EDITORIAL

If you glance down the contents listing you would most probably find it difficult to discover a common link between the various pieces. But, remarkably (because it was not intended) the whole issue not only has a strong theme, but a theme that is essentially topical. Most of you, I expect, have seen the short list for the Booker Prize and have noted with surprise and pleasure, mixed with disappointment, the name of J.G. Ballard. Not of course that we SF readers should be surprised as even five years ago, Ballard, in the words of the Nicholas' Encyclopedia was: 'one of the most important writers to work through the imagery of SF' - we have always known how good a writer he is. I said mixed with disappointment because the book in question Empire of the Sun (Collins £9.95) is, by all accounts, nothing to do with the science fiction genre or even the imagery of SF. Robert Lyte, reviewing the book in the Guardian, takes the next step and tries to disassociate Ballard from his previous work; 'the book deserves to be considered quite apart from his former work, not least because it would be a break with his past reputation as essentially a science fiction writer'. - the implication being, if he is a SCIENCE FICTION WRITER, he cannot be any good. - Leaving aside the historical factors of how this attitude came about, why is it still prevalent today?

Let's play that favourite game of the science fiction genre; 'What If?'. What if Ballard had written a novel on the same subject as Empire of the Sun which is just as good as his present one, but had decided, for some reason known only to him, to use the 'imagery of SF'

Continued on Page 26

CONTENTS

If you had borrowed a time machine in 1979 and for some obscure reason followed the history of the BSFA publications to the present day, you would most probably have a right to feel confused. Let me put it another way - I'm confused so I am sure you must be! But whether we like it or not confusion seems to be part of the BSFA's make-up (the reason for this I'll leave for you to decide). So let me put you straight - this magazine might be the same size, and might even look like the previous Matrix but it isn't - it is that Premier magazine; the one that is on the tip of everyone's tongue (but they never remember it); the one that publishes editorials which completely mystify a good 50% of the membership; the one that is having a new editor in the New Year as the present editor gave advance warning in May that he is reluctantly forced by circumstances - new job, new house and, if all goes well, 1st new member to the family on November 5th - to step down; the magazine whose contents are rather good this issue, so stop wasting your time reading this and get on reading VECTOR.

EDITORIAL

GEORGE RIPPINGTON,
57 LANTHORNE ROAD,
BROOKSTABS, KENT,
ENGLAND CT10 9NA
(Telephone 0832-6376)

ALL CONTENTS COPYRIGHT (C) 1984 BY
BSFA ON BEHALF OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS.

CONTRIBUTORS

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped envelope if they are to be returned. Submissions are preferred in typescript, with double spacing throughout. Footnotes should be numbered consecutively and grouped on pages separate from the text. Contributions should be in the range of 2000-6000 words, though shorter or longer submissions will be acceptable. Please note there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books for Vector should write to the editor.

ADVERTISING

Advertising copy should be 28 or division thereof, for reduction to A4. Black

DEADLINES

VECTOR COPY DATE: 125.........25 OCTOBER.........1/2 DECEMBER

MEMBERSHIP

The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organization, formed in 1950. which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing, and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish - Vector, a bi-monthly critical journal; Matrix, a bimonthly newsletter/magazine; Focus, a bimonthly forum for writers and Paperback Inference, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks. Other services include Obtaler, a postal SF writers' workshop; an SF Information Service; a postal Magazine Service; an SF Lending Library. Membership costs £7.00 per year. For details write to: N.G. Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire, G72 9DA or if you live in the USA: Cy Clawson, 23486 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan, 48213, USA. The chairman of the BSFA is Alan Darey, 22 Summerfield Dr, Middleton, Gt. Manchester.

ARTWORK: FRONT COVER BY JOHN MCFARLANE INTERIOR ARTWORK BY ALAN HUNTER.
M. John Harrison:
The Condition Of Falling

ANDY DARLINGTON

You must remember this...
Track your mind back, "NEW WORLDS" magazine? England's New Wave? The heat-death of the Science Fiction universe?

M. John Harrison: "I began on "NEW WORLDS" in 1968; by then Michael Moorcock had been editing it for four years. The ideological terrain had long been mapped out in his editorials, and in guest editorials by writers such as Ballard and Aldiss. The unprecedented Arts Council Grant and equally unprecedented pornography charge were already historical". Yet through Harrison's short stories - and the novels that followed - it soon became obvious that he understood "the depths and subtleties of the genre to an extent that elevated his work far beyond that of his contemporaries" (editor of "SOMETHING ELSE" magazine).

Born in 1945 M. John Harrison's first professional sale was to the long-extinct "SCIENCE FANTASY" in 1966, followed by hard S.F. contributions to the "NEW WRITINGS IN SCIENCE FICTION" anthology series. His later work was featured in "QUARK", the excellent Savoy Dreams collection, the prestigious AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS - and, of course, "NEW WORLDS", for which he was literary editor from 1968 to 1975. His elegantly crafted and meticulously fine-tuned critical essays for that journal launched damming invective against his chosen victims, a ritual literary slaughter that allowed no quarter, attacking all writing that he deemed imperfect, and all ideas that were not his, bayingly on the hunt.

In this way he set the standards against which his own work must be judged.

He lived in Camden (London) with what he claimed to be "the largest domestic cat in the world", relocated north to Glossop, and then to his current address, a small cottage on a steep hillside overlooking the Yorkshire village of Holmfirth - producing, a fistful of critically acclaimed novels on the way. The COMMITTED MEN, The Centauri Device, The Pastel City, A Store of Wings, and In Viriconium: Fantasies, according to "THE GUARDIAN" newspaper, "grounded in M. John Harrison's sense of reality" with the ability to "realise the unreal by brilliant selection of detail".

We met to discuss The Ice Monkey, a new short story collection he describes as part of a transitional process of moving out of the Science Fiction ghetto and into some less stylistically restricting definition. "My next book will have absolutely nothing whatever to do with S.F." he declares. "My stories and my fictions from now on will be human. They will have the human sympathy of a single human being for other single human beings".

In the flesh he's often difficult to interpret.
He's entertainingly self-opinionated in a style that's instantly recognisable from his "NEW WORLDS" essays. In a style that makes this conversation a lethal amputation from the genre he claims to be abandoning. A vehemently eloquent parting broadside at both Old and New Waves; but I get the impression that he's also fueled by a nervy energy that's humanly sensitive to any retaliatory slight.

M. John Harrison is "late evidence of the "NEW WORLDS" phenomenon". A writer whose style evolved out of - and transcended - the New Wave heat-death of the Science Fiction universe. Now he continues to embody its restlessly challenging and uncompromising spirit.

You must remember this...

DARLINGTON: Did you grow up reading conventional SF?

HARRISON: I grew up on everything. I read Science Fiction along with Boy's School Stories, Girl's School Stories, T.S. Eliot, books about horses.

From the age of eleven to about age twenty I read genuinely omnivorously. I preferred fantasy with a religious flavour if I could get it - C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, Tolkien. I adored T.S. Eliot from the moment I read the first line of "The Wasteland"., And I still do.

DARLINGTON: Was J.G. Ballard an influence on your development?

HARRISON: At about twenty this omnivorously stopped, and I began to read only Science Fiction. This happened for two reasons; the first is that I discovered J.G. Ballard, a living, breathing, verbally obsessed with his work for the two to three years that followed. So yes, he did influence the COMMITTED MEN, and one or two of the early short stories - "Visions of Novad" for instance. The second reason was that I began to work on "NEW WORLDS" and I didn't have time to read anything but review copies - and of course, they were all SF. It ruined my head until about 1976 when I finally packed it all in. During that time I never read a good book, never even read a decent book. I reckon at the age of twenty, although I was everything you would expect a young writer to be, that is - naive, not very good, etc. etc. - I could at least have BEEN a writer. But by the time I was twenty-four/twenty-five, I could only be a S.F. writer, because then I was reading nothing else. My whole head had become stuffed with the rubbish, even though I hated most of it, it still went in. It was like being force-fed with dirty dripping. And it went in every single month - a hundred, two hundred American paperbacks on that sort of grey paper that smells of excrement. About four years ago I decided I would get rid of the last vestiges of all that stuff in my library. I just chucked the whole lot out. I don't read S.F. of any sort anymore. I reckon you are what you eat, solely. Science Fiction was a very expensive blind alley as far as I'm concerned. It allowed me to earn a living and make a very small reputation within the field, although nowhere else. The technique
of S.F. writers is so POOR. They don't KNOW anything, they don't READ anything but Science Fiction. It's not their fault, although to an extent it's their fault as much as it is their readers. The readers won't read anything but S.F.. They are like children who won't eat meat 'cos it hurts their teeth (with a sneer), or it makes them feel sick. So they eat cake all the time. Science Fiction publishers are there like confectioners, to supply lots of cake. The whole "NEW WORLDS" and the whole New wave movement in S.F. was blown from the start by the very fact that if you eat nothing but cake then eventually your jaw atrophies. There is nothing else you can do. You may desperately want to be a great writer and say something worthwhile, but if you've spent your entire life reading and writing pap you haven't got a chance. You've got no techniques.

DARLINGTON: You once wrote a "NEW WORLDS" essay "The Literature of Comfort", which divided the history of Science Fiction into an approved S.F. of ideas (Wells, etc), and an escapist S.F. of comfort, which you traced from Frank Baum.

HARRISON: Yes. I remember the article. I dunno, it's a long time ago. I probably wouldn't agree in the sense that I don't think about things in those terms anymore. For instance - you say 'ideas' - I don't think writing is about ideas. I haven't for five or six years. Polemists, propagandists, philosophers and politicians write about ideas. People who write fiction or poetry, they don't have 'ideas'. I don't want to go into it any deeper than that without my notebooks! But, I don't know... I still don't like escapism. I still think that S.F. is a literature of comfort mainly. Even the New Wave - the "NEW WORLDS" style New wave of the late 60's and early 70's - has been corrupted into a kind of comfort fiction, particularly by many American writers, the so-called Labour Day group. Those people have simply stripped the nastier elements out of the New wave, repackaged the good, and sold the whole thing as 'Brotherly love' with lots of sex and furry animals. All of which has no interest for me at all. It's only purpose is to comfort people. If they need to be comforted that badly, then I suppose that's fair, but I don't think they do. I don't think anybody is in a poor enough shape to need Ursula Le Guin! I never have done (laughter). Really they should just stiffen their spines and get on with their lives - NOBODY needs Ursula Le Guin! I never have done (laughter). Really they should just stiffen their spines and get on with their lives - NOBODY needs Ursula Le Guin!

DARLINGTON: Critics invented a useful, and perhaps appropriate, phrase, "the school of cozy disaster". Originally they used it to describe the pre-New Wave tales of John Wyndham.

HARRISON: Yes. Of course, he specialised in the Middle-class disaster where everything was alright and be nice and decent, thoroughly decent and Middle class, we shall get through. Remember the T.V. series "The Survivors"? That was straight 'cosy disaster'. Did you notice that there was always one lower-class person, per episode? Like a token black. In every episode there was one, and he always spoke with a grating speech and touched his forelock and all that sort of thing. Horrible programme. It's a nice description though, 'cosy disaster'. We've specialised in it in Britain. Until I was going to say, it wasn't until Ballard and Aldiss came along that we had any disasters that WEREN'T cosy - but they were grinding different axes anyway. You couldn't really call their things disaster stories. My The Committed Men was a not-very-cosy disaster.
HARRISON: I don't know to be honest. I haven't been near a shop that sells it for two or three years. I haven't read any for so long.

DARLINGTON: While the mass pulp market for good new S.F. seems to have vanished entirely.

HARRISON: It was bound to happen. They printed too much of the stuff during the boom. The bust is always bound to come after the boom. Publishers never learn that sort of thing because they are very slow people.

DARLINGTON: Perhaps by delineating the escapism of Science Fiction you were also destroying its practical applications, its use as a comfort. Perhaps people buy quite compatible. They buy records. They dance to the record without being overly concerned about how technically well it is assembled or how aesthetically pure its motivations.

