OPENING TIMES 10 am - 6pm; THURSDAY 10am - 7pm TEL: 01 836 4179

FORBIDDEN PLANET

London's Newest Science Fiction and Comic Book Shop!
23 Denmark St., London WC2 - Just off Charing Cross Rd.

IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE A SIGNING BY LARRY NIVEN

ON SATURDAY 8th SEPTEMBER 1979
THE ANDROID's DREAM; An Editorial (of sorts...) 

It is 11.22am on Saturday 14th July and this afternoon I am driving down to Somerset to begin a two week holiday that I really need after putting this issue together. The sun shines in through an open window and Hammill sings from VITAL as I attempt to put down in some coherence my thoughts on this issue and on giving up the editorial seat. I should, perhaps, begin by saying that this issue is four pages smaller than I intended it to be, as the review section was going to be eight and not four pages, but for some reason (which, as yet, I haven't discovered) Mike Dickinson didn't deliver the review section and thus I had to rustle together as much as I could at the last moment. Hopefully it doesn't reflect the hassles too much. Hopefully Mike will have ironed out his problems by the time of the next issue. While I'm on the subject, can I ask that this is the last A4 issue and also the last bi-monthly issue for some while. I'm certain that FOCUS, the joint venture of Chris Evans and Rob Holdstock, will nicely bridge the gap between issues of VECTO, and from what I've heard of their plans it will be a far cry from the amateur ineptness of TANGENT. That such a venture should be getting under way at all is, I feel, a very encouraging sign that the BSFA is at long last, beginning to attain its real potential as a central focus for science fiction in this country. The one thing that I regret omitting from this issue is a review of the most recent FOUNDATION (Number 16) which arrived in the midst of the recent hassles and I can only make amends by giving it a plug here and asking anyone who is interested to write to Malcolm Edwards at the North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM8 2AS, UK, if they want to know further details. 

This is, of course, my eleventh and final issue of VECTO. I've enjoyed doing the magazine, naturally, but am really quite pleased to be moving on, particularly in view of the time it will free to me to pursue other interests in the genre. It is an exhausting job that requires a persistence that tends to wear down one's inventiveness, and I have needed to be extremely stoical at times in the face of impending deadlines and lack of promised material. None of the issues has really been completely what I would have liked to have done personally, but that again is one of the "drawbacks" of being the editor of an Association magazine. The one thing I was pleased to be able to do was introduce (through articles and reviews) various authors who may have remained simply esoteric names on shelves to readers who may otherwise have not been tempted to try them. I don't know what Mike Dickinson will do with VECTO, but I hope that he will continue to embrace the more obscure examples of literature that are "in spirit" related to the sf genre. A simple diet of hard core sf is like a meal of potatoes without meat and veg. I also hope that VECTO will continue to cover the related media. I was pleased to get the two film articles for this issue, and similar articles on sf artwork and music would, I am sure, be welcome.

I guess the highpoints of the job were the interviews. I thoroughly enjoyed doing those - especially those with Bob Shкол and Fred Pohl - although the tedious work of transcribing rob's of some of its joy. And perhaps I'll have the opportunity to do some more, either for VECTO or elsewhere, in the next few years.

Special thanks over the last few years must go to Tom Jones and Keith Freeman (and their kind, long-suffering wives) both for their friendship and support and their hospitality. Perhaps some of the more vociferous critics of the BSFA (now that some of them are actually "in office") will now realise just how bloody hard some of the BSFA officers have to work, without payment and with few kudos for their labours. Again, the pyrotechnics of new critics are not sufficient to fuel the organisation and persistence and forward planning are the key concepts in keeping the Association running from day to day. Not that, saying that, I don't greatly appreciate Jim Barker's "The Captive" for its incisive look at Organisations. Jim, incidentally, is doing a HALF-LIFE booklet at this Convention and at 75p (forgive me if I've got that wrong), Jim it's a bargain.

Something of the present flavour of VECTO I hope to maintain in my own magazine, KIPPLE (as regular as that is...) whilst I am sure that VECTO will benefit from a change of direction. Just to keep it all fresh.

Last moment thanks go to Chris Evans and Chris Morgan for providing material at a moment's notice, to John Brady for the stimulating but brief meeting re films and sf. And, of course, to Sue... for putting up with it all.

ADVERTISING RATES etc., may be obtained from TREV BRIGGS at 6, The Plains, Crescent Road, Chingford, London, E4 6AU (telephone: Office 01-803-7400 (Home) 01-529-3321)

BSFA COUNCIL: TREV BRIGGS, SANDY BROWN, ARTHUR C. CLARKE (President), MIKE DICKINSON, ALAN DONALD, MALCOLM EDWARDS, LES FLOOD, EVE HARVEY, JOHN HARVEY, DAVE LANGFORD, JONATHAN NICHOLAS, SIMON OAKLEY, MARK PINGLE, BOB SHOKL, KEV SMITH, (Company Secretary), DAVID SYMES, JAMES WHITE, DAVID WINGROVE.

Editorial Queries etc. should from henceforward be addressed to MIKE DICKINSON at Flat 7, 301 Chapeltown Road, Leeds, LS7 3JT.

This issue was produced at 4, Holmilde Court, Nightingale Lane, London, SW12 8TA.

* Those writers marked with an asterisk on the cover are members of the BSFA.

NB In Issue 93 I used a piece of artwork which was In Title (and unmarked) from the previous editor. Dave Langford informs me that this was by his little brother, John. (See inside back cover in the middle of the Paul Harris advert).
this world and nearer ones

BRIAN ALDISS

Did dinosaurs dream? Was there, in those tiny saurian brains, room for night-visions which related obliquely, fleetingly, to the daylight Mesozoic world? Looking at a triceratops skull, where the chamber designed for the brain forms a dungeon in a great Chillian of honey ornament, I find it impossible to think that consciousness, however dim, would not have wanted the emergency exit of dreams from such confinement.

And later. Those scampering tasters who were our remote ancestors — they must have experienced dreams of such towering paranoid ambition as to wake them twitching in their tree-top nests — or whatever sort of nocturnal arrangements tasters prefer — only to find themselves unable to cry, or even to know they were unable to cry, "Today a eucalyptus tree, tomorrow the world!"

Dreams must have preceded thought and Intention. They are the argument with reason omitted. The essays in this volume concern themselves with dreams, or applied dreams, or reason; the applied dreams of art and science contain both elements.

In these idle things, dreams, the unity of everything is an underlying assumption. Scientists have always needed artists to broaden their imaginations; artists have needed scientists to sharpen theirs. When William Blake wrote, "To see a world in a grain of sand...", he was not referring only to a visionary experience, as is customarily supposed when the lines are quoted; but also to the strictly practical business of looking through the microscopes of Robert Hooke and Antony van Leeuwenhoek.

However important dreams may be, they are far from being our whole story. For the human species, reason must take precedence, for reason is a human monopoly. Animals have reasoning ability; we have reason. Twelve million years ago the great physical world, this world, was different in an important way from the world of today. But the living world was greatly different: there was no reason, no pair of eyes to take a cool look at what was going on over the left shoulder or after the next meal. There were no human beings. Only taster dreams.

This prosaic reflection has been acceptable commonage for only two hundred years, if that. The great divide in the history of thought under which we all live, even the least philosophical of us, is brought about by the theory of evolution. That theory heard as a matter in the seventeenth century, rising to a prolonged murmur in the eighteenth, and finally becoming articulate last century.

Evolution has sharpened our ideas of time; the world of living things, previously frozen into immobility, like a stop-action movie shot, has burst into action in our understandings, filling us with fresh understandings of change.

Darwin, Wallace, and the many men of vision whose work went towards formulating evolution theory — not least Captain Fitzroy of "The Beagle" who remained a life-long opponent of Darwin's ideas — altered our way of viewing both the world and ourselves. Possibly it is just a coincidence that during the eighteen-fifties, when "The Origin of Species" was published, photography was all the rage. In particular, the stereoscope, without which no good Victorian family was complete, was familiarising people with ancient civilisations and the beauty of other countries and times. A new way of seeing was in the air.

Photography combines art and science in an ideal way. It is now so much a part of our lives that we hardly notice its all-pervasive nature. Yet it has not persuaded us to regard art and science as the complex unity I believe they are.

In their modest way, these essays represent my life-long interest in working in this ambiguous area. They could be said to trace the path through the last two centuries which can be seen leading us towards a fruitful concept of the present for our present is just someone else's old discarded future. We tread in the ruins of futures as well as of the past.

As for the essays themselves, they are also ruins in their way. They are salvaged from years of work I have done whilst not plying my trade as novelist and short story writer, expanded in reviews and articles, mainly trying to educate myself. Everything has been revised or rewritten — or thrown out in disgust.

Although not every essay concerns itself with science fiction, this volume is being published in connection with a science fictional event, the Thirty-Seventh World Science Fiction Convention, Secon, being held in Brighton, England, during August 1979, at which I am British Guest of Honour (the American Guest of Honour being Fritz Leiber).

Whilst the ordinary novel slumbers, paralysed perhaps by the gibbous awfulness of the twentieth century, it makes its annual excursions. Year by year, its progeny grow. Science fiction now accounts for between ten and twelve per cent of fiction sales. Yet it is very little discussed. When reviewed by newspapers and literary journals, it is either 'done' in a special issue, as a mad annual diversion, or else confined to small cemeteries on the fringes of a book page — semi-hallowed ground, the sort of spot where suicides are buried, its titles lying at wait another little like uprooted gravestones.

Other special cemeteries are reserved for science fiction authors. They are invited to appear on BBC TV with people like Uli Geller, Bruce Bellamy or Dr. Magnus Pyke. They are Introduced at literary luncheons with jokes about their not having two heads or green skins (less of that lately, thank goodness). They have to endure conversations with people who assume automatically that they believe, as do their interlocutors, in Flying Saucers and telepathy and Atlantis and the Bermuda Triangle and God as Cosmonaut and acupuncture and macrobiotic foods and pyramids that sharpen razor blades. They are scrutinised closely by their neighbours for traces of android-like behaviour.

At festivals of literature, they are regarded askance by chairmen of panels who make jocular interjections if they chance to refer to either E. E. Smith on the one hand or Dr. Johnson on the other. More orthodox writers present suspect them of earning either far more money than they do, or far less (both are true, by the way).
All this may suggest that I have reason to dislike being labelled an sf author. I have my reasons; but I do not dislike being an sf author. On the contrary. Although my first loyalty is to literature, I owe a great deal to a field to which I have been able to contribute something.

I am regarded as a difficult author, because I write non-fiction as well as fiction, ordinary fiction as well as science fiction, and occasionally what is a difficult book; but in my experience the readership of sf, on its more informed level, is remarkably patient, and will always endeavour to comprehend what they at first find incomprehensible.

Let me name two additional advantages in being a writer of science fiction, apart from becoming a guest of honour at a convention, since they are germane to these essays.

Firstly, over the last twenty years, the span of my writing career, science fiction has developed remarkably all round the world, the total peak of its progress rising like a population graph. Playing a role in that process has been tremendously rewarding.

Despite all the expansion, readers and writers have managed to remain closely in communication, as this convention indicates. This may be in part because of the indifference of people beyond the field, and the condemnation of critics armed only with the antique weaponry of standard lit. crit.; but it more probably springs from an inner mystery - the attempted complex unit of art and science - in itself. Because of that mystery, which every sf writer tries to interpret in an individual way, and because of the indifference from outside, we have been forced to form our own body of criticism, our own canons of taste; we have established our own editors, reviewers, scholars, booksellers and publishers, in a remarkable burst of creativity for which I can think of no parallel. We have done it all ourselves and given the world a new literature, whether the world wants it or not.

Secondly, that close community of interest, that fascination with the mystery, is global, and not confined to Western Europe or the United States. Largely thanks to friendly connections overseas, I have been able to travel about the world a good deal in the last decade, as some of the contents indicate, and have wandered as far afield as Iceland, Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, Japan, Brazil, Sicily, Mexico, Australia, Sumatra, and now Brighton. (Some of the trips were made by good old private enterprise, such as the Mexico and Sumatra ventures, but I should perhaps add that the Soviet visit was paid for by the arts council of Great Britain and the GB/USSR Association, to whom I wish to express my thanks.) Even the most casual traveller abroad must notice the way in which the whole world is caught up in a scramble of change.

The above is taken from the introduction to this world and nearer ones, published by waldenfield and nicolson to coincide with seac tools, and reprinted here by kind permission of the author.

Brian Aldiss...circa 1961, the year that saw the publication of the primal urge, serialised as minor operation in new worlds magazine.
One expects this sort of confession only from a writer whose period of disturbance is finished, or when he considers himself whole again. So we do not often get such illuminating statements. But I can think of several sf writers, some very famous, whose works give unmistakable indications of various kinds of deprivation and emotional upset; obviously it would be unjust to name names.

