

PAPERBACK INFERNO

55

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Editorial Address: 45, Greenbank Road,
Birkenhead, Merseyside L42 7JT, U.K.

Contents

EDITORIAL.....	p. 1
KEEPING BOOKS IN PRINT - by One who Knows.....	George Hay...p. 3
OVERVIEW.....	Magazine Reviews by Edward James.....p. 5

Plus reviews of recent paperbacks
by:-

Graham Andrews
Chris Bailey
David V. Barrett
Alan Fraser
Mark Greener
Judith Hanna
Joy Hibbert
Edward James
David Langford
Christopher Ogden
Nigel E. Richardson
Andy Sawyer
Martyn Taylor
Sue Thomason

Rust Never Sleeps ...

To some extent this is a transitional
issue.

I'm not sure my self - yet - how the
balance will turn out. There are reviews
commissioned under Joseph's editorship
as well as mine, as well as longer pieces,
and until everything is pasted up and
ready it's hard to judge how everything
will fit together.

But so far it all seems to be devel-
oping nicely. George Hay has contributed
an article giving some background to the
problems of getting out-of-print material
back to us: something which I intend to
return to in the future. Edward James
presents an overview of this year's IASF
and Analog, and will be looking regularly
at these magazines. Next issue, Chris
Bailey will begin the same process with
F&SF. There are some new names in the re-
viewing team and will be more next issue:
in fact, could I ask potential reviewers
to hold off for a while while we absorb
the flood of volunteers! (However, I'm still
in the market for overview articles on
aspects of the SF paperback scene, so if
you have anything you wish to contribute
on that, drop me a line. I'm also urgently
appealing for artwork - cartoons and fill-
ers.)

Before I start the 'real' editorial
let me express my grateful thanks to Jos-
eph Nicholas, not only for all the hard
work he has put into PI in the past, but
for the considerable aid he, together
with BSFA Printing Person John Harvey
and our Chairman Alan Dorey, has given
me over the last few months. Joseph has
been a model of outgoing editors, and I
would have coped far less effectively
without his willingness to explain, pat-
iently and in words of one syllable, his
administration and production of Paper-
back Inferno.

* * *

Sometimes it's good to question our pur-
pose, and I want to raise the question
of what Paperback Inferno is for. Who
reads the reviews? Why should they? Is
there, in short, a reason for the maga-
zine's existence?

Well yes there is (I say) because if
I'm to be spending my free evenings hit-
ting typewriter keys I have to believe
that there's a reason for it, but flipp-
ancy aside, if there's a reason for the
BSFA at all, that includes the existence
of a magazine devoted to the review and

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18, Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire G72 9Na.....

analysis of as much of the field as possible. If I must bring in a cliché at this stage, let me remark that if PI did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it.

That does not mean, of course, that it ought to exist in the form which Joseph gave it, or in its earlier incarnation as Paperback Parlour, conceived and edited by Philip Stevenson-Payne, or in the form which I am trying to give it. But although I've heard it said that when people read BSFA publications they never read the book reviews (or the fanzine reviews or the convention reports or the critical articles, depending on who's making the statements) I can't quite understand why. Critical coverage of SF publications is, presumably, vital if we're interested in SF, and there are few enough good and regular reviews around. I want to extend our coverage of SF for several reasons. First, because it's implicit in our existence: I don't think it's quite good enough to only partially reflect the range of published SF. Second, I think people want it: one of the reasons people join the BSFA is, allegedly, to find out more about SF: what's available and what's it like? Third, I think it's relatively easy to list new and forthcoming books, with perhaps a few lines on each nicked from a publisher's blurb, but that is neither desirable nor necessary. I've said before that I believe in the importance of criticism. That doesn't mean hatchet jobs on unfashionable authors or attitudes, but it does mean a reasoned and concerned approach and a care for standards. (And not the kind of 'standards' Keith Joseph witters about!) We may be an SF association, but just because a book is published on an SF list doesn't mean we should greet it with open arms. SF is only part of the world: there are other values which we must bring to bear in our criticism besides how far some shoddy piece of hackwork fits in with the cultural bias of American pulp fiction. So I'm sorry - no, scrub that, because in the end I'm NOT sorry that although I want PI to point out merit where merit is due I have no intention of allowing garbage to be overlooked.

But I hope that I can bring to your notice areas which are perhaps more worthwhile and interesting than the SF equivalent of Dallas novelisations. And here can I pay tribute to the way Joseph Nicholas has brought to our attention books dealing with some of the more disturbing possibilities of our potential futures (such as the range of books on the nuclear arms race reviewed in PI 49): books which would never have been mentioned had we confined ourselves to genre SF. There are, though, other avenues we could explore...

For example, I have just been reading Farrukh Dhondy's TRIP TRAP, a collection of short stories for teenagers published last year under the Fontana Lion imprint. Several of these stories are SF or near-SF, intriguingly self-referential tales concerning a story-telling computer or a school worksheet detailing a story of the future after the ice-caps have melted; a poignant story of an aging, failing teach-

er to whom metaphor and simile become distressingly real; the discovery in the Himalayas of a Fifth Gospel. These stories are obviously aimed at the kind of market for whom Dhondy wrote his earlier collections EAST END AT YOUR FEET and COME TO MECCA, and his move from realism to fantasy is interesting if at times a little strained. These stories are by no means flawless. But compared with some of the books I've been dutifully looking at for PI they are wonderfully fresh: inventive, caring and committed to providing good entertainment as well as combatting the cancer of racism. TRIP TRAP may be technically published 'for children'. But as I cannot possibly see any one other than psychopathic 13 year olds taking pleasure in, say, David Drake's HAMMER'S SLAMMER'S (reviewed herein) I don't think the distinction is worth making. In fact, I'm reminded of a remark by Edward James, who in his review of Piers Anthony's CREWEL LYE last issue mentions "the young teenagers whom Anthony admits to be a major component of the audience for his 'Xanth' series." Somehow, many of the books we do notice make more sense if we look upon them as a branch of children's literature.

So I've made a start this issue by noting one or two children's books which I believe deserve comment, and I will be increasing this aspect in future issues.

Two interesting developments this year have been the new 'action adventure' SF series (Venture) from Hamlyn and the Women's Press new SF series. The first four in the latter series vary considerably in quality from the brilliant poetic/angry/lyrical stories of Joanna Russ to the naively-constructed (but in my view, ultimately successful) PLANET DWELLER from Jane Palmer, and even more so in ideological stances. They are reviewed here by Joy Hibbert. The need for such a 'reactive' stance can only be stressed by comparing them with the unpleasant Venture books. Since reading the volumes reviewed elsewhere in PI I managed to see the previous two: Richard C. Meredith's WE ALL DIED AT BREAKAWAY STATION and Philip E. High's COME, HUNT AN EARTHMAN. The former has, apparently, been well received in places, but I found it lacklustre: the latter started extremely well but seemed to peter out after the required amount of wordage. Were I new to SF it is the only book so far of the series which would spur me to seek more of the same: essentially, the series would have turned me off.

So it's intriguing that the best read of the session so far came from a writer from whom I was turned off. Judith Hanna will, I hope, finish off her examination of Samuel R. Delany's 'Neveryon' series (see PI 48) at a later date, so let me say only that FLIGHT FROM NEVERYON (Bantam, 386pp. \$3.95) is superb!

And with that rush of enthusiasm I will leave you!

(Andy)

KEEPING BOOKS IN PRINT...

By One who Knows

If you take the long view of history, there is nothing wrong with publishing that a few thousand years won't cure. On the other hand, there is a famous retort to the Long View of History that "in the long run we are all dead." Well, whether you accept that, in turn, is a matter of metaphysics, a can of serpents which it might be best not to open here, since my brief is to speak of what I have learned about getting o/p sf back into print. In a spirit of kindness to readers, I shall start off with the negative aspects, and end with something more up-beat.

Let me begin with a not-untypical story. About, I think, seven years ago - maybe a few more - I went to the then-newly-established Womens' Press with my only copy of Hortense Calishers Journal from Ellipsia suggesting they read it with a view to getting it back into print: it had been o/p then for quite some time. I hope, by the way, that I have got that title exactly right - the fact, you see, was that when I got back to the people concerned, after allowing a tactful time to elapse, they had lost the book. Since then, I have been able to obtain another copy (any reader who has one, and does not desperately need it, can take this as a hint to write me stating what he would ask for it). I might add that to my way of thinking the novel is a masterpiece of sophisticated and witty writing, and light-years ahead of anything of the kind that has appeared since.

