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John MacFarlane
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THIS ISSUE

...is almost as big as the big, bumper, celebration issue 100. This is due
in part to Joseph Nicholas; his article "The Shape of Things To Come" is a
substantial one which has nothing to do with H G Wells, being rather concerned
with the future of SF. Joe outlines four trends that are now noticeable in
SF and expresses considerable concern about three of them. David Wingrove
has also written a major article. "Saving The Tale" asks the question, 'Can
there be a critical standard of science fiction?' and cites some critics not
normally found in an SF magazine. Arnold Akien's piece, "You Can Get There
From Here", was written as a letter, with "Standpoint" overtones, but when I
typed it out it was too long for that, and so became a short article all by
itself. It considers 'ghetto literature'. The issue is filled out with three
rather good "Standpoint" articles (I need some more for next issue),
the book reviews (I had more of these than room for them, but they will
appear) and an encouraging number of letters. Not to mention an editorial.
The squibs that fill the pages are taken, this issue, from Robert Heinlein's
The Number Of The Beast.

"I think you're cute too," Zobie answered, grabbed me by both shoulders,
dragged me over the table, and kissed me hard. Our teeth grunted and my
nipples went spung!
Editorial
Towards a Critical Standard
Part III

In Focus 2 (Spring 1980) Randal Flynn said this about plot:
I'd realised there were two fundamental types of plot in the universe. There was the plot boldly and artificially imposed from above, the way Poul Anderson does it. He invents a few names, John, Tom and Jane, and then makes them do things, like chase after treasures etc. Or there was the plot that grew of itself, starting from the imaginative creation or arrival of a life-given character and the results of his subsequent interactions with the physical and social environment, and with his own emotional nature. This was organic plot.

And made it quite clear that he thought 'organic' plot was the only one worth bothering with. Certainly a lot of people would agree with him, including a number of Vector reviewers. It's an opinion I have a great deal of sympathy with, but one which I can't wholeheartedly agree with, because of the number of great novels which don't have 'organic' plot -- Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, for example, the plot of which is the antithesis of 'organic'. With such a novel occupying stage centre, and dozens more waiting in the wings I cannot but feel that to insist on 'organic' plot is to limit what can be done in a novel.

Thus, when the requirement for 'organic' plot is raised again by Simon Ounsley in Vector 98 (in this article 'The Deadly Tiger') I find myself regarding it critically, and nodding in agreement with Alex Eisenstein when he says that there are two types of plot, 'those that work, and those that don't' ('Letters', Vector 100). Although Alex, of course, gives no indication that a plot can 'work' in several different ways; his distinction is a critical blunt instrument, useful for separating sheep from goats, but unable to tell a merino from a big horn. We need something more subtle.

In his book The Structure Of The Novel (Chatto & Windus, 1928; paperback edition 1979) Edwin Muir distinguished a number of types of novel. First there is the 'novel of action', in which a series of arbitrary and exciting events thrust the hero into and out of danger. The plot is strictly developed, as the narrator deplores by Randal Flynn, and here I would agree with him. So would Mr Muir. Such a novel, he says, 'is a fantasy of desire rather than a picture of life. It is never of much literary consequence except when ... it is also in some measure a novel of character.'

The 'novel of character' is Muir's second type of novel. In it the plot hardly matters at all; it is merely a device for bringing together numbers of characters so that they can interact. The characters are finely drawn and complete. This means that they do not change or develop in the novel, and that the plot is simply incidental. It also means that the characters are predictable and flat, and in that sense unreal. However, if you look around you can see real people with the characteristics portrayed by such characters, though real people generally play several parts at once. The purpose of a novel of character is to tell us about characters, about themselves and their reaction to each other. In no sense does it have, or need, a plot that is 'organic', but neither is it to be deplored as Randal Flynn would have us do. Deplore Thackeray's Vanity Fair, would you?

The third type of novel meets with Randal's full approval, I am sure. This is the 'dramatic novel', in which, as in the novel of action, the plot must be strictly developed. But unlike the novel of action, the plot and characters are closely interwoven, each affected by the other, each movement in the plot arising from the characters, and each change or development of the characters arising because of the plot. Examples of dramatic novels are Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and anything by Jane Austen.

The fourth type of novel is the 'chronicle' -- a novel such as War And Peace in which the action is dramatic (in the sense above) but the arbitrariness of nature itself is taken into account -- the 'cycle of birth and death, birth and regeneration'. As well as the characters' changing, the background also changes. Places are not just lived in, as in novels of character or dramatic novels; they have been lived in, and undoubtedly will be lived in as well.

The fifth type is the 'period novel', which is similar in appearance to the chronicle. Like the chronicle, it gives a fundamental respect; the chronicle is universal in its application; the period novel is concerned only with its own time and society. In a chronicle, the background changes, but it is the change not the background that is significant; in a period novel the significant aspect is the background. Examples are Bennett's Clayhanger trilogy, Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga and Wells's The New Machiavelli.

When we look at SF in terms of these five types it is evident that most SF (as indeed, most fiction) is of the first type, the novel of action. Some novels of action can be enjoyable; all of them are intended to be; and none of them are intended to be anything else. A large portion of the remainder of SF fits into the period novel category. The period novel's emphasis on historical accuracy is mirrored by the SF period novel's emphasis on the detail of future or alien societies. Jack Vance is the SF period novelist par excellence: his best, most lyrical writing always occurs in his descriptions of strange and unlikely societies; when he turns to action his writing deteriorates. Two quotations from Muir are appropriate here.

The bondage of the novel to period has naturally degraded it. Mr Bennett's and Mr Wells's many descriptions of the devices which have changed modern life are often fascinating, and these inventions are all important in their sphere; but no one could imagine their being given any consequence in a novel moving at the imaginative tension of War And Peace...

The bondage of the novel to period has degraded it. But it also insensibly falsified for a time the standards of criticism... Exactitude of contemporary detail became more important than exactitude of imagination.

It is easy to see the parallels with both SF and SF criticism. Almost all SF novels fall into one of Muir's lesser categories, the novel of action and the period novel. This doesn't leave much for the three more important types. However, the matter is simplified by the realisation that there are no SF novels of character. Nor is there any need for there to be. If all that matters is the interplay of characters, then any SF ideas or backgrounds are totally irrelevant and can be dispensed with. A novelist would be wasting his time with such a creation.

It is also true to say that the SF chronicle is a rarity in SF. Most 'big scope' novels -- Dune, for example -- are period novels merely. J.G. Ballard's The Wind From Nowhere and The Drowned World are examples, Ballard working out his action against the remorseless progression of time and change.

This leaves us with the dramatic novel, into which category one can place all the novels of Le Guin, and some Silverberg, Aldiss, Budrys, Priest, Shaw and Holdstock. In the dramatic novel, as we have seen, plot and character are intimately intertwined. In the SF dramatic novel this must remain true, with the added condition that the plot must also be dependent on an SF element. In other words, the science fiction must be an integral part of the drama of the novel. The SF dramatic novelist is, in fact, making life difficult for himself, giving himself something extra to do. Why should he do this? Why, to portray dramas that could not otherwise exist?

(continued on p23)
The Shape Of Things To Come

Joseph Nicholas

Once upon a time, as we all know, SF was a despised minority literature — but then came the bomb, television, rock music, Moon landings, future shock, academic respectability,drug laws and mass popularity, with the result that the very label has entered everyday speech as a jargon term for anything futuristic, high-powered and (often) unlikely. Not that the public mind has much more than a hazy idea of what it means anyway: conditioned by endless re-runs of Star Trek and the recent flood of big-budget cinema spectaculars, they conceive of it as but a saintly wonderland of spaceships, aliens and ray guns, ignoring the imaginative core of which these are the external trappings, and hence dismiss it as no more than juvenile escapism.

And the trouble is that altogether too damn much current SF seems not to warrant any other treatment.

It has been claimed that SF is the only true literature of our age, and it does indeed have the ability to dramatise and examine the problems that now confront us with a scope not possessed by any other "form" of fiction. The energy crisis, sexual politics, the microchip revolution, genetic engineering, the threat of nuclear war: there are the things that the so-called 'mainstream' can only deal with (should it ever choose to deal with them at all) as the backdrop to its usual parade of character interplay and personal catastrophe -- and when it comes to more abstract concepts, like the nature of consciousness, the evolution of intelligence, and the entropic disorder which ultimately over-takes all civilisations, it is clear that SF is the only medium for their expression. Not to put too fine a point on it, it has a potential and a novelty that all other 'forms' of fiction seem to have long ago exhausted.

Except that in certain quarters this potential has been thrown away unused and its novelty deep-sixed in favour of audience-pleasing repetition. What we get from the majority of the stuff that now crowds the bookshops is not challenge and re-interpretation of the romantic escapism: undemanding and easily digestible stories designed not to stimulate their readers' intellects, but to bypass their cerebrums and mainline their simple, transient thrills straight into their thalamuses, absolving them from the need to think and lulling them into a false sense of acceptance and security. Idiot adventure space opera from the likes of Jack Chalker and Alan Dead Foster, oversentimentalised wish-fulfilment cuteness from such as Anne McCaffrey and Spider Robinson, long-winded pseudo-philosophical moralising from wolfish hard-liners like Robert Heinlein and Jerry Pournelle, naive celebrat ions of the "inevitable" triumph of technology from such "Golden Age" leftovers as Arthur C Clarke and Larry Niven, derivative sub- Tolkien or (worse) sub-Howard fantasy by almost anyone you care to name...

Never mind all the barely literate novelisations of third-rate film scripts, large format paperbacks with an illustration on every other page, novellas expanded to the length of novels by the use of big typefaces, comic book adaptations of well-known stories and films (as though everyone were suddenly unable to cope with anything more complicated than a speech balloon) -- dear God, you think to yourself, what in Heaven's name is going on here?

It would be easy to blame Star Wars and others of its cinematic ilk for this malaise: but, while it is true that they did foster the new dead commercial boom that has given us much of these "decadent symbols of a declining literary form" (Christopher Priest, Vector 97), they didn't exactly initiate the trend, only enhanced the malaise in essence one from which the entire Western world is currently suffering. The Watergate affair of 1972-74 exposed so completely that even the most naive must have difficulty denying its relevance which lies at the heart of modern politics; the Arab oil embargo which began in 1973 brought the telltale signs of the apparently fragile economic system on which our society is based; and from there on in it's downhill all the way. As Brian Aldiss put it in "Magic And Hard Boards", his autobiographical essay in Belles Lettres, "...we are at the end of the realness period, New and Darker Age is coming. We have used up most of our resources and most of our time. Now the mirage must overtake the mirage, for this is the last act of our particular play." Faced with the incipient terrors of this in our ordinary everyday lives, who can blame the public at large for seeking escape? The rush of SF adventures which provided the escape route during the sixties, SF novels need not be set in the real world, nor even an idealised version of it, at all. When they are set in the real world, or a near-future facsimile of it, their authors usually cop out of confronting the problems that would be involved, either by ignoring them entirely (presumably in the ostrich-like hope that they'll thus be persuaded to go away) or by pretending that they've been completely solved (without ever saying how). And for total escape, there is naturally nothing better than straight fantasy, where evil can be externalised and defeated and the plot can be as simple as masala as possible because the readers are only looking for an intensively detailed imaginary worldscape which can be revisited at any time by simply rescanning the maps and re-reading the appendices.

But then, as I said earlier, the reading public at large has never seen SF as more than escapism anyway. We, its dedicated readers and critics, have always viewed it as something more -- or, at least, we did, because if the sales figures are anything to go by, more and more of us are coming to view it in the same light. Quality material is still being published, of course, but it has always constituted a small percentage of the total -- and, given that publishers have to sell books and make money, the needs of the market in mind, that percentage now seems to be gradually shrinking, with those writers who reject such pandering to popular taste in favour of pursuing their own individual visions in their own ways finding it increasingly difficult to locate publishers willing to back them and their work (although there are of course, at least as much, if not more, as the UK is concerned, exceptions -- two hardback firms spring instantly to mind as purveyors of quality first and sales potential second). The problem seems much more acute in the US than it does here, and writing about it elsewhere two years ago, before the recent spate of notable hits, I identified this as a benign blemish on the revolution of the sixties by what I termed the 'Old Guard': a coterie of editors for whom 'modern' SF was something being published, at the very latest, back in the mid-fifties, and who regard everything that has happened to SF since as either of no consequence or even as a definite retrograde step.

There is, obviously, something rotten in the state of SF -- and for all that I'm proclaiming the existence of a malaise is easier than identifying it, I think a number of trends which underly it. In this, I intend to engage not in a discussion of what's been happening during the sixties (for that I commend you to Roz Kaveney's forthcoming article in Foundation 22) but in discussion of the trends which are now emerging and which I feel will determine much of what is published in the eighties. Three of these trends strike me as definite contributors to the rot and the fourth as the only hope for SF's survival. They are, in the order I will deal with them, the retreat to the ghetto, the repetition of familiar themes, the big books sell best-sellerism, and the fight to reintegrate with the mainstream.

The first of these, the retreat to the ghetto, is closely bound up with, and in
fact seems a direct result of, the Old Guard backlash referred to above. It
can hardly be coincidence that what they conceive of as 'modern' SF stems from a
period when the genre's only home, its only outlet, was the genre magazines,
while the look of SF as we know it today was fixed by the fall of the
monopolistic American News Company, collapsed, putting almost all of them out of
business and ending the bright hopes of the early fifties for an SF which would
break through to a wider audience. (Horace Gold, the first editor of Galaxy, for
instance, looked forward to the day when his magazine would preside over the
readership as The Saturday Evening Post.) Suddenly, the genre seemed to 'lose
its way', by default repudiating its pulper excesses but seeming to have no idea
of what to do next, thus allowing a certain amount of stagnation and dissatisfac-
tion which in some way initiated a search for other routes into the wider world, and eventually led to the revolutions of the sixties.

(I was in this period, after all, that the two writers now considered the giants of
British SF, Brian Aldiss and J G Ballard, prime movers in the British wing of the
genre and their careers.) Yet in all this, the most prominent members of the Old Guard have consistently deplored this repudia-
tion, the search which followed it, and the eventual fragmentation — claiming
over and over again that the SF of the late forties to mid-fifties is the only
type to set in: a feeling which it should only be for the better that those
escapist entertainments (this despite also upholding the more serious SF-as-future
—realism line pushed by John W Campbell, which doesn't say much for their
capacity for logical thought), that its writers should eschew complexity of these,
plot, idea, characterisation, style and message, that they should make up undue
demands on their readers... The rejection slap issued by George Scithers for
Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine, for example, explicitly instruct those who wish to
sell to the magazine to avoid such nasty and corrupting subjects as sex, swearing
and violence and, citing inflation, the cost of car repairs and the sedum of its
requirements, urge them to produce something simpler, a policy which
partly deriving a school of exciting, risk-taking writers of the type who contributed to Moorcock's New Worlds, creates instead a group of paper-thin
stories whose stories are indistinguishable from each other, and
patronisingly juvenile to boot.

Worse than Scithers, however, by virtue of the greater control he wielded — in
theory only over Ballantine Books' fantasy imprint, but with his wife in control of
the SF side any suggestion that there is no overlap between their respective spheres of interest is simply laughable — is Lester Del Rey. This is a man who,
in five years of 'reviewing' for Analog dumped (heavily and often splenetically)
again and again on anyone who dared write something more ambitious and demanding
than simple escapist fare. Writers, he said, shouldn't take themselves or their
work seriously; heroes should be strong, unambiguous and forthright; style should
be simple, straightforward and easy to understand; plots should be plain, linear
and predictable. With all this sound as though I'm pushing at an open door, he
interview with him published in Science Fiction Review 18 (1976) in which,
perfect seriousness, he claimed that: 'pulp fiction is actually truer to
human nature than most other fiction' because it "tends to use what might be
called' the Del Rey bland. You don't go on the road in the popular press. You
don't establish your characters with small, tiny strokes of the brush. You use
broad sweeps. But in the long run that type of characterisation usually
be read by people for a longer period of time with understanding and identifi-
cation. Audible 'author types' etc, had grammar and syntax; SF was much
less than this ludicrous contention named Fielding's Tom Jones as a great pulp novel.
With such views as this being expressed by the man at the top, it comes as no surprise
to note that the majority of the SF published by Ballantine Books — under, of
course, his brand name — over the past three years shows a marked shift to the juvenile, the pulp, the artistically decorat-
and the instantly forgettable.