As it happens, sf is the ideal medium for externalising one's personal bogies and for unlocking one's secret fears in the form of aliens or stranger horrors. When a story has a slab of grey unbacked by any logical explanation, or abrading intractably from the structure of the story, then the watchful reader may know he is in the presence of a more irrational fear. I'm sure my friend Geoff Doherty's pet Shambles is in this category.

When I began writing science fiction, about 1955, I was in a nervous and in some ways repressed situation, and I channelled many fears into my writing. One example was my early story 'Outside' (reprinted in my SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL and In Craslin's BEST SF TWO). I was there putting into outer guise my own dread at the time of betrayal by other people. I did not realise I was doing this when I wrote the story; I realised it when I saw it in print. The therapy worked, however, for the fear of betrayal passed; nor have I been irrationally afraid of the dark since then.

Writing those early stories was a health care for me. At about the time that SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL was published, I ran out of phobias; they had all been expended on the stories that made Daman Knight say 'Altdis is most enjoyable when being most objectionable'; drained out into the daylight, the shy little things withered and died like bluebells stolen from the woods. That would have been much more of an hiatus in my writing life if I had not by then learnt a little of writing itself, the eternal fascination of trying to perfect the individual sentence and - how rare the successful - the individual story.

Of course, this therapeutic process only works on a superficial level. One has one's major obsessions. For an example: I have no patience with the belief in evil as a force external to man. In fact, I am cautious about allowing evil or bad into my beliefs and stories. I know that this belief exists, but hold it to be less than mere people think - thus such sins condemned by Christianity as lust or theft or gluttony may often prove to be, if examined, simple cases of deficiency, curable by understanding rather than punishment.

Whether or not these views are correct in an absolute sense, they are the ones I orient myself by. As a consequence, I can rarely raise enthusiasm for stories in which absolute good or absolute evil appears as an entity, as such works as Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS or Moorcock's Elric stories leave me untouched; for me they are based on a fallacy. In the same way, you will find little evil in my stories, although I rarely write about virtuous people. Here my beliefs are a handicap in writing as I do, I cannot draw villains.

Or, if I draw villains, the villainy is only in the eye of the beholder; when we understand things better, the villains are seen to be not so bad, and in fact motivated perhaps merely by ignorance or thoughtlessness or even by the best of impulses.

The giants in NON-STOP, the Rooks in EQUATEOR, the morel in HOTHOUSE, the nuns in THE INTERPRETER, even Rose English in THE PRIMAL URGE, turn out to be less black than they seemed before we grew to know them a little better. Hate yields to enlightenment.

I claim this to be a reasonable and rational view for an sf writer. But it means that the final scenes of my stories are not likely to be the climaxes of mayhem that some readers enjoy under an altered dispensation; you're much more likely to find some laugh out of court, or an armistice signed. And of course this isn't very dramatic.

Nevertheless, a writer is well advised not to violate his fundamental beliefs for the sake of fiction (any more than he should air his beliefs too brazenly). To anyone thinking of writing, whether for money, art or therapy - all sound motives - I would say that writing is not only the re-creation of life, but of life's experience re-assembled: It is itself a way of living; if your novel has any merit in it, you become a slightly different or deeper man by the time you have finished it. If you force yourself into a line of thought that does not ride with your personal philosophy just for the sake of the plot, there may be something wrong with your plotting. And you will never be really satisfied with the result.

If things work out as planned there should be a small advert in the space beneath for FOCUS, the new magazine for writers of sf, produced by the British Science Fiction Association and jointly edited by Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans. It just occurs to me now that the above challenge issued by Brian Aldiss in 1963 (and responded to at the time by subsequent issues of VECTOR) applies just as much today. So, perhaps anyone who wishes to make a similar attempt to analyse their own motives for writing would pen a brief article and forward it to either Chris or Rob at the address alongside...

Copyright: 1963 and 1979, Brian W. Aldiss

FOCUS is a new BSFA publication to be edited by Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans. The first issue (llithoed, A4 size) is being published coincidental to this issue of VECTOR.

FOCUS will be published twice a year and will run two or three pieces of fiction per issue (by unpublished writers) as well as items on all aspects of writing and publishing, market reports, queries answered, book reviews, and articles from writers, editors, agents and fans. The (Worldcon) issue has contributions from Chris Priest, Ken Bulmer, Dave Langford, Maggie Neach and Garry Kilworth.

It is hoped to produce a magazine which will not only provide advice and information for beginning writers, but which will also be of interest to established authors and people involved in other aspects of publishing. Although FOCUS cannot pay its contributors, it is aiming for professional standards in both the fiction and non-fiction departments.

Letters, stories, articles and artwork (and, of course, general enquiries and advertising) should be sent to: FOCUS, 32 Balfont Grove, Chitwick, London, W4 and please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with any manuscript you wish returned.
an interview with
brian aldiess

(The following interview took place in Melbourne, Australia during the Easter 1978 UniCon between Brian Aldiss and Brian Thurogood and was first featured in the New Zealand magazine NOUmenon, Issue Number 24, August 1978. My thanks to both Brians for their permission to run this slightly adapted version)

Thurogood: You mentioned in your guest of honour speech the potential ability of science fiction to stimulate and encourage people's imaginations. Could you expand on this and say whether you think much of achieves this?

Aldiss: Yes. I would love to give you a straight quote from Shelley's DEFENCE OF POETRY because he puts it so extremely well. And what he says is (I will have to paraphrase) that we have so much knowledge, and what we have that is (will have to paraphrase) that we have so much knowledge, and what he says is that we have so much knowledge, and we are unable to use them wisely because we lack the power to imagine, which is the power we gain through poetry -- and he means a complex thing by poetry -- but one of the things he would have meant today is fairly obviously science fiction.

So I regard Shelley as the first of poets, rather as his muse is the first of novels. And it seems to me that imagination is something that transforms everything. It transforms knowledge, it transforms facts into something that has a great deal more golden ore in it. For instance, we would be unable to kill each other on a large scale if we had that sort of imagination. A novel like SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE is exactly trying to get over this point. Vonnegut is trying to re-imagine the holocaust of Dresden for us all so that it wouldn't happen again. As to what other science fiction does this, the response is it is to the individual reader. You know very well that you meet people who rave about a book that you yourself don't care for. Well, I think often their imagination has been touched. When you first encounter science fiction at whatever age, you're struck by its imaginative qualities. When you've been reading it for some time you get a bit fed up with it because you don't get the same kicks. That's a common phenomenon. I have to say for myself that I don't get as many kicks as I used to, perhaps because the act of writing has taken over from the act of reading to some extent.

Thurogood: You still get as many kicks out of writing though?

Aldiss: Well, that's another matter. My pleasure in writing deepens because I have what is at least an illusion that I write better than I used to, that my understanding has deepened and my imagination strengthened. There's also the excitement of the chase... I think this is perhaps not generally realised. You're impressed by something - tally ho, it's in sight - sometimes you actually catch up with it.

Thurogood: Would you subscribe to the idea that the artist never really achieves his goal?

Aldiss: Well, it's a very easy thing to say but yes, I think it is true. Some sort of auto-destruct mechanisms come into play, though. After all, the goal itself is not a nebulous but it includes total self-knowledge, maybe, among other things, and I don't think you can attain total self-knowledge and still speak. You may find that you fall into a Buddhistic silence.

Thurogood: Do you think sf can continue to stimulate people's imaginations? What trends do you see in sf, either older ones coming into fruition, or hints and suggestions in current sf of future avenues?

Aldiss: I'll answer the first part of your question. Science Fiction's role in stimulating the imagination has changed slightly. I believe that a few years ago, let's say before the Apollo programme, before the great step that Armstrong took on the moon, the science fiction writer could easily astonish his readers because something like the moon walk was only a possibility. I can remember being absolutely breathless over reading a story about men getting to the moon. It seemed a tremendous goal. But once it's achieved, it's done and the situation is different.

As to the general population, they passed rapidly through three phases. The first one of course was believing that the moon walk was an impossibility, anyone who thought otherwise was a non-sense. Two, a nine-day's wonder when they marvelled and fell about in front of their television sets. And the third stage where they looked at each other and said, "Well, I always knew it could be done!"

Thurogood: Do you think that the presentation of the moon programme in the media was rather drab?

Aldiss: No, it didn't strike me as that. I was enthralled and felt the general public was getting something that until now was a private thing among friends. But after such an event the writer finds much more difficulty in stimulating his readers. I don't think that's a bad thing. Civilization has become more sophisticated in its thinking (if that isn't too big an assumption) so that the writer must also become more sophisticated. Instead of working against the grain of their disbelief, he now has to go with the grain and therefore has to go more deeply. That's a very questionable point because what we see happening in science fiction now is a trend towards pop sf. There's no doubt that the audience has grown enormously, and grown for all levels of science fiction. And the more adhered levels have got a much bigger audience than ever before. But it may be that proportionately, the new readership has come mainly on the sort of pop-Flash Gordon level. STAR WARS is going to encourage this trend. It's the things that don't explain a movie doesn't explain. If you make a film from a good science fiction novel the chances are that the novel will explain and extend your knowledge and the film won't. It will only show you. Although we all rejoice to think the two films that everyone must see at the moment are both science fiction: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS and STAR WARS, there are a lot of dangers in this situation. It could all go back to being that Buck Rogers stuff in no time, as far as I can see. And that has an effect on the serious science fiction writer in that he may get entirely possed off with this situation and decide to go and write something else.

Thurogood: Is this something like what's happened to Silverberg, for example?

Aldiss: Well, maybe, although I think that Bob has other difficulties — like having written too much for too long and now nemesis is overtaking him.

Thurogood: What is your opinion of sf on film? Have there been enough successes to talk of sf films as a distinct group, or are we still in the infancy of that field, pointing to a few successes and shuddering to think of the rest?

Aldiss: We certainly do less shuddering than we used to! There was a time when the whole thing was a disaster area. I'd say things have improved so much. Whether you can talk about the sf cinema per se, I don't know, although I think there are movies that do it with some accomplishment, Cine Fantastique and this sort of thing. By throwing in titles like SINBAD AND HIS WOODEN EYE or whatever, you have a certain range of fantasy films. But in cinema, much more than in the novel, we see the creative spirit moving in to a genre previously regarded as junk. There are a lot of cinematic equivalents to BRAVE NEW WORLD, I think.

There is always a prejudice in the sf writing field against sources that come in from outside and make a success. They are popularly supposed to be exploiting the field, which is a lot of dreadful nonsense. But in the cinema there are good instances of quite well-known directors who can see all the possibilities of science fiction, ALPHAVILLE, for example, directed by Godard — that kind of film seems to be readily accessible to a director with a wide vocabulary. There is an interesting English director, Lindsay Anderson, who's never actually made a science fiction film but he's made things like OH LUCKY MAN and IF with strong elements of fantasy. And even someone like Bunuel with THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE seemed to me to be doing a sort of Inner space science fiction. Godard also made WEEKEND, which is a marvellous movie. That really is science fiction.

However, if you tot up all the items on the bill I still don't think you'd make a fortune, simply because it really is difficult to do. It is genuinely difficult. You can't repeat the success of 2001 or A CLOCKWORK ORANGE every year. There's a thesis by Wyndham Lewis about progress in the arts. He claims this is an illusion, that the arts don't progress. Or, if progress can be seen, it's only towards the status of art. I'm afraid this doesn't say much for the science fiction field. But as far as movies are concerned the illusion of progress is strong and not only in technological approach. DARK STAR, for instance, embodies in its
Aldiss: Well, I certainly felt like that when I was doing my sf art book with an interesting moral question posed behind it, which was

Aldiss: Oh, well, I thought WESTWORLD did rather well for the 60s. It was a very 60s idea that if you could perfect androids they would only be used for your pleasure. I thought that was a rather fine film with an interesting moral question posed behind it, which was extremely well and effectively done. Funny too, by god, in parts! Intentionally funny as opposed to accidentally funny.

Thurogood: SF art and illustration is a field of great interest to me. Is it possible that field has more success, a far higher percentage of very imaginative and original work, than sf in other media?

Aldiss: Well, I certainly felt like that when I was doing my sf art book book, that the more I went into it, the more excited I got. There was some marvellously dedicated work done by guys who were being paid peanuts, who delivered far more than they were ever asked for. And reading the stories that went along with them, I really thought that the reverse was true. There are hundreds of unreadable stories in those old magazines that we’re supposed to revere – absolute rubbish! And it must have been rubbish at the time. Yet some of the illustrations seem as fresh, delightful and mysterious as ever. All sorts of people who have worked in the magazines are very much neglected. It’s a delightful creative field.

Thurogood: How did you put your art book together?

Aldiss: It was actually a project that I’d long wanted to do and had tried on several publishers with absolutely nil response. And then I got a letter out of the blue from a publisher I didn’t know, recently in business: that was Trewin Copplestone. I went up to see what their intentions were and found to my delight that they did actually want to do the sort of book I wanted to do. So there was no quarrel there.

Thurogood: So you had a large hand in the actual designing?

