WE ARE THE DEAD

L.J. Hurst on 1984 and The Day of the Triffids
plus Readers Letters and Book Reviews
EDITORIAL
David V. Barrett

READERS' LETTERS

WE ARE THE DEAD
L.J. Hurst on 1984 and Day of the Triffids

ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND
Paul Kincaid on Geoffrey Household

ORBITER
Views on Orbiter, edited by Sue Thomason
plus Market Information

BOOKS
Reviews edited by Paul Kincaid

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I recently read a book by a well-known science fiction (SF) writer, and I was struck by the high level of technical detail in the story. The author had obviously done extensive research, creating a world that feels both plausible and exciting. This is a great example of how science fiction can be used to explore complex ideas and concepts in a way that is engaging and accessible to readers.

However, I also noticed that the story relied heavily on technical jargon and scientific language, which might be off-putting to some readers. This is something that writers of science fiction need to balance carefully, as the scientific accuracy is important, but it shouldn’t dominate the story too much.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in science fiction, particularly those who enjoy detailed world-building and intricate plotting. It’s a great read that manages to combine the best of both science and storytelling.

David V Barrett

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an "ideal, internalized SF model" (my emphasis). Internal to what? The SF field as a whole, or the particular reviewer/reader? What I think Colin was saying was that all reviewing is of necessity subjective and that the reviewer/reader must make his piece as dispassionate, and hence useful to others, as possible. The professional reviewer, that is — the fun part of Vector or FI can be the larger allowance they make. Some pieces quite set the reader of those magazines, aware/Until the day all book reviews are composed by computers they will contain some subjective slant, however slight. I disagree with Colin here. Anyone who thinks that computers can’t write book reviews has never seen that which passes for a literary page in the Daily Mail.)

Then Colin wrote "the difference between reviewing and criticism." This is not a distinction that Colin drew, although I think it is one that I have vaguely noted before and always it has been to the detriment of the "Review." Reviews are journalism and ephemeral, criticism comes in enduring hardback. I find that much of what passes as "criticism" does in fact belie the word. It achieves little assessment and too much turgid exposition. The review has its faults, as illustrated by Colin, but because of that journalistic streak it has to it, its brevity and its attention-grabbing approach means that it is much more up-front with the ideas and the opinions. A long work of criticism may boil down to precious few of these.

CHRIS DAILY
23 Clevedon Road
London SE20 7QO

CI CHAVIN (V131) SAYS THAT JOANNA RUSSELL WROTE BETTER THAN ANNE McAFFREY, which may well be true from a critical literary point of view, but it is really relevant from a practical point of view, where I, and many others, quite a struggle to wade through and we don’t really learn that much from these passages. This may not be a literary flaw but it certainly is from a reviewer’s angle.

You refer in your editorial to ‘borderline SF... where it sometimes approaches literature.’ Surely SF does not need to be borderline to be literature. Admittedly, much "mainstream" or "hard" SF as Shaw or Ashim is hardly literature at its best, but some of Dick or Priest’s work must count without really being borderline as well.

As for Ken Lake’s suggested book on “99 best SF novels” I would like to see something Somewhere between David Friggle’s book and Steven King’s Danse Macabre, i.e. a detailed, readable analysis of the science fiction (and fantasy?) or is it too broad? Plural based roughly 99 best novels with the discussed films and only went into depth on about ten books (one of which — Ellison’s Strange Wine — is a collection).

I really must protest strongly about V131. Of a mere 20 pages, a quarter (pp 9-19 inclusive) are devoted to a rock group. How can anyone justify this utter waste of space, especially when it makes a mockery of the editorial statement (p 2) that ‘Vector is mainly about written SF.

Much worse than this and my subscription will certainly cease. I see we are threatened with an increase anyway, despite the fact that just well-funded professionally performed publicity campaign would quadruple membership and give the BSFA an additional £20,000 — plus a year to use for good magazines and better functions. Really, this "mall in beautiful" can only be killed off, or we’d well away and disappear into Dave Langford’s grammatically erroneous Twi-Du.

KEN LAKE
115 Karkhouse Avenue
London E17 8AY

I WAS SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED TO SEE DAVID WINGROVE’S ARTICLE ON YES IN V131, simply because I never expected to see a piece on a rock group in Vector. Perhaps the magazine has become a little staid and conservative, where is Joseph Nicholas these days?

I was able to follow Wingrove’s argument fairly closely. But I’m not sure how seriously to take the lyrical content in Yes, since Jon Anderson said in an interview that the words were chosen for their sound rather than their meaning — so perhaps it is the music, since music is the expression of emotion without information, and anyway Anderson has the most unique and wonderful voice that I don’t care what he sings.

I wonder if there might be some other connection between SF and Yes, rather than the rather banal and trival one suggested by their lyrics, particularly since so many SF readers I know are fond of Yes, and they are also very artistic — indeed, two or three fanzine titles have been inspired by their music. I think the significant connection is in the type of emotion often expressed or provoked in both, the transcendental experience, the experience of consciousness. Yes, as Wingrove notes, is so affirmative that I experience a sort of artificially induced state of enlightenment while listening to their music, which I can’t this with most other rock groups. Perhaps Colin MacKinnon and Alasdair Gray or Chris Priest might be appropriate in yes’s case, whilst McCaffrey compares with Bob Shaw, and possibly some of Piers Anthony, or more relevant perhaps, with Edna O’Brien (not just because of “Stick in Snow” but the Crystal Shagger as well.

One advantage McCaffrey has over Yes is in readability, and that is a thing that is often neglected, unfortunately. Russ in some way quite a struggle to wade through and we don’t really learn that much from these passages. This may not be a literary flaw but it certainly is from a reviewer’s angle.

You refer in your editorial to ‘borderline SF... where it sometimes approaches literature.’ Surely SF does not need to be borderline to be literature. Admittedly, much "mainstream" or "hard" SF as Shaw or Ashim is hardly literature at its best, but some of Dick or Priest’s work must count without really being borderline as well.

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KEN LAKE
115 Karkhouse Avenue
London E17 8AY

THE PRESENCE OF DAVID WINGROVE’S PRETENTIOUS AND FROLICKING ARTICLE "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY" IN V131 WIPED AWAY THE LAST THOUGHTS I HAD ABOUT REWADING MY SUBSCRIPTION TO THE BSFA. IF Vector is going to become a showcase for retrogressive rock music fans than it can do so without my participation and without my new sets quid a year. With Math in the diurnal state it is and Vector reduced to printing any old trash that comes along, I’d say it was high time to abandon the BSFA. As it is, the only worthwhile thing coming out of the BSFA is Paperwork Inferno, and I can get that, according to the cover, for 15p an issue... So goodbye...

RICHARD G. HARRISON
9 East Garforth
Leeds LS25 2LG

You’ll see from this mailing that Matrix has a new editor and a new look, as part of the ‘quality relaunch’ of the BSFA’s magazine and services; I’m hoping that this can be greatly improved. Ken and Nigel would appear to be in the minority over Dave’s article on Yes, but I can’t hope to please everybody with every article — or even with every issue. I asked you to send back this piece because I think that magazine articles, except for commissioned; I would love to receive more unsolicited articles, but I assure you that I won’t be printing any old trash that comes along. Occasionally, Vector has been 24pp since issue 132 — but look, Ken, if you want quality and if you want size, you’re going to have to pay for it. We would like bigger and better magazine, we
WE ARE THE DEAD

DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS and NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

by L. J. Hurst

Although it was his commercially most successful novel (or perhaps because of it), John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids has often been treated as a horror story devoid of ideas rather than an S.F. novel full of ideas. This has meant that some major themes in it have been ignored, despite the fact that they are shared with George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. The main theme that is never discussed by critics of either book is quite simply, permanent horror. Perhaps it is because people hate contemplating that possibility that they do not discuss it, but both Nineteen Eighty-Four and Day of the Triffids are about an eternity of irrecoverable pain. The only way of escaping it is not to have it start. Furthermore, the two authors are not religious. Their eternity of pain is on this physical earth.

The purpose of both novels is to account for the perpetual hurt and both cities are ironic references to their double treatment of time. The novels are about immediate suffering but they premise this going on forever. Winston Smith cannot know that the year is 1949; the day of the Triffids will last till the end of the Earth.

If we walk arrived at the state of Nineteen Eighty-Four it would never change back; any part of it could be represented by a boot stamping on a face forever. Nineteen Eighty-Four and Day of the Triffids place the cause of the catastrophe in their own time, and give it totally different forms, but after their catastrophes everyone ever born must experience the same misery: its causes will never fade away, and the nature of the catastrophe means things could never improve. Anyone in the year 1940 or after it, like Winston Smith, his lover Julia, his friend Ampleforth, or any of the nameless victims, would know they were in a world of inscapeable, unending misery. Similarly, anyone living, even on the triffid-free Isle of Wight to which the hero's party escapes at the end of Day of the Triffids, after the blindness, would be in the same state as their descendants. There can be no recovery, the disaster stops it. It is this dead stop, and the anguish with which it is presented, that distinguishes the two novels from others with which they are sometimes compared.

In Brave New World, for instance, the inhabitants do not question the social stratification that sends the eugenic semi-norms to die of radiation sickness, because they are all bred to accept the status quo. Genetics means the people could not not like it. Or compare Wyndham with George Stewart's reversion to nature, post disaster, Earth Abides. Stewart observes his reversion to barbarism simply. In the author's eyes the catastrophe does not negate the values of civilization, he simply records its passing. There are regular references to cyclic events in nature and human life - only "earth abides". James Blish, at least, when he adopted Spenglerism gave the race millenia in which to cycle. Earth Abides is a copy novel, everyone in it feels all right, and it is that consciousness which distinguishes it from works such as Day of the Triffids.

The word "cosy" appears here because either it or synonymous of it have been used by Wyndham's critics to derogue his work. Here are three examples of that criticism, and others, which are not really true: Brian Aldiss - "Day of the Triffids and The Kraken Wakes) were totally devoid of ideas but read smoothly, and thus reached a maximum audience, who enjoyed cozy disasters.

Christopher Priest - "Wyndham is the master of the middle-class catastrophe; his characters are of the bourgeois, and the books lament the collapse of law and order, the failure of communications, the lusting of snapping precincts and the absence of the daily newspaper."

John Clute - "His protagonists and their women tend to behave with old fashioned decency and courage, rather as though they were involved in the Battle of Britain, a time imaginatively close to him, and to his market..."

...he effectively wrote for a specific English market at a specific point in time - the decade following the Second World War,... he will be remembered mainly for the brief moment in which he expressed English hopes, fears and complacency to a readership that responded with a kindred spirit. Yet during that period, in England and Australia at least, he was probably more read than any other S.F. author. To this day his books regularly appear on school syllabuses in the U.K., in part, perhaps because they are so 'safe'."

The critics feel that the books is devoid of ideas, complacent and ideologically safe and undemanding. The text in question suggests at least three reasons for thinking otherwise.

Firstly, ideas. At one point a professor of sociology lectures the survivors on the pragmatic morality needed for the new, broken world. The body of his speech is given in chapter seven; Bill Masen and Josella Platon, the hero and heroine, discuss their changing standards and offer political interpretations of events, regularly from the first chapter onwards. At least three social theories lie behind the founding of different colonies - the Christians wiped out by the plague, the feudalismaries established by the dictator Torrence, and the final Isle of Wight fortress on which Masen and Playton live out their lives and write their account of events. Ideas clearly are discussed, and their consequences are worked out in the different camps. Wyndham also goes into an analysis of the triffid economy (see below). This is all explicitly done, but there are implicit levels as well, as will be seen later.

