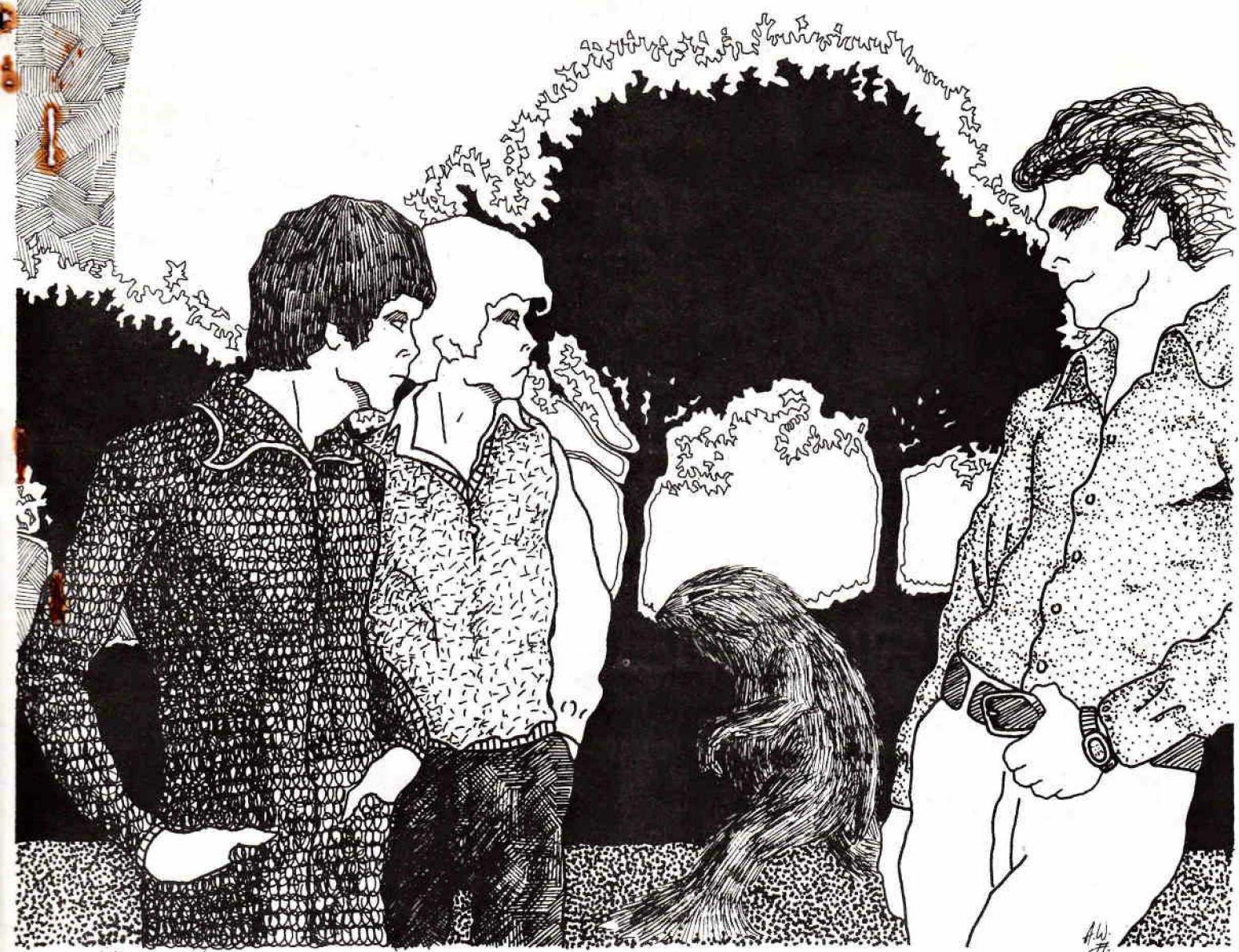


may – june 78

75p

VECTOR

87



DARK THEY WERE *and* GOLDEN BY GOD

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Vector 87 - May-June 1978

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Artworks: Cover, Andy Woudham (& p.27); Steve Bruce (p.10/17). Back Cover by our mysterious but talented artist - ?

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* * * * *

Special thanx this time to... Neil Young, Gerry Rafferty, Andy for Dylan tickets, Rob H. for enthusiastic response (but no beer..) and Sue for pure perseverance, among other things...

VECTOR is the Official Journal of The British Science Fiction Association.

The Android's Dreams

- an editorial

Usually this space is taken up with some item of polemic (for which I can be sure of getting some flack) dealing with SF and its many tentacles. This time out however I'm taking an extra page to reprint a recent exchange of letters between myself and two of our interested members. I promised to let Rog and Doreen have the last word in this issue, but that doesn't stop me from saying here that I find myself in total disagreement with their letter of 5th May. But then, I'm hardly able to be subjective in this matter; I feel far too much on this subject to pretend a false 'objectivity'. I think my initial response intimates my feelings, even if Doreen does seem to misinterpret my words. So it goes. Perhaps if it touches some reasoned response (and emotion is part of reason) let me know. If you send me two copies I'll ensure they're forwarded on to the other parties to this discussion. And with that...

12.4.78

Dear Sir,

We feel we must protest about the layout and content of recent mailings. First, the back cover of Vector 84. Since VECTOR is on sale to the general public, and is also disseminated to a large number of non-fannish people, this is hardly good advertisement for the BSFA. There is no excuse for such juvenility. Failing all else, a blank sheet would have sufficed.

Secondly, four-letter words and general obscenities are appearing more and more in our publications. The job of an editor is to edit, ie. prepare his publication for his potential readership. Just as one edits one's own vocabulary dependent upon the company in which one finds oneself, we think that, out of simple courtesy, the language in the mailings should be confined to that which causes the minimum offense to the maximum audience. No other editorial policy should be entertained. This is not 'censorship', but normal redactive practice.

Yours sincerely,

R.I. Gilbert

D.E. Rogers

26. 4. 78

Dear Roger and Doreen,

Thank you for your letter, which deserves a reply in far more detail than I'll no doubt provide here. You can either accept what I say here or have the last word. I'll print this whole correspondence in VECTOR 87 in any case as I do not believe in censorship (as I have made clear elsewhere).

Your protests, it would seem, refer entirely to the back cover of VECTOR 84 and to the 'foul language' that is appearing 'more and more'. I take it that this is a personal criticism because past mailings under both Chris Fowler and Malcolm Edwards editorship have followed a similar policy of printing reviews and comments which use 'four-letter words and general obscenities'. I am amused that you found the photo of me juvenile. Indeed, I was a mere nineteen when it was taken and the gesture I make is far from gentle, but

then 'gentility' has never been the forte of sf, nor of intelligent people. Even were the cover not originally intended for my own fanzine, KIPPLE and paid for entirely from my own resources, you would still have a perverse kind of a point.

No, I can't agree with anything you say in your letter. To me the whole attitude of 'repress it if it expresses itself' stinks of a peurile fear of what life really is. I've said elsewhere that I don't think that juvenile should be used as a term of derision as it only expresses a stage of physical development - nothing to do with mentality. If you find my attitude to life peurile than that is merely a question of your interpretation of my world perspective - just as mine is of yours. I am as equally arrogant as you in thinking I am right (and thus, also wrong). You say that one should edit one's vocabulary according to the company you find yourself in, which again surprises me. I know that people are, to an extent, chameleons, but such gross hypocrisy offends me. I do not use a lot of 'indecent' (god help me for using that euphemism!) language in conversation, but neither do I censor my mode of expression to suit company. In the same way I do not expect my reviewers to write to cause 'the minimum offense to the maximum audience', and in any case I'm quite sure that they cause no offense whatsoever to a 'mature' (sorry, but that again reflects my perspective, doesn't it?) readership, well acclimatised to our more modern laissez-faire (although I'd view it more as 'natural') attitudes to social behaviour.

Yes, on reading it again, your letter (that purports to be 'normal redactive practice' and not 'censorship') is a rather fatuous attempt to impose your own limited perceptions of what you think people want upon the readership of VECTOR. In view of your past silences, your total previous lack of interest and your general reactionary assumption that individual words are more important than the ideas they carry, I cannot find that I should 'out of simple courtesy' reduce VECTOR to a lobotomised and castrated piece of Victoriana.

Your letter should have received a far more curt and (to your minds) offensive reply. But there is no reason why I should lower myself and take the bait of your illogic. I pity those who have been raised to fear the sight of certain arrangements of letters on paper (or as expressed orally) and yet I have respect for their right to express their (at times) perverse views.

In short, I found your letter obscene and rather ludicrous. You are welcome, by all means, to respond to this. And perhaps, next time, you'll bring to my attention those obscene passages that are lowering the credibility of VECTOR as the journal of the BSFA.

Yours cordially,

David Wingrove
(Editor Vector)

5. 5. 78

Dear David,

Roje forwarded your letter to let me have first cut of the cake. You do sound a trifle belligerent and probably Roj feels this is a woman's job to sooth the fevered brow - or something!

Anyway, I will try and take it in sequence; a little difficult because you do tend to flit. Yes, on this particular occasion, we were referring to the back cover of V.84, but it was not a personal attack. You could print it on your fanzine and we would not bother to comment. Your fanzine is NOT THE "official organ of the BSFA" as Vector was called when I joined. And as for

paying out of your own resources - good luck - but you are not the first. I will not bore you with past history but take a look at Vector in the early part of 1967 - you might be surprised.

You state "I do not use a lot of 'indecent' language in conversation" and yet you have the unmitigated gall to inflict it expressly or by implication on members of the BSFA and those who read VECTOR. Examine your motives - why do you not inflict it on the company you keep? Are you not in fact consciously or subconsciously, censoring your conversation? 'Indecent' (for the sake of a generic term) language has its place in the context of the matter in which it appears NOT for effect, show off and such like.

Limited perceptions? define your terms. Are you imputing that I have no idea how the rest of the world exists or that I am doing a 'Mary Whitehouse'? Neither is true. I would think from a personal point of view I have lived life more than you by the very fact I have been "38" for a few years and because of having been involved in legal work all my life, there is nothing that surprises or disgusts me. I've seen and heard it all. But that doesn't mean I have to like it, and I don't. And as far as I'm concerned, a magazine about sf scattered with expletives and derisory gestures is unnecessary and offensive.

Is there NO continuity when an editorship changes hands? Do you NEVER read BSFA minutes? Many accusations have been hurled at my head but 'past silences' and 'lack of interest' is not one of them. Not only have I brought up the content of VECTOR on similar lines in the past, I've written to both Malcolm Edwards and Chris Fowler. Further, at Manchester, myself and others buttonholed Chris on this very subject and he agreed with our comments but said his contributors would not agree to censorship. WHAT an emotive word! You will, as a good editor, correct my spelling, grammar and unsplit my infinitives. You will, as a good editor, make sure no libellous statements are printed (you'd better - we were almost sued for libel through copy incorrectly checked). What is that if it is not censorship?

What makes you think we were expecting an offensive reply to our letter? Ours wasn't written offensively; I am not by nature offensive and by the same token do not expect offensiveness back. What I do expect is my views on Vector to be at least listened to with courtesy if not understanding even if disagreed with and i will say as I've said on previous occasions at great length and over a period of years:

" VECTOR is the BSFA's mirror to the world. If that mirror is dirty or stained, then that is the world's impression of Vector and the BSFA, If 'indecent' language and derisory gestures are found out of context in a magazine which purports to bring sf to the masses in an intelligent way (which was the object of the BSFA in the first place) then who can take it or the BSFA seriously?"

In conclusion, before passing this letter to Roje for his comments or ratification, Chambers definition of the word 'obscene':

adj: foul, disgusting, indecent, esp in a sexual sense, (less strongly) offending against an accepted standard of morals or taste.

who is degrading who (or should I say whom?)

Doreen Rogers/Roje Gilbert.

RG: "I'll bet you don't swear at interviews, otherwise you don't get the job. Is that censorship, courtesy or common sense?"

DW: The last time I had an interview was over 6 years ago. Suffice it to say that I got the job without compromise. As an incidental, I'm an Associate of The Institute Of Bankers, for what that's worth! I know a little about morality, I hope. But draw your own conclusions...

BANANAS

A Semi-Literate SF fan's Reaction to the Literary Quarterly.
by Cyril Simsa.

BANANAS is a literary quarterly which recently published its ninth issue (the first being produced in January 1975). It is almost unique in that it is a popular literary magazine; it is also unusual in that it features many items which are borderline - sometimes outright - fantasy (or occasionally science fiction). Every issue has contained a story by J.G. Ballard, and many issues have had items by Sladek, Disch and other writers associated with NEW WORLDS. The design, too, is unconventional, since BANANAS is in newspaper format, which allows plenty of opportunity for interesting graphics (their use of media such as linocuts is something that current SF magazines would do well to examine). Failure was predicted - and yet BANANAS is a success, with the result that BANANAS immediately began to be attacked in critical quarterlies, "always a good sign, and Auberon Waugh called it pretentious rubbish". (Emma Tennant, editor). And the attitude of that comment does much to sum up the attitude of BANANAS: it is irreverent and unorthodox, it is literary without the stodge, it is vigorous, it is fun. Here is a group of very individual writers who, in BANANAS, find a common stomping ground. Now, an anthology selecting the "best" of the first seven issues is available: BANANAS, edited by Emma Tennant (in soft cover from Quartet @ £2.50; also hardcover from Blond & Briggs @ £5.95). The selection covers all aspects of the magazine: it has literary memoirs and criticism, as well as the staple of stories and some poetry.

Much of the fiction has a strong mythological flavour, sometimes to such an extent that it consists principally of the retelling of existing myths and legends. An example of this is Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves", a superb rewriting of Little Red Riding Hood, tied in with lycanthropy, and reaching a brilliant new consummation made possible by the additional scope that werewolves offer. The style is rich and there are many incidental details which together give an authentic feel of folklore (an especially chilling touch is the tale of the newly-wed husband who steps outside to relieve himself and doesn't return till many years later, his clothes in rags, and lice in his shaggy hair - he is a werewolf, of course). This is a very fine story, and one of my favourite fantasy shorts of 1977.

With respect to more classical mythologies, there is Sara Maitland's ingenious revamp of Perseus & Andromeda, which puts a whole new psychological slant on the story. Selfless motives be damned! Here we find jealousy, hatred, obnoxious egocentricity, and suppressed longings for vengeance. Doubtless, the Ancients who first recorded this noble legend are turning in their mausolea, and Zeus is sighing with gratitude that the truth is out, at long last. This piece reminded me of Karel Capek's Apocryphal Stories in the way that it reconsiders a well-known event from a novel perspective - though personally I found Sara Maitland's story less starkly cerebral and hence emotionally more satisfying.

Emma Tennant's "Philomena" attempts to do the same thing for a bizarre little incident from the Greek myths, but (albeit absorbing, atmospheric, and featuring a well-developed central character) is less successful since it does not really add much to the classical version.

On a more personal level, there are contributions like Ballard's "The Dead Time", a characteristically bleak Ballardian landscape, dead and decaying, collapsed; but this time it does not involve an imagined disaster, instead a real one. It is set at the end of World War II, in the vicinity of Shanghai at the time of the Japanese capitulation. The protagonist is given the task of driving a truckload of civilian corpses to a cemetery. Gradually, as he is absorbed into the landscape, he becomes emotionally attached to the corpses until he feels that "they, the dead, were more living than the living who had deserted me." Finally, he becomes (or convinces himself that he has become) the "harbinger of all that lay before him." It has all the grotesquerie of Ballard's other stories of assimilation by the disaster, but it did not (contrary to the editor's claims) strike me as one of Ballard's very best. Some of the transition seemed awkward, and I was left not wholly convinced.

The preoccupation with death in this story is particularly strong (nor is it the only recent Ballard short with overtones of necrophilia: "The Smile" in BANANAS 6 concerned a beautiful woman preserved by taxidermy, and the protagonist is no longer being engulfed merely by the debris of our mechanised civilisation (as in HIGH RISE and CONCRETE ISLAND), he is now giving way to death itself. Deathwish, anybody?

"Doctor Clock's Last Case" by Ruth Fainlight startles with almost every paragraph; it twists and turns, surprises powerfully. A dazzling piece in which Dr. Clock is used as a medium for self-exorcism. An intense and extremely strange contribution.

Still in the category of personal mythologies is "Pancake's Latest Work" by Martin Ryle, a short but memorable fantasy concerning two investigators who go bicycling around the country, looking for the original of the meadow depicted on Pancake's latest canvas. The story is neat, and has a wry sense of humour about it: "Since Gock's not on the map," said Wainwright cleverly, "Let's get as far away from it as we can!" Martin Ryle is a new writer and a good one.

Less notable are Tim Owens, with "The Night it rained," which has a haunting flavour of twilight, and the quality of a repeating scratch across the microgroove; and Peter Wollen, with "Friendship's Death," the only science fiction story in the book. My main objection to the Wollen is that it practices literary incest: though quite enjoyable in itself, one must apparently know Mallarme in order to appreciate the ending fully.

There are also some pieces closer to the traditional mainstream, most of them coming under the category social satire and/or comment. The best of these is probably Hilary Bailey's "Middle Class Marriage Saved", in which cause, effect and chance fall click-by-click into a well-crafted, well-written examination of marriage and adultery. Relationships are concisely encapsulated, and not without pathos.

Additionally, there are Beryl Bainbridge, with a cast of eccentrics, at times hilarious, at times not; and Alan Sillitoe who is thoroughly predictable and boring. John Sladek's piece is perhaps the most disappointing, however, since it seems to peter out half-way through after an uproarious beginning. I found his "Goodbye, Germany?" in BANANAS 9 much more consistent, much funnier (it concerns suicides who try to disguise the fact and make their deaths appear to be murders; it's all to do with a viral infection, in which the mutant virus has a change in the sequence of bases on its DNA, from:

-G-T-G-C-A-A-A-T-A-A-T-T-G-G-G-G-, to:

-G-T-G-C-W-E-L-T-S-C-H-M-E-R-Z-G-G-G-).

