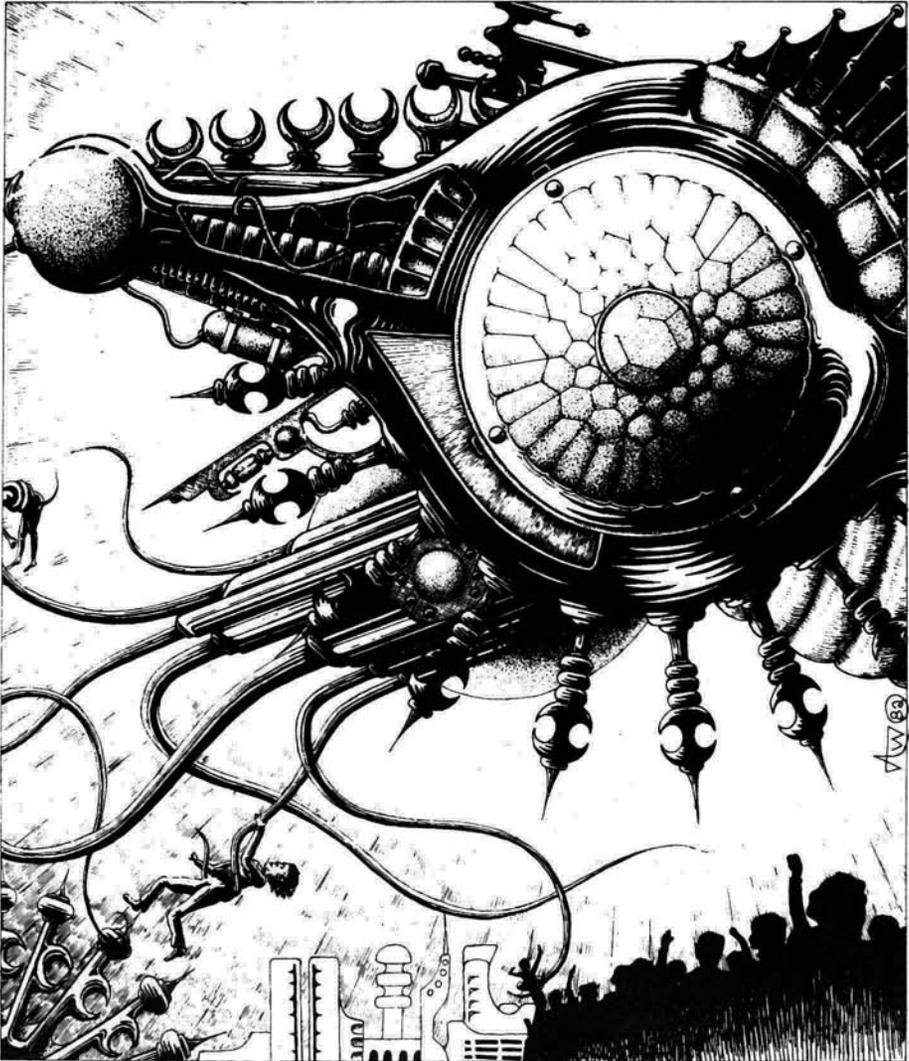


VECTOR ^{75p} 109



The Critical Journal Of The BSFA

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Editorial

The above quote might well have been published in the 1930's - 1940's and would have also slotted quite nicely into the McCathy era. But the fact that it is a cutting from last weeks Bookseller magazine does send a chill of misapprehension down my spine. John Brunner on his envelopes has a quote by Heine which is rather appropriate "where books are burned, in the end people too get burned". We are all used to reading about censorship, but to be confronted with the reality is disturbing.

Censorship in publishing can take many forms. One such form that is part of human nature is self-censorship. It is well known that fiction reflects the society that we live in. For example, during the years of the arms-race a predictable pattern could be seen in the sf stories being published: "Security Risk", "Security" and "A matter of Security". There's no difficulty in guessing what was on the minds of people in America during that period! This form of internal censorship, the avoidance of, or concentration on a subject, theme, idea is, of course, freedom of expression. You might not agree with Heinlein or Russ but...

What happens though if this self-

Censorship in some parts of the US has reached worrying proportions, and in some communities books have been burnt.

.....
The bonfire was made during a visit by travelling evangelist Penny Baker, who has quoted as saying: "We're not saying all books are bad... just those dealing with Satan and witchcraft."

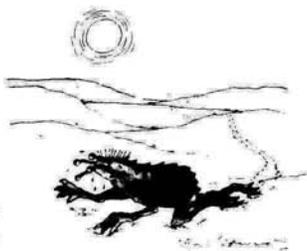
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There are few books that seem utterly safe from banning: those that have suffered disapproval cover a strikingly wide range of writers and subjects, including titles dealing expressly with sexual matters - the Kinsey reports and Alex Comfort's Joy of Sex; modern literature - A Clockwork Orange, all of Hemingway, Orwell, Remarque, Joyce; classics - Shakespeare, Shaw, Milton, Homer, Aristophanes.....

censorship goes astray as in the books by John Norman? We all must have read one of them, you know, Priest Kings of Gor, Mad Kings and Queens of Gor, that series. Apart from finding them totally boring (maybe the ultimate condemnation) they are also sado-masochistic soft porn. But they don't do any harm do they? Unfortunately, it seems that they do. According to the New Statesman "members of the Rhine army draw inspiration for wife and 'queer' bashing from an sf author" this author was John Norman. People are affected by what they read, see and hear. There is a complete industry set up on this one basic fact - advertising. What can be done about this unfortunate situation? Do we ban, nay censor the books by Norman? Do we set up a pressure group to write to Norman and his publishers to convince him of the errors of his way? We could even give ourselves a name, how about the "moral majority"? And if we hear about someone playing executioner do we ban Gene Wolfe's books? If you notice the number of people that dress-up as swordsmen and swordswomen at SF conventions I'm not straying too far from the truth. Between fantasy and reality there is only a thin edge.
(Continued on Page 36....)

SPACE WAR AT THE BOX OFFICE

THERE WAS ONLY ONE SEX LEFT
IN THE WORLD?

Mr Sci-fi
hits out,
but what
the heck



"...CH₄ SO₂ OH₂...CH₄ SO₂ OH₂..."

GETTING INTO
SCI-FI

Barry Coleman locks in to the Startrek cult

Ears Today... BECAME A REALITY?

LIVE IT UP AND DIE HAPPY

Apply for your Euthanasia Option NOW!

EDITORIAL

Geoff Rippington.....3

Last issue I made a plea for members to come forward and volunteer to contribute articles and artwork. The plea was more in hope than in a belief that anything would come from it. In this issue I'm going to have to eat my words as many of you flummoxed me by actually taking up my offer, which is extremely encouraging and gratifying. While it may take a while for the articles/reviews/artwork to filter through to the pages of Vector we should see a few new faces.

BUT...lets have a few more of you writing in. After all, what else have you got to do? Don't give me excuses about earning a living, paying the mortgage, painting the outside of the house, going on holiday - this is science fiction we are talking about, and I need more material. So no more arguments you hear, get on with it!

ARTWORK

This issue's cover is by Ashley Walker, his first time in Vector I believe.

SINGING FOR SUPPER

Frank Herbert &
Joseph Nicholas.....6

If I asked you to name the three most popular science fiction writers still living I would not be too surprised if you came up with the following - Asimov, Clarke and Herbert. While Asimov and Clarke are famous outside the science fiction genre Herbert is not as well known. Thus while I know quite a lot about Asimov and Clarke from the media within sf and outside, Frank Herbert, is still an enigma. Which made this interview rather interesting. He certainly seems a person I would like to meet.

DANGEROUS DIVISIONS

Various.....13

Letters of comment: Simon Gosden on Giant ants, Andy Hobbs one word review of Many Coloured Lands, Mike Lewis spreading awareness (Ugh!), Paul Brazier installing enthusiasm and John Brunner, Bob Shaw, Kenneth Lake, Roger Waddington, Ian Watson, Harold Powell, John Hobson, Lisa

Alien globs and cucumbers

Of making many books there is no end...

**SCIENCE
FICTION**
by MARTIN AMIS

**PLANET OF
THE MONTH**

CINEMA

Soviet 'Zone' Sucker's Dracula



Science fiction is more than escapist entertainment. The best of it combines fact and fantasy and explores the consequences of events that could shape our future. Whether or not you're already hooked, you should know about The World That Might Be. By Susan Stanley.

Tuttle, Andrew Sutherland and Spring chicken Dorothy Davies.

I would like to thank all of you who wrote in with answers to my little competition. The winner, from 11 replies, is Philip Collins with Dangerous Divisions. A copy of Disch's The Man Who Had No Idea will be sent soon.

INTO THE ARENA: THE BARREL

Chris Priest.....22

With such an obscure title I bet you are dying to know what Chris's article is about...well, I'm not going to tell you. Read the article damn you. Ha!

FOOLS ARE MY THEME, LET SATIRE BE MY SONG

Angela Carter & Eve Harvey....26

It's one of those lucky coincidences that while I missed Angela Carter's Guest of Honour speech at Channelcon I can now print it in Vector. To say that Angela comes across as a very, how can I put it?, unique/mysterious/extraordinary/odd/fantastic

person is understating it!

BOOK REVIEWS

Various.....37

We certainly have a right royal choice of books reviewed this issue from Brian Aldiss's blockbuster Helliconia Spring to The One Tree by Donaldson.

Reviews by Ann Collier, Chris Morgan, Kevin Rattan, Brian Smith, Mary Gentle, Joseph Nicholas, Chris Bailey on books by Tom Disch, Pamela Sargent, Poul Anderson, Damon Knight, Brian Aldiss, Stephen Donaldson and Terry Pratchett.

Some of you eagle-eyed readers will notice that there is no Vector's Choice this issue. Simply put, I forgot to put the heading on...Even I make mistakes! The book that the reviewer and I judge to be the best of the issue is Strata by Terry Pratchett. As Chris says, "it may not be great literature, but it comes from the same stable as Bill, The Galactic Hero, which should be recommendation enough."

Singing for supper

Frank Herbert
& Joseph Nicholas

This interview was conducted in two stages on 6 and 7 June 1981 at the Oberoi Hotel in Adelaide, Australia during Avention 81, the Australian national convention, with questions being asked by (in alphabetical order) Keith Curtis, Terry Dowling, Rob McGough, Joseph Nicholas and Helen Swift. This transcript has been prepared by Joseph Nicholas, supplemented by additional material from Charles Platt's Who Writes Science Fiction? and an interview published in the May/June 1981 issue of The Mother Earth News.

There can be few readers of Vector who have not read Frank Herbert's Dune, but how many of you have wondered what the author himself is like? The photograph on the next page at least shows you what he looks like, but communicates little of his personality, making him seem too forbidding by half. He is in fact the very epitome of one's childhood image of Santa Claus, with a manner to match: cheerful, friendly, yet with a strong sense of identity and independence. Raised on a subsistence farm in Kitsap County, Washington during the 1920s and 1930s, he was imbued early on with the need to be self-reliant, to do things for himself without waiting for others to help. As the interview with him published in Charles Platt's Who Writes Science Fiction? relates: "...when you're making hay, and the hay-baler breaks down, and it's the weekend and the handy little hay-baler repair store is closed, you don't say, Well, there'll be no hay this year. You leap in and repair the thing. You don't even question that you can repair it. Obviously you can." In that interview, he goes on to say that he thinks "self-limitation is the major limiting factor for most people in the world. People could do far more things than they believe they can. They've been led to believe in these limitations by various factors - the way they're brought up, and their families. (But) if you have a quiescent population, it's easier to govern; you don't want a lot of people out there doing strange things, producing new things, because new things are often dangerous to the people in power."

This would seem to imply some distrust on his part of 'big government', or perhaps even governments in general, because of the way they 'suppress' the rights and instincts of the ordinary citizen. In an interview published in the May/June 1981 of The Mother Earth News, an American ecology magazine, he said: "I think it's vital that men and women learn to mistrust all forms of powerful, centralised authority. Big government tends to create an enormous delay between the signals that come from the people and the response of the leaders. Put it this



way: suppose there were a delay time of five minutes between the moment you turned the steering wheel on your car and the time the front tyres reacted. (...) Governments have the same slow-response effect -- and the bigger the government, the more slowly it reacts. So to me, the best government is one that's very responsive to the needs of its people... that is, the least, loosest and most local government."

When the magazine's interviewer pointed out that, over the past few decades, society had been moving in the opposite direction, he replied that he didn't think it would continue to do so because "as communication systems improve -- and with the new computers that are continually being developed, communications are coming on like gangbusters -- people won't be so dependent on the often one-sided reporting of the conventional media for their information. Folks will see that we can take control of some social functions now handled by big government -- schools, taxation, whatever -- and that the 'bigger and stronger is always more effective' idea is a phony bill of goods. So I see an evolutionary movement towards a certain kind of fragmentation..." Indeed, in his eyes

this movement is already under way: in one of the interviews he gave to newspapers and radio stations in Adelaide, Australia in June 1981, he said that he felt the swing back to the right (and, presumably, the desire to 'privatise' the economy evinced by the current Reagan and Thatcher administrations) in America and Europe in recent years was a direct reaction to the increasing ponderousness and inefficiency of the 'managerial bureaucracies' that had waxed fat in the 1960s and 1970s. Not that this makes him a libertarian in the mould of, say, Robert Heinlein and Jerry Pournelle; in *The Mother Earth News* interview, he said: "We're going to have to make very tough evaluations of how we instill morality into our young ... and how we help people come to believe that all humans are similar creatures and that the world will be better off if everyone does try to live by something like the Golden Rule. And we'll probably discover -- possibly only after suffering a certain amount of pain -- that the only way to spread such values is, naturally, on the community and individual levels."

But how do these political concerns relate to his fiction, particularly when that fiction is thought of as having primarily ecological, anthropological and metaphysical slants? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is that politics has rather more important a role than might be supposed. One of the inspirations behind *Dune*, for instance, was his interest in messiah figures, especially the charismatic Leader who can get his country or his people into a quagmire through their blind, unthinking obedience to his fiat. In support of this contention, he names (in one of the above-mentioned Adelaide interviews) President John F. Kennedy as a prime example - a man who, by holding out the promise of Camelot, was directly responsible for the disastrous American involvement in Vietnam. Seeking to dramatise this messiah complex, he turned to religion as the best, most natural means of doing so, and began to study the comparisons between various theological doctrines.. realising in the process that the world's most important (or at least influen-

tial) ones had been bred in its harsher climes, in particular its desert regions. Thus was conceived the planet of Arrakis, one of the most detailed imaginary constructs in post-war SF. At the same time this enabled him to dramatise another of his concerns of the time: ecology, and in particular the idea that man should as far as possible adapt himself to the environment rather than simply impose his wishes upon it and attempt to remodel it wholesale. His interest in this line of thought, and indeed in ecology in general, had been sparked when, as a reporter for a San Francisco newspaper, he was sent to cover a USAF project in Florence, Oregon, for controlling the encroachment of sand dunes onto their runways. Their solution had been to plant the dunes with poverty grass, which had multiplied and spread, driving out the native species of grass and in consequence upsetting the life-cycles of the insects that lived on them. Searching for other examples of unforeseen side-effects to back up his story, he came across the tale of the mongoose, which had been introduced into Hawaii in the late nineteenth century to control the rat population and which, having exterminated most of it, became feral and began attacking the bird population, necessitating drastic measures to correct the problem.

