VECTOR

130

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

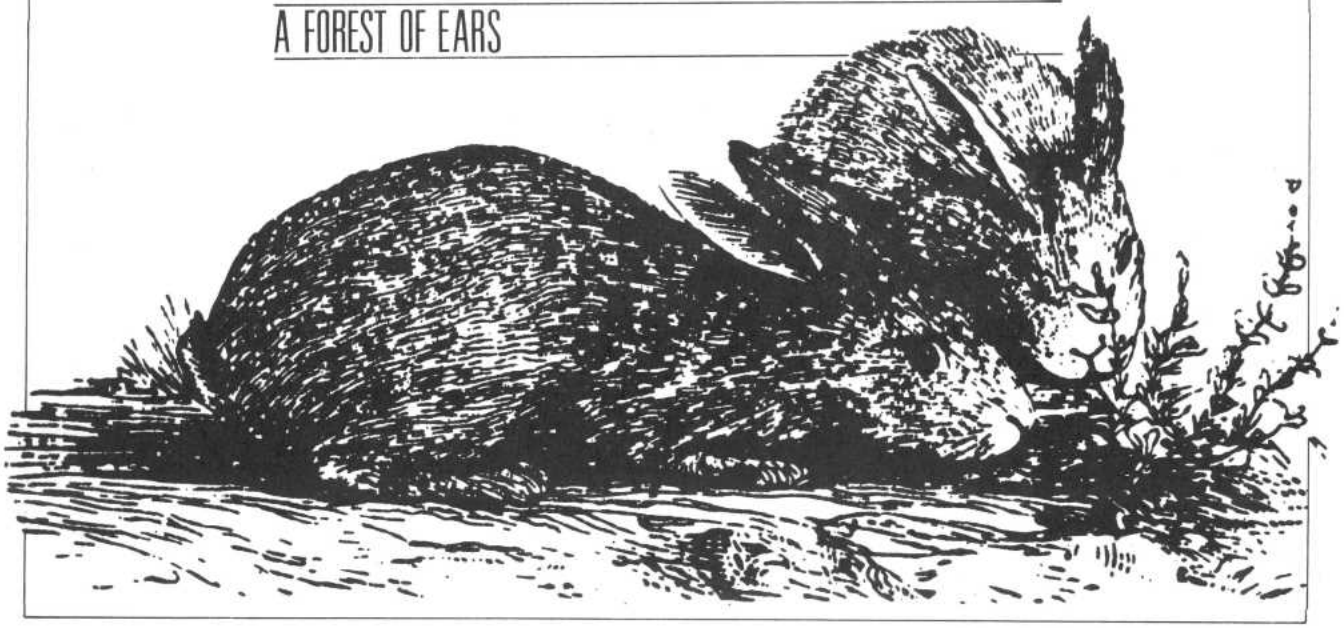
75P

feb/march 1986

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

MICHAEL CONEY

A FOREST OF EARS



VECTOR

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FEBRUARY/MARCH 1986

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THE BSFA: The British Science Fiction Association is an amateur organization, formed in 1958, which aims to promote and encourage the reading, writing, and publishing of science fiction in all its forms. We publish Vector, a bimonthly critical journal; Matrix, a bimonthly newsletter/magazine; Focus, a biannual forum for writers, and Paperback Inferno, a review magazine of the latest paperbacks. Other services include Orbiter, a postal SF writers' workshop, an SF Information Service, a postal Magazine Chain and an SF Lending Library. Membership costs £7.00 per year. For details, write to: Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire, G72 9NA or if you live in the USA: Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan 48213, USA.

EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT

THE BSFA EMBRACES MANY SF INTERESTS, including FIAWOL (Random is a way of life), Films, Comics, Games, and possibly even a Trekky or two. But for most of us, books are our prime and preferred source of SF, and of other genres. We enjoy reading for its own sake. While other kids were kicking a football around the Rec we were curled up with a book. We didn't mind being ill; it meant we could read more. We kept a torch under the pillow so we could read in bed.

Reading for pleasure is a bug that is almost always caught young.

When I was nine I was a member of the Lone Pine Club. I'd never met David Morton and the twins, Dickie and Mary, or Petronella, who preferred to be called Peter, but I knew them; I shared all their adventures, and in my imagination they shared mine. They were great stuff for a nine year old.

Recently I picked up one of Malcolm Saville's books that I'd not read for nearly 25 years. I knew before I started that my adult eyes would see it quite differently, and I allowed for that.

The book was dire. The plot was okay - standard adventure, with tunnels, and baddies, and that bloody dog Mackie around my heels. But the characters were utterly unbelievable, and the writing was unspeakable. In both cases it was the moralistic middle-class attitudes that made me retch, and I've nothing against either morality or the middle-class. But the book was also badly written...

What had changed

First, and obviously, I'm nearly 25 years older. I have different attitudes and perceptions, tastes and values. I've also read several thousand books since then, and so have a better idea of what is 'good' and what isn't. Maybe the book was as bad then as it is now, only I didn't know it.

Were middle-class children (was I?) actually like that a generation ago? Have children changed so much since then? Or was Saville out of touch with the reality of children when he wrote his books? How do the changes in society since then bear on this? For example, swearing and rude behaviour are far more acceptable in life now, and this is reflected in fiction.

Children's books today tend to be about working-class kids with societal problems. (But the Family at One End Street was working-class. And Peter is in a one-parent family, even if she does go to boarding school.)

Are children's books today better written, or worse? Alison Uttley and Noel Streatfield's equivalents today might be Alan Garner and Janni Howker, in terms of literary quality. But we also have **Dr. Death meets the Fanged Monster from Outer Space**, which we don't expect to have the same literary quality. But why not?

What's the relevance of all this to the adult readership of **Vector**? When I was reading Malcolm Saville, I was also reading John Pudney's adventures, and Capt. W.E. Johns' Biggles books, which led me on to his SF books, and Patrick Moore's SF books, and anything with space ships or robots or time travel... and by the time I was eleven I was reading Asimov and Heinlein and Pohl and Simak and was a hardened addict.

From the age of dot children read or are read stories which, if not SF, are closely linked with it. Fairy stories, myths and legends, fantasy in all its varied forms, historical novels with present day kids travelling back in time. And then their 'sensible' parents wean them off fantasy into the real world, and for a lot of kids their reading pleasure stops right there. They've had the fantastic taken away from them, and books have become boring, words just marks on paper.

WHICH WERE THE BEST SF BOOKS OF 1985? According to a dozen **Vector** reviewers, there were fifty-one of them, with very little overlap: only seven were chosen twice, and only two three times. These, to save you counting through, were:

Brian Aldiss	- **Helliconia Summer**
MJ Harrison	- **Viriconium Nights**
Gwynneth Jones	- **Divine Endurance**
Chris Priest	- **The Glamour**
Tim Powers	- **The Anubis Gates**
Keith Roberts	- **Kiteworld**
Geoff Ryman	- **The Warrior Who Carried Life**
Ian Watson	- **The Book of Being**
Gene Wolfe	- **Free Live Free**

Without any attempt to prejudge the issue (I haven't made my own choice yet) I would guess that the last five (which are eligible) would be strong contenders for the BSFA Award, and so might be worth reading in the next couple of months. In fact, we could do worse than to follow Chris Bailey's example: 'I spent the year chasing last year's recommendations'. When there's so much crap in the shops, one of the useful functions of reviews can be to tell us what other people thought a good read. But personal tastes differ, and the wide range of books chosen is emphasised by the contrast between Martyn Taylor's comment '1985 was not a particularly memorable year,' and Paul Kincaid's '1985 has been a remarkable year'.

A final thought: only one children's book was mentioned, and in the end, not chosen. I suspect we're all missing out by ignoring the books which are the bait to hook the next generation of SF readers.

STOP PRESS

SITS VAC

VECTOR, LIKE ALL **BSFA** publications, is produced entirely by members. Later this year the editorial team will need a new production assistant.
Requirements are: fast and accurate typing, ready access to a word processor and daisy-wheel printer, and endless patience.
If you think you can help, please contact the editor as soon as possible.

A FOREST OF EARS

MICHAEL CONEY

Michael Coney, author of **Syzygy, Charisma, Cat Karina** and numerous other novels,was born in Britain but has lived in British Columbia for a number of years. In a recent letter he wrote:

'It's good to see you still consider me a British writer. There was a statement in a Canadian fanzine not long ago that 'Michael Coney remains a British writer for all that he lives in B.C.' and I wrote back rather irritably to say that since I had, for some years, owned an axe and a chainsaw, and what was more I put maple syrup on my hotcakes, surely by now I could be regarded as Canadian? But no. In truth the fanzine was right and you are right; I only play at being Canadian. When I'm writing, my heart is still back there in South Devon.'

"AND THERE ARE CLUBS, TOO, WHERE YOU WILL MEET PEOPLE LIKE yourself, united in their love for this friendly, furry little sod."

These words, or words very much like them, appeared in a slim volume I bought from the pet shop. The sod in question was the Guinea Pig. The guinea pigs themselves, my passport to a life of frenzied social activity, sat watching me through the bars of their cage like tiny delinquents, and when I pushed my finger towards the biggest it snapped at me viciously with needle-like yellow incisors, the hallmark of the rodent.

In my time I've harboured guinea pigs (frozen during a cold snap), hamsters (decomposed), white mice (escaped), a white rat which even I found repulsive (drowned), a tortoise (eaten by rats), a dog called Chips (murdered by my father), a dog called Chopper (destroyed for worrying sheep), a dog called Lancer (poisoned by natives), a cat called Ginger Tom (fractured vertebra), and, alive at the time of writing but probably quite nervous, a cat (Sabrina) and four rabbits (Ashleigh, Theodora, Precious and Goldilocks). I should add that I've never been responsible for naming any of the above. Neither have I been responsible for killing any of them. So when it was suggested that I write an article on Biological Developments in Fact and Fiction, I knew that I was admirably suited to the task. Most of my stories have a biological slant, due to my imperfect knowledge of physics and the editors' stipulation that a science fiction story should contain science. So quite early in my career I started writing about giant shrews and land sharks. Biology allows the writer to invent within a much broader set of parameters than 'hard' science allows. In order to achieve authenticity, a biological invention needs only to evolve in accordance with its environment.

> I climbed down to the edge of the pool and peered into the depths. It was clear and green; seemingly empty, and I was about to turn away when I thought I saw a movement at the bottom among a nest of waving green fronds. I was looking for a stick to poke about with when a white form darted past me. A snowdiver had seen the same movement. I flinched involuntarily - the bird had passed close to my head - but I heard no splash.
>
> When I opened my eyes the entire rock pool was opaque and sparkling; the bird's hindquarters protruded from the surface, transfixed in mid-dive. Its webbed feet were paddling ineffectively and as I watched the movement became spasmodic, then died. I shivered...**(Hello Summer, Goodbye)**

The coastal ecology in this novel is based on a tidal phenomenon: instead of ebb and flow the water gets more or less dense according to the season. Pursuing this theme, the creatures living in rock pools maintain their water at a supersaturated level by balancing evaporation with small quantities of water expelled from their bodies. When a potential victim flops into the pool, however, the creature excretes a few crystals of whatever,and the whole pool crystallizes instantly, trapping the victim for future consumption.

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A couple of years ago the little girl over the road appeared with what seemed to be a small kangaroo on a leash. "He's Thumper, my rabbit," she said.

The rabbit, fat and furry, looked up at me with big brown eyes, waving its ears in a most attractive manner. Suddenly my whole life seemed to have been wasted, stretching behind me like a rabbitless desert. "He's very big", I said.

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"He's a Flemish Giant", she explained.

Later her family fell on hard times and - no, they didn't eat Thumper - they moved to an apartment where there was some kind of insane discrimination against Flemish Giants, so they bequeathed Thumper to me.

It seemed to me that Thumper's hutch was too small so I set to work to build him a compound where he had room to gallop. I bought posts and wire. I set the posts in concrete and cemented in the bottom of the wire too, so that Thumper couldn't burrow out, not that he would want to. I built a chalet for him to live in, with a sundeck to eat his food on, all matching the design of our own house. The whole thing cost me over two hundred dollars and many hours of work during which period I might otherwise - who knows? - have won the Nobel prize for literature, but it was worth it to see Thumper's delight when he was put inside. There were bushes and trees and rocks in there; it was typical British Columbian coastal scenery. I went to the feed merchants and bought a sack of rabbit pellets. I was in the rabbit business.

My first reward came when my wife was watching Thumper frisking in his enclosure. "He's a beautiful rabbit," she said. This was a good sign.

"If there's one thing I can't stand", she'd told me early in our relationship, "it's rodents." I decided not to mention the guinea pigs, the hamsters, the white mice and the appalling white rat. "They scuttle", she explained.

She'd also criticised their habits, referring to them as 'living in squalor.' 'Squalor' is one of her words for dirt, to distinguish it from sex, which she refers to as filth. Rodents abounded in squalor, and they were no slouches when it came to filth, either.

"You can tell Thumper's not a rodent", I said. "Rabbits are a different species. They don't scuttle. And there's no filth about Thumper."

Thumper suddenly looked lonely. His ears waved pathetically.

****

There is something beautiful and perfect about evolution, and if an imaginary creature doesn't quite ring true the writer can introduce some outside influence, albeit millennia ago, which joggled it into its present form. Evolution is no respecter of individuals, reducing all issues to a basic simplicity devoid of hypocrisy - a boon for the science-fiction writer who is trying to achieve an objective,future-based viewpoint. The inhabitants of my latest novel **Fang, The Gnome** are good and kindly little fellows, dedicated to repopulating a depleted Earth while still uncomfortably aware that they are imposing their own views on their environment; a problem which can lead to interesting conflicts.

> It happened that a dance was held that evening in honour of Nyneve, who had snatched King Bison from the jaws of a wild boar in the afternoon, at considerable risk to herself. All the Mara Zion gnomes were present except the Miggot, who believed in natural selection.

Later, Fang congratulates Bison on his escape, and mentions Hal o' the Moor, the Miggot's cousin.

> I don't want to hear about any relative of that damned Miggot!' said Bison loudly. 'The Miggot wants me dead!' It so happened that the dancing stopped that instant, and the final flourish of panpipes and drums sounded like a dramatic introduction to Bison's aggrieved remark. Heads turned.
>
> 'I'm sure the Miggot doesn't really want you dead,' said Fang. 'He's a gnome of principle, that's all. In principle he may think you should have died, but in practice, at the bottom of his heart, he's very glad you're safe.'
>
> 'Nonsense!' cried Elmera. 'The Miggot is a callous swine. I ought to know. I've lived with him long enough.'

The Miggot's dilemma stems from the fact that he is in charge of the Sa-Hua-Hi, a creature which is able to produce offspring in any form the Miggot desires, to fill any ecological niche he may have identified. Like the manager of a game reserve, he would not interfere in any life-and-death struggles which might take place among his charges. Only the fit must survive.

And, like any good science fiction writer, he extends the principle to include his own species. Only in science fiction can we do this. Real life is composed of individuals, each of whom is afraid of dying. So in real life we give people comfort, and speak of human rights and the sanctity of human life. As a human, I'm glad we do, but as writers we can cast aside the illogical aspects of the premise.

