Vector

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All opinions expressed in Vector are those of the individual contributors and must not be taken to represent those of the Editors or the BSFA except where explicitly stated.

Contributors: Good articles are always wanted. All MSS must be typed double spaced on one side of the paper. Contributions may also be accepted on standard IBM or Atari ST format disks. Maximum preferred length is 3500 words; exceptions can and will be made. A preliminary letter is useful but not essential. Unsolicited MSS cannot be returned without an SAE. Please note that there is no payment for publication. Members who wish to review books must first write to the Editors.

Artists: Cover Art, Illustrations and fillers are always welcome.

Advertising: All advertising copy must be submitted as b/w camera-ready artwork with all necessary halftones.

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Previously, I've talked about religion and I've talked about pornography, I thought this time maybe sex, maybe death, but then I realised I couldn't put it off any longer; it's time to talk about something really important. Let's talk about Vector.

The sharper-eyed of you will have noticed a slight change in the credits this issue, and will be wondering what changes this *putsch* will issue in. The answer to that is none that you will notice, except hopefully an increased efficiency. This is not a palace revolution, but an attempt to shift labels in accordance with perceived reality. Kev will continue to contribute editorials and interviews to Vector, to edit material in which he takes a special interest, and to share decisions about Vector's long term plans and ambitions. I will continue to control the way Vector looks, to decide on the contents of individual issues, and to be responsible for the final edit of all material included. It would be helpful if all submissions were addressed to me in the first instance.

This issue marks the end of my first year of editing Vector. I was initially terrified at the prospect, but I've learnt a lot and enjoyed myself enormously in the process. As one of Nature's little opportunists I dislike fixed goals, but I did have a couple of strong intentions in mind when I took this on and it is interesting to see how they have panned out:

I wanted to widen the base of contributors. I still do. I mean no offence to the people who have been the mainstay of this magazine over the last few years when I say that I think that Vector could benefit from more fresh voices. I think this is always true; variety is life. Please notice that when I ask for freshness, I do not also ask for youth; I feel that ageism is one of the more tiresome afflictions of the SF critical community. It is true that some writers become stale with age; we can all think of examples. Others take on fresh life, finding an originality they did not possess in their heydays. So I would like to see more contributions from the old as well as the young. I do not want to accuse anyone of apathy; we all live busy lives. I think some of you may be either a little shy, or scared of committing more time than you can afford. Please do not think this way, I am always ready to discuss contributions and to offer practical help where required.

I wanted to liven up the letter column. I had heard long-term members sighing over the days when Vector's letter columns were full of argument and a lively spirit of discussion. Although I wrote that review and Editorial in all innocence and with no previous personal bias against David Wingrove or his books (I think Chris Lewis, in this issue's letter column, comes the closest I've seen to discerning my original intent), I think I've had a little more success there, don't you? I think I've got a lot to thank him for. Despite the contents of some of the letters, receiving and reading them has been one of the joys of the last year; always something new to chew over. Please do not stop writing when the Wingrove affair has blown itself out!

So, two intentions; mixed results; where next? People have commented in the past that Vector can be a little grim, a little down. It is difficult to see how to combat this one; you cannot expect a reviewer to be cheerful about the process of wading through a hundred pages through a bad book. However I do have a couple of ideas and regular contributors can expect to hear from me in the not-too-distant future. Others, who do not recognise themselves in that description, may drop me a line if they're curious. My address is inside the front cover. Shamelessly begging for mail again.

So much for good intentions; how much of this is seen through into this issue of Vector? Sally-Ann Melia who has written about Angela Carter, is a new contributor, and I think one to watch. We received far too many letters to include them all, even after radical surgery. By the way, if some of the letters seem a little curt, it's because the first victim of my knife is always the polite bit at the beginning; on the other hand some of our correspondents are abrupt. As for cheerfulness, well maybe I listened too much to the Sisters of Mercy while putting this one together....

By the way, if anyone spots me at Blackpool, please introduce yourself. I don't usually bite on first acquaintance.

---

By Catie Cary

Artwork by Claire Willoughby
From Hussain Rafi Mohamed

What an extraordinary business! I can only thank the Nameless Ones that despite being a member of the Association my standing was not sufficient to warrant a letter from David Wingrove. I pity those who did because clearly the issue has become hopelessly clouded by the combination of what seems to me two quite separate and distinct matters. On the one hand the "Wingrove affair" (for want of a better title) which is about authors, criticism, reviews and egos; and on the other, pornography. But what really baffles me is why such mild efforts (Vector 164) should have provoked such a thunderous response (Vector 165).

Whatever authors may think there really are only two situations in which it seems reasonable for one to respond to a review of his/her book. Firstly, to correct clear errors of fact (although even there it can sometimes seem like overkill) and secondly to say "You will be hearing from my solicitor..." Responding to errors of judgement, opinions etc seems to be utterly pointless, a view shared by most authors, it would seem given the general lack of printed spotting (although I did notice a letter from Gare Vidal in the Guardian the other day). I'm sure that Mr Wingrove did feel slighted by Mr Cary's review and her editorial, but what purpose does he think venting his spleen in public service (and not me) serves, despite the obviously golden opportunities presented by all of known space and time. The endless possibilities seem still to be just that.

The essence of the argument, it seems to me, is what degree of risk is acceptable, and on that there is no consensus. Democratic political systems rely on an enormous extent on citizens accepting the risk of non-democratic bids for power. When pressed on the point people often seem ambivalent, asserting that "It's a free country" but reared to righteous wrath over, for example, the proximity of homosexual teachers to their children. There's no solution to that so I am no reason why there should be one where pornography is concerned.

Many years ago at a party I attended, given by people I hardly knew, I saw a sequence in a grizzly and badly produced video film. I was led to believe that this was made by what the Americans call a "snuff movie". Despite the fact that no one seemed to know anything else about it I am pretty certain it wasn't, but while the sex scenes were acted with a complete lack of interest by the participants (as usual), the apparent murder was real. It certainly provoked a stunned silence from those watching. I still doubt it was genuine, but it is certainly for something like this that "most" people would decide that legislation was necessary, despite the considerable amount of ground cover even now put to that point. But would that ever stop people writing about it - as Peter Strain did in Koko - with even more contrived and explicit detail?

Mr Wingrove defended his apparent excess with the words: "I now present this material gratuitously ... But to instruct". It's not the first time I've heard words to that effect and it can seem like a convenient way of acquiring respectability for what would otherwise be gross stuff. I'd like to believe that, but I do wonder who is being instructed here? Why do I so naively and ignorantly that I need to be told how to respond to and understand these things? If I can understand other politics, can I not also understand the sex? Is it really then merely a gesture; cover for someone who wanted to write a racy book, or not be thought simple-minded and second rate? And is it that hypocrisy that constitutes pornography? I wouldn't want to accuse Mr Wingrove of such a motive in case I receive a very long and angry letter, but in abstract I think the point worth making.

Personally I would insist all measures to censor the written word, in the same spirit that I would resist proscription of political parties. Certainly such happenings, as she describes are offensive to the senses and the mind, as I found in The Middle Kingdom (the torture of Si Wa Yen) by the sexually deprived De Vere and her subsequent brutal romance with the nobleman, (or whatever, that depicting this depth of vileness was integral to the narrative's purpose). Such actions could have been dealt with by deliberately banning or even violating. The author has to make a judgement; and because, to cite his circularised letter, he is concerned about "the reader what can be expected in a sick - 'Yang' society far out of moral control, he takes the harder, more disturbing option. An OED definition of obscenity is "the senses and the mind"; and of pornography, "dealing in the objects of sexual desire". Given these limited sequences, it seems to me that The Middle Kingdom, and Lust's frequent contemptuous usage which implies the cruelly cynical and commercial exploitation of sexual images, David

Incidentally, I haven't read any of the Chung Koo series but I dare say when my son one day brings home a copy of Chung Koo XXIV and I take a look at it because I think it unsuitable he will accuse me of censorship. He'll be right, but that is probably partly because... Hussain Rafi Mohamed

Kington-upon-Thames

From Humphry Price

There are quite a few points about the last issue of Vector that interested me, as I'm sure you can imagine.

None more so, perhaps, than the wildly inaccurate view of the content of my book (see Review of Our SF and Fantasy books, Vector 165). The idea that Chung Koo is a massive plot undertaken by NEL is quite wrong. We have published a number of Chung Koo series before, and are publishing another in a few months. It is also completely false to say that we publish nothing but cheap and easy SF and fantasy books in the UK - we publish every other publisher other than HarperCollins, Macdonald or Century. Of these, we were the first to publish, and after Macdonald, on second and third runnings, our books must be regarded as the most important of the series, anywhere, after Macdonald and Century.

Humphry Price

Senior Editor, Hodder & Stoughton

From K V Bailey

I see from a note in Vector 165 that your siten from Milthrop has not been arriving. It may be of interest to point out the second part of the enclosed letter, which I sent in good time for publication in Vector 165.

"At first glance through Vector 165 it seemed that the sheer weight and repetitiveness of opinion, particularly following David Wingrove's review, were doing nothing to improve sufficiently to kill the whole issue dead, but an extract from the number of Vector that contains one of the most interesting issues, I wouldn't propose, that such an event could materbiate me, but I would make an attempt to understand the reasoning behind the reviews and to see how much of their reasoning we shared..."

I note that Mr Wingrove has given wide circulation to his rebuttal of Catie Cary's criticism and to his detailed defence of The White Mountain. Not having yet read the novel, I hesitate to comment, but having read (and reviewed for Vector Books One and Two of Khoon I'm bound to say that I found in them more of ideological substance than Catie could discover in Book Three, where she sees only "history book pornography"..."

"...what she considers that as a "book of ideas" it has "nothing to say"..."

"...the White Mountain, the strength of megalopolis (the idea of megalopolis expressed metaphorically) is as much dry, "impression of vision" which (personal and political) still survive to survive. A yin/yang dialectic explored themes of conformity and corruption, and revolt, while the white knight yields an appropriate symbol. If these significant structures have not been carried through into Book Three, it will be both surprising and disappointing..."

If it possible that Catie's natural distaste for passages of what she views as pornography has clouded otherwise interesting happenings, as she describes are offensive to the senses and the mind, as I found in The Middle Kingdom (the torture of Si Wa Yen) by the sexually deprived De Vere and her subsequent brutal romance with the nobleman, (or whatever, that depicting this depth of vileness was integral to the narrative's purpose). Such actions could have been dealt with by deliberately banning or even violating. The author has to make a judgement; and because, to cite his circularised letter, he is concerned about "the reader what can be expected in a sick - 'Yang' society far out of moral control, he takes the harder, more disturbing option. An OED definition of obscenity is "the senses and the mind"; and of pornography, "dealing in the objects of sexual desire". Given these limited sequences, it seems to me that The Middle Kingdom, and Lust's frequent contemptuous usage which implies the cruelly cynical and commercial exploitation of sexual images, David


