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Vladimir Voinovich - MOSCOW 2042
Ian Watson - THE FIRE WORM
Ian Watson - WNOVES OF BARTLOW

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THE BSFA: The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organisation, formed in 1958, which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish bimonthly: Vector, a critical journal; Matrix, a news magazine, and Paperback Inferno, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks, and triannually, Focus, a forum for writers. Other BSFA services include Orbiter, a postal SF writers' workshop; an SF Information Service; a postal Magazine Chain; and an SF Lending Library.

MEMBERSHIP costs £10 per annum (overseas: $20 surface, $35 air). For details, write to Joanna Hains, BSFA Membership Secretary, 33 Thorville Road, Bartlepool, Cleveland 1SW.

CONTRIBUTORS: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double-spaced on one side of the paper. Length should be in the range 1500-4000 words, though shorter or longer submissions may be considered. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned unless accompanied by an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editor.

ART: Cover art, illustrations and fillers welcome.

ADVERTISING: All advertising copy must be submitted as black and white camera-ready artwork with all necessary halftones. All enquiries on rates, ad sizes and special requirements to the Publicity Manager: Dave Vodd, 1 Priary Close, Marine Hill, Clevedon, Avon BS21 7QA.

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VECTOR 147 December 1988/January 1989
The impression given to millions of listeners to Radio 4's Today programme early one morning in late October, is that Fantasy is actually another name for Horror. A brief piece on the World Fantasy Convention, which had begun the night before in London, featured Stephen Gallagher reading an extract from his book, Clive Barker ditto, the Con organiser saying that such writers have a great sense of moral responsibility, and an un-named reader effectively saying he licked the worst of it.

Fourteen hours earlier I'd registered at the Con (many thanks to Deborah Beale of Arrow/Legend for making that possible), and within minutes had bumped into W John Harrison, David Garnett, Mary Gentle, Alex Stewart and Colin Greenland - friends whom I think of as primarily SF writers.

So where's the Fantasy? I wondered. Well, Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones were there, along with some others who are immediately thought of as major Fantasy writers, and who are, in fact, pretty good, but we'll come to that another time.

Just where are the dividing lines between SF, Fantasy and Horror? What makes one book definitely Fantasy, another definitely SF? Is Horror really a separate genre, or not?

I've heard the arguments that SF (and Horror) are subsets of Fantasy. And that Fantasy (and Horror) are subsets of SF. And the relatively new one that all fiction, especially mainstream, is a subset of SF - or was it Fantasy? Countering all this, there are many SF fans who won't touch Fantasy, who sneer at Horror. And vice versa. And vice versa.

Bookshops over the last few years seem to have shown a move towards Fantasy - certainly judging from the covers. Is this actually the case, or is it simply a marketing ploy by the publishers? (Fifteen years ago you couldn't move for Chris Foss covers; was all SF at that time space opera?) It might well be so, at least in part. A lot of SF is being sold in covers deliberately aimed at Fantasy readers. It's not just SF; Kathleen Herbert's historical novels Queen of the Lightening and Ghost in the Sunlight are usually found on the Fantasy shelves, simply because of their covers.

This raises again the serious question of how far "current tastes" and Horror are publishable, author-led or reader-led. My belief (kept naïve for the sake of argument) is that authors should write what they want to write, readers should read what they want to read, and publishers should find the course which satisfies both as much as possible (and makes them money). But too often publishers appear to dictate taste.

A few years ago it was difficult to find anthologies of short stories by UK writers in the shops. Why? According to the publishers, they didn't sell. I reckon they didn't sell largely because they weren't in the shops, because they weren't being published. Self-fulfilling prophecy. I was amazed to hear this admitted by this American publisher on a panel on anthologies at the Con. But attitudes change. The UK original anthology market is partially dynamic at the moment; witness Other Edens, about to go into Book 3, the Interzone collections, Tales from the Forbidden Planet, and the anthologies edited by Alex Stewart, David Garnett and Chris Morgan.

Has the Great British Book-Buying Public suddenly changed its tastes or have the publishers changed their minds? Because those anthologies already published seem to be selling quite well. Maybe they're selling because they're in the shops. And in the shops because they've been published.

To return to sub-genre categorisations. Most of the authors I know write both SF and Fantasy. Some also write Horror. Several write Comic scripts. In fact there aren't many I can think of who restrict themselves to one sub-genre; perhaps Arthur C Clarke hasn't written any Fantasy; perhaps Clive Barker hasn't written any SF. But they don't seem to be typical.

So if the authors don't distinguish — if they're equally happy to write SF or Fantasy or whatever — why do publishers and why do we? A letter in V146 suggested that a lot of Fantasy readers don't realise that Vector (and the rest of the BSFA) covers Fantasy as well as SF, and so miss out on us. In response I suggested — and only half in jest — that we rename ourselves the BSFA&PA.

A sad but classic example of this Great Divide happened at the World Fantasy Con. I was talking to one of the organisers, and mentioned Vector and the BSFA.

"Ah, and how is the BSFA these days?" he asked in the tone one would use when enquiring after an ailing and senile aunt. When I said we had about a thousand members he looked stunned.

"What sort of magazine is Vector?" he asked. I told him. "Oh, it's not a news magazine then," he said, I think relieved that we missed out on this vital function. So I told him about Matrix. "But you don't have a fiction magazine," he said desperately. I agreed, but told him Focus is specifically for writers, and workshops a story in each issue. For good measure I described PI. "A total of 21 magazines a year for £10," I said.

James Herbert at the World Fantasy Convention

By this time he was looking distinctly dispirited. Not wanting to upset him any further, I left, to chat to a load of authors who were guests at the Con, who write novels and stories which might or might not be Fantasy or SF or Horror or whatever, and who are old friends of the BSFA and regular readers of and contributors to Vector.

I'm not putting the blame solely on this guy for his ignorance of the BSFA. The Fantasy Con is linked with the British Fantasy Society, and I know next to nothing about the BFS. He could no doubt have stumped me in a similar way.

So no blame; but it's sad that there's so much mutual ignorance between members of the BSFA and BFS, and such a gulf between the two organisations. It goes back a long way, probably right back to 1971 when, I believe, the BFS was formed by people cheesed off at the BSFA's anti-Horror stance.

There's still some antipathy in SF fandom; I'm told that some fans (who may or may not be BSFA members) have for some time been criticising the World Fantasy Con and the members of the BFS who worked their rocks off to make it work. I've got news for them: the World Fantasy Con was both successful and enjoyable. What might have upset the fans is that it wasn't a fannish event; it was a professional event. Practically everyone there was a professional author or editor or publisher or agent or critic. Yes, they were having fun, like at any other con,

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yes, the wine was flowing like wine and a lot of people stayed up very late and woke up with hangovers; yes, the rules and convention maybe gives the wrong idea. For just about everyone there, this was a working weekend; in a way it was a business conference, or a trade fair, with professionals dealing with other professionals in a convivial atmosphere.

During the weekend I talked with several of the BFS people who organised the Con; we agreed that the Gulf between the BSFA and the BFS is not only pointless, it's actually divisive and harmful. We're going to get together again for the odd pint, and maybe see if there's a way we can work together on some things. Perhaps a couple of them could come to a BSFA London meeting to tell us what the BFS is all about. Maybe organise some joint events.

For example I set up a Science Fiction Day at Marylebone Junior Library recently. The panel included Chris Evans, Neil Gaiman, Kay Gentie, Paul Kincaid, Maureen Porter and myself. It would have been good to have had an expert on RPGs, or adventure game books, or child-

\[suitable Horror; but in the time available I wasn't able to arrange this. A friendly contact in the BFS might have helped on that occasion. At least we'd be talking. No before anyone jumps to conclusions, I'm not suggesting any sort of merger; we're different organisations with different aims and different emphases — but we have so much in common.

The only thing that surprised me at the Fantasy Con, to return to where I began, was the emphasis on Horror; some call it Dark Fantasy. I'd expected more SF, more magic in feudal societies, more of what gets called Fantasy in Vector reviews. But the centres of attraction were Jeanne Delany, Clive Barker, Ken Macmillan, Steve Gallagher, and their American equivalents, not, sad to say, Diana Wynne Jones and Terry Pratchett and their ilk.

If we were to become the BSFA, maybe the BFS should rename itself the BBS. Maybe not. But the point is, our genres may be much such that you really have to split hairs to tell the difference. We write about, and read, largely the same books. And the authors? Well, there are no divisions there. They are the same people.
fusion of the Zone that he finds individuals he may trust, if only temporarily, and can escape his paranoia.

However the Zone is thick with people, the purveyors of negative entropy, and eventually the powers of order start to crumble. With the Zone begins to shrink, too, as the Allies clear up. The individuals who best survived in the Zone take on the appearance of being its controllers. As the disparate elements of the novel’s plot start to come together, the nature of paranoia, its demons, starts to appear, Slothrop’s character dissolves: further seeking sanctuary (in entropy) from his paranoia, Slothrop fragments:

...Tyron Slothrop, who was sent out into the Zone to be rescued...is assailed... He is broken down instead, and scattered.

[Some is one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature anymore. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold his together even as a concept - it’s just too restless’ what they usually say.]

The Firm, the controllers, have tried to use the Zone, entropy, for their own purposes, but have failed. In the words of William S Burroughs (various sources), “Here live a stupid vulgar son. This is a long way off, any fluctuations in entropic levels, the rise and fall of civilisations, must be seen in the context of how much energy is available to make strange things to counteract them; it is a vast, almost inconceivable amount.