And both are powerful men in their fields. Asimov's is the most commercially
successful SF magazine in history and Ballantine Books is one of the longest
established and most respected US paperback SF publishers, and it thus seems fair
to suggest that they do in some way set the tone and lead the way for everyone
else. Indeed, with the recent sale of Analog to Asimov's publishers -- because,
their many protestations to the contrary, it is most unlikely that independent
readership of each other -- and Analog's SF apparently adopting a
more conservative tone in order to retain its share of the market, with such
writers as Chalker, Hogan and MacCaffrey being published by Del Rey Books in a
manner that makes them seem 'the savours of SF' and equally 'serious' — there's
nothing new at all, just the same old concerns, now, with new writers like Cherryb,
Haldeman and Varley being similarly pushed by other publishers, the suggestion
seems even more fair, even more accurate.

None of it has the slightest pretence to literary quality, or can appeal to other
than the die-hard addicts: it is the sort of incessant, derivative, self-plagia-
ristic, third-rate stuff we thought had been condemned and abandoned long ago, now brought back to smilling semi-sentience with no other apparent object in
mind than the waving of the crumbling glimmer of the dusty pulses of those still gathered around its flickering campfires in resolute
ignorance of the world outside. Worse: it is actually pulling in a horde of new
readers, selling in its thousands of copies, winning plaudits and Hugo awards and,
on top of its further entrenching of SF's prevailing escapist image in the
public mind at large, is in the rigidly across-the-board application of its very
limited principles by this very same Old Guard next to stifling the life out of
the literature, denying it any impulse to creativity and innovation, making of
it nothing more than a fiction of safe, cozy, mind-deadenning pulp.

But then, a cynic might suggest, perhaps challenge and stimulation are essential-
ly alien to SF anyway. After all, one of the particularly besetting sins of a
genre literature is its very willingness to go for the lazy route, to produce
by circumscription of its readers' tastes and by regimenting its readers to expect
only a limited set of themes and approaches — as the truisms has it the,
readers want no more than another dose of what they're already getting (which
probably explains in large part the refuse and sometimes positively
forlornly forlorn, not entirely towards the New Worlds-led 'New Wave'). In the
days when the magazines constituted the only outlet for genre SF, this 'more of
the same', played up to by the authors, often expressed itself as a series of stories about the same characters and/or situations; but with the
merger there are now get instead series of novels: sequel upon sequel
upon upon future history upon... It goes almost without saying that no single novel of such a sequence can ever stand alone, can ever be (in
Chris Priest's appropriate term) 'autonomous', but must be read in conjunction with all the others -- sound commercial logic, to be sure, but is it art?

It's a moot point. Those story cycles which have been conceived and executed
such do have a certain unity and integrity about them, but those where the
author manufactures a sequel simply to capitalise on the impressed demand over
are too slipshod or lightweight to possess such characteristics. And the former
variety are often just as bad, their ideas being effectively sufficient for only
one volume but which are extended, padded, and supplemented to make up the
required three (or whatever) less for the sake of enriching the story or the
reader's experience than for the sake of enriching the writer by forcing the
reader to buy them in order to find out what finally happens. The current
near-perfect example is Jack Chalker's 'Well World' series, each volume
feeling at the end as to give one as to given impression that he's not
even writing to entertain himself, only to fill the pages. Further, some
series may not actually end with their final volumes: a growing practice is
the leaving of minor loose ends or unresolved plot threads to which their writers
at a later point can then co-opt the genre History's 'Bread of the Gods' ('Emperors' triology) is Empires in a war that kills millions but allows the top magician of the bad guys to escape unsanctioned. Never mind the series which just go on and on without apparent end, like E C Tubb's 'Dumarest' novels.
It isn't a completely new trend, of course -- the reader demand for series is, as a proportion of the total audience, probably much the same as it ever was, but the number of writers now clamoring aboard seems to be increasing. Ultimately they're no more harm than good, for the more they repeat themselves in this fashion the more likely they are to repeat themselves in what they can or cannot do. The easier it becomes to write (or rewrite) one particular type of story the less incentive there is to try to write something else, until they reach the point at which they have become so adept at writing (or rewriting) the same type of story that they simply haven't the skill to do anything else. Perhaps they just don't want to write anything else, because they know they have a market for their stuff and don't want to upset it. This, if so, might be halfway defensible if they evidenced some scruple for their readers: the cynicism of Roger Zelazny, for example, churning out his "Amber" potboilers until demand was sated and even he grew bored with them, or the contempt of Larry Niven who interviewed in Science Fiction Review 26 (1978) said that he conceived of his ideal reader as someone a lot like himself, 'except that he needs things explained to him', is simply inexcusable.

In fact, that the authors who write such series have loyal bands of readers who like their stuff is inexcusable anyway. The best, and the most memorable novels are and always have been those written at the frontiers of the audience's expectations; those which, dispensing with the baggage of the past and striving for some new insight from a new perspective, breathe new life into the body of the whole by forging new paths for others to follow and explore in their turn. Farmer's The Lovers, Ballard's The Atrocity Exhibition, Bester's Tiger! Tiger!, Abdo's Report On Probability A, Delany's stb-I, Moorcock's Glorp, J. T. McIntosh's Bigfoot: the early work of Asimov and Heinlein, have contributed more, have in the long run been more valuable than any number of sequels and series and trilogues. Such cannot point the way to progress, they can only rehash what has gone before, each succeeding repetition being merely a pallid imitation of its predecessor -- and where's the health and vigour in that?

For the reader, of course, the escape value of a series is high: the more of it there is then (in theory), the more detailed its background, the more complex its plot, the greater and more rounded its cast of characters, and the more the more the reader can lose himself in it. The same is naturally true of single long novels, and it was this sort of book -- most notably Heinlein's Stranger In A Strange Land and Herbert's Dune, not forgetting Tolkien's The Lord Of The Rings -- which crossed the genre boundary and made a wider audience more aware of SF's existence. And now that, post-Star Wars, the potential audience is even wider, we seem to be losing even more single large novels, marketed as escape route for both SF and non-SF readers. Brian W. Aldiss, Silverberg's Lord Valentine's Castle, Vinge's The Snow Queen -- all good blockbusting stuff, you might think. No, actually, as novels intended to expand the frontiers of SF they are anything but, enlarging it only in terms of its readership and not in terms of its compass of approaches and concepts. They are, to give them their aptest possible label, bestsellers.

The term as used these days doesn't mean that the book in question has sold or is selling many thousands of copies around the world but that it is, at least in that distinct type of book: one that appeals to the largest and most variegated possible audience. The novels of Arthur Hailey and Harold Robbins spring readily to mind as examples: books with huge, rambling plots in which twist is piled upon twist, with huge casts of rather stereotyped characters who undergo many shifts of personal allegiance and undertake many grafts for power over everyone else, with a wide and colourful range of expensive and sometimes entertaining diversions, with a hint or two of high level political intrigue and a whiff of three or vague and old-fashioned sex. Books designed not to challenge or subvert the reader's world-view but to reinforce it by allowing him to live a vicarious fantasy life of glamorous languor and transient thrills. (The title of a recent Susan Howatch novel, The Rich Are Different, just about says it all.) They have no genuine depth or insight, only a shallow illusion of them, and in consequence, although presumably intended for the long, long empathic read, can in practice be picked up and put down again at any time (or perhaps even read in reverse -- with some of them you probably never notice the difference).

But what in Heaven's name has this sort of mass-market fodder got to do with SF? If we really believe that SF has the ability to dramatize the inherent potentialities of any other form of fiction, then it can't afford the cop out of simply reinforcing its readers world-views: it can and indeed must confront them with the object of changing them, setting out to tear them down with all the power and passion it can muster, as Lord Valentine's Castle and The Snow Queen do but cop out? Stories of despised kings and despotic queens struggling to regain or retain their thrones are, bar their being set on other planets, no different from the jet set fantasies of Robbins and Howatch, and hence have nothing to do with challenge, confrontation and subversion.

This bestsellerism is the most recently emergent trend (the reason why I can't cite any other examples of the type, although certain of the series novels lambasted above possess much the same characteristics) but on present evidence it's a growing one. Its motivation seems to derive from a desire to reach the wider audience that is now known to exist, presumably in the hope that the audience for SF as a whole will thus be enlarged by the tempting in of a whole new generation of readers. So it's a misplaced hope, for the readers of such books will be interested in their SF trappings only as a fillip to other-ways jaded imaginations; give them anything more than the 'saintly wonderland' theme, and they'll recall in horror all the efforts of past masters, the readers tempted in by Star Wars have done, failing to make the transition from the ephemeral to the pure quill, because they couldn't take what the latter had to offer. One way or the other, they were the book. Provided, however, we do not allow such books to offer such challenges, we could be likely to enjoy (as do most bestseller authors) considerable short term success -- quantity has, after all, always been a depressingly more marketable commodity than quality -- but in the long term their books are likely, as with virtually all bestsellers, to fade completely from view, contributing nothing of any lasting value.

The desire to reach a wider audience probably motivates part of the 'fight' to reintegrate with the mainline, probably not all of it; literary, artistic and critical factors have more part to play than the mere commercial desire for increased sales. It's a trend that has been forcing slowly forwards for some time now, and often seems to have been supported more by those on the inside of the SF world, than those within -- Brian Aldiss and the appeal for an Arts Council grant to New Worlds, for instance, was backed by such respected establishment figures as Edmund Crispin, Margaret Laski, J B Priestley and Angus Wilson; and over the past few years we've had a number of SF novels from such mainstream writers as Kingsley Amis, Anthony Burgess, Len Deighton, Doris Lessing and Sheila Malcom (with many others, such as Margaret Drabble and John Fowles, also declaring their respect and admiration for the literature); and all of this has probably done more to 'rehabilitate' SF than anything else, like Alastair Cock and Priest, working from within -- probably because those working from without are operating from a position of automatic acceptance, 'subversive' elements in their own ranks that the literary community can ignore. If you don't believe me, look at what's been happening here, always harrassed by the die-hard fans; charge commonly levelled at them is that they are too ignorant of SF to do more than rehash old themes and concepts in a not particularly original manner -- a charge which reeks of exactly the same paranoid inverted snobbery I detested in "Gone Of The World" in Vector 99 and which, unless it can be materially substantiated, has to be dismissed out of hand.)
Which raises the obvious questions, do we really want such reintegration, and of vision we expect, the 'problems' to which I earlier referred, never mind its SF will lose its ability to dramatise and examine, with the intensity and depth ability to deal with the abstract concepts to which I also earlier referred, already. And if this impulse ia diffused or blunted then it is possible that declining into ever more uninventive pastiches of themselves (although, ns One might reasonably argue that, in attempting to reintegrate with the main­voiced by an audience accustomed to bestsellers: don't give me anything challeng­SF will result in the revitalisation of both, each drawing something from the The mainstream, too, suffers from the same sort of categorisation, with stories of character interplay and personal catastrophes having long ago assumed the ascendency over everything else. Much though I enjoy their work, I sometimes wonder what Beryl Bainbridge and Margaret Drabble can find to say about their 'types' of protagonists that hasn't been said a thousand times already by everyone else before them. It should thus be clear that the reintegrating of it with SF will result in the revitalisation of both, each drawing something from the other: SF receiving a necessary shot of social realism, a concern for character and a care for literary quality, and the mainstream receiving (although I have to exclude such as John Fowles and William Golding from these generalisations) been lacking for some time.

Or will it?

One might reasonably argue that, in attempting to reintegrate with the main­story of the building of L5 colonies or the distant interplanetary quests of dispossessed kings to regain their thrones, for this is merely to rework familiar genre material, and hence advances the 'fight' not one whit. The most fruitful route would appear to be by the writing of novels that in some way make use of the basic symbols and archetypes of the genre, reviving them into a pattern or configuration that will hold some meaning or appeal for everyone. The obvious example to cite in this instance is the great J G Ballard, who -- alone amongst those working from within the genre to tear down the 'fence' the mainstream -- has won through to critical acclaim, public acceptance and an audience all his own. One could also name as similar (though lesser) examples, Michael Moorcock and his "Jerry Cornelius" quartet, Christopher Priest's A Dream Of Wessex (and perhaps also his forthcoming The Affirma­tion), Brian Stableford's The Malacia Tapestry, Mervyn Vostry's, much if not all of his work, Tom Disch's On Wings Of Song, and perhaps Greg Benford's Timescape and Robert Silverberg's Dying Inside as well. In fact, this 'making use' of SF's basic symbols and archetypes is the only way in which the literature will ever have to make its way to these layers of society, and this is why the literature is evolving, it has to be something that will appeal to the literature. It may help to isolate fictions from the whole and its making over into a publishing category of its own that the works which fall into the first two of the trends detailed above. They have reached their pre-set boundaries, cannot or will not have turned in upon themselves, and the consequences are in consequence already well down the road to self-extinction. Quite apart from which, if we are to hold that SF is the only literature of our age, then we should not try to bring its mes­sages home to a wider audience, subverting the tropes and metaphors of the literature as much as it is a question of range and enhancement its compass of responsibility? Which more or less answers the second question: we want it to go all the way, all the time, and not due out of meeting any of the challenges and problems this poses.

Which statement automatically raises the question of how such reintegration can best be achieved. Well, certainly not by the writing of tediously unimaginative stories of alienation or the distanciation of the widening gap between the SF readership and what we now think of as the classics of world literature, novels that are read by all and acclaimed as great because of their universal appeal; and, of course, this is where the trend's hold on life actually is. I've called it a 'fight', and I really do mean it. Not so much a fight against the entrenched attitudes of the wider literary community, which no longer seem as entrenched as they once were, as against the growing force of the other three trends, which at the very least -- the bestsellerism of Bova and Vinge -- represent a genuinely smug and dispassionate view of the end of SF as a literature, a retreat to the ghetto of Del Rey and Scithers -- an outright hatred of anyone who dares to even think of disturbing, let alone expose as the ill-thought-out anti-intellectual nonsense it is, the current fashionable pejorative of the literature and its practitioners as "genre", their breasts. They are growing in force because in the final analysis they mean it. Not so much a fight against the entrenched attitudes of the wider literary community, which no longer seem as entrenched as they once were, as against the growing force of the other three trends, which at the very least -- the bestsellerism of Bova and Vinge -- represent a genuinely smug and dispassionate view of the end of SF as a literature, a retreat to the ghetto of Del Rey and Scithers -- an outright hatred of anyone who dares to even think of disturbing, let alone expose as the ill-thought-out anti-intellectual nonsense it is, the current fashionable pejorative of the literature and its practitioners as "genre", their breasts. They are growing in force because in the final analysis they have a better sales record than the fourth. The works which can be subsumed into them are safe, secure, soothing, undemanding, unchallenging... The reaction in every way -- and, that is, precisely where I refer back to what I said earlier, with the realisation that the state it is what better palliative can there be? Shallow bestsellers,

The answer to the first question is 'yes', of course. Genres, as genres, are inevitably doomed to stagnation if they do not attempt to break free of their self-imposed limitations. It is evident that this is just what is happening to the works which fall into the first two of the trends detailed above. They have reached their pre-set boundaries, cannot or will not have turned in upon themselves, and the consequences are in consequence already well down the road to self-extinction. Quite apart from which, if we are to hold that SF is the only literature of our age, then we should not try to bring its mes­sages home to a wider audience, subverting the tropes and metaphors of the literature as much as it is a question of range and enhancement its compass of responsibility? Which more or less answers the second question: we want it to go all the way, all the time, and not due out of meeting any of the challenges and problems this poses.
repetitive series, idiotic space operas, hack fantasy — drivel of the lowest order, yet drivel that is daily threatening to submerge the trend to reintegrate altogether: the only trend that is worth our attention and support.

