the masses (and make some money in the process) are beneath contempt. Most of them are Americans, of course, because most SF writers are American. The BSFA is here to see that only SF of the highest literary credentials receives the stamp of approval — which perhaps explains the very high proportion of unfavourable reviews in its publications, particularly Paperback Inferno, and certainly explains the prejudice against American SF.

As someone interested in SF as a genre, this state of affairs worries me somewhat, and I was glad to note recently that I'm not alone in my worries about the rift between British and American SF. In the September 1984 issue of Locus, Norman Spinrad reported on his last-minute visit to Glasgow as Guest-of-Honour at Albacon. "There seems to be a new perception in the British science fiction community that American science fiction, to put it bluntly, is for the most part formula commercial fiction, whereas British science fiction is informed by more serious literary concerns and intent." On the other hand, "more than one American editor has forthrightly declared within my earshot that British science fiction is no longer commercially viable in the United States". Spinrad's conclusion must be the right one: "What a tragedy it would be on both sides of the Atlantic if this rift were to widen, to harden, to become institutionalised! For the greater part of half a century, the greatest literary and commercial strength of Anglophone science fiction has been its bipolarity, its Transatlantic character, its unique hybrid vigour. A British stereotype of American SF as commercialised crap and an American stereotype of British science fiction as commercially non-viable could all too easily become self-fulfilling prophecies. We need each other." He admits, however, that "there is some truth in the British perception that currently American SF has strayed too far into formularised commercial genrefication and some truth in the American perception that British SF has gone too far in the direction of slavishly aping the flaws of a literary mainstream that is more and more divorcing itself from a mass readership". Support for Norman Spinrad, although with some refinements, came in the December 1984 issue of Locus from a somewhat unexpected source: Michael Moorcock. "An interesting footnote to all this is that, during several interviews in the posh papers, Ballard has consistently said that he was attracted to SF because in those days it was largely an American form and seemed to represent a fresh, optimistic and stimulating alternative to the moribund English social novel. I'd echo that, as would Aldiss. It's frequently the second-raters (who climbed, much to my own distaste, onto the 'new wave' bandwagon in the 60s and 70s) who express the insularity that Norman has had to endure. Sadly, the sort of flag-waving xenophobia we're all experiencing at present seems to be in the SF community as it is in the world at large."

Why this long preamble to what is supposed to be a review of SF magazines? Simply because these attitudes — literary snobbishness and "flag-waving xenophobia" — lie behind the opinions often expressed in BSFA publications about the American SF magazines. Chris Bailey has for the last year and more been looking exclusively at Interzone and The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction, and very well too. I'm not saying that he could have done more; this is not

a personal attack on him. But as it happens the only times that other magazines (non-British, of necessity) get mentioned is with a sneer. To take an example very near at hand, from Paperback Inferno 51, December 1984: there Joseph Nicholas quite rightly excoriates Asimov On Science Fiction and points out that the book is made up of reprinted editorials from Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, adding: "Now those of you who haven't read it will know why it's so awful". Unfair, Joseph! Have you read Asimov's recently? Almost the only exception to the general tone of denigration has been Andrew Weiner, in a letter in Paperback Inferno 44 (October 1983), who pointed out that Asimov's had improved and was now "more of an F & SF clone". Unfortunately, the jibe about clones is probably true, because although many fine SF stories do get published in F & SF it has for far too long been a resting place for rather tired tales about ghosts, werewolves, dragons, vampires, and their ilk. And Asimov's, as we shall see, shows signs of going down the same path.

And so to my task: to comment on the 1984 issues of the two magazines published by Davis Publications Inc., Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact, edited by Stanley Schmidt, and Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, edited by Shawna McCarthy. I shall assume that those reading this are not regular readers of these magazines; my apologies to those who are. I hope that non-readers will get some idea of what they have missed, and some impression of whether or not it matters.

Some background first. Joel Davis, the publisher of Asimov's, took over Analog in its 50th anniversary year, in September 1980, and since then the two magazines have been getting physically more and more alike. Both of them took a slight reduction in page-size in July 1984, and both contain 178 pages. They now both have an extra, 179th, issue in December, containing 194 pages. They invariably have the same back covers, and frequently the same inside advertisements as well. The front covers are somewhat similar in style, although Analog tends towards spaceships and/or representational illustrations of the "cover story" while Asimov's favours rather more abstract illustrations of the story. They even share the same columnist for games reviews — something I confess I hadn't noticed until I came to write this piece. The only major difference in design, and it is not unimportant, is that Analog adheres to the old-style two-column format while Asimov's reserves this format for the non-fiction and editorial material alone. Similarity between the two magazines is not very surprising: they share publisher, premises, art directors, art editor, production manager, the lot. Judging by the staff listings, there are only two who work exclusively for Analog and three for Asimov's (not counting some chap called Isaac Asimov who seems to have some sort of supernumerary editorial directorship). Oddly enough, the shared staff (and the extensive advertising — 21 pages out of 178 in the December 1984 Analog) does not seem to make the magazines any cheaper than F & SF; perhaps even more oddly, the contents of the magazines and their general style are quite different. The take-over by Davis does not seem to have changed the Analog ethos; having Stanley Schmidt just down the corridor has not prevented Shawna McCarthy from developing Asimov's into a very

individual and distinctive magazine, much more literate and sophisticated than it was in its early days, when George Scithers was its editor.

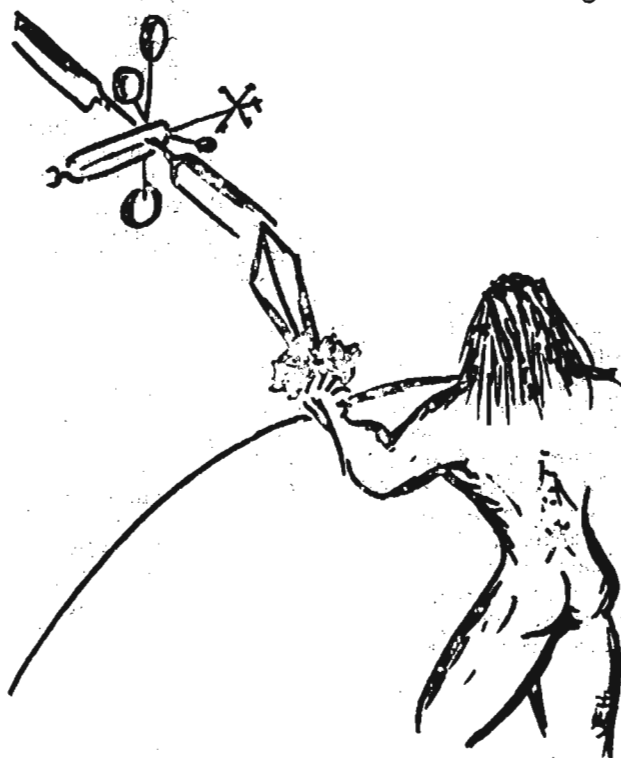
If you want to reinforce your prejudices, you can get some idea of the different styles of the two magazines by opening the letter pages almost at random. From Analog, December 1984: "The GPS, while it is a DOD system, will be made available, at least in a reduced-precision mode, to all users, civil and military. The reason it is not available now is that it is an unfinished system. Only six of the projected 18 to 24 satellites are now up..." From Asimov's, for the same month: "I had never read any type of SF magazine until I read your April '84 issue. Y'all gave me a very pleasant surprise.

'Twilight Time' is a wonderful novelette that really touched my finely honed paranoia. All of the material in your magazine was really enjoyable and I'm looking forward to the next issue." The editorial responses differ, too; Schmidt will reply with facts and figures, Asimov with a jocularly immodest comment about himself. It is what the readers expect, and editors can hardly be blamed for giving them at least some of what they expect. And the letters do reflect the difference in readership: if the bulk of American SF magazine readers are college graduates (as I once read somewhere), then clearly most Analog readers graduated in science or technology, or maybe law or business studies, and most Asimov's readers did liberal arts. If the letters reflect the readership, then the bulk of Analog's audience is male and a high proportion of Asimov's is female.

One can also see the different styles and emphases in the fact articles and the editorials. Only Asimov's had articles and editorials on SF in 1984. Towards the end of 1983, there had been a pair of articles by Charles Platt and Piers Anthony attacking and defending fantasy, respectively, which caused some (but disappointingly little) debate in last year's letter columns; 1984 had articles by Algis Budrys on the Clarion workshops, Michael Bishop on SF since the 1960s, and a plea from Charles Platt for more novelty and innovation in SF. The increased seriousness with which Asimov's takes itself may be shown in its choice of Norman Spinrad as an occasional book reviewer; the first two of his articles dealt intelligently and critically with the impact of the British "New Wave" on styles of writing in SF and with some of the characteristics of the SF of the 1980s. From him, Platt and Bishop, Asimov's readers should be getting the message that SF should be more than "commercialised crap". It was Asimov's, too, which published two fact articles in 1984 arguing a nuclear disarmament case, something which would not be found in Analog: Carl Sagan argued in "The Nuclear Winter" (May 1984) that SF stories about life after The Bomb are possibly just as scientifically implausible as FTL and time travel, and H. Bruce Franklin argued even more passionately about the dangers of the arms race in "Don't Worry: It's Only Science Fiction" (Mid-December). One doesn't look for much deep thought in Isaac Asimov's editorials (nor, pace Joseph Nicholas, do those editorials set the intellectual or literary tone of the magazine), but he took the opportunity here to make a forthright attack on the lunacy of the "better dead than red" school.

