VECTOR 76-7

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Contents:

Lead-In........................................3

Robert Silverberg Interviews/Christopher Fowler...............................5

Opening Mixer/Brian Stableford..................................................14

The Identity Box: Book Reviews/Cy Chawin
John Clute
James Corley
Chris Evans
Tom and Susan Jones
David Pringle
Brian Stableford
David Wingrove........................................18

The Celluloid Dream: Film Reviews/Steve Lipsey
Andrea Tidmarsh........................................52

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This issue is also for Jane

Thanks to: Candida, and all members of the Fantasy Workshop...
...Dona, Bernard Yvette, Sally/Margaret/Beverly, Steve/Audra, Florence, Judy and Keith...Martina Hatfield and Ian Thomson...

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76/77 has been produced by Chris Fowler, who is feeling a bit tired, and an IBM Selectric III, which is a bit hot. Time for reading, Ian.
11.30 am, Thursday August 5th, 1976 - Southcote

Now some of you, upon recovering from the shock of finding that you have received this mailing, may be wondering whether there are in fact three: why, in short is the 80-page Vector 76/77 a double issue when the 60-page Vector 75 is not? Now, if I were feeling snotty - which I well might upon being asked silly questions after spending five days typing those issues out - I should say: "Because I'm the editor (and the BSFA Publications and Distribution Officer to boot) and I say so"; but that would be an inadequate response to such a vital question, touching as it does upon the whole future of human, nay galactic, civilisation. The fact is that the standard size of Vector throughout its history has always been 60 pages. Thus any issue of more than that is an "outside" one. You will see from a cursory examination of the issues produced under my benevolent guidance that they have all been more than 40 pages. This particular package, of 80 pages, constitutes, under the "Vector-standard-40-page" rule, three issues. So... one as a single, one as a double. Sam?

Having disposed of that one, I can make some comments on the contents of this (double-) issue. We have the Robert Silverberg interview, conducted by my good self at the ManCon, the first of three articles by Brian Stableford, illustrated by award-winning artist Paul Dillon; the film review column, The Celluloid Break, where regular Andrew Tidmarsh is joined by an honoured visitor, Steve Divey; and a lengthy book review section, where John Clute makes a welcome first appearance as a Vector reviewer, and Brian Stableford also steps in as reviewer.

TheContents will be noticed that the review section this issue is a special "look-how-locustossed-the-of-field-is" one - we have Tom and Susan Jones reviewing Brian Stableford, who in turn reviews James Corley, who in his turn is reviewing... well, it would be nice to complete the circle and say that he was reviewing the latest issue of Matrix, but I wasn't able to contact him in time to arrange it.)

Next issue will definitely - it's half typed and only got squeezed out by demands of space - have the interview with Roger Elwood; plus an article by Ian Watson and the Bob Shaw talk from the ManCon; and will also have more letters in, space permitting.

A final couple of notes: the Vector editor is supporting Terry Jaques for Taff - if anyone deserves it, he does. And Evelyn Harvey informs me that arrangements for her convention bid for 1978 are going well, with hotels booked. More news of this in later issues.

Since I'm getting claustrophobia typing in the gap left by Paul Dillon's artwork, I'll stop, with the hope that you find this issue worthwhile.

--- Christopher Fowler
Robert Silverberg
talks to
Chris Fowler

Firstly, may I welcome you behalf of Vector readers, and of the BSFA, to the
Mercon convention. I hope you'll enjoy your stay in England, although it's
a very brief one.

A brief one this time, but it's a pleasure to be back here after five years.

Thank you. I'd like to start around about 1968, when, it seems to me - reading
your books and looking at the criticism - that there was quite a considerable
change in the kind of work you were producing. You'd forsaken the production
of a very large output of, shall we say, relatively trivial science fiction
material for works of much greater critical stature. I'd like to ask you:
how did you manage to achieve this, both in practical terms and artistically
and why did this change come about? What was the motivation; and was it a
conscious change?

It was partly a conscious change. It was partly a fact simply of being
older in 1968 than I was in 1958, that much more experienced a man, that much
more capable a writer. Partly a feeling that it was now time for me to reach
beyond my grasp, if over. Partly a matter of going through certain personal
changes in 1965 which simply worked for me a transition from adolescence to
adulthood, in a way. And, it was simply time for me to write differently, and
I felt this. It was not a conscious, calculated decision of: "Oh boy! Now
I'm going to write some good stuff!", but that I knew this was the moment
when I could not continue doing what I had been doing, therefore I had to do
something else.

How was it accomplished practically? I had been away from science fiction for
several years, so that when I returned I was virtually a new man. No-one
knew what to expect of me. I had known present at conventions, I was visible
but not writing. And, several editors were aware that there must be more in me
than what I had put on paper, and when I finally came to them and said: "Look, I
want to write again. Will you allow me to write as I wish?", they were
willing to take the chance. Those editors were Fred Pohl, who bought my
short stories of the period, and Betty Ballantine, who signed a contract for
Thorns on the basis of my description of the book... nothing but the description
of the book, I did not write any sample chapters. And once those books were
written, the only practical problem that remained for me was to get people to
read them who were aware of my previous output, to overcome the prejudice that
had, quite rightly, been built up during the years when I was turning out simply
machine-made pot-holiers. That took several years.

I see. And was that metamorphosis, if you like, aided by the fact that you'd
diversified your writing out of just science fiction into non-fiction, and
got quite a good reputation there for your non-fiction work?

I think so. I think it gave me much more confidence, the fact that I had had
a writing career which was not merely a back writing career, allowed me to return

Interview conducted Saturday 17th April 1976, at Owens Park, Manchester; by
Chris Fowler. Transcribed by Ian A. Thomson Copyright (c) C.J. Fowler, 1976.
to science fiction with such more steadfastness of purpose. Also, it gave me an economic base from which to work during the years when science fiction was extremely ill-paying.

It seems that in the works that you've produced since Thomas you've explored a number of major themes, particularly, it seems to me anyway, the theme of alienation. Did you, in any conscious way, set out to explore certain themes and then write books around them, or was it again something that grew out of the state that you were in at that time?

Well, I certainly never set out consciously to explore alienation. I recognize now that has been my theme, but that's the theme of any writer who is on this planet attempting to encounter other human beings and relate to them. The only thing I set out consciously to do in the late sixties was to return to the classic theme of science fiction which I felt had largely been mishandled... in execution, not in thought; but in literary execution and try to set them right, try to do them with a literacy, a grace that nobody seemed interested in doing. And so I worked my way through bob, time travel and ecolide and...

Well, you know what the themes are... and methodically re-examined them, attempted to wring from them the emotional and literary implications that I felt had been neglected. I don't mean any arrogance by this particularly, just that I feel the interests of other writers before me, particularly the generation before me, lay in other places. And, it was now time to re-examine those themes in a new light.

This new light that you speak of: it seems to me - perhaps it is a function of the way in which I, particularly, approach your work - that one of the central concerns of many of your books, particularly a book like Dune... is essentially spiritual: concerned with finding the answers to the problems that you're exploring by means of a transcendental transfiguration - a re-birth, if you like. Again, are you conscious of this spiritual or religious dimension? Are you explicitly exploring spiritual or other ideas of your own in your work?

Well, I'm an isolated human being, struggling against the pain of the human condition, to be very preoccupied about it, and searching in my own life for that which provides meaning. I'm not primarily a religious man. Well, I am in a way, but I don't belong to any religion. I have a Jewish ethnic heritage, that's all, but I have never been a practicing Jew. I'm doing my best, getting through. Those are the two phrases that I would attach to myself. And one of the modes of getting through, one of the modes of breaking through to perception of what it's all about, is reflected in books - particularly books like Dune... to the Earth, Son of Man - where it becomes more cryptic, perhaps - Time of Changes, where it's extremely explicit. The fault that I would lay at Time of Changes is that it's almost a scream, and that's not good. Moving to California five years ago was, to me, a great spiritual revelation; to get closer to nature in an environment which is relatively unraped. I'm talking about Northern California where I live. I'm 400 miles from Los Angeles...

What's up around San Francisco, is it?

I live near San Francisco, yes. The physical beauty of the place lends very easily to a kind of quasi-mythical experience. These days I've virtually given up writing - in fact, I've totally given up writing - simply to be closer to nature. I find it much more rewarding to encounter growing, living things that to wrestle with publishers.

To what extent did this move to California come about as a direct result of the five which you wrote about...?

No, not connected. In fact, the five, if anything, retarded my leaving New York because... The first was in 1968, we rebuilt the house completely and it
became an extraordinary house as a result of the rebuilding job. 1971 was when
I first began, very suddenly, to feel that it's now time to get out of New
York and to go to a cleaner, purer place. And what delayed us was the sentimental
bond with that house that we had suffered through the fire of and then rebuilt.
And that house not been there I think we'd have left six or eight months
earlier, but we both had to wrestle with the tie to the house. No, what got me
out of New York, on the simplest level, was the emigration of all our closest
friends, so that we felt marooned in this island of eight million strangers.
But also a sense that this is a collapsing civilization, that this is an
increasingly ugly place and that life is just not good here any more, and do we
not want to be the last ones left in the calamity?

Yes, If I may come back to the fire, because it seems that this...reading what
you wrote in Hell's Cartographers, reprinted in Foundation, one particular
quote struck me very strongly, when you were talking about your feelings
after that fire. You said, if I may quote: "I had felt the hand of some
supernatural being pressed against me that night, punishing me for real and
imagined sins, levelling me for overweening pride, as though I had tried to
be Agamemnon". It strikes me, in reading that, that you are writing very
much from the heart. Do you really feel that that particular incident was -
well, not to use a phrase like "divine retribution", but...

Oh, I do. I did. It was the only time in my life I've had that feeling.
There was a chain of events through 1965, 66 and 67, which I do not propose to
talk to anyone about - I hinted at that when you asked me the reason for the
change in my writing...

Please excuse me if I'm...

No, do not at all. This is because people will read this and say: "Well, you
can tell us". I really don't want to talk about it. But there was a chain of
events which, as a writer, I organised into a great tragedy, if you will. It
seemed to me a very logical progression, building up to the fire as the appro-
priate punishment. Now this, I think, in my own sense of form playing
macabre tricks on me. But I did perceive this very clearly in that
terrifying moment after the fire that: yes, it all fits together and what
better thing could there have been, worse thing could there have been to
do that to give me this fire? I didn't actually feel the sense of a Jehovah
sitting up there saying: "Well, it's really time to knock Silverberg down a peg".
But what I felt, and I still feel it, is a sense of compensating balances in
the universe, which to me is the governing force. And that in some inexplicable
way, even down on the molecular level where I live, the forces had balanced.
There was the rubble to prove this to me. I don't literally believe that there
is that degree of wasteland and symmetry in human life. I do believe that things
do even out in the universe, and that this is a factor one must treat with
great care.

Do you think that after that event and after your feelings about it that there's
a slightly darker tone to your work? It seems that there's always been a certain
underlying darkness to your works, but that it got stronger, particularly,
again, in The World Inside and A Time of Changes, where you're exploring similar
kinds of problems - alternation again - and the kind of societies which engender
these things: but no actual solution is offered in these works. Unlike Thorns
where, for example, the solution of love is offered, although it's a kind of
fierce love...

Time of Changes offers a solution of sorts
One felt at the end of that novel, with the man alone in there, in that shock
with everyone around him coming to...

Ah, but he's still offering a message of hope. He has lost, but... I would think
Time of Changes offers neither more nor less of a solution than the other books.
But, no doubt a darker tone came into my work after the fire, although... I should say that I was never particularly a jolly man. My humour takes the form of wit. I'm not boisterous, I'm not Harry Harrison-like in any way. I rarely tell jokes with punchlines or anything like that. There's a certain melancholy about me which dates from well before the fire, in fact to the beginning. And I think that was reflected in any story of mine that I took seriously, straight from "Road to Nightfall" when I was 18, before I was anything really.

Can I ask, then: have you lost faith in traditional solutions, like love? Oh God. I never had any faith in traditional solutions!...When I say I'm trying to get through, I think there are enormous obstacles to getting through, that we can be struck down at any moment. And eventually we will be struck down, without question of doubt. And there is no solution to that. There's no solution to the fact that a billion years from now the molecules of our society will be equally distributed through the atmosphere. We accept these things, and we do our best under the system that is vested out. But there are no solutions. There are only adjustments.

Does any darker tone in your work parallel your writing ability to write very fast and very easily? You've spoke, again in the Nell's Cartographer article, about how you find it. You say: "I have only rarely felt that dynamic sense of clear vision that enabled me to write in wild, joyous spurts"... that's a slightly abridged version of what you said. In there any - I'm sure you must have been asked this many times before - auto-biographical element in Dying Inside, the writing of David Selig's ps abilities? Is there any parallel there with your feeling that perhaps it's your ability to write quickly and easily that has slipped away from you?

I don't think so. In the context of my life, particularly in retrospect, it certainly looks that way. What I saw when I conceived Dying Inside was a general metaphor for loss and decay and ageing. However, I conceived Dying Inside in late 1969, I believe, around the time I wrote Son of Man - at any rate, at a time when I was not contemplating these problems particularly. So this is a bit of gratuitous, sort of, biography that appears only in retrospect.

I see. The Book of Skulls? I think, was the last of your novels which I read. You've said The Stochastic Man which has just been released in this country since then...

Well, Book of Skulls was actually written before Dying Inside. It's the book just before that.

Perhaps it's merely the order in which I managed to get hold of them...Anyway, I was wanting to come onto The Stochastic Man and Shadraah in the Furnace. Now, these are two books which I haven't read, and I think will be unfamiliar to the readers of Vector; because I think The Stochastic Man has only fairly recently appeared over here. Could you tell us something about those two books, and in there any development of your ideas through them, or...

It's very hard for me to tell that. You see, I don't see my books as neatly as, say, Brian Stableford is in that marvellous essay he has in Science Fiction Monthly. He's outside and he can perceive an unfolding pattern. I'm within and I perceive an organic pattern that's not easily expressed, except by the books themselves. I can't say much about them, except to say that The Stochastic Man does not, to me, fit the curve of my growth. It somehow is a book that was outside it and which I don't fully understand or appreciate, and that Shadraah, which was obviously to me going to be my final book for a long time, is, in a way, a summation in which I say goodbye to many of my technical tricks and many of my themes, and manages to hit each one as I go along. It's a much longer book than any of my other books, and I think a successful one, but I can't analyse it in the way that you're asking me to do.
I'm sorry, that was an unfair question to ask you. What is the publishing position on Shadrich in the Furnace? Is it out in the States yet?

No, it's not out. It will be serialized in Analog in a month or two, that is to say. In the summer of 1978, it'll be published by Bobbs-Merrill in hardcover in the fall of '78. It'll be published here by Gollancz. I would guess during the winter, and in paperback by Coronet... I think they've already bought the rights, unless it's The Stochastic Man. There have been no many deals lately that I've begun to get confused. But at any rate, the book will be along in the next six months.

And most of your other work, which has been in American paperback or hardback - we're likely to see that here yet? I know quite a lot of it has appeared lately...

I think by the end of 1977 you will have the complete Silverberg in print in Great Britain. When I say the complete Silverberg, I mean that the early books that I don't use any virtue in reviving will not be revived, but everything that I want to preserve will have a publisher here. It certainly looks that way. John F. Scott of Gollancz has been a great pillar of support during the last two years. Last year or two when I've had so much trouble in the States. I think he's given me a sense of renewed confidence in what I've been doing that has allowed me to be more aggressive in placing these other books. Some of that has flowed back into the States now where my books are returning to print this year very rapidly. I can't say that the complete Silverberg will be back in print in the States, but in Britain it's sure certain.

You spoke just there of troubles in the States. Is that trouble with publishers in getting your more recent work published, or just keeping your main corpus of work in print?

Oh, no. A great deal of trouble of both sorts with the paperback, only paperback publishers. I'm not having trouble with my hardcover people. But, without a paperback publisher, I feel quite alienated from the readership. Several of my best short stories collections have not been purchased for paperback at all in the States, including unfamiliar Territory which has been a considerable commercial success in Great Britain, and which was bought for quite a robust sum by Coronet. That contrasts strongly with the fact that, as of now, I haven't been able to find anyone to publish the book in paperback in the States. That's the chief problem. Then, also, because of changes in policy at such houses as Ballantine my older books disappeared from sale, and for about a year I was unable to persuade any of the publishing people to re-issue them. That has begun to change within the last few months. We've had Dying Insiders and Nightwing back. A Book of Skulls is not coming back. Downward to the Earth... oh, a whole string of them suddenly. But I spent 18 months banging on doors before there was much movement. Oh, Son of Man, even, will be re-issued, perhaps my most difficult book. I've finally been allowed to have that back.

That's been issued over here by a publishing house in Wales, hasn't it?

No, they were going to do it. It's a small press. I have never offered it commercially here. I assumed they were not going to. A friend of mine, an American who lives here, had agreed to do it, a poet. But his printer refused to set it on the grounds that it was blasphemous, and because he worked so closely with that printer he was stymied by this, and so of course been unable to find another printer who will give him the quality of work that he demanded in this small press operation. So, I may take the book back from him and place it with one of the commercial publishers, which I think would now be feasible.

You've spoken elsewhere - I think in the interview which we had in Vector 72, the postal interview with Malcolm Edwards - about the great frustration that you feel that your older books, which you described as machine-written pot-
boilers, and your more recent works, which are very seriously and carefully written works, seem to sell equally well on the stands. Is this part of the element of frustration which is driving you from writing?

Well, that's part of it, but only a small part. That's an interesting abstract phenomenon. I really don't care which books sell more in any fundamental way, so long as they're all out there, and the right audience for each can find each book. But, what eventually wore me down was the necessity constantly to remind my publishers that I existed, that my books existed and were no longer in print. The difficulty in getting the books published in a way that was not embarrassing to me. As these factors accumulated, and they are the factors that most any writer has to deal with, I just began feeling that I didn't need this any more, that there were other things for me to be doing with my life that were less irritating and more rewarding. And although I must say that many of the factors that so embittered me and exhausted me have dissipated by now, I still feel no impulse to go back to writing, because the ultimate life that I've devised in the last year and shall in quite fulfilling. And it's not a life of idleness by any means. It's simply a life without writing in it.

So...was there this dual force in action on you? One, the frustrations of continuing writing against the problems of publishers and the problems of finding the right readership; and at the same time your wanting to get back to a more natural life style, closer to the earth as you said before?

Yes. It was very easy for me to succumb to the temptation to go somewhere else because I had somewhere else to go. And, it was a matter of calculus of pleasures: this thing hurts, this thing fulfills. And now that I'm out of writing I feel amazingly little urge to return, even though I imagine I could return on my own terms. Though I've only been out a year, this may change, and I'm making no contracts with myself about it.

Can I ask you something about the kind of life style that you're leading now, if I'm not again treading on too personal an area?

Ask, ask. What would you like to know?

Well, you say that your present life style is one that's closer to nature and is a fulfilling one. Could you tell me what that means in practical terms? Do you do a lot of reading?