To put it bluntly, therefore: if this goes on, clearly, there isn't much hope for SF as a viable, let alone interesting, literary 'form'. What we have to hope for is that the fourth, and final, trend manages to entrench itself in its position on the fringes of the genre, that it isn't swept away by the other three, and that it makes it through the eighties more or less intact: alive and kicking, and full of the creative purpose that the other three will spend the decade abnegating.

- on our own push to make sure it does survive... for these trends are the ones which will determine much of what is published in the coming years: broad underlying currents denoting different 'zones' of interest and influence, the first three perhaps shading over into each other at their edges and the fourth, right out on its own — very likely increasingly isolated from the body of the genre which gave birth to it, but the only one with any hope of restoring to it the potential and novelty that it so often claims to possess.

Even if only in the sense of the Old Chinese curse, we have some interesting times ahead of us.

YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE
Arnold Akien

Last week, being fed up with the silence of my sitting room, but not in the mood for music, I turned on my radio and sought a programme which had human conversation -- or a reasonable facsimile of conversation. What I got was one of those arty chat shows, in which the intelligentsia display themselves to an admiring Great British Public. I had intended to use this demonstration of ramshackle pretentiousness as a kind of sonic wallpaper -- the spoken word as muzak. Instead I listened enthralled; for the man who was speaking was one of those who -- and his readers. Much play was made of the eccentric — but oh so charming — habit fans of the genre had of assuming fancy dress and holding mock battles. So I held conventions for this literary subculture I so could respect, was it? No doubt you've guessed the author's name by now. No? Well, the information I've given is a bit sparsely. His name is J T Edson. No, it's not a pen name; at least, I don't think it is, though I can't be sure since I'd never heard of him before the radio programme. You see, J T Edson writes Westerns. He doesn't live in our ghetto, but in the one next door.

Anyone who doubts the relationship of the two fields of literature has only to recall the number of times SF has been called, with some justification, a literary version of 'the old Chinese curse': we have some interesting times ahead of us.

His complaints were very familiar. Not his precise argument, of course, but the heartfelt grievances he spoke of are familiar to us all. He spoke with a touching sincerity of his relegation, by mainstream literary critics, to a kind of 'literary ghetto' in which, apparently, few fantasy writers were content to dwell. As his conversation with the 'beautiful people' unfolded he spoke of writing as an art and a business. He, unlike many of his peers, is successful. His fantasies may have little literary value to some people, but they sell very well. He has sold a total of 108 novels to his contented publishers, and his readers have bought nearly nine million copies of those novels. Currently he has several popular series on the market; he likes to have characters from each series do guest appearances with each other sometimes -- it helps sales and links his work into a, if not a, at least saleable whole. And the way his work is received by the critics gets on his titts -- to use a literary expression. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The author's fellow pundits didn't seem terribly impressed by the literary merits of the genre he works in. In cultural superiority they made gentle fun of him -- and his readers. Much play was made of the eccentric -- but oh so charming -- habit fans of the genre had of assuming fancy dress and holding mock battles. So I held conventions for this literary subculture I so could respect, was it? No doubt you've guessed the author's name by now. No? Well, the information I've given is a bit sparsely. His name is J T Edson. No, it's not a pen name; at least, I don't think it is, though I can't be sure since I'd never heard of him before the radio programme. You see, J T Edson writes Westerns. He doesn't live in our ghetto, but in the one next door.

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Shaw also told his readers of the movie sales his writers were making. In the 1930s they were making quite a few. The Maltese Falcon, for instance, was filmed twice before the 1941 Humphrey Bogart version. The whole idea of the 'adventure SF' v. 'literary SF' argument of today. I wonder whether Shaw gave his writers some tips on 'futility' as Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine is apt to do nearly fifty years later. The argument in the 1930s, and before, is simply ignored today in the way the argument of the 'literary view' quite often ignore the fact that the two aspects of fiction can be successfully combined -- to the benefit of both. Everyone who comments on SF seems to be a member of one of two mutually opposed factions.

Even those commentators who would like to knock down the boundary walls of our so-called ghetto cling to old familiar terms -- like 'ghetto mentality' -- and so do those who maintain SF's image as a uniquely put-upon genre. These critics claim, correctly, that SF has the potential for general recognition, as being more than just the literature of BME and blasters, it must face the literary world as an adult, not as an adolescent with the typically adolescent fear of criticism. And yet these commentators hang on to the strange twin concepts that SF is a ghetto and that SF must raise its literary standards towards those of 'mainstream' literature with unshakable tenacity. We cling to these ideas as a man learning to swim clings to a float, afraid to let go lest he should drown. But if we genuinely wish to develop a theory of literary criticism that includes SF as an equal with other literary forms we must let go of all the preconceived notions we have -- and start to swim.

All right, so we are going to bravely go where no critic has gone before, are we? Then let's see what our experiences, every existing convention of literary criticism can tell us of our own images of how the literary world is formed, not as hard and fast standards, but as points for debate. I see literature as being a city much like Los Angeles -- having many suburbs, villages and small towns within its boundaries, but without any real 'city centre'. The suburbs often touch and it is hard to tell them apart at their edges, but each maintains its own identity. And 'mainstream'? It resembles Main Street, a road which winds through the city picking up the best representatives of the inhabitants of the suburbs and taking them... where? The future, perhaps, or call it posterity. It does sound prominent, but probably the best test of a story's worth is how well it fits in. And the stories that have, so far, stood out in time are a motley assortment. Action adventure rubs shoulders with period comedy, political satire with romance. The only thing they have in common is their excellence.

Our critical standard should ensure us an inking of which of the works in our field of special interest will stand that ultimate acid test of time. And it should help us gauge all SF against that ultimate level of achievement. In deciding which is why I am up to such a rigorous trawl. No one has, as far as I know, ever tried to draw maps of the universe of SF and books from other fields of literature and point them out where they are relevant. And in being fair to the book he is judging, the critic must be equally fair to his audience and tailor his comparisons to their likely experience. It probably impossible to do all this, but the effort should be interesting.

It could be said, though, that if such an effort were worth making it would have been made long ago. And if its merits were so great the effort would have succeeded. But the trouble is we SF fans are afraid to disturb the foundations of our little world. We are afraid we may lose our comfortable sense of uniqueness, we are afraid that if we surrender just one part of that sense of difference we will lose it all. What we have failed to realise is that in recoginising, even proclaiming, SF's connections with the whole of literature we have the opportunity of gaining a new and far more important unique position for the genre. That uniqueness lies in the manifold connections SF has with every aspect of literature. Alone among literary forms it has much in common with every other literary form. This is a unique and original form of proclamation. It may even be that in SF literature has been evolving a form capable of doing just this, a form capable of taking on aspects of every established literary form and breathing new life into them. It's a big claim. Maybe it isn't true, but until we put aside the old certainties and accept this infinitely more valuable uniqueness we won't find out.

STANDPOINT

PUNK SF
John A Hobson

At the November RSFA meeting (in Hounsdown) Chris Priest, who was guest speaker, brought up the old chestnut about the lack of an SF magazine in the UK. He believed that any serious attempt to launch a magazine needed an editor steeped in the established literary world, a heavy financial input of money to gamble on the idea, and some distribution through the courtesy of W H Smith. It's a familiar argument and one which, I suggest, totally misses the point; by looking at the problems facing a new magazine from a conventional and very conservative viewpoint one adopts a frame of mind that is totally outdated for SF. What we need is a radical approach to the problem of publishing a viable SF magazine.

Abandoning the past approach of trying to interest the big publisher is justified when one considers the past decade of SF magazine publication in the UK. If a publisher is interested in a magazine he will play safe; we will end up with another SF Monthly, 'name' authors and damn all else. A publisher has to be conservative otherwise jolly old W H Smith, self-appointed keepers of the nation's morals, will not allow the magazine to appear on their stands, and we will have new Mordla all over again. (Not that I am proposing that we should revive Mordla, which is about as relevant to 1981 as flower power and that other SF in California.) Having a knowledgeable editor means very little either, as no two SF fans will agree on what an author's 'knowledge' should contain. Is a man steeped in US SF less qualified to edit than a man who resides US SF as puerile? Witness George Hay's efforts with Pulsea, a sort of Brit Doktorin and about as interesting. Mr Hay has a working knowledge of SF, but was still not a good editor. Is it therefore surprising that Ad Astra has taken the easy way out and become acceptable to publishers, W H Smith et al simply because, by conventional methods, there is no alternative: compromise or be spurned.

We will now deviate slightly and look at the phenomenal decline of the record industry in the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past three years. Record companies reacted to a series of the past
What has this to do with SF you ask. Well, everything, because the publishing industry is in the position that the record industry was in 1975. Each publisher survives on a handful of best sellers, authors like Robbins, Hailey and Higgins, which support everything else. These and other such authors naturally demand million dollar advances before a word has been typed, so the publishers' return is minimal. That's in a market that keeps growing, but paperbacks have now suffered the slump that hits records. You can sell only so many glossy film tie-in prepackaged stories before a glut starts and people stop buying; it will be interesting to watch the publishers make the same mistakes as the record companies. A publishing company, this time, will try to avoid them. A publishing company that 'this big is successful' policy will collapse, just as the film industry has bowed with blockbuster flops like Raise The Titanic and Heaven's Gates. Therefore a prospective SF magazine should avoid the system and create its own market, own methods, own product, by itself.

How? Simple. Find out how many bookshops specialise in SF or have owners with an interest in SF, that's where you need to be. As other place than an SF bookshop would be acceptable, such as specialist record shops, boutiques, anywhere but WM Smith. Why limit yourself to one outlet? Private Eye has proved you don't need a big distributor, so why should we saddle ourselves with a dead weight? Money, of course, is a problem, but here one needs to look at the format of the magazine. Another one is out for this reason, but would a properly thought out paperback magazine, with the long shelf life that this entails, be the correct approach? Or would an A4 magazine with, say, a glossy cover, similar to Zig Zag, be the answer? There is no need to go to a big printer either; this is the age and layout only takes imagination.

Which of course brings us to content. If you want a mass audience then you need bland crap that will offend no-one, hygienic SF of the type served up in the US with SF, chances that are now avoided by writers because only four hundred page scientific romances are expected. But the converse held by the less talented of the 'New Wave', that science fiction should contain no ideas at all, is not therefore automatically correct. William Bains

SCIENTIFACTIO N

William Bains

Science fiction, we are told with repetition worthy of Minitrue, is the literature of ideas. We are not told so much now, possibly because it is true, but the converse held by the less talented of the 'New Wave', that science fiction is just ideas at all, is not therefore automatically correct. In the fight for a literary SF I would like to cast a nostalgic glance at the rosny glow of Gernsback and Campbell burning at the stake, and ponder whether Sensawnda and similar diseases have any place in the SF we would like to read.

Certain critics will recall, demanding careful plotting, in-depth characterisation, realistic backgrounds, and their requests are valid. They can go read War And Peace. Me, I like Note In God's Eye, even if its characters are paradoxically wooden and cardboard, and if the resolution is based solely on Earth's (USA's) ability to bomb hell out of Mote Prime (everyone else). The Birdmen and the tin Doc Smithsonian spaceships they travel in are insignificent beside the Moties themselves, not individually where they display all the charm of the Space Odyssey crew, but as a species, a concept. As a vision of Man Future, if you will. To anyone scientifically aware the problem of applying evolution theory to intelligent species, to Man, is at least of passing interest and here Niven and Pournelle suggest an answer based not on Childhood's End or time-travel, that in itself is fascinating, but to construct the culture such a species might have, and answer the Fermi paradox of how come they are not here if they exist at all. Does Man evolve from or to Motie? Did the reviewer of WOOT in Vector even think about it? The characters could be glass sheet for all I care, invisible to the naked eye: the book has intrinsic ideas in it and explicitly conveys.

Similarly Tau Zero, recipient of unkind comments in a recent BSFA rag. Anderson doesn't borrow the physics as "EMK" and go on to Dickensian character analysis. He writes the whole book around the Lorentz transformation. Not quite as original as Mote (a German pre-empted him in 1905), but how much more original than, say, World Out Of Time where Smak-like, Niven takes an unimaginative look a hundred years in the future and calls what he sees 'three million AD'. WOOT nearly bored me to narncolepsy. Tau Zero and Mote still steam from the eyetracks. Yet to the 'literary' critic all three are of a type: 'Characters cardboard... plot unbelievable... writing styleless and banal... rubbish... rubbish...'

Is he wrong? On traditional grounds, no. But SF employs another area of judgement (dimension, to stick to the hard SF terminology), the sense of wonder "It's not science, it's science fiction. No wonder we write science fiction!" (To the 'literary' critic...)

As an amateur SF artist I have noticed, with some interest, that this particular branch of SF is held to be in a sorry state of affairs, referred to as 'bland SF art', 'flashy consumer packaging', and the like. I am not about to argue with those points of view as I fear SF art does indeed fall far short of its potential. But I see no reason why this should remain the case. For one thing I believe it is high time that this art form experienced its own 'New Wave', where artists should be prepared to experiment with their chosen field of endeavour. As you can see, I was inspired to write by Pete Lyon's letter in Vector 99.

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Of course, it is easy to talk of experiments in SF art, but this raises three immediate questions.

SCIENCE FICTION ART

RG Wilkinson

As an amateur SF artist I have noticed, with some interest, that this particular branch of SF is held to be in a sorry state of affairs, referred to as 'bland SF art', 'flashy consumer packaging', and the like. I am not about to argue with those points of view as I fear SF art does indeed fall far short of its potential. But I see no reason why this should remain the case. For one thing I believe it is high time that this art form experienced its own 'New Wave', where artists should be prepared to experiment with their chosen field of endeavour. As you can see, I was inspired to write by Pete Lyon's letter in Vector 99.
(i) Who will carry out these experiments?
(ii) What will be the nature of these experiments?
(iii) How will the results be distributed?

The answer to the first question should ideally be 'all artists', but, as Pete Lyon pointed out, it is not quite as easy as that. Professional artists, although in a more prominent position than the rest of us, are also more restricted. They have a living to make with their work and it is the publishers who pay the wages. Experimental artwork is all very well, but what publisher will risk using it on a book cover when he already has a perfectly functional system to hand?

This leaves us with the amateur as the likeliest candidate. He or she is not so restricted in choice of subject or medium. In fact the only limitations that immediately spring to mind are imagination and ability. It is likely that anyone who paints or draws SF has a fairly functional imagination to start with.

As for ability — well, as long as the artist puts his message across does it really matter if, for instance, the perspective is slightly out, the paltl too dull, or the humans tend to look like matchsticks? After all, practice does make perfect, as the saying goes. Besides, the professional of tomorrow is probably among the amateurs of today.

If today's amateurs are to lead a 'New Wave' in SF art then in what direction should they aim? This, our second question, does not have a simple answer, if it has one at all. However, an art teacher once told me that a good work of art should carry a message, whether it be a feeling or an idea. This does sound slightly maudlin, that famous cliche, 'SF is a literature of ideas', doesn't it? So why not apply it to the field of SF art? In fact, much that is said about SF as literature can also be applied to SF as a visual art form. For example, an author can set a novel around a subject on which he has strong feelings, and so be an artist. A story can be a strong warning of future dangers — so can a picture. If an artist wants to paint pictures of spaceships and space wars then he should do so, but why not add a little something to point out the needless horror of war, or the de-personalisation of war to the machine versus machine level.

There is no reason why SF art cannot become a truly respected artform in its own right, but to achieve recognition it must be on general view somewhere. This brings me, rather conveniently, to my third question, how will the results be distributed?