It was Sally, our daughter, who brought the angora rabbit home. Instantly I sensed a kindred spirit. He wore his ears at a jaunty angle and they were tipped with tufts of fur which fluttered in the wind. He had a perky look, inquisitive eyes and a long grey coat. Sally said his name was Ashleigh. I didn't want the compound to become a hotbed of homosexuality but Ashleigh soon put my mind at rest, proving beyond doubt that Thumper was female.

Around this time the local raccoons discovered the compound and in the evenings they would come to visit, climbing the wire like monkeys and stuffing rabbit pellets into their mouths with busy little fingers. They didn't move off when they saw us watching them, either. They just watched us back, black-masked bandits confident of the impotence of the law, looting with impunity. The raccoon is an animal which I would have been proud to invent. It is strong, clever, resourceful, omnivorous, and has learned to fit into whatever niche we allow it.

And there was another animal too; a small round-eared thing a little less than squirrel-size that appeared one afternoon. I studied it for a while, noted its salient features and looked it up in **Wild Animals of North America**. It was clearly a Rocky Mountain Pika, well outside its normal range. I debated writing to a learned journal about it. It is as well I didn't because its ears lengthened as the days went by, and it was joined by other similar creatures. One was grey - just the colour of Ashleigh. Another was Thumperish brown. Another was brown with grey patches on its face and paws; and the fourth, just to stimulate my interest in genetics, was pure white.

There had been an outbreak of filth in the compound.

I watched them thoughtfully as they chased one another around. By bringing Ashleigh and Thumper together, I had Created Life, just like the Miggot had. New vistas opened up before me, vistas filled with a forest of ears, with bunnies coloured to my own design. Now, if I bred Ashleigh back to that grey one there, I would have a three-quarter angora, possibly with tassels on its ears... I felt like God.

****

Evolution is fine and healthy in its own way, but it's painfully slow and there comes a time when a writer wants to fill an ecological vacuum in his story without having to describe the events of the previous few million years. Care is required here. Much as we all enjoy a good monster, they have been overdone in recent years and the first mention of something crawling out of a radioactive wasteland will drive the reader from his armchair and into the open air and pollution and skin cancer from which we, the writers, have a duty to protect him.

Readers demand something more subtle than radiation, something carefully documented, something they can believe in. In my **Song of Earth** novels many of the characters have a small proportion of animal genes, just enough to enhance their ability to do the job they were bred for. It seems to me a reasonable premise. The creator of these Specialists, one Mordecai N. Whirst, justifies them like this:

> 'I believe that when we evolved on this planet we inherited a trust. The trust was not Earth itself, with the riches that lay underground and in the oceans. Neither was the trust the stars we plundered for their wealth after we had emptied Earth. No - the trust was Life. The cells, the chromosomes, the genes. They were given to us to use wisely. And did we do this?' He paused, and the world waited. 'No, we did not. In our conceit we arbitrarily stuck our finger into the stream of history and said, "That is what a man is. That is the supreme life form, that, and no other." Even though the Second Species of Mankind was already beginning to evolve into something else! Even though the idiocy of what we said was right there in our mirrors! We had the vanity to consider ourselves perfect.
> Life is ours to use, and use it we must, because it is our only resource that is not in short supply. So let's drop this pride, this worship of a form that is changing with every generation, this nonsense about the sanctity of human life. Let's realize that we are one animal among many, and that they are all changing, and we can make a better life for everybody if we can help them change.'
>
> **(The Celestial Steam Locomotive)**

Whirst has been able to resolve the conflict between the human and animal kingdoms by in effect saying that no species is sacrosanct, that all species are expendable, that it is the sum total of life that matters. Do we Save the Elephants or do we Save the Africans? Whirst would have the answer.

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As an animal lover I am bothered by my own sentimentality, by this towering regret which seizes me when I read that another animal is on the endangered list and soon may never be seen again. Apart from receiving the aforementioned Nobel Prize for Literature (and thus, at last, making SF respectable for all you good people) my principal ambition is to Discover the Tasmanian Wolf, Alive and Well. Or the Moa. Either would do. But this concern and this ambition is purely selfish, and I would like to admit it here and now.

Because the last moa did not know it was the last moa. One morning it woke up with the realization that it didn't feel good. It felt old and tired, and those animals with sharp teeth seemed to be moving closer. But it had no sense of occasion. It just thought it was dying, like moas always had done. So as it keeled over, rolled onto its back and stuck its scaly legs into the air, no ghostly voice whispered to it: "This is the end of an era. This is a moment of terrible history. This is Extinction, the big E." No. All unknowing, it uttered a simple croak and the scavengers moved in.

Only we humans know, and feel the regret - and don't always have the sense to realize how selfish the regret is. Perhaps I write my kind of SF in order to come to terms with these regrets, to invent more animals to replace the ones that have gone, to give myself and my readers some hope for the next million years.

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If a coniferous tree is damaged or if it suffers through a period of prolonged drought it will usually produce a 'distress crop' of cones; thousands of them. Foresters around these parts often use this characteristic as a means of fooling the tree into producing seeds for reforestation; they persuade the tree it's going to die, so it does all it can to perpetuate the species.

There are some indications that humans do the same thing. In **Charisma**, my hero saved his girl from a messy death and:

> Susanna's blue eyes were looking into mine while I lay above her; and as I watched I saw the fear recede and become relief and, with amazing rapidity, controlled amusement. Her body moved under me.
>
> 'Thank you, John,' she said formally. 'Now. In cases where imminent death has been averted I believe it is the instinct of the human animal to involve himself almost immediately in the reproductive processes. It assists recovery from shock and has obvious psychological benefits.'
>
> I stared at her.
>
> 'I just thought you ought to know the accepted practice,' she said. 'Otherwise you might get it into your head to have a cigarette instead.'

Obviously I wrote that before I heard of distress crops, but the basic principle is there.

One day I heard Daphne screaming outside, 'A raccoon's got Thumper!' The raccoon, sensing that Thumper was by now old and infirm, was culling the herd in much the way that wolves cull herds of caribou. I shot it in the head. This didn't deter it; raccoons are notoriously difficult to kill. It took three shots to drive it off, then we took the trembling Thumper indoors and put her in a box with some hay to recuperate.

The next day she was out of shock although downcast, and there was a curious thing beside her, like a fleshy egg. It could have been a part of her, chewed off by the raccoon: a haunch or possibly a saddle (I ate 'roast saddle of rabbit with chestnut sauce' recently in a French restaurant) - or she could have cast an ovary, the way a horse might cast a shoe. This would be, I reasoned, a distress crop. Near death, she had done her best to perpetuate her rabbity species by separating her endangered self from her children yet unborn. It was a touching thought and one which a writer should turn to advantage. Thumper departed from our frame of reference a year or so later. (Her epitaph was written by the vet on an invoice, simple and affecting: Euthanasia, one rabbit $25) but in her passing she bequeathed the notion for a story.

Some notions, though attractive, do not hold water. It seems that during and following World War II the ratio of girl to boy babies born was exactly the same as at any other time. This exploded an elegant belief long held by my mother - that nature somehow compensated for the excessive loss of males on active service by adjusting the ration.

There's no such thing as water divining either. What a pity.

****

Ashleigh ruled the compound with snapping teeth and furious growls, and woe betide any baby rabbit who was unlucky enough to be born male. For a while we supplied the neighbourhood children with free bunnies and enjoyed a fleeting popularity. Two such bunnies, Precious and Theodora (male and female respectively) were returned to us after six months elsewhere and Ashleigh's fury, on beholding Precious, was terrible to see. Ear tassels flying, he hounded his son around the compound for weeks on end until I decided that the kindest thing would be to Give Precious his Freedom. So I opened the gate and ushered the little fellow out.

Throughout the following week Precious wandered miserably amid the long grass which surrounded the compound, peering sadly inside, glancing reproachfully at me, discussing his plight with Theodora and Goldilocks through the wire like a convict on visiting day, and no doubt voicing his opinion of me as a suitable person to be entrusted with animals. The plump female wild rabbits interested him not. He wanted in. So eventually I had to give him his way. I opened the gate and in he hopped. Ashleigh lost no time in taking a piece out of him. I had to concede once again that nature was not, in humanistic terms, perfect.

As writers we have the ability to create perfection, however; which may be another good reason for writing science fiction. From the biological standpoint we have a choice of two kinds of perfection: expanding or stable. The expanding kind postulates a dominant race, usually human, colonizing an ever-increasing number of worlds. There can be no end to the process of expansion because, like economic growth rates and the Roman Empire, the only alternative is collapse. Conflict is provided by the opposition of other races and such stories tend to be technological in content. An undeniable attraction lies in the headlong progression towards a vast Unknown, but the drawback is an uncomfortable similarity to our present situation on Earth.

I chose the second alternative for my recent novels because of its inherent optimism: it is theoretically possible to reach and sustain a stable perfection. The end product is a planet with a perfect ecology with a diversity of plants and animals dovetailing into a balanced whole. Conflict is provided by the arising of an occasional imbalance, either internally or externally inflicted. There is little room for technology in this kind of story because it would eventually be defeated by the finite nature of global resources, despite recycling and solar power. British SF often uses this introspective approach, although not always stating openly that life will go on after the difficult period that it often describes. Perhaps here there is an over-preoccupation with human life. The fact that the story is set at a point well before ecological stability is achieved sometimes brands it as 'pessimistic' in American eyes. This rather shortsighted view ignores the optimism inherent in the struggle for a stable perfection - as well as the practical impossibility of achieving an expanding perfection.

Given these definitions, my recent novels in the **Song of Earth** series are British in approach, although set much further along the road to stability than the near-future period which Americans view as typically British. Ecological perfection is the goal of my protagonists, and technology is sometimes seen as evil. The force behind this goal is the kikihuahuas, who first bred the Sa-Hua-Hi, and who also bred the gnomes and put them on Earth. At some point in their development the kikihuahuas decided it was improper to consume the resources of the Galaxy in order to make life pleasant for themselves. They codified their beliefs in the Kikihuahua Examples:

I will not kill any mortal creature

I will not work any malleable substance

I will not kindle the **Wrath of Agni**

the last one meaning: I will not light fires. Well, if you don't do any of these things, you are pretty well forced into living in accord with your environment like the kikihuahuas do. And the fun lies in bending the rules, just like the fun in Asimov's Laws of Robotics. The fun lies in having the human element creep in.

Kikihuahuas are miniaturists. They travel through Space in giant bats pushed by solar winds - which can take a very long time to get from place to place. So it is natural for them to view every planet as a self-contained unit; unlike humans, who can travel very quickly and therefore see Space as a broad canvas.

****

Yesterday, I looked into the compound and it seemed the balance of power had shifted. Ashleigh was sitting forlornly beside the wire as though wishing, for the first time in his rabbity little life, that he was somewhere else. Then suddenly he bounded away, pursued by a sleek and powerful brown brute. Precious was chasing him! A few minutes later Ashleigh was resting by the wire panting, his ear tufts lending his a

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strangely vulnerable and fragile look. Then Precious came into view again; Precious the once-effete,the slightly-poncy, the underling, the lackey, the whipping-boy, the seven-ounce weakling.

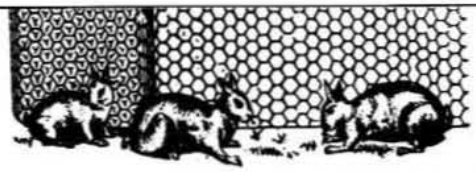
And Precious had changed. His legs were like steel springs, his eye piercing. He seemed to have developed beetling brows and his expression was intolerant and cruel. He looked like General Woundwort from **Watership Down**. He looked like a rabbit to be reckoned with. Theodora and Goldilocks were gazing at him in admiration as he preened himself on the chalet sundeck, occasionally glancing with contempt at Ashleigh huddled against the wire ten feet away.

I should have known better than to leave Ashleigh there, just as I should have known better than to try to write an article on Biological Developments in Fact and Fiction. I just don't know enough about what goes on in the real world.

The next morning Ashleigh did not appear at breakfast. I fed the others, taking pleasure in their appetites, their busily working jaws and their bright enthusiastic eyes, and nothing I saw prepared me for what was to come. There was no alarm in their happy faces, no worried glances over their shoulders, no exchanges of guilty looks. So it was with no more than idle curiosity that I went in search of Ashleigh, to roust him out and maybe give him a tickle between the ears.

I found him lying with his head inside a shallow burrow. He was cold and terribly stiff. There were no marks on him. He looked as though he'd sought a quiet hole to die in, but had lacked the enthusiasm to get right in there. So he's lain down half-in and half-out with his rump in the air and his head down between his forepaws. It was an undignified way to die, after such a distinguished life.

I took hold of his hind legs and pulled him out of there. He was heavy, so there was no question of his having been sick or old. He simply couldn't stand the ignominy of no longer being top buck, so he'd given up. He'd died of a broken heart. I carried him out, and the other three didn't even glance at him as he passed. Lost in their own rabbity thoughts, they'd probably already forgotten their grey and tufted Fuhrer. Sic transit gloria bunni.



LETTERS

LETTERS INTENDED FOR PUBLICATION MAY BE EXTRACTED or shortened at the discretion of the editor.

The science in SF

VECTOR 128 IS AMAZINGLY GOOD, BOTH IN ITS INTERESTING CONTENTS and the professional production.

The article on Asimov's robots is almost too scientific. These stories were written at a time when the ideas they held were new (at least to most people) and they were entertaining.

I am grateful for the books reviews but find the plethora of fantasy worlds beyond my ken.

E.R. JAMES
(No address given)

..all this and Langford too

THANKS FOR THE LAST ISSUE OF **VECTOR**; DESPITE ITS LIGHTWEIGHT FEEL it was the largest offering this mailing. I particularly enjoyed the transcription of Dave Langford's speech: almost as good as the first time.

The Geoff Ryman interview has convinced me that I should read **The Warrior Who Carried Life**, if I can get hold of a copy (and if I can afford it).

MICHAEL BERNARDI
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W Sussex RH16 3QH

Look back with kindness

THERE ARE GREAT INCONSISTENCIES WITHIN THE US ROBOTS "SERIES" AS L.J. Hurst says (V128), but as Peter Ellis rightly points out they weren't planned as a series nor was the first in the series the first written. Hurst's biggest mistake, however, is in expecting the Baley novels to be consistent with the US Robots short stories. Why should this be? Does Frank Herbert fail through the omission of "The Calibans", who enable galactic travel and communication to occur, from the **Dune** series where spice is used to the same effect? Of course not, they're separate universes with no connection between them.

The Baley novels are a trilogy and were written as a trilogy, though with a gap of over 25 years between **The Naked Sun** and **The Robots of Dawn**. The US Robots stories are a group of vaguely linked stories with no link to the novels.

I do expect consistency within a trilogy and within a series of stories, but it is wrong to expect a consistency between separate groups as L.J. Hurst seems to.

Still with Asimov, in Mark Greener's review of **The Gods Themselves** he expects Asimov to change his style to fit modern standards and trends. Why should he? Would Mark criticise someone who preferred Wagner or Beethoven to Wham or Culture Club? No, why condemn Asimov. Yes, its style is dated, but I enjoyed it when I first read it. I've just reread it and I'm not as excited as I was when I was 15 - I'd rather read Dick or Ellison now - but it's not a bad book.