HARRISON: What you’re talking about is a process of seeing off the bough that you’re sitting on. We may have done that, intellectually, and over a long period of time. I don’t think we did it as far as the people who just hop to the record are concerned. They went on just buying the stuff, and the publishers—who, of course, are only concerned with people who hop to the record—went on selling it to them.

DARLINGTON: But much of the Science Fiction that is popular today—the “Star Wars/”Star Trek” syndrome—is a reversion to pre-New Wave mentality. The type of material you were attacking.

HARRISON: Oh yes, I agree with you. If what you’re saying is that we sawed off our own particular bough a bit too, and that it was inevitable. And for about four writers it was a good thing. The writers who were good enough to make something out of the condition of failing. Of realizing that there was no bough left by Dicks, by a writer instance. One on two others. But then, they had always wanted to be writers who said something about the world, about people. They had always wanted to be proper writers. Writers in the tradition of writers, and not in the tradition of that condition. And seeing off that bough, in a way, gave them the confidence. You've got to go for it in the end. You've just got to decide to do it. Tom Dicks hasn't written anything that you could describe as Science Fiction for some time.

DARLINGTON: You describe your current book, The Ice Monkey, as part of a similar process of moving out of Science Fiction.

HARRISON: The book is very transitional in the sense that it still tries to use SF or Horror or some other trick to make it work. Perhaps the points are now so human, and so concerned with human being, that the S.F. is distracting. It’s taking the readers attention away from the point. The Science Fiction element in “The Ice Monkey” is more of adding an extra ingredient in the plot. It’s a good enough image in 1975 when I couldn’t talk directly about the future. A writer wasn’t technically capable of simply looking at people. But that doesn’t seem to me to be much of a solution nowadays. If I were writing that story now there wouldn’t be any S.F. in it. There wouldn’t be any science, because I now feel that my technique is good enough for me to look directly at people, and write about people.

DARLINGTON: But Science Fiction imagery provides a rich vein of contemporary mythology that can be used in a Symbolist sense. Much of what you describe as the S.F.-content of The Ice Monkey stories is more of the kind of symbolism in some of Kafka’s work. I think it would be good enough for me to look directly at people, and write about them.

DARLINGTON: But Science Fiction imagery provides a rich vein of contemporary mythology that can be used in a Symbolist sense. Much of what you describe as the S.F.-content of The Ice Monkey stories is more of the kind of symbolism in some of Kafka’s work. I think it would be good enough for me to look directly at people, and write about them.

HARRISON: Exactly. It is, in fact, Symbolism. The structure of the stories are symbolic stories. Even the more sinister ones in there, written as long ago as 1975, are structured exactly the way a symbol would have structured them. Exactly like Catherine Mansfield, or a post- Symbolist, a kind of pre-Modernist like Virginia Woolf would have had. There are no plots per se. The things proceed by parallelism and contrast of symbols and images. The whole idea was to be a symbolist, but at that time, rather a crude one. Whereas now I’d like to do a little better and not need aliens from outer space at all. I don’t think you need them. You can cut them out and still write the same story. Still make the same comment about being human.

DARLINGTON: There are advantages to working in a genre. There’s a guaranteed minimum market.

HARRISON: You’ve got a guaranteed audience. You’ve got a guaranteed market. But I realized that the genre wasn’t allowing me to say anything and at the same time I realized that if you really want to say what you want to say, you’ve got to take the risk of not having that guarantee. It is a very good book, it is a very promising book one of these days. What you’ve got to do is finally cut loose and do it. There’s a very difficult force that pulls back the Peak District called “Off the Wall” or “Fly”. Flying being along for a while. I just decided to cut loose. You must commit yourself to the effort even if you suddenly find yourself hundreds of feet up in space with only two directions up or down. You must take the risk. I decided to do it. Which means I shall probably become very poor very quickly. But then I wasn’t all that rich to start with. For me, from now on, after fifteen years of writing about this stuff, all I ever want to do again is write about human being. I don’t say that I won’t ever write S.F. again. The Bank Manager may need me to! But I wouldn’t be interested in it and I won’t even bother trying to fake interest. People are much more interesting.

DARLINGTON: Do you think in terms of an audience? Are the people who are going to read your stories a consideration?

HARRISON: No. But on the other hand, oddly enough, I’ve found that I’ve got a bigger audience since I decided to be me and do what I wanted to do. When you do that — when you make the conscious decision for the first time in your life — you mature as a writer and you develop a very obvious, very typical, voice. And people are bound to hear it. They are bound to be interested in it one way or another. I seem to have had more response since I stopped trying to be a generic pop-song writer. Since I stopped just grinding it out, and started to speak with my own voice. Certainly it’s had more effect on the people who do read my stuff. The critics who write about it are much more affected by it — presumably because it’s more honest, and because of that the voice is more distinctive. A lot of Science Fiction is so philosophically and meta-physically crude. Some of our writers are very matter-of-fact, for so-called imaginative people they are very much blinking. They seem to have the mentality of school Physics’ teachers. You can’t connect with them, because they never really got the idea all the time, they have no understanding of Einstein or relativity. One of the reasons I didn’t earn much of an income as a Science Fiction writer — as a so-called profession writer is that my standards were a bit too high. The stuff I wrote never actually made it as good rubbish, readable, generic S.F. — because it was always too fastidiously well-written. If I hadn’t done my side-trip into S.F. I might very well have matured a little bit earlier. In my case, I’ll admit that being a professional for fifteen years has given me certain techniques. Techniques for sucking the reader in despite myself, for facing him with things he wouldn’t normally read, because he can’t find out what happens. These are techniques you don’t learn from reading Virginia Woolf. These are techniques that you learn — god help you — from writing crap. And the ability to suck the reader in and keep him there while you do your operations on him. I suppose, is worth learning.
SURREALIST VERVE, ITS LOONEY NON-REALITY, ITS PIERCING TRUTHS, ITS WIT, ITS MASKED MELANCHOLY, ITS NOSE FOR DAMNATION, ITS BUNKUM, ITS CONTEMPT FOR HOME COMFORTS, ITS SLEWED ASTRONOMY, ITS XENOPHILIA, ITS HIP, ITS CLASSLESSNESS, ITS MYSTERIOUS MACHINES, ITS GAUDY BACKDROPS, ITS TRAGIC INSECURITY.

From the foreword by Brian Aldiss

The Science Fiction Source Book

Edited by David Wingrove
Published 3 September 1984 £8.95

Longman
LIST 1

Richard Adams
Kevin J. Anderson
Michael Blaylock
A. Bertram Chandler
Terry Dowling
David Drake
Roman Dirksen
M. R. James
James Blish
Robert Bloch
Marion Zimmer Bradley
John Brunner
Ed Bryant
Michael Bishop
Anthony Burgess
William Burroughs
Samuel Butler
Lars Branch Capell
Terry Carr
Joy Chant
Suzi K. Charnas
G.R. Chesterton
John Christopher
Hal Clement
D.G. Compton
Samuel Delany
George Alec Effinger
Charles G. Finney
E.M. Forster
Randall Garrett
Charles Grafton
Russell Hoban
Chris Haddon-Williams
Robert P. Holdstock
Fred Hoyle
Shirley Jackson
Collin Kapp
Gary Kilworth
Rudyard Kipling

None can achieve the originality of Ian Reamy's Blind Voices (five stars for idea content. Although a pleasant book, it's neither influential nor does it contain anything not prefigured by Stephen King.) None is as readable as the Space Eater, nor ho.) (You think I'm joking, don't you?) None can ascend that supreme pinnacle of literary merit and gain the five such stars allotted to the stodgy Web Between the Worlds by Charles Sheffield.

Five stars for readability means you're consistently more readable than the notoriously compulsive Bester, Harness, Vance or van Vogt (in addition to everyone else in List 1).

Five for idea content means you're consistently more original and influential than anything by Blish, Budrys, Pohl, Sladek or Wolfe (in addition to...).

To prove more efforts, besides List 1. Angela Carter, Cowper, Dick, Alasdair Gray, Herbert, Pangborn, Roberts and D. M. Thomas.

Five for literary merit is the biggie, and gives you the edge over, inter alia, Aldiss, Beagle, Dick and Gray again, Huxley, Lem, Nabokov, Orwell, Mary Shelley, Swift, Iwan, Vonnegut and Wells, none of whose listed SF/fan may make it. What does make the grade? I will tell you. Exactly eight books score the big five stars in every category. These are Bradbury's Martian Chronicles and Fahrenheit 451, Bigwood's To scatter Bodies Go, Golding's The Inheritors and Darkness Visible (what's that second one doing here?), and Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness and The Dispossessed. A result that is a varied batch, several of whose acknowledged merits do not exactly include top marks for zippy readability.

Another twenty books/stories receive five stars in three categories. Thus Blind Voices and White's Hospital Station would be perfect if they were only a little more readable, while The White Restaurant -- like the slightly higher scoring Web Between the Worlds-- would be perfect if only it had better character development. Budrys's Who? and Rogue Moon both need just one further star's worth of idea content to reach the big time, and all that stands between Crowley's The Deep and utter perfection is the tiniest lack of literary merit. This, in John Clute's oft-repeated words, is a game which has no ending. This shambles of inconsistent ratings isn't really the fault of the twelve contributors responsible...although there are places where it is unjust, as with Eric Frank Russell, whose "thrillers about invisible or superhuman enemies" are excessively dismissed as "routine", after which two such (Sinister Barrier, Three to Conquer) and none of his others are given star ratings as -- by implication -- Best Buys. Or take the case of Charles L. Grant, who'd have got better ratings if he'd written SF novels, as then he'd have been assessed (like E. E. Beaumont) on his considerably better shorts and fantasies. Kipling's most of whose many collections include some fine fantasy/ SF, is faintly damned as an author "two of whose short story collections might be considered to include SF stories, although this is more a use of the supernatural to speculate on social issues" which awards whole constellations of merit to Stephen King.

LIST 2

Damon Knight
R.A. Lafferty
Tanith Lee
Fitz Leiber
H.P. Lovecraft
Elizabeth Llynn
Vonda McIntyre
Compton Mackenzie
Arthur Machen
Barry N. Malzberg
Julian May
Walter M. Miller
Naomi Mitchison
C.L. Moore
William Morris
Laraine Interview
Andre Norton
Edgar Allan Poe
Christopher Priest
Thomas Pynchon
Mack Reynolds
Salman Rushdie
Bertrand Russell
Eric Frank Russell
James H. Schmitz
Norman Spinrad
Brian Stableford
Robert Louis Stevenson
Jock Trevor Story
Theodore Sturgeon
William Tenn
Wilson Tucker
George Turner
Lisa Tuttle
A.E. van Vogt
John Varley
Dennis Wilson
Jules Verne
Gore Vidal
Jean Vinge
Walter Jon Williams
Evelyn Waugh
Franz Werfel
Kate Wilhelm
I have a cold feeling that the ideal really is unattainable, that the only way to carry on is with as much honesty as possible along one's usual path of merry subjectivism... and that unless he'd tackled the massive, Johnsonian task of writing every entry himself, David Wingrove's Michelin Guide was doomed from the start to founder in the sloughs of inconsistency. Hubris Again Whodunnit

David Barrett


The standard, and highly offensive rejection letter from "Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine" reads in part as follows:

"Most stories are rejected because they lack a new idea or theme. A great many of the ideas that may seem innovative to an SF newcomer are in fact over-familiar to readers more experienced in the field... Another common cause... of rejection is the obvious lack of basic English compositional skills on the part of the author... Finally, your story may have been rejected... simply because it failed to rise far enough above the other 849 seen that month."