Secondly, the concept of law and order, and the need for its maintenance: this just does not appear. The "decent" narrator actually goes around killing people and helping people to kill themselves. Now, suicide, attempted suicide, and aiding a suicide were all offences when Day of the Triffids was published (only aiding now is an offence), but Masen records it without comment.

Of the deaths seen by the narrator (i.e. of whose cause we can be sure), Masen helps three people kill themselves (Doctor Snares, the landlady of the Alamein Arms, and the blind girl from his London party), he does not stop a young man from hurling himself and his (the young man's) wife from their flatblock, and he is also present at a mercy killing in the street. Although he sees the bodies of other people presumably killed by them, he sees only three people killed by triffids (two blind men in a shop front on his London patrol, and a flagwaver in the country). So, ignoring the deaths from uncertain causes, the count is:

by humans, 6

by Triffids, 3

The devastation wrought by the triffids is not so immediate as the hero's failure to display what is normally thought of as bourgeois regard for law. A new law is instigated by the new circumstances, and Day of the Triffids provides a reasonable, if popular and simplified, discussion of pragmatic ethics.
Thirdly, the historical references in the text: there are none that could refer to the Battle of Britain (June – September 1940). The only reference are to Hiroshima, the Ally’s victory over Monty-Germans in October 1942. Montgomerie’s likeness is on the Alamein of Monty-Weissen, and the title of chapter one, “The End Begins”, follows Churchill’s return to politics in 1942. This is the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”, the irony being that Bill Masen’s determination was not diminished, whereas Alamein was the turning point to Allied victory. Wyndham could have written an equally ironic chapterheading in Churchill’s Battle of Britain speech, about so many going so much to so few, ironic because after the Allied victory, we live like blind apart from help to kill themselves but Wyndham did not.

These grounds alone mean that Day of the Triffids is much more complex and richer in texture than the critics have admitted. But the novel also shares its additional attributes, and a common background of some ideas, with Orwell’s portrayal of the threat.

This is the common background: Orwell said that he got the idea of the glove split into three power blocks after the Allies’ Tehran conference in 1944. (This was intelligent guesswork on Orwell’s part, about the expansion of the Eastern bloc, particularly, as the Tehran conference passed only Poland into Soviet orbit after Hitler’s defeat. Day of the Triffids, the background is the same: the Cold war and the isolation of the Soviet Union. According to Bill Masen (and Goldstein’s analysis is similar) there was a need for the nations to be locked into a drive for agricultural, industrial and economic self-sufficiency, even while they all keep a War Economy.

Wyndham extrapolates from this.

The nations, possibly affected by the corruptions of Lyenkaosia, made the experiments that lead to the teratogenesis of the Triffids. The need, as Masen’s narrative makes clear, was for expansion of food production: it was being done by increased yields, reclamation of cropland zones, and new plant types. Yet the outcome of this research was the Triffid, not a better fed world.

The same, in his longest chapter “The Coming of the Triffids” – narrates how the nutrition and military needs of the world’s states meant that all nations stole and used the triffids despite the nine effects of being stung, blinded, killed and naturally, blindness. Economics of triffids became dependent on the flow of triffid oil. At the same time nationalist fears and hatreds and the strategic and tactical planning of the military meant that governments were putting up space weapons that could not be controlled in the final crisis. The triggering of the satellite by a chance sector described in the first pages of Wyndham wrecked the world. There could be no Marshall Aid as there was after 1945. It is never suggested that the Soviets were responsible for the blinding, or that the triffids were developed to be nasty.

Both Orwell and Wyndham saw that it was not the Atomic Bomb that threatened the world necessarily. As the book within the book, “The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism” of Winston Smith, the power blocs threaten everything simply to maintain their integrity, and the means they use to maintain them is with the triffids. In the novels, Eighty-Four is the most credible; in Day of the Triffids it is a consequence. Whatever was written in Brian Ash’s Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, these fantastic radiations have blinded the great majority of humanity, reducing it to the prey of powerful less than thirty years paroxysmally, had originally been far more for human benefit was wrong. There is no paradox; people become prey to the triffids as a necessary consequence of the world that originally farmed them. Bill Masen gives a clear description of how events came about and of the environment that order led to it. It is no good saying that the background is paradoxical. The politics and economics that govern the world are not rational. The two novels are about the logical consequences of irrationality.

Against the analytic background of Day of the Triffids one has to consider the lack of plot and rambling storyline. The notion of heroism is missing. There is the lack of plot, a lack of some ways the opposite is true of Eighty-Four – how the world deteriorated to 1984 is unclear, and Smith’s memory uneventful slavelike – but the novel is tightly plotted, and the turns in the story are based on Orwell’s Leninist extrapolation. In Eighty-Four these are two developments in electronics (the televisor) and in psychology: the Televisor is used to change his memories. We perceive the world physically, and they may also have supplied some of his dreams with the messages and images that lead him to rebel. (In data extrapolations – in genetic engineering and space technology – we now are not to have these dreams.)

The background of both novels requires about the same period of political development – from the 50s to 1984 in Orwell’s case, while it is set no (Masen’s father walked a single man through pre-war London and Moscow less than thirty years old when the meteors strike). Events have not falsified the warning they offer, nor as to year, but to as developments and consequences.

The power blocs exist in their bastard forms now, and the close relationship between destruction and national economy is obvious. The triffids are aware of the cleverness of the human blind and exploit it but the triffids are a product of the world in an armed race. The condition that leads to unconf trolled blindness also leads to the adoption of the triffid economy. Such a system is predicted equally by our own society, so that the governments of the world could be said to be finally identical, just as no one could distinguish between Injuc, Neo-Bolshevism or Oligarchical practices of the three states, Acoenia, Eurasia and Eassia in 1944.

The failure of an opposition to appear is a feature of both novels. Bill Masen, who leads his group to sanctuary, was employed as a triffid botanist by the BBC and did not see. Colin Coker, the former radical agitator, has failed in all his agitation. Orwell thought of calling his novel “The Man in Europe”, but there must be a false way to triffid and not the true to himself, actually enjoying working in the Ministry of Truth on the rewriting of history. Just as Orwell was correct to reject that title, so Wyndham’s original U.S. title, “Revel of the Triffids”, has been rightly replaced. The triffids do not revolt, they revert to their normal condition. Bill Masen sees more people die by human hand than by triffid sting; people are more deadly and more to co-exist than triffs and the triffids were themselves grown for human use.

Eighty-Four is a complicated work that can be read in many ways. It can be read, as William Empson has shown, as an attack on religion, or as a critique of the New Statesman. Orwell’s Travels in its unreal nature. Day of the Triffids can be read as a realistic account of one way of the holocaust but it could be read as an attack on other weapons and material sources: it, too, is not simple in its conception. Both authors have seen that as horrors arrive they have arrived in completeness; the Nazis were first encouraged by Big Business to limit the Left; they then started to control industry; war came of necessity. But even if triffids were unavailing to fight but the destruction was an integral part of the process of. Big Business encouraging Nazi, encouraging war, winning life, the destruction of Europe, the destruction of Nazis. One part reinforces the other. BUT this is not the case but this was the example that both authors had seen at first hand.

From their experience, Orwell and Wyndham wrote thoughts experiments in other possible worlds, the possibility of an evil that broke the circle and ensured its continuity. Orwell said that he had written a parody of a centralized economy made worse by the political intentions of its intellectuals. Looking at “Prophecies of Passion” in any essay, Orwell found many of them in the previous forty years: even in Gulliver’s Travels some of its trends were obvious. As the world develops materially the possibility of its political evolution through triffids will be the one escape: the systems that come about do not allow it: one would be triffid-free long enough to re-establish any level of technology; the party apparatus of 1984 would actually prevent research, so that the technology would be based on munitions. Only the extent of the destruction, though, would have altered: national economies reliant on space weapons and triffids, or nuclear research and exploitation, the destruction of the whole nation] (Parkinson et al). The world, the one possible, only go on so long before they negate themselves. The developed world flips the world that developed it, allowed it to develop, and relied on it. The researcher is consumed, and so are the consumers who normally were consumers.

Eighty-Four includes many more of such traits than Day of the Triffids, and as a traditional novel it is more successful than triffy, but if one wanted a reasonable allegory of the destruction on which the world implicitly relies, Day of the Triffids would provide it. The technology in use has changed but not the underlying motives and uses. These books cannot be written in order: the warning they offer is still relevant; the misery potentially eternal.
CHARLTON IS A TINY OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE WHICH RUNS TO ONE pub and a few dozen stone built cottages. It's so small it doesn't even have its own station; the nearest is two miles away at King's Sutton. Here in England as never-never-land. Green fields roll away towards the horizon, divided by a jagged pattern of hedgerows, a cypress bristles against the skyline. The slender Gothic spire of King's Sutton church rises behind a screen of winter-bare trees. It's an England most of us don't believe exists anymore.

Here, in a thatched cottage that is crying out for a Constable to record it, lives Geoffrey Household. The Geoffrey Household who wrote such archetypal English adventure stories as Rogue Male and A Rough Shoot, all Buchananese heroes and stiff-upper-lipped resources. And the Geoffrey Household whose most recent novel, Arrows of Desire, is a futuristic fantasy set in the year 3,000, 1,000 years after the Age of Destruction, when the Britons of the diaspora resettle here in just such a rural idyll.

It would be tempting to see this setting as the inspiration for the novel. It would be even more tempting to equate the parvenu Brits with the people I encountered in the Rose and Crown, in their sensible tweeds and designer wellingtons. One character talked loudly of the rabbits he "bagged" that morning. The landlord brought from the kitchen a tray of smoked pigeons, which his customers sniffed tentatively, unsure of such a native delicacy. Everyone knew everyone else, and the accents were pure Chelsea. But when I visited Household to talk about his novel it was November, within a few days of his 85th birthday, and we had only been living there for two months. Nevertheless, these types are evident in the novel.

Household is exactly as one might imagine him, still with the bearing and clipped accents of a British army officer, still sprightly and upright from a life devoted to action as to the pen, a life clearly reflected in his more than twenty novels. Yet if one were to imagine a rude jingoism to go with the appearance, one would be disappointed. Arrows of Desire is actually a vigorous satire on the insolarity of the British. "A great many years ago I wrote a form of it as a radio play because I was extremely angry, feeling myself a European, at the fact that we'd turned down, or were about to turn down, membership of the EEC. That was at the bottom of it."

The novel concerns three groups of people. After the Age of Destruction an international Federation has grown up to ensure world peace. The people of Britain alone reacted against this, unwilling to give up their national identity. The result of their disturbances was that they were forcibly removed from the island, which was hence abandoned for several centuries. As the novel opens, the Federation has decided to end the British diaspora, to see if they can live peacefully again in their own land. A small colony is set up in a clearing in the great forest that has now established itself across the South Downs. Hidden in this forest is a community of native Britons who escaped the diaspora and have established their own peaceful way of life, and they serve as ironic observers as the replaced Britons inflate their nationalism once more to the point of violence against the Federation.