The Best Books of 1991

edited by

Chris Amies

Chris Amies
!
Blue World - Robert R McCammon; in which he reveals his adeptness in various modes but most suited to keeping it short, something he admits to in his introduction. This lot kept me awake during a fifteen-hour night flight.
!
The Flies of Memory - Ian Watson: Watson has now taken a new linguistic fire and flair and buzz, as well as his customary intellectual depth and sly humour. This book represents the new Watson as much as does 'The Coming of Vertumnus' in Interzone 56, which I could also have nominated except that it came out in 1992.
!
By Bizarre Hands - Joe R Lansdale: a collection of strange, violent tales infested by the redneck Texan milieu inhabited by Joe Bob Briggs, six-packs of Bud and Louisville Sluggers.
!
The Devil's Mode - Anthony Burgess: a rare foray into short fiction with variations on Burgess's favourite themes of music, language, religion, Rome, Malays/af, and interracial sex. 'Floating Dogs' by Ian McDonald in New Worlds 1, a story of technobaroque overkill and artificial sentience, was brilliantly conceived and executed, just what we need.
!
KV Bailey
!
Here are five (and a bit) items of enjoyed 1991 reading - not arranged in any league order.
!
First, Storm Constantine's Hermitech for its futurological and environmental inventiveness, and for the verve with which she powers along the plot through a labyrinth of sexual ambiguities.
!
Also, Kim Stanley Robinson's Pacific Edge, where, after his distressed and distressing Californians, we find an Orange County utopia which is believable, even possibly attainable, and that just because of its imperfections. It's a utopia actually inhabited by interesting people.
!
Then there is Ian Watson's novella Nanoware Time, exhibiting his extraordinary ability to weave metaspace and metaphysics with a sophisticated playfulness.
!
Aside from fiction, Stanislaw Lem's Microworlds became available in paperback, a collection of reviews and essays so stimulating and controversial as to galvanise thought and leave you wanting to argue back. It's especially sharp on time travel, Philip K Dick, and the Strugatskys.
!
Lastly, the best SF movie of the year was in the Stateside publication (dubbed with Bruce Boston's Short Circuits) of Steve Sneyd's collection Bad News From the Stars - porcous, sardonic, hardboiled with which I will add (and this is the bit) We Are Not Men, Sneyd's illippician booklet of SF haiku, in which each seventeen-syllable poem quintessentially conveys what many an ambitious epic has less adroitly striven for through three large volumes. The art of the minimal!
!
David V Barrett
!
Ian McDonald's mythic Irish fantasy King of Morning, Queen of Day confirms him as one of Britain's finest young writers, with a brilliantly observant eye and ear. If you ever thought the world of faery was twee, read this and have nightmares. At the same time, in places it's utterly wondrous.
!
Ellen Kushner's Thomas the Rhyme is a beautiful, haunting novel, the definitive new version of the song, told by Thomas himself, the lady he leaves and returns to, and two elderly people who care for him. The Queen of Elfland is splendidly attractive and dangerous: perfectly portrayed.
!
Gael Baudino's Strands of Starlight and Gomorra's Axe are magical fantasies, written by someone who understands magic and whose Old Religion is believable. So are her elves; there are three more Strands books to come, and I want to get my hands on them.
!
For a humorous, touching and environmentally sound cross between The Hobbit, Little Fuzzy and Bilby's Black Easter, Alan Aldridge's The Game is one of the most unusual books of the year. The illustrations are fun too.
!
I don't know when it'll be available in this country, but look out for Michael Swanwick's Gravity's Angels, one of the finest short story collections I've ever read. Excellence throughout.
!
Martin Brice
!
Chase is another masterpiece of suspense from Dean R Koontz; but in this case a whodunit, first published under the name of KR Dwyer in 1972.
!
Creed by James Herbert is more than an erotic horror novel. It's a biting and perceptive picture of life and attitudes in the late 1980s. It should be set reading for future historians of the Thatcher years.
!
The author of Diary of a Space Person is Chris Foss, painter of fantastically complex technologies. In this pictorial book, gargantuan machines, weird aliens and beautiful women are juxtaposed with a handwritten text, which includes a number of thought-provoking religious concepts.
!
There is plenty of disturbing symbolism in Beyond the Looking Glass, by Jonathan Coe and Lesley Fiedler, subtitled Extravagant Works of Fairy Tale and Fantasy - Novels and Stories from the Victorian Era'. Well worth reading.
!
Marvels by RE Harrington describes the rise of the information technology industry in the Twentieth Century. Purists may argue that it is not strictly science-fiction, but it is certainly the best scientific fiction I have read in 1991.
!
Molly Brown
!
My favourite book of 1991 was Dreamside by Graham Joyce. Joy writes with such richness and maturity, it's difficult to believe this is a first novel.
!
Secondly, my favourite was Nazis May Be Encountered, a collection of short stories by Mary Scott. Not strictly speaking a genre book, but several of the stories stray into fantasy, and one is definitely SF. Nazis, like Dreamside, is a first book, and it's especially nice to see a publisher (Serpent's Tail) taking a chance on an original collection of short stories by a first-time author.
!
Next comes Jago, a big fat book by Kim Newman, who's anything but a first-time author. He's been around a while and he knows all the tricks of the trade. A great read.
!
My scintillating, beautiful. To thank in 1990, but I'm one who always waits for the cheap 'n' cheerful paperback. Queen of Angels by Greg Be‎cker stands out for the sheer power and impact. More please like Mary Cloyd, and I loved Good Omens by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, even though I'm foreign and had never even heard of the William books.
!
Catie Cary
!
The Werewolves of London and Angel of Pain by Brian Stableford head the pack. By turn incandescent, glamorous, mind-expanding and just plain weird, these are the work of a writer at the peak of his powers. I can't wait for the third part of the trilogy to appear, so that having read it I can then read them all again.
!
Thomas the Rhyme by Ellen Kushner is near the top of my list. It's a great mash-up of the extraordinary: a merging of the GMC climacteric story with the simple life of the plucky girl witch. This is a novel of great power and beauty.
!
I had problems with The Stress of Her Regard by Tim Powers: it descends all too often into 20th century dialogue and I dislike some of the basic premise of Ork (e.g. that human poets should require the assistance of another race). For all that it is a fascinating secret world book, and I've already finished it.
!
For a humorous, touching and environmentally sound cross between The Hobbit, Little Fuzzy and Bilby's Black Easter, Alan Aldridge's The Game is one of the most unusual books of the year. The illustrations are fun too.
!
I don't know when it'll be available in this country, but look out for Michael Swanwick's Gravity's Angels, one of the finest short story collections I've ever read. Excellence throughout.
Barbara Davies

The Silence of the Lambs by Thomas Harris was so gripping and well written that I didn’t dare see the film for fear of the inevitable disappointment. The tension was such that I needed frequent breaks to calm down.

In Pat Murphy’s The City, Not Long After - a different kind of post-plague novel - artists and sculptors continue to defend San Francisco from military thugs. The city itself lent a helping hand. A deceptively gentle book, it crept up on me, and before I knew it I was hooked. Raising the Stones by Sheri S Tepper took the idea of God as funny and added religious fanaticism and the male fascination with heroes. A lengthy but heady concoction.

In Black Trillium Julian May, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Brian Stableford gave us fantasy quests for the price of one. Tripletts Hazamis, Kadiya and Angiel had 3 fascinatingly different journeys to make and objects to recover.

Rune by Christopher Fowler combined the idea behind M. R. James’ “Casting the Runes” with video and computer technology to produce a gripping supernatural thriller. Policemen Bryant and May, and a librarian with occult interests helped Harry Buckingham avoid coming to a nasty end.

Lynne Fox

It should be impossible for all the Vector reviewers to each select five favourite new books from 1991. There aren’t that many good books published each year. But there are five good books to be read each year.

Pat Cadigan’s collection Patterns is packed with excellent, thought-provoking stories in the best tradition of speculative fiction. Well worth £3.99.

Colin Greenland’s The Entropy Exhibition is a wonderfully readable and detailed study of the British New Wave. Read, re-read The Unlimited Dream Company by JG Ballard. It’s this power of combined vision and experience to give us a fresh view of our world and now which so much contemporary fiction lacks.

John Gribbin

Best nonfiction: The Man Who Knew Infinity, by Robert Kanigel. The story of how an Indian clerk with no mathematical training, Srinivasa Ramanujan, produced a breathtaking stream of original work, became a Fellow of King’s College Cambridge, and died tragically young just after the end of the First World War.

Science is included, giving a flavour of the excitement and importance of Ramanujan’s work even to non-mathematicians.

Runner-up: Dennis Overbye’s Lonely Hearts of the Cosmos. This time the story is that of the Universe, and Overbye describes the lives and work of many cosmologists. He gets carried away sometimes, and presents a highly personal and US-centric view of cosmologists and their work. But it makes for great entertainment.

Fiction: I have an ongoing love-hate relationship with John Cramer’s Twistor. Love the science, hate the wooden characters. But it makes a refreshingly different view of all those stories with great characters and plots but no science. I think I’ll start a campaign for real science in SF (CAMREASCF).

Another hopeful sign for members of CAMREASCF was the appearance of John Sillit’s Redshift Rendezvous, which was high quality and entertaining and may help to change the mind of those who think that only science fiction is a valid form of literature.

The Nebula shortlist. Excellent “what if?” speculation about the implications of a minor (?) change in the laws of physics. But there is more to SF than hard science, and I got as much pleasure out of a book where the emphasis is definitely on characters and feelings, not hard science.

It isn’t new; I picked up a second-hand copy of a 1968 Ace, Synthajoy by DG Compton, and as far as I know it is out of print, like most of Compton’s work. And you thought all that stuff in Interzone was new! If Compton was American, Gollancz would probably be republishing his collected works by now. But as things are, I can only recommend you check out the book dealers at your next con.

LJ Hurst

1991 seems to have been the year I used even the specialist dealers to buy non-SF material. My first choice is tangential and most others even further away. That first choice is JG Ballard’s The Kindness of Women, which gives a very alternative reading of the life of a man who helped to reinvent science fiction. Although it is said to be autobiographical it seems to be just as much a reinvention of Ballard. The other book that reached us was the illustrated edition of The Atrocity Exhibition, that came with Ballard’s annotations to his sixties creation.

The next two are straight biographies of tangential figures: Ted Morgan’s Literary Outlaw: the Life and Times of William S Burroughs, an account of a man who dedicated his life to his own creation and provided an alternative philosophy on the way, and the other is Michael Shelden’s Orwell: the Authorized Biography, which makes Orwell more human but lacks Bernard Crick’s depth on the postwar writing of Nineteen Eighty Four. I only bought Harold I. Klavan’s Trials of an Expat Witness because the book club said I had to buy something, but it’s a good read about the application of scientific expertise, and I’ve now read his Newton’s Madness too.

Tom A Jones

Sadly I can only find four books I really enjoyed in 1991. I read fewer books than previous years, as the attention demanded by a two-year-old doesn’t leave much time for reading and most of what I did read wasn’t above average.

First, Barry Hughart’s Story of the Stone. I really enjoy his detective stories set in a magical ancient China which sadly never existed. The plot is too complicated to describe, but it has lots of dead people in it. Another ‘China’ book, The White Mountain, the third in David Wingrove’s Chung Kuo series. The second book was a little slow, but this one certainly picks up the pace again. At the basic level it’s a power-politics thriller but the layered plotting takes it well above that.

Simon Green’s Blue Moon Rising is a fantasy with a dragon, princes, magic swords, and the sub-Tolkien paraphernalia which I normally dislike. This book overcomes that with humour and some interesting plot devices, and a great character in the Uncorn.

Finally, Ray Bradbury’s A Graveyard for Lunatics. This is a detective/thriller (not atrace of SF) set in and around a Hollywood film studio. I liked the fast-cut style, the depth of knowledge and the affection that Bradbury obviously has for the movies.

Paul Kincaid

This year there’s no contest for the best book of the year Sarah Canary by Karen Joy Fowler (forthcoming) is a fantastical story about the Pacific Northwest in the latter years of the last century with a vivid historical awareness, a keen eye for peculiar historical fact, some wonderful writing, and an ending which just tips it over from straight historical writing into fantasy.

Any other year. Only Begotten Daughter by James Morrow would have won hands down.
This tale of the daughter of God coming to a near-future Atlantic City is sharp, corrosively witty, and an excellent example of science fiction at its most thought-provoking. By comparison, *Time and Chance* by Alan Bremt is lightweight and sentimental, but I still think it is one of the most entertaining novels I read this year.

It has been nearly ten years since Ted Mooney prophesied the death of western science fiction, but at last he has come up with a second novel, *Traffic and Laughter*. It isn't quite as good as the first but it still puts him up there with Paul Auster and Don DeLillo with an excellent piece of literature which just happens to be set in a world where history took a slightly different path.

Finally, *Night of the Cooters* by Howard Wystop, although which is totally necessary to burble incoherently and wonder how anybody could come up with such perfect stories.

**Andy Lane**

It hasn't been a classic year for SF, so I'm going to have to twist the rules to find five books that stand out.

First twist - Mike Resnick's *Soothsayer* was announced for UK publication during 1991 but only in the USA. Resnick wrote the sort of Western-in Space SF that will outlast all other styles. *Soothsayer* isn't his best, but since he doesn't have a book out in 1991, it gets a second look.


Third twist - I can't remember whether Dan Simmons' *The Full of Hyperion* was published during 1991 or not. What the hell, the Hyperion sequence has some classics to rank alongside Dune. I'll say no more.

Fourth twist - Jonathan Carroll's *Outside the Dog Museum* isn't SF, but then I'm not sure what the hell it is. All I know is that I started reading it at Glasgow station, finished it as I was pulling into Euston, and didn't notice the journey in between.

Fifth twist - er... nobody will believe that Stephen King's *The Dark Tower III - The Waste Land* is SF, well, it's about parallel universes, artificial intelligences, post-catastrophe dystopias and time loops. What's more, it's very good.

Then again, maybe it wasn't such a bad year after all.

**Ken Lake**

The mandatory nod of approval at Terry Pratchett and Sir Terry Rakin goes without saying, as does the genuflection before the complete five volumes of The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick. Now in paperback! Loin Master Bajoul's eighth Vor novel *Barzey* ought to win her a second Hugo, and the Robert Silverberg-franchised universe series *Time Gate* (vols. 1 & 2) are worth a try, as is Frank McSherry Jr's anthology *The Fantastic Civil War* while Pulphouse Publishing's *Author's Choice Monthly* series continues to please.

But I have to single out a much belated discovery - H.P. Lovecraft's *The Copa* and *Atoll*, one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?), along with Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* as one of my best experiences of 1991 (can anyone sell me a copy?).

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**Sally-Ann Melia**

Books for solitary pleasure, the brain translating the black ink into 3D Technicolour images and projection them on that all-encompassing screen behind the forehead. 'Good

books necessarily compete against personal dreams and nighttime memories. So I must beg your indulgence, what follows is not my top five books for 1991, but mine in 1991.

My first is *Canal Dreams* by Iain Banks. 1991 was the year I decided to read every story *Mr Banks* has written and this is by far his best. My first copy was lent to a friend, never to be returned; my second copy is dogeared from reappearances in *Other Times*.

My second is *Mindfall* by Anne Gay, a sophisticated debut weaving a heart-rending tale of dreams and references of the disappearing future, forever, the longed-for child is never born, Eden refuld is a disappointment; in the end, death seems a blessed relief. My third is Colin Greenland's *Take Back Plenty*. I loved the Perks, the Cherub and the Parrot. (It tells me what I always thought of men... well, another time.)

My fourth is Robert Rankin's *The Antipode*, the first of his very readable comic fantasies. The Devil comes to Brentford and upsets one too many of the Flying Swan's regulars.

My fifth is *The Centenary Edition* of *The Lord of the Rings*, a beautiful book I will probably treasure and reverently peruse for many years to come.

**Kev McVeigh**


From retreads to Mike Award shortlist goes without saying, and then... Jeanette Winterson - *The Passion*. A very personal, highly beautiful, view of love and history, and - fantasy. A rich and warm novel I could read many times over.

*S A S: Possession*. Lit crit, satire, history, a mystery, at least two love stories and poetry too.

Terry Bisson - *Voyage to the Red Planet*. A good novel on the world's in well thought through politics, SF bygones, histories and so on and so forth.

Mary Gentle - *The Architecture of Desire*. A love story, despite appearances, with as appropriate an ending as anywhere.

Ian McDonald - *King of Morning, Queen of Day*. Any novel which quotes Dlangford can’t be all bad. Three women, fantasy worlds, and Ireland interact within some marvellous writing. He gets better.

**John Newsinger**

Best books of 1991: three really memorable novels and a magisterial collection of short stories.