And the rest, as they say, is history... But how much of the Dune series was preconceived, and how much written in response to the success of the first novel? "The Dune trilogy was one book in my head. Parts of the second two were written before I'd really finished Dune itself. I'm not absolutely sure, but I know that the last chapter was not rewritten. But it's ancient history to me now and I'd have to think hard about it before I could reconstruct it." But the fourth novel, God-Emperor of Dune, had a somewhat different impetus behind it: "Leto II would not get out of my head," he said, laughing, "I had to do that book. It was just forced on me. One day I started making notes about him and realised that I was hooked." The Dune series is so famous, of course, that from the publicity attached to his name one might think that he'd never written anything else. "I know. And I get people coming up to me and saying 'I've read your book!'" But this doesn't worry him: "A book has to stand on its own. Various people have various favourites. I get people coming up to me and saying: 'Are you going to write any more of the Jorj X. McKie stories? Or any more Indian stories?' I even have people asking me if I'm going to write any more of The Green Brain type of book. In fact, I don't know of any particular book I've written where I haven't had somebody come up and say: 'That one was my favourite!' Fine. You can't be all things to all people."

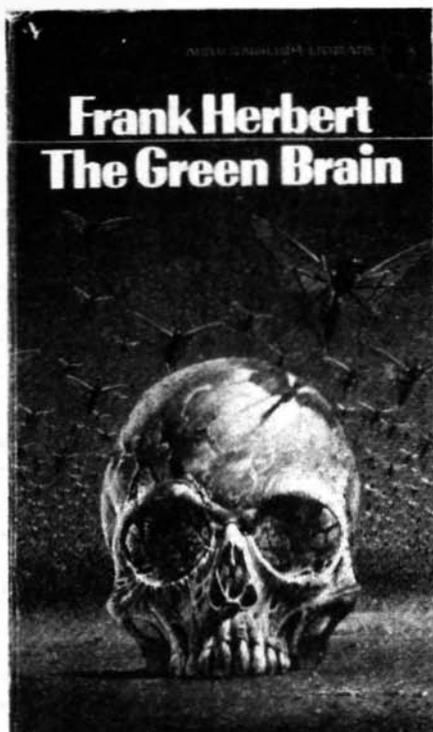
His own favourites amongst his works are Soul Catcher and The Santaroga Barrier. "I wanted to do a particular kind of book (with the later). I was infatuated with the idea of the utopia/dystopia dichotomy -- one man's utopia is another's dystopia. I set out to write a book that would just about split the readership in half. I was sort of snickering to myself as I did it, (knowing that) about half of them would think I was writing about a utopia and about half would think I was writing about a dystopia. Just about half my fan mail (on it) says: 'Oh boy, I'd love to live there' and about half of it says: 'Good God, what an awful place!' Fine. That's exactly what I set out to do, you see, and it's very satisfying to design a book that way, to really set out to do that kind of story then have it do that."

And Soul Catcher? "It's about the collision between two mythologies: the North West Coast American Indian and the Greek mythology of Western culture -- the Greek-dominated mythology, I should say, because it isn't totally Greek." He had a good understanding of that particular Indian culture because, as a boy, he had associated with some Indian children who had taught him how to make bows and spears and support himself off the land by hunting and fishing; but the book took him a long time to write. The first version "had the same title. It was about the North West Coast Indians and had similar characterisation, but it wasn't the same story at all. Part of the blockage was pride. I knew I was the definitive expert on these particular Indians because of the way I had been raised with them. I had written this book -- it was completed -- and then I had this experience at the University of Washington 'plunge' where I was on the staff. That week I had

to have the 'plunge' done to me, so that I had the same experience the students did. We had to bid for these little block sets that you built toy houses out of; they were like Lincoln Logs or erector sets, but they were all wood. One of them constructed an apartment house, one constructed a two-flat building, another one was a split-level suburban, and another one was a farm house. We were supposed to bid on which ones we wanted and were supposed to put them together as a team, five or six people on a team, but not speaking. It was billed to us as a psychological experiment, and in fact there was a person from the university psychological department to oversee each assembly effort to make sure we didn't talk, that we did it only with gestures and so on. We were told that if we built it correctly, we'd get our money back, which wasn't much -- two or three dollars at the most for the most expensive one. We were supposed to have an hour to do it and they gave us fifty minutes. They then condemned every one; we got none of our money back. So we went into the common room, feeling kind of put upon, and were told that the staff had taken all the money and gone out and bought beer and candy pissed it all off. God, were we mad! It was a trick pulled on us, you see. Then they said: 'You're angry now. This just happened to you once. It happens to Indians every day of their lives.' And all I could think about at that instant was, Oh my God! That awful book! That hideous, terrible book! I went home that night and I burned every bit of it in the fireplace, every scrap of it was gone. Then I sat down and rewrote the whole thing in three months. And it just seemed to write itself, it just came out." So there was a certain anger about the Indian predicament behind him when he wrote the second version? "There wasn't so much an anger as a sense that I understood the Indian predicament. And when I wrote the second one it wasn't anger either, but I knew I understood it then. I appear to have been extremely successful with the Indian culture. In fact, I've had some really interesting feedback. An American Indian leader, a very famous name (you'd recognise it, but I'm not at liberty to use it), at a tribal conference in South Dakota, got up and slammed a copy of Soul Catcher down on the table and said: 'Why does it have to be left to a white science fiction writer to tell what it feels like to be an Indian?' He was trying to whip them into realising that they should be writing of their experiences. I felt it was quite a compliment."

He once received a rather more bizarre compliment from another source in respect of the Gowachin legal system outlined in The Dosadi Experiment. "I was at the A.A.A.S. meeting in Washington, D.C. and a government attorney recognised me in the elevator at the Sheraton and informed me that the American Bar Association had appointed a three-man committee to examine the Gowachin legal system and make a comparison to see if an alien legal system could give us any insights into our own!" The recollection made him laugh - as well it might, for all he had done was take the existing Western legal system and invert it.

He has collaborated with other authors a few times in his life, in one instance on the building of a houseboat on San Francisco Bay with Poul Anderson and Jack Vance. "And while we were there, pounding nails and cutting wood and whatnot, we decided we would plot a story together. And we were going to write it together because we thought it would be fun to support our houseboat habit with a story we wrote while we doing the building. Then Poul got interested in something else, Jack likewise, and they shoved it off onto me and said 'Go do it!' So I did and it's called "The Primitives". The essence of it is that the actual Stone Age artisans were women -- they were the ones who shaped the spearheads and the axe-heads and made the artefacts because they were home around the camp fire while the men were out hunting. The problem of the story is that they have what is called the Mars Diamond, the biggest diamond in all of history, only it's the most complex diamond ever discovered as far as cutting is concerned. They're afraid to cut it. Finally, it's stolen, and the thieves have a captive -- a man whose family has a time machine. So they get this idea of going back in time and getting a primitive who really has a feel for the stone and can cut it. She is brought forward in time to do this and is left alone with it, and she makes a spearhead out of it." The story was originally to be written under the pseudonym of 'Noah Arkwright', and the name was saved for use in God-Emperor of Dune as the author of



an imaginary text referred to in passing -- and both of his would-be collaborators had already appeared in similar roles in *Dune*, as 'Holjance Vohnbrook' and 'Pander Oulson', giving Vance the opportunity to get his own back in the 'Demon Princes' series by attributing one of his imaginary texts to a 'Frerb Hankbert'. Less well-known than all this is the story behind Jack Vance's *To Live Forever*, which he and Herbert "plotted together in Mexico and then tossed a coin to see who would write." More recently, and perhaps more fruitfully, there has been his collaboration with Bill Ransom on *The Jesus Incident*.

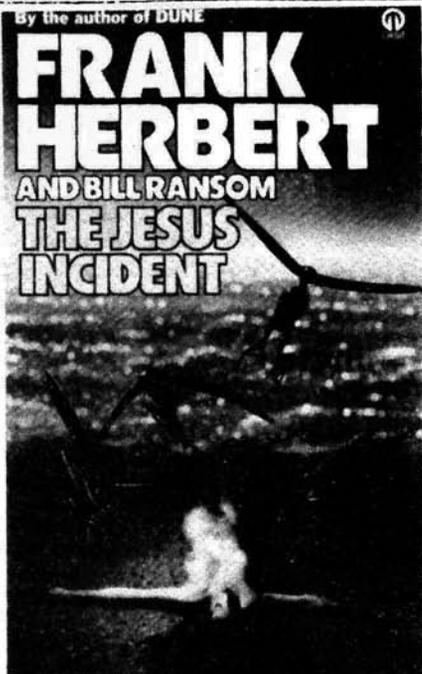
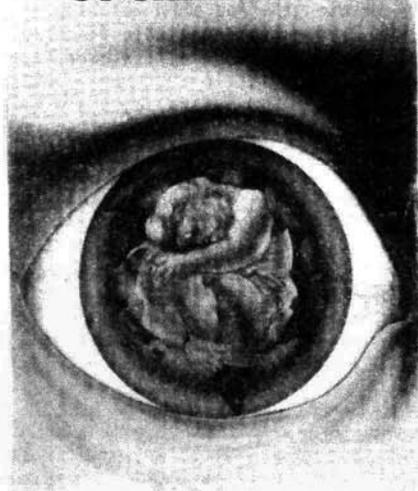
"Bill came to me and said he wanted me to do a sequel to *Destination: Void*. He had ideas about it -- you could do this and you could do that and you could do this other thing. I was very heavily pressed with deadlines at that moment and I didn't have time to do it, but I was talking to him about it -- he's a very close friend -- and I suddenly said: 'Hey, would you like to collaborate with me on doing a sequel?' And Bill said: 'God, I don't know. I don't know if we could work together.' And I said: 'I don't know either, but we could try it.' So we outlined a story, and that was fun, and before we knew it we were working together. I got in touch with my agent and talked to New York, who were a little queasy about it. They didn't know Bill Ransom, and there were other considerations. But I insisted that there be equal play on the names and that the contract be an equal split, because you don't write a collaboration and have one person be a second-class citizen. So we finally got our contract, and we started writing the story. Bill would do one chapter and I'd do the other, and so on. We were leapfrogging. Then we came back and rewrote each other to add uniformity of style, and even my wife Bev has trouble seeing which passages I wrote and which passages Bill wrote. But the spooky thing was that we began getting into each other's heads. In one instance, each of us introduced a character in succeeding chapters. Bill had the 10.

first chapter with this character in it and I had the second one. We named this character, gave her the same name, and these two chapters just dovetailed. We had no previous collaboration, no consultation on naming the character or the sequence. We came back at the end of the week on our regular Friday consultation and looked at it and both of us got spooked. And it happened not just once but several times -- there were other coincidences that happened this way, all through the book. It was as though we were on some kind of wavelength. And when we'd finished the book and mailed it off to New York, Bill and I each broke a little finger." He laughed, then continued: "We're going to do another one this next winter (1981/82), a sequel to The Jesus Incident. This one we'll do a little differently because I've got another book to finish when I get back (from Australia) and I won't get at what Bill has done until the winter. We've plotted the story together, but Bill is taking off on his own and doing any number of things according to the outline and the plot that we've developed. He's not completing the book and he won't have it all fleshed out, (but) we work well together. We enjoy the same things. In fact, Bev complains and says: 'You're always laughing up there and I want to know what you're laughing about!'" He refused to be drawn further on the matter of this sequel, however: "I don't talk about work in progress, mainly because you use the same energies to talk about the work that you use to write it, and you want to save that energy for the paper. That's really good advice, the best advice I ever had. If there are any would-be writers around, tell them this, because I've seen writers who tell their best friends the story and you never see the story. And that's a waste."

From which statements it's obvious that he's writing the books he most enjoys -- but does he write more for himself than for an audience, or does he write for a particular group of readers? "I have a kind of amorphous sense of an audience out there and I really care about that audience, I really do. I want them to be entertained, I want to give them the frosting on the cake. I want all these good experiences to come out in it. I sort of see myself as the jongleur who comes into the castle to sing for his supper, telling about the other castle down the highway. And, my God, people pay me for it. What a marvellous thing!" But, considering the size of his audience and the enormous popularity of his work, does it disappoint him that there has been (in the words of the Nicholls Encyclopedia of SF) "remarkably little critical analysis of his work"? The answer, it seems, is no. "It doesn't bother me, really doesn't bother me. There are some among my contemporaries who are bothered by that in their own work and are also bothered by the failure of the establishment literati to give them the status they feel they desire. I think this was Kurt Vonnegut's problem. I know damn well it was Bob Silverberg's problem because he said so. My own approach to this is that it's a waste of energy to bother with that. Do your thing. And as long as you're enjoying it, do it!" Apart from which, he has little care for the recent academic interest in SF: "I kind of have a leaning towards keeping science fiction in the gutter where it belongs," he said, laughing, "It's an emotional leaning, I think we have a lot of fun with it, you see. In addition to having fun, I think I'm prodding the guy next to me and saying, Hey, the king's naked!" So what's his view of the purpose of SF in general? "Well, to entertain. To ask the questions that aren't being asked anywhere else. They're fair game for us. What if the ecology breaks down? What if this kind of society develops? Or what if we get a particularly obtrusive police state -- the Nineteen Eighty-Four thing? None of these stories, I believe, prevent those evolutionary or devolutionary processes, but they sure as hell alert us to what's happening." But he's basically an optimist: "I would like to believe that there will be human beings millions of years from now, enjoying life the way we enjoy it or to the extent that they're capable of enjoying it then. Alive and enjoying it, you see."

And, after all these years and so many false starts, is he still optimistic that a film version of Dune will one day grace our cinema screens? The answer is yes, more optimistic than ever: a major studio has allocated a budget of \$40 million, pre-production work is in progress and, at the time we were interviewing him, crews were out scouring the world for suitable locations. "We have a director

Frank Herbert THE EYES OF HEISENBERG



-- David Lynch, the man who did *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*. I am absolutely delighted with the choice. I don't know of a director who would be more pleasing to me -- he's a fan, and he wants to do *Dune*!" And his own position regarding the film? "I am in the contract as technical adviser. Your guess as to what that means is probably as good as mine, but I do have input. They listen to me, and they listen with attention. I listen to them with respect and they listen to me with respect, which is a nice way to approach this. And I understand the difficulties of translating the written word -- the page -- onto the screen." After all, "when you stop and think about it, the cheapest set-building in the world is in your imagination. (But) they have to be able to build a real thing that will look real up there on the screen so you'll look at it and say, Yes! That's Arrakis! That's a worm, that's an ornithopter." Despite which, he does have some worries that the finished film will look somewhat different from his own conception of his own world, "but at this point they're minor, because there really is an effort to meet that general norm. (That is,) I'm sure that in your head there's a slightly different view of *Dune* than mine, as I'm sure there would be if we went around this room. But there is a norm in there somewhere and there really is a desire on the part of the production team to meet it, for economic reasons if for no others -- if people believe they've seen *Dune*, then they're going to spread the word. But beyond that, let me re-assert that I don't doubt at all that David Lynch really wants to do this, and he's a fan."

One amongst many, clearly, and certainly a better choice as a director than the one who once said that he was particularly interested in the possibilities of an incestuous relationship between Paul and his mother...(!) How long the film will take to reach fruition no one can yet say, but Frank Herbert will certainly be around to see it (and, perhaps, see it spawn as many sequels as his own original novel) -- full of life and energy, he clearly has many more books yet to write.

Dangerous Divisions

SIMON GOSDEN,
25 Avondale Road,
Rayleigh,
Essex.

I did wonder whether David Barrett's letter (Vector 108) really deserved any comment at all as I have a sneaking suspicion that it was deliberately written to encourage controversy and as such I assumed that to reply would simply be pandering to David's conceit. But I am forced

to comment on it as the full enormity of what he says begins to dawn on me.

At first I thought it was a simple piece of egoistic diatribe perhaps only slightly offensive to the readers of "Sci-Fi". But on reflection I realised that it was a very dangerous case of pseudo-intellectual elitism and as such proposed values to which I am definitely opposed. The values that David proposed are, it seems to me, very similar to those inherent in some of our older conservative institutions, like the Royal Academy.

