The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

Albion Writ ~ Dave Langford
Geoff Ryman interviewed
Book reviews and Letters

The Face of the Robots
L.J. Hurst on Asimov

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1985
EDITORIAL
David V. Barrett

DANGEROUS DIVISIONS
Readers' opinions and views on amongst other things, theology, and the new look Vector

THE FACE OF THE ROBOTS
L.J. Hurst asks, does Asimov's vision of robotics and their future really make sense?

O HAPPY DAY
Paul Kincaid talks to Geoff Ryman about his phenomenal success as an author of literate, visionary fantasy

ALBION WIRT
David Langford spoke about a great many things during his guest of honour speech at Novacon 14 last November, it least one of which was his forthcoming novel, The Leaky Establishment

ROCKS
Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid
Including Barbara Davies and Paul Kincaid on Vorlicium
Knights by M. John Harrison; Tom Jones on The Merchants'
War by Frederick Pohl; and Mike Dickinson on
The Power of Time by Josephine Saxton, amongst many others

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We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable..."

"Thou shalt not kill.
Thou shalt not commit adultery.
Thou shalt not steal."" It

FEM DISAGREES WITH THESE CONSENSUS BELIEFS, by which our lives and attitudes are consciously or unconsciously directed, but it does not take a doctorate in moral theology to establish their naïvete. They are generalisations of areas of thought or behaviour which, while useful as such, cannot be regarded as universally applicable, as laws of the Universe, or of God, or the gods; for to argue from the general to the particular (inductive reasoning) is to go from distortion of logic, common sense and reality as to argue from the particular to the general (deductive reasoning). Having said that, and having accepted that there are exceptions to every rule, we may still safely assume that the general consensus is that: "Thou shalt not kill, etc."

But - to paraphrase Animal Farm - some basic truths are basically more true than others. Consensus beliefs are subject to change.

It would be unthinkable now to hang a man for stealing a sheep, to send a ten year old child up a chimney, to call a woman a slut because her ankles are visible. But tell a respectable business man of a hundred years ago that he is not allowed to refuse to employ a man because he is black, or that his daughter plans to live with a man without marrying him, and you might think that a woman has entered church without a hat. Unthinkable! These aren't just changes in law, or in fashion. They are changes in deeply-held consensus beliefs.

It can be disturbing to live through such changes. Two examples:

1. A few years ago smoking was socially acceptable. If you didn't like it, you were a snob or a fag. Nowadays it's up to you to move away from it. But in my last office the five non-smokers exercised their democratic rights and forbade me to smoke. That I would just accept. What I could not accept was their attitude towards me: I was disgusting. They were in the right; I was in the wrong. I was the offender. I was the pariah. I became an oppressed minority. And society, which (in all other respects) is sworn to protect minorities, lends its full support to the vilification I suffered. What has happened: the consensus belief has changed, that's all.

"There seems to be a deep change in the way men now look at the world, as if one truth should drive out another - as if whatever is not their belief must be falsehood." - Marion Bradley, The Mists of Avalon

2. Ray Honsfords, Headmaster of Drummond Middle School, Bradford, was pilloried and subjected to abuse because he dared to disagree with the consensus beliefs about multi-racial educational methods. Put simply, he was attacked for his belief that for all his pupils - the white minority as well as the non-white majority. This was judged racial.

Consensus beliefs are even stronger when they are shared by a relatively small group, an elite. Try holding a discussion on comparative religion with a fervent evangelical Christian; or suggest to the youth selling 'Militant' that though there might be something in what he says, he has considered the policies of X, Y, Z on whatever political topic. Immediately you are marked down as the Enemy, the Evil One. You're happy to discuss all sides of a question; they will not accept the validity of any viewpoint other than their own. Voltaire may have said, 'I disagree of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'; they will deny you even that right.

This is where a deeply-held consensus belief becomes intolerable, arrogant, and a danger to freedom of speech or thought. In short, totalitarianism.

Martin seemed to receive his ideas as if they were personal attacks instead of considered differences of opinion.

- Paul Preuss, Broken Symmetry

Overturning current consensus beliefs has long been done in SF, but too often clumsily or didactically. Heinlein's Farnham's Freehold reverses Western racial prejudice; Edmund Cooper's Who Needs Man? reverses sexual stereotypes. Both are unsuccessful: they come over as contrived and insincere. You can't just swap things around and say, 'Now, that's really revolutionarty SF.'

Consensus beliefs are the power behind the power. They stem from, reinforce, and create convention. But fighting convention itself seldom works. Kids rebel against society's norms in clothes and hair - and end up wearing the uniform of the Mods or the Rockers, the Hippies, the Greaser, the Skinheads or the Punks. They replace one convention with another.

And there are conventions in SF writing. Take politics as an example: it is difficult that fantasy should be set in a feudal world, and that the far future should be either libertarian or authoritarian. It is a political system in a modern-economic system, which means it affects society, which is composed of people, who are individuals. The author has changed the story, and the characters have also changed the consensus beliefs, the deepest convictions, the givens of his characters? Or are they just late 20th Century middle-class people - or worse, 19th century cowboys or 17th century buccaneers - in a different milieu?

Conventions and consensus beliefs change; so do acceptable styles in SF writing. 'The Golden Age' - hard science, spaceships and blasters. 'The New Wave' - heavily influenced by and spurred on by Moorcock, and helping to form such differently brilliant writers as Disch, Delany and Ballard. But Moorcock had also been responsible for reinforcing a convention - sword & sorcery - which pervades the lower derivative end of fantasy even today. The convention of the higher derivative end, of course, is the one where we are constantly reminded in the blurs.

New Wave became a convention like any other, but it had the raw sophistication and energy of the Sixties, and it ought to have continued to be a major influence on SF writing. Some of the blame for its early success might be laid on Chris Foss and his imitators; their cover art may have sold millions of SF paperbacks in the Seventies, but it set the development of the genre back by decades: cleverly designed hardware was back. Perhaps not in the authors' minds, but certainly in the minds of people who don't read SF - 'I'm not into battles in space' - and, far more seriously, in the minds of publishers.

Technological SF dominated part of the genre, just as S&S is a legitimate part of fantasy. But not 100%. There is the space between, with the space-shuttle, one-man spaceship and the swashbuckling hero/ine from his covers! Covers plant impressions in the minds of the people who buy the SF readers of SF; an image is created, and then authors are told, 'I'm not saying it's not good, but it's not really SF, is it? It won't sell, you know.' It doesn't have to have rayguns and spaceships: we're back in the Forties and Fifties again.

In the last twelve months I've read just three new books that were original, that bucked the system and won through into print. Bob Holdstock's Mythago Wood, Chris Priest's The Glamour, and Mark Hamlins' Winter's Tale were SF with guts, whatever they were marketed as. Their authors each had an idea that was not just good, it was alive. Then they ignored the conventions, the consensus beliefs, the straitjacket that SF has become trapped in, and wrote three of the most outstanding books of the last few years, in any fictional genre.

But not these three. Many of the full-time authors have to make a living from their writing, and if the publishers won't accept a new idea, or work, or if they manage to convince the authors that their work will not sell, buy it, what can the authors do? Or maybe the publishers are right. Maybe their presumed consensus belief of SF is correct. Maybe the only valid and viable SF is Sci-Fi. But that thought is too depressing, and I, for one, have never been one to conform.
We're still getting response to Vector 126, but so far only a trickle of letters about Vector 127. The more quickly you write, the more topical this column will be; until I get a permanent address, please continue to write via Paul's address.

I particularly enjoyed the interview with Joe Haldeman (Vector 126); the interviewers came over as respectful but not egotistical (a problem with a considerable number of interviews). Joe Sournies makes some interesting points and I agree with the main thrust of the article. Of course we must be critical, but in some cases it seems current SF can do no right. If you look through the last year's issues of Vector, Matrix and PI some reviewers/critics/commentators seem to take pleasure in stating that they no longer read SF, in which case I find it difficult to understand why they continue in the BSFA. A classic example of this masochistic breast-beating came in the interview with M. John Harrison in Vector 122, culminating with his statement that he was no longer going to write SF.

Times change, styles change, readership preferences change - thank God. Many reviewers have their roots in the last period at best and often several periods ago: this colours one's views. Thus it takes concerted effort to understand the new period; many fail to do so.

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This week I see that the film Death Valley, shown on TV recently, is being blamed for a knife attack on a man in his doorway by a complete stranger just a few hours after. I also read that there was a drifting boy who thought he was a pilot. He became a heroin addict. It is alleged that this will encourage more children to use drugs.

Joe Sournies suggests that the Americans would never have walked on the moon if it were not for the writings of pulp SF in the 40s. Can this really be true? Does society reflect literature and television? Or is it the other way round?

I watched the film Death Valley. It didn’t tempt me into killing anybody. I don’t think that this film would have that effect on anyone. I wonder if it tempts Joe Sournies to think that if Grange Hill, if the programme is accurate about heroin addiction then I doubt if it will encourage but rather, discourage people from drugs.

Perhaps SF pushed America to the moon, but if so why has it not pushed us further? Where are the orbiting space stations? Why have there been no missions to Mars? It is nearly 20 years since the Lunar programme began. We have no Lunar bases (unless they’re just not telling us).

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I am not sure that the pages of Vector are the correct place for the theological discussion, but... Mary Gentle (Vector 127) suggested that the resurrection was added to the Jesus ‘myth’ late in the day. Martyn Taylor (Vector 127) quotes similarities in the gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ sayings about his future resurrection to attempt to refute this assertion. Now, the gospels were written approximately 30-50 years after the events they purport to describe. It seems to me unfair to use such sources to try to prove things one way or the other. It all depends on what is meant by ‘late in the day.’ Thirty years gives plenty of time for accretions and embellishments to the original events or sayings to have become accepted as actually happening or been said. (I got the impression that Mary meant even later than this, though.)

Martyn further states that without the resurrection there is no Christianity; Mary that the dying God myth isn’t specifically Christian. I can see that, at the time of the early Christians, a supernatural element in a religion was a necessary condition for its promulgation and growth. (I am not saying that one could not invent it.) This is precisely what Mary was getting at. However, and I don’t want to be willfully misunderstood on this as I’m not necessarily stating my personal position, belief in the resurrection is not actually necessary for Christian belief at all. All that is required is a belief that Jesus died to redeem sins. A sufficiently good man, not a god, would be enough for this.

