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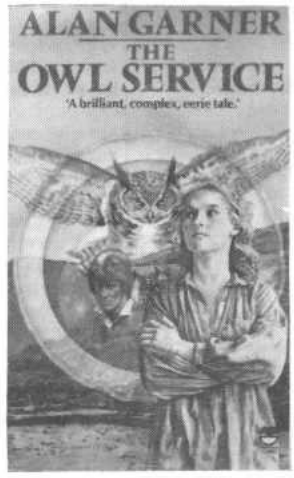

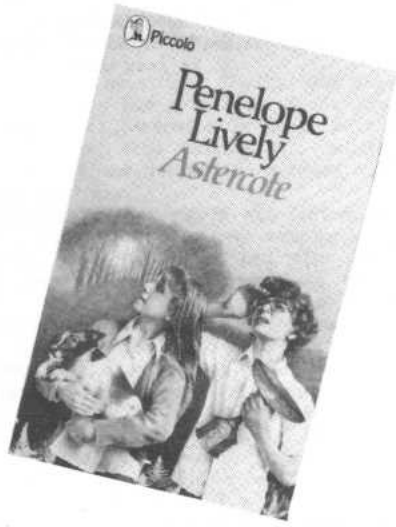

CHILDREN'S SF

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1987

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— THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION LTD —

EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

"MUM, CAN FIZZBO COME TO TEA?"
"Who?"
"He's green and he's got sort of tentacles growin' out of his head an' he comes from another planet an' he's magic."
"How many times have I told you not to tell lies?"
She turns to her husband. "Honestly, Jim, I don't know where he gets his imagination from. It certainly isn't me. Have you been filling his head with nonsense?"

Sounds familiar? I was that child. So were you. But are you the adult as well?

A child's imagination is -- literally -- fantastic. Adults live in an ordered world. The fantastic is unpredictable, unruly; there is no place for it in the lives of most adults. One of the saddest things about growing up is the loss of that incredibly powerful imagination. Maybe this explains the solemnity of the 15 year old that Gwyneth Jones mentions in her article: it sees its created world being supplanted by an imposed world view.

There's a song* I once heard Gary and Vera Aspey sing in a folk club: a child is painting blue trees and red grass and a bright purple sky. The teacher stops her, saying, "Flowers are red, and grass is green, and that's the way it's always been." A couple of years later the child, at another school, is painting a rather dull scene with red flowers, green grass and a blue sky. Her teacher says, "Why don't you brighten it up, use your imagination? Use some different colours -- why not have blue grass and a green sky?" And the child replies, "Because flowers are red, and grass is green, and that's the way it's always been."

Imagination destroyed.

For a child, the world of the imagination is as powerful, as vivid, as *real*, as the confusing world adults force on it. The imagined experience has all the power of the real experience; often more. Both have an effect on the child; both are remembered. We, our identities, are made up, at least in part, of our memories. If we remember something, if its effects continue, it becomes a part of our life; it is real; it is true. Even if it didn't "happen". The child I began with *isn't* lying; it *does* have a friend called Fizzbo who is green with sort of tentacles. It doesn't matter that Fizzbo is a creation of the child's imagination; for the child, Fizzbo is real.

We, of course, know Fizzbo isn't real. That's our loss.

READING

As you watch children growing up, from 4 to 7 to 10 to 13 to 16 (visualise the steps; at each age the child is quite different), you can see it distinguishing between the "real" and the "imaginary" worlds. Most children, at some stage (the age depends, *inter alia*, on sexual stereotyping, socio-economic class, intelligence, disposition, parental upbringing, siblings older and younger, peer pressure, school, rural or urban environment, and how many books there are in the home) -- most children will turn away from the worlds of the imagination, embrace only what is starkly concrete, scoff at what is not real. At least for a while. Many never return. Those who do, in nearly every case, are readers.

It doesn't matter so much readers of what. Any half-way decent teacher can spot immediately which kids in a new class read books for pleasure. Not by whether they are stoop-shouldered and myopic at 11 (though some are); not because they prefer their own company to the rough-and-tumble playground (though many do); not just by both the grammatical and the imaginative quality of their written work (though this is a sure sign); but also because they can be seen to be weighing the "real" world and finding it wanting -- and yet are not beaten down by disillusionment and disappointment, *because they have something better inside their heads.*

No, I'm not advocating that they, and we, go around stoned into happiness, secure in our own little internal worlds; there are psychiatric terms for people in that condition. The "real" world, after all, is the place we share with other people; like "sanity", it is a concensus state. And for better or worse, that's the place we live.

But reading, as we've all discovered, is an entry to other realities, an opportunity to share someone else's vision and, even better, use it as a framework for a new vision which is uniquely ours. The Arrakis I have in my mind is different from the one in yours; Frank Herbert and I, and Frank Herbert and you, worked together to create something different every time. (Which is why, if I ever see the film of *Dune*, I know I'll be disappointed. It won't be what I've had in my head since 1966; neither will Jessica, or Chani, or Alia.)

CHILDREN'S SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

Which brings me on, at last, to the theme of this *Vector*. Science Fiction we all know; children's SF most of us once read. But what is children's SF? Why devote an issue of *Vector* to something many BSFA members said goodbye to years ago? Why should adults read something written for 10 year olds? Who is children's SF actually written for? And why? Why should children read it? Does it have any value? Why should there be such a thing? Should it in fact exist at all?

That last is a trick question. The obvious answer is "Yes, of course it should." But both Diana Wynne Jones and Gwyneth Jones perhaps hint otherwise in their articles -- and both make their living from writing it. Douglas Hill also makes the point that the distinction between children's and adult fiction is arbitrary.

Like the sharp division between SF and fantasy, beloved of publishers and bookshops, but largely meaningless (many fantasy books contain elements of SF, and *vice versa*, and each has at times been defined as a sub-set of the other), the division into "adult" and "juvenile" is artificial. Publishers and bookshops love to label categories of books, but they actually make life more difficult for the browser and reader. *The Hobbit* is supposedly a children's book; *Lord of the Rings* is supposedly adult. Ursula K LeGuin's *Earthsea* trilogy, originally "juvenile", is now sold as an adult work. So is Douglas Hill's *Last Legionary Quartet*. The US edition of Mary Gentle's *A Hawk in Silver* had the bad language removed (so that US teenagers wouldn't see the word "shit" in print!); but then the US paperback was marketed as an adult fantasy. And how do you classify Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books?

"But children's SF is so childish." Sure, a lot of it is. So is a lot of adult SF. But *without exception* every juvenile book I've read in the last couple of years has been well-written, deep, and emotionally compelling, with believable characters and situations, and has stayed in my memory. Which is more than can be said for much of the adult SF I've waded through.

Look at the titles and authors I've mentioned already. Look at CS Lewis's *Narnia* series, all of Alan Garner's novels, Michael de Larrabeiti's *Borribles* and Mary Norton's *Borrowers*. Look at Joan Aiken, John Christopher, Monica Dickens, Peter Dickinson, Penelope Farmer, Monica Hughes, Penelope Lively, Andre Norton, Mary Stewart, Alison Uttley... the list goes on and on. "Children's" SF and fantasy which no adult should be ashamed to be seen reading.

Juvenile fiction, along with its other merits, can also help us, as adults, to understand kids better, to appreciate their point of view, their likes and dislikes, desires and fears. And by reading what they're reading, and certainly by not being disparaging about it, we can get back into the shoes we once wore, see the world from their perspective again, and regain for ourselves something of that freedom of the imagination we knew when we were 14, or 11, or 8.

And find that the grey world we live in still has a place for surprising colours.

* If anyone can loan me a copy of the song I'd be grateful.

L E T T E R S

«FIRST, A WELCOME TO ALL THE NEW MEMBERS WHO JOINED AT Worldcon -- and to any other new members. I hope you stay in the BSFA a good many years, and maybe also play an active part by contributing to its activities, including the magazines.

Letters are always welcome, and are nearly always published, though I reserve the right to edit them. If not for publication, please mark them DNQ. *Unfortunately I very rarely have time to reply personally to letters; my apologies to those who still wait...*

A couple of comments on V138 *before we get on to your response to the Feminism & SF issue:»*

VECTOR CURRENTLY SEEMS TO BE TURNING INTO AN INFORMATIVE and enjoyable read. That is not to say that I don't have disagreements with what is being said sometimes, but half the fun of such publications is in disagreeing with people in a civilised fashion rather than with lashings of acrimony...

I've been following the arguments over the short story in recent issues, and wonder whether the reason for its increasing lack of popularity (amongst publishers, at least) is that it has run into a credibility barrier. Once upon a time, SF threw off sparks of ideas like metal being touched to a spinning grindstone. Some of those ideas were big fat sparks that took a whole novel to burn out (and as we know, some of them were given artificial spark-prolonging additives which spun them out to over-blown trilogies, and beyond), while others were charming little glints that wore out after a short time, leaving only just enough elbow room to craft a short story.

The trouble was, in those days science was a far more mysterious field, and had so many undiscovered corners that an SF writer did not need to look too far before coming across viable new subject matter, whereas now, science is considerably less accommodating, having been theorised and factualised into a very solid body of knowledge, which the SF writer steps around in cautiously for fear of committing a Larry Niven-type *faux pas*. Any ideas which may emerge are cossetted and treated with respect, then milked for all they are worth (which means a novel or even a trilogy, rather than a a mere short story). The New Wave introduced the means by which even the slightest of ideas could be s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d to a sizeable novel, by concentrating less on the idea, and more on the characters, the setting, the language, even the very style of presentation. We may produce better novels as a result, but it leaves the short story in an undeserved limbo, which is only exacerbated by the pressure from publishers for novels rather than short story collections.

«I'd be interested in the response of professional short story writers to this; Garry Kilworth, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson et al *-- are you there?»*

Bruce Sterling's interview comments were interesting, but never truly get to explain the real genesis of cyber-punk, which to my mind had its origins in the work of one of the most stylish of the SF writers of the 40s and 50s, namely Alfred Bester. In reading Gibson or Sterling, I am often reminded, by echoes in distant corners of my mind, of books like *The Stars my Destination «in the UK* Tiger! Tiger!*»* or *The Demolished Man*, both in subject matter and in style of writing. The fireworks of Bester's style are certainly echoed in Gibson to a great extent. Both Bester and the cyberpunk writers draw from the imagery of the cinema, and from advertising, which adds to the familiarity of feel in the cyberpunk books. Granted that if you are going to copy a stylistic influence, then Bester's a much better place to go than some I could name, it's rather sad that he doesn't get credit for that influence.

I'm not at all sure about David Knott's article *«on engineering in SF»*. I rather suspect that you could prove almost the exact opposite to Knott's central hypothesis by altering the choice of stories or authors from the periods involved. You could (and rightly, in my opinion) reverse the polarity Knott establishes where Verne is held up as more "scientific" in his fiction than Wells. Knott stacks the deck one way, with a choice of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *The Time Machine*, whereas if you took Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* against Wells' *War of the Worlds* or *The Food of the Gods*, then the facts might be pointing contrariwise. And that problem extends throughout the piece: the selectivity is set too high, and filters out all the obvious pointers *against* Knott's reasoning.

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THE INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE STERLING IS PERHAPS AMONG THE most controversial *Vector* has ever published. I admire Paul Kincaid's tactful questions ("I got the impression you see considerable faults in *Schizmatrix*... care to elaborate?"); at times, I wish he had grilled Sterling even more thoroughly. These cyberpunks are so slippery! But he's done better than most by getting Sterling to give a little definition to cyberpunk:

> "It should be discussing topics that are of importance to the contemporary milieu, to be preparing people for what is to come, to be giving people conceptual tools to deal with the stress of change, to be suggesting what direction change should go in, what's workable, what paths for the future might work."

Well, that's actually Sterling's answer to what SF should be doing that it isn't now -- but I've sort of presumed that he thought cyberpunk was the answer to that. I have to admit that the future as expressed in what cyberpunk fiction I've read seems very bleak, and excessively concerned with drugs, and not as concerned with the important things Sterling suggests as I would hope. I'm glad, too, that Sterling doesn't go as far as Lewis Shiner, who said on the cyberpunk panel at *«last year's?»* Worldcon that the quality of a story depended upon how closely it related to reality -- which certainly must put all SF at a disadvantage.

What Sterling really believes is also difficult to understand at times because he likes answering questions with elaborate and colourful metaphor, such as the bit about the cyberpunk alligator biting the leg off of British SF, or lugging a gun along with Heinlein to do battle with the censors. Fun, yes, but what does it all mean?

My problem too with the popular culture aspect of cyberpunk is that it seems all rock culture, and rock culture and rock journalists and writers are ignorant of everything but themselves. And why use SF (itself a form of pop culture) to disseminate pop culture? Science, futurology, philosophy and even feminism have more to offer as sources.

Your editorial on the short story collections was good. I've just finished reading all the short fiction nominees for the Hugo awards, and like your surprise at the four collections you reviewed, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed them. I must admit that in recent years reading the Hugo nominees has been a chore instead of a pleasure. Instead this year the nomination list acted as I've thought it always should: as a list of stories and authors that fans recommend to one another to read and enjoy. Perhaps the large number of British fans nominating affected the quality of what made the short list. In contrast, I never did read any of the novels (and didn't vote in that category, despite the temptation -- anything but L Ron Hubbard!), and like yourself, consider myself primarily a novel-reader. Thus our prejudices are destroyed. Another one fell when I decided (after reading all the Hugo nominees and some articles within) that *Isaac Asimov's Magazine* was now decent and worthwhile, and I could stop boycotting it. Gardner Dozois is a good editor.

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L E T T E R S

VERY MANY CONGRATULATIONS ON THE MOST INTERESTING ISSUE of *Vector* I have seen in years (ever seen?). Impossible to single out one of the articles on Feminism in SF. All were excellent. I learnt least from Jean Weber's on Feminist Utopias, though that is probably because I've been reading up a lot on this myself, in preparation for an undergraduate course I'm putting on next year (called "Utopias"). Mike Christie's helped me to a better understanding of one of my favourite SF novels of recent years «*(Native Tongue)*»; Sue Thomason's was a very interesting sidelight (headlight?) on another old favourite of mine (it goes nicely with the KV Bailey article on Earthsea I've published in *Foundation 40* (plug), which was indeed originally written for Sue Thomason). And I'm tempted to send a copy of Mary Gentle's splendid diatribe «*on John Norman's* Gor *books*» to the manager of my local WH Smith's...

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I AM HALFWAY THROUGH *V139*. A FINE EDITORIAL, AND THE articles are very perceptive.

I met Robert Graves at a party here in Oslo, years and years ago. The host, with an exaggerated estimate of my writing ability, asked me to drive Graves to his hotel (I possessed a very battered Ford Zephyr), and to speak to him of my stories. I drove him to the hotel and he spoke to me about many things, but I could see no purpose in mentioning my crude writing efforts. But to get to the point. That meeting led me into reading almost everything Graves had written and I could see what he meant by *The White Goddess* theory. The female is the most powerful principle on this planet.

I imagine that the subject theme of *V139* again comes back to what is evil, and misuse of power is the only universal fundamental one can define.

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VERY MUCH ENJOYED THE FEMINIST SF ISSUE OF *VECTOR*. LONG overdue in my opinion, bearing in mind that some of the best and most thought-provoking SF is today being produced by women. I was particularly pleased to read Mary Gentle's diatribe against the very dubious John Norman *Gor* novels. Even though I speak as a "normal" heterosexual male, and regard erotic fantasy as a perfectly legitimate subject for fiction, I can honestly say that I have never been tempted to explore a Norman paperback beyond the cover. The sexual content suggested by the cover is so obviously adolescent and one-dimensional in scope that one feels only pity for the poor sods who have to get their jollies from such a desperately threadbare source of -- hum -- "entertainment".