Aldiss: Yes, although Copplestone had a very good designer called Terry. He was the chief sceptic to start with and the greatest enthusiast to end with. They said at the end, “That was great, Brian. We wish we’d done a bigger book.” So I said we could always do another book. “Oh, really, what?” And I said we could do almost the same thing again and call it Fantasy Art. There are a lot of books on the market calling themselves Fantasy Art and they’re all concerned with fairies. We can do hard fantasy. They thought about that and said they had a better idea. “We want you to edit a visual encyclopedia of science fiction.”

Aldiss: It's a very attractive package, but it is actually rather depressing in that it does compartmentalise all the cliches of science fiction and perpetuate them one more time. I suppose for most people that’s fine because that’s the level on which they read, but they must realise that I am a bandit in the hills and forever raising these sodal little commercial townships down on the plain. I want science fiction to be BETTER! To be stronger, to be a great intellectual force. So that ultimately I am hostile to the view of science fiction propagated in the VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA.

Thurogood: There is also the related field of sf comics – or rather comics with an sf theme. Have you seen much of the recent large expansion of work in the field, from Metal Hurlant/Heavy Metal and associated artists, to the hundreds of sf comic fanzines currently available?

Aldiss: Well, it doesn’t interest me very much. Again, I like the whacky theories and explanations in science fiction which I find are missing in the visual stuff. But, yes, I do see the French METAL HURLANT, which is just marvellous and transcendental. My god! the things that they do there. Quite extraordinary. Nothing like it. The work of people like Druillet is so outstanding, quite staggering. I like that very much because it gets to you, doesn’t it?

Thurogood: Do you have any idea of the origins of METAL HURLANT?

Aldiss: Well, it would not have begun life anywhere but France because they’re strong on sf at present. Science fiction has always meant something apart to the French. It always tends towards fantasy, with a sort of sadomasochistic undertone. This is the sort of seasoning the French like. AND METAL HURLANT embodies it all.

Thurogood: Music with sf themes and, in some cases, similar intent to written sf, is another field of great interest to me. Have you heard anything you consider imaginative or interesting which can give a similar buzz to that obtained from outstanding work in the other fields?

Aldiss: I honestly don’t know the answer to that. I know a lot of music that gives me a buzz, but whether it gives me the same sort of buzz, I don’t know. Except in one case, and that was what George Melly calls a “Revolt Into Style” of pop music in the 60s and it seemed to me very close to sf. And, as you may recall, BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD is dedicated to the shade of Ouspensky and Procul Harum’s “Whiter Shade Of Pale”. Music like that was right on the right wave band. A lot of the Beatles’ stuff when they were introducing new Instruments was very
Innovative. Recently, I can't think of much really

Thurugood: Are there any of your works that you would like to see taken into other media, like films or illustrated editions?

Aldiss: There is nothing that you do not mention. In Los Angeles, we are striving to make a film of HOTHOUSE, true to the original. Options are taken on NON-STOP and BROTHEL OF THE HEAD.

Thurugood: You mentioned in your guest of honour speech that you hope Earth has the only life in the Universe. Could you expand on this, please?

Aldiss: Well, there was a talk that was just Aldiss being difficult. It is part of my war against the cliché. I've long been making myself unpopular among my fellow authors by scoffing at FTL and telepathy - in my view they're just stunts and used without examination. And I begin to feel that the only one's almost in the same boat. If you use such a concept you should not accept it too easily or it loses its challenge. Like we were saying earlier about space travel to the moon, no one believed it, then they wondered, now they accept it. It wasn't long ago since everyone said we were nuts if we claimed there were people living on other planets - now everyone appears to believe it. You go to the bookstore and next to sf there's a whole new culture dealing with topics once sacred to sf.

Thurugood: Which brings me to my last section. Do you have a particular philosophy, through which you view the world, which contributes to your writing, and which you are prepared to state and/or discuss?

Aldiss: The brief answer, really, is no. It's no good my pinning these things down onto the dissecting board - they're the things I live by. If I pin them all down there would be very little more to write about. At heart I'm a skeptic. I don't have any formulated religious belief but at the same time I'm haunted by religious feelings about the world. Rather like Thomas Hardy. Let's just leave it at that.

---

a leiber bibliography

compiled by Chris Morgan.

The unique thing about Fritz Leiber is that he's done it all. Nobody else has managed to cover the field of speculative literature quite so completely, writing science fiction, fantasy and horror at all lengths, and also contributing book reviews and articles.

THE NOVELS:

GATHER, DARKNESS, 1950 (fantasy) - several US and UK editions, but not currently in print.

DESTINY TIMES THREE, 1952 (sf) - no UK edition; Dell paperback available.

CONJURE WIFE, 1952 (horror) - "all women are witches"; many editions; Ace paperback available.

THE GREEN MILLENNIUM, 1953 (sf/fantasy) - available.

THE SINFUL ONES, 1953 (sf) - US paperback only; exceedingly rare. A shorter version is "You're all alone".

THE BIG TIME, 1961 (sf/fantasy) - the "Change War" novel which won a Hugo; see SHIP OF SHADOWS collection.

THE SILVER EGGHEADS, 1962 (sf) - several editions; US paperback available.

THE WANDERER, 1964 (sf) - Hugo-winning disaster novel in which a planet sized alien spaceship upsets Earth's tides.

TARZAN AND THE VALLEY OF GOLD, 1966 (fantasy/adventure) - film novelisation; Ballantine paperback only; rare.

THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR, 1968, (heroic/fantasy) - the only full-length Fafhrd & Gray Mouser novel; available.

A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING TEXAS, 1969, (sf) - available.

OUR LADY OF DARKNESS, 1977 (horror) - Leiber calls it an occult thriller; much of the detail is autobiographical; available.

THE COLLECTIONS:

NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS, 1947 (horror/fantasy) - 10 stories, mostly horror but including two about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser; available.

TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE, 1957 (heroic fantasy) - Seven F&G stories, all included in the SWORDS AGAINST DEATH collection.

THE MIND SPIDER, 1961 (sf/fantasy) - Six "Change War" stories; Ace paperback only.

SHADOWS WITH EYES, 1962 (horror) - 6 stories; Ballantine paperback only.

A PAIL OF AIR, 1964 (sf) - 11 stories; Ballantine paperback only.

SHIPS TO THE STARS, 1964 (sf) - 6 stories; Ace paperback only.

THE NIGHT OF THE WOLF, 1966 (sf) - 4 stories; paperback editions, but not in print.

THE SECRET SONGS, 1968 (sf/horror) - 11 stories; UK editions only.

SWORDS AGAINST WIZARDRY, 1968 (heroic fantasy) - 4 linked F&G stories; available.

SWORDS IN THE MIST, 1968 (heroic fantasy) - 5 F&G stories; available.
NIGHT MONSTERS, 1969 (horror) - originally 4 stories, but UK editions have 7.

SWORDS AGAINST DEATH, 1970 (heroic fantasy) - 10 F&GM stories (ie. TWO SOUGHT ADVENTURE plus 3 additions); available.

SWORDS AND DEVLIRY, 1970 (heroic fantasy) - 4 F&GM stories; available.

YOU'RE ALL ALONE, 1972 (sf) - 3 stories; US paperback only.

THE BEST OF FRITZ LEIBER, 1974 (sf/fantasy/horror) - 22 stories; various editions.

THE BOOK OF FRITZ LEIBER, 1974 (sf/fantasy/horror) - 10 stories plus some articles; US paperback only.

THE SECOND BOOK OF FRITZ LEIBER, 1975 (sf/fantasy/horror) - 6 stories plus some articles; US paperback only.

THE WORLDS OF FRITZ LEIBER, 1976 (mostly fantasy) - 22 stories; US paperback only.

RIME ISLE, 1977 (heroic fantasy) - short novel ("Rime Isle") and 1 other story - F&GM; US hardcover only.

SWORDS AND ICE MAGIC, 1977 (heroic fantasy) - short novel ("Rime Isle") and 7 others; F&GM - available.


THE CHANGE WAR, 1978 (sf) - 10 "Change War" stories; US hardcover only.

HEROES AND HORDORS, 1978 (heroic fantasy/horror) - 9 stories including 2 F&GM; US hardcover only.


Fritz Leiber has written a couple of hundred stories, some of them not reprinted in any of his collections. Well over fifty articles by him have appeared (mostly in SCIENCE DIGEST and AMFA) not including a book review column he has written intermittently for the magazine FANTASTIC. He has written poetry and corresponded with many amateur and professional magazines. His special interests in chess, astronomy, cats and Shakespeare often display themselves in his stories. Season 79 is his second appearance as a Guest of Honour at a World SF Convention; the first was at Nolacon in 1951. In July 1969, THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION published a special Fritz Leiber issue, including a new novella, "Ship Of Shadows" and a bibliography.

I hope to be producing a complete bibliography of Fritz Leiber in time for Season 79. With a bit of luck it will include chronological and alphabetical listings of all his books and stories (including all editions and all anthology reprints), plus lists of his articles, awards and other activities. It should be on sale at Seacon and available from the specialist dealers. The price will depend on production costs.

- Chris Morgan (C) July 1979.

VECTOR BACK ISSUES (Available as at August 1979)

Issue 84 (Nov-Dec 1977): "The Instinct Of Non-Freedom", articles on Tengery Zamyatin by Phil Stephens-Page and David Wingrove; "One Man's Weak" by Brian Aldiss; "But Is She SF?" by P.M. Wansan; "The Camera Is The Eye Of A Cruising Vulture" (Burroughs) by Andrew Darlington; "Jorge Luis Borges - A Man Alone?" by Tom Jones and David Wingrove; reviews of Adlard, Asimov, Clute, Dick, Freeman, Greenberg & Olander, Griffin, Harness, Koonz, Pischler, Priest, Roberts, Shaw, Simak, Stichin, Tenn, Vance and Wilson.

Issue 85 (Jan-Feb 1978): "Brahmin Awakening: Phil Dick & The Metaphysical Fancies" by David Wingrove; "Descending On A Point Of Flame" by Steev Higgins (the Spaceship In SF); "All Yin And No Yang - ILLUMINATUS" by Robert Gibson; reviews of Bisht, Cooper, Dickinson, Clarke, Duncan & Weston-Smith, Harrison, Hesse, Miller, Niven & Pournelle, Lafferty.

Issue 86 (Mar-Apr 1978): "A Day In The Life Of An SF Writer's Wife" by Judy Watson; An Interview with Ian Watson by David Wingrove; "The Novels Of Ian Watson - Amazed And Afterwards/Avoiding Neotony" by David Wingrove; "Civilisation And Savagery (Two Novels of Robert Holdstock)" by Phil Stephens-Page; reviews of Pohl, Hill, Goulart, Vance, Delany, Zelazny, Watkin, Dickson, Strugatski, Carr and Aldiss.

Issue 87 (May-Jun 1978): "Bannocks, The Literary Quarterly" by Cyril Simms; "Purgatory Revisited Again" by Brian Stableford; "Yin, Yang & Yung" (fiction) by Brian Aldiss; "Slaughterhouse - an overview of Kurt Vonnegut" by Bruce Ferguson; "Are You Listening? The contemporary fantasy of Harlan Ellison" by Tony Richards; Season 79 - An Open Letter from John Brunner; reviews of Disch, Varley, Aldiss, Martin, Ballard, Strugatsky, Ash and FOUNDATION.

Issue 88 (Jul-Aug 1978): An Interview With Frank Herbert by David Wingrove; "Terminal Choreography - An overview of Michael Moorcock's Dancers At The End Of Time stories" by Andrew Darlington; reviews of Herbert, Bayley, Lewis, Aldiss, Moorcock, Tennant, O'Brien, Butler, Holland, Walters, Anderson, Clarke, and Priest.

Issue 89 (Sep-Oct 1978): "Don't Forget I'm An Artifice (Metafiction)" by Cy Chauvin; An Interview With Richard Cowper by David Wingrove; reviews of Shickley, Aldiss, Bayley, Butterworth & Brinton, Camper, Lindsay, Shaw, Silverberg, Vance, Labsy 1 and Foundation 14.

Issue 90 (Nov-Dec 1978): An Interview With Frederik Pohl by David Wingrove; "The Best Of Hamilton & Brackett" by Brian Stableford; "Dispossession" by Steev Higgins; reviews of Budrys, Butler, Clarke, Corley, Hill & Hill, Holdstock, Kilworth, McIntyre, Tiptree, Varley and Watson.


Issue 92 (Mar-Apr 1979): An Interview With Richard Cowper by David Wingrove; "The Rest Is Dreams - the work of Richard Cowper" by David Wingrove; reviews of Donaldson, Francis, W. Burroughs, Dickson, LeGuin, Clarke, Strugatski, Jakubowski, Foundation 15, Allan.

Issue 93 (May-Jun 1979): "Legerdemain - the science fiction of Christopher Priest" by David Wingrove; reviews of Donaldson, Francis, W. Burroughs, Dickson, LeGuin, Clarke, Strugatski, Jakubowski, Foundation 15, Allan.

NV Issues 84 through to 90 are duplicated, Issues 91 onward are 11th and 12th with (in some cases) duplicated supplements. Readers' letters are a regular feature in all issues (until this present one).