We must beware of attitudes that purport to this sort of elitism because in the long run it can only lead to divisiveness and bitterness perhaps even the end of the BSFA itself. The BSFA is the mouthpiece of British SF, all SF, and it would be wrong to start looking for divisions that exist only in the minds of members who consider themselves to be superior to the GBP on the premise that being long term readers, critics, and amateur writers entitles them to an elevated position. This is crazy talk.

David, come down off your lofty pinnacle and join us mere mortals because if you don't you are likely to end up cold and rather lonely up there. (((To be precise, the BSFA is the mouthpiece of the members rather than the mouthpiece of SF itself. Pedantic sod, ain't I!)))

As an afterthought and speaking as one of THEM, (not giant ants I hasten to add) could I ask a small favour. Having enjoyed the Keith Roberts and the Colin Kapp interviews very much it struck me that a short bibliography would be of great interest to collectors and non-collectors alike. This would be very difficult for the more prolific authors so how about a section devoted to the bibliographies of one of these authors per issue? Personally I would find this fascinating. (((I have no objection to this idea if other members think it is worthwhile and someone volunteers to do it. I do try to give some details of the books published by the contributors but to do a short, accurate bibliography is very time consuming. Incidentally, the second volume of the BSFA's British Science Fiction Writers should be out by the next mailing. The booklet is on Keith Roberts and has an article by Paul Kincaid on his work and a bibliography by Mike Ashley. Further booklets are being prepared on Mike Moorcock and James White. The Bob Shaw booklet is still available for 60 pence for those of you who have not already got a copy.)))

I'll start by wishing you every success with Vector, and congratulate you on a clearly presented first issue which, despite the lack of artwork, was interesting throughout. I am also fully behind you in your idea for a 'Vector's Choice' book in every issue. This, because of the prominence that is being afforded to a specific book, should lead to some more vociferous discussions on the merits of individual books - rather than on the ethics of printing them in the first place! (Er...the re-

ANDY HOBBS,
Riverlyn House,
Hoveringham,
Notts,
NG14 7JH

views that is; not the books. Well, not always 'not the books'.)

On the subject of the Book Reviews, I felt that a lot of space was wasted by the Ray Owen review of The Many-Coloured Land. The simple epithet CRAP would have sufficed. I was also slightly puzzled to read a review of a book that has been around for a length of time that would take it out of the new books category. Oh well, not to worry, it was still interesting to read that somebody thought more of the damn thing than I did. (((I will always try to publish a review as soon as we get the book but, as I'm sure you understand, it is not always possible. Vector's reviewers do have lives outside the BSFA! I hope that most people will be happy as long as we review a book within 5 months of its publication.)))

I was also interested in the letter from David V. Barrett, with regard to the US and THEM syndrome in SF. I would like to take his theory, with which in essence I agree, one more stage. Would it not be fair to say that the US element is not only the one that is trying to remove the SF genre from its ghetto position, but also the one that is, to a certain extent, keeping it there in the first place? In the pages of the BSFA publications there is, obviously, a predominance of SF - surely if we are to try, if we want, to break down the barriers, then it should come from within. Make the BSFA a more wide ranging body - it may be a solution, although I am not quite sure if the end result would be beneficial.

Plus, keep up the interviews; there has been a dearth of them recently, and it was good to see two in your first issue. (((If people send me the interviews I will certainly print them. How about you doing an interview Andy? Oh God, this eternal cry of "Break Down the Barrier", "SF is in a ghetto" is now so much a cliché that it is hardly worth a mention. Let's be specific; what 'Barriers' do you mean? If you mean that sf deserves a more understanding viewpoint from the 'literary critics' and the media, then I would agree. If you mean that the payment of sf authors is below the norm and should be increased, I would also agree. However, if you mean that the label 'SF' should be abandoned - I am not too sure what way to turn.)))

MIKE LEWIS,
5 Yew Tree Close,
Broadstairs,
Kent.
CT10 2LR

The letter I really wanted to respond to is David V. Barrett's. I honestly cannot see how he can hold the views he does, and how he can set himself and the BSFA up as judges on other peoples reading.

How does Dave reckon books should be assessed?

Whether they are deeply relevant to modern day society or whether they entertain people? I would have said that most people would agree with the last view, a book is primarily written to entertain the reader surely? Okay, if it communicates ideas and gives the reader some food for thought as well, then that's fine; but most people read SF for pleasure, not because they want to learn about todays problems - they can read a newspaper if that's what they want!

David also seems to imply that all best sellers are low quality and designed to appeal to the masses. Surely this isn't always true? And even if it was, is it really that great a sin to write books to entertain a lot of people? I will agree with him about the big name authors who churn out books, selling them only on the basis of their name. Number of the Beast is a prime example of this.

I don't see the point of an "Anti-Award", as you say, opinion would be too widely divided - and I don't think a negative attitude will get us anywhere. (((I am by nature a cynic and I feel cynicism is a healthy attitude. However, I agree with your view entirely; a negative attitude to fiction helps nobody.)))

I agree that we should spread the 'awareness' of SF, by advertising, etc. But we should do it by being positive, not by denigrating the public we are trying to reach. (((The best way we can spread the 'awareness' of SF is get more people to join the BSFA!)))

I was very impressed by the whole content of Vector 108, it was the first issue I've read all the way through first time. The interviews were interesting, and Ian Watson's article was particularly good.

I was glad to see you giving one of the rip-off computer books a deserving

review, there are far too many books like this around, selling to the gullible public.

PAUL BRAZIER,
75 Hecham Close,
Walthamstow,
E17 5QT

First of all, congratulations on your appointment, and commiserations on the demise of Arena SE. Your move may, however, prove fortuitous for me insofar as a different editor may do something about one of the more annoying aspects of the review column. I speak of the necessity

some of your reviewers feel to synopsise the story of the book under scrutiny. Two reviews in V108 suffer from this fault, those by John Hobson and Cherry Wilder.

As a first comment, I would ask anyone interested to turn up the reviews in question and read them, but skip any part that seems to be merely repetition of the story. I think you will find that the reviewers opinion comes across just as strongly. To reinforce my point, you could then read the reviews by Ian Watson and Paul Kincaid. Any revelation of story by these two worthies is couched in critical comment, and is not mere repetition of narrative.

Now to why I don't like synopsizing of stories. Basically, it's very simple: I don't want to know what the story is, if I did want to know the story, I would read the book, and I would not want my appreciation of the plotting to be spoiled by any advanced knowledge of the story. It is possible, as demonstrated by Watson and Kincaid, to instill some enthusiasm (or revulsion?) for a book without telling us that it was the butler who did it.

One further point. My first impression was that these were the two longest reviews, an impression that may be erroneous as investigation indicated that the reviews seemed to be of roughly equal length. However, look at the anti-penultimate paragraph of John Hobson's piece (pg 32, begins: 'The authors, having skillfully realised...'). It is over half a page long, but apart from the opening sentence, there is no critical comment at all. It is pure narrative. Surely the review would have been far more telling, interesting, and informative, had this paragraph been excised in its entirety.

The point to remember is that the reviewer is giving a personal account of his reaction to the book with pertinent examples where necessary. He is not a re-teller of stories, he is a commentator on stories. Please, have your reviewers bear these thoughts in mind and make your reviews not only shorter, but also more pleasing. And if I hear cries of "Do better if you can", I would say that I am more than willing to try my hand at reviewing, but I have no real idea of how I would start, except like this. Maybe I'll hear from Joe Nicholas in the near future about doing something for you hint hint.... (((Your point about plot summary is well made and for the majority of reviews is perfectly true. I do studiously try to avoid printing unnecessary plot summary and unless it is essential to the review, I will not give the ending of the book. However, in defence of the two reviews you mention I should point a couple of qualifiers. Cherry's review of 1200 words was of three books not one and by discussing the stories it was trying to show the basic weakness built into them. The actual amount of plot summary per book is very small. In fact, for the last book she reviews it is seven words! With John's review we have a slightly different kettle of fish. Without explaining the whole review one of John's points is that society is based on 'confrontations between conservatism and change'. He then goes on to show how the book reflects this idea through its plot. Thus, I feel, the partial plot summary was a necessary part of the review. I'm sure that Joe will pass a book along for review with pleasure - I only wish more people would write in offering to have a go...)))

In his Vector review of The Sword of the Lictor Paul Kincaid says that "cacogen" is an invented word. No, it comes from two Greek roots meaning "to become bad", and Chambers defines "cacogenics" as "the science of race

JOHN BRUNNER,
South Petherton,
Somerset.

deterioration". Now that's a speciality to be a professor of! (((And I would like to bet there is a course on it somewhere...)))

BOB SHAW,
3 Braddyll Terrace,
Ulverston,
Cumbria.
LA12 0DH

In Vector 108, Brian Smith passes up the chance for an interesting article about science fiction. He is content simply to state that SF stories whose setting might as well be the Bronx, Montmartre or Bethnal Green are bound to be bad. If we take it that he has nothing against the three mentioned locales in particular, we are being told that SF stories with a contemporary urban setting are bad. Could we have some amplification of this statement? I'm not the only writer who would be interested... (((Over to you Brian!)))

Forgive my presumption in throwing myself into the "Letters of Comment" fray after having received only one copy of Vector, but there are a few points expressed in No. 108 which struck chords in me.

KENNETH R. LAKE,
115 Markhouse Avenue,
London.
E17 8AY

Perhaps I should explain that I have been reading SF since 1945 without having been aware of the BSFA at all, and have never noticed a "BSFA Award" although I'm familiar with Nebulas and others.

My introduction came through a full-page ad in Smile on the Void, which was neither SF nor convincing and which (as another correspondent has said) was "a real effort to read." Hardly the best of introductions, but I won't hold it against you.

Someone asked that professional writers give the BSFA a plug in their blurbs. I am a professional writer (non-fiction, specifically collectables and mostly philately) and have written several books although 95% of my work is articles for magazines (in U.K., U.S.A. and Australia mostly). However, I have never known a publisher print my blurb as I wrote it - one mangled it so much I thought he was talking about someone else, the more so since the printer revealed that he believed the word "great" was spelt "grate" and made it look as though this was my fault.

I've been most interested in the book reviews in the various publications sent to me on joining; my interest comes mostly from the fact that few of the books reviewed sounded as though they would appeal to me - in two cases indeed, on the basis of "resume of plot" and not the personal opinion of the reviewer, I have noted books not to be bought even cutprice, so I have gained something and may indeed save the whole of my annual subscription in this way ultimately.

I haven't enough background yet to know whether the BSFA is "a snug little, smug little clique" but surely the fact that I have been buying SF paperbacks for nearly 40 years without knowing of your existence (apart from vague memories back in the fifties of someone referring somewhere to you but without adequate information to allow me to follow it up) indicates a shrinking violet feeling amongst



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the membership?

Criticisms of Perry Rhodan et al are, I feel, nothing to be ashamed of - we all have criteria of excellence and we'd merely be pandering to marxist "levelling down" idiocy if we hid our feelings of superiority over those who cannot appreciate fine writing. But without the underpinning of those unsophisticated readers no publisher would dare spend money on the Masters (this is simply a development of the situation in my own field, where it's the millions of "perpetual junior collectors" who support, like the base of a pyramid, the smaller number of serious philatelists, who in their turn support the wealthy few whose disbursements keep the stamp market buoyant and so keep dealers, publishers and others in employment).

I'm a bit perplexed about the "four favourite writers" bit, as I don't recall that question being on the application form. To put the record straight, mine (at the moment) are Philip K. Dick, Larry Niven, Joe Haldeman and Robert Silverberg, but I only reached that decision after cutting down the list from 20 via 10 to 5 and then tossing a coin over the last one to go. Why "four"?

But if I may branch out for once on my own instead of following up on others' comments: has anyone tried to analyse the percentage reaction of SF readers to the major TYPES of plot? I asked for two reasons: first, to me the most satisfying are "alternate history" novels, while I am sick and fed up of books which glorify death and pain (yet Joe Haldeman's The Forever War is war-war-war yet is graded 5 out of 5 on my private scale, while some alternate histories have been cast aside with a sigh of relief on completion of my reading stint and haven't even raised the 2 out of 5 necessary for me to THINK about keeping the book on my shelves). (((If there is a genuine interest in the above sort of information I'm sure the BSFA could run a survey. But it's really up to you - if we got a poor response the results would not be representative. Please give me your views on whether you think it is worthwhile and also what sort of questions we should ask.)))

To sum up: you CAN'T provide an adequate guide to a book by a resume of plot, you can't judge how well it's written by the back-cover blurb, you can't trust publishers anyway, and it's time the BSFA got around to some REAL publicity! (((The fact that we did eventually get hold of you does prove that we are trying! But I take your point that we could do a lot more than we are. The problem, of course, is money. If you can suggest a cheap and effective way of advertising the BSFA I'm sure that we would give it a go.)))

ROGER WADDINGTON,
4 Commercial Street,
Norton, Malton,
North Yorkshire.
YO17 9ES

I was especially pleased to see the interviews with Keith Roberts and Colin Kapp, as I've long felt they've been missing out on the recognition they deserve. Which could actually be due to the scarcity of their work; it seems to me that the Wolfes and Silverbergs of this world, to use a generic phrase,

have achieved their prominence because of sheer output, thus making critical articles easier to write; how can you pin down Keith Roberts, for instance, on what he's written so far?

And then again, it could be that they've been regarded as 'selling' authors (pause for hollow laughter) rather than 'important' writers, who count it more important to please their audience and so their publishers, than to put any message across. Which raises the question of who sells most, and for what reason, a debate that could go round in ever-decreasing circles... But is entertainment any less reason for reading than art, are the Jack Chalkers and Zack Hughes of this world (to use another generic phrase!) to be pilloried because they sell more than the Chris Priests and Michael Bishops? And where do we stand on Harry Harrison?

Well, the 'reality' of the Falklands war didn't affect me in the least, I have to admit, in so far as it affected the reading of sf. Though in defence, it was a very distant war while it was being fought, with as much coming through as in some far-off Victorian war, and in fact, depending on artists' impressions and the

written (and censored) reports of correspondents, it gave the uncanny impression of those days; and certainly as unimaginable as battles in space in the future... And by the time the films of the fighting came back to show what really happened, it was over and somewhere else; and I went back to reading sf anyway...

On the other hand, there was one interruption of reality that took me far from sf, and fandom, and indeed from the other minor pleasures of life, and that was the hunt for the Yorkshire gunman, which brought the TV news just a little too close to home. I work in Malton, and walk to work, so you can maybe imagine some of the fear I felt; but to actually be there while it was happening, to go past policeman with guns standing on every corner and see helicopters swooping low; all I could think about was a killer with a gun somewhere out there, however much I wished him far away; science fiction never seemed so irrelevant, or life so brief! And then on Sunday morning to realise, just how close he had been...It's something that's still affecting me, and it'll be a long time before I can get away from reality, and back to sf.

Perhaps, in the intro to my 'Into the Arena' column in Vector 108, you could have mentioned the other reason why I was reluctant to do six articles per annum; namely that I believed it would be unfair to the widely varied BSFA readership to have one and the same author holding forth at length in every single issue of the magazine for a whole year. I'm sorry that you feel 'put on the spot' by my modest reticence, but I still believe that the other course would have drawn you some membership flak. I'm delighted to hear that Chris Priest is going to join in, as well; and hope that a third gladiator volunteers before long. I assure you that I wasn't just feeling lazy... (((Thank you for writing in Ian. On re-reading my intro I do seem to have given the wrong impression. Don't worry about having 'put me on the spot' the major reason I'm doing this magazine is because I find it a challenge.)))

IAN WATSON,
Bay House,
Banbury Road,
Moreton Pinkney,
Nr Daventry,
Northants.