This is the pattern of the stories, and a similar pattern may be found in the poetry. It ranges from the truly weird and wonderful, such as Jorge Carrera Andrade's "The Workshop of Time" (in BANANAS 9; not included in this collection), to the rather ordinary, e.g. Frances Horovitz's "Elegy".

A question which obviously suggests itself is: why - in a publication that is very earnestly a serious literary concern - is so much of the fiction fantastical? And, even when not out-and-out fantasy, why does it at least concentrate on the outré aspects of life: unusual settings, abnormal life-styles and characters?

"Frankly, I believe the terrors of ancient days are re-emerging in this land which I thought so civilised." This quotation is taken from the opening of "Ixion" by an Argentinian writer, Jorge Torres Zavaleta, a story which appeared in BANANAS 8. In his essay, "A Climate of Warm Indifference" (reprinted from BANANAS 6), Martin Seymour-Smith tackles the problem of modernism in art, and especially literature. He reasons that a work of literature must be expressed in terms appropriate to its age, and asks the question whether "conventional realism...is an adequate means of representing the present."

"Crash," he says, "may not be a great novel. But it is truly modern...it gives a truer picture of life than that given by the media..." This is an opinionated comment, but it gives a clue to the puzzle, as do his observations on the idea of the espejismo (nearest English translation: "funhouse distorting mirror"). This is hardly a new concept, but in BANANAS it is being exercised to the full.

In her article, "Perverse Women" (BANANAS 9), Lorna Sage examines Gothicism in fiction. Gothic elements can increase, rather than decrease, the specificity of writing - she argues - since they allow disparities and disjunctions which do not occur in "actuality". These can be expressive, lending precision to the prose.

"SF is now sometimes called 'speculative fiction'. But all fiction must now be 'speculative' in one way or another. This is no longer a special and inferior category." (Martin Seymour-Smith).

Unlike Victorian Gothic, which tended to allow the individual to wallow in titillatory emotion, within themselves, and thus tended to cause asociality (when it did not cause outright antisociality), modern Gothic seems good because it is not "designed to produce an a-social vision... but a very different perception of society from that conveyed by social realism. That is, a society where self-division and self-consciousness are not diseases but techniques for living." (Lorna Sage)

Two different views trying to justify BANANAS-type fiction; one by way of "speculative" content, one by way of Gothicism. Yet both seem to me to be attempting to come to terms with the turbulence of modern existence, the chaotic complexity which threatens to grow beyond the grasp of the individual. The fantasy/"speculative" elements attempt to put the modern world back into a comprehensible perspective, in a mode appropriate to the times. The writers deal with what they see around themselves indirectly, through personal mythologies which subconsciously (distortingly) reflect the fears and preoccupations of the Seventies, as well as some more deep-seated ones.

"The chilling effects of distance and unreality, and the reworkings of myths have a special excitement because they're not (like the high-minded rituals performed by New Novelists) inspired merely by linguistic anxiety, but by low, selfish motives like fear and, shamefully enough, pleasure." (Lorna Sage)

There is something very interesting happening in BANANAS, something which devotees of fantastic literature should know about. The Quartet anthology gives a pretty fair overview of the periodical (though perhaps over-emphasising the critical side), its only drawback being the high price. If you don't have £2.50 to spare, at least borrow the anthology from your library.

*

BANANAS, edited by Emma Tennant. (Quartet Books; 1977; £2.50; ISBN 0 7043 3176 4).

BANANAS, the Literary Newspaper, edited by Emma Tennant. (Bananas Publishing, 2 Blenheim Crescent, London, W11; approx. quarterly; £3.00 for one year; ISSN 0308 381).

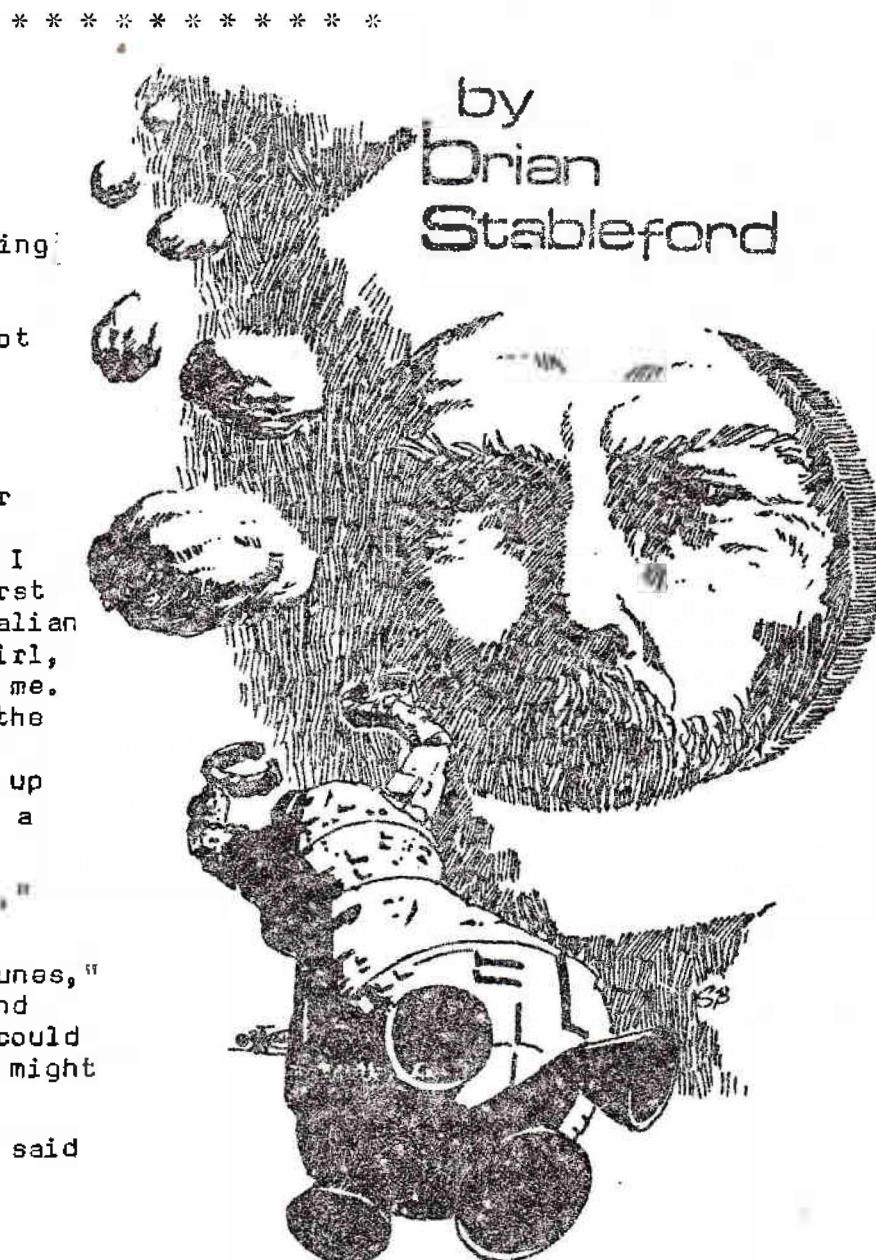
Purgatory Revisited Again -

I had just finished reading Lord Holden's PURGATORY REVISITED, and remember thinking that it might not be as lurid as Niven and Pournelle's INFERNAL but that it was a lot less nasty-minded. I suppose I must have dozed off. Or maybe died. Anyhow, the next thing I knew, there I was in purgatory. The first person I saw was some Italian bloke chasing a little girl, but I don't think he saw me. I don't think he caught the little girl either. Then Lord Holden himself came up behind me and offered me a hand up.

"Your trousers are muddy," he observed.

"We all have our misfortunes," I replied, trying to sound cheerful. After all, it could have been a lot worse. I might have been in hell.

"Come this way, please," said Lord Holden politely.



I followe him obediently, wondering where we were going but not quite sure whether I ought to ask. We members of the lower middle class are never wholly comfortable in the presence of the aristocracy. We don't quite have the intemperant aggressiveness of the average American.

We walked for an hour or two across terrain that looked rather like Jersey Marine Beach on a wet weekday. There was a thin film of oil covering the sand and the tide must have been out, because as far as I could see the beach went on forever in all directions.

Eventually we came to some dunes, but instead of being held together by Marram grass they had apparently formed around human beings. Each man seemed to be in an upright position with only his head protruding from the dune.

Lord Holden pointed to two of the nearer dunes, which were so close together that they had almost fused into one. The heads sticking out from the oily sand were turned toward one another and were nodding vigorously as if in agreement with one another, although (as far as I could tell) they weren't actually saying anything.

"Hey!" I said to Holden, my reticence dissolving because of my surprise. "I recognise those two."

"They were members of your own profession," confirmed Lord Holden. "They've been here for some time now."

"I didn't even know they were dead," I said.

"Don't quibble," he advised, kindly. "Or you might end up inside one of those dunes yourself one day."

"What are they here for?" I asked.

"They are expiating one of their sins. They once wrote a book called..."

"I remember it," I assured him. "I'd never have thought it would end them up here though."

"Their problem was that they weren't quite sure whether they intended it seriously," said Holden. "And, if so, how seriously. In many ways, you see, it was rather a vicious book. There were a lot of ideas they didn't like, and a lot of people they didn't like, and they took a rather malicious delight in consigning them all to perdition, with some very nasty tortures thrown in."

"Well," I said, charitably, "that's only human nature. It was a bit strong in places. Like that bit about the teacher who was trying to comprehend the trouble some of her pupils had with their reading. And it was a bit harsh on Kurt Vonnegut. And the bit about Ted White was bordering on the unforgiveable. But a lot of people liked the book."

"No doubt," replied Holden. "But it's a matter of emphasis. Was the book a joke, or was it serious? That's the crucial question. As my good friend the Virginian once pointed out, there are certain things you can only say if you're smiling - you have to smile to show that you don't really mean them, you see. Now, if the book was a joke, then all the nasty things they said could be excused as jokes in rather poor taste. Satire, I suppose, if you care to stretch the meaning of the word a little. But if, on the other hand, they were pretending to make some kind of philosophical statement about the problem of evil, and trying to do some serious moralising - well, that's a different matter."

"Why?" I asked, innocently.

"Because then all the nasty things they said about people? Ted White is a good example - become purely and simply spiteful."

"And which way did they intend the book?" I asked.

"It's hard to say," replied the noble lord. "If it was a joke, you'd expect an ending which made that clear - when the lead character wakes up in hospital, say, and realises that it's all been a dream. If it were serious you'd expect quite a different ending, which tries to say something about the situation in hell."

"Well, if that's the case," I said, "it should be easy enough to decide."

"Not really," sighed Holden. "They changed the ending between editions. Maybe they just thought the old 'And then he woke up' was too banal. Or maybe they thought the second ending really was better. It's difficult to say."

"Why not ask them?" I suggested.

"We did," he replied. "That's what they're discussing so earnestly. They've been at it for centuries, and they just can't make up their minds. It won't matter soon, anyhow. They'll have served their term. This is only purgatory, you know. No tortures.... it's just rather boring."

"Who are the people inside all the other dunes?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, "they're only here for a little while. They're all the reviewers who thought that the book was a philosophical statement of great import. They'll all be out in a matter of hours. Except for Philip Stephenson-Payne. He got an extra day for being unbearably pretentious and peppering his review with quotes from Dante in the Italian."

"Everybody makes mistakes," I said, charitably.

"True," admitted Holden, "but we don't all brag about them quite so loudly. Anyhow, I must leave you now and get back to my eminent Victorians. Can you find your own way out?"

Absent-mindedly, I nodded. After all, one can't presume on the good nature of a member of the aristocracy, can one?

I stood and watched the two authors nodding away for several more minutes. They were certainly agreeing a lot. I wondered what they were agreeing about, but as they never made a sound I decided eventually that I'd probably never know. So I turned away and began to walk back along the beach.

Pretty soon, I began to worry.

Basically the situation is this: either this is a dream, and I'll wake up, or it isn't, in which case I'm stuck here for God only knows how long to expiate crimes I don't even know I'm charged with. Either way, I have one urgent question.

When do I get out?

BRIAN STABLEFORD: APRIL 1ST 1978.

* * * * *

The next short story should perhaps be printed with a disclaimer (though if you read as much Phil Dick as I you probably feel most 'figureheads' are simulacra anyway). So, here we go.... These characters are fictitious, and any relationship between them and real people accidentally bearing the same names is purely coincidental.

yin, yang and jung; three galactic enigmas by brian aldiss

I. Some Transitory Characteristics of Matter

The complex interweaving of particles and fluxes which constituted Galaxy ZN989 maintained its viability by the interplay of two opposed but complimentary forces. Those forces were centrifugal and gravitational: inwards, outwards: yin and yang.

Between them, those forces, allied but ever warring, imposed a symmetry to which all else was subservient, whether conscious or unconscious. They represented the Un-named, Division-through-Unity-unity-through-division.

It was this Un-named which had activated the cosmos since its birth. No, more than activated - motivated.

Now the universe was long beyond its prime. Of all the splendid blazing galaxies, only ZN989 remained, together with one other. That other was the unknown KA9, a fair, fragile creation with the long tresses of its stars and gases spinning out across superannuated voids. ZN989, eon by eon, moved towards KA9.

Many a galactic year ago, the inhabitants of planets in ZN989 had said a long farewell to planetary habitation. Among the suns of their inner systems, they had soon shed the limitations of physical form. Through their own version of the Un-named, of Division-through-Unity-unity-through-division, they had multiplied, swarming throughout the tousled heart of ZN989.

Gradually, that heart had responded to their solicitations.

Their galaxy had opened to them. Now, the inhabitants were the galaxy; ZN989 possessed them, they possessed ZN989. They were one - yet, through the supreme principle, their voices still were many, conflicting yet assisting.

"Time is finished and the Great Comedy played," cried one set of voices in radiant blue. "It is undignified to linger in the theatre when the play is over. Let us go mannerly into the long night!"

"But we are both theatre and play," cried the ultraviolet. "We can still fill that long night with other players. So much is owed to the everlasting principle of renewal."

Although the argument was long protracted, eventually the ultraviolet won the case. All united in a tremendous surge of libido which caused ZN989 to pulsate with fresh life.

Suddenly the universe to its farthest unattainable perimeter was filled with a great cry. Two galaxies moved together and began to mate.

II. What's Happening To Your Lawn This Month

The convoy of big black cars swept down Whitehall towards Parliament Square. Police on motorbikes led the way. They snarled to a stop before Westminster Abbey.

From the second car, police dragged a struggling man half-smothered in a blanket. With a bit of rough handling and propelled by two uniformed toughs, the prisoner was moved quickly into the Abbey. Behind, crowding in, came grim-faced men from the other vehicles. The Archbishop of Canterbury was prominent among them. There were other famous faces too - scarcely recognisable, having dropped the masks of cloying amiability they wore for television or public appearances.

The blanketed figure was led into the nave. A police inspector hastily unlocked the iron grill door to the nave; the dark procession poured down the steps. Emerging among the tombs, members of the police knocked their prisoner on to a chair and whipped the blanket from his face. They tied his hands to the chair-back with wire.

The prisoner was a tall boney man with greying hair. His face was red and covered with sweat and blood. He blinked at his captors apprehensively. His spectacles had been broken.

The Archbishop stepped forward and confronted the prisoner.

"Okay, you know what you're here for. Why did you do it? We want a full explanation and we want it fast."

"I don't know what you're talking about, chum."

The Archbishop brought his gloved hand ringingly across the prisoner's face.
"Take that, my son, and start talking."

A thickset hairy man elbowed him away. It was Mr. Denis Healey, called so swiftly from 11 Downing Street that he was still in his long woolen underwear.

"Let me handle this." He turned to the prisoner. "Now, you, we mean to have a full explanation before Parliament sits, so spill the beans."

"Piss off, you and your pay policy both!"

At a signal from one of Mr. Healey's eyebrows, Sir Robert Mark moved behind the prisoner and started to grind knuckles into his temples. A slow flow of saliva ran down Mr. Len Murray's chin; this was the sort of TUC business he enjoyed.

"Right-ho," said Mr. Healey. "Now perhaps you'll tell us - why did you write that story about two galaxies mating? You've got four minutes to answer."

"Make him settle for three-and-a-half," said Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Len Murray's floosie. Nobody took any notice of her.

The prisoner looked about him distractedly. "It was a science fiction story, wasn't it? I mean, it was a sci-fi tale, like, wasn't it? Just a bit of SF. Don't blame me, blame Corgi books, mate."

"There was an unfortunate accident at Corgi books last night," Michael Foot sniggered, brushing his hair back. "The place burnt down. So much for freedom of speech."

Eyebrows signalled, knuckles ground into temples.

"Start making sense. You know we don't happen to like stories about mating - it's bad for the country's four million strikers. Why didn't you just write about two people doing it? Why two galaxies? No one's ever heard of such a thing. What will our partners in NATO think? Or the Arabs, come to that."

"That's what science fiction's all about," the prisoner protested. "Two people mating, ordinary fiction; two galaxies mating, science fiction. It's a literature of change, isn't it? Besides, that story's not about sex - I'm not Phil Jose Farmer, you know - it's about the eternal principle of what the Chinese refer to like as yin and yang, opposed but complimentary, you know what I mean."

"Are you a secret agent for China?" asked Mrs Thatcher. Nobody took any notice. She removed her wickerwork hat and wiped her brow with a red and black spotted handkerchief.

"Go on," said Mr. Cliff Richard, thrusting his face at the prisoner. His breath smelt of lettuce.