The plot of The Robots of Dawn is straightforward. Dr Han Fastolfe, the great roboticist of Aurora, is accused of roboticide - causing mental freeze-out in a humanoid robot he had designed and built. Plainclothesman Elijah Baley of Earth is called in to clear his name. It is important that he succeed; Fastolfe's political opponents want all further planetary colonisation to be done by Aurorans - or rather, by Auroran humanoid robots, so that no human need get his hands dirty - while Fastolfe would support Earth's exploration and settlement of other worlds. If he is proved to be innocent, his views are likely to prevail in the Auroran World Legislature; if not, his reputation will be sullied, and Earthmen will be condemned forever to foster in their caves of steel. Hence the fate of Earth, if not the Universe, hangs on Baley's success. (By this point, p22, I was already yawning. Still, there were less than 400 pages to go.) In true Asimovian style, we then have numerous false leads. Lije Baley accuses everyone in sight, then withdraws why his wit is uncompro- mising and in the last ten pages of the book it is finally revealed (Shock Horror Amazement) who actually dunnit.

This book is a very late sequel to The Caves of Steel (1954) and The Naked Sun (1956), and refers to both. Han Fastolfe appeared in the former and Gladia Delmarre, in whose home R. Jander Panell was 'killed,' is from the latter. And, of course, Baley's faithful ol' buddy is also here:

"He saw a thoroughly human shape, with a broad, high-cheekboned face and with short bronze hair lying flatly backward, someone dressed in clothing with a conservative cut and color scheme."

"Jehoshaphat!" said Baley in a nearly strangled voice.

"Partner Elijah," said the other, stepping forward a small, grave smile on his face.

"Daneel!" cried Baley, throwing his arms around the robot and hugging tightly. "Daneel!" (p30)

This touching little scene confirms that Asimov still writes about emotional interaction with all the literary skill and deftness of Mills and Boon. Being Asimov, though, he has to give the robot's point of view as well:

'The robot was holding him lightly, allowing himself to be hugged, judging that the action gave pleasure to a human being and enduring that action because the positronic potentials of his brain made it impossible to reject the embrace and cause disappointment and embarrassment to the human being... The insurmountable First Law of Robotics states...

Just in case the reader has forgotten the Three Laws, they are repeated and explained and elaborated on, singly or together, interminably, throughout the book.

Asimov has always had a love of chapter titles; for example, 'Conversation with a Commissioner' and 'A Robot is Confused' in the earlier books. This time the titles are character's names: 'Daneel', 'Giskard', 'Daneel and Giskard', 'Again Daneel and Giskard', etc. The system falls down because there are more chapters than characters, and because Giskard appears in Daneel's chapter and vice versa, as does almost everyone else. Also, the 19 named chapters are subdivided into 84 numbered chapters, so why bother?

Asimov has not yet cured himself of the habit of cliched writing:

'He struggled desperately to open his clogged throat, to call to Daneel for help - no sound - ' (p61)

'...he raised it high and brought his arm down to hurl it at Baley. And Baley, caught utterly by surprise, barely managed to cringe back against his chair.' (pB7)

"Let's get all of it into the open, so that we may be able to see light in what now seems darkness." (p164)

"So talk! Now!" (p213)

References, passim, to characters and events in The Caves of Steel and The Naked Sun are to be expected. What took me by surprise, though, was Dr Fastolfe telling Baley the 'legends' about Susan Calvin and the telepathic robot (pp82-3) ("Liar!":1941), and Andrew Martin and Little Miss (p191) ("The Bicentennial Man":1976), and about the possibility that:

"there may come a day when someone will work out the laws of Humanities and then be able to predict in broad strokes the future, and know what might be in store for humanity, instead of merely guessing as I do, and know what to do to make things better, instead of merely speculating. I dream sometimes of founding a mathematical science which I think of as 'psychohistory..."" (p108)

[The Foundation tetralogy: 1951, 1952, 1953, 1982]. There are legitimate plot reasons for one of these references, but I feel that their main function was to establish a unified framework for all of Asimov's major works. In any case, it seems a clumsy conceit.

Clumsiness if one of the hallmarks of this novel:

'Baley cried out (gasped out, rather), "Straighten the vehicle, Giskard!"' (p232)

"(Giskard) said in his contentless voice..." (p328)

Toneless, perhaps, but contentless?

"Let me take the opportunity of once again apologising for the scurrvy trick I played on you with respect to the Personal." (p01-2)

The extreme formality and 'scurvy trick' don't
quite blend. Using the Personal, by the way, equates to the American phrase ‘going to the bathroom.’ I am convinced that Asimov is preparing a learned paper on the anthropological implications of toilet taboos; he seems to spend half the book discussing them. He also displays an odd fascination with the genitalia of humaniform robots; Gladia is speaking to Bailey before showing him the body of R. Jander:

"Nothing was lacking and those portions which might be expected to be erectile were, indeed, erectile. Indeed, they were under what, in a human, would be called conscious control. Jander could tumesce and detumesce on order. I told him so when I asked him if his penis was functional in that respect. I was curious and he demonstrated." (p145)

"The body was, perhaps, not quite human. The muscular contours were somehow simplified and a bit schematic, but all the parts were there: nipples, navel, penis, testicles, pubic hair, and so on."

(p149)

I have visions of the robot filling an internal small polythene bag with a suitable synthetic fluid before performing coitus in accordance with First and Second Law directives.

As the robots are so human in appearance, why does the cover show a particularly chunky and mechanical, decidedly non-humaniform robot, and in an alien and totally non-human frame? Is it deliberate? I shall ask the person at Granada responsible for such decisions. 'It's Sci-Fi, it's Asimov, it's robots - I don't need to read the thing - where's Chris Foss's phone number?' They also didn't bother to Anglicize the spelling; that's laziness.

Asimov has written some damn good short stories over the years, but he was never particularly good at novels. He doesn't seem to have improved much over the last thirty years. This one bears one of the hallmarks of a first draft: everything is explained at interminable length because the author is thinking it out on paper; but the second draft he knows where he is, so he can cut the verbiage - but it seems Asimov never got that far. If it had been written by any lesser mortal it would have been rejected on the first reading. I can almost see the rejection letter...


A Russian book. A modern Russian book. A Soviet book. Not, perhaps, the sort of book to sell in millions and be made into a film by John Carpenter, but a thing of weight and significance. I call it 'a book', which it certainly is, but I hesitate to call it 'a novel'. We shall see why.

In his brief preambule, a call for mutual understanding and an end to the arms race, Aitmatov declares his allegiance to socialist realism and states - 'the main subject of socialist realism, in my view, is to present the image of the working man.' In the west the term 'socialist realism' conjures a composite image of dull epics set in a tractor factory and those flag draped forward leaning colonists seemingly so typical of the book's artists and sculptors who celebrated the immediate post Revolutionary fervour. It is Sholokov rather than Solzhenitsyn. It is a dish that does not appeal to our palate. Worthiness is not our cup of tea. As a model of a word and hero, though, it is the author's central character, Yedigei, serves well. He is named Burranyi Yedigei after the railway junction where he has worked for forty years since returning from the war shelled-out. Burranyi is miles from nowhere in an area of coal mines and Sarozek, which is one of the last places on this earth a man might choose to live and work. While he is, in that he is unlearned, Yedigei is by no means stupid or unthoughtful - a stark contrast to one of the book's principal educated characters, who combines examination success with thoughtless stupidity in an all too familiar way! In his heart he has a lode of Islamic poetry which translates like a punch in the jugular. He is a man who feels he is not yet out of his prime even though he is 58 years old, a passionate man who can be prideful and angry, whose pride and passions sometimes lead him outside the bounds of what is proper (and safe) to the dignity of a socialist worker.

In many ways he is one of a kind with his camel, the magnificent Karanar, an animal which doesn't know what tireirre is, who is a scavenger to the Sarozek and enduring as only a camel - it seems - can be. When the season is on him Karanar is the terror of the steppe, insatiable in his rut. Oh yes, if Yedigei stood next to me in a strange pub I should know him instantly; I might want him to stand a little further off, but I should know him.

Given that Aitmatov devotes 350 pages to creating Yedigei, this is hardly surprising, when you give a reader as much information as Aitmatov gives it would be strange indeed if we did not have some sort of picture by the end. The problem is that the aforementioned Solzhenitsyn would have created an equally complete picture in so many words and, what is much more important, done what Aitmatov signally fails to do, breathe life into his character. As ideas Aitmatov's characters are strong - the stalwart Yedigei, the wily old Karanar, his ne'er do well friend Subihan, the doomed former schoolteacher, the prisoner of war Abutalip, ever Karanar - and within the context of the very solidly plotted, realistically described story which Aitmatov has devised it would have taken just a tiny part of that genius which is the heart of any storyteller to bring them all sparkling into life. A clue to the reason why that spark is missing is contained within the text. There is a character, Yeizizov, who is a scientist who came to the Sarozek on a brief business visit and stayed on years to get to know the people and their lives. There is no doubt that
loves Yedigei and his fellows. By his diligent observation and recording he has made them briefly famous, Yedigei’s picture in a national journal, no less. There can be no doubt that Yelizarov is Aitmatov. It is equally plain that Yelizarov can never be anything but an interested outsider. Like Aitmatov he knows all about the people of Burranyi, all the facts and figures, but when he writes about them he writes about their externals. Which is what Aitmatov does. His intellectual knowledge is formidable, but he does not write from the inside. As an educated, compassionate anthropologist’s dissertation this is an interesting book, but it lacks the vital internal animation of a novel.

The story is ‘slice of life’ with side dishes of history and fantasy. The ‘life’ works well as an accurately reported way of people being. Old Kazangap has died, and his great friend Yedigei determines that this fine old khazak must be buried with all due simple respect at the traditional burial ground, Ana Beit, some 30 kilometers distant. By all the force at his command Yedigei bullies a respectful attitude into his neighbours who was captured during the war but escaped to Yugoslavia where he fought with the partizans and who has been seen to write and, fatally, to write a diary of his wartime experiences showing not to be congruent with the war as seen through the eyes of Josef Stalin.

Interspersed with the contemporary Aitmatov gives us some of the histories and the legends of the Sarazek. It is a testimony to the content of his book that Aitmatov keeps the reader’s attention despite the flat pacing of the story and the authorial voice. He describes the poetry in Yedigei’s soul, but nowhere does he give us any in his prose which lacks any sort of suggestive imagery. Aitmatov tells it all exactly how it is, no less and no more, as though he were delivering a learned treatise. Quite how inept Aitmatov is at the creation of a work of fiction rather than the assembling of component parts in textbook order may be seen when he leaves behind the stuff of his observation. The historical items are noticeably less ‘real’ than the contemporary scenes despite their higher content of physical action, the product, I suspect, of long hours in the library rather than long hours of imagination. Yet beside the space element running through the book these scenes are apt examples of the novelist’s art. Improbability of organisation is not uncommon in SF, but however improbably the arrangements must be believable. Aitmatov gives us a joint US/USSR enterprise, the Demiurgos programme, which is superpower paranoia in concrete form with a duplicated control system on an aircraft carrier moored equidistant between Vladivostok and San Francisco, and a single astronaut from each country labelled ‘Paritycaptain 1/2’ and ‘Paritycaptain 2/1’. Surely Aitmatov cannot be unaware of the impossibility of the Soviets allowing one of their men to be alone in space with an American, or to allow said American free run of Soviet hardware? In his description of the purging of Abutalip he acknowledges the institutional paranoia of Russian bureaucrats, so why this absurdity? Of course, I may be missing something subtle, or this may be a particularly dreadful translation, but I don’t believe so. Aitmatov is simply hopelessly out of his depth. The entire notion seems like something dreamt up by a hack at the behest of some apparatchik who wants to see Kings of the Fatherland print some ‘nobility of socialist science’ pieces. And if his hardware and organisation is straight out of some Soviet version of ‘Tomorrow’s World’ his astronauts don’t even reach that level of credibility. His two astronauts blithely take off with some recently encountered aliens without so much as a by your leave to ground control, leaving only a note couched in terms which a reminiscent of the very worst ‘beautiful higher beings’ excesses of the later books in Doris Lessing’s ‘Canopus in Argos’ series - without even a hint of

