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THE BSFA EMBRACES MANY SF INTERESTS, INCLUDING FANZINES (Random is a way of life), Films, Comics, Games, and possibly even a Trekky or two. But for most of us, books are our prime and preferred source of SF, and of other genres. We enjoy reading for its own sake. While other kids were kicking a football around the Rec we were curled up with a book. We didn’t mind being ill; it meant we could read more. We kept a torch under the pillow so we could read in bed. Reading for pleasure is a bug that is almost always caught young.

When I was nine I was a member of the Zone Pine Club. I’d never met David Morten and the twins, Dickie and Mary, or Petronella, who preferred to be called Peter, but I knew them. I shared all their adventures, and in my imagination they shared mine. They were great stuff for a nine year old.

Recently I picked up one of Malcolm Saville’s books that I’d not read for nearly 25 years. I knew before I started that my adult eyes would see it quite differently, and I allowed for that. The book was dire. The plot was okay—standard adventure, with tunnels, and baddies, and that bloody dog Mackie around my heels. But the characters were utterly unbelievable, and the writing was unapproachable. In both cases it was the moralistic middle-class attitudes that made me retch, and I’ve nothing against either morality or the middle-class. But the book was also badly written...

What had changed
First, and obviously, I’m nearly 25 years older. I have different attitudes and perceptions, tastes and values. I’ve also read several thousand books since then, and so have a better idea of what is ‘good’ and what isn’t. Maybe the book was as bad then as it is now, only I didn’t know it.

Were middle-class children (was it? actually like that a generation ago? Have children changed so much since then? Or was Saville out of touch with the reality of children when he wrote his books? How do the changes in society since then bear on this? For example, swearing and rude behaviour are far more acceptable in life now, and this is reflected in fiction.

Children’s books today tend to be about working-class kids with societal problems. (But the family at One End Street was working-class, and Peter is in a one-parent family, even if she does go to boarding school.)

Are children’s books today better written, or worse? Allison Uttley and Noel Streatfield’s equivalents today might be Alan Garner and Janni Ibbot. In terms of literary quality, we also have Dr. Death meets the Fanged Monster from Outer Space, which we don’t expect to have the same literary quality. So what’s the relevance of all this to the adult readership of Vector? When I was reading Malcolm Saville, I was also reading John Piddle’s adventures, and Capt. W.D. Johns’ Biggles books, which led me on to his SF books, and Patrick Moore’s SF books, and anything with space ships or robots or time travel... and by the time I was eleven I was reading Asimov and Heinlein and Pohl and Shanske and a hardened addict.

From the age of dot children read or are read stories which, if not SF, are closely linked with it. Fairy stories, myths and legends. Fantasy in all its varied forms, historical novels with present day kids travelling back in time... and then their parents skin them off fantasy into the real world, and for a lot of kids their reading pleasure stops right there. They’ve had the fantastic taken away from them, and books have become boring, words just marks on paper.

WHICH WERE THE BEST SF BOOKS OF 1985?
According to a dozen Vector reviewers, there were fifty-one of them, with very little overlap; only seven were chosen twice, and only two three times. These, to save you counting through were:

Brian Aldiss - Helliconia Summer
M.J. Harrison - Viriconium Nights
Gwyneth Jones - Divine Rehabilitation
Chris Priest - The Glass
Tim Powers - The Anubis Gates
Keith Roberts - Kitemorning
Geoff Berman - The Warrior Who Carried Life
Ian Watson - The Book of Being
Gene Wolfe - Free lunch Free

Without any attempt to prejudge the issue I haven’t made my own choice yet. I would guess that the last five (which are eligible) would be strong contenders for the BSFA Award, and so might be worth reading in the next couple of months. In fact, we could do worse than to follow Chris Bailey’s example: ‘I spent the year chasing last year’s recommendations’. When there’s so much crap in the shops, one of the useful functions of reviews can be to tell us what other people thought a good read. But personal tastes differ, and the wide range of books chosen is emphasised by the contrast between Marvyn Taylor’s comment ‘1985 was not a particularly memorable year’, and Paul Kincaid’s ‘1985 has been a remarkable year’.

A final thought: only one children’s book was mentioned, and in the end, not chosen. I suspect we’re all missing out by ignoring the books which are the bait to hook the next generation of SF readers.

STOP PRESS

SITS VAC

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Michael Coney, author of Sysygy, Charisma, Cat Karina and numerous other novels, was born in Britain but has lived in British Columbia for a number of years. In a recent letter he wrote:

'It's good to see you still consider me a British writer. There was a statement in a Canadian fanzine not long ago that 'Michael Coney remains a British writer for all that he lives in B.C.' and I wrote back rather irritably to say that since I had, for some years, owned an axe and a chainsaw, and what was more I put maple syrup on my hotcakes, surely by now I could be regarded as Canadian? but no. In truth the fanzine was right and you are right; I only play at being Canadian. When I'm writing, my heart is still back there in South Devon.'

AND THERE ARE CLUBS, TOO, WHERE YOU WILL MEET PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF, united in their love for this friendly, furry little rodent.

These words, or words very much like them, appeared in a slim volume I bought from the pet shop. The rod in question was the Guinea Pig. The guinea pigs themselves, my passport to a life of frenzied social activity, sat watching me through the bars of their cage like tiny delinquents, and when I pushed my finger towards the biggest it snapped at me viciously with needle-like yellow incisors, the hallmark of the rodent.

In my time I've harboured guinea pigs (frozen during a cold snap), hamsters (decomposed), white mice (escaped), a white rat which even I found repulsive (drowned), a tortoise (eaten by rats), a dog called Chips (murdered by my father), a dog called Chopper (destroyed for worrying sheep), a dog called Lancer (poisoned by natives), a cat called Ginger Tom (fractured vertebrae), and, alive at the time of writing but probably quite nervous, a cat (Sabrina) and four rabbits (Ashleigh, Theodora, Precious and Goldilocks). I should add that I've never been responsible for naming any of the above. Neither have I been responsible for killing any of them. So when it was suggested that I write an article on Biological Developments in Fact and Fiction, I knew that I was admirably suited to the task. Most of my stories have a biological slant, due to my imperfect knowledge of physics and the editors' stipulation that a science fiction story should contain science. So quite early in my career I started writing about giant shrews and land sharks. Biology allows the writer to invent within a much broader set of parameters than 'hard' science allows. In order to achieve authenticity, a biological invention needs only to evolve in accordance with its environment.

I climbed down to the edge of the pool and peered into the depths. It was clear and green; seemingly empty. And I was about to turn away when I thought I saw a movement at the bottom among a nest of waving green fronds. I was looking for a stick to poke about with while a white form darted past me. A snowdiver had seen the same movement. I flinched involuntarily - the bird had passed close to my head - but I heard no splash.

When I opened my eyes the entire rock pool was opaque and sparkling; the bird's headquarters protruded from the surface, transfixed in mid-dive. Its webbed feet were paddling ineffectively and as I watched the movement became spasmodic, then died. I shivered... (Hello Ranner, Goodbye)

The coastal ecology in this novel is based on a tidal phenomenon: instead of ebb and flow the water gets more or less dense according to the season. Pursuing this theme, the creatures living in rock pools maintain their water at a supersaturated level by balancing evaporation with small quantities of water expelled from their bodies. When a potential victim falls into the pool, however, the creature excretes a few crystals of whatever, and the whole pool crystallizes instantly, trapping the victim for future consumption.

********

A couple of years ago the little girl over the road appeared with what seemed to be a small kangaroo on a leash. 'He's Thumper, my rabbit,' she said.

The rabbit, fat and furry, looked up at me with big brown eyes, waving its ears in a most attractive manner. Suddenly my whole life seemed to have been wasted, stretching behind me like a rabbitless desert. 'He's very big,' I said.
As an animal lover I am bothered by my own sentimentality, by this towering regret which seems to me when I read that another animal is on the endangered list and soon may never be seen again. Apart from receiving the aforementioned Nobel Prize for literature (and, last, but not least, my principal ambition is to discover the Tasmanian Wolf, Alive and Well. Or the Moa. Either would do. But this concern and this ambition is purely selfish, and I would like to admit it here now.

Because the last moa did not know it was the last moa. One morning, as it was realizing that it didn’t feel good. It felt old and tired, and those animals with sharp teeth seemed to be moving closer. But it had no sense of occasion. It just thought it was dying, like now it must have done. So as it keeled over, rolled onto its back and stuck its scaly legs into the air, no ghostly voice whispered to it: ‘This is the end of an era. This is a moment of terrible history. This is Defining E’. No. All unknowing, it uttered a simple croak and the scavengers moved in.

Only we humans know, and feel the regret—and don’t always have the sense to realize how selfish the regret is. Perhaps I wrote my kind of SF in order to come to terms with these regrets, to invent more animals to replace the ones that have gone, to give myself and my readers some hope for the next million years.

*******

If a coniferous tree is damaged or if it suffers through a period of prolonged drought it will usually produce a ‘distress crop’ of cones; thousands of them. Poresters around the world have passed it off as a natural phenomenon; often use this as an excuse to fell the trees into producing seeds for reforestation; they persuade the tree it’s going to die, so it does all it can to perpetuate the species. In Charisma, my hero saved his girl from a messy death and...

Susanna’s blue eyes were looking into mine while I lay above her; and as I watched I saw the fear recede and become relief, and, with amazing rapidity, controlled amusement. Her breath was urgent under me. ‘Thank you, John,’ she said formally. ‘Now in cases where imminent death has been avoided, Thumper may be hised into the life of the human animal to involve himself almost immediately in the reproductive processes. It assists recovery from shock and has obvious psychological benefits.’

I stared at her.

‘I just thought you ought to know the accepted practice,’ she said. ‘Otherwise you might get it into your head to have a cigarette instead.’

Obviously I wrote that before I heard of distress crops, but the basic principle is there.

One day I heard Thumper screaming outside. ‘A raccoon’s got Thumper. I’ll break his back to save him!’ said Fergus just as the Thumper was by now old and infirm, was culling the herd in the mud the way that wolves cull herds of caribou. I shot it in the head. This didn’t deter it; raccoons are notoriously difficult to kill. It took three shots to drive it off, then we took the trembling Thumper indoors and put her in a box with some hay to recuperate.

The next day she was out of shock although downcast, and there was a curious thing beside her, like a fleshy egg. It could have been a part of her, shining off the raccoon: a haunch or possibly a saddle (I late ‘rock saddle of rabbit with chestnut source’ recently in a French restaurant) or she could have come an oyster, the way a horse might cast a shoe. This would be, I reasoned, a distress crop. Near death, she had done her best to perpetuate her rabbit species by separating her enlarged self from her children yet unborn. It was a touching thought and one which a writer should turn to advantage. Thumper departed from our frame of years ago. (Her epitaph was written by the vet on an invoice, simple and affecting: Bittania, one rabbit $25) but in her passing she bequeathed the notion for a story.