I don’t know what happened on the ‘first’ Easter because I wasn’t there. Neither was Martyn, nor Mary. The only descriptions (divinely inspired or not) we have of those events were written by men and are, therefore, fallible. The reasons for which they were written are also now unfathomable. The writings are as much open to exegesis and interpretation as any others.

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Continued on page 18...
The Robots of Eden
by L. J. Hurst

My name in science fiction is most often associated with 'Robots', Asimov wrote in Opus 150. The basis of this was a number of short stories written between 1938 and 1950, and three novels published in 1954 and 1957 respectively. Since Asimov abandoned consistent SF writing in 1957, it is possible to say that robots concerned him throughout his active SF career. Even though he later wrote two or three other short stories and has recently published a novel, The Robots of Damm (reviewed in Vector 122) the production date of the best known of those late short stories (The Bicentennial Man in 1977) and the marketing of the novel may seem good reasons not to include them in this reconsideration. Asimov's robots are the robots that he wrote of in the 1940s and 1950s.

Although they are sometimes treated as identical there are actually three types, or worlds, of robot. The best known is that of I, Robot and some of the Rest of the Robots - the world of US Robots and Mechanical Men, Susan Calvin and Donovan and Powell, describing events between 1998 and 2057. The second is found in the rest of the stories in Rest of the Robots and one other, which are varied in date and location: and the third is the universe (Earth and Outer Planets) of the two novels set in about 5000 AD, The Caves of Steel and The Naked Sun. There are major differences between the treatment of these three types.

Writing in 1958, Asimov said 'It was not until 1939 that, for the first time as far as I know, a science fiction writer (Asimov means himself) approached the robots from a consistent engineering standpoint...to me, the applied science of manufacturing robots, of designing them, of studying them was 'robotic!' (Opus 75). With Asimov's declared aim to end the frustration of the robot一次性的创建者, the stories raise a number of questions about his approach and his success: I think we should check that the robots are logical, decent, useful and of human benefit. The robots do not have to be of this, but we should be the robots may be showing us the way that automation should or should not go, or else Asimov did not examine well the problem of automation (robotisation).

In the short stories of the immediate future (the US Robot stories) we see the manufacture and use of robots, but not their intelligence, which is passed on to them. They come in a couple of lines.

The stories concentrate on the experience of Susan Calvin, robot psychologist, and Donovan and Powell, a team of installation engineers. They work for US Robot and Mechanical Men Inc. because the company makes all positronic robots and only leases them out. The company has enormous power, as do its agents, partly because of the cost of the robots, but in turn employees' lives are controlled by the company, internal politics and fear of repercussions. Several stories revolve around employees having to perform acts that are illegal or socially undesirable or both.

In this period, robotophobia (both against robots as machines and as agents of automation causing unemployment) has led to most of the robots being kept off Earth, and the need for the Three Laws. Although Asimov has explained how he developed the laws through several stories, he has never written a story about their origin (they do not seem to have been planned by US Robots, to whose interests they run counter). And given the alleged power of US Robots it looks doubtful that they would have been adopted.

US Robots seems to have been inspired by IBM. But when the robot stories began to appear IBM was not a computer company; it was producing mainly office machinery and tabulating machinery. As IBM became a computer giant Asimov's stories did not change, even though he regards computers and robots as identical. So they should obey the same logic and be as consistent. At the same time, the life style of the early robot period is the same as ours, or was the same as ours, with all its social problems and all the problems of work invading social life.

A few years later, in the two novels, space exploration has occupied the planets but Earth is overpopulated, causing the inhabitants to live in huge cellular Cities. Robinson Crusoe is still a vital problem. The problem is as it was when Susan Calvin said: "The labor unions, of course, naturally opposed robot competition for human jobs." However, both US Robots and trade unions seem to have disappeared. While the robots are not quite as intelligent as any human, they have a consciousness of their own. Sexual discrimination has continued on Earth, so that Jessie Halley has to take her husband's grade, and give up her own job just like Claire Balcomb three millennia before; and on the planet Solaris, too, a Spacer wife has to move in with her husband, horrible as his presence is to her. Generally, life is unpleasant, although Elijah Bailey, the robots' hero, seems to be happy enough.

With this background it is worth looking at the logic of the robot fiction, both in the explicit logic, how the robots work, and in the implicit logic, the consistency or inconsistency of the fiction.

The general impression of the novel is of an unexplained social regression. Three thousand years' development has not increased civilization; it has merely enriched the lives of a few. The 'human simulacrum', on Earth before 2058, the appearance of humanoid Daniel Olav and the reappearance of the robot by 'Let's Get Together', where simulacra are built without them. The development of robots on Solaris and the Outer Planets has had no effect. It is not clear if the development has not proceeded at a fast rate. The plot of The Naked Sun revolves around robot-piloted spacecraft as potential vehicles, yet how humans could have crossed space and hyperspace is not mentioned enough though they were being tested in 'Risk' and 'Escape' before Susan Calvin's death.

In the light of Asimov's 'engineering standpoint', the question of control also deserves consideration. Robotic complex three laws built is but they lack far simpler checks and controls. They seem to lack simple validity checks on their data input, do not have ways of storing information, nor do they lack information. Several stories revolve around robots damaged because they are allowed to accept and proceed with faulty or damaged data (the talking robot in 'Robbie' and the Brain in 'Escape'). A simple programming check for instance, a typical computer check would be that a day of the month must be a number between one and thirty-one is missed completely. Similarly robots forget easily. Do we know why he told you something was it in my memory story? (The Naked Sun, p134).

Is the word 'not' missing? (The Naked Sun, p134).

Lastly, on a higher level, robots cannot recognize patterns; eg. a pattern of beers on a table is not recognized as a pattern of beers. The stories revolve around problems of language, where figurative statements are misunderstood repeatedly as literal, as Joseph Conrad says in the eighth novel of his seven, 'Little Bear'. The meaning of 'little bear' is understood to mean 'don't let yourself be found' instead of 'go away'. Yet knowing these problems, major commands are given to robots in ordinary speech (eg 'Risk') without any attempt at fixing meanings by using a programming language or a dictionary or pre-agreed meanings. The general impression is that robots are built well but badly programmed, indeed seem never to be reprogrammed or corrected at all. As Joseph Patrick points out, whenenny the baby is not problematized to be like an adult that does not mean he is programmed to be a baby. In a robot both states should be the result of programming. To suggest otherwise is wrong.

Asimov's imagery and the language of his characters further complicate his works. Earth humans address robots as 'boy' and women as 'girl' by the name given by a personnel officer (clerk) she is shocked. 'Why can't I have a decent clerk? Ain't I respectable?' The position of the robots is treated as being like that of Asimov's contemporary Negroes. The attitudes encountered and their robot image make him a robot to people's face hatreds. But this is reinforced by the robot design - the makers 'built good, healthy slave complex into the damned thing.' Daniel Olav says Powell. The robot replies: 'I don't know to your question. 'Runaround'. Three thousand years later the Solarian robot nurse still says 'master'. Only the capital letter has disappeared. The Spacers and their robots talk of a Life-style, biological - mechanical but the robots still serve.

Furthermore, the Cities several times are given references that refer back to earlier crowded, teeming living areas. The east European ghettos and the Yellow Peril are recalled in indirect references. The Cities are 'the acme of efficiency', but the lives lived and the descriptions of it hardly echo that.
Before the physical perfection of the Spacers Earth is nothing, its inhabitants little more than a necessary evil of declining importance.

The fall in living standards can be seen, as population constraint means strict Earth grading and rationing. No-one ever seems to question this grade, which can be raised as promotion, or in ways not quite superior to a promotion (Baley's father lost all grade because he was responsible for a nuclear disaster), the other is loss of one's job - usually due to automation.

Grade benefits provides in peculiar ways: 'Baley' didn't put his rating ticket in his hatband till they passed the last of the Hudson sections. A C-5 had no seat rights east of Hudson'.

As a result we have all lost the living standards of the world. But do people still have to wear hats after living indoors for three thousand years to do it?

Whatever is governing Earth has no concept of full employment. Robots replace humans with little consideration of the costs or of the lost good will. Unless the capital costs of robot building have fallen since Susan Calvin's death (something not mentioned), it would be worth comparing the costs of a robot against a human shop assistant, who has to be housed anyway, and is fed on yeast milk. But this never seems to be done. In fact, apart from Daniel Oliva, who is not doing the job he was designed for, we never see a robot working normally (with one exception - see below).

Robots replace humans in another way, too. The novel needed to be set in the period of a reasonable period for human conditioning to change. Both novels revolve around a human response totally unimaginable today. In the Caves of Steel it's out of the question to allow anyone to leave the City exits, while in The Naked Sun it is fear of human contact (which must have developed over a far shorter period). Both of these changes are pre-conditions of the plot - Baley could not have solved the mystery of the robot divorce, to which he was led (Baley); and if humans are programmed because they are constantly arrived to the human free will of travel or communion with their neighbors. It is the robot which has to provide the human free will of travel or communion in the Caves of Steel also and to Susan Calvin's synthesis of the situation - 'There was a time when humanity faced the universe alone and without a friend. Now he has a stronger creature than himself, more faithful, more useful, and absolutely devoted to him'. And the solution to the story turns in a most indirect way on victory without the robots being aware of any of Calvin's attributes.

'Victory Unintentional' is written without limitations on the description of the robots; they are supermachines. In the world of Susan Calvin and Elijah Baley it is the limitations and meanness of their lives and environment that comes between the reader and roboaphilia. The robots may be nothing to fear, but the conditions in which they are used certainly are. It may be better not to have robots and not to have to work for US Robots or in the city yeast vats, than to have thinking, devoted slaves who make us unemployed. If the robots come as Asimov extrapolates, the workers may as well.

The world of the robots is one to which they have contributed rather than made totally, but it is a dreadful place. Roboticisation has helped move it towards the cramped and canted Earth described in the Outer Worlds. The technical development of Asimov robots leads finally to a dead end: without them we are limited, with them we are limited as well. The people who develop them are unattractive, the people who have to work with them are unattractive as well, and the poor programming they receive means that it is difficult to show their success.

Asimov wrote his robot stories to attack the Frankenstein theme: perhaps his creations never came to life.