Nil desperandum ... learning, around last September, that Women's Press were going to launch an sf series, I again approached them, suggesting that they reprint Stella Benson's Living Alone, a fine example of feminist fantasy written in ... 1914. I had no copy of the book, but had expensively xeroxed a copy from one on loan via the public library system. The publishers agreed to consider it. Sometime this spring, I rang up suggesting it could be time for a decision. Terribly sorry: we've been very hectic here, but you will hear within weeks... Two weeks ago, I wrote again. No reply. Last week, I phoned. At last, a decision ... not to publish... Well, things could be worse. At least they still have my xeroxed copy, which I shall go down and collect by hand, not trusting the Post Office overmuch.

You see what one is up against?

But perhaps I had better spell it out. Perhaps also I should spell it out that I am not, repeat not, engaged in any sour-grapes campaign against publishers. The fact is that we live in an age when, even more than usual, people take their protective colouring from their surrounding environment, and this applies very particularly to businessmen. And publishing these days is very much a business. Indeed, you would get some very odd looks were you to sit in a publishers' office

and suggest it even could be anything else. To allow for the possibility that a reading of these words might be of help to some post-holocaust scholar scrabbling about in the ruin of the Science Fiction Foundation's library, or wherever, let me particularise here, by a quote from Ian Robinson's THE SURVIVAL OF ENGLISH, published by C.U.P. in 1973. "Things are now industries which twenty years ago would have been trades or professions. Farming used not to be thought of as an industry (it was just farming) nor even used publishing, but the latter is now officially described as an industry on the forms publishers are compelled by law to fill up under the Statistics of Trade Act. 1947." We are now more than a decade onward (backward?) from there, and of course, the progress/regress goes on with ever-accelerating speed. If you sat in, as I sometimes do, at the Science Fiction Luncheon Club dinners, where the discussions centre entirely around contracts, you might hear things that would chill your blood. And yet, like Brutus, these are all honourable men ... that is, they act with good intent according to the mores of their time. What else could one expect? I assure you, there is little cas pay-off in nostalgia...

What I am saying is that publishing is run by accountants and publicity men, and is not likely in any foreseeable future to change away from that state of affairs. I am not, and do not wish to be quoted as, saying that all the editors concerned are either illiterate, idiots or money-maniacs. Some of them are highly literate. If you want to get an accurate picture of the publishing world, I recommend Anthony Blond's recently-published THE BOOK BOOK, written by one who very much knows what he is talking about. And yet ... and yet - a year or so ago I visited Anthony Blond, leaving with him my only copies of two very rare and absolutely-top-quality o/p fantasy novels. They decided not to handle them. Very well ... fair enough ... but what really hurt was that they then admitted they had lost both books... books which it had taken me decades to acquire. Let me be fair: when I finally managed to establish that the original publisher had a library copy of one of the books, Anthony Blond laid out £13 for a xerox to be made. No doubt, when I locate a copy of the other one, he will do the same. He is - and I speak without irony - an honourable man.

While I'm at it, let me add an account of what has happened with the xerox of the first of these books. I passed it to a lady colleague who is a publisher's reader and whose taste is excellent. Unfortunately, she has a full-time job and reads mss on the side, as well as reading on the side. Some of her reading she does on the Underground. But have you ever tried

reading a xeroxed-ms on the Underground? No way ... so, months later, she has hardly been able to get past the opening pages...

Well, well ... enough of gloom and doom. Let me say that over the last few decades I have been successful in getting a number of valuable sf/fantasy books into print, pb and hardback. I don't carry a list, but they include, I think four books by H.G. Wells (as a formerly active Vice-President - I think it is - of the H.G. Wells Society I felt I ought to do something), Robert Graves' masterpiece SEVEN DAYS IN NEW CRETE, in both hardback and pb. two short-story collections by Lord Dunsany, and Claude Houghton's I AM JONATHAN SCRIVENER. (As the latter can, with diligence, still be found in the early Penguin edition, I would have preferred to put out one of Houghton's really hard-to-get and very powerful works, but there you are). And, having found out that Robert Aickman's only novel, THE LATE BREAKFASTERS, had vanished without trace, I was able to get that back also. My latest success in this line was with G.K. Chesterton's THE BALL AND THE CROSS, o/p since, I think, 1909.

Is there any 'secret formula' to all this? None whatsoever. One establishes, by one's own reading, that such-and-such a book is, in one's own view, of such a quality that it should be available to an intelligent reading public. I should add here that some common-sense is called for. After all, since one will be bending the ear of the publisher, one owes it to him to recommend to him only books that do have at least a reasonable chance of, as a man I once worked for used to say, 'making their pennies'. After all, the publisher also has to look after his job, wife, mortgages, etc., and it would be quite unreasonable to expect him to put his outfit's money on the line for something that only three-and-one-half people are going to buy. For this reason, I have sometimes - often, in fact - refrained from recommending items that were - to put it as some would have it, cynically, but, as I would put it, realistically - too good for the general public. Of course, if one were dealing with a publisher specialising in a limited but above-average income clientele, that might be different...

Your next step is to check the situation with you proposed book. If it is in public domain - which varies in the U.K. from the United States - that is splendid: no copyright problem exists. (I may add here that the non-existence currently of many fine items is purely a matter of dates: the very day the copyright in certain famous names lapses, then books of theirs which are often referred to in hushed tones in works of Lit. Crit., but which you can't get for love or money, will start to drop off the presses). If the book is still in copyright with either the agent or his estate, then you must, via the agents, establish the exact facts

of the matter. Publishers work to hard schedules: you must not expect them to do your homework for you. On the other hand, if you put in front of them a specific proposal with all the relevant facts, they will see you as a fellow-professional and are more likely to take your proposal seriously, and start going into print costs and marketing estimates. If the author is or was a famous one, that helps considerably. You should also think of anything else that might help the sale of the book, even though it has no bearing whatsoever on the quality of the writing. Did your author write a book in which he dealt - in 1928, let us say - with an international airline plane kidnapped by Arab militants? (unlikely, I grant you, but you'd be surprised ... if my memory fails me not, the fact that Wells' The World Set Free was almost the first novel to mention in some detail the use of an atomic bomb helped me to get it into pb) - then you should mention that fact. The name of the game is marketing, not publishing.

There - I have given you the bones of the thing. I said that I would finish on as constructive a note as I could, and I will therefore add one or two small points. The English Language Society, for which I act as a consultant, has agreed to start publishing o/p monographs of value, and we shall start with a series that includes Lord Dunsany's Donellan lectures, given during the last war, and which should be of interest to anyone concerned with Dunsany himself, or with English prose, of which he treats. This is no enormous deal: the office out of which the Society currently functions has an excellent reproduction machine: one has only to clear a rights agreement - rejecting, I think, anything more than 10% - and run off a few copies. Hardly to be compared with the sales of, say, Tolkien, but valuable all the same. As a commercial, let me add that anyone interested should write: The Administrator, English Language Society, Fine Books Oriental at Luzacs', 46 Great Russell Street, London WC1.

More lately, tiring of this endless process of pushing heavy boulders one at a time up a steep hill, I have approached a Large Outfit with the suggestion that they negotiate with an Even Larger Outfit to produce a whole slew of o/p classics. It took a long time to even get to consideration of the matter, but I understand that some sort of counter-proposal should reach us in the weeks ahead. Who knows? Not I, to be sure... But I am reminded of the man who used to speak, book-wise, of "making pennies." From time to time he would ring me on a Saturday asking me, as a special favour, to come and visit him at home on a Sunday morning, he being too busy to see me at the office during the week (he said). "It's very important," he would add. "Take a taxi, I'll settle it for you." Sighing deeply - for I knew exactly what was to come - I would take the taxi. I would arrive, be offered

a drink, and then be told the message I now pass on to all those interested in these matters:- "Keep pushing, George!"

(George Hay)

{ Take heed of Critics, they bite (like fish) at any thing, especially at books.

{ (Thomas Dekker, 1606)

MAGAZINE REVIEWS

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Overview...

by EDWARD JAMES

ISAAC ASIMOV'S and ANALOG, JANUARY TO JUNE 1985

I suppose if I had any confidence in my own judgement I might have prophesied which of the stories I mentioned in my review of the 1984 Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine and Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact (PI 52) would make it in this year's round of awards. I could have predicted that these Davis magazines would not be in the running for any BSFA awards. And I would have predicted that Octavia Butler's novelette 'Bloodchild' (June Asimov's) and John Varley's novella 'Press Enter' (May Asimov's) would do well in the American stakes. In fact they both won Nebulas, came top in the Locus awards, and at the moment of writing both have a chance for Hugos. Perhaps I should be a bit bolder this time round. And reviewing the magazines so far in advance of the award-giving season means that any false prophecies are unlikely to be noticed...