All available at 75p from Phillip Muldawney at 28 Moorland View, Derriford, Plymouth, Devon, England.

Limited numbers of Issues prior to Number 84 are also available from Phil Muldawney and details may be obtained from him.
the infinity box
book reviews

Josef Nesvadba
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ABBOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Review by Cyril Simsa.

"Josef Nesvadba," the blurb opines, "is Czechoslovakia's leading science fiction writer." Too bad that New English Library forgot to tell its art director, who has slammed a hideous purple airmail-and-macho-sublimation painting on the cover. It is true that the short story which gives its title to this collection features a number of creatures who suffer a chunky physiognomy, but the luridly mindless brash and swagger of the artwork runs directly counter to the author's tone of "cheerful defeatism" (If I may borrow an appropriate appraisal from the Introduction). Though he often draws upon the tropings of pre-War adventure fiction, Nesvadba uses these tropings for a quite distinct and dissimilar purpose to their earlier pulp-magazine purveyors (usually, he uses them as an extended metaphor).

Thus, to Nesvadba, the society that mankind has created treats its denizens as rigorously as a jungle. In "Death of an Apeman," a lustful heir to the fortune of the German Baron von Hoppe is looked after by apes and grows to live as one of them. When he encounters an adventurer who has been stranded in the aftermath of a disastrous expedition to hunt monkeys, he is easily enchanted by her stories of civilisation: tales of altruism, sharing, and a life-style nobler than his own. He travels back to Europe with her only to find that his expectations are betrayed by actuality: bickering politicians squabble over his inheritance, he is exploited to their ends, and they eventually drive him to craving the existence he knew as an ape.

This jungle background, although most explicit in "Death of an Apeman," may also be found in many of the other stories here. Nesvadba's stories have a cast of selfish brutes who use each other to advance themselves and very rarely show visible signs of sympathy. His stories tend to be narrated by misogynistic, middle-aged, self-centred failing academics or minor-league medical practitioners; as a result, some of the less distinguished stories tend to be narrated by the self-interested drive that reason gives to Homo Sapience; the conflict of the story lies between feeling and rationality. Nesvadba does not come to any kind of facile resolutions rather, he creates an equilibrium balance of the opposing views. His is a complex viewpoint which in general avoids arriving at unwarranted and premature conclusions.

There is much, inevitably, that I must omit. In this short a review: Nesvadba writes with a gently Stygian humour which occasionally bursts out into reveries of gleeful fatalism. At his best (as in the title story) he constructs a thoroughly engaging and intricate yarn which twists and turns like hyper-tautened crile. My one criticism of the book would be Nesvadba's choice of his narrative mouthpiece; characters: his stories tend to be narrated by misogynistic, middle-aged, self-centred failing academics or minor-league medical practitioners; as a result, some of the less distinguished stories tend to blend with the passing of time (and there is a - significantly the shortest piece in Intelligence - which could hardly have been removed from the collection without anybody noticing).

Nevertheless, Nesvadba is a generally stimulating writer. He moreover represents a Continental tradition of writing of which English-speaking audiences are too often far too ignorant. For all my bitching at their heinous design department, N. E. L. should be commended for making available for at least a smattering of European writers (I am thinking also of their TRAVELLING TOWARDS EPSILON).

Get this book; it gives a rarely-granted opportunity to glimpse the very heart of the contemporary Continental jungle.

(If it should also be noted that a "follow-up" volume to EPSILON, edited once again by Maxim Jakubowski, TWENTY HOUSES OF THE ZODIAC, has been published to coincide with the World Science Fiction Convention by New English Library. Its International line-up of contributing authors is as follows: Brian Aldiss (England); Ian Hobana (Romania); Cherry Wilder (Australia); Gerd Maximovic (West Germany); Elisabeth Vonarburg (Canada); Robert Sheklicky (USA); Philippe Curval (France); Adam Barnett-Foster (Sam Saffire); Arkady & Boris Strugatsky (USSR); J. G. Ballard (England); Hugo Raes (Holland); Shin'tchi Hosh (Japan); Bob Shaw (Ireland); Daniel Walther (France); John Sladek (USA); Teresa Ines (Spain); Maxim Jakubowski (France/England); Sam J. Lundwall (Sweden); Stanislaw Lem (Poland); Michael Moorcock (England). The haste with which this issue has had to be prepared is unfortunately not allowed time to run a review of this volume, but it is hoped to prepare a review for a forthcoming VECTOR.)

David Langford
WAR IN 2080 (*he future of Military Technology)
Weidenfeld & Nicolson Books (David & Charles); April 1977; £5.95; 229pp; ISBN o 7153 7661 6.

Review by David Wingrove

I must admit to a certain conservatism in my approach to the hard sciences; my tastes tend to the artistic and thus I welcome novels unadulterated by cold slabs of scientific exposition and, likewise, textbooks which escape the blight of assuming that I, the reader, knows what Occam's Razor is, or why anyone should place a cat in a sealed environment and then say - without looking - that it was both dead and not-dead. WAR IN 2080 is, to my mind, almost a perfect book of its kind, a text book of possibilities that assumes basic intelligence on the part of its reader but goes to the bother of explaining the implications of the vitally terms of the science/military mind as it wrestles with modern physics to find a bigger and better way of ending the rat race. It is a wittily written book which - despite its subject matter - made me at one and the same time laugh and consider the moral implications of the matters discussed. That it should achieve this, I feel, its greatest success, and I was grateful for the Afterword, "Logic of Expansion", which, very rightly, placed the whole matter of future warfare into a moral perspective.

The subject matter ranges from the actual to the hypothetically; a logical progression that embraces both. Langford is clever at laying out his thesis: Historical warfare and - briefly - the kind of scenarios that are more at home in the Space Opera of the fifties. Each item is examined in the light of present scientific knowledge with the carefully made proviso that things may not always stay the same, nor may the laws stay true everywhere in the Universe and, finally, that our own knowledge of physics is an expanding thing which may release to us the power to make real some of these hypothetical weapons.

Strange enough I found this a rather comforting book in the sense that the actualities of the holocaust and its likelihood were unchallenged; there was no attempt to put it out, emphasis being placed on the consequences of modern nuclear warfare and the present small possiblities of evading the fact that the aggressor in such a war would pay as dearly as the aggressed. Dave Langford draws from a wide range of sources to illustrate human ingenuity and does not shrink from the scientists obligation to examine all the angles. In doing so - almost as a by-product - he has produced a book that not only examines (in a language comprehensible to the layman) the perversion of scientific advance to military means, but also provides a whole fund of ideas and references for anyone wishing to use scientific extrapolation as a basis for fiction (budding sf writers take note).

This is a nicely produced, well illustrated book, written with a great deal of style and an incisive knowledge of the subject matter. I recommend it without reservations either in this hardback format or (so I believe) in the paperback version due from Sphere later in the year. It confirms my belief that Langford might easily become as important a 'populariser* of science fiction (budding sf writers take note).

Fritz Leiber
OUR LADY OF DARKNESS
Fontana; 1978; 189pp; 80pence; ISBN 0 00 614861 1

Review by Chris Morgan

This is supernatural fiction at its best. It is an extremely erudite novel, (though not off-puttingly so) and cunningly autobiographical, mingling fact and fiction until they become impossible to separate. Throughout, an atmosphere of evil is gradually developed until it reaches a pitch of hysterical horror. To nobody's surprise this was voted the best novel of the year (1977) at the 4th World Fantasy Convention in October 1978.

Leiber's main character is himself - minimally disguised by the removal of twenty years from his age and by a change of name to Franz Westen, the writer of horror stories living alone in an apartment at 811 Geary Street.
In present-day San Francisco (Leiber's former address), Westen is very interested in chess and astronomy; he has not long got over a bout of alcoholism following the death of his wife. Perhaps many of the smaller details of Westen's existence are also autobiographical - the layout of his apartment, the people living in neighboring apartments, the strange books Westen owns.

It is two of these books which give rise to the action: the curiously prophetic MEGAPOLISOMANCY by Thibaut de Castris, published in about 1900, and a hand-written diary from 1928 which is supposed to have belonged to Clark Ashton Smith. Yes, not content with including himself, Leiber brings other well-known writers into the story. There are several lengthy quotations from the (obviously mythical) Smith's diary, which are important to the plot. (I say "obviously mythical" because at one point Leiber's edition slips and he — through the medium of a diary entry — refers to Dali, who was still unknown outside Spain in 1928.) Also, H. P. Lovecraft is referred to in places, together with Jack London, Ambrose Bierce and Dashiell Hammett. These are all supposed to have been acquaintances of the eccentric and sinister de Castris, who is said to have lived in San Francisco from about 1900 until his death in 1929.

de Castris, who must surely be fictional, is presented as almost an Aleister Crowley type — a powerful man who practised black magic and attracted young artistic types to him. Franz Westen learns about de Castris from Jaime Donaldus Byers, a rich poet and dilettante who is as strange and magnetic a character as de Castris himself.

Although the other characters are beautifully described — obviously drawn, or exaggerated, from life — it is Westen on whom the book concentrates. He is that pursues the pale brown thing which he sees through his binoculars, and ultimately confronts it. Investigating its connection with de Castris and — indirectly — with himself, he comes to think of it as Mater Tenebrorum, Our Lady Of Darkness — from the book Supina de Profundis by De Quincey (with some books mentioned in this novel being non-existent, one is forced to check on the reality of all the rest; the De Quincey does exist).

This is the sort of novel which Leiber has been threatening to write for quite a few years. His stories "A Bit of the Dark World", "The Black Gondolier" and "Midnight by the Morphy Watch" have been pointing in this direction, with an increasing tendency towards autobiography and a gradual refinement of his writing style. The element of horror is present but generally understated, combining with the wholly believable background to produce supernatural occurrences which rely not at all on the Lovecraftian approach (full of awful creeping horrors and archaic epithets) yet are much more credible. Even if you don't care for novels of horror or the supernatural, this is one which you should read as it is one of the best of its kind.
So, does THE PRISONER appeal because the village is a metaphor for dehumanized modern society, and does Number 6 seem such a hero because he possesses that rare strength of mind which enables him to resist the pressures to conform and compromise? Perhaps, but speaking personally I always liked THE PRISONER because it appealed to my incipient paranoia, confirming my suspicion that nobody is trustworthy and that everyone’s out to get me. Be honest, and admit that you’ve felt that way too, sometimes. Not that I’d believe you if you denied it: it was probably just a play in some sinister game you’re playing with me...

Before the men in the white coats arrive, I’ve just got time to say that this book originally appeared in the US in 1969 and that this is its first British publication. Since it’s written by one of SF’s best novelists, one would expect it to be better than the average BOOK OF THE FILM/TV SERIES, and so it is. Disch has skillfully blended several episodes together so that the book does have something of the flavour of a novel. I’ve not yet liked a book with a physical description of the village and its inhabitants and less of the slightly precious philosophical dialogue between Number 6 and his captors, but Disch adores perfectly faithfully to the spirit of the series overall. A must for all fans.

Anne McCaffrey
THE WHITE DRAGON
Staunton & Jackson; 1979; $5.95; 497 pages ISBN 0 285 983 299
review by Chris Morgan

Does anybody out there remember a pop single of a decade or so ago, “The Little White Bull”, sung by Tommy Steele? It’s a revolting twang, piece, which probably still gets requested on Junior Choice, about a little white bull (would you believe it?) which has to get into bullfighting but is turned down for being under age. The last lines are ‘You’re a great little bull/the best in town’. Well, a similar sentiment pervades the latest of Anne McCaffrey’s dragon books, which is about a little white dragon and his youthful rider managing to outdo all the adults on their full-sized dragons.

That does sound awfully like the plot-line for a juvenile novel, doesn’t it? In fact THE WHITE DRAGON is a compromise between juvenile and adult levels. It lacks the toughness of DRAGONFLIGHT and DRAGON QUEST, even DRAGONLANCE, even CONAN OF PERN. Nor is it an unabashed juvenile like DRAGONSONG or DRAGONSINGER. But the air of sentimentalities which affected those two wrinkles into THE WHITE DRAGON, as well. The main protagonists are not children but they are immature adults — teenagers with teenage emotions and outlooks. This accounts, in part, for the shallowness of the book, for the lack of insight into characters and situation. Only in part, though, for all the characters here are over-simplified; the adults are either cyphers (mainly too good to be true) or else mere spear carriers — a funny name, a line or two of dialogue and never heard from again. There seems to be a cast of thousands, and the main action spans almost four years and many hundreds of miles, leaping back and forth between Pern’s northern and southern continents. This presents a facade here and there; one scarce gets a good look at the board there but no depth. Anne McCaffrey has deliberately written this book to appeal to a relatively unsophisticated mass audience — for children of all ages, if you like — and she has achieved great commercial success with it. The US hardcover has sold 50,000 copies, so the dust jacket proclaims.