Sanoroki, a character in one of Household's earlier novels, A Rough Shoot, says; "I am opposed to all idealism." It seems to me that he is speaking directly for the author in this. Certainly, when I began to read this book I thought that the Federation would prove to be the villains, but they weren't. The nationalistic are the instigators of violence, and are decrying for that. When I observed that he didn't like nationalism, Household was emphatic: "I don't. It can't be avoided."

So what is the way ahead?

"The only hope is for some form of internationalism."

Though the Age of Destruction is never explained during the course of the novel, it clearly represents a nuclear war. "I'd have thought every reading, intelligent person knows what's going to happen if we carry on. Oh, people must accept the danger. Look at Greenpeace, look at all these women sitting around bared wire. All of us. And I think they're just as much afraid in Russia, too."

Geoffrey Household could hardly be described as a left-winger, but this novel is an effective little satire on some of the most cherished tenets of the British right-wing. Something well in keeping with his earlier novels where the villains are almost always fascists, or in some way of the right. Indeed, despite the far future setting, and the clearly didactic purpose, Arrows of Desire sits easily with Household's other novels - a slightly and readable suspense tale.

His effects are created with broad strokes, rarely crude, but without any great delicacy of effect. Only once does he achieve such delicacy, in one haunting and effective scene in which a woman in white holding a child by the hand emerges between two armies to ask for peace. It is an image redolent with Blakean undertones that echo the quotation from Jerusalem which serves as his title.

Other than that, as in all his books, he writes with a vigour and pace that don't allow for much subtlety, but which do keep the reader turning the pages. Characterisation is minimal; he is much more concerned with the roles people play than with the people themselves, but they do serve to make his point. Arrows of Desire is no great work of literature, but satire it is no match for 1984, as a suspense tale it falls a long way short of Householo's own Rogue Male, A Rough Shoot or Watcher in the Shadows. Yet it does have the energy of its author's own commitments, and that's not to be sniffed at.

ARROWS OF DESIRE - Geoffrey Household

(Michael Joseph, 1985, 136 pp., £4.95)
FIRST IMPRESSIONS
by Sharon Hall

I am a coward. That's not good for a writer. It took, if not courage, then a self pep talk before I dared to write to Dorothy. Not only as I new to the BSFA (actually, I've been a member for six months -- but I still don't understand half of what's going on), but I'm new to writing. Was I doing the 'right thing'? I wondered, and what is a postal writers' workshop anyway?

The answer came, without too much delay, on a piece of A4. "The point of the exercise", so the blurb goes "is to present your piece for constructive (not destructive) criticism. It is this which helps to expand a writer." Good.

"Your piece", it turns out, is to be a completed story. Oh, hell. Okay, so I'm a very slow writer, but in one year of scrabbling I'd yet to finish a story I would want to inflict on anyone else. PANIC STATIONS.

A writer's workshop doesn't teach you how to write. It tells you what's wrong with what you've written.

Luckily for me, though not for more anxious souls, Dorothy was easy to write to. I told her I was on hold. And scrabbling at a new frantic rate with one eye on the letter box. To give you an idea of actual time scales, the first reply was dated 9/1/85, the second 16/3/85, the letter from 'my' Orbiter organiser arrived 14/10/85. The folder was on my doorstep on the 16th of April. I opened it with eager trepidation.

Was it what I'd expected?

To a great extent -- yes. There were four stories, quite good ones too, a covering letter on each, and at the back -- the comments -- more on some than on others. (A note here, that in the end I joined an established group that had lost a member. This had obvious advantages -- the others know what they're doing, and disadvantages -- I'm still the new girl.)

So what were those first impressions? The folder made me think. For the first time I read a story, other than my own, as a critic, rather than just as a reader. An experience which will help aid self criticism. It was hard work; destructive criticism would be much easier to write. In short, Orbiter has helped me already, and I haven't had any feedback from my first story yet! Perhaps I'll feel differently when I've read that first set of comments.

One suggestion, which was new to the group, was to leave the comments on each story to circulate a second time around, so that everyone can see what everyone else thought of a particular story. An idea which has won the group's approval, and mine. If we can resist the temptation to comment on comments.

Where might Orbiter fail? I quote: 'An Orbiter group consists of five people. This ensures a good cross section of opinions on your submitted pieces'. By its nature, Orbiter -- and you -- are at the mercy of those five or four people. It is as good as its constituent parts. If you're lucky, it can be very rewarding, if not -- I wonder, if one group doesn't work for you, can you go back on hold and try another? If not, is this a workable idea?

No doubt each group has its own problems -- not least the post office -- and its own rewards. What do I want from Orbiter? A sounding board for some of my stories; honest, friendly criticism; a guaranteed response of SOME kind.

Success or not, I don't know yet -- but I'm hoping.

SECOND THOUGHTS
by Stephen O'Kane

Two and a half years of membership of an Orbiter group have not yielded me any returns in the sense of publication success. Indeed one rogue member of our southern group appears to have lost one of the packages, or at any rate, forgotten to send.

ORBITER

Introduced by
SUE THOMASON

SINCE I TOOK OVER FROM DOROTHY DAVIES, THERE HAS BEEN little publicity about the BSFA's Orbiter postal writers' workshops. Anyone who wants more information about Orbiter after reading the accounts below, or who wants to join a group, should contact me at the address at the end of this article. I am also happy to hear from members of existing Orbiter groups who want to change groups, and get some fresh opinions of their work, or from anyone who has any other problem or query connected with Orbiter. I'm particularly interested in hearing from any operational Orbiter groups who think that they may not be in contact with them -- I'm trying to assemble a complete list of working groups (1 currently know of 9) for BSFA records.

So on. Still, I have on the whole enjoyed being in an Orbiter group. I learnt fairly soon to overcome my fear of being asked to write criticisms of other people's work, for I normally found that I could think of something to say, even in one or two cases, something useful.

I joined originally because I hoped that some friendly, but honest, criticism of my writing, rather than just the useless rejection slip "I regret that we are unable..." might help me to develop some publishable stories. Last time was a bit of a disappointment, but previously I did find the Orbiter comments helpful, even though none of the stories has achieved the amazing feat of getting into print (three have acquired the status of rejects from Interzone. I certainly wouldn't ascribe the failure to lack of guidance from Orbiter.

On the whole, I've found Orbiter worth continuing, and I suppose that over three years one disaster is only to be expected. Save for the stories -- or novel extracts -- being something to do with SF or fantasy, there is no other attempt to organise common themes. Maybe just as well, in view of what can happen at writing workshops.

More information on Orbiter is available from:
Sue Thomason
1 Meyrick Square
Dolgellau
Gwynedd LL40 1LT.

Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your letter for a rapid reply. Please don't send me your manuscripts.
I'll try to answer all letters as quickly as possible, but please remember that I co-ordinate Orbiter in my spare time, and that it usually takes a few weeks to assemble a new Orbiter group.

MARKETS

For SF and related literature

For reasons of space the market listings are necessarily incomplete. We hope to provide further information in later issues.

This information concentrates on British markets as far as possible, and doesn't include either gaming outlets (unless they publish fiction as such) or little press poetry and literary magazines which occasionally publish SF. It does include amateur SF magazines, paying and nonpaying. For more information on little magazines, contact Oriel Books, 53 Charles Street, Cardiff CF1 4ED (they produce an address list of small presses and
little magazines). Also useful: PALPI (Poetry & Little Press Information), the magazine of the Association of Little Presses - subscription $6.00 p.a. from ALP, 89A Petherton Road, London N5 2QT.

This information is collated and updated by Sue Thomson, 1 Hayrick Square, Dolgellau, Gwynedd LL40 1LT from information supplied by SFPA members. If you can add to this list, or update it in any way, I'd be very pleased to hear from you.

Competitions

L. Ron Hubbard's WITIERS OF THE FUTURE contest is still running. Science fiction short stories (under 10,000 words) or novelettes (under 17,000 words) should be submitted typed, double spaced, have a cover sheet with author's name and address and title of work. The MS itself should be titled but not should be headed with the author's name. SAE for return of MS. Cash prizes $1,000, $750, $500 every three months. Contest is open only to authors who have not had professionally published a novel or novelette or more than 100 short stories or one novelette. Entries to Writers of the Future Contest, 2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 343, Santa Monica, CA 90401, USA, or write to: Dowgate, Douglas Road, Tomskilde, Kent. SW9 7TS.

Magazines

AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES -- takes SF and F to 15,000 words, pays 4c - 6c per word on acceptance. Editor: George Scithers, Box 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A.

ANALOG -- (hard) SF, 2,000 - 70,000 words, pays 3.5c - 7c per word on acceptance. Editor: Stanley Schmidt, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA.

BACK BRAIN RECLUSE -- original fiction and art. Probably companying. More information from Chris Reed, Eyers Field, Smallfield, Surrey RH6 9M.

CASSANDRA ANTHOLOGY takes fiction (from Cassandra SF Workshop members only). Details from Bernard Smith, 8 Mansfield Walk, Thorpynoodles Brook, Northants.

DREAM MAGAZINE -- Amateur SF sf magazine published bi-monthly. Pays $2.00 per thousand words. MSS to Trevor Jones (Editor), 1 Ravenshaw, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 4BE

FAR FRONTIERS -- Needs stories of the kind J. W. Campbell would have sought; hard SF, realistic fiction, good SF adventure stories, science articles, poetry. Pays 5c per word for 1st publication rights, on a one year non-exclusive royalty basis. Editor: John F. Carr (Managing Editor), C/O J. E. Pournelle and Associations, 3960 Laurel Canyon Boulevard, 372 Studio City, CA 91604, USA.

FANTASY MAGAZINE: CoH to PO Box 20610, Seattle, WA 98104, USA. Looking for supernatural, ghost, horror stories. 2,000 - 4,000 words. Pays 1 cent per word.

FISHEYE -- quarterly magazine of original fiction, financially supported by Kings College, London. Seeks stories up to 15,000 words. Publishes a broad range of material including SF/fantasy/dark fantasy. Editor: Simon Ings, 93 Berkhampstead Avenue, Clapham, London SW4 9BS.

HAUNTS magazine -- takes fantasy, supernatural, SF/horror. 1,500 - 10,000 words. Pays 0.25 c per word. 1st rights bought. Editorial address: P.O. Box 3342, Providence, RI 02906, USA. Copies in 4 - 6 weeks.

INTERVERSE -- Takes SF and F, "utopias and dystopias, possible, impossible or improbably visions of how things might become, and awful warnings." Seeks "material that counters the traditional macho blasters and space pricks bias of science fiction." Pays 5c per word, occasionally longer. Pays well. Editorial address: Judith Hanna, 22 Deming Street, Plainfield, London SW4 2ER.

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF Magazine -- Short SF and F to 15,000 words. Pays 5c - 7c per word on acceptance. Send SASE for requirements. Editor: Shawna McCarthy, C/O Gardner Dozois, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA.

MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION -- F and SF to 10,000 words. Pays 3c to 5c per word on acceptance. Editor: Edward Ferman, P.O. Box 58, Cornwall, CT 06753, USA.

MISCONSCAPE -- takes F and SF to 10,000 words, also poetry. No word and storyy, Star Trek, or Star Wars stuff. Pays 2c. per word for North American serial rights on publication. Editor: Mogens Brandum, P.O. Box 1656, Swan River, Manitoba, H0L10Z, Canada.

OMNI -- strong, realistic SF to 9,000 words, some contemporary hard-edge fantasy. Pays to $2,000 on acceptance. Editor: Ellen Datlow, 1655 Broadway, New York, NY 10023 - 5655, USA.