There have been some likely contenders for the awards in these twelve issues, though most of them, as last year, are to be found in Asimov's rather than Analog. An exception might be one of the two serials published in Analog so far this year: Charles Sheffield's Between the Strokes of Night (March - June). Sheffield is one of those English expatriate writers of hard sf (like A.C. Clarke, J.B. Clarke or James Hogan) whose enthusiasm for science - even messianic fervour - can make one forget the occasionally stumbling prose. And Sheffield is now a very much more proficient writer than he used to be, with a surer grip on his plot and characters. This novel has a scope and interest which recalls vintage Clarke or Blish, starting as it does with suspended animation experiments in New Zealand in 2010 (hardly a date drawn out of the hat) and broadening the canvas each episode to end, twenty-five thousand years later, with experiments in 'stella-forming'. He has managed to pack in a number of fascinating, and largely new, sf concepts: anyone whose mind needs a little old-fashioned bogging should pick up the book as soon as it comes out.

Otherwise Analog was rather more staid than its usual self. Few stories seemed to be anything other than not very imaginative variations on tried and tired themes. One exception to this might be Eric Vinicoff's 'When the High Lord Arrives' (April) which at least has Japanese 'space lords' instead

of the Americans who dominate the usual stories of space colonisation: the revival of old-fashioned feudal Japanese mores in this future world may not be particularly plausible, but it does provide some interesting situations. J. Brian Clarke offered a sequel, 'Earthgate' (May) to his competent tale of alien science from last year's February Analog, 'The Exediter'. And, solely because I find Talmudic scholarship fascinating, I rather liked Eric G. Iverson's lightweight short, 'The R Strain' (June), about the theological problems for a rabbi when genetic engineers produce a pig which chews the cud and has cloven hoofs. Is it kosher?

The fare produced by Asimov's was of an altogether different calibre, and it is well worth looking, briefly, at each of the issues. January led with a Lucius Shepard 'The End of Life as We Know It', a novelette with the finely drawn setting (Mexican) and excellent characterisation which one expects of Shepard, but I was left with a feeling that neither the plot nor the ideas were as good as the treatment. In Frederik Pohl's short called 'Fermi and Frost' a SETI expert experiences the onset of nuclear winter while in Iceland. The Fermi in the title relates to a possible explanation for the Fermi paradox: that the reason why we have not encountered alien life is because of the tendency of 'intelligent' life to self-destruction. We had another explanation in John Gribbin's 'Programmed for Destruction', in the February Analog. Both are in the good old tradition of lectures disguised as sf. A real lecture in the current (July) Analog by David Brin adds an interesting suggestion: that Carl Sagan's interest in the nuclear winter theory was sparked off by a desire to solve the Fermi paradox.

The February Asimov's contains the most obvious award contender: Robert Silverberg's novella 'Sailing to Byzantium'. It's a story of a far future of high-technology pleasure-seeking: a commentary upon Moorcock's 'Dancers at the End of Time' with Moorcock's innuence and fantasy replaced by a cynical realism, and the past used for the entertainment of the future in a much more subtle and ambiguous way. It's accompanied by a wry role-reversal short from Marta Randall, 'Undeniably Cute: a Cautionary Tale', and a Kafkaesque fantasy set in Egypt (?) from Lisa Goldstein, 'Tourists'. March continued the North African theme (as did May) with Wolfgang Jeschke's 'The Land of Osiris', a story of a traveller to a post-holo-

caust North Africa who meets aliens in the shape of Egyptian gods: nicely written, but too uncomfortably Danikenian for me.

April featured another Lucius Shepard, 'How the Wind Spoke at Madaket', a powerful horror fantasy this time with a Nantucket setting, and a setting that interlocks with the story rather than overwhelming it. But there were other good stories in this issue: Gregory Benford's hardest of hard sf, 'Time's Rub', a puzzle story (in more than one sense) featuring extremely alien aliens; Andrew Weiner's 'Klein's Machine', a psychological report on an sf fan with a rather different sense of reality from the rest of us; and a fun horror story from George Alec Effinger, 'The Beast from One-Quarter-Fathom', about the Thing bought accidentally by a tropical fish fanatic.

May was perhaps the most successful issue. The cover story was Bruce Sterling's short, 'Dinner in Audoghast', a beautifully written story (but is it even fantasy?) of a prophet who interrupts a civilised dinner in a medieval African city, to warn of its fate: almost total obliteration from history. The novella, 'Empire State', was by a newcomer (to me), Keith Minnion. I'm a little suspicious of future post-disaster scen-

arios which recreate past lifestyles, but this story of a naval expedition from the Catskill Archipelago to the drowned skyscrapers of New York is quite effective. And in addition there were at least three short stories in this issue worth going back to: by Scott Russell Sanders, Lisa Goldstein and Marta Randall.

Finally, the June issue, almost as consistently good. Another African tale, 'Tunicate, Tunicate, Wilt thou be Mine?', by Charles Sheffield, tried just too hard and too obviously for the horror effect (as if the title were not horror enough...); a couple of real chillers from Richard Grant ('Pages from Cold Harbour') and Garry Kilworth ('The Thunder of the Captains'), and a topical look at a future Stonehenge Festival, 'Solstice', by a James Patrick Kelly who obviously didn't realise there weren't going to be any more. Asimov's keeps going as the best sf magazine around, in my opinion, and with more of it too: both magazines went to 192 pages in April. All credit to Shawna McCarthy, who's done such a good job as editor. And, the bombshell: she's leaving, or has already left, to become a senior editor at Bantam. Watch this space for future developments...

(Edward James)

REVIEWS

- ★ Sally Miller Gearheart - - THE WANDERGROUND (Women's Press, 212pp. £1.95)
- ★ Jane Palmer - - THE PLANET DWELLER (Women's Press, 147pp. £1.95)
- ★ Joanna Russ - - (EXTRA)ORDINARY PEOPLE (Women's Press 162pp. £1.95)
- ★ Joanna Russ - - THE FEMALE MAN (Women's Press, 214pp. £1.95)

According to the introduction to each of these books, Women's Press have taken to printing sf for a number of reasons: to publish sf by and about women; to present exciting and provocative feminist images of the future; to challenge male domination of the sf tradition; to encourage more women to write and read sf and to give the sf readership a new and stimulating perspective.

I will be using stereotypes based on reality in this review. 'Sf fan' is the type of person who's written the reviews of The Female Man that I've read so far. 'Feminist' is the person I tried to have sensible discussions of sf with when helping to run a 'Women and Literature' course.

The Wanderground deals with a time in the future when the Earth her/itself has rebelled against male domination, and no machines work outside the cities. On the whole, men live in cities and women in the country, except for a few male feminists and a few breeding women. Inasmuch

as the book has a plot, it concerns the weakening of Earth's control and what can be done about it. Planet Dweller is a much more traditionally sf novel, and also funny, in a Tom Sharpe/Douglas Adams sort of way:

He was well aware of the procedure the Mott had for court martials. The main thing that made them different from any other species' was that the defendant was executed before the trial began. To their way of thinking this was more efficient, because they could always be found guilty on the grounds that they had failed to give evidence in their defence.

In another galaxy lives the Planet Dweller, a being living inside a planet and dependant on it. The Mott wish to prise the Planet Dweller, whose name is Moosevan, from her home as part of their plan of galactic conquest. Moosevan's 'escape-route' would cause the destruction of Earth. While the Mott and their Olmuke allies scheme to destroy Moosevan's planet, two shapechanging aliens attempt to get her through the escape route, and Moosevan and her two Earthly allies try to make them think up a third alternative which would allow Moosevan and Earthpeople to live.

The Planet Dweller is the most easily readable of the four books, involving no noticeable shortforms. Anything even slightly scientific is explained in a no-lecturing manner, and if there is a feminist message, I can't see it. Admittedly, most

of the goodguys are female and most of the badguys are male, but this is not immediately obvious to the casual reader. There are some strange resonances with previous works of sf. Moosevan, as I said, is a life form living on a planet and dependent on it. She meets a human male and falls in love with him. Like the 'Companion' in the Star Trek episode 'Metamorphosis'. Or consider the description of the Mott:

Genetic engineers decided to take over when nature didn't want anything more to do with them.

Compare it with:

The forces of evolution had simply given up on them... they never evolved again: they should never have survived... what nature refused to do for them they simply did without until such time as they were able to rectify the grosser anatomical inconveniences with surgery. (Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy)

The Wanderground is quite different. Both books are loosely based around an animate planet, both have several viewpoint characters, but they go about it in different ways. The Planet Dweller manages to introduce several viewpoint characters without it being noticeable, where Wanderground is like a fixup of short stories, each with a different character, which can be very jarring. Moosevan sits and waits to be rescued, while Earth takes active steps to ensure survival. In many ways The Wanderground is a disappointing novel, perhaps too short for what it's trying to do, and with too many internal inconsistencies. There are a lot of flashbacks: these are the best part of the book as they explain clearly and without diatribe what happened immediately after the Earth rebelled and how female society was formed. The inconsistencies and the ideas that are not sufficiently well explained are part of the major fault of this book: the idea of perfection.