First, Iain Banks' *Use of Weapons*. This author never fails to impress and this particular volume reads as strong as ever. Culture-mercenary Cheradenine Zakalwe, was outstanding.

Second, Bruce Sterling and William Gibson's *The Difference Engine*. An alternative history of Victorian Britain, exploring developments consequent upon the information revolution unleashed by Babbage's nineteenth century computers.

Third, Joanna McAlay's *Of The Fall* (the imported American edition was cheaper than the British edition!). Once again a fine novel of conspiracy and revolution on Elþyr. After these three it becomes difficult to single out two more that were outstanding. In the end it has to be Pat Cadigan's *Synners* and Philip Mann's *Spectacles*. The first chosen not because it was brilliantly successful, but because of my sympathy with what she attempted; the second for the space tragedy by consistently good writer.

**Cecil Nurse**

First I would like to endorse the Arthur C Clarke award shortlist, some of which I would mention here otherwise. Personal favou rites:

*Raising the Stones* - Sheri S Tepper. A full-blooded book, engaging fearlessly with the question of the creation, role and consequences of mythology in human history. On the one hand an unsentimental portrait of an intelligent lunatic who incorporates humans in its commune; on the other an almost paranoid fundamentalist community that nevertheless closely resembles real world attitudes. Eminent re-reading.

*Dream Science* - Thomas Palmer. Contemplations and variations on the nature of reality. Stupendous. As I mentioned in *Interzone* earlier, nowhere, one follows the rational protagonist through deeply puzzling changes until an explanation and resolution is reached. I loved it.

*Xenocide* - Orson Scott Card. I haven't read the earlier works in this sequence but I found this full of ideas, melodrama, humour, copyright, folkies/ordinary people, and an unhappy ending. With the world so full of stupid, nasty and ridiculous things, I can’t bear to be cynical about this.

*White Mountain: Chang Kao III* - David Wingrove. This portrait of a vast decadent society, in which there are few heroes, nor even happy outcomes for the protagonists, is winning me over. Paradoxically, I think it is because the unpleasant bits truly do make me feel queasy.

*Confessions of a Crip Artist* - Philip K Dick. A tale of three ordinary scale total weirdos, drawn with bewildering compassion. Amazing.

**Michael J Pont**

My *top 5 for 1991?* Difficult. I buy most of my books from my local *Age Concern* shop at about 25p each; the choice of 1991 hardback SF/Fantasy from this source was limited! I also devoted much of last year to trying to get my own books published, which left fewer opportunities for reading. These problems aside, I did catch up (just a little late) with Greg Bear's *Year of the Black Sun* which I much enjoyed. I also read and was sadly disappointed by Stephen Donaldson's *The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story*. Moving to *real* 1991 books, Terry Pratchett's *Reaper Man* is added to the list. One definition of a good story is that it should fill the reader with a compulsion to read, and then a sense of loss as the last page is finished; very much in this category for me was Ray Bradbury's *Next to Eden* and Goblins. *Lanatics*. Note that this is not, despite the author's previous record, a work of SF/Fantasy. Finally, from 1991 reviews, Chris Claremont's *Grounded*.

**Andy Sawyer**

Whereas in 1990 I could easily have nominated a top ten of SF novels read during the year, I found it quite difficult to narrow the list down. I'm sure. However, no fictional character I encountered in any form in '91 matched Lucy Snowe from Charlotte Bronte's haunting *Villette*, which I finally got round to reading following a visit to Haworth where I fell desperately in love with the author.
Maureen Speller
This year I've read more short fiction than novels. Indeed, I feel completely unqualified at present to comment on the state of novel publishing and I'm constantly behind on my quarterly reading of short fiction reading as well so my choice will seem a little biased.
I was very impressed by Nancy Kress's Beggars in Spain, an extraordinary short story about genetically engineered people who do not need to sleep. Set apart from society, the urge to regard it as sympathetic for the marginalised in any society is irresistible.
Connie Willis's Cibola, about a mysterious lost city, embedded within a familiar environment, delighted me as a person convinced that even concrete blockhouses have an inherent magic.
Terry Bisson's Bears Discover Fire is what Gary Larson would write if he didn't draw instead, and Bisson indeed acknowledged the influence of Larson. This story is wierd.
Richard Kadrey's Notes for Luchenko's Third Symphony [Back Brain Reshade 18] impressed me as an honest attempt to sidestep the conventional narrative form.
Mary Rosenblum's Waterbeuger, one of a series of stories set in a drought-ridden future America, each a beautifully-crafted gem.
For 1992, I want to pose two questions: when will the American short story, given the thoughtful critical attention it deserves in this country? And when will short story writing in Britain, which has been most exclusively tied to the production of theme anthologies?

Alex Stewart
By far the best book of the year for me was Mary Gentle's The Architecture of Desire, a delirious and disturbing swashbuckling fantasy which, unusually for the genre, wasn't afraid to confront some of the darker aspects of human nature.
Neil Gaiman's graphic album Season of Mists tackled similar themes on a more cosmic scale with a more philosophical and thoroughgoing point of view. Neil Gaiman's character s are often lighter, more whimsical in their approach, which is a welcome change.
Back in the mainstream, Paul Auster's Moon Palace offered a more allegorical, knowingly postmodern take on the urban equivalent of the modern world.
Finally, Garrison Keillor's We Are Still Married is a warm, quiet, surreal wit; probably best enjoyed on the BBC audio tape, read by Keillor himself.

Charles Stross
First off, Vineyard by Thomas Pynchon. Published in 1990, the novel that took him twenty years to write - a merciless and funny portrayal of corporate postmodernism America in the 'eighties, Japanese multinationalisn engaging in corporate power wars. Over the latest microchips, deranged DA's descending on drug farms in black helicopter gunships, teenage hackers jackin into the net (and each other), and an order of ninja feminist nuns in the hills above Hollywood. Sounds familiar? It should be; this is the ne plus ultra of cyberpunk... and it's set in 1982. But I had to read this book, or die trying.
Second: Rat's and Gargoyles by Mary Gentle. A masterpiece. A date set for me to let men just say: this is the most challenging, cerebral, downright intelligent fantasy to hit the bookshelves for ages. Pimply Trilogy junkies will be squawking dead on the toilet, pants around their ankles, smoke trickling from all their orifices and an overdose-part fix of this relentlessly sharp fantasy clamped between their hands. Weblee, I ain't no fantasy fan, but this is Righteous Stuff. Mainstream on it.
Third: The Brains of Rats by Michael Blumlein. The LA soul-surgeon strikes again with the precision of a cruise missile and the mercy of a social worker. Just as in his classic, The Trachy, etc., and about as avoidable as death: totally compelling.
Fourth: Night of the Cooters by Howard Waldrop. Waldrop writes exactly the opposite of Blumlein - expansive, broad, rambling, friendly, witty, snarkly, etc. These stories are, frankly, amusing. And, um, moving. And, uh, just plain fun. Go figure.
Fifth: Out on Blue Six by Ian McDonald. 'Quirky' is the simplest way to describe it. Or maybe outrageous... an exercise in the sustained suspension of disbelief that, interestingly, pulls itself off and leaves behind a quite strange emotional kick for an encore. I don't understand this book, but I want to. I'm going to have to read it again soon, to get back the feeling of immerseness that came from it.

Martin Taylor
The Fall of Hyperion by Dan Simmons is, to my mind, the superior third of the story - massively ambitious and at least he dropped that awful Canterbury Tales gimmick!
Earth is in for another ambitious work, although flawed - it could have gone through the WP one more time - but I like ambition.
The City, Not Long Ago by Pat Murphy is a unique piece of imagination, and writing, a story in that point of view, a point of view that I pointed out to the spraggy artists mentioned above, but what's wrong with being an individualist?

Outside the Dog Museum by Jonathan Carroll has ambitions as large as those of Simmons and Brit, but Carroll treats them as being the canons of his characters paint their smaller scale contributions to the drama. By some way the best of the Vena-esque sequence, Carroll thought it in hardback! At the same time I bought Robert Holdstock's The Fetch, also in hardback, on the strength of a first page which would not allow me to wait for the paperback. More of Holdstock's uniquely British muscral, earthy fantasy; he just keeps getting better.

Jon Wallace
A mixed bug this year. Mike Resnick's Ivory was well worth reading; first as widening SF - almost but not quite Space Opera -, second as thoughtfull fantasy, both elements blended together to grip the imagination to the end.
Still with thoughtful fantasy, Robert Holdstock weaves another beautifully constructed Lavondys which ties in with the earlier novels, but old and unraveling others from the Mythago Wood.

And talking of woods, Duncton Tales by William Horwood sees his excellent moles facing a new threat, this time from fundamentalist elements. Horwood's mix of myth and down-to-earthiness works as well here as in his other books, and sets you on the edge of your seat waiting for the last book in the series.
Religion also features prominently in Gaiman and Pratchett's Good Omens, a well-rounded apocalyptical tale featuring (among others) a prophet with a strangely narrow view of the future and what has to be the funniest line of the year - 'Do Nott Buy Betamacs.'
I know that this is supposed to be five books, but I'd just like to sneak in an honourable mention for The Glamour: The Master's collection. The proceeds of this anthology go to child protection charities. And it's worth reading.

Martin Waller
Pride of place to Kim Stanley Robinson's Pacific Edge, completing his Orange County trilogy and a warm, beautifully written story that achieves the impossible by making an ecotopia interesting.
Mary Gentle's Rats and Gargoyles was another must, an extraordinary, original vision. I enjoyed Colin Greenland's Take Back Plenty despite a lingering feeling that my leg was being pulled.
Gibson and Sterling's The Difference Engine was a light /'esprit with some dismally dark undertones.
I have an affection for alternate world yarns, so I include Robert Charles Wilson's Gypsies, particularly for his Novus Ordo, a vivid depiction of a United States gone horribly wrong.
Among the blockbusters, David Brin's Earth never really convinced despite a wiser detail but gave encouragement for next time.

Martin R Webb
This past year seems to have produced few outstanding books, and sadly even fewer from British writers. The one I found least worthy of praise was Reprisal by F Paul Wilson, a writer I had admired until this book. Whitley Streiber's kidnapping tale, Billy, did not fulfill the promise. While not technically new books, James Herbert's re-issued The Dark and The Spear deserve a mention because, not only are they eleven years old and are now published in NEL's mother imprint Hodder & Stoughton, their backgrounds still ring true. David Gemmell's Lion of Macedon, a fantasy based in mythological Greece, and the first part of a saga, was well-written and deserves attention from anyone interested in the genre.
My top five for 1991 were:
1. Twilight by Peter James, the best and most original book of the year.
2. Maltime by Chas Brenchley: a believable storyline.
3. Renegades by Shaun Hutson: politics and the occult join forces.
Angela Carter, cult writer of Gothic fantasy, described by David Pringle as a writer of "great verve, great good humour, great daring and great generosity of spirit," died on February 17th, 1992 of lung cancer.

Her dark fantastical novels The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman 1972, The Passion of New Eve 1977, and Nights at the Circus 1985 were amongst the most praised books of this genre; dying only weeks before her last book. Each of her powerful novels followed a quick succession: The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman was published, Angela Carter leaves us with books still to be written and is a great loss.

The daughter of a Highlander and a self-frighted cashier, Carter lived through the Second World War in a mining community in South Yorkshire. She claimed her earliest childhood memory was of standing atop a slag heap with a crowd of other youngsters, shouting abuse at the German bombers passing overhead to rain destruction on Manchester or Leeds.

The family lived in the house of Carter's maternal grandmother, whom she greatly admired. She once remembered: "Every word and gesture of hers displayed a certain dominance, a native savagery and I am very grateful for all that, now, though the core of steel was still an inconvenient when I was looking for a boy-friend in the south."

The war over, Carter's parents returned to London and she was increasingly drawn to the influence of her journalist father, Hugh Stalker. Together they would attend matine performances of glittering post-war films; the more flamboyant the better. Some of these films were not thought altogether suitable for a young girl; it seems she saw Jean Simmons in the original The Blue Lagoon. Carter's love affair with the glitzy showbiz of old Hollywood would pursue her through to adulthood and people novels with larger than life heroines: Tristessa, Fever and the twins Ina and Dora Chance.

From her mother, Carter gained an insight into "neecness" and learnt the importance of qualifications. She would go to Oxford, had it not been for her mother's off-the-cuff remark that she would also move to Oxford to be nearer to her daughter. Such suffocating possessiveness, paired with an insistence on academic excellence sent Carter spiralling down into a vector of depression, self-hate and finally a serious case of Anorexia Nervosa. So Oxford was postponed.

Instead Carter's father found her a post on the Croydon Advertiser. In retrospect a journalistic career may seem to have been a good fit, in fact it quickly revealed Carter's scant regard for facts and total disregard for actual events. From the newspaper she moved to a comfortable niche in record reviews and features.

Angela Stalker married Paul Carter in 1960 and moved with him to Bristol. Leaving her job Carter discovered herself "only a wife" and experienced acute frustration. Her husband tried to make her life more interesting by taking her on peace marches and introducing her to folk and jazz, but wandering through the city, she discovered for herself the student and cafe life of the university. Within a year she was studying English Literature with a particular interest in the medieval and the fantastic.


The Magic Toyshop won the John Llewellyn Rhys prize and has subsequently become Carter's international reputation. Her name became known from Denmark to Australia and teaching invitations to universities in love with the English speaking world. She was guest lecturer at Sheffield University in the 1970's and at Brown University, Providence and the University of Adelaide during the 1980's.

Angela Carter, an obituary by Sally-Ann Melia

The novel follows fast in Doctor Hoffman's wake and is in a similar vein. Carter allows her young heroine to seduce and impregnate a teenager. Becoming bored he forces the girl to have an abortion; when this back-street coat-hanger job goes wrong he abandons her to a life of sterility in an upright clinic. The remainder of the novel vindictively showers misadventures on the hero, from surgical sex change through imprisonment in a harem with weekly scheduled rapes, to the discovery that his long-life heroine is in fact a man, a brief night of passion before watching his fiancé from bunks to live in university life. Carter's last novel, this piece, in a world of dog-sized rats and gang street fights grown into pan-American civil conflict, takes my breath away. Still it is compelling reading.