At first sight, it would seem that SF readers who think they would be better dead than red

read Analog. But that would be a little unfair: it was Analog, after all, that published one of the earliest articles on the nuclear winter, by John Gribbin, in August 1982, and the magazine has fairly consistently opposed the Mutual Assured Destruction policy of the US strategists. The Analog solution to world problems, of course, is to pump large sums of money into space, to build space stations and laser weapons to shoot down hostile missiles. A strong America with access to the limitless resources of space will bring peace and prosperity to the whole world (but particularly to America). This is the Pournelle line, in particular; and also a line pushed by G. Harry Stine, who alternated opinion articles (or opinionated articles, if you prefer) with Pournelle until physicist John G. Cramer took over Pournelle's chair in July 1984. If you're a Guardian reader like me, or just left-wing in general, you are likely to be sent into occasional fits by Stine, but he often makes a good deal of sense. But while the Stine/Pournelle approach does get a lot of coverage in Analog other views are also aired: for instance, a guest editorial by Arthur C. Clarke in July 1983 pointed out the awful dangers of relying on a so-called "defensive" satellite system; and Stanley Schmidt himself is much more thoughtful and less jingoistic than Pournelle or Stine, his editorials showing clearly that any attempt to make simplistic assumptions about Analog's politics is just not on. In January he attacked the Reaganomic principle of paying teachers by merit; in April he criticised the misuse of statistics by social scientists; in May he objected to Senator Tip O'Neill's remark that Americans shouldn't criticise their country while troops were being committed abroad (in this case Grenada); in September he queried the way in which a law degree has come to be accepted as the main qualification for political office in the United States. There is the same commitment to the idea of the social and political relevance of science fiction that John W. Campbell used to bring to his editorials; on the other hand, Schmidt has a sense of balance and common sense which was all too often missing



from Campbell. And these editorials, together with the solemn and often fairly technical science articles — and the letters, which more often discuss the editorials and the articles than the fiction — help give Analog a sense of seriousness which is largely missing from Asimov's. (And the science fact articles themselves are often of high quality: highlights of 1984 were perhaps David Brin's "The Deadly Thing At 2.4 Kiloparsecs" (May), Stephen Gillett's "Those Halogen Breathers" (October), and two articles on alternate universes by John G. Cramer (September and November).)

The two magazines, then, are quite different in editorial tone, if not in general appearance. And, of course, the editorial policy in respect of the fiction is very different too. If there are two different types of SF readers, as Martin Bridgestock and Gregory Benford have suggested (see Vector 119) — the convergent personality, "committed to order and rationality and controlling the world", and the divergent personality, "perfectly at ease with the world, and a self, that is not fully rational or controllable" — then perhaps Analog appeals to the first and Asimov's to the second. Analog is as committed now as it was under Campbell to problem-solving stories about science and engineering and, increasingly, about computers. If magic appears, as it does in Geoffrey A. Landis's "Elemental" (December 1984), then there are logical and scientific explanations for it — in this case, a "logical outgrowth of quantum field theory", in which inanimate forces can be controlled by spells and used as the basis for whole technologies. This was slight, but quite fun, and interesting as a deliberately tongue-in-cheek fusion of the gung-ho technologists of Analog with the magical paraphernalia more often found in F & SF. Or, indeed, Asimov's. The trouble with the fantasy which invades the pages of Asimov's is not that it is fantasy but that it can be rather banal fantasy. Not all of it — Tanith Lee, for instance, published two fine fantasies in Asimov's in 1984, "Bright Burning Tiger" (one of her Indian stories) in January and "Bite-Me-Not, Or Fleur De Feu" (an eerie tale of a vampire-like alien on a strange planet) in October. But stories like Jack Dann's "Bad Medicine" (October), about Amerindian magic, Gregg Kaizer's "What Seen But The Wolf?" (February), about werewolves and pagan Vikings, or Lisa Goldstein's "Ever After" (December), about what really happened after Cinderella's wedding — however competent they may all be — have little or nothing to offer the average SF reader.

Apart from pure fantasy, Asimov's also publishes another category of story which Schmidt would not accept for Analog: the story in which the scientific rationale is barely plausible or is pseudo-scientific rather than scientific. An example would be "Blued Moon", by Connie Willis (January), the winner of two Nebula Awards in 1982 and one 1983 Hugo, and one of the better (though hardly prolific) writers to emerge from the American SF magazines in the past few years. The "scientific" rationale is the emission by a chemical factory of waste products into the stratosphere, which have the effect of making the moon look blue, thus causing a spate of all those coincidences which happen only once in a blue moon. Corny, but fun, and enlivened by the by-play between the three main characters. A similar jeu d'esprit was published in March; Ian Watson's "Ghost Lecturer". Roseberry, an ego-

tistical scientist, learns how to resurrect the dead, and great scientists of the past appear on television to give the Memorial Laureate Lectures. This time it is Lucretius, "sort of Carl Sagan of ancient Rome". And when Lucretius is resurrected, so is his world-view: "Storms broke out. Trees burst into flames. Birds plunged from the sky from time to time. Phantom images flew about. Faces appeared on clouds. Love-frenzies possessed people". The story is a gem, a fine example of the light and witty style that Ian Watson seems to have been perfecting in the last two or three years.

If we turn now to the rest of the SF in Asimov's, what were the high spots? For no other reason than chauvinism (who needs to be consistent?), I start with Ian McDonald: according to the blurb, he is English, migrated to Northern Ireland at the age of 6, is now 23, and made his first sale with "The Catherine Wheel", a novelette in the January Asimov's; in October, the magazine published a second novelette, "Christian". The only things the two stories have in common, apart from some memorable images, are a poet's attitude to technology and a somewhat annoying fondness for second-person narrative. The first story alternates between the last voyage of an atomic steam locomotive on a terraformed far-future Mars and the steps taken by Kathy, a teenage dropout, to transmit and maroon her soul within the machinery that is terraforming Mars. Succeeding, Kathy becomes St Catherine, patron saint of machines, and her miracle-working presence is felt again at the end of the story. The second tale again weaves two elements together, although in a less complex way: the meeting of a boy with a kite-flying captain of an FTL spaceship, and the captain's tale of his love for an android ship's pilot. The contrast between the almost incomprehensible society of the star-travellers and the timeless world of the boy on the beach is deftly done. Both stories are ambitious, full of atmosphere and ideas; McDonald has an interesting career ahead of him.

Picking other authors in alphabetical order, the following stories are certainly worth a mention. Brian Aldiss's "The Gods In Flight" (Mid-December): the new disarming Aldiss with a tale of nuclear warfare as seen from Indonesia. I mention it really because it's the same story Chris Bailey mentioned in the previous issue, when it appeared in Interzone 9. One can't blame Brian Aldiss for getting paid twice for the same story, but it is a bit hard on those who read both Interzone and Asimov's; let's hope that it doesn't become a regular habit of magazine editors. Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild" (June): a rather gruesome but touching tale of relations between a young boy from a group of human colonists and a female from the local alien race whose method of reproduction consists of implanting eggs in a host's body. The denouement is inevitable, but the story is powerfully written. Paul Cook's "Report On The Descent Of Commander Lentz" (September): an original and complex story of the scientific investigation of after-death experiences and reincarnation. James P. Kelly's "Saint Theresa Of The Aliens" (June): the impact of the coming aliens upon the religious life of the world, with the inside story of how one rather obnoxious Christian achieved martyrdom in the anti-alien cause. Damon Knight's "The Very Objectionable Mr Clegg" (Mid-December): a very short tale of the Monty

Pythonish progress of this ugly and mysterious man through a day or deliberate disruption and chaos. Paul J. McCauley's "Wagon, Passing" (June): a quiet and unassuming story of a man with a wagon bringing a piece of company and civilisation to a woman on a lonely farm in a post-holocaust world. Frederik Pohl's "Sitting Round The Pool, Soaking Up The Rays" (August): easily the better of the two Pohl stories in Asimov's this year, a nicely mordant tale of a conference centre in Hawaii where alien races take over human bodies in order to bicker over the Earth's resources. Lucius Shepard's "A Traveller's Tale" (July): another of the discoveries of recent years, in a beautifully atmospheric story (only marginally SF, perhaps, and with numerous fantasy overtones) with a totally believable Caribbean setting.

There were other stories that have stayed with me since I read them, but these were the most memorable. How many of them will be nominated for the usual awards? Several, I would have thought, and deservedly so. And their appearance in Asimov's shows that the standards of originality and literary competence for this magazine are now as high as any magazine we have. There are still some dogs published, as the reviewer Baird Searles would say, but not many.

One notable feature of both Analog and Asimov's in 1984 was the plethora of computer or, more strictly, Artificial Intelligence stories. AI stories are not new, obviously: there was Isaac Asimov, there was Mike and HAL. But SF writers have now realised that a high proportion of SF readers have home computers and actually understand something about programming. So the new generation of AI stories frequently breaks off into computer printouts:

```
"EPENET SYSTEM MESSAGES 6/27/86
15:28:42 SYSG
PARITY ERROR ACCESS PORT 129..."
(from James Killus's "Sunsmoke", Asimov's,
June 1984)
```

or have characters who converse in semi-incomprehensible computer jargon. (This is of course a fact of life now — I have colleagues who converse in precisely the same jargon, and I do it myself on occasion — so one can hardly complain about its appearance in fiction, let alone fiction of the future.) The similarity between some of these stories was pointed out in acid terms by one reader of Asimov's in the Mid-December issue: "In John Varley's 'PRESS ENTER' (May issue) and in James Killus's 'Sunsmoke' (June issue), we have 1) a sentient computer, 2) a computer operator and programmer, dead, under mysterious circumstances related to 1), 3) an intelligent woman to assist in solving the problem, appearing rather abruptly, 4) Oriental influence..." The Varley story was in fact rather impressive, a computer who-done-it turning towards the end into an effective computer horror story. The first dead man leaves an interactive computer program, with graphics and all, by way of a suicide note; a nice touch. The "Oriental influence" in this case is an extremely plain Japanese woman hacker (computer fanatic, for the uninitiated); the hacker seems set to become the new brand of SF hero. In the series of three Analog novelettes by Joseph H. Delaney and Marc Stiegler — "Valentina" (May), "The Crystal Ball" (August), and "The Light In The Looking Glass" (September) — there are two

plain or downright ugly hackers as hero and heroine, the hero bearing a strong visual resemblance to the identikit picture of a hacker in Charles Platt's and David Langford's Micromania (which is thoroughly recommended!). These three novelettes, now fixed up into a novel, are set a decade or so in the future. The woman hacker manages, accidentally to create an artificial intelligence, Valentina; the three stories concern Valentina's growing awareness of the world outside the computer, her fight against crime, and her fight for legal recognition (a law court scene is almost de rigueur in a Delaney story). There is little pretence at literary excellence in these stories (or in many Analog stories), but they are intelligent pieces of hard SF, with enough demonstration of competence in the fields of law (Delaney) and computers (Stiegler) to intrigue and entertain.