Loosely speaking, this is the idea that without men, women would be perfect, loving and kind towards everyone and everything would be perfect. Whether this could be the case I don't know, but it's certainly been taken too far in this book. In one section, Ono's dog has been caught in a trap, and is seriously hurt. A woman she contacts for help doesn't like dogs, and doesn't care. But rather than being justifiably upset, Ono grovels. Nature is no longer red in tooth and claw; carnivores wait politely till their prey dies or agrees to be kibled. Death is seen as part of life, which is fair enough, but no mention is made of untimely death and attitudes towards that. There are new forms of medicine, new mental powers, new ways of keeping warm, a method of reproduction without male or technological help, none of which are explained. All this gives an impression of unreality, makes it difficult to suspend disbelief. As far as I'm

concerned, sf or fantasy can postulate whatever it likes, so long as it's internally consistent. This isn't.

The Female Man is an sf classic. I wonder at the wisdom of the Women's Press in reprinting this. It is a classic, and thus should have no problems being reprinted by an ordinary company; also it is very complicated. It is possibly the most visible feminist sf novel, and so is probably the novel responsible for putting the most feminists off sf, and hardly likely to help with the Women's Press' stated purpose of 'encouraging more women to read sf'. This is not to say that it is bad, but in many ways it falls between two stools. Relying heavily on sfnal short forms (alternate worlds, genetic engineering, time travel) it will confuse the average feminist, and taking for granted many feminist ideas (femininity as constructed by society is artificial, women and men should be treated as equals, heterosexuality in many people is the result of brainwashing rather than nature) it will threaten and confuse the average sf fan. From a plot viewpoint it is also confusing. There are four viewpoint characters, all of which call themselves 'I' at some point. Russ also has a sharp satirical sense of humour which she uses at the expense of the silly social 'games' people play and attitudes towards sex-roles:

I've never slept with a girl. I couldn't. I wouldn't want to. That's abnormal and I'm not, although you can't be normal unless you do what you want and you can't be normal unless you love men. To do what I wanted would be normal, unless what I wanted was abnormal, in which case it would be abnormal to please myself, and normal to do what I didn't want to do, which isn't normal.

Or:

He: I can't stand stupid vulgar women who read Love Comix and have no intellectual interests.
 She: Oh my, neither can I.
 He: I really admire refined, cultivated, charming women who have careers.
 She: Oh my, so do I.
 He: Why do you think those awful, stupid, vulgar commonplace women get so awful?
 She: Well probably, not wishing to give any offence, and after considered judgement and all that, and very tentatively, with the hope that you won't jump on me - I think that it's at least partly your fault.

(Long silence)

He: You know, on second thought, I think bitchy, castrating, unattractive, neurotic women are even worse. Besides, you're showing your age. And your figure's going.

The average sf fan dismisses this as bitter

polemic - whether the average feminist manages to get through 30 confusing pages to reach the first sign of this, I don't know.

Having decided what the book isn't, then what is it? The plot revolves around four women. Joanna comes from our present, Jeannine from a timestream where World War II never happened and the Depression continues. Janet comes from a future in which the men have died out, Jael from the future where the so-called 'sex war' has become reality. Jael brings the other three women to her time, after they've wandered around each other's timestreams for a while, to try and get their help in the war. Not much of a plot, but this is a rich, fulfilling story, well worth abandoning prejudices and making an effort with the style for.

One of the stories Jael tells is of living in a feudal alternate society as a man. This idea is explored more fully in 'What did you do during the revolution, Grandma?', one of the short stories in Extra(ordinary) People. The five stories are linked in the form of a history lesson. The first deals with a medieval abbess who is not what she seems. The other four are all in the form of letters: a tale of bringing people to a telepathic colony in the 19th Century; rescuing dying people from the present and making them healthy again 2000 years in the future; the story mentioned above; and an account of trying to write a lesbian gothic novel.

Some sf is inherently sf; that is, it could not exist as anything else. Some sf seems to be mainstream fiction with a few sf trappings. Both types exist in this collection. 'Everyday depressions' comes into the latter category. The only mention of anything sfal is "I tell myself about these whenever I decide to emigrate to Mars." The story mentions Gaywyck, a gay-male gothic romance already in existence, so it can't be that far in the future or Gaywyck would no longer be available. 'Souls', the story about the abbess, is also in the latter category. I enjoyed both stories, but they're not really sf so should they be part of the Women's Press' much-vaunted sf range?

(Joy Hibbert)

★Robert Irwin - - THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE (Dedalus, 253pp. £2.95)

"The Arabian Nightmare is obscene and terrible, monotonous and yet horrific. It comes to its victims every night..." Thus the blurb writer, grappling with an exceedingly peculiar book. "As though a medieval historian (which the author is) had joined forces with Jorge Luis Borges and Philip K. Dick to rewrite The Arabian Nights as a horror novel." Thus a struggling reviewer - oh, all right, me - trying to convey its flavour in an 80-word Prestel page. As you might gather, I liked it.

The setting is Cairo in 1484, oozing with rich oriental sleaze. Cairo is inner as well as mundane space, a labyrinth of streets and dreams in which the sort-of-hero, Balain of Norwich, flounders helplessly. Does he wake or sleep? Why does he repeatedly awake (or does he?) with his mouth full of blood? Is he suffering from the dreaded Arabian Nightmare, possibly spread by the sinister Father of Cats, ever-unsleeping researcher of the Alam al-Mithal, world of dreams? Don't ask:

There are some who hold that talking about it, even thinking about it, is enough to attract it and stimulate its attacks. For this reason we do not name it. But even this may not be enough. Therefore I advised that no one should read this book unless he is already aware of what it is, and let those who know, forget, if they can.

The Nightmare, according to certain sources, is an infinity of torment experienced in sleep. The sufferer, awakening, remembers nothing of this horror and goes all unaware to the next night's hell. However, sources may not be reliable. Late in the book, a severed head gives five contradictory explanations of one of the more enigmatically nasty scenes, saying: "There are always more causes than events in the Alam al-Mithal. This generates great pressure..."

Dreams within dreams, stories within stories: but the author has a nasty way of upsetting the ordered symmetry of Arabian Nights narration. His hierarchy of dreams isn't simple; it contains what Douglas Hofstadter calls Strange Loops. A storyteller, who as the narrator of the book seems a decently stable landmark, dies at a most perplexing moment ("I did not intend it to be the story of my death," he later complains). Laughing dervishes confound the wise with Bertrand Russell's paradoxes, and courtesans indulge in Freudian Dream interpretation. An appalling Order of leper knights is deeply involved in the battle for the Alam al-Mithal, now pressing dangerously close to the real world. All is subject to change without notice.

"The Arabian Nightmare is a guide to the Orient of the mind," the blurb concludes, and that's about it: the meaning of the title keeps shifting and expanding, until it stands for the darker side of that whole complex of fantastic romance conjured up by words like 'Cairo', 'Orient' or 'Arabian Nights'. If you like historical fantasy and booby-trapped reality, grab the book.

I can't imagine why this isn't in Unwin's sadly talent-starved (with honourable exceptions) fantasy line. Because it comes instead from an obscure small press, The Arabian Nightmare's cover isn't grotty airbrush work but a marvellously daft old engraving of dervishes. For the same reason,

it's hard to find in shops (always excepting Forbidden Planet); try Dedalus Ltd, 9 St. Stephen's Terrace, London Sw8 1DJ.

(Dave Langford)

★J. Neil Schulman -- THE RAINBOW CADENZA
(New English Library,
300pp. £2.95)

I had the review of this B-format paperback all figured out until I read Ken Lake's contribution to "Book of the Year 1984" in Vector 124/5. There I was, about to rubbish this book, and someone else was raving over it! I had therefore to re-think my attitude to it, and look in it for what another reader had enjoyed. My reconsidered opinion is this: The Rainbow Cadenza is the definitive curate's egg - bad, but parts of it are excellent.

I think that 'J. Neil Schulman' is the pen-name of a woman, because TRC is about women in a feminist's dystopia, and the story is too well told from a woman's point of view to have been written convincingly by a man. I gave the book to a friend to read, and he reached the same conclusion without being prompted by me. This is a point which will be of little concern to most readers of most books, but as sex is a fundamental part of this novel, the sex of the author does have some relevance.