Well, I do some reading. Actually, much less reading than I should. But I spend a great deal of time out on the land, in California, in the deserts, in the mountains, hiking, examining. My particular interest is botanical, and I'm getting very close to an understanding, at least of the California landscape. At home, I have an acre of land that I play with, re-landscaping it, transforming it, experimenting with, testing, plants that are, perhaps, not hardy enough for the northern California climate, discovering what can be done. There are interesting rewards to this, both aesthetically, simply in the arrangement of the landscape, and technically, and...a curious event last year. I've planted a cactus garden behind my office, and a friend from San Diego - that's extreme southern California - a psychologist friend was visiting, and he knew nothing about what was going on in my writing, but he went down and looked at the cactus garden for a while, and he came up, frowned strangely, and said: "Are you having trouble with your writing," and I said: "As a matter of fact, I've given it up altogether", and he said: "Yes, I could tell. There's at least two novels worth of work down there".

It's a simple transfer of energy. I'm still serving the shaping spirit, but I'm shaping different things. There was a while when people would not believe that I was simply walking away from writing, they thought it was too bound up with who I was. In a sense, that's true, that my identity has much to do with the fact that I am Robert Silverberg, science fiction writer, author of the following books. But though the identity problem remains, the energy shift has been complete, and it's now convincing people that I'm not idle
I've just moved the energy to another place.
You've become, in a sense, a shaper of landscapes rather than a shaper of words...

Obviously an equally valid form of human creative effort.
I think I said in that Vector interview that some of the plants may be thorny, and some may be...

I remember the quote, yes.
It's easier to wrestle with the land than to wrestle with people in New York who don't understand what I'm doing.

You spoke a little earlier about the mystical or semi-mystical nature of the way you're living at the moment, on certain aspects of the way you're living at the moment. Does this involve any particular spiritual or mystic disciplines, or is it just a question of comming with nature in the way you spoke of?

Yes - I wouldn't want to be too sentiment about what I'm doing. I'm not a regular meditator, or a member of any Californian cult, though I've touched on these things in my life out there. It's simply a sense of connection which occasionally reveals itself to me in a moment of understanding. These moments are unsolicited and gratuitous, and quite wonderful when they happen. When the next one comes I will be very pleased, but I don't live for them. No, it's a matter of a daily rhythm of life which leads to these feelings of connection. That's the extent of it. It's not structured to produce quasi-mystic or ritualistic results.

I see. So it's something that flows naturally from what you're doing rather than being imposed on it by anything that you're doing. You say that you're not doing quite as much reading as you were before. Are you still carrying on reading science fiction, and are you still intending to carry on editing your New Dimensions series?

Oh yes, by no means have I given up editing both New Dimensions and several other reprint books. I enjoy that, and it's a kind of maintaining connection with the science fiction field. I read as much science fiction as I can. I think science fiction is wonderful stuff which has been occasionally badly served by its practitioners. But since I'm outdoors so much, and in California we have 12 months outdoors, it's only on a rainy day that I can really get any sustained reading done, and...well, this winter we've had a drought.

So to a large extent you're maintaining, shall we say, your connections with the science fiction field, and with the writing field in general through your editing activities. How often are you producing the New Dimensions now? Is it yearly, or...?

Annually. I have no intention of bringing it out more often.
It seems to me, and to most of the critics, that it's one of the best of the original anthologies that's appearing at the moment.

I'm very pleased with the writers who have come to me. I think it's a very exciting group...there is now, apparently, a New Dimensions group developing which seems unavoidable in this business. Yes, I'm very happy with New Dimensions. It's taken a while for its presence to establish itself, for people to notice what's going on there, but now we're...well, the sixth one is just out in the States, and so it's a fairly extensive shelf of books by this time.

Are we likely to see any of that series in paperback in this country?
Well, I hope so. I don't know what Gollancz has done yet. I think they're just
out with the first one there, number five. The series begins unavoidably with number five here because John Bush did not want to get too far behind what was being done in the States. I assume that he'll find a paperback house for it in short order. I hope so.

This brings us really to the - I suppose it's the 84,000 dollar question, and probably the question which you can't answer anyway. You've been out of science fiction writing for about a year, although you're still maintaining your connections. Do you see a possibility of returning to writing at some time in the future? Do you think that your creative energies may be diverted from what you're doing now back into writing, or do you see yourself developing into something else? Do you have any ideas?

Well, I always believe, and this is not the mark of a pessimist, I believe that anything's possible. I might very well return to writing. I would like to write a film script, and in fact have had serious negotiations with several producers in Hollywood, but I would like to write a film script of an intelligent sort, and that is an immediate problem. So I certainly haven't closed writing out. If I've said I'm willing to write a film script, I don't have any immediate plans for writing science fiction again. I doubt that I'll write a novel in the next two or three years. That's as far as I can see. I might start a novel July first, but I really doubt it. The impulse is not there. I have a feeling that I've done my work. I got a great sense of conclusion when I finished Shadrach, and this may seem almost grotesque for a man who's only 41, but we should consider, I think, the quantity of work that was packed into the last 20 years.

So there's an sense of unfinished business between me and science fiction, and until I feel that inner itch that tells me that there's something left undone, I see no reason to return.

Well, no doubt that's something that we'll just have to keep our fingers crossed for, and look forward to - that you may return to writing sometime again.

It's been gratifying to hear things like that. When I said I was quitting a certain number of people said: "Bloody well time", you know. But there weren't many of those. I think, perhaps, if I had had the stamina to hold out another year or two, and if the whole quality of my life had not changed in a way that took me away from really being interested in writing, I think the whole pattern might have looked quite different. Perhaps what I was doing in 1959 and 70, and the years since, simply was not ready to be noticed before 1977 and 78, and my patience ran out too soon.

But the irritations, the frustrations, are really incidental, I think. They were negatives. The main fact is that my life has just turned away from being a writer into being something else.

So in the same way that around 65, 66, you matured, shall we say, in a certain way which brought you to writing a more serious kind of book, now you've matured in another way, and you're...

I can't call this maturing, except in the sense that change is maturing. I think it's merely a change of sin, of centre. My centre is in a different place. Writing, literally, seems irrelevant to me. I can't imagine how sitting down and bothering to write a whole novel, and when a writer says: "I can't bother to write a novel", you know something fundamental has happened to him.

Yes, precisely. Well, as I say, I'm sure it would be a tremendous experience for an enormous number of people who love your work, all around the world, if you were to return to writing. But equally, I am sure that all of those of us who love your work accept the fact that you've changed in this way, that your creative fulfillment is in other areas now.
I appreciate that understanding; that finally people are comprehending what has happened to me, and are no longer saying: "Well, it's your obligation to write for us", which is hard for to handle, because it's a terribly moving thing to hear, but it's also a terribly irritating thing to hear.

I personally would have felt that your obligation is obviously to yourself, and to fulfill your creative energies in a way which is most fulfilling to you.

Also, there are a lot of books there. There are fifteen or sixteen novels within the really fertile period. I think Asimov only wrote eleven novels. So they can go back and read those fifteen. I'm sure hardly anyone, except Brian Stableford, has read the whole business...

I think I've managed all apart from the last two or three...

I'm sure you'll catch up with them.

Yes, right. Robert Silverberg, thank you very much for your time - thank you very much for giving us so much information.

Thank you, Chris, for asking.
by Brian M. Stableford
The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast two different approaches to the art of science fiction (and by "the art of science fiction" I mean not simply the art of science fiction writing, but the whole art of science fiction thinking, which is the prerogative of readers as well as writers). The best way to compare these approaches, I think, is to look at the methods and the work of two men who used and developed them in the same historical period: H.G. Wells and Alfred Jarry.

Wells was born in 1866, Jarry in 1873, the former in England and the latter in France. Their early writings appeared in the mid-1880s. There is a certain similarity in their educational and vocational backgrounds: each hesitated at one time between a career in science and a career in literature, and each opted for the latter. Their work converged at one point, when Jarry was inspired by Wells' novel *The Time Machine* to write a speculative article on "How to Construct a Time Machine", presenting a different concept of the nature of time.

Wells studied under Thomas Henry Huxley, the English evolutionist who was the most prominent champion of Darwinism. Jarry studied under the French evolutionist, Bergson, who became one of the principal opponents of Huxley's interpretation of Darwin's theory. In this curious biographical parallel we may find the source of the intellectual diversion which resulted in the works of Wells and Jarry (though both wrote what might loosely be termed "science fiction") being poles apart.

Huxley was a "hard" Darwinist, determined that the harshness and cruelty of "the struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest" must be accepted as the rule of life, from which men could not be immune. He believed these principles to have been blessed by scientific proof, and thus constituted no scientific truth. Bergson, on the other hand, was more concerned with fitting the ideas of Darwinism into a natural philosophy much more general in kind - he saw Darwinism as no more than a modus, truthful only so far as it was useful which, in his mind was not very.

Wells, pupil of Huxley, became a proponent of what is now termed "hard" science fiction. His works were scientific not only in their content but in the method of their composition. He adopted simple hypotheses and attempted to trace by rigorous logic their implications for men, society, and the world. Usually, he permitted no more than one such hypothesis per story, and he did his best to make it seem reasonable, fitting it into the scheme of the story as plausibly as possible.

In the introduction to the definitive collection of his longer scientific romances (assembled by Gollancz in 1933) he wrote that "the writer of fantastic stories... must help (the reader) in every possible way to domesticate the impossible hypothesis. He must trick him into an unwary concession to some plausible assumption and go on with his story while the illusion holds".

This is the method behind *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Invincible Man*, and it is very successful - these works are quasi-realistic, and the reader will accept their initial premises easily. In later works, like *The First Men in the Moon*, more ambitious hypotheses prove a little harder to swallow, but the method remains the same, and the attempt is there.

Wells thus held the highest prioritism in his speculative work to be the rational development of hypotheses and their plausible presentation to the reader. He took his inspiration from the idea of the scientist as a steadfast seeker of truth, dedicated to the classical scientific method of hypothesis and experiment, and the rigorous testing of results.

Jarry, however, drew his inspiration from a different kind of scientist - from men who produced new ideas in quantity: explorers to the imagination. Bergson was one such, and so was Clerk Maxwell, who revolutionised physics with
his synthesis of electromagnetism and a new theory of light. Maxwell was not so much an experimenter in the laboratory as an experimenter in the mind. In order to make his kinetic theory of gases comprehensible he imagined a "demon" which, by selecting appropriate molecules, could engineer the transfer of energy from a cool gas to a hot one. No such demon could exist, and perhaps it was irrelevant to imagine him, but the idea helped the mind to grasp the logic of Maxwell’s theory.

There were nineteenth century scientists who were both adventurers in the imagination and rigorous experimenters (Poincare, Lord Kelvin, and even Edison) but for the most part the dichotomy reflected by Wells and Jarry was a real one. Maxwell predicted the existence of electromagnetic waves in the ether, but could not demonstrate it. Hertz, after years in the laboratory, found the waves, but lacked the imagination to see their potential in wireless telegraphy (radio).

Jarry wrote two "pseudo-scientific novels", which bear very little resemblance indeed - on a superficial level - to Wells' scientific romances in The Supermale, investigating the possibilities of men becoming more than men. Jarry featured a race between a five-man bicycle team led on "Superfood" and an express train, while another character gives evidence of the benefits to be gained by an erotic training in performing erotic feats of an amazing nature. The second novel, The Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Parnassell, Pataphysician, is completely disordered - a chaotic mass of ideative inspirations drawn from scientific texts and symbolist poetry, a surreal celebration of bizarre philosophical concepts. Wells’ hypotheses are there in profusion - dramatised (often melodramatised) but never organised or rationally developed. The very last thing Jarry would have considered doing to a new idea was "dramatising" it.

Jarry is remembered today not for his avant-la-littera science fiction but for a short story called "The Crucifixion of Christ Considered as an Uphill Bicycle Race" (whose title is, amusingly enough, self-explanatory) and for his dramatic work. He was the pioneer of the "theatre of the absurd", which he developed through his character Papa Ubu. Ubu appeared for the first time on the Paris stage in Ubu Roi, which begins with his shouting obscenities at the audience. Jarry’s explanation of the philosophy of his compositions was that if theatre audiences were to be presented with the spectacle of characters like themselves acting out mundane and amusingly sensible scripts then all the commonplace illusions to which they were already committed would be made even firmer. He wanted to make people open their minds, to shock them out of their mental straight-jackets and offer them new opportunities to think. He wrote of allowing audiences the "relief" of seeing on the stage that which they did not understand, and the "active pleasure" of participating in the ideative explorations of the playwright. His science fiction, too, is intended to jolt dull minds into new paths of thought.

In the service of these ideals, Jarry invented a whole new science: pataphysics, the "science of imaginary solutions". "Pataphysics," he wrote, "will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be - and perhaps should be - envisaged in the place of the traditional universe, since the laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe are also correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones." (Here again, incidentally, we can draw a parallel between Jarry and Wells for Wells’ first important piece of scientific journalism, "The Rediscovery of the Unique", pointed out that technology made available the means of measuring minute differences among apparently similar phenomena, thus affirming the uniqueness of all entities and events.

One foundation stone of Jarry’s philosophy of science was the notion of "clinamen" - a concept initially used by Lucretius, one of the Greek exponent
of the atomic theory of matter. Clinesman is supposedly a tiny weave in the
motion of an atom, entirely at the discretion of chance, which is the hypothetical
"ultimate cause" of all events and phenomena. Kelvin had resurrected the idea of
Clinesman for his own theory of matter, and it has since been accepted into
modern scientific doctrine in the guise of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.
This chance 'weave' - the irrational origin of all orderly behaviour of
matter - is reflected in Jarry's work by the chance evervlog of the mind from
idea to idea, making imaginative leaps and settling nowhere.

Jarry died in 1907, aged 34. Wells lived to be eighty, such fame as
Jarry achieved was local and short-lived (although he has recently been
"rediscovered") whereas Wells became universally respected in his own lifetime
as a philosopher and writer.

Modern science fiction, through its critics and its writers, stil pays
homage to Wells. Few of them have even heard of Jarry. And yet even the most
cursory glance at contemporary science fiction reveals that Jarry's methods
survive, alongside that of Wells.

The modern writers of "hard" science fiction - almost all graduates of
the Campbell school - take their brief from Wells. Writers like Isaac Asimov,
Arthur Clarke, Poul Anderson and Hal Clement pose their hypotheses, and pursue
the implications thereof with ruthless discipline. Those who have written
critical manifestos championing this kind of science fiction (Kelvinian, Blish
and others) stress the realistic qualities of sf, its determination to stay
within the bounds of scientific possibility. All imaginative exercises which
fail this rigorous standard are relegated to the status of "fantasies".

There are, however, writers like A.A. Brillnty, Harlan Ellison, A.E. van
Vogt, Philip Dick and Michael Moorcock, who still consider that what they are
involved with is science fiction, and yet make no sense of the Wellsian
standard. The discipline of the classical scientific method is in no way
represented in their work. They are adventurers among ideas, and - whether
they are aware of it or not - they are the intellectual descendants of Alfred
Jarry. Clinesman plays an important role in their thinking and their art, and
their effect on the reader is to jolt his mind into new and unforeseen paths.
These writers, too, have their champions among critics who have written
manifestos for science fiction (Alain Panabon belongs to this group, as did
the prophet of the so-called "new wave"), declaring that science fiction is a
form of fantasy whose business it is to disturb settled routines of thought, and
whose claim to scientific fidelity is both spurious and unnecessary.

In a sense, it is a pity that this polarity should still exist today.
Many science fiction writers - particularly those of real ability - can work in
the one mode as well as the other (and this includes some of the writers whose
work I instanced as exemplary of the one mode or the other).

The polarity between Wells and Jarry was an opposition within a basic
similarity. Wells and Jarry were both involved in the business of opening
minds, and were opposites only in that they had very different ideas as to how
minds might best be opened.

Wells' idea was that minds should be opened by the nearest crack, so that
a new idea might be slipped in without the mind fully realising that its
boundaries had been breached. Once inside, the idea might then interact with
the contents of the mind to expand its imaginative horizons. Wells, and
Wellsian science fiction, attempts to invade the mind a little at a time,
introducing new ideas one by one and in such a way that they may not seem too
alien. It is a cunning method (but by no means dishonest).

Jarry scorned such cunning and he had no patience with careful procedures.
His intention was to dynamite the boundaries of the mind, sweeping them away with
a great flood of ideas. His policy was one of confrontation and challenge - ever
and dramatic (and in no way dissonant)

There can be no doubt that Wells' methods worked better at the turn of the century, and probably works better today. The cunning, diplomatic way, is more successful - kind of often react to the Jarryesque confrontation by closing up completely. The fact that one method is relatively more successful does not, however, mean that Wells was "right" and Jarry "wrong". It should be noted that in twentieth-century science it is the experimenters in thought (Maxwell, Einstein, Dirac) who are remembered as men of genius - for they it was who assaulted old dogmas with daring new concepts. These are the scientists Jarry would have admired. It should also be noted that the reasons that these men can be hailed as geniuses is that other men (Bertix, Eddington and Carl Anderson) did the experimental work which proved them right. These are the scientists Wells admired. There is no progress without thinkers of both kinds. Someone has to create new ideas, and someone has to test them - and it is a simple fact that only a very few men have the temperament to do both.

One might suggest that science fiction writers are especially favoured, in that there seems to be a considerable number of them who are capable of blending Wellsian methods and Jarryesque.

It is, I think, inevitable that science fiction writers should have discovered and used Jarryesque methods, without even knowing of his example, for it is through the methods of Jarry that the Wellsian imagination is provided with fuel. It is perhaps also inevitable that is should be the Wellsian methods which are the most revered within the field, while the Jarryesque are less respectable. Wellsian philosophy is, after all, tried and tested, guaranteed by classical scientific methodology, while Jarryesque exploration is irrational, irrefutable and mercurial.

When the critics of science fiction go in search of works outside the label which might be co-opted into the establishment, it is the Wellsian works which they embrace: Brave New World, 1884, We, and - of course - the works of Wells himself. They have not been so ready to acknowledge The Circus of Dr Lao, A 'lay'; of Arzuros, The Phantom Tollbooth and are generally unaware of Jarry's own work and novel like The Emperor of If (by Guy Dent) and Miriam (by Eric Thacker and Anthony Hermas). In any case, they would probably exclude these works as "pure fantasy". But fantasy has always lived alongside science fiction - and publishers have recognized this despite the reluctance of critics. All of the major science fiction magazines (Amazing, Astounding and Galaxy) have had fantasy companions (Fantastic, Unknown and Beyond) for a part of their lives, and The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction openly proclaims the alliance. The fantasy theme associated with science fiction (and written for the most part by the same authors) has generally been fantasy using ideas which come from the same intellectual springboard as more conventional science fiction, even though its vocabulary of symbols has been traditional and mythological.

We should, I think, be prepared to recognize the kinship between Wells and Jarry, and we should not be so determined to define boundaries between their methods. Though poles apart in their procedure, their aims were the same: to open minds. The Wellsian methods may work better, but someone has to evolve the ideas that are elided through the crack in the imaginations, and there are more likely to spring from climaxes than from the dugged pursuit of the minute of truth. It is often painful for minds to be biased open, but - as gold-miners always used to find - it is often the only way to get at the treasure.

