

CRITICAL MASS : A review of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Supernatural Fiction

Editor: Don D'Ammassa, 19 Angell Drive, East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

CRITICAL MASS is published approximately bi-monthly, but more often tri-monthly. Each issue is 24 pages long and costs \$.75. Subscriptions will be accepted up to four issues in advance. At present, CRITICAL MASS is mailed first class. This is the third issue.

* * * * *

The numbers following reviews of novels are ratings assigned in accordance with Gil Gaier's PPEN (personal preference) system. Readers interested in participating in Gil's project of compiling ratings should contact him at 1016 Beech Avenue, Torrance, California 90501.

This issue contains reviews of 50 books, of which were 34 novels with an average rating of 61.

FORMAT CHANGES: Plans are still to change to offset printing with issue 5 or 6. At this time, there will probably be a fifty percent increase in page count. This will allow for some interior art work, as well as a very short letter column. The letter column (CRITICAL MISSIVES, naturally) will not be designed for comparing opinions of books, but will be reserved for corrections of errors (I occasionally make a mistake just so people won't feel inferior. You believe that, don't you?), additional material about a book that I might have overlooked, and in some cases to provide an outraged author with a vehicle to reply. Everyone is entitled to his own ridiculous opinion, including the author.

With that change, CRITICAL MASS will be professionally printed, collated, and bound, removing much of the drudgery from this publication. If the surprisingly good response in subscriptions continues, I will have both the time and the money to adhere to the bi-monthly schedule I have set. More frequent publication is probably out of the question; I do need time to read all these books.

Only seven publishers have so far started sending review copies. Although I review books I purchase as well, first preference on space in each issue goes to those books I have received as review copies. ALL books received for review will be reviewed. As of this issue, I have only one book not reviewed, squeezed out of the final page because I wanted to spend more than a couple of paragraphs on it.

PLUGS: Three books to recommend this time that don't fit into the format of this publication. One is an excellent but stomach turning suspense novel, CITY OF THE DEAD by Herbert Lieberman. This is QUINCY for real, and for those with strong stomachs, this is a real find. The second is a Penguin paperback humor book, THE BOOK OF TERNS, a collection of outrageous visual puns. Lastly, the non-fiction book POWER by Michael Korda is an excellent discussion of psychological ploys in business. I particularly recommend the section on women and power that concludes the book. It has some very eye-opening passages about the subtle ways in which women are victimized in the executive jungle. Must reading for any woman who plans to succeed in the corporate world.

Cover art is by Bonnie Dalzell.

All material is Copyright © 1979 by Don D'Ammassa. Circulation is just over 300. This is the January issue. I hope.

The late Edgar Pangborn came as quite a shock to the world of science fiction. He was in many ways one of the most literate writers in the field. Reading his small output of stories and novels, one still tends to feel a perpetual child in the presence of an adult. If Pangborn condescends, he does so in such a fashion that the reader is never aware that he is being patronized.

Pangborn had two highly successful novels in the genre. A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS is a minor classic about the battle between good and evil for the possession of a single soul. DAVY is perhaps the TOM JONES of the field, a bawdy but moving story of a young man coming to maturity in a post holocaust North America. This latest, posthumous book is a collection of seven stories set in that same decadent future.

Very simply, civilization has collapsed after a war and plague, and the few pockets of surviving humanity are trying to rebuild society, coping with shortages, mutants, a lack of technology, growing ignorance, and a host of political and philosophical differences. If they succeed in only a limited fashion, it is chiefly because they have not been able to learn from their experience, although they think they have. But so much of civilization has fallen that they are not even capable of judging what they have lost, let alone how they lost it.

The stories are arranged chronologically, starting with "The Children's Crusade", which introduces Abraham Brown, an itinerant prophet leading a small army of children against the insular dictatorship of Nupal, a stronghold that has survived since before the war. Brown believes simplistically that it was technology that brought about the collapse of man, and that it should not be allowed to play a significant role in the future. Young Jesse Wilcox feels drawn to the prophet, much to the dismay of his mentor and village elder, Malachi. When the boy sets off to accompany the prophet on his suicidal task, Malachi is perforce drawn to accompany them as well.

Things develop predictably and Brown is martyred, but the religion that springs up as a result becomes the dominant force in North American society, and its effects on the world are the major elements in the bulk of the stories Pangborn has set against this backdrop.

"The Children's Crusade" is one of the finest things Pangborn ever wrote, and he rarely wrote badly. In a single novelet, he has crammed more definitive characterization than most authors can manage at novel length. There are three major characters who are examined at length, their motivations dissected before the reader, and the playing out of their interactions is more complex, and hence more credible, than many writers could even conceive, let alone execute.

Pangborn is frequently bitterly sentimental. In "Tiger Boy" a totally selfless man and a beautiful animal are slaughtered almost casually, and totally meaninglessly. "Harper Conan and Singer David" presents a beautiful friendship, doomed as the result of an accident.

The best story in the collection is another novelet. "My Brother Leopold" is also about a prophet, in a manner of speaking. A young boy undergoes some unspecified spiritual experience, as the result of which he forgets his earlier life and sets out to preach in a secular way to the masses. He is unpopular with church authorities because he is not one of them, and unpopular with the secular government because of his opposition to the current war. As a consequence, he is tried and burned as a heretic, although his teachings are later adopted in a bastardized version by that same church.

There are three minor stories in the collection as well, although minor has a different meaning than usual when applied to this writer. "The Witches of Nupal" deals with a satanist cult and their insane leader. "The Night Wind" is a rambling digression by an outcast. In "The Legend of Hombas" we see dramatically the decline of reason and its replacement by primitive superstition.

But even these last few stories would be worth the admission price. This may be the best single author collection of the year.

VISIONS AND VENTURERS by Theodore Sturgeon, Dell Books, 1978, \$1.75

Dell Books has come up with two major new collections in a surprisingly short time. Those of us who are fanatic Sturgeon fans have not had much new material during the last few years, and while this collection represents fiction written between 1942 and 1965, it does bring back into print some of the harder to locate items. There are, as well, a number of truly excellent stories that have appeared only in anthologies prior to this collection. (For that matter, there is enough first rate Sturgeon to make up at least two more collections this size.)

The two top items are "Hag Seleen" and "Talent", both short stories. In the former a couple vacationing in the Louisiana bayou country runs afoul of an authentic swamp witch, and only their daughter is able to save them. In the latter, a truly awful child with superhuman powers comes to a just end at the hands (or actually at the feet) of a young girl.

The other selections include "The Martian and the Moron", a rather minor plot grafted onto a fascinating character, a brainless woman who has found that with certain key phrases she can totally dumbfound male admirers. She is so brainless, however, that her brain presents a slate upon which a telepathic Martian can inscribe a message. A message that, because of some peculiar circumstances, is doomed to go undelivered.

"The Nail and the Oracle", first published in PLAYBOY, is a problem with surprise ending story. Why is the greatest computer in the world unwilling to answer questions put to it by three of the top men in the US? The answer is cute, but cheapens the story. "Won't You Walk" is a very minor story, possibly not even SF, about a personality change resulting from a placebo voice amplifier.

"One Foot and the Grave" is the typical UNKNOWN story, although published in WEIRD TALES. Shortly after wandering through a swamp, a young woman has her foot slowly change into a hoof. She and a male friend subsequently become enmeshed in an ancient battle between powerful sorcerer demons. "The Touch of Your Hand" concerns an individual queerly obsessed with technology and "progress" in a society that is totally stagnant and unambitious. Or is it? In "The Travelling Crag", a literary agent tries to cajole a promising author into writing anew, and becomes involved with a device that dissolves formless fear.

This is not a collection of the calibre of Sturgeon's earlier CAVIAR, A TOUCH OF STRANGE, or A WAY HOME, but it is still one of the finest likely to be published this year. Maybe we will yet see a collection that includes "To Here and the Easel", "Maturity", "The Chromium Helmet", and others.

WAR-GAMERS' WORLD by Hugh Walker, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.50, translated from the German by Christine Priest

This is something of an oddity. Magira is a fantasyland conceived by a group of wargamers in Europe, about which Hugh Walker has written at least one novel. Since DAW lists this as number one, there are or presumably will be others. Reading

that, I was somewhat nervous about the novel, having visions of self indulgent trips through Dungeons and Dragons equivalents. But, although certainly not a novel to be read and cherished, it's really not bad at all. In fact, a fairly entertaining lightweight adventure story.