I agree with Mary Gentle that censorship is not the answer (I've always been against censorship of any kind), but feel perhaps that, as Feminist arguments slowly filter through to the great lumpish majority of the male population (and I include myself here), and we all become more aware of the manipulative power of popular cultural imagery, an improvement may come about -- and Norman's dreary little fantasies will rot away on WH Smiths' shelves.

Mary Gentle's other point about whether these books cause the odd ill-adjusted male to go out and try to make his fantasies a reality is a very big and complex issue. There are strong arguments on both sides. It may be that Norman's books do act as a safety valve for some, but for others, perhaps already mentally damaged anyway, they may prove the catalyst that turns idle masturbatory fantasy into horrible reality. I honestly cannot give an answer. Perhaps, as so often in these things, the truth is somewhere in the middle.

I would certainly be interested in John Norman's own thoughts and reflections on his work. Not his justification -- the novels obviously make him a lot of bucks -- and in the good ol' USA that is the justification for anything -- but his rationale; his, for want of a better phrase, philosophy of life -- if it could be so dignified.

Finally I would like to add that it is perfectly possible to write "barbarian"/heroic fantasy, whatever you will, without recourse to the Neanderthal values of Norman and his ilk. One thinks particularly of Moorcock, a shining beacon (I'm really looking forward to buying his *Wizardry and Wild Romance*)... And Tanith Lee, a personal favourite, who manages to combine eroticism in her novels with an intelligent and stylish analysis of male/female relationships. And, of course, Mary Gentle herself, whose *Golden Witchbreed* novel was refreshingly free of sexual stereotyping.

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«Like you, I had never read, or even opened a Gor *book. Mary Gentle insisted I did before publishing her article. It is probably the most distasteful thing I have ever read.»*

V139 MADE ENTHRALLING READING. YOUR EDITORIAL, AS USUAL, was level-headed and intelligent -- and agreeable!... I agree with your attitude towards S African members. SF is supposed to be one of those symbols which bridge nations, unite peoples. It is not a political body -- at least in the sense of it being only one-sided it isn't...

All the articles were fascinating. I've read the *Earthsea* trilogy once and wasn't that taken with it (it was fun, but I wasn't on its wavelength at the time) and came away feeling oddly dissatisfied, as if recognising a great big emptiness in the world that was never illuminated to my satisfaction. Could it be that I regretted the short shrift women got in it, or were there other reasons? I'm not sure, but when I come to reread it, I may have a better idea of what I'm looking for that *isn't* there.

I've never read a *Gor* book and never will. I have an active dislike bordering on hatred for anyone who thinks it's fun to cripple and exploit others. Mary Gentle's article made me very angry, which was her intention, but I've had sufficient personal experience to know the horror and damage intense physical and mental pain brings, and an acute knowledge of its conditioning effects to despise all of that which the *Gor* books represent. Norman's philosophy is twisted and destructive, from what Gentle says (and from what quotes from his books illustrate) and that's all I desire to find out about his world. I read elsewhere that he began the novels presenting his philosophy of torture and conditioning as unwholesome (to say the least), but grew to believe it and now seems convinced of its universal truth. Perhaps he brainwashed himself too.

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WASN'T THAT A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE, THEN. I MUST SAY SOMEthing in response to Mark McConn. I understand his opinion, and respect it -- there is probably no more urgent requirement in the world today than the establishment of a free and just society in South Africa (although why stop there; such a society here wouldn't go amiss...) I think, however, that he misunderstands the ANC call for a cultural boycott...

«Martyn argues that this should be on an official level rather than ostracising individuals, and discusses the difficulty of the BSFA vetting each application that comes from S Africa.»

L E T T E R S

It's impossible. It would also be an utterly futile gesture, and the time is long gone when gesture politics were of any importance there.

Which brings me to Mary Gentle and John Norman. I've never bought or picked from the shelf a John Norman book, just as I've never put a cigarette to my lips, and would much rather not have to see the misshapen flesh of Samantha Fox seemingly wherever I look -- and for the same reason.

Carcinogens destroy health, create disease. Rape is just one manifestation of the cancer in our collective soul (but what a terrible manifestation), the cancer which converts everything into a commodity to be bought and sold, possessed. Today's rôle model, it seems, has the price of everything but knows the value of nothing. After all if that good egg Sam is up there spreading her legs for every *Sun* reader why isn't every woman; except, of course, our Sam isn't really making herself available to anyone, she just pretends in the sacred cause of selling something no-one needs -- how pervasive and corrupting is advertising. Doubtless our descendents, should we be lucky enough to have them, will marvel that the high priest of this politics of spiritual and moral scorched earth should have been female. Oppression, like freedom, is seamless. Which is exactly what Mary Gentle says, and how right she is when she says the only language the purveyors of this shit will understand is the holy language of the cash till. Doubtless they would have sold tickets to Dachau if there was a profit to be made.

On which depressing thought I'll leave you. A very good issue -- but then, they are all good these days. My thanks.

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«I've passed these, and several other letters on the BSFA's approach to S African members, to Maureen Porter for Matrix; please send any further letters on this to her.»

"HOW CAN A WOMAN WRITE BOOKS LIKE THIS?" SUE THOMASON asks us, referring to Ursula K LeGuin's *Earthsea* trilogy.

The answer is simple: believe it or not, LeGuin has actually written a genuine fantasy novel in *Earthsea*; it is not just an excuse to flood the lucrative SF market with feminist propaganda; it is not akin in any way to the endless feminist utopia/dystopias churned out by The Women's Press; it is pure fantasy, and it sells.

Just because every other female SF writer is seemingly giving every novel a feminist slant doesn't mean that, by definition, LeGuin must as well. In my opinion, she is a cut above the rest simply because she differs in this respect.

Sue Thomason might find it hard to believe, but I see no great relevance in the fact that women have only weak magic powers in Earthsea. I look on it as merely an almost arbitrary plot device (one of many, in fact) which together contribute to one of the greatest fantasy trilogies by one of the greatest fantasy writers of all time, feminist or no. It is a *bona fide* work, and one that truly belongs in the fantasy category.

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«That one I expect will draw some response -- as I think will this, for the unexamined assumptions implicit in its assertions:»

V139 WAS VERY INTERESTING, PARTICULARLY MIKE CHRISTIE'S linguistic investigation. However, it failed since the habitual discussion of the meaning of words is not only tedious but harmful. To be provocative about it, the amount of worthwhile knowledge that comes out of an enquiry is in inverse proportion to the amount of discussion of the meaning of words that goes on.

It *is* unfortunate that so many feminists view the world through the dead lens of Marxism. Proclamations that "we can't change anything until we change everything" are self-contradictory, and replace sexual bigotry and prejudice with the ideological equivalent. Marxism is an archaic and outmoded philosophy: by its craving to be right it betrays its unscientific nature.

I was astonished to learn from Paul Kincaid's review of the *Mirrorshades* anthology that cyberpunk is dead! That so? What evidence, we must ask, does he have to support this alleged autopsy? In his own words: "...it is difficult to work out what cyberpunk was. *Mirrorshades*, the definitive anthology and last gasp of the movement, provides no clues."

So on evidence that is circumstantial (as *he* sees it -- or doesn't) Coroner Kincaid declares the absent body of cyberpunk to be dead. Quick! -- someone call the DA's office!

Dead? Try telling that to Eric Brown, Charles Stross, Sharon Hall, William King and even this humble scribe. We are all British writers, and we are taking the opportunity to experiment with the cyberpunk mode, maybe even delve its theoretic potential. *«Huh??»* And Paul Kincaid has the staggering temerity to announce the death of something he does not understand.

The *Mirrorshades* anthology is due for release in the UK by Grafton in the coming months. Perhaps members might disregard Paul Kincaid's non-review and decide for themselves.

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«I've already given my opinion in V138 *(Editorial); it's not that cyberpunk is dead or dying: it never really lived. A handful of authors, a handful of novels and short stories, hardly amount to a genre-shattering new movement within SF. As John Owen says above, the best "cyberpunk" novels of all were written by Alfred Bester in 1953 and 1956; the stuff going under the label 30 years later is a pale and clumsy shadow with an inflated opinion of its own significance.»*

CONGRATULATIONS FOR *VECTOR 139*. GREAT TO SEE SOME FEMINIST articles. Mary Gentle's article on the *Gor* novels was devastating and made me wonder why they were still so freely available on bookshop shelves.

Your editorial was also interesting (and slightly self-congratulatory?). I felt you were rather unfair to Joanna Russ. What you perceived as "symptomatic of the arrogance and intolerance of some extreme feminist thinking" seemed to me an understandable reaction to her perception of a male attempt to appropriate feminism. The working class must have felt such an emotion when their movement was patronised and taken over by predominantly middle-class intellectuals. Whether Joanna Russ's perception was correct is another subject.

May I make a suggestion? One of the best ways for men to contribute to a feminist society is not to remove the struggle from the women's domain but to augment it from within the men's. *«Which is exactly what I was attempting to do.»* September's issue of *New Internationalist* is about the "politics of masculinity" and makes constructive reading.

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Letters continued on page 16

DOUGLAS HILL

INTERVIEWED BY

ANDY SAWYER

DOUGLAS HILL IS A CANADIAN WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED with SF for many years as reviewer, anthologist, literary editor of *Tribune* and latterly as a writer of fast-paced children's novels. *Galactic Warlord* (Gollancz, 1979) began his *Last Legionary Quartet*, continued with *Deathwing Over Veynaa*, *Day of the Starwind*, and *Planet of the Warlord*, a "space operetta" (as he once described it) in which the last survivor of a race of interplanetary mercenaries seeks revenge against a villain bent on galactic conquest. The *Huntsman* trilogy (*Huntsman*, *Warriors of the Wasteland* and *Alien Citadel*) returns to Earth, but a post-holocaust Earth where small bands of guerillas are the only resistance to an alien race which has taken total possession of the planet. An alien planet and an urban-derelict Earth form the background to the *Colsec* trilogy, *Caves of Klydor*, *Exiles of Colsec* and *Colsec Rebellion*, in which a group of teenagers survive the perils of exile and join a revolutionary force which rises against Earth's totalitarian government. Douglas Hill has also returned to the universe of the *Last Legionary* books -- albeit in an earlier time -- for *Young Legionary*, and has written SF tales for a younger age-group in the highly-acclaimed Banana Books series for 7-9 year olds. He is also active in meeting his audience: this interview (conducted in February 1987) was set up after I met Douglas while he was involved Children's Book Week activities in local schools. Forthcoming books include a two-part fantasy, *Blade of the Poisoner* and -- due in the autumn -- *Father of Fiends*.

In a BSFA Focus *magazine interview on the publication of* Galactic Warlord *you expressed your aims as a writer of children's SF, going for children who were into* Star Wars *and SF comics but who were not catered for in books. How successful do you feel you've been in achieving these aims?*

My "success", if any, in achieving my aim of writing books that will be rungs in a ladder for some kids from comics and TV into books... isn't really measurable. I travel up and down the country talking to kids in schools, libraries, book fairs etc., and I've talked to many thousands by now, in eight or nine years of doing so. I meet kids who claim to have been turned on to reading by my books, or to have been turned on to SF. I meet teachers who say that my books are always being borrowed from school libraries, and teachers who say that they have used my books in classes, including remedial-reading classes, as a means of reaching the less interested kids or less able older kids. All this is naturally gratifying. I'm also well aware that there are still hordes of kids who don't read (or who certainly don't read *me*) just as there are hordes of adults who have never opened a book since leaving school.

How did you end up writing SF for children?

I started writing SF for kids because I was an SF adviser to Pan Books (as to other publishers before). In the late 1970s, even before *Star Wars*, there was plenty of SF in films and TV, as well as a great fad among kids (top juniors, first and second year secondaries especially) for *Dr Who* books, and that endless series of Perry Rhodan. So I suggested to editors of Piccolo (Pan's juvenile list) that books be sought to feed this growing audience. Finally Pan hired as editor for Piccolo, Jill MacKay, who not only listened and agreed but added, "Why don't *you* write some?" At that moment one of those cartoon light bulbs lit up over my head... and it's still shining.

Do you have an "audience" you feel you're writing for?

I began my first book thinking partly of what would appeal to my son, then 13, but equally of what would have appealed to me when I was about 12. Nowadays I tend also to think of all the kids I meet when I'm invited to schools etc.

In an article on SF in Only Connect -- Readings in Children's Literature, *Sheila Egoff writes that SF may well be "the child's easiest entry into speculations that trouble the adult mind". Can SF, do you think, be a valid vehicle for discussing contemporary issues (war, pollution, energy crisis) or does this deaden the impact of the exciting story?*

I'm not so sure of "easiest entry", as Ms Egoff has it, but *an* entry, certainly. At the same time I remain suspicious of any children's book earnestly seeking to "confront issues" -- which usually means stopping the story for the sake of long, meaningful interior monologue or direct address to the reader. The "issues" or any other didactic purpose must be kept solidly in the background -- visible enough to be examined by kids who are inclined to do so, but never jammed down any young throat.

In your own SF you seem to try and depict values not usually found in that kind of SF -- (I'm thinking particularly of the stress on co-operation in the Colsec *trilogy, with Cord's reluctance to be a leader). Are you trying to suggest alternatives to the often right-wing imagery of much action SF?*

Following on from the last question... I don't think the (background) values in my books are "not usually found", even though some SF adventure does echo a little with the sound of jackboots. In the *Last Legionary* series, the hero is a product of a society that values communality, equality of the sexes, self-control, dedication, and so on. Many similar ideals are found among the Warriors of the Wasteland in the *Huntsman* trilogy. But these are just ideals that I find appealing, and that suit my heroes' nature. And they're not that unusual in heroic adventure.

Children's literature is particularly rich in fantasy writers who are eagerly seized upon by adults, from Lewis Carroll to Diana Wynne Jones, but the picture is very different for SF. Do you think this is because of the nature of SF itself or because SF readers tend to see SF as an "adult" genre and children's SF as a stage to go through before reaching the "real thing"?

Rather a complex question, since the distinction between children's and adult fiction is arbitrary -- due to the manifest differences in reading ability. I've met nine-year-olds who read Ian Watson and think my stuff is childish twaddle; I've met adults whose lips move over headlines in the Sun newspaper. SF bookshops like Andromeda or Forbidden Planet tell me that adults read my stuff as well as kids, a fact underlined when Pan put the *Last Legionary Quartet* into one omnibus volume. Then again,

I know that Harry Harrison's *Deathworld* books, *Stainless Steel Rat* series, *Planet of the Damned* and so on are much loved by my young readers (I recommend them at every opportunity!) but the publishers proffer them as adult reading. And that's true of many authors. I'm sure that if I were writing in an earlier age, my books would be "adult SF" -- just as Burroughs or Doc Smith were, back then. I'm also sure that lots of "adult SF" published today is not as texturally rich, or expressively powerful, as some kids' SF by the likes of HM Hoover or John Christopher.

Are there any children's SF (or adult SF, for that matter) writers you admire or who influence your own work?

You don't have space to list my admirations (see some of them above). I barely have space on my groaning bookshelves to accommodate them. But... one children's SF writer I've come to admire is Monica Hughes, whose *Keeper of the Isis Light* is for me a true classic and a gem, a book that I would dearly love to have written. It's also one of my weapons in my one-man battle against the stupid stereotype that SF is "boys' fiction". As for influences, I'm not conscious of any specifics, but I feel myself generally affected by having been an irredeemable SF addict for 40 years. Naturally, however, I'm conscious of some debts -- to Gordon Dickson and Jack Williamson, for instance, who were there first with the concept of an interplanetary warriors race. (But I owe something to the legends of Sparta, too.)

As a reviewer/anthologist you've been involved with adult SF for many years. Do you feel that the adult SF world tends to ignore or patronise children's SF?