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(contents Oppus 100 and Oppus 200)

Brian Stableford

'Robots' in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (Gollancy, 1979)

[This rejects Asimov's claims about his precedence in his portrayal of robot intelligence.]

F. Patterson (ed)


(Promotes an alternative reading of 'Victory Unintentional')

Joseph F. Patrouch Jr

The Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov [Panther, 1974]
'0 HAPPY DAYS' An interview with Geoff Ryman, by Paul Kincaid

BUT HAS BEEN A GOOD YEAR OR SO FOR GEOFF RYMAN. IN MAY 1994, AT Tynesicon II the Mexicon, his dramatization of Philip K. Dick's The Transmigration of Timothy Archer was premiered to considerable acclaim (and Geoff himself won special praise for his own performance). Around the same time, in Issue 7 of Interzone his incredible novella The Unconquered Country was published. The response to this was similarly fervid, resulting in a very clear victory in the BSFA Awards for best short fiction. The Unconquered Country would have been a clear favourite for inclusion in the First Interzone Anthology but for two things, its length and the fact that it is already scheduled to appear as an illustrated book. So instead Geoff received the singular honour of being invited to write a fresh story for the anthology. The result was 0 Happy Day, which I am not alone in considering the best thing in the anthology, indeed I consider it better than The Unconquered Country.

Now to complete the year his first novel, The Warrior Who Carried Life has just been published by Allen and Unwin. Mike Dickinson reviewed the novel in Vector 127 and on the evidence so far it would tip it as a strong contender for next Easter's BSFA Award. An eventful year by any standards.

When we met recently, however, I began by asking him about his first published story, The Diary of the Translator which appeared in Hilary Bailey's New Worlds Ten in 1976.

"It came very suddenly, on a train going to a party; I got this terrific idea for a story. It was one of those things where you more or less start writing it in your head, and I had to sit there on the train, go to the party, be polite, come back on the train, keeping the story going until I got home to write it. As usual the first draft took no time at all, then after that I spent a lot of time revising it."

It was a very assured story, so I was surprised when he said that it was the first short story he had written.

"I'd been goofing around writing, but it was the first short story I'd ever written. Unfortunately I'd read Tolkien and The Once and Future King, and I thought that if you're a writer what you did was splurge all over the place. So I kept trying to write these great big huge enormous things.

It was the idea of 'short stories' that inspired me: one little scene after another, five little scenes. It was a very indulgent story; I didn't have any commercial discipline at all. I think it was well written in a way though I wouldn't write it like that now, I think it was very pretentious in bits. I was very lucky that there was still a scrap of New Worlds left over to take it. I mean, there was a window there and it just slipped in before the window closed."

Lucky or not, pretentious and undisciplined or not, a story of the quality of 'Diary' would normally have pressed a steady climb to eminence, perhaps it was the closure of the New Worlds window that stopped this happening in Geoff's case.

He next wrote a story called 'Fall of Angels', which was my first introduction to him. He took it to a writers' course at Hebden Bridge where we met in 1977, along with Alan Dorey, Mike Dickinson, Graham James and Simon Duvaney - a formidable line-up. 'Fall of Angels' took the course by storm, it was original and inventive in a way that has become something of a Ryman hallmark. I know people who still consider that story the best thing he has written, but it never sold, a fact that to me seems to reflect more on the conservatism of editors than on the quality of the work.

Over the next year or so he sold a handful of stories to Ad Astra and Men Only, some of which he still considers 'kinda good', but which made little impact.

"Then I got bogged down in this huge story - I was half way through at the 100,000 word mark. I gave it to Randall Flynn, who read it and said it was terrible, and I gave it to a couple of other people who were or less said the same."

So I said 'God it!'; and thought: if I was a publisher, what would I want to be publishing? And I drew up an outline, and it started turning into a novel. It was a very simple thing, I'd forgotten you're not being subtle if you give your characters obscure, outre, psychological motivations; because they can have these motivations and yearn to do something and still sit there because of inertia. What I found out was, if you give your character a whopping great objective, he or she has got to react. And suddenly, I think it was '81, I sat down and wrote an outline for The Warrior Who Carried Life in the middle of work. Got very excited, went home and wrote the first draft and wrote the second and wrote the third, and that took a year. I finished at one of the Seacres, I think it was the second, and then as is always the case it seemed to take forever to sell."

After what he describes as "a long quiet period", he next started on The Unconquered Country, still drawing inspiration from the writing of Warrior. He wrote and rewrote and rewrote the story until it finally ground to a halt at around 18,000 words. Too long for any magazine outlet, but too short for a
novel. So he left it, until it fell into the hands of Mike Dickinson and Sandy Chippey, who both liked it and urged him to do something with it. He'd already sounded Interzone about the possibility of publishing something of this length and they said 'Not'. The book, he actually got the chance to read it. It's as good as J.G. Ballard, we might - And I said, 'Thanks'. But, under Dickinson's and Chippey's urging, Geoff decided to try Interzone again.

"I thought I'd make it easy on the guys. I made about six xerox copies and sent it to all the collective. I thought at least they wouldn't have to circulate among them all, at least they'd all have a chance to read it. I think it was sensible because it's a whopping great thing to ask them to even attempt to look at. And they said: 'Yes, but it's too long.' I said: 'I know it for my subconscience and the story is getting well, I think, the magazine.' I said: 'I know that.' They said: 'You're going to have to cut it.' I said: 'I'm not sure I can.' And they said: 'Okay, Ros (Raveney) and John Clute are on their way with a pair of scissors.'"

Between them they managed to cut the story down by about 2,000 to 3,000 words, and the story was, of course, published very successfully. This brought me onto one aspect of his work that bothers me a little: it is very violent.

"Yeah, it worries me very much, because I don't think I'm a violent person."

So I suggested, was he trying to make a point against violence by using extreme violence to make the point?

"No, I don't think I am. I think I'm trying to write about anger. And I think in the conditions, certainly of Warrior, you're writing about a very harsh society and so something is something very objective about the violence there.

Cara, when she starts out, has some bad things about her that I don't like. I'm very moved by her love of her family, I'm not very moved by her social snobbery, and I'm not very moved by her sense of self. What I was doing was building with the fine controls so that suddenly you had a flip-flop, and you modulated from something that was very violent to something that was very peaceful.

I don't really deal with structuralism or before that with Freudianism or any of that stuff. First off I don't understand it, so I'd be a fool to try it. But I think, post the fact when you're dealing with a fantasy novel you are getting back to something which is archetypal, and I think an awful lot of archetypal events feel violent, even if they aren't.

It actually does bother me, the violence in the book, I don't know where it comes from. It's as if the characters feel things very strongly and they're in an environment where they can use violence. Third, in Unconquered Country, you don't find it, and isn't interested in it. She's surrounded by it, it's interpenetrated all around her. But she is trying to find a way out, and in a sense could be said to find it, but only in a sense.

Yes, it's appalling to me, and very frightened of it. We live in a century in which appalling things continually happen, and it's as if we can't get beyond that point. I think I have to deal with that element in what I see going on before I can get around to other things. I hope that's where it is. I'm trying to program myself unconscious to put with something delicate and light and non-Sartrean."

That's as may be, though the thing may go deeper that he thinks. I reminded Geoff of a very similar episode in his first story Diary of the Translator. At one point the phrase 'Snelsor conjured up a reply of a reply and we were grinding on cigarettes in' (New Worlds 1955).

"Did I really have that with the... Jesus, I'd forgotten that."

"Yes, I've noticed that. I guess I just find women slightly more sympathetic in some ways. I always have."

But this is only one aspect of a far more significant feature of his work. In a review of the Interzone anthology I commented upon the sexual ambiguity of 'O Happy Day', where women organize and run the death camp. And something similar crops up in the story in which Cara, who was in the concentration camp, describes the torture of her adventures. It's an unusual perspective on women.

"Obviously being gay I'm more has a big influence. The thing that always amazes me is the expression about gays: 'he doesn't like women'. Whereas, in fact, if anyone knew anything about poxies they'd know perfectly well that was not what I'm straight do. And I think that's just part and parcel of the whole thing. I don't find men very sympathetic sometimes."

But he doesn't make the women especially sympathetic in 'O Happy Day.'

"Well, no, it depends on which women. That was the whole point. It was funny, because the story sort of got overtaken by another story. There always was going to be central character who jolly people along. But it did become a thing about America as well, and what was good about America, at the same time. So that was a surprise, that wasn't supposed to happen; though I'm very glad it did because it gave another layer.

But the whole point about it was that you had a whole way of thinking that creates a basis for action by creating analytical categories - for want of a better term you could call that 'history'. The thing that you've always got to remember is that in specific practice those categories don't apply, and don't even exist, so you couldn't talk about 'The Men' or 'The Women' or 'The Boys'. In practice the people who were running the camp were very nice people. In practice 1984 didn't happen because the people who manned the cameras got to see that they were watching better than the people who were ruling them. And Royce, who'd been a prison guard, knew that, knew you could end up liking the prisoners better than the people you were guarding them for. So what the shrewdness of a really good person he worked on that. The Gris is very obviously he was doing this, and forgave him simply because he was more interesting than anything else that was happening. So there's a sudden power shift.

The ideological villain, if there is one, is Big Lou. And Big Lou exists, he's absolutely and totally real. It's a political story, and maybe I shouldn't say this or I'll get something nasty in the post. It wasn't written against feminism, of course, it wasn't written against socialist feminism, it was written against radical feminism. It was written against something called revolutionary feminism, which I've heard a bit about through some women friends who've stormed out in disgust at some of the things it's contemplating - basically, things along this line. It's real, it's there, it exists. And my own feeling is, you're had perfectly good and liberating ideologies that have been ruined by mystification before, i.e. nationalism, which was supposed to be the way of splitting up empires, for goodness sake, and it's only the primacy of intangible values over money, over things you could count, intangible bonds of feeling and kinship. What happened was, it got mystified, much the same way that feminism gets mystified with 'The War Mother', and all this sentimentality about mothers and daughters.

Anyway, in a sense it started out saying: if you're really contemplating this, this is what you're talking about. There was a rationale behind it. It's a lot of people, including myself, who feel that a lot of people across the water, have criticised it because it didn't hold water for them. I think it would hold more water for them if some sections which I agree shouldn't really be there because they weren't fiction, they were a sort of explanation of how it happened - were just left out."