I don't doubt that many SF artists are producing excellent work at the moment, but with lack of suitable outlets how can fandom and the general public be made aware of it. Vector, Matrix and the various fanzines do offer hope, but there is a limitation on the size of the artform, and, of course, the artwork must be in black and white and easily reproducible. This does cause a problem for amateurs like myself who are more at home with brush and paint than pen and ink, but any artist worth his salt should attempt to master new media.

However, there is an outlet that may prove useful — the local art gallery or centre. These establishments sometimes run exhibitions of local art which are specifically aimed at the enthusiastic amateur. These exhibitions are normally intended to cover as wide a field as possible and SF comes easily within the limits. More important than the chance this offers for the SF artist to display his work and compare it with other fields of art.

Alternatively the artist could always join an SF group, if he is not already a member of one, and show his work to fellow members. At least this would to prove to fandom that SF art has a great deal of potential.

As you can see, this article is not intended to defend my chosen field, but is an attempt to give would-be artists a sense of direction and thereby to improve a situation which many find intolerable.

Saving the Tale

David Wingrove

...the sense of wonder. That is our sixth sense. And it is the natural religious sense. Somebody says that mystery is nothing, because mystery is something you don't know, and what you don't know is nothing to you. But there is more than one way of knowing.

Even the real scientist works in the sense of wonder. The pity is, when he comes out of his laboratory he puts aside his wonder along with his apparatus, and tries to make it all perfectly didactic. Science in its true condition of wonder is as religious as any religion. But didactic science is as dead and boring as dogmatic religion. Both are wonderless and productive of boredom, endless boredom. (1)

What is the element that distinguishes science fiction from other literary forms? A story is a single, clear distinguishing trait exist, or is the distinction a matter of several vague, unconfused and irrational elements glimpsed tangentially and recognised as general? Such questions of definition, familiar to anyone who has read SF thoroughly, thoughtfully and critically, are pertinent here only in so far as they allow us to establish a good reason (or otherwise) for treating science fiction as a special case when we come to analyse it critically, separate from the greater, encompassing 'world' of literature. But, as any modern philosopher would willingly and exhaustively tell you, definitions are not labels, but flexible, multivariant concepts. We are always, it seems, working in the realm of the general and not the single. Nonetheless, a definition of sorts is useful at this stage, if only as a starting point, and Aldiss's tentative offering at the beginning of Billion Year Spree is as good as any and better than most.

Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic, or post-Gothic mould. (2)

We can see, immediately, the strengths and weaknesses of such a definition (as, indeed, can Aldiss), and recognise that the second half of the definition is of more specific weight than the first. Is it, then, a question of form rather than content? The first half of this definition, after all, seems to cast too wide a net, and draws in every piece of great literary art existent. But isn't the second part too narrow? Doesn't the gothic form itself limit what we can clearly recognise (even if we cannot with any certainty say how we recognise it) as SF? It would seem so. And therefore the truth would seem to lie somewhere between the two. Between the idea and the form.

All sudden, gorgons hiss, and dragons glare,
And ten- horned fiends and giants rush to war.
Bell rings, Heaven descends, and dance to earth:
Gods, gods, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,
A fire, a jil, a battle, and a bell,
Till one wide conflagration swallows all.
This element of 'relevance' might be given the name 'perspective', and as such has little knowledge of the undeniably wider field of general literature; or because the critic has a sound academic grounding entered upon without a proper perspective? How much of it is, in Leavis's terms, extensive work undertaken within the genre. The former set of critics manifest

There is no externa], it provokes another question. Just how much criticism of science fiction is

Without establishing that, how can we establish a case for an independent criti­

We know little about scientifiction (nor cared greatly for Wells in his SF guise) and was talking of the principle behind all this today. The nature of the problem begins to be apparent. What is the element that distinguishes science fiction from other literary forms? Without establishing that, how can we establish a case for an independent critical theory for the genre? It is not, it seems, in an extensive use of metaphor.

At this stage we must focus in upon specifics of the criticism produced both 'within' the genre and 'without', and to this end I shall concentrate upon six readily available pieces of criticism, three from each 'camp'. Perhaps by looking at them in close up, we come to appreciate the notions of emphatic and perspectival the answer to our question might be revealed. Perhaps this is our only means of deriving 'a method of SF criticism that treats SF as part of the wider world of literature' (4). One of the discoveries of the literature is that it is all empirical and subjective.

There is no external, objective set of 'rights' and 'wrongs'; but there do seem, to be certain approaches which have more to commend themselves than others. As even Mr Leavis will readily admit:

I don't think that any critic who understands his job there are any 'unique literary values' or any 'realm of the exclusively aesthetic'. But there is, for a critic, a problem of relevance: it is, in fact, his ability to be relevant in his judgements and commentaries that makes him a critic, if he deserves the name. And the ability to be relevant, where works of literary art are concerned, is not a mere matter of good sense; it implies an understanding of the resources of language, the nature of conventions and the possibilities of organisation such as can come only from much intensive literary experience accompanied by the habit of analysis. In this sense it certainly implies a specifically developed sensibility. (5)

This element of 'relevance' might be given the name 'perspective', and as such it provokes another question. Just how much criticism of science fiction is entered upon without a proper perspective? How much of it is, in Leavis's terms, 'literary'? I mean, for two reasons: the critic has little knowledge of the undeniably wider field of general literature; or because the critic has a sound academic grounding without knowing much of the extensive work undertaken within the genre. The former set of critics manifest themselves in society journals, and specifically science fiction-oriented magazines and fanzines, the latter in Sunday papers and academic treatises from Professors of Creative Writing (usually from the States, and Britain are generally spared the blight of 'creative writing' courses). Perspectival is what we apparently need:

You then whose judgement the right course would steer,

Know well each Ancient's proper character:

His fable, subject, scope in every page

Religion, country, genius of his age:

Without all these at once before your eyes,

Cavil you may, but never criticize. (6)

Pope's An Essay On Criticism, written two hundred and seventy years ago, is the first of the six pieces I want to deal with here. It is pertinent because we have not considered this problem, perhaps in any reason at all. For the genre is no longer possible — and that we now have two distinct and differ­

its consequences: that science fiction up to the mid-sixties was similar in its

As it was fifteen years ago because in many respects the genre has

The forests dance, the rivers upward rise.

Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies;

And other planets circle other suns.

Another Cynthia her new journey runs,

Thence a new world to Nature's laws unknown,

Lo! one vast egg produces human race. (3)

Another of the discoveries of the literature is that it is all empirical and subjective.

Pope's is one of the first succinct statements on literary criticism in modern times. The quotation above indicates something of Pope's view that each work must not only be dealt with in its own right, but also in the light of what is happening in society journals, and specifically science fiction-oriented magazines and fanzines, the latter in Sunday papers and academic treatises from Professors of Creative Writing (usually from the States, and Britain are generally spared the blight of 'creative writing' courses). Perspectival is what we apparently need:

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our problems of definition, if you accept my argument re consciousness in the genre, began with science fiction as an 'addiction' contracted, rather like acne, in one's adolescence, but then proceeded to argue why it nonetheless had value much as Lawrence Ferlinghetti in his book "The Good Man Went to Heaven" expressed Melville and Hawthorne's fear that by their status as children's literature and restate them as a different form of adult literature, it is hard to hear a new voice, as hard as it is to listen to an unknown language. We just don't listen. There is a new voice in the old American classics. The world has declined to hear it, and has babble about children's stories. (8)

If we substitute 'science fiction' for 'the old American classics' we have Amis's critical stance in 1961. But such a stance, whilst the correct one to adopt, is no longer so easy to take. Can we any longer recognise SF as a distinct and new voice? Hasn't it now merged into the soft murmur of older, more familiar voices? What was once more vivid, has become more vague, more difficult to evaluate, in extending itself. We could still blinker ourselves and deal with a small section of science fiction -- which that now attracts the labels 'traditional' or 'classic' science fiction -- and pretend that that is all of science fiction. But if we choose to do this, we are in danger of omitting the majority of writers who would readily admit to the science fiction label, but who would not wish to be confined by the old limitations -- Le Guin, Compton, Aldiss, Crowley, Bishop, Disch, Roberts, Lem and Delany. Indeed, turning to the last of these writers, perhaps we might look at his essays 'Critical Methods/Speculative Fiction' as the second of our examples.

As any other area of art is judged by its finest examples, and not by the oceans of mediocrity that these high points rise above, this is the way SF must be judged. (9)

Again this is an approach that has much to commend itself, and we are inclined to agree. But can we readily judge science fiction by its finest examples? Surely the most immediate, the most evident factor about SF's finest examples is that they transcend those old limitations and become autogenera. They become something more than, something other than science fiction. The close-mindedness of the failure to use the imagination so charmed with the material science fiction -- the failure to create Lawrence's 'sense of wonder' -- is really the true science fiction. It is the 'sci-fi' we see in the cinema and on television. It is the science fiction rack in W H Smith's (with a rare few exceptions of the covers are in error) because of the covers on the books). It is the popular image foisted upon the millions, of robots, robots, clones, monster-aliens and fantastic futures. And this, I insist, is the true science fiction, from which all that is of value in the genre escapes in transcending that close-minded literalism. Let us call upon Delany again,

It is just this basic concern with thingness that makes me insist that the initial impulse behind SF, despite the primitve and vulgar verbal trappings, was closer to the impulse behind poetry than it was to the impulse behind ordinary fiction. (10)

This is a frequently heard argument from advocates of the value of science fiction. I'll repeat it in his article and insist that any singular reading of the SF genre undervalues its worth. This seems fine. But what of his thingness -- how does that manifest itself in the genre other than as literalism? I'll readily admit a rich use of metaphor in the better writers, but the 'wonder' of Rimbaud -- things if ever there were the genuine sense of wonder; it is only a simple, materialistic response to 'bigness. It is the respect we show to a millionaire for amassing so much wealth so quickly. It is the respect we show Hitler for taking France in five weeks. It is an inherently traditional science fiction genre thrives upon. This is not poetry at all, unless you relate it to the worst excesses of jingoism.

Delany is wrong, in as much as he is referring to the finest examples of science fiction and poetry, for in the former this traditional approach is transcended. Lawrence's writing of Melville and Hawthorne the he would be much nearer the mark, but when he draws this similarity and restates his case upon thingness, then he is simply lying in the deep mud at the bottom of his oceans of mediocrity. The finest examples of the genre surely don't rely only upon thingness. They are (and it is no surprise that one of the very finest of these rare works is Le Guin's novel) *dispossessed*, and their connection to poetry -- if it exists resides in a rich and imaginative use of metaphor (read Cooper or Le Guin and this becomes immediately apparent). Indeed, it would be worthwhile, at this stage of our discussion to refer to Le Guin and her article "Science Fiction and Mrs Brown" for a different perspective from within the modern genre -- something to counterbalance Delany's insistence upon thingness:

What good are all the objects in the universe, if there is no subject? It isn't that mankind is all that important. I don't think that Man is the measure of all things, or even of very many things. I don't think Man is the end of all evolution, certainly not. He is no god, he is not the thing. What are we, who are we, and where we are going, I do not know, nor do I believe anybody who says he knows, except, possibly, Beethoven, in the last movement of the last symphony. All I know is that we are here, and that we are aware of the fact, and that it behoves us to be aware -- to pay heed. For we are not objects. That is essential. We are subjects, and whoever amongst us treats us as objects is acting inhumanely, wrongly, against nature. (11)

In her essay Le Guin asks not only whether a science fiction writer can produce a novel -- having at its core a genuine 'secondary creation', a character -- but also whether it is desirable. Her answer is a resounding 'yes' on both counts, and she wonders whether in describing the novel she would like to see is she not once again transcending a genre and talking of what any literary art form strives for: stressing once again that first part of Alid's definition of science fiction:

The writers' interest is no longer really in the gadget, or the size of the universe, or the laws of robotics, or the destiny of social classes, or anything describable in quantitative, or mechanical, or objective terms. They are interested in what things do, or in how things are. Their subject is the subject, that which cannot be other than subject: ourselves. Human beings. (12)

But this subject becomes something that lies outside of the traditional concerns of science fiction. Le Guin in her essay -- as much as Delany -- dismisses the Utopian/Lyotard role of SF, underrates SF's value as a text book for sociologists and condemns its literalism. But in doing all of this -- in stressing the thing being at the centre of all -- she is positing an element insufficient to science fiction and produced solely by it, to that 'mystery' which Lawrence saw as consonant to all genuine creative activity. Yet there is another aspect of science fiction which Le Guin mentions only cursorily and disparagingly, as if she had forgotten that it were not simple fiction: it is that important part of Alid's definition which reads 'in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science)'. One thing Delany is careful to do in his essay is to note the fascinating nature of Man's 'truths' and to describe how they have powerfully intruded upon our world -- the belief in human nature and thus eternal truths at the bottom of all. Somewhere in between trips Lawrence, our fourth example, with his essay, 'Spirit Of Place' with a different kind of 'truth:

Art-speech is the only truth. An artist is usually a damned liar, but his art, if it be art, will tell you the truth of his day. And that is all that matters. Awaet with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day, and the marvellous Plato of yesterday is chiefly born today. (13)
And if there is a truth of the day, then that suggests also a form of art that will be just too that truth; one that would reflect the nature of that day's society best. Thus the polite and mannered Augustan literature of the age of Queen Ann and Alexander Pope, thus the wild flux and assertion of the individual and the nation of the Romantics in the age of the Industrial Revolution, thus the mass movement in the early years of the present century in the name of relativist and the existential abyss. What then would suit an age of high Technology that both praised and queried the results of that Technological drive? What would suit an age facing the Apocalypse? What suit an age that parses the past? And where in the future? And what will science fiction need in both the art-speech of our day we would seem, naturally, to seek its most perfect form in science fiction. Hence Doris Lessing's recent excursions; hence the interest of Golding, Fowles, Burgess in SF. It would seem that the very nature of the metaphors science fiction utilises are the things which make it a special case, but also that they are unimportant in themselves: their importance lies in that they allow us to focus upon the truth of the age; upon the specific nature of the human condition as it exists here and now. Thus Le Guin is partially correct when she says,

...when science fiction uses its limitless range of symbol and metaphor novelistically, with the subject at the centre, it can show us who we are, and where we are, and what choices face us, with unsurpassed clarity, and with a great and troubling beauty. (14)

Where I feel she is wrong is that it is not a 'limitless' range, but a quite specific range it ceases to become 'relevant' power-fantasy, wish-fulfillment and other forms of simple escapism. It seems that the critic's then, as Leavis noted, is to recognise the 'relevance', and thus to recognise and identify for us the 'art-speech' of our time, wherein lies the truth of our age.