Some emotions, though attractive, do not hold water. It seems that during and following World War II the ratio of girl to boy babies born was exactly the same as at any other time. This exploits the eugenically—why should sport or match-making be somehow compensated for the excessive loss of males on active service by adjusting the ration.

There’s no such thing as water dividing either. What a pity.

*******

Ashleigh ruled the compound with snapping teeth and furious growls, and wore beside any rabbit warlock who was unlucky enough to be born male. For while we supplied the neighbourhood children with free bunnies and enjoyed a fleeting popularity. Two such bunnies, Precious and Theodora (male and female respectively) were returned to us after six months elsewhere and Ashleigh’s fur cast no shadow. Theodora would blossom, but already, with ears tassels flying, he bounded his son around the compound for weeks on end until I decided that the kindest thing would be to Give Precious his Freedom. So I opened the gate and ushered the little fellow out.

Throughout the following week Precious wandered miserably amid the long grass which surrounded the compound, peering sadly into every corner, sniffing hopefully but without. I thought. For Ashleigh and Goldilocks through the wire like a convict on visiting day, and no doubt voicing his opinion of me as a suitable person to be entrusted with. In the end I decided that he was interested in nothing. So eventually I had to give him his way. I opened the gate and in he hopped. Ashleigh lost no time in taking a piece out of him. I had to concede once again that nature was not, in humanistic terms perfect.

As writers we have the ability to create perfection, however; which may be another good reason for writing science fiction. From the biological standpoint we have a choice of two kinds of perfection: expanding or stable. The expanding kind postulates a dominant race, usually human, colonizing an ever increasing number of worlds. There can be no end to the process of expansion because, like economic growth rates and the Roman Empire, the only alternative is collapse,质量 by the destruction of billions of worlds and such stories tend to be technological in content. An undeniable attraction lies in the headlong progression towards a vast unknown, but the drawback is an omnipresent risk of collapse.

I chose the second alternative for my recent novels because of its inherent optimism: it is theoretically possible to reach a form of life that is in a stable perfection. The end product is a planet with a perfect ecology with a diversity of plants and animals dovetailing into a balanced whole. Conflict is provided by the arising of an occasional enemy, either internally or externally or inflected. There is little room for technology in this kind of story because it would eventually be defeated by the finite nature of global resources, despite recycling and solar power. In this kind of SF often uses this introspective approach, although not always stating openly that life will go on after the difficult period that it often describes. Perhaps here there is an over-preoccupation with human life. The fact that the story is set at a point well before ecological stability is achieved sometimes brands it as ‘pessimistic’ in American eyes. This rather shortsighted view ignores the optimism inherent in the struggle for a stable perfection — as well as the practical impossibility of achieving an expanding perfection.

Given these definitions, my recent novels in the Song of Earth series are British in approach, although set much further along the road to stability than the near-future period which American SF typifies. When it is the inhuman and its goal of my protagonists, and technology is sometimes seen as evil. The force behind this goal is the kilhuahus, who first bred the Sa-Ma-Ai, and now breed them on Earth. On Earth, at some point in their development the kilhuahus decided they were improper to consume the resources of the Galaxy in order to make life pleasant for themselves. They colludified their beliefs in the Kilhuahus Examples:

I will not kill any mortal creature
I will not work any malleable substance
I will not kindle the Wrath of Aghy

the last one meaning: I will not light fires. Well, if you don’t do any of these things, you are pretty well forced into living in accord with your environment like the kilhuahus do. And the fun lies in bending the rules, just like the fun in Ambrose’s Laws of Robotics. The fun lies in bending the rules of the kilhuahus for the kilhuahus themselves.

I. They travel through Space in giant bots pushed by solar winds — which can take a very long time to get from place to place. So it is natural for them to view every planet as a self-contained unit; unlike humans, who can travel very quickly and therefore see Space as a broad canvas.

*******

Yesterday, I looked into the compound and it seemed the balance of power had shifted. Ashleigh was sitting forlornly beside the wire as though wishing, for the first time in his rabbit life, to escape. He seemed to have been blown away, pursued by a sleek and powerful brown brute. Precious was chasing him! A few minutes later Ashleigh was resting by the wire panting, his ear tufts lending his a
strangely vulnerable and fragile look. Then Precious came into view again; Precious the once-effete, the slightly-poncy, the underling, the lackey, the whipping-boy, the seven-ounce wagging.

And Precious had changed. His legs were like steel springs, his eyes piercing. He seemed to have developed beetling brows and his expression was intolerant and cruel. He looked like General Woundwort from Watership Down. He looked like a rabbit to be reckoned with. Theodore and Godlilocks were gazing at him in admiration as he perched himself on the chalet sundek, occasionally glancing with contempt at Ashleigh huddled against the wire ten feet away.

I should have known better than to leave Ashleigh there, just as I should have known better than to try to write an article on Biological Developments in Fact and Fiction. I just don't know enough about what goes on in the real world.

The next morning Ashleigh did not appear at breakfast. I fed the others, taking pleasure in their appetites, their bustling working jaws and their bright enthusiastic eyes, and nothing I saw prepared me for what was to come. There was no alarm in their happy faces, no worried glances over their shoulders, no exchanges of guilty looks. So it was with no more than idle curiosity that I went in search of Ashleigh, to round him out and maybe give him a tickle between the ears.

I found him lying with his head inside a shallow burrow. He was cold and terribly stiff. There were no marks on him. He looked as though he'd sought a quiet hole to die in, but had lacked the enthusiasm to get right in there. So he's lain down half-in and half-out with his rump in the air and his head down between his forepaws. It was an undignified way to die, after such a distinguished life.

I took hold of his hind legs and pulled him out of there. He was heavy, so there was no question of his having been sick or old. He simply couldn't stand the indignity of no longer being top buck, so he'd given up. He'd died of a broken heart. I carried him out, and the other three didn't even glance at him as he passed. Lost in their own rabbity thoughts, they'd probably already forgotten their grey and tufted Rührer. Sic transit gloria mundi.

I do expect consistency within a trilogy, and within a series of stories, but it is wrong to expect a consistency between separate groups as L.J. Hurst seems to.

Still with Asimov, in Mark Greener's review of The Gods Themselves I was surprised to see the expectation of Asimov to change his style to fit modern standards and trends. Why should he? Would Mark criticise someone who preferred Wagner or Beethoven to Wham or Culture Club? No, why condemn Asimov. Yes, its style is dated, but I enjoyed it when I first read it. I've just reread it and I'm not as excited as I was when I was 15 - I'd rather read Dick or Ellison now but it's not a bad book.

Asimov, Clarke, "Doc" Smith, etc. introduced most of us to SF would I think, so we do look fondly on them but we still expect them to produce the goods we want now. I hope there is someone out there of 10 or 12 who has just discovered the joys of Asimov, because in a few years time that child will progress through Dick, Ellison, Disch and the New Wave(s) to become a member of the BBSA and fandom in general. Remember that it isn't the artistry of the New Wave which brings the young into our fold initially, but the excitement and adventure of the Old Guard.

RICHIE McGRATH
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Look back with kindness

THERE ARE GREAT INCONSISTENCIES WITHIN THE US ROBOTS "SERIES" AS L.J. Hurst says (V128), but as Peter Ellis rightly points out they weren't planned as a series nor was the first in the series the first written. Hurst's biggest mistake, however, is in expecting the Bailey novels to be consistent with the US Robots short stories. Why should he? Does Frank Herbert fall through the omission of "The Calibans", who enable galactic travel and communication to occur, from the Dane series where spice is used to the same effect? Of course not. They're separate universes with no connection between them.

The Bailey novels are a trilogy and were written as a trilogy, though with a gap of over 25 years between The Naked Sun and The Robots of Dawn. The US Robots stories are a group of vaguely linked stories with no link to the novels.

HUSAIN MOHAMMED IS TO BE CONGRATULATED ON HIS SUCCESS IN producing a most professional looking magazine. Not only is it very stylish and elegant but he's made it consistent. After so many issues that have changed in style and format from one mailing to another, Hussain has actually sat down and designed a magazine and stuck to it. The result not only looks good, but has given Vector an identity. Kevin McVeigh asks why SF has not produced orbiting space stations etc. I'm sure that Liz Bourbet (V126) wasn't suggesting that SF works like some form of ritual magic - a model of something and along it comes. However, before anything is achieved it is necessary to have two preconditions: the desire and the means. The desire for space travel was planted in the minds of humans quite early on, but 20th century SF actually put meat on the bones and started to produce an image, and who can say that society didn't work towards that image? One other point is that Kevin may be confusing concept with detail. The idea of leaving our planet was put into the mind, but this certainly doesn't mean that technology will slavishly imitate every SF idea. Resources are limited, and so is willpower, and we have to remember that technology is also the art of the possible...

MICHAEL BERNARD
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...all this and Langford too

TEARS FOR THE LATE ISSUE OF VECTOR! DESPITE ITS LIGHTWEIGHT FEEL, it was the largest offering this mailing. I particularly enjoyed the transcription of Dave Langford's speech almost as good as the first time.

The Geoff Ryman interview has convinced me that I should read The Warrior Who Carried Life, if I can get hold of a copy (and if I can afford it).

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Art and desire

BASRAH MOHAMMED IS TO BE CONGRATULATED ON HIS SUCCESS IN producing a most professional looking magazine. Not only is it very stylish and elegant but he's made it consistent. After so many issues that have changed in style and format from one mailing to another, Hussain has actually sat down and designed a magazine and stuck to it. The result not only looks good, but has given Vector an identity. Kevin McVeigh asks why SF has not produced orbiting space stations etc. I'm sure that Liz Bourbet (V126) wasn't suggesting that SF works like some form of ritual magic - a model of something and along it comes. However, before anything is achieved it is necessary to have two preconditions: the desire and the means. The desire for space travel was planted in the minds of humans quite early on, but 20th century SF actually put meat on the bones and started to produce an image, and who can say that society didn't work towards that image? One other point is that Kevin may be confusing concept with detail. The idea of leaving our planet was put into the mind, but this certainly doesn't mean that technology will slavishly imitate every SF idea. Resources are limited, and so is willpower, and we have to remember that technology is also the art of the possible...