Asimov, Clarke, "Doc" Smith, etc. introduced most of us to SF I would think, so we do look fondly on them but we still expect them to produce the goods we want now. I hope there is someone out there of 10 or 12 who has just discovered the joys of Asimov, because in a few years time that child will progress through Dick, Ellison, Disch and the New Wave(s) to become a member of the BSFA and fandom in general. Remember that it isn't the artistry of the New Wave which brings the young into our fold initially, but the excitement and adventure of the Old Guard.

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Art and desire

HUSSAIN MOHAMED IS TO BE CONGRATULATED ON HIS SUCCESS IN producing a most professional looking magazine. Not only is it very stylish and elegant, but he has made it consistent. After so many issues that have changed in style and format from one mailing to another, Hussain has actually sat down and designed a magazine and stuck to it. The result not only looks good, but has given **Vector** an identity.

Kevin McVeigh asks why SF has not produced orbiting space stations etc. I'm sure that Liz Sourbut (V 126) wasn't suggesting that SF works like some form of ritual magic - made a model of something and along it comes. However, before anything is achieved it is necessary to have two preconditions: the desire and the means. The desire for space travel was planted in the minds of humans quite early on, but 20th century SF actually put meat on the bones and started to produce an image, and who can say that society didn't work towards that image? One other point is that Kevin may be confusing concept with detail. The idea of leaving our planet was put into the mind, but this certainly doesn't mean that technology will slavishly imitate every SF idea. Resources are limited, and so is willpower, and we have to remember that technology is also the art of the possible...

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We'd hoped to reproduce a selection of the short essays in David Pringle's new book before publication, but events conspired against it. Here, post-publication, but better late than never, with thanks to David and his publisher, Xanadu, are his comments on four books, outstanding in different ways, from 1957, 1968, 1974 and 1980.

Robert A. Heinlein
THE DOOR INTO SUMMER

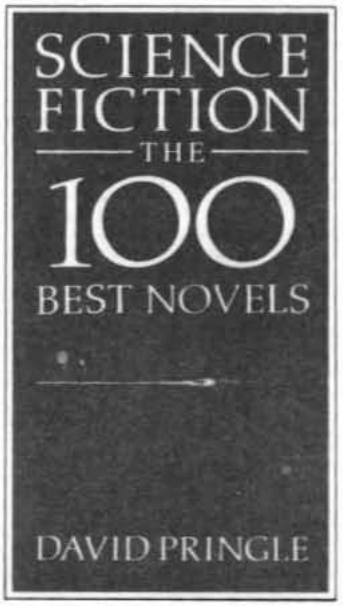
IN CONTRAST TO HIS EARLIER **THE PUPPET Masters**, this novel by Heinlein is a mellow and charming work. It features time-travel, a little girl and a pussy-cat - but it is not nearly as twee as that thumbnail description makes it sound. Apparently written at great speed (not that it suffers for that), **The Door Into Summer** was originally published as a serial in the 'Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction' - which, by the late 1950s, was overtaking 'Galaxy' as the most important of the American SF periodicals.

The story opens in 1970 (the future!). The hero, Dan Davis, is a talented engineer, designer of the domestic robots 'Hired Girl' and 'Flexible Frank'. He is also a cat lover. Thwarted in business by a treacherous partner and betrayed by his fiancee, he decides to take the Long Sleep in search of a 'door into summer'. That is to say, he invests his money cannily, then allows himself to be frozen into suspended animation, to awaken three decades later with swollen investments and a fresh start in life. The only person he regrets leaving behind is little Frederica ('Ricky'), his partner's step-daughter: 'Ricky had been "my girl" since she was a six-year-old at Sandia, with hair ribbons and big dark solemn eyes. I was "going to marry her" when she grew up...' He also regrets leaving his puss, Petronius Arbiter.

His plans go awry. Dan finds himself a pauper in the year 2000. It is a highly-automated world, one which he helped to create with his robotic designs of thirty years earlier, yet he has no recognised place in it. He has been cheated out of his 'inheritance'. Desperate to put things right, he contacts the inventor of a top-secret time machine and succeeds in throwing himself back to 1970. As in most tales which involve the paradoxes of time travel, the plot is complex. It is also delightfully absurd. All ends happily, with Dan getting the money, the girl (her age suitably adjusted) and the damned cat - and they return to the 21st century to live blissfully ever after amidst the fruits of Dan's labour.

In short, the novel is a piece of flummery. Yet it is interesting in that it casts light on the central obsessions which run through all Heinlein's fiction. As is the case with his famous short story, ' - All You Zombies - ', a twelve-page epic of time-travel and sex change in which the protagonist becomes his own mother and father, this novel illustrates a kind of solipsism, the belief that one is alone in an unreal world and that the individual's only means of elevation is to pull himself up by his bootstraps. This gells with Heinlein's 'political' philosophy of self-reliance and rugged individualism, but it all seems rather sad, and ultimately futile. But Heinlein is full of contradictions: the texture of this novel is anything but sad; on the contrary, it is a light, bright, jolly read, perhaps the slickest in the author's entire canon. The engineering details are very well handled, and the narrative carries a surprising amount of conviction throughout. I recommend **The Door Into Summer**, for its texture rather than its substance, to anyone who has been puzzled by the extent of Heinlein's reputation. It shows a great popular writer, a 'natural', at the height of his powers.

Note to Publishers and Authors:
As a general rule, Vector will be glad to give pre-publication publicity in the form of extracts from new books about SF, especially if written by BSFA members.



An English-Language Selection, 1949-1984

Samuel R. Delany
NOVA

IT IS AN APPROPRIATE TITLE. ALTHOUGH HE WAS barely twenty-five when he wrote it, **Nova** was Samuel Delany's eighth novel in a short space of time. It was also the first to appear in hard covers. His previous two paperback originals, **Babel-17** (1966) and **The Einstein Intersection** (1967), had won great praise, and Algis Budrys was moved to describe Delany as 'the best science fiction writer in the world'. It is hardly too extravagant to say that he burst upon the American SF scene like an exploding star. In effect, Delany was the American New Wave. Readers may not have foreseen it at the time, but **Nova** proved to be his summation. It was followed by a longish period of silence, and by the time that came to an end with the publication of his ponderous novel **Dhalgren** (1975) it was clear that he had gone off on a very different tack. One has to return to **Nova** to appreciate the young Delany at his peak - all flash and filigree, a master of movement and excitement.

'Set against an interstellar background, **Nova** is an updating of the pulp-magazine space opera. It concerns the quest of Captain Lorq von Ray to find a new source of the immensely valuable heavy metal, Illyrion. He believes he can achieve this by plunging his spaceship into a star which is on the point of going nova. In the stillness at the heart of the firestorm he will find his unlimited supply of treasure. With this wealth he will change the economic structure of the known galaxy and break the tyranny of the autocratic Prince Red, scion of the Red-shift corporation. To accompany him on this crazy mission he gathers together a motley crew of vividly-drawn characters. Chief among them is a gypsy boy called the Mouse, who improvises wonderful 'melodies' on an instrument known as a sensory-syrinx. Delany's greatest admirer, Algis Budrys, has pointed out that the Mouse is another incarnation of the author's favourite hero type, the 'magic kid', ripe with innate talents and a streetwise intelligence. Samuel Ray Delany (born 1942) was himself a magic kid, a black undertaker's son from Harlem, New York, whose greatest gift is his ability to communicate the sheer liberatory joy that science fiction represented for him.

The plot-business, though strong and well-handled, is of less importance than the rich and integrated backdrop to the action. The novel successfully portrays a vast, complex, teeming and fundamentally hopeful future society. It is, in fact, utopian, although without the static, over-organised qualities that make one queasy in the face of utopian visions. It conveys a sense that the future may turn out to be a marvellous place for 'ordinary folk' such as disinherited gypsies, blacks, women, albinos and freakish intellectuals:for this band of the meek have inherited the universe. The book communicates the feeling that the future will be different, in a million-and-one ways that we can scarcely comprehend at present. Incidental action spills off the page in profusion. Instead of the bland, metallic corridors of the future cities envisioned by Asimov and Clarke, Delany shows us an interstellar metropolis which is like an immense bazaar. It encompasses dirt, smell and chaos, but when seen through the eyes of the magic kid it offers wonder and delight, quickening the imagination to a fever.

The most appealing SF notion in the novel is that of the surgically-implanted sockets with which all the characters are equipped. These enable Delany's people to 'plug in' to any machine, any system, and to control it directly by nerve impulses from the brain. Happy, fulfilling relationships between human beings and machines are an important part of this utopia. Everyone is now a 'cyborg' or cybernetic organism - the machines have become a part of humanity, but humanity has not become machine-like, and the human mind is always in control. It is a vision which inspires, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Christopher Priest
INVERTED WORLD

'I HAD REACHED THE AGE OF SIX HUNDRED AND fifty miles'. It is an intriguing opening sentence which promises paradoxical things to come. The narrator is Helward Mann, one of the in habitants of a little wooden city which creeps across the surface of the earth (the hero's age is in fact measured by the distance that the city has travelled since his birth). 'My father was a guildsman, and I had always seen his life from a certain remove'. This statement sums up an odd quality of the book: its detached, distanced tone. Helward Mann sees everything from 'a certain remove', as perhaps the author does. Most of Christopher Priest's novels and stories are told in a stiff, remote style - which, I hasten to add, frequently suits the alienated subject matter.

Inverted World is a very strange novel indeed. It begins prosaicly enough, with a description of Helward's induction into the guild system which dominates the affairs of the city. Now that he has attained adulthood he is allowed to see the outside world for the first time. The city is travelling, at the rate of 36 miles a year, through a desolate region, sparsely populated by impoverished peasants who are sometimes drafted as labourers (or breeding stock). Locomotion is achieved by the painstaking process of laying tracks and winching the city along them, a few hundred yards at a time. The various guildsmen - surveyors, track-layers, bridge-builders - are all involved in this exhausting but imperative task. For some reason, as baffling to Helward as it is to the reader, it is essential that the city continue to

move, heading for an optimum point which is always just a few miles away.

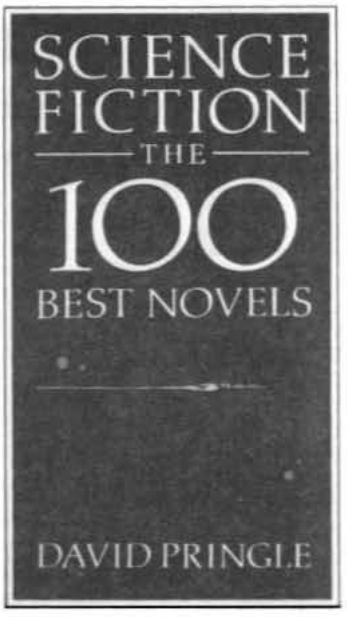
The terrain ahead of the city is referred to as the Future (Helward's father is a Future Surveyor), while that to the rear is known as the Past. On his first lengthy journey from the city, Helward is given the task of escorting three young women back to their native village, some distance south, or 'down Past'. This proves to be a truly extraordinary, nightmarish episode. It begins lightly enough, with sundry sexual frolics. Then, as the days pass, Helward notices that the women are changing: 'their arms and legs were shorter, and more thickly built. Their shoulders and hips were broader, their breasts less round and more widely spaced...' Soon he sees that 'none of them stood more than five feet high, they talked more quickly than before, and the pitch of their voices was higher.' It is as though Helward and the women are descending into a carnival hall of mirrors. Before long, the women are 'no more than three feet tall...Their feet were flat and wide, their legs broad and short... the sound of their twittering voices was irritating him.' The grotesque distortion of Helward's perceptions continues to grow in intensity until he finds himself tumbling southwards, to end up with his body stretched across a mountain range:

> He was at the edge of the world; its major bulk lay before him.
>
> He could see the whole world.
>
> North of him the ground was level; flat as the top of a table. But at the centre, due north of him, the ground rose from that flatness in a perfectly symmetrical, rising and concave spire. It narrowed and narrowed, reaching up, growing ever more slender, rising so high that it was impossible to see where it ended.

The 'explanation' for all this is a complex mathematical conceit. It seems that the city-folk inhabit a world which is 'shaped like a solid hyperbola; that is, all limits are infinite.' To the south of the city everything becomes horizontal and time passes slowly; to the north everything becomes vertical and time speeds up. It is impossible for people to live in either zone, and the very ground is constantly shifting beneath their feet, hence their need to keep the city on the move, ever reaching out for that theoretical 'optimum' where conditions are normal. One does not have to understand mathematics in order to enjoy this novel. Christopher Pries (born 1943) has succeeded in creating a powerful metaphor which is open to a number of interpretations, psychological, social and philosophical. There are more surprises towards the end of the book which cause one to revise one's ideas of what it is all about. Unlike many stories of conceptual breakthrough, this text is not at all predictable.

Russell Hoban
RIDDLEY WALKER

HOBAN'S NOVEL GARNERED ECSTATIC ACCLAIM from 'mainstream' literary critics, few of whom admitted to their readers that it is science fiction. At root, it is SF of a traditional sort - a post-bomb tale which could have been conceived in the 1950s but which gained impetus from the greatly renewed concern about nuclear weapons that marked the early 1980s. Apart from its



starkly simple subject-matter, the most striking feature of **Riddley Walker** is the language in which it is narrated: the broken, debased English of a neo-barbarian future. The author elaborates this dialect with considerable relish, wringing from it much comedy, poetry and pathos. One could describe the book as a cross between Miller's **A Canticle for Leibowitz** and Burgess's **A Clockwork Orange**. Here is a small sample of the style, an atmospheric passage which describes a gathering around a bonfire:

> We done the berning that nite on the bye bye hump. The moon were cloudit over and a hy wind blowing. I put the lst torch to the stack... Arnge flames upping in the dark and lifting all the faces roun. Catching that time of that nite stoppt on all them faces. You cud smel the berning sharp on the air mixt with the meat smel from the divvy roof. Dogs begun to howl it wer coming and going on the wind. The fire blowing in the wind and the sparks whup off in to the dark and gone. Dark and gone.

They are burning Riddley's father, Brooder Walker, who has been killed while trying to dig an ancient iron machine out of the ground ('the girt big thing coming up out of the muck all black and rottin unner the grey sky').

The setting is south-east England some thousands of years in the future, long after the nuclear holocaust. A few people scrabble in the dirt, scavenging nomads who are wary of the dog-packs that roam the devastated Kentish countryside. Young Riddley is literate, barely, and a poet at heart. He tells us the story of his life, interwoven with legends and little moral tales. The principal myth of his people is the 'Eusa story', a garbled account of atomic doom and the Fall of Man (Hoban says that he was inspired by the legend of St. Eustace, which he saw in the form of a reconstructed wall painting at Canterbury Cathedral). Puppeteers enact the Eusa story over and over again, warning the folk against any meddling with the old science, and in particular warning them against 'the Littl Shynin Man the Addom', who was responsible for all their woes. As the Eusa legend states, after the Littl Shynin Man was pulled apart 'evere thing was blak & rottin. Ded peapl & pigs eatin them & thay pigs dyd. Dog paks after peapl & peapl after dogs tu eat them the sayn. Smoak goin up frun the bernin evere wayr'.