Neither of these books was well received in the western world, though they have subsequently become Carter's international reputation. Her name became known from Denmark to Australia and teaching invitations to universities in love with the English speaking world. She was guest lecturer at Sheffield University in the 1970's and at Brown University, Providence and the University of Adelaide during the 1980's.
In 1973 Carter began to write on a regular basis for *New Society* magazine. A close friendship with Carmen Callil blossomed into a publishing relationship and her first piece of non-fiction, *The Sadeian Woman*, was the first book published by Virago. In writing to Callil in 1973, Carter said: "Here with is the Sade book for Virago, who I hope is a healthy child and screaming already." This was an important work. Carter gave voice to the feminist idea that women are partly responsible for their subjection within society. This was a thorny path for her to tread, but was a vital part of the growing feminist attack on British values frozen in a Victorian time warp.

The end of the 1970's saw the appearance of two further collections of short stories: *Fireworks* 1974 and *The Bloody Chamber* 1979. In describing these two books, W. L. Webb, Literary Editor of the *Guardian*, said: "The witty and rude comedy that was the erotic poetry of those fables and fairy tales for grown ups will be rediscovered delightfully long after the heavy prize-winners of the seventies and eighties have sunk without trace." *The Bloody Chamber* won the Cheltenham prize.

In the 1980's Carter started to reap the rewards of her industrious youth. This decade would see her produce two further novels, another non-fiction work, two screen-plays, two collections of short stories and a son.

**Night at the Circus** 1985 is the tale of six foot trapeze artiste with wings who is interviewed by an American journalist who hopes to expose her as a Humbug. The lady gymnast invites him into her dressing room, and into her life. The journalist, Walter, learns of Fever's past and joins her circus to become part of her present. Together they embark on a voyage of adventure across turn-of-the-century Russia from St Petersburg to Siberia and into the new century. To quote David Pringle: "Fever is a new woman for a new age, the all-embracing, all-conquering, high-soaring symbol of a liberated femininity." *Night at the Circus* won the James Tait Memorial Prize.

*Wise Children* 1990 is a multi-layered tale reflecting Thatcherite Britain which Carter invariably described as "Going to hell in a handbasket." The novel tells the life story of twin sisters Nora and Dora Chance and is told by Dora at the age of 75. Four-fifths of the book is reminiscences; the story only swings into the present in the last fifty pages for a family reunion. The front page bears the old saying: "It's a wise child that knows its own father." And the plot hinges precisely on that question: Who is the twin's father? And will he ever recognise them?

The only link I perceived with the swinging eighties under Thatcher was that the twins never sold their souls. A Thatcherite heroine may well have married the first and best millionaire who came along and lived the remainder of her life in clover. Both girls were tempted by such offers and passed them up, exposing their life together and family values.


A wider audience was reached by the television film of *The Company of Wolves* 1984, based on one of Carter's short stories and *The Magic Toyshop* 1987. Carter was involved with the writing of the scripts for both pieces and Neil Jordan spoke of fond memories of meeting her for tea in Clapham and devilling pieces she had written late into the night. He was impressed by her fearless
imagination and her awareness of sexual issues, but most particularly her sense of irony.

Carter started the 1990's with a new and unique anthology of fairy tales: The Virago Book of Fairy Tales 1991. This is a gem fallen on rough ground, just waiting to be dusted off to sparkle, with over forty short stories; some very short. These tales echo of "mother's knee" with their cast of princesses, trolls, evil fairy godmothers and adventures, yet these are the ones that got away. They have never been tamed for a PG rating or picture book painted by a hundred and one publishers, plain and simply the stories are thought-provoking originals. Carter's favourite was the Russian tale The Wise Little Girl about a spunky, dumpy, plucky seven-year-old peasant girl who outwits the Tsar and grows up "happy-ever-after" to become his bride.

Carter was an early contributor to Interzone. 'The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe' appeared in Interzone 1 and 'An Overture for "A Midsummer Night's Dream"' in Interzone 3. The stories are similar in that the first creates a fictional childhood for the famous black fantasy writer (or someone with the same name), while the second describes what happens before the curtain rises on a performance of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream. The two stories bear witness to the two main themes of Carter's writing: the wonderful world of make-believe in the theatre; and the conflict between male and female sexuality.

Carter had been a lifelong smoker and it seems she continued even after being diagnosed with lung cancer. It all came to an end on February 3rd 1990, and yet is not over. On April 6th Virago will publish her last novel Expletives Deleted, later this year will come a Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales. Her influence can also be felt in a decade of new writers from Rushdie to Jeanette Winterson to the American Fabulists like Robert Coover.

Carter's second marriage to Mark Pearce was a success and there are many testimonials to her deep love for her son Alexander. She lived her last years in and around Clapham Common. You were quite likely to have spotted her window-shopping and holding her son's hand. On one such outing a friend reported, they passed before a Latin American craft shop; after a few moments appraisal, Carter concluded: "Their devils are dull."

And so is the twentieth century now Angela Carter is gone.

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**Chronology**

Angela Carter, writer, mother and first rank feminist thinker. Born May 7th 1940, died February 17th 1992 from lung cancer.

- **Novels:**
  - 1965 Shadow Dance
  - 1968 The Magic Toyshop
  - 1969 Heroes and Villains
  - 1970 Miss Z - The Dark Young Woman
  - 1971 Love
  - 1972 The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman
  - 1977 The Passion of New Eve
  - 1985 Nights at the Circus
  - 1990 Wise Children
  - 1992 Expletives Deleted

- **Collections of short stories:**
  - 1974 Fireworks
  - 1979 The Bloody Chamber
  - 1985 Black Venus
  - 1986 Wayward Girls and Wicked Women
  - 1991 The Virago Book of Fairy Tales
  - 1992 The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales

- **Non Fiction:**
  - 1979 The Sadeian Woman
  - 1982 Nothing Sacred
  - 1984 Film Scripts
  - 1987 The Company of Wolves
  - 1987 The Magic Toyshop

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**George Mann Macbeth 1932 - 1992**

An obituary by Cardinal Cox

George Macbeth was an important figure in the development of British SF/rust poetry. He was editor of the *Fantasy Poets* series for the Fantasy Press of Oxford from 1952 till 1954. His contributions to *Penguin Modern Poets 6* 1964 include the evocative pieces 'Mother Superior' and 'Early Warning'. His first contribution (of several) to *New Worlds* was 'Crab Apple Crisis' in issue 167 of October 1966. This was followed in January 1967 by the oft-annotised 'The Silver Needle' in which a psycho-active hero journeys epically through innerpeace. He contributed four further poems over the next few years.

In Langdon Jones' 1969 anthology *The New SF* the poem 'Fast Car Wash' was included with an interview conducted with J G Ballard for BBC Radio's Third Program. (He had been involved with the BBC's *Poetry Now* from 1965 till 1976). For the 1973 anthology *Beyond This Horizon* he contributed the ephemer 'Lamps'.


At last year's Poetry Festival in Kings Lynn I was lucky enough to have a few words with him. He reminisced about the period when he wrote for *New Worlds* and expressed regret that so little contact was maintained between the various writers. He had just started reading SF again, starting with Greg Bear. His motor-nuerone affliction was evident, but he declined to use a wheel chair in public. His spirit, and his wife and young child, clearly powered him, dressed as he was like an Edwardian gentleman. His knowledge of Poetry was encyclopedic and the world is a little greyer without him in it.

"The candle has been extinguished, but come the dawn, we'll have its image in the Stained-Glass window still."

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"Open the door in heaven - 1 rule my throne - 1 open the way for the way for the births which take place on this day. I am the child who traverseth the road of Yesterday."
A year or so ago I thought it was time I read something by Stephen King. I'm not a horror fan, but people seemed to think he was the best and there was that delightful film *Stand By Me*, based on one of his stories. So I bought *Misery*, which had recently appeared at WH Smith's - SK had an entire shelfload to himself.

The book was, of course, a jolly good read with all the excitement and tension you would expect from a bestselling author; but there was more.

*Misery* tells the story of a cynical, middle-aged writer, Paul Sheldon, who has made his fortune with a series of corny, historical romances about a girl called Misery Chastain. Paul aspires to write the Great American Novel, but feels that as a popular writer he is not taken seriously by the cognoscenti. What's more, he is thoroughly fed up with his creation and decides, as Cora Doyle did with Sherlock Holmes, to kill her off. On the day when his final *Misery* novel is published he has double cause for celebration as he has finished his Great Work (a streetwise modern novel) and is all ready to take it to his agent. Gleefully toasting Misery's demise, he sets off alone to deliver his new manuscript: an unwise decision as he has just drunk a bottle of bubbly and there is a howling blizzard outside. Then the horror bit starts.

Paul's car crashes and he wakes to find himself helpless with two broken legs and in the clutches of a psychopathic ex-nurse who also happens to be his number one fan. When she finds out what he has done to her beloved Misery she is not at all pleased and shows her feelings by chopping bits off Paul. This is all good fun, but once you've been a medical student and not only attended postmortem examinations but spent several months in the dissecting room, you aren't going to bother much about the odd flying limb (just remember that next time you visit your GP).

Having established total control over Paul, Mad Annie forces him to write a sequel bringing Misery back to life, but not any old 'with one bound our heroine was alive again' version. Paul tries that at first, but Annie won't allow any cheating, and so the writer is forced to write and in doing so half enjoys the challenge.

The whole thing almost becomes a discussion about popular fiction and I suppose a defence, in a sly kind of way, of Stephen King's own work, as Paul comes to realise that writing Misery novels is what he is good at and something to be proud of. A large part of the narrative is taken up with passages from the new book as Paul desperately uses his talent to save his life. I found most of these passages saved from any possibility of sodium by the well-placed episodes of manic violence from Annie.

Kathy Bates won an Oscar for her performance as Annie Wilkes in the recent film version of *Misery*. Yes, she does a good job with a blunt instrument and looks fairly unpleasant. James Caan is adequate as the unfortunate victim. All the horror scenes are juicily performed. But I found the film a disappointment. Paul's fevered visions of African goddesses and trapped birds, the fear of the tide of pain washing over him if Annie refuses to give him his addictive analgesics, the fear of not being able to imagine any more stories - all this is missing.

In 1983, David Cronenberg filmed an earlier Stephen King novel *The Dead Zone*. This story also concerns a car crash victim, this time the young, almost-too-innocent school teacher John Smith. John wakes up to find he has been in a coma for five years during which time he has lost his fiancée, his job and his health but gained an overwhelming clairvoyant ability which constantly thrusts him into the public eye. Seeking anonymity and trying to escape the terrifying effects of using his Gift he becomes a recluse, hiding behind shuttered windows. But his conscience forces him to violent action when the Gift shows him a way to prevent a future nuclear war although at a terrible cost to himself. John Smith is a tragic hero and it would have been very easy to cast an All American College Boy as Johnny and play for the Kleenex sales. But David Cronenberg uses Christopher Walken whose strange features and sinister smile emphasize the character's enforced alienation from "normal" people. (Christian Walken is a dab hand at playing sad and bad weirdos if you think of his Oscar-winning performance in *The Deerhunter* and his contribution to world villainy as the camp blood half of the devilish duo out to exterminate James Bond and flood Silicon Valley in *A View to a Kill*.) But all the acting in *The Dead Zone* is of the highest quality. The constantly gloomy snow scenes, the compressed time scale and Michael Kenneth's sombre music, give a claustrophobic doomladen atmosphere to the film. Yes, there is some horror and some brilliantly economical special effects, but this isn't really a horror film: it's more than that, surely a minor classic, and much better than *Misery*.

I had to order the book - it seemed to be the only Stephen King not glaring at me from the horror line at Smith's. Was it worth it? Well yes, but I was a little disappointed. After the spare economy of the film, the story seems too long and discursive. It fills in all the spaces: what happened to Johnny's family and friends during the years he was unconscious, but we learn all this in one minute of the film; the rise of the politician Greg Stillson so that we know just why we should find him repulsive, but in the film Martin Sheen shows us with just a wink and a phony smile. I prefer the spaces left unfilled. Nevertheless it is an exciting SF-based psychological thriller, and a clever working of the talent-as-curse theme, perhaps not quite bloody enough for the genuine horror fan.

So if I had to choose I would vote for the written version of *Misery* and above all David Cronenberg's film of *The Dead Zone*. And I'd give it an Oscar. But if it's blood you're after, then watch *Casualty* on TV - yes it really is like that.

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**Liz Counihan discusses two stories by Stephen King**
Why do you write?

Vilma Kadlecková: Because I must; when I stop for a while, my fingers start to get terribly itchy.


Carola Biedermann: If a Sinclair Lewis or a Božena Nemciová [1] could express themselves to the world in which they lived, and address it, why shouldn’t I do the same? How’s that for coincidence? But then again, not completely, because writing for me is a form of communication with the outside world. And communication is a process which allows a person to prove to herself her own existence and the existence of the world outside. In the ideal case, writing mediates communication directly between these inner “I’s”. So that it is probably a way of coming to terms with my own psychopathology.

Why do you write SF, or where appropriate fantasy?

VK: I love everything special, contrary, peculiar, unreal—even without cosmic argosies or wizards bores me.

EH: I don’t have a sense for realistic detail or atmosphere. I have almost no memories. I need to extrapolate. To exaggerate. To invent. To propose theses. To play.

CB: Because a number of very nice people initiated me into the craft of writing in this field, and for a number of other reasons, which are contained in my replies to other questions.

With what obstacles have you met as a woman writing in this genre?

VK: Occasionally I am regarded as a lunatic, but then again I don’t have to do the dishes and I have a lot of intelligent friends.