Note: Jarry's work is available in English in two books published by Jonathan Cape: Selected Works edited by Roger Ashman and Simon Watson Taylor (which includes Panemomenon and The Sublime). Both are in paperback.
The Infinity Box

A STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME by H.G. Wells
(Corgi; Landoo; 1978; 112 pp; 45p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

"A Story of the Days to Come" first appeared in Pall Mall, in 1897, in the same year that The War of the Worlds and The Invisible Man made their appearances as magazine serials. It was subsequently included in Tales of Space and Time, and has been in print for the last forty years or so in The Collected Short Stories. I don't know what the current price of the Short Stories is, but such omnibus collections are usually cheap by hardback standards, and it is probably better value than the 45p paperback which separates out one of its longest but by no means most impressive offerings.

Wells was stimulated to write his imaginative fiction by two main interests - his dogmatic belief in Thomas Huxley's interpretation of Darwinism theory and his passionately committed Fabian socialism. The best of his work is the product of the conflict awakened in his imagination by the struggle to reconcile these doctrines and harmonize their precepts. Most of the early (pre-1901) scientific romances are, however, built primarily upon the flood of ideas which emerged from his exercises in popular scientific journalism and in these his sociopolitical ideas are really only embryonic. "A Story of the Stone Age" in the only one which is supported by sociobiological thinking alone, and in 1897 he was just not ready for it.

The story is set in a future where extreme urbanisation and class divisions, but as a vision it remains flaccid, and unfuelled by any real imaginative insight. Its plot is lifted from common Victorian melodrama without modification, even to the extent of resolution by fortunate "coming into a legacy". It must be remembered that this antedates anticipations - Wells first significant collection of essays - by four years. It is the reflection of an immature social and political consciousness, and does not compare with the biological fantasies, based on an area of imaginative extrapolation where he was at that time far more competent.

If Corgi really want to present this as part of an "SF Collector's Library" they owe it to the reader to provide an introduction which will set the work in context. Unless the reader understands something of the background of the piece - when it was written, why it was written, what use is is in it that is interesting and for what historical reasons - he is likely to be very disappointed by what he finds here, unable to put it into perspective.

Even the copyright notice, referring to an edition of 1897, is misleading. As it stands, this looks like an off-hand attempt to copy some easy money out of unwary readers.
As provenance-testing counts with crud too, it's relevant to note that it was as long ago as 1957 that Lester del Rey first published a version of *Ridge of Infamy* (a lousy little book) in an American sf magazine, which expired thereafter, and that it was 1963 that he expanded it into the otiose novella Dennis Dobson have had the effrontery to photograph and release - like a final straw - into the English hardcover market of markville. In 1957 there may have been some commercial excuse for Lester del Rey's publishing the thing, because he had to eat, and who was Lester del Rey in 1957 to polish crap; even in 1963 the tampering of old crud into the shape of a (mighty short) book might have passed muster as the sort of activity you had to expect out of an old back and its droppings, on the (mighty safe) assumption that professional hackery and toilet-training were mutually incompatible: but in 1976, on the last legs of the sinking ship, it does seem a piece of impertinence to be dealt this sort of stuff by Dennis Dobson, who have become the kind of publisher whose editorial activities and misdeeds seem to consist of the copying out of old blursh material from American editions of the titles they photograph for us suckers, and mis-spelling what they copy, too, incredibly enough (viz. "Imposter" in the back-flap blursh for Silverberg's egregious *The Silent Invaders*: in 1963, when they published it, Ace - even Ace - managed to spell it right).

Like most tam废气 of thin pulp, *Ridge of Infamy* runs very fast to stand still, just the way Chinese food is supposed to, so that all the extraneous goings and froings and rotarian philosophising about the injustices of universal suffrage drift through the mind like white noise, though something of a synecdoche does survive, barely. Universal suffrage having been granted all the ne'er-do-wells, great lobbies have sprung up to cater to the, and to control them. *The Medical Lobby* is one, and retains its power (can get this for an example of a sharp tongue and mind at work, Lester'a) by refusing to allow doctors to respond to field emergencies, which in pretty dystopic you can betcha, with the result that any doctor who does give first aid immediately suffers debagging, unfrocking, ostracism, and poverty. Our hero, Dr Dan Feldman, is out in the country with his fiancee and finds himself forced into giving first aid to save a life; both the patient and his ambitious aggressive girl afterwards denounce poor Dan, who sinks immediately into the gutter, and only begins to reconstruct his shattered life after finding himself able to sneak aboard a Mars-bound freighter; on Mars maybe a man can do what a man gotta do, without ambitious female betraying him to the authorities and trying to gain aughancement for themselves, like his ex-fiancee for instance, who aspires to succeed her father as chairman of the Medical Lobby, now can ya beat that for unemotional behaviour? Not only that, she's on board the freighter, and starts bouding poor Dan all over again, embarrassing and desecrating and debasing him all over again, until the message must have been transparently clear to the destitute pimplyteen teenager in 1957: Girls are vicious and untrustworthy and an even wonder they don't give you a date because they know you're else to them from reading of, and who needs girls anyway!

Dan doesn't. He escapes to the backwoods of Mars with some men pals, where he saves lives in the field, makes devoted friends, acts real nice, researches illegally into the deadly plague putting the solar system at risk, finds a cure when the entire Medical Lobby (including the female) cannot, and helps all his new pals on Mars rebel against the illegitimate authority of the lobbies (and the female). Not even when his fiancee finally surrenders to him does Dan blackmail into the naijypanjby creature he was before finding out that women are really like: With an expression of well-earned disgust on his male face, he turns his back on the demoted,
trencherous female to face the Martian future together with the guys.

What is peculiarly unpleasant about this creepy little story - perhaps it is something peculiarly unpleasant about more pulp at its foundation, though analysis is beyond our scope here - is the fact that the actual story says nothing out loud at all about women or their role; the animate is covert, coded, dingy. Its decipherment is sadly elementary, however. Not only does the female sit irremediably simply through taking it upon herself to act, though nothing of this is actually stated, ultimately there is no way to interpret any of her plot activities - whose lumacy and visioneens are otherwise inexplicable - without reference to an underlying hebria on her part. That ongoing act of reference the reader is forced to make, if he wishes to understand Mr del Rey's story at any level whatsoever. The reader is forced (by Mr del Rey) to incriminate himself - through these enforced decodings of the text - as gestures of misogyny the author (Mr del Rey) escapes, for all I know in dumb good faith, having to pay for.

Which was typical enough of us in 1957, and maybe even in 1969, when boys were boys. That seems pretty clear, however, in that what might have gone down in 1957 as fun misogyny does not wash as fun misogyny any longer, Dennis Dobson, Lester, so that one can only wish a sales-wise anathema upon this drab, costly, below-the-belt reminder of the same we've put behind us and of the dreck they used to munch, alone each Friday evening with Jack Pear.

NO DIRECTION HOME by Norman Spinrad (Millington; 1976; £3.90)

Reviewed by John Clute

It's rather a shame to the Norman Spinrad's recent collection of short stories, No Direction Home, in a paragraph, but there's a kind of disjointedness to the compilation that familiarizes any attempt to respond to the book itself, rather than to the various aspects of Spinrad's career the individual stories represent, and who has time for that, who has space. Some of the stories are in his least engaging pulp vein, their barkingly "pulp enthusiasm" (Alglo Budrys) biding under a sub-Ballardian carapace, uneasy, poverty-stricken, punchdrunk. Others more attractively lay down apocalyptic responses to the loss of the dream of America in the late sixties - though by now we're beginning to get nostalgic about the loss itself..."All the Sounds of the Rainbow" is too long but nicely renders a post-historical Los Angeles and could serve as a preliminary sketch for Edward Bryant's Clonesher. The brilliant "A Thing of Beauty" has appeared elsewhere more than once, but improves on rereading; a wealthy Japanese comes to a decayed tourist-ridden America and buys the Brooklyn Bridge for aesthetic reasons - reasons the vendors can no longer properly comprehend. "The Last Continent", very long, an earlier story, presents much the same deep structure of message, but not a line is plotted. Most of the tales, in fact, are too long, jive at the reader just that fraction beyond the demand of shape, so that you find yourself fighting the book, fighting Mr Spinrad despite your fundamental agreement with his opinions, the (failed) claims of his aesthetics, your sympathy with his sense of role. Add to these frustrations the fact that these stories are deeply implicated in a previous era of the American rhetoric of self-discovery in the cold polluted world, and you have a collection whose raison d'etre is somehow - dammingly - documentary.
STEPPE by Piers Anthony (Millington; London; 1976; £3.00)

Reviewed by John Clute

Steppe is a book to chugalug, and probably took about as much time to write. Piers Anthony's new novel is very speedy indeed, and a pleasure to ride.

Alp, an Uigur of the western steppes of Asia, several centuries after the birth of Christ, is a clever quasi-literate semi-nomad, fast-thinking, innovative tough as nails, lynx-eyed, ruthless, and he shits in little holes for local colour. As it's the only local colour we're going to get, revel in it. Mr Anthony is not about to sit still. The book opens in medieval times with Alp's traditional nomadic life. The Virgin is chasing him across the steppes after raiding his home. On his great horse, Suria, Alp attempts to leap a chasm, but the noble-hearted beast is too winded to make the jump, and Alp falls hundreds of feet to what seems certain death.

And makes same horse go on an operating table way into the future, in a world he has no way of understanding except through the assumption that he has died and gone to Hell. He figures he might as well adapt. Hell means to be dominated by the Game, a complex simulation of various epochs from Earth history, mediated by a giant front-end computer, eager citizens - like those who have whisked Alp forward to interrogate him about shitting in little holes and other tips about survival in the game of Steppe - participate in the recreated historical epochs as figures of note and compete for points, points being won mainly through the committing of mayhem in accordance with tradition. Quick-witted traditional Alp soon works it out that his best chance for survival in Hell is to enter the game of Steppe, so, warping his would-be interrogators, he makes his way to the great computer and applies successfully for entry into the Game.

At which point Mr Anthony begins to cackle, for jauntily, the eyes blue. It turns out that the Game is actually interstellar in scope - despite its semantic restriction to Earth history - and consequently the analogues it offers to life on the great steppes are a touch free. In the Game encampments are planets, horses, spacecrafts, and so forth, and with events conducted on a time-scale that compresses Earth history by a factor of ten, Alp soon steps past his own era, dies, and is reborn a few times, according to the rules, all the while warning Game-play as he planet-hops in his spaceship committing mayhem and shitting where he can, though sometimes it's a little hard, finding a hole. Finally he's hornswoggled by the computer - which had been planning this difficult role for him all the while - into taking on the part of an obscure teenager named Temujin who soon grows up to be Jeonghe Gai.

As Jeonghe, Alp is able to amaze an enormous number of points, become all-time winner of Steppe, and exit from the Game. Back in Hell, he's able to retire on his proceeds, and lives happily ever after. What he thinks of all this we never find out, Mr Anthony being not subjectivist reader, not having the time, the novel ends, a slyly metaphysical rollercoaster of a read, if you ask for more you are asking the wrong book. Apart from some pleasant voyeurism about sex, and some hilarious dramatizations of history, there simply isn't any more.

Not a thing
This is an anthology of critical essays rescued from various fanzines in order to give them the opportunity of wider circulation. Such projects are to be applauded, and although I have one or two reservations about the contents of this particular anthology I think that Cy Chauvin and T-L Graphics deserve every encouragement.

Chauvin's editorial policy is claimed to be to present "as many different and conflicting (yet always stimulating) views on science fiction as possible", it isn't possible - not in 67 pages - and one can detect certain other factors at work in the thinking that lies behind the selection process here. For one thing, there is the need to co-opt big names, and so we have transcripts of talks given by Ursula Le Guin and James Blish, plus a postscript lifted from an article by Stanislaw Lem and stranded alone. though Ursula Le Guin and James Blish had interesting things to say in their talks, talks are not critical essays and do not claim to be, and it is unfair to represent them as such. Similarly, an isolated postscript is bound to feel uncomfortable if asked to masquerade as an item in its own right.

Of the other five pieces, two are generalised broadsides aimed at the supposed shortcomings of contemporary sf, two are responses on individual works, and one - the best by far - is a comment on a body of work.

The two broadsides, by Tom Disch and Bruce Gilleoep, both suffer from the standard perils of wmsbuckling phrases aiming to show that everything stupid of readers love and admire is really poverty-stricken rubbish. They play with loaded dice, qualifying contemporary sf for what it is not, dismissing as irrelevant any attempt to decide just what it is, or why it is and not what they reckon it ought to be. These articles are provocative, but are exercised in shoving-off rather than constructive criticism.

Also guilty of blatant shoving off is Sheryl Smith, whose self-congratulatory piece dealing with (obliquely) R.A. Lafferty's Arrive at Eckworth is excruciating in its impotency. Self-indulgent fan writers often feed glutonously on self-indulgent novellas, but it can be done with style and competence, as evidenced by the other extended book review - Jeff Clark's essay on Aldine's Frankenstein Unbound. Although limited, this is a good piece of work and worthy of inclusion.

The one remaining piece, which really serves to reveal the merit of the idea behind the anthology, is Bob Rickard's essay on James Blish's After Such Knowledge novels. Here is the genuine value of criticism, providing not simply a commentary upon, but also a context for, an important group of books. Without agreeing with what Rickard has to say I can appreciate what he is doing here. He is making a real contribution to the understanding of these works, drawing a pattern of relationships between them and making an attempt to explain the pattern in terms of Blish's ambitions and limitations.

I have no idea how many other essays of the quality of Bob Rickard's there are lying about in the vast assembly of published fanzines. There are none, at least. There are, alas, also a multitude of items like Sheryl Smith's and a great many transcripts of talks by famous names which belong where they are unless or until their authors actually make articles out of them.

Let us see more collections like this, but let us see a little more editorial discretion in their compilation.
ANTHROPODA GUN by John Boyd (Arkley; New York; 1975; 172 pp; 05c)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

The introduction of an alien innocent into an ordinary human situation is just about as classic a strategy as of possessions. It served H.G. Wells, Eden Phillpotts, Olaf Stapledon and others as a useful tool in social criticism, and furnished many modern writers with a satirical instrument. What we have in Andromeda Gun is not, however, straightforward satire, but something new-step removed from that. The alien here finds not a human situation but a literary cliché - the landscape and the mythology of the western. The result is a curious by-fascinating literary joke.

One aspect of westerns to he disdained is they have been In the past, when attempted by John Jakes or H. Beam Piper and John J. McGuire, But John Boyd is extremely adept at damagum humour and he brings this off as perhaps few others could, with a keen eye for sober absurdity.

As a writer Boyd seems very limited in his use of loci. A coy prudence haunts all his works, at times irritating and often bewildering in the manner of its intrusion. His plotting shows great intricacy in some respects and whimsies sloppiness in others, suggesting strongly that he is a wake-up-as-you-go writer. Nevertheless, he is always readable.

The hero of Andromeda Gun is a gunlinger infected by an angelic alien whose mission is to bring Earth into Galactic Brotherhood. Hia character in ill-formed and unstable - he can't add 3 and 4 but cleans up the town with considerable ingenuity. He doesn't understand women but has a mastery of any woman. The alien, too, is a pretty weird angel - and yet it works...

There are three kinds of lie - lies intended to deceive, lies intended to confirm beliefs already held, and lies intended for sheer amusement which work through their idiocracy. Andromeda Gun is a thoroughly silly book, but it is silly with some style, and stylo can make a tall story stand up. Definitely a book for those with an eccentric sense of humour.

ONE-EYE by Stuart Gordon (Panther, 1976; St Alban; 360 pp; 75p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Here be dragons - not to mention wizards, demons, armies of women, a totalitarian state, a magic-infested tower, assorted monsters and a plot that never knows where it's headed from one chapter to the next. Though it is jargonised into the mythology of sf as a post-holocaust world in which most men are mutants and the powers of the mind run wild and the relics of an ancient superscience. One Eye is a fantasy, pure but not quite simple. The occult and the superscientific lie side by side here, and mingle.

The renaissance which this variety of fantasy is enjoying is an interesting phenomenon, particularly in that the demand for "sciencefictionality" seems strong. It seems that we can no longer take the supernatural imagination straight, but must splice it with ritual phrases which shift the symbology into the borderlands of the supposedly scientific imagination. Why this strange compulsion?

Such works as this one do not set their own literary standards. They do not (and perhaps cannot) contain anything special or unique. They are unstructured, without plot simply because anything can happen at any time - there are no problems or solutions but simply a constant flow of dangers to be exercised in formularistic fashion. The standards to which the work must be compared are those of the form, of the product - the bizarreness of the monsters.
the dexterity of the author in concealing the facility with which the hero (and assorted extras) are wheeled through their sequences of encounters. By those standards, this is a fair to middling piece of work. Its author is a man of not inconsiderable ability, and one can only hope that his inventiveness is up to the gruelling course of promised sequels.

This is perhaps the most stereotyped mode of contemporary fantasy, and for that reason it is the most difficult to write with sincerity. Writers who use it almost invariably make their impact - if they make any impact at all - with their earlier work. Familiarity makes them stale, if not contemptuous. One-Eye has verve and vigour. Its monsters are on puppet strings by the strings don't show. Its magic works in such mysterious ways that the author has to drown its logic in currents of verbal embroidery, but the embroidery is not without artistry. In three books time, or four, it will all become mechanical, dried-up, and lazy. Stuart Gordon won't be writing 200 pages a book then. But by then he will probably be moving on to other pastures, which give him more opportunities in virtuoso performance. In the meantime, One-Eye will please its audience.

THE SPACEJACKS by Robert Wells (Berkley; New York; 1973; 140 pp; 95c)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

"Ryder's Recovery Systems Limited was just trying to stay in business, getting to space wreckage faster than the competition. When a mammoth, mysterious star-craft begins showing up near Earth giving evidence of possessing that impossibility, faster-than-light speed, Trix Ryder thought that her father's business was in deep trouble..."

It was, too. It found itself in the embarrassing situation of being belied by the series of Planet Stories novelette which had somehow suffered the indignity of being padded to four times its natural length.

Planet Stories was never the linchpin of the of pulp magazine field (and what's more, it was one of the few magazines moderate enough not to claim that it was), but it had its virtues. One of them was an awareness of the fact that if you are going to give the reader unpretentious adventure stories set within a rather stereotyped mythology of interplanetary derring-do, then you should keep the action going at a good, steady pace. The most unfortunate thing about The Spacejacks is that the pace is anything but steady. Things happen in fits and spurts, and in between there are hopeless pieces of blatant dilletantism - like the six pages of torn-up newspaper (pp 30-35), the two-page spaceship massacre (pp 57-58) and the frustrated phone call (pp 79-82). It is also worth pointing out, I think, that a Planet Stories novelette would never, under any circumstances, allow its mysterious starcraft to last around for 150 pages and then simply go away, leaving the ending open for a sequel but letting down the present offering with a sad and soggy thud.

DOCTOR MIRABILIS by James Blish (Panther; St Albans; 1976; 310 pp; 75p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Doctor Mirabilis was first published by Faber & Faber in 1964. It has taken a long time to get into paperback. This is understandable, for Doctor Mirabilis is an esoteric book. It is by no means relaxed reading and the manner in which the author approaches his subject is far from familiar.
Most historical novels are interested in events and motivations. Writers who are sufficiently conscientious to avoid mutilating history are often meticulous and inaccurately skillful in the reconstruction of happenings and their physical background—incidents and appearances. Though this is admirable it is not uncommon. Slightly rarer, however, are writers who can supply persons known to modernity by their actions and writings alone with character and feeling. This is, inevitably, a distorting process, but there are still numerous craftsmen who can do it. These are criteria by which we might assess the competence of historical fictions, and James Blish meets both of them well. Roger Bacon’s world is constructed with the utmost care, a character grafted on to what is known of his career with craft and delicacy. The amount of work and effort which has gone into this is undoubtedly tremendous. But in this particular case the historical reconstruction is not an end but a means, and the further ambitions of Doctor Mirabilis transcend the usual realms of historical fantasy into imaginative territory which is very much its own.