"Crikey, what else do you want me to say? That's what science fiction's all about, guv. Look, I write a story about some poor bleeder's front lawn turning brown, that's a domestic comedy - who's interested? I write a story about everyone's lawn in the whole ruddy world turning brown, that's a catastrophe, that's sf - everyone's interested. It's the principle of the thing, if you catch my meaning."

"There's a whole raft of folk - poor Blacks, for instance - who don't have front lawns, owing to social injustice," said Ronald Reagan gloomily. He had flown over specially for the occasion and was still in Bermuda shirt, shorts and sneakers.

"Go on," said the Archbishop, waving his crook menacingly at the prisoner. "We want to know why you wrote that bit of filth."

"What else can I say? Bloke next door dies, that's nothing. Everyone dies, that's science fiction. Like it's socialism, isn't it? Uniformity. Big scale stuff. Like it's looking ahead to the World State. The triumph of the proletariat. Everyone's lawn goes wrong at the same time, everyone mates at the same time."

"Not necessarily in that order, surely," said Mrs. Whitehouse, peeling a banana and slipping the tip into her mouth.

"You got to have order, same as Marx said," the prisoner declared. "What's happening in the world is bigger and bigger units all thinking as one, the individual subservient to the state, and eventually the state taking over the world. I mean it all goes back to Hobbes and Rousseau, doesn't it?"

"I find this fascinating," said Sir William Ryland, scratching his crutch. "I had no idea. Pray do go on."

"Like it's a question of vision," said the prisoner. He peered out at the circle of bestial faces, which seemed to waver in the dim smoky light of the torches. "I mean to say, sf writers believe that size is everything, and that eventually everyone is going to have to worship Size, see what I mean? The individual won't count for nothing no more. That's why we go on about the universe, cause it's so big it's going to extinguish individuality. No more of the existential pain of oneness."

"Und where will yin und yang be then?" inquired Dr. Kissinger, superciliously slipping his hand into Mrs. Thatcher's.

"You got me there, squire," said the prisoner, shaking his head. "Nowhere, I shouldn't wonder."

"Nowhere!" screamed Mr. Denis Healey. "You hear that, everyone? If this rogue had his way, he and his kind of rabble would abolish yin and yang. What would happen to Right Wing Socialism then? Are we going to stand for that?"

The vaults rang with their wrathful rejoinder. The late Jeremy Thorpe gave the kiss-of-life to one of the police dogs.

"You got me wrong," cried the prisoner, "Honest. I got nothing against yin and yang. I like yin and yang. What I always say is it's the vital male-female principle. I made it the hero of my bloody story, didn't I?"

But his voice was drowned in the general hubbub. The Archbishop grabbed Mr. Healey and Mr. Richard by the shoulders and dragged them to one side.

"What are we going to do brethren? This makes it very awkward for us, as I suppose you realise, Swelp me, it could be the finish of civilisation as we know it. A world state would be the end of parasites like us, and after all, everything these sci-fi boyos write comes true sooner or later."

"You mean - even the mating of galaxies?" asked Mr. Cliff Richard, his neat little jaw dropping.

"Maybe he was talking metaphorically there," said the Archbishop uneasily, taking the stub of an unsmoked cigar from behind his ear and lighting it.

"I've got a brilliant idea, Mr Archbishop," said Mr. Healey. "Now that the Americans and Russians have signed their Co-Prosperity Pact, the Chinese are coming into the EEC, as I expect you've probably guessed. And the British are about to sign the biggest, craftiest trade deal ever with the Chinks - right under the noses of the flaming Berries and Frogs. Its terms are highly favourable to us - we're going to sell all British-made cars to the Chinese and they're going to sell us all theirs. Also, we're going to accept one hundred top Chinese technologists to help us with our industrial problems while we send them one hundred British artists to help with their education problems. Well - let's send them all our science fiction writers, Priest, Brunner, Harrison, the lot."

"S'pose they don't eat Chinese nosh?" asked the Archbishop.

"SF writers swallow anything. Let them sit around in China predicting their catastrophes and lawn-failures and mass-sex and things over there. It could be because everything they write is coming true over here that Britain's in such disastrous trouble at present. What you think, Cliff, laddie?"

But the others were pummelling Mr. Healey on the back even before he could finish. Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Whitehouse were kissing him where it mattered. Bobby Charlton offered him a soiled liver sausage sandwich.

As for the prisoner, he was seized up and the blanket reinstated, despite his protests. Amid the cursing of police, the barking of police dogs, and the noises from little Mervyn Bragg's mouth-organ, the prisoner was dragged and cuffed up the steps and out into the dazzling light beyond the Abbey. Delighted crowds of tourists, predominantly yellow in skin-shade, watched as he was packed into one of the automobiles.

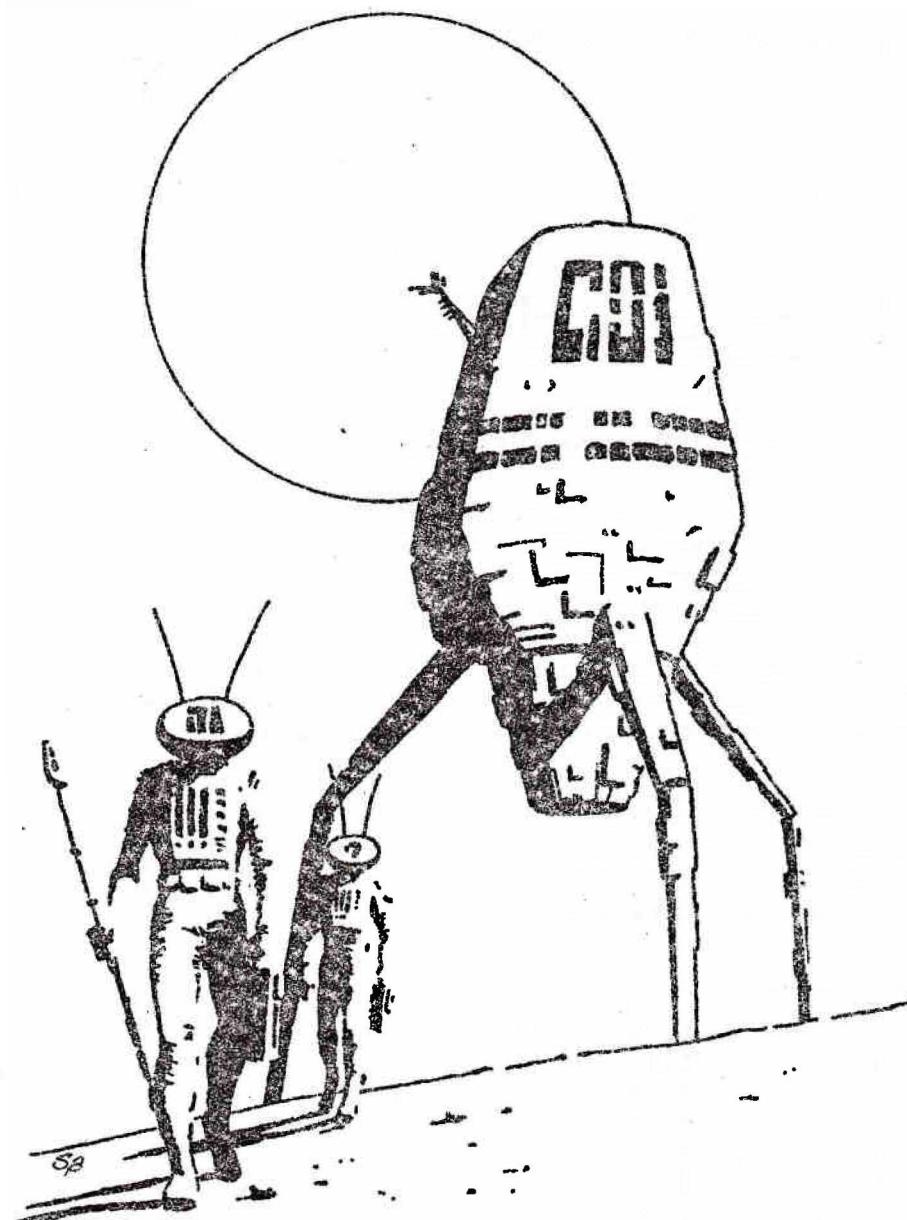
"Chines Embassy, and step on it!" yelled Healey to the driver.

Overhead, without any fuss, two galaxies moved together and began to mate.

III. No Happiness For The Happiness-Bringer

It was a bad black time and who could tell where the adverse influences came from...

In the long grey World Government flier sat Mao Kwo Lajos, Commander of Universal Happiness Enforcement, wearing his simple denim uniform. His lean hands were folded in his denim lap. He stared down at the distant ground, seemingly unmoving some twelve kilometers below the wings.



"Let us call off the hunt for today, comrade commander," said his aide. Mao Kwo Lajos' head inclined slightly in negation. Day after day, he had searched thus, unable to rest for longing.

Following the Period of Dying Lawns, when grass all round the globe had turned brown and died, great changes had overcome the precarious societies of Earth, just as prodromically implied in the Imported Writings. Civilisations had tumbled like rotten weddingcakes. China had stepped in and taken over government after broken government. Many millions of people had perished, but the Chinese cadres had upheld world order. Now there was only one state, the World State. It was neither white, nor Christian, nor democratic; but it ruled from Greenwich to Hawaii, and from the dreary shores of the Lincoln Sea at the North Pole to the shattered coasts of Berkner Island at the South; and, wherever it ruled, there went Universal Happiness, reinforced by firm decree.

Yet Mao Kwo Lajos looked down, seeking his lost white love, Kay.

The consciousness-detector at his elbow never flickered. No-one was down there. The ground fled by, untenanted.

"She must be there somewhere," he said, half-aloud. "I have to find her. She is the yin of my yang..."

The forests below marked what had been England. Even at this height, one could see how tall mesh fences divided the entire forest into kilometer-square compounds. No-one could make progress across the land. Yet somewhere - somewhere was the girl to whom his soul went out. It was a bad black time and who could tell where the adverse influences came from.

"One hour more of daylight," murmured the aide. Tomorrow they must return to duty.

Even the wisest man could not say why happiness never came when sought. Forces too vast for man controlled his corporate psyche.

There was no life below.

Far above and about was life. Two galaxies were slowly drifting apart, withdrawing, disengaging.

Post coitum omne animal triste.

Brian W. Aldiss (1977)

* * * * *

Slaughterhoused -

Bruce Ferguson looks at the books of Kurt Vonnegut.

I find Kurt Vonnegut Jnr. an entertaining, yet enigmatic literary figure. In his writing career he has crafted some intelligent and wonderful tales and he has earned plaudit from many sources both within and beyond the sf genre. He became head guru for the counter-culture and yet seemed unaware of this -- he was surprised to be asked by members of JEFFERSON AIRPLANE to assist in their Starship project. Vonnegut appears to seek the anonymity which surrounds Kilgore Trout (a character of his creation -- **and used by Phil Farmer in VENUS ON THE HALF SHELL), while continuing to excell at storytelling.

Vonnegut's sf writing is the very antithesis of the 'Space Opera' which has proliferated in the genre. Doc Smith may have a Ph.D. and write "the greatest game of cops and robbers in the galaxy" but Vonnegut was a lowly PR man and writes of people and technology; their conflict and the inevitable victory.

Vonnegut has written eight novels to date:

PLAYER PIANO	1952
THE SIRENS OF TITAN	1959
MOTHER NIGHT	1961
CAT'S CRADLE	1963
GOD BLESS YOU, MR ROSEWATER	1965
SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE	1969
BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS	1973
SLAPSTICK	1976

In addition he has published plays, stories, poetry, TV scripts, assorted articles and reviews, and two anthologies of his short stories (CANARY IN A CAT HOUSE; 1961 - is now almost impossible to obtain, though most of the stories re-appear in WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE; 1968, which is considerably larger and just as varied.)

Also mentioned in this overview is the Vonnegut miscellany, WAMPETERS, FOMA & GRANFALLONS (1975), and two published plays HAPPY BIRTHDAY, WANDA

JUNE(1973) and BETWEEN TIME AND TIMBUKTU (1975). The former is soon to be a film starring Rod Steiger and Susannah York and the latter is a space fantasy including elements from many Vonnegut tales.

Vonnegut frequently re-uses elements in his stories: Kilgore Trout is a prolific sf writer who is read, admired, praised and met in several novels whilst the inhabitants of the planet Tralfamadore play a key role on several occasions, as do members of the Rumfoord family. But don't get the idea that there is any coherent connection between any of his novels. They remain distinctly brilliant, amusing and independent. I would recommend a reader start with SIRENS and CAT'S CRADLE, then read all the others in any order at all.

WELCOME TO THE MONKEYHOUSE:

In this anthology of short and very short stories there are tales which are definitely sf. Others certainly are not, while others lie in the grey area between. The stories have been culled from a variety of sources: Esquire, Playboy, F&SF, Ladies Home Journal and many more.

Vonnegut may tell a story as a seller and installer of storm windows. Using this medium he can give insights into 'life' as he tells us of middle class America. 'The Hyannis Port Story' begins:

"The furthest I ever sold a storm window was in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, practically in the front yard of President Kennedy's summer home!" Then he continues to tell of the reaction of the established Rumfoords to the newly arrived Kennedys. Topical when it was written (1963).

The dreams, aspirations and behaviour of middle-America is Vonnegut's forte: the McClellans (Vonnegut's neighbours) desire 'More Stately Mansions'. Firehouse Harris (alias Herbert Foster) is content with his present dual identity as he shuns the benefits of 'The Foster Portfolio'.

With a higher sf element are 'Tom Edisons Shaggy Dog' (a genuine and excellent shaggy dog story), 'Report on the Barnhouse Effect' (about the ultimate weapon), 'Epicac' (very dated, about a large computer losing in love), and 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow' (preserving and prolonging life's problems -- and, incidentally, the title of an episode within Epitaph on KING CRIMSON'S first album).

Another frequent theme is that of identity. 'Where I live' reads like an essay for a school assignment. 'Who Am I This Time?' asks the actor who immerses himself in the role of his latest play. Then he falls in love with the Loading Lady. 'Harrison Bergeron' begins: "The year was 2081 and everybody was finally equal". Thus the big danger of equality is that of reducing everyone to the lowest common denominator. Harrison is the prophet telling people to drop their burdens, and his rejection of society is typical of many of Vonnegut's heroes. His fate likewise.

PLAYER PIANO:

This was Vonnegut's first novel and it presents a bleak picture of a future world that is popular with sf writers; a highly automated world with only the elite employed. The difference between this novel and those by other writers is the lack of emphasis on technical details and the HOW of the world. The WHAT and WHO are enough to make the reader ask WHY.

Dr Paul Proteus is the book's hero. He resists the oppression and in the end, like Harrison Bergeron, loses everything. The omnipresent Sha of Bratpuhr provides some stunning observations as he tours the factories at Illium, N.Y. (which is also the setting for 'A Deer In The Works' from WTTMH).

SIRENS OF TITAN:

After a lapse of about five years, Vonnegut's second novel is his most humourous and sf-ish. It lies somewhere amidst the future histories of Heinlein, Bester or Brunner. Similarities can be seen between Winston Niles Rumfoord and Heinlein's Lazarus Long or Jubal Harshaw. Rumfoord, however, is far closer to the Almighty.

It is difficult to say much about this book without spoiling everything for the reader. The book contains divergent aspects: interplanetary war and romance, german batball, prophesy and religious crusades, (space) ship-wreck and the nature of time.

The sirens of the title, like everything else, are part of a massive joke played on mankind.

MOTHER NIGHT:

Certainly not sf, but an attempt to show the horror of war and WW2 in particular. Vonnegut was a POW in Dresden during WW2 and witnessed the Allied bombing of the city.

In the introduction to my edition of this book the moral of the story is stated: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be." Two more morals are: "When you're dead, you're dead" and "Make love when you can. It's good for you."

Howard W. Campbell Jnr. (any relation to John I wonder?) is a novelist and playwright who returns to Nazi Germany as a spy for the Allies. As the war progresses he becomes a notorious propagandist, while communicating his messages.

The book operates on three time scales. Most immediate is Howard's internment in a Jerusalem cell and the narration of his diary. The other two are his post-war pursuit and earlier pre-War events. As the book develops the reader gains sympathy for Campbell, who is fully aware of the atrocities he commits and the reasons for doing so.

Be warned -- this book is not sf. But it is still a powerful tale.

CAT'S CRADLE:

"Nothing in this book is true!". So begins the Book of Bokonon, Bokonon being the chief prophet of Bokononism. Vonnegut has turned his highly perceptive vision upon religion and created his own 'ism' -- complete with doctrines, documentation, prophet and rites.

Bokonon is a fugitive from authority on the island of San Lorenzo. The president of San Lorenzo is his partner and himself a Bokonist, although he has banned the religion and outlawed Bokonon. Only thus can the religion thrive.

But while Bokononism is the hero of the book, the villain must be ice-nine. It is blue-white and has a melting point of one-hundred and fourteen point four degrees Fahrenheit. When immersed in water it transforms the lot into ice-nine. The developing properties of ice-nine and Bokononism conflict and struggle until the book's conclusion where victory is wrought. (This book commences with the writer announcing that he is writing a book called the day the world ended. The book was to be factual.)

GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER :

The favourite writer of Eliot Rosewater is Kilgore Trout. Eliot is a millionaire, heirless, and can afford to behave in an eccentric manner. His eccentricities also suit Norman Mushari, who is determined to remove Eliot as chairman to the Rosewater Foundation.

The humour is not as intense as Vonnegut's other novels and the sf content is low, but this is still an excellent story. It is full of quotes from Trout's novels and stories and one quote from VENUS ON THE HALF SHELL was the blurb on my edition of Trout's (Farmer's) full length version of the novel.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE:

Nominated for a Hugo in 1970, this book provides the summation of all Vonnegut's early writing. If Vonnegut stopped writing after this book he would be regarded as twice the genius he is today. Since this book he can only produce scant imitations and is forced to revel in his past glories and successes. Much of the light-hearted humour of SIRENS or CAT'S CRADLE has been replaced by a dark and doomy pessimism. The book does have its lighter moments, however, irony being the most frequent form of humour.