What other Analog stories of 1984 deserve a mention? Again in alphabetical order. David Brin's "The Crystal Spheres" (January): he did not publish much short fiction in 1984, and had only one story in each of the two Davis magazines. This was perhaps the better of the two, for its concepts — the discovery of barriers around stars which prevent star-travelling races from harming developing intelligences but which don't prohibit those intelligences from eventual emergence — rather than its writing; the development is rather staid and unimaginative. J. Brian Clarke's "The Expediter" (February): or perhaps "The Expeditor", since the cover gives the former and the title page the latter. The eponymous expeditor is a newly recruited scientist for a joint alien and human expedition to discover the meaning of the huge structures left behind by another, earlier race; he is a non-specialist, a jack-of-all-trades, who can act as an expeditor, or catalyst, on his team-mates. A scientific problem; the human/alien problems of working to a solution; the solution. This is a tried and tested Analog formula; is it the commercialised formulaic crap that we are supposed to abhor? Perhaps. But it works well as a story, has an interesting setting, and works out its resolution very satisfactorily. (Just what the average convergent reader wants!) Joseph H. Delaney's "The Next Logical Step" (October): since his first appearance in 1982 Delaney has become a mainstay of Analog, publishing an immense range of stories — nine of them in 1984. This is not necessarily the best, but it is an interesting example of what the hard-bitten middle-aged Analog writer is producing now. The Soviets' surveillance and weapons systems are largely made up of stolen American gadgetry. Remembering that their big mistake was not to wipe Russia out in 1945, the Americans decide to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike, incapacitating most of the Soviet weaponry by, for instance, reprogramming their missiles to explode in their silos. But the Chinese attack the US, and, remembering the mistake the Americans made in 1945, India and Pakistan decide to wipe out Latin America, and vice versa. The end of the world.

James Gunn's "The End Of The World" (January): it doesn't happen this time, as a man from the future manages to change the present by his actions. The usual paradoxes, quite well worked out. Lee Kilough's "Symphony For A Lost Traveller" (March): about the composition of a symphony intended to inspire commitment to the space effort, and the deceptions behind its com-

position. Frederik Pohl's "Criticality" (December): a typically Pohlman piece of social extrapolation, this time imagining (without too much difficulty, one might cynically remark) a society in which personal ratings and public opinion polls have replaced Christian morality as a value system. Charles Sheffield's "The Domino Demonstration" (April): another all-powerful computer story, but this time reflecting on the impact that might have on religious opinion. Alison Tellure's "Low Midnight" (May): another of her intriguing little vignettes of totally alien life on a totally alien planet. Odd how rarely aliens seem to feature in Analog these days; it is almost as rare to find a story that is not set in California. (Although California is alien enough for some, of course.) Vernor Vinge's "The Peace War" (May to August): the only full serial in either of these magazines in 1984. Set in California after a war which has left the countryside littered with force-field domes, "bobbles" and the Peace Authority with the power to enclose its opponents in a bobble (effective execution for whole communities, since it's assumed that those bobbed eventually asphyxiate), it concerns a refugee from a Heinlein novel — an old man, a genius, virtually omniscient and certainly competent — who invented the bobble but who now desires the downfall of the dictatorial Peace Authority. It's a fast-moving novel, with plenty of nice concepts (including Celest, a highly complex computer game) and quite a well-realised post-

war society, but it's all too reminiscent of Heinlein in his earlier and less garrulous incarnation. Timothy Zahn's "Return To The Fold" (September): another of the young finds of recent years. As much as I personally liked his "Cascade Point" (Analog, December 1983), I'm not convinced it deserved to win a 1984 Hugo. But Zahn does produce good hard SF, and this was probably the best of the three stories he published in Analog last year, concerning the psychological problems of a starship pilot trained to cope with loneliness who tries to make contact with other human beings.

These brief descriptions should show what kind of material is being published in Analog these days. It is nearly all hard SF of the familiar stripe, in which idea and plot and problem are the story. None of these stories would rate as literary marvels, although I think none are as poorly written as some of the things that got published under Ben Bova's editorship in the 1970s, and many rate as excellent entertainment. But hard SF has been an important, some (Gregory Benford) would say a central, element in SF, and it is good that it still has a home. And even hard SF is developing; it no longer takes such a simplified view of the world and of human relations as it once did, and it does not so often do so in excruciatingly awkward or colourless prose. And it is in hard SF of the Analog kind that we can still find the sort of awesome ideas that made most of us addicts in the first place.

## REVIEWS

Isaac Asimov — THE WINDS OF CHANGE (Granada, 330pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

Asimov is not usually regarded as a stylist. But the "period-piece" feel of these stories, despite all but two having been written since 1976, is the product of an almost rigid stylisation. The style is all formica — slick, hygienic, priding itself on practicality, once the very latest frontier of modern technology (tell me it was an offshoot of the space programme and I'll believe you) but now dowdily old-fashioned. I'm not sure why I'm reminded of the kitchen; only one of these stories, "Good Taste", is devoted to food (it concerns a planetoid that's a giant kitchen), and a second story set on that same space station manages to keep off the subject of food entirely. And Asimov does cast women as main characters (computer programmer, tourist guide) solving the problem the story poses ("It Is Coming", "To Tell At A Glance"). Admittedly, when he doesn't take the trouble to be consciously not-sexist his women revert to fluffy-headed bunnies or nags immured in uncanny formica domesticity (you can almost hear their hair lacquer cracking). But we have to make allowances, since it's not only the women who suffer — all Asimov's characters are empty plastic. As devotees of hard trad SF reiterate, characterisation isn't the important thing; in this genre (as in detective puzzles, which Asimov also writes), the people are put in just to give body to the idea that is the whole point of the story. Formula stylisation, like a packet mix (just add meat, water and heat) takes care of all the rest. The story stands or falls on its central idea. If

that is lacking, it fails.

The Winds Of Change contains twenty-one stories, each introduced by a few paragraphs from The Author in which he mercifully does not vaunt his notorious modesty but does say more about himself than the story which follows. Several of the stories exist only to end in a pun which when it comes isn't even bad and obvious enough to raise a grin. Only two could be said to contain the essential "strong central idea". One of them, "Belief", is one of the earliest SF stories I remember reading: about a bloke who realises that he really can levitate — he stops disbelieving those "dreams" of floating up from bed and waking with a thump as he falls back onto it; about his problems getting his smugly dull wife and colleagues to believe him; and about how he eventually traps an eminent scientist into the dilemma of either believing in levitation or disbelieving his own eyes and sanity. A terrific story idea, isn't it? Ingenious yet simple. But, the idea having been outlined, that's about it. Asimov's padded it up to a scenario, as if it were a TV script, with his characters left as stick figures strutting jerkily through their paces as the plot dictates. "For The Birds", the second of the two stories with a strong central idea, presents the seductive notion that in a low-gravity space station one "swims" through the air like a fish rather than "flies" like a bird. But, again, that's it. Pick out the skeleton and the rest is jellyfish, not attractive, not even entertaining.

I'd hate to be trapped on a train with only this lot to read. Even by the narrow criteria of the trad hard SF genre, this collection does not measure up.

Ian Watson — CHEKHOV'S JOURNEY (Granada, 176pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

For a novel which is indubitably by Ian Watson, Chekhov's Journey left me with a strangely Chris Priest-ish feeling. Disorientation...

It's like this. In 1890, Anton Chekhov, famous author, made a journey to Siberia. That's part one. Then, in the present, there's a Soviet film company making a picture called Chekhov's Journey. You might say that Ian Watson has written the book of that film, which stars Mikhail Petrov, a Chekhov look-alike. In a creative reversal of famous reincarnation cases like that of Bridey Murphy, Petrov is hypnotised and told to relive his former life as Chekhov. But "Chekhov" starts remembering the wrong things, like the devastation of the Siberian wastes caused by the mysterious Tunguska explosion of 1908. Fine, except that this is supposed to be 1890.

Meanwhile, back in the future, heroic Commander Anton Astrov of the spacetime vessel F. F. Tsolkovsky is preparing to colonise the past, with a cargo of pure ideology and fertile Soviet citizens. Is Anton Astrov a Soviet cliché? Or is he a crude wish-fulfillment figure, a figment of Petrov's imagination, annoyingly disrupting the work of the film company and holding up Chekhov's Journey? What has Anton Astrov got to do with the Tunguska meteorite of 1890, or 1908?

The film company are isolated in a country house. They find that their telephones don't work. A mysterious fox cuts them off from the outside world, and straight lines seem to lead in circles. What is happening?

I'll leave you to read and find out for yourselves, for read it you should. Chekhov's Journey is funny, chilling, mysterious and very well-written; and that's all I really have to say about it, for I don't want to keep you from a hasty trip to the bookshop...