---

**TO BOLDLY GO WHERE FICTION HAS RARELY GONE BEFORE**

---

**J. G. BALLARD**

**The Voices of Time**

A classic collection of stories by ‘science fiction’s most brilliant and most unorthodox writer’ New Musical Express £2.95

**The Drowned World**

This story of flooded London, overrun by tropical vegetation, first displayed Ballard’s extraordinary technical brilliance to its full City Limits £2.50

**The Terminal Beach**

‘a dazzling collection of tales of fantasy dystopias’ The Standard £2.95

---

**RACHEL INGALLS**

**Binstead’s Safari**

Rachel Ingalls’s marvellous inventive tale of love, legend and fantastic transformation is a small triumph. It should, if there is any justice, bring her hundreds of new admirers Paul Bailey, The Standard £2.95

**Mrs Caliban and Others**

Suburban housewife meets gentle sea monster in this ‘impeccable parable. . . so deft and austere in its prose, so drogily casual in its fantasy, but opening up into a deep female sadness that makes us stare’ John Updike £2.95

---

**EVERYMAN FICTION FROM DENT**
It would be all too easy to dismiss the book with a
incompetent and indeed amateurish
1983' that
[BATTLEFIELD EARTH : A SAGA OF THE YEAR 3000: by L. Ron
[HUBBARD. Quadrant Books 1984. 819 pp., £8.95]
help the
Battlefield Earth
got through
translated into 98.ODD
good as this book, for
people
11
What would se
Battlefield Earth, apart from num me vxnueu ut onuiuw w,u
self-help? Hubbard's own philosophy and propagandist aims
emerge plainly, particularly in the last section, which
deals with the reconstruction of Earth. This is the world
that Hubbard wants, run by competent technologists who
you yourself have to dominate', freedom from taxation and
government interference, freedom from intellectual
and

SF's Coelocanth
Edward James

[BATTLEFIELD EARTH : A SAGA OF THE YEAR 3000: by L. Ron
[HUBBARD. Quadrant Books 1984. 819 pp., £8.95]

Our worthy editor expressed amazement that someone
should want to review this monster. But anyone interested in
must all have been dominated by the fact that the first book
years by someone who was once an important SF writer,
the first book written since his foundation of the
world's first SF religion (Christopher Evans' phrase, not
mine), and a book which has caused immense controversy
in its press up intellectual descendants in the States.
What does it tell us about Hubbard? What does it tell us about
the SF buying public in the US (assuming that it is being
bought by SF readers rather than by Scientists)?
It is rather difficult to approach the book in any
other way than this, as an historical curiosity. It has
no literary merit whatsoever. Its style is positively
coelocanthine (thought by experts to have been extinct
since the 1930s, but brought to shore to cries of
amazement by St Martin’s Press in 1982). It creaks
from one climax to another in an effortlessly clumsy (and
often ungrammatical) prose, enlivened only by the
appearance of a much-loved SF cliché or stereotype
Chinaman. The basic plot has been aired many times
before, by Heinlein with more economy and Russell with
more humour. What humour there is may sometimes, I am
fain to be ungenerous, be intentional. For instance, it
intentionally ludicrous, certainly destroy the mood of
realism Hubbard tries to create. Could you believe in
aliens with names like Zt (by hook or by crook I’ll be
last in the Galactic ‘phone book’), Nump, Schleim,
Rogoder Snow and - wait for it! - An Isebog? The plot is this. The Earth has been taken over by
vicious aliens (with the help of a loan from the Galactic
Bank). Only a few tribes of human survive, dismissed by
the Psycho in the standard way, as ‘sub-humans’. One of these
animals, from Colorado, Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, with the
help of his stone club and an astounding technical
ability, wipes out the entire Psycho race (apart from a
few that survive). He now moves on to wipe out
all other races in the Galaxy by being able to decipher
the secrets of Psycho technology. After 819 pages of
redundant detail (you realise the amount of time I am
spending you by revealing the end) he has managed to impose
peace upon the Galaxy and make himself a trillionaire in the

It would be all too easy to dismiss the book with a
sneeze as a piece of incompetent and indeed amateurish
writing designed to cash in on the author’s notoriety. But George Hay has made the point (in Foundation 28, July
1983) that scientologists have been much concerned in
recent years with the growing reading problems suffered
by the younger generation. The short paragraphs, the
painful lack of sophistication, may all be designed to
help the thousands of semi-literate young people who
loved Star Wars but who have never got through a book.
Battlefield Earth is well constructed to hold the slow
reader, who will months later reach page 819 with triumph
and who will be there gratified to read about the first
book written of Jonnie Tyler, translated into 98,000
galactic languages: ‘It was not as good as this book, for
it was intended for semi-literate people’. What would semi-literate people learn from
Battlefield Earth, apart from the virtues of ambition
and self-help? Hubbard’s own philosophy and propagandist aims
emerge plainly, particularly in the last section, which
deals with the reconstruction of Earth. This is the world
that Hubbard wants, run by competent technologists who
offer freedom from domination by others (even if it means
you have to dominate), freedom from taxation and
government interference from intellectual
and
and
and
and
The word Robot was coined in Prague by Karel Capek in 1920, when the play RUR was published (it was staged the year after). This event thus preceded by seven years the christening of our genre by Gernsback. Capek never heard of science fiction before his play.

From this fact derive all the unique qualities of modern Czech SF. One might call it extremely literarily oriented. The borderline between mainstream and our SF is sometimes difficult to draw. There was no native science fiction for a long time, until practically the present boom which originated towards the end of the 70’s and that brought us not only several interesting new authors and books, but also the book of the same name by the Czech writer Jan Procházka.

One such author is Mr. Slobodník, who represents the Slovak branch in our movement. Another is the young Czech author and journalist Mr. Neff, who has undertaken some interesting information about the birth of the Robot.

The word itself means 'work' in Russian, but in Czech it means 'serf labour', so hasted in the feudal age of the hunt and revolution. The word labor, taking it from Laboratory, so we might today have labortronics, laborization and the dangerous labor. But would we? Would LUR be so successful in the world over as RUR was? This is a theoretical question concerning names of literary heroes. Because the Robot is a literary hero beyond doubt, practically the only one that originated in modern Czech writing and is known all over the world, with the possible exception of the Good-bye, Good-bye world of 1984.

Both a long time after writing it he was unhappy because people did not understand his play RUR. His book of 1921 and the dangerous 1922 are a thousand floors, and the dangerous 1923 are the dangerous 1922, but I think that his big book of 1925 is the dangerous 1924. His book of 1926 and the dangerous 1927 are written and read as a small book, and sometimes it's even considered as a danger to young talent! One of our leading critics recently told me that every other author who is beginning to write is trying to write science fiction.

To explain the situation I have to bother you with a short lecture about traditions. It was the Bohemian himself who called Bohemia and Prague "centres of fantasy, heresy and magic." Behind this statement lay the Czech heretical tradition dating from the Hussite wars, and the secret brotherhoods and sects thereafter, that bred saints, martyrs and magicians as well as a flourishing of all "secret" esoteric arts and sciences, especially in the period after the Good-bye, Good-bye world, but before the Pacificcon in Oakland 20 years ago hardly any fans knew this. However, things have changed for the better. They have also changed back home. SF is translated and eagerly read and even written. Sometimes it's even considered a danger to young talent! One of our leading critics recently told me that every other author who is beginning to write is trying to write science fiction.

Of the Thirty Years' War, a condottiere who was given to astrology and wanted to change history before his assassination by Piccolomini and others.

After the Thirty Years' War the Czech nobility and intelligentsia, if not exterminated, fled abroad, being replaced by Austrian, Spanish and Italian gentility. The country was forcibly re-Catholicized. The time of the Czech Risorgimento followed some 200 years later. Thanks to this a multi-level cultured developed in the country. It is known to us now that the manuscripts of the publications, the libraries of the certain Bohemian palace; you can read tales and novels about Prague and Bohemia written in German - from Kafka and Mayerink on. And if you are lucky you can find the famous films of the hundred and one tent of the milkman, with its doppelganger theme, and the Coles. Abolishing all you can marvel at the rebirth of literature written in Czech, especially the fantasy which is of interest to us today.

The found of the figure here is considered to be Jakub Arbor (1804-1914) a journalist, political prisoner, and author of many "romanetics", as he termed his longer fantasy stories. He was a pupil of Poe, Verne and E.T.A. Hoffmann. He is most notable with a great sense of the city was concerned, and was already one who wrote about time travel.

Karel Capek (1890-1938) is the second figure, today internationally known. He was strongly influenced by Wells and Shaw and Anglo-Saxon literature in general. For a long time after writing it he was unhappy because people did not understand his play RUR. "It is a comedy about truth and people," he told the Saturday Review in 1923. "But the audience is interested only in robots. I didn't intend to create machines, but artificial biological beings. But the world wanted mechanical danger, because it is more fascinated by machines today than by biology..." His next book The Factory of the Absolute wasn't however such a success as RUR. Nor was Krakatit, a novel that in a way anticipated the atomic bomb. Both these titles are novels and so is his best work War with the Newts, published in the thirties perhaps as an allegory of Fascism. His other works - The Insect Play, The Makropulos Secret, etc. - are well known, so I would only like to mention that his heroes are very different from the usual action type of the SF productions we know. A touch of humour is added, which seems to be a characteristic of fantasy in Czech.

Other names: Jan Weiss (1892-1972) author of a great book: House of a Thousand Floors. This fantasy originated during a typhoid dream when he was a young writer or in war in 1915. He almost died during the experience and returned to it in his writing ever after. He was no interested in science and has been regarded as a disciple of Poe.

František Behounek (1899-1972) was a colourful personality: a physicist, pupil of the Curie's, member of the Nobile expedition to the North Pole, he survived the crash of his airship. He wrote mainly for young people and reminds one of early Lem. In this he carried on the tradition of SF proper and it existed in Czech in the early 30's, mainly as reading for older children (Triska, Ryl, Hruby, Foustka, Babula). Ludvik Soucek was a stomatologist and colleague of mine, born in the same year 1926 and dead four years ago. He is a very popular author in my country, a prolific writer who became successful mainly through books on science fiction.

Last, the contemporary ones, authors of promising books - a dozen names perhaps. There are of course others among the fans. Up until now we have 25 active clubs in Bohemia. I am sure I have omitted someone and am also sure, that on this very day an unknown young Czech author - or authoress - is writing the truly big book, better than everything I have mentioned. But what will be the theme of this book? What are we discussing at our meetings?

The limits and boundaries of SF, first of all. There are people, not only among fans, who dislike "mainstream" literature and would like to live perpetually in an underground world. And there are others who would like to understand SF as a "true" literature inspired by Knowledge and the development of knowledge.
In this connection our themes are obvious: the threefold crisis we face today (economy, industry, ecology), the whole concept of progress (where too much emphasis is laid on technical progress and too little on the progress of the human personality, or so it seems to many people), and of course the question of war and peace.