We begin, last, to glimpse an area in which science fiction is distinct from the general run of literature, yet there is the irony that we recognize this distinction itself is only fair that we should also assert that science fiction is the literature of the age, and that we term the 'mainstream' is in fact a tributary, a cul-de-sac which fails to recognize the social movements of contemporary society. In doing so we would not necessarily be setting up a distinct form of literary criticism, for science fiction, but simply creating the circumstances in which the 'new voice' of the genre could be recognised as the voice of modern literature. To any literary critic outside of the genre this would appear to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. (27)

In Brian Aldiss's essay "Science Fiction As Science Fiction", he proposes that SF is:

...the ideal negotiator between the two hemispheres of the brain, the rational cognitive -- i.e. scientific -- left, and the intuitive -- i.e. literary artistic -- right; so its proper function is to cleave closely neither to science nor literature. (16)

As Aldiss points out, the very term 'science fiction' illustrates the straddling of these two hemispheres, the unification of two different parts of the personality. Science fiction is therefore, by this definition, centrally concerned with Man and his inner division, and not with simple thingsness. Aldiss is perhaps closest to Pope in his demand for a balance between head and heart (intellect and emotion) which avoids excess but yet recognises the two extremes of Man's nature; he, like Le Guin, also echoes Pope's words that the proper subject of Man's study is Man. This must, I feel, be borne in mind when criticising work produced within the genre. It is not enough to focus upon the ideative content, for this is to emphasise the dominance of the head, of the left hemisphere. Neither is it right to demand that character be all in science fiction, because once again we are creating an imbalance, this time for the heart, for the right hemisphere. Aldiss's article is valuable in that it once again illuminates that area which the critic of science fiction ought to focus upon, and lay emphasis upon, in his critical writings -- that bridge of imagination straddling head and heart and uniting the intellectual and intuitive faculties. That bridge is nothing more than the 'sense of wonder' we began with: the vital, creative principle itself. And as we have seen, such a principle is not confined to science fiction alone, but relates to all truly creative activities. We must use general standards of criticism. When Aldiss says, 'SF is a Sense of Wonder' (16) and claims this to be the most durable definition for the fans of science fiction, he is adding nothing that is genuinely useful, but when he states later on in the essay,

So one returns to SF as a principle, as imagination, rather than as subject. (17)

and talks of it transcending itself, he is recognising that there is this other 'thing of value', this new, as-yet-unnamed genre emerging from within science fiction -- a genre of balance, of imagination, of true creative vitality: 'sixth sense' as Aldiss perhaps might call it. And he also recognises that most true SF is unimaginative in saying of its writers,

In rebelling against the mundane, they too frequently use the weapons of the mundane. (18)

So what have we? From Aldiss we glimpse that what the SF critic must be emphasizing in any work is how successfully it achieves this 'balance' between idea and emotion by use of the imaginative faculty. And we shall be condemning books for a failure to achieve such a balance. Does this seem too definite an aim? Should criticism even profess an aim?

Criticism...must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste. (19)

We might well query the second part of this -- bearing in mind the fluctuating nature of taste and truth -- yet if we substitute 'imbalance' for 'taste' in Eliot's assertion we come close to a genuine critical standard: one that is fitting to the 'art-speech' of our time. Yet even in setting up a standard of 'interpretation', Eliot in 1923 was conscious of the problem of subjectivity in the critic:

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It is difficult to confirm the 'interpretation' by external evidence. To anyone who is skilled in this level there will be evidence enough. But who is to prove his own skill? And for every success in this type of writing there are thousands of impostors. Instead of an intuitive, unsupported element in 'interpretation' to prevent it from becoming simple dissection. Eliot puts it well:

Comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place. (21)

The critic, as well as the writer of fiction, must ultimately be a creative writer (here I run contrary to Eliot) if he is to accurately capture the 'sense of wonder' inherent in the fiction. An uncreative, functional critic will never see it; he will see only the factual 'lies' (see Lawrence, quote (12)) and so long as the structure is unbalanced, such a person has no business being a critic, and I make no distinctions here between science fiction and the wider field of literature.

In this article I have given vague glimpses -- vague because the things glimpsed are vague -- of the potential differences embroiled in a small proportion of the work emanating from the general mass of true science fiction. It is this small minority of accomplished, imaginative works that the genre's critics -- by necessity versed in both the nature of the true, unimaginative, and literal science fiction, and the nature of the true creative vitality behind all great works of literary art -- must deal. It seems to me that they must deal with the vital nature of the genre and not its dead processes. And in doing so they must bear in mind the widest perspectives of art, the aforementioned need for balance, and the particular element of 'art-speech'. And there is one further thing the critic has to do. Again it is a general rule, and again there is a far better writer than I who has expressed it succinctly. I leave it therefore to Lawrence to have the last word, as he had the first:

True art is a sort of subterfuge. But thank God for it, we can see through the subterfuge if we choose. Art has two great functions. First, it provides an emotional experience. And then, if we have the courage of our own feelings, it becomes a mine of practical truth. We have had the feelings at man's age. But we have never dared to dig the actual truth out of them to the truth that concerns us, whether it concerns our grandchildren or not. The artist usually sets out or used to to present a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals: the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it. (22)

NOTES

(1) "Voyage in a Man's Life" by D H Lawrence, October 1228 reprinted in A Selection From Phoenix, Penguin Books, 1971 (p.20)
(2) "The Origins Of The Species" by Brian W Aldiss in Billion Year Speep, Weidenfield & Nicolson, Corbi Books, 1973 (p.8)
(3) "The Duncad" (Book III, pages 235-248) by Alexander Pope, 1743 version.
(5) "Johnson And Augustanism" by F R Leavis, From The Common Pursuit, Peregrine Books, 1952 (p.114).
(6) An Essay On Criticism by Alexander Pope, 1711 (lines 118-123).
(7) Ibid. (lines 233-238).
(8) "The Spirit Of Place" by D H Lawrence, in Studies In Classic American Literature (1923), Penguin edition (p.7).
(10) Ibid. (pp.125-126).
(12) Ibid. (p.32).
(13) "The Spirit Of Place" Op. Cit. (p.8).
(14) "Science Fiction And Mrs Brown" Op. Cit. (pp.33).
(15) "Change: The Break With Tradition" by Brian W Aldiss, in Science Fiction As Science Fiction, Brains Head, 1978 (pp.1-2).
(16) Ibid. (p.43).
(17) Ibid. (p.35).
(18) Ibid. (p.37).
(19) "The Function Of Criticism" by T S Eliot (1923) in Selected Prose Of T S Eliot, Faber & Faber, 1975 (p.69).
(20) Ibid. (p.75).
(21) Ibid. (p.79).
(22) "The Spirit Of Place" Op. Cit. (p.8).

EDITORIAL (continued from p.5)

And now I am in a position to answer Chris Priest's question about 'types' of books (see 'Letters' this issue): "Is The Left Hand Of Darkness the same 'type' of book as Star Smasher Of The Galaxy Rangers?" The answer is "no". The former is a dramatic novel, the latter a (comic) novel of action. Overall, we have a basis for comparison of books -- of fiction books -- which is not dependent on their genre, but rather on their structure. And I am keeping David Petten happy, so far, by staying with traditional literary virtues.

I still haven't shown how to make the comparisons, but because of the letters I received after Vector 100 I felt it more important to discuss types of novel this time. Without an appreciation of types of novels it is obviously impossible to make proper comparisons of them. The structure of a novel is formed by the relationship between plot and character. The quality of a novel is based on the quality of its plot and characters, and also on its use of language, style and -- dare I say it? -- ideas. More next time.

NEXT ISSUE
ARTICLES -- by people who write articles.
REVIEWS -- by lots of reviewers, including a number that were ready for this issue, but for which there just wasn't room.
STANDPOINTS -- if anyone writes any and sends them to me.
LETTERS -- from hordes of you, surely.
EDITORIALS -- dozens of them, a whole issue full of editorials, all mine.
COVERS -- two, one at each end.

I'd be an idiot to risk competing with Duety's teats.

28
"It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive." It was fascinating to imagine what Ian Watson and Michael Bishop might produce between them: could Bishop's warmly living characters and Watson's metaphysical world simply be more convincingly arbitrary notion it is? Might Watson's imaginative strengths combine with Bishop's emotional drive and imagery to produce a truly "megalomania" of the science fiction genre? (to quote the blurb) Well... it might yet happen, but for the present we have Under Heaven's Bridge. It's a slim book, and a relatively slight one; once or twice it had me expecting an impressive, climactic bang, but somehow it never quite reached critical mass.

What defines the book? For a reader familiar with both authors' other work, the very name of familiarity doesn't help here, after all. are Bishop's aliens from A Little Knowledge and parts of Catacomb Years, familiar down to the last glass eyeball and tatter of loose flesh. Here too is a dollop of re-reconstituted Watmonogeneque metaphor (he said, sticking his neck out), the expansion of which occupies the climax scene, and which is as customary gives the ultimate answer to life, the universe and everything as, approximately, a lesson. I exaggerate: this part is really rather interesting, with a cybernetic religion which deduces an external Programme for the universe, and which the heroine arbitrarily refuses to accept because her Oriental nature rebels against a god external to the alien Kybers... Yes, this is the sort of stuff which would make a damned good short story in the Borges or for that matter the Watson manner.

Which brings us to the key phrase: a short story. This book, thin as it is, feels as if it would be happier as a long short or a novelette. One can hear the creaky machinery of delay, of authors playing for time... for example, the sun Dextro is going to go nova, and...

"The big man hunched his shoulders and nodded at the vibrant, falling sun. "Provided Dextro doesn't..."

"Doesn't what?" Skikiller prodded him.

"Captain Hsi wants to talk to me," Craig said...

- and the revolution gets pushed back fifteen pages (think of it as 10% of the book). Similarly, the aliens emasculate the plot to reveal their secrets until Chapter 16, and the Earth expedition spends the interim arguing, making love and lecturing each other on what they intuit about the aliens: 'The Kybers may have incorporated extrasensory data - facts, if you like - into their cellular physiology. Perhaps it is the biologically agency of the transfer... etc. Most of the book's pacing problem seems attributable to the authors' efforts to insert quantities of background material in digestible form.

There's a whole lot of intuiting in this area: one character intuit that the cyborgish Kybers are no machines, and anti-life, and generally despise another intuits that they have great secrets to tell, and hands down much pronouncements as, 'Their sleep is literally death, and their dreams are profound but inaccessible kybrotouches,' (a jolly good intuition about what on the face of it is but an extreme case of hibernation) or, 'Their lateral pupils are their death-eyes. Thanatoscopes, call them.' Instruments for perceiving life-in-death and death-in-life. Personally I cannot intuit why one should have external, physical organs to perceive the metaphorical world, but practically all the intuitions in the book prove to be correct... well, it's a convenient way of introducing far-out concepts, though not wholly worthy of these particular authors. Nor, from Bishop and Watson, would I have expected the gossamerwhere the expedition arrives is just before target planet's once-every-few-millennia orbital transfer between the suns of Dextro and Laveo, which itself happens just before Dextro goes nova: gosh! wow!

In due course the book winds down. One character travels spiritually towards the Kyber 'god', never to return the expedition leaves with ample safety margin, taking just six of the Kybers; the others stay home and may or may not have escaped the holocaust thanks to their pull with the Cosmic Programme; apparently they're also moving into a new evolutionary phase; it is intimated that the six on Earth will not emerge from their current 'death'; they do not, at least not before the end of the book a few pages and decades later; the closing scene artfully (a little too artfully) comes full circle to an early and recurring image of a Japanese temple of gilded statues; the now-aged heroine confronts a possibly dead Kyber currently on display there (in a temple? really?) and finds in its immobility the promise that it will 'wake up some day. This sort of summary can't really do justice to a book; you'll have to take my word for it that there's a sort of emotional rightness about most of this, but at the same time a disappointing number of intellectual loose ends.

The writing is pretty good, with some evocative descriptions of the icy planet (for example, and of the Kybers in their windy, roiling, roiling moments, as when the heroine makes love to the man who's obsessed with (and later succeeds to) the Kybers, and for an instant she feels him as a machine, his flesh warm metal... Also, a few hoary phrases do creep in ('Humanity was heading out to the last place it could go!') and likewise some, like the thrusting in, infuriates, dourishes.

And if the word 'grayson' is what I think it is, one of the authors must use a funny dictionary. That such routine colloquial stand out as bielashas is itself something of a tribute to the writing. Also there are signs of Trying Too Hard To Be Poetry: 'She felt her heart stutter in her breast like a great scarlet butterfly in a high wind.' Ugh.

In summary... an intellectually provocative book, even if it only provokes you to question the paratextual deflation implied by certain updatings, etc.; an interesting and readable book, but one which never quite seems to jell. In particular, the emotional conflicts and the intellectual exposition don't mirror and support one another as we'd hope. The character could be arguing about any old situation; the expositions could be made to any old characters. Even the heroine's key rejection of the machine deity comes over as a suddenly-adopted pose rather than an inevitable result of her beliefs. Deeper resonances and echoes seem to be lacking, such contrived neatness as the reiterated gilded-statue image doesn't really satisfy. This is the sort of criticism which would be worthless if directed at, say, another Larry Niven space opera; Watson and Bishop have set their sights a bit higher and demand to be judged by higher standards, and I'm afraid they ultimately fail. It may be that their very different approaches to writing all manner of whimsy, whimsy, touchiness. There are telling, just perhaps, this will be proved false when we see another book by this "promising new author".

My darling keeps her feelings out of her face, mostly, but those pretty pink epigons are barometers of her morals.

Her face remained calm but the light went out - and her nipples went down.
John Sladek -- RODERICK (Granada, 348pp, £6.95)
Reviewed by Ian Watson

Roderick is a young robot, initially no more than an erasable computer program at the third-rate University of Minnesota. The U of M has been given a grant to secretly develop artificial intelligence by a crooked employee of NASA, who is in fact the head of that operation. But this grant provides only a part of the resources to support the private fleet of vintage aircraft; and he chose the U of M because he knew for sure that they couldn't possibly come up with anything. But despite his skillful laundering of NASA's auditing computer, the dire truth comes out and the project at Minnesota is scuttled on the head. Thus young Roderick (for genius is an in the unlikeliest of places, midway between courses on Contemp Humanities and projects on telepathy in pigeons) is thrust out into the uncomprehending and incomprehensible world, ensnared in something like a trundling toy tank to provide a challenge, and just as well, since a real Think Tank out in the desert is hiring hoodlums to bump off anyone who looks like coming up with machine intelligence. Pursued by hoodlums, kidnapped by gypsies, sold into slavery as a fortune-telling machine, and adopted by Ma and Pa (two whose true roles I dare not even mention), Roderick grows from robot babyhood into adult genius. He has invented his own book for frighteningly disabled child, and then a Catholic institution, and eventually graduates into a more passably humanoid body -- though since he paints his black metal face black in mourning for Pa he gets lynched as a negro.

This book is a most wonderful bundle of zany absurdities developed with snappy, witty, slyly panache; it's a novel to burst out laughing over, time and again. It does, too, manage to shoot out tendrils into almost everything connected with artificial intelligence - new, if I ever saw a new, from the logic of thought and paradoxes, through Great Automata of History, to what the Sages have speculated about machine minds, picking up along the way all our neuroses and misconceptions about our relationships with machines.

The real irony of Roderick, of course, is that amidst this contemporary American Dickens-galley of caricatures (perfectly believable as people -- God help us -- yet like many of Dickens's best characters, in the final analysis, only his creation, I don't think it can be said that the people, with all their fleshly fulminations, quirks, obsessions, likes and traits, are mostly robots acting out self-written jargon programs of delicious spontaneity yet inflexibility.

In the final analysis it's, of course, another programmed jargon phrase which "springs to the lips".

When one has stopped laughing, one can start worrying.

Ursula K Le Guin & Virginia Kidd (eds.) - INTERFACES (Ace Books, 310pp, $5.99 lbr format, $2.50 mass-market)
Reviewed by Cy Clavin

This is the first anthology edited by Ursula K Le Guin. She says it began by her reading other anthologies and thinking, "Why did they put this marvelous and this trashy next to each other?" And when she asked herself that question, but I can't say that any anthology which includes a story like "Hunger And The Computer" by Gary Welburn (44 pages of a man starving in outer space with only his computer to keep him company and of course he is having delusions) who has retired the trash and kept only the marvells, but it does contain some exceptional stories.

The most outstanding is James Tiptree Jun's "Slow Music"; it is the longest, and develops its situation the most fully. The Earth is deserted, its inhabitants drawn away to the mysterious Rivers that course across its surface, making them immortal and taking their transformed intellects on a journey across the stars. One woman, Peacothief, remains; she wants to raise a family, to be self-sufficient up on her Earth-like gods. They have intercourse with one that Tiptree has always been very skillful at portraying - which makes the ending, when it arrives, that much more poignant.