Mark’s mistake is in seeing life as inherently unstable, something which despite its negative entropy it certainly is not. A watch running down is not unstable, merely losing energy in a controlled way, performing work with the loss of that energy. Of the energy stored in the spring some is lost, granted, in the ticking and in heat from friction but the efficiency is quite high.

Similarly the human being channels energy in a highly ordered way, working life is not a closed system, but it owes its negative entropy to the complex chemical systems that channel the energy, nothing less than a vast number of closed loops and cycles; life approximates to a closed system.

This illustrates why scientists as individuals are good at appearing less than intelligent on broad subjects (like real life). Specialisation narrows the outlook and if you wish to consider entropy and life, you cannot just consider entropy as a physicist, that is only one side of the question so biologist or biochemist would say that eating flouts the second law of thermodynamics — his colleagues would tear him limb from limb.

Living things exhibit negative entropy, but they do not control it, no more than a fickle controls the river or the Firm in Gravity’s Rainbow controlled the Zone. What living things control, what has caused their presence to remain on this planet for so long is equilibrium, balance. It is this that we must strive for, a balance between diversity and dissolution, or we will go the way of Tyron Slothrop.

And now some more thoughts on the nature of reality and how to cope with it; and on the writing of short stories:

Nicholas Berry

Bygdy Allé 45C, Oslo 2, 0265, Norway

THE VECTOR EDITORIAL — 146 — WAS VERY GOOD. I WOULD like to say again that I have never read a more interesting magazine.

When the unreality of being is perceived, you say it frightens with its potentialities. Heart of Darkness by Conrad arrived there, and Jorge Luis Borges’ fictions are always dealing with that dangerous place.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, All the king’s horses and all the king’s men Couldn’t put Humpty together again. That was the danger Conrad and Borges took on.

Anton Wilson described a terrifying experience called ego loss. If one has experienced this, then life can seem over-strange.

Nicholas next discusses how he approaches his own fiction, with reference to one particular story. The following extract from the story makes up point which I think are valid for all writers, and for many stories. Without straying too much into Focus’s territory, perhaps other writers might like to follow up these thoughts.

Some time ago Vector dealt with approaches to writing fiction.

I try to make the words do a lot of work, try to approach the poet’s aim of having language operate on many levels at the same time.

If a short story has little time for character description, be brief on physical description; maybe have the main character seen at a remove, by others; or have his character (and the plot) illustrated through dialogue.

When the short story is approached as an art form, there is always only one way of telling each story. A lot of the craft of writing can be taught, but the final narrative method, told, seen, described, by whom, is a combination of every other element in the story. These include time span, characters, theme, tone, plot-story.

A short story is most easily handled when part of it is past, and part to come.

Ideally the short story should move to a definite point which defines the psychological, or whatever, core of the tale, and such should be suggested, very little told.

Nicholas Berry

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THANKS FOR ANOTHER GOOD VECTOR. I PARTICULARLY LIKED the pieces by the two Davids — Langford and Garnett.

Perhaps ironically, my main reason for writing this time is a throwaway remark of yours in the letters column: "Maybe we should rename the BSFA The British Science Fiction and Fantasy Association". Hmm. True, it would be a more accurate reflection of the contents of the magazine, but if I were a Fantasy fan joining the "BSFA" I would feel a bit cheated at the bias towards SF. In 1986 there were two articles specifically about SF (Garnett and Turner/Ogilvia) and none specifically about Fantasy, although the reviews were evenly split; in P1 the score was 19 to SF and 11 to Fantasy (with a certain number I wouldn’t attempt to categorise). To rename our society would involve more than just the letterheads; we would have to reassess the balance of the entire output.

«See this issue’s editorial for further thoughts on the subject. I think you’re probably right, but how do you suggest we let Fantasy fans know they’re not totally ignored? Incidentally, there was a lot of interesting material in the last issue (I still don’t know how we crammed it all in); letters of comment would be very welcome.»
ENDLESS PATHWAYS

MIDSUMMER CENTURY, DEVELOPED FROM A 1972 STORY IN Fantasy and Science Fiction, and published by Faber and Faber as a hardback novella in 1973, is a late and comparatively neglected work: not Blish at his peak, but Blish still adept at creating a fast-moving surface narrative which is studded with symbols and subliminal clues leading the reader towards what lies beneath. Martels recaptures, packs in, and puts into bizarre, and by virtue of its very strangeness, thought-provoking context many of the ideas which made his science fiction of the 50s and 60s so innovative and influential: ideas about psi faculties, genetic engineering, entropy, inner space, immortality and the rhythms of history. That is a tall order for 40,000 words: so tall, in fact, as to constitute a modern trilogies. Though the following outline assists in understanding the story’s protagonist, John Martels.

He is a radio astronomer of our own time (preceding Rebirth I) who, while trying to remedy the malfunction of a giant telescope, falls down the inside of its tubular wave-guide. Despite Blish’s precise geography, that journey of 1,000 miles by foot and purloined wing is fantastic; and Blish’s crossing of SF with Fantasy is accentuated at the opening of Part III in his play with the concept of “juggatonic transfer.” The force of the same “juggatonic” that had propelled Martels into the future now propels him in the computer, leaving Quant in command of Tlam’s body. Martels resumes consciousness as occupant of a “spherical non-material machine floating in the middle of a nearly transparent dodecahedron”, which bestows on him sixteen-fold vision and instant comprehension. Quant he learns had been excluded from the computer because he had yielded to the temptation of passively exploring the Pathways of Contemplation it made available, to the neglect of the problem of the Birds. Quant tries in a psychic battle to regain the computer, but Martels persuades the Antarcticans to put Tlam’s body, and consequently Quant, into suspended animation. In return for organizing the tribes to assist against the Birds, the Antarcticans promise Martels a passage home.

After a hundred years the Birds attack: neo-albatrosses with bombs; neo-penguins with torpedoes; but by such strategies as Martels entering and confounding the mind of the King of the Birds, and by breeding back ancestral avian forae to diffuse a genocidal virus, the humans defeat them. Martels, however, after considering the implications of time paradox, decides to stay inside the Ewanon Museum brain case, linked to the computer; and to adjoin to consciousness Quant (at least reconciled) and in beginning to understand the Bird King’s “freedom”.

Now constituting the Quant, Autarch of Rebirth V, their mission is to “learn to love their immortality”, to explore the Pathways, and to free other men to travel them; their destiny is eventually to be called the Sixth... and so on, reality without end.

SO STRANGE A STORY, MIXING THE IMAGERY OF TECHNOLOGY WITH CONCEPTS OF MYSTICISM, COUNTERPOINTING THE PATTERNS OF A FUTURE HISTORY WITH THE RHYTHMS OF LINIERLY PERCEIVED SPACE AND TIME, INEVITABLY LEADS TO FANTASY THAN HIS SCIENCE FICTION. IT IS, IN FACT, A HYBRID. THIS MELTING OF GENRES IS NOWHERE MORE APPARENT THAN IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BIRDS. STARTING WITH THE STATEMENT (QUANT’S) THAT THEIR ORIGINAL “RITUALISTIC” BEHAVIOUR HAD BEEN SUBJECT TO
ancestors. Then the word cruel to which had been added, simply by bringing essence, become proud, territorially jealous and implacable and in temperatures of fantasy? To what exercises of the will, like things, as memory, and the inquant, neglecting to direct allusions to the landscape, is called evolutionary pressures, and after discussion (through Martels' rationally based reflections) of theories relating to their direction-finding and homing abilities, Blish makes the leap of supposing these faculties to have been selected out in favour of intelligence, and self-consciousness, making the Birds capable of speech, of constructing their King-rule,eloquence-creep, though their general mode of attack is pecking, of manufacturing explosive weapons — all this within a minuscule span of evolutionary time.

So this brings us into the realm of fantasy, if not of fairy-tale. Blish strengthens our sense of this being so by his glosses and allusions. When the enormous crow-messenger intercepts Martels/Tiam on the southwestern journey, Martels is haunted by memories of Edgar Allan Poe. The crow's speech might be straight out of the Brothers Grimm: "Go home; I lust for your eyes. The King has promised them to me if you do not go." The Birds' "city" to which they are brought, fashioned out of three trees interwoven and clad with leather to resemble a medieval fortress, is called the "Tower on Human Legs". Blish's description of its dark interior — "the ranked talons and eyes, the tricks of light that make it an illusory universe of nebulae and stars — is a splendid piece of high-fantasy prose.

For Martels the Tower proves to be a staging-post on his so-far-white journey, the real/unreal nature of which is hinted at when, from the Tower's thousand foot top, he looks towards Antarctica over the now forest-covered Drake's Passage:

There lay the Promised Land; but as far as Martels was concerned, the curtain of rising mist marked the beginning of the icecap as well as the layer of ice-crystals which delimited the atmosphere of Mars.

Had great gull-like birds flown toward him out of the mist trying Tanel-l, he could not have been more sure of the Tower's actual existence. Oblique or direct allusions to Poe are scattered through Midsummer Century, and this is one of the most specific and significant. On the last page of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, just before Pym, encountering a superhuman white feline, disappears into the Antarctic curtain of whiteness, we read:

The range of vapour to the southward had arisen prodigiously in the horizon... Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew now continuously from beyond the veil and their scream was the eternal Tanel-l as they retreated from our vision.