HAROLD P. POWELL,
29 Clarence Square,
Brighton.
BN1 2ED

Can I support your footnote to Cherry Wilder's letter in Vector 108.

You ask for details of books which might pay for being rediscovered.

I'm now pretty old and have been reading SF since 1932/33 (wish I still had those old copies of 'Amazing' & 'Wonder Stories') but there is one tale which after 50 years still sticks in my memory as one of the best stories I've ever read; it was a book called Menace from the Moon by a chap called Bohun Lynch, and I once (before the war) possessed a hardback copy which somehow got lost whilst I was away in the Army abroad. There's some reason to think it has been published in paperback since then, maybe around the sixties, as I once saw an advertisement for it in another old paperback.

I've had no replies to 'wanted' ads. in BSFA publications or to any of the usual SF specialist bookshops approached.

Any way of resuscitating this one?? (((Right hand reaches up picks out Encyclopedia; "Bohun Lynch (1884-1928) English writer and caricaturist. His Menace from the Moon (1925) is a blending of interplanetary, lost-world, and future-war themes, in which descendants of a moon colony established by 17th-century Europeans attack the Earth with heat-rays. It contains many references to the works of Bishop John Wilkins." That's all I've got. Can anyone help Harold find his book?)))

I found the Kincaid/Roberts interview to be quite impressive; did Paul have to squeeze info out of Roberts or did it come naturally? (((It's impossible to force a postal interview))) Either way the result gave a

JOHN A. HOBSON,
328 Upland Road,
East Dulwich,
London.

good insight into the mind of Roberts and just how deeply he considers his fiction.

Which was a contrast to the Colin Kapp piece. This should have been retitled 'Behold The Hack' containing a classic assertion by Kapp that he doesn't write for the fans, public or himself but what the Editors want. He thinks this is something new too! Having had the doubly unfortunate experience of reading the Cageworld books maybe I could torpedo the assertion by Kapp that he spent ages thinking up his world built around Dyson spheres...because, as any student of astronomy will tell you, the Cageworld is a direct crib of Aristotle's perception of the heavens (the planets were in spheres with the earth in the centre, and Ether beyond, studded with stars, which sounds suspiciously close to Kapp's novels) and Aristotle knew his idea was absurd. He conceived it as a mathematical model to explain things. Tut Tut.

LISA TUTTLE,
2 Huddersfield Cottages,
Lewdown, Okehampton,
Devon.
EX20 4DZ

If the word 'authoress' is not obsolete, it should be. While I can sympathize with those who groan at neologisms like 'chairperson,' I don't understand the urge that drives people to tack sexual signifiers on to perfectly clear, useful, nonsexist nouns like author and poet. There was a fashion

for it in the 16th Century, but is it really necessary, in the 20th, when talking about a piece of work, to define the one who did the work as reporter or reportress, doctor or doctress, creator or creatrix, teacher or teacheress, and so on ad nauseum?

I found Ray Owen's otherwise thoughtful and insightful review of The Many-Coloured Land (in Vector 108) badly marred by the willy-wagging in the third paragraph. What difference does it make whether Julian May is a he, a she, or a plain ole it? None at all, to judge from the rest of the review, which draws no conclusions at all linking the author's gender with the author's work. Following the reviewer's example, I am assuming that Ray Owen is male, although the lack of any biographical information conceals this...deliberately?

I realise that in print this letter may seem to have more of shrill hysteria than weary irony, but I'll take that risk. I don't mean to dump on Ray Owen in particular - bad examples are legion in this world. But because he seems to be sensitive to the difference between good and bad writing, I'm hoping this letter may make him aware of what he's doing himself. (((It's strange how a passage can be interpreted in different ways. The reason I thought Ray mentioned the male/female dilemma was so that the publishers were made aware that their slight of hand was noticed. As I'm sure you are aware, science fiction by females does not, in general, sell as well as science fiction written by males. It seemed that Pan were trying to hedge their bets. As to why male writers sell better than female I cannot understand. I expect it has something to do with the fact that the majority of sf readers are male. That is a true case of male chauvinism! However, I agree with the point you make and hope that we will avoid it.)))

Dorothy Davies, in her letter in Vector 108 writes that a reviewer "is after all only expressing a personal opinion. Obviously, a review can never be completely objective, but a good reviewer should always strive to present more than opinion. He should provide constructive, logically-argued criticism based on sound and accepted literary principles, to make his review as objective as possible.

ANDREW SUTHERLAND,
32 Hillview Terrace,
Cults,
Aberdeen,
ABI 9HJ

Whatever he says about a book he must attempt to justify, while at the same time providing intensive analysis of the book's theme and content. However derogatory the conclusion to a review may be, he is obliged to approach the book he is set to review with an open mind, and if a book has anything truly praiseworthy about it then a perceptive and responsible critic should be able to find and ex-

The second volume of the Saga of the Exiles is now available in paperback

JULIAN MAY THE GOLDEN TORC

*A worthy successor to
The Many-Coloured Land...
I read it with the same avid
excitement and I finished
it with the same craving
for more'*

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE



Publication date 9 July



Pan
Books



— Jensen

plain that aspect of the work. Obviously, this is not always done, since reviewers all have certain prejudices and will not approach a book as they should. It cannot honestly be said, for example, that Joseph Nicholas' review of God Emperor of Dune in Paperback Inferno was a particularly distinguished piece of literary criticism. It was more invective than constructive, open-minded and balanced reviewing.

To counter the obvious unreliability of BSFA reviewing, Dorothy Davies proposes "resumes of recently-published books, with no opinions. That way more books could get mentioned and less people get hurt." The drawback to this system is obvious to anybody who has tried to write resumes of novels such as Gene Wolfe's The Sword of the Lictor or J.G. Ballard's The Unlimited Dream Company, both of which were reviewed in the last mailing. When reduced to mere plot, these novels sound foolish and unremarkable. Only by presenting more than the resumes Dorothy Davies suggests can a reviewer hope to convey the true nature of these works.

Therefore, Dorothy Davies' idea does not, to my mind, stand up to examination. The only way the BSFA can lay her fears about reviews to rest is to concentrate on improving its own standard of criticism. The main fault at the moment is that too many people are "only expressing a personal opinion" instead of making discriminating comments, based on sound literary principles. (((Thank you for writing in Andrew as your comments are interesting and well argued. I hope you will keep Joseph and I informed on how the reviews are going. How about doing a review for Vector yourself?)))

DOROTHY DAVIES,
3 Cadels Row,
Faringdon,
Oxon.

It was on Nationwide, was it not? that the BBC ran a major item about how a bad review could kill a West End play, even one with Big Name stars in the cast?

If you had only a couple of £s to spend and were browsing in Smiths, would you not avoid the titles you knew a fellow BSFA member had disliked/slated/hated? I would. (((Not automatically - no.))) Tell me not that reviews can't damage a book. They can. They do. They will continue to do so. (((Of course reviews have some impact, what I was saying was that reviews in Vector have no appreciably effect on book sales, and therefore on whether books are published or not.)))

So, I irritated you slightly, did I? Swap irritations then. After close on 100 stories and 9 books, I don't think writing reviews would give me a better understanding of the process of writing a story! (You may never see it, but one of those books has been sold.....) (((Reject slips at fifty yards. You can have first quote..)))

As a writer, I have to, for sake of my own sanity, hold to the view that every review is a personal matter of opinion, and touches me not. Therefore, working on the assumption every other writer feels the same, and many I correspond with do feel that way, a review is not aimed at the author, who will dismiss it contemptuously. Therefore, the review is aimed at the reader, WHICH ONLY MEANS IT IS THERE TO GUIDE THEM AS TO WHAT IS WORTH READING AND WHAT ISN'T. And there you have it. Vector readers might have minds of their own, but if they read a bad review, they'll avoid that book!!

I have had two independent opinions on the book Timescape, both bad. I shan't touch it. It's as simple as that. (((And you will thus miss one of best books of this decade.)))

(((Letters were also received from Roger Heggadon, Terence Scott, Dave Collins, Philip Collins, Keith Marsland and Andy Sawyer. As letters are received sometimes too late for inclusion, Andy Sawyer's was a case in point, I will try to publish them next issue.)))

Into The Arena

THE BARREL

Chris Priest



**HELL CREATURES
OF THE
THIRD PLANET**



I think the worst moment so far of 1982 was the one when I realized I had been a member of BSFA for twenty years. No doubt to some people this will come as no surprise or revelation, but from my point of view I still feel like one of the new boys. Clearly, this hasn't been a real twenty years.

Well, way back then before the dawn of time, I was eighteen and working in a job I hated. They hated me too, but because I was under five-year articles they couldn't sack me until 1965. (When they did.) But in 1962 I was sent to work in a clothes warehouse in the East End of London, where I and another audit clerk called George had to check the firm's books. Like all teenage audit clerks we weren't too interested in the work, preferring to idle around all day talking about whatever grabbed us more. With most of the other audit clerks, such conversations ranged around the three staples: sex, motor cars and sport. But with George - someone I'd never worked with before - the conversation was confined to one obsessive subject. George was a science fiction fan. He had no discernable interest in girls, he didn't drive a car, and like me he was too tall and weedy to play any kind of sport. George talked science fiction. And talked and talked and talked it. He was a proselytizer, seeking to convert me to the faith. Most of what he talked was plot synopses...or, rather, book blurbs. He had a fascinating, infuriating talent for describing a book's plot in the minutest detail without actually spoiling any of its surprises. He dwelt on the ideas science fiction was said to contain, the concepts that could be found nowhere else. Within a day or two, he had me hooked, desperate to spend my entire salary on sf books. In those days I was making less than £5 a week, before tax. I already spent more than that on my weekly train-fare!

At this time I was in the fairly self-contradictory state of being quite ignorant of science fiction while believing I had read rather a lot. In fact, I thought that horror stories were a form of science fiction (George promptly corrected me on that), but I had discovered John Wyndham some two years before, as well as one of Robert Shekley's short story collections and a few rather more dodgy works by Dennis Wheatley. So I had at least read some science fiction, even if I was ignorant of the rest, suspecting that it was trashy, exciting stuff, bad for the soul like comics and television.

The books George was talking about was this very stuff. Most of it seemed to be by American writers with Germanic or Slavic names: Heinlein, Simak, Pohl, Asimov, van Vogt, Budrys...and even that vague, alienating quality had a magic and a challenge all its own. It wasn't long before I was out buying my own stuff, working my way down a long shopping list given to me by George. One day we skived off work long enough to get up to a bookshop in the West End. By now, George was on the advanced stuff, but I was still paddling around in The City and the Stars. I'll never forget that he bought eight paperbacks that day, telling me he would read them over the weekend. Paperbacks cost 2s.6d., and so George's weekend reading cost him £1 exactly.

Not long after this I was striking out on my own, came across the BSFA and joined it. Anxious to do George a return favour I told him all about it, and he too duly joined. He was a member for about a couple of years, I think, but left and never returned. I happened to meet George about five years ago. He was still tall and weedy, but he told me he no longer read science fiction, and indeed retained not a scrap of interest in it. He was now the chief partner in a City accountancy practice. My news that I was a famous science fiction writer, saved up for years for this very moment, made him laugh until his spectacles steamed up.

I don't know why George went off science fiction in general and the BSFA in particular because I didn't ask him. I myself lost interest fairly rapidly, until the BSFA struck its nadir in 1966 or 1967. One particular issue of Vector was so badly written and scrappy in appearance that I tore it up in anger. Along with many other people I drifted away to more interesting pursuits: in my case I got married, bought a car, gave up my wretched job and became a full-time writer. In the early 1970s I got divorced and, along with many of the same people, drifted back into the BSFA, where Malcolm Edwards was editing Vector and the whole place was altogether more interesting. Science Fiction Monthly came along

in 1974 and gave the BSFA a plug: millions joined overnight, the membership secretary committed suicide, and BSFA became BoSFA, big and mighty and owning its own litho machine.

That's more or less where things stand today. Vector has never quite slipped back again to its 1967 level, and now there are Focus and Paperback Inferno and Matrix to prop it up if ever it does.

Matrix was something that seemed to happen while I was away, although I might be wrong. At least, it seemed to spring full-grown into my sphere of consciousness, and ever since I've felt something of a stranger to it. Part of this feeling was undoubtedly caused by a lengthy correspondence in the early days, in which it was revealed that many of the letter-writers took science fiction on television as an entirely natural part of their sf diet. At first I thought it was a subsidiary interest, but the correspondence went on so long and at such a disputatious intensity that it soon turned out that this was not the case.

I've always thought that the best thing you can say about sf on television is that it's second-rate. If you strip away all the hysteria of the last fifteen years, Star Trek (to take a notable example) is hack, cardboardy and repetitive. Isn't it? And Doctor Who is for small children and emotionally retarded middle-aged men, isn't it? Blake's 7 is a corny, low-budget imitation of Star Trek. And as for those American series like The Bionic Woman and The Gemini Man and The Incredible Hulk, they are just hamburger meat ground out from the American tv mincing-machine. Aren't they?

Well, it seemed that there was a considerable proportion of the BSFA (and if not considerable, then certainly vocal) who took such stuff as a perfectly acceptable part of their sf experience. Obviously, the BSFA will reflect all shades of opinion (and back when it was founded, the main reason for it was to recruit new fans to fandom, and television sf is a good place to start), but I felt a bit disturbed by all this enthusiasm and controversy. Nearly all television series have a phoney feel to them, and the sf series are no different. There is a fundamental difference between routine television drama and speculative literature, and the gap between them is large.

Media fans - as such people are known these days - claim by their preferences that the visual media are of equal rank to literature. I find this a rather dubious proposition. Watching television is a passive, stuporous thing to do, while reading a book requires attention and participation. And the visual image has no sub-text.

The lack of a sub-text is the critical difference between the medium of the word and the medium of the picture.

Language has resonance, in that words can never be perfectly defined. Words and sentences can be taken to mean a variety of things, can be used with different emphasis, can be set down with a deliberate intention to misdirect or mislead. This essential irony of language is the reason you can take a perfectly comprehensible passage from something - a passage which carries the story along, and is in every sense a straightforward piece of prose - and lift it from context and examine it and discover more and more levels of meaning.

With the visual image, you get only what is there. This becomes literally clear if you use a video-recorder and play a sequence over and over again. (If you don't have a recorder, you can get a similar effect from watching a slowed-down action-replay in something like a football match.) You can examine the sequence as minutely as you like, frame by frame if your technology is up to it, but you can never see more than what you saw the first time. You can perhaps see it more slowly, you can perhaps see it more clearly, you can perhaps even see something in a frozen frame that the eye's definition was tricked out of seeing. But you never see anything additional, there is no access of quality; you see what you saw and you see it again.

This is not to say that the visual media are an inferior form, but they can be used as a secondary - that is, derivative or adaptive - form, and then they are by nature inferior. You can convert a mini-bus into an ambulance, and it will seem to work quite well, but not so well as an ambulance designed and built for



that job.

The best visual media are purpose-built: films which have been conceived cinematically, tv shows suited only to that medium.

The odd thing is that most television sf is created within the medium: in this strictly specialist use of the word, *Doctor Who* is "original". It is not based on books (quite the reverse, interestingly enough), and the scripts are written specially for the show. The same was almost wholly true of *Star Trek*, and is true of *Blake's 7*. Yet they are hand-me-down shows. Everything in them is creatively received: stolen or borrowed conceptually, either from the generality of books, from other shows, or even from earlier versions of themselves. Also, they stink of compromise.

A few years ago I was present at a publicity preview of *Blake's 7*. The slides showed the actors in a variety of poses from the forthcoming show. They were wearing drab, dark-brown costumes. The show's producer was at pains to point out that these costumes would be worn for only the first three episodes, because after that they would be given new costumes, somewhat more colourfully designed. The reason for this, it was ingenuously explained, was that the jigsaw puzzle concessionaires had complained.