Le Guin's anthropological interests are represented by two of the stories - Robert Holdstock's "Earth And Stone" and Phillipa C Madder's "The Pantzeren." Holdstock's is the most original: a time traveller to the Boyne Valley in Ireland of the New Stone Age finds a graveyard of stones where the tribepeople buried the living on the command of the god.s. But they've risen on the Earth, and arise filled with a vision; the result is most portentous. Madder's story is simpler: a tribe depends on a woman who has second sight to lead them to new hunting grounds by finding and following the trail of past adventures. But then she has a sight of the future and is shocked into immobility. The story is not exceptional in itself, but Madder seems the sort of writer whose power would accumulate in say, a novel or a novella, each incident bringing us deeper into her characters and society.

"The Reason For The Visit", by John Crowley, is a delightful conceit about a visit to the author's apartment by Virginia Woolf. Crowley knows how to preserve the magic (he never mentions her by name) and some of the story's touches are marvellous ("She framed the lemon juice into the tea in a plastic lemon", the plastic lemon she found enormously witty"), but the point of the ending is elusive. Nevertheless, I liked it.

The introduction to Wonda McIntyre's "Shadows, Moving" says that "There is perhaps no other young artist so committed to SF as a career and lifework, so purely, so triumphantly..." Not any other so overstated so early or so deadly dull. This pretentious story contains paragraph after paragraph on the order of "I feel loneliness..." and a kind of loneliness. It's different in my dark room. It's the loneliness of solitude, instead of the loneliness of desolation, and the pain is not so great. It is as if we were not really alone. This is what passes for insight and emotional revelation in McIntyre's work, and I think SF can do without it.

"A Criminal Proceedings", by Gene Wolfe, is a droll but dull parody of the American criminal system. Wolfe is usually a much more inventive writer, but this story fulfills the goals he set for it, but he just didn't set them very high. Michael Bishop's "A Short History Of The Bicycle: 401 BC To 2677 AD" I read first, expecting another clever morsel similar to his earlier "Rogue Tomato", but it just didn't hold up. It is two sorts of stories chopped up and put together like a layered sandwich: an exaggerated, pseudo-academic history of the bicycle, which is funny, and a story told by the historian of an encounter on an alien planet with herds of wild bicycles, which is also funny.

Hilary Bailey's "Everything Blowing Up: An Adventure Of Una Persson, Heroine Of Time And Space" is a chaotic, swinging sixties story, similar to the others she wrote about Una Persson for New Worlds. Like Crowley's, its point is elusive, but unlike his, its atmosphere is uninteresting. "The New Zombies" by Avram Davidson and Granile Davis, comes as a relief after Bailey's - it is a model of clarity - but it has nothing more marvellous to convey than the idea that all those burnt-out bums on the street corner are the result of a sinister organisation's having tapped them for an immortality serum. (In their defence,
I must admit that the authors do play it for laughs; but it is very hard to write true humour.) "Household Gods", by Daphne Castell, is actually more amusing, because its atmosphere is more unusual: the aliens have invaded and have taken nearly everything (including household furnishings), ignoring the native population. But one very proper old lady who has managed to retain her house goes on having parties.

D G Compton's "Bender, Fenugreek, Slatterman & Mupp" is a rather routine shocker set in one of those drugged and rigidly controlled utopias. The aliens have taken both his hands, but "no one could. He needn't do much. It really was true - they really did know what was good for him." Of course, he couldn't get it up for years. "Precensions", by Edward Bryant, is a story of love and shifting realities. "The lake," I said, "it looks like a goddamned brain," only Bryant isn't playing it for laughs. Michael G Coney's "The Sumner Sweet, The Winter Mild" is a much better story about an encounter between a herd of animals and human beings. It is not that the writing is so mediocre, but that the artist had no attachment for it. Fending's prose and observation make the story absorbing even though the situation seems somewhat familiar; it's the sort of story once common in P & SF.

Indeed, the overall quality of the anthology is rather like that of an average issue or two of P & SF; there are only one or two bona fide "marvels", the Tiptree and, perhaps, the Boldstock. Not all the rest is trash, of course (although Eorman would never have published "Hunger And The Computer"), but it is more than running. It is not that the writing is mediocre, but that the points, the emotions and the characters are so slight; only Crowley's and Tiptree's stories could do without expansion. Kidd and LeGuin seem no better as anthologists than Terry Carr and Don Wollheim (but could be following in their footsteps: Pocket Books has just released The Edge, another jointly-edited anthology which could well be composed of leftovers from this one). But it would be better for LeGuin, at least, to go back to creating her own stories; other editors can edit anthologies as well as she, but none can create her marvels.

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We've come a long way from Jirel of Joiry.

Being what it is, 'Amazonus' demands to be considered from two viewpoints: the fantastic and the feminist, but no one should be scared off by that. Here are some good and bad stories - don't be afraid to read it and find out which is which.

Besides thirteen stories, there is an Introduction which is in itself worth the cover price. Salmonson chooses to deal with historical examples of women who overcame cultural conditions to become fighters and adventurers, rather than the fictional ancestors of Amazons - Eowyn, or Jirel - which you might imagine more historically-oriented. There are old themes well handled: women called more beautiful than goddesses, divine wrath, timeless love in a dimension beyond time, and a return to find that the world has moved on. It's a lyrical story, but it lacks the abrasive quality of others in the book.

 Reviewed by Mary Gentle

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'Amazonus' is abrasive, controversial, and feminist. There are more beautiful than goddesses, divine wrath, timeless love in a dimension beyond time, and a return to find that the world has moved on. It's a lyrical story, but it lacks the abrasive quality of others in the book.

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parent:This is not a question, but a statement.

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example is Jane Saint in that part of the unconscious that manifests itself as a
golf course:

'suddenly and with great force she was projected into another state of conscious-
ness. The golfball had hit her head and knocked out stone cold.

'a little dog came sniffing over the grass and found Jane Saint, victim of a hit
and run driver.

Her astral body set free while her physical body undergoes brainwashing and sensory
deprivation through strange journeys, the nature of her quest is lost in the very beginning. Most people will recognize the
attitudes and opinions encountered here. It's a feminist book but not a feminist
tract: herein are mothers, goddesses, chauvinist men and chauvinist women, friends,
lovers and husbands, gold-feathered demons and philosophical dogs. The end of it -
with the quest accomplished, and Jane Saint back in her physical body — may,
according to your mood and inclination, make you cheer or cut you to pieces.

There are remarks throughout the book, both funny and serious, that cry out to be
quoted. One will serve to demonstrate the depth of Saxon's reasoning:

"Womankind is freer than mankind already, little one. We have the power of
creation, the hand that rocks the cradle and so on...

"Oh no, not that," moaned Jane desperately, having heard it all too often. Use
your charm, manipulate men, get power by stealth — it was a way to survive and
your influence but it was also enforced dishonesty, and it ruled out friendship
with men."

Many feminist utopias have the unspoken attitude that if only all the men could
be done away with, the world would be rosy. (A similar attitude spawned Helen.)
Aside from being impractical, it's also untrue. Jane Saint's realism is that no
free women you must, as well as humanizing women themselves, humanize men:
there is only one race here — human.

But inevitably the book suffers the same fate as Amazon!, that of ghetto
publishing. Genre covers, genre marketing — as female fantasy, perhaps, or women's
literature? — ensures that those who might benefit most from reading the books
never do. In the final accounting it may be that novels with a strong pro-feminist
attitude safely concealed inside the others — Delany's Tales of Neveryon, for
eample — have a greater effect than anything overtly self-conscious and, that
both Amazon! and The Travels of Jane Saint suffer from the inevitable Catch-22:
preaching to the converted.

Philip Jose Farmer - DARK IS THE SUN (Granada, 400pp, £6.95)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

Do you remember Brian Aldiss's novel Hothouse, in which humanity's far descen-
dants were in a struggle for survival — and a search for knowledge — on a dying
Earth? Philip Jose Farmer obviously remembers it, because he has taken the idea
as the basis for his latest novel, Dark Is the Sun. But that's not all. Farmer's
plagiarism: he has developed it in his own fashion and, lacking
Aldiss's depth, finesse and originality, it has made into an adventure story
which is broad and long but shallow. I would hesitate in calling it a novel it is more a series of adventures and discoveries, following a group of
humans and non-humans for several years as they travel around Earth upon more
than one quest.

In both books mankind has lost all technological expertise and reverted to a
primitive barbarism, and it is a more basically evolved sentient race which is
acting as a repository and disseminator of all knowledge (in Hothouse this is

a morel fungus — in Dark Is the Sun it is a half-plant half-animal creature,
both are good characters). In both books there are warring tribes of mankind
and numerous animal and vegetable dangers to be contended with. Farmer shows
his future Earth not simply dying peacefully but going through convulsions,
with ever-worsening earthquakes recurring whenever the action seems a bit slow.
I must give Farmer his due: he is never at a loss for another event, be it a
calamity, a discovery or an attack by a noxious beastie.

It is Farmer's inability to find a credible plot which is the book's weakest
aspect. The book is peppered with characters from familiar science fiction
books, particularly how to humanize them a lot, a lot of them.

People. As in several other Farmer books, the Mighty Being Who Controls
The Universe makes a brief, uninformative appearance. The ending is less than
that might expect, giving scope (I warn you now) for a sequel. If you enjoyed
Farmer's The Green Odyssey and his "World of the Tiers" series, you'll enjoy this,
though it lacks the originality of, say, John Varley's novels Titan and Wizard
(which are also about humans and aliens indulging in heroic adventure).

I must mention the poor packaging of Dark Is the Sun: a black dustjacket covered
by large lettering is not the ideal inducement to the reader. It's a pity.

Granada didn't make use of the accurate pictorial cover by Darrel Sweet which
accompanied the US hardcover edition.

Alexander Baine - PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD (Macmillan, 150pp, £5.95)

Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

Baine, born 1804, is described here as "the most popular of all Russian SF
writers." Apart from the fact that he flourished in the '20s and '30s, and the
titles of some of his other novels, that is all the information we are given...
but more of that later.

This story is an extremely competent scientific storyteller. Marie Laurent applies
for a job with Kern, a scientist, and is sworn to secrecy with some non-too-subtle
hints about what might happen if she reveals what she might see. It turns out
that Kern has been working with the late Professor Dowell to keep the heads of
animals and alive after bodily death, and has murdered the Professor, keeping alive
his head in order to use his knowledge and pass it off as his own. Marie's duty
is to attend to Professor Dowell's head, and those of two other people who are
later 'reanimated', Thomas, a labourer, and Brigitte, a cafe singer. The second
stage of the experiment comes when Brigitte is given a new body, that of
Angelica Gal, perfect in every way except for a minor injury to the foot caused
in an accident which killed her. Ms Gal was, by some strange coincidence, the
lover of Armand, a friend of Arthur Dowell, son of the Professor. Overseened
by Kern are given a second chance to live a full physical life, Brigitte escapes,
to be spotted in a casino by Armand, who is struck by her similarity to
Angelica.

Got that? Things get better...

Marie, more and more shocked at what is going on, is imprisoned in a lunatic
asylum to keep her quiet. Kern goes on with plans to announce 'his' discoveries
publicly. Brigitte, having spilled the beans to Armand and Arthur, develops
gangrene in her foot from the injury suffered by Angelica's body. She returns
to Kern, but too late: he can do nothing and her body (or her head, depending on which way you look at it) has to be amputated. Marie is rescued by Arthur and promptly falls for him. Kern publicly announces the result of his experiments, using Brigitte's severed head as example. At his lecture, Marie denounces Kern, who manages to pass her accusations off as the ravings of someone unhinged by observing the macabre (but perfectly ethical) processes involved in his scientific work. He is set up to take all the credit himself when Arthur Dowell persuades the police to act and the head of Professor Dowell is discovered. Unmasked for the rogue he is, Kern shoots himself.

PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD is a book to puzzle over. The main puzzle is why Macmillan's have chosen to reprint this particular title. It is a melodrama of the highest degree, highly enjoyable if you're in that sort of mood; it races along entirely at the surface and if you look below you start floundering. Inconsistencies abound. Do we really believe that Kern would wait for the police to come and discover Professor Dowell's head sitting clumsily disguised in his laboratory? Beliaev is too much indebted to coincidence and the conventions of melodrama to write a novel which can stand up to anything in the way of serious literary analysis. Characterisation? very much stock figures - the mad scientist, the beautiful heroine, dashing hero, etc. Yet there is a power to be detected in the book; ironically, it's saved from being totally hokum by the fact that similar experiments have been carried out on animals (since reading the book I cannot get out of my mind a terrible picture the Daily Mirror published some years ago of a severed monkey's head kept alive by 'scientists') and by the recent TV preoccupation with the question of transplants and when the donor's death actually occurs. There are no real characters, merely types, nor is there a genuine feel of place - very little even of a 'Russian' flavour (whatever that is) to it, with its studding of Anglo-Saxon and French names and Parisian setting, and even that is perfunctory - but image carries it through. Just.

Theodore Sturgeon makes the most of these points in his introduction: largely a useful comparison between the Weird Tales magazine and Beliaev which indicates how SF writers in both the US and USSR seemed to be using the Verne/Wells tradition to coin a language which reflected the works of those authors right from the pages of Weird Tales, yet we are told there was no connection; presumably we are faced with the stereotype of the Russian SF scene being more faithful to the hard-science aspect of SF because of the difficulty of sociological dissent, or even literary experiment, in a totalitarian society.

Yet how far can we rely on this? I would have liked more information on, if not Soviet SF (which is obviously a big subject and is touched on in further books in this series), why was he so popular in both the USSR and in the West? What was being done in the USA? Is this a typical book by him? Are his books still popular in the USSR? What was the reaction to certain aspects of this book, such as the Catholicalism of the female characters? Books, of course, must stand on their own, but the rationalisation behind this series must be that these books have an interesting background. It's no good presenting a book which assumes that every-one knows all about Alexander Beliaev.

Soviet SF is unknown territory to most people in this country. The translated works of one or two authors are changing this, and Macmillan are to be congratulated in their brave attempt to add to this change by devoting a series of novels, twelve so far, including five by the Strugatskys, to the works of Soviet authors. This series would be a valuable addition to published SF - but it would be interesting to note just why Macmillan think it will be valuable. For literary purposes? Then PROFESSOR DOWELL'S HEAD kept me amused for a couple of hours, harrowed for longer, and if you feel the same way I do I recommend it - but that's about all. For historical purposes? Then the lack of serious information is, I'm afraid, pretty inexcusable.

Edmund Cooper - A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE (Robert Hale, 191pp, £5.75)

Reviewed by Ian Williams

Aha, I said to myself on opening the book, a collection of fantasy stories. This ought to make a pleasant change from Cooper's SF novels of fascist Ubermenschen and their devoted, dumb sex-objects - you know, women, all tits and no brain.

Well, I was half-right: it was a change.

The most interesting and revealing part of the book was the two page introduction from which I extract the following quotations. 'There is another literary genre which is almost the antithesis of science fiction: it is fantasy. Good SF attempts to deal with the affairs of imaginary people in a potentially real world. Fantasy draws upon symbols and dreams and psychological archetypes for its literary potency.' If he'd begun that last sentence with the word "some" his ignorance of fantasy might not have been so obvious. Cooper concludes: 'I do not think I shall write any more fantasy. You know what you are doing with science fiction, but not with fantasy. At least, I don't. And that makes me just a little afraid...' My response to the first sentence was a sigh of relief and to the third, one of total agreement. Cooper does not know what he is doing.

Four of the six stories can be said to deal with mysticism - the relationship between individual experience and higher realities. In the 24 page "Jawheh", God is a super robot designed to stimulate primitive intelligences and would have been rejected by a fiction fanzine - it's that crude and trite. Equally as bad and in a similar vein, only slightly longer, is "The Snow Crystals": God and the Devil, two super-intelligences, give fragments of comfort to selected individuals. Main story in the book is the ninety page novella "The Firebird" - "first published in the USA where it was well-received" in a collection called 'The Engine in the Abyss'; it was followed by "Laughter among the stars!" 'And then there was nothing but the noise of night, the remote compassion of the start.' "Again there was a burst of laughter, laughter among the stars!" 'And then there was nothing but the remote constellations, the fuzzy dusty patterns of a thousand million suns.' 'Suddenly there was nothing... Not even the darkness of space or the fixed brilliance of the stars.// Nothing but the strange, invariable light of Resurrection...'