What should we make of these forays into the realms and literatures of fantasy? To what exercises of the imagination is Blish leading us? It seems clear that the Birds are a form of spiritual energy, a metaphor, a force. In evolving from man, and the Quant, neglecting to inhabit this, they had, in realising to the full their essence, become "proud, territorially jealous and implacably evil". A which had been added, simply by bringing it forward, the serpent window of their resentful ancestors. When the Tiam component of Tiam/Martels seems incapable of further terror, as the eye-lusting crow threatens him, Martels recalls a line from Canto IV of James Thomson's The City of Dreadful Night: "No hope can have no fear." It is another of Blish's associational clues. Thomson's immediately preceding lines are: "then some enormous things/Wooed past with savage cries and clanking wings." The poem's dominant image is the "sunless city", the "City of Tremendous Night", and there are many details (too many to cite here) which match those of that dim abode of torture and hatred, the Birds' "city" on Human Land. It is within the Tower's symbolic glooms that a psychic struggle takes place between Martels and Quant: "The ripples of demanding hatred surged through a featureless, locust-impervious chaos."

This fight lasts over calypso of eternity, sterilities of secondes." At the end of itMartels emerges from unconsciousness thinking that he has again fallen down the telescope's tube. Soon afterwards he realises that the Birds are possessed of one deeply-buried error: "Man cannot fly." Out of this comes his escape, symbolically by flight, from this hell to Antarctica. Blish gives resonance to his symbolism by likening Martels to Icarus, who escaped from the Labyrinth (as dark, as hopeless and as spatially disorienting as the Bird Tower) by soaring on similarly devised wings, only to fall into the Aegean Sea. Blish uses landscape again to remind us also of the fateful Antarctic denouement of Poe's Narrative. As Martels dives towards earth (which once had been seen) his vision is of: "a cruel series of volcanic lowlands, like a red-and-black version of the Mare Imbrium... or that territory which Poe had described toward the unfinished end of Pym."

There have been many interpretations of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Gaston Bachelard, viewing the surface narrative as overlying dream-like apprehensions, senses in it the imagination's transcending the limits of the elements, the lonely journey and struggle leading to experience beyond the labyrinth. Roger Asselain, citing this in introducing an edition of Baudelaire's translation, points out that Pym's voyage lasts nine months exactly, and that his supposed death in "ich be erwartet wie ein rauschender Katarakt" is at the same time a transcendent rebirth and entry into a universal consciousness, identity being lost in becoming, in effect, God. He relates this to Poe's later work Murders.

In the light of such interpretations, and of Blish's close interweaving of his narrative and landscapes with Poe's, it is significant that, while the last sentence of Part II of Midsummer Century is: "Once more, he had hit the bottom of the telescope of time, and was flung alone into darkness", the opening sentence of Part III (Rebirth VI), is: "Being dead, Martels decided after an infinitely long time, had had a bad press." He comes to consciousness experiencing something like "what the mystics had called cleansing the doors of perception." He is enjoying the into the great void of a luminous dolphin. It seems clear that in these sequences of the book we are involved in a progress from a restrictive to a liberating mode of experience. As medium for his symbols and metaphors Blish changes from depicting meaning to sexualizing landscape and organisms to using the images of mysticism and the figures of esoteric geometry. Martels opens his computer Eye to find himself existing as a sphere within a dodecahedron, the Eye having components located at the corners of the upper six of its twelve pentagonal faces. Blish's use of this

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Pythagorean form may well stem from an awareness of its iconic indications of completeness, unity and transcendence, and its "magical" association with gold, the colour symbolic of harmonising forces, and, in alchemy, of "the body of resurrection".

Blish then, still using geometric symbols, shifted attention from dodecahedron to sphere, into the nature of which Martels achieves insight during his struggle for possession with Qvant. Like the dodecahedron this sphere has upper and lower surfaces encompassing between them 560°, one surface receiving input from the inner world, the other from the outer world; and at the respective interfaces occur such phenomena as REM dreams and the Zen experience. "It was a model of the sentient universe, at the heart of which lay the primary pulse of life — and a core of absolute passivity.

It is this mode of being, with its endless Pathways, which the reunited Qvant/Martels/Tian trilogy will explore actively and, while resisting temptation to become passively lost in contemplative depths, will bring to the service of the human race. The organizing of the tribes, the war with the Birds, these events of a century, though they have relevance to the pilgrimage of Martels to and from the Rebirth, are unsatisfactorily crammed into the last six pages of the book, creating a sense of hurrying anticlimax before the Qvant, now a component of the solar system, in conclusion reestates definitively the major motif: "We shall fall often, but will also rise, within the wheels."

IN MY OWN CONCLUSION I WOULD LIKE ONLY TO POINT OUT ONE or two further strands which in Blish's novella have correspondence with, and in at least one case a discernable relation to, analogous works of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Few stories involving time travel fail to evoke in the reader some thought of the masterwork of that subgenre, The Time Machine. Blish, I believe, gets deliberate associative mileage out of it. The Museum of Rebirth III, with its collection of rusting artifacts, has distinctly the feel of Wells's Palace of Green Porcelain, and the magickal dichotomy and specializations of evolvementary development may also owe something to it, as may the destruction of the Birds owe something to The War of the Worlds.

The initial fall down the telescope tube, recollected in several subsequent falls, is a version of that symbolic birth, or rebirth, common in the literature of Fantasy. It may, as here, indicate transition to a different mode of experience: different environmentally or psychically. In the literature of pure fantasy, Alice's fall down the rabbit hole and arrival in the hall of the Pool of Tears is a classic instance. Ian Watson uses the fall down the gullet of the Worm in The Book of the River to take Yalesen into the Ka-store, this preceding the first of her many "rebirths". The repeated "fall" may also represent the fall of successive civilisations, as when the word is used by Gibbon of Rome or by Oswald Spengler in Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Blish was familiar with Spengler's historical schema; its shape and influence are very apparent in Cities in Flight, which, in this respect, Midsummer Century echoes in miniature. Blish was also deeply versed in the works of James Joyce, for whom the cyclical rhythmy life-style in philosophy, social existence and art, Vico provided a model for his circular patterning of history in the Wake, and for the corresponding rises and falls of HC Harwicker, his Everyman. Put into a Science Fiction setting, Martels and future history are similarly co-involved by Blish.

Like that of Dante, who from Inferno climbed the southern Purgatorial Mount to cross over Lethe and ascend to Paradise, or like Kerans' journey in Ballard's The Drowned World, a trek southwards through the phantasmagoric forest and "drenching aisles" while "searching for the forgotten parables of the reborn men", what Blish terms Martels' Drug nach Sweden, from the infernal Tower on Human Legs to his dodecahedral "immortality", has in it elements of the cosmic/personal pilgrimage of Everyman. In this aspect of interior pilgrimage, and in some of its symbolic landscapes — forests, coloured mountains, vast tree structures — it is comparable also to David Lindsay's allegorical fantasy A Voyage to Arcturus, of which Loren Eiseley wrote, introducing the Ballantine edition: "... do not mistake Arcturus in this day of easy science fiction for a superficial tale... it is a story of the most dangerous journey in the world, the journey into the self and beyond the self.

Blish was writing in this vein, and in much the same vein as Roger Asamailain says Poe wrote when in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym he created a fiction responsive to the popular taste of his time, while making a gradual transposition from the key of adventure novel to that of philosophically tinctured fantasy. Make no doubt, however, that, as always (and as Poe did), Blish told a good story.

**ARCTURAN — ALLEGORIES**

**TIM WESTMACOTT**

AFTER TWO COMPLETE READINGS, COUNTELESS RE-EXAMINATIONS OF CERTAIN PASSAGES AND THE MAKING OF MANY PAGES OF NOTES I AM STILL NOT SATISFIED THAT I HAVE CAPTURED THE FULL MEANING OF THIS BOOK. FOUND LATELY I AM NOT ALONE IN THIS RESPECT. THE OPENING SENTENCE TO LOREN EISELEY'S INTRODUCTION, IN THE 1972 BALLANTINE EDITION, CLAIMS THAT, "A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS IS, IN REALITY, A LONG EARTH JOURNEY," WHILST THE EXTRACT FROM A REVIEW IN THE TIMES PRINTED ON THE BACK COVER STATES, "THE BOOK IS NOT ALLEGORY..." PERHAPS MANKELL'S JOURNEY IS SYMBOLIC AND NIGHTSHADE'S IS NOT.

My interpretation begins with a crystallisation of the cosmological events leading up to the voyage and then moves into the area of speculation.

Many thousands of years ago there was a world called Kuspel where, we are told, grandeur reigned. Life there was in the form of fiery spirit which was "not below individuality but above it. It was not the One, or the Many, but something else far beyond either". The "God" of this world was Surtur, but another "God", Crystalman, drained off the entire life force of Kuspel in order to populate his newly created world, Torsacon.

Crystalman's intention had been to collect all the life force of Kuspel into pleasure-seeking individuals as it passed through his body, but some of the spirit emerged unaltered except that it was now fragmented into millions of parts. Every life-form on Torsacon, while being outwardly, i.e. physically and mentally, a product of Crystalman, contains some of these unaltered fragments of spirit in every atom. The fragments are blindly trying to get back to Kuspel, but not only are they imprisoned and suffering shame due to the life-styles of their hosts, they are also slowly being eroded away. They are passed into the new life-styles of their "God" had travelled from an area of speculation. But in fact life-forms may be created a fiction responsive to the popular taste of his time, while making a gradual transposition from the key of adventure novel to that of philosophically tinctured fantasy. Make no doubt, however, that, as always (and as Poe did), Blish told a good story.