This book is most similar to MOTHER NIGHT; both deal with Nazi Germany in WW2 in one of the time scales of either novel. Elements are successfully borrowed from other novels of Vonnegut's as well.

Billy Pilgrim is: the book's hero; a prisoner of war in Dresden; an up-and-coming optometrist who marries the boss' daughter; mate of pornographic movie starlet Montana Wildhack; exhibit in a zoo on the planet Tralfamadore; and a prophet about his own fate (and unable to do anything about it!)

This book is partly sf, partly autobiographical and is difficult to analyse. It is, however, a delight to read.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS:

Vonnegut's fiftieth birthday present to himself is a kaleidoscopic narrative tracing events leading up to a meeting between Vonnegut, Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover. Eliot Rosewater has an important behind-the-scenes role to play too!

Full of cartoons, anecdotes and (occasionally) plot, this shows Vonnegut to be as playful at 50 as he was when he wrote SIRENS or CAT'S CRADLE.

WAMPETERS, FOMA & GRANFALLOONS:

This recent (1975) book is more of a miscellany than WTTMH. It could be described as a collection of essays by Vonnegut but is also more than that and may be regarded as a summary of Vonnegut's philosophy.

The book appears to be St Vonnegut's Gospel until the final article is reached (Playboy Interview). This discussion is the coup de grace of the book. Within two pages Vonnegut tells his audience "you understand of course that everything I say is horseshit". This is a book to be taken seriously - if you dare! He is an incurable pessimist who is said to "put bitter coatings on sugar pills" (he says it himself here).

The composition of this collection is varied: several speech transcriptions, travel (Brief Encounters on the Inland Waterway), a criticism of Nixon and the divine rights of Presidents, reviews of books (science, politics and sex), contemporary tragedy (Biafra: A People Betrayed), politics, and sf (Science Fiction and Fortitude). Throughout the book Vonnegut's pessimism is a dark cloud, at least on the horizon, but usually around the reader's head; threatening and ominous.

The preface describes how the collection came to be compiled -- a result of interest in THE VONNEGUT STATEMENT. This collection does provide an excellent sample of Vonnegut's non-fiction and makes a perfect complement to WTTMH as a display of his short prose.

BETWEEN TIME AND TIMBUKTU or PROMETHEUS-5:

By about 1970 Vonnegut had little that was new to say. This book is most illustrative of his self-consumption. It is a TV play structured like the creatures from THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU. Vonnegut, like Dr Moreau, cut up and assembled all sorts of grotesque new creatures. Vonnegut's impossible creature lived for a while in the form of this script.

Mr Stoney Stevenson of Indiana wins a cereal jingle contest which has a first prize of a ride aboard the Prometheus-5 -- a rocket which is launched into a chronosynclastic infundibulum. Stoney is a poet and once in the sci (I'm not writing that phrase again!) he meets characters from other Vonnegut novels: Bokonon on the Island of San Lorenzo; Dr Paul Proteus on Trial at Ilium, N.Y.; Dr Hoenikker freezing bodies; Diana Moon Glampers and Harrison Bergeron and the handicapped ballet dancers; and, in conclusion, the dead images of Wanda June and Hitler.

The book is an over-size paperback with a generous number of photographs from the programme inserted into the script.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (the movie):

The Hugo Award has eluded Vonnegut since the early days of his writing career. In 1960 THE SIRENS OF TITAN was nominated and in 1964 CAT'S CRADLE was beaten by Simak's WAY STATION (a sort of consolation prize was a telegram to Kurt from Harlan Ellison). In 1970 SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE was defeated by Ursula LeGuin's THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Since then Vonnegut has not appeared in the novel category of the Hugos and only twice otherwise in different categories -- both as dramatic presentation nominations in 1973. BETWEEN TIME AND TIMBUKTU (a TV show) and the movie of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE were both nominated and the latter won the Hugo for the category.

Cinema, competently handled, is the only medium which could possibly represent the kaleidoscopic tale better than the book. The time-tripping is expertly handled, the cast is extremely competent and the setting(s) realistic. The different ages of Billy Pilgrim provide a complete series of individuals. Valerie Perrine is a suitably pornographic Montana Wildhack, the voice and setting of Tralfamadore and the war years at Dresden are well handled, and even Howard Campbell Jr makes an appearance as a Nazi superman in a colourful, symbolic costume. The time-tripping is not as incoherent as can appear in some movies but is comprehensive to anyone, whether or not they have read the book.

The book, like the movie, is a collection of emotions and plots. There is the tragedy of the stolen teapot, Mrs Pilgrim's frequent promises to loose weight, the irony of her death by carbon monoxide poisoning after one of the most destructive car chase scenes in the movie. It is a film to make you laugh, cry and, most importantly, think. See it if it appears nearby.

THE VONNEGUT STATEMENT:

Edited by Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer.

In conclusion I would like to mention this book which consists of a series of articles by renowned critics on Vonnegut (all pre BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS however), which also includes an excellent bibliography.

I can see how the need for such a book arose in concept but I do find some of the articles objectionable -- particularly a chapter by Karen and Charles Wood which asks and answers the question: "When is a science fiction writer not a science fiction writer?". The answer given is 'when the writer is beyond science fiction': they then proceed to claim that Vonnegut qualifies.

Vonnegut's popularity is increasing and there are even college courses on him in the US. Thus the academic elite intellectualise Vonnegut and this

book provides a start to the volumes of analysis which will arise about the author. If you enjoy studying Vonnegut this book will be of help, but my personal opinion is that Vonnegut is a writer to be enjoyed rather than studied academically.

Various chapters of this book consist of articles written by critics and reviewers. They occasionally provide insights into Vonnegut's life and/or views, but on the whole they read like a selection of essays requested by a high school english teacher.

SLAPSTICK: or LONESOME NO MORE:

I have recently read a condensed version of Vonnegut's most recent novel in the September 1976 edition of PLAYBOY magazine. The book concerns the memoirs of the last president of the United States, but, as with all of Vonnegut's books, it deals with slightly more than just the main theme.

The excerpts show that Vonnegut's writing style has not radically changed. So if you have read and enjoyed all of his other books you may enjoy this when the full-length novel comes out.

I would like to note, however, that PLAYBOY do not appear to be able to successfully condense Vonnegut's tale without losing a lot of vitality and playfulness. But then I don't suppose any other magazine could do it either. One enjoys the totality of Vonnegut's stories rather than specific episodes.

BRUCE FERGUSON (New Zealand; September 1977).

The above was reprinted from the excellent New Zealand fanzine NOUMENON (double issue 16/17: Sep 77). NOUMENON is available from Brian Thurogood at Wilma Road, Ostend, Waiheke Island, Hauraki Gulf, New Zealand. Rates: NZ\$12 for 12 Issues (Airmail), NZ\$6.50 (Seamail). Well worth the price...

SLAPSTICK, or Lonesome no more By Kurt Vonnegut Jr.
Panther; 1977; 75p; 186pp; ISBN: 586 04012 9.

Reviewed by David Wingrove.

Vonnegut's most recent novel is the usual miscellany of outrageous ideas, touching insights and marvellously comic writing. Vonnegut's strength has always been his ability to say in three words what others take two hundred pages to express. He is at his most incisive in this novel, and it is a genuine delight to have something in one's hands that both disturbs the placid, sluggish tides of our thought and makes us fall about laughing. We are given two 'monsters', born of very rich parents. Thought to be mongoloid in intelligence as well as appearance, they are locked away in a country retreat where they learn to drool and babble because it is 'expected of them'. In secret they develop a precocious and startling intelligence; being two halves of a single brain, brought together in the act of animal copulation to spawn a higher thinking faculty. There is pathos in this situation and a great deal of knowledge of human inter-reaction.

"There were thousands of books in the mansion. By the time we were ten, we had read them all by candlelight, at naptime or after bedtime - in secret passageways, or often in the mausoleum of Elihu Roosevelt Swain.

But we continued to drool and babble and so on, whenever grownups were around. It was fun.

We did not itch to display our intelligence in public. We did not think of intelligence as being useful or attractive in any way. We thought of it as being simply one more example of our freakishness, like our extra nipples and fingers and toes.

And we may have been right at that. You know?
Hi ho. " (Page 42)

The language, as ever, is simple. The messages are spelt out as if the author were tapping a blackboard with a long ruler: Here is the Human Race, as ridiculous as it is; see how it treats its freaks, its cast-offs, its odd-balls. But it isn't simply a comic catalogue of such types; the book develops into an experiment in social fantasy. Vonnegut lets his freak, Wilbur Swain, become President of the United States of America (after the fall, caused by the fuel crisis). He creates artificial family groupings to replace the old groupings of profession, blood-tie, politics etc. His election button has the simple slogan 'Lonesome No More'. It is a symbol of the book.

And in the end there is Wilbur, the aged but hardly senile man, looking back on his life, telling his story and making wry observations in true Vonnegut fashion:

"Waiting around for more people is just about all there is for People in Heaven to do." (Page 112)

It is even unfair to quote from this book. As Bruce Ferguson states, it is impossible to view a Vonnegut novel as a sum of parts, only as a totality. There is perhaps less pessimism here, or if not less, then a far more mellow form of it. There is an author's prologue thrown in that gives insights into Vonnegut's attitudes to his writing (which, if we are to believe him, he hates), that perhaps should be read both before and after the story proper.

Hi ho.

Are you listening? -

An evaluation of the contemporary fantasy of Harlan Ellison
by Tony Richards.

The genre of science fiction has seen many favourite authors, many best-selling writers who, deservedly or not, attract huge audiences and devout followers. It has, in contrast, only brought forth a pitifully small handful of genuine phenomena. Harlan Ellison is one of that handful. In plain empirical terms his record is stunning: six Hugos, two Nebulas, endless nominations and, on top of his numerous accolades from the sf world, a plethora of additional awards in thriller, horror and screenplay-writing categories; a ceaseless cascade of shields and statuettes wrought of royal metals which each say "People like what this man is doing -- and they want him to continue doing it." Twenty-three years since the sale of his first story, the cornucopia of elected honours has still not been torn from Ellison's grasp. His work has been reprinted in sixteen languages, his stories have been bought for practically every 'Best Of The Year' collection existing. But Harlan Ellison commands far more than the ability to collect annual awards; he commands a strong and enduring respect from the genre and from many people outside of it. But how does any one man exact such high dues from the generally indifferent masses of ordinary folk? What makes a single writer so extraordinarily popular? Perhaps the answer lies in this: Harlan Ellison is one of our few living writers.

That may seem an odd thing to say. The sf genre in its active form is comparatively young and most of its bards remain medically alive. They perambulate, occasionally; they breathe, almost without exception; hot blood runs through their veins, in nearly all instances. But then, with one deathlike rattle of the typewriter keys, they'll attempt in their ghoul-like manner to whisk readers away into a world where men are strong and women are dumb, where spaceships thunder across the cosmic trails as gleaming monuments to the superiority of homo-technologicus, where constant battles are waged between evil, repellent aliens and pure-as-the-driven-Wagnerian-snow Mankind. Those writers, in short, reveal themselves as the zombie-folk, the undead, with their proseless death and their tales of derring-do. They are not of this world, and never should be. Harlan Ellison, on the other hand, inhabits this world with both feet on the ground and his typewriter nailed firmly down here with him. He knows the ways of this world, knows the venomous fangs that lie waiting behind that hypnotic mask and, mongoose-like, dodges those fangs and bites back harder.

Perhaps I'm starting too early, for the most recent works of Ellison bear little relation to his early stories. It has been a steady progression.

Ellison's first accepted story was a tale called 'Glowworm' (1956). The late James Blish called it "the single worst story ever published in the field of science fiction", which is an exaggeration to say the least. Parts of that debut tale were pretty awful - the syntax throughout left much to be desired - but even in this average sf yarn from two decades ago there were the first glimmerings of the talent that was to be: tiny snatches of description, scintillae of reasoned comment, soft, subtle murmurings of a writing style that, when matured, would delight his readership. (That story was recently re-published in UNEARTH 1 if anyone is interested in reading it). On the tail of 'Glowworm' came a parade of stories that were, for the most part, average fifties sf --- that is, vastly below average by today's standards. Yet, as with 'Glowworm', the signs are there for anyone with the advantage of hindsight. 'The Sky is burning', for example, remains one tall and shining beacon towards the sensitive, perceptive artist Ellison was to become.

But Harlan Ellison progressed, and progressed fast. As early as November 1958, readers were enjoying stories of the calibre of the excellent 'The Very Last Day Of A Good Woman', while December 1959 saw Ellison snapping at the heels of unquestioned social mores with 'Eyes Of Dust', in which a fast swipe is taken at the beautiful-people syndrome we so overtly worship.

Out of the festering, infertile soil of conventional sf, a strange and solitary mushroom was growing. In the sixties it burst and dispersed its spores to the wind's four corners.

'Try a Dull Knife'; 'Pennies Off A Dead Man's Eyes'; 'Bright Eyes'; 'Repent Harlequin!'; 'Painted'; 'The Beast That Shouted Love'; 'A Boy And His Dog'; 'Shattered Like A Glass Goblin'; 'Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes'; 'The Face Of Helene Bourneau'; 'Ernest And The Machine God'; far, far too many to mention in an introductory piece like this.

Which brings us back to the living Ellison, and, most appropriately, to his work in the 1970's. The foremost reason for Ellison's popularity must be that readers, especially in the States, can relate his stories to the world they find themselves trapped in. Nothing of Ellison's better later work encourages an audience to escape into another galaxy; instead, the man takes his readership by the scruff of the neck to rub its nose hard in the happenings of the real world. He has the courage to do that.

One infamous day in New York, a woman called Catherine Genovese was stabbed brutally to death while thirty-six people looked on and did nothing.

And while the American populace was sitting back, saying: "Isn't that awful. Now, what's for dessert tonight!", Harlan Ellison was writing a story -- 'The Whimper Of Whipped Dogs' -- which will serve to remind those same people of their shame, and hopefully put them off their precious deserts, for a long time to come.

One infamous day in Indo-China, a certain Lt. William Cailey ordered the massacre of an entire village of peaceful Vietnamese -- and large areas of the States rang with applause. Ellison wrote 'Basilisk' as a comeback to those ogres.

In an age when conventional religious beliefs are being questioned, Ellison has written 'The Deathbird'.

In an age when the student movement is collapsing with an apathetic, weary sigh, Ellison has written 'Silent in Gehenna'.

In an age when racism still regularly rears its nasty head, Ellison has written 'Knox'.

While others seek to deny this world by means of soulless power-fantasy or irrelevant literary whimsy, it is reassuring to know that there is at least one writer with his finger on the pulse.

Ellison's sole talent, though, is not purely as a commentator on the evils of modern life -- that factor alone would scarcely make him a good writer. It is, however, the foundation upon which his art rests. There is such a fiery conviction in what he is writing and trying to say to his readers that the wit and sharpness of perception, and unique, bombastic style, seem to follow naturally. He is a scribe of contemporary fantasy, of modern nightmares, and everything in his work is geared towards that up-to-date outlook.

Above all, the characters stand out most clearly in Ellison's work; clear, identifiable people that we have all met at least once in our lifetime. Ellison admits this emphasis on character himself:

"The best plot line in the world is merely a series of incidents without living, breathing people scurrying along that line; conversely, a dud of a story can be compelling if the characters are compelling... if I were denied one or the other, I'd opt for the people over the plot."

An eminent sf writer once suggested that characters have little relevance to an sf story; that most readers simply cannot remember the names of characters from an sf yarn two weeks after reading it. It's an interesting test which seems to hold water, until the reader casts his mind back to Ellison. As Ellison is a living writer, his characters are living people (or even dogs...). Perhaps the two prime examples are Kostner and Maggie from the classic 'Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes'. They are people we have met in the office, at parties, at discoteques; both utterly memorable in that nagging, nervous way. Ellison's characters demand attention, each in his or her own manner.

Nor does Ellison limit himself to a type of character or a type of background. His reputation lies mostly in writing of unpleasant people and violent situations and in a great percentage of his work this holds true; yet few writers have captured the atmospheric beauty of New Orleans as

'On The Downhill Side' captured it, and no writer can be accused of knowing nothing of love who has written a tale like 'Nothing for my Noon Meal'.

So much for the Ellison of today. What of tomorrow's living phenomena?

Perhaps, inevitably, after turning the mirror on the outside world for so long, Ellison's most recent stories are assuming an inward-looking aspect. The 'Harlan Ellison' issue of F&SF (July 1977) bears this out with two deeply reflective stories: one of nostalgia for the writer's childhood --

Jeffty is Five -- and one of soul-wrenching self-analysis in Alive and Well on a Friendless Voyage. Even more introspective, and by far the most successful, has been One Childhood, Furnished In Early Poverty, in which the author travels back in time to visit himself as a child. Of course, Ellison takes the risk of alienating some readers who cannot identify with that kind of childhood, that particular type of upbringing; but Ellison is quite used to taking risks and his vast talent will certainly pull him through. He has always been a presence in his own work in the best possible way. After all, how can a writer hope to survey humanity without counting himself as part of the Race? Whatever direction Ellison takes in later years, his work will always be relevant, always be living.

In the 1958 story 'Are You Listening?', (a personal favourite), middle-aged Albert Winsoki becomes so bland and insignificant, so easily lost and ignored, that he finally descends into unnoticed invisibility. The same fate will never befall Ellison. He will always be by your shoulder as you read his work, screaming, forcing matters to your attention. Are you listening? You cannot help but listen.