Yet somehow this second-best form is not only found to be acceptable by many people, it is considered in some quarters to be superior to literature. You often hear warnings that we are a society drifting into illiteracy, or at least into non-literacy. We slide from the verbal to the visual, letting our beautiful language become debased and under-used. One of the curious and special things about science fiction fandom is that it is a popular fan-group based on literature. Not football, pop music or evangelism: the congregation we hold is to celebrate simple words written on plain paper.

Knowing the fervour with which the media fans celebrate their own eccentric passions, the religious ecstasy that can be induced by the raising of a Spockian eyebrow, I realize these are probably unpopular opinions. I'm not really trying to make a point, but merely raise my voice. Last year, while I was at a convention in Holland, I was wandering around the hotel looking for a place where I was supposed to be, and I walked by mistake into the media room. Thirty people sat in silence, dull-eyed and witless. Before them on a television screen was an episode of *Star Trek*. It made me think of the million-masses who sit in similar stupor before televisions every night of the week. Years ago, my accountancy friend George had kicked open a door for me, and I escaped from all that. I discovered, amongst other things, that sf conventions were usually held over Easter. Before I went to conventions, Easters at home were a nightmare of television, chocolate eggs and bunny-rabbits. But that's another story.

In our compartmentalised, prepackaged world Angela Carter is an anomaly, a publisher's nightmare. Like Doris Lessing, she is one of those rare writers who defy classification; the only suitable category is that unfortunately sparsely populated area where literary excellence is the main criterion.

She is reminiscent of Lessing in that her writing style can raise prose to the level of poetry, but she surpasses her in that the characters she portrays exude life from every page. For me, she also combines the best of both Ballard and Fowles. Like Ballard, she possesses the ability to depict utter desolation and the total degeneration of society; like Fowles, her characterisation is such that, no matter how bizarre the circumstances (and believe me, they can be bizarre) all her characters, not only the main protagonists, appear real and their actions are utterly believable in the context of the plot.

The Passion of New Eve provides an excellent example of her Ballardian abilities. In this novel the reader is led through a bizarre, violent, bestial and sexually perverse corruption of the American Dream as he/she follows the odyssey of an innocent Englishman, Evelyn, who emigrates to the USA in the hope of finding the America of the traditional Great American Dream.

For the Fowles connection one need look no further than The Bloody Chamber. This collection of traditional fairy stories has been given that indescribable Carter touch, transforming them into haunting, stylish, erotic, nightmarish tales. The reader develops an affinity not only for the traditional heroes or heroines, such as the Beast in 'Beauty and the Beast' which, as Carter, becomes "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", but also for the villains - the werewolves in particular. I felt this even more strongly when I had the pleasure of listening to Angela Carter reading one of the stories from the collection - "The Werewolf" - and was reminded of the feelings of sympathy inspired by Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire.

After The Passion of New Eve, for me her best work is The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman. This describes the war with, and eventual victory over Doctor Hoffman. His weapons are unconventional, to say the least; he has devised a method of altering the fabric of reality using the power of our own subconscious desires, sexual desires in particular. We follow the 'hero' Desiderio, as he is sent out of the City to track down and eventually destroy Dr. Hoffman. The novel makes a very important statement about our motivations - we are guided by our own desires and are incapable of controlling our own destinies. This theme pervades much of Angela Carter's work (see Heroes and Villains) and she argues her case very persuasively. So beware: no matter how strongly you discount the theory, she propounds it so well that you won't notice your own metamorphosis.

She is not the easiest of writers to follow; she demands much of her readers, but the effort is well rewarded. If you haven't read any Angela Carter do take this opportunity to explore new and exciting territories.

EVE HARVEY

(((This appreciation was originally published in a slightly different form in the 1982 Channelcon Programme Booklet.))

Fools are my theme,
Let satire be my song.

Angela Carter

I'm very pleased and flattered to be here. More pleased and flattered than you might have thought when you invited me. I'd like to tell you how it came to pass that to be an honoured guest at a science fiction convention was a girlish dream of mine from a relatively early age. Since to most of you I suspect that I'm respectable but obscure, I thought that I'd indulge myself in a bit of autobiography. I'd run through my life as a science fiction fellow traveller, if you like.

When I was a child, about 11 or 12, I suffered from insomnia and I very rarely slept. My father was a journalist and he worked at night. He'd bring in the next day's papers about midnight. This was very exciting. They'd smudge the sheets. He used to bring them to me where I lay on my sleepless bed and all the fresh print would smudge the sheets in a delicious way and get onto my fingers. I liked that very much. If I had a cut some of this printer's ink must have got into my blood. He'd bring the Times for my mother and the Daily Sketch for me. I wasn't very precocious and if any of you remember the Sketch it was about suited for a child of my age.

So it came to pass that in the small hours of those long ago sleepless nights I found myself reading a book called The Day of the Triffids, which was coming out in parts in the Daily Sketch at that time. Now, mock not; I'm aware that this is a book which is not taken terribly seriously these days by people like yourselves. I could be wrong, but I understand this is so. Maybe I was the right age for John Wyndham, who can say. But I enjoyed it very much, and to my enquiring mind, for indeed I had an enquiring mind, it wasn't the triffids that interested me at all. I don't like gardening much. I get very claustrophobic in the countryside because so much is going on. And I think I always thought that plants were like that really if you gave them a chance. It was the idea of a blind world that obsessed and indeed terrified me. A world which was irretrievably changed because of the loss of one single human faculty. And I think that book left a lasting impression on me because it taught me that writing didn't have to be true in order to have a meaning, and a catastrophe that was impossible, that was purely imaginary, could both move and disturb me.

So time passes. I continued to follow the career of John Wyndham, and I would read a little science fiction from time to time. But it didn't really take. Because it was the 'Golden Age', and I was already into prose style. I'd quarrel with people's grammar and I'd heckle the page and I'd generally throw copies of "Amazing" out of railway train windows.

What was important in this life I'm describing was when I eventually went to university, which I did at a mature age. I read English, and I was drawn to that section of our native literature which is actually mostly about monsters. Old English and medieval literature, in fact, which is how I came not to take JRR Tolkien seriously. But it's also the part of our literature, our inheritance, in which literal truth isn't important at all. In Beowulf, for example, it's not a question of do monsters exist or can a monster have a mother? It's: how does a monster's mother feel?

And I also got used to an idea which I think is very important in science fiction, which is that the reader is doing a lot of the work, that reading a book is in a sense a recreation of it. That writing is not necessarily a personal activity, not a personal expression of my feelings or personality, but an articulation of a whole lot of feelings and ideas that happen to be around at the time. I won't bore you with a lot of stuff about medieval literature, which I still love very much, but I assure you that before the invention of printing reading was hard work. You really felt like you'd accomplished something when you'd read a manuscript in handwriting. Just as sometimes I feel that reading some of those books on very friable yellow paper that come apart in your hand, and come unglued from the spine, and the print's all over the page, and it seems to have been written for people who have magnifying lenses in their glasses, that's hard work too. Actually this remained true, about reading being hard work, right up to the 18th century with the regularisation of spelling. We were having a panel discussion about critics, and also about publishers and editors, just the other day; and I was thinking I do have a use for editors. It's because they can correct my spelling.

One of the things I love about science fiction readership, fans in fact, is that they really feel that they've made your book their own by reading it, which is a very respectably academic thing to do. That you've worked at it by reading it, that it's become yours. And people take a book personally. They tell you what it means to them. They tell you what should have happened in Chapter Seven. They take you to task over things that happened in Chapter Five. And if you didn't quite mean that yourself, well your interpretation is as valid as theirs, but you have to put up a very good case indeed to justify yourself.

Once the book is published it belongs to the fan, not the writer. And though this is a response which occasionally gets up my nose a lot, unfortunately I have a feeling that it's correct, that it is what happens to a book. Once it's written, once it's published, once it's read and somebody loves it, you cease to have any responsibility for it at all. It takes on a life of its own. It doesn't belong to me.

Anyway, into the booksian hermetic world which I've just described, at a time when I was doing research into the untold but not unchronicled early life of the magician Merlin - Robert Nye actually used a lot of that material. I was very annoyed he got there before I did - just as I was about to learn old Welsh and vanish entirely into a universe of dusty tomes, a magazine called 'New Worlds' dropped into my consciousness. And it was exciting. It seemed to me, because I came to it freshly - I found a copy of it in a bookshop - that I didn't know any of the back-up to this. I didn't know what had happened. I didn't know why people suddenly began to write like that in the early 60's. I can't tell you how exciting it was. I was reading Ballard and Moorcock and Sladek as it came tumbling off the presses.

I was writing fiction myself at that time, and fiction that was nudging at the edges of possible experience, that was acutely dissatisfied with various formulas of what you'd call mainstream fiction. When I read those mid-60's issues of 'New Worlds' I realised it was possible to scrap almost everything I found oppressive about those apparatuses of fiction.

People talk about mainstream fiction and sf as though they were two quite different kinds of writing, and fantasy as well, as though it was quite different. But I think this is a false distinction, that it is a labelling that helps librarians, and people who know the kind of thing they like and don't want their prejudices to be disturbed.

I've just had a letter from a friend who's doing a little TV play about the relationship between a man and a woman, and she wants to set it in a circus. The TV director she's working with says: "No, you can't possibly have an affair between a high-wire walker and a trapeze artist. That's weird, that's unlikely. They've got to be ordinary people, like a solicitor and a social worker, that sort of person." But Lorna says that if she gets them down to the ground and into a flat in Hampstead, that for her then it begins to get really weird, then it gets really strange. She doesn't know what's going to

happen next. And that's how I've always felt. As my grandmother used to say: There's nowt so queer as folk.

I could relate instantly to the world of Ballard's *Crash*. It seemed to me that that was how the late 60's felt, that that was how it was like. That was how it felt to be living through the margin of the Vietnam War. And it was only, it seemed to me, the group of writers who were loosely connected with 'New Worlds' that were actually dealing with the new circumstances in which we found ourselves, as British people in a society that had changed quite radically since we'd been grown up. And also as beings in the world, because we were the generation that grew up with the reality of nuclear weapons. I was five when the Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and I came of age roughly with the Cuban Missile Crisis, which I think was one of the great watersheds, certainly of my life. I think people who were born after the Cuban Missile Crisis, who don't remember it, are different because it was touch and go for a minute there. And I think you could say that nobody could ever be ordinary again - if anybody ever could be, which I don't think they actually could, except in terms of wish fulfillment. But we can't be ordinary now because there isn't the time.



The idea that first gripped me when I was a little kid and read *The Day of the Triffids* in the newspaper, that the literal truth might not be the whole truth, turned into a conviction that one way of asking questions - because I think that one of the functions of fiction is to ask questions that can't be asked in any other way - is through constructing imaginary worlds in which ideas can be discussed. And speculations about the nature of our experience on this planet be conducted without crap about the imitation of life getting in the way, because whose life are you supposed to be imitating. Obviously a trapeze artist has got as much claim to be alive as a solicitor.

Autobiographically, what happened next, when I realised that there were no limitations to what one could do in fiction, was just what happened when people tried to get out of genre into mainstream - maybe what always happens when one tries to scramble one's labels - I stopped being able to make a living. Actually I didn't really stop being able to make a living because I've always found it easier to tailor my lifestyle to my income than the other way. So, shall we say, we took a significant nose-dive in lifestyle, complicated by the fact that those who'd known me as a mainstream writer kept telling me I'd only gone into genre for commercial reasons. Which certainly wasn't so. Novels of mine would resurrect themselves with naked women and tentacular monsters on the cover, but that didn't do the trick. I became the literary equivalent of a displaced person. I kept applying for my naturalisation papers in genre, as some of you probably know,

but although some fans were ready and indeed eager to offer me resident alien status, basically someone else always seemed to smell a rat. You can't scramble labels as easily as that. So, with Channelcon, I do believe I have at last received my passport, resident permit and credit card. Thank you.

I'd just like to say a little more about the arbitrary divisions as I see them between straight fiction, sf and fantasy. It's not a question of making genre-sf or fantasy respectable, because that would kill it. In mainstream terms my honoured co-guest, Mr Sladek, the Grand Demystifier, is quite outrageously experimental and it's his good luck, in a sense, that he's able to do what he does without disturbing the horses, because he's in a genre, instead of joining the great unread in the remoter regions of the John Cowler catalogue. Not being respectable often means that you are read by people with open minds who are not intimidated by the unorthodox, who love it in fact. It's interesting that one of the first English translations of a story by the great Argentinian writer Borges first appeared in 'Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine'. It was a story called 'The Garden of Forking Paths'. Borges, who only writes little philosophical investigations, has been adopted as a kind of household god by a lot of people who neither know or care that the publication of *Labyrinths*, which was his first collection, here in the 70's rocked the entire mainstream to its foundations, opened up whole new possibilities for all kinds of writers. They showed, in fact, what lots of sf fans knew in their heart, that you don't actually need a plot, or characters, only an idea, and a monomaniacal obsession with getting it across.

It doesn't really matter why people read new things, strange things, unorthodox things, as long as they actually read them, as long as they get into the texts. And it was amazing for me to see in the Fancy Dress Parade last night all these people who've got into the texts to such an extent that for a few hours they actually live out these characters from novels. I think this is wonderful. You certainly don't get that at, for example, literary conventions. People turn up imitating themselves at do's like that.

The technological aspects of science fiction have always passed me by. For purely practical reasons. I can't so much as change a plug on an iron. This isn't because I'm a woman, I assure you, my brother can't either. It's kind of an inherited gene. Every time I look at a technological appliance it goes wrong. It's like King Midas in reverse. And theoretical physics has always seemed to be pure poetry, partly because I don't understand it. Fantasy is only what people think of when their minds are at play.

Just recently, in the last four or five years, there have been distinct signs of feedback from genre into the kind of fiction that gets respectfully reviewed in the Sunday papers, that wins the big respectable prizes. Which is difficult for me, because I'm a perverse person, and my response has been to start contemplating fiction about the international arms trade. I don't think it's impossible to do this in terms of the fantastic, far from it. But we live in very confused, confusing and dangerous times, and fiction, which is a kind of log of these times, changes its nature and expands and sucks in material from all manner of places and from all manner of styles and genres to be able to adequately describe ourselves



to ourselves at all kinds of levels.

It's also supposed to give pleasure, too, and what's nice is that you're all here basically to have a good time, and you have fun reading books. As a visitor or a co-optee from another part of the literary forest, take it from me, that's odd. It's a real shot in the arm. Actually, it's very nice.

Thank you. I'm not very good at doing party pieces, but I'm a whizz at repartee, so I'd very much like to open all this up now and have you address me as you would any kind of target.

QUESTION: Having completed this journey in our direction, do you think, if you wished, you could ever retrace your steps?

CARTER: What do you mean? Do you mean I could become respectable again?

QUESTION: If you ever wanted to, could you ever go back to recover the position you had? It's a difficult concept to explore, I suppose, given that the attitude to sf changes, but you appear to have had to change people's attitude to you, and what you were writing, and generally fight against prejudice. Do you feel that there is even a journey to retrace now?

CARTER: No, not really. I don't worry about it very much. As long as my books get published I don't worry about what happens then. But, when I was young I was promising, but now I'm old so I can't go back to being promising. I can't imagine how I could have done anything else than what I did.

QUESTION: When were you respectable?

CARTER: Oh gosh, honestly? Before you were born. No, I was respectable about 1966, 1967. I was very young and I was quite respectable for a little while. I won prizes and things.

QUESTION: I was reading a book of yours from the 60's, The Magic Toyshop, and I think that was splendidly unrespectable. Are you going back before that?