Ignore? Patronise? Categorically, yes. Which partly explains why some adult readers don't "seize upon" some kids' SF. It's clear snobbery. I suppose I get admitted to the fringes of activity among the great and the good of SF because I've been around for 20 years as an anthologist, reviewer, adviser and so on. But have you ever seen Nicholas Fisk on a platform at an SF convention? or Monica Hughes, HM Hoover, Terrance Dicks...? Well, maybe Dicks, covered with the *Doctor Who* glory. These days, it seems that such folk are children's writers first and SF writers a long way second; and there seems to be no cachet in writing for kids, except among kids. (Which suits me.) But also, is there a children's SF category in the Hugo or Nebula or BSFA or whatever award? (No doubt some will detect a whiff of sour grapeshot in the foregoing. Dead right, too.)

Since the Star Wars *boom we've had various other trends -- roleplaying games, microcomputer games, Tolkienish fantasy. What effect do you think this will have on your own writing and SF for children in general?*

I can't believe that the "Tolkienish fantasy" boom arose after *Star Wars*. Maybe even the reverse! But with all the games, "interactive fiction" for computers and so on, it's a whole new world. And a fairly brave one, too, for such things can help to create a climate of acceptability for SF among the kids (including even more girls) that could lead a lot of them to SF in books. I don't think that the computer will kill the book, any more than photography killed painting. But maybe, if the interactive fictions ever get any good as *fiction* (that is, with good plots and real dialogue and cinematic graphics etc.) books might become something of a minority interest. Or do I mean even more of one?

Pan reprinted your Last Legionary Quartet *in an omnibus edition as an adult book. Were you happy about this bearing in mind that people who bought it might not have realised it was originally a "children's book"?*

I was very happy about the omnibus, as I've suggested. I don't believe anyone was deluded; I doubt if any reader would have liked the book more, or less, if it had borne the label "This is a children's book". Booksellers tell me that the omnibus was bought from the "adult" shelves by readers of 14 or 41, along with books by Arthur Clarke, Asimov, Harrison, Heinlein, Bob Shaw...

Finally, what differences do you see in the field of children's SF between the time of Galactic Warlord *and now?*

When my first SF, *Galactic Warlord*, was being published, the world was agog at *Star Wars*. (The film, not the Reaganite fantasy.) In my profession you can divide time like BC and AD, only it's BSW and ASW. Since then we've had all the other SF blockbusters, from ET to *Dune*, along with the adventuring fantasies of Indiana Jones *et al*. This outrush of material has enlarged the audience, I'm sure (along with the usual echoes of the trend on TV). It has also served to make SF more commercially respectable, since not even the gutter press can sneer at "sci-fi" when the movies are making mega-bucks. For me, it has been a good time to be a kids' writer, since there are now so many kids out there who share my addiction. On the other hand, as they're more sophisticated in SF, they're more demanding; I know I can't get away with things that writers in the 1950s might have. And there's one other counter-productivity: because of *Star Wars* especially, and the *Star Trek* films, *Alien* and so on, far too many kids think that SF is nothing more than space adventure. (I know, most of my books seem to confirm this misapprehension.) So we have to struggle to inform the kids that SF comes in many modes, and they might like some of the others if they don't like rocketships and rayguns. And this struggle may be partly why I'm currently writing something that isn't SF but is a two-part *fantasy*, good old-fashioned sword-and-sorcery. I'll get back to SF before too long; but it's sort of refreshing to get away from interstellar space for a while. Maybe for the readers too...

Douglas Hill, thank you.

What is the attraction of children's science fiction? One young reader tells us why it appeals to him.

SPACE OPERA FOR CHILDREN

PATRICK LEE

SOME YEARS AGO, CHILDREN WOULD BE TREATED WITH STORY books about ghosts, spies, and detectives, with some science fiction in the background. That SF would include famous stories such as John Christopher's "Tripod" trilogy, but otherwise children would mostly see SF by watching television or reading comics. By the start of the 1970s however, the enemy of the books somehow helped the books, with television programmes such as *Doctor Who*, *The Tomorrow People*, and *Star Trek* causing books to appear which were based upon such programmes. In competition with football and pop music, the cinema succeeded in giving SF a stable footing in children's literature, with the arrival of the *Star Wars* films, which very probably increased the child's interest in reading SF, particularly space opera. This has become apparent today, in the 1980s, with more science fiction books being produced, with attractive covers, opening the doors wide open to adventures in space and time for children.

So what is on offer for children anyway? Quite a lot. There are just as many SF books for children, as there are for adults. Some adults read them, but it seems that most of the adult fans of SF have virtually ignored them, though this may be changing. So perhaps we should be asking, what is on offer for children *and* adults? There is a lot of the traditional SF theme, space opera around, with plenty of books describing adventures in space and on other planets, with the smash of speeding spacecraft echoing in your mind, together with the roar of explosions, and the zap of the laser gun. These books are written by such people as Douglas Hill, Terrance Dicks, Brian Earnshaw, and Andre Norton.

In my opinion, Norton's *Trader* trilogy is excellent, illustrating her ability to write stories that are vividly futuristic. Terrance Dicks, meanwhile, has used his experience with *Doctor Who*, and has written a trilogy himself, entitled *Star Quest*, the books being *Spacejack*, *Roboworld*, and *Terrorsaur*. Here you find a good example of space opera, with UFOs, rescue missions, robots, blasters, and so on.

Other than space opera, there are SF stories which deal with people, such as those written by Monica Hughes and HM Hoover; while in the middle, there are people such as Nicholas Fisk who writes a variety of SF tales for children, ranging from *Grinny*, a story about an android infiltrating a present day English family, to the *Starstormer* serial, quick fire adventures of four 21st century children flying in space in an adapted meteorite, while trying to defeat the Octopus Emperor of Tyrannopolis.

HM Hoover is my favourite author; she has written a number of SF novels, such as *The Rains of Eridan*, *This Time of Darkness*, and *The Delikon*. Most of her novels involve the heroes/heroines surviving in the outdoors, sometimes with futuristic camping gear, sometimes with nothing. All her stories however, are set more than five hundred years into the future, and in that safety of time she is able to include in her stories aircars, starships, and laser weapons, as well as other technological wonders that are so attractively, but dangerously included in stories, written by other authors, set in the 21st century. Archaeology and biology are two subjects that feature in most of her stories, whose settings range from devastated future Earths to old alien planets. Hoover's stories of intrigue and exploration are written in a way that can captivate the reader: awesome, fascinating and, perhaps, beautiful. Read her books, and you may see what I mean.

Among the most popular books written for children, are the "Doctor Who" stories, based upon the television adventures of the rebel Time Lord; written initially for children, these are old enough in writing for adults to read.

All the authors mentioned so far write books for teenagers. However, there are SF books for younger children, and most of them are published by Ladybird. For example, for readers around eight, there are the extra-ordinary adventures of Professor Gamma, William, and Kiryl, written by Fred and Geoffrey Hoyle, and illustrated by Martin Aitchison. But if eight year olds, and their elders, want something a bit better than reading stories about an old man and two children who use a pipe as a teleport device, then I recommend them to go and meet *Dragonfall 5*.

Now the *Dragonfall 5* series is definitely for children. The books in this series are written by Brian Earnshaw, and each tells of the fantastic adventures of the ancient starship, *Dragonfall 5*, and her family crew, and all of them are pure space opera. The stories are exciting, amusing, and very entertaining, which is why I think these books are definitely for children, and yet they are also fun for adults to read too.

But why should children, and adults, read children's science fiction?

This is difficult to answer satisfactorily, since there is a clear similarity between adult SF and children's SF. Both share the basic themes, such as space opera, time travel, far futures, etc. But there is a certain something in children's SF which distinguishes it from adult SF.

It isn't necessarily the method of writing. True, children's books are written in a way that allows the story to be comprehensible to the young reader. But these days, adult fiction appears to be written in the same style in some books, and hence are probably just as readable as children's fiction. There is certainly a touch more description, of both surroundings and hardware, in children's SF, and there is more clarity in description, compared to that found in adult SF.

So what is there on offer for us between the covers, now that we know vaguely what is on offer in the book-shops? For children and adults, SF books for children may contain hidden messages concerning our society, or our attitude to everything. For example, HM Hoover, in some of her books, regards industrial companies of the future as being callous, or virtually uncaring, concerned more for high profit than in the people likely to be affected by plans promoting that profit. Perhaps these fictitious companies are mirror-images of the real industrial companies of today, which are creating near ecological havoc in their money-making plans. Hoover also wonders, in an indirect way, whether humans will be able to recognise intelligent life when they see it. For example, in one of

her novels, *Another Heaven, Another Earth*, a handful of scientists dig up an alien grave, and find a body that probably died of gunshot wounds; gunshot wounds probably caused by humans who regarded the body as an animal because it had hair all over itself. No matter what it looks like, surely a creature which can build grave stones, and dwellings, should be regarded as perhaps just as intelligent as a human? In this book, this does not seem to be the case.

While there is violence in children's SF, there is virtually no sex, and I'm sure that quite a few adults will welcome an SF story that does not feature sex or pornography. Violence in children's books is usually written to a level which will not terrify the young reader. There are exceptions to this however; aliens and people die unpleasant deaths in Douglas Hill's *Exiles of Colsec*; and in Nicholas Fisk's *Evil Eye*, the children get the chance to act like savages, killing one or two mutated animals with kitchen knives, on what looks like a ringworld. An example of low level violence on the other hand, can be found in the *Dragonfall 5* books, which always seem to feature weapons, ranging from stunners to spears; but despite this, no one gets seriously hurt.

The mentioning of war and weapons seems to reflect how violent we humans are, but for the children, the horrors of war are more or less hidden from their minds, while they are excited by people wearing guns and shooting each other. In children's SF, the young reader can witness people getting killed, not only due to the use of blasters, but also due to the anger or hunger of monstrous creatures as well. But children like this sort of thing, and authors use violence (so it's said) because it is regarded as being dramatic. Dramatic it may be, as boys dream of flying spaceships and making war, while the girls dream of flying spaceships and making peace, and as you can see, the matter of sex rôles is spread to children's literature. In Dick's *Star Quest* trilogy, for example, you have one boy grabbing every laser rifle he can see, while a girl risks her life on potentially dangerous alien planets, unarmed, or at least not using her laser pistol.

The excitement of violence is probably one reason why the adventure game books from the *Fighting Fantasy* series are so popular. With these books, some of which are written by Steve Jackson, young people can be the heroes of an adventure, where they not only explore unusual places, but defend themselves against deadly hostiles as well. Most adventure game books are fantasy, but there are quite a few SF ones as well. And because they are written in the same style as seen in children's fiction, they are classified as being children's fiction, and are placed on the children's shelf.

It may be considered a shame, but the SF market owes some of its success to the use of violence, and in children's SF, the young reader is attracted by books that feature excitement and adventure, where the baddies are dealt with by the use of the laser pistol or the sword.

The fact that violence in children's literature is written at a lower level compared to the death and horror found in adult literature, adds one brick to the wall that divides and distinguishes children's from adult SF.

Children have dreams. They have nightmares as well. Children's SF probably contains the favourites of those dreams and nightmares: to be chased by a robot or a monster, to fly in spaceships, to fire laser weapons, meet nice little creatures on another world, explore strange places, and so on. Children's SF also seems to answer to the wishes of some children. For example, children are often bored by school. In Earnshaw's *Dragonfall 5 And The Empty Planet*, you will find a school of the future, where children have fun playing games, and going on field trips; where the lessons consist of children sleeping under electronic equipment which fills their minds with subject matter, and afterwards having the children wake up and enter a discussion with the teacher about the appropriate subject, and therefore squashing a year of learning down to a few weeks. Learn astro-navigation in a few weeks! It makes you wish that you could live in the happy 23rd century universe of *Dragonfall 5*. And since children, to whatever degree, like animals, the young reader can meet animals as intelligent beings, inhabiting alien planets, in the *Dragonfall 5* stories. Children, like adults, have all sorts of dreams, where they wish this happened, or wish they could do that, or wish they could go there. Children's SF can take young people out of present day reality, and into worlds of dreams and adventure. And while adult SF seems to magnify the terror of the unknown, children's SF is written in a way that allows the child to explore the unknown with little fear. But writing SF for children so that it is simple and less frightening than adult SF, is only part of the reason why children should read it.

Children's SF differs from adult SF in that it excludes some of the human problems adults may face, as well as adult behaviour, so that the young reader is not upset or confused by sex and extreme violence, or other related subjects. Now this may not be correct, but one thing is for sure: one reason why children should read children's SF, is that they are able to follow heroes (while exploring other places, other worlds, other galaxies, other times) who are just as young as the children themselves. Most stories feature children or young people as the main characters, indicating that you don't have to be grown up to have adventures, nor do these adventures have to take place on 20th century Earth.

It is not only the encouragement of adventure that you find in children's SF, but also the encouragement for friendship too. You can find children's stories where the adventurers are strengthened by friendship, where they also try, if possible, to make friends with alien beings. Another message for the future adults of the next century.

Children's SF is interesting to read, and if a child is interested enough to read more of it, then it could benefit the child's education in three ways.

First, a child's fascination with children's SF can help perfect its reading skill, improve its spelling and writing, and increase its vocabulary.

Secondly, you can obviously find quite a bit of science, imaginary or factual, in children's SF. It is mostly written in a very comprehensive way so as not to confuse the young reader, though there are some authors who seem to throw science in just to impress the young reader. In Brian Earnshaw's *Dragonfall 5 And The Mastermind*, for example, one character demonstrates the silicon gun against a groper fish, underwater:

> In half a second a fine film of silicon, like clear plastic of huge strength, spread all around the great fish. For a moment the silicon hung flappily like an old bag. Then, activated by its tensile neutrons, it opened into a clear globe, perfectly round and smooth, with the groper in the middle of it.

Despite this, writers like Earnshaw are able to excite children with their worlds of dazzling science and technology, while using science in an uncomplicated, if sometimes careless, way.

In children's SF heroes as young as 12, living in the future, are often shown to be just as technologically minded as today's 18 year olds. Today's children are probably quite aware of increasing technology which will affect their future lives, and, together with the reading of children's SF, they may be encouraged to study science and technology to enable them to live in the 21st century.

Thirdly, reading children's SF will not only give the child an introduction to SF in general, but could also expand the imagination of that child; quite an asset for any would-be writer or artist.

And what about you elders, the adults. What have you to gain from reading science fiction children's books? Everything that I have said more or less applies to you too. But there is one thing, one reason why you should read children's SF.

They say that there is no longer a sense of wonder in science fiction. Maybe adults will be able to find that sense of wonder by reading children's SF. Read *Dragonfall 5 And The Super Horse*, and gasp at the landscapes of the planet Mowl; feel the futuristic atmosphere when you read Ian Marter's *Doctor Who And The Sontaran Experiment*, and perhaps you'll see what I mean. Compared to adult science fiction, the books of children's science fiction are so uncomplicated, and for want of another word, refreshing.

PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S FICTION

(Or: 8 out of 10 fans, whose owners stated a preference, either loved or hated Narnia)

GWYNETH JONES

ANYONE WHO WRITES FOR CHILDREN, SAYS JOAN AIKEN, EXPerienced and prolific in the business, must bear in mind the momentousness of being among a child's first impressions, and the overall duty to protect and educate the reader. They must accept a child's intense sense of morality and brutal "eye for an eye" sense of justice... and at the same time give some kind of glimpse or vision that things are not always what they seem.

It appears that SF fans and children have a lot in common, from this catalogue. SF is also concerned with first impressions: the shock of the new. It is an intensely didactic genre -- often satirical or socially educational, always packed with at least as much useless information as you ever picked up in school. And of course, notoriously, SF/Fantasy operates at the literary, moral and emotional level of an eight year old child. It is no wonder then that a reasonable number of SF readers also belong to that curious group of adults still able to enjoy books where the recommended reading age appears under the blurb.

For a writer of both kinds of fiction the similarities are even more marked. However, the comparison is not disparaging to either: in fact each genre seems to justify the other.