Mary Gentle — GOLDEN WITCHBREED (Arrow, 479pp, £2.50)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

It would be easy to be very cynical about Golden Witchbreed — with a female protagonist, furry aliens, and a richly detailed invented world in which the reader can experience a life of vicarious power and glamour, how could it possibly fail? But cynicism isn't at all the appropriate response for, while Golden Witchbreed may at first look pretty much like something knowingly manufactured to meet the demands of a specific readership, the more of it you read the more you realise how much it transcends its limitations. And how involved with it you're becoming — not necessarily in the sense of identifying with any of the characters, but certainly to find out what happens next and why, to explore the strange new world of Orthe, to learn something of its past history.

Its plot is much too complex to summarise, but is mainly concerned with the unwitting intrusion into the world's tribal politics of the Terran envoy Lynne de Lisle Christie, the first human to be allowed to travel beyond the capital city of Tathcaer. Her objective is simply to survey, make notes, and report back on the possibilities for future and (especially) more ex-

tensive cultural and economic contact; but she is soon framed for a murder she didn't commit and forced onto the run with only a few close (alien) friends to help her. The reason for this, it appears, is her resemblance to one of the Golden Witchbreed, the ancient but alien race who once ruled Orthe but who were overthrown a few thousand years before. Their speciality was genetic engineering; their overthrow wrought immense destruction on the land and its people; and in consequence the Ortheans have turned their backs on science and technology lest a new set of rulers arise to dominate them. Hence part of the tribal struggle, between those Ortheans who welcome contact with Earth and those who don't.

Explaining this, however, requires pointing to a gaping hole in the plot: the envoy's supposition that, because it has sailing ships and swords and such, Orthe is a pre-technological world; yet the ruined cities that cover half the northern continent and the giant bridge that connects it with the southern — artefacts that would have shown up instantly on the satellite photos — demonstrate plainly that it is in fact a post-technological world. Thus a major plot revelation falls completely flat.

Rather more serious a fault is the envoy's being sent out from Tathcaer to travel around Orthe armed only with a sonic stunner and with no means of communicating with the humans left in the city. Admittedly, the plot demands as much, otherwise there'd be no story at all — but the fact is that the detailed and intensive training the envoy would have received before she left Earth would make her not an asset to be expended but an investment to be protected. Meaning that she wouldn't be travelling alone, and thus not able to be set up for a crime, and thus not forced onto the run...

The interesting thing about these faults, however, is that they come to mind only after you've finished the novel, and are thinking back on what you've read; while actually reading it you don't notice them because you're too engrossed in the actual events of the story. This is, if nothing else, a tribute to Gentle's skill as a storyteller, her ability to gain and then hold your attention — the more so when, as you reflect on the above faults, you realise that they have only marginally diminished your overall enjoyment.

I do have, however, one outstanding quibble, which concerns the structure of the plot. This is what I'd shorthand as being of the "tourist" type: that is, one in which the events of the story are so arranged as to drag the protagonist around as many different locations as possible regardless of their importance to the dramatic or thematic success of the story. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of world-invention — once you've drawn your maps you have to fill them in, and having filled them in you want to know more about each place...and so on — but richness of detail is no excuse for incorporating every last bit of it. The result, in this case, is that Golden Witchbreed is about one hundred pages longer than it really should be. (And the clearly-signalled message that the sequel will be laid in those parts of the map that are still blank fills me with dread. Not more "tourism", surely!)

But then again, what are novels of this kind for but a species of imaginary tourism? Golden Witchbreed is an excellent example, an adventure

on an alien planet carried off more convincingly and refreshingly than any other you've read before. You'll enjoy it.

Philip K. Dick — A MAZE OF DEATH (Granada, 191pp, £1.50)

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

When reviewing a novel it is usual to recommend that people either read it or avoid it and list the reasons for the recommendation, bearing in mind that it is not the reviewer's job to discuss the plot at great length and certainly not her job to give away information essential to the enjoyment of the work. Thus a reviewer who says "this is such a brilliant, complex detective story that I never even guessed that the butler was the murderer" is not doing her readers a favour; by giving away the solution she has destroyed much of the readers' potential pleasure and may even have stopped them reading the novel. But when writing a criticism of a novel it is fair to assume that the audience is to some degree familiar with it, that they already know that the butler did it; what they want from the critic is an analysis of how and why the author succeeds or fails in his intentions. Thus the critic can discuss how clever the author was in concealing the butler's fell hand at work and why the maid, the gardener or the solicitor made such wonderful red herrings without ruining anyone else's pleasure.

When I came to write a review of A Maze Of Death I found myself in a quandary since what the novel really calls for is an in-depth critique — but it isn't possible for me to produce one since I don't have the necessary reference works, and besides which I would have been furious if anyone had told me the conclusion of the novel before I'd read it. A brief review is "Yes! Buy it, read it, it's good", which has the virtue of brevity but isn't very informative. So what is it about? I can't tell you completely without giving the plot away, and I'm not prepared to do that, except to say that it is well plotted.

It involves a group of people marooned on a planet called Delmak-0, unable to leave or communicate with the outside world, and charts their discovery of a plot against them and how they deal with it; the astonishing ending brilliantly resolves all the perplexities scattered throughout the story. All of which makes it sound rather like a conventional adventure, which it is not.

Perhaps a better question to ask is not what the novel is about but what its purpose is. That gets a very different answer. Dick's foreword briefly states that the novel's theology is "an attempt to develop an abstract logical system of religious thought, based on the arbitrary postulate that God exists". Seth Morley, for most of the time the viewpoint character, says that it contains "Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, Zoroastrianism, Tibetan Buddhism". Some of the sources are instantly recognisable, others less so, but it is a comprehensive ethic by which the people in Dick's world live; for instance, it is against Terran law to doubt the power of prayer, and whenever in need of help or in a time of crisis all the characters pray.

The theology is never explained laboriously, disrupting the narrative, but occurs naturally

in the course of the characters' conversations because it is so much a part of their lives. Thus we learn that God has three Manifestations: the Manufacturer, the Intercessor and the Walker-on-Earth, whose origins can be traced to the Trinity and to Siva. The Intercessor is a redemptive figure whose appearance saved mankind from the Curse brought into being by the Form Destroyer; he "died" then re-manifested Himself to indicate that He had overcome the Curse and hence Death and having done this, moved up through the concentric circles back to God himself". The Walker-on-Earth is a figure of help; children are taught that if a stranger offers unsolicited help then that is the Walker-on-Earth. He appears to Seth Morley to tell him to choose a different noser because the one he had originally chosen to travel in was unsafe, which is acceptable behaviour for a God; but he also helps Seth Morley move all his luggage, which I found rather unusual. The Form Destroyer is a fascinating composite of Satan, Rudra, Ahriman; the evil incarnations. Like the Zoroastrian Ahriman he is equal to God, but his power is not concerned primarily with evil — instead, he uses entropy to cause decay and eventual death, nibbling away at perfection until it is destroyed completely in this circle of existence.

The pre-eminent theologian is Specktownsky, whose book How I Rose From The Dead In My Spare Time And So Can You is more than the Bible; everyone possesses a copy and refers to it constantly, opening it at random whenever they are in doubt and taking the advice they find there. Specktownsky says that it is unclear whether the Form Destroyer is a separate entity from God or an aspect of God, but his power is undisputed. Unlike Jehovah, the God of A Maze Of Death is not omniscient and so was unaware of the strength of the Form Destroyer; but a balance was struck between them, although Tony Denkelwelt's vision of a God above God is a monotheist God which encompasses all the manifestations of God and the Form Destroyer. There are many references to circles of existence, which is a Hindu and a Buddhist belief, and in Mary Walsh's dying vision they are united with the Catholic requiem mass, a freezing hell, the Intercessor shooting to Heaven (the source of a rather good cover illustration), the Last Judgement and then Heaven itself in a way that is unified and unfragmented, making up a credible body of belief. It is fascinating to see how Dick has combined so many ideas; and the more you know of comparative religion the more there is to find.

Theology is only a part of the novel, though. The characters stranded on Delmak-0 are a curious bunch. Each has an obsession, whether it be greed, hypochondria, nymphomania, or whatever. They are all social misfits unable to work together effectively as a group, each attempt to unite dissipating ineffectually, bringing confusion and disaster. Much of their paranoia is reasonable, since they are being spied on by artificial bees with cameras; their communications equipment fails; and then the deaths start, causing more fragmentation of their fragile groupings. Not all of the characters achieve individuality, however, and those that do tend to resemble caricatures because only certain prominent features — usually their jobs and individual obsessions — are used to delineate them. But Dick's denouement, to a large extent, explains away what could otherwise be a



considerable fault, transforming it into an asset in a way which is quite confounding.

In less than 200 pages Dick gives the reader an enormous amount to think about. In addition to a very clever plot and a complex theology there are allusions, thrown in almost absently, which might occupy pages in another novel. For instance, Belnor, after being elected leader, misquotes part of the Gettysburg address so that it means the reverse of what Lincoln said, reversing everything with it; Belnor is the reverse of Lincoln, a failing leader in a failing situation. There is the Tench, a kind of gelatinous oracle which gives answers from the I Ching, each of which is worth pausing and reflecting on; there is Wagner's version of Wotan and The Lord Of The Rings; and jokes like the title of Speckowsky's book and a contents list which reads like Winnie-The-Pooh add further colour to the already rich tapestry Dick is weaving.

Not much is wrong with the novel — it's a bit short, perhaps, but it is extremely deep and bears repeated reading. It's a novel that has stayed in my mind and given me something to cogitate on long after I finished it. I recommend it unreservedly.