ORACLE -- SF, F, sword & sorcery to 500 words maximum. No horror, poetry, or reviews. Pays 1c to 3c. per word for 'one time' rights. Editor: David Lillard, P.O. Box 15222, Detroit, MI 48219, USA.

OUT -- Modern upbeat stories with unusual settings; sexual situations or overtones helpful but not mandatory. Editorial address: 100 W. 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036, USA.

PLAYBOY -- Quality SF to 10,000 words, active plots with strong characterization. Pays well on acceptance. Editor: Alice K. Turner, 929 Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611, USA.

SPECTRUM -- F and SF, 1,000 - 8,000 words. Pays 1c - 3c per word. Editor: Marshall Bonfire, P.O. Box 113945, Arlington, TX 76011, USA.

STAR LINE -- Newsletter of the SF Poetry Association. Publishes 10 - 12 poems per issue, pays $1 for the first 10 lines, thereafter 5c. per line. Editor: Bob Piazza, P.O. Box 491, Mankato, MN 56004, USA.

STARZTAT -- a multi-media SF sf magazine. Takes STAR TREK, DR. WHO, and straight SF material, no fantasy or horror, up to 10,000 words, though under 5,000 words preferred. Pays 10c. per word, British agent (to whom stories from Brits should be submitted): Lisa Tuttle, 1 Ortygias House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middx. HA2 0QH. Editorial address: Dave Bischoff, 1010, Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 910, Washington, DC 20005.

SWORDS & SORCERESSSES -- takes fantasy 1,200 - 12,000 words with the emphasis on women as sword swoppers, wizardsesses and heal- raisers. Pays 3c - 5c. per word against gro ratia rates of royalties, DOES NOT want to receive dot matrix submissions. Editor: Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 352, Berkley, CA 94701, USA.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE -- Stories to 5,000 words, dark fantasy, suspense, supernatural (like the TV show). Pays $150 to $800 per story, half on acceptance, half on publication. Editor: Ted Klein, 800 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA. Reporting time said to be very slow.

TO THE STARS -- SF (no fantasy) stories. Pays 6.5 cents per word. Editor: Terry Carr, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611, USA.

WORDS Magazine -- publishes some short fiction, and runs an annual short story competition. For more information on style, length, payment, contact: 7 Pale House Common, Fromfield, Elsfield, East Sussex.

Novel length works

TOP BOOKS seek SF novels (no fantasy). "I can buy SF novels, either completed or on the basis of portion-and-outline, provided you've never sold a book to Tor before" says Terry Carr, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611, USA.

THE WOMEN'S PRESS seeks good feminist SF. Send novel-length MSS to Sara LeFanu, The Woman's Press, 124 Shoreditch High Street, London E1 6EF.
Welcome, Chaos - Kate Wilhelm

BITUARY - - - ----- -- --,

KATE WILHELM IS SUPRELY AN AUTHOR TO BE
reckoned with, one whose works merit seri-
ous consideration and against which you
will seldom hear a bad word spoken. She
was a legend in those dark haunts where SF fans gather
to discuss the all-time greats, her name is not
merely used that often. I know that is
hardly the same of critical recognition
setting - nevertheless, it might say some-
ing. I recall Where Late The Sweet Birds
Sang, one of SF's seminal novels treated
fetchingly, but hardly tellingly. With
Welcome, Chaos, theme and approach are
again.

The classic theme this time is immor-
tality, and Wilhelm views the subject in an
oblique and intelligent manner. Art and
history are our two tools for regulating
our mortality, she says, the one for rec-
cording our permanence of spirit, the other
to make collective memory tangible, the
two establishing a sense of reality about
our existence. Destor immortality and these
two conveniences of death and removal have
you and the human spirit, not un-
changed, but blundering without direction -
welcome, chaos.

This struck me as being a thoughtful
approach to the theme - a definite advance
on the accruing-seons-of-wisdom nonsense,
and Wilhelm is to be congratulated for
writing tantalisingly, leaving the reader the
enjoyable job of speculating. She directs
most of her attention towards the threat -
not, the boon that the promise of

BOOKS

APOLLO

Some particularly nasty gremlins
seemed to creep into the works of
Vector 132. In particular some very
strange additions were made to Helen
McKabbs review of Ratha's Creature
Cookbook. We won't make a nonsense
of her review, and we
apologise sincerely to Helen and to
Gollancz. The correct text of the
review will be reprinted in Vector 134
and we hope we won't suffer any harm
of these unwelcome interpolations.

Immortality holds for the world. This
heard of immortality comes in the form of a
complete immunological system, offering,
for example, immunity, or at any rate speedy
recovery, from the effects of radiation.
And so what is likely to happen if the
Russians have it? and the Americans think
that they are far advanced in the immo-
ration of their population; or if the
Russians have it and believe that the
Americans are a long way down the same path?
The book is politically intelligent and its
author not afraid of plain talking: 'Our
military and theirs are equally crazy. To
talk about a practical road to immortality
is insane and yet both sides do it'.

So, while the political reasoning is
convincing; it also points to the main
weakness of Welcome, Chaos, as Wilhelm
gets tangled in the behind-the-scenes
mannerisms. A freelance operator, Leaster,
is on the trail of the secret of death. He
is page after page of tedious stuff as he
plays bluff and counter-bluff with his CIA
half and an inside story which is, well, it
was done. One scene, the lifting of a
Russian scientist from an Amsterdam hotel,
strained the credulity of even this un-
sophisticated reader. The whole story
starting, of course, with a Nazi research
project lost in the confusion of wartime
Europe... This all serves to deme and to
detract from the elegance of Wilhelm's
approach to the immortality theme, which in
turn Nice uneasiness in such a context.
Leaster, for example, is potentially a
captivating character within the world of
subject matter, but once the subject is
side once the secret is out in the open.
The heroine, Tylee Taney, is selected to
cover the psychic details on
account of her spiritual qualities and there-
fore belief in her is strained when she is
called upon to perform feats of daring and
curiosity.

Can Wilhelm write thrillers? I think
not, although Welcome, Chaos is a command-
able try and nobody after all wants to see

OBITUARY

JORGE LUIS BORGES 1899 - 1986

JORGE LUIS BORGES

BOOKS OF SAND

by Paul Kincaid

Jorge Luis Borges, the Blind Poet of Buenos Aires, Died in
Geneva in June. He was one of the most acclaimed and
brilliant writers of this century, though constantly denied
the highest literary honours such as the Nobel Prize. Though
not a science fiction writer as such, he chose puzzle and
amusement as his subject matter, and used the fantastic as
the rich tool for the exploration of all new materials.
His work has had a tremendous influence on everyone from
Stanislav Lem (who has collection of reviews of unwritten books
to greater length of Borges' most distinctive devices) to
the magical realists, while both Alan Gray (in Luna) and
Ian Rankin (in Walking on Glass) pay specific homage to his
influence.

Borges was born in 1899, in Buenos Aires, the city that was
to be at the heart of so much of his writing. He was brought up
speaking English as fluently as his native Spanish, and
throughout his life a passionate devotion to English literature. He
was widely read and expert in everyone from the Anglo-Danes The
Stevenson and Conan Doyle. He travelled widely, assessing a vast
knowledge of European literature and culture, all of which was
to come out in his own work.

He was a poet and essayist, and a leader of the radical
Ultrass movie movement in the early 1920s. His stories did
not begin to appear until the publication of A Universal History of
Jewish In is 1935. These early stories captured the romance
and futility of the lives of refugees, at their best when dealing
with the knife-fighters of the Buenos Aires slums in 'Streetcorner
Kaz', or 'The South' from his later collection Ficciones. But already he
was investing works of reference and fictionalising authorities, a

wealth of learned volumes to substantiate worlds that could not
possibly exist. He tricks his reader with immortality, with
infinity and experiencuch and a whole arsenal of
fantastical devices. In The circular Ruins' his character dreams a
person into existence, only to realise in the end that he himself
is a dream. In 'Borges and I' the author encounters himself, and
can see in which it is he who appears.

The stories all seem to have their origins in some literary
trickery, as if Borges is looking how our imaginations will let
us run unchecked into all sorts of weird and unlikely places.
There is a sense of the librarians relinquishing the unbound reach of
the written word. Yet there is more to it than that, he is not simply
poking fun at learning but revealing a deeper unease beneath. There
is a fertility in the way everything runs in a circle, the further
you seem to have reached in a Borges story, the closer you are to
the beginning. He excavates the unconscious like an archaeologist,
discovering grave goods one moment, a dead body the next.

For all of that, his stories are remarkably light. They are
rarely more than a handful of pages long, and some of the best are
just a side or two text. Yet within that tony compass he
manages to insert so many startling images that his stories linger
in the memory long after many a novel has faded. In 'Funes,
The Memorable', crippled Funes sets out to memorise in precise detail
everything he has experienced, while at the same time applying a
name to every individual object. "Funes not only remembered every
leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times
he had perceived or imagined. He determined to inscribe all of his
past experience to some seventy thousand recollections, which he
would later define numerically." It is the sort of project that
would intrigue and absorb Borges, blind yet with a tremendous
understanding, but would have left Funes with the same
puzzles fun at it! Funes' individual name for five hundred is 'nine'.

The literature of ideas has never had a better or more
through emerging project. A turn of the page, a raising of the
raised, examined, and turned into elegant, sharp jokes. We don't
to have to be a Funes to remember the genius of A Universal History
of Jewish, Ficciones, The Aleph and other stories, A Personal
Anthology, The Book of Imaginary Beings, Doctor Broder's Report,
The Book of Sand, and above all Labyrinths.
BOOKS

a writer afraid to attempt something new. And eventually the book does deliver, after a fashion - it is just that it could have been so much better.

I, ROBOT - Isaac Asimov

[Review by the original publication date, 1966, 262pp, $9.95]

A DOZEN YEARS AGO A KINDLY LIBRARIAN, noticing my diet of B. E. "Doc" Smith, decided to remove me from the primrose SP soup, and pointed me in the direction of Isaac Asimov, and the first book of his I read was: I, Robot. The rest, as they say, is evolution! (and history.)

Indeed, this book is an historical survey of robotics from the inception of the positronic brain until the robots' eventual world domination in a future Utopia; but, since the stories were written for The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction in the 1940's, they themselves mark an historical event in science fiction. Not only that, they are a source of nostalgia for the seasoned SF reader. (Presumably the hardback edition will appeal to the next generation of robot fans, enticed by Asimov's new robot novels.) The question is: how have they stood the test of time?

They haven't disappointed as I expected to be. The stories exemplify Asimov's strengths and weaknesses as a writer. With the exception of 'Robbie', the first story, all the pieces centre round the Three Laws of Robotics, and are essentially puzzles or games. Perhaps this is why, when Asimov combines detection with robots, he is at his best. The science in the stories has definitively dated and the characters, with the exception of the notable robots, are fairly weak. The Utopia depicted in the last story, 'The Evitable Conflict', grates a little after more than two decades activity falling on East Germany than there is in the 'hot' room of my lab. Still, we need to dream and Asimov's dreams have (like it or not) had a real impact on even the wider scientistic community.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE - Margaret Atwood

[Review by the original publication date, 1986, 232pp, $9.95]

Margaret Atwood has written a weighty and distinguished fable that is never less than readable and in places achieves a real power. Gilead is frighteningly convincing, its institutions and beliefs always plausible. It is a feminist book, yes, the brutalizing of women is its subject; yet it is not atrocity, neither does it attack men indiscriminately. The men are delineated carefully with often surprising sympathy, they are victims too. When Commander Tooker elicits a certain compassion. Atwood is at pains to show that women are among the most enthusiastic supporters, and indeed instigators of the old and new regime, and many of the most restrictive practices are in the hands of women.