It's true that children's fiction as a whole (like most things) strongly confirms the CDM* theory of cosmology. Kilo for kilo, the vast bulk of what is read, and read avidly, is the literary equivalent of cellulose fibre in the diet. So it was, and so it always will be. Adventure game clones are bad, but there is really not a lot more going on in *Swallows and Amazons*, the *Chalet* school, or any of those interminable Blyton series. Editors, teachers, parents all despair: but perhaps they simply misunderstand. For those who read all the time, a lot of reading must be just chewing the cud. But a child has another excuse. To her there is no need for a cast of well-rounded characters. She supplies her own, with herself as heroine. The adult arbiters of quality all judge the book as a work of art. The child sees it as a stepping off place for personally customised fantasy. It is not a picture, it is a door. Much SF of the adventure kind, and genre Fantasy, is read in the same way. It is pointless in either case to criticise what appears on the printed page. No one can know the quality of the scenario in each reader's head.

In writing SF, you try to achieve the shock of the new by inventing or distorting the world of your fiction. Children's writers do not have to try with the externals, the readers' inexperience is enough. The journey they must make is into their own past. But the technique is the same: a kind of cleaning of the needle -- re-cognition of a world that is strange, but also your own. All writers are closet teachers. They have an enormous need to pass on information. It is easy to do this when writing for ten year olds, more difficult with almost any class of adults. Important facts about how the world works and what works it, and how to make raspberry jam, have to be slipped in sneakily between the emotional crises. Unless you have the wit to write SF or *call* it SF, which is what matters. But the strongest likeness of all is in the morality. This can be laughable, as in the naive pronouncements of Captain James Kirk (and his many brothers). It can also be deadly serious. Stop doing that or else you're going to get dead... According to SF, that's the childish level on which the cosmos operates a great deal of the time.

photo: David V Barrett

GWYNETH JONES, in addition to *Divine Endurance* and *Escape Plans*, has written a number of children's books, including:
Water in the Air, The Influence of Ironwood, The Exchange, Dear Hill, Ally Ally Aster and *The Alder Tree*, the last two as Ann Halam.

Fine writing is not wasted on the young. An eight year old can be as sensitive a reader as anyone could desire. Still, children's fiction is censored: by editors, by writers, and most of all by audience incomprehension. It isn't simply a matter of cutting down on the sex, the long words and the violence. There are dimensions of human life that *cannot be seen* by children, not even the most streetwise. You can hint, you can peek -- as Joan Aiken said -- at decisions that are never final, at problems that are never solved and never go away; at mortality. Do not do more. You will not be believed. And it is extraordinary how much of purely literary value has to go along with these grown up pleasures. The deep descriptive passages, the rich allusive treatment of character: *pourriture noble*.

*** Footnote**
CDM: Cold Dark Matter. Theory of expansion of the Universe understood by Gwyneth Jones. We believe it concerns large amounts of inactive undetectable matter being present in the Universe.

photo: David V Barrett

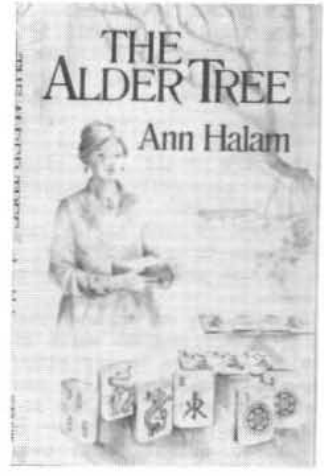
In SF, *pourriture noble* is now quite welcome. But the development of literary SF -- alongside and never ousting the real thing -- has only revealed that the simplicity remains: not a flaw but a feature of the genre. Straight novelists invent families. SF novelists invent worlds. It is impossible for human individuals to loom obsessively large on such a scale of creation. Tolstoy attempted it, in *War and Peace*, at an enormous expense of paper. But even he failed. Who ever reads the War bits -- Tolstoy's science -- word for word? But if it is to be science fiction, the science must live. It seems that in SF the world itself is such a major character the others are only realised in their relationship to that central presence. An SF writer can fully describe, say, the experience of being a creative physicist. But not a marriage. See this in *The Dispossessed*. And in the excellent Gregory Benford, who makes a really diabolical stab at the latter in *The Stars in Shroud*. Perhaps the situation is the same in children's fiction: it is a genuine artistic balance that is being maintained, not a trade off between writer's skills and child's ignorance.

There is an adult readership that accepts it can be exciting to meet again your first ideas about love, death and the nature of reality dressed up as bunny rabbits or in the back of a wardrobe. But for someone who is actually interested in children's fiction, straight, there is the same excitement in recapturing the emotions and the sights, the smells, of any first time. First love, first betrayal, first day in secondary school... If you feel you'd like to find out more try Jan Needle, Jan Mark's first books, Cynthia Voigt's *Dicey's Song*; Catherine Petersen, John Rowe Townsend, William Mayne, Nina Bawden, Peter Carter, early Robert Westall, Anna Schlee before she crossed over, Anita Desai. Look for the Carnegie and Newbery awards: they are usually reliable.

I have spoken so far of the curious affinities between SF and children's fiction. There is also of course some SF that actually is children's or adolescent fiction. Most of this is rather too much like the real thing. But there are some exceptional books: Jan Mark's *The Ennead* and perhaps also *Divide and Rule*, William Mayne's haunting *Earthfasts*. Peter Dickinson's *Weathermonger* books and his remarkable (and acclaimed) *Tulku*.

Notably, there is Alan Garner's *Red Shift*, which employs an arresting science fiction idea that I have seen nowhere else. There is a well-loved theme in magical historical romance, which involves a past tragedy that is so powerful people are forced to act it out again, on the same stage, over and over down the centuries. Garner flips this movement around (Red Shift). His tragedy is in the present, the bitter end of an adolescent love affair. The event reverberates backwards, not forwards, through place. A raw scream of adolescent pain translates itself into an ugly incident in the English Civil War: into a massacre in post-Roman Britain... It is not an easy book. Children's literature had a New Wave in the early seven-ties, just like SF, and a lot of the experimental writing looks barren and clumsy at the moment. And Garner's treatment of character became inexplicably withdrawn and cold when he moved into teenagers: after the child-shaped cut-outs of the first two books. But Garner should be read. Anyone who chooses not to because his characters are under sixteen, is giving way to childish prejudice.

But what about Narnia? I hear you ask. The meaning of my sub-heading is that most of the audience at Mexicon seemed to have *read* Narnia. Or if they hadn't they thought they ought to. It is in Fantasy that the children's section and the adult section really run together. Cross fertilisation is constant. LeGuin's *Earthsea* trilogy (which she has quietly removed from the juvenile category



in her list of works) is probably responsible for more "adult" future-mediævalists even than Tolkien. Susan Cooper is as revered as Julian May. Lewis himself is fondly supposed by some to have been a pure-living Christian scholar. Not at all! Narnia is littered with evidence of his fandom: the famous duel scene in *Prince Caspian* that is lifted practically word for word from *The Worm Ouroboros* -- and *all* Eddison's scenery. Neither does he restrict himself to Fantasy. The underground landscape of *The Silver Chair*, with its inhabitants, bears a more than passing resemblance to the Mooncalfs' country in HG Wells. This is the fun of writing for children. We all retell the Greek myths, the Mahabharata and so forth. But for adults you're supposed to keep a decent distance away from your own times. For children you can tell all the stories you loved yourself, without much fear of being caught out in your (ahem) intertextualities.

The community between the genres can be bewildering. To read *The Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe* at eight is one thing. To come at it at 34, say, assured it is a fine piece of romantic metaphysics -- is definitely going to be a bizarre experience. And yet it is that still, if you can clean the needle. *The Hobbit* might survive better, because *The Hobbit* (like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Wind in the Willows*, and many others) is an adult book written for children, with constant sly asides of fatherly self-indulgence. It is a pity so few of those sly asides got into *The Lord of the Rings*. But the *Rings* is different. That is a children's book written for adults, a book of closed doors and unexamined questions and impenetrable reserve. Perhaps that's why Tolkien hated Narnia so much. Not because the stories were slapdash and derivative, but because of Lewis's absurd, unconscious, eight year old candour.

An enduring interest in children's fiction seems to me to imply above all a belief in the continuity of human personality: a conviction that a 50 year old man is still himself at eight, and vice versa. This explains the Lewis dictum, often quoted, about a children's book being the right art form for something you have to say. If eight "is the same as" 50, then at the level where what one wants to say can be understood by the other, there is a chance of finding some kind of basic, intrinsic language of humanity. A code of symbols and images that can be discovered and understood by all ages. Naturally, this continuity works best in fantasy, where internal experience matters more than external accretions.

But not all children's fantasists have a whole metaphysical programme in mind. Fantasy is also the realm of the poets and eccentrics. John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk* and *The Box of Delights*, Walter de la Mare's *Three Royal Monkeys*, Vaughan Wilkins's *After Bath*, Eric Linklater's *The Wind on the Moon*... These books were open doors to me, into sheer richness and wildness and dream. I hardly dare to recommend them -- the Wilkins certainly is simply dust and ashes now. But there are more accessible writers in the present day -- Phillipa Pearce, Diana Wynne Jones, Joan Aiken, Lucy Boston -- all writing about the places where the ordinary world breaks down. This is another transformation of the fantasist impulse: not expressing a deeper, buried order of reality but actively seeking disorder -- the dragon under the stairs, the witch next door.

It is a great misfortune that while organisers are well served in the "adult" Fantasy genre, the disruptors are scarcely regarded. There is far too much of this cosmic wholeness around nowadays. "Magical Realism" will not serve to fill the gap. Magical realism is too human-centred. It attempts to colonise the unknown and make it part of the literary armament: a vivid way of seeing, a powerful metaphor. The dragon under the stairs is not a state of mind, or the arbitrary eruption of the unknown into the known... it is a dragon. Or rather (this gets complicated) maybe it is both those things. But to call it such does not convey that state, that eruption.

There are things that happen in the mind that seem so important, experiences of such charm and colour and strangeness, that to translate them as passages of introspection or literary ornament is totally inadequate. It is not enough to say "she felt she had turned into someone else". She *did* turn into someone else. Like the time travelling in Phillipa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*. The platitude about the past living all around us does not speak. What speaks is Tom's absolutely realistic experience of pushing his (not yet existing) body through the long vanished garden wall. There are slips in time (in the mind). There are causal reverses, startling incongruities, impossible connections. Children know this. They have not yet learned to ignore the peculiarities of their own thought processes, or call these experiences invalid. In straight fiction children learn to recognise the world. I think in fantasy what they recognise is the inside of their own heads... But why this should be so: why the mind of a child, or anybody's mind, works like that (how did the dragons get there?) I do not know. That is a mystery: a subject for science fiction.

There is one other point to be made about children's fiction. One more for this piece of writing, anyway. Fiction for children is an historical and marketing phenomenon. Children as a distinct leisured literate class emerged about 200 years ago and were discovered (the way Alan Freeman discovered pop-pickers) by a writer, bookseller, publisher of Paternoster Row, London, called John Newbery -- as in the prestige American children's fiction award. But it is maybe only in the last forty years that a group of inspired editors, librarians, critics, in the UK and USA, invented "children's literature". For a while they made it (almost) respectable to write for children and adolescents as a serious proposition. Not story books, or didactics, or whimsical adult escapism, but honest novels: addressing the rawness of adolescence and the mystery of childhood as if these things might be important.

That was the golden age. It is practically over now, due to economic pressures etc., etc. There were good and bad things about the phenomenon. People started to forget the rule of inexperience and pile on the literary style. Others took their method acting too seriously and became as solemn as fifteen year olds themselves. Perhaps it will do children no harm to be treated like miniature adults again, allowed to vote with their pocket money for what goes on the lists. (It will have to be their pocket money. Libraries can't buy the way they did). Perhaps they no longer need a specially enriched or wholesome diet. However that may be, certainly one way of perceiving "children's fiction" might be as an entity that only looked permanent as we were passing through it -- like the welfare state.

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(The books and writers mentioned in the article are in no way to be taken as a coherent or inclusive reading list in children's fiction. Some of the material in this article was used in the Children's Fiction panel at NexiconII, February 1986, with Jan Mark also on the panel and Nick Lowe in the chair.)

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

DIANA WYNNE JONES

People have been asking me this question ever since my first fantasy for children was published. The ones who ask it diresctly are mostly aunts who are ashamed to show the book to neighbours. But I get it in all sorts of insidious indirect forms too: from embarrased looks when I say what I do; from teachers who suggest I write about real things like racism and unemployment because fantasy is too "difficult"; and politely from fantasy fans who say they *would* try my books if only the jackets were more adult. Recently I got the guilt-ridden version too, from a 19-year-old who thought there might be something wrong with her because she liked my book *Eight Days Of Luke* so much. But the real Heavy Brigade are Head Teachers. Whenever I visit a school, the Head spares a moment to crush my hand and say warmly, "I haven't read any of your books of course." Do notice that *of course*. They always say it.

What all these people mean *of course* is that *real* books are for adults. It seems to follow from this that children are not real people.

photo: David V Barrett

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

The fact is I write for adults. I have to. Few children buy books for themselves. No children sell books, or work in publishing, or run libraries, and I have yet to hear of a teacher who is ten years old. So if a child is ever to read a book, that book has to have something *first* to please the grim battle-line of publishers, reviewers, parents, librarians and teachers who stand in the way. On the good side, this battle-line insists on very much higher standards than you get in *real* books. On the bad, they try to impose unreal taboos (like not having a character who is a snob, this being Socially Harmful). The challenge is to get the book past the battle-line to the children beyond -- who are not anyway good at saying what they want.

I admit I chose to meet the challenge that hard way, by writing fantasy, in the teeth of the part of the battle-line that thinks kids' noses should be rubbed in current social issues like racism and unemployment (ignoring the fact that children spend their time dealing with racism in the playground and unemployment at home and might need a change). And I make a lot of what I write funny, so that adults laugh aloud at it and then at once assume the book is trivial (I'll come back to that). But the main thing I set out to do, at the start, was to break the two really restrictive old taboos. Taboo One stated that all adults, particularly parents, must be shown as wise, powerful, kind, understanding -- in fact, faultless. Adults with faults were Baddies and had to be killed or reformed on the last page. Taboo Two permitted one child in each book to have one fault in order that he or she could be punished horribly, thus making the book Moral.

Now a moment's thought will show that the majority of adults are stupid, weak, unkind, inattentive and ridiculous in various ways, or else they are divorcing, whereupon they become impossible to live with (except that children have to live with them). Children have many similar faults and are likely to spend half their time in fear and guilt -- and then get punished horribly for the one thing they didn't do. Their resentment of adults is boundless, for the main difference is that while adults have the power, children live at a higher emotional pitch.

DIANA WYNNE JONES is the author of many fantasy &/or SF novels for young people, including: *Eight Days of Luke, Wilkins' Tooth, The Ogre Downstairs, Archer's Goon, Who Got Rid of Angus Flint?, Howl's Moving Castle, The Homeward Bounders, Witch Week, Power of Three, Dogsbody, Cart and Cwidder, The Spellcoats, Charmed Life,* and *The Magicians of Caprona.*

So I decided to recognise this and treat every character of whatever age as a real person. The resulting freedom astonished me. The battle-line stopped seeming grim. I saw it as just a set of people with fears and foibles like anyone else. And there was no need to wonder what children wanted. I *knew*, since children are people too. I could write about the whole human race (and any non-humans I cared to devise) and the only limit turned out to be that anyone reading the book has to be able to say, "Oh yes, we would react just like that!"

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

Then what is the difference in fantasy for children? The major one is that it is of necessity written on two levels, for adults too. The absolute rule is that it tells a story (which had better be gripping or children stop reading). I have also evolved a second rule, out of careful consideration of style and language: it has to be written so that it can be read aloud. This is not simply because a lot of children's books *are* read aloud -- it is the best way to

ensure that situations are clear and sentences not too long (and, incidentally, it sets you free to use every tone the human voice is capable of). Children read slowly. This means they get lost in multiple clauses and also in purple passages. Writing for someone to listen to helps ensure that any description is there because the story needs it. If the story is really going, long words and complex ideas are no problem at all.