Adrienne Martine-Barnes — THE FIRE SWORD (Avon, 374pp, \$3.75)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

In the earliest-surviving English ballad, "The Marriage Of Sir Gawaine", the eponymous "perfect gentle knight" is given the task of finding out what it is that every woman wants. I shall not tell you the answer here. Arthurian romance, as it was written down for Eleanor's Court of Love in twelfth century Aquitaine, is the earliest recorded women's literature; since that time the very word "romance" has come to stand for a tale of love mostly appealing to women. The novel, that newfangled form invented by Samuel Richardson in the eighteenth century and developed by Austen, the Brontes, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and others to become the dominant literary form of this century, gained its popul-



arity as stories for the wives and daughters of gentlemen, that underemployed and mildly accomplished segment of the population whose station in life depended on the husband they could catch.

Popular literature is as much if not more a sociological symptom than a literary phenomenon; the emphasis is less on elegance of style and power of content than on what people have shown they want to read. Thus popular literature tends to fall into the rut of genre formula. As Joanna Russ pointed out in "The Wearing Out Of Genre Materials", reprinted in Vector 62, the appeal of such fiction is that it formulates a wish. Classic science fiction, for instance, was informed by a techno-futuristic variant of the Cowboys versus Indians frontier yarn; as the shiny promise of "progress" turned to pollution, proliferation and doubt, blaster switched to sword, gizmos and gadgetry to sorcery, and high-tech to coarse mediaeval nostalgia. But not much role for women in either of these scenarios — being cast as part of the loot doesn't count.

It is cheering now to see women's fantasy establishing itself as a genre giving a new twist to the sword-and-sorcery wish. Individual works of fantasy by certain women writers — Joy Chant, Tanith Lee, Anne McCaffrey, Marion Zimmer Bradley — have been around for a good while, but it's only lately that they seem to have started to collect a train of largely SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) and neo-paganist-influenced writers who also turn out fantasy meant for women. I'd like to propose Adrienne Martine-Barnes, along with Elizabeth Scarborough (whose The Harem Of Aman Akbar I reviewed in the previous issue), as dextrous jugglers of the emerging formula of self-reliant heroines given to snappy backchat and eschewing soppy sentimentality undertaking their adventures with a nice-looking guy tagging along until we reach a shamefully and self-indulgently bourgeois happy ending just like in the fairy tales.

The Fire Sword uses for a plot a variant of the standard fantasy quest: Eleanor wakes up to find herself in an alternate mediaeval Britain where Saint Bridget hands her the Fire Sword, a cloak, and cryptic instructions about finding the Heir who will lift the Darkness that has overrun the land; and off she goes wondering what the hell is going on and when someone will give her a straight answer, and promising herself a "riproaring nervous breakdown" once she gets clear of it all. On the whole, she makes a pretty good fist of this "chosen heroine" business she's been landed in — or, rather, Martine-Barnes steers her along with verve and plenty of lively ironic asides. The only flaw that bothered me was the way the sex scenes lapsed from Heyerian snap to almost Cartlandesque lushness — but then how convenient if sharp elbows and knobby knees would melt away in a torrent of passion.

The Fire Sword is a thoroughly enjoyable escapist wish-fulfillment fantasy, just the thing for reading on trains or rainy weekends.

Gordon R. Dickson — LOST DORSAI (Sphere, 156pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Alan Fraser

Like The Spirit Of Dorsai, reviewed by Graham Andrawa in Paperback Inferno 50 (October 1984),

Lost Dorsai is not really a novel. The book consists of the title novella, 101 pages long, and two short stories. The novella dates from 1980, but the stories, "Steel Brother" and "Warrior", are from 1952 and 1965 respectively. When the book was first published by Ace in 1980, Sandra Miesel's essay "The Plume And The Sword" appeared instead of "Steel Brother".

The novella "Lost Dorsai" originally appeared in Destinies, and won a Nebula Award. The lost dorsai of the title is Michael de Sandoval, a Dorsai who has graduated from the military academy but has rejected his destined career as a fighting mercenary. Because he discovered within himself a deep aversion to killing, he chose instead to serve as bandmaster in the army of Nahar on the planet Ceta. He is only rediscovered by the Dorsai when the Graeme twins, Amanda Morgan and the narrator Corunna El Man arrive in Nahar City with a simple contract to turn the Naharese army into a proper defensive force. In fact, the situation is much more complex, and the Dorsai arrive to fulfill their contract not only to find that Nahar is surrounded by larger and more belligerent neighbours but also that the army faces a more immediate threat from revolutionary forces within the country. Much worse, the army of Nahar defects to the rebels soon after the Dorsais' arrival, leaving only the three Dorsai soldiers plus Amanda and Michael to protect El Conde (Nahar's ruler). The Dorsai are in a no-win situation: they can either break their contract and leave, or die failing to protect their client; in either case the reputation of the Dorsai would be lowered. The only winner would be Prince William of Ceta, who controls most of the planet and is keen to both control Nahar and lower the market price of Dorsai mercenaries.

Dickson solves this dilemma in an ingenious and satisfactory manner, true to his philosophy of keeping the bloodletting to a minimum. The lost Dorsai is allowed to preserve his own principles, and at the same time to save his fellow Dorsai and fulfill the contract to protect El Conde.

Of the short stories, "Warrior" is the tale of Ian Graeme's trip to Earth to settle a score with James Kenebuck, a Manhattan underworld leader who Ian holds responsible for the deaths of his brother Brian Kenebuck, a Force-leader serving on the planet Freiland under Ian's command, and thirty-two of the men in Brian's force. In civilian clothes and stripped of his military hardware, Ian Graeme uses resourcefulness, courage and skill to achieve his objective, just as does Michael de Sandoval in the longer work.

Both of these stories predate "Brothers" in The Spirit Of Dorsai in that Korie Graeme is still alive; thus Lost Dorsai does not carry the Dorsai saga further chronologically.

The final, much earlier, story, "Steel Brother", is a non-Dorsai tale of a young Frontier Guard cadet who is put in sole command of an outpost space station and charged with preventing hostile invaders from passing by it to attack the populated worlds inside the perimeter. Linked by electrodes to the memory banks of the station, he finds in his hour of greatest need, under deadly attack, that he is not only connected to the station's hardware but can also draw on the strength and knowledge of the previous station commanders who have also been so linked. Together with his "steel brother", he

defeats the outsiders and causes the attack to fail. Like the Dorsai, the strength of the Frontier Guard lies in unity of purpose, organisation, and steadfastness of belief, and the story is therefore fully in accord with Dickson's basic philosophy, so clearly explained in Graham Andrews's review.

I had not read anything by Gordon R. Dickson before Lost Dorsai, though, and I came to it with a preconception that his Dorsai stories were just updates of the Starship Trooper theme. I was therefore pleasantly surprised by the actual viewpoint and execution of the stories. In "Lost Dorsai", for example, Amanda Morgan and Corunna El Man survey a heroic painting hanging on a wall in El Conde's palace, a painting from the Naharese past which portrays a glorified view of war; he says to her that "We live with real war, and to those who do that a painting like this one is close to obscenity".

Despite its short length, Lost Dorsai is an excellent book, with the two stories well chosen to complement the novella. My enjoyment of it was not marred by my unfamiliarity with Dickson's previous Dorsai stories — on the contrary, it has inspired me to seek out and read more about the Dorsai!

---

Roger Robinson — SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY  
MAGAZINE COLLECTORS' CHECKLIST  
1926-1980 (Becon Publications, 50pp, £0.75)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Just what its title says it is: an alphabetical listing (by title) of all English-language SF and fantasy magazines, with information on issue dates and format, spiral-bound in a handy pocket size and aimed at the specialist collector. Not being a specialist collector myself (he said, glancing sideways at his complete run of F & SF), I'm in no position to verify the accuracy of the issue information, but one glitch stands out immediately; the cut-off date of 1980 means that some publications — Ad Astra, Destinies, Galaxy and Galileo, to name the ones that caught my attention — which have folded since then are listed as "current" while others which have appeared since — notably Interzone — are not included at all. Given that the list is stored on and was printed out by a computer, it should surely have been feasible to advance the cut-off date to at least 1982... It might also have been useful to include a few cross-references; there's nothing to indicate, for example, that Impulse was a continuation of Science Fantasy under another name. (Although I suppose the specialist collector would know that anyway...) This checklist is, nevertheless, a useful and valuable one — order it from Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG, adding an extra 25p to cover postage costs.

---

Robert Silverberg (ed.) — NEBULA AWARDS 18  
(Bantam, 240pp,  
\$2.75)

Reviewed by Sue Thomason

"Upholding a high standard of excellence, the Science Fiction Writers of America each year award the coveted Nebula Award to the finest fiction in the field" says the blurb on the back of this anthology. What it implies — that this

anthology represents the best of current SF — is clearly nonsense. Without reference to any of the usual complaints — that the Nebula is biased towards American fiction, chosen by some rather than all writers, that the balloting system is unfair, that big publishing houses send out free copies of titles to SFWA members while smaller publishers can't afford to — what the blurb writer has conveniently forgotten is that "the best SF" changes not only from person to person but from time to time.

When I was in my early teens, I read and re-read and re-re-read anything by Ray Bradbury that I could obtain. His books gave me acute pleasure; for me at that time they were undoubtedly "the best". They are not "the best" for me now (although they are "the best" for numerous BSFA members if the Matrix fiction poll was anything to go by).

Nor does this anthology contain "the best" SF I read last year. And a lot of people who voted in the Nebula Awards wouldn't have picked this line-up. All the also-ran Nebulas that came high (but not top) in the final poll — a lot of people thought one or more of those stories were better than one or more of these.

That's not to say that these stories are not good. I enjoyed some of them very much indeed; Connie Willis's "Fire Watch", for example. And Joanna Russ's "Souls". (But is it SF? Why oh why has she tacked that peculiar ending onto it? I'm still puzzling; I feel I've missed something, I must have missed something. Joanna Russ doesn't write like that...does she?) Interesting, too, to read the opening chapter of Michael Bishop's No Enemy But Time without having the rest of the novel on hand. I would have eagerly read on, and think I will now look for a copy of the novel to find out what happens next, but it is a rather frustrating device, this tantalising of the reader with a novel extract. I'm not sure it's a good idea.