A man of our own reality is magically transported into the world of the game he is playing, Magira, and immediately finds himself a pawn (in more ways than one) of circumstance. King Andavil is titular head of his government, but is effectively ruling at the whim of the priesthood. When the mysterious stranger from another reality is labelled a demon and sentenced to death, he becomes the focal point for a power struggle that has been long developing.

This is basically the long-journey fantasy, with the non-hero being carried from one setting to another, viewing wonders as the author's instrument. There is virtually no plot other than that mentioned above, and obviously not much momentous in that. The characters are adequately drawn for this sort of thing, and the self-indulgence doesn't intrude noticeably. I hope this doesn't become another open-ended series, though. Too much of Magira would cloy. (58)

MAN PLUS by Frederik Pohl, Bantam Books, 1977, \$1.95, reprint of 1976 hardcover

This is not, somehow, the sort of book that I would have expected Fred Pohl to write. Pohl is one of the truly gifted satirical writers, possibly the most consistently successful satirist in the field. But MAN PLUS is not so much a satire as a tragedy, the tale of the destruction of a man and a society, although with the optimistic note of someone who really doesn't want to believe that things are as bad as he has portrayed them.

Roger Torraway is an astronaut, chosen to be transformed physiologically into a being capable of living on the Martian surface. His predecessor in the experiment died because of a failure to properly integrate his brain with altered and augmented sensory input provided by his new sense organs. So Torraway finds himself next to be transformed into a bug eyed monster, with shining black wings, superhuman speed and strength, but all too human failings and self-doubts.

Torraway has a number of distractions. He knows that his wife is having an affair with one of the top ranking scientists with the project. He knows as well that the President is personally concerned about the success of the Mars probe, because computer analysis shows that the success of the project may be the only thing that will prevent a world engulfing nuclear war. Added to this is the possibility that he will never be able to reassume his human shape, and Torraway is indeed one very troubled man.

Pohl has produced a very effective, low key novel, but one that is marred somewhat in the final chapters. There's a surprise ending that explains away one incredible element (the fact that nuclear war can be averted by completion of the Mars landing) with yet another incredible element. And this latter is never resolved at all. It may be that Pohl just couldn't find a satisfactory way to escape from the story situation, but it's a shame in any case. (77)

A WORLD CALLED CAMELOT by Arthur H. Landis, DAW Books, 1976, \$1.75

CAMELOT IN ORBIT by Arthur H. Landis, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.75

The first of these two novels was originally published as LET THERE BE MAGICK, and was apparently privately printed. Following DAW's release a couple of years ago of the paperback, Landis apparently sat down and wrote the sequel, much as Christopher Stasheff wrote the sequel to THE WARLOCK IN SPIRE OF HIMSELF. But where

Stasheff disappointed us with KING KOBOLD, Landis actually does a better job with his follow-up than with the first volume. I attribute this primarily to his no longer having to work up to the "surprise" ending of having the cute little teddy bears turn out to be the prime movers behind everything.

In the sequel, Kyrie Fern (agent of the interstellar empire) continues in the secret identity of Sir Harl Lenti in the court of Marack on the planet Fregis, known intimately as Camelot. Camelot is a world where magic really works, because of the invasion from another universe of the first member of a malevolent alien race intent on displacing the human population. The mysterious alien dominates a large part of the globe, and our hero and his friends have to protect their side.

Fern and his cohorts decide that offense is the best defense, and they sneak into the alien ruled lands to foment civil disorder and help the triumph of good over evil. Almost casually they dispose of a number of diverse and entertaining menaces, with only cursory aid from the busybody teddy bear superrace.

This is a fun book, artless perhaps, but with a good humor in its affectations that is refreshing. I wouldn't mind seeing some more adventures on Camelot, but Landis seems to have tied up all the loose ends this time. (vol I 52, Vol II 62)

CLONING by David Shear, Pinnacle Books, 1978, \$1.95, reissue of the 1974 paperback.

The title alone explains why this book is back in print after a six year lapse. With cloning in the national news, it is inevitable that every book remotely connected with the subject is going to be reprinted as a prophetic novel, in this case "a story of tomorrow -- today!" Sigh.

Paul Kyteler is a biologist troubled by dreams in which he seems to be living events of which he could not possibly have any knowledge. Even naive readers will be able to easily ascertain that he is somehow telepathically linked with clones of himself (unknown to him, of course). You see, Kyteler has an abnormal dislike for androids, finding them somehow unnatural, so it is only fair that he turn out to be something unnatural as well, so that he can learn the error of his ways.

As one might expect, he begins to have problems separating one personality from another, and even reaches a point where he is physically taking the place of another of his clones, who has been killed. Things become confusing for Kyteler and the reader, and it is with great relief that one finally reaches the last few pages. (38)

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL by Barbara Freeman, Manor Books, 1978, \$1.50

Stella and Stephanie are twin sisters, sisters who have really not been close for many years, although they avoid letting this become common knowledge. But when the former disappears mysteriously, the latter begins to feel a telepathic call, and is helpless to avoid answering it. Any more of the plot would be a spoiler.

There is a good basic idea here, so good that it has been used before. Stephanie investigates her sister's disappearance by taking her place, fumbling her way through a strange circle of acquaintances looking for information. Stephanie is also affected in other ways; her paintings seem to take on an atmosphere that she had not intended.

There's a lot going for the plot, and the author isn't a noticeably bad writer, but still it doesn't quite come off. Partly, the problem is that there is little suspense. Freeman really doesn't create much of an atmosphere in her story, apparently because

she was more interested in advancing the plot than in laying the groundwork for tension. Partly it's because, in an apparent attempt to create a shroud of mystery, the motivations are too vague for us to understand what is going on in the mind of the protagonist. Stephanie is talked about but never personally demonstrates much behavior other than the compulsive acts caused by the telepathic call. There is insufficient background as well, and I suspect Freeman would have been far more successful if she had included flashbacks to different significant events in the childhood and adolescence of the two girls, rather than rely on offhand remarks and brief bits of memory. (45)

STARSONS AND UNICORNS by Eric Norden, Manor Books, 1978, \$1.75

This collection of ten stories provides 300 pages of SF not readily available elsewhere. Manor, regrettably, does not credit original appearances of these stories, although I suspect that many appeared in men's magazines, others as originals in this book. I had personally only encountered three of them before the appearance of this volume.

Norden, who wrote a fine Uchronian novel titled THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION, has a different way of handling familiar SF themes, and often the stories are more interesting therefore than for their merits alone. Which is not to say that they don't have ample merit in their own right.

"The Primal Solution", for example, is a well written story that probably should be classed a fantasy despite its basically SF theme, simply because the logic of the science is poorly thought out. The plot makes sense dramatically, but not scientifically. A psychiatrist places a catatonic woman in an experimental type of sleep, and she is able to return through time and kill the rapist who damaged her sanity. Norden does not explain the mechanism by which she accomplishes this, nor does he explain why everyone in the present has forgotten the original train of events except the psychiatrist.

It is important that he remember, you see, because he decides to return through time and kill Hitler. Instead, he finds himself imprisoned in the mind of the young German, and realizes that his presence - revealed to his host as being a Jewish presence - unhinges Hitler's mind. He has in effect created the anti-semitism that he had hoped to eradicate. His ultimate realization is that history cannot be altered. Thus, logic fails again, because in the case of his patient, history was in fact altered. Dramatically effective, this story fails because of elementary oversight in plotting.

"Chrysalis" fails because it is too obviously propaganda. A racist near future society begins to disintegrate when people begin to revert instantly to neanderthals. This is possibly the lowest point in the collection. More promising is "Pendulum", which features an entertaining dialogue between aged hippies and the young straights of the future. This is a one gimmick story that cannot hold one's attention long, but Norden cuts it off at the right time.

"The Gathering of the Clan" is a surprise ending story of no particular originality, in which a dead man uses a time machine to get even with his vulturelike heirs. In "The Pratlfall Papers" we have a parallel world where Ford is a right wing maniac with a secret plot against America. This is a frequently scary story; Norden seems to have a real gift for portraying the mental state of a Naziesque personality, and his portrayal of the alternate Ford's flipflops of personality are very effective.

"One Fine Day" is another gimmick story, wherein - following a war -- men are required to breed per government order because of the scarcity of non-sterile males,

and what we would consider a "normal" male-female relationship is an illegal perversion.

"The Praetorians" is a political story in which the probable next president is assassinated as part of a complex scheme to abrogate a treaty with some aliens who are not quite what they seem. This is a well written story that left me rather unimpressed because of the simpleminded solution to a complex problem.