Where do I stand in all this? Here are a few words about myself. Before the war I was a pupil at the Prague English Grammar School, which was closed by the Nazis shortly after they occupied Prague. But I had a lot of books to read, mostly by Wells, Huxley and Shaw. Wells's *Outline of History* was my sole source of independent information. Later I tried translating. After the war I published my translation of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. Some people trace his influence in my writing. Certainly my story *The Lost Face* was influenced by a quotation of Coleridge about his face. I tried to translate modern English poetry and served as an interpreter when Dylan Thomas visited Prague in 1947. One morning he made me tell him what I was writing about. "It sounds like science fiction," he commented, and wasn't too excited... That was the first time I heard about the genre. I was writing plays and dreamed of a career in the theatre. Very few if any of my plays were performed and none with any success. One day I began to write synopsis of the plays I had already written or intended to write. The first book was *Death of Tarzan*, a collection of short stories published in 1958. It was a success back home. Later, when the title story was filmed, I had some trouble with the Burroughs family because of the name. So did Mike Moorcock, who also began his writing with a Tarzan story, as he told me much later. I wrote two other such books in a three-year span after that. I was trying to convey to the reader what I thought about the world, its fate and development. This interested me more than psychology. The stories were more or less anecdotes or metaphors, or parables, if you like. They were called science fiction when Avram Davidson published some of them in the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1962. For some reason they were also translated in Europe. It was the period of the "new novel", and for the prevailing literary taste they were too full of message, so they were called science fiction even in Germany where there was no market for this genre at the time. In 1968, twenty years ago, I was invited to Oakland, thanks mainly to Don Wollheim. This was my first trip to the States, my third to the west, and it was a revelation. I met a lot of writers, among them Silverberg, Anderson, Pohl, Simak and the fan Forrest Ackerman. I also met for the first time the other European guest John Brunner, who had already written about my stories. We had a marvellous time. The fashion at the time was for biological science fiction, sociobiological stories. New themes. I sold one of my genetic stories to Judy Merril, or rather she sold it for me. Wollheim published my "Vampires ltd" story in his *Year's Best*, and we discussed the possibilities of biotechnology and its implications. I was mainly interested in SF. It seemed that in the approaching time it would automatically bring peace, that we would understand each other through the language of science and become citizens of the world. This did not seem to be over with the Korean War and we were all full of hope... and also young. My book was published by Gollancz and Taplinger later on, and here Brian Aldiss was of help.

I travelled a lot in those years. The invitation to Oakland reached me in the Czech hospital in Haiphong, Vietnam. I returned to the States in 1966, full of hope that my Vampire story might be filmed. I had several good films shot in the film and written a second novel. But it was a bad year for my projects. Everything seemed to have failed. The success of the short stories for various reasons, moreover, I was not a full-time writer at the time. I took my medical degree in 1950 and since that time have been working in another field regarded as eccentric by our standards at home, namely group psychotherapy. This work entirely consumed me for the first part of the seventies. I was also looking for new experiences. Until that time I had avoided writing about the psychology of my heroes, for fear that my readers might feel themselves cheated. But soon after my name became known as a writer I began to run into another difficulty. People hoped to achieve fame through being treated by me. I tried to combine both my relath to become a writer-psychotherapist, so as not to get letters like this one:

"Dear doctor, I am a schizophrenic, an invalid, and an avid reader of your stories. My disease started when we went to the neighbouring city and wanted to sign a treaty of cosmic peace in a UFO. Perhaps you could use my experience..." Neurotics wrote to me about their problems on film. So soon I realised that these letters were not, because of their contents. With my colleagues I tried to develop something we called "psychotherapy through correspondence" by utilising the style of our patients as an expression of their personalities. It was the time when I corresponded with Mary Barnes here, and their letters became a literary success. In my view nobody until then had analysed the style. This could be of aesthetic value, but I mention this only in passing. Much more important was the change that occurred in psychology and psychiatry during the seventies. In my youth, advances in behaviour theory and behaviour techniques, under the influence of Pavlov, Watson and Skinner, seem to me to be removing all the mystery from psychiarmy and psychology. Even Freud wanted to study man as an object of scientific analysis, in order to explore laws which would enable us to forecast and control human behaviour, in the same way as scientists in other fields. But towards the end of the sixties many people, particularly the young, looked for other ways. They experimented with psychedelic drugs, meditation, Eastern religions and occultism. In psychology there was talk about human values and the deeper meaning of life, and so-called humanistic psychology was born - inimical to science as we knew it.

It is this same trend that I think we are witnessing in our genre: the birth and success of parascience in the first place, fantasy and sorcery, and so on. Science fiction these days is very short on science as we knew it. New mysticism and man is a paraprog. Can we go with this without trouble, as I can remember the very same process from the thirties, when astrologers were employed by the brownshirts in Germany, for instance. This is only a symptom, but the whole of society and rationalism a major crisis ensues... or vice versa.

In my country these tendencies are not so strong; we still live in a boom period for SF proper. However, parascience is already read, and this inspired me to write an "anti-Daniken" book in the early sixties (Delusions of EN). Later I turned to my own science, namely psychology and psychotherapy, and wrote two more books.

The first one is called *Driver's Licence for Parents*. It was inspired by the birth of my daughter when I was almost fifty. For a psychiatrist who spends much of his life diagnosing his patients' infantile experiences, such an event is of revealing importance. I would call the book "child-rearing fiction", whose theme is the
interaction between generations. It is also an experiment in an idyllic dystopia.

"Ideas of an Old Psychiatrist" is the subtitle of the second book, which is called Ninehiva the Second Time. It is intended that these essays and inventions, that would simplify the process of psychotherapy. It could easily be termed psychofiction. I also tried to combine it with popular information, an experiment which I consider to be a success.

Just now I am finishing a bigger novel. It's subtitled "sex fiction," but it tries to understand not only human sexual behaviour but also our aggressive drives, justifying them. And, simply, the whole "psychosocial evolution" as we call it. Set in a near future, it could also be called "Notes From the End of this Millennium," for it is evident that if we could answer the questions: What sort of being is man? What determines his behaviour? - we could also answer the question: What will his future be? How this millennium will end.

Today we don't feel the enthusiasm for scientific advance that we felt 20 years ago. But should we abandon reason because of that? Everything we wrote about has materialised: robotics and automation, microelectronics and computers, biotechnology and space exploration. But this didn't result in a scientific world at peace. On the contrary, the very microelectronics we dreamed of leads to a new arms race and new tensions. The economic crisis will not be solved by robotics, there will be no robot revolution - the will take place, for all cheap labour instead. And the endangered species Man can be manipulated further through his own sciences: his embryos stolen and re-engineered, his limbs and organs stolen and his mind tested, his being tested.

It is evident that our themes today are different when compared with the themes of the sixties. It is the duty of every one of us to speak for himself and find his own. Personally, I see my theme - apart from debating with parapsychics and the new mysticism - as stressing the value of the individual human being as such, in its entirety, and death and the danger of atomic extermination on the other. Everyone of us is important. Everyone of us is a source of hope and should be treated with respect.

It is also important, it seems to me, to communicate between our different worlds, and between individuals to create mutual understanding. Here science fiction can play an important role. Ours is perhaps the only genre that is indeed international, readable and read in east and west, north and south, because our themes and our problems matter everywhere. It is our duty to uphold these links... be it only through meetings and discussions such as we are having here.

Valentine Pontifex


Let's face it, this isn't science fiction. Lord Valentine's Castle (1979/80) was the first in this series and is a tale of adventure set in a mythical environment. It was very much about the comparative heights of certain mountains, the functions of the Isle of Sleep which accept only by any logical person. I confess this fooled me at first. I keep on hearing "realistic" explanations which would set my mind at ease over these non-standard features: I am still waiting.

The Majipoor Chronicles (1981/2) took the story off on a more ambitious scale, but was plagued with some problems. One critic was being a fix-up, using a fairly blatant gimmick to take the reader through the highspots of Majipoor's history and cultural development in the form of a series of personal memories. To be honest, I thoroughly enjoyed the book for what it was: a series of exercises in depicting - and empathising with - strange cultures which still managed to hang together despite the re-use of the same mystical features which placed the original book outside the SF canon.

With Valentine Pontifex we pick up the story of our volume one and arrive at the story of our hero of volume two. We trace them through many adventures, yet this is by no means just an adventure story: having set the scene in the earlier works, Silverberg now sets out on a pilgrimage to progress. Motivations begin to matter more than actions, dreams and portents loom larger than life, every stage of Valentine's anabasis has at least two deeper levels of meaning, and, in fact, we can accept it on that basis, many of the otherwise annoying tricks and trappings cease to bother and become part of an old and honoured form of story-telling with a moral.

Having embarked upon the actual reading, I saw what I thought was a rather unconvincing comment by Dave Langford (in Cloud Chamber, 28), and made a mental note of it with the thought "damn - I wish I'd said that first!" In brief, it read "A powerful plot thread is the struggle concerning whether Valentine's love should become Pontifex... Readers will be in an agony of suspense, unless of course they have cheated by reading the book's title. The point is, however, that it's perfectly obvious from the start to the reader that this is to happen; it's Valentine who can't or won't accept it, and we watch his reactions with growing interest and involvement as this tangled tale unwind..." I think this is true, and that the document is not quite as revolting as those other stories make it out to be.

Valentine's Castle (1979/80) is, unfortunately, a very great amount of agricultural dilution among some quite interesting ideas. By now, the population explosion on the one hand and the danger of atomic extermination on the other. Everyone of us is important. Everyone of us is a source of hope and should be treated with respect.

It is also important, it seems to me, to communicate between our different worlds, and between individuals to create mutual understanding. Here science fiction can play an important role. Ours is perhaps the only genre that is indeed international, readable and read in east and west, north and south, because our themes and our problems matter everywhere. It is our duty to uphold these links... be it only through meetings and discussions such as we are having here.

Bunyan Revisited

Ken Lake

Bunyan Revisited

[Valentine Pontifex by Robert Silverberg. Victor]


Let's face it, this isn't science fiction. Lord Valentine's Castle (1979/80) was the first in this series and is a tale of adventure set in a mythical environment. It was very much about the comparative heights of certain mountains, the functions of the Isle of Sleep which accept only logical person. I confess this fooled me at first. I keep on hearing "realistic" explanations which would set my mind at ease over these non-standard features: I am still waiting.

The Majipoor Chronicles (1981/2) took the story off on a more ambitious scale, but was plagued with some problems. One critic was being a fix-up, using a fairly blatant gimmick to take the reader through the highspots of Majipoor's history and cultural development in the form of a series of personal memories. To be honest, I thoroughly enjoyed the book for what it was: a series of exercises in depicting - and empathising with - strange cultures which still managed to hang together despite the re-use of the same mystical features which placed the original book outside the SF canon.

With Valentine Pontifex we pick up the story of our volume one and arrive at the story of our hero of volume two. We trace them through many adventures, yet this is by no means just an adventure story: having set the scene in the earlier works, Silverberg now sets out on a pilgrimage to progress. Motivations begin to matter more than actions, dreams and portents loom larger than life, every stage of Valentine's anabasis has at least two deeper levels of meaning, and, in fact, we can accept it on that basis, many of the otherwise annoying tricks and trappings cease to bother and become part of an old and honoured form of story-telling with a moral.

Having embarked upon the actual reading, I saw what I thought was a rather unconvincing comment by Dave Langford (in Cloud Chamber, 28), and made a mental note of it with the thought "damn - I wish I'd said that first!" In brief, it read "A powerful plot thread is the struggle concerning whether Valentine's love should become Pontifex... Readers will be in an agony of suspense, unless of course they have cheated by reading the book's title. The point is, however, that it's perfectly obvious from the start to the reader that this is to happen; it's Valentine who can't or won't accept it, and we watch his reactions with growing interest and involvement as this tangled tale unwind..." I think this is true, and that the document is not quite as revolting as those other stories make it out to be.
Close To Home
Paul Kincaid

160pp. £1.95 0 575 03440 8]

I have always preferred Richard Cowper's short stories to his novels. I suppose because in his novels the plot is to the fore, whereas in the stories he tends to concentrate more on atmosphere. Like Keith Roberts, the writer Cowper most closely resembles, he is a master at creating atmosphere and a sense of location. The image of the remote monastery in 'The Custodians' lingers long after the memory of what actually happens there has faded.

And for me 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn' will always be superior to the sequence of novels that followed it.

What a pleasure, therefore, to be able to welcome a new collection of his short stories, particularly at a time when fewer short story collections then ever seem to be being published.

I have mentioned already that atmosphere is the strong point of Cowper's stories. In fact the thing that emerges most clearly from these stories is a sense of nostalgia. The most common structure he uses is of a looking back to some earlier time that had a sort of rosy glow attached to it and as often as not there will be a flashback within this flashback.