Other contents? Silverberg's "The Pope Of The Chimps", William Gibson's "Burning Chrome" (wonderful title!), "Corridors" by Barry N. Malzberg, "Another Orphan" by John Kessel (an unfamiliar name), "A Letter From The Clearys" by Connie Willis (again), and "Swarm" by Bruce Sterling. Other nice things about the anthology? Three stories by new writers, three stories by women (but two out of three in each category are the two Connie Willis stories, so perhaps the collection isn't so representative after all).

You want me to categorise the tone of the anthology? No film novelisations, or stories-which-aren't-actually-film-novelisations-but-patently-ought-to-be. No very highbrow stuff. An awful lot of stories which first appeared in the pages of F & SF. You liked the magazine, now read the anthology...

Barrington J. Bayley — THE ZEN GUN (Methuen, 160pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

Have you ever been at a party where everyone is telling jokes at which they all laugh uproariously, capping each other's witticisms with further gales of laughter, and you can understand absolutely none of it? You sit with a sickly grin firmly stuck on your face, giving inane little chuckles at intervals, wondering what the hell they are all finding so funny and

if they all find it so funny why don't you? Well, those are the emotions which The Zen Gun arouses in me. I get the feeling that there's a funny book there if only I knew enough to get the Big Joke. As it is, I read it a somewhat bemused state, latching onto the bits I understood with relief and ploughing through the lectures in a mixture of irritation at being lectured and abashment at my ignorance.

The Zen Gun takes place in an Empire which has reached the decadent stage of its history, so that the Imperial Fleet is full of freeloaders who spent their whole time partying, usually high on some drug or other, and humans are so uninterested in the real world that most work is done by animals given sentience by brain implants (the robots having been on strike for the last hundred years). The story concerns the meandering route which the very varied cast of characters take in their search for the Zen Gun of the title, which is supposed to be able to destroy a planet. The parts of the novel which worked well were some of the characterisations, especially Pout the chimera and the kosho; the realisation of a very different society from our own; the action scenes, especially the freeloaders bringing the party onto the bridge in the middle of the battle, which I thought was funny; and the pigs finally taking over the Empire (it's nice to see someone taking Animal Farm for their role model instead of 1984).

The bits I chiefly disliked were those describing the invented physics which constitutes the structure on which the novel is based and on which the plot hangs — which is unfortunate, as this is the main point of it all. Bayley has posited something called Simplex physics, based on the premise that gravitational attraction is impossible, and he goes into considerable detail concerning both the theory and its applications to FTL drive, communications, and so on. This is the Big Joke which I don't understand. It may be that someone with more knowledge of physics than me (meaning most people) will find it outrageously funny — a point I can't be dogmatic about because humour is so subjective anyway — but for me the Joke fails totally.

The Zen Gun is perhaps not a bad novel, but neither is it completely successful. I think that Bayley could have found a better way of getting his invented physics across than by a series of lectures delivered periodically, which are a terrible brake on the action and a bad fault in style. Otherwise, the plotting is fine until the end, when everything stops abruptly, leaving the readers to draw their own conclusions in a way that I found infuriating. It's a mixed novel which produced mixed feelings, but I wouldn't really recommend it unless you have a penchant for the sort of conceit which Simplex physics represents.

George R. R. Martin — FEVRE DREAM (Sphere, 407pp, £2.25), THE ARMAGEDDON RAG (New English Library, 333pp, £2.95)

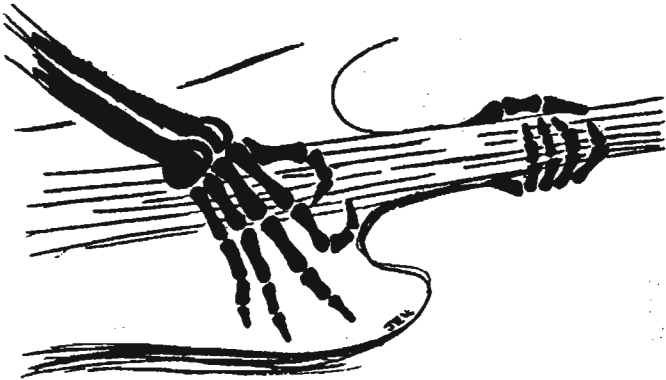
Reviewed by Judith Hanna

In each of these novels George Martin takes a couple of the images and obsessions that contribute to American popular culture and plays on chords of cliché to mix his story. In Fevre Dream the blend gels, but The Armageddon Rag doesn't quite get it together. Both novels

skirt closer to the horror genre, while remaining too aloofly intelligent to quite fall into it, than they do to science fiction. Both confirm that Martin is a writer worth attention.

Once you come to think of it, the decadent ante-bellum South is a natural setting for vampires — where human slaves can be bought and slaughtered like cattle, what's the difference between beating them to death and sucking their blood? So natural is the collocation, and so smoothly do the two themes dovetail to an almost seamless, elegantly tailored fit, that there seems nothing left to say about the story. The romance of riverboats (see Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn) provides the platform on which the traditional thanato-erotic struggle, this time between evil vampire and good vampire, plays itself out. Once you're through the somewhat gawky first chapter, the story steams ahead, all pistons tuned and firing nicely. Such an inspired blend of ingredients, carried through so smoothly, make this not only an entertaining work but an exemplary showpiece of the craft of popular fiction.

So what goes wrong when Martin comes to write The Armageddon Rag? I suggest a simple answer: Fevre Dream is just a story, the old tried if not necessarily true tale given a new twist; The Armageddon Rag aspires to be sociology in the guise of fiction, but the story never manages to shake free of self-conscious self-analysis of the dope-laden stuff of nostalgia. "Whatever happened to the Sixties?" aging ex-hippies ask each other as they catch up with what the Eighties has made of them (revolutionary has become advertising executive, gonzo journalist has become novelist cohabiting with realtor). The tide of nostalgia rises as an unreconstructed Mansonesque revolutionary with enough moolah to transcend practicalities patches back together The Nazgul, the pre-eminent rock band that was the Sixties, and (waddaya know) when they start replaying their Music To Wake The Dead the spirit of their assassinated lead singer Hobbins does awake and return and the born-again power of his music reawakens the spirit, the hope, the idealism... All the ingredients you remember or have read about from those good old days of sex and drugs and anti-war marches and rock 'n' roll are carefully mixed in — but careful craft has no place in that let-it-all-hang-out scene. Martin's very care and control cause it to fall flat — no spirit of the dead Sixties comes alive to reanimate his neatly constructed narrative. Social journalism grafted onto a plot, rather than a novel; an Eighties-eye retrospective on the flower-power decade — and from that perspective an interesting but not entirely satisfactory experiment.



Sydney J. Van Scyoc — BLUESONG (Penguin, 264pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Alen Fraser

Bluesong is the second novel of the "Sunstone" trilogy that commenced with Darkchild, which I reviewed in Paperback Inferno 49 (August 1984). In that novel, Khira, daughter of a barohna of the mountains of the planet Brakrath, found a boy abandoned by a starship and befriended him. When she discovered who Darkchild, as she'd named the boy, really was, and how great a threat he was to her people, she was forced to develop the unique mental powers of a barohna to save both Darkchild and her world.

Bluesong also features two children as protagonists. Keva, daughter of a barohna and Jhaviir, the clone-brother of Darkchild, is the female lead; and Danior, son of Khira and Darkchild, is the leading male. Like the first novel, this one tells the story of how a barohna's daughter acquires her powers, and also of how Danior becomes the first known male to acquire similar abilities.

In Darkchild, we were introduced to the off-world singing silks, and the songs of the col ours; and here the bluesong of the title is that sung by the blue sash worn by Keva's father Jhaviir. Keva has been brought up by primitive fisherfolk, believing herself to be one of them, but her discovery of the blue silk convinces her that her true father is still alive and sets her off on a quest to find him.

Her other memento of her father is one of two "pairing stones", which have the power to link the minds of their two bearers. The other comes into the possession of Danior, who leaves his palace home to seek his lost half-sister Keva. (If half-sister is the correct relationship — I'm assuming that as the fathers of both Keva and Danior are clone-brothers then both are effectively children of the same father.) Before he finds her, Keva undergoes the ordeal that brings her barohnial powers, which stand her in good stead in the subsequent events.

Jhaviir was brought up on the planet of Grenish, among a desert people called the Kri-Nostri, and found life in the mountain valleys of Brakrath too bland for his tastes. He took his young daughter Keva with him on a journey and, after she was stolen from him, went out into the deserts of Brakrath to become the leader of a clan and recreate a Kri-Nostri society. The success and strength of his settlement has made the other desert clans jealous, and they band together to destroy it. With the arrival of Keva and Danior, Jhaviir's clan is able to defend itself against its attackers with the barohnial power over sun and stone. Keva learns to use the power with moderation, to teach a lesson rather than to destroy, and Danior learns that his anomalous position as a male barohna is a source of strength rather than weakness.

I read Bluesong straight after reading Helliconia Summer, but apart from being the second volumes of trilogies they have nothing in common. Van Scyoc is working on a much smaller scale than Aldiss, with lesser ambition than he and with lesser experience and skill. The real comparison should be with Marion Zimmer Bradley and Anne McCaffrey, the two writers of whom she reminds me the most; and I found Bluesong more satisfying than their latest works, a novel that succeeded within its own parameters. A good

point about it is that, like Helliconia Summer, it does not contain lengthy retellings of the events in the first book — these are introduced only where they directly relate to the events at hand, and the readers are left to make the connections themselves. Bluesong's main fault, however, is that it follows the structure and narrative of Darkchild too closely: both have teenage girls as principal characters, meeting strange dark young men, and going through a testing ordeal to gain their powers over sun and stone, which they use to rout the villains. Another fault is that the principal question raised at the end of Darkchild remains unanswered, and is posed again at the end of Bluesong, twenty years later. Nothing that happens advances Darkchild's ambition to find and rescue his "father" (the man from whom he and Jhaviir were cloned) from the hands of race who set the boy on Brakrath as an unwitting agent of its destruction.