Three of the stories are extremely good. My personal favorite is more of an inside joke than a story. An African immigrant attempts to write modern SF despite his upbringing on a diet of PLANET STORIES. He steadfastly refuses to alter his style, and resorts to black magic to force his writing on the world. Soon we see Ed Ferman bewitched, Harlan Ellison swallowed whole by a python, Ben Bova trampled by an elephant, etc. This is great fun, so much so that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it really isn't all that good a story. Read it anyway.

"The Final Analysis" features God seeking psychiatric care from an incredulous and not particularly interested psychiatrist because He, the Deity, is beginning to experience homicidal (on a grand scale) tendencies. Also excellent is the fairly well known "The Final Quarry", in which an amoral would-be poet murders an even more repulsive rich man on a hunt for the last unicorn in the world. This is a sentimental story, but a bitter one, and the bitterness overcomes the tendency to oversentimentalize.

This is a long collection of readable, average quality stories, with a couple that are above average. It's worth the price, despite the truly awful cover, but it might be hard to find. I haven't seen it on a bookshelf yet. Look for it, or order it from the publisher. This might be Manor's best offering for 1978.

FANTASMS -- A Jack Vance Bibliography, Underwood-Miller, 1978, \$6.95 softcover, \$10.95 clothbound. Limited to 900 and 100 copies respectively. Order from: Chuck Miller, 239 North 4th Street, Columbia, PA 17512

I am an unabashed fan of indices. I have a row of them, and my personal index to my SF library fills 20 looseleaf notebooks. And I love to get indices of things from other people. It doesn't even have to be something I'm particularly interested in, so long as it is done well. This is done very well.

The book is broken up into several parts. There is an alphabetical list of books, followed by notes on same. There is an alphabetical list of stories, with notes about series and connected stories. There is a section on pseudonyms, on TV appearances, and a chronological listing of Vance's publications. It is thoroughly illustrated throughout with covers of Vance books and magazine appearances, is well organized, printed, and bound.

Particularly interesting for me was information on five mystery novels published under three pseudonyms (one of which is Ellery Queen). I'm not going to go into particulars here; that's what the index is for. The index also appears to be as complete as humanly possible. I can find nothing left out, based on my own index. The only apparent error I could find is that the foreign language entries for LANGUAGES OF PAD don't seem to include the edition illustrated on the same page. But then, no one's perfect. It offends God.

The most recent listing, incidentally, is WYST: ALASTOR 1716, so there isn't likely to be need for an update in the near future. \$6.95 might seem a bit steep for a paperback index, and unless you're a first rate fan of either Vance or indices, it might not be worth your while. But if you're interested in one or the other, this is an excellent bibliographic tool.

WYST: ALASTOR 1716 by Jack Vance, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.95

Speaking of Jack Vance, this is his latest novel, set in the increasingly popular Alastor cluster of worlds. While perhaps not the equal of Trullion or Marune, Wyst is nevertheless the basis of a very fine novel, and one full of the clever techniques that have made Vance one of the more quietly popular SF writers in this last decade or so.

Jantiff Ravensroke is a young would-be artist who finds life on his home planet stifling. So off he travels to Wyst, a planet unique in that it has made work of any type a minor annoyance, freeing its people for a better life. Of course, this leads to a few minor problems, like all of the equipment falling into disrepair, essential work and skills needing to be contracted to off planet personnel, and steady impoverishment of the populace. As it is, there are only three foodstuffs on the entire planet, and it is disloyal to complain about the monotony of the food.

While attempting to survive on Wyst, Ravensroke discovers what appears to be a plot against the Connatic himself, the supreme ruler of the Alastor cluster. His attempts to report the plot to the Connatic's agent on Wyst end with a trumped up murder charge, and Ravensroke is off into hiding. But he perseveres because of his basic practical superiority to the unimaginative indigenes.

Vance is perhaps most successful because of his broad splashes of color, his realistic characters, and his constant inventiveness. His political criticism (Wyst is obviously analogous to the welfare state) is well cloaked with the oddity of the settings, and his points are made almost painlessly. Just as in THE GREY PRINCE he showed a system where apartheid was the "right" solution, so he shows in WYST a society where welfarism is counterproductive. One doesn't have to share Vance's particular personal leanings to accept and enjoy his satiric look at the drawbacks of one or another system.

This is a book that deserves to be read more than once. Vance seems to steadily improve as the years pass. (78)

THE DEVILS OF D-DAY by Graham Masterton, Pinnacle Books, 1978, \$1.95

This is the latest novel of the supernatural from the author of the very successful THE MANITOU. Although Masterton has turned out a couple of books of dubious merit, this is one of the better standard supernatural novels of the past year. It is also rather ambitious and unusual in its premises.

Dan McCook is a photographer doing research for a book on D-Day. While travelling through France, he hears the legend of thirteen black tanks which routed an entire German army, about which no one seems to know much of anything. One of the tanks became disabled, and was abandoned, after all of its turrets were welded shut and a priest performed certain rites atop it. Curious, McCook locates the tank, and is shortly apprised of the fact that a devil resides within it.

McCook is skeptical, understandably, and it is not until he is presented with demonstrable proof that the story is true that he becomes committed (unfortunately, without much explanation as to why) to removing the demon from the tank and reuniting it with the other thirteen.

McCook and a pretty French woman are soon the pawns of a powerful supernatural creature of incredible powers. The demon forces them to convey him to a secret army installation where the others of his kind are still stored against some poss-

ible future need. There then follows a suitably terrifying and fast moving climax.

Masterton is highly skilled at very obvious terror, as opposed to the subtle psychological variety that is the mainstay of supernatural fiction lately. This gives him a certain advantage, in that he has little direct competition. For whatever reason, he seems to be the best around at what he does, the short, fast novel of supernatural beings unleashed on earth. There is a basic sameness in most of his books, just as there is little difference among most space operas. But if you enjoy this kind of story, you're not likely to find many better. If you do, let me know. (78)

STAR FORCE by Robert E. Mills, Belmont Tower, 1978, \$1.75

This is an embarrassingly bad novel, third in a STAR WARS ripoff trilogy that began with STAR QUEST and STAR FIGHTERS. The Fellowship of Light, led by star pilot Red Rian, beautiful Lady Nila, and young Dann Oryzon, guided by the aged star warrior Garthane, launch their final attack against the Dark Emperor, etc. etc.

This trilogy simultaneously supports and refutes the fear that STAR WARS would give rise to a general degradation of the quality of writing in the field. This is, obviously, a series inspired by the movie. But at the same time, it is so thoroughly bad, I can't believe that it will attract much attention, or many imitators. At worst, it's a fleeting aberration, here a moment, then hopefully gone forever. It does, as a matter of fact, have a fairly good imitation Berkeley cover. (22)

YOLANDA SLAVES OF SPACE by Dominique Verseau, Grove Press, 1976, \$1.95

Soft core porn sf is what this is. Intrepid space adventurer Yolanda comes to the aid of a planetary populace kept in sexual slavery by a minority of rulers. She is mistreated along the way, but triumphs at the climax, no pun intended. I review this merely to save you the \$2.00. Not only is this bad SF, it's very bad porn as well, not titillating in the slightest. Grove press used to publish interesting, well written stories that were heavily oriented toward sex. If this is representative of what they are doing now, they are no longer interesting or well written, and the sexual content is a reader cheater as well. (23)

THE EARTH BOOK OF STORMGATE by Poul Anderson, Berkley Putnam, 1978

I have stated in the past that Poul Anderson is one of the most underrated writers in the genre, and this collection of eleven stories and one novel provides a good deal of support for that contention. The novel is THE MAN WHO COUNTS, published in different form by Ace as WAR OF THE WINGMEN. This is the story of Nicholas van Rijn and two human friends, marooned on a planet of flying people, far away from the only human outpost, and unable to live long on native food because of various deficiencies. The traders must manipulate the natives in order to achieve their own rescue, and the results are planet shaking. Under the veneer of a standard adventure story, this is one of Anderson's finest works, and readers should be careful not to miss the characterization of Van Rijn under the caricature that the master trader himself assumes. To do so would be to totally misunderstand the appropriate ending.

Several of these stories are hard to locate; two appeared previously in BOYS LIFE, three others in original anthologies. Most of the remaining appeared originally in ANALOG/ASTOUNDING. The worst of them is merely routine, and the best of them is top rate. Together with the novel, they provide a history of humanity's dealings with the winged Ythrians, who play a significant role in another novel, PEOPLE OF THE WIND.

"Margin of Profit" is the oldest story (1956) and has been revised somewhat for the new printing. It's a well done but typical Van Rijn story, as the venerable gentleman outwits a press gang. The same is true of "Birthright" (alternate title "Esau", except this time it is one of Van Rijn's lieutenants, Dalmady, who outwits an invasion force by reprogramming their computer.