THE WHITE DRAGON is fairly typical of its kind. It has plenty of action, the grandeur of flying dragons, a romantic interest, the sense of a civilization striving to improve itself and a juvenile hero with whom it is easy to identify (always assuming that one wants to be a juvenile hero). And one cannot (however hard one tries) forget the fire-lizards — effectively miniature dragons — which fly around everywhere, carrying messages and being two. Some passages rise above all this, particularly the brief scene where Masterharper Robiniont (now calling) realises that he loves Mennally (the young female harper, star of DRAGONSONG) and that he is too old for her, but that he is too old and this revelation too late. Yet there is much happiness and joy in the book, and little sadness; deaths seem rare and petty disappointments are soon forgotten. There is no real evil on Pern. Threads, the dangerous alien spores which fall intermittently, are being coped with. Token baddies are introduced — a few dragonrider who have become enslaved to the southern continent — but they are never much of a threat.

Mostly the plot is one of continuing progress towards fulfilling for Jaxom (an under-age nobleman) and his unique white dragon, Ruth. (Having a male dragon called Ruth is just about as silly as having a male rabbit named Hazel.) Ruth is only half the size of the other dragons,
which makes Jaxom all the more determined that together they will be the greatest dragon-and-rider team of all.

"You know," N'ton began, frowning slightly as he folded his arms across his damp-splattered tunic. "Ruth isn't really white.

Jaxom stared incredulously at his dragon. "He's not?"

"No. See how his hide has shadows of brown and gold, and ripples of blue or green on the near flank."

"You're right!" Jaxom blinks, surprised at discovering something totally new about his friend. "I guess those colors are much more noticeable because he's so clean and the sun's so bright today!" It was such a pleasure to be able to discuss his favorite topic with an understanding audience.

This "gosh, wow!" approach persists throughout the book. Too many plot developments are telegraphed in advance, but this doesn't make Jaxom's notable achievements and serendipitous discoveries any more believable. Ruth is exceptional in that he has the ability to pinpoint himself in time and a special affinity with fire lizards, though we never find out why. From the outset it's obvious that Jaxom and Ruth are going to succeed with everything they try. It is comic-book stuff.

More interesting is Anne McCaffrey's insistence that this is science fiction rather than fantasy. She's trying too hard to convince the reader that fire-breathing dragons can be explained away in a perfectly scientific manner, that mankind came to Perun in spaceships and that the present level of civilization represents a resurgence from barbarism towards technology under difficult conditions (a shortage of metal, falls of Thread etc.). It isn't giving away too much to say that one of the areas in which Jaxom and Ruth's story intersects with that of Perun as a whole is in the discovery of ancient technological remnants belonging to the first settlers. And it isn't giving away anything to suggest that these archaeological triumphs pave the way for sequels.

(DRAGONDURMS, the third juvenile book, had already been published in the US; more supposedly adult novels can obviously be expected.)

To complete the package, THE WHITE DRAGON has a magnificent wrap-around jacket illustration by Michael Whelan, a map which doesn't mark everything it should, and not an Index but a Dragondex (well, it made me cringe so I thought I would inflict it on all of you, too) at the end.

It is far from being high class literature but its undoubted popularity may win it a Hugo at Seacoon.

Brian W. Aldiss
THESE WORLDS AND NEARER ONES (Essays Exploring the Familiar)
Weldenfield & Nicolaiony July 1979; $6.95; 261pp; ISBN 0 297
77655 X
review by David Wingrove

When talking of Theodore Sturgeon, Aldiss says, "after all, it is a shame to read his non-fiction when much of his fiction is so charged, loaded, in a way to which articles can never aspire." (p204). As much could be said of this collection of essays by Aldiss, thought whilst they obviously haven't the bite of a great deal of his fiction, they are sufficiently 'charged' to provide any reader of this volume with a satisfying reading experience.

Collected from a wide range of sources over a number of years and covering a number of topics, these essays reflect a personal philosophy that constantly attempts to reconcile all the disparate elements of life (something that is particularly noticeable here in 'From History to Timelessness', for example).

Aldiss has, of course, published several volumes before this one which have traced the outline of his thought in a non-fictional form, but this is perhaps the most compact 'broad view' of his ideas yet to see print. THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS (published nine years ago) is a more autobiographical book than THIS WORLD AND NEARER ONES though certain preoccupations (centred on the genre) recur in the new volume. BILLION YEAR SPREE is a more detailed study of the genre, yet it lacks something of the overall charm of this new book. CITIES AND STONES is an Intensive travellers guide (and something of an historical document now considering the progress of modern Yugoslavia) yet it is also partially reflected here in the travel essays. Perhaps the best description of THIS WORLD... is to say that it is a drawing together of the threads, a compact 'sample' of the ideas that permeate all his work and are disseminated in a more diluted form throughout his fiction.

The first section of the book, beneath the heading 'Writing' is a series of nine essays on SF authors (inclusive of one on his own BAREFOOT IN THE HEADL). As a critic Aldiss aims to inform and stimulate his readers and these articles are "positive, motivated by love" (in Hesse's words). He seems motivated by a sympathy with the works he is discussing (particularly the essays on Dick and Blish - the latter a much extended and revised version of the article that appeared recently in FOUNDATION) and displays an intellect that selectively collects and inter-relates ideas to produce studies that may be read detached, or as one, wanting to re-read in the context of earlier discussion I had already read and seek out those I hadn't. The variety of this first section is typical of Aldiss, dealing with Verne, Nesvadba, Sheekley, Vonnegut and contemporary British SF besides the aforementioned authors.

This pertinent and stimulating first section (from the viewpoint of the sf reader) is introduced by an essay "Ever Since The Enlightenment", a fine general piece that gives a perspective (if, perhaps a biased one?) to the role of SF in modern culture. Not only does it set the tone for the first essay but for the whole book as well. After a humorous interlude (under the heading "Hoping") entitled "Looking Forward to 2001", Aldiss focuses upon a number of less sf-oriented topics in a section called "Living". They are perhaps less interesting than the articles in the first section and are somewhat reminiscent of those "filler" articles you find in the glossy magazines. Nevertheless, they are entertainment of a thought-provoking nature (and, to an Aldiss-white such as I, they are quite illuminating, giving a glimpse of the mind behind the fiction).

My favourite section follows. Headed "Seeing" Aldiss presents us with six essays on Art and the SF film. Aldiss' preoccupation with the Pre-Raphaelite movement is noticeable in his fiction and here he deals with the work of G. F. Watt (not a Pre-Raphaelite) with a care that shows the impact of the Victorian era upon his consciousness. The idea of the future as buried in the past is strong in these essays (Indeed, it is a constant theme throughout his fiction) and surfaces again and again, even when he is dealing with something as modern as a TV movie: "The duel between man and tanken is an archetypal confrontation between Man and Thing, suggesting patterns that hark back to our origin as individuals and as a species. Some millions of years ago, sapiens won the battle against the automatic response, and so entered human existence; but that battle was only the first in a long war still raging." ("Spiegelberg", page 174, concerning DUEL).

The essay "SF Art: Strangeness with Beauty" (an amended version of the Introductory essay in SF ART) is the meat of this section, throwing off numerous avenues for the curious to explore whilst giving the feel of art a coherence that no other critic, I feel, has yet managed to convey. The stimulating article on Tarkovsky's "Solaris" and the humorous piece on Star Trek and its bastard creations nicely compliment each other, emphasising Aldiss' concern that didacticism should not prevail in his criticism.

Another section, another emphasis. "Rough Justices" groups together six small essays which again touch upon the written genre of sf, though this time with a cautionary "Yes, well, but..." (the title of one of the essays) added to the expected diet of enthusiasm. Perhaps this section, more than any of the others, encapsulates Aldiss' attitude towards morality (even if it is not one that can be strictly delineated). His condemnation of Aldiss Berry's eulogising of a continuously expanding technology (with the ultimate intention of "dawning" stars for energy) is a reaction against the atrophy of science at the expense of humanity. It perhaps even indicates that for as much as Aldiss is an sf writer who has used sf's mechanical gimmickry he is no champion of unchecked technology. His concern for 'balance' (almost Tostal at times) is reflected here, and there is also a hint of his notion that we are in the last few years of Western Civilization ("as we know it"). The essay, "The Universe as Cool-Scuttle" is the best expression here of his revolt against technocracy.

The last section of the book (excluding the index) is entitled "This World" and comprises of four articles loosely based on his travelling experiences. I think that this is perhaps the most disappointing of the sections, not because the writing is any less whole book as well. After all, re-read those personally-experienced aspects of travel can never be passed on to a reader in this length of essay. It would need one of Aldiss' "kipple" books (SEE THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS pages 117 onward) to capture the precise details (physical and psychological) of travel. But, in spite of my qualms, Aldiss does manage a fair job here, evoking a genuine taste of California, Miami, Georgia and Florida (the last being my favourite stay of the four, with the other wistful tone.

In conclusion then, this book is a tiny fraction of Aldiss would be worth purchase. Its compact loose-endness (If you'll forgive the paradox) is compelling, its perspective is that of twenty five years within and on the fringes of the sf genre, and its value is that of the unfamiliar interpreting the familiar. Perhaps its only handicap is its cover price. But then, that's inflation!
SCIENCE FICTION AND THE CINEMA
by  steve gallagher
Film Is, regrettably for those of refined tastes, one of the most commercially successful forms of entertainment. The majority of films do not compete with the theatre or the concert hall, but they succeed in providing a form of entertainment that is accessible to the masses. Films are not merely a means of escape from the daily routine; they are a way of life for many people. The success of a film does not only mean the loss of the investment, it also leads to increased production costs, which must be recovered by the studio or show your backers. Television programmes would probably cause it to be regarded as a commercial of the media. 100,000 copies sold of any book would make it a more than modest success, whilst a similar number of viewers for a television programme would probably cause it to be regarded as a community service, the costs of which would be absorbed into general production budgets and probably set against tax. Sell no more than 100,000 cinema seats throughout the total run of a film and you’ve got an unmitigated disaster on your hands; you’ll barely cover your printing costs, let alone pay your production bills or show your backers any return. Because of the millions involved in any single cinematic property producers and studios have to cast their nets wide — failure of a picture doesn’t only mean the loss of the investment, it also leads to a loss of confidence when backing is sought for other projects.

The broader and more popular forms of sf appeal to a significant minority of audiences — significant, but still a minority in the harsh terms of the mass market. A certain proportion of this group will be interested in nothing beyond the raygun-and-monster genre, and others will be attracted not so much by any theme of content of a film but by the promise of action, adventure and spectacular visual effects. ‘Serious’ sf — a form utilising the shapes and symbols of culture and technology to tell stories that couldn’t be told any other way — doesn’t seem to have much of a chance. The history of the sf film is a repeated pattern of the superficialities of the genre being adopted and exploited for the widest appeal, whilst the underlying structures of ideas have been abandoned in favour of self-sustaining ‘Hollywooden’ conventions. Although there has been sf in the cinema, mainly concentrated in Infinitantist sf, it is evident that there has always been a sufficiently coherent and intelligent output of films and ideas to warrant the generic title of a ‘cinema of science fiction’. There have been numerous notable exceptions which have raised their heads above the crowd, but I’d suggest that their main achievement has been that of transcending the conventions within which they’ve worked. This brief survey is an attempt to define some of these conventions and to see how filmmakers managed to work with and around them.

No self-respecting film historian seems to be able to resist drawing a comparison between the film work of the Lumière brothers and that of Georges Méliès. Both worked in the earliest days of the development of the cinema, the Lumière as technical innovators and Méliès as a businesslike showman quick to see a commercial outlet in this new medium for his stage-conjuror’s illusions. The Lumière, like Thomas Edison, saw the Cinematograph as a short-lived technological novelty which would capitalise on the nineteenth century fascination for science as entertainment, little more than a Victorian parlour trick. It was the simple fact that the pictures moved which had novelty value, and such novelties tended to wear thin very quickly.

The Lumière expanded their library, adding exotic subjects of distant scenes in an attempt to forestall ennui in the polite social gatherings for whom they catered, but they never presented anything more ambitious than scenes taken directly from real life. Once you’ve seen one train pulling into a station, you’ve seen them all. The early cinema was all image and no communication, with the camera being used as a simple recording device with no attempt being made to control those images by careful direction or juxtaposition of shots. Georges Méliès attended an early Lumière show and saw in this new photographic device a potential for the expansion of his stage magic. He acquired a machine and used it to record the illusions that he performed at the Theatre Robert-Houdin; no longer was the novelty in the photographic process, but in what was being photographed. Méliès found that his films could command a wide and enthusiastic audience, and he exploited this with great profit. His early depiction of the cinema as a mechanical curiosity — helped along by his rejection by polite society after a disastrous nitrate stock fire in a Parisian showplace — gave way to the birth of the cinema as a dramatic medium as Méliès drew upon his stage background to develop his tricks into scenarios.

The step was an important one, almost a philosophical about-face. Film was no longer a simple, reliable document; it was a means of presenting events that had not happened. Méliès and his imitators took the process a step further, demonstrating that the convention could be used not only to depict flat objects even with apparent verisimilitude, but that it could also, with a similar appearance of truth, present a view of the world which was impossible under prevailing concepts of reality.