Editor's Note: Tony's piece here should be read merely as an introduction to Ellison, not a full-blown critical study. That will come in time. Meanwhile, any comments on Ellison's writing would be welcome by both Tony and I. Feedback is the name of the game...

And now...

THE INFINITY Box

THE PUPPIES OF TERRA by Thomas M. Disch (Panther; 1977; 142pp; 75p; ISBN 0-586-04744-1)

Reviewed by Chris Evans.

"Being a True and Faithful Account of the Great Upheavals of 2037; with Portraits of Many of the Principals Involved; as well as Reflections by the Author on the Nature of Art, Revolution and Theology."

I should, at the outset, admit a bias: I consider Tom Disch to be the finest writer we have in science fiction. Having said this, it must be admitted that The Puppies Of Terra is Disch in a minor key, poking gentle fun at one of the hallowed themes of sf, alien invasion. This novel was originally published in the United States twelve years ago as Mankind Under The Leash (a title only slightly less horrendous than the present offering) and is an



expanded version of his 1965 Worlds Of If novelette "White Fang Goes Dingo". Disch is such an intelligent and articulate writer that even his lighter work must be afforded serious consideration, and while I do not propose to attempt an in-depth analysis of an essentially frivolous work, the novel does have points of interest which merit closer scrutiny.

So, the Earth is invaded by a species of alien beings who exist as electromagnetic energy and are drawn to the planet by the Van Allen radiation belts. The aliens soon become known as the Masters, for they take over many humans as their 'pets'. Their invasion is a benevolent one, however, for they cause no-one any harm and treat their 'leashed' humans in the same way that humans would care for dogs, tending to their physical and emotional needs, and giving them an existence entirely free from responsibilities. The story is narrated by White Fang, a former pet of the Masters who has gone dingo, or joined those humans who have rejected alien domination. White Fang is, however, extremely ambivalent about his freedom, recalling his time as a pet with great fondness. Compared with the aggressive masculinity of some of the dingoes, he comes across as a rather prissy character, the product of a pampered upbringing. He is not averse to addressing his audience as 'dear reader' and he tells his story in the manner of an eighteenth-century novelist, prefacing each chapter with a one sentence summary of its contents, as, for example, the last chapter which is sub-titled "In which I am more or less responsible for saving the World". This semi-archaic mode of presentation (describing the future in the style of the past) is typical of Disch's command of irony, and is effective because it is not overdone (the body of the narrative is written in modern prose). White Fang does, indeed, save the world - not through any audacious act of bravery, but strapped to a pallet with electrodes attached to his head and forced to undergo a series of unpleasant experiences. It would be possible to synopsize the plot of this novel so that it reads like a standard pulp offering, but anyone familiar with Disch's work will be only too aware of how capable this elegant and urbane writer is of transforming the dross of sf into gold.

As in all of Disch's work, at the heart of this novel lies his abiding preoccupation with the question of awareness and autonomy. Although the leashed humans lead happy lives, they are not free, while the Dingoes, for all one might wish to identify with them, are presented as crude, boorish people who lack any culture (unlike the puppies who are fully steeped in all spheres of the arts under the guidance of their electromagnetic patrons) White Fang recognises his obligations to the cause of freedom, but realises that he will sacrifice his happiness if the human rebellion succeeds. It is significant that he is finally converted to the dingo cause by reading a book of his father's, rather than through some dramatic event, and we must assume from this that Disch is asserting the superiority of reason over sentiment. But the options are never clear-cut in any of Disch's fictions, and White Fang remains a reluctant convert, ending up on the side of the victors more or less by default.

If you're interested in what a highly gifted writer can do with a hackneyed sf theme, then I advise you to locate this novel. It's a tremendously enjoyable book and a useful introduction to Disch's work. The humour is low-keyed, but I was grinning out loud (if you'll forgive the expression) towards the end of the book where White Fang and his cohorts, attempting to escape from a dingo prison, stage a vulgarized version of the story of Salome, which they re-entitle Salami and splice with motley songs from various operas. The performance culminates in a striptease finale (the Dance of the Seven Veils) for the edification of the guards, while the (literal) cast of thousands retreats to freedom via the rear of the stage. There's a rumour that Disch is publishing two new novels in the not-too-distant future. Personally, I can't wait.

THE OPIUCHI HOTLINE by John Varley (Sidgwick & Jackson; 1978; £4.95;

Reviewed by Grahaeme Barrasford Young

"It's a joy to read a first novel that positively radiates with its author's talent and shines with his brilliant future. That's the kind of book The Opiuchi Hotline is." Thus Fred Pohl, concluding his *Algol* review of this novel. My copy arrived about two days after I read those glowing words, so I came to it expecting much; and didn't get it. I agree with Pohl's sentiments, but not when he applies them to this book, and so sat wondering whether I was missing something or whether Pohl was. Then, as I sat wondering, came *VECTOR 86*, and the report of James Baen's remarks at Skycon, and all was revealed - what I had just read (stopping only for exciting diversions like TV snooker and sleep) was 'what your audience wants'. If this novel is the best an apparently prestige series can begin with then the sooner Baen's implied dichotomy between British and American writers widens the better. At least The Opiuchi Hotline allows one to give a generalised answer to where the dichotomy lies (we now know what is causing it); British authors continue to write literature with sf themes; American authors continue to write sf themes that happen to look like novels.

The most obvious objection to TOH is quite simply that the author has no style. His story plumps down the pages like so much cold porridge, lacking pace, lacking movement, lacking rhythm, shade, poetry - even the obligatory 'poetic' descriptions are thrown out in exactly the same style as the most clinical detail:

"Lilo (sic) loved working with plants, but was not so fond of cooking. She was teaching Cass and three other children how to do that. They were coming along fine, but in the meantime there were hardly enough hours in a standard day."

"She faced the sun, which was a small but very bright disc just to anti-spinward of Saturn. Saturn itself was a dark hole in space edged by a razored crescent with the sun set in it like a precious stone."

What grace! What sparkle! I don't know - perhaps this is Varley's attempt to bring poetry to the people by disguising it as prose. I came away with the distinct impression that every sentence in the book was exactly the same length; I know it isn't so, but it would at least account for the amazing monotony. On top of this, though great efforts have presumably been made to create a viable future society, the efforts are marred somewhat by a decided sense of deja vu throughout (one gets the feeling that somewhere along the line Delany has described all these cities and locations - better); by the rather odd assumption that in (at least) 500 years the only major social change, discernable, has been sexual; by some slapdash creation - I found the idea of a symbiotic vegetable that has somehow acquired long range and zoom scanner vision more than slightly unbelievable; and by the fact that no attempt has been made to write believable or futuristic dialogue (which in itself is a symptom of the retrograde policies Baen advocated).

The convention of ignoring linguistic change is well enough established for those with no verbal imagination, or with other concerns, to carry on regardless, but not when the author specifies an Anglo/Russian mix, then introduces one 'new' usgae only ('cop' for 'fuck'), and no rhythmic variation at all (well in keeping with the rest of the book.)

Now, it would be unfair to spend so much time on the stylistic failings of the book if the story itself was interesting - but it isn't, particularly, despite the extravagant claims made for it by Pohl and others. Varley has an annoying habit of allowing the drift to degenerate into the mini-adventures of the multiple clone who is the central character - and the degeneration is degeneration because the adventures are pointless; they do not build character, either for the reader or the heroine, because co-existent, non-telepathic (except, out of the ether, at the end), non-communicating, clones

cannot teach each other anything (and even when the clones are consequent they learn nothing from their ancestors) and because the reader knows this the episodes become mere padding. Nor is character built, or even modified, by the utterly arbitrary inner monologues that turn up from time to time, and, except in one case, do nothing to help the story that the author does not promptly repeat in the ordinary narrative. The whole impression is of someone attempting to write sub-standard Delany, even down to ~~s~~ with the frills and excursions, and the last, arbitrary, chapter discarded - the plot, which reads to me like a vague mix of *Nova*, *Babel 17*, Larry Niven, and others, with additions that certainly don't reach me as 'breathtakingly original', which is what Harlin (sic) Ellison is quoted as calling it on the back cover.

What is most worrying about this book, however, is not the general lack of quality (it being no worse than most new material) but that it is the first of a series being presented as the best America can offer, with significant editors (Asimov and Bova) and, in America anyway, luxury packaging, with, on this edition, liberal use of the word 'outstanding' on the cover (though outstanding has other meanings, most of which could justifiably be applied here). Of course, Asimov is not renowned as a stylist, and Bova is not renowned for anything, which might be an excuse for poor writing, if poor writing was any longer excusable. Without, the, generally gratuitous, sex references, TOH could have been written twenty, even thirty, years ago (and in its derivations probably was). If American publishers are so afraid of experiment and mood writing, or even of good writing, that the peak of their aspiration is to regress frantically twenty years as soon as SF achieves some degree of acceptance among those who like their novels to be worth the reading, then those writers who have struggled ~ on both sides of the Atlantic ~ during those twenty years to make such acceptance possible have wasted their time.

LAST ORDERS & other stories By Brian Aldiss (Jonathan Cape; 1977; 223pp; £3.95; ISBN 0 224 01487 0).

Reviewed by David Wingrove.

It is appropriate that Brian Aldiss should have entitled this collection 'Last Orders', for there is a preoccupation with eschatological matters in all of Brian's recent work. Western Civilisation is in decline in most of these tales despite the technological advances that have allowed men to build the tiny zodiacal planets (zeepees) that circle the Earth. It is a decline that has its roots way back in our Renaissance past and that Brian envisages as resulting in a World State.

But there is also a marvellous polemic here beneath the wash of style and plot. Brian discusses the essence of Free Will and the nature of Predestination. Can we chart our own course through life, or is it all already chosen for us? It is a question he explores briefly in several of the tales, especially in his enigma 'The Aperture Moment' and, more covertly, in 'Journey To The Heartland'. In the former we have finches that fly in random patterns about a cage before they fall and die - patterns charted by a computer which then produces a prediction. This is developed more fully in his recent 'A Chinese Perspective' (in the Chris Priest collection ANTICIPATIONS from Faber) where Edward Maine creates a working Predestination Machine. In 'Journey To The Heartland' the question of the cyclic nature of existence is raised. Are we just repeating the patterns of previous generations? Or are the acts of repetition far closer than that - and all our acts mimickries of our earlier actions? The story takes place amidst experiments on the three types of dream - sigma, tau and epsilon - and intimates that we are limited beings, living out predicted courses. 'An appearance Of Life' takes this idea a stage further, where a synthesist, wandering through a vast museum of Man's galactic works, discovers two 'holocaps' (three-dimensional character projections) that are 'related'. Their conversations are cyclic - they have only a limited and predestined

appearance of life. The 'synthesist' learns the 'key' to the mystery of human existence from this - that Man himself is only a more complex 'holocap' created by some higher form. It is a revelation he cannot totally accept. In a sense this theme has been ever present in Aldiss' work from the start. It is charted in 'Not For An Age' (1955), examined in 'Barefoot In The Head' (1969 in novel form) and is finally fully explored in these modern tales.

But it is not only the true nature of existence that Brian speculates upon, but the effects of Social Change upon the Arts. In 'Diagrams For Three (Enigmatic) Stories' he examines the effects on Art of cherishing it too much. Aliens are amongst us (an evolutionary strain of Man) who have culture as their 'devouring interest'. Their surfeit of attention, however, changes the essence of Art. In his conclusion to this enigma, he makes the following auctorial instruction:

" Try to show how difficult life is for people, even for aliens.
 How difficult art is. How it dies when reduced to a formula.
 How art perhaps should be difficult and not have wide appeal. Even how enigmatic the universe is, full of paradoxes and unpredictable side-effects.
 How arbitrary everything is.
 How the aliens are undermining and devaluing what little culture we have simply by cherishing it too much. "

(Pages 69/70)

It is a conclusion that is reached in several places in this book - in 'The Aperture Moment' where Hazelgard Nef creates his machine that 'activates' Pre-Raphaelite paintings and thus destroys their essential ambience.

Before I give the perhaps unfortunate impression that this is nothing more than a book of purely philosophical meanderings, I should add that throughout this collection Brian Aldiss' prose sparkles. In 'Last Orders' there is a delightful undercurrent of humour. 'Creatures Of Apogee' and 'The Expensive Delicate Ship' are both beautiful short fables, richly sketched and delicately told.

There is the interplay of the real and the fictional as Anna Kavan, Holman Hunt and Frankenstein intrude upon several tales to hint at a pantheon of Aldiss' preoccupations. The zeepes are central to many of these tales, their second rennaissance attitudes valuable in creating an objective perspective of near-future Man.

Often Brian dwells in the realm of pure language and metaphor, as throughout 'Three Coins In Enigmatic Fountains' (my personal favourite in this collection). Indeed, like all of Brian's work since BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD it deserves several readings to unearth its full opulence. It is certainly a considerable progression from his last collection, 'The Moment Of Eclipse', itself a beautifully-crafted book. But always with Brian Aldiss it is ridiculous to make too many comparisons as he moves ever onward, experimenting and exploring the stylistic and ideative borders of the genre.

If there is any doubt of the correct, progressive path of Sf, then a glimpse at the innovative, imaginative and stylistically satisfying works of such as Aldiss dispels it. I have no such doubts and this collection of deeply satisfying and often beautiful tales confirms my impression that the Sf that will be remembered in years to come is being produced by those writers (and Aldiss is the prime example) who have chosen literacy and philosophy before the superficial garnishes of slick market effect.

Perhaps this is the last serious Sf collection we shall see from Brian Aldiss. I personally hope it is not. We cannot afford to lose a practitioner of his undoubted skill and imagination. Moreover, the genre needs writers who are not afraid to court unpopularity (in immediate terms) by writing what they visualise and not 'what the people want'.

DYING, OF THE LIGHT by George R. R. Martin (Simon & Schuster; 1977; 365pp; £9.95; ISBN 0 671 22861 7)
 A SONG FOR LYA by George R. R. Martin (Coronet; 1978; 205pp; 85p; ISBN 0 340 22779 6)

Reviewed by Brian Stableford.

George Martin won a Hugo with "A Song For Lya", which he published within three years of beginning his writing career. It is reprinted now as the lead story of his first collection (his second is already out in the U.S.A) and his first novel Dying Of The Light, has been released on both sides of the Atlantic (Gollancz is the British publisher) following the serialisation of an abridged version in Analooq. I think Dying Of The Light - which was published too late in 1977 to be a nominee for this year's awards - will be a leading contender for the 1979 Hugo and Nebula.

With the exception of the title story the contents of A Song For Lya are trivial. The only one which lives, even for a moment, is 'The Second Kind of Loneliness' - a story with a painfully inept structure and a banal conclusion which works in spite of these handicaps because of the sheer intensity of the emotion encapsulated within it. The hero of the story is alone on a space station a long way from anywhere, doing a job which is basically a science-fictional equivalent of that of a lock-keeper. His isolation is little enough compared to his memory of the 'second kind' of loneliness, and it is worth quoting the description he offers here because it is the same emotion which provides the essential core of both 'A Song For Lya' and Dying of the Light:

"It's the loneliness of people trapped within themselves. The loneliness of people who have said the wrong thing so often that they don't have the courage to say anything any more. The loneliness, not of distance, but of fear.

"The loneliness of people who sit alone in furnished rooms in crowded cities, because they've got nowhere to go and no one to talk to. The loneliness of guys who go to bars to meet someone, only to discover they don't know how to strike up a conversation, and wouldn't have the courage to do so if they did.

"There's no grandeur to that kind of loneliness. No purpose and no poetry. It's loneliness without meaning. It's sad and squalid and pathetic, and it stinks of self-pity."

There is a good deal of fiction which reflects this particular species of the sense of alienation, but most of it attracts the accusation from robust-minded critics that it, too, "stinks of self pity". George Martin, however, despite his fascination for the second kind of loneliness, is not a man to wallow in it. Both 'A Song For Lya' and Dying Of The Light are primarily examinations of hypothetical solutions to this kind of predicament. The fact that neither is overwhelmingly optimistic testifies to the awkwardness of the problem, not to the defeatism of the writer. Though they certainly have their seasoning of self-pity the stories have a great deal more to them than that, and the anguish is balanced by some careful creative thinking and some very level-headed contemplation of the emotional issues involved.

'A Song For Lya' concerns the reactions of two telepaths - a man and a woman - to a puzzling situation on an alien world, whose religion requires its followers to become hosts to a parasite which ultimately engulfs them. This absorption brings to the 'cictims' a sense of peace and an expectation of a kind of immortality - fusion with the 'mind' of the parasitic superorganism. The telepaths are asked to discover why humans are becoming converts to the religion, and - inevitably - one of them perceives the reasons only too well. The woman, who is the better empath of the two, decides that the human existential situation, even alleviated by the kind of love that she can share with her partner, has little to offer compared with the sense of union with creation that the alien parasite offers. The story is told by the man, for whom there is no such solution, and who therefore loses even what he has.

Dying of The Light is a very different story, but in terms of emotional predicaments it takes up where 'A Song For Lya' leaves off. Its protagonist has lost his loved one, and is making his lonely way through life when he is summoned to meet her again in the eerie milieu of the story: a bizarre world that is part of a wandering system briefly associated with a sun and thereby warmed into life, but destined for the imminent return of infinite darkness and death. The world, during its brief summer, has been the scene of a great festival, during which half a dozen cultures have built showcase cities, which now provide the derelict sets for the protagonist's personal drama. His beloved is now married to Jaan Vikary, a representative of an alien culture, and thus bound also to his teyn - another male united with him by virtue of a relationship rather more powerful than that of brotherhood. Vikary is the most fascinating character in the book, and its real hero. The attempts of the protagonist to lure away his wife are the least of his problems, which are really concerned with keeping in check the ambitions of others of his race who wish to use the dying world as an arena in which to resurrect the cruel customs of their barbarian ancestors - customs which are still reflected in the sacrosanct pattern of social obligations made concrete in the relationship which binds Jaan to his teyn and to his wife. Dying Of The Light becomes an exotic adventure story with a gaudy background, at times reminiscent of Jack Vance, but in its ambitions it is much more than that: a highly-stylised drama of personal and social relationships which constrain and manipulate people who try to bend or break them. This is the substance of tragedy, and Martin uses it as well as he can. Because of the careful work he puts into the design of his alien culture he almost brings it off, but there is always a jarring note because of the intrusion of the protagonist, who has no real function to fill as an actor, yet cannot be simply an observer. Martin's preoccupation with the predicament of the protagonist often - and never more so than in the inevitable final scene - seems to be dragging attention away from the real heart of the drama, which is the role played by Jaan Vikary. The protagonist and the theme are never really brought together, remaining awkwardly at odds, and this is the one thing that prevents Dying Of The Light from being a truly awesome accomplishment.