The avian sapients, the Ythri, are introduced in "Wings of Victory" Hijackers are outwitted in "A Little Knowledge" An amusing anecdote about the dragon being Adzel, part of Falkayn's trader team, is related in "How to be Ethnic". Anderson spent some time delving the nature of the Ythrian race in "The Problem of Pain". There is more detail but less story in three shorter pieces, "Wingless", "Rescue on Avalon", and "The Season for Forgiveness". Falkayn and an aging Van Rijn have a minor confrontation in the far better "Lodestar".

Other than the novel, the best story in the collection is "The Day of Burning" (originally "Supernova"). Falkayn finds himself aiding the comparatively primitive Merseian Gethfennen culture to prepare for an unavoidable supernova. The Merseians are, of course, the chief rivals of the Terran Empire later in Anderson's future history.

Although it is pleasant to see some of the more obscure Anderson stories come into easy availability, I still wish that some of the far better stories by Anderson that have been overlooked for years could be collected. It is easy to underestimate Anderson by reading small quantities rather than be exposed to the range of his fiction at one time. This is compounded when inferior stories are included in his few collections simply to fit in with a thematic unity. This is a good book and well worth having (even if just for the new version of the novel) but it is not the best new Anderson collection that it is possible to devise.

DYING OF THE LIGHT by George R.R. Martin, 1978, Pocket Books, \$1.95 (reprint of the 1977 hardcover, an expanded version of the ANALOG serial AFTER THE FESTIVAL)

Martin's first novel is set on Worlorn, a world receding into the twilight, soon to become inhospitable to human life. The rest of the inhabited worlds have made the wanderer over into a gigantic festival, but now that it's energy is beginning to run low, most of the revellers have left. Still, isolated groups of individuals inhabit the enormous exhibits, living out the last few years of life on Worlorn.

From the world High Kavalaan have come representatives of that bloodthirsty culture, which has divided humanity into two castes -- hunters and prey. Although contact with the interstellar community has blunted many of their prejudices, there are still conservatives left who hope to set about a new cycle of hunts against the remaining populace of Worlorn. Determined to stop them is one of their own number, a reformer named Jaan Jaanthony of Ironjade.

Jaan and his outworld wife Gwen inadvertently draw into their personal and political problems her ex-lover Dirk T'larien, who mistakenly believes that she wants to be rescued from her apparent chattel relationship with her husband. Jaanthony's long time friend, ascerbic Garse Banacek, further complicates matters, as the Ironjade stronghold and its friends find themselves the prey in a bizarre hunt through the exotic settings of the festival.

Martin is clearly a new master of the exotic setting. With this first novel, he proves as well his ability to portray humans in all the intricacy of their conflicting motivations and personal desires. There are clear internal conflicts tearing at all four of the major characters, and it is this playing out of their feelings that is the significant part of the plot, not the violent chase sequences.

Martin is clearly destined to be one of the more influential new writers in the genre, one of the few whose stories are popular with fans of both "hard" and "soft" SF. I hope he is also one of the more prolific new writers. (86)

CHILL by Jory Sherman, Pinnacle Books, 1978, \$1.75

This is the second in a series about a psychic detective, the first of which -- SATAN'S SEED -- I have never seen. It is a basically familiar and moderately well handled story that suffers a bit from overkill. "Chill" is Dr. Russell Childers, a psychic investigator with a small staff that includes Laura Littlefawn, a gifted clairvoyant. His visit to the birthday party of a friend's daughter takes a bizarre twist when he finds that the girl has sunk into a comalike sleep from which she cannot be wakened. Worse, the very life of the surrounding Louisiana bayou country seems determined to take her soul. Green slime invades her room, growing in a straight line for her bed, etc.

Much of the suspense is diluted by the author's hurry to get to the "good parts". The girl is into her coma almost before we know her name; we certainly never have time to feel sympathy for her. The various manifestations are generally too blunt and unmysterious to be effective in creating a mood, and only the search for another girl lost in the bayou manages to develop any real growing tension. Characterization is at the minimum necessary, and Chill has no really original attributes that might make him memorable.

There is a fairly interesting story line, despite the "possession" theme, which must be one of the most overworked plot devices in recent fiction. Sherman is a fair writer of no particular merit, but with no really significant shortcoming. It will fill a couple of free hours tolerably well. (57)

PENDULUM by A.E. van Vogt, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.75

I assume that van Vogt sold this collection solely because of his name; it certainly couldn't have been on the merits of the book. There are seven short stories and an interview, and only one of the stories (written in collaboration with Harlan Ellison) is worth reading at all. They all have the snappy plot that made this writer popular, but there is almost literally nothing else.

"Pendulum" concerns a simple seaman who is somehow the catalyst for the awakening of a lost race on Earth, a race which has countless millions of people in some sort of suspended animation. Awakened, they intend to dominate our world. The government, recognizing this fact, attempts to murder the seaman, because with his death, the link will be broken. "The Male Condition" is a truly awful story about a psychologist who wants to experiment with an aberration that has disappeared from] the world - rape. Where the former plot dominates the story to the exclusion of all else, in this is just absurdity piled upon more of the same.

"Living with Jane" crams all of the plot twists of a novel into 31 pages. Dan Thaler is somehow the only man on earth who recognizes that the new generation of super androids is being manipulated by some mysterious group into grabbing control of the world. His wife and daughter are held captive by several of these as a gambit to prevent his testifying against a bigwig in their organization. But his daughter Jane has unique mental powers that enable her to take advantage of the androids. If van Vogt had taken the time to rationalize some of the leaps of logic in this, it might have made an enjoyable short novel. As it is, it reads like a Badger Book cover blurb.

"The First Rull" follows the adventures of an alien shape changer on Earth, as it inexplicably tries to fit in with our culture, rather than conceal itself from us,

as part of its effort to regain possession of a Rull artifact captured by a human space probe. The narrative, excepting the aforementioned logical gap, is fairly straightforward, and the story is acceptably well written. The same is true of "Foot print Farm", in which an alien buried under a farm exerts psychological pressure to have itself exhumed. This is a sort of "Color Out of Space" with a happy ending. Again, it is narrated in an acceptable style, but is unoriginal, trite, and lacking in characterization. "The Non-Aristotelian Detective" is not a Gosseyn story; in fact, it's a straightforward mystery resolved through some semantic doubletalk.

The collaborative story is "The Human Operators", and deals with a fleet of starships that has broken free of humanity, except for a single slave operator aboard each. Herein, they revolt and settle a peaceful planet. It's an entertaining story. But one good story cannot justify such an overall low quality collection. Pass this up entirely.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, comic version from Marvel, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

I suppose it was inevitable that this would appear. Here, in comic book form and full color, is the entire three hour opening adventure of the Battlestar Galactica story. It is true to the movie, with all of its absurdities, drawn not noticeably well. There are accompanying non-visual pieces, including an interview with John Dykstra, and various articles on one or another aspect of the film, such as history of the human civilization, robots, spaceships, battle tactics, etc. If you're fond of the show, you might as well pick it up. If, like me, you watch primarily to see what cliché they'll use next (while I'm typing this, the legendary Kane is sacrificing the Battlestar Pegasus), then this is one you can skip with a clear conscience.

WORLD'S BEST SF SERIES TWO edited by Don Wollheim, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.95 (reprint of THE 1973 ANNUAL WORLD'S BEST SF)

This is a reprint of what has actually been one of the best anthologies of the past few years. 1973 was one of those years where a lot of people seemed to be writing well, rather than recently when a few write well and most write very badly, at least at shorter length. Short story writing is becoming a rare art even in SF, it's last stronghold in English literature.

The collection opens with Poul Anderson's excellent "Goat Song", a lyrical tale of the future which mixes elements of fantasy with computers. It is followed by James Tiptree's "The Man Who Walked Home", his famous story of a man caught in time. Michael Coney is represented by what must be one of his very best stories, "Oh Valinda!", wherein gigantic leviathans are used to propel icebergs wherever they are desired. This is followed by Frederik Pohl's best story in years, "The Gold at Starbow'd End", in which the decadent near future, torn by international and internal strife, is given a chance to survive because of the intervention of another intelligence.

Also included is "Rorqual Maru" by T.J. Bass, a short version of one part of his excellent novel, THE GODWHALE, in which the few humans with some remaining individuality fight to avoid being absorbed by the hive world of the human nebbishes. The latest weapon of the nebbishes is ARNOLD, a semi-human programmed for the purposes of the hive.