There is in existence a screenplay version of the story.
which might win the approval of such critics. More simply done, it eliminates the explanations and allows the hero to look back at what led up to it, showing his arrest, how he got on the train, and the evidence to hear him say the things that would get him into trouble.

Talking about this dramatisation led us naturally to his stage version of The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, and I asked him why he'd done it.

"Oh, because I just read the book and I thought it was wonderful, that's why. I couldn't believe the tone of voice - just every sentence you could hear somebody saying it in a sort of flat, ironical, very funny, totally fed up, very heart-broken way. And I saw how it could be a play, and I thought: I bet no-one else knows it could be a play, and an incredibly dramatic one.

So I wrote in the margins, and found there was a lot of rewriting because you just couldn't have Angel talking to the audience. As soon as you begin to cut, it's so maudlin. You see, the lines of dialogue don't do much so you say: take one thing out and the connections don't work any more, the connections aren't there. Things become non-sequiturs. Wild, emotional leaps that really caught a feeling now were just strangled metaphors. It was very disappointing when I went back and read the first draft and realised I hadn't done it, I hadn't got it. So I cut it some more, and kept cutting it.

For months we didn't have a cast, it was just Kim and me. The only reason I went ahead was Kim Campbell said that she'd take it on - which was an incredibly brave thing to do, and quite a leap in the dark for her too, and a lot of work.

I decided to concentrate on the humour, because audiences always like to laugh in drama, then I'd concentrate on the key emotional point. The big problem was, he was writing about a bore. You cannot have Tim do what he does on the page. But I was then left with a Tim who wasn't even positively boring. I'd cut out all of his dialogue, or most of it, so there was very little left for Tim to do, which meant that in the third act I had to do a lot more with him. So Tim changed. And I thought: well I don't like the character and I don't like the dialogue, I couldn't describe feeling at all. So I knew that sooner or later I might do some drama.

I remember when I was writing this long horrible novel that never got anywhere, the main character - I mean, I didn't like the main character - was always putting on plays. And I thought: well, I don't like the character and I don't like the novel, but I assured him of some of the plays he was putting on. So maybe I was programming myself to write some plays.

When I asked if there was any more drama in the pipeline he revealed, surprisingly, that he was writing a movie screenplay for the Andrews. But he had to go along having given it problems in the first half, which is very boring. "See, I'm writing about everyday life. One shouldn't do it."

He asked me to suggest that he didn't therefore, see himself as a great realist novelist. He was decisive:

"No. The things I like best about my work are the realistic elements, but it seems to need a fantasy kick-off somewhere along the line."

If he is going to stick to fantasy that will be literature's loss, but our gain. But as a fantasist he is incredibly prolific with his ideas. Those of us who remember 'Fall of Angels' recall in particular the casual way in which free and vivid ideas, like the background. I think any of us at Hebden Bridge would have been only too happy to construct an entire novel about the sort of ideas that occupied no more than a sentence of Geoff's story. Readers of The Unconquered Country will probably have had a similar response, with the background peppered with such details as walking houses and women renting out their wows to give birth to tools and weapons. When I pointed this out, he said:

"I've always liked the idea that if you're in a different world, everything should be different. That's why I'm a fantasist and not a writer of fantastic literature where everything's everyday, and then a single element comes in to break her up."

Was that, perhaps, why it took him so long to write stories, then? I don't know why. I wouldn't like to say that was it. Once I got the idea it was very quick with the first draft, then it's lots and lots of rewriting. I'm a great believer that you're embodying with words, and words are terribly terribly important. There's an audible click when it all falls into place.

I always remember Malcolm Bradbury's The History Man. They printed all nine different drafts of the opening of his novel, and none of them are interesting except the one he used.

Bringing the story almost up to date, I now moved on to talk about his next book, which is to be illustrated version of The Unconquered Country due from Allen and Unwin later this year. The illustrations are by Michael Kubeck which accompanied the story's original appearance in Interzone had been commissioned by Geoff in the first place, so I asked him about these.

"I now feel more kindly about those illustrations that I did when they first came. I'd seen the guy's previous work which is absolutely stunning. I didn't understand at the time that artists are like writers, they get seized by inspiration, have projects that they really love and are very good at because of it. I now look at the illustrations that were in Interzone and think they're not too bad, but at the time I didn't think they were very good and couldn't really disguise my disappointment, the Interzone people didn't bother to disguise it either. We couldn't get enthusiastic."

While still leaves the question of who will illustrate the book version, and that is still open to doubt. "I think we've found this nice Ukrainian, but I don't know."

And there's also the question of the text. He has not restored the cuts made before its publication in Interzone, but the text is longer.

"There's another story about Third when she's a child in the village. And that, somehow, for some reason, made it easier to talk about the courtship with the person Crow. I haven't changed too much else apart from that. I didn't turn it into a novel, though, I almost tried to."

When I'd turned off the tape recorder at the end of the interview, Geoff suddenly started pummelling me for any criticism I might have of his work. It's not something I have come to expect from the authors I know, who tend to shiver and act distant at all the many mentions of the word criticism, even from friends. But it was in character for someone as painstaking as Geoff Ryman. The only problem was - I couldn't think of any.
David Langford's second novel, The Leaky Establishment, is published in paperback by Sphere on 24th October. As a taster, here is the text of his Goll speech at Novacon 14 in Birmingham last November.

I FEEL A LITTLE BIT GUILTY ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF THIS TALK. IT WASN'T ENTIRELY MY FAULT; I WOKE UP AFTER CHAIRMAN STEVE Green had persuaded me, and found the words 'YOU ARE GIVING a Novacon talk on your book The Leaky Establishment' tattooed on my typing finger. Dimly I remembered the terrible hours of coercion in the bar, and how Steve finally clinched it by offering me a two-week all-expenses-paid holiday in lovely Ireland at the home of Anne McCaffrey. It was either that or give this talk.

The guilt is because I reckon I'm here on false pretences: I ought to be talking about science fiction, or at any rate fiction, and most of The Leaky Establishment is in fact autobiography. It does actually contain an SF idea, and an exceedingly daft one too, but... Once or twice I've read a few chapters to people (this was before all my friends bought earplugs), and was boggled to find that they fell about laughing not at the jokes but at what I thought were ordinary, unfunny details of Civil Service life. Like the routine way in which, in my part of the Civil Service, large racy security men were forever groping your thighs on the pretext of searching for suspicious lumps of plutonium hidden in your jockstrap.

Perhaps I should start by explaining how I ended up chasing neutrons for five years at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment - a job which has failed to impress anybody in the whole world except Greg Benford. "Why did you quit Big Science Biz?" he asked me in tones of concern. I told him how much a grateful British government pays its weapons physicists, and he fainted.

So it is time to tell the true story at last. A story of shame and degradation, of pitiful struggles against impossible necessity, and above all, of hangovers. Long ago in the mists of 1974 I woke up with a hangover - some things never change - and discovered that all my mates at Oxford had been applying for jobs. I personally had been busy celebrating my physics finals, such a major event in the Langford career that I celebrated more or less continuously for six months before it happened.

Since I was more sensible then than I am now, I decided not to become a freelance writer. The lure of a free pint of fizzy beer at Novacon 14 was balanced by the fact that in '74 I'd only sold one short story, to Ken Bulmer, for £1.30p payable in several instalments; while my masterpiece Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid had merely collected rejection slips, from both the 'Christian Science Monitor' and the 'Times Literary Supplement'. Accordingly I nipped round to the Oxford careers office, and propped about vacating for top-salaried executives with a JAG provided by the company. At a pinch I was prepared to settle for an Aston Martin, but I kept that up my sleeve for the time being.

Of course it turned out that all the really cushy jobs had been snapped up, right down the line from Chairman of ICI to cigar maker's bottom knocker. Sneering at my pitiful grovelling, they explained that there were only five things for late, hungover physicists to apply for, and one of them was a UB40. I went away with the other four application forms and started inventing lies about my star-studded career to date.

Oh dear, it all comes back, like the curry I had at Mancon. I applied to IBM and they lost my application in the infallible data-processing system. I applied to the Post Office, and I couldn't tell you how that application got lost. I applied to ICI, famous louse d like, with the promise that my as-yet untapped talents could make them even lamer. They actually invited me to spend a luxurious weekend at one of their places, and it was there that I made a huge tactical error - one which I am not repeating this Novacon. I tried to demonstrate what a reliable, responsible programmer I'd make, by not drinking much. I should have known this was a mistake when I reflected that ICI had already taken on Martin Hoare.*

What was left was the Ministry of Defence. I approached their interview room with an ominous sense of doom and foreboding - which was in fact another hangover - convinced they were going to expose my pitiful ignorance with sudden trick questions like 'Newton's laws of Motion: how many are there?' or 'If equals ac what?'. Inside, this evil-looking fellow stared at me with the sort of expression seen on Joe Nicholas's face as he weighs the literary merits of the latest Perry Rhodan novel. He said: "Mr. Langford, just one simple question. Can you explain to me the nature and significance of the Moesbauer effect?"

Thus it was that I became a scientific officer at Aldermaston; and only years after, when I'd shaken the radioactive dust of the place off my shoes forever, did I tell anyone that the day before that interview, I'd been doing an Oxford physics practical on the Moesbauer effect.

There were a few other formalities, such as being positively Vetted - which only sounds like Civil Service jargon for a vasectomy. Large thugs covered in hideous scars kept breaking down doors to interrogate people about my sexual preferences - I got the impression that they received some slightly inventive answers. At least I've never worked out why at one interview I was shown pictures of melons and asked about my reactions.

Around then came the first of the amazing incidents which I

* [Martin Hoare is a well-known convention fan, a computer expert, and a confirmed non-testotater. -Ed.]
couldn't resist putting into the novel but which nobody can say really happened. It was my last night in Oxford, in January. The morning was very cold and the sun had just risen. I was writing a draft of my novel at a table in my room. It was a beautiful day, with a clear blue sky and white clouds. I was sitting at the table, with the sun shining on my face. I was writing a very important chapter, and I was thinking hard about it. The sun was shining on my face, and I was feeling very good.

As I was writing, I suddenly had a sudden inspiration. I wrote a very important sentence, and I was very happy. I was thinking about the story, and I was very excited about it. I was writing a very important chapter, and I was very happy. I was feeling very good.