It is of interest for us to note from where Méliès drew much of his scenario material. Jules Verne and HG Wells were plundered freely — extending to Germany. In a demonstration of a pattern that was to be repeated during the Second World War the depressive nature of the period led people to seek escapist entertainment. The German cinema found itself in the midst of a boom; wartime conditions drove production companies indoors so that films were made not in the open air with a naturalistic setting but, as with Méliès, in the controlled environment of the studio building. There was no point in trying to imitate the Hollywood product with the limited resources available; deprived of expensive trappings, the films had only one asset upon which they could draw without reference to the financiers, and that was imagination. In retrospect it is tempting to look back at Méliès’ stretching of the medium and his adoption of sf forms as having a certain inevitability about it; the temptation is increased when one considers that exactly the same route was to be followed in Germany.

Expressionist trends in art and design first reached the screen as the war ended, with The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1919). Sombre, mythic, and with a strange and violent poetry all its own, Expressionist art in filmic form proved to be surprisingly commercial. This line of development culminated in Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1926), the first recognisable attempt at a ‘serious’ sf film.

The approach of the Expressionist cinema was to construct a stylised and consistent visual environment which was not required to pay homage to any conception of reality, but which was under the control of the filmmaker. The expressionist approach presented the opportunity to impose a new form to add to its chosen theme. In many ways sf is well suited to this approach, allowing the artist to lose the restrictions of superficial and temporary reality in order to define more fundamental truths; this is certainly the view that Lang and his scenarist, Thea von Harbou took in their rather simplistic fable of class struggle. Compensation for this and the atrocious acting was to be found in the grand design and excellent effects; unfortunately the uneven match of technical and intellectual content was already becoming a characteristic of screen sf.
Metropolis was the last of the Expressionist films of Germany - and it was backed by American money. Hollywood had noted the growing success of such studios as UFA (Universal Film A.G.) and had reached in an attempt to invest in German production and then using those Investments as a lever for control. Although Metropolis was a success the arrangements of the Par-UFA-Met financing deal brought paradoxical ruin to UFA when the studio was unable to put up its share of the production costs.

It was as a result of this quiet coup that the leading talents of the German cinema, including Lang, Peter Lorre, Conrad Veidt and Emil Jannings, were drawn off to the USA. The promise of Expressionism was never followed through and although many of its features were apparent in the output Hofland's existing genres, it was not among them. America's appetite for the unreal and the impossible was satisfied throughout the 1930's by Universal's gothic horrors, a line of films that began with James Whale's excellent Frankenstein (1931) and ended ignominiously with Abbott and Costello. The vigorous expansion of written sf during this period went unregistered; the major project of the Broadway and the Irving in England. Alexander Korda was determined to give British film production a world significance, and Things to Come (1936) was one of the results of this determination. The very fact that America was ignoring sf made the idea attractive to Korda, anxious as he was to avoid imitation and there was the added advantage that the reputation it conveyed for the producer was an asset not belonging to sf but also a specifically national character. This said, Hungarian Korda hired an American director, William Cameron Monizess. Monizess had designed Douglas Fairbanks' Thief of Bagdad (1923) and he brought a certain visual grandeur to Things to Come which contributed greatly to the Impact of its release. William Temple and Willy Ley wrote the story from a work of futuristic vision and himself, as the age of seventy, wrote the scenario.

The film is not the best reflection of Wells' life's work, a ponderous social tract that lacks the humanity of his earlier fiction. Despite its favourable reception by the public Things to Come did little to add to the cinematographer's idea of sf. Korda's next Wells-inspired production was The Man Who Could Work Miracles (1937), a light fantasy indicating that it was Wells himself, and not sf in general, who was being regarded as the producer of golden eggs.

Korda's grandiloquent projects were cut short by the Second World War. Home finance was drastically reduced, key technicians were enlisted, and large spacious buildings - not unlike film studios - were up to be commandeered for the assembly of Spitfires. He transferred his remake of The Thief of Bagdad to Hollywood in 1939.

Throughout the 1940's the cinema still did not reflect the growing appetite of the public for sf, apart from in the most simplistic terms. Catering for a market conditioned by the pulpwood adventure magazines there were outright Arabian fantasies and oversized monsters in low-budget imitation of King Kong, but the structures of these films were such that they could accommodate the Hollywood conventions of hero/heroine and danger/rescue formats. Written if it was beginning to be used as a way of breaking out from a straightforward approach, but the screen counterpart at this time was a highly diluted form. Indeed, 1940's screen sf was derived not even from the pulp, but from comic strips. Ideas were filtered out and only the jargon remained. This process was at its most obvious in the chapterplays or serials - fast moving, frantic, incredible and cheap, their enjoyable gusto was marred by the fact that they tended to shrivel most people's uninformed view of sf - that it was no more than a childish literature of adventure, 'sci-fi' at its worst. Any attempt to dispel this view was liable simply to uncover the long-established prejudice that 'serious' sf was entirely dry and predictive.

The serials were numerous, and variable in their quality. All were produced inexpensively, using leftover sets and costumes with scores clipped from other films - even with scenes clipped wholesale from other films. The cityscapes of Lang's Metropolis provided back-projected windows for Wells' London in Buck Rogers (1939) whilst Flash Gordon Conquers The Universe (1940) contained stock footage from the 1930 feature White Hall of Fritz Palu. The low production values and poor ideas-content of the serials - popular and durable though they were - betrayed a certain contempt for their Intended audience on the part of the production companies. Whilst one may laud the persistent fascination, this fact must be accompanied by the suspension of most if not critical attitudes.

We should not despise the serials, for that affection contained a promise for the 1950s. Flash Gordon, Brick Bradford and the Flying Disc Man from Mars were making an Indelible mark upon juvenile consciousnesses. Although the 1950s were to produce many quasi-sf films in response to the enthusiasm of this maturing market, there would also be some fairly worthwhile successes; such dime jewels could never have been produced without the more embarrassing films whose commercial success formed a context for them.

1950 saw the release of Destination Moon with Robert Heinlein as co-writer and technical advisor. The film was something of a landmark with its semi-documentary a proach and respect for scientific accuracy, but it demonstrates the conservative nature of the film industry; lunar landing stories were nothing new, but rocket technology was developing fast and it was this current interest that Destination Moon capitalised upon. The film embedded a number of the recurring traits that we have so far observed in the more successful sf enterprises of the cinema: a baseline of literature, a totally controllable studio environment, and a freedom from the standard cinematic conventions (Heinlein fought hard to exclude the perfunctory 'love interest' which usually came packaged in the form of an elder scientist's daughter). Much of the success of the film may be credited directly to Heinlein, for when producer George Pal went on to make a line of sf-derived films he lapsed into the kind of inferior cinematic sf that on a completely separate existence from the written model. Thought was replaced by sensation; science became not a subject matter but a symbolic force, the foly which conjured the monster or the savour which destroyed it. Partly for reasons of economy and partly out of audience preference the films tended to be Earth-bound, with alien Invasion being a favourite theme as was the race against time, or any other origin. Whilst the literature might have a scientific premise and then proceed from there to a situation from it, the Bert I. Gordon's of the film industry would take appealing and sensational situations and then add a token scientific explanation to fit them, with a result that implausibility would destroy any attempt to create a credible and self-defining imaginative environment.

This gulf may be clearly seen if we compare the film The Thing From Another World (1951) with the story upon which it was based, "Who Goes There?" (John W Campbell Jr., writing as Don A Stuart). The change of title really says it all, but on the most superficial comparison we see that the main suspense element of Campbell's story - a being that can replicate any living model and so infiltrate the isolated community of an Antarctic camp - has been replaced by a rampaging vegetable, and that the perfunctory love interest that Heinlein had fought, and that Campbell I had seen no reason to include, has now been introduced. The monster is overcome by Science with a capital S, being electrocuted with minimal ingenuity.

The Thing From Another World is reckoned by many to be one of the better sf films of its period, along with Invasion Of The Body Snatchers (1956), a film which depended more on its tight construction and allegorical message than the plausibility of its premise. This Island Earth (1955), showing a brief glimpse of a world, was able to expand its horizons without over-extending its budget. It is perfectly possible that the sf reader will find these films interesting and entertaining, as a meagre diet is better than no diet at all; but it was Forbidden Planet (1956) which was to prove the film with its foot most firmly planted over the boundary of sf.

Forbidden Planet defies next planeleaching. It had no definite connection with science fiction literature (claiming Shakespeare's Tempest as its source) and it did have a conventional love interest and a rampaging monster - a sure formula, one might expect, for disaster. However, the film was made with a certain Integrity; the general disregard for the basic functions of plot and character that we have noted elsewhere was not present here, added to which must be the fact that the design and technical realisation of the film were usually good. It was a good argument that the technology of the studio, coupled with expensive production costs, is essential to the sustainment of an environment or a reality not based on our own. Sets and effects must be conceived, created and designed anew for such a production, and apart from the imaginative originality Involved this is one of the strongest arguments against making an sf film; there are easier ways of making money.

The British cinema of the 1950s gave a limp response to the American product, sometimes even backed by American money or featuring a leading American star to ensure some kind of transatlantic recognition. High spots of the decade were the Hammer Guatemalan films, based on North American TV serials, or the stultifyingly hamstrung items of the period, but the theme of 'scientist saves world' has long been as simplistic cliché by sf readers.

Although the decade had seen the perversion of sf into a cinematic form which had all the sensation and little of the ideas-content of its parent literature, there was at least some hope; many of the films had been quite enjoyable on their own terms, and there was an established pattern of production and finance which made it seem likely that good sf might finally make it onto the screen without compromise. Unfortunately the
1980s saw the beginnings of the decline of the major studios; power began to shift to independent producers who rented facilities as and when they needed them, and sf became prohibitively expensive.

Location shooting became fashionable, sfoming films which were set in a natural and observed environment rather than the controllable artificial of the studio. Whilst this is by no means an impossible condition for sf, it severely limits the producer's options; subtle distortion of existing reality or as practised in Luc-Godard's Alphaville (1965) has a limited and short-lived appeal. SF was polarised into the newspaper nightmares of On The Beach (1959) and Doctor Strangelove (1964) -- films which are generally considered to be of the mainstream -- on the one hand, and the extravagant frath of Barbarella (1967) on the other.

Considering this background, it is difficult to understand what happened at retrospective how Stanley Kubrick was able to raise finance from MGM to make 2001 - A Space Odyssey (1968). He had only force of personality and his own track-record of success to support him, as the project one of those commercial and critical successes that seemed of the circuitous trends of the 1960s. Whilst 2001 brought cinematic sf nearer to the capabilities of its parent literature than any film before it, there were no monsters, no love story, and nobody saved the world. Jargon-free and with a technology that was subservient to the structure of Ideas, the film took its style direct from the space programme. Kubrick, who began his career as a stills photographer, was a specialist in 3-D, and his paleontologically techniques brought the eventual fulfillment of the early promise of Metz. The film is a visual sing into its length, a pure artifice presented in a manner which is indistinguishable from photographed reality; cinema as the concrete realisation of the artist's interior vision without the modifications inevitability in ordinary observation.

The Kubrick-Clarke partnership assured acceptability in both film and sf critical camps. The long-running success of 2001 is an Indication that the science fiction film is a commercially viable form, but those films which have followed have either fallen short of the standard or else they have misguided reverted to earlier and shuddier values. In the first of these groups I would include Silent Running (1972), directed by Douglas Trumbull. Trumbull had been part of the special effects team on 2001 and in this film he set out to restore the humanity he felt the machine-dominated 2001 lacked. Unfortunately this humanity was executed in the form of some navel-gazing and to nature's ecological philosophy which detracted from the film's numerous strengths. Of the second type, I would suggest that Star Wars (1977) is representative; extremely well photographed (employing and in many ways improving upon the mechanics and methodology used by Kubrick) but disappointingly empty-headed, whilst its stream of instant successes promise little more than that. The market of the exploitation film is the exploitation of Star Wars' success (1979) is a wonder and wish-fulfilment story, satisfying rather than provoking: If I were to make a personal choice of the best post-2001 sf film, I would probably opt for the quirky and idiosyncratic Dark Star (1974) inspired in part by Roy Bradbury's short story Kaledioscope. A $60,000, a hitherto small figure in current production terms. Dark Star began production as a film student's episode and in the 1970s the project was under way finance was provided by Jack H. Harris, who had made a similar investment in the horror-fantasy Equinox and discovered a useful and previously unexploited niche in the Industry. Credits for acting, scripting, editing, design, special effects and music all over-lapped and inter-related in distinct contrast to the usual pattern of production where departments, separated not only by training and experience but also by rigid union demarcations, make distinct contributions to the overall whole. 2001 showed a different division from the established system, a controlled monomania with Kubrick supervising each creative field to an abnormal extent and with Arthur C. Clarke standing somewhat apart from the production processes and communicating directly with Kubrick.