The remaining stories are all readable, and probably are among the best published in 1973, although none of them is up to the quality of the preceding, with the possible exception of Phyllis MacLennon's macabre "Thus Love Betrays Us". The

remaining stories are by Simak, Wallace Macfarlane, Robert Tilley, and Vernor Vinge; they concern a new virus, Indian magic, time travel paradoxes, and interstellar seeding operations respectively. This is one of the best anthologies of the past few years, and unless you're a chronic reader of the prozines and have already read these stories, you ought to take advantage of this second chance to acquire them.

STRANGERS by Gardner Dozois, Berkley Books, 1978, \$1.75

This is Gardner Dozois' first full-length solo novel, and it's every bit as good as his shorter fiction might have led one to expect. Farber is a human on the planet Lisle who has fallen in love with the native woman Liraun. At first, their marriage seems idyllic, one of the few authentic love stories of science fiction, but then things begin to go wrong, first subtly, then in large scale. The astute reader will recognize the growing sense of doom that Dozois has foreshadowed throughout his story. Readers familiar with his work will be expecting the tone of his ending. You'll enjoy it anyway, no matter which category you fall into.

It is not so much his plot as his style that makes Dozois one of the best new writers in the field. Although often criticized for his lack of plot in shorter fiction, there is plenty of story line in STRANGERS. Enriching the plot, however, is a facility with words that has been increasingly evident as Dozois' career progressed, and the current novel, along with an earlier novelet, "Chains of the Sea" demonstrate an ability to write the kind of story Dozois apparently wants to write, but in such a fashion that it can be enjoyed even by those who would not normally enjoy that kind of story. If this seems a paradox, then read STRANGERS for yourself. I suspect it's a sleeper, a novel that will figure more significantly in a few years than it does at present.(88)

MASQUE WORLD by Alexei Panshin, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.75 (reprint of the 1969 Ace paperback)

Back in the late 1960's, it appeared that Ace Books was doing most of the really inventive new books. Delany and Zelazny were with ace, as well as the early Ursula Leguin. There was also Alexei Panshin, who had accomplished two of the most difficult feats in the field. First, he had written a Heinleinesque novel that did not fade to insignificance beside the originals (RITE OF PASSAGE); second, he wrote three consecutive truly funny SF novels, the adventures of Villiers, an unlikely hero, and his associate Torve the Frog.

This is the third in the series, originally projected to be seven volumes. I assume that Ace has also reprinted the first two volumes, THE STAR WELL and THE THURB REVOLUTION, although I have seen neither. In this volume, Villiers is off to attend a party, among which are numbered some of the strangest characters in any field.

I'm really sorry Panshin never completed this series. There's not much emphasis on plot, just delightful romping through a web of circumstance. This is the sort of thing that Goulart attempts, and fails at. Panshin is successful time after time. It may not be a novel of biting social commentary, but it's a whole lot of fun. Just the thing to cheer you up after three straight Burroughs pastiches and a half dozen mediocre space operas. I quote the blurb from the GALAXY review: "Read the book. Stop asking silly questions." (72)

EARTH MAGIC by Alexei & Cory Panshin, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (originally published as SONS OF BLACK MORCA in 1973 as a serial in FANTASTIC)

The last novel to appear under the Panshin name was this dark, bloody fantasy novel of Haldane, the son of Black Morca, a man determined to create an empire for his son to rule. Set in the fantastic land of Nestor, the novel concerns itself mostly with overweening ambition, betrayal, and death. Morca is a babe in the woods and is easily betrayed and killed. It is only through happenstance that Haldane escapes with his life, accompanied by his dead father's magician.

The two of them attempt to flee to safer environs, but the prophecy of the witch Jael follows the young man, and he is doomed to bring about the end of his tribe. Along the way, he meets and overcomes a number of menaces, both mortal and otherwise.

This is not your typical heroic fantasy. For one thing, the mood is far more sombre. For another, there is a lot more concern with literary values than is common in the sub-genre. Interesting though it may be, the novel fails for me. I suspect it's a combination of my mild prejudice against barbarian stories, the unceasing mood of gloom, and the rather ambivalent ending. I believe this was originally supposed to be part of a series which never came off. If so, this last aspect may be explained. (54)

THE DREAMING JEWELS by Theodore Sturgeon, Dell Books, 1978, \$1.75 (originally published in 1950, this has seen at least three previous paperback editions from Pyramid, under the title THE SYNTHETIC MAN. Sturgeon's novels were all so good that it really isn't fair to rank them against each other. Suffice it to say that this would be an immediate Hugo contender were it published for the first time this year.

Horty Bluett is peculiar almost from the moment of his birth. As a young child, he was caught eating ants behind the bleachers, in answer to some inexplicable inner craving. Later in life, missing fingers regenerate themselves. It begins to appear quite inescapable that Horty is not human.

The bulk of this novel is set against a brilliantly realized carnival background, and features one of the blackest villains of all time, Monetre - the "Maneater". Horty and a young girl find themselves both under the spell of this sinister figure, a man who seems somehow to know more about them than do they themselves. And his dominance cannot be for anything but evil.

If there is anyone who reads SF who has not read THE DREAMING JEWELS, then they owe it to themselves to go out immediately, call in sick to work, and sit in one spot until they have finished it. This is SF at its very best, and there is little in any field to compare with it. (94)

GOLDEN SCORPIO by Alan Burt Akers, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.50

This is the eighteenth in this series, so I guess it must be popular with the readers. Damned if I can tell why. I suppose it's the closest thing we have to Edgar Rice Burroughs writing today, but Akers (assumed to be Kenneth Bulmer for some time now) is nowhere near the storyteller that Burroughs was, even though he is in some ways a better stylist.

Dray Prescott is on the loose again, driven out of his adopted homeland by external invasion and internal treachery. At the whim of the Starlords, he is once again separated from his beloved Delia and sent off on a mission, this time to repulse the attacks of the ironclad cavalry known as the Iron Riders.

Under the adopted name of Jak the Drang, Prescott spies on the movements of the Iron Riders, and works out a plan to foil them. None of this is much of a surprise to anyone, and the novel rolls inevitably toward its conclusion.

Akers' primary problem with this series is that he has crammed too many details into the world of Kregen without allowing readers to adjust to each. When I lost count, there had already been revealed well over 20 different intelligent races on that planet, as well as a plethora of tribes, nations, pirates, etc. If Akers had been a bit less ambitious in the early books, he might not already have reached the point where every novel seems a mere written over version of the preceding ones. If you've enjoyed them so far, this is more of the same. If you haven't, read the original - Burroughs - instead. (42)

THE OUTLAW OF TORN by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

I AM A BARBARIAN by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

These two historical novels are of associational interest, considering their author. TORN, published originally in 1913, is the story of a Norman swordsman in England of the Plantagenets. It's an excellent, fast-moving adventure story, not particularly heavy in historical references, but much fun in any case. With Burroughs other novel of knighthood, THE MAD KING, Burroughs proved he could write this story and write it well. Indeed, much of his SF is the same sort of thing, set on a strange world.

I AM A BARBARIAN is, I believe, a novel the manuscript of which was found only recently. There was a hardcover edition and an earlier Ace paperback of this, as well as TORN. BARBARIAN is set in ancient Rome, and deals with a young British slave in the court of Caligula. Burroughs is able to spend time fighting beasts in the coliseum and such not. Again, it's a goodentertaining adventure, but the historical background is just a veneer, not really surviving close examination. They're both fun though, and Burroughs certainly did know how to tell a good story.

STAR WATCHMAN by Ben Bova, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (reprint of the 1964 hardcover)

This was originally published as a juvenile, and has much in common with the now defunct but fondly remembered Winston juvenile line. Human culture has been defeated by star faring aliens. Now, spreading out into space once more, humanity is very cautious, determined that this time the conflict will have another outcome. To this end they have created the Star Watchmen, a kind of interstellar police whose role is to keep humans united against the common, though currently absent, foe. And young hero Emil Vorgens is about to earn his pay, because the colony world of Shinar has decided to ignore the alien menace and cut itself loose from the mainstream of human culture.