The plot of the book involves the rediscovery of gunpowder and the tragicomic consequences of that particular piece of 'clevverness'. Riddley himself eschews violence and finds the way of true wisdom. It is a straightforward enough tale, copiously enriched by ingenious puns and overtones of mysticism. The language, although occasionally difficult to read (a difficulty which is often exacerbated by the use of numerals in place of letters, so that 'wear 2 s uv l thing yu & me' signifies 'we're two halves of one thing, you and me'), has its undeniable charms. Russell Hoban (born 1925) is an American writer and illustrator who has lived in Britain for the last couple of decades. Despite the English setting, some of the novel's futuristic slang seems transatlantic in origin. Nevertheless, the language is very carefully contrived and fraught with real feeling, making of **Riddley Walker** much more than the simple fable which it seems in outline.

— THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION LTD —

ANNOUNCEMENT

SINCE ALAN DOREY RESIGNED, the **BSFA** has been without a chairman. Alan put in a number of years of very hard work. To fill his place we need someone energetic, reliable and with good workable ideas. If this sounds like you, you will need people to propose and second you when the new chairman is elected by popular vote at the AGM at Eastercon.

It is not necessary to submit your name in advance, however the BSFA committee would be interested to know of anyone thinking of standing

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

1985

CHRIS BAILEY

WHEN WE DID THIS EXERCISE LAST YEAR, A reassuring number of people confessed to having read none of the year's significant novels, so I hope to get away with making a similar admission and shall highlight some short stories instead.

To say it has been a poor year at 'The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction' is perhaps too subjective a judgement and is harsh on the dozens of honestly striving writers,but I found only three stories to excite me: Keith Roberts' 'Richenda', Walter Jon Williams' 'Side Effects', and Lucius Shepard's 'A Spanish Lesson', and it is indicative of the general standard that I can select the Shepard when it is not one of his top performances.

The improving 'Interzone' did rather better and I enjoyed Peter Garratt's 'If the Driver Vanishes', David Langford's 'Cube Root', Ian Watson's 'The People On The Precipice' and M. John Harrison's 'A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium'. Previously I have been unhappy that the BSFA Award voters have leaned so exclusively towards 'Interzone', but this year I feel they can do so with more justification.

It was a splendid year for anthologies. There was Josephine Saxton's **The Power of Time** (Chatto) (admired more than enjoyed), Garry Kilworth's **The Songbirds of Pain** (Gollancz) (a 1984 book really, but what the hell), Ian Watson's **Slow Birds** (amazing), M. John Harrison's **Viriconium Nights** (Gollancz) (even more amazing), and the 'Interzone' collection which provided the new story of 1985, 'O Happy Day!'. That man Ryman again.

Otherwise, just to prove that this feature works, I spent the year chasing last year's recommendations and was duly bowled over by, amongst others, Angela Carter's **Nights At The Circus** (Chatto). And, twenty years late and courtesy of a junkshop, I also caught up with Carter's first novel, **Shadow Dance** - a menacing performance.

K.V. BAILEY

THREE NOVELS AND TWO OTHERS. KEITH ROBERTS' Kiteworld (Gollancz) for its evocation of borderlands and boundaries - of the mind, of the senses, of the elements. Ian Watson's **The Book of Being** (Gollancz) as an achievement bringing together the strands of a complex trilogy and then transposing the result to open up new perspectives which rationalize the story of his universe, but which, in actually demythologizing, reconstitute its myths at even deeper levels. Barry Unsworth's **Stone Virgin** (Hamish Hamilton) is not science fiction, but a marvellous novel of realism shot through with fantasy, a narrative of the persistence of the genius of evil and the genius of beauty through the centuries, in embodiments that are material, corporeal, and metaphysical; it also wonderfully recreates Venice almost as a living - and dying - organic presence.

SOME PERSONAL CHOICES

First of the others is Brian Stableford's **Scientific Romance in Britain, 1890-1950**, (Fourth Estate), a model of readable scholarship, and of how to bring alive half-forgotten fictions by relating them to their socio-historical contexts and, in tracing genre influences and continuities, establishing their contemporary significance. Umberto Eco's **Reflections on 'The Name of the Rose'** (Secker & Warburg) appeared in Italy in 1983 but was not published in translation here until 1985. This is just what it says it is, but among Eco's reflections are many that writers, readers and critics of SF will find relevant - particularly those contained in the chapter 'The Novel as Cosmological Event' and, applying its thesis mutatis mutandis, that entitled 'The Historical Novel'. There were other excellences in 1985, but these are my choice.

BARBARA DAVIES

I DON'T BUY HARDBACKS, SO WHEN I WAS ASKED to pick 'the five best books of 1985' some of the titles that immediately came to mind had returned either to the library or to their respective owner. I therefore propose to choose five paperbacks. To qualify my choice even further, my definition of 'best' will be not 'literary merit' or 'admirable subject matter' but simply 'readability' and 'un-put-down-ability'. In other words, here are five paperbacks that I bought with high expectations and with which I was not disappointed.

The first two books are fantasy-quest-serials. That may be enough to condemn them in some people's eyes, but for those of us who read Sterling E. Lanier's **Hiero's Journey** in 1976, 1985 will go down in history as the year in which at last produced the sequel **The Unforsaken Hiero** (Granada). The wait was worth it. Similarly, having been hooked by the Shannara books since 1978, **The Wishsong of Shannara** by Terry brooks (Futura) was a welcome addition.

For 'proper' SF John Varley's **Millenium** (Sphere) and Bob Shaw's **Fire Pattern** (Grafton) got me hook, line and sinker. Both have a wise-cracking way with words and inventive and unexpected plotting, the former being about time-travel and the latter about spontaneous combustion.

Finally, a book that is hard to categorise as fantasy or SF but is perhaps a little of both, **Divine Endurance** by Gwyneth Jones (Unicorn). This compelling and intelligent account of the journeyings of Cho and her cat raised more questions than it answered - an intriguing book.

MARK GREENER

THE NEW YEAR IS A TRADITIONAL TIME FOR re ection. However, contemplation of the SF books I've read in the last year reveals precious little of merit. It is a savage indictment of the genre that so few SF novels can be favourably compared with the mainstream books that I read in 1985.

The best novel was Moorcock's **The Laughter of Carthage** (Secker & Warburg), a wonderful mosaic of a novel rich in incident and impeccably written. Like all great novels **The Laughter of Carthage** may be interpreted in many ways depending on the reader's prejudices.

Aldiss's **Helliconia Summer** (Granada) maintained the high standard set by the

first book and the series looks set to become his magnum opus. Holdstock's **Mythago Wood** (Gollancz) was a truly remarkable fantasy, which finally saw Holdstock writing at his full potential. The best newcomer was Clive Barker; **The Damnation Game** (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) is the best horror novel you are likely to read in a very long time. Barker is a name to watch because his first novel puts many established authors to shame.

The brace of Chris Priest books I read this year were outstanding. **The Affirmation** (Faber) being a more mature and intelligent novel than **The Glamour** (Cape) which had some obvious faults. However, even at his worst Priest stands head and shoulders above the majority of SF writers.

However, much SF is read for escapist entertainment rather than intellectual stimulation. The best novels were Harrison's **A Stainless Steel Rat is Born** (Michael Joseph) which brings the series back to the level of the first two books, and Langford's **The Leaky Establishment** (Sphere) which is not even listed as SF and so might reach a larger readership than would otherwise be expected.

When I consider the huge number of SF books I have read in the last year the above novels represent a very small proportion of the total. Choosing the books to be included presented no problem and that must be the saddest indictment of all.

COLIN GREENLAND

'MUCH IS EVER PERFECTLY NORMAL AND predictable.' Robert Aickman, deceased alas, wrote perfectly twisted 'strange stories' (his term) wherein you don't know what's going on, you only know it's compellingly nasty. **Night Voices** (Gollancz) is a posthumous collection, but makes a good introduction. I don't know, but I reckon Aickman may be prominent on the bookshelves of M. John Harrison, whose **Viriconium Nights** (Gollancz, completely rewritten from last year's Ace edition) turns a fierce eye on peculiar goings-on in the shadows of the famous senile city. Gene Wolfe's city, cold and crumbly, is ostensibly Chicago, but **Free Live Free** (Gollancz) steeps it in obscure warming magics until, like Mark Helprin's New York, it could be Somewhere Else altogether.

All right, I like being baffled. I like to have my own sense of the impenetrable strangeness of things confirmed and amplified by authors with imaginations much braver and more capacious than my own. Hence a loud hurrah for the subversive intelligence of Josephine Saxton, taken notice of at last and all of a sudden by British publishers. (Three more books due this year!) Meanwhile **The Power of Time** (Chatto) is an exotic and erotic, wild and witty banquet. Bleaker and more melancholoy is the mystery of Michael Carpenter's unexplained interment **In Limbo** (Granada). A cooler, more insidious presentday version of **The Prisoner**, Christopher Evans's novel of a wholly British official purgatory has been unfairly overlooked, I feel.

L.J. HURST

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS OF THE YEAR contained material over forty years old, and previously unpublished. I revelled in it. **Orwell: The War Broadcasts** and **Orwell: The War Commentaries** (Duckworth/BBC), both edited by W.J. West, are sources of new insight into Orwell's work. West writes a brilliant account of Orwell's career at the BBC (particularly the sixty page introduction to the war broadcasts) and shows the roots of Orwell's later works. There are three areas of interest: firstly, **Animal Farm** - West makes a very reasonable claim that this was conceived as a radio play rather than a prose narrative; secondly, he shows Orwell's awareness of the scientific developments of propaganda, how Orwell and the BBC worked to counter Axis propaganda and promote Allied interests, and the logic of their work (together with the bureaucracy, backstabbing and political in-fighting of the corporation and Ministry of Information); and thirdly, Orwell's active scientific interest - he had talks broadcast by people like Haldane, Bernal and Waddington. Orwell, it is becoming clearer, was never a litterateur.

In the second volume, of Weekly news round-ups, West's editorial control goes a little awry. Orwell wrote 'On sunday, July 26th, a huge meeting was held in London, to demand the opening of a second front' and west adds 'the meeting in 'Victory Square', described by Orwell in **Nineteen Eighty-Four** are obviously based on such events'. Great stuff, anyway.

The best fantasy of the year was Michael Shea's **Nifft The Lean** (Granada).

Although it was published in 1984 I have only seen **Re/Search 8/9**, the J.G. Ballard special, in the shops this year. It

is a fantastic compendium of classic and new(ish) Ballardiana. There is a very good discussion of fetishistic pornography as well as some much rarer material.

And two more books from 1984, both published by Pluto - **A Haunt of Fears** by Martin Barker, a discussion of 1950s horror comics and their suppression and the **The Video Nasties**, a collection of essays edited by Barker, a revelation of the mischief promoted by the censors.

Has anyone else noticed how long it takes to get books from the USA? And then get the wrong edition?

EDWARD JAMES

IT WOULD BE HIGHLY PRESUMPTUOUS OF ANYONE to name 'the five best books of 1985' relating to SF and fantasy. What is 'best'? Who has read all the relevant books? Certainly not me, particularly as I rarely read SF hardbacks. But there are a number of books that have made an impression on me, for various reasons, that have come out in one form or another this year. So I would choose Samuel R. delany's **Flight From Neveryon** (Bantam), a fascinating conclusion to what is undoubtedly the most original fantasy trilogy since Tolkien. (Partly because it is so utterly different from Tolkien. None of Tolkien's characters had AIDS, for instance.) Suzettte Haden Elgin's **Native Tongue**(Women's Press), because of its beautifully drawn characters, superb aliens and very interesting ideas on language. Terry Pratchett's **The Colour of Magic**(Corgi), because it's very funny and because I've known him for a very long time and he's kill me if I didn't mention it. (Thus Pratchett wins over Ryman.) Somtow Sucharitkul's **Utopia Hunters** (Bantam), because it is rather better than the 1985 conclusion to his 'Chronicles of the High Inquest', and because people shouldn't be snobbish about well-written space-opera. And **The Cambridge Atlas of Astronomy**, one of the most beautifully produced and illustrated books I own, and I suspect, a source of information and inspiration for a long time to come.

TOM A. JONES

FIRST NON-FICTION, THE WIZARDS OF Armageddon (Simon & Schuster) by Frank Kaplan, the history of military operational research and systems in the USA related to nuclear weapons. A fascinating book, told in an interesting and, on the whole, unbiased way. The characters are human with all that implies in terms of ego and self-doubt. Most books about nuclear warfare are coloured/biased by the personal views of the author. **Wizards of Armageddon** gives you the documented facts and only in the very last chapters do any signs of authorial opinion appear. This is a must for anyone who wants to understand something about this topic without having to rely on newspapers, CND tracts or government handouts.

Tim Powers' **the Anubis Gates** (Chatto) is a time travel romp which mixes together Egyptian magic, literary figures and the 19th century denizens of London's beggars' world. The novel is pyrotechnic, I haven't read anything like it since Zelazny and Delany at their best. The book isn't without faults, for instance the writing occasionally stutters, but it's only a minor distraction. Keep a lookout out for Tim Powers, he's good now and he could be something really special.

I didn't think I'd find anything more enjoyable this year than **The Anubis Gates**, until I read Lucius Shepard's **Green Eyes**. Whilst I didn't enjoy it more I do think it's a 'better'book. There's an atmosphere and a pace to the writing which belies Mr Shepard's relative inexperience. At a secret US research station the use of a virus allows the resurrection of the dead. But these reanimated bodies are not the same people who died, some have enhanced abilities and perhaps strange powers. The penalty they pay is the green glowing eyes and a short life. One of the 'patients' escapes and we follow his attempt to understand himself and his powers, to make sense of the strange world he dreams about. And mixed into this tale of scientific zombies we have the old voodoo religion and its gods. The book captures the sinister atmosphere of that dying landscape which is the swampland and bayous of the southeast USA.

From two new writers to an established one, Brian Aldiss. I'm never sure if I'm →

1 9 BOOKS OF THE YEAR 8 5

going to like Mr Aldiss' stories but **Helliconia Spring** was excellent, many fine stories within a broad tapestry. **Helliconia Summer** (Granada) doesn't have the same time span but the detail is still there as is the breadth of characterisation and variety of character. Add to this the exploration of the relationship between Earth, the Earth observation station above Helliconia and Helliconia itself and we have another rich and complex novel.

That's only four books, unfortunately nothing else came up to this standard. But I regret not having read William Gibson's **Neuromancer**, Geoff Ryman's **The Warrior Who Carried Life**, and Robert Holdstock's **Mythago Wood.**

PAUL KINCAID

1985 HAS BEEN A REMARKABLE YEAR. IN ANY other year I would have been happy to include within my selection of my favourite books of the year: **Night Voices** by Robert Aickman, **The House of the Spirits** by Isabel Allende, **Helliconia Winter** by Brian Aldiss, **Illywhacker** by Peter Carey, **The Book of Being** by Ian Watson, **The Anubis Gates** by Tim Powers, a splendid children's novel, **Michael And The Secret War** by Cassandra Golds, and **A Maggot** by John Fowles. As it is, however, the books I consider the 'best' of the year almost chose themselves, so vividly do they stand out in my memory.

The book of the year has to be **Hawksmoor** (Hamish Hamilton) by Peter Ackroyd, a strange and haunting tale of resonances that cross time. The character, in particular, of Nicholas Dyer, whose dark personality finds expression in the churches built by the real Nicholas Hawksmoor, is one of the most powerful in contemporary fiction; and the writing, especially the successful pastiche of 18th century literary style, is almost flawless.