**SURTUR Has TO RESCUE HIS "PEOPLE" SOMEHOW BUT CRYSTALMAN IS PASSING HIMSELF OFF AS SURTUR, PRESUMABLY IN CASE ANY MEMORY OF THE NAME OF THEIR "GOOD" HAD TRAVELED TO TORSACON WITH ITS SPIRIT OF LIFE. CRYSTALMAN TAKES ON THE ALIAS OF KRAG WHOM CRYSTALMAN AND THE PEOPLE OF TORSACON BELIEVE TO BE A DEVILISH SPIRIT "COMPounded OF THOSE VESTIGES OF KUSPEL WHICH SHAPING DID NOT KNOW HOW TO TRANSFORM." THAT CRYSTALMAN DOESN'T KNOW THE REAL IDENTITY OF KRAG IS SHOWN BY THE FACT THAT THE
latter steadfastly refuses to tell Maskull who and what Surtur is. This, I assume, is because Maskull’s mind can be easily read by Crystalman’s people.

After struggling since the creation of Tormance, but without any success at all, Krag came up with an idea which might lead to the saving of one of his people. For it to work he would require from another planet a human with “a bold daring heart and no encumbrances” (i.e. no ties such as a family) who would be prepared to give his life for the privilege of spending a short time on an alien world. Krag picked a suitable inhabitant of Tormance, Nightspore, brought him to Earth, blocked off part of his memory and programmed him to find a suitable subject for his plan. Maskull fitted the required specification perfectly. The night of departure, a voice, which I take to be that of Crystalman, in the tower at Starkmone, reveals the outline of Krag’s plan in an attempt to warn him off: “Maskull, you are only an instrument to be used and then broken. Nightspore is asleep now, but when he wakes you must die. You will go, but he will return.” I’d have got the next train back to London, but Maskull is not deterred.

This is where things start to get difficult. His erstwhile companion Nightspore is mysteriously absent for the whole of Maskull’s journey across Tormance but just as he is dying, Krag tells him, “You are Nightspore.” Loren Elseley states that Nightspore is Maskull’s spiritual self, but this is shown not to be the case by the fact that Nightspore endures such great physical distress when he climbs the Kuspel tower. This makes that Night­spore was, in some unknown way, entirely incorporated in Maskull’s body. Facts: We know that Maskull was a large man and Nightspore of middle height; Krag felt extra­ordinarily heavy when he spoke on Tormance even though he’d had the preparatory treatment; when Krag replaced Maskull on the outskirts of Barey he responded to his questions concerning Nightspore, saying that he was “not far away” and that they wouldn’t wait for him because he would arrive at their destination “as soon as we shall”. These are the sort of subtle ambiguities which are only appreciated on a second reading, but they support the notion that from his arrival on Tormance, Maskull, as his name implies, was a mask for Nightspore.

After a voyage to Arcturus, David Lindsay gives the reader the benefit of having an Earthman’s point of view on the various incidents.

Just before Gangnet joins Maskull and Krag, the latter says, “Perhaps Crystalman will make one more attempt on you.” If we cast this idea back through Maskull’s various encounters we find attempts to sidetrack him nearly all the way. This is not just by the natives but also due to the fact that as he travels from province to province he develops specialised sensory organs which amplify or distort his perception of the world.

In the area of Poolingred, Maskull’s new organs reveal the true splendour of the landscape such that he can even hear the rays of sunlight. The inhabitants of this area revere nature and their philosophy is summed up by a child who asks, “What pleasure is greater than loving-kindness?”

When Maskull sleeps on the outskirts of Idfawn his organs mutuate and these subsequently give him a different perspective. Whereas earlier everything had existed purely in literal fashion, right, now things are de’ed of their usefulness to him. He can now also absorb the minds of other people. Here, an Oceanex tells Maskull, they believe that “animals were made to be eaten, and simple natures were made to be absorbed.”

Despite their contrasting attitudes both of these women enjoy their lives and wish Maskull to remain in their countries. They also both believe that Crystalman and Surtur are one and the same. On the other hand the men of Sant know this to be “the greatest of lies”, quoting the oracle. They also know that Tormance is a strange world and that its pleasures are, as Spadevil states, “a fierce mocking enemy” which kills “the naked grandeur of the soul”. To protect themselves they have resorted to self-inflicted pain. However, according to Spadevil who has been away broadening his horizons – he from getting to Lupiel.

When Maskull is given a double membrane on his forehead like that of Spadevil, pain and pleasure have no meaning and objects are perceived in terms of his importance to them. Spadevil’s law is that of Krag, that Maskull be his first disciple, but when Cattice strikes out one of the Earthman’s membranes, Maskull realises that duty is “but a cloak under which we share the pleasure of other people.”

Dreamsinter shows Maskull a vision in which Krag stabs him in the back; Polecrab (quoting Broodviol) tells him that the way to get to Kuspel is by renouncing the self-life but at the same time reuniting with the whole of Crystalman’s world. Leshallaf claims that Kuspel is another world of some sort, replies, “That cannot be. There is only one world – Faceney’s.” (Faceney, he informs Maskull, is the original and true name of Crystalman). Corpang, on the other hand, states that there are three worlds to us; Faceney’s face and that turn out to be three states of perception – existence, Love and Religion; Haunet creates in Maskull’s mind the desire to meet the woman Sullenbode, a desire which is enhanced by alcohol and the female atmosphere of Licstora; Sullenbode’s things are Masull’s heart of taken his greater attraction to Kuspel-light than to her competitive embraces causes her to die he loses all impetus to travel on. At this point Krag suddenly shows up in order to push Maskull onwards to his destination.

Gangnet is Crystalman’s final attempt on Maskull. He extols the virtue of Tormance’s second sun, Alpaim, of which Maskull has only so far seen the after-glow, telling him that it “is a wonderful, life-giving sun”. However, Krag warns Maskull that this is Crystalman’s trump card; you must renounce the world so eagerly that you’ll want to stay in the world merely to enjoy your sensations.” As always Krag is correct and when Maskull finally sees the blue sun he says, “I feel as if some foul tumour had been scraped away leaving the bones and leaving nothing anymore... this is life.” Disillusionment is, according to Krag, the last and strongest illusion of all.

The journey across Tormance has enormously weakened Maskull and it takes only a little prompting on the part of Krag to bring about his death. Prematurely only Maskull’s death could release Nightspore from within. Krag tells Nightspore. “You have got through”, and the latter realises that he has escaped from “that ghastly world”. After climbing the tower and learning the facts he discovers that he is only the first to be rescued and that
he and Krag (whom Nightspore soon learns is Surtur) have to somehow return the remaining trapped spirit fragments to Tormance before they are totally absorbed by Crystalman.

This seems a good point to list the questions for which I still don’t have any answers. If, as he claims at the end, Krag (Surtur) is mightier than Crystalman, how did the latter ever drain off all the life force of Nightspore, and why for thousands of years was Krag unable to reclaim any of his “people”? How will Nightspore be able to help him? Why are we told near the end that “the corruption of his life on Earth were scoched out of Nightspore’s soul, perhaps not for the first time”? Is there a connection between the events on Tormance, why is it so similar to the one on Tarkan? Perhaps the reader is not told much about the Gap of Sorgey? Why did the voice in the tower say that Nightspore would return? Who had slept in the beds and where did they go?

What is the significance of Kaskan’s vision in Tydan’s cave where he sees the essence from the apparition’s point of view?

If Tormance is a composite of the words Torment and Romance, which words combine to make Nightspore? (My guess is Rush and Dispel.) Why is the remnant of Nightspore in the form of a tower, why is it situated on Tormance, why is it so similar to the one at Starkness and why does the latter have Tormantic gravity? What is the connection between the banshee-like wall heard before the departure and the similarly described voice of Crystalman heard from the top of the Nightspore tower?

This brings me neatly to the question of whether the story is an allegory. When Krag meets Kaskan on the latter’s fifth morning on Tormance he says, concerning the Earthman’s impending death, “You are ripe for it. You have run through the gauntlet. What else is there to live for?” Does he mean that Kaskan has seen all there is to see of Tormance and that it’s now time to give up his life in accordance with the original bargain? Or, does he mean that in his previous four days Kaskan has experienced the equivalent of a normal lifetime on Earth and, as such, is he not depriving him of anything?

For the first two days of Kaskan’s journey there is a close parallel with life on Earth. He arrives naked on a new world and, after a woman has given him a vital infusion of her milk-like blood, he familiarizes himself with his environment via his new sensory organs. Later the woman’s husband tells Kaskan a story which gives him an insight into the ways of that world. His next encounter takes him into the realms of space and violence, domination and usurpation, and jealousy and as such represents the loss of innocence. After this Kaskan falls in with some people who spend all their time thinking about the meaning of life.

When Kaskan leaves Surt he progresses ceaselessly to have a direct parallel with the course of life on Earth which makes me wonder if perhaps the previous similarity was not intentional, at least not as a sequence anyway. Perhaps we are just meant to perceive that the behaviour patterns of most of the people of Tormance are exaggerated versions of human characteristics.

The only thing that is certain is that Kaskan’s running through the “gauntlet” was primarily for Nightspore’s benefit as already described. “Gauntlet,” as well as meaning a whole course or extent of something, also refers to a whole series of puzzling notes. The book is full of musical references so perhaps when Krag tells Kaskan, “the music was not playing for you, my friend,” he is talking about the latter’s journey as much as the mysterious drumming.

That aside, a wider aspect; are Tormance and Nightspore metaphors for Earth and our notion of an afterlife? There are certainly similarities between events in the story and various theological beliefs. Crystalman, whom Krag refers to as “the real devil,” constantly distributes the people of Tormance with various pleasures, and only those who deny them recall their origins in Muspel. Similarly it has been said that what we call the devil is in reality the input of wrong thoughts into our minds, such as greed, lust, etc., the intention being that we should overcome them in order to get to heaven.