The result is a truly shocking dystopia. It is written with a dolorful rhythm, precise of details by a repetitious, listless minuet until the reader too knows the emptiness, the sterility of Offred's life. Yet, bleak though it is, The Handmaid's Tale is not an entirely black vision - it ends with a note of hope, even humour that seems appropriate in this distinguished and effective novel.

THE DAY OF FOREVER - J. G. Ballard

[Review by the original publication date, 1986, 122pp, $9.95]

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN PAPERBACK IN 1967, this is the first hardback edition. People might question the validity of reissuing these stories but I think they have as much to commend them in 1986 as they did nineteen years ago. Each story is complete in itself, but all are characterized by a certain remoteness as though reality is perceived through a window rather than directly. This invests even the most straightforward storyline with a slightly quality. The book is an example. A conventional story of murder through hypnosis, in Ballard's hands it takes on a dream-like quality as Forbes struggles to comprehend his fascination for tall buildings in a world in which, apparently, only he and his two protagonists exist. Ballard also shows an interest in paradox in 'The Last World of Xr Goddard' and 'The Gentle' notably, in improved eyewitness. But what is remarkable about the fantastic, notably 'Prisoner of the Coral Deep'. This is a slim volume, just ten stories, but the depth and richness of the writing, with no word wasted, is ample compensation.

BLOOD MUSIC - Greg Bear

[Review by the original publication date, 1986, 262pp, $9.95]

THE BLURRY WRITERS HAVE DONE IT AGAIN! They correctly quote that this is the "Childhood's End of the 1960's" - and come on to the book's build-up and revelations. Hopefully, before the paperback comes out the publisher will take note and not rubish the writer's efforts to build suspense in a modern biological disaster novel convincingly told. Bear has expanded considerably his award winning short story from Analog and succeeded in developing his theory of the seeds of Future Mankind being sown in a Californian genetic engineering lab.

It begins with a not particularly likeable Genevra experiment on the first 5 hours of life and being found out. He is fired but before going manages to inject himself with the results of his experiments so far for intelligent lycophyces. Perhaps the only unconvincing aspect of the whole book is where this character is unable to connect the injection with the changes that occur in his physique, voice, etc. But that is a minor quibble in a true written, fast-paced exposition on the spread of this "disease" - even faster than AIDS andfar more devastating. To say more would detract from the book.

Annoyingly, the word 'convincing' keeps coming to mind in trying to describe the book. It will linger for some considerable time, as did Clarke's Bear's imagination, delving into metaphysics and microscopic scales, does not bewilder; the characters are as complete as they can be within the limits the disaster- allows them and they are more substantial than any cardboard reactor to disasters.

Space-time, reality, and our future are all interlocked, brought to a new insight by infinitesimally small subatomic. There is a rightness about the explanations of racial memory and "oneseness of the human beings" - after all, we all evolved from the same space-dust. Inevitably,
because of the blurs, the apparent threat is dissipated for this striving for "oneness with the universe" espoused by Childhood's End and now Blood Music is besetting; perhaps horrifying to material souls, but inexplicable to true romantics. Greg Bear manages to convey both the horror and the wonder of the end of the world of so many people . . . Do they die, are they reborn, does the world end, really? That is not for me to say, what I will say is, read the book, try to ignore this review and the blurs, just enjoy it as it sucks you into a fascinating experience.

HEART OF THE COMET - Gregory Benford & David Brin
[Bantam, 1986, 469pp, $17.95]
Reviewed by Jim Englund

THE APPEARANCE OF A NEW NOVEL BY these authors should be a big occasion. They belong to that breed, one that is expected to get their scientific facts right and write the hardest of hard SF. After all, they work in scientific academia and can (apparently) enlist whole teams of experts to help with their enquiries. Benford is a professor of physics, Brin an astrophysicist and consultant to NASA. When they write an SF novel, every sincere devotee of hard SF must want to see them prove that they can also write.

Unfortunately, in their chosen theme, they have taken on a difficult task. How do you weave an interesting tale around the colonisation of a potato-shaped and rock-infected chunk of ice no more than a few cubic miles in volume? I refer, of course, to Halley's Comet. The answer seems to be: don't worry too much about plausibility. Have a large cast of characters (most, admitedly, in "sleep slots" most of the time) in the caves and tunnels honeycombing the ice of Halley's Comet. Let them dispute how its orbit should be changed and kill one another in tribal battles reminiscent of the worst kinds of back-written space opera. Let them have fatal accidents and mysterious diseases, discover BEKs (the "Halley-forms"), do research on telepathy and artificial intelligence; in short, you name it, and we'll try to fit it in.

According to the blurb, Benford and Brin have been "praised for their skill in blending visionary science with compelling human characters", but I did not find their characters at all compelling and their supposed vision of the future is almost absurdly silly. The characters, of many nationalities, converse at great length in surroundings impossible to imagine, and when they engage in introspection it is usually of a banal or cliched kind, not giving them any semblance of flesh-and-blood reality. Under stress they utter unfinished sentences and bite their lips a great deal. Worst of all, the prose is very often so ugly as to suggest that the authors are either word-blind or have a rooted objection to plain English.

The authors may have set out to write a real blockbuster, the definitive novel about a famous comet to end all novels about comets. The result is good in parts, and it can probably be assumed that the calculations were done correctly; but it is padded out to far too great a length, the characters do not ring true, much of it is in a pain in the neck to read, and (despite the grandeur of the theme) it is almost completely devoid of any poetry.

UNIVERSAL 13 - Edited by Terry Carr
[Mala, 1986, 192pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

SEVEN AUTHORS - ONE BRITISH (Ian Watson), one Australian and female (Leanne Frahm), the rest American male - provide a range of stories from hard SF to the sort of comedy of manners one thinks of as Ray Bradbury country. That's the 13th of Terry Carr's anthologies of all-new stories, and everyone should find something in it to appeal.

But it's a bit disheartening to discover 40% of the text devoted to Michael Bishop's 'Her Habiline Husband'. As the story is a short little piece, one wonders where the editor's money went. Happenings and some very nasty people hung on an almost infinitely improbable event: the survival of a single Homo Habilis with little ability to learn and significant for - quite out of character on both sides - an irresistible sexual appeal to the hero's ex-wife whom he impregnates.

After that, Ian Watson's almost cosy, certainly more normal characters participate in a superbly presented and gripping (but decently quiet) disaster. Brevity and wit make this memorable, so watch out for 'The Width of the World'. Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Stone Egg' (a pointless title) returns us to strange Americans in an odd little piece that's basically about alienation, I suppose.

Bill Bickel's 'The Widow and the Body Builder' - again redeems Carr's selection - it's lust, amusing, complex enough to make you think, and hinges on a simple idea: floating out of a sick body until it's cured and hiring a body sitter to suffer the pain. Another one to watch. Lucas Shepard's 'The Taylorsville Reconstruction' is something else - more unpleasant Americans messin with telepathy to change the political colour of the country. A few nice turns of phrase, but I found it hard to believe in the characters' posturings or beliefs.

To an even greater extent I found impossible to empathise with Bruce Sterling's creation in 'Cicada Queen' - hard socio-SF at its most uncompromising. I like Sterling, but this time he has gone over the top for many readers, including me.

Leanne Frahm, I've left till last because I think she offers something new and enjoyable. Her female protagonist is astonishingly spineless and weakly, her men well characterised, her landlady a gem; the ambiance - the Queensland rain forests as the dinosaurus take over again - is accurately depicted, strange enough to appeal, normal enough to be accepted. The denouement is carefully understated, as indeed is all the action; no American could have written this. I hope this first hardcover appearance will lead to better exposure for a writer it would be patronising to call "promising".

TALES FROM THE SHADOWS - R. Chetwynd-Hayes (186pp)
SHORT CRITICAL GLEAMERS - Edited by Peter Haining (224pp)
THE HAUNTED GARDEN - Mary Williams (174pp)
[Williams Kimber, 1986, £5.50 each]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

THE SHORT STORY IS, GENERALLY speaking, alive and well. Most modern
writers are aware of the stigma of cliched plots and shoddy characters attaching to the short form and are therefore finding ways to expand. Characterisation and narrative technique have progressed beyond the crude standard of horror stories of the past, and short stories are no longer bogged down in the mire of ideas—after all... at least, so I thought until I settled down to read these three collections.

*Supernatural Sleuths* is a reprint collection, with stories dating from 1866 to 1963, tied tenetically to Ghostbusters (the movie) by an editorial introduction in which Peter Haining says: "... the American Paranormal Society in New York(...). Investigators are anything but like those of the film's trio of madcap heroes! It is interesting mainly due to the strength of its line-up (Conan Doyle, Algernon Blackwood, Sax Rohmer, etc.) and as a measure against the other two books.

These two modern collections show clearly that the stylistic progress evident in other genres has passed the supernatural market by. They share a remarkable uniformity of story technique with *Supernatural Sleuths* despite the intervening years. On some things have changed. The new stories have the occasional outbreak of reviews passage to look fruitively about him) *sex,* and a note of obscenity, masquerading as elegia, has attacked some of the endings, but the overall feel of all three collections is the same.

I read these books with a sense of anticipation, they combine, after all, two of my favourite areas—short stories and supernatural suspense—was doubly disappointed. Read these dark... if you're an insomniac.

**NOVA** — Samuel R. Delany

**THE SIRENS OF TITAN** — Kurt Vonnegut

Gollancz, 1986, 244pp ea., £5.95 ea
Reviewed by K.J. Bailey

**THE COLLANCE COLLECTION OF SF CLASSICS** will make currently available a number of past works which are lastingly enjoyable and of continuing significance. Opening the list is *The Sirens of Titan,* a classic of the absurd, of comedy, of pastiche, of a variety of existential angst. It uses (while parodying) space opera as framework in establishing Vonnegut's emerging metaphor of ironic perspective.

This is an imaginatively bold and wildly entertaining fantasia. Its claim to classic status lies partly in its aetegorical scheme which has influenced the "philosophical" sector of later genre writing (including Vonnegut's own); but also in its innovatory stylistic miasmeries, its inventiveness of incident, and its unleashed spring of imagination which even when parodizing space opera, rises aesthetically far above most of those models.

The function of good fiction is to tell a story well; classic fiction does this, but as in *The Sirens* there may be, perhaps must be, levels of meaning and tension in action which have an additional psychological or apocalyptic import. Such extension is certainly there in *Nova.* At its straightforward story level it is the picaresque adventure of a somewhat piratically-led crew to win energy-revealing resources from an exploding sun. The resources will serve to destabilise a stable galaxy. Captain Lorg Von Ray ploughs through the tortos at the nova's heart, emerges in agony, but survives, as a Prometheus figure combining the attributes of both destroyer and renewer.

In his cosmic crime Von Ray says: "I feel no sin in me. Then it must be that I am a unit." The stance is not only Promethean but Nietzschean. *Nova* sets up such "classical" reverberations and, both by virtue of that dimension and for its bravura descriptive writing and narrative zest, is itself a classic of science fiction.