George Martin is not, as yet, an outstandingly skillful writer. He will develop his craftsmanship as time goes by. He has everything else that he needs: a powerful visual imagination, an ability to build hypothetical constructions that are solid and convincing. If he has a weakness that he may not be able to overcome it is the dependence which he has so far shown upon a single species of emotional experience. There are writers who have built entire careers on little more than a profound sense of alienation, but the main characteristic of the particular kind of alienation which fuels the emotional intensity of Martin's work is that it is not very profound - it is, in fact, a species of alienation which tends to be readily overcome. Martin may have to discover some other motive force to replace it, but there is every chance that he will. If he does, he may well write the best science fiction of the 1980's.

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE by J. G. Ballard (Penguin; Re-Issued 1977; 211 Pages; 55p; ISBN 0 14 00 2345 3)

Reviewed by Rob Carter.

J. G. Ballard's impact on SF and our concept of what SF is and should be has, of course, been immense. This alone should motivate the uninitiated, through curiosity at least, to 'take in a little'. Penguin have thoughtfully re-issued this collection of his earlier masterpieces so that the latest generation will not have to search too hard.

The anthology is improved by the substitution of 'Prima Belladonna' by the superb story 'The Overloaded Man', and perhaps weakened by the inclusion of what I felt to be a slightly below-par story, 'Thirteen to Centaurus' in place of 'Studio 5, The Stars'.

Perhaps my own appreciation of this book has been coloured a little by nostalgia, since it was a decade ago that Ballard's The Voices Of Time, the American Berkeley edition, trapped my fascination and seemed to open up unguessed pleasures for a schoolboy as yet unfamiliar with the US brand of SF from which this 'New Wave' was divorcing. Consequently my appreciation of the Asimov/Heinlein/~~etc~~ Smith school was not what i might have been.

The first three stories in that Berkely Original were identical with the first three of the current book, and they weave an atmosphere which lingers with the reader for many years. It is possible to be confronted with special situations throughout one's life and identify feelings reminiscent of the flavour of a Ballard story; that is not to say that there has to be any correlation between the actual incidents in the book and events one experiences which cause that sense of atmosphere to manifest itself. It operates on a much more emotional level, and in that sense - a very real sense - Ballard's work is truly haunting.

Honest writers return time and again to their obsessions; and for Ballard reality is very much a part of the head. He is interested in perception, has this moth-candle relationship with synesthesia and he explores the schizophrenias with the dedication of one keenly interested in psychology. His style is highly enjoyable with a surrealism reminiscent of the endless arid landscapes of Slavador Dali.

The Voices Of Time deals with a world suffering from terminal entropy. What better vehicle is there for the demonstration of frustration and despair, inexorable deterioration and the running-down of the Universe?

There is a strange poetical overlay to his writing which leaves you with the impression of glaring white noise and a suspicion that this man fears the sun.

Ballard has a medical background, and he uses his good sense to leave that knowledge where it ought to be; he never obtrudes irrelevant explanation and boring pseudo-scientific justification, and this has led to criticisms that his work is not SF but fantasy. This debate is rather redundant since the need to classify a given story into some convenient compartment is a purely personal thing, and can have no objective use. I prefer to leave nomenclature out of the argument and simply enjoy the stories.

It is Ballard's forte to evoke atmosphere and illustrate poignant situations, and when dished up a delightful collection of fine stories, to dwell overmuch on the cuckoo in the nest (and here I think of page 111 and Thirteen to Centaurus, where the Earth's mass is incorrectly calculated) is to distort the picture.

I do not know to what extent you, the reader, will accept what I say, especially to the extent of actually buying a copy, but if you are currently in possession of 55p, you should go immediately to the nearest large bookshop and get yourself a bargain right now.

In Garden Of Time we have a surrealistic view of the passing of a dynasty, of revolution; it reminded me of the nightmare of the Czar and his family, and the storming of the Winter Palace. Again it deals with efforts to stave off the inevitable, and the unreasonable self delusion that we invest in.

The Sound Sweep: Mangon must support the delusions of Madame Gioconda as she attempts to recapture her escaped past. Ballard sees the sounds, like ocean waves, crashing onto walls, furniture, the floor, subtly imprinting them with memories. The deformed Mangon's job is to erase those memories, erase the past, but when memories are all someone has remaining....?

In The Cage Of Sand, we have two men and a woman who have, for their own intensely private reasons, decided to defy evacuation from a skyfallen

desert; and again the Ballard symbols of sand and too-vivid colours, jewels and tortured fugitives, tangible emotion and a curious sense of time distortion.

The Watch Towers and Chronopolis round off this intelligent anthology, proving that when it comes to astute selection, the boys at Penguin have few peers and a true regard for the genre.

ROADSIDE PICNIC by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (translated by Antonina W. Bouis); Gollancz; 1978; 145pp; £3.95; ISBN 0 575 02445 3.

Reviewed by Chris Evans.

One of the more optimistic assumptions of western science fiction is that when humanity eventually encounters an intelligent extraterrestrial species we will be able to communicate with them on a rational basis. H.G. Wells spoke of "Intellects vast, cool and unsympathetic", yet to read many contemporary sf novels one would assume that any prospective aliens are likely to be no more exotic than a bunch of Mongolian sheep-herders. The paperback shelves are filled with books containing humanoid bipedal beings who have a vocal apparatus amazingly similar to that of a human's, and, even more remarkably, a brain which thinks along similar lines, so that it is merely a question of both parties learning interstellar Esperanto, shaking hands and getting down to negotiations (or declaring ultimatums, as the story demands). It may provide a sense of reassurance to feel that aliens are just as nice or as nasty as we are, but given the variety of evolutionary forms on Earth alone, and the fact that we may be sharing the planet with another sentient species (the cetaceans) with whom we are unable to communicate on anything but the most rudimentary level, it seems likely that any encounter with an alien species would be fraught with communications difficulties. One of the puzzling things about the pattern of UFO sightings which has emerged over the past thirty years is that there is no pattern, and yet the desire to believe that these objects are manifestations of alien activity, and, more importantly, the need to understand the phenomenon in human terms, is tremendously strong: witness the current box-office success of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, which satisfies just these needs. There is, however, a tradition in sf running from Wells through Stapledon to such present-day writers as Ian Watson which recognises the possibility that there may be only limited ground on which intelligences of biologically different heritage may meet. This tradition is also strong in continental sf, with Stanislaw Lem's Solaris being a classic example of the creation of an alien life-form (a sentient ocean) with which humanity is incapable of communicating on a rational level. If we ally to this premise Arthur C. Clarke's dictum that the technology of an advanced civilisation would be like magic to us, we come at length to the subject matter of the Strugatsky brothers' novel Roadside Picnic.

"Roadside Picnic" is, in fact, the euphemism used by a scientist in the book to describe what lies inside the six zones which exist on the Earth's surface following the visit of aliens, who came and went without contacting the human race. Various artifacts litter the abandoned landscapes, and the scientists are naturally keen to get their hands on them. However, within each zone normal physical laws have been changed so that the stalkers, those humans who do venture inside to retrieve the objects, have to move with the caution of men working their way through minefields; but minefields far stranger and more dangerous than any created by human hand. There are areas of gravity distortions, regions where the earth itself has altered in constituency, sudden intensifications of heat, weird crackling sounds, and sinister blotches on the landscape which the stalkers must avoid at all costs. Theories abound which attempt to explain the zones, one of the favourites being that the artifacts were deliberately left behind to enable humanity to master them and 'make a giant technological leap'. The scientist, Valentine Pilman, however, is far more circumspect in his

appraisal. When asked for his views on the Visitation, he warns that "the question comes under the heading of xenology. Xenology: an unnatural mixture of science fiction and formal logic. It's based on the false premise that human psychology is applicable to extraterrestrial intelligent beings." Pilman believes that the aliens' motives are ultimately unknowable simply because they are aliens and have minds which are not isomorphous with ours. Having made this qualification, he then opines that the zones contain the detritus of the alien equivalent of a roadside picnic, that the artifacts are simply the extraterrestrials' "apple cores, candy wrappers, charred remains of the campfire, cans, bottles, somebody's handkerchief, somebody's penknife, torn newspapers, coins, faded flowers picked in another meadow" - in short, rubbish irrelevant to the aliens but as fascinating to us as the residues of our own picnics might be to an animal. This is a somewhat humbling premise, and it's a measure of the Strugatskys' abilities as writers that they succeed in instilling a good deal of humanity into their narrative - for the novel is, above all else, about people, specifically the stalker Redrick Schuhart, and the way in which his life is changed by the zone.

When the story opens Schuhart is working for the International Institute for Extraterrestrial Cultures - the official body which is investigating the artifacts - on the border of the Canadian zone at the village of Harmont. Schuhart is a cynical, self-centred young man who subsides his regular work by making unofficial forays into the zone and selling his booty illegally. He is both fascinated and disgusted by the zone, and his ambivalence grows as the book progresses and most of his fellow stalkers are killed. A rumour persists that amongst the artifacts there is a miracle machine which will grant a person's deepest desires, and when the machine is finally located, it falls to Schuhart to attempt to retrieve it. By this time he has grown so thoroughly sick of the dishonesty and greed which surrounds the salvage operations that it is possible that he is harbouring a death wish for the entire human race. The denouement manages to be both tantalising and illuminating.

Comparisons with Lem are not inappropriate for, like him, the Strugatskys are thoroughgoing sceptics, suspicious of human motivations, yet fascinated by them nonetheless. Schuhart's brash, sardonic voice almost shouts from the pages at times; the prose has a blunt severity which demands attention. The book suffers somewhat from its Canadian locale - the North American vernacular is a little overdone at times, and the characters' penchants for hard liquor and cigarettes seem decidedly more Russian than American in bias. But these are minor flaws which do not really affect the flow of the story. Especially noteworthy is the visit of Richard Noonan to the Schuhart family home (Schuhart's daughter is a mutant and his father is a moulage, a dead person raised to life by the zone) which is a model of restrained and ultimately haunting writing. The closing sections tend to ramble just a little, but overall this is a very good book, passionately written, capably translated, and possessed of a special eeriness which lingers in the mind long afterwards. Introduce yourself to the Strugatskys; you'll find it a rewarding experience.

THE VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION edited by Brian Ash (Pan; 1977; £5.50; 352 Pages; ISBN 0 530 25275 5)

Reviewed by Chris Morgan

At first sight this looks impressive. It's a very large, heavy paperback with lots of colour illustrations. In fact, it's a botch-up, a hastily-thrown-together piece of junk aimed at cashing in on 1978's science fiction boom, and rife with errors, important omissions and misleading statements. I had intended to provide an errata list with this review but, having listed a hundred items without checking every section, I realised that such a list would be too long for VECTOR to print and would not, in any case,

be complete. So I'll confine myself to pointing out some of the worst items as I go along (I don't possess all the reference material necessary to check every fact presented in a book of this size and scope, but Brian Ash should have ensured that everything was checked. Obviously he didn't. Despite the fact that nine researchers are cited at the beginning of the book, their individual contributions are not by-lined, so the editor must take responsibility.) While I do not expect any volume of this nature to be totally free of errors, a high standard of accuracy is essential, because its task is to provide information.

In his introduction, Ash excuses the work for failing to be comprehensive but states that 'there is something for everyone'. In reality there is a conflict in the aim; much of the book will be of interest only to a fairly serious student of sf, except that there is insufficient detail or accuracy to satisfy such a student; the general reader, without a knowledge of fandom or a huge personal collection of SF will be dismayed by the layout, by the complexity of material presented and by the impossibility of obtaining more than a small fraction of the books and stories referred to in the text. (No attempt has been made to use more readily obtainable material for reference purposes).

I'll work through the book, section by section, from front to back. The first item is a checklist of "all science fiction terms". But just try looking up Gas Wars, Faster Than Light, Flying Men, Multiple Personalities or Underwater Cities. A few definitions are given, but there is no cross-referencing.

Next is the Program section; a chronological summary of the history of SF from 1805 to 1976, set down in a hard-to-follow style with trendy titles --- Countdown (for the period 1805-1894), Lift Off (1895-1925) and Inter-Galactic Insertion (1926-1976). This covers about sixty pages (the pages are not numbered in this section, just to make things difficult) and is a great waste of space. The early periods are compressed almost out of existence (1805-1894 in one page), omitting many important items. Even the facts are sometimes inaccurate or misleading, showing that Ash has preferred to refer to another work of reference rather than to the original book in question. Hence for 1827 it says "The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century by J. Webb", which is taken straight from I. F. Clarke's The Tale of the Future (he always gives initials rather than first names), rather than researching it properly and giving the author as Jane C. Webb. On the same page, Poe's "Hans Pfaall" gets spelt wrongly and italicised as if it were a novel, while H. G. Wells's "The Advent Of The Flying Men" (1893) is referred to as one of his first stories (it's an article). But it's from 1926 onwards that the Program section really begins to waste space, being so concerned to tell the reader when various obscure authors had their first story published and which pulp magazines were launched or aborted on which dates, that important novels are ignored. The worst of all these mistakes in the section is in 1954 where (slavishly following the wrong information printed in James Gunn's Alternate Worlds) two photos of Robert Silverberg are printed, one above the other, with one labelled "Thomas N. Scortia". (Most photos used throughout the book first appeared in Gunn's Alternate Worlds. It's a pity more up-to-date ones could not have been obtained). Also, the editor of Science Fiction Monthly is given as Anne Batt (just to show that Brian Ash does have a sense of humour). The correct spelling is Aune Butt, though he (or she) was never more than an editorial assistant, the editor being at first Patricia Hornsey and later Julie Davis. Two novels (at least) are shown as being published in the wrong years --- Huxley's Ape And Essence and Gerrold's When Harlie Was One. The "noted novels" mentioned for each year are frequently ridiculous choices, and the snippets of fan history are very patchy, omitting the important in preference for the trite. My final quarrel with this section is that one cannot find anything unless one already knows the year it happened (or the year when

Ash thinks it happened.

The Thematics section occupies most of the book. It is arranged according to the decimal classification system which is better ignored. All SF themes are covered under nineteen major topic headings (Spacecraft and Stardrives, Galactic Empires, Inner Space etc) each with a short introduction by one of "the world's leading science fiction writers". By short, I mean under a thousand words, so that these authors (Aldiss, Asimov, Ballard, Brunner, Clarke, Leiber, Niven, Pohl, Van Vogt etc) are really only lending their names for publicity purposes. Most are big names, the only real exception being Josephine Saxton. Please don't let my words be interpreted as a slight to Josephine Saxton or her work, but she is far from being among the world's leading sf writers, if only by reason of the difficulty of obtaining any of her novels. (I note in passing that Brian Ash's Who's Who In Science Fiction, Sphere Books 1977, doesn't have an entry for Ms Saxton; and that seems a surprising omission!)

By and large the Thematics section provides adequate coverage based on relevant novels and stories, and is well illustrated -- though the illustrations are not always appropriate to the text (a praiseworthy attempt has been made to credit most artists, not just of magazine covers but for interiors and book covers too. But like much else in the book, this is incomplete, with some artists remaining uncredited even when their signatures are plainly visible on the picture itself). The nineteen topics are broken down into sub-sections, each with a short bibliography of extra works not mentioned in the text but relevant to the topic, with details of the first appearance of stories and (sometimes) book titles where these differ from magazine serial titles. This is fine, better than in the text itself, where the sources of stories are generally not given; just the year.

The topic which is covered least adequately is Inner Space. After a boastful introduction by A. E. Van Vogt, there's a quick mention of Moorcock's NEW WORLDS, a half-hearted summary of a few of Philip Dick's novels and a bit about Ballard which doesn't do justice to his contribution. Then the emphasis is swung round to John Brunner, who was never a New Wave author. Although there are mentions given to the Jerry Cornelius stories and to Disch, Sladek and Spinrad, too much is again omitted and the sub-sectional bibliographies are pitifully small, the pages being padded out with an exceptional number of inappropriate illustrations. Another poor section is that on Taboos, where it is mentioned that SF is still 'reluctant to handle' fetishism and sado-masochism. Obviously Brian Ash has not kept up with the work of Philip Jose Farmer and John Norman. Nor does that sub-section refer to the intention of Harlan Ellison's Dangerous Visions anthologies -- to explore and break down taboos.