This is one of those juveniles with broad ambitious plans that dominated the hardcover field for a time. Novels today are more relevant and more polished. In a far more recent juvenile, CITY OF DARKNESS, Bova himself explored urban decay, race conflict, sex roles, etc. STAR WATCHMAN is from another time, and there is more than a trace of nostalgia to be found in re-reading it. Even when the prose and plotting seem crude, there is still an aura of pleasure -- the old sense of wonder, I suppose. This is not a really great book, not even a great juvenile. But it's a good one, and it's a pleasure to read. I believe there was a sequel titled THE STAR CONQUERORS, but I may be mistaken. ((62)

THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY STORIES: 4 edited by Lin Carter, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.75

This collection of eleven stories consists of eight reprints and three originals. Excuse me, four of them are original I see now. Three of them are very forgettable; the original stories by Grail Undwin and Carter himself, and a lost story by Clark Ashton Smith. The two best pieces are "The Tale of Hauk" by Poul Anderson, in which a man battles the possessed body of his dead father, and "The Changer of Names" by Ramsey Campbell, in which a barbarian hero must fight against a magician who is stealing his identity.

Less outstanding but still worthwhile are Tanith Lee's story of an inventive young girl chosen as a sacrifice to a seagod, a new adventure of Alaric the Minstrel from Phyllis Eisenstein, and a posthumous collaboration between Robert Howard and Andrew Offutt set in the lost city of Cibola. The original story by Philip Cookley is a pleasant surprise, as is the one by Pat McIntosh. The former deals with a time and space travelling magician; the latter is a supernatural fantasy adventure for a young warrior maiden. The remaining piece is an amusing anecdote by Avram Davidson.

IMMORTALITY INC by Robert Sheckley, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (reprint of the 1958 novel, previously released in paperback by Bantam. Hardcover title was IMMORTALITY DELIVERED and magazine serialization was as THE TIME KILLERS)

In the 22nd century, death is not after all final. You can pay the Hereafter Corporation to ensure that you will survive and be reactivated if, through some mischance, you should be terminated. That is, if you've kept your insurance premiums up to date, and no one makes a mistake, and the poltergeists aren't active. So if you're bored with life, you hire someone to hunt you across the world, picking the means of your ultimate death, in order to experience one more thrill. After all, you can't really die, can you?

Sheckley is another of those writers who has been greatly underestimated over the years, probably because of his relative inactivity in the past decade. This was one of the two early novels that were largely ignored because of the endless stream of wittily barbed short stories that seemed to issue forth unceasingly from his typewriter. The same barbed humor is in the novel, and it's another of those rare few that really deserves to be called a "classic", whatever that term has come to mean in recent years. I believe this has been out of print for over a decade, so grab it while you can. (78)

THE QUILLIAN SECTOR by E.C. Tubb, DAW Books, 1978, \$1.50

This is the nineteenth adventure of Earl Dumarest, the wandering Earthman in search for his lost homeworld, a planet that the rest of the human populated universe has dismissed as a legend that never existed. For the past several years, Tubb has chronicled the adventures of Dumarest, a hardened survival type, fleeing from the interstellar organization of the Cyclan, a corps of augmented intelligences, totally devoid of emotion, determined to dominate the universe, in pursuit of Dumarest because of a secret he possesses.

Tubb is as aware as are the readers that the continued success of Dumarest in escaping the machinations of the Cyclan is tested the borders of credibility, yet he is understandably reluctant to break a formula that has proven to be so popular. How many series, after all, go nineteen volumes?

And Tubb is not at all a bad writer, although one would hope that he could come up with occasionally more interesting plots than the Dumarest stories, which are essentially the interstellar version of THE FUGITIVE. In this case, the Cyclan has hired the services of a professional hunter, a man who takes the mission not so much for the money as for the pure joy of the chase. And he accepts gladly the probability that his prey this time is far more dangerous than anything he has ever hunted before.

Dumarest gets involved with the obligatory low keyed dalliance, this time with the female engineer of a trading ship. He is as unsuccessful in this case as he has always been in the past. This is a novel with no surprises, no real attempt to explore new territory. The formula is acceptable though, and the adventure is fairly plausibly written. Neither a winner nor a loser. (52)

STAR PROBE by Joseph Green, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (originally serialized in ANALOG in 1975)

There has certainly been a lot of interest in first contact stories lately, fueled by the popularity of the film, CLOSE ENCOUNTERS. Patrick Tilley's FADE OUT, Clarke's RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, and Simak's "Construction Shack" come immediately to mind. Joseph Green has in this novel used man's first encounter with a probe from another solar system as the backdrop for a story about technology and those who fear it.

Hal Hentson is a prominent industrialist who feels that the probe should be intercepted. He is opposed by a number of radical antitechnologists (most of whom are female), a timid and incompetent government, and his rather colorless wife. The latter is concerned because Hentson is planning to send their son on a suicide mission to rendezvous with the probe, after imprinting the personality of Hentson's deceased father into the younger body. Does all this sound complicated? If so, it's because the novel itself is complicated.

I think Green was a little too ambitious this time. Not only does he throw in enough conflicting groups to make van Vogt balk, but he has stereotyped some of his characters and made their positions completely untenable. Shooting down straw men is easy for even a mediocre writer, and Green is actually a fairly good one (though he has never really followed through on the promise of his earlier THE LOAFERS OF REFUGE). There's sufficient political machinations to keep the story moving well, and if you're of the same position as Green on technology, this will reinforce you nicely, but it really doesn't examine the issues that it raises. (58)

THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE by Larry Gonick, Rip Off Press, 1978, \$1.00

I have no intention of regularly reviewing comic books (underground or otherwise) in CM, but this particular title - pointed out to me by a friend - is so exceptionally good, I have to recommend it. Gonick projects several titles in this series, of which this is the first, dealing with the evolution of everything. It consists of a sarcastic but accurate recapitulation of the evolution of life on Earth, illustrated in black and white, but with marvelously funny lines throughout. I am particularly fond of the early landcrawler complaining about the smell of dead fish. Look up your local underground comic dealer and buy twelve copies, then give them to all your friends.

THE TOWER OF THE ELEPHANT by Robert E. Howard, Today Press (Grosset & Dunlap) paperback, 1978, \$6.95

This is a very classy high quality paperback edition of two Conan tales, the title story plus "The God in the Bowl". They are both among the very best Conan adventures, and they are illustrated by nine full color paintings by someone named Richard Robertson. The paintings, however, are not up to the quality of the stories, and I regret that they didn't choose someone like Roy Krenkle or Boris Vallejo to do them.

In the first story, Conan determines to break into a magician's tower and steal the secret of his magic. Once inside, however, he finds a strange being from another universe, imprisoned and tortured by the magician in order to obtain from the being powers against other human beings. Conan becomes the agent by whom the being is able to end the imprisonment and wreak vengeance on the captor.

In the second story, Conan is accused of murder when he is discovered inside a closed museum near the corpse of a powerful local dignitary. Conan had intended to steal some valuable properties on commission, but is inadvertently implicated in a totally unassociated matter. The story is in some ways a standard murder mystery, although the resolution depends on a supernatural being of sufficiently weird aspect to bring shudders of repulsion to the reader.

This book was first published in a limited edition hardcover by Donald Grant.

THE SIEGE OF FALTARA by Arsen Darnay, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

This is the second published novel of a new writer who might well turn out to be the new Jack Vance. This novel in particular is reminiscent of Vance, although lacking some of the older author's wit and finesse. Perhaps that will come with age and experience.

The plot is straightforward. An agent is set down on the planet Fillippi to foment a revolution, because political considerations make outside intervention impractical. In the guise of Penta Mart, leader of the Cush underground, the agent sets about undermining a culture which uses the drug Menoma to destroy the will of its slave labor force.

Mart's primary agent is a minor aristocratic family, the Fanganos, to challenge the rule of the dominant Contortus family. High government positions are filled by duelling, and the ruling Contortus has managed to survive many such, always recovering through some strange agency from the most horrible wounds.

The reader knows from the beginning that the rebellion will succeed, but that doesn't really interfere with anything. The enjoyment is from the unravelling rather than the final kernel of happenstance to be revealed. Shrewd readers will have a pretty good idea of the Contortus ploy long before it is revealed to the other characters, although the details may be vague.

Entertaining, occasionally excellent, definitely rewarding to casual readers. Darnay is likely to be one of the leading writers of the thood and blunder adventure story SF novel in the next few years. (67)

THE HOLMES-DRACULA FILE by Fred Saberhagen, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

This is at least the second book to depict the encounter between Sherlock Holmes and Count Dracula, but this is the first to have Dracula appear as the misunderstood hero. Believe it or not, Dracula is a kindly, God-fearing vampire in London to pursue a love affair when he is kidnapped and made a victim (or intended victim anyway) of a group of men intent on holding London to ransom -- the alternative being to suffer an infestation of the Plague. Dracula, temporarily suffering from amnesia, eventually escapes and regains his memory, and is determined to avenge himself for the mistreatment he suffered at their hands.