There is a positive side to children's slow reading: children *take in* what they read, so you only have to tell them the facts once. This makes them wonderfully good at following plots, and they get better and better at it the more they watch telly. They can take any complication you care to throw at them. I always have trouble making my plots simple enough for adults to follow.

Most people assume there should be no sex in books for children. This is not so, although the battle-line is unlikely to let pornography past. But children themselves tend to class scenes of overt sex -- with scenes of racism, drugs, unemployment, pointless conversation and loving re-creation of how it feels to be a child -- along with heavy moralisation as "boring", by which they generally mean emotive topics which they know all about but have no control over. I make much use of aspects of sex they *do* have control over -- Freudian innuendo, sexual myths, sex-based horror, gay behaviour, and all love stories -- because in these things children are gleeful and accurate observers. They always know a great deal.

There is another rule: don't talk down to children. People talk down to children so much that children expect it, but they do not enjoy it. When they hear it starting, they either become self-consciously "childish", or put their minds into neutral and wait for you to stop. So I never treat what I write as an indulgent game of Let's Pretend: I make a point of believing in it, utterly, and got worried when I was writing *Dogsbody* and sunlight slanted over my shoulder, in case Sol did not approve of the way I was portraying him.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

About half of what I write is funny, which is why Head Teachers can't spare time to read it. I don't do it only because I love to laugh. Which I do. I nearly fell off the sofa laughing while I was writing *Howl's Moving Castle*; and I was glad to find that a ten-year-old I lent it to fell out of bed laughing at the same bit. No, the reason I do it emerges if you consider what a joke is. Children tell jokes all the time. *Q. What lies on the ocean bed and shivers? A. A nervous wreck.* Adults tell jokes too. *Q. What is a Cape Canaveral cocktail? A. Seven-Up and a sprinkling of Teachers.* Yuk? The first thing to notice is that both jokes turn on puns, meaning you have to think on two levels, and that this makes them pocket fantasies. Second, they are both nasty. One concerns mental breakdown and the other violent public death. A lot of jokes are nasty, because people tell them in order to live with unpleasant facts. Children, who have to live with adults and the mess adults make of the world, know how to use a joke (just think of the nicknames *you* gave your teachers) to give themselves space to live round the edges of the mess. A third thing to notice is that telling a joke is almost the only time real people like Head Teachers ever indulge in fantasy. *There was this potato, see, who sat in the bar, all eyes, and in comes this punk carrot...* Which suggests that fantasy, as well as laughter, may be a basic human need.

Fantasy is basically a more serious and extended form of what the joke is in miniature. Both start from "What if...", but it is usually only jokes that go on to require you to think on two levels. As soon as you see how closely the joke and fantasy are related, you can start exploiting the multi-level nature of fantasy too, by making use of the joke within it. By writing a funny fantasy, I can talk about those things children call "boring" and adults think are real, and handle all the implications, even extreme and violent ones, because while people are laughing they are able to think about things that otherwise they do not want to consider at all. People call this trivial.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

Another reason my books are assumed to be trivial is purely sexist. It was my husband who pointed this out. As he said, a man writing fantasy for children is assumed to have powerful motives for doing this odd thing. This means he is instantly credited with a message. His subtle observation of places and people, his delicate use of myth and his superb handling of language are all examined and praised. Now this will probably be quite just, since the double audience for children's books forces a high standard on everyone who writes them; but if the writer is a woman, exactly the same features will be called female, or too clever, or strange, or simply ignored. Women are supposed to write for children out of deep female instinct, without calculation or style, and the product will *of course* be worthless.

Children, although they never notice the sex of a writer, tend to be very sexist too, at least when they are together in school. Most boys would rather die than be *seen* to read a book with a girl as the main character. This is hard on girls. You usually have to supply a hero for both. Or another way around it is to have an adult hero. Boys will accept a grown woman, provided she is a strong personality, but the story then has to be set somewhere that is not present-day Britain or both sexes will call it "boring".

In fact, the sexist aspect is a double double bind.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

I must have said enough by now to show that a great deal of thought goes into what I write. Despite this I am an inspirational writer. I forget meals and write with ever-increasing speed, sometimes all night, feverishly involved and avidly following the story. All the calculations I have described get made at white heat as the story gets written, and the faster it goes, the clearer and more complete I find the calculations become. It is the slowly-written parts that need most adjusting in the next draft.

Adjustment is necessary because, although a story almost seems to write itself (it goes in a very certain direction right from the start and you only mess it up if you try to make it point another way), the logic of the story does often lead to extreme and surprising twists, and I have to go back and make sure the clues are laid in advance. The fact that I can follow the logic of the book to the bitter end -- maybe the Goodies turn out to be Baddies, or murder is the only right course of action -- is a freedom I get from the fact that children live at a higher emotional pitch than most adults. Children love to be extreme and never mind if their expectations are turned upside down, quite violently. In adult fantasy, the way is too often blocked by some convention or other.

But my main calculation as I write is how to take advantage of the fact that I am anyway writing on two levels, and then on two more levels by making it funny, to make a story that will resonate on as many more levels as I can manage. In order to do this, the white heat of writing nearly always causes me to pull in elements from myth or folktale as I go. One beauty of these tales is that they take to pieces like Lego. I find I use the pieces in countless ways, from a passing reference or an inset legend, to actually translating the myth or tale or legend into the characters and events of my own story. And they

resonate. This is the main beauty of them. The resonance comes from the fact that myths or folktales all have a gut relationship somewhere to everyone's everyday experience (let those who don't believe this ask themselves if they have ever felt like Cinderella); but the relationship is not near-to and local and temporary (like a concerned narrative about drugs or miners' strikes might be), but distant and timeless, so that it says something to everyone.

The good thing about living and writing in an age like this, where there have been so many changes, is that modern myths have grown up to echo the changes. *Frankenstein* and *1984* are the most notable, but there are scads of notions which people usually think of as the conventions of SF, which have actually passed into myth class and can be used by anyone. I always cross the notional boundary between fantasy and SF, on these grounds, whenever I need to (*Archer's Goon* is my *1984* book, only few people noticed). Children, I may say, make quite as much silly fuss about genre as adults do, but they *are* prepared to be shown differently. They know they lack experience. And experience is what I am trying to give, as vivid and manifold as possible.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE REAL BOOKS?

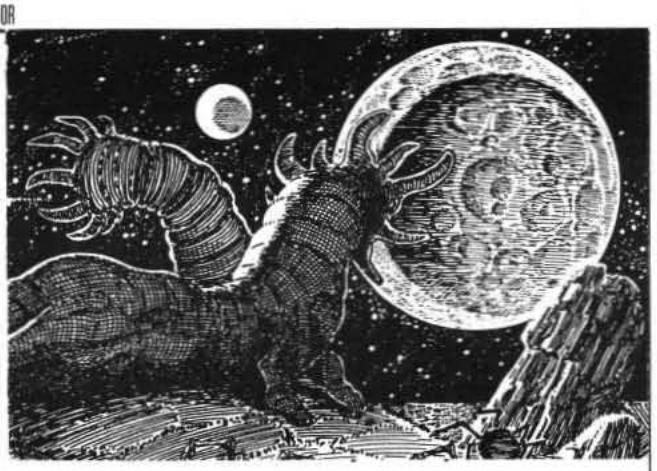
Fantasy for children is no easy option. It is more of an iron discipline. But it is also immensely exciting and *fun*, both to read and to write, because its freedoms far outweigh its limitations. I love writing it because it is not dogged by conventions like much adult fiction and I am free to use any idea I get. I love ideas. I get hundreds. There is one sense in which this kind of writing is *about* ideas and new views of old ideas. In the heat of the story, I can flip an accepted notion over on its side -- often while you laugh, but quite often while you don't -- and give a fresh perspective on anything: genre, nuclear holocaust, your parents, your accepted lifestyle, or indeed (yes, teacher) racism and unemployment. This is something fantasy is superbly good at.

But the thing fantasy is even better at, something only fantasy can do, is to feast the imagination. It can take in all parts of the brain, and particularly the poor, starved section which so many people only use when telling bad jokes, and bring them together in a wholly satisfying experience on many levels at once. Only writing for children gives me enough freedom to try to do this.

Here I would like to come back to my correspondent who thought there might be something wrong with her for liking one of my books so much. Unlike all the other people who know I don't write real books, *she* took the sane view. Since her assumption did not fit the facts, she adjusted her assumption. She suggested there should be a new category: "suitable-for-everyone-books". She is quite right. There should be. As I have said, I have to write for adults anyway, and I make use of this necessity to fill my books with things to interest anyone, of any age. This is the best way of ensuring that I am not writing down to children, but up.

There is an even more important way in which children's books are "suitable-for-everyone-books". Children grow up. You did. A hundred worlds to a button that you still remember that wonderful book you read as a child, the one that opened your imagination right up and then went on pulling at it. Remember? Even money that that book was a fantasy. This book has a lifelong influence on you, since it has become part of your memory and part of you. If you were to reread it now, you would probably find it still as good. This is because most of us who write for children bear in mind that it might be *our* book that gets lodged in someone's personal memory one day.

I suggest you give this time-honoured, arduous, genre-free reading a try. Wrap the book in brown paper if the jacket distresses you so much. Remember it won't be a real book. It will just be a better one. The very limitations it was written under guarantee that it will be better written, better constructed, more gripping and a far more original fantasy than any other kind of book. You might even enjoy the experience.



LETTERS

Continued from page 6

I THINK THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER A MALE writer can write on feminism is "yes" -- *provided* that the male in question has earned that right. By which I mean, done some investigation into how women are socialised, how girls are conditioned, how many forms oppression takes, what male conditioning is and how it affects him... We do not, male or female, start from a neutral position in this argument: before one argues, one should at least try to work out how one is prejudiced and why. (What, me, prejudiced against men? No no, whatever makes you think that...) This involves a basic grounding in marxism and neo-marxism, a fairly wide reading of feminist writers both male and female, being aware that quite a lot of the latter is written from a Third World perspective which just re-complicates the thing one stage further, debating the concept of "class", having a passing acquaintance with anthropology and sociology, and being prepared to listen to women's rage for what it is -- not arrogance but anger. For a male, this probably involves coping with some guilt feelings, either as an individual or a class. For a woman it will certainly involve feelings of guilt, but that, as they say, is another story.

So yes, people can write about feminism, male and female people -- so long as they know what the arguments are. And then we reach answers? No, then we are able to debate about what actions we should take. Like, for example, having another feminist issue of *Vector*, or a feminist article in each *Vector*, or -- since, as you say, we should all be feminist now -- every issue of *Vector* a feminist issue. *Vector*, vanguard of the revolution! (Well, it's got to start *somewhere*.) How about it?

«It's certainly my hope that -- as both I and other Vector *writers, female and male, come to a greater understanding and absorption into both our life and writing of feminist principles -- that each issue will be a feminist issue in its approach (which is what we're really talking about) even if not in its subject matter. I was well aware that having a specifically feminist issue of* Vector *put me in a damned-if-I-do, damned-if-I-don't position, but I considered it a personal risk well worth taking. Incidentally, while not agreeing with Mike Cobley (above), I must point out that the* weltanschauung *of marxism and neo-marxism is simply one (or, to be more accurate, several) amongst many, which also require consideration.»*

By the way, I beg to differ with Mark Valentine's review of Katherine Kerr's *Daggerspell*. Granted there is not too much new in the ur-Celtic world the novel is set in, but the landscape is convincing; and the society, to me, seems based not on feudalism but on tribalism of the kind depicted in the *Mabinogion*. The book's strength is its characters -- when I picked it up in a shop, I opened it at a fairly sympathetic portrayal of incest, which even in these liberated days is not going to get into Mills & Boon; I had to read it to find out why, and what happened next. Apart from a soggy mid-novel stretch, I wasn't disappointed. Read it for the characters, not the fantasy; and please don't dismiss it out of hand.

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BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

EINSTEIN'S MONSTERS - Martin Amis
[Cape, 1987, 127pp, £5.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

SINCE BEFORE I WAS BORN, IMPLACABLE enemies have brandished nuclear weapons at each other across a gulf of understanding. In other words, I have lived my entire life on sufferance, subject to the whim of decision makers over whom I have not one jot of control. Earlier generations shivered under the hand of God, we shiver under the hand of Man - I know which is more fearsome. As Amis says in his excellent polemic 'Thinkability', there is only one provocation that could bring about the use of nuclear weapons, one priority target for nucear weapons, only one established defence against nuclear weapons, and only one threat that prevents the use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons! They are their own *raison d'etre*; we can't get rid of nuclear weapons because nuclear weapons exist.

And if they should be used? Amis muses on his survival:

> I shall be obliged (and it's the last thing I'll feel like doing) to retrace that long mile home, through the firestorm, the remains of the thousand-mile-an-hour winds, the warped atoms, the grovelling dead. Then - God willing, if I still have the strength, and, of course, if they are still alive - I must find my wife and children and I must kill them.
>
> What am I to do with thoughts like these?

These five stories and their introductory essay are the answer. This is not the technical work of someone dispassionately considering these instruments of destruction and their effect. It is the cry of someone like me, or you, a victim.

And a victim not necessarily of nuclear war itself, but of the threat of such a war. Only two of the stories look to a time when the holocaust has happened. 'Bujak and the Strong Force', for instance, finds symbols for nuclear power, and perhaps for the options facing our political masters, in this story of a Polish heavyweight who has lived his whole life believing in revenge, but when his mother, daughter and granddaughter are raped and murdered he doesn't exact revenge. He has lost everything, revenge will add nothing.

The psychological effect of the nuclear threat is beautifully and chillingly presented in 'Insight at Flame Lake'; and there's a physiological effect in the comic inversion of 'The Time Disease'. But it is in the two post-apocalyptic tales that the stories actually achieve the bite of the introduction. 'The Little Puppy That Could' paints a conventionally terrible portrait of life after the bomb, but can't avoid a note of hope buried within it. But 'The Immortals', which applies the perspective of the entire sweep of history to the last shreds of humanity dying in squalor, is a superbly effective story.

In his introduction Amis criticises the writers of the mainstream for ignoring the nuclear threat, while praising SF for taking up the theme. It is interesting that, other than polemic, the only way Amis himself can find to talk effectively on the subject is through the medium of science fiction.

COSMIC KNIGHTS - Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh (Eds) (339pp)
GIANTS - Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh (Eds) (351pp)
[Robinson, 1987, £2.95 each]
Reviewed by Jon Wallace

THESE ARE TWO COLLECTIONS IN THE series entitled "Isaac Asimov's Magical World of Fantasy", and there lies the first disappointment. The books are largish format with nice cover illustrations by Julek Heller, very fantasy-like, just the thing to catch unwary heroic fantasy fans ...

Wait, I'd better start again. These are meaty works, containing in total 22 short novels and stories from 22 masters of fantasy, at least that's the claim on the cover. And in some ways this claim is valid. No one woud deny that the likes of Clark Ashton Smith, Manly Wade Wellman and Roger Zelazny are fantasy writers, but some of the others would set off alarm bells in the minds of any browser who had read science fiction. Frederick Pohl, Gordon R Dickson and Damon Knight, while excellent writers, are not exactly known for their fantasy output.

And there lies the flaw in these collections. The 22 stories are, in the main, well written and clever, but this cleverness lies in adapting mainstream SF ideas to fantasy ends as in Robert F.Young's 'A Knyght Ther Was' or vice versa as in L.Sprague De Camp's 'Divide and Rule'. This is more obvious in *Cosmic Knights* presumably because there are more knight-like stories written than stories about giants. *Giants* suffers from an excess of obviously mainstream SF (several of the stories contain no fantasy elements except in the very broadest sense), *Cosmic Knights* from an excess of cuteness.