If the plot line of these convoluted stories were straightened out, they would probably be as slight and as simple as the plot lines of his novels too often are. But by looking back at the key events, instead of simply recounting them, what happens becomes less important than the feelings and emotions generated.

A case in point, and to my mind the most typical and the most successful of the stories in this collection is 'The Scents of Silverdill'. The narrator looks back on a childhood he played on the near desolate wasteland that had been a spaceport. But there are still a few people who work there, and the boy makes friends with an old man who had visited Mars before it was declared independent. The old man has a tale to tell that does not create a sense of the alien, but it would certainly not stand as a story in its own right. However, tied up as it is with the old man's regrets for lost opportunities, the boy's longings for the unattainable, and the overall nostalgia for childhood, it becomes a most compelling and enjoyable piece.

It is interesting that of the six stories in this collection, three are concerned with childhood, and two of them, 'The Scents of Silverdill' and 'What Did the Deazies Do?', have the form of looking back to childhood. 'What Did the Deazies Do?' is the closest to home of all the stories, and seems to be the story that Cowper was most comfortable with, as his writing is assured, and the story is decked out with incidental detail that establishes the time and place more effectively than any other story. The setting is a remote East Anglian village before and during World War Two, and concerns a gateway through two worlds or another plane of existence. The glimpses of this other world are suitable atmospheric but unprecise. The picture of local life, the spirit of place and of time, the sound of country speech which convinces rather than seeming contrived, all are very precise, and show Cowper at his best.

The third story of childhood, 'Brothers', is not quite so effective as these other two, perhaps because it is told through the eyes of the boy rather than looking back upon the incident. Again it is set in a remote country village, with the rural atmosphere and accents well realised, indicating that Cowper is at his best when he lets the strain of English pastoralism show through in his writing. But this time it is not so precisely located in place or, more importantly, in time, and this is perhaps a defect. The story concerns a boy whose brother is returning from military service. The boy hero worships his brother, but during the course of the story learns of the grim deeds he has had to do, and the ways it has changed him. A nice idea, but too simply, too straightforwardly told to be as effective as it might be.

The title story of the collection, 'The Tithonian Factor', also employs the flashback within a flashback device. Again by this method Cowper is able to give a depth and a strength to the story that might otherwise be no more than an interesting irony. A drug is discovered that confers immortality, some time after that mankind conquers death naturally by some sort of evolutionary change that seems to involve allowing the soul to fly free, but those who took the 'Sempiterna' drug are unable to enjoy this freedom. Many another writer might have simply made this irony the centre of the story, but by having one of the new breed look back on her encounter with a sempitern, and then having the sempitern look back to her reasons for taking the drug, Cowper is able to

C. J. CHERRYH
Hugo Award Winning
Author
A brilliant new Downbelow Station novel
MERCHANT'S LUCK £1.95

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK
One of SF's greatest names
Two new novels...
SPECIAL DELIVERANCE £1.95
OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN £1.95
(October)
...and a classic reissue
WAY STATION £1.95

T. J. BASS
From the author of The Godwhale, a pulsating vision of the future
HALF PAST HUMAN £1.95
...and a reissue of THE GODWHALE £1.95

PETER TREMAYNE
At last, his stunning Celtic fantasy is complete with the third volume
BUCCANEERS OF LAN-KERN £1.95
...and the reissue of the first
THE FIRES OF LAN-KERN £1.95
milk stronger emotions with his story. It is notable that the two stories that do not employ nostalgia or childhood as their central devices are the two weakest in the book. 'Incident at Huacaloc' concerns a tourist at some ancient Inca remains who finds herself caught in an Incan ceremonial. It is a fairly good story, but Cowper doesn't seem really comfortable away from English, or at least European, landscapes. And there is a certain 'So what?' aspect to it all. If the story had been presented in his more usual manner, as a memory with its added perspective, I am sure the events described would seem even more evocative.

As for the final story, 'A Message to the King of Brodbingnag', it is a straightforward ecological disaster story recounted from the beginning to the end. And since the end is telegraphed several pages before the story actually finishes, it doesn't even manage to generate the usual tension. Again the story is presented as an ironic tale - the protagonists set out with the best of intentions to discover an answer to world hunger, but as an unexpected side effect they unleash something beyond their control. But even the irony has been done before.

'A Message to the King of Brodbingnag' comes in the collection immediately after 'The Scents of Silverdill', and this juxtaposition at least serves to highlight what Cowper is best at, and what he should leave alone.

---

**A Tangled Web**

Chris Bailey

[THE GOLDEN GROVE by NANCY KRESS. Bluejay Books 1984.]

[250pp., $13.95. ISBN 0-312-94180-3]

Something is happening in America. Here in Britain, safe behind the barricades of Ballard, Aldiss, Harrison, et al., we have been firing salvos of scorn and disillusion at the glibners, the glibackers, the glibblymers, and the glibbers. The worthy has gone down in eager analysis. While she worthily has attempted to write a novel of character, her characters exist only in her imposed interpretation of them and thereby she deprives the reader of one of his greatest pleasures.

If the novel is better than the above would suggest, it is because it does succeed on the level of device. In a book one of the recurrent images of which is that of spinning and weaving, the author herself spins around her characters a complex web of images and symbols, water and land, court and country, grove and field, weaving and rending; the decay, death and rebirth of the Grove itself is a most effective symbol of the delusions and subsequent coming to self-awareness of several of the characters.

While it is elegantly and intelligently resolved, the moral impression left by The Golden Grove is of an absence of life and action. Occasionally - just very occasionally - I could have sworn I was reading Marion Zimmer Bradley. On the present evidence, Nancy Kress may well become a wordly, saying lots and conveying little, or she may well become something very much better.

---

**Second Class Returned**

Ken Lake


Busby has invented one useful phrase - the Long View, found in the first three chapters with and without quotation marks and with and without italics. The concept is simple: take a break in the brutal, torturing style of biological and a chronological age, and apparently this can provide a social and even an intellectual cachet to the possessors of two "ages" with the first chapter being purposedly written by a 8.5-year-old (big) child, the daughter of our earlier heroine Risu. Kerguelen, it can be seen that her claim to a "chrono" age of 18 is intended to imply something - though what it is is hard to grasp, and certainly the brat's subsequent behaviour fails to indicate that she has in any way benefited from the dual age.

It's true that in composing her purported "introduction to a short story", as a means of providing us with the sort of synopsis that used to be printed in italics at the beginning of partworks in Astounding, Busby has made her sound quite unlike any 8.5-year-old I have had the misfortune to encounter, but then, since every one of your 8.5-year-olds is different, and Ilse and the rest - is a cardboard cutout at best, such an intro is for the course. I only wish I had realised he was going to write it, for it would have saved me from tiring of the Star Rebel Zele M'Tai and the three subsequent volumes of this interminable space opera.

An intriguing writer in Busby: his Demu Trilogy (1973/80) started off in the brutal, torturing style of some much of today's adventure fiction, but at least it had the virtue of its speed, strength and conviction to see
you through the first two parts; by the time he reached
the third, however, Busby had obviously lost interest and
it all petered out in waffling and piffle. All these Earths
(1979), however, is vastly more interesting, with an
unusual development of the "alternate worlds" idea
whereby spacemen can never return to the world they left,
but with each journey veer further and further from their
homeworlds continuum. All comes out right in the end of
course, but both the mechanics and the characterisation
were fairly acceptable and, as usual, the suspense was
well crafted.

Now, unfortunately, we are back to the great
American multivolume family saga, Dallas of the Spaceways
- transparent and excessively juvenile motivations,
regularly injected snippets of sexuality (including
Busby's hangup on breast feeding) and quite arbitrary
disasters - acts of valour - domestic spat - simplistic
solutions. So ineffectual are the humans that the very
friendly aliens have to be described as "clown-marked"
and "toe-dancing" so that the most clapped-out Earthman
can feel superior to them.

Busby also suffers from a basic confusion over
language. The Friendly aliens speak "a rather Germanic
syntax" ("she still piles all her verbs in one place a
lot' as Our Hero explains it); this is fair enough as
indicating an obviously somewhat unintelligent alien
cooping with the English language - after all, none of
the humans even attempts to learn the alien language -
and saves Busby having to provide any more realistic
characterisation.

But the "bad aliens" also garble the English
language to a point where understanding really is hard
yet this occurs in parts of the story where Busby is
reporting their internal monologues, where (as with a
translation from Cantonese into English) any competent
interpreter would automatically put the sense into our
syntax. Again, I suppose the aim is to stress the aliens'
alienness, but it all seems both unnecessary and
downright annoying for the reader.

Jerry Pournelle is a credited by the publisher as saying that
"Busby writes fine adventure stories, the kind that
made this love science fiction in the first place." For
that "first place" must be all of forty years ago, and
perhaps I should have asked my neighbour's teenage son
to review this adventure story for me. Unfortunately he
can't cope, at age 15 (bio), with anything not in
pictures, leaving me puzzled to learn just where Busby's
market for juvenilia can actually be found today.

Still, one must not be too unkind. There's a lot of
colourful action, things and places in the book, the
cover portraits of Bran and Rissa match anything in True
Confessions, there is of course scope for an infinite
number of further novels starring the same cast, and as
throughout this saga Hud and Blunder rules 0.K.

Lemon & Onion
Edward James

[THE LUNATICS OF TERRA by JOHN SLADEK. Gollancz 1984.]

The Steam-Driven Boy. Keep the Giraffe Burning.
Alien Accounts and now his fourth short-story collection
(unfinished, but I've missed one), the one with the most suitable
title yet. All, or nearly all, John Sladek's work has been about
the lunatic fiction in this sense, and certainly some of these particular
lunacies we've met before, in his SF or in his non-fiction (The New Apocrypha)
or even in his detective fiction (Black Aura). (Some of them are
even having the same conversations: if you want to be
unfair compare the bottom of p.60, in the story 'After
Flaubert' with the conversation on p.28 on Black Aura
(panther ed., 1975)).

The pattern is to some extent the same as before;
to no one's regret: the standard is as high as ever. We
have more delicious parodies of the lunatic fringe.
"Great Mysteries Explained" is there, although sadly only
with the four great mysteries originally in Isaac
Asimov's rather than the "Seven Great Unexplained
Mysteries" he published in Jakubowski and Edwards'
Complete Book of SF and Fantasy Lists (1983). There is
"An explanation for the disappearance of the Moon", from
England, which is good nonsense, pseudo-linguistics,
Celtic mysticism and numerology into a
convincingly loony thesis. A third parody features a
twentieth-century Renaissance man who makes astonishing
classical jokes in all kinds of human languages: he proves
that the sun isn't really hot, works out a new and
simpler value for pi, discovers a thirteenth sign of the
zodiac, and heads an expedition to the East Pole. (He has
been put off traditional science by his grandfather, who
had heard that scientists could still not make a living in
a test tube. "Or was it life they couldn't make?
Whatever it is they all admit it." I never forgot her
words. Out of gratitude, I told her how to make a second
small hole in the other end of the egg, to make the
sucking easier.)

The humour is, of course, still there, in almost
every story. Sladek is the greatest humorist in SF, as
has often been said, and it is worth pondering why. He
has that delight in the weirdnesses of the English
language which characterises all the best Anglo-American
comic writers and, which comes to much the same thing,
a great feeling for the English language, which enables him
to produce marvellous parodies of SF writers such as
those in The Steam-Driven Boy. He has an imagination
which can see the ludicrous potential of any situation.
He can turn out one-liners as fine as any in the New
Yorker school of humour (which has been influential in so
much so-called SF humour) (some of the best come in the
afterwords which follow each story). But what gives his
humour intensity and staying power is his vision of the
world and of human nature, which is just as black as that
of Swift or Voltaire (as we have seen from Sladek's own
robot Candid, Roderick).