Meanwhile, Sherlock Holmes is simultaneously attempting to trace down a missing person and to solve the problem of dealing with the Plague threat. Inevitably their paths cross, with Holmes accepting popular folklore about vampires -- to some extent. But it is clear early that the two men will form some sort of alliance, because Watson mentions in an early chapter that the manuscript will be kept safe by the Count.

This is an average Sherlock pastiche, but the Dracula connection is tenuous at best. Saberhagen's vampire bears so little relationship to Stoker's that it is clear the name was only used to bolster sales. It's a pretty good adventure story though, and Saberhagen does have some surprises tucked away in the last few chapters that are worth reading through for. I'd rather see more Berserker stories (of which there rumoredly are going to be some) but this is a fair substitute. And there really is a certain fascination about the vampire figure, whether he be a force for evil or, as in this case, one for more-or-less good. (62)

LORD TEDRIC by Gordon Eklund, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.75

Here we have the first volume in another series "inspired" by the late Edward E. Smith. Humanity is largely confined to a limited number of star systems after losing a war to the alien Wykzl. A repressive aristocratic government has subsequently arisen, and maintains a stranglehold on all the worlds, ostensibly to keep a united front in case of a resumption of the war, but in reality in order to secure their own personal political and economic power.

When a mining world goes into revolt, a military vessel is sent to quash the revolution. Aboard the ship is the spoiled son of the power behind the Emperor, another young man from a rival family that maintains its integrity despite the corrupt system, and Tedric, a mysterious man secretly brought from another universe by a mysterious group known as the Scientists. Tedric is, however, the pivotal figure in the entire story.

The already overused plot is worsened by a series of coincidences. When two men are chosen to accompany Tedric on a secret mission to the planet's surface, one of them just happens to be the husband of the woman who is leading the rebellion. When they are trapped in the mines by a bombing attack, it just happens that the two of them are the only people who remember a secret escape hatch, which just happens to be accessible. You can probably anticipate many similar coincidences as you read it yourself, if you bother. I wouldn't recommend that you do, and since there are supposedly nine more titles in this series to come, I wouldn't like to see them all depend on such manipulations on the part of the author...after all, I have to read them all. (45)

I -- ALIEN by J. Michael Reaves, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.75 (profusely illustrated by Terry Austin)

The illustrations are perhaps the high point of this, yet another first contact story, and apparently the first in yet another series. Caliban is an alien with mechanical implants who is transported to Earth by means of some inadvertent space warp, along with his girlfriend, who doesn't appear in this story, but who will apparently be the object of his wanderings around our tacky planet.

Caliban is plunged into the world of motorcycle clubs, religious cults, artists, and so forth as he attempts to find a means to locate his girlfriend and return to his home world, simultaneously avoiding agents of the government who want to dissect him, and to prevent a psychic artist from admitting horrible creatures loose on Earth by opening occult pathways between the worlds. It's the fugitive all over again, but with special near-magic powers, and determined to save the world in each episode. The result is melodramatic, contrived, overdone, and uses the superpowers to escape from situations the author has written himself into. This is a definite miss, and I hope the series dies aborning. Reaves doesn't do too badly with shorter fiction, and he should stick to it until he can come up with something better than this. (33)

THE FACE IN THE FROST by John Bellairs, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.75 (reprint of the 1969 hardcover)

This is a surprisingly good fantasy novel, considering that it has been overlooked for almost a decade, probably because the author is noted chiefly for his juveniles, which in some ways this delightful fantasy resembles. Two wizards, Prospero and Roger Bacon, discover that an evil plot is afoot. The evil magician Melichus has gained possession of a book of fantastic occult power, and is about to conquer the world. The two set out on a magical quest to stop him before he gains total mastery of its powers.

Their adventures include a voyage in a model boat, enchantment in a graveyard, a number of evil meances of the most repulsive kind, trolls, and the like. Bellairs has a deft, light, amusing style that is a joy to read. He makes extensive and effective use of anachronism (his mirror can show pictures of our modern world, and Prospero has been known to watch football games). Good reading throughout, with none of the "cute" stuff that mars much of childrens' literature. Indeed, some of the suspense passages are sufficient to frighten the teeth out of an adult. The best piece of this type I've read outside of Alan Garner. (82)

ZARSTHOR'S BANE by Andre Norton, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

This is another illustrated novel from Ace, but the illustrations by Evan TenBroeck Steadman are not at all interesting. They are basically crude drawings, often reflecting the fact that the artist spent little time reading the book. The female character is described as blonde, clad in baggy clothing with full pants legs, yet she is drawn everywhere as having dark hair and wearing naught but a bikini.

The story, on the other hand, is one of the best of recent Norton's. Brixia is a young woman wandering alone in the wild after a war threw down the house in which she formerly dwelt. She comes upon two other outcasts, a young squire and his lord, a man suffering from lapses of memory and general confusion following the death of a close friend, presumably in that same war.

The three are thrown together by a chance encounter with bandits, and find themselves journeying across a strangely haunted landscape, retracing the history of a conflict from the past which continues on an occult level.

Norton is not particularly strong on characterization here, rarely has tried to provide much in-depth motivation in any case. She excels at the journey story, painting in one macabre landscape after another. This latest novel is one of the better examples, and the sweep of events, the various dangers (particularly a section where the ground itself seems to be stalking them) is excellent. (77)

THE CAVE GIRL by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (includes THE CAVE GIRL and THE CAVE MAN, published originally in 1913 and 1917, and published in paperback by Ace twice before).

THE ETERNAL SAVAGE by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (originally published in 1914 as THE ETERNAL LOVER, also previously released by Ace)

Here Ace is reprinting two more barbaric action novels. The first is a below average Burroughs tale of Waldo Smith-Jones, a diletante who finds himself stranded on a lost island inhabited by people who have never risen above the caves, and who must still battle for survival against sabre tooth tigers and such. There is as well Nadara, the obligatory beautiful princess, destined to be rescued from one danger after another as the hero realizes that brawn is as important as brains in the primitive world. He perseveres, triumphs, is rescued, and brings his beautiful bride back to civilization. Nothing special at all; in fact, one of Burroughs' more disappointing efforts.

He did far better with the very similar novel, THE ETERNAL SAVAGE. Victoria Custer is the beautiful girl this time, bent on a visit to the home of Tarzan. But a time warp occurs, and she finds herself journeying back to the Niocene with a brawny cave man, Nu. This is just the reverse of the other title, with the girl discovering the value of a man who is physically capable of protecting her from the same basic menaces that arise in THE CAVE GIRL. For some reason, everything seems to come off much better this time, though, and the story is every bit as good as the Tarzan books. If you like one, you should like the other, but not necessarily in the same ways.

It's nice to see that Burroughs is likely to remain in print in soft covers, because despite the crudity of his writing style, and even the outdated moral codes he subscribes to, there is a clear talent for storytelling in most of his novels that will almost make them worthwhile, particularly to younger readers. Anyone who is totally incapable of enjoying on at least a surface level the adventures of Tarzan or John Carter or David Innes is missing something. CAVE GIRL (44) SAVAGE (58)

CITIZEN IN SPACE by Robert Sheckley, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (12 stories first collected in 1955 and published in paperback by Ballantine Books)

Ace has provided me with a good excuse to re-read some of the best short stories published in the early 1950's. Robert Sheckley reigned for many years as the unchallenged master of black humor in SF short fiction. In story after story he shot barbed arrows into every target that presented itself, portraying human foibles in a variety of ways. He was also a master of the surprise ending, so much so that it is really impossible to tell you the plots of many of these without giving away the punch line. But that doesn't mean that this is a collection of one liners. This is one of the all time finest collections ever produced by the genre.

There is everything here, spaceships, far worlds, a planetary intelligence, time paradoxes, aliens, and everything more you can imagine. There's a story about feminism that was originally published in 1955. If you don't have one of the Ballantine editions, this is your chance. Ace has also announced their intention of reissuing another Sheckley collection, UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS. Watch for both of them.

BROTHER ASSASSIN by Fred Saberhagen, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (reprint of 1969 Ballantine paperback)

Ace seems to be bringing back into print a lot of books allowed by other publishers to languish. This is the second collection of stories about the Berserkers, those sentient machines that travel between the stars, left over from an eon old interstellar war, whose only purpose is to destroy life wherever they find it. This book consists of three novelettes originally published in IF (not GALAXY as credited) in 1967. Their individual titles were "Stoneman", "The Winged Helmet", and "Brother Berserker".