**FUCKABLE RHYTHM** — Stewart Farrar

(Bale, 1986, 240pp, £5.95)
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN IS DYING OF A LONG-SUFFERED LEUKEMIA. During scientific ESP experiments, a mental projection, he finds he can occupy the body of a fellow experimenter while he is projecting. So when he dies, he takes another walk; far so good, but at this point the book ceases to resemble SF in any way, as he is eventually expelled by a coven of Wiccan witches and a dead priest.

Stewart Farrar is apparently a white writer who has written many occult plays and novels. So the intent here appears to be to popularise and de-syncretise white magic by setting up a problem then solving it by white magic. If he were a scientist would invent a gadget, or the girl would spend her time in limbo scientifically deducing a way to represent the body. So this book is definitely not SF.

However, SF or occult, neither would be an excuse for the excruciating badness of this book. The man exploring the woman's body from the inside in offensively male-oriented—first thing he notices is her missing genitalia despite the fact that most amputees can still feel the missing parts until their removal is proved.

The trouble with reviewing bad books is that if plot factors are not mutually relevant or interlinked in any way, there is very little one can do apart from catalogue endless loose ends. If this were a bad book politically, scientifically, or even science fictionally, I could have a stab at it and tell you what's wrong with it. But it's which is badly plotted in beyond redemption. As a final example, it concerns a man forcibly entering a woman's body, however nowhere is there any real account of the horror or anguish she suffers. I can only suggest it be republished under the far more apt title *Psychic Rape,* and then let more qualified feminists than I see Mr Farrar into well deserved little pieces.

**NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE** — Timothy Findley
(MacMillan, 1985, 352pp, £9.95)
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

**NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE IS ABOUT** the Flood, Noah and his family surviving the Deluge with an Ark full of animals. We all know the story—don't we? However, I don't remember the old struggles to save her beloved hypocrite, bending beliefs to suit his purpose, a man with an unholly interest in his daughter-in-law, a vivisect-unist. Nor do I remember Mrs Noah as a gentle frigfneten who, had she had the nerve to release the bullying Noah, seeking solace in the gin bottle and with her half-blind cat, victim of Noah's experiments. And the children—Shem, the ox, unambiguously beautiful, enigmatic Hannah; Ham with the unearthly (in all senses) Lucy; and Japhet, unable to consume his own marriage to the child Ema, expressing most of his energy to the rest of the family. It's not exactly the sort of family that deserves to survive the Flood and repopulate the world. But Yaweh cannot see through the dissembling of his old friend. Deeply distressed at the corruption in the world he has created, he conceives the idea of the flood water. Inspired by one of Noah's comforting tricks for declining age, and his family shall be the sole survivors, along with a representative selection of the world's fauna.

The old world disintegrates in dust and fire stories before the rain comes, the animals flee in panic or are trampled underneath. There is little sense of human suffering; people appear only as dead bodies in the carnage. There's no orderly exbahdration, but hysterical confusion as frightened animals are herded aboard or consigned to Noah's sacrificial fire of thanksgiving. Only Mrs Noah shows compassion because she struggles to save her beloved cat, now pregnant, and the world's death throes. Once on board, Noah's tyranny continues as he lives in luxury with Hannah whilst the others are forced into the hold to care for the animals and defend them against their demands for fresh meat. The fairies are lost in the flood, the unicorns die and the sheep no longer sing. The magical things are all gone, but only Mrs Noah nourishes their passing into memory and only she abides wounds that they are as important as Noah's 'science' and, once lost, cannot be replaced.

The message of this novel is grim and uncompromising. The only way to escape the perpetual cycle of death and ruin is total destruction. Even the
survival of a small group of apparently perfect people ensures its continuation. Mrs Noah recognises this at the end of the novel she is seen praying for rain. Even so, there are lighter moments, delightful anachronisms and pleasant to remember that someone remembers how it ought to be, how it used to be, the world has a chance.

COUNT ZERO - William Gibson
(Gollancz, 1986, 269pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Mike Dickerson

GIBSON'S FIRST NOVEL, NEUROMANCER, WON last year's Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick awards. More importantly, it changed many perceptions of SF, brushing away a certain jaded feeling and re-interesting many who had drifted off to fantasy and Latin surrealism.

So how do you follow a book like that? The answer is a sequel. The smart money thought and Gibson is smart - on a quasi-sequel. In other words, Gibson seems to have followed his own interests while exploring further the dimensions of his world.

One major difference is that he has chosen a tripartite viewpoint. Inevitably this lessens the pace, and it was probably the driving paranoid pace of Neuromancer that made that a hit, but there are compensations. Case and Molly in the earlier book were archetypal drifters - gear figures. In Count Zero only Turner, a mercenary, is of that type. Bobby, whose grandiloquent title 'Count Zero' names the book, most closely resembles Case, but he has a streets background which is still with him. Marly, however, is a start on characterization proper, though much, this is not Gibson's strongest point. As yet he has kept to the sort of narrative where characterisation, rather than clever charicature, is unimportant. Marly is a scoundrel, a consummate that need not always be true.

Nevertheless he continues to develop his art, producing a book that is in many ways superior to its predecessor. The art boxes, a central plot device, are solidly described and intriguing as objects. Bobby's life on the streets is more believable than the rather stroboscopic views of Chiba in the first book. There are also endearing qualities to sense of large cartels jostling and pulling the rest of the world puppet-like along with them; the introduction of a dimension of art and culture; and a real development in his world of cyber-space.

Gibson's other strengths are still apparent. His ability to produce dynamic and colourful minor characters is sufficiently unusual, however there is at times a wisdom about his writing which gives the authenticity of a true chronicler. Gibson is not just a genuine science fiction writer but also a humanist in that tradition which has done such to present the genre from becoming engineers' bedtime stories. He is on course to being the last indispensable writer in his field: his achievements are already tremendous; his potential, stunning. Even if you never buy hardbacks, buy this one and treasure it.

THE DREAM YEARS - Lisa Goldstein
(Allen & Unwin, 1986, 161pp, £3.50 paperback, £2.95 hardback)
Reviewed by J.F. Hurst

THIS BOOK IS ONE OF THREE LAUNCHING a new SF series from Unwin. Clearly the publisher's intentions were good. Why they allowed themselves, then, to publish this rubbish is beyond me. I can find nothing to praise in it. And this failure is already known - Martyn Taylor was able to criticise the book on the basis of the original paperback edition. Why Unwin bothered I cannot say - unless they were so keen to launch an SF imprint that they took anything they could get. In which case anyone who deplores their lack of judgement. On the other hand, the other books in the launch - Gwyneth Jones' Escape Plans and Graham Dunstan Martin's Time Slip - the wrote the rather good Soul Master (also published by Unwin but as fantasy) promise more.

The Dream Years describes the life of Robert St Tage, a young prodigy on the edge of a first-rate school before they became fashionable in the 1920s. By an unexplained time slip he travels forward to fall in love with a student revolutionary in 1968 Paris (and she sometimes travels back to him). She convinces him that surrealism has revolutionary importance, even while the students on the barricades fail to change anything. A masked time police (like the holy in John le Carre) is chasing them, and other people get involved. At rare intervals one gets bursts of some sort of philosophy underlying this but those bursts tend to be less than a sentence long, and generally Ms Goldstein shows less ear for French and the French than Van Gogh.

This series can only get better.

MAN OF TWO WORLDS - Frank & Brian Herbert
(Gollancz, 1986, 317pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Ken Lake

WE ALL OWE A DEBT OF GRATITUDE to Gollancz for this series list - the back flap details here include Dick, Gibson, Hiven, Roberts and Watson among others, and this excellently printed, colourfully jacketed volume brings the late Frank and Brian Herbert together in what turns out, unfortunately, to be a load of codswallop.

The dust-wraper a striking design by Gabino, bears absolutely no relevance to anything in the book! The title is redolent of all that was worst about Golden Age pulp fiction, and unfortunately the text bears out that judgement from start to bloodletting finish.

The plot's summed up in the very first sentence, which, like far too much of the book is in the form of a fictitious 'quotations' from an imagined book. It follows that the universe collapses, for all life and all matter are sustained by Dreen imaging'. No, not a misprint - "imaging" is what we call imaging but actually it's too. And (shock, horror) Our Earth and all its people are mere products of Dreen imaging. (Dreens, incidentally, are incredibly stupid, equally stupidly formed, and prone to drunkenness brought about by "bazool" which, we discover without a shred of surprise, is our old herb Basil!).

The anti-hero is "the wily... action of an industrial emperor, Finkle, and his adventuress" to quote the blurb. How does an author enter into the mind of such a person? Answer: make him and all around him almost as stupid as the Dreens but nasty with it, with a paranoid father, an unutterably vicious mother, a plan to become President of the United States of America, and of course a horde of unprincipled, murdering hangers-on. Mix with this characters called "Sam R. Kand" and Dreens called "Mugly and Wemy",

Devote pages to attempted trollopism between a virgin, the President of the US and a Dreen which is sharing his body and doesn't want to know about sex anyway, and all I can say is that if you have a particular type of mind, no doubt this all adds up to "entertainment".

But not for me it doesn't. But as a Dreen captive of Earth, one Denda-Re says, "Someone's gotta tell yew nesters yore fences are a'cosin' down'. You have been warned.

SANDWITCHER - Konrica Hughes
(Julia MacRae, 1985, 159pp, £6.95)
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT BETRAYAL and trust; prejudice and pride; knowledge and wisdom; about growing up.

Princess Antia - a very young and spilt - is sent from her home on the twin continents of Komlant and Kanlan to the barren island desert of Roshan, to meet the boy her aunt, the ruling princess, plans for her to marry. Khur Khan has no doubts - life is simple and basic. Antia is treated just like everyone else, and it rankles. Do these primitive people not realise who she is?

They realise - but as they treat their own leaders as ordinary human beings why should she be treated differently? The people of the desert are more puzzled than angered by her behaviour, and continue to treat her with the respect and kindness.

This is one of the faults of the book: Antia is too blind, too unwilling to accept the differences of a different culture, and far too childish.
in contrast the desert people are too nice, friendly, rough and ready, sensible, down-to-earth people. There has to be a contrast between the corrupt and the honest, the authoritarian and the egalitarian, and between Antia as she was and as she becomes, but it would have been all the better for not being so heavy-handed. Children, contrary to much adult belief, can appreciate and understand the subtle approach.

There is, however, a great depth to this book. The Rosannites live close to the desert, in more ways than one; and like Frank Herbert's frozen they must understand its ways if they are to survive. The Sandwriter, an old woman living out in the desert, acts as sage, guardian, and the embodiment of Rosanite myth. And because the mythicology deals with sand and water and survival, it is an essential part of everyday Rosannite life - as is the distinction between knowledge and wisdom: "Knowledge helps men...Wisdom helps mankind". The twin continents may have much knowledge, but Rosannite Antia may be a pain in the neck for most of the book, and the story may be over-moralistic; yet this is an enjoyable SF novel, telling an exciting tale, and leaving the young reader to consider matters adults often shy away from. Antia suffers the emotional and mental agony of betrayal of her love and trust, but her worst pain is the knowledge that she herself betrayed the love and trust of others.

FACES - Leigh Kennedy
(Cape, 1966, 152pp, £6.95)
Reviewed by Sue Thompson

FACES IS A COLLECTION OF 10 SHORT stories. It has been previously published over the last four years; three of them in Asimov's. On the strength of that information, I'm thinking of renewing my subscription to Asimov's.