The life force of Muspel was originally in a spirit form which transcended individuality. Likewise humanity, although split into many races, has a belief common to its various creeds that we have a spiritual origin and that our earthly minds are like rock pools temporarily separated from the ocean.

However, as with Kaskan’s journey, the parallel is only partial. The life force of Muspel was 100% pure and was stolen by a completely external entity in order to populate his world, whereas some of our religions tell us that man in his original state sinned in some way necessitating the creation of the Earth — by the same God. A further difference is that on Tormance the spirit fragments are being eroded away with spiritual death as the end result, due to the lives of their host bodies, while we are told that our world is meant to be enjoyed and that we can’t come to any permanent spiritual harm on it.

So a Voyage to Arcturus is allegorical in some of its parts but not in whole. I think it is best to approach this book as a fantastic adventure peppered with an assorted collection of symbols rather than as a comprehensive metaparable for the universe.

Perhaps David Lindsay’s intention is summed up by Kaskan when he says of Broodvola’s philosophy, “He must have meant that, as it is, we are each of us living in a false, private world of our own, a world of dreams and appetites and distorted perceptions.”

At one point the author has Leebahliae say “Everything hangs together.” If he is also talking about the book he is encouraged but not enlightened.

Anyone who can offer further enlightenment on this difficult book, please write to Vector or direct to Tim Westmacott at Flat 1, 13 Rose­ neath Avenue, Winchmore Hill, London N21 3NH.

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VECTOR 147 December 1988/January 1989
BOOK REVIEWS
Edited by Paul Kincaid

BEST SF STORIES - Brian W. Aldiss
(Gollancz, 1988, 328pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Edward James

SEVERAL REVIEWERS NOTED THAT ONE OF THE PROBLEMS OF ALDIS AND WINGROVE’S "TRILLION YEAR SPREE" WAS ITS FAILURE TO DEAL WITH THE IMPORTANT ROLE PLAYED BY ALDIS HIMSELF IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION. THOSE SAME REVIEWERS, OF COURSE, WOULD HAVE BEEN JUST AS CONDEMNED had ALDIS AND WINGROVE GONE INTO THE OTHER EXTREME, AS LESTER DEL REY DID IN HIS HISTORY OF SF. ANYONE WISHING TO GET SOME IDEA OF ALDIS’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD IN THE SPACE OF FOUR OR FIVE BOOKS COULD DO WORSE THAN READ, SAY, "NEMESIS, PULP SPACES, AND THE GODS IN FLIGHT".

This collection of their judgement was not far off the mark.

FAR AS HUMAN EYE COULD SEE - ISAAC ASIMOV
(Grafton, 1988, 214pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Darrell Fardoe

TO ISAAC ASIMOV ANTHOLOGIES THERE IS NO END, BUT AS THIS ONE IS CONSIDERED MAINLY WITH CHEMISTRY I WAS ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN IT. TO MY MIND, THESE POPULAR SCIENCE ESSAYS ARE WHAT ASIMOV DOES BEST. I’D PREFER TO READ ONE ANY DAY IN PREFERENCE TO HIS SCIENCE FICTION, WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE NEITHER GROWN NOR CHANGED IN 40 YEARS. THIS CURRENT BATCH OF ESSAYS, WHICH APPEARED IN "FAS" OVER 1984/6, RANGES WIDELY IN ITS SUBJECT MATTER, FROM BEACHES AND PHOTOLECTRIC CELLS, THROUGH VITAMINS AND COENZYMES TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH, THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF INTERSTELLAR SPACE AND ODDBALL STARS. ASIMOV’S WRITING IS ALWAYS ENTERTAINING, ALWAYS INSTRUCTIVE AND ALWAYS COMPREHENSIBLE. I ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE LITTLE SIDES, THE SNIPPETS OF OLD INFORMATION THAT FIND THEIR WAY IN, SUCH AS WHY AMERICANS AND CANADIAN NUTS CALL NITROGLYCERINE "NATUR".

CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION SHORT NOVELS OF THE 1930s - ISAAC ASIMOV, MARTIN H. GREENBERG & CHARLES G. WEUGH (Gollancz, 1988, 572pp, £4.95)
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

NOVELAS ARE NOT LONG ENOUGH TO BE PUBLISHED AS A NOVEL (WITHOUT PADDING) AND TOO LONG TO BE PRINTED IN A TRADITIONAL ANTHOLOGY. THUS I APPLAUD THIS ENTERPRISE WHICH ALLOWS SOME OF THE BEST OF THIS LOST PERIOD TO BE PRINTED. THE COUNTRY IS "THE LITTLE LESSER MAN" AND "THE GODS IN FLIGHT".

Of these 10 novellas, three are perhaps classica: LOVECRAFT’S "THE SHADOW OUT OF TIME", CAMPELL’S "WHO GOES THERE?" AND DE CAMP’S "DIVIDE AND RULE", AND I’D HEARD OF LEINSTER’S "SIDEWISE IN TIME", BUT I’D READ NONE OF THESE STORIES BEFORE.

I DIDN’T LIKE THE LOVECRAFT BECAUSE I DON’T CARE FOR HIS STYLE OF WRITING, FAR TOO EMPHATIC. HE POUNDS INTO US HOW TERRIBLE THE SITUATION IS, HOW HORRIFIC THIS ALIEN RACE, AND THE ACTUAL DESCRIPTIONS DO NOT SUBSTANTIATE THIS. IF YOU’RE NOT READING LOVECRAFT IT MAY BE A GOOD INTRODUCTION, BUT FOR ME IT CONTAINS NO FEAR OR HORROR AND THERE ARE BETTER LOVECRAFT STORIES WHICH CONVEY THIS ASPECT OF HIS WRITING.

"WHO GOES THERE?", THE STORY OF AN ALIEN GRADUALLY TAKING OVER MEMBERS OF A RURAL COMMUNITY, WAS A COMPLETE UNSUCCESSFUL STORY. WHAT I’D HEARD OF LOVECRAFT’S WORK ON WHICH I’M BASED ON THIS ASSESSMENT IS IT’S A WORK OF FANTASY.

Divide and Rule is fun. You may think of a fantasy of an alien planet, a world with knights in armour in modern-day New York, but it’s an alien conquest story where the aliens have restricted mankind’s technological base and revivified to earthlings and they are a simple mankind fights back - but de Camp’s obvious knowledge of armour and other knighthood things and the amusing way in which it’s told meant I could still enjoy it.

Leinster’s story is about parallel worlds, now a standard theme. We follow a small band through some of these worlds and things happen to them, but it’s not really a story; just events surrounding the idea.

Of the rest I only really rated Stanley G. Weinbaum’s "Down of Flames", and put it into a box it’s a post-holocaust rite of passage story. I’m somewhat surprised that he got away with the sexual overtones in this story. He’s an under-rated author and much of his fiction still holds up today.

Jack Williamson gives us a story about lyceanthropy, Eric Frank Russell and Leslie T. Johnson provide a time travelogue, and Harry Bates’s story is similar but includes the end of the human race. Cornell Woolrich deals with re-animating the dead and Horace L. Gold with the transference of personalities. All much used themes now but then.

I found two common threads: xenophobia and the lack of rocket ships. Without exception the aliens are bad, at least the humans consider them bad. In Bates’s "Alas, All Thinking the "aliens" are the future human race who have followed a cerebral rather than physical path and this is considered sufficient justification for the "hero" to kill them! Williamson’s aliens are more evil than Lovecraft’s, and like Lovecraft’s somewhat over written. At least de Camp’s are sort of high tech buffoons, but as they conquered mankind that doesn’t say a lot for us. USA in the 30s was isolationist, and
perhaps that’s reflected in the treatment of the aliens.

As for the lack of rockets, only Russell and Johnson’s story takes place off Earth, but while the narrator is on Venus his story takes place on Earth. Either these 10 are atypical, or my belief that most early stories relied on rocket ships is easily wrong.

These stories from the 30s have some historical significance, and three hold up very well. My greatest disappointment is the large number of typos, surely we could have had better proof reading. I look forward to future volumes.

IN THE COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS - Paul Auster
(Faber, 1988, 186pp, £9.95)
DAYS BETWEEN STATIONS - Steve Erickson
(Futura, 1988, 249pp, £3.99)
THE WAR AGAINST CHAOS - Anica Mason
(Damian Hamilton, 1988, 252pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THINGS FALL APART, AS THE POET PUT IT, the centre cannot hold. These three books demonstrate that a common theme among today’s writers is the end of things; and that, as so often happens, the mainstream is turning to science fiction in order to express its fears and failings.

Urban blight, the civilisation of the city is under attack, and reeling from the blows. Government indifference, or even active support for the processes of decay, do not help. The result is a grim, grey vision of rot and ruin.

Each book, in its own way, is excellent, but each author chooses to look askance at the city of tomorrow in very different ways. Auster and Mason are closest in some of the details they envisage: institutionalised scavenging, for example. Yet it would be hard to imagine two more different books in style and tone. Auster’s rapid follow-up to the minimalist detective story of The New York Trilogy, is equally bare, equally concerned with literary reference, equally an intellectual enquiry into the nature of identity and the death of language. It is more bleak in its manner than in any state it portrays. Fresh, vigorous and challenging, it builds upon the success of that first book without really advancing much beyond it, nevertheless it is not the book for fans of plot and incident.