CARTER: No, that was my second novel. No, truly, it had respectful reviews that one. Nobody told me to take up another occupation.

QUESTION: Do they do that now?

CARTER: They did for a little while. They've stopped doing that now.

QUESTION: The move towards the fantastic in mainstream literature; I mean novels like Riddley Walker and Doris Lessing's series and so on, is it just a fad? Do you think it's a real change in the accepted literary world which will last?

CARTER: I think it's terribly important. It's a realisation, a recognition by certain writers that the formulas of fiction can no longer contain the content that they want to put in them, that something has to change, that something new has to happen, and that it's no longer possible to write simply about the world. And it's no longer possible to write directly from reality. I really think that.

QUESTION: Do you think that your writing is part of a greater women's movement in writing?

CARTER: What could be greater than a women's movement?

QUESTION: You were talking about formulas, but I got the impression that it's still not so much a formula, in a way it's myth, the structure of the story.

CARTER: I don't know. There's a whole lot of stuff lying around in the mental attics of the world to ransack and to dust over and bring out again and show people what kinds of loony things they've always believed in. And I'd like to see it as a kind of ransacking of the world, I'd like

to see it as a kind of looting. I rather like to see literature as a kind of looting and vandalising of the past.

QUESTION: Do you think you fit in with a lot of other female writers in that way?

CARTER: Oh like whom?

QUESTION: Well, like Anna Kavan for instance.

CARTER: She had advantages I don't have, like a habit. She's also long gone. I'd like to think I'm out there in the great world chucking rocks at things rather than sitting alone with my neuroses.

QUESTION: Does it trouble you that your books really are what could be described as a minority taste? That the majority of the public are tending towards illiteracy if anything, and even those literate few who still read books, even of those few the ones who read and enjoy your books might be a minority of a minority as it were. Does that trouble you?

CARTER: It didn't until you put it like that. I would hope it wasn't quite the case. You know, lots of people like them because they're rude and violent. I would hate to think that they're absolutely obscure, I would always like to think that there was something that gave pleasure to almost anyone.

QUESTION: You say that you've discovered that we came here for pleasure, that we came here for fun.

CARTER: Are you annoyed? Are you going to take issue with that?

QUESTION: No, I agree. Fun is not something I associate with your books. Do you think having discovered that we can get fun, do you think that will change what you do?

CARTER: I don't know. God, it's truth time, isn't it. Well, fun is different from pleasure. I would say I'd like to give pleasure. I mean fun

is something else. Quite possibly seeing all you fun lovers here, the prospect will lighten my spirits in the future, and the gloom will lift.

QUESTION: You've been talking about scrambling labels, and here you've been put into categories, a female writer, a writer for minority tastes. It seems to me so obvious that you're an individual who writes books. Some of us love them, and who cares about respectable and unrespectable, it's just the instant of pleasure. Do you think it's important: respectable, not respectable; male writer, female writer?

CARTER: No, I don't think it's important. But the thing is the relationship between the writer and the reader, which is the ideal relationship, which is what you're writing for. You're writing for this imaginary reader who is going to respond to you. You're putting a message in a bottle. This ideal relation is mediated by a number of people in between. It's a very lengthy and elaborate process. And along this line all the categorising takes place. We're a categorising species. We love categories, we love labels. We're a librarian species, we adore stacking things up. We adore putting them in sections. We adore putting them on shelves. One of the first things you find children doing is sorting out their things, putting them in groups. In a way all this has to happen before it's negated by the ecstatic union of reader and writer. Because all this had to be gone through. And you know which part of the bookshop the books you like are in. You know which part of the library. Unless you wander at random around the shelves. It's all part of the experience. No relationships in this world are pure, and it's like a happy accident when that meld takes place.

QUESTION (John Brunner): An interesting thing happened to us in science fiction a few years ago, largely, I suspect, because American academics have run out of other subjects to write on. The academic spotlight got turned on sf, giving rise to that celebrated rallying cry: "Get sf out of the universities and back in the gutter

where it belongs." I suspect that people must have written scholarly dissertations and theses about your work. How do you feel about the current state of academic criticism, and the kind of things it's saying about the kinds of things we do review?

CARTER: Well actually nobody has. It's flattering of you to suggest it might have happened. I once met somebody who wanted to write a thesis on me, but they didn't after they talked to me. It's a strange world. I don't think you need worry about it because it's not to do with anything. In the States it's to do with tenure track, and it's to do with making sure your department isn't going to get cut (a castration fear, obviously). It's opening up new areas for Eng Lit because everything else has been done. You've got to start genre now. You get whole departments devoted to Lovecraft, you know. But I don't think it's got anything to do with anything. It gives one almost a superstitious fear that if you're being studied in depth by a professor of Semiotics in some American university, that this means by the intricate system of laws and balances that govern the universe, that suddenly all over Britain, Europe and America, instantly smelling a rat, people are going to start hurling you books out of a window yelling "Enough! None of this nonsense for me!" But I don't think it happens because it's such a hermetic world, and it doesn't spill out at all and it does create jobs. I mean you don't want to see these people on the streets. Perhaps you do want to see these people on the streets, I don't know how strong your passion is. I know it's very annoying seeing people earn healthy livings teaching people who died penniless, but I wouldn't want them to starve.

QUESTION: Recently I heard on the radio one of your stories. Did you get any interesting reaction from it?

CARTER: When was that? I never get any reaction to anything. I get letters occasionally, sometimes with addresses, sometimes not. I don't



get much reaction.

QUESTION: It just occurred to me that putting something on the radio or television brings it to the attention of people who wouldn't have come across it in book form.

CARTER: I'm not sure this happens. It's all hit and miss.

QUESTION: Your last novel, *The Passion of New Eve*, was in fact an outrageously genre novel. It now goes back quite a few years, and since then you've mostly been working on non-fiction, on translations, modernisations and variations on fairy stories and children's books. What will be coming soon?

CARTER: Don't dismiss my modernisations and variations of fairy stories out of hand like that. I worked very hard at them. I thought I was doing something unique and subversive and outrageous and strange. I thought *The Passion of New Eve* was an absolutely straight down the middle genre novel, but nobody else seemed to



notice it. I'm much too superstitious to talk about what I'm working on. I can't possibly do that, it terrifies me.

QUESTION: Do you think if they did start writing PhD's about you that they'd be able to say anything? I mean, I'm thick sometimes, and very often find that reading a book about another book makes me go back to the original book and see things I hadn't seen in it before. Do you think if someone started writing books about you that we could learn anything that way? Or that you could learn anything that way?

CARTER: Sure, I could learn lots. It would be fantastic. I would open the pages with tremendous glee. I do feel that once I've finished something it no longer belongs to me. It belongs to whoever's reading it. And they can do what they like with it. I would be very angry if people really did attribute to me motives and intentions I hadn't had, but what they find in it is what they find in it. It's got nothing to do with me, it's got to do with their gestalt and what

they're putting into the novel.

QUESTION: Someone said earlier that they didn't think it important that you were a female writer. Well I think it's very important in your writings, especially in the theme that works into a lot of your stories of sex and violence and the interrelationship that often exists between them. And I think it's actually made me re-examine my own feelings towards the situations because I found a lot of them very disturbing and I could say I don't like the stories, I don't like having read them, because they disturbed me even though I know they're very good stories. What made you choose this as something that you write about a lot? And what made you write the Sadean Woman? I'd be very interested to find out why you wrote a whole book about pornography and violence as it relates to women.

CARTER: Well I am a feminist. I call myself a feminist. It's a label which is not only applied to me, but which I wear proudly, indeed defiantly. The area of female sexuality is still one of the great taboo areas, one of the great areas which has not been explored. And I wanted to explore it, I wanted to investigate it. And I wanted to try not to bring any prejudices I might have had towards it, and also to attempt to see certain kinds of interpersonal violence as a metaphor for certain kinds of violence within society, certain kinds of institutionalised violence within our economic system, within our hierarchical system, within the way that our society operates.

QUESTION: In your novels there is a notable progression towards greater complexity over the years, particularly when you've got the Sadean influence coming in. Is this deliberate? And is this defensible? Is it a good thing to become more complex because you're perhaps writing for a smaller audience when you become more complex. Is it a good thing?

CARTER: If I've got more complex over the years it's just because I've got older. And I get bored very

easily. I get bored with myself and I have to think of new things. I get bored with my ideas and I have to re-work them. One of the reasons, if my writing has become more clotted, is to stop myself getting bored. I think a lot of writers do actually do things in order to stop themselves getting bored. I read a novel called Princess Daisy, which I don't know if any of you have read. I read it for reasons of my own. I can't imagine how she didn't bore herself into the ground writing that. It's 900 pages and how she kept awake at the typewriter is amazing. You know that old thing about nobody ever lost a fortune underestimating the intelligence of the American public; well I think that's a terrible thing to say. I've got absolutely no reason for assuming that people who are going to read me are going to be any stupider than I am. I would like to think that most of them are a lot better than me so I can pitch it as high as I like because there'll be someone out there who'll pick it up and beam it back. In my experience the more expectations you have of people the more likely they are to live up to them. So I am unrepentant.

QUESTION: How do you see yourself going on from here? Are you going to be the sf mole in Virago?

CARTER: No, the thing about Virago is it's all moles. I don't know, I shall go on my merry way. The thing is I talk about age a lot, obviously because I've just passed one of those great meridians in a woman's life which is 40. And I appear to be getting infinitely more light-hearted as I get older. Possibly because the clans are closing in fast and the thing to do appears to be to keep cheerful.

QUESTION: Are you intending to use laughter as a weapon against the parlous state of affairs closing in around you?

CARTER: I'd always hoped I did, but an awful lot of people don't seem to think I'm funny. It's very distressing. I think it's something to do with black humour, a lot of people take it seriously and find it very un-

pleasant.

QUESTION: You seem to object to the suggestion that you're a minority readership writer. Yet you are a very self-conscious writer and your work is peppered with literary references which might restrict your audiences.

CARTER: What I've found, on the whole, is that people don't seem to find it too arduous. What I've found is that although some people are intimidated by that sort of thing lots of people are kind of torn by it, and coming across references to things they don't know about will think: "Gosh, that's interesting, I must go and look that up." In a way that's why I do it. It's like seeding something. (It's very arrogant of me, but this has been a feast of self-gratification). It's nice if you can actually send people off on other tracks. Most of the books I've read that have been most important to me have actually sent me off on a whole new adventure in finding out about things. I do think that there is this thing, and people will pick up on things and follow them up. Actually, if I saw it as a limitation I would have probably stopped it.

QUESTION: Like a lot of J.G. Ballard, your last novel refers to a sort of mythical America. Have you been there?

CARTER: I have been, yes.

QUESTION: What sort of reaction do you get from America and what reviews and reactions have American critics and readers made to your books?

CARTER: Well I wrote The Passion of New Eve on the basis of two days in Manhattan in 1969, and I don't use that lightly because I tell you Manhattan in 1969 was a very very strange and disturbing and unpleasant and violent and terrifying place. Especially if you were a hippy as I was then. And also three weeks on a Greyhound bus. It was the height of the Vietnam War, it was the height of the paranoia in America. I had a very

intense experience of America. I was absolutely horrified by it. I went to live in Japan for two years afterwards because I felt I can't cope with the West. I spent a year there last year and I had a lovely time. One changes, one mellows, I learnt a lot about America. But that novel was based on that very intensive experience of America at one of its spiritual, psychic, existential worsts. The number of people who offered to do me violence was extraordinary. I could hardly get off the bus eventually. It was dangerous sitting on the bus because people would come and abuse one because they thought you were a peacenik, or they thought you weren't.

How do I do in America? We have an expression up North: to go down like a cup of cold sick. And after what I've just said, is it any wonder? I mean that novel you were talking about was supposed to draw a portrait, warts and all, of the soul of America. Some people liked it very much. About three people liked it very much! I have a small cult following in America - some of whom are rather frightening. Some of the reviews I get in America, I think they want to put me behind bars. I think the Moral Majority actually has a price out on me. I guess I must be banned somewhere in the States.

QUESTION: Prior to your introduction to convention fandom, what was your idea of your audience? How would you have categorised your readers, if we can reverse the categorisation question?

CARTER: I always had an idea of this person in a bedsitter who drank a lot of Nescafe and worried. That was certainly the person I had in mind when I was writing.

□□□□□□□□

Photographs by Arnold Akien.

Edited and transcribed by Paul Kincaid
from a tape recording produced by
Aardvark House.....

A second form of censorship, by the publisher or editor, is possibly the most dangerous and unforgivable. It is dangerous because we, the readers, cannot tell if it's happening and it's unforgivable because you would hope that they would know better. It would be nice to say that the taboo subjects are no longer with us - Politics, Sex, Profanity, Religion, Pessimism to name but five - but it seems that they are. In the days of Astounding Science Fiction under Campbell's editorship it was well known that he disliked publishing downbeat stories in which humanity came out second best. After all, it might put the reader off buying the next issue. This is such a naive attitude that you wonder how it ever got started, but what is even more remarkable is that it is still prevalent today with some sf magazines sending out rejection slips stating "pessimism" as a reason for rejection. I can see it now; "Dear Sir, in these drab and perilous times, because of the downbeat and pessimistic nature of your novel I'm afraid to say that we have to reject your book 1984. P.S. If you would consider rewriting the ending..?" But where does editorial control finish and censorship start? For instance, the average readership age of Asimov's SF Magazine I would guess to be in the early teens. Do editors/writers have a moral right to publish extracts of a book like Delany's Dhalgren which hits all five of our above mentioned taboos? To put it another way, how would you like to find your 13 year old daughter reading it? What about censorship now?

I would like to suggest that the third form of censorship, the burning of books syndrome, is as a direct consequence of the supposed 'lack' of the first two. The burning of books is the most despicable but it is also the most understandable. In the case of the 'moral majority' it seems to be pure frustration, in some respects a cry for help as people feel themselves swallowed by the media. However, the danger is self-evident in that publishers might take the easy road and simply not publish a book that could be contentious.

Do we take the attitude publish and be damned? Is not moral responsibility required? Censorship?

COOL CAT....

ANN COLLIER

(THE MAN WHO HAD NO IDEA by THOMAS M. DISCH. Gollancz 1982, 186pp., £7.95.)

Impersonalised, urban societies. Bored, unfulfilled characters. When lucky, they drift into brief relationships with real people or with their transmitted images conveyed by technological miracles which provide the means of communication long after people have run out of things to say. When unlucky, they relate only to images of themselves or their own obscene fantasies.

This collection explores situations in near-future societies where human intercourse is centrally controlled, from the pursuit of pleasure to conversation. Rendered by other writers, this catalogue of despair would be a scream of anguish, provoking an emotional response from the reader's shocked nervous system. Disch, however, takes one measured step back from it all and, unhastily, treats it with humour, sometimes restrained, carefully modulated irony, sometimes preposterous, wildly exaggerated comedy. His insistent invitation is to the intelligence and to the capacity for amusement, not to the emotions.

First the basics. This collection comprises seventeen stories, of which many are extremely short. They date from 1973-1982 and are characterised by Disch as drifting towards "laughter, satire and responsible mature concerns".

Two of them are good, old-fashioned horror stories, exercises in genre writing, but where the sexual elements normally only alluded to are fully recognised and made explicit. "The Black Cat" is easily the more successful. The protagonist moves into a flat whose previous occupant committed suicide. Her cat befriends him and becomes his alter ego, his companion and, symbolically and physically, his sexual partner. It comes to represent the murky, barely glimpsed depths of his personality whose compelling power increasingly suborns him. This compact story wisely suggests far more than it explains, assuming the readers familiarity with the conventions of the genre. The second horror story is Disch's attempt to upstage Rosemary's Baby. It fails to frighten because he allows his salvos against religion and believers to interfere with the stylistics and therefore some of the phrases jar, jolting the reader out of the mood.