What interested James Blish about Roger Bacon was neither his actions nor his world, but his world-view. The events which overtook Bacon and the historical pattern of which he was a tiny part are—towards and Blish’s Bacon—only scenes set upon a greater stage. That stage is the philosophical image of man’s place in the universe and his role within the universal scheme which dominated the intellectual climate of thirteenth century Europe and which Bacon attempted to affect.

This is the proper context for a novel about Bacon because this is the context in which what Bacon was and what he tried to do is significant and important. His actions did not divert the flow of eventful history, nor did his efforts accomplish a great deal in altering the scientific thinking of his day, but what he attempted was something of profound importance with respect to the scheme in which all these things had meaning. Doctor Mirabilis is, first and foremost, a story about an individual intellect developing and working within an intellectual cosmos. It is not, by virtue of that fact, divorced from all the customary criteria by which a novel might be assessed, but it thus renders itself to other criteria of criticism as well—criticism on the basis of its concern with the life of ideas and the nature of scientific knowledge. It is, I think, sufficient to say that it measures up well to all these criteria. This is not faint praise but recognition of a triumph which is considerable indeed. There are very few writers who could have fulfilled such a prospectus, a few besides James Blish would have had the courage or the determination to try.

James Blish was a science fiction writer. He was, when he first came to prominence in the early fifties, the most intellectually adventurous of all science fiction writers, using the vocabulary of ideas offered by at to approach and consider (in literary thought-experiments) philosophical problems of all kinds. His writing was not without its faults—his prose was often lame,-moving with determination but without grace. He was careful in construction but contrivance was sometimes blatant in his work. These were principally faults of method. He was a writer who had to work very hard indeed to make his characters live and feel because they were all-too-often called upon to be far more than simply themselves—they had to be actors in a precise scheme, pieces on a board where the moves in an existential game were to be worked out. Only when he worked very hard, and things worked for him, could he actually bring it off. Doctor Mirabilis is the book in which he succeeded best. He had the advantage of not needing to invent an alien environment to provide a setting for his play—he had, instead, to reconstruct one. It is not easier work, but it is more secure. The alien environment be rebuilt via the world-view of the Aristotelian cosmology as adapted to
dogmatic Christianity by Averroes and Aquinas, which opened up in the course of that uncomfortable hybridisation a great expanding galaxy of enigmas and possibilities. In this intellectual context, with the horizons of the imagination ready to be pushed back, and the hierarchy of the Church ready to punish with the utmost severity anyone who tried to push them back, the mind of Roger Bacon found its challenge, its quest and its essential dilemma. In that challenge, that quest and that dilemma James Hillis found the means to pose fundamental questions about the nature of scientific knowledge.

Hillis had already posed related questions in A Case of Conscience, and he was later to pose more in Black Easter and The Day After Judgment. Doctor Mirabilis fits in, with these books, to a particular field of investigation. But it is also, in a sense, a cornerstone in the whole edifice of the literature of the scientific imagination: a unique work; a very special book.

Laemmle 1: WAITING ON THE BANK by Julian Jay Savarin (Corgi; London; 1976; 255 pp; 75p)
Laemmle 2: BEYOND THE OUTER MIRR by Julian Jay Savarin (Corgi; London; 1976; 255 pp; 85 p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Laemmle features (among other things):

The Galactic Organisation and Domains, based on Latim, the original world whence all human populations in the galaxy initially come. Its language is Latim...

An expedition to the virgin world Terra, headed by one Joel Adams, which settles on the island continent of Atlantis...

A character named Yosef Chri'Estl, sole survivor of the Atlantia catastrophe, who is transferred back to Earth at a later date for 30-odd years to carry out a mission connected with the saving of mankind...

etc...

You may wonder why people whose native tongue is Latim should have names like Joel Adams and Yosef Chri'Estl - not to mention Yuli Plu'n'd, Gial Ch'ariv, Yil Plu'n'd, Drushedey Kyboxx, etc - but if you listen to read Laemmle that's the kind of thing you'll just have to content to wonder. You will, also, have to wonder what happened to the geological record - and come to that science itself.

Basically, Laemmle is a mess. It is a trilogy, but part two (Children of Laemmle) is included in the second volume along with part three, whose title the column bares. The first part (or the first phase, as Savarin has it) is basically a long and involved prologue to events scheduled for phases two and three. It is 248 pages long. The second part - mostly space opera - highly reminiscent of early Edmund Hamilton or John Campbell, and runs 157 pages. The third part, about the final stages of the Terra experiment, is 84 pages long. The steady decrease in the magnitude of the phases is evidence, I think, of the increasing boredom and frustration of an author who found that he had saddled himself with a grotesquely naive and pointless project.

Waiters on the Nance was first published by Arlington Books, who then abandoned the series. It was a wise decision. The author, it seems, also realised that the axe had to fall, for the concluding part never abstractly, without any ceremony, in the manner of a mercy killing.

As science fiction goes, Laemmle is most remarkable for an appalling poverty of ideas. Most of the time it gets by with petrified long ago, and
even Edmund Hamilton left them behind in the thirties. *Lemmata* is empty of logic, of organization, and of any form of intellectual or aesthetic discipline. As a reader-experience it is very tiresome. I would not, however, be inclined to write off Lemmata as a hopeless case solely because he seems to have reached a similar conclusion. We seem to have been betrayed, in planning *Lemmata* by the inspiration of a guileless and unfurnished imagination, but there are signs in volume three of an attempt at rescue. One or two intrusions suggest that Lemmata is at least aware that he was going wrong and perpetrating a horrible travesty. In time, he may produce work that will leave this far behind, and everyone in entitled to a few beginning-of-career indiscretions.

I only hope that Lemmata won't stay around to haunt him— or, if it does, then it makes him enough cash to enable him to cry all the way to the bank.

Coriol plan to publish another Lemmata book called *Archives of Haven*. I shall read it, looking for an injection of ideas and significant progress away from the credulity of the present offering, and I will try to avoid shuddering at the title. I honestly don't think that I can say fairer than that.

**SPACE CHANTERY** by R.A. Lafferty (Dobson: London; 1976; 123 pp; £2.75)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

I have heard it argued that the *Odyssey* is a science fiction novel. I remain unconvinced. Of the statement's obvious, however, there can be no doubt—there are indubitably several sf novels which are the *Odyssey*. I do not refer to books which use a similar method, or to those which simply borrow odd incidents from the Homeric epic, or to works like Ernst Schmeckel's magnificent *The Voyage Home*, which are modern novels about *Odysseus*. I refer, instead, to the group of novels which are manifestly and specifically, the *Odyssey* itself. Symbolically transfigured by the ideative vocabulary of science fiction. The first of these, I believe, was Fletcher Pratt's *The Wanderer's Return*. *Space Chantey*, originally published by Ace in 1968, is the second. There is at least one other. *Space Chantey* is the best of them.

R.A. Lafferty is chief dramatist in the science fiction theatre of the absurd. His works grow wild and unpredictable, witty and wonderful. His characters are, for the most part, at once worldly wise and inordinately innocent. They are guaranteed to overlook the obvious while assiduously discovering hidden meanings. It is a combination which makes for good comic writing.

The *Odyssey* is ideal material for the kind of bizarre adventures which usually take place in Lafferty's version of the cosmic stage. At novel length Lafferty has a tendency to lose all semblance of shape and direction, and it helps to have a model for reference. (Thus, incidentally, I am not to write down his novels in general— *Past Master* and *Fourth Mansions* are masterpieces, albeit amorphous ones.) Lafferty, like Marshall McLuhan, explores rather than explains. He is relaxed and extravagant, always ready to disconnect and disengage, stretch his material all the ways it can be stretched in order to accommodate a truly prolific imagination. Thus, in the epic of Captain Roadstrum, we find invaders like Valhalla and the Club of High Liars, while Mauritons and her harem of rest is abandoned without a qualm.

Will there be a mythology of the future? asks the novel, and answers itself in the affirmative. There must and will be— a mythology by which the nonnarrativity of the known and unknown universe may be made known and thus become familiar. Like *Space Chantey*, a mythology of the future can at least be no more than half-rational, and at worst ineloquently comic—a tale told by an idiot-savant.
RING OF RINGS by Robert A. Heinlein (Robert Hale; London; 1978; 168 pp; £2.10)
Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Science fiction as a publishing category was American in origin, and as publishers in other countries have adopted it they have usually begun by importing standards and assumptions about the nature and quality of sf which are also American in origin. British sf writers, too, have often tended to inherit the American attitudes and methods which characterise the genre. There has, however, always been a vein of British sf which retains a taste and texture rather unlike the American product - calmer, slower in execution, lacking in extravagance and literary shorthand. The difference is not in the content but simply in some of the methods and methods intrinsic to the philosophy of mass-produced pulp fiction - which appear central to American sf writing largely thanks to a historical accident.

At its worst this separate, stiff-upper-lip brand of British sf writing (as, for instance, in the works of Edmund Cooper and "John Hasting") seems rather dull and sometimes patronising....not only unoriginal but unimportant. At its best (as, for instance, in the work of D.G. Compton) it can be much more clinical and analytical than American sf - more objective, tending to a better display of corollaries and conclusions.

Ring of Rings belongs to this school in British sf, and unfortunately it is closer to Cooper than to Compton in terms of its efficacy. Nevertheless, it is not without its merits. One of the characteristics of the vein is that its least ambitious works rarely even absurd or merely mechanical operations of pulp formulas. Ring of Rings is readable and comfortable. It is difficult to avoid spotting the ending very early, but there is enough interest outside the gimmick to sustain reader interest. The direction here and there of Hugh Neesie (to make those pseudointellectual comments many sf writers seem to feel is necessary to their posturing) is mere showing off, and is quite unnecessary, but not offensive. A novel with a principal character called Rupert Willbers can't be all good, but it's not bad either.

ARENA: SPORTS SF edited by Ed Ferman and Barry N. Malzberg (Hodder Books; London; 1978; 123 pp; £3.25)
Reviewed by Brian Stableford

I am a sucker for science fiction sports stories. Why this should be, I am unsure. Perhaps, as Barry N. Malzberg suggests in his afterword, it is because I recognize subconsciously the basic structural similarities between reading sf and watching sport. "Crystallisation, metaphor, extension, the medium of exchange" he quotes, meaning these are common factors, or even identities, between the fictional exercises of the sport and the game. Perhaps, alternatively, it is because my childhood was devoted to the perennial moulding of games using dice and complex sets of number/event translation devices, after the fashion of J. Henry Waugh in the brilliant novel The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. by Robert Coover...a passion which, I suppose, was gradually supplanted by the habit of sf reading. Perhaps the two activities, each involving private universes of well-defined structure and co-ordination, were serving the same need. I still retain a profound fascination for the mechanics of betting - odds and races and weighting of incommate data in the service of speculative forecasting. Probability theory - mathematical or intuitive and almost always both - is central to all these universes of discourse. There is an affinity between sport and sf.

Anyhow, I came to Arena ready and willing to love it. I found within it no cause for distillation. I did love it. Only three of the stories were unfamiliar, but I re-read the rest without getting bored.
The longest story is the book by Irvine Shaw's "Whispers in Bedlam", and it is perhaps the archetype of the speculative sport story - or the speculative sport daydream - with a moral at least as old as Perrault's fairy tales. It is the story of the sportsman whose equilibration of a supernatural talent allows him to become a super-success, but which, in the end, proves to be an existential curse. This is an excellent version of it.

Bill Stanton's "Dodger Fan" is about sports fandom - and next time someone tells you that fandom has unique characteristics, take off your blinkers and think beyond the literary world. It makes its point simply and gracefully.

Gary Wright's "Mirror of Ice" (which, contrary to the story intro, is not Wright's only contribution to it, or even to its sf sports story - cf. "The Ultimate Racer" in IF Nov 1984) forms, together with Barry Malzberg's "Closed Sicilian" and Vance Andern's "Beyond the Game", a kind of triptych on various aspects of the psychology of competition.

These five, together with Frederic Brown's classic "Arena" - representing, of course, the game situation stripped of its symbolic and metaphorical sublimations - are the book's real heart and strength. Of the rest, James Gunn's "Open Warfare" and Bruce Jay Friedman's "The Night Boxing Died" lack subtlety, while Budrys's "Nobody bother's Gus" and John Anthony West's "Gladys's Gregory" are surely marginal to the prospectus. The only original story in the book, Bill Pronzini's "The Hungarian Cicock", deals with trick hustling made far too easy by the recruitment of alien powers.

Those are what there is. Not there are Almak's antique "Rule 16" or any of the good of boxing stories of the fifties - William Campbell Gault's "Title Fight", Richard Matheson's "Steel" and Robert Pronzini's "The Champ" are surely better than "The Night Boxing Ended"...but such quibbles as these are really not relevant.

It is perhaps worth noting the obvious point that this is distinctly an anthology of American sf sport stories. American sport, as we all know, has a flavour very different from English sport. It is more mechanical in philosophy, its aims and means are better defined. Its laws are more like scientific ones. It is far more commercial in all its relationships and transactions. I make these comments not simply as a footnote but in order to try to reach something which may lie at the very heart of the anthology - a fascination, perhaps natural to it, with figures and measurements. It seems significant that in "Open Warfare", for example, it is scores that are important, not strokes, or that "Gladys's Gregory" is permitted its surprise punch line only because the reader has been entranced throughout by the magic of statistics. Is my long-nursed secret ambition to write the great cricket sf story really possible? Could "Whispers in Bedlam" have been written about soccer? I'm not sure. Is it, I wonder, purely coincidental that Rollerball, Death Race 2000 and other recent bandwagoning performances celebrate the total breakdown of both the ethics and the aesthetics of sport and a return to the gladiatorial circus? Are the stories in Arena really about sport at all...or do they represent the decline and fall of sportsmanship, isolating - like all good sf - trends within the present and exposing them by strategic exaggeration? There is, I suggest, food for thought here. But read and digest the book first.

\[\text{THE INFINITE CAGE by Keith Laumer (Dobson; London; 1976; 221 pp; £3 30)}\]

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

"The type of person whom psychiatrists designate 'schizoid' is characterised by detachment and emotional isolation. There is a lack of ordinary human contact; a feeling that such a man is unconcerned with, if not superior to, the ordinary, mundane preoccupations of ordinary people; that he is 'out of touch' with, or 'on a different wave length' from, the people with whom he mingles but does not
mix...schizoid individuals habitually play roles which, intellectually, they believe to be appropriate, but which do not reflect what they are actually feeling. A second characteristic of schizoid people is paradoxical. It consists of a sense of extreme weakness and vulnerability via-a-via others, combined with an exact opposite, a sense of superiority and potential, if not actual, omnipotence."

That description comes from Anthony Storr's book The Dynamics of Creation, and forms part of the preamble to a discussion of the characteristics of schizoid creativity. In literature, Storr's archetype of schizoid creation is Kafka's The Trial - the model of the schizoid world-view which is all-but perfect.

Science fiction, by virtue of its vocabulary of symbols, is the literary medium par excellence for such modelling. It is also, perhaps, the perfect medium for neurotic readers, who may find in the pages of many sf novels their fantasies not merely displayed, but also justified and resolved.

The man who has done most to incarnate the schizoid world-view in science fiction is A.E. van Vogt, whose novels Slan and The World of Null-A are schizoid fantasies of great delicacy and detail. Keith Laumer is one of the foremost among van Vogt's literary heirs, and The Infinite Cage is probably the most definite schizoid novel he has produced to date.

We begin with a character who knows not who or what or why he is. Picked up naked in the streets and beaten up by the police he is in terrible state. His identity shifts constantly as he tunes in other men's minds and allows their personalities to invest his body. Ultimately, he is recruited by a fake medium who intends to exploit his superhuman talent, but slowly - as the situation develops - he begins to realise the extent of his powers and begins to discover an identity of his own. However, though potentially all-powerful he remains totally vulnerable thanks to his naivete, and is taken to death's very door before his innate powers prevail and allow him to undergo a transcendent metamorphosis taking him away from the poor human condition altogether.

This is a plot and a conclusion which suit, by now, be familiar to all sf readers. This motif of transcendence has been the key to so many post-war sf novels: Childhood's End, More than Human, Camp Concentration, The Honeymoon, More than Enough for Love etc, etc. It has become a standard, and the only thing which stops it becoming a cliche is that it still seems to be acknowledged as appropriate and pertinent.

To comment that The Infinite Cage is another to a long list of schizoid sf novels is merely informative, and perhaps obvious. What is really interesting is that it is another in a long list of schizoid sf novels which reach this particular resolution, for this is not simply a logical extention of the first observation. There is nothing startling about the observation that many sf writers are schizoid, but what we find in novels like The Infinite Cage is not by any means a meta-history of neurosis but a myth to counteract neurosis. The Infinite Cage (and all its brethren) stands in stark contrast to The Trial, in which the schizoid situation becomes schizophrenic - utterly crushing and hopeless. (It is worth noting that even in the most despairing of sf writing in this vein - the work of Barry N. Malzberg - there is to be found the superhuman novel schizoid, which self consciously evokes the transformation myth.) Now, then, are we to evaluate The Infinite Cage. Assessed by the standards and requirements of literary art, it is not much of a reader-experience. It is not very logical and not very well-written. But it is nevertheless attractive reading, perhaps even compelling reading. It is enjoyable... and perhaps it serves a purpose.

In today's world it is easier to be schizoid than it ever was before. We are each, within the universe of our own imagination, godlike - and we are each, in the real world, exterminable and utterly vulnerable, no matter who or what we may be. In an age when the power exists, in human hands, for the destruction
of the world, the paradoxical element in the spectator world-view is not longer an illusion. And when social relationships are in the process of undergoing slow de-personalisation and disintegration, the isolation of the individual is no illusion either. In such a world, to be a spectator is to be normal, and in such a world we should not be surprised to find myths of escape, myths of transcendence. They may help us to live with our existential situation by providing temporary escape into a world where that situation is redeemable.

On these grounds, I am prepared to declare that *The Infinite Cage* is an excellent book.

**THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND** by Jules Verne; translated and abridged by Lowell Blair

(Corgi; London; 1876; 194 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Jules Verne once wrote a book called *The Mysterious Island*. It was published in 1876. It was his favourite book, and it is in many ways the archetypal Verne novel, most typical of the man and most representative of his particular literary endeavour.

Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* is a robinsonade, dealing with the experiences of a group of castaways. The robinsonade is one of the most interesting classes of fantasy because it reflects in a rather neat and concise manner a certain aspect of world-view associated with the capitalist/protestant ethic.