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Robert A. Heinlein
THE DOOR INTO SUMMER

In contrast to his earlier The Puppet Masters, written while he was in his twenties and a young married man, this is a much more mature and demanding work. It features time-travel, a little girl and a pussy-cat - but it is not nearly as twee as that thumbnail description might suggest. More important, although written at great speed (not that it suffers for that), The Door Into Summer was one of the first novels to be serialised in a serious magazine, 'Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction' - which, by the late 1950s, was overtaking 'Galaxy' as the important American SF periodical.

The story opens in 1970 (the future). The protagonist of the story - a young and promising engineer, designer of the domestic robots 'Hired Girl' and 'Flexible Frank' - has also been a cat lover. Inwarded by business, but provided with a fiancée, he decides to take the Long Sleep in search of a 'door into summer'. That is to say he means that his money expends and he allows himself to be frozen into suspended animation, to awaken three decades later with the unemployments and a fresh start in life. The only problem is that behind him is little Frederica ('Ricky'), his partner's step-daughter: Ricky had been 'missing for years' since she was a six-year-old in a Sandia, with hair ribbons and big dark screeen eyes. He is 'going to marry her when he gets up'. He also regrets leaving his puma, Petronius Asterix.

His plans go awry. Dan finds himself a pauper in the year 2000, it is a highly unusual situation which he regards as the best way to bring into being his robotic designs of thirty years earlier. Yet he has to make his way, cheated of his inheritance. Desperate to put things right, he contacts the inventor of a top-secret time machine and successfully throws himself back to 1970. As in most tales which involve the paradoxes of time, the plot is complex. It is also filled with incident which he, and Dan getting the money, the girl (her age suitably adjusted) and the damaged cat - and then a century later - are blissfully over after amid the fruits of Dan's labour.

In the short novel, as a piece of flumery, it is interesting in that it casts light on the central obsession which runs through all Heinlein's fiction. As is the case with most of his short stories, All You Zombies, - a two-page epic of time-travel and sex change in which the protagonist becomes his own mother and father, this novel illustrates a kind of solipsism, the belief that one is alone in an unreal world and that the individual's only means of elevation is to pull himself up by his bootstraps. This gels with Heinlein's 'political' philosophy of self-reliance and individualism, but all seems rather sad, and ultimately futile. But Heinlein is full of contradictions: the texture of this novel is anything but sad: on the contrary, it is a very bright, jolly read, perhaps the slickest in the author's entire canon. The engineering writer, one very well heeded and the narrative carries a surprising amount of conviction throughout. I recommend this sometimes tricky texture rather than its substance, to anyone who has been puzzled by the extent of Heinlein's reputation. It shows a great popular writer, 'a natural', at the height of his powers.

Note to Publishers and Authors: As a general rule, Vector will be glad to give pre-publication publicity in the form of extracts from new books about SF, especially if written by ISFA members.

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Samuel R. Delany
NOVA

It is an inappropriate title: although he was barely twenty-five when he wrote it, Nova was Samuel Delany's eighth novel in a short space of time. It was also the first to appear in hardback, Samuel R. Delany paperback originals, Babel-17 (1966) and The Einstein Intersection (1967), had won great praise, and Algol Rody was moved to describe Delany as 'the best science fiction writer in the world'. It is hardly too extravagant to say that he burst upon the American SF scene like an exploding star. In effect, Delany was the American New Wave. Readers may not have foreseen it at the time, but Nova proved to be his summation. It was followed by a longish period of silence, and by the time that came to an end with the publication of his picaresque novel Dhalgren (1975) it was clear that he had gone off on a very different tack. One has to return to Nova to appreciate this surface - all flash and filligree, a master of movement and excitement. Set against an interstellar background, Nova is an updating of the pulp-magazine space opera. It concerns the quest of Captain Izhx von Ray to find a new source of the immensely valuable heavy metal, Illyric. He believes he can achieve this by plunging his spaceship into a star which is on the point of going nova. In the stillness at the heart of the firestorm he will find his unlimited supply of treasure. With this wealth he will change the economic structure of the known galaxy and break the tyranny of the autocratic Prince Red, scion of the Red-shift corporation. To accompany him on his hazardous journey he gathers together a motley crew of vividly drawn characters. Chief among them is a gypsy boy called the House, who improvises wonderful melodies on an instrument known as sensory-synx. Delany's greatest admirer, Algol Rody, has pointed out that the House is another incarnation of the author's favourite hero type, the 'magic kid', ripe with innate talents and a palpable gift for the impossible. The young David Cameron (born 1942) was himself a magic kid, a black undertaker's son from Harlem, New York, whose greatest gift is his ability to communicate the sheer liberatory joy that science fiction represented for him.

The plot-business, though strong and well-handled, is of less importance than the rich and integrated backdrop to the action. The novel successfully portrays a vast, complex, teeming and fundamentally hopeful future society. It is, in fact, popular SF, although the far-fetched, often-organised qualities that make one uneasy in the face of utopian visions. It conveys a sense of the future as the truly marvellous place for 'ordinary folk' such as disenchanted gypsies, blacks, women, and other alien and freakish intellectuals. For this band of the meek have inherited the universe. The book communicates the feeling that the future will be different, in a million-and-one ways that we can scarcely comprehend at present. Incidental action spills of the page in profusion. Instead of the bland, metallic corridors of future cities envisioned by Asimov and Clarke, Delany shows us an interstellar panorama of space cities, a vision of an immense universe. It encompasses earth, small, and chaos, and when seen through the eyes of the magic kid it offers wonder and delight, quickening the imagination.

The most appealing SF notion in the novel is that of the surgically-implanted 'biochip' by which the brain can now be 'cyborged' or equipped. These enable Delany's people to 'plug in' to any machine, any system, and directly direct its inner workings from the brain. Happy, fulfilling relationships between human beings and machines are an important part of this novel. Everyone is a part of a micro or a nanomach - the machines have become a part of humanity, but humanity has become a part of the machines. The intuition of the future is always in control. It is a vision which inspires - a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Christopher Priest
INVENTED WORLD

'I had reached the age of six hundred and forty-five years,' said Pri- reports of 1970. I had been the author of a sentence which promises paradoxical things to come. The narrator is Helward Mann, one of the in habitants of a little wooden city atop a mountain on the edge of the earth (the hero's age is in fact measured by the distance that the city has travelled through the sea, by a bi-pedalised island or a gnomlike, and I had always seen his life from a certain remove. This statement sums up an odd quality of the book: it's detached, distanced tone. Helward Mann sees everything from a 'certain remove', as perhaps the author does. Most of Christopher Priest's novels and stories are told in a stiff, remote style - which, I hasten to add, frequently suits the alienated subject matter.

Invented World is a very strange novel indeed. It begins promisingly enough, with a description of Helward's induction into the world of the city, which is a strange world. It is a city located at the rate of 36 miles a year through a desolate region, sparsely populated by impoverished peasants who are drafted into the city (by the draft board, torque stock). Locomotion is achieved by the painstakingly laborious process of laying tracks and sweeping the city along them, a few hundred yards at a time. The various guildsmen - surgeons, track-layers, bridge-builders - live in a perpetual state of irrepressible task. For some reason, as baffling to Helward as it is to the reader, it is essential that the city continue to
move, heading for an optimum point which is always just a few miles away.

The terrain ahead of the city is barred to as the future (Belward's father is a Future Surveyor), while that to the rear is known as the Past. On his first lengthy journey from the city, Belward is given the task of escorting three young women back to their native village, some distance south, or 'down Past'. This proves to be a truly extraordinary, nightmarish epiphany. It began lightly entwined with sundry sexual frolics, then, as the days pass, Belward notices that the women are changing; their faces and legs are shorter, and more thickly built. Their shoulders and hips were broader, their breasts less round and more widely spaced... Soon he sees that 'none of them stood more than five feet high, they talked more quickly than before, and the pitch of their voices was higher.' It is as though Belward and the women are descending into a carnival hall of mirrors. Before long, the women are 'no more than three feet tall... their feet were flat and wide, their legs long and broad... the sound of their twattering voices was irritating, the grotesque distortion of Belward's perceptions continues to grow in intensity until he finds himself tumbld southwards, to end up with his body stretched across a mountain range:

He was at the edge of the world; its major bulk lay before him.
He could see the whole world.
North of him the ground was level; flat as the top of a table. But at the centre, due north of him was a perfect square, from that flatness in a perfectly symmetrical, rising and concave spire. It narrowed and narrowed, reaching up, growing ever more slender, rising so high that it was impossible to see where it ended.

The 'explanation' for all this is a complex mathematical concept. It seems that the curve of the ground is 'shaped like a solid hyperbola; that is, all limits are infinite.' To the south of the city everything becomes horizontal and time stands still. But in the north is accelerated by an immense weight of people in a horizontal plane which becomes vertical and time speeds up. It is impossible for people to live in either zone, and the very ground is constantly shifting beneath their feet, hence their need to keep the city on the move, ever reaching out for that theoretical 'optimum conditions are normal. One does not have to understand mathematics in order to enjoy this novel. Christopher Priest (born 1963) has succeeded in creating a powerful metaphor which is open to a number of interpretations, psychological, social and philosophical.

There are more surprises towards the end of the book which cause one to revise one's ideas of what it is all about. Unlike many stories of conceptual breakthrough, this text is not at all predictable.

**ANNOTATION**

**SCIENCE FICTION THE 100 BEST NOVELS**

David Pringle

Since Alan Dorey resigned, the BSFA has been without a chairman. Alan put in a number of years of very hard work. To fill his place we need someone energetic, reliable and with good workable ideas. If this sounds like you, you will need people to propose and second you when the new chairman is elected by popular vote at the AGM at Eastercon.

It is not necessary to submit your name in advance, however the BSFA committee would be interested to know of anyone thinking of standing.
BOOKS
OF THE YEAR
1985

CHRIS BAILEY

WHEN WE DID THIS EXERCISE LAST YEAR, A
reasoning number of people confessed to
having read none of the year's significant
novels, so I hope to get away with making a
similar admission and shall highlight some
short stories instead.

To say it has been a poor year at 'The
Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction' is
perhaps too subjective a judgment and is
harsh on the dozens of honestly striving
writers, but I found only three stories to
excite me: Keith Roberts' 'Richenda',
Walter Jon Williams' 'Hide Effects', and
Lucius Shepard's 'A Spanish Lesson', and it
is indicative of the general standard that
I can select the Shepard when it is not one
of his top performances.

The improving 'Interzone' did rather
better and I enjoyed Peter Garrett's 'If
the Driver Vanishes', David Langford's
'Cube Root', Ian Watson's 'The People On
The Precipice' and M. John Harrison's 'A
Young Man's Journey to Viriconium'. Previ-
ously I have been unhappy that the BSFA
Award voters have leaned so exclusively
towards 'Interzone', but this year I feel
they can do so with more justification.