If I was a fan of the sort of fantasy that is crowding the bookshops with trilogies and quartets, I would be upset if I'd paid over hard earned cash for these collections, but I'm not, and I enjoyed most of the stories contained in these two books, especially Damon Knight's 'Cabin Boy' (in *Giants*) and Roger Zelazny's 'The Last Defender of Camelot' (in *Cosmic Knights*) and with the exception of Vera Chapman's 'Crusader Damosel' (in *Cosmic Knights*) and Murray Leinster's 'The Mad Planet' (in *Giants*).

But I don't know who's going to buy and enjoy these books. The 'fantasy' label would stop me buying them, and I'm sure that fantasy fans won't like them.

THE BEST MYSTERIES OF ISAAC ASIMOV - Isaac Asimov
[Grafton, 1987, 345pp, £10.95]
WILDWOOD - John Farris
[Hodder, 1987, 445pp, £11.95]
MISERY - Stephen King
[Hodder, 1987, 320pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

TAKE A BEST-SELLING WRITER WITH TWO broken legs after a car accident. Transport him to the house of an insane ex-nurse describing herself as his Number One Fan who requires him to burn the MS of the best novel he has ever written and write another one to please her. Subject him to sickening indignities at the hands of this murderous, unattractive woman, including the chopping off with an axe of parts of him before the novel is completed. And there you have, in essence, the plot of *Misery* by Stephen King, described on the cover as "arguably the most popular novelist in the history of American fiction." Responding to demotic and demoniacal demands for gore King has surely produced yet another best-seller.

Wildwood by John Farris, described by Stephen King himself as "America's premier novelist of terror" is a very different kind of novel. There's no gore. The terror is supernatural. It concerns an eccentric millionaire's paradise in the Great Smoky Mountains transported with the help of the scientist, Tesla, from the year 1916 to modern times along with "inhuman creatures". To say much more about the plot would be unfair. Suffice to say that it is well worth reading. A sprawling blockbuster, slow moving at times and variable in the writing, but in the best parts it rips along like a whirlwind.

In contrast, Asimov's *The Best Mysteries* .. is a collection of 31 stories whose nature can be deduced from the introduction: "I hold with the ancient Greeks that all deeds of violence should take place offstage." They are, in short, stories of the Agatha Christie "armchair detective" variety, involving intellectual puzzles (sometmes with SF ingredients) and their solution by cerebral characters

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resembling Asimov himself. The notes preceding them are often of as much interest as the stories themselves (yes, I know this is ambiguous.) The book is a must for Asimov completists as many of the stories have never been collected before in book form.

THE HUB - Chris Beebee (249pp)
HARDWIRED - Walter Jon Williams (343pp)
[Macdonald, 1987, £10.95/£11.95]
Reviewed by Paul J. McAuley

BOTH OF THESE NOVELS ARE LABELLED high-tech, but they are at opposite ends of the spectrum of new hard SF, one firmly part of the latest evolutionary twist of the genre, the other more expermental.

Hardwired is loaded with the icons and imagery of cyberpunk: the interface between people and machines is blurred; skills can be acquired as easily as loading a programme into a computer; operators plug directly into their machines; personalities can be read from one brain to another or dumped into a memory bank. Consonant with this dehumanisation, the narrative style is hard edged and pared down; not elegant, but adequate. The plot is a fairly common SF one. The earth is ruled by orbital corporations which ruthlessly exploit its population. Cowboy is a Panzerjock, a black market runner who plugs directly into his armoured hovercraft, dreaming of the lost glory of the USA and beginning to wonder where the stuff he runs actually comes from. Sarah is a cybernetically enhanced freelance bodyguard/assassin hired first to help Cowboy run a valuable cargo, and later to betray him when he tries to organise the cyberjocks into a union. Williams weaves these and other plot lines together deftly, though towards the end he begins to pack in the information needed to carry the resolution rather too obviously, a fault of pacing which means the last fifty pages are overcrowded with events and explanation. Still, *Hardwired* contains some of the most vivid and imaginative SF writing I've read this year.

Hardwired is solidly based in SF: Williams specifically acknowledges a debt to Roger Zelazny; obviously, the work of William Gibson and Samuel R. Delaney (especially *Nova*) were also influential. For all its hard SF gloss, *The Hub*, British writer Chris Beebee's first novel, is grounded more firmly in mainstream literature, and is altogether a darker vision than *Hardwired*. There may well be a World Government, an L5 colony (the Hub) and a cure for cancer; but the poor are herded into vast urban Stacks, anarchic Pranksters threaten order, and there is a new fatal disease, organ implosion ... which Frank Turner is suffering from. Turner's job is to rescue and deprogramme victims of religious cults. His latest assignment gets him in over his head with a plot to destroy the government. At the same time scientists on the Hub have developed the Cloud, a computer-controlled alternative reality which, if it falls into the wrong hands, could brainwash all of Earth's population ... and the device which can render it harmless has fallen into Turner's hands. So far, so good. But about two-thirds of the way through, the story unravels. Beebee's narrative style is a mixture of Joycean interior monologue and the kind of cutups and typographical trickery beloved of the late lamented New Wave. Some of this is fairly accomplished, and Beebee displays an acutely sardonic sense of humour as he sends up various SF tropes, but the weight of the word-play smothers the narrative drive. In the end, a character has to be dragged in to explain All, and Turner becomes no more than a spear carrier, bringing the device which can defuse the Cloud to the Hub with no apparent volition of his own. *The Hub* is a brave attempt to bring mainstream style and character revelation into SF, but it fails because Beebee is unable to weld story and narrative style together. May he have more success with his *next* book.

BONES OF THE MOON - Jonathan Carroll
[Century, 1987, 216pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mark Valentine

CULLEN JAMES, THE FEMALE NARRATOR, has, after some misfortunes and false starts, found contentment in her marriage to capable husband Danny. Then she begins dreaming of a strange land, Rondua, and finds herself caught up in a quest for the five Bones of the Moon; and "to acquire each one, a person must possess a certain good quality". She herself failed in this quest as a child, through lack of courage, but now she accompanies a son who exists only on this plane; also aiding the quest are three large animals, a dog, a wolf and a camel. Problems begin when features from the dream world start to seep into her everyday life, and she seems to acquire paranormal powers; the climax of the novel has both worlds merging with a vengence.

The story is told in a matter-of-fact way which holds the attention by its very affability, but this restraint also has its disadvantages; some of the fantasy scenes seem a bit glib and directionless. For my taste, they also verge too close to the twee, as the giant friendly talking animals might indicate. The people in the everyday world - the dependable husband, their gay neighbour, a cult film director who shares her dream world - are also rather too well rounded and stereotypical. The concept as a whole strikes me as being more modest than the dustjacket acclamations suggest; for balance, I should mention that Stephen King finds the book "a triumph", Stanislaw Lem talks of "transcendent wonder and horror", and Robert Wilson calls it "surrealist" and "a visual tour-de-force". Certainly some of the dream-world scenes show an original imagination and exude an aura of exquisiteness, but these are not sustained long enough to establish a convincing, coherent otherworldliness. A not dissimilar work which succeeds much better, and which I would recommend in preference, is Josephine Saxton's *The Travails of Jane Saint*, where the fantasy is presented with much more panache and pertinence.

DRACULA'S CHILDREN - R. Chetwynd-Hayes
[William Kimber, 1987, 208pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by John Newsinger

HUNTED THROUGH THE NIGHT, A SMALL desperate man with straggly grey hair and watery blue eyes pounds on a door, summoning help. He thrusts a brown paper parcel into the hands of a tired pyjama-clad novelist and tells him that it contains the secrets of Dracula's children. He urges that it be written up in the form of a novel, and then leaves to take his chances with the pack.

Unfortunately, the doomed figure by some stroke of ill-luck made the mistake of choosing R Chetwynd-Hayes to write his novel and the result is, to say the least, disappointing.

The six stories in the book are all pretty lifeless, bloodless affairs that fail to generate unease, let alone fear or horror. Indeed, they don't really attempt the task and seem intended more to amuse, although the result is generally plain silly. For example, in one story, the great vampire, Lord Marcus, firstborn of Count Dracula, resolves to destroy the world and cull mankind using a certain Philip Martin as his instrument. He gives him the ability to control everyone on the planet. Martin promptly furthers his business interests by advertising Matco Plastic Toys and telling everyone to buy them. The world is plunged into economic and social chaos with nuclear war impending because that is now the only product that anyone will buy! Such simple-minded literalness can be quite effective in a character but hardly in an author.

Worse is to come, because when Martin tries to put a stop to the collapse of society as we know it and the vampire prepares to kill him, he remembers that he has been given the

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power to control everyone, and everyone, in a simple-minded, literal way must include the vampire himself. A pretty silly mistake, you might think, for an eight hundred year old vampire who has, moreover, tapped the universal memory bank.

The other stories are much the same. Mildly inventive on occasions, but essentially horror stories without any horror. Having said all this, Chetwynd-Hayes is the author of a number of novels and numerous short stories. He obviously appeals to many readers, but is unlikely to be of interest to BSFA members. Give me Ramsey Campbell, Clive Barker and James Herbert any hour of the night.

GUARDIANS OF THE WEST - David Eddings
[Bantam, 1987, 429pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

I WONDER IF IT'S REALLY NECESSARY TO say anything of the plot, but for Eddings fans *Guardians of the West* is the first volume of a projected five, *The Mallorean*, and sequel to *The Belgariad*.

A new Lord of the Dark and a sister Orb to Cthrag Yaska threatens Garion's realm (*and* this reviewer's sanity) and to that end kidnaps Garion's son. The volume is very careful to endlessly repeat itself, and these lines referring to yet another bland confrontation between the Powers of Light and Dark are now familiar to *Vector* readers. "Hasten therefore to the meeting where the three-fold quest will end. And this meeting will come to pass in a place that is no more, and there will the choice be made" (page 271 and phrased differently on many other pages throughout the book). Places that are no more seem to be cluttering the fantasy genre, as, so it seems, are "selfless" guardians (this book and Donaldson's *Covenant* saga easily come to mind).

If you could tell a brainless book by the number of capitalised and italicised phrases that make it up and give awards for the book with the most, *Guardians* must be a contender for The Ultimate Prize. It is a progression from one deus-ex-machina to another, and contains a prologue synopsising the five previous volumes, and four unnecessary maps.

In this book, knitting needles always flash, women's hair is the 'color' of honey, their voices are 'rich' and 'musical' and have 'peculiar lilts' and they have 'glorious eyes'. Men are exasperated by "Women!" with disheartening regularity, they drink, bully their wives (but they love them really), take perverse pleasure in chopping up enemies with swords and axes (though they don't really like to fight) and don't like women to nag them or say "Deploy your men and sweep the area" or "strategy" as they are "military terms".

Guardians is a fairytale with a naive, adolescent outlook, a sometimes appealing, wry but simple sense of humour, and contrary to the blurb does not explore "technical and philosophical ideas" concerning the genre.

This is a colourless book, with an awkward beginning and a lifeless middle. It may make you smile, but unless you like empty and interminable epic fantasies, *Guardians of the West* will bring you scant pleasure.

DAUGHTER OF THE EMPIRE - Raymond E. Feist & Janny Wurts
[Grafton, 1987, 409pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

RAYMOND E FEIST PREVIOUSLY WROTE THE Riftwar trilogy, the first of which was *Magician*. Janny Wurts has written several books including *Stormwarden*. They have combined their talents for *Daughter of the Empire* - a huge tome with a plot to match.

On the planet Kelewan, the Tsurani empire consists of many great families, each with its own estates, servants and warriors. The greatest families sit on the High Council under the Warlord, Almecho. The so-called Game of the Council is in reality a deadly intrigue practised by the families as they jostle for power. The only criterion is honour.

17 year old Mara is the daughter of the Acoma family. Her brother, father and most of their warriors are treacherously slaughtered as a result of intrigue by the Minwanabi family. Mara becomes the ruler of her house and the book concerns her attempts to restore its former strength and to avenge her family's betrayal. Along the way she must enlist the aid of a race of alien insectoids called the Cho-ja, marry a man she loathes, turn former outlaws into loyal subjects and generally prove herself worthy of the title Lady of the Acoma.

Daughter of the Empire owes much to the cultures of China and Japan. It reminded me at times of a female *Shogun* with SF/fantasy elements. The characters are interesting and convincing. The two authors have an advantage over other writers in that they can make both the male and female protagonists more than cyphers. Also, the balance between action and interaction is quite good. Some writers bore me to tears with their exposition of battles and tactics, but not these. There are enough loose ends and underused characters to imply that a sequel is planned, yet the book is complete within itself. For example, we are told in passing that a battle is being fought on an alien planet but little more, and the Cho-ja remain tantalisingly on the sidelines with only cursory plot involvement.

To conclude, *Daughter of the Empire* is an enjoyable long read.

INTO THE OUT OF - Alan Dean Foster
[New English Library, 1987, 293pp, £10.95]
ALIENS - Alan Dean Foster
[Severn House, 1987, 247pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by David Wingrove

WITH THESE BOOKS WE SEE THE TWO sides of Foster - originator and noveliser. Let's deal with the latter first. If you've seen *Aliens* you'll know exactly what's in the book. Apart from one brief scene, depicting the little girl Newt's family before disaster struck the colonists of Acheron, Foster adds nothing. The fast-paced, slickly-told nature of the film is captured efficiently by Foster. It's a good, tense read - but no substitute for the film. Necessarily so, perhaps, although there are other ways of approaching the task of novelisation that might enrich and enlarge what we encountered via the cinematic medium. Foster has a long history of novelisations, and as a teacher of screen writing obviously has what the movie moguls want when they need a script turning into suitable merchadise. Beyond that, nothing.

As originator, he's a more complex being. *Into The Out Of*, whilst neither innovative in content or experimental in style, is an interesting and well-crafted novel. Far from run-of-the-mill. Where it's interesting is in the way it handles fairly clichéd elements to produce something that involves at a level both above and below that on which the normal best-seller operates.

First thing to note is the depth of characterisation. *Into The Out Of* is basically a quest story: three people go to seal up a hole in reality through which millions of evil creations - shetani - are coming into our world. It *sounds* clichéd, but Foster creates his characters - Merry, Sharrow, Joshua Oak and the Maasai elder, Olkeloi - with enough understanding and idiosyncracy to circumvent any feeling in the reader that this is the standard horror/fantasy/sci-fi mix. The things that happen are firmly anchored in the real; the thoughts, feelings and actions of the three carry a conviction we aren't accustomed to expect from this kind of novel.

Second thing to note is the improvement in Foster's abilities as a writer. Whatever I might have though of his early work, he has become a skilled craftsman. Nor is it the same kind of purely technical craft he displays in *Aliens*. *Into The Out Of* is readable, certainly, but it's also thought-provoking. Unlike most quests of its kind it doesn't root the source of all evil outside of Man, but weighs the moral question more subtly.

So. One book much as expected, one a welcome surprise. My advice? Forget *Aliens*. Get the film out on video again. But don't ignore *Into The Out Of*. It's a little bit more than a good read.

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ARCHON - Stuart Gordon
[Macdonald, 1987, 316pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

THIS IS THE "FIRST BOOK OF THE Watchers", a science fantasy trilogy. Science fantasy is an interesting term and appropriate as this is no sword and sorcery tale, this is a mixture of the present and the past and the magic of a forgotten super science. The book also has a religious theme, with the theology of gnosticism and dualism being central.

But, let me start by saying that I have taken longer to read this book than virtually any other I can remember. Not because it's badly written, it isn't, but because on the whole I wasn't interested in the characters. I know that's a negative way to start a review but I want to make it clear at the outset as it will colour the rest.