EH: With nothing but advantages. Because there are fewer of us and consequently we are more conspicuous. What’s more - as a man I would probably write in a more “literary” way, with less personal perception and drive, and a greater interest in scientific and constructive detail instead.

CB: At first, with sticks between the legs and ridicule on the part of my family, especially with regard to my chosen genre, later with a certain grudging respect, and in the end with out-and-out respect and a little amazement, chiefly that with all my work I manage to write at all - even when I am forced for my own reasons to exceed which are accounted to my “artistic” temperament. That is of course complete nonsense, but why should we take advantage of it, eh?

For whom do you write? Do you have an “ideal audience”?

VK: Naturally, I write only for myself and my parrot. It’s an ideal audience.

EH: Sometimes when I am writing I imagine somebody concrete, how they are reading it. Sometimes not, and I write only with regard to myself. It depends whether I am writing the thing for a particular occasion - for someone.

CB: In this province, my eldest son excels. He snatches everything I write and reads it wholly raw and unfinished, in the course of which he actively contributes by his own notables crazy ideas. Some things of a more delicate nature I try to hide from him, but he knows where to look for them. Apart from that, I have developed a corps of consultants, composed of Egon Círanyak, Jan Pavlik and Lad'á Kejval [2]. Jan, for instance, has already stung me a couple of times with an idea for a surprise ending, the others tend to indicate when the text is too long, when there isn’t enough action, and so on.

What role does feminism play in your writing?

VK: I prefer not to think about feminism.

EH: A spontaneously large one - ever since I got married. My writing is in a small way a counter-pressure called out by the fact that once in while someone drives me to the stove and tries to make me feel guilty for my neglected children and household, and my long-suffering husband.

CB: About the same role as it plays in my life. Every woman who doesn’t have just the soul of a slave (and God knows there’s a lot of them) must in our world be continuously angry and combative, so long as she doesn’t take pleasure in people doing it on her head. A woman, if she wants in some way to hold her own, must be better than the majority of men, which admitted is no great art, but it is damnably strenuous, and spiritually it is a life on the race track. It is simply impossible that this would not be projected into my writing. I very much like to project it by way of the contrast, by describing the stupidity and laziness of men. That is a theme which is so fabulously productive...

What future do you see for SF and fantasy?

VK: It will be a natural part of life and art - one of many variants. Nothing more, nothing less.

EH: Here in Czechoslovakia, at first a glowing one, then a respectively stable one; the biggest sellers will probably be comics.

CB: A good one and getting better. At a time when our sorely-tired country is being flooded with the literature of the desk drawer, which despite all its qualities is in the end much of a muchness, SF and fantasy form a direct spring of live water.

What influences and motivates you in writing?

VK: By and large I write things which I already learned to write at the age of ten - but even without any kind of particular intention on my part. Everything I meet with gets subconsciously projected into it. Motivation - see question one; weapon against laziness - closing dates for competitions.

EH: Influences: fairly unmediately, my life and surroundings. Motivates: my friends, competitions, requests for contributions to a magazine or an anthology. I like writing columns and working as a publicist, writing to meet the opportunity.

CB: That varies. Quite often it’s the crazy ideas of my sons. The anecdote about how they forced me to write the Antigé Award [3] because they liked the prize as an artefact, is I think abundantly well known. Then again, not long ago they forced me to write a western, except it wasn’t a true western, rather a western from their world, so they protested about the killing of a traitor. We had a lot of fun with it, and my sons occasionally washed the dishes. At other times, I need to come to terms with something in myself with this method, and other times it is perhaps the army anecdotes of my husband. That was the case with the story which won the Antigé Award in 1989, which I tried to describe the world of the military, which is for me something like ET psychology.
What position do you occupy in the SF and fantasy writing community?

VK: I am woven into fandom like a liana twining through the primeval forest: just like all the others, creeping after the sun, sometimes on view to everyone and sometimes concealed.

EH: I see myself as an eternally beginning cracked woman of letters, who has only now started to have a serious go at it, and is clawing her way up onto that wall, where there are already - well - at the moment they have a fairly large turnover.

CB: I’m supposed to say this about myself? Well, okay. It’s already a lot of Fridays since I was a novice to fandom, sitting somewhere in a hidden corner and putting together something which had nothing in common with literature apart from the fact that it also used letters. In those days, I used to peer timidly at those whom I called the corphaceae [4]. For me they soared at Olympian heights. There followed an entrance to those heights so fast and sheer that it took my breath away. It’s like a dream, and I’m afraid that I will wake up with a fever and a sock in my hand, and a chorus of family Fates will be explaining to me that I’m using the wrong needle for darning socks, an unsuitable kind of thread, and that the threads must be lined up one next to the other, for precisely on that rest the fortune and contentedness of the whole family. Into that, some dumpling on the television screen will be gabbling something I don’t understand, even if it ostensibly seems like Czech, my temperature will keep rising, and I will feel inferior because that darning, well listen, even the neighbours refer to it... But back to Olympus. I don’t feel like one of the gods, rather like one of the demigods or heroes whom form the gods’ underbrush. Like that formed by Heracles, perhaps.

Are there things you can say in an SF or fantasy story which you can’t say in the mainstream?

VK: It’s not a question of which or what. SF and fantasy cannot say anything more than the mainstream and vice versa. It’s a question of how. I love SF and fantasy backdrops.

EH: Precisely everything. Mad scientific ideas, mad social, cultural and linguistic ideas. Here, freedom has dominion. In the mainstream, it hasn’t.

CB: Any kind of fantastic story has one immediate advantage: it makes it possible to avoid circling the point of contention, which I hate in life just as in literature.

Do you think there is a “male” and a “female” style of writing?

VK: Of course! We have different ways of thinking - and so inevitably we must also have a different way of writing. This gives us a great opportunity in ‘unfemale’ fields of writing - in SF, but perhaps also in detective stories, horror stories, westerns. We have the opportunity to introduce something new there with considerably less effort than do men. And similarly women writing women’s or girls’ novels struggle much harder than women SF writers.

EH: Yes. Men are obsessed with constructions, a one-sided viewpoint, theses, and so they write in a more black-and-white fashion, more forcefully, but in SF they form a mass of graphomaniacs fascinated by technological visions. Women write in a more complex manner, about their circumstances, but sometimes this can be boring: trifles, minute observations, etc. A surplus of feeling and sentimentality is perhaps no longer a danger for women here.
CB: Yes, but on the whole it is independent of the gender of the author, it depends rather on their point of view. The male and the female world differ in a lot of things; perhaps in a system of totems, taboos and priorities. A man is capable of making a totem for himself out of his sexual organ, out of the act of voiding himself, or out of its end product. For women these things belong to the domain of the taboo. And so it is with lots of other subjects of examination. An author can study these affairs, and from a bird’s-eye view write in either a male or a female way, according to need. I know plenty of things written by men in a downright female way. Something like The World According to Garf I’d gladly sign my name to.

How do you regard the process of writing? Are you an experimenter, a stylist, a messenger or an entertainer?

VK: I’m the one who spins and weaves fates and stories for the pleasure of the stories themselves.

EH: A crafty ironist, an autotopian, and sometimes just someone who hysterically cries the truth!

CB: That’s a bit of a weighty question! How does one tell? You must understand, I don’t have time to search myself. I have too much work, including my writing. Let others search me.

Do you feel any pressure (from fans or a particular culture) to write in a particular fashion?

VK: Very strongly. In fandom I have distinguished two conspicuous and antithetical tendencies — in the direction of experimentation (Eva’s biopunk, Martin Klíma’s desert drama, Pav’s stories [5]), and in the direction of experiencing long, balladic tales interwoven with themselves (Franzík Novotný’s story cycle about the space junkyard [6], the great love of Tolkien, Dune, etc.). The adherents of one direction or the other try very hard, often subconsciously, to bring the others over to their side. Personally, I belong to the second stream — and in the final analysis it is so close to me that, for all that I am aware of some pressure from outside, I am almost unable to distinguish it from my own intentions.

CB: Of course. It’s enough for me to get information about some new direction, and I already have a taste to try it. For example, steampunk fascinates me. And I think it’s necessary to listen to one’s readers. But nobody will force me not to write “Thank God!” if I feel it that way. Just at the moment the poor little Lord God is in full bloom, but the Christians are praying around again, so pretty soon it will be undesirable to say I don’t know — perhaps “bum”. And I can’t just not write it, if I feel it belongs in the text. (A pes on religious zealots!)


NOTES

1. Božena Nemčová [1820-1865]. Important 19th-century Czech woman writer. Many consider her to be the first significant novelist in the Czech language, and she was also responsible for several popular collections of Czech fairy tales.

2. Egon Čierny, Jan Pavlík, Ladislav Kejval. Active members of the Jules Verne SF Club in Prague, of which CB is also a member. Čierny was for many years the editor of the club fanzine, Poušť (also occasionally published in English), and is now trying to turn it into a professional publication. Pavlík doubles as president of Czechoslovakia’s first Star Trek club, but is also a skilled translator of stories from French and English.

3. Antický Award. Annual short story contest run by AF167 magazine in Brno, AF167, which started life as a fanzine in 1985 (the name means “Amo Frankensteini 167”), has since the revolution transformed itself into a very fine professional SF quarterly, and looks set to become Ikari’s main competitor. They are also planning a line of SF paperbacks, beginning with Harry Harrison’s Deathworld novels.

4. Coryphaei. In Greek drama, the leaders of the chorus.

5. Biopunk: literary movement founded by Eva Hauser in 1987, in response to cyberpunk; other figures associated with the movement include the short-story writer Zdeněk Přes [b.1959], and the Jihlavá based editor/translator Miroslav Fíšer. Martin Klíma, a prominent Prague fan and gaming enthusiast (responsible in part for the Czech edition of Dungeons & Dragons), has also reputedly been working on an experimental stage play about a group of travelling in the desert, first night yet to be arranged.

6. Franzík Novotný [b.1944]: one of the leading lights of the Brno SF group, and a popular writer and critic, whose celebrated story-cycle about the vrakovité (space junkyard) is set in a future where humanity has decided to abandon technology, and has put all its derelict space craft, robots, etc. into a huge storage facility. The cycle began with ‘Legenda o Madoně z Vrakovité’ (“The Legend of the Madonna of the Junkyard”, 1985), which won first prize in the Karl Capek Award short story contest that year, and was published soon after in samizdat, but did not appear legally until Dec. 1990. The most recent installment in the cycle, Ramax, won the Karl Capek Award as best novel of 1991.

With thanks to Denise Du Pont, on whose book, Women of Vision (St Martin’s Press, New York, 1988), the questions have been based.
Although full of admiration for the high quality of Bruce Sterling's work, and of his special skill at Swing Trading, it is clear that he may have word-painted pictures that show only one side of a whole currency of fictional and real value. Indeed, it appears that the story was largely kick ed out of SF by television. And that the sufferer was kicked again by computer games. But, if it is now as moribund as Sterling may argue, it may be the fault of editors who fail to encourage a kind of writing people will pay to read, and of writers who fail to turn out for the editors the sort of material that cannot be put down.

I am not as well read nor, I feel, as well educated as either Sterling or his enjoueurs of and contributors to the BSFA magazines, so that my examples and points of view are limited and may be no more than a personal moaning.

For instance, although I feel that New Moon Science Fiction (It used to be Dream SF) has consistently varied content, some issues of Interzone have been so depressing that they could have tripped an unhappy reader into suicide... because they were so good! While fans may enjoy such misery, no general reader is likely to pay a regular £2 for it.

SF needs iconoclasts, but surely a mixed diet is likely to be more saleable? And saleable?

SF, I think, should be exciting, thrilling, interesting, inspiring as well as shocking. It is not necessary for SF to be above all better world, but if it does so, the seminons should be wrapped in a mixture of colour, action and varied characters that should even have good morals - sorry to have to introduce this last pair of unpopular words!

SF in trying to be an art form, can so easily become anti-science. It should never be overlooked that science is crammed full of wonders. SF should not concentrate only on the dreadful possibilities of science. SF should, I think, actively try to spread at least a veneer of scientific awareness. SF is up against the fact that most people simply do not wish to know. They want to drive the car but not understand how it all works.

People generally simply do not wish for more scientific knowledge, do not want to suffer the disciplines of science. Many others have been trapped by circumstances and have forgotten how they once felt. Science should attract all kinds of people by offering the thrill of knowledge in small or large doses with a fictional narrative of sugar to help the medicine go down.

If there is to be a lot more spine and brain as Sterling suggests, ought it not to be written up into Bazaar's such as the`s revenge on the Market. The Invisible Hand, for instance, feeds people in this country even though they may never have grown a single tomato in their lives. The Invisible Hand Organisation created and operates the jet in which Sterling came over from America. In fact without organisation there could be no possibility of the application of science in human existence and certainly no general enjoyment of art whether in a popular book or a popular song. If you wish to court anarchy might do well to think again and consider keeping the Invisible Hand. It is not all bad.

Unfortunately sex could always be bought, but, although having human organs for sale does sound less ritualistic, yet, it might be argued that large numbers of people may depend upon a millionaire purchaser for their work and prosperity.

And is the Invisible Hand really like a coral reef? A coral reef is crammed with life, all busily trying to keep alive, even to the extent of eating each other. Compassion, on the other hand is a uniquely human quality, not at all evident in nature. It should be kept in mind that out of the fat generated (inhumahly?) by the Market, enormous sums are being given to the less fortunate people in the so-called third world where the Market would appear to be unable to operate because of graft, civil war and an overall lack of organisation.

Of course the Market is far from perfect. For instance, its existence encourages rural populations (who might otherwise feed themselves, and be productive and even happy in some ways) to migrate to slums and become dependent on Invisible Hand cities. Yet on the other hand, many people in developing countries find themselves eager to work for the Market and thus produce automobiles and video-recorders because they do so more cheaply and so undercut the old producers of such things... so that a start is made to level standards within the Market.