There are also two feeble jokey stories, one about a dragon, the other a ghost. But why go on. Had these stories been published under a pseudonym I'd have suspected the author to be a fumbling teenager. As it stands, calling them abysmally mediocre is praise.

If Mr Cooper goes back on his word about not writing any more fantasy, then I suggest he try sword and sorcery: the limited imagination and sexist characters of his science fiction would go well there. At least it would be more entertaining than this drivel.

My nipples popped out. I grinned and stuck out my tongue at them. They stayed up, I was happy.
Richard Cowper -- A DREAM OF KINSHIP (Gollancz, 239pp, £5.95)
Reviewed by Ros Kaveney
Richard Cowper writes quietly and elegantly; his work has a certain atmosphere of lush and stillness no matter how violent the events portrayed. His vision of the universe and of his characters and scenes is clear-edgedy precise but a little pastel-colored and, while it would be wrong to say that his work is two dimensional, the third dimension doesn't actually back all that far, a certain sense in which what has looked like reality is an artifice kept convincing by the sheer niceness of the notional personality. On the whole, I prefer his shorter fiction merely because in it he seems to make the judgments and those he does make do not have to be lived with for so many pages. In short, it is possible to love his work as a whole yet be deeply unhappy about many aspects of each individual example of it.

A Dream Of Kinship is a sequel to The Road To Conlay, which was itself a successor to the novellalette "The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn". All three are, as most of you will know, set in a pseudo-medieval British Isles a millennium after our century ends in catastrophic melting of the polar ice-cap. The people of this world are under water and independent island kingdoms held together by loose trading and the will of your bishop. In the original novellalette, a split-tongued boy named Peter reached visual and harmonic harmony and brotherly love, made especially convincing by his mutant windpowers, before the Church, which saw him as a threat that could be controlled, had his martyred and canonised. In the first of the two novels Cowper has written so far with this background -- at least one more is implied -- he decides to crack down on the Boy's followers and, in spite of killing a lot of people, fails to smash the movement for spiritual renewal which will, it is implied, bring a cultural and technological renaissance with it. This fairly standard plot was given immense interest by the presence in the mind of one of its characters of a psychic investigator, Carver, from our own time and the attempts of his colleagues to retrieve him.

The new book is back with the original story's 100 per cent concentration on the imaginary world of the future, and suffers from the usual problems of middle volumes of trilogies. Cowper has a fair idea of what he wanted to get done in this middle stretch and goes about doing it economically and effectively -- the Church overplays its hand totally and the followers of the Boy's movement win even more powerful converts. This creates an environment in which the son of the man who was briefly vanquished by the Church, a boy who is possibly a reincarnation of the Emperor himself, can grow up, become a great composer and learn enough to compel men's minds with his music. This boy, Tom, wins everyone's eternal gratitude by saving the Princess Anne from rape by a monster dressed as a man and then punishing her brother, the inconstant Duke Arthur, who has set the situation up, with the madness on the court which he already predicted. Tom is shown as a bright young man who will go far, and who as the book ends is about to travel around his world learning more about what's going on.

All of this is entertaining enough, of course, done in very good taste and with very good manners, and if I see a little chilliness in it it is merely because I keep hoping that Cowper will do something a little less conventional with it. As the series has progressed the Cardinal, an essential part of Kliss and therefore of the Church's authority, has become less rather than more convincing because the more you repeat the descriptions of his tight-drawn ascetic mouth and agonised brow the less one actually sees them, and the more you go on about his agonising over the fact that the body of his bright young son is to be able to follow down the cult he gave it its most effective leader the less his emotions seem real. Given that the Cardinal has thus become more of a cardboard villain, one cannot react as Cowper would wish to the dilemma of Richard, Marshal of the Church's private army, who is increasingly convinced that the Cardinal is risking political disaster and destroying the Kingdoms of Britain to save the Church; what we should see as a dilemma comes to seem like a choice he has to make and the answer to which is obvious. His duty is plain and we cannot feel for his moral dithering.

Cowper's restatement of the paranormal mental powers of his characters and of their new religion is similarly hindered by a tendency to clitch. He has not tried to give a certain sense in which what has looked like reality is an artifice kept convincing by the sheer niceness of the notional personality. On the whole, I prefer his shorter fiction merely because in it he seems to make the judgments and those he does make do not have to be lived with for so many pages. In short, it is possible to love his work as a whole yet be deeply unhappy about many aspects of each individual example of it.

The writing is as good as ever and the characters warm and plausible, but the longer this goes on the more we look at this pseudo-medieval world with its curiously high level of sanitation and the less I believe a word of it.

Clifford D Simak - THE VISITORS (Blandford, 229pp, £7.75)
Reviewed by Ian Williams
In the not too distant past, a gentleman of this establishment said that the critic should identify his prejudices. Fair enough: I'm a Simak fan. There are few SF and troubleshooting novels that I haven't enjoyed to some degree and have found the recent trend towards Simak-bashing by trendy critics to be rather regrettable. Out of twenty Simak novels on my bookshelf I could only find two I disliked. On the other hand I also noticed that I could remember virtually nothing at all about any of his books published since 1963, with the single exception of Mastodon (aka Catface), whilst the titles of several of his sixties novels evoked many pleasant memories.

If you think that this review is going to be of the "more in sorrow than in anger" type, you are perfectly correct.

The plot is fairly straightforward. Large slab-like aliens appear in our skies, land and begin musing their way through North American forests. Observing the insects, they casually light tubes of cellulose, then, shortly afterwards, begin budding baby slabs which eat the cellulose excreted by their parent. They are observed by Jerry, our hero, who gets scooped up briefly by a slab, and Kathy, our hero's journalist girlfriend. In Washington, a press secretary tries to pacify the public and the President. Lots of people discuss at length what is going on and try to build hypotheses. Meanwhile the aliens begin to bud super-cooper-dropper flying cars in huge quantities as a means of paying for the chopped up forests. Lots of discussions over the implications of this: take place. The conclusion is that it will wreck the American economy and that the rest of the world will need to help out. At the very end the aliens start building houses with them -- it is suggested, budding people inside them. But this, the most interesting development, isn't followed up. So really this novel is the old chasman of the enigmatic alien.

It is also the worst novel Simak has written in his life. Despite his attempt to create enigmatic aliens he's unable to withhold his cutesy touches with the result that whilst the aliens may be puzzling they are neither impressive nor scary.
Neither is there any pace to the story, no impetus and not much happening. People either stand around watching the aliens going about their business, or talk endlessly about what the aliens are doing and the implications of the alien activity. If the characters were interesting in themselves then this might have some point or entertainment value. But there are no characters in that sense, merely clumps of dialogue with people's names attached. How Simak was never much of a characteriser, but in his better books the heroes always had an intensity about them, whether it was Blaine fleeting through a surreal landscape in *Time In The Simplest Thing*, Sutton working out his predestined fate in *Time And Again*, or the unashamedly Enoch Wallace of *Way Station* an intensity that made you care about them.

All right then, what about the pathos or the relaxed pastoral quality that set Simak's prose apart from any other writer? Sadly, it's almost gone, to be replaced by leaden exposition. There are a couple of short chapters where lone man confronts alien, which hint of the old Simak but these are all too brief. It's as if Simak, an old man, sat on his front porch in a rocking chair and read out his typewriter script at the table by his side and let his fingers do the walking while he dozed on a hazy mid-summer afternoon.

Twenty years ago he might have spent a couple of days on the idea contained in this novel and not in the resulting short story to F & SF where it would have been printed and forgotten about. Now he pads it out to ten times its natural length and it is printed in hardback at the ludicrous price of £7.95.

This is a dull, dull book and if it is now the best he can do then he should retire from writing rather than tarnish his reputation even further with tedious trivias like this.

**ALSO RECEIVED...** Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

**Charles Waugh, Martin Greenberg & Joseph Olander (eds.) - MYSTEROUS VISIONS (Hale, 516pp. £6.95)**

A definite oddity, this: 26 fantasy stories by authors, like Agatha Christie, John D MacDonald and Mickey Spillane, normally noted for their crime and mystery work. In his thoroughly dispensable introduction, Isaac Asimov baldly holds up the "paradox" of his enjoying both the rational, problem-solving approach of the crime story (similar to SF, he claims) and the "irrational" fantasy story; not much of a paradox and not at all interesting. The stories themselves vary widely in quality, from G K Chesterton's witty and bizarre "The Finger Of Stone", about the chemical properties of a stream which changes the living creatures who fall into it into stone replicas of themselves, to Melville Davison Post's hack Bible-punching "The Angel Of The Lord", another of those tedious Devil-in-the-Old-West pieces which is incomprehensible to anyone who can't live there; then there's the odd selection, although in his introduction Waugh attempts to impose order on it by dividing them up into categories ("Strange Phenomena", "Spectral Creatures", "Miracles And Magic", and the like): but his explanations are too short and superficial to be convincing, and by some quirk tend to hinder rather than help analytical thought.

Michael Moorcock - WARRIOR OF MARS (New English Library, 384pp. £7.95)

The first hardback, one-volume edition of Moorcock's "Martian" trilogy - *The City Of The Beast*, *Lord Of The Spiders* and *Masters Of The Pit* - written in homage to and as a pastiche of Edgar Rice Burroughs's "John Carter" novels, in terms of his total output, it's pretty early and hence pretty crude and simplistic stuff, but has a certain naive vigour and colour which carries the action along at a fast enough pace for the reader not to care overly about its gross implausibilities and essentially weaknesses in the plots. In an introduction, Moorcock details the various aspects of his life that went into the trilogy's genesis; I wouldn't put much money on what this is worth in the price itself, but it does shed some tangential light on his other heroic fantasy fiction, and is hence of some intrinsic interest.

**FLIGHT FROM THE HEART OF BEING?**

Iain R. Byers The S in SF stands for schizoid, or so John Walsh says he & Charles Brown and Ives (vector 100). But like a politician, what he says he believes and what he actually believes are two different things. The actual schizoid nature, or otherwise, of science fiction is of little importance to him, his ruling passion being the 'heart of being' or, more properly, 'the female element'. Both of these quotations from Mr Walsh's "Standpoint", itself titled 'The Flight From The Heart Of Being', are themselves quotes from the book which has inspired him. Although he actually credits the theories of 'object-relations psychology' with assisting him in reaching his valuable insights, his exiguous knowledge of the subject would seem to be derived solely from this book, namely *Hume's Hope And The Death Instinct*. Certainly it is the source of all his quotes.

As I have said, his real interests lie not in the schizoid but in the 'female element' whose wondrous qualities consist of love, feeling, sensitivity and creativity; not to mention sugar and spice and all things nice. If I may be permitted to quote at length we will see just how much importance he places on this the essential value of writers like Le Guin, Sturgeon, Ellison and Dick lies in their deeply intuitive insights into problems of illusion, reality, identity, etc, insights which spring from the profoundly important, creative 'female element' of 'being' in them. It can let us see that these are writers who often involve us in solutions to these problems of existence which are based on love and separation rather than on hate. And on the other side of the coin: "...it can also let us see that writers such as Silverberg, Heinlein, etc, (whose work is so often deficient in creative symbolism) equally often attempt to rediscover these "female elements' which deny the "masculine solutions" which encourage the 'taboo on weakness'." Mr Walsh appears to be slave to an idea which goes as far back as the ancient Greeks. The belief that there is some kind of connection between creativity and femininity no doubt has its roots in the idea that women are not only passive, but has also been, and has also been, the way of the minds. It is, however, a belief which is entirely fallacious, a belief which is entirely fallacious, a belief which completely ignores the importance of the male in the act of procreation. If female qualities are so essential to creativity, then why is it that there are so few creative geniuses among the opposite sex? It is the very aggressiveness of masculinity which provides the spur necessary to achieve anything in this world. While not wanting to suggest that women are in any way inferior to society, I would like to point out that it is nothing less than feminism that endorses this superiority. This applies as much to the 'female element' as it does to women themselves.

And what of the value judgements implicit in Mr Walsh's beliefs? All feminine qualities are associated with love, while all male qualities are associated with hate. This is highly untenable by anyone's standards. Solutions which are based on love are necessarily right, solutions based on hate wrong. Who is Mr Walsh to decide what is right and what is wrong? Surely the correctness or otherwise of a solution is something relative to the situation in which it is to be applied. To be sweet and light in society which is barbaric and violent will not get one very far, and many of the societies depicted in science fiction are barbaric, Our own society is one which is based on 'hate', that is, it would be as defined by Mr Walsh, a society which is intolerable, partly because we consider ourselves to be civilised and feel bound to behave in a manner befiting that civilisation. It is, however, only a facade.

Robert Silverberg. Another interesting thing in the article is Mr Walsh's attitude to this particular writer, singling him out for appraisal, if appraisal it can be called: "Silverberg, who is a classic example of a schizoid writer within the science fiction field, is, I think, especially guilty... a writer
whose grasp of emotional reality is so thin and whose feeling for experience is so anti-human and full of hate..." and, "...the very elements in Silverberg's work also show him to be wrestling with deep intra-psychic conflicts, and this deserves only our compassion, not our scorn." Mr. Welsh then goes on to say this about someone who deserves only our compassion: "this is not to denigrate these writers as people; ...simply to point out that the solutions offered to the problems of existence are false solutions based on hate and on a schizoid reversal of human values." For someone who is not denigrating Silverberg as a person, Mr. Welsh is expressing a very low opinion of the man, an opinion which, on the face of it, would appear to be based on hate and a schizoid reversal of human values.

He concludes by saying that he believes that a critical approach using interpretations from object-relations psychology would add to the plenitude of science fiction. Did it really? Psychologists are notorious for their infighting, there being as many different theories as there are psychologists. Behaviourists scorn the analysts, the Freudians mock the Jungians, and so on ad infinitum. But the psychologists have fully explained the mechanics of human behaviour or the workings of the mind, and no theory ever will. True, many advances have been made, but none which would suggest that any one theory has any more credibility than any other, and when one holds one theory over another it is due more to personality than to objective assessment. Psychoanalytical authors on the strength of their works, whichever standpoint one takes, is an amusing, sometimes informative, game, and nothing more. What a person writes and what the person is are intimately related but they are not the same. It is highly unfair to judge someone on the basis of their productions, and it is patently foolish to generalise for an entire genre on account of any such judgments. Science fiction writers have only one thing in common: they all write science fiction.

If I have said very little concerning the schizoid or object-relations psychology it is because I do not think having read one book or one hundred books on these subjects would qualify me to utter anything other than opinion. Obviously John Welsh thinks differently.

**WHITE LIGHT**

Maxim Jakubowski
Managing Director
Virgin Books Limited
61-63 Portobello Road
London, W1 3D

May I first congratulate Vector for reaching such a ripe old age; at times I thought the dear thing would never make it. I'm also obviously very pleased by the coverage given to (White Light by Ruby Tucker) and naturally agree wholeheartedly with Ian Watson's review. I fear, however, that I must comment on some of Paul Kincal's remarks, as I feel very close to the early RSFA members/readers who were then the lot. Sec. ken knows how many centuries ago, and wouldn't want BSFAites to see me as a rip-off artist!

I do not agree that $1.95 for a book of 128 pages in a larger than usual paperback format is extortionate. In fact I would point out that the American Ace edition, by padding out the typeface, reaches 284 pages, although I concede that the print of our edition is somewhat small. Our paperbacks are higher priced than most major market productions because we try and provide original material, not reprints, better quality and more lasting paper, binding and covers. We also feel we decent royalties to authors. Most new hardcovers these days seldom go under $6.95 and get no promotion whatsoever, while White Light was advertised in the bookstores, Paperback Buyer, Paper Out Quarterly, TQ, New Scientist, Cipher and a special badge was designed. All this costs money. So while we might be guilty of being more expensive than the majority of shoddily-produced paperbacks, I feel this is well justified by the fact that we are offering the public quality stuff and the author a bloody good deal in terms of promotion. My case rests!