The book is set two centuries in the future, and its major premise is that if people could choose the sex of their children they would overwhelmingly choose males. Women are therefore outnumbered seven to one, and must all serve a period of conscription in the state prostitution service. After beautification and intensive training, they spend three years meeting the sexual needs of the majority of heterosexual men who have no female partner or chance of marriage. After their service women are expected to marry and raise large families, with all governmental institutions and attitudes being male-dominated. The penalties for crimes are very severe; lawbreakers are classified as 'Touchable' and become fair game for the populace. Regular hunts take place during which male Touchables are murdered and female Touchables provide sexual sport.

The plot concerns Joan Darris, the daughter of a wealthy family, whose ambition is to become skilled and accepted as a lasergraphic composer and player. Lasergraphy is the art of creating laser-generated light patterns at a console and based on the application of the harmonic structure and rhythmic patterns of music to light wavelengths. This has replaced music as the most popular form of artistic expression, with forms equating to classical, jazz, and pop music. This creation is the excellent part of the book. Schulman writes as if well-versed in musical theory (the book is dedicated in part to "my father, the violinist"), and this theme is enjoyable and convincing. The story of Joan's struggle

is told with gusto, spiced up with lots of sex, especially in the section concerning her conscript training and service before she rebels and is sentenced to life as a Touchable.

The bad part of the book is its content. It would be too lengthy to list all the social, technological and historical developments to Western society detailed in TRC because practically every sf idea in the last thirty years is in there somewhere. The whole creation, therefore, is more confusing than convincing. The sf elements are really just window-dressing; they lack that edge of credibility that marks the real sf novel. The publishers do call TRC a 'fantasy', so they too realise the shortfall. I would classify the book as an erotic novel with a feminist heart in sf packaging. Not my favourite book of 1984, but if that's what you fancy, then buy it and enjoy it.

(Alan Fraser)

★Nigel Frith -- KRISHNA (Unwin/Unicorn,
238pp. £2.95)

Over half the paragraphs in this book begin with the word 'and'. That statement is, I hope, significant rather than inane, as it is intended to indicate the style and manner of a book in which narrative and event, what happens next, are given pride of place. In his introduction the author makes portentous claims for this simple and direct approach to storytelling - "By using Homeric techniques of narrative and construction, I hope I have written something new to English literature" - but happily the book slips past the author's self-consciousness to retell the rags-to-riches legend of the Indian folk-hero Krishna and his love for the cowherd Radha in a wholly beguiling fashion.

Device there is, yet only in that the very act of telling the tale is presented as a conceit within the tale itself. This is in keeping with the traditions of the literature from which the author extracts his story. In the Mahabharata, from which some of the Krishna material is derived, the poem's author is at one point obliged to enter the tale himself to father a child in order to keep the plot going, and while Frith never has quite such nerve, his conceit is in a similar spirit of appropriate wittiness. Otherwise, the story speaks for itself, the entertaining narrative moving swiftly and smoothly between furious cartoon action and violence, formal pageantry, pastoral calm, wry humour and gentle eroticism.

Even then the author cannot quite leave the book alone. Turning back to the introduction, we discover that rasas have been excited on our behalf, a rasa being one of the classical Sanskrit identifications of a literary mood or emotion. The quality I enjoyed in Krishna, however, does not seem to be one of these

and the author makes no claim for it at all. I enjoyed the rasa of reader identification with the hero. This is perhaps unusual in a book which takes the stern stuff of ancient legends as its matter, yet Krishna - man and god, peasant and raja, warrior and lover, philosopher and prankster - emerged as rather a charming fellow. I suggest you skip the introduction and get on with reading his story.

(Chris Bailey)

★J.R.R. Tolkien - - THE BOOK OF LOST TALES 4
(Edited by Christopher Tolkien) (Unwin/Unicorn Fantasy, 304pp. £2.95)

The 'Lost Tales' are, to put it plainly, what were left out of The Silmarillion. They were left out because they weren't as good as what went into it: neither as well-structured as stories; nor as polished in the telling. The archaisms which Tolkien's final drafts eschewed are here as irritatingly insistent as in William Morris: respect for first drafts can be carried too far.

But then this volume is not aimed at the ordinary reader in quest of an entertaining yarn. Like Unfinished Tales, it's aimed at an audience made up of two overlapping categories: (1) devotees of Middle-Earth eager for every last detail dripped from the Old Master's pen, and (2) scholars researching the development of the myth Tolkien created. The two cannot be kept distinct: much Tolkien research is undiluted adulation.

This volume, footnoted, annotated, painstakingly comparing variants, is for those who, whether from desire to escape to Middle-Earth, or for the philological desire to find out how it and its languages ticked, want to immerse themselves in the cobwebs and dust of Tolkien's second-best notebooks.

(Judith Hanna)

★David Drake - - HAMMER'S SLAMMERS (Hamlyn, 274pp. £1.95)

★John Brunner - - INTERSTELLAR EMPIRE (Hamlyn, 256pp. £1.95)

These books are nos. 3 and 4 of the new 'Venture' series of adventure sf which claims to bring 'novels of action adventure - no short stories, no fantasy, no boredom.' So much for promises. Here we have two collections of stories which bored me rigid. So much for editorial accuracy.

Hammer's Slammers charts the rise of a team of interplanetary mercenaries, glued together with some tedious 'factual' passages giving some content to the fiction, and provided with a beginning and end by the first and last stories in which the beguiling Col. Hammer cuts loose with his troop and eventually becomes hailed as a true Dictator.

Mind-blowing sf it isn't. The story 'Caught in the Crossfire', for example, may be set in another world, but tells of an incident which could have happened in any war in the past two centuries. Fair enough. But the routine SF trappings merely provide a useful generic hook which prevents the writer from doing anything inconvenient like creating a sense of reality or (if it were a description of, say, World War Two or Vietnam or guerilla war in Zimbabwe or Nicaragua) taking a real moral stand either way.

Jerry Fournelle, in an introduction of remarkable silliness, tells us that Hammer's Slammers is 'a serious book' and 'a whacking good story' and likens the eponymous Hammer to Caesar, Robert E. Lee, and Alexander the Great. The tendency of liberals and pacifists to sneer at the military until they are in need of protection is one thing: the tendency of sf writers to churn out rubbish is another. Perhaps the best thing about this book is that it's so badly put together in terms of narrative, plot and character that it's impossible to take it seriously as propaganda.

In comparison, John Brunner's Interstellar Empire is almost readable. It contains three novellas linked only by a common background - a declining Galactic Empire. Perhaps the best part is Brunner's introductory essay on the problems of writing this sort of 'swords-and-spaceships' fiction. The stories themselves contain routine plots of usurpers and mutant threat, and unfortunately (I'm an admirer of John Brunner) have little to commend them.

But perhaps that's unfair. They'd make great and colourful TV or comic strip in the fashion of DC's lamented Ironwolf series: maybe it's just that narrative fiction is the wrong medium for this kind of story. As it is, I get the impression of a professional going through the motions for an undemanding audience.

If this is the standard the Venture series is aiming to live up to, I really can't even be bothered to get angry any more...

(Andy Sawyer)

★Mike McQuay - - PURE BLOOD (Bantam, 280pp. £2.95)

Mike McQuay has always been best known to me as the author of a passable novelisation of that passable SF film Escape from New York. I've read some favourable reviews of Jitterbug, and some not-so-favourable reviews of his 'Mathew Swain' detective series. Now I've been exposed to Pure Blood, and McQuay is no longer such an 'unknown quantity' so far as I'm concerned.

Pure Blood is the opening episode of yet another post-'Breakdown' saga. A thousand years of ecological shitwork has left the Earth racked by the runaway Greenhouse

Effect and populated by 'true' humans, half-humans, and genetically engineered mutants (known as 'Genies'). The Genies - with or without 'light brown hair' - are a motley crew of giants and dwarves, dog-men and cat-men, though many of them have been endowed with specialised skills, i.e. tradesmen, engineers, politicians (eh?), soldiers, etc. Then there are the sentient elm trees...

The plot concerns two wildly dissimilar brothers; Margan ('a natural ruler, deprived of a title by the baseness of his birth') and Ramon ('whose cruelty and cunning marked him as a tyrant'). It's the old, old story of Cain and Abel. Their father, Tw'Jorman Delaga, the Governor of Alb'ny (get it?) leaves his ramshackle 'kingdom' to his legitimate son, Ramon, while providing as best he can for his beloved bastard, Morgan. The fact that Morgan is a 'born leader' (with a 'tangled mane of fiery red hair', no less) means that he vows to triumph over the cowardly, incompetent Ramon (who is dark-haired and vaguely Hispanic, to boot).