The collection contains two pieces which are mere snippets, "How to Fly" is Disch limbering up for On Wings of Song. The other purports to be a perfectly serious proposal to build "Pyramids for Minnesota" and is in the form of typical questions the functionalist would ask, to which are given answers capable of articulation only with the tongue firmly in the cheek. The incongruity at the centre of this piece is widely used by Disch throughout this collection. In "The Revelation" the voice of God speaks to one Ingman Bergmar, a Swede of course, and maker of films for adult audiences. Divine wisdom is imparted, in this instance, from the middle of an Italian pastry, and tells Ingman when the world will end. Time passes, mould encrusts the pastry and Ingman begins to doubt the authenticity of the divine manifestation until his doubts are relieved by the ultimate confirmation. Gods of the Greek variety meddle in human affairs in "The Vengeance of Hera or Monogamy Triumphant". Winged-heeled messengers no longer bring the news to Hera, who these days keeps abreast of human affairs by reading the Social Announcements in The Times. Outraged by a man's failure to pay due respect to the institution of marriage, she plans vengeance. This story has a strong flavour of soap opera, Greek myth meets Dallas, and Disch disposes of the more modern 'myths' of happy-ever-after marriage, and of fulfilled motherhood for the bored, empty-headed, housewife consumer. The latter fares even worse in "Concepts" in which the cliché 'worshipped from afar' acquires a literal meaning. Receivers transmit images to other solar systems and the female protagonist falls in love with a distant stranger by this rather ethereal means. Constantly returned to in this

collection are Disch's thoughts on the shallowness of relationships and the superficiality of communication. This poor woman seeks companionship by tuning into different signals in space but, apart from her faithless friend, finds only the visual equivalent of the telephone heavy breather, a patronising, evangelising computer and some jolly but inane pigs who recite Browning! Disch in less subtle mood... In the title story, even though conversation of all kinds is strictly regulated by the authorities, banality is still the norm when people are allowed to speak. This story, although intermittently amusing, is long-winded and of interest only as evidence of the skill with which Disch obliquely gives background detail and for the touches of purely incidental humour, both of which are characteristic of the collection as a whole.

More consistently amusing is "The Santa Claus Compromise", a splendid parody of the Watergate conspiracy, lampooning the naive desire to believe that integrity is the hallmark of public figures. Easy to laugh at that. Less so at "Planet of The Rapes" which Disch says is a lampoon on male chauvinism. Whilst it certainly stresses the oppression of women in the role of passive objects of male aggression and pleasure seeking, its loyalties seem somewhat divided. It describes a world in which the men return occasionally to Earth from their permanent home in space to visit Pleasure Centre, to which women are regularly conscripted to be sexual partners and to become pregnant. Men are conditioned to rape not to love and the women are dressed and made up to confirm to several stereotypes. This is a cleverly told satire on sexual attitudes, brimful of perspectives on chauvinism yet the details are undoubtedly titillating, whether Disch intended so or not.

Of the remaining stories in the collection, "The Apartment Next to the War" is one of the most single minded and probably the best. Three pages long, it deals brilliantly and understatedly with TV's ability to bring world events into the living room whilst distancing the viewer from the reality of what is happening. Residents of an apartment block are inconvenienced by noisy neighbours. By chance, one day, their neighbour's door is left open and they see the source of the noise. A war is being waged. The inconvenience grows.

Perhaps Disch is right. Cool irony may be the appropriate response to the horrors of life in urban societies. He offers a distant perspective on them to the reader who is prepared to focus his mind, but he has no intention of making it easy. These are not parables and it is not Disch's style to impart ready-made easily digestible wisdom. This clever collection is packed with ideas, side-lights and passing fancies. Despite the heaviness of much of the material, it is often very funny. I was, however, relieved to come to the end and be allowed to reclaim my feelings.



DO YOU KNOW THE ONE ?

CHRIS MORGAN



(THE GOLDEN SPACE by PAMELA SARGENT. Timescape 1982, 271pp., \$15.50)

Pamela Sargent has written a long, long book about increased longevity.

You must know the old story about increased longevity: you have to give up drinking, smoking, sex and eating rich food; it doesn't make you live for ever, it just seems like it. Similarly, Pamela Sargent has given up writing interestingly; her book isn't infinitely long but certainly seems that way.

Note how carefully I refer to this work as a book rather than as a novel or a collection - for it is neither of those. It is a fix-up. If the Peter Nicholls Encyclopaedia had achieved nothing else its existence would have been fully justified by its popularisation of that term, fix-up, spawned by A.E. Van Vogt to mean a work of fiction consisting of several linked (and usually previously published)

stories. It's a marvellously expressive term, full of negative connotations suggesting seediness, undesirability, a botched-up job and the inability to write a proper novel. Of course, I realise that this is an unfair response. There are some very good fix-ups (I can think of Gene Wolfe's *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* and Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight*) but *The Golden Space* isn't one of them.

Increased longevity - or immortality, if you prefer - is a fascinating subject which has tripped up most of the authors who've attempted to deal with it. (I'll spare you the casualty list.) Just imagine what it must be like to live for 200 years, 500 years, 1000 years - could anybody maintain the will to live over such a time period? Would the pressures of old memories become overwhelming? How would the mind occupy itself, with repetitious thoughts or something new? Would boredom be inescapable? How alien would a human being have become after a millennium of continuous existence? All these - and more - are questions which Pamela Sargent either fails to answer adequately or else sidesteps completely.

Most of the characters in *The Golden Space* are effectively immortal. They can die by accident or disease but not of old age. Each wears a bracelet, the *Bond*, for communication and for summoning help in case of emergency. Having undergone a course of treatment they stay young forever. The time when longevity and immortality treatments became available (known as the Transition) conveniently resulted in collapsing governments and widespread deaths (some from the treatments themselves), so that the surviving immortals have no legacy of overpopulation to contend with. The book's overall plot (in so far as its meanderings contain one) concerns an experimental breeding programme aimed at producing a new variant of humanity - hermaphroditic, less emotional, and more able to cope with everlasting life. Growing up, these children resemble those in John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos*. Later they reach new heights of science and philosophy, becoming superpersons after the manner of Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*. Naturally, being hermaphroditic, they are persecuted by some normal humans and find it necessary to found a large, force-shielded reserve for themselves in what seems to remain, throughout the book, a greatly underpopulated USA.

Some of these aspects sound almost exciting, but when Ms Sargent writes about them she achieves a remarkable degree of tediousness. In part this is due to the absence of any sympathetic characters, and in part to the author's style of presenting the action in many brief scenes (which lack depth and seem designed to conceal the fact that very little actually happens). This episodicalness is most evident in the first part of the book, "The Renewal". Some of the later parts, especially "The Summer's Dust", seem contrived - a desperate attempt by the author to tell a real story for once against her chosen background. On the whole only a very oblique and patchy picture of this background is given. There's much more in the book that I could object to for reasons of logic, scientific accuracy, common sense or style, but I think I've warned you sufficiently, so I'll rest my case.



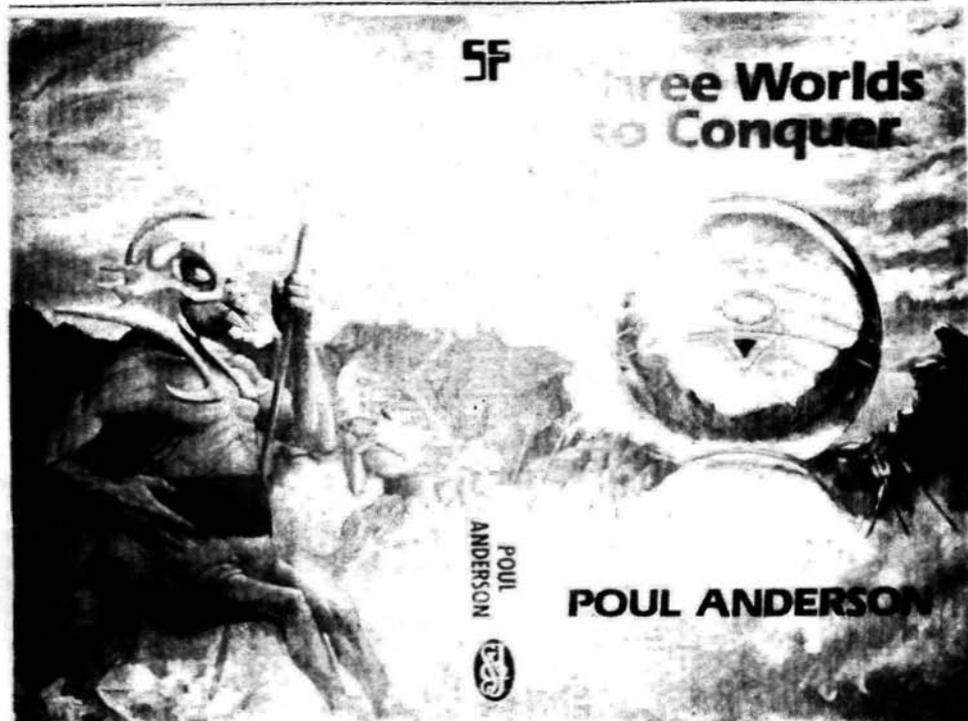
MONEY FOR OLD SLUGS

KEVIN RATTAN



(*THREE WORLDS TO CONQUER* by POUL ANDERSON. Sidgwick & Jackson 1982, 182pp., £5.95)

Here we have a reissue of a 1964 novel by one of SF's 'established names', Poul Anderson. For some reason, all the reissues of his works that I've seen recently have atrocious covers, and this one is no exception. Whilst it does bear some relation to the story inside, it does so in such a way as to make the tale seem even more primitive than it actually is, depicting battle-robbed blue centaurs surrounding a spaceship in the act of blasting off and thus giving the impression that this is yet another in the endless sequence of xenophobic novels that Ander-



son has served up to the reading public. This impression is misleading, however, for in fact this is not a novel in which the super-duper humans battle and blast all and sundry but one in which both humans and sundry have to line up together.

The tusked centaurs of the cover are visualised within the book in a much more sophisticated manner, and with more credibility. They are also considerably more alien, an effect achieved by their emplacement in an environment that convinces as both alien and workable, and to which they are obviously adapted; indeed, Anderson appears to have visualised excellently the forms necessary for survival on the planet Jupiter (although whether conditions there now are what they were thought to be in 1964 I can't say). But in respect of the most crucial factor, that of thought and behaviour, far more important than appearance and biology, the aliens fail to convince as anything other than human. They are concerned with 'honour', fight with spears, have warlike males and females who look after the young, and are sufficiently like us to be able to converse with humans via a language developed for the purpose by the two races. So all we are left with in the end is humans in strange shapes.

As I've mentioned, the title isn't as xenophobic as it appears. It refers to one man, Mark Fraser, who is in a position to save the Earth, which is going to be attacked by some nasty fascist types; Ganymede, which the nasty fascist types have taken over for the purpose of mounting the attack; and Jupiter, where the friendly aliens are being attacked by another group of not-so-friendly aliens also living on the planet. The narrative jumps back and forth between Theor, a friendly alien, to Mark Fraser, who seems convinced that he is not the hero type. Even the author seems convinced of this, but his hero's actions prove this opinion wrong. At times we see Mark fighting, at times Theor fighting, but always they are facing ultra-nasty baddies. Wasn't it lucky that the probe which landed on Jupiter happened to fall amongst the goodies...?

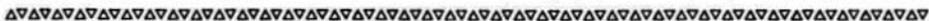
Three Worlds To Conquer is not a very good book, nowhere near as good as the Anderson 'classics' named on the jacket. Its plot stretches coincidence too

far and contains too many implausibilities. If it had been written by an up-and-coming young author rather than by Anderson, I doubt that it would have been published. So why, when there are new young British authors around, do we have a reissue of a not particularly distinguished Poul Anderson?



CHIC MILK AND WATER

BRIAN SMITH



(THE WORLD AND THORINN by DAMON KNIGHT. Berkley 1981, 227pp., \$2.50)

This novel is a genuine Curiosity. It is also deceptively ambitious. Knight has reached back into the history of SF to add his own contribution to that time honoured sub-genre, the hollow earth novel. The world of the title is a much transformed Earth, of the far future. Thorinn is a boy living in a vaguely Dark Age Icelandic society, whose life is rudely shattered when his family drop him into a well, as a sacrifice to appease the 'demon' that is plaguing their land with earthquakes. From the well, Thorinn finds his way through tunnels, caverns and rivers into a series of strange inner worlds, full of equally strange inhabitants, as he is driven downwards by his geas towards the centre of the Earth.

From the outset, Knight gives a masterly demonstration of narrative technique. His protagonist is an intelligent but untutored peasant, and his viewpoint is maintained with unswerving conviction throughout, couched in marvellously elegant language, so that the prose acquires a patina of quiet archaic charm. It is a restriction imposed by this style which behooves Knight to describe

familiar and recognisable (to us) phenomena in terms that someone like Thorinn would understand, but it is a triumph also. I do not think that I have ever seen the chasm of mystification between the pre-technological mentality and the hi-tech world so well depicted. Obviously, the changes that the Earth has undergone since our time are part of the mind-sets of the characters, so that they go quite unmentioned until the story requires them, and are only mentioned in passing even then. Knight takes a certain gleeful delight in startling the unwary with the sudden incongruencies thus produced. He is clearly not catering for the reader who likes the author to do all his thinking for him, although he does relent sufficiently to insert enough excerpts from histories and legends to permit the reconstruction of the fate of the Earth. It soon becomes clear this fate involves the leaving of the solar system. The introduction of the (admittedly not new) idea of Earth as generation starship leads, as is the wont of generation starship stories, to the introduction of questions of conceptual break-through, a motif which is pointed up by the close



resemblance between the inner worlds and the so-called Midworld, which is the surface. Thus, Thorinn's odyssey becomes a twofold rite of passage; not only must he overcome the dangers that he meets, but he must also attempt to reconcile his lifelong world picture with the glimpses of the Earth's true nature which are revealed to him.

A novel, then, which interweaves three themes, with a feast of fine writing (although the ending disappoints slightly, when Knight takes drastic action to rescue the story from the rather Gordian corner in which it has become enmeshed). And yet, in the final analysis, even with so much going for it, it is not a wholly successful novel, for its heart is empty. It has no spirit. If only Thorinn were a little less resourceful, a little more prone to fear and uncertainty (even in the narrowest tunnel, he does not suffer the slightest twinge of claustrophobia, which I cannot credit), then he might be more believable. As it is, he seems at times to be no more than a vehicle of the plot, serving only to turn the pages of the catalogue of inner Earth's wonders. He failed to elicit my sympathy for a moment.

The World and Thorinn is an exquisitely crafted artifact of a novel, glittering clockwork as precise as the innards of a Swiss watch. It reads as though it were conceived, not out of any particular passion on Knight's part, but as a virtuoso party piece, a status which it achieves effortlessly. But the human touch is, although not absent, sadly diluted. While this is a novel which I can admire greatly, I fear that I could never come to love it. ((Editorial Note: The Berkley issue of this novel has internal illustrations by Val Lakey. The illustration on the previous page is an example of her work.))



THE THREE AGES OF MAN

MARY GENTLE



(HELLICONIA SPRING by BRIAN ALDISS. Joannathan Cape 1982, 361pp., £6.96)

Sherlock Holmes, on being told that the Earth revolved around the sun and not vice versa, replied that this was an irrelevant piece of information which he would do his best to forget. Helliconia is not Conan Doyle's world, however, lost though it may be, and to Helliconia it is of supreme importance. The planet of a double star system, its orbit round Star B, Batalix, gives it a year of 480 days; but the greater orbit of both about Star A, Freyr, gives it a Great Year equal to some 2,592 terrestrial years. Supreme importance, because Aldiss, in creating a world like Earth but "with only one factor changed - the length of the year", has made Helliconia a world entirely subject to the repercussions of gravitation.