But then, just as I was about to finish the chapter, I suddenly had a sudden inspiration. I wrote a very important sentence, and I was very happy. I was thinking about the story, and I was very excited about it. I was writing a very important chapter, and I was very happy. I was feeling very good.

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minutes, my chief qualification being that I was the only person on the committee at that time who was deaf. I was told to sit on the committee chair in an attitude of sycophany and ignore all distractions, such as other people's voices. These minutes were not written down after the meeting concluded, so the only information available was conveyed in a few dect words like 'The Chairman agreed. The chairman disagreed. The chairman could not endorse the first proposal. The chairman advocated adoption of uranium ore, etc., etc.' So far as my appalling experiences on such committees, I find I'm now wickedly prejudiced against exciting events like HMOA meetings, even when the speaker is someone charismatic like Alan Dorey. In fact, experience has taught me nothing.

I'm also prejudiced against engineers. My main contact with engineers at Aldermaston was when one rang up, explained that his section had spent two years working on some new development and classified substance, and could I now do all the theoretical background work for them in, say, one week? Ever willing to oblige; and even willing to find an excuse for putting off my own urgent work. I asked for some vital information like the density of the stuff. 'Density?' he said, as though I'd made a suggestion so obvious he didn't want to admit he'd understood it. 'Bringing you back,' he said. After a week of what I suppose must have been massed research efforts by his entire engineering team, he rang me back. This time he sounded actively hostile: 'I've got the information you asked for. We've measured a piece of the material. It's 5mm by 10mm by 25mm, and it weighs 85 grams. Can you work out the density from that?'' Painfully I assured him that with the aid of a computer I probably could.

The trouble was, I realized literally too much for the engineers and, specifically, cracks. Every so often I'd get appalling wads of badly duplicated stuff in my IN tray, and as security regulations won't allow me to be new for that, I was often asked to act as AMRE's front office and passed to the nearest convenient sucker (me), just in case they contained the ultimate secret of life, the universe, and everything. One chap had a brilliant, self-consistent theory of atomic nuclear structure; I particularly liked the way in which every single element as yet discovered by science was a special case, an exception which proved the general rule. His theory was that the revolutionary theory was that nuclear weapons couldn't possibly work, and I thought it kind of the author to let us know. However, I was bound against him because he didn't even believe in the Mosebach effect...

The best bit of alternative science to land on my desk was Robert Kingsley Morison's An Experiment With Space. I quote:

'Sterile but pathetic attempts have been made by terrestrial air forces to obtain possession of gravitational knowledge by capturing an alien space-vehicle...

This book suggests a more sensible approach. An Experiment With Space not only lessens the chance of a national monopoly on levitation but also takes us beyond the stage of idolizing the Space-Brothers.

Robert Morison conceived a simple idea for generating artificial gravity (for aircraft, trains, etc.) but not until August 1979 could he assemble enough scientific and philosophical thoughts for a book. Anyone who succeeds in mastering gravity will make possible a vast expansion of humanity's horizons - thus enabling men to change.'

He doesn't say what it'll enable women to do. Anyway the front cover blurb spells the secret:

'Internal vortex lifts 9-metre disc by space dynamics: angular velocities of 20000 to 60000 rps in main molecules moving at 1 k/sec. YOUR PLANET NEEDS YOU to consider and investigate possibilities that may radially neutralize gravity and debunking materialism.'

The general idea is that molecules at the edge of this spinning disc are in such orbital velocities that they will naturally drift off into one. Of us dropped the author a note asking why CERN at Geneva, with particles circling its storehouse of artificial gravitational fields of the size of Pluto long ago, I understood the reply was that that was part of the world-wide cover-up, and that to fool the public CERN had to be invented. My collection of anecdotes about the horrible所得税s of Aldermaston used to be endless. Those Noé policemen fondling helpless young scientific officers' thighs. The amazing gate security system whereby all attempts to smuggle plutonium were presumed to happen in the evening so there was no need to spot-check people or cars at lunchtime (this, no doubt, based on evidence of the security people at DSEI. The SRS was on, the days before the energy crisis was invented, which thriftily threw away its entire heat output into the surrounding air (yes, it was a swimming-pool reactor; yes, somebody did fall in). The

even more conservation-conscious site heating, with live steam being carried around a five-mile perimeter fence by above-ground pipes which not only leaked at the joints but to boost heat-loss by radiation were painted black. The Royal Visit with the Queen was limited to two at a time, and only those of us born before the war.
KITEWORLD - Keith Roberts
[Glance, 1985, 288pp, $8.95]
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

CURIOUS AND UNSETTLING PLACES, THESE WORLDS. Keith Roberts creates, not worlds transplanted from some other dimension or time, but effects of technology, at once as-magic or through the wholesale dislocation of reality, but our own world, seen through a mirror slightly flawed, wherein one or another aspect often is missing, and their stand-ins, peripheral to us, assume a disconcerting empathy, or a sense of the harrowing, or the instruction, perhaps - and now kits.

I felt uneasy rather than disconcerted - a kite is a summer afternoon's fancy, a child's toy. Still, these are Kites, proper nouns. While the folk of Kiteworld understand the principle of the wing and come to develop the internal combustion engine, either they fail to put two and two together, or they lack the will to do so, because although the kite's functions might then be performed more efficiently, the emblematic tradition would be lost. The flying kites, though they guard the Veal, yet the process of the kite, but a small part of the in-service attendance, the Kitemaster sprinkling oil and earth. The kites, you begin to realize, are ridden brandished against vampires; and where the flyers adieu the earth on which they stand, both practical and totemic, they also may have a private beast in view, something different, something else, perhaps. And this is fittingly seeking, Kauli has an aerial battalion with the demons of sexuality; the enigmatic Commander Vanquished, the Veal, a 'Hate, in which there is no scale'.

For Keith Roberts might give us the thrill and question of a baroque science fiction piece, yet his gift - at least, until the final scenes of this novel - is to ensure that the trappings do not overwhelm the individual. The Badlands, for example, offer easy routes for those who would take the Kiteworld too literally. These lands which used to be the wasteland of the Badlands, and their inhabitants are stunted and coloured a translucent blue and you can see their inside workings. 'I think men did it, to take these landscapes away, shows another character. Does it matter how we describe an agent of Hell? As a post-holocaust vision, the book mellowes with the introduction of the character of Veld, a curious creation who is lovable, Kites are like us, Mark is it, but in the sense of a self consciously Dickensian exercise, a cross between Little Nell and the Artful Dodger - she doesn't talk proper, but 'as and the sight of gold. Veld is wicked, but without malignancy, her activities directed towards her vision of owning a little house with baskets of flowers on the windowills. Clearly, there are degrees of evil. Roberts is enlarging the scope of his moral exploration in anticipation of the conclusion he is driving for.

Yes, the ending. There's nothing wrong with it and there's everything wrong with it. We learn that the centre cannot hold, that the Kites are no defence as the fire runs up the strings and that the best that can be hoped for is that a few pieces of human flotsam may be washed up on a brave new shore. Morally, and in terms of the Veal as metaphor, it is a fine ending. Narratively, it jars horribly. Science fiction paraphernalia intrudes; melodramatic reunions are staged. I momentarily considered it as being over the top, intended to make us see all of what has gone before in a different light. I then rejected that, yet even if it were so, the effect would be the same, the effect of the conclusion not being true to what has gone before, to Roberts' real attributes: his loving and detailed evocation of places, countryside, physical things, even machinery, and his sensitivity to human emotions and failibilities.

Perhaps it is worth noting that some readers have detected a slight sense of such an imposition at the end of Pavan. I have tried to labour the comparisons with Pavan - a book with which Roberts made a rod for critics of future volumes to beat him with - although the publishers push the association (and who can blame them?), citing in support of the Roberts' cause Victoria Glendinning's review of the recent reissue - 'a cross between Thomas Hardy and Russell Hoban'. As I recall the review, she also considered Pavan to be a very good book, so good that it overflowed the confines of Glance's SF packaging. You can argue about that amongst yourselves. Meanwhile, Kiteworld is quite a good book, but the ending ensures that its SF packaging is appropriate.

VIRICONIUM NIGHTS - M. John Harrison
[Glance, 1985, 156pp, $8.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

VIRICONIUM NIGHTS IS A COLLECTION OF SEVEN SHORT STORIES, SET IN THE STRANGE, HAUNTING, SUITABLE WORLD OF VIRICONIUM AND ITS CITIZENS, LAST MET IN M. JOHN HARRISON'S PREVIOUS BOOK, IN VIRICONIUM. IT IS NOT AN EASY COLLECTION TO READ AND THE AUTHOR STARTS IT WITH THE FOLLOWING QUOTATION:

'Nothing stays. Nothing is completed. I can make nothing whole from it, however small. Elizabeth Taylor, A Breath of Snow

So be warned.

The first story - 'The Luck in the Head' - is the strangest. Here is no gentle introduction to Viriconium (or Virico or Viriconium as it is variously called). The reader is thrown in at the deep end and left to drown. Concepts and items are described rather than named and it is not a long time before one begins to get an inkling of what is going on. The plot is about poet Arwick Crome's search to give meaning to, and hence banish, his recurring dream about a lamb's head given to him
during the ceremony - The Luck in the Head. This ceremony ends with the head of a lamb being cooked in meat pies which are said to be loved by the queen up in a plot to kill the ruler of Urocnion which goes horribly wrong.

The story is vividly written - horrific images come to mind and an air of despair and decay. I wish I had not read it because its colours remain indelibly fixed.

'A dull, dingy shape withered and fought against itself on her palm, smooth, the topcoat of it dried pink to what of a newly born dog. It was, he saw, contained... by a damp membrane, pink and grey, which it burst suddenly by butting and lunging. It was the lamb he had seen in his dreams.' (p23)

'The Lamia and Lord Cromis' seems a much more straightforward story. It is in the fantasy vein. The 6th Lord Cromis is the latest in a long line whose fate is to kill and be killed by a monster - the Lamia. To fulfil his destiny, Cromis and his companions, the dwarf Morgante and the beaked fisherman, track down the Lamia by its trail of destruction and confront it. The confrontation is not as Cromis expected. The Lamia has no intrinsic reason to come is no longer so. I will not give the game away as it relies on a plot twist in the later chapters.