Anita Mason’s previous book, on the other hand, was an excellent historical novel, The Illusionist, and though this retains the same rich and eminently readable style, it could not be more different in subject or manner. Like Auster she sets her action in a nameless city in decay, but here the decades of civilisation are more rigorously maintained by the Council and the Company. But when John Hare is unfairly dismissed from his job he becomes a marginal, and begins an odyssey through the underworld of this rotting world that reveals much about the nature of the state, and the inexplicably lethal Zone at the heart of the city. Along the way Mason propounds a powerful yet equivocal argument about the nature of political control, and the instruments for maintaining civilisation.

The best of the three, however, is Steve Erickson’s extraordinarily surreal vision of a future in which Los Angeles drowns in sand, Paris freezes, the canals of Venice run dry, and two blue eyes glow in a bottle. In and around this is a cock-eyed story of the century built around the career of an obsessive but brilliant film maker. Strange connections are made, coincidences abound, and the world we know slips into one we don’t without us noticing the change. It is a peculiar, magnificent novel, full of flaws yet so original and daring that its bold successes far outweigh the failures.

I WAS GOING TO SAY THAT THE PLAYER OF GAMES is a more mature work than its predecessor, Consider Phlebas, but in view of my recent discovery that The Player of Games was written first, I’m not so certain this is a good idea. However, I also know it was extensively rewritten, so maybe that observation still holds true. I hope so, because The Player of Games rises head and shoulders above Consider Phlebas. The latter was an action-packed but unconventional space opera, enjoyable to read, but I wasn’t the only person to feel that it sprawled uncontrollably. As for the last hundred pages, they really should have been cut down to something much more succinct. For all that, it was definitely one of the more readable novels of last year.

The Player of Games, despite its earlier genesis, shows signs of greater maturity, presumably acquired in the rewrite. It’s a thoughtful, sombre sort of story, less reliant on action, but redolent with a careful attention to plotting which reflects the central image of the novel: the game. In this case Azad - a game which has so much importance in The Culture in which it is played that it powerfully determines the whole structure of life within the Azadian Empire - is effectively “as comprehensive a model of life as it is possible to conceive... a model of life, institutionally, establishment promotion, political faction: the fates of all are controlled by the outcome of the game. The ultimate winner becomes Emperor.

The Culture, having established contact with this civilisation, approaches Jernau Morat Gurgeh, expert in all games but seeking a new challenge, in the hope of persuading him to play for them. The Culture’s interest in Azad is perhaps ambiguous, but no more so than the nature of the Culture itself, probably Banks’ finest creation in these two SF novels. It’s a “communist society that’s with a small ‘c’ for the politically aware” with a penchant for meddling discreetly in the affairs of others, particularly the authoritarian regimes they despise. The Culture is a rationally organised society, and as such requires no laws to govern its people. Near in principle, but practice sometimes falls rather short. In Consider Phlebas, Horza disagrees violently with the Culture’s stance, to the extent of fighting on behalf of its enemies, despite not supporting them either. Yet The Player of Games offers the other side of the coin. Bank’s portrayal of the Azadian Empire as a corrupt and decadent monarchy is particularly chilling, and his presentation of the Culture as an attractive alternative is very skilful, pointing up the undesirable nature of each in its turn. Gurgeh stands in the middle, the observer and commentator.

It is too simplistic, not to mention inaccurate, to regard this as a Contra Consider Phlebas, but the novels might be read as complimentary pieces, presenting two sides of a coin. Consider Phlebas, even with its turgid approach to space opera, is very much the fast-moving, action-packed story, exhilarating in the way it ranges across the universe. The Player of Games is much more compact, a microcosm encapsulated in the image of the gaming board. Neither novel offers any real answers, but they ably illustrate that there is more than one side to a story.

THE SKY LORDS - John Brunner
(Gollancz, 1988, 316pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Chris Barker

THIS IS A PASSABLE POST-HOLOCAUST story of the ecological variety, and the story of the emergence of a new science fiction though he has other fiction to his credit as well as numerous books, essays and reviews relating to SF and fantasy in the cinema. One’s immediate impression is that the
BOOKS

book might have made a much better film. Its general tenor invites comparison
with the work of Philip José Farmer or early Moorcock. Omitting the
front and back the novel has been cheque and expanded, some titles in-
itably will have slipped through the net. Nevertheless, not many can have
been missed, the list of books by
author fills double-columned pages
and covers not only straight SF and
fantasy, but also juveniles, non-
fiction, and novels only tangentially
related to the genre. And for each
book we get an editor, ISBN date of
publication, price, page count, cover,
and a brief summation. In other words
this is an excellent reference tool. It
also lists books by title, books
originally published in 1986, books by
subject (SF, fantasy, horror, juvenile,
collection, anthology, magazines, ref-
ference, associationl, miscellaneous),
stories by author and title, the con-
ten of the year's anthologies and
magazines, plus an appendix which in-
cludes recommended reading lists from
the Locus reviewers. In other words
it's good to browse in, as one entry
leads to another. And because British
books are covered as well as American,
it's as useful on this side of the
Atlantic as the other.

It is in one sense a rite-of-
passage piece in which a nice feminist
girl with a sheltered upbringing en-
ers the real world where men and
women "play" rather than the genetically tempered weak, insufflctual version she's
used to. Some may take umbrage at
Browan's treatment of his protagonist,
though the effect may be inten-
tended to be ironic rather than chew-
vinistic. It is worth bearing in mind
that the book's intent clearly lies in
adventure rather than serious litera-
ture. It's a middle of genre SF, but
Browan is outclassed by other writers within mainstream SF, for example Bob Shaw who has a
much greater sympathy with the character
he creates. Finally the conclusion leaves
a large thread hanging loose, doubtless this will be woven into at
least one sequel.

Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THIS TONE IS SUBLITTED: "A COMPREHENSIVE Bibliography of Books and Short
Science Fiction Published in the English Lan-
guage", yet right at the start we learn
it's been put together from the mon-
thly "Books Received" column in Locus,
and though the information has been
checked and expanded, some titles in-
vitably will have slipped through the
net. Nevertheless, not many can have
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it's as useful on this side of the
Atlantic as the other.

But it is the British side that
lets it down. British listings in Locus
are never as comprehensive as the
American, and there are gaps. Thus,
although Interzone: The First Anthology
received American publication that
year, its contents are not listed, and
one scours the book in vain for men-
ton of Geoff Ryman's "O Happy Day!"
So, not quite as comprehensive as it
claims, but still very good.

still binds the new housing estate and
embraces the present - and future -
generations of the Sinclair family.
future, because the site of Clavering
Grange is also a multi-dimensional
interface, a doorway into other times,
other places, and other realities.

Tales from the Hidden World com-
presses four novels covering incidents
in the 20th Century. My favourite is
"Those That Serve", a well-written
portrayal of 1960's high society, often
dressed as a horror story. The char-
acters are believable eccentrics; only
gradually do they make their sinister machi-
inations apparent. The young servant
until it is too late for her to escape
her inevitable yet unexpected fate.

The idea that Immortals condemned
(?) to "Life Everlasting" should play
pranks on living people seems a more
amusing way of passing eternity than
wandering around wailing as ghosts
usually do. The extravagant behaviour
of the psychic detectives in "The Cringing Couple of Clavering" disguises
two very professional ghost-hunters,
experts in scientific and occult tech-
niques for investigating and counter-
ting the paranormal. And for most
of "Home and Beauty" we are not sure who
will prove the greater peril: Sinclair
and his plant-like Munkins; or the
erotic couple and their photographers in
the house where the heroine is lodging
- an old-fashioned horror tale made
more powerful by the use of first person.

No, I haven't visited Clavering
Grange before, but I know I shall go
there again.

CRADLE - Arthur C. Clarke & Gentry Lee
(Gollancz, 1988, 309pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by John Newsinger

ACCORDING TO THE COVER BLURB, CRADLE is a "masterwork of soaring visionary imagination" with the US space
scientist Gentry Lee adding another
dimension to Arthur Clarke's masterly
skill. Unfortunately this is totally
misleading. In fact the novel is a
rather clunky-paced thriller, an
adventure that is a strange encounter element worked into the
plot.

Of course, misleading cover
blurbs are hardly something new even
if they continue to annoy. More to the
point, does the book actually succeed
at what it sets out to accomplish, is
it any good? Not for me I'm afraid.

Is the plot a little rather
than funny and the characters are
strictly cardboard. It must be adm-
itted that some attempt has been
made at giving them psychological
depth, but it is not as well done as
it should be. A selection from an American psychiatrist's
casebook. We are dealing here with
the insane rather than the mentally ill.

The plot develops remarkably slowly
and though the last third of the book
actually concerns the strange
encounter that takes place beneath the
ocean. What occurs is very much sub-
Spielberg with a Connie-obessed naval

TALLES FROM THE HIDDEN WORLD - B. Chetwynd-Hayes
(William Kimber, 1986, 206pp, £9.50)
Reviewed by Martin H. Brice

I HAVE ALREADY READ SOME OF THE WORK
of Chetwynd-Hayes, but I do not think
I have visited Clavering Grange before.
Located in Kent, I suppose it is not
far off the M2 or M20 - its foun-
dations were laid in ground forever
haunted by some ancient horror. The
Grange has gone, but its macabre spirit

VECTON 147 December 1988/January 1989
officer being confronted by an alien carrot, and sentient carpet creatures making an appearance, etc. At the end, when all heroes' pleadings persuade the aliens to leave our world alone ... well it just doesn't work.