Alexander Selkirk, a castaway in real life, famed with his goats and went mad. Returned physically to civilization after some years he was ever able to return socially and psychologically, but dug a hole at the bottom of his garden and was a castaway for evermore. So much for reality. In fantasy, Robinson Crusoe built a little England on his desert island — a capitalist, imperialist England complete with a native population of one to be colonized, civilized and exploited. In the work of Defoe the island became an allegory of bourgeois Utopia, or perhaps a kind of bourgeois heaven.

The *Mysterious Island* (the one by Jules Verne) was a product of the heyday of bourgeois France, written by its most popular armchair voyager. Verne was the all-time champion middle-class daydreamer...his work is filled with ships and islands — private worlds furnished with all the comforts of idealized picturesque ritual middle-classness. These microcosms are transported by the characters they surround (semblable, resplendent, civilized characters all) all around the known world (once in 90 days by usually at a very leisurely pace) and also round the moon, twenty thousand leagues under the sea and off on a comet. The scope of the journey confirms and epitomises the narrow all-inclusiveness of bourgeois ambition in all its cliastic philistine simplicity.

*The Mysterious Island* (1875) was Verne's longest, most self-indulgent, scintillating book. The essence of it — the whole purpose and joy of it — was its longadrome, its luxuriant dwelling on the comfortable isolation of the protagonist, their house-keeping, their assembling of possessions, their establishment of semblable social relationships, their glorious solipsism, their careful furnishing of their fantasy world. It is a significant book, a book which offers great insight into the character of its author and the times which made him.

And now for something completely different

Corgi have published a book which claims to be *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne. It isn't.

Perhaps, in a technical sense, Corgi have not violated the Trade Descriptions Act, in that it clearly says on the cover "nearly abridged and translated by Lowell Blair". Morally, however, and by any meaningful literary standards, the publishers are guilty of gross deception.
Julien Verne's Mysterious Island was nearly a quarter of a million words long, and Stirling has abandoned nearly two hundred thousand of them. He has thrown out everything which made Verne's book significant and interesting. All that he has saved in the plot— which was, in Verne's book, a simple and rather pretentious convenience completely extraneous to the real concerns of the work.

Cargi offer this in their 'SF Collectors Library'. It is not science fiction (nor is Verne's novel of the same title). In any case, there is no reason why any kind of collector of any kind of fiction might be interested in a bideous case of literary butchery like this. Even Dr. Bowler was not so careless of the works he practiced his degradations upon.

This is, of the part of the publishers, an insult to Verne, an insult to science fiction and an insult to the reading public. Do not, on any account, touch it with the proverbial barge-pole.

THE CHALK GIANTS by Keith Roberts (Berkeley; New York; 1970; 217 pp; $1.25)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Though Keith Roberts first appeared in the pages of Science-Fantasy while Kyril Bonfiglioli was editor he had, I think, first been 'discovered' by John Carnell, who had earlier 'discovered' Michael Moorcock and J.G. Ballard in the same magazine. Roberts' first sf novel, The Furine, was competent but formuistic, working ground already familiar to British sf. His second book, however— the episodic novel Pavane—was one of the classics of its period and of the genre. About eight years have passed while we have waited for Roberts to put on display again the considerable power which showed in that work. And here, in The Chalk Giants, they are.

The Chalk Giants is structurally similar to Pavane— it is episodic, the parts linked in a cursory manner by one particular character but in a much more dramatic and meaningful sense by a developing theme and concern with a historical integrity which transcends individual characters. And, with an element of parallelism which signifies a real thematic link between the two novels, The Chalk Giants concludes at the same geographical location as Pavane.

Cora Guts

The world of Pavane was an alternate present—a world of if built meticulously and beautifully with the aid of the Thubarian thesis concerning the intimate relationship between the rise of Protestantism and the rise of Capitalism. In Pavane's world the Industrial Revolution is stifled by Catholicism and lost on to the cultural and political development in modern Europe. The Chalk Giants, conversely, is set in a post-Bolshevik future, but identically the future forms here with the past, and we find an examination of historical process and human interaction in the historical and circumstances of barbarism. The novel is concerned very much with the politics of superstition and the value and quality of human life in circumstances very different from what we identify today as the human condition.

Very few writers can free themselves to any significant extent from the subconsciously-nurtured attitudes and values attached to contemporary worldviews. Indeed, very few writers even in this field have consciously tried. American sf has not taken this as its brief at all, but has developed the vocabulary of ideas characteristic of sf as a kind of metaphorical commentary on contemporary situations. It is primarily in British sf— principally in the work of Ballard and those he has influenced— that the attempt at a genuine disassociation from the present day's conception of the present day is sometimes made. Similar attempts have been made elsewhere in modern English literature, too—and it is perhaps Neory Tence's The Golden Stranger which is, in content and ambition, most nearly comparable to The Chalk Giants. But Roberts has
drawn some benefit from his knowledge of and association with science fictional thinking, and his book has a depth that Travers's has not.

This is not a comfortable book. It is not an enjoyable one in the trivial sense of the word. It sits out, in fact, to be a disturbing book, and some of its methods are slightly gruesome. It will alienate its readers, and there may well be many who accept this alienation as an essential part of the book's aim and a process both strategic and constructive. This is not a book to be taken lightly, for relaxation.

It is unlikely that the talent which Keith Roberts has will ever make him popular. It is not in the nature of his creations that they can have wide appeal. In the science fiction community, where a writer is so much closer to his audience, and that audience so much more reactive, it is easy for an unappreciated writer to despair under attack. This process has driven several writers away from the genre into a curious kind of limbo. This may be the fate of Keith Roberts — to follow Ballard into introspection or Halberg into retirement. I hope not, for Keith Roberts is one of the few men who can genuinely use science fictional ideas to accomplish real artistic ends.

**KYE AMONG THE BLIND** by Robert Holdstock (Faber and Faber; London, 1976; 319 pp; £3.00)

**Revised by Bryan Stableford**

This is a first novel, and, I fear, must be assessed as such — in terms of the potential it shows rather than its actual achievements. It is somewhat more ambitious than many firstintentations with novelistic length and complexity, but not so ambitious as to break entirely new ground. In fact, it deals with material which has become almost stale in the diet of the SF reader of late, but tries to use a little more insight than is common.

We find here an alien race in the process of cultural pollution by "advanced" humans but who are, in fact, better integrated with their environment than we are. We also find the memory of an ancient race of advanced capabilities which may not after all be legendary. In the background there hovers the shadow of an interstellar plague threatening humanity. The immediate narrative — which haphazardly switches viewpoint far too often to retain its cohesion — examines the attitudes of various humans to come to terms with the alien world, with the understanding that what is happening there may help to elucidate the purists looking anxiously to the stage.

There are, however, the seeds of a good book — similar seeds deployed elsewhere have grown well. But Holdstock cannot protect them from a certain amount of nutriment starvation, so that he cannot find the words to make clear the products of his imagination, and also a little mild poisoning by courtesy of an excess of melodramatic wasteland.

Everyone in the book except the ultradignified blind superman is in a constant state of incipient anguish. Their relationships are tortured, their existential situations trembling on the brink of intolerability. Their dialogue is fraught with false-ringing sections. I realize that the characters are under great stress, but I wish the author were not apparently in a similar state. The events in the book gather into a pattern which begins vaguely and ends in tatters.

Most of them fail to live the fault of inexperience. The author seems, in fact, notably lacking in authority. But Holdstock is putting effort into his work, and it will not be wasted. He deserves encouragement for his willingness not to settle for something simpler. There are virtues in his kind of thinking and writing, although they are fugitive in a jungle of words and ideas that have not sorted themselves out in this mind.
The blurb describes *Spy Among the Blind* as "a deeply imagined and accomplished piece of work". It is, alas, only half-accomplished, but it is deeply imagined. This is not the superficial work of a shallow imagination. Given time to learn a little more about clarity of expression and the analytical treatment of the deep contents of the imagination Holdstock may prove to be a fine writer, with a genuine contribution to make to the genre.

**The Anarchist Preludes** by John October (Robert Hale; London; 1978; 169 pp; £3.10)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

This is a book about the re-emergence in the year 2001 of the old oriental cult of the assassins, who have been hiding in an underground city and who now plan to achieve world domination by murdering world leaders in alphabetical order. It is not made clear how they expect this plan to lead to world domination and, indeed, the assassin who sees the light and betrays his plot concludes that it is a stupid idea. I heartily concur.

The last man to attempt the plot was Sue Rohmer, who nearly made it work. He made it work for him by pitting villains of personality (Fu Manchu, The Golden Scorpion, etc) against English gentlemen in plots which moved vigorously from one ingeniously dastardly threat to another, never leaving a pause for the absurdity of it all to become apparent. While these are no great shakes as literary virtues go, they are virtues nevertheless, and if Sue Rohmer had decided to do without them he would probably have stayed Arthur Ward all his life and died unknown. I don't know that John October's real name is, but he is not Going to make his pseudonym famous while he maintains his present habit.

The bulk of the novel is pure background, related in a clipped, potted-fact-for-similation style reminiscent of Readers Digest articles. (And as his history of the cult coyly manages to avoid the word "bizarre" from which "assassin" is derived, I would not be surprised to learn that, despite quotes from Pliny the Elder and Marco Polo, the Reader's Digest was where he did his research.) No characters are introduced to the stage as actors until page 108. Everyone quoted in the book, whether lunatic oriental cultists or Scandinavian beauties unreasonably fascinated by Atiases, speaks in colloquial English, which gives some of the sterner fantastic passages delivered by the lead of the cult a quite remarkable quality of bizarreness. The lead character is ridiculous and I was quite glad when he exited on page 145 to head back to Reader's Digest articles. The plot ends according to that famous old dictum of tired plotters, "the end is all up".

As an attempt at novel-writing this is pitiful. The writer probably knows no better, but Robert Hale's editor seems to be suffering from altruistic fever.

**Logan's Run** by William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson (Forgé; London; 1975; 144 pp; 50p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Logan's Run first appeared in 1967 to the sound of fanfare - world rights had been sold in advance for a large (pre-inflation) sum. Now, the movie itself is about to put in a belated appearance. According to Nolan it has, during the long interim, drifted so far away from the book as to render any resemblance negligible, but the re-release of the novel was nevertheless inevitable. It's a very readable book - a cavalier, slightly gaudy, escapee to a future where euthanasia is compulsory at twenty-one. It is, as belits a novel about a youthful world, essentially a playful book. Curiously, it one seems a little dated, perhaps because it reflects too accurately the temper of the sixties, perhaps
because I'm nine years older than I was when I first read it, and even less playful now than I was then. Anyhow, it's worth reading as entertainment - a pleasant literary confection.

STAFF SURGEON by James White (Corgi: London; 1976; 156 pp; 60p)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

James White's Sector General stories began in New Worlds in the late fifties and occupied several years of that magazine's early incarnation, when it was under the guidance of John Carnell. The magazine had a distinct flavour in those days, although not so distinct as it was later to acquire. Carnell's product was directly related to John Campbell's idea of what sf ought to be, but it seemed more self-effacing that the actual product which Campbell published in Astounding/Analog. It was not so brash, not so aggressive. It dealt with problems of the same artificial type, and provided the same species of artificial answers, but more genteelly. These stories by White - Hospital Station is a series of novellas not really improved by the addition of connective tissue to allow them to pretend that they are a novel; Staff Surgeon is a novel that grows from a preliminary novella - are typical of the Carnell product, and are among the few examples of it likely to survive.

It is easy to confuse modesty of style and treatment with a lack of ambition. These stories do not dazzle their readers. But they are by no means unadventurous - nor has James White ever been an unadventurous writer. They are a fusion of space opera with medical drama, and that is no easy fusion to make. Space opera characteristically relies for its appeal on splendid violence on a cosmic scale, while hospital stories usually employ the "commitment mystique" of the medical profession as a counterweight to an apparatus of frustrated emotion and muted passion. When hospital drama is transplanted into the science fiction universe, and the patients (plus most of the doctors) are aliens, both the romance angle and the excruciation of galactic terrorism become inappropriate. A substitute has to be found, and it comes from the standard sf methodology of inventing imaginary problems with difficult imaginary solutions. Anti-violence takes priority over violence and the spectacle of giant forces in conflict is replaced by the emotionally private battles taking place in the intellect and the imagination.

There is a certain clumsiness in the way these stories are put together. Human relationships and human/alien relationships are equally strange, and the former become unconvincing by comparison with the latter. The main protagonist, Conway, has a tendency to secrecy (in the service of maintaining suspense for the reader) that often seems close to lunacy. The background assumption that all conceivable problems have neat solutions that miraculously integrate any number of loose ends is annoying. Some of these difficulties arise from the nature of the exercise, come from the fact that James White was not so accomplished an author in 1960 as he is today. But some of the faults stem from mere carelessness, or from a willingness on the part of the author to judge things into a merely passable condition. White is perhaps not blessed with such natural grace in the way he writes, but he has always worked hard at producing good work, and he has worked hard on the reader's behalf, trying to write stories which are interesting and entertaining to read. It is for this reason that these books will merit further reprinting as new generations of readers emerge to be introduced to them.
BENEDICT'S PLANET by James Corley (The Elmfield Press; Leeds; 1976; 160 pp; £4.95)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford

Yesterday I watched Flash Gordon on TV. I saw him tortured in the static scene, threatened with the Tunnel of Terror and watched him staking the atom furnaces, which failed every time he threw in a shovelful of radium nuggets. I enjoyed it, it was fun. But it was a period piece - an antique. If they made it tomorrow and called it Space 1999 (for instance) it would make me wince.

Benedict's Planet isn't Flash Gordon, but it still makes me wince a little, for similar reasons. It has a plot which has surely, by now, become very haggard indeed. This old prospector has found an old abandoned mine, with a payload more than you or he can imagine. An evil corporation tries to jump his claim but he is befriended by a weird private investigator who doubles as piano player in a Martian night-club. A semicent alien race once enslaved by the terrifying ex-mines owens gets into the act, and so does a lavish dollop of relativistic double-talk.

It's hard to believe that Corley can retail this in 1976 with a straight face, but he tries, and one can almost admire his nerve. He doesn't handle his clichés all that badly but he certainly does them all. They're all on parade and standing to attention, just as they were in Ray Palmer's Amazing Stories. No hint of irony or originality, I fear... unless you count the highly ambitious notion arched in the last chapter to wrap up two loose ends. To start varying time, space and reality to account for a few trivia in using aledgehammer to crack a monkey nut, and I am disposed to wonder whether Corley could have written twice the books he has if only he had thought of it at the beginning. Only a coward uses his best ideas as excuses rather than premises - but this is perhaps a tragedy of misjudgment born of inexperience. This is only Corley's first published novel, and might perhaps be regarded as a trial run, a practice exercise. There is definitely hope for him, and next time out, if he manages his material better, he could produce a good book. I only pray, though, that his is not writing a sequel to Benedict's Planet.

BALDWIN DRIFT by Brian Stableford (Pan; London; 154 pp; 50p; 1976)

RUAPAPOY IN BLACK by Brian Stableford (Pan; London; 1976; 137 pp; 50p)

PROMISED LAND by Brian Stableford (J.M. Dent & Sons; London; 1976; £2.95; 160 pp)

Reviewed by Tom and Susan Jonas

These books are the first three in the Star Pilot Granger series, of which there are six in total.

First let me say that these books aren'tSF. Sure, they've got spacecraft and planets and aliens, but for all the science fictional use made of them they might just as well be ships, islands and natives. What we have here are adventure stories, and so Brian likes of he has put them in an sf format. Having said that... it is not 100% true. There is one element which is developed in a true manner, but whether this is continued throughout the series I don't know. I may be forced to buy the last books in the series to find out.

Now for the plot summary.

Ballyon Drift: Star Pilot Granger is marooned on a planet at the edge of the Ballyon Drift, a dark nebula where dust and space-time distortions mean that no ship can survive for any length of time. Something like a cross between a melaleuca and the Murgasso Man. Whilst on the planet Granger picks up a mind symbiont (or so it claims).

Eventually Granger is rescued, charged an exhorbitant fee for the rescue (so spirit of good will between space companies here) and dumped on the backwater planet of Earth. Granger is offered the job of piloting a new spacecraft, the
Mooded Swan, a mix of human and alien technologies. Eventually, after much mulling, he takes the job as the salary will pay his debt in a few years, where normally it would have taken a few centuries.

Lo (and behold) somewhere in the Eucypom Drift is a legendary lost ship (bello Xi Dorado) and Granger’s first job is to penetrate the impenetrable Drift and find it. With a cardboard crew and a couple of plot twists our hero sets out.

As an adventure story it’s not bad, but every of element is quickly suppressed to pilot the ship requires a man-machine welding between Granger and the Mooded Swan, which could be interesting but is not investigated in any depth. In fact, the main use is to generate some excitement, an attempt to heighten the drama.

Potentially the most interesting part of the book could be Granger’s reaction to his mind partner and how he comes to terms with the situation. This isn’t done, the symbiote is ignored for the most part of the book and only appears as a deus ex machina at the end.

The writing is very workmanlike and I found the book easy to read, unlike some other novels of this genre. The only distraction in the scientific and pseudo-scientific jargon often used in lieu of explanations, but once one realises it is irrelevant and can be skipped it doesn’t distract.

Rhapsody in Black: Here we have Granger planet bound so Rhapsody. This planet is quiescent on the surface as its occupants live underground in caves and tunnels. These occupants all subscribe to a particular religion which is into mystery and hardship in a big way.

Something of Galaxy-shattering importance is discovered on the planet and Granger is sent to find it. There are various adventures and clashes in caves and with rebels, before Granger finds what he’s after. For a simple space pilot, Granger reveals his massive biological knowledge and deduces the significance of the discovery.

Suddenly you’re at the end of the book and the interesting dealings between all the parties, to reach a suitable outcome, is summarised in a couple of pages.

This time the book employs a flashback technique to tell the story. This is a standard technique to heighten tension but it didn’t come off and I found it positively distracting. Once again much scientific jargon, but this time mostly biological (Vilain has a B Sc. in biology). Thus words such as “alveolae” and “stretched” appear frequently, so it is necessary to have a dictionary handy (unfortunately I’m fascinated by dictionaries and find myself reading them instead of the novel).

This book perhaps epitomises the way the series is going. The Mooded Swan, much played up in the first book, is virtually ignored, becoming just a means of transportation. The crew are locked in a prison for most of the book, and play little part in the story. Granger’s personality is expanded and explored though his big-headedness does get so one’s nerves.

The most interesting part is the expanded role of the mind partner. Along with Granger on wonder exactly what powers the symbiote really has. After many discussions with the symbiote we see Granger realises he cannot continue to ignore it. He accepts he must come to some compromise. Both we and Granger realise it is just his big-headedness which makes him delay.

Promised Land: Once again we have a planet-bound Granger, this time sent to find a supposedly kidnapped girl. Granger ventures into the rain forests of the planet, Chao Phrya, accompanied by a couple of human inhabitants of the planet, descendants of the people form a generation ship and three natives (who turn out not to be so native).
BOOK REVIEWS

After several incidents, such as giant "spider" and discovering the path about the natives, Granger finds the girl and discovers the truth about the natives. Granger once again displays his knowledge of biology and ecology and we are treated to a lecture on the biology of the rain-forest and its eco-system. For a space pilot, Granger certainly spends as little time as possible in space.