The writing is cleaner and the story has great impetus once the stage has been set for the denouement. The images are again vivid.

The trees of the interior were of quite unknown kinds, black and burst-orange, with smooth-barked tapering stems; their tightly woven fronds larger than fifteen feet above the surface of the bog, tinted the light a frail organic pink which seemed sometimes to be veined like the lope of a very delicate ear.' (p51)

'Strange Great Sins' - the third story - has already been published in Intercourse. (Some of the other stories have also been published. It concerns the street gangs of Urocnion. These gangs, called The Peerfew Anschluss and The High City Mohocks to name but two, are groups of young racor-racing aristocrats who hold duels and 'rumbles' much like the Montagues and Capulets. After one such duel between Ignace Nett, champion of The Low Stad, and Don Pratt of The Lowcast Clan, Nett has to flee to escape retribution. Harrison makes the outcome unpredictable by an obscure device - namely a magical trap.

'Out of the tapestry drifted the scent of roses on a warm evening. There was the gentle sound of falling water, and somewhere a single line of ragged notes rose and died away again on a stringed instrument. The knight in the scarlet armor looked his queen's hand and kissed it.' (p93)

The fifth story, 'The Dancer from the Dance', is another obscure tale. Harrison quotes as inspiration for this: 'I'll be your dog' - Kira-Crae advert. There are three main characters: a dancer, a dwarf, and a woman. The story begins before the dancer Vera Gellera, the dwarf Kiss-O-Stick (previously Morgante) and the aristocrat Flemmi Ego Rhys become involved in a trip into no-man's land, called Allman Heath, in search of a giant loonum. West, 1801, A Summer's Inspiration in whatever they are best at. There is no explanation for the strange events that occur.

'As she (Vera) danced she reduced the distinction between Heath and sky. The horizon, never convinced of itself, melted. Vera was left crossing and recrossing a space steadily less. She came to Kiss-O-Stick's lips... 'She's floating!' (p120)

'Lord of Misrule' concerns the inspection of the fortifications near the house of the Yule Greave by Lord Cromis. Urocnion is at war with some unknown force from the north, and the inspection is necessary. The inspection is between the Yule Greave and his family and Lord Cromis. I enjoyed this story the most. There is a sense of space and air - it felt like the inspection of a human ontotrop by a centaurian.

'There were deep muddy furrows in the gateways where the stone carts went in and out. The wind came in gusts from the south and west, bringing a rainy smell and the distant blast of sheep. The dwarf appears on the slopes above and shifted their branches uneasily and sent down a few more of last winter's brownish withered leaves.' (p125)

Finally, 'A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium' disconcerts us by bringing together the earth we know and Viriconium. Set in Yorkshire it is concerned with the boundaries between Earth and Viriconium and the perception of the two places. Dr. Petrom is a realist who says there is a world between the worlds nothing glamorous. This is a Harrison story, just as a mirror is the saddest of all the lavers and cafes. The contrast is between mundanity and insanity and is reflected in the character's tales of Viriconium's descriptive powers are as strong as usual.

'When I remember Piccadilly it isn't so much by the flocks of starlings which invaded the gardens at the end of every short winter afternoon, filling the paths with their thick mossy smell and sending up a loud mechanical shrill, as by standing in the traffic, as by the latter of pots, the smell of marruiz or a match just struck, wet woolen coats hung over another one in a corner.' (p147)

This collection is left with mixed feelings. It is undoubtedly masterful in its use of both language and mood. It leaves behind many resonances. It is, however, left open to the author himself (cf. Harrison's entry in the Nicholls Encyclopedia of SF)

'The best family is a terra incognita. The reader is first lured into it and then abandoned. If he's not enjoyed his subsequent bewilderment he should be reading "Which Car instead?"

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

M. JOHN HARRISON HAS BEEN WRITING ABOUT THE CITY OF VIRICONIUM SINCE HIS FIRST NOVEL, THE PASTEL CITY (NEL. 1971). IT IS A LAMELY NAMED CITY OF THE DEEP ALCHEMY LANDS, INDUSTRIALLY PROGRESSIVE, TECHNOLOGICALLY PROGRESSIVE, INFORMALLY METALLIC, BY TURNO RENAISSANCE ENGLAND, WELSH, GERMANY, FIN DE SIECLE PARIS, IMPERIAL VIENNA AND RENAISSANCE FLORENCE. NOTHING IS SIMPLIFED IN THIS URBAN NOVEL . THE ONCE BEAUTIFUL CITY HAS CHANGED, NEMINGI WILL. IGGNET, FLEETING THOSE WHO WOULD KILL IT, ON FORGETTING OF ITS ORIGINS, CROSSING BY "MEANLESS TRENCHES", AND LOOKING AS IT HAS BEEN DEFILED. OVERNIGHT, RICHA GELLER AND HER COMpanIONS DISCOVER, ON THE TINY ISLAND OF ALLMAN HEATH, AN INFINITE LANDSCAPE IN WHICH STRANGE DREAMS AND DESIRES TAKE ON LIFE.

YET THE MOST TOLERABLE ELEMENT OF ALL IS HISTORY. NO RIGID CHRONOLOGY BINDS THIS CITY TO ANY CLEAR NARRATIVE. MAIN CHARACTERS IN ONE STORY PLAY A MINOR ROLE IN THE NEXT, OR MAY EVEN BE CRAT BEGINS FROM ANOTHER WORK OF FICTION. ONE WHO HAS BEEN LOST IS LIKELY TO CROP UP ALIVE AND WELL IN A TALE THAT WOULD SEEM IN NO WAY CONNECTED. AN APPRECIATION OF THE INHUMANITY BETWEEN THE YULE GREEVE AND HIS FAMILY AND LORD CROMIS. I ENJOYED THIS STORY THE MOST. THERE IS A SENSE OF SPACE AND AIR - IT FELT LIKE THE INSPECTION OF A HUMAN ONTOPE BY A CENTAURIAN.

'History repeats over and again this one city and a few frightful events - not rigidly, but in a shadowy, tentative fashion, as if it understands nothing else but the brush like to the past. M. John Harrison is the most elegant stylist writing fantasy, or indeed most forms of fiction, in this country. But he has a dark vision, presenting an entropic state into which his cast of poets, dancers, and fighting men live their complicated, interlocking lives against a backdrop of vacant lots, crumbling tapestries, and an aging ruler whose stultifying reign is nearing an end. Yet for all its grandeur, Harrison's vision of man is a man of our own world and time. He and others long to go there; in all its decay and violence, Viriconium still proves an alluring parallel realm to our own sad reality.

With each book I have wondered how much better a M. John Harrison can possibly get; and the question has yet to be answered. There seems no limit to his talent, and after reading this stunning, captivating work of staggering imaginative power, one is left wondering: what next?

RIGHT VOICES - Robert Alckman

(Gollancz, 1985, 180pp. £8.95)

Reviewed by Nigel Richardson

THE LATE ROBERT ALCKMAN WROTE VERY peculiar, very idiosyncratic stories which escape easy classification. To call them ghost stories or horror stories is to miss the point; their cool elegance is calling them horror stories, but in this collection there is only one ghost, and that remains of fudge, harmless and almost incidental. Perhaps it is best to follow the book's jacket in calling them 'strange stories' and keep in mind that they are not enough to suffice. Alckman's stories are strange - at first glance they seem to be old-fashioned
The world Ackman describes is a kind of half-forget, half-mythical England, a place of nostalgia and dread, of middle-class tutelage and romantic reminiscence of Eliot's Wasteland. The characteristic Ackman story tells of someone trying to escape from this claustrophobic stagnant but safe world after glimpsing a brighter, more vivid world; in the longest and best story in this volume, 'The Stains', a middle-aged widower gives up his job and his friends in order to pursue a mysterious young girl he sees out on the moors. The Ackman devotee will know that the man is doomed from the moment he sees the girl, but Ackman manages to weave around the reader's expectations, toyng with the conventions of the ghost-and-horror story so that the inevitable ending still packs a punch. 'The Stains' is a complex and sustained crescendo of anxiety and horror exactly right. With this story, together with 'The Train', also showed an ability to express the terrible beauty of the northern countryside, showing an unsentimental but vivid view of nature as striking and wonderful as Emily Bronte's.

A few of the stories in this collection would please a teacher of creative writing: Ackman's style relies heavily on allusion, hints and undercurrents, things unfinished and left unsaid. At the end of the sixty-one pages of 'The Stains' you don't really know what has happened to any of the characters. In Ackman's stories the meanings and conclusions are rarely clear. In 'Just a Song At Twilight' the ambiguous circumstance could mean almost anything, but the elliptical events linger on in the mind like a fragment of a disturbing dream. The dream-like way in which Ackman's stories work recalls Kafka, Lewis Carroll and Gene Wolfe in the way the strange seems familiar and the familiar strange. In his introduction to this collection, Barry Humphries - yes, possum, that Barry Humphries - says that Ackman 'can evoke in a few lines of concentrated prose the tenacious and oppressive atmosphere of a very bad and inescapable dream' and for once a book's introduction is telling the truth. If you like spooky, the kind of Ghoul that the stuff on the market to be laughable pornographic rubbish then this (and Ackman's earlier collection which really ought to be reissued in paperback, if anyone influential is reading) is what you should be reading.

The POWER OF TIME - Josephine Saxton

Did you know that there is such a collection as 'The Power of Time' itself, and 'Dormant Soul' is works of near-genius. There are a few stories in this book that I have to admit I had not yet read, and one story 'The Walls', that no longer works - a shame as there are some good stories in her others, but all remain identifiably the work of an atavistic evil. Horror devotees will seize upon this reading habit and expect one of those usual stories, such as stumbling across Lovecraft or Malleus Maleficarum - in fact, her only books are the Guinness Book of records and a collection of curry recipes. Saxton's books seem to be an extension of her stories work recalls Kafka, Lewis Carroll and Gene Wolfe in the way the strange seems familiar and the familiar strange. In his introduction to this collection, Barry Humphries - yes, possum, that Barry Humphries - says that Ackman 'can evoke in a few lines of concentrated prose the tenacious and oppressive atmosphere of a very bad and inescapable dream' and for once a book's

The following book's language is often deliberately simple, choosing exactly the right word, avoiding simile and metaphor. In fact, in only one story - 'Silence in Having Worlds' - does it fall to the reader to decide from the highest control. This slightly dated story of one man's destruction of a rather psychedelic community, one level down, is pure应答 analyst - symbolic - another interpretation is a fable on the necessity for physical effort) that is enabled to be a word-and-colour play, but may be the book's only true minority taste.