Michael Crichton once suggested that in a comparison of the numbers of sf films and the amount of accessible sf writing, the percentage of excellence would be roughly the same. Whilst this may be true, it should not be taken as an absolute form of shame or ineffective creative effort. The history of sf in the cinema gives only a small handful of clues to successful sf production, mainly in the form of negates; don't imitate, don't think that an sf story requires any less craftsmanship than any other kind of story, and, if you start with a good idea, don't take the easy way out and allow it to be altered to suit the convenience of the producer/producers. Doing it properly -- imperative venture, and once the world -- is, shaping those processes to the whole -- takes more time, money and original thinking, and this is perhaps the main reason why good cinematic sf is so rare.

(C) Steve Gallagher (1979)
PHILIP STRICK CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE!

Turning the pages of Science Fiction Movies is a labour of love, and not only for the cognoscenti. This is primarily because of the eye-grabbing stills, for the most part discerningly chosen to promote the unfamiliar. Few other film genres can boast of the astonishing variety revealed by these pictorial delights which so aptly complement Strick's text. Apart from a dozen or so of the colour photos which could be in the thrones of mutation (some are frame blow-ups), all the remaining images are as good, if not better, than those in previous surveys of this eclectic genre. I am thinking in particular of John Baxter's Science Fiction In The Cinema (Tantivy Press, 1970) whose serviceable text was hardly enhanced by the pocket format forced on the accompanying stills. Subsequently reprinted, it has by no means been eclipsed by the latest competitors in the field.

Unlike Baxter's chronological approach, Strick has opted for a less cut-and-dried division of eighty years SF movie-making; his account consists of eight broadly thematic essays with headings, a la Baxter, like "Watching the Skies", "Armageddon and Later", "Taking Off" and so on. With good reason these chapters are un-numbered, encouraging readers to plunge in where fancy (and the comprehensive index) takes them. Like me you may find yourself skipping to and fro, checking out whether Strick's pantheon coincides with your own - and if not why not - before you ever get around to his two-page Introduction.

When you do, the first item for your consideration is a characteristic quote from J. G. Ballard that concludes: "...the only external landscapes that have any meaning are those which are reflected in the central nervous system, you know, by their direct analogues." Underneath this thought-provoking assertion there is a grotesque image from A CLOCKWORK ORANGE of Adrienne Corri being manhandled prior to her rape. The significance of this arbitrary juxtaposition apart, a lengthier quotation would have been worth referring back to, a propos particular movies. To clarify this point here is an extract from Ballard's article on surrealism, "The Coming of the Unconscious" (NEW WORLDS 164, reprinted in THE OVERLOADED MAN, Panther):

"By crushing gauache Domínguez produced evocative landscapes of porous rocks, drowned seas and corals. The coded terrains are models of the organic landscapes ensnared in our central nervous systems. Their closest equivalents in the outer world of reality are those to which we most respond - igneous rocks, dunes, dried delta lar. Only these landscapes contain the psychological dimensions of nostalgia, memory and the emotions."

Illustrations of this abound in the series of movies Jack Arnold directed in the fifties (for Universal) on location in the Arizona desert, curiously dubbed by Strick as neo-realist SF (p. 14). Unfortunately, grouping works by theme does not facilitate a development of this interpretation.

However, this drawback is not really crucial until later, when Kubrick's famous trio have to be segregated into different chapters. Strick begins his introduction by explaining his reluctance to settle for prescriptive definitions. One readily sympathises when he says:

"Science fiction is a vast subject rendered only more complex when translated into film." (p. 4) After rummaging in alternative approaches (both Wells and Lem are quoted), Strick goes on to illustrate the claim that: "...in many ways the cinematic is science fiction." Ever since McLuhan, commentators have been far too eager to confuse media and messages with confusing results for the rest of us. As here, the drive to unify has flattened the data of commonsense.

For more illuminating is an exemplary paragraph tucked away among the zoological horrors Strick has christened "The Mark of the Beast". He says:

"The matter of size, as we've noted with films like INCREIBLE SHRINKING MAN, is an important element in science fiction. The literature itself is based on different perspectives, fresh methods of examining problems that were being taken too much for granted; it distorts the conventional in order to reassert it. The technique is simple but effective - a slight change in the dimensions of anything familiar causes disorientation and alarm, whether it be a book that won't quite fit on the shelf or a door that jams in hot weather. We live by a set of unconscious relativities matched to average human standards but in any other respects quite arbitrary, and film, which itself distorts normal laws of size and time, is in a unique position to challenge them - if for no other purpose than to shake us up a little." (p. 66)

The rest of his preliminary sketch contains nothing as perceptively analytical as this. By augmenting it with some of his other more generalisations - which you will find scattered throughout the book - he could have had a more auspicious prologue, also unifying the following thematic chapters. If I see hypercritical on this point, then that is mainly because Strick is so eminently qualified for the task in hand, namely, writing the first critique of SF Cinema without losing sight of "the translation of ideas into images" (p. 4).

Too often, I found that Strick's prose, though never less than interesting, was neglecting analysis for entertainment. For example, in 'Men Like Gods' his synoptic powers dispatch three diverse movies in one wittily paraphrased paragraph:

"Where Robby, and even Daleks, are manageable bits of clockwork, the computer undoubtedly lacks charm. In THE FORBIN PROJECT (1969) based on D. F. Jones's novel COLOSSUS, Russian and American super-computers jostle forces and take over the administration of the world. 'In time' Collossus placidly informs its former controller, 'you too will respect and love me!' It's the assertion of a very dictator, but from a machine it sounds even more arrogant. As with HAL in 2001, we itch to pull out a few plugs: Robots should know their place, like the handsome specimen in the Russian film He's Called Robert (567), who is turned loose on society and discovers the admirable rules that are beyond its comprehension, or the resourceful Trent in Brian Haskin's DEMAND WITH A GLASS HAND (1969) who carries the whole of mankind on g.p piece of wire in one of his fingers." (p. 53)

Notice the penultimate word which confers a male person on Trent - Robby the Robot was similarly excised in the preceding paragraph. Overall, however, the book is singularly free of errors including misprints.

A pleasing feature of his thematic structure is that each essay (after the first) concludes with a peroration on particularly outstanding films; six of these were made in the last decade, a measure of the genre's recent progressiveness. (A new edition will surely include CESK among this fantastic pick of the bunch). Though I am bound to say that Strick identifies both 2001 and A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (despite DR STRANGELOVE which I regard as Kubrick's masterpiece) I can only salute the Olympian treatment accorded to Tarkovsky's SOLARIS ("the most intelligent and questioning science-fiction movie ever made") and Boonman's ZARDOZ ("not for its originality in science fiction terms but for its extraordinary achievement as pure cinema"). Quite apart from putting 2001 in perspective, SOLARIS, especially, neatly limits its contemplations on the expressive powers of a master director. Strick evidently endorses this because he discusses among his "Time Twisters", works by Resnais, Hasegawa, and Pasolinaiti which have only tenuous links with SF - New Wave or OId. According to Strick:

"The interchange of fact and fantasy, if acceptable as a characteristic of the modern science-fiction movie, makes Luis Bunuel the greatest exponent of the genre in the history of the cinema, despite his
assertion that "my hatred of science and technology will perhaps bring me to the absurdity of a belief in God."

This contentious judgement is perspicaciously argued, surprisingly without even a passing mention of Bunuel's most subversive fantasy, THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL (1962). If the causeless behaviours of THE BIRDS (1963) couldn't disqualify Hitchcock's movie, then an unexplained force-field or two in the novel oughtn't to have stretched its eligibility. Incidentally, it is interesting that both of these films strictly adhere to Campbell's aesthetic laws; given a single dramatic premise, the rest has to follow with remorseless narrative logic. By contrast, twenty years later, Bunuel's consummate style was so accomplished it could unify the 'unrealities' of THE PHANTOM OF DELUXE ("the highest printing that science fiction... has reached in the cinema") but only... I would argue - at the expense of emotive content. By the same token, in his sympathetic account of Marker's LA JETEE, Strick fails to cite the intensely poignant moment when the girl's eyes open. Why?

My conviction is that such critical judgements are far from insignificant. In his introductory coda, Strick gives his aesthetic criteria as logic, beauty and efficiency. For me, these are necessary but not sufficient; if the film in question has no emotional range or depth then I'm unlikely to persever with it. Hence my affirmation of SOLARIS and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS rather than MARIENBAD and 2001, although the importance of the latter as a path-breaking duo is incontrovertible. In a more general context, so-called Objectivity rules (under the 'Constitution' of science and technology) and all too often we objectify to this abstractedly labelling Kelvin or Sartorius? To feel or not to Feel...

Let me end this section with a suggestion: when you get hold of a copy of this immensely stimulating book, turn to the superb publicity still from THE GORILLAS IN THE MIRROR - an image Strick couldn't have hoped to do justice to with a handful of words. Alice Day's exotic posture and Walter Pidgeon's similar leer set a chain reaction going in the psyche of the beholder (male or female). My guess is that no two outcomes mean the same.

ALAN FRANK IS SMITTEN BY 'THE FORCE'!

Whatever the failings of Strick's opus, they seem venal compared to those of SCI-FI NOW, Frank's critical quickie, which is misleadingly subtitled as "10 Exciting Years of Science Fiction from 2001 to STAR WARS and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND". On the plus side, many of the beguiling stills brought together by Strick recur in conjunction with more than twenty from George Lucas's Mega-Hit. Such a disproportionate mix turns out to be the visual counterpart to Frank's text; primarily because of STAR WARS, "Science Fiction cinema can no longer be regarded as a minor, eclectic screen genre." (p.7) He continues:

"As a movie, STAR WARS is unique. Indeed, to refer to it as simply a movie is to underestimate the Empire State Building by calling it just a skyscraper, or by referring to King Kong as merely another monkey. In its influence, not only on the cinema itself but on all media, and the effect it and its by-products have had on the public worldwide, S.W. is clearly much more than just a movie - it is a genuine phenomenon and one that is unlikely to be repeated on a similar scale for a very long time to come."

So far, so factual. However, Frank's following assertion is anything but. In brief;

"STAR WARS is not just the very best science fiction film ever made, totally eclipsing its nearest rival 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY... " (Bild)

In his concluding chapter, 'The Big One', he attempts an extended justification of this preposterous judgment: the raison d'etre of SCI-FI NOW. To my mind, such a critical comparison (of STAR WARS and 2001) is tantamount to confusing King Kong with the Empire State Building. Let me explain.

Lucas' first feature, THX 1138 (1970), was a visually sophisticated dystopia in the grimly satirical tradition of WE and BRAVE NEW WORLD (the inspiration for a new TV series in the U.S.). This outstanding debut was well received by critics but failed to find an audience. Lucas was confirmed in his belief that what he - and the mass public[1] - wanted most (but couldn't have) was a wide-screen equivalent of the Flash Gordon serials of the thirties, or "total fantasy for today's kids". Finding that the rights to the characters had already been sold, Lucas went ahead with the shooting of AMERICAN GRAFFITI (1973) which became one of the highest grossing films of that year. Even before this unexpected success, as Franks quotes Lucas:

"...I began researching and went right back and found where Alex Raymond (who had done the original FLASH GORDON comic strips in newspapers) had got his Ideas from." (p.71) Lucas found out that Raymond's Inspiration had come from the work of the creator of Tarzan, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and especially from his John Carter series of books. Further reading of the John Carter series revealed to Lucas that what had originally sparked off Burroughs was a science fantasy work, published in 1905 and called Gulliver on Mars. This story, written by Edwin Arnold, was the first story in the Flash Gordon genre that Lucas has been able to trace. 'Jules Verne had got pretty close, I suppose', says Lucas, 'but he never had a hero battling against space creatures or having adventures on another planet.' A whole new genre developed from fantasy idea." (p.71)

A whole new genre indeed! However, throughout this SCI-FI NOW, Frank treats the diverse films under discussion as the products of one homogeneous genre. For example, he concludes his Introductory chapter, "Decade of Dreams", by stating that his chronological survey

"enables some interesting juxtapositions to be made, ones which show the diversity and range of the genre. The year that saw 2001; A SPACE ODYSSEY also marked the release of GOKE? BODY SNATCHER FROM REEL." (p.13) On page 24 we learn that GOKE, or to give it its Japanese title, KURETSUKI GOKEMIDORO, "managed to combine extra-terrestrial's (in impressively created flying saucers), possession and vampirism in one movie..."