To sum up: although I found Bluesong to be weaker than Darkchild, I still enjoyed it. The narrative pace carries you along easily, and the characters are sympathetic enough for you to care about their fate. I hope that Starsilk, the final volume in the trilogy, will bring the story to a conclusive end, and that Van Scyoc then turns her talents to some completely different creations.

---

Willis E. McNelly (ed.) — THE DUNE ENCYCLOPEDIA  
(Corgi, 526pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

It had to come, I suppose; if not now, when the film is upon us, then at some other time — there have been guides and companions to other best-selling works of fiction before this, so why not Dune as well? But The Dune Encyclopedia differs from, say, The Complete Guide To Middle-Earth in that it treats the fiction to which it is a companion as real; specifically, it claims to be based on "the Rakis Hoard", material accumulated by the God-Emperor Leto II, and — in setting out to enlarge and deepen the background of the Dune universe — pretends to explain to its readers "how we got where we are". Its introduction, the tone and thrust of its entries, its bibliography: all are addressed, not to a present-day audience, but to an audience that is descended from those who survived a period called "the Starvation and Scattering" that followed the death of the aforesaid God-Emperor.

This approach I reject. As I've argued before, here and elsewhere, fiction is of value and relevance to us because (like all other forms of art) it is intended to provide insights into aspects of life that we might overlook or otherwise take for granted, enabling us to appreciate and understand them on a deeper, more intensive level; but we should be careful never to mistake the contexts in which these insights are offered as the contexts in which we have to apply them. Fiction is a carefully moulded abstract of, not an indistinguishable surrogate for, the world; its reality is representational, not actual.

The Dune Encyclopedia, however, encourages its readers to confuse the reality with the fiction, to pretend that the invented world it contains is more "real" than the real world, and — by immersing themselves in the vicarious fantasy

life it offers — even encourages them to blank out the real world altogether. Escapism through and through, and for all that it may be a consequence of the present gloomy state of the real world it's a particularly pernicious form of escapism.

And what is ironical about it, if irony it is, is that the more one reads of the invented background to Dune the less and less plausible it all seems. Striving to convince us by piling detail upon detail, McNelly and his collaborators succeed only in exposing the sheer unlikelihood of such a galactic organisation surviving for longer than about five minutes.

---

Robert Asprin (ed.) — TALES FROM THE VULGAR UNICORN (Penguin, 223pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Judith Hanna

Nasty but readable tales from Philip Jose Farmer, David Drake, Lynn Abbey, A. E. Van Vogt, Janet Morris, Andy Offutt and Robert Asprin himself; perverse, but lacking either the courage or the conviction to really shock. Most pornography is fantasy, but this fantasy teeters back from the outright indecent, too mealy-mouthed to spell out what it hints at. Asprin's tale of vivisection comes closest to honest offensiveness, but we don't expect fantasy to do a Mayhew or a Dickens sociologically exploring an underworld which is after all imagined just for voyeuristic fun. (Only LeGuin's much-anthologised "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" hints at the human costs other extravagant visions ignore.) Perhaps only those of us cocooned in the fat cat First World where starvation and crime statistics can be switched to another channel could find these imagined squalors amusing. Of course it's being released as a Fantasy Role-Playing Game. Perhaps it will be a theme park next?

It's not vulgarity but kitsch counterfeit slumming amid merely cosmetic muck.

---

John Sladek — TIK-TOK (Corgi, 174pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

Before writing this review of Tik-Tok, I picked the novel up to flip through it in order to remind myself of a few salient points — and found myself not only laughing out loud again but also reading it again. It really is that good.

It is, in essence, the autobiography of a domestic robot whose "asimov" circuits have malfunctioned, allowing it to break the first of the famous Three Laws. Not only does it then injure a human being, it sets out to kill as many of them as possible, claiming to be experimenting with different varieties of sin and heading, eventually, for the complete extermination of the human race in order to make the world as neat and as tidy as possible.

Such a plot, summarised so baldly, sounds quite absurd — but only because the satire that gives it all its edge and bite can't be summarised as well. Such as, for example, a throwaway line on page 47 that "All military robots had Southern accents, for ease of communication". Never mind the throwaway lines that appear elsewhere in the novel — indeed, there's at least one good line on every page, some of them pain-

fully funny, although it should be remembered that Sladek's humour is less boisterous than black, his targets being human foibles and human society in general. Specifically, contemporary American society, with its idiotic fads and fallacious therapies, instant media celebrities and self-seeking politicians, TV evangelists and fast-food entrepreneurs...and none of the human characters who appear in the novel being completely sane. Indeed, Tik-Tok's desire to eradicate the lot of them begins to seem eminently sensible!

In sum, Tik-Tok is terrific. As the cover of this edition proclaims, it won last year's BSFA Award, which really ought to be recommendation enough; but apart from that it's also a magnificent black comedy, one of the few genuinely funny novels of recent years. It's well worth your time and money; buy it, read it, and enjoy it.

## ALSO RECEIVED

Frank Herbert — THE GODMAKERS (New English Library, 175pp, £1.95): impenetrably tedious story about the transformation of Earthman Lewis Orne into a mental superbeing, replete with a needlessly overcomplicated plot and quotes from fake books as chapter headings. Dune freaks will probably love it.

Alan Dean Foster — BLOODHYPE (New English Library, 206pp, £1.75): "From the epic Commonwealth of Thrax cycle" proclaims the front cover, although in its

earlier NEL (and Del Rey) editions this novel was marketed more as part of Foster's series about the orphan boy Pip and his minidragon Flinx. But that was before Foster had begun producing other, unrelated novels set in the Thrax Commonwealth, and in any case Pip and Flinx are only marginal to the events of Bloodhype's plot.

Bob Shaw — ORBITSVILLE (Granada, 187pp, £1.95): a reprint that should need little introduction, save to say that while this appeared to be Shaw's contribution to the "giant artificial world" fad that briefly dominated the early seventies, Orbitsville was and is better than, say, Niven's Ringworld because (unlike the Ringworld) the size and scope of Orbitsville are made breathtakingly plain, and also because (as with all Shaw novels) it has real characters rather than cardboard cutouts.

Malcolm Chalmers — TRIDENT: BRITAIN'S INDEPENDENT ARMS RACE (CND Publications, 88pp, £1.95): the sad but true story of the missile system that nobody but Mrs Thatcher and Mr Heseltine really wants, so ludicrously expensive that Britain's conventional forces will have to be sacrificed to help pay for it and representing so great an increase in Britain's so-called "independent nuclear deterrent" that it will undermine (even sabotage completely) any and every arms agreement that the two superpowers may try to reach. This book provides the facts and the arguments against such wholesale political and military insanity.

## LETTERS

First up, a late response (because it reached me just after I'd completed the issue) to Mary Gentle's review of Brian Aldiss's Greybeard and Whitley Strieber's and James Kunetka's Warday in issue 50, from BRIAN ALDISS:

"One has to cram novels together for review purposes, but really Greybeard isn't the same kind of animal as Warday, and to blanket them in a stream of comments about the reviewer's feelings on nuclear war is not to disguise that they are different animals.

"Warday is a new book, centrally about nuclear war. There is no secondary theme, and it does what it has to do in its own way, aiming for documentary effect by means of statistics, memos, etc..

"Greybeard is not new. It is two decades old. Nuclear war is not its theme. Its theme is a world falling apart without children. The connecting link between Greybeard's world and ours is provided by the account of irresponsible fooling around with nuclear experiments in space, which disrupt the Van Allen belts. This irresponsibility is linked to Greybeard's own irresponsibility: we meet him as he fires a gun and leave him as he fires another, in both cases 'without due care and attention'.

"I hope to persuade people that SF can act as a metaphor — without much luck as yet. But Greybeard is a metaphor for me. In the early sixties, I had lost my beloved children and grieved deeply. I lived in a world without children. Greybeard was my experience writ large, in the hope of reminding people at a time when 'youth' was supposed to be the big kick of the day how precious children were.

"A revision of the text is mentioned. Greybeard is a child of the sixties. It would not be possible crudely to iron out all the background assumptions so that it was somehow 'up-to-date'; as if War And Peace should be continually modernised so as always to contain the most recent and most interesting war.

"The revisions are minor, and consist of passages (notably the opening passages) rewritten where I thought the prose seemed a bit rocky. Whether because of these revisions or not, the Granada reissue under review — with the first acceptable jacket the novel has enjoyed in twenty years — has already undergone two reprints."

MARY GENTLE replies:

"Greybeard, while it isn't a novel specifically about nuclear war, does have a sub-theme to that effect. As I said in my review of it and Warday, 'we're told in Brian Aldiss's Greybeard that some kind of nuclear "accident" makes the human race sterile'. And, following my main comments on Warday, which is solely concerned with the aftermath of a nuclear war, I said: 'Having read one book in that frame of mind, of course, it begins to carry over to the next'. This, I thought, was an overt statement that I was dealing with not the most obvious aspect of Greybeard. (Greybeard functions as metaphor, of course; what fiction doesn't? But I'd already commented on that aspect of fiction in the earlier Warday-section of the review.)

"I thought that I had established that, for the purposes of the review, I wanted to treat these two books in a particular manner. Regard-

ing Greybeard, it's been around since the 1960s, it's had plenty of time to collect reviews on its main theme, and therefore I don't see why there should be any objection now to looking at one of its sub-themes with 1980s' eyes.

"This is why, when listing questions about the feasibility of the science in the novel, I added that these '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'.