Hawksmoor is one of those books where the mainstream takes to itself the tropes and symbols of SF; safely within the SF realm however is **Kiteworld** (Gollancz) by Keith Roberts. All the familiar Roberts obsessions are here, the church-ridden state, the minutiae of strange mechanisms, minds at the end of their tether, and the fate of ordinary people caught on the fringes of great events. It is familiar ground, and yet fresh, achieving the same power as **Pavane** and **The Chalk Giants.**

Roberts is one of the finest writers in British SF, but perhaps an even greater stylist is M.John Harrison, and his new collection, **Viriconium Nights** (Granada), reveals him at his best. Taut, dark, disturbing, yet full of colour (though it may be faded or sickly), and full of life (though on the brink of death). This is a book to be savoured.

Allen & Unwin, now that they have discovered that fantasy is not just Tolkien, have recently established an impressive record for introducing new writers. Hot on the heels of Gwyneth Jones comes the first novel from Geoff Ryman, **The Warrior Who Carried Life** (Allen & Unwin). It is flawed, perhaps overly violent, and the plot advances in a rush, but there is undeniable power here, and real talent.

And finally **Free Live Free** (Gollancz) by Gene Wolfe, just to prove that there is life after the New Sun, and pretty impressive life at that. An original fantasy that is by turns touching and very funny.

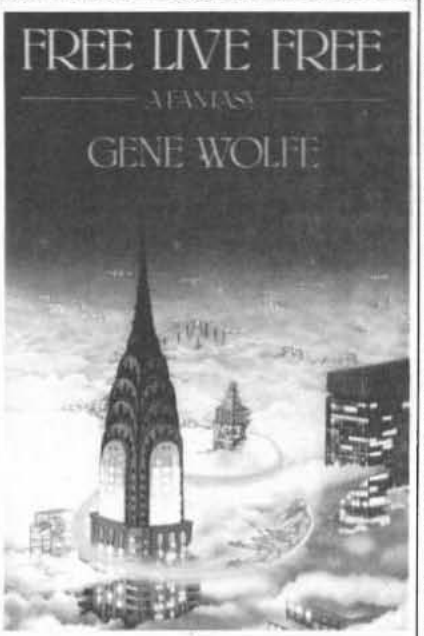
HELEN McNABB

I SHALL HAVE TO START READING BOOKS IN THE year in which they are first published because again I haven't read many of the possible 'best books'. However, of the ones I have read, two nominate themselves: **The Warrior Who Carried Life** (Allen & Unwin) by Geoff Ryman is a gripping, vividly imaginative book full of enough ideas to fill four novels and so intensely readable that I finished it in a sitting. **Divine Endurance** (Allen & Unwin) by Gwyneth Jones is harder work, less immediately exciting, but the two central characters of Cho and Divine Endurance have stayed with me like living people I met a few months ago. Both these books are original creations, different enough to call attention to themselves and good enough to stand stern scrutiny and bounce back smiling.

Of the rest I thought volume One of the Fionavar Tapestry by Guy Gavriel Kay, called **The Summer Tree** (Allen & Unwin), promising. I'm looking forward to the next book and just hope he can sustain and develop it into something more than just another fantasy trilogy. In the to-be-read pile is **Hawksmoor** by Peter Ackroyd which sounds hopeful. Of the books I've read many were entertaining, many were competent, some were dreadful, but very few, depressingly few, were outstanding. It does make me wonder whether I'm reading the wrong books.

MARTIN TAYLOR

1985 WAS NOT A PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE YEAR



for 'new' novels. For me two 'alternate' histories and one 'alternate' present stand out. Joseph Heller's **God Knows** (Black Swan) is a bravura improvisation on some of the things you're liable to read in the Bible, an 'autobiography' of David which is deeply flawed but, in its bull, balls and bluster, has a coarse vitality which shines like Pharos Lighthouse in these literally ennervated days. J.G. Ballard's **Empire Of The Sun** (Granada) is entirely different, as corosive and unsettling as ever with all the Ballardian tropes but allied to a linear narrative and a scaldingly accurate child's eye view of hell - if the child is called Ballard, that is. A very important novel. Mr. Golding meet Mr. Ballard. My opinion is that Christopher Priest may well join such elevated company, and **The Glamour** (Arena) is a long step on from his previous work. This too has an atypically strong narrative strand and, like **Empire Of The Sun** is a much easier read than his previous novels. The language particularly appeals to me as being utterly appropriate to his visually oriented characters, a literary technique all too often ignored in this logorreic era. Both Ballard and Priest have been known for providing hard reading, as had Ian Watson. His **The Book Of Being** (Gollancz) finally took his trilogy up its metaphysical/metaphorical orifice, as expected, but retained the vigour and entertainment of its predecessors.

Watson writes fractal equations, recursive but beautiful and always interesting. Two writers have come to my attention this year, much to my pleasure. Tim Powers' **The Anubis Gates**(chatto & Windus) may be geographically wayward in places but his irreverent blend of literary joke and madcap magic grips and entertains, and the narrative gallops along. Denis Johnston's post-holocaust fantasy, **Fiskadoro** (Chatto & Windus), is odd and imaginative and static by comparison, but his muscular, poetic prose is an example to us all. One lesson both Powers and Johnston could learn from Messrs Ballard, Priest and Watson is the importance of the end to any novel,even if that ending may be flexible.

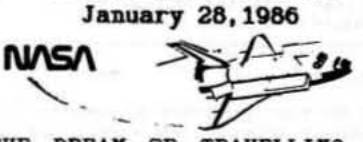
SUE THOMASON

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN FIVE BOOKS WORTHY OF selection this year, have there? Or if there have, I haven't read them, and probably won't for another couple of years. SF is dead.

Excellent Books of the Year are **The Warrior Who Carried Life** (Allen & Unwin, Geoff Ryman, **The Dragon Waiting**, John M. Ford, and **The Final Reflection**, John M. Ford. These are respectively a 'literary' fantasy, a popular alternate history, and an original Star Trek novelisation. Only the last is really SF, and we all know that we are supposed to despise anything to do with Star Trek, for God's sake.

The Book of the Year which is closest to my heart, and which damn well ought to be in here as an Excellent Book, but isn't, is the Women's Press anthology **Despatches From The Frontiers Of The Female Mind** (now generally referred to as either **Despatches** or 'that book with the silly title'). The Women's Press series of women's SF strikes me as being the most exciting development in SF publishing for years. Support British Women's SF! Yay, yay! So what do we get? We get reprints. We get American reprints. We get some very good fantasy and ONE not-wonderful British SF original novel. And **Despatches.** This is IT, girls. Support this or nothing. And please, PLEASE, will you for crying out loud get writing? Maureen, Ros, Sharon, Margaret, Mary, By, this means you. I guess it means me as well, though God knows there are better writers than me around, but I promise to TRY...

CHALLENGER
January 28, 1986



THE DREAM OF TRAVELLING IN space has been with mankind for millenia. We remember two women and five men who pursued that dream and died.

BOOKS

REVIEWS EDITED BY
Paul Kincaid

GALAPAGOS - Kurt Vonnegut
[Cape, 1985, 269pp, £9.50]
Reviewed by Colin Greenland

THE THING IS, KURT VONNEGUT HAS WRITTEN another novel.

It begins like this:

The thing was:

One million years ago, back in A.D. 1986, Guayaquil was the chief seaport of the little South American democracy of Ecuador, whose capital was Quito, high in the Andes Mountains.

It ends like this:

"You'll learn," he said. "You'll learn, you'll learn."

In between, the human race dies out, all but two handfuls, ten survivors, shipwrecked on the Galapagos island of Santa Rosalia. These are the survivors: six little cannibals from Ecuador, all girls; a pregnant Japanese and her female lover; an elderly biology mistress; and one man, the ship's captain, who is so authoritarian and incompetent that only the biology mistress can abide his company.

Two ill-picked handfuls, you might think. Or, you might think, two well-picked handfuls; depending on who picked them, if anyone, and what they picked them for, if anything.

Tiddley pom.

The thing is this:

Kurt Vonnegut picked them.

He picked them to be in his new novel, which is a science fiction novel. Like all good science fiction novels, it happens in the future, next year, as he wrote it, this year, as you read this, a million years ago, so the story goes. Like all good science fiction novels, it's about science, about Darwin's theory of evolution, which takes a million years to prove, in the Galapagos, which is where he first thought of it. Like all good science fiction novels, it's about what it takes to be human.

Listen: this is what it takes to be human.

Not much.

It doesn't take much more to be human than it takes to be a seal. All the rest, civilization and religion, dentistry and cocktails and science fiction novels and Dresden and Vietnam, all that is surplus baggage. Not required on the voyage. The thing is, our brains are too big. our big brains, says Kurt Vonnegut, are like the antlers of the Irish elk, which grew so large they kept it from grazing. It couldn't even use those antlers to fight with, they were so over-developed.

The Irish elk survived for two and a half million years.

So it goes.

Kurt Vonnegut hasn't yet survived for two and a half million years. He only feels as if he has. It's as much as he can do to raise a wheezy chuckle. It's as much as he can do to raise an eyebrow. That's the weight of that big brain, dragging him down. He'd be better off as a seal. Instead, he has to be a novelist.

Being a novelist is a stupid, unnecessary, superfluous thing to be. Look at Kilgore Trout. You can be right about everything, civilization and Dresden and the meaning of evolution, right all the way down the line for a million years and more, but it doesn't matter a damn. You get ignored. Or else you get rich, and published by Dell and Jonathan Cape, and taught on college courses. Either way, it doesn't help. Every word you write excites that old big brain, which just adds to the mess. What happens is, you accidentally evolve Douglas Adams. Douglas Adams accidentally evolves people who carry towels everywhere and have arguments with hotel managers. Old hippies with new haircuts sneer at your latest books.

And then your editor rings you up and says, Hi, Kurt, how about another novel?

What do you do?

This is what you do:

You make up a story. You make up a stupid story, because stories are stupid things. You make up people who are stupid and warm and wonderful and mean and damaged and only really there half the time. Then you force them through stupid, delightful, heartbreaking routines, because that's how people act, and anyway they're not people, just things you made up. Then, just in case anybody should get too carried away with your stupid story which really isn't worth sour apples, you break it all into little bits. You put bits from the end at the beginning, so nobody will worry what's going to happen. You put bits from the beginning at the end, because everybody likes to have something to look forward to. You put in lots of big questions and little answers, to keep everyone comfortably on edge. You put in some jokes and some genocide, some schmaltz and some sermons and snippets of poetry, until it looks like the 'Reader's Digest Book of Atrocities. Norman Rockwell Paints Auschwitz'. Which is more important? Who can tell any more?

The thing is this: you do it just the way God does it, like a bad science fiction writer. You have this in common with God too: Whatever you do, they'll misunderstand it.

Thomas M. Disch, another master of haute cuisine sweet and sour science fiction, will say this:

"Vonnegut's genius is for satire on the broadest Voltairean lines... He is a master debunker, a superb monologuist, an ingenious farceur, and has a quick and wicked tongue." Thomas Disch understands the cookery of Kurt Vonnegut so well he mistakes it for his own. "A foxy novelist," says Thomas Disch, "will never let himself be caught by the hounds of criticism".

John Sutherland is a master of hounds, an English professor working in America. This is what he will say:

"At the heart of **Galapagos** is an exhausted misanthropy trying unsuccessfully to change its mind."

But Kurt Vonnegut isn't a fox, or a wolf. He's only too clever to be a seal. He lies on the harsh volcanic beach of the modern world, in a position of comfortable moral helplessness. he looks up at us with those soft eyes, that walrus moustache.

God damn it, you've got to be kind. You've got to be kind. God damn it.

IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET - H.G. Wells
(Introduction by Brian Aldiss)
[The Hogarth Press, 1985, 249pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Jim England

OF THE MANY INTERESTING THINGS BRIAN ALDISS has to say in his Introduction to **In The Days of The Comet**, I noted the following: 'Wells wanted to be happy, that most immodest of ambitions'; 'By 1906 Wells was extremely famous in a way that writers these days are not... went travelling about the world, enjoying intercourse of one kind or another with presidents and prostitutes... eternally lively and curious. A natural advocate of free love'; 'Wells was essentially rather a simple person (and)...put forward his less-than-simple plans for mankind, generally in the expectation that they would be immediately taken up'; and 'Since **In The Days Of The Comet** was not well received when it first appeared, as frequently happens when visionary books are set before a largely unprepared public, it seems appropriate to offer a new reading of the novel to a new set of readers'.

Why 'appropriate'? Well, almost eighty years have passed and Halley's comet is now (as it was then) hurrying near, like Time's winged chariot.

It felt strange to be re-reading the novel for the first time since the distant days of adolescence. I remembered it as a rather boring novel (or novella) greatly inferior to Wells's best work: the first half not even remotely science fictional, the second half a pseudo-scientific fantasy about the effects upon mankind of whiffs of comet vapour. Indeed, there are gassy passages towards the end that must rank among the worst H.G. Wells ever wrote. But, strangely, I liked the book much better on re-reading.

The first half, set around the turn of the century, starts off with a detailed description of the room in which Willie Leadford tells his story: the wallpaper, floorboards, grate, lamp, a 'table that behaved with a mulish vindictiveness to any knee that was thrust beneath it suddenly. Leadford tells how he storms across England in pursuit of the girl he loves and her lover. He sees himself as a member of a sick society comparable with our own in many ways: the same process of 'uglification' goes on, thanks to 'crass materialism', humanity is 'choked amidst its products' and the world of thought is 'choked with obsolete inadequate formulae'. There is a miners' strike.

Then comes the Change, miraculously, to a time of 'peace on earth and good will to all men'. Afterwards, the sun seems to shine all the time for no apparent reason. It is not at all clear how humanity is changed. Wells hints that people have become more 'cool-headed' but they still have emotions. In fact, they have all become more like himself - or as he would have liked to be. Even the women have become more like himself, although Wells generalizes in a few places about the inherent psychological differences between men and women in a manner that would nowadays be viewed as controversial. After the Change, even pig-headed politicians formerly puffed up with self-importance and full of 'guarded watchfulness' become more like himself in being good-hearted and able to listen to the voice of reason - a highly improbable circumstance. But Wells had written on the theme of a better world in **A Modern Utopia** only a year before and perhaps he had become briefly tired of it. His genius shows itself not only in what he wrote but in the astounding rate at which he wrote.

The fact that Wells wanted happiness and was seldom able to find it, despite all his enviable fame and perseverance, suggests that happiness is hard to find. And if it is hard for a single individual, how much harder it must be to realise, even on paper, in Utopia. Wells's hopes for a World State and his advocacy of free love now seem very dated; he was unrealistic about the former and rather blinkered as regards the latter. As to whether or not he was 'rather a simple person' as Aldiss claims, perhaps the world would be a better

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place if we were all as simple. Wells would have liked many complications of the simple truth to be swept away. He was very open, as a person can be who has little of which he need be ashamed, and he was child-like in the best sense: as used to describe scientists humble enough to sit down before the truth.