Three books with the somewhat limited character of Granger is becoming a bore. In fact, the book is a bore, it's not even a good adventure story. One gets the feeling it's here to pad the series out. Whatever the reasons for the book, it doesn't fill me with enthusiasm and make me want to rush out and read the rest of the series, and I think this will be the general feeling of the readership.

Overview: I'm sure there's a story here, and I'll probably read the last book in the series to find out how the mind-sympathies/Granger relationship works out. Whilst books one and two are barely of they are readable adventure stories; unfortunately book three is boring, and it puts one off the rest of the series. The preponderance of biology should not go without note. If I'd wanted to learn some biology I'd read a text-book. It also does nothing for the believability of Granger that he, a simple space bum, should have sufficient biological and ecological knowledge to get a degree in the subject!

This isn't Brian at his best, but at least the writing's workmanlike, and the first two books will help you get through a train journey or a wet afternoon.


Reviewed by James Corley

Did you realize that eating is fatal? All the cholesterol in eggs, milk and cheese, that instant killer processed white bread, fruit saturated with DDT, the shellfish that carry typhoid, the tooth-rotting heart-attacking refined white sugar and peanuts, bacon and kippers are only a few of the many things which give you cancer. I try not to think about kippers - the worry makes me sick too much.

It was like a reprieve from the moose when the 4p off voucher for Cadbury's Boys Chunks came through the letter box. Here at last was something safe, the long-awaited nutritional panacea Boys Beans. But there was another delivery that day, Michael Elder's new book, Double Time. It looked good - maybe if I got into it it might make us forget about lunch.

It's about this man Grant Lomax, a minor bureaucrat in the 21st century, and even though almost the entire country has been built over with apartment blocks the population explosion means that there's still a pressing need for more building land. That's why, when someone spots a patch of green on the map, Lomax is sent off to stop a compulsory purchase order on it.

He finds Verney Henesh and his daughter bucolically unwilling to exchange their homestead for a high rise flat, and rather than be flushed out by tear gas Henesh puts a shotgun to his head. His injured daughter is taken off to hospital where, after eliciting Lomax's sympathy, she dies by the classic method of ageing the odd hundred years overnight.

Something odd is going on here. Elder has done the immortality story in "Everlasting Man" this time he shows on the reverse of the coin. His hero Lomax, following clues left by a eccentric great grandad and helped by mysterious higher-ups in the bureaucracy, does not so easy apparently ordinary heroes do in this sort of situation, he risks a safe job and comfortable home
life by sticking his nose where it shouldn’t be. burglarising (an Watargal, at least you enriched the dictionary) official records, and generally going as Drunken as any civil servant might reasonably be expected to. Maybe the fact that he’s only 15 years old excuses this lack of maturity, though he looks twice that age. Be discovers that for the past couple of centuries, unnoticed by the public and suppressed by the government, the pace of life has been steadily accelerating until it’s now double what it used to be with people marrying at ten, retiring in late middle age at thirty and dying of senility at forty.

What caused it? No clues – but I’ve thrown out the tip off voucher for Soya Combs.

Double Time isn’t what you’d call a deep investigation of the social problems of overcrowding, though the split-off idea that computers will have to be programmed to make mistakes to make sure for all the people the computers have made redundant strikes me as being brilliantly credible. The book couldn’t rightly be described as unpublishable in the sense that it generates continuous high-pitched excitement: it does though, somehow, slide down as easily as an oyster (damn, I wish I hadn’t thought of that). In fact, it’s the only book I’ve ever known two people to read in a single day, and one of them not even a regular of reader. Of course, it is short, no more than 30k unless the computer’s bowed again, but being read twice in the same day can’t be a bad recommendation.


Dominic Flandry, the hero of a new paperback novel by Paul Anderson, appears at first glance to be just another long distance superman from the same mould as Perry Rhodan, the intrepid book and countless others it will be harder not to name publicly. But though the story is, as the cover claims, a “fast moving adventure of a new intergalactic hero”, Flandry is no Nietzschean loner or even an old fashioned chapman of good against evil. Far from it, the design is the first of an entirely new breed, an innovative sub-genre that might in time come to be described by the phrase “the hero as cretin”. For Flandry, as Mr Anderson says in his ploy, is certain to sex and remaining demonstrably on the wrong side. And right to the end, though by this time the point should be obvious to him, our retarded dare-devil remains perfectly oblivious to the fact.

To give him his due, Dominic Flandry, 19 year old star of the Imperial Space Navy, was the Academy’s most promising cadet. This lack of intellectual calibre is therefore undoubtedlly exploited why the Empire of Barib is still crumbling under the weight of its own corruption. Long after the passing of Anderson’s Poleotechnic League the Navy is serving, by means after more soul than fair, a toppish aristocracy whose decadence dime old Louis the Sun King to a dump Roman Candle. The Empire and Flandry become embroiled in a minor war on a backward planet called Starkad, supporting the side which is not supported by the other super-powers of the universe, the rigorous and expanding Merseian Empire - which supports the rather charming Seatrolls against the Lantish Tigray (whom our side support for lack of anyone else to support).

Only cunning Lord Rauhberg realises that the Merseian, having learnt a few tricks from contact with Earth in its better days, are actually using the conflict as a launching pad for a full-scale inter-Empire war. Perhaps because of some twisted grudge against adventure story writers he determines that a negotiated peace is indispensably required.

Meanwhile our clean-cut ideal Flandry, though quick to laugh when praised or propositioned, is so successful in his honest slaughter of Seatrolls and so unsuccessful in radiating the boudoir attacks of Rauhberg’s subtle courtesan,
BOOK REVIEW

that bookish Commander Abrams recognizes him as an ideal candidate for intelligence work (a good new guy) He is sent to accompany the worthy diplomat to the capital of Nevara, where, by playing inactivity, he is instrumental in lousing up the entire peace negotiations.

This being that sort of book we may safely reveal, since you've already guessed the outcome, that thrown out in the cold by his own side, hunted as an outlaw by two interstellar empires, and faced with the problem of cracking an uncrackable code which contains the crucial secret about Starkan, he eventually saves humanity. What still remains a mystery is why he bothers, the Americans being so much more deserving of the universe than the human. I maintain that either Flandry has failed to think the situation through as logically as Mr Spock would require or else he is merely being selfish and inconsiderate by banging onto the entire spiral arm the way he does.

Judgment may be premature. Remember in this first book Domicile is still a raw assign. In the next of the series The Rebel Worlds I am led to understand that he is promoted to Starship Commander and goes so far as toФ

Thankfully whatever Flandry lacks is compensated for by the talent of Poul Anderson. His writing is well above the average for this sort of space opera and he makes a sterling job of keeping a literary straight face whilst keeping heroes onto his perils. It's also good to see for a change a series in which the hero gets older as time goes by. I rather suspect that Mr Anderson knows what he is doing with his main character, he is, I hope laying the ground for the future development of the saga, even though the ambiguity which results in the isolated first episode might be disturbing to some used to the simple black and white heroes of John Carter, Adam West and Lucky Starr.

Be whatever level it's approached, Flandry is entertaining. I doubt however if The Rebel Worlds where Flandry saves the universe again will keep me. What I look forward to, when it comes, is the last volume of the series. What happens I wonder? Does decapit Great Admiral of the Fleet Flandry finally see through the whole shambles, turn traitor and join the deadly green aliens in overthrowing Earth? Or does he simply retire to go hunt to raise ducks like some futuristic Candide, oblivious to the end of what it's all about?

WHERE LATE THE BIRDS SANG by Kate Wilhelm (Harper and Row; New York; 1978; Reviewed by Cy Cheuvlo

Part One of this novel appeared in Orbit 14. It is about the founding of a clone society on disaster stricken the world - social services break down, epidemic diseases run rampant, most people and animals become sterile. A large wealthy family (the Dumaresq) build an experimental hospital in a valley, and begin cloning both animals and people. The clones think differently from the Elders (as they are taught to call themselves), and a wide gulf develops between them two.

Wilhelm uses a postulate similar to the one Le Guin used in "Time Enough" the clones are exceptionally close to one another, and there is such a close empathic link between the members of a clone group that it seems they are almost telepathic. There is none of the essential "loneliness" that humans so often experience; the clones have one another, they are promiscuous, and have group sex.

The three sections of the novel chronicle the conflict between individual human beings and the clones. In the first section (when the clone society is just being established), the conflict is between the survivors and the new clones. In the second, between a clone (Holly) who is sent out as one of the first expositors into the post-disaster wilderness, and returns with strange
visions filling her head. She has need to be alone, to paint and draw and give
her visions artistic form. She is exiled for her oddity to an old farmhouse,
and bears a baby boy there in secret. Mark, as he is called, inherits his
mother's artistic bent, and since he is not cloned develops unique characteristics
that set him apart from (and in conflict with) the close community. His mother
is put in the breeder's compound, along with the other fertile females, but
she escapes into the wilderness.

The novel does seem rather didactic; the clones are never presented in a
sympathetic light, and yet certain of the qualities Wilhelm described as being
characteristic of the society (close, intimate contact, strong empathy for one
mother), are good qualities, ones that could be to the benefit of most individu-
als in Western society. The very stark, black and white conflict Wilhelm paints
seems simplistic; it is too much a case of the 'good guys' vs. the 'bad guys',
rather than an inevitable conflict between radically different approaches and
philosophies of life. The story would be more moving if we could identify with
both (though, truthfully, Wilhelm does describe a couple of clone administra-
tors in a favourable light - but those clones are given individualistic human character-
istics, and are presented favourably because they sympathise and identify with
Mark and Molly, and not because they are happy example to their own culture."species").

The novel may also suffer in comparison with others because its background
does not seem so original if keep thinking of Volta's Fifth Head of Cambra, which
has a three-part structure similar to where late the Sweet Bird Song, and the first portion of which also appeared in Orbits. It is drawn competently,
but in plain, lacks the cultural and anthropological details that give good
of as much of its flavour.

But Wilhelm writes well, and captures the forests and fields where most of
the story is set in her prose. It is a good novel, but not an exceptional one;
mere craft than art, perhaps. But if all of was not at least as finely crafted as
where late the Sweet Bird Song, we'd have great cause to rejoice.

TRITON by Samuel R. Delany (Bantam Books; New York; Feb 1976; 369 pp; $1.65;

Reviewed by David Wingrove

This is once again a long book, a complex book, ambitious in parts but basically
less vague than Dhalgren. It is an attempt at of the Nova variety, for less
inaccessible and far more ingenious thematically than his last novel. In Dhalgren
Delany explored the brief aphorism "You have confused the true and the real",
and did so in some detail, likewise in Triton; which is an attempt to
illustrate the Mary Douglas quotation (used at the very beginning of the book):
"The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived...".

And, once again, this is an exhaustive elucidation.

The plot has the back reads: "Interplanetary war, Capture and escape.
Diplomatic intrigues that topple worlds..." which is not what Triton is about.
No, not one bit! "The social body constrains..."; Triton depicts a future
society where the economic division of people no longer exists (Or exists at a low
level) and where the decision is quatered on an equal basis. Which is not to say
that this is a genial novel, for it is not. But most of the many pages in the
book are preoccupied with sex; sex being in Delany's envisaged hothouse
the motivating social force, much as money is in our present system. It is
an artificial sexual utopia contained within an artificial city; the city Tethys,
pinned to Neptune's moon, Triton, by Man's technological wonders. Each
environment shapes the new society, and is this respect Delany's creation of a
maximally-motivated society is perfect.
Upon Triton both marriage and prostitution are illegal. However, it is free
house to any other form of relationship. The city is divided into co-operatives
which can be straight, gay male, gay female, communistic (of the family sort) or
even of a sexually-repressed nature. Each co-operative is contained within
one building, and movement between them by individuals in search of a more or less
extreme lifestyle is quite common. I say the book is out exist, and it is
not, but the central character of the novel, Bron Delany, is a misanthropist of the
old order; a chauvinist in an age where it is no longer possible (socially) to be
such, and in a society where it is totally unacceptable. His love affair with
"the Spike" (a street-theatre director/player) is a very astute portrayal of
misunderstanding between people, particularly on the part of Bron who was
"misunderstanding" prevents him from ever realizing what he is. His self-delusion
becomes more and more apparent throughout the book until it surfaces as lies.
At one stage he states: "They don't understand about men... I mean ordinary,
heternsexual men." (which bears comparison with what D.H. Lawrence said in
LOA through his character Brideshead about a separate understanding between
men). And eventually his solution is to become female (totally female, physically
and in mental inclination). This in itself is nothing unusual in the age have
described, but it is his reason for doing so that is. He changes sex to avoid
women; so that he could only be concerned with men. He is described as a "logical
sadist" and certainly his actions bear this out. He is charming, handsome,
sexually gifted (after so adolescence spent as a male-prostitute on Mars) but
some of these attributes can compensate for his lack of understanding of other
people. He is selfish, destructive and possesses the empathy of an 18th century
slave-trader. Even his inherent intelligence does not remove the cloud that
surrounds his introspective thoughts; he cannot accept self-blame and
unconsiously twist events and reinterpret them so that they are sympathetic
to him. 

In Bron, Delany has created his first genuine unsympathetic character, and
in many ways - because he is antagonistic rather than protagonistic - he
could real one

Because of the sexual element involved, Delany also wanders into frequent
discussions about "types", and concludes that "everyone is a type". The wide
variety of sexual tastes results in an equally bizzare number of "types". But
despite this regular discourse amongst his characters, they do not fall foul
of becoming caricatures. Unlike most of novelists, Delany's lesser "players"
have an inner-ambiguity that gives them individual life. The, and the things
they do, are not easily predicted or predictable. That, perhaps, was a fault of
bibalym: that his types were "types"

Another reviewer said of Bibalym: "And its content does not justify its
length". We could, perhaps, say the same of this book and also the point
entirely. Delany is writing about people and their interaction in certain
social climates and perhaps because of this the sexual element comes off second-best.
But perhaps that isn't in itself a bad thing! So why write it at all? Delany
gives the reasons for better than I could in Appendix A of this new novel
(where he follows the idea laid down in The Kindred of Printing:
excerpt from his writer's notes)

"I feel the science-fictional-enterprise is richer than the enterprise
of mundane fiction. It is richer through its extended repertoire of
sentences, its consequent greater range of possible incident, and through its
more varied field of rhetorical and symbiotic organisation."

Richer? How much richer? From Bibalym I remember the images of the double
moon, the receding/approaching river, the scorpions abise in the darkness,
the gapin lift-sha ft. From Triton (close as it is to ours) I recall the vast
clearly the miniature war-game, the wet, the Susan's Clue, the sensory shield
(invaluable with Neptune's bulk) Delany handles images as well as any writer
of sf, and more important than that in his usage of the "extended repertoire
of sentences" Delany avoids the cliches of the genre and is afraid to
experiment with words (which to me was an important aspect of Dhalgren). If anything can be criticised it is his creation of a hermetic universe in which all the characters are either poets or mathematicians; where the central character wears mantels and slumes with either sex... a world of wall-slogans and curious sects, abstruse mathematical systems and four-gram boys.

Progressing through the book systematically it must be said that the opening section is clumsy. Our introduction to the society of Triton is through the eyes of the main-dressed Bron. We are offered facts as if from a text book and the contrived nature of these early pages in parallelled in the prose:

"...poised her blue-nailed hand on his blue-nailed hand, grinned (blushly) at her..." which could not be tolerated from a beginner, but this is a small flaw. Whilst it lacks the smooth literary style of Nova and the early poetic flow of The Jewels of Aptor, the gritty, ultra-perceptive mode of language used here (as in Dhalgren) is attractive, and the detail achieved through the use of this style more than compensates for the occasional banality:

"...entered a wooden door (in a white plaster wall) with painted green flowers on it, and real blue flowers growing beside it in a wooden box."

Which could have been said in twenty less words. But the additional wordage gives visual perceptiveness to the scene and adds another brick to Delany's house of sub-reality. Delany writes what is basically fantasy; the science in his stories is so much fairy-dust. (For example, his seven-Die explanation of "metalogics" in Triton.) But unlike the smitten fantasy writer, Delany uses a harshly realistic style and imbues his characters with introspective and observant traits that most writers of "mundane fiction" would not give their creations. It is a strange amalgamation that only works because Delany can use words properly to cover both image and thought.

As in Dhalgren Delany splits his book into seven sections (excluding, in this case, the two appendices, of which I shall say more later), and each section attains a separate stage in the development of Bron. In the first two sections our sympathies are with Bron; we accept his view of people and place. From the middle of the third section it is apparent that Bron's interpretation is confused, usually from the observations of the minor characters, and in the next two sections Bron becomes an unsympathetic creature as the self-centred nature of his observations is made clear. This process necessitates a complete re-evaluation by the reader of every other character, and it is this gradual operation that makes this Delany's finest work yet. As in life, Delany's "layers" change quite radically, but from what they do, but in the same way that the information you possess regarding you is, to me, them, and as this information becomes more complete our view can metamorphose dramatically.

The last two sections of the book continue the logical progression, and when be says of the Spike: "Really, a logically consistent position in just beyond her", his comment is double-edged and applies more to himself then it does to the woman he loves. Here, the war (between the planets and the moons) impinges directly upon his life, and for a brief while it seems that the apocalyptic events of that war could jolt him into self-awareness (i.e. the deaths of 88% of Earth's population and the loss of his "friend", Alfred). But the opposite occurs and he changes his sex because he believes it to be the only way out of the dilemma of constant misunderstandings. And finds himself in danger! The last section shows Bron, the woman, unable to formulate any kind of relationship, mental or sexual, the climax of which comes in a dream where she meets Bron, the man:

"I shall destroy you" she clawed at his gold brow, hissing: "I shall destroy you, destroy you, destroy you, do you hear!"
The realization, when it comes, is of the nature of the society in which he/she lives; that the "subjective was held politically inviolable; and hadn't they just killed three out of four, five out of six, to keep it so - ?" It is a chilling finale which leaves the pathetic Iron men alone, more confused and much more unaware of his true nature than ever before.

Many readers will shun this novel, disillusioned by the excesses of Dhalgren. Triton contains the best elements of that book whilst concerning itself with a far greater scope of human experience. It it well written and well developed (and even the first section improves on re-reading). Now important is that it marks a new stage for Delany, possessing a maturity not evident in any of his earlier works. Superficially, the book seems a derivation of all his previous novels, and brought to us that he was recurrent imagery and symbolism in all his work, that is no fault. The same could be said of Ballard, Dick, Le Guin and Herbert. Triton is so important because Delany at last has harnessed his considerable talent in a novel that is controlled without being contrived. It isn't perfect and probably will not appeal to the reader whose ideal of an sf novel is one in which adventure and scientific idea sweep the pondering characters (the Larry Niven, Isaac Asimov school of us). What is - and in this respect it is akin to Silverberg's Dying Inside, Le Guin's The Dispossessed and Ballard's Crash - is a serious literary exploration of a basic human dilemma. What, serious literature calling itself sf? I can hear the objections now. I have already quoted Delany on the subject and can only reiterate his comments. The two appendices to Triton, one a discourse upon sf writing and the other upon our perception of literary "andea" should be read by anyone who is uncertain as to where sf is heading. Delany compares it to abstract painting and atonal music, spheres of activity where the idea and the image coincide, if only for his comments on this aspect of the genre this book should be looked at by anyone who sees sf as more than an escapist amusement.