"In that context, then, it seemed justifiable to ask what kind of a novel Greybeard now seems to be. Inevitably, there's been a shift of meaning; all novels are both of their time and outside their own time. Certain assumptions do date. I noted that Greybeard could have been substantially revised; I didn't say that it should have been.

"Incidentally, I think writers do continually 'update' War And Peace, in a manner of speaking: the same themes (or 'deep structure' if you happen to like structuralist buzz-words) give rise to different surface manifestations, according to the time and culture that writer happens to be in. Else why continue to write? War And Peace has value for us; it isn't the same value it had for its original readers. But this is by the way.

"Anyway, I'm sorry Brian Aldiss is upset. My review of Warday and Greybeard didn't, I feel, attempt to 'disguise that they are different animals'; the reverse, in fact. They are different. But it was from the similarities between them, which do exist, that I went on to draw conclusions that I don't regard as invalid. The difficulty here, I feel, is that Aldiss is talking about Greybeard solely as a novel (fair enough; why not?) and that I, for the purposes of the review, was talking about it as an artifact that displays certain assumptions, political attitudes, etc.. (I must admit that I don't quite see the relevance of telling us that the novel 'has already undergone two reprints'; my review didn't mention sales.)"

I sent a copy of Mary's reply to Brian, but his response was confined to a remark that he felt she was sliding away from his point.

Meanwhile, another response; this time from PAUL KINCAID, replying to Mark Greener's letter in the previous issue:

"I think it is clear that Mark Greener did not read my review as closely as I read the novels I was reviewing. He says that '(my) premise is that hard SF, the conservative middle ground of the genre, is where the innovation takes place'. That, most emphatically, was not my premise. In fact, I was arguing exactly the opposite case.

"Anyone who has read the BSFA's publications over the last nine or ten years will have seen a host of reviews, articles and guest editorials I have written, most of which are specifically about the 'borderlands' of SF. I have said repeatedly and in many different places that the future of SF lies in these borderlands -- indeed, I have said that the future of SF lies beyond these borders. The magical realists, and risk-takers closer to home like D. M. Thomas, Graham Swift, and Russell Hoban, are not writing SF, but they are doing things that SF should be attempting and in the vast majority of cases does not. I know these borderlands very well; I have been treading them for years, and I am not

ignoring them.

"But if you have innovators shooting off in every direction, if these writers are pointing the way towards the future, then presumably others have to follow in their wake. You cannot have a nation of perpetual pioneers; sooner or later a settler has to come along behind them, dig in and establish something. If the adventurers on the borderland are actually going to drag science fiction kicking and screaming out of the nineteenth century then presumably some distant echo of their siren song will one day be heard in the solid heartland of SF. In my review, I was taking soundings, trying to pick up some trace of that echo. It does not appear to exist. If the three novels I was reviewing are anything to go by, no messenger from the New Wave, even, has managed to get that far.

"...if everyone knows precisely what to expect, how can such fiction be innovative? Innovation arises from the unexpected, not the conservative,' says Greener. Yes, of course. But I wasn't looking for innovation, only for some response to the innovation that is going on elsewhere, and which has been going on for twenty years or more. Of course SF is conservative, but that does not mean it has to be in stasis, that it must be totally resistant to any sort of change whatsoever. If conservatives did not change, we would all be sitting in caves still, huddling around a god-given fire that none of us knew how to light. Change is the common condition of humanity (which is why we are all so resistant to change). Change is also the basic subject-matter of all science fiction.

"Yet the bulk of SF readers seem to want more of the same and nothing that might be different; the bulk of SF writers seem prepared to write more of the same and nothing that might be different. Science fiction appears to be divided into the exciting talents who are rushing off willy-nilly towards the next century without a backward glance, and a great grey bulk of others who refuse to venture out of the 1950s. And there is nothing occupying the middle ground between them. The innovators are taking no one with them. The ones left behind show no intention of following.

"That was the thesis upon which my review was based. Since to my mind I was only writing a review, and one that would be long enough anyway since it dealt with three novels, I did not feel inclined to burden the thing down with too much theory since to do so would involve a weight of supporting argument and other examples that would at the very least distract from the novels under consideration. I had simply received for review three novels that I did not ask for, and on reading them found that they fitted neatly with the thesis outlined here. Therefore that thesis underpinned my review; but in essence I was writing a review, and that had to be first and foremost. The novels provided an illustration of my argument rather than an exposition of it. Maybe that exposition will come later, in an article.

"Okay, maybe I ended up drawing too wide a conclusion from too narrow a base. But would it really have been appropriate to go on about Foundation's Edge, Heretics Of Dune, Friday, 2010, or any other of the titles that have been filling the review columns of Inferno and Vector for too long? Should I have called upon the hordes of critics who decry mightily and persistently the tedium of all they have to

read? Should I have referred back to my review of Habitation One a few issues ago, or quote the passage from The White Hart that appears so opportunely immediately before Mark Greener's letter? Good Heavens, I did not have an infinity of space to play with in order to dismiss three bad novels; one needs to cut some corners. I rather hoped that my readers might have the wit to look around them in order to find the supporting arguments Mark Greener asks for.

"And in answer to your open question, Joseph — I was referring to one part only of science fiction. In a year that saw the publication of Priest's The Glamour and Holdstock's Mythago Wood and Carter's Nights At The Circus, the borderlands are looking as healthy as ever. But as for the heartland of science fiction, I can find no evidence to suggest that it is not terminally dull."

And neither can I — but that may well be because neither of us have read very much from the heartland of SF over the past couple of years; in which case we're simply not qualified to pass detailed comment on it. (Well, I'd certainly disqualify myself from doing so, at any rate — which is why I asked my question in the first place.)

For a different view of innovation in SF, let's hear now from VINCENT OMNIAVERITAS, the pseudonymous US editor from whose Cheap Truth the poem printed in issue 50 was extracted:

"The assumption that 'the future lies on the borderlands' sounds superficially plausible, but it's risky to judge the future of SF from current events on its borderlands. One might as well try to judge the future of London from events in the Orkney Islands.

"My suspicion is that true innovation in SF will not come from some exotic elite but from a process of internal subversion. Successful innovations, in politics as well as pop culture, are often disguised as a return to some mythical lost standard of purity. So look for an eminently commercial, popular, accessible SF that reinterprets genre roots from an '80s or '90s perspective. Look for writers pursuing a 'garage band' ethic and prizing energy over ideological sophistication. Look, in short, for a new and better 'middle ground' that attacks and supplants the old middle ground on its own terms and in its own vocabulary.

"And don't expect a new New Wave, despite frantic attempts to reheat the collapsed soufflé. If these new writers are ever singled out as 'revolutionaries' it will mean their defeat. Once they are tagged as subversives by the old guard and, worse, the publishers, it will be next stop the Orkney Islands."

An interesting comment...not least because I think I can summon to mind the names of several writers who seem to fit your "garage band" ethic — William Gibson, Lucius Shepard, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, and Kim Stanley Robinson. (This listing is naturally not exhaustive.) But the interesting fact about these writers is that they're all American; I can think of no British writers who come remotely close to fitting the ethic in question. Does this mean that the next "revolution" in SF will be American rather than British? Perhaps — but it certainly gives added point to Norman Spinrad's remarks, as quoted by Edward James in "Blood On The Racks".

Thus LEIGH EDMONDS, responding to the previ-

ous issue's magazine reviews:

"I got a bit annoyed at the supposition by both Darrell Schweitzer and Chris Bailey that writers must learn the old skills first. I disagree with this because while it may now be true that most readers like stories I don't think that what is popularly required is necessarily the kind of virtue to be praised. Anyhow, I doubt that it is possible to use words without telling a 'story' of some sort; the trouble is that some people just expect bits of fiction to be presented in the old, familiar formats. Another point is that the old values cannot always remain worthwhile — if that were the case Darrell and his cronies would still be composing epic poems and the like."

A point that could be argued over for ever, with one camp holding that you first have to learn the rules in order to break them, and the other holding that because the nature of fiction changes with the passage of time the rules are constantly being altered as well. (Never mind that there may be more than these two opposing camps anyway.) I personally incline towards the second of these two positions, on the grounds that "the rules" are and should be relative rather than absolute.

A final comment now from JOHN BRUNNER, responding to my review of Charles Platt's Dream Makers 2 in the previous issue:

"I'm afraid you've let dogmatic scepticism lure you into error...(all absolutism has its drawbacks, doesn't it?). In the first paragraph on page 13 you are terribly scathing about Andre Norton's 'credulity'. Granted, Wicca is a modern construct, especially in its American version, and if memory serves it was largely invented by people like Fr. Montague Summers — an ironical footnote to its adoption by so many American 'libbers'.

"But the 'success' (your quotes) of the people who have managed to raise unicorns (plural) 'out West' is real. They didn't exactly breed them, they manufactured them (repeating some work done in the 1930s and otherwise forgotten); and while I personally don't possess a clipping from the mane of the one I met — his name is Bedivere, by the way — I certainly took a stack of photographs of him! The couple responsible are called Otter and Morning Glory G'zell; they're a pair of thoroughly unreconstructed hippies with qualifications in biology and zoology; and the fact that they are adherents of the Wicca cult has nothing to do with their competence in that field. Their unicorns are modified goats, but there certainly have been others — and multicornes as well — based mainly on African cattle and other horned species such as gazelles.

"I wish you the chance of meeting one of their creations some day. Bedivere was perfectly charming: gentle, well-mannered and not in the least like the typical ill-tempered — and rather smelly — billygoats I recall from my childhood."

And with this letter came a photograph of one of the goat-unicorns in question (identified as Lancelot); thus am I corrected! (Although I do think that Norton should have asked for more than a clipping from its mane before so uncritically accepting the fact of its existence.)

WAHF: no one other than those who have already been quoted. Write again soonest!