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**WHAT VECTOR IS FOR**

David V. Lewis
BSFA publications are primarily for providing members with information on SF and its creation. Note I did not say writing, as I include films, musical, artistic and broadcast SF as well as the written kind. The recent (by Quarterly) (edited by Terry Jeeves) produced 47 books reviewed. That equates to 188 per year, 30% more than the BSFA and all done by one elderly retired school teacher on a shoestring budget. Surely with the resources we the members provide you ought to be managing at least 50 books reviewed a mailing. The members provide you anyone who use cannot get it over in two paragraphs is a waste of space. Times are hard, boss; us folks need value for money, not long meaningless ego-tripping screeds.

- I don't reckon much to your arithmetic, Dave. I make 16 x 4 + 14 x 6 = 148.
- Not to mention the fact that Vector 99 had 24 reviews... I can't agree that two paragraphs is an absolute maximum for a review. There's little you can say in two paragraphs about a good and important new book, though it's quite enough for old rubbish. In any event, not everyone agrees with you about the purpose of Vector.

Simon Booth
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Quite a lot of the issues of Vector haven't had a main, central article - an interview the most likely candidate. In the past you had them, and Vector wasn't the publication it is now, so what is the problem? Of course, but surely Paperback Inference caters for the fans who love them. More Jim Barker art in Vector! Lovely stuff.

Alan Dorey's article was fantastic and very informative, as I haven't been following the RSFA for long and it's good to know what I missed. Ron Hansen's art book articles were refreshing and reminded me that the RSFA isn't so interested in RS books.

- Why no interviews recently? No-one has sent me any, that's the problem.

**COVERAGE OF TOLKIEN**

Andrew Sutherland
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AB1 9UA

Amidst the self-congratulating padding and nostalgic reminiscences, some of Vector 100 was actually worthwhile reading.

Several of the books reviewed in this issue could be classified as 'fantasy', and nearly all of these reviews contained unfavourable comparisons with The Lord Of The Rings. Unfortunately The Greatest Nook of this type was written. Why, then, did you not review Unfinished Tales, a volume actually written by Tolkien, while wasting space on these inferior imitations? Obviously Unfinished Tales is to some extent a barrel-scraping, but it still exhibits Tolkien's tremendous lyrical power and the intricate details of his painstaking creation. I am certain that many RSFA members are interested in Tolkien's works, although maybe not enough to join the Tolkien Society. Because of this, limited Tolkien coverage would be much appreciated.

- Again, the reason why we didn't have a review of Unfinished Tales is quite simple: the publishers didn't send us a review copy. And after all our efforts to build a critical standard, too...
CRITICAL STANDARDS

Chuck Connor
Selden House
Chatellen Road
Weston
Mr. Barnsmore
Suffolk, TF19 0NF

What worried me (in Vector 100) were the comments on a "heroic standard" that could -- should -- be achieved when reviewing a book. It just cannot be created. With a 'basic' standard it would, theoretically, be possible to compare Ballard's High Rise to Edmund Hamilton's Starship series while using Sf & Wilson's Illuminatus as a side salad. It would, of course, be a fruitless exercise -- though it would be amusing to see someone try and perform this.

It is even impossible to 'standardise' two books using the same reference point. For example, I've recently read The Long Walk by Richard Bachman, and The Feudies by Mick Farren. Both books deal with the pathetic 'Game Show Civilisation' that America has/is, but Bachman's book deals with a marathon war and Farren's with drug-fuelled preprogrammed fantasies. One is extrovert-based, the other completely introvert.

Surely the better (easier?) approach is to standardise the reviewer. A blindly this is a more 'trial and error' way, but if you know the way a reviewer will jump when a certain 'type' of fiction is presented to him, then you have, basically, two choices: either buy the book because you enjoy the same tastes as the reviewer, or give it a wide berth because the reviewer can't tell chalk from cheese -- to put it mildly.

The argument about 'standardising' the reviewer is one often put forward, and it sounds plausible enough. You can rely on the reviewer until you have found out the hard way -- by buying trash -- how his views differ from your own. You can't rely on him even then, because he may review a type of book that is completely new to you, and you won't know the reviewer's method is unworkable. The number of reviewers is large and constantly changing, and no-one appears often enough for anyone else to deduce his quirks and foibles. This is apart from the fundamental fact that a critical standard can be used other than in reviews.

David Penn
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How far we are actually going to get along the road towards a critical standard depends on whether we start in first gear or reverse. A phrase Kevin Smith used in answer to my letter in Vector 100: "I think illustrates what is wrong with a lot of science fiction criticism." Kevin Smith and Joseph Nicholas agree that reviewers who are also fans are often strongly biased in their criticism, yet Kevin displays a similarly provincial attitude when he writes: "There is something about SF (don't ask me what) that the traditional standard of 'literary excellence' can't cope with..." He has not escaped from the root problem of fan criticism. As long as 'critics' believe that there is an essence of science fiction separate from the essence of ordinary literature, they can't expect to be capable of assessing what really is good about science fiction. SF will continue to be an isolated area of fiction with recourse to its own critical standards and no fundamental need to stand the test of broader literary criticism.

Behind the avowed desire of those who wish to tread on what Kevin calls the 'middle ground' to adopt wider literary values is a determination to dispense with their own standards and recognize the equal of wider literary values while separate being taken. To actually institutionalise bias by honouring the 'something about it' of science fiction is to involve a contradiction in our criticism from the start. Kevin properly advises that the critics should try to be more of his prejudices, but a critic who is operating on the assumption that science fiction is essentially different from other literature has sublimated his prejudices.

Nor do I agree with your last two steps: comparisons (a) with other books of the same 'type' and (b) with all other books. Is The Left Hand Of Darkness the same 'type' of book as Starshipper Of The Radiant Rump? Is either of them comparable, in any literal way, with all other books? With a biography, say? Or a crossword book? Or a algebra textbook?

This brings me, advertingly, to Martin Perry's letter, in which he takes me to
task for supposing that the same standards should be applied to all SF books. What I think I said, in any event what I meant, was that science fiction novels (particularly) should be able to survive the same standards of criticism that apply to other books. Both in and out of the field you see repeated examples of the sort of criticism that goes, "This is only science fiction, but" or "and" or "however"... So that any particular title is judged within the imagined context (which might or might not be an informed judgement) of SF as a whole.

From this you get such false ideas as that Alfred Bester, say, or that Fritz Leiber is a stylist, or that Isaac Asimov is a storyteller.

** It had to be Chris Priest, of course, who caught me out in using sloppy terminology; I didn't mean ‘algebra textbooks'. The next question, naturally, is, "why not?" The answer is left as an exercise for the reader.

** REASONS FOR READING

Dorothy Davies

5 Cadale Row

Parrington

Oxon.

"I read a book for one reason and one reason alone. To be entertained. If a book does not entertain me by the end of the second chapter, I stop reading. If I am not moved to action, I look for someone more likely to entertain me. If a book entertains me I do not seek its flaws and gaps between the lines, and then denigrate that book.

** A THOUGHT

William Bathe

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A thought occurred to me as I sat at the breakfast table the other day. Here am I, pontificating happily about Art and Literature and other subjects I can scarcely spell, insulatet from the slings and arrows etc. and who, by the gods! mentions the opinions of others in your editorial offices and myself. Maybe the reason certain BSFA reviews etc. became a little more heated about certain topics than is called for by said topics is that they, too, are protected from their readers' wrath and scorn by a typewriter and the depersonalising delays of the GPO. If all reviews had to be read out in public by the reviewer at the BSFA monthly, they would be more rigorous and paired on the merest suggestion of hyperbole, we would get some balanced, informative reviews published. It's only a thought.

P.S. Ra Ra Proglodytes! Can you cap it in V.101?

** THE RELEVANCE OF SF

Andy Sawyer

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Well, that's 100 issues over; now for the next hundred...

Very good, all, especially Alan's survey of past issues, much of which was unknown territory to me, I think, although it is interesting to see the majority of current members, and Dave Langford's piece on G K Chesterton, who is unclassifiable in genre terms but what the hell -- a science fiction journal has as much right to run articles about him as any other.

Rod Jones sounds like someone the BSFA needs and it's a shame that he felt he had to go. I think he's wrong; that there are ways 'science fiction' can be relevant to our problems and the society we live in (even if it's just giving us 30 minutes recreation: but God, I hope it's more than that!) but he's right in that these ways are becoming less and less intrinsic to the SF we see in the bookshops. I don't think 'hippie revivals' will offer much hope (I'm sure there will be one and it will last about as long as and be as effective as the mod revival -- remember that?) but the humanist vision of the original movement (stripped of its pseudo-religious trappings) would offer a great benefit if it could be sparked off. SF claims a concern for the future: if so it should (that is, writers, readers and critics) should show more awareness of possible future alternatives. We could have more discussion about possible futures, about social trends and the direction we're moving in. A few writers -- Brummer, Moorcock, etc. -- manage to produce popular fiction which poses interesting questions. The SF 'scene', however, you could say, is largely a facade of optimism and 'future orientation', which is a mass of decaying right-wing cliches and conventional wisdom, and even if the next Vector is full of letters agreeing with this point of view, that's not going to change much.

** But I could be wrong...

Ian Goffin

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I'm the same age as Rod Jones, but his letter in Vector 100 confused me. I was disillusioned with the world so I looked to SF to take me away from the same old everyday life that was going on outside of my front door; but he looks to SF for reality. The only way he's going to be able to face the day is if it puts all the crap that's going on in the world out of his mind and the only sure way of doing this is to escape from reality with a very good (or, for that matter, very bad) SF book.

** SF AWARDS

Mark Green

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In Vector 100 Joe Nicholas said: "... but then, what do awards mean these days?"

I hate to say, Joe, but they mean hell of a lot. I agree that the books or films which win the awards are usually a load of crap, but that is just my own subjective opinion. Bar the Nebula and the Prix Apollo they are in the main voted for by your average fan in the street. Take this year's Hugos, for instance. Clarke's Rendezvous With Rama won best novel award. Joe himself called it 'dull, dull, dull' and I would tend to agree with him. Most people who voted in this category did not have a clue as to what they were voting for in the Hugos must have enjoyed it as much as the work of Bergman, Gance, Godard, Kurosawa or Truffaut, but it is fun. The solution to this is simple. Why not start a 'rix Apollo of our own? Perhaps the BSFA could administer it. The object of the award would be to present a prize for the best not necessarily the fans' favourite book of the year. The panel must also have enough guts to say that no book is good enough and to award the prize. The judging panel itself would consist of both fan and pro critics, editors and, as SF cannot be taken in isolation from 'mainstream', a couple of non-SF writers. How does that sound, Joe?

** More things for poor Joe to do? As if running the BSFA Award that we already haven't enough! (I tend to think of our award as the 'BSFA', despite the decision taken at an AGM to call it 'the Carnell', it trips off the tongue more easily.) There is still time to vote in this year's Award, particularly if you are going to Torcon II so please make the effort to do so.

Since the Hugo and the Nebula have become devalued in recent years, it is nice to have an award that consistently picks the best. The novel winners are obviously popular; they have all been critically acclaimed. You lot have good taste.
As for the reason why the Nebula, at least, has become devalued, witness the following letter from Dell, which has come into my possession.

October 20, 1980

Dear SFWA Member:

Enclosed herewith is a copy of the Science Fiction Book Club edition of THE SNOW QUEEN by Joan D. Vinge. We are sending this to give you a chance to read it, and consider it for the Nebula Award. Unfortunately, our hardcover edition is out of stock, and the paperback won't be published until long after ballotting has closed, hence the book club edition.

The last time we sent book club editions to SFWA members, it was copies of DREAMSNake by Vonda N. McIntyre. While THE SNOW QUEEN is quite a different book, we feel equally strongly about its quality, and hope that you will concur that it is worthy of the Nebula Award for Best Science Fiction novel of 1980.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours,

James R. Frenkel
SF Editor

I make no comment. You are perfectly free to do so, and I'd be pleased to see the result.

TUFF BUSINESS, THESE FACTS

Malcolm Edwards Finally received my copy of the December BSFA mailing (they 88 Duckett Road made me renew my subscription first), so now I have the opportunity to set Alan Dorey straight on a little matter of detail London N4 1BN (though hundreds of others have doubtless already done so). It was not I who wrote the "Behind The Scenes" column in Vector § 8 at T. it was Peter Weston, who chose the pseudonym 'Malcolm Edwards' -- so he later assured me -- because of its extreme improbability as a name. It was a great shock to him when I appeared in the flesh five years later, and the fact that I not only proceeded to follow a fannish career which closely paralleled Peter's in many respects, but even went on to edit the magazine in which he'd unleashed this pseudonym is just one of those curious coincidences which make Arthur Koestler happy. I think Peter still nurses a suspicion that he somehow created me.

Actually, to be perfectly honest, the part of this which leaves me really

miffed is Alan's evident belief that although I may not be old enough to have been a BSFA member in 1961, I am quite sufficiently advanced in years to have been an experienced fan in 1965! So, it, I was only 15 in 1965.

Steve Higgins's reviews have generally struck me as intelligent and well-judged, but I'm bound to say that I felt he failed to do justice to TIMESCAPE. He agrees with the blurb's claim for the book as "perhaps the most convincing portrayal of working scientists to be found in modern fiction" -- no small achievement, surely? -- yet ends up wondering why Benford writes the kind of SF he does. The answer is surely that TIMESCAPE is the novel which Benford was almost uniquely qualified to write as, on the one hand, a practising scientist of some repute, and, on the other, a writer whose interests (unusually for a 'hard SF' man) are in traditional literary virtues rather than technological gimmickry. I thought it made the practice of scientific research -- hitherto an area of zero interest to me -- intensely exciting.

Minor points: Joseph's casual slagging of the latest Terry Carr anthology, without actually having read it, strikes me as irresponsible. And Millington, not he, are right about the original date of INTO THE SLAVE NEBULA: a revised version published in 1968 of Brunner's earlier (1960) novel SAVAGE OF SPACE. Tuff business, these facts. And, to be boringly pedestrian, TIMESCAPE, whatever its merits or otherwise, was Ursula Le Guin's title for her book: the Americans changed it.

Are you sure the palindromic Mr Rafcan isn't a genius in disguise? If "inciting unnecessary pathos" isn't an offence at present it certainly should be, while the idea of an explosive which leaves people effete is novel and attractive. Now Lionel Fanthorpe has been rehabilitated Rafcan must be the next target. I look forward to his Gah speech at a future convention.

Now, now, Malcolm! I can't let you get away with slagging Joseph in this fashion. He did read Terry Carr's Best SF 8, and I have proof of it. What he didn't read was Terry Carr's Best SF 9.

Sandy Brown (who caused this issue's cover to come into being), Paul Dombis (who seemed unduly impressed by the glossy blueness of the cover and the straightness of the margins), Pete Lyon (who sent some artwork, the final version of which I hope you'll be able to see soon), Keith Roberts (who only wanted me to forward a letter to Paul Kincaid, but whose name is a rather impressive thing to have in the W3Fs) and Ashley Walker (who also sent some artwork).

21 letters: a definite improvement, but don't let that make you complacent...

VECTOR BACK ISSUES

All the issues listed in Vector 100 with the exception of numbers 91, 91, 90, 90, 90, 89 and 79 are SOLD OUT. However, a past Vector editor has unearthed a few copies of issues 66, 65, 64, 61, 60, 60 and 59. These historic issues are also available for 50p each including postage.

FOCUS BACK ISSUES

No. 2, Spring 1980, Richard Cowper, Garry Kilworth, etc.
No. 3, Autumn 1980, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Dave Langford, Dave Garnett, Kevin Smith, etc.

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