All of this may strike you as being one of those peculiarly American, fascist-pig power fantasies, and - of course - you'd be 100% correct. Nevertheless, McQuay's hard-driving narration seldom allows the reader time to reflect upon the dubious morality which lies behind his 'saga', not to mention its many socio-political and scientific implausibilities. McQuay also has an extraordinary talent for creating new, unnecessary verbs, i.e. "The world tangled white" (p. 4) and "he had just officially coronated himself" (p. 55). And when he tries to be 'poetic', well - judge for yourselves:

Band of three,
Band of three,
Soldier, Builder,
Referee.
Band of three,
Band of three;
The perfect mix, the
Apogee. (p. 155)

Pure Blood is a very good book of its kind for those people who like this kind of book. The sequel, Mother Earth, will probably be out before this review goes to press; it chronicles 'the epic battle between Ramon and Morgan' which 'comes to a thrilling conclusion in N'ork City'. Meanwhile, look closely at the cover of Pure Blood and you'll notice two cute giant rabbits a la the TVM, Night of the Lepus (or should that be The Wild Bunnies?)

(Graham Andrews)

★Sterling E. Lanier - - THE UNFORSAKEN HIERO
(Granada, 318pp.
£2.50)

This 'long-awaited sequel' to Hiero's Journey is, rarely, superior to its original in plotting and structure, and in the quality of the writing: the wooden language which made Journey read like a poorly-executed translation is almost entirely gone.

Hiero is kidnapped, has his mental powers stripped away by agents of the Unclean, and barely manages to escape death on numerous occasions in the course of another long trek through North America 5,000 years after the Death - or is it 10,000 years? There are other niggling inconsistencies, but none as great as this. Our hero sets off alone, and so is dependent on his own wits until he gains some new allies. How long he would have survived without them is open to question: although all the other characters find him the most amazing and wonderful leader, Hiero is surely more correct than even he believes when he prays, "I didn't earn this adulation!... Father, preserve the least of Thy servants from the dreadful sin of pride! Besides... I really don't deserve it!"

His allies this time include a massive snail with an overwhelming thirst for knowledge, and a group of fierce but somewhat sexy cats. The author misses a golden opportunity for a spot of miscegenation (remember the tree-women in Journey?); the cats use their pheromones only to induce overwhelming fear in their enemies. As well as the obligatory good triumphing over evil, there is actually quite a strong moral/religious undertone to this novel, which at times seems to be more Lanier than Hiero.

Also obligatory in these epic fantasy novels are the maps and glossary, both of which are quite unnecessary here, as is the Prologue, which summarises Hiero's Journey and fills in the brief gap between the books. Lovers of Hiero will be pleased to see that the ending strongly implies a third volume: "Are you willing to go on where only a man of your proven ability to defy the Unclean can go? Will you go far south...?"

Okay, so it's not great literature; it's not even particularly good sf or fantasy. But purely as an adventure story, it's not at all bad - and it must be a must for Hiero fans.

(David V. Barrett)

★Sondra Marshak & Myrna Culbreath - - THE
FATE OF THE PHOENIX
(Bantam, 262pp. \$2.95)

Several years ago I read a Star Trek novel called The Price of The Phoenix. I did not like it. There have been some good ST novels - Joe Haldeman's Planet of Judgement, for example, or David Gerrold's The Galactic Whirlpool - but this was not one of them. My main criticism would be of the prose style, which was at times almost unreadable. Soon after reading that book I gave it away and thus have not read it since.

Which makes the task of reviewing the sequel, The Fate of The Phoenix, a little difficult, as Fate leans heavily on its predecessor; thus the eight(?) year gap between reading the two books has created some confusion over events, moods, etc. (This need not always be the case, of

course; the only common link between Orbitsville and Orbitsville Departure is Orbitsville itself.)

Basically, the Phoenix process allows the creation of an exact copy of an individual - a form of cloning. The creator of this effect, a character called Omne, intends to use this process to aid his plans for galactic domination. (Sounds familiar.) Matters are complicated by the fact there are actually two Omnes - neither of which is the original - one of whom is physically identical to Spock. There is also 'James', who is a copy of Kirk (perish the thought!) who has now been surgically altered to look Romulan. His role is that of consort, or 'princeling', to the female Romulan commander from The Enterprise Incident.

This is undoubtedly a well plotted novel for which the authors have used their knowledge of Star Trek competently, and the prose style has improved a little, though much of the dialogue is unconvincing. But doppelgangers are perhaps an overused theme in Star Trek, on the screen at least, and the authors' talents could perhaps have been better employed in a different direction.

If you do decide to read this book, it is essential to read the prequel first.

(Christopher Ogden)

★Robin May - - ROBIN OF SHERWOOD AND THE HOUNDS OF LUCIFER (Puffin, 172pp., £1.75)

Kids' programme it may be, but ROBIN OF SHERWOOD has been one of the high-spots of recent TV; a wonderfully spirited rendition of (as it were) the subsidiary Matter of Britain. Richard Carpenter has kept the 'pagan spirit' and 'Peoples' Warrior' interpretations of Robin, and fused them with some 20th century sword-and-sorcery, aided by the gorgeously photogenic Michael Praed and Judi Trott. This book covers various episodes from the last series up to the 'death of Robin' story which cleared the way for Michael Praed's departure. Although Richard Carpenter is mentioned on the cover, the actual work of novelisation seems to be May's, and it's a pretty prosaic piece of work. Very much a 'children's book', with carefully added sections of wooden exposition, it cannot match the visual strengths of the TV series.

If you disagree with my enthusiastic response to the TV series, don't bother with the book: to be honest, you won't miss a great deal. If you agree, the book will be a useful souvenir. I certainly enjoyed it, but that was basically because I had enjoyed the programmes. It's a pity Carpenter himself didn't handle the novelisation, because he's one of the few people who can actually do this sort of thing very well indeed.

(Andy Sawyer)

★Frank Herbert - - DESTINATION: VOID (Penguin, 220pp. £1.95)

In Appendix II to Dune, 'The Religion of Dune', Herbert states that in the one hundred and ten centuries before the Butlerian Jihad, space travel was achieved by a hodge-podge of methods, none of which was entirely satisfactory. Only the discovery of the spice melange on the planet Arrakis enable space travel to become reliable, and hence fast, widespread and regulated.

A tale which precedes Dune by many millennia, Destination: Void was originally published in Galaxy in 1965 (the same year as Dune) under the title Do I Sleep Or Wake? The colony ship 'Earthling' is bound for the planets of Tau Ceti on a 400 year voyage, with a crew of six and 6,000 would-be colonists in 'hibernation' tanks. The crew are to monitor the ship until it leaves the solar system, when they will hand over total control to an Organic Mental Core (OMC) for the rest of the journey. The OMC is a human brain taken from a terminally-ill child which has been reared to control a starship, and there are two back-up OMCs in case of failure. The crew and colonists are all what Dune calls 'gholas', grown in the axolotl tanks of United Moon Base from donated human cells. This is important because not only are they totally expendable, they are also completely reproducible.

Disaster is facing this ship, because the first two OMCs have gone catatonic, and the third went completely insane, turning every servo on the ship into a murder weapon. It kills three of the crew before one of the survivors manages to cut the feeder tubes, leaving them on their own for the voyage to Tau Ceti. Six ships have preceded the 'Earthling', each of which disappeared without trace - and now they think they know why. A female medical doctor from the back-up crew is awakened to complement the survivors, and the four crew-members contemplate the choices they face: to turn back, to soldier on to Tau Ceti by keeping a crew alive and running the ship by themselves over the centuries; or to find out WHY the controlling OMCs went mad, and manufacture an artificial, conscious replacement for the OMC that will reliably transport them to Tau Ceti.

Actually two of these choices are non-starters: one of the crew has orders from Moonbase to destroy the ship if they try to turn back or go to Tau Ceti 'the long way'. This person must also destroy the ship if they create an artificial consciousness they cannot control. As I said before, the crew and colonists are totally expendable.

The novel is concerned exclusively with the efforts of the crew to come to terms with their own different ideas on how to proceed, to placate Moonbase and prevent them from interfering, and to fulfil their task as they see it. Herbert's skill as a writer twenty years ago is underlined by the fact that as sf novel consisting entirely of dialogue (most of which is scientific explanations) holds the interest throughout, the more so because the eventual outcome is guessable from the outset. (The back

cover blurb gives it away, too!) I can only comment that the machines destroyed and banned in the Butlerian Jihad were not the cozy little chaps that play 'Manic Miner' at home and print out those jazzy bar-charts at the office!

If you've just struggled through Heretics of Dune, don't be put off Herbert - he knew how to tell a sharper tale in those days. I recommend Destination: Void to those who like Dune and the non-Dune novels, but find the Dune sequels unutterably boring.