The world inhabited by The Lunatics of Terra is one
which we can recognise all too easily; it is, thank God,
still one or two steps removed from Earth. Terrans elect
a puppet (Punch) as President ('The Last of the
Whaleburgers'). Their media resort to on-stage murder to
keep up the viewing figures ('The Last of the
Whaleburgers' and 'Red Noise'). When aliens visit Terra
they are so overwhelmed by the pervasive media-culture
that they abandon their own alienness and succumb to its
lures, either passively ('Guesting' and 'The Next
Dwarf'), or acting out its fantasies with men as their
victims ('White Hat'). Terrans have an uncritical
fascination for the irrational and the received face ('After
Flaubert' and 'Breakfast with the Murgatroyds') and
a yearning to be incorporated into the machines they
admire ('The Last of the Whaleburgers', 'Answers' and 'The White Dwarf'). Adult Terrans may become so taken over by their irrational view of the world that they regress into juvenility, leaving machines and children to run the world ('Calling all Gumdrops'). The stories are not related to each other in any way, but all of them (except perhaps the not very successful horror story about a teddy bear, 'Ursa Minor') share the same bitter despair at the apparently innate stupidity and pettiness of mankind. Comic, yes; work of great artistry and even genius, no doubt; and if you want to cheer yourself up afterwards, read some P.G. Wodehouse.

A Slice Of Heresy
Martyn Taylor

[THE GOSPEL FROM OUTER SPACE by ROBERT SHORT. Font] [Paperback 1984, 99pp., £1.50]

This pamphlet is a printed edition of an illustrated lecture Short has given many times in America - he says - in which he seeks to convince the young that films such as 1979's A Space Odyssey and 'Superman' are the work of godless materialists while 'Cem', 'Star Wars' and 'ET' are modern reworkings of the bible story. The book looks impressive, with lots of serious seeming quotes, although there are more quotations from such heavy sources as 'Peanuts' and 'Hagar the Horrible' than from actual writers, whether dramatists or theologians. The reason for this becomes obvious when the book is actually read. There are some fine points, but Short seems to believe he is better than any writer really means than the writer did when he actually put pen to paper. A brave man indeed who puts words into the mouths of such as Shakespeare and Nietzsche, who, most would have considered more than capable of expressing their true thoughts. In one place Short quotes Stanley Kubrick. At least, the words appear in parentheses even though Short suggests they are a paraphrase. In fact the words are not a paraphrase of what Kubrick actually said - printed immediately beforehand in large friendly black letters for everyone to see - but of what Short thinks he said. The difference is illusory - on Mr. Short. Similarly, he seems not to have noticed that he quotes Carl Sagan with approbation and then, sixteen pages later, dismisses him as an atheist materialist so typical of modern scientists. I suspect Mr. Short believes he has assembled a work of scholarship. His scholarship is species bordering on fraudulent.

His theology isn't too hot either. He has a notion of original sin that had never occurred to me before. It is the idea that sin is an entirely new school of theology! He isn't too strong on the power of prayer, either. But these pale into nothingness beside his crass incomprehension of the nature of Christ. Whether or not one accepts the truth of the Christian doctrine it must surely be accepted that the Christian churches do not hold Christ to have been a good man, a shining example to us all, the perfect human being ever, but to have been the Messiah whose crucifixion redeemed all of us. According to Mr. Short, Obiwan Kenobi (Star Wars) and ET are 'Christ symbols', so in his world Christ wields a mean light saber and all that Prince of Peace, whose sacrifice was for all of us, is hot air, and a cute little alien with a heart of gold and a nice line in stage drunk acts is the full, perfect and complete sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

Two facts give the flavour of this book. Mr. Short is a casual antisemite, as revealed in his attitude towards Spielberg, and in an awesomely religious work there are more quotations from William Kowitzki's novelisation of 'ET' than there are from the gospels.

The uncommitted will laugh like drains at this book. Me, I shall pray for Mr. Short. With friends like him, who believe they can lead young people to the truth with meretricious farrago of lies and distortions like this book, our Lord has no need of enemies.

---

Trampled SF
David Barrett

[FIRE PATTERN by BOB SHAW Gollancz 1984. 190pp., £7.95] [ISBN 0-575-03452-1]

'Oh, I wish you would burn to death,' snaps an exasperated Mave Starzynski to her aging, pipe-smoking father, who in giving a gnomically ominous warning, pours out the contents of his cardigan. Ten minutes later she returns to find a room full of smoke, a hole in the floor - and a mound of fine grey ash and one hand where her father had been.

Rayner Jerome, a local journalist, is given the job of writing up the story. He is a pronounced sceptic, stubborn, proud, and something of an intellectual snob who often rubs people up the wrong way - it was easy to identify with him. He begins to research the documented cases of 'Spontaneous Human Combustion', and very quickly becomes convinced that the phenomenon is genuine. Within a couple of days he himself witnesses another case of SHC, which is graphically described, and shortly after that he is interviewed by the man himself. Until then this is one of those books where surprise follows revelation follows sub-climax, and there is no safe way to outline the story beyond about p65. What fascinated me, though, was how in the end Jerome could then use a handful of well-trod SF ideas without letting them appear too old hat. Within the framework he has set up they work, so he uses them - and why not? In passing, I admire his taste in beer: '... sat there in The Globe in Ulverston... drowning a pint of Hartley's best... I sometimes think they could keep all their free love if I could just have a few pints of Hartley's best every now and then.' (pp101-102)

Recalling the more than a few pints of Hartley's Mild I knocked back in my student years, I echo the sentiment. Shaw's characterisation throughout is as good as ever; but this particular gentleman has to be drawn from real life.

Another character, who appears briefly in a telephone conversation, might also perhaps have some claim to reality: a certain John Sladek who in 1974 had published a no-nonsense study of the paranormal in a book called Psychic Superstars. Sladek's first words are, 'You're not a bill collector, are you?' When told that Jerome was impressed by his book he replies, 'Thankyou. It's nice to hear from one of my readers.' Wonder who the other one is? (Just how many copies of The New Apocrypha did Sladek sell?) Jerome enquires about Spontaneous Combustion. 'Oh, I don't know,' Sladek said. 'Maybe people do burst and make ashes of themselves... Well, it's a whole new category of event that the insurance companies can refuse to pay off for.' (pp39-40)

There is very little overt humour apart from this passage, though there are some scenes in the book that turned a smile into a guffaw: 'I think I shall count the people before I go in... I mean I shall count the number of people who I have met.' (pp55-56)

Well, it's a whole new category of event that the insurance companies can refuse to pay off for. (pp39-40)

There is very little overt humour apart from this passage, though there are some scenes in the book that turned a smile into a guffaw: 'I think I shall count the people before I go in... I mean I shall count the number of people who I have met.' (pp55-56)

I am usually the first to complain about the current tendency of SF writers to produce 500p over-extended epics. Fire Pattern, I feel, would have benefited from this: a simpler story, a more traditional atmosphere, perhaps. Two scenes were too telescoped, and there were a few ideas which could have been extended further - particularly the whole subject of Spontaneous Human Combustion which, having been explained so ingeniously, is then almost forgotten. This book certainly won't win any awards but, like most of Bob Shaw's work, it's a good, enjoyable read.
TERRY BROOME, 
45 Hykeham Road, 
Lincoln. 
LN6 8AA

With reference to Jim England's review of Asimov on Science Fiction. If what Mr. England has said is true, then poor old doddering Asimov isn't as bright as he thinks he is. I haven't read the book, myself, but when it comes out in paperback, I'll buy it to check the facts, because it strikes me that Mr. Asimov can't (surely?) be as shallow as he seems from the review.

If the review is true to the book (I'm not saying Jim's a liar - just that I find a veteran such as Asimov could make so many mistakes hard to believe), then where does that leave our Master of SF?

If we're to meet the bright future he (Asimov) paints then technological advancement MUST go hand-in-hand with sociological advance - i.e., we must grow at the same rate our technical and scientific knowledge expands. Already, we have atomic science and are too immature to handle it properly - thus, we use it or keep on using it to build weapons we don't need or want - and that's putting it mildly.

So how can he criticise Orwell's Animal Farm or 1984 as 'didactic' or 'very bad science fiction'? After all, the social sciences DO exist, and Orwell has based or partly-based the systems of both books on existing governments or rulerships of the past. Animal Farm is an allegory - the events really did happen, but he has replaced the people with animals and the country with a farm. It is 'didactic', but the SF genre sprang about, partially, as a need amongst its writers, to put forward a message or warning in order that perhaps, common sense and sanity will prevail eventually.

STAR WARS isn't utterly brainless - the film does hold certain moral standpoints, which is more than can be said for any of Asimov's works.

In reply to Martyn Taylor's letter (Vector 121), I agree with all three points he raises - I meant to say 'form', not 'philosophy', but my wires got crossed somehow along the way unfortunately (for me)!

I've since seen BLADERUNNER again on video, and though I also saw some emu's (?) I've come to the conclusion that Mr. Taylor was right on this count too (that being the concrete jungle and simulae is not held as an ideal); about his last point - as a fan of Blade Runner, I found the dub-overs spoiled the film somewhat, but if it helped others to understand what was going on, then Scott obviously made the right decision in including it.

I thought the two pieces on Lisa Tuttle in Vector 121 the most entertaining, an author, yet in the pages of Vector. The two 'articles', which follow, however, should have been put under the 'letters received' column: Good writing finger-flexing exercises, but as articles they're blown out of all proportion.

K.V. Bailey starts his review/exploration with such long-winded phrases! The first page and a bit was gobbledygook to me, but perhaps the articles are aimed at those who have already read The Drowned World? But if that is the case, and the article is aimed at those who, like a greater appreciation of the Drowned World have read The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, or have heard of the Saturnalia. Or is it that I'm ignorant of these two works? I've heard of Gordon Pym, but this is the first time the Saturnalia has come to my attention. I gained nothing from the article, except as a reading exercise, because the references were obscure and scholarly, the writing crammed full of puffed rice. I'm sure a few members have read the writings he mentions, and will get something out of this, but I'd hazard a guess they're terribly outnumbered by the ones like me, who, after wading through the OED's left-overs, were left to drown in the storm.

Or is the BSFA aiming for a scholarly and well educated audience (i.e., the university boffins)? What is the level of education of most Vector readers and BSFA members? Perhaps a survey?

[[One of the perennial problems with Vector is to know at what level of knowledge the contents should be aimed at. (The criteria being knowledge of science fiction and literature; especially literary criticism). Most members would agree that when David Wingrove edited the Vector the type of magazine that was produced was too academic for the members' taste. In fact, to give you a more recent example the contents of Vector 119 and 120. (Competition winners again, and presumably obviously did not catch the readers' interest as they killed off the letter column of the last issue! But conversely, the contents of those two issues were just as good as the other issues if not better, as most of the articles were original; they were just aimed at a different level of sophistication). So I did not concern yourself too much about the level of education of most Vector readers as any editor of Vector is always going to aim the contents of the magazine to elicit a response from his readers. However, this does not mean that the contents of each issue has to have the consistency of over-cooked porridge but rather a mixture of articles/interviews/reviews some of which are bound to capture the interest of each reader. In your case why I would suggest that I succeeded in that aim and to expect to like the whole contents of each issue is only an ideal. On the point of the Ballard article I think it was necessary to have read The Drowned World but not the other books mentioned. The fact that the references existed was K.V. Bailey's point.]]

K.V. BAILEY. 
Val de Mer. 
Aldeyney. C.I.

Vector 121 is good value. My only reservation is that while transcribed interviews are enlightening and illuminating in moderate dosage, they can get a bit tiring if prolonged - all the same there were some very interesting things in the Lisa Tuttle transcript - particularly the insight into how living in Britain affects an American writer. The high spot in this number is surely the Beautiful Days article. Actually I didn't read that until after completing my Zen Gun review, and of course found it retroactively more interesting. The fact, plenty of common ground and I find myself with a foot in either camp, but a bigger foot, as it were, in Drug Knives. Incidentally, it took me a little time to puzzle out the uncaptioned photo on page 28. It's narcissism. It appears as a para. on C.S. Lewis, although there is a resemblance, it's not him. It is inset into a paragraph on Dante and it's not him. By processes of elimination and probability it must be Mr. Ballard! [][10 out of 10!]]