This book is worth reading and re-reading, not because of any vision of Utopia or any special brilliance of the prose, but because of his account of the time at which he wrote, because of the similarities between this time and ours, and because of who Wells was.

THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY - THE ORIGINAL RADIO SCRIPTS - Douglas Adams
[Pan, 1985, 249pp, £4.99]
Reviewed by Paul Brazier

A few years ago, someone bought me a copy of **The Goon Show Scripts**. I never read it. But then, I was never much of a goon-fan. I am a hitcher-fan, and know all twelve episodes of the radio serial nearly by heart. Reading this book adds little to a brilliant idea. Constantly while re-encountering well-loved comedic gems I was forced to realise that the comedy lies as much in the performance as in the words on the page - and that Douglas Adams was correct, in writing the novels, to completely retell the stories.

Apart from this negative reaction, it was interesting to see the out-takes, at least one of which made sense of an episode which had been incomprehensible to me before. But the real value of this book lies in the anecdotes of the genesis of ideas, scripts and performances. It is interesting also to learn that a sperm whale is suddenly called into existence only to splatter on the surface of an alien planet a few moments later as a direct reaction to the thoughtless killing-off of minor characters in more stereotyped media fiction; that John Lloyd was responsible for such words as 'anaconda', 'ningi' and 'prehensile'; and that Douglas Adams is responsible for sound effects' directions which actually appear to be even more insa. than the effects called for. However, as each such explanatory note rarely exceeds a page of type for each episode, £4.99 seems rather a lot for a dozen or see anecdotes padded out with useless printings of words most of us have by heart already.

To return to **The Goon Show Scripts**, it was bought for me by a well-meaning person who didn't know me or the goons very well except by reputation, and who thought we might entertain each other. I suspect that this is also the market this book is aimed at, and that there is no serious intent behind its publication beyond making money. As 'Vector' readers look for more in publishing that mere capitalism, my only conclusion can be that I ought to stop wasting your time with it.

FOOTFALL - Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle
[Gollancz, 1985, 465pp, £9.95]
Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

HARD SF WRITERS ARE CERTAINLY FEELING aggressive nowadays, whether storming the best-seller charts or attacking fellow writers who do not happen to share their dogmas.

Heavily promoted, reputedly sold for a few not unadjacent to the cost of a probe, **Footfall** is to be found in large stacks in Smiths. There are certainly elements of the best-seller in its execution: fat, replete with sufficient characters to need a preliminary list; episodic enough to encourage those of limited concentration; and centrally concerned with an interrelated group of well-to-do preppie females, which gives it the sort of manipulate **Lace**-like quality that cannot harm sales at all.

As for the SF writers: since the Earth is menaced by an alien invasion, whom else would the general in charge of defending the good old US of A call in? Ah, but not all writers are welcome; thus a small-talking journalist remarks, while palpating his mistress's breasts, on the disappearance from public view of these writers: 'Well, not all of them. The ones who make up their own science are being interviewed all over the place. The ones who stick to real science are getting hard to find'. (p.81)

The USA is, of course, notoriously lacking in scientists capable of thinking beyond the surface of the planet. Not that any stuffy old scientist stands a chance against the charisma of these guys:

> Robert Anson leaned forward again and again everyone fell silent. I've seen generals get less respect than that, (Sergeant) Mailey thought.

(Try adding a surname to the superstar if you want identification. Other skiffy surnames that get an airing include Lafferty, Leiber and even Pournelle. A few little jokes for the cognoscenti; shucks, you shouldn't have bothered.)

Such is their success that at one stage their boss orders his assistant to offer them hot coffee and hotter (presumably) whores in return for quick results. Fortunately, we are spared the sight of preppie Jenny pimping for the Pentagon, and what her secret policeman's mind would dream up for the token woman writer (eny fule nose wimen SF writers use made-up science, chiz). After all these are pure science fiction writers.

Our authors are, of course, also pure SF writers. As such they can devastate you with scientific facts. An alien invasion causes Kansas to be destroyed by the majority of American and Russian atomic missiles. Now, you, I and the Average **Sun** reader might consider this unimaginable torrent of bombs to be somewhat detrimental to the health of whole areas of the United States; after all, there is such a thing as radiation, and sufficient to turn Kansas into a 10 years no-go area. But within a week up turns Jenny, watching bands of refugees and 'losing her lunch', which is difficult because her only protection is her gas mask. Without even that, she seems to function well enough, though it's all dreadfully icky..

This, to a layman, cavalier attitude extends to the people camped in a bomb shelter a short distance from a naval base. Now, a mere twenty megaton bomb destroys everything within a twelve-mile radius and is dangerous within a massively bigger range. As Dresden proved, under conventional attack, bomb shelters may make it worse in a firestorm area. Yet the navy judge a five-mile area safe and plan the shelter to be used for two hours only. What are they hiding from? Oh yes,a spaceship powered by more than a thousand nuclear warheads which are let off in clusters to provide thrust. Once again, laymen may decide that, like Jules Verne's cannon, the force of gravity would tend to make not only the mission, but also its participants fall as flat as a pancake. Larry and Jerry know better. Naturally it saves the Earth.

But what is it really about?

Well, in his **F&SF** review, Algis Budrys claims it's really about the fascinating alien civilisation, for we cognoscenti anyway. Certainly Niven and Pournelle have worked hard to create a sensitive and sympathetic alien civilisation, even if it is all based on a usurped earlier culture. However, even in this they make one unreasonable proposition - it is implied that the members of this civilisation cannot lie. Since lying is inseparable from the imaginative construction necessary for scientific and philosophical progress, this is plainly tommyrot. You cannot evolve with that kind of blinker on the mind's eye. However, it is the author's eye which must cause us greater concern. Picture a parachuting, upright, two-trunked elephant, wearing red platform shoes. The problem for any defence would be reviving the hysterical before they hit the ground. And they expect the reader to take this seriously?

A reader hot from the Land of the Free might just be more inclined to see the Real Point of It All as being the usual propaganda disguised as art. Only the Americans halt an invasion, only they fight back when the white South Africans (God bless us all!) are surrendering and finally only they save the world from the menace. What about the rest of the world? The Russians are the only Europeans worth a mention. There are a couple of good Russians on Earth and they ensure Soviet co-operation in the bombing of Kansas, for which one is shot. After this, the whole lot disappear from the book, as plainly not worth any more attention. There is also a trio of Russians aboard the shipful of captured humans, who,because they are KGB-hating and pretty individualistic, are allowed to be okay guys. Nevertheless,the only prisoner who has any real effect on the story is an American congressman who is stalwart and takes solo action; one high-class American male is worth three Russians any day. (Blue-collar American males tend to get killed off so their women can be redistributed.)

But you would not really expect much from the Russians, since the invaders are little better than interstellar Reds anyway:

> 'Unity', Sherry said. 'They'll unite us -'
>
> '- even if it kills us', Reynolds finished.
>
> Curtis raised a clenched fist and sang off-key. 'And the Inter-nation-ale unites the hu-man race.' (p.428)

Though how he knew the tune is a mystery.

Thus the point is made couple of times that the Russians would get on well with them; it is no surprise that the Cubans in Angola are are assumed to be working for the enemy and that in whole areas of the Third World,like Africa, 'their puppet governments' are only too happy to fall in. Indeed, a reasonable reading of some of this suggests that not only is the rest of the world happier with unity rather than strife (shame!) but that the gravest concern (p.248) is to act dramatically before America becomes a third-world country itself. Not that America would surrender: they have an abusive term 'snouts", for the enemy and everybody knows America doesn't give in to 'snouts', 'gooks','greaseballs', etc.

Not all America is blameless, however. An environmentalist nearly chokes on his crow pie when the aliens invade:

> 'I was trying to stop atomic plants. I should have been screaming for atomic plants to power laser rockets! I tried to stop the Space Shuttle, damn me for a fool. They've smashed every environment on Earth! Damn you!' he shouted into the sky. 'Pour fire on the earth, pile bodies in pyramids. We can live anywhere! We'll hide in the deserts and mountain peaks and the Arctic ice cap, and one day we'll come forth to kill you all!' (p.325)

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(I let that run on to show you what fine writing and realistic speech they're capable of; 'Come forth', eh? Some inferiors might have contented themselves with 'strike back' or even 'return' - not these masters.

The environmentalist does get to do something for this individualistic society though,when he drowns the investigative journalist, who is poking his nose into military secrets. The people may be free but don't necessarily need to be informed; nor does it make much difference that the country is in such a state that newspaper publication is inconceivable, let alone the journalist's coveted Pulitzer Prize. No, he just has to go.

That sort of inconsistency is endemic to the book. The authors may have thought through some effects of the aliens, but when they drop a meteor on Earth, the 'Foot' (as in stomp) of the title, also described as a 'dinosaur-killer', the effect is only to trigger off bursts of rhetoric, such as that of the environmentalist quoted above. Thecrucial Navy seaport, for example, seems to have had not even one extra high tide. Clearly Russians, the environmental effects of a meteor and some characters have little interest for our authors, so they're ignored or dropped. The story has been set up technically (countdowns, etc.) to be exciting and this mostly works. However, the writing is bombastic and even slack at times. even the prepared biology and the ostensibly perfect physics are as reliable as candy-floss. This may be a best-seller but by comparison, the works of Jackie Collins are well researched and stylisticallybrilliant.

SCIENCE FICTION: THE 100 BEST NOVELS - David Pringle
[Xanadu, 1985, 224pp, £9.95 hardback, £3.95 paperback]
Reviewed by Edward James

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE ALL COME ACROSS someone who's said 'I've just read **Childhood's End** (or whatever); how can I find out what other SF is worth reading?' We could have suggested **A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction**, but it was too American, too general, and pretty uncritical. Now at last we have a book that beginners in SF will find immensely useful - and old hands will have harmless fun picking holes in.

In Foundation 30 (March 1984), David Pringle reviewed Anthony Burgess' **Ninety-Nine Novels**, and included, straight off the top of his head, a list of his 99 'best' SF novels, saying 'Please don't take it seriously (but if any publisher wants to pay me to write a page of notes on each of these titles and publish it as an instant book, I'd be happy to oblige!)' Well, here it is, and the 100 Best bear a very close resemblance to that impromptu 99 Best:he's only dropped thirteen, by those such as Vance, Tiptree, McIntyre, Kavan, Compton. In one case he explains why: he re-read Anderson's **Brain Wave** and discovered 'just how ill-written and patchy it is' (p.121). By a simple mathematical calculation, you can see that he's added fourteen new titles: some of these include substitutions of other works by the same author, thus **The Dream Master** and not **This Immortal**; **Nova** not **The Einstein Intersection**. He admits that about ten made it to the list not because he especially liked them, but for the sake of balance and variety.

Hole-picking in a list like this is fairly easy. There's the inclusion of the odd item, or the omission of another, that will annoy some. But hole-picking is rash and really rather pointless. None of us, after all, can have read everything (I confess to having read only 85 of these 100) and few of us have David Pringle's great knowledge of the field and almost puritanical pursuit of the Good. It's a personal choice, of course, 'but I would not be so foolish as to claim that I have been wholly uninfluenced by the critical consensus on modern SF'. Thus, the most frequently selected authors are Dick (6 times),Ballard (4), and Aldiss, Disch and, yes, Heinlein (3 each). (I certainly wouldn't have chosen **Have Spacesuit - Will Travel** as one of Heinlein's best, but perhaps I should re-read it...) The 100 books range from 1949 (**Nineteen-Eighty-Four**) to 1984 (**Neuromancer**), with each full decade represented by about 28 books. Perhaps half of them are obvious choices: who could leave out **The Demolished Man, Fahrenheit 451, More than Human, Flowers for Algernon, Stand on Zanzibar** or **Dune**? (Though, in the latter case, Pringle clearly would have liked to.) And it is nice to see the appearance of some that moved Pringle to tears when he first read them in his teens, and of some less predictable choices: Leiber's **The Wanderer**, Crowley's **Engine Summer**, Priest's **Inverted World** or Niven and Pournelle's **Oath of Fealty**.

The actual list, of course, is much less important than what Pringle does with it. The books are arranged in chronological order. Each has two pages of comment and criticism, followed by brief bibliographical details. A hundred book reviews, then, but each review is approached and treated in a different way, so reading the book from beginning to end is not a tedious process. The beginner will learn a lot about the books in question, and about the development of SF over the last 37 years (guided by a short but excellent introduction); the seasoned reader will be informed by Pringle's perceptive criticism, and, like me, impelled by waves of nostalgia to go back to fondly-remembered books.

SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE IN BRITAIN 1890-1950 - Brian Stableford
[Fourth Estate, 1985, 372pp, £19.50]
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

WITH SO MANY BOOKS BEING WRITTEN THESE DAYS on all aspects of SF it is unusual - and very pleasant - to find one that breaks new ground. Brian Stableford's subject is completely original: while other authors have dealt (almost ad nauseam) with H.G. Wells, virtually nothing of any consequence has been written about the other British writers of SF during this period. (It is coincidental that another very fine work on British SF, Darko Suvin's **Victorian Science Fiction in the UK: the Discourses of Knowledge and Power**, G.K. Hall, 1983, complements the present volume with very little overlap.

Stableford defines scientific romance as that separate tradition of SF which grew up in Britain and remained separate, owing nothing to the US tradition of pulp magazines. While Wells is far and away its best known practitioner, it is a sub-genre full of good, interesting writers, most of whom have been unjustly ignored for decades, and some of whom are unknown even to historians of SF.

Among the more major writers with whom Stableford deals are M.P. Shiel, Arthur Conan Doyle, Olaf Stapledon and C.S. Lewis, with perhaps ten pages each of biography, critical analysis, relevant plot summaries and their relevance to the development of scientific romance. Paradoxically, though, the similar sections on (or briefer references to) lesser writers are more valuable because they are largely the result of original research. Stableford has corresponded with the author (in the case of John Gloag) or obtained letters and unpublished manuscripts (from the families of S.Fowler Wright and Neil Bell) or has otherwise broken new ground, uncovering links and trends never previously noted. For example, at least ten writers of scientific romance had fathers who were clergymen, and who rebelled against parental influence to become freethinkers - too large a number to be coincidental, and indicative both of the declining faith of the times and of the inherently iconoclastic nature of the field of literature to which they were drawn.

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O B I T U A R Y

L. RON HUBBARD
1911–1986

MANY SF WRITERS HAVE created new religions in their fiction. Only one did so in reality.

L.Ron Hubbard, whose book **Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health** (1950) led to the founding of the church of Scientology, died in California on Friday 24th of January, of a brain haemorrhage. He was 74.

Hubbard was not one of the *great* names of SF and fantasy, but he was a significant writer in the 1940s, with stories published mainly in **Unknown** and **Astounding**. Much of his work, anticipating his later psychological and religious teaching, was about mental development, leading to superhumans.

He wrote no SF from c.1950 to 1984, when his epic **Battlefield Earth** was published. Like some other aging SF writers, his earlier talent appeared to have dissipated, and the book was consistently panned by the critics.

Nevertheless, to quote Edward James (**Vector 122**), in the founding of Scientology L.Ron Hubbard was "the SF writer who has had more of an impact on the non-SF world than perhaps any other."