Most people, although there is no physical compulsion to work for the Market, would admit that there are visible advantages in doing so.

Indeed, if there were no Invisible Hand, I fear there might be no SF. Sterling and all other writers would have no media in which to work. We would return from our World Organisation to a rural economy. There are quite simply too many people for it to be otherwise. Vast numbers would die or be reduced to subsistence levels. World civilisation needs the Invisible Hand of Organisation.

In fact the Invisible Hand seems, on the whole very much a good thing, if not a necessity for humanity. SF should not, in my opinion, be knocking it, unless SF is anxious to knock away the very basis on which the future can be built. If SF has a duty to point out the dangers of organisation, it should also point out the benefits... In fact organisation is a knife-edge and if we fall off it there can only be anarchy on a scale that will bring death and destruction on a scale never before possible.

The Market is organisation; is civilisation; is surely more desirable than mud huts and no electricity and no sewage and... no hope?

Please, let SF show hope as well as gloom! To some extent, life really is what you make it, regardless of circumstances. It may not be a perfect system to have this Invisible Hand, but for a steadily increasing number of people it feeds, clothes and entertains them and leaves them to run their own lives. Surely the business of SF is not to bash such a system, but only to comment on it.

As for the conclusion of SF... well, the written word is unique and may never be replaced entirely. Anyone who has read Dune in Analog and then in book form awake my imagination and hopefully awakes every reader's imagination in the reader's own, individual way. A writer can never know exactly how he affects his readers. Each reader may experience a different response. This cannot be the same as being spooned images as in the cinematic Dune which, though excellent, reminded this writer-reader of Flash Gordon rather than of Frank Herbert.

Look, live SF, I say. Editors, writers and fans ought, in general, to like the world and try to bring a balanced way of looking at life and... dare I say it... thrills and excitement can capture more readers.
person to see Hayley alive? Is it Caroline’s childless friend? Or Caroline’s first husband, Hayley’s father? Or Caroline’s present husband and children, jealous of the unforgotten dead. Could it be the detective; or even Caroline herself, always appearing at the crucial moment, deliberately spreading occult alarm to cover a campaign of corporal murder? An excellent book—I wish I’d written it.

In the Blood is another good read, although it could easily be subtitled “Marlowe meets Dracula.” Palmer, a down-on-his-luck private investigator, is hired to find a beautiful dame, Sonja Blue; he falls for her and wants to know why she’s wanted by a Mafia-type organisation. But In the Blood is more than a simple amalgam of the detective and horror genres. I enjoyed the earlier part more—Palmer tracking down his elusive quarry, gradually realizing the weird world into which he is blundering. The latter part becomes a brain-teasing maze, where every word has to be studied to ensure you don’t miss some clue to the next occult maneuver. In between there are some really grim passages: a gruesome birth, encounters with a pyrotic, and very nasty ogres. Yet most frightening is the attitude of the master-manipulator Pangloss, who names all his personal assistants Renfield: “My dear Mr. Palmer, the world is full of Renfields! Just like it’s full of letter openers and paper clips. You don’t cherish each and every paper clip you use with its own name, do you?”

Shades of those Nineteen Century stately homes where every footman was called John and every maid, Mary!

Martin Brice

Clay’s Ark
Octavia Butler

There are bleak echoes of the AIDS epidemic in this reissue of a futuristic, nicely wrought, controversial story. A strange plague is creating an interdependent nomadic super race. Blake, a doctor, and carrier of the virus, is the main male protagonist. He is concerned to prevent the disease from spreading. Yet, like a gnawing hunger, his survival is dependent upon physical connection. Thus, he warms within himself, his moral code irreversibly superceded by his tainted human condition.

Feuding factions of desperado survivors wrestle with the knowledge that they are on the verge of extinction. While, coincidently, the infection... With Blake, and his two daughters, we travel at a dizzy pace, gleaning previews of a future containing a high-tech society of quadrupeds. The reader is moved forward through the pain barrier, into a new dimension, where death, perhaps ultimately, has no dominion, and where reality is absorbed into an umbra_default wherein eugenics becomes a plethora of new rabid offspring... the summer of a new doomed race? Or perhaps a brave new world, breeding-oriented, where we recognize a humanistic fear for the future of the mutant children.

Conversely, the story does contain a lot of perhaps gratuitous violence; and the depiction of a naked doctor’s daughter, dying a long drawn out death, riddled with bullets, perhaps smacks of megalomaniac, as Mr. Butler says, “With no outlet it gets... painful and crazy, sort of frenzied when there are a lot of unconverted people around. I have dreams... where I have no choice but to kill people... I’m on automatic. It’s just happening.” Finally, this book heralds the cosmic orgasm, not as a sinister virus, but a new breed of person, a message.

Suzanne Rasmussen.

Halo
Tom Maddox

The eponymous Halo is an L5 habitat, owned and supposedly administered by the megagovernmental SeNTrax, but actually administered by a self-aware Artificial intelligence called Aleph in conjunction with an Interface collective of humans. In that difference between form and reality lies this small story.

One of the original movers and shakers of Halo, Jerry Chapman, is at death’s door. His body doesn’t work much but his friends think they can ‘preserve’ him by computer aided surgery while his personality is having a vacation in machine space. Sentras, of course, want to keep tabs on this, and send along their investigator, Gonzalez, and a former staffier, Diana Heywood, who also happens to be a former lover of Gerry (coincidence, eh what?). Once everyone is in this idyllic machine space Jerry’s body gives up the ghost and Sentrax executives pull Gonzalez and Diana out of the interface. This sends Aleph off in a jiff, and it effecttively shuts down the station while devoting all its attention to keeping ‘Jerry’ alive.

Perhaps I don’t know enough about computers, but I cannot buy this scenario; the machine space and the ‘life’ therein, that’s okay, as is the aware AI, but not the maintenance of one ‘illusion’ requiring all the ‘attention’ of the AI. I think that a large part of my problem is due to the duality of this novel. It begins as a hard edged, fast paced typically C-punk action story—Gonzalez hunting 3rd world corruption and all but getting iced by those ‘laser’ in the jungle. So far, so good. Then he gets of Halo and everything gets soft and squishy, an AI mediated love story, not that I mind a love story, but the two parts don’t fit together.

Put simply, the future technology Maddox could extrapolate from his library works just find, the stuff he has to imagine-machine space simply does not convince, convince me, at least.

All of which is a pity, because Tom Maddox can write his characters come alive, his storylines can accommodate sharp action when he wishes and his prose has that spare, evocative crispiness which is the characteristic of so many good American writers. He can handle adult emotions in a way that gives them a genuine three dimensions.

So, what is the problem? I think it is Artificial Intelligence, that future concept which has been a staple of SF since we first imagined machines ‘thinking’, for the minute the conscious are fabricated by human beings I have great difficulty in believing that the mechanical brain is ever truly conscious. Even in the most human-like ones I think of our organic electro-chemical melanges. Halo ends with the inevitable oriental guru saying to the sentient, if not yet angst-ridden, Aleph, ‘Welcome, brother human.’

No, I don’t think so. They are more likely to be the insecure demi-urges of Tom Simms’ imagination. Not that this is a ‘failing’ peculiar to Tom Maddox. To my mind, all the C-punk crew fall into the trap of anthropomorphising their machines (and most other SF writers with them). Perhaps it is a generic failing, I don’t know.

Martyn Taylor.

A Rage In Heaven
Kenichi Kato
Questar/Warner, 1991, $19.95hb

Question: After Davind Wingrove’s Cheng Kuo series, who needs another SF oriental? Answer: we all do. Especially when it’s as cheerfully silly as A Rage In Heaven. At first sight this book appears to be just an updated version of E.E. Doc Smith. The cover even shows a Robot-worshiping orbit around a planet, and, for once, that’s exactly what you get to read about inside. However, on
closer examination there are some very subtle and amusing tricks going on here. Kato, a Japanese-American Vietnam veteran who migrated to America, reviews emerging from the world of comics and film some three or four years ago, gets away with being very rude about predecessors, America and Japan, and he does it in a wonderfully intelligent way.

Kato takes delight in marking the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor with a tale of East versus West in the interstellar empire of four hundred years hence, but there is also a clever echo of the history of four hundred years ago, with some of the same problems as the Continuous Cycle Shogun he mercilessly parodies throughout. He makes an interesting criticism of the comics (both Eastern and Western) and effortlessly takes apart all the assumptions of the American world-view as the book proceeds. American cultural core-beliefs like the racial integration of humanity, the idea that Progress is a worthwhile goal, or even an inexcusable concomitant of civilisation are gently toe-posed into the gutter. Democracy, human rights, social and sexual equality, all come under the jack-hammer. His American characters seem somehow always to be either gung-ho good-of-boy Texas or nasty, reptilian Washington-style politicians. He even mentions another known as Wyoming, covered in forests, where the economy depends upon "corporate future and the earth's yield". He even shot vast amounts of game. It seems he understands America pretty well.

It is refreshing to see a book as original as this, but it was probably a bad idea to disguise it so heavily as something as worn-out, trite and unfashionable to a western audience as Spass Opera. Even though this setting is only the vehicle for the story, Kato's attention to detail is close, and he goes to the trouble of using plenty of scene-setting and atmosphere in constructing his star empire. The action takes place in a plausible colonised universe six hundred light years across, where Old Earth has been destroyed by some unspecified disaster which is constantly and tantalisingly referred to. Another running mystery is the question of extraterrestrial life. Unlike just about every other SF interstellar empire Kato's has never encountered so much as an amoeba, and the mystery as to why this should be builds up interestingly.

The central theme of Kato's book is an examination of the historical process itself, and a drawing of the distinction between belief in Free Will or Determinism. This crystallises out in the image of the man 'the closest living thing to God' who, through his presence, is able to reify the world and make it more bearable. The dense intellects of the characters, who are powerfully drawn, are involved in a struggle of ideas which in them selves are intriguing but which are not fully explored in the story. This sets up a tension between the characters' attempts to make sense of the world around them and their desire to maintain their beliefs in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It is a book that is both entertaining and thought-provoking, and one that is sure to leave a lasting impression.

Another Round at the Spaceport Bar
George H. Scithers and Darrell Schweitzer

The "bar story" is well known in SF-usually a short, slightly whacky tall tale type of story; in a world where all that remains of the "ghosts" is a record held in front of a roaring fire*. This book contains 19, only one of which ("The Ultimate Crime") doesn't strictly fit into the defined format. These are the stories:

- The Far King-Richard Wilson (1978) takes place in a "hidden" bar in Chicago frequented by a few Earthing and many different extra-terrestrial. Humour with a serious point made.
- The Altar at Midnight-C.M.Kornbluth (1953). Short with all the punch in the tail-most a prerequisite for the "ideal" bar story.
- The Subject is Closed-Larry Niven (1977). The overall reader a pantom to solve, or think about, in an entertaining way.
- Free Will or Determinism. This crystallises on the good doctor's Black Widower's tale when the reader is required to solve a riddle which may mean the difference between life and death.

These are the ideas upon which *Albion* is based, ideas which in themselves are intriguing enough to make you try to imagine what it would be like to have such men at the helm. Take for instance the provoking idea, all Grant has done with it is to go to war. Twice. The first half of the book describes the rebellion led by Liam, Terman's son, against the rulers, and the second half describes the rebellion led by Ana, Liam's daughter. But a war in a war, blood and fighting are still much the same wherever they take place, and I did find the amount of time spent describing events similar to those in hundreds of other SF books. As a result, I think the author was the number of raps and the lack of effect they had on the victim. My impression is that Grant had an excellent idea, and being uncertain what to do with it, decided to send his protagonists on their way. This is well written in so far as the writing flows well and the descriptions are good; but the characterisation is disappointing and frequently shallow. People have their behaviour radically without sufficient cause, except perhaps the author's needs.

Overall, a rather disappointing use of a really good idea.

Helen McNabb

Illumun
Paula Volsky
Gollancz, 1991, 700pp, £8.99 pb

Want to find out about the French Revolution? Yes? The really bloody one? Well, 1789 through 1794? But you are someone who would not been dead reading anything other than SF or Fantasy? If so, Paula Volsky's *Illumun* is the Fantasy novel for you!
700 pages of plot boils down to: boy and girl, garden playmates and classroom competitors, grow up to discover Liam the; the boy, Drey, is a mere servant. Come the Revolution, the patriot Drey saves the outcast Elise, and they live happily ever after.

*Illumun* opens with a lengthy depiction of a pampered and privileged lifestyle. Necessary, yes; the reader needs to appreciate the scope of the subsequent social upheaval, but me, I was almost hysteric with boredom. Take for example, this fascinating conversation between Exalted Miss Elise, and her cousin Ar'ul'e on politics and spending:

- "Do not my eyes reveal all? Are not the windows of my soul? They shout my secret to the world, and I am surely unhappy, I am! Come; Cousin, you only look into my eyes, and you will know all. Just try, do!"
- "Resignedly Elise complied. "Really, I can't guess. Your eyes are scarcely the tramps you imagine!"

And oh, poor, cousin... And so it goes. 100 words later we discover Cousin Ar'ul'e is in love. At first, I thought *Illumun* was translated from Polish or perhaps Russian. Not the Victor Gollancz confirmed Paula Volsky is American. Come the Revolution, the story picks up, Paula Volsky's gift for detailed work is evident. The characters are flawed, but they are believable. The story is gripping, and I found myself unable to put it down. Overall, a well-written and entertaining read.
to Elise’s rescue? Will Elise and Drel get together? I might even have liked Illusion if I didn’t have one area of specialised knowledge. Edward Kirk opens a Way to another world; the detailed account, in the sordid detail of the Terror, 1793-94. During those two years of Revolution, Robespierre and Danton, who later killed each other. The Terror was a product of a decade of famine, a reaction to the 12000 inhabitants of the Royal Court could have been executed (25% of France’s National Product, and a defence in the face of the young Austrian Emperor storming down on them.