Licked very much your autobiographical cocktail - and the title design accompanying it: a
It certainly is good to see the Blish, in print, particularly "A New Totemism?". David Ketterer has the name of the forthcoming book from Advent wrong: it's "The Blish of the Gods", not "Dog!". Otherwise, his introduction and commentary seem very accurate. Your comment that Blish always seems to find his peculiar position within SF is probably very accurate, too. Gregory Feeley, in a personal conversation with me, pointed out how many of the science SF writers, including Jerry Pournelle, thought Blish very liberal and new wave, while other liberal writers such as Michael Moorcock thought he was still in the "sizzle" mode. (Feeley based these impressions on interviews he conducted with these writers for his biography.) I don't deny that Blish was, and is, ambivalent: careful writer and critic who tried to wind his way carefully between the propaganda and the work. And really, to a small degree, he seems to have been a pivotal figure in SF: between old writers and new (he encouraged both Paul Anderson and Joanna Russ); between those in England and America, since he had lived in both countries; between routine commercial SF and the "avant garde" (which attempted to be literature. (He wrote both the first Star Trek book series, After such Knowledge); between writers and science and literature. There's not too many writers in SF, as you say, that have covered the same expanse, (although I appreciate anything doesn't stop the "real" hard core of the writer's focus). Sometimes I think there isn't so much a discussion between the groups within SF as there is a conflict of ideas and themes that seems an almost willful hesitation to relax within their own prejudices.

Gregory Feeley's article on King's "The City That Was the World" is a good character study, but "Darkside Crossing" is stunning: one of the best SF short stories of this year. I actually think it is better to consider the stories separately, and not part of a series: "Binary Brothers" is a particularly good one from "Darkside Crossing", since the ending suggested in the latter is far more mystical and unworldly than any Blish short fiction. Feeley strays into murky ground when he attempts to extrapolate how Blish might have written the rest of the series, "it all speculation, and really doesn't fit very well with the rest of the pieces we are lucky enough to have.

Paul Kincaid should give poor Terry Carr a break. I admire his stamina for reading all the English language short SF; other languages would be wonderful, but impossible. It's also obvious that Carr read Interzone, but didn't dare care what he found. (I'm particularly like "Whitecross". You're right if I was editing such an anthology as Carr's, I'd have included Saxton's "No Coward Soul from Interzone.") Kincaid's other comments are quite penetrating ("Swarm!" is such junk), but unfortunately my page 39 is a repeat of page 35. All Icacies were identical. I'm afraid.)]]

In Vector 119, Paul Kincaid says that only Greg Benford in Timecapsule attempts to explore the work and character of a scientist. What about Shevek in The Dispossessed? The science is not the main point in that novel, but must it be? Still, I realize that one more exception does not ruin his argument. The current issue (122) is good, although I miss the letter column.

The interview with Lisa Tuttle was interesting: I've always tended to distrust printed fiction, but Lisa is certainly an example of a writer who emerged from those depths. I remember reading the fanzine she helped edit (Mathom, I believe it was called; Joe Pullicia might have been a co-editor) while in high school at night. I remember writing to her and complaining that it was typed in too many different typefaces, apparently at random; (this might have been a problem with a fanzine, I really) I don't remember the contents. I wonder if I would recognize the fanzine collection if I see it again. After a rare bit of Tuttle juvenilia, or from Lisa Tuttle herself to suppress it. The Thayer/Smallwood exchange reminds me of James Blish's conclusion in his essay "The Science in Science Fiction" - Blish decided, to his own surprise, that the most exciting content in Science Fiction were the impossibilities, because they suggested new paradigms in science, and are the paradigmatic thinking. But I don't think anyone, King included, would want to see the logical consequences of development of a scientific idea and its affect on people neglected in SF. But as Benford has pointed out elsewhere, it's a self-defeating logic: you can't create multiple new ideas (longitude, pollution, contact with an alien society) on characters and end up with something. The conflict between this "thrill of discovery" and the story and character development. It's pretty hard to write SF properly (i.e. fulfill all its potential roles) seem both awesome and daunting. I wonder how many writers of science fiction and background on a theoretical basis, and how many just write "by feel"? Hard SF seems to need that theoretical background. Lisa Tuttle's description of how she wrote with George Martin, Windhaven, gives me that impression too, although flying again on a SF book from a downed spaceship seems a sort of trivial possibility (or impossibility) to explore. I don't think anyone could conceive a novel for its logic or rigor, but it's the sometimes fascination of trivial ideas for there own sake that makes me feel good, [[My thanks Cy, for a long and interesting letter.]]
EXTRAVAGANZA!

K.V. Bailey


208pp, £7.95)
to portray his theme.

For a start, who would publish it? Although Ballard is well known and sells quite well, up to now he has not been in the super league and would have difficulty placing it in one of the literary publishing houses. But let's say he has a streak of luck and a publisher shows enough interest to arrange a meeting. To his horror he finds out that he is the SF editor (or at least the SF expert) who is making the offer. What should Ballard do? He instinctively feels that it is the best book he has ever written and with a bit of luck might be considered for the Booker shortlist. However, if it is published under the SF label with, most probably, gaudy Japanese robots on the cover, he can guarantee that it will not make the shortlist or even be reviewed at all by the critical press. In his mind, it has little choice. With the stigma that is attached to anything to do with science fiction it will be unlikely to be accepted by any publisher other than an SF publisher. This way at least it will be published. Although our fictional case is a striking example of the absurdity of the position science fiction has within literature, it is of course, nothing new. Over the last twenty years writers like Moorcock and Aldiss have been praised for their works outside the genre and generally been ignored for those inside.

What is new, and what is exacerbating the situation is the commercial success that SF writers are having in the genre so far. The fact that this is happening among the rest of the new science fiction writers. Why on earth is that started is irrelevant; be it the publishers' accountants or the SF Editors' essential laziness, but in any case science fiction has had its floodgates to commercialism sprang open and now seem close to taking the dam with it. Up to a point, especially with paperback houses, commercial instinct must take its place. But any hope of a book like Moorcock and Aldiss have been praised for their works outside the genre and generally been ignored for those inside.

Now when I came to actually write this piece, I found I couldn't remember anything about the book. So I leafed through it, refreshed my memory, and wrote something which constitutes a major part of the latter half of this review. But I stayed on filling in the background. Reason? I couldn't remember any of the short stories. So I glanced through the collection again in order to fill in that background, and realised that, apart from one outstanding story, I could remember none of them. So I re-read one or two, and it was as though I was reading them for the first time. I couldn't remember them at all. This is, as I said above, very strange, because I have almost certainly read all the stories originally in Astounding or Analog as well as in the collection.

Now let me be quite plain. I like Janifer's stories and I like his writing. So why should I find it so difficult to remember anything about them apart from the development? The answer, of course, is that the SF short story is much more difficult than the short story in general and the SF short story in particular.

A short story has little time or space to spare for the development of character or plot. And of course, again, this is why Janifer's short stories are so short. They are much more difficult than the development. So we come to Reel, a novel by a master of the form.

At 186 pages, Reel is a short novel. But of those pages, the first twelve are blank save for titles, publishing details, and a four line dedication. The story itself is made up of twenty 'calls', each begun (half way down the page), is repeated for each call, so that 200 words FIRST CALL... make it clearer, the twenty calls we have four pages devoid of narrative. This is very strange. When I knew that I would be reviewing this book, I read a collection of Janifer's short stories in order to ground myself in his style. When I arrived at the twenty calls, I could remember none of them. So I re-read one or two, and it was as though I was reading them for the first time. I couldn't remember them at all. This is, as I said above, very strange, because I have almost certainly read all the stories originally in Astounding or Analog as well as in the collection.
essentially blank! Add the opening twelve, that's ninety-two. Ninety-two pages blank out of one hundred and eighty-six is nearly half the book: that's too many.

Thus it must be obvious that the reason I could barely remember Reel is that it is little more than an extended short story:

Now I'm not complaining about this shortness on a value for money basis, although there is probably another argument there. No, what I find most frustrating is that there simply wasn't enough prose.

Among the epigraphs there are quotations from Plato, Shakespeare, Freud, Alan Blake, and the narrative stuggles beneath their erudite weight, for it is at most a simple story. Boy meets girl, falls for girl, and wins girl, despite this being totally contrary to the established patterns of behaviour on his world — the Reel — where he is heir to great wealth and power. Almost incidentally, he fails an attempt to take over the planet, and in fact the whole book is a series of testimonies -- or 'Calls' -- about this attempted coup, including the final testimony of the convicted culprit.

What this adds up to is an awesome achievement. The narrative is entirely first person, but there is never any doubt about which of no less than seven different first-person narrators is speaking, once you realize that they change. But, Oh that short story syndrome! We get occasional tantalizing glimpses of the vital functioning of what appears to be a well-thought-out and convincing capitalist anarchy. And that's all. Just glimpses.

This could have been a seminal contribution to the dialectic or capitalism or collective in SF, and that clearly appears to be the intent. After all, there must be some point to dreaming an entire first person narrative denies the author the opportunity to comment or explain impersonally, but surely this style allows for other methods of conveying insight and explanation.

As must be clear by now, my only real criticism of this book is that it is far too short. But that must be the most damming criticism of all, for there is not enough of the writing to make any sensible comment about. On top of that the choice of the book was so available in this country, I would honestly advise you not to read it unless it has been copiously extended, for after a very short read it will leave you only with a vast yach of and frustratingly vague question mark in your mind. This I find the most unpleasant thing about this book. After all, if the author is not trying to give us answers to burning questions, the least he can do in all common decency is to try to define clearly the questions he is asking.

interzone
THE MAGAZINE OF IMAGINATIVE FICTION

has recently expanded in size. It remains Britain’s only magazine devoted to high-quality science fiction and fantasy by writers both established and new. Published quarterly, each issue also contains illustrations, news and reviews.

INTERZONE 9, Autumn 1984, contains:
"The Object of the Attack" by J.G. Ballard
"The Gods in Flight" by Brian Aldiss
"Canned Goods" by Thomas M. Disch
"The Luck in the Head" by M. John Harrison
"Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson
"Spiral Winds" by Garry Kilworth
plus art by Jim Burns, Richard Kadrey and others

INTERZONE 10, Winter 1984/85, contains:
"The Dream of the Wolf" by Scott Bradfield
"John's Return to Liverpool" by Christopher Burns
"Green Hearts" by Lee Montgomerie
"The Malignant One" by Rachel Pollack
"Soulmates" by Alex Stewart
"Love Among the Corridors" by Gene Wolfe
and more, including book reviews by Mary Gentle

For a four-issue subscription in the UK send £5 to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to INTERZONE. Overseas subscribers send £6 by International Money Order (we regret Eurocheques cannot be accepted).

American subscribers send $10 (or $13 if you want delivery by air mail) to our US agent, 145 East 18th Street, Apt. 5, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, USA. Please make cheques payable to INTERZONE.

Kindly specify which issue you want your subscription to commence with. Single copies of the magazine are £1.50 each (£1.75 or $3 overseas), postage included.

23
MYTHAGO WOOD
ROBERT HOLDSSTOCK

'One of the strangest, most beautiful and most compelling fantasies I've ever read. A marvel of a book' — Keith Roberts

August 23rd 252 pages £8.95

NEUROMANCER
the eagerly-awaited first novel by
WILLIAM GIBSON

'Gibson's writing is strong, controlled and very visual... A classic plot, well handled. Neuromancer creates the most palpable, three-dimensional future since late-60s Delany' — Locus

September 20th 256 pages £8.95