Clarke's reputation can survive this sort of difficulties, but Gentry Lee would be well advised not to give up his day job.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY - Annie Dalton
[Nethuen, 1988, 173pp, £6.95] ADAM'S PARADISE - Alison Rush

ADAM'S PARADISE IS ANOTHER IN THE LONG line of Celtic fantasy for younger readers. In a dreary landscape of mudflats, dunes and a river estuary in north-west England Ruth revisits her childhood home, her Gran and her younger brother, Adam. Soon she is drawn into a supernatural conflict in her world where her mother, the witch Fincara, and a host of women warriors seek a battered cup, all that is left of the Cauldron of the Dagda. Meanwhile a group of half-mortals seek to regain the cup as they hold the other three treasures of the Four Cities. Ruth is told that her mother will put the Cauldron to evil purpose, but the men fight for the light. Alison Rush dares to write intense, poetic prose though it may not always succeed; but speaking about the light and dark inevitably sounds pretentious if the reader has already read much of the genre. And I was puzzled by an inconsistency: Fincara says the cauldron can only be restored to its place in Caer Wydyr by a child born for that task, which is why she sought a mortal man to be that child's father. Yet when Adam brings the cup to her, Fincara tries to hang it on the chains herself.

Apart from plotting problems, the story is well written. The characterisation is strong, the setting well worked out. But alas, it is not a particularly coherent, compelling novel, and unless the excesses of the 20th Century have been put to rights, and men have taken away from women the unfair burden of having to vote — indeed, of having to make any decisions.

The story is a continuation; unfortunately the ideas set out in Native Tongue for the development of a woman's language, Láadan, are not really taken any further. The language is, yes, and is spread from the Lingquist women who developed it out into the rest of society by, of all things, the woman Civic Church through a clever series of deceptions.

So Láadan will be spoken by women everywhere; women will change, will become more capable of coping with men; men will be changed by their contact with such women; and eventually Láadan will be learnt, with other languages, by both girls and boy babies.

But we know all this from Native Tongue, or could summarise it.

"No more powerful instrument for change exists than language," we are told on p352. But that is much of what is wrong with both books; we are told, not shown. Elgin's theory may well be valid; she is a Doctor of Linguistics, and see Mike Christie's article on the theories behind Native Tongue in VJ95.

But Elgin's not a particularly compelling or inspiring novelist, and unless she can pull a few literary rabbits out of the hat in a third volume (this one reads like the middle book of a trilogy, with the usual fault-ballmarks), I would regretfully consign her, as a novelist, to the category of worthy, but dull.

THE JUDAS ROSE - Suzette Haden Elgin

THE JUDAS ROSE CONTINUES THE STORY begun in Elgin's Native Tongue, set in America a century after which there are two major changes. mankind is in contact with extraterrestrials, some of whom we can communicate with through the special skills of the Linguists. And women are subordinated to men: the excesses of the 20th Century have been put to rights, and men have taken away from women the unfair burden of having to vote — indeed, of having to make any decisions.

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THE SUPERNATURAL TALES OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE - Peter Haining (Ed)
[Poulsham, 1987, 272pp, £12.95] Reviewed by Darroll Fardoe

IN THE COLLECTIVE MIND OF THE PUBLIC Conan Doyle is inextricably linked with Sherlock Holmes. There are several reasons for the enduring popularity of the great detective, notably the perfect image of late-Victorian England they conjure up, and the interplay of the characters of Holmes and Watson. Conan Doyle was also sufficiently slapdash in his plot construction to leave a store of contradictions and discontinuities for his fans to argue over. So it is interesting to read this collection of supernatural stories to see how he fared as an author in a non-Holmesian milieu. Conan Doyle is revealed as a journeyman writer, competent but
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"...a relentless page turner..."  
Sunday Today

"Simple and wicked and funny."  
Detroit News

"...overflowingly readable."  
The Times

"...cuts through layer upon layer of intrigue...dazzling..."  
Oxford Mail

"...a big, humourous tale of intersteler intrigue in the classical mold. I fully enjoyed it."  
Roger Zelazny

"Lively and entertaining... a rollicking delight!"  
David Bischoff

"Transcendent science fiction, written with style and verve..."  
A. E. van Vogt

Now in paperback.
rarely able to rise above the pedestrian. The problem, in his supernatural stories specifically, is that he is never able to make his horrors believably scary, either in the traditional way which raises the hair at the nape of the neck, or in the currently fashionable creation of grue. Only five of the 18 stories here were published after 1904, so there is little trace of the obsession with spiritualism which dominated his later life. This is a book to read once, then give away. I wonder if William Hope Hodgson read "Playing with Fire", from which the raising of an astral unicorn, before he wrote "The Horse Invisible"?

HAUNTED - James Herbert
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1988, 224pp, £10.95)
Reviewed by Nick Morton

THE PROLIFIC AND COMMERCIALLY POPULAR Herbert has now tackled the Haunted House mystery, while Straub, after his own previous Ghost Story, has embroiled himself in a horrific thriller.

Koko - Peter Straub
(Viking, 1988, 576pp, £12.95)
Reviewed by Martin Waller

THE PROLIFIC AND COMMERCIALLY POPULAR Herbert has now tackled the Haunted House mystery, while Straub, after his own previous Ghost Story, has embroiled himself in a horrific thriller.

Koko concerns four survivors of the same plan-tragedy whose service in Vietnam culminated in an atrocity in a small village, In Thoc. 15 years later they reunite to investigate a series of murders in the Far East: the killer stuffs one of the regiment's playing cards into his victim's mouth, mutilates him, and identifies himself with a name they all once shared - Koko.

Herbert's characterisation is unusually shallow, but the reasons are (possibly) wound up within the plot: to say more would give away the suspense (though it was sign-posted for me very early on). Sadly Koko suffered the same silen: if a character who is murdered has his face badly disfigured so he can only be identified by his dog tags then the possibility of a switched identity is bound to suggest itself. The difference was that Haunted only relied upon that one fact to produce the scary end, whereas Koko was many-layered, rich in characterisation, suspense and horror.

Haunter seems to have been written with fading in mind; scene shifts to show the person on each end of a telephone are unnecessary and abruptly switch the reader's attention; transitions from scene to scene is smooth, however: "She remembered the last time, more than a year ago ..." followed by the new chapter, "When was the last time you went to church?"

Ironically, ex-Lieutenant Beavers is the instigator of the search for the Koko killer because he can see the potential for a bestseller non-fiction book and even a mini-series...

Both books feature the flash-back. With Haunted the 10 pages comprising Ash's investigation into the demonic possession of a church is "all so obvious" to use his own words; it reveals little about his character and hardly moves the story along at all. The other, with a charlatan medium who is actually telepathic, is handled well, and paves the way for the "shock ending", when Ash's locked memories and guilt pour out to unhinge him. The Koko flash-backs are graphic and snatched from the memories of the characters: each in their way adding another piece to the puzzle of why they acted as they did.

In Koko Dr POole observes that "improbability and violence overlapped from ordinary life, and Stephen King seemed to know that". So does Straub. Time and place would enter a room and I would wonder if the killer was there, ready to pounce; and even when he did, the suspense continued. Some of the characters were not particularly pleasant, but I still cared what happened to them - well, with the exception of Beavers. And as the search progressed and the identity of the killer changed, sympathy began to creep in. For Koko is a story about a haunting too: as "if Vietnam was their real life and everything else just afterglow." It is a pleasure to read, notwithstanding the coarse language and graphic brutality depicted.

"terror has many layers" says one of the characters, and so does Koko.

This is a psychological horror thriller, touching upon Vietnam, the ironies and terror of that conflict, but mainly it is about people sucked into the past. Both books are page-turners, but Straub's is more memorable.

ENDGAME ENigma - James P. Hogan
(Century, 1985, 408pp, £12.95 hardback, £5.95 paper) Reviewed by Ken Lake

HAD ANYONE TOLD ME A WHILE BACK THAT people would pay £5.95 for a paperback SF novel. I'd have laughed. Yet here we have another of those "trade paperbacks" that will soon appear in normal format by a simple trick of photoreduction, saving the publisher the cost and trouble of binding. In the sort of cover that would preserve this book for longer than the few hours it takes to wade painstakingly through its complexities and consign it to the box of unwanted books.

Paranoid American spies are so thoroughly unlikeable, I find it hard to understand how they can be regarded to the level of admiration that US SF fans apparently offer them - for if they don't, this book is flawed from the start. Again, utterly twisted, politically indoctrinated Russians are surely a creation of American comic book fantasy - how come Hogan believes we will accept and find convincing, an anti-Communist pollemic disguised as realistic fiction (though not very convincingly)

Hands up all of you who realise that Ziganda is not a breakaway part of the Malagasy Republic. Hardly anyone? Then you may have read the prologue of this dangerous, bigoted book. Did you trust it to be true. Hogan will tell you that if that is the case, for he realised that his aim is to sow distrust among us all, to "prove" that only dirty American politics can save the world from dirty Communist politics. Open this book and almost the first thing you will see is an acknowledgement for texts reprinted from an anti-Communist compilation published in the United States: facing this you will read a dedication you can now call this book.

The book is riddled with deliberate red herring, every thought and action is argued three ways or more, confusion is spread upon misdirection and you cannot trust a word anyone says. The "secret" is revealed on page 327 after an interminable repetition of plot, counterplot, betrayal and lie, sprinkled with expressions like "You Irish asshole" and leading to no end of neatly sketched engineering cut-away drawings, page after page of technical explanations, all boring down to: (a) the entire Russian leadership is in a massive hole in the ground which everyone believes to be the space station aforesaid. If you can swallow this, you can swallow anything. Come now, where's your common sense - and Hogan's?