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The book is not one of unmitigated adulation. Obviously Stableford would not have written about these authors at all had he not admired some of their work and been interested in the theories that they tried to advance as part of their fiction, but, in the grand tradition of his fearless book reviews, he is not afraid to be honest. Thus he refers to George Griffith as 'inept', as a writer who only achieved great success with **The Angel of the Revolution** because he was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. Elsewhere he says of Olaf Stapledon: 'Storytelling was definitely not his forte, and there are sections in all his books that are awkward to the point of risibility'. On the other hand, he puts forward strong arguments for the upgrading (to the status of important writers) of M.P. Shiel and S.Fowler Wright.

Among the 'unknowns' dealt with here are Muriel Jaeger, Owen Gregory, Fenton Ash and Guy Dent - all of whom produced worthwhile novels that can be read with enjoyment today, if one can find copies. (Surely there is an enterprising publisher somewhere in Britain or the US who is willing to reissue a few of these works?) Additionally, the book covers some of the predictive non-fiction of the period, a subject rarely touched on by other critical works, and including original commentary on the highly influential 'Today and Tomorrow' booklets published between 1924 and 1930.

No book is perfect, and this one has several small faults. There is occasional unnecessary repetition of information (sometimes within a couple of pages) as if the text had been written in piecemeal sections and not properly edited. Also, it is rather frustrating bibliographically, since the date of publication of mentioned books tends to be given only once and not necessarily at the first mention.

Not only is **Scientific Romance in Britain** a rigorous work of scholarship, fully referenced and indexed, but it is interestingly written, as one would expect from an accomplished novelist. It is an excellent book for anybody interested in the history of SF, intelligible to the layman yet academic and informative enough to be useful to the most knowledgeable of readers. It is probably the best work of criticism published in the field of SF this year.

THE NEEDLE ON FULL: LESBIAN FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION - Caroline Forbes
[Onlywomen Press, 1985, 267pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Sue Thomason

THIS IS A COLLECTION OF NINE STORIES FROM A press who present themselves as 'radical feminist and lesbian publishers'. Initially I had considerable trouble in forming an unbiased opinion of the quality of Forbes' work, which is neither inflatedly literary-intellectual nor slickly commercial. The stories are all set in close-to-home futures, and their primary concern is the spectrum of possible emotional relationships and links between women. Men appear only as stereotyped evildoers, representative of the destructive forces of patriarchal dominance. The subcreated backgrounds of most stories are not described in great detail, being subordinate to their main purpose, which is the depiction of present-day lesbian radical feminist lifestyles and attitudes in a thin sugar-coating of fiction.

The first thing that struck me about these stories was how spare they seemed in comparison to other fantasy and science fiction I'd read on similar topics. 'London Fields', for example, depicts a post-collapse collective of women living in an abandoned and disintegrating Hackney, who are threatened by the existence of a small group of surviving men. The story's solution to the Men Problem seems both simplistic and drastic when compared with, say, the relations between women and men in Sally M. Gearhart's **The Wanderground**. And although the realistic aspects of relations between women are well described, the stories have a tendency to gloss over problematic but important details of the scientific background necessary for good SF. For example, in 'London Fields' the problem of how women without men can reproduce their species is sidestepped - women who wish to become pregnant simply do so, conveniently and mysteriously. This looks suspiciously like a failure of imagination when compared to the Whileaway fiction of Joanna Russ. I also suffered a failure of belief when confronted with the convenient (and never fully explained) gravity lurches in 'The Comet's Tail', the longest story in the collection, which deals with the changing emotional dynamics between two astronauts on a twenty-year mission.

The most powerful and successful stories in Forbes' collection, for me, were not those which looked at the standard themes of SF through lesbian feminist spectacles, but the fantasies, which were more story than statement. The short-short 'Transplant', for example, is a beautifully understated horror story, which doesn't contain a single redundant word. The revenge story 'Snake', and 'Night Life', which combines the timelines of several different women in a near-alternative world, were also works which read more like stories than statements of ideology.

This all led me to the conclusion that Forbes is a writer of lesbian feminist fiction first, and science fiction second, and that this is a shame from the science fiction reader's point of view, particularly as all the other fiction I have been comparing Forbes with is American. I know of no good reason why British writers shouldn't be able to produce lesbian feminist SF (or fantasy) which appeals to a wide readership, except that as far as I know, we haven't. Forbes' book is therefore a necessary first statement, a disappointment and a challenge; the thing has been said, it remains to say it well.

BLACK VENUS - Angela Carter
[Chatto & Windus, 1985,121pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by L.J. Hurst

THE STORIES IN THIS COLLECTION APPEARED IN sources as various as Interzone, Vogue, and the London Review of Books. Yet they appear to be more essays - essays of an impressionistic kind - than simple fictions. Three of them deal with real people: 'Black Venus' is an account of Mauritian-born Jeanne Duval, one of Baudelaire's mistresses and inspirations; 'The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe' deals with his dementia; and 'The Fall River Axe Murders' is a study of Lizzie Borden (who, contrary to the impression given by the story, was found Not Guilty of murder). Several of the other stories seem to have been inspired by real incidents - 'Peter and the Wolf' is an account of a child growing up feral with a wolf pack, and 'Our Lady of the Massacre' deals with a Moll Flanders figure in an early American settlement. Only 'A Kitchen Child' and 'Overture and Incidental Music for a Midsummer Night's Dream' are fantasies.

These stories, then, combine two elements - a brevity and conciseness of detail at the same time as an easy impressionism. None of Angela Carter's work has a narrative tightness, plotting tends to disappear if it ever exists. Her two SF-influenced works, **The Infernal Desires Machine of Dr. Hoffman** and **The Passion of New Eve** both lack the idea of narrative resolution. And reading her first volume of short stories, **Fireworks**, shows that she has not changed her style. Can it be explained?

Angela Carter sees any incident as implying much more - any incident that would be the whole purpose in the telling of someone else's stories, to her is only a part. Her best explanation of this theory is her book **The Sadeian Woman**. There, in chapters analysing De Sade's three major works, she describes the social, personal and universal significance of the incidents in De Sade's pornography. There is nothing pornographic or erotic about **Black Venus** but it uses the same method: that any everyday act is an expression of something much wider and more general.

This can be seen in a couple of paragraphs from 'Our Lady of the Massacre' (the woman has just had to knife a master violating her):

> 'The gardener, being a good-natured kind of Negro man and slave hisself, and hisself tickled once too often by the overseer's whip, cannot forbear to laugh but says to me: "Then you must be off into the wilderness, Sal and cast your fate to the tender mercies of the savage Indian. For this is a hanging matter."
>
> He gives me his handkerchief with his bit of dinner in it and a tinder-box he had about him, which I stowed away in my apron pocket, and I shew the plantation a clean pair of heels, I can tell you, adding to my list of crimes that most heinous: escape from bondage.'

In the much more impressionistic 'Black Venus' the same notion appears. Jeanne Duval is treated as both the perfect example of Baudelaire's alienated life, and as an example of what modern life may do to anyone (especially a woman). Carter supposes that Duval engaged in certain activities with, and for, Baudelaire.

> 'Now, however, after a few crazy seasons in the clouds with him, she sometimes asked herself if she'd played her cards right. If she was going to have to dance naked to earn her keep, anyway, why shouldn't she dance naked for hard cash in hand and earn enough to keep herself? Eh? Eh?
>
> But then, the very thought of organizing a new career made her yawn. Dragging herself around madames and music halls and so on; what an effort. And how much to ask? She had only the haziest notion of her own use value.'

This final allusion to the Marxist interpretation of affairs is not a suggestion that it is the only interpretation possible. Later on, the story denies that it is about the economic suppression of races, though certainly they are repressed, and expands the idea of repression - as Baudelaire escapes it, so by his escape Duval is caught:

> 'Therefore you could say, not so much that Jeanne did not understand the lapidary, troubled serenity of her lover's poetry but, that it was a perpetual affront to her. He recited it to her by the hour and she ached, raged and chafed under it because his eloquence denied her language. [She did not speak French well.] The greatest poet of alienation stumbled upon the perfect stranger; theirs was a match made in heaven. In his heart, he must have known this.'

One of the features that completes our

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image of Baudelaire is the syphilis. If he was to enter into a relationship with anyone, the syphilis would pass. Consequently, as Jeanne Duval has participated in, experienced herself, and been infected by, so 'Until at last, in extreme old age, she succumbs to the ache in her bones and a cortege of grieving girls takes her to the churchyard, she will continue to dispense to the most privileged of the colonial administration at a not excessive price, the veritable, the authentic, the true Baudelairean syphilis.' In these quotations we can see Angela Carter's method of expanding an incident - 'use value' and 'alienation' are terms from Marxist theory found to be literally true. But the infection of Baudelairean syphilis is little to do with pathology, it is the state of mind associated with it, the modern mind that accepts its occurrence in those circumstances. Someone like Baudelaire, vaguely aware of what was/is going on, is likely to be destroyed in the becoming aware.

Yet this awareness is nothing to be enjoyed, as the story 'Peter-and the Wolf' shows - a peasant boy going to town meets his sister, as they drink at a river, long after she has become feral, her mind now a wolf's mind. They do not even have humanity in common anymore. And he realises that it is the circumstances that allowed him to develop as he has done that are also responsible for his sister's condition. Yet he has to moderate this consciousness as he decides never to return to his mountain birthplace - 'If I look back again', he thought with a last gasp of superstitious terror, 'I shall turn into a pillar of salt'. The boy's mind is mis-shaped as well as his sister's.

Angela Carter described her first volume of tales as having 'a singular moral function - that of provoking unease'. It is one that she has retained in this collection. Her method is universally applicable.

INSIDE BABEL - Snoo Wilson
[Chatto & Windus, 1985, 208pp, £3.95]
Reviewed by Nik Morton

THIS BOOK'S BLURB - MUST WE REALLY TAKE notice of them? - states that this second novel by Snoo Wilson is wickedly hilarious spoof SF. It is a little reminiscent of the 60s book, **Candy**, and has the flavour of an updated Candide with undertones of both Vonnegut Jnr and Ballard. The humour, for the most part, seemed strained; there was an overabundance of sex which implied that it you want to be 'wickedly hilarious' you must mention genitalia. I forgot which reviewer in the 'London Review of Books', commented on Tom Sharpe's success; he succeeds because he is not unafraid to show the ridiculousness of the characters in the sexual act and their antics. Snoo Wilson only achieves this once, with an aroused growth from a character's forehead, helped to coition by the female lead, Chrissie. It has its moments, but they are not often, and the philosophy is fairly thin. As satire, directed at the absurdities of the present, it does work to a certain degree. The main caution must be that if you don't like explicit sex in your SF, then don't read this; if you want to have an inkling as to what the late space age Britain might be like, then you could try this concoction. It is inevitably too fantastic, but perhaps this criticism is unfair, for if it is in fact an allegory of the present, with satire pointing up the silly attitudes held today, then it does have a right to be fantastic, just as Swift was in his **Travels**.

It is the near future, and Chrissie has been returned to Earth after floating in space following release from cryogenesis- where she had been sent along with the many unemployed, waiting for full employment. She sought fame. Here, she takes the path of Marilyn Monroe, becoming manipulated to the point where is virtually worshipped;the power of the media is shown to be corrupt, with one entrepreneur being Mudroche, which is pretty obviously Murdoch of today: 'Chrissie would never live like a normal persona again, did she realise that?'

It is clear that Wilson has read SF and probably pseudo-SF as well; there is mention of a Fortean deluge: '...an army exercise had to be abandoned after the ground had been pelted to a depth of six inches with substandard fountain pens.

Surrealism figures; one Hassan dies but his body glows, lives on and becomes a tv viewer of past events in recent and long-gone history. The viewpoint switches between characters repeatedly, which does not promote reader's sympathy in any one in particular. Indeed, the gamut of characters does not linger, even Chrissie is insubstantial, but as satire perhaps they are merely message bearers. Wilson cocks (no pun intended) a snook at Women's Liberation, at the establishment in general and in particular, at psychologists, at the ineptitude of the figureheads of corporations, where 'the corporations were the new gods'. Ultimately, though, it is a love story with the potential for a sequel - what else? Love soured by a huger for fame...A Moral book, after all?

An air of degeneration pervades the London of Snoo's future, and the state of the streets and living conditions, are reminiscent of Ballard. The future is not all clean plastic; it is tarnished and scratched, stained. The unreality of the world is brought out in the revolt of some inmates of a mental hospital, where they decide they are actually sixteenth century pirates.

On the whole, Aldiss has done it all so much better, and the puns worked. It is not worth the cover price, but it may be worth a look if it ever comes out in a mass market paperback version.

THE BADGER OF GHISSI
- Wolf von Niebelschutz
[George Allen & Unwin, 1985, 262pp, £2.95]
Reviewed by Helen McNabb

THIS BOOK IS A TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN and is the first part of a series first published in 1959. It was published here in hardback in 1963 and this Unwin edition is its first English paperback. All that is confusing enough,but not as confusing as to why this particular book is being sold as fantasy. It's true it is set in an imaginary country (Kelguria) somewhere in Southern Europe (south of Burgundy according to the map) and is about imaginary people, but those qualifications apart I should have classed it as an historical novel, it has its feet set firmly in the 12th century. Unlike le Guin's **Orsinian Tales** which have a quality of strangeness, this book has a quality of being in its historical period, it reminded me of the novels of H.M. Prescott more than of anyone from a fantasy background. To use the standard historian's excuse - the 12th century isn't my period, but nothing in the book jars with my admittedly sketchy knowledge of the time, it all seems to hold together cohesively.

The Badger of the title is the hero. His name is Badger and he comes from a village called Ghissi. He begins life as an illegitimate shepherd and by the end of the book is acting Margrave of the Country which may seem fantastical enough, but his father was a Count and stranger things are documented historical fact. It is an eventful book. Badger meets knights, rulers, churchment, becomes friends with their Muslim enemies, loves various women, rises to greatness, and yet... and yet we never get close tohim. Badger never steps off the page into real life, he is a chess piece and following his progress is of academic interest only, one's emotions are never engaged so that the book at best is only half a book.

Partly I think this stems from the writing style which is itself very distant. The author describes movements rather than emotions much of the time, and even in an intensely emotional scene he leaves a great deal unstated, either by choice, to make the reader work it out and thus become more involved, or by an inability to adequately confey the feelings. Whichever was the intention, it doesn't work, I found myself merely uninvolved with the characters. The author has adopted a comrpessed form of writing, people appear with little or no explanation, sometimes they tell us who they are, sometimes not, but there are too many of them for that to be successful, they move about too much for their movements to be unexplained, for the writer to jump locations and characters without even a break in the typescript. It is a style of writing which can work by making the reader work, by involving him, but in this case it fails and becomes irritating. It is a book which tries hard, it's beenwell researched, but it doesn't fully succeed. I feel no amition to read the rest of the series which indicates how little read interest in the Badger the author has awoken. There are better fantasy novels about, and better historical novels too.

CASTLES - Alan Lee (Written by David Day, Edited by David Larkin)
[George Allen & Unwin, 1985,191pp, £7.95]
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

THIS COFFEE-TABLE PAPERBACK, PREVIOUSLY published in hardback, is more pictures illustrated with text than vice-versa. Alan Lee has produced nearly 100 paintings and tinted drawings which are linked by the text of David Day. Judging by the tenuousness of some of the links this was an almost impossible task.