The Visual Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction (and particularly its Thematic section) is far too large for a reviewer to comment on every sub-section so please excuse me if I summarise my impressions. Each thematic topic has something to commend it; none are totally free from error. Fantasy, as a genre, is ignored by the book, though many works of fantasy are dealt with under Parallel Worlds and Living Myths. Throughout the text there is a tendency for novels to be called by their magazine titles, without mention of their better-known book titles. Thus on p.80 there is reference made to The Faceless Man and The Domains of Koryphon by Jack Vance (The Anome and The Gray Prince), on p.112 Vance's Slaves of the Klau is called The Planet of The Damned, on p.99 James White's Sector General stories are said to include the novel Field Hospital (presumably Hospital Station), and on p.148 Harry Harrison's The Technicolour Time Machine is mentioned only as The Time-Machined Saga --- all very confusing. Illustrations which should have been credited include those by Robert Foster (p.75), Paul Lehr (p.88), Peter Goodfellow (p.90), H. Lano (p.124) -- his illo on p.312, also from Wells's The Sleeper Wakes, is credited, Paul Hardy (p.165), Richard Powers (p.238) and the Dillons (p.242). Omissions of information are obviously a

matter of opinion in any book of this sort, but generally no attempt has been made to note the first story connected with a particular theme. Also, the early French novel of an alien world, Defontenay's Star should have been mentioned, and Samuel R. Delany deserves far more than the single passing reference he gets.

The next major section, titled Deep Probes, contains a long and excellent article by Australian critic, George Turner who, despite his harsh criticisms of SF as a genre, attempts to set absolute standards by which it may be judged as literature and to account for the lack of characterisation in SF. Some of his sweeping statements are incorrect or, at best, deliberately misleading ("Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward... became Science Fiction's only over-whelming best-seller" p.260) but I applaud his intentions. Of the other articles in this section little needs to be said. Brian Ash contributes 5,000 words of flannel, Edmund Cooper makes an idiotic statement concerning the work of Brian Aldiss, Damon Knight says nothing new (though far more succinctly than Ash) and L. Sprague de Camp contributes an out-of-place piece on fantasy.

Fandom and Media is the bitty final section, covering the story of fandom, conventions, awards, SF art, SF films and TV, magazines, books, anthologies, juveniles, comics, education and fringe cults - few of them adequately. The history of fandom includes reproductions of artwork by Harry Bell, Andrew Stepheson and Carol Gregory etc; I wonder whether their permission was obtained for its use. The list of awards appears to be error-free and is therefore a valuable summary. The article on Art is good despite its spacial limitations. It even mentions Richard Powers (probably the most prolific of all SF artists) -- the first book I've ever seen which does (and it's a pity none of his artwork in this book gets credited. Not even his clutch of colour covers on p.318). Accompanying the article on books is some exotic Hannes Bok cover art (p.314) which is a delight to see; the article itself concentrates mainly on the small specialist publishers, providing useful information. On anthologies the article is surprisingly good despite being less than 2,000 words in length. It omits little of note save the Not at Night series of twelve anthologies (1925-1937), which are of much greater importance than those of the period which do get a mention. The next two pages contain a long, but by no means complete, listing of post-1945 anthologies, though it would have been helpful to indicate which are of original stories and which of reprints. The bibliography following the article Commentators and Courses, on academic SF, is very nearly complete, listing histories of SF, bibliographical works, classroom texts, etc. The only omission I can think of is the Versins Encyclopaedia.

The final item is the index, or rather, two indices, one of authors and titles, the other of artists. A small asterisked note informs one that the various sectional bibliographies and all caption material have been excluded from the author and title index. In addition, the entire Program section, all magazines and awards, and most editors and anthologies are omitted. What is left is an index which covers only half the book. Look at it this way: if you bought a book and discovered that its index only went from A to L you'd be pretty annoyed about it, wouldn't you? Well, Ash's Visual Encyclopaedia only contains half an index, too, except he's been a little more sneaky, and has tried to disguise the fact. Nor is the depleted index cross-referenced at all. On the other hand, the artists index is largely complete, and it does cover most of the caption material, demonstrating that the stories and authors referred to in caption material would easily have been included, had the editor wished. A book of this kind is only as good as its index, and an index as incomplete as this is inexcusable.

Although The Visual Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction has a wider coverage than any other book on SF it is so lacking in accuracy and detail that it fails to make a contribution to the field. James Gunn's Alternate Worlds -- a similar work in many respects -- is superior despite its faults and narrower scope. Several good books (and many mediocre or bad ones) have

appeared during the 1970's on various aspects of SF, but nothing has succeeded in covering more than a small corner of the genre with any authority.

If I had paid money for this copy of The Visual Encyclopaedia I would consider myself to have been robbed. I hope it will quickly follow Ash's Who's Who In Science Fiction into much-deserved oblivion.

WHO'S WHO IN SCIENCE FICTION by Brian Ash; Sphere; 1977; 95p; 218pp;
ISBN 0-7221-1235-1.

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

I have ambivalent feelings towards this compilation of potted biographies and bibliographies of some four hundred writers, editors, illustrators and so on. First the bouquets: most of the field's well-known names are included, this information not being otherwise available in one volume. Also the standard of accuracy has been greatly improved since the hardcover edition was published (Elm Tree Books; 1976). For those readers of SF who possess no other bibliographical material and wish to find out a few facts about their favourite big-name authors, this book should prove useful.

But (and here come the brickbats) Brian Ash's choices for inclusion (and omission) are sometimes bizarre. The entries are always incomplete (bibliographically), frequently misleading, often full of trivia and occasionally wrong on matters of fact. Despite several pages of introductory excuses, this is a much poorer work of reference than it could or should have been, given the number of pages available --- particularly as Ash doesn't even stick to his own set of rules.

I'll cite a few examples of these shortcomings. Too many hack writers from the pre-War pulps get in, despite never having been published in book form (such as R.F. Starzl and Paul Ernst) while several respected authors who were producing good SF novels during the same period (Neil Bell, J.D. Beresford, Eden Phillpotts, etc) are ignored. There are many notable omissions among current authors and artists, too (particularly the latter, with Jack Gaughan, the Dillons, John Shoenherr, Frank Frazetta and Rick Sternbach all missing, just to quote Hugo winners). Although fantasy authors are said to be excluded except where they have influenced more relevant writers, Robert E. Howard is included but the father of the fantasy novel, William Morris, is not. In the entries themselves, Ash almost falls over himself to tell the reader about writers' early jobs and what they have on their letter-headings, but frequently he fails to mention the more relevant points, such as titles of novels or important achievements. Far too many post-1968 works are omitted (1968 is the cut-off date for inclusion in Don Tuck's excellent Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction And Fantasy, from which much of Ash's information has obviously been rather inaccurately copied). Hugo Award datings are consistently screwed up. There's no cross-referencing, so to find an author who employs a pseudonym one needs prior knowledge and persistence (Try looking for David Grinnel or K.M. O'Donnell, though).

So Who's Who In Science Fiction has its uses as a handy reference guide for newcomers to the genre, but for the cognoscenti, particularly those of a bibliographical bent, it provides nothing but a short cut to raised blood-pressure and the tearing of hair.

FOUNDATION 13; Edited by Peter Nicholls; May 1978; 124pp; £3.00 for subscription of 3 issues to 'The Editor', The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM8 2AS.

Reviewed by David Wingrove.

At long last (and in line with recent promises) FOUNDATION is back on the road. This is material that Pete Nicholls has had for some while, and in his editorial (his last before Malcolm Edwards takes the chair) he explains the

internal hassles that have led to many people giving up all hope of ever seeing one of these journals again:

"The SFF has been effectively moribund for 12 months. There is every hope now that it will become more alive than ever before."

That, of course, cannot be judged from this issue. The reviews are a little dated, owing to the delay, and the sense of continuity needed for polemic has been seriously damaged by the 'break'. Nevertheless, this is a fine issue and with a proposed schedule of 4-monthly publication, the potential of FOUNDATION as the 'heavyweight' critical magazine on the genre, is greater than ever. The team, as Mr Nicholls rightly observes, is capable of producing interesting and worthwhile critical offerings (Dave Pringle, Ian Watson and Colin Lester are the other three members of FOUNDATION's new-look editorial staff). But I'll restrict my comments to the actual contents of this issue this time out and try to give anyone ignorant of it, an idea of the apparent aims of FOUNDATION as manifest in its journal.

I commented earlier on the reviews, and while they are a little delayed, there are still many worthwhile things to be gleaned from them. The 49 pages of reviews cover 39 books, none of them products of the last few months or (it seems) published in the last six months. John Clute writes on Ian Watson's failure to achieve his intended effects in THE JONAH KIT and ALIEN EMBASSY; Brian Stableford remarks upon Vonnegut's recent failure to write a 'participatory' novel in SLAPSTICK; Angus Taylor notes Silverberg's naive conceptions of both the macrocosm and the microcosm in THE FEAST OF ST DIONYSUS; Brian Stableford and Tom Shippey list the failings of Dick and Zelazny in recent novels; and Ian Watson congratulates the Panshins on their optimistic view of SF's future). It is always a solid, well-written section, guaranteed to have a few things with which you'll take exception, a few reviews that'll have you nodding your head in solemn agreement and a rare (but notably existent) few that are remarkable and considerable additions to the serious body of criticism on the genre.

The main diet of this issue are the pieces on and by the late James Blish (writing here as William Atheling Jr). I'll come to those later in the review. To make up the balance, however, are pieces by Chris Priest and (in editorial capacity) Colin Lester, and a curiously pertinent (even after the delay) letter column. Taking them in order, Chris Priest's 'Overture And Beginners' is another in the FOUNDATION's series, 'The Profession Of Science Fiction' which has been a positive feature of every issue. It provides interesting new information on Chris' genesis as a writer, but is more an examination of the 'states of consciousness' of a writer and the mystery of the process of creativity. It also explains, more lucidly than ever before, Chris' ambivalent attitude towards SF (one shared by so many of the British school of writing, it seems). It is a quite nicely balanced and wry piece of analysis that leads one on to the discussion (tied together loosely by Colin Lester) by Aldiss, Cowper and Disch on 'Problems of Creativity'. This is a fascinating exchange of epistolatory views on the 'creative process'. That all the views expressed are intensely subjective ones is admitted in all cases, but nevertheless for anyone interested in the creative task these are illuminative glances from capable writers.

The letters are very often small critiques in themselves, and these are no exception. James Gunn once again illustrates the British/American dichotomy when he talks of writers having to be freed 'from the notion that writing is self-expression' at the outset of their careers. And when he says once again that 'know who you are writing for' should be a tenet, he is only suffering from that typical delusion that 'to communicate' (without any deeper level of meaning) is what the craft of commercial writing is about. Disch is wryly ironic in reply to rude students pestering him for personal information (a delightful object lesson) and Richard McKinney re-evaluates Zelazny from Richard Cowper's comments in a previous issue. It is all interesting stuff.

The meat of this issue is, however, the Blish material. The first of the three pieces is Blish's own essay (under his William Atheling Jr by-line) "Probapossible Proegomena to Ideareal History" which is evidence of just how much the genre misses his incisive criticism. It centres around the Spenglerian theory of cyclical history and examines sf's role as seen from this perspective. Whilst I agree with few of his (and thus Spengler's) conclusions (I subscribe more to the school of linear development and see history more as a slow ascension) it is a very fine piece of writing which manages (intelligently) to put the cat among the pigeons.

Brian Stableford is next with his "The Science Fiction Of James Blish", which comments chiefly on Blish as a 'literary engineer', concerned with rational explanation and structure. The section on 'Experiments In Thought' is, I feel, the most interesting, despite its brevity. Brian examines Blish's statement that "it is an... important function for(the sf writer) to suggest new paradigms". Divided into six sub-sections, Brian Stableford manages in his essay to contemplate all the important aspects of Blish's work

The last of these sub-sections deals with our preceptions of rationality as affected by scientific knowledge (As BS says, "Objectivity is itself a commitment to one side" when dealing with the battle between invented knowledge (dogma?) and the pursuit of discovered knowledge). This section, 'After such knowledge' deals with A Case Of Conscience, Dr Mirabilis and Black Easter/The Day After Judgment.

Whilst I have not read enough of James Blish's work to be able to comment upon Brian's conclusion that Blish possessed "an imaginative ambition which no other science fiction writer of the post-war generation has yet matched", I was impressed by his arguments and am now (in the light of this article) tempted to fill-in the gaps in my knowledge of Blish's work.

Brian Aldiss' contribution, "James Blish: The Mathematics Of Behaviour" is a far shorter, thematic study, and the two articles (and, in a sense, Blish's too) are not just complimentary but succeed in creating a three-dimensional view of James Blish's work.

Aldiss is always our most readable and enjoyable critic and his is a much more personal view of Blish (as friend as well as critic) which deals primarily with Blish's eschatological preoccupations and dwells upon his attempt to reconcile the wonders of numerology/mathematics with the intricacies of theology and determinism. Both Brian's manage to avoid duplication in these criticisms but rather enrich each others observations.

All in all then it is a very fine issue that bodes well for the future. The field of sf criticism is woefully lacking in intelligent platforms, and the renewed presence of FOUNDATION (and a regular FOUNDATION too!) can only be good for the genre. If you aren't a subscriber already, then your Three Pounds won't be wasted on this. If you have even the most marginal interest in the more serious aspects of the genre then FOUNDATION is a necessity. No less.

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The next item is produced here without apology on the part of the editor. I hope John's comments are pointless (as he himself does) and that the matters raised within John's letter have already had the SEACON Committee's attention. And in any case, the letter raises much deeper implications concerning our general attitude towards continental sf. Perhaps anyone who feels strongly enough about this subject will be kind enough to write to me (copies of all letters received will be forwarded to John Brunner).

* * * * *

Seacon 79;

an open letter

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE 1979 WORLD SF CONVENTION

Dear Peter,

Perhaps because Marjorie and I have attended quite a lot of continental conventions, I've received an appeal requesting me to draw your attention to the fact that your committee is creating much unnecessary ill-will by its persistent disregard for our friends and colleagues elsewhere in Europe. I know for certain that in France, Italy and West Germany people have had high expectations of Brighton, as compared with - say - London '65 or even Heidelberg (though the latter was about as genuinely international as circumstances then allowed). And there's a widespread feeling that these expectations are not being fulfilled.

Why are people getting upset? Because at "world" convention after so-called "world" convention SF is treated as though it only existed in English.

If the same thing happens again at Brighton, your committee will make itself, and indeed the whole of British fandom, very unpopular indeed. It will be branded as parochial, insular and chauvinistic. And I confess that I'd be hard put to it to defend it against such charges.

Now it is of course possible that you've taken steps to avert so disasterous an outcome. I sincerely hope so. But the news seems not to have reached me, nor - come to that - science fiction people in other countries. Let me therefore take it upon myself to outline a minimum programme to save the day.

(i) Ask a representative selection of SF publishers in every European country to contribute books by native authors - rather than translations - together with catalogues and publicity material, for an exhibition at the Con.

(ii) Suggest to these same publishers that they might care to send an editor, or one of their best-regarded writers, to join us at Brighton.

(iii) Inform all the continental fanzine publishers you can reach that this is being done, and ask them to spread the news; this by itself will do a great deal of good.

(iv) Invite the said fanzine publishers to contribute a couple of issues a piece for inclusion in a display at the Con.

(v) Set up at least the skeleton of an interpreting service, even if it amounts to no more than compiling a register of fans who admit to speaking something other than just English and who will volunteer as courier to a bunch of foreigners for some period during the weekend. (Incidentally, don't please forget that some of our Canadian friends speak chiefly French, will you?)

(vi) Reconsider your refusal to add a continental Guest Of Honour to the list. Something is wrong with your funding if you're not running with enough margin to pay one extra person's hotel bill. There are lots of people who speak English well enough to enjoy the Con and give us

a GoH speech: Sam Lundwall, Herbert and Lotte Franke, Gerard Klein, Pierre Barbet, Domingo Santos, Karel Thole... Any of them would be an ornament to the proceedings.

(vii) Above all, bear in mind that Europe does not consist just of that bit across the Channel! The convention should be publicised in at least the following countries:

France	Belgium	Holland	Ireland	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	Italy	Spain
Portugal	West Germany	Greece*	Yugoslavia	East Germany	Austria	Switzerland			
Czechoslovakia	Hungary	Poland	Romania	Bulgaria	Turkey	USSR			

(* Yes, there's science fiction in Greece. Judy Lawrence Blish sent us a catalogue from Athens the other day.)

I'd like to stress that this should be regarded as a minimum. If the foreign delegations turn out to be numerous enough - that is, those who speak languages other than English - consideration should be given to mounting a "parallel programme" item where they could answer questions about the state of SF in their countries for interested Con members. It's often illuminating to find how writers highly regarded or ignored in English-speaking countries are looked on by people from different cultural backgrounds.

It might be argued - indeed it has been - that reducing the emphasis on the American contribution to the Worldcon series may reduce the chance in future years of having cons voted elsewhere in the world. I disagree! The more varied, the more stimulating - in a word, the more different we can make conventions held outside North America, the better the chance of the vote going to other countries. Even the best US convention, after you've been to a dozen or so, does begin to resemble its predecessors, you know.

But there is a further reason why your committee should reconsider its attitude towards our European colleagues. They have been very generous in extending invitations to English-speaking writers as GoHs at their own national conventions. It would be churlish and ungrateful not to return such a succession of compliments. Therefore it should be done irrespective of whether we're holding in Britain a so-called "world" convention, or simply another local con like those British writers have been invited to in France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Belgium...

Thanks to the fact that fandom very early became one of the most international of (dis)organisations, you're stuck with the problem, I'm afraid. In a small way, you're upholding the honour of Great Britain.

Don't let us down.

Sincerely,

John Brunner

(and Marjorie!)

PS: Of course, if you reply that the committee has beaten me to the punch on all counts, I shall cheerfully climb down off the high horse and tell our continental friends not to be so agitated in future. And buy you a large drink at Brighton. But I expect to do that anyway. Someone who's taking on your size of problems deserves it. - JKHB.

found in a bathtub

a lettercol..

GREG HILLS; Palmerston North, New Zealand.

So. That's where all the NWavers went when the New Wave broke and frothed away a couple of years back. They joined BSFA.

Salvaged back cover, which had excommunicated the rest of the mag and was floating round the room. Admired the BFS ad. Flipped to 'Half-Life'. Speculated on how profound a kick it was against the sort of literature depicted therein. Many levels of interpretation. Snickered a bit.