METAPHORIC - Richard Kadrey
(Pan Books, 1988, 240pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by Mark Water

METAPHORIC BEGAN AS A TERRY CARR AGE SPECIALIST. his swansong - he died after editing it. It was the series that also saw the debut of William Gibson, and this is another of those novels about a hustler moving through the cloaca of a neurotic, computerised future city.
being double-crossed at every turn. Jonny Qabbala, drug dealer and part-time anarchist, is one of those persons we would all love to be at 20 and should, if we read about him in our morning papers once we pass 30.

He is caught in a future Los Angeles which is gradually dying of an apparently imported new strain of leprous disease. That disease is thought to have been brought by the Alpha Rats, aliens who have taken up residence on the moon, or a neo-Palestinian Middle East superstate at virtual war with the US, or even the city's own authorities cleaning out the bizarre gangs who have taken over. Kadrey manages a (fairly) new slant on what is, on the face of it, already hackneyed material. He writes the familiar clipped, cool streetwise prose style but shows at least some awareness of what each word means.

Surrealism and Dadaism provide an unusual theme - art is continually referred to, descriptions invoke well-known paintings and the leader of one of the older street gangs is named Man Ray. The link is made explicit at one point. "I don't think Lincoln and Dali could have been snap-shots from an only slightly deprived tour book of Los Angeles." To add to this Kadrey drags in Situationism and the concept of the Spectacle, the Big Lie used by the Government to keep its subjects in line. In this case it is the aliens who are the necessary invented hate figures. The Good Guys are the Croakers, a web of anarchical black market doctors forced underground in the 1990s by the AIDS crisis. Jonny ends up, his friends and lovers dead, his smuggler-boss murdered, walking away from a city ravaged by civil war with the cure to the plague in his bloodstream.

The book has its weaknesses and infelicities. Jonny starts too many chapters coming round from yet another beating, and Kadrey has little concept of character in his peripheral cast list. But it has its strengths as well, not least its black humour. Characters with names like Peri Usu, Groucho and Nitable Virtue thong the city, throwing bombs shaped like glass roses. One character claims surrealism to be the first art movement to genuinely comprehend the modern age. It is not a new contention within SF, but it has seldom been expressed with such panache and glee.

THE REVOLUTION OF SAINT JONE — Lorna Mitchell
[Women's Press, 1988, 204pp, £4.95]
Reviewed by Mandy Gunning

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF MEN'S EOSALTARIAN IMAGINATION? If history compelled men to make a world where women are their equals, what would their creation resemble? Mitchell replies that our world would still be the model. Women's oppression would persist and men would con everyone, including themselves, into thinking that black women are white women, that the same rites of sexual equality, they'd carry on working and bettering and running the show. The best that men can achieve is the ideology of equality: only a world made by women could realise it.

Or at least that's the realisation that Saint Jone, the novel's heroine, comes to. In the opening chapters she ardently believes in her society. It is a place where science has become an

dread Billion Stars is his first novel and even if it isn't brilliant — flagging and becoming repetitious towards the end it is exciting.

The theme is finally, the cold, starless, evolutionary, "evolution" and discovery. Dorothy Yoshiada, an astronomer, has been shanghaied to a remote planet where the human scheme of things is challenged and which may just hold the key to an interstellar war. Dorothy is psychic in a big way and knows there is a major league alien intelligence on the planet — only no-one believes her, especially her rigid-minded military superiors, because the local fauna is distinctly unintelligent. Dorothy really wants nothing but out of her situation, but the story has her journey, both literally and metaphorically, to the dark tower which is an entirely logical and satisfying resolution. And yet...

The novel's weaknesses are structural. The plot development is seen pre-ordained rather than organic. There are physical perils galore for Dorothy, yet never any real doubt that she — and only she — will solve the puzzle. The effect of the characters upon the plot is very limited. They are well realised but seem divorced from the storyline which runs along the rails laid down when the story was planned. More than one act against character because the plot demands that is the way they must behave. Then there are the strong echoes of McAuley's influences — although there is no real effort in admiring the likes of Aldiss, Kilworth and Bear.

These, though, are quibbles, those factors which keep Four Hundred Billion Stars a good novel, rather than a great one. It is an entertaining, fascinating read which sets its stall out from the beginning as a traditional science fiction story and resolves the tension.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS BOOK. THERE IS NO LITERAL SENSE TO THE PLOT.

But I enjoyed it. Essentially it is an allegory in a symbolic code to which I don't have the key. It has a Christian basis: the central characters are a group of twelve; one is a traitor; and death is merely a

FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS — Paul J. McAuley
[Goéanx, 1988, 253pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

REVIEWING HOLDS A GREAT JOY, DISCOVERING a writer the prospect of whose next work is exciting. I knew McAuley from his short stories, and liked his tart, evocative prose style. Four Hun-
acetic dogs, where passions may only be expressed in classroom games, where the worth of every human artefact is measured by its mathematical harmony.

One by one, the scales are peeled from Jone's eyes until, aided by a superordinate that forces the articulation of intuitive truths, she proclaims the failures of the male scientific theocracy. Chapter by chapter, she moves inexorably towards love and sex with a savage ecstacy. This research is essential for Jone's burgeoning political awareness; one of the sensibilities of our age is that love and revolution go together like a puzzle and solution.

And here lies the chief problem of the novel: it reads like a straight translation of feminist truisms into another dialect. Mitchell plods faithfully through every transcription. Lesbians are now Babylonian. Chaos ethic is, what's Christian standing on the shall of the turti, and as the fantasy world fully through every trage-dy, Mitchell can place that enrich their...
aided and abetted by The Hunt, which sees his emotion as being good and right and really ought to be legalised. He is set the task of hunting a Nicaraguan contra terrorist (Guzman) and around him the CIA, various criminal groups and assorted scientists, seek to further their interests. A beautiful enforcer called Mercedes inexplicably falls for him but dies in the end. The surprise in the tail is surprisingly unpredictable. The novel run like scenes from the movie to come, including a self-referential time-slip (tracing the origin of the book to the first book in the sequence) which did not so much boggle my mind as niggle at it. The light and even blithe tone might class this as a parody except that the portrayal of killings and destruction is all too believable. The underlying philosophy — that wars are caused by the frustration of each individual's desire to kill, or perhaps that the excitement of man-made destructions is a fundamental part of modern living — is presented as propaganda rather than speculation. Basically, a nasty piece of work dressed up as a comedy.

MOSCOW 2042 — Vladimir Volnovich
(Cape, 1988, 424pp, £11.95)
Reviewed by K.V. Bailey

TO SAVOR GULLIVER'S TRAVELS TO THE full you need to know about Swift's society and times, though the inventiveness and action appeal universally. While there is plenty of inventiveness and action in Parts I and VII ofVolnovich's novel, many of the intervening chapters are titled as "Rashly and Marriage", "Papill", "Inside the Kremlin", consist of discursive confrontations in the course of which communism is extrapolated into absurdity. The satire, while often Revelations and comical, is inevitably attenuated for me and for most readers by lack of intimacy with the society being satirised. For the reader dissident exiledism is by no means excused; and because translation (however excellent) from Russian into English (American Idiom) is a further barrier, since it introduces into the novel many linguistic savagings rest on linguistic tricks and subtleties and on the euphemisms and evasions of Moscow's street-talk and bureaucratic jargon.

Volnovich, exiled since 1980 and living in West Germany, sends his dissident hero, Kartsev, from the Munich of 1982 to the technologically regressed Moscow of 2042 by a photon-powered time shuttle. He has been manoeuvred into accepting a commission to publicise, in the twenty-first century, twentieth century plans to promote a Gorki counter-revolution. The novel of having the author-as-observer transcribing and presenting the art of another. In each case the second is handled differently and quite competently, but in a manner which provokes little surprise or dissolution.

The Fire Were contains some of the same historical authority of such a book as Prebble's The High Girders, and comes close to what The Power has been but wasn't. The actual content of the chapters are one thing to live under Tynemouth castle is used. It is a local focus of evil, having been imprisoned there by a knight riding out and making a name of local maidens, not to mention indulging in other unruly pursuits.

The evil has affected not only the present but the past lives of a local psychosist who is also a horror author on the quiet. He practices "past life therapy", allowing his patients to work out problems in their current lives by regressing them hypno-suggestively to the past lives which he believes to be fictional.

In a recent past life a patient underwent a homosexural rape beneath Tynemouth castle which led him to give his soul as an offering to the devil in the under the influence of the woman. The horror-author side of the psychist's personality takes over and stages a compensatory act of sex for his own soul in the novel. The novel attempts to effect a cure.

Less of a novel than a thesis on the nature of reality, Whores of Babylon is an ancient Greek novel and programmed by computer-interference. He becomes elbowed rapidly in the lives of several "Babylonians", experiencing every statue from tourist to the slave of the highly manipulative and scheming Theseeus — his mistress in at least two obvious senses. The arsina line of narrative is fragmentary. This is the point, possibly intrigue and the use of religion to cover the computerised work of the initial project are main features, but all of the conclusions about the nature of life and identity have been arrived at during an evening of intelligent conversation. Of other Watson I have read, it recalls to me the memoirs by Emile Remond.

This second is an encouraging book, in that it points the way to territory such as that inhabited by Priest in The Affirmation. Close, but no cigar.

Both books work very well within their own terms, and certainly the Watson of Babylon is once more proving to be a challenging and thought-provoking author.

THE FIRE WORM — Ian Watson
(Gollancz, 1986, 207pp, £10.95)
WHORES OF BABYLON — Ian Watson
(Peladen, 1986, 302pp, £3.95)
Reviewed by Michael Fern

THERE ARE TWO COMMON FACTORS WITH these offerings. They both play games (not to say take liberties) with history, and both use the stylistic trick