Instead she describes sentient machines controlled by magicians, not even particularly interesting. Illusion is one page ripped unceremoniously from history, and embroidered into a Fantasy novel.

Sally-An Melia

Darker Than The Storm
Freda Warrington
NEL, 1992, 304pp, £4.99 pb

Prince Ashurek and his lover Silvren have been living happily on Ikonus where Silvren teaches in the School of Sorcery. In a fit of restlessness Ashurek opents a Way to another world; the concern...and as punishment for this unauthorised use of power, he is sent through to that world to observe a culture where sex poses no threat. In fact he discovers that Jhenis is slowly being consumed by the Maelstrom, and a small group of gifted people have been sending promising young people to Khoon to study at the School in the hope that one would come back to save their world. However as Ashurek passes through he sees the Maelstrom sweeping through and catches both Silvren and the High Master Gregardronics, deposing them in the Maelstrom. Meanwhile among the ruling elite a sinister murderer is loose, and the Hyalana quite unreasonably suspects his sister, who therefore has to take refuge with the lowly Pels. And what is the secret of the White Dome? And why the references to Ikonus’ Sphere?

As I am not a fantasy fan, I have not read any of Freda Warrington’s other books. However this tale of a corrupt and blinkered upper class ops on to the Hyalana, which is a metaphor of the world, is a taut, competently crafted novel. The two societies of Jhenis are credibly drawn with their physical characteristics, reflecting their societies. I particularly like the idea that enjoying gardens and growing things is “dirty”. The effect of the Maelstrom upon those capable of long is quite exhilarating. Most of the characters are rounded and the various subplots, though predictable, are carefully interwoven to build up to a spectacular climax.

I am less happy with the magic in the story. Given the conventions of High Fantasy I can accept the Hyalana’s Faustian bargain with the Face, I can accept its transfERENCE to Ashurek, which neatly adds a deadly complication to the plot. I can just accept that its transfer brings the Hyalana back to life, as its original purpose was to cheat death. But I found its ultimate resolution completely unconvincing. Furthermore, although one should not complain of a lack of killing, the only characters who are killed are the Face and, on the Hyalana, unimportant, expendable victims, usually nearing the end of their lives. Characters whose deaths have been tragic are miraculously restored to life. There is no suggestion on the cover that this might be a Horror novel. However the references to Ashurek’s violent past and the recent history of Ikonus are so frequent as to suggest that this could be a rich source of material for prequels, while the ending does not rule out sequels. We can but hope...

Although this did not exactly stimulate my jaded palate, it is better than a lot of books currently on the market and should appeal to those who like Fantasy.

Valerie Housden

Allen Sex
Ellen Datlow (Ed.)

The title of this collection may provoke worries about the contents: I know I received many “knowing” glances while reading it in public. To say it does not contain some material which could be described as violent is also true (for example, Harlan Ellison’s “How the Night is Cissalda”) would not only be lying, but also, strangely doing wrong. Where it is puerile, it is also hilarious. Where it is explicit (the closest it gets is in Richard Christian Matheson’s “Arosaul” and Scott Baker’s “The Jamesburg Incubus”), it is more usually disturbing than pornographic; it would be hard to imagine anyone getting their sexual “jollies” from this book.

What you will get is literary “jollies”, in a very well put together collection. The selection ranges from the very explicit to the very obscure, with ten new stories and nine reprints, each giving the other class a good run for their money in quality stakes.

The range of “experience” (always a tough word to use in relation to SF) encompassed is also impressive, from Lisa Tuttle’s intensely personal “Waking Up”, through to Geoff Ryman’s story which can only be described by its title, “Omnisexual” (and, please, no jokes about the magazine....)

For your few pence, you get a high quality, but varied in style, review of how SF can approach a delicate subject now that it’s all grown up. Somewhat to be read alone and inwardly digested, such as Connie Willis’s “All My Darling Daughters” ; some, Larry Niven’s “Man of Steel” , Woman of Kilimanjaro”, begs to be read aloud and laughed at. But out of all ten stories, only perhaps one or two don’t demand to be read. This could adequately become for the nineties what DANGEROUS VISIONS partly wanted to be for the late sixties/early seventies; proof positive of a mature literary mode called science fiction.

Pete Darby

Hooray for Hollywood
Esther Friesner
Orbit, 1992, 217pp, £3.99 pb

Plainsong
Deborah Graben
Pan, 1991, 281pp, £4.50 pb

Both these books can be described as light fantasy, but the first is the lightest. Despite the spelling “Hollywood” in the first title, it is largely set in Hollywood and a sequel to Here Be Demons and Demon Bites, both described on the back cover as “A hilarious, well-paced novel of imported American sitcoms. Much of the humour may be lost on British readers. To quote two examples: p54 of about four hundred, like “The legendary and extinct two-dollar valise”, and p76 “There is a planet full of my descendents here to this day, all of whom drink warm beer, eat cat biscuits, and blame the Tories for everything”’. I’ll risk censorship of this sentence and say it’s writing which can be read from The Shit-Writer’s Guide to the Galaxy. Plainsong deserves to be taken much more seriously. It may help to say that its author is said to have “exchanged the foggs of London for those of San Francisco... She divides as much time as possibly between, “first a great, and pleasant” after a mysterious plague has left her almost the only survivor. Typical of the fantastic elements is the fact that there appear to be no inconvenient human bodies lying around. Julia is quite clearly glad that all “noisy, destructive, rapacious” ocenoids are in the background. She finds herself able to communicate telepathically with a cat called God (not God) and various other telepaths, a little more homorphically. It would be wrong to give away what happens next. Suffice to say that what starts as a pastorial, wish-fulfilment fantasy in the tradition of William Morris rapidly becomes as narcissistic as Virginia Woolf and full of Christian allegory. The style is rather windy at times, beautifully poetic at others, always tremendously confident and competent.

Jim England

Darkness, Tell Us
Richard Laymon
Headline, 1991, 312pp, £14.95

Captors
Shawn Hutson
Macdonald, 1991, 432pp, £14.95

A couple of workmanlike chasers, one American midlist and one British blockbister, both of which display stock elements to vary different effect. Laymon opts for the up-front supernatural, sending the obligatory cross-section of obnoxious American teens off into the wilderness in search of buried treasure at the behest of a passing ouija board, just in time for the opening of a serial killer treasure. From here on an astute reader will have little trouble joining the dots, but the prose is well-crafted, the kids convincingly bratty, and the overall effect entertaining enough within its limited scope.

Shawn Hutson, on the other hand, needs only a passing nod to Mad Science to kick-start a plot which floors the accelerator and keeps it there. His narrative style seems to have a depiction of violence, both physical and emotional, all the more resonant for its apparent dispassion, and his evocation of place and mood deftly crafted. Like a great deal of material currently being published as horror, Captors owes more to the polltergeist and the horror-thriller than the horror. Most of the characters are rounded and the various subplots, though predictable, are carefully interwoven to build up to a spectacular climax.

Alex Stewart

Once Upon A Time
Lester del Rey and Risa Kessler (Ed.)

Once Upon A Time is described as “A treasury of fantasy and fairy tales”. It includes new material by Terry Brooks, CJ Cherryh, del Rey himself, Susan Dextor, Wayland Drew, Barbara Hambly, Katherine Kurtz, Anne McCaffrey and Lawrence Watt-Evans. The book has illustrations, one story, by Michael Pangerzio. The stories span the whole of literature, from the stories in depth, but I enjoyed the collection as a whole. True, despite del Rey’s insistence in the foreword “This is not a book of fairy tales”, the fairy tales meant for mature, adult readers, some of the stories on occasions cross the border between the two, but almost all the stories can be forgiven. In general, the stories are well constructed and written. The
The Drowners
Garry Kilworth

The Drowners is set in the wetlands of the river Ichen in Hampshire around the middle of the 19th century. Tom Timbrell's father is a Master Drowner, whose extensive knowledge of the river Ichen and, more importantly, its life and its lore, is sought after by many farmers, who depend on it for their livelihood. Kilworth brings in a professional troublemaker, Wesley Wickerman, to sabotage the farmers' efforts, the scene is set for a gripping tale that gradually builds up to a climax.

The characters too, are strong enough to identify with, the two main youngsters (Tom and Jem) at the heart of the story, their relationships and conflicts are well drawn.

Despite some weaknesses in the plot, the story is gripping and keeps the reader hooked.

Jon Wallace

N-Space
Larry Niven


Another major retrospective on one of the USA's leading science fiction writiers, N-Space is a collection of over 50 familiar and not so familiar short stories, novel excerpt and articles, works much better than 1991's Asimov's Chronicles. The collection includes an introduction by Harry N. ARC 10 Red October author Tom Clancy, story notes and laudatory "blurbs" comments by other writers, and even the introduction is in a tongue-in-cheek dramaatis persona.

The quotes serve well as plugs, but needlessly displie the original material. The collection is a delight and different, something which is needed to break the mould of the genre. It is a collection of "magic" and religion but it's also a collection of "magic" and religion. A book that everyone should read.

The characters are strong enough to identify with, and the story is well written and well constructed.

Michael Pout

Prayers to Broken Stones
Dan Simmons

Headline, 1992, 311pp, £15.99

The time comes and the reviewer knows he has no choice, he has defied this necessity numerous times, but there is no escape from these hostilities to posterity. He must review a harlin Ellison introduction. The story is set in a world where the introduction voice to new or little known writers, familiar but because these things are the same, it was there at the beginning of the Bruce Sterling's Involution Ocean, of Tom Reamy's Lightfoot Sue, it is inescapable throughout everything to do with Dangerous Visions and Universe, and only the uncounted hordes of other books. now it is weighing down an otherwise fine collection of stories by our latest cross-genre wunderkind Dan Simmons. How can anyone praise of Simmons with criticism of Ellison, but at some point this would have to be said, it might as well be done at once.

The perfect Ellison introduction goes something like this: There is a portentous opening full of the great sweep of time in which Ellison is perhaps best known, the first time readers will encounter the eminently quotable characters, with his incisive dialogue and his penchant for long, rambling sentences. The review would be a cautious one, but the reviewer would be willing to grant the author the benefit of the doubt. But when the time comes and the reviewer knows he has no choice, he has defied this necessity numerous times, but there is no escape from these hostilities to posterity. He must review a harlin Ellison introduction.

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Dan Simmons


Greenmantle - Charles de Lint [Pan, 1991, 328pp, £4.99 pb]. At the point where the known world gives way into something much older, much more unknown; ancient folklore weaves into the present day, just at the edges of vision. And when it steps out of the shadows?

Vengeance for a Lonely Man - Simon R Green [Headline, 1992, 186pp, £4.50 pb]. In which Hawk and Fisher of the Haven City Guard go on the trail of a spy, but find themselves menaced not only by a shapechanging energy vampire, but also by a noble and ancient family not pleased at finding undercover cops in the ancestral manse.


Thomas the Rhymers - Ellen Kushner [Gollancz, 1991, 247pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Dave Mitchell in V162. The Queen of Elfland took Thomas from human sight for seven years, and then returned him to his people with the gift of prophecy. This was the World Fantasy Award; its style is poetic, and its portrait of the medieval Border country and its people is remarkable in itself.

Pegasus in Flight - Anne McCaffrey [Corgi, 1991, 319pp, £3.99 pb]. "No one has ever... done justice to the... dragon". V162. Sequel to To Ride Pegasus (1973): an overpopulated Earth is beginning to send its populations into space, assisted by parapsychic Talents.

The Ultimate Dracula - Byron Preiss [Headline, 1992. 372pp, £4.99 pb]. Compiled to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the first "Dracula" movie, this is an anthology of new vampire stories. Some bring in Count Dracula himself, others his historical inspiration Vlad Tepes, WR Philbrick's excellent *The Dark Rising* tells the school of a vampire-racing across the First World AIDS virus ravaging Haiti, whose attention must soon focus on the American mainland. (remember that Stoker's Dracula represented the dual opposing forces of eroticism and the fear of syphilis); Karen Roberts' "Sugar and Spice" and is a cynical tale of a very little vampire; "All Dracula's Children" by Dan Simmons goes into the terror of just-post-Ceausescu Romania and suggests why so many Romanian orphans had AIDS. I wouldn't say all the stories are as good as those three, but I should guess that if you like vampire stories you'll like this book, and if you don't you won't.

Farslayer's Story - Fred Saberhagen [Orbit, 1992, 252pp, £4.50 pb]. Of mermaids, swords and magic, this is the fourth book of Lost Swords. Seems like a double dose of "566" to me.


Majipoor Chronicles - Robert Silverberg [Pan, 1983, 317pp, £4.99 pb]. The first two volumes in the "Majipoor" collection, and the first story of Valentine's wanderings as a juggler and his reacquaintion to the throne usurped from him, the second a set of tales ranging across Majipoor's vast distances and long history and among its many races. The third volume, Valentine Pestilence, should be reissued shortly.

The Fall of Hyperion - Dan Simmons [Headline, 1991, 632pp, £5.99 pb]. Reviewed by Charles Stross in V162. The second volume of Hyperion. Composed of, and poars in the original inspiration (John Keats), and adds turning against humankind and trying to replace it.

Dowracer - Iain Sinclair [Paladin, 1991, 407pp, £5.99 pb]. Into the darkness of a London whose river sweats oil and tar; hauntcd by vast Gothic dossouthouses and their Gyorgennost inhabitants, and perhaps the ghosts of those who disappeared (vanished, murdered, the death of water and fire…) whose trail must be picked up before it, and the Isle of Dogs and by extension London itself, vanishes under concrete, scrambling the signature of time. The style is intense and referential, but persist, persist.