Precisely the kind of derivative huck-pitch that Kubrick was so concerned to break away from yet, when Frank comes to 2001, he signals that he fails to deal with Kubrick's original handling of the theme of intelligent ETs, opting instead for a detailed description of the giant centrifuge that was specially constructed by the Vickers-Armstrong Engineering Group. Frank's lack of interest in the visual presentation of SF Ideas is implicit in the rapid assertion that "The film was inflated into an over-long 141 minute running time with Clarke's original story barely visible under the surrounding padding." (p.24) Later, Boorman's extraordinary ZARDOZ is roundly condemned, apparently because its writer-director wasn't too concerned about leaving some of his audience behind. According to Frank:

"What he in fact succeeded in doing was to make one of the most boring, self-indulgent and pretentious films of the genre, filled with shallow philosophy and inept echoes of much better movies that clearly had influenced him... ZARDOZ will remain boring - on a monumental scale." (p.46)

In the long run, this scathing judgement may well be vindicated although I am at a loss to understand the reasoning behind it. In seeking to give a retrospective appraisal of the past decade's cinema, this kind of simplistic assertion should have no place. Boorman would be the first to admit that ZARDOZ was far from perfect and one of the critic's tasks is to explain why this is so by means of cumulative insights. Apophasis I would have liked a development of a rationalising remark towards the end of his opening chapter, viz:

"The fact that the cinema has been able effectively to create whole new and unique areas of science fiction exposition tends to be ignored, possibly because these new areas are buried within an art form which is (usually) arrogantly directed towards the mass audience." (p.12)

This is even truer of what Frank writes of in his second chapter, abridged as "SCIFITIV". Easily the most helpful section of his book, Frank takes up where Barrie left off and gives us a thumbnail survey of a woefully neglected area of SF. (Strick only touches upon it occasionally). DUEL is far from being the only SF film made-for-TV worth considering; in particular, movies like THE LOVE WAR (1970) and A COLD NIGHTS DEATH (1973) should not be allowed to disappear without trace. Perhaps the long-awaited video-cassette technology will rectify such losses of collective memory.

"Future Perfect?" begins with a consideration of the thematic potential of SF takes as a film genre (the raison d'etre of Strick's books), conceding it "a freedom not enjoyed by any other screen genre." (p.49) The alien invasion cycle of the fifties apart, each film exists "as a creative entity in its own right rather than appearing to follow a current trend or theme within the genre." Among the many and various productions under way (from SUPERMAN and the re-make of Steigel's BODY SNATCHERS to THE SHINING and THE STALKER) it is to be hoped that this move towards experimentalism will increase and multiply and co-incidently that Alan Frank's sequel to SCI-FI NOW will be less over-rated by STAR WARS II.
JOHN BROSAN MARCHES MUCH ADO ABOUT SPECIAL EFFECTS...

At £6.95, FUTURE TENSE, subtitled "The Cinema of Science Fiction" by John Brosnan fails to justify its price tag — even allowing for inflation. In his provocative Foreword (about which, more later), Harry Harrison goes so far as to claim that Mr Brosnan has "given the history of the growth and growth of these films." (p6). I submit that he has done nothing of the sort, as even a casual comparison with the relevant sections in Baxter or Strick should make clear. Even when writing about a recognised landmark of the genre such as 2001, Brosnan seems unwilling to reflect on his own experience in the cinema, preferring to quote how Kubrick reacted to his negative critics or why other SF authors dismissed the Space Odyssey. Incidentally, this was not due to Kubrick's "condescending attitude towards technology" (p180). Kubrick has always been (cf. DR STRANGELOVE) ambivalent towards technology but condescending, never.

Brosnan's chronological lay-out works well enough until chapters 9 and 10: 'Boon Two' and 'The Boom Goes On'. A close reading of these tandem sections suggests that a second 'Boon' did not occur before the advent of STAR WARS which Brosnan does not even mention until chapter 11. 'Close Encounters with STAR WARS', (Recall Alan Frank's struggle to chronicle this eclectic period, 1970-6, without resorting to wishful Impossibility.) When he isn't quoting sf authors and film-makers, Brosnan gives us lengthy plot synopses (which are not always accurate) in conjunction with a plethora of details about his pet subject, namely special effects. Indeed, one would be forgiven for assuming that Brosnan's FUTURE TENSE is a commercial follow-up to MOVIE MAGIC - his serviceable 'Story of Special Effects in the Cinema'. However, despite the visual pyrotechnics of STAR WARS and CE3K, it must be obvious by now that some of the best SF movies like INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS and DARK STAR (which Brosnan particularly admires) do not depend on expensive special effects, succeeding by other means because of - rather than in spite of - their tiny budgets.

Brosnan invariably devotes more coverage to those movies which utilise elaborate special effects, oblivious to this unfortunate bias which, historically, has been responsible for retarding the development of the genre, at least in Hollywood before Kubrick's feat of persuading MGM to finance the research as well as the cinematic execution. For example, I believe that FORBIDDEN PLANET (one of the so-called classics of fifties sf) is so poorly characterised and so devoid of any speculation that all the spectacular effects fail to redeem it as an enduring piece of film-making. Brosnan rates this as an sf film that is "Loth intellectually satisfying and visually evocative" (p290), apparently on the grounds that its sf content was innovative (unlike CLOSE ENCOUNTERS which "offers nothing new", ibid.) As sf cinema, absolutely, it is the cinematic work of film-making such as Tarkovsky's SOLARIS which Brosnan utterly fails to engage with, asserting that "it has been described, with some justification as too pretentious and too long." (p216) Not surprisingly, other intelligent films like JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME, ZARDOZ and THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH get the same short shift. But you don't have to delve too deeply to find out what Brosnan regards as exciting: it's his unlikely quartet of all-time greats. After summarising the execrable plot of THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR he says: "Written and directed by Robert Clouse (who previously made the Bruce Lee epic ENTER THE DRAGON and the more recent THE PACK about a band of killer dogs), it is a very good sf film - hard, uncompromising, cynical, and excellently directed by Clouse, who moves the action along at just the right pace." (p233)

Naturally enough, Brosnan feels no need to tell us what his aesthetic criteria are in his Introductory chapter which is chiefly concerned with an abbreviated history of written sf that culminates in 2001, Baxter is correct, I feel, in pointing to "a symbolic language, bypassing intellect" and overall his book was important for outlining a map of this terra incognita. Of the three authors I have been criticising, both Frank and Brosnan are singularly lacking in their appreciation of the expressive possibilities of sf cinema. In the case of Brosnan, I do not want to give the impression that I have no time for special effects which - with the development of computer technology - have entered a revolutionary phase. On the contrary - it is the distortions that arise from an obsessional interest in S.E. that I object to. For example, when he comes to CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, there are pages devoted to the wondrous sequences conceived by Spielberg and put on the screen by Trumbull and his team but hardly a word spent on the rich symbolic content of the film, so busy boning down the technical details that he (quite unconsciously) serves up the following interpretative gaffes: CE3K "begins in a small, rural town in Indiana where a number of people experience a strange manifestation." (p270) Perhaps he'll pay more attention to the opening of the Mark II version which Spielberg plans to release later this year.

Re-infusing his Idea fixe, roughly twenty of Brosnan's chosen stills take us "behind the scenes" with directors, actors and special effects people in between takes. As none of these are in colour, the book as a whole lacks the visual frissons provided by the images in Strick or Frank. On the plus side, Brosnan has a useful Appendix: SF on TV and an even more comprehensive Index. But, I have to point out that intending purchasers could buy each of the books by Baxter, Strick and Frank and still get a shilling or two change out of seven quid. On the other hand, they might peruse Harry Harrison's Foreword (with its back-scraping compliments) and Invest. This short talent is penned from the heart and I am happy to disagree with it. Consider the following selective quotations:

... when film-makers talk about SF films, they are really talking about the same old sf films they have always made - only tarted up with some of the mechanical trappings of SF. " (p6, his ital.).

"If a failed SF film like CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND can make millions, think of the profits that a real SF movie could generate." (p7).

"It is evaporating that no one to date seems able to separate the look of SF from its Ideas." (p8).

"It is not science that is important but the attitude towards science." (p8)

"... SF films should be written by SF authors." (p8) After five years film study, my considered opinion is that a screenplay is only the skeleton of the film-to-be and it is the flesh and blood of the director's mise-en-scene that gives us - so infrequently - an experience worth having.

A propost, Mike Moorcock has come into contact with one too many hack directors of the British Film Industry and he now feels "that the producer is the most important person in the making of a film.... if he can actually write the script and good advice is given it is a wonderful thing that matters which direct it." (p289). Don't you believe it! This is a literary hubris (and arrant nonsense) as Moorcock himself concedes in some of the other points that he makes. A pity that Brosnan didn't splice these lengthy quotes with a few pertinent questions.

In his closing paragraph, Harry Harrison informs us that Lester Goldsmith is planning to produce a new, superior kind of sf film by getting "the authors themselves write screen-plays of their already successful SF novels." (p8) I wish his projects every success and would only point out that what looks like being written may end up on the cutting-room floor. More alarmingly, the reverse can happen too as Harry Harrison found out for himself during the shooting of Soylent Green (based on his novel MAKE ROOM: MAKE ROOM.

"I also learned a great deal about screenwriting and how they turn a screenplay into a film. And overall I was happy with the way the film turned out, given that screenplay and such things as the 'furniture' girls,
which should have been thrown away as it was just nonsense. ... the suicide parlour sequence worked okay... I didn't put it in the book because I didn't want to use any of the old science fiction gimmicks, I wanted to keep it all as realistic as possible, but the scriptwriter obviously didn't realise that a suicide parlour is such a cliché of device, so he put it in. And I've got to admit that in the film it took on a different aspect and worked very well... but a lot of the credit must go to Chuck Braverman again. In the original screenplay it just says! 'They take Sal into the suicide parlour and show him scenes of his youth... and then he dies.' But Braverman inserted all these shots of beautiful landscapes with pure blue skies, virgin white snowscapes etc., and after sixty minutes or so of watching life in a claustrophobic New York where a green smog is covering everything and everyone is suffering from the heat and looking dirty, these shows have a tremendous impact. And of course you also had a fantastic actor like Robinson Involved. The scriptwriter just says something like "He looks up and dies." But Robinson and Fletchcr worked from that and produced something very memorable." (p208)

Would that all our insights were arrived at as painlessly as that!

POSTSCRIPT: SHORT NOTES ON A BAKER'S DOZEN.

For the most successful movie since the Hitchcock genre of STAR WARS is Ridley Scott's ALIEN (due to open here in September). As this SF horrorshow is strictly adult fare, its box-office receipts to date underline one of Brosnan's punchlines: "The SF boom is only just beginning." (p279)

The plot-outline (of an alien creature decimating the crew of a space freighter) had become a screen-worn cliché by the end of the sixties. What this comparatively unknown, British director has done to worked from that and produced something very memorable. "(p208)

For a couple of urban nightmares, you could try Polanski's THE TENANT or David Lynch's astonishing debut feature, ERASUREHEAD. These grisly psychodramas chronicle the dis-ease of unstable characters relieved only by a blackish sense of humour that draws you closer. It's easy to carp that the oppressive build-up in each film is not sustained to the bitter end though obviously murder and suicide are more palatable when contemplated from a safe dramatic distance.

Two films that have something positive to say about aboriginal culture are Peter Weir's THE LAST WAVE and Skolimowski's THE SHOUT (from the story by Robert Graves). Weir had already established himself as one of the leading talents of the new Australian cinema with THE CARS THAT ATE PARIS and PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK. THE LAST WAVE is even more ambitious. Richard Chamberlain plays a lawyer defending an aborigine accused of murder, to the point of stunning his own allegiance. But we never understand the implications of the crime nor how the freak weather conditions have come about. If the film inflicts the blinkered rationality of Western Man, the alternatives are only hinted at.

The killer shout belongs to Alan Bates who claims he learnt it from the aborigines and is eager to demonstrate it on John Hurt (who suffers again in ALIEN). The break-up of the latter's marriage (to Susannah York) turns out to be Bates' prime goal and this is what the film centres on. Though it falls apart at the end, the climax on the windswept dunes of Dorset when Bates puts the frighteners on his quarry will not be forgotten in a hurry.

Quite the best fantasy of the past five years has to be Barozewycz's erotic version of a nursery tale called THE BEAST. Bowdlerized here by the distributors (instead of the censor), it retains the capacity to delight and even shock. Never before has the physicality of sex been so completely dramatised on film in a succession of images, each of which has been precisely imagined within the total montage. The soundtrack (by Scarlatti) has a dual function knitting together the real and the imagined scenes and commenting ironically on our uncontrollable sexual drives.

Finally a word about two films we can look forward to without reservations. First there is Kubrick's new production of Stephen King's novel THE SHINING (including Jack Nicholson among the cast). And then there is Tarkovsky's new science fiction film, THE STALKER (again based on a story by Lem, which does not appear to have been translated). Shot in a remote region of Siberia, it might just go one better than SOLARIS. I can hardly wait to see!
This year the Worldcon is being held in Brighton.

It'll be an international gathering of SF personalities.

There'll be lots of famous writers from all over the globe.

I'll be hobnobbing with the elite of the SF world.

I've even been invited to the special writers banquet.

Apparently they're short of waiters...

At Seacon

Half-Life

The life & times of Elmer T. Hack

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Leiber... I've always been a great fan of yours.

You've set new standards of excellence in the fantasy field.

You're Elmer T. Hack aren't you? I've just read your "Blood Lust of Fornic..." trilogy.

I'd say you've created a whole new sub-genre of fiction.

Something to compare with sword & sorcery?

Most definitely! I'd describe it as "core & debauchery."