I do not wish to join the current disputation between academe and fandom as to whether or not sf should seek to become accepted for its literary merit. To me that problem was solved long ago, and Triton to but one more reaffirmation of my feelings on the matter. It is a richer field than that of mundane literature. And Triton is another example of the genre's consistent opulence. But what Triton also evidences is that sf has the inherent capability of becoming a far deeper realm of fiction at the same time. It is in my opinion that standards are higher within the field than without Triton proves it.


Reviewed by David Wingrove

Any book by Robert Silverberg is guaranteed to attract attention, for as much as anyone within the genre he is the writer of the moment. Tower of Glass, finally released over here in paperback format after a six-year delay, does much to back the claim by many that Silverberg's work is sui generis, and yet at the same time such a book could not have been written outside the genre.

The dominant theme of the book is that Helen Alden termed "the submerged android theme". Simon Krug has created a race of androids, the best of which are superior to Man in every respect but for the fact that they cannot procreate. They are manufactured in robotic wise, trained as machines and then sold to commercial concerns as slaves, possessing no human rights. This is the foundation upon which Silverberg builds a tale of the androids' struggle for equality with Man.
The majority of the androids have formed a religious sect in which Krug and his allies, to their delight, name their slavery an "time of testing" before Krug claims them worthy and allows them equality. A smaller but more vehement section of the android community believe in political agitation and the slow legal progression towards equality. The questions of "property or brother" and "thing or being" are examined at several levels and through many eyes; sympathetic and hostile.

Subsidiary to this (although a grand enough idea in itself to be the subject of a separate novel) is Krug's obsession with the construction of a "tower of glass", a 1500 metre tall communications spire with which to answer the pulse that originates 300 light-years from Earth. The construction of the tower and its gradual and actual fall (coincidental with the absence of humanity as the androids claim their denied birth-right) runs through the novel like a spinal column, linking together the various strands.

As in all his recent works, Silverberg refused to "cop-out" with the ending: there are no easy solutions or happy endings and the stunning climax is powerful because of this realism. The characters are not prone to changing their habits over night but remain utterly faithful to their beliefs and codes of behaviour to the end (even if disillusioned). This is often the weakness of a lesser writer but it is a fault no one could direct against Silverberg here.

Even apart from the above, though, there are many other factors which recommend themselves. At first I was slightly dismayed by the technicality of the early chapters, and the strong characterization and more than counterbalanced this aspect of the work. The whole work is more able to traditional "hard" than any of Silverberg's recent books and contains a great deal of interesting technical explanations: tower-construction; android-creating; technobeam transmission; interstellar star-flight; transmission; shunting. The book is over-crowded with ideas and the least-mentioned, shunting, deserves special mention because it is a "machine" forerunner to the mind-expanding drug used as a "catalyst" in Huxley's *A Time of Changes*, a device that opens one's "ego" or "soul" to the other participants in the shunt.

One unfortunate aspect that struck me and which will quite probably occur to anyone who has read Huxley's *Brave New World* in the similarity between Silverberg's androids and Huxley's "bokonoskilled" men, and my objections were only calmed by Silverberg's careful manipulation of the inner psychological turmoil of his androids which made them fuller, deeper creations than Huxley's satirized hedonists.

The major strength of this book is, however, that of any memorable work of literature (and is comparable to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in this respect) in that it can be read on several levels: as a straight-forward adventure tale of revolution and thwarted ambition; as a "hard" sf story packed with captivating ideas; or lastly, as a psychological study of the concepts of "Humanity", "religion" and "property". Read it all three and the full richness of the work is immediately apparent. I have read recent works of Silverberg's which have moved me more but none so entertaining, tense, masterful or well-written and constructed.

"AAA AAG AAC AAD"

Praise him to Silverberg .

_BORN WITH THE DEAD_ by Robert Silverberg (Vintage Books; New York; 1975; 257 pp; $1 95 (available on import, $I.00); ISBN 0-394-71447-4)

Reviewed by Chris Evans

Subtitled "Three Novellas about the Spirit of Man", the stories within span the period 1971 to 1974 - vintage Silverberg indeed.
What can I say? I found this book so vivid, so haunting that I'm sorely tempted to blubber incoherently in admiration for the remainder of the review. Reading these stories you become aware that if Silverberg stops writing, then we will lose one of its finest stylists, one of the few authors who is capable of tackling themes with intelligence and realism. Silverberg's major gift is that he can think ideas which we had assumed were exhausted or clichéd and breathe fresh life into them, giving us, as readers, new insights and perspectives. The phrase "breathe fresh life" is oddly appropriate in this context, for two of the three novellas in this book are about death.

"Born with the Dead", the first, describes a society in which a method of revivifying the dead has been developed. The "dead" live in their own communities, having little contact with the ordinary world of the "souls" and evoking a complete disinterest in its affairs. Jorge Klein, the madman who resurrected his resurrected wife Sybille obsessively, unable to accept that in her rekindled existence she has no interest in him. He follows her to the Cold Town where the deads congregate, to Africa where she and her companions are an safari walking deads, men and quaggas - the dead hunting the dead. Sybille repeatedly spurns him, as a man he cannot share her world. Klein is finally released from his quest by death - he is killed and restarted.

Klein's fate serves not only as the logical outcome of the plot thrust but also as a clever tragic twist. The deads are perfectly adapted to the real world, whereas Jorge, lacking Sybille's love, is hardly alive at all - his unrequited love is his sole preoccupation. The irony is manifest in the final scene when the rekindled Jorge, accepted at last by Sybille, finds that he has lost his desire for her.

"Thomas the Proclaimer" tackles a particular religious question, which could only be examined through the medium of science fiction: what would happen if we received a sign from God? Thomas, a long-haired, wine-swilling Ascetic of Pear, asks for, and is granted, a miracle: the sun stops in the sky for twenty-four hours. However, his success in eliciting a response from the heavens does not unite the people under a common faith. Various sects quickly emerge: the Discerners, an intellectual, secular group founded by scientists; the Ascetics, who anticipate a second sign which will reveal whether the first was celestial or satanic in origin; the Propitators, who believe that the miracle was the work of the Devil. The sign that Thomas had hoped would bring spiritual unity to mankind has the opposite effect, and his crusade degenerates into interdenominational strife.

Some of the parallels in this story are too apparent to labour - for example, the ultimate betrayal of Thomas by his patron, Saul. Thomas is in many ways detached from the gospel which he so eloquently espouses. Like Christ he employs his oratory gifts to attempt to impose some order on the arbitrariness of life, but unlike Christ he lacks any real philosophy, simply exhorting the people to "have faith and all will be well." I found this story the least interesting of the three (the congoada prophet being rather too familiar a figure in fiction), but it is probably the most ambitious. Told from several viewpoints, Silverberg makes us aware of the unreasoning nature of religious sects and its connections with violence. That so many different sects could evolve from such a broad base is not surprising given the history of Christianity. The author's point seems to be the religious conviction is ultimately a matter of personal psychology.

With "Going, the last of the three novellas, we return to the question of death. Assuming that the human lifespan could be considerably extended, at what point would we decide that we had achieved all our ambitions and it was now time we voluntarily passed on? The gut reaction is to say: never, I'd live on whatever the cost. But Silverberg takes you into the mind of Henry Staunt, a somewhat companionable, and shows you exactly what it would be like to be a hundred and thirty-six years old. Staunt has a backlog of memories, a moderately successful
career as a composer; a happy marriage; several generations of descendants, and a house full of fine ornaments collected over the years from every part of the world. However, his wife has been dead for fifty years and is accessible to him only via a portrait cube; his sons and grandsons have their own families and are independent of him; the ornaments he has come to see merely as abstract pieces, their symbolic and emotional value long gone. He is, in short, lonely and bored, and he applies to House of Leaves taking to prepare for his death.

Despite its sombre theme, "Going" succeeds because Silverberg is really writing about life rather than death. Gustav is not a sad figure, merely a man around by time. Following his decision to "go" he experiences ranges of doubt, hesitates, regards his resolve unfailingly with memorable dignity.

The main difference between Silverberg's output during the fifties and sixties and his more recent work lies not so much in a profound change in style (though it's obvious that he now lavishes more time over his work) but rather in a shift of emphasis. Ideas in sf, an Joanna Russ has astutely pointed out (see "The Bearing out of Genre Materials" in Vector 63), often evolve through three distinct stages. In the primitive stage the novelty of an idea is often sufficient in itself to create interest. In stage two the idea in developed, expanded upon, and various conventions may arise governing its treatment. In stage three the concept may be relegated to the background of a story, serving as a metaphorical device or a traditional prop without being the central point of interest. It is clear that most of the fiction that Silverberg is now producing lies in the third category. He is no longer interested in the technical details of the sf elements in his stories. Thus the method of re-creating the dead in the title story and the precise nature of the miracle in "Thomas the Proclaimer" are never explained - Silverberg's attention is focused sternly on his characters. The density and clarity of his prose are a joy in read, and his deep knowledge of history brings his often exotic locations fully alive. This book confirms his position as a major writer of the seventies - in any field. Go out and buy it. Read and enjoy.

PERIOD CHARM:


Reviewed by David Pringle

It has been remarked often enough that the 1970s is a decade of nostalgia in the popular arts. There have been "rediscoveries" of the music of Scott Joplin, Glenn Miller, the Beatles; minor cults devoted to the 30s and 40s movies of such directors as Raoul Walsh and Howard Hawks; the box-office success of the musical compilation That's Entertainment; periodic rock'n'roll revivals; the re-creation of the song of Jimmie Rodgers by the contemporary country-and-western singer Merle Haggard; a growing minority devotion to the blues roots of all modern popular music; intellectual pastiches of 1930s detective novels, such as Kingsley Amis's The Riverdale Villain Murder or John Bladon's Black Sun; a multitude of films set in the earlier decades of this century (and full of conscious references to the work of older film-makers) such as Peter Bogdanovich's Paper Moon or Roman Polanski's Chinatown, other examples too numerous to mention. There is definitely something going on here, some retrograde motion of the zeitgeist, but is nostalgia an adequate word to deal with the phenomenon? For one thing, many of the people who appreciate these trends were not even born when the various styles first enjoyed a vogue (I spent a most pleasurable week in the summer of 1927 watching the films of Mary Pickford during the Brighton Film Theatre's short season of her work; most of them were films made a good thirty years before my birth). Can one be nostalgic for a world one has never known? Perhaps it is
not so much a matter of true nostalgia as of traditional escapism: the happy flight into a simpler world where the values are certain and where contemporary reality (at worst painful, at best confusing) cannot intrude.

There is more to it than that, I’m convinced. After all, we have just come through some 70 or 80 years of the most extraordinary fecundity in the popular arts. The richness and variety of what has been created in this relatively sparse field of high population, age-universal literacy, and rapid communications seems quite remarkable if one pauses to look back on it. And pausing to look back is, in effect, what many of us have been doing in the last few years. It is not so much a a waxing in nostalgia (although it can be that at times) as a rediscovery of roots. More than that: it is an appreciation of what has always been there, but which we have not had the eyes to see, a realization of the value and interest of much that our parents and teachers (with our uncomfortable acquiescence) condemned as trite, ephemeral, and in bad taste. However, this is not to say that the heritage of our century’s popular arts should be uncritically accepted: there are definite distinctions to be drawn. In brief, there are tensions running throughout the popular arts — the tension between authentic folk expression and commercial exploitation. For instance, on the tension between the individual imagination and collective fantasies — and it is from the interplay of these tensions that much of the best work has been generated. That is, in fact, the uncritical acceptance of much popular art simply because it is old that has given the current backwards-looking mood a bad name, and which proceeds the use of words like “nostalgia” and “escapism.”

The rediscovery of roots has been going on space in the field of science fiction, too. Admittedly, this has always been a tradition-conscious genre, but in recent years the tendency of authors to re-examine the genre’s origins and its various phases of development has increased markedly. There have been about a dozen histories of sf, and scores of anthologies of early stories, published within the last decade (and as I type this I have just read the news that a set of Astounding Stories dating from the 1930s has been auctioned at Sotheby’s for upwards of £300). Old novels have been reissued and have enjoyed a surprising new popularity: the space extravaganzas of E.E. “Doc” Smith are no obvious example. Against this background, writers like Michael Moorcock (with his Captain Avoidable novels, The Warlord of the Air and The Lord Sidereal), and his Sharok Cernelian books, An Alien Beast and The Hollow Land), and Brian Aldiss (with his Frankenstein Unbound and an announced, but as yet unpublished, sequel to Wells called Korova’s Other Island) have turned to the past, and particularly to science fiction’s past, for their inspiration. Philip Jose Farmer (the American Moorcock — or should we call Moorcock the English Farmer?), has given us a sequel to Jules Verne in The Other Log of Phileas Fogg, and he has repeatedly done versions of the Tarzan and Doc Savage stories. Harry Harrison has written a spoof scientific romance (A Transatlantic Novel, Hurrah!) and a space opera (Star-Smashers of the Galaxy-Rangers) and the other Harrison, M. John, has performed a similar exercise (more successfully, I fear) with his The Constant Device. What all these works have in common is that they rely heavily on literary references for their major effects; earlier writers (Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells) even crop up as characters. They are, if you like, all examples of ingrown science fiction.

Which brings me at length to Christopher Priest’s new novel, The Space Machine (substituted, predictably enough, “A Scientific Romance”), a work of ingrown sf ever there was one. The plot involves one Edward Turnbull, a conventional lower-middle class young man of the year 1893, and his meeting with New Amalia Fitzgibbon, an independent-minded young lady who works as “amannonia” to a crackpot inventor. Sir William Reynolds is not as much of a crackpot as he at first appears to be, since he has built a workable time machine (indeed, in the end he turns out to be H.G.Wells’s anonymous time-traveller). Sir William’s machine moves through space as well as time, and when Edward and Amalia (in the inventor’s absence) decide to go for a joy-ride they find themselves stranded some ten years in the future and on the planet Mars. Approximately two-thirds of
the novel is taken up with their adventures on Mars, where they discover a society that is deeply divided. The common Martian folk are close enough to human beings in appearance, but their overlords, the artificially-"evolved" Martians, are tentacled monsters. The latter are planning to invade earth by travelling across space in projectiles fired from an enormous cannon...In short, the War of the Worlds is about to begin, and Edward and Amelia are faced with the double problem of finding a means of returning to earth and of foiling the Martian invaders.

That the plot of The Space Machine is basically an elaboration on the plots of two of H.G. Wells's major works is surely obvious, and it must be added that the whole thing is ingeniously done. Dates, events and characters are all carefully slotted into place, so as to do no violence to the "truth" of the Wellsian cannon: om man, if one wishes, conceive of the story as taking place in an alternate universe, where the events that Wells imagined in these two books actually did occur (and where Mars is an anarchistic abode of intelligent life, complete with breathable atmosphere, canals and red sand). Christopher Priest's new work is an entertainment, then a jeu d'esprit - scarcely a "serious" novel in the vein of Pierre for a Darkening Island or Inverted World, but an ingenious exercise in reproducing the flavour of late-Victorian scientific romance. Much of the book is comic in tone (there are some amusing, if rather predictable, digs at the characters' sexual inhibitions) and the whole story is handled with a pleasing lightness of touch. For once, Priest's somewhat stiff and remote prose style seems apt (although I wouldn't say that it amounts to a good pastiche of Wells's prose style - if, indeed, that is what the author is trying to do).

But is it all to some purpose? Is Priest telling us anything about Wells, or about life, or about science fiction, that we didn't know before? Or is he just using the Wellsian trappings to produce a comparatively easy effect - namely, the effect - namely, the effect of "period charm"? I find this thought disturbing, for it suggests that many people nowadays read Wells for his period charm rather than for his real qualities as a writer. (Conan Doyle is certainly read in this way: the period atmosphere of the Sherlock Holmes stories is their major source of appeal, as is testified by the recent spate of Holmes pastiches, where the emphasis is placed heavily on hansom cabs and London fog). But it seems to me that the sole point of The War of the Worlds is that it is a frightening and admonitory tale - recall, for example, Wells's brilliant description of the panic-stricken London mobs, full of authentic feeling of 20th century nightmare which he also caught very well ten years later in The War of the Air. There is nothing frightening or admonitory about The Space Machine, however, even though it ostensibly deals with the same events. Karl Marx once said that when historical events appear to repeat themselves they are always replayed as a comedy. Something similar seems to be true for literary "events": Wells's tragedy becomes Priest's comedy, and although I don't believe that comedy is inherently a lower thing than tragedy, I can't help suspecting that Priest is cheapening Wells.

But it may be that Christopher Priest is not really to blame, and that the time machine and the war of the worlds, like Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan, have become so familiar and accessible a part of the literary mythology of our times that they are fair game for anyone wishing to concoct a whimsical entertainment. Literature feeds on itself: this is true for all languages at all times, even though some schools, such as Naturalism, have tried to pretend that it is not so (if you want to find out more about this, read Northrop Frye's excellent new book: The Secular Scripture: a Study of the Structure of Romance, Harvard UP, 1976). Science fiction, however much it has drawn its inspiration from extra-literary sources - science, technology, the future - is no exception to this rule. Books like Aldiss's Frankenstein Unbound and Priest's The Space Machine are tributes to this fact, and seem almost to be the products of a desire to turn the SF tradition into a closed circle, like a snake swallowing its own tail. Is this unhealthy? Insufferable as it is a natural, if unrecognized, attribute of all literature, no, but insufferable as it leads to the abandonment of all new ideas. Yes we cannot afford to become
This is not a work of fiction, but it is a remarkable book which should be of great interest to all readers (and writers) of G. Harry Stine, a long time member of Campbell's Analog stable of "science fact" writers, gives us here the first reasoned and sustained argument for the economic necessity of man's going into space. Due to lack of gravity, the presence of vacuum and extreme temperature ranges, among other factors, space is an ideal industrial environment, Stine tells us. Not only that, but energy (from the sun) and raw materials (from the moon, the asteroids and elsewhere) are available in abundance. At the same time, we know that industrial resources are dwindling on this planet and that modern processes pose an ever greater pollution problem, while the continuing population growth makes it necessary that we expand production. Therefore, why not move all heavy industry into space, and eventually return the earth to an Edenic state? It can be done, Stine argues, and it will be done, beginning with the first flights of the Space Shuttle in 1980 or thereafter. It will be possible to manufacture materials in space which simply cannot be made under terrestrial conditions, and the costs of transporting them to the surface will be low, since they simply have to fall down the gravity well and arrive by parachute "from the sky like Biblical manna". Fantastic? Yes, but Stine's reasoning is very convincing.

As writers have shown a gross failure of imagination when it comes to the possibilities of space manufacture and its likely repercussions on the life-style of all of us, History has an economic motor, as Marx told us long ago, and while Harry Stine is no Marxian (the introduction to the book is written by Harry Goldwater, no less - but don't let that put you off) he appreciates the importance of this three-quarters truth. Pace Arthur C. Clarke and his spiritual brethren, man will not go into space unless he has a sound economic incentive to do so, and such and incentive is fast becoming apparent. Far from being a part of the problem, as some misguided environmentalists seem to think, space travel could well turn out to be the major solution to mankind's present "megacrisis". Despite Stine's advocacy of a rapacious free enterprise, and the occasional crudeness of his style, I strongly recommend this book to everybody who has the slightest interest in the future and the question of mankind's survival. Stine does not have all the answers, but at least he re-opens a debate which has been in danger of going moribund due to the refusal of the best minds to even think about it. We need philosophie for the space age, and we need them fast!
Reviewed by Steve Dryay

The rock opera Tommy was written by Pete Townshend in 1969. It achieved critical acclaim in music circles, made a lot of money for the Who (it is now available in three different versions) and it became a staple feature of their stage act to perform parts of it. The fact that it had to wait until 1975 to be filmed has not diminished its cultural impact because the music has become a modern classic and the new arrangements for the voices used in the film are totally successful.