It was a splendid year for antholo-
gies. There was Josephine Saxton's The
Power of Time (Chatto) (admired more than
enjoyed), Garry Kilworth's The Songbirds
of Pain (Gollancz) (a 1984 book really, but
what the hell), Ian Watson's Slow Birds
(amazing), M. John Harrison's Viriconium
Nights (Gollancz) (even more amazing), and
the 'Interzone' collection which provided
the new story of 1985, 'O Happy Day'. That
man Ryder again.

Otherwise, just to prove that this
feature works, I spent the year chasing
last year's recommendations and was duly
bowled over by, amongst others, Angela
Carter's Nights At The Circus (Chatto).
And, twenty years late and courtesy of a
junkshop, I also caught up with Carter's
first novel, Shadow Dance - a maticing
performance.

K.V. BAILEY

THREE NOVELS AND TWO OTHERS. KEITH ROBERTS
Rifekrewl (Gollancz) for its evocation of
borderlands and boundaries - of the mind
of the senses, of the elements. Ian
Watson's The Book of Being (Gollancz) an
achievement bringing together the strands
of a complex trilogy and then transcending
the result to open up new perspectives
which rationalise the story of his
universe, but which, in actually demytholo-
gizing, reconstitute its myths at even
deeper levels. Barry Unsworth's Stone
Virgin (Hamish Hamilton) is not science
fiction, but a marvellous novel of realism
shot through with fantasy, a narrative of
the persistence of the genius of evil and
the genius of beauty through the centuries
in embodiments that are material,
corporeal, and metaphysical; it also
wonderfully recreates Venice almost as a
living - and dying - organic presence.

SOME PERSONAL CHOICES

BARBARA DAVIES

I DON'T BUY BACKS, SO WHEN I WAS ASKED
to pick the five best books of 1985 some
of the titles that immediately came to
mind

M. John Harrison

VIRICONIUM NIGHTS

First of the others is Brian
Rableford's Scientific Romance in Britain,
1890-1950, (Fourth Estate), a model of
readable scholarship, and of how to bring
alive half-forgotten figures by relating
them to their socio-historical contexts
and, in tracing genres influences and con-
sequences, establishing their contemporary
significance. Umberto Eco's Reflections on
The Name of the Rose (Secker & Warburg)
appeared in Italy in 1983 but was not pub-
lished in translation here until 1985. This
is just what it says it is, but among Eco's
reflections are many that writers, readers
and critics of SF will find relevant
particularly those contained in the chapter
'The Novel as Cosmological Event' and,
applying its thesis mutatis mutandis, that
entitled 'The Historical Novel'. There were
other excellences in 1985, but these are my
choice.

MARK GREIFER

THE NEW YEAR IS A TRADITIONAL TIME FOR
re-reading. However, contemplation of the
SF books I've read in the last year reveals
precious little of merit. It is a savage
indictment of either the library or to
their respective owner. I therefore propose
to choose five paperbacks. To qualify my
choice even further, my definition of
"best" will be not 'literary merit' or
"admirable subject matter" but simply
"incidentally" and "unputdownability." All
other words, here are five paperbacks that
I bought with high expectations and with
which I was disappointed.

The first two books are fantasy-quest
serials. That may be enough to condemn
them in some people's eyes, but for those of
us who read Sterling E. Miezer's Hieros
Journey in 1976, 1985 will go down in
history as the year in which at last produced
the sequel The Unbroken Hieros (Granada).
The wait was worth it. Similarly, having
been hooked by the Shamara books since
1976, The Whispering of Shamara by Terry
Brooke (Future) was a welcome addition.

For 'proper' SF John Varley's
Millenium (Sphere) and Rob Shaw's Fire
Patterns (Grafton) got me hook, line and
sinkers. Both have a wise-cracking way with
words and inventive and unexpected
plotting, the former being about time
travel and the latter about spontaneous
combustion.

Finally, a book that is hard to
categorise as fantasy or SF but is perhaps
a little of both, Divine Endurance by
Owen Jones (Unicorn). This compelling
and intelligent account of the journeys of
Cho and her cat raised more questions than
it answered - an intriguing book.
first book and the series looks set to become his magnum opus. Holdstock's Mythago Wood (Gollancz) was a truly remarkable fantasy, which finally saw幻想 writing at its full potential. The best newcomer was Clive Barker; The Damnation Game (Weldenfeld & Nicolson) is the best horror novel you are likely to read in a very long time. Barker is a name to watch because his first novel puts many established authors to shame.

The brace of Chris Priest books I read this year were outstanding. The Affirmation (Jonathan Cape) is a remarkable novel than The Glamour (Oupe) which had some obvious faults. However, even at his best Priest stands head and shoulders above many SF authors.

However, much SF is read for escapism entertainment rather than intellectual speculation. A Stainless Steel Rat is Born (Michael Joseph) which brings the series back to the level of the first two books, and Langford's The Lazy Establishment (Sphere) which is not even listed as SF and so might reach a larger readership than would otherwise be expected.

When I consider the number of SF books I have read in the last year the above accounts for only a very small proportion of the total. Choosing the books to be included presented no problem and that must be the saddest indictment of all.

MUCH IS EVER PERFECTLY NORMAL AND PREDICTABLE. Robert Aickman, deceased alms, wrote perfectly twisted 'strange stories' (his term) wherein you don't know what's going on, you only know it's compellingly nasty. Night Voices (Gollancz) is a posthumous collection, but makes a good introduction. I don't know, but I reckon Alcock may be prominent on the bookshelves of M. John Harrison, whose Viriconium Nights (Gollancz, completely recommended) has me torn between in the interests of Free Live Press (Gollancz) steeps it in obscure wearing magic until, like Mark Helprin's New York, it could be anything at all.

All right, I like being baffled. I like to have my own sense of the impenetrable strangeness of things confirmed and amplified by authors who share the imaginations much baver and more complex than my own. Hence a loud hurrah for the subversive intelligence of Josephine Saxton, taken notice of at last and all of a sudden by British publishers. (Three more books due this year) Meanwhile The Role of Time (Chatto) is an exotic and erotic, wild and witty banquet. Sleaker and more melancholy is the mystery of Michael Chabon's The Yiddish Policemen's Union (Granada). A cooler, more insidious present-day version of The Prisoner, it is more an essay novel of displacement. British official purgatory has been unfairly overlooked, I feel.

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS OF THE YEAR contained material over forty years old, and previously unpublished. I revealed it in, despite the eloquent claim by the other talkies, The War Commentaries (Duckworth/BBC), both edited by W.J. West, are sources of new insight into Orwell's work. West writes a brilliant, fresh account of Orwell's career at the BBC (particularly the sixty page introduction to the war broadcasts) and shows the roots of Orwell's later works. There are three areas of interest: firstly, Animal Farm - West makes it very reasonably claim that this was conceived as a radio play rather than a prose narrative; secondly, he shows Orwell's awareness of the scientific developments of propaganda, how Orwell and the BBC worked to counter Axis propaganda and promote Allied interest; and thirdly, Orwell's active scientific interest - he had talks broadcast by people like Haldane, Bernal and Waddington. Orwell, it is becoming clearer, was never a litterateur.

In the second volume, of Weekly News round-up, West's editorial control goes a little awry. Orwell wrote 'On Sunday, July 26th, a huge meeting was held in London, to demand the opening of a second front' and west adds 'the meeting in Victory Square, described by Orwell in Nineteen Eighty-Four are obviously based on such events'. Great stuff.

The best fantasy of the year was Michael Shea's Night The Train (Granada). It was only been a few years since I have read only Search 8/9, the J.G. Ballard special, in the shops this year. It relating to SF and fantasy. What is best? Who has read all the relevant books? Certainly not me, particularly as I rarely read much else. When I have a good look at some books that have made an impression on me, for various reasons, that have come out in the last two years, I can see that Orwell's work. So would choose Samuel R. Delany's Light. From Beyond Beyond (Bantam), a fascinating conclusion to one of the final SF books, published, because it is so utterly different from Tolkien. None of Tolkien's characters had appeared in space opera. A fascinating book, because of its beautifully drawn characters, superb aliens and very interesting ideas on language. Terry Pratchett's The Colour of Magic (Gorgi), because it's very funny and because I've known for a very long time and am a fan of his. If I didn't mention it (thus Pratchett wins over Ryan.) Scott Sucharitkul's Utopia Hunters (Bantam), because it is rather better than the 1985 conclusion to his Chronicles of the High Inquest, and because people shouldn't be snobbish about well-written space-opera. Great stuff.

TOM A. JONES

FIRST NON-FICTION. THE WIZARDS OF Annapoison (Simon & Schuster) by Frank Kepner, the history of military operational research and systems in the USA related to nuclear weapons. A fascinating counterpart book, told in an interesting and, on the whole, unbiased way. The characters are human with all their foibles in this period, and the author, Robert J. Service, is to be congratulated on this this topic without having to rely on newspapers, OD tracts or government handouts.

The Powers' The Ambles Gates (Chatto) is a time travel romp which mixes together Egyptian magic, military figures and the 19th century denizens of London's beggars' row to produce a novel. Elsewhere read anything like it since Delaney and Delany at their best. The book isn't without faults, for instance the sex is occasionally stutters, but it's only a minor distraction. Keep a lookout out for Tim Powers, he's good now and he could be something really special. I didn't think I'd find anything more enjoyable this year than The Ambles Gates, read back last year. Whilst I didn't enjoy it more I do think it's a better book. There's an atmosphere and a pace to the writing which belies Mr. Service's relative inexperience. At a secret US research station the use of a virus allows the resurrection of the dead. One of the scientists' escapes and we follow his attempt to understand himself and his powers, to make sense of the strange world in which he finds himself. And mixed into this tale of scientific missiles we have the old voodoo religion and its gods. The book captures the strange world of the voodoo sphere of that dying landscape which is the swampland and bayous of the southeast USA.

From two new writers to an established one, Brian Aldiss. I'm never sure if
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1985 was a remarkable year. In any other year I would have been happy to include within my selections of my favorite books of the year: Night Voices by Robert Ackroyd, The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende, Bellholman Mystery by Brian Aldiss, Illywhacker by Peter Carey, The Book of Being by Ian Watson, The Anubis Gates by Tiptree, a splendid children's novel, Mikel & Jean, and The Secret War by Golds, and I may not have found them in a book of the year, but instead chose them because so vividly do they stand out in my memory.