((Strange loc. First I received. The above is about all that made sense. Still, I can't make out how it got out to NZ so fast. Explanations, Tom?))

ALEX PILLAI: Stapleford, Cambs.

The Judy Watson piece was about as illuminating of her and Ian's real life as a WI outing to Barnsley is on deep sea diving. Apart from that it was entertaining enough, as was the interview of her husband, which was really quite good.

This is followed by a series of overlong and mediocre articles on Ian Watson's books (ok..but too long), a critique of two of Robert Holdstock's books (again too long, and the addition by the editor is just so much space filling gulch) and a too boring Infinity Box on books which, I'm sure, many people have read before.

It was mediocre altogether, the main fault is that the authors just don't know when to stop. Shorter articles on a slightly wider range of subjects (ie; not just critiques of single author's works but more on films and shorter book reviews) would benefit VECTOR a great deal and would make it more attractive for a first-timer.

((Balance is a crucial aspect of any magazine, and I perhaps should have intimated on the cover that it was an issue that concentrated on the work of Ian Watson. I still think that the idea of focusing on specific authors in single issues is a good idea, and I hope to run several special issues over the next year, covering the best of our modern sf writers. Short book reviews are the province of Phil in Paperback Parlour, he makes a good job of that. VECTOR looks, I hope, a little deeper. But I'll come back to this later when discussing the reviews in greater detail))).

CHRIS MORGAN: Westham, Weymouth, Dorset

((This just missed the last deadline..but I think it makes a few points worth printing))

One thing I particularly liked about V85 was the paragraph in your editorial describing your surroundings; knowing even that small amount about you helps one to understand why you write what you do and why you're developing V in a particular direction.

Your article on Phil Dick had me alternately agreeing and disagreeing (which I guess is what you were aiming at -- to arouse some, but not total, controversy). When you talk (p.7) about Dick's "overt shunning of realism" with "no attempt to create credible extrapolations of our world", I think

this is the wrong approach. I feel that Dick has always written about things as he, subjectively, sees them, or would like them to be. Thus his views of alternative futures fit in with his views of the present to produce a fairly uniform framework which does hang together and is, basically, a surrealistic distortion of objective reality, induced by a combination of drug abuse and paranoia. I'm not just saying this for the sake of disagreeing with you, or in an attempt to appear clever. It's an inevitable conclusion on reading Confessions Of A Crap Artist (which shows how his SF relates to his view of contemporary domestic life because it is essentially a non-SF treatment of one of his SF novels, with the same approach), A Scanner Darkly (which demonstrates how much his SF is based on drug addiction subjectivity) and his ICA speech, recently available in paperback in Explorations Of The Marvellous ed. Nicholls (which amply demonstrates the paranoia). But I do agree that "a single Dick novel, read in isolation, is an enigma", though I feel that Deus Irae is the novel which fits least well into Dick's 'pantheon'. Oh, it has many of Dick's stylistic hallmarks, as well as being in part a rewrite of Dr Bloodmoney, but it's still an odd man out among his works. Obviously there are many conflicting interpretations of Dick's work, though much of the disagreement is based on semantics. Perhaps Dick should be read and enjoyed rather than analysed too deeply.

((Perhaps so, Chris. As Hermann Hesse said of a student of Kafka "If one is content to extract from a poem or narrative its content in ideas, partisanship, information, or edification, then one is content with very little, and the secret of the art, the thing that is true and original, is lost." (Interpreting Kafka, 1956; from MY BELIEF). I am only trying to describe the patterns that are obvious to me - to impart something of my understanding, of the magic (the 'poetry' of any writer) that the author's books weave upon me. Which could explain the uncertainties and ambiguities in that piece..as could inadequate vision, I guess.))

TOM JONES: Bracknell, Berks.

If you read James Corley's excellent review od Delany's BABEL 17, you would see that Ian Watson was not the first to realise language reflects a culture and express this in SF. Delany was, this being the central theme to the book. This doesn't detract from Ian, whose articles on linguistics I've read with much pleasure and contain much wisdom.

Back to my usual theme. What's 'Neoteny' and who is Kurt Godel. I'm pleased to see others have remarked on this trait of yours, "wearing your intellect on your sleeve" was a good comment in the letter column. I know it's difficult for you so I'm not going to belabour this point.

These points are minor, but I have one major criticism, which I suppose is a criticism of you as editor.

There's too much Dave Wingrove. I think you've had at least one article in every issue so far. This issue carries it to an extreme. Article by DW, Interview by DW And you even have to chip in following Phil's article. (This isn't a criticism of the standard of your material, which is good). I know the reason for this is the shortage of material you initially had but this may not be so clear to others. And now you say you have 1½ drawers of material there is no excuse for issues to be dominated by you.

((That's a highly reasonable criticism. In fact most of the material I have is review material, and I was hoping to run alternate issues as 'specials' dealing with specific writers. Thus this issue is a wider-based one with smaller articles. The next will be on Sheckley. Then another wide-base issue with pieces on Moorcock, Clarke, Technology and SF and so on, and then one on Richard Cowper. As far as articles is concerned, I am trying

to obtain these from various people, but they are far harder to obtain than simple review material. They require concentrated study and can take several weeks whereas a simple review can be bashed out in a few hours. Count this as an appeal, if you like. Oh, and while I'm at it, I'm very interested in small filler pieces of artwork. Anything from a few inches square to quarter and half-page pieces.))

Now for your editorial. What I am about to state are facts; they may not be nice facts (I don't particularly like some of them) but they are the rules if you want to play the game:

- (1) Publishers publish books, particularly genre fiction such as sf, to make money, not to improve the quality of life or the standards of literature.
- (2) Publishers' editors are professionals whose job it is to choose books which will sell. That is their only function. The editor knows if he's winning the game (so do his bosses) because he has a gauge, it's called number of books unsold: the fewer there are the more Brownie points he gets.
- (3) It is very easy to gauge what an audience wants, particularly the SF audience. You walk around WH Smith's (or similar) and look at the SF in stock - that's what the audience wants (maybe not what you or I want, but certainly what The Audience en masse want).
- (4) The easiest way to sell SF is to write for The Audience. But it's not the only way. It is possible to create your own audience (eg. Delany, Watson, etc) but it is not easy.

((From what I've heard a lot of publishers lose money on fiction, making subsidies taken from the successful books on potted plants and so forth. With regard to your second point editors are not just that, Tom. The good ones - and see what Blish says of Fabers in this regard in FOUNDATION 13 - are concerned with the standard of the work they publish. Your third point is hardly valid either, in that markets can be artificially created: an economic fact. What you see in Smith's is what the publishers think their audience wants. But that is a circular argument and could only be proved in a perfect world, which this isn't. I agree with you on the last. But why should it be easy. Nothing that's worth a damn is ever easy!))

CHRIS PRIEST: Harrow, Middlesex.

How about some new kind of reviewing policy for VECTOR? It would be about time, if I may say so. What's the point, I ask you straight, of reviewing books like THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION and BABEL-17 and REPORT ON PROBABILITY A and LORD OF LIGHT? Each one of these books is at least ten years old. One of the great weaknesses of the Chris Fowler VECTORS was the way in which old books were reviewed as if they were new. If you must give coverage to reprints, why not put them in a separate section and allocate less space. All this was given an ironic twist by your editorial, in which you declare that Unless Things Improve for New Writers we'll be reading reprints forever more. I know the feeling, and sense that we'll be reading reprints of reviews too.... It strikes me that if you must review old books why not dig into the back files of Vector and reprint the original review?

A propos your editorial, I hope whoever that lady in the audience of the panel was, she didn't go away as depressed as I did. As you say, all that panel revealed was the gulf between certain types of British writers and certain types of American editors. The question of whether a writer writes for him/herself first, always induces paranoia from either side. There's a lot wrong with the sort of self-indulgent, introverted, private type of writing that many beginning authors go in for; but there is a hell of a

lot more wrong with the cheap, cynical, mass-audience fiction that panders to an imagined popular taste. I suppose the ideal lies somewhere between the two: fiction that looks like it has been written with an audience in mind, but which is deeply personal to the author. Probably the only safe practical advice is for writers to look at the work of contemporary authors they personally admire, and, without copying them, try to understand how they achieve the balance.

((The only rider I should have made on my comments is that certain books deserve second, even third looks owing to their importance to the genre. None of the reviews were irrelevant. There are new people discovering the genre all the time, and to give that audience an idea of some of the better works produced by the genre, be they reprints or otherwise, is one of the aims I set out in an earlier VECTOR editorial.))

BILL LITTLE: Biddulph, Stoke-On-Trent

I enjoyed 86, mainly because I'm familiar with, and enjoy, both Ian Watson and Robert Holdstock. I felt that I belonged this issue. Nice. Just one gripe. Can you ask Judy Watson not to refer to the loo/toilet/khazi as "lavatory"? I think that is the most hideous word in the English language! It's so...so... Well, I'm not sure what it is, but I certainly hate it. And I'm very surprised her being a Geordie and all that, that she should even know the word exists. We Geordies never, ever, use the word "lavatory". Shame on you, Judy! Have you forgotten your heritage? Still, I'll forgive her. After all, she has been south of the Gin & Tonic belt for some time now. What I cannot forgive, is that she and Ian drink (of all things) Davenports!

You will notice, Dave, how I refrained from even mentioning that page 8 was ...er... upside down. With the intellectual calibre of VECTOR being so high, it was only on my third re-read that I noticed same. There was I trying to look "κοορ" up in 'Teach Yourself Greek' before I realised what it was!

((No ...er... I didn't notice you hadn't noticed. Personally, I thought it was a neat trick of Keith's. He seems to understand the nature of Ian's work even better than Ian.))

MARTIN MacGILP: Morayshire, Scotland.

I was interested by Steve Byfield's letter - I didn't even know Dick had written over 30 books. Any chance of a list of titles/publishers?

((We are - we repeat - working on a series of bibliographies. Dick is planned to be amongst them. Owing to the recent disorganisations our plans have been delayed. But this is going to be one of our priority schemes))

If I can jump back a bit, how about some brainy chappie doing a very long review of DHALgren? - in my opinion an effing magnificent tome. And while on the scrounge for information, can anyone tell me anything about Tanith Lee? (nothing naughty of course...)

((Doug Barbour is currently in Europe for a sabbatical and mentioned just such a lengthy article on DHALgren he is willing to let me print in the near future. I'll be happy to do so. That book has received very little in depth criticism, and it is a bloody good book. Tanith Lee, anyone?))

MICHAEL GLICKMAN: Glasgow, G41.

I was somewhat annoyed by Chris Evans' review, or rather non-review, of None But Man in VECTOR 86. Granted that it is not the best novel ever

published and that Dickson's style may be somewhat pedestrian, it is still unforgiveable for a reviewer to abandon a book when only a quarter of the way through it.

I read None But Man a number of years ago, when it was already a far-from-new library book and I suspect that it must date from the early 60's. There is no mention that this is a re-issue. Chris seems to have assumed that Dickson was writing to the current DAW formula, and that criticising the publisher is a substitute for criticising the author.

By giving up only a quarter of the way into the book, Chris missed some rather interesting attempts at portraying an alien social structure which are more convincing than many I have seen. If he had borne in mind that he was not reviewing a 1977 novel, he might have been more charitable.

I have had occasion in the past to review one or two books myself, and I have always worked on the principle that, no matter how bad a book may be, it is the reviewer's duty to read it to the end, to see if it has any good points whatsoever. Breaking off with a "ho hum" might be a useful device in Vonnegut, but it is hardly a formula for good reviewing.

((Chris had a disclaimer clause in there somewhere, but the point is still well made. I try and avoid the really deathly books myself. You'll note - from a slip that'll accompany this issue - that most of the crud is taking the direct route to the library. But a book that has killed all interest by the quarter-mark is unlikely to become another War And Peace in the final segment. Better, I guess, to have no review at all. But Chris, as you observed, was trying to make a comment about DAW's policy))

DAVID V. BARRETT: Skelmersdale, Lancs.

Editorial. Brief and fairly good. I must confess I get annoyed by Mag. editors telling me to "examine the market and write what the readers want to read". That's okay if I want to be published (eventually) by a certain hack firm whose books, gracing the Public Library shelves, are always authored by people with names surprisingly close to those of good established authors; take a trip to your local library and you'll see what I mean. No, when I write, I write what I want to write. Perhaps it will take longer to sell it, but at least I'll not be part of the sausage machine certain editors and publishers are a party to.

Judy Watson's "Day In The Life..." and your interview with Ian Watson I thoroughly enjoyed. Judy and Ian became real people. I am, be thankful for those two articles; I intend to read your novels on the strength of them. (They) illustrate again the point raised by at least half the correspondents in that same issue: your writing style is hellishly difficult to make sense of. As you say in reply to Brian Griffin, it doesn't hurt to look up a word or two in the dictionary, but, BUT. Honestly, David, you might have a super command of the English language (or you might not - perhaps you write with an OED and a Roget by your typer? ...), but you mustn't assume every one of your readers is as proficient as you. Please, for our sake, set down your arguments and ideas a little more simply.

((That's difficult when dealing with the writers I admire. I guess it could be done with Vonnegut, but how do you deal with an author who is interested in linguistics and neoteny without touching upon the subjects in some depth. I do have a Roget, as should any writer. I don't have an OED, I wish I had sometimes. I'm afraid it's my natural style, cluttered as it is. In the last resort I'll agree to a glossary at the end of my articles... Ho hum...))

..On Delany, it was good to see not one but two reviews, and both good ones. Tom Jones made an excellent job of explaining the myth-import of The Einstein Intersection. I'm not sure which of his categories I fall - probably the second and third. I like the book, I think it's a great work, but it's by no means my favourite Delany (who is one of my favourite authors). Like Tom, I've read it a few times, but still find it.. let's say, strange. I don't claim to understand it well. But it's classic Delany, albeit not an easy introduction to him. Andy Darlington, like Tom Jones (like me and, I hope, many others, though I know some people who can't stand him), obviously appreciates Delany's writing. Basically he is a prose poet, and an excellent one. Can anyone else see some similarities to Dylan Thomas? This is an even better review, Andy, than the two you did in V82 on The Ballad Of Beta-2 and Empire Star - and they were good.

Delany is probably the best writer of SF there is. Hold on before you shout me down, everyone. I'm not saying his novels are the best sf novels ever, though some of them rank there; I'm not even saying he's the best sf writer. But I do think he's the best writer; he knows how to choose and use words to get the best possible effect: the sign of a major poet. It's obviously significant that most of his writings contain a poet (though - thanks, Andy - I hadn't grasped the comparison between Rydra Wong and Delany as clearly as you pointed it out in your final paragraph).

Recommended for anybody who likes Delany, or wants to find out more about how he writes: his essay "About 5175 Words" in George Hay's "The Disappearing Future". Also, showing how carefully he writes in comparison with many other SF authors, compare:

"I don't think any of the stories in Driftglass were written in under six weeks, and that's usually six weeks labouring eight to ten hours a day."

- Delany, in SF Monthly, Vol.2, No.3.

with:

"The Runestaff books originally took three days each, the Eternal Champion took three days (the original was eighteen hours...)

- Moorcock, in Vortex, Vol.1, No.4.

and:

"...it did not take me one day. It took me two and a half hours."

- Asimov, on 'Light Verse', in Buy Jupiter,
Panther edition, p.254.

Draw what conclusions you like.

((No arguing with that, or is there?))

T.W. FRANCIS: Trowbridge, Wiltshire

"Future Man is an alien" Yes I would agree with that, but I'd go farther -- all beings are alien to each other. Some totally alien, even among the same species. Others not quite so. There will always be some alienation between individuals no matter what the bonds. The reason for this I think is that as yet man does not have a language of total communion. Only a language/s of partial communication.

A couple of comments on a couple of the reviews in V86. Re Mr. Morgan's review of Gateway. I think Mr Pohl is a psychologist or some such and is well schooled in matters psychological. So his use of a section every other chapter which included his main character opening up his soul to a machine was very informative. It helped one to understand the fellow's reasons for being such a coward. Or, better, it gave an insight into the motivation of fear. Fear is the strongest motivation, perhaps the only one. Personally I enjoyed Gateway and I think it should get an award.

((And that's it.. Ta too to Mic Rogers for the rhyme..and Alan Fraser..))

FOUNDATION

Editor: MALCOLM EDWARDS Features Editor: IAN WATSON Reviews Editor: DAVID PRINGLE

Now under new management and appearing regularly again, Foundation features the best in serious (but lively) discussion and criticism of science fiction. Each issue contains a variety of critical articles, a "Profession of Science Fiction" piece in which a leading sf writer talks about himself and his writing, the Foundation Forum (a continuing discussion of the nature and purpose of sf) and an extensive review section. Every issue now contains at least 108 pages, with more wordage than most novels.

Foundation 13, just published, is the James Blish issue, including the last article Blish wrote (as "William Atheling Jr") and assessments of his work by Brian Aldiss and Brian Stableford. There's a "Profession of SF" article by Christopher Priest and Forum contributions from Aldiss, Richard Cowper and Thomas M. Disch. Reviewers include Hilary Bailey, John Clute, David Pringle, Tom Shippey, John Sladek, Brian Stableford and Ian Watson.

Foundation 14, due in September, will feature articles by Maxim Jakubowski, David Samuelson, Brian Stableford and David Pringle, a "Profession of SF" piece by Alexei Panshin, Forum articles by Michael Bishop and Thomas M. Disch, and reviews by Clute, Robert Holdstock, David Masson, Stableford, Watson and Cherry Wilder.

Subscriptions to Foundation are £3.00 (\$7.50) for three issues (one year). Back issues 7-12 are still available -- ask for details if you are interested. All cheques etc. should be crossed and made payable to the Science Fiction Foundation, and sent to Malcolm Edwards, Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS, U.K.

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