FACES is everything a single-author collection of short, imaginative fictions should be. The stories are frighteningly acute; oddities observed and recorded with a semi-dystatched compassion. They are stories about the insides of people's heads; inner landscapes. The familiar country is transformed into a strange place, the wildly unfamiliar and debatable land is shown to lie very close to home. The stories are about a phantom child, a conventional miracle, what it feels like to have pétit mal, an ethical cannibal. Some of them are science fiction, some of them are fantasy, some of them are speculative, some of them are realistic (these categories are not exclusive here).

Faces is a first-time collection. Next time I see Leigh Kennedy's name on a book I will buy the book. They're that good.

AMY'S EYES - Richard Kennedy
(Julia McKay, 1966, 379pp, 1986)
Reviewed by Maureen Porter

AMY'S FATHER LEAVES HER AT AN orphanage with a sailor doll of his own mother. She goes off to seek his fortune. Amy accidentally brings the doll to life, and he goes off to seek his fortune in order to take her away from the orphanage. But Amy doesn't hear from him, and turns up in a doll's house. After that life gets a little frantic. The Captain does return, and they embark on a complicated adventure in a ship crewed by vivified toys. Amy is reunited with her father through the Captain dies in a battle with pirates.

This is an odd book, eccentric and a little anarchic at times. Richard Kennedy lacks a firm hand on the narrative which, consequently, wanders all over the place, and there is too much sub-plot, a lot of it totally unnecessary. He is also very fond of philosophizing on the state of human existence but his wisdom and insights are uncomfortably with a swashbuckling pratical adventure which would stand quite nicely on its own. It has no more need of the cloying sentimentality that it requires a theological discussion on Revelations and numerology which is interpolated at one point.

Despite its many minor faults, stripped of the life enriching commentary, it is a first rate adventure story. It also contains many delightful moments, such as the Captain training his crew on the sayings of Mother Goose, as well as incidents of stark brutality - the battle with the pirates is uncomfortably realistic in its violence. The author has enhanced the occasion these of a search for treasure with many original ideas, it's a pity he couldn't resist embellishing to the point where the book narrowly misses becoming cute rather than meaningful.

VARG-Room - Bernard King
(New English Library, 1980, 244pp, 4.95)
Reviewed by Terry Brooks

IN THIS SEQUEL TO STARKADDER, A VARG, the Norse-myth idea of a werewolf, is let loose in Sweden. Hather Lambston sets out with an anarchistic band of men to hunt it down. Meanwhile the Swedish king declares war on the Danes and the dwarf-king, Alvis, seeks Tyrifing, a sword that holds his destiny. At the same time (or more "meanwhile", a device the book is overly fond of) Odin and Mother Skuld vie for control over the destinies of men.

At the beginning of the story, Hather's first wife is murdered and his son taken by the varg. Within weeks of the murder, he again falls in love, based largely on the fact that "her skin was warmer than hers". Of course she falls into his arms at the first opportunity. The mother of his new love has a starring role in the obligatory rape and grand-some death scene. Norse myth should be more than this disappointing tripe.

Characters are backed to pieces by the author in passages like "the two friends grinned at each other, genuine pleasure shining in both their eyes. Purple prose properly suits her voice". - crept into the bars like the insidious, demented whisperings of some lurking, perverted dwarf inciting acts of lust and murder". But King really shows his mastery of vocabulary with one of the few passages in the book which isn't a cliché, describing the sorcerer's eyes, "The yellow wasn't yellow. They were red, a deep blood-crimson crimson-blood bloody red. The red of terror and dementia".

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Time-Slip - Graham Dunstan Martin
(Allen & Unwin, 1966, 164pp, £2.95)
Reviewed by Mark Greener

SCIENCE IS ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS THE WESTERNS WORLD'S new religion, encased in an ideology requiring priests, saints, dogma, and even a mystical language. SF has provided a consummate vehicle for examining the relationship between the scientific development tradition and science. Time-Slip is firmly rooted in this sub-genre and although it does not challenge the parameters of SF it is a readable and intelligent novel.

Scotland has been spared the worst effects of the nuclear holocaust. The war has resulted in science being considered blasphemous and evil and man attempts to find reassurance in the plethora of cults ensuing from the fragmentation of established religion.

Peter Gilchrist loses his job when he is discovered with prohibited books on quantum mechanics. Knocked unconscious in an accident he finds the world changed in subtle and inexplicable ways. Contemplating these, Gilchrist is suddenly enlightened and develops the one true religion. He is in communion around Edin- burgh, he is quickly assassinated. The following: the government perceives him as a threat to their power and begins to take action against him... P'll follow the tradition of A Canticle for Leibowitz and shows the role of the church in rebuilding society after nuclear war. But far from kindling the flame of scientific know-
ledge, the cults in *Time-slip* are united in their desire to extinguish it. However the true strength of *Time-slip* lies in the excellent characterisation. Most SF is populated by archetypal "caricatures", but Martin's characters are described in such depth that they are equivalent to many mainstream novels.

I do have a few reservations. I always find 'post-nuclear' novels hard to believe and the assumption that anything of the world would be left in at best contentious. It is to Martin's credit that he overcomes this obstacle and achieves conditions conducive to the suspension of disbelief.

The major flaw lies in the scenario which Martin expects us to believe leads to nuclear war early in the 21st century. This is not the place to produce a detailed repudiation of his politically naive arguments, but the upheavals are described in terms so vague and rest on such shaky propositions as to be totally at odds with the rest of the book.

The reactions are not enough to spoil the novel. *Time-slip* is impressive. It is Martin's second fantasy novel, I would be interested to know if he has produced anything outside side *Time-slip* is too polished to be the work of a newcomer. Martin is certainly a name to watch. In the meantime I recommend *Time-slip*.

THE CITY IN THE AUTUMN STARS

- Michael Moorcock

(Granta, 1986, 344pp, 29.95)

Reviewed by Edward James

A MOORCOCK SCHOLAR MIGHT BE ABLE TO untangle all the internal references in his works; I can't. It is enough, I think, to say that chronologically *The City in the Autumn Stars* comes between *The Warbound and the World's Pain*, where Ulrich von Bek in the 17th century makes a pact with Lucifer, and *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, in which Richardt von Bek enjoys a joint obsession with his lady-love and his city, late 19th century Wiresburg. Here Manfred von Bek, lover of adventure and liberty, French Revolution style, is unwillingly brought face to face with the pact his ancestor Ulrich made: here, in the last few lines, Manfred decides to go to Rosenstrasse. But as the jacket-note rightly (if somewhat defensively) says, this is "a self-contained novel in its own right".

Manfred leaves in 1794, and quite a realistic one at that, rendered in colloquial English of c. 1800 (with German low-life slang nicely if almost incomprehensibly "translated"

Manfred leaves Paris on the day his friend Tom Paine is imprisoned on Robespierre's orders. "Ah!" I thought, "Moorcock is telling us this is an alternative world. Paine was never imprisoned by Robespierre." Luckily I looked it up: he was. The strength of the book indeed is the way Moorcock slides from Von Bek's picaresque but plausible adventure in an historically real 1794, into a world inhabited by sinisters but fairly recognisably loony alchemists and Illuminati, and finally into a world in which the fantasies of those alchemists are suddenly revealed to be true, indeed only a pale reflection of the truth. The magical twin of Wiresburg, The City of the Autumn Stars, is a stunning creation, and the apocalyptic climax is horrifyingly perfect.

One of Moorcock's aims, I take it, is to reveal a philosophical framework for a world in which God is dead or, as here, has at least retired from the scene. He pours Christian tradition, alchemical fummary, and modern nonsense (such as the demonstrably false and foolish ideas from the best-selling *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*) into a glorious mixture; while allowing the book to be read as a fantastical allegory of a period, around 1800, when stasis was indeed being sought by both mystical and severely rational means. Von Bek's two companions, the mysterious Libussa and the Scots adventurer and engineer in whose balloon the magical city is reached, symbolise these two approaches; the two mingle and harmonise in a very odd way in Manfred von Bek himself.

I approached this book convinced I would not enjoy it; I have never been much of a Moorcock fan. But by the end I had been captivated by its characters, its colour, and its sensitive and often beautiful writing. I'm already looking forward to re-reading it.

DOWN TOWN - Vido Polikarpus & Tapan King

(Macdonald, 1986, 232pp, £4.95 paperback, £3.95 hardback)

Reviewed by Helen McKabb

IF YOU KNOW NEW YORK AS WELL AS London taxi drivers know London, and love it with a sentimental and nostalgic passion, then this is the book for you. You can wallow in historical memories, excite in recognition, and marvel at the cleverness of the authors. If, like me, you know New York's vague geographical location and have seen bits of it on TV and films then a large portion of this book will be meaningless.

It is a fantasy with a 10-year-old boy, Cary Bawman, as protagonist and hero. In the middle of a tantrum he accidentally finds himself in Downtown, "a place for all the people and things, real and imaginary, that the Uptown world no longer has a use for". It mirrors and echoes the real world, mirroring its magic and legend in a way that seems almost random. Cary and Allie, a street kid he meets, go through various adventures trying to find a way home for Cary, during which Cary and Allie are the long awaited saviour of Downtown.

It is unsatisfactory in many ways. The baddies, the Gnomes of Wall St. and their henchmen, the Bedsmashers, are thoroughly evil but they are not balanced by the goodies who are self-absorbed, motivated by a desire to defend themselves rather than by any altruism. The main force for good is a tree called Taara which is about to be destroyed both in the real world and Downtown by the instigators of the Gnomes and their supercomputer. Cary's task is to feed a microdisc into the computer telling it the whole truth so that tree and computer can combine in a force that will save both worlds.

Cary is essentially passive. People or Taara tell him to do things and he does them. There is no particular virtue in him to make him a hero, he is merely the one carrying the relevant microdisc. It is a very contrived book, the plot and its resolution predictable, with no allowances for individuality from the characters.

Rawle's book to spell out the writing compensate. It is very colloquially American throughout, not just in the dialogue, which aggravated me. There are a number of illustrations which I can't justifiably read, but I read and enjoyed. They were only photocopied. The vagueness of the myths and history behind Downtown may be because they are not ones I recognise or sympathise with. Even so the book never moved me or aroused more than tepid interest. For the price you can get two or three much better books.

THE AVALI OF ICE - Michael Scott Rohan

(Macdonald, 1986, 348pp, 29.95)

Reviewed by Barbara Davies

I LAST CAKE ACROSS MICHAEL SCOTT Rohan under the pseudonym, together with Allan Scott, of *Michael Scott*. Their book, *The Ice King*, was full of old Norse legends. This preoccupation plus a love of Wagner's operas now gives us the first volume of a fantasy series called *The Sword of Ice*. The book manages to contain the chronicle 'The Book of the Sword' plus an appendix about its background, and purports to be based in the Wisconsin Ice Age of 18,000 years ago. The endpapers contain a map.

The scope of the book is vast. It is set among many lands and peoples: the Eskwesh, fierce sea raiders; the Duergar, underground dwarves; and the red-faith Southlands and dark-haired Northlands races. There are Powers for good, evil or indifference - Eumenides the wanderer, Hilarad of Absalom, and Tapiol the Frowning. The *Sword of Ice* is being driven by malevolent forces to sterilise everywhere of life.