The book has two parts. The first, 'In the last days', takes place in the present. It is the story of Sam Joyce succumbing to 'the enemy', Madame Pedauque, and his daughter Chrissa awaking to her destiny and an understanding of her dreams of the Burning Man. It takes some 170 pages for this to happen with Sam almost falling several times only to fight back or be saved by Chrissa. But there is litte tension, you know he's going to go under sometime, we're just prolonging the agony.

Part 2, 'In the former days', I found more interesting. Part of it is set in 1234 AD in Languedoc, a Cathar region of France where Father Bernard aided by the shepherd Pierre Belot seeks to save Chrissa. Bernard is a parfait, a sort of Cathar priest, though wise man might be more appropriate. Cathar influence is waning, the Catholic church is waging the Albigensian crusade against them. This part of the story is based on historical fact, but I know little about the period and so can't comment on the detail.

This alternates with a prehistoric era where Madame Pedauque is keeping Sam, who has lost his memory. In this era the mons (fallen angels) are fighting among themselves and are regarded as gods by the natives who fight for them. Madame uses the twin forces of sex and death to restore Sam's memory and set in train her plans. She also uses the native warrior Hoel as her unwitting tool. He dies in a particularly nasty way to reappear throughout time to play a similar role.

Enough of the story, let me tell you about Madame Pedauque. She is a beautiful red-haired woman with hairy legs and duck's feet. I don't believe Gordon meant this to be terrifying but I don't think he meant it to be funny either. I kept thinking of Donald Duck.

In summary, a book I found difficult to read; no character to identify with and a drawn out part 1. If the other two parts of the trilogy are like part 2 of this they may be worth reading, if I could only stop thinking about those duck feet.

IN SEARCH OF THE BIG BANG - John Gribbin
[Corgi, 1987, 413pp, £5.95]
Reviewed by Darroll Pardoe

MODERN PHYSICS IS DIFFICULT TO PUT over in a non-mathematical way, but John Gribbin has a gift for so doing. If you enjoyed *In Search of Schroedinger's Cat*, you'll like this one too. It deals with the origin of the universe - a fascinating subject, and one which cosmological theory can now make a good stab at describing. This is really stirring, sense-of-wonder stuff. I found the main theme itself hard enough to tear myself away from, and as a bonus there are little pleasant asides all the way through, human touches which lubricate the text and render it very readable. How the coffee knows it's being stirred; Penzias and Wilson cleaning pigeon droppings out of their radio telescope; Einstein stopping dead in his tracks half way across a busy road and almost coming to a premature end. My favourite is a quote towards the end, reporting John Paul II's strictures on the limited rôle of the natural sciences in explaining the origin of the universe - strictures already outmoded, since the reverse is rapidly becoming true. Science is squeezing religion very hard at this point. Perhaps it's time for Christianity to return back towards a deity immanent rather than extrinsic. *In Search of the Big Bang* provides an excellent insight into modern thinking on the early history of the universe, and I recommend it to you without any hesitation.

THE WITCH KING - Maeve Henry
[Orchard Books, 1987, 126pp, £6.95]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

THIS IS AN ADVENTURE STORY, AND A magic story. Robert Harding is a 15 year old from a fishing village sent by an old Witch Woman to seek the City, a place reduced to legend by Robert's people, a place of stories, magic and kings, tales to be told over the fire. He finds the City, with an ailing King, a Prince of abundant charm and ambition, a Princess of intelligence and beauty, and a Wizard with great power, but a power rooted in a magic which Robert senses as evil. The City has false knowledge of its past, its stories of its beginnings are radically different from those Robert knows. Robert is expected, he is there to fulfil visions and prophesies concerning the coming of the Witch King who will "save the City and destroy it" and his actions are crucial to the events which occur, culminating in a dramatic and violent answer to the questions he has posed.

The book is not perfect, but many of its imperfections are those caused by brevity. It is too short, so the action seems unnecessarily compressed, almost hurried, at variance with the nicely paced telling of the internal stories. It is as though Robert's arrival was the toppling of the first domino and everything falls ever faster thereafter. This also gives a feeling of the author's omnipotent hand putting the characters where she wants them, rather than letting them get there by their own devices. The characterisation is the weakest element of the book, even Robert is thinly drawn and his change from ignorant fishing boy to a man of decision, strength and power is too abrupt to be credible.

In other respects the book is admirable. It is written with a clear, simple, poetic prose which is a delight to read, especially when retelling the stories of the City. Aimed probably at a juvenile audience, the book has an unusual sophistication which enhances without complicating it for the younger reader. It is original, not merely a repetition of countless other stories, vivid and enjoyable. But to be lifted above that to excellence, the author must give her people more life, allow them free will. They need to be more than her shadow puppets.

THE STALKING - Robert Holdstock (400pp)
THE GHOSTDANCE - Robert Holdstock (411pp)
[Century, 1987, £11.95 each]
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

DO YOU REMEMBER *THE FUGITIVE*, A TV programme where David Janssen searched for the one-armed man who murdered his wife, while evading the police who thought he had committed the murder? An endless series of episodes with no redeeming qualities, I was strongly reminded of it by these books.

Four novels originally, they have presumably been republished now to cash in on Holdstock's prize-winning notoriety. But despite the Fantasy and SF imprint, they are horror stories and undoubtedly pot-boilers. A man's family is stolen from him by a magical group on Christmas Eve and he is left for dead. He survives, and pursues them, learning more of the occult and this particular group as he goes, and the scene is set for a series of grisly deaths for anyone innocent and unlucky enough to cross his path. But after four novels, he is no closer to regaining his family than he was to begin with. These books read more like horror soap-operas than real literature.

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Having said that, the depiction of some characters is often quite touching, although this is usually a device to make their almost immediately subsequent death more horrifying. Nevertheless, despite the distinct feeling of first draft about much of this writing, it is evident that there's a serious and intelligent mind at work behind it. The plotting, such as it is, is tight and the stories move forward well. If Holdstock had to write this rubbish to pay the bills, then at least he used it to develop his skills towards his later successes.

Of interest only to people who want to see where a writer has developed from, and of course to people who enjoy reading about gratuitous and grisly deaths.

THE ENEMY WITHIN - L.Ron Hubbard (388pp)
AN ALIEN AFFAIR - L.Ron Hubbard (323pp)
(New Era, 1987, £10.95 each)
Reviewed by Debbie Moir

THE ENEMY WITHIN AND *THE ALIEN Affair* are two more books in the ten volume *Mission Earth* series by L.Ron himself, these being Volumes 3 and 4 respectively. They continue the saga of Jettera Heller, now on Blito P3 (otherwise known as Earth), narrated by arch-villain Soltan Gris.

The whole series is a send-up of Space Opera, as it used to be in the good old days of pulp SF. All the characters are bigger than life and as such are just that little bit too unbelievable.

Soltan Gris is not only excessively evil, but also incredibly stupid and insensitive. As in most fictional conflicts between evil and good, he always seems to be the loser, so much so that one almost ends up feeling sorry for him. But let's face it, when one is inflicted with a name that smacks of an overdose of Ambre Solaire what else can one be but a comic opera villain.

The hero "Jet" Heller, in the tradition of Kimball Kinnison, is a clean cut all-American male, in spite of coming from outer space (parallel evolution?). He is ever ready to come to the aid of anyone weaker than himself, who he thinks is in distress. However, he also comes over as being somewhat lacking in common sense and is really too much of an innocent. In fact, if you look closely at any of the characters you wonder how they ever managed to get dressed in the morning, let alone survive in the big bad galaxy.

As to the plot, well in both books it takes place on Earth. It is a mad medley of gangsters, big business, motor racing, whorehouses, spies and politics. One gets the definite impression that Hubbard is having a dig at most of modern America and its institutions. As long as one doesn't take this too seriously it is great fun.

However, beware the ending of Volume 3, it's a cliffhanger in the tradition of a Flash Gordon episode. I got the feeling that he decided to do a book of exactly 393 pages and then cut off the text there; to be continued in the next volume. This I found very frustrating and also I felt it was a rather cheap trick to get you to buy the next volume.

In spite of the deficiencies, the pace is generally fast and wild and at times can be very amusing. For those who like pulp Space Opera (and I do) these books are a rare good read, even if somewhat lighthearted.

SPIRAL WINDS - Garry Kilworth
(Bodley Head, 1987, £10.95)
Reviewed by David Wingrove

SPIRAL WINDS IS GARRY KILWORTH'S second mainstream novel and calls upon his personal experience as a soldier in Aden in the days when HM Forces were pulling out. The story itself is a fictional development of the lives of the two boys involved in the motor cycle accident that killed T.E.Lawrence back in 1935. Their obsession with the desert, born of that tragedy, culminates in them going out to Arabia. It's an uneven novel and takes some while to engage its reader fully, but from mid-way in it's compelling, and the two central sections - both headed up 'Jim' - contain some of the best writing I've seen from Kilworth, both lucid and evocative. The story hinges about the encounter with the 'desert hero' at a water hole deep in the desert - a scene that seems to re-write history itself in an almost mystical manner. This much is done well, but the writer felt the necessity to have one twist too many at the end: too tricksy for my taste and too clichéd - like an old-fashioned ghost story.

EARTHDOOM! - David Langford & John Grant
(Grafton, 1987, 303pp, £2.95)
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

DAVID LANGFORD AND JOHN GRANT ARE two of the funniest writers around in the SF world. Either single-handedly could have me falling apart with laughter; together, they are earth-shattering.

Earthdoom! is the ultimate disaster novel. Think of any end-of-the-world scenario you've ever encountered in SF or sci-fi, serious or screwy, and it's here. Simultaneously.

Nuclear explosion; anti-matter comet about to hit the earth; out-of-control space ship ditto; aliens set to conquer us; a new Ice Age; Adolf Hitler stepping into a time machine in 1945 and emerging today to clone himself in the hundreds; the Loch Ness monster (complete with two brains which argue with each other) coming up for air, somewhat miffed at humanity; the attack of the rabid lemmings; Death personified, stalking the streets of New York; even an aware amalgam of superglue and biological washing powder, which kills in *the most unpleasant way*. And more; and more; and more.

Aaarrgghh! The world's about to end. Whether it does or not, dear reader, you must discover for yourself, if you dare to submit yourself to the unspeakable horrors piled six on top of another by the authors. And not only horrors of destruction, but horrors of humour (would you believe "The answer is a lemming"?) and even worse (if worse there could be) horrors of literary excruciation:

> "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" he murmured, slightly surprised by his unwonted command of repartee. "This thing is bigger than both of us. Let me take you away from all this."
> *I wish this kind of book came with a better class of dialogue*, they each thought with silent resentment.

Langford and Grant take the piss right royally out of the entire genre in what must be one of the spoofiest spoofs to appear for years. Nothing, but nothing, is sacred. No cliché is left to fester in obscurity. No ultimate horror is too hackneyed.

There's one unforeseen side-effect: you'll never be able to take another disaster novel seriously. But maybe that's not such a bad thing.

THE ICE BEAR - Betty Levin
(Julia MacRae, 1987, 179pp, £7.95)
Reviewed by Valerie Housden

IN THE ABSENCE OF THE KING, THE LORD of Urris has been extending his influence, and to show his contempt for regal power he captures the king's white bear and bear-keep and has both killed. Vat the baker's boy rescues the surviving bear-cub, and together with the bear-keep's daughter, Kaila, escapes to the forest. However, until the king returns, Kaila and the bear will only be safe if they return to her country across the sea. And to do this they have to return through the town.

This is a juvenile fantasy set somewhere, somewhen. The proper names: Ulf, Gunni, Havel, Brunn have a Scandanavian ring; but the place names are indeterminate: Odstone, Forest of Lythe, Thyrne. The time is vaguely medieval - we are given no clue as to whether this is a Crusade or some other adventure. The folklore and entertainment performed by the Mirth Mongers is generally Northern European rather than specific to any particular national culture.

A writer's usual excuse for fantasy is the intrusion of other-worldliness: magic, ghosts, etc. There is none of this in *The Ice Bear*. This

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story is set in the real world. What a pity it is not set in a real time and place as well. The plot may well have not been quite the same, but a well-researched historical, geographical and cultural background would have enriched the book greatly.

Betty Levin is an otherwise competent writer. Her characters are vividly portrayed. Wat is a typically tedious little boy, and the practical, Eskimo-like Kaila, with her bear and forest lore, still remains an enigma to the end. The plot is well-paced with some neat twists. But ultimately, the book is unsatisfactory. There can be no excuse for laziness.

NIGHT VISIONS - George R.R. Martin (Ed)
[Century, 1987, 298pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Rosemary Pardoe

THREE AUTHORS, ALL CONSIDERED TO BE at the literary end of the horror genre, were asked to contribute 30,000 words of original fiction to *Night Visions*. The resulting book contains seven short stories by Ramsey Campbell, two short stories and a novelette by Lisa Tuttle and a long novella by Clive Barker.

Most of Ramsey Campbell's short fiction falls into one of two categories: the ghost story and the tale of madness. Arguably, his best work occurs when he combines the two. Looked at objectively his plots are often quite ordinary, concerned with traditional themes and ideas. Here, for instance, there are tales of a haunted wood ('In The Trees'), a warlock's curse (the excellent 'This Time') and druid survivals ('Root Cause'). Yet Campbell has such an individual voice and such a talent for creating real people that he rarely fails to satisfy. But does he write horror fiction? Arguments over definitions are pointless, but his intention is unquestionably to disturb rather than to horrify, and in that he usually succeeds. The shivers down the spine one gets from his writings are not of the comfortable variety.

Lisa Tuttle's three stories do not horrify either, and they disturb rather less than Campbell's, mainly because she is not so adept at developing characters and settings. All three tales are about obsessions - with death, dragons and (literally) nightmares. 'Riding the Nightmare' is much the best; a tightly plotted and unpredictable account of uncontrolled supernatural powers. The novelette, 'The Dragon's Bride', is marred by some unpleasant sex scenes (not the first time I've encountered this in a Tuttle story), but it's *Listen with Mother* fare compared with Clive Barker's 'The Hellhound Heart'. Now that really does horrify! I'll never understand why people of taste (including Ramsey Campbell) think so highly of Barker. 'The Hellhound Heart' is litle more than sado-masochistic pornography with a supernatural coating. Admittedly, it's very well written pornography, but I hope I never have to read the like again.

I can't help but feel that those who buy this book to read the low-key horrors of Campbell and Tuttle will be put off by Barker's offering, while those who buy it for the Barker will find the rest not at all to their liking. The three authors in *Night Visions* make uneasy bedfellows.

BEYOND ARMAGEDDON: SURVIVORS OF THE MEGAWAR - Ed. Walter M. Miller Jr & Martin H. Greenberg
[Robinson, 1987, 386pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Edward James

If you want to read 386 pages about the horrors, poignancies, degradations of the world after nuclear war, then this is for you. No, seriously. At least three-quarters of the stories in this anthology would be in anyone's collection of the best sf on this theme. If you're an old-time sf reader, of course, you have read three-quarters of these stories already, or all of them. But if you are not, it is an excellent introduction to the ways in which sf writers have approached surviving the "megawar" (Miller argues that "holocaust" is too closely associated with the slaughter of Jews).

In chronological order (which is not the order chosen by the editors) the stories go from Stephen Vincent Benét's 'By the Waters of Babylon' (1937), the classic tale of a return to prehistoric simplicities (and originator of a myriad clichés), through to two 1984 stories from the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*: Lucius Shepard's 'Salvador' (a splendid story which is not about 'survivors of the megawar' at all), and Jim Aikin's humourous 'My Life in the Jungle' (a nice note to end the volume on). In between these, a roll-call of famous stories: Clarke's 'If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth'; Bradbury's marvellous 'There Will Come Soft Rains'; Spinrad's 'The Big Flash'; Ward Moore's wicked 'Lot'; Ballard's 'The Terminal Beach'; Ellison's 'A Boy and His Dog' (which produced arguably the best post-holocaust film). 21 stories altogether, with a broad range of writing styles and (in so far as the theme allows) of moods. The 1950s provide more stories than any other decade; most of these have stood the test of time, and changing political circumstances, surprisingly well. The whole thing is effectively and emotionally introduced by the author of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, who selected the 21 from dozens sent him by Greenberg.