The book of the year has to be Hawkmoor (Hamish Hamilton) by Peter Ackroyd, a strange and haunting tale of resonances that cross time. The character, in particular, of Nicholas Yeat, whose personality finds expression in the churches built by the real Nicholas Hawksmoor, is one of the most powerful in contemporary fiction; and the writing, especially the successful pastiche of 18th-century literary style, is almost flawless. Hawksmoor is one of those books where the mainstream takes to itself the tropes and symbols of SF; safely within the SF realm however is Kettengold (Gollancz) by Keith Roberts. All the familiar Roberts obsessions are here, the church-ridden state of the world, the strange minds at the end of their tether, and the fate of ordinary people caught on the fringes of events. It is familiar ground, and achieving the same power as Pavane and The Chalk Giants.

Roberts is one of the finest writers in British SF, but perhaps an even greater stylist is N. John Harrison, and his new collection, Viriconium Nights (Granada), reveals him at his best. Not dark, disturbing, yet full of color (though it may be faded or sickly), and full of life (though on the brink of death). This is a book.

Allen & Unwin, now that they have discovered that fantasy is not just Tolkien, have recently established an impressively record for introducing new writers. I'm on the heels of Cyneth Jones comes the first novel from Geoff Ryman, The War for Caradura (Allen & Unwin). It is flawed, perhaps overly violent, and the plot advances in a rush, but there is undeniable, a real talent at work here. And finally Free Live Free (Gollancz) by Gene Wolfe, just to prove that there is life after the New Sun, and pretty impressive work. For both authors, a real talent that is by turns touching and very funny.

HELEN MCBAIN

I STILL HAVE TO START READING BOOKS IN THE YEAR in which they are first published.

because again I haven't read many of the possible 'best books'. However, of the ones I have read, two nominate themselves: The War for Caradura (Allen & Unwin) by Geoff Ryman is a gripping, vividly imaginative book full of enough ideas to fill four volumes; the other is Divine Endurance (Allen & Unwin) by Cyneth Jones. Both are hard work, and I'm using at the time of finishing it, a sitting. Divine Endurance was written with such clarity that even though I finished it in a sitting, Divine Endurance had stayed with me like a living person. I met a few months ago. Both these books are original creations, different enough to call attention to themselves and good enough to stand stern scrutiny and bounce back smiling. Of the rest I thought volume One of the Pionavvar Tapestry by Guy Gavriel Kay, called The Summer Tree (Allen & Unwin), promising. I'm looking forward to the next book and just hope he can sustain and develop it into something more than just another fantasy trilogy. In the to-be-real pile is Hawkmoor by Peter Ackroyd which sounds hopeful. Of the books I've read many were entertaining, many were competent, some were dreadful, but very few, depressingly few, were outstanding. It does make wonder whether I'm reading the wrong books.

MARTIN TAYLOR

1985 was not a particularly memorable year for new novels. For me two 'alternate' histories and one 'alternate' present stand out. Joseph Bell's God Known (Black Sun) is a bravura improvisation on some of the things that historically happened, and an autobiography of David which is deeply flawed but, in its bull, balls and bluster, has a special quality. At the other end of the scale is Mar's Lighthouse in the Tinstar line of variously eccentric works. J.G. Ballard's Empire Of The Sun (Granada) is entirely different, as corrosive and unsettling as ever with all the Ballardian tropes but allied to a linear narrative and a scarily accurate psychological study. The child's point of view, called Ballard, that is. A very important novel. Mr. Golding meets Mr. Ballard. My opinion is that Christopher Priest may well join such elevated company, and The Glamour (Acena) is a long step on from his previous work. This too has an atypical and strong narrative strand and, like Empire Of The Sun is much easier read than his previous novels. The language particularly appeals to me as being utterly appropriate to his visually-oriented characters, a literary technique all too often ignored in this age of visualisation. Both Ballard and Priest have been known for providing hard reading, as had Ian Watson. His The Book Of What (Gollancz) finally took his trilogy up its metaphysical/metaphorical orifice, as expected, and rekindled the vigor and entertainment of its predecessors.

Watson writes fractal equations, recursive but beautiful and interesting. Two writers have come to my attention this year, much in my pleasure. Tim Powers' The Anubis Gates (chato) is an original and fascinating novel, but it's not the irreverent blend of literary jive and magic grinds and entertains, and the narrative galleons along. Denis John and the Secret War by Golds, and a Maggot by John Rowes. As it is, however, the books I consider the 'best of the year' are those chosen this time, as so vividly do they stand out in my memory.

SIR TSERHON

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN FIVE BOOKS WORTHY OF SELECTION this year. There are some that I have, I haven't read them, and probably won't for another couple of years. SF is dead.

Excellent books of the year are The Warrior Who Carried Life (Allen & Unwin), Geoff Ryman, The Dragon Waiting, John M. Ford, and The Final Judge by J.G. Ford. These are respectively a literary fantasy, a popular alternate history, and an original Star Trek novelisation. Only the last is really SF, and we all know that we are supposed to despise anything to do with Star Trek, for God's sake.

The Book of the Year which is closest to my heart, and which damn well ought to be in here as an Excellent book, but isn't, ia From The Frontiers Of The Female Mind (now generally referred to as either Despatches or The Book with the Red Letter Title). The Women's Press series of women's SF strikes me as being the most exciting development in SF publishing for years. Support British Women's SF! Yay, yay! So what do we get? We get reprints. We get American reprints. We get some very good fantasy and ONE not-wonderful British SF original novel. And Despatches. This is 17 girls. Support this or nothing. And please, PLEASE, will you for crying out loud get writing? Maureen, Ros, Sarah, Margaret, Mary, et al. This is your chance, you. I guess it means me as well, though God knows there are better writers than me around, but I promise to try.
GALAPAGOS - Kurt Vonnegut
[Capo, 1985, 268pp., $20.95]
Reviewed by Collin Greenlaw

THE THING IS, KURT VONNEGUT HAS WRITTEN another novel. Things go
Begin it like this:
the thing was:
One million years ago, back in A.D.
1986, Galapagyi, the chief seaport of
the little South American democracy of
Broucer, whose capital was Quito, high
in the Andes Mountains.
It ends like this:
"You'll learn," he said. "You'll learn."

In between, the human race dies out, and
all but two handfuls, ten survivors, shipwreck-ed on the Galapagos Island
of Santa Isabel. These are the survivors: six
little cannibals from Broucer, all girls; a
pregnant Japanese and her female lover; an
elderly biology mistress; and one man, the
ship's captain, who is so authoritarian and
incompetent that only the biology mistress
can hide hiscompany.
Two ill-packed handfuls, you might
think. Or, you might think, two well-packed
handfuls, translated into a novel, and
then, if anyone, and what they picked them for, if
anything.

"It's a poetry."

The thing is this:
Kurt Vonnegut picked them.

He picked them.
He picked them from his new novel,
which is a new fiction novel. Like all
good science fiction novels, it happens in
the future, next year, as he wrote it, this
year, you had this a million years
ago, so the story goes. Like all
good science fiction novels, it's about
science, about Darwin's evolution, and
a seal. All the rest takes a million years to prove, in the
Galapagos, which is where he first
thought of it. Like all good science fiction novels, it's about what it takes to be
human:

Listen: this is what it takes to be human.

Not much.

It doesn't take much more to be human than to drive a car. After all, the
civilization and religion, dentistry and
cocktails and science fiction novels and
Dresden and Vietnam, all that is done and
begun decades before your time. It's all
early. There was a time, a long ago, so
large they kept it from grasping. It
might even use those units to fight with, they were so over-developed.

The Irish elk survived for two and a
half million years.

So it goes.

Kurt Vonnegut hasn't yet survived for two and a half million years. He only
feels as if he has. It's as much as he can do to raise a wheezing chirp. It's as much as he
can do to raise an eyebrow. That's the
weight of that big brain, drawing his
down, dragging his head down, it's better off as a seal.

Instead, he has to be a novelist.

Being a novelist is a stupid,
unnecessary, superfluous thing to be. Look
at Kilgore Trout. You can be right about
everything, civilization and Dresden and
the meaning of evolution, right all the way
down, fifteen million years and more, but
it doesn't matter a damn. You get
ignored. Or else you get rich, and
publish and publish and publish and
teach on college courses. Either way, it
doesn't help. Every word you write excites
the English professor, which just adds to the
mass. What happens is, you accidentally
evolve Douglas Adams, Douglas Adams
accidentally evolves people who carry
towels everywhere and have arguments with
hotel managers. Old hippies with new

hairstyles sneer at your latest books.
And then your editor rings you up and
says, "Hi, Kurt, how about another novel?"

What do you do?

This is what you do:
You make up a stupid story, because stories are stupid things.
You make up people who are stupid and
warm and wonderful and seem and
mean and only really there half the time. Then you
force them through stupid, delightful,
heartbreaking routines, because that's how people
act and anyway they've got people
just things you made up. Then, just in case
anybody should get too carried away with your
stupid story which really isn't worth
anything, you break it all into little
bits. You put bits from the end at the
beginning, so nobody will ever notice.
You put bits from the beginning at the end, so everybody
likes to have something to look forward
You put in lots of big questions and
little answers, to keep everyone comfortably on
edge. You put in some jokes and some
tsarcasm, some schmaltz and some sarcastic
and snidest of poetry, until it looks like
the Reader's Digest Book of Atrocities.

Norman Mailer, 'A查看', "Melvin and the Stпуск", which is more
important? Who can tell any more?

The thing is: you do it just the
way God does it, like a bad science fiction
writer. You put this in common with God
too. Whatever you do, they'll misunderstand
it.

Thomas M. Disch, another master of
haute cuisine sweet and sour science
fiction, will say this:

"Vonnegut's genius is for satire on
the basics of human lines... He is a
master debunker, a superb nonologist, an
ingenious farceur, and has a quick and
wicked tongue. In short, he is the
cookery of Kurt Vonnegut, and that is
good for his own. A foxy novelist.

""The Irish elk," says Thomas Disch, "will never let himself
be caught by the hounds of criticism."

John Sutherland is a master of hounds,
an English professor working in America.

This is what he will say:

"At the heart of Galapagos is an
exhausted misanthropy trying unsuccessfUlly
the change its mind."

But Kurt Vonnegut isn't a fox, or a
wolf. He's only too clever to be a real.
He lies on the harsh volcanic beach of the
modern world, in a position of terrible
moral helplessness. He looks up at us with
those soft eyes, that wary smile.

Once in it, you've got to be kind.
You've got to be kind. God damn it.

IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET - H.G. Wells
[Introduction by Brian Aldiss]
[The Hogarth Press, 1985, 248pp., $3.95]
Reviewed by Jim Engledow

OF THE MANY INTERESTING THINGS BRIAN ALDIS has
has to say in his Introduction to In The Days of The Comet, I noted the following:
"Wells wanted to be happy, that most
immodest of ambitions; 'By 1906 Wells was
extremely famous in a way that writers
these days are not... went travelling about
the world, enjoying intercourse of one kind
or another with practically everyone on earth-
even animals... eternally lively and
curious. A natural advocate of free love'
"Wells was essentially rather a simple
man... put forth a rather simple plan for mankind, generally in the
expectation that they would be immediately
accepted... and 'S. Years later, Days of The Comet was not well received when it first
appeared, as frequently happens when visionary books are written. In public, it seems appropriate to
offer a new reading of the novel to a new
set of readers.

Appropriate? Well, almost eighty
years have passed and Halley's comet is now
(as it was then) hurrying near, like Time's
watchman.

It felt strange to be re-reading the
novel for the first time since the distant
days of adolescence, and a rather
boring novel (or novella) greatly
inferior to Wells's best work: the first
half not even remotely science fictional.
In her final analysis, it's a rather
poignant study about the effects upon mankind of
whiffs of comet vapour. Indeed, there are
gassy portions of the text that bring
one to think of the worst H.G. Wells ever wrote. But,
strangely, I liked the book much better on
re-reading.

The first half, set around the turn of
the century, starts off with a detailed
description of the room in which Willis
Saxon, later to be 'visually discovered by the
wallpaper, floorboards, grate, lamp, a table that
behaved with a muriel vindictiveness to any
noise that would thrust its benevolence slightly.

Laidoff tells us how he storms across England
in pursuit of the girl he loves and her
lover. He seems himself to have a variety compatible with our own
in many ways: the same process of
'scalification' goes on, thanks to 'crystal
them', humanity is 'cherished amid its
products' and the world of thought is'
cherished amid its inadequate formulae'.

Then comes the change, miraculously,
at a time of peace on earth and good
will to all men. And, as everyone knows
shone all the time for no apparent reason.
It is not at all clear how humanity is
changed. Wells hints that people have
never before been so close to each other, and
have emotions in fact, they have all
come more like himself - or as would be
impossible. But it seems to be one to
become more like himself, although Wells
generalizes in a few places about the
inherent psychological differences between
men and women in a manner that would
nowadays be viewed as controversial.

After the change, even pig-headed politicians
formerly puffed up with self-importance
and full of 'guarded watchfulness' became more
like himself in being good-hearted and able
to listen to the voice of reason - a highly
improbable circumstance. But Wells had
written on the theme of a better world in A
people in his book, and perhaps he had
become a sort of a death. His
journalism shows itself not only in what he
wrote but in the astounding rate at which he
wrote.

The fact that Wells wanted happiness
and was seldom able to find it, despite all
his considerable talent and sage advice,
suggests that happiness is hard to find.
And if it is hard for a single individual,
how much harder it must be for a
people, in Utopia. Wells's hopes for a
World State and his advocacy of free love
now seem very dated; he was unrealistic
about the former and wrong in the latter.
As to whether or not he was 'rather a simple
person' as Aldiss claims, perhaps the world would be a
better
place if we were all as simple. Wells would have liked many complications of the simple truth to be swept away. He was very open, as Dali once said, until he was needed, and he was child-like in the best sense; as used to describe someone who is humble enough to sit down before the truth.

This book is worth reading and re-reading, which makes of my vision of Utopia or any special brilliancy of the prose, but because of his account of the time at which he wrote, of the ideas that he had when he wrote, and of the reason why he was so child-like, and because of who Wells was. A few years ago, someone bought me a copy of The Goon Show Scripts. I never read it. But then, I was never much of a fan. I am a hitcher-fan, and know all twelve episodes of the radio serial nearly by heart. Wells adds his name to a brilliant idea. Constantly while re-encountering well-loved cosmic guns I was forced to notice that the comedy lies as much in the performance as in the words on the page - and that Douglas Adams was correct, in writing the novels, to compile the scripts.

Apart from this negative reaction, it was interesting to see the out-takes, at least on one point of view of Wells which had been incomprehensible to me before. But the real value of this book lies in the collection of the ideas, scripts and performances. It is interesting also to learn that a sperm whale is suddenly called into existence only to splatter on the surface of an alien planet a few moments later as a direct reaction to the thoughtlessly killing-off of minor characters in more stereotyped media fiction; that John Lloyd was responsible for such words as ‘anacconia’, ‘nigil’ and ‘prehensile’; and that Douglas Adams is responsible for sound effects directions which actually appear to be more innovative than the effects called for. However, as each story has explanatory rare rarely exceeds one page of type for each episode, £4.99 seems rather too a lot for a dozen or so anecdotes plus a hundred pages of printed words; most of us have by heart already.

To return to The Goon Show Scripts, it was bad enough that everyone who didn’t know me or the goons very well except by reputation, and who thought we might entice each other. I suspect that this is also the market this book is aimed at, and that there is no serious intent behind its publication beyond making money. As ‘Vector’ readers look more for publishing that more capitalism, my only conclusion can be that I ought to stop wasting your time with it.


HARD SF WRITERS ARE CERTAINLY FEELING aggressive nowadays, whether storming the bookshelves with hard-sell attacks on fellow writers who do not happen to share their dogma. Heavily promoted, reputedly sold for a few not adjacent to the cost of a probe, Footfall is to be found in large stacks in Shilton. There are certainly elements of the best-seller in its execution: fat, replete with sufficient characters to need a proper careers, societie and seriously encourage those of limited concentration; and centrally concerned with an interrelated group of wild-to-do preppie females, which gives it the sort of manipulate-face-like quality that cannot harm sales at all.

As for the hard-sell writers: since the Earth is menaced by an alien invasion, whom else would the general in charge of defending the ground accept but not realize? And the disappearance of a single writer: ‘Well, not all of them. The ones who make up their own sciences are being interviewed on average every three days, and the one who stick to real science are getting hard to find’. (p.81)

This is, of course, notoriously lacking in scientists capable of thinking beyond the surface of the planet. Not that any stuffy old scientist stands a chance against the charismas of these guys:

Robert A. Heinlein learned forward again and again everyone fell silent. I’ve seen generals get less respect than that. (Sergeant) Smiley thought.

(TRY adding a surname to the superstar if you want identification. Other skiffy titans, I think, include Alan Enderby, Safferty, Isler and even Pournelle. A few jokes for the cognoscenti: shucks, you shouldn’t have bothered.)

Such a plot, that at one stage their boss orders his assistant to offer them hot coffee and hotter (presumably) whores in return for quick results. Fortunately we are spared the sight of preppie Jenny pumming for the Pentagon, and what her secret policeman’s mind would considerizable use as an SF women’s writer (my fule nose women SF writers use-made-up science, chis). After all these are mere sex ploys.

Our authors are, of course, also pure SF writers. As such they can devastate you with scientific facts. An alien invasion causes Kansas to be destroyed by the majority of American and Russian atomic missiles. Now, you, I and the Average Man reader might consider this unimaginable. Torpedo of bombs to be somewhat detrimental to the health of whole areas of the United States, to unknown to what extent. Even to the world of radiation, and sufficient to turn Kansas into a 15-year no-go area. But within a week up turns Jenny, watching bands of refugees that has no other choice. It is difficult because her only protection is her gas mask. Without even that, she seems too functionable to do enough, though it’s all dreadfully jobsy.

This, to a layman, cavalier attitude extends to the point to camped in a bomb shelter a short distance from a naval base. Now, a mere twenty megaton bomb destroys everything within a twelve-mile radius and is dangerous within a massively bigger range. As Dresden proved, under conventional attack, bomb shelters may make it worse in a firestorm area. Yet the navy judge a five-mile area safe and plan the shelter to be used for two hours only. What they mean power by more than a thousand nuclear warheads which are let off in clusters to provide thrust. On the same, laymen may decide that, like Jules Verne’s cannon, the force of gravity would tend to make not only the mission, but also its participants float, as Jules Verne and Jules Verne know better. Naturally it saves the Earth.

But what is it really about?

Well, we might as well use the arguability as the basis for a look at the concepts. Wells has apparently quoted a long list of all the aliens that are known in science fiction. (p.284) is to act dramatically before America becomes a third-world country itself. Not that America would want that: the alien term ‘8mouths’, for the enemy and everybody knows America doesn’t give in to ‘8mouths’, ‘snouts’, ‘tongues’, even.“

Not all America is blameless, however. An environmentalist nearly choked on his crow pie when the aliens invaded:

‘I was trying to stop atomic plants. I should have been able to stop atomic plants to power laser rockets. I tried to stop the Space Shuttle, damn me for a fool. They’ve smashed every environment on Earth.’ He should have known there would be fire on the earth, pile bodies in pyramids. We can live anywhere! We’ll hide in the desert and mountain peaks and the Arctic ice cap, and one day we’ll come forth to kill you all’ (p.325)

However, even in this they make one unreasonable proposition - it is implied that the members of this civilization cannot lie. Since lying is inapplicable from the imaginative construction necessary for scientific and philosophical progress, this is patronizing. The writer has no doubt to evolve with that kind of blanker on the mind’s eye. However, it is the author’s eye which must remain bolstered and untrained, paring and trowling, upright, two-trunked elephant, wearing red platform shoes. The problem for once would have been to be so utterly hysterical before they hit the ground. And they expect the reader to take this seriously.

If the reader hot from the Land of the Free might just be more inclined to see the Real Point of It All as being the usual propaganda disguised as art. Only the Americans halt an invasion, only they fight back when the white South Africans (God bless us all) are surrendering and finally only they save the world from the menace.

What about the rest of the world? The Russians are the only Europeans worth a mention. There are a couple of good Russians on Earth and they ensure Soviet co-operation in the bombing of Kansas, for example. But why isn’t she shown? She can’t even disappear from the book, as plainly not worth any more attention. There is also a trick among Russians aboard the shipful of captured humans, who, because they are keeping and pretty individualistic, are allowed to be okay guys. Nevertheless, the only country that the Russians’ real effect is the story is an American congressman who is stalwart and takes solo action: one high-class, though not so very much, by any day. (Blue-collar American males get killed off so their women can be redistributed.)

But you would not really expect much from Russian, since the invaders are little better than interstellar Reds anyway:

‘Unity’, Sherry said. ‘They’ll unite us.’

‘Even if it kills us’, Reynolds finished.

Curtis raised a clenched fist and swung off away. ‘And the inter-national-ality unites the hu-man race!’
I let that run on to show you what fine an eloquent speech they're capable of: 'Come forth!', eh? Some inferiors might have contented themselves with 'strike back' or even 'return' - not theatrical.