The title **Castles** is a misnomer since the book contains tales connected with castles rather than the castles themselves. In fact, many of the paintings are of knights and maidens in suitably romantic settings.

> The shattered wall,
> the broken tower
> have a story to tell -
> from the touchstones of ruins
> and ancient texts
> we make a pilgrimage.
> (p.6)

According to Day, the castle was a metaphor with many meanings - some seeming rather stretched.

> 'The castle is the emblem of the civilisation of western man. It is the manifestation of that culture's stern power and high romance... The castle implies order, the rule and enforcement of law and government. Stability, protection, limitation. The castle was the centre of medieval life, and it became the whole world in microcosm. It protected the seat of earthly power, the throne, it contained the symbol of heaven, the chapel, and it threatened with the symbol of hell, the dungeon.' (p.12)

Yes, well...

The book is divided roughly into three

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Ages - Myths, Romance and Fantasy. These divisions overlap in some areas - Merlin occurring in both Myths and Romance.

'The Age of Myths' attempts to deal with 'Origins: Castles of the Gods: Castles of Giants: Castles of the Faeries'. Here are included Merlin and Beowulf, the Volsungs and Valkyries, Asgard and Jotunheim, the Mabinogion and more. From each, Lee has painted scenes and Day has summarised and selected key moments. The choice seems arbitrary.

The same is true of 'The Age of Romance' which tackles 'King Arthur and Camelot: The Court of Charlemagne: Siegfried and The Rhine Castles'. Here are the tales of the Knights of the Round Table and the Holy Grail., Charlemagne's Holy Wars and German folklore (Siegfried and Dietrich).

Finally, 'The age of Fantasy' covers 'Castles in Fantastical Literature: Castles in Fairy Tales: Castles in Modern Fantasy'. Here **The Orlandos** from Italy and the literature of Portugal, Spain and France are mentioned. Dante's **Divine Comedy** rates a special paragraph about infernos. Sleeping beauties and transformed princes make up the entry on fairy tales. Bram Stoker, Poe, Kafka, T.H. White, Tolkien and Peake are the strange bedfellows that are encompassed by 'Fantasy'. A passing nod is given in the direction of the 'gothic novel' but none is included - Mrs. Radcliffe is never mentioned.

This collection of pictures and stories is an odd mixture. It is difficult to see who the book is aimed at. For art lovers, if you like the style of Alan Lee's delicate paintings then this book may be for you. If it is the stores that interest you, however, I would recommend that you read the originals - there is a bibliography at the back.

HAWKSMOOR - Peter Ackroyd
[Hamish Hamilton, 1985, 217pp, £8.95]
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT TIME. NOT TIME TRAVEL in any conventional sense, though by the end of the book the two protagonists seem to communicate with each other across more than two and a half centuries; yet a story in which movement from one time to another lies at the core of all that happens. It is also the story of a haunting, without any ghost.

Perhaps the only way possible of describing this book is to begin with a summary of the plot, though in this intricately crafted and subtly shifting novel that is no easy task.

We start with Nicholas Dyer, architect, working under the supervision of Sir Christopher Wren in the early years of the 18th century to build seven new churches in the East End of London. It is a rational age, a time of questioning, of scientific endeavour, and Wren represents his age perfectly. Dyer does not. Orphaned by the plague, he was taken under the wing of a devil worshipper, and now is thoroughly imbued with an anti-rationalism. Wren is on record as extolling the beauty of the straight line over the curve; but as Dyer watches a child fall from the scaffold of one of his churches, he muses: 'Curved lines are more beautiful than Straight'. A strange creature, then, to be building, churches; but there is more to Dyer's churches than meets the eye. Hidden within each are symbols that represent his own non-Christian beliefs, and, more importantly, each one is secretly sanctified with a human sacrifice. Children and tramps are his victims.

There are obvious parallels with the real Nicholas Hawksmoor in the fictional Nicholas Dyer - pupil of Wren, colleague of Vanbrugh, and architect of the churches of Spitalfields, Limehouse, St George's Wapping, St Alfrege's Greenwich, St Mary Woolnoth, and St George's Bloomsbury (the seventh church, Little St Hugh Moorfields,does not exist). The differences, however, are more pronounced, not least the fact that Dyer disappears before Hawksmoor really got started on his London churches.

There is a Nicholas Hawksmoor in this novel, however, a Scotland Yard detective in contemporary London. He is investigating a series of murders. The bodies of children and tramps are being found close to certain 18th century churches. But these are no ordinary murders, they are without any apparent motive, and the very best of modern forensic science can find no trace of a clue.

The echoes between Hawksmoor and Dyer are obvious, and at times laboured a little too much. Hawksmoor is also a man at odds with the rational world around him. While his colleagues feed details about the crimes into computers and get no results, Hawksmoor believes in an almost mystical union between detective and villain which is bound to bring the two of them together in the end.

Dyer becomes convinced that his crimes have been detected, a conviction that grows into paranoia as he prowls among the slums and derelicts of his world to discover and dispose of his persecutor. Hawksmoor becomes so involved with the crimes and the seedy world of crumbling, rotting London in which they are set that his superiors eventually have to dismiss him from the case. For both men, as their battle against rationalism is reflected in their own declining rationality, the barriers of time begin to break down and each hears ghostly echoes of the other.

Ackroyd describes with a certain relish the seediness of the world both men inhabit. As with other features of the book - the children's songs that provide a link between the two centuries, the lines of dialogue that crop up in both times - he occasionally overdoes it. One feels occasionally that, powerful as it is, the novel might be even more haunting and evocative if the temporal resonances were not hammered home quite so vigorously. Yet the ending is a model of restraint and suggestion, and his characterisation, particularly of Dyer, is most effectively done. When 'The South Bank Show' devoted a programme to the book, Dyer was impersonated by Shepard as if the part had been created for him, and that hollow-cheeked, wild-eyed look informs the book with a chilling madness.

In his previous novel, **The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde**, Ackroyd revealed a talent for pastiche which is put to even greater use here. The novel is constructed of alternating chapters set in the 18th and 20th centuries, and for the 18th century sections written in the first person by Dyer, Ackroyd produces an exceptionally convincing model of the literature of the time. Though the pace might be a little faster than Defoe, for example, might have managed, the spelling and sentence structure are very accurate. Yet the whole thing remains remarkably easy to read, and the 20th century sections sustain the drama and tension of the whole. This is a remarkable book that I cannot recommend enough to anyone with the slightest interest in what the novel is capable of achieving.

PLANET OF ADVENTURE - Jack Vance
[Grafton, 1985, 536pp, £39.95]
Reviewed by Terry Broome

THIS LARGE-FORMAT OMNIBUS EDITION CONTAINS the entire series first published between 1968-70, **City of the Chasch, Servants of the Wankh, The Dirdir, The Pnume** and a two-page map.

Reith and Waunder's survey-ship is crippled in an attack over the planet Tchai and crashlands. Waunder is killed outright by local tribesmen who take Reith captive and teach him the world's common language. Reith educates the tribe's leader, a lad called Traz, and they begin a quest for a ship that will return Reith to Earth. On their way they meet Anarcho, a Dirdirman, who conveniently provides essential background information.

It is Anarcho who provides Reith with answers to many of the planet's mysteries. Tchai is inhabited by four alien races, the Dirdir, Wankh, three types of Chasch and mutated humans brought from Earth as Dirdir' slaves. The humans, who are convinced they are part of the biological cycle of whatever race - the Chasch, Dirdir, Wankh or Pnume - they are slaves to, name themselves after their slavemasters. Hence, Anarcho believes himself to be a Dirdirman.

As Reith undertakes his planet-wide search he finds himself in positions where, reluctantly, he is forced to make drastic changes to the local social and political structures - often doing this almost accidentally. These elements, coupled with coincidence and fortune are typical of Vance's work and can be seen as limitingly formula. However, they do help to identify Vance's style, which is very distinctive despite its faults.

Its faults - use of cliches and stereotypes. The women, particularly, are given short shrift: 'The man advanced on the cringing girl, who stood with fists pressed to her mouth'. Women serve as useful plot devices and exotic distractions, but they are simply tools, unlike Traz and Anarcho who are more rounded. The Flower of Cath is the most blatant example of this criticism and Vance, tiring of her towards the middle, neatly disposes of her. Reith, himself, is the breezy archetypal Vancian hero, being charming, relaxed and uncomplicated though he's not always perfect, having an inconsistent and sometimes uncaring nature, which sometimes appears to be unintentionally implied.

Tchai is decadent, the people self-indulgent. Vance's language is sparse, but the world is richly detailed and occasionally very Victorian: 'Reith, only half-conscious, managed to seize a stanchion. Pulling himself to the panel, he struck down the stabilization switch. Instead of a smooth hum there was hissing and thumping, nevertheless the wild, windmilling motion gradually was damped'. It's wonderfully written nonsense, full of the usual, improbable, bizarre Vancian names.

Planet of Adventure isn't as good as the first three **Demon Princes** books and like most of his series work, some interest seems to have been lost in the writing half-way through (reading the books separately might strain your patience), but it's still an entertaining read and this edition does have a wonderful cover.

AFTER MIDNIGHT STORIES - Edited by Amy Myers (222pp)
THE KING'S GHOST - R. Chetwynd-Hayes (206pp)
THE GHOST SHIP - Edited by Peter Haining (206pp)
[William Kimber, 1985, £7.95 each]

REVIEWING FOR VECTOR CERTAINLY BROADENS one's literary horizons, this issue I have three ghost story books. I had a passing flirtation with ghost stories when I was about 15 but I soon returned to my first

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love, SF. So I come to these books untainted by any preconceptions but also lacking any knowledge of how the field has developed over the last 20 years (except for what has appeared in **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction**.

After Midnight Stories contains 16 stories, all but two being originals. I was impressed by the general quality of writing - clear, concise, able to evoke an atmosphere - I wonder if a volume of 14 original SF stories could have achieved the same level. But good writing isn't everything. What about content?

Ghost stories seem to have changed since I last read them, few of these have any physical menace, with the exception of Mary Williams' 'The Ferret' and Lanyon Jones' 'The Punch and Judy Man'. Many of these ghosts are just there, not deliberately interacting with the 'real world'. Of the few with traditional ghosts, two are meant to be humorous, Fred Urquart's 'The Straitened City' and 'To Be of Good Behaviour' by T. Arthur Bowden, neither of which succeeds completely.

Not surprisingly the closest story to those I read 20 years ago is A.L. Rowse's 'All Souls Night' which was previously published in 1945.

So what about content? Well, those with strong plot seem to miss out on atmosphere (and vice versa). I found the most evocative were 'Under The Shadow' by J.C. Trewin and Rosalind Wade's 'The cat's Tea Party', both set in Cornwall and managing to convey the unique quality of that count.

Perhaps Derek Stanford's 'The Old Brighton Road' and 'The Underground' by R. Chetwynd-Hayes achieve the best mix of plot and atmosphere.

It was interesting to compare my memories of past stories with the modern ones presented here. Whilst I didn't hate any of them I wasn't knocked out by any of them either. I accept this is very much an uninformed, subjective view and avid ghost story readers may disagree with me.

The 'Notes on Contributors' is interesting and I find most of the writers are experienced, often in several literary fields. They also tell me that R. Chetwynd-Hayes is publishing his sixth novel in 1985, a supernatural history story called **The King's Ghost**.

Set around 1610 this is an adventure told in the first person by Miles Harrington. Miles is the acknowledged bastard son of a lord, once in service to Lord Leicester he is now landless and almost penniless having just returned from a foreign war serving Henry of France.

Miles thwarts the robbery of a young noble lady, Anne Sinclair; wounded in the process he is taken to Clavering Manor to heal. Eventually he becomes steward to Sir Rupert Sinclair, brother of Anne and Lord of the Manor. The basic plot is Miles falling in love with Anne, although she is betrothed to another, and what he does about it.

To this add Sir Rupert's attempt to become a power in the land, a visit to Clavering by Queen Elizabeth and a subsequent plot to kidnap her, the love of a young gypsy girl for Miles and the hate of Anne's aunt for him and, of course, a number of ghosts. You can tell that a lack of action is not one of the book's failings.

The ghosts sort of just appear and frighten or disturb people and I did wonder if they were really necessary to the plot, eventually I decided it was probably the best way of introducing certain elements into the story.

I'm not completely happy with the language. Supposed Elizabethan figures of speech are used occasionally, such as 'Marry, Sir!'. This grated. The pace of the story meant that whilst this was initially disconcerting I quickly ignored it.

There's a lot of detail, although unfortunately some bits seem tacked on as if the author felt some authentication was needed. What little I know about Elizabethan times squares with what the author tells me, for example: the belief that women were adjuncts to men rather than individuals, the belief that intelligence was the prerogative of the upper classes and ignorance that of the lower classes.

Miles is a mixture of these Elizabethan views and more modern ones which stretch from mercy almost to socialism.

So whilst the supernatural is a necessary part of the book it is treated in a matter of fact way, which is realistic for Elizabethan times, and is in no way the main thrust of the plot. Primarily, this was an easy read but not really above average, sort of boys' own adventure - connoisseurs of historical adventure stories may disagree.

A final niggle: I didn't realise they still wrote books with chapters headed 'I meet a dark lady and fight a duel' or 'Which is concerned with love and honour'. But on a plus point it certainly has more energy than most of the After Midnight Stories.

Back to anthologies with **The Ghost Ship**, this time with a theme - The Flying Dutchman. Peter Haining is obviously fascinated by the legend and his knowledge is also obvious. The sixteen stories appear in chronological order, from the early 19th century to Roger Zelazny and Jack Sharkey. Unfortunately the Zelazny and Sharkey tales are both the shortest, 4 pages and 1 page respectively, and the weakest. Fortunately this is unusual, some of these stories are very powerful, for instance Joseph Conrad's 'The Brute'. Authenticity is there in the early stories; while being perhaps stylised for modern tastes the authors knew what they were writing about.

Among the straightforward tales are some unusual ones, such as 'A Primer of Imaginary Geography' by James Brander Matthews with the Flying Dutchman giving a guided tour of other fabled lands and people. I found this less satisfying.

Of the more modern tales I thought Pierre Mac Orlan's 'By the Light of The Lanterns' very good; the crew of the Flying Dutchman rescue and bring up a human baby. Malcolm Jameson's 'Train for Flushing' was also enjoyable with Captain Vanderdecken mistaking the New York subway station of Flushing for his own Dutch city and the unfortunate(?) consequences for two passengers

As well as an introduction Peter Haining provides a preface to each story discussing how it fits in the the larger story of how the tale of the Flying Dutchman has become one of the two major sea myths (the Marie Celeste being the other). Those are most enjoyable.

Before I read this book I knew the bones of the story and that Wagner had written an opera but I was ignorant of the detail and of how the opera came into being. I am now better informed. What a pity all educational texts aren't as well done. But taken on its merits as an anthology the quality of the stories as stories mean it's no better than just above average. Indeed,although the stories are varied there is still this common theme which around three-quarters of the way through leads to a touch of sameness, almost deja vu.

My minor excursion into the realm of ghost stories was interesting, but it's just a genre like any other. The short sample of modern fiction indicates a tendency to style rather than plot (similar to SF) and whilst I can appreciate the writing there seems a lack of energy. I now await being told just how wrong I am by ghost story enthusiasts.