There she can also use language sumptuously, as this description of cooking from 'Food and Love' shows: 'The sauce is perfect. It is not taint, it is rich and nature. A smoke of garlic, and pearls of fat from bacon, each slice curled round like sleeping cats ... the dish of the world with rosemary and breathing creatures...'

I defy anyone to read the story and not salivate.

Succulent might perhaps best describe the drive of the story, the story is not particularly good because of that. The story is less like a novel than a fable on the necessity for physical effort. I defy anyone to read the story and not salivate.

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As can be seen from this extract...
could develop his ability to play the lute, taught and encouraged by his teacher the Archangel Raphael. This book has an odd mix of characters, and people who are major characters, witches and magic integrated in one of the plots but the background being less well-defined, with people being poor, unwashed and on the wrong side of the law, the Avignon Pope even makes an appearance to give Damien a new lute: it is as though half the characters in the book were meant to die. The author has the need to use more of that than was strictly necessary to the plot, not all the interactions necessary, the way which gave the book an uneven texture.

Stylistically the two books are at opposite extremes, the prose in the Anthony is pedestrian and strictly utilitarian, that in the Macavoy strives for poetic fancy and falls badly enough to make me wince at times. Of the two I preferred the Macavoy, at least the characters had the vestiges of life, enough personality to be individual, whereas Anthony's were so cardboard as to be utterly unmemorable. Neither book inspired me with a wish to read the next, nor was the central character in any book by these authors; the Anthony is clever in a way but it read like a pot boiler, the Macavoy has more of the air of a novel: it does not have the heights it was aiming for, if Macavoy had kept a firmer control of the plot and the procession of events better it is, I can't honestly recommend either of them to anyone.

**WEST OF EDEN - Harry Harrison (570pp)**

**CIRCUMPOLAR - Richard A. Lupoff (352pp)**

Reviewed by L.J. Hurst.

These are two alternative histories. I read Circumpolar first but the joy with which I grabbed West of Eden after finishing it faded as I read on. Now having considered West of Eden, it is not a vastly greater book. If it were revised it could be improved but it could never be great, it is conceived in the wrong way. (Circumpolar does not seem so much to have been conceived as sneezed.)

Interestingly, this is the 1920s on an Earth that has a Synme Hole, and a very slightly different history - World War One lasted only one year in 1912 and Lenin is the Tsar of Russia - against this background two teams plan to race their biplanes through the hole, along the core and escape Earth's gravity. (In Circumpolar, the war is not circumpolar.) The American team consists of Howard Hughes, Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, their Russo-German rivals of two von Richthofen and a Princess. Inside the hole they find a couple of lost lands, one Prussian, the other Mayan, battles ensue and the Americans win. The Mayans have force fields and flying platforms, the Prussians have flying model horses and secret mole machines for foreign conquest. A vast new geography of rivers, forests and islands is created, and the war is ignored before the battles and hand to hand fighting of the pilots. What is even worse than the originality is the lack of clarity - nothing is done more than once, there is no structure, the conflict is not being as a whole a model of a new world order, which implies a vast entrance, yet the heavy detail has done little to character development and been the sides once inside. Perhaps Richard Lupoff was not thinking of a knocking, perhaps he was thinking of an escape...

Edward James reviewed West of Eden originally in Vector 123. He had mixed feelings about it, saying it was quite similar, sixty-five million years ago the dinosaurs were not wiped out. One species evolved into a sentient, technically advanced civilisation.

Population pressure and the glacial advance drives them to attempt to colonise the Florida Keys, where they meet opposition from other human beings. The male of Florida Keys has driven south in America (the only continent in which humans exist). One hunter is captured as a teenager, and his internal political struggles, escapes as a teenager, then leads the tribes in a war of resistance that frees the continent of the Yanite.

The kick comes from the society and technology of the Yanite. The males are subordinate to the females; control of the females is their status. The females are vicious and intelligent, there are classes based on intelligence within the species; all their technology is organically-based - their photographer is an animal with slots, genetically manipulated for the purpose, for instance.

The failure comes in two ways. Firstly, the expertise is not overwhelming. For instance, when the males give birth the hormonal changes need a 1 in 2 chance of dying on the beaches. This is then taken to mean 'A third time to the beaches, certain death' which is statistically wrong. A 1 in 2 chance does not mean that after the second birth one would die but that of a group half would die. Since one has already been killed, it is more likely to be successful a second time, and its young would inherit that character. The Yanite are the fittest. This denial of Darwinism is implicit in all the actions of the Yanite - the first thing the Yanite do after coming out of the humans to protect their victory, they are constantly involved in genetic experiments. There are others in the plot - the hero's reptile mistress is not killed by his deliberate knife attack, the humans abandon the spear, and it is because the Yanite cannot eat the Yalite's breast bones, yet the same mistress is able to stab a rival with an arrow and kill him. But the plot couldn't continue without that sort of mean-spirited success. And the inconsistencies continue even in the notes in the end. A selection of Yalite history is given - they count in base 8 so they have no numbers 8 or 9. Despite this the story manages to talk of 854 of a population.

But the second failure and my greatest reason for rejecting West of Eden is that it is composed of two whole sections which both side-track the plot. Firstly, a novelogy about the war itself which is large scale killing. In that it is like too many other books. Paradoxically, perhaps, the invention hides the cliché.

**FANTASY AND REALISM: Responses to Reality in Western Literature**

**Kathryn Hume**


Reviewed by David V. Harrodt

This is an academic work, written for English Literature students by an associate professor of English at the University of Washington, treating such works as being a dominant genre, which implies a vast entrance, yet the heavy detail has done little to character development and been the sides once inside. Perhaps Richard Lupoff was not thinking of a knocking, perhaps he was thinking of an escape...

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Hume's working definition of fantasy is fairly all-embracing; 'Fantasy is any type of story in which there is supernatural activity' (p11). The opening chapter, 'Critical approaches to fantasy', shows diagrammatically how the work of the reader affects his work, which in turn affects the reader's perception of his own world.

She then looks at historical perspectives on fantasy and realism before going on, in the main body of the text, to examine how fantasy is used in the literature of illusion (invitations to escape reality, for example), of new worlds (as in science fiction), of revision (for improving reality) and of disillusion (making reality knowable).

The final section of the book examines the functions of fantasy, and attempts to show why it is used. But I'm afraid that this is the chapter that has thrown me. 'Cosmological didacticism', 'Degree of dislocation and techniques for introducing new worlds', and 'The power of images' has to work hard to grab my attention, and Hume just did not work hard enough.

I spent much of my time spotting gaps in the holes she cites. For example, she over-uses Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions, Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, and Coover's The University baseball Association. J. Henry Haugh, Jr. seems to think that Heinlein only ever wrote Stranger in a Strange Land. I Will Fear No Evil and Time Enough for Love for example have a Yudhistira-like prince who suffers a 'cosmological didacticism', 'Degree of dislocation and techniques for introducing new worlds'... could be the Yudhistira who suffers the 'power of images' (p159) - wonder how the good Doctor would react to that? And yet no-one seems to have noted anything at all about Mervyn Peake's fantasy in the Gormenghast trilogy, or G.W. Thomas's The White Hotel although my, like the author, feel that it popped up everywhere, or the 1960s equivalent to Vonnegut, William Kotzwinkel, or two of the 1960s of dislocation, in totally different works, Samuel de Champlain, Dick, or two of the great fantasy classic of the 80s, John Crowley's Little, Big and Mark Helprin's Winter's Tale (though neither latter might have been published just too late to come to her attention; a shame, because she devotes five pages to discussion of the winged horse).

There are also numerous inaccuracies which, especially in a scholarly work, should not occur. For example, Anne McCaffrey becomes Ann, and the author of A Carolle for Leibowitz becomes William Miller.

The book is well enough planned; reading the introduction to each section gives a clear sense of the directions within which the work will proceed. In the mass of words, the structure becomes lost to the reader. A scholarly textbook that remains chronologically and topically structured sub-heads to help the reader to see how each sub-section relates to the whole.

Yet there are definitely points worth considering in this book. Rather than pick from here and there, it is worth quoting from just one paragraph (p162): 'Many ideas need only minimal development. Like cartoons, they exert most impact when trenchant. Too great a length can trivialize even a good idea. What makes so much popular fantasy so either the author's inability to get the proper dimensions of his creation or his failure to enter far enough into the fantasy. For an action-based fan to true fantasy, the fantasy must affect the plot and characters in ways which would not be recognizable if the character or setting were not deeply affected by the fantasy. Perhaps the greatest weakness of science fiction is that good ideas are so often too easily understood that they are not pressed to develop them lovingly and imaginatively. But the good material is that which serves to break down mono-cosmology, or psychology, man's future, man's nature, man's happiness, or man's failings. Some of these topics can be better approached through some form of
The literary history, the machine has been threatening yet fascinating, superior to and yet paradoxically intrinsically familiar. It has been shunned for fear of its iconoclastic, apocalyptic, mind-expanding visions, for thinking the unthinkable. Now, it would appear that the novelist is good enough for the above-named authors though much of their work contains SF in different paths which will lead to ingenious exposition, there is certainly some credibility in proposing the new label, though I suspect it will not be widely adopted outside academia.