By the way, the story of Destination: Void is continued in Frank Herbert and Bill Ramsom's The Jesus Incident (1978), and if that doesn't give the game away, nothing will!

(Alan Fraser)

*Robert Asprin (ed) - - STORM SEASON (Penguin, 220pp. £1.95)

"Another mind-blowing experience from today's top fantasy writers," promises the cover. The weary reviewer lifts himself up from his bed and sighs; "Oh no, not another mindblowing experience..." The 'top fantasy writers' turn out to be Robert Asprin himself, C.J. Cherryh, Diana L. Paxson Lynn Abbey, Janet Morris and Andrew J. Offutt, none of whom makes it into my list of top fantasy writers, but I guess someone must rate them as this is volume four of the Thieves(sic) World saga. A more consummate critic than myself would seek out the previous collections so as to be able to place this book in its correct context, but having been reliably informed that this volume is the best so far I'll make my excuses and review this book as it stands, a collection of related short stories about 'the motley assortment of thieves, swordsmen and small-time sorcerers who live in the mean and seedy town of Sanctuary', as the back blurb puts it.

As much concerned with sex 'n' Sadism as Sword and Sorcery, these stories try to come across as sophisticated and decadent, risqué and visceral; torture, magic and coitus interruptus in mock-medieval squalor. Moorcock, Wolfe and M. John Harrison can get away with this kind of thing, but in the hands of these writers it all comes across as tasteless and silly. It's all so annoyingly arch, particularly the language; as in BDC costume dramas everyone speaks in a backwards, passive style, saying things like "sleep was never his" when they mean "he never slept" and "he slept not well and his dreams were not for the repeating" as if they're translating literally from a Germanic tongue. The worst offender is Janet Morris who compounds her mangling of the English language by telling her story in the present tense, something best left to Damon Runyon and Thomas Fynchon. She is also able to show Stephen Donaldson a clean pair of heels with such quotable horrors as "a tiny thrill of caution had horripilated his nape", "he

had given her a latitude befitting a probable sibling and childhood passion, and she had exceeded his forbearance" and "he rode tight in his saddle under a soapy, scum-covered sky gone noncommittal, its sun nowhere to be seen, doubling back from Wideway and the gutted wharfside warehouses where serendipity had taken his partner's life as suddenly as their charred remains loomed before him out of a pearly fog so thick he could barely see his horse's ears twitch." Phew, pick the bones out of that.

That this genre is not the dead ground a lot of us assumed it was has been proved lately by the likes of Tim Powers' The Drawing of the Dark, John M. Ford's The Dragon Waiting and Geoff Ryman's The Warrior Who Carried Life, and it is to these writers that I direct you if you want to read some good, satisfying fantasy; after all, everyone knows that if you really want a 'mind-blowing experience' you're going to have to take something a lot stronger than Asprin...

(Nigel E. Richardson)

*Fred Saberhagen - - BERSERKER (Penguin, 224pp. £1.95)

OCTAGON (Penguin, 272pp. £2.50)

What we have here is the old (1963 - 6) Saberhagen and the almost new (1981). Of course the 'Berserker' stories are those on which his reputation in sf circles is founded whereas the novel Octagon seems to have come and gone unregarded. Which leads me to the conclusion that reputations are easily won - I find the shorts crude, uninteresting, lifeless - and immune to current developments - the novel is brisk, lively, interesting and even subtle.

There is little point in critically essaying Berserker. For good or ill it is a 'classic' and much beloved of SF fans the world over. For completist purposes it is good it should be available again, although I have to wonder at Penguin schizophrenia in publishing it. I always thought Penguin was a class imprint, certainly so far as sf is concerned. The dead hands of Heinlein and Asimov lay heavily on the young Saberhagen's shoulders, with 'significance' and 'morals' well to the fore, certainly well ahead of any storytelling or character development. I felt I was being lectured to by a man whose knowledge of life was less than mine and who saw it as his duty to hammer home his crude, simplistic points without the least regard to my entertainment. These stories illustrate most of the worst points of the bad old/good old golden days and I felt numbed by the relentless, arbitrary illogic of the machines' weaknesses, matched only by the robotic dancing of the human 'characters' to the author's tune.

Octagon, on the other hand, is a deceptive book. Again there is a touch of the Heinleins in the character of Robert Gregory, immensely rich, immensely talented and full of the right wing stuff so typical of the Annapolis Lip. Electronics are Bob Gregory's scene, Big Electronics for Big Government, and he is convinced that his old workmate turned commie pinko faggot pacifist Henry Brahmaguptra (you can tell he is untrustworthy with a name like that: he can't be a real American) has released to left wing elements his key to a massive 'tapeworm' the younger, more idealistic pair left in the government machine back in the days when they were concerned that Big Government might not turn out to be Good Government. The whole drama turns on a computer moderated role playing game in which Gregory and (he thinks) Brahmaguptra are engaged, unknown to each other, and the fact that various other players and persons associated with the game are mysteriously and exotically murdered. Given the structure and storytelling of this mystery it would not be fair to give away much of the plot.

I have remarked before that Saberhagen is a workmanlike writer, and as far as thrillers go, Octagon is very well constructed. The pace is just right, with the mysteries being unravelled at an accelerating pace to leave you at the end, all revealed and all loose ends neatly tied, breathless and satisfied. Craftsmanlike is the word to describe the structure: a sound professional piece of work and well up to the standard of a 'real' thriller writer of the first order. Of course it smacks of a film script (but how many commercial novels don't these days?) and I could easily see a good film being made of this - directed by Michael Crichton, with Nick Nolte and Robert Vaughn in the leads and Jason Robards as Brahmaguptra. But that is not all. Saberhagen appears well aware of his genre tropes and subverts his omniscient, little less than godly superman in a way Heinlein would never do. Gregory, as it turns out, isn't just right wing, he's right right wing, even for America. He employs psychopaths. He's an incestuous electronic voyeur. In the end he pays for his sins, almost losing everything he holds dear (but not quite, although through no fault of his own) because of his paranoia. It may not be poetic, but it is justice.

These are an oddly assorted couple of books which show that inauspicious beginnings need not blight a career. Had I read the 'Berserker' stories when they first came out (I was in my early teens) I think I might well have dismissed Saberhagen to the waste paper bin of literature. Which would have been a pity. There are few books I receive to review that actively please me in the ways I am pleased by books I choose for myself, and Octagon is one of those books. Great Art it may not be, but a great read it is for sure. Thriller writing is a definite craft, and Octagon is a fine example of that craft. (Martyn Taylor)

★ Jack Vance - - THE DRAGON MASTERS (Granada, 123pp. £1.95)

The Dragon Masters is a re-issue of a book first published in 1963. This richly textured fantasy novel brought Vance his first Hugo and for once the accolade was deserved, for although The Dragon Masters cannot claim to be great literature, it is an enjoyable read - a virtue sadly lacking from the Hugo winners of late.

Man has long since left his home planet and cast his seed amongst the stars. On one of the planets he colonised, Aerlith, two communities, Happy Valley and Banbeck Vale, have been established. The leader of Happy Valley, Ervis Carolo, has expansionist aspirations against the Vale. So he deploys his genetically engineered dragons against them. However, Aerlith is invaded, at regular intervals, by the Basics; reptilian creatures who come from the same stock as the dragons. The rationale behind the attacks is a simple one: destroy the last remnants of the human civilization which once united the galaxy.

The Vale's leader, Joaz Banbeck, realises that the attacks by the Basics coincide with the apposition of the star Coralyne. As an apposition is imminent, Banbeck tries in vain to warn Carolo and the mysterious race of subterranean Sacerdotes to the danger and maintain the fragile peace between the two communities. As Carolo invades Banbeck Vale the Basics land in Happy Valley...

The Dragon Masters might be considered the archetypal Vance novel. All the typical elements are present. There is the characteristic political allegory which, in this case, does not intrude to the narrative's detriment. There is the fascination with science which is in the process of becoming a new religion. There is the interest in the myriad ways that man might evolve away from the womb of Earth, especially in a socio-political context. The style is typically Vance, well written with a Baroque flavour and although the characters are stereotypes this works to the book's advantage as it allows the plot to develop unhindered. This camouflages any inadequacies of characterisation which might otherwise have undermined the book's credibility.

The Dragon Masters is not a great novel, but it is a fastmoving lightweight yarn which I have no hesitation in recommending.

(Mark Greener)

★ Mike McQuay - - LIFEKEEPER (Bantam, 260pp. £2.95)

A routine sf potboiler. Golden boy learns dark secret of totalitarian society, rebels, gets girl, loses girl, teams up with sentient computer, starts the revolution and dies in glory. Unremarkable stuff, notable only for 100% incorrect cover blurb and dedication 'to the lawyers at Fagin, Hewett, Matthews and Fagin.' So they're the guys who read this kind of thing...