The tremendous visual impact of the film, which makes it considerably more than a mere celluloid version of the record, is of course due to its director and writer Ken Russell. He was the Who's first choice and they had to wait until he was available; hence the delay. No one else could have done justice to it.

The plot of Tommy, to which Russell's treatment in essence adheres, should be familiar to most people by now. It is a single act horror story about a child who is stricken deaf, dumb and blind by the trauma of witnessing the murder of his father, missing and presumed dead in the war, by his mother and stepfather. His childhood and adolescence consists variously of being fiddled about with by dirty Uncle Pote, bullied and traumatised by Conrad Keene and subjected to non-medical hallucinogenic therapy by the Acid Queen. All of this he is virtually a passive spectator until he begins to relate to the world by means of a pin-ball table. He becomes so adopt at this hugely popular spectator sport that he defeats the champion and becomes an enormous youth-cult figurehead. His madcap, which are diagnosed as psychopathic, are miraculously cured when his mother places a mirror into which he has endlessly gazed. From this point the story picks up one of the themes of Peter Watkins Privilege (GB 1966). His senseless appeal to the legions of fanatic devotees is manipulated and exploited for commercial ends by his relatives until the masses realise their plight and destroy their oppressors. Tommy himself survives, and rid of the damaging influence over him in finally able to experience liberation and enlightenment.

Russell's use of images in this film, rather more than in his other work, constitutes a visual experience matching in intensity the strength of the music. It produces total involvement with the action which is no mean feat for a film with no spoken dialogue whatsoever. (Have any other ALL-musical science-fiction films been attempted?) After the music and imagery the main strength of the film lies in the inspired casting. Obviously only Roger Daltrey could play Tommy as he's been rehearsing for it on stage ever since the record came out. Ann-Margret as his mother is brilliant. Nominated for an Oscar (which she must have won had not one of the all too rare great films turned up in the same year and justifiably swept the board), she covered the whole acting range from devotion through desperation to hysteria, and the "avalanche of模块 beans" sequence, which apparently took three days to shoot, must have been one of the most unpleasant acting experiences of anyone's career. Tommy's step-father was well played by
Oliver Reed. Whilst not usually famous for his singing voice, he manages very convincingly as the extrovert sinister/cinematic "heavy" of very average intelligence that he has done so well before. All the other appearances are consistently superb cameos by well-known faces. Keith Moon as the totally believable Uncle Ernie is a joy to behold. Tina Turner injects far more than acid into her role as the Acid Queen, giving a new dimension to the familiar Who number. Elton John as the pin-ball wizard, Paul Nicholas as Cousin Kevin, and Jack Nicholson as the suave seducer in the role of the Specialist all added substantially to the film's structure.

The theory that rock music can save the world, which was found to be worthless by the beginning of the seventies, has been used to level at Russell the accusation of sensationalism. This is despite the superb sequence where child Tommy is taken to a faith healing establishment founded on the Powry of Rock Music, the high priest of which is played by Eric Clapton - one of the cleverest pieces of casting in the film. The mother-fetish focus of this cult is an enormous plastic-looking statue of Marilyn Monroe in the famous pose of having her skirt blown by a gust of wind. Whilst Tommy not surprisingly failing to be cured, he knocks over the statue which shatters along with the spurious faith which created it. Russell's image of a plastic Marilyn Monroe is an especially nice touch in that it comes from one who, almost alone in this country's cinema, has opposed the insidious fabrication, by the American film industry, of a product that is carefully marketed, manufactured and packaged for the sole end of maximising world-wide profits, but which has essentially less content than the legally required minimum of vitamins in a packet of corn-flakes. Russell's views on this subject have provoked hostile reaction from many quarters, not least from a reviewer on a London evening paper who is well known for his books on the American industry. Their mutual animosity over earlier films has led to two staged TV confrontations coming near to blows and ending with Russell using language described as "offensive to many viewers". Although Russell's innate ability to provoke hostile response from these reviewers unsympathetic to his work has given him a bad press for many of his films and despite the fact that for the initial press screening of this film the volume of sound in the cinema was inadvertently set too high, this film has deservedly received consistently good reviews from most of the respected critics. Amongst these was the award of best British film of 1975 from the highly authoritative Film and Filming. I urge you, when seeing this film, to select, if possible, a cinema with a reputable sound system so as to provide yourself with a treat for both ear and eye.

THE PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE

Reviewed by Andrew Tidespard, 20/3/1976

A superb film: a mixing of the rock rip-off industry and fantasy. I'm not certain which comes off on top, but the collaboration can only be mutually beneficial. Who would have thought, for instance, that the Faust theme could be revitalised? But that is what, among many things, this film does.

An impression, Swan, controls the rock (music) industry. He plans to open a new, sensational night-spot, the Paradise, but has no suitable music to use. While watching over a performance of his latent (literally) creation - The Juicy Fruits, a band formed to promote/generate a "nostalgia cult" - Swan hears an unknown pianist play an unknown song. There is an attraction; Swan must use the music of Hanslow Leech. Swan's assistant - Iat Freddie - talks to Leech and is told that the composer has completed a concerto - based upon the story of Faust - which he would like to perform. Freddie is unimpressed, but nevertheless lightens Leech of a few written songs; lightens so that Swan might know what Leech can do. The naive composer believes that he has impressed upon Freddie
the fact that Leech will only allow himself to sing the song. Then there is silence.

Winslow waits for a week or two until deciding to present himself at Swan's "Deab Records" HQ and asking what Swan thinks. But, from the stark office, Winslow is evicted. He will not be deterred; he writes for Swan, who, bedazzled with a black linoleum, rolls serenely home at the end of the day (thou how else it must be for a man's day to end) and leads Leech to the country mansion, Swanage. The composer invades the mansion, only to find a row of beautiful girls struggling with a vast staircase to sing one of Leech's most personal songs. Leech aids an aspiring star - Phoenix - with her modulation and is locked upon by acrobatic faces that say: "If you are the composer of this song why has not Swan invited you to this audition?" Of course, Leech is once more evicted and once more returns - disguised.

Arrest follows a final eviction and a violent assault. Winslow Leech is convicted, for possessing a packet of drugs planted by two crooked policemen, and is sent to Sing Sing (prison). Therein the singer's teeth are extracted - as an experiment conducted under the auspices of a Swan "charity" - and replaced by a set of metal dentures; his voice is thereby stolen.

But Winslow is still alive and he can hear how Swan is making use of his sonata. When it is announced that The Juicy Fruits will open The Paradise by performing his work, Leech is outraged and escapes from confinement by hiding inside a box emptied of its intended party goods. Leech breaks into a warehouse where cartons of Juicy Fruits' discs are stashed and destroys them; by so doing he uncovers a record press and decides to destroy it. But, he is apprehended; before he can escape he trims his head between the surfaces of a hot plate and makes an impression of the Fruits' hated rendering of "Faust" on one side of his face. His subsequent flight leaves a trail of blood. Winslow finally falls into a river, and is presumed to be drowned.

The scene is thereby set for a fabulous recreation of "The Phantom of the Opera". Actually, the situation is not so simple; the film does not merely recreate it re-tells. Winslow Leech - mutilated and voiceless - enters the Paradise and menace Swan by exploding a bomb among the Juicy Fruits. Swan does not fear the masked Phantom; he rightly sensed Leech sustained by its Fantastic costume and offers this creation a further stretch of life. Leech insists that Phoenix - no other - sings the songs he no longer can; and Swan decrees. He offers an intricate contract which Leech signs to bind himself to Swan unto death. As a demonstration of his goodwill - and in a scene of poignancy and simultaneous gratifying horror - Swan returns Leech's voice: the composer is wired into a synthesizer and the impresario expertly recreates a voice which can earn him fortunes yet which he despises.

The Phantom undertakes to, within a week, rewrite his sonata so that Phoenix may perform it. But Swan will not allow the girl's perfect voice to compete with his perfect mastery of the rock business; so he introduces a new star, Beef, and relegates the girl to a subsidiary choral role.

Need one go on? I ought to mention the subtle way in which the imagery familiar to an admirer of SF and fantasy films is used to highlight the machinations of the music industry. (For example: from the sex-together remnants of dimunished teenagers a new sensation - Beef - is born.) I could recite a long list of verbal gags. (A Phoenix from the ashes - of an electrocuted guitarist - newly arisen.) Perhaps I could probe further the heavy use of the legend of Faust and the contemporary arrangements by which life is prolonged, youth is preserved (Swan retains his smooth features by recording him every action on a film, that shows reality, his age.) Or maybe I ought to dwell upon the first deliberate staging of an assassination (will this event not go down well? will audiences, from the myriad comforts of their suburban parlours, not be enthralled?)
Oh, I felt that the ending was chaotic. But several themes were being simultaneously resolved: tragically, yet the Paradise's hysterical audience were not concerned, had been so absorbed by the performance of the myth-maker, that fantasy and reality were indistinguishable. Ah! does not a spectacular death give substance to a phantom?

I will remember this film, though I've not mentioned the music, or the photography, or the acting (all superb), or...the strange and frightening mask of Winslow Larch, the Phantom of the Paradise.

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH directed by Nicolas Roeg (1976, USA)

Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh, 27/3/1976

The first film is a description of how the American business community reacts to the visit to their great, open, free-enterprise country of a British national who is the possessor of nine basic patents (MM). The Briton, a veritable alien by name of Jerome Newton, rather hastily establishes a giant corporation, World Enterprises, which, though making a great deal of money, has no purpose. The outcome of Capitalism, the envy of Capitalist? No, no. With a perception no doubt heightened by a psychological and physiological impression on "the greenback", various self-interested associates realize the debilitating effect of no independent concern on the viability and profitability of the tightly-knit incestuously inclined American economy. World Enterprises must, and inevitably does, collapse. The Institute Newton - by now a somewhat resigned alcoholic - is forced to live out the rest of his life in a shabby hotel room. One problem, however: Newton is not a human being; if he does age and move towards death, no human can tell. So David Bowie (but he's not in this film, is he?), thrusting aside libidary and a glass of neat gin...The Visitor makes a record.

The second film describes the unfruited journeying to Earth of an alien being. This Creature has left behind a wife and two children on a desolate (apparently uninhabited) parched desert world (sky mysteriously overwhelmed by clouds) to come to the "Planet of Water", but intends to return. The creature's space vehicle transverses downward through Earth's atmosphere, landing (with a thump) in a water hole beside an abandoned quarry. The creature - red hair centrally parted, blue/grey eyes mismatched, gait unsteady beneath the Earth's weighty influence - assumes a British nationality and the name of Thomas Jerome Newton. He - the main-role into which the creature is increasingly forced - is the possessor of nine basic patents (seemingly sprung full-grown from the riven head of Zeus, a figure absent from the film) and quickly has established a giant corporation, World Enterprises. The nature of Newton's products is to him irrelevant; all he desires is the money, a way to finance the construction of a space vehicle which will take him home. But...Newton does not understand Earth and its strange inhabitants; radio and TV transmissions, after all, are not, and are not intended to be, representations of reality, penetrating analyses of human motivations. The chosen, isolated upon, isolation of World Enterprises works against it, exposes it to the ravages of fate. Various balances are toppled, various relationships fall apart. The beleaguered, impoverished, isolated alien is forced to abandon his ambitions, to abandon his loved ones, to abandon his memories of home, to abandon, indeed, his insistence that it is an alien disguised to seem human. At the end of the film, Newton, once an identifiable - and at times frightening - monster, has become a human being. (It is the image, the unfamiliar, and unindescribable image, of D. Bowie that makes and breaks this...
The third film describes how a young man is unable to touch a young woman. The man is handicapped by not being a human being (and therefore not suitably constructed) and by being married and used to a joyous, peculiar process of intercourse — all liquid, all bouncing. The girl is handicapped by inexperience, by fear, by revulsion. The tenuous partnership, bittersweetly put together in a small New Mexico hotel, falls apart through lack of the requisiteнут и булы.

The fourth film is an unshapely, unsatisfying mishmash of ideas and emotions, put together in such a way that their sum seems no more than a promotional short for David Bowie, rock superstar (I'm sure I've read that somewhere). The film opens with the fall to Earth of the alien protagonist, Thomas Jerome Newton, and his initial hesitancy, "his" initial discomfort. Newton could well have come from another world (and this is Bowie acting, not being himself). Throughout the film's first half — during which World Enterprises is established and prospered, and the reclusive Newton befriends the slow-witted Mary Lou — we are reminded that we are watching an extraterrestrial being struggling with the strangeness of Earth. We learn why Newton has come to Earth (so that "he" can drink many, many glasses of water); we also learn that "he" desires to return to "his" wife and children and has formed World Enterprises for this purpose. The most important thing we learn in that Newton's body has been skillfully disguised to look human, to look, moreover, masculine. All is revealed (literally, and startlingly) when Mary Lou begs to be touched. From then on the film disintegrates.

World Enterprises is skillfully taken apart, off screen. Newton's pet project — his space vehicle — is dismantled and he is imprisoned. Time passes and the characters age. Though Newton's identity is not socially masked, can only be glimpsed in the way that his memory of his home disappears. The film's slow crescendo — to a disappointing climax — demonstrates the fact that the story of the character Nathan Bryce, reveals the continuing youthfulness of Candy Clarke beneath the coarse make-up of an aged Mary Lou and suggests that someone, for reasons unclear, can no more than obscure the ends of a promising narrative, cannot even grasp the tantalizing threads.

And, in the final frame, from behind the mask of Mr Newton, all too the lurking, ever-present D Bowie. We bow the film out.

THE BLOB directed by Irvin S. Yeaworth, Jr. (1958, USA)
Reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh, 15/4/1976

Could you be horribly mutilated by the Blob?

Well, an immediate reassurance: in the film the carnivorous strawberry jelly (or is it the sharper raspberry?) do not occur. Yet it lurks as often do those delicious secrets of human nature (or do I mean mixture?) — waiting for a weak mind and a hateful heart to retrieve it and roll it again upon the children of the species. It may momentarily rest solidly against the arctic snow, may in its absence allow amicable community between young and old. But on its inevitable return — banishment, after all, is not extermination — the Blob, innumerable, shapeless, animality between "generations", will take many lives and destroy many things.

The film neatly explains the Blob's mysterious origin as extraterrestrial. At first, few of the townsfolk believe the claims of a youthful Steve McQueen that a monster is among them. But McQueen's persistence, and the loyalty of his young friends, finally convinces the town's Lieutenant of Police that a threat does exist and that action against it must be taken. Meanwhile, the monster has grown by devouring several "oldsters" (including a doctor who has described the monster's capacity for total absorption of human tissue) and can no longer hide
beneath bushes. During the finale talk of all ages are threatened; but the Blob is defeated by the observation of a youthful Steve McQueen (why not plug this young actor, tackling his first "starving" role?). One ought to be apprehensive though (and one might be if the film were more effectively horrific), for the Blob has not been totally destroyed; should circumstances dictate it will again roll among... among the unconvincing "special effects".

The story of the film (in supposition, I will admit) was written by Geo Alec Effinger (and appears as "The Westfield Heights Hall Monster" in the first "Clarion" anthology). The author propounds - and no doubt his mind was sharpened (and twisted? may!) by the ingestion, from a crisp celophane pouch, of a small quantity of cocaine - that the Blob appears one evening in the midst of a sparsely populated shopping precinct. Of course, Effinger allows his monster to emerge upon young and old alike and sweeps them all unerringly away. There can be no resistance to a thing so obscure as to cause conflict between parties whose cooperation can only be mutually beneficial.

Perhaps the fiction lacks conviction. "The Westfield Heights Hall Monster" is, after all, a film grounded which the story is built: the soft centre, out the hard shell. The fictional narrator is looking upon a world of horror - which is not his world, is not the "real" world. But this conjecture is disfigured by the ingestion of the cocaine: surely it must be true that the narrator's brain is helplessly added, his perception consequently impaired? No. The narrator's perception is sharpened: he grasps the connection between his presence in the cinema and the message of the film he sees. The message is relevant to his life; the film is not escapist, is a reflection of the environment in which it was made (and, of course, a reflection of the environment in which it is seen, of the people who see it). When he wrote the story (in 1958?) Effinger was, consciously or unconsciously, writing about the American circumstances of that time. "The Westfield Heights Hall Monster" was shown to be all-consuming because all American citizens were in 1958 touched by some kind of emotional fervour (anti-war, anti-racial, anti-political) and there were sharp divisions between cliques, between parents and their children.

The story would be different if it were to be re-written in 1976. The literary use of cocaine as a means of viewing one world from another (two facets of the same) would be unacceptable. The message, also, of the story would be inappropriate. No one, nowadays, has much time, money, or energy to protest greatly about matters other than how much time and money and energy one ought to have (deserve). Aren't we all going to give to others so that we, in the short term, may benefit? Enough! This is not an appropriate forum for discussion of politics. Though, if a formidable case could be made for science fiction as a medium for change..."
Can things be that simple?

Why, in what way, is *The Blob* social criticism? The film was probably made on a low budget to exploit the popularity of the sf/horror genre. Its subject matter would, consequently, have been the carnivorous Blob, and human reactions to its presence on Earth. The selection of McQueen as the protagonist (the hero) could have been a deliberate market policy to attract a "young" audience. The film's plot was without thought lifted from any number of other contemporary films. In short, *The Blob* was a casual 1958 product of the commercial film industry. How, then, can I claim that the film metaphorically examines the "generation gap"?

Where can I look but to the recent upsurge of interest in, and analysis of, sf. Having learnt what a metaphor is, and that several of sf's most persistent images are (actually?) metaphors, one is inclined to boast. One is inclined to be vain, and to exaggerate, and finally to distort truth. To claim that *The Blob* was more than a science fictionally iced horror film would be to overstate its worth. All I can plead is a belief that I would not have understood Effinger's delightful story had I not seen the film. Which, however, is the key to which? (My answer, it would seem from the text of this review, is that Effinger knew what he was writing, that he was employing the metaphor consciously. The film gained "overtones" from the deliberate post-1958 - though when? - merging of sf with non-genre fiction.)
Whispers From the Past... Back Nos. of Vector

75: July, 1976 -- Harlan Ellison interviewed by Chris Fowler; book reviews, including an in-depth look at Again, Dangerous Visions by David Wingrove; cover by Paul Ryan

73/74 March 1976 - J.G. Ballard interviewed by James Goddard and David Pringle; book reviews; cover by Paul Dillon

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68/69 (the last Malcolm Edwards issue) Three Views of Tolkien by Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe and Peter Nicholls; Letter from Amara by Philip K. Dick; Period of Transition by Michael Coney; After the Renaissance by Brian Aldiss; Machinaria and Inventions by Brian Stableford; Down-at-heel Galaxy by Brian Aldiss; book and film reviews: Spring 1974


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