Against this backdrop we follow the adventures of Biof the Smith, who was as a boy driven from the ice by his mother's dyingagasping. The *Sword of Ice* is about the forging and tempering not only of steel but also of a boy into a man. Alv, apprentice to Masterwind Nyilo, under whose protection and guidance Biof was raised, suffers hardship and disease, discovers himself and his real
name, and begins the long haul to set right the wrongs he has caused.

The style of The Devil's Ice is rather grand in places but meshes well with the plot. A mass of research has gone into the book, and it shows in the detail given of, for example, the forging of metal. All in all, for his work, the effort and grime, are conveyed strongly.

There are many plot strands, some of which are left for development in later books. It will be interesting to watch Elle's relationship with the elusive Kara. The characterisation is good - I genuinely cared for the protagonists. References to old legends are legion, particularly those used in Wagner's Ring operas. The atmosphere is convincing and compelling.

I couldn't put this book down and can't wait for the sequel. Whether Michael Scott Rohan can finish what he's started remains to be seen.

**QUEEN OF THE STATES**

- Josephine Saxton

**(The Women's Press, 1986, 175pp. £1.95)**

Reviewed by Maureen Porter

It's hard to know where to begin with this extraordinary novel. On the one hand, Magdalyn may have been abducted by aliens, who want to research the human species. If so, they do not conform to the standard behaviour patterns of alien researchers, providing Magdalyn with every creature comfort, not to mention a very high standard of cuisine. At the same time, one of them seems to be a strange insect which she spotted on a flower in a cave years previously. Alternatively, Magdalyn is Queen of the States, the United States, that is. Or possibly she is mad, a patient in a psychiatric hospital, a反射 from White House and her husband. So which is true?

The only conclusion that can be...

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**LETTERS continued from page 3**

would like more members, and we're working on a number of advertising ideas right now. But the BSFA has kept its subscription rate low for too many years, which is why we can't afford "a well-funded professionally performed publicity campaign." The best advertising is word of mouth: if every member persuaded a friend to join, that would double the membership and bring in the badly needed revenue. But it costs money to produce and distribute these magazines every two months. All our own work is free, but printing and postage are real expenses which have to be paid. The mistake you've been making is, if you want the BSFA to be worthwhile, you're going to have to do your bit as well. — *Ed.*

**PERHAPS I HAVE A CYCLIC NATURE, BUT KEN LAKES'S CRITICISM OF DAVID PRINGLE'S SCIENCE FICTION: "The 100 Best Novels" (Letters, V131) sounded very much like sour grapes. Some of his comments were valid.** Second, if he really wanted to help but felt that in his attempts to unfavourably compare Pringle's work with his own projected one, Lake has lost sight of a certain objectivity.

First, Lake vilifies Pringle's "comedy" three times. What proceeds to say that he had called his own book 99 SF Novels. Come on, is there really such a difference between the two? Surely any selection has to be a personal one, unless you plop for the "popular" choices (award-winners, best-sellers, etc.). I thought that Pringle gave a more than adequate defence of his choice of title in the introduction to his book.

Second, if, by the title of Lake's book was to be "somewhat different" from Pringle's, why does he adopt the same criteria to judge it by? Pringle's work was obviously designed to appeal to fans old and new, whilst Lake is aiming for the newcomer. Nothing wrong with either task but it is clear that the contexts of each author will be dissimilar. Lake's idea to place each of his selections in context seems both worthwhile and ambitious, but I would also welcome the occasional "non-fiction" with which Lake wishes to eschew -- dangerous, as blandness may all too easily be the result.

I enjoyed Pringle's book on two counts: it was entertaining and is provided with realistic reviews. Perhaps a more fruitful approach would be, not 99 recommended books by one person, but 20 "best" by five. Allowing for overlaps, there wouldn't be as many books actually recommended, but the difference in taste and approach would be far more useful to an "ordinary reader" is search of guidance.

**ANDY SAWTER**

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**WHICH WAY DO I LOOK AT IT? I FAIL TO SEE KEN LAKES'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN SF: THE 100 BEST NOVELS AND 99 BEST SF NOVELS. It seems to me that he also makes the "wild claim" that his 99 are the most excellent, desirable, etc. etc., no matter what. In this case, his book is far inferior. Not even the plots are revealed, at least on the evidence of the extracts in Vector 130. As I have only read about 30 of the novels listed I will not be reading the book yet. Thanks to a recent flyer from Andre's Bookshop I have a useful list of Pringle's selections. Ken's suggested book sounds much like *The Encyclopedia of SF* only not as comprehensive.

I enjoyed reading the article on Yen. It was persuading me to consider one of their albums when I next go to buy a record. I felt that the inclusion of several links between the lyrics of Yen and works of SF was unnecessary. It seemed as though David Vignoy was trying to justify the inclusion of the article in Vector. The subject matter of the album appears to make use of a legitimate target for discussion in an SF journal.

I would be interested in seeing a compilation of some of the final results of the questionnaire. What, for example, are the favourite novels of the BSFA membership, and how does it compare with David Pringle's list?**

**STEPHEN R. ELBLY**

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Well over 200 of you completed and returned the questionnaire, far more than the most optimistic prediction. Our thanks to all of you. I'll try to reply to those who offered phone or help over the summer; if you think I've forgotten you, drop me another line to remind me. None of the winners have been notified, but I now have 33 of the titles mentioned.

**GRAHAM SMITH**

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**Sorry about that; I know the collating team are very careful not to use any dual pages, but occasionally (like typos) they slip through. Because we've had to put this issue together in a hurry, in the hope of avoiding various holiday reasons, this is the only letter re V132. I've received no so far. Any further letters will be held over till V134.** — *Ed.*
reached, given the pun contained in the title, is that Magdalen is undergoing these experiences simultaneously, depending on which part of her consciousness is most active at any given moment. To Magdalen this is a perfectly reasonable state of affairs, it's the people around her who can't cope, who seek to condemn or defy her, who can't manage without her and who would rather she couldn't manage without them. That she can reject all this and walk away to find her own destiny is a powerful statement of the capabilities of this protagonist.

Is Queen of the States to be classed as science fiction? To be honest, I'm not sure. It defies categorisation. On the one hand it is certainly an examination of states of being, exploring the possibilities of several consecutive existences, resonances from one spilling over into others. And, of course, there are all those aliens discussing the matter of the human experience. At the same time it is a witty, observant comment on woman's place in society, with actual and perceived, carrying a strong, defiant message in favour of women taking control of their destinies and questions our awareness of the world, whether things really are as we think we know, an acceptable standard of morality could be imposed on society. Magdalen most certainly does not conform to outside standards but she is completely at ease, at the centre of her world as she perceives it. Ultimately, why should it concern anyone else, any more than it really matters what label this book wears.

What does matter is that Queen of the States is by far the most stimulating and thought-provoking book I've read in a long while. It has so much to say on so many subjects, and all in a direct and forceful prose style which I find very refreshing. It is also very heartening that The Women's Press has finally found an original science fiction novel which is actually worth publishing and which deserves as wide a public as possible. All I can say is, read this book and enjoy it - it's wonderful.

ROBERT SILVERBERG - The First Silverberg (Gollancz, 1966, 320pp, 9.95)
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

POOR, MAD TON.
Once there was Silverberg who won the Best New Writer Hugo, 1956. Then Silverberg who turned the handle and produced SF adventure stories I have no memory of now. Then the promise of 1956 was fulfilled as Silverberg the craftsman became Silverberg the artist. (Nightwing, A Time to Change, The Stochastic, The Lord Valentine's Castle and the other Kajipoor books was a return of Silverberg the adventure writer and I was disappointed.

This is the first Silverberg I've read since Castle, and while it doesn't have the atmosphere of the 'serious' Silverberg nor is it just an adventure story. Let me set the scene. A fragmented Earth not too far in the future, with tracts of land made deadly by radioactive dust (used in a war that avoided the bomb). A world with hover vehicles, personal laser weapons and force fields but no airships. We only see California.

One line follows the march of the tumbaine people. Tumbaine is a religion owning more than a little to voodoo, but its pantheon of gods come from space. The followers have visions of marvellous alien worlds populated by these gods.

Then we have the patients and staff of the Repenthe centre, a psychiatric establishment treating suffers from Gelbard's syndrome, a consequence of this post-dust world. First the patients then the staff starting having space dreams.

Finally we have Tom who falls in with a bunch of drifters living by what they can find in the deserted areas. Tom has had visions for as long as he can remember. Not only does he see the alien worlds, he talks with the inhabitants, he knows their history and their future. And he knows that one day there will be the Crossing and he will leave this world and join the space people.

All revolves around Tom, but are his visions real or hallucination? Will be the instrument that opens the way for the Crossing or is he some kind of super-telepath broadcasting his hallucinations?

I had assumed there would be an ambiguous ending, but one answer is clearly indicated. Having said that, there is still room for doubt and I think this ambiguity is necessary and isn't done as well as it could be. The writing is well done, the story is fast paced and keeps you turning the pages. On the minus side I was unhappy with some of the detail. The tumbaine religion, its followers and leaders, don't seem to have complete internal consistency. The technology isn't in step - I don't insist that it must be feasible based on present day knowledge but I do expect some attempt at internal consistency.

So, not vintage Silverberg, but interesting.

IN THE HEART OR IN THE HEAD: AN ESSAY IN TIME TRAVEL - George Turner (Norstrilia Press, 1984, 239pp, no price quoted)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

As its subtitle would indicate, this is part autobiographical, part literary, part historical, part futurological, part political. Of three sections the first divides its chapters into 'a' and 'b'. The 'a' sequence follows what the author describes as 'an egocentric, selfish lifetime', the 'b', in parallel, the development of science fiction, objectively outlined, subjectively appraised, between the 20s and 60s.

His compelling life story introduces a Dickensian tragi-comic cast from a variety of antipodean environments. It is a kind of rake's progress - interrupted by brilliantly described episodes of war - from the youthful pilfering of cash to buy Amazing Stories (and being beaten for reading them). To the time he authored the vacuous line between 'one of the boys' and 'one of the town drunks'. He adds: "In this ambience of decay my literary career began - a career producing first the 'Treelake' Australian back block books and later his SF novels, that second phase entered via fanzine and professional reviewing."

In Part II autobiography is directly interwoven with accounts of early Australian SF conventions, workshops and publishing enterprises. They are documentarily interesting, acid or generous in their remarks on authors encountered; likewise on experiences during two visits to Britain. Turner in Part III, after providing a sequence of mostly dystopian scenarios, defines a small but "socially meaningful role for the science fiction writer". He specifisms Gene Wolfe, Moorcock and Asimov as virtuous only as "decorators of mental scenes we already know" and brackets them dismissively as "no longer science fiction writers but fantasists". Paradoxically he describes Carroll strongly with SF. This he elaborates by saying: "He did not fantasize; he extrapolated received knowledge and theory to points beyond the edge of the universe". As if this were not enough, Turner calls 'the oddities and quiddities of the thought of Brian Aldiss' do just that; and Moorcock's The Dancers at the End of Time follows multiverse contours far outside the "easy dream" category in which Turner places it.

What is undoubtedly the relevance of a twice-quoted aphorism coined from T.S. Eliot: "It is not enough to understand what we ought to be, unless we know what we are". Eliot also wrote in Four Quartets that only "at the still centre of the turning world in timeless consciousness can past and future be balanced - a concept which brings into the fold some of the metaphysical and even fantastical sheen that George Turner would prefer to exclude.

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