The environmentalist does get to do something for this individualistic society through his individualistic nature. The environmentalist is the journalist, who is poking his nose into military secrets. The people may be free but the times are economically speaking, servile. The environmentalist does make much difference that the country is in such a state that newspaper phones all the time, and the environmentalist's boasted Pulitzer Prize, no, he just has to go.

That sort of inconsistency is endemic to the book. The authors may have thought through some effects of the aliens, but when they drop a meteor on Earth, the 'Fool' (as in stamps of the title, also described as a 'dinosaur-killer', the effect is only to trigger off bursts of rhetoric, such as that of the environmentalist quoted above. The Chironic Navy seaport, for example, seems to have had no other in one extra high tide. Clearly Rumsby, that is the environmentalist's story, and some characters have little interest for our authors, so they're being used as symbols. The story has been set up technically (countdowns, etc.) to be exciting and this mostly works. However, the writing is bombastic and even slack at times, even the prepared biolody and the ostensibly perfect physics are as reliable as being a 'real' character and can be confusing by comparison, but by comparison, the works of Jacky Collins are well researched and mystically brilliant.

SCIENCE FICTION: THE 100 BEST NOVELS -
David Pringle [Pantheon 1995, 234pp, £9.95 hardback, £3.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Eberard James

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE ALL COME ACROSS someone who's said 'I've just read Childhood's End' - how can I find out what other SF is worth reading?' We could have suggested A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction, but it was too American, too academic, too anachronistic, and mostly critical. Now at last we have a book that beginners in SF will find immensely useful - and old hands will enjoy as well.

In Foundation 30 (March 1984), David Pringle reviewed Anthony Burgess's Nineteen-Eighty-
and really rather pointless. None of us, top of his head, a list of his 99 'best' SF novels, saying 'Please don't take it seriously (but if any publisher wants to pay me to write a page of notes on each of these titles and publish it as an instant book, I'd be happy to oblige!'. Well, here it is, and the 100 best bear a very close resemblance to that imprint: 99 that he's only dropped thirteen, by those such as Vance, Tiptree, McIntyre, Kavan, Compton. In one case he explains: 'I re-read Anderson's Brain Wave and discovered just how ill-written and patchy it is' (p.121).

By a simple mathematical calculation, we can see that he's added fourteen new titles: some of these include substitutions of other authors, e.g. 'Dream Master and not This Immortal; Move not The Einstein Intersection.' He admits the book is in part a personal wish-list, because he especially liked them, but for the sake of balance and variety.

We'll see if this list is any better than this is fairly easy. There's the inclusion of the odd item, or the omission of another, that will annoy some. But hole-picking is rash and really rather pointless. None of us, after all, can have read everything (I confess to having read only 85 of these 100) and few of us have David Pringle's great knowledge of the field and almost puritanical pursuit of the Good. It's a personal choice, of course, but I would not be too sure of his claim that I have been wholly uninfluenced by the critical consensus on modern SF. Thus, the most influential, best known, authors are Dick (six times) Ballard (4), and Aldiss, Diitch and yes, Heinlein (3 each). (I certainly wouldn't have chosen Brian Stablefield - Will Allen; Travel, among the latter, Pringle clearly would have liked.) And it is nice to see the appearance of some that moved Pringle to tears when he first read them in his teens, and of some less predictable choices: Leiber's The Wunderer, Crowley's Bridge of Time, Priest's Inverted World or Hiven and Pourneille's Oath of Neatly.

The actual list, of course, is much more important than what Pringle does support or reject. The books are arranged in chronological order. Each has two pages of comment and criticism, followed by brief bibliographical details. A hundred book reviews, then, but each review is approached and treated in a different way. The author then comments (from beginning to end) on a topic that is a tedious process. The beginner will learn a lot about the books in question, and about the development of SF over the last 37 years (guided by a short but excellent introduction); the seasoned reader will be informed by Pringle's perceptive criticism and, like me, impelled by waves of nostalgia to go back to fondly-remembered books.

SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE IN BRITAIN 1890-1950 -
Brian Stablefield [Fourth Estate, 372pp, £9.50]
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

WITH SO MANY BOOKS BEING WRITTEN THESE DAYS about SF, I was pleased to find a really enjoyable - and very pleasant - to find one that breaks new ground. Brian Stablefield's subject is clearly important, and the author has dealt (almost) sa knowledgeablely with G.K. Wells, virtually nothing of any consequence was written by British SF writers during this period. It is coincidental that another very fine work on British SF, Dakin's Victorian Science Fiction, in the UK, the Discourses of Knowledge and Power, G.K. Hall, 1983, complements the present volume with very little overlap.

Stablefield defines scientific romance as that separate tradition of SF which grew up in Britain and remained separate, owing nothing to the US tradition of pulp magazines. While Wells is far and away its best known practitioner, it is a sub-genre full of good, interesting writers, most of whom have been unjustly ignored for decades, and some of whom are unknown even to his admirers.

Among the more major writers with whom Stablefield deals are M.P. Shiel, Arthur Conan Doyle, Olaf Stapledon, and G.K. Chesterton, with particular coverage of biography, critical analysis, relevant plot summaries and their relevance to the development of the genre. Historically, though, the similar sections on (or briefest references to) lesser writers are more valuable because they are largely the result of original research. Stablefield has corresponded with the author (in the case of John Glogo) or obtained letters and unpublished manuscripts (from the families of S.Powell Wright and Neil Bell) or has otherwise broken new ground, uncovering links and trends never previously noted. For example, at least ten writers of scientific romance had fathers who were clergyman, and who rebelled against the ecclesiastical influence to become, if not a too large a number to be coincidental, and indicative both of the declining faith of the times and of the inherent iconoclastic nature of the field of literature to which they were drawn.

OBITUARY

L. RON HUBBARD
1911-1986

MANY SF WRITERS HAVE created new religions in their fantasy. Only one did so in reality.

L. Ron Hubbard, whose book Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health (1950) led to the founding of the church of Scientology, died in California on Friday 24th of January, of a brain haemorrhage. He was 74.

Hubbard was not one of the great names of SF and fantasy, but he was a significant writer in the 1940s, with stories published mainly in Unknown and Astounding. Much of his work, anticipating his later psychological and religious teaching, was about mental development, leading to superhumans.

He wrote no SF from c.1950 to 1984, when his epic Battlefield Earth was published. Like some other aging SF writers, his earlier talent appeared to have dissipated, and the book was consistently panned by the critics.

Nevertheless, to quote Edward James (Vector 122), in the founding of Scientology L. Ron Hubbard was "the SF writer who has had more impact on the non-SF world than perhaps any other."
The book is not one of unmixed or unmitigated good fortune. Clearly, Robinson would not have written about these authors all had he not admired some of their work and been interested in the subject that they developed. He does not advance as part of their fiction, but, in the grand tradition of his fearless book raps, he raps the truth. Thus, he refers to George Griffith as 'inexplicable', as a writer who only achieved greatness after a long and hard road. He raps the truth about Griffith's Revolution because he was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. His story 'The Storyteller' was published in 1913, and there are sections in all his books that are awkward to the point of risible. On the other hand, he puts forward strong arguments for the upgrading (to the status of important writers) of M.R. Shiel and S. Ponder Wright. For those 'unknowns' dealt with here are the Muriel Jaeger, Owen Gregory, Penson Ash, and Cohen, B. L. H. and, of course, the comparatively recent development of the SF novel. The subject rarely touched on by any other critical works, and including original commentary on the work of these 4 today and the 2 booklets published between 1924 and 1930. No book is perfect, and this one has some minor faults. There is occasional unevenness in the repetition of information (sometimes within a couple of pages) as if the text had been written in piecemeal sections and not entirely properly. Also, it is difficult to follow the chronological order of events, since the date of publication of mentioned books tends to be given only once and not necessarily at the beginning of the book. Not only is it a scientific book on Britain a rigorous work of scholarship, fully referenced and indexed, but it is interestingly written, as one would expect from an accomplished novelist. It is an excellent book for anybody interested in the history of SF, intelligible to the layman yet academic and informative enough to be useful to the most knowledgeable reader. This is the book I called the 'best criticism of the field of SF this year.'


This is a collection of nine stories from a press who present themselves as 'radical feminist and lesbian publishers'. Initially, I had considerable trouble in finding an understanding of the difficulty of identifying the stories as science fiction, but the difficulty of identifying the stories as science fiction is not the point. The stories are clearly written by women, and their primary concern is the spectrum of possible emotional relations and links between women. The stories are not stereotypes of women, any more than stereotyped exemplars, representatives of the destructive forces of patriarchal dominance. The stories are not intended, and they are not intended to be enjoyed in the way that they are intended, in any great detail, being subordinate to their main purpose, which is the depiction of personal lives, detailing emotional lives, styles and attitudes in a thin sugar-coated of fiction.

One thing that struck me about these stories was how much stronger they seemed in comparison to other fantasy and science fiction I'd read, on similar topics. London Fields, for example, depicts a post-collage collective of women living in a sudden and disintegrating Hackney, who

are threatened by the existence of a small group of survivors. The story is told in the first person. The story concerns itself with the men in the story. The men in the story concern themselves with the women in the story. The women in the story concern themselves with the men in the story. This is the whole purpose in the telling of someone else's story, to her is only a part. Her best explanation of this theory is that she is a woman. In the first, and only, chapter analysing De Sade's three major works, she describes the social, personal and sexual significance of the incidents in De Sade's pornography. There is nothing pornographic or erotic about Black Venus, but it uses the same method: that any everyday act is an expression of something much wider and more general.

This can be seen in a couple of paragraphs from 'Our Lady of the Massacre' (the women have just had to a knife a man holding her):

The gardener, being a good-natured man, we think of him, and didn't, of course, take on the whole world, and himself and himself tickled once too often by the overbear's whip, cannot forbear to laugh but says to me: 'Then you would be better off if you only were a Suézz and cast your fate to the tender mercies of the savage Indian. For this is a hangman's death.'

He gives me his handkerchief with his bit of dinner in it and a tin of cures, which I stowed away in my apron pocket, and with the plantation a clean pair of heels, I can tell you, adding to my list of crimes that most heinous escape from bondage."

In the much more impressionistic Black Venus, the only possible example of De Sade's alienated life, and as an example of what modern life may do to anyone (especially a woman), Carter supposes that Duval engaged in certain activities, and so, for that reason:

'Now, however, after a few shy scenes in the clouds with him, she sometimes asked him to show her where she could get her cards right. If she was going to have to dance naked to earn her keep, anyway, why should she not dance naked for card canes? She could earn enough to keep herself? Eh? Eh?"