To create a world (as one might say to a demiurge) is creditable but not necessarily admirable. Orbits and eclipses, age-long seasons; flora and fauna, rajabarals and hoxneys, stungebags and childrim - no more than a problem in physics and biology, unless it contains the human or, perhaps, the alien that is of interest to the human (the proper study of mankind being, after all, anything and everything that comes to hand). Helliconia walks a tightrope between subcreation for its own sake and allegory, being, as Aldiss says, "a stage for the kind of drama in which we are embroiled in our century".

Inhabitants, then. Men, of course, for "no one wants a passport to a nation of talking slugs". That begs the question, bearing in mind the impossibility of any man creating something truly alien to mankind. But there is alien life on Helliconia; in fact there are three dominant organisms on the planet, and the book is most impressive where these are at their strangest.

The Prelude, 'Yuli', is at first sight a standard hero-tale, the quest of the orphaned young man who will found the dynasty of Embruddock/Oldorando with

which the rest of the book is concerned. The theocratic cavern-world of Pannoval, which he matures in and escapes from, echoes both pre-Industrial society and pre-life in the womb. Yet Yuli is not so much hero as anti-hero - murderer, conspirator, and false priest - in rejecting faith, he rejects also the 'truth' of this paranoid superstition-ridden society. In the main part of the book, Embruddock's people will devote much time to rediscovering what is concealed from Yuli (and the reader): that Helliconia is passing from ages-long Winter to ages-long Spring.

'Prelude: Yuli' is a curtain-raiser, and there are times when it appears to have very little to do with the rest of the book; in fact, to be there solely to compare and contrast two of Helliconia's seasons.

The main section of the book takes place in Embruddock, paradigm for civilisation. The power-struggles of the chieftain Aoz Roon, the innovations of the young dispossessed heir Laintal Ay, the woman Vry's discovery of primitive astronomy, and the quest of Shay Tal:

"You think we live at the centre of the universe. I say we live in the centre of a farmyard... It makes us not only ignorant but in love with ignorance. We're infested with ignorance. I'm going to propose a treasure hunt - a quest, if you like. We have to piece together what has happened to reduce us to this chilly farmyard... Knowledge. Truth. You fear it, yes. But you must seek it. You must grow to love it."

Which leaves the reader reflecting that Embruddock - mud-ridden, resolutely ignorant, bitterly afraid of truth, venal, amoral, quarrelling and murderous - is not the only farmyard in the universe.

The trouble with these people is that they represent so much: the hunger for knowledge, for political power, for civilisation growing out of barbarism; also slavery and inequality, helplessness before nature, and the thin growth of science in a Winter-sterilised soil. They have hardly time to be simply human. They fall in love, couple, commit treachery - but the pace (and the characterisation) is low-key, laid-back; it has the disadvantage of moving so slowly that at some points it just stops. Helliconia Spring has its boring moments.

But perhaps these allegorical people are not meant to be fully-rounded human beings? The evidence indicates they are meant to be more than archetypes. Over Helliconia the reader discovers (not quite in time to pick up flagging interest) the orbital Earth Observation Station Avernus: five thousand people beaming details of Embruddock's scandals back to their audience on Earth, a thousand years away. Does Embruddock have the soap-opera quality to hold a mass audience? Allegory and drama are uneasy bedfellows. Helliconia, like nature, cares more for the species than for the single organism.

The more alien of the planet's species are the phagors; horse-minotaurs at first presented so much as animal that it is a distinct shock when they speak. The phagors are the non-humans, the Others, their keratinous ancestors still present amongst them, compelled to abandon their civilisation and migrate along 'air octaves' and 'land octaves'; they are possessed of that touch of strange that aliens should have. At the lowest level they are something of a plot device, to start Yuli on his quest and to hang as a threat of invasion over Embruddock. They are also part of Helliconia's seasonal transformation; at cold apheion the civilised rulers of the planet, enslaving and worshipped, but compelled to change as Spring and Summer come. To some degree they are man's mirror-image; Helliconia Spring sets us a dichotomy between Batalix/Wutra/phagors and Freyr/Akha/mankind. Only rarely does the book come down to a personal level, as with Aoz Roon's forced encounter with a non-warrior phagor, to consider what effect one alien individual has on the other.

True, Helliconia's mankind also have their alien qualities. For the first part of the book the reader might be forgiven for mistaking it for fantasy - for sword-and-sorcery, to be precise. On the surface it could be no more than a re-creation of history; analogue pre-Industrial civilisation menaced by analogue

Mongol Hordes. (The current predilection in SF is for books that put pre-Industrial humans in costume drama on science-fictional planets, as in *The Snow Queen* and *Lord Valentine's Castle*.) Two things preclude this. One is the transformation of Earth's humanity into Helliconia's. They have, for one thing, their dead forever available for consultation - gossies and fessups under the earth, stacked in their land-octaves, diminishing into the unguessable past and growing steadily more bitter and spiteful, complaining and forgetful, as the years go by. But to have the afterlife known, and known to be unpleasant, doesn't make as much difference to life as might be expected. Embruddock is still superstitious, worshipping idols. The past holds its own ironies for them. The second difference the use of neologism - not as a kind of one-to-one key to be deciphered ('hoxney' = horse), as is familiar in many "alien" societies, but as shifting concepts. Eddre, for example, and harneys, because they are never explained and are attached in place of several different common English expressions, give the reader the feeling of glimpsing some new concept for which no English equivalent can be found.

Helliconia Spring is science fiction rather than fantasy, not because of such devices as Earth Station Avernus or a multitude of orbital and solar data, but because the world-view behind it uses science as a method of thought. Anti-mystic, anti-religious; the cure for ignorance, in Spring at least, is science. Hope is found in the systematisation of knowledge, the ordering of events, the extension of technology. There is little use for the way of the mystic, for the extension of inner perception. Only towards the end, in Laintal Ay's encounter with the protognostics (a species neither human, animal, nor rational) does it appear that there are other directions of knowledge. Helliconia promises us (with only a small possible reservation) that everything, ultimately, is explicable if only we search diligently enough.

Every aspect of Helliconia is subject to its position as a planet of a double star, with cyclic transformation as an iron law. Spring triggers off startling changes in flora and fauna, and - in a kind of biological determinism - the more rational species as well. The most powerful organism is neither human nor phagor, but a virus. It is this that keeps Avernus's inhabitants from visiting the planet and kills off large numbers of humans, so that those who survive its effects will be biologically fitted to survive the climatic changes of Spring. Helliconia reflects, perhaps, the fact that more wars have been won by bacteria than by battles, and more civilisations changed.

Which is not to say that there isn't humour in the book - sometimes sly, ironic, sometimes slapstick (and about halfway down page 173 is enshrined one of the great corny jokes); just that in the end there is very little left to laugh at.

The book comes across as pessimistic, even nihilistic. People are incapable of cooperation; character is submerged in the movement of culture. Men live in Embruddock where:

'So greatly had time dismantled a once proud city that its inhabitants did not realise that what they regarded as a town was nothing more than the remains of a palace, which had stood in the middle of civilisation obliterated by climate, madness, and the ages.'

And not even their own civilisation, let it be said, but that of the equally trapped phagors. Pessimistic because a circle can be begun anywhere - and if Spring is here, can Winter be far behind? The phagors' destruction of Embruddock is doomed even as it succeeds. Their time is over. The double star system condemns them, and mankind, to emnity. And what of men's lives (where even miracles are only accidents of physics)? Aoz Roon:

'''The generations are born and fly their course, then they drop to the world below. There's no escape from it. Only to have a good word said after all's over.'''

The reader is tempted to regard both man and phagor as victim of the environment, as easy to snuff out as the childrim.

Are there other possibilities? Helliconia's Spring has brought man from hunter-gatherer barbarism to city-state; what then might Summer bring? A technological revolution, perhaps, that would bring humanity knocking on Earth Station Avernus's door. Or a cultural revolution, some advance of inner perception. More about the relationship of men and phagors. Less about cultural cliches (such as the male-dominant/female-submissive society, and the equating of knowledge -- the scientific academy being run by women -- with something done only when one is incapable of 'manly' activities, such as killing). Helliconia Spring is, after all, only the first third of the trilogy; the forthcoming books may undergo changes of form and philosophy. In which case Helliconia undergoes retrospective revision.

Two things argue against optimism. Firstly, while Helliconia's Winter is described as 'frozen', Summer has the equally ominous appellation 'overheated'. Secondly, the allegory has its base in this century's civilisation.

Winter may be bleak: it depends, I suppose, on whether the pattern of history is a circle or a (hopefully ascending) spiral. But that, like so much else, is not only applicable to Helliconia. Ambiguity extends even to the etymology of Helliconia itself, which you may derive appropriately from HELIOCENTRIC, sun-centred, and CONIC, having to do with cones, ellipses, and orbits; or else from Mount HELICON, home of the Muses, and even HELLENIC Greece, also the cradle of a civilisation. Or, considering the Earth Observation Station's naming after Lake AVERNUS, the entry to the underworld, even more appropriately from HELL.



MIDDLE VOLUME PROBLEM

JOSEPH NICHOLAS



(THE ONE TREE by STEPHEN R. DONALDSON. Sidgwick & Jackson/Fontana 1982, 475/479pp., £8.95/£11.95. }

Traditionally, the middle volumes of trilogies have little to commend them: they exist less as novels in their own right than as chunks of plot intended to fill the gap between the other two volumes. There are exceptions (some more successful than others), such as Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast and Ursula Le Guin's The Tombs of Atuan, which have themes and stories of their own, but The One Tree is very definitely not of this company.

Donaldson was obviously aware of the "middle volume problem" when he wrote the first "Thomas Covenant" trilogy, and went some way towards smoothing it out by placing the events of each volume at several years remove from the events of the others; as a result, The Illearth War, while clearly part of a larger whole, at least has something resembling a story of its own. Then, too, there was the dramatic expedient of returning Covenant to our world at the conclusion of each volume, which -- apart from pointing up his role as the "Unbeliever", one who considered the Land as a self-induced hallucination -- meant that his reinduction into the Land at the start of the next constituted some kind of beginning, however forced, for it.

Then came The Wounded Land, first in the second trilogy, which cleared up a lot of the fudging evident in the conclusion of The Power That Preserves and more or less destroyed the Land as-we-knew-it (which, given that so few writers have the courage to wreak such havoc on their creations, made it memorable almost for that alone) - but which undid the whole "Unbeliever" aspect by giving Covenant a companion, Dr Linden Avery, transported into the Land with him. In addition, the failure of either to return to our world at the end of the novel seemed a portent of further decline to come: a decline which, with The One Tree, is so pronounced that I have serious doubts about the eventual worth of the third volume,



White Gold Wielder.

The One Tree, however, picks up from where The Wounded Land left off, chronicling Covenant's and Avery's search for the eponymous tree, from which they may cut a new Staff of Law to defeat Lord Foul. Since neither they nor the Giants on whose ship they are travelling know where it might be found, they first call in at 'Elenesnedene', home of the 'elohim' or fairy-folk, where they receive cryptic directions, a fairy to accompany them, and a curse which turns Covenant into a shambling moron. Then, caught in a storm at sea, they call in at Bhrathairain to effect repairs, where the chief minister, Kasreyn of the Gyre, attempts to take Covenant's white gold ring from him; after much intrigue and counter-intrigue, Kasreyn is killed, rebellion breaks out and they all escape. Then they reach their destination, and... and if you think that 470-odd pages is too many for such a story, you're absolutely right. Padding isn't the word for it.

Part of this is due, as his readers might suspect, to Donaldson's writing: never using two words where he thinks he can get away with fifteen. His prose is as clogged and as top-heavy as ever, in some places becoming so convoluted that it has to be read twice before its meaning emerges. I suspect, however, that most of the book's length is attributable to the contractual obligations imposed on him by the editors who pressured him into writing this second trilogy in the first place: having cleared up the points left over from the first trilogy (which was initially intended as a self-contained saga anyway) in The Wounded Land, Donaldson must have found himself with precious little left to say -- yet had a book to deliver regardless. Aware of the need for his characters to do something on their way to the One Tree but unable to work out what, then, he developed a writer's block... and there is present in the book a tone of the frustration you'd expect to be spawned by such. Not only does very little happen, but it takes a long time to do so, and is described so flatly and colourlessly as to have, in the main, no life or interest at all. Worse, none of what happens seems to have any relevance, either to their ostensible mission or to the Land. There are hints that the 'elohim's' cursing of Covenant and Kasreyn's later attempts to take his ring are inspired by Lord Foul, but they are never followed up (indeed, faced at one

point with a situation in which they could be, Donaldson quite blatantly has his characters switch their attentions elsewhere, and never mention the possibility again -- dishonest, to say the least). Worse still, the story is told from the viewpoint of Linden Avery, who to all intents and purposes is no different a personality from Covenant, and from whom we thereby gain none of the new insights or fresh perspectives that we might have expected; and since Covenant, even when under the curse, remains the focus of the 'action' there is no point at all to this change of viewpoint.

The One Tree is, in sum, a bitter disappointment, the reading of which was never other than a chore. It has reactivated all the reservations and doubts about the wisdom and worth of the second trilogy that I had from the moment I heard that it was in progress but which The Wounded Land largely laid to rest. I can only hope that White Gold Wielder, awful though I somehow expect it to be, will prove a more final conclusion to it than The Power That Preserves was to the first, fudging nothing and closing all the loopholes, rendering impossible any further volumes in the chronicles of Thomas Covenant.



A CACKLING-TIME

CHRIS BAILEY



(STRATA by TERRY PRATCHETT. New English Library 1982, 192pp., £1.50)

Terraforming can be fun; the bones of mammoths with hearing aids are buried at the correct depth by mischievous apprentices on the strate machines. "Don't bugger about planting funny fossils," the foreman admonishes. It turns out that humans are only the latest in a long line of world-builders. Evolution never happened, but a lot of trouble has been taken to work out what it would have been like if it had, because evolution is very reassuring, and humans are carrying on with the joke.

But then the novel suddenly shifts direction and we're off on an expedition to the Disc, a coin-shaped artificial world laid out like Earth. Except that the Venus which creaks across the sky on Ptolomeian wires hasn't got a moon, and everyone knows that Venus as seen from the real Earth is orbited by Adonis... And then you realise that the entire Disc expedition is a glorious parody of Ringworld: "It's a General Neutrino, ground-to-ground, ring-rim fusion motor, Spindle uni-brake..." The heroine and her two alien companions have their spaceship destroyed as they approach the artifact; after a hair-raising landing, they discover that the Disc machinery is malfunctioning and set out to investigate. There's a map room and a search for mysterious Engineers and, of course, a hole punched in the wall for them to make good their escape. Mind you, Niven isn't Terry Pratchett's only victim; incidental digs are made at Clarke's space elevator and Blish's demons, amongst others.

If you want to be serious about it, then Strata has its weak points. For a start, the plot is based on one of Niven's sloppier efforts. The book almost loses direction in describing the trek across the Disc in search of the control centre, but remains irresistible throughout because of its unrelenting jollity. The style is light and brisk (though never careless), the pace furious, the characters eminently likeable if not profound, and jokes both science-fictional and of the ordinary pub variety are worked in by Pratchett with the dedication of a pantomime script-writer. Given all this, he still manages to reach a thought-provoking - almost sombre - conclusion in which the secrets of the Disc help to explain the terraforming fad; it would be churlish to give too much away, except to say that the eventual lesson is along the lines of 'All the world's a stage.' Strata kept me cackling away into the small hours. It isn't great literature, but it comes from the same stable as Bill, The Galactic Hero, which should be recommendation enough.

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