The Project Gutenberg Etext of Tolkien

By C.S. Lewis, 1985, 240pp, $10.95 (hardback)

Reviewed by Nik Morton

This book, which attempts to define a new literary genre, cybernetic fiction, is not an easy read, but it is, on balance, worth these efforts. Quite openly, Prof. Purush admits to stealing the title from William Burroughs' novel; he believes the metaphor and the novel are very unlikely to see the mechanisation of man on some metaphorical level. What appears to differentiate these authors' works from those of older, larger pulp genres of science fiction, in which technology is either glorified or blamed but always projected into some future, other worlds, to an unknown author. In short, we have a novel which precisely imprints itself on readers to the extent that they are self-reflexive and draw attention to the materials and forms of the novel. This is especially attributed to what Tolkien was doing, but reading it as a story it is too distanced by the style, I would appreciate more the earlier version. Tolkien's work is not a Saxon poet's sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English Saxon poets sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English

The Tale of the Children of Hurin which is written in the alliterative verse form belonging to Anglo Saxon literature. The second major poem is The Lay of Leithian which is written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets; the other major poems, however, are mainly based on events that are not to be found in the letter. Technically both verse forms are handled skillfully, it would have been surprising had they not been. Tolkien was a scholar of the highest order as a medievalist and when read about the dreadful tendency to 'te-tum' the rhyming couplets was easy something they would not allow for anything other than the rules of the alliterative verse form so that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English Saxon poets sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English Saxon poets sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English Saxon poets sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English Saxon poets sounds only peculiar to a modern audience. When I look at it from the point of view of an early millennium, I may be surprised at the rules of the alliterative verse form for that to the modern ear it sounds quaint and archaic, the elevated artifice of language which is archaic, all that to the middle English
THE MERCHANTS WAR - Frederik Pohl
[Gollancz, 1985, 209pp, #8.95]
Reviewed by Tom Jones

This book serves as A SEQUEL TO THE Space Merchants by Pohl and G. M. Mossbrook, and thus fits the present trend for established writers to produce sequels to their earlier works. The novel is set in the 1930s, or whether it's a sequel to a 1930s 'classic' just as long as it's an enjoyable read about a book that can stand on its own.

Deprived of direct references to The Space Merchants, even so, and though I read the book many years ago, it is a classic and would remember the general plot, also as I read this book details from The Space Merchants kept being dredged from my memory.

The setting for the story is an Earth effectively run by advertising agencies, all current political systems have been swamped by a rampant capitalism, the only creed is to produce and then CONSUME. Nothing can stand in the way of this and what happens is that all the natural resources and heavy pollution. Conservation is the dirtiest word.

Still, the world is a better place because of the conservationists, a planet they have escaped to avoid Earth's society (see The Space Merchants) and I remember the general plot, also as I read this book details from The Space Merchants kept being dredged from my memory.

Just before T arb is due to return to Earth he and Mitzu are injured in an 'accident'. This is a story about how the planet Earth takes several years and so suspended animation in use. When T arb wakes he is surprised to find Mitzu has also returned cut short her tour of duty. Also she has almost recovered from her injuries, provided the doctors can prevent her from an out of court settlement for the accident. T arb is (justifiably) pleased that he has been cut out of this settlement. On Earth T arb has fallen foul of a new advertising technique and has a 'Canny' addiction' to the drug. He has been programmed to need Medite, a 'renewing', taste-tingling blend of the finest chocolate-flavoured coffee extract and selected coca analogue.

We then follow T arb's declining fortunes. Although they do oscillate, fate always deals a blow to any improvements and the general trend is very definitely down. He descends from top ad agency to military service (civilizing a group of abos) and then grooms maker and the horrors of being a consumer. We also see the total addiction with the ad industry and Mitzu going nowhere.

Mitzu has changed since her return to Earth. When T arb takes him to a meeting with the ad agency her attitudes don't fit the norm for such an exalted rank. You should have a good reason for this now, as it was now, pages later. And hence it was not a good idea for him to take the job.

The central theme, as the book's title tells us, is how the advertising agencies take over the society of Earth and Venus, a conflict into which T arb is sucked and which he eventually solves. Again you should be able to work out how this does long before he does (or is that just me remembering The Space Merchants?)

This is a satire, Pohl and the blurb writer tell us this but whereas The Space Merchants (and stories with a related theme by Pohl written around the same time) are instantly and amusingly funny, this is only often and amusingly funny. The novel is mainly about the consumption of the world and the consumer society and those familiar with Sartre's existentialist works will see that there is a very basic connection.

The title comes out of practice for the book: we are never really aware of the consequences of advertising and what it does to society in the long run. By the time the clever reader has realized this, it is too late for the book to do much. It is a very interesting book and I would recommend it to those who are interested in the matter.

SOMEWHERE TOWARDS THE BEGINNING OF THIS NOVEL, the narrator mentions 'a confusion that, though charming, was nearly impossible to follow'. Yet, much later, the narrator says, 'It is Peace. Whether it's a good novel, I don't know; I do know that it requires about three times the amount of work that a reader would normally put in to understand it.'

Peace is Modernist in style, the
B 0 0 ( s

al 1 is seen through his mind. it's an o t
everything else; both small and
Some illustrations: Alden discovers a 'taller the batter.
houae in a poor part of the city about to
this is no child, it is Wear, during or
X would understand this book a whole
lot better if 1 were conversant with the
finer details of Christianity, and spec-
the Dead whose Greek title was coined by.
So what's real? another of these fake books
 sends Alden, and a woman he might have
is a compulsive eater. Immensely fat. and a
but 1 don't know enough about these states
have already node, seeing it without
illusion? That could be a definition of
hell. When Alden seeks advice from a long-
dead doctor, what Judgement is it that he
ает? imagination or death, asks him to take *a
test with mirrors*, and these - scenes from Alden's
- are mirrors in which he sees himself precise and exactly as he is. And
is it Alden who judges, or another?
Peace's other title may well be 'The Book
That Binds the Dead'. Thus afterlife
is one these, wound in with a theme on the
nature of tales, and one about the im-
finiveness of telling, that it cannot come to
is, what is real? Alden is trying to
find that out, and since 'a man is only the
bundle of his relations, a knob of roots',
he tells the stories of his aunt Olivia (who raised him) and her
four suitors, three of whom are figured in an
absurdly linear narrative, and one - the
victorious - in modern commercial cap-
it. And of Cassonville, and the other
people that surrounded him as a child,
whose memories go back into history and
myth. Interlocking: they themselves tell
stories, of weird tales, and old pagan
religious fables that demonstrate the
impossibility of telling, firstly, what is
evil and lastly, are evil things necessary?
Alden may be a necessary evil. By the end of the book, he has destroyed much
of the pattern of life in Cassonville. That's
ironic, for a man who always harbored the
living in favour
of the dead and
the past,
believes that the contingent world is' the
impossibility of telling, firstly, what is
evil and lastly, are evil things necessary?
Alden accepts, somewhere,
say 'somewhere' because chronological order is difficult to trace.
Like memory itself, the narrative darts
back and forward, stories are begun in one
place by one person, only to be finished
off later by someone different: the seller
of fake books, the dead doctor, the Dog
Boy. Which is rather more realistic than
straightforward 'realist' novels. However,
the risk that some people do - of giving
the reader the impression of being trapped
in a life which both twists and turns isn't boring. But it is slow. This is
'peace' as in 'rest'.
Free Live Free is a comedy. It's full of moments
which are treated with a straight face, but
which you have to laugh at. There is
humor or pure mirth, as much as the plan. The
novel, for instance, is an extended set
piece in which the four separately come to
the mental hospital ot Belmont and find
themselves being considered as inmates.
There are some conversations during this
time, that are both increasingly wild and lunatic like something out of Thorne Smith.
More to the point is the command of language, the
shrewdness of characterisation: the combination of these has come to expect. Nor is his skill
at characterisation or his ability to paint
a scene particularly unexpected. But I must
confess myself surprised and delighted by this
talent for farce, and also by his control of the character and tone.

This is not his best book, but I think it is one I shall long regard with a
particular joy and affection.
TEAR ALONG THE ROTTED SPINE
by Ian Pemble

Though perhaps not best known for its coverage of Science Fiction/Fantasy, Knave magazine has in the last year published interviews with Harry Harrison and Frank Herbert, both by Neil Gaiman. "It's all carried in "The Dragon-Hiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's edge...Odyssey Two", based on a Season address by David Langford, another regular contributor to Knave, as is Paul Barnett (also John Grant, also Eve Deveraux, also BLIX).

In and large it's not a sad little number. This EDITING BUSINESS - except for all the reading you have to do. Manuscripts and things. Mostly things. Some of them quite dreadfully written. And all this enforced reading has an unfortunate effect on my private reading habits.

Take newspapers for example - I no longer do. I once worked for an 'off-Fleet Street' photo agency (which put me off Fleet Street for life), and as part of the job, had to read virtually every national newspaper, every day. The only one I didn't have to read was The Guardian. This is the morning paper I do read.

So you see the job carries its own aversion therapy, which carries over into those precious moments when a good book may be happily curled up with. I like escapist fantasy, something easy on the brain cells. Absorbing without being too challenging, exciting without being likely to keep me awake all night. Science & Sorcery, etc. And with the vast number of authors/titles in the field these days, I should be a happy man.

But Knave, as is foul Harriett (ala Jdsi Oant, aka Eve Devereux, aka all this enforced reading has an infuriating effect on my private reading habits.

More fool they - meaning me in most cases. But I hate the way publishers fail to indicate on the jacket that the book in your hands is a three-in-one amalgam. Has it all turned out as well as I expected? At least they will be able to say: 'Half for the writer(s), care to join me? If enough of us buy, we'll build up your hopes of a satisfying conclusion - a rare and wonderful thing.'

In the last three years FOUNDATION has published an incisive and perceptive interview with Barry Nunn and Frank Herbert, both by Beil E. Varden, and Victor Milan. Then I hurled it, along with so many others of your 'new look' Vector came from: David Langford, Robert A.W. Lowndes, Robert Meadley, Pamela Sargent, John Sladek, Brian Stableford, George Turner, Liana Tuttle, Ian Watson, Cherry Wilder, Jack Williamson, George Zebrowski, and many others.

In the past three years FOUNDATION has published articles and reviews by:
- Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Michael Bishop, Algis Budrys, Richard Cowper, Thomas M. Disch, Phyllis Eisenstein, Harry Harrison, Garry Kilworth, David Langford, Robert A.W. Lowndes, Robert Meadley, Peter Nicholls, Christopher Priest, Rudy Rucker, Pamela Sargent, John Sladek, Brian Stableford, George Turner, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson, Cherry Wilder, Jack Williamson, George Zebrowski, and many others.


OTHER LETTERS/continued

I found your editorial a bit hard to follow - though your opening paragraph, I think it was because the points you were making seemed to vary, e.g. Paul Hardcastle's quote isn't about the war, but about people's attitudes to the soldiers once they'd lost the war. Maybe I missed the point.

Barbara R. Davies

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I'm sure you have many of vectormagazine.com/letters