But then, the very thought of organizing a new career made her feel like draggling herself around madmen and music halls and so on: what an effort. And how much to ask? She had only the hardest notion of her own value.'

This final allusion to the Marxist interpretation of affairs is not a suggestion that it is the only possible interpretation. Rather, the story denies that it is the economic suppression of women which are repressed, and expands the idea of repression as - Duval escapes it, so by his escape Duval is caught.

Therefore you could say, not so much that Jeanne did not understand the reality of the trouble about her, but that it was a pernicious affront to her. He recited it to her by the hand, and she had to have the poem interpreted to her, and chafed under it because her eloquence denied her language. (She did not understand the eloquence of her language, and the eloquence of the poet of alienation stumbled upon the perfect stranger; theirs was a match made in heaven. In his heart, she must have known this.)

One of the features that completes our
image of Baudelaire is the myth of. If he was to enter into a relationship with anyone, the myth would pass. Consequently, at Jeanne Duval has participated in, experienced herself, and been infected by, so 'Until last, in extreme old age she seeks to the in her life. But if she takes the path of Marilyn Monroe, becoming manipulated to the point where a virtual shells the myth is shown to be fragile, with one entrepreneur being, which is clearly pretty much the protagonist of today. Chriasis would never live like a normal person again, did she realise that?

It is clear that Wilson has read SF and probably pseudo-SF as well; there is mention of a 'no-man's-land' at which any exercise had to be abandoned after the ground had been pelted to a depth of six inches with ice. But the myth of Baudelaire is myth that little to do with pathology, it is the state of mind associated with it, the modern mind that accepts its occurrence in those circumstances. Someone like Baudelaire, vaguely aware of what is about to happen, seems likely to be destroyed in the becoming aware.

Yet this awareness is nothing to be enjoyed from a character's foreshadowed, helped show: a peasant boy going to town meets a sister, as they drink at a river, long after she has become a girl, her mind now a world in itself. It is impossible to tell whether the story makes no sense at all, or it makes no sense at all, it has to be interpreted as if he goes to meet his mind is malleable as well as his sister's.

Angela Carter described her first volume as 'a single-life function - that of provoking unease'. It is one that she has retained in this collection. Her method is universally applicable.

**BIDES BABES** - Snoo Wilson

[Cherry & Witherby, 209pp, £3.95] Reviewed by Nick Norton

**THIS BOOKS EMBRACE** - We must really take notice of these, states that this second novel by Snoo Wilson is viciously hilarious spoof SF. It is a little reminiscent of the Goon Show in its style, and the famous story of the updated Candid with undertones of both Vonnegut Jr and Ballard. The humour, for the most part, is usually strained there was an overdramatisation of sex which implied that you want to be 'wickedly hilarious' you must mention genitalia. I forget which reviewer in the London Review of Books commented on Tom Sharpe's success; he succeeds because he is not unashamed to show the ridiculous qualities of the characters in the sexual act and their antics. Snoo Wilson only achieves this once, with an aroused gust of sex which leads to collision by the female lead, Chriasis. It has its moments, but they are not often, and the philosophy is fairly thin. As a matter of fact, if you do not like SF, you may not want to try this. If you like SF, you may not want to try this. If you want to have an inkling as to what the late space age Britain might be like, you should try this.
Ages - Myths, Romance and Fantasy. These divisions overlap in some areas - Merlin occurring in both Myths and Romance.

Attempts to deal with 'Origins: Castles of the Gods: Castles of the Fairies'. Here are included Merlin and Rowland, the Voice of the Dead, Anger and Jotunheim, the Mabinogion and more. From each, Lee has painted scenes and Day has summarised them in key moments. The choice seems arbitrary.

The same is true of 'The Age of Romance' which Anson C. Cameron, 'The Court of Charlemagne: Siegfried and the Rhine Castles'. Here are the nicholfs of the Round Table and the Holy Grail, Charlemagne's Holy Wars and German folklore (Siegfried and Dietrich).

Finally, 'The age of Fantasy' covers 'Castles in Fairy Tale: Castles in Modern Fantasy'. Here the Orlandoos from Italy and the literature of Portugal, Spain and France are mentioned. Dante's Divine Comedy rates a special paragraph about infernos. Siegfried and Dietrich are the fellows that are encompassed by 'Fantasy'. A passing nod is given to the direction of the 'gothic novel' concluded - Mrs. Radcliffe is never mentioned.

This collection of pictures and stories is an odd mixture. It is difficult to see who the book is aimed at. For art lovers, if you like the style of Alan Lee's delicate paintings then this book may be for you. If it is the stories that interest you, however, I would recommend that you read the originals - there is a bibliography of sources.

FANSIDE - Peter Ackroyd

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT TIME. NOT TIME TRAVEL in any conventional sense, though by the end of the book the two protagonists seem to have escaped from the other side of time, by a mere two and a half centuries; yet a story in which movement from one time to another lies at the core of all that happens. It is also a story of healing, without any ghost.

Perhaps the only way possible of describing the book is to begin with a summary of the plot, though in this intricately crafted and subtly shifting novel that is no easy task.

We start with Nicholas 'Dyer, architect, working under the supervision of Sir Christopher Wren in the early years of the 18th century to build seven new churches in the East End of London. It is a rational age, a time of questioning, of scientific endeavour, and Wren represents his age perfectly. Dyer does not. Orphaned by the plague, he was taken under the wing of Sir Christopher Wren, and his years are thoroughly imbued with an anti-rationalism. Wren is on record as extolling the beauty of the straight line and the circle, but Dyer, when he watches a child fall from the scaffolding of one of his churches, he muses: 'Curved lines look more beautiful than straight ones. Strange creatures: the Amour who builds churches; but there is more to Dyer's churches than meets the eye. Hidden within each a devilish celebration of non-Christian beliefs, and, more importantly, each one is secretly haunted by a shadow - a child and a tramp are his victims.'

There are obvious parallels with the real life of Hawskmorer in the fictional Nicholas Dyer - pupil of Wren, colleague of Vanbrugh, and architect of the churches of Spitalfields, Limehouse, St. George's Wapping, St. Alfreys Greenwhich, St. Mary Woolnoth, and Westminster Abbey (the seventh church, Little St. Hugh Moorfields, does not exist). The difference is that Hawskmorer has committed at least the fact that Dyer disappears before Hawskmorer really got started on his London church building.

There is a Nicholas Hawskmorer in this novel, however, a Scotland Yard detective in contemporary London. He is investigating a series of cases of children and tramps being found close to certain 18th-century churches. But these are not ordinary murders, they are without any apparent motive, and the very best of modern forensic science can find no trace of a weapon.

The echoes between Hawskmorer and Dyer are obvious, and at times laboured a little too much. Hawskmorer is also a man at odds with the rational world around him. With his colleagues feed details about the crimes into computers and get no results, he uncovers a host of ancient superstitions and beliefs that are the basis of his investigation.

Dyer becomes convinced that his crimes have been detected, a conviction that grows in intensity and leads him to believe that the echoes of the past are coming back to him. He begins to ask questions about their origins and the drells of his world to discover and dispose of his persecutor. Hawskmorer becomes so involved with the crimes and the denizens of the underground that he is forced to face the fear that the past might be reflected in their own lives.

Ackroyd describes with a certain relish the messiness of the world both men inhabit. As with other features of the book - the children's songs that provide a link between the two centuries, the lines of dialogue that crop up in both times - he occasionally overdoes it. One feels occasionally that, powerful as it is, the novel is an incantation and that any emotive if the temporal resonances were not harnessed home quite so vigorously. Yet at the end of the book, Ackroyd's light, and a suggestion, and his characterisation, particularly of Dyer, is most effectively done. When The South Bank Show devoted a programme to the book, Dyer was not impersonated by Shepard as if the part had been created for him, and that hollow-cheeked, wild-eyed look informs the book with a chilling madness.

In his previous novel, The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde, Ackroyd revealed a talent for pastiches which is put to even greater use here. The novel is constructed of alternating chapters set in the 18th and 19th centuries, and for the 18th century sections written in the first person by Dyer. Ackroyd produces an exceptionally convincing model of the literature of the time. Though the pace might be a little faster than Dfoe, for example, might have managed, the spelling and sentence structure are very accurate. Yet the whole thing remains remarkably easy to read, and the 20th-century sections are well integrated into the drama and tension of the whole. This is a remarkable book that I cannot recommend enough to anyone with the slightest interest in what the novel is capable of achieving.


Reith and Naunier's surveyship is crippled in an attack over the planet. Chasch, which is now under the control of the leader, a lad called Trax, and they begin a quest for a planet that will return Rei to Earth. On their way they meet Anarcho, a Diridirian, who eventually provides essential background information.

It is Anarcho who provides Reith with answers to many of the planet's mysteries. The Chasch is inhabited by four alien races, the Diridir, Wankh, three types of Chasch and Anarcho, the fourth. The humans, who are convinced they are part of the biological cycle of the Chasch, are the only ones who can help the humans, and they are slaves to themselves after the alveasamphs. Hence, Anarcho believes himself to be a Diridirian.

In the meantime, while undertaking the search, the search, the search, the search for the village, a man advanced on the chirping girl, the Dorn, who went to press to her mouth. Women serve as useful plot devices and exotic characters, but unlike Trax and Anarcho who are more rounded. The Flower of Cath is the most interesting of the characters, tiring of her to the middle, neatly disposed of her. Rei, he, is the last of the book is a rather amiable, charming, relaxed and untroubled though he's not always perfect, having an occasionally inconsistent and sometimes unreliable nature. Rei, sometimes, appears to be unintentionally implied.

While Chasch is decaying, the people self-destructive "Way" to what Rei finds. Rei encounters the world is richly detailed and occasionally very Victorian. Rei, only two decades, takes place in a swarm of a diabolical and sadistic planet. Pulling himself to the panel, he shook the stabilization switch. Instead of a smooth hand there was hissing and humming, nevertheless the wild, windowless motion gradually was damped. It's wonderfully written nonsense, full of the usual, improbable, bizarre Vancian names.

Planet of Adventure is not as good as the first three Demon Princes books and like most of his series works, some interest seems to have been lost in the writing through the later books..sep separately might strain your patience), but it's still an entertaining read and this edition does have a wonderful cover.

AFTER MIDNIGHT STORIES - Edited by -

Amy Myers (222pp)

R. Chtwynd-Hayes (206pp)

THE GREAT SHIP - Edited by -

Peter Haining (206pp)

(William Kimber, 1985, £7.95 each)

REVISING FOR VICTOR CERTAINLY BROADENS one's horizons. My first three ghost story books. I had a passing flirtation with ghost stories when I was about 15 but I soon returned to my first