It is such a pity that Robinson have not given more thought to the production. In particular I found the running heads at the top of every single opening - *Beyond Armageddon* and *Walter M Miller and Martin H Greenberg* rather than the story name and author - to be remarkably annoying. Yet the editors' names do not appear on the spine ... And the cover-painting (a Jim Burns which has been used already, reversed; see p.77 of his *Lightship*, a punk driving a Mad Max vehicle with a crashing spaceship in the background) gives a totally erroneous and unnecessarily lurid impression of the contents. We're used to that, of course, but we still ought to complain.

THE DRAGON IN THE SWORD - Michael Moorcock
[Grafton, 1987, 283pp, £10.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

THIS BOOK IS SUBTITLED "... BEING THE final story in the History of John Draker, Eternal Champion", but since John Draker *is* Elric, Corum, Erekosë, Hawkmoon and many other figures of Moorcock's earlier fantasy sequences, it is possible that it is the author's intent to lay them all to rest - not just Draker himself. This, therefore, is an important novel in Moorcock's continuing development as a writer.

Whereas some writers' attempts to draw previously disparate novels into a grand, all-encompassing work ultimately fail, Moorcock, with increasing maturity in his craft, has been able to transcend his earlier heroic fantasies - without denying them in any way - drawing them together into the Multiverse, a balance between Law and Chaos. The role of Draker in this is neatly summarised in the prologue "I am the Champion Eternal, at once a defender of justice and its destroyer. In me, all humanity is at war." This combination of evil and good in one man was a notable departure in this type of fantasy - Moorcock casting an individual die into the literature. In this concluding work his writing is as fresh and inventive as ever. He writes with the deft assurance of a master musician returning to well-loved tunes of his childhood, playing it with gusto and yet perfect control and anticipation. It would be unfair to divulge too much of the plot, but I will say that John Draker, through daring and spectacular adventure, does reach a position of peace, an end of the cycle, and perhaps, as I intimated earlier, so does Moorcock.

THE SMOKE RING - Larry Niven
[Macdonald, 1987, 362pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Ken Lake

IN *VECTOR* 124/125 I DEVOTED CONSIDerable space - and thought - to an examination of Larry Niven's *The Integral Trees*, a most disappointing work from this prolific but variable author.

The Smoke Ring is described as "the exciting sequel" to that book; it is not, on two counts. First, it is far from exciting; secondly, it is

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obviously only the second part of a trilogy (or worse) centred on the strange world of Citizens Tree, the Clump, and the rest of the Smoke Ring in which our protagonists live, fight, procreate, die and meanwhile discuss endlessly and repetitively everything that was already made clear in the first book and is here repeated several times.

Niven has created an intriguing world; unfortunately it still fails to persuade me of its verisimiltude, while the characters are wooden and juvenile, and suffer from that dirty auctorial trick of being written more stupid than anyone could expect so as to 'justify' some of the sillier parts of the plot.

As before we get pages of charts and maps at the front, and pages of dramatis personae and glossary at the back; between this we have constant interpolations from old records (all in capitals to make them bigger) and pages of textual explanation and reiteration. It's as though Niven, realising just how ludicrous and ultimately unbelievable his invented world is, is trying to persuade himself as well as us by the wealth of his background data.

We get the now hackneyed scenes of a computer arguing with its own sequestered memory - back and forth, with yet more repetition. And the very adventures our cast of characters undergo are so juvenile that they really do not merit all the trouble Niven has taken to set them in focus.

One assumes that Macdonald do not have a qualified science fiction reader on their staff, and as with *The Integral Trees* have gambled on Niven's name selling vast quantites of large-type and costly hardcover books. Unfortunately, I fear they may be right. How are the mighty fallen ...

CONVERSATIONS WITH LORD BYRON ON PERVERSION, 163 YEARS AFTER HIS LORDSHIP'S DEATH - Amanda Prantera
[Cape, 1987, 174pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mike Moir

BRAINCHILD HAROLD IS AN EXPERIMENT in artificial intelligence. It is an advanced kind of Expert System that has as its expert knowledge everything known about, and expected to be known by, Lord Byron, the idea being that, with all the available data collected together, and with an 'intelligent' machine to analyse it, new information about his Lordship could be interpolated.

Thus far Ms Prantera has walked the scientific tightrope perfectly. The Expert System cannot be capable of original thought, only of drawing conclusions from existing data. Early parts of the novel include printout-like conversations between a Byron expert and the computer as the expert tries out the system. Ideally it should converse as if it really was Lord Byron (or rather Elbe, as he prefers to be called) and maybe even compose the odd couplet. The first sign of success is that the program becomes very moody and often chooses to amuse itself rather than talk to anyone. At this point the author becomes a little self-indulgent and pretends to let us in on the computer's inner thoughts, but they are not the thoughts of the system, instead we are treated to her version of the real Lord Byron's thoughts.

Slowly, through the rest of the novel, Elbe ponders over a single and very complex part of his life. As this tale unfolds some of the parameters controlling his psychological makeup are tuned. The tuning is crucial to allow different stages of the tale to be told. We are left with a complete and rather over-romanticised story. The problem is that the whole adventure is preposterous, unless you allow for the fact that Elbe's mind is being altered during the telling. Each phase of the tale makes sense within its own context, but not in relation to the others. However, I got the definite feeling that I was expected to accept the whole tale.

I do not know enough about Lord Byron to know if this tale has any grounding in fact. I would love to think it did, but I doubt it. I also wish the novelist did not present the tale so that you are presumed to accept it. Presented as a pure fabrication it would have significantly improved the subtlety of the book. Or perhaps I am the one being thick.

The book was fun to read. As well-written pulp SF I enjoyed it thoroughly, but I am amazed to find it published as high quality mainstream fiction.

I have one final complaint. If they spent large research funds on an artifical intelligence system that 'thinks' like Lord Byron, why couldn't they think of something better to ask him than: did he bugger choirboys?

PSIFI: PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES AND SCIENCE FICTIONS - Jim Ridgway & Michelle Benjamin
[British Psychological Society, 1987, 229pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

I APPLAUD THE IDEA OF THIS BOOK, BUT do not feel it is in any way as good as it could have been. What Ridgway and Benjamin have done is to select seven SF stories, then use them as jumping off points for discussions on aspects of psychology.

Bob Shaw's 'Burden of Proof', one of his slow glass stories, is the prelude to a chapter on perception, memory and testimony; an extract from Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* sparks an examination of attitudes towards women, sexual differences, behaviour and discrimination; and Keith Laumer's 'Field Test' provides a basis for a look at artificial intelligence.

The other stories are the beautiful and tragic 'Come to Venus Melancholy' by Thomas Disch (personal relationships); Le Guin's 'Orr's Dreams' (the study, function and interpretation of dreams); Heinlein's 'They' (a mixed bag of describing and explaining people, actions and events, and *knowing about ourselves*); and Frederick Pohl's 'What to do until the Analyst Comes' (drugs and their effects, society and the law).

I don't complain about the selection of stories; we'd all come up with a different set if asked for seven stories for this purpose. nevertheless, the editors/authors have missed so many opportunities: Philip K Dick ought o be here *somewhere*, on the nature of reality, perception, insanity, religious belief ... So should Ian Watson, for more or less the same areas. Or Samuel R Delaney. Or Chris Priest. Or ...

They've also missed out on whole areas of psychology: paranoia (they could have looked into this when discussing 'They'), assorted neuroses, self-deception, mass deception, propaganda, the psychology of religious experience and belief, visual and auditory hallucinations, the effects of isolation, crowd psychology ... If there's a volume 2, these ought to be in it.

But what puzzles me is: Who is this book aimed at? It's unlikely to be much bought by the general public; SF fans will have many of the stories in it already; and anyway, the price will put most people off. Which leaves the educational market - I say educational rather than academic because the standard of argument is really rather low. There are gaping holes in their logic, excluded middles all over the place, non sequiturs everywhere. So not university psychology courses. Which leaves schools, Colleges of FE and Teacher Training.

But the writing style would make any reasonably intelligent student cringe: "To help clarify the process, try drawing a cube. What does it look like? Compare what you have drawn with the cubes in Figure 7.3."

On the positive side, the stories are all a good read, some of the discussion is interesting (at a popular science level), there's a very good bibliography, and the book is well-indexed. Bob Shaw's Foreword is, predictably, well worth reading. But thre's no introduction and literally a one-sentence conclusion: "We have seen throughout this volume that explaining behaviour is no easy matter." But we knew that already.

STARHAMMER - Christopher Rowley
[Century, 1987, 297pp, £11.95]
Reviewed by Keith Freeman

THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF TRILOGY - those that are really one book split into three, those that are really one book with two sequels, and the true trilogy, where you have three books that are part of a whole but which, individually, stand up by themselves.

Starhammer is part of one such trilogy. I have not read the previous two books, (*The War for Eternity*, and *The Black Ship*) but this did not in any way affect my enjoyment.

There was, admittedly, one point where a reprise of something that had (I presume) happened in a previous book caused me to realise there *was* a previous book. Generally, however, the fast pace and reasonably good characterisation carried me through the story effortlessly. Jon Irehard, born a slave of the alien "Masters of the Universe" (Laowons), escaped (in a somewhat contrived manner) to a human-run star system, Nocanicus. His adventures here were interesting and believable; in fact, this part of the book was quite capable of being expanded into a novel in itself. To tell the truth, the story in the Nocanicus star system could be assumed to be peripheral to the main story, only when you reach later parts do you realise it helped explain them.

From Nocanicus the story moves to a desolate world, Quism, which has on it the remains of a civilisation extinct for aeons ... but machines (of a never fully explained bio-organic-mechanical nature) soldiered on. Visitors to Quism, mostly humans with a few Laowons, plundered what they could. Jon and his allies sought a fearsome weapon with which to free mankind by cowing the Laowons.

The bare bones of the plot do not reveal any startlingly new ideas. With this proviso I can recommend the book. It is far from being a classic but it is a thoroughly enjoyable piece of enertainment.

On the earlier books - though I won't actively search for them, nevertheless, if I come across them, I won't hesitate to read them - can I say more?

THE HOUNDS OF GOD - Judith Tarr
[Bantam, 1987, 334pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Chris Barker

THIS IS THE FINAL VOLUME IN *THE Hound and the Falcon* trilogy. Without wanting to denigrate Tarr's obvious careful research, it is best to view these novels as a fantasy with historical/theological elements forming the backcloth. However this background material considerably strengthens the fantasy.

The current novel continues the adventures of Alfred, a fair 'Elf-kind' with supernatural powers. Raised in a monastery but having left its restrictions - both physical and theological - he now acts as Chancellor in the Kingdom of Rhiyana. Both he and the King and Queen are of the same kind, trapped in eternal youth, possibly without an immortal soul. The Church of 13th century Europe, unsurprisingly, is uncomfortable with such 'witch-like' persons having authority in Christendom, and the Hounds of God, the church inquisitors, instigate war against the 'witch' kingdom.

However, the inquisitors are using a dark-force far more powerful than the 'good' power of the elfkind. This power kidnaps Alf's family, quashing the supernatural powers which protect the kingdom, and allowing conventional warriors to sweep through in conquest. The rest of the story is concerned with the search and eventual confrontation with this dark power in Rome itself.

In this final novel, Tarr's writing shows a greater maturity than in the two previous, more time is spent developing the other main characters in the drama, though Alf still has a pivotal rôle. This perhaps reflects the fact that the personal conflict of one extraordinary monk trying to reconcile his unearthly powers to his faith, which we saw in the first book, has been transposed to the bigger question of what the established Church does with a Kingdom, faithful in so many ways, but ruled by beings bearing an uncanny resemblance to witches. The position of Alf and his fellows is not dissimilar to the alien Lithians in Blish's *A Case of Conscience*. In both cases, the author, in not minimising the difficulties presented by an alien and theologically threatening being, or in portraying the Church in so unsympathetic a light as to allow no room for debate, has produced a work of much greater depth than one might have thought possible. Tarr is at the beginning of her career, and I look forward to seeing how she might develop her writing in the future.

THE ILLUMINATION OF ALICE J. CUNNINGHAM - Lyn Webster
[Dedalus, 1987, 306pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by David V. Barrett

THIS IS A STRANGE AND DISTURBING book. The whole way through I was unsure whether it was brilliant or first-novel-clumsy. Perhaps it's both. In retrospect I keep confusing scenes from it with Iain Banks' *The Bridge* and Chris Priest's *The Glamour* - which is an indication that it's actually *very* good. But I'm still not sure about the quality of the writing.

The two parts of its structure echo each other and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. Alice, fat and thirtyish, sprawls beneath a tree with her pregnant friend Maria, who is "deftly and economically designed to instruct mankind and to please him .. She was the sort of person who had willpower, never put on weight, and passed exams easily." She is the author's foil to contrast Alice against.

The author addresses the reader, comments on her characters. This is the writing style I find unsettling, yet it also echoes Carroll, and provides the reader with a long perspective from which to view the characters and the story. There's a strange combination of unreality (which is unsurprising in what is basically a 1980's adult *Alice*) and a blunt heavy realism (Alice herself, who sweats when it is hot) about the whole thing.

The first half of the book is on the other side of the mirror, in a town whose streets spiral in towards the centre, where Alice gets involved in rescuing a friend from a sado-masochistic nightclub where "you have to sign a paper handing over your will and agreeing to let them extract a recompense equal to the value of the pain or pleasure you've requested." She meets characters like Anaxa, a night club dancer, who she meets up with again as a TV actress in Leeds, in part 2; and Lewis, a failed boyfriend from the real world. Lewis is actually more asexual than bisexual; basically he and sex don't get on. She also meets Tom, a strange guru figure in both worlds; and next door's cat in Leeds is called Thomas: "a neutered Tom-cat would not do. She needed the real thing." This book is highly sexually charged throughout: sex for fun, for pain, for affection, for fucking, for power, for spiritual and mental and physical release and relief - and almost incidentally, but emphasising that life kicks you in the balls when you're least expecting it, for procreation.

When she returns to the real world Alice retains links with the spiral town and other dream worlds, living in a multi-layered reality where events you are sure are dreams or visions get entangled with, prefigure or even cause events in the reality of Leeds. And there are times when dreams within dreams might be the real reality.

This is a book which needs to be read for a second or third time to catch all the resonances, internal and external. But first, I think I'll read *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* again. And then maybe look through the mirror ...

YORATH THE WOLF - Cherry Wilder (178pp)
THE SUMMER'S KING - Cherry Wilder (244pp)
[Unicorn, 1986/7, £2.95/£3.50]
Reviewed by Denise Gorse

THESE BOOKS COMPRISE THE SECOND AND third in Wilder's 'Rulers of Hylor' trilogy, the first of which was *A Princess of the Chameln*. The Hylor books concern themselves with the lives, fates and feuds of a number of aristocratic families as each tries to gain ascendancy over the continent of Hylor. It was sometimes difficult (especially as I hadn't read the first in the series) to disentangle the complexities of plot and counter-plot; it was even more difficult to care who was doing what to whom. To be blunt I found these books hard going. The action could kindly be described as episodic, or, less kindly, as rambling: incident piles upon incident in a shapeless way, and the trilogy comes to an end with the fates of several major characters - in particular Yorath, who had gone into self-imposed and, it was hinted, temporary exile at the end of Book Two - unresolved. I was left feeling that there could equally well have been four books in this series, or five, or ... The magical element in the stories ensures their classification as 'fantasy', but these incidents of the fantastic are reported in the same flat, matter-of-fact tone as the more mundane politickings of the Daindru and Duarings and never seem to be more than a plot device. In short this is production-line fantasy, competently written but ultimately dull. Not recommended unless you are a hopeless addict of this kind of thing (and even then with reservations).