Stalin's Teardrops - Ian Watson [Gollancz, 1991, 270pp, £3.99 pb]. Reviewed by Catie Castle in V162. A varied collection of stories, time-travel, near future thrillers, political fables; like the latest, "Soknake", and the "Mademoiselle", and like very much "Gaud's ' Dragon" - ten years ago they were talking about finishing. And the one called "Lila and maybe holograms are the only one to do it."

Interzone were not sure about publishing "The Sense of the Ayatollah" in case they got backlash from fundamentalists, but they did publish it, and here it is too.

Thomas the Rhymers - Ellen Kushner

**Reviews continued**

**The Key to Midnight**

**Dean R Koontz**

**Headline, 1992, 311pp, £15.99**

In this re-issue from his pseudonymous past, Koontz moves, as if proof were needed, that he is no longer a "tale with or without horror." The theme is the woman with amphinon past, and a private detective with a nose for the truth, the fact that the detective, Alex Hunter, had been hired by the woman's father to find her, ten years before, seems a little too coincidental, but Koontz's style saves it from being just another romantic thriller, as the girl goes on her self-defence and remaining unharmed while those around her are being mugged. He is no longer to be expected to be believable and belongs in a Mills & Boon novelette. The story's one redeeming feature is the style in which it was written paper. Once you pass the first chapter you will not be able to put it down.

**Martin Webb**

**The Weeder: Book 1**

**Roz Kaveney and Mary Gentle (Eds)**

**Rox, 1992, 360pp, £4.99 pb**

The Weeder are a race close to human, capable of changing their shape, usually wary of humankind. They call themselves the Kin. As the human population increases they are being pushed out. The three novels told in this book come from the archives of the Library of the Conspiracy, where Harry Lennond, a notionalist, has been employed to investigate by the need to know what it was he once loved, for his love was a shapeshifter. The stories cover everything from perichoric - where Liz Holliday suggests that the Greek gods were Weeder, through the Renaissance - where Mary Gentle shows the investigations of Rene Descartes; the Victorian Age of Industry - where the effects of building the Settle to Carlisle railway on a previously isolated Weeder community are described by Michael Farn; the Wars of Intervention in Russia - described by Roz Kaveney; through to the present day where in Paul Cornell's 'Sunflower Pomp' the shape changing includes the ability to imitate a pair of training shoes with unfortunate results.

The research comes from a Library of Conspiracy, and other conspiracies and secret strains of thought run through the stories. These include the Opus, Bel in Christopher Amies' 'Rain' (along with the mainstream Roman Catholic Church), the Rosicrucians, Aleister Crowley in Josephine Saxton's 'The Lost Friend', alchemy, and various branches of the KGB and other secret services in Charles Stross' 'Ancient Knowledge' - along with various ancient beliefs and mythologies.

The Weeder are found around the world, the stories describe their lives in Siberia, Spain, England, Greece, and North America, but they are not united in purpose and are divided by old animosities. Though they are not werewolves some of their activities seem unpleasant, and like most minorities they are driven into economic uncertainty and to the edges of society. In English towns and cities they live a sort of Cathy-Come-Home life, although Brian Stableford does describe one becoming a minor popstar (who could only come second in the European Song Contest). Abroad, Christopher Andrew Leitamendi tries to bring rain to a drought-stricken Spanish town, but Colin Greenland's Tom in 'Going to the Black Bear' seems to hand his hitchhiker over to his family for disposal before changing his shape and rescuing her. Only Storm Constantine meets two Weeder living happily like fairy children. The result of all this is that the Weeder are not particularly weird, and somehow lack the interestingness of, say, evil werewolves or vampires. There is little life and the conspiracies do not create any strong plot. The social background in which the Weeder live recedes behind the character, and the Horrible trilogy, strangeness and plot coalesced in his novels. Here, the whole is not as good as some of its parts.

**L J Hurst**
Letters continued from p 5

As always, I’m most impressed by the number and quality of the letters from readers, authors and critics. I can say that Anglo-Saxon society doesn’t seem to get more agitated about sex than about anything else. A devious person can achieve high office; someone who is emotionally and sexually concerned with vast sums of money; someone who launches a war; someone who erects something in their memory. But let one leader, one expert, one campaigner, confess a sexual misadventure, then all past service can be nullified and career ancestors disowned. It always surprises me that if literary and visual art can be so socially damaging in a sexual matter, then the same campaigns claim then why isn’t similar consideration given to the harm done by art in other spheres of human activity? All kinds of books are good for example: they are obviously the pornography of general interest. If the general interest were to overheat to what most of the world’s population is starving.

Conversely, there is the pornography of pride – or rather its reverse, humility; all those magazines devoted to diets and slimming and how to avoid being ashamed of what you naturally are. Equally pervasive are the twin pornography of avaricious envy; there are all those advertisements and brochures which tell you how to make more money, more fame from it or vice versa... The glossy magazines and coffee-table tomes which portray the house and garden beautiful... All very unsettling, disrupting family relationships, in some cases as totally as uselessly.

Then there is the pornography of anger – not outright vitriolity (which’s linked with lust) but the impassioned encouragement of aggression. Most automobile advertising is aggressive and selfish, but equally distasteful are the advertisements for television programmes which make you feel guilty and angry, and unable to do anything about it... I may agree that one gets more and more angry. In fact, most campaigns – even for pacific causes – seem to be permanently bellicose, near war although there is no war.

Quirky, too, is my constant, I maintain that all these trends can have results as devastating as any sexual misbehaviour. If sexual pornography can stimulate social misbehaviour, then are we not seeing a parallel in the way we have another trend... But what should you ask? What is the pornography of apathy? Well, I don’t know. I can’t think about everything. Someone else can write about that.

Mark Brinton

Alton, Hunts

From Andy Mills

DM Thomas’s The White Hotel (to take a well-known example) contains a passage of sexual violence which, for the effect it has on the reader, in likelihood outweighs anything in the Winowie book (although I haven’t read the latter). It is truly shocking and upsetting. Millions of people have read it - have they been completely unharmed by it? If so, how do we know? Can’t they recall any “cop-out” crimes being reported. Of course, if pornography does corrupt and deprave, then everyone of us is corrupt and depraved (as we all know, sex and violence are inextricably linked, aren’t they?) If so, why is it that we are not more often called to the police should logically be to the film censors’ office. After all, by virtue of their work they must be among the most corrupted of us. Perhaps this is not a fair way of saying that it is more likely the police be involved in other activities other than those regarded as sex. Many of these activities could involve coming down on things which do have a measurable and detrimental effect on people, such as heroin and handguns.

I’m frankly bewildered why some mongers find depiction of the sexual act, and especially the sight of the undressed human body, so offensive. It strikes me that such disgust at an enjoyable activity is the problem so much more, not the depiction itself.

Andy Mills

Half

From Steven Tew

A critical value that seems to be obscured by one of the two or three correspondents that that style is not important, and that judgement of whether writing is good or bad is subjective. I think it does matter whether a book is well written or not. It is a judgment to see the reviewer’s job to state an opinion of this as to this. I think there is a lot of stew that is the waste, repetitive writing, and there clearly is some objectivity. Of course, whether that text is wasteful in this sense, even if it is arguable as to where the line should be drawn. There is such a thing as bad writing even when the context is not making bad writing differ.

A small points to Ken Lake: obviously, when Winowie describes people as “bastards”, this is referring to their parentage. English usage, as you well know, even a habit of overstating dictionary definitions.

1, for one, find Winowie’s use of the word appropriate and comprehensive.

Stephen Tew

From Erwin Blank

I was one of the probably few not being sent the Winowie letter and so I was a bit surprised by the attention it gets. It is often the case - at least for me - that all which saves me a penny or two. The only other thing I got out of it was when the letter touched the issue of censorship.

Which brings me to the letter of Robert Gibson, from which I understand I am an immoral, liberal, anti-censorship robot. I gladly go along with the immaturity, for maturity has an air of non-existence about itself or at least immaturity, the rest of it doesn’t describe me, and I shall try to prove my anti-censorship opinion is not grounded on some. Any form of good, clean, honest and objective censorship (how about that for a contradiction?) Needs a firm, unshakable, reality. That is necessary to decide what is wrong and what is right in human behaviour. Yet there are as many equally good realities as there are people (or almost as many). Also, it’s a fact (which is not the same as reality) that any reality is formed by the fact that it is not the reality made from ice. The basis for censorship is shaly to say the very least.

Besides a philosophical side, there’s also the material side; a lot of time and effort is being put into fighting books, records and movies. Isn’t it better to redirect that time and effort to fight what happens to living beings? A psychiatrist once said: “If you forbid people to write about certain things, they’ll go out and do it for real.”

Finally, this is the point of what people do with censorship. Ask the people of Amnesty International. Ask the people of Amnesty. Finally, “in an interview, that his writings have been in jail for two years for selling "Me so henny" by 2 Live Crew to a 14-year-old boy. Ask the author of Lord Lovell. Ask homosexuals, people the religions and atheists as well.

Erwin Blank

The Hague

From Ken Lake

I feel I must correct Peter Tannent and Tom A Jones when they so blatantly misrepresent the facts.

Books for review have to be sent to selected reviewers. Winowie’s Chao Kao was sent, not under any condition to facts, often misleading, propaganda, direct to me. Knowing that Paul Kincade would have allocated the review to someone else, I asked him if I could - unusually - write about the pack of press releases sent direct to me, since I found them so unacceptable in their contents. Subject to his approval of my review, Paul kindly that I could do so.

If Winowie is not wanted to be judged by his own words, and those of his appointed publicity agents, then he should perhaps not 'do not dismiss without’ the book - I was not made to comment on it.

Ken Lake

London

From Chris Lewis

When I read a review, what I want to know is whether I would like the book. Should I buy it immediately or leave it on the shelf? Since a review is always going to be somewhat subjective I try to consider what little I know of the reviewer and how their tastes have been formed in the past. I enjoyed reading New Scientist’s review of The White Mountain, which was before I had read the novel, her name did not mean anything to me. I acknowledged the review as particularly negative with reasons given, personal, of the start and stylistic tone of the book but was able to avoid, unless some other reviews were strongly positive.

It may be that this is what Dave Winowie doesn’t like - another reader put off his books. But having read his own book, or at least the beginning of the book’s contents, I still do not want to read it. I would now say that Cato did not care about those sentiments. Cato describes a society rotten to the core and peoples it with “monsters”. Winowie - “The world of Ching Kao is sick in appeal. There are undoubtedly a number of evil men.” This seems to be nothing more than a different approach to horror.

The matter of the editorial is somewhat different. An editorial article should be there to draw attention to issues which may be of greater interest in the ‘outside’ world or to give some theme to a particular issue, to inspire thought and intelligent debate.

Again, it seems to me that this is what Cato tried to do - to tie together his revulsion to The White Mountain to the larger, wider issues, to ask questions on warning labels, certification and censorship. Having read the editorial I went back to reread the review and then the article on the Savoy books affair. This gave me a little more background with which to assess the review, but more importantly it made me think about some of the books that have been praised in BSFA (and other) reviews but that I personally have found distasteful in places. Would I have wanted a warning? Would I have avoided those books if I had known then? Would my life have been better? Would I have lived longer? Surely that was the point of the editorial, not a debate on whether I would have read the books man. I was not the one who was reading the pornographic, but what should be done about literature (and films? and plays? and records?) that could be considered tempting? Perhaps we could get on to that.

Chris Lewis

Oxford

From Michael Cobley

I would like to write in concern about the Chao Kao books, and had to laugh. According to David Barrett, Maureen Speller and Paul Kincade, Cato Cary is entitled to his exposition of The White Mountain while David Winowie is scorned for objecting to it. What I read: Readers and Cato Cary in an informed opinion, not any old mishmash of fancy and prejudice, and certainly not unsupported allegations and value judgements. David Barrett has previously criticized Chao Kao The Middle Kingdom on the grounds of plotting, background characterisation and prose style, and Cary took up where he left off, focusing on sex and violence. Yet neither of these comments provides a single corrupting excerpt from the texts that had so offended them: no, we were expected to take them at their word that what they say is the truth...

Whereas the truth is that great lake of mud are being agitated at the Chao Kao books. Incidentally, some of it will stick and there are readers out there who will believe it. I'll bet the reviews in the Times, or what they are about, simply on the say-so of a few people whose critical attitudes in this matter have more to do with narrow-mindedness than with truth. Oh, and it so happens that I’m a friend of David Winowie, maybe readers should take that into account. Maybe readers should think - and read - for themselves.

Michael Cobley

Glasgow

From Howard Reynolds

It’s fine for Winowie to describe the world of Chao Kao as deliberately designed to be horrifically terrifying. I don’t think there’s anything to be gained from having lurid unpleasantness thrust down our throats. The reason he concentrates on horrors characters, and their plots revolve around such matters as vice and rape, if it’s because he’s rather too often to make an entertaining show in this kind of the fiction of the sex, as long as they’re handled genuinely.

Howard Reynolds

London

From Judith Johnston

I feel that the only book the BSFA who didn’t get the letter from David Winowie, judging from the limitless amount of space given over to his response to it. I ploughed through it all, charges and counter charges, mystified, and increasingly bored, wondering might they be better advised spending my hard-earned payment on a subscription to a successful Times instead of the BSFA. It could well prove more entertaining.

And what do I think - if anyone really wants to know about me? I don’t think it’s a pity so many too had to be added. Perhaps I would have had far more at the heart. No wonder we’re supposed to have problems with global warming - and now I’m adding to it.

Firepower gives me like this one.

Judith Johnston

Bowen-on-Warderney, Cambria

Despite moral attacks with some morons, a last time that all your letters in this issue. We also heard from Brian Atias, Helen Bland, Marcia, Peter and Joseph Nicholas and C. Cowan. Maybe next issue...

It would be a certain sympathy for Judith Johnston’s point of view. Please, no more letters directly related to Chong Kao or Cary. The majority of the letters as far as the letter is concerned is written by Kim Cowie’s article, and to ask questions on warning labels, certification and censorship. Having read the editorial
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