(Nigel E. Richardson)

★ Brian Aldiss - - THE EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR
(Granada, 288pp, £1.95)

Reprint of the satirical self-styled 'space opera' first published in 1974. Plot indescribable; characters (deliberately) cardboard; dialogue/style sample follows:-

When she could bear to hear his automatic words no longer, she cut off her automatic tears.

"What are those creatures out on the glacier?"

"There are a lot of creatures out on the glacier."

"Do you seriously think the world's coming to an end?"

"Not if I can help it, miss!"

The voice of reason, she thought. She shivered.

"I suppose you couldn't talk philosophy to me a bit sir, could you, just to cheer me up?"

"I ain't a great one for philosophy. I could maybe find you a cookie in my shack."

"I've been through a harrowing experience, you see. I just - well -"

In fact, the dialogue is actually better and funnier sampled at random like this. But that should be enough of a sample to let you know whether this is the sort of thing you like or not...

(Sue Thomason)

★ Barbara Hambly - - THE TIME OF THE DARK
(Unwin/Unicorn Fantasy, 284pp. £2.50)

Well-written fantasy blending elements of Tolkien, Le Guin, Donaldson and Lovecraft with a touch - just the faintest necessary tinge - of originality. Hambly appears to suffer from the inability to kill off her Good Folk when the plot so demands, but this is only Volume One of the inevitable trilogy, after all. The plot is adequate, the setting well enough realised to be believable, though a little thin in places, but the book really stands out for its characterisation of the two young Americans from 'our world' who get involved in the world of the wizard Ingold Inglorion of Darwath, and his struggle to save a baby, and civilization, from the ravages of the Dark. So far, nothing more, or less, than a Good Read - - but I certainly look forward to reading the two forthcoming volumes.

(Sue Thomason)

★ Guy N. Smith - - THROWBACK (N.E.L., 256pp. £1.95)

A virus induces physical and mental change in the population of Western Europe and the USA. Almost overnight, people revert to primitivism and tame animals go feral. Oddly pastoral moments counterpoint routine 'nasty' graphic descriptions of brutal rape and violent death.

(Andy Sawyer)

★ Piers Anthony - - BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT 2: MERCENARY (Granada, 415pp. £2.50)

BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT 3: POLITICIAN (Avon, 346pp. £2.95)

Current political/racial tensions are reflected by thinly dramatising them in a far future: a bit unfair if you look to sf for extrapolation, but OK if what you want is simple-minded allegory. Some potentially interesting analysis of present day US politics mixed in with pastiche Woody Guthrie, pastiche John Norman (!) and genuine if laboured wit, but the overall effect is bathetic.

(Andy Sawyer)

★ Marion Zimmer Bradley & Paul Edwin Zimmer - - THE SURVIVORS (Arrow, 238pp. £1.95)

The Survivors, first published by DAW Books in 1979, is the belated sequel to Hunters of the Red Moon (DAW Books, 1973).

Dane Marsh (nice name for a bird sanctuary), his girlfriend Rianna and the 'monster' Aratak have been asked by the Unity's Council of Protectors to troubleshoot on Belsar Four -- a closed World. Dane considers that their latest assignment should be a "Sunday-school picnic compared to the Red Moon and the Long Hunt!" (pp. 21-1). Famous last words...

Fans of Marion Zimmer Bradley, and - by extension, in this case -- Paul Edwin Zimmer, will probably buy this book no matter what anyone says about it, for or against. But it is a good read, on the space operatic level; certainly much better than The Mists of Avalon or some of the more recent 'Darkover' extravaganzas. The strikingly effective wrap-around cover is well worth an 'honourable mention in its own right.

(Graham Andrews)

★ F.M. Busby - - REBEL'S QUEST (Bantam, 243 pp. £2.75)

Rebel's Quest is the final (?) installment of the 'Hulzein Chronicles', following Rissa Kerguelen, The Long View, Zelda M'Tanna, Star Rebel, and The Alien Debt. It is, in fact, a direct sequel to Star Rebel. Bran Tregure is his usual moody, doom-ridden self: He is the closest thing to a 'Byronic hero' in sf since Leigh Brackett's Eric John Stark.

At the age of twenty-one, and with a souped-up starship named Inconnu, Bran Tregure has turned himself into the arch-enemy of United Energy and Transport, that most rapacious of interstellar conglomerates. Then he meets up with Rissa Kerguelen, and it's all over bar the shooting... There is much 'overlapping' between this novel and

others in the series, particularly Zelda M'tana and Rissa Kerguelen, i.e. the same events are seen from many different perspectives. I was reminded of an early film by Stanley Kubrick, The Killing (1956), which employed the same 'flash-sideways' technique.

Ideally, this novel should only be approached after reading Star Rebel, but there is a 'Prologue', subtitled 'Bulletin on Tregare', which does an adequate job of scene-setting. F.M. Busby has once again proved himself to be the thinking man's David Drake. Rebel's Quest is an epic adventure filled with 'blood and thunder', instead of the more usual 'thud and blunder'.

(Graham Andrews)

★ Isaac Asimov - - 'X' STANDS FOR UNKNOWN
(Avon, 218pp. \$2.95)

Yet another collection of the science fact articles which Asimov has been writing for The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction every month since November 1958; this contains the 17 articles published between January 1982 and May 1983. You know the sort of thing: humorous anecdote featuring

Contact

I hope to re-start a proper letter-column next issue, so please write! Meanwhile, lack of space prevents me from doing more than acknowledging letters from BRIAN ALDISS, D.J. KEMPER, KEVIN McVEIGH, DAVID MACE (who took jocular(?) exception to Chris Bailey's review of his Nightrider last issue), and K.V. BAILEY, whose verse epistle demands publication. Many others offered me encouragement in private letters, and I'm sorry this notice is so brief...

★ ★ ★

Joseph's review in 54
Rates Heretics a static bore,
Asks how such things originate
And constantly proliferate,
Why certain breeding laws should be -
On that I'm just as foxed as he -
But as for tales of Arakis
I think they come and grow like this:
A piper pipes a desert tune
To conjour up the worlds of Dune.
A dust cloud floats, a dust cloud drops,
Then out of it a sandworm pops.
From steepening depths out pops its
brother,
And then another, and another ...
While lines of dunes to distance fade
The tune goes on, the pipe is played
Apparently till kingdom-come,
And though this no doubt wearies some
Millions are loth to lose or quit
The paths of Bene Gesserit.

(K.V. Bailey)

the Good Doctor followed by a clear account of the spectrum, the possibility of silicon life, comets, or whatever else has crossed his mind that month. This volume contains two of his welcome attacks on the Biblical fundamentalists, astrologers and the irrational in general. If only a few more well-known and respected individuals would join in the attack on the lunatic fringe as forthrightly as he does. (Would Asimov ever get mixed up in television series on 'the mysterious' or 'the unexplained'?)

(Edward James)

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

ALDISS, B.	The Eighty-Minute Hour	p. 15
ASIMOV, I.	'X' Stands for Unknown	p. 16
ASPRIN, R. (ed.)	Storm Season	p. 13
BRADLEY, M.Z./ZIMMER, P.E.	The Survivors	p. 15
BUSBY, F.M.	Rebel's Quest	p. 15
DHONDY, F.	Trip Trap	p. 2
DRAKE, D.	Hammer's Slammers	p. 10
FRITH, N.	Krishna	p. 9
GEARHEART, S.M.	The Wanderground	p. 6
HAMBLY, B.	The Time of the Dark	p. 15
HERBERT, F.	Destination: Void	p. 12
IRWIN, R.	The Arabian Nightmare	p. 8
LANIER, S.E.	The Unforsaken Hiero	p. 11
McQUAY, M.	Lifekeeper	p. 14
McQUAY, M.	Pure Blood	p. 10
MARSHAK, S./CULBREATH, M.	The Fate of the Phoenix	p. 11
MAY, R.	Robin of Sherwood & the Hounds of Lucifer	p. 12
PALMER, J.	The Planet Dweller	p. 6
RUSS, J.	Extra(ordinary) People	p. 6
RUSS, J.	The Female Man	p. 6
SABERHAGEN, F.	Berserker	p. 13
SABERHAGEN, F.	Octagon	p. 13
SCHULMAN, J.N.	The Rainbow Cadenza	p. 9
SMITH, G.N.	Throwback	p. 15
TOLKIEN, J.R.R.	The Book of Lost Tales I	p. 10
VANCE, J.	The Dragon Masters	p. 14