BROTHER ASSASSIN is more of an integrated whole than the earlier Berserker book, so it is probably a better novel. But it struck me that Saberhagen was not true to his own conception here. In the earlier book, they were raging devices, whose menace lay in their incredible force. But with this series, they became more subtle, and somehow less menacing -- probably because of their new rationality.

Fully alert to their presence, humanity is able to stalemate the Berserker forces. Frustrated, they turn to the planet Sirgol, the only planet in the universe where time travel is possible (yet another new twist that detracts from the continuity of the whole series). They plan to travel back through time to prevent the successful career of a famous scientist, hopefully to thus reduce the technological basis of human culture.

Ranged against them is Derron Odegard, a kind of time policeman. Odegard turns out to be a very resourceful man and there, as they say, hangs the tale. Competent, interesting, in some ways novel, but I found it disappointing. (58)

THE ASUTRA by Jack Vance, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95 (reprint of the Berkley edition, originally published in F&SF in 1973)

This is the third volume in a trilogy originally serialized in F&SF and subsequently released in paperback by Dell; the first two volumes are THE ANOME and THE BRAVE FREE MEN. On the planet Durdane, the land of Shant is once more in trouble, menaced by the barbarian hordes of Rogushkoi and their symbiotic partners, the asutra. Gastel Etwane, a typically enchanting Vance hero, and an Earthman named Ifness set out to spy on the barbarians as they gather in the nearby land of Caraz.

The plot unfolds at a dizzying speed from there on, as we find the real reason for the presence of the asutra on Durdane, and as Etwane gets up to his boot-tops in trouble. This is a superior novel even for Vance, the last major work he completed before starting the Alastor cycle, the best things he has yet written. The whole trilogy is excellent, and Ace seems determined to bring a large number of superior novels back into print. Their selection thus far is every bit as good as were the selections of the Avon Rediscovery series, and the Ace editions have the advantage of being competitively priced. If you never read the trilogy before, be certain to pick it up now. (85)

TORNADO ALLEY by William Tuning, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95

This is not a badly written book, for the most part, but it is one of the most boring SF novels to appear in quite a while. Tuning wrote an average quality short story titled "Jill the Giant Killer", then made the mistake of padding it out to novel length.

Jill Kernan is a senator whose pet project is to make over a portion of our armed forces into a tornado killing group. Highly skilled pilots will fly into newborn tornadoes and break them up with thermal bombs. Over the objection of reactionary old Senator Thurlow she establishes a pilot project under the command of Colonel Dan Hammer, with whom she eventually becomes romantically entangled. There follows endless pages of senatorial bickering, power plays, espionage, and grotesque oratory. There is a basically sound plot, but Tuning just can't seem to make his characters work, and the dialogue is so artificial that all verisimilitude is lost. (44)

AN ANCIENT RAGE by Jacqueline La Tourette, Dell Books, 1978, \$1.75

This is a fairly traditional and somewhat low key ghost story, sort of. It has all the traditional elements -- an old English house with an enigmatic inscription on a stone in the yard, a history of violent death, strange monkish events, a mildly psychic and beautiful young woman, and things that go bump in the night. It is also this author's sixth book, only one of which was not fantasy of one sort or another.

Although not a bad novel, it really doesn't merit a lot of attention. There is nothing particularly new in it, unless you count the fact that the "ghost" is actually a fairy warrior from another world, driven mad and murdered by his own people. There is very little active menace throughout the novel; it's as though the characters had all read the book beforehand and each knew his or her own fate in advance. Indeed, any reader who can't predict the outcome halfway through should have his credentials revoked. Acceptable filler material as a change of pace, but certainly nothing to actively pursue. (47)

FIRESHIP by Joan D. Vinge, Dell Books, 1978, \$1.75

Joan Vinge is one of the more promising new writers to appear in the past few years, and this is one of two of her books to appear in the past month or so. It consists of two novellas, the title story from ANALOG in 1978 and "Mother and Child" from ORBIT in 1975. They are both very good, despite being totally different from each other.

The first concerns Ethan Ring, a composite personality created when the basically unsuccessful and limited human being, Michael Yarrow, is coupled with the mini-computer ETHANAC. With the computer plugged into his spine, Ethan Ring flees Earth to Mars, where he becomes involved with some professional spies attempting to infiltrate the financial empire of Khorram Kabir, a mysterious recluse whose whims affect nations. Ring is the typical involuntary hero, though his electronic augmentation lends him an extra dimension.

Less conventional is "Mother and Child", a story with a medieval atmosphere set on a colony world. Non carbon based aliens are deliberately manipulating the culture of this stranded colony to prevent the rise of a technological civilization, because the aliens fear our aggressiveness. To this end, they bring a great deal of hardship to Etaa, a young priestess of one nation, enslaved by another, then kidnapped to another world. There, she and one of the aliens develop a form of contact that is likely to affect the future of both races. A very fine story indeed.

THE SHIP THAT SAILED THE TIME STREAM by G.C. Edmondson, Ace Books, 1978, \$1.95, at least the third Ace printing of this 1965 novel.

This is one of the few novels in the De Camp style that rivals De Camp himself, and it amazes me that Edmondson went on to produce a few mediocre SF novels afterwards, never writing the obvious sequel to this fine novel. A crew of American sailors on a research vessel are inadvertently propelled through time, and find themselves fighting Viking longships, rescuing fair maidens, bucking the Roman legions, etc. This is my third reading and I still love it. Buy copies for your friends. (88)

* * * * *

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

AN ANCIENT RAGE by Jacqueline LaTourrette (22)
THE ASUTRA by Jack Vance (21)
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA by Stan Lee (12)
BROTHER ASSASSIN by Fred Saberhagen (21)
CAMELOT IN ORBIT by Arthur Landis (4)
THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE by Larry Gonick (17)
THE CAVE GIRL by Edgar Rice Burroughs (20)
CHILL by Jory Sherman (11)
CITIZEN IN SPACE by Robert Sheckley (21)
CLONING by David Shear (5)
THE DEVILS OF D-DAY by Graham Masterton (8)
THE DREAMING JEWELS by Theodore Sturgeon (14)
DYING OF THE LIGHT by George R.R. Martin (10)
THE EARTHBOOK OF STORMGATE by Poul Anderson (9†)
EARTH MAGIC by Alexei & Cory Panshin (13)
THE ETERNAL SAVAGE by Edgar Rice Burroughs (20)
THE FACE IN THE FROST by John Bellairs (19)
FANTASMS (7)
FIRESHIP by Joan D. Vinge (22)
GOLDEN SCORPIO by Alan Burt Akers (14)
THE HOLMES-DRACULA FILE by Fred Saberhagen (18)
I ALIEN by J. Michael Reaves (19)
I AM A BARBARIAN by Edgar Rice Burroughs (15)
IMMORTALITY INC by Robert Sheckley (16)
LORD TEDRIC by Gordon Eklund (19)
MAN PLUS by Frederik Pohl (4)
MASQUE WORLD by Alexei Panshin (13)

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL by Barbara Freeman (5)
THE OUTLAW OF TORN by Edgar Rice Burroughs (15)
PENDULUM by A.E. van Vogt (11)
THE QUILLIAN SECTOR by E.C. Tubb (16)
THE SHIP THAT SAILED THE TIME STREAM by G.C. Edmondson (23)
THE SIEGE OF FALTARA by Arsen Darnay (18)
STAR FORCE by Robert Mills (9)
STAR PROBE by Joseph Green (17)
STARSONGS AND UNICORNS by Eric Norden (6)
THE STAR WATCHMAN by Ben Bova (15)
STILL I PERSIST IN WONDERING by Edgar Pangborn (2)
STRANGERS by Gardner Dozois (13)
TORNADO ALLEY by William Tuning (22)
TOWER OF THE ELEPHANT by Robert E. Howard (17)
VISIONS AND VENTURERS by Theodore Sturgeon (3)
WAR GAMERS' WORLD by Hugh Walker (3)
WORLD'S BEST SF SERIES TWO edited by Donald Wollheim (12)
A WORLD CALLED CAMELOT by Arthur H. Landis (4)
WYST: ALASTOR 1716 by Jack Vance (8)
YEAR'S BEST FANTASY #4 edited by Lin Carter (15)
YOLANDA: SLAVES OF SPACE by Dominic Verseau (9)
ZARSTHOR'S BANE by Andre Norton (20)

* * * * *

CRITICAL MASS
19 Angell Drive
East Providence
Rhode Island 02914

FIRST CLASS FIRST CLASS FIRST CLASS FIRST CLASS FIRST CLASS